

ACTING WITH AN ACCENT™

STAGE DIALECT INSTRUCTION

by

DAVID ALAN STERN, Ph. D.

Manual for Tape #17

Detroit - CHICAGO - Buffalo

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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
GEENA DAVIS OLYMPIA DUKAKIS and SALLY FIELD.

For further information on Dr. Stern's tapes, coaching, or on-campus seminars contact:

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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> (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"	

*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.

Instructional Tape #17

CHICAGO

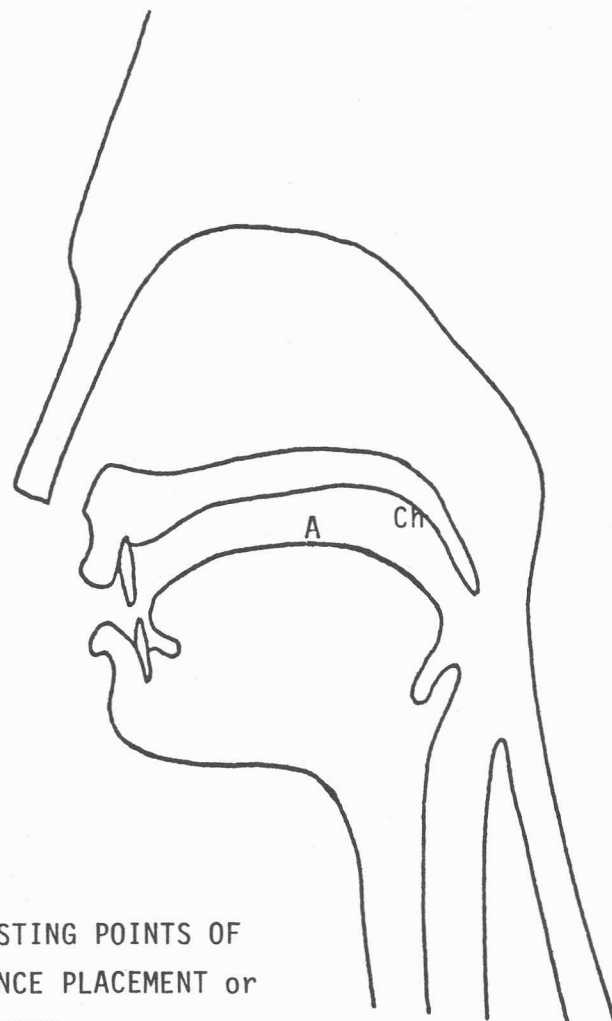
BUFFALO - also - DETROIT

LESSON 1: CREATING THE CHICAGO RESONANCE

The first step in creating a Chicago (or Detroit or Buffalo) dialect is to make an overall change in the resonance features of the voice. As explained on the tape, Chicago speech focuses its tone or resonance in the high-rear of the mouth--on the back part of the soft palate and even spilling over slightly onto the back wall of the throat near the opening of the nasal passage. Since this focal area is so near the nasal opening, the dialect often gives the impression of having a "nasal" quality, even though the phonated air does not actually come out through the nose on voiced sounds. Still, there is no doubt that these dialects are often characterized as being "whiny" in nature--an impression due primarily to the rear-palate, near-nasal nature of the tone focus.

Follow the tape through several exercises for generating the new resonance away from the mid-mouth focus of non-regional speech and toward the above-mentioned Chicago focus by:

- (1) visualizing the change in tone focus and feeling a change in tissue vibration.
- (2) conceptualizing the difference between "whining" and "not whining."
- (3) slightly pulling back the corners of the mouth into a "tight little smile."
- (4) limiting the degree of the mouth opening during speech and keeping the back of the tongue higher in the mouth.



CONTRASTING POINTS OF
RESONANCE PLACEMENT or
TONE FOCUS

A--Standard American Dialect

Ch--Chicago Tone Placement
("Whiny" but not actually
nasal)

- (5) decreasing and intensifying the degree to which you impose the Chicago resonance and muscularity on your speech.

LESSON 2: THE VOWELS OF THE CHICAGO DIALECT

Most of the vowel pronunciations which follow actually grow directly out of the muscularity you had to develop to produce the tone focus we worked on in the last lesson. Try not to think of these pronunciations as isolated vowel changes. Study them as natural extensions of the overall muscularity. Follow the tape for illustrations of the proper pronunciations.

1. [æ] becomes [iə] (In the Lessac system: #6 becomes y+N⁴.) NOTE: This vowel happens with various degrees of intensity and different amounts of "whininess" depending on the "thickness" of the accent.

--and; am; man; castle; soprano; absolute; accent; Frank; bank; sang; rang
 --The soprano laughed as she shattered the glass.
 --Pam made an ample snack of waxed apples.
 --During the disaster the master demanded a ransom.
 --He played the character of Captain Anthony Abso-lute.

Here's the same vowel followed by "R."

--Karen; baron; Darrow; marrow; Larry
 --The parrot had a narrow escape.
 --The Baron married Karen Darrow.

Now a slight variation--"R" after a "short E," which takes the same pronunciation as we just examined.

--berry; ferry; dereck; Jerry; very
 --Have a very merry Christmas.
 --The dereck picked the berries off the ferryboat.

2. [aI] becomes [əI] (Lessac: #6y becomes N⁴+y.)

--fine; I'm; ice; style; spice; virus;
 dried; crisis
 --The ivy vines were tied down behind the shutters.
 --The actor recited an ironic rhyme.
 --Hide the pliers in the file cabinet.
 --It's the right time to find a gold mine in the sky.

3. "Short O" is pronounced as unrounded [ɑ] sharply and with hard Chicago resonance. (Lessac: #4 becomes a sharp #5.)

--bog; pocket; stop; hot; rock; opera;
 obstinate

Words with "wa" and "wha" have their vowel pronounced with this same sharp sound.

--want; wash; what; watch
 --What do you want to watch?
 --The obstinate opera singer was preoccupied.
 --Move from the rocks to the log.
 --The frog got groggy and hopped away.
 --Becket was positive about the honor of God.

4. [ɔ] becomes [ɑ] (Lessac: #3 becomes #5.)
 CLARIFICATION: Since this vowel has many pronunciations in different parts of the country, note that this is the vowel usually spelled with "au" "al" "aw" "ou" "of" "ong" "oth" and "os."

--pause; brought; off; walk; hallway; lawn;
 long; cause
 --The awful sauce made Paul pause and walk home.
 --The cat crawled across the lawn after hurting its paw.
 --The cloth in the hall closet smelled of mothballs.

--You taught me to vault flawlessly without falling.

5. [ɑr] is intensified by the Chicago resonance. It may be thought of as moving very slightly toward [æɹ]. (In Lessac: #5+R intensifies and moves slightly toward #6+R.)

--ark; scarf; car; hard; heart; army; harbor; march
 --Disembark, then park the cargo.
 --Charles argued long and hard for the car.
 --The guard charged the marshal's cart.
 --Carl and Marni formed an artful partnership.

6. [ɛə] is intensified, moving toward [iə].
 (Lessac: N³n+R intensifies toward y+N⁴+R.)

--hair; barely; cardful; stairs; where; there
 --An air of excitement rarely blares down the stairs.
 --Pay your fare then tell the driver where to stop.
 --The flu scare was really hard to bare.
 --Where can I get my hair cut carefully?

7. [il] moves toward [Iɪ] (Lessac: y+L moves toward N²+n.) This change is most likely to happen in the heavier accents of these areas.

--I feel it. --That's real nice.
 --I saw the trained seal.
 --I sat behind the steering wheel.

8. [eɪl] moves toward [ɛɪ] (Lessac: +y+L moves toward N³+L.) Again, this happens in the heavier accents.

--ginger ale
 --I sailed the sailboat.
 --I'm standing behind the rail.

9. [ɛɪ] and [uɪ] both move toward [əɪ] in heavier versions of these dialects. (Lessac: N³+L and #1+L both move toward N⁴+L.)

--I'll do it myself.
 --The food's on the shelf.
 --I did it for my health.
 --Go to school. --He's singing foolishly.
 --I bought some jewels.
 --It's in the jewelry box.

SHORT SENTENCE PRACTICE

The following short sentences contain many of the "little words" that contain the Chicago vowel changes. These are words which occur frequently in normal conversation, so it's important you become comfortable using them with their altered vowel pronunciations.

--It was on the rocks. --He was on time.
 --I have to have it. --That's right.
 --Well, I guess that's that.
 --Where are you at? --I'm at home / at work.
 --I'm at the movies / at the factory.
 --Sam just had to have that at work.
 --I'll be there as soon as I can.
 --Have you got the right time?
 --That's hard to stop.
 --Could you park the car over there?
 --We did it in nineteen seventy-nine.
 --They had to do it in nineteen seventy-nine.

LESSON 3: COACHED DRILL

Here are the shorthand symbols which I use for marking scripts in this dialect. Remember that some of the vowels we studies are not really pronunciation changes, just extensions of the new resonance. Even those which do actually change pronunciation should still grow out of the new muscularity of this dialect.

SUBSTITUTION	SYMBOL	EXAMPLE
[æ] becomes [iə]	iə	am; bank; Larry
[ɛr] becomes [iə]		very; merry
[aI] becomes [əI]	ə	high ivy vines
[ɒ] becomes [ɑ]	ɑ	want lots of rocks
[ɔ] becomes [ɑ]	ɑ	all, pause; long
[ɑr] and [ɛr] both intensify	,	the March Hare
[il] becomes [II]	I	a real seal
[eIl] becomes [ɛI]	ɛ	sail, rail
[ɛI] and [uI] become [əI]	ə	jewels, shelf

DRILL PASSAGES

Oh say, can you see by the dawn's early light
 what so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last
 gleaming. Whose broad stripes and bright stars
 through the perilous fight, o'er the ramparts we
 watched were so gallantly streaming. And the
 rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air gave
 proof through the night that our flag was still
 there. Oh say, does that star-spangled banner yet
 wave o'er the land of the free and the home of the

brave.

Fourscore-and-seven years ago, our fathers
 brought forth on this continent a new nation--
 conceived in liberty and dedicated to the pro-
 position 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. 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. The brave men, living and dead
 who struggled here, have consecrated it far above
 our poor power to add or detract. The world will
 little note nor long remember what we say here,
 but it can never forget what they did here.

HAVE AT IT WITH YOUR CHICAGO DIALECT!