

Vocal Teacher Terminology

An International Survey on the Terminology Used by Vocal Teachers in Europe, USA, Asia and South Africa.

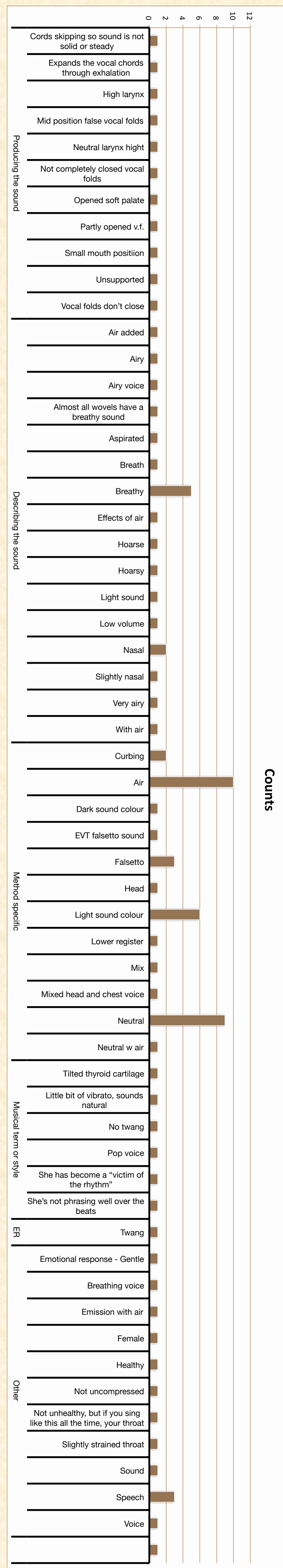


Figure 1. Variety of descriptions and terms used by the respondents in the evaluation of the word "when". Bars illustrate the number of respondents using the particular term.

A Genuine Interest...

The study is an investigation in the possibility to identify differences and similarities in the terminology of Vocal Teachers.

Research question

"Do Vocal Teachers use the same terminology, when describing the sounds of the singing voice?"

Method

11 short commercial sound clips from different genres of music were compiled with a transcript of the lyrics. The clips were presented in an online questionnaire together with the lyrics.

Respondents were asked to characterize the singing in words and terms. Furthermore they were asked to mark the terms precisely on the forms, indicating when and how the voice changed.

The survey was distributed via internet to 530 professional vocal teachers (April 2011), and to a total of 171 universities and conservatories in Denmark and internationally (November 2012).

Our intention was to collect data from approx 100 respondents, that subsequently would be processed and analysed.

Results

The survey was returned continually until April 2013 and includes 11 sound examples, and a questionnaire.

We received the amount of 53 survey reports from teachers worldwide.

Within the survey reports, we have detected 468 different terms in use. Those are divided into 7 main categories, and several sub-categories.

As the full statistical analysis is not available yet, this is an ongoing project with aims, objectives and methods.

Conclusion

Vocal teachers use a huge variety of terms to describe the singing voice. These can be categorised into words, used to describe how the sound is produced, description of the sound itself, terms used in various singing methods, musical terms, mixed terms, those that induce an emotional response and "other".

Many of these terms are not clearly defined and open to different interpretations. Even those used as part of most established singing methods are not defined. Of concern is the use of anatomical and physiological terms based on the vocal teachers' perception of their own voice. This can potentially lead to communicational problems between teachers and their students.

There are some clearly defined tendencies when it comes to the following:

"Vocal teachers use different terms for the same sounds. Only 28% of the respondents seem to agree on a terminology"

We have also detected that following possible studies could succeed the present study:

"Does a lack of common terminology affect possible cooperation, and the sharing of knowledge between vocal teachers?"

This research study is undertaken by:

- Bebiane Bøje, assoc. Professor, The Royal Academy of Music Aarhus, 1
- Anders Ørsager, assoc. Professor, Rhythmic Music Conservatory CPH, 2
- Cathrine Sadolin, Complete Vocal Institute Copenhagen, 3
- Henrik Kjelin, Complete Vocal Institute Copenhagen, 4
- Julian McGlashan, ENT, Queen's Medical Centre, Department of Otorhinolaryngology, Nottingham University Hospitals, UK, 5

| Category | Definition | Sub-category | Examples |
|----------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| Producing the sound | This is where there is some reference to the assumed anatomical site or physiological mode determined by application of scientific knowledge to the sound production. Perceived involvement of structures through experiential learning and perception which is not related to a specific method. | Anatomical | High larynx, False folds closing |
| | | Physiological | High subglottal pressure |
| | | Perceptual | Anterior part of the face resonance, Compresses the larynx to close the upper part of the resonance |
| Describing the sound | This can relate to terms used in describing positive or negative features of different elements of the sound, such as loudness, pitch, overall tonal quality and added vocal effects. The sound is not relating to those used and defined in specific methods. | Acoustic terms | Jitter |
| | | Phonetic terms | Aspirated, Glottal onset |
| | | Use of simple adjectives | Clear tone, Dirty, Projected, Airy voice |
| | | Use of imagery | Drops of scratch sound, Open sound |
| Method specific | The terms used are those that are either accepted, defined or commonly used in established singing techniques or pedagogic methods. They may relate to producing or describing the sound. | Modal | Modal register heavy |
| | | Bel canto | Register, Chest, Head mix |
| | | Estill | EVT falsetto sound |
| | | CVT | Overdrive, Curbing |
| | | Other | 1st bridge, #3 larynx |
| | | Musical term or style | Collatura, Screamo, No vibrato, Volume low, no twang |
| Mixed Terms | This is when a method specific or musical term is combined with another term or adjective, which alters the meaning of the original. | Open chest, Chest resonance pressed | |
| Emotional response | The terminology used reflects an emotional response in the listener to the music or song. | Emotional | Angry, Cautionary, Beautiful |
| Other | This category includes other terms and comments which do not fit into the above. | Descriptive terms | Light blend, Normal, Healthy, Unhealthy |
| | | Comment | a "no-go" in the classical world |
| | | Use of imagery | Breathless, Fishface, "Half-tube" resonator shape |

Figure 2. Categorisation of the responses with definitions, sub-categories and examples

The study is a part of a research programme

This study is a part of a series of studies conducted by 3,4,5 since 2009.

Data résumé

- Start of research project April 2011
- Data collection from April 2011 to April 2013
- Participants: 530 professional vocal teachers and 171 Universities and Conservatories Worldwide

Research Partners:

- The Royal Academy of Music Aarhus, Denmark
- Rhythmic Music Conservatory Copenhagen, Denmark
- Complete Vocal Institute Copenhagen, Denmark
- Nottingham University Hospital, United Kingdom