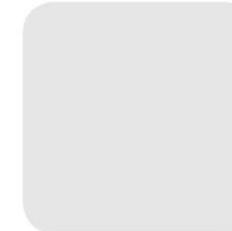


# Investigating vowel duration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Aitken's Law in naturally spoken Scottish Standard English



# 01 Introduction

# Introduction

## # tempo

→ the faster the speech, the shorter the vowels  
(i.e Crystal & House 1988, 1990; Schütz 2007)

## # frequency

→ more frequent words tend to be shorter than less frequent words  
(i.e Jurafsky et al. 2001; Bybee 2002; Gahl 2008; Bell et al. 2009; Priva 2017)

## # intrasyllabic compression

→ vowels tend to be shorter the more phones in a syllable  
(i.e Maddieson 1985; Munhall et al. 1992; Katz 2012)

## # phrasal position

→ final syllables tend to be longer than non-final syllables  
(i.e Oller 1973, Umeda 1974, Rathcke & Stuart-Smith 2016)

## # stress

→ stressed syllables tend to be longer than unstressed syllables  
(i.e Crystal & House 1990; Turk & White 1999; Rathcke & Stuart-Smith 2016; Chevalier 2019)

## Vowel duration

## # vowel height

→ high vowels tend to be shorter than low vowels (intrinsic vowel duration)  
(i.e House and Fairbanks 1953; Lisker 1974; Tauberer & Evanini 2009; Solé & Ohala 2010)

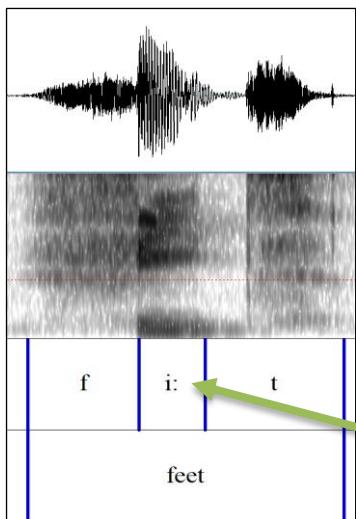
## # polysyllabic shortening

→ vowels tend to be shorter the more syllables in a word  
(i.e Barnwell 1971; Klatt 1973; Windmann et al. 2015)

# Introduction

**Voicing effect** → vowels tend to be longer before voiced consonants than before voiceless consonants in most varieties of English

(i.e Sweet 1877; Heffner 1937; House and Fairbanks 1953; Peterson & Lehiste 1960; Chen 1970; Tauberer & Evanini 2009; Tanner et al. 2020)



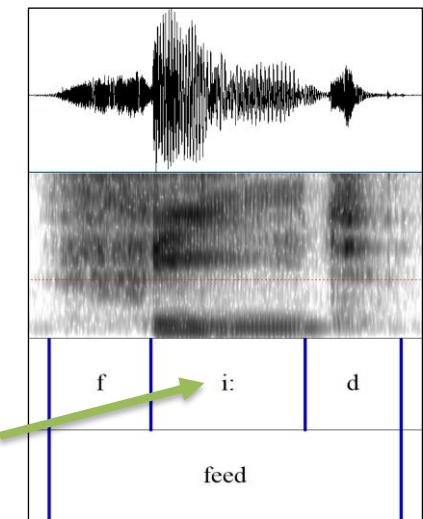
feet

vowel duration:  
~ 130 ms



feed

vowel duration:  
~ 300 ms



# The Scottish Vowel Length Rule (SVLR) / Aitken's Law

**Table I.** Environments constraining durational allophony in varieties of British English.

Constraint	Examples	Scottish English	Anglo-English
Voiceless consonants	<i>beat, greet</i> <i>brute, cute</i>	short allophones	short allophones
Voiced (oral and nasal) stops and /l/	<i>bead, bean, beal</i> <i>brood, broom, gruel</i>	short allophones	long allophones
Voiced fricatives and /r/	<i>tease, beer</i> <i>bruise, smooth, cure</i>	long allophones	long allophones
Morpheme boundaries	<i>bee, bees, bee's</i> <i>agree, agreed</i> <i>brew, brews, brewed</i>	long allophones	long allophones

(Retrieved from: Stuart-Smith and Rathcke 2016: 406)

### Phonological / historical discussions

- Lass 1974
- Taylor 1974
- Ewen 1977
- Harris 1985
- Carr 1992
- Anderson 1993
- Kamińska 1995
- Kiełtyka 2003

### Perception study

- Smith and Rathcke 2016

### Empirical studies in uncontrolled speech

- Warren 2018
- Stuart-Smith and Rathcke 2016
- Chevalier 2019
- Stuart-Smith et al 2019



### Empirical studies in controlled speech

- van Leyden 2002
- Scobbie 2005
- Watt and Yurkova 2007
- Scobbie et al. 1999
- Pukli 2006
- McKenna 1988
- Agutter 1988
- McMahon 1991
- Hewlett, Matthews and Scobbie 1999
- Watt and Ingham 2000
- Milroy 1995
- Llamas et al. 2011

# Previous findings

- SVLR applies most consistently in the vowels

/i/

McClure 1977  
McKenna 1988  
McMahon 1991  
Hewlett et al. 1999  
Scobbie et al. 1999  
Watt & Ingham 2000  
van Leyden 2002  
Scobbie 2005  
Pukli 2006  
Llamas et al. 2011  
Rathcke & Stuart-Smith 2016  
Chevalier 2019  
Stuart-Smith et al. 2019

/u/

McClure 1977  
McKenna 1988  
Hewlett et al. 1999  
Scobbie et al. 1999  
Watt & Ingham 2000  
Scobbie 2005  
Pukli 2006  
Llamas et al. 2011  
Rathcke & Stuart-Smith 2016  
Chevalier 2019  
Stuart-Smith et al. 2019

/aɪ/

Agutter 1988  
McMahon 1991  
Milroy 1995  
Scobbie et al. 1999 Watt &  
Ingham 2000  
Pukli 2006  
Llamas et al. 2011

# Previous findings – Remaining issues

→ geographical scope of the SVLR?

(e.g. McClure 1977 | Aitken 1981) vs. (Lodge 1984 | Agutter 1988 | Watt & Yurkova 2007 | Warren 2018)

→ age-related variation?

(Agutter 1988 | Milroy 1995 | Watt and Ingham 2000 | Warren 2018) vs. (Scobbie et al. 1999; Llamas et al. 2011)

→ gender-related variation?

(Agutter 1988 | Watt and Ingham 2000 | Stuart-Smith and Rathcke 2016; Chevalier 2019)

→ SVLR in naturally spoken SSE?

# 02 PhD Project

# PhD Project – RQs and aims

RQ1: **Which vowels** are affected by Aitken's Law / the VE in 21<sup>st</sup> century spoken SSE?

RQ2: What is the **effect of regional, age- and gender-related variation** on Aitken's Law / the VE in 21<sup>st</sup> century spoken SSE?

RQ3: **Which prosodic factors** have an influence on Aitken's Law / the VE in 21<sup>st</sup> century spoken SSE?

- all vowels of the *Basic Scottish Vowel System* (Abercrombie 1979)
- representativeness for the whole of the country in terms of age, gender and regional background
- accounting for all possible prosodic factors

# PhD Project Dataset

- Two data sources: ICE Scotland + Self-collected data
- (Schützler et al. 2017)
- 130 (64 f) speakers from 3 age groups & 6 dialect regions
- 150995 words

Variable	Level	Number of words
Regional background	East-Mid	27199
	HHE	23604
	Insular	26147
	Northeast	18007
	South	24412
	West-Mid	31626
Gender	female	67726
	male	83269
Age group	old (60+)	33165
	middle (31-60)	94683
	young (18-30)	23147
Style	scripted	85044
	unscripted	65951
Total		150995



# PhD Project – Data preparation

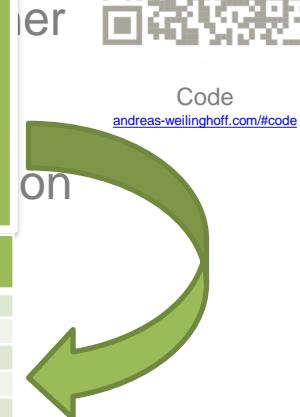
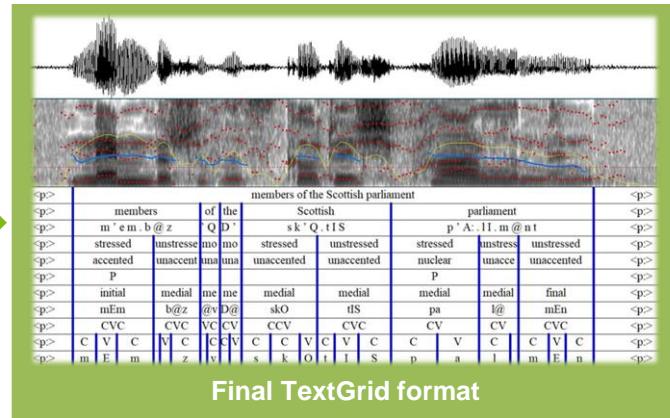
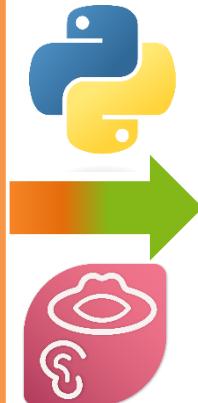
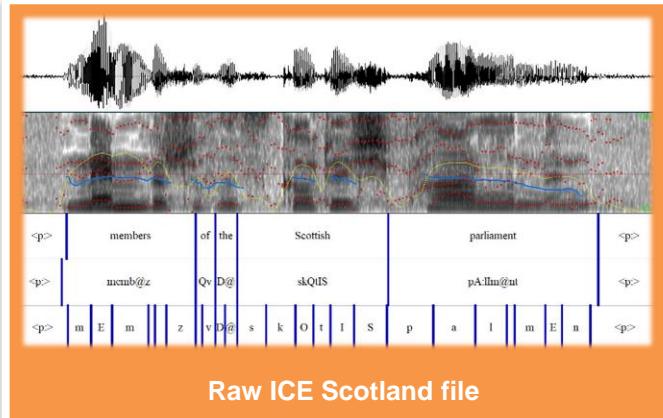
- semi-automatic transcription (correction) of the datasets with different Python scripts (Python software foundation 2022) using the library *textgrids* (Nieminen, 2019)
- force alignment with the updated version of the Montreal Forced Aligner (McAuliffe 2017) and WebMAUS (Kisler et al. 2017)
- implementation of different prosodic levels, prosodic stress identification with ProsoBox (Goldman & Simon 2020) and manual correction of the segment boundaries on the basis of voicing criteria (Hewlett et al. 2017; McKenna 1988; Rathcke & Stuart-Smith 2016; Warren 2018)



Code  
[andreas-wellinghoff.com/#code](http://andreas-wellinghoff.com/#code)

→ conversion to csv structure

# PhD Project – Data preparation



dataset	filename	phone_label	phone_xmin	phone_xmax	phone_dur	phone_code	syl_structure	syl_label	syl_duration	num_phone_in_syl	+ other columns
ICE	btaL_10	m	1.433	1.495	0.062	C	CVC	mEm	0.214	3	...
ICE	btaL_10	E	1.495	1.550	0.05	V	CVC	mEm	0.214	3	...
ICE	btaL_10	m	1.550	1.647	0.097	C	CVC	mEm	0.214	3	...
ICE	btaL_10	b	1.647	1.664	0.017	C	CVC	b@z	0.125	3	...
ICE	btaL_10	@	1.664	1.694	0.03	V	CVC	b@z	0.125	3	...
ICE	btaL_10	z	1.694	1.772	0.078	C	CVC	b@z	0.125	3	...
+ other rows	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

# PhD Project – statistical analysis

- Linear mixed effects modelling on log-transformed vowel duration with *lme4* and *lmerTest* packages (Bates et al., 2015; Kuznetsova et al., 2017)

Random factors: speaker, word

Fixed factors: SVLR / VE categorization, phrasal position, stress, word frequency, local articulation rate, syllable phone count, word syllable count, style, age, gender, region + all possible interactions

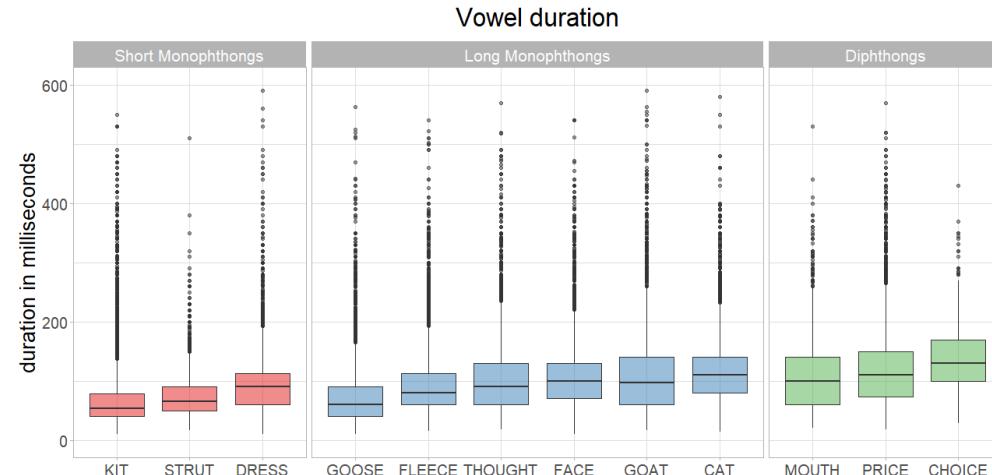
- stepwise regression with backward selection (AIC | R<sup>2</sup>) & subsampling technique PrInDT for automatic model generation (Weihs & Buschfeld 2021; Weihs & Weilinghoff forthcoming)

- vowels analyzed collectively and independently; different models for different SVLR and VE classification schemes → avoid collinearity

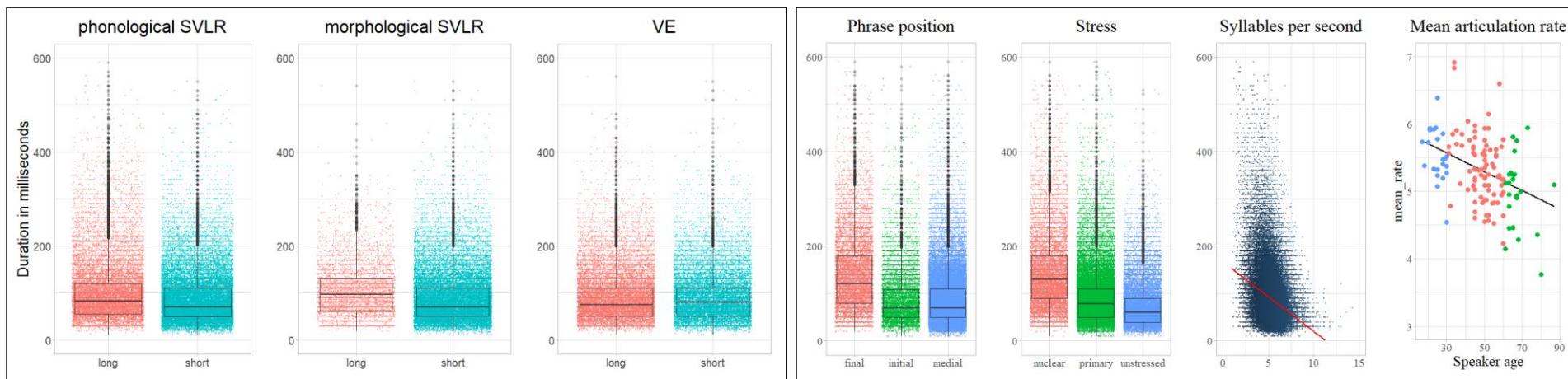
# 03 FINDINGS

# Findings – vowel overview

Vowel(s)	Lexical Set	Type	Tokens	Mean duration (ms)	Standard deviation (ms)
/ɪ/	KIT	Short monophthong	44382	64.71	41.14
/ʌ/	STRUT	Short monophthong	6467	71.72	35.70
/ɛ/	DRESS	Short monophthong	13714	91.76	47.27
/ʊ/	GOOSE	Long monophthong	6351	92.33	55.55
/i:/	FLEECE	Long monophthong	9146	100.42	53.91
/ɔ:/	THOUGHT	Long monophthong	7762	112.64	55.79
/ʌʊ/	MOUTH	Diphthong	9394	114.90	56.95
/e:/	FACE	Long monophthong	6708	113.00	57.34
/ə/	GOAT	Long monophthong	10868	119.10	70.32
/ɑ:/	CAT	Long monophthong	2992	119.71	51.23
/ʌɪ/ /æ/	PRICE	Diphthong	9540	125.02	60.52
/œ/	CHOICE	Diphthong	480	140.74	59.09



# Findings – All vowels



# Findings - Individual vowels

Lexical Set	Vowel(s)	Aitken's (1981) SVLR status	Phon SVLR	Morph SVLR	VE	VE (plosive contexts)	Highest cond. R <sup>2</sup>	Other important observation
KIT	/ɪ/	no	no	no	no	no	0.36	shortest before nasals
STRUT	/ʌ/	no	no	no	opposite	opposite	0.42	shortest before nasals, anti-VE
DRESS	/ɛ/	yes	opposite	no	opposite	no	0.42	shortest before voiced fricatives
GOOSE	/u/	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	0.40	VE1 significant but not VE2; shortest before nasals
FLEECE	/i/	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	0.49	shortest before nasals
THOUGHT	/ɔ/	regional variation	weak	weak	opposite	no	0.53	shortest before nasals; anti-VE
FACE	/e/	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	0.49	shortest before laterals
GOAT	/o/	regional variation	yes	yes	yes	yes	0.41	shortest before voiceless fricatives
CAT	/a/	yes	no	weak	no	yes	0.48	shortest before voiced fricatives
MOUTH	/ʌʊ/	yes	yes	no	opposite	no	0.47	shortest before nasals
PRICE	/ʌɪ/ /ae/	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	0.46	shortest before voiceless fricatives
CHOICE	/ɔɪ/	yes / regional variation	no	no	opposite	unclear	0.61	shortest before nasals

# Findings

- consistent SVLR patterns in GOOSE, FLEECE, PRICE, FACE, GOAT  
(/ʌ/, /i/, /aɪ/, /e/ and /o/)
- Aitken's Law does not operate in KIT, STRUT, DRESS, THOUGHT or CHOICE  
(/ɪ/ /ʌ/ /ɛ/ /ɔ/ /œ/)
- SVLR patterns less stable in the Highlands, Southern and Northeastern Scotland
- weak influence of *age* and *gender*

# Findings

- all vowels are significantly influenced by *tempo*, *stress* and *phrasal position*
  - strong interactions between Aitken's Law and the factors *stress* and *phrasal position*
- SVLR is amplified in prominent prosodic contexts
- anti-voicing effect (Stuart-Smith et al. 2019) found in STRUT, DRESS, THOUGHT, MOUTH, CHOICE
- **strong shortening before nasals**

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# Thanks for your attention!



Slides

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