

THE USE OF LANGUAGE AND THE GHANAIAN ACTOR'S TECHNIQUE

by J. Scott Kennedy*

The object of this project is to determine the relationship between the use of language and the development of the Ghanaian actor's technique.

The subjects of the investigation include the major acting groups of the country, beginning with the Accra area. The instruments used include intensive interviewing via interview-response sheet, autobiographical case histories and language-survey check-sheets, taped interviews, graded technique exercises, questionnaires, and participant observation.

This initial investigation limits itself in scope to an intensive study of the major acting groups in Accra including the following:

- (1) University of Ghana School of Drama students
- (2) Ghana Drama Studio Players
- (3) Graduate Experimental Workshop Seminar of the Ghana Drama Studio
- (4) Builder's Brigade Drama Group
- (5) Damas Choir of the Arts and Culture Centre ('Lost Fishermen's Company')
- (6) Ghana Drama Club, students of the Arts and Culture Centre

The subjects include male and female, adults and children, and make a total of one hundred and ten.

The approach and check includes a specific design and analysis based on the 'Tune-In' and 'Unlocking' Process. Special check-sheets, study-sheets, and syllabi have been designed in the areas of oral interpretation, drama analysis, and acting technique. Graded tests and exercises are being used in voice production, and graded tests and exercises are also being used in diction.

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Under focus in this study is the verbal behaviour of the subject, as well as his theatrical life. The analysis uses as a point of departure the discipline of the Professional Director and Critic for the acting technique, and the disciplines of the Specialist in Communication (Phonetician) and the Voice and Speech Pathologist in the language area.

A basic rationale is included in the design and study. It is stated as follows: The actor's ability to communicate determines his effectiveness on the stage. The actor's ability to use language determines his ability to communicate. The actor's technique is, to a large degree, determined by his use of language and communication. The actor's essential task is to create and communicate life (vocal, physical, emotional life) from the stage, and most important is the sustaining of that life.

Technique is the actor's tool for the creation, recreation and sustaining of a role. Often the amateur actor can create beautiful life on the stage, but it is spotty and erratic, and, rarely if ever sustained. Technique enables the actor to sustain a role.

It follows then, that the theatrical process must find a method that enables the actor to do this -- create life and sustain life. Moreover, this theatrical process must create conditions that make it possible for the actor to produce 'good tone' (voice and speech production) and 'believable life'. Consequently, the participant observation phase of the 'tune-in' and 'unlocking' process stresses the following:

- (1) Study the subject and find out how he uses his language.
- (2) Study the subject and find out what technique, if any, exists.
- (3) Design tests and exercises that reveal his verbal behaviour.
- (4) Design tests and exercises that develop his acting technique.
- (5) Utilize tapes, acting scenes, improvisational scenes, and interpretation tasks.
- (6) Design a method that aids the actor in developing proper physical habit patterns and attitudes in respect to verbal behaviour and acting technique, and finally
- (7) See and analyze the end-product in theatrical productions.