

Abstract

The Effect of Metaphoric-Image, Motion, and a Dual Modality Approach on the Perception of Vocal Tone

The use of imagery and movement to affect vocal tone has long been a part of choral pedagogy. These often used, yet little explored tools, are employed by choral directors on all levels. The present study sought to determine if the use of imagery, metaphor, motion, and a combination of the three, as pedagogic tools to affect vocal tone, could be perceived by outline listeners. Three singers - an untrained singer, an undergraduate in choral music education, and a graduate student in vocal performance - were asked to perform a melody under a control and three research conditions: metaphoric-image, motion, dual modality (a combination of metaphoric-image and motion). Participants were randomly assigned to listen to one of the three singers. Participants were asked to rate each condition on tone color, tension, preference, and were directed to ascribe a color to the tone they heard for each condition.

Results indicated that respondents could indeed perceive a difference in tone over the four different conditions. For the metaphoric-image condition, the singers were asked to “sing the line as if it were yellow.” Overall, respondents rated this tone brighter than any others across singers and conditions. The majority of respondents also ascribed the color yellow to the metaphoric-image tone across singers and conditions. Overall data indicated that respondents perceived the dual modality condition as darkest and most relaxed while the metaphoric-image condition was perceived as brightest and most tense. These results were consistent with the expected pedagogic intent of the conditions as well as the researcher’s hypothesis. A X^2 performed on the color ascription data revealed statistical significance in the expectation of response. The data seems to indicate that specific color ascription to vocal tone is consistent across respondents and conditions.

The results of this study are consistent with data found in similar studies examining the effect of imagery on expressive performance. The study’s finding will have an influence on choral methods, rehearsal technique, and choral conducting pedagogies. Seeking to “make the voice tactile,” the study at hand presents empirical evidence as to how using imagery, metaphor, and motion can indeed change the perception of vocal tone. These tools can be used to help students of singing better understand the complexities of the physiological process of singing. They allow conductors a way to increase rehearsal efficiency, increase creative thinking among their ensemble, and connect physiological concepts to a framework of knowledge students already have in place.