

DIALECTS

FOR THE STAGE

EVANGELINE MACHLIN



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SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES DISCLAIMER

Additional resources were previously made available for this title on CD. However, as CD has become a less accessible format, all resources have been moved to a more convenient online download option.

You can find these resources available here: www.routledge.com/9781138143876

Please note: Where this title mentions the associated disc, please use the downloadable resources instead.

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F O R T H E S T A G E

E V A N G E L I N E M A C H L I N

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Publisher's note: The text of *Dialects for the Stage* has been modified from the original edition to correspond to CD format.



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DEDICATION

*Dedicated to Robert M. MacGregor,
late director of Theatre Arts Books,
my publisher and good friend,
without whose faith, hope and charity, this
work would never have been completed.*

E.M.



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THE ACTOR, THE CDS AND THE MANUAL

Any actor who can sing a tune can learn to speak a dialect. Each dialect is like a song with words and music, the words having their own special pronunciations, the inflections having their own special tune. The CDs give you the music and the words as spoken. The manual gives you the words written out. CDs and manual together enable you to learn any of the twenty dialects presented or either of the two standard speech forms of English that are included. Thus, you will see a dialect in print while you hear it in recorded sound. Following and learning with both ear and eye, you will begin to speak the dialect well in a surprisingly short time.

The CDs and the manual are arranged for the play-it-and-say-it method of dialect acquisition. This method was developed by me working with students of Boston University's Division of Theatre over several years. A special method of spacing the first dialect selection in each group on the CD permits you to reproduce it readily in short units. After this you proceed to longer ones, following a sequence explained in Part Three. Playing and saying the examples systematically and repeatedly, you soon become competent in reproducing them exactly, with their sound changes and inflections. Later you transfer these to other material in the dialect, then to improvised material, and so to the lines of a dialect role.

Dialect roles in plays are quite common. Entire plays in dialect are not rare. As an actor, the learning of accents and dialects is a challenge that you must meet to improve your chances of being cast in a

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variety of roles. The first break into the professional theatre may be the hardest to get. An actor needs every possible asset, and skill with dialects can be an important one.

The term “dialect” in this manual refers to variant speech forms of English used by native speakers of English. The term “accent” is used for variant forms used by those whose native tongue is not English. However, one born in the American South, perhaps, or in the Lowlands of Scotland, who has spoken the speech of his region from childhood on, will be unlikely to call his own speech a dialect. He is more likely to describe it as “my Southern accent” or “my Scottish burr,” perhaps because the word “dialect” seems to suggest uncultivated speech.

The CDs present three broad groups of examples: a North American dialect group, a British dialect group and a group of European accents. Two black African examples are presented in conjunction with black American. An accent that I have called “General European,” which is cosmopolitan in nature, follows the last of the European accents. The CDs also present two types of standard English—a selection of speakers of standard North American, including one Canadian, and a variety of speakers of standard British, several of whom use “received English,” as it used to be called.

None of the dialect groups presented is in any way exhaustive. Those included have been selected to serve the actor’s purpose, not the linguist’s. Some that may have a limited use have been omitted for lack of space. In the North American group, Pennsylvania Dutch, Cajun, Newfoundland and North American Indian dialects are not represented. Nor are many subdialects of the West and South. The Midwestern group on CD One represents only the dialect speech of the extreme southern boundaries of the Midwest, which is a vast region, geographically stretching east from the Rockies to the Alleghenies and north from the Ohio River and from the states of Missouri and Kansas into the Canadian prairie provinces. Its many near-dialects flow and merge into one another, but are most sharply defined in the border examples given.

All dialects at the present time are suffering from erosion, due to the ubiquitous influence of radio and television, and the increasing importance of speech education departments in universities. Dialect traces persist in some areas, especially among the older generation, but are fading from the speech habits of many of the younger generation. A great richness and diversity is thus beginning to pass from common speech. Dialect usage remains, however, as an element in many important plays, and this manual and the CDs aim at preserving source material from living dialects for the actor’s use.

ones. Ignore this feeling, and push on till the new sounds and inflections become your own.

At the end of CD Three, there is a special help for dialect learning, the International Phonetic Alphabet, presented in sound. It is included for actors who learned it once and have forgotten it through disuse and for those who will take the trouble to learn it for the sake of reproducing new pronunciations not met with on the CDs. The IPA, as it is called, spells by sound elements only. One phonetic symbol stands for one sound element, or phoneme, and for that one alone. Many of these symbols are the same as the letters of our regular alphabet. Others are different but easily learned. On CD Three the sounds for the symbols are spoken in groups. They are presented in the same order in Part Eight of this manual. For a fuller treatment of the subject and a method of learning the IPA easily as you work with your voice, see my *Speech for the Stage*, Chapters 8 and 11. Once you have learned the IPA, you can write out the sounds of an unfamiliar dialect with absolute accuracy. It is what Professor Higgins of *My Fair Lady* and *Pygmalion* was doing that rainy night in London when he first heard Eliza Doolittle's Cockney.

However, since many actors are unfamiliar with the IPA, words heard on the CDs with dialectal variant sounds are respelled phonetically in this manual, using the ordinary alphabet, not the IPA alphabet. The Southern *I*, for instance, is respelled *Ab*. The New York-Brooklynese "shirt" is heard as *shoit*, and is so respelled. The respelling for each variant is as phonetic as possible. But you must always remember that respelling is suggestive rather than exact as to the pronunciation it represents. It is the best that can be done to show dialectal pronunciations using the letters of the alphabet. The dialect pronunciations that you must learn are those HEARD ON THE CDs. There only can you discover exactly what the respellings are meant to stand for. Guiding yourself by what you *hear* rather than by what you *see*, you will safeguard yourself against mistakes in dialect reproduction.

If you are to become an expert in this field you will do well to make the effort to learn the IPA and to use it, not only with the material in these examples, but in working with new material or in writing out dialects as you hear them in life. Reading your transcriptions, you will find you are reproducing exactly what you heard, which is the aim of dialect learning. The IPA gives a total correspondence between what is written and what is heard. Thus, even if you hear a dialect speaker when you have no recording device at hand, you will not lose the opportunity to record his speech. You can immediately make a perfect record in writing and add it to your growing store of dialect information.