

Can you learn a language by listening to pop songs?

Can you learn a language through music? Of course you can! From slow, crooning(ささやくような歌い方の) love songs to the latest boy band hits, music is a really useful tool for language learning.

Pop music isn't the whole story, though. *Any* style of music, by any artist, as long as it has lyrics(歌詞), can be useful in language learning. You just need to approach it the right way, and make sure you choose music you enjoy.

Let's look at how you can *go about*(取りかかる) learning a language through music.

<Learning a Language Through Music Transforms "Studying" into Fun>

The most important part of learning a language is talking with native speakers. The second most important part? Self-study.

Songs are great for self-study because they make your study sessions fun. Having fun while you study is a really effective way to learn. So drop your dictionary and turn up the boombox(ラジカセ、CDプレーヤー)! Or, since you probably don't have a boombox, plug in that smartphone to some external speakers and *crank it up*(音量を上げる)!

<How Songs Help You Learn a Language>

Learning songs in your target language is an incredibly useful tool for your language goals because...

- **Music is Sticky:** Ever had a song stuck in your head? Who hasn't! Music sticks in your brain – which is why songs are so often used in language classes to help students memorise new words. Most people who enjoy music listen to their favourite songs over and over until they know them by heart. This repetition, accompanied by a catchy tune, is the perfect formula for getting new words and phrases stuck in your brain *so you can't get rid of them*. No grammar charts required!
- **Music is Portable:** You can take music with you to listen to anywhere, unlike textbooks, movies or conversation partners. Keep a playlist handy on your phone to listen to your favourite songs in your target language anytime you have a few minutes free. Be sure to listen *actively*; pay attention to the words, pronunciation and cadence(リズム) for maximum benefit.
- **Singing Songs Improves Your Pronunciation:** The joy of singing along to songs you love makes it easier for you to pick up correct pronunciation.
- **Song Lyrics Help You Learn Vocabulary in Context:** Learning how vocabulary is used in sentences is a key part of learning how to speak a language in the real world. You can't learn isolated words in your target language and expect to get fluent.

Think of it this way. Even if you could download a foreign-language dictionary into your brain, that still wouldn't make you a very good speaker in your target language. You would have no idea how to put words together into complete sentences.

In fact, some people actually *have* memorised foreign-language dictionaries for competitions such as Scrabble(アルファベットを並べ替えるゲーム), but still can't speak the language at all!

Listening to songs in your target language gives you something that no vocabulary list can: a *context* for words. You get to hear how words are used in real life. When you learn complete sentences along with their English translation, you're learning how to use complex grammar without the need to memorise all the rules behind it. This means that you'll be understanding and speaking your target language more like native speakers in less time than you would with some other study methods.

Inspired to try it for yourself? Here are some hints for how to get the most out of using music for your language learning.

<Pick Songs You Enjoy>

This might seem obvious, but a lot of language learners I've met will just listen to the radio to get exposure to songs in their target language, or download whatever's popular in that language right now. Others only try to find songs that have a slow rhythm so that the words are sung slowly enough to be easily understood.

Why does this method so often fail? You've got to choose songs you can live with, songs that you're willing to listen to hundreds of times.

Find songs that you love, and you'll take almost all the effort out of learning those songs. You'll *want* to listen to them on repeat, and you'll *want* to learn the words so you can sing along. This can be true even if the song isn't in your target language. I've met several people who learned the words to the French song *Magic in the Air* even though they don't speak any French at all, just because they enjoy the song so much.

How can you find songs that you'll like? Easy. You probably already know what kind of music you like in your

native language. You can use an app like *Spotify*(音楽配信サービス) or *Pandora*(音楽配信サービス) to search for music of same genre, but in your target language. Check *YouTube* as well to see if there are any music videos that display the lyrics for you to follow along.

<Get the English Translation AND Original Language Lyrics>

Depending on how advanced you are, you might not need the English lyrics. But no matter what your level, you should definitely get your hands on the lyrics in the song's original language. Trust me, you don't want to try to learn all the words to the song without that reference. If you hear the wrong thing, it will be tough to "unlearn" those incorrect lyrics in the future! Believe me. To this day, I *still* hear the words "Knock, knock, knockin' on Kevin's door" when I listen to Bob Dylan's *Knockin' on Heaven's Door*!

Listen to the song while following along with the lyrics. I prefer to follow along with the original *and* the English lyrics side-by-side at first. For those first few listens, you're not really gaining a lot of vocabulary in your target language. What you *are* doing is getting an ear for the sounds of the song (by listening to the words and sounding them out as you read the original lyrics), and learning what the song is about (by reading the English lyrics).

How you go about learning the song is up to you. If you prefer to memorise the lyrics in your target language and be able to sing the song verbatim(一語一語) before ever looking at the English lyrics, that's fine. If you prefer to start by studying the English lyrics while you listen, so that you can hear a line of the song and instantly know its English translation without knowing what the individual words in that line mean, that's fine too.

You can also follow a combination of these approaches, or invent your own unique approach. As long as you persist, you'll eventually have the song memorised and understand its meaning. Repetition is the key (remember what I said about picking a song that you like?).

<Break the Song Down into "Chunks">

Learning a whole song can feel overwhelming, especially if most of the words in the song are new for you. There's no need to force yourself to learn the whole thing in one chunk(塊). Break it up into verses(歌詞の一節), lines or even words.

The chorus is a good place to start. It's repeated often throughout the song, and usually has the catchiest tune.

Pause and rewind as often as it takes until you're comfortable with one section of the song. Only then should you move on to the next. When you move on to the next section, don't just forget about the previous section. Start the song over again, and listen to everything you've already learned up until the new section. You'll reinforce the lyrics that way, as well as have a better idea of how the song flows from one line to the next.

<Don't Just Listen: SING>

The best way to learn a language is to *speak it*. The best way to learn a song is to sing it! Choose songs you love, and you probably won't be able to resist singing along to them anyway. Suffering from inhibition(抑制)? Don't be shy. *You* don't have to sing badly in a foreign language on video and post it online for the world to see! Just do whatever works for you.

Sing home alone, while you're cooking dinner, or in the shower. Sing to your dog, cat or tortoise. Learn to sing even a small handful of songs in your target language, and you'll surprise yourself – and the native speakers you talk with on a regular basis – with the big steps in your progress over a short period of time.

I doubt you'll stop at just a small handful of songs, either.

Chances are, you'll get *hooked on*(にはまる) learning a language through music, and it will become a regular part of your study routine. A part which barely feels like studying at all.(1477)