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Code-switching in the Classroom:
Teaching the Neutral American Dialect to the 21st Century Student

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in
Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

Louise Antoinette Casini Hollis

Bachelor of Arts – Theatre
Rhodes College, May 1994

Master of Arts in Liberal Studies
University of Memphis, May 2007

Master of Fine Arts – Theatre Pedagogy
Virginia Commonwealth University, August 2013

Director: Susan Schuld
Assistant Professor of Voice and Speech
Department of Theatre

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
July 2013

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their support and guidance. First, my husband Brian Hollis for his patience and unwavering support through this process. He has been a sounding board, source of encouragement and makes me laugh every day. Susan Schuld for her vocal and pedagogical wisdom, as well as her keen editorial skills and encouragement which has made the development of this thesis achievable. She has been a tremendous mentor. Janet Rodgers, who taught me the mechanics and dynamics of vocal coaching productions. Noreen Barnes for showing me how to be an inventive and collaborative teacher. Aaron Anderson for broadening my view of theatre's relationship to contemporary society. Dudley Knight, Louis Colaianni, and Patricia Fletcher for their time and insightful answers to my questions about their work. Finally, and most importantly, my daughter Sophia, who has been my greatest teacher, richest inspiration, and who has taught me more about language than any book.

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Abstract

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Language is a personal process, a product of not only our development, but of one's culture. Yet in the United States, an actor must be able to speak without a detectable dialect to be competitive in the entertainment world. How can voice teachers in a multi-cultural society, train students with more attention to the individuality of the students we educate? In this thesis, I present the information I have found important in my development as a voice teacher that has influenced my approach to training actors to use the Neutral American dialect. I begin by outlining human language acquisition and the behavior of code-switching to establish an understanding of how communication is developed. Next, the journey of voice and dialect training in the United States is traced from the 19th century to the present so that we may understand who shaped our speech standards and the motivations behind their efforts. Lastly, I

outline how I incorporated my knowledge of language acquisition and code-switching into the sophomore Voice and Speech For the Actor class I taught at VCU in the Spring of 2013 which introduced students to the International Phonetic Alphabet and the Neutral American Dialect. I hope this information inspires other 21st century educators to embrace an inclusive approach to dialect training in a multi-cultural classroom.

Introduction

We each have our own unique worldview that has been shaped by our family, friends, environment, and individual experience. This shapes not only how we respond to situations and one another, but how we move and sound. By merely speaking with someone for a few moments we get a unique glimpse into how he or she has learned to navigate society. Do they sound like us or are they the “other”? How open is he or she? Is their vocabulary familiar to us, or do they use vernacular foreign to us? Every time we speak with someone we leave a unique impression, creating a persona that conveys information about who we are.

I did not always feel this way. I knew what sounded intelligent and what sounded “hick”, or stupid. I grew up in Memphis, Tennessee in the 1970’s and 80’s. The nickname for Memphis is the “Mid-South” but my immediate family didn’t identify as “Southern”. My father had come to Memphis from Winona, Minnesota by way of Honolulu, Hawaii, finding himself in Memphis when he was in high school. His mother was a second-generation Pole from Winona, Minnesota, and her dialect reflected this heritage. His father was a second-generation Italian from Connellsville, Pennsylvania via New York City, who had a distinctive drill sergeant shout. He served under Patton in WWII and, earned a purple heart after a shell blew up his left hip, damaging the hearing in his left ear, which forever left him shouting so that he could hear himself. As a child, this shouting frustrated me and I would shout back, not understanding it wasn’t completely rooted in stubbornness – partially, but not completely.

My Mother grew up in a poor family in the Binghampton area of Memphis, which was a poor area then and remains so now. She would tell me tales of walking to school and having

children throw rocks at her and her brothers, as they shouted “Dego” at them, a derogatory term for Italians. Her mother died when they were young, and they found themselves at St. Peter’s orphanage for a time. Her father then passed away in her early twenties. She had a difficult childhood, but fortunately Uncle Joe, her Mother’s brother, put her through nursing school. Her job as a pediatric nurse allowed her the independence to study music and art, things she had always been interested in as a child but not had the luxury to explore. She wanted to put her humble beginnings behind her, and she always strove to expand her knowledge.

I share this because as a child I did not grow up around very Southern sounding people. My Mother wished to distance herself from her humble beginnings. The most Southern sounding person I remember was my Uncle Joe, and he seemed a charming older spirit. My father liked to listen to opera. My Grandmother would drop something and exclaim “matka boska” which loosely translates as “Mother of God” in Polish. We didn’t have hors d’oeuvres at the holidays, but rather “pu pus” the Hawaiian term for appetizers that my Grandparents had picked up when living on the island. I learned very quickly at school that that term was one to keep inside family tradition, because the average Southerner found the term too alien and hilarious to allow explanation.

To compound this, my family’s non-Southern heritage and my Mother’s wish to transform her own background found me growing up around some very non-Southern sounding people. I do have a Southern dialect, and I would dare say a Memphis dialect, having lived there much of my life, but many Memphians didn’t identify my dialect as Southern. I was fine with this. I didn’t want to sound “stupid” or “backwards”, or “hick,” the sound that I identified as uneducated. The first music I remember hearing was opera, not Elvis. I was, in short, a vocal snob.

Not that I didn't (and still do) have Southern tones to my voice. But I just wasn't *as* Southern as some of the "dumb hicks" around me. Watching "The Beverly Hillbillies" reruns alone informed me that big Southern accents were funny and dumb. The pushiest local commercials featured the largest Southern dialects. Even as an adult, I was surprised, (and a bit delighted) when my students, both children and adult, did not think my dialect sounded like I was from the area. My own spouse, who was raised in Pennsylvania, doesn't think I have a Southern dialect, although his ear may be accustomed to the sound.¹

To complicate this belief, most of my training has centered on freeing tension and the breath. My own voice training began one-on-one with a Lessac teacher, Joanne Malin, in the early 1990's. Jo didn't focus on any breath work, but rather on the crispness of consonants and precision of vowels. Thanks to Jo, I speak forward with resonance in my mask, can say "Antarctica" with haughty precision, and limit the amount of air used when creating plurals. After studying with Jo for two years, I ventured off to the Lessac training workshop in 1995 held at Virginia's very own Mary Baldwin College. We spent five weeks on bodywork (body energizers and shapes) as well as on structural and tonal action of the voice, but no breath work. In fact, when I came back from the workshop I struggled with integrating the Lessac technique with my singing training, until I eventually stopped singing a year later.

At our workshop Arthur had been questioned about breath, in relevance to Kristin Linklater and Catherine Fitzmaurice's work but he did not wish to address it at that time. In fact, this is where I had first heard about Linklater work. I had found out that the center of Linklater training was at Shakespeare and Company, and entertained attending the Month Long Intensive

¹ Although my husband is from a small town in Pennsylvania (DuBois, pronounced /dʊbois/) he has lived in Virginia and North Carolina since he was 18 years old, so his ear may have become conditioned to the area's sound.

in 1996, but decided that the time and funding was not right. The desire to experience Linklater training resurfaced when I read Caroline Nesbitt's article "Into the Woods with Shakespeare & Company" in *American Theatre* magazine which renewed my interest (Nesbitt, *American Theatre*). So I signed up for a weekend intensive in Kentucky, and experienced my first taste of Linklater work.

After that weekend I had a whole new perspective on the body /breath connection and I wanted to learn more. Two years later, I did the "Month Long Intensive" at Shakespeare and Company that entailed 11 hour days of Linklater voice work, integrated with Shakespeare's text. I deepened my relationship to my breath and my impulses as an actor. This work excited me, and I was excited to take it back to my students at Playhouse on the Square. Speaking with an authentic voice is brave at any age, and I wanted to empower my students as early as possible, so I began to teach it in our Summer Conservatory. I wanted them to be as present as possible not only on stage, but in life, and I believe that freeing tension in the body and connecting with one authentic breath allows that connection.

Linklater training fueled my desire to increase my understanding of what gives us the impetus to speak and be *present*² so I pursued a performance studies degree at The University of Memphis through the Liberal Studies department. There I was able to explore the idea of what "presence" is through Anthropology, Sociology, and of course, theatre classes. Two of the most helpful classes I had were with Julie Cleary and Susan Chrietzberg. Professor Cleary's class, "Language and Speech Development," explored the way children learn language, and taught me one of the most important foundations of speech: movement. Susan's Asian theatre class

² Patsy Rodenburg calls being present being in "second circle", which she outlines in her book *The Second Circle*. This text was published in 2007 after I had completed my MALS degree.

introduced me to Rangda/Barong dances and the phenomenon of artists being swept up in the moment acting and reacting. In Susan's mask class we let the masks to tell us their story and allowed their worldview to wash over us and shape reality.

Through an independent study in Anthropology class with Profess Charles Williams I discovered the term psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi gave to the ephemeral phenomenon of presence as being in "flow". Flow occurs when "Concentration is so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant, or to worry about problems (Csikszentmihalyi 71). I believe that flow is an element of stage presence, and crucial to the freedom to speak fluidly.

Once I moved to Virginia, I discovered that Victor Turner, with whom Richard Schechner had worked, had been the chair of the Anthropology department at the University of Virginia. This excited me, and I thought it would be an adventure to take a class there and get a feel for the department to see if my research interests were compatible. I chose "Topics in Sociolinguistics" with Professor Ellen Contini-Morava, and I learned more about linguistics in one semester than I thought possible. We explored the structure of language, how dialects are acquired and change, and how they have their own structure. William Labov and his work in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) was also examined in depth. Professor Labov was the guest speaker for the Page-Barbour lectures that year, and he spoke in depth about the work he and his team were doing to create reading materials for children using the AAVE grammar structure so that children who are brought up speaking this dialect can be as academically successful as those who speak a more "standard" dialect. It is here I also learned one of the most fascinating traits of language: the malleability of code-switching.

Code-switching is the verbal way human beings bond. We change our sound and the words we use to identify with whomever we are speaking. It's a social skill, a subtle way to connect with one another. It's also what we do as actors without thinking. When we read a play (or novel, even poem) we "hear" the tone, pitch and rate. The dialect of the character emerges and we instinctually bring it to life. The same with code-switching: it's a form of adapting. Being present is part of code-switching. We can achieve it consciously or unconsciously.

After taking Sociolinguistics, I looked at people's dialects in a different light. I realized I had been elitist and I was able to appreciate the tale the imprint of one's dialect tells. Word choices, grammar structure, rhythm, pitch and sound structure give color and life to a speaker's expression. These features give us a glimpse into an individual's unique story. Thus, when asked to teach the Neutral American³ dialect, I chose to approach it by educating my students about their own dialects, and then presenting Neutral American as a dialect they should use for employment. In many theatre programs, following the tradition of Edith Skinner, student's dialects are reprogrammed. I wanted my students to be aware of their natural sound, and be able to use Neutral American where it is appropriate: at certain auditions and when dealing with industry professionals such as casting agents. My course's dialect training revolved around the concept of code switching and understanding that humans instinctually use dialects and registers appropriate to the social situation. Once this was understood, we proceeded to learn the sound of the actor, Neutral American, and to understand what shifts they needed to make within their own dialect to achieve the sound need in the entertainment industry.

³ Neutral American is the term Patricia Fletcher uses for a dialect that is devoid of regionalisms. She introduced this term in her book *Classically Speaking*(2006). Other popular terms for a "flat" dialect are Standard American, General American, Announcer Speech, and even Career Speech. Any variations found in these dialects reflect the teacher's training needs.

My students seemed to genuinely appreciate that their own unique voices are important and beautiful, and did not have any hesitation to learning Neutral American. They were also able to be open, confident and present when presenting their speeches. I found the experience to be rewarding and, now advocate a holistic approach to dialect training rather than a rigid formula that has been the tradition in many actor-training programs. Dialect training should not only address an actor's natural sound, but in doing so, examine the origins of his or her dialect and the speaker's motivation for usage. Once this is accomplished, a person can make the shifts needed to adapt to any dialect. Therefore, in the following document I wish to share my findings that have shaped my ideas about dialect training for actors, in the hope that it may enlighten other educators and actors in making this aspect of vocal training interesting and accessible.

Chapter 1: Language Acquisition and Code-switching: How Do We Learn to Communicate?

Communication is the key to successful social interaction, which has made it one of the most intensely studied and debated acts of humankind. All the facets of language: syntax, phonation, language acquisition and dialects are constantly under scrutiny not only from the medical community and the fields of linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and psychology, but also from the literary and performance community. To truly understand the dynamics of verbal communication, one must understand the process of language acquisition because language is used to define ourselves, our ideas, and the “other”. It is commerce and is continuously evolving, as we evolve. It is how we socialize and how we are socialized. Linguistic anthropologists Bambi Schieffelin and Elinor Ochs write that

Language socialization begins at the moment of social contact in the life of a human being. From the extensive literature in socio-linguistics and the ethnography of communication we know that vocal and verbal activities are generally socially organized and embedded in cultural systems of meaning. Those vocal and verbal activities involving infants and young children are no exception. From this perspective the verbal interactions between infants and mothers observed by developmental psychologists can be interpreted as cultural phenomena, embedded in systems of ideas, knowledge, and the social order of the particular group into which the infant is being socialized (“Language Socialization”, 164).

Although we constantly learn to respond to others in more refined manners throughout our lifetime, the foundations of our language sound structure are formed within the first two years. These first twelve to thirteen years are crucial to the child's organization of the sound and order of his or her world, and point towards the child's understanding and use of language. By the onset of puberty, the brain has attained, "its final state of maturity in terms of structure, function, and biochemistry," which "locks certain functions into place," one of which is the facility for language (Lenneberg 639). Thus, the foundation of how we use language is in place as the teen years commence. A child has learned how to navigate the world, and how to effectively communicate with a variety of people. With this in mind, let us review the hallmarks of cognitive, motor, and social skills that influence language development in the emerging individual.

The Foundations of Language

The most recent finding on human language acquisition shows that babies begin to understand language in utero based on their parents' voices. Dr. Fabrice Wallois notes of her study that

at just 28 weeks' gestation, the babies appeared to discriminate between different syllables like "ga" and "ba" as well as male and female voices. Our results demonstrate that the human brain, at the very onset of the establishment of a cortical circuit for auditory perception, already discriminates subtle differences in speech syllables" (Roberts).

In fact, at 25 weeks gestation a fetus may begin to respond to “familiar sounds” which is why expectant parents are encouraged to talk and sing to their babies so that they may begin identifying their parents’ voices (“Fetal Development: The Second Trimester”, Mayo Clinic).

Once a child is born, motor development occurs in what is called the, “cephalocaudal progression, meaning from the head down” (Owens 66)¹. A physical action must occur to produce sound, hence speech therapists scrutinize children’s motor developments in order to determine if they are developmentally on target. From birth to one month a child makes reflexive movements, is able to raise his or her head slightly, cries to voice his or her needs, and may make pleasurable sounds (Owens 74). By two months, a child begins to smile in response to a smile, just in time to charm their exhausted caregivers (Murkoff 2003, 212). Additionally the two-month-old child makes deeper “goosing” noises and is able to hold his head up while on his stomach (Owens 74). By three months a child begins to coo in consonant-vowel combinations and respond vocally to the speech of others. This is reflected in her ability to lift the head during “tummy time”² (Owens 74). By four-months-old a baby has more control over head movement; begins to turn over from tummy to back; raise his or herself off the ground with arms when on the tummy (Owens 74). Verbally babies begin to starting varying pitch, imitating tone of voice and babbling more consonants (Owens 74). As a bonus, children also begin to laugh in response to others antics (Murkoff 2003, 289).

¹ Dr. Robert Owens is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communications at The College of Saint Rose in Albany, New York. His book, *Language Development: An Introduction*, “is the most widely used in the world and has been translated into Spanish, Korean, and Arabic”(The College of Saint Rose).

² Dr. Jay L. Hoecker defines “Tummy time” as, “placing a baby on his or her stomach while awake and supervised. . .[it] can help your baby develop strong head, neck and shoulder muscles and promote certain motor skills. Tummy time can also prevent the back of your baby's head from becoming flat” (Web).

It is important to note that during this time, caregivers are using what is colloquially called “baby talk” and more specifically called “motherese” or “parentese” by language researchers³ (Owens 166). Motherese is used not only by family members, but by anyone who interacts with young children under three years old (Falk 73). It is characterized by slow speech, over emphasis of vowels, and has a musical quality which echoes the infant’s cooing, creating foundations for language aurally and visually (Falk 72-80). This over emphasis of vowels has been documented in American, “English, Russian, Japanese and Swedish mothers” (Falk 80). Other features include, “concrete words that describe the child’s immediate environment, “and a “high proportion of questions,” that increase, “in complexity as infants grow, because mothers automatically tailor their speech to their babies’ comprehension level” (72). So as children are developing their perception, their caregivers are modeling language by vocal and visual means, overemphasizing sound and, collaterally, the facial musculature that is needed to form the words. By modeling sound and musculature, caregivers are teaching children not only the basics of language, but also that of social interaction, which is important to navigating the world.

By five months of age children are able to sit up on their own for limited amounts of time, roll from their tummy to their back and swap objects from hand to hand (Owens 75). They also begin to imitate sounds and discriminate, “angry and friendly voices” and are able to imitate some vowel sounds after modeled by their caretaker (Owens 75-76). Even more remarkably, Athena Vouloumanos and her team found that:

Five-month-old infants matched speech, but not human non-speech vocalizations, specifically to humans, looking longer at static human faces when human speech

³ One study showed that women talk to their pets using most of the characteristics of motherese except for emphasizing vowels.

was played than when either rhesus monkey or duck calls were played. They also matched monkey calls to monkey faces, looking longer at static rhesus monkey faces when rhesus monkey calls were played than when either human speech or duck calls were played. However, infants failed to match duck vocalizations to duck faces, even though. Results show that by 5 months of age, human infants generate expectations about the sources of some vocalizations, mapping human faces to speech and rhesus faces to rhesus calls. Infants' matching capacity does not appear to be based on a simple associative mechanism or restricted to their specific experiences (Vouloumanous, Druhen, Hauser and Huizink).

So at five months of age a child is already able to discriminate between the similarly structured sapiens and simians, and identify the sounds each makes in association. They are also able to make assumptions about how someone of their species will sound, and be able to identify whether they are part of their culture or *tribe*, thus evaluating someone as friend or foe.

By six months a child is able to express herself not only with rhythm and pitch but also volume and rate (Owens 75). Mouth musculature is also becoming more sophisticated as the child has more forward control and begins to be able to constrict the lips and produce the sound of /b/, /p/, /w/ and /m/ (Owens 77). Vowels such as /i/, /e/, and /ε/ are also present, but /u/ does not come into play later until, “jaw and longitudinal tongue movement, and lip rounding” are present(See Appendix A) (Owens 77). While this is happening vocally, children are beginning to sit without support and turn and identify the direction of a voice (Murkoff 2003, 346). So, as they become more able to sit up and identify more in the world around them, children are increasing the texture of their verbal palate, and the ability to socialize.

By seven months the infant is able to discriminate more different tones and inflections in communication and can produce several sounds in a single breath (Owens 78). To complement this, the child is able to push up on his hands and knees; move objects from hand to hand; and enjoy banging objects together, exhibiting a deeper comprehension of cause and effect (Owens 78). At eight months, children are crawling; pulling up to standing position; and are exploring objects through manipulation such as throwing, dropping, and a baby favorite -- disassembling things (Owens 78). Our daughter discovered that pulling all of the carefully alphabetized compact disks out of the rack was fun and attention getting. Children at this age also show the ability to use gestures such as pointing at what they want, and vehemently shaking their head “no” in opposition to food, diaper changes, or anything else deemed undesirable at the moment (Owens 81). The eight month old is also more acoustically sensitive, and is able to practice *echolalia*, the ability to imitate the tonal quality and gesture of adult speech and exhibit variegated babbling with vowel-consonant-vowel and consonant-vowel-consonant structures further exhibiting their budding comprehension of speech (Owens 78-81).

The nine-month-old shows a more wide expanse of world knowledge by not only climbing on everything, but also figuring out how to get down off of couches, beds and benches interspersed by brief periods of standing upright alone (Owens 78). Verbally children begin jargoning: babbling sounds that sort of sound like language (Owens 78). In English, *mama*⁴ and *dada* begin to come into play as repeated babbled intonations, and cognitively the child may begin to respond to his or her name and possibly the meaning of “No” (Owens 78). Owens notes a slight verbal breakthrough at 10 months when he notes that the child, “obeys some

⁴ The author’s daughter’s use of “mama” was her favorite complaint command until about 19 months when it was replaced by “no”. The author *may* have taken this utterance choice personally at times.

commands”, which is fairly accurate for the emerging personality that possesses an opinion of what he or she wants to do (78). Children are also beginning to imitate more adult speech and enjoy the interaction of perpetual “peek-a-boo” (Owens78, Murkoff 436).

By 11 months, children are starting to *cruise* by holding onto furniture to help them walk, and are able to easily go from lying down to sitting up (Murkoff 2003, 460). They are also able to somewhat competently feed themselves with a spoon and frighten their caregivers by climbing up stairs (Owens 79). Building on these motor skills, the eleven-month-old furthers her communication by refining abilities to emulate inflections, rhythms and facial expressions” (Owens 79). By twelve months some children may be able to speak a word or two such as *dada* or *mama* and be able to follow simple instructions such as “give me that”, often mixed with jargon (Murkoff 2003, 460; Owens 79). “single words are used to make requests, comments, inquiries, and so on” (Owens 83). Even more impressively, some children are able to not only use a spoon, but fork, cup and crayon, and some are taking their first steps with caregiver assistance (Owens 79).

Observation of children’s motor development is important when examining the vocal abilities of young children because kinesthetic awareness is a precursor to language development. If one can physically put things together such as blocks, then the mind can understand the concept of stringing sounds together to create the action of speaking a word and later a thought such as “Mom sit”. We see the correlation of cognition and motor development deepen after the child’s first birthday as he or she begins to walk. The more a child interacts with the world, the greater their experience and their desire to communicate their wants and needs more specifically.

The correlation between being able to circumnavigate the world and the word comes into sharper focus after the child's first birthday. Between twelve and thirteen months, the newly termed "toddler" is able to:

Understand some words based on a combination of sound, nonlinguistic and paralinguistic cues, and context. . .in certain specific contexts children have limited comprehension of some phonemic sequences. The words are not comprehended alone. The exceptions are the child's name and no, which most children seem to recognize out of context. As a result of continued exposure to recurring sound patterns in context, the child learns these patterns in these situations" (Owens 82).

Officially, most toddlers will not walk well until about 15 months. Until this time they take a few steps, and continue to cruise (Murkoff 2011, 3). Of course depending on the caregiver's perspective, some children are "walking" by one year, whether it be well or not. During this time motor skills such as playing patty-cake (between twelve and thirteen months) make their appearance (Murkoff 2011, 3). This is an important development because the connection between the midline of the body occurs, which influences writing and reading. Renée Abramovitz, the force behind the school preparedness website *School Sparks*, explains the significance of bilateral integration:

Successful writing depends on well developed asymmetrical bilateral integration and an ability to cross the midline. First, a child must use one hand to control the pencil and the other hand to position and stabilize the paper (asymmetrical bilateral integration). Without well developed asymmetrical bilateral integration

or an ability to cross the midline, a child will limit his drawing to the portion of the paper closest to his writing hand . . . Successful reading depends on an ability to cross the midline. When reading, a child's eyes must follow along the entire horizontal length of the page, before moving to the next line.

Bilateral Integration effects speech in relation to processing and production (Poeppel, Idsardi and van Wassenhove).

From 13 to 15 months the toddler continues exploring the world by honing fine motor skills. Favorite pastimes include filling cups, bins, bowls up and emptying them (Murkoff 2011, 4). Playing "make-believe" also becomes part of their day, and they are able to follow one step directions, identify body parts when asked, scribble with a crayon and walk well (Owens 84; Murkoff 2011, 4-5). Additionally, they are able to use a words such as *Mama* and *Dada* to signal intent, such as "Mama, give me that" (Murkoff 2011, 4-5) The 15-month-old will be able to walk well, navigate backwards and sideways, and will have also added the perilous skill of climbing in, up and out of everything to the movement repertoire (Owens 84, Murkoff 2011, 5). They will also play using a toy "phone", enjoy pointing out objects named by their caregiver, and show an interest in housework (Owens 84).

By 16 months children can understand simple directions such as "come here" and "look", and may even initiate independent sequences (Murkoff 2011, 5; Owens 86). My daughter performed a fine example of this industriousness, when she surprised us one evening when her Grandparents were visiting. We adults were having a lovely conversation, while she toddled over to the "toddler proof" cabinet, got out a bowl, and helped herself to some cheese crackers, and happily munched her snack. I had noticed she seemed more aware as of late, but was

surprised that she was able to figure out a specific unfamiliar sequence and perform it with fine motor dexterity.

Such awareness increases as children approach 18 months of age. At this age, children should be able to easily drink from a cup, sing, speak at least ten words, play by themselves, and combine skills that lead to stacking blocks and throwing balls (Murkoff 2011, 6; Owens 85). Of course this isn't always the case in terms of language development. By 19 months my daughter was only saying "Aut-oh", "O no", "Oh dear", and "Dada" consistently. She would occasionally specifically point out nouns such as "kitty" and "Elmo", but she did not use them consistently, and resorted to getting most of her needs met by taking her father or myself by the hand and pulling us to what she wanted and pointing to it, while we patiently went through a litany of objects in the vicinity of what she "wanted". This form of communication came to a head when we visited the pediatrician at 19 months for a regular check-up, and our daughter wanted a crayon from the pediatrician. Our doctor took one look at her behavior, and informed us that she was not worried about any kind of verbal delay. Our daughter had no need to talk because her method of guiding us physically to what she wanted was working. When my husband and I began practicing "tough love", and tried to not be as amenable to her demands, she finally found the impetus to speak up.

Of course this was not without glitches. Because our little Empress had perfected the art of "no," I diligently worked to model the opposite of this: "yes". Unfortunately, she wasn't buying it. Her affirmative respond was "mm-hmm". I was perplexed because she was actually exhibiting advanced skills in her play. How children play is a peek into their cognitive development. As a child's capacity to understand and put ideas together increases, it is evidenced in their play by simple actions such as stirring and feeding a doll, and stacking

multiple blocks. Our daughter was manipulating objects and stacking blocks and other objects quite well. I couldn't figure out what was wrong, and was getting more worried about her comprehension skills, until I realized I was being taught language acquisition by *her*.

Children learn language by interaction and modeling (Owens 203). One evening when I was discussing something with my husband we realized we are both chronic “mm-hmm”ers. She was merely interacting with the world as it sounds, and was verbally responding just as her parents. “Yeah” then became her response before the more formal “yes” which made its first appearance right before her second birthday when she was trying to be funny and contradict her parents. The funny bone develops early.

By 21 months, the toddler is dancing to music, walking up and down stairs, running, climbing, kicking and throwing objects and generally interacting with the world more and more to get what they want⁵ (Owens 84). They are also setting, “simple goals such as deciding to fill a bucket with water and bringing it to the sandbox to wet sand” (Murkoff 2011, 8). Between 22 months and 24 months the child smoothes out their movements, plays pretend often, loves action toys and speaks many, many words (Owens 84). They are adept at identifying pictures by naming and enjoy responding with the sound an animal makes such as “Meow” for “What does the kitty say?” and “Choo-Choo” for the sound of a train (Murkoff 2011, 8). At two years, children add several words and phrases (usually commands) to their vocabulary a day. This is when parents must reevaluate their own uses of language, lest their child acquire an interjection that could create an awkward moment. For example, my husband “accidentally” taught our daughter how to burp one morning during a car ride. She heard him burp, and imitated it, which made him laugh, which made her giggle. Inherently, such an act is not funny, but it does

⁵ Our daughter discovered that by asking for dance music means after dinner fun, which leads to later bedtime.

illustrate the social construct of understanding laughter is commerce. In his article “What’s So Funny? Well, Maybe Nothing,” John Tierney of *The New York Times* observes, “most laughter has little to do with humor. It’s an instinctual survival tool for social animals, not an intellectual response to wit. It’s not about getting the joke. It’s about getting along” (Web). Again, use of language assures one’s place in society, and in this case it reinforces the bond between father and daughter.

At the age of two years, basic communications skills have been organized, and they continue through age five when, “the child has acquired about 90 percent of the syntactic structures that he or she will use as an adult” (Owens 87). At two and a half, children begin to interact and play together, prompting a greater variety of language exposure. At three years of age English speaking children have acquired the following consonants: /t/, /d/, /f/, /m/, /n/, /w/(Owens 91). This varies due to the patterns of different languages (Owens 89) . For example, by age three, Spanish Speaking children have acquired /k/, /m/, /n/, and /j/, whereas it is not until the transition to four years that English speaking children master the sounds of /s/ and /j/ (Owens 91). Three year olds have finer tuned motor skills and are able to do tasks such as riding a tricycle and spreading jam with a knife (Owens 88). This fine tuned ability is reflected in their expansive vocabulary of around 900-1000 words, use of simple sentences, and ability to converse about the present (Owens 88). By four, children are finally able to take alternating steps when walking up and down the stairs, hop, jump over objects and they prepare for the milestone of writing by copying block letters (Owens 88). This is reflected in their ever expanding vocabulary that uses more complex sentence forms and requires word order for comprehension (Owens 88). The five year old boasts a vocabulary of over two thousand words and is able to understand the concept of time and how things relate to each other (Owens 89). He

or she also shows interest in group activities, and has control of their gross motor skills, shows an interest in group activities, and plays with intentions (Owens 89).

Language foundations continue to develop through age twelve, albeit slower than the first five years. The six year old has a longer attention span; is better at problem solving; uses a more articulate sentence structure, as well as achieving a larger vocabulary; and begins to become competitive (Owens 95). Being competitive is important to note, because it shows a greater cognition of understanding that navigating the world takes effort. By age eight, children's motor skills are more fine-tuned and they are better at maneuvering objects; they also converse more and are able to communicate thought (Owens 95). The eight year old also understands that others have, "different perspectives," which reflects the growing awareness of conversation give and take (Owens 95). They also understand contrasts, such as which is someone else's left or right hand (Owens95). Ten brings a more talkative child, one with stronger comprehension skills, and one that is more aware of his or her actions, and the ability to plan future actions (Owens 95). Physically the ten year old's eyes, lungs, digestive, and circulatory systems have almost reached maturity, which, perhaps, reflects increasing perception of the world (Owens 95). Finally at twelve, physical development "rests' before puberty (Owens 95). The twelve year old, teetering on teen-dom, has a, "50,000-word receptive vocabulary," and is able to construct more adult-like definitions (Owens 95). Thus as childhood ends, puberty begins. The child's physical development and foundations of cognitive communication have been laid down so that he or she will be able to (hopefully) withstand the flood of hormones that will inundate the pubescent mind.⁶

⁶ I have heard over the years various theories that our dialect is "solidified" at around age five or that our dialect is set by age twelve. The only scholarly evidence I've come across as to this dialectical "certainty" is that of linguist

Understanding how language develops in humans is crucial to understanding why we sound the way we do. The more a child is involved and able to navigate the world, the more social interactions in which she partakes. Language is the commerce of discourse. It helps us to be understood and to have our needs met. Human beings are marvelous in that they progress in a reasonably predictable manner, and this has allowed the study of language to be measured and studied in logical manner, thus creating a basis for speech therapists and linguists to follow when evaluating what is agreed to be normal language development.

Code-Switching is Verbal Adaptation

Humans may develop their understanding of speech in a predictable manner, but each person's exposure to environmental acoustics is unique, thus creating their own unique dialect. Pronunciation, syntax, rhythm, pitch and intonation are what make up a dialect, and it is by hearing these that children learn to navigate the world, beginning with motherese. It is through this interaction that one's needs are met, and one learns to properly ask for one's wants and desires. We learn that it is not just what we ask for, but *how* we ask. We learn that certain people and groups require us to adopt a manner of speaking that is unique to that group. In cases of children living in bi-lingual homes, children learn that one language expresses a thought more accurately than another, and that some forms of talk are appropriate for the home setting and some for school or work.

Karen Lund who asserts that if a person begins to try to learn a new language after age five or six, he or she may never be able to completely acquire true pronunciation features of the new language(Lund). Perhaps, such a deficit may be perceived with the proper scientific instruments or by an astute native speaker, but there have been many instances in which people have been able to achieve excellent enunciations and the ability to use a believable dialect.

Sociolinguists term this ability to shift the style of one's communication code-switching. Social psychologists Howard Giles and Richard Y. Bourhis explain the mechanics of code switching:

One important feature of social interaction is that individuals often adapt to each other's speech on a number of linguistic levels and in a manner that is not easily explicable simply in terms of normative demands of the situation. When two people meet there is a tendency for them to become more alike in their dialects, speech rate, utterance length and so forth. Such convergence is what we have termed 'interpersonal accommodation through speech'. Our theory has at its basis a model of similarity-attraction which, in its simplest form, suggests that as A becomes more similar to B this increases the likelihood that B will like A. Interpersonal accommodation through speech then is but one of the many devices a person may adopt in order to become more similar to another. Specifically, it involves the reduction of linguistic dissimilarities between two people as for example in terms of their dialects. Indeed, our own empirical research has shown that such convergence may elicit favorable reactions from the recipient if the intentions underlying the accommodation are attributed positively (Simard, Giles and Taylor). Since increasing similarity between people along such an important dimension as communication is likely to increase interpersonal attraction as well as mutual intelligibility, accommodation perhaps reflects a speaker's desire for social approval. . It follows then that the greater the speaker's need to gain another's approval, the greater the magnitude of accommodation there will be within the limits of the speaker's repertoire. On the other hand, situations can

arise when a speaker wishes to dissociate himself from his listener, perhaps because of the other's ethnic group membership, undesirable attitudes, habits or appearance, and so he may wish to modify his dialect away from this other, that is he may diverge (298).

Culturally we may conclude that code-switching is instinctual because we innately know we need to sound like the tribe we come from. We understand from infancy that certain sounds mean we belong. Motherese, after all, is a form of code-switching.

Under the umbrella of code-switching is where forms of talk such as bilingualism and the strategy of using different registers to negotiate find themselves. Linguist Martin Joos identified 5 different registers people use, which are the following:

Intimate register is the highly informal language used among family members and close friends, and may include private vocabulary known only to two people or a small group, as well as nonverbal cues exclusive to the pair or group.

Casual register is the informal language of a broader but still well-defined social group, and includes slang, elliptical and elided sentences, and frequent interruption.

Consultative register is moderately formal language that marks a mentor-protégé or expert-novice relationship, such as that between a doctor and a patient or a teacher and a student.

Formal register is language spoken between strangers or in a technical context.

Frozen register is ritualistic or traditional, as in religious ceremonies or legal proceedings (Nichol 2011).

It is easy to identify one's own use of these registers in context, and I'm sure the reader can easily think of others to add to the list. Human beings instinctually are able to shift into these registers, and actors live for the opportunity to inhabit them. By examining the given circumstances – whether it is during an improvisation or through a text -- an actor shifts into these and play the moment.

This is a feature we all employ to survive. By code-switching we reify our relevance not only to our caretakers and peers but to our employers as well. We have learned from birth that certain sounds help us to attain our needs, and that if we sound like the people around us we receive a more favorable response. Psychologist Katherine Kinzler and her research associates have found that:

Research on adults underscores the importance of accent as a social-category marker. Among speakers of the same language, accent may mark an individual's social class, ethnic group, and regional identity; adults tend to attribute more positive qualities to a person who speaks with a dominant or native accent to others whose speech is comprehensible but signals membership in a different social group (Kinzler, Dupoux, and Spelke 19).

Membership in a particular group is desirable to everyone, but especially the actor attempting to adopt the attitude and language of the character. More practically, the actor needs to adapt to a sound that is appealing to casting agents and directors so that she is able to work.

So why should code-switching be taught in dialect training? Because code-switching reflects the complexity of the 21st century's global community. Actors need to have not only the tool of the Neutral American dialect, but to also be able to access any other dialect that should be asked of them. However, respect should be give to his native dialect not only not only for the obvious reasons of cultural sensitivity, but for the practical reason that in order to survive in certain situations, a human being must communicate their relevance to that group. In short, we simply do not trust those who we perceive as culturally removed from our group.

We've been trained since birth that certain sounds from our caretaker and community guarantee that our needs – both physical and social – will be met. A 2010 study led by neuroscientist Dr. Patricia Bestelmeyer, “suggests that people process words spoken with their own accent more quickly and effortlessly than other accents,” and that,

The pattern of neural activity differed strikingly in response to their own specific accent compared with other English accents," Bestelmeyer said. "The initial results suggest that such vocal samples somehow reflect group membership or social identity, so that 'in-group' voices are processed differently from the 'out-group' (Listeners' Brains Respond More to Native Accent Speakers; Imaging Study Suggests Accents Are Subtle 'Insider' or 'Outsider' Signal to the Brain, Science Daily).

A similar study led by Shiri Lev-Ari at the University of Chicago asked Americans to judge the truthfulness of statement spoken by non-native English speakers. The study found that

Participants attempted to counteract the impact of processing difficulty, but were only partially successful . . .while participants rated statements with mild accent

just as truthful as statements by native speakers, they rated heavily accented statements as less truthful than either. . . These results have important implications for how people perceive non-native speakers of a language, particularly as mobility increases in the modern world, leading millions of people to be non-native speakers of the language they use daily. Accent might reduce the credibility of non-native job seekers, eyewitnesses, reporters or news anchors. As we showed, such insidious impact of accent is even apparent when the non-native speaker is merely a messenger. Most likely, neither the native nor the non-native speakers are aware of this, making the difficulty of understanding accented speech an ever present reason for perceiving non-native speakers as less credible (3).

So in order to fit in and seem reliable we must sound a certain way, which, as the study points out must be even more malleable in today's society.

Thus, actors must be more malleable in our era of globalization. In order to acquire a job, and actor must not only be able to aurally size up the people he is dealing with, but also be able to verbally connect with them in the appropriate dialect. By communicating with the correct vernacular, an actor not only illustrates his savvy understanding of the part he is auditioning for, but also that he belongs to the theatre "tribe", and is worthy of consideration and inclusion. Being noticed for favorable reasons is what we all strive for, and as an educator I hope to aid my students both personally and professionally by teaching them not only about dialects, but also how we use language and why, so that they can be present in all that they do.

Chapter 2: Standardization of Sound: How the Sound of the American Stage Developed

American Voice and Speech trainers are in a unique position. We are asked to train our students, depending on the situation, to speak “correctly.” This can mean to speak in their natural dialect; a dialect different from their own speech; or it could mean to speak devoid of any trace of a dialect, meaning that they are presenting themselves in Neutral American, General American, or Standard American, etc. depending on the preferred terminology. Even if this may be the case, the term “American” is also used to describe the sound of this dialect, which implies that the sound of this so-called “standard” is how most Americans sound, which is far from the truth in the 21st century. In fact, a 2007 survey conducted by the United States census reported that 55,444,485 people ages five and older out of the 280,950,438 people surveyed reported that they speak a language other than English at home (Shin and Kominski). With such a diversity of language, one must ask why we subject one another to the tyranny of a homogenous sound?

Because of tradition.

The Evolution of the American Stage’s Sound

English’s standardization of sound began in Britain with Thomas Sheridan’s¹ *A General Dictionary of the English Language* published in 1780 (Harder 66). “He provided markings for

¹ Sheridan was also an actor “of no mean talents. . .but Sheridan's greatest success as a propagator of educational theory came with his "Lectures on Elocution," which had been composed some years before they were delivered in 1759” (Harder 66).

consonants, as well as vow-els[sic], and also respelled words somewhat phonetically” (Harder 67). Sheridan was also known as a lecturer on elocution², and wrote a number of works regarding the topic (Harder 67). The tradition of elocution was, and is, deeply ingrained in British education, and is oddly making a come-back. In a 2012 article in the *Daily Mail*, Lindsey Johns writes of this resurgence:

There is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that being able to speak lucid, grammatically correct and easily understood English not only unlocks an intellectual feast, but also enables us to be taken seriously when interacting with others, be it in college, university or job interviews, whereas speaking poorly leads to disenfranchisement, marginalization and ultimately the dole queue.³

Whilst I wholeheartedly applaud the job seekers’ ardent desire for betterment and their willingness to attempt to improve their future career prospects through learning to communicate more clearly (a highly laudable realpolitik strategy, especially given that the competition for jobs is now fiercer than ever in these dire economic times), I fear we are in danger of confusing “proper English” and regional accents. The two are by no means mutually exclusive. Grammatical

² Elocution is defined as: a clear, concise manner of speaking. The word derives from the word ‘eloquent’ being adept at skilled, easy, pleasing communication of a thought, idea or feeling. Elocution not only focuses on diction but also on using the voice properly. Before speech therapy became a recognized profession, people who were correcting speech were known as elocutionists(What is Elocution Anyway?)

³ I would like to take Mr. Johns to task with Dudley Knight’s observation that, “It is generally accepted precept in Sociolinguistics that an accent that may be stigmatized in one social context may command prestige in another”(“Standards”, 67). He cites native Arkansaian Bill Clinton’s eight-year run as a U.S. president as an example. Of course, Knight published this in 2000, the year before George W. Bush became president. Bush spoke with a “Texan” accent, which many comedians emphasized as a “dumb” trait. With Clinton they used this feature to highlight his infidelities. Thus any accent may be used against someone. It just depends on the circumstance as to how it will be employed.

exactitude and not pronouncing words correctly are simply not the same as speaking in a regional accent” (Johns, 2012).

This need for betterment was certainly present in America in the early 1800s when the elocution movement began to take hold. Mary Margaret Robb characterizes this period in American history as “romantic” and cites Dr. James Rush’s *Philosophy of the Human Voice*, as one of the most influential of the time (Robb 178). In fact, there was such a demand for elocution teachers in the rapidly growing country that people in professions, “such as medicine or theatre,” often taught courses, and in college programs it was sometimes taught along with composition classes (Robb 179). Amherst, The University of Alabama, Harvard, and Yale all offered college courses in the discipline, but it was the seminaries that really emphasized the need for training in elocution (Robb 179-180). Rev. Ebenezer Porter, who taught at Andover Seminary, was the first to recognize that voice training should be rooted in, “anatomy and physiology” (Duchan). He revolutionized speech training by dividing, “the study of elocution into five parts: articulation, inflection, accent and emphasis, modulation, and action” (Duchan). He furthered the pedagogy of the profession, for he, “believed that the student should be allowed to read without interruption in class exercises. When he had finished, the teacher pointed out the mistakes, demonstrated by reading the exercise correctly, then asked the student to repeat the parts that were not well done” (Robb 182).

William Russell and James Murdoch were also influential figures in 19th century speech training. Russell, a prolific writer, believed that elocution should be taught at an early age, noting that, “the young pupil never has his attention called, definitely or consciously, to the fact that the letters of the alphabet are phonetic characters, the whole value of which consists in the sounds

which they represent” (Robb 187). James Murdoch, an actor who toured with Edwin Booth, Edwin Forrest and Fanny Kemble, worked to train actors and those giving dramatic readings (Robb 189). Murdoch did not believe that students should be trained with, “arbitrary rules and prescribed grooves that the individual’s characteristic speech was changed to imitate that of the teacher”(Robb 190). He also felt that the use of breath was crucial to voice quality (Robb 192). Additionally, Murdoch wrote *Orthophony, or Vocal Culture. A Manual of Elementary Exercises for the Cultivation of the Voice in Elocution* in which he presented a detailed study of the formation of sound and his vocal gymnastics, for which he credited James Rush’s work as inspiration (Read Any Book, web; Robb 191). Dudley Knight⁴ describes the elocutionary sounds of James Rush and William Murdoch as,

A pattern that mandated the extreme extension of vowel sounds Often with a tremendous dying fall of intonation when a word is to be emphasized, so that the lines were more sung than spoken; a pattern that required syllables --- which in ordinary conversation are unstressed – to be stressed with discrete vowel sounds, as through one were reading the written word out of a book and paying attention only to the word as spelled (the “book word”), not to the spoken utterance(so that “ocean” becomes “owe-see-yun”); a pattern that insisted upon heavy glottal attack on words beginning with vowels as a sign of vocal vigor: the active explosion of the vocal folds into an open orotund vowel sound (Knight, “Standard Speech”, 158-159).

⁴ Dudley Knight was a pioneer in speech training. He believed that actors in a multicultural society should keep their own voices and fought the orthodox practice of teaching them to use upper-class white speech patterns as the favored norm. . . Knight trained his students to deliver any spoken sound the human voice could produce — an arsenal that could be deployed flexibly as roles and artistic approaches demanded. He codified his method in *Speaking With Skill* which was published in 2012 (Bohem).

Dr. Samuel Silas Curry was also an influential figure in nineteenth century vocal training. Curry went to the University of Boston to become a preacher, and found that his true passion was elocution (Robb 193). He stayed at the University, having a Ph.D. bestowed upon him in 1880, and he and his wife Anna Baright (a former pupil of his) were allowed to organize a department called the “School of Expression (“History” Curry College). Curry found the word “elocution” too limiting, and preferred “expression” because, “expression implies cause, means, and effect. It is a natural effect of natural cause, and hence is governed by all the laws of nature’s processes. The cause is in the mind, the means are the voice and the body” (Curry 310).

Other influential figures were that of J.W. Shoemaker who founded The National School of Elocution and Oratory in Philadelphia which functioned from 1873 until 1943 when it was forced to close due to the conditions of World War II (Renshaw 303). The Boston Conservatory of Elocution, Oratory, and Dramatic Art (now Emerson College) was founded in 1880 by Charles Wesley Emerson, and boasted 18 different categories of instruction (“A Short History of Emerson College” Web). Two of Emerson’s graduates, Mary Blood and Ida Riley established The Columbia School of Oratory in Chicago (now Columbia College Chicago) in 1890 (Renshaw 305). Finally Leland Todd Powers and his wife carol Hoyt Powers established The Leland Powers School of the Spoken Word⁵ in Boston in 1904, now closed (Renshaw 307). Powers was known for his “monoacting”: “interpreting all the characters in a play or story” (Renshaw 307).

⁵ Margaret Prendergast McLean was Tilly’s star pupil. She wrote *Good American Speech* (1927) which outlined Tilly’s methods. She taught at the American Laboratory Theatre, and was simultaneously the head of the Department of English Diction at the Leland Powers School of Theatre. McLean later left for Hollywood to teach at Maria Ouspenskaya’s Acting School (Deacon 78).

What ties these teachers together is their desire to instill passion, expression and creativity in their students. This is a stark contrast to the rigid notation that William Tilly, one of the most influential figures of twentieth century voice and speech training, imparted to his students. Tilly, was born in Australia and moved to Germany in 1890, to study under, “the renowned phonetician, Professor Wilhelm Viëtor” (Thompson). The Institut Tilly was established around 1900. Phil Thompson notes that:

The course was rigorous: students had to agree not to speak, hear or read their native tongue for the duration of their stay. German was used in all situations, social and pedagogic, inside and outside the institute. . . Tilly insisted that his students speak absolutely accent-free German for he despised all regional pronunciations, including that of Berlin (Thompson).

It was this rigor that attracted students to Tilly, but he has also been described as a, “charismatic figure because he inspired great love and admiration in his students”(Deacon75). Densly Deacon observes that

Part of Tilly’s innovation as a proponent of the direct method was to teach speech patterns based on the spoken word rather than the written word – and to use the relatively new International Phonetic Alphabet developed by Henry Sweet⁶ to accurately describe each sound” (76).

⁶ George Bernard Shaw wrote of Henry Sweet, “*Pygmalion* Higgins is not a portrait of Sweet, to whom the adventure of Eliza Doolittle would have been impossible; still, as will be seen, there are touches of Sweet in the play” (Shaw, *Pygmalion*, Web).

When World War I broke out, Tilley fled Germany, and found his way to New York City to teach at Columbia University by way of Switzerland and England (Thompson). Tilly used some of Daniel Jones's⁷ symbols, but he found them, "too broad, and added cumbrous diacritics which, in the hands of some of his students became symbols of orthodoxy rather than tools of fine distinction" (Emsley, Thomas, and Sifritt 338).

Tilly termed the dialect he taught "World English." Dudley Knight describes the sound as,

a speech pattern that very specifically did not derive from any regional dialect pattern in England or America, although it clearly bears some resemblance to the speech patterns that were spoken in a few areas of New England, and a very considerable resemblance, as we shall see, to the pattern in England which was becoming defined in the 1920s as "RP" or "Received Pronunciation." World English, then, was a creation of speech teachers, and boldly labeled as a class-based accent: the speech of persons variously described as "educated," "cultivated," or "cultured"; the speech of persons who moved in rarified social or intellectual circles and of those who might aspire to do so. Margaret Prendergast McLean asked, "WHAT USAGE is the law and rule of speech?" and answered, "Linguistics scholars and historians have incontestably established the fact that it is the speech of the intelligent cultivated classes-who have sorted, refined and polished the speech of the masses - which becomes the final law and rule." Sophie Pray, who brought Tilly's teaching into the New York public school system, had a

⁷ Daniel Jones, an Englishman, was originally a student of Tilly's and studied with him in Germany. Dudley Knight notes that Jones, "became arguably the most influential figure in English speech and dialect study in the first half of the century" (Knight, "Standard Speech", 156)

more mystical formulation for this key to upward social mobility: "Good speech signifies the possibility of readier spiritual integration with, and membership in, the cultured group in which most of us want to live as citizens" (160-161).

McLean may be correct about the educated classes creating the "rule" but merely because a rule is written in a book does it make it a dialectical law. Traditionally, the upper class is a small elite group. If this small elite group speaks differently from the masses, and does not mingle with them or maintains their elite status during contact, the desire of the non-elite group to maintain their distinct sound may become stronger. As noted in the previous chapter, we learn to sound like the group we are involved in and want to be identified with. Thus, if one wants to be elite, Tilly and his follower's work is an excellent stepping-stone. However, one must also know the value in being able to switch into the dialect of the people she must rely on to achieve their goals, and having the ability to comfortably communicate in an alternate sound is an important skill. Code-switching is a skill we are all born with and use whether we are conscious of it or not.

But the prospect of the beauty of a rainbow of dialects did not appeal to Tilly or his followers. One of Tilly's students, Marguerite E. DeWitt, was a leader in educational and dialect reform, focusing many of her energies towards the New York school system. DeWitt dubbed "World English" "Euphonics" in her writings. She believed that the root of education reform was speaking in an educated manner. In her article "Our Americanadian Problem of the Spoken Word," Dewitt writes that,

extreme dialects of any kind are completely out of place under most world conditions and circumstances. Standard English is the ideal form, Accepted Standard is the form which makes the necessary allowances for the slight

differences that always exist when we deal with anything that is human and not machine-made. Although many can and do use Accepted Standard there are many more who use what we term Euphon English, which even makes allowances for slight regional and other differences, providing always that its general tendency is decidedly toward and not away from the World-Standard. But it is this standard-or composite of the best-that must be the working basis in schools (DeWitt 176).

Such rigid sentiments echo the demanding teaching style of her mentor, Willaim Tilly.

So how did Tilly's work become a cornerstone of American theatrical training, when dialects are sprinkled throughout many popular plays that are staged across the country? One of Tilly's star pupils, Edith Warman Skinner, was quite an influential figure in American voice training. Another student of Tilly's, Windsor P. Dagget, a New Englander, shaped America's perception of what good speech sounded like from his pulpit as the theatre critic for *The Billboard* (which became *Theatre Monthly*) magazine (Deacon 74). Tilly's name is known in the theatre world because of Skinner and Dagget's contribution the training and sound of the actor's voice⁸. But Tilly's goal was to train people, and when he began teaching at Columbia he attracted not only people who were trying to learn English as a second language, abut also New York city school teachers who were trying to, "maintain acceptable standards of English

⁸ At the time Bert Emsley, Charles K. Thomas and Claude Sifritt were writing their chapter "Phonetics and Pronunciation" for *A History of Speech Education in America* in 1954 it seemed that Tilly's influence had waned and, "today it is largely confined to the New York City School system" (Emsley, Thomas and Sifritt, 338). In fact Skinner is not even mentioned as one of his students who have published work.

pronunciation within a secondary school curriculum that still allowed for the active teaching of speech, rhetoric, and forensics” (Knight, “Standard Speech,” 157-158).

Windsor P. Daggett’s, studied with Tilly at Columbia for 10 years (Deacon 74). During this time he began to write his column *The Spoken Word* for *The Billboard* (magazine) in 1921 (Knight, “Standard Speech”, 172). Dudley Knight notes that:

For six years – through 1926 – Daggett was able to write at length on the voice and speech work of the stars of Broadway and his columns, taken together, are an impressive, detailed, and often very perceptive record of the period. The enterprising Daggett, who had more or less cornered the New York market in theatre and speech improvement, ran his own speech school for clients on stage and off, and founded Spoken Word Records, a label that lasted for some years; by the mid-twenties Word Records, a label that lasted for some years; by the mid-twenties Daggett could offer a complete course in World English on records, as well as dramatic recitations by well-known actors of whom Daggett approved (Knight 172).

Daggett’s favorite classical actor was Walter Hampton who, although American, had trained in Britain and spoke with a British accent (Knight 172). For Daggett, World English and Received Pronunciation (the elitist sound of the British upper class) were synonymous (Knight 172). Knight also observes that the voices Daggett didn’t like he would fervently criticize, such as America’s Alfred Lunt whom he felt had an, “overly conversational vocal delivery on stage and slurred consonants (Knight 172). He also went after a fellow Tilly student, Margaret Prendergast McLean, for her public reading of *Les Miserables* in 1925 noting that her voice and

diction were perfect, but her delivery was absent of feeling (Knight, "Standard Speech," 173). Thus with a powerful platform and detailed opinion, Windsor Daggett helped shape not only the sound of the American actor, but also the method of training through his studio.

Another of Tilly's disciples was Edith Warman Skinner. Skinner had studied under Margaret Prendergast McClean at the Leland Powers School in Boston before she began studying with Tilly at Columbia (Deacon 78). In 1937 Skinner became the speech "expert" at Carnegie Tech (now Carnegie-Mellon) in Pittsburgh. In an interview from The Pittsburgh Press, following Mrs. Skinner's appointment, Evelyn Burke writes that the formula for "cosmopolitan" speech Skinner seeks to cultivate is to

Take the open quality of speech below the Mason Dixon line, but drop the southern drawl; add the vigorous timbre of western speech without the "burr", and the precision of eastern speech without the Yankee twang. Mix with a certain amount of rhythm, a good natural pitch, and good tone placement. Practice constantly – and the result will be that you'll be talking like the President (Burke)!

Skinner goes onto to say how she uses recordings of President Roosevelt as a model in her classes. "His speech is really the answer to a prayer. Besides being a purist, without affectation, of course he has a most intimate way of speaking that inspires confidence"(Burke).

Burke continues noting that

Most women, the speech doctor explained, are lamentably out of date in habits of speech. "They spend hours at beauty parlors, and at dress-makers making themselves beautiful," she said, "and then they lose all the effect of their time and

money the minute they open their mouths. Their voices are unpleasant, and they don't keep up on the ne pronunciations which change just as styles do" (Burke).

Of course, what goes unspoken is that this ideal of speaking in a standard is only for the elite upper crust who have the time to be "fashionable". Not quite the blood, sweat, and tears that America was founded upon, but quite profitable for those who purport a "fashionable" sound.

However elitist, Skinner made an indelible mark on actor training in the United States with her teaching and text, *Speak With Distinction*, which was first published in 1942(Skinner). After retiring from Carnegie-Mellon in 1968, she was asked by John Houseman to help lay the foundation for his new theatre school in New York – Julliard (Deacon 78).

It was the speech teachers of the early 20th century that shaped the standard for how actors must sound not only on the stage, but on screen as well. Desley Deacon writes that in the beginning of film, "actors, producers, directors and writers – moved backwards and forwards between the two mediums" of stage and screen (Deacon 79).

From the mid-1920's to the early 1930's many films were made in New York, and stage actors and producers mixed socially with those in film. In addition, Hollywood producers such as MGM's boy wonder Irving Thalberg⁹ came regularly to New York to decide which Broadway shows to buy, to see what was fashionable and what different audiences enjoyed. They would often film the

⁹ Irving Thalberg was the producer of at least 90 known film titles, among which include: *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923); *The Merry Widow* (1925); *Ben-Hur* (1925); *La Bohème* (1926); *Laugh, Clown, Laugh* (1928); *The Broadway Melody* (1929); *The Hollywood Revue of 1929* (1929); *Billy the Kid*(1930); *Private Lives*(1931); *Mata Hari*(1931); *Tarzan the Ape Man*(1932); *Grand Hotel*(1932); *As You Desire Me*(1932); *The Barrets of Wimpole Street* (1934); *A Night at the Opera* (1935); *Romeo and Juliet* (1936); *Camille* (1936); *The Good Earth* (1937); *A Day at the Races* (1937); *Broadway Melody of 1938*(1938) ("Irving Thalberg", Internet Movie Data Base).

performance as a guide to the movies. If we are going to talk about a global vernacular, we have to take Broadway theatre seriously as one of its important sources (Deacon 79).

Of course, we hear the effects of this everyday in the media, with the pedagogical hand of Skinner guiding one of film's leading vocal coaches, Timothy Monich, her student from Carnegie-Mellon (Wilkinson).

Dialectical Identity

So Tilly's "World English" became dubbed "Euphonetics" by Margaret DeWitt, and "Good Speech" by Edith Skinner were certainly popular with those who wished to change their sound and social identity, but it is a very trained sound. Dudley Knight pulls no punches as when he describes "Good American Speech" as, "mired in a self-serving and archaic notion of Euphony, and in a model of class, ethnic, and radical hierarchy that is irrelevant to the acting of classical texts and repellent to the sensibilities of most theatre artists" (Knight, "Standard Speech" 177). The proof that many artists agree with this lies in the fact that there are now multiple terms and variations of what an acceptable dialect for an employable actor, among which are Neutral American, General American, and Standard American.

So where do these terms come from? To decipher this, I contacted Dudley Knight, Patricia Fletcher, Paul Meier and Louis Colaianni who are currently the leading dialect and phonetics teachers in America.

Dudley Knight's response to the questioner guarding these dialects was that

The use of a mid-western model for “General American” has a Slightly murky genesis, as does “Good American Speech” for that matter. Certainly, by the time the Krapp and Birmingham book (I have a reference to it in “The Ongoing Debate”) came out shortly after the First World War, there was a model for American speech that was essentially General American as we know it (message to the author).

In their introduction to *First Lessons in Speech Improvement* Anna Birmingham and George Krapp try to solve the question of how cultivated speech is imparted as they ask:

Where shall one then go, then, for the correct pronunciation of the language? One may go to the dictionary. This does not really answer the question, for one must still ask, “Where did the man go and who made the dictionary?”. . . . But the real question is this, Did the dictionary make the language, or does the language make the dictionary? Obviously the latter. One must go to the ordinary use of language to find how words are pronounced, and one goes to the dictionary only to supplement or enrich one’s knowledge and observation of the language as ordinarily used.

When one thinks of the language as ordinarily used, one means, of course, not the language as carelessly or vulgarly spoken, but as it is spoken by persons whose practices are worthy of respect and imitation. In ordinary use there is a difference, however, between Formal and Familiar Style. When one speaks in Familiar Style of “a man of war,” the first and third words of this phrase may sound exactly alike. For purposes of exercise and discipline, however, one does not take the

Familiar Style as a foundation. One takes rather the Formal Style, because the Familiar Style, being the result mainly of haste and negligence, does not call for Special training. If the Formal Style is well taken care of, the Familiar Style will take care of itself (Birmingham and Krapp).

Interestingly enough, Birmingham and Krapp unwittingly refer to code-switching; however, they are condoning that the Formal style influence and supersede the Familiar Style.

Knight also notes that John S. Kenyon's *American Pronunciation* and John Samuel Kenyon and Thomas Albert Knott's *A Pronouncing Dictionary of American English* were influential as well as an "indirect influence," by the *NBC Handbook of Pronunciation* (Knight, message to the author). "Pat Kelly¹⁰ was the Supervisor of Announcers from the late 1920s until his retirement in 1954," and wrote the Forward to the 1951 edition of NBC' handbook (Shoshani). In the forward, Kelly observes that

Dependable tools or instruments are indispensable to the capable artisan. This is especially true of any artist whose livelihood is dependant upon the spoken word, and in matters of pronunciation this book should be a valuable aid. Outstanding public speakers and performers on the air or in the theatre, all know that a successful performance may often depend not so much on what you say, as "how you say it." To say it well frequently may involve voice quality, inflection, or speech melody, and emotion. But a prime requisite at all times is correct

¹⁰ When asked about a war-time rumor that women may become network announcers in 1942, Pat Kelly, according to Richard Pheatt of the *Toledo Blade*, "diplomatically states this is only a remote eventuality, and blames it on feminine psychology. Women just won't believe from another woman the kind of guff that lards both ends of most commercial broadcasts, Pat indicates. It takes a man to do it, which leads us to the conclusion that the guys ought to be ashamed of themselves"(Google News). How interesting that in 2013 that men still dominate the duties as television announcers, while women predominate the voice training profession.

pronunciation. . . Many persons may be surprised – on checking a familiar word - to learn that the present-day pronunciation is different from that learned in school some decades ago. Ours is a living language, constantly adapting itself to changing customs and world conditions. Recurring warfare and the speed of modern communication methods, have resulted in the addition to our language of many foreign words and place names hitherto seldom used in our everyday speech. The responsibility now placed upon speakers, radio announcers, and commentators is greater than ever before. Audiences are becoming more critical in their demands for the use of correct pronunciation by the broadcasters. . . This book gives only one pronunciation. This is not an attempt to be arbitrary but rather a sincere effort to clarify our pronunciation problems and still maintain that high standard of speech which is the desire of cultivated people (iii).

This text, no doubt, has influenced past and current broadcasters as well others dealing with film and television.

But the a problem remains with tracing the origin of the term “General American.”

Even Dudley Knight, a master teacher in his own right observed that

Of Course, “General American” itself is something of a chimera; personally I try—though without complete success—to avoid use of the term. Even within “Inland Northern” or “North Midland” accents, there are so many variations that the best we can do is find an accent, probably somewhere in Iowa, that seems sufficiently unmarked by regionalisms that the general population would notice. Many American dialectologists have resisted the labeling of any American

accents the “standard.” The famous linguist Raven McDavid¹¹, who himself had a South Midland accent, derisively labeled Inland Northern with the acronym “SWINE”, standing for “Standard White Inland Northern English” (message to the author).

Louis Colaianni¹² writes that for him, General American

is a linguistic term, synonymous with "mid-western American speech." I am more inclined to use the term "general American" than the other two terms you mention, because it casts a wide net of general guidelines without being too prescriptive. It is implicitly, more tolerant of variation and individuality than the other two terms. "Standard American" like "Standard British" was of course, a prescriptive, minority accent associated with a privileged class (message to the author).

It is interesting that Colaianni mentions the British because a Brit’s dialect text is one of the leading dialect handbooks used today. Enter Paul Meier, the founder of IDEA (the International Dialects of English Archive) and a leading dialect coach in the United States is British. Meier includes a thorough guide to the General American dialect in his book *Accents & Dialects For*

¹¹ According to the biographical note on the University of Chicago’s Library website, “McDavid is perhaps best known for his work as the editor of the 1963 edition of H.L. Mencken’s *American Language*. His work also includes *The Structure of American English* (1958), *The Pronunciation of English in the Atlantic States* (1961), *Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States* (1979), and *The Mirth of a Nation: America’s Great Dialect Humor* (with Walter Blair, 1983)” (Guide to the Raven I. McDavid Papers 1951-1976, University of Chicago Library).

¹² Louis Colaianni is a certified Linklater teacher and creator of Phonetic Pillows. He has written *The Joy of Phonetics and Accents; Bringing Speech to Life; How to Speak Shakespeare and Shakespeare’s Names: A New Pronouncing Dictionary* (“About”, Colaianni, Web).

Stage & Screen¹³. In the introduction to the dialect, Meier writes

What kind of real people actually speak “General American?”. . . Listen to recordings of vintage American newsreel journalists and members of American high society, and you will hear the British English was undeniably the model. That all changed fairly rapidly after World War II. American English gained in power and prestige; and actors, journalists, and other professional people began to sound less British, and what we might call General American came into its own. The dialect I describe here, then, may be called the commonly accepted General American English. It has the advantage of being regionally indeterminate. It is not Midwestern, and not the speech of the northeast cities. Perhaps the children of career U.S. service personnel, raised in military base schools and rubbing shoulders with kids from all over the States – perhaps these people come closest to being the non-trained ‘real people’ who speak this dialect (175).

Based on Meier’s explanation, the idea that General American is based in the sound of actors and journalists that one would encounter by film, radio or television would certainly explain the influence of the *NBC Handbook of Pronunciation*. However, as explained in the previous chapter, we acquire language through our caretakers and closest friends, and I do not think that living on a military base would incline anyone to develop a “general” dialect. One would acquire the sound features of those with whom they most identify, and the group with whom they wish to be identified.

¹³ Meier’s book also includes CDs of each dialect in his book that covers sound changes, rhythm and pitch as well as modeling the sound in practice sentences and monologues from plays that utilize each dialect. It is, by far, the most thorough and accessible guide to dialect shifts I’ve found.

So we have resolved that the idea of “General American” dialect was generated by British sensibilities. But what of the term “Neutral American”? In her book *Classically Speaking: Dialects For Actors*, Patricia Fletcher¹⁴ notes that Neutral American is employed:

- when a particular region of the country is unspecified in the text
- clear, well-spoken sounds are required, rather than under-articulated speech, or slang
- when actors from various parts of the country need to convincingly play members of the same family
- in classical plays, when more formal classical dialect is not required
- in voiceovers and commercials involving upscale characters, pricey items, or well-articulated spokespersons (2).

Fletcher’s reasons for utilizing the Neutral American sound creates an excellent argument for the dialect to be a foundation in any actor training program. When I asked Fletcher where the term “Neutral” came from in reference to the sound, she replied,

I first started using the term Neutral American when working with actors from foreign countries. Our class was called 'Neutral American Speech' since our goal was to help actors to 'neutralize' their 'home' accents in an effort to help them speak English clearly enough to be cast in the US. It also supported the idea of

¹⁴ Patricia Fletcher, “is a Designated Linklater Voice Teacher. She has worked as Speech, Dialect, Voice, and Audition Coach for actors both on and Off-Broadway, in feature and independent films, documentaries and television, and has been a guest artist at many colleges and universities”(About Patricia Fletcher, Web).

process—the process of being able to neutralize one's sounds when desired (very related to your idea of code switching, I think) for casting purposes. . . I do not think it was necessarily a formal switching of terms--rather a gentle migration -- mostly away from the term Standard--in order to open to the idea of process and choice (message to the author).

Indeed, Neutral American should be an aid to actors, not a prescriptive sound, as was the traditional training of the 19th and early 20th century elocutionists, World English cultists, and devotees of “Good American Speech”.

Why train actors to sound a certain “way”

The foundations of American dialect work were put into place by an Australian and his students who were trying to create an elitist sound to “save” the beauty of the English language and reinforce the “classy” upper-crust sound. So why perpetuate it? Because actors need to work, and as voice and speech teachers it is our job to ensure that our students have all the available tools to book a job. Guy Olivieri, actor and co-author of *So You Wanna Be A New York Actor: The New York Actors Guide to The Career of Their Dreams While Paying the Rent* states

Successful actors have to look at themselves as a product that needs to be sold, not just once, but at every single audition. (I can speak to this, having been on 2100 auditions.) Sometimes dialects are needed for roles, but 95% of the time, Neutral American is what's expected. If an actor can't produce Neutral American, he's resigning himself to a much smaller segment of the market. Furthermore, agents only want to work with actors who can make them money.

So, why would they keep actors on their roster who can only book work in a small portion of jobs where a regionalism or an accent is needed? Answer: They won't(message to the author).

Christopher Isherwood reinforces this idea as he writes about the way dialogue is written for the theatre:

We don't go to the theater to listen to conversations that we might just as easily hear while waiting in line at the grocery store or commuting on the subway. Among the essential gifts most great playwrights possess is an ability to take the dross of humble human speech and give it a silvering polish (6).

The audience needs to be able to suspend its disbelief, and part of being transported lies not only in the text, but also in the beauty of the spoken word. Finally, in his essay "Standards," Dudley Knight draws the bottom line citing "intelligibility" being the most important factor in any voice, speech and dialect training class (70)¹⁵.

Bearing this in mind, what is the best way to approach teaching the Neutral American dialect while still being culturally sensitive to an actor's heritage and sense of self? By teaching students about the way language and dialect works. We naturally code-switch in every day depending on with whom we are speaking. By giving students an understanding of the mechanics of dialects and language, students are not forced into sounding a certain way by being shamed by their own dialect, but rather given an educated choice as to how they converse with whom.

¹⁵ This is in response to Rosina Lippi-Green's article "The Standard Language Myth" where she passionately censures the idea that a standard dialect should exist in any form.

In the following chapter I will outline how I provided one class with this knowledge by inviting them to explore and share the features of their own dialects. In addition, the class learned about code-switching and the Neutral American dialect so that they would have the flexibility at the tips of their tongues to present themselves in the best light in any social or business situation.

Chapter 3: Training the 21st Century Actor: An Approach to Teaching Phonetics and the Neutral American Dialect

As a teacher, it is foremost in my mind that I am teaching individuals, and this was paramount in my mind as I planned my sophomore Voice and Speech class for the Spring of 2013. VCU has approximately 31,000 students attending classes on the Monroe park and MCV campuses (“About VCU”). In the fall student census of 2012 4,072 students identified themselves as Black/African American; 2,663 identified themselves as Asian; 68 identified themselves as Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; 1,567 identified as Hispanic/Latino; 635 identified as International; 927 identified as two or more races; 72 identified as American Indian/Alaskan; 11,430 identify as Caucasian and 744 who identify themselves as unknown (“Virginia Commonwealth University Student Demographics Fall 2012 Census II”). My sophomore class consisted of eleven students with diverse backgrounds ranging from the mountains of western Virginia, to the isthmus of Panama. Their cultural heritages were also diversified, and as a class we were able to learn about traditions and dialectical anomalies from Korea, Iran, and Panama, as well as compare and contrast the regional Southern dialects from around Virginia along with the dialectical features of African American Vernacular English.

What added to this rapport is that my students had been working with each other for a year and a half, and we had already completed the Fall semester of Voice and Speech for the Actor as a class, so the classroom culture of sharing one’s experience in discussion was

established. Understanding the genesis of American stage speech¹ as well as language development were foremost in my mind when planning the semester, because the requirements for course content included the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), the Neutral American Dialect and applied rhetoric. It was very important to me that my students understand not only the minutiae of the Neutral American dialect, but also the discourse of what dialects are, and why these differences create such passionate conversations. To facilitate these dialogues, I built in readings and exercises to promote this exploration.

Dudley Knight's newly published *Speaking With Skill* was the textbook selected to explore the IPA. To support this, I instituted the "muscle of the week" to teach the muscles of articulation and to get students involved in the learning process. Every week a different student was responsible for informing us about their assigned muscle's location, pronunciation, function, and way to warm it up. I modeled the first week, so that students would know what I expected from their presentations. This short exercise was the beginning of our communal learning² experience. By instituting communal learning, a student's contribution goes beyond participation in classroom discussions and activities. She becomes responsible for contributing to the knowledge and resources of her fellow classmates. In doing this, I hoped to get my students more excited about what we were doing because they had a stake in the information. Also, they

¹ Here I am grouping the terms Neutral American, General American, Standard American, Good American Speech, Announcer speech etc. under the umbrella term "stage speech".

²In her article "Pedagogy and Technical Communication: The Power of Communal Learning," Jana Jones cites the theories of Sociologist Stephen Katz and the University of Rochester's Professor of Language and Literature, David Bleich as she explains communal learning: "The classroom can be thought of as a community of interpreters. Bleich suggests that ideas should be presented to a class and then interpreted, or resymbolized, through consensus within the group. Katz points out that teaching in an inductive manner places students in a position of authoritative power. It places teachers and students together in a communal effort toward learning and interpreting" (Web).

would be able to bring eleven different perspectives to the class discussion. As a whole, my students responded well to this process.

The muscles of the week also supported usage of Knight's daily articulation warm up that begins with the jaw and moves through the lips, tongue, soft palate, face muscles, and neck release ending with the ancient art of gurning³ which is, "to make strange faces, and the more bizarre they are the better" (Knight 29). Later in the semester, as we moved into political speeches, I incorporated more elements of the Linklater method including the body work, jaw shake, tongue stretch and resonators along with Lessac's Call and Y-Buzz into their daily warm-ups to increase their freedom of movement and sound.

We began exploring the IPA by examining the pulmonic consonant chart, following the trajectory of Knight's book (Appendix B). Knight believes in teaching the entire chart so that students understand all the possible sounds that can be made by the articulators not only in their own dialect, but in any language. To begin the process, I put the consonant chart's vocabulary words in a hat, and had students pull an articulation focal point (the top row of the chart) and an action to create the sound (left column of the chart). Students were to research and bring in a definition of what their terms meant, and present it in class. I then compiled this into a document for them labeling the actions "vertical" and articulators "horizontal" so that as we explored the articulator/sound combinations, per Knight's method, they would have a self-generated point of reference.

The class then explored the sound and articulation possibilities, deciding on what was possible and what was not, notating their findings on a blank chart made from transparency film.

³ The World Gurning Championship is held annually at the Egremont Crab Fair in Cumbria, England. It is thought to be the world's longest continual fair having begun in 1267 when King Henry the III granted Thomas de Multon a charter to hold a weekly market and annual fair in September ("Brief History of the Crab Fair", Web).

After we explored the entire chart, I had them place their findings over a copy of the complete IPA pulmonic consonant chart, and compare their observations to the actual chart. Then I gave them a transparency of the pulmonic chart with only the sounds used in English dialects to impress upon them the small range of sounds used in English dialects compared to others. As I had hoped this sparked an interesting discussion as to the limitations of English, and the Anglicization of words. We then covered the other symbols of which W, H, and the glottal stop are most useful to English speakers.

To reinforce the lesson and phonetic symbols, I brought in my phonetic pillows⁴. Students explored the sounds with movement by moving through the classroom with them to experience the sound's effect on the body. Next, they experienced Colaianni's Sound Symphony. Finally, as a class, we told the story of "Hansel and Gretel" by pulling pillows out of the pile and using the sounds to convey each moment of the story. We then proceeded to explore the vowel chart(Appendix B). This time I started out using the complete chart, so we looked at the symbols on the chart as we deciphered what the sound would be by placement. To enhance this I brought in some rope and outlined the quadrilateral on the floor, and had them match the sounds to the position on the chart with the pillows. Afterwards we "walked" through the chart, making the sounds as we went. Then we moved on to diphthongs and triphthongs, and were ready to fully explore language.

Of course, once we had put these all together we were able to "spell" words, which my students really enjoyed, especially learning what their names looked like phonetically. (One

⁴ Louis Colaianni is a Designated Linklater teacher and the inventor of phonetic pillows. Phonetic pillows are actual pillows in the shapes of phonetic symbols. Using tangible representations of the symbols helps students to embody the sounds and have a visceral connection with the sounds rather than just memorizing a symbol as a representation of sound.

student even signed in the rest of the semester with her name using the phonetic symbols /ə'lɪzəbɛθ/ .) This of course allowed us to play games to reinforce the concepts, and we had a rousing game of IPA “Go Fish” before their final quiz. Understanding how the sounds create words and how one uses these symbols, is invaluable to actors. Getting students invested in a very technical “science” could be a challenge, however I think having physical objects, such as the pillows, made the process more tangible and fun for my class.

Phil Thompson⁵, who was Dudley Knight’s long time collaborator, writes of his experience training actors that:

I believe that studying phonetics helps us to untangle perceptual confusions that arise when we compare the sounds we hear and make to our internal model of language. I also believe that training in phonetics enriches an actor’s linguistic inner life, providing useful contextual knowledge and developing skill in perceiving and performing. I’ll even go so far as to say that an enriched perception of the variety of sounds in language builds an actor’s imagination and flexibility. Finally, I feel that these benefits can be maximized in speech training and that improving an actor’s understanding of language variation in general and their own perceptions specifically, should be a goal of speech training for actors (“Phonetics and Perception”).

Learning to feel and “spell” sound with the IPA was the goal for this class. I have learned that next time I teach this I will introduce the vowels first. Starting with the vowel

⁵ Phil Thompson is also a master teacher of Fitzmaurice Voicework.

quadrilateral would be any easy way to map the mouth and articulation points. Then moving from vowels, diphthongs, and triphthongs into the pulmonic consonant chart may be easier because students will have the visual shape of the mouth mapped in their minds, and then be able to put the more specific language of the pulmonic consonant chart to use. As a bonus, we would be able to begin sounding words sooner. Vowels are needed to create a variety of words, and if I begin with vowels we can immediately create words once the first column of consonants is learned, and start having the discussion of how pronunciation differs from person to person, region to region and dialect to dialect.

Learning IPA is the gateway to dialect training, so the next step was for my students to understand their own dialects. In order to do this I assigned them a “Vocal Inventory” in which they were asked to make a recording stating their name and birthday; talk about where they are from, their family, and friends; tell a funny story; and finally read the story I had given them (Appendix C). The order was designed to get them comfortable and talking in their natural voices, as well as to give me a picture as to the influences on their voices. When one talks about their family, or a funny story, the familiarity of the subject can bring out one’s natural voice. These personal narratives were used to set up the abstract “dream” story that targeted certain sounds in the Virginia dialect that would detract and in some instances oppose to the Neutral American dialect. The words and phrases I was specifically targeting are the following, in the order they appear in the text: today, get, last, across, going, asked, sitting, tomorrow, law, thinking, to, next-door, vanilla, candidate, for, Jenny, Did you eat yet?, getting, Grandma, Grandpa, little, prescription, (favorite curse word), Antarctica, house, granted, and won. Words such as “get” and “for” are often shifted to “git” and “fer” in Southern dialects, which I found some of my students were not aware that they used in their everyday speech. Other words such

as “last” and “going” target word endings because in everyday communication these are often dropped creating the sound of “las” and “goin”⁶. “Little” was used to test for the switch of doubled consonants from the unvoiced /t/ to the voiced /d/ as in “liddle”. Finally, one of my personal pet peeves is the abuse of the word “asked”, which frequently comes across as “assed”. When we began studying Neutral American, “asked” is the only word I insisted students change in their personal dialect citing that, “It’s rude to ‘ass’ someone and could put you in peril.” This attempt at humor seemed to penetrate their dialectical habits, and this issue happily resolved as evidenced in their presentations of political speeches at the end of the semester.

What I found over the semester is that words such as any, espresso, exactly, butter, pen, and syrup should be added to future versions of the vocal inventory. “Espresso” is often pronounced as “xpresso”, and “any” is often pronounced as “innie” as opposed to its /ε/ sound, and therefore I think they will be useful to address in future dialect conversations.

While my students were busy recording their inventories, we watched the 1988 PBS documentary “American Tongues” to open the discussion on regional dialects. As a class we agreed that the documentary is mostly East Coast/ Deep South centric, and it would be helpful if a future documentary included discussions about the dialects of the Great Lakes region (such as Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan) as well as more Western and West Coast dialects. What was exceptionally striking to the class was a story from a woman with a pronounced Bostonian dialect telling about when she and her boyfriend (who went to Yale, who she thought sounded like a “Yalie”), drove South to meet his family at Christmastime. The further they drove, the more Southern his dialect became, and her discomfort level was so great that

⁶ I use ”goin” when speaking in motherese to my daughter. This comes from my trying to *suggest* rather than *command*, although the need to command has become more common since she has crossed the threshold of being two years old.

By the time we got to Sparta, um, I had had it. I just knew that someone with those little accents was not gonna crawl around inside of me. I was not gonna have little Southern babies who talked like that and I got on a plane home. No question (*American Tongues* Transcript).

This story struck a particular chord with my students because of the bigotry towards his dialect when she herself had such a distinctive sound. When he sounded differently she was enamored with him, but when he began to code-switch into the way he spoke with friends and family her judgment of him changed. This opened up a dialogue with the class about what code-switching was, and if they had experienced this in their own lives, and in their own judgments of other's dialects. I then told the class to start taking notes on their own sounds, and introduced the exercise of "My Dialect" that asked them to define and describe their own voices.

Having opened up the discussion of different types of dialects, I then introduced my students to the Pittsburghese dialect, which I had first encountered via my Pennsylvania family. The University of Pittsburgh hosts the *Pittsburgh Speech and Society Project* that has sought to document and describe the vowel and consonants shifts utilized in this dialect as well as the slang. I chose to explore this dialect because it has a completely different sound from Southern dialects, yet it also has some pronunciation features that may seem familiar to their ear. For example "yins" means "you guys" which is similar to the Southern "ya'll". "Jeet jet" has a similar sound to the Southern "Dijet?" ("Did you eat?") (McCool 19-39). Dialectical features such as these help to distinguish Pittsburghese⁷, and served to fuel our classroom dialogue.

⁷ I have found the spelling of the dialect is notated as "Pittsburgese" and with an "h" as in "Pittsburghese, depending on the source consulted.

To begin this section, we watched Tim Nicklas’s “Pittsburghese – A Dialectical Primer” and “How to Speak Pittsburghese by ScaryMary,” and older woman who was born in Pittsburgh but now lives in the West. I had watched a few talks on Pittsburghese via You Tube by Sociolinguist Barbara Johnstone of Carnegie Mellon and Ron Ramolt, a teacher at Brookville Area High School. Both were informative, but I felt the lecture style of the speakers might not hold my students’ interest. Also, what I needed to accomplish with Pittsburghese was not a mastery of the dialect, but to ignite enthusiasm for understanding different dialects and the desire to explore one’s own sound.

To explore the dialect, I took vocabulary terms from *Sam McCool’s New Pittsburghese How to Speak Like a Pittsburgher*, and broke them into groups, asking them to try to decide how these words are pronounced⁸, and what they thought the words meant based on their sound. Then they were to create a short improv scene that used the word and conveyed the perceived meaning. Most students enjoy improvisation, and this offered them intellectual as well and physical involvement. The outcomes were entertaining, with about a 70% accuracy as to the terms’ actual meaning.⁹

After the improvisations, we looked at the University of Pittsburgh’s overview of the features of Pittsburghese via their website. This is a brief overview that mentions vocabulary and sound changes such as the diphthong of /aʊ/ as in “pout” becomes /æ/ as in “pat” making words such as “downtown” become “dahntahn”, one of the words used in the aforementioned improv

⁸ McCool writes the words as they are commonly spoken and notated in Pittsburgh, not using the IPA.

⁹ This also created an enthusiasm for the new sound, and students were delighted when the new political drama *House of Cards* portrayed a code-switching Pittsburghese speaking Senator.

(Johnstone). Encountering this “alien” dialect, one none of them had heard of before yet which was still English, successfully helped students to think about their own regionalisms and dialects.

The next step was for students to present their interpretation of their own dialects, which could not have gone better. One of the delightful things about this group of students, and the theatre students at VCU, is the spirit of camaraderie. They have worked together since their Freshman year, are friends, and some are roommates. They know each others’ habits, both vocal and physical, and trust their peers when it comes to observations and advice. Thus, this was the perfect environment to introduce them to what defines a dialect and to begin their training in Neutral American.

To facilitate this, we discussed the components of a dialect, and I gave them guidelines asking them to evaluate the influences on their voice, key vowel and consonant adjustments and vowel shifts; consonant additions/subtractions; contracting words; rhythm and pitch variation; volume; regional markers and word choices; unique words (aka “slang”, which is usually self generated); and finally I asked them to create a key sentence that would reflect their personal dialect’s sound (Appendix D). Many of their key sentences were humorous phrases they wanted to be identified with rather than being helpful to define sound changes, but nevertheless they served their purpose well.

The results of this exercise proved even more profitable than I anticipated. Everyone likes to talk about themselves, and additionally, my students found talking about their friends and family’s influences on their dialects and their own particular quirks exciting. They also enjoyed each other’s presentations, and since they were friends, would occasionally remind each other of slang used. What astounded me was that two of my students, on two separate days, claimed in their presentations that they did not have any vowel shifts as they were using “fer” for “for”

during their presentations. The rest of the class quickly pointed this out to them, and one student even caught himself in mid-word as he uttered it. Seeing them learn in this manner was not only exciting, but refreshing. The interaction of give-and-take amongst a group is much more memorable, meaningful, and easier to digest than any repeated correcting by a single individual. Our class discussions on the articles read welcomed a similar effect. Students were asked to read and respond in writing to a section of Dudley Knight's *Speaking With Skill*; interviews with Linklater teachers Andera Haring and Louis Colaianni from Nancy Saklad's *Voice and Speech Training in the New Millennium*; Chad Nilep's "Code Switching in Sociocultural Linguistics"; William Labov's website on the *Telsur Project*; and Scott Walter's "The Wal-Marting of American Theatre." The sections from Knight's book that were assigned as writing responses set up the usage of the materials we covered with his text. The articles by Haring and Colaianni helped to remind and reinforce the body/breath/ alignment connection taught during the Fall semester.

Nilep's article is a comprehensive study of the various researchers who have influenced the world of Sociolinguistics and shaped the idea of code-switching. Being thorough, it is seventeen pages of information, and I think this seemed a bit daunting to some of my students. The responses I received on the article ranged from insightful dissections of the material that showed they were able to appreciate the multiple layers of code-switching to half-pages stating that the author tried to do too much and it was confusing.

Scott Walters' "The Wal-Marting of American Theatre" struck a particular chord with the class. The article laments the trend of casting actors from New York, comparing this trend to the practice of gathering goods from across the country and shipping them through a central point - Wal-Mart's being Bentonville, Arkansas - which homogenizes the shopping experience

(Walters). Walters cites teaching Neutral American to actors homogenizes their identities, and that,

theatre artists and educators who continue to promote this system are contributing to the homogenization of the American Theatre. . . the way a person speaks reflects their background, the place where they were raised, their past, their people. To erase this in favor of a “neutral,” so-called “standard American” accent that has the flavor of no place, no background, no history and no class is to erase a person’s uniqueness in favor of generic blandness (Walters).

One of the biggest concerns that my students cited was their discomfort with the idea that they would be asked to be like everyone else. Several students stated that one of the reasons they like Theatre VCU is that the emphasis in their training has been on using and marketing their individual strengths. Another student expressed very passionately her love for the art of the people and how this made her want to go to an area that is not urban and create theatre “of the people” that reflects the region. Strangely enough, there was not a discussion of the need to move to New York.

Walter’s article also succeeded in reinforcing the value of understanding and utilizing code-switching. Instead of being a Sociolinguistic concept that was out of their field, the importance of employing one’s flexibility in dialects became evident not only in their career preparation, but more importantly in defining themselves as artists and connecting with others in the business. This set the stage for our exploration into examining and distinguishing Neutral American pronunciations from their own.

The text selected to introduce Neutral American was Patricia Fletcher's *Classically Speaking*. We began with the fricatives and then worked our way back with the front, mid and back vowels, and then exploring the diphthongs and triphthongs. I also addressed word endings, emphasizing the importance of enunciating /d/'s and /t/'s so that the word is finished. We also touched on linking words, and how this is necessary for fluidity but not a substitute for good, clear articulation. This sounds like an easy process, but it took a few weeks of going through the words lists in Fletcher's text, and comparing them to student's own dialectal proclivities, and identifying what shifts needed to be made in order to use the Neutral American dialect. Some students were able to make the shift easier than others. For students who were previously unaware of their Southern dialectal habits, the process of shifting certain vowels and consonants was a slower process than those who came from bilingual households.

All of this knowledge was implemented in the classes' final exam project, political speeches. Students were asked to select a famous political speech and perform it using the Neutral American dialect. Before working the speeches, students were to memorize their pieces. We discussed what operative words are and spent a class period looking at each student's speech, dissecting it, and experimenting with operatives. This open discussion of what was an operative, and different voices and reading of the text encouraged students to express and support their acting choices. We then moved into discussing rhetoric and rhetorical devices¹⁰ and identifying which devices were used in each text.

¹⁰ I modeled how devices should be presented by defining and giving examples of simile, metaphor, distinctio, and antanagoge. Students each had two of the following terms to define, give an example of, and share with the class: Allusion, Understatement, Litotes, Zeugma, Procatalepsis, Antanagoge, Sententia, Epithet, Hyperbole, Apostrophe, Rhetorical Question, Hypophora, Parallelism, Chiasmus, Anadiplosis, Conduplicatio, Synecdoche, Metonymy, Anaphora, Epistrophe, Amplification, and Parataxis.

Armed with the knowledge of rhetorical devices, and Neutral American we proceeded to rehearse speeches. To facilitate the process, I included working on Neutral American in our warm-ups, and created a key sentence out of words that contained the classes' biggest issues, which is "Did you forget to get butter at the store, Grandma?" One of my students, Raven Wilkes, who had a particularly difficult time switching from her native dialect of African American Vernacular English to Neutral American added "like I asked", so that the key sentence evolved to, "Did you forget to get the butter at the store like I asked, Grandma?" to address the sequence /s-k-d/ that some students have trouble adding to their pronunciation skills.

As we worked I would give feedback, and afterwards ask students to give one another feedback. Feedback from the instructor is important, but peer commentary is an incredible adhesive to cement ideas. For example, one student was working on Margaret Sanger's "The Morality of Birth Control", and was approaching the text delicately. She has a strong personality, and I told her I needed to see her passion come through in the speech, and to allow it to be present. When she said she didn't think she could do it, her peers pointed out that in her personal life she rarely keeps her opinions to herself and if she really cares about something they hear about it. She tried it again, and the piece was spot on. Another student took on Robert Kennedy's speech announcing Martin Luther King's assassination at a political rally in Indianapolis, Indiana. He struggled a bit with Neutral American, especially the "fer/for" shift, but once he felt comfortable in the dialect, he gave a very earnest and moving performance that elicited praise from his peers.

The most transformative moment came when one of my students, who had struggled shifting from her natural dialect of African American Vernacular English to Neutral American, got up to work towards the end of the semester. AAVE has been an asset to her in many

characters she has played, and rather than asking her to adopt Neutral American as a standard, I encouraged her think of it as another tool in her acting kit. She is a very persistent young lady, and with this in mind she was determined to tackle this different dialect, especially since she was speaking the words of W.E.B. DuBois, a highly educated African American who was born and raised in Massachusetts in the nineteenth century. During this session she showed remarkable progress with her acquisition of Neutral American, so much so that after her first attempt, one of her classmates remarked that in the performance she had just given she, “grew up five years.” Indeed, she had left her casual comfort zone, and presented the words in Neutral American allowing the text’s maturity and gravity to be the focus the piece.

Circumstances such as these speak to the power of using the Neutral American dialect, and the confidence it can instill in students. By teaching the dialect through code-switching, two goals are achieved: students are encouraged to be themselves by understanding their own sound; and, at the same time, it incites them to use their skills as actors to inhabit the dialect of the theatrical culture in which they live and work. A successful actor should be malleable enough to switch between his own sound, the dialect of the character, or the Neutral American dialect. By teaching students to understand their own influences, and identify their own sounds, they are more likely to be able shift into the neutral sound easily because they will be aware of their own habits. Consequently, when they are doing business with someone, they may have the sensitivity to that person’s dialect and be able to make a connection by employing a sound that is appropriate to that situation. Ultimately, what I hope is that this training allows my students to be vocally flexible, confident, and comfortable with who they are, and how they present themselves in the entertainment world while being sensitive to the culture in which they live, and to the people they portray.

Conclusion

American actor training has experienced a long journey that began on British and Australian soil. In the 21st century, the methods of training actors may have changed, but the intent remains the same: to assist students in becoming articulate individuals who can be understood without acoustical biases. As educators, we must strive to educate the whole student, not just the sound he or she makes. Voice and speech trainers should think of themselves as vocal advocates, guiding students to find and use the sound in which they feel the most articulate. Currently in the United States the most marketable dialect is one devoid of any regionalisms, so it our responsibility to teach this to our students while respecting and teaching them about their natural sound. If we help students to understand and celebrate the cultural and societal genesis of their natural dialect, we will empower them with a deeper understanding of themselves and the diverse texture. It is my hope that my approach will offer inspiration to students and teachers as they explore their voice's unique sound and malleability.

Appendix A

Robert Owens notes on page 89 in his text *Language Development: An Introduction* that the order of phoneme acquisition may be generalized as the following:

1. As a group, vowels are acquired before consonants. English vowels are acquired by age three.
2. As a group, the nasals are acquired first, followed by the plosives, approximants, lateral approximants, fricatives, and affricatives.
3. As a group, the glottals are acquired first, followed by the bilabials, velars, alveolars and post-alveolars, dentals and labiodentals, and palatals.
4. Sounds are first acquired in the initial position.
5. Consonant clusters and blends are not acquired until age seven or eight, although some clusters appear as early as age four. These early clusters include /s/ + nasal, /s/ + approximant, /s/ + stop, and stop + approximant in the initial position and nasal + stop in the final position.
6. There are greater individual differences, and the age of acquisition for some sounds may vary by as much as three years.

Appendix B

THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET (revised to 2005)

CONSONANTS (PULMONIC)

© 2005 IPA

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d		ʈ ɖ	c ɟ	k ɡ	q ɢ		ʔ
Nasal	m	ɱ		n		ɳ	ɲ	ŋ	ɴ		
Trill				r					ʀ		
Tap or Flap		ⱱ		ɾ		ɽ					
Fricative	ɸ β	f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ	ʂ ʐ	ç ʝ	x ɣ	χ ʁ	ħ ʕ	h ɦ
Lateral fricative				ɬ ɮ							
Approximant		ʋ		ɹ		ɻ	j	ɰ			
Lateral approximant				l		ɭ	ʎ	ʟ			

Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a voiced consonant. Shaded areas denote articulations judged impossible.

CONSONANTS (NON-PULMONIC)

Clicks	Voiced implosives	Ejectives
◌ ǀ Bilabial	ɓ Bilabial	ʼ Examples:
◌ ǃ Dental	ɗ Dental/alveolar	ɓ' Bilabial
◌ ǂ (Post)alveolar	ɟ Palatal	ɗ' Dental/alveolar
◌ ǁ Palatoalveolar	ɡ Velar	ɡ' Velar
◌ ǁ Alveolar lateral	ɠ Uvular	ɠ' Alveolar fricative

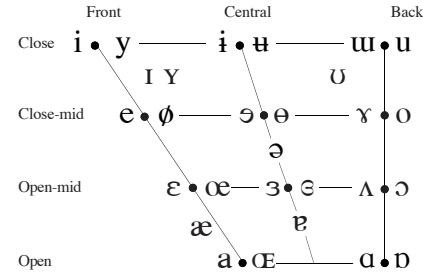
OTHER SYMBOLS

ɱ	Voiced labial-velar fricative	ɕ ʑ	Alveolo-palatal fricatives
ʋ	Voiced labial-velar approximant	ɺ	Voiced alveolar lateral flap
ɰ	Voiced labial-palatal approximant	ɥ	Simultaneous ʃ and x
ħ	Voiced epiglottal fricative		
ʕ	Voiced epiglottal fricative		Affricates and double articulations can be represented by two symbols joined by a tie bar if necessary.
ʔ	Epiglottal plosive		

DIACRITICS Diacritics may be placed above a symbol with a descender, e.g. ɲ̰

◌ [◌]	Voicedless	◌ [◌]	Breathily voiced	◌ [◌]	Dental	◌ [◌]
◌ [◌]	Voiced	◌ [◌]	Creaky voiced	◌ [◌]	Apical	◌ [◌]
◌ [◌]	Aspirated	◌ [◌]	Linguolabial	◌ [◌]	Laminal	◌ [◌]
◌ [◌]	More rounded	◌ [◌]	Labialized	◌ [◌]	Nasalized	◌ [◌]
◌ [◌]	Less rounded	◌ [◌]	Palatalized	◌ [◌]	Nasal release	◌ [◌]
◌ [◌]	Advanced	◌ [◌]	Velarized	◌ [◌]	Lateral release	◌ [◌]
◌ [◌]	Retracted	◌ [◌]	Pharyngealized	◌ [◌]	No audible release	◌ [◌]
◌ [◌]	Centralized	◌ [◌]	Velarized or pharyngealized	◌ [◌]		
◌ [◌]	Mid-centralized	◌ [◌]	Raised	◌ [◌]		
◌ [◌]	Syllabic	◌ [◌]	Lowered	◌ [◌]		
◌ [◌]	Non-syllabic	◌ [◌]	Advanced Tongue Root	◌ [◌]		
◌ [◌]	Rhoticity	◌ [◌]	Retracted Tongue Root	◌ [◌]		

VOWELS



Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a rounded vowel.

SUPRASEGMENTALS

ˈ	Primary stress
ˌ	Secondary stress
ː	Long
ˑ	Half-long
◌̥	Extra-short
◌̆	Minor (foot) group
◌̇	Major (intonation) group
◌̣	Syllable break
◌̤	Linking (absence of a break)

TONES AND WORD ACCENTS	
LEVEL	CONTOUR
◌̥ ^{or}	◌̥ ^{or} / Rising
◌̥	◌̥ \ Falling
◌̥	◌̥ / High rising
◌̥	◌̥ / Low rising
◌̥	◌̥ / Extra low rising
◌̥	◌̥ / Rising-falling
◌̥	◌̥ / Global rise
◌̥	◌̥ / Global fall

Appendix C

Vocal Inventory

- I. Name
- II. Birthday
- III. Tell me about where you're from and where your family is from. Who do you hang out with?
- IV. Tell a true funny story. (*Example in class*)
- V. Read the following short story:

Today I am really sleepy. I've got to get my head straight. Last night I had the strangest dream. I sailed across the sea to China, in a little toy boat to find you. Everything was going great. The waves were low, the water calm, and the view was stupendous -- and then a cop pulled me over. "What were you speeding for?" he asked.

"I wasn't speeding, Sir," I said. "I was just sitting here floating along."

"What do you think this is, the World of Tomorrow? Your row boat was speeding. You're breaking the law!"

So I said, "But officer, I don't have any oars."

He said, "Yeah, well maybe not today, but you were thinking about it," as he slapped the cuffs on me.

I didn't know what to do. He made me swim to the station. When I got there, I noticed there was an ice cream parlor next door, run by my next-door neighbor. I decided I wanted vanilla ice cream. So I told the officer, "If I buy a treat for you, will you let me go?"

"Are you a presidential candidate?" asked the officer.

"No," I answered, bewildered.

"Ok, fine." He quipped and then let me go.

So we went inside for some ice cream, and it turned into a house -- and who was there? My friend Jenny! I was so glad to see her! She said, "Did you eat yet?"

I said, "No," and asked her if she had seen you.

Jenny said, “No but I saw your cat. He was getting chased by a giant mouse. He looked scared.” I thanked Jenny and immediately ran outside to look for my cat, Grandma. I started calling, “Grandma come here,” but to no avail.

Then the police officer came outside and said, “You didn’t pay for the ice cream. That does it! You’re under arrest!” Just as he slapped the cuffs on me, Grandma came running around the corner chased by the biggest, mouse you’ve ever seen. “Well spank my Grandpa.” screamed the policeman like a little girl. “Maybe I need a stronger prescription,” he said as he removed his glasses. “*(Your favorite curse word)*,” he exclaimed as he dropped his ice cream.

Intrigued, the mouse stopped and started eating the ice cream, which allowed Grandma and I to get away.

We ran and ran all around the Earth, even through Antarctica! Then we suddenly found ourselves in front of your house, where you were folding a load of clean clothes. “Hello Honey,” you said, “I’m sorry if I took you for granted.” “Where have you been? Did you eat yet?”

“I just had a little adventure,” I smiled. “In my own way, I fought the law, and won.”

“Meow,” Concluded Grandma. Enough said.

Appendix D

My Dialect Voice & Speech for the Stage THEA 202 – Spring 2013

We each have a unique sound that gives our distinct voice its own footprint. This exercise asks you to honestly analyze your own unique sound, and share your findings with us.

You will present a brief presentation in class on your own dialect. You will want to address your personal influences such as family, friends and region. Also include vowel and consonant key adjustments; any rhythm or pitch variations particular to you; and any bits of slang speech that we would need to become you.

Influences

Tell us a little about what has shaped your sound. Where are you from? Who is your family? Your friends? Training you have had or any particular instances that influenced the way your sound.

Vowel Shifts

For example, *ɛ* frequently becomes *ɪ* in American dialects.

Thus “ten” sounds like “tin”, etc.

OR

“Wash” sounds like “worsh” (an intrusive r is also added)

Do you elongate any vowels or diphthongs?

*Example: elongating *aI* in “diet”*

Consonant Additions/Subtractions

Do you shift any consonants?

Example: “mutter” sounds like “mudder”

“ask” becomes “ax”

Do you drop any consonants?

Example: “Grandpa” sounds like “Granpa”

Do you add any (intrude) consonants into other words?

Example: “across” becomes “acrost”

“water” becomes “warter”

Contracting Words

Do you mush some words together?

Example: "Yes, that's a good boy" becomes "Yat's a good boy"

How do you ask someone if they've already had lunch? Etc. .

Regional Markers & Word Choices

What words may identify your dialect with a certain region?

For Example:

What do you call your parents?

-- that fizzy stuff that comes in cans?

-- that thing you carry groceries home in from the store?

-- the long soft piece of furniture in your living room (or den)?

-- the appliance that keep your food cool?

-- the names you use for your parent's parents.

Unique Words aka "Slang"

"Snarfle" means to eat all the good stuff and leave the rest. Thus, to *snarfle* a piece of pizza means you ate the topping off and left the crust.

Rhythm & Pitch

Do you notice your speech has a certain rhythm?

Do you pitch range vary or change at the end of a phrase? What is unique to you?

Volume

Are you louder or softer around certain people? At a certain part of a sentence?

Key Sentence

Write a key sentence you could give a fellow actor to help he or she "get into" your dialect.

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Vita

Louise A. Casini Hollis was born on July 27th, 1970 in Memphis, Tennessee, and is a United States citizen. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Theatre from Rhodes College in 1994 during which time she studied Improvisation with Paul Sills in Door County, Wisconsin. She went on to attend The British American Drama Academy in Oxford, England and has also studied with Arthur Lessac, at The Denver Center, and with Shakespeare and Company. Louise worked as the Assistant Director of Theatre Education at Playhouse on the Square, Memphis' Resident Theatre Company, from 1999 to 2005. While there, she developed several courses for the After School Acting Program including Greek Theatre, Shakespeare, Environmental Theatre, Commedia dell arte, and Musical Theatre. She also taught voice and playwriting for Playhouse's Summer Conservatory. She has written over fifteen plays for, and with, children. She received her Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from the University of Memphis in 2007. While at U of M she taught Creative Dramatics, and continued to do so until she moved to Virginia in 2008. In 2013 she received her Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy. While at VCU she taught Voice and Speech for The Actor and Speech for Business and the Professions. She currently lives in Yorktown, Virginia with her husband, daughter and two Maine Coon cats.