a heart
ə 'hɑːt

a harp
ə 'hɑːp

an arm
ən 'ɑːm

a mast
ə 'mɑːst

a bard
ə 'bɑːd

a castle
ə 'kɑːsl

From: Trim, J. (1965). *English Pronunciation Illustrated* CUP p.22

PRONSIG ONLINE CONFERENCE
25 OCTOBER 2025
PRONSIG.IATEFL.ORG/CONFERENCE2025

WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT ACCENT
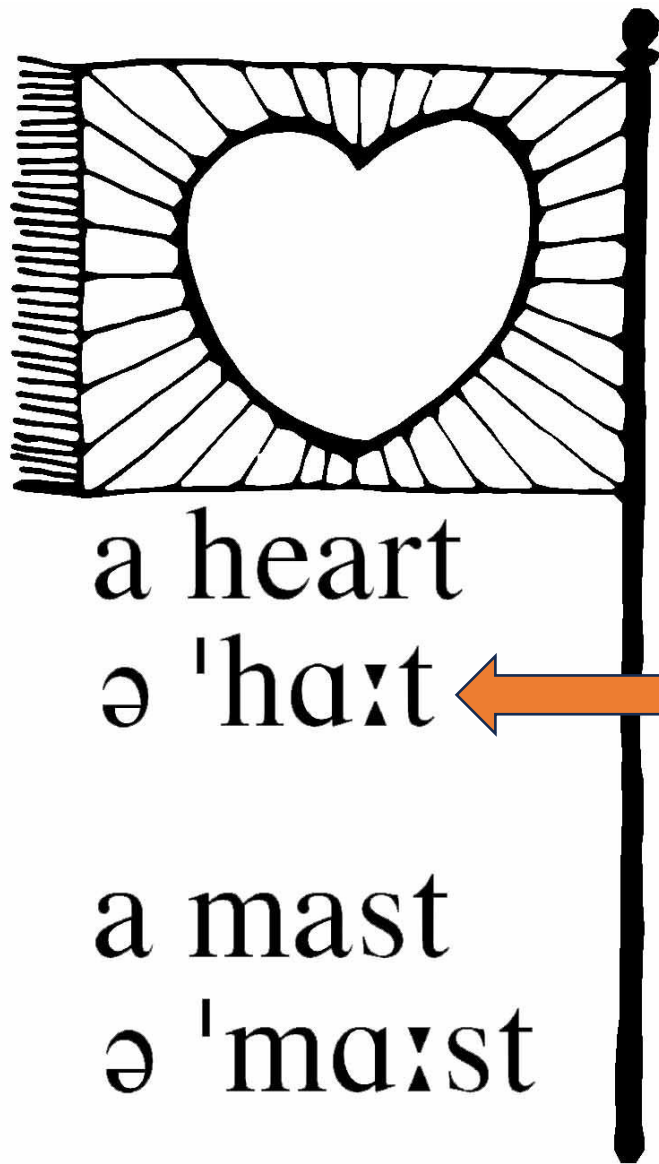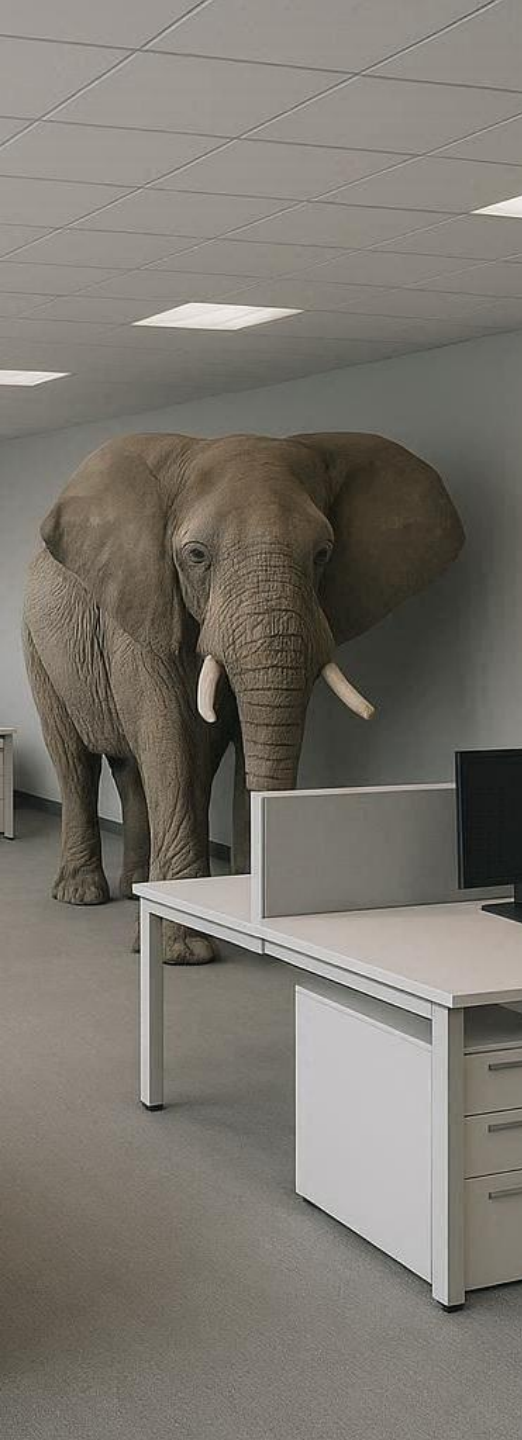
Mark Hancock

https://hancockmcdonald.com/talks/we-need-talk-about-accent
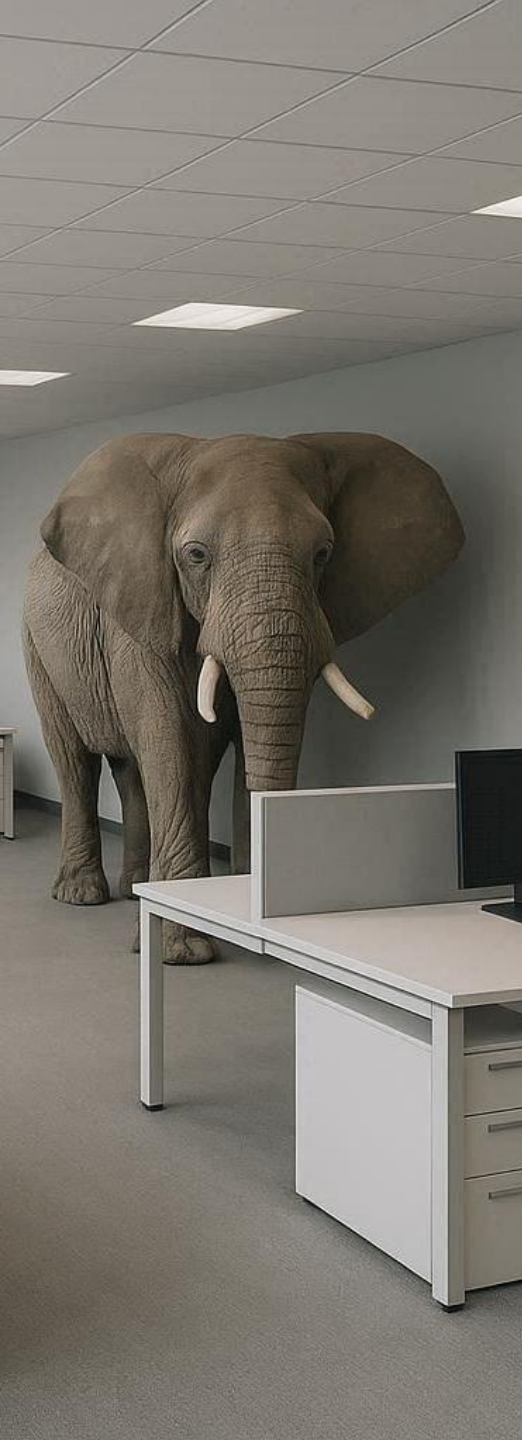
THE TROUBLE WITH MODELS

Aliens might think ALL humans lack arms.

Learners might think ALL Englishes lack Rs.

a heart
ə ˈhɑːt

a mast
ə ˈmɑːst

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MODELS or INPUT?

| NARROW SENSE (ACCENT FOR IMITATION)	BROADER SENSES (MODEL = INPUT)
• pronunciation given in course and reference materials (model = one accent)	• teacher's accent • classmates' accents • beyond the classroom (in a globalized world)

"... rather than relying on models, context-specific and flexible evaluation of the content of pronunciation teaching and testing in terms of phonological *features* is required"

Andrew Sewell (2016), *English Pronunciation Models in a Globalized World: Accent, Acceptability and Hong Kong English* Routledge   (Chapter 5)
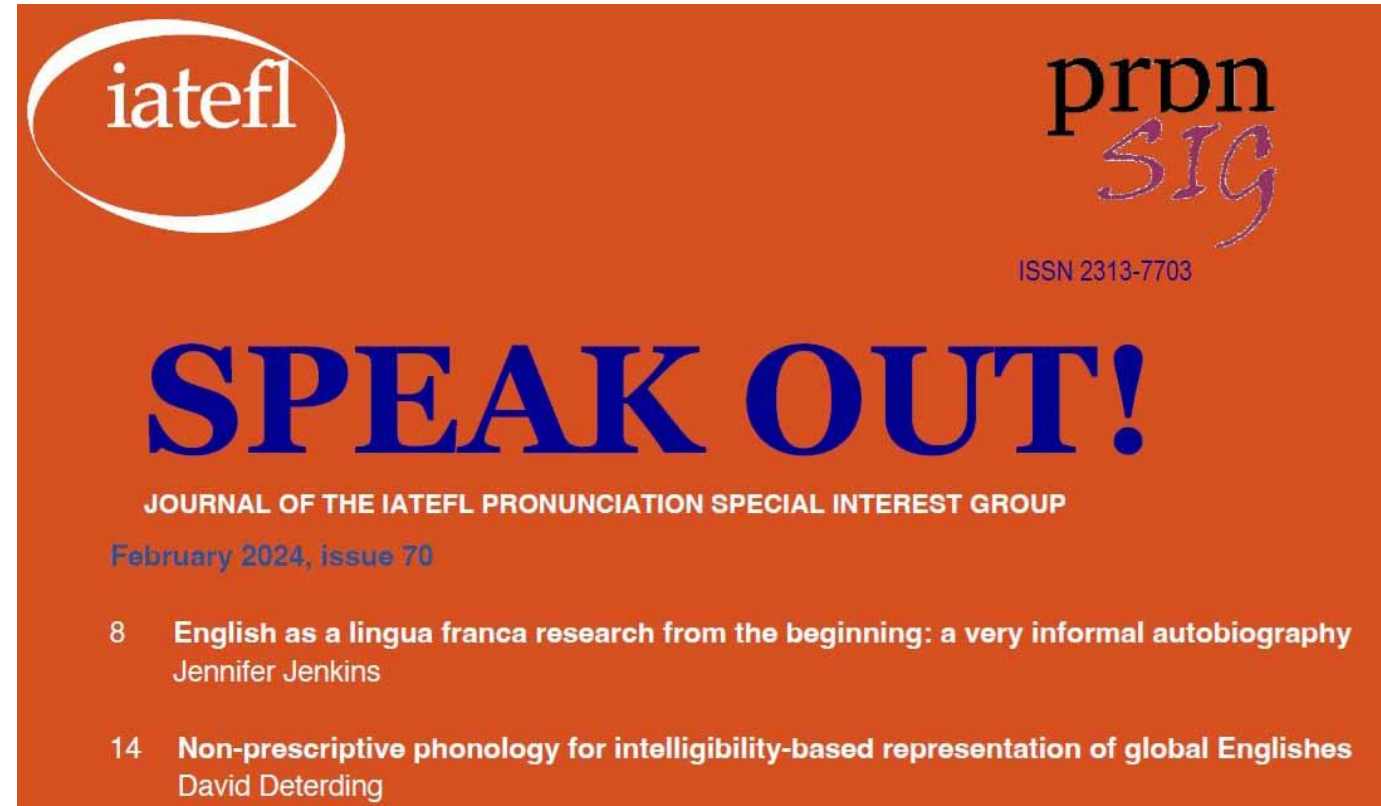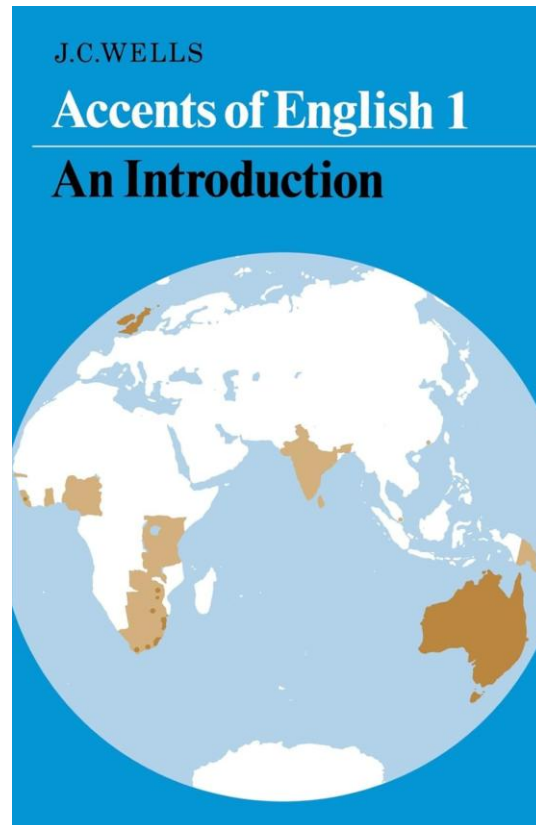
https://hancockmcdonald.com/talks/we-need-talk-about-accent
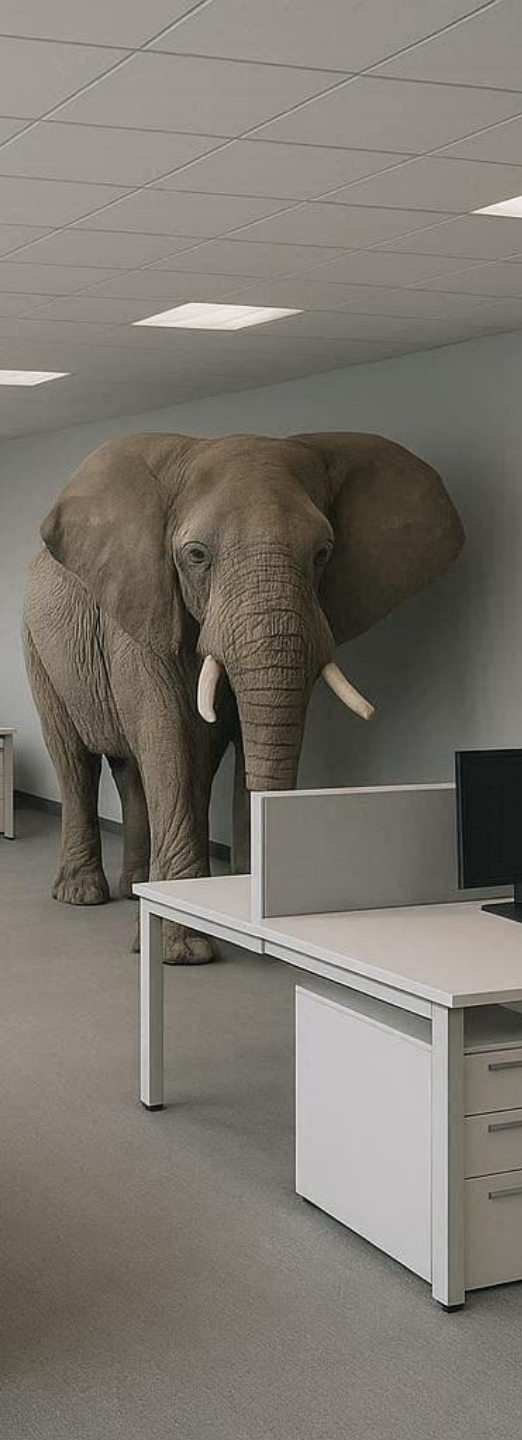
FEATURES VERSUS ACCENTS/MODELS

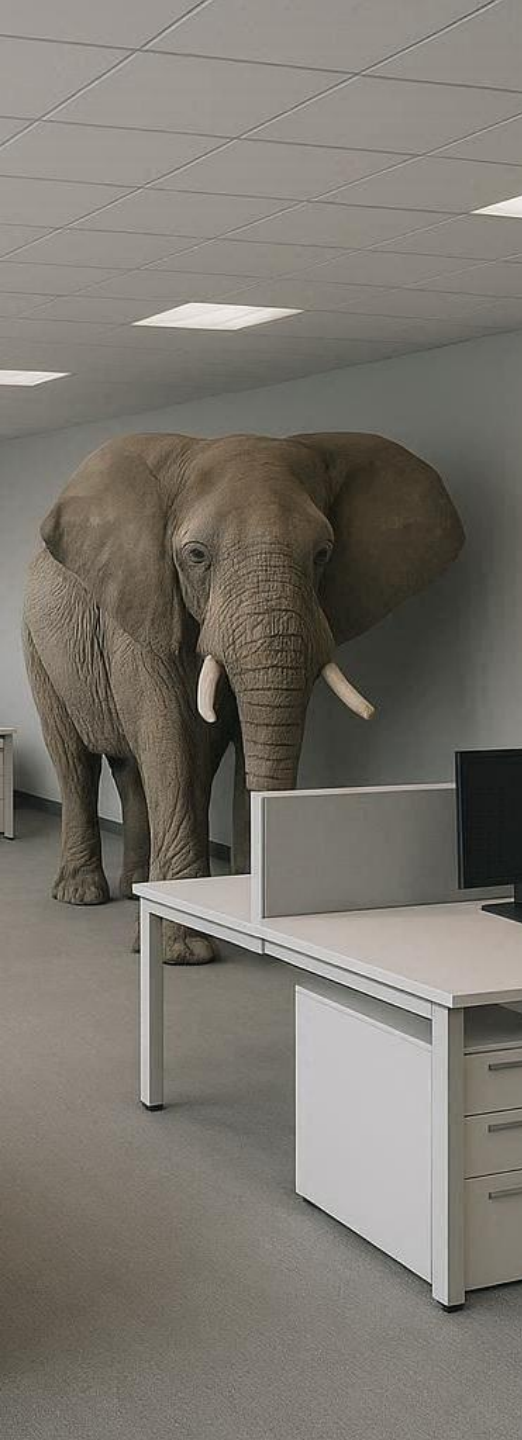| ACCENTS / FEATURES	English	American	French	Scottish	Indian	etc
R-dropping						
TH sounds						
Long and short vowels?						
Schwa?						
etc						

A NON-PRESCRIPTIVE APPROACH

lexical sets
keywords

John Wells (1982), *Accents of English* CUP
David Deterding (2024), *Non-prescriptive phonology for intelligibility-based representation of global Englishes* Speak Out

A KEYWORD CHART

CLAP cat thanks man	**PRICE** lie side light	**CALM** father ma spa
BATH staff grass dance	**MOUTH** how count down	**START** far card part
DRESS neck best head	**FACE** way late great	**SQUARE** share pair bear
KISS give drink lift	**TEETH** see speak green	**NEAR** beer beard here
LOT stop box watch	**BOUGHT** saw caught walk	**SPORT** store door four
CLOTH cross strong soft	**CHOICE** boy noise oil	**NORTH** war short warm
DUCK cup run love	**GOAT** know road note	**NURSE** shirt verb search
PUSH foot full could	**GOOSE** who group rude	**CURE** poor tour sure

© Mark Hancock   PronPack: The Book of Accent

WORD SETS

Key words containing a single vowel letter A

CLAP
cat thanks man

CALM
father ma spa

BATH
staff grass dance

START
far card part

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LAST DANCE

Marcie danced with Mr Darcy
Mr Darcy's fast and classy
Dancing fast and dancing faster
Laughed and laughed
And then disaster
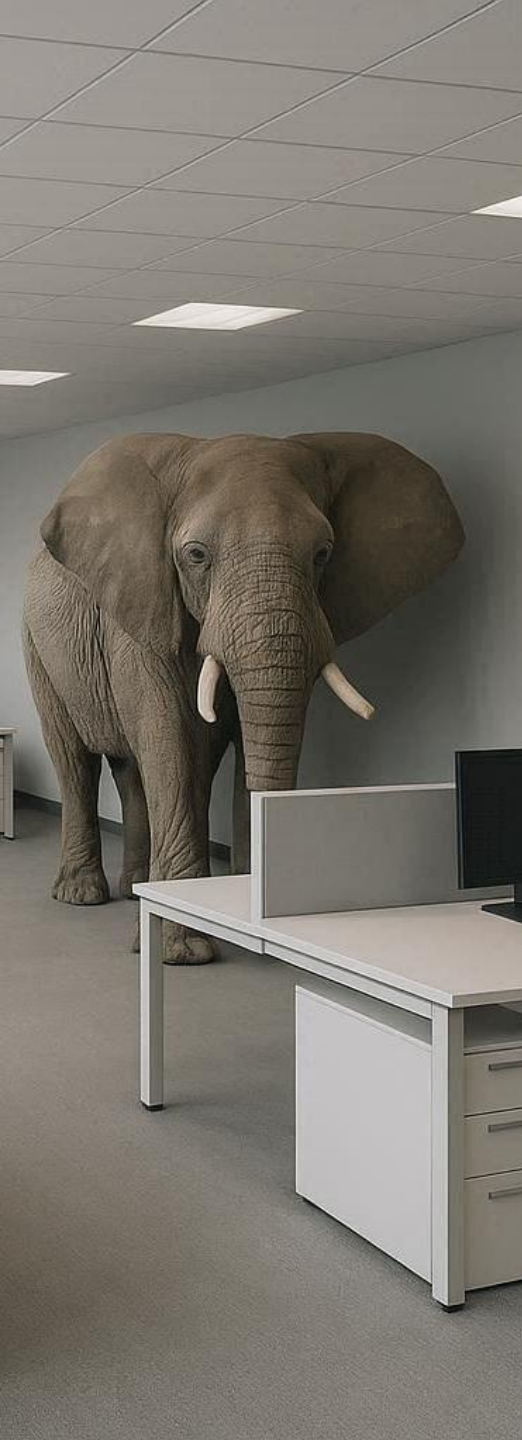
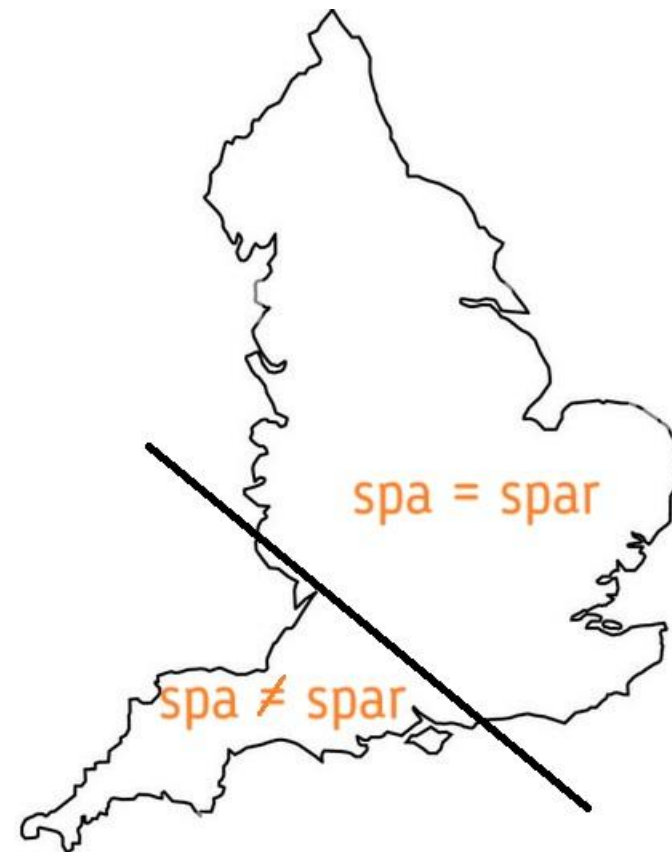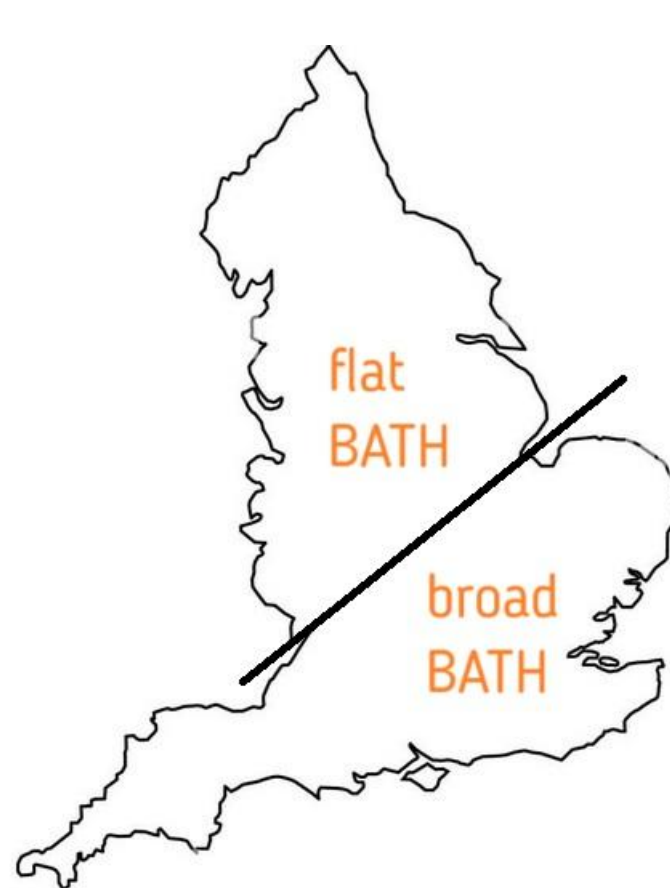Does "Darcy" rhyme with "classy"?

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SHIBBOLETHS

flat
BATH

broad
BATH

spa = spar

spa ≠ spar

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TEXT-TO-SPEECH

Ask not, "Is the accent authentic?" but rather, "Is the feature clear?"

SOUND TRAINS   shifts or mergers?

NEW ZEALAND – bat bet bit

bat bet bit – ENGLAND

bat/bet bit –SINGAPORE
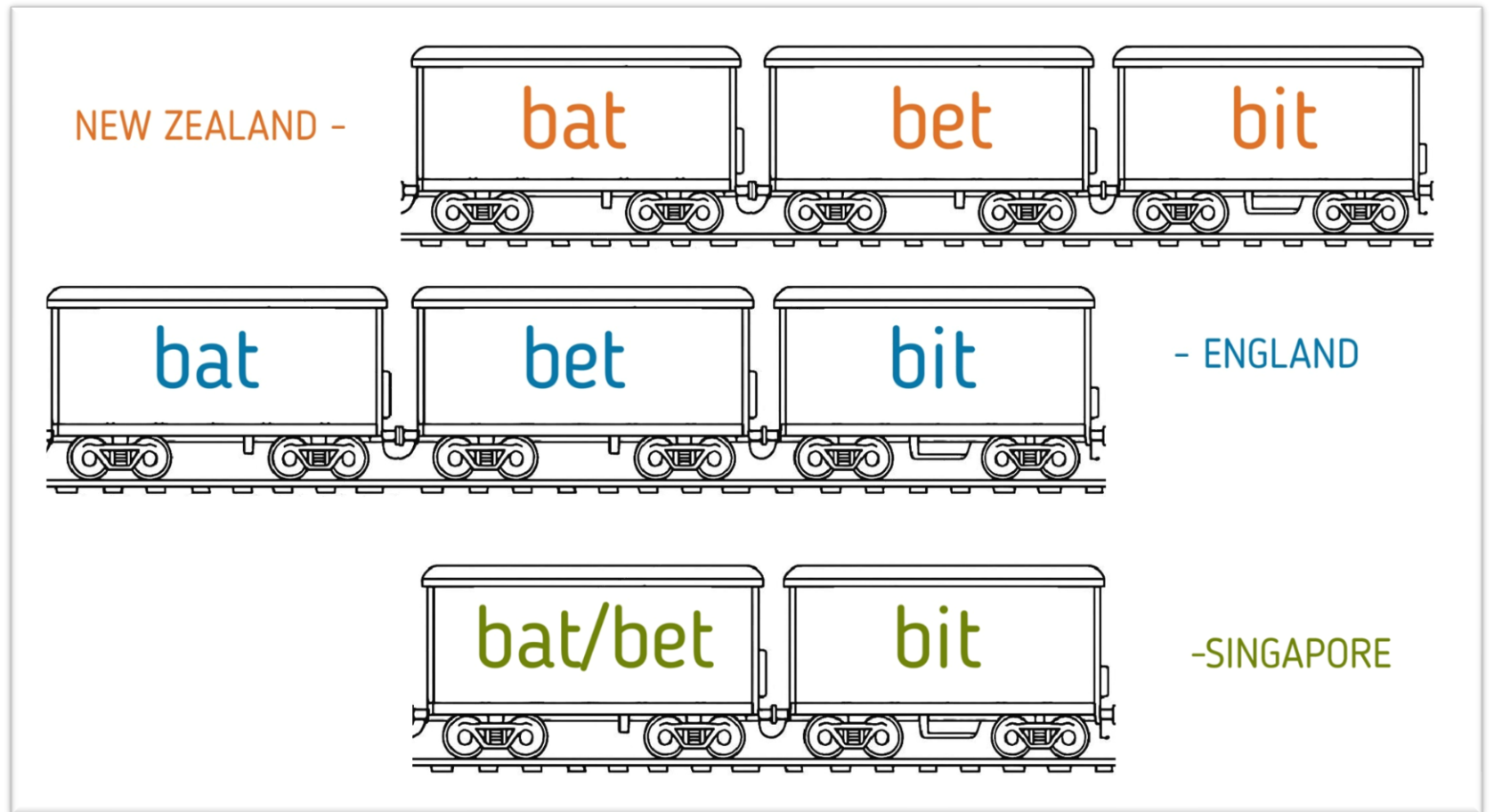
Shifts call for flexibility
Mergers call for ambiguity tolerance

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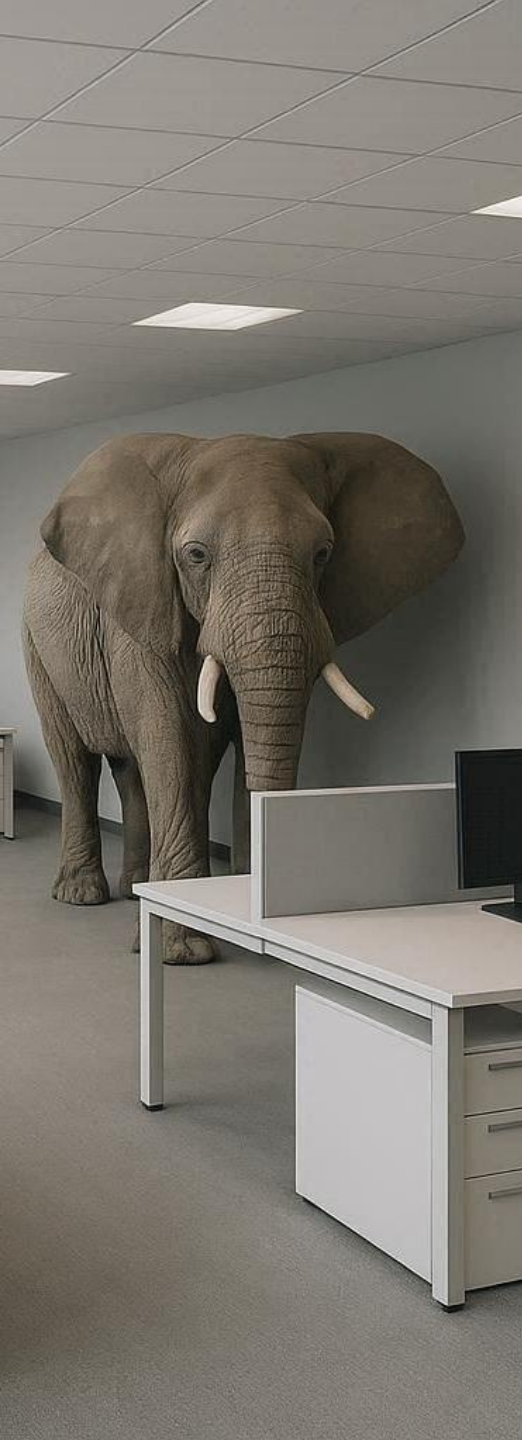
MERGERS MAKE HOMOPHONES

This cow
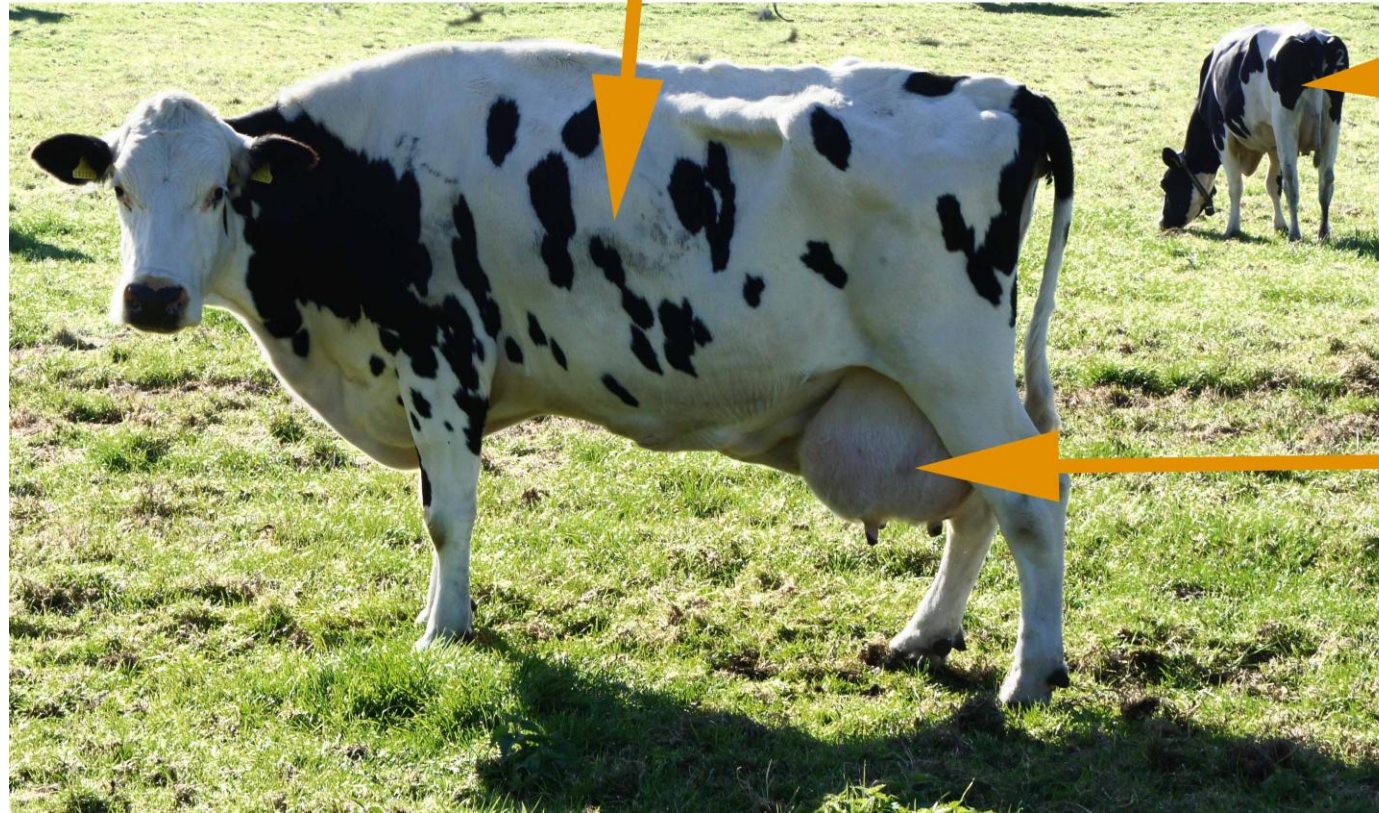
A
The other

B
The udder

FOCUS ON ACCENT 2

WEATHER

Whe**th**er **th**e wea**th**er was good
Or whe**th**er **th**e wea**th**er was bad
The wea**th**er was better
When we were toge**th**er
Whatever **th**e wea**th**er we had

1=ð, _ =v, _ = z, _=d

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FOR AND AGAINST

"We should stick to a standard native-speaker model in pronunciation teaching"

FOR	AGAINST
• **Easier** for the teacher (simple message & lack of alternative) • **Easier** for the learner (single target) • **Empowering** (accent bias exists in the real world: deal with it) • **Oven-ready** (materials already available) • Other?	• **Unfair** for teachers (privileges heritage over merit) • **Unattainable** model for learners (and why 'models'?) • **Unrealistic** for learners' listening skills • **Outdated** (ignores global status of English) • Other?

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