

a lot of energy, and sometimes some improvised copy, which was really fun too). As far as choosing an all time favourite, it would have to be playing the singing chicken for Zeneca Agricultural Products. Yes, I sang like a chicken!!

What range of VO work do you do?

Now that I'm older and my voice is a little deeper than it used to be, I mostly do a lot of narrations or Siri-sounding characters. However, I love doing different voices and accents (Check out demos on my website, www.SusanCBennett.com), so I'm really hoping to be a cartoon one day!

Any advice for drama students on either the VO industry or acting/voice work as a whole?

Basically, there's a lot of competition now, because technology has made having your own recording booth at home so accessible and fairly inexpensive. So...as always, it's best to be really good at what you do, and have as much range as you can possibly have. Learn to read really well, and be able to take direction. As a voice actor, it's not just enough to have a great or interesting voice, you have to have certain skills as well. I put together a doc with advice for people trying to get into voice work, and here it is:

I broke into the business many years ago, and the process has changed...a lot! Here are my suggestions for how to go about pursuing a career in voiceover (VO) now:

Reading Skills are essential, and taking any kind of acting class or voice coaching would be beneficial. There are two types of VO performances: announcers (commercial tags, news, messaging); and actors, who tell the story in commercials, etc.,. Read as much as you can, and record yourself if possible. That should give you a sense of whether VO is something you should try to pursue. Taking an improv class would help in every way, because VO is basically acting for the voice, and learning to think on your feet will help you in any situation, whether you pursue a career in voiceover or something else entirely!

Find a Local Voice Coach. Look on the web, call recording studios, and/or talent agents to find one who's right for you, and who can help you put together a demo (:60 mp3). Many of you have said you'd like to be a cartoon, but start with a demo

of you, as you....your voice print, as it were. Make a commercial demo first, then branch out into character voices, IVR, narration, etc.,

Auditions are the way you get work! Almost all VO work today is cast through auditions, so it's important for you to get comfortable with that. You can sign onto VO websites like Voice123 and Voices.com. You'll receive tons of auditions, so you can practice. You might also consider reading for the blind, or doing other volunteer projects for which you can utilize your voice and reading skills.

Professional Sound This can be tough if you're a novice, but look on the web for inexpensive equipment. It's important that you sound professional, which means you need a good mic at the very least. Actually, you can do a lot with your smart phone, MixerFace (recording interface for smart phones), and a good microphone.

The Web. Today's trend in VO is to sound "natural." Even announcers today are often asked to sound "less announcery!" Use the web to help you. Practice with different commercials, and take advantage of the many coaching and instructional videos out there.

Remember that VO is a skill! It's not enough just to have a good voice. You have to learn the "tricks of the trade" so you can be confident when you start to compete for VO work. Eventually, you'll want to get an agent and join SAG-AFTRA to get higher level work. Check out Dee Bradley Baker's site www.IWantToBeAVoiceActor.com as well. He's got a lot of good advice for all levels of VO experience.

Good luck! A career in voiceovers is a lot of fun!

How do you take care of your voice?

Basically, I try not to overwork it. I have allergies which affect my voice, so I'm careful about what I eat (no wheat, no dairy, no smoking, limited alcohol), and I try to use my voice correctly. By that I mean, it's important to use the diaphragm when speaking....It makes the voice sound better, you'll have more breath while you're reading, and it's less stressful for the vocal cords.

What equipment do you use?

I have an Allen & Heath mixer (which is English!), a Mikttek pre-amp, and a Neumann TLM 103 microphone. There's a lot of new equipment out there now...much smaller and perfect

for travel. In fact, you can basically have your own studio if you have an iPhone, a Mixer Face mixer, a good microphone, and a closet!

Do people ever recognize your voice? And do you prefer the fact that you are not a "visible" performer?

In the years that my voice was on the iPhone, only two people recognized it (other than some close friends and family). One was a banker, and one was a waiter. I told them both they needed to quit their jobs and get into audio because they had such great ears! Most people didn't recognize my voice because no one ever expected to hear Siri's voice coming from a human! Many people still don't know that the voice wasn't completely computer generated. Another reason is that my regular speaking voice is higher pitched than the original Siri, so it doesn't really sound like her.

As for being "visible," in the digital age it's advantageous to be anonymous or "invisible," because the voice can be very changeable, and we voice actors don't really want clients and producers to know what we look like, where we're from, etc. We all audition via our computers and email, so it's important for us to be judged solely on our voices and our performances, and not be stereotyped because of how we look.

I do a lot of regular work, but most voice actors are freelancers... which is a nice way of saying we don't know where our next job is coming from!! We audition all the time to get new work. I've been lucky, but what usually happens is a voice actor will be cast in a role, and it will last for a certain amount of time, and then that person has to go looking again-unless you're a bona fide celebrity! There are lots of American celebrities like Jon Hamm, Michael Douglas, Donald Sutherland, and many more who do lots of commercials.

I love doing voiceover work, and I highly recommend it. However, like anything else, you need to work at it, and you also need to have something else to fall back on, because, like film, TV, and theatre acting, it's never a given. I wish all of your students the best of luck!

Susan Bennett,

Original Voice of Siri

Reading Aloud in Britain Today (RABiT), an introduction

Sam Duncan, Jan. 18

Reading Aloud in Britain Today (RABiT) is a two-year research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (ARCH) to find out whether, what, where, why and how we, as adults, may sometimes read aloud rather than in silence. We are trying to create a record and analysis of contemporary adult reading aloud practices across the whole of Britain – the first of its kind. We want to create this record of adult reading aloud practices in order to create a larger, fuller, richer picture of reading today, a picture which takes into account different ages, phases and contexts of adult life, as well as the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of those living in rural and urban England, Scotland and Wales.

As an adult literacy teacher, a reading researcher and a teacher educator, I have often been struck by what seem to be unspoken assumptions about the nature of reading, for example, that adult reading is a silent, individual thing, usually carried out to gain a new piece of information. Some of our reading is certainly like this, perhaps even most of it, but surely not all of our reading fits this box?

Anecdotally, I knew of adults who liked to read aloud of an evening to a partner, to read recipes aloud while cooking, or to listen to others reading aloud as part of religious worship. I knew of adults who read aloud and listened to others reading aloud in different languages, at different volumes and at different times of the day depending on the season. I knew of adults who read aloud to others, and those who only read aloud when they were completely and utterly alone. Yet these practices just weren't talked about in the contexts of reading teaching or research.

Two years ago I decided to find out more, and interviewed seventeen adults in one south London borough (Duncan, 2015). This was a very small-scale study but still I was blown-away by the diversity of practices revealed, from reading aloud as part of a song-writing process to reading aloud Agatha Christie novels to develop English language skills, and from reading aloud emails as part of a working day as a PAT-testing electrician to reading aloud poems as loudly as possible walking around the house alone. People spoke of reading aloud as part of their family lives (as ways of being parents, grandparents, sisters, brothers, partners, wives, husbands, daughters and sons), as part of their working lives (as psychologists, teachers, musicians and electricians), and as part of their spiritual lives, whether as members of organised religions or as their own private meditation or contemplation. Some kind of picture of contemporary adult reading aloud practices started to emerge, along with several key questions. Why do some people like to read aloud as part of reading circle interactions? How does reading aloud help (some people) with memorization, focus or understanding? What is the relationship between individual reading aloud practices and communal ones? Are we taught to read aloud? How does a reader communicate a meaning or understanding when reading aloud? And perhaps the biggest one, what difference does the voice make? And so I worked to secure funding for this larger study, RABiT.

RABiT started in June of 2017 with the creation of an online survey of adult reading aloud practices and a Mass Observation Project directive (<http://www.massobs.org.uk/the-mass-observation-project-1981-ongoing>). We are now beginning to analyse the data from over 600 responses to the online survey and one hundred and fifty-four Mass Observation Project responses, while also travelling across the country to conduct individual interviews and make audio-recordings of adults reading aloud.

This analysis is still at a very early stage but a pattern is appearing of reading aloud as 'something' which is a part of many adult lives. It may not be a big part of many lives (with silent reading dominating in terms of the amount of time spent reading in any given day), but reading aloud is certainly a big part of some lives, and a smaller part of many more lives. Perhaps more interestingly, reading aloud is something which features in many different areas, contexts or domains of adult life, from reading aloud minutes at meetings in the workplace to reading aloud prayers as part of a communal faith life, or from reading aloud snippets of news to a partner across the breakfast table to reading aloud at a political rally or in a court of law. Reading aloud most definitely at least a small part of adult life, lifelong and life-wide.

But I would argue that reading aloud practices can also play a very important role in our lives and how we understand them. Many of those who completed the Mass Observation directive, writing about their own current reading

aloud practices and past memories, recounted stories of reading aloud at funerals or reading aloud to loved-ones in pain or distress. These are moving and meaningful stories, where the act of reading aloud is invested with great personal and cultural significance. Reading aloud may be less common than reading silently in terms of the time most adults spend doing it, but an uncommon practice is not necessarily an unimportant practice.

Responding to both the survey and the Mass Observation directive, participants wrote of reading aloud as unplanned or spontaneous (reading aloud blurbs at an art gallery, reading aloud an unexpected road sign, or reading aloud a funny passage from a newspaper), as well as reading aloud which is very much planned, practiced even, such as reading aloud at poetry or literary events, reading aloud stories to friends or family (old as well as young!) or reading aloud at a synagogue. These examples may be very different, but do share something, in that they are all reading aloud to serve others, whether to inform, entertain, or enable worship or reflection. Other examples of reading aloud could be classified as reading aloud as some kind of personal tool: to aid understanding (reading aloud complex legal text for example), memory (an actor reading aloud a passage as part of a process of memorization), or the composition process (reading aloud a passage one is trying to write to see if it 'sounds right'). These, the data so far suggest, can be both spontaneous and planned, regular and rare, but all concern a particular dynamic between the eye, voice and ear.

There are also practices which seem to be about the pleasures of the voice and ear in particular. They are activities which celebrate the joys of saying or hearing particular words, in a particular order, and perhaps - for some - in particular voices. Participants have shared their ideas on which well-known voices they find the most attractive, emotive, interesting or "velvety" (Richard Burton and Alan Rickman both feature). Others have written about their need to read out loud when they have spent the whole day alone, just to hear their own voices, to feel grounded, real, 'voiced'. As prominent as voice, in the accounts RABiT's participants so far, is the idea of types or levels of meaning, with reading aloud as a particular engagement with, chewing over, and sometimes communication of, meaning.

Even at this early stage of analysis it is clear that reading aloud for adults is not one thing, not one practice, one purpose, one activity. Rather it is many: many practices, many activities, with many different motivations and meanings. Over the next year we will be working to understand all this better, including understanding the relationships between reading aloud and memory, recitation, singing, storytelling, drama and speechmaking. In year two of the project, we will hold an academic symposium bringing together the research of those working in related disciplines to explore these issues and questions. We will also hold four regional community events across Britain, inviting anyone interested to come along and examine the findings so far and their potential implications.

The aim of this project is not to advocate for particular forms of reading aloud, or to say that teachers (of any age group or type of education) should use or teach reading aloud in particular ways. Rather, the aim is to provide an account of the diversity of existing practices, to shine a light on what is already happening all around us but rarely spoken of. We want to be able to say 'this is reading aloud in 2017-2018' or 'this is what some people do and this is why' and therefore keep working towards a larger, more developed, and more nuanced sense of what reading is or involves. This will include reading as communication, reading as meditation or prayer, reading as writing or composition, reading as intimacy – and no doubt much more. This will allow those of us working in the teaching of reading to approach it at least slightly differently.

If you would like to take part in the interviews or recordings, or would like to join us in year two of the project in the academic symposium or a regional community event, please get in touch by email sam.duncan@ucl.ac.uk

Reference:

Duncan, S. (2015). Reading aloud in Lewisham: an exploration of adult reading aloud practices. *Literacy*, 49(2), 84-90.