

Rethinking Phonetics: Decolonising Clinical Teaching in Speech and Language Therapy Programmes in the UK

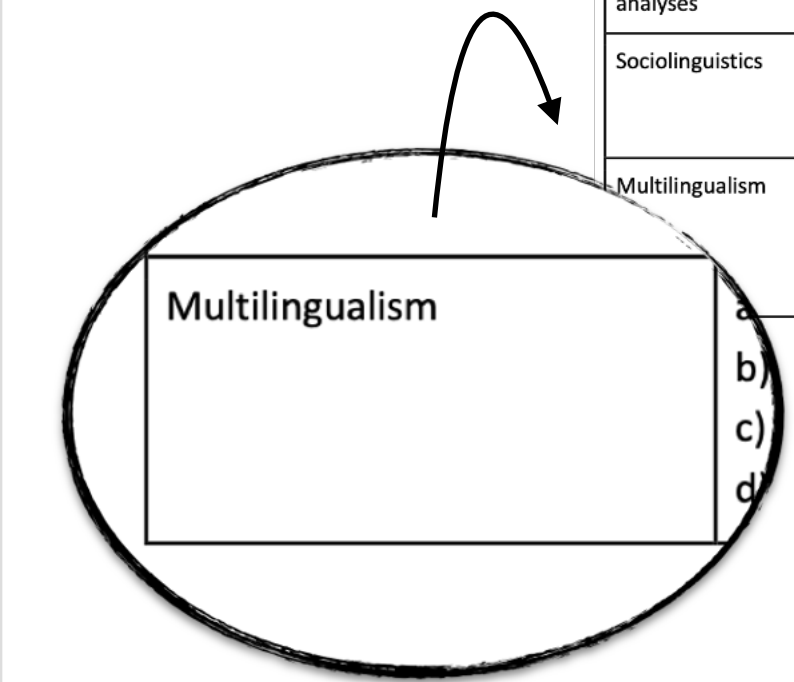
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1. Background

- SLTs who speak more than one language often face **unique challenges** in the profession. Many feel pressure to speak perfect English and other are **not feeling confident** of their training (Gréaux et al., 2024).
- Currently, the RCSLT guidance (2021) on SLT training includes broad, **general recommendations** for teaching **phonetics**. This allows accredited programmes across the UK to **shape their teaching in many ways** (Timmins et al., 2024) based on the programme's duration, available funding, and number of students.



Speech and language acquisition and change over the lifespan	a) Semantic-pragmatic, syntactic and phonological acquisition, development and change b) Speech acquisition and typical articulatory development and change c) Acquisition of language in alternative modalities
Psycholinguistics	a) Current psycholinguistic frameworks and their clinical application 1) Comprehension of language 2) Expression of language 3) Speech production 4) Speech perception b) The extension of psycholinguistic models to other communicative modalities
Conversation and discourse analyses	a) Theoretical models and frameworks of conversation and discourse b) Current approaches to analysis in pragmatics, conversation and discourse
Sociolinguistics	a) Regional and social accents and dialects b) Gender- and age-related variation in speech and language c) Styles and registers
Multilingualism	a) Theoretical models of multilingualism b) Typical and atypical patterns of development in multilingualism from infancy to old age c) Additional language acquisition, speech production and perception d) Implications of multilingualism for assessment and intervention in speech and language therapy practice

The RCSLT Curriculum guidance, March 2021, p.63

- Whilst ‘multilingualism’ is present and highlighted as a **separate subject** in the RCSLT guidance, it is not linked to the teaching of **phonetics** or speech sounds, as well to any other linguistic components.
- In a multi-country survey with SLT, participants reported that their training has failed to prepare them well for working with multilingual children (Eikerling et al., 2025).

2. Aims

- To bridge the gap by integrating **multilingualism** into the theoretical study of linguistics, ensuring inclusion and diversity are embedded in the foundational training of SLTs.
- To develop recommendations for an inclusive, **decolonised curriculum**, integrating multilingualism and linguistic diversity into phonetics and phonology training.
- To produce reports and guidelines for RCSLT and disseminate findings to **promote discussion** within the SLT community.

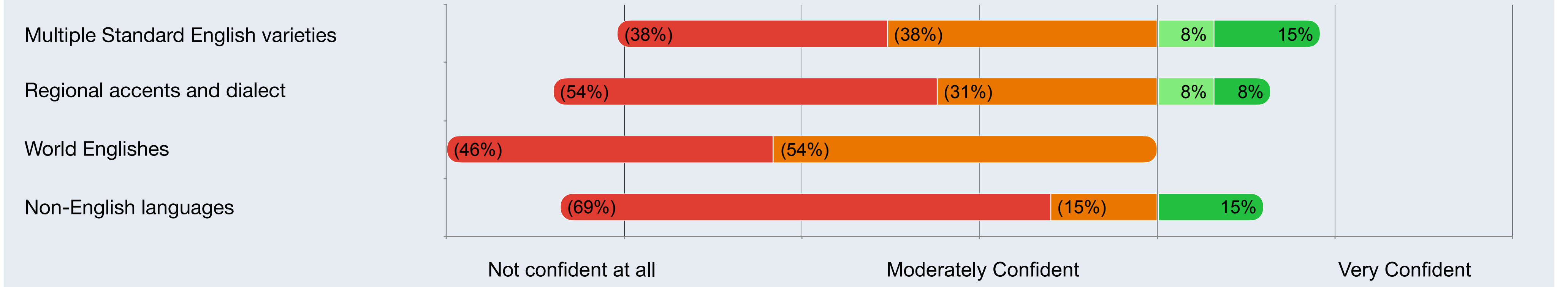
3. Methodology

- Qualitative** approach:
 - a review of academic literature
 - two** separate online surveys **and** a focus group*
 - online recruiting in all 18 RCSLT pre-reg programmes
 - anonymised surveys on Google Forms
 - two pilot phases completed
- Teachers of Phonetics can participate if:
 - work in higher education in an institution accredited by RCSLT **and**
 - are a teacher/professor/PGTA/convenor of phonetics and phonology modules in SLT courses across the UK
- Students of SLT courses (4),(5) can participate if:
 - are in higher education in an institution accredited by RCSLT **and**
 - are students of HEIs pre-reg SLT/SLP programmes across the UK **and**
 - have or are currently taking phonetics courses

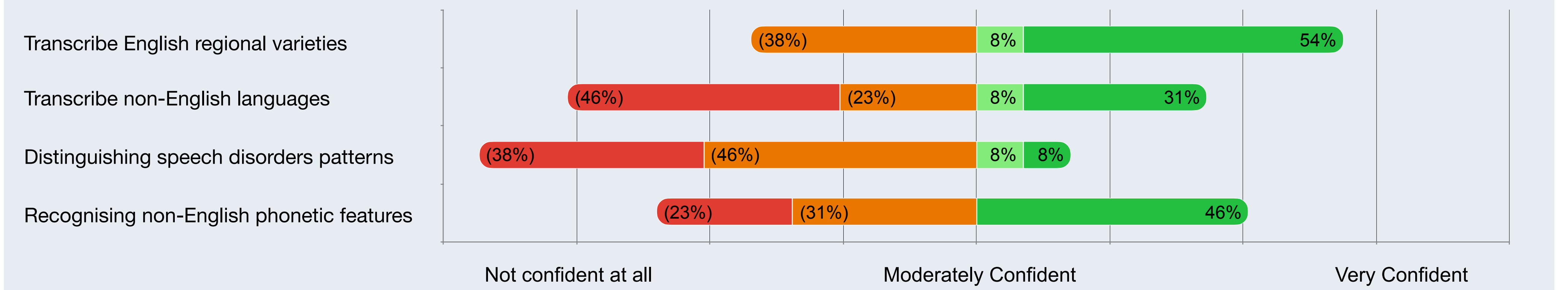
*The study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee: LING-2024-12-2, APPROVED 20.12.2024. This work was supported by The Centre for Equality Research in Brain Sciences (ERB Centre).

4. Our Survey

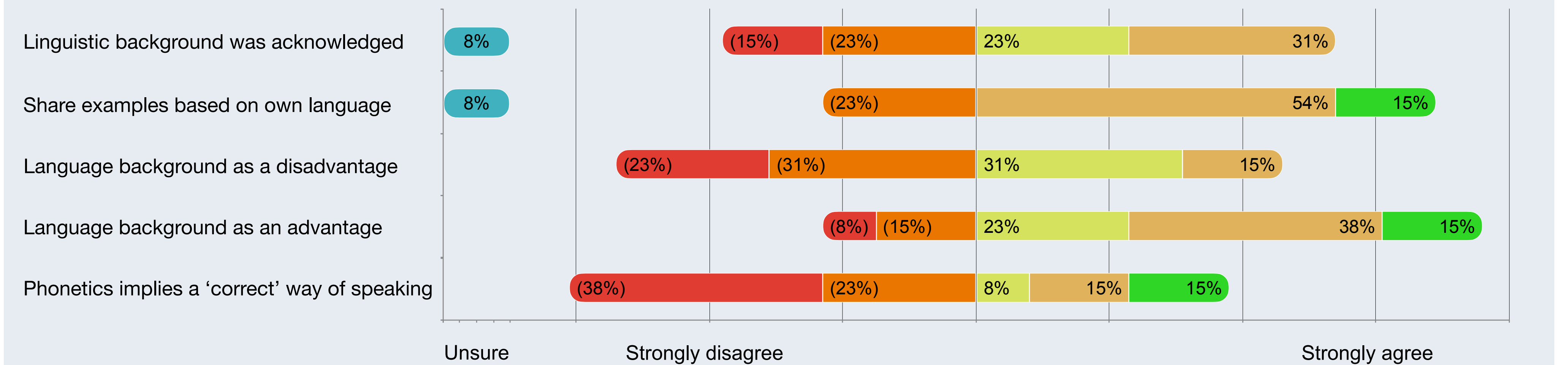
Feeling confident about a topic means: you understand it well, you can explain it in your own words, and you know how to apply it or recognise it in different situations.



Feeling confident about a practice means: you are comfortable doing it, you know when and how to use it, and you can apply it independently in real situations (for example, during placement or in professional work).



Personal Background – reflect on how aspects of your **own linguistic background** (e.g. the variety of English you speak, your accent, or other languages you speak) may have shaped your experience during training.



5. Critical Reflections

Multilingualism intersects with **several sensitive topics**, especially in clinical and educational contexts. Here is a list* for you to reflect on whether they are discussed in class, and how.

		Never emerged in class	Raised by students In class	Teacher informally mentioned it	Teacher formally included it
Standard vs. Non-Standard Varieties	The idea of standard English can be contentious	8%	23%	69%	38%
	Some accents or dialects sound 'wrong'	92%	0	8%	8%
	Linguistic diversity VS standard varieties	46%	15%	38%	31%
Language Ideologies and Assumptions	Speaking multiple languages confuse children	38%	23%	0	38%
	Certain languages are associated with lower standard	8%	8%	31%	54%
	Terms like 'accent reduction' carry colonialist implications	85%	8%	8%	0
Colonialism and Linguistic Identity	Some languages have been imposed due to colonial histories	77%	0	15%	15%
	The power imbalance between dominant and minority languages	85%	8%	15%	0
	Language is deeply tied to cultural and personal identity	15%	15%	46%	62%
Language Policy and Integration	Language discrimination (e.g., for speaking a native language)	31%	15%	38%	31%
	Highly politicised language policies	69%	8%	15%	8%
	Linguistic policies and histories in different countries	85%	8%	0	8%
Other Communication Modalities	Politically charged issues of migration and social integration	92%	0	0	8%
	Multilingualism as a 'barrier' to communication	69%	0	15%	15%
	Marginalisation of sign languages in speech-focused professions	31%	0	46%	31%
	Prioritisation of spoken language over sign language	15%	8%	23%	69%
	Code-switching or translanguaging	15%	0	38%	54%