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Autonomy in External Learning: Developing Learner's Ability to Choose and Use Study Materials



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Introduction

- Internet is rich source of study materials
 - Too rich?
- Do learners know how to choose materials?
- Do learners know how to use materials?

Overview

- Background
 - Learner autonomy in Internal and External learning
- Classroom Approach
 - Comprehension course
 - Students as teachers
- Materials selection
 - Teachers
 - Students
- Discussion

Learner Autonomy

- “Autonomy is ... the ability to take charge of one's own learning.” (Holec, 1981, p. 3)
- Crucially involves ...
 - Determining goals
 - Deciding how to reach the goals
 - Measuring progress

Levels of Learner Autonomy

1. Awareness: Learners become aware of learning goals.
2. Involvement: Learners get involved in choosing their goals.
3. Intervention: Learners intervene in their learning program.
4. Creation: Learners create their own learning goals.
5. Transcendence: Learners link their classroom learning to the outside world.

(From Nunan, 1997)

Learner Autonomy - Inside

- Emphasis on collaboration and negotiation in autonomy research in 1990s (Benson, 2001)
- Examples
 - Self-access centers
 - Learner development (i.e., strategy training)
 - CALL
- 1990s research focused on autonomy in the educational context.

Learner Autonomy - Outside

- In 2000s, call for more attention to learner autonomy outside the educational context
 - “Continuing learning” (Harmer, 2001)
 - “External learning” (Field, 2007)

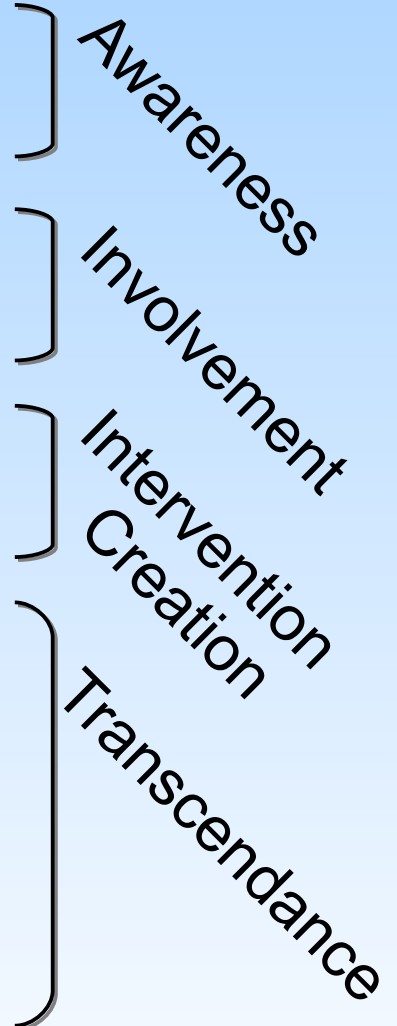
Classroom Approach

- Context
 - University of Tokyo
 - Comprehension course
 - Compulsory
- Objectives
 - Improve students' listening comprehension skills.
 - Prepare students for future independent study of English

Classroom Approach

- First half of course
 - Teacher-directed
 - Comprehension practice with one material each lesson
- Second half of course
 - Student-directed (in groups)
 - Each group chooses one material and presents lesson to classmates.

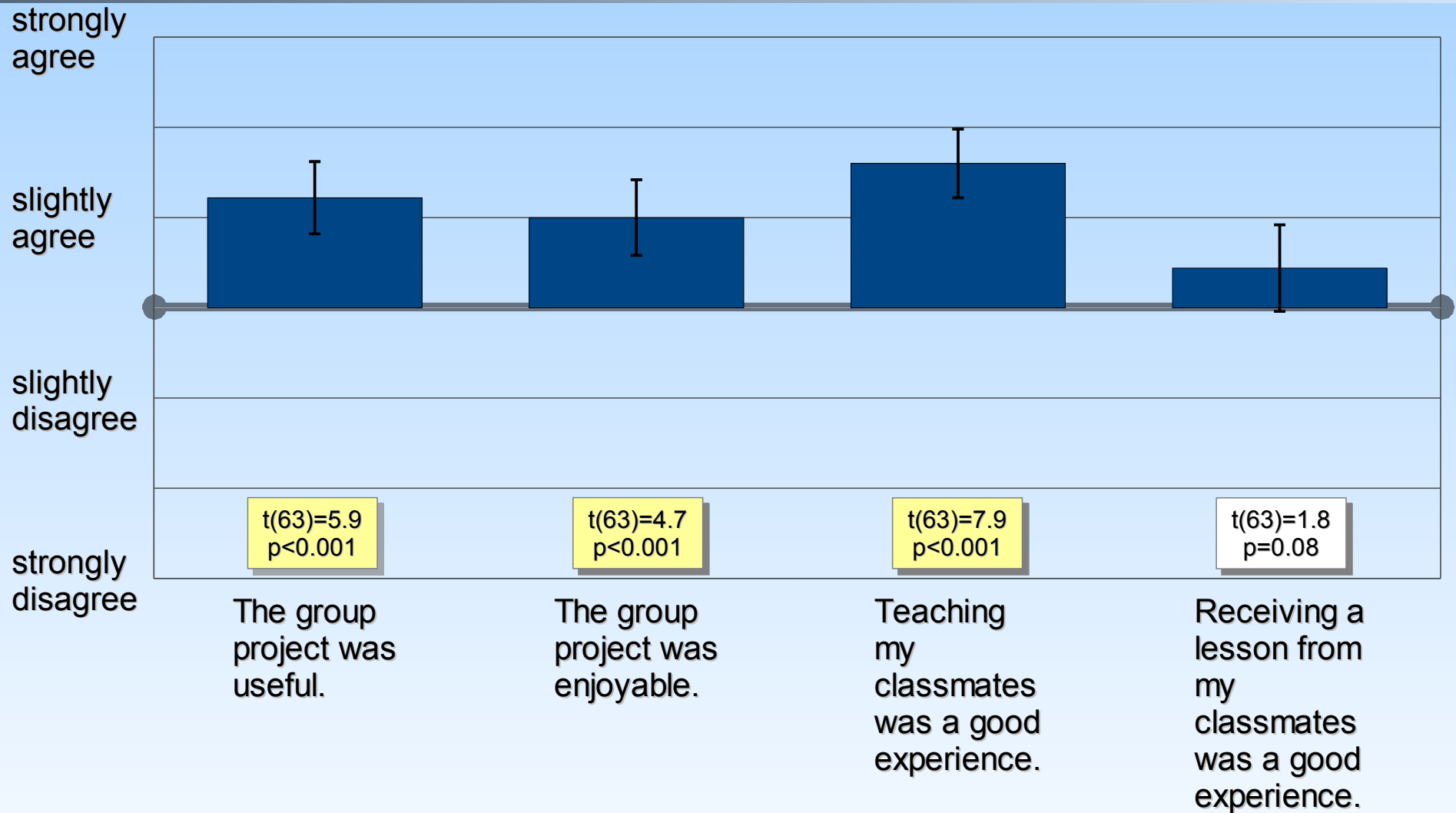
Structure of Group Projects

- Instructor gives instructions about how to organize an effective comprehension lesson.
 - Groups choose A/V material on Internet and report to instructor. Instructor gives feedback.
 - Groups develop lesson plan and submit to instructor. Instructor gives feedback.
 - Groups teach their lesson.
 - Groups prepare a review quiz and submit to instructor.
 - Class takes review quiz in following week.
- 
- Awareness
- Involvement
- Intervention
Creation
- Transcendence

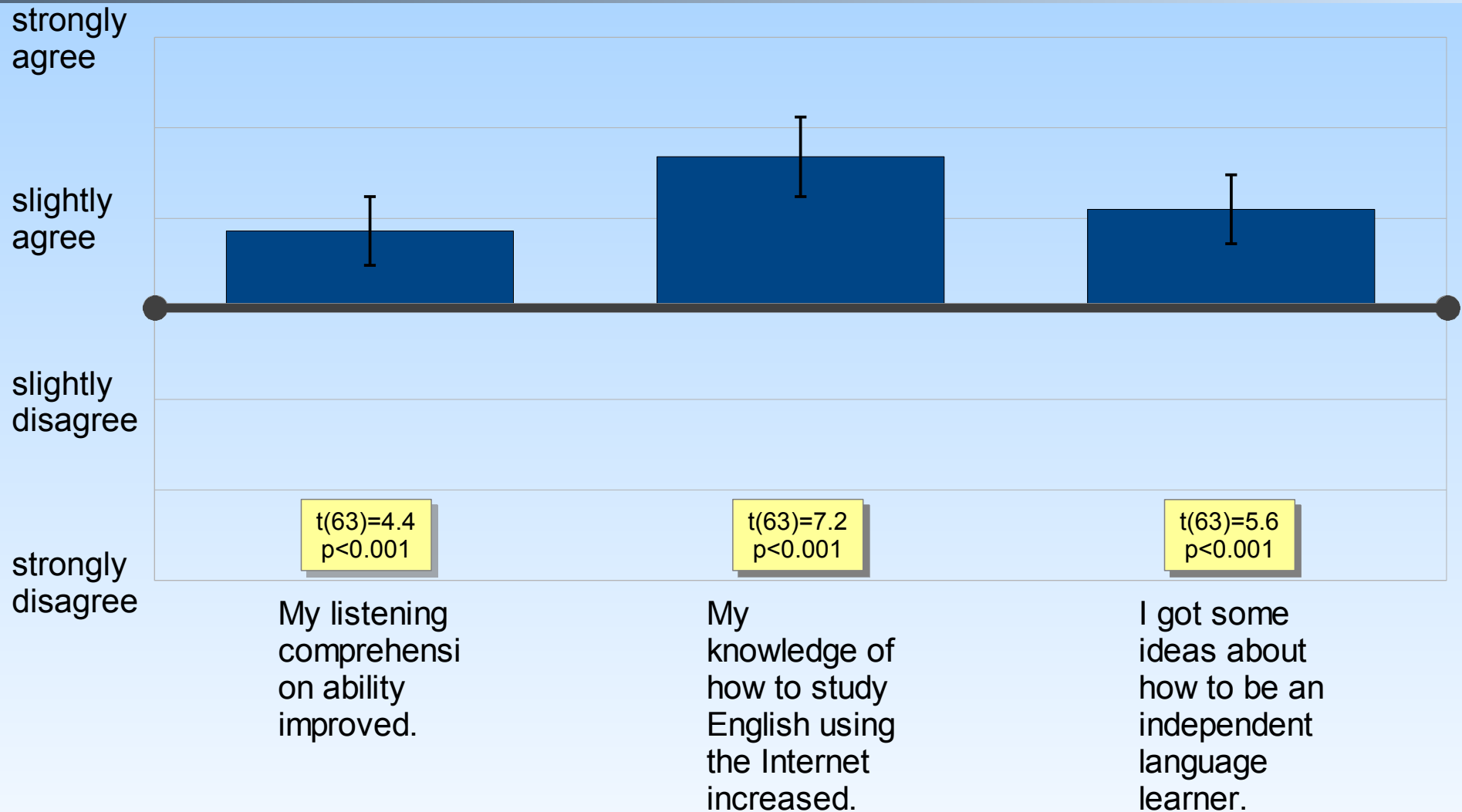
Survey

- Objectives
 - Gauge students' perception of the development of their ability to engage in independent study
 - Measure importance that students place on various factors in choosing materials for independent study.
- Given after completion of all group projects
- Structure
 - Likert-scale questions
 - Fixed-response questions
- Respondents: n=64

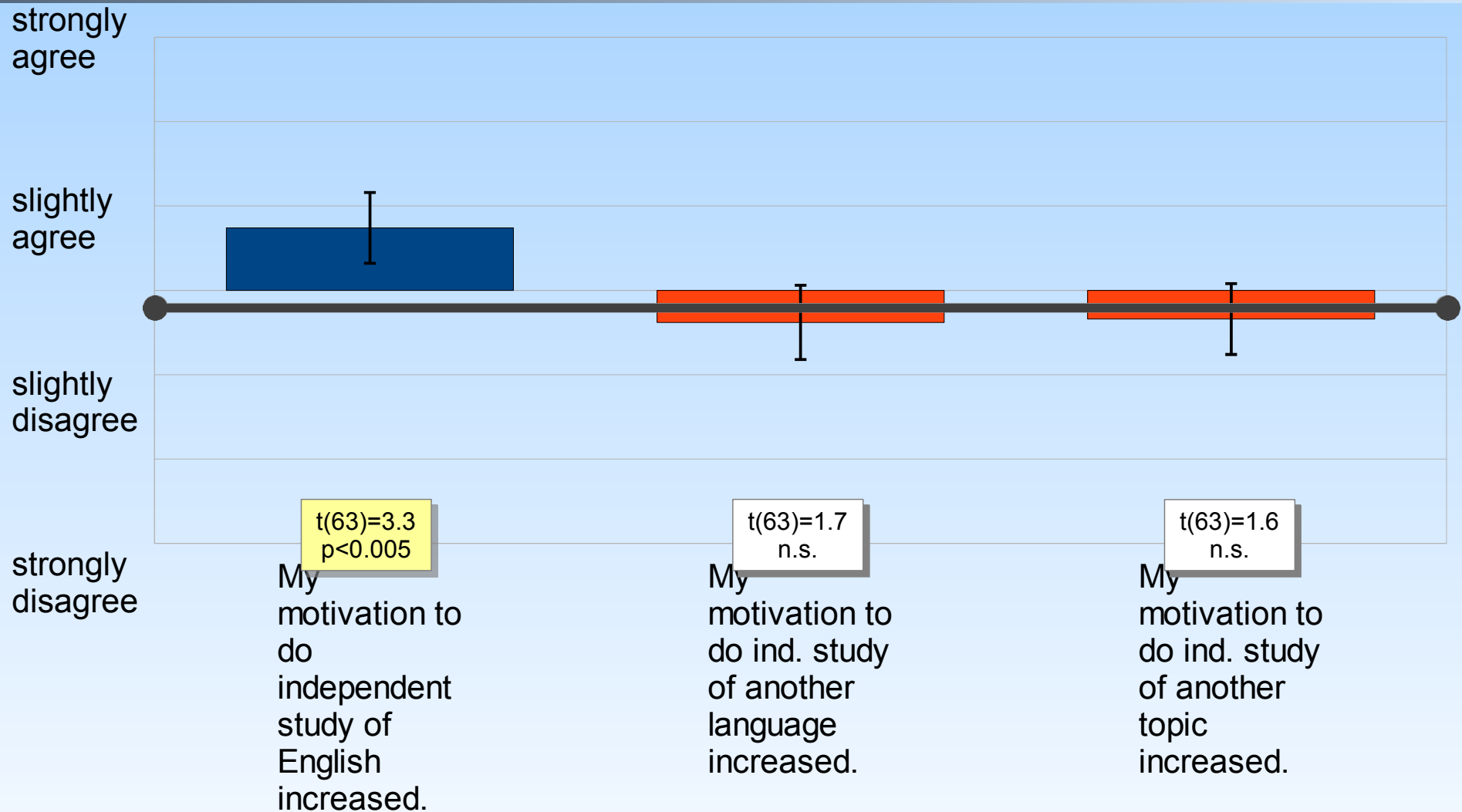
Results



Results



Results



Summary

- Students become more autonomous learners.
- Students are aware of their own autonomy.
- Autonomy in language learning does not necessarily engender autonomy more widely.
- As autonomous learners, how do students choose materials?
 - Which selection criteria are most important?
 - How do they judge each criterion?

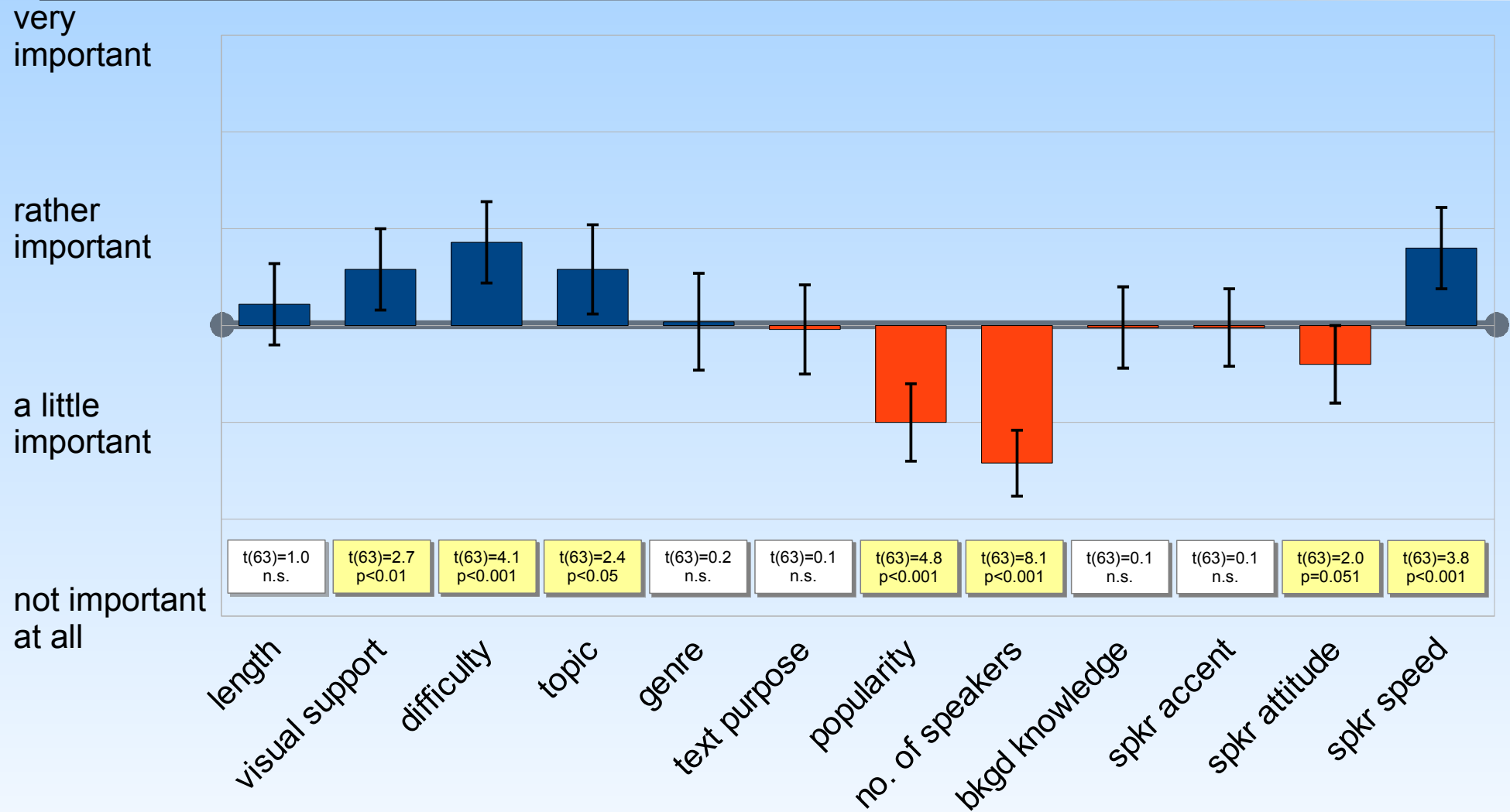
Materials Selection Criteria

- Length
- Visual support
- Difficulty
- Topic
- Genre
- Text Purpose
- Popularity
- No. of speakers
- Background knowledge
- Speaker accent
- Speaker attitude
- Speaker speed

1. Which criteria are most important?
2. For each criterion, what is the range of options and which is optimal?

(Adapted from Arcario 1992, Burt 1999)

Results

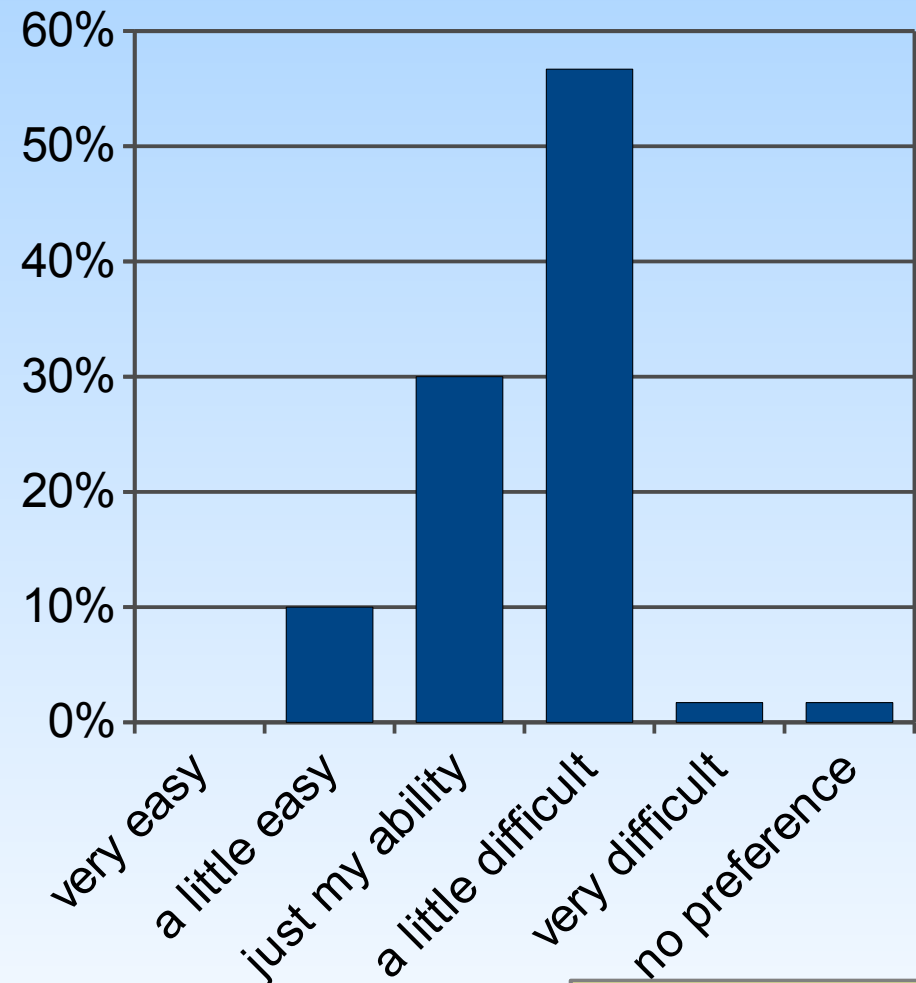


Relative Importance of Factors

- Important to most students
 - Difficulty, speaker speed, visual support, topic
- Important to some, not to others
 - Length, genre, text purpose, background knowledge, speaker accent
- Not important to most students
 - Popularity, No. of speakers, speaker attitude

Difficulty

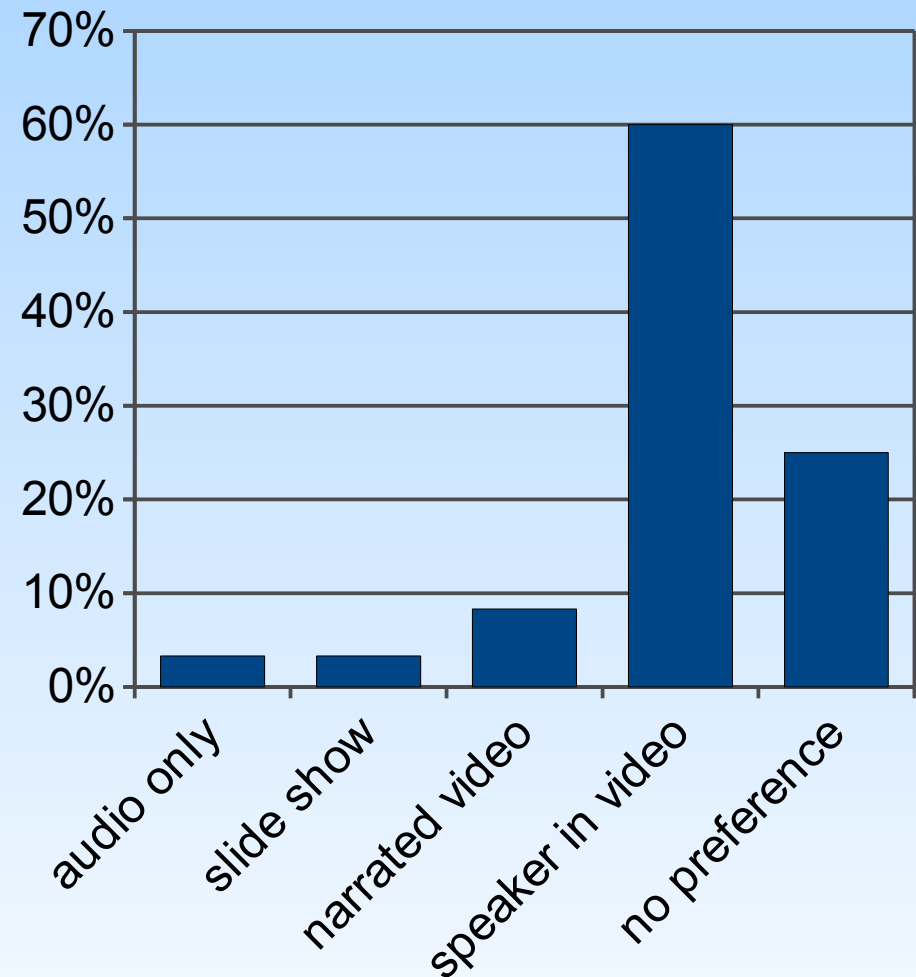
- Important factor to most students
- Students want to work with materials that are a little challenging.
 - n+1 (!)
 - Gaps for noticing



$\chi^2(5) = 91.8, p < 0.001$

Visual Support

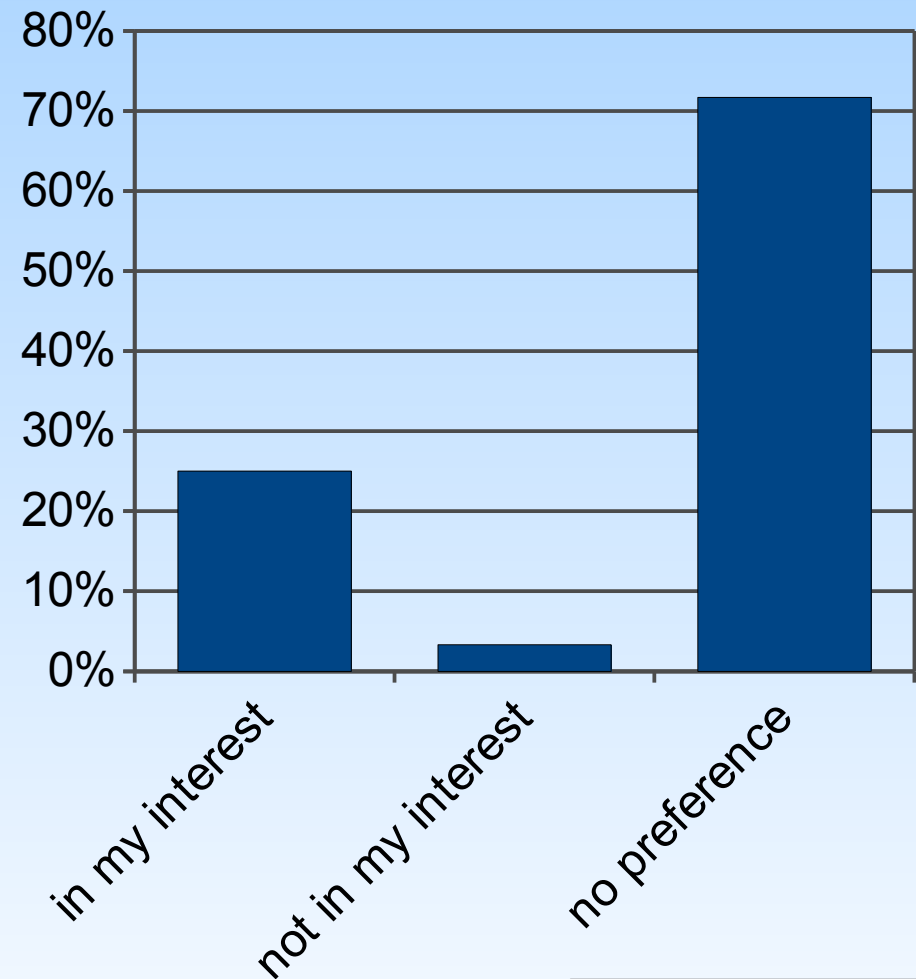
- Important factor to most students
- Students want to see the speaker
 - Mouth, for linguistic support
 - Face and body, for discourse pragmatic support



$\chi^2(4) = 69.5, p < 0.001$

Topic

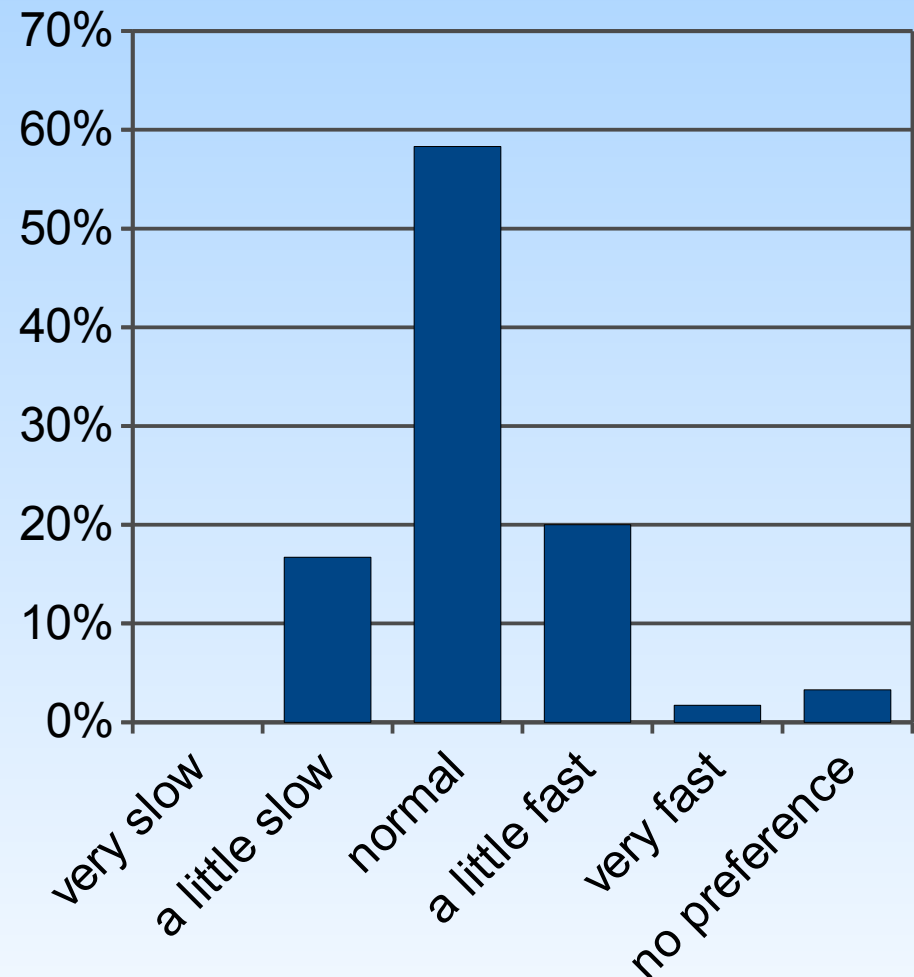
- Important factor to most students
- “Interest” is not the relevant factor in topic choice?
 - Academic relevance?
 - Current relevance?
 - other?



$\chi^2(2) = 43.9, p < 0.001$

Speaker Speed

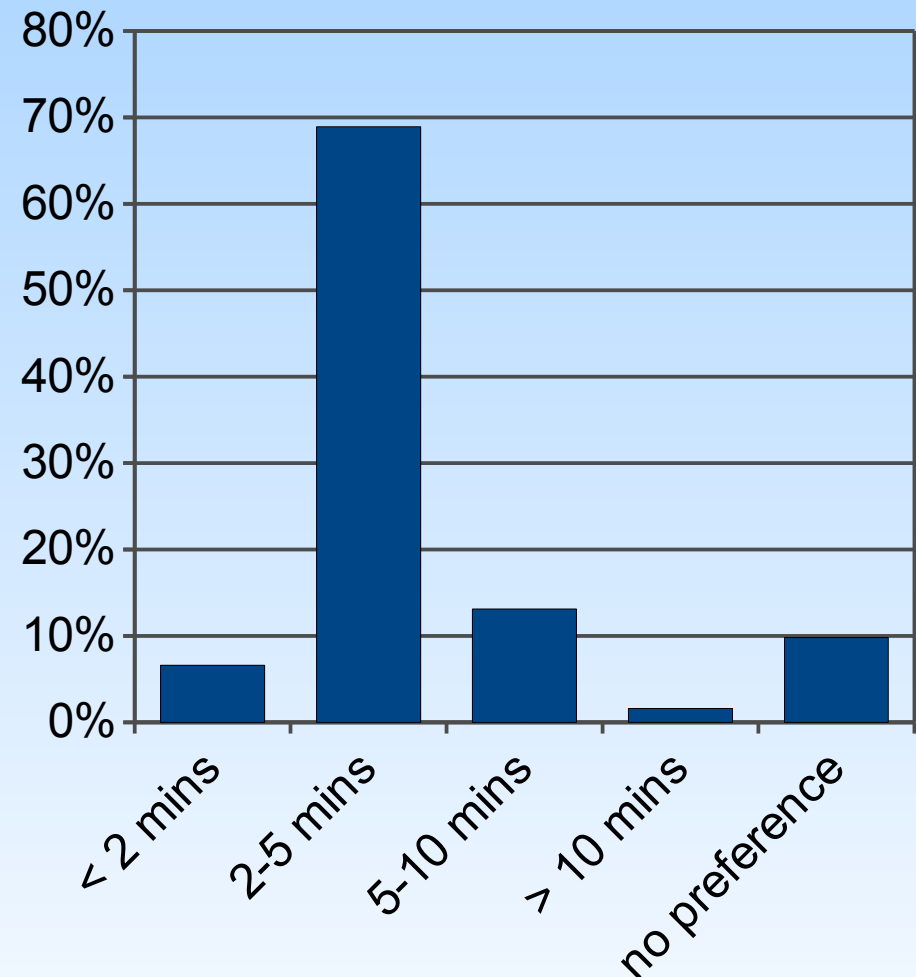
- Important factor to most students
- Students seem to be particularly frustrated by fast speakers.
 - Comprehension errors and gaps compound rapidly.
 - Students give up soon.



$\chi^2(5) = 87.4, p < 0.001$

Length

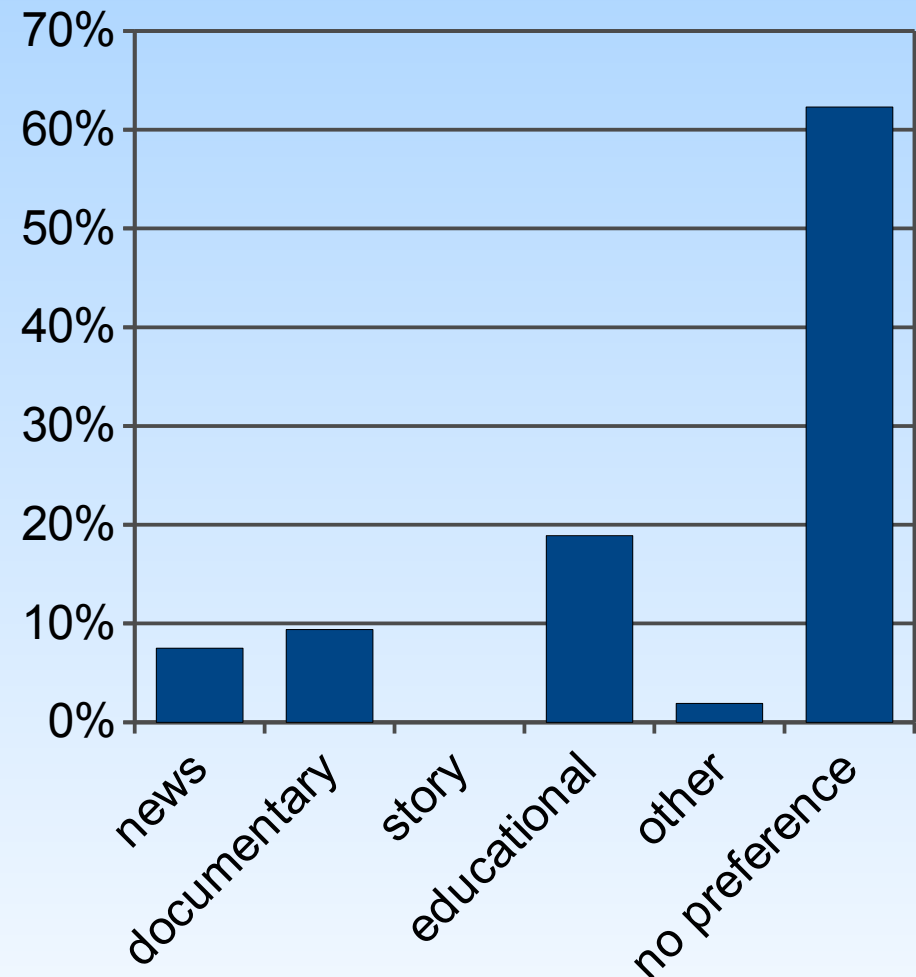
- Important factor to some students, not others



$\chi^2(4) = 93.2, p < 0.001$

Genre

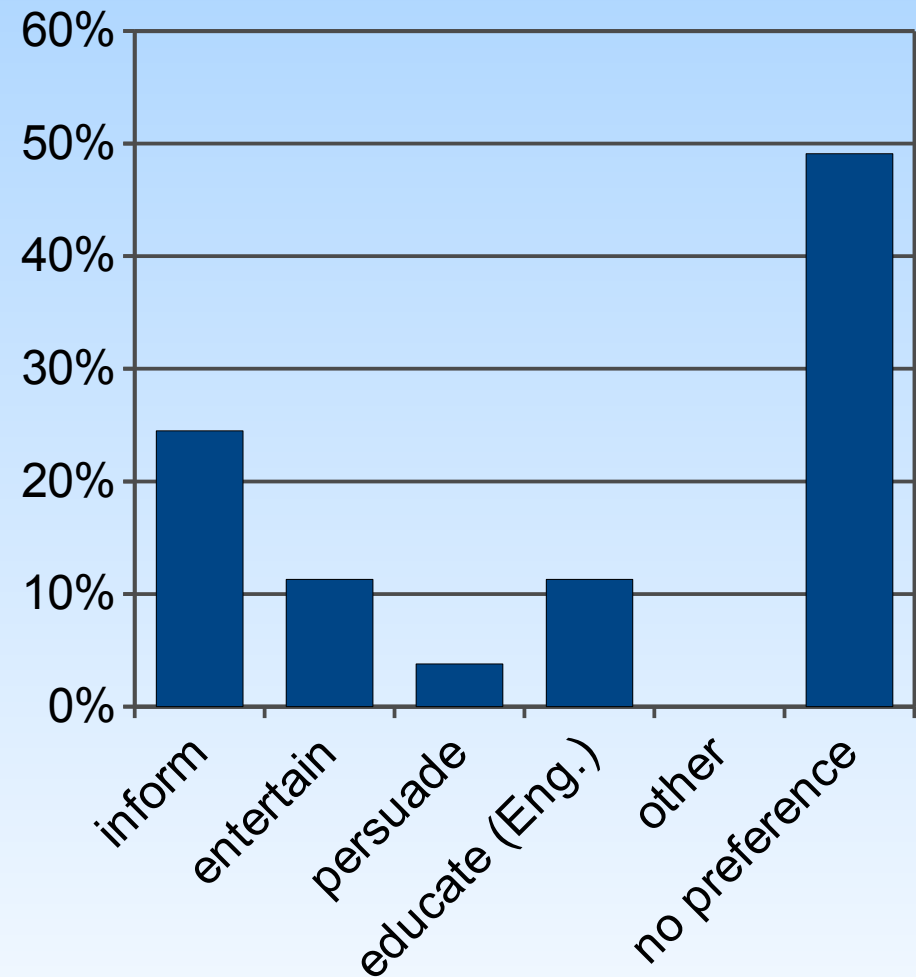
- Important factor to some students, not others



$\chi^2(5) = 86.4, p < 0.001$

Text Purpose

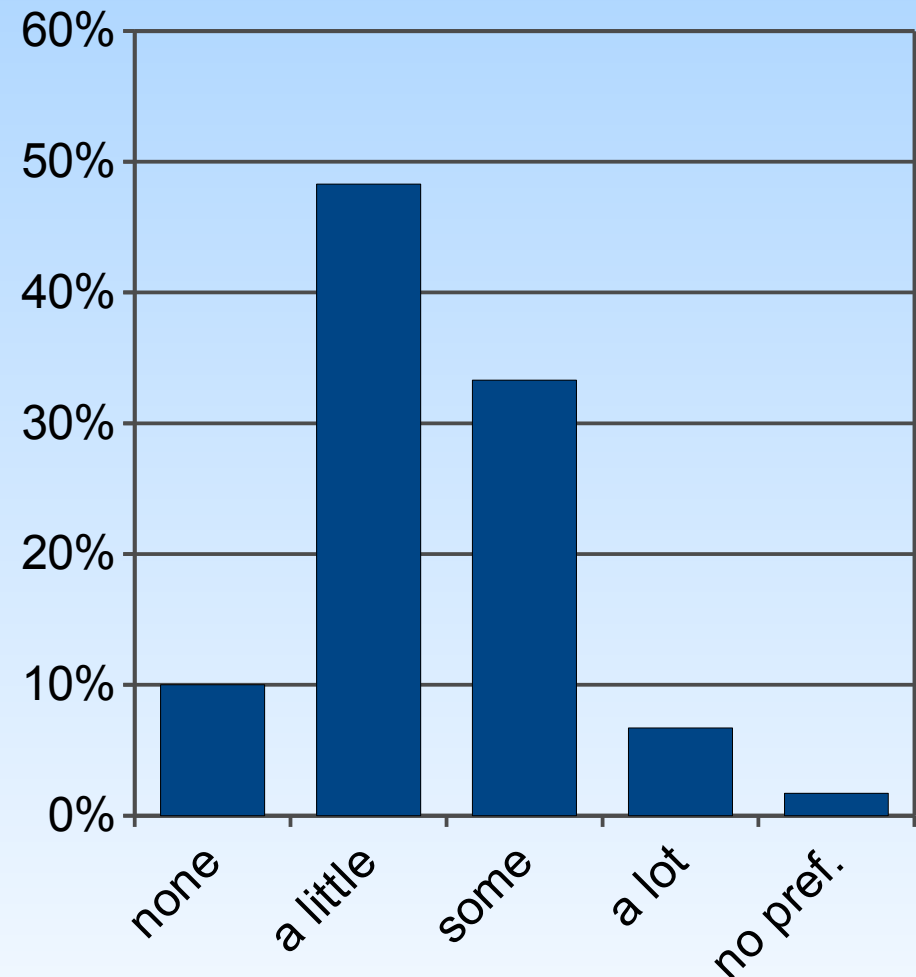
- Important factor to some students, not others



$\chi^2(5) = 51.3, p < 0.001$

Background Knowledge

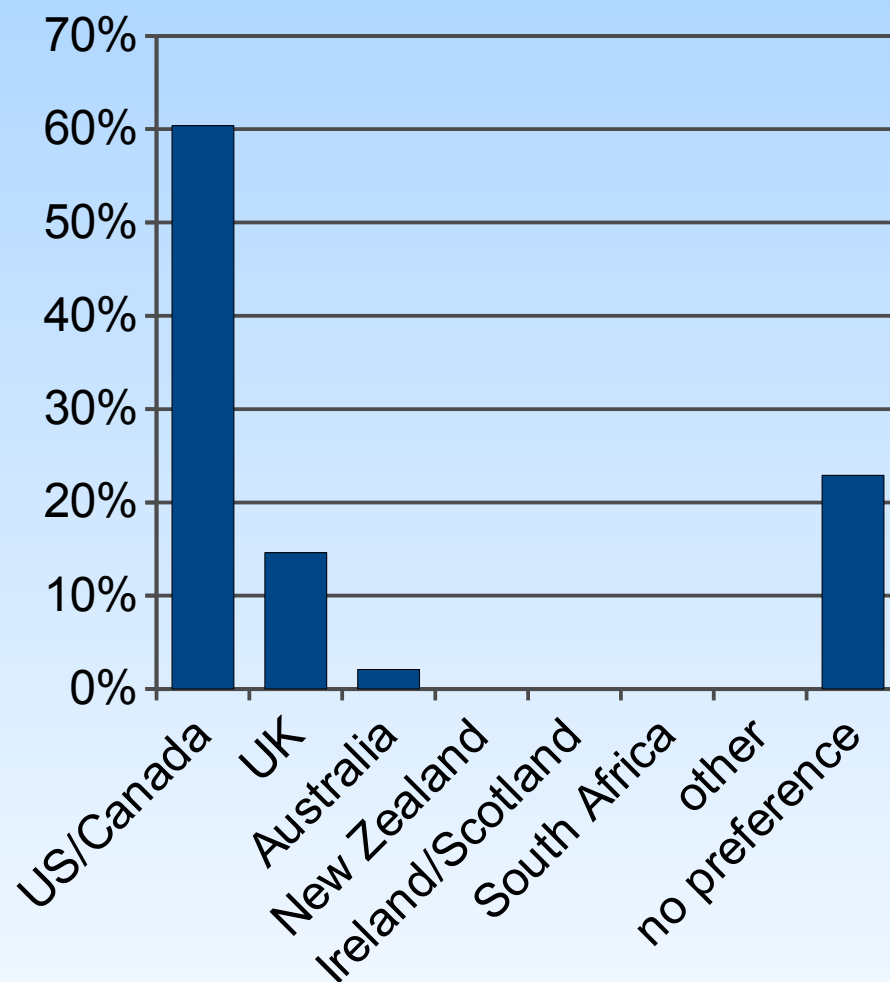
- Important factor to some students, not others



$\chi^2(4) = 47.8, p < 0.001$

Speaker Accent

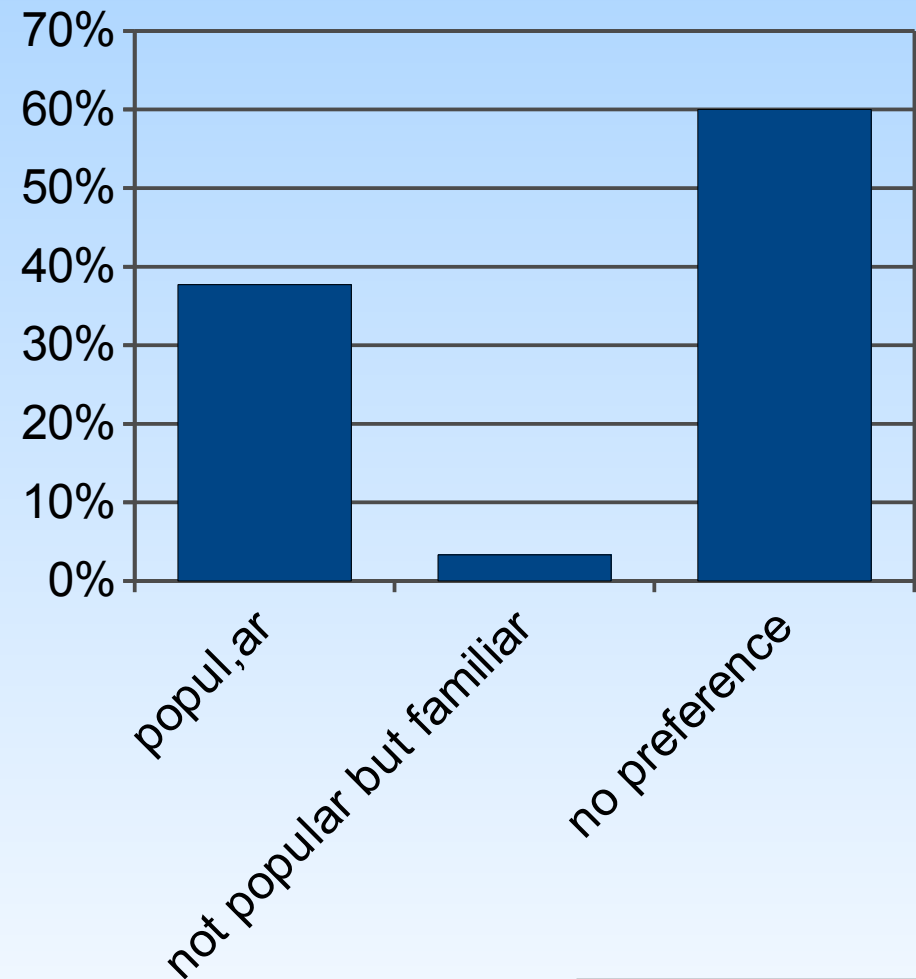
- Important factor to some students, not others



$\chi^2(7) = 120.7, p < 0.001$

Popularity

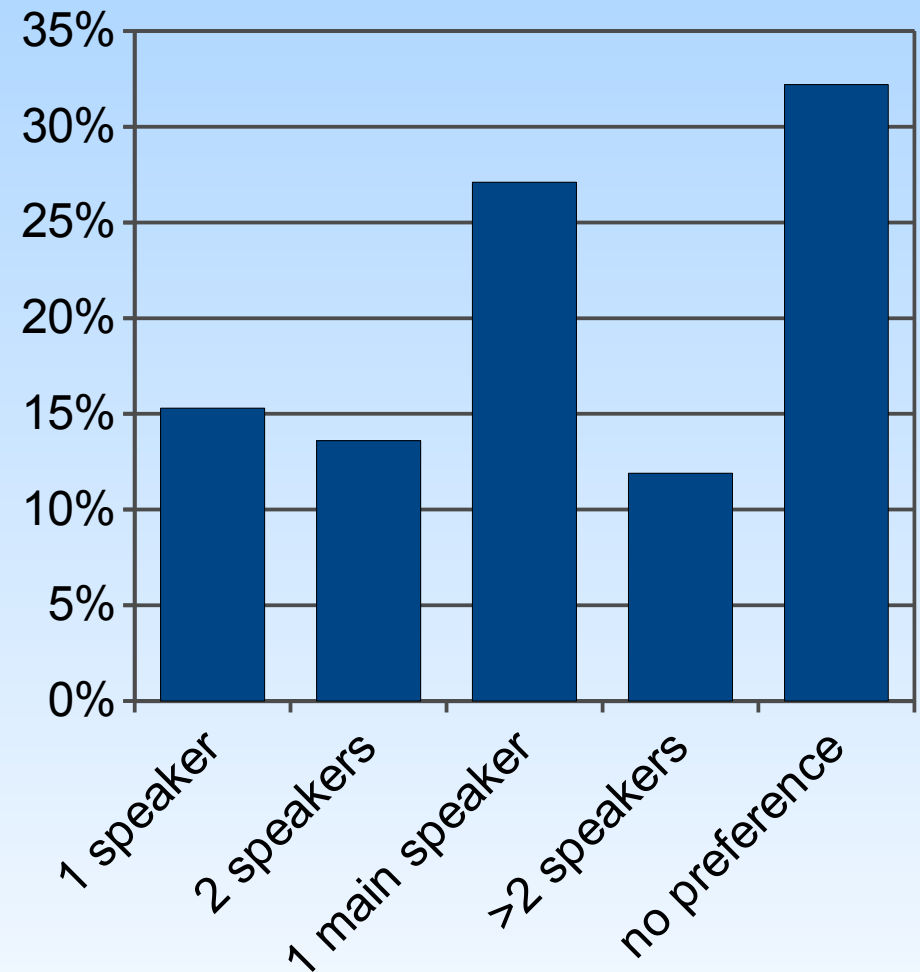
- Not important to most students
- Surprising result for young people



$\chi^2(2) = 29.0, p < 0.001$

Number of Speakers

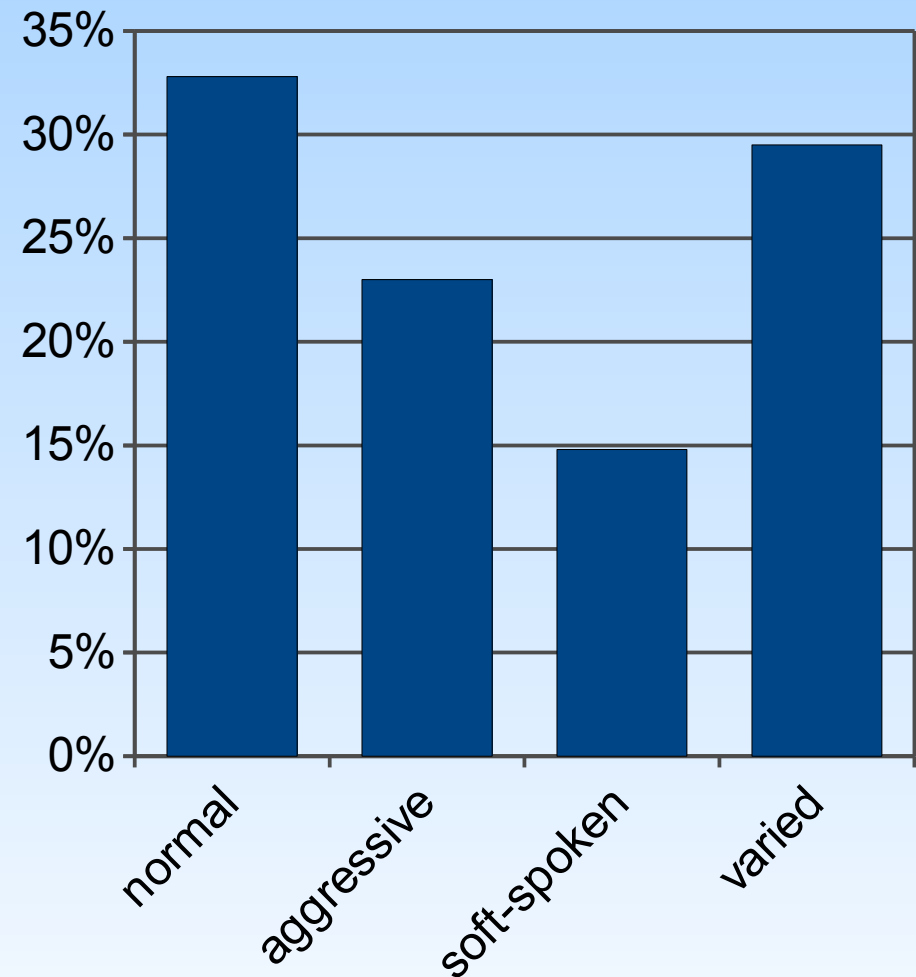
- Not important to most students



$\chi^2(4) = 9.7, p < 0.05$

Speaker Attitude

- Not important to most students



$\chi^2(3) = 4.6$, n.s.

Fostering Autonomy

Benson (2001)

- How does this practice help learners take greater control over their learning?
 - Opportunities for control
 - Enable learners
- How does the practice improve language learning?
 - Proficiency
 - More effective language learners

Discussion

- What questions, comments, or suggestions do you have about the present research?
- What experiences or observations about (un)successful practices to promote learner autonomy do you have?
- How can we go about assessing autonomy in a reliable or objective manner?

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