

An Exploration of Links Between Formal Music Training and Second Language Learning

Sophie Jayne Newlove^{*1}

*Corresponding Author: s.j.newlove@2014.hull.ac.uk

¹Faculty of Arts, Culture, and Education, University of Hull, Kingston-upon-Hull, United Kingdom

A wealth of literature exists linking music and language, the way we use and learn them, and the place they occupy in our minds (Sloboda, 1985; Patel, 2008; Rebuschat, 2012). While the majority of studies focus on the unconscious processes of first-language learning and familiarisation with a native musical system (McMullen & Saffran, 2004; Clark, 2009; McPherson, 2016), the current study aimed to investigate the conscious processes of learning a second language and formal music instrument training. The objective of this research was to highlight similarities in the ways musicians and linguists work which could act as groundwork for future research to improve music and language teaching for future learners. A tailored questionnaire was created for musicians and linguists to complete. The questionnaire was in three parts; the first asked some basic demographic questions, the second asked about participants' musical experience, and the third asked about linguistic experience. Participants were asked about their approach to learning unfamiliar musical or linguistic material, and their approach to improvisation either on their main instrument or in their second language. Preliminary findings highlighted that musicians and linguists both approach unfamiliar material by firstly finding what is familiar (given meter, or words considered cognates with a language they know), then tackling what is unfamiliar in small, manageable segments. In order to improvise, musicians suggested using phrases and melodies that they were familiar with as the basis for their improvisation. Similarly, linguists said they would use familiar phrases in the first instance, then paraphrase in order to express things without necessarily having the vocabulary to do so.

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