

# Vocal Teacher Terminology

An International Survey on the Terminology Used by Vocal Teachers in Europe, USA, Asia and South Africa.

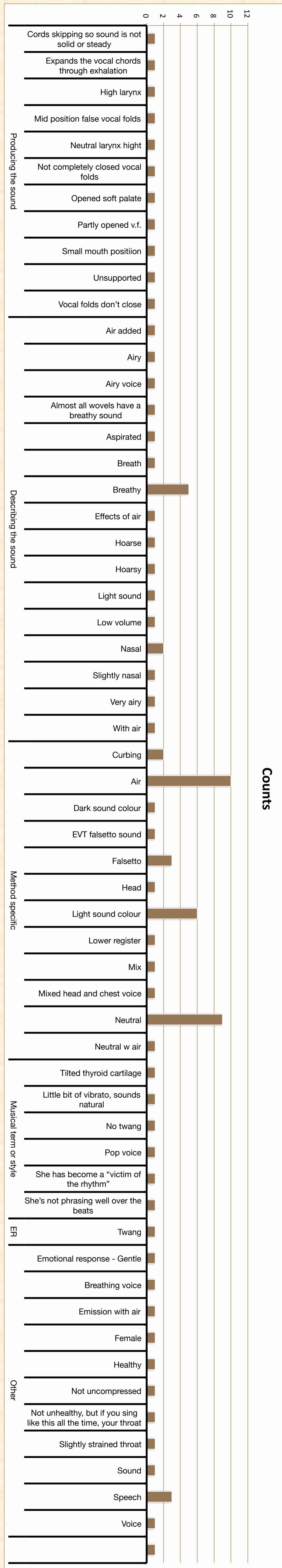


Figure 1. Variety of descriptions and terms used by the respondents in the evaluation of the word "when". Bars illustrate the number of respondents using the particular term.

## A Genuine Interest...

The study is an investigation in the possibility to identify differences and similarities in the terminology of Vocal Teachers.

### Research question

**"Do Vocal Teachers use the same terminology, when describing the sounds of the singing voice?"**

### Method

11 short commercial sound clips from different genres of music were compiled with a transcript of the lyrics. The clips were presented in an online questionnaire together with the lyrics.

Respondents were asked to characterize the singing in words and terms. Furthermore they were asked to mark the terms precisely on the forms, indicating when and how the voice changed.

The survey was distributed via internet to 530 professional vocal teachers (April 2011), and to a total of 171 universities and conservatories in Denmark and internationally (November 2012).

Our intention was to collect data from approx 100 respondents, that subsequently would be processed and analysed.

### Results

The survey was returned continually until April 2013 and includes 11 sound examples, and a questionnaire.

We received the amount of 53 survey reports from teachers worldwide.

Within the survey reports, we have detected 468 different terms in use. Those are divided into 7 main categories, and several sub-categories.

As the full statistical analysis is not available yet, this is an ongoing project with aims, objectives and methods.

### Conclusion

Vocal teachers use a huge variety of terms to describe the singing voice. These can be categorised into words, used to describe how the sound is produced, description of the sound itself, terms used in various singing methods, musical terms, mixed terms, those that induce an emotional response and "other".

Many of these terms are not clearly defined and open to different interpretations. Even those used as part of most established singing methods are not defined. Of concern is the use of anatomical and physiological terms based on the vocal teachers' perception of their own voice. This can potentially lead to communicational problems between teachers and their students.

There are some clearly defined tendencies when it comes to the following:

**"Vocal teachers use different terms for the same sounds. Only 28% of the respondents seem to agree on a terminology"**

We have also detected that following possible studies could succeed the present study:

**"Does a lack of common terminology affect possible cooperation, and the sharing of knowledge between vocal teachers?"**

### This research study is undertaken by:

- Bebiane Bøje, assoc. Professor, The Royal Academy of Music Aarhus, 1
- Anders Ørsager, assoc. Professor, Rhythmic Music Conservatory CPH, 2
- Cathrine Sadolin, Complete Vocal Institute Copenhagen, 3
- Henrik Kjelin, Complete Vocal Institute Copenhagen, 4
- Julian McGlashan, ENT, Queen's Medical Centre, Department of Otorhinolaryngology, Nottingham University Hospitals, UK, 5

Category	Definition	Sub-category	Examples
Producing the sound	This is where there is some reference to the assumed anatomical site or physiological mode determined by application of scientific knowledge to the sound production. Perceived involvement of structures through experiential learning and perception which is not related to a specific method.	Anatomical	High larynx, False folds closing
		Physiological	High subglottal pressure
		Perceptual	Anterior part of the face resonance, Compresses the larynx to close the upper part of the resonance
Describing the sound	This can relate to terms used in describing positive or negative features of different elements of the sound, such as loudness, pitch, overall tonal quality and added vocal effects. The sound is not relating to those used and defined in specific methods.	Acoustic terms	Jitter
		Phonetic terms	Aspirated, Glottal onset
		Use of simple adjectives	Clear tone, Dirty, Projected, Airy voice
		Use of imagery	Drops of scratch sound, Open sound
Method specific	The terms used are those that are either accepted, defined or commonly used in established singing techniques or pedagogic methods. They may relate to producing or describing the sound.	Modal	Modal register heavy
		Bel canto	Register, Chest, Head mix
		Estill	EVT falsetto sound
		CVT	Overdrive, Curbing
		Other	1st bridge, #3 larynx
		Musical term or style	Collatura, Screamo, No vibrato, Volume low, no twang
Mixed Terms	This is when a method specific or musical term is combined with another term or adjective, which alters the meaning of the original.	Open chest, Chest resonance pressed	
Emotional response	The terminology used reflects an emotional response in the listener to the music or song.	Emotional	Angry, Cautionary, Beautiful
Other	This category includes other terms and comments which do not fit into the above.	Descriptive terms	Light blend, Normal, Healthy, Unhealthy
		Comment	a "no-go" in the classical world
		Use of imagery	Breathless, Fishface, "Half-tube" resonator shape

Figure 2. Categorisation of the responses with definitions, sub-categories and examples

### The study is a part of a research programme

This study is a part of a series of studies conducted by 3,4,5 since 2009.

#### Data résumé

- Start of research project April 2011
- Data collection from April 2011 to April 2013
- Participants: 530 professional vocal teachers and 171 Universities and Conservatories Worldwide

#### Research Partners:

- The Royal Academy of Music Aarhus, Denmark
- Rhythmic Music Conservatory Copenhagen, Denmark
- Complete Vocal Institute Copenhagen, Denmark
- Nottingham University Hospital, United Kingdom