

Nate Halloran

I. Prospectus and Title: The Linguistics of Theater: Stage Dialect Learning and Application

The purpose of this study is to find out whether stage dialect teaching techniques bring about any sort of linguistic authenticity, which is characterized by the correct application of phonological rules (sounds as influenced by surrounding sounds) of another dialect, and/or the correct use of speech segments that are present in dialects other than one's own. This research involves the elicitation and recording of speech data from student actors here at PSU applying stage dialect techniques to a text provided to them by the researcher. There will also be a brief interview to ask questions about their use of stage dialect techniques and their "phonetic imitation" history. In linguistics, phonetic imitation is imitating the sounds of a dialect or language other than one's native dialect or language.

This study will begin with a brief interview (15-20 minutes) of the subject, administered by the researcher and recorded on audio. This interview will consist of several questions (see Appendix B) regarding the nature of their experience with stage dialects and phonetic imitation. This data will be included in detailed case studies in an attempt to correlate subjects' performance on the imitation tasks with self-reported experiences in stage dialects and/or phonetic imitation.

The elicitation tasks (also to be recorded) will include two separate sets of sentences to be read aloud in two stage dialects (Standard British, and Irish). Each set of sentences has been crafted to include a certain number of dialect-specific phonological "traps" to see if the subjects can apply "deep" phonological rules to imitating a stage dialect (see Appendix C). Subjects will have three attempts to read each sentence. They will then hear a playback of these attempts and be asked to select which they consider to be the best imitation.

I hypothesize that those actors who have studied stage dialect techniques will obtain slightly more linguistic authenticity than those actors who have not studied these techniques.

II. Exemption Claim for Waiver of Review

This study does not qualify for a waiver of review.

III. Participant Recruitment

Participants will be 12 student actors from Portland State University's Theater Arts Department. 6 will have taken a stage dialect class or voice training class that included the learning of stage dialects, and 6 will have not taken such a course. Ideally, each of these subgroups will include 3 males and 3 females.

The only age requirement for participants is that they are over 18 years of age, as part of my study looks at whether participants past puberty are still "phonetically able" to acquire a new sound system. For ease of comparison and to control for a "length of experience" effect, an attempt will be made to keep the participants between the ages of 18-30, but given the age ranges of students here at PSU, that will not be adhered to strictly.

The only other participants who will be excluded (besides those younger than 18) will be those who are highly proficient or fluent in more than one language, as it is thought that the depth and breadth of their “phonetic experience” may make them better at imitating dialects than those people without such linguistic experience.

Selection of participants will not be in any way harmful or discriminatory. To recruit participants, there will be fliers posted in the theater arts department, as well as announcements made in acting classes. Included on the fliers will be the list of attributes of the participants needed for the study; such as “Are you over 18? An acting student here at PSU? Have you taken an stage dialect class? (this is not necessary, but half the participants will *have* to have taken such a class) NOT fluent or proficient in more than your native language?”.

No real names will ever be attached to the data. Only pseudonyms will be used in the writing of the thesis; the only place participants’ real names will appear is on their informed consent forms.

IV. Informed Consent

Consent forms will be given to the subjects, by the researcher, prior to administering/recording the interview and elicitation tasks. Subjects will be asked to read the informed consent form, which will include an explanation of the research project and sign on the bottom before conducting the data collection. See Appendix A for the informed consent form.

V. First-Person Scenario

“I saw a flier [or heard an announcement] looking for actors with varying experience using stage dialects. I am interested in using these, so I replied to the email address on the bottom of the flier. Nate contacted me, clarified a few things about my background, and then we set up an appointment to meet in the linguistics building [East Hall] to record my imitations and conduct the interview.

When we first met, he gave me the informed consent form to read and sign. I did so. Nate then turned on his tape recorder. At this point, Nate reminded me that I did not have to answer any questions in the interview I did not feel comfortable answering, and I agreed that I understood that point. He also told me I was free to stop my participation in the project at any time. He then conducted the interview. While sitting across from me at a table, he asked me several questions regarding my background in acting and about my experience using stage dialects. This lasted about 20 minutes and was a pleasant conversation.

Then he gave me a set of sentences to read out loud in Standard British dialect. He asked me to read each sentence in my own dialect once, and then I was given three chances to read the sentence in British dialect. Then we listened to the three attempts I had made, and I was asked to choose which one I thought was best among the three. This was repeated for each sentence.

Then he gave me another set of sentences to be read aloud in Irish dialect. Again, he asked me to read each sentence in my own dialect once, and then I was given three chances to read the sentence in Irish dialect. We repeated the same process of selecting the reading I thought to be the best representation of Irish dialect.

When I was finished reading these two lists of sentences out loud and selecting what I considered to be the best representations of these two dialects, I was finished. The whole process took about an hour and a half, if that.”

VI. Potential Risks and Safeguards

The major identifiable potential risk would be that a subject's name, might somehow be associated with their results. This will be safeguarded against by referring to participants with pseudonyms in the write-up of the thesis. Participants will never have their real names associated with their data. The only place their real names will appear is on their informed consent forms.

Another potential risk is that participants may feel frustration if they feel unable to approximate the dialect to their liking. This will be safeguarded against by informing participants that they may stop at any time.

VII. Potential Benefits

The results of the study will inform both stage dialect technique, and pronunciation practice in English as Second Language. The study has the potential of adding data to the ongoing discussion in Applied Linguistics about how to best teach pronunciation, as well as informing stage dialect teachers (coaches) as to the level of authenticity in their methods.

The students may actually learn a strategy to improve their stage dialect technique through the process of listening to themselves on the playback, and selecting what they consider to be their best tokens among their attempts at the dialect readings. They may also perhaps enjoy the opportunity to perform, even under such a controlled setting, and even if only for an audience of one (i.e. the researcher).

VII. Records and Distribution

Subject confidentiality will be maintained by the use of pseudonyms attached to their data when written out to be analyzed. Their pseudonyms will also be used on the recordings; for identification purposes at the beginning of each interview session a pseudonym will be chosen by the researcher and uttered into the microphone, so their real names will never be said on the tapes. These pseudonyms will also be in the thesis itself. The only place their real names will appear is on their informed consent forms.

All data and records, including taped interview sessions and taped elicitation data will be kept on file at the researcher's home, in a file cabinet, for a minimum of three years after the completion of the research, per federal regulatory requirements.

APPENDIX A Informed Consent Form

My name is Nate Halloran. I am a graduate student in Applied Linguistics at Portland State University. I am inviting you to participate in a research project that I am doing as a part of my university requirements. I will ask you to produce some sentences using a stage dialect. I will also be asking you some questions about your theatrical background, as well as your background imitating dialects and languages other than your own. I hope to find out what stage dialect techniques bring about the most linguistic “authenticity”. I will not be using your name in the study.

What will I have to do?

If you decide to take part in this project, you:

- ♦ will be interviewed by me regarding your background in theater and stage dialect use.
- ♦ will be asked to read two sets of sentences out loud, one in Standard British dialect and one in Irish dialect. You will read each of these sentences out loud in your own dialect first.
- ♦ will be tape-recorded during both the interview and the reading.

Why have I been asked to participate?

- ♦ You are over 18, a native of the Pacific Northwest, and an acting student here at PSU who may or may not have taken a stage dialect class.

Are there any risks?

There is a very small risk someone will find out your name and attach it to the results found within the write-up of this study (my thesis). However, I will be using pseudonyms on your data; the only place your real name will appear is on this informed consent form. You may also feel frustrated if you have a hard time using a stage dialect. If this happens, you can stop at any time.

What are you doing to protect me?

Any information obtained in connection with this study and that can be linked to you will be kept confidential by the use of pseudonyms. Your gender and age may also appear in the text of the thesis, but again, will only be associated with your pseudonym.

I will keep the informed consent form (the only document containing your real name) and all the tape-recorded data locked away in a file cabinet. The tape-recorded interview will not be shared with anyone. The sentences read aloud in dialect may be shown to my thesis advisors to aid in analysis, but will only be heard by me otherwise. Your name will not appear anywhere on the labels of the tapes, only your pseudonym. Your name will not appear in my thesis.

Also, you may stop the interview or investigation at anytime.

What are the benefits if I participate in this project?

- ♦ You will have a chance to showcase and practice your talents as an actor/impersonator.
- ♦ This study may help improve teaching in both English as Second Language pronunciation classes, as well as in stage dialect classes.

What happens if I decide not to participate in this study?

- ♦ If at any point you wish that your data not be included in the study, simply contact me via email and I will strike it from the record. Your decision *will not* affect your relationship to me, Nate Halloran, the Applied Linguistics Department at Portland State University, the Theater Arts Department, nor the University itself, at all.

Any questions?

You may contact me if you have any questions about the study itself:

natehalloran@hotmail.com

503 236 6376

Or, you may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee of Portland State University about your rights as a research participant:

Portland State University

111 Cramer Hall

1721 Broadway

Portland, OR 97201

hsrrc@lists.pdx.edu

503-725-8182

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the above information and agree to take part in this study. Please understand that you may withdraw your consent at any time without penalty, and that, by signing, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. The researcher should provide you with a copy of this form for your own records.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX B

The interview will consist of questions about their learning/use of the dialect. It will consist of these questions:

- 1) Did you use the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) when learning the dialect?
- 2) What did you use as a target for learning the dialect (tape of native speaker, tape of imitation, native speaker acquaintance, movie set in native area of D2, etc.)?
- 3) What special techniques did you employ outside of these first two (if at all)? i.e. Was there a particular dialect coach whose techniques worked best for you and you applied his teaching here when I asked you to imitate the dialect?
- 4) How long did you spend trying to learn the accent?
- 5) Were there any that seemed to be more difficult than others?
- 6) Did you spend more time on any one accent than others? Either as a result of its difficulty or because of your preference for that accent?
- 7) Did you imitate dialects as a child or adolescent? When did you start and what dialects would you imitate?

There may be other related questions or topics that come up as a result of this interview; it will be left somewhat open-ended to accommodate for this possibility. However, the interview will remain related **only to these topics, no personal questions will be asked other than those listed above, and questions of a similar nature. Subjects will be reminded that they do not have to answer questions they feel uncomfortable answering, although the chances that any question will be “too personal” are minimal to none, as the questions will never stray from these and related topics regarding theatrical and phonetic experience.

APPENDIX C

Texts to be read aloud.

Irish dialect sentences

There was a lull in the conversation.

The bull hit a man with his horns.

The bottom of the light is brighter than the top.

While digging the trench they found a skull.

I tried to pull out the rest of the story from him.

“Do you think the air is still?” I said.

“Not at all,” I said.

Standard British dialect sentences

There are a lot of people here.

I bought a pint of lager.

A man planted a little palm tree at the bottom of the hill.

My mother coughed when I said I was moving to Boston.

My father made some broth.

“That was a quality dodge” he said of my evasive tactics.

The nurse asked for alms for the poor.

They will build a spa.