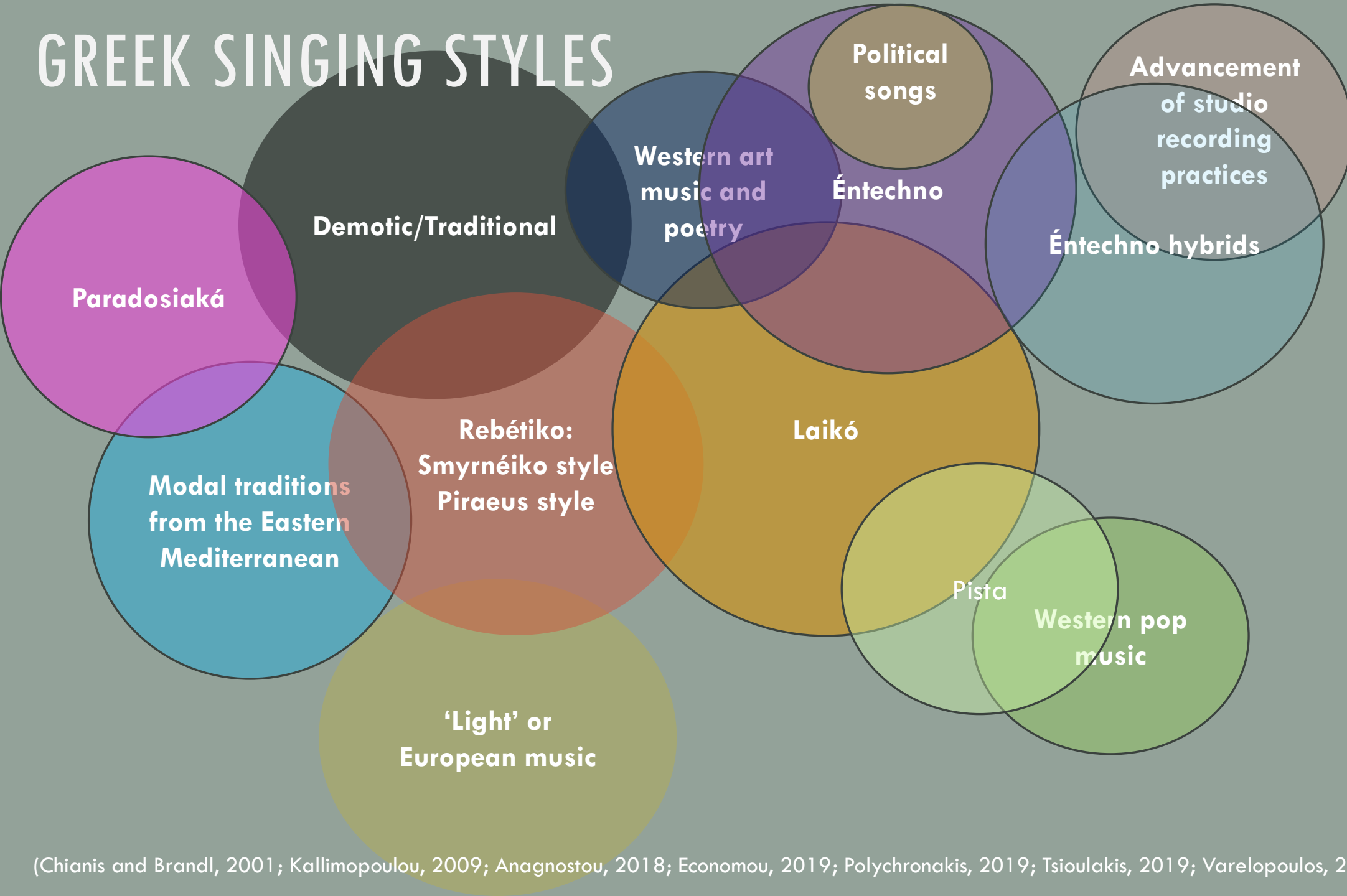




GREEK SINGING TIMBRES | A Pedagogical Exploration

Anna Tsipa

GREEK SINGING STYLES



VOCAL TIMBRE

- ❖ Encompasses all those perceptual auditory parameters that allow us to distinguish two different singers singing in the same pitch and loudness.

(American Psychological Association, 2024)

- ❖ Within the individual physiological boundaries of the vocal instrument, singing timbre can be diversly shaped through conscious or non-conscious vocal learning.

- ❖ Timbre shaping is ‘a discursive practice with corporeal consequences’

(Eidsheim, 2008, p.254)

THE GREEK VOICE-PEDAGOGICAL LANDSCAPE

- ❖ Elite Greek singers most often lack pedagogical articulation, as traditional and urban-folk timbre is ‘caught’, through imitation and social feedback, rather than ‘taught’ (Tsachouridis, 2008; Ranganathan, 2023; Tsipa, 2022).
- ❖ Exclusivity of Western classical voice pedagogy in Conservatory education until the 1990s.
- ❖ Marginalization of Greek folk-urban music (rebétiko, laikó) within Conservatory and academic education (Ordoulidis, 2014).
- ❖ Lack of dedicated lessons of voice-pedagogy in academic programs, as implied by academic curricula and corroborated by anecdotal reports (Department of Music Studies of Ionian University, 2024; Department of Music Studies of University of Ioannina, 2022; University of Macedonia, 2023).
- ❖ Voice-building—the establishment of ‘motor control and behavioral patterns which allow sustainable, healthy voice production’ (Gill and Herbst, 2016, p.170) within the conventions of the Greek singing styles—is taken over by teachers of diverse musical and educational backgrounds, with diverse understandings of vocal function.
- ❖ Long standing lack of a Greek voice-teachers’ association, founded only in 2024, has left voice-pedagogical practices largely unmapped.

THE TEACHER AS EXPERT-LISTENER

Voice-builders' expert-listening encompasses:

- ❖ Expert-singing skills in the respective style
- ❖ Understanding of voice physiology, acoustics, psychoacoustics
- ❖ Skills to apply knowledge in pedagogical context

(Gill and Herbst, 2016)

What the expert-listener hears 'is not necessarily about the sound; it is rather about what...[the listener]...believe[s] to be sounded', what is 'in tune' with their preconstructed notions of vocal timbre and correlated cultural schemas.

(Eidsheim, 2008, p.170)

- To what extent does science inform the teaching practice of Greek singer-teachers?
- How are Greek singing timbres perceived and shaped by Greek teachers, in relation to their highly diverse musical and educational backgrounds?

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Critical assessment of the available literature on Greek singing timbres.
- ❖ Exploration of how voice-teachers conceptualize timbre in Greek styles, and how diverse musical and educational backgrounds influence pedagogic approaches.
- ❖ Identification of potential gaps in pedagogical practice in Greek styles and proposals for improvement.

AIMS

- ❖ Contribute to the limited body of research on the Greek singing voice.
- ❖ Highlight the role of vocal timbre as a stylistic element and mean of signification.
- ❖ Offer useful insights to singers, educators, and researchers interested in Greek vocal music.
- ❖ Initiate a constructive dialogue among Greek voice practitioners towards a critical, evidence-based and culturally relevant voice pedagogy.

METHODOLOGY

Timbre's complex ontology necessitates a flexible ontological and epistemological stance

Theoretical interpretative bricolage (Kincheloe, 2005)

allowed engagement with scientific, interpretative, and critical approaches fostering deeper understanding and enabling the development of alternative interpretations and practices (Rogers, 2012)

Bricolage methodology aligns with the researcher's critical pragmatist paradigm, combining diverse perspectives, reflexivity, and examination of the ideologies that shape teaching practices, ultimately contributing to a transformative pedagogy (Van Manen, 1977; Morgan, 2014)

METHODS

❖ Literature Review

- a. Preliminary review of peer-reviewed and grey literature on the history and socio-cultural context of the Greek singing styles
- b. Critical literature review of the literature on the technical aspects of Greek singing practices

❖ **Interviews** of five singing pedagogues with professional standing, diverse musical and educational backgrounds, teaching singers of Greek styles in various educational settings.

PARTICIPANTS				
	PERFORMANCE EXPERIENCE	STUDIES	TEACHING	TEACHING SETTING/EXPERIENCE
P1	over 30 years in Greek laikó and éntechno	Contemporary singing in National Conservatory	Laikó and éntechno	Over 20 years of teaching in private studio
P2	Western classical choir	Western Classical Conservatory Education	Voice-building in all styles	23 years of teaching in • Conservatory and private studio • Creation and direction of a two-year voice-pedagogy course
P3	Afro-american popular styles	• BA Jazz singing • BS speech-therapy • Estill Voice Training Master	Voice-building in non-classical styles	17 years of teaching in • Private studio • Music schools • Drama schools
P4	20 years in Byzantine chanting, demotic, rebétiko, laikó	• Music high-school • BA in traditional and folk singing • MA in Byzantine chanting • Workshops and private lessons with classical singers in voice-technique	Demotic and urban-folk singing	5 years in • Academic programs • Workshops • Private lessons
P5	30 years in demotic, paradosiaká	• Music high-school • BA musicology, MA ethnomusicology and contemporary composition • Bulgarian singing in private lessons • Private lessons with a male classical singer in vocal technique	Traditional and paradosiaká	15 years in • Traditional choir direction • Workshops

Interviews' focus:

- a) personal vocal training, pedagogical approaches/challenges in timbre shaping, participants' views on the Greek singing landscape and their role as voice-teachers in it.
- b) discussion on a curated selection of YouTube videos featuring prominent singers of diverse Greek styles (Fleming, Gaidys and Robb, 2003)

Semi-structured → focused format

❖ Interview analysis through hermeneutic phenomenology (Annels, 1996)

Narrative data analysis suitable for the exploration of individual perspectives and the intricate ways in which individual backgrounds shaped them (Burck, 2005)

❖ Expansion of the theoretical interpretative framework through
Grounded Theory (Cohen, Manion and Morisson, 2007; Constantinou, Georgiou and Perdikogianni, 2017)

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- ❖ Informed participants' consent
- ❖ Use of code names, safe storage of participants' personal data, exclusion of data that could lead to participants' identification or harm third parties
- ❖ Extension of anonymity to the professionally active singers featured in the videos by attributing code names, particularly when negative commentary was present
- ❖ Inclusion of diverse pedagogical voices
- ❖ Prioritization of respectful collaboration, valuing the experience of all participants

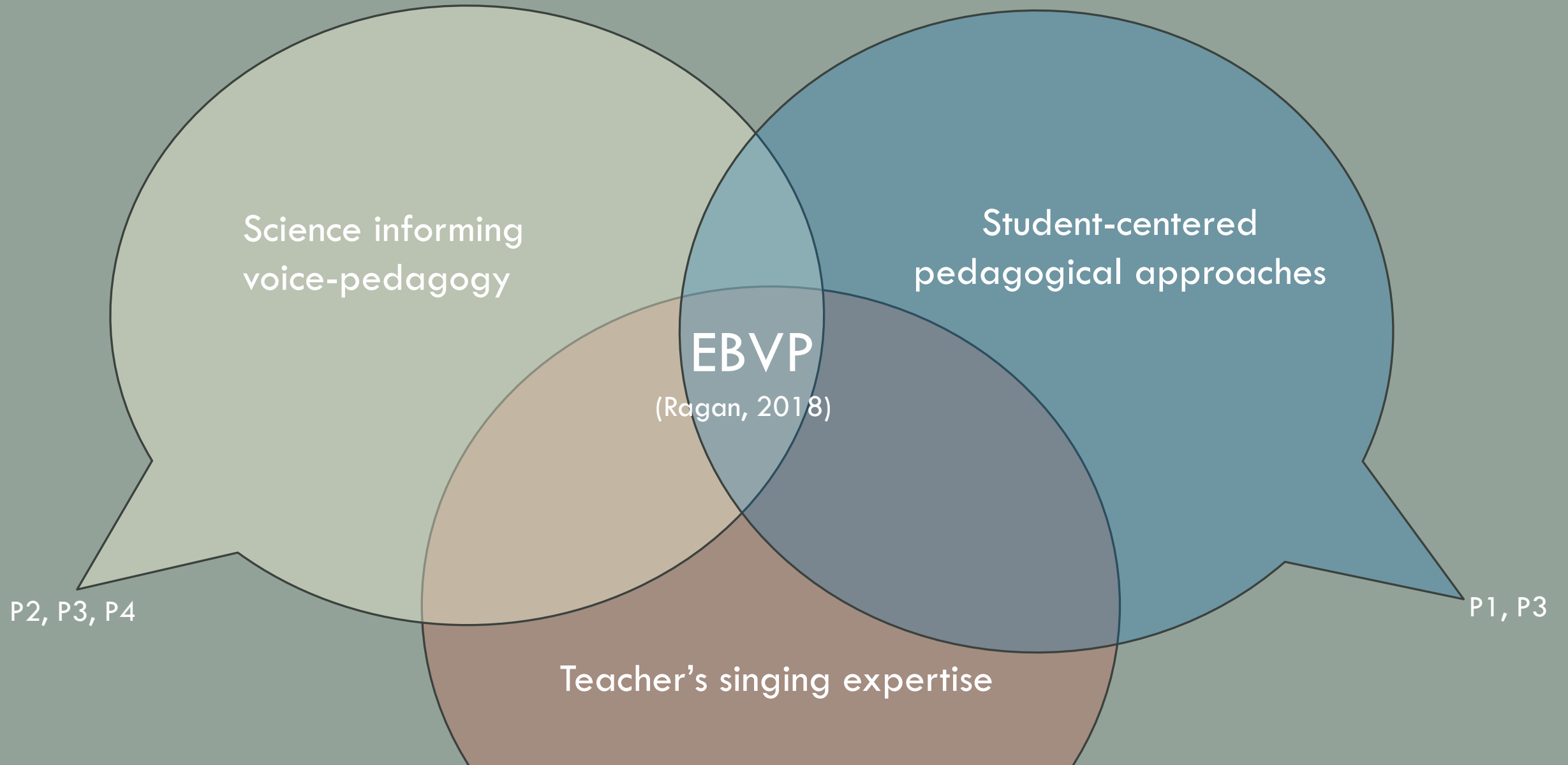
(Cohen, Manion and Morisson, 2007)

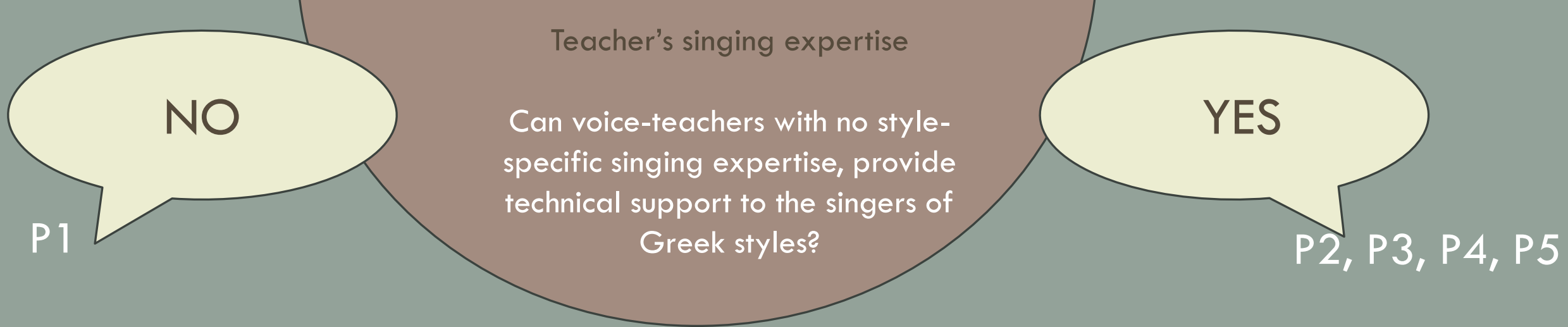
INSIDER RESEARCH STATUS

- ❖ Facilitated access to a diverse participants' sample, fostered trust, allowed understanding of cultural and technical complexities in participants' responses (Saidin and Yaacob, 2017).
- ❖ Adoption of Gadamer's view that pre-existing notions enable us understanding and interpreting difference (Gadamer, 1975, cited in Annells, 1996).
- ❖ A self-reflective, hermeneutically aware stance was prioritized over the pursuit of neutrality, which may inadvertently perpetuate hegemonic ideologies in research and education (Gramsci, 1971; Freire, 2000).
- ❖ Critical examination of interpretations and documentation of the researcher's evolving understandings throughout the research process
- ❖ Clear statement of researcher's positionality and inclusion of her own views on the discussed singing timbres alongside those of the participants (Kincheloe, 2005)

FINDINGS

What do we need to improve pedagogical practice in Greek singing styles?



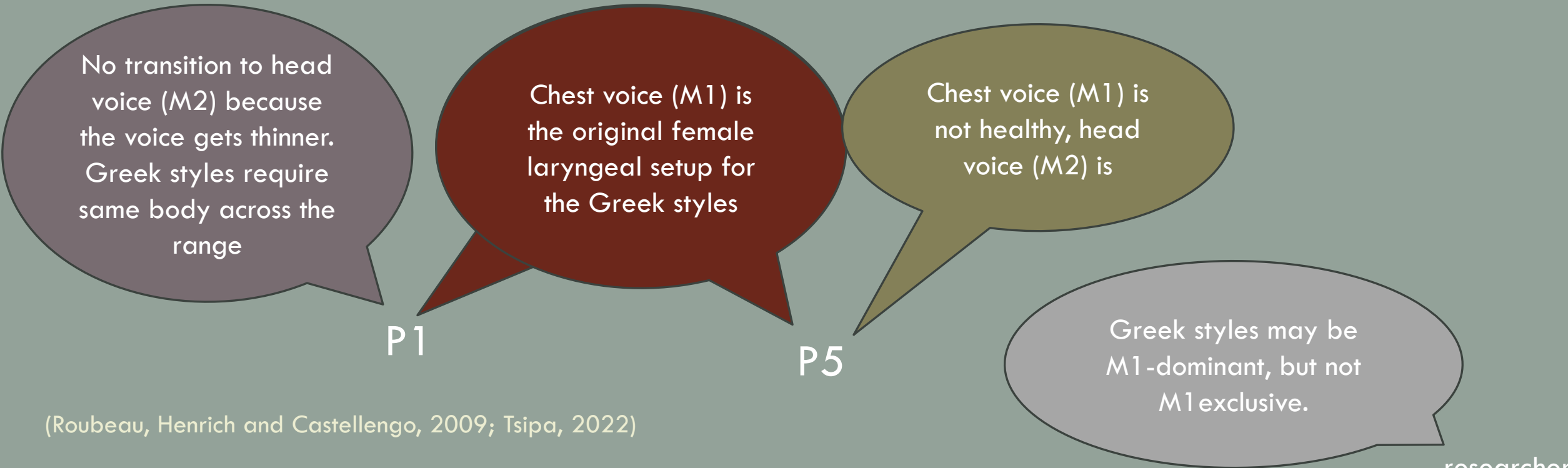


P1: Voice-teachers, outsiders of the tradition, impose their own vocal standards on students, hindering their artistic development. **P1** emphasizes the importance of embodied and contextual, style-specific knowledge and is skeptical about the usefulness of scientific understandings.

P2, P3, P4, P5: Teaching voice-technique requires specialized, science-based knowledge. Stylistic expertise is not necessary to provide 'objective' technical support. The objective criterion for voice-building is vocal health.

- **P4**, despite his extensive academic studies in traditional singing and Byzantine chanting, considers himself self-taught in vocal technique and would prefer teaching repertoire than voice-building.
- **P5**, despite her 5-year systematic vocal training in Bulgarian singing, reports lacking automaticity in basic singing skills such as 'support' and perceives chest-like sounds above the passaggio as strenuous.
- **P4** and **P5** received technical instruction from classical singers to resolve past vocal issues, focused on vocal exercises and devoid of repertoire context. This approach probably fostered a view of technique as a specialized and style-independent discipline, accessible through an 'objective' lens.

- ❖ Singing styles differ across all parameters of phonation, laryngeal register, formant tuning, use of amplification, pitch range, need for textual clarity (Sundberg, 2019; Tsachouridis, 2008)
- ❖ Singer-teachers' diverse singing experiences, can lead to diverse and sometimes conflicting notions of vocal efficiency, even within the Greek tradition.



No transition to head voice (M2) because the voice gets thinner. Greek styles require same body across the range

P1

Chest voice (M1) is the original female laryngeal setup for the Greek styles

P5

Chest voice (M1) is not healthy, head voice (M2) is

Greek styles may be M1-dominant, but not M1 exclusive.

(Roubeau, Henrich and Castellengo, 2009; Tsipa, 2022)

researcher

- ❖ Lack of analytical understanding, may perpetuate hegemonic ideologies and western classical pedagogic authority.
- ❖ Analytical understandings, though facilitate decoding timbre perception, are not enough for the teacher to discern the stylistically appropriate vocal setup when there is no musical, embodied understanding (Gill and Herbst, 2019).

Dalgás (male Smyrnéiko, demotic)

How is he doing these melismas?!
Distinct, fast, I cannot do this... A different school.

P1

Wasn't he a classical tenor?

P5

P4

differs from classical: higher larynx, no or little tilt, and a higher tongue placement...same technique as demotic singing

bel canto technique: a high, open placement; high soft palate, low larynx, full resonance.

P2

thin vocal folds, abrupt laryngeal movements with body-cover change, mid-palate position and back vowels during ornamentations. **'I wouldn't work on this thing...! In R&B they do it with an open mouth and a lighter sound'.**

P3

Payioumtzis (male rebétiko)

He knew what bel canto was...rebetiko requires a robust articulation

P4

Heavy, constricted, unwieldy.

He goes up and down with great ease and precision.

P5

Not overall pressed, but there may be some constriction when H2 approaches F1 vowels' area (above D4). F1 raising strategy.

I would definitely give them lessons... they didn't know how to sing very well...

Grey (female heavy laikó)

Bel canto...she had ease at the top

P4

She was comfortable

P1

Very heavy, very pressed... I was shocked!

P3

Pressed. Similar sound with female demotic singers.

P5

I perceive no constriction. I think she decreases mass as she ascends in pitch. Possible transition in M2 with pharyngeal narrowing in C#5 here, D5 in other songs. M1-based, yet mixed registration

A.B. (male demotic)

'An admirable tool'

P1

'He is pressed...
he is holding the
air down with
the larynx'

P2

Rougher, more
pressed than the old
Smyrnéiko....but the
melismas are like the
old Smyrnéiko style

P3

These ornamentations are impossible to perform with such agility and accuracy with a pressed voice. Loud phonation in yell timbre, inevitably increased roughness close to Bb4. Old recordings probably are of reduced roughness due to their narrow frequency range.

researcher

H.R. (female éntechno-laikó, here in a Smyrnéiko song)

in the higher notes she
modifies the vowels
trying to resemble the
Smyrnéiko... which is a
different school of
technique than éntechno-
laikó.

P1

goddess! wow, wow,
wow! How
beautiful...there is
space!

P2

chesty, thick

P3

The vocal setup is good
for laikó and éntechno-
laikó but inefficient for the
original key, tempo, and
musical articulation of
Smyrnéiko style.

researcher

DISCUSSION: MULTITHEORETICAL EXAMINATION OF EMERGENT THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

Real Voice

cognitive psychology (Barrett, 2017)

neuroscience (Kleber and Zarate, 2019)

critical studies

(Eidsheim, 2008; Eagen, 2021)

timbre physiology, acoustics and psychoacoustics
(Herbst, 2020,2021; Howel, 2017)

voice pedagogy

(Welch, 2012; Tsipa, 2024)



Multiple singing timbres are possible, provided the investment in dedicated, varied practice to transcend quotidian vocal modification such as mimicry

Performative Voice

Reconciliation of two seemingly conflicting aims: honoring the repertoires' socio-culturally embedded ethos and achieving self-expression. Self-discovery and identity construction becomes ongoing through singing practice.

DISCUSSION: MULTITHEORETICAL EXAMINATION OF EMERGENT THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

Greek vowels are of 'low', 'chesty' placement, lacking 'twang'. Belting and twang serve the American singing and require adaptation to the 'low', Greek vowel placement.

voice acoustics and psychoacoustics

(Howel, 2017; Titze, Maxfield and Walker, 2017; Perta, Bae and Obert, 2020; Jelinger et al., 2024)



phonetics and phonology

(Hawks and Fourakis, 1995; Ladefoged and Johnson, 2005; Arvaniti, 2007)

Vocal twang in singing is distinct from the dialectic American twang in speech, and independent from the linguistic content of the voice

'Chestiness' is a perceptual, psychoacoustic attribute, dependent upon the harmonic structure of the voice spectrum and independent of the linguistic content of the voice

A greater tendency among Greek speakers to categorize vowel sounds as non-Greek in comparison to American-English speakers, possibly posing intelligibility limitations in formant tuning.

Need for further investigation, considering that in singing vowel perception is shaped by the entire acoustic spectrum and not solely by F1 and F2, as in speech

CONCLUSIONS

- ❖ Personal singing experience, analytical understandings and ideologies influence expert-listeners' timbre perception (Gill and Herbst, 2016; Eidsheim, 2008), often leading to conflicting notions of vocal efficiency within the Greek styles.
- ❖ Stark dichotomy between teaching style and voice-building in Greek styles (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5), stemming from long-standing and ongoing educational deficiencies.
 - Music high-schools neglect solo singing and fundamentals of vocal technique (Kyriazopoulou, 2022), hindering Greek singers' vocal development during a critical phase for vocal growth (Welch, 2012).
 - Academic programs on Greek singing lack dedicated lessons on vocal pedagogy, while academic singing teachers struggle to access valid knowledge to resolve students' vocal problems, potentially limiting the singing and pedagogic development of the graduates (P4).

CONCLUSIONS

- ❖ Technical instruction in Greek styles is hegemonized by Western classical or Western contemporary singer-teachers —potentially also informed by style-independent pedagogic models— with no relevant performance experience (P1, P4, P5).
- ❖ Systematically trained singers, potentially outsiders of the tradition, can help singers of Greek styles in improving breath-to-folds coordination and body alignment, however suggesting laryngeal and acoustic strategies requires style-specific knowledge.
- ❖ Potential disconnect between espoused theories and theories-in-use in pedagogic practice (Argyris and Schön, 1974). 'Vocal health' and 'science' are sometimes misused as rhetorical tools, without actual scientific foundation, to assert authority and conceal pedagogic bias (Brookfield, 1998; Ioannidis, 2018).
- ❖ Research on Greek vocal techniques is very limited and problematic in terms of pedagogical applicability:
 - Retrieved qualitative MA and BA dissertations lack engagement with voice-literature and employ ambiguous terminology (Psatha, 2017; Dimopoulos, 2020; Ioannou, 2016)
 - Acoustic studies with properly recorded samples are scarce (Sarris and Tzevelekos, 2009; Kolozakis, Georgaki and Kouroupetoglou, 2021), far from covering the multitude of regional traditional styles.
 - Methodologies currently employed in the research of historic Greek timbre raise questions of validity (Zacharakis, Kazazis and Cambouropoulos, 2023; Zacharakis and Cambouropoulos, 2024; Zacharakis, Gkougkoustamou and Cambouropoulos, 2024)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Greek vocal education necessitates a transformation towards an evidence-based framework (Ragan, 2018), where science-informed, student-centered pedagogic approaches are integrated with the expertise of Greek singer-teachers.

The nascent Hellenic Voice Teachers' Association could take a leading role towards this transformation by:

- establishing research partnerships with universities to investigate the physiological and acoustic features of Greek singing styles
- developing specialized training programs for voice-teachers that integrate scientific knowledge with culturally informed pedagogical approaches
- creating a platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration among voice-teachers, researchers, educational and cultural institutions.

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AUDIO SAMPLES

Antonis Dalgás (1932)



Stratos Payioumtzis (1961)



Katy Grey (1962)



A.B.



H.R.



Τέλος

(The End)