Vocabulary Load of English Song Lyrics for EFL Learners

Meral Ozturk (mozturk@uludag.edu.tr)

ELT Department, Faculty of Education, Uludag University, Turkey

Abstract: English songs are very popular with EFL learners and thanks to the natural repetitions of vocabulary they provide through choruses, repeated listening as well as through a special type of 'language din' in the head, they offer great opportunities for vocabulary learning. While most authentic texts have been shown previously to be too loaded with unfamiliar vocabulary for lower level learners, there are suggestions in the literature that songs have a light vocabulary load consisting mainly of high frequency vocabulary. The present study investigates these suggestions in a corpus of 177 English song lyrics that appeared in fourteen most recent albums by four artists. The data were analysed through vocabulary frequency profiling. The results indicated that around 95% of words in the songs were made up of the most frequent 1,000 words of English, suggesting that the vocabulary load of English songs is lighter than other authentic spoken genres. There were, however, differences among different artists and among different albums by the same artist. The vocabulary load of chorus sections was lighter than the rest of the songs. Songs are recommended as suitable for lower level EFL learners.

Key words: EFL vocabulary, vocabulary load, vocabulary coverage, song lyrics

Introduction

One of the most challenging issues in Second Language Vocabulary research has been the identification of reasonable targets for language learners. Some kind of limitation on the number of words to be learnt seems essential as the vocabulary of any one language is too large for any person to acquire in its entirety. Second Language Vocabulary researchers have approached this problem in two ways. One approach has been to measure the vocabulary sizes of native speakers (Goulden et.al., 1990; D'Anna et.al.,

1991; Zechmeister et.al., 1995). This research has focused on English native speakers and estimated average vocabulary sizes as being around 20,000 words[1]. A vocabulary target of this size still seems too large for a typical language learner in the light of studies of EFL learners around the world which revealed rather small vocabulary sizes of around one to two thousand (e.g. Barrow et. al., 1999; Nurweni & Read, 1999; Olmos, 2009). The other approach has been to measure the vocabulary needed to understand authentic written and spoken texts (i.e. vocabulary load). While comprehension is best when all the words in a text are known, it has been shown that adequate comprehension is possible when known words are less than 100%. Two percentages have been suggested: 98% for optimum comprehension and 95% for minimum comprehension (Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010). The percentage of known vocabulary in a text is termed 'coverage' and several studies have attempted to identify the size of vocabulary needed to cover the suggested percentages. This has revealed smaller vocabulary size requirements for optimal coverage (98%): 8,000-9,000 words for written English texts and 6,000-7,000 words for spoken texts (Nation, 2006; Webb & Rodgers, 2009a; 2009b). For 95% coverage, knowledge of the most frequent 3,000 words was found to be sufficient for both written and spoken texts (ibid).

The few research on spoken texts suggested that different text types require different vocabulary sizes. Webb & Rodgers (2009a) studied the vocabulary of English TV programmes and found that a vocabulary size of 7,000 words was needed for 98% coverage. In another study Webb & Rodgers (2009b) estimated that English movies required 6,000 words to be known for the same coverage. A study by Staeher (2009) suggested that a variety of text types in a standardized listening test at the C2 level of CEFR required 5,000 words. Informal conversation, on the other hand, required only around 2,000 words (Adolps & Schmitt, 2003). Webb & Paribakht (2015) also found large variation among 37 listening passages in an English proficiency test used in Canada. The vocabulary size for 98% coverage ranged between 4,000 and beyond 14,000 words. For 95% coverage, it ranged between 2,000 and beyond 14,000. Webb & Rodgers

(2009a, 2009b) also found differences among different 'genres' of TV programmes and movies. This suggests that different text types need to be studied separately. One spoken text type that remains under-investigated is song lyrics. Few studies prior to the present study investigated the vocabulary of songs (Murphey & Alber, 1985; Murphey, 1990; Murphey, 1992; Meara, 1993), which is rather surprising given the popularity of English songs with language learners inside and outside the classroom. These studies were indicative of a smaller vocabulary load of English song lyrics in comparison to other authentic spoken text types, which renders them particularly suitable for use with lower level learners. However, it is hard to draw any strong conclusions from this research as the evidence is either indirect (Murphey & Alber, 1985; Murphey, 1990; Murphey, 1992) or based on too small a sample (Meara, 1993). The present study will address this gap by using a larger data sample than was used previously.

Songs in SL Learning

A number of studies on second language learners have shown songs to be effective in learning vocabulary (Coyle & Gómez Gracia, 2014; Rukholm, 2011; Salcedo, 2010; Alipour et.al., 2012; Medina, 1990; Hahn, 1972). Songs have several advantages over other authentic spoken texts that would be facilitative of vocabulary learning. One of these relates to the number of repetitions. It is well established in Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition Literature that repeated encounters with words generally lead to better learning (e.g. Webb, 2007; Chen & Truscott, 2010). In addition to natural repetitions that occur in texts, songs offer additional repetitions through the choruses which are repeated several times in a given song. Murphey (1992) analysed the discourse properties of 50 pop songs and found that words were repeated three times on average in a given song, which suggests that pop songs are quite repetitive. Another way that songs increase repetitions is through repeated listening. Repeated listening to the same song is quite normal and rather preferable in contrast to other spoken texts whereas seeing the same movie or the same episode of a TV series more than once is rather boring. Thus, songs increase the number of encounters with words in a natural

and ecologically valid way. A third way songs increase repetitions is through a phenomenon called 'the-song-stuck-in-my-head' phenomenon (Murphey, 1990). It refers to the vocal or subvocal recitation of a song even when one is not listening to the song, and as such it constitutes a special case of 'language din' (Krashen, 2015, 1983; Parr & Krashen, 1986; Bedford, 1985), i.e. song din. Murphey (1990) investigated the occurrence of this phenomenon with a questionnaire among 49 native and non-native English speakers in Switzerland and found it to be quite common. Only 2 of the respondents both of whom were beginning EFL learners reported not having experienced it before.

Songs also differ from other authentic spoken texts with respect to the difficulty of words. Murphey and Alber (1985) found that 83% of words in a Steve Wonder song were monosyllabic and the song was equal in difficulty to the reading level of an English-speaking child that completed the fourth grade. Murphey (1992) found the reading level of the 50 pop songs he investigated to be grade level 5. Reading level measures use word and sentence length to estimate difficulty, so these findings actually mean that English pop songs are generally made up of short words which should be easy to learn at least with respect to form.

A more common approach to investigating the lexical difficulty of a given text in Second Language Vocabulary Research is to check the frequency of text words in the language at large. If a text is made up words which are highly frequent in the language, that text can be considered easy for the learner as research has shown that L2 learners know a greater number of words of high frequency than low frequency (e.g. Ozturk, 2016; Ozturk, 2015; Milton, 2007; Brown, 2012). There is only one study to our knowledge that has taken this approach to songs. Meara (1993) studied the vocabulary frequency profile of a Chris de Burgh album which consisted of 1500 word tokens. The analysis has shown that 20% of words in the album were function words and 70% were among the most frequent 1,000 (1K) words of English. With the addition of 2K words, the percentage went up to over 90%. Meara commented that 'almost all the vocabulary in

this album comes from the most frequent items of English' (p.12). It is difficult to compare this finding with the findings of other research that studied other spoken genres due to a difference in the treatment of function words, where they were not separated into a different category. Meara assumed that function words were among the most frequent words of English, but this was not universally true for all of the function words in the list of 500 words he used. It is true that most function words are very frequent, and even more so than content words. Corpus-based word lists are often topped by function words (McCarthy & Carter, 1997: 23-24). However, not all function words are high frequency (e.g. thus, hence, nevertheless, whereby, lest, etc.). In fact, function words are scattered over a range of vocabulary frequency levels. It is possible that the inclusion of all function words in the high frequency category in Meara (1993) might have led to overestimation of the degree of high frequency vocabulary in songs. Other studies include function words in their respective frequency lists, and therefore they are not directly comparable.

Another limitation of Meara (1993) is the size of the data, which includes only one album by one artist. The present study will use a bigger sample and will also investigate the differences among artists and among the albums by the same artist. The chorus will be studied separately as it is more prominent than other sections. For two reasons, the words in the chorus stand a greater chance of being retained by the listeners than words in other parts of the song. First, the chorus is repeated several times in the song and listeners are exposed to the chorus words more than once. Second, the chorus is more likely to lead to the 'song-stuck-in-my-head' phenomenon as it is often the chorus that most listeners remember and later sing to themselves.

Research Questions

1. What is the vocabulary size needed to cover 95% and 98% of words in English song lyrics?

2. Are there any differences in vocabulary load among different artists or among albums by the same artist?

3. What is the vocabulary size needed to cover 95% and 98% of words in the chorus sections of songs?

Method

The Lyrics Corpus

The corpus consisted of 177 song lyrics in 14 albums by four artists (See Appendix for further details of the corpus). The artists were chosen mainly on the basis of author's personal taste. However, all four were also internationally popular artists representing different genres (rock and pop) and different traditions (American vs British). The most recent 4 albums by each artist were used for analysis with the exception of Adele, who had only two released albums. The fourteen albums appeared between the years 2005-2014.

Song lyrics were downloaded from A to Z Lyrics website (http://www.azlyrics.com). This is a very popular lyrics site with 6,500 000 daily unique visitors. The song lyrics are provided by users and are open to correction. In most cases, the lyrics undergo several corrections by different users. Therefore, they were assumed to be rather accurate and were not further checked for accuracy.

The corpus consisted of 54661 tokens. The average length of songs was 309 tokens. The shortest mean length per song was 280 tokens ('19' by Adele) and the longest was 402 ('Speak Now' by Taylor Swift).

Data Analysis

The data were analysed with the Vocabulary Profiling software 'VocabProfile' on the Lextutor website (Cobb, http://www.lextutor.ca/vp/). Vocabulary profilers compare vocabulary in texts to word frequency lists based on language corpora. The lyrics corpus

was matched against 25 lists that include the most frequent 25,000 words of English in the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of the Contemporary American English (COCA). The lists contain 1,000 words each and go from the highest (1K) to the lowest frequency (25K). The output from the profiler gives the number and percentage of tokens, types and word families in the lyrics corpus that belong to each frequency list.

The data were cleaned and prepared for analysis following the common practice in similar studies to ensure comparability of findings. Data-cleaning involved deletion as well as modification of text. Any text that did not belong to the songs was deleted. These often appeared in parenthesis and indicated the name of the singer when there is more than one or the section of the song such as '*chorus, verse 1*, etc'. Forms like '*oh, mmm, ha, na, whoa, yeah*' which are common in songs, but are not words in English were also deleted. Spoken language forms like '*wanna, gonna, 'til, 'cause, somethin', fallin', 'bout, kinda*' were changed to their written forms '*want to, going to, until, because, something, falling, about, kind of*' to improve the recognition of these words by the software. Although these forms are highly frequent in English, the programme does not recognise these words and classifies them as off-list. Contractions which were not separated by the programme were split into full words, e.g. *we're* to *we are*, *I'll* to *I will*. Proper nouns were classified as off-list. Compounds were not separated as often they had meanings not entirely predictable from the individual words of the compound, e.g. *flashback, fingerprints, cannonball, headphone, etc*. Numbers were changed to words (e.g. *17* to *seventeen*) which were then classified as 1K by the programme. Repetitions of chorus were inserted in full where they were omitted in the original text as the listeners hear them repeatedly receiving extra input.

Results

Several analyses were carried out on the corpus. One of them involved the whole corpus while others were conducted on parts of the corpus. The results of the whole-corpus analysis are given in Table 1. The data shows that 94.50% of words in the lyrics are

among the most frequent 1,000 words of English. This percentage is rather close to the 95% coverage figure and rises to 97.07% at the 2K level. Cumulative coverage quickly reaches 98% only at the 4K level.

Table 1. Vocabulary Coverage of Songs

Frequency Level	Tokens	Coverage %	Cumulative Coverage %
K1	51652	94.50	94.50
K2	1404	2.57	**97.07***
K3	280	0.51	97.58
K4	262	0.48	**98.06****
K5	152	0.28	98.34
K6	95	0.17	98.51
K7	44	0.08	98.59
K8	11	0.02	98.61
K9	21	0.04	98.65
K10	13	0.02	98.67
K11-K25	39	0.07	98.74
Off-List	688	1.26	100
Total	54661	100	100

* indicates the point at which the 95% coverage is reached.
** indicates the point at which the 98% coverage is reached.

Another analysis was carried out on each artist separately and the results are given in Table 2. The results suggest a difference among artists. The lyrics by One Direction seem to have the lowest vocabulary load. They reach 95% coverage in the 1K level and 98% coverage in the 2K level. The highest load belongs to Bon Jovi lyrics. They reach 95% coverage in the 2K level and 98% in the 6K level. Adele and Taylor Swift lyrics are in between. Adele lyrics have a lighter load as they reach 98% coverage in the 3K level while Taylor Swift lyrics reach that coverage in the 5K level.

Table 2. Vocabulary Coverage (%) **by Artist**

Frequency Level	Adele	Bon Jovi	One Direction	Taylor Swift
K1	93.59	92.49	**96.70***	94.14

K2	96.67*	96.23*	98.34**	96.54*
K3	98.02**	96.90	98.64	97.05
K4	98.36	97.64	98.86	97.61
K5	98.59	97.83	99.05	98.03**
K6	98.62	98.14**	99.11	98.23
K7	98.72	98.27	99.15	98.31
K8	98.72	98.30	99.16	98.34
K9	98.76	98.36	99.18	98.38
K10	98.79	98.39	99.20	98.41
K11-K25	98.87	98.47	99.21	98.52
Off-List	100	100	100	100

* indicates the point at which the 95% coverage is reached.
** indicates the point at which the 98% coverage is reached.

The albums by each artist were also compared. Table 3 displays the results for Bon Jovi albums which are ordered chronologically. The results suggest a difference among albums. Lost Highway seems to have the lightest load as it has the greatest coverage at the 1K level (94.25%). While all albums reach 95% coverage point at the 2K level, 98% is reached at different levels (5K and 6K). 'Have A Nice Day' has the highest vocabulary load as it does not reach 98% in the first 25 levels.

Table 3. Cumulative vocabulary coverage (%) of **Bon Jovi** albums

Frequency Level	Have A Nice Day	Lost Highway	Circle	What About Now
K1	92.26	94.25	92.11	91.51
K2	96.10*	96.84*	96.35*	95.67*
K3	96.48	97.45	97.12	96.60
K4	97.17	97.78	97.95	97.69
K5	97.40	97.93	98.04**	97.96
K6	97.71	98.08**	98.70	98.07**
K7	97.71	98.23	98.70	98.45
K8	97.81	98.23	98.70	98.45
K9	97.81	98.32	98.73	98.56
K10	97.86	98.35	92.11	98.59
K11-K25	97.98	98.41	98.76	98.73

* indicates the point at which the 95% coverage is reached.
** indicates the point at which the 98% coverage is reached.

Table 4 presents the results for One Direction. All four albums reach 95% at the 1K level and 98% at the 2K level suggesting similar load in all albums. Still, the last album 'Four' seems to have a higher load than others as the coverage in the 1K level (95.38%) is lower than the other albums which are all above 97%. On the other hand, the vocabulary load of this album is reduced by the fact that it does not contain any low frequency words beyond the 6K level.

Table 4. Cumulative vocabulary coverage (%) of **One Direction** albums

Frequency Level	Up All Night	Take Me Home	Midnight Memories	Four
K1	97.04*	97.04*	97.16*	95.38*
K2	98.51**	98.33**	98.48**	98.01**
K3	98.68	98.64	98.82	98.41
K4	98.85	98.82	99.02	98.76
K5	98.98	99.08	99.09	99.08
K6	99.00	99.23	99.13	99.11
K7	99.02	99.23	99.13	99.27
K8	99.02	99.25	99.13	99.27
K9	99.04	99.29	99.13	99.27
K10	99.06	99.36	99.13	99.27
K11-K25	99.08	99.36	99.13	99.27

* indicates the point at which the 95% coverage is reached.
** indicates the point at which the 98% coverage is reached.

Table 5 shows the results for Taylor Swift albums. The first album 'Taylor Swift' seems to have a lighter load as it reaches 95% point in the 1K level and 98% in the 4K level while the other albums reach 95% only at the 2K level and 98% is reached in still lower frequency levels (4K and 5K) or beyond 25K.

Table 5. Cumulative vocabulary coverage (%) of **Taylor Swift** albums

Frequency Level	Taylor Swift	Fearless	Speak Now	Red
K1	95.20*	93.55	93.43	94.79
K2	97.25	95.77*	96.45*	96.88*
K3	97.69	96.19	97.00	97.47

K4	**98.13***	96.44	97.84	**98.06***
K5	98.48	96.65	**98.46***	98.47
K6	98.48	96.75	98.78	98.74
K7	98.61	96.79	98.86	98.81
K8	98.64	96.83	98.89	98.83
K9	98.67	96.87	98.92	98.88
K10	98.67	96.93	98.94	98.90
K11-K25	98.73	97.12	99.01	99.00

* indicates the point at which the 95% coverage is reached.
** indicates the point at which the 98% coverage is reached.

Finally, the results for the Adele albums are given in Table 6. '19' seems to have a lighter load as its coverage figures are slightly higher and it reaches 98% at the 3K level, one level above that of '21'.

Table 6. Cumulative vocabulary coverage (%) of **Adele** albums

Frequency Level	19	21
K1	93.72	93.48
K2	**97.11***	**96.29***
K3	**98.06***	97.98
K4	98.30	**98.41***
K5	98.63	98.56
K6	98.66	98.59
K7	98.75	98.69
K8	98.75	98.69
K9	98.81	98.72
K10	98.81	98.77
K11-K25	98.99	98.77

* indicates the point at which the 95% coverage is reached.
** indicates the point at which the 98% coverage is reached.

A still further analysis was carried out on the chorus sections of songs. The choruses of all songs by each artist have been copied to a separate file, cleaned and submitted to vocabulary profiler. The results are given in Table 7, where the results for the entire songs were repeated for ease of comparison.

The coverage figures are generally slightly higher in choruses in comparison to whole songs in the corpus overall as well as in individual artists. In the corpus, the key coverage points are reached one level higher in choruses than in whole songs (95%: 1K in choruses vs 2K in whole songs; 98%: 3K in choruses vs 4K in whole songs). The greatest difference seems to be in Adele where the coverage of choruses in the 1K level is greater by 1.87 %. These results suggest that the chorus has a lighter vocabulary load.

Table 7. Cumulative Vocabulary Coverage (%) of **Choruses** in comparison to whole songs

Frequency	Adele		Bon Jovi		One Direction		Taylor Swift		Lyrics Corpus	
	Whole	**Chorus**	**Whole**	**Chorus**	**Whole**	**Chorus**	**Whole**	**Chorus**	**Whole**	**Chorus**
K1	93.59	**95.46***	92.49	92.83	**96.70***	**97.19***	94.14	94.29	94.50	**95.15***
K2	**96.67***	**98.05****	**96.23***	**96.57***	**98.34****	**98.70****	**96.54***	**96.68***	**97.07***	97.62
K3	**98.02****	98.48	96.90	97.04	98.64	98.94	97.05	97.10	97.58	**98.00****
K4	98.36	98.70	97.64	97.83	98.86	98.98	97.61	97.61	**98.06****	98.39
K5	98.59	99.02	97.83	97.99	99.05	99.14	**98.03****	**98.03****	98.34	98.65
K6	98.62	99.02	**98.14****	**98.10****	99.11	99.18	98.23	98.17	98.51	98.73
K7	98.72	99.02	98.27	98.31	99.15	99.18	98.31	98.22	98.59	98.80
K8	98.72	99.02	98.30	98.31	99.16	99.18	98.34	98.22	98.61	98.80
K9	98.76	99.02	98.36	98.36	99.18	99.18	98.38	98.27	98.65	98.83
K10	98.79	99.02	98.39	98.36	99.20	99.18	98.41	98.32	98.67	98.84
K11-K25	98.87	99.24	98.47	98.36	99.21	99.18	98.52	98.37	98.74	98.88

* indicates the point at which the 95% coverage is reached.
** indicates the point at which the 98% coverage is reached.

Discussion

The first research question asked the vocabulary size needed to cover 95% and 98% of words in English song lyrics? 95% coverage was reached at the 2K level in the whole corpus. The coverage at the 1K level was also very close to the 95%. This suggests that knowledge of less than 2,000 words is sufficient for 95% coverage of songs. Although this coverage point is often taken as the minimal adequate figure, a recent study by Van Zeeland & Schmitt (2013) suggested that it is the best coverage for spoken text. It follows from this that the best vocabulary size needed to understand English songs is less than 2,000 words. In comparison to some other spoken text types, this vocabulary size is rather small. In Webb & Rodgers (2009a; 2009b) and Staehr (2009), 95% figure corresponded to a vocabulary size of around 3,000 words while in Webb & Paribakht (2015) it required a vocabulary of 4,000 words. The 98% coverage in the present study was reached at the 4K level, which is also much lower than the 10,000 figure in Webb & Paribakht (2015), or 6,000-7,000 in Nation (2006) and Webb & Rodgers (2009a; 2009b) or the 5,000 in Staehr (2009). This evidence lends support to the claim that songs have a lighter vocabulary load than other spoken texts.

The vocabulary load of songs seems to be closer to that of everyday conversation. Adolphs & Schmitt (2003) found that 2,000 word families covered 94.76% of words in the CANCODE Corpus which is a British conversational corpus. The similarity of pop songs to conversational English has been noted previously by Murphey & Alber (1985). The frequent use of first and second person pronouns, present and past tense forms of verbs and non-specific nature of the topics turns them into pseudo-dialogues between the singer and a significant second person. It is likely that a closer fit might be obtained between songs and conversation if word lists drawn from conversational English could be used. The present study used word lists drawn mainly from written corpora, and the assumption that word frequencies would be identical in written and spoken language is too optimistic.

The second research question asked if there were any differences in vocabulary load among different artists or among albums by the same artist. The answer to this question is positive. Songs by different artists have different vocabulary load. One Direction has the lowest vocabulary load requiring only 1000 words for a 95% coverage and 2000 words for 98%. Bon Jovi, on the other hand, has the highest requiring 2000 words minimally and 6000 words optimally and thus, is closer to other spoken texts. Adele is closer to One Direction and Taylor Swift is to Bon Jovi. The differences among artists may be purely idiosyncratic stemming from the personalities of the artists or may be more systematic. A satisfactory explanation requires further data.

The study has shown that different albums by the same artist have different vocabulary load although differences are smaller in comparison to those among artists. Still, there is consistency in vocabulary load among albums. One Direction's all albums have a light vocabulary load although the last album 'Four' has lower coverage of the 1K level (95.38% as opposed to 97.04%, 97.04%, and 97.16%). On the other hand, all Bon Jovi albums have a heavier load around 5,000-6,000 while 'What A Nice Day' goes beyond 25,000.

The third research question asked the vocabulary size needed to cover 95% and 98% of words in the chorus sections of songs. In general, the chorus had a lighter vocabulary load in comparison to the whole. However, the difference was smaller than what would be expected. A bigger difference could be obtained if the chorus is compared to the rest of the song minus the chorus. In the results reported above, the choruses were compared to the whole of the songs including the choruses. If choruses indeed have a lower vocabulary load as hypothesized, the inclusion of choruses several times in the overall figures will lower the load making the difference appear to be smaller than it really is. This possibility was checked with one album by Taylor Swift ('Taylor Swift', 2006). The reason for choosing Taylor Swift for this analysis was the rather similar percentages between choruses and whole songs in the previous analysis. For the present analysis,

two files have been created: one with only the choruses in the 2006 album 'Taylor Swift' and one with the rest of the song text minus the choruses. The results are given in Table 8. The results of the previous analysis were repeated in the table for ease of comparison. The results show that the percentages are higher in choruses. The key coverage points (95% and 98%) are reached one level higher in choruses than in non-chorus text. On the basis of this result we can conclude more confidently that chorus sections of English songs have a lighter vocabulary load.

Table 8. Cumulative Vocabulary Coverage (%) of **Choruses** in **Taylor Swift**

Frequency Level	Taylor Swift (2006)		Taylor Swift (All Albums)	
	Minus Chorus	**Chorus**	**All**	**Chorus**
K1	94.68	**95.41***	94.14	94.29
K2	**96.96***	97.31	**96.54***	**96.68***
K3	97.53	97.73	97.05	97.10
K4	97.72	**98.31****	97.61	97.61
K5	**98.10****	98.68	**98.03****	**98.03****
K6	98.10	98.68	98.23	98.17
K7	98.29	98.73	98.31	98.22
K8	98.29	98.78	98.34	98.22
K9	98.29	98.83	98.38	98.27
K10	98.29	98.83	98.41	98.32
K11-K25	98.48	98.88	98.52	98.37

* indicates the point at which the 95% coverage is reached.
** indicates the point at which the 98% coverage is reached.

Conclusion

The present study has shown that English song lyrics have a lighter vocabulary load than other authentic spoken texts. In that respect, they are appropriate for use with lower level learners. The chorus sections also have a lighter load consisting of higher frequency vocabulary. Learning high frequency words is important for language learners given their usefulness in language use. Choruses are particularly suitable for

teaching this vocabulary given their prominence in the song and their greater potential for leading to a 'song din'.

Caution is necessary, however, when using songs to teach words as there may be differences in vocabulary load among artists or among the albums of the same artist. Teachers need to check the vocabulary load of songs for suitability to their learners' vocabulary level before using them in the classroom.

Notes

[1] Throughout the text 'word' refers to 'word family' which includes a headword, its inflected forms and transparent derivations.

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Appendix

Table 1. Song Lyrics Corpus

Artist	Album	Year	Number of Songs	Tokens	Average number of tokens per song
Adele	19	2008	12	3359	280
	21	2011	11	3957	360
Bon Jovi	Have a Nice Day	2005	12	3928	327
	Lost Highway	2007	12	3287	274
	The Circle	2009	12	3487	291
	What About Now	2013	12	3674	306
One Direction	Up All Night	2011	13	4630	356
	Take Me Home	2012	13	4559	351
	Midnight Memories	2013	14	4465	319
	Four	2014	12	3765	314
Taylor Swift	Taylor Swift	2006	11	2,785	253
	Fearless	2008	13	4,476	344
	Speak Now	2010	14	5,623	402
	Red	2012	16	5,546	347
Total			177	54661	