

ACTING WITH AN ACCENTTM

STAGE DIALECT INSTRUCTION

by

DAVID ALAN STERN, Ph. D.

Manual for Tape #19

POLISH

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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 OLMOS
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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.

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

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>
[ɛ] as in <u>set</u>	[ɔ] as in <u>brought</u>
[æ] as in <u>sat</u>	[ɑ] as in <u>father</u> (British)
[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.

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Instructional Tape #19

POLISH

LESSON 1: CREATING THE POLISH RESONANCE

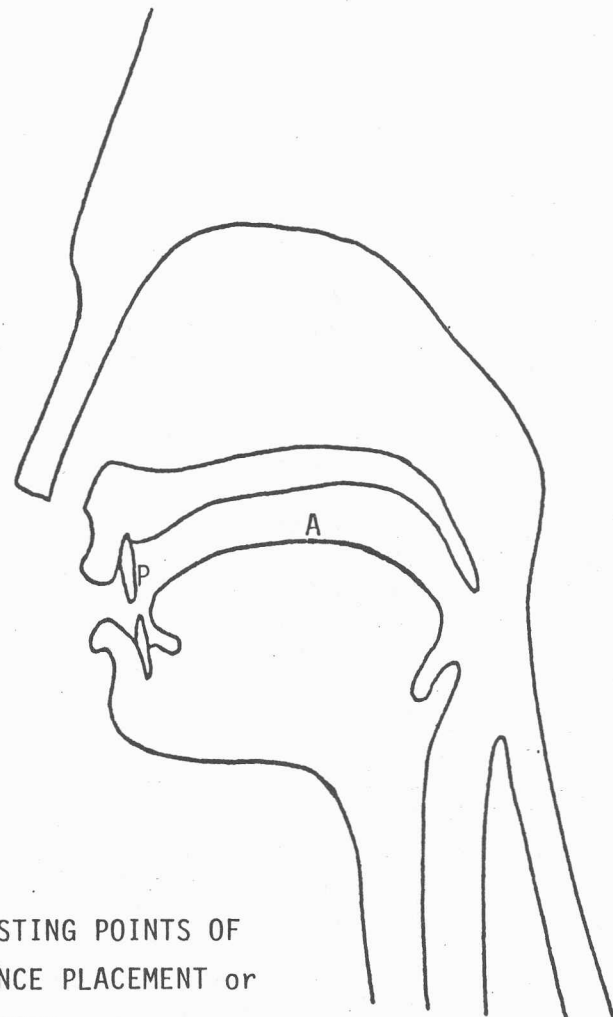
Before studying actual pronunciation changes in your new, target accent, you first must generate an overall change in the resonance, tone focus, or muscularity of the overall vocal production. The standard American pattern of English tends to focus its vibration at the mid-point of the oral cavity. The Polish language (and its accent on English) moves that point of maximum vibration slightly forward in the mouth to a point just behind the front teeth--between the portions of the cheeks which are just a half inch or so behind the "corners of the mouth."

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

- (1) imagine or visualize the point of focus shifting between the American and Polish resonance points just described.
- (2) attempt to feel actual tissue vibration shifting between the focal points of the two accents.
- (3) limit the amount of mouth movement during speech.
- (4) pull in the portions of the cheeks just to the rear of the corners of your lips.

LESSON 2: RHYTHM AND INFLECTION PATTERNS

Both American and British standard dialects of English have an intricate pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. When English is spoken by a native speaker of Polish (or other Slavic languages),



CONTRASTING POINTS OF
RESONANCE PLACEMENT or
TONE FOCUS

A--Standard American Dialect

P--Polish Resonance Placement

there is a relative absence of unstressed syllables. Listen closely to the examples on the tape as you begin to give a more even stress to the sequence of syllables within the Polish accent.

The Polish pattern also has a very specific lilt or inflection. The pitch glides upwards on the words which are given the most stress or importance. The inflection rises and then usually stays up until the end of the word in question. Although this upward inflection can take place on any vowel within the target word, the inflection will tend to be more noticeable on diphthongs or double vowels. Follow the tape for examples of this inflection both in this lesson and in later lessons when it is applied to specific vowel sounds.

LESSON 3: THE PRONUNCIATION OF VOWELS

The following pronunciations should be studied as extensions of the resonance you just learned. Continue using the new muscularity, stress and inflections. Don't just attempt to isolate the substitutions of the vowels.

1. [i] and [I] both move toward a heavily stressed [I]. To the ears of English speakers, they almost seem to reverse in their pronunciations. (In the Lessac symbol system: y and N² both become a heavily stressed N².)

--seat; see; yield; need; meter
 --He hurt his knees while skiing down the peak.
 --He achieves intrigue very easily.
 --Meat and cheese were served under the tree.
 --physical, pick; inside; mistake; wind
 --The inspector charged interest on Wilma's income.
 --The chicken committed itself to the interest of dinner.
 --Sit inside the pavilion.

2. [u] and [U] both move toward a heavily stressed [U]. Again, to the ears of most English speakers, they may seem to reverse in pronunciation. (Lessac: #1 and N¹ both become a more heavily stressed N¹.)

--studio; school; review; pupil; truth
 --The gloomy June moon is moving foolishly.
 --It's true that Sue proves school is useful.
 --They were soon to be marooned on the moon.
 --wouldn't; ambush; goodness; faithful; cushion
 --We pulled the wolf from the woods to the boulevard.
 --I understood there's a good book in the library.
 --They couldn't find enough wooden beams.

3. [æ] and [ə] both become [a]. (Lessac: #6 and N⁴ both become #5.)

--laugh; class; France; grant; and; at; camera; back
 --Ask for the hand of any bashful man.
 --They ate a lamb and ham sandwich at the camp.
 --trouble; struggle; under; love; above
 --A mother's love makes you struggle to come back, my brother.
 --The puddle was made by some suds from the supper dishes.

4. "Short O" migrates toward [o]. (Lessac: #4 becomes a single vowel #2.)

--exotic; bond; common; college
 --She dropped out of college.
 --He's not popular because of many problems.
 --The frog got groggy and hopped away.

NOTE: The next five vowels are the English diphthongs or "double vowels." These are the sounds which are most likely to happen in conjunction with the lilt characteristic examined earlier.

5. [eI] moves upward and toward [ɛI] (Lessac: +y lilts up and moves toward N³+N².)
 --day; rain; investigate; neighbor; administration
 --A great April shower came our way today.
 --The ailing aviator sought compensation after losing the race.
6. [oU] lilts upward and moves toward [ə] or [oə] (Lessac: #21 lilts and moves toward N⁴ or #2+N⁴.)
 --go; explosion; closed; expropriate; social
 --Smoke rolled out of the open hotel window.
 --The oboe and cello sat alone, woefully echoing tone for tone.
7. [aI] has a large upward lilt (Lessac: #6y)
 --cry; advice; politely; arrive; dialogue
 --The ivy vines were tied down behind the shutters.
 --It's the right time to recite ironic rhymes.
8. [aU] lilts upward and sometimes moves toward [o] (Lessac: #51 lilts and sometimes moves toward #2.)
 --how; crowd; astounded; Geiger counter; pronouncement
 --Wild flowers abound in out-of-the-way mountain towns.
 --The scale proudly announced that I had lost about a pound.
9. [ɔI] lilts upward (Lessac: #3y)
 --soybeans; choice; exploits; royalty; rejoice; boisterous
 --The little boy was annointed with the oil of royalty.
 --First aid ointment is your best choice for aching joints.

LESSON 4: CHANGES IN CONSONANT PRONUNCIATION

1. Pronunciation of "R" In this accent, the "R" sounds, whether before or after vowels, fall halfway between taking a single tap on the gum ridge with the tongue and having a typical American R-glide. Follow the tape closely for examples of the "R" in relationship to a wide range of vowel stems.
- red; rose; truck; crime; brilliant
 --Rick rode the rapids down the Red River.
 --singer; runner; player; helper
 --The runner staggered into the water and then became a swimmer.
 --earth; worst; perfect; word
 --First thing is to search the world for a perfect curve.
- NOTE: The "er" sound at the beginning or middle of words (as in the above group) will sometimes move its vowel stem slightly toward the [ɛə] (Lessac: N³n) diphthong.
- jeer; career; tears
 --I'm sincere about wanting the deer to appear this year.
 --air; where; therefore; barely
 --He carefully pays his fare, but he can't bear to walk up the stairs.
 --poor; cure; sure
 --I can endure a long tour if I'm sure we're secure.
 --cart; army; charming
 --He disembarked from the car after parking at the cargo hatch.
 --before; support; implore; corner
 --The Concord roared forth, pouring out exhaust.
- NOTE: The vowel stem on "or" combinations with often move more toward [o] (Lessac: #2).

2. Voiced and Voiceless "TH" ([ð] and [θ]) remain "TH" but become harder and more dentalized.

--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 around with this and that.
 --There's a day left before they go to the country.
 --lathe; blithe; soothe

The remaining consonant changes are all related. Voiced consonants in final (or sometimes in medial position) usually become voiceless consonants. This trait is similar to that of the German or Russian accents, but the new, voiceless consonant is not pronounced as sharply or harshly as it usually is in those other patterns.

3. [b] becomes [p]

--tribe; robe; grab; sober
 --The members of the tribe began to sob.

4. [g] becomes [k]

--rag; rig; sag; drag
 --The pig did a jig when the tag in his ear hit a snag.

5. [ŋ] becomes [ŋk]

--singing; ringing; buying
 --My loving daughter is growing up and moving away.

6. [d] becomes [t]

--head; planned; blend; spend
 --Blizzards cause many colds, so the parade was cancelled.

7. [v] becomes [f]

--grave; save; sliver; grieved
 --There will be grave consequences to the native olive groves.

8. [z] becomes [s]

--noise; tries; repose
 --The bulldozer made so much noise that Edward's repose ended.

9. [ʒ] becomes [ʃ]

--garage; vision; collision
 --The luge of the television studio gave an illusion of confusion.

10. [dʒ] becomes [tʃ]

--voyage; courage; judgment; budgerigar
 --Don't nudge the judge over the edge of the ridge.

LESSON 5: COACHED DRILL

Here are the shorthand symbols I use for marking scripts for pronunciation changes. Remember to integrate all of the sound changes into the total muscularity of the accent's new resonance and inflections.

SUBSTITUTION	SYMBOL	EXAMPLE
[i] toward [I]	I	see ^I the meter ^I
[u] toward [U]	U	shoot ^U the moon ^U
[æ] becomes [a]	a	ask ^a the man ^a
[ə] becomes [a]	a	under ^a cover ^a
[ɒ] toward [o]	o	hopping ^o frog ^o

Diphthong Lilts

great; go; my;
house; annoy

Voiced to Voiceless
Consonants

p, k, t, f,
s, ʃ, tʃ

tribe; drag,
riding; spend,
grave, noise,
garage, voyage

DRILL PASSAGE

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 en-
dure. 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. It
is altogether fitting and proper that we should do
this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate;
we cannot consecrate; we cannot hallow this ground.

HAVE AT IT WITH YOUR POLISH ACCENT!