

Theory II: Applied Chords and Tonicization

Applied Chords (sometimes called *Secondary Dominants*) briefly *tonicize* a harmony other than tonic. A *tonicization* means that you briefly experience another key for a short period of time (a few beats or perhaps a measure or two). This is different from a *modulation*, which is an extended shift to a new *tonal center*.

Applied chords elaborate a diatonic harmony with chromaticism. For example, the third of a supertonic triad can be raised to create a V/V chord. See the figure below. If we are in the key of C, changing a D minor triad to a D major triad will change the harmony from a ii chord to a V/V chord, giving a brief sense that we are in the key of G major. V/V can be read as "Five of Five," or the dominant of the dominant. There are two kinds of applied chords to look at, applied dominant chords and applied leading tone chords.

C: I ii V I I V/V V I

Applied dominants and leading tones may be triads or seventh chords, and will have an altered tone of some sort. The altered tone will become either the leading tone or the seventh of the chord to which it is applied. Below are examples of applied dominants and applied leading tones in both the major and minor modes. Note that you cannot tonicize diminished harmonies.

I V^7/IV IV ii V/V V I^6 $vii^{\circ 6}/ii$ ii I^6 $vii^{\circ 7}/iii$ iii

i V^7/iv iv III $vii^{\circ 6}/VI$ VI iv V^7/VII VII VII V^7/III III

Voice Leading Rules:

1. Applied Dominant and Leading Tone chords have the same voice leading rules as their home-key counterparts. This means that the leading tone of the tonicized key and the seventh of the chord (if it is present) still need to resolve appropriately.

2. A *Cross-relation* occurs when an altered tone moves from one voice to another when it could occur in a single voice. This should be avoided if at all possible by preparing altered tones to move by semi-tone in a single voice. When a cross-relation must occur, it is best to do so as a leap from an inside voice to an outer voice. Below, the A in the soprano moves to A# in the tenor, creating a cross-relation. In the second example, the A moves up to A# in the same voice, which prepares the altered tone.

Incorrect Correct

The image shows two musical examples in 3/4 time, key of A major. The first example, labeled 'Incorrect', shows a progression from I (A major) to V/vi (E7) to vi (F#m). The soprano voice leads from A4 to G#4, and the tenor voice leads from E4 to F#4, creating a cross-relation. The second example, labeled 'Correct', shows the same progression. The soprano voice leads from A4 to A#4, and the tenor voice leads from E4 to F#4, preparing the altered tone.

I V/vi vi I V/vi vi

3. When resolving an applied dominant 7th chord to another dominant 7th chord, you will resolve the leading tone of the first dominant 7th to the 7th of the second dominant 7th chord.

The image shows a musical example in C major, 4/4 time. It illustrates the resolution of an applied dominant 7th chord (V7/V) to another dominant 7th chord (V7) and finally to the tonic (I). The leading tone of the first chord (F#) resolves to the seventh of the second chord (F).

V⁷/_V V⁷ I

General Guidelines:

1. Almost always, when you see a Major-minor 7th chord (Dominant 7th) that does not belong to your tonic key, you are dealing with an applied dominant. The same is mostly true for fully-diminished 7th chords: they are often applied leading tones.

2. You can think of applied chords function as *local* dominants, but as *global* pre-dominant harmonies. V/V is a pre-dominant harmony. Their function generally will not change from the diatonic harmony from which they are altered.

3. Typically, the altered tone will be a leading tone (especially if it is raised) or a seventh (especially if it is lowered). Use these as signposts to quickly analyze and determine which applied chord you are dealing with. Signposts: b7 ("Te") = V⁷/IV, #4 ("Fi") = V or vii/V, #1 ("Di") = V or vii/ii, #2 ("Ri") = V or vii/iii, etc.