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Perceptions of Choristers from Estudio Choralia,
Costa Rica**

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*Nivel de inglés y la interpretación de canciones: percepciones
de las personas coristas de Estudio Choralia, Costa Rica*

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Abstract

Introduction: Singing in English is essential in choral practice, regardless of language level. **Objective:** The study evaluates the perception of choristers, in Estudio Choralia from Costa Rica, on the relationship between their English level and their interpretation of songs, identifying the main techniques used to overcome difficulties. **Methods:** Choristers completed a questionnaire about their English level, the impact of cultural background on interpretation, the difficulties that each area represents for them, and the actions carried out for improvement. **Results:** Participants showed a high level of English and knowledge of anglophone cultures. However, participants considered all areas of interpretation to be affected by culture and pointed out “pronunciation”, “emotional expression”, and “word stress” as the areas of highest difficulty. **Conclusions:** The results of the questionnaire coincide with the experts’ opinion who emphasized the impact of cultural origin on the pronunciation and placement of word stress, as well as the difficulties that these areas represent within choral direction.

Keywords: English repertoire; choral singing; foreign language; interpretation; pronunciation

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Resumen

Introducción: Cantar en inglés es esencial en la práctica coral, independientemente del nivel en el idioma. **Objetivo:** Este estudio evalúa la percepción de coristas, en Estudio Choralia de Costa Rica, sobre la relación entre su nivel de inglés y la interpretación, identificando las técnicas principales para la mejoría. **Métodos:** Las personas coristas completaron un cuestionario sobre su nivel de inglés, el impacto del trasfondo cultural en la interpretación, las dificultades que cada área representa para ellas y las acciones de mejora. **Resultados:** Las personas participantes indicaron altos niveles de conocimiento del inglés y culturas angloparlantes. Sin embargo, consideraron que todas las áreas son impactadas por la cultura y resaltaron la “pronunciación”, “expresión emotiva” y “acentuación” como áreas de mayor dificultad. **Conclusiones:** Los resultados del cuestionario coinciden con la opinión de los expertos consultados, quienes enfatizaron el impacto del origen cultural en la pronunciación y colocación de los acentos, así como la dificultad que estos representan dentro de la dirección coral.

Palabras clave: repertorio en inglés; canto coral; lengua extranjera; interpretación; pronunciación

Introduction

The presence of English-language songs in choral repertoires along with the predominance of anglophone composers in modern times is undeniable. However, the impact of its implementation in Costa Rican choirs and the relationship between the repertoire preparation and the choristers' English level has been unexplored. Previous research delved into the benefits of participating in a choir to improve language skills, primarily pronunciation (Lehtinen-Schnabel, 2023; Lehtinen-Schnabel & Levänen, 2024). The uncovered publications focus on the relationship between English skills and singing, which lies in the benefits of singing as a pedagogical activity. Prior research works also address the techniques that choristers use, or professionals recommend in order to sing in foreign languages (Slavik et al., 2020; Djumaeva, 2024).

This study sought to gain insight on how Costa Rican choristers participating in Estudio Choralia perceive that their own English level affects their interpretation as well as techniques that they must use to offset any difficulties. The purpose of the paper is to provide initial insight on the direct connection between the perceived level of English and background knowledge, with the interpretation of English-language repertoire, by providing a starting point through a specific choir that is known to perform English-language repertoire, given the lack of research on Costa Rican choristers, specifically on related subjects.

The emphasis of prior research tends to limit itself to pronunciation issues. However, language and cultural background impact interpretation in a wider variety of areas, namely: pronunciation, word stress, syllabic division, phrasing, emotional expression, and memorization. The lack of research on these additional factors led to the incorporation of these areas in the study. Finally, this paper also sought to verify if choristers agree with the impact of language and cultural background on the linguistic factor previously mentioned, and the difficulty that those areas represent for them as individuals. The results obtained outline the perceived relationship between English and their interpretation, serving as a starting point on how choristers approach this type of repertoire and the necessities they have as performers.

Literature Review

Singing in a different language is a regular activity within choral practice and, with the rise in popularity of English-language songs and English-speaking composers connected to the modernization of choral repertoire, choristers have to sing regularly in English regardless of their language level. Consequently, choral conductors must train and improve these

abilities as well, no longer focusing on more traditional choral languages such as Latin, Italian, French, and German. Choral conducting study programs in Costa Rican public universities contain obligatory language modules in preparation for foreign language singing ([Universidad de Costa Rica, 2022](#); [Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica, 2024](#)). Despite this, courses provided at a national level that address lyrical diction do not cover English diction (F. Vargas, personal communication, October 2, 2024). Even so, more than 650 composers, out of the 3,000, who are publicly available in the virtual choral library Musica International are from an English-speaking country ([Musica International, 2024](#)). In spite of this, choir auditions do not typically contain a language level component, placing the responsibility on choristers to ensure a proper preparation and external rehearsals for any repertoire pieces that might pose a challenge due to the language of the lyrics, especially when preparing English-language songs in a choir made up by Spanish speakers with varying educational and social backgrounds.

According to the [Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos \(INEC, 2022\)](#), only 12.2 % of the Costa Rican population is proficient in a second language, of which 95.7 % is proficient in English. [Cronquist and Fiszbein \(2017\)](#) rank Costa Rica amongst the top three countries in Latin America for English proficiency. However, the results point towards a low proficiency in the workplace and a basic level in the TOEFL exams. Therefore, statistically, most choristers are not proficient in English. Singing in English is a key component of modern choral practice in Costa Rica, but the implementation of a foreign language has an impact on choristers' performance and training needs. This literature review follows a thematic order focusing on the three main areas of research on the intersection of music and foreign languages: the cultural aspects that define musical practices and vocal interpretation, the difficulties of pronunciation in a foreign language, and the positive impact of songs and singing in foreign language learning.

Cultural aspects of musical practice and vocal interpretation

Vocal interpretation varies across cultures, which forces choristers to study the original language of the songs, as well as the culture these come from, to provide an authentic performance. [Reimer \(2021\)](#) stresses the generally accepted universality of music, but variations exist within each culture's musical practice regarding vocal sound production. Even within its universality, music is difficult to grasp in its entirety as an outsider to the particular culture it belongs to. Therefore, performers should seek genuine interpretation through

the distinctive characteristics that it manifests itself through, which include “the particular uses of pitch, attack, duration, intensity, timbre, to form groupings, metrical structures, hierarchies of events, and so forth” (Reimer, 2021, p. 8). Subsequently, when performing in English, choristers should seek to incorporate the aforementioned pronunciation and intonation characteristics of the anglophone culture in question.

A comprehensive understanding is unlikely, as the choristers are primarily Costa Rican, but an approximation can be accomplished through a cultural awareness. Moreover, Ujvárosi (2021) addresses the impact of the socio-cultural background on singers’ music and language learning opportunities, as well as the repercussions for the interpretation of repertoire in foreign languages. This paper also establishes students’ who major in singing at a higher education institution sentiments towards the necessity of further foreign language interpretation studies for a conscious use of language within the singing methodology of the original language, especially with a chorister body comprised of Costa Rican singers with a varied background, which implies distinct levels of contact with languages and foreign cultures dependent on socio-cultural backgrounds.

Foreign language pronunciation in singing

Singing in a foreign language presents an added layer of difficulty due to the requirement of clear and accurate pronunciation with proper stress patterns while applying the corresponding vocal techniques. Slavik and collaborators (2020) applied a questionnaire to 450 singers and conductors from 19 different countries regarding their techniques to overcome the challenge of singing in a foreign language, resulting in 83.4 % of them listening to recordings, 80 % taking notes, and 69 % consulting a fluent speaker of the language. Up to 60 % of the participants found useful the utilization of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) directly on the music scores instead of the foreign-language lyrics, but they also provided feedback indicating that discussion of the target language is still necessary due to other semantic and linguistic issues that are not visible through IPA transcriptions. Therefore, the use of phonetic transcriptions solves part of the problem derived from not knowing the language while at the same time evidences the depth of impact the language has on singing.

Pronunciation is not the only challenge to overcome. Djumaeva (2024) states that directors should teach choristers a logical reading of the text that considers the stressed and unstressed syllables, as well as semantic caesuras, to have a solid understanding of the metrorhythmic organization of a musical piece and its phrasing. Additionally, although

experts consider vowels the traditional basis of singing, in certain languages, such as German, consonants often provide a shock force that emphasizes a sentiment or a word for the audience. The same can be said of English, in which consonant sounds can complement the sentiment through the imitation of environmental sounds.

Benefits of singing in foreign language learning

Although initial encounters with foreign-language lyrics may be challenging, extensive research exists on the benefits of implementing songs and singing in foreign language learning environments for the improvement of various skills. [Lehtinen-Schnabel and Levänen \(2024\)](#) carried out a study on the improvement of Finnish by L2 speakers through participation in a choir. Prior to taking part in the choir, participants struggled with the majority of the typical challenges of Finnish phonetics. However, after five to nine months, participants described an improvement differentiating between sounds and word stress. The research establishes that recurrent singing in the target foreign language minimizes pronunciation difficulties that arise from singing in said language.

[Pandey and collaborators \(2022\)](#) asked English learners at an Indonesian high school their perception regarding the use of songs to improve their English level, demonstrating that 98 % of participants consider that their speaking skills improved quicker through the use of English songs. Similarly, [Wahyuni and collaborators \(2024\)](#) tested the pronunciation of Indonesian eighth-grade English learners after the implementation of activities involving the study of English-language songs, which revealed an improvement between each cycle of activities as well as a decrease in difficult sounds. Choristers constantly review and practice oral skills in foreign languages and might be improving through implicit learning.

[Lehtinen-Schnabel \(2023\)](#) argues that listening and singing songs in a foreign language “leads to quick and easy memorization of the texts” (p. 424), which in turn helps in the memorization of structures. In addition, the researcher states that, regardless of the enjoyment of music, it triggers an activation process that stimulates associative and mental thought processes. Although memorization issues are common amongst choristers, the difficulty is likely less than if they had to memorize texts independently from the music. Finally, [Tursunovich \(2022\)](#) points out the benefit of using songs in foreign language teaching due to the mnemonic codes like rhyme, repetition, and melody, all of which aid in memorization. Furthermore, Trusunovich suggests pedagogical techniques to work with songs in the classroom, which emulate the type of work required for the preparation of a song by the conductor and

choristers. For example, the author advises explaining the meaning of idioms and figurative meanings and drawing attention to specific English pronunciations. Evidently, incorporating English in a musical manner within choral practice is beneficial for the choristers.

In conclusion, this literature review addresses the following points regarding vocal interpretation and musical practice in a foreign language: the effects of cultural background on a composition and its interpretation, the unique challenge of pronunciation of a foreign language that singers must overcome through individual study techniques or formal training during song preparation, and the unique characteristics of songs as the medium for foreign language that can facilitate the preparation for vocal interpretation. The authors agree that, due to the complexity of layers in vocal interpretation and musical performance, knowledge of not only the language but also the culture behind the song becomes essential for authenticity. Although the research points to challenges in singing in a foreign language, the benefits of learning a language through music are also acknowledged. Besides, choral practice in Costa Rica is impacted due to the low English levels.

However, identifying the challenges gives choral directors a vantage position to improve them. Given the publications uncovered through the literature review, this research seeks to concentrate on the specific difficulties or benefits that choristers have as Costa Rican Spanish-language speakers who are regularly required to sing in English, as well as provide a reference point on which choral directors who work with Costa Rican choirs can base their practices.

Methodology

The main purpose of this study was to determine how choristers from Estudio Choralia understand the relationship between their singing practice and English, as well as exploring the influence that the English language and choral music have on each other. While the selected areas of study and difficulty can affect singing in any foreign language, English was selected as the target language for study due to its rise in popularity among choral repertoire alongside the lack of formal instruction in national universities on choral work, specifically in English. Furthermore, during observation of rehearsals from Estudio Choralia prior to the design of the study, the incorporation of the English-language repertoire was viewed as concerning among certain choristers: they referred to the difficulty it presented for them, mainly regarding pronunciation and memorization. Hence, the study was designed as a mixed exploratory case study due to the lack of prior research on the subject and seeking

to work with a specific choir in the given language to provide an initial approach to the perceived relationship between choristers self-reported language skills and the approach they took to their singing practice. To accomplish this, the selected instruments were participant observation, a questionnaire for the choristers, and an interview with two experts and choral directors that have worked with Estudio Choralia. Observation was carried out through ten rehearsals and two performances.

The questionnaire was applied through Google Forms with links sent individually to each choir member. The study used purposive sampling, and participants were all active members of Estudio Choralia at the time of implementation from any socioeconomic background or English level. The study included 30 participants who answered five control questions and ten closed-answer questions. The questionnaire contained three distinct sections. In section one, participants answered the control questions and reported their English level and places where they formally learned the language. In section two, participants indicated their awareness of dominant anglophone countries and the impact that they considered the English language and anglophone cultures have on repertoire performance. In section three, participants completed questions that addressed the direct impact that their English level and knowledge of anglophone countries has had on repertoire performance, as well as the impact that singing in English has had on their language level. The questions varied between multiple-choice questions and Likert-scales.

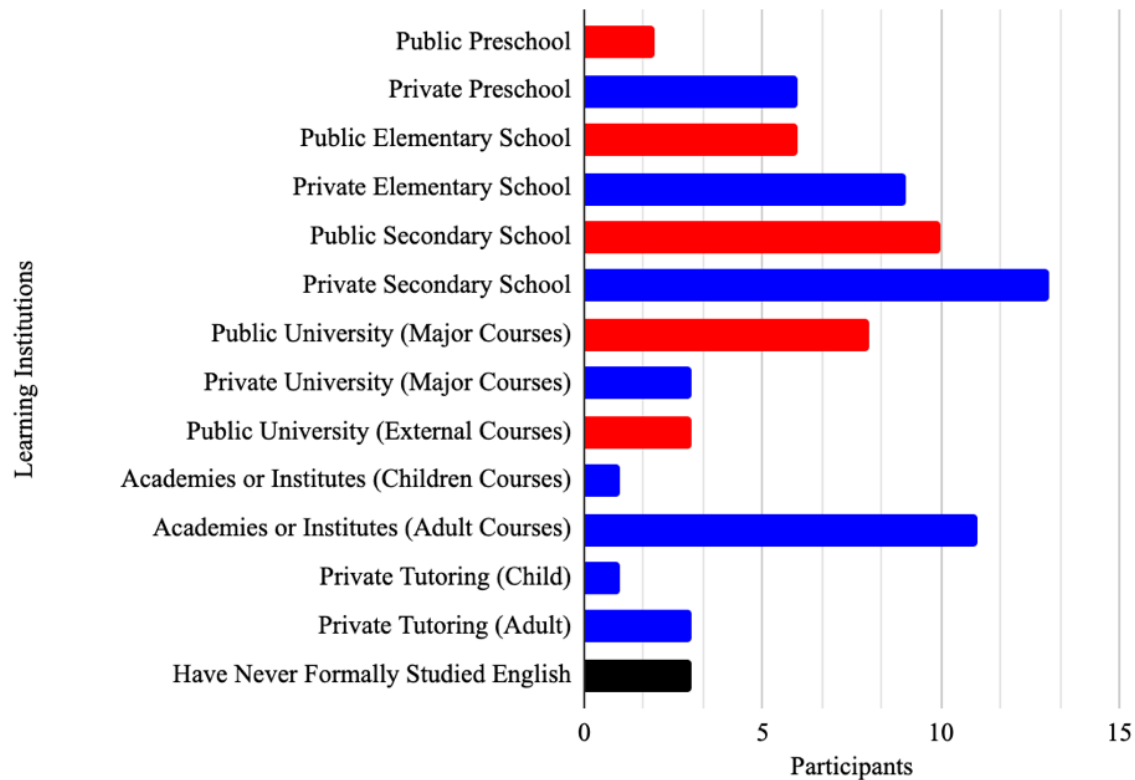
Additionally, the choral director and choir direction university professor provided input as an expert on the topic through a phone interview. M. Ed. Fabián Vargas is the founder and director of Estudio Choralia, as well as the director of the National Symphonic Choir of Costa Rica. He serves as a professor at the National University of Costa Rica in the Choir Direction major at both graduate and postgraduate level. A second phone interview was carried out with Roger Montoya, the current director of Coro Universitario from the University of Costa Rica, artistic director and choir teacher at Country Day School, owner of Fermata Music Academy, and until 2025 assistant director of Estudio Choralia. The interviews addressed mainly the practices involved when directing Spanish-speaking choristers to sing repertoire in English. The questions also included their thoughts on the impact of singing in English learning. The information gathered establishes an overall vision on the relationship between English and choral practice stemming from the personal experiences of Costa Rican choristers associated with Estudio Choralia.

Results and discussion

The study revealed an English level amongst participants above expectations, which in turn generates a more positive impact on singing. Observation of the choir through rehearsals revealed a heterogeneous group with varying degrees of musical experience and knowledge. When rehearsing English-language songs, several participants expressed their difficulty in remembering the lyrics. Others mentioned not understanding what they were saying. The comments revealed some hesitancy amongst participants when singing in the language, although not the majority of them.

In order to establish the relationship between English level and the outcomes, participants first self-reported their English level. Out of the 30 surveyed participants, 18 indicated being bilingual, four indicated a high English level, and one participant indicated being a native English speaker. Only three participants answered “intermediate” and four answered “low”, despite the variety and vast difference in the number of years that participants have studied English. Seven participants answered having studied English between one and three years, followed by six participants who responded more than 15 years. Therefore, the majority of the subjects fall under the 12.2 % of Costa Rican population, according to [INEC \(2022\)](#), that is proficient in a second language. These results were against the expectations as it was thought that the choir members would have a lower level of English. Therefore, the relationship between singing and English was established according to a majority of fluent or conversational English.

[Figure 1](#) shows the institutions that participants reported learning the language from. Red shows institutions of the public sector; blue represents institutions of the private sector, and black indicates no formal studies. Private preschools, elementary, and high schools dominated over the public entities as the places of formal English language studies, which shows that the participants were from a higher socio-economic backgrounds. Nevertheless, eight participants indicated taking English courses as part of their major at a public university and three at a private university. Only three participants signaled never having formally studied English before at any sort of institution. The common age ranges also explain the higher access to English learning: more than 60 % of the participants were between the 18 and 30, and 16.7 % between 31 and 35, which are age groups that have experienced an increased exposure and necessity of English language skills.

Figure 1. Institutions of formal English studies

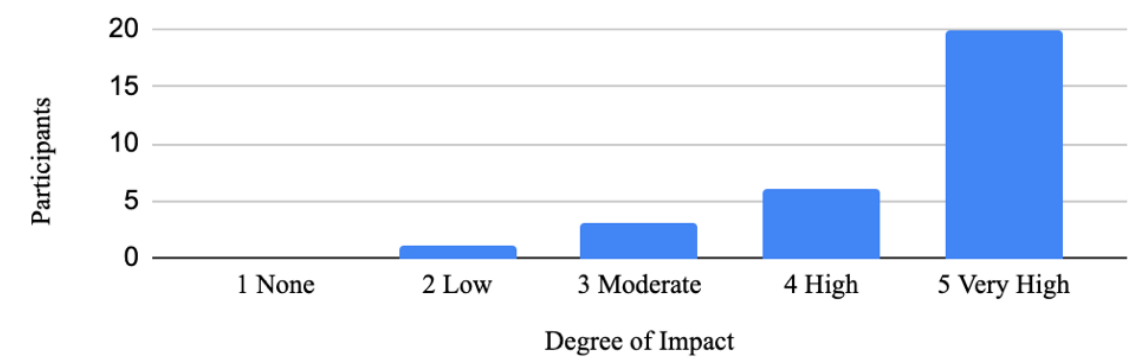
Source: Researcher's own design.

Therefore, findings show increased learning opportunities amongst participants, which [Ujvárosi \(2021\)](#) mentions as a point of consideration due to its impact on a more comprehensive understanding of the music, language, and cultural background. Regarding the impact of English level on English-language repertoire, 43.3 % of participants answered that it was “very positive”, 30 % claimed it was “positive”, and 26.7 % responded it was “neutral”. The impact was more positive than expected, albeit closely connected to their higher levels of English and better access to learning and opportunities reported by the participants.

[Figure 2](#) shows the participants' perceived degree of impact of the cultural origin of the repertoire on its musical interpretation. On this matter, they and the interviewed experts agree for the most part that the cultural origin of a repertoire has a high degree of influence on its interpretation and the areas of singing it affects, understanding “cultural origin” as the

country, specific cultural or ethnic group, and the time period from which the musical work originated or the composer associates with. While that was the opinion of the majority, one participant considered its impact to be low; no one responded that the cultural origin has no impact at all on interpretation.

Figure 2. Perceived impact of cultural origin on musical interpretation



Source: Researcher's own design.

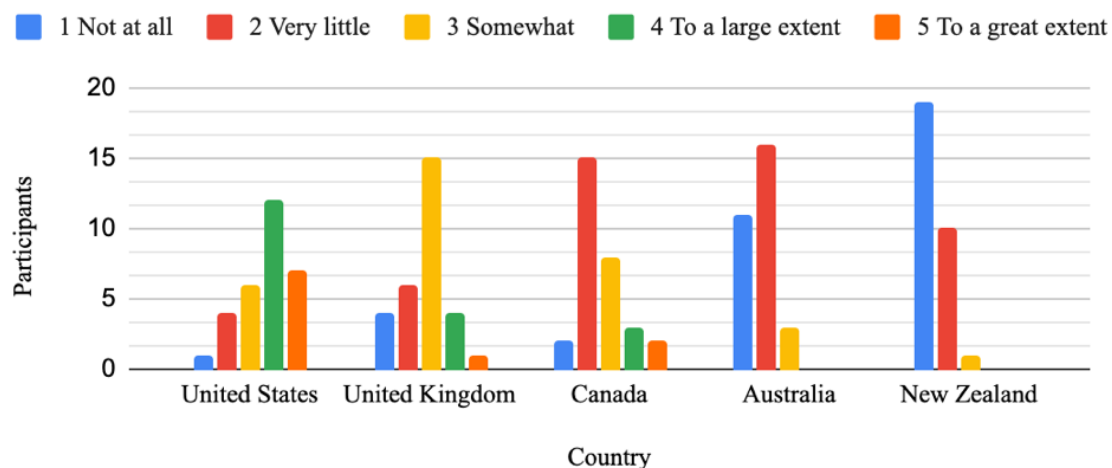
When asked which of the five areas of singing they considered that the cultural origin affected, between 12 and 25 participants selected all five areas: pronunciation, word stress, syllabic division, phrasing, and emotional expression. No participant selected the choice “none”, thus recognizing the influence of the cultural origin on interpretation. The responses reveal that participants consider the origin of the repertoire affects pronunciation and emotional expression the most. However, word stress and phrasing were considered relevant, since more than half of the participants selected those.

Vargas (personal communication, October 2, 2024) added that the cultural origin of the repertoire has a strong connection with its interpretation. He provided examples such as, when singing English madrigals, the collocation of vowels and consonants is different than modern British English, requiring a distinct preparation and presenting a unique challenge as the correct pronunciation is difficult to achieve and emulate. Similarly, when singing African-American spirituals, it is required to work with the African American pronunciation as well as the original African dialects that influenced English. Montoya (personal communication, December 16, 2025) also mentioned African American spirituals as a relevant example

of distinct pronunciation affected by the ethnic origin and social standing of the original singers, since they were enslaved people with dialects influenced by African languages. Overall, cultural origin directly impacts the interpretation of repertoire in various areas of singing, and participants perceive that to varying degrees.

Furthermore, Figure 3 shows the participants' self-reported knowledge of the most dominant anglophone cultures following a Likert scale. In connection to the influence of cultural origin, participants reported having higher cultural knowledge of the United States and the United Kingdom, which is beneficial because the English-language choral repertoire comes from these countries.

Figure 3. Familiarity with anglophone cultures



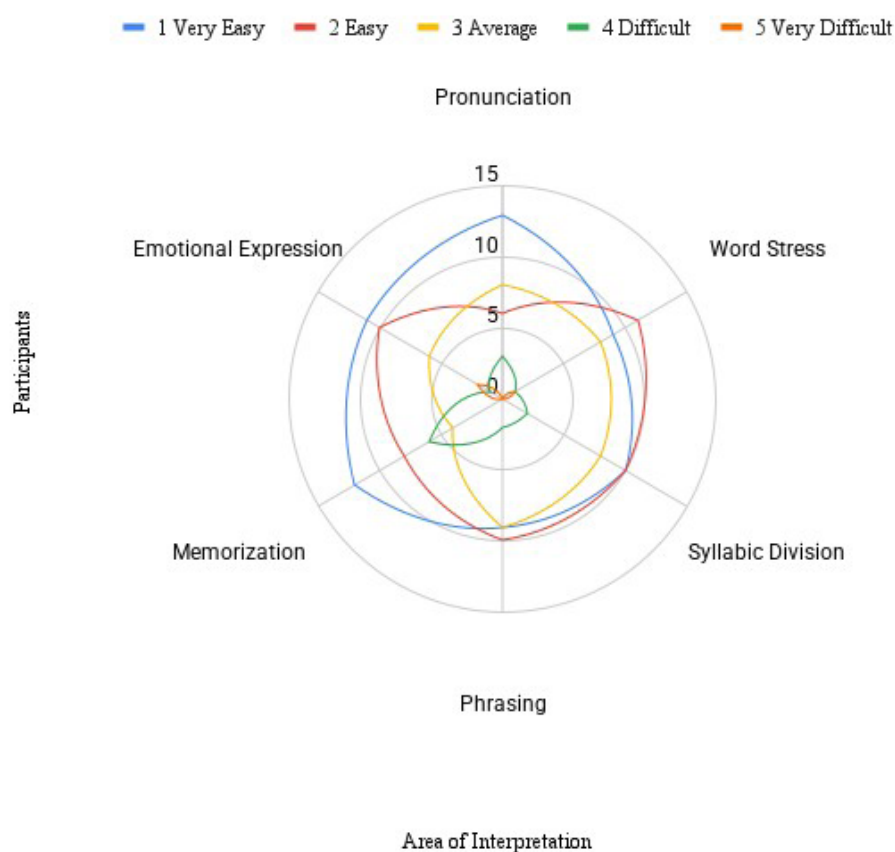
Source: Researcher's own design, 2024.

Participants expressed greater familiarity with the United States: 12 indicated familiarity “to a large extent” and seven “to a great extent”. The United Kingdom was a close second with four participants answering “to a large extent” and one “to a great extent”, but 15 people indicated “somewhat”. Canada had intermediate results with some participants more knowledgeable than others. However, Australia and New Zealand had significantly higher percentages of participants who indicated “not at all” as far as their familiarity with the culture. Despite the variety of anglophone cultures, composers from the United States

and the United Kingdom dominate the researched choral library ([Musica International, 2024](#)), which means that participants are more knowledgeable of the cultures that they might encounter at a higher frequency.

In [Figure 4](#), the results from the Likert scale applied across the five designated areas of interpretation can be appreciated: pronunciation, word stress, emotional expression, syllabic division, and memorization. Participants expressed a generalized ease in most areas of interpretation, although they pointed out “emotional expression” and “word stress” as “very difficult”, which coincides with the experts’ opinion.

Figure 4. Difficulties in English singing by area



Fuente: Researcher's own design.

The questionnaire asked participants to indicate the difficulty that each of those areas represents for them when singing in English. Between nine and twelve participants answered “very easy” across all five areas. As mentioned before, participants only included the option “very difficult” for “word stress” and “emotional expression”, although they answered that “memorization” and “pronunciation” were difficult as well. Overall, “pronunciation” and “phrasing” had the highest number of participants indicating a level 3 or above in the Likert scale: “average” to “very difficult”.

For instance, Vargas (personal communication, October 2, 2024) mentioned that his main concern when working with repertoire in a foreign language is the formation of the vowels, which falls under “pronunciation”. He explained that vowels in Spanish are more open while in English they are obscured or reduced. Since the musculature is accustomed to those open vowels, not only do Spanish-speaking singers have a harder time adapting to the appropriate pronunciation, but also to the proper collocation for singing the lyrics. He also highlighted dental consonants as a feature of English that proves difficult within choral preparation due to their rarity in Spanish. A concern in pronunciation preparation within a choir is that an error of that kind becomes evident if not everyone within the voice type has the same articulation and diction. The director must unify pronunciation within choirs, which can only be accomplished through group work.

The observation evidenced the exercises director Vargas carries out with the choir connected to the unification of sounds and pronunciation. There were also repetition exercises with specific words that presented the most difficulty, mainly focusing on consonant clusters and endings such as “heard” and “wings”. Vowel sounds on long notes also required additional work and modeling of the desired pronunciation, which did not always match the standard American English pronunciation. Once again, the word “heard” was addressed multiple times, not pronouncing it as [‘hɜːd], but rather as [‘hɛɪdʰ]. There was a distinction of the vowel sound for the purpose of clarity and stronger consonant sounds with aspiration at the end for a marked separation of the sounds in the cluster. The rehearsal exercises unified the pronunciation of members and, while performing, the difficulties presented during rehearsals were not evident.

Regarding pronunciation, Montoya (personal communication, December 16, 2025) referred particularly to specific needs of English pronunciation with Spanish speakers, which included: the introduction of entirely new vowel sounds, eliminating the trill of the *r*, and a required softening of the *y*. He mentioned the extended time required when working with

choristers with lower language level knowledge, be it English or any other unknown language, due to the need to connect each syllable with the corresponding musical note, rather than being able to connect entire words or phrases with the musical notation.

Despite the difficulty, Vargas agreed that, in pronunciation, there is a clear connection between time dedicated and lower language level, mentioned by Montoya, and the observed rehearsal time dedicated to addressing these problems. It's important to remember that thirteen participants indicated pronunciation was very easy for them while only three answered it was difficult. No participants considered pronunciation was very difficult, while 20 participants answered that, for them, word stress is "easy" or "very easy".

At the same time, Vargas (personal communication, October 2, 2024) highlighted the importance of word stress due to its connection with musical rests and breathing spaces. The word stress needs to be placed correctly and according to the desired emphasis or effect, not only what would be natural sounding in the English dialect according to the culture of origin. In spite of the perceived ease of participants in the five areas due to their higher levels of English, pronunciation and word stress continue to be a concern and are areas to address in detail by choral directors due to differences between choristers.

Precisely, [Table 1](#) shows the list of actions participants may have had to carry out to overcome any difficulties that singing in English represents for them and the frequency of selection. At least four participants selected all the suggested actions for overcoming difficulties in English, demonstrating their importance within choristers' preparation. At the same time, no participants indicated actions different from those proposed. Participants selected the increased repetition of songs for memorization the most despite not feeling memorization is an area of particular difficulty (see [Figure 4](#)), although it does match the comments heard from multiple choristers. Listening to existent recordings of the repertoire and writing down markings to denote phrasing were popular actions as well.

When it came to consulting a fluent speaker, only five people responded that they have consulted someone with a higher language level than them. At the same time, the observation did reveal that, when first engaging with a new song in English, the director asked members he knew are fluent in English to read over the lyrics and for the rest of the choir to repeat after them. Therefore, consultation of fluent speakers is happening as part of the rehearsals, albeit not in an independent manner. Phonetic transcriptions were also rare, as only three people mentioned using them to study.

Table 1. Actions for overcoming difficulties with English singing

Action	Number of participants
Increase study time	7
Listen to existent recordings	11
Translate or look for existent translations	6
Create phonetic transcriptions or Spanish equivalents	4
Look for support from someone with a higher English level	5
Consult the director more frequently for clarification	4
Write down accent marks to denote word stress	5
Write down marks to denote phrasing	10
Write down ligatures, caesuras, or other marks to denote syllabic division	8
Implement mnemonic techniques	4
Repeat the lyrics with higher frequency for memorization	13
Does not apply	11

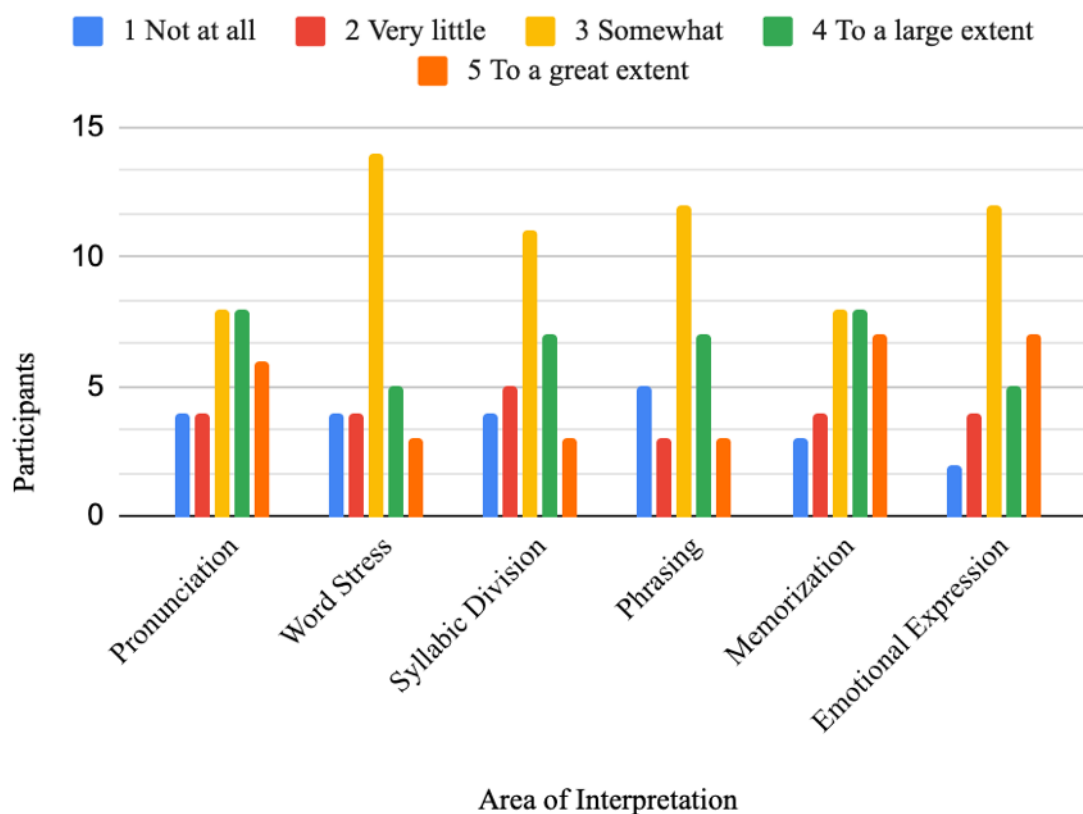
Source: Researcher's own design.

Vargas (personal communication, October 2, 2024) mentioned that, as part of the choral preparation, he goes over word stress, phrasing, and lyric meanings so choristers may have an in-depth understanding and uniformity can be achieved. In the interview, he also indicated that a technique he commonly uses to improve pronunciation is stage whispering. The stage whisper allows for the text to be heard while at the same time lowering the volume of the vowel sounds, which is the common style for English singing. Similar to using a pencil between the mouth, the technique forces singers to overgesticulate at the same time that the musculature is undergoing an unusual stress that allows it to become more accustomed to different collocations.

Finally, [Figure 5](#) shows the responses of participants, on a Likert scale, in reference to what degree singing in English had had an impact on their English level. Research supports the idea that singing in English is generally beneficial for skill improvement and, although

participants' perception is divided, a majority has felt an impact to various degrees. They reported that 56.7 % have been in Estudio Choralia between four and seven years and 90.1 % have been performing as singers or choristers for more than four years. With these time-frames, participants have had extensive exposure to English-language repertoire. Besides, participants pointed towards a greater impact in emotional expression, memorization, and pronunciation.

Figure 5. Improvement in areas of interpretation



Source: Researcher's own design.

The improvement of memorization and pronunciation perceived by the participants matches the studies referenced ([Tursunovich, 2022](#); [Lehtinen-Schnabel, 2023](#); [Lehtinen-Schnabel & Levänen, 2024](#); [Wahyuni et al., 2024](#)), which all agreed they improve in those same areas after exposure to English songs and the practice of the language through these medium. Similarly, one the directors expressed the benefits of learning language through a daily or motivating context rather than from a grammatical perspective (F. Vargas, personal communication, October 2, 2024). He believes that educational approaches that implement music make learning a more efficient process. Therefore, choral directors can identify and use the impact across the distinct areas of interpretation for the benefit of the choristers.

Conclusions

The research study evidenced the choristers' acknowledgement that word stress, emotional expression, pronunciation, and memorization impacts their performance when singing in English, while also demonstrating that they have reduced difficulties in English-language performance due to their socioeconomic background. The answers provided by participants are consistent with the concerns of the choral director when introducing English-language repertoire from various cultural origins. However, due to the prior English language level of participants, most of them indicated a generalized ease with the indicated areas of interpretation.

At the same time, despite signalling high impact of cultural background on performance, participants also attested to poor knowledge of anglophone cultures beyond the United States and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, due to the self-reported language levels, many participants also indicated not pursuing any additional actions to improve areas of difficulty in their own preparation, even though the interviewed expert pointed out actions that could impact all choristers regardless of language level, such as achieving a unified pronunciation as a choir. Pronunciation is dependent on the cultural and historical background of the piece, which means that choristers singing in their natural accent, even with native-sounding speakers, is not necessarily appropriate for the performance.

Therefore, this study recommends that choristers engage in actions supported by prior research such as implementing IPA transcriptions, listening to prior recordings, and writing down marks that denote word stress and phrasing, according to the choral director's specifications, to approach a unified performance despite the chorister's individual English language level. In addition, the study of a song's cultural background becomes essential for

proper interpretation. Furthermore, most participants perceived an impact in their abilities across the areas of interpretation from having to sing in English, reinforcing the benefits of singing in English language skill development.

Finally, the connections between English skills and choral singing within a Costa Rican context were surprising due to the higher level of English amongst Estudio Choralia members. Consequently, carrying out a similar study in a choir with members of a more disadvantaged socioeconomic background would be beneficial to determine more accurately the perceived relationship between English language and choral singing. Furthermore, as this study was based on the choristers' self-reported language level and perceived difficulties, a more thorough study could address the actual English language level of participants as well as the weaknesses or strengths as determined by a director to provide possible solutions for other professionals beyond the individual effort and actions of the choristers.

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