Sentence Stress in Songs

The Potential of Using Authentic Songs for Teaching English Sentence Stress to EFL Learners in Swedish Lower-Secondary School

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Abstract

Using music as a tool for teaching a foreign language has been shown to positively affect the language learning process (Balčytytė-Kurtinienė, 2018; Cañete García et al., 2022; Heidari-Shahreza & Moinzadeh, 2012), and this essay suggests that authentic English songs can be used in the teaching of EFL in lower-secondary school in Sweden to efficiently meet many aspects of the syllabus. Therefore, in acknowledging that songs and sentence stress in connected speech share rhythmical features, where some syllables are more prominent than others, the present study presents a model for investigating which principles of sentence stress are present in songs, adding to the understanding of the potential of using songs to teach language. The presented model consists of two steps: first, the rhythm of the song lyrics is translated into stress; second, the found stress pattern is analyzed for what principles of sentence stress are present. Furthermore, this process is applied to five authentic songs: the present principles of sentence stress manifested in these songs are first displayed and then discussed from a teaching point of view, to exemplify how this model can be used by teachers to investigate the learning potentials of songs. The songs under investigation are "Mercedes Benz", "Fast car", "This land is your land", "Blowin' in the wind", and "What shall we do with the drunken sailor". The findings show the noticeable presence of various principles of sentence stress in the chosen songs, adding to the understanding of how songs can be used in the teaching of EFL pronunciation. Additionally, some unconventional cases of both word and sentence stress were found, and the essay argues that teachers need to be aware of the present principles of sentence stress in the songs, as well as the unconventional cases, when aspiring to use songs in the teaching of these supra-segmental aspects.

Keywords: sentence stress, pronunciation teaching, musical instruction, English as a foreign language, English songs

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Introduction

Songs have an obvious role to play in the EFL lower-secondary education of Sweden. Not only does the syllabus for the English subject in grades 7–9 explicitly state that songs should be included in the teaching, but it adds that living conditions, traditions, social relations, and cultural phenomena, in contexts and areas where English is used[1] should be covered (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022, p. 3, my translation). English music has an essential cultural value which is tightly linked to the English language and its social context: songs often have a pivotal role in celebrating traditions, depicting living conditions, provoking societal change, and reflecting current cultural values. Additionally, English is widely used within popular music all around the globe. Hence, teaching English-speaking cultures without including songs would be inadequate. The use of songs in the EFL classroom is thus an important field to investigate. More specifically, the research of this paper focuses on authentic English songs and how these can be used in the EFL teaching in grades 7–9 in Swedish compulsory school. *Authentic songs* are, in this context, defined as all songs that are not specifically generated for teaching purposes.

Authentic songs in the EFL classroom can have additional purposes besides being studied as cultural phenomena: they can aid language learning. Previous studies indicate that musical instruction has a positive effect on foreign language learning (Balčytytė-Kurtinienė, 2018; Cañete García et al., 2022; Heidari-Shahreza & Moinzadeh, 2012), that it can reduce anxiety and increase motivation in the foreign-language classroom (Dolean, 2016; Şener & Erkan, 2018), and that music can be used to aid listening comprehension (Besson et al., 2008; Gordon et al., 2011). While most of these studies concern music created for learning (Balčytytė-Kurtinienė, 2018; Besson et al., 2008; Gordon et al., 2011; Heidari-Shahreza & Moinzadeh, 2012), Dolean's (2016) study uses authentic songs. However, the authentic material is not

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[1]"Levnadsvillkor, traditioner, sociala relationer och kulturella företeelser i olika sammanhang och områden där engelska används"

discussed to any noteworthy extent in the latter-mentioned study. Thus, taking a closer look at authentic songs could add to the understanding of how these can be used to teach language.

Songs and spoken language share a rhythmical quality: just as notes in a melody take on different prominence when sung, some syllables are stronger than others in spoken language, a phenomenon referred to as stress. Therefore, analyzing the rhythm of and accentuation in song lyrics can increase the understanding of how songs can be used to teach aspects of sentence stress in connected speech. The difference between strong and weak syllables is a crucial aspect of English speech (Roach, 2009, p. 110), and reducing vowels in unstressed words is typically neglected by EFL learners (Collins et al., 2019, pp. 130-131). Additionally, stress in connected speech can be used to emphasize different information (Collins et al., 2019, p. 136). Hence, English lyrics rhythmically realized in relevant ways in songs can be an instrument to teach sentence stress.

Aim and research questions

The aim of this essay originates from a lack of research on supra-segmental aspects in authentic songs for teaching purposes. While the use of songs in foreign language teaching and learning has been the object of much investigation (Balčytytė-Kurtinienė, 2018; Besson et al., 2008; Dolean, 2016; Gordon et al., 2011; Heidari-Shahreza & Moinzadeh, 2012; Şener & Erkan, 2018), the current research lacks a deeper analysis of supra-segmental aspects, such as rhythm and stress, in authentic English songs. This research gap is problematic: since EFL teachers are obliged to include pronunciation in their teaching (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022, pp. 3–4), continuous research within the area is necessary, so that revised and efficient methods for teaching pronunciation can be developed. As music has proven to be a helpful tool to use to teach pronunciation (Balčytytė-Kurtinienė, 2018; Shahreza & Moinzadeh, 2012), the study aims to add to the understanding of how songs can be used in the teaching of EFL

pronunciation. This is achieved by analyzing how principles of sentence stress are represented in carefully chosen authentic songs. Additionally, as only a handful of songs are analyzed, the process will work as a guide for language teachers who want to include songs in their teaching. Therefore, the thesis further aims to provide a model for analyzing how principles of sentence stress are present in songs, which will enable EFL teachers to use authentic songs to teach these principles. However, the thesis analyzes songs and not teaching situations; thus, the actual learning outcome will not be discussed.

This essay takes specific principles for sentence stress under consideration when investigating the songs. Four principles are used. These are brought up by Collins et al. (2019, p. 136): the general rule of stressing important content words; and three conventional exceptions of stressing a function word that is a wh-word in a question, a demonstrative pronoun, or used to indicate contrast. This essay investigates how these principles of sentence stress are present in the chosen songs.

The research questions for this study are:

- How can principles of sentence stress be identified in songs?

- Which principles of English sentence stress are present in the chosen authentic songs?

- What is the potential of using authentic songs when teaching sentence stress to EFL learners?

These questions are addressed in different stages of the essay. The first research question is tackled in the *Method* section. The answer to the second research question is examined in the *Analysis* section. The third research question is explored in the *Discussion* section.

<center>**Background**</center>

The relevance of teaching pronunciation

Before further diving into the teaching of EFL with music and songs, the role of pronunciation teaching in a Swedish context is addressed. First, how the syllabus for the English subject in lower-secondary school treats the topic of pronunciation is brought forward. Secondly, the role of pronunciation and speech anxiety is addressed. Finally, the need to focus on English stress in multilingual environments, such as Swedish schools, is discussed.

Teachers of EFL in Swedish lower-secondary schools are obliged to teach pronunciation to their students. The syllabus for the English subject, issued by the Swedish National Agency for Education (2022, pp. 3–4), clearly states that teaching in grades 7–9 should deal with pronunciation, both as a receptive, productive, and interactive skill. Although sentence stress is never explicitly mentioned, the importance of cultivating an ability to employ aspects of sentence stress is further supported by the aim of the subject: the syllabus emphasizes an aim to develop students' abilities to use the language in different ways while considering different circumstances and intentions (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022, p. 1). In this regard, it is relevant both to develop a natural sentence stress that reduces breakdown in communication and that enables efficient communication, and to practice the ability to vary the semantics of your language by using contrastive stress to convey subtleties. Furthermore, the aim of the syllabus for the English subject emphasizes confidence building and helping learners to develop trust in themselves as users of the language (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022, p. 1). Hence, teaching pronunciation is vital as it provides the students with tools to successfully express themselves.

A key element in developing confidence when speaking a new language is to reduce speech anxiety, which can be tackled through teaching pronunciation. Recent research shows

that speech anxiety has a negative effect on the use and learning of a foreign language (Baran-Łucarz, 2014; Khan, 2015; Pérez Castillejo, 2019; Kasap & Power, 2019). In order to motivate students to communicate and interact in a classroom, this needs to be addressed. Baran-Łucarz's (2014) research suggests that students with a high level of anxiety regarding pronunciation are less prone to communicate and participate in classroom interaction. Since practicing pronunciation helps students interact and engage in the learning, pronunciation teaching could increase communicative confidence and lead to reduced anxiety among students, supporting the aim of the syllabus to increase confidence and trust in the students' abilities to communicate (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022, p. 1).

In a multilingual learning environment, it is important to emphasize the teaching and practicing of prosodic features. Since there are an estimated 150–200 different L1s in Sweden (Lainio, 2013, p. 302; Norrby & Håkansson, 2015, p. 242) and 20% of our population is born in countries other than Sweden (SCB), Sweden could be argued to be a multilingual country. Research conducted on the influence of linguistic backgrounds in acquiring English word and sentence stress suggests that the different rules for stress in different languages impact the learning: Lee et al. (2019) investigated and compared L1 speakers of Spanish and of Korean, and concluded that having an L1 that uses sentence stress makes it easier to acquire these features in English; a study by Jaiprasong & Pongpairoj (2020, p. 152) showed that Thai learners' errors in word stress were a result of the contrasting principles in English and Thai for placement of stress. Additionally, in light of French and English having different prosodic structures, Capliez's (2016) research shows that teaching prosodic elements of English, such as rhythm, stress, and intonation, to French speakers improves listening comprehension. Additional difficulties acquiring English stress can be found in a study conducted by Kucukoglu (2012), where he shows that native Turkish speaking teachers of English have trouble acquiring English sentence stress, and the reason for this, he proposes, is that the Turkish language is a

syllable-timed language. Therefore, as various linguistic backgrounds are likely to occur in a classroom and since it cannot be foreseen which L1 the students will have, giving proper attention to prosodic features in the teaching of EFL in Sweden is of great relevance.

To conclude, it is clear that pronunciation is vital when learning a language, and that an important part of this is teaching aspects of stress. This calls for the topic to be further investigated so that effective and creative ways of teaching it can be found. One possibility is to use music and songs to teach aspects of stress, as music and language share many similar features (discussed in the *Method* section). Since the research questions of this thesis deal with how aspects of English sentence stress are manifested in carefully chosen songs and the potential of teaching these aspects with music, the next section will explore previous research on the teaching and learning of English with music.

Previous research

Much research within the field of foreign language learning and teaching that includes musical elements has established the positive effects of using music in the classroom. In this section, research showing the potential of using music in language teaching is presented. This will support the continuous investigation of the field.

Using music and songs during language learning has been shown to reduce anxiety levels and increase motivation. Dolean (2016) concluded that using music to teach a foreign language significantly reduced the anxiety level of those who initially had a high anxiety level, but that the anxiety level of those who initially had a low anxiety level was not altered to any noteworthy extent. This demonstrates that students who struggle the most with foreign language learning due to speech anxiety could benefit from being taught language with music. Regarding the motivating role of music, Şener's and Erkan's (2018) study showed that the students in their research viewed their English lessons more positively and regarded English teaching as more

important after the inclusion of musical activities. Their research also showed that the students were highly motivated and engaged in lessons that included music. Dolean's (2016) and Şener and Erkan's (2018) studies show that musical instruction during language learning can reduce anxiety among those with high anxiety and have positive effects on motivation.

Additionally, research suggests that musical experience is a positive factor when predicting and acquiring aspects of English pronunciation. Jekiel and Malarski (2021) found that proficiency in rhythmical memory correlated with more native-like vowel pronunciation among native Polish speakers before a year of English studies at university, and that years of musical practicing predicted the acquiring of a more native-like vowel production after having had EFL pronunciation teaching for a year. Moreover, in France, Cason et al. (2020) showed that high scores on a rhythmic production test predicted native French students' abilities to correctly reproduce the penultimate stress on English trisyllabic words – a foreign location to put stress in the French language. Hence, the studies suggest that musical competence correlates with proficiencies of prosody and stress placement, as well as vowel quality, for L2 speakers of English. This demonstrates that there is a relationship between music and language learning that needs to be investigated further.

Musical instruction has proven to have positive effects on the ability to improve the correct use of stress. Balčytytė-Kurtinienė (2018) concludes that the learners who received musical instruction performed better than those who received audio-lingual teaching on all the tested proficiencies: strong/weak syllables, vowel reduction, and sentence stress. Additionally, Heidari-Shahreza and Moinzadeh (2012) investigated word stress being taught to Iranian EFL learners with Persian as their L1 by giving words a melody. They conclude that the musical patterns that were applied to the words during the learning were effective in helping the participants to later recognize the correct stress patterns of the target words. Both these studies

examine the positive effects of musical instruction, indicating a positive correlation between musical instruction and linguistic performance, which demands to be investigated further.

Moreover, rhythm and melody have been found to impact our listening comprehension. In a study by Besson et al. (2008), a phrase of six made-up trisyllabic words, in which the words recurred but in different orders, was spoken to one group, and sung to another group. Their results show that the participants were more likely to remember the words and segment them correctly – in the way the words had recurred in the phrase – when the words had been sung. On another note, Gordon et al.'s (2011) study focused on rhythm and concluded that aligning strong beats with strong syllables improves the comprehension of the lyrics, and that comprehension is disrupted when this is not the case. More than 40 years earlier, Martin (1970) investigated the internal perception of how language stress relates to rhythm. His findings show that when sentences were read with a consistent tempo, the participants interpreted the syllables on the downbeat (i.e., the strong beat) to be stressed, although each syllable was equally strong and long. Both Martin's (1970) and Gordon et al.'s (2011) results show that rhythm is one vital factor influencing our interpretation and comprehension of oral language, and Besson et al.'s (2008) study shows that melody can be another. Since authentic songs feature both of these elements, the importance of further investigating the use of songs and music in language teaching is emphasized.

To summarize, there is much research supporting the use of music to teach EFL. However, the considerable potential of using music in language teaching is dependent on the continuous research and development of musical instruction in language learning. Authentic songs were sparsely used in the mentioned studies, and the similarities between English sentence stress and the rhythm of these songs' lyrics have not been analyzed to any noteworthy extent. To approach how authentic songs can be used in the teaching of principles of sentence stress, the presence and manifestation of these principles in songs needs to be investigated. Such

an investigation can help us to further understand and explore the potential of using song as a teaching tool.

Theory of sentence stress

Since this thesis is concerned with how aspects of stress are manifested in carefully chosen authentic songs, the theory of English sentence stress needs to be outlined. The features of stress and rhythm that are brought into focus are called supra-segmental, in phonology. Supra-segmental features, also called prosody (Roach, 2009, p. 119), stretch beyond separate segments and are present in any sequence of spoken language from a syllable to a whole sentence, or longer (Collins et al., 2019, p. 130). Prosody also includes intonation, but this study will regard the rhythmical features of language. Hence, principles regarding sentence stress and how it relates to rhythm are described, as well as the effect of vowel reduction.

Syllables can largely be divided into stressed and unstressed syllables, which both have distinctive characteristics. Phonetically, stressed syllables are generally stronger and with a longer vowel as opposed to unstressed syllables, which tend to be realized by central vowels or syllabic consonants (Collins et al., 2019, p. 131). Thus, when a stressed syllable becomes unstressed, the vowel sound generally changes to a more central quality – an effect called vowel reduction, which is claimed to be something many learners of English struggle with (Collins et al., 2019, pp. 130–131). Vowel reduction could be explained by the fact that these sounds require less effort to pronounce than the original, often more peripheral, vowel qualities.

In the English language, the stressing of syllables in connected speech is guided by principles. In connected speech, many syllables that would normally receive stress if the words were pronounced in isolation are not stressed at all (Collins et al., 2019, p. 21). Generally, content words with important information are stressed while function words, with more structural purposes, are unstressed. (Collins et al., 2019, p. 136). The former corresponds to the

open word classes – also called lexical words – and the latter to the closed word classes – also called grammatical words. Additionally, Collins et al. (2019, p. 136) list conventional exceptions to this rule: a function word is often stressed when it is either a wh-word in a question (including the word *how*), a demonstrative pronoun, a possessive pronoun, or when it is used to show, indicate, or imply a contrast; when a lexical word is closely repeated or followed by a word with the same referent, the latter is rarely stressed; the faster the tempo of the speech is the more syllables will be left unstressed, even content words. Hence, the words – content or function – with significant information are generally stressed.

The fact that the English language has clear examples of vowel reduction can be explained by its rhythm. English is often said to be a stress-timed language, meaning that stressed syllables are realized at a relatively equal pace, regardless of the number of unstressed syllables between them (Roach, 2009, p. 107). On the other hand, languages such as French, Turkish and Spanish are said to be syllable-timed, indicating that syllables occur at comparatively equal intervals (Collins et al., 2019, p. 138–139). Although the actual existence of this rhythmical distinction between stress-timed and syllable-timed languages is debated and the evidence is weak, Roach (2009, p. 110) claims that we perceive language as rhythmical in this sense. Additionally, the distinction helps us understand the difference between weak and strong syllables – a vital element in learning English. Roach (2009, p. 110) continues to argue that a rhythmical approach in which oral language is repeated in rhythmical exercises gives the learners guidance in the practice of stressing, where focus is put on producing weak unstressed syllables between the strong stressed syllables. Taking all this into consideration as well as the fact that the research of this essay deals with songs in the context of language learning and teaching, the thesis will regard English as a syllable-timed language.

To conclude, the distinction between stressed and unstressed syllables in connected speech is a dominant feature of speaking English. Additionally, vowel reduction is affected by

principles for sentence stress and rhythm since the unstressed words need to be pronounced quickly and with ease when squeezed in between stressed syllables. Finally, this distinction between stressed and unstressed syllables can be practiced by highlighting the rhythmical nature of the English language, which is beneficial in language learning situations.

Musical terminology

Since this study combines the field of phonology with the field of music, terminology from both disciplines is used. This essay is directed toward English teachers; thus, the phonological terms are expected to be understood. However, some rudimentary musical terminology is explained here. In music, a *measure*, also called a *bar*, refers to a unit of time partly defined by the tempo and the inherent rhythm of the song. The most commonly used measure in pop songs fits four *quarter notes*. These measures usually have two *strong beats*, placed where the first and the third quarter notes would be, had the measure consisted of four quarter notes following each other. There is also a widely used measure that is half the length, in which the strong beats would be the first quarter note of each bar. For pedagogical reasons, this is referred to as a *half-length measure*.

<p style="text-align:center">Material and method</p>

This section deals with the material and the method of the study. First, the material is presented. Secondly, the method of the study is explained.

Material

In this essay, five songs were investigated. These are "Mercedes Benz", written by Janis Joplin and Michael McClure; "Fast car", written by Tracy Chapman; "This land is your land", written by Woody Guthrie; "Blowin' in the wind", written by Bob Dylan; and "What shall we do with the drunken sailor". The latter is a traditional sea shanty, so the writer is unknown.

In the analysis of the songs, the scores were thoroughly investigated as the core source of information (see Chapman, 1988; Dylan, 1974; Guthrie, 2003; Joplin & McClure, 1976; What shall we do with the drunken sailor, 1978); additionally, audio recordings were examined (see Chapman, 1988, track 2; Drunken sailor, 2012, track 1; Dylan, 1963, track 1; Guthrie, 1997, track 1; Joplin & McClure, 1971, track 8). For instance, verses from both the music scores of "What shall we do with the drunken sailor" and the audio version recorded by The Irish Rovers, named "Drunken sailor", were considered, providing more material.

Method

In this section, the method of the study is presented. First, what guided the search for and choice of songs is elaborated on. Secondly, the model for analyzing sentence stress in the songs is discussed. Finally, how the findings were categorized is explained.

Searching for and choosing songs

What guided the search and choice of materials were two things: the possibility of discussing English-speaking culture and the estimated value of interesting and useful results, in terms of

present principles of sentence stress, that could be generated by the analysis process. Hence, the songs needed to fall into both of these categories.

First, the chosen songs open up for many possible discussions regarding living conditions and culturally important events which, with an active choice by the teacher, could be connected to English-speaking circumstances: "Mercedes Benz" deals with consumerism, "Fast car" with poverty, "This land is your land" and "Blowin' in the wind" with civil rights and the American folk movement, and "What shall we do with the drunken sailor" with the life as a sailor, which, since the song is a part of British culture, opens up for discussions about the British Empire. Although living conditions and other social aspects of English-speaking culture are expressed as core content in the syllabus for the EFL subject in grades 7–9 in Sweden (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022, p. 3) and therefore important to include, my study will not further concern itself with this; the investigation of authentic songs is, however, justified by the core content stated in the syllabus.

Secondly, the songs needed to have the potential to yield constructive and valuable results in light of the previously outlined theories of sentence stress. For this type of analysis, the rhythmical dimensions of the songs had to represent the rhythm of authentic speaking, to some degree. Hence, while searching for material, many songs in which the rhythm was considered to prominently deviate from the principles of sentence stress previously mentioned were excluded. Audio recordings were listened to and songs which were estimated to represent the rhythm of connected speech were chosen, leading the investigation of the five chosen songs of this study.

Model for analyzing sentence stress

To answer the first research question, which concerns how principles of sentence stress can be identified in songs, a model for analyzing sentence stress was developed consisting of two steps. These two steps of the model, and how they were applied to the songs are outlined here.

Step one – the translation of rhythm into stress. To examine how the song lyrics could be interpreted to include sentence stress, the theory brought up by Roach (2009, p. 107) that English is a stress-timed language, and the fact brought up by Collins et al. (2019, p. 131) that stressed syllables are stronger than unstressed syllables, were considered. In their experiment, Gordon et al. (2011) aligned the naturally stressed syllables of the lyrics to the first quarter notes of each new half-length measure; these placements correspond to the strong beats. Similar to their process, the music scores were investigated to determine where in the songs there are words that include syllables that occur on strong beats. Since stressed syllables are stronger than unstressed syllables, it would be natural for them to be placed on the strong beats, and the fact the English language is stress-timed strengthens this interpretation since strong beats occur are regular intervals, just as stressed syllables. More concretely, it was registered where the words in the songs' lyrics include syllables that are realized in notes placed on strong beats in the measures, which was established by comparing the notes and the lyrics in the music scores.

However, it needs to be acknowledged that, just as the number of stressed syllables reduces when the tempo in speech increases (Collins et al., 2019, p. 136), the tempo of the music affects which notes are perceived as strong enough to reflect stress. Therefore, the audio recordings were listened to in order to determine to what degree the singer accentuates the syllables on the alleged strong beats. When a syllable is accentuated by the singer, it is perceived as strong, which is a property of a stressed syllable; hence, when listening to the recordings it was established if the syllables that were interpreted to be stressed by the examination of the

music scores were also stressed by the singer. The general interpretation was that when a syllable both occurs on a strong beat in the music scores and is accentuated by the singer, it is stressed; however, if the tempo is slow to a degree that the quarter notes between the stressed syllables on the strong beats are also stressed by the singer, these were also considered stressed, resulting in four stressed syllables in a measure. Since this essay is concerned with sentence stress and not word stress, where the stress falls within a word will not be mentioned as long as it is on the correct syllable; a word with a stressed syllable will simply be considered a stressed word.

Step two – principles of sentence stress in the songs. Once the stressed words within the songs were identified, the next step was to determine which of the principles of sentence stress are present. Four key principles were used in this study. These principles can be found in Collins et al. (2019, p. 136): the general rule of stressing important content words; and the three conventional exceptions, in which a function word is stressed if it is a wh-word in a question, a demonstrative pronoun, or used to indicate contrast. The stressed words from the lyrics were then analyzed to determine which principles are followed; when all stressed words in a sentence are content words, the general principle of stressing content words is followed. However, if a function word was found to also be stressed, that word was examined, and if the word displayed one of the three conventional exceptions, that principle was considered to be present in the song. However, when a function word was found to be stressed without following one of the principles of sentence stress, this was considered an unconventional exception.

Categorizing findings

While the findings were categorized, the focus was on the four conventional principles of sentence stress used in this study, as well as on unconventional exceptions. The findings were categorized so that each stressing principle is dealt with under its own subheading in the

analysis section. Not all songs include each stress principle; thus, not all songs were placed under each subheading. It was registered where representations of sentence stress principles were found, and how they were expressed. Additionally, unconventional cases of sentence and word stress were noticed and analyzed. These were also given their own subheading. Moreover, the findings in each of the chosen songs were recorded and summarized in table.

Analysis

This section will account for the relevant aspects of sentence stress found in the chosen songs: "Mercedes Benz", "Fast car", "This land is your land", "Blowin' in the wind", and "What shall we do with the drunken sailor". When the songs are quoted, the words interpreted to be stressed are underlined; hence, all underlinings are mine. First, how the general rule of stressing content words with significant information is manifested in the songs is addressed. Secondly, conventional exceptions to the general rule in the songs are displayed. Thirdly, a section outlining examples of where the principles are not strictly adhered to follows, focusing on syncopes and unconventional cases of stress. Finally, a short table of the findings in each song concludes the section.

Important content words

The general principle of stressing content words with significant information is dominant in many of the songs. "What shall we do with the drunken sailor", "Blowin' in the wind", "Mercedes Benz", and "Fast car" are analyzed here. However, "This land is your land" is addressed in following sections, as it clearly displays how stress can indicate contrast.

The majority of the first lines in each verse of the song "What shall we do with the drunken sailor" are clear examples of where the content words are stressed and the function words are unstressed, and since the verses consist of the repeating of the first line twice, ending with the line "early in the morning", they are a large part of the song. This can be seen in lines such as "Give him a hair of the dog that bit him" (What shall we do with the drunken sailor, 1978, p. 114), "Shave his belly with a rusty razor" (Drunken sailor, 2012, track 1), and "Stick him in a scupper with a hosepipe bottom" (Drunken sailor, 2012, track 1), where the stressed words are underlined. In these cases, the stressed words are exclusively content words, and the unstressed words are exclusively function words.

Much of the lyrics of "Blowin' in the wind" also follows this principle. In the chorus the stressed words are, just as in the previous song, lexical words, while the grammatical words are unstressed: "The <u>answer</u>, my <u>friend</u>, is <u>blowin'</u> in the <u>wind</u> / The <u>answer</u> is <u>blowin'</u> in the <u>wind</u>" (Dylan, 1974, p. 175). However, while some function words receive stress and many lines include an unstressed content word, for example, *walk* and *look* (Dylan, 1974, p. 174) in the initial line of the first and second verses respectively, the great majority of the stressed words in the verses are lexical, and the grammatical words generally tend to be unstressed. A representative example of this can be found in the middle of the first verse: "<u>How</u> many <u>seas</u> must a <u>white</u> dove <u>sail</u> / <u>Before</u> she <u>sleeps</u> in the <u>sand</u>?" (Dylan, 1974, p. 174), where five of the seven stressed words are lexical and all the unstressed except one are grammatical.

Additionally, in both "Mercedes Benz" and "Fast car" the principle of stressing content words is followed in much of their lyrics. Examples of this can be found in the two lines ending the second verse of "Mercedes Benz": "I <u>wait</u> for <u>delivery</u> each <u>day</u> until <u>three</u> / So, <u>Lord</u>, won't you <u>buy</u> me a <u>color</u> <u>TV</u>?" (Joplin & McClure 1976, p. 51). Similar examples of stressing lexical words can be found in "Fast car": "<u>Maybe</u> <u>together</u> we can <u>get</u> <u>somewhere</u>" and "<u>Starting</u> from <u>zero</u> got <u>nothing</u> to <u>lose</u>" (Chapman, 1988, p. 8). However, the lyrics of "Fast car" are sung in a rapid tempo, leading to the stressed syllables at times being perceived as fewer while the unstressed ones increase. This is, for instance, evident in the line "Is it <u>fast</u> enough so we can <u>fly</u> away?" (Chapman, 1988, track 2, 1:45–1:49). Here the lexical words *enough* and *away* are unstressed while *fast* and *fly* are stressed, which could be explained by the fact that the latter words contain more significant information, while the former mentioned words, in a sense, revise the given information. Although the particle is more likely to receive the stronger stress of the words in phrasal verbs like *fly away*, both the principle of stressing significant information and of dropping stressed syllables when the tempo increases are followed.

Conclusively, four of the five chosen songs display clear cases of the general principle of stressing content words, but not exclusively and not equally as much, which is discussed in the remainder of the analysis section. The fact that not all lexical words are stressed does not imply that the general rule of stressing content words is not followed; the principle only concerns the content words with significant information. When all stressed words are content words, the general rule is followed. Therefore, the occasions where function words are stressed are the object of further investigation. This could, in a sense, justify an analysis where "This land is your land" also follows the general principle of stressing content words; however, since the stressed syllables are relatively few, it is more relevant to treat the song as a special case, where other features are in focus. Hence, it is addressed further down.

Conventional exceptions to the rule

There are conventional exceptions to the general rule of stressing lexical words: wh-word in questions, demonstrative pronouns, and grammatical words indicating a contrast are generally stressed (Collins et al., 2019, p. 136). How this is manifested in the songs is addressed. Additionally, cases when stressed function words suggest an implicit contrast are presented.

Questions

The principle of stressing wh-words in questions is present in two of the chosen songs: "What shall we do with the drunken sailor" and "Blowin' in the wind". In the former, it can be found in the first line of the first verse: "<u>What</u> shall we <u>do</u> with the <u>drunken</u> <u>sailor</u>" (1978, p. 114). Here, the function word *what* receives stress, just as the content words *do*, *drunken* and *sailor*, while the other function words fall unstressed between the stressed words. Additionally, this principle is highly prominent throughout all three verses of "Blowin' in the wind" (Dylan, 1974). More precisely, each verse consists of three questions, all beginning with the stressed

function word *how*, which can be seen in the example: "How many years can a mountain exist / Before it's washed to the sea?" (Dylan, 1974, p. 174), where the grammatical word *how* receives stress just as the other underlined words. Hence, both "What shall we do with the drunken sailor" and "Blowin' in the wind" demonstrate clear cases of the principle of stressing wh-words in questions.

Demonstratives

In the last verse of the recording of "What shall we do with the drunken sailor" (Drunken sailor, 2012, track 1), the demonstrative pronoun *that* is stressed, following the principle of stressing these. The first, second, and third line of the last verse is thus pronounced accordingly: "That's what we do with a drunken sailor" (Drunken sailor, 2012, track 1, 1:54–2:00). The grammatical word *that* is combined with the word *is*, forming the contracted form *that's*, which is stressed just as the underlined lexical words – contractions are often stressed, according to Collins et. al. (2019, p. 21).

Contrast

In two of the chosen songs, "Fast car" and "This land is your land", the principle of stressing grammatical words when indicating contrast is found. The melody of "This land is your land" (Guthrie, 2003) starts with three pickup notes before landing on the first strong beat of the first measure and continues to follow this rhythmical figure (motif) five more times before the last line of each verse, the word receiving the most prominent stress in each motif is the one after these pickup notes. Thus, the general pattern of sentence stress in all lines except the last in each verse looks like this: "This land is your land, this land is my land" (Guthrie, 2003, p. 197); additionally, when these words are monosyllabic, the following word also receives stress. This is not always the case, as can be seen in the lines "I saw above me that endless skyway / I saw

below me that golden valley" (Guthrie, 2003, p. 197), where *skyway* and *valley* are disyllabic. This stress pattern becomes evident when listening to the recording of the song (Guthrie, 1997, track 1). In these examples, contrast is indicated by the stressing of certain function words. First, there is an emphasis that the land belongs to the *you* of the song, and second, there is an emphasis that the land also belongs to the narrator of the song. Additionally, the narrator emphasizes the different direction of his gaze and what he found there, indicating a contrast between what is above him and what is below him. In "Fast car", a similar contrast is indicated between the *you* and the *I* of the lyrics, as these pronouns frequently are placed on strong beats. This can be seen in the example "You got a fast car / I want a ticket to anywhere" (Chapman, 1988, p. 8); contrast between personal pronouns is indicated in this manner four more times in the song. To summarize, both "Fast car" and "This land is your land" employ the principle of stressing functions words to show contrast.

Special emphasis / implied contrast

Cases where special emphasis is brought to function words by stressing them are evident in the songs "Mercedes Benz", "This land is your land", and "Blowin' in the wind"; in these cases, the contrasts are implicit. In "Mercedes Benz", this can be found in the line "I'm counting on you Lord" (Joplin & McClure, 1976, p. 51); in "This land is your land", it is displayed in the line that ends each verse: "This land was made for you and me" (Guthrie, 2003, p. 197); and in "Blowin' in the wind" the subordinating conjunction *before* is frequently stressed: for example "Before he can hear people cry?" (Dylan, 1974, p. 174). In the first two cases, following the general principle of stressing content words, the words *Lord* and *land* would be stressed, as opposed to their preceding words *you* and *this*. Hence, stressing these function words indicates that there are opposing options: the narrator of "Mercedes Benz" addresses *Lord* out of two or more candidates, and the narrator of "This land is your land" specifically refers to the addressed

landscape, implying that the claim does not concern any of the other pieces of land. Additionally, in "Blowin' in the wind", *before* is emphasized, as if someone had claimed otherwise, as if to say: *not after, but before*. To conclude, the stressing of these function words indicates an implicit contrast; as the opposing options are not present in the lyrics, their presence is implied by the contrastive stress. This type of stress to adjust meaning is often used in spoken language, especially when gestures are present and the referent needs to be delimited, or when someone has implied an opposing view; often, it can also be used to highlight one's opposing position.

Syncopes and unconventional stress

There are cases in the songs where the stress patterns do not conform to any of the conventional principles or rhythm discussed this far. First, in both "Mercedes Benz" and "Fast car", stressed words are realized in syncopes, as the addressed stressed syllables do not fall on strong beats but just before, while the length of the note stretches over the prominent beat of the measures. In "Fast car", this can be found in "<u>May</u>be we can <u>make</u> a <u>deal</u>" (Chapman, 1988, p. 8) and "You s<u>till</u> ain't <u>got</u> a <u>job</u>" (Chapman, 1988, p. 11), where the words *deal* and *job* are stressed syncopes. Additionally, it can be found in the lines "<u>please</u>, don't <u>let</u> me <u>down</u> / <u>prove</u> <u>that</u> you <u>love</u> me" in "Mercedes Benz" (Joplin & McClure, 1976, p. 51), where both *down* and *love* are syncopes stretching over strong beats. Even though these notes are not placed on the prominent beats, the fact that they stretch over – and thus occur during – the strong beats makes them perceived as stressed; this is further supported by the fact that the vowel sound in stressed syllables is longer than in unstressed syllables, a fact brought up by Collins et al. (2019, p. 131).

Secondly, there are cases where a function word is stressed instead of a content word, while not following any of the conventional exceptions. In "Mercedes Benz", cases like "<u>tryin'</u> <u>to</u> find <u>me</u>" and "<u>buy</u> <u>the</u> next <u>round</u>" (Joplin & McClure 1976, p. 51), where the words *to* and

the are stressed instead of the following *find* and *next*, are clear examples of this. Furthermore, unconventional stressing of function words can be found in the chorus of "Fast car": "driving, driving in your car, speed so fast felt like I was drunk" (Chapman, 1988, p. 10); note that *car*, *fast*, and *like*, are stressed syncopes. Here, the preposition *in* is stressed instead of its preceding verb *driving* and the subordinating conjunction *like* is stressed instead of its preceding verb *felt*. Additionally, in the version of "What shall we do with the drunken sailor" (1978) from the music score, if one were to sing the third verse identically to the rhythm outlined for the first verse, the stress would fall accordingly: "Pull out the plug and wet him all over" (p. 114). However, since the exact rhythm of the melody is only specified for the first verse, and since it is an old traditional song without a known composer, there is nothing to suggest that one could not stress *wet* instead of *him*, while modifying the rhythm slightly.

Finally, in "Fast car", "Blowin' in the wind", and "Mercedes Benz", there are examples of unconventional word stress: in the line "Maybe we'll make something" in "Fast car" (Chapman, 1988, p. 9), the word *something* is given ultimate stress instead of penultimate; additionally, in the line "Before they're forever banned" in "Blowin' in the wind" (Dylan, 1974, p. 175), the word *forever* is pronounced with antepenultimate stress instead of penultimate; and, in the line "Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz" (Joplin & McClure, 1976, p. 50) in "Mercedes Benz", the word *Mercedes* is pronounced with antepenultimate stress instead of penultimate, while the word *until*, in the line "I wait for delivery each day until three" (Joplin & McClure, 1976, p. 51), is pronounced with penultimate stress instead of ultimate – even if *until* does not receive a full sentence stress, there is still a stress hierarchy to the word. Although the focus of this study is on sentence stress, an awareness of word stress is essential since both are important elements of pronunciation. Hence, an outlining of where the songs deviate from the theory of stress discussed so far has been given.

Compilation of principles of stress in each song

In this section, a table of the features of stress found in the chosen songs is presented, answering the research question regarding which principles of English sentence stress are present in the chosen songs (Table 1). Note that these features are manifested in different ways and to various degrees.

Table 1

Principles of sentence stress present in the investigated songs

	Important content words	Wh-words in questions	Pronouns indicating contrast	Demonstrative pronouns	Special emphasis/ Implied contrast	Unconventional sentence and word stress
"Drunken sailor"	X	X		X		X[a]
"Fast car"	X		X			X
"Blowin' in the wind"	X	X			X	X[b]
"This land is your land"			X		X	
"Mercedes Benz"	X				X	X

[a] Only one possible unconventional sentence stress and no unconventional word stress.

[b] Only one unconventional word stress and no unconventional sentence stress.

Discussion

Regarding the aim of this essay to increase the understanding of how songs can be used in the teaching of EFL pronunciation, the findings of this study contribute to the research field of using music to teach language. Since there is an established connection between musical abilities and listening comprehension (Besson et al., 2008; Gordon et al., 2011; Martin, 1970), and since musical instruction has shown to decrease anxiety levels among those with a high anxiety level (Dolean, 2016) and to increase motivation (Şener & Erkan, 2018), the role of music in language teaching is justified. Therefore, understanding what type of language qualities a song manifests is a vital step in exploring how songs can be used to teach connected speech. Additionally, the established positive correlation between rhythmical proficiency and pronunciation (Jekiel & Malaraski, 2021; Cason et al., 2020), and the recognized positive effects of musical instruction on practicing English stress (Balčytytė-Kurtinienė, 2018; Heidari-Shahreza & Moinzadeh, 2012), can now be partly understood with the knowledge of how specific aspects of sentence stress can be reflected in songs. Hence, as this research establishes that various principles of sentence stress are distinctly present in the chosen authentic songs, the suggestion of causation, instead of mere correlation, between rhythmical ability and stress proficiency, is not far-fetched: proficiency in sentence stress could be a result of rhythmical competence and an experience of practicing sentence stress by singing songs where these features of sentence stress are present. To complement Roach's (2009, p. 110) claim regarding the positive role of rhythmical exercises in teaching stress, where the difference between stressed and unstressed syllables is practiced, this research highlights the different features of sentence stress that can be practiced with authentic songs.

As different principles of sentence stress are variously represented in the chosen songs, it would be natural to teach these principles using the songs in which the principles are manifested. To discuss the third research question, which regards the potential of using

authentic songs when teaching sentence stress to EFL learners, it is important to be aware of the cases of unconventional sentence and word stress. This could either be avoided as far as possible, commented on, or ignored, depending on the teaching approach and aim; however, if the aim is for the students to acquire and practice proper sentence stress, too many unconventional cases could defeat the purpose, especially if unnoticed. Hence, I suggest that "This land is your land" would be suitable to use to teach aspects of contrastive stress, since those principles are prominent features of the song, and since the song includes no unconventional sentence or word stress; I claim "What shall we do with the drunken sailor" to be a particularly beneficial song to include in the teaching of the general principle of stressing important content words, since that principle is highly present throughout the song and since the song, modified slightly, does not include any unconventional sentence or word stress either; and I propose that "Blowin' in the wind" is a favorable choice when teaching sentence stress in questions, since that principle is frequently adhered to in the verses, and since there is only one case of unconventional stress in the song. Furthermore, there is nothing to suggest that "Fast car" and "Mercedes Benz" cannot be used to teach the features discussed in the analysis section, or that other present principles of sentence stress, displayed in Table 1, should not be taught by using "This land is your land", "What shall we do with the drunken sailor", or "Blowin' in the wind", as long as all aspects are carefully considered.

However, it should be emphasized that this analysis model, primarily, is developed for EFL teachers to apply to other authentic songs to include in their teaching; the songs investigated in this essay are only examples that allows for a demonstration of the developed model for analyzing songs for sentence stress. When teachers have located the desired principle of sentence stress they wish to teach, they could apply this analysis process to authentic songs to examine their learning potential regarding this principle – if relevant musical proficiency is wanting, I suggest asking a music teacher for help. More concretely, EFL teachers teaching

sentence stress with songs could, for instance, with their classes, start by singing the song – or relevant extracts from it – then proceed to speak the lyrics with the same rhythm as the song – alternatively, exaggerate its rhythm and stresses – while progressively arriving at pronouncing it more conventionally.

To further discuss the third research question, including carefully chosen authentic songs, analyzed using the model of this study, in the teaching of sentence stress has the potential to also be beneficial regarding the syllabus. As stated in the syllabus, EFL teachers in Swedish lower-secondary schools are required to teach aspects of pronunciation, and to include and discuss songs, living conditions, specific cultural phenomena, and various traditions, from the English-speaking world (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022, pp. 3–4). If they wish to combine these aspects in their teaching, they could choose songs from a specific period, songs depicting a relevant occasion or living condition, songs connected with a concerned tradition, or songs that had a significant impact on something, and then analyze them according to the same process and principles described and used in this study. Finally, since speech anxiety can affect the use and learning of a foreign language negatively (Baran-Łucarz, 2014; Khan, 2015; Pérez Castillejo, 2019; Kasap & Power, 2019), and since musical instruction can increase motivation and decrease anxiety (Dolean, 2016; Şener & Erkan, 2018), there is great potential in using songs to also meet the aim of helping learners to build confidence and develop trust in themselves as competent speakers of English, expressed in the aim of the subject (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022, p. 1). Hence, there is considerable potential in including carefully chosen and analyzed songs, to successfully meet many aspects of the syllabus for the English subject in grades 7–9.

Conclusion

The three research questions have been answered in different stages of the essay. The developed analysis model answers the first research question, which regards how principles of sentence stress can be identified in songs. This model consists of two steps: first, the rhythm of the lyrics to the songs has to be understood in terms of stress, and second, these stressed words have to be analyzed to determine which principles of sentence stress are manifested. Five authentic songs were analyzed using this model, and their present principles of English sentence stress were outlined. Cases where the songs reflect unconventional sentence and word stress were also highlighted. The results of this analysis process answer the second research question, which concerns which principles of sentence stress are present in the chosen authentic songs, and it was concluded that the principles are noticeable present in the songs. To address the third research question, which regards the potential of using authentic songs when teaching sentence stress, it was recommended to use the songs in which the principles of sentence stress were clearly manifested, to teach these principles. Then, a discussion was conducted, addressing the need to be aware of the unconventional cases in each song. Moreover, how this research places itself in relation to previous research and how it is relevant in a Swedish context was argued: it was concluded that the findings add to the understanding of the correlation between musical ability and pronunciation proficiency, and that it provides EFL teachers with tools to use authentic songs in their pronunciation teaching, to effectively adhere to the syllabus for lower-secondary school by teaching multiple aspects of the expressed aim and core content.

The findings of this essay unveil a need for further investigation. I recommend conducting research on the teaching of sentence stress with songs, analyzed using the model provided by study, while examining the learning outcome; experimental research collecting qualitative data through classroom observations could be conducted to compare the effects of teaching sentence stress with songs as opposed to using other methods. Additionally,

interdisciplinary research where music and English pronunciation are taught simultaneously would be a welcomed contribution to the field. The positive effects of musical instruction, found in previous research, and suggested by this study, deserve to be addressed and acknowledged; the application and further development of musical instruction in language teaching carry potential that cannot be disregarded.

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