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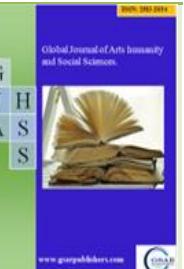
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BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PRONUNCIATION THE VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE IN MUSIC

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Abstract

As a form of social consciousness, music has always held an extremely important position and role in the spiritual life of humankind. Furthermore, music strongly influences the material production activities of society. Music and lyrics are the two fundamental components that create the value of a song. Although each element has independent values, when combined to create a song performed by a human voice, the relationship between melody and lyrics is close, supporting and enhancing each other. However, there are special cases where the melody of a song is arranged for instrumental performance, or when the lyrics are "separated" independently for the artist to perform in the form of recitation or reading, the lyrics themselves are still considered an important part of the song's value. Vietnamese music also exhibits both the rules and specific characteristics of its linguistic culture.

Keywords: General theory of lyrics and music; Basic characteristics in the structure of Vietnamese letters; Difficulties and limitations of Vietnamese pronunciation in the art of singing.

1. General theory of lyrics and music

Lyrics must first and foremost be constructed using linguistic material with rules and grammatical regulations, but clearly, the language of lyrics is not spoken language but rather the language used to sing along with music, with its own specific rules. The relationship between lyrics and music in vocal music in general, and in songs in particular, is governed by characteristic rules. Although the rules of music are considered the dominant and primary element, they are closely related, supporting and enhancing each other. This is because, if music is the art of using sound, melody, and rhythm to express, connect, and convey human emotions and ideas, then lyrics are feelings expressed through language, used to convey thoughts and moods, and are often combined with musical melodies, performed by the human voice.

The inherent limitations of language somewhat restrict and "frame" the imagination and evocative power of music, but it is precisely this limitation that gives music immense artistic value, thanks to the high capacity for generalization and imagery that literature and poetry offer.

Classified as an expressive art form, music uses various methods to reflect life and reality. Therefore, songs in particular, and vocal music in general, must adhere to the rules of realistic reflection found in literature. Consequently, when literary language becomes the means and material for musical expression, that literary language must be influenced and guided by music.

The Vietnamese vowel system is used flexibly in daily life in general, and especially in the art of singing, demonstrating a softness and subtlety. This is a unique characteristic of Vietnamese singing.

In the art of singing, the initial sound plays the role of "opening" and the final sound plays the role of "closing" the lyrics. The impact of "closing" the syllable has a greater and more decisive influence on the volume of the lyrics than the "opening" sound. That is, in Vietnamese singing, the role of the final sound is the deciding factor in enhancing or limiting the openness, resonance, and brightness of the vowel in that syllable – the lyrics. The practice of singing training and performance in Vietnam has been unanimously confirmed by many leading music researchers, linguists, vocal experts, and performing artists: the number of



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lyrics that must be closed with a closed or muted sound accounts for a large proportion of Vietnamese vocal works. It is precisely because of the impact and effect of the final syllable in determining the meaning of the lyrics that Vietnamese singing, although not as resonant, vibrant, or powerful as European singing, possesses a very unique "figure": more delicate, more delicate, but leaning towards introspection with profound and contemplative thoughts.

Vietnamese is also considered one of the most tonal languages in the world. The content of lyrics depends not only on the pronunciation of initial and final consonants but is also significantly influenced and determined by the Vietnamese language's tonal system.

2. Basic characteristics in the structure of Vietnamese letters

The Vietnamese language is both monosyllabic and polyphonic; each letter produces only one sound, but a single letter can have many different tones and meanings. A typical letter is divided into: the beginning, the middle, and the end.

For example, the word VANG is formed from V + A + NG, but when pronounced, it is divided as follows:

VA _A _ANG

When pronouncing the letter A, the body of the letter A is connected to the beginning of VA and the end of ANG without any break. To sing the word "VANG" at a certain length, we handle it as follows:

VA_A_ANG (singing "légato" together)

Regardless of the length, the word "VANG" (meaning "resonant" or "vibrant") is always a single, resonant sound. Awkward singers often pronounce it in a disjointed manner, resulting in harsh, unpleasant sounds.

In reality, there are many types of writing in different forms:

Head, body, tail, letter are one: O

The letter starts with the body of the letter and ends with the letter: ao (a + o), on (o + n)

Head + body and tail are one: ta (t + a)

For singers, the proper opening or closing of the mouth when enunciating words is a matter of study in order to achieve the most scientific and logical enunciation, thus ensuring clear pronunciation.

Open-ended letters:

Words composed of vowels are easy to pronounce and sustain. If the ending of a word is a single vowel, only one mouth movement is needed to produce a stable sound; there's no need to bend or retract the ending.

For example: oh, me, madam, dream, etc.

If the ending of a word is a diphthong, in addition to mouth movements, you also need to curl the syllable and shorten the ending.

Examples: flower, pond, I

If the ending of a word is a vowel combination, then in addition to mouth movements, the pronunciation should be clear throughout the process before the ending is finalized.

Examples: longan, pomelo, willow

Words formed by the double consonants NG and NH of level tones:

Open rhyme scheme:

ang, ang, ang, ung: The mouth is wide open but the sound is nasal. anh, ênh, inh: The mouth is narrowly open, the back of the tongue presses against the roof of the mouth, and the sound is also produced through the nose.

Closed rhyme scheme: ong, ong, ung: after finishing the sound, close your mouth and hum it through your nose.

Words ending in double consonants NG and NH, whether open or closed, share a common characteristic: they sustain a nasal resonance after pronunciation.

Words formed by combining the consonants c, ch, p, t of the falling tone rhyme:

Open rhyme scheme ac, ac, ac, uc: mouth wide open but sounds produced by the back of the tongue.

Ach, ech, ich: the mouth is narrowly open, but the sound is produced by the back of the tongue against the roof of the mouth.

At, att, at, it: the mouth is narrowly open and the sound is produced by pressing the tip of the tongue against the base of the upper front teeth.

Closed rhyme scheme:

"oc, oc, uc": making sounds by covering the mouth.

Ap, ap, ap, op, ep, op, up, ip: to make a sound by gently closing the chin.

Words with endings ending in a falling tone, whether closed or open, share one characteristic: they do not have a lingering sound after pronunciation.

Due to the aforementioned general characteristics of the Vietnamese language, Vietnamese singing art, including both folk singing and modern singing using classical European vocal techniques, has developed a special singing technique called "singing with consonants." The singing and handling of consonants is dynamic and varied, simultaneously achieving accurate enunciation, creating beauty in the lyrics, and expressing the "inner meaning" of the lyrics, making each lyric carry within it a vast ocean of profound emotion. The skillful handling of consonants gives Vietnamese singing its unique beauty.

3. The difficulties and limitations of Vietnamese pronunciation in the art of singing.

In modern singing art, the primary criterion is that the sound produced must be *round, resonant, bright, and highly expressive*. However, as analyzed above, Vietnamese phonetics poses significant challenges to singing art, particularly in applying the



singing methods of the Bel canto school, a leading and advanced singing style worldwide.

From the characteristics mentioned above, we can see that pronouncing Vietnamese in singing presents certain difficulties. For example, words spoken without sustain must be sustained for a long time in singing, following the musical duration and maintaining accurate pitch; especially since Vietnamese has six tones, ensuring both correct pitch and clear pronunciation is not an easy task.

We can analyze the lyrics of some familiar Vietnamese songs to see these difficulties. First, let's analyze the lyrics of the song "Boat and Sea" (Music: Phan Huynh Dieu, lyrics: Xuan Quynh).

First sentence:



"Only a boat can understand how vast the sea is."

This song has beautiful lyrics taken from a poem by Xuan Quynh, but when singing, the words "boat," "understand," and "sea" all have vowel endings. Besides mouth movements, you must pronounce each word clearly before adding the ending.

"boat" -----> th - u - uyen
 "understand" -----> h - i - ieu
 "sea" -----> bi - e - ien

These two words correspond to the lowest notes in the song, so when choosing to sing them, you must pay attention to your vocal technique to ensure resonance and clarity.

Second sentence:



" Only the sea knows where the ship is going and where it is coming from."

This sentence includes the words "know" and "where". The word "know" has a vowel ending, and the word "where" has a diphthong ending. Besides mouth movements, one must also adjust the pronunciation and shorten the ending.

"know" -----> secret
 "where" -----> d - da - au

The word "where" corresponds to the highest note in the song, and its long duration makes it very difficult to achieve the criteria of "resonance, brightness, and clarity." To express this word well requires the singer to have a certain level of vocal skill, full breath control, and extensive practice.

Third sentence:

" The days we don't see each other, the sea turns white with longing."



The word "Nhường" (Those) is a closed-syllable word with a double consonant " nh" at the beginning and " ng" at the end, making it one of the most difficult words in Vietnamese singing. Furthermore, "Nhường" corresponds to the highest note in the song, requiring the use of the "silencing" technique when pronouncing it, which is considered a fundamental and challenging technique in Vietnamese singing.

The next line is, " If you leave the boat behind, the sea will only be filled with waves and wind."



Besides the "difficult" words analyzed above, this sentence contains the word "if," which has a final consonant cluster (a falling tone) and requires pursed lips when singing, thus greatly affecting the resonance of the lyrics.

Last sentence:

" If we are separated, all that remains is a storm."



The word "cách" in the sentence is a closed sound combined with the consonant " ch" at the end, which corresponds to the highest note in the song. Because it has a free-flowing duration, expressing this word well is not simple and requires a fairly high level of vocal skill from the singer.

The word "tố" in the sentence has an open ending, which is very advantageous for vocal technique. This word partially compensates for the limitations (in terms of vocal technique) of the lyrics in the song, and it also creates conditions for the singer to showcase their vocal technique, which is why the song is chosen by many people.

Next, we will analyze the lyrics of the song: "Red Leaves" Music: Hoang Hiep, lyrics: Nguyen Dinh Thi.

Let's analyze the first sentence:

" I met you high up in the windy mountains, amidst the rustling red leaves of the Trường Sơn forest."



The song begins with the word "Meet," which is a word with a falling tone ending in the consonant " p."

" Meet" -----> Seduce – Meet

When pronouncing, pressing the lips together, corresponding to the lowest note in the song, is very difficult for singers; beginners will find it hard to express the criteria of "round, resonant, and bright". The word "em" is a closed-ended word with the consonant " m" at the end.

" em" -----> e - em

When pronouncing, the lips must be pressed together, but here, due to the rather long duration, the singer must be very skillful to



ensure the words are clear. In particular, the word "em" (you/she) in the following lines, corresponding to the highest note in the song, has a long duration, creating many difficulties for the singer: "Hello, my dear girl from Truong Son..."

Second line of the song:

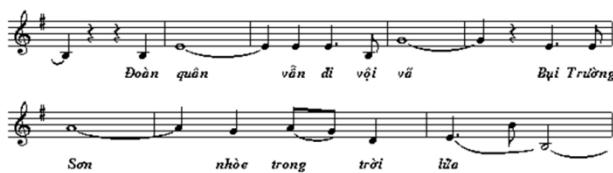
"I stand by the roadside like my homeland."

"A silver jacket draped over his shoulder, a rifle slung over his shoulder."



The word "standing" in this second line is a closed trill, and when singing, the technique of "singing with a closed note" is used. Here, the word "standing" corresponds to a note with a long duration, so serious practice is needed to sing this line well.

Next sentence:



"The army continued marching hastily."

"The dust of Truong Son blurs in the fiery sky."

This is the line with the most favorable lyrics in the song; however, "Đoàn quân" (army) is a word with a closed rhyme, so when pronouncing the word, you have to press the tip of your tongue against your palate to close the end of the word. The word "quân" (army) has a long duration, so it requires skillful handling when singing.

"quân" -----> quâ - ân "

Sentence



Another lyric worth noting in the song is the word: "little sister," the word As mentioned earlier, the word "girl" has a vowel ending in "i," which corresponds to a high and sustained note, so it needs to be handled well when singing to sound good.

"girl" -----> gá - i

The fundamental limitations of the lyrics make this song one of the most "difficult to sing," as the challenging words correspond to high and sustained notes. Singing songs like this often requires a lot of energy, and if the singer has a "low" vocal skill level and chooses an inappropriate vocal range, it can easily lead to vocal damage.

In the art of multi-part singing, singing in Vietnamese presents many more difficulties and limitations. Besides the limitations mentioned above, the biggest drawback is the tone, which causes a loss of meaning in words, unclear lyrics, and ultimately a lack of expressiveness, even resulting in an unpleasant effect.

We analyze the lyrics of the excerpt from the song "Autumn Day of School Opening".

The lively sound of the school drum dispels the summer heat, calming the cicadas' chirping still lingering in the green canopy.

Autumn arrives so beautifully, stirring many hearts.

The joyful sound of the school drum, in the songs of autumn.

Oh autumn, oh autumn, the season for building dreams, the vibrant colors of scarves fluttering brightly on your shoulders.

Oh autumn, oh autumn, the season fragrant with new books, the songs of the first day of school as bright as the autumn sky. [Music and lyrics: Vu Trong Tuong, arrangement: Dao Ngoc Dung; page 101 of the book "Conducting and staging group singing", author Doan Phi, University of Pedagogy Publishing House, 2005].

We see that the song only has two parts, but there are many forced notes in the bass part. If we transcribe the tone marks according to the pitch of the song, it would be: "Oh autumn, the season of new books, the sound of grains of rice opening, the drums resounding like the sky of hatred." Clearly, the meaning of the lyrics has been distorted, misinterpreted, and even negatively affected by the tone marks. Therefore, during teaching, practicing, and performing multi-part group singing, we must pay close attention to singing clearly, otherwise it can easily offend the listener.

Thus, it can be affirmed that the Vietnamese nation was formed very early, and throughout its history, it has experienced various periods of ups and downs. However, the distinctive characteristics of patriotism, indomitable spirit, and cohesion of the Vietnamese people have created and preserved the unique nuances of the Vietnamese language, with its rich and subtle vowel system. In the art of singing, the Vietnamese have always known how to blend this richness to create songs that are characteristic of the ebb and flow and profound depth of their language.

