

Approach For Mimicry and Breaking Down Voices

Intro

Although mimicking voices right off the bat remains the best approach for learning new voices, it doesn't work as well when we're starting from a point that is really far away from the voice we want while lacking the coordination to get it. Or lacking the ear training needed to hear all the different things about the voice. Or trying to mimic people's voices as opposed to character voices, where the parameters are not often as extreme, so we don't have the luxury of sacrificing accuracy and have our brains fill in the gaps

Quick refresher on pitch, weight and size, if you're familiar with these terms already, feel free to skip ahead to the next point.

Pitch: is a perceptual quality based on periodic, harmonic sound and frequency. **In our voice, we can short hand it by how fast or how slow our vocal folds vibrate.**

Weight: is a perceptual quality based on how many frequencies are in a sound, **to our ears it's heard as how buzzy or soft a sound is.** Think of the difference between a really buzzy 8 bit tune vs a really soft piano synth

Size: is a more practical approach to *resonance*, as the latter can be broke into how sound interacts with containers and spaces around it based on the material, size and shape of them, **making different parts of sound louder than others which is what ultimately gives our voices different sounds even when we hum the same tune**, we can disregard the material because that doesn't change for 99.99% of people, leaving us with shape and size modification, the former referring to any unwholstic change to the vocal tract (*like doing a much smaller mouth size while keeping your throat size bigger*)

1. Setting up a goal for yourself and tackling the main three pillars of voice

Trust yourself and set up some general descriptors of the voice you are listening to in three aspects

- a. How does it sound in weight? Does it sound like a really soft sound or a really buzzy sound?
- b. How does it sound in size? Does it sound like a small size or a big size?
- c. How does it sound like its pitch? Does the pitch sound and feel high, medium or low when you try matching it?

Having those three general descriptors based on perception as a goal to get to is already a big jumping pad into what you should be adjusting and because size and weight are two general descriptors made up of different features, sometimes we can get to those general qualities with the wrong combinations, like trying to mimic a high pitch softer voice by doing a breathy low pitch voice, but **the general sound at the end will still not be exactly right, however even that in of itself is a really valuable experience, knowing what not to do is sometimes as important as knowing what to do**

2. The qualities that we can break almost any voice into

1. **Pitch and vocal fold behavior**: this can be split into three different parts; how high, medium or low someone's pitch is and we can expand on that further by also including intonation into the mix, how far their vocal folds are and which *mode of registration* they're primarily using

- i. **Pitch and intonation**: we can notate people's voices as either being melodic with a lot of intonation in their voice or fairly monotone, mostly keeping to the same pitch and as a general outline for how we define low, medium and high pitches, we take in the averages of people's speech; B2 to D3 being the low end, E3 to G#3 being the medium and high being A3 to C4

- ii. **Vocal fold closure**: people's vocal folds can be either pressed (close together), smooth (normal distance apart) and decompressed (further apart or breathy)

- iii. **Registration**: often also referred to as mechanisms; refers to how people's vocal folds vibrate, people have four registers: fry (m0), chest (m1), head (m2) and whistle register (m3), people speak in the first three alone.

Registration is much more important when it comes to character voices, otherwise it's often blended together across people's ranges and can be a topic of its own.

2. **size**: which can be broken down into two further parts, mouth size and throat size,

i: **mouth size**: is majorly dependent on the tongue as it's one of the most flexible muscles in the human body with 8 extrinsic and intrinsic connections, that is multiple connections to itself and surrounding muscle, the front can be independently moved from the back and vice versa. Other aspects of mouth size include the jaw, how slack it is. And finally the lips; how spread or protruding they are gives us different sounds

ii: **throat size**: includes all the areas above the vocal folds, including the larynx, pharynx and oropharynx areas, know what the muscle names here doesn't really matter, as our way to modify them, modify the throat size will ultimately be following simplified and complex sounds

iii: **telling mouth size and throat size apart**: as a general note; when it comes to modifying mouth and throat size to different ratios is when we are adjusting the perceptual quality of *shape change*

And we can tell the differences between them both by listening to the undertone and *overtone* of sound, so you need to ask yourself: "do i hear this person as a bright voice exhibiting darker qualities or a dark voice exhibiting bright qualities?"

3. **Nasality**: is defined by how much air is going through our nose verses the air that is going through our mouth, this can be set to different ratios entirely by our soft palate (*the fleshy upper ceiling of the mouth just behind your hard palate, you can feel this by tracing your tongue backwards towards the roof of your mouth, yes the area is much larger than most people realize*)

A lot of people sit in a **homeonasal** kind of voice where some amount of air is going through their nose as they speak, some people speak in a **hyponasal** sound or an oral sound by diverting all their air through their mouth save for the nasal consonants in languages, and some people speak in a **hypernasal** voice where most of their air goes through their nose when they talk

Nasality can be heard as an 'm' or 'n' quality into some's sound

4. **Turbulence:** can be defined as white noise in our sound as a result of obstructed airflow, and although turbulence can happen from any part of the voice where the air is obstructed like an s sound or a pharyngeal high tongue on the advanced side. Under normal articulatory conditions turbulence most often comes from *false vocal folds* and uneven contact of the vocal folds.

5. **Articulation patterns:** refers to any consistent modification to someone's speech ACROSS their speech, this includes all accent differentiations like Norwegian people having more nasality into their vowels, someone having a lower tongue eh sound in their speech instead of high Es, or someone having their sibilants (s sounds) replaced with a 'th'

6. **Prosody:** with general overlap to intonation, prosody refers to the pace of someone's voice and the different stresses they put on words

7. **Vocal weight:** can be broken into many different factors, since a lot of things affect it. The most important factors that go into it are pitch and airflow (how much air we're using) but other noteworthy relations are vocal fold closure, nasality, fullness.

3. Figuring our voices by deduction and simplifying

The fact that voice parameters are highly connected and cascading into each other is a daunting at the beginning but a huge advantage the more advanced we are; it makes voices harder to break down for a beginner, but it allows us to solve voices like a pretty equation.

For example, listening to someone talk with a lot of fry in their voice can clue us in that they might be keeping their vocal folds closer to each other on words outside of fry or not using enough air in their sound, or both! And the moment we talk into account how loud they sound or how pressed their vocal folds sound the more we have a clearer picture

Naming out all the connections between different parts of voice is something beyond this article, **however what we can already start doing to help us with breaking down big concepts like weight is simplifying to surface level parameters**

Any simple voice parameter is a parameter that is easy to notice on a surface

level and cascades into other qualities

Examples of surface level parameters include from things we discussed in the previous category: pitch, vocal fold closure, nasality, tongue height (by paying attention to what type of vowels someone is using) and by matching those simpler components we're much more likely to match the overarching quality

1. The importance of pitch matching: nailing down the pitch is one of the easiest ways we can make sure our other voice qualities snap into place, for example breathiness or overdoing low volume to have a low weight at a low pitch is a common beginner mistake instead of lowering the weight by raising the pitch for a more feminine sound

Or jumping straight into a small size, with often too much buzziness and nasality is likely to happen if we don't adjust into a higher pitch

2. Importance of nasality: given that it's a quality that affects the aesthetic of voices for the most part it's not given enough thought but the level of nasality we have in our voice is one of the things that gives us all a unique voice; the lack of it is just as important as having a lot of it

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