

## ACS Teaching with Technology Fellowship

### Summer 2006 Project Proposal: "Teaching French through Songs and Singing"

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The "Teaching French through Songs and Singing" project intends to make available on the Internet original recordings of public domain songs, in multiple versions to facilitate in-class use. This audio material will feature a mix of French traditional songs, French-Canadian folk tunes, and originals written and arranged by Aaron Prevots, Assistant Professor of French at Southwestern University. A devoted web site will make the mp3's and related pedagogical information accessible to ACS users and allow for free on-demand use.

#### **1. Background: Rationale for Overall Project**

Students learn language best when immersed in a culture. Songs provide a means for them to access a foreign culture as if they were already a part of it. On the one hand, songs are authentic materials that help us see how others think and feel. Like the images being gathered for ACS's REALIA project, they are rich sources of information that are readily adaptable to a variety of courses. On the other hand, songs have a unique role in language learning in that they provide invaluable speaking and pronunciation practice. Unlike images, which teachers can work with quite handily for the information they contain, songs pose greater challenges as classroom realia, for the simple reason that singing can make one feel awkward.

I am a seasoned teacher and musician with much practice integrating songs into my beginning and intermediate French courses. In class, I use sing-alongs with guitar to liven each unit. Students consistently praise this aspect of my courses. In summer 2004, I recorded a half-dozen songs in a modest home studio and placed them online. They follow a progression of grammatical and linguistic difficulty, ranging from the basic "Bonjour! Comment ça va?" (Hello, How Are You?) to the popular Québécois folk tune "Ah! Si mon moine voulait danser" (If Only Our Priest Would Dance) that highlights conditional verbs. Educational web sites focused on songs are few, and rarely emphasize both wide-ranging grammatical content and actual singing.

With songs posted online, students listen to them before coming to class and familiarize themselves with lyrics and vocabulary. They quickly welcome songs and singing as a learning activity. Not only does awkwardness about speaking melt, a certain excitement also develops regarding the chance to sing in class, i.e., to go beyond dialogues and role plays and experiment with this new kind of authentic text. My goal for the ACS Fellowship is to record more songs in my home studio to share with students and ACS

colleagues and to build a related archive. The initial group of songs will be unique for several reasons. First, I will record full arrangements of both regular and slowed-down versions (for home listening vs. for classroom use). Next, I will create versions with vocals removed and an instrument playing the melody line as a singing guide (accompanied by cues for when participants are to join in). In these ways, fellow teachers can just press play and still have exciting sing-alongs.

## **2. Description: Part of the Project To Be Done Under ACS Funding**

The project includes three main phases. First, I will determine which songs to record and most likely also write more originals that I have in mind. (For example: recaps of grammar and vocabulary, a simple blues, traditional ballads set to simplified French lyrics.) Second, I will work in my home studio recording, arranging and mixing on Pro Tools, the industry standard software. Third, I will work with Southwestern University's Language Learning Center to make these materials available to others at a special web site. At present, I have initial versions of six songs recorded, all with voice and guitar. For this project, I will focus on fuller arrangements with acoustic and electric guitar, bass, drums, and mandolin, and collaborate with a teacher-musician friend for vocal harmonies and arrangement ideas.

## **3. Timeline: Deliverables/Milestones for ACS Funded Part of Project**

*October 2005-May 2006:* Choose songs, write more originals

*May 2006-June 2006:* Record, mix, arrange; co-design web site with Southwestern's LLC

*July 2006:* Finalize recordings, post to Internet, refine initial version of web site

## **4. Technology: Technical Requirements for the Project**

*Hardware:* Macintosh PowerBook, Mbox, ART preamp

*Software:* Pro Tools LE music recording software; Flash Player, Quicktime

*Microphones:* Shure SM-57, SM-58, Røde NT-1

I will use grant funds to purchase additional microphones (e.g., a stereo pair of AKG C1000S's and a Røde NT-2).

## **5. Other Support: Institutional and/or Outside Support for Project**

Southwestern University has supported preliminary phases of this project through its use of Segue Course Management systems and implementation of smart classrooms, both of which have underscored the benefits of flexible online access. I will receive ongoing support from our Language Learning Center, with which I routinely collaborate for existing courses. I envision calling on Wesleyan University's Michael Roy and

Southwestern University's ACS staff for preliminary user feedback once the recordings become part of a completed a web archive.

## **6. Learning Outcomes: How the Project Will Enhance Teaching/Learning**

The "French through Songs" project will enhance students' understanding of culture, vocabulary, grammar and phonetics. For teachers, it will allow integration of this distinct form of realia in direct ways and provide an enjoyable break from textbook routine. Students and teachers alike will gain familiarity with similarities between French-Canadian and American Country music traditions, expressed particularly in my song selections and interpretation style. I expect to eventually include detailed culture notes, once I have posted a critical mass of songs.

## **7. Curriculum: How the Project Will Be Integrated into the Curriculum**

It can be frustrating as a language instructor to have songs whose technical difficulty prevents sharing. Even for the easiest material, I routinely slow down rhythms when playing guitar in class. This project will facilitate classroom use of songs and singing by providing such alternate versions. Moreover, once the web site is in place, I can gradually build it into a repository for additional lyrics and mp3's. Although my personal interest has been especially in French children's songs and in French-Canadian music, I have also explored Louisiana Cajun and French Caribbean material and foresee posting mp3's in these categories as well. In all cases, I will include at least a vocabulary list, if not also mention of relevant grammar points and cultural contexts. I would like to apply for future grants (e.g., Mundy) to promote teacher-student collaboration, for example in view of working with Southwestern's Fine Arts students to post original mp3's of their singing repertoire.

## **8. Assessment: How the Project Will Be Evaluated**

The site will include a registration system to identify ACS users. I will solicit feedback from these users as well as from my own students. In addition, I will present my work at a Southwestern University Pedagogy Lunch and most likely at professional conferences. I am particularly interested in building the site further as outlined above, and to this end will gather ideas from students and colleagues. Thanks to course web site creation and more recently development of online testing materials for French, I have ample experience evaluating technology projects and integrating feedback on redesigns.

## **9. Collaboration and Dissemination: How the Project Will Be Shared with ACS Colleagues**

I have spent several years researching and developing songs that can be placed online in the public domain. I will continue in this direction by creating the devoted web site and implementing ideas based on feedback received. Assuming an appropriate password protection system can be established, I would like to provide links to related learning

objects involving copyrighted material, such as the set of famous songs about Paris that I included in my current "Paris in Literature and Film" seminar.

Samples of existing performances of mine are at  
<<http://www.southwestern.edu/~prevots>>.