

NEW WAYS OF USING SONGS IN THE CLASSROOM

By Josep Suller

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As a musician, Josep has been playing the guitar for more than 20 years. He studied in the "Taller de Músics de Barcelona" and has played with some famous bands or singers such as Lausengiers, Mikel Herzog or Chicanos. He has appeared on the radio, TV and music magazines many times and has performed concerts all around Spain.

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The vast majority of foreign language teachers use music in the classroom, both as a tool for teaching and as a means of motivating students. Most students are exposed to English songs in their everyday lives, on the radio, on television, in TV commercials etc. They often buy music by English artists, and can usually recognise and sing a few of the lyrics. Music is a fun way of approaching the language.

All teachers will agree that songs provide us with a natural context for most common structures, they are an excellent way to look at culture and their melody and rhythm will help students remember new vocabulary and structures much better than just by doing a repetitive and boring exercise.

However, if we just resort to one or two kinds of activities with songs (typically fill-in-the-gap exercises), this valuable tool may not be as motivating and useful for our students. In this workshop, I showed some exploitations that I have used in my classes (both with secondary level and EOI students) that have always worked really well for me. Some of them are more “traditional” and can be easily carried out in the regular classroom with just a CD player. Other activities will involve the use of ICT and we will need to use a computer room or, at least, a computer should be available in the classroom.

ACTIVITY NUMBER 1

- **VOCABULARY COMPETITION:** Divide the class into groups of 3-4. Play a song once. The students’ job is to try to write (or remember) as many words as they can catch. Go from group to group asking for a word from the song and taking “only 1 word from each group”. Write each word on the board next to each group’s name. Keep going until they can give no more words. If they repeat a word already said or say a word that doesn’t belong to the song, they miss the next turn. The group with the most words wins.

ACTIVITY NUMBER 2

- **RUNNING DICTATION:** The teacher divides the song into different parts (ex. verses) and sticks each part on the board. Students are divided into groups (the size of the groups should be equal to the number of parts in the song). In turns, each student is responsible for one part and he/she has to go to the board, read his/ her part and try to remember as many words as possible. They come back to their group and have to dictate as many words as they can remember until the verse is finished. Then it’s another student’s turn. The purpose of the game is to dictate the whole song correctly. Then the teacher plays the song and students check.

ACTIVITY NUMBER 3

- **INDIRECT TRANSLATION.** Teacher gives a translation of the song (as literal as possible) in Spanish / Catalan. Students in groups have to translate the song back into English (it is highly recommendable to let them use a dictionary for this activity). Then, they listen to the song and check how close their translations were.
After translating these lines, play the song several times (at least 3 times). Students should try to write down the whole lyrics with the help of their translations.
When the teacher prepares the exercise, it’s very important to try to provide students with a “literal translation” – it does not matter if the lines don’t sound completely natural in Spanish or Catalan. The purpose of this is to enable your students to “guess” the highest amount of lines.
This translation exercise might seem a bit “traditional”, but in fact it is really motivating and useful for students. They are absolutely delighted when they see that some lines in their translations coincide with the original song.

It's very important to remind students that in any translation, there is not just "one" correct alternative. Teacher should check different alternatives and accept the correct ones even though they may be different from the actual song.

ACTIVITY NUMBER 4

- DISCRIMINATION / MULTIPLE CHOICE: The teacher asks the students to choose the correct word from different alternatives (beforehand, while or even after listening-). Then, they listen to the song and check.

ACTIVITY NUMBER 5

- SONG WORD PUZZLES: Choose a "secret word" which is connected with the topic of the song. Select some words from the song and create a puzzle with some definitions: each word should contain at least one letter from the secret word. Arrange these words in such a way that the secret word can be seen after the puzzle is complete.

ACTIVITY NUMBER 6

- MISTAKES: Insert common mistakes your students make in a lyric sheet you prepare for hand-outs (spelling, sg. & pl. agreement, tenses, prepositions...) Students should try to find the mistakes before listening to the song. Then, they check.

ACTIVITY NUMBER 7

- DID YOU HEAR IT?: Prepare cards with words (50% refer to words that actually appear in the song and the other 50% are distractors, or words that do not appear in the song but whose sound is similar to that of the words that really belong to the song). Divide the class into teams. Each team has to take 8-10 cards / words at random. They should put the cards on the table and you play the song. Students pick up a card if they hear the word. The team with the most cards picked up wins. You should check if the cards / words they picked up belong to the song. If any team picks up a card whose word is not from the song, they don't score the point and they lose an additional point.

ACTIVITY NUMBER 8

- JUMBLED WORDS / DOMINOES. Prepare cards with words / sentences from the song. Students are given the cards and have to try to arrange them while they are listening to the song.

ACTIVITY NUMBER 9

- TRIVIA QUIZ: Prepare a quiz related to the song / singer / topic / vocabulary & grammar appearing in the song / cultural background, etc. of the song you are going to play. In groups they have to try to guess as many questions as possible. This is very good as a warm-up exercise before listening to the song.

ACTIVITY NUMBER 10



- **MATCHING:** You split up the lines of a song into 2 halves. Students have to match the beginnings with the corresponding endings (beforehand or while listening).

USING ICT: Hot Potatoes

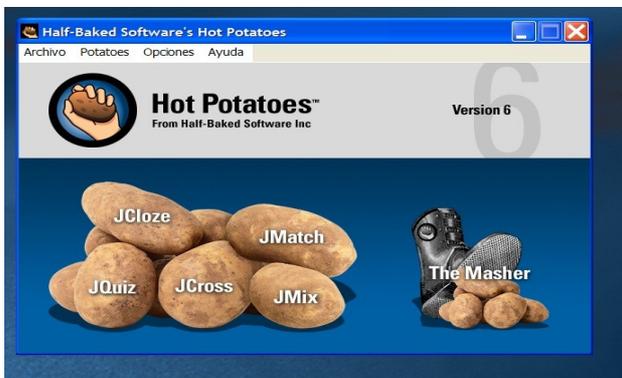
WHAT IS HOT POTATOES?

With this great (and free) programme (<http://hotpot.uvic.ca>) we can easily create interactive exercises for the Web that work with any modern web explorer (Internet Explorer 6 or 7, Mozilla, Firefox, etc.) We do not need to know anything about .html language, JavaScript, etc. The only thing you need to do is enter your data -- texts, questions, answers etc. -- and the programs will create the Web pages for you. Then you can post them on your Web site or work with your activities locally. In a few minutes, one can learn how to use this programme and create his/her own activities with exercises of all kinds (multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword, matching, ordering and gap-fill exercises.)

USING HOT POTATOES

When we start “Hot Potatoes” we’ll see a screen with 5 applications or “potatoes”. We’ll select the screen we want to work with:

- JCLOZE: To create gap-fill exercises
- JMATCH: to create matching exercises
- JQUIZ: To create question-based exercises (multiple choice or short answers)
- JCROSS: we can create crosswords
- JMIIX: to create jumble exercises



CREATING AN EXERCISE WITH HOT POTATOES:

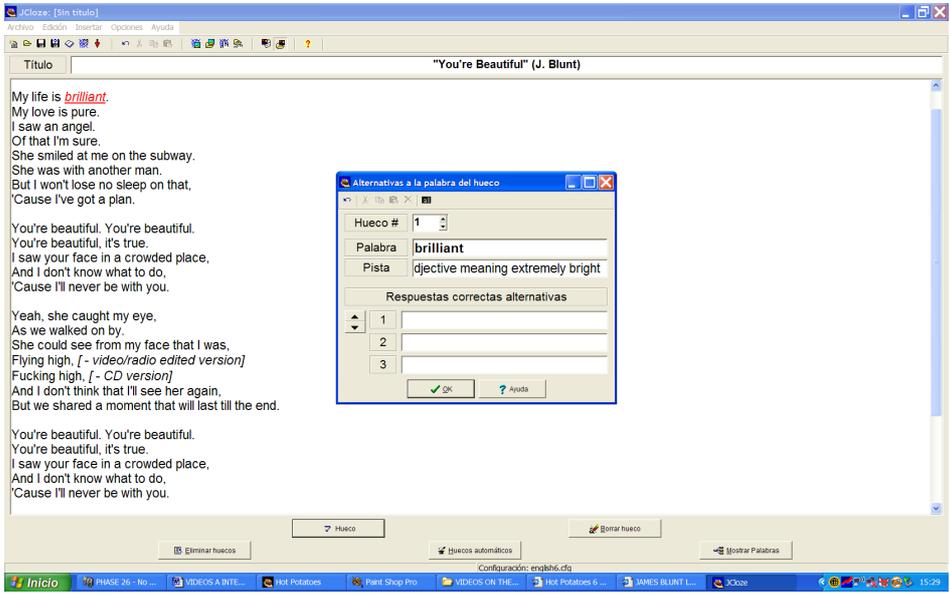
The best way to get used to Hot Potatoes is by following the tutorial included in the programme. In a few minutes we will know how to create a simple activity. It’s very important to register (it’s free and it will take you less than 5 minutes), otherwise the programme options will be very limited.

In the workshop I showed how to create an activity with a video-clip from YOUTUBE with “JCLOZE” as an example. All the other potatoes are really similar and once we know how to use one, we will know how the others work quite intuitively.

JCLOZE:

We need to follow **3 steps** to create any activity with Hot Potatoes.

1. **Introduce the title, the text and the questions or gaps.** Afterwards, we will have to choose the words we want as gaps. We can include clues and give alternative answers, too.



It is very important to save the exercise beforehand: Go to FILE / SAVE AS and then give the exercise a name. You are going to save it as a .jcl file. This will not be the web page or exercise, but a data file (teacher's file) we will have to open if you want to edit the activity later on.

2. We have to **configure the file output format.** (OPTIONS / CONFIGURE OUTPUT).



In "Configuration File" we will see a screen with several tabs: (Titles-instructions / Prompts-feedback / buttons / appearance / etc.).

2.INSERTING A VIDEO DIRECTLY FROM YOUTUBE: We can embed a video from the internet simply by copying the "embed" code that some websites (such as Youtube) provide. Then, we will have the .html exercise on our hard disks (or websites), but we will be using a video from an external server / Internet.

To do that, copy the "embed code" that Youtube videos provide

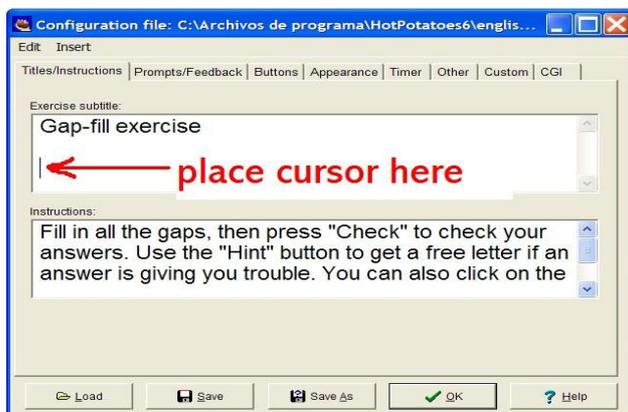
EXAMPLE:

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URL http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-C3a1w4eg
Embed <object width="425" height="350"><param name=

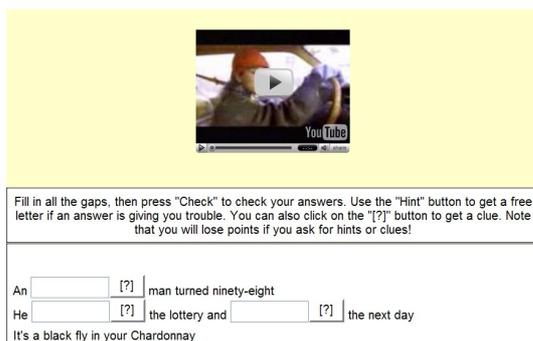
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In the file output format (OPTIONS / CONFIGURE OUTPUT), you should place the cursor at the end of “Exercise Subtitle” inside the tab titles-instructions under the default “gap-fill exercise” sentence. Before inserting the video, press the Enter button a couple of times to separate the video from the exercise subtitle. We will then paste THE CODE we have copied from Youtube



You should paste the “embed” code from Youtube here and press OK.

3. We will create the activity (html file) at this point: ARCHIVO / CREAR PÁGINA WEB / PÁGINA WEB PARA NAVEGADORES and we’ll have a “very small” .html file with a video.



Hot Pot exercise with an embedded video from Youtube.

Remember that if you are using Internet Explorer, you will probably have to let your explorer **show “active contents”** for the video to appear.

In order to work with this activity, our students will have to double click the **.html** file we have created (not the data file .jcl), which we can save in another folder, just in case we want to edit the hot potatoes exercise later.

It’s very important to have the latest version of Internet explorer, Firefox or other modern web browser for our “potatoes” to work properly.

These interactive activities created with Hot Potatoes are ideal to be used in the computer room. As students have control over the video, they can repeat the sections they have problems with and fast forward the sections that they have already understood. They can work at their own pace. Besides, they can use the clues that the teacher has prepared and in this way you can almost have an interactive self-access learning centre. Alternatively, you can send these files to your students by email, include them on your website, blog or moodle, so that they can work with them at home.

USING ICT: Let’s Karaoke!

“Karaokeing” is a great activity you can carry out in class taking advantage of a PC + Projector. There are a few “FREE” karaoke players available on the Internet:

www.vanbasco.com

www.karafun.com

etc.

The great advantage of Computer karaokes is that, apart from being completely free, they allow you to “adjust” the key of any song, so that anybody can become a “singer”. Can you imagine your students (or you) singing any song by Mariah Carey, Freddy Mercury, Police, etc. effortlessly?

It’s extremely easy to find any “FREE” karaoke song on the Internet using “Google” or any searching engine:

Karaoke files usually have the extension: **.kar**

Example: type: **every breath you take police .kar** to find hundreds of webs from where you can download that song by Police (in Karaoke format) “completely free”.

Using Van Basco Karaoke Player:

1. First you should go to www.vanbasco.com and download the latest version available of their free player. To install it, simply double click on the file you have downloaded and accept everything.
2. Start the programme and make sure that the following buttons are activated in the main control panel:



Playlist: allows you to create play lists of songs

Control: opens a screen where you can change tempo & key

Karaoke: it’s the screen where lyrics will appear synchronized with the music

Output: On this screen you can mute any instrument you don’t want to hear: ex. Guitars, main lead vocals, etc.

3. Van Basco Karaoke player also has a tool to search for free karaoke files (.kar) on the internet: Click on the lens (on the right of the main panel)



4. To play any karaoke song, simply double click on any “.kar file” after installing Van Basco Karaoke player. Karaoke files will be associated with it and it will automatically open and play the song. You can also use the *playlist* screen to browse files on your hard disk and play them.

Obviously, you cannot expect a professional sound quality from this sort of free karaokes. The music sounds a bit “synthetic” and not-natural, but it’ll be more than enough to motivate your students to learn English through songs and have a lot of fun in the class.

Apart from trying these ideas, all those teachers who are interested in using music as a complement to your classes, I would really recommend you to visit the following website: **www.singalongproject.com** This website is a project that I have created with Barbara Latham, another teacher working at the EOI Tarragona, and who is another enthusiast of using songs as a way of approaching the language.

I'm sure that all these ideas (or at least most of them) will be really successful in your classes and will help you motivate your students a bit more by using music to learn English. Let's rock to learn!

If you are interested in the exercises that go with the different activities, visit our web page:
<http://www.apac.es>