

The Harmonic Sequence

A sequence is a series of chords that are systematically transposed 2-4 times by a given interval. The change in pitch level (transposition) adds an element of variety to the unity created through repetition.

2 frequent examples:

Sequence by 5th movement between roots: vi-ii-V-I

Sequence by 3rd movement between roots: I-vi-IV-ii-(V-I)

The chords in a sequence may or may not function in their normal manner.

Occasionally, the melodic pattern involved in the sequence will take precedence over the harmonic progression. In the sequence I-IV-vii^o-iii-vi-ii-V-I₆ [Mozart C major P.S.], vii^o does not function properly (vii^o-I) as its leading tone does not resolve. Voice leading requirements, with the exception of bad parallels and hidden perfect consonances, are suspended in a sequence. IV is not the dominant of vii^o.

In a sequential progression that involves chords that do not function properly, the progression should be understood as a contrapuntal (harmonic) elaboration of the framing harmony. In the above sequence, the framing harmony is I and therefore the progression simply exists to prolong the tonic chord. The sequence is not a strong progression but serves to prolong a single structural chord.

A sequence of 5ths may involve diatonic triads, 7th chords, or alternating triads and 7th chords.

A sequence may also involve a series of 1st inverted chords: I-V₆-IV₆-iii₆-ii₆-I₆-vii^o₆-I. In this case, the root progressions make very little sense.