Analysis in terms of counterpoint: Second species

First species should be taken not just as the most basic form of reductional analysis but also as the most central – the most standard case, the default option.

When other species are used, they are often only used for a measure or two within a phrase, mixing species in the spirit of fifth species (though fifth species is quite different at a more detailed level as it doesn't use first species at all).

The possibility of a measure in second species allows greater flexibility, in that more than just one note can appear in the reduction above a given bass tone. There are three main options for this.

1) Leap between two chord tones

The most common possibility is the leap between two chord tones (remember, rules about consonance in species counterpoint are translated into rules about chord tones in reductional analysis). This will most often be leap of a third or a fourth, though larger leaps (including octave leaps) are possible. Breaking into second species is a good option when the melody moves rapidly to fill in a significant registral separation between the main melodic tones of the chords preceding and following.

Still try to account for each chord's (or significant inversion's) melody in terms of first species, using second species only if it seems clearly preferable. Don't let use of second species make the line leapier than it should be, as would happen if second species were used to justify inclusion of the F's in the start of the melody in "Voi che sapete" (see notes on first species reductions).

Many of the same criteria used for choosing notes in first species can be used to decide whether two chord tones are both important enough to justify use of second species.

2) Include passing tones, and especially chordal sevenths

If a non-chord tone appears in second species it must be a passing tone, and accounting for passing tones is the second most common use of second species.

Sevenths, when they descend melodically from the root, are both passing tones and chord tones at the same time. Both roles justify their inclusion in a reduction in second species, and so they provide a very good reason for breaking into second species.

3) The cadential 6/4

A cadential 6/4 will almost always move by step between two main melodic tones, one for the 6/4 and one for its resolution. Include both, using second species.

Technically, the first of these tones (probably the 6th or the 4th above the bass) doesn't really belong in second species, as it is a non-harmonic tone, and non-harmonic tones aren't used on the downbeat in second species. As non-harmonic tones they are extremely conventionalized, however, so much so that they almost act like chord tones. (This is reflected in their inclusion in the figured bass; in contrast to baroque practice, modern use of figured bass in roman-numeral analysis hardly ever takes account of non-harmonic tones.) In general, you should include both tones in your reductions, using second species.

You will sometimes encounter cases in which the first main melodic tone of the cadential 6/4 is the same as the main melodic tone from the preceding chord. In such cases, write a tie over the barline instead of rearticulating the note. As we shall see, such cases preview the use of fourth species in analysis. The example below illustrates.