Theses of doctoral (PhD) dissertation

Foreign Language Interpretation in Teaching Soloist Singing

Andrea Ujvárosi

Supervisor: Veronika Bocsi, PhD.

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Doctoral School of Humanities
Educational and Cultural Doctoral Program

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The aim of dissertation, the topic delimitation

Researches in Music Pedagogy are defined by a special duality that states singing has both scientific and artistic projections. Singing methods concentrating on the physiological aspects divide instructors of singing in key questions of singing technique (breathing, registers, resonance) between the singing techniques and anatomy and the scientific approach which is giving more role to the physiological questions. The international researches started off by Appelman, Brown and Vennard, Miller and Sundberg’s investigations helped the extension of the practical and scientific aspects of Vocal Pedagogy. The complex view of methodological questions in singing technique on the basis of Chapman and Sadolin’s method in connection with the mechanism and technique of singing biased the researches of singing to the direction of cooperation with co-sciences. In domestic terms, this endeavour primarily focuses on ear-nose and throat researches together with health and functional aspects of singing in Nádor and Mészáros’s researches. Another strong wave of researching solo singing pedagogy focuses on the artistic aspects of presentation analysing the specialties of different nations and ages. Twentieth century vocal music in this aspect is extended with new genres (pop, rock, jazz, and musical) that bring different artistic and educational tasks depending on cultural and educational politics traditions. Clark, Melton and Peckham put these questions into the focus of their researches.

The analysis of training fields from sociological and educational aspects required for the music career show that both in the early years and in higher education we can see the differences that can be described with the socialization agents with capital forms and habitus. In their researches, Moore and More and also Burland and Davidson make the effects of these obvious on the forms of learning music and motivation as well. Researches on the students of musical higher education focus on more aspects (curricular components, students’ institutional-characterizations), however, we do not find the issues of foreign language interpretation. The preceding Hungarian literature analyses the social background and institutional forms of music learning in lower age periods. The first stage of researches on higher artistic education was made by Kucsera and Szabó who had unique empirical studies that showed the special position coming from the result of the research interpretation of art education. These recent studies the entrance and exit side of the Hungarian higher education, while the music education, and in particular private education and its curricular elements, have not been included in this study.
In vocal presentation – unlike instrumental music – lyrics is of the same importance and a natural element of the melody. However, studies of the language and use of the sung text have not been investigated so far. The problems of singing in the original language has become a special feature of the soloist training in Central and Eastern European region. Today’s opera stages have an obvious expectation from the singers to handle the task of singing vocal works interpreted in the original language. It is not question that the sung lyrics can only convey its author’s intention faithfully vocalized in the original language. The domestic language and training practice of performances, however, show a different picture. From the viewpoint of performing arts there are debates on professional aspects, social demands and expectations from culture politics modulated by the audience and the linguistic knowledge of the interpreting artist as well. The linguistic aspects of the soloist training is put to test by the international expectation that regards the authentic original language singing as a natural part of professional efficiency. At the same time, among the training and output requirements of the Hungarian higher education we only find the foreign language requirement in the classical singing basic training to have the acquisition of a state-recognized intermediate level (B2) complex language exam in a living language. The output requirements of the MA level classical singing major do not either require a higher expectation from the students regarding command of language. The 'foreign language specialized in training’ got among the competences to be acquired without the definition of the language. In the core material of the compulsory knowledge, only German language appears to illuminate the authentic pronunciation of the songs, the text comprehension and the deeper relationship between the text and music. The dialectical chapter of the differentiated knowledge of the professional core material, with the aim of viewing the entire musical material, is to understand the relation between melody and text, but does not mention the languages concerned. In vocal music genres, language and music effect the recipient with a dual communication therefore the linguistic aspect of the soloist training covers a more complex issue beyond the command of language. The educational scientific relevance of the problem is given by the challenge that the higher education soloist training has to cope with.

In our dissertation, we were looking for the answers to two basic questions:
1. What factors determine the choice of the language of the vocal interpretation? Answering this question we are going to have an impact assessment of the language of the sung works with their music-, culture and cultural history antecedents and also explore the institutional and training changes of singing training in the theoretical chapters of the dissertation.
2. What are the institutional, personal and curricular components for the perfecting the original language singing? How do these components form the habits and quality of the original language singing? From Eurostudent and DPR researches we can partly know the socio-cultural background of the Hungarian higher education students’ population, with our research we wish to make this picture more complete.

The first aspect explores the longitudinal changes of the question of foreign language interpretation in solo singing training, the second aspect gives a cross-sectional view of the Hungarian higher education soloist training today.

The goal of the dissertation is to have this issue put in the focus of researches with the help of these two approaches. The topic calls for the interdisciplinary outline of theoretical frameworks. It is not avoidable to look at the theoretical basis of music and cultural history along with an overview of the changes of the vocal melody, style and the genre of vocal music with the methodological answers of teaching solo singing. It is worth approaching the institutional and instructor component of solo singing training in the development of the Hungarian Music Pedagogy in accordance with these changes. Including the interdisciplinary fields show the appearance of education politics, education sociology, acoustics, phonetics and linguistic aspects as well in the theoretical frameworks of the foreign language interpretation.

The phonetic and acoustic aspects of speech and singing, language and music got a great emphasis by the researches of Sundberg, Taylor and Bloothooft along with its neurolinguistics, special pedagogical projections by Gibson, Ratner, Besson and Schön’s researches Nardo and Reiterer study the correlations of the two forms of manifestation from the viewpoints of the helping role of music in speech communication and language learning. Domestic music pedagogy researches are primarily based on the transfer effects of music. Gósy and Deme’s works connect to the international directions of research with their acoustic and phonetic aspects of training professional singing voice. The elements serving the perfection of the vocal interpretation in relation to language and music have not been in the focus of researches. Following the tendencies of original language singing we can sporadically find methodological attempts in the Anglo-Saxon literature that are about the special training needs of singers but these elements had not become well-defined. These conceptions attached to Denbow and Owen are based on the convergence of spoken and sung lyrics and its starting point is not the soloist instructor but the aspect of the language instructor. Our research’s basic approach is that of the soloist instructor who studies the linguistic aspects of the vocal presentation in educational science aspects. In our thesis, after
the exploration of the common parameters of the two forms of manifestation, we are going to contrast the special features appearing in singing in the languages making up the backbone of the vocal literature (Italian, German, French, Russian and English) with those in the Hungarian language. This linguistic aspect is not the backbone of our work but we think that its knowledge contribute to the success of the musical realization. By studying the wholeness of the effect mechanism connected to the content and forms of education will assign musical pedagogical aspects and goals for which we wish to explore in the empirical chapters of the dissertation.

During our empirical research we studied the three components of today’s original language singing; instructors, students and the institutions of higher education with Soloist major. Therefore, we divided our hypotheses into three groups. We refer to these to the instructors, students and thirdly to the institutions.

Regarding the group of students we formed the following hypotheses:
1. The demographic and social background of the students fundamentally influence the learning of music and language. The students’ socio-cultural background form the variants of musical and linguistic capitals.
2. The students’ demand for the foreign language interpretation training is stronger than the present frameworks of subjects.
3. In certain age groups the pattern of studied languages is different. In case of younger ones the dominance of English is typical that falls further from the professional expectations.
4. The greater extent of foreign language capital results in a wider spectrum of language use not only in free time activities but in fields connected to the profession as well.
5. Students’ command of language is useful in singing in the original language. Studying foreign languages show in the quality of the original language singing. The issue of usefulness was based on the instructors’ opinion and justify it with the help of a qualitative technique.

Regarding the group of instructors we formed the following hypotheses:
1. The present practice of original language interpretation shows the strong features of the instructors’ traditions of the current major. The habits of foreign language singing are inherited together with the singing techniques.
2. Original language singing and its changes of judgement indicate historical milestones that are reflected in the major subject instructors’ commitments.
3. The art instructor who completes his career in abroad as well gives greater importance to the original language interpretation, motivates students for language development better and prefers students’ mobility and the enrichment of the language capital.

4. The judgement of the instructors’ foreign language competence is better among the MA students.

Regarding the group of institutions we formed the following hypotheses:
1. The foreign-language part of the vocal repertoire in institutions with a master's degree is higher compared to the institutions where there is only a classical vocal set.
2. Higher level of education is subject to higher language requirements, which can be seen in the acquisition of a second language exam or in compulsory professional language learning.
3. The patterns of the learned languages do not fit into the professional interpretative language requirements.

Research methods

The empirical study field of our dissertation was the institutions of higher education in Hungary. We focused on two questions in our research: 1. What language does a soloist student sing and why? We studied the factors that define the language of interpretation in the present practice of soloist training. 2. What does the perfection of the foreign language interpretation depend on? How do personal, institutional and subject components affect the professional original language vocal presentation? How do knowledge of foreign languages and interpretation expectations relate to each other in the training and what concept, structures and methods are there to develop original language singing?

We based our studies on two techniques. We made structured interviews among the instructor staff in higher education with Soloist major and analysed the students with the help of questionnaires. When analysing the instructors’ interviews we were curious to see what role the main subject instructor has in the choice of the language of the musical repertoire, how the traditions prevail in this issue and how the methodological tendencies to perfect the linguistic interpretation are enforced. When studying the students’ questionnaires we put the emphasis on the students’ habits of original singing and the training practice aiming to develop the foreign language interpretation. In our research the students’ commitments and motivations for original language singing got a central role and their demands for subject and content elements to perfect the original language interpretation. Furthermore, we wanted to
outline the socio-cultural background of the students and the way their status is connected to the patterns of their musical and linguistic qualifications.

The stage of the empirical study was the full Hungarian higher education with Soloist major. The instructors’ interviews and the students’ questionnaire were carried out in six institutions with this kind of specialization: Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, the University of Debrecen Faculty of Music, the University of Szeged Faculty of Music, the University of Pécs Faculty of Music and Virtual Arts, the University of Széchenyi István Faculty of Art, the Institute of Musical Art and the University of Miskolc Bartók Béla Institute for Music. The survey among the students and the instructors gave a way to contrast the training conditions and conceptual features of the institutions. On the basis of the instructors’ interviews we are giving an outline of the soloist instructors’ network map as well.

The instructors’ interviews

When choosing the subjects of the interviews of the instructors in the institutions included in the survey we had to take the institution's size, the number of soloist students and the hosting ability of the institution into consideration. We defined the subjects of the interview with three dimensions (instructors’ hierarchy, the time-length of the experience in the institution, regionalism) when coding them. There were all together nine soloist instructor interviewed. The interviews were made in January, 2017.

The outline of the interview was built around five key points. The instructor’s artistic description of the major subject gave us the opportunity to get to know the musical and linguistic attitudes appearing in the training specialties and the methodological traditions. The next group of questions showed the composition of the instructors, the infrastructure and the changes of training in foreign language interpretation of the educational institutions. In our third block of questions we gain information about the socio-cultural background of the students of the given institution and also its related variants of the musical and linguistic qualifications. These questions enabled us to have a picture of the utilisation rate of the musical and linguistic training and also of the musical biography. The fourth block of questions was based on the longitudinal changes of the foreign language interpretation practice coming from the institutional traditions of the original language singing. We examined the evolution of the linguistic composition of the vocal repertoire in the training forms of each institution. Besides the subject frameworks, number of lessons, instructor conditions and methods of the original language singing we focused on the judgement of the major subject by the instructors. The last block of questions were to characterise the students’
linguistic competences by the instructors. We expected results regarding the efficiency of linguistic training and the use of vocal language as well.

The questionnaire

The pattern of the students’ survey was the student population of the Hungarian higher education majoring as Soloist training in the term 2016/17. During our research we planned to have a full survey of the population but for the low number of the population there was no sampling procedure. The survey was completed by 90 students out of the 152 soloist students from the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, and 5 more institutions in the country (the University of Debrecen Faculty of Music, the University of Szeged Faculty of Music, the University of Pécs Faculty of Music and Virtual Arts, the University of Széchenyi István Faculty of Art, the Institute of Musical Art and the University of Széchenyi István Faculty of Art and the University of Miskolc Bartók Béla Institute for Music). This means a 60% response rate which can be regarded a high rate considering the self-fulfilling query. This number of elements, however, limits the current relevance of the research results and the statistical opportunities of analysis. The areas tested by us with one variant were made possible for analysis, however, in case of more variants our options were more limited. From the answers a database was created with the help of SPSS 19 Programme. The research database will be referred to as the Foreign Language Interpretation Database. The structure of the student questionnaire was built on the analogy of the instructors’ interviews.

During the quantitative analysis of the dissertation (especially when studying the socio-demographical features and linguistic qualifications) we compared our own data with national or regional data. As the item number of the database is small, we mainly used percent and averages while in some cases when the item number made it possible we used chi squares statistics. We made indices for the survey of musical and linguistic qualifications (financial capital, index of the knowledge of musical instrument, index of command of a language and language exam index).

Research findings

The basic goal of the dissertation was to first overview the linguistic practice of the Hungarian interpretation of vocal genres rooted in historical precedents. The analysis of the present condition of the higher education soloist training put the curricular and methodological issues of original language singing in the centre. We examined how the traditions of original language singing relate to the present practice. We outlined the
professional and linguistic competences connected to original language singing and the strategies aiming to perfect them, which are in accordance with the students’ expectations as well.

Our research on original language interpretation there are few precedents in Hungarian and international respect. The further novelty of the theoretical part is given by the fact that it approaches vocal interpretation from more contexts: 1. the dominance of text-melody relationship is followed through the vocal genres and focuses on the sung text in the history of the vocal methodology, too. 2. It treats the common parameters of language and music as the starting elements of the theoretical research. 3. It sees the togetherness of text and the melody as a priority and examines it with respect to the comparison of Hungarian and foreign languages, which are the backbone of vocal literature. 4. Explores the special features of singing language in research and in practice as a new aspect 5. Language – in both the theoretical and empirical chapters of the research – is regarded not exclusively from the pronunciation side of the language.

The analysis of the hypotheses formed during the empirical research resulted in the following:

*The instructors*

We had formed four hypotheses in connection with the instructors the first, second and third of which we wanted to justify with the help of interviews and the last one with the help of a survey.

As a summary of the analysis of the instructors’ interview we can state that the traditions of the soloist teaching – as we had supposed in our first hypothesis with regards to the instructors – have a strong mark of the traditions of the major subject. The present practice of original language interpretation shows the strong features of the instructors’ traditions of the current major. The habits of foreign language singing are inherited together with linguistic priorities attached to the singing techniques.

In our second hypothesis regarding instructors we stated that original language singing and its changes of judgement indicate historical milestones that are reflected in the major subject instructors’ commitments. This hypothesis was justified as we unequivocally could see those changes of aspects that can be connected to the historical and political changes of judgement of singing in the original language from the interviews made with the instructors.

In accordance with the interpretation debates explored in the theoretical frameworks the most significant turning point was the change of the regime in the artistic career of the instructors
which is reflected in changes in institutional requirements and subject conditions for the 1990s.

Our hypothesis, namely, that the art instructor with higher qualifications preferring students’ mobility and the enrichment of the language capital was not justified. We supposed that an art instructor who completes his career in abroad as well gives greater importance to the original language interpretation, motivates students for language development better. In spite of this we found that the major instructor behaviour has strong personal and artistic components besides the professional ones.

The quantitative analysis of the students’ questionnaire enabled us to form a fourth hypothesis. We assumed that the judgement of the instructors’ foreign language competence is better among the MA students. This presupposition can be possible among the students in MA training with the institutions specialized in this training have more resources for the bettering of the training for foreign language interpretation. The opportunity to have more native instructors and correpetitors with strong command of language involved in the training appeared positively in the students’ assessments. This students’ demand shows one of the possible ways of the evolution of the methodology of the training.

The students

In connection with the students we had formed five hypotheses, the first four of which were tested with quantitative analysis of a survey and the last hypothesis was expected to be justified by the interviews made with the instructors.

The research results justify our first hypothesis, saying that the demographic and social background of the students fundamentally influence the learning of music and language. The students’ socio-cultural background (type of settlement, parents’ educational qualifications, and financial capital) form the variants of musical and linguistic capitals. The variants of the social status was positively correlated with the opportunities of learning music and languages. This results shows similar patterns with the theoretical frameworks of educational sociology in the dissertation and draws attention to the relations between music learning and social background.

When forming our second hypothesis we expected that the students’ demands are stronger than the present subject frameworks of the interpretation training. It is an important gain of our research that it unequivocally represents the stronger demand of students for the training. The students’ answers justified our presupposition that half of those students who do not learn foreign language interpretation as a subject felt the shortage of this kind of training
and those who take part in these prefer the higher number of lessons and strengthening certain content elements of the training. Suggestions about making a glossary of terms for the singers, making translations of the archaic texts and weighing the pronunciation of singing and spoken language show the new points of the methodology of original language singing. These proposals are in accordance with the experimental methods of Denbow and Owen explained in the theoretical part. They indicate that the methodology for the perfecting the original language singing is worth developing the linguistic and musical connections discussed in the theoretical framework with the conscious use of language structure, grammar and logic besides the sound side of the language.

Our third hypothesis says that in certain age groups the pattern of studied languages is different. In case of younger ones the dominance of English is typical that falls further from the professional expectations. This expectation was fulfilled as it was obviously shown that the younger students’ command of language concentrated on English, while older ones (above 26) the knowledge of German and Russian was more typical. In singing, the command of languages besides these (Italian, French) is not significant in any of the age groups. Our results per languages are in accordance with the domestic tests (Eurostudent V) but they do not meet the special linguistic expectations of the vocal interpretation.

According to our fourth hypothesis the greater extent of foreign language capital results in a wider spectrum of language use not only in free time activities but in fields connected to the profession as well. We were not able to justify this hypothesis due to the low item numbers while free time activities in the foreign language (reading, watching movies, listening to music, using the Internet) were not related to the index of the command of language with some rare exceptions.

On the basis of the interviews made with the instructors we formed our fifth hypothesis saying that students’ command of language is useful in singing in the original language. Studying foreign languages show in the quality of the original language singing. As opposed to our expectations the students’ command of language does not come back completely in original language singing. On the basis of the instructors’ interviews the reason for this is that the foreign language training and the expectations of foreign language interpretation do not correlate with each other. The professional nature of the language lessons is missing there are no methodological connections and the circle of the studied languages do not cover the languages that are used during the vocal interpretation.

The institutions
The student base of each institution is formed by more factors. The composition of the students in the art courses is more favourable than the average of higher education, but the geographical location and prestige of the individual institutions and faculties also have a forming effect. The most favourable pattern is shown by the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music that is purely an institution with musical profile holds a prestigious place in the international higher education rankings in the categories of capitals and performing arts. The student composition is also influenced by the instructor trainings as the social background of teachers’ training is lower than the average. The non-capital institutions, enrolment areas typically cover the less-favoured regions and counties. The following differences are shown in the structure of the institutions involved in the survey: in the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music there was no non-divided soloist teacher major student, and the University of Szeged Faculty of Music and the University of Miskolc Bartók Béla Institute for Music do not have an MA level classical singer artist training (oratory singing/opera singing). However, the University of Debrecen Faculty of Music, the University of Széchenyi István Faculty of Art and the University of Pécs Faculty of Music and Virtual Arts have both BA and MA level soloist training as well.

In connection with the institutions we had formed three hypothesis, for the first and third of which we used quantitative while for the second hypothesis we used qualitative methodological tools.

Our first hypothesis regarding the institutions was the following: The foreign-language part of the vocal repertoire in institutions with a master's degree is higher compared to the institutions where there is only a classical vocal set. This supposition was only partly justified by qualitative analysis as the highest rate of foreign language repertoire was characterizing the soloist students’ training in the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music and the lowest rate was in the University Of Szeged Faculty Of Music among those students of classical singing without MA training who sing their repertoire in the original language. In case of the other institutions we did not find a definite pattern in the relation of the training levels and the language of the repertoire.

In our second hypothesis we assumed that higher level of education is subject to higher language requirements, which can be seen in the acquisition of a second language exam or in compulsory professional language learning. This presupposition was not justified as there was not a longer period of training for higher training levels and further language studies or acquisition of a second language exam are not necessarily part of the MA training.
The third hypothesis that we had formed in connection with the institutions said that the patterns of the learned languages do not fit into the professional interpretative language requirements. We justified this statement from more aspect as well. The utilisation of the original language singing represented without a doubt that the languages mostly used (Italian, German, French, Russian, English) in the vocal repertoire do not cover the students’ command of language. We saw that among institutional linguistic frameworks, these languages do not get their worthy role in vocal literature.

The theoretical background necessarily approached the research topic from a broader perspective. The empirical plan of the problem of linguistic interpretation created the opportunity to narrow the examination perspective by analysing the training practice of foreign vocal singing. The novel element of the empirical research is that it draws attention to the soloist students in the researches of higher artistic education training. Before that this group of students had not been as deeply analysed. A significant result of the research is that with the help of the interviews made with the instructors a network map was made about the Hungarian higher soloist instructors’ institutions, on the basis of which the domestic higher education level soloist training can be traced back until the beginnings. It is an important result of the dissertation that the empirical research helped to draw the picture that shows the training and methodological traits of the perfecting of the original singing in the context of singing in the original language. The research with our own method can be a useful starting point of further researches. These descriptive, exploratory studies are closely related to those theoretical frameworks that base language and music, text and melody on the basis of common parameters in the centre of their studies. In connection with this we interpreted the issue of raising awareness of the features of Hungarian and foreign language in singing in the original language as a key issue that has not been an object of any scientific research. The empirical research showed for the first time that the soloist students’ command of language is not sufficient for the professional challenges neither in connection with the group of languages nor the level of their language efficiency. The knowledge of a language manifests in pronunciation, comprehension, vocabulary, command of language and intonation does not utilise in original language singing and the reflective effect of foreign language singing does not prevail in perfecting the knowledge of a language either. This complex attitude appears in the students’ expectations, in the instructor and institution side of the training as well, only presented immaturely in the methodology and the curriculum. A test inspecting the musical and linguistic competences and based on this train of thought can mean the planned continuation of the scientific work.
Candidate: Andrea Ujvárosi Zilinyiné
Neptun ID: L07YAH
Doctoral School: Doctoral School of Human Sciences
MTMT ID: 10055094

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