

## BOSTON ACCENT

### HISTORY:

New Englanders still have many of the characteristics of British pronunciation that are dying out elsewhere along the American East Coast. However, pronunciation has also been greatly affected by Irish immigrants who settled in Boston in droves in the 19th Century. The Irish influence has become a defining cultural characteristic of Boston, linguistically as much as anything.

However, Bostonians will tell you that their particular accent is much different from the accents of people throughout other parts of Massachusetts and New England. To untrained outside ears, they all sound pretty much alike, and are branded with the label 'Boston accent'. However, it seems that there are not only subtle differences in accents throughout New England (Maine's is fairly distinctive) but also in *neighborhoods* throughout Boston. The dialects of the North End and East Side of the city are heavily influenced by Italian immigrants, which creates a speech pattern more like that of New York City. The South Boston accent is more Irish and is closer to the stereotypical Boston accent.

For the characters of Patty Ann, Joe, Mr. & Mrs. Donovan in **Luck of the Irish**, we are aiming for an accent that is not as thick as, say, the accents of Ben Affleck and Matt Damon in Goodwill Hunting. Please see the sample speakers and links below for examples of the sound we are aiming toward.

Speaking of the samples, when learning a Boston accent it is vital that you listen to sound samples of native speakers – over and over and over again. The Foundations and The Groove listed below are blanket descriptors and do not replace your own listening and imitation of native speakers. Every speaker is unique, naturally, and so these are not rules but guidelines.

It is also important to work on the accent before you learn your lines. Embodying an accent is a kinesthetic process, and if you learn the lines in your accent it will be all the more difficult to embody the sound later. Not only that, but the way a character speaks is integral to who they are in the world and how they experience communication with other people. Learning the accent while building your character will lead to more truthful and effective acting.

### FOUNDATIONS:

Zone: 3 – hard palate

Tone: muffled

Vocal Tract Posture:  
lips slack

cheeks loose

Direction: The sound tends to swirl around in the back.

Hesitation Sound: um

**THE GROOVE:**

Laban Effort: Dab

Melody/Lilt: There is a softness and musicality to the sound that is reminiscent of many Irish accents.

Rhythm: A light bouncing

Pitch/Intonation: Rather narrow pitch range, but they have a unique use of upward inflection.

**HOOK PHRASE:** Near the square, the sad man slurped his wicked hot chowder.

**RESOURCES:** *The South Boston Dialect* by Paul Meier

**SAMPLE SPEAKERS:**

**International Dialects of English Archive (IDEA):**

- [dialectsarchive.com/Massachusetts](http://dialectsarchive.com/Massachusetts)
- Massachusetts samples 8 and 6

**YouTube links:**

The Real Boston Accent –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sutl7Ou6DV4>: This woman grew up in Dorchester, MA. The dialect isn't super thick and her comment about nobody actually speaking like "Rose Kennedy" made me think of feelings Patty Ann about Lucy

New Kids on the Block -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCnxuu1T9g>: Their Boston Dialect is a bit stronger and less subtle than the speaker in IDEA 8

All About Boston –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8G6OU41RMjM>: This offers a variety of speakers. Pay special attention to Tom Finneran and Tom Keady.

Lexical Set	BOSTON	Practice Sentence(s)
<b>Monothongs</b>		
PAM	/ɛə/ When this sound proceeds a nasal consonant (m, n, -ing) it often becomes a nasalized diphthong.	The sad family man was apparently trapped by anger.
BATH	/ɑ/  Cup the front of the tongue	I had to laugh when she danced.  The passing master demanded my aunt prance. <i>(note: "aunt" can also be pronounced with the /ɑ/ as in "father")</i>
PALM	/ɑ/	My father went farther than Ghana.  Brahms calmly sipped a lager in the plaza spa.
LOT/CLOTH/ THOUGHT	/ɑ/ as in father, or the more rounded  /ɒ:/ variable!	She taught her dog to clench his jaw when gone.
<b>Non-Rhotic w/Linking R</b>		
TOUR	/ʊə/	I have the cure. The nurse should administer more medicine near the part that hurting her.
START (see PALM)	/aə/	Park the car in Harvard Yard.
FORCE	/ɒə/ or just /ɒ/ when it ends a word (e.g. for)	He's not normal when has to give an oral presentation for a large crowd.
NEAR	/ɪə/	Corporal Norton had to restore order on the

NURSE	/ɜ~/ *This set does get /r/ coloring	north shore.
lettER	/ə/	
linking /r/ - in between words	fathɚ ɪz	For only one day, the poor ate nothing but her apple pie.
MARRY MERRY MARY	mæɹi mɛri mɛəri	Mary is merry because she's going to get married.
HURRY	hʌɹi	If you hurry your furry pet is going to lose courage.
<b>Consonants</b>		
WITH	The final consonant moves to a /t/ without release of breath	If she ain't going with me, she ain't going nobody.
FORTY	d	Eighty