CHAPTER FIVE

TRANSCRIPTION AND CO-ARTICULATION

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INTRODUCTION
The words annunciate, enunciate, and pronounce are often used interchangeably in connection with articulated words and thoughts. Annunciate has a grand history with its archaic definition, to announce or proclaim something wonderful is about to occur. In the Christian tradition, the Angel Gabriel’s appearance before Mary is known as “the annunciation.” The verb, enunciate, means to articulate a word or thought distinctly, giving it emotional weight and imagery. The verb, pronounce is the most prescriptive of the three. It operates in the realm of “acceptable” articulation that follows societal norms agreed upon by a majority of the speakers of a language.

Enunciation and pronunciation will be referenced often in the sections that follow. In terms of an actor’s speech, the word pronunciation will be reserved only for those times when the actor must demure to accepted standards in order for the poetry of the author’s text to be understood. Enunciation will be used in pursuit of poetic and emotional truth within this pronunciation of the text, elevating articulation beyond the technical and into the poetic.

TRANSCRIPTION
A successful actor must have a well-trained ear, as they observe and mimic the various ways human beings communicate. For quite some time, speech for the actor has relied on prescriptive phonetics, which dictates a “proper” method of pronunciation to the actor. Cultural and regional speech patterns are wiped away in pursuit of a standard speech. Descriptive phonetics is reserved for sociologists and linguists who record and preserve cultural and regional dialects that are slowly homogenizing into global standards of English, French, Spanish, Russian, Mandarin, and so on.

Descriptive phonetics requires that the transcriber listen to and record the spoken language exactly as the speaker says it. These professionals use a very close transcription that records the minutest detail of pronunciation using diacritic markers. For the purposes of this class, it is more important that we focus on broad transcription, listening to and identifying the general sounds important to storytelling, poetry, and operative structure. Through this the actor can refine the oratory skills they already possess, allowing speech to become an acting tactic. When this happens, an actor’s understanding of pronunciation evolves into a purposeful use of enunciation. The text becomes an action towards achieving a character objective rather than a cold exercise in pronunciation.
BROAD TRANSCRIPTION GUIDELINES

As we delve deeper into transcription it is important to establish some guidelines. Nearly all of these “rules” will have exceptions, but when in doubt, please abide.

1. Before transcribing a text, scan it poetically to determine patterns of stress. This will allow you to determine when to use long, crisp, stressed or unstressed vowels, and vocalic consonants. (For the purposes of this exercise, stressed beats in the examples will be underlined).

2. Forget orthographic spelling. It does not exist. Throw it away and listen to how the words and phrases sound when spoken in pursuit of your character objective!

3. For all transcription exercises when a spelling word orthographically, place it in quotations. When transcribing it in IPA, place it between slash marks. When transcribing thoughts and phrases, place each thought within brackets [ ], words between slashes /, and syllables between periods.

4. Pay attention to stress patterns and contractions. Is the speaker speaking one word at a time, or in long thoughts and phrases?

5. In polysyllabic words, the first sound in every syllable, except the first, must begin with a consonant sound

6. In polysyllabic words, the syllables that receive the least stress in a word should use crisp vowels, the shwuh, or clustered vocalic consonant sounds.

7. The vocalic consonant sounds / j /, / w /, and / ɹ / are only transcribed in a pre-vocalic position, before the vowel sound. Some of you may think you can hear them taking place at the end of some vowels and diphthongs. That is residual phonation that adds no emotional or intellectual meaning to the phoneme and is unnecessary to acknowledge in our broad transcription.

8. Verbs that are conjugated with “ing” use the crisp vowel / ɪ /, never the long vowel / i /.

9. Short supporting words like “for”, “and”, “be”, “to”, “or”, and other similar words can be reduced down to unstressed centered vowels and consonant clusters if they are not in an operative location in the thought. With very few exceptions, the articles “a” and “the” never use long vowels or diphthongs, but rely on the shwuh sound. Over-pronunciation of small subordinate words and articles leads to a cluttered operative structure and imprecision of objective pursuit.

10. In polysyllabic words where a syllable terminates in the / ɻ / or / ɹ / and followed by a syllable beginning with, / ɹ / the rhoticity of the vowel is linked to the retroflexion of the following consonant. Use the following diacritic symbol to show this link: / ɹ̃ / . This is also true for all diphthongs and triphthongs of “R”.

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ACTIVITY – SONNET 60
Return to your scansion of Sonnet 60 and read it aloud, listening both to the pronunciation of words, and your chosen enunciation of the material. Using your scansion as a guide, attempt a broad descriptive transcription of the third quatrain. Work only in pencil and place your transcription below the orthographic lines on the page. Where do you notice your chosen enunciation to be at odds with accepted pronunciation? Would the clarity of your objective and tactics be affected if you were to revert to the accepted pronunciation?

Example from first quatrain:
Like •as•the / waves•make / to•wards / the•pe • bb•led•shore,

[ldɪk/əʊ/ðə/wɛɪvz/meɪk/tə.wæd/ðə/pɛ.blɛd/fɔð] /

So •do /our•mi• nutes•ha / sten•to / their•end;

/sɔʊ/dju.əwɪts/heɪ.sən/tu.ðə/ɛnd/ 

Each •chan / ging•place / with•that / which•goes / be•fore,

/ɪtʃ/ʃeɪ.ʤɪŋ/plɛɪs/wɪθ/ðæt/wɪtʃ/ɡoʊz/bə.fɔ/ 

In•se /quent•toil /all•for / wards•do / con•tend.

/ɪn.sɪ.kwnt/taɪl/fɔ.wædz/dju.kən.tɛnd/ 

Now that you have a transcription in hand, continue reading aloud and pay attention to the following questions:

• Are your vowel sounds affected by the emotional circumstances of the piece?
• Are you using your consonants to communicate the clarity of your objective?
• What happens when you perform only the vowel sounds in the piece?
• What about only the consonant sounds?

CO-ARTICULATION
In Building a Character, the teacher Tortsov tells his students,

“It is up to the actor to compose the music of his feelings to the text of his part and learn how to sing those feelings in words. When we hear the melody of a living soul we then, and only then, can come to a full
appreciation of the worth and beauty of the lines and of all that they hold concealed.”

This brings us to the next step in your articulation and enunciation training: the art of co-articulation. If a phoneme is the smallest unit of sound, and the morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning, then the thought—specifically the co-articulated thought is the smallest unit of spoken language. Actors on the stage rarely speak perfectly pronounced words one at a time in succession. Instead an actor must see their speech as a tactic towards a character objective.

In *Building a Character*, Tortsov takes one of the young actors, Sonya, to task for adding far too many “accents” to the structure of her speech, focusing primarily on the phrase, “a wonderful individual.” Using our imaginations let us pretend that first young Sonya speaks the line in English, accenting every beat:

[ʌ/wʌn.dɜː.ʃʊʃ/mɪn.dɪ.vɪ.dʒu.ʍɚ]

Tortsov would call this an unsuccessful presentation of one idea with the voice. The author, in this case, Tortsov, wrote this combination of article, adjective, and noun to represent a single image for the actor to invest with meaning and communicate to the listener. Perhaps the tactic is to persuade the listener that the “individual” is better than previously thought, or some other objective driven scenario. By breaking the image up into its constituent parts and communicating them one at a time, its impact as a whole is undermined.

Tortsov goes on to task Sonya with repeating just “wonderful individual” over and over until the image is restore and the “accent” of the meter are wittled down to those that create the imagery. The resulting enunciation might have sounded something like this:

[wʌn.dɜː.ʃɪn.dɪ.vɪ.dʒə.wəl.]

This successful tactic has intellectual and emotional meaning and is a complete image. Tortsov explains to Sonya,

“Your panic… stemmed from your feeling that you must pile on instead of take off the accents. The fewer of them in a phrase the clearer it becomes, that is if the few accents are on the key words. It is just as difficult art to diminish the accents as it is to put them on. But you must learn both.”

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10 *Building a Character*, p. 166-167
Co-articulated thoughts and images such as the one that challenged Sonya are the individual building blocks of an acting beat and the foundation of the descriptive transcription we will pursue from here on out. Some thoughts are short and clear:

“All people age.”

Others are long and complex:

“All as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,  
So do our minutes hasten to their end;  
Each changing place with that which goes before,  
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.”

In co-articulated speech, an actor must focus on the **tactic of speaking**; deciding on the appropriate stress and enunciation a character’s thought requires and combining the sounds in a manner that is both intelligible and meaningful. Read through the following questions an actor must consider regarding spoken tactics:

1. What are the general circumstances of the character? What sort of role has prescriptive pronunciation played in their life?
2. Does the text come from a primarily emotional or intellectual need, or is it something of a mix? How does this affect the enunciation of consonants, vowels, etc.
3. What are the stakes of the thought? Dire? Average? Inconsequential?
4. Is the character speaking their mind, or is there a sub-textual life to what they say?

Once you have answered these four questions, you are ready to explore the co-articulation of thoughts in a text.

**CO-ARTICULATED POETRY**
The first quatrain of Sonnet 60 is a complete thought, essentially saying that “all people age,” but in such a detailed and thorough way that it gives us insight into the emotional and intellectual state of the speaker. So in order to appropriately acknowledge the actors enunciation in transcription we must attempt to transcribe thought-by-thought rather than word-by-word.

The first step in this process is to separate out the major thoughts of the quatrain with brackets:

[ Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,  
So do our minutes hasten to their end;  
Each changing place with that which goes before,  
In sequent toil all forwards do contend. ]
Complex and emotional thoughts such as this can be further broken down into its subordinate sub-thoughts. Use slash marks to this end and allow each sub-thought to occupy its own line on the page, removing all other orthographic punctuation.

[ Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore / 
So do our minutes hasten to their end / 
Each changing place with that which goes before / 
In sequent toil all forwards do contend ]

Next scan the line in the usual fashion in order to determine the meter of the verse.

[ Like as the / waves make / towards / the pebble / ed shore / 
So do / our mi / nutes ha / sten to / their end / 
Each chan / ging place / with that / which goes / before / 
In se / quent toil / all for / wards do / contend ]

The final step is to transcribe each sub-thought as a single co-articulated phonetic phrase. The best way to transcribe a co-articulated phrase is to speak the entire sub-thought and approach it as a single “word” on a single breath. For instance:

[ ɹ.l ɪ̆.k ə̄.z ɹ.ŏ.we ɪ̆.vz.meɪ̆.k.t ə̆.we ɹ ʃ ɹ.d ə̄.p ə̆.bl. ɬ ɹ.d ʃ ɹ/ 
/s ɹ.ŏ.du. ɹ.w ə̆.m ɹ.ĭ.nts.heɪ̆.s.n.tu. ɹ.d ə̄.ʃ ɹ.t ɹ.end/ 
/ɪ tʃ.ʃeɪ̆.dʒɪ̆.n.pl ɹ.eɪ̆.s.wɪ̆.d ɹ æ̆.t.wɪtʃ. ɹ.goʊ ɹ.z. ɹ.ĕ.ʃ ɹ/ 
/ɪ n.sɪ̆.kwnt. ɹ.t ɹ.ŏ.l.ʃ ɹ.ʊ̆.d ɹ.w ɹ.e ɹ.d ɹ.z. ɹ.d ɹ.u ɹ.k ɹ.e ɹ.t ɹ.end ]

TAKE NOTE:
/ ɹ.l ɪ̆.k ə̄./ and / ɹ.d ɹ.w ə̆../

In a co-articulated phrase, short mono-syllabic words that usually begin with a vowel sound take on the final consonant sound of the preceding syllable as in / ɹ.l ɪ̆.k ə̄/. If the preceding syllable lacks a terminal consonant sound, as in / ɹ.d ɹ.w ə̆/ the following syllable takes on the qualities of the glide consonant when a closed vowel sound shifts into an open vowel sound.
/pe.bl.led/ and /tɔt.lob/  
Like the similarly structured linking of /dɛɪ.ən/, when the /t/ is immediately followed by the /l/ sound in a co-articulated phrase, a tie diacritic is placed below the transcription to indicate a fluid relationship between the two syllables exists, but lacks rhoticity.

SCANNING AND TRANSCRIBING PROSE
Now up until this point we have mostly focused on the scansion and transcription of verse poetry. The techniques we have used for this particular style of performance is also applicable to prose and more contemporary forms of dramatic literature if the actor always remembers one thing:

*All enunciated language is inherently poetic!*

So let us now take a look at some prose from *Hamlet*:

“I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises and, indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame the earth seems to be a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy the air, look you, the brave o’erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man—how noble in reason; how infinite in faculties, in form and moving; how express and admirable in action; how like an angel in apprehension; how like a god; the beauty of the world; the paragon of animals. And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?”

First, find the Major Thoughts and place them in brackets:

[I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises and, indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame the earth seems to be a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy the air, look you, the brave o’erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.]

[What a piece of work is a man—how noble in reason; how infinite in faculties, in form and moving; how express and admirable in action; how like an angel in apprehension; how like a god; the beauty of the world; the paragon of animals.]

[And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?]
Now, concentrating on the first full thought, place each of the sub-thoughts on its own line:

[I have of late,
but wherefore I know not,
lost all my mirth,
forgone all custom of exercises and, indeed,
it goes so heavily with my disposition
that this goodly frame the earth seems to be a sterile promontory,
this most excellent canopy the air, look you,
the brave o'erhanging firmament,
this majestical roof fretted with golden fire,
why it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.]

Next, scan the prose line as if it were poetry to determine stress. The final step is to transcribe each sub-thought as a single co-articulated phonetic phrase. Here is a selection of Hamlet's first sub-thought transcribed:

[ɑɪ.ˈhæ.vəv.ˈleɪt/]

/hæt.ˈwæd.ʃoʊ.ˈdə.ˈnu.ˈnɔt/  
/lɒs.tɔl.ˈmɒt.ˈmɜθ/  
/ʃoʊ.ˈgɒn.ˈnɒl.ˈkæs.ˈtɪm.ˈmə.ˈvik.ˈsə.ˈsæi.ˈzæz.ˈzæn.dɪn.dɪd/  
/ˈɪt.ˈgəʊz.ˈsoʊ.ˈhɛ.ˈvɪ.ˈwɪθ.ˈmɒt.ˈdɪs.ˈpæ.ˈzɪ.ʃn/  

TAKE NOTE:

/hæ.ˈvəv/

If the preceding syllable lacks a terminal consonant sound, as in /hæ.ˈvəv/ the following syllable takes on the qualities of the glide consonant when a closed vowel sound shifts into an open vowel sound
Like the similarly structured linking of /tɔɪ.ɫ/, when the /n/, /m/, or /z/ consonants are immediately followed by the same sound in a co-articulated phrase, a tie diacritic is placed below the transcription to indicate a resonant relationship between the two syllables exists, but lacks rhoticity.

Now let's leap ahead a few centuries and look at one of Gwendolyn's monologues from The Importance of Being Earnest:

“Well, to speak with perfect candour, Cecily, I wish that you were fully forty-two and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong upright nature. His the soul of truth and honor. But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others. Modern, not less than Ancient History, supplies us with many most painful examples of what I refer to. If it were not so, indeed, History would be quite unreadable.”

First, find the Major Thoughts and place them in brackets:

[Well, to speak with perfect candour, Cecily, I wish that you were fully forty-two and more than usually plain for your age]

[Ernest has a strong upright nature]

[His the soul of truth and honor]

[But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others]

[Modern, not less than Ancient History, supplies us with many most painful examples of what I refer to]

[If it were not so, indeed, History would be quite unreadable]

Now, concentrating on the first full thought, place each of the sub-thoughts on its own line:

[Well
to speak with perfect candour
Cecily
I wish that you were fully forty-two and more than usually plain for your age]
Well
to speak / with per / fect candour
Cecily
I wish / that you / were fully / forty-two / and more / than us / ually plain /
for your age]

And finally, transcribe each sub-thought as a single co-articulated phonetic phrase. Phonetically, the first thought of the prose would look like this (note, this has been transcribed using Received Pronunciation and not an American dialect):

[weɭ]

/tə.spik.wiθ.p3.fkt.kæ.də/

/se.si.li/

pleɪn.ʃə.jəɹəŋf]/

While the work of Oscar Wilde is a heightened text, written in Received Pronunciation—standard British—so that all the tactical wit of the line is heard by the recipient and understood, some texts are written with co-articulation firmly intoned by the playwright. Read Mr. Webb’s line from Our Town below.

“Well, I dunno . . . . I guess we’re all hunting like everybody else for a way
the diligent and sensible can rise to the top and the lazy and quarrelsome
can sink to the bottom. But it ain’t easy to find. Meanwhile, we do all we
can to help those that can’t help themselves and those that can we leave
alone.—Are there any other questions?”

Can you see the co-articulation represented orthographically? Here is what a co-articulated transcription of the line might look like:

[weɭ.ˈlʌi.də.noʊ]
TRANSCRIPTION and CO-ARTICULATION

[ɑɪ̆.ɡɛs.wɜ.ɾəl.hʌŋ.təɬ.lɑɪk.əv. ri. bə. dɪ. jɛts. fə. rə. wɛ. ðə. dɪ .lɪ. dʒɪnt.: ən. sɛn. sɪ. bɬ. kəŋ. tɛ. ðə. tæp/]

[æŋ. də. lɛɪ. zi. jənd. kʊ. rɪ. səm. kn. sin. k. tɛ. ðə. ba. tm]

[bə. ti. teɪ. ti. zi. tɛ. fænd]

[min. waɪ̯l/]

[wi. dʊ. wəl. wi. kæŋ. tɛ. hɛlp. dəʊz. ɗət. kænt. hɛlp. ðm. sɛlvz/]

[æŋ. dʊʊz. ɗət. kænt. wi. liv. və. loʊn]

[ə. ɗə. ɾɪ. n. j. ʌ. ðə. kws. tfɛnζ]

FINAL NOTE:
Some vowel sounds do not co-articulate perfectly, as their placement on the vowel quadrilateral do not lend an easy transition using the / j / or / w / consonants. Take note of the following sentence.

“The shwa is neutral”

It is easy to decide that this should be spoken as a single co-articulated thought, but how should it be transcribed, as we have no linking consonant to rely on? In cases like this the actor inserts a brief cessation of phonation into the thought without losing operative energy. It would be transcribed like this:

[/ðə.ʃwə.ɪz. nu. trɪ/] 

The / : / acknowledges the pause, but keeps the thought whole.