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**Vocal Schizophrenia or Conscious Flexibility?**  
***Owning the Voice in the South African Context***

*A minor dissertation*

*Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of  
Master of Arts in Theatre and Performance (Voice)*

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This dissertation is my own work. It has not been previously submitted in whole or in part for the award of any degree. The Harvard Convention has been used for citation and reference. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work or works of others has been acknowledged through citation and reference.

Signed by candidate

Signed

4 October 2009

Date

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**Vocal schizophrenia or conscious flexibility?**  
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**Abstract**

This thesis questions how and why certain South African performers habitually and unconsciously shift accent in the performance context. I refer to this vocal action as *habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation*. This examination is made considering that contemporary voice training at the Drama Department of the University of Cape Town (UCT), where the author locates, does not designate any accent as a criterion for performance. Whilst I do not contend habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation to be language-specific this research is English-based.

Habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation highlights three primary concerns: the first I term an ‘ossification’ of sound producing vocal inflexibility; the second is potential class-based exclusion from the performance context; and the third concern is a need for critical awareness in training and performance, evidenced by the preceding concerns. Despite accent-based speech adaptation paradoxically demonstrating the voice’s flexibility, when accent-based speech adaptation happens *unconsciously* and *habitually* the real flexibility of the voice is negated producing detachment from the performer’s own vocal identity or ‘vocal schizophrenia’ (Rodenburg, 2001: 81).

I study examples of habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation using the contestation that through voice training performers may subliminally pursue an ‘acoustic image of expectation’ argued by head of voice training at UCT, Liz Mills (2008: 10). The formation of this image of expectation is suggested within historical and contemporary contexts placing social and political ‘values’ onto and into sound: specifically accent. I draw on the work of French sociologist and anthropologist, Pierre Bourdieu, to locate South African socio-linguistic patterns. Contemporary research in neuroscience, into imitation and the human mirror system, is then considered to suggest how these ‘values’ are physically transmitted through language and accent, and as a result, how habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation

can occur in the performance context. Finally, I consider how to engage with habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation through a 'listening module' aimed at stimulating critical awareness.

At the core of this examination lies my intention of engaging perceptions around accent to stimulate awareness in order to enable performers to develop conscious choice and so determine the sound of their voice work for, and in, performance.

Please refer to *Annexure A* (pp54-55) for definitions of core terms used in this paper. These core terms are: accent; dialect; Received Pronunciation; South African English; register shift; and speech adaptation.

## Introduction

The child goes seeking his voice.  
(The king of crickets had it.)  
In a drop of water  
The child sought his voice.  
(Lorca, 2002: 515)

I understand Lorca's poem as a search for self-identity in sound. Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero affirms identity as utterly expressed through the voice stating: 'uniqueness resounds in the human voice; or, in the human voice, uniqueness makes itself sound' (2005: 177). And self-identity, like the voice, *is* unique.

Whereas Lorca whispers meaning through the metaphor of a 'child seeking a voice' performers quite literally seek for *ways* in which the voice can be interpretatively used for expression in performance. And whilst voice training should trigger an unending exploration of each individual's voice, performers can, unfortunately, sometimes seek for *a singular voice* to use exclusively for performance through voice training. Mills describes this sought-for voice as the 'image of expectation' by suggesting that 'in voice work as in any other form of performance the actor will create the *image of expectation* whether consciously or unconsciously' (2008: 6). Voice training can produce this 'image of expectation' either implicitly or explicitly *of itself* because

[i]n whatever ways it is named and even where it is not named, the aesthetic choice embraced in the training will be heard by the actor as the desired choice, the acoustic image of expectation....  
(Mills, 2008: 10)

An image of expectation will hold performers' voices captive just as the voice is held captive by 'the king of crickets' in Lorca's poem. From this perspective the perceptions performers hold over their voices themselves keep their own voices captive<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Rodenburg, in the wider context of Western voice practice, similarly argues for a need to 'free' the voice for performance noting that during training performers can 'mimic' instead of performing with a 'passion all their own' (Rodenburg, 2001: 29). Other contemporary voice practitioners equally challenge vocal self-limitation in the performance context, including, for example, Berry (2000: 16-17) and Linklater (2006: 1, 6).

Considering a performer who negatively and judgementally suppressed his own identity and consequently limited his performance, emerging voice coach John deBoer notes

[b]y focussing on the suppression of his own identity, [the performer] caused himself unnecessary physical and psychological vocal tension (2007: 24).

The function of voice training at its core is to empower and develop the voice for use in performance and, by implication, to engage with and relieve such 'unnecessary physical and psychological vocal tension.' One specific way in which performers can cause these unnecessary forms of tension is by *unconsciously* suppressing their own accents in performance. And such forms of tension result from this suppression precisely because accent forms part of the identity expressed in the voice. Voice does operate differently in the performance context from everyday contexts in that performance is a heightened state. But the performance context should not demand a 'heightened' accent of the performer, and specifically not a *socially* 'heightened' accent for performance, unless a consciously active artistic choice is explicitly made relevant to a specific production. From this perspective, and contrary to traditions of voice practice based on a concept of a 'standard' or 'neutral' accent<sup>2</sup>, I contend that voice training should not use any accent as a criterion or image of expectation for performance<sup>3</sup>. At the Drama Department of the University of Cape Town (UCT), accent is not a criterion for performance: performers are informed from the outset of voice training at UCT that 'all accents are welcome onstage' (Mills, 2006: 3). This

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<sup>2</sup> Within certain, now-dated voice traditions a 'neutral' or 'standard' accent supposedly enabled 'clarity' in speaking onstage and such an accent was used as an exclusive and exclusionary criterion for performance. In British voice practice this 'neutral' accent was Received Pronunciation (RP), the accent of the dominant dialect of Southeast England strongly associated with the 'educated' British middle-class, that was taught in British drama schools for most of the twentieth century (Rodenburg, 1998: 123). Although RP is still taught in certain drama schools in Britain its use as an exclusive criterion for performance is largely discontinued (Martin, 1991: 164-5, 171). In the USA a similar pattern pursuing a 'standard' American accent for use onstage also emerged as a tradition in voice practice, noted by Knight (2000: 41, 43-44). As explored later, South African voice practice was influenced by the British tradition and as a result initially approximated, taught and used RP as a 'neutral' accent for use in the performance context (Mills, 2006: 13).

<sup>3</sup> Hardie draws on the work of Trudgill (1975) and language-learning studies to argue that 'if training attempts to change the dialect or accent of the speaker, the speaker becomes...faltering and may develop problems of personal and cultural identity,' (Hardie, 2001: 187). The imposition of an accent as a criterion for performance can produce similar identity conflicts within performers particularly when considering the multicultural composition of South African society and the divisive history experienced by this society most especially under Apartheid, as later explored in this thesis.

declared position in voice training at UCT<sup>4</sup> is strengthened further in that performance extends to optional bilingual streams offered in Afrikaans or isiXhosa<sup>5</sup> (Mills, 2006: 8).

Despite this openly stated position of not favouring any one accent over another at UCT, certain performers develop an image of expectation of *a singular voice* exclusively for performance that is rooted in a shift in accent. A professional performer who experienced four years of voice training at the department indicates this image of expectation, stating: ‘I speak differently when I am acting...it’s like RP...it’s become automatic’ (Araujo, 2008: 8). From her statement the performer reveals three aspects of her image of expectation when performing. Firstly, she indicates that her accent is different when she performs by describing her sound for performance as being ‘like RP’; secondly she reveals that she habitually shifts accent in this way by stating this happens specifically ‘when I am acting’; and thirdly she indicates this shift in accent to be unconscious by indicating ‘it’s become automatic’ (Araujo, 2008: 8).

From these three aspects of the professional performer’s description of her image of expectation the action her voice undergoes can be linguistically identified as ‘speech adaptation’ (Branford, 1987: xxiv; cf. Rhoades & Zhao, 2006: 6). A range of variables indicates the occurrence of speech adaptation and these include shifts in volume, pitch, syntax, word choice, language or simply a shift in accent. The example of the professional performer’s vocal action is a form of speech adaptation because she indicates that one of these variables – the accent with which she speaks – *adapts* in a particular situation: her accent changes when she performs.

This thesis focuses on a specific form of speech adaptation that occurs in response to perceptions around the voice for performance that is the speech adaptation enacted when a performer *habitually and unconsciously shifts accent in or for performance*. For clarity, I refer to this vocal action that reflects the performer’s image of

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<sup>4</sup> Voice training at UCT is chiefly informed by the practices of Berry (1973, 1975, 2000, 2002), Rodenburg (1992, 1998, 2001, 2007), Linklater (1992, 2006), Lessac (1978, 1997), Mills (1999) and Houseman (2002).

<sup>5</sup> At UCT, accent is not currently taught in the performer training in isiXhosa, whilst performer training in Afrikaans teaches ‘...“suiwer Afrikaans” (pure Afrikaans)’ (Mills, 2006: 8).

expectation for performance as *habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation*.

Habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation that is informed by a performer's image of expectation produces three primary concerns: what I term an 'ossification' of sound that produces inflexibility in the voice; the potential for class-based exclusion from the performance context; and the need for awareness about the operation of sound, in training and in performance.

By 'ossification' of sound I mean that accent-based speech adaptation becomes a performer's unconscious and self-referential habit: a single shift in accent is consistently associated with, and used in, the performance context by the performer. This reaction seems to be disconnected from conscious artistic interpretation and character choice and indicates vocal inflexibility. Contemporary voice practitioner Rodenburg argues that

vocal enslavement can obliterate the speaker's imaginative response to language and words and encourage an emotional disconnection through the voice (2001: 79).

So this ossification of the voice also produces an emotional ossification in the performer because unconscious accent-based speech adaptation subtly emphasizes *how* words are said instead of *how* words are *felt*.

The second concern is the potential for class-based exclusion resulting from unconscious accent-based speech adaptation in performance. I later explore how accents can be used in society to delimit an individual's social position specifically through class systems that are supposedly reflected through accent. If a performer's image of expectation in voice training is *specifically* based on an accent it presupposes that other accents are considered 'unworthy' for performance.

The third area of concern is the need for critical listening to stimulate awareness about the operation of sound in voice training and consequently in performance. Training in the performance context should aim at enabling conscious vocal choice in order to create and *recreate* performance. If accent-based speech adaptation happens unconsciously, habitually and therefore unintentionally, this suggests that the

performer is not making an active vocal choice for performance and simultaneously indicates that the performer is not *vocally present* in performance.

Overarching these areas of concern is the paradox that accent-based speech adaptation demonstrates the responsiveness and flexibility of the voice to adapt to difference. And voice practice requires vocal flexibility and adaptability to meet the potential acoustic differences the performance context invites. But, when accent-based speech adaptation happens *unconsciously* and *habitually* I argue that it creates detachment from the real flexibility that is embedded in the voice as well as a negative detachment from the performer's own vocal identity to produce 'vocal schizophrenia' (Rodenburg, 2001: 81).

Consequently I am interested in both *why* and *how* unconscious accent-based speech adaptation can inform a performer's image of expectation in voice training. This interest stems from the need to discern ways of engaging with this vocal action in order to stimulate awareness within the performer of unconscious accent-based speech adaptation occurring. My desire to discern methods of stimulating awareness of this unconscious action stems from my premise that awareness can consequently enable the performer to exercise conscious vocal choice in performance and overcome unconscious habit.

To briefly describe the parameters of my research, in this thesis I explore unconscious accent-based speech adaptation in voice training within the performance context from the perspective of performing specifically in English. The research practice examples referenced in this thesis are drawn from first language English speaking performers. I explore this action of the voice within this language purely because my own first language is English and also because voice training at the Drama Department at UCT is given in English. But I neither contend nor suggest that unconscious accent-based speech adaptation is exclusive to English or is language-specific<sup>1</sup>.

Equally, the examination of accent-based speech adaptation in the performance context is made within voice training at the Drama Department at UCT, where I locate, with the assumption that this vocal action operates elsewhere in South African voice training and performance contexts. My own voice practice also requires

consideration: my practice is largely informed by current voice practice at UCT because I completed my undergraduate performer training at this department. And, as previously outlined, voice practice at UCT is in turn informed by the work of key contemporary voice practitioners such as Berry (1973, 1975, 2000, 2002), Rodenburg (1992, 1998, 2001, 2007), Linklater (1992, 2006), Lessac (1978, 1997), Mills (1999) and Houseman (2002). Prior to my training at UCT, my personal practice was chiefly informed by the work of Patsy Rodenburg through participation in a voice workshop led by this key practitioner (2000). So my personal voice practice stems from my physical understanding and experience of these voice traditions.

Importantly, this thesis is not an argument for accent acquisition as such: I am simply concerned with an unspoken image of expectation based on a shift in accent functioning as a criterion for performance. Furthermore I regard accent reduction as a violent disregard of an individual's voice that should not occur in voice training.

I led the voice practice that included research modules for two groups of performers in their first year of voice training UCT and this experience forms the practice-based research cited in this thesis. The performers entered the voice training programme in 2008 and 2009 respectively. Further research informing this thesis includes information and observation gathered from separate voice sessions, which I conducted for professional performers who agreed to participate in the research and who had graduated from UCT within the last two to five years. By agreement all of the performers who participated in the practice-based research remain anonymous.

In the first chapter of this thesis I explore *why* habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation can happen by considering the 'values' that can be placed onto and into sound. These 'values' are considered from historical and contemporary political and social perspectives in South Africa. From these social and political perspectives I consider why habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation might happen and even pass unnoticed in South African voice training.

The second chapter explores *how* habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation can happen. I consider shifts in accent by examining how language is learned and how learning language is linked to our capacity to imitate. In this regard I

examine how accent can shift in everyday contexts both consciously and unconsciously. This may explain how accent might shift in the performance context and develop into unconscious habit by the performer drawing from experience of the same vocal function in everyday contexts.

In the final chapter of the thesis I consider how to engage with habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation through a 'listening module' aimed at stimulating critical awareness. I formulated the listening module as an English-based six-session series intended to enable participants to voice perceptions around sound and accent and consequently to question the 'values' put into and onto sound. I map the observations and practical examples that the listening module sessions stimulated in the participating performers and locate these observations within the theory explored in the preceding chapters.

Conclusions drawn from my practice-based research into habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation are then considered. Most specifically, I argue that a system of actively engaging with the perceptions that underlie a shift in accent is the most useful and empowering method of enabling performers to allow themselves conscious choice to determine the sound of their voice work for, and in, performance.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Why habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation can happen

Speech adaptation is an everyday function of the voice enacted by shifting volume, pace, tone, pitch, syntax, word choice, language, or as specifically examined in this thesis – by *shifting accent*. And speech adaptation tangibly shows how remarkably responsive, adaptable and flexible the voice is. In essence, speech adaptation – in all the forms it may take – is an incredibly complex and often subtle action of the voice in response to context. And context is ultimately informed by the *spatial relations* between speaker and listener and by the *power relations* between speaker and listener.

Even individuals who are not performers would probably speak to a friend differently from how they would speak to a traffic officer about to issue them a fine. Individuals might also sound different in conversation with a friend from how they might sound when reading aloud to someone. Within the performance context three broad ‘sub-contexts’ occur that impact on the voice: *radio*, *camera-work*, and *theatre or live performance*. So, for example, performers would speak differently in character to other performers in character on *radio* from how they would for *camera-work* primarily because of their proximity to the microphone. Similarly, performers would speak differently in turn from *radio* and *camera-work* to how they would speak in character to other performers, in character, to an audience of six hundred people for example, in *theatre*. An audience can be singular or plural; it can be a crowd of paying patrons, peers in a class listening to a speaker, a traffic officer about to issue a fine, or a friend. Some ‘things’ adapt in the voice: the speaker accommodates the audience or asks the audience to accommodate the speaker, and it is in this sense that South African lexicographer Branford argues that speech adaptation occurs under ‘social and environmental pressure’ (1987: xxiv).

The social pressure that induces speech adaptation essentially indicates the *power relations* existing between the speaker and the listener: *power relations* are apparent in the example of a traffic officer, symbolising the State, threatening to issue an individual with a fine. The environmental pressure stimulating speech adaptation literally indicates the *spatial relations* between the listener and the speaker: *spatial*

*relations* are obvious in the example of a *live performance* for a six hundred-strong audience.

I am interested in how *spatial relations* and *power relations* could specifically cause *accent* to shift in the performance context. Voice practice and linguistics agree in effect that ‘accent’ means ‘the way you sound when you speak’ either when speaking a foreign language ‘using the sounds of another [language]’ or in ‘the way a group of people speak their native language’ (Bimer, n.d.; cf. Rodenburg, 1998: 122). So this chapter separates and examines *spatial relations* and *power relations* to explore how these interfacing contextual factors could possibly induce a performer to shift *accent* in performance unconsciously and habitually.

### **Spatial relations**

The *spatial relations* in most everyday contexts differ from the spatial relations impacting on the performance context – specifically regarding *live performance* and the nature of performance areas such as built theatre environments seating hundreds of audience members. *Live performance* requires the voice to physically project sound, meaning and emotion across the space to the very last listener. Voice practice, in considering the performance environment, insists that the performer must be audible to the audience (Mills, 2006: 3; Rodenburg, 1998: 4). Regarding audibility Rodenburg argues that

some accents are not so useful when it comes to projecting...you might have to compromise the accent slightly for the sake of clarity.  
(1998: 128)

But Rodenburg does not argue for accent-based speech adaptation as a general prerequisite for projection from the above. Contemporary voice practice suggests that the performer considers clarity in constructing a role. Rodenburg further argues that ‘when the actor is connected to the text we hear what is being said and should not be distracted by the accent’ (Rodenburg, 1998: 128). And this statement supports the use of any accent for performance.

Whilst voice practice within the Drama Department at UCT similarly emphasises that ‘clarity is the fundamental right of the audience,’ the department significantly declares

that 'all languages are welcome on stage [and] all accents are welcome on stage' (Mills, 2006: 3). Furthermore voice training is not offered in any one accent as a criterion for performance so *conscious* accent-based speech adaptation is neither taught nor actively encouraged at the department (Mills, 2006: 2, 4).

Resultantly it may be concluded that contemporary voice practice, especially at UCT, does not impose accent-based speech adaptation onto performers because of the *spatial relations* within the performance context. If voice practice was to actively impose accent-based speech adaptation, and it is demonstrated as not doing so, it would be precluded here: this thesis focuses on *unconscious* accent-based speech adaptation.

However, audiences can pressure performers to shift accent and this social pressure essentially involves *power relations*, not *spatial relations*. Exploring this social pressure from the audience Rodenburg acknowledges that

[a]ccents carry the weight of such political fear that even when an actor is perfectly audible in an accent I still receive letters of complaint that the performer is unclear (1998: 127).

From this perspective it seems that a perception of clarity in the performance context can confuse *spatial relations* with *power relations*. I suggest this confusion stems from a history of performance and voice practice that reflected and resultantly reinforced *power relations* through accent; specifically through the notion of a 'standard' in speaking.

### **Power relations**

The concept of a 'standard' in speaking pivots on the concept of accent operating as a marker of status, which Bourdieu terms 'symbolic power' (1984: 251). Symbolic power that is sounded out through speaking involves a *perception* of power that is neither intrinsic to the *sound* to which it is attributed, nor necessarily reflects the *actual power* or status held by the speaker. South African linguist De Klerk argues that a 'standard' accent is created by, and reflexively creates, a 'linguatocracy' that is 'a minority group who control the registers...of decision-making, leadership and power' (1999: 318). Essentially, to insure, reassure and extend its dominance the linguatocracy must enact methods of measuring, enforcing and reproducing this

dominance, and one such method is how language is spoken: determining a 'standard' accent.

To reiterate, contemporary voice practice at UCT does not actively encourage or impose a 'standard' in speaking English. Yet within voice practice at UCT *unconscious* accent-based speech adaptation occurs. Illustrating this, a first year performer asked a question in an initial voice session and then read an extract from a recent work by a South African poet. The accent of the voice that asked the question differed from the accent of the voice that read the poem: but the performer was the same. Asked if a difference occurred between the 'voices' a peer answered: 'I heard the difference.' And the performer who had enacted the accent-based speech adaptation acknowledged: 'I felt the difference' (Araujo, 2008: 2). In a subsequent voice session I asked this performer, who had unconsciously shifted accent, how she had learnt to use a different accent for performance as she had not been taught to do this at UCT. The performer answered 'I don't know. You just see other people doing it I suppose' (Araujo. 2008: 31). This is an example of unconscious accent-based speech adaptation.

Considering the professional performer's description of shifting in performance to an accent 'like RP' I asked a class of first year performers to perform a range of texts first in an accent they considered to hold the highest status in performance; then in an accent they felt held the lowest status for performance. The *multiracial* and *multicultural* class of first year performers identified the accent with the highest status for use in performance as 'British' and listed a range of local South African accents associated with speakers whose first language would not be English, as accents holding the lowest status in performance, and these latter descriptions included 'Afrikaans' or 'Coloured' accents (Araujo. 2008: 6, 13).

Whether these performers used an accent that could linguistically be defined as *British* is of less consequence than that their answers indicate perceptions based on a sense of symbolic power embedded in an accent that *sounds British*. This perception resonates subtly with the example of the professional performer who described her accent shifting to sound 'like RP' in performance in that RP would be described as sounding *British* because, as indicated, it is the accent of the dominant dialect of

Southeast England (Upton, 2004: 218). The acoustic link between these examples is strengthened considering that RP was held as the 'standard' accent of English for performance by a tradition of South African voice practice that demanded *conscious accent-based speech adaptation* from the performer to approximate this accent during the early half of the previous century: precisely because South Africa was a British colony at that time (Mills, 2006: 13).

Whilst I want to explore unconscious accent-based speech adaptation by tracing the descriptor 'British' I am not arguing that one accent, or a 'British' sounding accent, is *exclusively* the accent towards which performers locate when enacting habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation. However the referenced descriptions usefully provide an identified accent to which certain performers unconsciously and habitually shift and of which they have subsequently become aware.

In examining how this unconscious, habitual shift towards an accent performers *perceive* as sounding 'British' could happen, I consider South Africa's history as a British colony involving *power relations* based on the accent with which English was spoken.

English claims a global power and domination from a history of British colonization and British domination in South Africa stretched from 1806 until 1961 (Lanham & MacDonald, 1979: 9). As a result of colonization English was used to rule as an 'official' language – the language of law, commerce and education. This was first enacted in the then Cape Colony after the formal surrender of the previous Dutch colonisers to the British in 1814 (Bowerman, 2004: 931). The subsequent British colonial government declared English the only 'official' language of the Cape Colony in an open policy of 'anglicization' (Gough, 1996: xviii-xix). Despite the multicultural and multilingual nature of the population of South Africa, English held the highest status specifically through its use as the language of rule and of commerce for the region and through commerce English became a bridging language between different language groups (Banning, 1989: 9; Lanham & MacDonald, 1979: 11). Alternatively considered however, English was historically learned by the colonized because the colonizers refused to learn indigenous languages (De Klerk, 1999: 312).

And from this perspective I concur with Bourdieu's argument that

[r]ecourse to a neutralized language is obligatory whenever it is a matter of establishing a practical consensus.... Communication between classes (or, in colonial or semi-colonial societies, between ethnic groups) always represents a critical situation for the language that is used...(2008: 40).

Because of its use as a bridging language English did not remain a neutralized language but via the system of dominance enacted through governance, and through the system of language-distribution enacted through commerce, English both established and increased its status.

In order to govern through an 'official' language, that language must be imposed on a population, and its symbolic power is most easily maintained and extended through the education system. In his address to Parliament in 1855, Governor of the Cape, Sir George Grey argued that

[t]he native races beyond our boundary, influenced by our missionaries, instructed in our schools, benefiting by our trade, would not make wars on our frontiers (cited in Christie, 1986: 37).

Resultantly, English-medium mission schools made English accessible to a small group of black Africans; cyclically increasing the prestige associated with English precisely because such access was limited (Lanham & MacDonald, 1979: 14).

The dominance of English in South Africa was later irrevocably entrenched by the influx of British immigrants following the discovery of gold and diamonds at the end of the nineteenth century: a dominance cyclically generated by British imperialism that was supported by the newly-created 'mining plutocracy' (Lanham & MacDonald, 1979: 77). Lanham and MacDonald, who formulated much of the early sociolinguistic theory around spoken English in South Africa, significantly observe that this plutocracy *lived* this concept of imperialism through social enactment by

the denigration of what was obviously local... This extended to the 'colonial' who was rated socially inferior to those who were 'home born'... There were, therefore, many colonials striving to be British. (1979: 76)

Speaking identified the 'colonial' because a 'colonial' accent evidenced sounds of South African languages with which English had made contact. The 'home born' accent carried symbolic power by potentially associating the speaker with the status attributed to the economic elite. Precisely from this viewpoint Mills, with reference to

Bourdieu, argues that language and how we use it functions as '*cultural capital* for use in a sociolinguistic market of exchange' (emphasis in original: Mills, 2006: 10). Similarly, sounding 'home born' was not merely sounding 'British' *as such* but to sound out the accent of the British middle-class: the basis of RP. This was the aspired-to 'standard' accent that not even the literally wealthy could afford to speak without: mining magnate Barney Barnato underwent elocution lessons for the 'correction of his Cockneyisms' (Lanham & MacDonald, 1979: 81). This example demonstrates how symbolic power attributed to any accent is expressly *symbolic* in that Barnato's cockney sound supposedly indicated poverty despite the actuality of the opposite. And this evidences how speakers can encash an amount of accent-signalled symbolic power as 'cultural capital' – social currency that carries sufficient 'value' to 'buy' speakers what they want from their listeners. So accent-based speech adaptation can occur to increase the amount of 'cultural capital' held by a speaker.

Approximately fifty years later, against this context of colonization and dominance through accent, when Drama received departmental status at UCT in 1955 the tradition of voice practice at the department subtly reflected these power relations: a 'standard' accent for English was taught for performance (Mills, 1999: 7). The Drama Department at UCT was initially based on the British system of performer training in that Rosalie van der Gucht, who headed voice practice at UCT in 1946 and who outlined the basic tenets of the coursework for the Performer's Diploma, originally trained in 1926 at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London (Mills, 1999: 7, 8; Morris, 1989: 46). Berry argues that the voice practice governing the period when van der Gucht trained at the Central School was class-based, as evidenced by the 'standard' accent in English taught to the students, which was 'the English middle-class accent' (Berry, 2000: 287). This middle-class accent or RP was anointed as a 'neutral' accent – and Mills contests this neutrality precisely because RP was formulated on, and propelled by, the sound of the British middle-class of the early twentieth century (Mills, 2006: 13; cf. Berry, 2000: 287). The idea of an accent formulated around a middle-class sound being at all neutral is controversial in that, as Barthes argues 'in the middle classes, the art of speaking according to certain rules is a sign of social power' (cited in Martin, 1991: 11). So RP cannot be considered to be 'neutral' because of its function as a marker of status and consequently holding

symbolic power – in the same way that any given accent will inevitably privilege some group of speakers.

Pertinently, Bourdieu acknowledges that ‘authority comes to language from outside...[and is] passed to the orator who is about to speak’ (Bourdieu, 2008: 109). Voice practice at UCT, as it occurred when South Africa operated within the British Commonwealth, consequently functioned as such a system of *authorisation*. Bourdieu analyses systems that determine the ‘value’ of such cultural capital using the concept of ‘habitus’ that is simultaneously the ‘generative principle’ of judgements and the system by which those judgements can be classified (Bourdieu, 1984: 170). Consequently, via the Central School’s legacy coupled with the colonial legacy of South Africa, when UCT Drama Department was formed in 1955 the habitus of the department was to *authorise* RP as the ‘standard’ for English in training: because RP was the ‘standard’ *authorised* for use onstage (Mills, 2006: 13). Regarding ‘cultural capital,’ this meant that speaking a ‘standard’ accent within the system designating that ‘standard’ literally ‘bought’ the performer the ability to perform within that system.

So during this specific period at UCT accent-based speech adaptation was a *conscious* action of the voice, shaped by this tradition within voice practice.

*Power relations* embedded in sound in South Africa are further complicated by the Apartheid era and its impact on language policy. Afrikaans replaced Dutch (an ‘official’ language since 1910) as an ‘official’ language alongside English in 1925, but because South Africa still operated and traded within the British Commonwealth Afrikaans did not hold the status that English held (Gough, 1996: xviii-xix). But Apartheid ended direct British influence in South Africa when the Republic was declared in 1961 and the Apartheid government moved to establish Afrikaans as a language of rule (Lanham & MacDonald, 1979: 9; Mills, 2006: 13). It is no coincidence that before heading the Apartheid government and declaring republic, then Minister of Native Affairs, H.F. Verwoerd stated

[w]hen I have control over native education, I will reform it so that natives will be taught from childhood that equality with Europeans is not for them (cited in Christie, 1986: 12).

Under the Apartheid government Afrikaans was declared the medium of instruction for black South Africans (cf. Mills, 2006: 12-13). And so Verwoerd's vision of education directly echoes Bourdieu's referenced argument that, in ruling through an 'official' language, 'the educational system plays a decisive role' (Bourdieu, 2008: 48). The motion of imposing Afrikaans specifically on black South Africans through education was significant in that it removed access to English from these South Africans at a time when Afrikaans was an 'official' language only in the political sphere. The language of commerce remained English (Lanham & MacDonald, 1979: 21). So essentially, withholding access to English from black South Africans in order to exclude black South Africans from commerce was based on Verwoerd's ideal of enforcing racial inequality.

The Apartheid policy evidences how the symbolic power held by an 'official' language further involves 'symbolic violence' (Hanks, 2005: 78). The symbolic violence of withholding English from non-English speakers is clearly identified by Lanham and MacDonald who observe:

Edelstein's (1972) survey of Soweto attitudes found 88.5% of black parents chose English as the language in which they wanted their children educated (1979: 15).

Withholding English from black South Africans created the paradox of black South Africans placing a further premium on English, which was perceived as 'the language of liberation and black unity (as opposed to Afrikaans, which has been perceived as the language of the oppressor)' (Gough, 1996: xviii, xix). Consequently, whilst English in South Africa was removed from immediate British influence, English retained the title of an 'official' language and, especially amongst black South Africans, increased its status socially.

As a result English in South Africa became socially restructured into a localised hierarchy of accents and a new 'standard' in spoken English emerged.

Specifically during Apartheid, in the late seventies, Lanham and MacDonald identified three accent bands as 'socially significant' (Lanham & MacDonald, 1979: 30). These accent bands defined South African English (hereafter SAE) but excluded any contribution from non-white South Africans through the insidious argument of

the time that racial groups other than the white community in South Africa ‘remain[ed] outside the community which determines the norms of the standard and the attitudes that maintain them’ (Lanham & MacDonald, 1979: 19). And so, because of the fixation on race, Apartheid increased the ‘value’ of these three accent bands of SAE because speaking with these accents potentially identified the speaker as a white person. The three accent bands were:

Conservative SAE...upper class, associations with Britain...  
Respectable SAE...least apparent as a differential between social groups...  
Extreme SAE...strongest associations with lower class, Afrikaner descent... (Lanham & MacDonald, 1979: 30).

Where a hierarchy of accent had placed Received Pronunciation in the dominant position in the period of British colonization, a similar hierarchy of accent in English emerged in independent Apartheid South Africa precisely because of the influence of that colonization. In this way the ‘standard’ shifted in South African English to the closest local approximation of the British ‘standard’ or RP: Conservative SAE. This follows the colonization-approximation dialectic suggested by British sociolinguist Fairclough, which holds that a colonised population eventually approximates the concepts imposed upon it (Fairclough, 1999: 77). Essentially, the principle of a linguistic system to differentiate social positions became approximated by South African society because a similar social stratification system based on accent had initially been imposed through colonization.

The shift in ‘standard’ accent of English in South Africa consequently reflected at the UCT Department of Drama and by the early seventies RP was organically no longer taught in the department (Araujo, 2008: 11). Despite South Africa’s independence and voice practitioners at UCT no longer having direct links to British voice practice, Mills states that

a British ethos was in place...an unspoken sense that for standards and for confirmation of the authenticity of theatre voice practice, the practitioner should look to Britain (1999: 8).

And this evidences the cited colonization-approximation dialectic in that Mills elaborates on a shift within the department towards a ‘standard’ in SAE ‘exemplified by the old SABC English Service radio accent’ (Mills, 1999: 13). Lanham and MacDonald reference John Simpson, the then BBC Southern African correspondent,

to identify this SABC English Service radio accent as Conservative SAE (cited in Lanham & MacDonald, 1979: 19). And so the 'standard' accent used in voice training at UCT during this period was Conservative SAE: an identification strengthened by the cited 'British ethos' supporting the referenced definition of this accent as indicating 'associations with Britain' (Lanham & MacDonald, 1979: 30).

This shift in the 'standard' accent notwithstanding, during the seventies, accent-based speech adaptation was still a *conscious* vocal action within voice practice at UCT.

Driven by the momentum of this historical context, contemporary *power relations* in South Africa continue to place symbolic power onto and into sound, specifically English, reflexively placing pressure on accent. But teaching *conscious* accent-based speech adaptation as a criterion for performance no longer occurs at UCT: not only is RP no longer taught, but what Mills terms 'Standard South African English' (that has been identified as Conservative SAE) is not taught either; and to re-emphasize, voice practice at the department asserts that 'all accents are welcome onstage' (Mills, 2006: 3, 15).

Historical linguist Lass, who conducted much of his research at UCT, considers how *power relations* sounded out in speaking English in South Africa have shifted from the Apartheid-influenced categorisation of SAE as 'Conservative,' 'Respectable' and 'Extreme' to the present, and locates the English currently spoken by first language South African speakers within the following bands:

Type 1: An externally-focussed, very 'English' type, whose norms are dictated to a great extent by (a vision of) the Southern British Received Standard, in particular Received Pronunciation (RP);

Type 2: A new local standard, which while sharing many features (including prestige) with Type 1, is nevertheless recognisably local...

Type 3: A cluster of local vernaculars, stigmatised by Type 1 and Type 2 speakers, highly stereotyped by them and 'corrected' in local schools... (Lass, 1995: 93).

Basically the linguistic equation that determines which accent becomes the 'standard' in speaking at a certain time does so to the displacement of another accent. An attitude of simply rearranging the variables in this linguistic equation is not useful in that it does not alter the equation, or the principle of the equation, which is precisely to

achieve a hierarchy of accent. Despite South Africa having eleven ‘official’ languages, the language policy put into practice in South Africa since 1994 has been the *authorization* of English (De Klerk, 1999: 311). And Lass’ observation that Type 3 SAE is ‘stigmatised’ and ‘corrected’ through schooling underlines that symbolic power remains very evident in how English is spoken in contemporary South Africa: specifically as English has been *authorised* as the South African language of education. Besides the overwhelming proportion of English usage at tertiary level, English is the medium of instruction specifically from Grades Four to Twelve in the South African education system. This high level of English usage in education contrasts against the percentage of South Africans who are first language English speakers: a mere 8.6% where ‘75% are speakers of the 9 indigenous African languages’ (De Klerk, 1999: 315). And so it follows that English is also at present the *authorised* language of commerce.

In terms of contemporary linguistic study, however, South African sociolinguist Mesthrie (2008), argues the ‘deracialisation’ of sound to be a success of the new South Africa: in certain cases, accent is operating more independently of race. But as Mesthrie notes the current ‘prestige’ variety of English in South Africa is the accent that makes the speaker ‘sound white’ – and this is Type 2 SAE (Mesthrie, 2008). For this reason Type 2 SAE momentarily holds the highest ‘cultural capital’ in South Africa. Ten years prior to Mesthrie’s research, De Klerk noted that

middle and upper-class black parents<sup>6</sup>...are sending their children to formerly whites-only English medium schools...to learn ‘proper’ English, and...these children will acquire something closer to standard SAE [Type 2 SAE]... (1999: 321).

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<sup>6</sup> The accent more commonly used by this specific section of the population is termed Black South African English (BSAE), a label that is debated due to its racial descriptor. Notably, Type 2 SAE differs from BSAE, in that BSAE is an English spoken by ‘all South Africans who speak a Bantu language as first language and who probably learned English from BSAE-speaking teachers’ (De Klerk, 2003: 465). Essentially, BSAE is English spoken with the accent of a Bantu language. Linguistically, ‘Bantu’ languages include the Nguni languages (isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiSwati and isiNdebele), the Sotho languages (Setswana, Sepedi and Sesotho), and Tshivenda and Xitsonga (Vermaak, 2006: 21). Whilst the term ‘Bantu’ is currently used linguistically it is under scrutiny within the linguistic community because of the previously negative connotations applied to the term by the Apartheid system. Linguistically, ‘Bantu’ is not used offensively but as a descriptor for this group of local languages (Wissing, 2002: 144). Equally, because of patterns of grammatical structure within BSAE, De Klerk notes that whilst BSAE has been linguistically viewed as ‘deviant from standard English’ a contemporary movement within the linguistic community argues that BSAE ‘is a variety [of English] in its own right [and is] a new or World English’ (De Klerk, 2003: 463). Alternatively, BSAE might more inclusively be viewed (in contexts in which it occurs as an accent) as locating within the band of Type 3 SAE.

Mesthrie's research apparently vindicates De Klerk's argument. That parents, who themselves do not speak using Type 2 SAE, want their children to speak English with this accent essentially reflects Labov's linguistic study showing the support for a 'standard' accent often stems from a section of a population who themselves do not speak using this 'standard' (cited in Hanks, 2005: 76).

Exploring the 'cultural capital' that English holds in South Africa, using a survey across a linguistically representative range of respondents, De Klerk and Bosch show English to be consistently associated with high-status occupations (1995: 32). And 'an overwhelming percentage (68.7%) assigned high-status occupations to the English [speaking] person speaking his mother tongue' (De Klerk & Bosch, 1995: 32). From these results using a Type 2 SAE accent not only signals a supposedly high level of education but also signals a supposedly high status occupation – and by corollary – a high level of income (De Klerk & Bosch, 1995: 32). So the 'cultural capital' embedded in accent also functions as a *social indicator*.

From these perceptions, Type 2 SAE is currently regarded as the 'standard' in South African English against which all other forms are compared.

But in this thesis the explored examples of habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation in the performance context describe a shift towards an accent sounding 'like RP' and performers indicate a perception of a *British-sounding* accent holding the highest status in the performance context. These descriptions do not suggest an accent locating within Type 2 SAE (cf. Lass, 1995: 93). The performers' perceptions do however resonate with Lass' argument that Type 2 SAE speakers might 'wish they did' sound like Type 1 speakers where Type 1 SAE speakers 'perhaps nostalgically and ignorantly...[look] to an image of the speech of Southern Britain as [their] source of norms' (Lass, 1995: 90). So from the referenced descriptions the performers seem to indicate a shift probably locating within Type 1 SAE. Notably Type 1 SAE is not RP but a quintessentially distinct *South African accent*: the performers' perceptions indicate deafness to the South African identity of Type 1 SAE. That the students identified Type 1 SAE – the accent within SAE that sounds the most 'British' – is interesting in that it is not currently regarded as the 'standard' in SAE.

I suggest that these examples of a shift towards a sound locating within Type 1 SAE indicate a perception of needing to exceed the 'standard.' Because the ability to speak with the 'standard' accent can be converted into 'cultural capital' (as explored), it follows that speaking an accent exceeding the demands of that 'standard' further increases the speaker's 'cultural capital.' Type 1 SAE can therefore claim a subtly higher 'cultural capital' than Type 2 SAE in the habitus of an environment that 'values' language, speech, and the 'quality' of speaking because Type 1 SAE *exceeds competence*. And the performance context is just such an environment with a 'habitus' that places a premium on these 'values.'

However this perception of Type 1 SAE contrasts with the stated, current habitus of voice practice at UCT that welcomes all accents onstage. Equally Mills argues that the habitus of contemporary South African theatre places a premium on personal South African stories and therefore 'the linguistic identities of individual students' (Mills, 2006: 18). But, as significantly demonstrated by the performers, the perception of a linguistic hierarchy for performance, wherein a 'British' accent holds the highest status, is held *on entering voice practice at UCT*. And this perception literally vocalises these performers' 'image of expectation.' The performers' perception is strikingly negative when juxtaposed with Rodenburg's observation 'I think it is a violation of any speaker's right to tell them their mother accent is not good enough to speak the great texts' (2001: 79). From the cited examples the individuals identifying their 'mother accents' as insufficient for performance are the performers themselves.

So, for certain performers who hold an accent locating around Type 1 SAE as their image of expectation, this accent ultimately forms and informs their habitus or at least their acoustic 'taste' in English – where 'taste' is a purely subjective impetus to 'value' one thing over another. But as Bourdieu argues, 'taste' is as much a cultural acquisition as language: meaning that the dominant group validates 'taste' as a further function of symbolic power (1987: 1). Consequently, Bourdieu notes 'taste is a match-maker' whereby co-option is an act 'through which a habitus confirms its affinity with other habitus...[producing] habitus affinity' (1987: 243). So habitus affinity can result from a performer and a voice practitioner sharing a similar habitus that 'values' similar sounds. Because habitus affinity cannot exist outside a historical process it provides an *unconscious* method of *authorizing* an accent that embodies a

certain symbolic power. And habitus affinity is made possible as a result of the socio-political and historical processes that impacted on voice practice at UCT: particularly through the shift during Apartheid that regarded Type 1 SAE, under the synonymous label of Conservative SAE, as the 'standard' in voice practice.

I also find a significant link between unconscious accent-based speech adaptation and individual shifts in habitus outlined in Bourdieu's argument that

[t]he 'choices' of the habitus [especially] in the presence of legitimate speakers...are accomplished without consciousness or constraint, by virtue of the dispositions which, although they are unquestionably the product of social determinisms, are also constituted outside the spheres of consciousness and constraint (2008: 51).

So despite a voice practice that 'welcomes all accents onstage' the personal habitus held by the voice practitioner can be *unconsciously* and *unintentionally* exerted on the performer precisely because the performer will hold the voice practitioner as the 'legitimate speaker' in voice practice: producing an acoustic image of expectation.

Additionally, the *power relations* within *spatial relations* of this training context can exert auxiliary unconscious pressure on the performer in that a university is credited with further symbolic power not only as a centre of education but as the highest tier of the education system.

However accent-based speech adaptation is an exceptionally complex action, dependent on numerous contexts and pressures. And I do not suggest that there is necessarily any *one* answer to explain how an unconscious accent-based speech adaptation can occur because in addition to habitus affinity there is a factor embedded in the performance context that can stimulate unconscious accent-based speech adaptation to happen habitually. This factor is so obvious it can be easily overlooked and yet this factor distinguishes the performance context from everyday contexts: performance is often text-based which requires reading aloud.

Because dialogue in the performance context is often predetermined this can produce pressure from *power relations* expressed through the subtlest form of *spatial relations* inherent in the performance context: writing. Writing presents language to the reader

within a specific spatial relationship that is grammatically and semantically predetermined and precludes the possibilities that conversation can produce.

Bourdieu argues that in pre-revolutionary France, the use of an 'official' language was cyclically empowered by the use of that 'standard' in writing (2008: 46-47). But the structuring tastes imposed on a language through writing are also paradoxically and cyclically drawn from spoken usage of that language. It follows that the grammar of written language indicates the dialect of that language, and consequently, the accent of the written dialect (Trudgill, 1999: 3). In linguistics, 'dialect' refers to a regional type of grammar and word choice that can also include the accent of that region as a factor and so because it is possible to encounter a dialect spoken with the accent of another region it allows for better clarity to think of these two terms as distinct (Trudgill, 1999: 2,3). The dialect in which most writing is found is 'Standard English' a 'standard' determined in Britain and synonymous with RP (Trudgill, 1999: 3). And so, in reading aloud, where writing potentially makes speech occur *spatially* in a dialect different from that of the reader, the accent of the reader can be highlighted through sound by this juxtaposition.

Consequently Mesthrie seems to have found very useful research for performers in his method of gathering sound samples (Mesthrie, 2008). During interviews respondents first chatted with Mesthrie, who noted accent, and then respondents read. But Mesthrie noted respondents' accents unexpectedly and unconsciously shifted when reading from their recorded accents in unscripted conversation (Mesthrie, 2008). And this indicates unconscious accent-based speech adaptation. Mesthrie suggested that the accent-based speech adaptation might have resulted from respondents encountering alternate word style lists: essentially words they wouldn't necessarily use themselves. But Mills contends that writing is formal and this perception would produce a formality in the voice – expressed acoustically as a shift to a 'formal' accent (Mills, 2008). Mills' argument is especially important in that it suggests that *writing itself* produces this perception: meaning that the performer's response to reading aloud can be to negate the *actual* dialect in which a performance text is written by simply associating text with a shift to a 'higher' social accent such as Type 1 SAE.

This seemingly unconscious response to shift to a 'higher' social accent is essentially a strategic form of *deception* in that it suggests the reader/performer operates within the accent used to read. However, I do not delimit accent-based speech adaptation solely to reading, but accent-based speech adaptation seems to link very strongly *with* reading: and performers will generally have to work from texts. In learning lines, it is probable that performers additionally learn the initial accent with which they read the text aloud, reiterating the *habitual* unconscious reaction of shifting accent when reading.

I suggest the reason *strategic deception* should happen unconsciously is exceptionally simple: feeling nervous, which presupposes some form of judgement of sound and self and produces the basis of constructing an image of expectation from the first. Rodenburg considers the shock experienced by a performer's body on an opening night to be measurable by the amount of adrenalin released: and the amount of adrenalin released in a performer's body on an opening night is equivalent to that released by the body in a head-on car-crash (Rodenburg, 2000). Performers work on a varying scale of nervous tension: from reading texts aloud in front of peers all the way through to performing work onstage for an audience. Nervousness is therefore a probable reason for the shift in accent as a defence tactic of deception.

Improvisation specialist Viola Spolin makes a similar connection between unconscious action and systems of judgement in arguing that 'surviving by pleasing others' results in an 'approval/disapproval syndrome [creating]...robotlike behaviour' (2001: 109). In this context unconscious accent-based speech adaptation *is* 'robotlike behaviour' particularly considering performers' descriptions of this shift operating 'automatically' (Araujo, 2008: 8). And I contend an approval/disapproval syndrome is inherent in a student formulating an acoustic image of expectation at all.

Essentially then, when operating under circumstances where nervousness generates an approval/disapproval syndrome to monitor self, the stimulus response is to defend self. Keith Johnstone notes status forms part of this defence and argues:

people have a preferred status...they like to be low, or high, and...they manoeuvre themselves into the preferred positions.... In either case the status played is a defence, and it'll usually work. (1981: 43)

So I suggest that a likely recurring reason for accent-based speech adaptation specifically when reading a text aloud is for protection: especially as a form of protective mimicry. In this sense 'protective mimicry' is apt: the imitator has perceived another individual, operating under the same set of circumstances, upping or lowering their status through accent-based speech adaptation that seemed a successful defence strategy. This form of mimicry seems embedded in the response of the performer who answered why she shifted accent in performance with 'You just see other people doing it I suppose' (Araujo, 2008: 31). The imitation is consequently most possibly an attempt to conceal what speakers consider inadequacies in their own sound – essentially, their accent. And so, because nervousness will be repeatedly encountered by nature of the profession, the performer will construct a repeated pattern: to form habit, subliminally refer back to habit, and then unconsciously imitate this reference point: reinforcing habit.

It follows to interrogate *how* humans imitate and whether imitation is an utterly conscious action. This may further explain how unconscious accent-based speech adaptation can happen, undermining the current tradition of voice practice that welcomes all accents onstage.

## CHAPTER TWO

### How habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation can happen

The focus of this chapter is to explore *how* habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation can occur. I have suggested that an unconscious shift in accent is linked with imitation. And I propose that a sense of ‘value’ in an observed action precipitates imitation in the observer. This is suggested in the example of a performer who explained shifting accent in performance as a result of ‘just see[ing] other people doing it I suppose’ (Araujo, 2008: 31). This performers’ accent shifted between asking a question and reading aloud, and when asked if a difference existed between the accents a peer answered ‘I heard the difference’ (Araujo, 2008: 2).

Hearing the difference in accent in the above example is of importance because, to hear the shift in accent, the fellow performer contrasted spoken sound to define the shift in accent by counterpoint. Perceiving an accent through counterpoint can operate by hearing the accent of the Other against the *supposedly accent-less sound* of the Self. As Thompson argues:

we *all* have accents and those accents all mean something in our society. The belief that accents are what other people have makes us deaf to our own (2007: 354).

Through this system of perception accent is attributed to the Other but not to the Self. This distinction is important in that it suggests the range of external human sounds experienced by the speaker are processed against the speaker’s own sounds as a determinant of identity.

This raises two important questions: the first question being how it is that speakers initially acquire the range of sound determining their accents; and the second question is whether this acquisition process is experienced consciously or unconsciously. And underscoring both of these questions is how it is we learn to speak at all.

### Mirror neurons

Considering *conscious* ability, humans are the only primates with the ‘precise voluntary control...of the vocal cords and tongue’ necessary to produce speech (Corballis & Gentilucci, 2007: 51). At a basic level *consciousness* enables us to speak.

But language is not a given ability in humans and Oppenheimer notes ‘language was invented and has to be internally reinvented in every child learning to speak’ (Oppenheimer, 2007: 104). Language is consequently a cultural possession inherited by speakers. Regarding how it is we learn to speak language at all, Hurley contends that both acquiring language and language itself depend on imitation: and Hurley further contends that our ability to imitate other humans is made possible by the ‘mirror system’ (Hurley, 2005: 8).

Basically, the mirror system *enables imitation* and it is found in humans, having first been identified in monkeys (Blakemore et al. 2004: 217; cf. Corballis & Gentilucci, 2007: 52). The human mirror system occurs in Broca’s area, which is the region of the brain that specifically controls language (Hurley, 2005: 14,16; cf. Corballis & Gentilucci, 2007: 53). Mirror neurons only fire when watching a biological action: when observing another person physically performing an action (Blakemore et al. 2004: 217). Corballis and Gentilucci state the ‘perception and production of language’ are part of the mirror system that is in turn part of a bigger system letting us understand a biological motion through ‘visuo-motor (and audio-motor) integration’ (Corballis & Gentilucci, 2007: 53). But whilst the coordination of speech muscles involves *conscious ability*, imitation is not necessarily a *conscious act*. Blakemore, provides evidence that demonstrates this in that infants older than nine months, therefore outside the ‘sensitive period’ for categorising sound, were able to learn new sounds only if a person demonstrated those sounds to them in person (Blakemore et al. 2004: 219). This suggests the babies matched the physical movement of their own speech muscles with those of the speakers to produce new speech sounds using imitation through the mirror system.

And so by imitating spoken language accent is simultaneously acquired. This happens because the language acquired, such as English, is a ‘cultural possession’ and not a ‘biological aspect,’ of, say, being English (Oppenheimer, 2007: 111). In this sense O’Riagain states:

linguistic sounds are more than mere tools for communication...[but function] for cultural expression...passed from one generation to another (cited in Moore, 2003: 269).

A subtler link between learning and culture lies in the education system: learning language from a teacher at school suggests cultural meanings in language can be further layered within a broader sound community; and equally, cultural meanings placed into and onto language can be controlled and disseminated through the education system. And this is precisely the concept underlying the imposition of an 'official' language through the education system, that has been previously explored. The idea of a broader sound community existing at all is significant: Moore argues that sound is an important factor in constructing identity in that we learn cultural meanings embedded within sound that grow our 'imagined community' (Moore, 2003: 266-267). The act of taking a sound-based identity for granted within an imagined community is apparent in 'hearing' the Other speaking with accent whilst the Self exists as accent-less. And this concept links in turn with Hanks' argument that 'systems of distinction, including language, present themselves to native speakers as natural' (Hanks, 2005: 77). This system of distinction is revealed in operation by the suggestion that the 'sound range' used to 'hear' accent is one's own: and that range is essentially the same range in which one was first immersed.

Regarding *unconscious* ability that impacts on speaking, imitation, enabled by the mirror system, does not end after infancy. The experimental research of Bargh and Dijksterhuis shows evidence of 'an automatic, unconscious tendency to imitate in normal adult subjects' (cited in Hurley, 2005: 8). It follows that imitation is an evolutionary tool for survival that continues throughout life.

However, mirror neurons are insufficient of themselves to induce imitation and Rizzolatti contends that 'the motor resonance set up by mirror neurons makes action observation meaningful by linking it to the observer's own potential actions' (cited in Hurley, 2005: 14). The mirror system must be connected to a 'comparator system' and this means 'an intended imitative movement is controlled by reference to an observed target movement, enabling imitative learning' (Rizzolatti cited in Hurley, 2005: 14). Imitation is enacted because of a 'value' perceived in the action observed. 'Value' in this sense depends on context, speaker and listener. It is not enough for 'value' to be conferred by someone upon something: the conferred 'value' must be recognised by someone else through the observed action *achieving some goal*. Essentially this means we are able to 'value' another person's physical action by

seeing how they achieve a goal through that action: and this is ‘intentionality’ (Tomasello et al. 2005: 675; cf. Dunbar, 2007: 40, 42). ‘Intentionality’ refers to our ability to read what someone is trying to achieve, and in this sense, Wolpert’s observation is telling: ‘People use language, not just to signal emotional states or territorial claims, but to shape each other’s minds’ (Wolpert, 2007: 178). And this ability to shape minds is a property of language in that language itself is a form of collaborative activity based on intentionality. Tomasello indicates this is because the ‘joint goal’ of conversation is the reorientation of the ‘listener’s intentions so that they align with those of the speaker’ (Tomasello et al. 2005: 683). This is illustrated when an adult gets a baby to imitate a sound. But as demonstrated, even in this example, multiple ‘values’ embedded in sound involving both communicative and cultural meanings operate precisely because accent is simultaneously transmitted with language. So another ‘value’ embedded in the language-acquisition process is the consequently simultaneous accent-acquisition process that functions like an access-card: the baby imitating the accent will acoustically develop to locate and operate within the imitated, matching sound group.

Because language and accent acquisition seem to occur through the mirror system, I suggest that the subliminal operation of the mirror system probably explains how unconscious accent-based speech adaptation occurs. This seems embedded in the response of the performer who was asked where she had learnt to shift her accent for performance so early in her first year of training and who answered ‘I don’t know. You just see other people doing it I suppose’ (Araujo, 2008: 31). This response is telling in that *seeing* and *hearing* an accent spoken, are demonstrated as essential to its imitation.

### **Memes**

Whilst the socio-political contexts locating accent within the ambit of symbolic power are intricately complex, this complexity is further heightened by the *physical act* of transmitting those ‘values.’ And the *physical act* of transmission is the neurophysical act of *speaking* and this identifies language as a ‘meme’. Dawkins defines a ‘meme’ as ‘a unit of cultural inheritance’ (Dawkins, 2004: 278)<sup>7</sup>. This cultural inheritance is

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to distinguish between ‘memes’ and ‘habitus.’ A meme is a unit of cultural inheritance and as such it is a ‘replicator’ (Hurley, 2005: 18). Habitus, as explored, is simultaneously

significant because, as O’Riagain notes, *language* is a cultural possession ‘passed from one generation to another’ (cited in Moore, 2003: 269). So, because language is a meme and because accent is demonstrated as being transmitted simultaneously with language, accent is a meme too. In this sense I suggest that the cited performers who were not taught to shift accent in performance *consciously* at UCT and who identified their accents for performance as locating somewhere within Type 1 SAE, acquired these accents through imitative learning. In this context, Hurley cites Heinrich et al. to argue:

there may be a tendency to copy memes that are more frequent than other memes (*conformity bias*) or to copy memes that are associated with high status persons (*prestige bias*), regardless of their content (cited in Hurley, 2005: 19).

It is possible to locate within a sound group and to merely signal difference by not adapting accent when making contact with a different sound group. But Hurley’s above argument outlines a basis for accent-based speech adaptation to occur in the performance context based on a perception of a dominant sound<sup>8</sup>, particularly with reference to the socio-political contexts already explored. Hurley’s argument indicates two primary acoustic possibilities. Firstly, it is possible to *consciously* or *unconsciously* signal difference by adapting to – that is, imitating – an accent perceived by the performer as more dominant and socially different from that of an encountered sound group. Secondly, it is also possible for a performer to wish,

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the principle that generates judgements and the system classifying those judgements. Thompson, in his introduction to Bourdieu’s *Language and Symbolic Power*, makes this distinction clearer by defining habitus specifically as ‘a set of *dispositions*’ (2008: 12). So whilst habitus is indicated by dispositions, which can be everyday physical acts, those dispositions are not in themselves described as ‘habitus’ because ‘habitus’ refers to the collectively overarching, subliminal social construct both informing and informed by those dispositions. So ‘meme’ is a broader and more useful term in this thesis in that it not only describes overarching *systems* of replication (habitus) but *units* of replication (including the individual dispositions that constitute habitus), as Dawkins suggests: ‘examples of memes are tunes, ideas...ways of making pots or building arches’ (cited in Blackmore, 2007: 3). From these definitions follows the critical understanding that *habitus is a meme* because habitus is a system that undergoes replication. Conversely however, whilst habitus is a meme, a meme is not necessarily a form of habitus in the same way that English is a language, but language is not necessarily English (or, a poodle is a dog but a dog is not necessarily a poodle, to give a more tangible example: although a dog is a dog and not a meme at all). Equally, to consider these replicated and replicating units solely from the perspective of habitus would limit an understanding of these units to socio-political perspectives as opposed to developing an understanding of how such single units could accumulate to eventually form overarching, possibly socio-political, frameworks. The concept of the meme is therefore included in this thesis because this term has specifically already been used to understand language within neuroscience and parapsychology (Blackmore, 2007: 13; Hurley, 2005: 18-19). Memes enable an understanding of how the process of replication can *physically* occur.

<sup>8</sup> The ‘dominance’ of an accent is based on a perception of a higher cultural capital as being embedded in that accent. So a *numerical majority* using a given accent in speaking does not necessarily indicate ‘dominance.’

*consciously or unconsciously*, to conform to the dominant accent in an encountered sound group and so imitate this accent.

Both of these modes of imitation, whether *consciously* or *unconsciously* enacted, are ultimately forms of *strategic deception* to gain access within a sound group. And in a similar manner, as examined in the previous chapter, by shifting accent when reading aloud, the accent to which the reader shifts *seems* to locate that reader within the sound group associated with that accent.

Bargh and Dijksterhuis' research reinforces the potential of the conformity bias in that

the mere perception of another's behaviour automatically increases, in ways subjects are not aware of, the likelihood of engaging in similar behaviour oneself (cited in Hurley, 2005: 8).

And consequently, the uncertainty of the first year performer as to how it was she learnt to shift accent for performance – other than just *seeing* other people do it – seems to resonate with Hurley's observation that

[w]e automatically tend to assimilate our behaviour to our social environment in that modelled personality traits and stereotypes automatically activate corresponding behaviour in us. Chartrand and Bargh (1999) call this the *chameleon effect* (Hurley, 2005: 8-9).

The chameleon effect can explain an *unconscious reaction* in the performer to a new or different environment: from a meme-based perspective the chameleon effect is essentially a conformity bias. Sensing a need to blend in, a performer will assimilate the accent of the dominant sound group in the new surroundings. Whilst the mirror system does not induce imitation but simply enables imitation the perceived 'value' underlying the chameleon effect is a subliminal need to hide difference. This is the 'value' of imitating the dominant accent of the social environment: accent-based speech adaptation provides a kind of acoustic camouflage through *strategic deception* because an important 'value' embedded in accent is that it locates the speaker within a group, enabling the speaker to operate within that group.

Deception is not necessarily negative; it exists as an evolutionary 'value' that operates as a vital part of human behaviour. Oppenheimer argues that deception is an advantage embedded in speaking that is learned in the form of telling lies around age four (Oppenheimer, 2007: 105). Age four is the developmental time when children are

able to read other peoples' intentionality with exceptional ability (Whiten, 2007: 152). Essentially, when we lie we are 'recognising when others will be guided by beliefs which do not correspond with reality' (Whiten, 2007: 152). Not actually belonging to a given social class but unconsciously imitating the accent attributed to that social class is such a deception. So using an accent that tends towards Type 1 SAE, as suggested by performers in this thesis, whilst not subscribing to the 'values' supposedly governing the social class associated with this accent, is such a form of deception.

From this perspective, the cited example of tending towards an accent locating around Type 1 SAE might not be an instance of conformity bias. This example could suggest prestige bias aggravating the performer's accent-based speech adaptation in that definite social prejudices have been shown to operate within accent in everyday South African contexts. The need to exceed the 'standard' of Type 2 SAE by using an accent locating within Type 1 SAE, for example, would be an instance of prestige bias operating.

However I am not suggesting that class aspiration, which might indicate a prestige bias from a meme-based perspective, can explain away accent-based speech adaptation in the performance context. As indicated above, imitating an accent as an act of *strategic deception* does not mean that the speaker necessarily subscribes to the 'values' associated with that accent as located within socio-political class systems. What the cited examples identifying a hierarchy of accent for the performance context, dominated by an accent sounding 'British,' do suggest is that strong prejudice against certain accents in SAE exists. I have explored why such prejudice is rooted in socio-political contexts. Resultantly these socio-political, everyday contexts will infiltrate the performance context creating self-censorship and the censorship of peers' sounds.

To review some basic insights developed in this chapter, I have suggested that imitation through the mirror system enables unconscious accent-based speech adaptation. And I have suggested that unconscious accent-based speech adaptation is probably stimulated by the historical and socio-political contexts still current in South Africa. The actual act of accent-based speech adaptation can occur through a pursuit

of cultural capital either because of a conformity bias or a prestige bias. Whilst these biases can operate *consciously*, due to the explored strongly impulsive, unconscious tendencies underlying imitation itself, I contend that the potential for either of these biases to operate *unconsciously* is heightened.

Nevertheless *conscious* ability is demanded of the performer within contemporary voice practice, as Thompson argues

in order to move beyond the narrow palette of his own voice...an actor needs some explicit knowledge of what makes up the range of possible human expression and some experience consciously manipulating those sounds (2007: 356).

Ultimately, *conscious* ability is required of the performer to ensure vocal flexibility for interpretative expression. And I contend that overcoming the potential obstacle of unconscious accent-based speech adaptation lies in stimulating awareness of precisely that habitual unconscious accent-based speech adaptation happening; in order for performers to personally assess if they experience this vocal action.

The 'listening module' formed one possible method of stimulating such awareness and examples of critical listening are drawn from this practice-based research in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Engaging with habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation

Accent-based speech adaptation is an exceptionally complex action. And whilst this vocal action demonstrates just how responsive the voice can be it can also paradoxically create inflexibility in limiting the performer's voice to a single sound defined by accent that becomes habitually associated with performance regardless of emotional connection with character or text. Awareness is key to stimulating critical choice for the performer in that awareness can free the performer from habit by making habit explicit and known. I contend that *how* and *why* unconscious accent-based speech adaptation happens effectively matter more than this action *actually happening* because unconscious accent-based speech adaptation is symptomatic of an underlying cause suggesting the social and cultural filtering of sound.

So I suggest that if performers who enact habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation become aware of this shift in accent occurring in the performance context they will be able to avoid this action *precisely through increased awareness*.

As a result I devised and ran a 'listening module' for first year performance students. The listening module was an English-based six-session series aimed at stimulating critical hearing: questioning meanings put into and onto sound. I am not suggesting that the examples drawn from the listening module necessarily *prove* anything: I did not intend the module to produce empirical results and so the listening module was not structured to produce such data. My intention was to make perceptions of how the voice is heard explicit.

This chapter maps how, through the listening module, perceptions around accent were raised and how these perceptions locate within the explored theory: specifically concerning language; how it is learnt through imitation; and how accent is used through the socio-political filters outlined previously.

Each session of the listening module essentially incorporated physical release explorations to promote both the release of tension and sensory awareness of the release of tension; vocal placement explorations to stimulate a sensory experience of

how the voice could operate when muscularly supported; and the remainder of each session then focussed on improvisation and text-work. Improvisation was used to allow for an awareness of how the voice could operate differently from reading and performing a text, and, in conjunction with the vocal placement explorations, also allowed an experience of the voice operating outside of language.

In formulating the listening module I drew on my own voice practice and selected voice exploration practices from the work of Patsy Rodenburg (1998, 2001) and performance techniques developed by Yoshi Oida (Marshall: 2007). The listening module also made use of the improvisation methodologies of Viola Spolin (2001), Chris Johnston (2006) and Keith Johnstone (1981). Discussion also formed an integral part of these sessions during which the performers shared and debated perceptions that arose from their participation in the practical explorations. I openly and repeatedly declared the sessions to be safe spaces in which no right or wrong answer existed: allowing all perceptions to be voiced.

### **Recognising accent-based speech adaptation in the listening module**

Whilst the group of performers participating in the listening module was both multilingual and multiracial the module focused on habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation specifically in English. So despite certain multilingual performers indicating an awareness of experiencing vocal shifts when moving from first to second language use, where physical differences in phonation can explain accent shifts in moving between languages, these instances are precluded from this thesis.

But the identity-loss in shifting between languages identified by these multilingual performers during a discussion at the outset of the module merits a brief mention: because directly from this discussion a similar loss of identity was significantly, and equally, perceived and expressed by first-language English-speakers who found a remarkable parallel in speaking in English. During this discussion one English-speaking performer responded:

[w]hen I speak English with different groups of different people I feel I change my accent to try match theirs. It's a bad thing. I feel I lose my identity. I'm hiding myself (Araujo, 2009a).

This performer indicated becoming subsequently aware of unconsciously changing his accent in socially different acoustic contexts. This in turn suggests an awareness in the performer of other accents operating within English as a first language.

Through the listening module certain performers gradually identified accent-based speech adaptation as an action they had experienced. The performers did not identify this action as *accent-based speech adaptation* as such, and neither did I, but their own descriptions of shifting accents in certain contexts match how I define this vocal action.

Accent surfaced in the first session of the listening module when performers working in gibberish used sounds suggesting identifiable languages. I asked the performers to identify the ‘accent’ of the gibberish. Listeners regularly matched the ‘accents’ of the gibberish with the ‘language’ intended by the speakers. The performers explained what *they* meant by ‘accent’ as ways of saying vowels and consonants differently. This is an interestingly technical definition. One performer suggested *how* accents were heard observing that ‘an accent is what is out of your range of sound’ (Araujo, 2009a). These definitions suggest the Self is perceived as operating within a ‘range of sound’ but is not perceived to speak with an accent.

An exploration in a following session required performers to imitate a partner’s sound. A performer asked specifically in response to this exploration ‘What must you imitate? Their accent?’ (Araujo, 2009a). For this performer accent *could be* imitated and existed before any other sound quality, even a quality as apparent as volume. After this exercise, another performer argued: ‘Accent changes, my accent changes, it depends who you’re talking to, where you are, what the situation is’ (Araujo, 2009a). This group of performers recognised through the exploration that context caused accent to shift: this is the determinant of accent-based speech adaptation.

It seemed useful to isolate examples of accent-based speech adaptation in everyday contexts in order to make accent-based speech adaptation more explicit in the performance context. Isolating possible everyday contexts from the performance context also seemed to stimulate an awareness of accent-based speech adaptation as an action that the performers had experienced quite vividly in certain instances. This

awareness allowed for a greater awareness of accent-based speech adaptation when it occurred in the performance context.

### **Examples of accent-based speech adaptation in everyday contexts from the listening module**

Performers were asked where they learned their first language and who had taught it to them. The answers established two general categories: ‘my parents’ and ‘my parents and my teacher [at school]’ (Araujo, 2009a).

The aspect of accent being simultaneously transmitted with language is embedded in the first of the two categories: that language was learnt from ‘my parents.’ It is the simultaneous transmission of accent with language that determines language to further function, as previously explored, ‘for cultural expression...passed from one generation to another’ (cited in Moore, 2003: 269).

The second category identified language as learnt from ‘my parents and my teacher [at school].’ This is significant in that it suggests an opening-up of a sound community: the broader sound community encountered at school is apparent in this category. This in turn relates back to Moore’s argument that sound factors in constructing identity because cultural meanings are learnt in sound, growing ‘our “imagined community”...’ (Moore, 2003: 266-267).

Both categories are significant in locating examples of accent-based speech adaptation of which the performers had become aware. Noteworthy examples include:

Okay my mom is coloured and my dad is white so when I speak with my mom I sound coloured but when I speak with my dad he doesn’t want me to speak like that so I speak more like this, how I’m speaking now [demonstrates accent locating within Type 2 SAE]....  
(Araujo, 2009a)

This example indicates a sense of adaptability according to context and suggests a conscious choice to shift between the cited accents: as well as a complex accent shift in interpersonal communication.

Accent-based speech adaptation can be unconscious despite an extreme shift in accent. Another performer argued that her extreme shift in accent was unconscious

and stated 'I don't even know that I'm doing it' (Araujo, 2009a). The performer argued that her drama teacher had noticed her extreme accent shift: the performer used a Type 2 SAE accent at school (an environment where this accent was dominant), but at home, the performer spoke with 'a "coloured" accent' (Araujo, 2009a).

Another performer noted that his speech had not been understood when he changed schools and he had decided to change his sound, as he defined it, 'from "coloured" to "English"...' (Araujo, 2009a). This performer stated he had made the shift himself, of his own choice and that nobody had taught him different sounds to shift accent. He also noted that he now struggles to understand his 'coloured' friends and that they struggle to understand him (Araujo, 2009a). A permanent state of speech adaptation is indicated by this radical example and it evidences a very conscious choice to shift accent. This example further demonstrates how Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital can operate by indicating that the accent 'valued' at home lost its 'value' when it arrived at school. But the initial accent must have had some 'value' to operate at home. At school however, another accent was perceived as being 'valuable' in this different environment and it was consequently imitated to equip the speaker with the cultural capital necessary to operate in the new environment.

These different examples show that accent-based speech adaptation can be conscious or unconscious. Conscious shifts can be externally imposed where the speaker is literally asked to shift accent, such as the performer shifting accent in speaking from father to mother. Or conscious shifts can be self-imposed in reaction to a perceived difference in acoustic environment, such as the performer who decided to change his accent himself. Unconscious shifts can also occur as demonstrated by the performer who was unaware of enacting extreme shifts when operating across two contrasting acoustic environments.

Importantly, in the same session that students identified where they first learnt language, one student suggested that accent depended on 'socio-economic conditions' (Araujo, 2009a). This was very strongly challenged by another student who disagreed saying that just because people spoke with a certain accent didn't mean they had a certain amount of either money or education (Araujo, 2009a). From this example,

perceptions around language and ‘value’ – Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic power – simultaneously became apparent and stimulated critical discussion within the listening module.

### **Examples of accent-based speech adaptation in a training context**

During the third session, improvisation using finger puppets produced shifts within voices that included placement, pace and in some instances, accent (Araujo, 2009a). The performers used finger puppets to improvise around the story of Little Red Riding-hood.

The following example usefully indicates a shift in accent from working with the finger-puppets. A male performer playing Little Red Riding-hood, and encountering other performers playing other characters during this role-play, characterised Red Riding-hood with a high-pitched vocal placement that retained his personal, identifiably Afrikaans-influenced accent (Araujo, 2009a). Then Little Red Riding-hood (the same male performer) encountered another performer who used an American accent to play the wolf. Suddenly the male performer playing Little Red Riding-hood spoke with an American accent despite maintaining his described pitch range. The performer playing Little Red Riding-hood subsequently lost this acquired American accent when other performers (who retained their idiosyncratic South African accents) replaced the acting partner who used the American accent (Araujo, 2009a).

I suggest the above example illustrates the *unconscious* chameleon effect that forms ‘the default underlying tendency for normal humans adults. It needs to be specifically overridden and inhibited’ (Hurley, 2005: 12). The imitation of the American accent by the performer playing Little Red Riding-hood in the finger puppet improvisation seemed an unconscious reaction to context: i.e. an example of unconscious accent-based speech adaptation.

### **Text-based examples of accent-based speech adaptation in training/performance**

Following the finger-puppet improvisation the performers read extracts from Shakespeare and worked in pairs. The performers then compared their experiences of

improvising with finger-puppets with reading text. One performer argued: 'With Shakespeare your range is limited – you couldn't do it the way you did the finger puppets' and whilst this was indicated to have been the general experience another performer further noted 'We were reading' (Araujo, 2009a). Reading was therefore observed as operating differently from improvising dialogue and understood as stimulating a shift in spoken sound that the performers felt was 'limited.'

In questioning what made performing the Shakespeare different from improvising with finger puppets the notion of an image of expectation was explored. One performer argued 'With Shakespeare you have a preconceived way of doing it': and that is precisely what *an image of expectation is* (Araujo, 2009a).

To explore what established this image of expectation for the performers I asked the performers if I had asked them to speak the written text in any specific way. The performers noted I had not imposed restrictions on them. I asked who had imposed these restrictions. One performer, who had noted undergoing unconscious accent-based speech adaptation between school and home, observed: 'We did, we imposed the restrictions on ourselves' (Araujo, 2009a). So the performers became aware of holding preconceptions: and forming an image of expectation.

In the final session of the listening module the performers explored their preconceptions more fully, and I contend these preconceptions can strongly determine accent-based speech adaptations in the performance context especially when stemming from performers *at the start of their first year of training*.

**Preconceptions: causing accent-based speech adaptation in training/performance**

An image of expectation is a preconception that requires an operating approval/disapproval syndrome to cyclically generate and evaluate itself. And an approval/disapproval syndrome that would generate an image of expectation is evident in a performer's reaction to my continual reiteration in the first session of the listening module that there was no right or wrong; at the end of the session the performer approached me and asked 'You *will* still tell us when we do something wrong' (Araujo, 2009a). This approval/disapproval syndrome operates as the

generative principle of the image of expectation because it forms the judgement base against which sound is measured as ‘worthy’ or ‘unworthy.’

So in the final session of the listening module the performers were asked to work as a group and construct a table listing any accents they could think of under two headings, which I supplied. The first heading read ‘Should use onstage’ and the second read ‘Shouldn’t use onstage’ (Araujo, 2009a). The performers were asked to work without judging each other’s answers or their own: any answer was admissible even if there was disagreement within the group. The performers began with ‘Should use onstage’ and this column read, in the order of writing:

Shakespearean<sup>9</sup>; Victorian; English – posh; From England; Association and connections I make with the text; Stereotypes; How I choose to associate.  
(Araujo, 2009a)

Whilst it may be argued that these results don’t show anything conclusive for the group, they do show a strong tendency towards a specifically preconceived accent, perceived as ‘From England’ that in South African terms would translate into Type 1 SAE per Lass’ categorisation of Type 1 SAE as a ‘very ‘English’ type whose norms are dictated to a great extent by (a vision of)...Received Pronunciation’ (Lass, 1995: 93). Consequently, what is most interesting regarding the table the students constructed is that Type 1 SAE, linguistically distinct from RP, is not owned as being a uniquely South African accent.

What is most remarkable about the first four answers listed (if not all the answers) is that first year performers who had only started their training arrived at them. These perceptions that accents *authorized* for performance should sound ‘Shakespearean, Victorian, English – posh, From England’ are entering the department and are therefore not necessarily inherent in a training programme that openly states that RP is not taught and notably that ‘all accents are welcome onstage’ (Araujo, 2009a; cf. Mills, 2006: 3).

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<sup>9</sup> Using ‘Shakespearean’ as a descriptor for an accent in this context shows a historically inaccurate preconception of sound and accent: as Rodenburg observes ‘Shakespeare’s actors did not speak his texts in RP but in their own mother accents’ (2001: 79). And further, Rodenburg argues that accents, including RP, constantly change roughly every ten years (1998: 124). The performers’ use of ‘Shakespearean’ as a descriptor for a supposedly ‘British’ sound that in actuality would locate around Type 1 SAE – an accent developed approximately three centuries *after* Shakespearean texts were written – essentially indicates an uninformed and exceptionally limiting perception of sound.

Under the second column, 'Shouldn't use onstage,' the performers listed the following:

Afrikaans; Indian; South African; Common; American; Gham – local dialect; Stereotypes (Araujo, 2009a).

A voice practice welcoming all accents onstage is immediately silenced. Of particular relevance is the further observation of one performer that 'People should be taught to speak in a neutral accent – proper English' (Araujo, 2009a). Against this perception it is important to reiterate that a 'neutral accent' was the supposed definition of RP – an accent rooted in the middle class as demonstrated in the first chapter of this thesis. And as previously noted, RP was not taught in the department from the early seventies. Consequently I suggest this table of accents evidences perceptions based on a dated system of training that previously used RP through a legacy of colonization (Mills, 2006: 13; cf. Araujo, 2008: 11).

To review the listening module an anonymous written survey was conducted in which performers were specifically asked: 'Do you feel something changes in your voice – without your choosing it to happen – when you read in front of people?' and 'Do you feel the same thing happens when you perform in front of people?' (Araujo, 2009b). Whilst the answers varied idiosyncratically and I do not intend for the results to reflect anything more than a broad type of opinion poll, the responses are worth considering.

One performer did not answer either question. Three performers said no change occurred in their voices in the first scenario, and of these three, two stated no change other than volume occurred in the second scenario. But of the three, one performer did note a change in the second scenario answering, 'my accent becomes more anglicized [sic]' (Araujo, 2009b). Twenty-five performers said 'something' changed in response to the first question.

Because language operates as a status marker and consequently holds symbolic power, fear and status seem embedded in the act of performing or reading aloud for an audience. I suggest that fear is linked to the need to indicate some type of status drawing from Johnstone's argument that status is often played for defence (1981: 43). Fear – perhaps more gently described as feeling 'nervous' – is a probable reason for

the shift in accent as a defensive measure. Six performers cited feeling nervous as inducing the ‘something’ changing their voices when reading or performing in front of people (Araujo, 2009b).

Of all twenty-five performers, three identified the ‘something’ that changed in the first scenario as accent, and correspondingly the same respondents agreed that what changed in the first scenario also changed in the second. These three performers described the shift in accent as follows: one performer indicated the shift in accent to a sound described as ‘...“theatrical” and “British-sounding”...’; another noted ‘I automatically alter my voice into a more formal accent’; and the third noted a shift to ‘proper English (more white) [parenthesis in original]’ (Araujo, 2009b).

This last cluster of answers reveals insight into the habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation a performer can experience either in reading aloud or in performing, notably, a text-based piece. The first of the three answers indicates the common experience outlined in this thesis, identifying the shift in accent in performance towards an accent socio-politically perceived to historically hold high cultural capital that is described as ‘British-sounding.’ The second answer shows accent-based speech adaptation in performance can be unconscious: the shift happens ‘automatically.’ The third answer indicates that a speaker can experience a sense of formality in performance, which seemingly subliminally requires the speaker to use ‘proper English.’ Furthermore, the explored social pressure experienced through an apparent awareness of the ‘values’ attributed to Type 2 SAE is explicitly demonstrated by the third answer that notes a shift in accent to sound ‘more white.’ This answer relates strongly to Mesthrie’s cited argument that the accent currently perceived as the most prestigious in contemporary South Africa is Type 2 SAE, because this accent makes the speaker ‘sound white’ (Mesthrie, 2008).

A common determinant within these examples is the shift to an accent that sounds ‘more formal’ and ‘English’ or as the oddly dissenting-but-affirming answer stated ‘more anglicized [sic].’ The descriptors in these answers link directly with Lass’ outline of the norms dictating Type 1 SAE, most especially when coupled with the descriptions supplied by other performers elsewhere in this thesis, in which performers speak of shifting to an accent ‘like RP,’ which is the primary descriptor

for Type 1 SAE (Lass, 1995: 93). I propose that the actual, resultant accents used in the examples would probably locate somewhere within the accent band of Type 1 SAE, but at the same time, the students need not have necessarily fully achieved Type 1 SAE as such, in that a shift in a performer's accent coupled with a habitual tendency towards this sound in performance qualifies as habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation.

Most importantly, another, subtler common factor underlies each of these examples of accent-based speech adaptation in performance: a limited sound is produced regardless of audience. This sound is limited in that it does not shift according to 'who you're talking to, where you are, what the situation is' as argued by the performers previously regarding speech adaptation in everyday examples. Rather, this type of accent-based speech adaptation has a fixed sound value for the performer – demonstrated to be a socially 'heightened' accent (such as Type 1 SAE) – that is associated with *performance* and not with text or character.

The listening module made this observation explicit and this is an important insight to emerge because training requires *conscious choice*. And the ability to override and inhibit compulsive imitation is possible in that this ability appears present in adults, as noted (Hurley, 2005: 7). I contend that an awareness of the imitation happening reinforces this ability to override compulsive imitation. This seems supported in the feedback sheets completed by performers after the module ended, notably in the following exchange:

*Question* Do you feel something changes in your voice – without your choosing it to happen – when you read in front of people?

*Answer* Yes – it can become “theatrical” and “British-sounding”

*Question* Do you feel the same thing happens when you perform in front of people?

*Answer* Sometimes – I try to consciously force myself to avoid it happening.

(Araujo, 2009b)

The shift in sound in this example can be defined as accent-based speech adaptation via the descriptor 'British-sounding.' And the performer indicates that an awareness of this accent-based speech adaptation happening enables them to 'consciously' avoid its occurrence, which otherwise happens unconsciously.

### **Some important insights that developed from the listening module**

The listening module practically exposed aspects of accent-based speech adaptation for the performers and also furthered my understanding of this vocal action.

The module explored *conscious* accent-based speech adaptation in everyday contexts indicating that the voice will respond on demand and that it can be trained to respond. This was demonstrated through the examples of performers shifting sound when entering different acoustic environments, such as when moving to a new school.

Significantly, examples of *unconscious* accent-based speech adaptation that the performers identified in their own lives, particularly those in everyday contexts, show a remarkable, instinctual ability to respond to a situation and listener. Regarding this vocal flexibility, a performer offered the following useful insight to the cited first-language English-speaking performer who noted his accent continuously shifting when he encountered different accent groups:

Perhaps all these sounds are a spectrum of who you are.  
(Araujo, 2009b)

I would argue that these sounds definitely are a spectrum of the individual located in turn within the sound-spectrum of the multilingual, multicultural society of contemporary South Africa.

However, examples of accent-based speech adaptation in everyday contexts from the listening module equally point to a very clear pattern impacting on the performance context: an ossification in the voice in that a fixed sound becomes associated with a context. The everyday example of this ossification was the use of one accent-based sound to speak with one's father. And so when this pattern is transposed to the performance context it produces habitual and unconscious accent-based speech adaptation through the performers routine association of one sound with performance.

The moment of awareness intended from the listening module occurred when the table of accents supposedly 'suitable' for use in performance was completed. The table evidenced very negative perceptions operating in a multiracial, multilingual, class of first year performers who, for example, listed the accents they felt 'shouldn't' be used onstage as 'Afrikaans; Indian; South African; Common...' (Araujo, 2009a).

When the table was completed one isolated performer asked ‘Why do those [South African] accents go under that category – aren’t they refined enough? Or civilized enough? *I am asking us*’ (my emphasis: Araujo, 2009a).

The question demonstrates a critical hearing of meaning put into and onto sound: the hoped-for aim of the module.

## CONCLUSIONS

Accent-based speech adaptations in everyday contexts are contextually dependent and so can occur frequently, with variation between contexts, either *consciously* or *unconsciously*. Because of the unconscious impetuses underlying imitation I argue that the unconsciously impulsive tendencies to imitate encountered speech patterns in everyday contexts – specifically accents – are reinforced. And from everyday examples, permanent associations between sounds and contexts emerge that are compounded by habit.

So because habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation is informed by the everyday enactment of permanent associations between sound and context, performers can make a similar, *unconsciously* permanent association between the performance context and a *singular voice* that is based on a shift in accent induced by an underlying image of expectation. One reason for performers unconsciously associating a shift in accent with the performance context is the frequent use of text within this environment. Reading aloud to another person is specifically demonstrated to effect unconscious accent-based speech adaptation. Nervousness about reading aloud seems a likely stimulus of automatically shifting accent for *strategic deception*, via conformity and prestige biases, intended to avoid judgement on sound through a pursuit of cultural capital. The shift in accent in this context essentially operates for self-protection.

But whether working from text or not, permanently associating performance with a *singular voice* that is based on a shift in accent, albeit *unconsciously*, is not useful in this environment precisely because the performance context explores, encourages and invites multilingual identities. Further, habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation in the performance context can cause emotional detachment from the voice and limit the performer's acoustic range and interpretative ability.

Engaging with this unconsciously permanent association between the voice and the performance context through a listening module encouraged performers to critically hear and to question 'values' placed into and onto sound: specifically through accent. Because training for performance should ultimately stimulate a performer's awareness

of unconscious reaction and conscious ability, awareness of unconscious accent-based speech adaptation occurring can assist the performer to develop conscious choice. When consciousness happens in voice training, choice is enabled through an awareness of acoustic options that can extend beyond both the self-limitations placed on personal identity, and the socio-political limitations imposed upon personal identity. It may be argued that none of the choices around shifts in sound is easy to make and that choices around sound – specifically accent – imply loss and gain and attract both positive and negative judgements. But these judgements are ultimately based on the socio-political construct of ‘taste.’ And ‘taste,’ as such, relies on a *perception* of ‘value’ as being supposedly intrinsic to accent. I have argued that such a perception is misleading because ‘value’ is placed onto and into sound by the dominant, privileged group in a given context and as such, ‘value’ is quite arbitrarily attributed to sound. In this sense the image of expectation operates as an act of symbolic violence that vocally limits the performer and Bourdieu argues that this violence

is never more manifest than in all the corrections...to which dominated speakers, as they strive desperately for correctness, consciously or unconsciously subject the stigmatised aspects of their pronunciation...which leaves them ‘speechless’...as if they were suddenly dispossessed of their own language (2008: 52).

Importantly, Bourdieu notes that the speakers subject *themselves* to such ‘corrections’ that essentially reflect ‘taste.’ In the same way, the fear of losing status by literally voicing the ‘wrong’ taste embodies an act of symbolic violence and returns performers to a censoring image of expectation. And this image of expectation – whilst potentially originating from broader social systems – operates via an approval/disapproval syndrome and is essentially *self-imposed* in voice training specifically at UCT, as demonstrated.

Critical awareness of sound, however, allows for an understanding of self-identity alongside other peoples’ identities. And this awareness also increases creativity by encouraging performers to express these identities through the voice. Knight explores the extremes of this argument to contest that acting itself can be seen to ‘rob the actor of cultural identity...[a]cting is, after all, largely about becoming someone else, albeit through the vehicle of one’s own personality and awareness’ (2000: 48). But the critical point of my argument is embedded in Knight’s observation: that the vehicle

for performance is precisely one's own personality and awareness and that these qualities are not to be discounted – specifically because they are the means for interpretative expression.

If performers do not approach performance from a sense of negative judgement based on acoustic 'taste' but approach performance *consciously* from a critical awareness, then perhaps their image of expectation will shift. If performers do not approach performance from a sense of acoustic 'right' or acoustic 'wrong,' but from an *awareness* of a myriad of acoustic options, then perhaps their image of expectation can shift further. And if performers do not approach a role or a character from a sense of self as acoustically inadequate, but rather from a *conscious enjoyment* of exploring acoustic difference that is enabled by awareness, then perhaps their image of expectation can fall away altogether; and perhaps an awareness of acoustic play can result.

Through experiencing *conscious* acoustic play that is enabled by an equally *conscious* exploration and enjoyment of difference I suggest that performers will find less restrictive and more useful possibilities to interpretatively express through the voice in performance without suppressing self. And so awareness can overcome vocal schizophrenia to enable conscious vocal flexibility. And from this awareness performers can own their voices more fully in the performance context in South Africa.

## Endnote

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### <sup>i</sup> How ‘value’ can operate through accent in other languages

A debate over performer training in Afrikaans occurred during the listening module that focussed specifically on regional accent differences between Afrikaans from the Gauteng area and the Cape: performers from Gauteng argued that a ‘Cape’ sound was imposed on them in Afrikaans performer training (Araujo, 2009a). This would be an example of *conscious accent-based speech adaptation* through the active imposition of an accent on the performer. Mills states that the performer training in Afrikaans is open to second language Afrikaans speakers but notes that ‘the speech that is taught is “suiwer Afrikaans” (pure Afrikaans)’ (Mills, 2006: 8). When I asked these Afrikaans performers to consider why this imposition had occurred, certain performers suggested an accent shift was needed to produce clarity for the audience, and, intriguingly a ‘neutral Afrikaans accent’ was proposed (Araujo 2009a). The concept of a ‘neutral’ accent in English, that is, RP, has been explored in this thesis, and by corollary no accent in any language can be ‘neutral’ because the validation of one sound community over another inevitably results.

In response to the Afrikaans performer training debate, performers participating in the isiXhosa training stream noted that ‘Speaking onstage is different to everyday life so there is a difference, we do more articulation [in isiXhosa class], it’s about speaking clearly’ (Araujo, 2009a). Mills notes that previously isiXhosa performer training at UCT was exclusively for proficient isiXhosa speakers: and at that time the criterion for a performer’s selection – or *authorization* – to participate in the isiXhosa ensemble production was to speak ‘isiXhosa esilungkileyo (pure isiXhosa)’ whilst performers ‘who [spoke] with a Zulu, seSotho, English or other accents [were] not considered’ (Mills, 2006: 8). This emphasis on accent for performance in isiXhosa has since changed at UCT. But the prior emphasis on accent within the isiXhosa performer training stood to create a hierarchy of sound based on accent.

Notably none of the performers in English voice training felt that any accent was being imposed on them (Araujo, 2009a). However, the listening module demonstrated that the performers imposed accent-based restrictions upon themselves in the form of a self-constructed image of expectation producing habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation. I include these notes to suggest that working in any language within the performance context can potentially validate a certain accent-group – especially where the work is text-based in the first language of that accent-group. The accent-group achieves the appearance of validation in that the accent presents itself as the most proficient for that language.

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## Annexure A: Glossary of core terms

*To share a vocabulary, this is what I mean by:*

### ***Accent***

Voice practice essentially shares the linguistic understanding of *accent* as ‘the way you sound when you speak’ either in speaking a foreign language ‘using the sounds of another [language]’ or in ‘the way a group of people speak their native language’ (Bimer, n.d.; cf. Rodenburg, 1998: 122).

### ***Dialect***

Voice practice tends to merge *dialect* and *accent* (cf. Rodenburg, 1998: 124). But linguistically *dialect* refers to a regional type of grammar and word choice that can include the *accent* of that region as a factor: so because it is possible to speak a *dialect* in the *accent* of another region it is useful to keep the two terms distinct (Trudgill, 1999: 2-3).

### ***South African English (SAE)***

A usefully contemporary categorisation of how English is broadly spoken as a first-language in South Africa is supplied by Lass as:

***Type 1:*** An externally-focussed, very ‘English’ type, whose norms are dictated to a great extent by (a vision of) the Southern British Received Standard, in particular Received Pronunciation (RP);

***Type 2:*** A new local standard, which while sharing many features (including prestige) with Type 1, is nevertheless recognisably local...

***Type 3:*** A cluster of local vernaculars, stigmatised by Type 1 and Type 2 speakers, highly stereotyped by them and ‘corrected’ in local schools... (Lass, 1995: 93).

Type 2 SAE is currently regarded as the ‘standard’ in SAE and is synonymous with ‘standard SAE,’ ‘Model C English’ and the racially controversial term ‘General White South African English’ (Bowerman, 2004: 935).

### ***Received Pronunciation (RP)***

‘RP’ is Received Pronunciation, the accent of the dominant dialect of Southeast England, and the ‘standard’ accent taught at drama schools in the United Kingdom (Allen, 2000: ix; Martin, 1991: 163-164). Demonstrating the symbolic power applied

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to this accent, Upton notes that RP has historically been used as a ‘model in dictionaries and English-teaching texts’ (Upton, 2004: 218).

### ***Register Shift***

This linguistic term refers to modifying speech because of formal or informal contexts through shifts in volume, pitch, syntax and word choice and dialect (Rajimwale, 2006: 192, 194). ‘Dialect’ can, but might not, refer to a specific accent, as demonstrated.

### ***Speech Adaptation and Accommodation***

‘Register shift’ is linguistically synonymous with *speech adaptation and accommodation* except in that I have found the latter used with specific reference to pronunciation and accent (Branford, 1987: xxiv; cf. Rhoades & Zhao, 2006: 6). Because of this distinction I prefer this term to ‘register shift’ and refer to it in this thesis simply as ‘speech adaptation’ where this thesis is specifically concerned with *habitual, unconscious accent-based speech adaptation*.

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