

Dothraki Accents

Note: The audio files in this section can be found in the "Accents" folder inside the "Audio Files" folder.

1. Introduction

When *A Game of Thrones* is filmed, I've been given to understand that the actors will hail from varying locales (the United States, the United Kingdom, Morocco and elsewhere). As such, I've written up this document, which should accomplish all of the following:

- Explain to English speaking actors how to pronounce Dothraki fluently.
- Explain to actors whose first language is Arabic how to pronounce Dothraki fluently.
- Explain accents *in* Dothraki (three types).
- Explain how English is pronounced with a Dothraki accent (three types).
- Explain how to produce authentic Dothraki crowd babble.
- Provide alternatives to standard Dothraki (if absolutely necessary).

2. Pronunciation Guide

In the *Dothraki Reference Grammar and Lexicon*, I went over the romanization system and the pronunciation¹, but I'll do so again here, just so everything related to pronunciation is housed in one document. Below is a table showing how each sound of Dothraki is pronounced. Each row of the table below comprises the following (in order from left to right):

1. The romanized Dothraki letter or digraph.
2. The IPA transcription of that letter or digraph.
3. The approximate English equivalent.
4. The approximate Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) equivalent.
5. A pronunciation description.
6. One or two sample Dothraki words.

For sound samples, listen to the accompanying audio file.

[tab1.mp3](#)

| Doth-raki | IPA | English Equiv. | MSA Equiv. | Description | Sample(s) |
|-------------|-----|----------------|------------|--|-----------------|
| <i>A, a</i> | [a] | <i>a</i> | ا | A low, somewhat centralized unround vowel. | <i>khalasar</i> |

¹ See the Romanization and Pronunciation section of the [Dothraki Language Description](#) in the *Dothraki Reference Grammar and Lexicon*.

| Doth-raki | IPA | English Equiv. | MSA Equiv. | Description | Sample(s) |
|---------------|------|----------------|------------|---|---------------------|
| <i>B, b</i> | [b] | <i>b</i> | ﺏ | The same as both the English and Arabic sounds. | <i>Bharbo</i> |
| <i>Ch, ch</i> | [tʃ] | <i>ch</i> | — | The tongue is put in the same place as for <i>sh</i> (see below), but the release is slowed considerably, allowing for pressure to build up behind the tongue tip. | <i>chom</i> |
| <i>D, d</i> | [d] | <i>d</i> | ﺩ | The same as both the English and Arabic sounds with one crucial difference: the tongue tip is placed between the teeth as for <i>th</i> (see below), rather than behind the alveolar ridge. | <i>dothrae</i> |
| <i>E, e</i> | [e] | <i>e</i> | — | A vowel in between <i>a</i> (see above) and <i>i</i> (see below). An Arabic pronunciation of <i>fatha</i> (short <i>alif</i>) won't be far off. | <i>ershe, indee</i> |
| <i>F, f</i> | [f] | <i>f</i> | ﻑ | The same as both the English and Arabic sounds. | <i>fishat</i> |
| <i>G, g</i> | [g] | <i>g</i> | — | <i>Always</i> pronounced as the <i>hard</i> English "g" (like the "g" in "gasp"; never like the "g" in "gem" or the "g" in "mirage"). Egyptian Arabic has this sound for <i>jiim</i> . Darija speakers should be familiar with the sound, though (<i>kaaf</i> with three dots above it). | <i>gango, gezri</i> |
| <i>H, h</i> | [h] | <i>h</i> | ﺡ | The same as both the English and Arabic sounds. English speakers will have to learn to pronounce this at the end of a word. (Note: I've used the emphatic Arabic "h" here. There's no distinction in Dothraki, but I think the emphatic "h" sounds better.) | <i>halah</i> |

| Doth-raki | IPA | English Equiv. | MSA Equiv. | Description | Sample(s) |
|---------------|------|----------------|------------|---|----------------------|
| <i>I, i</i> | [i] | <i>i</i> | ي | Either like the "i" in "machine" or the "i" in "kid"; both sounds are acceptable. | <i>irge, hlizif</i> |
| <i>J, j</i> | [dʒ] | <i>j</i> | ج | The same as both the English and Arabic sounds. (Note the distinction between <i>j</i> and <i>zh</i> .) | <i>jahak</i> |
| <i>K, k</i> | [k] | <i>k</i> | ك | The same as both the English and Arabic sounds. | <i>koholak</i> |
| <i>Kh, kh</i> | [x] | — | خ | This sound can be pronounced either as a uvular or velar voiceless fricative; the distinction isn't important. The German <i>ach-laut</i> sound in the German pronunciation of <i>Bach</i> is close enough. | <i>khal, kherikh</i> |
| <i>L, l</i> | [l] | <i>l</i> | ل | The same as both the English and Arabic sounds, though it would be best if the actors pronounced it with their tongue tip <i>between</i> their teeth. | <i>lakhlat</i> |
| <i>M, m</i> | [m] | <i>m</i> | م | The same as both the English and Arabic sounds. | <i>majah</i> |
| <i>N, n</i> | [n] | <i>n</i> | ن | The same as both the English and Arabic sounds, though it would be best if the actors pronounced it with their tongue tip <i>between</i> their teeth. | <i>negwin</i> |
| <i>O, o</i> | [o] | <i>o</i> | و | This sound is a rounded back vowel that is often lax; rarely as tense as the "o" in English "boat". It can be pronounced like a short "o", a long "o", a short "u", a long "u", or anything in that range, as the sounds are in free variation. | <i>osoleth, ozo</i> |

| Doth-raki | IPA | English Equiv. | MSA Equiv. | Description | Sample(s) |
|---------------|---------|----------------|------------|--|--------------------|
| <i>P, p</i> | [p] | <i>p</i> | — | A voiceless bilabial sound; extremely rare in Dothraki. Arabic speakers can pronounce it like <i>f</i> (see above). | <i>Pono</i> |
| <i>Q, q</i> | [q] | — | ق | The most difficult sound for English speakers, this is like a "k", but with the back of the tongue touching the uvula. Some speakers pronounce this sound naturally when producing a deep, <i>deep</i> yawn. | <i>qazer, oqet</i> |
| <i>R, r</i> | [r, r̥] | — | ر | Almost identical to Arabic's <i>raa</i> . For English speakers, try to emulate the deep, rolled "r" of the Romance languages and opera singers. The short variant is a single flap, not unlike the "dd" in "middle". | <i>ori, rohane</i> |
| <i>S, s</i> | [s] | <i>s</i> | س | The same as both the English and Arabic sounds. | <i>seris</i> |
| <i>Sh, sh</i> | [ʃ] | <i>sh</i> | ش | The same as both the English and Arabic sounds. | <i>shiqeth</i> |
| <i>T, t</i> | [t] | <i>t</i> | ت | The same as both the English and Arabic sounds with one crucial difference: the tongue tip is placed between the teeth as for <i>th</i> (see below), rather than behind the alveolar ridge. | <i>tahar</i> |
| <i>Th, th</i> | [θ] | <i>th</i> | ث | The same as both the English and Arabic sounds. | <i>thirat</i> |
| <i>V, v</i> | [v] | <i>v</i> | — | The voiced equivalent of <i>f</i> . Arabic speakers should also be familiar with the character <i>faa</i> with three dots over it being used for "v". | <i>vezhven</i> |

| Dothraki | IPA | English Equiv. | MSA Equiv. | Description | Sample(s) |
|----------|-----|-----------------------------|------------|---|--------------------------------|
| W, w | [w] | w | و | The same as both the English and Arabic sounds, though <i>w</i> is <i>never</i> a vowel. | <i>mawan</i> |
| Y, y | [j] | y | ي | The same as both the English and Arabic sounds, though <i>y</i> is <i>never</i> a vowel. | <i>yazla</i> |
| Z, z | [z] | z | ز | The same as both the English and Arabic sounds. | <i>zasqa</i> |
| Zh, zh | [ʒ] | s*, g* (see description) | — | As the "g" in English "mirage" or the "s" in English "leisure". This is the voiced equivalent of <i>sh</i> (see above). Arabic speakers must take care not to confuse this sound with <i>j</i> (see above). | <i>zhalia</i> , <i>azho</i> |

One thing to notice about this list is that if you compare the "English Equivalent" column with the "Modern Standard Arabic Equivalent" column, you'll notice there's *no* sound used in Dothraki that is foreign to both English speakers and Arabic speakers. Thus, if one group of speakers is having trouble with a given sound, the other group can help them out.

For example, one thing that Arabic speakers might help out English speakers with is doubled consonants². The distinction is important in several places, for example (to hear these, listen to the associated sound file): [ex1.mp3](#)

adakhāt (v.) "to eat"

addakhāt (v.) "to feed"

An alternation such as this will be second-nature and simplistic to Arabic speakers, but rather foreign to English speakers.

Also, a quick note about stress. The stress on any Dothraki word can be marked with an acute accent, like so: [ex2.mp3](#)

éshina (n.) "fish"

afazhilát (v.) "to be warm"

² See *Doubled Consonants* in the Romanization and Pronunciation section of the [Dothraki Language Description](#) in the Dothraki Reference Grammar and Lexicon.

The stress is predictable, based on the shape of the word³, but marking it will make things maximally simple for the actors.

3. *Accents in Dothraki*

In *A Game of Thrones*, it seems like there will be cause to have at least three separate Dothraki "accents". These accents won't be regional, per se, but will instead reflect the speakers' abilities with respect to the Dothraki language. The three accents are as follows:

1. Native: This is the accent that all native Dothraki speakers have (e.g. Drogo, Haggio, Qotho, Irri, etc.).
2. Non-Native Fluent: This is the accent for those who speak and understand Dothraki with near-native fluency, but who, nevertheless, are not Dothraki (e.g. Illyrio, and, in later episodes, perhaps Daenerys).
3. Non-Speakers: Every so often, there are characters who need to say a word or phrase in Dothraki who, nevertheless, don't speak the language themselves at all. This is their accent (e.g. Jorah, Viserys, etc.).

Below I'll describe each accent.

The Native Accent

The *Native Dothraki Accent* is possibly the easiest to understand. Basically, the language is pronounced as it's written. By following the pronunciation guide above, and all the pronunciation instructions in the various documents and in the script, one should sound like a native Dothraki speaker.

The Non-Native Fluent Accent

I call this "Illyrio's Accent". Have you ever heard a person speak a foreign language quickly and expertly who sounds *totally* non-native? If you go to the highest sections of any college-level language instruction course, you're bound to hear one or two. Sure, there will be plenty whose accents are outstanding, but there will be a handful who, despite their obvious fluency, simply don't sound native. This is what I imagine Illyrio sounds like to native Dothraki speakers.

To achieve a *Non-Native Fluent Accent*, first the speaker will have to master the cadence of native Dothraki. The speed will be the same; the stresses will be the same; the intonation will be the same; the vocabulary will be appropriately complex. The

³ See the Stress section of the Dothraki Language Description in the Dothraki Reference Grammar and Lexicon. Basically, if the ultimate or penultimate syllable ends in a consonant, it's stressed (the ultimate is stressed if both end in a consonant); if neither ends in a consonant, the first syllable is stressed.

differences will be slight variances in pronunciation that may or may not exist in every utterance. They're subtle nuances that will crop up in the speech of a non-native speaker, however fluent, that only natives can detect.

Below is a list of some things that the actor who plays Illyrio can do to achieve a *Non-Native Fluent Accent*:

- As mentioned already, the actor will have to achieve the speed of a native Dothraki speaker, and hit all the correct stresses.
- The letter *q* will likely be inconsistent. This is a trouble spot for non-native speakers of Arabic, Inuktitut, and other languages with uvular consonants. To be sure, Illyrio will get the *q* right a fair percentage of the time (~60-70%), but occasionally, that sound will be replaced with *k*.
- The doubled consonants or geminates will, similarly, be inconsistent. Most of the time, he'll pronounce the full doubled consonants as he's supposed to, but occasionally, he'll pronounce them as if there is only a single consonant there (e.g. *t* instead of *tt*).
- Illyrio will likely suffer from what I call the "Lazy R Syndrome". This happens to a lot of non-native speakers of Spanish, who feel that the trilled "r" is "effortful", and so sometimes replace it with the tapped variant. It's unlikely that Illyrio will ever default to an English swallowed "r", but every so often, when a full, trilled "r" [r] is called for, he will replace it with a tapped "r" [ɾ].
- It will be very, very subtle, but the top mistake any non-native speaker will make is replacing dental *t*, *d*, *n* and *l* with the regular alveolar (i.e. English or Arabic) variants. The difference in sound will be very subtle, but, for example, Spanish speakers will be able to pick it out effortlessly, and will peg Illyrio as non-Native—and so will native Dothraki speakers.
- The sound *kh* is also problematic for non-native speakers, and will sometimes be replaced by Illyrio. If the sound occurs at the beginning of a syllable, the sound will be replaced with *h* (so *khal* will sound like *hal*); if it occurs at the end, it will be replaced with *k* (so *adakh* will sound like *adak*). This is only something that near-native speakers would do (for what non-speakers would do, see below), and, again, this is occasional.

- The postvocalic *h* will be difficult for non-native speakers, and will sometimes be dropped completely. Thus, for example, the word *najah* will be pronounced like *naja* (though note that the stress will be on the final syllable for both words).
- Now for the vowels. One of the simplest problems will be Dothraki hiatus. In a word like *dothrae*, "he rides", the *a* and the *e* are fully voiced, without a *y* sound coming in between. A non-native speaker will sometimes flub this up, inserting a phantom *y* (or *w*, depending on the vowel) in between the two vowels to make them easier to pronounce.
- Additionally, English speakers (and in the world of the television pilot, Common *is* English, so a Common accent will be the same as whatever accent the English-speaking actor has) tend to have trouble with pure, short vowels that don't trail off. For example, our pure "o" in English often ends with a "w" sound, and our pure "e" often trails off into a "y". This never happens in Dothraki (unless the vowel actually ends with a *w* or *y*), but non-native speakers will often allow themselves to trail off into a semi-vowel like *y* for front vowels and *w* for back vowels.
- Finally, there's a good chance that reduced, unstressed vowels will show up as a schwa (like the first "i" and the last "o" in "organizational"). In Dothraki, many of the vowels are short, and sound as if they're reduced, but they never are reduced to the extent of a schwa in English. This will be a common mispronunciation for Illyrio.

Now to see the accent in action. Below is some (somewhat nonsensical) dialogue in Dothraki. Listen to the recording. I will pronounce it first with a *Native Dothraki Accent*, and then I'll pronounce it with a *Non-Native Fluent Dothraki Accent*. Note the differences: [dia1.mp3](#)

Tihas jin feshithqazeran. Me hezhahoe kishoon. Hash yer dirgi mekhal zala qazer, zhey Temmo? Anha tihak Irries! Jin asshekh najah!

"Look at that apple tree. It's far from us. Do you think the Khal wants an apple, Temmo? I see Irri! This is a victorious day!"

Listen to both versions and compare the two. Notice that, while both are equally fast, the *Non-Native Fluent* version has less "Dothraki-sounding" vowels. Often the

vowels at the end of words are lingered over inappropriately. Notice the pronunciation of vowels in unstressed positions like the second *e* in *feshithqazeran* and the *a* in *hezhahoe*. They should sound very English-like.

In addition, you should be able to notice everything else mentioned above (the English-like *t*'s and *d*'s; the shortening of *rr* to *r*; the added semi-vowels; the simplified geminates; the simplification of *kh*; the deletion of postvocalic *h*, etc.). The overall effect is that the speaker sounds like someone who definitely *knows* Dothraki, but who, perhaps, hasn't put as much effort into *sounding* Dothraki. This is precisely how I imagine Illyrio will sound when speaking Dothraki (and others who attain sufficient fluency such as Daenerys [who, though, will undoubtedly put more effort into sounding native]).

The Non-Speaker Accent

For this accent, I'm tempted to suggest that the actors be given the lines cold, without any pronunciation guide whatsoever, and told to speak the lines. The result will, in effect, be exactly what I describe below.

Several of the constraints you will see below are similar to those above, only instead of their being occasional, they are ubiquitous. In addition, the speech of a non-speaker will be slow, the stresses will be off, the intonation will be all wrong, and there will be several halting pauses. In addition, of course, the vocabulary will be limited, and the grammar poor, but that part is the translator's job, not the actor's.

Here are some guidelines for the *Non-Speaker Accent*:

- As mentioned already, the actor should produce the lines slowly and deliberately, as a non-native speaker.
- The letter *q* will consistently be replaced with *k* in all positions.
- The doubled consonants or geminates will consistently be reduced to a single consonant (so *tt* will become *t*).
- The Dothraki *r* should be pronounced *exactly* like the English "r", however it's pronounced in the position it occurs in. So if you have a Dothraki word like *serja*, the actor should ask him/herself, "If this were a new English word, how would I (specifically) pronounce it?" Once they have the pronunciation, that's how the Dothraki *r* should be pronounced (in the case of *serja*, swallowed for Americans; non-existent for most British).
- *T*, *d*, *n* and *l* should be pronounced just as they would be in the actor's English.

- The sound *kh* will be replaced in *all* instances by *k*.
- Postvocalic *h* will be dropped completely.
- Whenever two vowels occur next to each other, a semi-vowel will separate them. If the first vowel is *o*, then it will be followed by *w*. If the first vowel is *i* or *e*, then it will be followed by *y*. As for *a*, *ao* will be pronounced like the "ow" in "how"; *ai* and *ae* will be pronounced like the "i" in "like"; and *aa* will be simplified to a single *a*.
- At the end of a word, all vowels other than *a* will end in an appropriate semi-vowel (so *-i* will be *-iy*; *-e* will be *ey*; *-o* will be *-ow*), and *-a* will be pronounced like a schwa (for which, see below).
- Aside from the examples above, *a* will tend to be pronounced like the "a" in "happy". The only differences will be those in English (e.g. before "r").
- Finally, just about all unstressed vowels will show up as a schwa (like the first "i" and the last "o" in "organizational"). In Dothraki, many of the vowels are short, and sound as if they're reduced, but they never are reduced to the extent of a schwa in English, so the difference in pronunciation will be noticeable.

Here's the same sentence from above. Obviously, a non-speaker would never spontaneously produce a sentence like this, but it will serve to show how the accent works. For this recording, I've retained the first two pronunciations from before, and added the *Non-Speaker Accent* variant: [dia2.mp3](#)

Tihas jin feshithqazeran. Me hezhahoe kishoon. Hash yer dirgi mekhal zala qazer, zhey Temmo? Anha tihak Irries! Jin asshekh najah!

"Look at that apple tree. It's far from us. Do you think the Khal wants an apple, Temmo? I see Irri! This is a victorious day!"

The mistakes should be evident, yet at the same time, it should sound as if the speaker *is* trying. It's not as bad as a first year language-learner—there is effort—the speaker is simply failing to produce.

This should be everything one needs to know to be able to produce some authentic Dothraki accents (both authentically good, and authentically bad). Next, we'll look at English, and see how one can produce authentic Dothraki-accented English.

4. *Dothraki-Accented English*

In *A Game of Thrones* (here referring to the book, not the pilot), there are some examples of Khal Drogo speaking "Common" (i.e. English), and doing so non-fluently. Here's an example from the chapter after Daenerys has eaten the wild stallion heart:

"What is meaning, name Rhaego?" Khal Drogo asked as they walked, using the Common Tongue of the Seven Kingdoms. [...] "Is good name, Dan Ares wife, moon of my life."

Based on my Dothraki proposal, some things here are right, and some aren't (or, rather, some things are more common, some less). I was a teaching assistant for a class at UCSD that focused on first and second language acquisition, so I learned quite a bit about first language interference and non-native errors. Here's a list of what will be grammatically common when a native Dothraki speaker speaks "Common" (i.e. English):

- When learning a language, the *last* thing speakers get down correctly is redundant agreement. For example, in the sentence, "He walks to the store", the "-s" in "walks" is redundant. It *agrees* with "he", but it doesn't actually tell you that the subject is third person singular; the "he" does that. A Dothraki speaker speaking English, then, will drop the "-s" for the third person singular verb form frequently.
- It's common for speakers of a pro-drop language to pro-drop in non-pro-drop languages. Thus, a common error for Spanish speakers speaking English is to say something like, "Is correct?" instead of "Is that/it correct"? Dothraki, however, is *not* a pro-drop language, so we would *not* expect Khal Drogo to say something like, "Is good name". However...
- Dothraki pronouns don't distinguish between masculine and feminine—or even animacy, though the rest of the language does. For this reason, one thing we *will* expect is the overuse of—and confusion of—"he" and "she". For example, instead of saying, "It is a good sword", they'll say something like, "She is good sword" or "He is good sword"—and even more bizarre things, like, "He is strange plan, but maybe she good."

- Dothraki, like Russian, lacks articles entirely ("the", "a", "an"). I would expect a Dothraki speaker to almost never use any articles, then. So instead of, "That is the horse I saw", it would be, "That is horse I saw".
- Quick note: One thing non-native speakers do *not* do is unconsciously use the native word order of their language. So it's unrealistic for a Dothraki speaker to say something like, "She is horse brown" for "It is a brown horse", even though Dothraki adjectives follow the nouns they modify. This is not an error non-native speakers make.
- In Dothraki, there is a certainly variability between the infinitive forms ending in *-at* and the verbal noun forms ending in *-ar*. As such, I'd expect Dothraki speakers to say things like, "You want going to Mother of Mountains?" for, "You want to go to the Mother of Mountains?"
- In Dothraki, the allative is used for beneficiaries as well as goals, so I'd expect Dothraki speakers to confuse "to" and "for" frequently.
- Certain Dothraki conjunctions (such as "and" or "or") occur before each element in a conjunction phrase, and I would expect this to carry over to English.
- Dothraki speakers have a sentence-initial question particle, but it's not a verb. I'd expect errors like these: "Do he wanting for horse?" or "Did he wanted for horse?"
- In Dothraki, the plural and singular are *rarely* distinguished in inanimate nouns. When talking about things that would be considered grammatically inanimate in English, then, Dothraki might leave off the plural marking, e.g. "He find three mouse in field" for "He found three mice in the field".
- And, of course, everyone who learns English has trouble with the irregular plurals and tenses. Instead of "men", one often hears "mans", or sometimes "mens"; instead of "ate" there's "eated", etc. (This, though, won't be as common.)
- The Dothraki frequently translate their compounds directly into English. For example, saying "iron throne" is certainly no more difficult than saying "iron chair", but Drogo consistently refers to the Iron Throne as the "iron chair". This should be pervasive (e.g. not "blonde" but "straw head"; not "oath" but "word of blood", etc.).
- As possession in Dothraki always puts the possession before the possessor, I would expect Dothraki to overuse the "x of y" strategy in English, and rarely (if ever) use the "x's y" strategy.

The above are just things for the writers to look out for when writing up "Common" dialogue for Dothraki speakers who don't speak Common very well. Now I'll discuss pronunciation for the Dothraki actors who are speaking in "Common":

- The English "r" is, far and away, the most difficult sound for *any* non-native speaker to master. Most all speakers replace it with their own variant, so Dothraki would replace the English "r" with the lightly trilled Dothraki *r* consistently.
- A speaker with a thick Dothraki accent can distinguish between *p* and *f*, and *b* and *v* (respectively), but the speaker won't be able to produce the difference regularly. So, in a sentence like, "Please have bite; it is bear meat with pear, for you", I'd expect something like, "Flease have vite; it is vear meat with fear, for you". Of course, alternatively, a Dothraki speaker may over compensate and say something like, "Please hab bite; it is bear meat with pear, por you". A real Dothraki speaker would probably mix these up routinely.
- Diphthongs would be difficult for the Dothraki, as they have no true diphthongs. So in words like "house" and "lice" and "mayor", I'd expect a Dothraki speaker to replace the diphthongs with sequences of two vowels—roughly, the following Dothraki pronunciations (in the same order): *haos* ['ha.os], *lais* ['la.is] and *meior* ['me.i.or]. If done right, the result will be pronounced (excuse the pun), and at least a tad humorous (especially the last one).
- Dothraki speakers can't end a word with *g*, *p* or *b* (or *q* or *w*, but those won't come up in English). All words that end in *p* and *b* in English will turn to *f* and *v*, respectively, so "club" will become "cluv", and "cup" will become "cuf". As for *g*, a Dothraki speaker will add a noticeable *e* to the end of the word, so "bag" will become "bag-eh" (roughly), and a sentence like, "Only coward beg for life" will be, "Only coward beg-eh for life".
- The large English vowel system will be simplified to the four vowel Dothraki system. This means that words like "bait" and "bet" will be pronounced similarly, as well as "kid" and "keyed" and "sad" and "sod". As for the back vowels, *o* and *u* will be confused, so that "boot" may come out as "boat" and vice versa. In addition, four words such as "hood", "who'd", "hoed" and "hod" will never be able to be distinguished, and any Dothraki *o* or *u* vowel may pop up.

- For unfamiliar words (e.g. if a Dothraki speaker is learning a word for the first time), the Dothraki stress system will be applied. The place where this will be most noticeable is with words that end in a consonant. So, for example, if a Dothraki speaker were taught the word "backpack", s/he would pronounce it "backpáck", with the stress on "pack" (and, of course, the "p" is liable to become "f").
- Complex clusters will be simplified by adding an *e*. So a word like "kingsguard" will not only be stressed on the final syllable, an *e* will be inserted between the "g" and "s", giving us a word like "king-gess-guard". This also goes for English's complex onsets, so "stock" will become "eh-stock", etc.
- For the common "-ing" ending in English, the Dothraki will pronounce a fully-voiced "g" on the end (and, of course, will have to add an *e* if it comes at the end of a word). So "ring" will be "ring-geh", and so forth.
- All alveolar obstruents ("t", "d", "l" and "n") will be pronounced with the tongue between the teeth, as their Dothraki variants.
- The Dothraki lack our voiced "th" (as in "the", "this", "though" and "these"), and will replace it with a *d*.
- The "h" will be rougher (deeper) than the English "h".
- The Dothraki have *w* in their sound system, so they are able to produce the sound, but they have trouble with it when it starts a word (as it often does in English). Dothraki speakers will replace this with an initial *o* sound to try to approximate it.
- To compensate for the lack of weight in English words with penultimate stress, Dothraki speakers may geminate the penultimate consonant. So, for example, "Viserys", which seems like it's pronounced on the penultimate syllable, would have its "r" trilled strongly by Dothraki speakers. The same goes for the "k" in a word like "awaken".

All right, below is some random English dialogue I've recorded as a sample. On the recording, I'll read it in my normal American accent, then I'll do it in the various Dothraki variants listed below.

Standard American Accent

[dia3.mp3](#)

Yesterday, I went to a rock and roll concert. I forget who opened the show, but the Doors were the headliner. It was an incredible show. They played "L.A. Woman", "Roadhouse Blues" and "When the Music's Over". Towards the end, someone in the front row started heckling Jim, though, and he went off on him. It was hilarious. You should've been there.

Thick Dothraki Accent

Yesterday, I go to and rock and roll concert. I forget who flay pirst, but Doors are headliner. He is incredivle show. Day flay and "L.A. Oman", and "Roadhouse Vlows" and "Oh-enn Myosic Is Ober". For end, some-oh-one in front row he estart for heckling-geh Jim, dough, and she go off to her. He is hilarious. Yo shod for veing dare.

Middling Dothraki Accent

Yesterday, I o-ent to rock and roll concert. I forget who open show, but deh Doors o-were headliner. It was incredivle show. Day flayed "L.A. Oman", "Roadhouse Blues" and "Oh-wen deh Music Is Ober". Towards ending, some-oh-one in deh front row start heckling Jim, dough, and he go off on her. She was hilarious. You should have for been dare.

Non-Native Fluent Accent

Yesterday, I went to a rock and roll concert. I forget who opened the show, but the Doors were the headliner. It was an incredible show. They played "L.A. Woman", "Roadhouse Blues" and "When the Music Is Over". Towards the end, someone in the front row started heckling Jim, though, and he went off on him. It was hilarious. You should have been there.

As you can see, by the end, this is simply a Dothraki accent, but is fluent English—the Dothraki equivalent of Illyrio. After a little practice, it shouldn't be hard for a good actor to be able to do this off-the-cuff.

5. Crowd Babble

When large crowds of Dothraki are gathered, the viewer will need to hear them "speaking" Dothraki. Of course, thirty extras aren't going to have dialogue written for them, but speaking English (or even Arabic) is out of the question. Here I'll explain how

to produce "crowd babble" that *sounds* authentically Dothraki without actually *being* authentically Dothraki.

When heard from a distance, the most noticeable things about Dothraki (at least for an English listener) are the consonants and the intonation. This we can reproduce fairly simply. One method would be to simply grab a bunch of random Dothraki words and string them together, but even that seems like too much trouble for something that won't be processable. So instead, here is what can be done.

Dothraki has essentially three types of stress patterns: initial, penultimate, and ultimate. All one needs to do, then, is give an extra a couple consonants, a couple vowels, and a couple patterns. These, then, can be repeated continuously. Here's an example:

Consonants: *d* and *kh* [bab1.mp3](#)

Vowels: *a* and *o*

Patterns: (C)VCV CV (C)VCV CV C

Result: *dákhoda khódokha dakhadákh ádakha ódodo odokhód*

Just allow the extras to get the sense of the pattern, get the consonants and vowels down, and have them play around with it for whatever length of time is required.

Now here's the way to get the sense that Dothraki is actually spoken. Give each extra (or perhaps each group of four or five extras) *different* consonant and vowel pairings. The most characteristic Dothraki consonants are *r*, *q*, *kh*, *v* and *n*, so make sure those consonants are represented. Then, making sure the patterns are varied (some others would be VCVCCV, CVCVCVVC, CVC, etc.), when all the various babble types are combined, it will come together to sound like a symphony of spoken Dothraki. You can listen to the sample I've provided which uses several patterns, several consonants and all the vowels. [bab2.mp3](#)

6. *Alternatives*

Even though I've tried my best to make a language that actors will be able to pronounce with a little practice, and a fairly transparent romanization system, I realize that some actors still might have problems. As a result, I've come up with several alternatives to help smooth the process.

Understanding that there will be Moroccan actors who need to use Dothraki, I've developed two additional possible transcription schemes which might be more familiar to them: One based on Arabic (informed by the unofficial orthography of the local variety, Darija), and another on French (the Lingua Franca of Morocco).

Finally, as the resulting Dothraki may still be a bit difficult for an actor to pronounce, regardless of his/her country of origin, I've developed a system for

simplifying the pronunciation of Dothraki considerably. It's the same exact language, of course, but basically it's pronounced as an English speaker would pronounce it. The result will still sound similar to actual Dothraki, but may be a lot easier on the actors.

Below is a summary of each of these four systems. The first column is the sound itself in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The second column is that sound represented in the standard romanization system I've developed for Dothraki. The third column is the simplified variant of the standard. The fourth column is the French-inspired transcription system, and the fifth is the Arabic-inspired transcription system (note: for vowels in the Arabic-inspired transcription system, I'll use *raa* as the carrier of diacritics).

Dothraki Transcription

| IPA | Standard | Simplified | French | Arabic |
|------|----------|------------|------------------|----------|
| [a] | A, a | A, a | A, Ä, a, ä | رَا، ا |
| [b] | B, b | B, b | B, b | ب |
| [tʃ] | Ch, ch | Ch, ch | Tch, tch | چ |
| [d] | D, d | D, d | D, d | د |
| [e] | E, e | E, e | E, È, Ě, e, è, ë | رِ، ة، ا |
| [f] | F, f | F, f | F, f | ف |
| [g] | G, g | G, g | G, Gu, g, gu | گ |
| [h] | H, h | H, h | H, h | ح |
| [i] | I, i | I, i | I, Ĩ, i, ĩ | ي |
| [dʒ] | J, j | J, j | Dj, dj | ج |
| [k] | K, k | K, k | K, k | ك |
| [x] | Kh, kh | K, k | Kh, kh | خ |
| [l] | L, l | L, l | L, Ll, l, ll | ل |
| [m] | M, m | M, m | M, Mm, m, mm | م |
| [n] | N, n | N, n | N, Nn, n, nn | ن |
| [o] | O, o | O, o | O, Ö, o, ö | و |

| IPA | Standard | Simplified | French | Arabic |
|----------|----------|------------|--------------|--------|
| [p] | P, p | P, p | P, p | پ |
| [q] | Q, q | K, k | Q, q | ق |
| [r], [r] | R, r | R, r | R, r | ر |
| [s] | S, s | S, s | S, Ss, s, ss | س |
| [ʃ] | Sh, sh | Sh, sh | Ch, ch | ش |
| [t] | T, t | T, t | T, Tt, t, tt | ت |
| [θ] | Th, th | Th, th | Th, th | ث |
| [v] | V, v | V, v | V, v | ف |
| [w] | W, w | W, w | W, w | و |
| [j] | Y, y | Y, y | Y, y | ي |
| [z] | Z, z | Z, z | Z, z | ز |
| [ʒ] | Zh, zh | Zh, zh | J, j | ژ |

The simplified system should look familiar to the *Non-Speaker Accent*. Essentially, what I tried to do was produce a simplified system for those who really cannot pronounce the Dothraki, no matter how hard they try. It uses only English sounds, and only English syllable structures, but should still be recognizable as Dothraki. If it's ever required, I've transcribed *all* the dialogue from the pilot using the simplified system as well as the ordinary system (which is what you have), and I can send it to whoever needs it.

So that you can see these different systems in action, below is a Dothraki sentence transcribed using each system detailed above. The sentence means, "The valiant man hopes to kill his foolish enemies with his bare hands". Here's how it would look in Dothraki: [dia4.mp3](#)

IPA: [mah.ɾaʒ veʒ.ˈven za.ˈlak ad.dri.ˈvat ˈdoz.ge ɿto.ki ma ˈqo.ra.so.a ɿme.ni]

Standard: *Mahrazh vevhven zalak adrivat dozge toki ma qorasoa meni.*

Stressed (Stan.): *Mahrázh vevhvén zalák adrivát dózge tóki ma qórasoa méni.*

Simplified: *Marazh vezhven zalak adrivat dozge toki ma korasowa meni.*

Stressed (Sim.): *Marázh vezhvén zalák adrivát dózge tóki ma kórasowa méni.*

French: *Mahraj vèjvenne zalak addrivate dozguè toki ma qorassoä mèni.*

Arabic: مَحْرَاژْ قَرْزَقِينْ زَلَاكْ أَدْرِيفَاتْ دَوْزْجَةْ تَوْكِيْ مَا قَوْرَسُوَةْ مَنِيْ-

Hopefully the stressed simplified version (above) would be manageable for *any* actor. For Arabic speakers, I've relied on my knowledge of Arabic (one year of formal instruction at UC Berkeley; informal training with a friend of mine who was in Morocco this past summer) to create a transcription system that will produce the closest approximation to the actual Dothraki dialogue. Vowels are notoriously difficult to translate into the Arabic script, but I'm confident that what I have is as close to the original as it can get.

Dialogue that I translate can very easily be transcribed using any of the systems above, if it's needed (though I'd actually prefer to write the Arabic system by hand: it allows for more control, and is simpler than trying to use a right-to-left script in a left-to-right word processor). The language and its presentation is *extremely* flexible, as am I. Anything it takes to get the desired results on the screen, I can do.

7. Conclusion

Everything one needs to know about how to pronounce Dothraki should be contained in this document. If more is needed, I'm more than happy to work with the actors, the writers or the directors to ensure that the end result is perfect.