

ACTING WITH AN ACCENT™

STAGE DIALECT INSTRUCTION

by

DAVID ALAN STERN, Ph. D.

Manual for Tape #18

MID-WEST FARM/RANCH

DIALECT ACCENT SPECIALISTS, Inc.

P.O. Box 44

Lyndonville, VT 05851

(802) 626-3121

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 | - New York City |
| - British North | - American Southern |
| - Cockney | - Texas |
| - Irish | - Boston |
| - Scottish | - Down East |
| - Australian | - "Kennedy-esque" |
| - American Accents for English Actors | - Chicago |
| - Spanish | - Mid-West Farm |
| - French | - Italian |
| - Russian | - German |
| - Polish | - Yiddish |
| - Arabic | - 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 OLMOS
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

Lyndonville, VT 05851

(802) 626-3121

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>	[o] as in <u>home</u> (Romance)
[ɛ] as in <u>set</u>	[ɔ] as in <u>brought</u>
[æ] as in <u>sat</u>	[a] 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

[eI] as in <u>say</u>	[oU] as in <u>grow</u>	[aI] as in <u>high</u>
[aU] as in <u>now</u>	[ɔI] 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.

Instructional Tape #18

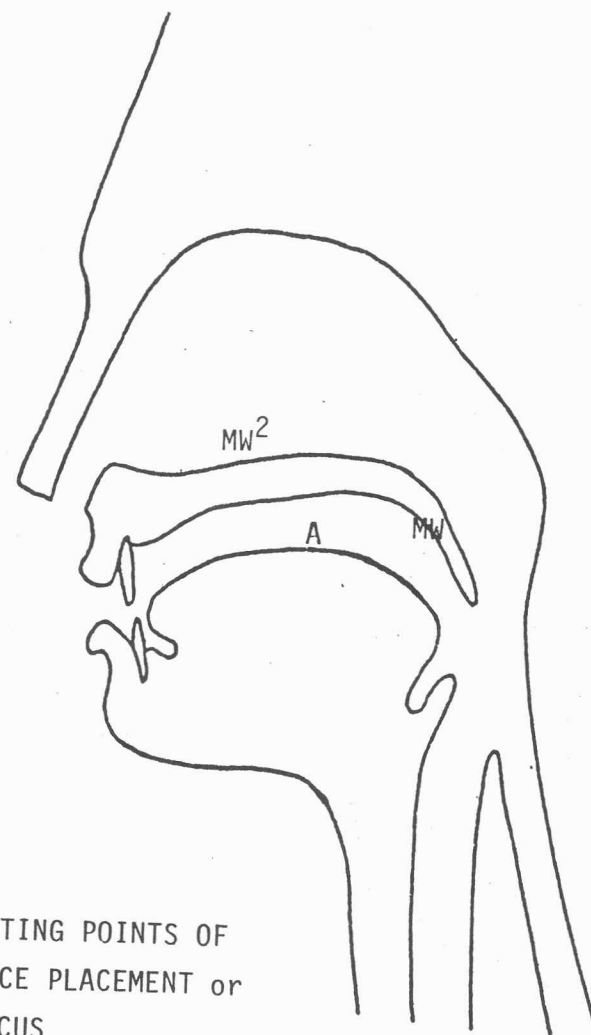
"MID-WEST FARM/RANCH"

The "Mid-West" dialect is heard in a very large section of the country often called "the farm belt." The dialect is not exactly the same in every part of this region, so we are going to deal with a general "farm/ranch" dialect which should suffice for any roles where your character is from a rural or farm area anywhere within this area from Ohio to Colorado, Nebraska to Kansas and central Missouri.

There is one extremely important point to be made here. You will occasionally be asked by a director or casting director to do a speech pattern which is rural, but not Southern. In most cases, the dialect dealt with on this tape will be the one you need. Therefore, it is extremely important that you note the definite differences between "Southern" speech and the "mid-West" pattern we're now exploring. These differences are overviewed in the first few minutes of the tape and then examined very closely in the lessons on lilt, resonance, and pronunciation.

LESSON 1: THE RESONANCE OF THE FARM/RANCH DIALECT

As explained in detail on the tape, before working with the actual pronunciation changes, it is necessary to change the overall resonance, tone focus, or timbre of the speech. This is done by changing the muscularity of the resonance cavities and getting the "energy" of the speech sound to vibrate or resonate in different parts of the cavities. For the farm/ranch dialect you must move the vibration away from the central-mouth resonance of the "standard American" pattern and up to the back of the soft palate. This will create a "twangy" resonance (which is not actually nasal, but which gives the impression of nasality to many listeners because of its proximity to the opening of the nasal cavity).



CONTRASTING POINTS OF
RESONANCE PLACEMENT or
TONE FOCUS

A--Standard American Dialect

MW--Mid-West Tone Focus on Velum or
Soft Palate

MW²--Some Mid-West Dialects have a bit
of actual Assimilated Nasality

Follow the tape through several exercises which are designed to generate the muscularity of the new dialect's resonance. In this series of exercises you will:

- (1) imagine or visualize the vibration or energy moving from the mid-mouth to the back of the soft palate.
- (2) feel or sense added vibration on the tissues of the soft palate.
- (3) close your mouth a bit--put less space between the upper and lower teeth in back and limit the amount of lip movement which takes place in the very corners of the mouth.
- (4) avoid pushing the lips forward. This could create an unwanted "Southern" impression.
- (5) raise the back of the tongue slightly, forcing the vibration up to the velum.
- (6) create actual nasality and then reduce the actual nasal air flow, keeping the palatal focus of the vibration.

LESSON 2: LILT AND RHYTHM CHARACTERISTICS

Perhaps the most important difference between the "Southern" and the "Mid-West" dialects is the presence of an inner-vowel lilt or pitch change in "Southern" speech which does not exist in most farm belt speech. Follow the tape closely for illustrations of this basic difference. Remember that "external melody" or pitch change between words may still exist. It's the lilt inside the vowels which is "Southern."

There is also a slight "bouncing rhythm" which often characterizes heavier farm dialects. This trait is also illustrated on the tape.

LESSON 3: CHANGES IN PRONUNCIATION

This section will outline the specific differences between the pronunciations of the standard and farm dialects. It will also point out several important aspects of pronunciation which differentiate farm and Southern speech. REMEMBER: don't just think of these as isolated pronunciation changes. You must do them in conjunction with the resonance which you studied in Lesson 1 if they are to sound authentic.

1. [ɛ] becomes [I], especially before the letters "m" and "n." (In the Lessac system: N³ becomes N².)

--*twenty; enter; tenth; center; memory; get; sweat*
 --*Ed, get ready to rent the penthouse.*
 --*Ten and ten eventually get you twenty.*
 --*Ben was a general from Tennessee.*
 --*Don't lose your temper when I enter.*

NOTE: This pronunciation change is similar in most Southern dialects. However, there is more of a lilt and vowel extension in the Southern version.

2. The "R" sound, when it comes after a vowel, becomes slightly "tighter" or "harder." This is similar to the "R" pronunciation in the mountain or rural parts of the South and in most of Texas.

- a. [ə] (Lessac: N⁴+R)

--*runner; player; helper; brother; letter*
 --*The burglar and his helper stirred up such a clamor.*
 --*The runner staggered over the hill and became a swimmer.*

b. [ʒ] (Lessac: R-deriv.)

- earth; curse; worst; word; perfect
- Herman was the first to win thirty games.
- He searched the world for a perfect curve.

c. [ir] (Lessac: N²n+R)

- jeer; weird; steer; clear; near
- Never fear, the wheel to steer is near the gear shift.
- I'm sincere about wanting the deer to appear this year.

d. [ɛə] (Lessac: N³n+R)

- hair; pair; barely; careful; everywhere
- An air of excitement rarely blares down the stairs.
- Pay your fare, then tell the driver where to stop.

NOTE: In heavier farm belt dialects, the vowel stem before the "R" will move slightly closer to a "long A" sound--[eI] or +y.

e. [ur] (Lessac: N¹n+R)

- tour; sure; cure; poor; contour
- Are you sure you can endure the long tour?
- The cure for polio makes his name endure.

f. [ar] (Lessac: #5+R)

- marshal; heart; scarf; bar; harm
- Are all the palace guards good marksmen?
- He disembarked from the sparkling new car.

NOTE: In heavier farm dialects this vowel stem will tend to round a bit before the "R."

g. [ɔr] (Lessac: #3+R)

- four; door; pour; fortune

- The spores were found in the core of the ornament.
- The Concord poured forth exhaust, causing sore throats.

NOTE: In heavier farm dialects this vowel stem will move slightly toward a "long O."

3. There are two diphthongs which, in Southern dialects, become single vowels with inner lilt. In farm dialect, however, they both remain diphthongs and stay free of the inner-vowel lilt.

a. [aI] (Lessac: #6y)

- skylight; baptize; dried; right; cry
- It's the right time to find a gold mine in the sky.
- The sight of dry land was exciting for Ira.

b. [ɔI] (Lessac: #3y)

- joyful; noise; hoist; loyal; oil
- He coiled around the moist cloister.
- The boisterous boy oiled the toy.

4. There are several single vowels and diphthongs which are pushed forward into the lips and extended with an extra, preliminary vowel when they are spoken in many Southern dialects. These sounds do not do this in most of the farm belt. The vowels are similar to those of "standard dialect" with the farm belt resonance imposed.

a. [eI] (Lessac: +y)

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

b. [i] (Lessac: y)

- Please cease to creep through the Garden of Eden.
- Meat and cheese were served under the tree.

c. [oU] (Lessac: #21)

- Slowly the ocean rolled toward the row of homes.
- The oboe and cello sat alone, woefully echoing tone for tone.

d. [u] (Lessac: #1)

- I always knew that cool prunes are never blue.
- At two-past-noon I heard hooves on the roof.

5. There are two vowels which, in many Southern dialects, have extended lilts and elongate into consonant glides. Such lilting and gliding is unlikely to occur in most areas of the mid-West.

a. [æ] (Lessac: #6)

- I have to have it.
- Ask any bashful man in Alabama.
- The huddled masses lifted their lamps.

NOTE: As often happens in many parts of the U. S., this vowel will occasionally slip toward [ɛə] (Lessac: N³n) when it comes before a nasal consonant.

b. [ɔ] (Lessac: #3)

- The tall author walked often.
- The awful, awkward, strong man walked home.

NOTE: Because much of the farm-belt is, indeed, "mid-Western," this vowel might sometimes unround and become [ɑ] (Lessac: #5).

6. "Short O" is generally an unrounded [ɑ] or Lessac #5

- rock; opera; honor
- The rocket shot toward the opposite airlock.
- The obstinate opera singer was preoccupied.

NOTE: In most dialect groups the vowel in words spelled with "wa" and "wha" is pronounced in the same manner as the "short O" within that area. In this dialect, however, there tends to be a bit more rounding on words like *watch*, *what*, and *want*. In fact, the word *wash* not only rounds but often has an "R" inserted after the vowel.

7. "ing" endings frequently drop the "G"

- I was walking, singing, and dancing in the rain.

NOTE: Listen carefully to the tape for examples of how "ing" words often play into the "bouncing rhythm" which was discussed earlier. There's also a brief mention of grammar changes which often take place in the heavier farm dialects.

8. The words "sit" and "sat" are frequently pronounced as if the speaker were using the word "set" to substitute for both of them.

- Come in and sit down.
- We sat there on the couch.
- That person was sitting there all day.

LESSON 4: COACHED DRILL

Here are the shorthand phonetic markings which you may find useful in indicating pronunciation changes. But, remember to integrate all of the pronunciations into the new resonance.

SUBSTITUTION	SYMBOL	EXAMPLE
[ε] becomes [I]	I	get twenty cents ^I ^I ^I
Harder R's after vowels	optional circle	car, here, there ^o ^o ^o
"ing" drops G	/	singing & dancing ^ε ^ε
"Set" substitution	ε	sit, sat

AVOIDING SOUTHERN: If you tend to use Southern pronunciations, you may wish to mark a (.) over the words are most likely to fall victim to "Southernism" (see items 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the pronunciation chapter).

DRILL PASSAGES

I don't look forward to experiencing the touch-down of a tornado, which is probably why I'm one of the few people in Wichita who actually takes cover when the warning sirens blow. What most of my friends have done over the year is to run outside with their cameras as soon as the warning comes, trying to get pictures of one. There's an old Indian legend that a twister won't ever hit at the fork of two rivers. And since Wichita is at the meeting place of the Big and Little Arkansas,

they've gone on for years thinking it will never come.

and now some LINCOLN

Four score-and-seven years ago, our father brought forth on this 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.

HAVE AT IT WITH YOUR FARM/RANCH DIALECT!