

## **The Analysis of a Choir as a Discourse Community**

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims at delving into the topic of discourse analysis and discourse communities by examining two discourse samples from a choir. In the first place, a music score is analyzed in terms of written discourse, and the similarities between language and music are examined. Secondly, the paper explores the topic of non-verbal communication. The gestures with which the director of the choir communicates are analyzed with the objective of appreciating how important non-verbal communication is for a choir. Finally, an assessment is made as to whether this discourse community is able to communicate in a meaningful and effective way.

**Key words:** discourse analysis, discourse community, choir, music score, written discourse, non-verbal communication.

### **Resumen**

Este artículo tiene como objetivo profundizar en el tema de análisis del discurso y de comunidades discursivas mediante el examen de dos muestras discursivas de un coro. En primer lugar, se analiza una partitura musical como muestra de discurso escrito y se examinan las similitudes entre el lenguaje y la música. En segundo lugar, el ensayo explora la comunicación no verbal. Se analizan los gestos con los que el director del coro se comunica con el objetivo de apreciar cuán importante es la comunicación no verbal para un coro. Finalmente, se evalúa si esta comunidad discursiva es capaz de comunicarse de forma significativa y efectiva.

**Palabras clave:** análisis del discurso, comunidad discursiva, coro, partitura musical, discurso escrito, comunicación no verbal.

## **Introduction**

This paper analyzes a non-fictional discourse community located in Buenos Aires, Argentina. More specifically, the discourse community that is approached is the choir in which I participate since 2017. The methodology used to examine this group of people is scientific observation. The general aim of this paper is to describe the discourse community and to examine two discourse samples. Also, the paper intends to demonstrate whether this discourse community is able to communicate in a meaningful and effective way. To achieve these purposes, first, the discourse community is described. Secondly, a written piece of discourse, a music score, is taken as a starting point in order to identify which characteristics are shared by language and music. Thirdly, the paralinguistic behavior of the teacher/director when directing the choir is examined.

## **The choir as a discourse community**

The discourse community that is analyzed in this paper is the choir in which I participate since 2017. In terms of number, the choir is relatively small since it is comprised of 17 members. In general, not all the participants attend classes every week. Thus, the number of participants per class varies and, in general, there are around 12 members per class. Classes take place only on Tuesdays from 7 p.m. to 8:10 p.m. at the music school “Evaristo Carriego”, which is located in Villa Soldati. Taking gender into consideration, female voices prevail, since only three young boys attend the class. The teacher is also the director of the choir: he first teaches the songs to the group, and later on he directs us.

One significant characteristic of this choir is the fact that it is made up by adults; however, teenagers are also part of the group. “Adult” is a word that comprises a wide variety of ages in this discourse community. This is the reason why the youngest member is 15 years old and the oldest is around 60. Also, it is significant to remark that, since meetings take place for only one hour per week and participants belong to different generations, there is not much communication among some members.

This group of people will be described in depth taking into account linguist John Swales' work *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings* (1999), in which he proposes six defining characteristics of a discourse community.

Firstly, Swales (1999) states that “a discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals” (p. 24). In the case of the choir I am part of the goal of the group is mainly to sing and express ourselves musically with other people in a context in which socialization and congeniality prevails. Basically, all members should a) like to sing b) like to sing with other people, the assumption being that, since it is an adults' choir, nobody would attend it out of obligation, as it might happen in a children's choir.

What is more, also in relation to the common goals, the main objectives established by the official program of the choir are: a) to foster participation and production in the school of music, where objectives are aimed at adults; b) to generate a space of socialization through choral singing rooted in the values of the neighborhood; c) to promote choral singing as a genuine individual and social form of expression; d) to develop habits of respect towards the maturation processes of all the members of the community; e) to generate dynamics of common understanding in the instances of collaborative learning; and f) to become aware of the importance of collective construction as the fundamental dynamics of a choir. These official goals are a contribution obtained from the teacher/director of the choir as part of the research carried out in the community.

However, data was also collected as regards the general reason why individuals join the choir. In order to obtain this information, 10 members of the group were asked the following question: “Why do you attend this choir?” Appendix 1 provides the answers obtained. After analyzing the responses, in general terms, the set of motivations for most of them is that they enjoy expressing themselves with their voices and find it meaningful to do this with other people.

Taking power relations into consideration, the teacher/director of the choir is the authority in the class. On the basis of observation, it can be stated that his personality is an important factor since it creates a proper learning atmosphere. He is an accessible, kind and very funny man. There is always a joyful atmosphere when he shows an exercise related to vocal

technique because he can be so spontaneous with his comments and actions that the group cannot help laughing. Also, he is not afraid of laughing at the things he says or does. Thus, his personality makes everybody feel comfortable. Furthermore, when member A was asked why she attended the class, she mentioned that she liked being a participant due to the teacher's personality. She also expressed that he makes her feel comfortable, that he is spontaneous, that he knows a lot and that he likes to teach what he knows.

It was mentioned previously that one of the official objectives of the group is "to develop habits of respect towards the maturation processes of all the members of the community". The teacher is the first person in the choir who applies this in class. He always tries not to expose individual singers in the middle of the class, since they may feel uncomfortable or nervous if they sing alone, for example. Instead, he sometimes asks two or three people to sing together. This is an important idea to bear in mind, since a positive interaction between the members of the community can only be achieved if all of them feel truly comfortable.

What is more, since there are only three male voices in the choir, sometimes the teacher/director moves and places himself next to the boys to sing together with them. This point can be observed in the second discourse sample that is analyzed. Poggi (2011) indicates that singing together with the group is one way to induce motivation to the singers, since the leader is an example for them and, thus, makes them feel he is just like them (p. 345). Also, as Poggi (2011) remarks, the teacher can help, guide and encourage the group by playing the role of the singers but without losing his authority (p. 345).

Secondly, Swales (1999) claims that a discourse community has "mechanisms of intercommunication among its members" (p. 25). In this discourse community, as it was mentioned before, people meet once a week. Thus, the first mechanism of intercommunication is face-to-face interaction. However, there are other mechanisms, such as communication through gestures and looks (as it will be analyzed in the second discourse sample) when the teacher/director gives orders to the members of the group, and a WhatsApp group. These are the only mechanisms of intercommunication among the participants.

Swales (1999) additionally mentions that the mechanisms used by the community provide information and feedback (p. 26). In the choir, the main mechanism of communication is face-to-face interaction. This allows both teacher and singers to be fluent in terms of

information and feedback. When singers have a question, they simply raise their hand and they are answered immediately. The same occurs when singers need musical scores or other things. In the WhatsApp group, communication is not so fluent since this is a type of asynchronous communication. All the members of the group receive the messages, but some of them respond only when there is an audio from the teacher or when somebody says they are feeling sick and will not be able to attend.

Lastly, Swales (1999) mentions that a discourse community possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims (p. 27). Particularly in this discourse community, face-to-face interaction predominates, since it is only by getting together that a choir can truly function. In the case of the WhatsApp group, members mostly type, send audios, and send videos or links related to singing. This last point occurs rarely, however. The general topics of conversation are: members saying they will arrive late, members sharing pictures in a special day such as for example Mother's Day or Teacher's Day, members sending videos after performances, and the teacher sending the audios corresponding to each voice part so that members can practise.

In relation to gestural communication taking place among singers, members sometimes greet each other by waving and smiling. This occurs when someone arrives late, and therefore they cannot approach members or say "hello", so they resort to other ways of communication without producing sounds.

Swales (1999) also takes lexis into account. He claims that "a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis" (p. 26). This is an important idea since particular words are used in this discourse community in order to refer to a great variety of musical concepts. Probably, the most distinctive words that are used in the class and that an outsider would not be acquainted with are *soprano*, *contralto* and *baritone*. Formento (2017) claims that voices are divided according to men and women (p. 32). *Soprano* is a concept that refers to women's highest pitch voice; whereas *baritone* is the masculine voice which is lower than the tenor pitch and higher than the bass pitch. *Contralto* is defined by Formento (2017) as the lowest pitch voice among women (p. 32). However, this is not the only terminology used among singers. Green (2015) provides a list of common words in a singing context. The director of

the choir refers to *falsetto* on many occasions. This is defined by Green (2015) as “a term used when male singers go extremely high into their head voice” (para. 9).

Another term used in the community is *blending*. According to Green (2015, para. 13), the term refers to making singers sound like one voice. Sometimes the director perceives that the choir does not sound as a unit: the sopranos/baritones/contraltos’ voices sound fragmented or some voices in particular stand out. Thus, the director encourages singers to listen to one another and try to blend in order to sound as one voice. Also, *register* is a word used in this discourse community. Green (2015) mentions that this term can be classified as “chest” or “head” depending on the part of the body that produces the vibrations when singing (para. 7). A *capella* is another well-known term that refers to creating music only with the human voice and, therefore, “without instrumental accompaniment” (Oxford Online Dictionaries, 2019). Finally, *staccato* refers to “a series of short, sharp sounds or words” (Oxford Online Dictionaries, 2019).

Lastly, Swales (1999) states that a discourse community has a limited level of members with “a suitable degree of relevant content and discursual expertise” (p. 27). As it was mentioned before, the choir is made up by only 17 members. This number is suitable since, for example, the classroom is relatively small. If there were 50 people, they would not be able to gather in that specific place. Nevertheless, it would be good to increase the number of male singers since there are only three. There should be a balance between male and female voices.

Considering how members can be part of the group, anyone who is 14 years old or older can become a member. Classes are free of charge. Whenever there is a presentation, the teacher/director invites people to join the choir and claims that it does not matter if they have never taken singing classes before. The spectators at presentations are usually kids who attend other classes in the school of music, kids’ parents, and other persons invited by performers. The teacher encourages people to come and simply have a good time while learning, since singing should not be stressful.

Finally, it can also be pointed out that some members of the group enrolled, attended some classes and then dropped out. Most of them claimed they were leaving since they had other responsibilities or could not attend due to family reasons.

### **Analysis of a musical score as a written discourse sample**

In this section of the paper, a musical score is taken as a sample of written discourse and, therefore, it is analyzed by considering the properties of written discourse. Also, this section intends to explore the similarities between language and music.

Musical scores are important elements for people who are involved in the musical field. According to Oxford Online Dictionaries (2019), a musical score is a “written representation of a musical composition showing all the vocal and instrumental parts arranged one below the other”. Thus, this tool is crucial for musicians to have a guide either when they play an instrument or when they sing. The musical score that is analyzed in this paper can be found in Appendix 2.

If we consider the non-verbal elements of writing, musical scores contain prominent elements that serve as *paratext*. Alvarado (2010) mentions that the term paratext makes reference to everything that surrounds and goes along with the text (p. 20). She additionally mentions different types of paratext, such as material, format, typography and graphic design.

If we analyze the music score in terms of material and format, music sheets are easy to recognize by any person even if they do not know how to read music. In general terms, these are simple A4 or legal-size paper sheets. In most schools of music or places where people sing and are given scores, teachers simply hand in copies. That is the reason why the paper type is a very common one. However, original scores may be printed in a thicker type of paper which, in any case, does not prevent the score from being identified as such. Taking colors into account, scores are characterized by their smooth white background—in the case of copies—or yellowish background—in the case of original scores—and the contrast of these colors with typical black musical staves. Once people perceive that a white/yellowish sheet of paper has a black musical staff on it, they are able to recognize it and classify it within the musical field. Also, most of the scores have a vertical orientation, as in this case.

Secondly, taking typography and graphic design into consideration, the staves printed on the paper are around one centimeter high. A staff is “a set of five parallel lines on any one or

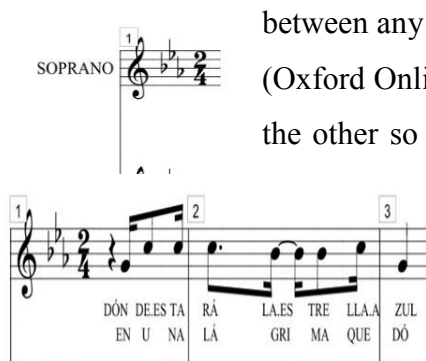


Illustration 2: segmentation of lyrics.

words next to each staff.

between any adjacent two of which a note is written to indicate its pitch” (Oxford Online Dictionaries, 2019). Further, staves are placed one under the other so that, once a line finishes, the interpreter continues reading on the line below. However, in this score, it is significant to bear in mind that staves are set by groups of three since there are three voices —soprano, alto and baritone— that interact at the same time. Thus, interpreters should only read the line corresponding to the voice that has been assigned to them.

As regards the linguistic-textual characteristics of written discourse, the lexical level is important, since, there are virtually no words accompanying the song apart from *SOPRANO*, *ALTO* and *BARITONO*. These are written in capital letters and are relevant not only because they signal the different voices of the musical piece, but also because they allow the singers to identify what line they should follow. These words are very specific and known by anybody who has musical knowledge (they were explained in the lexis of the discourse community). Thus, lexical choice is crucial (Illustration 1).

According to Calsamiglia & Tusón (2001) segmentation is an important element in written texts since it facilitates the comprehension of the material (p. 96). In the score that is being analyzed, this segmentation can be seen in the lyrics placed under each musical note. What is significant is the fact that lyrics are not written in a continuous form under the staff; instead, words are divided in syllables (Illustration 2). Thus, only a syllable corresponds to a sound, and not a whole word. That is to say, there is one note per syllable in most cases. This occurs because, in the staff, musical notes are separated, and, therefore, one note corresponds to a certain part of a word.

Every staff of the music score is also segmented by means of one division bar (Illustration 3). This is a vertical line that crosses the staves to create intervals of the same length of time (“What are Musical Bar Lines”, n.d.). These are very useful lines whose objective is to organize the musical piece and orient the reader.





*Illustration 3: division lines.*

What is also significant to mention is that there are numbers placed at the top of every staff and immediately after every division bar. These numbers, which segment every staff, serve to identify the different beats (Illustration 4). Thus, these numbers can be compared to, for

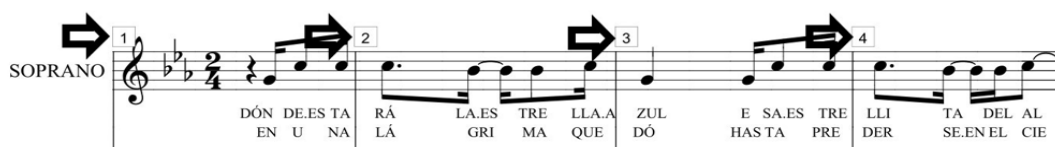


*Illustration 5: dotted quarter note.*

example, the chapters of a book. In a literature class, when discussing a novel, students can identify chapters thanks to their numbers. In a singing class, singers identify the different parts of a song by referring to the numbers above the staves. The teacher might want to start working on the song from a certain place

onwards and these numbers are very helpful to establish sense and organization, since readers do not need to start counting beat by beat but just check the numbers next to every staff.

According to Calsamiglia and Tusón (2001), punctuation in written texts is used to organize them grammatically and to give them a certain logic (p. 96). Some of the punctuation marks that are used in traditional writing are also used by musical language. For instance, in the staff, next to some notes, there is a dot (Illustration 5). In regular written discourse sample this signals the end of a sentence, therefore, readers know that they should make a pause. However, in musical writing, this symbol, placed after a quarter note, transforms it into a dotted quarter note. According to Kraemer (2019, para. 1), what this punctuation signals is that the duration of the note should be increased by a half ( $1 + \frac{1}{2}$ ). Thus, whereas in traditional writing this punctuation signals that the reader should make a pause, in musical language it indicates an increase in the duration of a note, which, curiously, is the opposite of making a pause.



*Illustration 4: Identification numbers for each beat.*

Finally, Calsamiglia and Tusón (2001) take titles into consideration. They claim that they have cataphoric reference since they anticipate the content of the text. The musical score is identified by a specific title, which is *La Estrella Azul* (Illustration 6). In this case, the song is expected to deal with a blue star and not, for example, cars. The name of the song is also part of the lyrics: ¿*Donde estará la estrella azul, esa estrellita del alma?* What is more, under the song title, we see the word *Huayno*. The presence of this subtitle is significant since it allows the reader to classify the song within a musical genre and, thus, they can be aware of what style it should follow (provided they have previous knowledge about the general characteristics of a Huayno).

*Illustration 7: altos and baritones wait for their entrance in the following beat.*

The previously analyzed concepts correspond to the characteristics of written discourse. However, I also find it significant to consider *turn-taking* and *overlapping*, which are characteristics of oral discourse.

As in oral discourse, when interpreting music, singers find themselves taking turns. This concept refers to the distributed opportunities speakers have in order to speak (Heldner & Edlund, 2010). In the case of musical language, this occurs when there are two or more voices that interact. Unlike oral discourse, where turn-taking is perceived as it takes place, there is no need for singers to produce sound in order to appreciate this feature. By reading

## La Estrella Azul

Huayno

*Illustration 6: title and subtitle of the song.*

the score, singers already know they will have to take turns. To exemplify this point, it is possible to observe that, in the first beat of the second and third staves identified as *ALTO* and *BARITONO*, there is a small black symbol, which signals a silence. Nevertheless, when directing the attention to the staff above, it can be seen that sopranos sing while altos wait for their entrance. In other words, there is turn-taking because altos and baritones wait for their turn while sopranos sing (Illustration 7).

Apart from turn-taking, another significant feature of oral discourse that can be applied to the score is that of *overlapping*. Heldner & Edlund (2010) define the term overlap as “portions of speech delivered simultaneously with speech from another speaker in a speaker change” (p. 556). Thus, in most cases, an overlapping in any regular conversation would be an

impediment to communicate properly with the other person. However, without overlapping, music would not be as rich and beautiful as it is. Even though many people can sing exactly the same piece of music in unison, it is the overlapping of voices that defines a choir. In this sample of written discourse, as it was mentioned before, staves are organized in groups of three. The fact that there are musical notes on the three staves means that voices overlap since the three different voices will produce sound at the same time. This is the reason why this is a polyphonic song. According to Oxford Online Dictionaries (2019), polyphony is “the style of simultaneously combining a number of parts, each forming an individual melody and harmonizing with each other”. Literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin (as cited in Malcuzyński, 1984, p. 78) applied the term to literary studies and stated that some novels did not provide a single point of view, that a text may show a variety of voices and opinions, and thus be defined as “polyphonic”. For him, a book shows a unification of several consciousness, which is similar to what occurs in a choir.

Finally, in relation to how language and music resemble cognitively, Jackendoff (2008) mentions that both the acquisition and processing of music and language involve having a number of skills that are shared with other cognitive domains and explains that both language and music require having the ability to store representations (p. 196). These representations are words (in the case of language) or recognizable melodies (in the case of music). Receptive skills precede productive skills in the development of both language and music (Jackendoff, 2008, p. 196). Thus, it can be said that in the discourse community that is being analyzed, all its members have the ability to store not only the different melodies of each song but also the corresponding lyrics applied to those melodies. However, remembering lyrics may be complicated sometimes, especially when there are new songs to learn. Thus, once again, resorting to musical scores is important.

Jackendoff (2008) additionally states that the processing of both language and music is connected to “creating expectations for what is to come” (p. 196). What is more, Jackendoff (2008) comments that learning in order to produce both language and music is connected with our ability to imitate other people’s vocal production (p. 197). In the case of language, this is not only clearly related to the acquisition of our mother tongue, but also to the acquisition of a foreign language, in which we need to imitate sounds. Nevertheless, in the case of music, imitation is necessary as well. One song performed by the choir is called *Rock*

*my soul*. The majority of the members of the choir do not speak English and, therefore, need to resort mainly to the imitation of sounds produced by the teacher. However, when songs are in Spanish, the group also resorts to imitation: we copy the melody and repeat the phrases that the teacher sings.

According to Wen (2011), both language and music are characteristics of the human species that seem to be universal and specific to all humans. She adds that all humans are able to acquire both linguistic and musical competence (slide 8). Taking the choir under analysis as an example, it is formed by persons between 15 and 60 who are able to produce musical sounds. Thus, singing is not an activity connected only to young generations. However, what will vary is each person's ability to sing and tune.

Moreover, it is important to consider that when singing, both hemispheres of the brain are exercised at the same time (Wen, 2011, slide 33). Whereas the right hemisphere is concerned with music and art, the left hemisphere is concerned with language (Wen, 2011, slide 33). This exercise is taken to another level at the time of singing songs which are not in the singers' native language. A more complex mental exercise is required in order to learn new sounds and words that belong to a foreign language.

Language and music are both comprised of three elements: A) phonology, which refers to the characterization of the basic sound units; B) syntax, which refers to the rules governing the way in which sound units are combined; and C) semantics, which refers to the way in which meaning is assigned to sound sequences (Wen, 2011, slide 18).

Regarding phonology, in the human language there are phonemes, whereas in the musical language there are notes. Wen (2011) claims that these are characterized by frequency and duration parameters (slide 19). Notes tend to be longer than phonemes since, for example, whenever there is a dot next to a musical note, it increases its duration. While phonemes can only be produced with the vocal chords, musical notes can also be produced with the vocal chords, body or a great variety of instruments.

Regarding syntax and grammar, the structural unit in the musical language is the musical phrase (Wen, 2011, slide 20). In the human language, the prominence contour includes stress,

timing and intonation of a sentence. In the musical language, the prominence contour includes harmony, tonality, rhythm, meter, melody and repetition (Wen, 2011, slide 20). This last concept of repetition can be appreciated in the discursive example under analysis, where the discourse community sings a song that is based on repetition.

Lastly, as regards semantics in language, there is a distinction between lexical semantics — which is related to the meaning of words in isolation— and compositional semantics —which is connected to the meaning of words in combination— (Wen, 2011, slide 21). In the case of music, Wen (2011) claims that meaning emerges from mimicry. This occurs because choirs usually sing songs written by famous artists who have already provided meaning to the song by their performance. Also, meaning can be related to the song itself and the connotation that the song has. Taking an anthem as an example, it is not performed with the same feeling as any regular song. Finally, each person can interpret a song differently: that is precisely the magic of music. Two different people can interpret a song in a variety of ways and, therefore, will perform it differently even when they are singing exactly the same lyrics.

Considering the discourse sample under analysis, this choir's version does not sound like the original version by Peteco Carabajal, first, because it is an adaptation by Julián Sisterna, and, second, because originally the song is a solo and not a polyphonic song. Also, “La estrellita azul” can simply refer to a blue star for many people; however, the teacher commented that the author of the song used this metaphor to refer to his son, with which he could not have a close relation. For this reason, the choir does not sing “La Estrellita Azul” exactly with the same passion as Peteco Carabajal, since his feelings towards the song are stronger than the choir's feelings.

### **Analysis of non-verbal communication: the director's body language**

The second discourse sample to be analyzed in this research paper is a multimedia recording from a presentation that took place in October 2018. The song performed by the discourse community is called *Ipharadisi*. In the video, we can observe what was mentioned previously: the teacher/director moves from the center and places himself next to the baritones in order to sing together with them. In most cases, the director places himself in the

front of the choir, giving his back to the audience. However, in this presentation the director leaves the typical location for a specific reason: being another singer of the choir.

According to Lemann (2015), the figure of the director is very important, since his function is to organize the voices of a group that is willing to sing together (p. 97). In order to help the choir perform at its best, Rodríguez Palacios (2013) states that gestures are a key element when directing. What is more, he claims that introducing audible elements to give instructions would cause an overlapping of sounds between the instructions and the music that uses sound itself to be produced (p. 65). Since the director's function is to communicate various types of information to the singers, Poggi (2011) asserts that the director's movements are by definition "communicative" since his gestures and his whole body allow him "to communicate various types of information to players" (p. 342).

Further, Poggi (2011) states that the end goal for singers is to sing at their best and that this can be achieved by means of three sub-goals. The first one is that singers should know what and how to sing, that is to say, they should feel confident about what they are singing (p. 343). In the video, the singers seem to be confident about what they are singing since they do not even have the musical score or the song lyrics in their hands. The song is easy to remember. Also, from the expressions of the members of the group, they all seem to be focused and are paying attention to the teacher/director. Some of them even smile, showing they are enjoying what they are doing. Smiling can be classified as an affect display according to Ekman and Friesen (as cited in Hartman, n.d., pp. 1-2), because it carries emotional meaning and reveals how they are feeling at the moment of singing.

The second sub-goal with which the director can encourage singers to sing at their best is motivating them, claims Poggi (2011, p. 343). This can be observed in the video when the teacher/director marks when each voice should make its entrance. Not only does he mark the entrance, but he also mimics the lyrics together with the group without actually producing sound. This can be observed particularly during the first minute of the song. Thus, he is constructing a sense of motivation so that the choir can feel confident about the lyrics and know that "we are in this together" and that he is helping; he is one of us.

In connection with what was mentioned in the description of the discourse community, the teacher/director is an accessible, kind and funny man. Thus, each time he directs the choir, he smiles at every single member, making us feel that we are performing well. This idea of the director looking at each member can be observed in the video: he makes eye contact with all of us, and at second 00:49 he is even laughing with that joyful charisma he always has. Rodríguez Palacios (2013) additionally mentions that, when directing a choir, the director's head should be high, aligned vertically with the body, neither with lateral inclination nor protruding (p. 72). The previously mentioned aspect can be appreciated in the video since the director is standing properly.

The director gives directions to the singers by moving his hands and arms, and through looks. Rodríguez Palacios (2013) claims that arms and hands are the principal means of the gestural language of musical direction because they are the most easily movable and observed parts of the body (p.74). The distance from where the video is recorded does not allow a very precise analysis of his facial expressions, but it can be pointed out that he laughs, smiles and sometimes raises his eyebrows. Raising eyebrows could be classified as an illustrator

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*Illustration 1:  
his right hand  
marks tempo;  
his left hand  
provides  
feedback.*



*Illustration 2:  
the director  
provides  
feedback with  
both hands.*



*Illustration 3:  
the director  
claps at the  
end of the  
presentation.*

according  
Ekman  
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because  
movement  
eyebrows

accompanies and reinforces his singing.

Finally, Poggi (2011) claims that the third sub-goal for directors to make singers sing at their best is the feedback they provide. In this particular case, from second 00:19 to second 00:22, the director does two things at the same time: he directs by marking the tempo with his right hand—which Lemann (2015) says is the hand that directors use to do this—and he makes a gesture with his left hand to signal that the group is performing well (Illustration 1). His raising of the thumb can be categorized as an emblem according to Ekman and Friesen (as



*Illustration 4:  
length is  
signaled by  
using his arms.*

cited in Hartman, n.d., pp. 1-2), since it can be translated into the words “great”. Thus, this shows how the teacher/director is very expressive and so supportive that he even tells the singers they are doing well while he directs them at the same time. The same emblem can be appreciated at seconds 00:56-00:57 when he congratulates the singers for having made a correct movement of their bodies towards the right side. He makes these gestures with both of his hands and smiles as well (Illustration 2). Finally, another instance in which he provides positive feedback is when, at the end of the song, he claps together with the general public (Illustration 3). An applause is a positive emblem that is generally accompanied with the word “bravo”. The gesture represents enjoyment and approval. Nevertheless, according to Ekman’s and Friesen’s classification, an applause can also be an affect display since it carries emotional meaning and sends a message about people’s feelings.

Throughout the presentation, his most repeated gesture is the one with which the director marks the tempo. Even though he does not mark it so firmly, it is a guidance for singers to consider. The teacher/director does this by slightly moving his right hand to the left and to the right and by putting together his forefinger and thumb.

In seconds 00:03 and 00:18, while signaling the entrances to the different voices, the director makes a gesture by opening both arms, which is a signal for singers to make a note last longer. (Illustration 4). Thus, length is signaled by using his arms. However, apart from this movement he resorts to the opening of his mouth and the raising of his eyebrows once again. Moving his lips without actually singing is a facial movement that reinforces what he conveys with the movement of his arms (an emblem).





*Illustration 8: he anticipates the side to which the group should go first.*

In second 00:16, the director makes clear eye contact with the sopranos, since they are the ones who should sing after the contraltos (Illustration 5). Thus, oculosics —the study of eye-related non-verbal communication— is an important factor in a choir: without eye contact, communication is difficult. Moreover, the director points at the sopranos with this left hand. These two actions —pointing and making eye contact— help the group pay attention to what is about to come.

The same procedure is repeated at second 00:35, when baritones are signaled to make their entrance (Illustration 6).



*Illustration 5: the director points out and makes eye contact with sopranos.*



*Illustration 6: the director points out and makes eye contact with baritones.*



*Illustration 7: the director turns around to mark the bongo entrance.*

At second 00:36, the director turns his head and part of his body to his right. He does this in order to mark the

entrance to a man who is standing next to him and about to play the bongo. (Illustration 7). Once more, the director resorts to movement, eye contact and a slight nodding to do this.

Together with the teacher/director we decided to include an element to make the song more interesting. This element is a very simple “choreography” which consists in moving one step to the left and one step to the right while following the beat of the song. Throughout the year, we had trouble doing this because some members would often move in the wrong direction. Lemann (2015) mentions that intuition is a very important factor in a director, since he should be able to avoid defects or accidents. Thus, it can be observed how —starting from second 00:46, with movement beginning at second 00:55— the director makes a gesture to anticipate the side to which the group should go first (another emblem). The shared knowledge is that we should go to the right first, but he signals this as a reminder. At second 00:54, he does this again with his two hands by pointing at his right leg (Illustration 8). Without eye contact it is impossible for the singers to follow the instructions properly.

Proxemics is also an important aspect to analyze. Agnus (2012) claims that it was anthropologist Edward Hall who coined the term. Proxemics makes reference to the use and perception of one's social and personal space, such as seating (Agnus, 2012, p. 1). Further, Hans & Hans (2015) mention that the term refers to how space and distance influence communication. Rodríguez Palacios (2013) states that all the members of the group and the director should consider distance for two main reasons: the director be seen properly by all the singers, and he should also place himself where he can assess how the choir sounds. Plus, it is beneficial for the members of the group to form a semicircle so that all of them can see the directors' gestures and vice versa (p. 73).

Following the concept of proxemics, Hans & Hans (2015) state that “space influences how people communicate and behave” (p. 49). In the example that is being analyzed, three



different types of distance, which serve different purposes, can be observed.

The first one is intimate distance, which is 0 to 1.5 feet from the other person, as explained by Agnus

(2012). It is crucial that singers are close to each other so that they can listen properly and sing in unison. Moreover, this closeness is organized according to the singers' voice type (sopranos, contraltos and baritones).

Woods (2010) claims that choirs are often organized by taking into consideration voice type—soprano, alto, baritone. Thus, since there is more than one voice singing at the same time, this is an example of polyphony. The three voice types sing exactly the same notes and lyrics but the element that varies is the tonality in which each group sings. Once again, this can be interpreted by looking at the score, without the necessity of singing the song. Woods (2010) additionally mentions that this type of organization into sections “usually helps singers hear their voice part, thus lending a measure of security to any music making” (p. 2).

Nevertheless, even when the members of the choir are divided into different voices, this should not be perceived visually by the public who is watching them perform. That is the reason why, in this discourse community, sopranos and contraltos should stand close to each other and no gap should be seen between the two groups. Also, there is a second gap that divides the five contraltos into three and two. This should not occur either.

The second type of distance that can be observed is the one between the director and some of the singers. This distance can be classified as personal distance, which is 1.5 to 4 feet from the other person (Hans & Hans, 2015). It is important to point out that the type of direction found here is informal, and that directors usually give instructions from the front. In this case, because the director sings with the baritones, there is an intimate distance among them, whereas sopranos and contraltos are more separated from the director. Were the director at the front, all singers would be sharing personal distance.

The third type of distance is public distance, which Hans & Hans (2015) describe as space that is “four or more feet away from our body” (p.49). This type of distance is often taken in public speaking situations or, as in this case, in presentations. We can easily observe how the person recording the video and the rest of the audience are part of this category. In fact, the recorder is far away from the group and many other people’s heads can be seen in the image.

Finally, to complete our analysis of non-verbal communication, it is important to mention physical traits and artifacts. The place where this presentation is taking place is the hall of the school. We simply arrange some chairs for the audience and organize a simple presentation. Hanging on the wall, there is a blackboard with the following phrase: “Day of respect of cultural diversity”. The reason for this is that this school functions as a school of music during the afternoon but it is a regular primary school during the morning. This does not affect the performance because the members of the choir are used to sharing the space with the primary school, and also because both the choir and the audience focus on the performance rather than on what is hanging on the wall.

As regards temperature, it was moderate. The fan that can be seen on the right is off, and (since the author is a member of the choir) we know the heating was not on. Performances always take place in the hall of the school because the temperature remains comfortable

throughout the year. This is an important matter, since the choir needs to feel relaxed to provide a good performance. What is more, the hall is relatively small, which helps the members of the choir and the director have a closer connection with the audience.

Finally, in terms of colors, it is significant to mention that most of the members of the choir are dressed in black. This has been agreed beforehand with the teacher in order to look more or less all the same. If not, some people might wear more striking colors than others and this may be distracting for the audience. A choir should show unity, even in its members' clothing.

### **Conclusion**

This paper analyzed a choir as an example of a discourse community. It was explained that this is an adults' choir whose members cover a wide age range, but who share the same passion, which is expressing themselves through singing. As regards the first discursive example, an analysis was made on how musical scores are helpful for singers, and how music and language share a great variety of similarities. In relation to the second example, we analyzed the director's non-verbal communication and how it helps singers perform well.

Reflecting on this discourse community, we consider that, even though communication is fluent and effective in presentations, this community still fails at communicating out of the class. In the classroom, there is not so much communication. This may be simply because the group is very heterogenous in terms of age and because classes take place only once a week for an hour. Also, 85% of the class is devoted to singing, therefore, members cannot exchange much information among themselves. Being divided by voices and always taking the same seats does not allow us to socialize with people we never sit next to either.

Lastly, we believe this group simply enjoys communicating by singing. This does not mean there is no conversation, or that classes are boring. In fact, the atmosphere is comfortable, since the teacher is a great provider of fun and knowledge. However, for the reasons mentioned previously, it was difficult to obtain significant pieces of discourse such as conversations to analyze in this research paper. Thus, it can be said that the communicative

expectations of this group of people are met through music and therefore, rational and linguistic communication seems to be unnecessary.

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## Appendix 1

The following answers were obtained when members of the choir were asked why they attend the choir:

- Members A and B (females, 57 and 35 years old) attend because they both like singing. Since they are soloists in the music ministry at their churches, their objective is to improve their singing and gain experience in a different way. Also, the younger woman expressed that she wants to exercise her auditive skills.
- Member C (female, 37 years old) claimed that she attends the choir due to the fact that singing with other people and learning and practicing vocal technique motivates her.
- Member D (male, 15 years old) attends the class because he likes singing and is interested in creating music with his voice instead of with an instrument. Also, he mentioned that, even though he likes singing on his own, he prefers to do this activity with other pitch tonalities in order to create a harmony that cannot be created with just one voice.
- Member J (female, 29 years old) expressed that, even though she likes singing, the main reason why she is part of the group is due to the fact that her son attends another class in the same establishment at the same hour, so she has the chance to wait for him while enjoying this activity.
- Members E and F (females, 16 and 32 years old). The former expressed that she attends the choir in order to spend her free time doing an activity she enjoys. Further, she claimed that her initial intention was to enroll in an individual class, but since the music school does not offer that option, she enrolled in the choir and found the experience enjoyable as well. Similarly, the 32-year-old woman simply expressed that she likes singing and finds the class to be “a moment for herself” since the activity makes her feel well.
- Member G (male, 20 years old) enjoys expressing different emotions through music together with other people. He describes singing with others as “different” and “more gratifying” than doing it on his own.
- Members H and I (females, 45 and 53 years old) have liked singing since they were children and like social activities as well.



## **Appendix 2**

## La Estrella Azul

Huayno

Peteco Carabajal  
VC: Julián Sisterna  
dearbues@gmail.com (2007)

The musical score is written for Soprano, Alto, and Baritone voices in a 2/4 time signature with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The lyrics are in Spanish and are distributed across three systems of four measures each.

**System 1 (Measures 1-4):**

- Soprano:** DÓN DE.ES TA RÁ LA.ES TRE LLA.A ZUL E SA.ES TRE LLI TA DEL AL  
EN U NA LÁ GRI MA QUE DÓ HAS TA PRE DER SE.EN EL CIE
- Alto:** - - - - -
- Baritone:** - - - - -

**System 2 (Measures 5-8):**

- Soprano:** MA SUS O JOS SUE LEN BRI LLAR PER DI DOS EN LA.IN MEN SI  
LO MI CO RA ZÓN SE PAR TIÓ A TRA VE SA DO DE PE
- Alto:** AL MA AL MA SUS O JOS SUE LEN SUE LEN BRI LLAR EN LA.IN MEN SI  
CIE LO LO MI CO RA ZÓN SE PAR TIÓ DE PE
- Baritone:** - - - - -

**System 3 (Measures 9-12):**

- Soprano:** DAD DAD A VE CES PIEN SO QUE.ES TÁ.A  
NAR NAR A NA DIE PUE DO PRE GUN
- Alto:** DAD DAD A VE CES PIEN SO  
NAR NAR A NA DIE PUE DO
- Baritone:** - - - - -

13 14 15 16

QUÍ Y SE.I LU MI NA.EL CA MI NO CUAN DO.A PA RE CE.EL FUL GOR  
TAR CONLAS PA LA BRAS DEL AL MA Y.ES MI TRIS TE ZA.UN PA PEL

QUE.ES TÁ.A QUÍ SE.I LU MI NA.EL CA MI NO CUAN DO.A PA RE CE  
PRE GUN TAR PA LABRAS DEL AL MA MA Y.ES MI TRISTE ZA

TÁ PUE EL DO CA MI NO EL FUL  
DO PRE GUN TAR UN PA

17 18 19 20

CER QUI TA DE MI CO RA ZÓN ¿DÓN DE.ES TA RÁ LA.ES TRE LLA.A  
QUE.EL VIEN TO NO DE JA CA ER ER

EL FUL GOR DE MI CO RA ZÓN ¿DÓN DE.ES TA RÁ LA.ES TRE LLA.A  
UN PA PEL NO DE JA CA ER ER

GOR MI CO RA ZÓN  
PEL DE JA CA ER

21 22 23 24

ZUL? ZUL EN O TROS CIE LOS BRI LLA

YA NO PO DRÉ CON MI DO LOR EN O TROS CIE LOS BRI LLA

25 26 27 28 DC

E SA.ES TRE LLI TA DEL A MOR

RÁ DEL A MOR

RÁ E SA.E TRE LLI TA DEL A MOR