

# THE ROMA-GYPSY ANTHEM AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL FOR INCLUSION WITHIN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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## Abstract

This proposal deals with some aspects towards the inclusion of Roma-Gypsy students in the current Educative System through the use of Music in the EFL Classroom at Secondary School level. Therefore, the aim is to explore how the implementation of our proposal connects the English language learning with music as well as the history and culture of the Roma-Gypsy people. The theoretical framework has been based on the Textual Transpodidactics Model for teaching and learning languages and as it can be seen in the discussion, the results demonstrate that this action taken can positively contribute to the achievement of the educative and inclusive objectives established by the European Parliament on the National Roma Integration Strategies and the strategies established by the Spanish Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality. And hence the achievement of real inclusion and the obliteration of racial prejudice against gypsies.

**Keywords:** *music; transpodidactics; gypsy; inclusion; EFL; secondary school.*

## Resumen

Esta propuesta aborda algunos aspectos relacionados con la inclusión de estudiantes gitanos en el actual Sistema Educativo a través del uso de la Música en el Aula de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera en el nivel de Secundaria. Por lo tanto, el objetivo es explorar cómo la implementación de nuestra propuesta conecta el aprendizaje del idioma inglés con la música, así como la historia y la cultura del pueblo gitano. El marco teórico se basa en el modelo de la Transpodidáctica Textual para la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de lenguas y, como se puede apreciar en la discusión, los resultados demuestran que esta acción realizada contribuye positivamente a la consecución de los objetivos educativos e inclusivos establecidos por el Parlamento Europeo sobre las Estrategias Nacionales para la Integración Gitana, así como para las estrategias establecidas por el Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad de España. De ahí el logro de la inclusión real y la eliminación de los prejuicios raciales contra los gitanos.

**Palabras clave:** *música; transpodidáctica; gitanos; inclusión; EFL; educación secundaria*

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## Introduction

This proposal has been developed with the aim of making visible and including Roma-Gypsy students in a Secondary classroom's context, this being understood as a non-segregated classroom. In order to achieve this aim, we have decided to tie together the teaching and learning process of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) with the use of music and popular gypsy literature. As experience has shown us, stereotypes and prejudices have been always fed by the lack of awareness as well as the lack of communication between majority and minority ethnic groups. Unfortunately, the Roma-Gypsy community has suffered a lot of mistreats, rejection and discrimination not only in Spain but also around the world in and outside the educational community. Some examples could be mentioned as: repression and ethnic cleansing which have taken place in different historical moments and different geographical

locations as Spain or Germany. The lack of educative policies fostering inclusion of ethnic minority groups or even the “romantic” idealization that literature has always portrayed are also some other examples of this. At the same time, with this proposal we would be contributing to the new National Roma Integration Strategies established by the European Parliament (September, 2021) in order to combat the negative attitudes towards people with Romani background in Europe, as well as to the Spanish National Strategy for the Social Inclusion of the Gypsy Communities.

The Hymn or anthem that we are going to use as the basis for the development of this paper could be understood as the sobbing and weeping of a nation that has been prosecuted since its origin. As it happens, the title “Gelem, Gelem” – which translated into English means – “I walked, I walked” – is no more than the reflection of nomadism as the defensive strategy Roma-Gypsy communities carried out to protect their culture, traditions, language and freedom. The anthem or hymn of the Roma-Gypsy nation was written by Jarko Javanovic in 1978. However, the chords used by the Yugoslav were older and there are historical records which state that Milan Aivazo, a musician from Bulgaria (1922) can remember this popular melody that was taught to him by his grandfather (Marushiakova & Popov, 1995).

As compiled on the second volume of *Studdi Romani* by Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, the chords of this song gain recognition thanks to the film director Alexander Petrovic who used it as soundtrack for his movie “The Buyer of Feathers” (*Skupljaci perja*) under the title “I have Met Some Happy Gypsies” which was nominated for an Oscar in 1967. In 1971, the *First International Congress* of the Roma-Gypsy culture (London) took place and the chords were selected as the International anthem of the whole gypsy nation. During this international meeting, another important step was taken in order to give more visibility to this ethnic minority, the institutionalization of their International Day the 8th of April. It was seven years later in Geneva, in the *Second International Congress* when Jarko Javanovic with the help of a Swiss-German gypsy doctor Jan Cibula wrote the popular lyrics that today accompany the chords.

But why is the Roma Anthem so important for the gypsy culture? If we dig a little bit more and we continue researching, we find out that little has been written about the history of the gypsy nation. In short, what we mainly find regarding their history is the vision and the facts given by the occidental eye as a superior nation and culture, rather than the vision of the repressed. In fact, when it comes to education and the curriculum of the subject of history within our educative system no traces exist about the existence, if any, of their historical background. Not surprisingly, Roma and Gypsy students then see little with which they could identify themselves. This does not mean that Roma or Gypsy history does not exist. In fact, the organization “Secretariado Gitano” had published a book entitled *Lección Gitana*. Within its pages this organization not only presents the history of the gypsy nation, but also gives visibility to this ethnic minority group. Therefore, it is more than understandable that, a nation deprived from its history would see this anthem not just as a combination of words and music but as the symbol that unifies and portrays the identity of the whole gypsy nation.

### **Theoretical Background**

Many theories and methodologies have been written about the use of music as a facilitating tool for learning English as a foreign language. The majority of these studies highlight its benefits as they affect at the same time linguistic, affective and sociolinguistic levels. For example, in words of Toscano-Fuentes and Fonseca-Mora: “Numerosas investigaciones aseguran que la inclusión de canciones o elementos sonoros-musicales en la enseñanza de las lenguas extranjeras aportan beneficios en el proceso de aprendizaje” (2012, 197-213).

Also, we should mention Aparicio-Gervás and León-Guerrero’s article about the necessity of introducing new educative measures and strategies to create and stimuli and response in the

Students of a specific School located in Spain. To do so, they took as an example a school located in the neighborhood of Lambeth (London) in which Lloyd Webber implemented a new project entitled “In Harmony”. A social action program that pursues change and social reinsertion within the educative system as well as in society. In addition, we can say that “the Main Objective of providing a teaching of quality, based on freedom and respect towards multiculturalism, while making possible answering the formative necessities of the students” (Aparicio-Gervás & León-Guerrero, 2017) “while contributing on their integral development as the ability to learn it is developed through culture” (Claxton, 2001).

At the same time, other studies such as the one developed by Israel mentions that through the use of songs music learners of second languages have been inspired and achieved better results in the acquisition of the target language (2013).

### **Methodology. Musical adaptation of the Anthem**

As we have already stated at the beginning of this paper, our main aim is to develop a musical English translation based on the traditional Roma-Gypsy anthem “Gelem, Gelem”. The theoretical framework has been based on the Textual Transpodidactics Model for teaching and learning languages (Couto-Cantero, 2014) for a group of students at Secondary School level. However, and in order to further explain this transpodidactic process, we need to go deep into the lyrics of the song and analyse the historical context hidden within it. To do so, we have decided to analyse this Anthem from a literary-historical point of view as the formal vehicle to present Roma-Gypsy culture and traditions (See Figure 1).

#### **Figure 1**

*Literary contextualization of the Anthem*

I walked,  
I walked through long roads<sup>1</sup>  
And I met happy Roma.  
Oh, Roma.  
Where do you come from  
carrying tents<sup>2</sup> and hungry children<sup>3</sup>?  
Oh, Roma! Oh, my people!  
Once did I have a large family<sup>4</sup>  
The Black Legions murdered them<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This line in the lyrics refers to the long distance that Roma-Gypsy nation had to walk for centuries since they started their long-forced migration from India towards different areas in East, Central and West Europe as well as Africa, USA and South America. Also, we can refer to the numerous times that they had to escape from a society unable to understand their lifestyle. Regarding this aspect, we could mention both literary and historical works that depict this tragic reality. For example: *La Gitanilla. Novelas ejemplares*. Cervantes, 1613; *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders*. Defoe, 1722; *Notre-Dame de Paris*. Victor-Hugo, 1831; *Gypsies under the Swastika*. Kenrick, Puxon, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> It refers to the traditional accommodation used by Gypsies while travelling across countries as part of their nomadic life. However, it does not only refer to the main action of carrying but to the fact of having to carry their homes and all their belonging with them – the same as Jews had to do for the simple reason of being Jews -. At the same time, the reference to the tents could also relate to the horse carriages where these tents were normally located.

<sup>3</sup> The historical moment that is being portrayed is the II World War. Therefore, it is easy to establish a relation between war and famine years, as due to chemical war most of the fields were left unproductive. That did not only mean children being hungry but also ending up dead due to starvation.

<sup>4</sup> Traditionally, gypsy families are large and there exist a lineage that connects most of them.

<sup>5</sup> The reference to the Black Legions is used within the Anthem to refer Himmler’s Latvian Legion (Right-Hand man of Adolf Hitler).

Men & women were carved up<sup>6</sup>  
And among them little ones too  
Oh, Roma! Oh, my people!  
Open, God<sup>7</sup>, the stygian doors<sup>8</sup>  
So, I can see where my people is  
I would go through the ways again  
and I would walk side by side.  
with fortunate Roma  
Oh, Roma! Oh, my people!  
Stand up Roma!<sup>9</sup>  
Today is our time,  
Come with me,  
Roma from all over the world<sup>10</sup>  
Dark faces<sup>11</sup> and ebony eyes<sup>12</sup>  
I want them as black as grapes.  
Oh, Roma! Oh, my people!

*Note.* Own translation into English of the Roma-Gypsy Anthem “Gelem-Gelem” (2019)

## Discussion

Motivation among new generations is in continuous decrease nowadays. Especially when motivation relates to teaching and learning as few are the teachers that decide to take the big step of leaving aside traditional education and open the doors to inclusion and innovation. Nowadays students belong to a generation that has seen the offspring of new technological advances, a generation that is able to have access to knowledge easily. The high speed in which their lives spin contributes to this lack of interest and no matter what their cultural and economic background is, the problem continues being there. Therefore, as teachers we need to help them to understand that they are also part of the class and part of the community that the educative center inherently creates. As argued by Dewey (1958) and Vigotsky (cited in Wertsch, 1985), “education is a social rather than an individualistic process” and therefore they promoted the idea that “the quality of education is realized in the degree in which individuals form a group” (1958, 65). We must therefore help them to develop a feeling of belonging within the school as well as peer-relation between them and their classmates. So, by leaving behind traditional teaching methods and including in our lessons new pedagogical approaches and activities – such as our proposal of a musical adaptation – we would be favoring their positive limelight as well as their sense of belonging to the classroom. In fact, social inclusion is one of the Council of Europe’s main objectives regarding youth policies. As stated by the European Council (2004) “social inclusion is a process of self-realization of the individual within a society, acceptance and recognition of personal potential by social institutions and integration in the social relations network in a community” (Mareva, 2017) and this also includes the Educative System. These activities will contribute to the development and establishment of social relations among gypsy and non-gypsy students, and also foster inclusion and collaboration among them. This way, we

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<sup>6</sup> It refers to the atrocities that non-Nazi people had to suffer in and out concentration camps during the ruling of the Nazi Power.

<sup>7</sup> The importance of Faith and God for Roma-Gypsy people.

<sup>8</sup> Refers to the doors of the Underworld.

<sup>9</sup> Calling towards the whole gypsy nation.

<sup>10</sup> It emphasizes the fact that gypsies could be found everywhere.

<sup>11</sup> Skin color.

<sup>12</sup> Dark eyes.

will be contributing not only to educate our students under democratic values, but also to erase the stain that has been tattooed on gypsies and, foremost, we will be providing a positive environment in which Roma-Gypsy students would feel welcome and thus, they would want to come to school.

As previously stated, in this particular proposal, we have decided to appeal to music for two main reasons: first, the strong connection between music and gypsy culture “probably, the most important and effect vehicle for the emerging gypsy consciousness has been music” as stated by Manuel (1989, 51); and secondly, the positive effects of using music in order to help students to acquire a certain proficiency in a foreign language as English, as some research studies carried out by Hatasa (2002) and Daniels (2003) have proven. These authors also specified that early, positive, age appropriate experiences with music have a remarkable impact on children’s second language learning, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, comprehension and expression. At the same time, this paper entails the creation of the necessary pedagogical conditions that would enhance educative and personal progress as well. Moreover, it is possible to erase the prejudices originated and inherited by the historical development of our world. We also encourage respect towards diversity as well as empathy with gypsy students that had suffered and continue suffering discrimination.

Through the use of the anthem as a pedagogical tool in our teaching practices we helped our students to acquire the objectives and contents established in the Galician curriculum for Secondary Education (Decree 86/2015, 25th July),<sup>13</sup> and we have also contributed to the construction of social relationships between students, as well as the increase of motivation among them, especially those of gypsy origin as they have discovered interesting aspects and facts of their own culture.

From what has been presented, one might conclude that this paper based on the inclusion of gypsy students in the English Classroom through the use of Music has contributed to the increase of the inclusion and motivation of gypsy students while improving the social relationships among gypsy and non-gypsy students. In addition, we can also highlight the cross-curricular contents (History of the Gypsy Nation and History of the Holocaust) and values (development of democratic citizens) that are also part of the development of this proposal, helping our students to raise awareness regarding the Gypsy Nation and the right towards equality.

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<sup>13</sup> At the same time, with this particular activity, we are giving a broader visibility to the history of an ethnic minority group that seems not to have presence or space in our educative system. We also give a broader vision of the Holocaust as not only Jews had suffered the atrocities carried out by the Nazis during the genocide.

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### Information of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest regarding this paper.