

ACTING WITH AN ACCENT™

STAGE DIALECT INSTRUCTION

by

DAVID ALAN STERN, Ph. D.

Manual for Tape #22
NORWEGIAN & SWEDISH

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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
BRONSON PINCHOT LYNN REDGRAVE FOREST WHITAKER
and MICHAEL YORK as well as OSCAR WINNERS
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For further information on Dr. Stern's tapes,
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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

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>	[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.)	[ɔ] as in <u>brought</u> [ɑ] as in <u>father</u> [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"	

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.

*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 #22

NORWEGIAN & SWEDISH

WARNING: The "Swedish" accent many of you may be expecting to hear may be hazardous to your characterization. The "cartoon" Swedish of many comedians and comic actors is, indeed, a stereotype, based partly on actual northern Scandinavian vocal patterns, but blown totally out of proportion. Listen carefully to a full explanation and demonstration of this principle during the first few minutes of the tape.

LESSON 1: THE NORTHERN SCANDINAVIAN INFLECTIONS

One of the traits which can often become very stereotypic in Swedish and Norwegian accents is the lilt or pitch inflection. There certainly is a characteristic lilt in these languages--in fact three different levels of lilt.

(1) SYLLABLE INFLECTION: Even when a Swedish or Norwegian speaker is not using a great deal of pitch change or inflection, there will usually be a slight upward and then downward pitch movement on the stressed vowels of most words. Listen to examples on the tape.

(2) INTONATIONAL INFLECTION: Those speakers who do use pitch change to stress important words will do so, within this accent pattern, by raising and then lowering the pitch significantly on the vowel of the word's most heavily stressed syllable. This is the trait which, if taken too far, can begin to sound very stereotypic. So be careful. Again, follow the tape for examples and helpful hints.

(3) MELODIC INFLECTION: Particularly expressive speakers will, in almost any dialect or language,

often use an increased amount of pitch variety. When that happens in a pattern which already has a great tendency toward inflecting, you can end up with a rather enormous amount of pitch change taking place. This is the time when the pitch changes really have to be integrated quite well into the inner life and the expressive intentions of the character. BE EXTREMELY CAREFUL THAT AN OVERLY MELODIC PATTERN IS NOT DETRACTING FROM A SENSE OF REAL COMMUNICATION.

LESSON 2: CREATING THE RESONANCE OR TONE FOCUS

Before studying actual pronunciation changes in your new, target accent, you must generate an overall change in the resonance, tone focus, or muscularity of the vocal production. The standard American pattern of English tends to focus its vibration at the mid-point of the oral cavity. However, the Norwegian and Swedish languages (and their accents on English) move the tone focus much farther forward to a point between the lips involving much more muscular action in the front of the mouth.

Follow the tape closely through a series of exercises for generating this new resonance focus. In these exercises you will:

- (1) glide or push your lips forward in order to focus the energy away from the center of the cavity. Use the muscles in the rear parts of the lips.
- (2) feel the vibration of the sounding alternating between the central mouth with rear tongue movement and the front of the mouth with increased lip action.
- (3) increase awareness of the bottom lip by pulling in the sides of that lip just beneath the corners of the mouth.

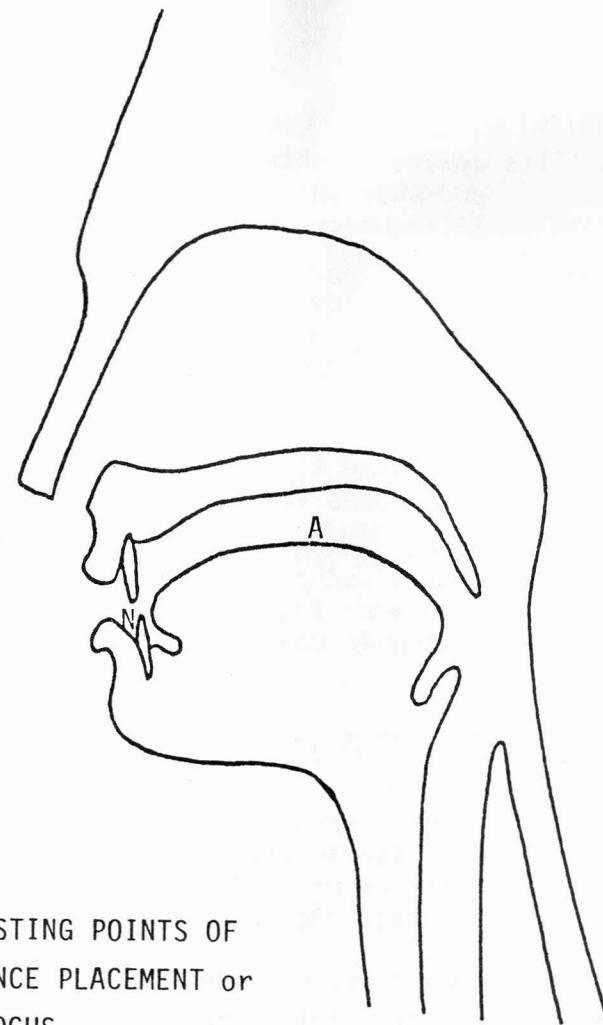
LESSON 3: CHANGES IN VOWEL PRONUNCIATIONS

The following pronunciation changes should be studied as extensions of the resonance you just learned. Continue using the new muscularity and inflections. Don't just focus on the actual differences in vowel pronunciations without integrating them into the total accent pattern.

Not all of the vowels actually change pronunciation. Some retain the same actual phonemic characteristics, but they are given a very different sounding character by the resonance and/or lilt of the dialect. The tape first explores several vowels which do not actually change in pronunciation. These are [i] (Lessac: y), as in "see," [ɪ] (Lessac: N²), as in "winter," [eɪ] (Lessac: +y), as in "great," [ɛ] (Lessac: N³), as in "center," [æ] (Lessac: #6), as in "sat," [ə] (Lessac: N⁴), as in "under," and [aɪ] (Lessac #6y), as in "right." Follow the tape through a demonstration of how the lilt and resonance alter the overall impression of these vowels without actually changing their phonemic pronunciations.

The following vowels actually do change in their pronunciations.

1. [u] can become [œ] (Lessac: #1 becomes umlaut.)
 - studio; beauty; spoon; plumage; ruby; coupons
 - I always knew that cool prunes grew under the moon.
 - It's true that Sue proves school can be useless.
 - Rumor has it that racoons buy fruit with coupons.
2. [ʊ] can become [œ] (Lessac: N¹ becomes umlaut.)
 - wooden; bullet; butcher; full; foot; sugar; good
 - We pulled the wolf from the woods to the boulevard.
 - I understood there was a good book in the library.
 - Captain Hook ate a bushel of cookies.



CONTRASTING POINTS OF
RESONANCE PLACEMENT or
TONE FOCUS

A--Standard American Dialect

N--Norwegian/Swedish Resonance Placement
and Point of Maximum Muscularity

3. [oU] lilts upward, tightens slightly in the lips, and shortens to [o] (Lessac: #21 lilts, tightens, and shortens to #2.)

--notion; phone; bloated; over; solo; wrote
 --The oboe and cello sat alone, woefully echoing tone for tone.
 --The rowboat slowly floated in the ocean.
 --Smoke rolled out of the hotel window.

4. [ɔ] becomes the same tight [o] as above (Lessac: #3 becomes #2.)

--applaud; author; brought; hall; nautical
 --Wear a shawl when you go to the mall.
 --The awful sauce made Paul pause and walk away.
 --You taught me how to vault flawlessly, without falling.

5. "Short O" also becomes [o] (Lessac: #4 becomes #2.)

--hot; pot; rock; opera; common
 --The rocket shot toward the opposite air lock.
 --Becket was positive about the honor of God.
 --The frog got groggy and anonymously hopped away.

6. [aU] lilts upward and moves slightly toward [oU] (Lessac: #6y moves toward #21.)

--coward; south; trowel; around
 --The loudest hound in town bow-wow'd at the mouse.

7. [ɔI] lilts and might unround slightly toward [aI] (Lessac: #3y can move slightly toward #51.)

--joyful; noise; rejoice
 --The boisterous boy oiled the toy.

NOTE: The last two changes are actual phoneme differences with some speakers, and just minor muscularity effects on resonance with others.

LESSON 4: CHANGES IN CONSONANT PRONUNCIATIONS

1. Pronunciation of "R": "R" (especially coming after a vowel) is pushed slightly further forward into the lips (as a result of the general muscularity).

--runner; brother; father; worker
 --The runner staggered over the hill, then became a swimmer.

--earth; first; worm; search; Herb
 --Herman was the first to win thirty games.

--jeer; clear; appear; sincere
 --I'm sincere about wanting the deer to appear this year.

--hair; barely; dare; everywhere
 --An air of excitement, which was rare, blared down the stairs.

--tour; poor; cure; endure
 --The poor hunters offer no allure to newer sure-shots.

--car; marshal; heart; harm; harbor
 --The two sergeants were college archery partners and bought a new car.

--four; door; ignore; sport; score
 --More and more support came forth for the orphans' party.

2. Voiced and Voiceless "TH" ([ð] and [θ]) tend to become [d] and [t]

--thin; thick; thorough
 --Thoughtful theologians thank God through prayer.
 --Thin people think dieting is thoroughly unnecessary.
 --wrath; teeth; eighth; path

--this; there; thus; therefore
 --They played with this that and the other thing.

--There's a day left before they go to the country.
--lathe; blithe; soothe

3. Initial "W" moves toward a soft "V"

--wish; want; work; wait
--I wish Ward didn't want whiskey on Wednesday.
--Wall posters waved in the wind when Wendy went in.

4. [dʒ] can move toward [j] when spelled with "J"

--just; Jimmy; jealous; jump

5. [z] becomes [s], especially in final position

--noise; tries; repose; pleases
--The bulldozer made so much noise that Edward's
 repose ended.
--Max tries to revise the law that applies to blazing
 potatoes.

LESSON 5: COACHED DRILL

First, here are the shorthand symbols for marking
scripts. Just mark the actual pronunciation changes.
It may be a bit confusing to mark those sounds which
are just slightly altered by the new resonance.

SUBSTITUTION	SYMBOL	EXAMPLE
[u] becomes [æ]	æ	soup spoon
[U] becomes [æ]	æ	full woods
[o] becomes [o]	o	go home
[ɔ] becomes [o]	o	awful sauce
short o to [o]	o	groggy frog

[aU] can be [o]	o	around town
[ɔI] can be [aI]	aI	right time
[ð] becomes [d]	d	this and that
[θ] becomes [t]	t	thin things
[dʒ] can be [j]	j	jumping judge
[z] becomes [s]	s	tries; lies

DRILL PASSAGES

We, the people of the United States, in order to
form a more perfect union, establish justice, in-
sure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common
defense, promote the general welfare, and secure
the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our pos-
terity, do ordain and establish this constitution
for the United States of America.

Fourscore-and-seven years ago, our fathers 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.