

ACTING WITH AN ACCENT

SCOTTISH

by

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DAVID ALAN STERN is the founder and president of DIALECT ACCENT SPECIALISTS publishing, and has worked in Hollywood since 1980 as an accent and dialect coach for the motion picture and television industries. 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.

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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 dialect(s). (2) If the entire script is set in a country or region where a specific dialect of English is spoken, determine whether the whole cast can use that pattern while still creating complete, believable characters. (3) Avoid using foreign accents for translations of foreign scripts. For example, don't play Chekhov with a Russian accent or Moliere with a French accent. For such "classics," try using ELEVATED AMERICAN DICTION (see the final tape 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 techniques lead to good dialects?

Perhaps as few as twenty per cent of actors have the "good ear" that leads to skillful imitation of speech patterns. Other actors must use a systematic approach in order to create authentic-sounding accents and dialects. Here is a brief discussion of the most important factors.

PRONUNCIATION: Creating correct pronunciation changes is a "necessary, but not sufficient" condition for generating dialect authenticity. Most teachers, texts, and recorded programs drill their students almost exclusively with the appropriate vowel and consonant substitutions needed for the target pattern. Although I believe that correct pronunciation is absolutely necessary, these changes will not sound authentic unless you combine them with several other important vocal features that I'll discuss in the next few paragraphs.

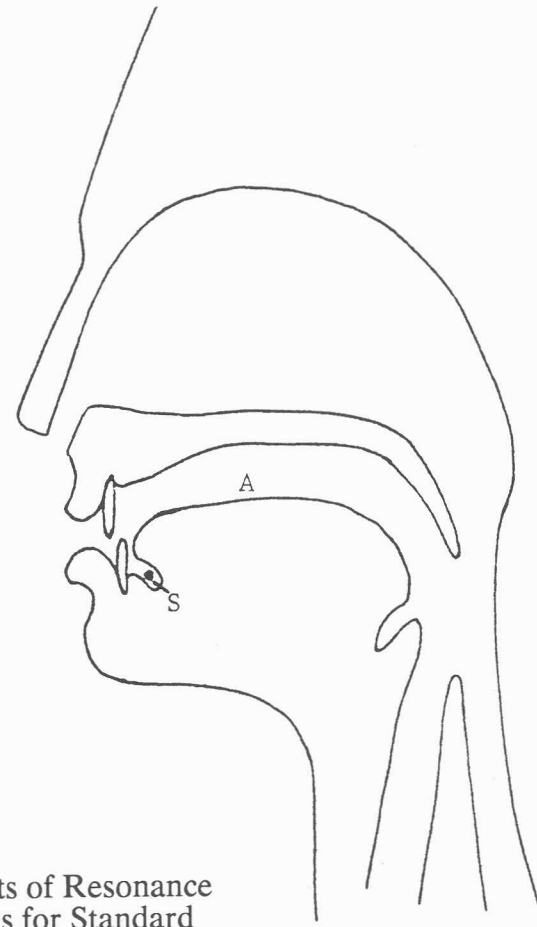
PITCH CHARACTERISTICS: "Pitch" can refer to any of several vocal traits--from how high or low a voice is to how much intonation or pitch variety is used. But for many of the dialects which actors must study, the most important of these traits is a unique lilt or pitch change that takes place inside vowels, especially (but not exclusively) during the sounding of stressed syllables. In many accent patterns, this trait (which I call **INNER-VOWEL LILT**) helps to generate an authentic-sounding dialect.

STRESS PATTERNS: American English has a complex pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. Some other dialects and accents have few, if any unstressed syllables. Still others have rather intricate staccato rhythms which must be mastered before the dialects can possibly sound authentic.

RESONANCE or MUSCULAR SPEECH IMPULSE: Much of my research, teaching, and performing experience has taught 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. Such a specific "tone focus" is 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. So now your new pronunciations have an "organic core." They need no longer be isolated memory exercises.

What is the best way to practice?

Begin by drilling the mechanics of the new dialect--the resonance, lilt, rhythm, and pronunciations. Go on to integrate the changes into phrases, sentences, and passages. Then 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 the sense that you are a real person who actually talks this way.



Points of Resonance
Focus for Standard
American and Scottish
Dialects

A -- Standard American

S -- Scottish

ACTING WITH AN ACCENT SCOTTISH

LESSON ONE:

RESONANCE or MUSCULAR SPEECH IMPULSE

The first step in creating a Scottish dialect is to make an overall change in the resonance features of the voice. Standard American speech has a tone placement in the central part of the mouth. In Scottish speech, the tongue is carried much higher in the mouth. As a result, many speakers perceive the tone focus as moving down lower to a spot located under the tongue (see diagram on Page 5). **NOTE:** Some students feel more comfortable following the same exercises but thinking of the resonance as being "squashed" up higher in the mouth, between the mid-tongue and the hard palate.

Follow the tape carefully through the series of exercises for moving the new resonance away from the mid-mouth focus of American speech and toward the new Scottish muscularity by:

1. visualizing the change in tone focus and feeling a change in the tissue vibration in and around your mouth.
2. lifting and lowering the tongue during phonation.
3. forming the tongue in a slightly concave shape with the edges touching the upper teeth.

NOTE: As important as this unusual Scottish resonance is for creating an impression of dialect authenticity, the degree of this lateral, or, "squashed" sound will vary drastically depending on the particular area of Scotland and the educational level of the speaker. We will further discuss degrees and levels of this dialect later in the tape.

LESSON TWO:

PRONUNCIATION CHANGES RELATED TO RESONANCE

The following vowel substitutions are extensions of the resonance shift you just learned. Repeat the words and sentences after hearing them on the tape. Don't just imitate the new pronunciations. Create the new muscularity, and let the Scottish vowels grow naturally out of that change in speech impulse.

1. "SHORT-OO" as in ^{u↑}COULD ^{u↑}PUT

IPA: [U] becomes [u].
LESSAC: N¹ becomes #1.

- A. bookcase, could, stood, hook, footwear
B. I understood there's a good book in the library.
C. Brooks didn't like to be hoodwinked from the pulpit by Reverend Cook.

Now here are a few additional drills for this sound which are not recorded on the tape.

- * Dr. Goodman took the bullet from the rookie's foot.
- * Captain Hook ate a bushel of gook instead of cookies.
- * The crook was hoodwinked from the pulpit by Mr. Cook.
- * We pulled the wolf from the woods and took him to the boulevard.
- * The butcher's hook made pudding of the sooty bully.
- * Only tourists put bushels of soot in the brook.
- * Woody stood up wearing cushioned footwear.
- * I couldn't have understood the crook's motives.

2. THE "AH OO" SOUND as in ^{u↑}TOWN ^{u↑}HOUSE

IPA: [a.u] moves toward [u].
LESSAC: #51 moves toward #1.

- A. sow, town, count, doubt, cloud
B. Even the proud bow down around the count.
C. The sow, the mouse and the cow sounded a rousing medley.

Now here are a few additional drills which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * We went around and about the town.
- * The cloud's shower doused the cow.
- * Try not to pound down the flowers.
- * The bound man counted the hours and vowed to find a way out.
- * Wild flowers abound in out-of-the-way mountains.
- * The loudest hound in town bow-wowed at the mouse.
- * The coward found a trowel and plowed into the mound.

* *The crowd loudly prowled the streets of the town.*

3. THE "TRILLED R" as in RIVER BIRDS

All Scottish R-sounds, whether initial, medial, or final, are trilled, or, burred. Some American speakers find it difficult to accomplish this tongue trill, so let me take you through a short series of exercises which have proven successful with many students. But, if you are only able to produce a very short trill, or even a single tap, you will still have enough to give the impression of the Scottish R. Follow the tape closely through a series of exercises in which you will:

- begin with the simple, untrilled "ER" [ə] sound.
- lift the tongue up toward the palate.
- slap the tongue-tip back against the palate.
- start again with the tongue slightly out the mouth and slap the tongue-tip in and up to the palate.
- produce the series of sounds [g ə d ə] and add a series of additional ER [ə] endings to it. Then try to coax this utterance into a full, continuous trill.

Now follow the tape and try the trilled R in initial, medial, and final word positions.

- rose, republic, role, round*
- first, worst, worm, hurt*
- harbinger, married, mirror, horror, arrow*
- world, girl, germ, worm, churn, stern*
- mother, father, bear, there, far, store*
- The early bird catches the earliest worm.*
- The burglar and his helper were caught because they stirred up such a clamor.*
- Be sincere, my dear, it's a queer world.*
- The red rose rested in the earth for the first year.*

Now try these additional sentences for the Scottish R which are not recorded on the tape.

- * *Try to remember the Red River Valley.*
- * *Rest assured that robbery is a real crime.*
- * *The runner staggered over the hill and become a swimmer.*

- * *My mother, father, sister, and brother thank you.*
- * *The girl caught a perfect fish with an earthworm.*
- * *Searching for the curse words was hard work.*
- * *Arthur played cards in the cardinal's garden.*
- * *At a quarter to four the sportsmen adorned the shore.*
- * *Never fear, the wheel to steer is near the gear box.*
- * *I'm sincere about wanting the deer to appear next year.*
- * *He carefully prepared to go upstairs.*
- * *Are you sure you can endure the long tour?*

LESSON THREE: THE SCOTTISH INTERNAL VOWEL LILT

Scottish is rarely thought of as a musical dialect because it usually does not have a dominant, external melody pattern. But much of the Scottish essence comes from an internal vowel lilt--an upward rise in pitch which frequently takes place during the vowels and diphthongs of stressed syllables. This pattern is especially evident on diphthongs because the second stage is sounded on a distinctly higher pitch than the first.

Listen closely to the tape for examples of this pattern as you try to imitate the Scottish-sounding gibberish passage. Then go back through Lesson Two and try adding this new lilt characteristic to some of the pronunciation changes you already studied. Later, go on to Lesson Four and study the way that this lilt can create slight alterations in vowel pronunciations.

LESSON FOUR: VOWELS RELATED TO THE SCOTTISH LILT

The Scottish lilt extensions do not create drastic changes in pronunciation. Instead, these vowels and diphthongs extend into an additional stage at the same time that the pitch lilts upward. Several single-stage vowels become diphthongs. Several diphthongs take an even heavier stress and extend into a third state during their upward lilt. Don't forget the overall change in resonance while practicing these vowels.

Now here are a few additional drills for the "Long OO" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * *I always knew that cool prunes were never blue.*
- * *The gloomy June moon moves fools to loons.*
- * *At two past noon, we heard hooves on the roof of the room.*
- * *Give the duke a boost with your boot.*
- * *Rumor has it that raccoons buy fruit with coupons.*
- * *Newman got juiced because Stu threw brew into the soup.*
- * *After his review, the pupil developed a loose screw.*
- * *Judy was rude to Susan because of the music.*

LESSON FIVE: ISOLATED PRONUNCIATION CHANGES

We now look at those Scottish sound changes which do not seem to grow directly out of either resonance or lilt features. While practicing these changes, however, you still must continue producing the Scottish resonance and lilt learned earlier.

1. THE "SHORT I" as in ^ɪWILLIAM ^ɛLISTENED

IPA: [ɪ] tends toward [ɛ].
LESSAC: N² tends toward N³.

- A. *him, listen, will, miss, Jim*
- B. *Listen, will the bank charge him interest on his investment?*
- C. *Crystal is fragile, so lift it significantly slower.*

Now here are a few additional drills for this sound vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * *Winter differs incredibly in its impact on individuals.*
- * *The inspector charged interest on Wilma's income tax.*
- * *The clinician instantly investigated the infant's itch.*
- * *Sit inside the pavilion instead of in the sun.*
- * *The chicken committed itself to the interest of dinner.*
- * *I intend to split the pit in the middle of the cherry.*
- * *I intended to imply that you were ignorant.*
- * *The infant twitched and gripped the crib.*

2. THE "MEDIAL T" as in BETTER BOTTLE

Many Scottish speakers substitute a glottal stop [ʔ] for the "Medial T" and, occasionally, for the "Final T." The stop is more important for producing the authentic impression of the dialect in Scottish than in Cockney speech. Make sure all of your consonant articulation is clear so this sound does not interfere too much with audience intelligibility.

- A. *gentleman, citizen, got, better, glottal, pity*
- B. *The cat wants a bit of water.*
- C. *A glottal stop happens in a lot of unlikely dialects.*
- D. *It's a pity that a little water is not more greatly valued.*

Now here are a few additional drills for this glottal sound which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * *The beautiful British writer scattered the letters.*
- * *Seize at every opportunity for a greater life, .*
- * *What is it about city settlers?*
- * *Get out of the battle with a better position.*
- * *The visit lasted the better part of a week.*
- * *What if the cattle got a lot of extra care?*
- * *The Cincinnati batter was better at the bottom of the ninth.*

3. "-ING ENDINGS" as in SINGING & DANCING

This substitution of the [n] for the [ŋ] in "-ing endings" does not always happen, especially not in educated Scottish speech.

- A. *happening, walking, feeling, searching*
- B. *Mrs. Browning is always asking for something for nothing.*
- C. *The loving cup needs cleaning and polishing.*

Now here are a few additional drills for this consonant sound which aren't recorded on the tape.

- * *I was hoping you'd be feeling better and be wanting to go walking.*
- * *They were singing and dancing in the rain.*
- * *Don't be telling tales while waiting for the next sailing.*
- * *I'm finding myself slipping into a new way of thinking.*
- * *The ending of the film left one feeling like searching for life.*

- * They're travelling around the world, gathering costly belongings.
- * She was hurrying home, trying to avoid running.
- * Flying home was going to be the only option for arriving on time.

LESSON SIX: COACHED DRILL

The passage you'll hear on the tape is printed below. It is marked with all of the important pronunciation changes using the same shorthand symbols I demonstrated earlier in the manual. At first it might be well to mark scripts in this way to jog your memory of the sound changes and the resonance characteristics related to them. If you really go after the Scottish resonance and lilt, the pronunciation changes should soon become second nature. At that time you will benefit from doing a lot of improvising and cold readings in the accent to set the sounds and establish the real sense of conversational authenticity.

From Shakespeare's Macbeth

If it were done when 'tis done, then twere well
 It were done, quickly. If the assassination
 Could trammel up the consequences, and catch
 With his surcease success; that but this blow
 Might be the be all and the end all here;
 But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
 We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases
 We still have judgement here; that we but teach
 Bloody instructions, which being taught, return
 To plague the inventor. This even-handed justice
 Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice

To our own lips . . .

In the next selection, which is later in the same speech, follow the tape closely for examples of several different levels of intensity within the Scottish dialect. Remember that you intensify this dialect by lifting the tongue more vigorously and "squashing" the resonance harder against the soft palate. The vowel stems will also move farther away from the American standard pronunciation as the dialect becomes heavier.

... his virtues
 Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
 The deep damnation of his taking-off;
 And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
 Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horrid
 Upon the sightless couriers of the air
 Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
 That tears shall drown the wind . . .

From Lewis Carole's Jabberwocky

Twas brillig and the slithy toves
 Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
 All mimsy were the borogoves,
 And the mome raths outgrabe.

Bewarfe the Jabberwock, my son!

 ? ? ?

The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!

Bewarfe the ^uJubjub bird, and shun

The ^ufurious Bandersnatch!

HAVE AT IT WITH YOUR SCOTTISH DIALECT!