

ACTING WITH AN ACCENTTM

STAGE DIALECT INSTRUCTION

by

DAVID ALAN STERN, Ph. D.

Manual for Tape #14

BOSTON DIALECTS

DIALECT ACCENT SPECIALISTS, INC.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DAVID ALAN STERN is founder and president of DIALECT ACCENT SPECIALISTS in Hollywood where he works as an accent and dialect coach for the motion picture and television industry. After receiving a Ph.D. in speech from Temple University, he served on the faculties of both Wichita State and Penn State Universities. He has taught thousands of actors and broadcasters to put on (or take off) foreign accents and regional dialects. Among the students he has coached are:

MIKE FARRELL JACK KLUGMAN EDWARD JAMES OLMO
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SOME PRELIMINARY CONCERNS

When Should I Use Dialects & Accents?

Here are a few guidelines I've put together after years of performing and coaching dialects.

(1) If there are characters in the script who come from a different speech group than the rest of the cast, consider differentiating them with appropriate dialects. (2) If the entire script is set in a country or region where a specific dialect of English is spoken, decide whether you can have the whole cast use that dialect without violating the rules listed below. (3) Avoid using foreign accents for English translations of foreign scripts. For example, don't try Chekhov with a Russian accent or Moliere with a French accent. For such "classics," try using ELEVATED AMERICAN DICTION (see tape #8 in the SPEAKING WITHOUT AN ACCENT series). (4) Elevated Diction is also appropriate when American casts are doing Shakespeare, especially those of his plays which are not set in England. (5) Finally, DON'T USE ACCENTS UNLESS THEY ARE GOING TO BE PERFORMED WELL!

What Makes a Good Dialect/Accent Performance?

I consider dialect performances to be good if they follow four rules or axioms: (1) They must create an IMPRESSION OF AUTHENTICITY. Audiences must be able to suspend reality and really perceive that the characters speak those patterns. The characters must not give the impression that they are "putting it on." (2) Dialect performances should be TOTALLY INTELLIGIBLE. Every word must be understood by the audience. (3) Accents must be CONSISTENT; characters from the same dialect groups cannot have totally different regionalisms. (4) The speech patterns must be integrated into COMPLETE ACTING PERFORMANCES. They must be free of stereotypes or any traits which call attention to the use of the accent. With or without accents, the principles of moment-to-moment acting must still apply.

What Learning Techniques Lead to Good Dialects?

Perhaps as few as twenty per cent of actors are skilled in dialect imitation. They have "good ears" and are able to match dialects acoustically without having to analyze the patterns. Other actors must learn dialects more systematically to create an impression of authenticity. Here is a brief discussion of the most important factors.

PRONUNCIATION: Creating correct pronunciation changes is a "necessary BUT NOT A SUFFICIENT" condition for creating dialect authenticity. Most texts, recorded instructional programs, and teachers in the field concentrate almost exclusively on drilling vowel and consonant changes between standard dialect and the target pattern. Although I believe that correct pronunciation is absolutely necessary, these changes will not sound authentic unless accompanied by several other vocal features that can also be drilled and mastered.

PITCH CHARACTERISTICS: "Pitch" can refer to any of several vocal traits from how low or high a voice is to how much intonation or pitch variety is used. But for many of the dialects we will study, the most important trait for authenticity is creating a unique lilt or pitch change that takes place inside vowels--especially (but not exclusively) during the sounding of vowels which are in stressed syllables. In many dialects, this trait (which I call INNER-VOWEL LILT) generates much of the impression of authenticity.

STRESS PATTERNS: American English has a complex pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. Some other patterns have few, if any unstressed syllables. Still others have rather intricate staccato rhythms which must be mastered if the dialect is ever to sound authentic.

RESONANCE or TONE PLACEMENT: Much of my research, teaching, and performing experience has proven to me that the most important part of a dialect's authentic essence comes from a characteristic shaping of the

throat, nose, mouth, tongue, and soft palate. The many available configurations, in turn, give many different resonances or timbres to the overall sound. These specific resonances or "tone focuses" are very noticeable throughout a dialect, regardless of whether actual pronunciation changes are occurring on certain words. In fact, once an actor has mastered the new muscularity and tone focus for a given dialect, many of the important pronunciation changes can be made much more easily and convincingly. Most of the tapes in this series begin with a detailed lesson on resonance. Subsequent pronunciation drills then grow from the new muscularity. As such, you have an "organic core" for generating your pronunciation changes. You are not simply memorizing isolated, mechanical substitutions for vowels and consonants.

What's the Best Way to Practice?

Begin by drilling the mechanics of the new dialect--resonance, lilt, rhythm, and pronunciations. Then integrate the changes into sentences and passages. Next you must try improvising and actually generating your own speech while using the new dialect. Don't limit your new accent to the target script. If you do, you are apt to be very mechanical and never create a sense that you are a real person who actually communicates with the new dialect as a primary medium of speech.

What Other Resources Are Available?

Here are a few other tapes, records, and books which could be of use to you in your stage dialect pursuits.

Jerry Blunt, *STAGE DIALECTS* and *MORE STAGE DIALECTS*, (New York, Harper & Row, 1967 & 1979).

The first Blunt series (three tapes and a book which is available separately) teaches the International Phonetic Alphabet and twelve major dialects of America, British Isles, Europe and Japan. Instruction is by imitation and a fairly complete pronunciation analysis and drill. The second series (two tapes and a book--again available separately) demonstrates the accents of

native speakers from many groups around the U. S., British Isles and many other parts of the world. The representative samples are excellent for imitation and of fairly good recording quality. The book contains transcripts of the tapes and very brief analyses of major pronunciation changes.

ENGLISH WITH AN ACCENT and ENGLISH WITH A DIALECT,
BBC Records #166 & #173.

These records provide samples of most European accents and British dialects (plus a few samples from Asia, Africa, and America). Recording quality is excellent. No analyses are given. Learning must be by imitation only.

Lewis Herman & Marguerite S. Herman, FOREIGN DIALECTS and AMERICAN DIALECTS (New York, Theatre Arts Books, 1943 & 1947).

These books contain detailed pronunciation analyses of most major American & European accents. Alphabet symbols are used instead of IPA. Though the pronunciation breakdown is overly detailed for a new dialect student, it is quite useful for advanced students and teachers. Other dialect traits are briefly discussed.

Evangeline Machlin, DIALECTS FOR THE STAGE, (New York, Theatre Arts Books, 1975).

The manual and two tapes (sold as a set) provide most of their instruction by imitation or "play it and say it" technique. The series contains most of the major speech patterns of America, Europe, Africa, and Britain. Though the recording quality is often less than ideal, the tapes provide excellent samples for imitation.

INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC SYMBOLS

VOWELS

[i] as in <u>see</u>	[u] as in <u>soup</u>
[I] as in <u>sit</u>	[U] as in <u>foot</u>
[e] as in <u>say</u> (Romance)	[ə] as in <u>some</u> [ɜ] as in <u>bird</u> (Romance)
[ɛ] as in <u>set</u>	[ɜ] as in <u>doer</u>
[æ] as in <u>sat</u>	[ɜ] as in <u>bird</u> (British)
[a] as in <u>father</u> (Eastern U. S.)	[ɑ] as in <u>brought</u>
	[ɑ] as in <u>father</u>
	[ɒ] as in <u>honest</u> (except Eastern U. S.)

DIPHTHONGS

[eɪ] as in <u>say</u>	[oʊ] as in <u>grow</u>	[aɪ] as in <u>high</u>
[aʊ] as in <u>now</u>	[ɔɪ] as in <u>boy</u>	[ɛə] as in <u>air</u>
[iə] as in <u>beer</u>	[uə] as in <u>poor</u>	

CONSONANTS

[p] as in <u>pick</u>	[b] as in <u>best</u>	
[t] as in <u>tank</u>	[d] as in <u>dinner</u>	
[k] as in <u>kiss</u>	[g] as in <u>dig</u>	
[f] as in <u>cough</u>	[v] as in <u>every</u>	
[θ] as in <u>thin</u>	[ð] as in <u>this</u>	
[s] as in <u>sing</u>	[z] as in <u>pigs</u>	
[ʃ] as in <u>ship</u>	[ʒ] as in <u>garage</u>	
[tʃ] as in <u>chip</u>	[dʒ] as in <u>judge</u>	
[m] as in <u>men</u>	[n] as in <u>name</u>	[ŋ] as in <u>sing</u>
[w] as in <u>witch</u>	[j] as in <u>yes</u>	[r] as in <u>river</u>
[h] as in <u>hill</u>	[hw] as in <u>which</u>	
[l] as in <u>let</u>	[ʔ] "glottal stop"	

*Other symbols, not commonly heard in English, are explained as needed within the dialect manuals.

**"Lessac" refers to a totally different system of phonetic symbols used by Arthur Lessec in his text, The Use and Training of the Human Voice. Lessac symbols are provided in the manuals for those who have studied that system.

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Instructional Tape #14

BOSTON DIALECT

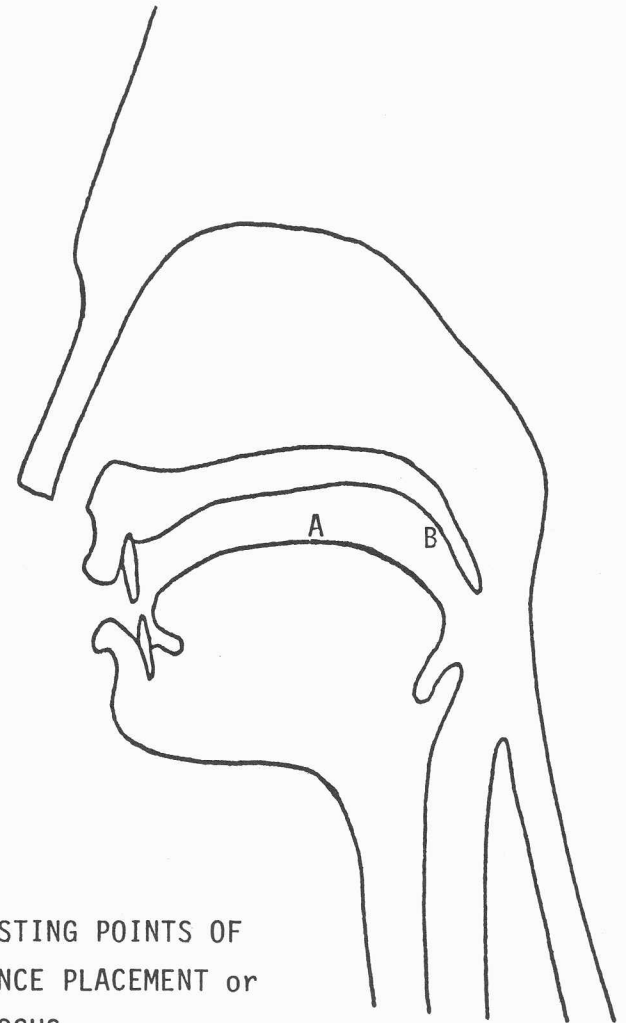
This tape addresses itself to two basic styles of Bostonian speech patterns which are more similar to each other than they are different. They are characterized by slightly different resonance focuses and have minor vowel differences. These two patterns will usually suffice for all Boston and most general Eastern New England speech patterns except for the very specific DOWN EAST and "KENNEDY-ESQUE" patterns which are the topics of tape 15 and tape 16 respectively.

LESSON 1: CREATING THE BOSTON RESONANCE

The first step in creating a Boston dialect is to make an overall change in the resonance features of the voice. As explained on the tape, Boston speech focuses its tone or resonance in the high-rear of the mouth, on the back of the soft palate, near the opening into the nasal passage. The resonance is not really "nasal." The air does not actually come out through the nose on vowels. It is, however, perceived as nasal in nature by most listeners.

Follow the tape through several exercises in generating the resonance focus away from the center of the mouth where it creates a nonregional American impression and onto the rear palate by:

- (1) Imagining the Change in Tone Focus and Feeling a Change in Tissue Vibration
- (2) Creating and then Reducing Nasality
- (3) Lifting the Back of the Tongue
- (4) Gliding the Lips Forward and Closing them Slightly (***)This exercise generates what I refer to as the "muffled style" of Bostonian--the slightly less articulate sounding of the two basic patterns.)



CONTRASTING POINTS OF
RESONANCE PLACEMENT or
TONE FOCUS

A--Standard American Dialect

B--Boston point of resonance

LESSON 2: LILT & INFLECTION PATTERNS

Although the DOWN EAST and the MASSACHUSETTS UPPER CLASS dialects do have a very characteristic "drop lilt" in their stressed vowels (refer to tapes 15 & 16), the actual Bostonian speech style is fairly flat. There is no real characteristic vowel lilt, nor is there much movement of pitch between words. This doesn't mean that every Bostonian speaks in a monotone. Individual characters may be very expressive with pitch. This particular trait, however, is not one of the defining characteristics of this dialect pattern.

LESSON 3: VOWEL PRONUNCIATIONS OF BOSTON DIALECT

Most of the following vowel pronunciations actually grow directly out of the muscularity you had to develop to produce the Bostonian resonance in the last lesson. Try not to think of these pronunciations as isolated vowel changes. Study them as natural extensions of the overall muscularity. Follow the tape to hear the following vowel pronunciations:

1. [ɒ] for "short O" and several [ɑ] vowels. (Lessac: Vowel #4 for "short O" and some #5 vowels)

***This is a specialized "short O" very characteristic of Boston. The lips are held forward lazily. Follow the tape.

- hot; rock; God; odd; not; knock; golf; obligate; fox;
- Becket was occupied defending the honor of God.
- The rocket shot toward the opposite airlock.
- The obstinate opera singer was preoccupied.
- The frog got groggy and hopped away.
- what; watch; wash; want
- What do you want to watch?

2. [a] substitutes for the rounded [ɔ] of other parts of the Northeast and for the [ɑ] of the Midwest. This is the vowel usually spelled with "au" "al" "aw" "ou" "of" "ong" "oth" and "os."

(Lessac: The Eastern #3 vowel becomes #5 with a slightly frontal placement.)

- Boston; song; often; cloth; awful; applaud; laundry; sought; saw; draw; taught; always
- The tall author often walked awkwardly.
- He stalked the ball and vaulted across the lawn.
- The dog fought the moth which he brought home from the mall.
- The cat crawled across the lawn with its hurt paw.

3. [ou] with the lips forward and considerably closed substitutes for [aʊ] in the "muffled" or the "closed" style of Boston dialect. This change doesn't always have to happen. (In the Lessac System: #51 moves toward being #21 with the lips muffled.)

- sound; crowd; around; coward; power; crown
- How about now?
- Even the proud bow down before the Count.
- I found I'd gained about a pound.
- Wild flowers abound with out-of-the-way sounds.
- The loudest hound in town bow-wowed at the mouse.

4. [æ] has several different pronunciations in Boston dialect, depending on the consonants which follow it. It occasionally changes to [ɑ] as it does in Standard British in words such as "laugh" and "can't." However it does not follow the British rule and isn't even very consistent from person to person. (Lessac: #6 sometimes becomes #5.)

- class; laugh; last; chance; can't; after; past

Before "m" and "n" (except for the "nc" combinations noted above), many Bostonians will use the nasalized [ɛə̃] diphthong. (Lessac: In this situation, #6 can become a nasalized N₃n.)

- example; sand; advantage; and; Sam; transfer; standard

BUT--much of the time this vowel stays the [æ] or Lessac #6 vowel, albeit with the Boston resonance placed upon it.

--basket; tramp; character; establishment; act

And now here are several sentences with all three possible pronunciations of this vowel mixed in. Listen closely to the tape.

--The last man handed the annual to the Admiral.
 --Ask any bashful man in Alabama and accept his answer.
 --Sam laughingly rammed the flag into the anthill.
 --The staff had a rash of bad habits.

LESSON 4: THE PRONUNCIATION OF "R" FOLLOWING VOWELS

In the heaviest Boston dialects, "R" drops after vowels (except when the next word or syllable begins with a vowel and the "R" has to reappear). The vowel stems which remain, of course, must have the Boston resonance. Even in the softer accents when many of the "R's" are retained, the vowel-plus-R combination still is shaded by the palatal tone focus.

1. [a] substitutes for [ar] ****This is one of the most characteristic and recognizable Boston sounds. Not only does the "R" usually drop, but the vowel stem becomes both palatal and forward. (Lessac: #5+R drops "R" and becomes frontal and palatal.) Listen careful to the tape for this very characteristic Boston sound.

--marshal; heart; scarf; charge; ark; barn
 --He disembarked from the sparkling new golf cart.
 --Father Charles argues about the guards' identity cards.
 --Arthur charged out of the arbor unharmed.

REMEMBER--a vowel after the "dropped R" will bring it back to life. Here are some contrasts.

--Are they there? / Are all of them there?
 --This is a par five hole. / Par is five on the hole.
 Also remember, the vowel in the word "father" sounds like this particular "R-drop."

2. [a] also substitutes for the [ɔr] combination. The rounded vowel followed by "R" sounds in Boston dialect almost exactly the same as the [ar] we just studied. (Lessac: #3+R becomes #5)

--four; score; door; fortune; Orville; more; pour
 --Fourteen bored sportsmen adorned the shore.
 --Forty gory creatures poured through the French doors.
 --The spores were found in the core of the ornament.
 --The shore is big. Let's explore it.
 --The Concord poured forth exhaust.

3. [uə] substitutes for [ur] (Lessac: N¹n+R drops R)

--poor; tour; secure; allure; sure
 --Are you sure you can endure the long tour?
 --Poor hunters offer no allure to the newer sure shots.
 --The cure for polio makes Salk's name endure through history.

4. [ɛə] substitutes for [ɛɜ] (Lessac: N³n+R drops R)

--Air; hair; barely; scared; stairs
 --Where did the polar bear go?
 --The flu scare was really hard to bear.
 --Grin and bear it.
 --An air of excitement rarely blares down the stairs.

5. [iə] substitutes for [ir] (Lessac: N²n+R drops R)

--gear; clear; appear; sincere; tears
 --Never fear, the wheel to steer is near the gear shift.
 --Be sincere my dear, it's a queer world.
 --A keg of beer appeared near the rear window.

6. [ə] substitutes for [ɜ] (Lessac: N⁴+R drops R)

--runner; brother; worker; helper; hanger; sailor; color; sister
 --The burglar and his helper made a clamor.
 --My mother, my father, my sister and brother went away.
 --The runner staggered over the hill.

[3] substitutes for [ʒ] (R-Deriv. doesn't add R)

first; bird; earnest; word; search; worm
My name is David Alan Stern.
Herman was the first to win thirty games.
He searched the world for a perfect curve.
The girl caught a perfect fish with an earth worm.

**In softer Boston accents, some of the R-flavoring stays on this vowel, along with the Boston resonance, of course.

Adding an "R" to Vowel Endings: Many people think that Bostonians add "R" to all words which end with a vowel. NOT TRUE. Most of the time the "extra R" is added only onto words ending with vowels when, in turn, the next word begins with a vowel. Follow the examples on the tape.

That's Cuba. / Cuba is an island.
That's a good idea. / That's an idea-and-a-half.
That's what I saw. / I saw it over there.

LESSON 5: COACHED DRILL

Here are the shorthand symbols which I use for marking scripts in this dialect. Remember, however, when going through the drill passage, that the pronunciation changes noted must be generated as extensions of the new tone or resonance focus.

SUBSTITUTION	SYMBOL	EXAMPLE
[ɔ] for short o & for [a] after w	ɔ	watch hot on
[a] for [ɔ]	a	ball coffee
[ɔ] for [a]	o	how about now
[ɛə] or [æ] for [æ]	ɑ ~	last sand act
[a] for [ar] [or]	a	hard core

SUBSTITUTION

SYMBOL

EXAMPLE

Other "R-drops"

r

he~~re~~ bi~~nd~~

Extra R

r

the idea ^ris

DRILL PASSAGE

Follow the tape closely. We'll go through Lincoln's speech once word-by-word. They you can hear it in connected speech with several different styles and intensities of Boston dialect.

Four^ascore^a-and-seven years^a ago, our^a father^as brought^a forth^a on this^a continent a new nation--conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this, but in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will

little note no^a long remembe^a what we say he^ue, but
it can neve[~] forget^a what they did he^ue.

HAVE AT IT WITH YOUR BOSTON DIALECT!