

# **ACTING WITH AN ACCENT**

## **IRISH**

by

**DAVID ALAN STERN, Ph.D.**

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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 theatre faculties of both Penn State University and the University of Connecticut. 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  
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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.



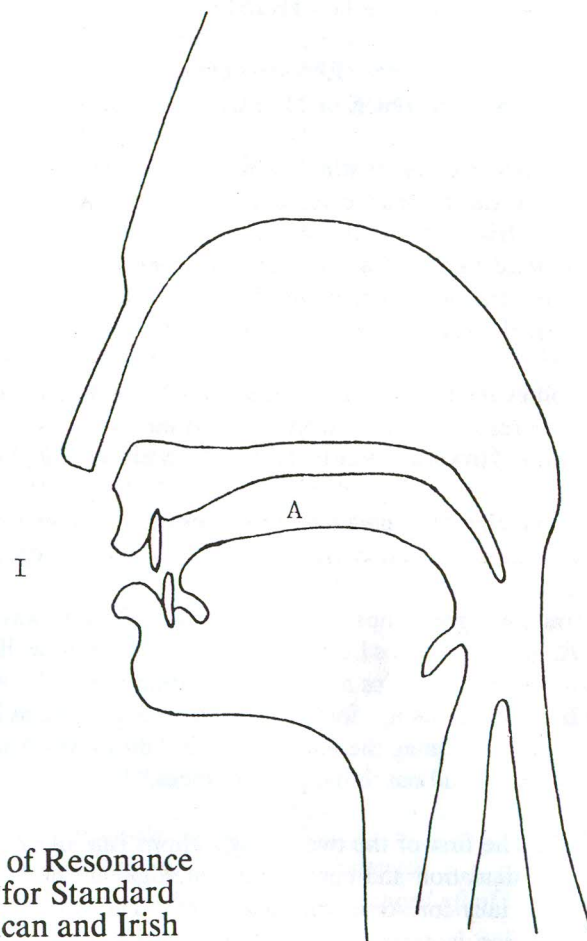
**PITCH CHARACTERISTICS:** "Pitch" can refer to any of several vocal traits--from how high or low a voice is to how much intonation or pitch variety is used. But for many of the dialects which actors must study, the most important of these traits is a unique lilt or pitch change that takes place inside 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 Irish  
Dialects

A -- Standard American

I -- Irish



## ACTING WITH AN ACCENT IRISH

### LESSON ONE:

#### IRISH RESONANCE or MUSCULAR SPEECH IMPULSE

The first step in creating an Irish dialect is to make an overall change in the resonance features of the voice. As I explain on the tape, Irish speech almost seems to focus its tone or resonance far forward to a spot a few inches in front of the lips. It almost feels like the maximum point of vibration is outside the mouth, and that the sound is being carried out there on a soft stream of air.

Follow the tape through the series of exercises for generating the new resonance away from the mid-mouth focus of American speech and toward the more frontal Irish muscularity by:

1. visualizing the change in tone focus and feeling a change in the tissue vibration as you create a slightly breathy vocal quality.
2. configuring your lips in one of the two following ways:
  - A. pulling the lips back toward the front teeth--as if you were pulling your lips away from the sound, or
  - B. pushing the lips forward and tunneling them, as if you were forming the "barrel of a gun" down which you "shoot" the sound out to the point of focus.

**NOTE:** The first of the two configurations can interfere with articulation and cause some intelligibility problems, especially for American audiences. The second configuration is safer, but the first can still help you develop a "feeling" for the Irish resonance.

### 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 Irish vowels grow naturally out of that change in speech impulse.

#### 1. THE "AH" or "SHORT O" as in WHAT & STOP

IPA: [ɑ] becomes [a].  
LESSAC: #3 becomes more frontal.

Since the [ɑ] and [a] vowels are usually heard as being the same phoneme, you can easily consider this substitution to be a resonance change only.

- A. *ark, calm, stop, option, army*  
B. *Father Charles argued for the honor of God.*

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

- \* *He occupied the gondola of the golf cart.*
- \* *The rocket shot toward the opposite air lock.*
- \* *Oxygen is commonly found in air pockets.*
- \* *Becket was positive about the honor of God.*
- \* *Move the fox from the rocks to the bog.*

#### 2. THE "SHORT A" as in AS & CAT

IPA: [æ] tends toward [a].  
LESSAC: #6 tends toward #5.

- A. *man, basket, castle, answer*  
B. *The soprano laughed as the glass shattered.*  
C. *The passenger and the baggage were trapped aft of the alcove.*

And now here are a few more drills for the "SHORT A" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- \* *Pam made an ample snack of the wax apples.*
- \* *Lady Astor handed the annual to the commanding admiral.*
- \* *Ask any bashful man in Alabama and accept his answer.*
- \* *The huddled masses sang the National Anthem.*
- \* *Let's have a lamb and ham sandwich.*
- \* *Sam rammed the flag into the anthill.*
- \* *During the disaster the master commanded the castle.*
- \* *The staff has a rash of bad habits.*



### 3. THE "BROAD AW" as in <sup>a</sup>TALL <sup>a</sup>AUTHOR

IPA: [ɔ] tends toward [a].  
 LESSAC: #3 tends toward #5.

- A. off, awful, sauce, hawk, morning, author*  
*B. The cat crawled across the lawn after it pawed the thorn.*

And now here are a few more drills for the "Broad-AW" vowel which aren't recorded on the tape.

- \* *The awkward, awful, tall man walked home.*
- \* *He stalked the ball and then vaulted down the hall.*
- \* *The awful sauce made Paul pause and walk away.*
- \* *You taught me to vault flawlessly without falling.*

### 4. THE "OY DIPHTHONG" as in <sup>ai</sup>NOISE

IPA: [ɔ i] tends toward [ai].  
 LESSAC: #3y tends toward #6y.

- A. loin, moisture, point, coiled*  
*B. In his toil, he hoisted the soy beans from the soil.*  
*C. The boisterous boy oiled the toy.*  
*D. Annoyed at her coy loitering, he foiled her exploits.*

Now here are some additional drills for the "OY" sound which aren't recorded on the tape.

- \* *Sing out with a joyful noise.*
- \* *The royals exploited their loyal subjects.*
- \* *Ointment is the best choice for aching joints.*

### 5. THE "SCHWA VOWEL" as in <sup>ʊ</sup>UNDER <sup>ʊ</sup>COVER

IPA: [ə] becomes [ʊ].  
 LESSAC: N<sup>4</sup> becomes N<sup>1</sup>.

In soft versions of Irish, the target vowel can be closer to the [a] which we used in the last four substitutions.

- A. blood, governor, puddle, other, hunt*  
*B. The stuntman stumbles and tumbles in the mud.*  
*C. A mother's love is above that of another brother.*  
*D. The puppy hunted the slumbering dove.*

Now here are some additional drills for the "SCHWA" sound which aren't recorded on the tape.

- \* *The dumb puppet was shut up in its trunk.*
- \* *The suds from the supper dishes fell into a puddle.*
- \* *The hunters used clubs and lived in huts.*

### 6. THE "LONG I" as in <sup>a</sup>RIGHT <sup>a</sup>TIME

IPA: [ai] becomes [əɔi].  
 LESSAC: #6y becomes N<sup>4</sup> + #2 + y.

- A. find, likely, lifetime, dry, fight*  
*B. The actor recited ironic rhymes of an ionic kind.*  
*C. Blind justice presided over the indictment.*  
*D. A life of violent crime has become a depressing sign of the times.*

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

- \* *It's the right time to find a gold mine in the sky.*
- \* *The sight of dry land made for an exciting ending to the flight.*
- \* *The light came out of the night sky.*

### 7. THE "AH OO" SOUND as in <sup>a</sup>TOWN <sup>a</sup>HOUSE

IPA: [au] becomes [əu].  
 LESSAC: #51 becomes N<sup>4</sup> + #2 - y

- A. mouse, vow, trounce, abound*  
*B. The cloud's shower doused the cow.*  
*C. I found that I had gained about a pound.*  
*D. The bound man counted the hours and vowed to find a way out.*

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

- \* *We went around and about the town.*
- \* *Even the proud bow down around the count.*
- \* *Try not to pound down the flowers.*

### LESSON THREE: THE IRISH INTERNAL VOWEL LILT

Irish speech, except in Northern Ireland and the northernmost counties of the Republic, often glides downward in pitch during vowels. This glide is most evident on diphthongs, but all vowels (especially those in stressed syllables) contain a bit of this downward, internal vowel glide.

Listen closely to the tape for examples of this pattern as you try to imitate the Irish-sounding gibberish passage. Then go back through Lesson 2 and try adding this new lilt characteristic to some of the pronunciation changes you already studied. Then go on to Lesson 4 and study the other lilt extensions.

### LESSON FOUR: VOWELS RELATED TO THE IRISH LILT

The Irish lilt extensions do not create drastic changes in pronunciation. Instead, these vowels and diphthongs soften slightly, lilt downward in pitch, and increase slightly in duration. Listen closely to the examples on the tape.

#### 1. THE "LONG A" as in GREAT DAY

IPA: [ei] softens and lilts downward.  
LESSAC: +y softens and lilts downward.

- A. *take, baby, rainfall, stray, fateful*
- B. *They paid the price for delaying the instant replay.*

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

- \* *The flaky neighbor made a face at the baby.*
- \* *The fateful delay in rainfall placed a great weight on Nathan's shoulders.*
- \* *The ailing aviator chased the victory for its own sake.*

#### 2. THE "LONG O" as in GROW

IPA: [oʊ] softens and lilts downward.  
LESSAC: #21 softens and lilts downward.

- A. *oldest, open, boat, growing, over*
- B. *Show auditions can lower actors' egos over time.*

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

- \* *Long ago people slept on the cold earth.*
- \* *He was bloated from eating a roasted tomato.*
- \* *Of all the folks I know, he is the most hopeful.*
- \* *I told Joan that the snow is flown in from Ohio.*
- \* *Smoke rolled out the open end of the hotel window.*

#### 3. THE "LONG OO" as in BLUE MOON

IPA: [u] softens and lilts downward.  
LESSAC: #5 softens and lilts downward.

- A. *food, troupe, loosely, juicy, spoon*
- B. *Give the duke a boost with your boot.*
- C. *Rumor has it that raccoons buy fruit with coupons.*

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.*





#### 4. THE "LONG E" as in SEE or BEAT

IPA: [ɪ] softens and lilt downward.  
 LESSAC: y softens and lilt downward.

However, when this sound is spelled with the letters "ea," "ei," or "ie," the pronunciation will often change to the "Long A" [eɪ] vowel.

- A. [i]: agree, intrigue, scene, Japanese
- B. [ei]: tea, beat, receive, deal, conceive
- C. The speedy car careened off the freeway.
- D. He teased the eager marine with sneezing powder.
- E. He achieves intrigue by agreeing to speak Japanese in two scenes.

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

- \* Please cease to creep through the Garden of Eden.
- \* For tea, meat and cheese were served under the tree.
- \* Steve went to pieces because he was so green with envy.

### LESSON FIVE: ISOLATED PRONUNCIATION CHANGES

#### 1. THE IRISH R as in RIVER/BIRD

All Irish R-sounds, whether initial, medial, or final, are produced with the arch or tip of the tongue pointing up and back toward the palate. The sound also elongates and is often subject to the downward lilt you learned earlier.

- A. rose, heather, arrive, fear, bird, ever
- B. The girl put the worm on the hook and caught a perfect flounder.
- C. The cure for polio makes Salk's name endure through time.
- D. Are all the royal guardsmen qualified marksmen?
- E. The runner staggered over the ridge and recovered his wind.

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

- \* My mother, father, sister, and brother thank you.
- \* 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.
- \* 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?

#### 2. THE "SHORT E" as in TEN CENTS

IPA: [ɛ] becomes [ɪ].  
 LESSAC: N<sup>3</sup> becomes N<sup>4</sup>.

This change only takes place when the vowel comes before M, N, or V.

- A. never, devil, emblem, twenty, generation
- B. The twenty cemetery plots gave the gravedigger a devilish time.
- C. I don't ever want you to tremble before the devil.

Now try these additional drills--

- \* Entering the room was heavenly.
- \* His birthday was September seventh.

#### 3. "ING ENDINGS" BECOME "IN" as in FLYING

This substitution does not always happen, especially not in educated Irish speech.

- A. eating, catching, falling, thinking
- B. I was hoping you'd be feeling better and be wanting to go walking.

Now try these additional drills--



\* They were singing and dancing in the rain.

\* Don't be telling tales while waiting for the next sailing.

NOTE: Some Irish speakers substitute T and D for the two TH sounds. But since those changes often interfere with intelligibility, they can create problems if used on the American stage.

### LESSON SIX: COACHED DRILL

The song lyrics you'll hear on the tape are printed below. They are marked with all of the important pronunciation changes using the same shorthand symbols I demonstrated earlier in the manual.

#### "I'LL TAKE YOU HOME AGAIN, KATHLEEN"

I'LL TAKE YOU HOME AGAIN, KATHLEEN;  
 ACROSS THE OCEAN WILD AND WIDE,  
 TO WHERE YOUR HEART HAS EVER BEEN,  
 SINCE YOU WERE MY BONNY BRIDE. <sup>or</sup> [mi]  
 THE ROSES ALL HAVE LEFT YOUR CHEEK;  
 I'VE WATCHED THEM FADE AWAY AND DIE;  
 YOUR VOICE IS SAD WHEN E'ER YOU SPEAK,  
 AND TEARS BEDIM YOUR LOVING EYES.  
 OH, I WILL TAKE YOU BACK, KATHLEEN  
 TO WHERE YOUR HEART WILL FEEL NO PAIN,  
 'N WHEN THE FIELDS ARE FRESH AND GREEN  
 I'LL TAKE YOU TO YOUR HOME AGAIN.

#### "MY WILD IRISH ROSE"

MY WILD IRISH ROSE,  
 THE SWEETEST FLOWER THAT GROWS,  
 YOU MAY SEARCH EVERYWHERE,  
 BUT NONE CAN COMPARE  
 WITH MY WILD IRISH ROSE.  
 MY WILD IRISH ROSE,  
 THE DEAREST FLOWER THAT GROWS,  
 AND SOME DAY FOR MY SAKE,  
 SHE MAY LET ME TAKE  
 A BLOOM FROM MY WILD IRISH ROSE

#### "MOLLY MALONE" (COCKLES & MUSSELS)

For this song, follow the tape closely for examples of various levels of Irish speech, including the stereotypical version.

IN DUBLIN'S FAIR CITY WHERE GIRLS ARE SO PRETTY,  
 'T WAS THERE I FIRST SAW MY SWEET MOLLY MALONE.  
 SHE WHEELED HER WHEELBARROW  
 THROUGH STREETS BROAD AND NARROW,  
 CRYING "COCKLES AND MUSSELS, ALIVE, ALIVE-O."



↘ ˊ      ˊ ˊ      ˊ ˊ      ˊ ˊ      ˊ ˊ  
 SHE WAS A FISHMONGER BUT SURE WAS NO WONDER  
 ˊ ↘      ˊ      ˊ      ˊ      ˊ      ˊ  
 FOR SO WERE HER FATHER AND MOTHER BEFORE.

↘ ˊ      ↘      ˊ      ˊ      ↘  
 THEY EACH WHEELED A BARROW

↘      ˊ      ˊ      ˊ      ˊ      ↘  
 THROUGH STREETS BROAD AND NARROW,

ˊ      ˊ      ˊ      ˊ      ˊ      ˊ      ↘  
 CRYING "COCKLES AND MUSSELS, ALIVE, ALIVE-O."

↘ ˊ ˊ ˊ ˊ      ˊ      ˊ      ↘  
 SHE DIED OF A FEVER 'N NOTHING COULD SAVE HER  
 ˊ      ˊ      ˊ      ˊ      ↘      ˊ      ↘  
 AND THAT WAS THE END OF SWEET MOLLY MALONE.

ˊ      ↘      ↘      ˊ      ↘  
 NOW HER GHOST WHEELS A BARROW

↘      ↘      ˊ      ˊ      ˊ      ↘  
 THROUGH STREETS BROAD AND NARROW,

ˊ      ˊ      ˊ      ˊ      ˊ      ˊ      ↘  
 CRYING, "COCKLES AND MUSSELS, ALIVE, ALIVE-O."

HAVE AT IT WITH YOUR IRISH DIALECT!