

Why Do We Talk Like That?
Exploring Accents and Dialects

John O'Connell

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“The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain”...

Or, as we all know dear Eliza was transformed in her speech to say:

“The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain.”

This transformation of Eliza in ‘My Fair Lady’ implies a great deal about the origins of speech and dialect as they imply her social class, her education and her place in the stratosphere of the English classes.

My paper assignment, my question: “Why Do We Talk Like That? Exploring Accents and Dialects” could be answered in our assumptions of the many cultural, educational and social realities that lie at the heart of this simple plot that draws dear Eliza and Professor Higgins together. However, while simple plot realities work well for a 1960’s musical comedy, they don’t work well for a Quest paper seeking a modicum of academic review (application).

I must say, I felt a bit privileged when I received this topic as my first Quest paper. After all, I was trained MANY YEARS ago as an actor and dialect training was one aspect of that education, more on that later. I immediately began to shape an outline in my head of the direction of my Quest paper with a topic that I must say, felt fairly straightforward. Then, the work began....and as I know many of you long-time Questers here can attest to, the outline in my head began to blur, sway and slowly dissolve into a mash of puzzle pieces seemingly cut to fit many puzzles, but not the one I was assigned to complete. Add to that comments from Quest nominator, Susie Meyer like: “Wow great topic,

you're an actor, should be good", or from my colleague Melinda Haines, wife of fellow Quester Bruce Haines, 'oh don't worry, they just want you to be fun and entertaining". Ah THAT old pressure, fun and entertaining! I guess to be FUN I could read the remainder of the paper with a strong Standard British accent, making all my words, short and clipped, and all very sing-songy and rather sassy, or to be entertaining I could meander through the American south and draw "them sounds out", like I am from Alabama and I never met a vowel I didn't like. But lucky for ya'll, I shan't do any of that because I am not proficient in dialects and hardly passed that dialect class back in 1981.

Silliness aside, I have divided my paper into three distinct areas; I will discuss BREIFLY the definition of the word dialect and how it stands apart from the ideas of language, then look specifically at the origins of American speech patterns with a look at 6 distinct American dialect regions and consider a couple of the distinctive elements of each region and lastly, a brief exploration of how film and stage actors approach learning dialects for a given script or play. Be ready for audience participation!

Dialect. What is a dialect? Well linguists say a dialect is: "When a group of speakers of a particular language differs noticeably in its speech from one group to another, we say that these groups are speaking different dialects. In English, the term dialect sometimes carries negative connotations associated with nonstandard varieties. Linguistically speaking, however, a dialect is any variety of a language spoken by a group of people that is characterized by systematic differences from other varieties of the same language in terms of structural or lexical features. In this sense, every person speaks a dialect of their

native language. The term dialect is also misused by laypeople to refer strictly to differences in pronunciation or sometimes to refer to slang usage. This misuse is easy to understand, because differences in pronunciation, or vocabulary, are usually accompanied by variations in other areas of their grammar and thus correspond to dialectal differences. However, the appropriate term for systematic phonological variation is accent. Here again it must be noted that every person speaks with an accent. This point may be easier to appreciate if you think about accents on a larger scale, such as an "American accent" or an "English accent." Every speaker of English speaks with an accent of some sort but their dialect is specific to regional and social constraints to be discussed in this paper. (Ohio, 409)

"Every speaker speaks a dialect (or more than one dialect) of his/her native language, and no two speakers of a language or dialect speak in exactly the same way. Further, an individual speaker speaks differently in different contexts. In English, speakers distinguish between different speech styles. Speech styles may be thought of as systematic variations in speech based on factors such as topic, setting, and addressee. Speech styles can be very different - playful, stilted, strictly formal, etc. Some speech styles are described in terms of degrees of formality. Thus, a speech style may be described as "formal" or "informal," "casual" or "careful." (Ohio, 411) Most of us don't "plan" a speech style, we just adopt one according to many factors in our environment at that given moment. We automatically shift from one speech style to another without effort and this is known as style shifting. (Ohio, 411) For example, I bet the style of speech that occurred at these tables during lunch today differs from the style in any

number of interactions you had at home, at the gas station or at your office prior to your arrival at lunch.

“Contrary to the common view that every language consists of one "correct" dialect from which all other "inferior" or "substandard" dialects depart, all dialects are linguistically equivalent. This misconception has arisen from social stereotypes and biases. It is very important to realize that a person's use of any particular dialect is not a reflection of his or her intelligence or judgment. Linguistically speaking, no one dialect or language is better, more correct, more systematic, or more logical than any other.” (Ohio, 412)

“The notion of standard dialect is very often a complex one and in many ways an idealization. Descriptively speaking, the standard dialect is very often the variety used by political leaders, the media, and speakers from higher socioeconomic classes. It is also generally the variety taught in schools and to non-native speakers in language classes. Every language has at least one standard dialect, which serves as the primary means of communication across dialects. Other dialects can be called nonstandard dialects but should not be considered inferior”. (Ohio, 412) Linguists call this standard dialect the prestige dialect. Or, the dialect recognized by most as the standard dialect of a given region. However, the prestige of any speech variety is wholly dependent upon the prestige of the speakers who use it. In the United States, the prestige group usually corresponds to those in society who enjoy positions of power, wealth, and education. It is the speech of this group, therefore, that becomes the standard, but there is nothing about the variety itself that makes it more prestigious than any other variety.” (Ohio, 413)

Part II: American Speech Patterns or American Dialects

“The standard dialect in the United States is called Standard American English (SAE). As with any standard dialect, SAE is not a well-defined variety but rather an idealization, which even now defies definition because agreement on what exactly constitutes this variety is lacking. SAE is not a single, unitary, homogeneous dialect but instead comprises a number of varieties. When we speak of SAE, we usually have in mind features of grammar rather than pronunciation. These varieties of SAE, however, are still considered standard by those who speak them and even those who hear them.” (Ohio, 414)

Before I head into specific discussion of dialects, I must say that most of our common knowledge about dialects was pioneered by sociolinguist Dr. William Labov from the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Labov is considered the founder of the discipline and study of sociolinguistics. Surprising to me, Wm. Labov believes dialects today are as segregated and individual as ever and are not influenced to change by mass media and/or the cross cultural integration and movement of speakers from one dialect region to another. Even though Americans are more transient, and more fluid from one region of the country to another for professional and personal reasons as never before, the dialect regions of America remain steadfast, and some would say as pure in their distinctions as ever. You will hear me pepper my paper with information from Wm Labov throughout my presentation. (YouTube)

So, why do differing dialects exist? Two factors are recognized by linguists and they are called regional dialect variation and social dialect variation. (Ohio, 420) Regional dialect variation is somewhat self-explanatory; “regional boundaries often coincide with natural barriers such as rivers, mountains, or swamps. For example, very distinctive varieties of English have developed and have been preserved on Tangier Island off the coast of Virginia and along the Sea Islands of South Carolina, owing in part to the geographic isolation of these areas. Further, the distinctive dialect known as Appalachian English can be attributed at least in part to the isolation imposed by the Appalachian mountain range.” (Ohio, 421) Social dialect variation refers to social class, age, gender and ethnicity. I will address these more closely after I discuss the origins of the American Dialects.

Origins of American dialects:

“The development of U.S. regional dialects began, in part, in England, as speakers from various regions of England journeyed across the Atlantic and settled the Eastern seaboard of the United States. These early settlement patterns are reflected in [regional] dialectal boundaries still present today. Settlers from the eastern regions of central and southern England settled in eastern New England and the Virginia Tidewater area. Settlers [to the] New Jersey and Delaware areas came from northern and western parts of England, and Scots-Irish from Ulster settled in parts of western New England, New York, and Appalachia. The westward migration reflected the settlement patterns of the Atlantic states to a large extent. People from western New England and upstate New York fanned out while moving west, settling chiefly in the Great Lakes area. Those who came from the Middle Atlantic region (primarily Pennsylvania and Maryland) journeyed straight

west to Ohio, West Virginia, and the Mississippi Valley. Likewise, influence from the southern Atlantic colonies was felt as speakers from this area moved west and settled in the Gulf States. These lines cannot be clearly drawn, however, because the streams of migration often mingled. The spread of migration continued to the Rocky Mountain States, essentially following previously established patterns but with greater mingling. And finally, the westward migration reached the west coast, resulting in even greater crossing of dialect lines.” (Ohio, 422)

At your table you will find a map showing the approximate location of what linguists call the ‘supra-regional’ dialect areas of the United States. These consist of five large regional identifications and one small, very specific, Appalachia dialect.” (Ohio, 424) Of note here is that Wm. Labov recognizes 15-16 separate American dialects that are sub-dialects of these ‘supra-regional’ dialects. (YouTube) Thankfully for ya’ll, I won’t be covering 16, I will cover the six seen on your map, and they are: New England, The North, The Midland, The South, The West and Appalachia. “It is important to note that the described patterns of speech [on this map] reflect, for the most part, those of Euro-Americans because of their historical prominence as the majority speech group in the United States.” (Ohio, 424)

I will now detail one or two dialect elements of all six areas as defined on the map provided. Before doing that however I just have to remind you of the term phonetic, this term is used for the ‘sound of speech’, speech is a series of phonetic sounds, ah, a, e, oo,

d, t, k, etc. Later I will talk about the phonetic alphabet when I discuss methods of altering dialects and accents.

Please refer to your map.

The North:

This region stretches from western Massachusetts to the Dakotas and dips down to southern Iowa.

Some salient phonetic features include the shifting of the (a) sound in bag and bat more closely resemble [beg] and [bet]. My personal struggle, being from central Minnesota is the work BAGEL, and people say it sounds like I say Beg, not Bagel.

Other Northern features that deal with the syntax or formation of sentences and phrases as they relate to dialect, include for example;

In the North we might say: **The table needs cleaning**

Other dialects might say: **The table needs to be cleaned**

Or, the syntax use of the word 'by'

North: some northern dialects say **I was by Sarah's house yesterday**

Other dialects: **I was at Sarah's house yesterday**

I can't talk about the North dialect region without addressing the Dakotas, Minnesota and Wisconsin [o] sound. A very loooong [o]. This region of the United States has strong dialect influence from settlers from Scandinavian, Norway and Germany. You've all heard it in the movie Fargo, "**oh yeah, don't cha know, I saw that movie Fargo' and everybody says they talk funny, but not to me., Noooo, that's how we all talk, ain't it, we're from Minnesota and North Dakota.**" (Ohio, 424)

This Northern dialect, sans some of the [o] variation I just demonstrated, is sometimes referred to by layman as a 'Midwestern' dialect and is considered the Standard American Dialect. Note that most of your media news personal, national news anchors, seek to speak with a Standard American Dialect or traits of a Northern Dialect.

Lastly, a lexicon trait of the north can be found in the generic term for a sweetened carbonated beverage which is called "pop". (Ohio, 424)

New England:

The New England dialect area is defined as the area including western New York (except New York City, which is a distinct speech island), eastern Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Maine. New England and Northern dialect share many dialect traits leading to a high degree of dialect overlap. One strong characteristic of New England is the [ah] vowel caught. We say caught, thought, hawk, they say **caaaught, thaaaught, and haaaawk**, so much so that the words cot, (COT) and caught, (CAUGHT) become homophones, or pronounced the same, so cot, and caught, sound alike. Further, we would all recognize the dropping of a [r] sound in New England. Resulting in "**pak ya ca, not park your car.**"

For anyone who watches the Ray Donovan show which takes place in Boston, you will hear very strong New England/Boston dialect which is very nasal and short [ah] sound in Boston and Donovan place high and forward in the nasal cavity.

Here, the generic term for a sweetened carbonated beverage is "soda" rather than "pop". (Ohio, 425)

The South:

The southern dialect covers the second largest swath on your map from the Carolinas, westward to Texas, excluding Florida as it is like New York City, a “distinct speech island”. Now having spent 12 years in the south I can tell you the southern accent of Alabama differs slightly from Arkansas and Arkansas from Texas and Texas from Mississippi and on and on, hence the Wm. Labov identification of 15 American Dialects. (Ohio, 425) One thing they all have in common is the love of the VOWEL and lack of use of hard consonants. You probably have heard it referred to as the southern drawl, but in fact it is a phonetic vowel change turning single vowels sounds into dual sounds or what we call diphthongs, two sounds together. So, the single vowel sound [o] becomes [ao] “o” to “ah-o”. Example:

“Oh, I like tha TV show, my momma watches it, I don’t know how long, but she likes it!”.

So the [o] is longer and there is a lack of hard final position consonant articulation. Now listen for the absence of hard final consonants: **My truc is dead, and I called my daddy, but he said their ain’t nuth’n I ken do to fix it.** A lack of landing on or articulating final position ‘Ds’, ‘Ts’ and even ‘Ns’ is common in this dialect. Please don’t think for one minute I wish to imply the social or economic status of the speaker in that last example, I don’t, because highly educated and very smart people in Alabama use terms, like ain’t, and nut’n, and my favorite that I still use today whenever it fits...the word “ya’ll”., **Ya’ll listened ta me?**

According to Wm. Labov the Southern dialect region is shrinking because the larger cities, like Atlanta, are being infiltrated due to commerce and industry by people of other dialect regions. Labov credits the misinterpretation of southern dialect as less than as a result of the Civil War. The distain for the confederacy warped into a distain for the dialect as well. In fact, prior to the Civil War the southern dialect was the Gentleman's speech. Think of Mark Twain and the southern gentlemen of literature and commerce. Interesting that this fallacy of the southern dialect implying a lack of intelligence certainly hasn't hurt recent past presidents, Clinton, Bush and Carter...all with noticeable southern accents were still elected. (YouTube)

Here, the generic term for a sweetened carbonated beverage is "coke". Believe me when I moved from New York City to Tuscaloosa Alabama 1995, and the first waitress said us, 'ya'll want some coke'? I was very confused. They use the term coke for every soft drink, and then you define the flavor as dark or light coke. (Ohio, 426)

Appalachia:

This is the smallest geographical area on your dialect map as it really is strictly speaking, the Appalachian Mountain Range. Keeping in mind what I said earlier regarding linguists' two variations on dialect; regional and social, the Appalachian dialect would be the quintessential example of regional constraints of a dialect area. The boundaries of the Appalachian Mountains have contained the specific elements of this dialect to that region since the area was settled. I say settled because the makeup of the settlers of the Appalachian Mountain region are the singular reason for why this small area of the

United States remains a dialect anomaly. The Mountain range was settled by Scots-Irishman, British, Pennsylvania Dutch and French Huguenots.

One distinct sound is the changing of the i to e sound as is **fish is feesh**. Another of the more salient features of Appalachian dialect is the changing of the primary syllabic stress points in words. For example: **Cigar' becomes Ce'gar, November becomes No'vember and Insurance becomes In'surance**. A couple of syntactic elements set Appalachian dialect apart from other southern dialect: First is use of the 'a' as a prefix, found in "**He come a-running**"...or... "**That dog was a-cryin and a-hollerin' when he saw that deer**". The second syntactic element of note is the irregular, or lack of past tense suffix of e..d. We might say "**he climbed that tree**", where they would say '**he clumb that tree**. Or, **het instead of heated and ruk instead of raked**. Here, the generic term for a sweetened carbonated beverage is "dope". Which I've never heard before. (Ohio, 426)

The Midland:

Looking at the map provided you will see that "The Midland" dialect is a long narrow swath of land stretching from Pittsburgh in the East to the western edge of parts of Kansas and Oklahoma, but excluding a large pocket of land surrounding St. Louis which is considered part of the North Dialect. (Ohio, 427)

As dialects go, and among those that study speech, The Midland dialect has 'nothing special' about it that strongly distinguishes it from the other main dialects of the United States. However, the argument for defining it as a separate dialect is so singular in use

that dialectologists continue to recognize it as a main speech pattern. One such distinction is known as the /l/ - vocalization, where the l sound in the terminal position of a single syllable word is transformed to a /w/ sound. As found in the pronunciation of the word “**Belt**” and “**Hill**” become “**bewt**” and “**hiw**”, I am transforming the l sound to w, while very subtle, apparently very common and indicative of this region.(Ohio, 427)

The West:

Probably the largest section of the country with a defined dialect region is The West, looking at your map we see that it stretches “from roughly the western sections of Kansas and Nebraska to the western coast of the United States.” (Ohio, 427)

“Unlike the other regional dialects, Western speech among Anglo-Americans is less distinctive; there are fewer features that can be specifically discussed as occurring primarily in the West. The reason is that the West was the last dialect area to be extensively settled in the United States, and by the time settlers colonized the area, dialect patterns had become fairly solidified in other areas. Consequently, Western speech can perhaps be best considered to be a hybrid of the other regional dialects of English.”

(Ohio, 428) In fact, I am not really going to spend anytime delineating sounds for you in this section on The West dialect. BECAUSE, I would rather spend the time on the single morphosyntactic pattern from The West that has so invaded all other dialects that it drives me to near academic hysteria in most conversations with anyone younger than 25 years old...and that is the complete global infestation of the mis-use, in my mind of the word ‘like’. As an academic it makes my hair stand on end but I see no end in sight to my

distress. You all know of what I speak...you've heard your children and grandchildren use the word "like" or the phrase "I'm like" as an interjection in sentences.

Examples; **"I'm like, I told him not to call her, and he was all, like, I know but I had too." And then I was like, okay then go ahead, like call her!"** That example had 4 interjections of the word "like" that were completely unnecessary to the subject matter of the sentence. I have no answers for conquering this infestation of "like". In the West, the most widely used generic term for a carbonated beverage is "soda", making the West akin to Eastern New England." (Ohio, 428)

My discussion of the six main dialects of American speech have surrounded the regional elements that contribute to variation in language and dialect. But regional and geographical factors are only half of the language story. What about the social factors, or as I mentioned in my introduction, the social dialect variation. "These additional factors are attributes such as socioeconomic class, age, gender, and ethnicity. These are speaker characteristics that are associated with the social groups to which speakers belong, and they reflect what are known as social dialects of a language." (Ohio, 429)

"Socioeconomic status affects language varieties for a number of reasons. To a certain extent, people often want to be associated with a particular socioeconomic group (e.g., to express solidarity with those of the same group or to show distance from those of a different group), and language is one way to achieve that. Furthermore, socioeconomic status may be associated with particular levels or types of education, and this subsequently affects language use. Remember we discussed the notion of 'prestige' and

the role it plays in deciding which dialect is considered standard: the dialects spoken by people of higher prestige – generally those of higher socioeconomic status – are considered the standard.” (Ohio, 429) This is where we get into trouble with regard to any discussion of dialect. We need to define the discussion as dialectal, not dialect vs. language, lexicon, slang or colloquialisms. Our socioeconomic status, and in turn usually our educational status, affects how we use language and speech separate from ‘what we sound like’. Our dialect is separate, for the most part, from the word choices at our disposal that we use to communicate our ideas and converse with our community.

“Another way in which language varieties differ has to do with age: younger speakers may not speak the same way as older speakers. Many times, older speakers will comment on the "degradation" of language, or the "desecration" of language, by the younger generation. From a linguistic point of view, however, these age differences are not "good" or "bad"; they are simply changes that occur naturally, just like any other differences between language varieties.” (Ohio, 430) Every generation influences language as a way to set themselves apart from their adult community. Language, not dialect, allows for this community identification as a marker of their age and generation.

“In addition to region, socioeconomic class, and age, another factor that influences language variation is gender. Gender here is not a dichotomous category, divided into males versus females, but rather cultural patterns of masculinity and femininity. While there certainly are differences in language varieties that are based on biological sexual differences between males and females, these are not the types of differences we mean

when we talk about language and gender.” (Ohio, 430-1) “The linking of cultural norms for behavior-including linguistic behavior-with gender is usually arbitrary. This is evidenced by the fact that stereotypes involving language use (e.g., talkativeness, loudness, and silence) are, in different cultures, associated with different genders. One pattern that has repeatedly been found, at least in studies of western cultures, is that women tend to use more prestige (standard) variants than men, and listeners even expect female speech to be more like that of the middle class and male speech to be more like that of the working class.” (Ohio, 431) A number of different hypotheses have been proposed to explain why the correlation between females and standard language should exist. These explanations are again tied not to anything inherent about being male or female, but rather to the social roles that women and men play.” (Ohio, 431) I don’t know about your youth, but in my over-crowded, Irish-Catholic house, my mother corrected our speech while my father swore at us...there were 8 of us!

“Finally, ethnicity influences language variation in multi-ethnic communities. Part of the reason for this is that ethnic groups are often associated with particular languages that represent the group's heritage and culture; pronunciations, words, and constructions from such a language may influence how the group speaks the standard language variety of the country or region they live in. No individual speaker of an ethnic variety, or any variety, speaks the same way all the time. Rather, we all vary our speech depending on style and context.

Part III – Altering Our Dialect

So, how does Meryl Streep do it? As I mentioned in my introduction, I was an acting student back in 1981 and one of our required courses was Stage Dialects. I have brought along a ‘show and tell’, my dialect textbook. [SHOW BOOK] I must say I was not, and remain, not particularly good at dialects, at least not the complex ones. I remember Dr. Delmar J. Hansen, one of those venerable, feared, dapper acting teachers sitting in the back of a dark rehearsal hall, cigarette in one hand, coffee cup in the other, yelling “Mr. O’Connell why do all of your dialects have the same strange lift at the end of every sentence”. I replied, Dr. Hansen, I grew up in central Minnesota, an area settled by Norwegians, Scandinavians and Germans, filled with Larsons, Johnsons and Hansons and we talked with a strange long O, and a strange lift at the end of our sentence.

Dr. Hansen on the other hand had perfect elocution. In fact, he grew up in NE United States where between 1900 and 1950, grammar schools taught elocution and speech classes as part of the regular curriculum. What they taught is referred to as the Transatlantic or Mid-Atlantic dialect. You’ve all heard it; it was that strange half British, half American dialect we heard from Cary Grant and Katherine Hepburn and most of the film stars of the black and white films 1940s and 50s. Film star wannabees were sent to elocution class by Studio Heads in order to learn the ‘sound’, the ‘speech’ of a real star. Why did Humphrey Bogart stand out so much? Because he was one of the first stars to move away from this prescribed speech pattern as his stardom grew. (YouTube)

The three main qualities of a Transatlantic dialect of that film era are:

Dropped 'r' at end of word: **Winner, Clear,**

Softer 'a': **Dance instead of Dance**

Clipped and over pronounced 't', water and writer, not with d as we say wader.

"Oh, give her a glass of water because she a true winneru at the dance"

Our friend, Dr. Wm. Labov says it fell out of popularity after WWII because fewer teachers were teaching the Mid-Atlantic dialect as the 'correct' way to speak. (YouTube)

How do acting students, or the film stars of the 1940s, change their dialect? The primary method used by most until the in 1990s was transcription of sounds using the

International Phonetic Alphabet or IPA. Your handout has all the characters of the

International Phonetic Alphabet from Jerry Blunt's book, my show and tell book. IPA is a system for transcribing the precise sounds of human speech into writing. (Wikipedia)

Students of dialect learn IPA, usually by memory, at least in 1981 we did, and transcript the dialogue of a play from English characters to full IPA characters. We are substituting sounds from the desired dialect into the position of the sound, in the dialogue, where we want to make the sound change.

Characteristics of dialect shifting include:

Sound substituting: changing one sound to another:

British: **half to half** – most common shift in British dialect

Sound dropping: dropping a sound from your dialect:

British: dropping the terminal r – **winner to winna**

Sound altering: taking one sound and instead of substituting, you alter it using the original sound:

Southern O: singular O into a diphthong ah-o (two sounds)

“Do you know him”

Thus, the main three avenues for applying the Phonetic Alphabet to dialect change are sound substituting, sound dropping and sound altering.

In the late 1980s a new method for dialect training was introduced by David Stern. Professor Stern believed that a more effective method for dialect change was in the study of sound placement in our resonating, or sound producing, cavities. Meaning, where and how the sounds are created in our mouth, throat and nasal cavities is a better way to alter the sounds we produce. While the ensuing battle of ideas was not intense or vitriolic, two schools of thought did emerge in the halls of acting academies for approximately 15 years.

Today, dialect teachers and dialect coaches believe the best method of altering our own dialect is a strong combination of both theories. Both placement of the sound in your resonating cavities and the application and understanding of the International Phonetic Alphabet are essential tools in altering one’s own speech. So, if I am coaching a cast of actors to alter their dialect I would always begin with the Phonetic Alphabet and then fine tune the sound with coaching about the placement of the sound in a particular part of a given resonating cavity. For Example, if I am going to coach an actor to be on **the HBO Ray Donovan show, where the family are all of Boston, I’d make sure the actor**

understood that everyone from Boston sounds like they have cotton up their noises because a strong Boston accent comes mainly from nasal cavity, a very high and forward, short and tense sound. But, if I am teaching placement of an Alabama accent, I would encourage the actor to **move the sound to the back of their throat so the vowels can have room to roll around like they should.**

The last model for teaching dialects, not one I would suggest, but one I had to adopt last year when I directed “Lord of the Flies” for Fort Wayne Youtheatre, with fourteen 12-14 year olds, is that of teaching the dialect by ear. I introduced the 3 or 4 main sound changes that ‘imply’ a British dialect, which are shift in the A sound; an elongated O sound, over clipped T’s and D’s and lastly, slight lift in energy at the end of the sentences. I had the boys all go through their dialogue and mark in red every time I expected them to make one of these sound changes. And then, I could only teach the dialect by ear, I would say the word and they would repeat it, actor by actor and for the most part, it worked quite well. Funny, the boys with the most dialogue did quite well, the boys who had few lines would not be ‘warmed’ up to the dialect and thus would not be as accurate. But when I brought it to their attention, they would correct immediately and be more accurate.

Now is the audience participation portion of my paper: Ready?

The most common sound we alter in all dialects is the a sound. The a, ah, au sound is slightly different in most if not all dialects. In the British dialect it is the most recognizable sound shift. We will use the word half:

Half – normal

Half – low back for cockney

Half – middle sound for Standard British

So say all three with me: Half, Half, Half

That same ‘a’ is in ask, answer, past, bath, demand, disaster, master, command..

Let us drill one full sentence found on your table document:

“I can’t drink half a glass and only have one cup left”.

Well done, I prefer to teach the long “o” in the British Dialect, **but as you know, I’ve gone on too long for that lesson.**

Yes, I’ve gone on long enough and to the question of “Why Do We Talk Like That”? We talk like that because of our ancestors who settled different regions of America, because of where and who we grew up with and lastly our age, our gender, our socioeconomic status, and educational background all contribute to our personal dialect that as Dr. Lobov says: even with our most common dialectal traits, our speech remains completely and utterly individual.

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