

# How to Write an Article Based on an Accent Break Down

## Some Opening Thoughts and Suggestions

Many voice and speech coaches for the performing arts create accent break downs as a regular part of their work. Some of these accent break downs can translate into valuable articles in the *Voice and Speech Review (VSR)*, but many do not. For academic publication, the accent break downs need to be unique or new in some way. Simply offering a breakdown and notes from your latest show is generally insufficient. Why would the larger voice community find this accent break down valuable?

Be specific and meticulous in your approach. For example, please do not submit a “German Accent” breakdown. More information is needed. Context questions include but are not limited to: Who are the speakers specifically? Is there a specific region or location? When in time did the accent exist? What is the context of the performance opportunities?

In your discussion, please be sure to delineate whether you are discussing an accent, a dialect, or both. Simply stated, an accent is the pronunciation, while a dialect includes other linguistic elements like grammar and syntax.

You should use detailed and accurate IPA that would be valid within a linguistic academic journal. Some older systems of phonetic transcription for the performing arts are not academically rigorous enough for publication in the *VSR*.

Often, accent break downs publish in the forum section of the *VSR*. This is the experienced-based section that is not peer reviewed. Accent break downs *can* qualify as peer reviewed articles on a case-by-case basis; please indicate if this is a goal upon submission. In any case, the historical and linguistic analysis should be rigorous, and the literature review should be thorough with careful attention given to how this accent fills a gap in the research literature.

## General Outline for an Accent Break Down Article

There *can* be some variation to this outline, and authors do *not* necessarily have to answer every question in this outline. Rather, the goal is to offer a guiding structure and to help authors avoid common issues.

### 1) Introduction

- a) Introduce the topic
- b) Why is an article based on this topic needed? For example:
  - i) Is there a gap in the accent/linguistic literature?
  - ii) Is the common understanding or the common use of this accent in theatre incorrect?
  - iii) Why is this accent break down unique from a typical accent break down that a coach would create for a typical show?
- c) What is the context of the study?
  - i) How did you come to the project?
  - ii) Why did you decide to write this article and this specific accent break down?
  - iii) What's the purpose of this article?
  - iv) What do you want people (coaches, actors, singers) to do with this break down?

## 2) Literature Review

- a) What does the academic literature already say about this topic?
- b) What is the history of the people who speak this accent?
- c) What is the history of the accent?
- d) Is there any other relevant historical or academic information that is needed to contextualize the article?

## 3) Methodology

- a) What form of linguistic analysis is being used?
  - i) Note: In the history of the *VSR*, most authors have based their accent break downs on the work of J.C. Wells. This is typical for our audience but not necessarily required. There are other valid and reliable systems in linguistic academic literature.
  - ii) Be sure to cite the literature of your methodology
- b) What is the structure of your accent break down?
  - i) Why did you choose this structure?
- c) If you used sound samples, where did you get them?
  - i) How many people did you sample?
  - ii) Where are they from? What is their background?
  - iii) Note: Don't forget that you need permission forms

## 4) Accent Breakdown

- a) Be detailed and use accurate IPA that would be acceptable in a linguistic academic journal
- b) For visual ease, you are encouraged to include a table or tables showing the sound shifts
- c) There should also be commentary and discussion in paragraph form in addition to a table or tables
- d) Don't forget that you need to discuss the accent's prosody
- e) Be careful with the term "oral posture." This is a common term with accent coaches, but it can have many meanings. How are you defining it and using it?
  - i) Give a source for the definition.
- f) In the *VSR*, never include impressionistic language when academically discussing an accent. Examples include words like: rough, clipped, soft, harsh, twang, guttural, lilt, and even potentially nasal. These words may be useful in coaching, but they do not necessarily have inherent linguistic meaning. Please define the terms specifically or avoid them altogether.

## 5) Conclusion

- a) What are the implications of this break down?
- b) What needs to change in how we view this topic?
- c) What is there still left to explore?