“How’s it, bru?”

An examination of Leonardo DiCaprio’s Rhodesian Accent in the Movie *Blood Diamond*

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Abstract:

This essay intends to determine how easy or difficult it may be for actors to learn to speak with a different accent than their own for movie roles. It also aims to discover whether there are any situations in which it may be difficult for actors to maintain their accents. The essay should be seen as a case study, as it focuses on the movie *Blood Diamond* (2006) and Leonardo DiCaprio’s attempt to change his General American accent to a Rhodesian English one. Firstly, the characteristics of Rhodesian English are described in order to know which features differ from General American. Secondly, the study works in detail with phonetic transcriptions and focuses on the phonemes that differ between these two varieties of English. The essay also attempts to establish whether there are any circumstances in which DiCaprio is more likely to lose his Rhodesian accent, such as his character’s state of mind or the person to whom he speaks.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Sometimes actors take on roles which demand that they speak with another accent than their own. Some actors are very successful at this, while others are not; the ability to adopt a different accent is individual. The movie *Blood Diamond* (2006), stars American actor Leonardo DiCaprio, who plays mercenary Danny Archer from Rhodesia, or Zimbabwe as the country is now called. There have been mixed opinions, for example in Internet forums and among film critics, about whether DiCaprio succeeded in sounding like a person from Rhodesia or not. Some say he sounds too Australian while others say his accent is “spot on”. After having seen this movie, I was also curious as to whether DiCaprio managed to sound like a person from Rhodesia. This was partly due to the fact that I did not know how the accent was supposed to sound like. Therefore, a principal aim of this essay is to describe the characteristics of the Rhodesian variety of English. Further on, this essay will in a more methodical way try to determine whether DiCaprio manages to sound like a native speaker of Rhodesian English or not.
2. FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

Through transcribing DiCaprio's speech phonetically and comparing it to that of the Zimbabwean politician Roy Bennett, the essay intends to determine whether DiCaprio's attempt to speak with a Rhodesian English accent is convincing. Thus, one aim of this essay is to work in detail with phonetic transcriptions in order to see how easy or difficult it is to describe sounds by listening to them and using phonetic symbols to represent them. The study will focus mainly on the phonemes that differ from DiCaprio's usual accent, General American English.

Apart from focusing on the sounds that differ from General American, which may be difficult for DiCaprio to copy, this essay will also study instances in which he may be more likely to lose his accent. These instances can be for example when DiCaprio is speaking to fellow countryman Jennifer Connelly, who plays the leading actress role in the film. The fact that she shares his normal speech habits may affect DiCaprio's way to talk. Other situations may be when DiCaprio needs to focus on conveying various emotions or raising his voice, on top of having to speak with a different accent than his own.

Considering the various aims of this essay which have been described above, the study can be seen as a case study which attempts to discover whether there are any particular situations in which actors struggle with the accents that they have learnt for a role in a movie. The study may therefore be helpful for accent coaches to know what to focus on in training with actors.
3. BACKGROUND

Caucasians in Zimbabwe speak a variety of English that developed from the British and South African settlers who entered the region in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In her essay “L1 Rhodesian English”, the author Susan Fitzmaurice refers to the accent in question as Rhodesian English; abbreviated as RhodE. Portraying a Rhodesian who had to flee to South Africa, this accent is applicable to Leonardo DiCaprio’s character in the movie Blood Diamond.

Fitzmaurice also establishes a clear line between Zimbabwean English (ZiM) and RhodE; the varieties of English spoken in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwean English applies to both black and white speakers of English, currently living in Zimbabwe and born after 1980. Zimbabwean English is also a productive and changing variety that involves influences from Bantu languages, to which group the other official languages of the country belong (Fitzmaurice 2010: 263). RhodE, on the other hand, is only applicable to the white people since they have English as a first language (L1) while black people usually have a different L1 and English as their second language (L2). RhodE is its own accent with different characteristics but shares some characteristics with accents found in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, as they are all Southern hemisphere varieties of English (ibid.).

Through a brief description of the history of the country that is now Zimbabwe, we will learn which other accents have influenced RhodE and why it has the characteristics it does.

3.1 Brief History of Rhodesia

The first European influence in the area came from big game hunters, prospectors and missionaries in the 19th century but none of them established anything permanent there until
1888 when John Cecil Rhodes obtained mining rights in return for protecting the Ndebele Kingdom from Dutch Boers and German settlers. In 1890, Rhodes persuaded the British to begin colonizing the area and the British sent some 200 settlers. In 1893, the Ndebele Kingdom was destroyed by the settlers and by 1895 the north and the south of the colony were united to create Rhodesia (Fitzmaurice 2010: 265).

White English-speaking settlers continued to come to Rhodesia and by 1904 their population was roughly 12,600. Just fourteen years later, a census revealed the settlers population was 33,620; an increase of 200 percent. The majority of these settlers who came to Rhodesia were farmers and miners (ibid: 268). After 1923, Rhodesia had become a self governing colony. During the depression in the 1930’s, more settlers came to Rhodesia for farming opportunities. The settlers also sought English speaking, lower middle class, and skilled laborers for their farms. The majority of these lower middle class settlers came from South Africa (ibid: 269). British influence was also brought by RAF pilots who trained in Rhodesia during World War Two. By 1956, the settler population was 177,000 and by 1969 it was 228,000, which was the peak of Rhodesian settlement (ibid: 269-270).

Trouble began in Rhodesia in the 1960’s. Other regions of Africa were gaining independence and the white leaders of Rhodesia became afraid the British would grant independence to the colony with African majority rule. In 1965, Ian Smith, leader of the Rhodesian Front Government declared the colony independent of Britain. The British responded by blockading Rhodesia and a state of emergency was declared for the colony (Birmingham 1995: 75-76). The situation became worse in 1972 when civil war broke out between the government, and two rival nationalist parties; the ZANU, which operated out of Mozambique.
and the ZAPU which operated out of Zambia. Both nationalist parties adopted a guerrilla warfare strategy; creating further segregation (ibid: 76). In 1978, the government tried to stop the civil war by promising shared governance. However, the ZANU and ZAPU both boycotted this initiative and continued the war. In 1979, the British lead peace negotiations culminated in the end of European rule in Rhodesia. A year later, the country was renamed Zimbabwe and Robert Mugabe and the ZANU established a one party system as he eliminated his ZAPU competition (ibid: 77-78).

3.2 How the Variety became what it is: Sources of Influence

By examining the history above, it is possible to have an idea of the influences which have formed RhodE. To begin, we already know that British English is the most dominant factor of the variety, but what has made it different?

One of the main factors that have influenced RhodE is South African English. The brief history about Rhodesia above reveals that many of the settlers who came to the country came from South Africa, as well as England. South Africans in the region would have had a great impact on the formation of RhodE because of the difference in their dialect. Before Rhodesia was settled, the British and the Dutch competed hard for the Cape Colony, which is today South Africa (Birmingham 1995: 71-72). As a result of this, both empires left linguistic traces of themselves. The South African dialect of English is thus a combination of English and Dutch, giving the accent a unique sound (ibid: 72).

One also must think of the Rhodesian sphere of interest. The Rhodesian colony was some 8,500 kilometers away from Britain while South Africa shared a border with the colony. This meant that Rhodesia had greater contact with South Africa than they did with Britain which
also would have had an impact on the accent. This becomes even truer after 1965 when Ian Smith and his government decided to break away from Britain who responded with an embargo on the colony. Rhodesians in turn received support from the South Africans who had a similar stance on segregation (ibid: 76).

We can thus conclude that RhodE is the result of mainly two dialectal influences; South African English and British English. It is different from South African English in that it has only had indirect influence of Dutch, which is why RhodE can be classified as its own accent, different from SAE. However, it is difficult to not group the two accents together as they are very similar. Before RhodE had been studied in any systematic way, John C Wells wrote in *Accents of English* that the accent in question “appears to be generally similar to South African” (1982: 611).

### 3.3 Previous Studies Regarding the Variety

Not many studies have been made concerning Rhodesian English, probably because it is regarded as a fossilized version of the language (Fitzmaurice, 2010:272). RhodE is quickly dying because the past thirty years have been rather tumultuous as war and political issues have been the norm and many speakers of RhodE have either been killed or have been forced to flee to various corners of the globe. Most Caucasians of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe with English as a native language have left the country due to the current political situation (ibid). To have an actor like Leonardo DiCaprio portray a descendant from Rhodesia has shed some light on the accent.

Finding sound samples with a Rhodesian accent has been difficult since the accent is rare. However, there are videos clips available online featuring a white farmer from Rhodesia
named Roy Bennett who has been figuring in the media due to the current political situation in the country. A third generation Zimbabwean, he was born in Bulawayo in 1957. Bennett used to be a coffee farmer but later turned to politics, and has become known to people of other countries for his struggle for democracy in Zimbabwe (BBC). I will use his speech as an additional reference other than the descriptions of the various features to that of DiCaprio’s speech in the movie. Naturally, the speech will not be the same when a person reads from a script, as when one speaks without one. However, since an actor’s job is to sound as natural as possible, we can compare an actor’s lines in a movie with an interview featuring a real person, even if it is a comparison between fiction and reality.

3.4 The Movie Blood Diamond

The 2006 film Blood Diamond is set in 1999 and based around the civil war in Sierra Leone. At the center of the war were diamonds and those were illegally smuggled out of Sierra Leone in order to fund the rebels’ weapon purchases. The main character, Danny Archer, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, is a Rhodesian-born mercenary and diamond smuggler. During a short time in prison for smuggling, Archer learns of the fisherman Solomon Vandy, who is also in the jail after being taken prisoner by the rebels, and under suspicion of being a rebel himself. Vandy found a large diamond which he hid while in the rebels’ labour camp. Archer tries to convince Vandy that he will help him find his family, which he became separated from in the conflict, if Archer can have his share of the diamond’s worth. Maddy Bowen, an American reporter (played by Jennifer Connelly) who Archer met in a bar helps them past military checkpoints with her reporter credentials. Bowen knows that Archer’s intentions are not good, but she also knows that he can lead her to the story of her career, as he has connections to diamond company business executives in Europe. For this she is
willing to help them. Together they set off on a journey into the dense West African jungle to recover Solomon’s family and the diamond. Bowen, presumably from hearing Archer’s accent, assumes that he is from South Africa, but he is very quick to correct her:

25.14: tsk-tsk-tsk I’m from Rhodesia huh

Leonardo DiCaprio’s performance in the film was recognized with an Academy Award for Best Actor nomination. Various film critics gave mixed reviews regarding the Rhodesian accent DiCaprio used in the film. Claudia Puig of USA Today claimed that his accent was “spot-on”, while the BBC film critic Paul Arendt commented that DiCaprio is “sporting what may well be a plausible Zimbabwean accent” in the film. On the other hand, Mick LaSalle of the San Francisco Chronicle said the following about DiCaprio’s performance:

“Danny, a smuggler from Zimbabwe -- he calls it Rhodesia. The role requires that Leonardo DiCaprio speak in a Zimbabwean accent that he never quite gets right. He has the lyrics, knows the tune, but he just doesn't have the music. It's rare that an entire scene goes by without his saying something that jars the ear.” (LaSalle, 2006)

While the film critics are not linguistic experts, they still offer an idea about peoples’ opinions as to whether DiCaprio succeeded with his accent. This makes me wonder what it is that causes the different opinions about DiCaprio’s attempt to speak with a Rhodesian accent. Further on in the essay, I will try to sort this problem out in a more scientific manner.

However, even if I will take a phonological approach to the accents in question in this essay, deciding whether DiCaprio has succeeded in adopting RhodE will tend to be a matter of subjective judgment. We all perceive sounds differently and my Swedish ears will certainly have limitations in deciding whether an American has successfully learnt to speak with a Rhodesian English accent.
3.5 DiCaprio’s Prerequisites

The American actor Leonardo DiCaprio was born in Hollywood in Los Angeles, California and speaks with a General American accent (abbreviated GA), as do the vast majority of the population of the United States (IMDB). According to Wells in *Accents of English*, to learn to speak with a different accent than one’s own is basically to “add new, late rules to our existing phonological competence” (1982: 111). If the new accent is very different than one’s own, it also means learning new phonological phenomena for certain words (ibid). Wells also states that some aspects of the new accent can be “inevitably difficult” and that not many people can manage to sound like a native speaker when one has attempted the accent for the first time when an adult (ibid). Though, in order to know how GA differs from RhodE, we need to compare the phonetic systems of the two accents. It will then also be easier to see which features might be difficult for DiCaprio to master.

When preparing for his role as Danny Archer in the film *Blood Diamond*, Leonardo DiCaprio spent time with people from southern Africa and learnt to speak like them. On the website Zimbabwejournalists.com, DiCaprio said that, in particular, he came close to one mercenary who was born in Zimbabwe. In an interview with TIME magazine, DiCaprio said that the dialect coach Tim Monich also helped him with his accent training. They recorded the speech of a person from the area, making utterances in different tempos and tones. DiCaprio then listened to that “over and over again” and tried to copy what the person said. DiCaprio has also said that he is “pretty good at imitating people” (Time.com).
4. METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

This section will first look at how accents differ in general and then specifically at the differences between Rhodesian English and General American, in order to know what DiCaprio would need to learn for his role in *Blood Diamond*. After the description of the sounds in Rhodesian English, an evaluation of DiCaprio’s attempt to speak with the accent will be presented and it will be made clear if he managed to copy it or not.

In order to discover how well DiCaprio manages to speak with a Rhodesian accent in *Blood Diamond*, I have listened closely to his speech in the movie and transcribed his lines orthographically and then phonetically. Some examples of that will be presented below in the description of the sounds, along with the time code of when the lines appear in the movie.

4.1 How Accents Differ

Phonology is in *Accents of English* described as “the study of the way words and sentences are pronounced” (Wells 1982: 39). When we hear a different accent, what we notice first about it is most likely how the speaker pronounces certain words. A speaker can have a different pronunciation of certain words because their accent may use different phonemes for different words. These differences do not change the meaning of words, but they are what make an accent recognizable. For example, a speaker of British Received Pronunciation (RP) would pronounce the word bath as [bɑːθ], whereas a speaker of General American, would pronounce it [bæθ]. Most of the phonetic differences have to do with vowels, but they can also affect consonants.
Accents also differ in amount of phonemes and manner of pronunciation; some accents have more phonemes than others, some have less. For example, in some cases, RhodE uses fewer phonemes than GA. The words “square” and “near” can both be realized with the [ɪə:] sound used in the word “near” in GA as well as RP. However, there are also other possibilities of realizing the mentioned sound, which will be discussed closer below. In most cases, DiCaprio would have to learn the equivalents of the sounds in RhodE and apply them to all the words in the group.

According to Wells, what makes people say that a certain way of pronouncing a word is right while another one is wrong can be explained by lexical distribution (Wells 1982: 79). Accents as well as individual speakers vary in what phoneme is used to pronounce a given word. For instance, a speaker of GA can pronounce “tomato” like [təməʊtə] or [təmeɪtə] and a speaker of RP can pronounce “either” as [əɪðə] or [eːðə]. Further on, the different ways of realizing various vowel sounds will be described.

Another way in which accents can differ is phonotactic distribution (Wells 1982: 75). This means that the pronunciation of a certain sound is affected by the sounds surrounding it. In the case of GA versus RhodE, the main difference is that they differ in the phonotactic distribution of the phoneme /rl/; GA is a rhotic accent whereas RhodE is not. This means that in RhodE, the phoneme /rl/ is not pronounced when it appears before another consonant or at the end of a word, so [pæ:k] “park” and [bɑː] “bar”. In GA, which DiCaprio speaks, the /rl/ is pronounced: [pɑːk] and [bɑːl].

While the term accent only refers to the sounds of a variety, the word dialect takes into account vocabulary and grammar as well. This essay will mainly focus on the sound system.
Though, we can mention briefly that apart from the RhodE sounds DiCaprio has adopted, he uses words like “ja” for “yes” and “bru” for “brother”, as well as expressions such as “how the body?” to say “how are you?”.

4.2 Characteristics of Rhodesian English
While RhodE shares most features with South African English in that they share an almost identical vowel system, it is different in that it has only had indirect influence from Afrikaner English. This is most noticed in the consonant system (Fitzmaurice 2010:275).

The sounds in the following sections (3.3.1 and 3.3.2) are the characteristics of RhodE which one would look for in determining whether an actor succeeds in sounding like a native speaker. The example set of words come from Wells’s Accents of English. Each example word refers to a set of words based on RP, which have the same realization of the vowel sound (1982:122-24). For instance, in the DRESS set, words like “step”, “bread”, “friend” and “many” are found (ibid: 129). In RP, they are pronounced with the /e/ sound.

As an additional reference to the sounds described, I have listened to interviews featuring farmer and politician Roy Bennett from Zimbabwe, which have supported the way in which the sounds are realized, and also showed additional possibilities of pronunciation.

4.2.1 Vowel Sounds
When the pronunciation of a vowel sound is described, the roles of the lips and the tongue are taken into account. If the lips are rounded when realizing a vowel sound, the vowel is described as “rounded”, and if they are spread, the vowel is described as “unrounded”. It is, however, more difficult to describe the role of the tongue since its movements when producing a sound cannot be seen, as is the case with the lips. Also, the tongue does not
have any contact with the roof of the mouth as it does when producing consonants, which makes it easier to decide its position. However, pedagogically, the role of the tongue is usually described assuming that it moves horizontally and vertically. When the tongue moves horizontally it decides whether the vowel is a front one or a back one. The ones that are realized in between are called central vowels. When the tongue moves vertically it decides whether a vowel is open or close. Open-close is a continuum, and in between these states the vowel can be open-mid and close-mid. So, when a vowel is described, the position of the tongue is mentioned; where it is on both the horizontal and vertical “lines” (Lundström-Holmberg and af Trampe1987: 49).

Fig. 1 Vowel Chart

VOWELS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Front</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Back</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close</td>
<td>i  y</td>
<td>i u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I Y</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close-mid</td>
<td>e  ø</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-mid</td>
<td>E  æ</td>
<td>ê</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>æ</td>
<td>ø</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>a  ë</td>
<td>ë</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a rounded vowel.
4.2.1 a) Short Vowels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>GA (in red)</th>
<th>RhodE (in navy)</th>
<th>DiCaprio (in green)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KIT</td>
<td>[ɪ]</td>
<td>[ɪ]</td>
<td>[ɪ] / [ɪ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRESS</td>
<td>[ɛ]</td>
<td>[e]</td>
<td>[e]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRAP</td>
<td>[æ]</td>
<td>[ɛ]</td>
<td>[ɛ] / [æ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOT</td>
<td>[ɑː]</td>
<td>[o]/ [o]</td>
<td>[o] / [ɑː]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOOT</td>
<td>[u]</td>
<td>[u] / [u]</td>
<td>[u]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRUT</td>
<td>[ʌ]</td>
<td>[ɛ] / [ʌ] / [æ]</td>
<td>[ʌ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KIT: GA [ɪ] → RhodE [ɪ]

The realization of what in American and British English is the [ɪ] sound is in RhodE centralized, making it an [ɪ], approaching the schwa sound [ə]. This pronunciation is socially unmarked and a phenomenon which is shared with other Southern hemisphere extraterritorial varieties of English, such as Australian and South African English (Fitzmaurice 2010: 275). However, according to Wells, the vowel of the KIT set is split in South African English, and the phoneme is pronounced [ɪ] when it is adjacent to a velar consonant such as /k/ or /g/ and schwa [ə] in the other cases. Since both the vowel qualities used and the conditioning environments are variable”, it is hard to decide to which sounds the different vowels correspond. It is though possible to regard the [ɪ] sound as an allophone of the schwa-sound [ə] (1982: 612). According to Lass, this is one of the things that characterizes South African English (2004:375). Though, from listening to the interviews featuring Roy Bennett, it is difficult to decide whether the KIT split is applicable to RhodE as
well. Also, in the CNN interview, it is difficult to tell whether Roy Bennett, who fights for
democracy in Zimbabwe, says that he wishes its habitants to have a “bitter” or a “better” life:

better life
[bɪtə laɪf]

- DiCaprio’s realization of the KIT set

Since Roy Bennett in the interviews does not seem to use the [ɪ] as a replacement for the [i] in any systematic way, it is difficult to decide whether DiCaprio fails to represent a Rhodesian accent based on this sound. In Wells (1982), it is described that the [ɪ] for [i] is used in certain positions. However, Bennett is not being consistent in varying between [ɪ] and [i] as he for example says [maɪˌɪmpɪrəsəm] but [əː wæz ɪn pʊzən]. Nor does there seem to be any rhyme or reason as to how DiCaprio uses the [ɪ] and [ɪ] respectively. In the first example below, DiCaprio realizes the [ɪ] sound as in RhodE, whereas he in the last example with the same letter combination, the [ɪ] sound between a plosive and a fricative consonant, realizes it as a speaker of GA would.

28.11: How’s Alice?

[hauz ælɪs]

39.33: [...] see what’s in the mini bar huh?

[siː wɒtsɪn ðə mɪnɪ bɑː]

42.23: Listen, the right stone can buy anything.

[lɪsən ðə rɑːt stɑːn kæn bɑː ænɪθɪŋ]
DRESS: GA \([\varepsilon]\) \(\rightarrow\) RhodE \([\varepsilon]\)

In General American, the sound is realized like \([\varepsilon]\), whereas it in Rhodesian English is realized more close and more front: \([\varepsilon]\), like it is in RP. In the interviews, Bennett sometimes realizes the sound closer to \([i]\). Fitzmaurice describes the \([i]\) realization as a Rhodesian characteristic; an informant was as a child told to say “yes, not yis” (2010: 275).

- DiCaprio’s Realization of the DRESS set

For the most part, DiCaprio manages to copy the more close Rhodesian \([\varepsilon]\) sound, and does not fall into his usual GA, more open \([\varepsilon]\) vowel. The Rhodesian characteristic of \([i]\) for this sound, which Roy Bennett occasionally uses, is however not heard in DiCaprio’s speech in the movie.

52.45: If you help me out, ja.

\([fju:\ helpmi:_\aut]\)

13.04: I-I’ve got a letter [...] 

\([a:v \ got\le:te]\)

13.14: You ever uh read [...] 

\([ju:_\even\_e\ read]\)

TRAP: GA \([\varepsilon]\) \(\rightarrow\) RhodE \([\varepsilon]\)

The TRAP set is pronounced like \([\varepsilon]\) or a raised version of it in RhodE. This makes it different from the GA pronunciation \([træp]\). The \([\varepsilon]\) sound can be compared with the standard Swedish short \(\mathring{a}\) of “håst” (Lundström-Holmberg and af Trampe, 2009:111). Also, speakers of RhodE can sometimes pronounce this sound like a lowered \([\varepsilon]\) in order to be different
from South African speakers. Though, it seems as Bennett varies between an [e] and the more front [e] pronunciation.

- **DiCaprio’s Realization of the TRAP set**

From listening to Bennett in the interviews, a characteristic which seems to be one of the most typical features is the pronunciation of the TRAP set as [ɛ]. This is something that DiCaprio manages to do for the most part; although there is a few times that he breaks into the GA [æ]. In the example below, DiCaprio pronounces the works “have to” and “damn” like a speaker of GA would:

58.51: When we get to Kono we’re gonna have to walk, alright?

[getu:] [wægænæ hæftu: wɔ:k æwait]  
You damn well better be able to find it.

[ju dæm wel bɛt̚ə biː _ɛɪbɛl tufaind it]

In the following example, DiCaprio varies between [æ] and [ɛ]:

59.40: In the ninety degree heat, Solomon Vandy drops, to his knees, rattling the wire with his powerful hands

[ɪnðə naiːti ɗɪɡiː hɪt sɔːləmæn vændi drɒps tu hɪz kɪziː rætəlɪŋ ðə waiːən ɒɾd hɪz pauː əfəl hɛndz]

LOT: GA [ɑ:] → RhodE [ɑ]/ [ɔ]

The pronunciation of the vowel sound of the LOT set is sometimes slightly lengthened so that “god” is almost pronounced like “guard”. The sound is not fully open and can be unrounded [də] or rounded [p]. The GA realization of this phoneme is [ɑː]. The [ɔ] variant
which is most likely influenced from Afrikaans is avoided in most RhodE varieties since it is socially stigmatized.

- **DiCaprio’s Realization of the LOT set**

DiCaprio is slightly inconsistent with the LOT set in the movie, seeing as he in a few situations pronounces it as [a:]. The first two examples are from a dialogue between Danny Archer and Maddy Bowen, who speaks with a General American accent, something that may have played a part in how DiCaprio talks, and in the third example, DiCaprio is yelling.

1.01.10: (...) be a _doctor_ one day?

    [biː_ə daːktə wʌn deɪ]

1.02.56: [...] to keep _off_ the market [...] 

    [tu ki:p ɑːf ðə maːkɪt]

2.02.10: No _god_ no, _stop_!

    [nəʊ ga:d nʊ stɑːp]

Other times, DiCaprio successfully replaces his GA way of pronouncing this phoneme with the more Rhodesian [ɒ] sound:

23.41: _Body_ fine _man_

    [bɒdi fain mən]

**FOOT: GA [u] → RhodE [u] / [u]**

While the vowel sound of the FOOT set is typically pronounced like GA and RP [u], some young speakers may realize this sound with less rounding and more centralized as in [u] (Fitzmaurice, 2010: 276). However, Roy Bennett pronounces this as [ʊ]:
putting pressure

[puˈtɪŋ]

• DiCaprio’s Realization of the FOOT set

In the case of the [u] sound of the FOOT set, DiCaprio fails at lip rounding, and to realize the sounds further front in the mouth, as shown in the following example:

14.12: [...] Now look, why don’t I just look the other way,

[nau lʊk wʌr ˈdəʊn aɪ dʒæst lʊk ʌɪː_ʌðə weɪ]

However, as written before, it is acceptable for a speaker of RhodE to realize this sound as [u] as well, which is also what Roy Bennett does in the interviews.


The [ø] in RhodE is a raised, open variety of the schwa sound. The [e] sound can be found in German words that end with –er, as for example “Schumacher” [ʃuːˈmæxə] (Longman: xxxi). Also, the vowel of the STRUT set can sometimes be pronounced closer to the front, approaching [ä] (Fitzmaurice 2010: 276). In General American the vowel used to pronounce the STRUT set is [ʌ]. Bennett also pronounces the STRUT set with the [ʌ] sound, as shown in the example below, and it is also how Wells describes the South African STRUT vowel (1982:131).

I love the people of Zimbabwe.

[lʌv ʌðə piːpəl]
• DiCaprio’s Realization of the STRUT set

Since Roy Bennett pronounces the vowel in the STRUT set as [ʌ] in the material available, which is also the General American way of pronouncing it, it seems like a safe strategy for DiCaprio to use in the movie. This is also what he has chosen to do:

14.12: [...] trouble for me or my friends [...] 

[truːbl foː miː _ɔː ma fɛndz]

why don’t I just look the other way [...] 

[waː dəʊn ar _ʌθəst lʊk _ʌðə wɛi]

4.2.1 b) Long Vowels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>GA</th>
<th>RhodE</th>
<th>DiCaprio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FLEECE</td>
<td>[iː]</td>
<td>[iː]</td>
<td>[iː]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOOSE</td>
<td>[uː]</td>
<td>[uː]</td>
<td>[uː]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQUARE</td>
<td>[æɹɔ]</td>
<td>[eː]</td>
<td>[eː] / [æə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NURSE</td>
<td>[ɹɜː]</td>
<td>[øː]</td>
<td>[øː]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THOUGHT</td>
<td>[ɑː]</td>
<td>[oː]</td>
<td>[ɔː] / [aː]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BATH</td>
<td>[æː]</td>
<td>[ɑː]</td>
<td>[ɑː]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FLEECE: GA [iː] → RhodE [i]**

The [i] sound in RhodE, of the FLEECE set has no gliding, and is “very close and fronted”. Sometimes the vowel is shortened and tensed (Fitzmaurice 2010: 276). The difference is that in GA, it does have gliding: [iː].
• DiCaprio’s Realization of the FLEECE set

28.50: That’s for breaking my tv, bru

[dəfts foː bækɪŋ maː tviː bruː]

39.45: Look, people here [...] 

[lʊk piːpel]

DiCaprio has not managed to make this vowel shorter, as it is described in the Fitzmaurice essay (2010). However, in the interview with CNN, Roy Bennett pronounces the word “people” like DiCaprio does:

Uhm, I resonate to the people, I love the people of Zimbabwe.

[ɹɪzənæt tuː də piːpel] [lʌv də piːpel]

GOOSE: GA [u:] ➔ RhodE [ʉ:]

The GOOSE set is in RhodE realized as [ʉ:], a sound that corresponds to the Swedish /u/ sound of the word “ruta”, which is a long, mid-high, rounded front vowel (Ladefoged). This sound is associated with younger white speakers of RhodE, which is what Leonardo DiCaprio is trying to achieve (Fitzmaurice 2010: 276). In GA the vowel sound of the GOOSE set is pronounced [u:], which is realized further back in the mouth than the Rhodesian version, and is unrounded.

• DiCaprio’s Realization of the GOOSE set

This sound is something that DiCaprio did not succeed in copying. In the movie, he stays with realizing this phoneme as [u:]:

9.32: Don’t worry! They want these guns too much to do

[dən̩ ənɔː ɻæi dər ɒ:wən dɔi tə ɹiː tuː maːtʃ tuː də]
anything *stupid!*

æn i θʊŋ stʊːprɪd]

However, one of the characteristics of Roy Bennett’s speech is that he uses the [u:] sound for the words in the GOOSE set:

whilst my party I’m sure is doing everything it can

[ðərɪŋ]

**SQUARE: GA [æʊ] → RhodE [e:]**

This vowel sound [e:] of the SQUARE set in RhodE is not a diphthong like it is in GA and most other varieties of English. The sound [e:] is close, long and does not glide. It can be compared to the long /e/ of Swedish, as in the word “be” (Lundström Holmberg and af Trampe, 2009:110). A hypercorrect and conservative feature is to pronounce it more open and retracted, as /aː/. When we look at how the GA pronunciation differs from the Rhodesian one, we are reminded of the fact that the former is a rhotic accent; which means that the /r/ is pronounced: [skwæʊr].

- **DiCaprio’s Realization of the SQUARE set**

DiCaprio has an advantage for the SQUARE and NEAR sets in that he can generalize the pronunciation of these phonemes with the monophthong [e:]. This is what Roy Bennett does in his interviews and seems to be the wisest strategy, as it would require less effort. DiCaprio for the most part pronounces the sound as the monophthong [e:] but in some parts realizes the sounds as [eː], as used in RP.

20.36: [...] *There’s a fisherman in there,*

[ðeːsə fɪʃəmən ɪn ðeː]
9.51: Where is commander Zero?

[weəʊz]

1.15.36: [...] spare you huh?

[spə juː]

NURSE: GA [ɜ:] → RhodE [øː]

Speakers of RhodE realize the NURSE set using the short, rounded front vowel [øː], which corresponds to the Swedish /ö/ of “snö” (Lundström Holmberg and af Trampe, 2009:111).

Some speakers are hypercorrect and conservative and pronounce the vowel sound of “nurse” more like /ɛ:/ which is the long /ä/ vowel in Swedish as in “säl” (ibid). Since GA as opposed to RhodEn is a rhotic accent, the /r/ is pronounced in the latter; [nɜːs].

- DiCaprio’s Realization of the NURSE set

DiCaprio most often realizes the NURSE set like a speaker of RP would, using the [ɜ:] sound and does not manage to pronounce the [øː] more front and rounded like Roy Bennett does.

One of the very few times in the movie when DiCaprio manages to used the [øː] sound is when he gives instructions to Solomon Vandy during their quest for the diamond:

1.29.55: [...] if I point to the dirt you lie flat

[dɔːt] [lai fɪt]

However, it is difficult to not see it as a coincidence since it happens so seldom in the movie.

The British Received Pronunciation of the NURSE set sounds fairly close to the Rhodesian way of pronouncing it, so perhaps DiCaprio failed to realize that the latter differs from the former.
THOUGHT: GA [ɑ:] → RhodE [ɔ:]

Again, this sound of Rhodesian English corresponds to a Swedish one: the å in “gås” (Lundström Holmberg and af Trampe, 2009:111). It is a mid-high, long, rounded back vowel and is raised as opposed to most other varieties of English: [ɔ:]. Speakers of GA realize this sound more open and more back, as [ɑ:].

- DiCaprio’s Realization of the THOUGHT set

DiCaprio has mostly chosen to use the [ɔ:] for this sound, but sometimes he slips into the [ɑ:] to represent it, which cannot be regarded as RhodE. In the interviews, Roy Bennett pronounces the [ɔ:] sound much shorter, saying [fɔð] for “fourth”.

24.49: When was the last time the world wasn’t falling apart

[loːst tɔːm ðə wɜːld] [foːtən əpət]

1.23.09: You’ll be alright huh

[ɑːɹt]

1.23.29: She’s uh (.) she’s with me alright?

[ɔːɹt]

BATH: GA [æː] → RhodE [ɑː] / [ɔː]

In RhodE, the BATH set can be pronounced more or less rounded, [ɑː] to [ɔː] but is typically realized further back and rounded. In GA it is pronounced more front and less open: [æː].

- DiCaprio’s Realization of the BATH set

This is a sound that DiCaprio has not had any problems in adopting. Throughout the movie, he has replaced his GA [æː] with the RP and also Rhodesian [ɑː].
9.51: Where is commander Zero?

[weərz kəˈmændə zɪrəʊ]

24.49: When was the last time [...] 

[lɑːst tɜːm]

38.37: How about you dance with me huh 

[haubaɪt juː dɑːns wɪðmiː]

### 4.2.1 c) Diphthongs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GA</th>
<th>RhodE</th>
<th>DiCaprio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOUTH</td>
<td>[au]</td>
<td>[au] / [aː] / [æː]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRICE</td>
<td>[ar]</td>
<td>[ar] / [aː]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FACE</td>
<td>[eɪ]</td>
<td>[ai]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOAT</td>
<td>[ou]</td>
<td>[ɔu]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHOICE</td>
<td>[ɔɪ]</td>
<td>[ɔi]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEAR</td>
<td>[u]</td>
<td>[iɛ] / [eː]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CURE</td>
<td>[ʊ]</td>
<td>[iʊ – iɔ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The pronunciation of the vowel sounds of the MOUTH set varies according to among other things social status and ethnicity. It can be either the GA and RP [au], or it can be monophthongized into [aː] or [æː]. Roy Bennett pronounces it as [aː] in his interviews.
Realizing this phoneme further back and more close signifies higher status of the speaker (Fitzmaurice 2010: 277).

- **DiCaprio’s Realization of the MOUTH set**

The easiest thing for DiCaprio to do would have been to generalize and pronounce both the MOUTH and PRICE sets as [aː]. However, in most cases he chooses to pronounce the MOUTH with a [au]. There are very few cases in which he realizes this sound as a monophthong.

21.16: You just get him out, Get him out!

   [juː dʒəst get hɪm aʊt, getəmaʊt]

25.32: Not really. Peace corps types only stay around long enough to realize they’re not helping anyone

   [nɑːt rəli] piːs kɔr tæps əunli stɪər æaːnd lɔŋ]

37.55: How’s it, bru?

   [hauzɪt bɾuː]

**PRICE: GA [aɪ] → RhodE [aɪ] / [aː]**

The vowel sound of the PRICE set is either pronounced like the standard [aɪ] or it can be a “monophthongized glide” [aː] as in the MOUTH set in RhodE (Fitzmaurice 2010: 277).

However, this is typical for speakers under the age of 30, something that Leonardo DiCaprio’s role in the film does not fall under. Though, Roy Bennett, also over the age of 30, occasionally replaces the [aɪ] with an [aː] sound in his interviews.
• DiCaprio’s Realization of the PRICE set

DiCaprio varies between realizing the PRICE set as a diphthong and a monophthong. The same word may be pronounced with an [a:] at one time, and with a glide [al] at another time:

9.58: Right.

[ɹaɪt]

10.31: Alright

[ɹaɪt]

21.11: listen, his name is Solomon Vandy, alright?

[soleman vəndi ʊɹaɪt]

13.58: Na na na, listen here my friend, listen here. Alright?

[lɪsən heɪ maː fiend lɪsən heɪ ʊɹaɪt]

1.17.55: [...] Side by side.

[saːd baɪ saɪd]

As Roy Bennett also varies between monophthongs and diphthongs it seems to be an acceptable way of realizing the sound in the Rhodesian variety.

FACE: GA [ɛ] → RhodE [ai]

The typical pronunciation of this sound in RhodE is a lowered onset with a glide upwards and front: [ai]. However, the first element of the diphthong varies, and the higher the vowel is, the higher the status of the speaker (Fitzmaurice 2010: 277). In General American, the onset is more front and the glide is more central: [ɛ].
• DiCaprio’s Realization of the FACE set

Throughout the movie, Leonardo DiCaprio stays with his GA way of realizing the diphthong of the FACE set: [ɛɪ]. He would have needed to pronounce the onset further back and more open, and with more of a glide: [ai] for it to resemble the RhodE form.

9.22: Listen, you take off as soon as I’m out the door, you
don’t land until I raise you on the SAT-phone huh

GOAT: GA [ou] → RhodE [ɔu]

The pronunciation of what is in GA [ou] is different in RhodE in that is more central and has a glide front; [ɔu]. Another variety of the phoneme is to pronounce it only with the slightest glide and unrounded: [e]. Though, Roy Bennett also pronounces the GOAT set with the RP form, except for certain words with the vowel sound in between consonants, such as in the words “road”, “vote” and “total”. According to Wells, to have the RP pronunciation in South African English means that one has more conservative accent (1982: 614).

• DiCaprio’s Realization of the GOAT set

In some cases, Roy Bennett realizes the sound as [ɔu] and as the RP form [əu] in others. Seemingly, DiCaprio tries to imitate the more RP-like form. It could also be that DiCaprio has the same problem with this diphthong as with the GOOSE set, since it also contains the [u:] sound that he seems unable to produce. Also, in some cases he slips in to his usual GA [ou], which cannot be regarded as RhodE.
Down below are a few lines, which contain four examples of the GOAT set in the words “stones”, “no”, “holdings” and “own”. DiCaprio manages to pronounce it accordingly in three of the cases, but fails on the word “no”.

52.33: They get the stones that I smuggle into Liberia.

[ðeɪtʃəʊnz ðə ta: smʌgəl ɪntu: la:ɪnɪ_.ə]

Now, Van de Kap has no visible ties to Tierra, but through a series of cross holdings and offshore bank accounts they actually own it.

[ʃərɪzəʊn ˈkros həʊldən ən əv ɔ: beŋk əkəntz]

CHOICE: GA [ɔɪ] → RhodE [ɔi]

The GA pronunciation of this diphthong is [ɔɪ]. The pronunciation in RhodE is different in that the first element is realized more close, and the second element further forward in the mouth, thus [ɔi].

- DiCaprio’s Realization of the CHOICE set

There are only a few examples of words from the CHOICE set in the movie and in the interviews featuring Roy Bennett, but from the material available it can be concluded that DiCaprio does not succeed in adopting this sound. The mistake he makes is that his diphthong is too open and has more of a glide. In other words, he realizes the sound as in GA.
2.07.10: Maddy, you find some place safe for the boy alright

[mædi ju faɪnd sm plaɪs seɪ feðə boʊ əˈraɪt]

Roy Bennett’s way of pronouncing “destroyed” in the following example is less open and has less of a glide:

represents everything that he’s tried to destroy.

[traːd tə ˈdestroi]

NEAR: GA [u] → RhodE [ie] / [e:]

Again in this diphthong we are reminded of the fact that General American is a rhotic accent, as it is pronounced [u] in this variety. The standard pronunciation of this diphthong in RhodEn is [ie] though it is also fairly common that this phoneme becomes a monophthong: [e:], making it rhyme with the SQUARE set.

- DiCaprio’s Realization of the NEAR set

As described before, one way of realizing this sound would be with the [e:] sound of the SQUARE set, which is what DiCaprio does for the most part in the movie.

51.27: Ah, cheers.

[tʃeːz]

1.25.49: [...] I am not leaving here without it.

[liːˈvɪŋ hɛː ˈwɪðəu tɪt]

CURE: GA [u] → RhodE [iø – iɔ]

The second element of this diphthong varies in RhodE, “from a front rounded quality to a backed quality”; [iø - iɔ]. In GA this sound is pronounced [u].
• DiCaprio’s Realization of the CURE set

This sound is rare in the movie, but here are a few examples of DiCaprio’s different pronunciations in each of them, none of them being the [iɔ] or [iɔ] sounds:

31.46: Clean living and a pure heart I suppose huh

[kli:n lɪvɪŋ æn pjoʊ hə: ʰɑː təː səpəʊəs]

1.39.19: Sure you’re not a reporter? [...] 

[juː] jʊˌnəʊt ə rɪˈpɔrər]

25.37: [...] they are not sure they wanna take over.

[ðeːnɔt ŋər]

4.2.2 Consonants

In general, the sets of consonants in different English accents do not differ a lot. Though, there are some features of Rhodesian English that vary from General American and therefore should be mentioned.

The phoneme /r/ can be realized in different ways, depending on the social status of the speaker but the most common way of realizing it as an alveolar approximant: [ɾ] in all places, which is also how it is pronounced in General American and most other varieties of English. Also, in the Lesser Known Varieties of English, it is described that lower middle class speakers with Afrikaner connections pronounce the alveolar tap [r] in most positions (even when they appear before a vowel), which is something that Roy Bennet does in his CNN interview. Also, which has been mentioned before, Rhodesian English does not have rhoticy like GA. This means that /r/ is omitted when it appears before another consonant or in the end of a word. Though, according to Wells, it is not very difficult for a speaker of a rhotic
accent to learn non-rhotic (1982: 114). DiCaprio would learn to omit the /r/ when it appears before another consonant or in the end of a word.

When /h/ is the initial sound of a word it can be realized in different ways depending on the proceeding letter. If the following letter is a close vowel, the /h/ is realized as a voiceless palatal fricative, like the German “ich” (Longman). If the /h/ is followed by a non-close vowel, it may be dropped: so [el] for “hell” (Fitzmaurice, 2010: 278).

Velar nasals become alveolar, making the ing-endings become –in: [ra:ti:n] rioting, which is also heard in how Roy Bennett says “highlighting” in his MSNBC interview: [ha:la:ten].

• DiCaprio’s Realization of Consonant Sounds

Regarding the /r/ Bennett uses an alveolar tap in most intervocalic positions, thus realizing very as [veri] in most cases, but otherwise the usage of this phoneme is inconsistent.

DiCaprio uses the alveolar approximant [ɹ] in most of his lines throughout the movie. This is probably a wise decision, since Bennett seems rather inconsistent with the variation between [ɾ] and [ɹ], so it would be safer for DiCaprio to use his regular realization of this consonant sound.

Adopting the non-rhotic of Rhodesian English is not something that has caused any difficulties for DiCaprio, as he has managed to not pronounce the /r/ before another consonant sound or in the end of a word in most cases, as shown in the example below:

42.17: You hear that? [...] They came into the city

[ju: heːðɪ] [ɪntuðə siːtɪ]

over night. It’s started. What are you gonna do now huh?

[əʊvənait] [ɪts staːtɪd] [wəˈtʃʊdənə duː nau]
4.2.3 Phonotactic Features

Phonotactic features refer to sounds in connected speech, when the sounds are “strung together” (linguisticsnet.com). The pronunciation of a word may differ if it appears in a phrase or a sentence, from when it appears “in isolation” (Rönnerdal and Johansson, 2005:75). For example, consonants can assume the place of articulation of a preceding or following sound, in a process called assimilation (ibid, 77). Among the phonotactic features that differ RhodE from GA is that the linking /r/ is often replaced by a glottal stop [ʔ], so that “for example” becomes [ˌfə egˈzæmpt]. Also, there is usually no vowel reduction of the initial unstressed syllable in words such as “remove” [riˈmuːv], “enough” [ˈɪnəf] and “concern” [kənˈsɔn]. In connected speech, a speaker of GA would have realized the unstressed syllable vowel sounds with a schwa [ə].

- DiCaprio’s Realization of Phonotactic Features

If we listen to how DiCaprio pronounces the vowel sounds and consonant sounds in the words themselves, we notice that a few sounds are pronounced wrong. Also, when we pay attention to when words float together and pass on features to each other, we begin to notice additional mistakes that he makes.

At one point in the movie DiCaprio’s character says “get him out” with a raised voice, and pronounces the utterance [getəmaut], using the American weakened /t/, approaching /d/ for which the Longman Pronunciation Dictionary uses the symbol [t].

21.16: You just get him out, Get him out!

[juː dʒʌst get him aut, getəmaut]
In *Accents of English*, JC Wells describes this attribute as an American innovation, although it exists in other varieties as well (1982: 250). Gordon and Sudbury write in their essay Southern Hemisphere Englishes that /t/ voicing is common between vowels in all Southern Hemisphere Englishes, but it is not as widespread as in America. In the CNN interview, Roy Bennett pronounces “better” like [bɛtə], whereas he in the MSNBC interview pronounces “putting” with a flap, making it [pʊrɪŋ].

Also, that the linking /r/ is rare in Rhodesian English is not something that DiCaprio seems to respect, as he uses the mentioned feature frequently. There are only a few examples of when DiCaprio uses a glottal stop instead of a linking /r/ as when he tells the prostitute outside his hotel to “bugger off”.

22.11: I said not now, next time. **Bugger off!**

[ˈbʌɡə?ɒf]

A curious occurrence is that DiCaprio uses the contraction “I’monna” in the movie.

20.44: [...] **I’m gonna** contact our friends in [...] 

[aːˈmɛnə kɒntəkt oʊ ˈfɛndz ɪn]

In the Language Log forum hosted by University of Pennsylvania, it is suggested by Mark Liberman that this is a phenomenon originating from the Caribbean or African American Vernacular English. This has spread to the rest of the American population through mainstream culture, mainly hip hop music and movies (Liberman, 2005). Though, from listening to the Bennett interviews, it is not possible to make out whether this phenomenon has reached Rhodesian English or not.
The times when DiCaprio fails to pronounce phonotactic features as in Rhodesian English happen mostly when he needs to raise his voice for one reason or another. The example below is from a scene when Danny Archer is yelling at Solomon Vandy, and makes various mistakes simultaneously.

1.36.00: Right now that is exactly what I am! And you’d [ɪgzaːktli wətər æm enjud]
better remember it, kaffir!

In this sentence, he fails to replace the [æ] sounds with the Rhodesian [ɛ] ones, as well as uses the typical GA phenomena of voiced t, and linking /r/.
5. DISCUSSION: HOW WELL DID DICAPRIO MANAGE TO SPEAK WITH A RHODESIAN ACCENT?

One thing that makes DiCaprio’s attempt to speak RhodE less convincing is that he is not consistent in using the various features of the variety. While he uses them at some points in the movie, at other times he slips into his usual GA accent, or even a different one, such as RP. This happens for example when pronouncing words from the SQUARE set as [ea], which is the RP form. The fact that DiCaprio is not consistent with his accent makes his effort seem less natural.

When DiCaprio is speaking at a normal rate and in neutral state of mind in the movie, he does not seem to have many problems with keeping his Rhodesian accent. However, when he needs to raise his voice or be emotional, his normal General American accent tends to shine through. This may be because it requires the actor to focus on other things than to just speak. It may be more important to create natural reactions to events in the movie, such as his sadness or anger to seem authentic, than to focus on speaking with a different accent. Having to be emotional may put stress on a person and then they feel more comfortable speaking with their own accent.

That DiCaprio would be more likely to fall in to GA when talking to fellow countryman Jennifer Connelly can however not be proved. DiCaprio makes various mistakes here and there in the film, independent on to whom he is talking.
6. CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have attempted to decide whether Leonardo DiCaprio has been successful in learning to speak with a Rhodesian English accent for his role as Danny Archer in the film *Blood Diamond*. The aim has been to discover if there are any situations in particular that accent coaches need to focus on when working with actors. Even if I have a subjective opinion, I have attempted to reach a conclusion in a more methodical way than for example the movie critics. DiCaprio’s lines from the movie have been phonetically transcribed and compared with a phonetic transcription of Zimbabwean politician Roy Bennett’s speech in TV interviews.

Although the study has shown that DiCaprio has not managed to successfully replace all his General American vowel and consonant sounds with the corresponding Rhodesian ones, the study of the various individual phonemes that differ between RhodE and GA has not been very rewarding. However, more mistakes have been noticed when listening to DiCaprio’s sounds in connected speech, since he then has used certain American features. These have been noticed especially when DiCaprio’s character has needed to speak with a raised voice. The fact that he occasionally slips into General American English or even other varieties of English, such as in the above mentioned situations, is what makes one doubt as to whether his attempt has been successful.

The results found in the study thus point to what accent coaches need to focus on when training different accents with actors, namely to practice pronouncing words using different tones.
7. WHAT CAN BE DONE IN THE FUTURE?

It has not been easy to find material featuring people of the same background, age and
gender as Leonardo DiCaprio’s role in the movie. The person that I have used to compare
his speech is not of the same age as Danny Archer, who says in the movie that he is in his
30’s. Also, it is not revealed in the movie which part of Zimbabwe Danny Archer is from, and
there is a possibility of different types of regional varieties of RhodE, so for a more fair
comparison one would have to find examples of the variety from different parts of the
country.

While listening to the interviews featuring Mr. Bennett gives us an idea of what a
Rhodesian/Zimbabwean accent sounds like it is not entirely fair to compare his speech to
DiCaprio’s attempt in the movie, as the two of them are of different backgrounds. It would
have been more correct to compare to the persons that Mr. DiCaprio had his accent training
with, but finding who these people are would have been a difficult task. Though, since we do
not have this information, we do not have any way of knowing whether Leonardo DiCaprio
failed to imitate the persons he had learnt from or if they did not use the features that are
described as belonging to RhodE by Fitzmaurice (2010). Everybody will not speak according
to the book.

Also, as mentioned before, I have had limitations in being able to hear to what extent
DiCaprio has been successful in adopting the Rhodesian English accent. At times it has
been difficult to decide which phonetic symbol to represent certain sounds. Although
phonetician Peter Ladefoged said that “[t]here is no doubt that the ultimate authority in all
phonetic questions is the human ear” (2003:27), different persons naturally have different
abilities to perceive sounds. In order to be able to distinguish more precisely between sounds, one could use various computer programs as an additional help, which could be something to consider for future studies.

If this essay was to be further improved, it would also reflect on something else that it has overlooked, namely prosodic features which are also important for establishing an accent. This essay has merely looked at the different sounds of speech, not the pace of it nor the tones.
8. WORKS CITED


Tables and figures