Do pronunciation models matter? Results and reflections from the Scottish English language classroom.

Gemma Archer
University of Strathclyde

Structure

- Background

- Do pronunciation models matter for teachers?
    i.   Scottish survey results, 17/18
    ii. Strategies to increase 'pron-tegration'

- Do pronunciation models matter for students?
    iii. 5-week classroom based study, 2016

SSE? Scots? RP? SBE?
A quick note on acronyms and varieties.

Jennifer Smith, University of Glasgow '*North East Scots part 2: the present*'
The Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGRm4DlDy7k

Jennifer Smith, University of Glasgow
Accentricity: episode 2 'More than one voice'.
https://www.accentricity-podcast.com/episodes-1

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The beginnings of my journey with pronunciation

Is it just me?

No!

» Pronunciation was once the 'pinnacle of importance' (Levis, 2005)

» Introduction of communicative methods of teaching 1960s and 70s led to decades of neglect: belief that students would learn 'naturally' through communicating.

» Despite the current pronunciation resurgence, many teachers still don't include it due to:

1. **Lack of training in phonology and teaching pronunciation** (MacDonald, 2002; Fraser, 2000; Yates, 2001; Bradford and Kenworthy, 1991; Murphy, 1997; Walker, 1999; Breikrutz, Derwing & Rossiter, 2001; Henderson, 2012).

2. **Lack of awareness of the importance and transferability of pronunciation.**

3. **(For many years) Lack of appropriate contextualised materials** (Derwing, Diepenbroek, & Foote, 2012) **a lot of 'drill and kill'!** (Fraser, 2000).

A fourth reason?

Could the mismatch of regional teachers' accents with that of RP dominant materials also contribute?

Archer (2017): Does accent mismatch dissuade teachers from teaching pronunciation?

Questionnaire: distributed via email, social media and various gatekeepers.

| 2017: Initial round of data collection	2018: Second round of data collection
➤ 114 responses ➤ 30 Scottish Standard English (21%)	➤ 205 responses ➤ 72 Scottish Standard English (35%)

17/18 combined total:
- 102 Scottish teachers

Typical Scottish Respondent

- ESOL teacher
- Teaching 10+ years
- Masters/CELTA qualified

Question 1: Did you receive explicit pronunciation training?

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Did you receive explicit pronunciation training? (Archer, 2018)

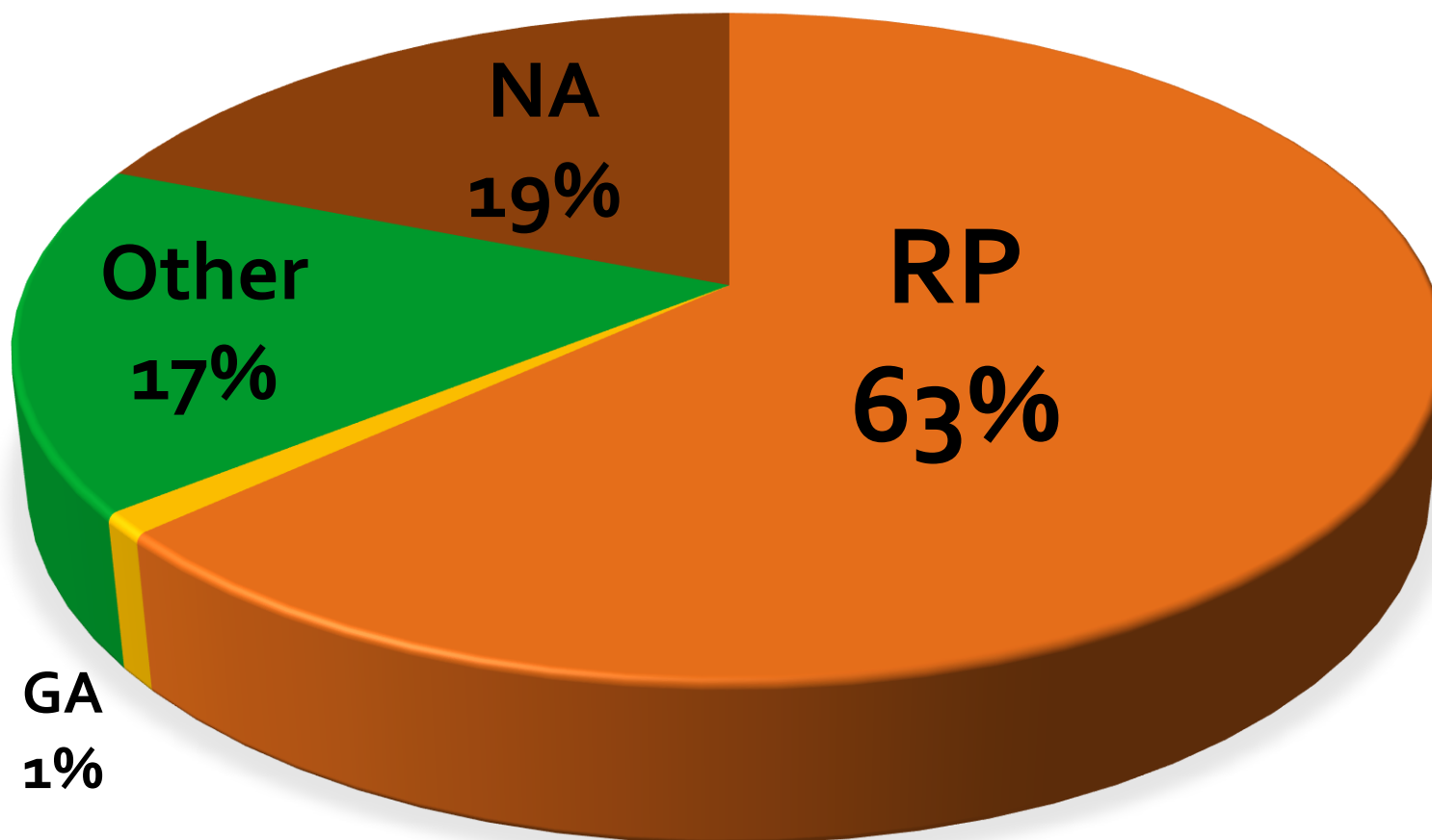SCOTTISH TEACHERS

13% No

34% Yes, but not in detail

53% Yes
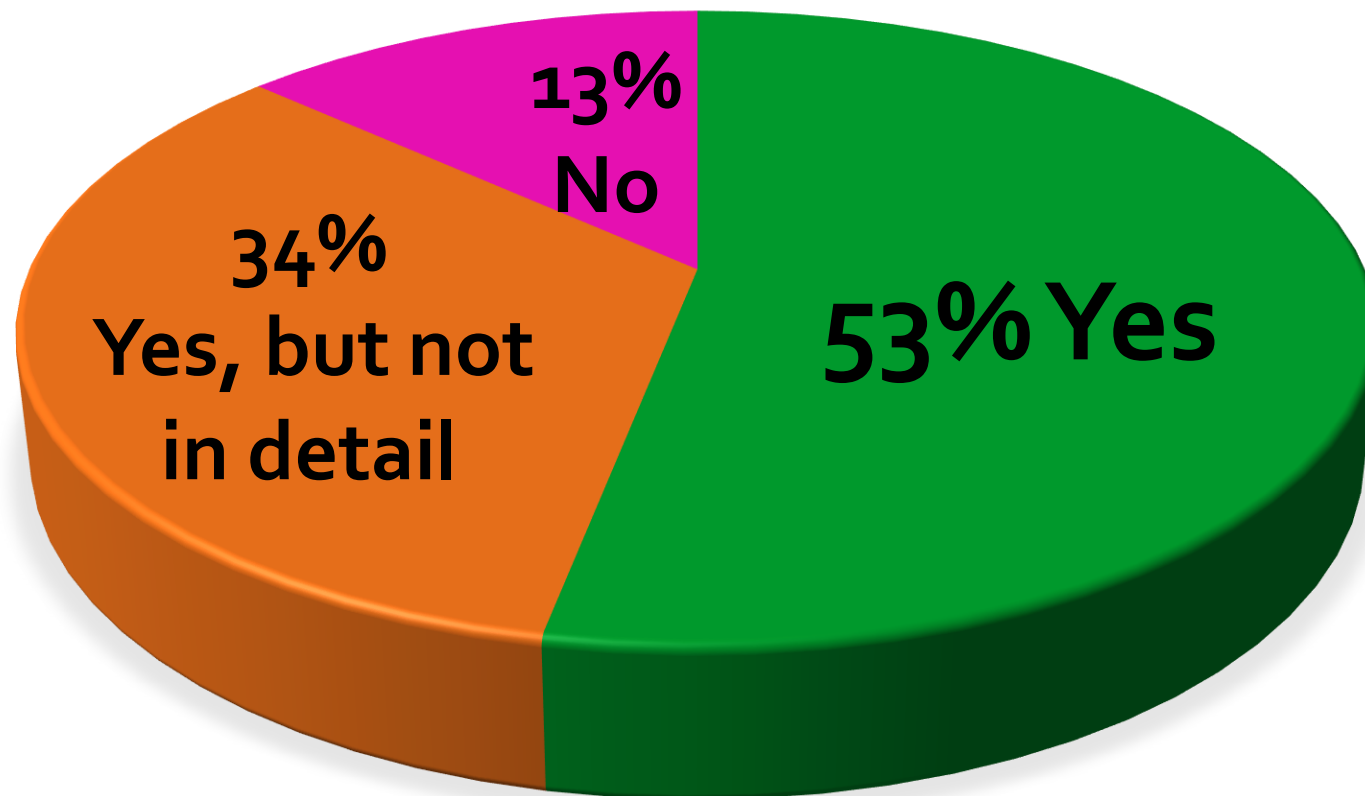
Question 2: Which pronunciation model were you taught with?

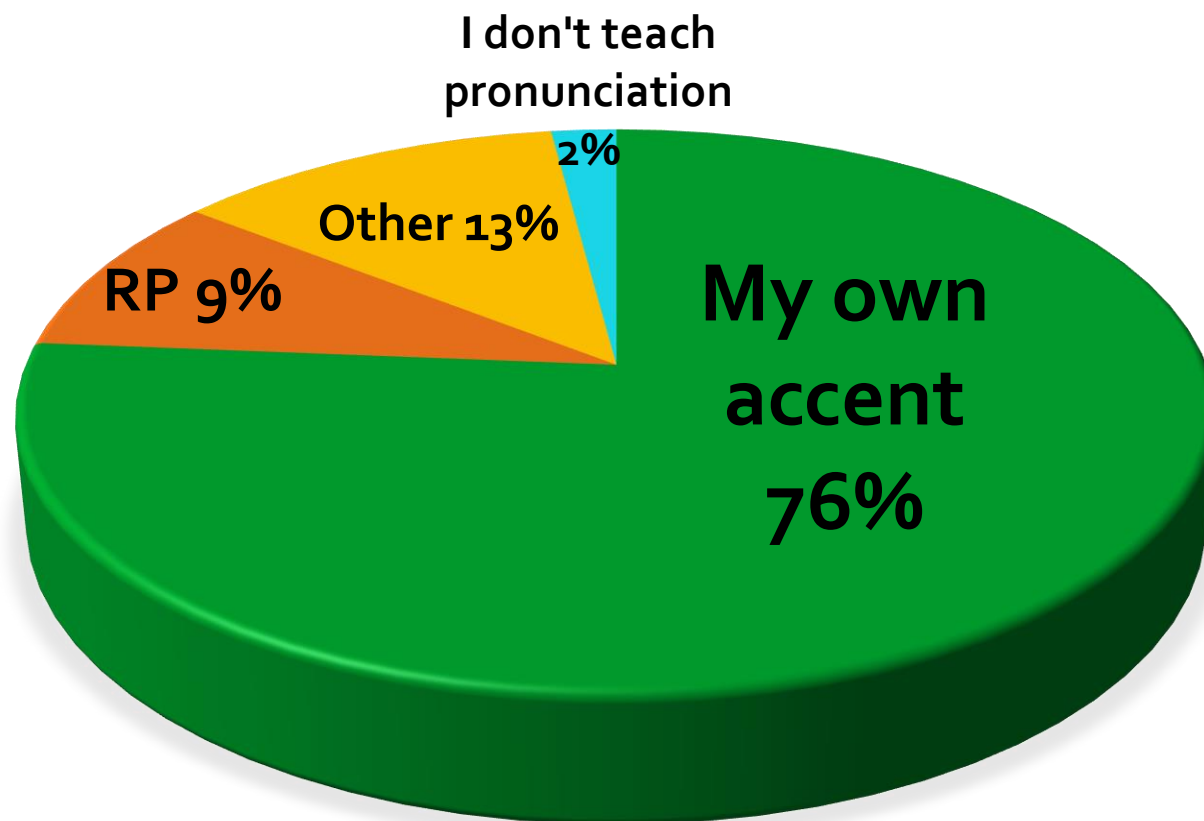Which pronunciation model were you taught with?
(Archer, 2018)

SCOTTISH TEACHERS

RP 63%
NA 19%
Other 17%
GA 1%

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Question 3: When teaching pronunciation, which accent model do you use?

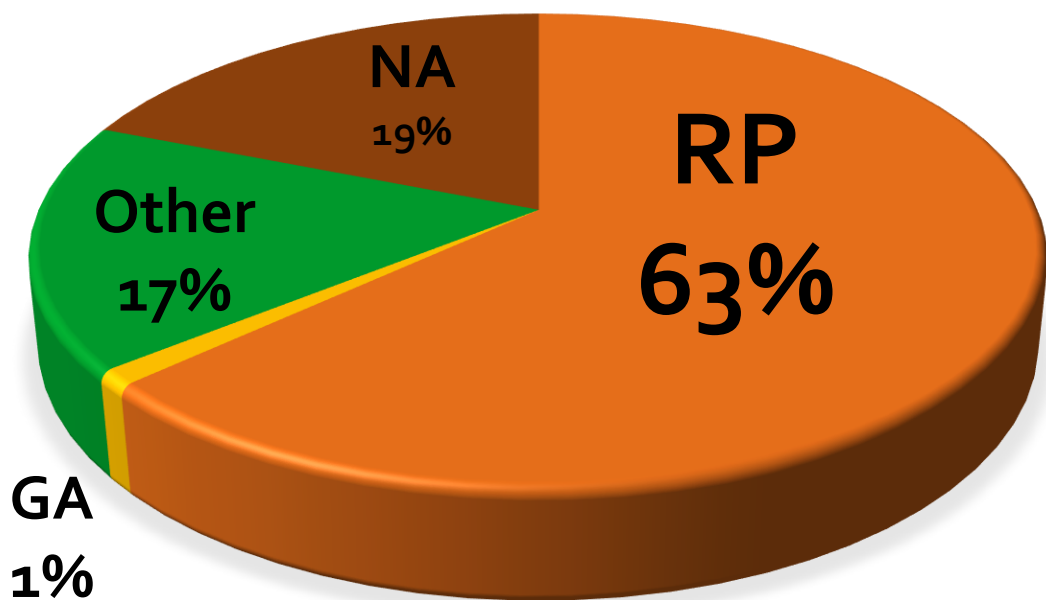# When teaching, which accent model do you use?

(Archer, 2018)

SCOTTISH TEACHERS

I don't teach pronunciation 2%

Other 13%

RP 9%

My own accent 76%

Let's compare those …
(Archer, 2018)

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I was trained with …

NA 19%
RP 63%
Other 17%
GA 1%

I teach with …

I don't teach pronunciation 2%
Other 13%
RP 9%
My own accent 76%

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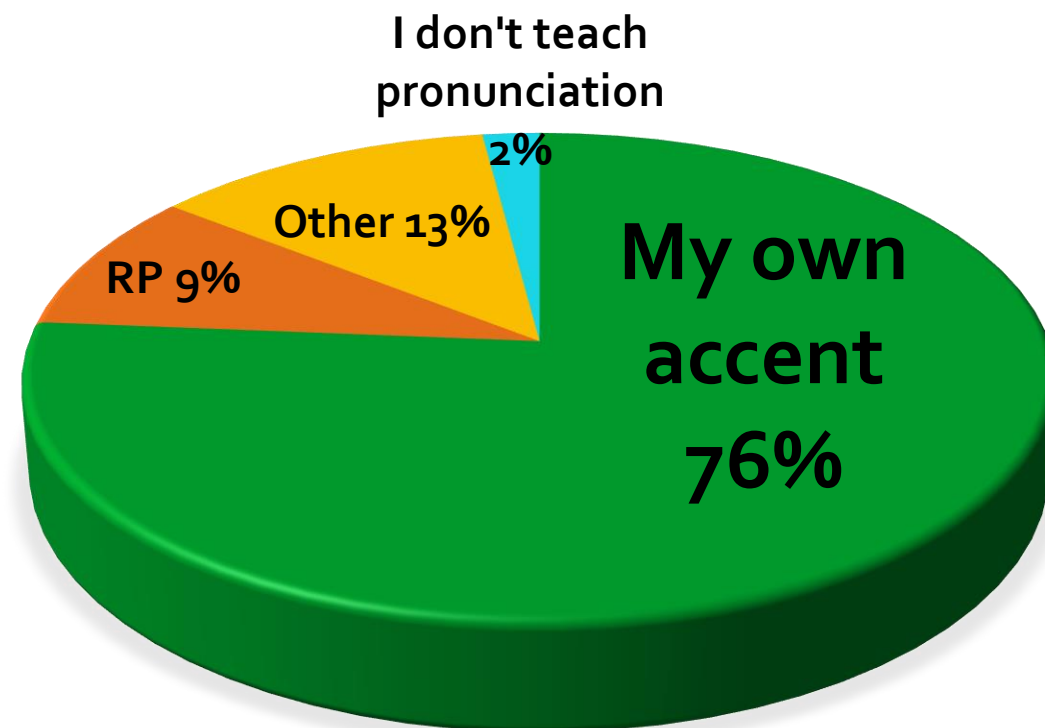
67% satisfied/ very satisfied/ extremely satisfied
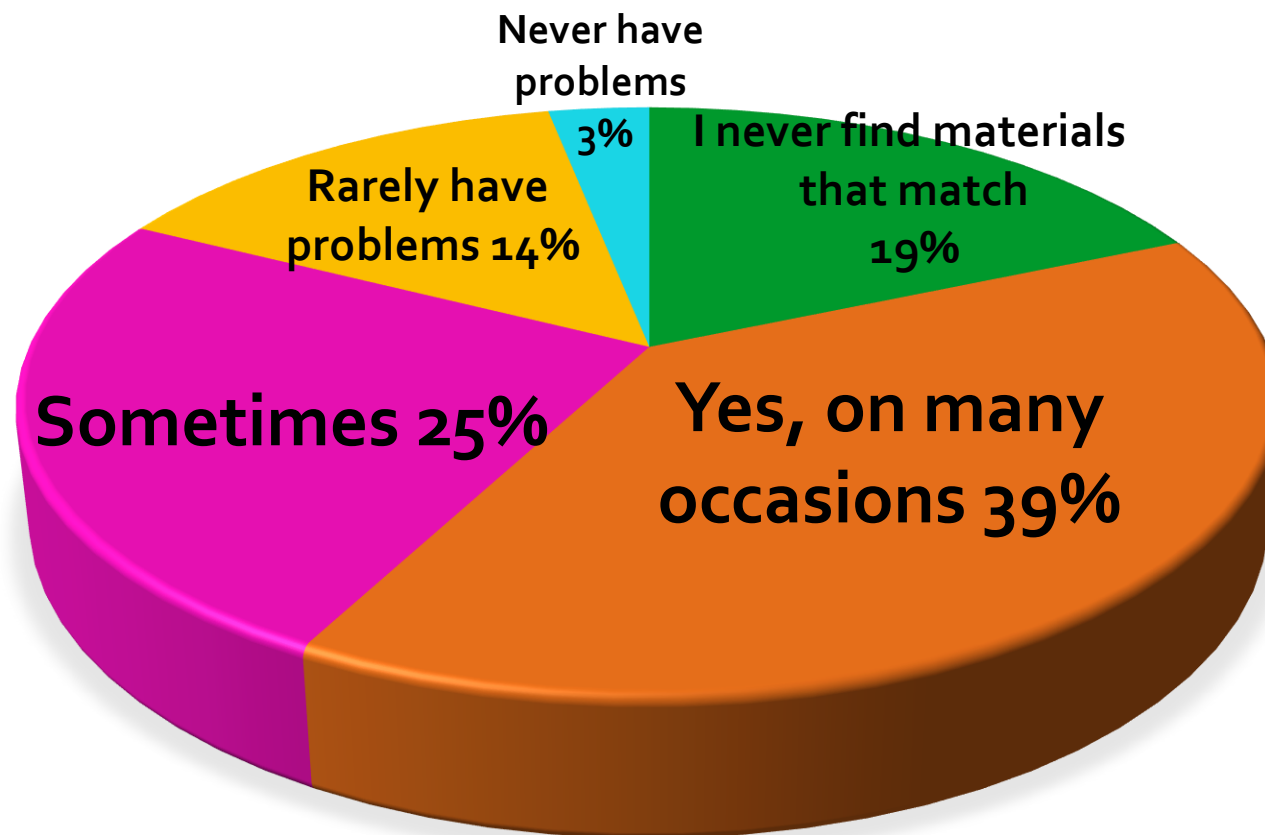
19% dissatisfied or extremely dissatisfied

14% NA

» *'It was largely based around the RP model. I feel that this is outdated and perhaps even discriminatory against teachers with non-RP accents. There could perhaps have been some guidance on how to adapt the phonemic chart to better match regional accents.'*

» *'Focus on RP when studying in Scotland seemed irrelevant, especially with a view to teaching in Scotland afterwards.'*

» *'RP is the standard model for pronunciation in language teachers and in audio tracks accompanying language books we use for learners, e.g. New English File. However, that does not mirror the Scottish pronunciation learners hear in daily life.'*

» *'Very few people have RP yet this was what was focused on in the limited pronunciation training I experienced.'*

» *'Using IPA with ESOL students is a minefield…. Everything is focused on RP.'*

» *'There is no one real or original English. In a class with Americans, Canadians, Chinese and British, I was taught to use RP when teaching pronunciation, yet expected to teach in my own accent. It was quite ridiculous.'*

Question 4: Have you ever struggled to find materials that match your accent?

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Have you ever struggled to find materials that match your accent?
(Archer, 2018)

SCOTTISH TEACHERS

Never have problems 3%

I never find materials that match 19%

Rarely have problems 14%

Sometimes 25%

Yes, on many occasions 39%

Have you ever struggled to find materials that match your accent: a comparison

(Archer, 2018)

RP/SSBE respondents

Yes on many occasions: **2%**

I never find materials: **6%**

Sometimes: **20%**

Rarely have problems: **39%**

Never have problems: **33%**

Summary:

Teachers reporting difficulty in finding materials

(never find materials, on many occasions, sometimes)

RP/SSBE: 28%

Scottish teachers:83%

Irish teachers:85%

Question 5: If you answered:
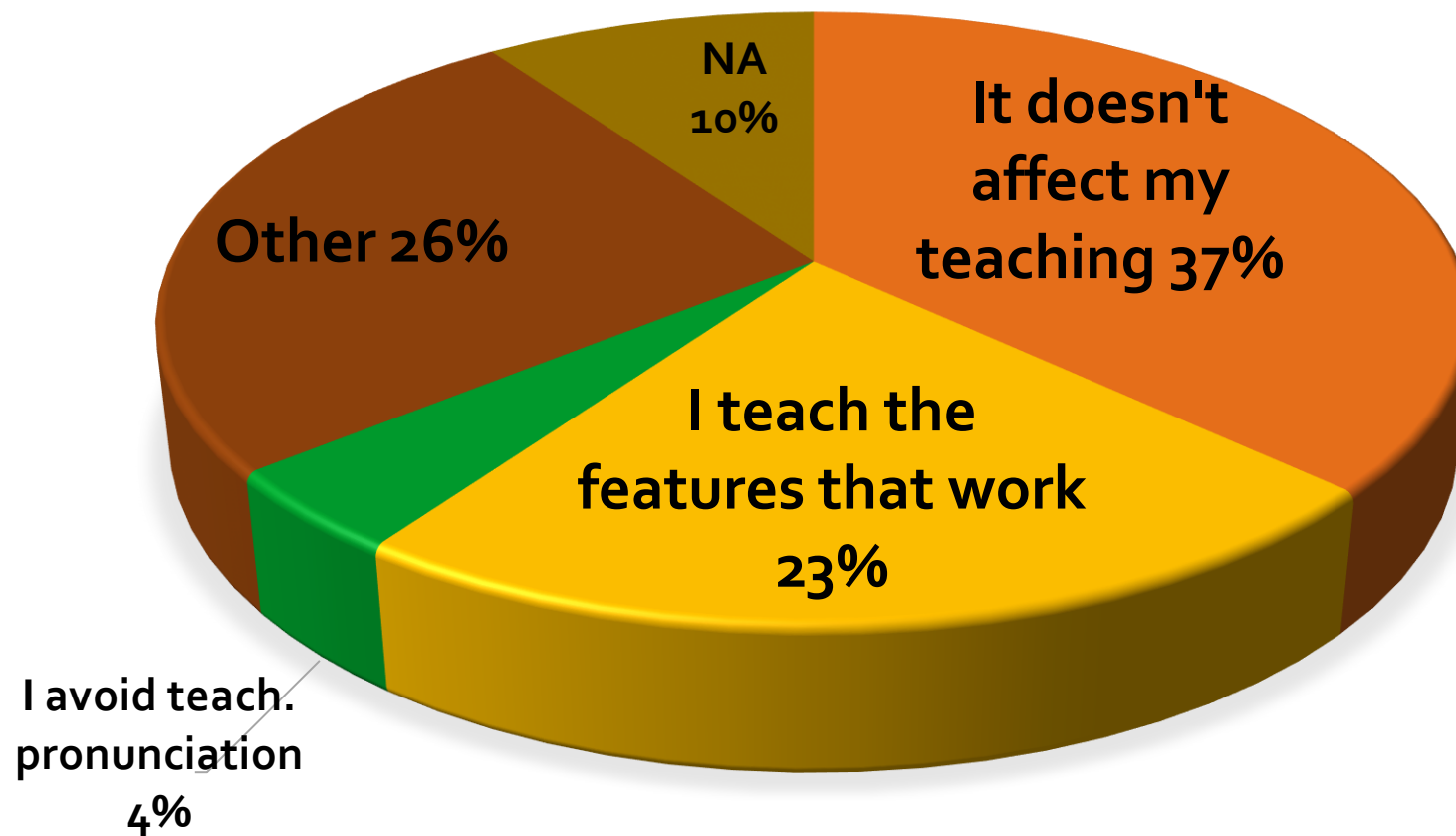
'I never find materials that match'
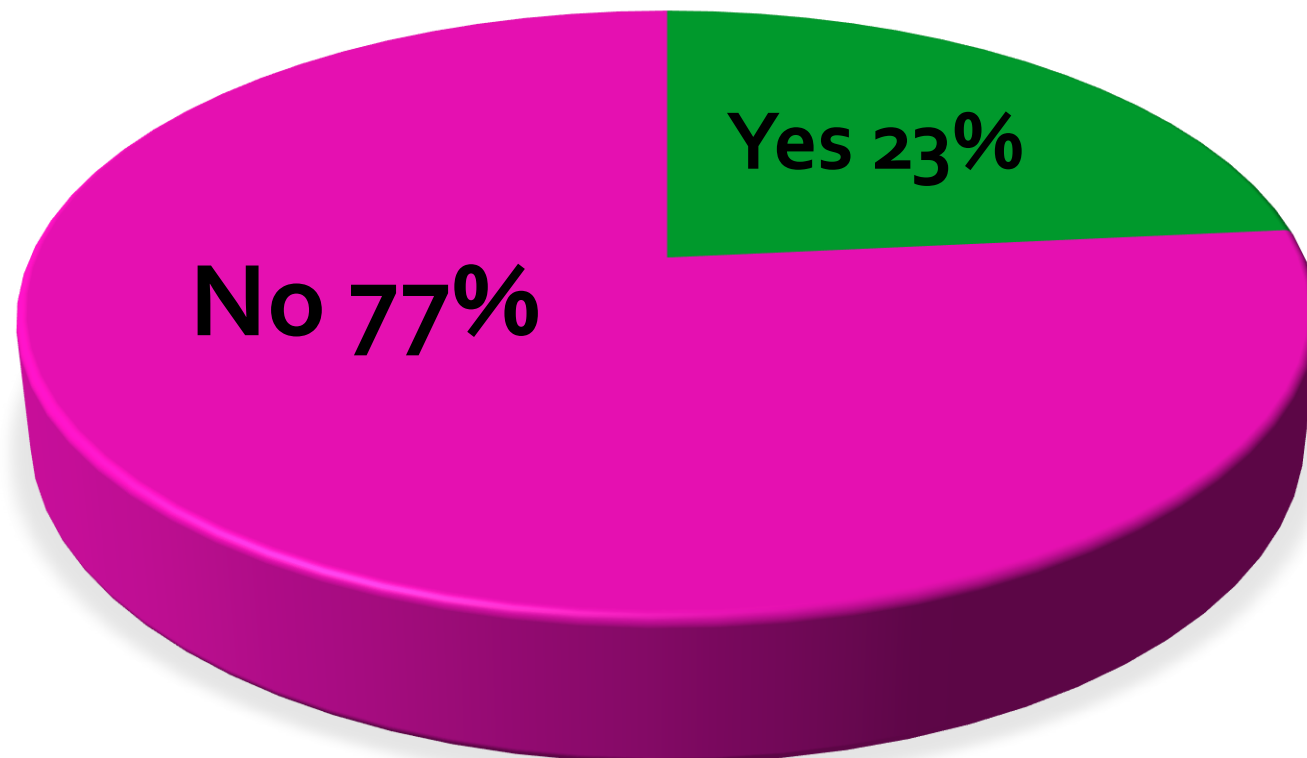*'On many occasions'* or
'Sometimes'

How does this affect your teaching?

Question 6: Has your accent ever specifically prevented you from being able to teach something in a textbook or syllabus?

Has your accent ever specifically prevented you from being able to teach something in a textbook or syllabus? (Archer, 2018)

SCOTTISH TEACHERS

Yes 23%

No 77%

Question 7: Which features were you unable to teach?

Which features were you unable to teach? (Archer, 2018)

- Vowel sounds can be tricky and often have to give examples in both RP and my accent as ss can be very sceptical if you differ from the textbook/ audio.'
- 'When the textbook suggests that the following are the same: "four" and "for"; "paw" "pour" and "poor"; "pawn" and "porn"; "caught" and "court".'
- 'Long and short vowels can be tricky.'
- 'I feel a little silly teaching students RP pron. of words with /ɑ:/ that I would pronounce with /æ/. Equally, it can be hard to distinguish between /ʊ/ and /u:/ in my accent.'
- 'There are some sounds that I don't have, e.g. bIRd. It seems forced to teach it that way.'
- 'many vowel sounds'
- '/ʊ/ and /u:/ - I still don't get the difference!'
- 'RP features e.g. the long /a/ in car park.'

Typical vowel inventory for SSE (ignoring diphthongs except /ai/):

/i/ (beat)   /ʉ/ (look, Luke)

/ɨ/ (bit)   /ʌ/ (luck)

/e/ (bait)   /o/ (coat)

/ɛ/ (bet)   /ɒ/ (caught, cot)

/a/ (Sam, psalm)

/ai/ (side)

Typical vowel inventory for RP (ignoring /ɜː/, and ignoring diphthongs except /ai/):

/iː/ (beat)   /uː/ (Luke)

/ɪ/ (bit)   /ʊ/ (look)

/eɪ/ (bait)   /əʊ/ (coat)

/ɛ/ (bet)   /ʌ/ (luck)

/ɑː/ (psalm)   /ɔː/ (caught)

/æ/ (Sam)   /ɒ/ (cot)

/ai/ (side)

(Ladd, 2005)

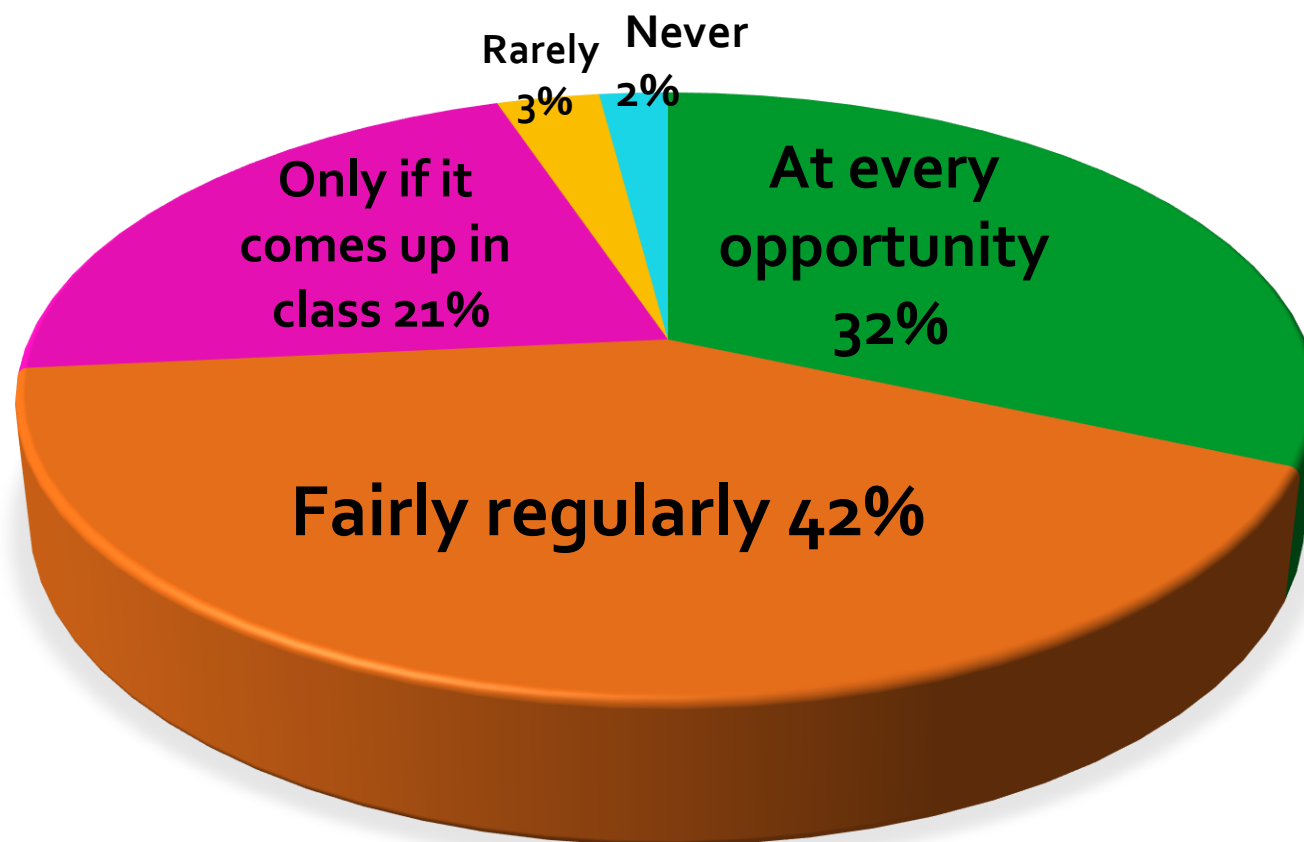| Scottish Standard English	RP/ Standard British English
No: 13 vowel sounds (9 monophthongs, 3/4 diphthongs)	**No:** 20 vowel sounds (12 monophthongs, 8 diphthongs)
Vowel length Scottish Vowel Length Rule (SVLR) Vowels are generally short, long before voiced fricatives /v ð z ʒ / plus /r/ and at morpheme boundaries e.g. agree/agreed **Diphthongs:** /ʌʉ/(mouth), /ɒɪ/ (choice), /ae/ʌɪ/ (price) **Schwa** or /ɪ/ /ɪr/ /ɛr/ /ʌr/	**Vowel length** Vowels longer before voiced consonants, shorter before voiceless consonants. **Diphthongs:** /ɪə/ /eɪ/ /ʊə/ /ɔɪ/ /əʊ/ /eə/ /aɪ/ /aʊ/ **Schwa** or /ɪ/

Question 8: How regularly do you include pronunciation in your classes?

# How regularly do you include pronunciation in your classes?
(Archer, 2018)

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SCOTTISH TEACHERS

Rarely 3%

Never 2%

Only if it comes up in class 21%

At every opportunity 32%

Fairly regularly 42%

Question 9: What are the most frequent pronunciation activities you include in your lessons?

What are the most common pronunciation activities you include in your lessons? (Archer, 2018)

Scottish teachers
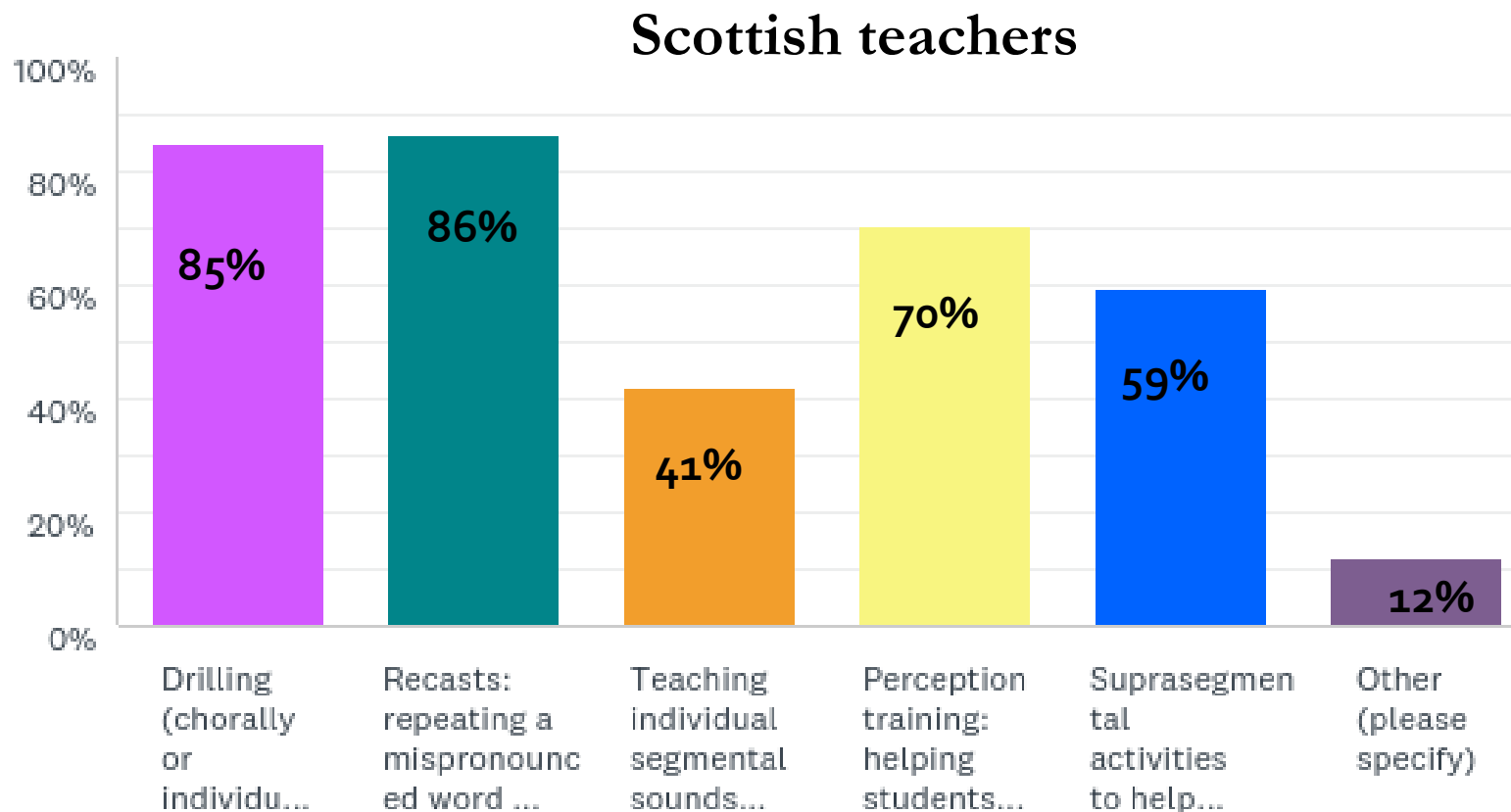
Planned integrated pronunciation instruction is less frequent than pronunciation for error correction/drilling. This is in keeping with Foote, Trofimovich, Collins, & Urzúa, 2013; Baker & Murphy, 2011.

» Disconnect between what we are trained with (mainly RP) and what we go on to use in the classroom (mainly our own voices)

» RP materials can cause difficulty for teachers, particularly vowel sounds.

» SSE speaking teachers sometimes struggle to find apt. materials/ **Consequences?** Teachers *may* only teach a limited range of features, or even avoid pronunciation altogether.

» Teachers may think they are doing more pronunciation work that they actually are.

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Consensus:

» Teach the 'book accent' **and** the 'real accent'. Be explicit in how they differ.

Consider: Does only teaching one prestige model deprive students of real knowledge and strategies to deal with the language they hear every day?

Sources:

» *Authentic Listening*, (Hancock McDonald, 2014)

» *Teaching the pronunciation of English as a Lingua Franca*, (Walker, 2010)

» www.elllo.org

» https://www.dialectsarchive.com/scotland (IDEA)

» http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/research/gsound/Eng/Database/Phonetics/Englishes/Home/HomeMainFrameHolder.htm (*Accents of English*, Uni. Edinburgh)

» http://accent.gmu.edu/searchsaa.php?function=detail&speakerid=611

» *Sounds of the City* (Uni. of Glasgow)http://soundsofthecity.arts.gla.ac.uk/stories.html#stories

» *Accentricity* podcast: https://www.accentricity-podcast.com

» Obliging friends and family!

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When working on production

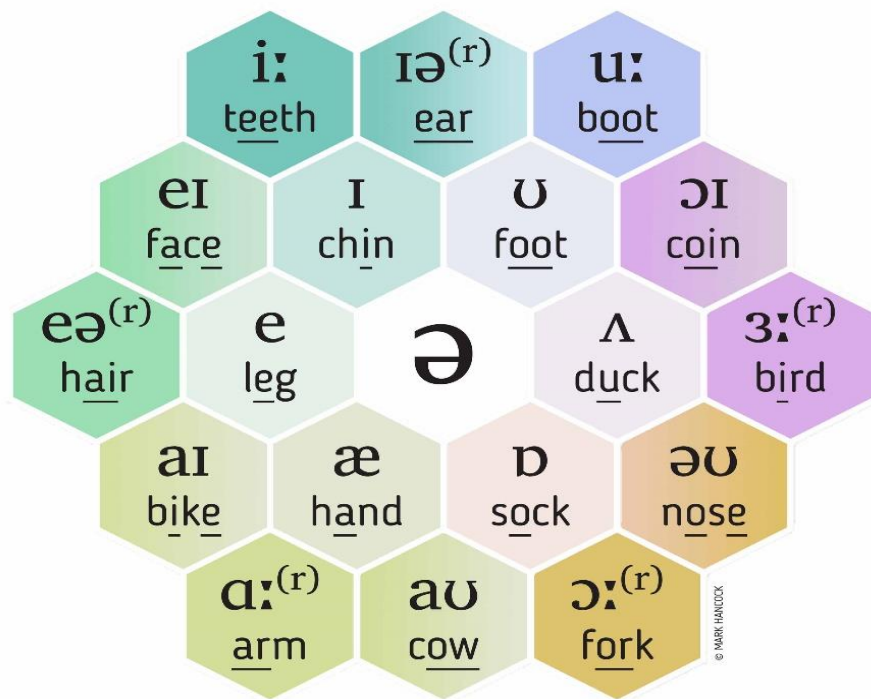» Introduce students to segmental sounds using **the most appropriate chart for you/ your linguistic community**

» Underhill

© Underhill, A.

source: http://www.macmillanenglish.com

- Hancock Mcdonald

© Mark Hancock
Source: http://hancockmcdonald.com

Strategy 3: What to do with vowels….?

Options:

1. Use your own voice, and provide alternative audio models to show explicit differences. Or ask students to decide which model they want.

OR

If you don't want to use your own voice, use a pre-recorded audio of another

variety, but highlight differences through your own voice.

2. Consider prioritising high functional load vowels e.g. /ɪ/ /iː/

3. Consider the Lingua Franca Core: consonant sounds considered more important than vowels, but vowel length can affect intelligibility (Jenkins, 2000).

The Lingua Franca Core (Jenkins, 2000) advocates teaching certain core pronunciation features for maximum intelligibility rather than native-likeness.

LFC core features include:

» All consonant sounds (except /θ/ and /ð/)

» Consonant clusters

» Rhotic /r/

» /t/ not tapped i.e. butter not '*budder*'

» More clear /l/ than dark [ɫ]

» Nuclear/ tonic stress

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J.C.WELLS
Accents of English 2
The British Isles

https://www.accentricity-podcast.com

mouton textbook

1

**VARIETIES
OF ENGLISH
THE BRITISH
ISLES**

Bernd Kortmann
Clive Upton
Editors

Mouton de Gruyter

Strategy 6: Teacher Training

- Given that phonological instruction comes late for most teachers (if ever) push for:
    i.   in-house training
    ii.   collaborative study with peers
    iii.   trickle down sessions
- Make and share audios with your colleagues (using Audacity)
- Plan lessons which teach both local and
- global varieties of English

Do pronunciation models matter for <u>students</u>?

5-week classroom based study, 2016

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If this is the answer, what's the question?

A.

» It's ugly, I hate it!

» It's not proper!

» It's too fast!

» Sad … I thought everyone would speak like in Harry Potter!

B.

• It's more official

• It's the way gentlemen talk

• It's how my favourite star, Tom Hiddleston, talks

• It's the best way to get a promotion

Stigma

Historical stigma against regional forms of English (See *Punch!*)

Confusion (students and teachers) over what is Scots versus what is Scottish Standard English.

Despite change occurring in British media since 2008, students are still picking up this stigma. Familiarity with only a prestige accent doesn't help.

Students may vocalise a preference for one accent over another, but they can rarely tell the difference.

'*Rab. C. Nesbitt*'. BBC Scotland; *The Simpsons*, Fox Broadcasting Company.

The hunt for justification

I wanted to know once and for all …

1. Why I should (exclusively) teach an RP model/ material to students …
   - who can't identify it
   - who are living and studying in locations like Glasgow where its presence is negligible, even said to be 'phantom' (Daniels, 1995)
   - which can be met with hostility?

2. If the students' preference was right – that RP **truly** supported their perception and production better than other accents.

The 5-week study (Archer, 2018)

RP model group	SSE model group	Particulars
16 volunteers Teacher: Gemma (Accent model: recorded RP)	16 volunteers Teacher: Gemma (Accent model: recorded SSE)	All enrolled on 21-hour/week pre-sess. programme. L1: Mandarin, Cantonese, Thai, Korean Age: 21 -37 years Sex: 90% female
✓ Diagnostic test **+ 5-week course**	✓ Diagnostic test **+ 5-week course**	Tested ss' perception and production
✓ Evaluative test	✓ Evaluative test	Tested ss' perception and production
Control Group	✓ Diagnostic test	Tested ss' perception and production
22 volunteers *(particulars – as above)	✓ Evaluative test	Tested ss' perception and production

Course and test features: influenced by the Lingua Franca Core (Jenkins, 2000) and Functional Load Theory (Catford, 1987).

Pre-planned: Lesson structure

Celce-Murcia et al communicative framework for pronunciation (2010):

| Step 1	**<u>Description and Analysis</u>:** oral and written illustrations of how the feature is produced/articulated.
Step 2	**<u>Listening discrimination (ear training)</u>:** focused listening practice with feedback on learners' ability to correctly discriminate feature.
Step 3	**<u>Controlled practice</u>:** oral readings of target sound e.g. minimal pair sentences, short dialogues, etc. with special attention paid to the highlighted feature in order to raise learner consciousness.
Step 4	**<u>Guided practice</u>:** structured communication exercises, e.g. information-gap activities, map tasks etc. that enable the learner to monitor for the specified feature.
Step 5	**<u>Free/Communicative practice</u>:** less structured, fluency building activities e.g. role play, problem solving etc., that require the learner to attend to both form and content of utterances.

44

Course breakdown

Lesson	Segmental contrasts:	Consonant clusters	Vowel duration	Suprasegmentals
Diagnostic assessment				
1	**/l/r/*** **/p/b/**			
2 Stress:* ing the word				**Nuclear Stress:*** **Stressing the final content word**
3	**/t/d/** **/t/s/**	**Word-initial clusters including:** **/t/d/s/** **e.g. straw/ drop**		
4	**/ɪ / i:/**		**Vowel Length***	
5	**Review of weeks 1-4**	**Word-final clusters including:** **/p/b/l/r/t/d/s/** **e.g. crisps/hands**		
Evaluative Assessment				

Results: perception (Archer, 2018)
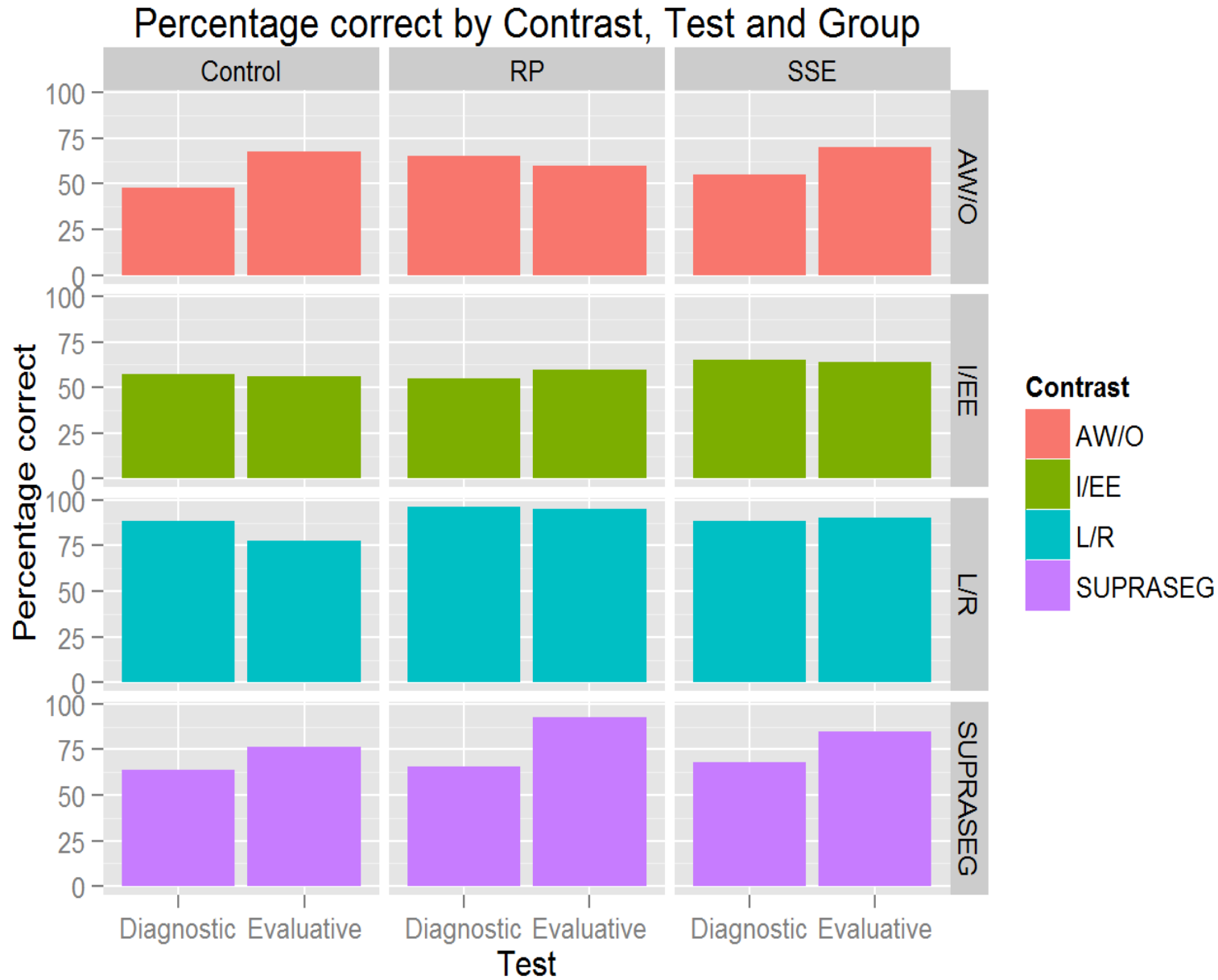
Results: production (Archer, 2018)
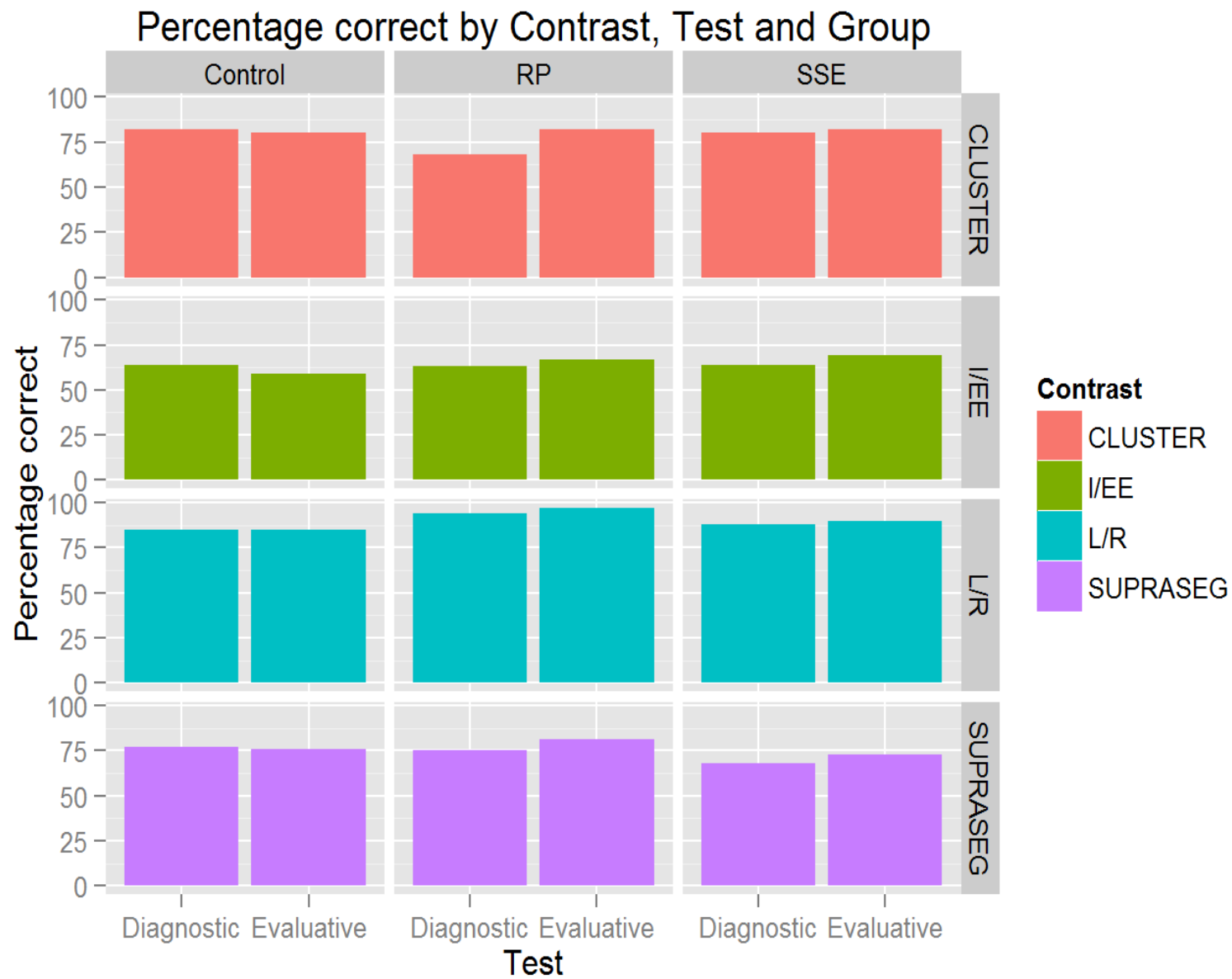
Discussion

» **Familiarity:** unfamiliar pronunciation can affect listeners' comprehension/ speed of comprehension   (Adank & McQueen, 2007)

Most of these students had spent up to 10 years studying English/ completing Cambridge exams and had limited familiarity with anything other than controlled, prestige models.

» **Attitude:** students' feelings about the model they were using.

Outcome:

Which model, from a choice of two, RP or SSE, best supports international students' perception and production of English while studying in Scotland?

Neither model fits perfectly, but the results do not justify exclusive use of an RP model.

No:

» I feel that 5 weeks of explicit tuition in **<u>any standard accent</u>** has the potential to improve students' perception and production.

Yes:

» Students' familiarity and attitude towards it may influence how receptive they are towards any 'deviance' from prestige models!

Concluding Recommendations

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1. **Keep working on suprasegmentals** in class – practice does make perfect!

2. **Pronunciation models: provide options** and allow for comparison to help support students listening comprehension, providing strategies to deal with English as it is truly spoken.

3. **Turn model resistance into 'teachable moments'** raising awareness of the pros/cons of familiarity with just one model.

4. The golden rule:

All voices are of value in the ELT classroom, don't be afraid to use yours!

Great resources for pron-phobes!

» http://international.okanagan.bc.ca/pronunciation/ (free)

» http://hancockmcdonald.com/ (free)

» Pron Pack (Hancock McDonald) for exercises beyond listen and repeat

» *Clear Speech* (Gilbert, 2014) for introducing stress/ prosody

» The Prosody Pyramid (Gilbert, 2008) https://pronsig.iatefl.org/Info/Gilbert-Teaching-Pronunciation.pdf   (Free)

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Thank you!

✉ gemma.archer@strath.ac.uk

✉ speakout@IATEFL.org

GL_archer

Gemma Archer