

English children's songs in early childhood music and language education: observations on singability and choice of songs for teaching young voices¹⁶⁰

Deborah Kiszely-Papp, Apor Vilmos Catholic College, Vác

Introduction

A dramatically expanding interest in early bilingual and intercultural education for young children can be observed in Hungary in recent years, in part as a result of an increased influx of foreign nationals during the past two decades.¹⁶¹ As demand for multicultural preschools and kindergartens in Hungary continues to rise, the number of institutions featuring bilingual educational programs has proliferated. For purposes of this article “bilingual kindergartens” refers to various pedagogical approaches, including international kindergartens, bilingual kindergartens (in Hungary primarily English-Hungarian, but also German-Hungarian and the languages of other minority groups), and those featuring language teaching programs designed for young children (e.g., Helen Doron English method for children). This rapid market growth has sparked the formation of new college and university degree programs, such as the Early Childhood Education pedagogy program in English at the Apor Vilmos Catholic College, designed to prepare kindergarten teachers to fill the burgeoning need for bilingual educators.

The main objectives of these programs include mastery of the specific professional knowledge required of a preschool teacher and the corresponding English language skills. Music Education courses require learning an extensive repertoire of suitable English children’s songs and nursery rhymes to facilitate age-appropriate, effective teaching of vocabulary acquisition. Some students in these degree programs are already employed in bilingual kindergartens even before having had any formal music training. An objective of this article is to call attention to the need for integration of effective methods of teaching music and language acquisition in early childhood education by taking into consideration some of the key pedagogical principles of Zoltán Kodály and Katalin Forrai. Several sources are recommended and compared to facilitate holistic song choice, and other creative strategies are suggested to compensate for the scarcity of pentatonic songs in English. A list of song recommendations is also provided.

1. Musical versus linguistic considerations.

The rapid expansion of early childhood English training programs has encouraged a tendency to place language acquisition goals ahead of musical considerations, such as singability, simplicity of rhythm, and a suitable range. Prior to the current research, a cross-section of popular English children’s songs was analysed to determine the degree of language acquisition supporting features (including mnemonic value, presence of repetitive patterns, rhyme schemes, symmetrical melodic lines, and other formal characteristics). A resulting observation was that while many of these songs have overall appeal and are linguistically useful, they often contain musical features which make

¹⁶⁰ Edited version of the presentation: “Angol gyermekdalok használata az óvodai zenei- és nyelvpedagógiai foglalkozásokon: észrevételek az énekelhetőségről és optimális dalválasztásról a kisgyermeknevelésben”, 10 November 2022, XXVI. Apáczai-Napok Scientific Conference, Széchenyi University, Győr.

¹⁶¹ Almost Twice as Many Foreigners Live in Hungary as at Turn of Millennium. *Hungary Today*, 2022.02.08. <https://hungarytoday.hu/foreigners-moving-to-hungary-foreign-people-citizens-hungarians/>

them difficult for young children to sing, and thus would be better suited for use in primary school education or later. Frequently the songs are characterized by angular melodic contours with wide intervals outlining harmonies,¹⁶² ranges of an octave or more, and rhythmic complexities, such as a prevalence of upbeats and dotted rhythms (Kiszely-Papp 2021). When compared with their counterpart Hungarian children's songs, most of which are in simple duple meter and feature pentatonic melodies with small, authentic ambituses, it can be assumed that from a music pedagogical perspective the latter are better suited for the voices of very young children.

Nowadays teachers have access to a plethora of songs at their fingertips through the internet. Thus, it is becoming increasingly common to search for and download songs quickly from unchecked sources rather than using traditional collections of English children's songs or reliable textbooks. Frequently, songs found on websites are introduced by videos rather than scores, which inadvertently places the focus on visual/aural entertainment aspects rather than on the listening itself or the music reading experience. The result is that the original texts, rhythm, and even the melodies of many songs are circulated in different forms, causing a certain loss in their universal quality. While children's and folk songs have been passed on throughout history in variant forms, it is difficult or virtually impossible to check on the origins of discrepancies found on many internet sources.

As part of this research, a survey is currently being conducted to gather empirical data about English song selection practices in a broad cross-section of bilingual kindergartens in Hungary. It includes basic questions regarding the type of institution and the individual teacher's musical background, experience, and native language, and specific questions about the language background of the children, most frequently used English children's songs and sources used, use of media vs. personal demonstration in teaching music, observations on any difficulties encountered with particular songs, and average frequency of singing activities in the kindergarten. Answers will be used for statistical purposes and will remain anonymous. Another goal of this project is to help raise awareness of the importance of thoughtful selection of songs and the need to maintain a healthy balance between linguistic and musical considerations when teaching children in kindergarten.

2. Kodály's pedagogical principles applied to English kindergarten music education

An advocate of mother tongue pedagogy, Kodály promoted the use of simple pentatonic folk songs and relative solmization for teaching singing to young children (Kokas 1977). He also noted the potentially negative effect of foreign language learning on the pronunciation of one's native language (Blankó 2023). Kodály maintained that children should be educated with music of high artistic quality as much as possible, and even in his pedagogical works he favored setting texts by outstanding poets (Forrai, 1998: 4). An excellent source of pedagogically appropriate, simple (or simplified) English children's nursery rhymes and songs is the now out-of-print book by Katalin Forrai,¹⁶³ *Music in Preschool* (Forrai 1995b). This textbook is not a mere translation of the Hungarian classic *Ének az Óvodában* by the same author (Forrai 1995a) but was adapted for the

¹⁶² See for example: *The Wheels on the Bus* (Figure 1.a); *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes* (Figure 5.a); *My Bonnie* (Figure 6.a); *Six Little Ducks* (Figure 7.a); *Sing a Song of Sixpence* (Figure 8.a); etc.

¹⁶³ Katalin Forrai (1926-2004) a foremost proponent of Zoltán Kodály's music pedagogical principles, especially as applied to early childhood education in Hungary. Author of numerous books on the music education of young children, her work eventually earned widespread international recognition. *Music in Preschool* was published in 11 editions between 1988 and 1998 in English and Hungarian and is held by 40 WorldCat member libraries worldwide.

English readership by Jean Sinor (Mucsi 2020). The second half of the book features a collection of 170 nursery rhymes and English children's songs suitable for use in kindergarten, grouped according to ambitus, set of pitches used, topic, potential games, and other considerations.¹⁶⁴ As the author explains, young children can usually sing clearly up to the interval corresponding to their age: a 3-year-old can sing up to a third, a 4-year-old a fourth, and so on. A student and leading proponent of Zoltán Kodály's music pedagogical principles, Forrai emphasized the importance of age-appropriate, creative music education for young children. Many of her basic principles in terms of holistic, effective methods of teaching singing are universally applicable and can be put into practice in bilingual kindergarten music education through careful selection of songs and creative adaptation of lyrics to new or pre-existing melodies. The comparison of selected popular English and Hungarian children's songs provided below serves to illustrate these ideas, with observations on suitability and practical recommendations for use in kindergarten music teaching.

Important goals of early childhood music education according to Forrai include the development of spontaneous creativity, a love of singing, and the ability to sing in tune (Forrai 1995b: 12, 14). Among the problems encountered by kindergarten teachers seeking suitable English children's songs are the inherent difficulties of many English songs as described above and the relative scarcity of songs that meet the criteria Forrai specifies: "...the most appropriate music for the education of young children is pentatonic in character and within the range of a sixth" (Forrai 1995b: 26). Pentatonic songs consist primarily of thirds and major seconds with some fourths and fifths, making them easier to sing than many popular English songs, which, by contrast, abound in larger intervallic leaps and often contain half-steps in addition to those that naturally occur within the scale of the tonic key.

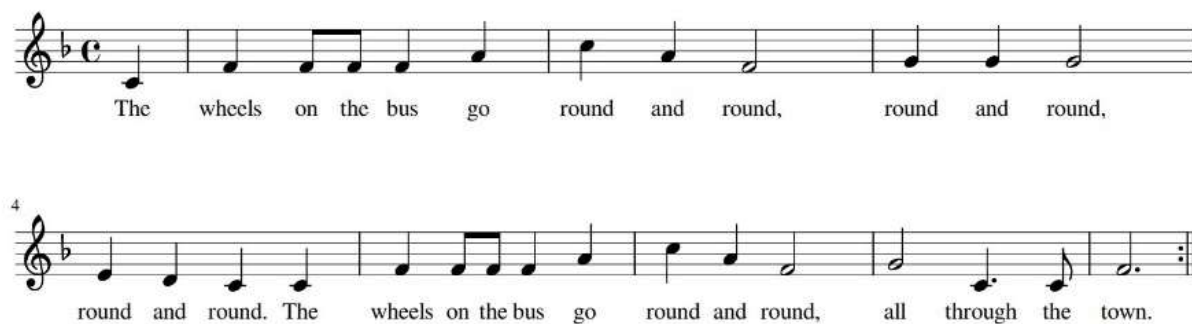
3. A comparison of certain typical features of English vs. Hungarian children's songs

Regarding the characteristically wider range of most English children's songs Forrai noted:

"Most Hungarian children's songs have an authentic range, which means that the tonic lies at the bottom of the range of notes. For example, a typical Hungarian song might consist of so-mi-re-do, where *do* is the tonic. By contrast, an English-language song will lie in the middle of the range, e.g., mi-re-do-so, (with *do* as the tonic). This is clearly accounted for by the prevalence, in English-language songs, of upbeat, which tend to be on the lower dominant. As a result, the melodic range of English-language children's songs is larger than that of Hungarian songs" (Forrai 1995b: 10).

Figures 1–4 show comparisons of the ranges and pitch sets of four popular English and Hungarian children's songs. The scale degrees indicated in bold represent the tonic note of the song, *do* in major and *la* in minor. The italicized scale degrees indicate those pitches that fall below the tonic, indicating a plagal (nonauthentic) range. The corresponding Hungarian songs have been selected either because of a motivic similarity, being related in topic or mood, or some other association.

¹⁶⁴ Chapter Five, "Musical Materials" (104–196) features 63 nursery rhymes and 107 children's songs, many with illustrations and suggestions for games, followed by three indexes to facilitate selection (Forrai: 1995b). The 2nd revised and expanded edition (Forrai: 1998) includes 24 new melodies composed to the text of Mother Goose rhymes by the translator, Jean Sinor.



The wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round,
round and round. The wheels on the bus go round and round, all through the town.

Figure 1.a: The Wheels on the Bus (P8, *s-l-t-d-r-m-s*)
Source: American folk song



A - ki nem lép egy - szer - re, nem kap ré - test es - té - re,
Mert a ré - tes i - gen jó, ka - to - ná - nak az va - ló.

Figure 1.b: Aki nem lép egyszerre (P5, *d-m-s*)
Source: Forrai 1995a: 140



The een - tsy, ween - tsy spi - der went up the wa - ter spout. Down came the
rain and washed the spi - der out; Out came the sun and dried up all the
rain; And the een - tsy ween - tsy spi - der went up the spout a - gain.

Figure 2.a: The Eentsy-Weentsy Spider (P8, *s-d-r-m-f-s*)
Source: Beall-Hagen Nipp 1998b: 8

Kodály - Gazdag

Ár - kot ug - rott a szú - nyog, ki - tö - rött a lá - ba,
5
Sza - lad - tak a szú - nyo - gok szú - nyog - pa - ti - ká - ba.

Figure 2.b: Árkot ugrott a szúnyog (P4, s-I-d)
Source: Forrai 1995a: 227

If you're hap - py and you know it, clap your hands. (clap, clap) If you're
3
hap - py and you know it, clap your hands. (clap, clap) If you're hap - py and you know it, then your
6
face will sure - ly show it. If you're hap - py and you know it clap your hands. (clap, clap)

Figure 3.a: If You're Happy and You Know It (m7, s-I-t-d-r-m-f)
Source: Beall-Hagen Nipp 1998b: 42

Kodály - Csukás

"De jó a di - ó!" fü - tyül a ri - gó,
5
Vi - dám da - la száll: él - ni, jaj de jó!

Figure 3.b: De jó a dió (P5, d-r-m-s)
Source: Forrai 1995a: 209

The far - mer in the dell, The far - mer in the dell,
Heigh Ho! the Der - ry O! The far - mer in the dell.

Figure 4.a: The Farmer in the Dell (M9, s-d-r-m-s-l)
Source: Beall-Hagen Nipp 1998a: 14

Meg - is - mer - ni a ka - nászt é - kes já - rá - sá - ról,
E - lől - fű - zött bocs - ko - rá - ról, ta - risz - nya - szí - já - ról.

Figure 4.b: Megismerni a kanászt (M6, s-l-d-r-m)
Source: Forrai 1995a: 246

Figures 1-4: Comparison of four pairs of English and Hungarian children's songs
Source: Own work

All four of the English songs (Figures 1a–4a) begin with an upbeat on the lower *so*, whereas all of the Hungarian songs (Figures 1b–4b) begin on the downbeat. The ambitus of the English songs ranges from a minor 7th to a major 9th, while that of the Hungarian songs is considerably smaller, from a perfect 4th to a major 6th. Two of the Hungarian songs feature a lower *so* (Figures 2b and 4b), and two have authentic ranges (Figures 1b and 3b). All of the English songs have plagal ranges. As for meters, all of the Hungarian songs are in 2/4 time. Two of the English songs are in the compound duple meter of 6/8 (Figures 2a and 4a), very typical of English songs, and two are in common time (4/4, Figures 1a and 3a). However, *If You're Happy...* (Figure 3.a) is most often sung with a swing feeling, another prevalent feature of English songs.

The frequent presence of half-steps (minor seconds) is yet another typical difficulty of English songs (see Figures 5a and 9a), which Forrai warns should be avoided when teaching singing to very young children:

“The young child’s ability to discriminate pitch is not yet sufficiently developed for him to distinguish clearly between half-steps, nor does the physical development of his vocal cords permit him to reproduce such fine distinctions; therefore, he always sings half-steps out of tune. If the child has a firm grasp of the five ‘pillar’ tones of the pentatonic [d-r-m-s-l], he will later find it easy

to fit the half steps between them, whether from above or below. Pentatony is the departure point for the mastery of diatonic scales in elementary school” (Forrai 1995b: 26).

Figures 5–9 provide further comparisons of five additional popular English and Hungarian children’s songs. Here the ambitus of the English songs remains consistently wide, ranging from a perfect octave to a major 9th, with wider inner intervals and other difficulties, such as chromatics. The ambituses of the Hungarian songs range between a perfect 5th and a perfect octave and contain no chromatic pitches. Despite some wider ambituses in the Hungarian songs (Figures 6b and 8b), the largest interval between any two consecutive pitches within one verse is a perfect 5th. The English songs frequently feature inner intervals ranging from a 6th to an octave and sometimes contain chromatic pitches.

Figure 5.a: Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes (M9, **d-r-m-f-fī-s-l-t-d²-r²**)
 Source: American folk song

Kodály - Weöres

Figure 5.b: Járjunk táncot (M6, **d-r-m-s-l**)
 Source: Forrai 1995a: 219

Verse:

1. My Bon - nie lies o - ver the o - cean, My
5 Bon - nie lies o - ver the sea, My Bon - nie lies
10 o - ver the o - cean, Oh, bring back my Bon - nie to
15 Chorus:
me. Bring back, Bring back, Oh,
21 bring back my Bon - nie to me, to me, Bring back,
27 bring back, Oh, bring back my Bon - nie to me.

Figure 6.a: My Bonnie (P8, *m-s-l-t-d-r-m*)
Source: Raph 1986: 202–203

Kodály - Weöres

Ó ha cin - ke vol - nék, út - ra kel - nék,
5 Hőm - pöly - gő su - gár - ban é - ne - kel - nék.
9 Ó ha szel - lő vol - nék, min - dig fúj - nék,
13 Min - den bő ka - bát - ba be - le - búj - nék.

Figure 6.b: Ó ha cinke volnék (P8, *I-d-r-m-s-l²*)
Source: Forrai 1995a: 249

Six lit-tle ducks that I once knew, Fat ones, skin-ny ones, fair ones too, But the
5 one lit-tle duck with the feath-er on his back, He led the oth-ers with a
8 quack, quack, quack! Quack, quack, quack, quack, quack, quack!
11 He led the oth-ers with a quack, quack, quack!

Figure 7.a: Six Little Ducks (M9, s-d-r-m-f-s-l)
Source: Beall-Hagen Nipp 1998b: 16-17

Cif - ra pa - lo - ta, zöld az ab - la - ka,
5 Gye - re ki, te tu - ba - ró - zsa, vár a vi - o - la.

Figure 7.b: Cifra palota (M6, s-l-t-d-r-m)
Source: Forrai 1995a: 240

J. W. Elliott

Sing a song of six - pence, a pock - et full of rye,
3 Four and twen - ty black - birds baked in a pie;
5 When then pie was o - pened, the birds be - gan to sing,
7 Was - n't that a dain - ty dish to set be - fore the King?

Figure 8.a: Sing a Song of Sixpence (m9, t-d-r-m-f-s-l-t-d)
Source: Beall-Hagen Nipp 1998c: 28

Kodály - Weöres

Megy az ö - reg Á - dám, ba - tyut visz a há - tán:
5 Csup - rot, lá - bast ja - ví - tok!
9 Gye - re i - de bá - tyám, gye - re ö - reg Á - dám,
13 Csor - bult bög - rét gu - rí - tok.

Figure 8.b: Megy az öreg (P8, l-d-r-m-s-l²)
Source: Forrai 1995a: 248

Új írányok és lehetőségek a novelák, humán és táncadalomtudományok területén

Doe, a deer, a female deer Ray, a drop of golden sun
 Me, a name, I call myself
 Far, a long, long way to run Sew, a needle pulling thread
 La, a note to follow so
 Tea, a drink with jam and bread that will
 lead us back to Do, oh, oh, oh Do
 Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La, Ti, Do, So, Do

Figure 9.a: Do-Re-Mi (P8, d-r-m-f/fi-s/i-l-ta/t-d2)
 Source: Rodgers-Hammerstein 1995: 39-46

A, a, a, ma van bú - csú - zás nap - ja.
 A - zért já - runk se - reg - gel, Hogy tré - fál - junk ked - vünk - kel.
 A, a, a, ma van bú - csú - zás nap - ja.

Figure 9.b: A, a, a (P5, d-r-m-f-s)
 Source: Forrai 1995a: 213

Figures 5-9: Comparison of five more difficult English songs with counterpart Hungarian songs
 Source: Own work

Another striking difference noted by Forrai between Hungarian and other children's songs is the lack or use of sequencing as a compositional technique: "...sequential repetition, which never occurs in Hungarian children's songs, is characteristic of the songs of some other peoples" (Forrai 1995b: 24). Occasionally sequencing can be found in a Hungarian song, for example in *A, a, a* (Figure 9b), and *Megy az öreg* (Figure 8b) but such instances are rare.

By contrast, the great majority of English children's songs feature sequential repetition, including *The Farmer in the Dell* (Figure 4a); *The Eentsy–Weentsy Spider* (Figure 2a); *Do–Re–Mi* (Figure 9a); *My Bonnie* (Figure 6a); and *Sing a Song of Sixpence* (Figure 8a); to name but a few. Another related compositional device found commonly in English songs is that of repetition with expanding or diminishing intervals, as in: *If You're Happy* (Figure 3a); *Six Little Ducks* (Figure 7a); *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes* (Figure 5a); etc.

4. Recommendations for suitable English children's songs in early childhood education

The following is a list subdivided into three parts of recommended English children's songs. Tables 1 and 2 feature pentatonic followed by diatonic songs that have an appropriate range for kindergarten-aged children, with ambitus not exceeding a 6th. Note that the first three songs in Table 1 have formulaic melodies with only 2-3 pitches, to which many different texts have been (and can be) set. Table 3 consists of songs with an ambitus greater than a 6th, recommended only for groups of children aged 5 and older who can sing clearly.

No.	Title	Ambitus	Pitch set	Meter
1	Starlight, Starbright	m3	m-s	2/4
2	Hot Cross Buns	M3	d-r-m	2/4
3	Bounce High, Bounce Low	P4	m-s-l	2/4
4	Mary Had a Little Lamb	P5	d-r-m-s	2/4
5	Bought Me a Cat	P5	d-r-m-s	2/4
6	Diddle, Diddle Dumpling	P5	d-r-m-s	2/4
7	Let Us Chase the Squirrel	P5	d-r-m-s	2/4
8	Ring Around the Rosy	M6	d-m-s-l	2/4
9	Hello Song	M6	d-r-m-s-l	4/4
10	Goodbye Song	M6	d-r-m-s-l	3/4
11	Mockingbird	M6	d-r-m-s-l	2/4
12	Bow-wow-wow	M6	d-r-m-s-l	2/4
13	Frosty Weather	M6	d-r-m-s-l	2/4
14	Pumpkin, Pumpkin	M6	d-r-m-s-l	2/4
15	Old MacDonald Had a Farm	M6	s-l-d-r-m	2/4

Table 1: Selected Pentatonic English children's songs within the range of a 6th
 Source: Own work

No.	Title	Ambitus	Pitch set	Meter
16	Oats, Peas, Beans, and Barley	P5	d-r-m-f-s	6/8
17	Love Somebody	P5	d-r-m-f-s	2/4
18	What Are You Wearing?	P5	d-r-m-f-s	6/8
19	Go Tell Aunt Rhody	P5	d-r-m/me-f-s	4/4
20	Little Miss Muffet	m6	t-d-r-m-f-s	6/8
21	Skip to My Lou	m6	t-d-r-m-f-s	2/4
22	Firefighter	m6	l-t-d-r-m-f	2/4
23	Rain, Rain, Go Away	M6	d-r-m-f-s-l	2/4
24	London Bridge	M6	d-r-m-f-s-l	4/4
25	Over in the Meadow	M6	d-r-m-f-s-l	2/4
26	Humpty Dumpty	M6	d-r-m-f-s-l	6/8
27	Hickety, Pickety, My Black Hen	M6	d-r-m-f-s-l	6/8
28	Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star	M6	d-r-m-f-s-l	4/4
29	This Old Man	M6	d-r-m-f-s-l	2/4
30	Good Morning	M6	d-r-m-f-s-l	6/8
31	Teddy Bear	M6	d-r-m-f-s-l	2/4
32	Hickory Dickory Dock	M6	d-r-m-f-s-l	2/4
33	Michael Row the Boat Ashore	M6	d-r-m-f-s-l	4/4

Table 2: Selected Diatonic English children's songs within the range of a 6th
 Source: Own work

No.	Title	Ambitus	Pitch set	Meter
34	If You're Happy	m7	<i>s-l-t-d-r-m-f</i>	4/4
35	Little Cabin in the Wood	m7	<i>s-l-t-d-r-m-f</i>	4/4
36	The Eentsy-Weentsy Spider	P8	<i>s-d-r-m-f-s</i>	6/8
37	Baby Bird Scale Song	P8	d-r-m-f-s-l-t-d²	6/8
38	Lazy Mary	P8	<i>s-l-t-d-r-m-s</i>	6/8
39	The Wheels on the Bus	P8	<i>s-l-t-d-r-m-s</i>	4/4
40	The Mulberry Bush	P8	<i>s-l-t-d-r-m-s</i>	6/8
41	To Market	P8	d-r-m-f-s-l-t-d²	6/8
42	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Once I Caught a Fish	P8	<i>s-l-t-d-r-m-f-s</i>	4/4
43	My Bonnie	P8	<i>m-s-l-t-d-r-m</i>	3/4
44	Roll that Little Ball	P8	<i>s-t-d-r-m-f-s</i>	2/4
45	Kookaburra	P8	d-m-f-s-l-t-d²	4/4
46	Over the River	P8	d-r-m-f-s-l-t-d²	6/8
47	Little Boy Blue	P8	<i>s-l-t-d-r-m-f-s</i>	6/8
48	Brahms' Lullaby	P8	d-r-m-f-s-l-t-d²	3/4
49	Three Little Kittens	P8	<i>m-s-l-t-d-r-m</i>	6/8
50	I Had a Little Nut Tree	m9	<i>t-d-r-m-f-s-l-d²</i>	4/4
51	Rock-a-bye Baby	m9	<i>m-f-s-l-t-d-r-m-f</i>	3/4
52	Sing a Song of Sixpence	m9	<i>t-d-r-m-f-s-l-t-d</i>	4/4
53	Farmer in the Dell (pentatonic)	M9	<i>s-d-r-m-s-l</i>	6/8
54	Did You Ever See a Lassie?	M9	<i>s-d-r-m-f-s-l</i>	3/4
55	Six Little Ducks	M9	<i>s-d-r-m-f-s-l</i>	4/4
56	Hey Diddle, Diddle	M9	<i>s-l-t-d-r-m-f-s-l</i>	6/8
57	Jimmy Crack Corn	M9	<i>s-t-d-r-m-f-s-l</i>	4/4
58	Are You Sleeping?/Where is Thumbkin?	M9	<i>s-d-r-m-f-s-l</i>	4/4
59	Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes	M9	d-r-m-f/fi-s-l-t-d²-r²	4/4
60	Do-Re-Mi	P8	d-r-m-f/fi-s/si-l-ta/t-d²	4/4

Table 3: Selected English children's songs with an ambitus greater than a 6th

Source: Own work

5. Other sources of English children's songs

Although Forrai's original *Music for Preschool* is out-of-print (Forrai: 1995b), and a certain percentage of the songs it contains may be unfamiliar or even obsolete, it remains an important collection of English children's songs systematically organized according to the proven music pedagogical principles of Kodály.¹⁶⁵ Other suitable songs can be found in the popular American children's song series, *Wee Sing*, initiated in 1977 by Pamela Conn Beall and Susan Hagen Nipp. These richly illustrated music education volumes, the result of extensive research into historic rhymes and nursery songs, present a comprehensive selection of the most well-known English and American nursery rhymes and children's songs, many with game suggestions and

¹⁶⁵ The second revised and expanded edition (Forrai 1998) is orderable as printed material (spiral-bound photocopied pages) from the British Kodály Academy and the Archives of the Hungarian Kodály Institute.

supplemental audio recordings (e.g., Beall–Hagen Nipp 1998a–c). The authors explain their motivation for this project:

“As early as the 1500’s, children’s rhymes were documented. ... Today’s children are often exposed to the wonderful heritage of nursery rhymes, but the melodies are rarely heard. Thus, we have researched in depth to find the earliest and most often notated music to these rhymes in order to pass on the tradition. ... Many of the tunes were originally notated in higher keys and with more difficult chordal sequences. We have sometimes lowered and simplified the arrangements so they can be more easily sung.” (Beall–Hagen Nipp 1998c: 3).

The original twenty-three songbooks are arranged topically, without classification of the songs according to age group, ambitus, or pitch sets. Thus, the most difficult songs appear alongside easier songs, as seen also in *The Best of Wee Sing*, a compilation of some of the most popular songs in a single volume (Beall–Hagen Nipp 2007). More recently, the *Wee Sing* series has expanded further to include videos and other digital teaching applications.

Another source for children’s songs with supplemental audio recordings is the *Music Together* series, developed by the Center for Music and Young Children in Princeton. This collection of songbooks contains many original tunes and some arrangements of traditional melodies, with emphasis on parental participation, freedom of movement, inclusiveness, and improvisation with rhythm instruments. Children are encouraged to “create their own stories, drawings and spontaneous songs” (Levinowitz–Guilmartin 1997: 1). The authors describe their innovative pedagogical philosophy thus:

“Music Together® is a music and movement approach to early childhood music development for infant, toddler, preschool and kindergarten-age children and their parents, teachers and other primary caregivers. Originally offered to the public in 1987, it pioneered the concept of a research-based, developmentally appropriate early childhood music curriculum with materials for home use that strongly emphasizes and facilitates adult involvement.” (Levinowitz–Guilmartin 1997: c).

This overview is not intended to provide a comprehensive list of sources of English children’s songs, but to offer suggestions based on my teaching experiences and preferences.

6. Creative solutions: Composing alternate lyrics to existing songs and original songs

As a creative solution, the relatively small number of suitable English songs for young children can be supplemented by writing additional lyrics to existing simple melodies, a practice that Kodály also allowed for: “It is equally permissible for someone who has a good idea to make up new words for a melody, provided this is not in contradiction with the character of the music” (Forrai 1995b: 25). There are many examples of such songs, e.g., the popular *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes* is actually based on the melody of an older folk song, *There is a Tavern in the Town*. According to Riah Werner, it can also be pedagogically effective to use simple, well-known melodies with new lyrics, including those composed by the teacher for purposes of teaching specific vocabulary (Werner 2018: 3–6). Simple formulaic melodies are ideal for this.

Occasionally some older, traditional English and American folksongs can have disturbing lyrics that some teachers may prefer to avoid. One example is *Go Tell Aunt Rhody*, with lyrics graphically describing the death of an old grey goose: “Go tell Aunt Rhody (3x), The old grey goose is dead. She died in the millpond (3x) A-standing on her head.” (Zeitlin–Goldberger 1984: 12). However, the musical value of this song makes it indispensable, especially because there are very few English children’s songs written in minor keys. The melody in ABA form features contrasting sections in both major and minor, thus making it ideal for teaching the different moods as expressed by the change of mode (Figure 10). In such cases, one can compose fresh lyrics about a topic appropriate for small children, taking care that rules

of good prosody are observed. Here are my alternative lyrics written to fill the need for a harvest song:

Burl Ives

D Major

Come to the har - vest, Come to the har - vest,
5 Come to the har - vest, Let's pick some grapes to - day
9 **d minor**
Au - tumn is com - ing, Au - tumn is com - ing,
13 **Da Capo al Fine**

Original melodies can also be composed as inspired by everyday situations and pedagogical needs (Figure 11). Jean Simon, who worked closely with Katalin Forrai and was influential in the growth of the Kodály concept in the United States (Parey 2014: 4), composed many of her own melodies to various Mother Goose rhymes, including some as alternatives to existing melodies (Forrai 1998: 201). Composing melodies need not be overly complicated: use of two and three note formulaic melodies (e.g., using only the syllables s-m, s-m-l) is especially encouraged for kindergarten teachers with less experience in music. Children can also be encouraged to make up their own simple songs, using words and sounds they enjoy. Despite any views to the contrary, encouraging musical creativity is an important part of kindergarten teaching and can make everyday activities and learning more fun.

DKP

Bless us, oh Lord, and these thy gifts which we're a - bout to re -
4 ceive, from thy boun - ty through Christ, our Lord, A - men.

Figure 11: Table Blessing
Source: Own work

Conclusion

In summary, the recent, increased emphasis on early foreign language acquisition in very young children in Hungary has prompted the rapid growth of multicultural and bilingual kindergartens. In a country with a strong tradition of mother tongue pedagogy as advocated and developed by Zoltán Kodály and his followers, which has proven particularly effective in early music education, it is neither necessary nor desirable to throw the baby out with the bath water. To help raise awareness among kindergarten teachers of the importance of appropriate song choice, including consideration of the physical development and needs of very young children, a selection of popular English children's songs has been compared here with typical Hungarian songs to illustrate some of the musical complexities inherent in the former group. Creative strategies are suggested to compensate for the scarcity of English pentatonic songs, particularly the composition of new lyrics to simple melodies, and especially repetitive, formulaic melodies with small ambituses. Along these principles, early music educators are also encouraged to invent original melodies to existing nursery rhymes, especially those for which the rhythmic notation is available (e.g., in the chapter "Rhymes," Forrai 1995b: 104–134). Healthy, age-appropriate song choice in early childhood education must reflect realistic musical expectations according to the capacity of young voices. Katalin Forrai stressed the ultimate importance of "the joy of singing, the pleasure of the game, and the group experience" in early childhood music education (Forrai 1995b: 27). These objectives can be accomplished most effectively in bilingual kindergartens by maintaining a balance between musical considerations and language acquisition goals.

Bibliography

- Beall, P. C.–Hagen Nipp, S. 2007. *The Best of Wee Sing*. New York: Penguin Young Readers.
- Beall, P. C.–Hagen Nipp, S. 1998a. *Wee Sing and Play*. New York: Price Stern Sloan.
- Beall, P. C.–Hagen Nipp, S. 1998b. *Wee Sing Children's Songs and Fingerplays*. New York: Price Stern Sloan.
- Beall, P. C.–Hagen Nipp, S. 1998c. *Wee Sing Nursery Rhymes & Lullabies*. New York: Price Stern Sloan.
- Blankó M. 2023. A nyelvész zenetudós. *Élet és Tudomány* 78 (9): 272–274.
- Forrai, K. 1998. *Music in Preschool*. Transl. and adapted by Jean Sinor (2nd rev. and expanded ed.) Queensland: Sound Thinking Australia.
- Forrai K. 1995a. *Ének az óvodában*. Budapest: Editio Musica.
- Forrai, K. 1995b. *Music in Preschool*. Transl. and adapted by Jean Sinor (3rd ed. Budapest: Kultúra).
- Kiszely-Papp, D. 2021. Experiences Teaching Music Pedagogy in the English-Language Preschool Education Program. In: Lovassy A.–Pázmány Á (eds.): *Kihívások a 21. századi nevelésben-oktatásban*. Vác: Apor Vilmos Katolikus Főiskola, 79–87.
- Kokas K. 1977. A Kodály-módszerről. In: Hovánszki J. (ed.): *Zenei nevelés az óvodában*. Debrecen: Didakt Kft. 2008, 20–27.
- Levinowitz, L. M.–Guilmartin, K. K. 1997. *Music Together, Songs*. Princeton: Center for Music and Young Children.
- Mucsi V. 2020. *Forrai Katalin: Ének az óvodában és angol nyelvű adaptációja*. Thesis, ELTE TÓK Ének-zenei Tanszék.
- Paney, A. 2014. Jean Sinor and the Development of a Musicianship Program in Kodály Certification Courses. *Kodály Envoy* 40: 4–8.
- Raph, T. 1986. *The American Song Treasury: 100 Favorites*. New York: Dover.
- Rodgers, R.–Hammerstein, O. 1995. *The Sound of Music*. New York: Williamson Music.
- Werner R. 2018. Music, movement and memory: Pedagogical songs as mnemonic aids. *TESOL Journal* 9: e387. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.387> (accessed: 04.11.2020)
- Zeitlin, P.–Goldberger D. (eds.) 1984. *Folk Song Book II*, First Piano Library. New York: Amsco.