The Phenomenon of Learning Song from Lyrics

Ellen G.Y. Manueke[1], Lucky Mangkey[2], Teddy Manueke[3]
[1]Fakultas Bahasa Asing Universitas Nusantara Manado
[2] Fakultas Teknik Informatika Universitas Nusantara Manado
[3]Fakultas Teknik Informatika Universitas Nusantara Manado
Email: ellen@nusantara.ac.id, luckymangey@gmail.com,
teddy.manueke@yahoo.co.id

ABSTRACT

Learning language through song is commonly found in today's society and it has been proven by various scientific studies. On the other side, the fact that tremendous singers learn songs based on words seems to have been out of attention. The process that naturally caused by the people's blindness of notation reveals the existence of both segmental and suprasegmental approaches in the process of acquiring melody. At the same time, it also shows how language, both in written and unwritten forms, has long been united within the society. This article describes the process of learning songs based on lyrics or words. The data is acquired through interviews conducted in a number of choir members across various groups in Manado regarding the methods of learning, understanding and performing songs. Participants were interviewed randomly over a period of time. The obtained data was then classified and described from both music and linguistic perspective. This research is a qualitative study using phenomenological approach to decipher the regular practices in the process of learning song.

Keywords: Lyrics, suprasegmental, notation, prosody, phonology

INTRODUCTION

Just as language, song communicates someone's thought and feeling. These two tools are only owned by humans and cannot be separated from human's life. There are similarities in intonation, rhythm and structures of the two forms of expression; which are often combined and becoming another form called song. The unification of two elements of culture into song become an interesting object of research, both from musical and linguistic perspectives.

Bernstein (1973) put forward the existence of linguistic principles in music: phonology, syntax and semantics, sampling the existence of fermata or staccato and various forms or positions of tones and harmony, in explaining phonetic elements categorized as phonology. From syntax point of view, motif in music has its grammatical substance; a motif in opera constructed of three notes that resembling three letters or phonemes likely forming a noun that has meaning, categorized as semantics in linguistics. On the other hand, Patel (2009) examined the strong influence of language in the process of music making, saying that the formation of melodies is greatly influenced by the composer's native language. The difference of intonation of verbal elements in English and French is revealed physically, where the contrast between long and short vowel duration is more occured in English than in French. This indicates the possibility of differentiating rhythm and melody when a series of words from certain language is arranged into song. In the study using 300 compositions from those two different countries, Patel explicitly demonstrated the differences of melody trend of English and French composers who lived between the 1800s and 1900s. There were 131 compositions from 6 England's composers, compared with 181 compositions of 10 France's composers. The comparison of Elgar and Debussy's melodic movements, for example, could be seen in the short-length contrast; Elgar's rhythm and intonation appeared to be more often than Debussy's.

From phonology, morphology and syntax's views, the accuracy of the stress or intonation of a word or a syllable in its position in the melody is important because it determines the meaning of lyrics and the form of melody. A number of musicians who are also language observers, categorized vowels' position in lyrics as a division of strong, medium and weak, such as /a/ /u/ and /ê/. The strong stress is placed on the first beat of the measure such as /a/, the medium stress /u/ is more suitable to be put in the middle or the measure, while the weak stress /ê/ is more suitable to be placed on the soft stress point, usually right before a strong beat coming. The variety of languages indicates the diversity of rhythms and melody of a song (Adersson and Ulvaeus: 2009).

Although sentence and song intonation are related, their conditions or positions in the melody can be unpredictable. Bernstein's theory indicates that there are separate laws in music regarding the length and pitch of sentences, where music has its own characteristic. The existence of an emphasized tone in melody is one of the them. For example, the use of 'fermata' that holds a note longer than the others, form a certain meaning of a note or the syllable embedded in that note. Another characteristic are the pitch or high-low notes that can be played one octave higher or one octave lower even though the tone is the same, also the rhythmic movements that consist of long and short notes emphasis meaning.

Melody can be developed into various forms, for example when it is distributed into chords with different melodies or different voice directions that could have the same phrase or sentences. This has attracted the author to observing more deeply; to what extent does the singers' concept of thought have had been built when they are learning song

based on the written words. So far, the concept of learning by ear has been known as a common way of leaning song without the direction of sounded-notes, based only on the 'hearing' and 'interpreting' meody ability. This becomes more unique when the choir have to sing a four-voice composition that usually has certain dynamic and harmony pattern (non-parallel chords). Most singers admitted that they learn songs by hearing; it has been performed before by other groups. Normally, when they are handed the music text, they will read only the words and often rewrite them for further learning. A number of participants, including those who read notes, admitted that they prefer to rewrite the words to simplify them, following the majority who unable to reading music.

The fact that most people learn songs through lyrics is based on several reasons: (1) note-blinded, (2) reluctant to read notes, (3) more accustom to the construction of words which are visible and readable compared to notes, and (4) assumption that imagining notes through a series of words is easier compared to pronouncing words through a series of notes.

For people who understand notation, learning songs through notes is much easier than having to interpret melodies through words. However, the habit of learning songs through lyrics has been living from generation to generation and becoming an interesting object to study. If a sentence's rhythm and intonation is different with the trend of melodies, then the pronunciation of each syllable may be varied. Deciphering the process of acquiring melody through lyrics is the aim of this study.

Theoretical review

Lyrics are the poetry of a song that are more often used in popular music (Manueke et all, 2023). Lyrics contain a series of continues arrangement of words that expresses ideas; just as series of melodies in music. Lyrics consist of musical components such rhythm, stress and intonation which classified into suprasegmental according to Anderson (1986) and they have phonological regulations. Although they are said to have musical elements, lyrics are not bounded by specific rhythm or tone like in music. The high and low intonation of stand-alone lyrics are categorized as suprasegmental. But when they are embedded in the melody, lyrics already have melodic pattern and could not be categorized an suprasegmental anymore since the intonations are measurable and the tones have definite frequencies.

A. Suprasegmental

Suprasegmental is a term in phonetics and phonology that refers to vocal effects, covering more than one sound segment in speech, namely high-low or tonality or pitch, pressure or stress and juncture or differentiation of speech characteristics to distinguish the same sound but with different meanings such as 'ice cream' and 'I scream' (Christal, 2003, p. 446) as quoted in Kang (2010).

In linguistics, it is divided into three components including rhythm, stress and intonation. Topintzi (2010) classifies it into voicing, tone and stress. While Ilse Lehiste (Lass, 1976) groups suprasegmental into duration and quantity, tone and intonation and stress and emphasis. Rhythm is the interaction between sound and time, in which there is silence. Pressure is also known as stress while intonation is the high and low of words or syllables.

The branch of linguistics that studies suprasegmental components is called prosody. Prosody covers stress, pitch, and duration of vowels and consonants, which Hyman

(1971) classifies as part of phonology, a linguistic science that studies the sound system of language in which it is categorized as suprasegmental aspect of words. Firth (1948) and Robins (1957b) as cited in Hyman, included elements of nasalization and vocal harmony in prosody. Harper (2018) describes the existence of music and poetry as two separate components; when combined will produce a tremendous power that exceeds the power if standing alone.

Although prosody consists of elements that have similar functions to melody in music, the context of rhythm, stress and intonation or pitch of high-low notes between the two have a different unity or attachment. Rhythm in music is arranged with tempo and pitch that has certain duration and frequency. The harmony between of rhythmical movement and the intonation or tone between prosody and melody has a very measurable difference. This is proven by the difference in intonation and rhythm of prosody when it is spoken and song when it is sung. Prosody can stand alone without being attached to a melody; melody on the other hand is able to express its own ideas without lyrics. The difference leads to the fact that learning melody based on prosody or words or lyrics is an interesting object to study.

Suprasegmental in music

If in linguistics 'suprasegmental' concerns the rules of tone behind speech, then in music, it is no longer refer to tones but trends of tones and chords. This is because the tone or melody is the word or the sentence of music itself, where each component of tones has a measurable unit with certain frequency. The term 'suprasegmental' in music would refer to the invisible trend of tone and chord progress that could be felt or predicted. For example, the seventh tone in a scale (ti) will definitely lead to the first tone of scale (do); chord II will lead to V. Suprasegmental also refers to the dynamics of music concerning high-low, long-short and loud-soft of tones.

The process of learning melody by hearing or feeling can also be classified into suprasegmental, because this method uses intuition of predicting tones and chords trends. There is a fundamental difference between learning melody by feeling, starting with combined voice and sound (melody) with learning that starting with notation guidance. Acquiring melody by feeling uses intuition in determining a series of tones; on the other hand, acquiring tones based on notation is based on definite pitch and rhythm and very logical. Although in reality melody obtained from these two different methods is the same, the method of acquisition goes through a different process. Suprasegmental means a form that cannot be seen physically but can be felt and estimated. On the other hand, segmental is a visible and measurable unit, such as vowels and consonants in language and tones and rhythms in music.

B. Notation

Notation is a written form of music, like writing in speech or language. Notation is a symbol of tone and rhythm; rhythm has tempo, tone has frequency and is different from rhythm and tone in linguistics. If in language intonation is categorized as something that is not written (suprasegmental), then in music, the flow is clearly depicted in frequencies and rhythm patterns in which including the duration, the high and low tones or pitch or dynamics, the strength or pressure of each tone or syllable. Notation is written in the staff, known as block notation or written in the series of numbers called numerical notation.

In Indonesia, numerical notation has been taught from generation to generation, where the up and down movements can be easily seen based on the sequence of numbers; number 1 is known as Do, followed by numbers 2, 3, 4, 5,6 7 and i are known as Re, Mi, Fa, So, La and Si. In the Diatonic scale, the sequence of notes in C scale appears as follows:
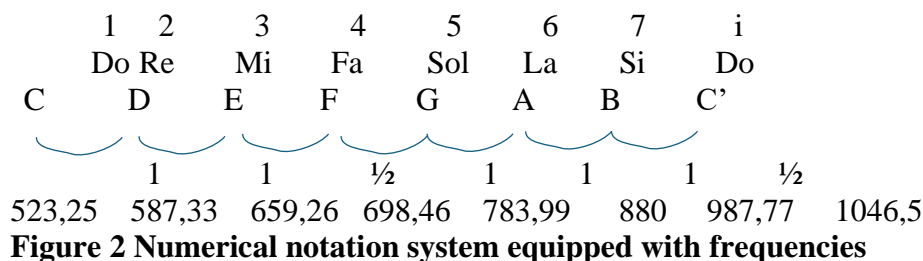
Figure 2 Numerical notation system equipped with frequencies

In the staff, the notes series are as follow:
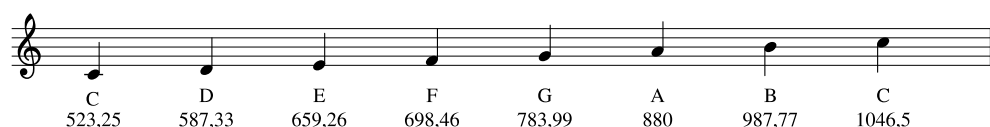
Figure 2. The frequency of notes in C scale

In the addition to the name of notes displayed through lines and spaces in the staff, the fundamental difference between the staff and numerical system lies on the method of reading notes. In the staff, notes have unchanged positions. Numerical notation, on the other hand, changes. The basic pitch of any scales is regulated by the equalization of Do, such as C=Do, D=Do, E=Do, and so on (Manueke, 2022).

C. Learning Song

Song is melody embedded with words. It also could be said that song is melody with lyrics. Learning song means finding out melody sequences as well as the embedded lyrics synchronously or vice versa, to be performed accordingly as composed. There are two or more sub melodies in polyphony composition to be sung by different voices, both male and female voices. Every sub voice should be learned in particular. Vocal groups like duets, trios, quartets or choirs, perform polyphony composition with several melody sequences.

METHOD

Phenomenological research (Creswell, 2009) is implemented in this study to identify existing practices in society, which is the process of learning songs based on lyrics, by ignoring the author's personal experience. Data is collected through interviewing participants from different vocal groups spreading across the city of Manado over a certain period of time. They singers, pianists and conductors. Participants are selected randomly, coming from mixed choir groups, mixed vocal groups or similar vocal groups, male and female.

It was found that 90% of the participants learning songs by 'listening'; the rest are varied from including learning songs by reading notation and learning by mixing method, combination of seeing the notation and listening to the melody via cassettes or social media, or directly played by a pianist. 'Listening' here means listen to the melody along

with the words. They are not able to go through the song only by listening to the tune or melody alone whether it is played directly through piano directly or are hummed the solmization. This process is carried out even when the singers are holding music texts that clearly writes the notes and lyrics. Generally, they will separately rewrite the lyrics separately for further learning.

After finding out the methods in learning songs, the next phase is to depict them, which is the main purpose of this writing. There are three ways to learn songs, namely learning based on lyrics, learning based on notation and learning based on a combination of the two where the introduction of lyrics and notation are performed simultaneously.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There are three methods of learning song the writer found in this study, cited below:

A. Learning song from lyrics

Learning song based on lyrics means that the process of learning is based on lyrics. Melody is obtained simultaneously with the process of understanding the sentence, or else, after the sentence has been understood. This process of learning consists of two methods, namely 'written' and 'unwritten'. The written method is divided into two approaches; the first approach is using music text that contains both notation and lyrics, and the other one contains lyrics only. Singers rewrite the lyrics even though it is already written on the music text with the notes at once. Whereas the 'unwritten' means that participants only 'listening to' and 'trying' to remember the sung-lyrics in which the possibility of making errors is enormous. The latest group is classified into dependent learners because the singers' accomplishment depends on other people.

Despite written text, regardless of it is equipped or not with notation, singers mostly need guidance to be able to sing the song appropriately. This can be through the melody **sung** by someone, means melody performed simultaneously with words, or played through piano and a recording. The lyrics alone cannot show the melody of the song, unless the melody is already heard and memorized, or someone is able to read the notation directly without the help of sound pattern.

The basic thing about learning songs from lyrics lies on the need of most participants for a **voice demo**, namely a guide-melody performed with words. Generally, singers cannot match words into notes independently. They cannot master the song through **tone demo**. It is the role of conductor to present a voice demo to help singers mastering the song.

B. Learning song from notation

Notation is a written form of music, containing both melody and lyrics, or notes alone. Complete notation is known as music text or score.

The process of learning songs from notation is divided into two methods. Firstly, learning the notation and then the lyrics. Secondly, learning through tone demo. Tone demo is sounded-notation played through piano or keyboard. The sounded melody is then be imitated by the singers. If the melody is sung correctly, then the words are to be included. In many casess, tone demo is often followed by voice demo performed by conductor or group leader. The demo can be performed directly using musical instruments or through the audio recording. It can also be played directly by pianist. Live demo is

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more interactive for sure. Voice demo is distributed according to voice type, soprano, alto, tenor or bass. The important part of voice demo is the element of word presented together within the melody.

There are two types of written notation: numerical notation and the staff. Staff is more independent compared to numerical notation for it does not require any interpretation in playing notes, the notes are played as they are written. However, in numerical notation, when the scale is not C, the notes should be played differently, that only a few people know it (Manueke, 2022). Nevertheless, guidance from tone demo is needed by the singers who unable to read notation.

C. The combination of seeing note movements and listening to the demo

People learn song by seeing the note movements appeared on the text and at the same time listening to the demo, voice demo or tone demo. Singers in this group are note-blind but creative. They will try to interpret melody by looking at the high and low or long and short movements of the notes that written in the music text. If the song has already been heard, they will try to sing it by comparing or matching it with the written notation. Whenever they encounter obstacles, an expert or a recording is the one they can rely on.

The ways of learning song cover unisono and polyphony learning process. The first has only one melody pattern which is much easier to learn, while the other is constituted by two or more melodies and should be addressed into different voices through different demos. It could be in the form of duets, trios, quartets or quintets that consist of two, three, four, five respectively; or even choir. For mixed choirs, voice grouping is divided into group 1 or soprano, group 2 or alto, group 3 or tenor and group 4 or bass. The type of voice can change according to the category of the choir. In women choir, melodies usually distributed into soprano, mezzo soprano and alto; while in men choir, they are circulated into tenor, baritone and bass.

Suprasegmental in lyrics dan melody

Although it looks the same, there is a fundamental difference in learning melody through notation and through 'hearing' or 'feeling'. Both of these methods utilize the ear to ensure the accuracy of the tone. However, the method of learning songs by referring to a series of words will use the suprasegmental side in determining the high and low or short lyrics, namely factors that are invisible but can be estimated in direction; such as when pronouncing syllable intonation. However, in music, the high and low melodies have a definite frequency. For learning songs that are preceded by notation, the high and low notes are no longer categorized as suprasegmental parts because the intonation has been clearly described and has a definite tone.

The first method known as learning songs through 'hearing' or feeling can be categorized as a suprasegmental method, because it is guided by syllables or melodies that are estimated in nature. This method will tend to ignore the existence of other tones that are owned by one syllable in a song, for example the phrase "let e-v'ry heart" in the song "Joy to the World"; should have eight tones (compared to its syllables which only have four syllables), where 'e', 'v'ry' and 'heart' have two tones, two tones and three tones respectively. Learning songs by 'feeling' has a high possibility of singing the phrase with only four tones. If the learning is done segmentally, namely according to the music system or notation, then the number of tones will be clearly and precisely seen so that the

pronunciation will also be even according to the number of tones. The construction of polyphonic song compositions that have different voice lines need to be trained with a segmental system so that the accuracy of tone and rhythm is maintained.

CONCLUSION

The combination of music and linguistics in a form of arts called song allocating two different views of acquiring melody. There is a huge different of acquiring melody through notes and the one gained through feeling. Learning song by hearing accommodating the aspect of what linguistics called suprasegmental, while the other one performing the contrast, segmental perspective; in which both ways end in one melody.

Learning song through lyrics normally occur in note-blindness society which is accustomed to the practice of writing and reading language. People view singing similar to the activity of speaking and using language as a reference in singing classroom. Further study needs to be conducted in the future to compare the process of learning song, not only in music and linguistics but also in psychology perspective. The way the brain processes the segmental and suprasegmental view is interesting to be studied.

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