

Giedrė Balčytė

Music as a Tool to Internalise the Rhythm of English for Natural Fluency

The rhythm of English, although often questioned in terms of strict isochrony (Couper-Kuhlen, 1993; Roach, 2009), continues to be recognised as a defining feature of its prosody and a crucial component of natural sounding speech. English rhythm is largely realised through connected speech phenomena such as weak and strong forms, pitch and loudness variation, linking, elision, and assimilation, which together create the perception of stress timing and fluent delivery. Foundational pedagogical models emphasise that teaching rhythm and prosody is essential for natural fluency and intelligibility (Gilbert, 2008; Low, 2015). Many learners whose first languages are syllable timed rather than stress timed struggle to perceive and reproduce these rhythmic contrasts, which limits both intelligibility and naturalness.

This study argues that musical rhythm offers an effective and universal medium for internalising English prosody. Music's inherent isochronicity and beat structure mirror the temporal organisation of English, allowing learners to attune to timing and stress through embodied rhythmic engagement. Motor rhythmic activities such as clapping, tapping and chanting promote auditory and motor coupling, enhancing learners' sensitivity to prosodic prominence and temporal reduction (Zhang et al., 2024). Music therefore supports both perception and production of connected speech, helping learners to align with the rhythm of English (Chen, 2024; Nguyen, 2025; Patel, 2008).

A classroom based quasi experiment was conducted with twenty-five international learners (ages 14 to 17, CEFR B1 to B2) attending a UK academic summer programme. Over two weeks of daily English lessons, participants engaged in rhythmic and jazz-chant based exercises designed to emulate authentic connected speech. Post test analysis revealed measurable gains in fluency and prosodic control, with improved stress timing, clearer weak form reduction and smoother linking. The findings confirm that rhythm focused instruction enhances both intelligibility and natural fluency. By aligning the rhythm of English with the universal language of music, this research reinforces a phonological and cognitive bridge between speech and musical rhythm, demonstrating the pedagogic value of rhythmic integration in pronunciation teaching.

References

- Chen, M. (2024). *Language learning through music on the academic and cognitive basis*. *Acta Psychologica*, 251, 104-152.
- Couper-Kuhlen, E. (1993). *English Speech Rhythm: Form and Function in Everyday Verbal Interaction*. John Benjamins.
- Gilbert, J. B. (2008). *Teaching Pronunciation: Using the Prosody Pyramid*. Cambridge University Press.
- Low, E. L. (2015). *Pronunciation for English as an International Language: From Research to Practice*. Routledge.
- Nguyen, P. B. T. (2025). *Music mediated pedagogy to boost EFL students' listening and rhythm perception*. *F1000Research*, 14, 1207.
- Patel, A. D. (2008). *Music, Language, and the Brain*. Oxford University Press.
- Roach, P. (2009). *English Phonetics and Phonology: A Practical Course* (4th ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Zhang, Y., Jia, J., & Lin, H. (2024). *Embodied music training can help improve speech imitation and pronunciation skills*. *Language Teaching*, 57(3), 32-343.