

Letting rock music move us in the EFL classroom

Ian Nakamura

Okayama University Foreign Language Education Center

Scott Gardner

Okayama University Faculty of Education

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Rock music brings people together for purposes such as love, peace, and protest. It does so because of its motivational effect on us. EFL teachers use music to teach linguistic and cultural concepts that appear in rock music lyrics. Some teachers shun music as a teaching tool due to lack of interest, perceived limitations of music beyond class entertainment, incompatible musical tastes among students, or lack of systematic (or "correct") language. However, it should be possible to draw from the enthusiasm in powerful music and put it to use in the classroom. If students are allowed to receive the energy of the music, they will want to investigate on their own the ideas, the culture, and the language behind it. Through discussion and visual and audio materials, we want to help teachers, not to simply make music fit their instructional designs for the class, but to use music for the purpose it was created, namely to emotionally transform listeners, temporarily or permanently. This transformation can be highly motivational.

ロックに代表される大衆音楽は、「愛」「平和」「抗議」など多くの目的で、人々を寄せ集めるが、それは音楽がモチベーションを喚起することができるためである。EFLの多くの教師が、ロックの歌詞に現れる言語的、文化的概念を教えるのに音楽を使っている。その一方で、音楽に興味がないという理由や学生と音楽の嗜好が異なるなどの理由で、音楽を教材として用いない教師もいる。しかしながら、パワフルな音楽にみなぎる熱情を引き出し、それを教室で用いることが可能なのである。学生達が、まず音楽の活力を受容できれば、その背後にある理念、文化や言葉を自ら探りたいと思うことである。本稿で論じていく中で、また精選視聴覚教材を通じて、単に音楽が授業用の教育的意図にかなうようにする方法をEFLの教師が見つけるよう助力するのではなく、音楽家が音楽を創作する本来の理由で音楽を用いることができるよう助力したいと思う。すなわち、EFLの教師が、一時的にせよ恒久的にせよ、聞き手である学生に何らかの感情の錬磨をもたらせるよう手助けできればと思うのである。このように感情を錬磨させることが、学習向上へのモチベーションを高めることに繋がり得るからである。

Popular music is often touted as useful linguistic and cultural material for EFL classrooms, but in our experience it has just as often been belittled as simplistic student entertainment for lazy teachers or else as a form of cultural indoctrination with only tenuous ties to actual EFL methodology. Music is also dismissed by many teachers simply because they say they have no interest in music themselves and don't want to make a pretense of its importance to their students. While critics give excuses for not using music and skeptics point out limitations, we see the tremendous potential of a resource waiting to be tapped. If we are interested in the "quality of life" of our classroom (Allwright, 2003), bringing in a slice of vibrant social life such as rock music (though it is certainly not the only possibility) could prove to be a worthwhile venture. An additional reason for exploring the possibilities of rock music to move our classroom is the growing call for more content-based lessons where learners are *using* English to do something interesting.

One goal of our presentation was to remind teachers that music, particularly popular or rock music, has had powerful effects on several generations of young people, and that most of us in our youth once felt that the music we heard was very important to us, even if we may no longer have an interest in it today. Another goal was to show that, rather than simply resorting to the "ELT cliché" (Scrivener, 2005, p. 339) of co-opting well-known songs into pre-decided linguistic aims, teachers should instead consider the music's original goal—to emotionally transform its audience—and through it try to convey something to their students that transcends simple language and culture study. We have tried to show through

music, video, and activities that rock songs have far more to offer than the vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation of their lyrics.

In general we want to reverse what we see as the typical approach to music use in the classroom, which is to have a teaching point in mind beforehand and to think, "It might be fun to have a song or some music to support this teaching point." There's nothing wrong with this approach, but we want to remind teachers that good songs have deep emotions to them—you might even say they have souls—and it's a shame to see those souls constantly glossed over in favor of secondary characteristics such as, for example, convenient repetition of subjunctive "if" clauses.

Both the workshop and this paper try to address two levels of interest among teachers: (1) immediate practical classroom application (2) appreciation of the music itself. Those who attended the workshop appeared to be interested in both of these aspects with varying degrees of particular interest based on their individual teaching context (and personal tastes).

Opening chords: Guess who?

As a way of warming up our audience, we played a few songs from the (very loosely defined) genre of rock music and allowed participants to guess whose songs they were. This activity also served as a demonstration of possible activities that teachers could use with their own students at the beginning of class to get them involved in music appreciation. Depending on the age of listeners and the choice of music, teachers could either play several seconds

of a song until someone guesses correctly, or play (as we did) only the first chord of a song, “Name That Tune” style. Songs could be random, could reflect the interests of the teacher, or could fit a theme that the teacher wants to cover in the lesson.

Two verses: Two sets of two perspectives

In our presentation, to insure that participants recognized that we saw great value in moving from the music to the teaching, rather than vice versa as is normally the case, we asked them to consider our music presentation from the two viewpoints mentioned above: for their own *enjoyment and enlightenment*, as well as for *practical application* to their classes. As justification for the first viewpoint, we pointed out that classrooms can become sterile places where only a few things are ever expected or done, and breaking up the predictability with some heartfelt music can make the class more enticing to students. Music can add some welcomed spice to the teacher’s routine as well. The second point needed no justification for most participants at our presentation, since their very presence indicated their desire to increase the amount and versatility of music in their classes.

Another spectrum through which we wanted the participants to view the music we discussed was two important ways that we believe rock music influences its listeners. Using several examples we tried to show that 1) rock music can transform people’s lives, either temporarily or permanently; and (2) rock music can change people’s attitudes towards society. While there may be some overlap in these two avenues, they are far from the same thing, as our examples hopefully showed.

First verse: The power of rock to transform people

Our first assertion about rock music was that it wants to transform the lives of its listeners, and there are countless examples, both among rock musicians and among listeners, that show rock music offering people a fresh and new chance to be somebody different. Originally, rock music was far from the mainstream form of music that it is today. By listening, dancing to, or playing this kind of music, young people could create a different atmosphere with the promise of a new identity. The challenge for each generation has been how to distinguish themselves from the previous one. Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) point out that membership in a particular group such as an alternative culture can be approved or disapproved according to features commonly understood in society as being affiliated with them. For example, Sacks (1979, 1992) points out how “hotrodders” (*a teenager type* as he refers to them) use language to make distinctions between people inside their group and outside. Edwards (1998) further explains Sacks’s idea as how insider-outsider gets attended to in talk and “how descriptions can perform ‘membership’ business” (p. 33). In this sense of making a statement of distinction, the James Dean character in *A Rebel Without a Cause* could have been a rocker. Identity connected to rock music could become the cause or reason for living. This can be seen in groups such as Goths or hippies, who forsake old relationships and traditional clothing styles in favor of a new life in which music plays a central role.

“Identity” is displayed not only by taste in music, fashion, and appearances, but also by how we conversationally interact with each other (with outsiders as well as insiders).

Ironically, declaring membership in a particular group may make us *both* an insider and outsider. This dilemma is typically faced by characters portrayed in songs and movies. Through the music they catch the spirit and excitement of their new community and become “transformed” by the music. In the process, they become at once an insider within their very selective group while also becoming an outsider from the mainstream.

This insider/outsider tension provides much of the energy and passion which attracts young and old alike to the power of rock music. In our presentation we showed examples of how the energy of this highly personal yet widely enjoyed medium of artistic expression can be used as a resource to re-vitalize the quality of engagement among students and between students and teacher in the language classroom. One fitting example came not from music per se but from film about music, a movie called *School of Rock* (Nicolaidis, et al., 2003), starring Jack Black as an unemployed rock musician who lands a temporary job as a substitute teacher at a private elementary school and attempts to instill in his students some of the life-changing force of the music he loves so much. The following excerpts from *School of Rock* show a conversation between the teacher, Dewey (Black), and one of his students, Larry. Dewey has been forming a band among his students, and is persuading a hesitant Larry to stay in the band. We see how Dewey emphasizes the way that rock music (and membership in a band) can change Larry’s life, as evidenced by the special words (shaded below) and behaviors which are associated with group membership.

Larry: Mr. Schneeibly?

Dewey: Yeah. (sitting in the cafeteria busily writing something down) Hey. What’s up?

L: I don’t think I should be in the band.

D: Why not?

L: I’m not cool enough. **People in bands are cool.** I’m not cool.

D: **Dude, you are** cool. The way you play. What, why do you say you’re not cool?

L: Nobody ever talks to me.

D: Well, those days are over **buddy**. ‘Cause you could be the ugliest sad sack on the planet, but if you’re in a rocking band, **you’re the cats’ pajamas**, man, **you’re the bee’s knees**.

L: Bee’s knees?

D: Yeah, the bee’s knees. You’re going to be **the most popular guy in school**. Trust me.

L: OK. I’ll do it.

In the next excerpt, which is a continuation of the same conversation, Dewey teaches Larry how to do a special intricate handshake for group membership

D: Now listen. This is a **big commitment** now. You don’t just say “yes” if you’re going to flake out later.

L: I won’t.

D: Larry, **welcome to my world**. (begins coaching Larry through a handshake routine) Boom.

L: OK.

D: Boom.

L: OK.

D: A couple of these. Now these.

L: OK.

D: Now give me a platform. “Let’s rock let’s rock today.”
Now do it to me.

L: “Let’s rock let’s rock today.”

D: That’s good. Slap it. Shoot it. Kaboot it. We’re going to
work on it some more later. **It’s a very long shake**. Get going.
Good knuckle crack.

As Sacks notes with hotrodders, membership is a serious commitment. We see in Dewey’s reminder to Larry that joining a band is not a “one night stand.” The deal initiating Larry into the band is signed through the handshake which only members of the group know. Not only are the steps of the shake scripted out in a sequence, but also there are certain words which accompany certain actions (“boom” along with the rubbing and twisting of hands and “let’s rock” when the forefinger and middle finger alternately kick out like dancing feet). Beyond the importance of showing individual competence in performing the handshake which requires time to perfect it, there is the synchronized and choreographed action ritually performed by the two participants. This is a co-produced shake between two rockers. Our main point here with a look at the film script is that rock music transforms us not only via the actual music, but also via the other trappings of the culture we have chosen to be a part of.

Becoming “part of the culture” is not restricted just to joining a band and jumping around on a stage. As we mentioned above, listening to the music and becoming a fan allows people to join the movement and be transformed, either for life or just for an evening at a nightclub. And the reach of rock music into other parts of our lives such as sporting events and TV commercials means that we can become members of “the movement” at almost any time of day.

One musical example, a duo of songs by Queen called “We Will Rock You” and “We Are the Champions” (May, 1977; Mercury, 1977) can be heard in sports arenas all over the world. These songs promote not only passive participation in the form of listening, but active participation in the form of foot stomping and goading of the opposing team. In our presentation we tried to show some interesting questions that students can be asked (as seen in Appendix 1) to get them to think about what makes these songs so provocative. By reading the words, and especially by listening to the music, it’s easy to conclude that there is far more to talk about in these songs than just linguistic or literary issues.

Second verse: The attitude of rock against society

The other facet of rock music’s influence that we tried to illustrate in our presentation was that rock gives us a way to express our frustrations with social systems we are part of. When we can’t say what we want directly to the faces of our parents, our teachers, or our bosses, we can find popular songs that express our feelings for us. This channeling of emotions through music was perhaps borrowed from historical musical forms such as blues, slave hollers, gospel,

and perhaps even older forms of popular and religious music. But through 50-plus years of rock music the lamentations of youths have grown steadily more serious, from dating curfews to military drafts to human rights. In all that time one overarching theme has remained prominent, that of the supremacy of the individual. From Ike Turner's "Rocket 88" to the Eagles' "Life In The Fast Lane" to Green Day's "American Idiot," thousands of rock songs have contained "heroes" who were at odds with those around them, who had either something to prove or something to fight against. This individual-against-society theme is partially what makes rock music so appealing to young people, and that theme should be brought out when these kinds of songs are played for students. At the very least it gives them a picture of certain priorities of Western culture, and at the most it can give students a different kind of motivation to accomplish their own life goals.

Different songs will display this rebellion to different degrees, and some songs are more "angry" than others. A wonderful example of an angry song is Neil Young's "Keep On Rockin' in the Free World" (1989; see Appendix 2). It's a song that is teachable on many levels. It has a few repetitions of sentence patterns to provide examples with variation. It is sung in straightforward, prosaic, slang-ish English (which still manages to rhyme) that can be helpful for those interested in hearing and developing a natural style. At a higher linguistic level, though, it is a fine example of irony, in that it describes a series of depressing images of a broken society, and then says "keep on rockin'" presumably because implied listeners live in a free country that allows them to do all of the things mentioned.

Moving beyond simple linguistic phenomena in the words, the images themselves in the lyrics can generate discussion about the freedoms and responsibilities of American, Western, and Japanese societies. And another more challenging subject of discussion can be the possibility in the song of a critique of rock music itself and how its rebellion has helped prevent or contribute to the society described in the lyrics. One final, fully musical, advantage of this song is that the album on which it appears has two versions. One is sung solo by Young playing an acoustic guitar, and the latter is with his entire band at full electric guitar volume. Hearing both versions allows students to give more thought to, and perhaps to comment on, the part of the message that is carried in the music rather than focusing only on the words.

Another example of a "rebel" song which has the potential to spark a lot of discussion is a controversial tune by Jane's Addiction called "Been Caught Stealing" (1990; Appendix 3). This song's use in teaching is controversial in many ways: First, obviously the subject is antisocial behavior. The sensitivity of this subject was brought to our attention during our presentation by some junior high school English teachers whose schools had recently had troubles with students shoplifting and stealing from student lockers. These teachers felt that validating shoplifters' behavior by giving attention to their point of view (as the song does) would adversely affect discipline at their schools. It was difficult not to agree. However, for students mature enough, aware enough, and far enough removed from such behavior, it could make an interesting discussion of relative morality, especially when the song is presented along with other serious questions and activities (as in the handout) which make students think

about the social acceptability of their own behavior. As we would suggest with any song, we asked that teachers be sensitive to their students' situations, values, and interests (as these junior high school teachers obviously were) in deciding whether or not to play this song for students. The same could be said for any texts or realia brought into the classroom for the purposes of sparking dialogue.

Another potential drawback of this particular song is difficulty in understanding the singer's words. The lyrics are sung in a high-pitched, multi-tracked voice that makes the words difficult to hear at times. This makes the song almost useless as an English listening activity, except to the most advanced students. But again, part of our aim with these musical activities is to get to the heart and soul of the song, and the teenage intensity with which this singer describes his attitude and activities (with little regard for standard rhyme or stress-timing) conveys a message above and beyond what the words say. Rather than frustrate students by expecting them to hear individual words in the song, teachers can provide some (or all) of the words to help them concentrate on other issues in the song that are within their grasp. The ability of students to bypass incomprehensible input in favor of getting the "gist" of a message is a valuable one in attaining listening and speaking fluency.

Obviously, not every song is going to be deemed acceptable for use as language learning material, whether for ideological, esthetic, linguistic, or practical reasons. Teachers must draw their own lines regarding how far to allow the "rock attitude" to go in their classes. It is useful, though, to keep in mind some advice by Dougill (cited in Abbott, 2002) that "it is the task that needs to be graded, rather than the

text" (p. 11). In other words, don't use a song you hate just because it's popular, and don't throw out a song you like just because its use presents challenges to you and your students. The trick is to gear activities for their level as much as you can, while showing them your passion for the song, its ideas, its attitude, and its sound. Well planned and well intentioned activities can help improve the motivation of students hearing and discussing music that is aurally or cognitively challenging.

Chorus: Finding meaning beyond rock

Songs shape our memories of important activities in our lives: certain songs from years past can remind us of old lovers, of sporting events, of good times with friends, of marriage, or even of difficult times with parents, lovers, or bullies. Our brains have inextricably connected those past emotions to those past songs. Stirring up emotions is the primary purpose of music, and with some types of music at least, the intention is not only to stir up emotions, but to press into action. Rock music was perhaps the first type of music to go beyond complaining and to actually ask its listeners *en masse* to turn their emotions into social work. Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are a Changin'" explicitly asks its listeners to press their governments for change. Not all songs are so direct in their entreaties, but they will have similar messages nevertheless. It is almost miraculous that rock music is able to mobilize disaffected youth to positive action, often more so than their own parents.

The Beatles were probably the group that changed the face of rock the most in the late 60's by making it artistic, thoughtful, and respectable, while still wildly popular.

But one event, Woodstock (The Summer of Love, 1969), memorialized forever the ability of rock music to transform an entire *community*. We chose a clip from *The History of Rock 'n' Roll: My Generation* (Benz, 1995) to illustrate how one of the rock performers at Woodstock, Carlos Santana, has grown up and still remains a vital influence in music and spirituality today. Our interest in Santana is how his *School of Rock* attitude has evolved into meditative reflection and even bliss. His lasting success proves how rock continues to be the music of choice for many aging musicians, fans, and teachers. Below is an excerpt from an interview in which he explains and demonstrates (with his guitar) how rock music has moved him over the years. If we compare the two excerpts, we notice how the music has transformed him:

Jamming is playing hooky. It's really that's simple and when I was in Mission High School, I played a lot of hooky. We didn't know what the hell a "bridge" was or a "chord" was or a "verse" was. We couldn't care less. We just wanted to play what we heard.

If you stay in your heart you will always be inspired. If you are inspired you will be enthusiastic. There is nothing more contagious on this planet than enthusiasm. The songs become incidental. What the people receive is your joy.

Rock music touches Santana just as deeply now as when he was young and unknown, but now there is a transcendent quality of his understanding of what rock music reveals to us. There are lessons to be learned beyond the music itself.

Fade out

Rock provides listeners, spectators, students, and teachers with personalized, yet communal opportunities to build our individual identities as well as to connect us with others. We have summarized this two fold process by pointing out two primary themes found in the examples which we presented at the workshop: transformation of the individual along with a change of attitude or rather to have an "attitude". As Dewey in *School of Rock* tells his students, "Rock ain't about doing things perfect." He goes on to say, "That's the problem." However, the problem is not for those who use the energy, image, and attitude of rock to move social boundaries, but for those who do not want to.

We brought our presentation to a close (and down to earth) by giving the participants a list of five practical teaching tips which have proven helpful in guiding our own use of rock music in the classroom.

- (1) How to select songs: pick songs with clear delivery of words foregrounding a story or narrative with a steady and clean beat that is not overwhelming (or distractive).
- (2) How to select activities: make use of what you normally do with guided yet more open-ended opportunities for students to relate the song to their own lives.
- (3) Think of how the lyrics work at all linguistic levels and choose what works best.
- (4) Use a variety of musical styles, starting with your own favorites and expanding to meet the interests of your students.
- (5) Remember that rock music is an aspect of Western culture that students identify with before they ever study

a foreign language. Focusing adequately on the context and mood that the music creates for the language helps fulfill Krashen's call for "extralinguistic context" in the presentation of comprehensible input (see Kramer, 2001, p. 29).

Admittedly, rock music may not be a viable option for all teachers and classes. Reasons could include the level of students, interest (or lack of it), or exam oriented curriculum. However, we believe rock music presented as appealing authentic cultural material may offer teachers more choices of how to use it than they realize. There is more to do than simply playing the song and writing down the words. A distinct way of thinking and a way of living can be explored through rock music.

While these tips have proven helpful within in our own context of teaching intermediate level students in university, we believe teachers in other contexts should be able to adapt our ideas and approach to fit their own preferences. The ideal common denominator to be found in classes of all levels and types is a shared desire of both students and teachers to create an atmosphere conducive to learning and teaching. Allwright (2003) calls this "focusing on 'quality of life' rather than on 'quality of work'" (p. 119). Rock music offers us one way to enhance the environment of our classes through its potential to raise both passion and familiarity. Finally, exploring the possibilities of using rock music could inspire teachers in the development of exciting content-based lessons. In the most successful cases, students and teachers will share a common interest and pursue it cooperatively with a degree of engagement, investment, and cooperation not often seen in the classroom.

Ian Nakamura works in the Foreign Language Center at Okayama University. He is also a doctoral candidate in applied linguistics at Lancaster University, UK. His professional and personal interests merge in the study, teaching, and enjoyment of music and films.

Scott Gardner has taught at Okayama University since 1998. His interests are in the benefits of humor in the classroom, as well as in improving feedback techniques in student writing.

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Appendix 1: Student handout for Queen songs

Name: _____

Student #: _____

We Will Rock You

Queen

Buddy you're a boy make a big noise playing in the street
Gonna be a big man some day
You got mud on your face
You big disgrace
Kicking your can all over the place
We will we will rock you

Buddy you're a young man hard man shouting in the street
Gonna take on the world someday
You got blood on your face
You big disgrace
Waving your banner all over the place
We will we will rock you

Buddy you're an old man poor man pleading with your eyes
Gonna make you some peace someday
You got mud on your face
Big disgrace
Somebody better put you back into your place

We will we will rock you

We Are The Champions

Queen

I've paid my dues time after time

I've done my sentence, but committed no crime

And bad mistakes, I've made a few

I've had my share of sand kicked in my face

But I've come through

And we mean to go on and on and on and on

We are the champions, my friends

And we'll keep on fighting till the end

We are the champions

We are the champions

No time for losers 'cause we are the champions

Of the World

I've taken my bows and my curtain calls

You brought me fame and fortune and everything that goes with it

I thank you all

But it's been no bed of roses, no pleasure cruise

I consider it a challenge before the whole human race

And I ain't gonna lose

And we mean to go on and on and on and on

Reflection Questions (discuss these with a partner)

1. "We Will Rock You" is popular around the world for use in crowd motivation (such as at soccer or basketball games). Why do you think it is so popular?

2. "We Are The Champions" is also often played at American sporting events to motivate players and fans. What are some of the words or phrases in the song that make it good for this purpose?

3. Can you think of a song that inspires or motivates you? Tell your partner about the song. If you like, you can bring the song to class next week, with (translated) lyrics, and let us listen to it.

Appendix 2: Student handout for Neil Young song

Name: _____

Student #: _____

Keep On Rocking In The Free World**Neil Young**

Colors on the street, red, white and blue

People shuffling their feet, people *sleeping in their shoes*

But there's a warning sign on the road ahead

There's a lot of people saying we'd be *better off dead*

I don't feel like Satan, but I am to them

So I try to forget it any way I can

Keep on rocking in the free world

Keep on rocking in the free world

I see a *woman in the night with a baby in her hand**Under an old streetlight near a garbage can*Now *she puts the kid away, and she's going to get a hit**She hates her life* and what she's done to itThere's *one more kid that will never go to school*

Never get to fall in love, never get to be cool

We got a thousand points of light* for the *homeless* manWe got a kinder, gentler* *machine gun* hand

We got department stores and toilet paper

We got *styrofoam boxes* for the *ozone layer*We got a man of the people, he says keep hope alive*We got *fuel to burn*, we got roads to drive

*These are statements about Americans made by President George Bush (Senior) in the late 80s and early 90s.

Reflection Questions (discuss with a partner)

- Cover up the lyrics and try to list some of the things that the song says we have ("we got"). Don't look at the lyrics; use your memory. Then compare with a partner. "We got _____"

- The marked words (in *italics*) describe some modern social problems that we have talked about in class today. Can you describe these problems in simple words? Can you think of some other social problems we have? Compare your list with a partner.

3. Why do you think the song combines the positive words of President Bush with all of the negative images of the social problems?

Optional Activities:

4. (Combining Questions 1 and 2) Think of some modern conveniences “we got” and talk about the problems they cause (e.g. prepackaged food that increases garbage, polluting automobiles)
5. (Related to Question 3) Delve into the world of irony, of saying one thing and meaning another.
6. Correct the grammar in the lyrics.
7. Find your own song about social problems and bring the (translated) lyrics to class.

Appendix 3: Student handout for Jane's Addiction song

Name: _____

Student #: _____

Been Caught Stealing

Jane's Addiction

I've been caught stealing, once when I was five
 I enjoy stealing—it's just as simple as that
 Well, it's just a simple fact
 When I want something, and I don't want to pay for it
 I walk right through the door
 And I walk right through the door
 Hey all right! If I get by, it's mine, mine all mine!

My girl, she's one too, she'll go and get a skirt
 Stick it in her shirt—she'll grab a razor for me
 And she did it just like that
 When she wants something, and she don't want to pay for it
 Walk right through the door
 Walk right through the door
 Hey all right! If I get by, it's mine, mine all mine!

Reflection Questions

1. Why do you think the singer is so proud to sing about stealing things?

2. Of course we all know and accept that stealing is bad, but we sometimes differ on *degree* of badness of some things. For example, if you were alone on a train and found ¥100 on the seat, you'd probably keep it. But if you found ¥100,000 in a bag on the train, you'd probably take it to the conductor and hope that the owner gets the money back (wouldn't you??).

Rank the following things according to how “bad” they are, from “not so bad” (7) to “really bad” (1):

- _____ speeding
- _____ sitting in the “silver seat” on a train
- _____ driving through a light that just turned red
- _____ talking on your cell phone in a crowded train
- _____ “burning” a copy of your friend’s CD
- _____ throwing a newspaper in the burnable trash rather than the recyclable trash
- _____ speaking Japanese in an English conversation class