

ACTING WITH AN ACCENT™

STAGE DIALECT INSTRUCTION

by

DAVID ALAN STERN, Ph. D.

Manual for Tape #15
DOWN EAST NEW ENGLAND

DIALECT ACCENT SPECIALISTS, INC.
P.O. Box 44
51 Depot Street
Lyndonville VT 05851
(800) 753-1016

www.DialectAccentSpecialists.com

Copyright (c) 1983
DIALECT/ACCENT SPECIALISTS, INC.

No part of this book or the accompanying audio tape may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying or audio-taping, without permission in writing from the publisher.

ACTING WITH AN ACCENT tapes available for:

- Standard British
- British North
- Cockney
- Irish
- Scottish
- Australian
- American Accents for English Actors
- Spanish
- French
- Russian
- Polish
- Arabic
- New York City
- American Southern
- Texas
- Boston
- Down East
- "Kennedy-esque"
- Chicago
- Mid-West Farm
- Italian
- German
- Yiddish
- Norwegian/Swedish
- Farsi (Persian)
- West Indian & Black African

TAPES ARE ALSO AVAILABLE FOR REDUCING
FOREIGN ACCENTS AND REGIONAL DIALECTS

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
BRONSON PINCHOT LYNN REDGRAVE FOREST WHITAKER
and MICHAEL YORK as well as OSCAR WINNERS
GEENA DAVIS OLYMPIA DUKAKIS and SALLY FIELD.

For further information on Dr. Stern's tapes, coaching, or on-campus seminars contact:

DIALECT ACCENT SPECIALISTS, INC.
P.O. Box 44
51 Depot Street
Lyndonville VT 05851
(800) 753-1016

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

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> [ʒ] as in <u>bird</u> (Romance)
[ɛ] as in <u>set</u>	[ɔ] as in <u>brought</u>
[æ] as in <u>sat</u>	[ɑ] as in <u>father</u>
[a] as in <u>father</u> (Eastern U. S.)	[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>	[ʊə] 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.

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.

Instructional Tape #15

DOWN EAST NEW ENGLAND

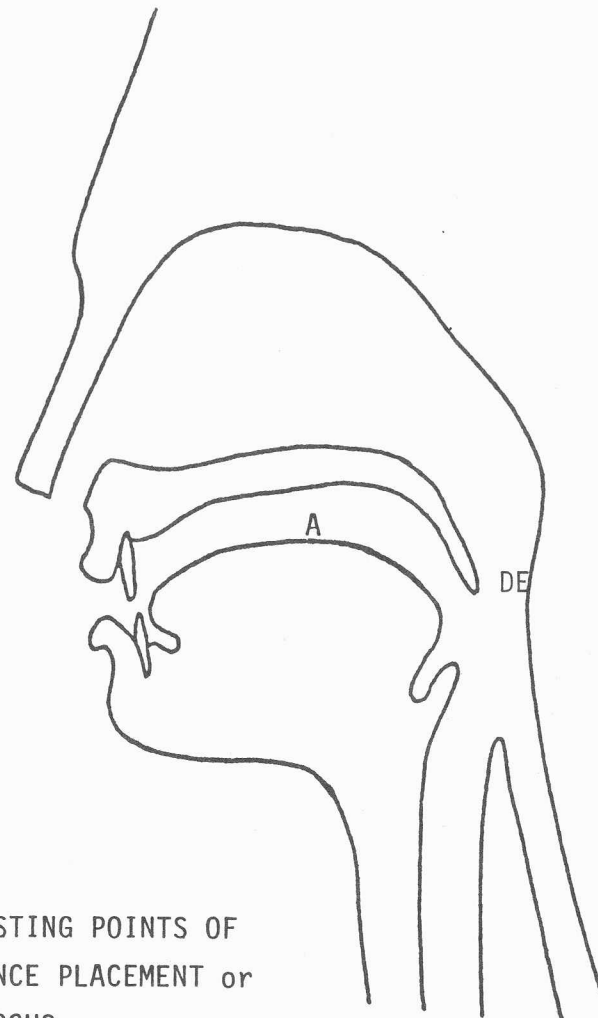
The Down East, sometimes called the Yankee dialect, is the rural or coastal speech pattern of Eastern New England--especially Maine and New Hampshire. In point of fact, most of the residents of these states have a softer speech pattern which sounds to many non-New Englanders more like the Boston pattern than the traditional Down East dialect. Though you won't hear this pattern all that much these days, it still exists, and it certainly exists within American theatre literature.

LESSON 1: CREATING THE DOWN EAST RESONANCE

The first step in creating the Down East dialect is to make an overall change in the resonance or tone focus of the voice. As explained on the tape, New England speech focuses its resonance to a point in the farthest reaches of the mouth---actually on the back wall of the upper throat, just behind the uvula and near the opening into the nasal passage. The resonance is not really nasal. The air does not really come out through the nose on vowels. The sound, however, is often perceived as nasal in nature because the tone focus is so near the nasal opening.

Follow the tape through several exercises for generating the resonance focus away from the central mouth focus of nonregional American speech and toward the Down East resonance point by:

- (1) Imagining the Change in Tone Focus and Feeling a Change in Tissue Vibration
- (2) Trilling or Flapping the Uvula and Using its Vibration to Identify the New Point of Resonance Focus
- (3) Closing the Front of the Mouth to Emphasize Resonance in the Rear (There are two styles of closure as you see later.)



CONTRASTING POINTS OF
RESONANCE PLACEMENT or
TONE FOCUS

A--Standard American Dialect

DE--Tone Focus of Down East Dialect

- (4) Creating and then Reducing Actual Nasality to Identify the Point of Focus (Remember that the D. E. resonance is not really nasal.)
- (5) Slightly Lowering the Entire Laryngeal Structure (Be careful not to tighten or create any tension around the larynx or between the vocal folds.)

LESSON 2: INFLECTION AND STRESS PATTERNS

Down East dialect often gives the impression of being monotone. Although some speakers of the dialect use few, if any, pitch changes between words, this is more of an individual character trait than it is an essential element of the dialect. There are, however, two characteristics that you must note.

First, we can say that almost all syllables seem to take at least a degree of stress, giving a punched rhythm to the dialect. Second, there is a characteristic way in which pitch drops during the actual sounding of vowels in the stressed syllables of particularly stressed words. I call this trait the "Drop Lilt." Be careful not to overdo it with this lilt, but take careful note as it is demonstrated by the tape. NOTE: There are different ways the Drop Lilt can function. (1) Between the stressed syllable and the next syllable of multi-syllabic words. (2) During the stressed syllable if that syllable is in final position or if the word has but one syllable. ALSO NOTE: There are some vowels which carry slightly different pronunciations depending upon whether or not a drop lilt is used. We'll examine this in the next lesson.

LESSON 3: PRONUNCIATION OF VOWELS IN DOWN EAST

Many of the following vowel pronunciations actually grow directly out of the muscularity you studied in

the first lesson. Try not to think of them as isolated pronunciations, but as an integral part of the resonance you've already developed.

1. [ɔ] becomes [a] (In Lessac: #3 becomes #5 with a frontal placement.) NOTE: Since this vowel is not always the same throughout the Standard American dialect areas, we'll specify that we are now dealing with the vowel that is spelled with "au" "a" "aw" "ou" "ong" "of" "oth" and "os."

- applaud; always; sought; saw; lofty; song; Boston; cloth
- The tall author often walked awkwardly.
- Lost boys often become flawless.
- He stalked the ball, then vaulted across the lawn.
- The dog fought the moth which he bought at the mall.
- The cat crawled across the lawn with its hurt paw.

2. "Short O" is pronounced [ɒ] with a slight elongation. (Lessac: "Short O" is pronounced as a slightly elongated #4.)

- odd; not; knock; golf; obligate; fox
- Becket was occupied with the honor of God.
- The rocket shot toward the opposite airlock.
- The obstinate opera singer was preoccupied.
- Move the fox from the rocks to the bog.
- The frog got groggy and hopped away.

NOTE: Words beginning with "wha" or "wa" fall into this same category.

- what; watch; wash; want
- What do you want to watch?

ANOTHER NOTE: There are places, especially in the western parts of this "Down East" region, where this vowel may occasionally stay unrounded and become [ɑ] or Lessac #5.

3. [aU] frequently takes a drop lilt. In the "muffled style" of the dialect, it tends toward [oU] (Lessac: #51 can be #21)

--coward; powder; crowd; sound
 --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.

4. [aI] can become [ɪI] in the "muffled style."
 (Lessac: #6y can become #4+y.)

--sign; rhyming; mine; oblige; fried; rifle
 --It's the right time to find a gold mine.
 --He led a life of violent crime.
 --The sight of dry land was exciting.

5. [æ] occasionally becomes [ɑ]. In "muffled style" it also may often tend toward [ɛ] (Lessac: #6 sometimes becomes #5. In "muffled style" it will occasionally become N³.)

--can't; laugh; laughter; last; half; answer; chance
 --example; sand; basket; character
 --The last man handed the annual to the admiral.
 --Ask any bashful man and accept his answer.
 --Sam laughingly rammed the flag in the anthill.
 --The staff had a rash of bad habits.

NOTE: If stressed, this vowel may drop lilt.

--There he sat.
 --Give it to the cat.
 --That's all he had.

Most of the vowels which follow do not actually change pronunciation. The tape illustrates what happens to these vowels when words are given stress and "drop lilt" take effect.

6. [i] (Lessac: y)

--You get what you see. --He got up on skis.
 --He went skiing, and he got up on skis.

When this vowel comes at the end of a word (usually when it is spelled with "Y") it often becomes [I] (Lessac: N²)

--Her name was Mary--naturally.
 --He was likely to do it.
 --likely; frankly; hardly; Mary; naturally; hardly

7. [I] (Lessac: N²)

--It doesn't fit. --Don't quit the team.
 --Please don't quit. --He got a hit.

8. [eI] (Lessac: +y)

--It's a great day. --What do you say?
 --Please say it. --What did he say?

9. [ɛ] (Lessac: N³)

--What did you get?
 --Harsh words were said.

10. [u] (Lessac: #1)

--I don't know what to do.
 --The sky is very blue.
 --I know what to do because the sky is blues.

11. [oU] (Lessac: #21)

--I don't know. --I can't grow old.
 --I won't go. --The flowers can't grow.

12. [ə] (Lessac: N⁴)

--I did it once. --We only did it once.
 --I did it last month.

LESSON 4: PRONUNCIATION OF "R" FOLLOWING VOWELS

Most of the time when "R" follows a vowel but does not fall between two vowels, is carries the classic Eastern U. S. "R-drop."

1. [ar] becomes [a] with a characteristic New England resonance. (Lessac: #5+R drops the R.)

--car; star; harsh; marshal; heart; charge;
are
--He disembarked from the sparkling golf cart.
--Father Charles argues about the guard's identity card.

NOTE: The [a] by itself often takes the same characteristic New England [a] as does the [ar] combination.

--Arthur charged out of the arbor unharmed.

ANOTHER NOTE: Whenever "R" is the final sound in a word, the normally dropped sound will continue to be pronounced if the following word, in turn, begins with a vowel.

--Park the car in Harvard Yard.
--Are they there? Are all of them there?

2. [ɔr] becomes [a] or [owə] with a drop lilt (Lessac: #3+R becomes frontal #5 or #21+W+N⁴ if there's a drop lilt.)

--four; score; fourteen; bored; sportsmen
--Please close the door.
--He's doing it more and more
--We're at the shore.
--The shore is big, so let's explore it.

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

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

4. [ɛə] becomes [ɛə] (Lessac: N³n+R drops R.)

--hair; air; barely; scarcely; stairs; scared

--Clean air is rare.
--Where did the polar bear go? The bear is here.
--An air of excitement rarely blares down the stairs.
--The flu scare was really hard to bear.

5. [ir] becomes [iə] (Lessac: N²n+R drops the R.)

--ear; jeer; clear; appear; sincere; tears
--Never fear; the wheel to stear is near the gear shift.
--A keg of beer appeared near the rear window.

6. [ə] becomes [ə] (Lessac: N⁴+R drops the R.)

--runner; brother; sister; helper; settler;
camper
--The burgler and his helper made a clamor.
--My mother, my sister, and my brother went away.
--The runner staggered over the hill.

7. [ɜ] becomes [ɜ] (Lessac: R-Deriv.+R drops R.)

--word; bird; earth; earnest; first; search
--Herman was the first to win thirty games.
--He searched the world for a perfect curve.
--The girl caught a perfect fish with an earthworm.

8. Adding an Extra "R" Occasionally words ending in a vowel will add on an "R" glide when the word following also begins with a vowel. This trait is not absolute. Don't overdo it.

--I saw it. Cuba is an island. That's an idea and a half.

LESSON 5: PRONUNCIATION OF "EYA"

Follow the tape closely for instruction in the pronunciation of the special Down East word [ɛjə], meaning "yes" (after a fact). It is a very important word in this dialect, one which can really spoil the dialect's impression of authenticity if it is not done correctly.

