

Teaching vowel sounds in Scottish ELT classrooms: problems and solutions

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Workshop Overview

1. **Why vowel sounds?**
2. **Data presentation:** Scottish teachers' thoughts about pronunciation & teaching vowels.
3. **Summary of phonology:** what we need to know.
4. **Opportunities/categories for vowel work** (and associated techniques).
5. **Group work and discussion.**

Aims:

- To provide food for thought.
- Help you identify how and when to integrate more vowel content.
- Encourage you to feel more confident to work on vowel sounds in the Scottish English classroom.



Why vowels?

As a novice teacher I ...



- Had less than an hour's worth of pronunciation training.
- Failed miserably trying to teach pronunciation in 1st teaching job. Didn't teach any pronunciation for the next 5 years.
- Vowel sounds = particularly scary!
 - Less tangible
 - No time to study or read up on it
 - Lack of resources
 - Accent mismatch

The effects of accent mismatch: was it just me?

The questionnaire:

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
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ 114 responses➤ 30 Scottish Standard English (21%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ 205 responses➤ 72 Scottish Standard English (35%)

17/18 combined total:

- 102 Scottish teachers

Typical Scottish Respondent

ESOL teacher, 10+ years experience,
Masters/CELTA qualified

- 53% received pronunciation training.
- 63% of those who received pronunciation training were taught using an RP model only.
- Yet 76% teach using their own voice, not RP/ other model.
- 83% struggle to find apt. pronunciation materials that suit their voice/ accent.
- 25% say their accent has prevented them from teaching using a prescribed coursebook or syllabus.
- 53% 'change their plans' when faced with pronunciation content.

Scottish respondents: comment on pron training

- » ‘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 I feel that this is outdated and perhaps even discriminatory against teachers with non-RP accents.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.’

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.’

2: Summary of phonology

What do Scottish teachers need to know?

1. Phonological knowledge of their own accent:

- How it differs to other models
- Challenges it can pose to students and why

&

2. Pedagogical Knowledge:

- What to teach
- When to teach
- How to teach it

The art of the 'right' chart

prɒn
SIG

ɪ	I	U	u:	θ	θ	ɪ	ɔ
e	ə	ɔ:	ɔ:	θ	ɔ	I	ə
æ	ʌ	ɔ:	ɔ:	θ	a	I	ə
P	b	t	d	tʃ	dʒ	k	g
f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ
m	n	ŋ	h	l	r	w	j

Plus

✓ /o/

✓ /ɛ/

Plus

✓ /x/

© Underhill, A.

<http://www.macmillanenglish.com>

Scottish Standard English	RP/ Standard British English
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12 vowel sounds (9 monophthongs, 3 diphthongs)	20 vowel sounds (12 monophthongs, 8 diphthongs)
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Vowel length
 Scottish Vowel Length Rule (SVLR)
 Vowels are generally short, but long before

- voiced fricatives /v ð z ʒ /
- /r/
- at morpheme boundaries e.g. agree/agreed

Diphthongs: /ʌʊ/(mouth), /ɔɪ/ (choice),
 /aɪ/ (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/

3. Opportunities for vowel work

Listen and read examples A and B:

Can you guess what the first category for including more vowel work is?

Category 1. Example A



本田 : I have to take care of myself
(自己管理をしなければならない)

Category 1: Example B

An Arabic speaking Master's student rehearsing for their final presentation:

- *In the last /'dɪ kɛd/ ...*
- *The most important /'dɪ kɛd/ ...*
- *Another significant /'dɪ kɛd/ was ...*
- *It is important for us to remember this /'dɪ kɛd/*

Category 1:

Fear of challenging/embarrassing sounds

Often students have experienced or observed negative reactions to mispronunciation, particularly if the resulting language was a swear word or out of context.

Result? Embarrassment, humiliation, anxiety about speaking aloud.

- Certain vowel contrasts can be particularly troublesome, think
 - Bitch/ beach / bitʃ / /bi:tʃ/
 - Shit / Sheet / ʃit / / si:t /
 - Fucked /Fact /fʌkt / /fækt/
 - Piss /piece/ /pis/ /pi:s/
 - Six / sex /siks/ /seks/
 - Guy/ gay /gai/ /gei/
 - Faces/ feces /feisɪz/ /fi:si:z/
- Be aware: once you open the flood gates on this topic ...!

Solutions and techniques to target challenging vowel sounds.

Identify problematic sounds for your learners

- Run a simple diagnostic / needs analysis task.
- Ask students to record onto their mobile phones and email you their response.
- Ideally a targeted read aloud task containing the vowels you want to evaluate **plus** a spontaneous task to measure natural unplanned speech.

E.g.

Tim is a part time student. He mainly studies Russian literature, but has many diverse interests [...] But Tim is poor, so he funds his studies by working as a peach picker at the weekends...

Q1. Have you ever had a part time job?

Q2. Would you like to be a peach picker? Why/not?

Other well known diagnostics (all sounds):

- *Please Call Stella*
- *The Rainbow*
- *The Northwind versus the wolf /*
- *The Northwind and the Sun*

Target challenging sound contrasts using *The Colour Vowel Chart* –adapted here for Scottish Standard English (Taylor & Thompson, 2009).

white tie /aɪ/	green tea /i/	*purple shirt /ɜr/	blue moon /u/	turquoise toy /ɔɪ/
	silver pin /ɪ/			
	grey day /eɪ/	a cup of mustard /ʌ/	rose coat /o/	
	red dress /ɛ/		brown cow /aʊ/	
	black cat /æ/		auburn autumn /ɔ/	

Tim is a part-time student. He mainly studies Russian literature, but has many diverse interests. In his spare time, he listens to podcasts about Yiddish and Spanish history, and reads books about art and learning languages. But Tim is poor, so he funds his studies by working as a pecker at the weekends. While this is a difficult way to make a living, Tim loves it, especially in the autumn when the leaves on the rows of peach trees change colour and it's not too hot. When his employment ends in winter, he works shifts in a pub.

Using the colour vowel chart in class

Advantages

- Colours and names provide a tangible memory aid.
- Once students understand what the colours represent, (sounds/ jaw & tongue position) it can be a useful autonomous learning tool.
- Can highlight some of English's complex sound/spelling rules e.g. sun/son.
- Flexible: can be personalised, used to recycle/ review, create extension activities and creative tasks.
- Provides practice in perception and production and highlights mouth position.

Disadvantages

- Takes time to adapt to your own variety.
- At first, printing colour copies can be expensive / you may not have the facilities.
- It's not accessible for everyone (e.g. colour blindness).
- Some sacrifices have to be made: e.g. which symbols to use, exact locations of sounds in order to be '*user friendly*'.

Category 2: To expose students to diverse varieties

Students must be

- taught about linguistic diversity;
- taught to think critically about social prestige attached to different varieties of language (including in their mother tongue);
- encouraged to be tolerant of diverse forms, including that of their new linguistic community.
- *‘Learners are understandably concerned about pronunciation because accent discrimination is a very real phenomenon, impacting job prospects and educational opportunities’ (Patsko & Simpson, 2019).*
- ***‘If teachers and learners do not hear a variety of accents in the audio recordings, they are being sent the message that there is only a limited number of ‘correct’ accents’ (ibid).***

Solutions and techniques to target challenging vowel sounds.

Exploit YouTube, Social Media and Television to create bespoke materials



BBC Scotland
@BBCScotland

Home
Posts
Videos
About
Photos
Groups
Community
Social Channels
Events

Like Following Share ... Watch Video Send Message

Playlists (30)

Most Viewed

110 videos · Updated about 6 months ago

Our most popular videos, as watched by you!



Burnistoun archive: Voice Activated Lift
183M views · 23 December 2016



News at 3: Easter Special
100M views · 12 April 2017



Highlands - Scotland's Wild Heart: Osprey slow-motion footage
34M views · 6 May 2017

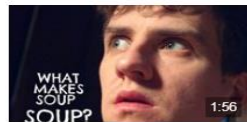


Scot Squad: Bamoi
30M views · 26 Sept

Short Stuff

139 videos · Updated about 3 months ago

Quick, fresh and funny stuff from Scotland.



Short Stuff: Soup
470K views · 1 February



Short Stuff: When you're too tight to turn the heating on
345K views · 18 January



Short Stuff: Fitness Friends
47K views · 8 January



Short Stuff: Forgotten Name
168K views · 19 Dec

Loop

22 videos · Updated about a month ago

Creative talent and culture from across Scotland.



Stonehaven's Mystery Sculptor Revealed | Loop
290K views · 8 May



I Wonder If She Smiles | Loop
173K views · 7 May



I'm Capturing My Family's History Through Sculpture | Loop
298K views · 2 May



The artist painting to change storm she
109K views · 24 Apr



The story so far 2010 || Kevin Bridges
Somebody to love · 196K views · 2 years ago



Kevin Bridges stand up (Best of the Apollo, the Comedy Roadshow and the Edinburgh comedy festival)
silkskills85 · 1.1M views · 2 years ago

Kevin Bridges best stand-up routines from Live at the Apollo, the Comedy Roadshow, the Edinburgh comedy festival and the ...



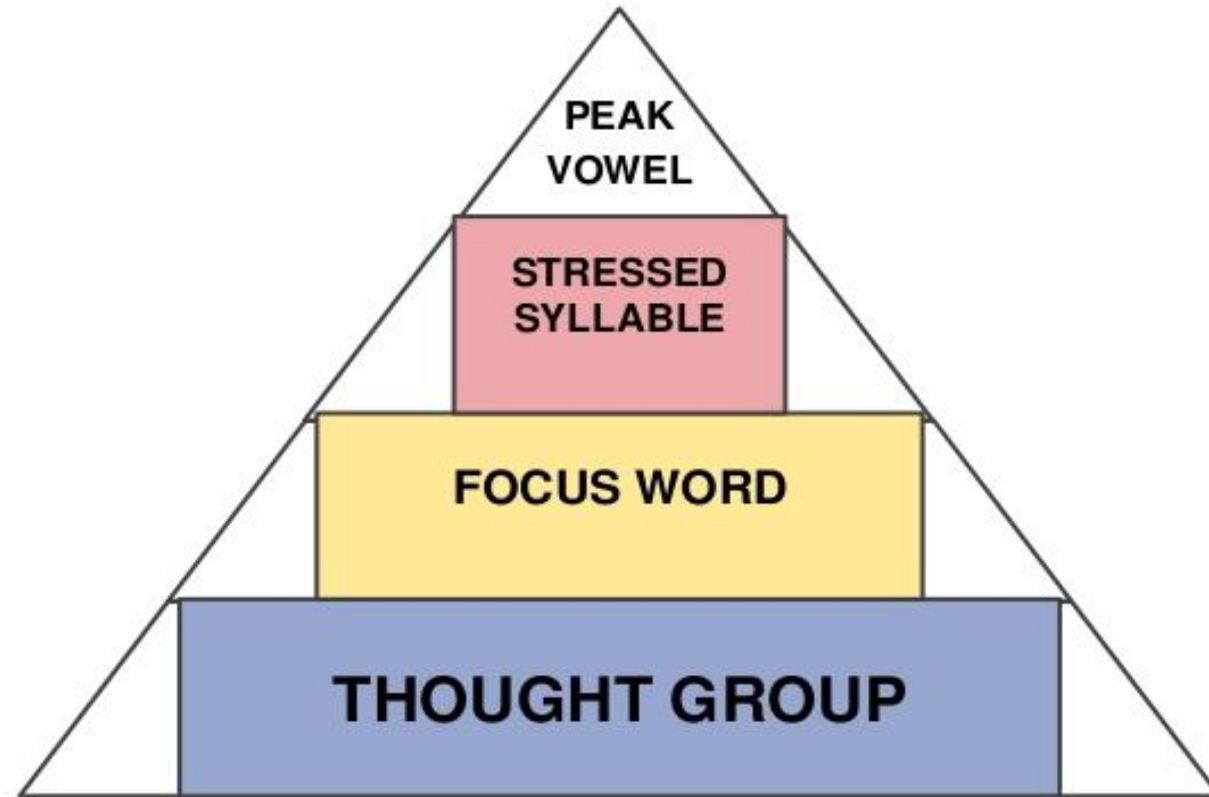
Scottish Voice Recognition Elevator - ELEVEN!
ChanAlmighty · 918K views · 8 years ago

What happens when 2 Scottish people end up in an Elevator that uses Voice Recognition.

- 'Is it fair?' law
- Screencasts for simple online recording

Category 3: Vowels sounds' role in stress and reduction.

The Prosody Pyramid



(Gilbert, 2008)

Clear Speech 4th edition

<https://pronsig.iatefl.org/Info/Gilbert-Teaching-Pronunciation.pdf>

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Vowels

‘Yet every day, vowels are bought and sold on national television, subjected to reduction (or even deletion) in unstressed environments and worst of all, in elementary and middle schools, students are systematically taught to deny the existence of more than two thirds of their ranks, focusing instead on five (sometimes six) lies spread by the million-dollar-a-year spelling bee industry’(Styler, 2012).

Vowels are

- Changeable
- Enigmatic
- Altered by vowel reduction processes

Other options

1. Create your own audio recordings, grab a friend/ partner/ colleague and record them using your phone or small hand held recorder (or access recordings on [Dynamic Dialects](#))
2. Use the model provided in materials, but elicit and highlight the differences between it and students new local linguistic environment in post-task discussion. (*Least amount of preparation*)
3. Record or read class audio aloud yourself, allowing students to compare and contrast. What did they hear that was different to the original audio model?
4. Prioritise high functional load vowels e.g. /ɪ/ and /i:/, /a/and /e/ (Catford,1987).

Introduce vowel sounds using the Celce-Murcia et al communicative framework for pronunciation (2010):

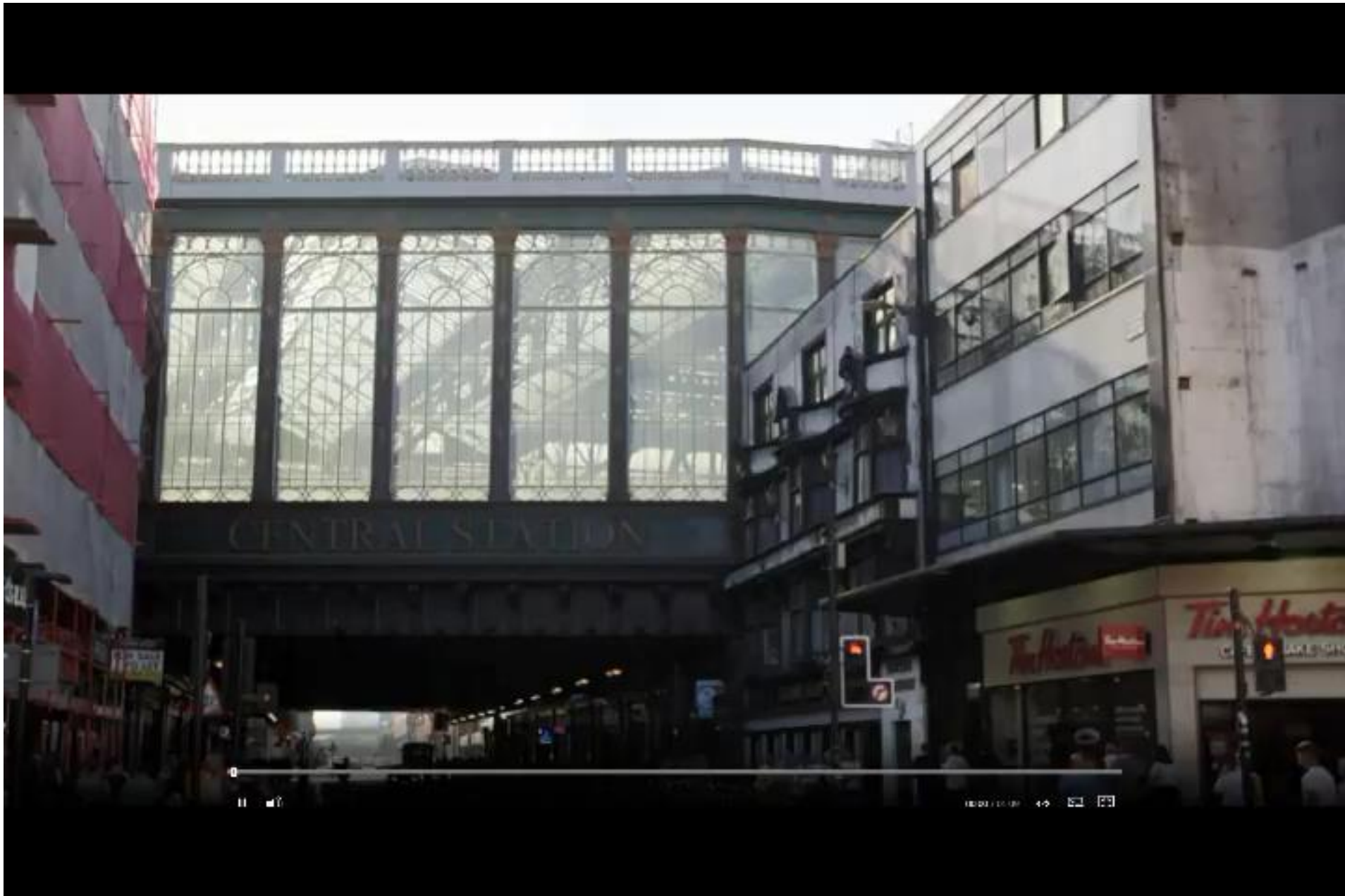
Step 1	<u>Description and Analysis</u> : oral and physical demonstration of how the feature is produced and when it occurs within spoken discourse.
Step 2	<u>Listening discrimination</u> : focused listening practice (ear training) with feedback on learners' ability to correctly discriminate between features.
Step 3	<u>Controlled practice</u> : oral readings of 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, such as information-gap activities or cued dialogues that enable the learner to monitor for the specified feature.
Step 5	<u>Communicative practice</u> : less structured, fluency building activities (e.g. role play, problem solving) that require the learner to attend to both form and content of utterances.

TASKS

Task 1

1. You are teaching a group of pre-intermediate ESOL students. The theme in your syllabus this week is '*The world of work*'.
2. Your students have been reporting difficulty listening and understanding native varieties, prompting a spontaneous classroom discussion in which they communicate feeling like they will never understand Scottish English!
3. You want to use some authentic resources on the theme of work, that will also provide the opportunity for discussion of pronunciation, and highlight vowel sounds in particular.
4. Watch the video/ read the transcript, and discuss with those sitting next to you: how you might use the resource? Consider, perception and production.

Inside Central Station (BBC Scotland, 2019)



Script:

Today The Heilenman's Umbrella remains an important landmark in the city and is one of the many places around the station that weary travellers can get a bite to eat.

1. Blue Lagoon.
2. Blue Lagoon.
3. The best chip shop.
4. The best chip shop.
5. In the toon.
6. In the toon.
7. Yes... high five!

This chippy has long been a Glasgow favourite.

8. Hi Sir, can I help you please?
9. Can I get a small portion of chips, please?
10. Would you like salt and vinegar?
11. Just salt please.

Trisha has been helping her Syrian colleague Mizar with the local language.

12. His Glaswegian is coming along good. 'Alright m'man?'
13. 'Alright, alright, nae bother at all!'
14. Yeah, good good, I try and teach him something different!

Potential phonological features:

- **Vowel sounds:**
 - /u/ in blue lagoon, *toon (*Scots, not Scottish Standard English)
 - /ɛ/ in best, help
 - /ɪ/ in chip, vinegar
 - /ɔ/ in shop, small, salt
 - /aɪ/ in high five
 - /i/ in please
- **Consonants:** sh and ch /ʃ/ and /tʃ/ chip shop

Possible In-class activities:

- Ss listen and identify the words containing certain target sounds
- Gap fill
- Semi-structured dialogue
 - provide a word bank of the target language/vowel sounds, ss use it to come up with their own workplace dialogue.

Task 2: Exposure to diverse models.

&

Task 3: Highlighting how vowels change when stressed/ reduced.

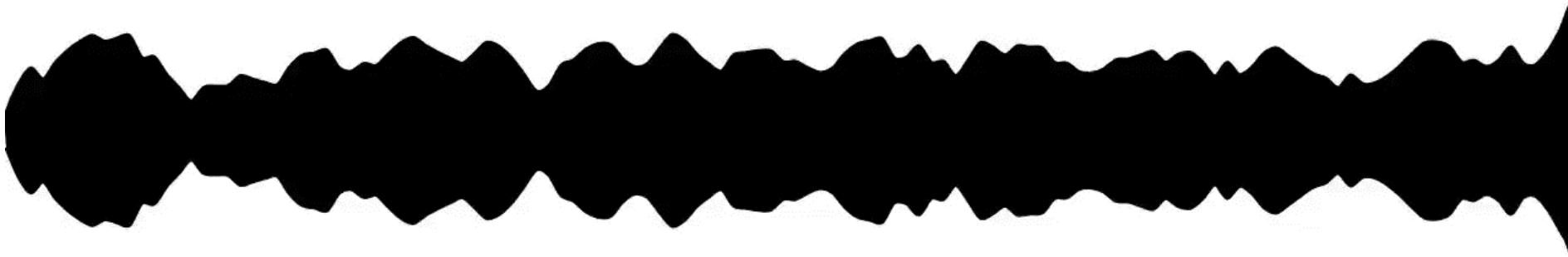
Tasks 2 & 3

1. You are teaching a group of multi-lingual upper-intermediate EAP students
2. Some of your students have been asking questions about the differences between Scottish English and other varieties. Some are curious to hear more about it (and other forms), but worry they won't understand.
3. You want to use some authentic resources using diverse accents, that will also provide the opportunity for discussion of pronunciation, highlight vowel sounds and other important features such as connected speech and the reduced vowel sounds used in fast spontaneous speech.
4. Watch the video and discuss with those sitting next to you: how you might use the resource?

*Slightly slower
audio version
available here:



Accentricity



***Accentricity* podcast (Ryan, 2019): Series 1, Episode 2 [‘More than one voice’](#).**

Script:

Ros has an antiques stall at the Barras.

Ros (In a South African accent): *It's funny I did the Antique Roadshow, I've done it a few times, but the last time I did it, I did it with Charles Hansen, now he's English, you know.*

But I went straight into South African, and when it was on the Television I was all 'ya' and this and that. And all my friends said to me 'you're supposed to be Scots, you were bloody, totally South African on that one!'

Ros has moved between Scotland and South Africa her whole life. When I first started speaking to her, she sounded South African. But then a friend of hers, who's Glaswegian, walked past and this happened.

Ros (in a Glaswegian accent): *He's not in today darlin, no I don't know what's happened, don't know darlin, I don't know, no he doesn't, no.*

Possible Activities

- **Gap fill to highlight reduced vowels**

Provide students with the script in advance, removing '*and*', '*a*' and some prepositions (at/on etc.) before hand. Ask ss to listen and fill in the blanks. Listen as many times as necessary.

Elicit the effects of this reduction for the listener. Is it harder/easier to understand? Why?

- **Identifying Scottish vowels**

Instruct ss to listen to Ros' last line in the script and identify the 'colour' (if using vowel colour chart/ if not, identify vowel sound/ phoneme) in all the negatives she uses.

After, elicit:

- Is/ how is this different to other types of English pronunciation you've heard?
- How do we produce this sound? What do we need to do with our lips?
- Can you think of any other words which would have this pronunciation?

- **Identifying the 'colour' of peak vowel phoneme (if using colours)**

Instruct ss to examine chunks/word groups in the script, listen for the stressed word/ syllable and circle the peak vowel using the appropriate colour.

To conclude ...

While vowel sounds may not be considered as much of a priority as consonants for students' intelligibility, including them in our lessons can help us meet students needs:

- We can address challenging features they may feel unsure or embarrassed about in a safe environment;
- We can help promote tolerance to their new linguistic environment by exposing them to local models;
- We can aid their comprehension of local models, by highlighting the role vowels play in spontaneous speech (stress/vowel reduction).



Thank you!



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