

The Status of International Phonetic Alphabet Transcriptions in Archived Choral Octavos with Foreign Language Texts Distributed in the United States from 1970 – 2013: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Both previous research and an array of vocal methods materials have suggested that the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) facilitates learning sung diction. This exploratory study examined archived SATB choral octavos ($N = 184$) with foreign language texts distributed in the United States across four decades (1970 – 2013) to ascertain to what extent these octavos provided (a) IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) transcriptions and (b) other tools to assist conductors and singers with articulating and comprehending foreign language texts. Results indicated that less than half (45%, $n = 83$) of the examined octavos provided word by word diction assistance, 19% ($n = 35$) provided IPA transcriptions, and 26% ($n = 48$) supplied English transliterations. More than half of the octavos (53%, $n = 97$) included a general pronunciation guide without word by word assistance. Most octavos (96%, $n = 177$) provided poetic translations of texts, with 9% including a word by word poetic translation. These exploratory data were discussed in terms of directions for future research, and possible discrepancies between current directions in choral pedagogy and the overall publishing practices exhibited in the examined choral octavos.

Keywords

International Phonetic Alphabet, diction, foreign language choral octavos, pronunciation guides

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Diction learning of any language is a complex process because the spelling of a word does not always coincide with how it sounds. Globalization and the broadening of the world's cultural boundaries have moved once obscure languages to the forefront of choral music performance. Increasingly, singers and choral directors must master the diction of multiple languages set to music. Although singers may learn the diction of particular texts through rote listening or phonetic transliterations, International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) transcriptions may provide a more stable, consistent means to learn the sounds of a particular language. The proliferation of web-based IPA resources (e.g. Diction Domain), the availability of commercially produced IPA transcriptions (e.g., IPA Source) for purchase, and the recent advent of software applications that automatically transcribe texts in various languages into IPA symbols (e.g., IPA Now) may attest to a growing interest among singers and conductors in using the IPA.

Various voice pedagogues have long endorsed IPA as an effective tool to assist singers with learning diction. As early as 1967, Appelman advocated that this phonetic system be implemented in voice studios as a consistent instrument for teaching and learning the rules of diction of multiple languages. Other writers have agreed with this recommendation (Armstrong & Hustad, 1986; Christy & Paton, 1997; Marshall, 1953; Moriarty, 1975; Kaplan, 1985; Robertson, 1995; Wall, 1989).

Numerous choral methods books (e.g., Gordon, 1977; Hylton, 1995; Kaplan, 1985; May & Tolin, 1987; Robinson & Winold, 1992) have suggested that the use of the IPA is a necessary skill for both conductors and singers. Phillips (1992) submitted that the study of diction could become an easier task if students learned and understood IPA symbols at younger ages.

More recently, Karna (2010) developed a comprehensive resource for choral educators

who aspire to teach IPA symbols by addressing their use for English, Ecclesiastical Latin, Italian, German, Germanic Latin, French, Spanish, Hebrew, Romanian, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Brazilian Portuguese, Swahili, Basque, Hawaiian, Hungarian, Baltic Languages, Dutch, Russian, Swedish, Finnish, Greek, Norwegian, and Polish.

Emmons and Chase (2009) stated, "A testament to the usefulness of the IPA is the fact that it would be difficult to find any major musical institution whose vocal department does not insist on the use of the IPA" (p. 97). They suggested that use of the IPA afforded a systematic framework for accurate vowel execution, which, in turn, permits choral singers to achieve better ensemble blend and resonance through vowel uniformity.

Empirical studies of IPA instruction, though comparatively small in number, have tended to confirm the perspectives of choral pedagogy writers. As early as 1942, Peterson investigated the ability of pre-school children to produce the sounds of the IPA, and studied the relationships of chronological age, intelligence, and sex to this ability. Results showed that even the youngest children (31 to 36 months) could produce the sounds of IPA vowels and diphthongs. Articulatory efficiency most closely related to age and intelligence, rather than sex.

Flower (1936) investigated the effectiveness of two methods of teaching French pronunciation to young students. Results showed that participants assigned to the "Phonetic Method" (IPA symbols, conventional spellings of these symbols, as well as physiological production) demonstrated a smaller number of pronunciation errors and a greater ability of comprehension than participants assigned to the "Imitation Method."

Epp (1993) found that choral conductors who had taken a college diction class and whose applied concentration was voice (or who belonged to professional choral-singing

organizations) used significantly more non-English texts with their choirs, were more comfortable with non-English texts, and were more likely to use IPA than other choral conductors surveyed. Pan (1997) investigated the effectiveness of three types of diction instruction (phonetic instruction using the IPA, phonetic instruction using the English Phonetic Alphabet (EPA), and traditional rote instruction) for performance of liturgical Latin diction in selected choral pieces performed by three middle school mixed choirs. Findings revealed significant difference among treatment groups in favor of the IPA experimental treatment for improving text reading accuracy and application of phonetic knowledge in phonetic translations of unstudied Latin texts. Participants also preferred phonetic instruction to traditional rote instruction.

Dekaney (2003) investigated the effect of time in computerized versus classroom instruction on the ability to correctly pronounce English words phonetically transcribed into IPA using a pre- post-test design. Participants ($N = 63$) were randomly assigned to one of three groups to receive phonetic instruction using IPA symbols for English: (a) class only, (b) computer only, and (c) class and computer. Results showed significant differences among the groups' posttest scores. Scores from the class and computer group were highest, followed by the class only group. Findings suggested that choral conductors would be able to teach IPA symbols efficiently to inexperienced adult singers within a short period of time.

Numerous vocal pedagogues have advocated use of the IPA by singers and choral directors as a means to learn the diction of a particular language. Previous empirical research has suggested that singers of all ages can efficiently acquire facility with IPA, and that learning the diction of a given language text through IPA may transfer to learning unfamiliar texts in that language. To date, however, no

investigation has examined the extent to which choral music octavos published by major firms include IPA transcriptions.

Omission of these transcriptions would not necessarily deter use of the IPA by choral conductors and singers. Inclusion of IPA transcriptions, however, could save the time it takes for singers to write IPA symbols in their scores during rehearsal or the preparation time needed for conductors to provide singers with separate, teacher-made IPA handouts.

The purpose of this study was to examine an archived selection of SATB choral octavos ($N = 184$) with foreign language texts distributed in the United States between 1970 and 2013 to ascertain to what extent these octavos provided (a) IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) transcriptions and (b) other tools to assist conductors and singers with articulating and comprehending foreign language texts.

Method

A major publishing firm may issue hundreds of new choral octavos each year. Because publishers do not consistently include the presence or absence of IPA transcriptions in catalogue descriptions, visual examination of published choral octavos is the only reliable means by which to ascertain the status of such transcriptions. Only visual inspection, moreover, can determine with consistency whether IPA transcriptions appear as part of the choral score (above or below the printed text used in singing) or occur elsewhere in an octavo. Moreover, there exists no database that contains all choral octavos published within a given timeframe from which a truly random sample might be extracted.

Therefore, a convenience sample of SATB choral octavos with foreign language texts archived at a university in the Northeast United States constituted the initial data for this exploratory investigation. The octavos housed in this archive originated from the personal

libraries of two choral conductors, each with more than 20 years of experience directing SATB choirs. The octavos had been collected since 1996 from reading sessions at national and regional conferences of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) and the National Association for Music Education (NAfME). They thus represented selected compositions and arrangements that had been recommended by either publishers or clinicians at national and regional conferences over the course of 17 years.

I first culled from this archive all SATB octavos with foreign language texts. I then excluded from consideration texts in Latin, German, Italian, and French that had been frequently set to choral music, under the assumption that foreign language texts already familiar to conductors and singers may not require as much assistance with diction as would less familiar texts.

This process yielded 184 SATB octavos with texts in 50 languages from 55 countries published between the years of 1970 and 2013 by 27 publishing firms. The 50 languages represented in this sample ranged from major languages, such as Spanish and French, to lesser known languages, such as Phanti, Tsonga, Krio, Kraó, and Luo. As seen in Figure 1, the four languages appearing most frequently were: (a) Spanish (17%), (b) Hebrew (13%), (c) Portuguese (7%), and (d) Zulu (5%).

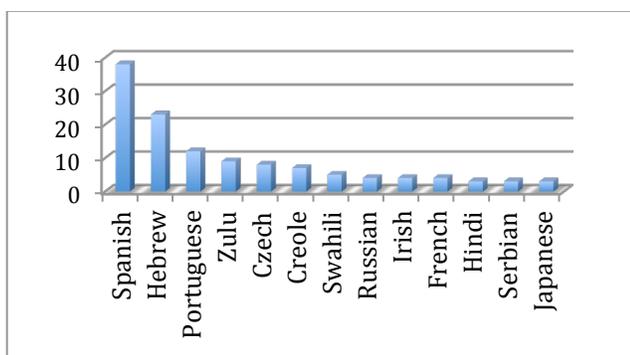


Figure 1. Languages appearing most frequently in texts of the archived octavos.

Sixty octavos (33% of the sample) contained other languages that appeared less frequently in only one or two publications. The language of one song from Senegal, a country in which there are more than 11 national languages, was not identified in the octavo.

Of the 55 countries and seven continents represented in the texts of the sample, the largest geographic representation (61 octavos, 33%) came from South America (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay, Venezuela, Peru, and Chile) and Africa (Sierra Leone, South Africa, Senegal, Kenya, Nigeria, and Tanzania). Although 13% of the texts were in Hebrew, no one country could have been determined as a geographic origin, a factor that also characterized texts in Yiddish and Ladino.

The octavos in this sample represented 27 publishing companies: earthsongs ($n = 45$), Boosey & Hawkes ($n = 21$), Alliance ($n = 10$), Santa Barbara ($n = 10$), Transcontinental ($n = 9$), Walton Music ($n = 9$), Kjos ($n = 9$), Hal Leonard ($n = 8$), Alliance Publications ($n = 7$), Roger Dean ($n = 7$), Oxford ($n = 6$), World Music Press ($n = 6$), E.C. Schirmer ($n = 6$), Pavane ($n = 5$), Musica Russica ($n = 4$), Mark Foster ($n = 4$), National Music Publishing ($n = 3$), Carl Fischer ($n = 3$), Alfred ($n = 2$), G. Schirmer ($n = 2$), Lawson Gould ($n = 2$), Emerson ($n = 1$), Colla Voce ($n = 1$), Shawnee Press ($n = 1$), Third Planet ($n = 1$), Theodore Presser ($n = 1$), and Hinshaw ($n = 1$).

Publication dates ranged from 1970 to 2013. Two octavos did not list a date of publication. Of the remaining 182 octavos, 103 (56%) were published in the twenty-first century (2000-2013), while 79 (43%) were published between 1990-1999.

The multiple languages, countries, publishing companies, and dates of publication reflected in these 184 octavos appeared to afford a reasonably varied sample to analyze for purposes of generating hypotheses for future research relative to the presence of IPA

transcriptions in published SATB choral compositions and arrangements.

A preliminary assessment of each of these octavos revealed multiple ways by which publishing companies provided assistance with foreign language text diction. On the basis of this initial assessment, I subsequently examined each octavo to catalogue inclusion of one or more of the following elements: (a) IPA transcription (yes or no), (b) poetic translation (yes or no), (c) word-by-word translation (yes or no), (d) pronunciation guide (yes or no), (e) English transliteration (yes or no), and (f) when appropriate, other descriptive data that enhanced the information about each octavo.

Upon completion of this process an independent observer compared each octavo against the researcher's recorded classifications

in order to calculate reliability using the formula, "the number of agreements between two independent observers divided by the number of agreements plus disagreements" (Yarbrough, 2008, p. 128). Reliability between the two observers was 96%.

Results

Research Question One: IPA Transcriptions

Of the 184 SATB octavos examined, 35 (19%) provided an IPA transcription. Table 1 organizes these octavos in ascending year of publication by title, publisher, language, and country.

Table 1. *Choral Octavos with IPA Transcription*

| TITLE | PUBLISHER | LANGUAGE | COUNTRY | YEAR |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|------------|--------------------|------|
| <i>Palpahaugen</i> | Kjos | Norwegian | Norway | 1992 |
| <i>Wonfa Nyem</i> | World Music Press | Akan | Ghana | 1992 |
| <i>El Vito</i> | Hinshaw | Spanish | Spain | 1993 |
| <i>Pengyou Ting</i> | earthsongs | Chinese | China | 1994 |
| <i>Lua, Lua, Lua</i> | earthsongs | Portuguese | Brazil | 1996 |
| <i>Noél Ayisyen</i> | Mark Foster | Creole | Haiti | 1996 |
| <i>Três cantos nativos dos Índios</i> | earthsongs | Kraó | Brazil | 1996 |
| <i>La Zamba de los Besos</i> | Roger Dean | Spanish | Argentina | 1997 |
| <i>Morena, Morena</i> | Roger Dean | Portuguese | Brazil | 1997 |
| <i>Para Peneirar</i> | earthsongs | Portuguese | Brazil | 1997 |
| <i>Gate Gate</i> | earthsongs | Sanskrit | India | 1998 |
| <i>Maringa Krimeses</i> | earthsongs | Krio | Sierra Leone | 1998 |
| <i>Papa Nou</i> | Mark Foster | Creole | Haiti | 1998 |
| <i>La Perla</i> | Boosey & Hawkes | Spanish | Cuba | 1999 |
| <i>Zungo</i> | Roger Dean | Nigerian | Nigeria | 1999 |
| <i>Alélouya</i> | Mark Foster | Creole | Haiti | 2000 |
| <i>Casita de Campo</i> | Boosey & Hawkes | Spanish | Dominican Republic | 2001 |
| <i>Chanflín</i> | Boosey & Hawkes | Spanish | Dominican Republic | 2001 |
| <i>Don Óíche úd l mBeithil</i> | E.C. Schirmer | Irish | Ireland | 2002 |
| <i>Dulámán</i> | E.C. Schirmer | Irish | Ireland | 2002 |
| <i>'S í do Mhaimeo í</i> | E.C. Schirmer | Irish | Ireland | 2002 |
| <i>Sauntraí na Malghodine</i> | E.C. Schirmer | Irish | Ireland | 2002 |
| <i>Ton Thé</i> | Colla Voce | French | USA | 2003 |
| <i>El Cielo Canta</i> | Boosey & Hawkes | Spanish | Argentina | 2005 |

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|--------------------------------|-----------------|------------|---------------------|------|
| <i>Three Caribbean Chants</i> | Boosey & Hawkes | Spanish | Puerto Rico | 2006 |
| <i>Naye-e-sin</i> | earthsongs | Navajo | USA | 2008 |
| <i>Nesta Rua</i> | earthsongs | Portuguese | Brazil | 2008 |
| <i>Twa Tanbou</i> | Walton Music | Creole | Haiti | 2008 |
| <i>Mama Afrika</i> | Walton Music | Creole | Haiti | 2009 |
| <i>Y se quedaran</i> | earthsongs | Spanish | Venezuela | 2009 |
| <i>Entarisii ala Benziyor</i> | earthsongs | Turkish | Turkey | 2012 |
| <i>Lok Sui Tien</i> | earthsongs | Hakka | China | 2012 |
| <i>Sach' Idao</i> | earthsongs | Georgian | Republic of Georgia | 2012 |
| <i>Soleram</i> | earthsongs | Sumatran | Indonesia | 2012 |
| <i>Two Brazilian Folksongs</i> | Carl Fischer | Portuguese | Brazil | 2012 |
| <i>En El Principio</i> | Boosey & Hawkes | Spanish | Spain | 2013 |

Of these 35 octavos with IPA transcriptions, 13 (36%) were published by earthsongs, 6 (17%) by Boosey & Hawkes, 4 (11%) by E.C. Schirmer, 3 (8%) by Roger Dean, 3 (8%) by Mark Foster, and 2 (6%) by Walton Music. Carl Fischer, Kjos, Colla Voce, World Music Press, and Hinshaw each had one octavo (3%) with IPA transcription represented. The earliest IPA transcriptions in this array of octavos were published in 1992 ("Palpahaugen" from Kjos, "Wonfa Nyem" from World Music Press).

The languages transcribed into IPA included Spanish (9 texts), Creole (5 texts), Portuguese (5 texts), and Irish (4 texts). Sanskrit, Kraó, Krio, Navajo, Chinese, Norwegian, French, Nigerian, Akan, Turkish, Hakka, and Georgian had one IPA transcription each.

Most (94%, $n = 34$) of these IPA transcriptions appeared in the octavos separate from the choral score. Only two (6%) of the transcriptions appeared within the score, either placed underneath the original text and English transliteration ("Zungo" published by Roger Dean) or above the English transliteration ("Wonfa Nyem" published by World Music Press).

In most instances (89%, $n = 32$), the composer, arranger, or editor had transcribed the text into IPA. In two of these octavos (6%), someone other than the composer, arranger, or editor provided the IPA transcription ("La Zamba de Los Besos" published by Roger Dean, and "Alélouya" published by Mark Foster). For

two other octavos ("Lua, Lua, Lua" and "Para Peneirar," both published by earthsongs), the editor completed the IPA transcription with the assistance of another person.

Eleven (31%) of the octavos containing IPA transcriptions also included a pronunciation guide ("Palpahaugen," "Wonfa Nyem," "Pengyou Ting," "Para Peneirar," "Gate Gate," "Papa Nou," "Zungo," "Alélouya," "Three Caribbean Chants," "Nesta Rua," and "Two Brazilian Folksongs").

IPA transcriptions occurred consistently in some choral series: (a) "Don Oícre Úd 1 mBeithil, Dúlaman," "Sauntrí na Malghodine," and "S í do Mhaímeo I" published by E.C. Schirmer in the David Mooney Irish Choral Series; (b) "Mama Afrika" and "Twa Tanbou," composed by Sidney Guillaume and published by Walton Music; and (c) "Casita de Campo" and "Chanflín," arranged by Juan-Tony Guzman and published by Boosey & Hawkes).

Research Question Two: Other Aids

Of the examined octavos, 177 (96%) contained poetic translations of the foreign language texts. Most of these poetic translations (98%, $n = 174$) appeared outside the score, printed alongside a repetition of the original text. In three octavos, however, the poetic translation appeared in the choral score, printed underneath the foreign text in the music ("Ale Brider" published by World Music Press,

"Three Brazilian Folksongs" published by Carl Fischer, and "Ce Grand Martin" published by Mark Foster).

Ninety-seven octavos (53%) provided some sort of pronunciation guide. These guides were sometimes quite comprehensive with detailed information about consonants and vowels (e.g., "Na Bahia Tem" published by Alliance, "Three Caribbean Chants" published by Boosey & Hawkes). Other guides, by contrast, contained only a word or two (e.g., "N'Kosi sikelel'I Africa" published by Hal Leonard, "Hine Hine" published by earthsongs, and "Joulupuu on rakennettu" published by Boosey & Hawkes).

Of the octavos examined, 48 (26%) provided English transliterations, sometimes referred to as English phonetic transcriptions. Occasionally, these transliterations appeared as part of the choral score. Most often, they appeared elsewhere in the octavo, usually under the reprinted foreign language text. Some publishers (earthsongs, Theodore Presser, Alliance Publications, Alliance, Walton Music) occasionally mentioned in the published octavo available recordings of the texts by native speakers.

Seventeen (9%) of the 184 octavos featured a word-by-word translation that focused on the meaning of each individual word (e.g., "Noel Ayisyen" and "Papa Nou" published by Mark Foster, "Doluri" published by earthsongs, "Two Polish Wedding Songs" published by Roger Dean).

Discussion

Publishers, composers, arrangers, and editors regularly attend to the inclusion of appropriate musical markings and symbols (e.g., dynamics, tempo, phrasing) in published choral octavos. These resources provide conductors and singers with information necessary to interpret and execute the notated musical sounds of a particular composition or arrangement. Unlike music for instruments alone, however, most choral music has text. Therefore, the

extent to which published choral octavos, particularly those with foreign language texts, afford singers and conductors resources by which to articulate and pronounce texted music is a matter of interest to choral musicians.

The primary findings of this exploratory investigation are that of the 184 published SATB octavos with foreign language texts examined, (a) 96% of them provide singers with some poetic translation of the text, while (b) only 19% provide IPA transcriptions. All but two of those transcriptions appear outside, rather than within, the score. Thus, on the whole, the 27 publishers represented in the archived sample of octavos consulted for this study readily discern that singers and conductors benefit from comprehending the meaning of a given text. At the same time, however, there is much less recognition that singers could benefit from a consistent, systematic means by which to articulate and pronounce that text.

The efficiency with which choral singers articulate and pronounce words affects the quality of a choir's tone and the degree to which its singers blend and balance (Emmons & Chase, 2006). Given increasing availability and popularity of choral music octavos with texts from many parts of the world, these considerations become particularly germane as choirs learn scores whose texts consist of unfamiliar languages.

Slightly over half (53%) of the octavos examined provide some sort of pronunciation guide apart from the score. These guides, however, typically represent singular, *sui generis* efforts applicable only to a particular octavo. Moreover, they do not provide word-by-word assistance. Having to interpret or acquaint oneself with a new pronunciation guide or system each time one has to articulate a foreign language text can be a laborious, unnecessary process.

English transliterations or phonetic spellings, which appear in 26% of the octavos examined, likewise vary from composition to

composition in the spellings used. Moreover, whether these transliterations promote accurate or compromised pronunciation of a given language is unknown. Future investigations might explore this matter.

The archived octavos analyzed for this study represent a wide variety of publishers, languages, and countries of origin that have been recommended by various clinicians in national and regional venues. Nonetheless, results of this pilot study are limited to this particular sample of octavos and to the procedures of this one investigation.

This study is the first investigation to examine the text resources provided in choral octavos published by major firms. Its findings generate two major hypotheses that can be tested by subsequent research: (a) SATB choral octavos with foreign language texts exhibit more attention to understanding what the texts means rather than how to articulate and pronounce the texts; (b) In those octavos that provide some sort of pronunciation assistance (IPA, English phonetic spelling, or a sui generis pronunciation guide), these resources appear outside, rather than within, the choral score; and (c) publishers appear less inclined to include IPA assistance than phonetic spellings or pronunciation guides.

As subsequent investigations test these matters, they might incorporate a random or stratified random sample of published choral octavos. This sampling might be accomplished first by identifying the five most prolific publishers of choral octavos with foreign language texts and then analyzing all octavos or a selection thereof published by the firms during one, recent year.

Future studies might also include interviews with a cross section of publishers to ascertain their reasons for including or not including IPA transcriptions. The facts that (a) some publishers include IPA transcriptions with some compositions but not with others and (b) at least a few published octavos contain IPA

transcriptions in the choral score naturally raise the questions of whether inclusion or omission of IPA transcriptions are matters of publisher or composer preference, or whether there might be some technical or financial reasons entailed.

IPA transcriptions that appear outside the choral score likely do not assist singers and conductors as much as IPA transcriptions that appear either above or below the printed text within the choral score. Subsequent studies might explore the logistics of including IPA transcriptions within the score from a cost-benefit perspective. Certainly, at one point in its history Shawnee Press printed the "tone syllable" phonetics favored by Fred Waring along with the scored text, and some editors of public domain choral compositions found in the Choral Public Domain Library manage to include IPA transcriptions as part of the choral score.

This investigation examined only a selection of SATB choral octavos. Future studies should include octavos in other voicings, such as SSA, TTB, two-part, etc.

The ever expanding need to include choral repertoire from around the world, featuring sometimes obscure languages and dialects, makes it imperative for composers, arrangers, editors, and publishers to agree on a consistent set of symbols to represent sounds. For instance, the song "Fōg Elnā Khel" from Iraq/Syria published by earthsongs (2009) is a comprehensive edition with detailed information about the arranger, Salim Bali, and the cultural, musical, and historical backgrounds of the song. The editor provided the Arabic text in the original alphabet, an English transcription, and an English translation, which are valuable tools for choral directors and singers. On the very last page of this octavo there is a detailed and comprehensive chart with the symbols for transliteration, Arabic, IPA, and pronunciation. Yet, choral singers and conductors still have to transcribe the text into IPA symbols, if this is their preferred learning tool.

Another noteworthy situation occurs with choral octavos in Spanish, which accounted for 17% of the 184 selections in the sample. The Spanish pronounced in Venezuela has variations from the Spanish spoken in Argentina, Chile, Spain, Colombia, Costa Rica, and so on. These variations in Spanish (or in any other language for that matter) should be considered when performing songs from these various countries. Of the 32 selections in Spanish, only 8 included IPA transcriptions and the other 24 did not even include a pronunciation guide. Although Spanish is a widely known language, having IPA transcriptions showing particular sound variations for the various geographic regions would enhance the performance practice of choral music set to Spanish texts.

Publishing companies, editors, composers, arrangers, and choral directors are all engaged in choral music education, either directly or indirectly. By participating in mutual dialogue and working together, these stakeholders could likely facilitate singers' learning of foreign language texts by providing systematically consistent, accessible, and accurate transcriptions of foreign language texts. This outcome would maximize the learning, teaching, and performance of a diverse choral repertoire.  IJRCS

Institutional Review Board Approval and Compliance

The author obtained approval from an appropriate Institutional Review Board to conduct this research in a manner that assured the ethical treatment of participants and the confidentiality of participant information.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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