

Singing in Spanish with Pre-School Children

w/ Kathleen Hannan

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Living in Peru for six months at the age of 19, I learned directly how challenging it is to be in a new country where you do not speak the language. After a few weeks in Peru I realized that my favorite way to learn Spanish was through songs. So each time I met a new person, I asked them to teach me their favorite song, and I wrote the words down in a notebook and then sang them over and over again. This was a quite painless way to gain vocabulary and learn grammar. It's a lot more fun to sing a song over and over than it is to speak vocabulary words in a book!

I teach Spanish songs in the preschool classroom for two purposes. If there is a Spanish speaking child in the classroom, this child can watch other children in the process of learning a song in her/his first language, and may feel a sense of pride in his/her own ability to speak Spanish, and a sense of being seen, or understood.

In a classroom where all the children speak English, learning Spanish songs can give children an experience of joy in the sounds of Spanish, the language that more and more of their neighbors speak. When they hear Spanish in the grocery store or from a new child in school, now they will have a connection to it's sounds, and perhaps an interest in learning more.

Pronouncing Spanish is easy even if you do not speak Spanish!

In English we have a lot of different vowel sounds for each vowel. In Spanish it is much simpler, with one sound for each vowel. Just remember, it's *always* true that:

A in Spanish sounds like AH in English

E sounds like AY

I sounds like EE

O sounds like OH

U sounds like OO

Z sounds like S

Ñ sounds like Ny

LL sounds like a Y (or in some countries, it sounds like a light J)

R sounds like a *very* light D with a *tiny bit* of the watery sound of an R in English)

RR is rolled on the tongue RRRRRR

C, as in English, can be soft like an S or hard like a K (when it comes before an A, O or U it is hard, when before an E or an I it is soft.)

QU is hard, like a K (and the U is silent)

When you see an accent mark, that syllable is accented.

Some pronunciations:

Adelante (in front) Sounds like AhDayLahnTay

Policía (police) Sounds like PohLeeCeeAh

Araña (spider) Sounds like AhDahNyah

Perro (dog) Sounds like PayRrrrOh

Chiquita (small) Sounds like CheeKeeTah

Pueblo (town) Sounds like PooAyBloh

Musica (music) Sounds like MooSeeKah

Atrás (behind) Sounds like AhTrahs (with the accent on the second syllable)

Gorila (gorilla) Sounds like GohDeeLah

Cocodrilo (crocodile) Sounds like KohKohDreeLoh

Uno Dos Tres Tira!

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This is a song for juggling scarves, or the first step in juggling, which is throwing a scarf to another person while catching the one they throw. We throw them on the word 'tira', which means 'throw'. With two year olds and one year olds we just throw them up in the air. With 3 (older threes), 4, and 5 year olds you can toss them back and forth between partners. If passing the two scarves at once is too much for the children, they can be in pairs passing one scarf back and forth.

Uno dos tres tira! 4x
One two three throw! 4x

Cuatro cinco seis tira! 4x
Four five six throw! 4x

Siete ocho nueve tira! 4x
Seven eight nine throw! 4x

La Florita

I'm not sure what country this traditional song comes from. Although most preschoolers don't really understand this kind of hide-the-object game till they're five or so, they do love to play it anyway. The little flower can be passed behind everyone's backs in a circle, or you can hide the flower under one of three pots and pans, and have the children sing the song and then guess which pan is hiding the flower. The words mean 'The little flower, where is it? I cannot see, I cannot see!'

La florita donde esta, no puedo ver no puedo ver
La florita donde esta, no puedo ver, no puedo ver
Where is it? Where is it? Where is the little flower?
Where is it? Where is it? Where is the little flower?

Chocolate (In Spanish, pronounced Choh-Coh-Lah-Tay)

You could make wonderful Mexican hot chocolate to go with this song. You can buy the Mexican cinnamon chocolate in many supermarkets now, as well as in the little Latino tiendas, neighborhood stores. Chocolate comes from Central America and Mexico. 'Bate' means stir. The song can be sung as a fingerplay, holding up fingers on the counting part, and making the motions of stirring the chocolate on the 'bate bate' part. 'Bate' means stir. The song can also be done as a dance with shaker eggs, freezing after each line at the beginning and dancing freely on the second part of the song.

Uno dos tres cho
Uno dos tres co
Uno dos tres la
Uno dos tres te
Chocolate chocolate bate bate chocolate
Chocolate chocolate bate bate chocolate

La Granja ~ The Farm

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This song is sung all over Latin America. In Mexico 'granja' means 'farm'. In Argentina it is sung with the word La Chacra (The Farm). In other countries the word Rancho (Ranch) is used. Notice that the sounds the animals make in Spanish are slightly different from the words. I sing this song with stuffed animals, and give each child a chance to hold a stuffed animal on one of the verses.

Vengan a ver mi granja que es hermosa *Come and see my farm for it is beautiful*
Vengan a ver mi granja que es hermosa
El patito hace así Cuá cuá *The little duck makes a sound like this, quack quack*
El patito hace así Cuá cuá

Vengan a ver mi granja que es hermosa
Vengan a ver mi granja que es hermosa
El pollito hace así pío pío *(The little chick makes a sound like this, peep peep)*
El pollito hace así pío pío

Other verses with these animals:

La vaquita hace así mu mu *(The little cow)*
El puerquito hace así oinc oinc *(The little pig)*
El burrito hace así íja íja *(The little donkey)*
El gallito hace así kikiri kí *(The little rooster)*
El perrito hace así guau, guau *(The little dog)*
El gatito hace así miau, miau *(The little cat)*

De La Cabeza A Los Pies

Lyrics from the book, De la cabeza a los pies, by Eric Carle Melody by Kathleen Hannan

*This **gorgeous** book is a great way to have English speaking children become familiar with a lot of Spanish words, and give the Spanish speaking children a chance to shine. Everyone will completely understand the meaning from Eric Carle's marvelous illustrations. I made up the melody to add a little music to the game of moving as inspired by all of the animals' movements.*

Soy un pingüino y giro la cabeza *(I am a penguin and I turn my head)*
Soy un pingüino y giro la cabeza
Puedes hacerlo tú también? *(Can you do it too?)*
Claro que sí *(Clearly yes)*
Oh yes I can
Claro que sí

Soy una jirafa y doblo el cuello *(I am a giraffe and I bend my neck)*
Soy un búfalo y alzo los hombros *(I am a buffalo and I raise up my shoulders)*
Soy un mono y saludo con los brazos *(I am a monkey and I wave with my arms)*
Soy una foca y aplaudo con las manos *(I am a seal and I clap with my hands)*
Soy un gorila y me golpeo el pecho *(I am a gorilla and I pound my chest)*
Soy un gato y arqueo la espalda *(I am a cat and I arch my back)*
Soy un crocodilo y meneo las caderas *(I am a crocodile and I wiggle my hips)*
Soy un camello y doblo las rodillas *(I am a camel and I bend my knees)*
Soy un burro y doy patadas *(I am a burro and I give kicks)*
Soy un elefante y piso muy fuerte *(I am an elephant and I step very strongly)*
Yo soy yo y muevo el dedo gordo del pie *(I am myself and I move the big toe of my foot)*

La Vibora De La Mar ~ The Sea Serpent

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This game is very popular in Mexico. It's just like London Bridges, except that the children go under the bridge as a Sea Serpent, holding the waist or shoulders of the person in front of them, and weaving under the bridge. On the last line of the song, the two people who are the bridge, catch the child who is under the bridge and gently rock her or him. I alternate singing in Spanish and English.

A la víbora, víbora	(To the serpent serpent)
de la mar, del la mar	(Of the sea of the sea)
por aquí pueden pasar	(Here it can pass through)
Los de adelante corren mucho	(Those in the front run a lot)
los de atrás se quedarán	(Those in the back will stay behind)
tras, tras, tras, tras	(Back, back, back, back)

Oh the serpent serpent
of the sea of the sea
Come and play this game with me
Those in the front go very fast
Those in the back you know we'll catch
Back back back back

Los Pollitos Dicen

This is a very well known song in Mexico and other Latin American countries. You could act it out with puppets, or stuffed animals, or with the children as the chickens and the teacher or one child as the hen. There are some adorable versions of this song on U-Tube at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJVib32-kf8>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61XoNeFZpTw&feature=related>

Los pollitos dicen pío pío pío	(The little chickens say Pío pío pío)
Cuando tienen hambre	(Whenever they are hungry)
Cuando tienen frío	(whenever they are cold)

La gallina busca el maíz y el trigo	(The hen searches for the corn and wheat)
Les da la comida	(She gives them their dinner)
y les presta abrigo	(and she keeps them warm)

Bajo sus dos alas, acurrucaditos	(Under her two wings, the babies cuddle up)
Duermen los pollitos	(The little chicks sleep)
hasta el otro día	('til the next morning)

San Severino

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*I've changed the words of this traditional song to be about playing musical instruments.
You could use rhythm sticks for the song or mime the playing of the instruments.*

San Severino de la buena buena vida (*San Severino of the good good life*)
San Severino de la buena buena vida

Asi asi asi asi toca guitarra (*Like this like this like this Like this one plays guitar*)
Asi asi asi asi me gusta a mi (*Like this like this like this Like this is what I like*)
Like this like this like this Like this we play guitar
Asi asi asi asi me gusta a mi

San Severino de la buena buena vida
San Severino de la buena buena vida

Asi asi asi asi toca el tambor
Asi asi asi asi me gusta a mi
Like this like this like this Like this we play the drum
Asi asi asi asi me gusta a mi

San Severino de la buena buena vida
San Severino de la buena buena vida

Asi asi asi asi toca la flauta
Asi asi asi asi me gusta a mi
Like this like this like this Like this we play the flute
Asi asi asi asi me gusta a mi

San Severino de la buena buena vida
San Severino de la buena buena vida

Asi asi asi asi toca el violín
Asi asi asi asi me gusta a mi
Like this like this like this Like this we play the violin
Asi asi asi asi me gusta a mi

San Severino de la buena buena vida
San Severino de la buena buena vida

Asi asi asi asi toca piano
Asi asi asi Asi me gusta a mi
Like this like this like this Like this we play piano
Asi asi asi Asi me gusta a mi

El Juego Chirimbolo

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This traditional song and dance come from Ecuador. I learned it from a book called Roots & Branches; A Legacy of Multicultural Music for Children (most of the songs in that book are for children a bit older than preschool.) Children stand in two lines facing each other, holding hands across with a partner. I will give directions here for older children, but with preschoolers, you will adjust to their level of ability, perhaps not doing the side steps, or with the 4 and 5 year olds probably doing the side steps but not worrying about which hand or foot they use. On the first line they take 4 open-close side steps to the left, then reach out with the right foot and touch the right foot of their partner. Then they reach with their left foot, to the left foot of their partner. Then right hand, then left hand. Then right elbow, then the left elbow. Then begin again doing the side steps to the right and the feet, hands and elbows with the left first.

After the second time through, on 'El juego chirimbolo' take two open-close steps to the left, On 'que bonito es' partners raise hands up high, and on 'hey' they drop hands, jump up, flinging arms into the air with hands extended and freeze!

El juego chirimbolo que bonito es	The game of Chirimbolo how beautiful it is
Con el pie, otro pie	With one foot, another foot
Una mano, otro mano	One hand, the other hand
Un codo, otro codo	One elbow, the other elbow

El juego chirimbolo, que bonito es,
Con el pie, otro pie,
Una mano, otro mano,
Un codo, otro codo
El juego chirimbolo, que bonito es, Hey!

Bibliography

De Colores and Other Latin-American Folk Songs for Children , Jose Luis Orozco

Diez Deditos ~ Ten Little Fingers CD Jose Luis Orozco

Collins Dictionary; EspaZol-Ingles; English-Spanish - this is an excellent dictionary, with local phrases and usages from all over Latin America.

Roots & Branches; A Legacy of Multicultural Music For Children (with CD) Campbell, McCullough-Brabson, Tucker