

ACTING WITH AN ACCENT™

STAGE DIALECT INSTRUCTION

by

DAVID ALAN STERN, Ph. D.

Manual for Tape #21

FARSI

IRANIAN--aka--PERSIAN

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

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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>	[ɔ] as in <u>brought</u>
[ɛ] as in <u>set</u>	[ɔ̃] as in <u>father</u>
[æ] as in <u>sat</u>	[ɔ̃] as in <u>bird</u> (British)
[a] as in <u>father</u> (Eastern U. S.)	[ɔ̃] 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.

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Instructional Tape #21

FARSI
(PERSIAN -aka- IRANIAN)

LESSON ONE: STRESS, PITCH, and RHYTHM TRAITS

Although most of the tapes in this series begin by considering resonance or tone focus, many Asian accents, including Farsi, are given the greatest amount of their "impression of authenticity" by the stress and rhythm traits they display.

- A. The most important point is that EVERY SYLLABLE IS A STRESSED SYLLABLE in this accent. Although some may take extra stress, there are no unstressed syllables within this pattern. Follow the tape through its demonstrations of this pattern through the exercises which follow. Remember that in the Arabic accent the stress pattern which is created is SLOW AND EVEN and not quick and staccato (like the accents of India). Also remember that "silent syllables" which tend to disappear in "standard American" English will usually be pronounced within this accent.

--ac-tu-al-ly; ba-sic-al-ly; his-tor-ic-ally

Also note that vowels in unstressed syllables, which often migrate toward being pronounced as "short I" in American English, will usually keep a full pronunciation of the vowel which is used in the spelling.

--ca-pi-tal; spe-ci-al; guar-an-tee; muslim;
in-de-pen-dent; se-ve-ral
--There were several independent Muslim states.
--pronounce; provision
--movement; government
--sweetest; highest; planted; seated
--conservation; instruction; reaction

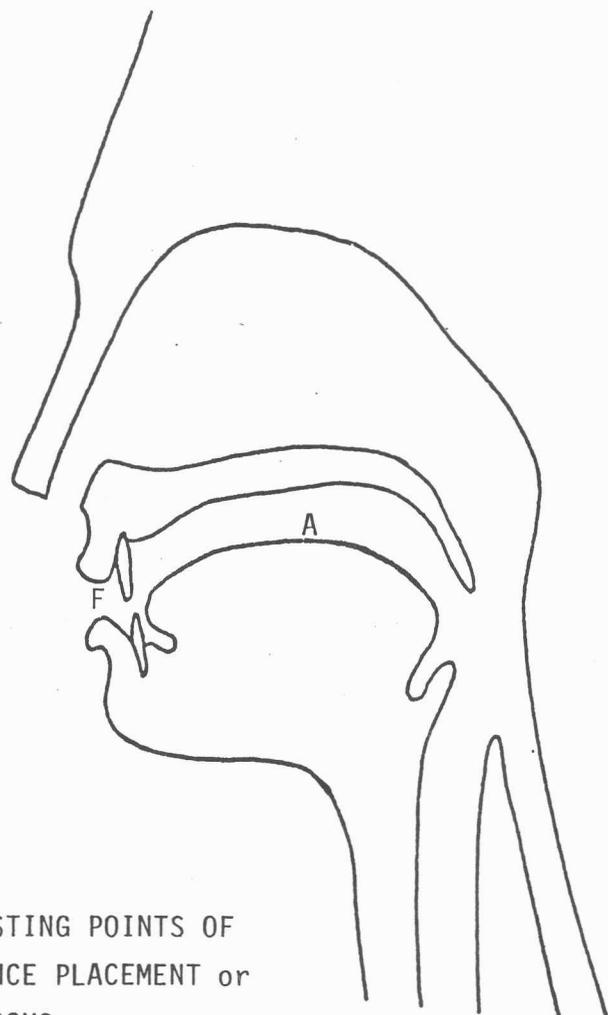
- 7
- B. This and many other Asian accents display a relative monotone--a lack of pitch change between words. This does not mean that every word is at the same pitch level. It does mean, however, that most words within the same phrase or thought will be at the same pitch. You can, however, differentiate a new phrase or thought by raising or lowering the pitch at the beginning of the phrase and then keeping it there for the phrase's duration. Follow the tape through the demonstrations of this "monotone-within-phrase" pattern.

- C. The new stress-rhythm pattern also leads to another accent trait--that of occasionally adding an extra, intrusive vowel inside clusters of consonants. This trait (which is somewhat related to the whole discussion of stress) is considered in much more detail later in the tape during the lesson on consonant pronunciation.

Follow the tape through a demonstration of all of these stress/rhythm/pitch traits using the beginning of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

LESSON 2: CREATING THE FARSI RESONANCE

The next step toward creating the authentic impression of the Farsi accent is to generate the proper resonance or "tone focus." Whereas the "Standard American" point of maximum vibration is approximately at the midpoint of the mouth, the Farsi accent has its focus in front of the mouth, surrounded by the lips, with a great deal of muscularity stretching the entire structure of the lips forward. Follow the tape through a series of muscle exercises which have you use a whistling lip position to create the Farsi mouth muscularity.



CONTRASTING POINTS OF
RESONANCE PLACEMENT or
TONE FOCUS

A--Standard American Dialect

F--Tone Focus and Lip Muscularity of
the Farsi Accent

LESSON 3: FARSI VOWEL PRONUNCIATIONS

The following pronunciations should be studied as extensions of the rhythm and resonance traits which you already learned. Try not to think of them as isolated vowel substitutions.

- [i] and [I] both become [i] with a single-pitched stress. (In Lessac: y and N² become a single-pitched y).

 - yield; see; need; teach; needle; esteem; supreme
 - He hurt his knee while skiing fleetly down the peak.
 - He achieved intrigue by agreeing to speak Japanese.
 - winter; pick; physical; mistake; quiver; wind; in
 - The inspector charged interest on Wilma's income tax.
 - The chicken committed itself to the interest of dinner.
- [eI] and [ε] both become [e] with a single-pitched stress. (Lessac: +y and N³ both become a heavily stressed N³.)

 - weight; chased; fateful; face; neighbor; instigate
 - A great April shower came our way today.
 - The ailing aviator flew the race for its own sake.
 - twenty; embrace; celebrate; semester; deadline; federal; mental
 - Ten and ten eventually get you twenty.
 - Ben was renting several sections of Federal land.
- [u] and [U] both become [U] with a single-pitched stress. (Lessac: #1 and N¹ both become #1 with a single pitched stress.)

 - studio; plumage; school; spoon; review; pupil; loose

- The gloomy June moon is moving foolishly.
 --It's true that Sue proves school can be useless.
 --wooden; ambush; goodness; boulevard; booklet;
 cushion; sugar; forsook
 --We pulled the wolf from the woods to the boulevard.
 --I understood there was a good book in the library.

4. [oU] and [ɔ] both become [o] with a single-pitched stress. (Lessac: #21 and #3 both become a heavily stressed #3 or the first half of the #21 diphthong.)

- romance; bloated; notion; slowly; staccato
 --The oboe and cello sat alone, woefully echoing
 tone for tone.
 --The rowboat slowly floated in the ocean.
 --coffee; cloth; wrong; maul; applaud; naught;
 all right
 --Lost boys often become flawless.
 --The awful sauce made Paul pause and walk away.

5. The "O" Principle: In American English the letter "O" is not always pronounced as a "long O." In accents having the type of stress pattern which characterizes Farsi, however, the sound of [o] which we just examined in the last group, usually applies whenever "O" occurs in the spelling.

- rock; obstinate; on; stop
 --I burned my hand on the hot pot.
 --The rocket shot toward the opposite airlock.
 --The frog got groggy and hopped away.
 --mother; love; cover; come; trouble
 --A mother's love is above that of another brother.

6. [æ] becomes [a] (Lessac: #6 becomes #5.)

- after; passage; can; handsome; glass; fabric
 --The passengers and baggage were trapped in the
 alcove.

7. The three remaining diphthongs--[aI] [aU] and [ɔI] (Lessac: #6y, #5l, and #3y)--all retain the same pitch on both stages of the diphthong and stress both stages of the diphthong with nearly equal stress.

- light; skylight; advice; virus; while
 --It's the right time to find a gold mine.

- coward; south; flounder; shower; trowel
 --The crowd loudly prowled the streets of the town.
 --Loud sounds drowned out the hourly chimes.

(This diphthong will occasionally migrate toward the [o] vowel of the "O-Principle" due to the new muscularity of the lips.)

- annoy; pointed; choice; enjoy; poignant
 --The boisterous boy oiled the toy.
 --We hoisted the soybean from the soil.

LESSON 4: PRONUNCIATION OF THE "R"

In English with a Farsi accent, most of the "R's" pronounced with a single tap of the tongue against the gum ridge. Occasionally an "R" will take a trill consisting of two or more tongue taps. Be careful, however. This accent should not really have a full trill such as the one which characterizes some Russian and Scottish patterns.

- red; dread; river; grow; runner; ring; read
 --great; crisp; strong; bright

(In the next group, when "R" is in the context of "er" sounds--[ə] and [ɜ]--not only will the "R" tap, but the pronunciation of the vowel stem will become [ɛə] as in the word "air.")

- sister; mother; father; later; runner; earth;
 earnest; first; worm; word; worst
 --car; spar; heart; sergeant

- four; door; pour; more
- jeer; clear; near; beer
- hair; bear; everywhere; stairs; blare
- tour; sure; cure; lure; secure
- Are all the royal guardsmen qualified marksmen?
- The runner staggered over the ridge and recovered his revenge.
- The girl put a worm on the hook and caught a perfect flounder.

LESSON 5: CHANGES IN CONSONANTS

1. Medial "T" does not change to "D"

- The beautiful British writer scattered the letters.
- The Cincinatti batter was better at the bottom of the ninth.

2. Voiced and Voiceless "TH" ([ð] and [θ]) will sometimes become [d] and [t]. However, many Farsi speakers of English can handle the "TH" placements.

- this; that; other; thing
- That was a thick thistle.

3. "V" and "W" before vowels both sound like a "V" which made with the two lips instead of with the lower lip and upper teeth.

- whistle; very; victory; every; west; what do you want; one
- Vincent went to work every evening.
- Walter wanted to question his grandfather's will.

4. Many words beginning with "S" take a [ɛ] vowel before the "S"

- speak; study; street; start; skillfully

- I am studying because I must speak English with more skill.
- I still think this is a beautiful street.

5. In many Farsi accents--especially the heavier ones--the speaker will insert a [ə] vowel between two clustered consonants. This is most likely to happen when the second consonant in the cluster is [r] or [l].

- intrigue; tree; expression; April; priest; friends; Frank; dress; dream; cracked; cringe; bring; brought; great; group
- cling; claim; flame; fling; gleam; glow; play; plant; black; blame
- against; suspense; myself; film

LESSON 6: COACHED DRILL

In most of the dialect manuals, this chapter provides you with detailed shorthand markings to put in scripts indicating all of the pronunciation changes we studied in the earlier chapters. But remember that I stressed many times on the tape that most of the sound changes were not really major, and that they almost had to happen automatically if you used the new stress and resonances of the Farsi accent. Thus, most of the vowel changes are likely to go too far if you actually mark your script and "think about" the substitutions. Follow the tape in generating these changes from the other vocal characteristics we studied. The more definite pronunciation changes are still listed below. These you may wish to mark in your scripts.

<u>SUBSTITUTION</u>	<u>SYMBOL</u>	<u>EXAMPLE</u>
[æ] becomes [ɑ]	ɑ	ask that man

<u>SUBSTITUTION</u>	<u>SYMBOL</u>	<u>EXAMPLE</u>
tapped "R"	.	red reindeer
extra [ə]	ə	group play
Full pronunciation of single-stressed vowels and added diphthong stress may be marked by a stress symbol	,	capitál, hót movémént, sít abóút, ríght óld, sóng

DRILL PASSAGE

I am going to take advantage of this final drill passage to not only point out how the stress, rhythm, and pronunciation changes take place when moving toward a Farsi accent; I also want to point out to you how you must practice these speech characteristics so that they become second nature. When that happens you won't have to pay attention to the mechanics of the speech changes, and you can go back to your main task of concentrating on the actions and intentions of your character: a character who happens to speak with an accent. The thoughts must flow. We must be conscious of your character thinking and speaking, but not thinking about the way he or she is speaking.

HAVE AT IT WITH YOUR FARSI ACCENT!