Language through Song: A Musical Approach

Affinities between language and song have been explored by musicologists and voice teachers, but have drawn scant attention from linguists and language instructors. This lecture intends to correct that oversight by promoting an innovative approach of improving language proficiency through singing. Song is the highest form of speech. It is nothing more than the elongation of vowels and extension of pitch inflections found in everyday conversation. As sung language, a good song synthesizes the linguistic, poetic, and musical beauty of speech. Because song “ups the ante” by emphasizing the color, pronunciation, and intonation of every syllable, it is a valuable tool for improving the student’s spoken language skills. This lecture will also discuss the pedagogical benefits of teaching language through song in terms of improving students’ abilities for diction, expression, fluency and memorization.

Hong Zhang’s Bio:

Hong Zhang holds a Master of Music degree in Voice Performance from Binghamton University, SUNY, and a Bachelor of Music degree in Voice Performance from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Currently an Instructor of Chinese and an associate faculty member of Music at Binghamton University, Zhang has received the award for Excellence in Teaching from Binghamton University and for Outstanding Contribution to Chinese Language Education from the Chinese Language Teachers Association. Zhang gives lectures and recitals on “Chinese Ethnic Groups and Their Songs” as well as workshops on “Teaching Chinese through Song” extensively in the US and abroad. The places she has performed and presented include the United Nations, University of Michigan, University of Virginia, New York University, University of Toronto in Canada, Peking, Fudan, Zhejiang, Nankai and Soochow Universities in China, as well as Nanyang University in Singapore. Her curriculum includes the groundbreaking course, Singing Chinese. Her students have won awards at many international competitions. In addition, Zhang has also co-authored Chinese through Song (SUNY Press, 2010) and Cultural Chinese: Readings in Art, Literature, and History (Georgetown University Press, 2012).