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INVESTIGATING ACTOR SPEECH TRAINING HISTORY THROUGH THE LENS OF KNIGHT-THOMPSON SPEECHWORK: HOW A NONPRESCRIPTIVE APPROACH REVOLUTIONIZES THE FIELD AND APPLICATIONS OUTSIDE OF A THEATRICAL CONTEXT

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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ABSTRACT

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Speech training for actors in the United States has a history deeply rooted in prescriptive practices. Many speech trainers have and still do teach from a model that they consider to be the "correct" way to speak. These practices have proven to be quite damaging to students' emotional and cultural identities, as speech is an inherent part of who we are as individuals. This thesis first examines such speech training pedagogies of the past, specifically the progression of William Tilly's World English to Edith Skinner's Good American Speech. Doing so establishes the necessary contextual understanding required to provide an alternative method for actor speech training. I compare the aforementioned pedagogies to Knight-Thompson Speechwork, an organization whose training methodology is focused on exploring the physical actions of speech while honoring each student's individual identity. After outlining the progression of work that Knight-Thompson Speechwork offers, I provide an example of how I would apply it to a specific coaching session. Lastly, I broaden my scope and explore potential applications of Knight-

Thompson Speechwork's pedagogical practices to issues within professional settings outside of

the realm of theatre.

VITA

Harrison Gray Runion was born on August 30th, 1995, in Richmond, Virginia, and is an American citizen. She graduated from Brunswick Academy in Lawrenceville, Virginia in 2014. He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Theatre Performance with a minor in Music Theatre at Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia in 2018. He is a candidate to receive a Master of Fine Arts Degree in Theatre Performance & Pedagogy from Virginia Commonwealth University in May of 2023.

Introduction

The human voice is a representation of a person's unique identity; this has been said many times, in a multitude of ways, by countless practitioners of voice and speech pedagogy. But what does it mean, exactly? We know that a person's voice is a crafted mechanism that develops and changes all throughout life, and the way an individual produces sound is determined by a myriad of factors aside from their geographical place of origin. Gender identity, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, sexual identity, and emotional well being all have a direct impact on the voice. This means that using the voice to engage with the world can be quite personal and vulnerable. Acting students are often burdened with the overwhelming and near-impossible expectation of entering the room and leaving all of their emotional baggage, and sometimes their identity, at the door. Therefore, voice and speech instructors must honor each unique human in the classroom and the way their personal instrument has developed.

Contemporary actor training methods grew out of the desire for techniques that not only produce skilled actors, but also adhere to social standards. Uniqueness has not always been valued in the United States, and racism, sexism, classicism, and prejudices of all kinds have always been ingrained in American society. Pedagogical practices have mirrored societal systems of oppression, and discrimination and prejudices against diverse voices are still major issues specifically within American education. Though pedagogical systems that arose from the late 19th and early 20th centuries were quite effective for many people, they were not tailored to serve all people, especially in the realm of performance. Even going back as far as the oral interpreters/communicators of Ancient Greece, the preferred method was to prescribe a standard that would have all orators essentially sound the same. At the risk of sounding cliché, my opinion is that the world would be a very boring place if we all sounded alike.

Thankfully, there have always been pedagogues who work against such dangerous practices, and present-day speech trainers continue to revise and build upon what worked in systems of the past. Knight-Thompson Speechwork (KTS), for example, is an organization made up of speech teachers who experienced and learned within older pedagogical systems. With pedagogical practices originally conceived by acclaimed speech teacher Dudley Knight, their work aims to provide a method of speech training that is universal and inclusive of all people. This is done by cultivating articulatory awareness within the vocal tract, which leads to the procurement of skills that allow for effective accent acquisition.

This thesis aims to thoroughly examine the history of actor speech training, followed by an analysis of recent pedagogical trends that support the advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the performing arts, such as the work that KTS is doing. Various actor speech training methods investigated in this thesis have been used for decades and have yielded excellent results for many people. These positive outcomes have been studied for a long time, and I have consequently chosen to focus this MFA thesis on some of the underlying problems inherent in these pedagogical systems. Before I begin, it is essential to define specific terms and concepts related to the field that will be referenced throughout this exploration:

The **International Phonetic Alphabet**, acronymized as the **IPA**, is an alphabetic system of phonetic notation that was created by the International Phonetic Association. It is a set of symbols that represent speech sounds in written form and is primarily used by linguists, speech-language pathologists, stage performers, and countless other professionals and language enthusiasts. It is considered by voice and speech specialists to be the best way to visualize and represent speech sounds effectively and efficiently. The term **intelligibility** refers to the degree to which a speaker can be understood by an audience. **Received Pronunciation (RP)** is a

manufactured British English accent that is traditionally regarded as a prestigious form of speaking for the upper class. Though this thesis covers speech trends in the United States, **RP** has long since been considered the standard way of speaking in the United Kingdom. In fact, it is often referred to as Standard British, and the cultivation of RP has a direct relationship to the creation of a standard for American speech. **World English** and **Good American Speech (GAS)** are both accent configurations manufactured and championed by speech teachers William Tilly and Margaret Prendergast McLean respectively. Edith Skinner, McLean's student would later be known for creating the evolution of these sound systems: the **Mid-Atlantic Accent**. Also known as Trans-Atlantic, Stage Standard, or even still GAS, this accent configuration became the primary and often required manner of speaking for stage and screen in the early 20th century and remained prevalent until its decline prior to the turn of the 21st century. It is also sometimes used as another term for World English. **General American** or Neutral American is another manufactured pronunciation pattern that does not attribute the speaker to any region, but rather offers the listener a sense of "neutrality." Teachers of these methods are often referred to as prescriptivists, based on the requirement for students to adhere to their prescriptive methods. For the purposes of this thesis, the term **speech trainers** will refer directly to those individuals who specialize in speech training for actors. For other professions, such as speech pathologists, I will refer to them by their specific occupations.

Chapter One of this thesis will explore the history and development of Tilly's World English and influential individuals and methods that arose from his teachings. Chapter Two will provide an analysis and critique of Edith Skinner's Good American Speech, followed by an examination of the transitional period that led to her methods declining in popularity. Chapter Three will focus on KTS, their methodology, and how their process remedies some of the issues

that prescriptivist methods produce. Chapter Four will provide my perspectives on how KTS

pedagogical systems can be applied in disciplines outside of a performance context, and

potentially aid in the advancement of societal progress in areas such as diversity, equity, and

inclusion.

Chapter 1: World English and What Came After

In order to continue down the path to speech training that is equitable for all students, we must recognize and understand the history of speech training as it relates to the field of theatre. An important figure to begin with is William Tilly,[1] an Australian phonetician who cranked the engine to the machine that eventually pumped out theatrical speech standards. Tilly, who reportedly hated the theatre, studied with European scholars, Henry Sweet and Wilhelm Viëtor. Sweet was instrumental in the creation of the IPA.[2] Viëtor was a prominent German phonetician and language educator. Both were early members of the International Phonetic Association, which was founded in 1886. Their goal for the IPA was to supply a tool which facilitated the learning for foreign pronunciations in English, French, and German Schools. Tilly himself joined the organization in the 1890's and, by this time, had relocated his family to Germany. There, he would solidify his influence on the world of linguistics and develop his notoriously zealous teaching style. Australian sociologist, historian, and biographer, Desley Deacon, reported that "William Tilly established the Institut Tilly, first in Marburg, then in Berlin, where students came from all over the world for intensive and rigorous language tuition. Among his students was Daniel Jones (1881–1967), who became the pre-eminent British phonetician of the early twentieth century" (Deacon 3) and is the individual typically credited with the creation of Received Pronunciation. As for Tilly, the aforementioned intensity and rigor that he employed in his classroom was no joke. "He was an opinionated Germanophile who had a particular affinity for Prussian meticulousness and efficiency…A combination of the newest innovations in language teaching and a close attention to minute detail, especially in the area of pronunciation,

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[1] Originally spelled "Tilley," he shortened his name in order to eliminate confusion from German speakers, as the "ey" ending did not match the actual pronunciation of his name.

[2] He also inspired Shaw's characterization of Henry Higgins in *Pygmalion.*

produced excellent results" (Thomson). The rigor of this work came in the form of incessant speech drills with a strong phonetic foundation; he was focused on teaching spoken language rather than the written word, and this teaching method is still useful today because it separates speech action from the conventions of language. Although Tilly himself was a native English speaker, he prohibited students in his school from speaking, reading, or listening to any other language than German for the duration of their attendance, whether students were on school grounds or not. While his approach was notably effective for many to both develop articulatory agility and preferred pronunciation patterns, this description of his pedagogy provides a glimpse into the root of some of the biased teaching and discrimination practices we face today in speech training.

Tilly and his family were forced to leave Germany at the beginning of World War I in 1914 and eventually found themselves in New York by 1917, where he began teaching English and phonetics at Columbia University. It is at this time that he began to establish his influence over speech in the United States. I spoke earlier about prescriptive standards in speech training; Tilly was a primary contributor to this idea, and his practices strongly informed the teaching of English. He and his students' creation of World English–a wholly manufactured accent– exemplifies this. Much like the elitist RP, World English was created to supply English speakers all over the world with an accent that would be viewed as "cultured," "educated," and "cultivated." It was considered by the Tilly cohort to be more intelligible and more beautiful than any other accent in the world, as it was composed of elements from both RP and various American accents that were perceived as prestigious (Deacon 4). However, World English was

proposed as an accent configuration that fell in line with transnational[3] ideals that were cropping up in intellectual conversations at the time, as it had no immediate indications toward localisms or regionalisms. While this thesis does not aim to dive deeply into these sorts of political theories and concepts, it is worth noting that World English, as a concept, promotes a sort of language assimilation with clear hierarchical values. The goal was for all English-speaking elites to speak with the same accent.

As World English made its mark on speech in a societal context, its influence on actor speech training grew as well. Figures like Windsor P. Daggett, an American speech teacher for actors whose studio was dubbed "Home of the Spoken Word," incorporated World English and Tilly's teaching of the IPA into his own pedagogy. Another proponent to acknowledge is Margaret Prendergast McLean, Tilly's apprentice and assistant and star pupil. McLean brought Tilly's method to various institutions, including the American Laboratory Theatre, the Leland Powers School of Theatre in Boston, the Carnegie Institute of Technology, and the Cornish School in Seattle (Deacon 7). She would go on to write a book titled *Good American Speech*, codifying Tilly's method for the general public.

Suffice to say, the idea of a universally-accepted accent permeated the theatre scene and, in all honesty, for good reason. Prior to the implementation of World English, formal public speaking in the United States was conducted in a song-like manner. Vowels were lengthened and produced with a great deal of vibrato, or the subtle and quick alternating of pitch. From a modern perspective, it seems quite logical that public speaking would move in this direction, regardless of social implications. American Realism had truly begun to pick up steam as an artistic

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[3] Referring to the social phenomenon which arose in the early 20th Century and promoted interconnectivity between the world's nations.

movement, so it seems fitting that speech would follow suit. Of course, it can be argued that World English is not a "realistic" accent, but I can imagine that for people in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was the closest and most attractive alternative. Teachers like Daggett were seeing the benefits of teaching from a phonetics-based model, as it produced more intelligible actors for their audiences.

Though Tilly died in 1955, his legacy, particularly that of World English, was carried on through his pupils…and his pupils' pupils. In his article, *Standard Speech: The Ongoing Debate*, Dudley Knight remarked upon individuals like McLean and what they would consider their plight: "So the Tilly followers were grappling with the forces of verbal ugliness, represented by every form of speech that was not this particular ornate artifice of speech teachers – those forms of speech, in short, which almost all Americans actually spoke." These forces of "verbal ugliness" that speech teachers were fighting against included the millions of African Americans migrating northward and the hordes of recent immigrants (Hampton et al. 167, 169). It is hardly surprising that such privileged, white academics paraded their racist and classicist opinions not only within the classroom, but within their writing. Tilly fanatics, such as Marguerite DeWitt, spent a great deal of energy and time attacking and othering the multitude of sounds and the individuals producing them. DeWitt even went as far as writing a piece where she pleads for a more restrictive immigration policy in the United States.

It saddens me to explore this chapter in our history. At the time of writing, we are nearly a century ahead of these acts of bigotry, yet I still hear the privileged cry aloud ultimatums of "Learn English or get out of our country!" If languages other than English are not welcomed in the United States, then it stands to reason that the accents born out of learning English as a second language would suffer similar treatment. When those in power put systems in place, often

their ideals are reflected within them; therefore, systems created by linguistic supremacists like DeWitt will be intrinsically full with vitriolic biases.

Recognizing these individuals and their contributions to Tilly's legacy allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the individual whose teaching still resonates with and/or frustrates educators today. Edith Skinner (née Warmen) is the American speech teacher who would be instrumental in ushering in the true age of Good American Speech. Skinner was to McLean what McLean was to Tilly. She was McLean's student at the Leland Powers School, where she trained as an actor and also worked with Tilly directly for around five years. Like McLean, and unlike Tilly, Skinner's focus was in applying her expertise in speech training to performance. Because of her aptitude and association to McLean and Tilly, she would go on to obtain the position of speech instructor at Carnegie Tech's theatre training program. Here, she "gradually established her reputation as the most eminent theatre speech trainer in America." Knight attributes this to the sheer amount of well known actors and speech teachers she trained (Hampton et al. 174). She eventually moved on to the theatre program at the Juilliard School and continued to maintain her foothold in the realm of speech pedagogy.

In chapter two, I will examine Skinner's phonetic descriptions in her book, *Speak with Distinction*, in order to evaluate what issues of speech standardization were exacerbated throughout her process but also what was effective in her teaching. First, however, I'd like to provide some insight into her pedagogical practices:

> Like Tilly, Skinner ruled her classes with the proverbial rod of iron. Like Tilly, she seated students in order of their skills in Good American Speech, and progression to the front of the class became a sought-after goal. Like Tilly she favored narrow, rather than broad, phonetic transcription. Like Tilly, she used phonetics primarily as a tool to inculcate

Good American Speech, not as a means of defining sound distinction in itself. Like Tilly

she relied heavily on incessant drill exercises. Like Tilly, she used an unconnected

cursive phonetic transcription, with a strong emphasis on writing the symbols beautifully.

Like Tilly, she insisted on Good American Speech as a speech pattern for life as much as

for art…(Hampton et al. 175)

Skinner clearly was carrying on the aspirations of those who came before her, such as DeWitt

and McLean. For Skinner, there was no room for speech variations, regionalisms, slang, or

anything of the like.

Anyone trained as an actor, director, or theatre teacher who has worked in the field for

over 20 years will recognize most, if not all, of the devices which Skinner employs in *Speak with

Distinction*. Speech trainers share a common language when it comes to their objective. In terms

of phonetics and speech action, for example, most speech trainers agree that a plosive is

produced by the obstruction of airflow in the vocal tract followed by a sudden release of that

flow. Using phonetic symbols, however, can be just as subjective as acting itself, seeing as how

different people will produce specific speech actions differently, and therefore may use varying

IPA symbols to represent that speech action. Due to this I have no reason to criticize the majority

of Skinner's phonetic choices and will not go into detail regarding her anatomical descriptions,

but I will share various charts for the purpose of comparison later. Though *Speak with

Distinction* has been revised several times with multiple editions having been published, even

after her death the book still maintains the same degree of standardization– focused on

subjectively beautiful speech. The 1990 edition of the book even opens with Skinner's own half-

page foreword from the first edition of the text. In this section, she first declares, "The speech of

the character must bring to life the character itself," and "the actor must create the illusion by

changes in sounds and melody. However, the actor must not create so much dialect that it interferes with understanding the lines being spoken." While I certainly agree with her that intelligibility is imperative in this context, it is the final statement of the foreword that sums up her true machinations for the book: "In search of the best, we look to the stage; for the theater has a responsibility too often neglected: to foster the finest sound of Spoken English" (Skinner et al. iii). In less than half a page of text, Skinner divulges her opinion on speech training, one that *appears* to be focused on developing the skills of each actor for the sake of performance, but then immediately places value judgments on how those actors speak. With words such as "best" and "finest," Skinner makes a clear delineation between her preferences and the rest of the world. Those who adhere to her methodology are of the highest *distinction*, while others are simply common. These value judgments set the tone for the rest of her text.

I'd like to make my own *distinction* to Skinner through one of her Tilly contemporaries. Daniel Jones, as previously mentioned, is often credited with the creation and standardization of RP and is widely renown for publishing such linguistic texts as *An Outline of English Phonetics* and *An English Pronouncing Dictionary*. World English and Good American Speech are often compared to RP, as both are manufactured accents that set a standard of *correct* speech. However, Jones was also known to refute this idea of standardization. In an essay published in the "Voice and Speech Review," Dudley Knight writes about Daniel Jones and his perspectives on linguistics as prescription. He pulls a quote from the latter of the above texts where in which Jones addresses RP being used as a standard:

> I wish it to be clearly understood, however, that RP means merely "widely understood pronunciation," and that I do not hold it up as a standard which everyone is recommended to adopt…. The fact that RP is easily understood almost everywhere in the English-

speaking world does not mean that it is used by a majority of English-speaking people. On the contrary, it is used by a rather small minority…I do not claim that RP is intrinsically "better" or more "beautiful" than any other form of pronunciation. I wish to state that I have no intention of becoming either a reformer of pronunciation or a judge who decides what pronunciations are "good" and what are "bad." (Jones, ix)

Knight provides arguments on both sides as to whether Jones was simply posturing or not to save face. He compares the use of linguistic tools and strategies within the field of linguistics to the application of those same tools in real life situations with real human beings, saying:

"there is a substantial cautionary message for accent specialists in the alacrity with which linguistic description can harden into prescription and proscription. Pronouncing dictionaries by nature lend themselves to this speedy transformation because they freeze accent in time while in reality the language goes marching on, ever changing." (Knight 4)

Once a pronouncing dictionary is printed and ready for distribution, it becomes an unchanging document that does not account for the dynamic nature of language. While they may be valuable documents for research purposes, they will never be considered testaments of absolute truth since speech and language are, again, constantly changing. Linguist John McWhorter describes language as a lava lamp. He says that the lava "swirls and clumps and rises and falls in its fluid in an eternal, mesmerizing flow. Although constantly changing, in no sense is the clump of lava decaying" (McWhorter 18-19). He uses this analogy as a basis to describe how languages are formed throughout time. Languages, accents, and dialects all can change, shift, combine, break apart, spread, and more in an infinite amount of possibilities.

In regards to pronouncing dictionaries, Knight does acknowledge that accent work in theatre and film requires a high level of linguistic specificity in order to effectively portray and honor both the accent being spoken and its native speakers. This all ties into an overarching argument for intelligibility in the performing arts. Though this thesis is focused on speech training in the United States, I find this bit about Jones to be a fascinating point of study, as he makes *at least* some sort of effort to separate his work from Tilly/McLean/Skinner-type standardization. It also provides a wonderful contrast to Skinner's ethos, one that directly requires students to adhere to the hard and fast rules of her classroom.

I would like to take this opportunity to mention that I am in no way writing to villainize Edith Skinner or anyone who trained with Tilly. The truth is that actor speech training would not be where it is today without many of those individuals. Of course, I say this with a sense of duality: while speech training does owe its place, in part, to Tilly and his underlings, many harmful and prejudiced pedagogical flaws can also be attributed to them. Next, I am going to examine some of the specifics found in *Speak with Distinction* that will, hopefully, provide contextual evidence towards the prior claims. To reiterate, my goal is not to demonize, but rather to attain a more thorough understanding of the past for the purpose of solving the problems that exist in speech pedagogy today.

<u>Chapter 2: A Distinct Standard</u>

Good American Speech, otherwise known as Mid-Atlantic, Trans-Atlantic, or Stage Standard, is the culmination of efforts that began with the codification of William Tilly's methods by Margaret McLean; methods that were further revised by Skinner in order to tailor Tilly's World English into a so-called American Standard. *Speak with Distinction*, then, outlines the specific method to implement this accent into an actor's speech capabilities. I refrain from using the word "repertoire," as that might imply that the accent is simply a tool. With the historical context already laid bare, it is quite clear that this *was* a tool that aimed to neutralize any less-than-favorable accent features. As this thesis is not primarily a review of *Speak with Distinction*, I will not be scrutinizing the entirety of the book. Rather I will select points in the book that support my claims of harmful pedagogy, as well as highlight information that I think is useful. I also think it important to note that my commentary directly applies to the revised version of the text, published in 1990.

Before diving in, I would like to provide an anecdote about Skinner recounted by Dudley Knight in *The Vocal Vision*. The interaction occurred between Skinner and Catherine Fitzmaurice, the latter being a London-trained voice and speech teacher. Skinner apparently remarked that Fitzmaurice's speech sounds were "perfect Good American Speech," even though Fitzmaurice was born in India and primarily resided within the United Kingdom at that point in her life. Two points arise from this story regarding Skinner: First, it seems that in this instance she was unable to recognize GAS, the very accent she taught and promoted so vigorously. Second, it proves that Skinner had a preference toward British speech patterns. Events like this may shed some clarification on Skinner's accent preferences, and provide insight into her intentions with GAS. So, let's begin dissecting the meat of Skinner's brainchild.

Speak With Distinction starts with a detailed description of how the body produces voice

and speech, striking an impressive balance between impressionistic and technical verbiage. She

does still manage to incorporate her own value judgments into these descriptions, however, as

she states that "a good voice issues from a
relaxed throat and resonates freely through the
pharynx, mouth and nasal passages, producing
an appropriate balance of resonance…it can
vary in pitch, timbre, volume, and tempo"
(Skinner 3). While the vocal traits she lists are
certainly useful for performance, it seems that
she also means to imply that voices that do not
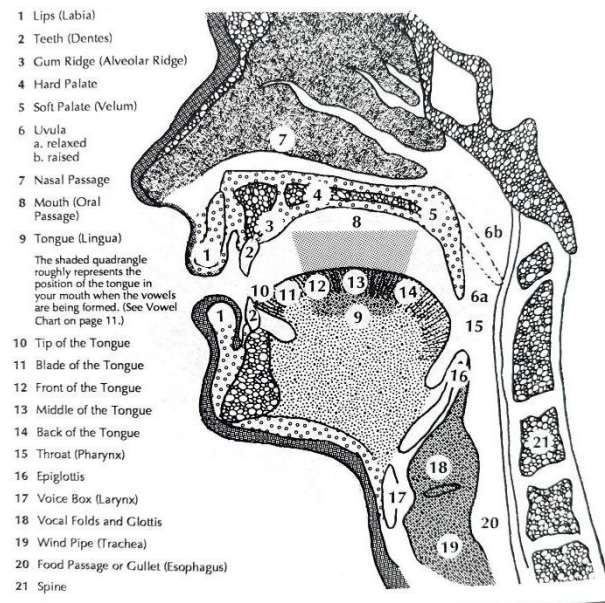achieve such criteria should be considered *bad*.

Figure 1 - "Organs of Speech - Diagram of Articulators" (Skinner 3)

Skinner also provides a comprehensive

anatomical diagram of the vocal tract with numbers that correspond to the name of the articulator

(see **Figure 1**). I have no qualms with the image itself or the naming conventions used, but I feel

compelled to bring attention to a specific quality of the image that I feel resonates throughout the

rest of the text. I previously claimed that *Speak with Distinction* is concerned with

standardization for the sake of beauty, and I think that this ideal is present even in this diagram.

Rather than making an attempt at precise anatomical accuracy, Skinner has opted for an image

that is more impressionistic in nature. The shape itself successfully indicates the human vocal

tract (albeit, one that is most likely white and male), but the patterns that indicate muscle fibers,

bone, and tissue are reminiscent of fabric. This in and of itself is not an inherently bad thing to

do, as this is, in fact, a book for artists and plenty of effective teaching methods opt for this type

of imagery. In this particular context, it does not pose an issue, and I even found it quite helpful

in pulling my focus to the different structures within the vocal tract. However, it's a trend that

bleeds into her description of speech actions that leads to the practice of placing value judgments

on particular voice/speech qualities. Skinner requires that the voice produces beautiful sounds,

and it *seems* that she wanted the images representing the voice to reflect that.

Skinner's tendency towards aesthetics extends to her application of the IPA. Here, I have

included two variations of IPA charts: The first (**Figure 2**) is a portion of the original alphabet

from 1888, and the second (**Figure 3**) is Skinner's take on the consonant chart.

Figure 2 – Partial 1888 International Phonetic Alphabet (Udomkesmalee)

Figure 3 - "The Consonant Chart"
(Skinner 16)

In comparing the two charts, many similarities remain (and continue to do so today). It is fascinating to see the progression from the original chart to Skinner's version, but there is one major difference that strikes me: Skinner's IPA appears to be handwritten in cursive script. This serves as a considerably stark contrast from the printed format of the first chart, and indicates her desire to step away from convention to match other stylistic, aesthetic-based choices. The problem is that the International Phonetic Alphabet is a tool, and that tool's purpose is to assist in communicating speech actions regardless of language. If the reader knows what speech action each symbol corresponds to and how to use various diacritic[4] symbols, then language

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[4] IPA markings that accompany a phonetic symbol, indicating an adjustment to the speech action.

theoretically should not cause an issue in communication through the tool. Of course, it takes little time to notice that the chart is heavily influenced by the Latin Alphabet, so native speakers of languages such as Japanese or Russian are already at a disadvantage. Also, I have found that many English speaking students struggle with separating the IPA symbols as representations of speech sounds from the letters of the Latin Alphabet.

Skinner's use of cursive takes this *othering* a step further, since it deviates from the original typeface for no clear reason. If a speaker of the Greek language learns the IPA as it is now, then proceeds to decipher a transcription using the Skinner method of writing phonetics, there will probably be some confusion surrounding certain symbols. For example, the symbol for an unvoiced alveolar fricative is **/s/**, and is represented this way in the original consonant chart; but in Skinner's cursive, as seen in **Figure 3**, the symbol is completely different. It is not difficult to imagine such a scenario and the confusion this format would cause. In Appendix A, she refers to the phonetic symbols as "letters," which could potentially be a problematic use of phrasing in the classroom. The fact that many of the symbols bear likeness to letters in the Latin alphabet continues to be a challenge for students learning IPA; referring to them as "letters" only further adds to the confusion. So now we have two separate problems that could potentially cause compounding confusion for non-English speaking students: the first - not unique to Skinner - is the usage of Latin symbols in a tool that is supposed to represent speech sounds in *all* languages; the second - a Skinner addition - is her usage of cursive. In my experience, making the effort to separate the IPA from the Latin alphabet provides a clearer delineation in meaning, but it also shows an attempt to not put value in already baked-in biases.

An essential component of GAS that I would like to bring attention to is the way Skinner handles rhoticity. The general consensus today is that a significant number of North American

accents and dialects are rhotic, meaning that words containing a post-vocalic[5] "r" are pronounced with that "r" sound intact. Received Pronunciation, however, is a British accent that is considered non-rhotic, meaning speakers of that accent do not pronounce that sound. It's important to use RP for comparison here, as Skinner makes it a point that rhoticity has no place in GAS, either. I find this both fascinating and revealing, especially considering Knight's anecdote regarding Skinner's admiration for and misconception of Catherine Fitzmaurice's accent. In her introduction to the IPA, she provides several transcription examples, including the triphthongs found in the word groupings *higher/hire* and *flower/flow'r/flour*.[6] She transcribes these triphthongs as /aɪə/ and /ɑʊə/ respectively - with no "r-coloring," or rhoticity. If one were to refer to Daniel Jones' *Everyman's English Pronouncing Dictionary*, they would find that he transcribes these words in a similar way. This similarity between Jones' and Skinner's work is consistent throughout her exploration of diphthongs and triphthongs associated with the post-vocalic "r." She even uses the same description of rhoticity for every single diphthong and triphthong: "The tip of your tongue is tensed up and over, the body of your tongue is retracted. The sound is tense and back." This description is always in opposition to the option without rhoticity, stating that "the tip of your tongue is relaxed behind your lower front teeth. The sound is free and forward" (Skinner 171). Her usage of words like "tensed" and "relaxed" seems to imply that this process is applicable for all speakers. However, I would argue that these suggestions on rhoticity disregard the possibility that some speakers may feel relaxed having their tongues in the opposite position. These are more examples of her tendency to put value judgements onto speech sounds, further nourishing her implicit biases.

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[5] Post-vocalic refers to a speech sound occurring immediately after a vowel.
[6] Words shown in italics are examples for IPA transcription when not part of a quote.

However, a very important difference between Jones and Skinner is the context under which each is writing. The former says that the "pronunciation represented in this book is that which I believe to be very usually heard in everyday speech in the families of Southern English people who have been educated at the public schools." Jones is referring to RP, of course, and continues by mentioning that the pronunciation he recorded in the book may also be found in the speech of people who are not from Southern England but did receive education from the same schools. He also brings up the fact that the accent may have possibly been picked up by individuals from the area who did not receive a similar education. From the start he claims that the book "is a record of *facts*, not of theories or personal preferences. No attempt is made to decide how people *ought* to pronounce; all that the dictionary aims at doing is to give a faithful record of the manner in which certain people *do* pronounce" (Jones xv). Jones seems to be fairly consistent in covering his bases in reference to pre/proscription of speech habits. Skinner's linguistic mission, however, as we know, is another ball game entirely.

It makes complete sense that Skinner's vision was for Good American Speech to be considered the best way to speak as an American: the accent is some strange bastardization of Received Pronunciation, a fabricated way of speaking meant for the most privileged of Southern British people. Of course, there are individuals who remain steadfast proponents of Skinner's dogma. When Dudley Knight published his article, *Standard Speech: The Ongoing Debate*, he received quite a bit of backlash from individuals in the voice and speech community. This is not surprising in the least, as Skinner was certainly a celebrated speech trainer, and many notable actors and speech trainers learned from her and have readily lauded her methods. Kelsey Grammer, who is known for his portrayal of Frasier Crane in both "Cheers" and "Frasier," credits the speech patterns of that character to Skinner. In a PBS interview, though, he also

recalls his experience at Juilliard and feeling intimidated by his teachers, including Skinner. He says of the experience: "we surrender our identity to them, at which point we all start talking exactly the same way" (*Kelsey Grammer, Juilliard*. 2000). In a similar interview, actor Kevin Kline talks about Skinner's eccentric personality and teaching styles. He admits that she made great efforts to "beat any regionalism out of your speech…speech training is a way of neutralizing you." He admits that people lose themselves in this type of training, but insists that it is necessary in order to do any classical acting, such as Shakespeare or Chekhov, and that accent work requires the actor to partially sacrifice the way they speak (*Kevin Kline, Juilliard*. 2000).

Many speech trainers, as well as theatre educators whose disciplines lie outside of speech, leapt to her defense when Knight's aforementioned article was published. Sanford Robbins, former Director of the Professional Theatre Training Program and Chair of the Department of Theatre at the University of Delaware, perceived Knight's article as damaging to Skinner's memory. He shared several anecdotes from when he was her student that describe her kindness as a human and refutes the idea that her methods could be racist or culturally damaging. He argued that she demanded the same standard from all of her students regardless of ethnicity, race, or gender. "She insisted that everyone, regardless of background, treat speaking with reverence and she inspired, corrected, and coached us all equally in doing so" (Robbins 58). All of these qualities that Robbins described are certainly admirable, and a plethora of individuals felt this way about Skinner's teaching. However, Knight was primarily concerned with her methodology, not her personality; he critiqued Skinner's methods based on the systems and sources they used rather than Skinner as a human being. Ralph Zito, chairman of the Voice and Speech Department of the Juilliard School Drama Division at the time, also defended Skinner, but did, in fact, dig deeper into her methodology (rather than discuss her personality).

In his article, *Who I Am, What I Teach, and Why I Teach It*, Zito articulated why he proudly considers himself a "Skinner teacher." He actively combatted Knight's characterization of Skinner teachers, refuting ideas of mindless drills, using number two pencils as weapons, and overall zealotry for her methodology. He also denied the notion of shaming students into using a "bloodless version of watered down British speech," referring to Knight's representation of GAS. Rather, he listed the following criteria for being a Skinner teacher:

> Uses *Speak With Distinction* as a primary sourcebook for practice material, teaches narrow transcription using script letters, teaches students to be able to hear and reproduce the *Intermediate A* or *Ask Sound* [a], teaches students to be familiar with the *ask-list* of words, so that they will know which words use that sound in certain dialects (both created and naturally occurring) of American, British and British-influenced English, and by extension which words receive the *Broad A* in Standard British, introduces the concept of *r-coloring* as a continuum of pronunciation possibilities, not as an aesthetic or moral imperative, does not use the term *Standard Speech* to refer to any style of American speech, either naturally occurring or invented. (Zito 80)

Zito's argument for Skinner's methodology is specifically gauged toward his own pedagogical practices, along with the various Skinner teachers he converses with. He addresses Knight's critique (specifically, how Skinner's text frequently refers to specific speech patterns and traits as *good*, implying that others are *bad*) by claiming that modern Skinner teachers[7] have absconded from such value-based language. Another major argument of Zito's is that *Speak with Distinction* is a great teaching tool, since GAS is not an accent that people use in everyday life; the patterns

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[7] Note that Zito's article was published in 2000.

presented in her book are useful tools for students to learn how to utilize the muscles of articulation in the vocal tract. Here, we find more nuance in making a case for Skinner's method. Perhaps many Skinner teachers acknowledge that although some of her practices are outdated, they are still able to find valuable nuggets of information. For example, narrow transcription is still used today in speech training methods like Knight-Thompson Speechwork to indicate more specific aspects of speech action.

Similar to Robbins and Zito, acclaimed director and acting teacher David Hammond penned an article opposing Knight's, "Another Opinion: Reflections on Skinner in the Classroom and in Rehearsal" in which he blended themes found in both of the prior defenses of Skinner. He acknowledged that he is not a speech trainer in discipline, though he has cultivated a strong reputation as an acting teacher with experience in verse and text. This experience, in addition to his close relationship to Skinner as a student, prompted him to respond to Knight's article. Hammond began by addressing a flaw in modern actor training:

> Unfortunately, the most effective way to attract attention as a teacher…seems to be to promote oneself as the possessor of a unique process and to market that process aggressively as the sacred truth that remedies all the terrible wrongs imposed by other methods. Certainly that is what Strasberg, Adler, Meisner, and Lewis did as they competed for students. This rigid sense of exclusivity and isolationism–*'that* is the *wrong* dogma, *this* is the *right* dogma'--still clings to the teaching of acting today, when the major centers of training have moved to university campuses. It continues to be a detriment to honest creative work wherever it occurs. (Hammond 132)

I agree wholeheartedly with Hammond's sentiments here regarding actor training, my opinion is that there is no such thing as *right* and *wrong* in the subjective field of acting. Rather, I think that

there is only what *works* and *does not work* for a given student. However, it appears that Hammond has mischaracterized Knight's intentions. Rather than promoting his own methods, I believe that Knight was opening a discussion on what aspects of actor speech training should be kept and refined upon and what aspects should be left in the past.

Previously, I drew comparisons between Received Pronunciation and Skinner's Good American Speech, but Hammond claimed that many criticisms of RP may be true, and that they don't apply to Skinner's work. He suggested that the benefits of teaching RP as a means of connecting to the actor's inner self are similar to the benefits found in the grounding principles of Alexander technique, which is a methodology that promotes movement in a more relaxed and natural manner.

He recalled his experience in Skinner's classroom as a means of refuting Knight's claims that she was absurdly strict. Hammond was present for this work and said that they did not do an "inordinate amount of drill work in her classes;" he also said he witnessed such work in classes that were based on non-Skinner methods. Regarding Skinner's value-based language towards speech sounds, Hammond offered his own opinion about her usage of words like "good" and "correct" in relation to speech, and what she considered to be "acceptable." He argued that Skinner's recommended speech sounds promote the release of tension.

> Her legendary battle with *r-coloring*, for example, was not so much about the actual elimination of any sound of r at the end of a syllable as it was about the reduction of the tensions caused by a tongue prematurely retracted in anticipation of the *r*, resulting in the coloring of the preceding vowel or diphthong and a restricted back placement of sound. (Hammond 136)

As with his comparison between RP and Alexander technique, he suggested that her language and relaxation techniques strive for the same objective as other voice and speech pedagogies. I assert that there is no such thing as a good or correct speech sound and that we must avoid putting a value judgment on any speech sounds that would create a hierarchy of individual traits developed over a lifetime.

There is a massive distinction to be made between. Indeed, what Hammond failed to consider when he discussed ideas of tension, release, and relaxation is the individual student. Much like Skinner, he does not consider the possibility that there may be students who do not find her preferred and prescribed speech sounds to be relaxing. Of course, creating non-rhotic sounds does often lead to a release of *muscular* tension, but framing individual preference as a standard risks diminishing a person's cultural speech history. The release of muscular tension does not equate to comfort for every person; this is why it is important to draw parallels between Skinner's Good American Speech and the class-based Received Pronunciation

Hammond also responded to the following statement from Knight: "Many of the founders of regional theatres were Carnegie graduates and most of the speech instructors in the training programs were Skinner students" (Hampton et al. 175). In my opinion, he missed the point when he said that the "implication seems to be that a network of theatres and training programs had developed that would automatically and unquestioningly promote Skinner's work," and provided examples of universities and theatre companies at the time who were not influenced by Skinner. These includeNew York University, Yale, Southern Methodist, Northwestern, A.C.T., the University of Washington, the American Academy and the Neighborhood Playhouse. Hammond claimed that only two founders of regional theatres in the 1960's were Skinner students, these being Ellis Rabb at the Association of Producing Artists and

William Ball at the American Conservatory Theater; but Knight was concerned with the effects that she had on the future of the business, not just what was happening in the 1960's. Skinner trainers were highly sought after for productions and voice and speech teaching positions.

While Knight's claim may have been hyperbolic (in fact, he only gives two examples in the footnotes), Hammond did not acknowledge at this point that the vast majority of successful actors were speaking with some form of Good American Speech. He also criticized Knight for not including positive quotes about Skinner from the many actors she taught. Included in Hammond's list are actors Boyd Gaines, Kelsey Grammer, Ving Rhames, Keith David, Robin Williams, Christopher Reeve, William Hurt, Lorraine Toussaint, Ted Danson, Kevin Kline, Patti Lupone, Randy Danson, Mandy Patinkin, Val Kilmer, Mary Lou Rosato, Kelly McGillis, Nancy Marchand, Sada Thompson, Christine Baranski, George Segal, and Frances Conroy. He claims that they serve as examples as to why Skinner's methodology was not restrictive but fails to recognize that all of these actors may not have garnered such success without assimilating their speech *in the first place*. Both Grammer and Kline's previously-mentioned PBS interviews are great examples of this. Hammond says that "Skinner trained actors found work, as all actors find work, because directors liked what they offered" (Hammond 139). Indeed, directors liked that Skinner trained actors to all sound the same, as it made their jobs easier so as to not have everyone sound like they were all from different places. Also, even if it wasn't acknowledged, the accent all actors were being asked to speak was based on the speech of white midwesterners. By creating a link between what was "white" and what was "neutral," anyone who didn't fit into that framework was automatically left out in the cold. This is important, because we still face the problem of underrepresented and misrepresented minorities in film, theatre, and television.

Therefore, it is imperative that we separate our teaching practices from a standard that promotes such biases.

Skinner used Good American Speech as the foundation for her teaching, and any truly successful accent work was meant to start from that kind of baseline. Hammond substantiates this idea with an anecdote revolving around a theatre production coached by Skinner:

> I recall a celebrated New York production of a Tennessee Williams play with a brilliantly talented leading woman who adored Edith, had worked with her frequently, and who would sit at coaching sessions bewitchingly moaning, *Oh, if only I had learned phonetics!* Edith supplied what was needed. The sounds produced were consistent with themselves and melded beautifully with the actor's extraordinary performance: you believed without question that this woman talked this way. Sitting at a preview, enchanted by the actor but knowing what my ear heard, I asked Edith, *How's her dialect? Awful*, she whispered back, *And it doesn't matter one bit*. I should add that this same quality of uniqueness was also evident in this particular actor's daily speech: her sounds were her own, and Edith helped her to transform them into the speech of another human being. The dialect was not a textbook set of *Southern* sounds, but a reshaping of the actor's own speech to incorporate a regional influence. Had this actor lived the life of the character she portrayed, she would have sounded as she did on stage (Hammond 137-138).

I think that Skinner's application of her methods here are quite reasonable, as she assessed the situation and assigned achievable targets for that specific actor. This differs from my argument regarding prescription, because the speech targets were strictly for the character rather than for the sake of changing the actor's personal speech configuration. My opinion is that if an actor

cannot fully produce the required accent, then incorporating specific speech choices without negatively impacting their connection to the character and the performance is the next best thing. However, I question Hammond's understanding of how dialects work based on the last sentence in this quote. Had the actor lived the life of her character, then she would have grown up in completely different circumstances that would affect her speech. Skinner's coaching was the *only* situation in which the actor would have sounded as she did on stage.

He concludes the article by saying: "Edith Skinner taught. She did not sell a method. She did a job. She had a powerful effect on her students, and doors subsequently opened for her to opportunities that extended her influence. Her legacy and her work still merit respect and have much to teach us. Shame on those who would begrudge her that" (Hammond 140). The issue that I take with this sentiment is that Knight *does* respect the work that Skinner has done, as well as the work of her predecessors. In the very same article to which Hammond is critiquing, Knight states that "William Tilly was a visionary and a reformer. Margaret Prendergast McLean, Alice Hermes, and-especially-Edith Skinner, were all exceptional teachers who trained many noted actors" (Hampton et al. 178). Although Knight does critique World English's prescriptive influence on Good American Speech, he clearly also conveys some form of reverence for these teachers. Knight recognized the plight of prior educators. However, he is also acknowledging that we have to continuously question our practices, else we risk failing the primary objective: being of service to our students.

Skinner cultivated a vast population of students who clearly admired and found purchase in the knowledge that she had to impart. I dedicated this chapter to exploring specific aspects of Skinner's Good American Speech, as I think it necessary to recognize those who paved the way for individuals such as myself, eager to learn and grow as voice and speech practitioners. On the

other hand, part of the process of learning and growing is acknowledging what works and what does not. Inevitably, there will always be staunch opposition to those who question the popular technique or dogma of an era, and I certainly understand the intense emotion one feels when an individual you admire greatly is brought to question, since I have experienced this on several occasions myself. Whether it be a high school or college teacher, or simply a mentor held in high regard, our biases influence our reactions to any criticism of said individual.

Chapter 3: Description, Not Prescription

The task now is to shift focus to the present and my current goals. Knight-Thompson Speechwork is the brainchild of Dudley Knight and his former graduate student Phil Thompson; an organization leading the charge against harmful, prescriptive speech training practices. Knight was well known as an outspoken and highly revered scholar in the voice and speech community, and his stance on speech training was clear. The aforementioned *Standard Speech: The Ongoing Debate* article, and his acclaimed book *Speaking with Skill: An Introduction to Knight-Thompson Speechwork* are two works that serve as testaments to his dedication to the craft. Since Knight's unfortunate passing in 2013, Thompson, and others in KTS leadership, including Andrea Caban, Julie Foh, Tyler Seiple, and Nathan Crocker (not to mention growing numbers of KTS certified teachers) have made great strides in continuing this work and evolving KTS teaching practices as time moves forward. In fact, the current practices of KTS do not strictly adhere to Knight's original process, so much so that a new book was published in 2021, nearly 10 years after *Speaking with Skill* was published.

Experiencing Speech: *A Skills-Based, Panlingual Approach to Actor Training* was written by three leading KTS trainers: Andrea Caban, Julie Foh, and Jeffrey Parker. It adapts and expands upon Knight's material and more closely aligns with the progression taught in KTS workshops and classrooms. This is significant, as the educational climate has changed tremendously since 2012. For example, in Knight's book, he provides an exercise called "the sound of stupidity." This exercise is intended to create a relaxed vocal tract sound, something akin to "uhhh." He even calls it a "nice dumb 'uhhh'" (Knight 28). While I do not imagine that Knight intended to insult anyone's intelligence, this type of language is still antithetical to my argument as to why value judgements should not be attributed to speech sounds. At present, both

students and teachers are more aware of negative language involved in their interactions, and people are therefore held more accountable for their actions, in speech or otherwise. KTS has evolved with the times as well. In regards to the example above, the exercise remains under a new moniker. It is now called a "hesitation sound," implying a state of thoughtfulness in the speaker.

As a pedagogical system, the primary KTS offerings include three week-long workshops that also serve as prerequisite training to be considered for acceptance into their teacher certification program. The first of these workshops, "Experiencing Speech," corresponds with the information found in Caban's book. It explores how our bodies produce speech sounds and establishes a basic foundation for learning the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The second workshop is simply called "Phonetics Intensive," and lives up to its name, as participants dive into narrow phonetic transcription. These first two workshops build the necessary skills for the third workshop, "Experiencing Accents" where participants learn how to analyze an accent sample and create a breakdown or "celebration" based on that sample. This pedagogy centers around the idea that students develop skills through play, which can then be applied to accent acquisition. The preface of the aforementioned text begins with what the authors call "Principles (perhaps) or Precepts (possibly)," modifying similar principles that Knight began his own text with. They invite the reader and participants in the workshops to constantly challenge the tenets of KTS, and this idea of consistent questioning of the work has proved to be a major pedagogical advancement. They appear in the text as follows:

1. Everyone has an accent. No one's speech is "neutral" or "general."
2. There is no good or bad way to speak. There is only what is good (or bad) *for* a particular context. Speech itself has no inherent qualities that could be assessed as good or bad. You may *prefer* one accent or pattern to another, and that's fine. Having preferences is human.

3. All humans have preferences. Whether conscious or not, preferences can become prejudices against or in favor of a group of people if separated from our sense of fairness. At this point they become biases. Perhaps we can't ever fully free ourselves from our biases, but being aware of our biases is essential so as not to inadvertently weaponize them.

4. The only baseline "standard" our role as storytellers requires is being understood (unless obfuscation is the goal). But intelligibility is a moving mark based on your target audience. It is not one truth held by one person or persons (including the authors of this speech text!). Intelligibility is about communication, and communication is both giving and receiving. It is a relationship between speaker and listener. Whatever skills we deploy in our speech must be guided by the changing needs for communication within that relationship.

5. Speech training is an essential and deeply integrated layer of actor training, and as such it is part of a complex and subtle developmental process. As with all parts actor training, the development of skills is not arrived at mechanically or by rote, but by cultivation and play, and by an incremental deepening of experience.

6. A skills-based approach to speech training invites the actor to explore all skills, not merely those that have been marked as socially preferred. Limiting the opportunity to play with the full range of possible speech sounds is impoverishing to the imagination. This work trains actors in the practice of expanding expressive territory through speech.

7. Even though this text is originally being written in English, the work within begins with an exploration of the fundamentals of human language. It represents a universal approach which can be applied to any spoken language. We hope to see this work taken up across languages and cultures, translated, and continually reimagined as a panlingual approach. (Caban, et al. XIII-XIV)

It is plain to see that the authors and teachers of this work are separating themselves from

the problematic approaches of the past through these loose principles, laying groundwork to

stand upon early on in the process. They acknowledge the humanity of an educational

environment, that being the acknowledgement of preferences, biases, etc. This first step

establishes trust between teacher and student by acknowledging that exploration of speech is an

exploration of identity, which can be emotionally provocative or even exhausting. Therefore,

these principles act as a safety net for both teacher and student, so long as both parties agree to

abide by them. This chapter will examine the pedagogical process KTS employs in their primary

workshop offerings, revealing how this methodology follows the previously laid out principles

and proving that the approach is more effective and appropriate for today's acting students. Following this examination, I will provide an example of how I would coach a piece of text using the methods taught in the following workshops.

Before moving on, however, I must address a bias of my own for the sake of credibility. As previously mentioned, I am, at the time of writing, an intern with Knight-Thompson Speechwork, or KTS, an organization dedicated to actor speech training in a non-prescriptive fashion, with methodology originally conceived by the late Dudley Knight. As someone training to be a KTS certified teacher, I have invested a lot of time and energy in this particular method and am, therefore, biased in favor of its approach. I am acknowledging this fact, as this chapter will involve dissecting KTS Pedagogy in a similar manner as the prior, establishing what I think works well and what, possibly, could be improved upon.

Experiencing Speech

"Experiencing Speech," the first of the three major workshops in the KTS progression, seeks to strip away preconceived notions the student may have about speech. It is, quite literally, meant to bring the participant to a place where language does not yet exist and to promote a exploratory and playful environment to, as the same suggests, *experience* speech actions. In this context, to experience speech actions means to gain "flexibility of articulation combined with muscularity of action," so as to learn how to perceive how and where the sound changes in the vocal tract and the rest of the body (Hampton et al. 181). Acting students lack instruction on how to isolate individual speech sounds, and KTS makes the point that this skill is necessary to incorporate specific pronunciation patterns.

The workshop begins with an introduction of all participants and teachers, including outlining each participant's goals for the workshop. A brief summary of the history of speech training is offered, akin to the information found in the second chapter of this thesis. Once the history lesson ends, however, the play begins. I say play, but there is a strong element of rigor, as the development of essential skills does in fact take hard work and focus. Participants are invited to put on a "veil of ignorance" so as to not let preconceived notions about language influence the playful experience. When introducing a new concept, this workshop's pedagogical format guides participants through the experience first, followed by the provision of corresponding information. The following anatomy exploration is one example of this, as participants are encouraged to roleplay as "alien anthropologists" tasked with examining a human vocal tract and locating parts such as the larynx and jaw while continuing to work under the pre-established veil of ignorance. As an aside, the instructors make sure to use encouraging phrasing, a common theme in KTS pedagogy that I appreciate: participants are *invited* to engage with the work and given agency to experience it at their own pace. The prerogative is to create an environment free of judgment and expectation, which ultimately encourages effective learning more so than enforced participation.

The initial round of exercises explores the flow of breath and the sounds that result from that flow, while also experiencing the vocal tract anatomy without placing any names that may prove familiar to the participant. For example, it is common to liken the voice to a musical instrument, but KTS takes this even further by breaking down the components of an instrument: a power source, oscillator, and modifier. Participants are then invited to locate those components within their own anatomy using the flow of breath. Only after physically experiencing specific

anatomical components and discussing the experience, are names (such as vocal folds or vocal tract) brought into the conversation. The same process is applied to the articulators:

> Nearly every sound in every language is created by activating selected muscle groups to achieve a specific acoustic effect. Rather than lifting a dumbbell, you're lifting, advancing, curling, arching, cupping, protruding, raising, and lowering parts of the vocal tract to shape sound…for an actor to experience and replicate *every* sound in *every* language, you'll need to develop muscular awareness and agility *beyond* your current patterns. (Caban et al. 18-19)

This is where the rigorous work begins. Again, the task is simply to experience what it feels like to move specific parts of the vocal tract *before* naming them. Participants isolate the tongue, jaw, lips, and more through a process called gurning. Gurning is, as the book calls it, "the very serious art of making funny faces" (Caban et al. 19). The best part is that this description is totally accurate, as it involves moving parts of the face in exaggerated fashion, but with the clear intention of isolating specific muscles. Participants share their gurns with each other and attempt to replicate a partner's gurn. Just as before, experience is followed by information. For example, when isolating the tongue, the instructors will guide participants to place their knuckle into the soft place under their chin while sticking the tongue in and out of the mouth so that the student can feel the actions of tongue root retraction and advancement respectively. Another example involves participants rounding their lips to create a trumpet-like shape and then bringing them back together. The articulator actions of lip rounding and lip pursing are explored, and instructors talk about the inner and outer rings of the lip muscles (or *orbicularis oris*).

The gurning process continues by layering in a voiced flow of air that builds towards creating language from the ground up. A potential critique of this process is that it is much slower than teaching models involving mimicry. It is, however, more effective in helping participants truly understand what is happening in the mouth while creating specific sounds. Vocalization is added into gurning, and participants explore the resulting sounds. This is called phthonging, and it is a major step towards the creation of language. A phthong is another term for a vowel sound, and there are three versions of phthongs that are typically used in this work. Monophthongs are vowel sounds that only require the speaker to move to one position in the mouth. Diphthongs and Triphthongs require the speaker to use two and three positions for their sounds respectively. Phthonging is then further expanded with obstruction, which involves the lips, teeth, tongue and/or glottis[8] blocking the flow of air (voiced or unvoiced) at some point in the vocal tract. These speech sounds are called obstruents.

The learning environment becomes a fun space to play, as all kinds of sounds are invited. This includes any number of sound effects–whistles, hissing, gurgling, lasers, and more. Instructors then encourage the participants to imagine that the sounds they are making are somehow the creation of a language from a fictional world often called Outlandia, and the language is often called Outlandish! Eventually, Outlandish is narrowed down to the more specific Omnish, which tasks participants with making intentional phthong and obstruent combinations. The transition from Outlandish to Omnish is a gradual one; participants are given time to explore their sounds while being reminded of possible combinations of obstruents and phthongs. Not only is this an engaging experience for participants, but it also doubles down on the notion that the primary goal of speech training should be the development of speech-centered

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[8] Defined as the vocal folds and the opening between them.

communication skills. The experience of and discussion around creating language in this context allows participants to break away from inhibitions and preconceived speech boundaries and simply explore the copious realms of possibilities allotted within their own instruments. This way, when an actor well versed in these skills approaches a new accent, they are able to comprehend and appreciate the specific speech actions and patterns at a higher degree. If an accent is a person's identity, then it is necessary for an actor to commit to this level of work to paint a clearer image of their character's identity.

Descriptive explorations continue, but the focus shifts to phonetics. KTS pedagogy is, as previously addressed, concerned with the speech of all languages, not just English. The IPA is first introduced to the workshop as an empty chart, which can be seen here in **Figure 4**.

THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET (revised to 2005)

CONSONANTS (PULMONIC)   © 2005 IPA

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Post alveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive											
Nasal											
Trill											
Tap or Flap											
Fricative											
Lateral fricative											
Approximant											
Lateral approximant											

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

CONSONANTS (NON-PULMONIC)   VOWELS

Clicks	Voiced implosives	Ejectives
Bilabial	Bilabial	Examples:
Dental	Dental/alveolar	Bilabial
(Post)alveolar	Palatal	Dental/alveolar
Palatoalveolar	Velar	Velar
Alveolar lateral	Uvular	Alveolar fricative
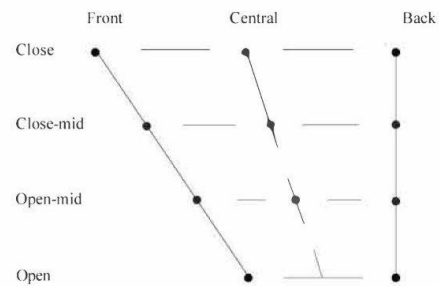
OTHER SYMBOLS

Voiceless labial-velar fricative

Voiced labial-velar approximant

Voiced labial-palatal approximant

Voiceless epiglottal fricative

Voiced epiglottal fricative

Epiglottal plosive

Alveolo-palatal fricatives

Voiced alveolar lateral flap

Simultaneous   and

Affricates and double articulations can be represented by two symbols joined by a tie bar if necessary.

VOWELS

Front   Central   Back

Close

Close-mid

Open-mid

Open

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

Figure 4 - Empty IPA Chart

KTS instructors guide participants through an exploration of the location and manners of articulation for each obstruent, or consonant, sound, then applying a symbol to each block to represent those sounds. The same process is conducted for the rest of the chart–non-pulmonic consonants, vowels, and other symbols. Now, participants have a common language for addressing their speech actions; combined with Omnish, it becomes a clinical practice for developing the necessary articulation skills to produce desired speech actions. The final portion of the workshop is spent working through more speech exercises with the newly attained skills and information as a contextual framework, and instructors address questions from participants.

When working with theatre students, the teaching of phonetics has proven to be difficult, as it is probably the most analytical and intricate portion of their training. As the IPA was developed primarily as a linguistic tool rather than an acting tool, this makes sense. Actors tend to be concerned with the more impressionistic aspects of the craft, such as exploring techniques that will effectively convey a character's emotional state to an audience. However, when crafting an accent, the IPA has been proven to be most effective once the user becomes fluent.

In most speech classes for actors, the IPA is usually limited to the symbols most commonly found in English, and this is done for good reason. My experience as a teacher's assistant in voice and speech classrooms is proof enough that very few students have the analytical bandwidth to absorb and retain such a high level of phonetic information. Caban, Foh, and Parker state that "it is important to get specific about how we refer to speech actions in language, and so we turn to phonetic symbols as *one tool* for that purpose. But we will use only some of our time together exploring the actual symbols that represent the speech actions we play with. Phonetic symbols will become much more significant when we take on the more complex goal of acting in accent" (Caban et al. xxi). This is important to remember, as KTS workshops

are designed to teach teachers and speech enthusiasts rather than the average undergraduate

theatre student. That being said, I think what sets KTS's approach apart from other methods

is….that KTS's approach of providing detailed description to precede the phonetic information

from simply providing symbols and the corresponding sounds. It is also stressed in the workshop

that the information provided is not a "one size fits all" for every classroom. I think it is the

prerogative of each individual speech instructor to take the skills and tools from these workshops

and tailor the experience to the level of engagement that each class or coaching session brings.

Phonetics Intensive

As its title suggests, the second workshop in the KTS progression is dedicated to deep

exploration of the IPA and transcription.[9] It is also the shortest of the three offerings, only lasting

three days. On the first day, some of the basic concepts from Experiencing Speech are revisited

in more detail. These may include, but are not limited to, IPA consonant and vowel chart

explorations, diacritics, and more phthonging with a focus on the shape of the tongue. Helpful

tools are introduced to the mix, such as the lexical sets[10] codified by phonetician J.C. Wells. In

Figure 5, I have included a breakdown of the lexical sets categorized for both RP and General

American (GenAm), that KTS provides in the workshop. The first day also includes a game of

"IPA bingo", where a sound is produced by one of the instructors and participants are tasked

with matching the symbol to that sound. It is a good way to include some light-hearted fun

within the synapse burning phonetic work.

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[9] Referring to the act of writing or typing IPA symbols to represent speech actions.

[10] These are used to describe the vowel sounds that are *generally* used in specific groups of words within a specific accent. This is a useful tool for collecting an inventory of these sounds, though they are not used to say that sounds are *right* or *wrong* for any given accent.

keyword	RP	GenAm	other examples
1. KIT	ɪ̞	ɪ	ship, sick, bridge, milk, myth, busy, women..
2. DRESS	ɛ	ɛ	step, neck, edge, shelf, friend, ready..
3. TRAP	æ̝	æ	tap, back, badge, scalp, hand, cancel..
4. LOT	ɒ	ɑ	stop, sock, dodge, romp, possible, quality..
5. STRUT	ɐ̞	ʌ̈	cup, suck, budge, pulse, trunk, blood…
6. FOOT	ʊ	ʊ̞̈	put, bush, full, good, look, wolf..
7. BATH	ɑː	æ	staff, brass, dance, ask, sample, calf..
8. CLOTH	ɒ̝	ɔ̞	cough, broth, cross, long, Boston..
9. NURSE	ɜː	ɚ	hurt, lurk, urge, burst, jerk, term..
10. FLEECE	iː	i	creep, speak, leave, feel, key, people…
11. FACE	eɪ̞	eɪ̞	tape, cake, raid, veil, steak, day..
12. PALM/FATHER	ɑː	ɑː	psalm, father, bra, spa, lager..
13. THOUGHT	ɔ̝ː	ɔ̞	taught, sauce, hawk, jaw, broad, caught..
14. GOAT	əʊ̞	ɤ̈ʊ̞	soap, joke, home, know, so, roll…
15. GOOSE	uː	u	loop, shoot, tomb, mute, huge, view..
16. PRICE	aɪ̞	aɪ̞	ripe, write, arrive, high, try, buy…
17. CHOICE	ɔɪ̞	ɔɪ̞	adroit, noise, join, toy, royal…
18. MOUTH	aʊ̞	aʊ̞	out, house, loud, count, crowd, cow…
19. NEAR	ɪə̞	ɪə̞˞	beer, sincere, beard, fear, serum…
20. SQUARE	ɛə̞	ɛə̞˞	care, fair, pear, where, scarce, vary…
21. START	ɑː	ɑə̞˞	far, sharp, bark, carve, farm, heart…
22. NORTH	ɔ̝ː	ɔə̞˞	for, war, short, scorch, born, warm…
23. FORCE	ɔ̝ː	ɔə̞˞	four, wore, sport, porch, borne, story…
24. CURE	ʊə̞ ~ ɔ̝ː	ɔə̞˞	poor, tourist, pure, plural, jury…
25. happY	ɪ̞	i̠	city, party, money, century, coffee, taxi, calorie…
26. lettER	ə	ɚ	mother, brother, daughter, scissors, another, quitter…
27. commA	ə	ə	sof*a*, Afric*a*, Alask*a*, *a*bout, *a*nother, tel*e*phone…

Figure 5 - Lexical Sets

The delineation of broad transcription and narrow transcription is offered on day one:

Broad transcription provides an interpretation of the basic phonemic breakdown of a sound

sample, meaning that the transcriber only utilizes symbols that indicate units of sound, making it

a low barrier for entry to phonetics work; narrow transcription has the transcriber utilizing all the

tools provided by the IPA to produce the most specific interpretation of the sound sample,

involving the use of diacritics, suprasegmentals[11], and more to communicate the exact speech actions that are happening. Broad transcription is typically used when the transcriber is either at the beginning stages of working with phonetics or simply requires quick phonetic communication. Narrow transcription is used for linguistic specificity. Offering both broad and narrow transcription makes the IPA a more accessible tool, and allows the transcriber to use it as they please. Participants get to try their hand in applying their knowledge to phonetic transcription, as they are assigned homework for day two: transcribing a sound sample using both of the aforementioned methods.

Day two, then, leaves behind the experiential exercises in favor of examining transcription. Typically, participants share their transcriptions anonymously in a Google Doc, and the day is solely spent going through each transcription. This is a slow process, as KTS instructors take time to analyze and give thorough feedback while also valuing each participants' transcription work by not applying right/wrong values to each submission. They acknowledge that everyone's ear is different and experiencing speech sounds varies from person to person. This is another major departure from pedagogical methods like Good American Speech where students are required to make specific phonetic choices and any deviation is considered incorrect. Participants are free to remain anonymous during the feedback, but also may chime in to further communicate with the instructors. For day three, participants are assigned more transcription homework, but they must only use narrow transcription. The extIPA[12] is another tool offered for

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[11] IPA Symbols that denote stress, intonation, length, syllabification, and tone of a speech action.

[12] Extensions to the IPA for Disordered Speech–devised by the International Clinical Phonetics and Linguistics Association for use in transcribing speech disorders and impairments.

this transcription, and participants are encouraged to challenge themselves by using some of the symbols found on that chart as well.

Day three is conducted in nearly the same fashion as day two: each narrow transcription is thoroughly analyzed, but participants are encouraged to drop their anonymity so that they can discuss their work with the instructors. The sound sample for day three is usually longer and considered more challenging, so the discussions tend to take more time. Once they have concluded, however, a Q&A session begins. While questions vary based on individual curiosities, the instructors try to facilitate discussions first on phonetic transcription, and then on the rest of the KTS progression. They make a point to connect the skills learned in Experiencing Speech and the Phonetics Intensive to the requirements of the third and final workshop: Experiencing Accents, as both articulatory agility/awareness and knowledge of transcription are necessary for breaking down an accent sample.

Experiencing Accents

The final workshop in the KTS progression is geared towards using the skills acquired in Experiencing Speech and the Phonetics Intensive to create an accent breakdown, or "celebration," as it is framed within the work. The word "celebration" is a further continuation of integrating low stakes fun into the learning process, even though the work is rigorous. Prior to the workshop, participants are instructed to collect a sample of an accent that they are interested in working in, and with which they will create their celebration. The accent sample that participants bring to the workshop include extemporaneous speech, along with the recitation of two passages. These passages are chosen specifically with the lexical sets in mind, so that participants have an easier time listening and identifying sound characteristics. The KTS website describes this workshop as follows:

This takes the KTS methodology from its focus on increasing awareness through a *descriptive* approach, to looking at a specified set of accent features as a *prescriptive* target. What keeps this shift to the prescriptive from becoming limiting for performers is our focus on skill building. Grounding the work in physical experience and rigorous description of speech actions prepares us to feel, hear, analyze, and execute the features of an accent. (ktspeechwork.org)

Up until this point, I have mentioned the idea of prescriptive speech as a negative thing, but this workshop highlights when it can be positive. Prescription is necessary when there is a specific sound or speech action one wants to achieve; but there is always a reminder in the pedagogy to fall back on descriptive speech processes, as everyone's vocal instrument is different which may result in various means to achieve the same target. KTS pedagogy uses a system for analyzing and breaking down accents called the "Four P's," in which each P represents an essential component toward accent work: People, Posture, Prosody, and Pronunciation.

Many participants elect to begin their celebrations with the People section, since it provides the cultural context of the accent, including relevant information regarding geography, language, social class, and cultural traditions. If the focus is on a singular individual's accent, otherwise known as an idiolect, then research would dive even deeper and address factors such as information on family, home, and school environments as well as the way their accent is perceived by peers. Cultural context is imperative to both the cultivation and performance of an accent celebration. Proper research shows respect to native speakers and demonstrates that the researcher is actively avoiding generalization and stereotyping. In performance, it allows an actor

to embody and convey a sense of authenticity in their accent work, which serves the overall truthfulness of the character.

Posture, or oral posture, refers to the shape of the human vocal tract. This is where the skills built in Experiencing Speech come into play. The ability to isolate and examine the articulatory muscles in the vocal tract is crucial to shift one's oral posture to fit the needs of a target accent. Oral posture is not a static shape, but honing in on the placement and usage of articulators (such as the lips, tongue, and jaw) of any given accent is crucial for the performance of that accent. Dialect coach and KTS Master Teacher Erik Singer speaks to accent performances that hit specific sounds in a target accent, yet do not sound quite right. "That's what happens when you cut and paste individual sounds and just layer them on top of your own oral posture…When you've really clicked into the oral posture for an accent, a lot of the individual specific sounds simply fall into place on their own" (Singer, 1:36). One technique that KTS has developed to study the posture of an accent is called "The Fifteen Listens." This technique is quite literal in its naming, as the accent researcher is tasked with listening to an accent sample 15 times, taking note of different articulatory characteristics each time. With each listen, the listener attempts to replicate the shape and sound coming from the sample using one articulatory feature at a time. This process is, aptly, called "listening with the mouth." In working this way, the listener compiles a detailed list of features that make up the speaker's oral posture.

Prosody is the term used to describe the musicality of an accent. Much like oral posture, every accent has particular characteristics of rhythm, pitch, and dynamics, and the actor must use these fully in order to successfully perform the accent. This does not mean, however, that successful accent performance is restricted to the musically inclined. Knowledge of music theory is not necessary, but it is important to develop listening skills that can identify pitch variation and

stress patterns that can be incorporated into accent performance. In Experiencing Accents, workshop participants practice listening to an accent sample and collect an inventory of prosodic patterns. Using tools like AmPitch[13] and descriptive, impressionistic language, participants can give specific shapes to their collected patterns. For example, in my celebration of a Virginia Beach accent, one of the prosodic patterns would steadily rise in pitch while also spiking in pitch and falling back down for emphasis. This pattern brought to mind images of a runner having to jump hurdles while running up a hill. As a teaching tool, this provides more options for the accent learner. Not all learners latch on to impressionistic ideas like equating a speaker's pattern of pitch variation to jumping hurdles on a hill; and in turn, there are certainly learners who need this type of imagery to supplement sound samples and corresponding diagrams. Approaching prosody in this way makes the concept more accessible to a larger group of students.

The final "P" in this list is Pronunciation. This one is interesting, as it is usually the aspect of accent work that actors want to address first and will spend the most time on. In KTS pedagogy, however, pronunciation is addressed last. Posture and prosody are prioritized to have an actor hone in on the accent, but pronunciation is certainly not left out. The KTS website states that "actors need to develop a physical and perceptual sense of precisely how a speech sound is rendered in an accent, but it is equally important to know under which conditions that sound is deployed" (ktspeechwork.com). Using the phonetic and phonological skills built in Experiencing Speech and the Phonetics Intensive, participants create an inventory of sounds characteristic to their accent donor. Wells' lexical sets (**Figure 5**) are used as a tool to establish which phthongs (vowels) occur in an accent.

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[13] An online amplitude & pitch tracking tool through speechandhearing.net

Once the exploration of the Four P's has concluded, participants work independently craft their accent celebrations, and the workshop culminates in the presentation of these celebrations, and instructor feedback. As Experiencing Accents is geared toward the *teaching* of accents and accent acquisition, the feedback is often focused on how the participant's information is organized and conveyed to the group. From my personal experience, there is a conscious effort to make this feedback as objective, constructive, and collaborative as possible.

Applying the Work to Production

Having examined the KTS process, I will provide an example of how I might use this process to coach an actor for accent work within a short piece of text. The text I will be using is a speech of Amanda's, from Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. Though the play is set in Depression-era St. Louis, Missouri, I will be working under the hypothetical context that the director of the production has requested that Amanda speak with a non-rhotic, aristocratic Southern American accent, based on the play's description of the character. As is the case when working under hypothetical conditions, certain variables will remain unknown and thus cannot be addressed. These variables include information that is gathered in the rehearsal room regarding the actors, director, music director, and other collaborators.

The excerpt is as follows:

> AMANDA. You know, Laura, I had the funniest experience in church last Sunday. The church was crowded except for one pew way down front and in that was just one little woman. I smiled very sweetly at her and said, "Excuse me, would you mind if I shared this pew?" "I certainly would," she said, "this space is rented." Do you know that is the first time that I ever knew that the Lord rented space. These Northern Episcopalians! I

can understand the Southern Episcopalians, but these Northern ones, no. Honey, don't

push your food with your fingers. If you have to push your food with something, the

thing to use is a crust of bread. You must chew your food. Animals have secretions in

their stomachs which enable them to digest their food without mastication, but human

beings must chew their food before they swallow it down, and chew, chew. Oh, eat

leisurely. Eat leisurely. A well-cooked meal has many delicate flavors that have to be

held in the mouth for appreciation, not just gulped down. Oh, chew, chew–chew!

(Williams 12)

In preparation for rehearsal, I thoroughly research the target accent using the

aforementioned 4 P's (*People, Posture, Prosody, and Pronunciation*) and create an accent

breakdown based on that research. The breakdown is broken into sections in accordance with the

4 P's, and I usually begin with *People*. For the purposes of this hypothetical, I would provide a

brief summary describing pertinent cultural and geographical information about Blue Mountain,

Mississippi, as that is where Amanda recalls growing up. So as not to impede the actor's research

or any dramaturgical responsibilities, I try to keep this section brief, but informative. For

example, I would include that Blue Mountain had a population of 544 people in 1940 (US

Census Bureau), four years prior to the premier of *The Glass Menagerie*.

The next portion of the breakdown is *Posture*. For this accent, my research[14] reveals that

older speakers from Mississippi speak with retracted lip corners and a lifted jaw, and the shape

of the mouth may feel like a slight smile. In private sessions with the actor, I would assist the

actor in finding these postural targets and have them breathe through the posture on both voiced

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[14] Samples found on YouTube: "Air Crash Near Blue Mountain, Mississippi"

and unvoiced flow. Then I would have them work through the text solely focused on maintaining

the established oral posture. After posture, I address *Prosody* in my breakdown, describing the

musicality of the accent and providing 3-5 prosodic patterns from sound samples with

corresponding images from a pitch tracking tool like AmPitch. For example, older speakers from

Mississippi tend to have a bouncing quality in their pitch variation and stress pattern, so I would

have the actor mimic the musicality of the recording either by humming or repeating what the

speaker is saying in the sample followed by applying that pattern to a line, such as "You must

chew your food." This may not be the exact prosodic pattern they use with performance, but like

Posture, it is a helpful tool to hone into the accent. I have included an image that supports this

bouncing quality in **Figure 6**.

**Figure 6 - Blue Mountain, Mississippi "Bouncing" Prosodic
Pattern**

Lastly, I will focus on *Pronunciation*. The breakdown will include pronunciation patterns

that I find the most salient for the accent. If the actor has experience with the IPA, then we may

explore diacritics and other markers to identify more specific sound locations. If not, then I will

rely on physical descriptors to assist the actor in hitting the target speech action. I will model the sounds using example words and sentences, having the actor repeat, and keeping an eye on their oral posture and prosody. Depending on the needs of the production, I will typically sit in on rehearsals about a week after initially teaching the pronunciation patterns in a group session to observe how the actors are faring with the information. I will then use one-on-one coaching sessions that ideally last at least 30 minutes to an hour, working through each line and identifying where the salient sounds need to occur. In rehearsals with the entire cast, I try to ensure that they are using their articulatory muscles to hit the target sound by gently layering in postural and prosodic reminders, so as not to disrupt the flow of the rehearsal process. I have found that harping on detailed pronunciations can produce adverse effects, causing the actor to drop their posture/prosody, as well as their acting choices. Similarly, I have found that my constant presence in the room can be somewhat intimidating for actors, so I will step away from rehearsals to give them breathing room and pop back in when needed and/or to fulfill contractual obligations. Regardless, when I am in the rehearsal space, I try to present myself as a supporting presence rather than a critical one. KTS pedagogues are taught to encourage their students and recognize their successes while providing kind but objective feedback for when the actor struggles

      Here, I will provide a few salient pronunciation patterns that I could potentially teach for this accent with broad IPA and practice sentences:

- **PRICE [aɪ]** migrates toward **[a]**
    - The *Wright* brothers had a *wild flight*!
- **GOOSE [u]** immediately follows a central onset → **[ᵊu]**

- ○ *You* need to *choose* a place to eat *soon*.

- **[ŋ]** becomes **[n]**

  - ○ I was *thinkin'* about *chillin'* in the *swimmin'* pool.

In these examples, description precedes prescription, but the latter is still necessary. Actors need to have targets to aim for in regards to accent features, otherwise they will be directionless. Giving clear descriptions of how to achieve the prescribed speech actions from the actor's natural speech configuration removes any potential to place speech configurations above or below one another.

In the coaching process, I use KTS methodology as I find it quite effective in communicating and implementing the necessary parts of accent work for actors. The aforementioned hypothetical coaching situation is just one example of how this process may turn out, as every production has different needs and the tedious, skillful approach may have to be modified to suit those needs. I have had conversations with experienced coaches who have been called in to "fix" an actor's accent very close to the opening of the show. In this context, one does not have time to trudge through dense phonetic descriptions, but can potentially prioritize posture and prosody as a quick adjustment that the actor can hone in on.

In this chapter, I have discussed how detailed, descriptive, and rigorous KTS pedagogy is. Some may say that it is all of these to a fault, but the process itself is malleable and allows coaches to insert their own styles. It is not a dogma to be strictly adhered to, but rather a framework that prioritizes skill and description. KTS is made up of teachers who learned from older models of speech training and decided that there must be a better way to train actors in speech and accents for performance while also honoring the cultures and sound configurations of

others. Employing a descriptive and exploratory model of speech training allows the actor to become familiar with their own vocal tract and work to develop an understanding of their articulatory musculature. Doing so gives agency to the student and/or actor, as the work becomes more about exercising their skills rather than mimicking their teacher's sounds. KTS takes a panlingual approach, as these skills are not language based, but vocal tract based. KTS continues to pave the way for speech trainers with new and innovative pedagogical methods, and I look forward to how the landscape of this pedagogy changes with time. In my fourth and final chapter, I will broaden my scope of speech practices to areas outside of performance exploring how aspects of KTS may be applicable.

Chapter 4: Application of KTS Pedagogy Outside of a Theatrical Context

In this thesis, I have addressed aspects of speech pedagogy from a theatrical perspective, specifically at the collegiate level. However, speech biases exist in many professional disciplines. These biases arise out of preferences toward gender identity, race and culture, language, and socioeconomic background and can lead to discriminatory practices if left unchecked. In the broadest sense, discrimination based on speech has been a problem in Western society for a very long time. When preferences towards speech patterns or accents are realized into value judgments and placed on others, a hierarchy is put in place that gives favor to some over others. The privileged few who "speak the same language" enjoy special treatment while those who fall outside the majority are often viewed as second class. This chapter will focus on three topics involving speech-based discrimination: accent modification/reduction, code-switching, and speech disabilities in the workplace. As a speech teacher and accent coach, I am concerned with teaching in a way that respects and honors all types of speech configurations and the people and cultures from which those speech configurations arise. While I do not and would not claim that a single speech training methodology can serve as a magic cure for such systemic social issues, I will explore how to practically apply Knight-Thompson Speechwork's pedagogical methods so as to work against such discriminatory practices.

Accent Modification/Reduction

A subsection of speech training is the practice of accent modification (AM). Also referred to as accent reduction (AR), this practice is often poised as a method to increase intelligibility in a person's speech by teaching standardized pronunciation patterns that are recognized by the general public. In an article published in the *Journal of International Students*, researchers at the

University of Jyvaskyla, Finland conducted a study of 26 different university websites that offer AM/AR courses, interrogating the marketing tactics used, and arguing that these courses present an ideological problem that draws on "the students' ethnic or geographical origins, and thereby racializing the question of language proficiency" (Ennser-Kananen et al.).

Their findings present common themes that indicate ideologies that run counter to the current understanding of linguistics. Excerpts from university websites that provide course descriptions often use language suggesting that modifying one's accent consists of a series of isolated steps or building blocks that join together in a particular order. The classes described teach a standardized version of English, such as General American, disregarding the dynamic nature of language, much like the lava lamp imagery that McWhorter provides. The study raises the issue of pathologization of accent in AM/AR courses:

> The pathologization of accent thus goes hand in hand with the need for a professionally trained expert (speech-language pathologist) who can remedy the course participants' deviation from what is described as Standard American English pronunciation. In connection to this elevation of a professional expert, some promises the websites make struck us as noteworthy--for example, the ones stated on the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association website that is behind a link on the website of College E, which invites participants who seek to "... modify their speech pronunciation, sentence intonation, learn the subtleties and implied meanings in English, improve comprehension of English and cultural pragmatics" (Ennser-Kananen et. al.).

Interestingly, the first goal for that list of objectives is pronunciation; while non-native English speakers take these classes to improve their intelligibility in order to communicate more

effectively with their coworkers, clients, and various peers, I believe that learning an entirely

new pronunciation pattern is not necessary to do so. Accents are not problems that need fixing,

and there are ways in which a speaker can improve intelligibility while retaining their accent and

vocal identity.. In her article, *Empowering International Speakers: An Approach to Clear and*

Dynamic Communication in English, Rebekah Maggor presents strategies for this exact purpose.

Utilizing methods from KTS that focus on articulatory musculature, prosody, vocal control, and

audience connection followed by the adjustment of pronunciations that actually impede

intelligibility. She encourages speaking clearly *with* an accent. In reference to a recording of

Anatoly Smeliansky, head of the Moscow Art Theatre, she states that audiences easily

understand his "thick Russian accent" because "his pacing is slow, his articulation muscular, and

his pitch variation dynamic" (Maggor 178). She makes it clear that taking away a speaker's

accent takes away from their character and individuality, and that unique accent features can

actually be advantageous in drawing an audience's attention–so long as they are intelligible.

AM/AR courses are tailored toward business executives, lawyers, doctors, and other

professionals who desire greater intelligibility in their speech. This is why I think these types of

courses would benefit from adopting Maggor's strategies, as her article serves the same purpose.

This is not to say that these courses should shift their focus to accent performance like KTS, but

rather to supply their students with the necessary tools to utilize their vocal tract and articulatory

musculature to fit their own needs. Doing so rather than attempting to apply a standard form of

speaking allows the speaker to engage with their own instrument and build their anatomical

awareness. Maggor discusses the importance of this type of engagement, stating that clients

struggling to *hear* how a sound changes actually need assistance with *feeling* that change:

For example, if a Chinese speaker does not hear the difference between *sung* [sʌŋ] and sun [sʌn], hearing someone repeatedly model the word with the correct pronunciation is more irritating than helpful. When he discovers how to move the tip of his tongue to the alveolar ridge, rather than lifting the middle of the tongue to the soft palate, he can *feel* the difference and alter his pronunciation. Once he can physically distinguish between the speech actions, he can typically hear the difference as well. (Maggor 180)

This gives autonomy back to the individual speaker, allowing them to choose the degree to which they adjust their speech and under what circumstances they make those adjustments. Of course, this means that the speaker must agree to participate in the necessary exercises to attain these skills.

Maggor recognizes that the intended clientele are not actors, so she approaches the teaching of these exercises in a different way than in an acting class. She establishes buy-in for the work by providing an in-depth explanation of why the exercises are important, thus building trust. Exercises are led confidently and seriously, and all must either participate or leave the room. Aside from articulation exercises, Maggor incorporates breathing and voice exercises from the works of acclaimed voice teachers Catherine Fitzmaurice and Patsy Rodenburg. These exercises assist with the pacing of speech, teaching the speaker to pause between sentences and breathe in during the pause rather than holding their breath. They strengthen breath support and promote muscle relaxation for the speaker (Maggor 180).

The work that Maggor discusses in her article encourages the speaker to establish long-term habits that assist with their intelligibility without eliminating the unique features of their accent; they also assist with audience engagement skills. Her clients discover these habits by

presenting two short talks: once in English and once in their native language. These talks
juxtapose each other, revealing the speaker's natural charisma in their pitch variation and
rhythm. After identifying these prosodic elements, Maggor works with the client on applying
them to how they speak English.

These strategies that Maggor has crafted take elements of actor speech training from KTS
and adapt them for professional non-native English speakers seeking higher levels of
intelligibility. She guides her clients in feeling and experiencing the necessary articulatory
muscles and prosodic qualities required for intelligible speech. Doing so reduces the need to
focus on pronunciation shifts, which allows the speaker to keep their rich accent features and
retain their vocal identity.

Code-Switching

Marginalized groups of people have long resorted to the adjustment of their speech not
for the task of communicating with their colleagues, but rather to have a chance at getting a job
or to avoid being stigmatized. This is called code-switching, which is by definition the practice
of alternating between two or more languages or varieties of language in conversation. The
definition implies that there are multitudes of situations in which code-switching can be
implemented. When used as a tool for bilingual people to swap between languages for efficient
communication, the benefits are clear. However, I am interested in looking at code-switching
from an accent discrimination perspective.

A study published in the Harvard Business Review examined the results of a survey sent
out to 300 college-educated black employees in the United States. The survey consisted of
questions that participants would answer on what they called a "code-switching at work" scale.

The results revealed four situations that influence the degree in which the participants engage in code-switching:

> We found that black employees with high career aspirations for leadership and promotion opportunities actively avoided conforming to black stereotypes to a higher degree than those with low career aspirations… Black employees who perceived that they "fit" in their organization also reported downplaying their race and promoting shared interests with dominant-group members…High levels of vigilant behaviors — that is, always preparing for potential discrimination and mistreatment — were also positively associated with all three dimensions of code-switching at work…racial composition of the workplace, as well as whether respondents perceived that their organization had an environment that promoted diversity, influenced the extent to which black employees code-switched. While we know that black employees code-switch when they aren't well represented in companies, we also uncovered evidence that they downplay their racial identity and promote shared interests with others even when they are equally represented. (Durkee et. al)

All four of these situations point directly to the ways in which prejudice and racism are interwoven into our society. For black workers and other minority groups in the United States, there is often pressure to suppress their individuality and cultural influences in order to succeed, and code-switching has become a survival instinct for many. Much like the ideology behind AM/AR classes, minority groups have been conditioned to view their authentic modes of speech as a barrier to success, which is a major problem that only continues to feed the dominant culture.

Though I have mentioned this multiple times throughout this thesis, I believe it continues to bear repeating: everyone has an accent. This means that all accents and all speech configurations are equally valid. The systemic issue of code-switching in the workplace as a survival instinct clearly indicates that minority workers in the United States do not view their personal speech configurations as valid in their respective companies, occupations, etc. The aforementioned study includes some suggestions on how companies and their respective people in power can work toward creating a more inclusive environment. Incorporating inclusive behaviors as a daily practice is one of the primary suggestions. "Organizations need to create inclusive environments for employees to feel comfortable bringing their authentic selves to work." They mention that collecting information on employees who belong to underrepresented groups is a part of this process (Durkee et. al.). When people who hold positions of power demonstrate that they are willing to put in the effort to learn about their employees in a genuine and respectful manner, it is a show of good faith that they want to invite every voice to the conversation, regardless of ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

As this is a systemic issue, behavioral changes must coincide with policy changes. Establishing processes and guidelines that hold employees and employers accountable for their actions is crucial to maintaining an inclusive environment where diverse voices feel welcome, valued, and able to express their authentic selves. KTS makes a point to establish a space that is collaborative and full of diverse voices, but this cannot and will not function as a solution to the problem. However, when enacting policy changes that are driven towards diversity, equity, and inclusion, having a sort of framework to work within can be quite helpful. In chapter three, I presented the set of principles that KTS pedagogy is based in. The third principle addresses how preferences become biases and the importance of becoming aware of our biases. Implicit

(unconscious) bias training is a newly investigated area of research and development within professional workplaces that combats this problem. Research conducted by the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) provides strategies that address bias at the both the individual and institutional levels.

This research suggests that individual employees/employers can take action in a variety of ways. The first is becoming self-aware of one's own biases. One can do so using tools such as the Implicit Association Test.[15] Understanding that biases arise from categorization, or preferences, and that this is a normal part of human cognition is the next step. This is followed by sharing and discussing biases in a safe and collaborative space; this step is most effective when discussions involve various socially different groups of people, ensuring that a wide variety of voices and perspectives are brought to the table. Lastly, the individual can engage in facilitated discussions and training sessions that promote bias literacy ("Unconscious Bias Training"). Using these strategies can empower individuals to face their biases, which in turn reduces the risk of discriminatory behavior.

Institutions must also be held responsible for creating programs that incorporate implicit bias training and literacy into their work spaces. The research provided by UCSF explains that all institutions should do the following:

> Develop concrete, objective indicators & outcomes for hiring, evaluation, and promotion to reduce standard stereotypes…Develop standardized criteria to assess the impact of individual contributions in performance evaluations…Develop and utilize structured

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[15] Online program that measures the strength of one's associations between concepts and evaluations or stereotypes.

interviews and develop objective evaluation criteria for hiring…Provide unconscious bias

training workshops for all constituents. ("Unconscious Bias Training")

In terms of creating positive change, an institution promoting and incorporating practices such as

these will cover much more ground than any single individual ever could. However, it is

necessary for both institutional and individual strategies to work in collaboration for the most

effective and widespread changes to take effect.

Code-switching, in this particular context, is a practice born out of speech and language

discrimination, making it a tool for survival. However, it takes away the potential for more

diverse discourse occurring in professional settings; therefore, these strategies are actionable

ways to reduce the necessity for it. Furthermore, KTS methodology teaches speech with a heavy

focus on identifying one's biases, giving individuals a strong foundation for implicit bias

training.

Speech Disabilities

Lastly, I would like to switch gears and address another pathological problem in the

realm of speech discrimination in the workplace. Speech disability is often a point of

discrimination for many in the United States. There seems to be a discrepancy between the way

that speech disability is handled in the workplace as opposed to other physical disabilities.

Particularly, people with speech impediments such as stuttering experience a great deal of

workplace discrimination. Various studies corroborate this claim, and also reveal many cases

where people who stutter make less money annually than those without speech impediments. In

2018, a study was published in the Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research that

pulled data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health. "Of the 13,564

respondents who completed 4 waves of surveys over 14 years and answered questions about

stuttering, 261 people indicated that they stutter." The results found that the deficit in earnings

for people who stutter exceeded $7,000 in comparison to their counterparts who do not stutter.

Another interesting finding was that characteristic differences (education, occupation, etc.)

accounted for most of the earnings gap for male employees, but relatively little for female

employees. They also found that females who stutter were 23% more likely to be underemployed

than females who do not stutter (Gerlach et. al.). This type of discrimination derives from the

idea that those who stutter are perceived to be less competent, less confident, and have less

cognitive ability and value as an employee. However, the truth is that this is both discrimination

and misidentification, as people who stutter of course have just as much capacity to be confident

and have valuable assets as an employee as their non-stuttering colleagues, according to board

member and special projects chair at the National Stuttering Association, Carl Coffey

(Gonzales). What's more is that the previously mentioned study shows that this type of

discrimination is clearly compounded with the gender wage cap.

I think in these situations, the same rules apply. All voices in the room must be included

and valued. Those in positions of power must take action to check their own biases to ensure that

personal preferences and perceptions are not influencing decisions that affect their employees.

While KTS work primarily deals in accent study, the broader KTS community includes

professionals who work in areas such as speech pathology and linguistics and invite those voices

and corresponding perspectives to the conversation. This overall enhances the discoveries that

are made throughout the process, and can provide deeper insights into areas such as speech

disability that performance disciplined individuals may otherwise be lacking. That being said,

this issue of discrimination based on speech disability is another systemic one and can, once

again, only be solved by systemic changes. Like with the previous discussion of code-switching, it is imperative to create policies within companies and organizations that hold employers and employees accountable for their actions and behaviors.

<u>Conclusion</u>

In this thesis, I have examined the history of speech pedagogy for actors and how these pedagogies prescribed standard modes of speaking English on stage and in film. William Tilly's manufactured accent intended for the global elite, World English, would find purchase in the United States. Margaret Prendergast McLean and Edith Skinner would then codify it for performance, and any successful actor of the early-mid 20th Century would learn the Mid-Atlantic accent. It was composed of sounds that Tilly, McLean, Skinner, and others like them found *preferable*. As this sound configuration contains a combination of features from midwestern white American accents and British Received Pronunciation, this type of speech training mirrored societal standards of the time by squashing any trace of diversity in the performing arts.

Likewise, this thesis provides insight into modern pedagogical practices that work against the conformity and standardization of the past. Knight-Thompson Speechwork supports the advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion by providing a skills-based approach to speech training. KTS values all voices and refrains from attributing qualities of good, bad, right, or wrong to speech action. This pedagogical method allows the speaker to take ownership of their instrument and understand the complex musculature of the voice. Though it is a slower process, it proves to become a valuable resource for actors wanting to excel in accent work or hone their intelligibility.

KTS is universal in that it can be beneficial for all voices and can even be utilized to supplement equitable and inclusive practices outside of the performing arts. Accent modification/reduction classes teach standardized pronunciation patterns to non-native English speakers who seek greater intelligibility, consequentially erasing their unique accent features.

Minority groups are pressed to code-switch, making speech choices that sound akin to their white peers in order to succeed in their professions or simply stay afloat. People with speech disorders are paid less than their abled coworkers, as their disabilities are written off as inabilities to communicate. Of course, KTS is not a catch-all solution to these problems, but I believe that the principles under which KTS operates are certainly applicable. All people deserve equitable treatment, regardless of how they naturally speak.

The work that this thesis has explored is part of a new field which is consistently developing in new and exciting ways. In chapter one, I discussed the fact that pronouncing dictionaries will always fall behind due to the dynamic nature of language. In the same way, any speech methodology that becomes codified through writing will also suffer that fate. This is why it is imperative for teachers, especially speech trainers, to constantly interrogate our own practices. I think that Knight-Thompson Speechwork is a fantastic pedagogical system, but I recognize that it cannot solve all the world's speech problems. At this time, I cannot say for certain how effective KTS pedagogy is outside of specific classroom and production scenarios. I have had some experience using it for undergraduate theatre productions and BFA voice and speech classes, but it remains to be seen how I might incorporate this slow paced and detailed work into something like a BA theatre program without a performance concentration. The same can be said for students who minor in theatre; I am simply not sure how this work may fit into their progression. However, as I move into a professional career of theatre pedagogy, I look forward to experimenting with this work, dissecting it, and combining it with other methods and practices.

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