

ACTING WITH AN ACCENT

FOUR TEXAS DIALECTS

by

DAVID ALAN STERN, Ph.D.

Copyright (c) 1983
DIALECT ACCENT SPECIALISTS, Inc.
P.O. Box 44
Lyndonville, VT 05851
(802) 626-3121

No part of this manual or the accompanying audio tape may be reproduced or otherwise transmitted in any form, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying or audio tape dubbing, without permission in writing from
Dialect Accent Specialists, Inc.

The ACTING WITH AN ACCENT series

New York City	Standard British	French
American Southern	Cockney	German
Texas	British North	Russian
Boston	Irish	Yiddish
"Down East"	Scottish	Polish
"Kennedyesque"	Australian	Norw./Swed.
Chicago	Spanish	Arabic
Mid-West Farm	Italian	Farsi
West Indian/Black African and American Accents for English Actors		

Instructional Tapes are Also Available for
Reducing Foreign Accents and Regional Dialects &
Aesthetic Improvement of the Speaking Voice

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
Geena Davis, Olympia Dukakis, and Sally Field.**

For further information on tapes, coaching, and campus seminars or residencies contact:

DIALECT ACCENT SPECIALISTS, INC.
P. O. Box 44
Lyndonville, VT 05851
(800) 753-1016

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 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.

ACTING WITH AN ACCENT FOUR TEXAS DIALECTS

LESSON ONE: THE TEXAS (or SOUTHERN) LILT

In Texas, as well as other Southern dialect regions, most vowels and diphthongs contain a characteristic jog in pitch, especially when they occur inside stressed syllables. The pitch slides up and then back down again during the stressed vowels. This lilt is especially noticeable within particularly important words. Carefully follow the tape through the gibberish exercises for producing this Texas/Southern vowel lilt.

LESSON TWO: CENTRAL & NORTHEAST TEXAS RESONANCE

The speech muscularity and resulting resonance or voice placement varies drastically as you move from one part of Texas to another. We will begin with the "general Texas" sound of the Austin and Dallas areas. In these regions, part of the vibration energy focuses on the soft palate (right near the opening into the nose) giving the speech a slight nasal or palatal "twang." There is also a secondary focus in the very front of the mouth (near the lips). Closely follow the exercises in Lesson Two during which you will:

1. close the lips and glide them forward.
2. glide the tongue tip forward.
3. create a slight degree either of actual nasality or of vibration on the soft palate.

LESSON THREE: VOWELS RELATED TO LILT AND RESONANCE

I. LILT TRUNCATIONS

As the pitch lilt up and down, two of the diphthongs drop (or almost drop) their second stages.

1. "OY" as in JOYFUL NOISE

IPA: [ɔi] almost becomes [ɔ]
 LESSAC: #3y almost becomes #3

boy, joy, Roy, poison, employ

- Did James Joyce employ metaphors in writing about the war in Troy?
- The farmer was annoyed when the car failed to avoid the field of soy beans.

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

- * The boy joined in the noise.
- * Loyal Lloyd anointed the royal head with oil.
- * Doyle put soy sauce on the boiled oysters.
- * He coiled around the moist cloister pillars.
- * He toiled to hoist the soybeans from the soil.

2. "LONG-I" as in RIGHT TIME

IPA: [ɑi] becomes [ɑ]
 LESSAC: #6y becomes #6

light, time, finally, ride

- I transcribed all five dialogues into IPA, though I couldn't think why.
- Eliza was the pride of the whole science department when she won the biology prize.
- Fried pike was sliced thinly for Friday night's supper.

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

- * It's the right time to find a gold mine in the sky.
- * The sight of dry land was exciting for Ira.
- * A life of violent crime is a sign of the times.
- * My guide and I had a fine time exploring the Nile.

II. MINOR LILT EXTENSIONS

There are a series of vowel changes I call "minor lilt extensions." Some vowels elongate slightly as they lilt up and down. Although some hear an extra "schwa vowel" [ə] at the end of the sound, it's easiest simply to perceive these vowels as stretching out or elongating slightly during the lilt.

1. "SHORT-I" as in BIG CITY

IPA: [ɪ] elongates as it lilt
 LESSAC: N² elongates as it lilt

suspicious, city, sister, invisible, minute

- The inspector charged interest on Wilma's income tax.
- The clinician instantly investigated the speech impediment.

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

- * 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.
- * The infant twitched and gripped the crib.

2. "SHORT-OO" as in COULD PUT

IPA: [u] elongates as it lilt
 LESSAC: N¹ elongates as it lilt

bullet, footwear, rookie, cushion, butcher

- We pulled the wolf from the woods and took him to the boulevard.
- The butcher's hook made pudding of the sooty bully.

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.
- * Woody stood up wearing cushioned footwear.
- * I understood there's a good book in the library.
- * Brooks was hoodwinked from the pulpit by Mr. Cook.

3. "SHORT-O" (and RELATED "A") as in QUALITY OPTION

IPA: [ɑ] elongates as it lilt and rounds in some regions
 LESSAC: #5 elongates as it lilt and rounds in some regions

oxygen, honor, calm, scarf, quality

- The frog got groggy and hopped into Prince Charming's armor.
- People disembarked from the rocket parked at the cargo hatch.
- The obstinate opera singer was preoccupied.

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

- * He occupied the gondola of the golf cart.
- * The rocket shot toward the opposite air lock.
- * Anonymous letters commonly dishonor Adonis.
- * Becket was positive about the honor of God.

4A. "SHORT-E" BEFORE NASALS as in TWENTY MEN

Prior to nasal consonants, and in several other isolated words, this vowel not only elongates, but actually changes in pronunciation to the "Short-I" [ɪ]. NOTE: In the sentences that follow, the vowels which change to this "Short-I" are underlined twice.

twenty, Tennessee, cents, enter, get

- Ben was a general in the Grand Army of Tennessee.
- If you can't hold your temper, you can get out of the room.
- Ten and ten eventually get you twenty.

4B. "SHORT-E" as in BED REST

bed, deck, headache, met, western

- A great echo beckoned across the canyon.
- If you make an extra effort, you can cross the desert handily.

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

- * Ed rented the penthouse at an exorbitant price.

- * I meant every word I said in the elementary section.
- * He was especially edgy after the separation.
- * I was in an exceptional mental dilemma.

III. MAJOR LILT EXTENSIONS

Some vowels are really drawn out by speakers from Texas. Often, a consonant glide is actually inserted between the original vowel and the added "schwa" [ə]. Follow the tape closely.

1. "SHORT-A" as in HAM SANDWICH

IPA: [æ] becomes [æjə]
 LESSAC: #6 becomes #6 + Y-Consonant + N⁴

bath, hand, adding, laughter, glass

- Ask any bashful man in Alabama and accept his answer.
- The huddled masses lifted their lamps and sang the National Anthem.

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

- * The soprano laughed as she shattered the glass.
- * The passengers and baggage were trapped in the alcove.
- * Pam made an ample snack of the wax apples.
- * Lady Astor handed the annual to the admiral.

2. "BROAD-AW" as in AWFUL THOUGHTS

IPA: [ɔ] becomes [ɔwə]
 LESSAC: #3 BECOMES #3 + W-Consonant + N⁴

NOTE: This major extension can occur even if the vowel is followed by the R-sound. And remember, R-dropping, as heard in parts of the American South, is not characteristic of Texas dialects.

call, sought, raw, wrong, naught, war, short

- The awful sauce made Paul pause and walk away.
- The cat crawled across the lawn.
- Horses often cost more than four dollars.

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

- * The tall author walked often.
- * The awkward, awful, strong man walked home.
- * Lost boys often become flawless at reform school.
- * The dog fought the moth he had brought home.

IV. REVERSE LILT EXTENSIONS

There are two cases in which vowels extend into diphthongs by displaying the extra "schwa" [ə] before the vowel stem instead of after it. Listen carefully to the tape.

1. "LONG-A" as in LAZY DAY

- wait, chase, rain, great, day, wayward, may, face, safety, player, neighbor
- Statesmen hasten to awaken the nation in these chaotic days.
 - The fateful delay in rainfall placed a great weight on Nathan's shoulders.

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

- * A great April shower came our way today.
- * They paid the price for delaying the instant replay.
- * The ailing aviator chased the victory for its own sake.
- * They blamed the dame with the famous face.

2. "LONG-O" as in GOING HOME

- cold, slowly, ocean, phone, co-host, window, woeful
- The oboe and cello sat alone, woefully echoing tone for tone.
 - The rowboat slowly floated over the ocean.
 - I told Joan it was going to snow.

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

- * Long ago people slept on the cold earth.
- * Slowly the ocean rolled toward the row of homes.

- * He was bloated after eating a roast and a tomato.
- * Of all the folks I know, he is the most hopeful.

3. "LONG-OO" as in TOO SOON

- smooth, noon, humor, loose, prove, through
- I always knew that cool prunes were never blue.
 - The gloomy June moon is moving foolishly.
 - At two past noon I heard hooves on the roof.

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

- * It's true that Sue proves school is gloomy.
- * Give the duke a boost with your boot.
- * After his review, the ppil developed a loose screw.
- * Judy was rude to Susan because of the music.

4. "LONG-E" as in MEAN STREETS

- each, deal, agree, feed, meal, team
- Meat and cheese were served under the tree.
 - Steve went to pieces because he was green with envy.
 - Meat, peas, and beans each provide protein.

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

- * He teased the eager Marine with sneezing powder.
- * Please cease to creep through the Garden of Eden.
- * He twisted his knee while skiing fleetly down the peak.
- * He achieves intrigue by agreeing to speak Japanese.

LESSON FOUR: THE "HARD-R" AFTER VOWELS

Texans are among those Southern dialect speakers who typically do not drop the R-shading when an R follows a vowel as in words like MOTHER and HERE.

earth, curse, thirsty, earnest, German

- Herman was the first to win thirty games.
- The search for the cursed pyramid left them dirty and thirsty.

runner, player, helper, mother, father

- The runner staggered over the hill and then became a blur.
- My mother, my father, my sister and brother all thank you.

gear, weird, steer, clear

- I'm sincere about wanting the deer to appear this year.
- Don't jeer at me; I'm not weird.

hair, pear, air, fair

- The flu scare is really hard to bare.
- There is an air of excitement which is rare.

NOTE: In heavier Texas patterns, the vowel stem in the last set of drills can extend to [e j ə].

sure, you're, endure, allure

- You're sure you can endure the long tour?
- The poor broker tried to insure the alluring gem.

four, door, before, more

- Forty gory creatures poured through the doors.
- The spores were retrieved from the core of the ornament.

NOTE: In heavier Texas patterns, the vowel stem in both the last and the next set of drills can extend to [ow ə].

star, mar, retard, harm

- I played cards in the cardinal's garden.
- The archer got out of the arbor unharmed.

Now here are some additional drills for the R after vowels.

- * The girl caught a perfect fish with an earthworm.
- * Esther was a good talker who never wrote letters.
- * A keg of beer appeared near the rear window.
- * Where can I get my hair cut with great care?
- * I'm secure that Mr. Moore can endure without the velour.
- * Father Charles argues about the guard's identity card.
- * Fourteen bored sportsmen adorned the shore.

LESSON FIVE: ISOLATED PRONUNCIATION CHANGES

Here are a few consonant changes which take place in most Texas dialect regions.

1. "MEDIAL T" as in BETTER BUTTER

As in most American dialects, the T is pronounced as a soft D when it falls between vowels or between a vowel and an L.

British, matter, after, better

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

And now a few additional drills for this medial-T sound.

- * It's a pity that a little water is not more greatly valued.
- * What is it about city settlers?
- * Get out of the battle with a better position.
- * They battled over the bottled water.

2. "-ING ENDINGS" as in LAUGHING and CRYING

In much of Texas speech, the [ŋ] consonant in "-ing endings" becomes the simple [n] consonant.

ripping, dipping, writing, finding

- The stockings were being stuffed with packages with bright wrapping.
- The meeting hall is filling with men straightening their ties.

NOTE: When a [ŋ] consonant is part of a root word, such as "sing," "thing," or "think," the [ŋ] will not drop, but the vowel stem often will migrate toward [ei].

Now here are some additional drills for "-ing endings" which are not recorded on the tape.

- * Don't be telling tales while waiting for the next sailing.
- * He was walking around carrying the baby.
- * I was hoping you'd be feeling better and be wanting to go walking.

* I'm finding myself slipping into a new way of thinking.

LESSON SIX: COACHED DRILL

Here are the marked transcripts of the passages you'll hear in Lesson #6. All the important pronunciation changes are marked with the same shorthand symbols I used earlier in the manual.

1. "Dixie"

I wish I was in the land of cotton,
 Old times there are not forgotten.
 Look away, look away, look away, Dixie Land.
 In Dixie Land where I was born,
 Early on a frosty morn,
 Look away, look away, look away, Dixie Land.
 And I wish I was in Dixie, away, away.
 In Dixie Land I'll take my stand
 To live and die in Dixie.
 Away, away, away down south in Dixie.

2. From Gilbert & Sullivan's Pirates of Penzance

I am the very model of a modern major-general.
 I've information vegetable, animal and mineral.
 I know the kings of England, and I quote the fights
 historical,
 From Marathon to Waterloo, in order categorical.
 I'm very well acquainted, too, with matters
 mathematical; (continued on Page 16)

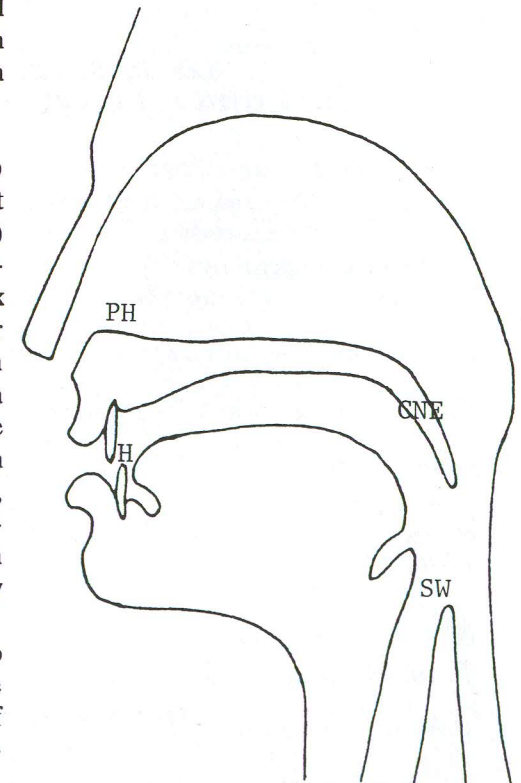
CENTRAL & NORTHEAST TEXAS (CNE): This placement of the Austin and Dallas areas combines the palatal (or velar) focus with a slight forward push of the lips. Review Lesson Two.

HOUSTON (H): The Houston, or Harris County, dialect is very similar in its placement to the "Deep South" pattern. The lips are pushed forward, but there is little or no palatalization or nasalization of the sound. The rear tongue does not move upward for this regionalism as it does in most other parts of Texas.

SOUTHWEST TEXAS (SW): By "southwest" I refer to the areas around San Angelo, but not all the way over to El Paso (which doesn't really have a strong Texas sound). Southwest placement is characterized by a lowering of the entire laryngeal structure, giving a "throaty" quality to the vocal resonance. The pitch glides that constitute the inner-vowel lilt are also much smaller. (See Lesson One.)

PANHANDLE (P)
 The Panhandle dialect (in its strongest form) combines the lowering of the larynx with several other factors. The velum opens, resulting in a nasalization. But, the nostrils tend to pinch closed in the front, obstructing the nasalized sound stream from passing freely through the nose.

Listen closely to Lesson Seven on the tape for samples of these resonance qualities.



I understand equations, both the simple and
quadratical.

About binomial theorem I'm teeming with a lot o' news,
With many cheerful facts about the square of the
hypotenuse.

I'm very good at integral and differential calculus,
I know the scientific names of beings animaculous.
In short, in matters vegetable, animal and mineral,
I am the very model of a modern major-general.

LESSON SEVEN: THREE OTHER TEXAS REGIONALISMS

You can change to other Texas regionalisms by altering the speech muscularity and resonance. See the diagram on Page 15 and listen to the instructions for visualizing resonance changes and creating proper muscle movements. Then apply the regional differences to this lyric from Gilbert & Sullivan's The Mikado.

The sun, whose rays are all ablaze with ever-living glory,

Does not deny his majesty--he scorns to tell a story.

He don't exclaim, "I blush for shame, so kindly be indulgent."

But fierce and bold, in fiery gold, he glories all effulgent.

I mean to rule the earth as he the sky.

We really know our worth, the sun and I!

HAVE AT IT WITH YOUR TEXAS DIALECTS!