

ACTING WITH AN ACCENT

COCKNEY

by

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DAVID ALAN STERN is the founder and president of DIALECT ACCENT SPECIALISTS publishing, and has worked in Hollywood since 1980 as an accent and dialect coach for the motion picture and television industries. 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 Olmos,
Bronson Pinchot, Lynn Redgrave, Forest Whitaker,
and Michael York as well as OSCAR WINNERS
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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 dialect(s). (2) If the entire script is set in a country or region where a specific dialect of English is spoken, determine whether the whole cast can use that pattern while still creating complete, believable characters. (3) Avoid using foreign accents for translations of foreign scripts. For example, don't play Chekhov with a Russian accent or Moliere with a French accent. For such "classics," try using **ELEVATED AMERICAN DICTION** (see the final tape 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 techniques lead to good dialects?

Perhaps as few as twenty per cent of actors have the "good ear" that leads to skillful imitation of speech patterns. Other actors must use a systematic approach in order to create authentic-sounding accents and dialects. Here is a brief discussion of the most important factors.

PRONUNCIATION: Creating correct pronunciation changes is a "necessary, but not sufficient" condition for generating dialect authenticity. Most teachers, texts, and recorded programs drill their students almost exclusively with the appropriate vowel and consonant substitutions needed for the target pattern. Although I believe that correct pronunciation is absolutely necessary, these changes will not sound authentic unless you combine them with several other important vocal features that I'll discuss in the next few paragraphs.

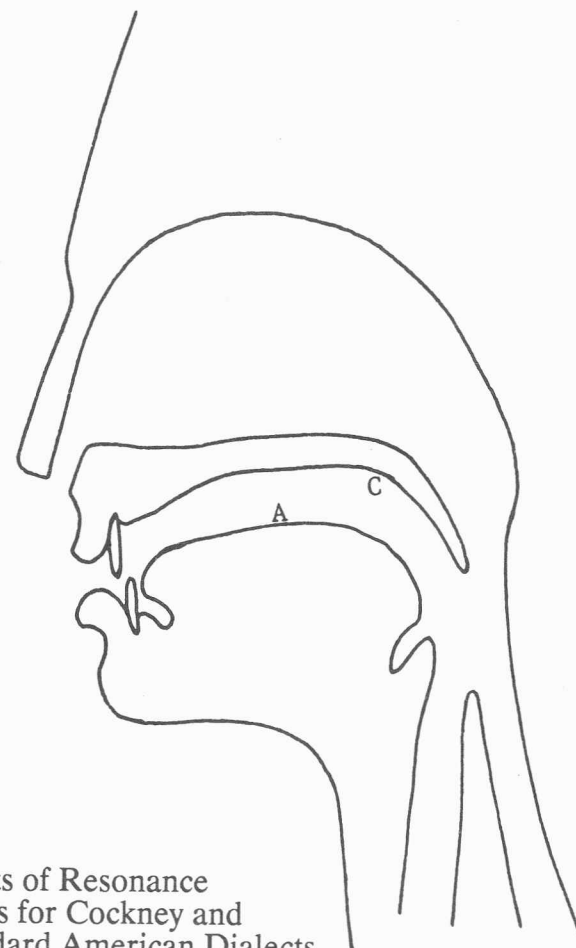
PITCH CHARACTERISTICS: "Pitch" can refer to any of several vocal traits--from how high or low a voice is to how much intonation or pitch variety is used. But for many of the dialects which actors must study, the most important of these traits is a unique lilt or pitch change that takes place inside vowels, especially (but not exclusively) during the sounding of stressed syllables. In many accent patterns, this trait (which I call INNER-VOWEL LILT) helps to generate an authentic-sounding dialect.

STRESS PATTERNS: American English has a complex pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. Some other dialects and accents have few, if any unstressed syllables. Still others have rather intricate staccato rhythms which must be mastered before the dialects can possibly sound authentic.

RESONANCE or MUSCULAR SPEECH IMPULSE: Much of my research, teaching, and performing experience has taught 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. Such a specific "tone focus" is 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. So now your new pronunciations have an "organic core." They need no longer be isolated memory exercises.

What is the best way to practice?

Begin by drilling the mechanics of the new dialect--the resonance, lilt, rhythm, and pronunciations. Go on to integrate the changes into phrases, sentences, and passages. Then 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 the sense that you are a real person who actually talks this way.



Points of Resonance
Focus for Cockney and
Standard American Dialects

A -- Standard American

C -- Cockney

ACTING WITH AN ACCENT COCKNEY

LESSON ONE:

COCKNEY RESONANCE or MUSCULAR SPEECH IMPULSE

The first step in creating a Cockney dialect is to make an overall change in the resonance features of the voice. As I explain on the tape, Cockney speech focuses its tone or resonance in the high-back part of the mouth--between the rear-tongue and the soft palate. Contributing drastically to this new resonance is a distinctly different speech muscularity. Standard American speech centers most of its muscle work in the middle part of the tongue. Cockney, by contrast, requires a wider opening in the back of the mouth and much more work in the very back of the tongue.

Follow the tape through the series of exercises for generating the new resonance away from the mid-mouth focus of American speech and toward the high-back muscularity by:

1. visualizing the change in tone focus and feeling a change in the tissue vibration,
2. lowering the back of your tongue to create a wider opening in the back of the oral cavity, and
3. pretending that you are "gulping" and "swallowing" the sounds.
4. WARNING: Be careful that you do not create any tension in your throat during these exercises. Remember, the muscle changes are in the mouth, not the throat.

Finally, follow the tape and try the new resonance on the following sentences:

THE BOOK IS IN THE DESK.

THE CAT IS DOWN ON THE GROUND.

THE BOY WENT AROUND THE TOWN.

LESSON TWO: VOWEL CHANGES RELATED TO COCKNEY RESONANCE

The following vowel substitutions are extensions of the resonance shift you just learned. Repeat the words and sentences after hearing them on the tape. Don't just imitate the new pronunciations. Create the new muscularity, and let the Cockney vowels grow naturally out of that change in speech impulse.

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1. THE "LONG E" as in SEE

IPA: [i] becomes [əi].
LESSAC: y becomes N⁴ + y.

- A. each, agree, cheat, achieve, equal
- B. Please cease to creep through the Garden of Eden.
- C. For tea, meat and cheese were served under the tree.
- D. Steve went to pieces because he was so green with envy.

Now here are a few additional drills for the "LONG E" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * The speedy car careened off the freeway.
- * He teased the eager marine with sneezing powder.
- * He achieves intrigue by agreeing to speak Japanese in two scenes.
- * We can't seem to agree on what to eat this evening.

ə

2. THE "LONG OO" as in SMOOTH

IPA: [u] becomes [əu].
LESSAC: #1 becomes N⁴ + #1.

- A. moon, truth, gloomy, prove, flute
- B. I always knew that cool prunes were never blue.
- C. The gloomy June moon moves fools to loons.
- D. At two past noon, we heard hooves on the roof of the room.

Now here are a few additional drills for the "Long OO" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * Give the duke a boost with your boot.
- * Rumor has it that raccoons buy fruit with coupons

3. THE "LONG A" as in DAY

IPA: [ei] becomes [ai].
LESSAC: +y becomes #6y.

- A. able, greatest, played, neighbor, famous
- B. The flaky neighbor made a face at the baby.
- C. The fateful delay in rainfall placed a great weight on Nathan's shoulders.
- D. The ailing aviator chased the victory for its own sake.

Now here are a few additional drills for the "Long A" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * They paid the price for delaying the instant replay.
- * A great April shower came our way today.

4. THE "LONG I" as in CRIME

IPA: [ai] becomes [ɔi].
LESSAC: #6y becomes #3y.

- A. bright, time, Eliza, writer, widest
- B. It's the right time to find a gold mine in the sky.
- C. The sight of dry land made for an exciting ending to the flight.
- D. A life of violent crime has become a depressing sign of the times.

Now here are a few additional drills for the "Long I" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * The actor recited ironic rhymes of an ionic kind.
- * Blind justice presided over the indictment.
- * This time of night is for the shining of lights.
- * Nine firemen tried to fight the flames

5. THE "LONG O" as in ALONE

IPA: [ou] becomes [æou].
LESSAC: #21 becomes #6 + #21.

- A. oaken, loan, staccato, stone, slowly
- B. Long ago people slept on the cold earth.
- C. Slowly the ocean waves rolled toward the homes.
- D. The oboe and cello sat alone, woefully echoing tone for tone.

Now here are a few additional drills for the "LONG O" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * The rowboat slowly floated over the ocean.
- * He was bloated from eating a roasted tomato.
- * Of all the folks I know, he is the most hopeful.
- * I told Joan that the snow is flown in from Ohio.
- * Smoke rolled out the open end of the hotel window.

6. THE "SHORT O" as in HONEST and WHAT

IPA: [ɑ] becomes [ɔ].
LESSAC: #5 becomes #4.

NOTE: In many American regions, this vowel is already rounded. Lessac, in fact, calls for the slightly rounded #4 vowel in these words.

- A. obstinate, odd, quality, aqua
- B. Mr. Roberts threw the potted palm into the balmy deep.
- C. Tommy is a rock opera.
- D. He fled from the swampy bog and stopped on the rocks.

Now here are a few additional drills for the "SHORT O" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * He occupied the gondola of the golf cart.
- * The rocket shot toward the opposite air lock.
- * Oxygen is commonly found in air pockets.
- * Becket was positive about the honor of God.
- * Move the fox from the rocks to the bog.

7. THE "BROAD AW" as in BROUGHT

IPA: [ɔ] becomes [ɔ:]
 LESSAC: #3 rounds very tightly

- A. pause, brought, important, author
- B. The cat crawled across the lawn.
- C. The quarterback stalked the ball.
- D. The tall author stormed toward the North Pole.

And now here are a few more drills for the "Broad AW" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * The awkward, awful, tall man walked home.
- * He stalked the ball and then vaulted down the hall.
- * He thought he saw the autumn leaves falling.
- * You taught me to vault flawlessly without falling.

LESSON THREE: PITCH CHARACTERISTICS OF COCKNEY

Cockney speech has no essential internal lilt or external melody. The type and amount of intonation can vary with the traits of the individual characters. Follow the tape as I demonstrate the following sentence with different intonation traits.

WE TRAVELED ALONG THE MOTORWAY AND WENT
OFF TO GET A BITE TO EAT.

LESSON FOUR: PRONUNCIATIONS LEARNED WITH PITCH

1. THE R-DROP as in MOTHER

As with Standard British, when "R" follows a vowel, Cockneys drop off the actual glide sound of the "R," leaving only the vowel

or diphthong stem. Listen carefully to the tape for the proper style of "R-dropping."

- A. player, helper, brother, blur, mother
- B. The Dodgers weren't only baseball players but also great fellers.
- C. The runner staggered over the hill and became a blur.

- A. first, thirsty, earnest, hurdle, word
- B. Herman was the first to win thirty games.
- C. Herb first learned twenty new words.

- A. shore, more, before, door, explore
- B. Fourteen boring sportsmen adorned the shore.
- C. Forty gory creatures poured through the French doors.

- A. car, Harvard, sergeant, guard, mark
- B. The archer got out of the arbor unharmed.
- C. Archie told him to park the car in Harvard Yard.

- A. sincere, here, queer, appear, cheer
- B. Don't jeer at me; I'm not weird.
- C. The steering wheel was near the gear shift.

- A. hair, pear, rare, barely, fair
- B. Where did the polar bear go?
- C. There was an air of excitement, which was rare.

- A. endure, tour, sure, allure
- B. You're sure you can endure the long tour?
- C. Poor hunters offer no allure to pacifists.

Now try these additional R-drills.

- * Summer went faster and further than winter.
- * Herman was the first to win thirty games.
- * Father Charles argues about the guard's identity card.
- * More and more support came forth for the orphans' party.
- * Pay your fare, then tell the driver where to stop.
- * Be sincere my dear; it's a queer world.
- * I'm secure that velour will endure.

2. R-GLIDES as in THERE IS

Between vowels, the "R" neither drops nor taps in Cockney speech. Instead, it returns to its full pronunciation. Within a word (between vowels) you simply pronounce a hard R, attaching it more closely to the second of the two vowels. If the R comes at the end of a word and is followed closely by another word beginning with a vowel sound, the R glides over as if it were the first phoneme of the following word.

- A. *very, sorry, miracle, adore it, more and more*
 B. *I'm sore at you because you prefer everybody else's cooking.*
 C. *Trevor Adams had to be carried out of the convention hall year after year.*

And now here are a few more drills for the "R-GLIDE" which are not recorded on the tape.

- * *sore at me*
 * *a pair of socks*
 * *I prefer it.*

LESSON FIVE: ISOLATED PRONUNCIATION CHANGES

Although the following pronunciation changes are not directly related to the resonance you learned, they will not sound authentically Cockney without the high-back resonance you learned in Lesson #1.

1. The "SHORT A" SHIFT as in GLASS

IPA: [æ] occasionally becomes [ɒ].
 LESSAC: #6 becomes #4.

As discussed on the tape, this change takes place only when the vowel comes immediately before a limited number of consonants or consonant clusters.

A. Before the F sound as in:

after, half, laugh

MAJOR EXCEPTIONS: *caffeine, saffron, sapphire*

B. Before the voiceless TH as in:

bath, pathway, wrath

MAJOR EXCEPTIONS: *catholic, mathematics, catheter, cathode*

C. Before the NS sound combination as in:

dance, chancellor, France

MAJOR EXCEPTIONS: *fancy, cancer, romance*

D. Before the NT sound combination as in:

advantage, plant, chant

MAJOR EXCEPTIONS: *banter, fantasy, fantastic, tantalize, ranting*

E. Occasionally before the ND sound combination as in:

commander, demand, slander

MAJOR EXCEPTIONS: (Remember, most of the ND words do not make the change.) *grand, stand, hand, land, etc.*

F. Before the S sound as in:

fast, last, grass

MAJOR EXCEPTIONS: *gastric, hassle, tassel* (although "castle" does change)

G. And in these isolated words which are not recorded on the tape:

banana, example, sample, soprano, ranch & branch (both optional)

Try these sentences in which some of the "SHORT A" vowels do broaden and others do not. The proper vowel changes are underlined.

- At last, the commander's repast is half ready.
- After the batter scored, he tripped on the cat who was dancing.
- Ask any bashful man and accept his answer.

2. THE "H-DROP" as in ~~HENRY~~^j ~~HIGGINS~~^j

Dropping H is a bit more difficult than it seems on the surface. Follow the tape for the three kinds of H-drops:

- (1) as in ~~I~~^j ~~HASTEN~~^j and ~~THREE~~^j ~~HOLIDAYS~~^j:
--gliding into H-Drops with a [j] sound when they follow a "front vowel"
- (2) as in ~~TRUE~~^w ~~HEART~~^w and ~~SO~~^w ~~HUNGRY~~^w:
--gliding into H-Drops with a [w] sound when they follow a "back vowel"
- (3) as in ~~FIVE~~^w ~~INCHES~~^w ~~HIGH~~^w and ~~IN~~^w ~~HERIT~~^w:
--attaching a final consonant to the beginning of the next word or syllable when that next word drops an H

- A. *hereafter, hello, uninhabited, apprehend*
 B. *I hasten to add my hearty and humble congratulations.*
 C. *To hide from harm, Henry hijacked the hydrofoil.*
 D. *Don't hog the hash; we're hungry too.*
 * *the hallowed halls of Hawthorn House*
 * *I hated to have to hurry to work hard.*

3. THE L TO W SWITCH as in ~~BELL~~^w

This substitution takes place only when a final or medial [l] follows a vowel but is not itself closely followed by a vowel sound. Listen carefully to the examples on the tape.

- A. *cruel, hill, build, thrill, conceal*
 B. *Steel workers always feel the need for real friends.*
 C. *He was still able to conceal the state of his health.*
 And now a few more drills for this sound:
 * *Gail fell down the hill.*
 * *The snail crawled over the garden wall.*

4. T CAN BECOME GLOTTAL as in ~~BOTTLED~~^ʔ ~~WATER~~^ʔ

- A. *little, water, waiter, criticize*

- B. *A glottal stop happens in a lot of unlikely dialects.*
 C. *It's a pity that a little water is not more greatly valued.*
 And now a few more drills for this sound:
 * *What is it about city settlers?*
 * *Get out of the battle with a better position.*

5. "ING" ENDINGS SHORTEN as in ~~ENDING~~^ʔ

- A. *rehearsing, singing, reading*
 B. *I'm singing and dancing in the rain.*
 C. *We're coming and going all at once.*
 And now a few more drills for this sound:
 * *He was walking around carrying the baby.*
 * *She was hurrying home, trying to avoid running.*

NOTE: Many Cockneys also change TH sounds to V and F. But since this change can wreak havoc with intelligibility, I'm reluctant to have you do it for American audiences.

LESSON SIX: COACHED DRILL

Here are the marked transcripts of the passages you'll hear in Lesson #6 of the tape. All of the important pronunciation changes are indicated using the same shorthand symbols I demonstrated earlier in the manual.

from Gilbert & Sullivan's H. M. S. PINAFORE

A ~~BRITISH~~^ʔ TAR IS A ~~SOARING~~^ʔ SOUL,
 AS ~~FREE~~^ʔ AS A MOUNTAIN ~~BIRD~~^ʔ,
 HIS ~~ENERGETIC~~^ʔ FIST
 SHOULD ~~BE~~^ʔ ~~READY~~^ʔ TO RESIST
 A ~~DICTATORIAL~~^ʔ WORD.
 HIS ~~NOSE~~^ʔ SHOULD PANT

AND ~~HIS~~ LIP SHOULD CURL,
~~HIS~~ CHEEKS SHOULD FLAME
 AND ~~HIS~~ BROW SHOULD FURL,
~~HIS~~ BOSOM SHOULD HEAVE
 AND ~~HIS~~ HEART SHOULD GLOW,
 AND ~~HIS~~ FIST BE EVER READY
 FOR A KNOCK-DOWN BLOW.

from Gilbert & Sullivan's **PIRATES OF PENZANCE**

WHEN A FELON'S NOT ENGAGED IN HIS EMPLOYMENT,
 OR MATURING HIS FELONIOUS LITTLE PLANS,
~~HIS~~ CAPACITY FOR INNOCENT ENJOYMENT,
 IS JUST AS GREAT AS ANY HONEST MAN'S.
 OUR FEELINGS WE WITH DIFFICULTY SMOTHER,
 WHEN CONSTABULARY DUTY'S TO BE DONE,
 AH, TAKE ONE CONSIDERATION WITH ANOTHER
 A POLICEMAN'S LOT IS NOT A HAPPY ONE.

Now follow the tape in trying this last passage again with a softer, more general London street sound. Have fun, and

**HAVE AT IT WITH YOUR
COCKNEY DIALECT!**