**Decentering Listening: Toward an Anti-Discriminatory Approach to Accent and Dialect Training for the Actor**

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**Abstract**

This article reports on the findings of practice-based research into the development of anti-discriminatory accents and dialects training for actors with diverse intersecting identities. The author reviews an earlier strand of research into speech training within a UK conservatory that identified a bias toward Received Pronunciation reinforced by colonized listening practices. This article explores the impact of those listening practices on accent and dialect training. The author responds to the challenges inherent in providing training that both develops high-level skills and meets industry needs, while aiming to center the experiences of somatically othered students. The author develops their previous decolonizing model into a decentering framework for an approach to training actors that draws on critical pedagogy and asks students to cross the border from the conservatory into the community. This approach to accent and dialect training builds on verbatim and documentary theatre-making techniques, resulting in a practice that values empathy, listening, embodied practice, and autonomy, and the approach allows actors to perform “multiple authenticities,” while offering the potential for political insurgency within the performing arts industries.

**Key Words:** actor training, accents, dialects, critical pedagogy, anti-discriminatory, diversity, inclusion.

# **Context and Research Question**

The future sustainability of drama programs will hinge on how the current curriculum evolves to meet the multifaceted needs of a diverse U.S. population. The time has come to move past talking about systems of oppression to dismantling them by organizing and implementing conscientious training pedagogy and cross-cultural curriculums that promote transparency, equity, and ownership. (Nicole Brewer 2018)[[1]](#endnote-1)

In this article, I propose a new direction for the training of accents and dialects[[2]](#endnote-2) within acting conservatories. This proposal is fueled by a desire to train actors for an industry that can respond to the heightened political tensions dominating the beginning of the 2020s—aiming to support the vital movement toward increased transparency, equity, and ownership within actor training that Brewer demands above. This vision for the next steps in accent and dialect training addresses the tensions inherent in providing training that meets the needs of diverse students, who do not fit the theatre’s “somatic norm.” It addresses the need to both center and celebrate the differences of culture and expression across the student body while working within the temporal, spatial, and staffing constraints of the contemporary conservatory.

In their article, “Resistance and Resignation: Responses to Typecasting in British Acting,” Sam Friedman and Dave O’Brien draw on sociologist Nirmal Puwar’s concept of the “somatic norm” and show how the “skew in supply of ‘types’ in British acting is formational […] in establishing and designating the white male middle-class body as the industry’s somatic norm” (8). They go on to describe how, in the performing arts labor market, “somatic othering […] becomes normalised” (12). In my article, “Decolonizing Listening: Toward an Equitable Approach to Speech Training for the Actor”(Oram 2019), I adopted the term “somatically othered” to describe students within training who are othered because their intersectional identity does not conform to theatre’s dominant norm. In that article, I demonstrated how the use of speech standards as part of foundational actor training negatively impacts somatically othered students and I proposed a new direction for anti-discriminatory foundational speech training that aims to enhance equity and ownership.

The second strand of research outlined here engages with the ensuing challenges for curriculum planners within acting conservatories as they focus on accent and/or dialect training. If conservatories require all acting students to focus on a core set of standard accents, then they become complicit in the process of somatic othering as they are asking actors to mimic the performing arts’ somatic norm. Alternatively, conservatoires can enable somatically othered actors to play roles beyond the somatic norm by training them to speak accents that represent a diverse intersection of race, ethnicity, and/or class. This choice presents a second challenge: how those diverse accents can be taught in a way that does not marginalize the student experience when compared to the teaching of prestige accents such as Received Pronunciation, General American or General Australian? The challenges inherent in these questions become ever more complex the more diverse cohorts of students become. Limitations concerning teaching time, staffing, and room allocations further constrain innovation in this area; all of which has a direct impact on the student experience, as the following quotes from students engaged in focus groups for this research demonstrate:

There needs to be more of an acknowledgment that we are a very diverse class in terms of accents and abilities. There wasn’t really that, it was just like, “This is an accent, and this is what you’re going to do.”

I feel like a lot of the time there's a lot of tension with accents and with other stuff in a room of diverse people because everyone has something to say that's different. Sometimes it has felt, throughout the training, that that pressure and that anxiety and that perspective…there hasn't been any time for it and it's been pushed out of the room […] we're learning something in a format that's, I feel like, meant for a certain type of person (Focus Group).[[3]](#endnote-3)

These quotes from students who had experienced a “traditional” approach to accent and dialect training highlight the tension between individualized needs and group training. Professional actors and acting students consulted in this research spoke of a desire to learn accents related to their casting and future employment potential. There was a strong desire for personalized learning and, at the same time, a recognition that what was suitable for one person would be of little use to another. As this student explained, “The specificity of the individual learning accents is key because not everyone is going to learn a Nigerian accent. Not everyone is going to be doing that, but for me, I need that” (Focus Group).

The approach to accent and dialect training offered here seeks to address the challenges outlined above. This training approach aims to prepare all students effectively for the industry while sowing the seeds of change by challenging perceived norms around accents for performance.

# **Methodology and Discussion of Previous Findings**

This research uses a heuristic methodology as outlined by Clark Moustakas (1990). Moustakas details the six stages of heuristic research as: “initial engagement,” “immersion,” “incubation,” “illumination,” “explication,” and “creative synthesis.” [[4]](#endnote-4) In the first strand of this research, the key point of heuristic illumination was a recognition of a bias toward Received Pronunciation (RP) within existing foundational speech training that focused on articulation, or speech clarity; as if “clarity is somehow encoded into those individual [RP] consonant sounds” (Oram 2019, 288). I drew on Jennifer Lynn Stoever’s (2016) discussion of race and colonized listening practices in the United States to understand how my “unconsciously colonized White East-Midlands, working-class ear was further colonized by my training” (Oram 2019, 289). In response to this, I developed and introduced a model of foundational speech training for actors, which focused on “affective speech skills” using students’ “everyday speech patterns.” This approach developed students’ awareness of their “individual sonic palette” and how that might be consciously employed to affect change within the listener. This revised approach to speech training values the socio-linguistic capital and existing skills of communication that students bring with them to training. In the revised training process, listening becomes a central component, enabling students to become attuned to the linguistic diversity across a group of speakers as well as the variation within their own speech patterns.

In this second article, I describe how this research has been extended to explore how students can further develop their listening practice to engage with the transformative speech work of accents and dialects training. At the heart of this work, is an exploration of the use of verbatim or documentary theatre techniques[[5]](#endnote-5) to bridge from voice and speech training into accent and dialect training.

# **Applying the Listening Ear to Accents and Dialects**

In the first strand of this research, I noted how—using Stoever’s critical framework—“it is possible to perceive the presence of an invisible listening ear in every studio and rehearsal room, to which training and performances are constantly being tuned” (Oram 2019, 288). I described how, in the UK, this listening ear perpetuates a bias toward RP consonants as the mechanism of clear speech, even though it is evident that all accents have the potential to be understood across accent groupings. Rather than revisiting that discussion here, I intend to show how the impact of the listening ear is similarly evident in the training and coaching of accents and dialects.

Accent and dialect coach, Dudley Knight talks of the need to “modify accuracy of accent” to accommodate “intelligibility” (2000a, 75), this belief is echoed by Marian Hampton when she states that:

As teachers, we must guide students in listening astutely to the speech of others so that they may adopt those characteristics which will contribute to the establishment of character, yet choose carefully what will help in this process without destroying an audience’s ability to understand the text of the play. (Hampton 2000, 15)

This attitude toward accents for performance extends beyond accent coaches to directors. It is my experience, and that of other accent coaches that I have spoken to, that directors will commonly ask for actors to find “just a hint of the accent.” This request indicates a desire to locate the character by engaging with a sense of regional, class, or racial/ethnic authenticity, while at the same time, wishing to ensure that the work will be “understood.” This focus on intelligibility reinforces the culturally embedded nature of the listening ear and raises the following questions: If the accent is to be adapted to be intelligible, then what is it being adapted toward? If a performance needs to be understood, who is judging the level of understanding and against which standard is it being measured? As Stoever states, “listening is an interpretive, socially constructed practice” (2016, 14) and the answers to these two questions ultimately reveal a bias toward whatever the local “neutral” speech standard might be; a standard that is consistently associated with the somatic norm.[[6]](#endnote-6) Any adaptation of accent and dialect for intelligibility reinforces power structures that sustain the dominance of white middle-class listening practices and, at the same time, renders those structures invisible.

In his 2000 article, Dudley Knight proposed that the “very act of listening may be becoming something of a lost art in a world where auditory experiences are so often amplified, equalized and filtered” (Knight 2000a, 71). In contrast, I suggest that in an increasingly mediatized and connected world, the art of listening is becoming more democratized. In the same 2000 edition of the “Voice and Speech Review”*,* accent coach, Louis Colaianni, noted that, in the US, “The difference between now and twenty years ago is that, today, hard news is moving more toward regional accents” (Colaianni 2000, 22). In the UK, Maggie Inchley has tracked the rise in the use of regional accents in performance, relating this rise to an ideology of tolerance and inclusion at the heart of Tony Blair’s *New Labour* government (Inchley 2015). Taking this concept further, Carol Martin discusses the rise in the popularity of verbatim theatre as a step beyond naturalistic representation into a “Theatre of the Real,” “born from a sea change in archiving brought about by digitization of the internet” (Martin 2013, 5). This trend and increasing access to digital technology have jointly impacted listening. There is now a generation of young people who regularly listen to—and easily understand—podcasts, Vlogs, and YouTube channels presented by people from across the globe, many of whom will have had little or no training in speech and accent. This digitized turn toward the “real” paves the way for a radical shift in the training of accents/dialects.

In the first strand of this research, I developed a process of *affective* speech training that moves beyond an *effective* focus on clarity and intelligibility. This approach begins with the assumption that all accents have the potential to be equally understood across accent groupings and do not need to be modified for the listener. This assumption requires the listener to *want* to understand the speaker. Rosina Lippi-Green describes how “it’s not coincidental which accents we like and which ones we don’t. You like the accents of the nations which you have a good idea about. 90 percent of positive or negative accent evaluation is in the wanting” (quoted in Colaianni 2000, 22). Artist and queer academic, Yvon Bonenfant, describes how “sound can be understood as a form of touch” and that the vibration of voice “is a form of social touch” (Bonenfant 2010, 77). He goes on to challenge whether we might understand “racism and […] complex dynamics of oppression as an unwillingness to be touched by vocal bodies” (79). Sociologist, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, takes this further when he describes how “what is unintelligible […] is always positioned before the hearer as an uncontrollable presence, hence, as potentially dangerous” (de Sousa Santos 2018, 178). Drawing on each of these sources, I surmise that, where characters in a play are speaking with an accent from an unknown community, culture, or race, listeners are more likely to say that they do not understand the speaker, due to an unwillingness to engage with a voice that is “other”; a fear of being “touched” by an uncontrollable difference. This understanding drives a political imperative for actors to portray characters who speak with authentic accents and dialects, resisting “softening” or “lightening” adaptations, that favor the hegemony of the dominant white middle-class listening ear.

Authenticity is itself a much-contested term and there is a need for caution when applying it as a criterion. Tania Canas writes for ArtsHub Australia and states that “authenticity is determined, verified, and labelled by the dominant narrative in relation to periphery narratives” (Canas 2017). An all too common example of this is the Black actor or actor of Color who is told by the white director that they need to sound *more* Black, Asian, etc. (Ginther 2015; Luckett and Shaffer 2017; Coronel 2018; Lanceta Coronel, Springfield and Feliciano-Sanchez Moser 2020). Canas goes on to assert that, “multiplicity, as opposed to authenticity, defies constructs that are palpable and easily consumable to the dominant narrative” (Canas 2017, 1). Multiplicity was central to the revised training program outlined in the first strand of this research. In that approach, students investigated their own everyday speech patterns and learnt to recognize the variations and code switching within their own vocal identities.[[7]](#endnote-7) This awareness of the multiplicity of voice and speech, both individually and across groups of speakers, lays the foundation for the approach to accents developed here. This approach includes an understanding of authenticity that embraces intersectional identities and the variability of speech patterns within those identities. In this sense, the work aims to decenter the listening ear in accents and dialects training and enable diverse and marginalized stories to be told with “multiple authenticities.”

# **From Decolonizing to Decentering**

In the first strand of this research, I spoke of my initial reticence in adopting a decolonizing framework (Oram 2019). Since that time, I have had the opportunity to engage with a further stage of heuristic explication, which has allowed me to examine processes of decolonization further. Previously—building on the work of Stoever—I saw decolonization from an intersectional perspective. This perspective is advocated by academics, Rosalba Icaza and Rolando Vázquez, who have researched decolonizing practices within Amsterdam University, and believe that decoloniality can offer a

perspective that allows us to see how the dynamics of power differences, social exclusion and discrimination (along axes of race, gender and geographical and economic inequality) are connected to the ongoing legacies of our colonial history. (Icaza and Vázquez 2018, 113)

This intersectional approach initially appealed to me as a queer academic from a working-class background as I was seeking to address both class, race, regionality, and internationality within my research. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang challenge this adoption of decolonizing discourse for broader social justice projects in education claiming that it “turns decolonization into a metaphor” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 1). They state that, “when metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it renders whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settled future” (3). As I have continued this research, I have become increasingly aware of how my queer and working-class “credentials” have distracted me from the impact of my whiteness. Further, I have become ever more aware of the impact of colonization on Indigenous communities and now recognize the specificity of decolonizing discourse in relation to the “relinquishing of stolen land” (19). Following this change in perspective, in this strand of research on accents and dialects I have adopted “decentering” as a term that avoids the metaphor of decolonizing and better suits the broad intersectional perspectives within this work. The decentering process impacts the somatic norm of the listening ear within actor training and the performing arts industry, as well as the power structures and value systems inherent in voice and speech pedagogy.

While I was exploring approaches to decolonization, I read the work of lawyer and civil rights consultant, Poka Laenui. Laenui offers a model of decolonization that draws on the experiences of Indigenous communities in Hawai’i (Laenui 2000). Even though I have moved away from an overarching construct of decolonization, Laenui’s model still resonates with the findings of my research and his five stages of decolonization have provided a valuable framework from which to approach an intersectional decentering process.

Laenui begins by describing Virgilio Enriques’s five-stages of colonization: (1) “Denial and Withdrawal,” (2) “Destruction/Eradication,” (3) “Denigration/Belittlement/Insult,” (4) “Surface Accommodation/Tokenism,” and (5) “Transformation/Exploitation” (Laenui 2000). Enriques’s descriptions of stages four and five, surface accommodation and exploitation, are readily mapped onto contemporary discourses of diversity and inclusion within the arts and can be applied specifically to accent and dialect training. For example, a conservatory that wishes to move toward more diverse or inclusive accent and dialect teaching might decide to start teaching something like Multicultural London English (MLE) to its students. If the accent is taught using traditional top-down methods, without any consideration of the power structures inherent in the pedagogy of instruction or the value systems inherent in listening, then this move to inclusivity might be seen as adhering to Enriques’s fourth stage, surface accommodation. This process might extend into the fifth stage of exploitation were that conservatory to begin to showcase its move toward increased diversity and inclusion within its marketing, to gain esteem for the training, and, in turn, to secure economic capital for the institution.

Previous iterations of accent training within the acting: collaborative and devised theatre program (BA Acting-CDT) that I teach on at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (Central) have themselves fallen into this category. Previously, there was a surface accommodation of accents and dialects, such as African American English (AAE), which were introduced with a desire for greater inclusion. However, teaching AAE without addressing the power dynamics at play in the classroom, or engaging with a broader range of Black vocality, can easily perpetuate an idea of “sounding Black,” reinforcing an essentialized sound of Blackness as discussed earlier. Voice teacher, Marcus McQuirter, states:

The discourse on racial authenticity with regard to performance centers around two opposing poles. At one end, the rhetoric of Black authenticity has often delimited Blackness and derailed efforts to expand Blackness beyond the confines of racist essentialisms and intersectional blindness. At the same time, authenticity also functions as a significant aesthetic principle, as a strategy for resistance, and the grounds for erecting communities in the face of racial denigration. (McQuirter 2012, 12)

McQuirter’s discussion of “Sonic Blackness” highlights the tension between approaches that seek to represent or include the vocal identity of a specific community and the need to recognize the multiple authenticities of vocal expression within that community—a tension that this research seeks to address.

Further to the exposition of surface accommodation within many inclusion strategies, Tania Canas describes how:

Diversity is a white word […] It seeks to make sense, through a white lens, of difference by creating, curating and demanding palatable definitions of “diversity” but only in relation to what this means in terms of whiteness. (Canas 2017)

When approaching diversity and inclusion, it can be helpful to ask, “who is doing the including?” and “diverse from whom?” The desire to avoid surface accommodation and exploitation presents a problem for the predominantly white profession of voice training, particularly in the UK where there are currently only a handful of teachers and coaches who are Black or of Color. In this research, I have grappled with the question of how, as a white teacher, I can appropriately meet the needs of students who are Black or of Color. In doing so, I have accepted that I must constantly work to decenter my experience in relation to race. While I can draw from my own queer, working-class experiences, I cannot allow that to blind me to the experience of other somatically othered identities as I move “toward” a more anti-discriminatory practice.

To help my decentering approach within this research, I have used strategies that have centered the voices of my students as much as possible and have discussed the work with colleagues who are Black or of Color in both the UK and US. Student focus groups were run for students toward the end of their training across three year-groups. The groups were led by a facilitator who identifies as Black, female, and queer, and the students were very open about their experiences on the program. Through a process of “deep listening”[[8]](#endnote-8) those experiences have informed the development of both strands of this research and, in this second strand, Laenui’s five-stage framework has then been used to guide the decentering process away from the surface accommodation of previous iterations of inclusive and/or diverse accent and dialect training.

Laenui’s model suggests a far deeper systemic and human undertaking than diversity and inclusion and aims to fundamentally change existing power dynamics. His five-stage model includes: (1) “Rediscovery and Recovery,” (2) “Mourning,” (3) “Dreaming,” (4) “Commitment,” and (5) “Action” (Laenui 2000). In the first strand of this research, I developed a process for foundational speech training that engages with students’ intersectional identities and everyday speech patterns (Oram 2019). For many students, this stage of the training can involve a process of rediscovery and recovery, when they recognize how they have, often unconsciously, adopted an attitude to their own vocal identities that has led them to mimic the dominant norm. For example, I describe in my previous article how students have found themselves instinctively moving toward RP for performance without having been asked to do so. The revised voice and speech training offers students the opportunity to engage with affective speech practice using their everyday speech patterns and celebrates their vocal identities. This process offers students a space for, what Laenui recognizes as, a process of “healing” inherent to the second stage of mourning.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Laenui describes the third stage, dreaming, as “the most crucial for decolonization” (Laenui 2000, 155). Providing space to dream requires an acting curriculum that does not seek to constrain, correct, directly instruct, or acculturate to a certain mode of performance; it requires an approach that opens possibilities rather than closes them down. At the simplest level, I begin my teaching with the statement, “I don’t know how you will make sense of this work, and I don’t know how you will make theatre and art beyond this training.” Within that is an invitation to dream and an invitation to move beyond, and eventually, even reject aspects of the training. This is part of the vital process of addressing the power structures within the training and moving toward a more critical pedagogy.

Laenui, cautions against cutting the dreaming process short, and it is incumbent upon schools to hold this dreaming space for as long as possible. For many young actors, this time for dreaming will come to an all too abrupt end as they begin to meet the performing arts industry and their personal need for economic capital. Some actors will necessarily assimilate into the dominant structures within the performing arts and it is hoped that they will revisit the initial stages of this process for themselves later in their careers. For others, the training will have provided space for them to coalesce into groups who, either through their own performance companies or through networks of peer support, will engage with the final two stages, committing to a shared path and taking action that furthers the decentering cause.

Laenui also cautions about simply placing “previously colonized people into positions held by colonizers,” stating that:

decolonization includes the re-evaluation of the political, social, economic, and judicial structures themselves and the development, if appropriate, of new structures that can hold and house the values and aspirations of the colonized people. (Laenui 2000, 155)

This reinforces the requirement that acting schools do not train students for the sole purpose of filling only marginalized roles available to actors who have been somatically othered, nor should they limit potential with a training process that focusses on mimicry of the somatic norm. Rather, it is necessary that training allows actors to dream into a place where they will be able to eschew type-casting and mimicry within the industry, giving space to the stories that have been marginalized and allowing those stories to be told with multiple authenticities, without the need to adapt to the dominant listening ear.

This work will change again when it is delivered by teachers who are Black or of Color. The current whiteness of voice teaching needs to be acknowledged and decentered. The significant dominance of white voice teachers is clear evidence of a profession that systemically excludes people who are Black, Indigenous or of Color. I sincerely hope that actors who have been discriminated against by the white supremacy of traditional voice training, can themselves experience Laenui’s stages of rediscovery, recovery, mourning and dreaming; to heal from those experiences and commit to an anti-discriminatory voice practice. I am eager to see where we can take this work when teachers from across a broader range of intersecting identities work collaboratively toward a shared goal.

# **Decentering in Action**

The production of *Barbershop Chronicles* produced in 2017 by the National Theatre and the West Yorkshire Playhouse provides a valuable example of a decentering practice that has been influential within the heuristic process of this research. In this play, set in barbershops across Africa and in London, the actors used authentic accents and dialects from the regions represented. The actors fully immersed and embodied the rhythms, gestures, and utterances of the characters. The play was performed with an expansive quality and every thought and action was delivered with a strong affective intention, such that, even though I did not comprehend some dialectical features, I understood every moment of the performance. This level of understanding is a key component of decentered approach. Actors will be able to adopt an authentic accent and/or dialect without skewing it in favor of the dominant listening ear if the focus on performing a specific variety of linguistic intelligibility has been decentered.

As the students begin to engage with accent and dialect work, I continue with the assumption from the first strand of this research that all accents are equally able to be understood across accent groupings. While the use of certain dialectal features, including words, may occasionally obscure the comprehension of the linguistic text, an affective delivery of those dialect features allows the listener to draw understanding from the “sonic text” of the play. This commonly happens in Shakespeare where the intention behind unfamiliar words is understood if the actor delivers the text through a clear, *affective*, and embodied performance. As discussed earlier, this also requires the audience to have a desire to listen. It challenges an audience that is willing to tune in to the classical canon of Shakespeare to be as open to being touched by the voices, dialects, and accents used in a play such as *Barbershop Chronicles*. This challenge to the hegemonic listening practices of theatre audiences is part of the political drive of this work and was critical to the decentering impact of *Barbershop Chronicles,* whichassumed the right to be heard within the dominant norms of National Theatre. The production’s dialect coach, Hazel Holder, described how the company made a conscious decision not to modify the accents and dialect features. She explained that many of the actors had personal connections to the regions of the play and that “if you water down those accents, you water down those people’s life experiences” (Holder 2017). One of the actors echoed the language of the early stages of Laenui’s model of decolonization when he described the rehearsal process as both “humanizing” and “liberating” (Holder 2017).

Liz Mills engages with a discussion of the sonic text of the play in her work on identity and voice training for Postdramatic Theatre. Her proposition is that “vocality” can be one of the many intertextual weavings of theatre. Mills describes how a focus on the meaning of language, or logos, in traditional theatre forms silences the “sonic, intertextual layering of the voice” (Mills 2009, 394) and explains how the prioritization of intelligibility over vocal expression can lead to an erasure of identity. Mills goes on to advocate for voicing that, “becomes less subjectively grounded and more acoustically liberated” (Mills 2009, 400), where sonic qualities of the voice have equal footing alongside meaning. She likewise describes how the sound of voices can still convey meaning even where language becomes unintelligible.

The turn toward affect and the sonic text begins to expose the commonly held belief, that speech and accents should be adapted to achieve constant intelligibility, as a myth that seeks to center performance and training around dominant value systems. Using the approaches described below, actors might choose to perform using accents and/or dialects that are not always immediately intelligible to the dominant listening ear. When those actors engage in those vocal representations with a focus on affect, the “sonic text” is still received by the audience. In this way, the audience can still understand the play, while the cultural identities of the characters do not become watered down through a process of accent lightening.

*Barbershop Chronicles* is by no means the first play which has been performed using authentic accents and dialects, but, as part of my own heuristic journey, this production provided a significant moment of illumination. The production was able to shift the center of power and there was a relationship between performers and audience that I had not previously experienced. As a white British audience member, I was in no way excluded but was situated on the periphery, while fellow audience members recognized sounds and gestures from their own communities and caught jokes that I sometimes lacked the cultural references to fully appreciate. The play felt to me almost like a new form of theatre and that was directly related to how the actors were able to speak from a deeply embodied sense of the world that they were portraying, without any concessions to a somatic norm of the dominant listening ear.

It could be argued that the showcasing of African experiences within the National Theatre sits within the fifth stage of exploitative colonization; however, the production was not limited by the Eurocentric perspectives dominant within that institution. Some of the processes used to make this work—certainly, at the level of acting, dialect, and storytelling—decentered the value systems inherent in that building. From this perspective, the production can be seen as a pocket of decentering insurgency within the wider performing arts industry.

# **Verbatim to Accent and Dialect**

Speech, accents, and dialects training is a prime site for seeding insurgency in the industry. To be effective, the revisions need to go beyond curriculum content and engage directly with the pedagogy of instruction. Kyoko Kishimoto describes how

anti-racist teaching attempts to create a sense of community in the classroom through

decentering authority and encouraging collaborative learning rather than individualistic, competitive learning styles. (Kishimoto 2018, 549)

This decentering of power relations is similarly essential to developing a broader anti-discriminatory accent and dialect training. When RP was removed from the foundational speech curriculum, it was necessary to identify and decenter any conscious or unconscious ideological perspectives in the newly developed pedagogy of affective speech. Within this second strand of the research, it has been equally necessary to try to avoid the privileging of one accent over another and to maintain a decentered critical pedagogy.[[10]](#endnote-10)

One aspect of a critical pedagogy is a move away from the tutor as “expert”—moving away from what, Paulo Freire, describes as a “banking model of education, where the great guru ﬁlls up their students, whose rapt attention does not allow for thinking and action [...] and inhibits their creative power” (Freire 1996, 58). In this research, verbatim theatre techniques have been adopted as part of this move toward a de-centered critical pedagogy. I detail the foundational stages of this process in my previous article (Oram 2019). In short, the process starts in the first term[[11]](#endnote-11) of the first year, when students engage in the verbatim performance of a recording of their own voices. This is followed by a second term of work on affective speaking. In the final term of that first year, students create and perform a verbatim monologue for assessment using a recorded interview with a speaker from outside of the school. Working with a verbatim source means that the first time a student works on transformational speech work, including a change of accent and dialect, they do so in an individualized way. The students gather their own source material, which allows them to define the parameters of their assessment. For instance, they might choose a source speaker with a distinctive accent that they are interested in exploring beyond this project or choose something simpler and closer to themselves as a gentler step into the process.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Icaza and Vázquez (2018) discuss the need for “the university to actively address its own societal and ecological implications by enabling the students to bridge the epistemic border between the classroom and society” (120). By engaging with a verbatim project outside of the school, students begin to engage with transformational speech work beyond the epistemic border of the conservatory. Their engagement with their first new accent is not determined by their teacher’s positionality, nor is it adapted to the somatic norm of the dominant listening ear. This revised approach continues to shift the expert-novice power dynamic; the teacher is responsible for guiding the students in how to study but is, for the most part, less knowledgeable than the student about the specific speech patterns of each of the verbatim sources. The teacher needs to work besides the student, rather than over them, and trust that the student will learn what they need to learn. This approach helps to develop autonomy and empowerment in the student actor, while developing a deeper awareness that each individual speaker performs a variety of speech patterns and that there is not an essentialized standard or ideal. This initial stage of embodied verbatim performance has proved a vital steppingstone into more targeted work on accents for performance. Students develop their understanding of manner and placement of speech sounds through a process of comparison between themselves and their subject. Listening is trained as much as speaking and, with it, empathy. Students immerse into the world of the subject, which helps them to understand that accent is just one element of intersectional identity and that speech patterns cannot be easily separated from embodied experiences, as this student explains:

You get really close with these people, and I got really close with my verbatim source […] They tell you about their culture and their heritage, so you get to know that part of them. Also, on the other side of it, you are also doing your own research, so you learn the human of it. (Focus Group)

The empathic respect for the individual’s humanity that this student describes is a recurring theme within this work; it develops a level of cultural competence and paves the way for accent learning that delves far deeper than sonic reproduction and articulatory mechanics. Activities, such as dancing the rhythms, breath, and verbal structures of the speaker, create an embodied experience of that humanity, and working to find the inner affective drive behind the words enables a deeper connection than sonic reproduction alone. Alongside this work, students develop their skills in notating their verbatim source material and submit a transcription as part of the assessment.[[13]](#endnote-13) This prepares them for later work where they will begin to isolate accent features from verbatim sources. These systems of notation have been a key consideration within the research.

# **Transcription and Notation**

Phonetics teaching has evolved into a core component of much actor training and, in the UK, is usually taught within the first year as part of the package of RP, speech, and articulation (Oram 2019). Beyond the possible implications of the modernist-colonial history of the IPA, there are practical difficulties in teaching phonetics. When there is limited time for the curriculum, phonetics is most easily taught in relation to a standard reference accent. In the UK, this inevitably results in reinforcing a systemic bias toward RP. Dudley Knight explains how Daniel Jones used the newly developed system of phonetics in “An English Pronouncing Dictionary”in 1916 and this was seized upon “in a very conscious effort to maintain RP” (Knight 2000a, 62). He goes on to reference this as a “substantial cautionary message for accent specialists in the alacrity with which linguistic description can harden into prescription and proscription” (63). Dudley Knight and Phil Thompson responded to this issue with the development of Knight-Thompson Speechwork.[[14]](#endnote-14) This popular and effective approach to training teaches the entire range of sounds contained in the IPA and avoids the use of standardizing reference accents. Knight trains actors to work toward “narrow phonetic transcription” believing that “broad transcription is appropriate for most language-learning, but actors need to learn dialects and accents in much greater detail” (Knight 2000b, 50). This approach is thorough and represents a viable option for making speech training more inclusive, but it does not shift the power dynamics in the room, which is an essential component of anti-discriminatory pedagogy. I argue, then, that there is a level of detail in the Knight-Thompson approach that holds the teacher in the position of expert and implies a necessary correctness within the work.

During the Voice and Speech Trainer’s Association (VASTA)’s recent *Anti-Oppression Panel*,Leslie Ishii implored teachers to “take out correctness” as “it sets us up to perpetuate a society of violence” (VASTA 2020).[[15]](#endnote-15) The anti-discriminatory approach developed here no longer uses phonetics and moves away from the correctness inherent in a detail model. In doing this, I am not suggesting a rejection of expertise, rather a repurposing of that expertise. It takes great skill for a teacher to use their advanced knowledge in a collaborative approach that develops their students’ autonomy and helps those students to find ways of codifying accents in a manner that works for each of them individually. Kaja Dunn talks about a necessary process of “de-codification” when training theatre students of Color, stating that “[c]odification keeps existing power structures in place.” (Dunn, Luckett and Sicre 2020, 280). I have found that the dominant codification system of phonetics does not work for all actors. In a survey, I carried out with 58 British actors, none of them identified phonetics as a useful tool for accent learning; preferring, instead, approaches that involve listening and immersion. Coaches who work with professional actors tend to agree that it is a rare actor who effectively recalls their phonetics training, with most preferring to use a personal system of notation developed over the course of their careers. Students on the BA Acting-CDT program now develop and test their own notation systems over the course of their training. This gives them time to develop a personalized approach and pre-empts the seemingly inevitable professional strategy that the actors in my research have adopted.

In the foundational speech work developed as part of the first strand of this research, students analyze their own speech patterns and create a basic transcription of a recording of their everyday speech using a transcription style that they devise themselves. At that stage, the transcription focusses on suprasegmental features and differences between consonantal realization and orthographic spelling. The guiding question in the development of the transcription is always “what will be useful to me in order to perform an accurate recreation of the original recording in performance?” Later in the year, when the students work on the recreation of a recorded verbatim monologue, they increase the level of detail when transcribing. At that point, students learn to incorporate the four “Foundations” for accents, developed by Edda Sharpe and Jan Haydn Rowles (Sharp and Haydn Rowles 2007, 33-45), along with some notation of significant vowel changes. Again, students work with their own system of notation. As a guide, the students focus on how they might be able to use their transcription should they lose their audio recording and need to recreate their performance from the transcript alone. The assessment of the verbatim performance focusses on the realization of the source material; both from the perspective of the accuracy of the recreation of the speech and the *affective* quality of the delivery.[[16]](#endnote-16)

In their second year of training, students are introduced to the “Lexical Sets” created by phonetician, John Wells, in his book *Accents of English 1: An Introduction* (Wells 1982)—Sharpe and Haydn Rowles refer to these lexical sets as the “Kit List” (Sharp and Haydn Rowles 2007). In class, students play games and do exercises to get a feel for each of the 24 word-families within the Kit List. As the students become familiar with their own pronunciation of each family of words, they also gain a sense of how pronunciation varies across their peer group. This work on lexical sets then forms one of the bridges into accent work. Again, students create their own transcription, which might include a mix of symbols, “faux-netics,” or re-spelling; whatever works for the student in enabling them to realize the accent accurately. The use of self-devised notation is of additional significance for dyslexic students, many of whom can find the symbols and phonemic sequencing of phonetics a significant challenge,[[17]](#endnote-17) Likewise, those that are L2 English speakers often draw on vowel symbols from their first language or use an alternative orthography, such as Cyrillic. One Mandarin-speaking Chinese student described how they had previously had a “horrible time” with phonetics and loved the way that they could now use their own system—including Chinese characters and an adapted use of pinyin[[18]](#endnote-18) (Class Notes). Another student, who is a dyspraxic learner, filmed a movement sequence as part of their transcription of intonation and phrasing.

Within this research, the use of self-devised transcription has not led to any identifiable decrease in accent accuracy in performance. This approach reinforces a process that acknowledges a plurality of experience, while shifting the power dynamic within the training. The teacher holds and guides students’ independent study, and the students develop their own autonomous expertise. On a simple practical level, the removal of phonetics frees up time within the curriculum to focus on more immersive experiential practice. Each layer of notation is built up over time; notating self in the first term, notating others in the verbatim monologue, and then notating key accent features based on a verbatim monologue exploration as part of the verbatim to accent pedagogy. The notation is always there to support the acting and, at each stage of this process, it feeds into a performance.

# **Multiple Authenticities: Applying the Verbatim to Accent Pedagogy**

At the start of the second year of the BA Acting-CDT Course at Central, students engage with an immersive exploration of theatre from the United States; it is in this context that students move from pure verbatim work into accent acquisition. To effectively teach a group of students how to extract an accent from a verbatim source all the students need to be working on the same accent at the same time. This presents a challenge as the first accent chosen will always be conferred with some level of prestige, even if unconsciously. For our purposes, we have chosen to work on a “General American” (GenAm) accent. The term “General American” is much contested and gives rise to similar debates to those associated with RP when taught as an accent standard. Phonetician J. C. Wells notes:

“General American” is a term that has been applied to the two-thirds of the American population who do not have a recognizably local accent […] the type of American English pronunciation taught to learners of English as a foreign language […] nevertheless “General American” is nowadays looked at somewhat askance. (Wells 1982, 118)

For most of our students, GenAm does not carry the linguistic and cultural capital that RP does. In fact, for many it represents a potential gateway to economic capital through enhanced casting opportunities as it is an accent favored amongst the UK’s industry gatekeepers, agents, and casting directors.[[19]](#endnote-19) It must be acknowledged that for those of our students from the US there may be a different perspective on this accent, and GenAm does not offer a perfect solution, although in this context it is not taught as a standard, nor is it tied to foundational speech skills training. First-year foundational training focuses on students own vocal identities and speech patterns, which means that when they meet GenAm it is seen as a specific tool for their career, rather than as a standard to be taken on in daily life or across all performances. Additionally, the verbatim to accent pedagogy outlined here helps to decenter the dominant somatic norm associated with the accent.

In the current iteration of the verbatim to accent pedagogy, students begin by performing a learnt verbatim monologue based on a recording of a source speaker whose accent sits within broad parameters of GenAm. The students are given a choice of political speeches to choose from as their source material. The source speeches include a range of Black speakers, speakers of Color, queer and trans speakers, and disabled speakers. In this way, students are able choose a source speaker that more closely aligns with their own somatic identity, if they wish. The verbatim-led approach stops GenAm being introduced as a generalized standard, taught by a voice teacher who themselves may well represent the somatic norm. Rather than reducing the accent to articulatory mechanics and acoustics, the verbatim approach focusses on affect as well as the accuracy of speech, and it is culturally embedded. The approach involves an embodied engagement with the source speaker and the political nature of the speeches allows for empathy with that speaker. This process builds on the empathic experiences that students identified in the first-year verbatim project and helps to move them toward more culturally competent performances.

Over the course of the term, the students come to class with their own “expert” knowledge of the vocal identity and speech patterns of their verbatim source. This knowledge is embodied in their performance of the source material as well as notated in their transcription. Students then compare the accent features of their source speaker with those of their peers. The teacher supports and guides the group in identifying the accent features within the verbatim sources. The group uses this process to create their own bespoke version of a GenAm accent. Voice teachers, Lanceta Coronel, Springfield, and Feliciano-Sanchez Moser (2020) advocate for an approach that engages student actors with, “the histories, myths and uses of standard dialects” (5). In the process outlined here, the myth of standard speech becomes immediately apparent to students through a process of de-codification. The students not only learn the accent but, at the same time, engage with, and take a position on, the politics inherent in that process. This process can involve debate over specific sound choices for the final accent. This debate is encouraged, and the teacher resists the desire to problem-solve or impose solutions onto the group; an approach that is central to critical pedagogies and allows students to take informed positions on the authenticity-multiplicity question.

After their work on GenAm, students move on to study another US accent. At this point, the listening skills and autonomy that students have developed enables several accents to be taught at the same time. Using the verbatim process as a starting point, smaller groups coalesce around a choice of accents. The choices offered will relate to performance work that students are engaged in as part of their scene study or production work for that term. For instance, one group might explore a working-class New York accent, while another might look at an accent spoken by people who are Black and living in Arkansas, and a final group might learn an Arkansas accent more common to white speakers. It could be argued that, by approaching pluralistic accents through small group self-directed study, the linguistic capital conferred on those accents is lesser than “prestige” accents taught to all students. If GenAm had been taught using a traditional top-down, expert-novice banking model of delivery, and the students had not developed their autonomous skills, then this perception would be reinforced. However, in the work outlined here, the move to small-group peer-learning is a further enhancement of the autonomous skills developed thus far. These small-group accents are assessed in production or scene study work at the end of the term, which, in turn, confers increased systemic capital onto those accents as they are not “just” for a voice assessment.

In the subsequent term of the second year, this autonomous process reaches its peak in an “accents for auditions” class. In these classes, students freely chose accents that they think will be useful to them in their future careers.[[20]](#endnote-20) Students choose a verbatim source for each accent and work toward a prepared monologue or scene, which they then perform in mock auditions. In these classes, I have been able to hold the group as they explored 18 different accents from across the globe. To give this some context, one single year group on the BA Acting-CDT program self-identified in the following ways; three Black African students, two mixed-race British students, one Chinese student, six White British students, one White American Jewish student, one Turkish student, one Peruvian mixed-race student, one Indian student, and one White Russian Jewish student. As a white British teacher, if I were to try to teach the global accents chosen by a group of students such as this, using traditional top down methods, I would not only hit up against the limitations of time, I would also face the challenges of embodying cross-cultural accents as an “expert” and filtering that sonic otherness through my white British somatic experience. During VASTA’s *Anti-Oppression Panel*, Nicole Brewer, whose quote opens this article, stated unequivocally, “it is not ok to do the teaching if you don’t have the cultural knowledge” (VASTA 2020). This presents a challenge for the teacher whose class includes the breadth of cultures outlined here. Nicole went on to explain, “you hear the sound, but if you don’t have the cultural context or an anti-racist ethos, you are doing harm.” Teaching on-line during a pandemic has opened up possibilities for more culturally competent teachers to be brought in to the work, which is especially helpful in the UK where there are so few teachers who are Indigenous, Asian, Latinx, Middle-Eastern, or Black. However, there are limits and, with the cohort described above, the only option is to adopt an anti-discriminatory pedagogy. Kyoko Kishimoto (2018) summarizes an anti-racist pedagogy as

course delivery that seeks to (1) challenge assumptions and foster students’ critical analytical skills; (2) develop students’ awareness of their social positions; (3) decenter authority in the classroom and have students take responsibility for their learning process; and (4) empower students and apply theory to practice; and (5) create a sense of community in the classroom through collaborative learning. (549)

The anti-discriminatory accent and dialect pedagogy described here contains the key elements of an anti-racist approach; it challenges assumptions about standards, the student filters the source material through their own somatic experience and cultural competence, the student becomes the expert, and the teacher collaborates with the student to help guide the learning and the application of the accent to text and performance.

This approach has had a significant impact on the third and final year of the program when students perform in public productions. In this context, students hone the verbatim-led approach and carry it through to fully realized performances. Rather than waiting for a coach to teach them accents that are required for productions, the student actors now arrive at rehearsal having done their verbatim to accent process and the coach collaborates with them to help them finesse their work. A recent production of Dennis Kelly’s play *DNA* produced in partnership with the Queen’s Theatre, Hornchurch, featured a group of final year students who used this verbatim-led approach for a range of accents including M.L.E. and Essex/Estuary. The process allowed for a multiplicity of accent authenticity across the cast. This multiplicity did not undermine the authenticity of the setting of the play, rather it gave the sonic text of the piece a layered texture, with one reviewer remarking of the accents that there was a “unifying sound from actors drawn from several parts of the world.”[[21]](#endnote-21)

# **Conclusion**

In this article, I have identified the challenge inherent in meeting the needs of diverse cohorts of actors when providing training in accents and dialects. I have shown how traditional approaches to accent training favor the white middle-class somatic norm and dominant listening ear within the performing arts. I have identified the need for an approach to accents and dialects that not only meets the training needs of students who are somatically othered by the dominant norm, but that also decenters the power and values inherent in traditional approaches. The emergent approach to training that I have outlined here develops both listening and performance skills in tandem, with autonomous practice as a goal. Verbatim voice sits at the heart of this practice; from the verbatim of self, explored in the first strand of this research, through to verbatim of other, and finally into a verbatim to accent pedagogy. This work recognizes that accents are intertwined with identity, inhering into bodies beyond the level of articulatory mechanics and acoustics. For this reason, the embodied performance of a fully realized verbatim source material is critical at every stage. Embodying the lived experience of others prior to the application of accents to the performance text develops an empathy that can carry through into performance, as this white male middle-class student identifies:

The process has affected me deeply, it’s not only helped me work on my accents, it’s helped me to be a more respectful artist. It’s gone from making me realise […] what politically I represent, even if I don’t want to. It’s gone from shifting that into […] how actually, giving a voice and a story to someone…how to do that properly investigative, rather than as a gimmick. (Focus Group)

The verbatim to accents pedagogy is industry-focused and meets the individualized needs of diverse cohorts of students.

I think just gaining […] the tools to teach myself any accent that I need to learn has been very valuable. I know where I am comfortable, and having a couple of accents with me from Central that I’m, like, “I can put these on my CV. I’ll be able to do this in two days if asked.” But then also being, like, “If you give me a month, I can probably learn most English accents, and I can teach myself that.” I feel like I have a lot of agency, and a lot of power, in a sense, within my craft. (Focus Group)

This approach helps to build cultural competence as part of an anti-discriminatory approach that seeks for multiplicities rather than standards and imposed correctness. The decentered process outlined here allows me to hold the space for accent and dialect learning from multiple racial, ethnic, and class perspectives. I do not teach generalized versions of accents translated through my white British somatic experience. I do not hold the expertise in those accents and dialects. The students bring that from their embodied engagement with their verbatim source material. I foster and guide that process.

It feels a very creative prospect, and very exciting as a result. Hopefully, the idea, to me, is that it’s really freeing for all kinds of different actors to go to all kinds of different parts. That the tools we have are very robust. (Focus Group)

Finally, it is hoped that the embodied multiple authenticities offered by this approach can lead to pockets of insurgent action as a challenge to the generalizing and softening of accents prevalent within the performing arts industry.

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**Notes**

1. “Training with a Difference*,” American Theatre*. (<https://www.americantheatre.org/2018/01/04/training-with-a-difference/> last accessed August 16, 2019) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. In linguistics, the term “accent” is used to refer to the variation in sounds that a speaker makes when speaking language, and dialect refers to word changes that speakers make, most commonly in reference to the geographical location of the speaker. This distinction is common among UK voice professionals. For voice professionals in the US and Australia, the term accent has been more commonly applied to the sounds of that an L2 English Language speaker makes, and dialect is used to refer to variations in sound and words of L1 English language speakers. In this article, I have commonly used the term accent and dialect training as an overview of the subject area within actor training. Where I use the term accent on its own, I am referring to the sounds of speech by both L1 and L2 English language speakers. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Focus Group comments quoted in this article are not dated to avoid potential identification of individual students from a specific year group. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. I detail the methodology in full in (Oram 2019, 281-2). Briefly, the process began with student focus groups, which led to an initial revision of the curriculum. This was followed up with further focus groups and revisions. Alongside this practice-based research, I gathered quantitative and qualitative data from structured interviews with directors, casting directors, agents, and voice coaches and conducted a survey of 58 actors who had been trained across a range of UK institutions. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Verbatim Theatre uses the recordings of live speakers as the basis for creating a dramatic presentation. Outside of the UK this is sometimes referred to as documentary theatre, a term that can extend to the use of non-recorded sources such as transcripts, diaries, and other artefacts. I will use the term verbatim across this article to refer to work that uses recorded speech. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. In my research, I have shown that, in the UK, this is Received Pronunciation. Melissa Tonning-Kollwitz and Joe Hetterly (2018) state that in the United States, “right now in training, the default standard is middle class White American” (309). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Semantically, I prefer to refer to vocal identities rather than the more quantifiable and seemingly fixed idea of idiolect as it sits better with an intersectional approach that engages with multiplicity. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. In my recent article on heuristic research processes, I describe how deep listening “involves attending to somatic experiences while listening; noticing things like the tightening of the solar plexus when a disagreeable statement comes up, or the warming comfort of agreement; taking time to experience being moved without immediately defending a position”(Oram 2020). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. This has implications for the language of voice classes beyond the speech, accent, and dialect training discussed here. In short, I have moved away from liberal humanist rhetoric of neutral or natural toward a recognition of the performance of intersectional identities and a re-centring of vocal difference. I discuss this work in “The Heuristic Pedagogue: Navigating Myths and Truths in Pursuit of an Equitable Approach to Voice Training”(Oram 2020). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, and anti-racist pedagogy are responses to education, which

    has often been exclusionary and functioned to assimilate students by normalizing dominant knowledge and values through the hidden curriculum (Kishimoto 2018, 541) [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. The UK teaching year is broken up into three teaching terms; Oct-Dec, Jan-March, April-June. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. The scope for students to set their own goals in their assessment is another aspect of critical pedagogy and is additionally valuable in a diverse cohort which includes L2 English speakers. The assessment is pass/fail and the assessment criteria allows includes: “ability to adapt vocal usage to match that of the speaker,” “specificity and accuracy of accent and all other speech features,” “Ability to find an authentic physical embodiment of the original speaker,” “ability to adapt the original speaker’s level of communication to work effectively with a theatrical audience” (course documents, 2020). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. The transcript is not assessed as this would necessitate a judgement of the validity of a personalized system. The efficacy of the system used should be evident in the final performance. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Details of this training can be found at <https://ktspeechwork.org/about-the-work/> (last accessed 30th Sept 2020) [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Leslie explained that she “traces correctness and its perpetration of a society of violence back to the first empire that centralized power and introduced good/bad, right/wrong that led to systems of punishment and therefore reactions of retaliation that developed and normalized a culture of violence.” She goes on to detail how “[f]irst contact/colonialism and genocide and its replications of centralized power in forced removal, forced servitude/enslavement and the oppressive patterns that continue today are embedded in what the dominate culture/white supremacy culture deem correct/good/right” (personal communication October 18, 2020). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. The performance is recorded so that comparisons with the source material are possible as part of the assessment process. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. For many people who are dyslexic, phonological sequencing presents significant difficulties, and the use of symbols to represent sounds can be difficult for those people whose reading is affected by their dyslexic processing. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Pinyin is a respelling of Chinese characters using Roman script. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Along with RP, agents and casting directors, interviewed as part of this research, often described a desire for actors to have a “good” General American accent. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. As Lanceta Coronel, Springfield, and Feliciano-Sanchez Moser point out, “it is impossible to predict what tools an actor will need over the course of their career” (2020, 4). The accents and dialect training outlined here does not attempt to cover all of those eventualities, but supports actors to develop an autonomous process in line with Lanceta Coronel, Springfield, & Feliciano-Sanchez Moser’s demands for “a variety of skills needed to function confidently and adaptably as artists in a broad, rapidly changing global industry” (2). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. https://broadwaybaby.com/shows/dna/739041 (accessed March 3, 2019). All of the actors arrived at rehearsals having done their verbatim preparation and having applied that foundational accent work to the text. Our thanks go to accent coach, Joel Trill, for his support in collaborating with the actors to move this work into performance. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)