Chromaticism I: Mixture

General

The word "chromaticism" comes from the word "chrome," which goes back to the Greek word for color. We think of the seven diatonic notes within a key to be its natural components; any element that we add to this can be thought of as a "coloring" agent. Therefore, in its broadest sense, chromaticism refers to the employment of any tone that does not belong to the key.

I. Mixture: Definition

The simplest and most common type of chromaticism deals with what is called modal borrowing, or mixture. This involves the importation of one or more elements from a parallel mode (typically a borrowing from minor when in major, or vice-versa). The term "modal borrowing" emphasizes the specific modal affiliations of the tone(s) involved. The term "mixture" refers to the hybridized musical result: a space that is not exclusively major or minor, but composed of (or mixed from) elements from both.

The precedent of the leading tone in Minor

The most common (and perhaps oldest) example of modal borrowing involves the importation of the leading tone into modes that ordinarily have a lowered seventh scale-degree. The associated practice of raising scale-degree six is also an example of a borrowing from major.

The appropriateness of a term like "mixture" can be seen in passages where the borrowed tones are both preceded and followed by strong indicators of the original and prevailing mode.
Some other common examples of mixture

At various times and in various regions, a stylistic feature of much minor-mode music was the characteristic major third employed in the final chord of the composition. This example of modal borrowing is known as a **Picardy Third**.

The **Lowered-Sixth Scale Degree**: Although the examples thus far have involved the importation of elements from major into minor, it is also very common for $b6$ (from minor) to be used in a major context. The two instances in which this tends to take place are the predominant moment in a cadential progression, and as an afterthought following a tonic arrival.

Finally, the entire triad built on $bVI$ (from minor) is often imported into major to increase the effect of a deceptive cadence, or deceptive-type motion from V to VI.

**NB:** the $bVI$ triad from major is almost never imported into minor in a parallel fashion except in advanced chromatic music which is characterized by a particularly free exchange between major and minor.
\( bVI \) is also sometimes employed as part of a prolongational progression on the way to iv or ii\(^6\): 

\[ \begin{align*}
   \text{Bad:} & \quad \text{Fine:} & \quad \text{Cadential Progression:} \\
   I & \ (bVI) & \ iv & \ V & \ I & \ (bVI) & \ ii^6 & \ V & \ I & \ (bVI) & \ ii^{\#5} & \ V
\end{align*} \]

\( bVI \) may also be used as a predominant. Note that if the \( b6-5 \) motion is in the bass the progression must utilize a Cadential Six-Four in order to avoid parallel fifths.

II. **Mixture: A Hierarchy of Relationships**

Beyond the very common instances outlined above, a wide array of borrowings remain available to composers working in a tonal idiom. Although, strictly speaking, it is not necessarily incorrect to understand these as considerations of scale-degree and scale-degree assemblies, it is simplest and generally closest to compositional practice to think of the wholesale importation of chords into parallel modal environments. These chords can be classified according to the relative "foreignness" of their constituent parts with relation to the prevailing key.

A. **Simple Mixture: Case 1: Common Root**

There are four tones in common between parallel major and minor scales (scale-degrees 1, 2, 4, and 5); the simplest type of mixture involves borrowing a chord built on one of these tones. These chords have two tones in common with the parallel chord in the other mode.
B. Simple Mixture: Case 2: Changing Root

Borrowing the chords built on scale-degrees 3, 6, and 7 involves importing a new note for the chord root. Because of the primary importance given to this member of the chord, the overall effect can be considered "more drastic" than the importation of a chord whose root belongs in the prevailing mode. In the cases of the chords built on 3 and 6 this borrowing involves changing two notes; in the case of the chords built on 7 only one note is changed, but the functional importance of scale-degree 7 highlights the "drasticness" of the shift.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major (from minor)</th>
<th>Minor (from major)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bIII</td>
<td>bVI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bVII</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Neapolitan: The borrowing of the major triad built on a lowered scale-degree 2 (from Phrygian) is an outstanding example of this type of mixture, frequently imported into both major and minor contexts. The most common usage of this chord is as a predominant in a cadential progression, in which case it is virtually always found in first inversion (i.e., with scale-degree 4 in the bass). The smoothest voice-leading employs a cadential six-four, but the motion may be to a five-three dominant.

C. Secondary Mixture

Beyond the options related to modal borrowing, it is possible to change the quality of the chords built on the natural scale degrees. In the case of the chords built on 1, 4, and 5 this yields the same results as simple mixture. However, additional, new, options arise on 2, 3, 6, and 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Minor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bII</td>
<td>bIII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bVI</td>
<td>bVII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bvii</td>
<td>bVII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bII</td>
<td>biii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bvi</td>
<td>bvii</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
D. Double Mixture

A Final resource involves changing the quality of those elements borrowed from the parallel mode. Again, in the case of the chords built on 1, 4, and 5 this is redundant (e.g., changing from C major, to c minor, and back again to C major). However, in relation to 2, 3, 6, and 7, where simple mixture involved a new chord root, additional, new, options arise. (The following examples show the accumulated transformations that lead to double mixture.)

Note that the results of double mixture in one mode resemble the results of secondary mixture in the other mode.


III. Major-Minor Hybridization and Artificial Chords

Thus far we have looked at scale degree behaviors and harmonic situations which (even if solely on a chord by chord basis) reinforce, or are reducible to, the structural norms of a single diatonic system. However, it is possible to create harmonic units that are built out of scale-degree representatives from multiple modes. Just as the harmonic minor scale is called artificial - because it is not reconcilable to a single diatonic structure (mode), but created from elements of both major and minor - the term also describes these kinds of hybrid chords.

The Diminished Seventh Chord

This line of thinking can theoretically develop a number of distinct harmonies, one, however, the diminished seventh chord, is particularly common in compositional usage. As can be seen, this chord combines the leading-tone from major with b6 from minor.
IV. A Chart of Harmonic Relations

The following chart shows the set of chord relations amongst chords related to a given tonic. In a sense, the closest relation is that between the two parallel tonics (i.e., the change of mode). Taken abstractly, the chart can be seen to represent relations amongst chords within a progression, or key-areas within a composition. Items within a single column can be considered to be "related" (in terms of belonging to the same diatonic unit); while movement across a row can be seen to involve parallel and chromatic alterations (i.e., change of mode, or change of tonic [root]). Solid lines indicate a shared root (change of mode), dashed lines indicate a chromatic change of root.

Here's a realization of this chart using "C" as the point of reference:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{VII} \quad \text{vii}^0 \quad (\text{vii}) \quad \text{(VII) vii} \\
\text{VI} \quad \text{vi} \quad \text{vi} \quad \text{(VI) vi} \\
\text{V} \quad \text{v} \quad \text{v} \quad \text{(V) v} \\
\text{#IV} \quad \text{iv} \quad \text{iv} \quad \text{(#IV) iv} \\
\text{III} \quad \text{iii} \quad \text{iii} \quad \text{(III) iii} \\
\text{II} \quad \text{ii} \quad \text{ii} \quad \text{(II) ii} \\
\text{I} \quad \text{i} \quad \text{i} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{B} \quad \text{b} \quad \text{b} \quad \text{(B) b} \\
\text{A} \quad \text{a} \quad \text{a} \quad \text{(A) a} \\
\text{G} \quad \text{g} \quad \text{g} \quad \text{(G) g} \\
\text{F#} \quad \text{f#} \quad \text{f#} \quad \text{(F#) f#} \\
\end{array}
\]