Music(s) of the world as an online EFL resource: A Japanese EFL classroom experience

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ABSTRACT

This research considers how the study of musical performances from around the world can be drawn upon as a useful resource for language instruction, particularly in EFL Japanese university classrooms. This study shares the insights gained from literature reviews combined with the researcher's teaching experiences on the advanced English elective course of "Computer-Assisted Ethnomusicology." This work was carried out over a five-year period between 2013 - 2018 at a university in the Tohoku region of Japan, based on a course that focused on the music and culture found in Oceania, South East Asia, East Asia, Africa, and North America. This study identifies the language resources present within the ethnomusicological content, and identifies the ways it can help awaken learners to the rich variation that exists among the cultures of the world, and highlighting the way local and global features combine in the 'glocal'. In addition to digital applications, approaches introduced in the study also include the combination of high and low contact activities based on ethnomusicological resources. This helps to emphasize how Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and open-source multimedia make it possible to approach musical song texts and discourses that surround musical practice and performance and apply these to EFL teaching.

Keywords: *Music; Performance in education; Ethnomusicology; EFL; Multimedia; CALL*

1. Introduction

In universities throughout Japan, industry-standard textbooks based on British and American English continue to support the delivery of undergraduate English language courses (Mishima, 2017; Sugimoto & Uchida, 2018). However, in addition to core English classes, many institutions offer instructors the freedom to design and

deliver elective subjects in English (Lassegard, 2016; Susser, 2017). Samples of the offerings I have encountered over the last decade include Teaching English through Manga, 3-D Printing, Film, Global English, Cyber Culture, and Culture and Society. My own work has explored teaching English through music (Rockell, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Rockell & Ocampo, 2014). The initial promising results of this work with music generally prompted me to consider ethnomusicology as a possible vehicle for language education in developing my own elective courses. I am motivated to learn more about how ethnomusicological resources such as traditional Japanese "*Noh*" drama are usefully appropriated in the context of EFL university classrooms in Japan and curious about the pedagogical implications of this practice.

It may be helpful at the outset to outline ethnomusicology for those readers less familiar with the discipline. It can be thought of as a branch of socio-cultural anthropology that studies all human music in its cultural context with an emphasis on fieldwork. While its data can be represented through audio-visual, diagrammatic and notated musical examples, the lion's share of academic work in this field is presented in human language, and increasingly in English. Work in languages other than English has also become readily available for English language readers since 2013 in the Society for Ethnomusicology's online serial publication translations. Moreover, it can be noted that human language is inextricably bound to this discipline. This can be seen clearly in the tripartite model of one of ethnomusicology's preeminent scholars, Merriam. Merriam considers music as sound, concept and behaviour (Barton, 2018; Merriam & Merriam, 1964; Pugh-Kitingan, 2017). Here, human language appears in all three divisions:

1. *Sound* – as song text or performance-related speech and chant
2. *Concept* – in as much as frameworks of ideas, formal and folk evaluations and general thoughts about music are conceived of and expressed in spoken and written language.
3. *Behavior* – in mediating performers' interaction, creating and maintaining hierarchies, supporting musical pedagogy and the transmission of performance traditions.

Hence it can be seen that human language is not only fundamental to ethnomusicology's practice as an academic discipline, it is also richly pervasive within the musical data under consideration. This linguistic richness, the intrinsically interesting and popular nature of music as topic, as well as my own serious engagement with it as a researcher led me to consider it appropriate as the basis of a university EFL elective course. Once determined to apply ethnomusicology to EFL, my inquiry set out to answer the following questions. How can ethnomusicology be applied in EFL? What is the role of language in ethnomusicology, and what language resources can be identified within its course materials? What approaches do these materials invite, and if presented digitally, what are the affordances of MOOCs and multimedia in this context? While numerous studies of music in EFL have been conducted, few

ethnomusicologically-oriented studies, and in particular those considering online resources, have been carried out, leaving a gap which this paper begins to address.

2. Literature review

As an important background to the current research, I drew upon relevant literature including work on world Englishes and teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy, music and performing arts in EFL, and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL).

The way Global Englishes are incorporated into English language classrooms is covered broadly by Galloway and Rose (2018), and the issues and challenges arising teaching English in a more specific context in Indonesia is offered by Yusny (2013). Pennycook (2003) provides interesting insights on these issues from a sociolinguistic perspective, also approaching rap music and performativity, which are relevant to the current study. Work by Nunan, helped to contextualize the research within the Asia-Pacific and gave insight into how the use of English as a global language tended to impact on regional educational policies (Nunan, 2003).

In addition to my own earlier work, which was referred to in the introduction, a number of studies that explore music and performing arts in EFL have a bearing on this study and were helpful during the current research. A detailed survey of research on the use of music in English language learning was provided by Engh (2013) and this work was usefully expanded on by Mover (2017), who also begins to consider music, language and CALL. Nadera (2015), considers the affective dimension of music in language learning, specifically how it impacts on students' motivation. In this connection, music has an important role within approaches based on suggestopedia, as recognized by Kharismawati and Susanto (2014), Zaid (2014), and also Younus and Ahmad (2017), whose case study included music within suggestopedia approaches in Pakistan. Drama-focussed language teaching techniques, which can also include singing, were endorsed in studies by Gaudart (1990) and also several years earlier in a book length contribution by Holden (1984). The benefits celebrated by these authors are also echoed in more recent work based in the Asia-Pacific region (Abdulrahman et al., 2019; Sembiring & Sarwono, 2018).

CALL literature was relevant not only because of the online component of this study, but also because many of the students in the relevant classes were computer science majors at a boutique institution specializing in computer science. This is a relatively new and fast changing field. Seminal work by Lian, such as his 2004 Technology-enhanced language-learning environments: A rhizomatic approach (Lian, 2004), later work by Levy and Stockwell (2013) and more recent work by Heft et al., deal with the key developments in computer-assisted language learning (ICALL) (Heift, 2017; Yaghoobi & Razmjoo, 2016). These provided a very helpful overview when commencing the current study.

3. Method

I conducted an experimental study combined with a qualitative methodology based on the iterative assessment of course taught regularly over a five-year period from 2013–2018. In approaching methodology, which can be "defined as a general research paradigm that outlines how a research project is undertaken" (Ma, 2015, p. 567), I consider the idea of 'research pathways.' In this project, the pathway lead to the reflexive analysis of observable behaviour, stated attitude and viewpoints, and degree of participation in working with the materials in the Computer-Assisted Ethnomusicology (CAE) class, as a participant-observer, without specific reference to individual participants, and mainly focused on the materials. It moved forwards from a stance of interpretivism, which sees knowledge as "personal, subjective and unique," and appropriate for case studies such as this current paper (Ma, 2015).

Qualitative research in EFL has been recognized as helpful in examining human behaviour in depth, exploring new topics, and in approaching the "rich in description of people, places, and conversations, which is not easily handled by statistical procedures" (Ma, 2015, p. 567). The benefits of this kind of study have retained researchers' interest over the past two decades (Atkins & Wallace, 2012; Heigham & Croker, 2009; McKinley & Rose, 2019; Read, 2003). In line with Ma (2015), I conducted this work with the understanding that EFL teacher-researchers including myself are an "important source of knowledge regarding their own classroom situations."

While the definition of ethnomusicology offered in the introduction referred to an emphasis on fieldwork, in the current study, this aspect was almost totally reduced to E-fieldwork (Wood, 2008). Several factors influence this including the boutique nature of the institution as a computer science university, its remote physical location in the Tohoku region of Japan, the prohibitive expense of overseas travel for students, and increasing concerns for their personal safety abroad (Lassegard, 2013). The Internet, however, provides a birds-eye view of the musical world and open source, audio-visual materials and examples are readily accessible. Language resources identified were retrospectively examined and tabulated. Samples from three sessions, which indicate the rich language content present in CAE multimedia materials, are presented in the findings section that follows. These samples are then interrogated for affordances, based on the iterative assessment that took place during the course of the study.

4. Findings and discussion

This section begins by presenting the resources that were discovered and specific affordances they were found to process. The general titles alone of a single instance of open-source access are identified in the tables that follow. For completeness, materials from the other classes taught during a fifteen-week long university semester appear in the appendices and in some cases are referenced in the

text. Positive applications of ethnomusicological materials identified during the study are related to the tabulated resources and presented as 'six affordances.' These are unpacked and discussed further after Table 4.

Note: For ease of identification, language resources in the following tables appear in **Bold Type**. For conciseness, abbreviations of terms such as **GA** (general American English) and **RP** (Received Pronunciation) have also been used in the tables, and also appear in bold type.

Table 1

Computer Assisted Ethnomusicology (CAE) Lecture Multimedia Language Content (MLC) Session 1: Introduction.

Audiovisual example title	Language
Music and instruments around the world	**General (North) American English GA** (General American English) Female Narrator
Ethnic dance around the world	**GA English** Male Narrator
Music Technology Developer Adam Place	**Standard/Southeast British English**
A Musical Journey for World Peace	**Written English** text on stage. No other spoken language. Takes place in India.
Journey into the Cultures of the Earth	No spoken language

Table 2

CAE Lecture MLC Session 2: Basic concepts applied to world music in culture.

Audiovisual example title	Language
What is Ethnomusicology?	Narrated in **Irish English**
Ethnomusicology Comedy	**African American Ebonics**
Music at Royal Holloway: Dr. Henry Stobart	**British English RP** (Received Pronunciation)

Table 3

CAE Lecture Multimedia Language Content (MLC) Session 3: Area focus 1 – Oceania.

Audiovisual example title	Language
Electronically modified Didgeridoo	Technical explanations in **English text** on screen
High-tech Didgeridoo	**GA English** Male Narrator
The Dreamtime–Northern Territory Aboriginals	**Standard/Southeast British English**
A Musical Journey for World Peace	**RP British English** Narrator, Interviews with Aboriginal-Australian politicians,

	Aboriginal craft workers and **Aboriginal** and **non-Aboriginal** Northern Territory residents in Australian English(es)
The Didgeridoo	Narrated in GA English
Contemporary Australian Group Yothu Yindi	Torres Strait Aboriginal Australian English
Tiki Taane NZ	No spoken language
Papua New Guinea Sing-Sing Festival	Interview in Papua New Guinean English, subtitles, and narration in Hebrew
Palauan Traditional Dance	Cries and shouts from Audience, performance introduction in Palauan English
Solomon Island Instrument	No spoken language
Solomon Short film	Various Solomon Island languages and Pijin, on-screen titles in English
Solomon Island Documentary	Interviews in English with former Solomon prime minister, journalists, and Church minister in Solomon English(es)
Festival of Pacific Arts	New Zealand English and Maori, Interviews in English with the head of Samoan delegation

4.1. CAE materials' affordances

The iterative assessment of the delivery of the kinds of materials illustrated in the preceding tables over a five-year period, helps me reach towards an understanding of how using these resources and presenting them from an ethnomusicological perspective can be a helpful vehicle for language education. The affordances that the materials revealed can be categorized in the following six ways:

Table 4
Six affordances of CAE materials.

1. Examples of English speakers from many different places	(interviews, demonstrations and examples of teaching etc.)
2. Awakening anthropological awareness	(beyond a bi-cultural, them and us model)
3. Example of languages other than English	(accessible via English subtitles)
4. Intrinsically interesting	(provide a springboard for discussion)

5. Represented by a large literature	(wide and varied texts for all kinds of language study activities)
6. A vast range of related semiotic resources	(costumes, dance, gesture, etc.)

4.2. Unpacking the six affordances

These six affordances or benefits will now be unpacked in more detail based on the findings of ongoing observations as a participant-observer.

4.2.1. A variety of voices

Item one identified examples of speakers from many different places. In general, the musical and music-related audiovisual materials that students work with in class exposed them to a far wider variety of speakers than they encounter in their standard English classes. As explained, within the course, five of a total of fifteen sessions were devoted to specific world areas. These were presented as Tables 1–3 above and in Tables 5–11 in the appendices (appendices 1–7). A glance at these highlights the breadth of language that students experienced during the course as a result of accessing ethnomusicology materials. However, despite the breadth and apparent inclusivity, the most strongly represented voices in these materials are still those of adult males speaking General American English (GA), and the least represented are the voices of women and children. Nevertheless, this selection definitely had the potential to open Japanese students' ears to a broader world of English than they would otherwise experience using standard British and American EFL materials.

4.2.2. Awakening anthropological awareness

The second affordance found was the potential to affect a change in thinking about human diversity and encourage students' thinking to go beyond a 'them-and-us' model. Within the Multimedia content of CAE, such a model is still common and GA English is seen to interrogate and present less pervasive world cultures in many examples. Nevertheless, there are also many examples that have the potential to affect change. These include the use of English by and for insider audiences, such as the Malaysian Punjabi Bhangra English (appendix 7) and intergenerational Ghanaian English between Scottish Ghanaian resident father and son; interesting multilingual environments such as the mixing of GA influenced English, Portuguese and British Cockney by Buraka Som Sistema; and the empowering diplomatic role of English in helping young Ewe tribe children from Ghana explain their culture to a French-Canadian filmmaker (appendix 5).

4.2.3. Providing examples of languages other than English

An examination of the course materials reveals many examples of musicians chanting, singing, and speaking directly in languages other than English, such as

Indonesian/Malay and Chinese, important languages in the Asia-Pacific region, in which this study took place (Baldwin, 2019). These link the now ubiquitous diversity of the world's linguistic resources to keenly felt, individual, often local concerns involving language and identity (Habiburrahim et al., 2020; Nakaya, 2018; Subandiyah et al., 2019). At the same time, subtitles in English help to provide a 'key' into them that helps to inform students and increase their interest and curiosity in these materials. Although the intercultural implications of subtitling invite debate (Espindola & Vasconcellos, 2006; Ortega, 2011), in this specific educational context, they at least make the material more approachable and help students gain initial access.

4.2.4. A springboard for discussion

The fourth affordance found within the materials was that they are an effective springboard for many kinds of discussion. During the five years when the course was delivered, the split classroom emerged as the main approach (Chen, 2016; Kelsen, 2009). This involved the creation of a sufficient number of self-paced online quizzes using MOOCs, created using the platforms Moodle and then later Schoology during the fifth iteration of the course. Online activities included cloze, true/false, comprehension, and open-ended opinion questions that related directly to the multimedia materials in sufficient number to keep students totally occupied at their computer workstations during a 90-minute Japanese class period or *Koma* and beyond. Meanwhile, the discussion was facilitated by working intensively with 6-8 students at a time to discuss the materials in what was referred to as Dynamic Conversation Corner (DCC). DCC took place near the front of the classroom and away from students' computer workstations. Topics and conversation prompts were presented on a portable mini whiteboard. Students usually stood and rotated partners, and during the relatively short window of time (approximately five minutes per group), many lively conversations took place.

4.2.5. Wide and varied texts for all kinds of language study activities

Five of the fifteen CAE course sessions contained textual examples related to ethnomusicological multimedia. These included an article on Musical Ensemble Synchronization by Peter Keller of the Max Planck Institute (Keller, 2007), and Knight's work on the exhaustive classification of musical instruments by German scientists Hornbostel and Sachs (Knight, 2015). Such texts contain much interesting and complex vocabulary that relates to the topics at hand, and these were used mainly as the basis of reading comprehension and vocabulary building exercises. Students found many of these terms unique and interesting, and they diligently sought out definitions using online dictionaries.

4.2.6. Introducing a vast range of related semiotic resources

The CAE audiovisual materials were found to be replete with a variety of semiotic resources too numerous to mention. Notably, of these, students were surprised without fail when they saw instruments such as Adam Place's Alpha Sphere (Place et al., 2014) (Table 1), the single-player, multi-tube bamboo and stone instrument from the Solomon Islands (Moyle, 1974) (Table 3); the jewelry, head adornments, virile stomping and facial expressions of performances in Oceania, and the undulating, trance-like torso rotations at male-only dance parties in the Egyptian Nile. These resources exhibited an unparalleled aesthetic richness that never failed to captivate students' attention during the course.

4.3. Emergent discussion: The importance of the 'glocal'

Unpacking the six affordances of CAE multimedia in the preceding Findings section showed how the use of computers and the Internet gave students an 'eye on the musical world.' It was interesting to note, however, that this expansive view came to support a glocal awareness, as the world's music(s) were made relevant for students at a local level. This is an aspect of curriculum design that I have always considered very important, and which continues to be recognized in the literature (Downes, Wold, Belatchew, Mustafa, & Blount, 2017; Lee et al., 2019). However, the delivery of CAE over five years served to highlight the increasing importance of the glocal, which I will cover now as a further discussion, emergent from the study's main findings.

Two projects were developed within the CAE course that addressed this. These were the Domestic Research Project (DRP) and English *Noh* Drama Performance Project. In DRP, after having been awakened to a vast array of world music, students were asked to think about a song, musical style, event, performer, composer, music teacher, instrument maker, repairer or retailer, or anything at all related to music in their hometown, or where they currently stayed near their university. They were then encouraged to investigate further and write a report, seeing the familiar through fresh eyes. During the five years when the course was delivered, in most cases, students initially complained that there was no music in their hometown. However, on reflection, they frequently changed their minds when they realized that there was such music. Typically, it was a unique local festival performance or a famous musician they did not realize had actually been born in their own home town. In this way, students came to see their local environments in more positive terms. For example, in the Tohoku area, near the university where the course was delivered, a renowned local dish was 'sauce *katsudon*' [deep fried pork cutlet on rice with Picante sauce and finely sliced cabbage]. Students developed a renewed appreciation for this dish on learning about the locally produced 'Sauce *Katsudon no Uta*' or song in praise of sauce *katsudon*, of which a limited number of CDs are sold at an event center near the local city hall. Writing reports about these kinds of things in English prepared students to share unique local knowledge with non-Japanese speaking visitors to Japan.

Finally, the culmination of the CAE course was the preparation and performance of an English language *Noh* play, which linked local Japanese traditions to the global communication tool, English. This component of CAE has been reported on in more detail elsewhere from the point of view of translingualism, intercultural art education, and as a practical drama workshop technique (Rockell, 2018, 2019, 2020). While teaching CAE, I learned that students had often heard about the 600-700-year-old traditional Japanese theatre *Noh*, which combines music, poetry, dance, and drama, but usually had no direct experience of it. In general, they considered *Noh* as an important cultural heritage but claim to be uninterested. Over several weeks, we rehearsed, created costumes, designed the set, and then gave dress rehearsal and final performances, which were open to other interested students and staff to attend. Unlike the other activities in this course, which with the exception of the DCC tended to focus more on receptive language skills such as listening and reading, the English *Noh* play involved energetic chanting in a loud voice and focuses on the production of spoken language. The *Noh* script was an original work in English, maintaining the general framework and structure of a *Noh* play in terms of scenes, roles, and syllable structure influenced by *tanka* poetry. The typically tragic theme, however, was contemporary and set in cyberspace. Students who participated in this part of the course frequently claimed that their attitude towards *Noh* changed for the positive and that they would like to seek out live performances of traditional *Noh* or even take it up themselves. This outcome is an example of a glocal turn and increased engagement and interest in the locally-based activity as a result of CAE.

5. Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the content-rich and aesthetically appealing nature of ethnomusicological resources, replete as they are with human language. However, it is the example they provide of Englishes from around the world in local, international, and multilingual environments that appeared as most helpful for language learners in Japan. The pedagogical implication here is that a reliance on standard British and American texts in Japan is an anachronism in an age when such diverse resources are freely available and more often than not often available free on the Internet.

In seeking to expand students' horizons, CAE resources reaffirmed the importance of local musical traditions, encouraging glocal thinking on the part of students. The importance of MOOCs and open source multimedia was also emphasized. Clearly, it would have been nigh on impossible to construct and deliver the CAE course without the benefit of the Internet and the full access of students to individual computer workstations furnished with audio-headsets, which were all available during the study. The broad conceptual framework supported by Merriam's tripartite model of music in culture clearly supports a tremendous range of language activity in the classroom, and the aesthetic dimension of CAE multimedia is highly effective in engaging students' attention. Considering the breadth of issues that arose in the course of this study, in

particular the six affordances listed earlier in the paper, it is strongly hoped that it will be possible to conduct more carefully nuanced future research on one particular aspect in order to make a continued contribution to our understanding of the music(s) of the world as an EFL resource.

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