UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

BALEAP Conference 2025

All Ears:

A Preliminary Study on the Motivation for and Implications of Student Use of Speech-to-Text Interpreting Software for Academic Communication

Laura Richards & Charles Lam
Language Centre, University of Leeds

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Who are we?

Laura Richards

Laura is a Senior Lecturer in English for Academic Purposes at the Language Centre. Her teaching and research focus on how digital tools and practices can be used to support academic English development and use in Higher Education.

Dr Charles Lam

Charles is a Lecturer in English for Academic Purposes at the Language Centre. His teaching interests lie in academic communications in STEM at all levels. His research includes corpus linguistics and digital humanities.

Sound familiar?

"Master's-level classes are designed as advanced learning and teaching environments that are often highly interactive. Now, our typical seminar experience is that material must be delivered in a lecture style, and preferably as a written document so that it can be translated using one of the many translation apps. Further, **many students use translation apps (of variable quality) to provide real-time translation of any spoken content. Open questions to the whole class are often met with silence, while group tasks are typically conducted using translation apps, before usually the same student from each group is tasked with reading out the answers.** We both recognise that this can be an extremely stressful and challenging environment for these students, and we try really hard to support them, often by rapidly changing the content and pace of classes."

- *Two anonymous professors at Russell Group universities* (HEPI, 2025)

What about you?

Our context

- Language Centre situated in a school
- Insessional provision, working across disciplines to provide ESAP for PGT students
- Collaboration with subject lecturers

More specifically….

- Biology and Performance & Cultural Industries
- Large cohorts (75+), mostly Chinese L1
- Frequent groupwork activities
- Differing attitudes to use of translation

The Landscape

- Financial reliance on international students (Bolton et al., 2024)
- Proliferation of Machine Translation and Generative AI (Ou et al., 2024)
- Growing use of Google Translate, ChatGPT in addition to other tools (Alharbi, 2023)
- Academic integrity concerns & response through assessment (Xia et al., 2024)
- Acceptance of use (Groves & Mundt, 2021)

Terminology

MT…….. Machine Translation

GenAI… Generative Artificial Intelligence

STTI…… Speech-to-text-interpreting

ASR…….. Automatic Speech Recognition

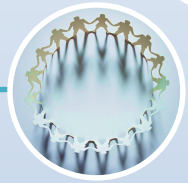
AILT…… AI-powered Language Tools

What does the literature say?

- MT widely studied for academic offline activities (reading & writing), but underexplored for live communication (listening/speaking)
- Lack of research on
  - student motivation for use
  - use practices and preferences
  - disciplinary, cultural or other influencing factors
- Academics hesitant about STTI in seminars/ presentations but more accepting for reading/writing

Impact of STTI use: the 5 Cs

Consent



Community

Communication

Connection

Creativity

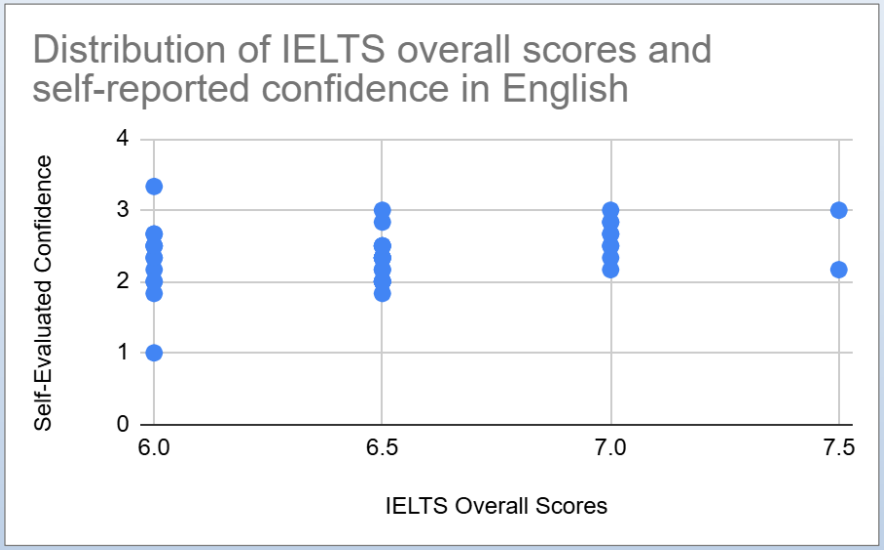
Research Design & Methodology

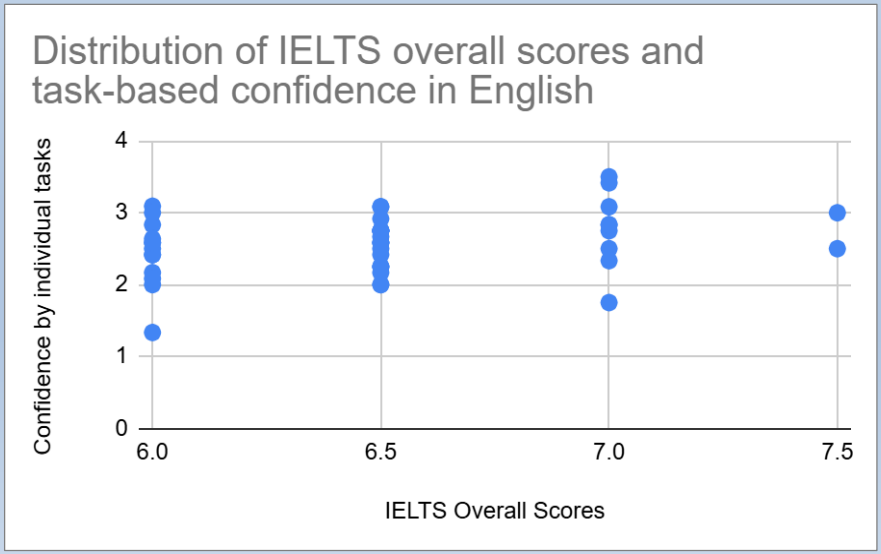
- Ongoing research with PGT students in creative disciplines (n=70)
  - MA Culture and Creativity, MA Design, MA Film Studies, MA Communication and Media, MA Music Management.
- First survey: motivations and usage patterns
- Expected findings: complex motivations, clear usage trends

Preliminary Findings

- Why students use STTI: Comprehension aid, confidence boost, accessibility
- How they use STTI: Seminar participation, lecture transcription, presentations
- Emerging concerns and trends

Motivations: Comprehension aid, confidence boost, accessibility

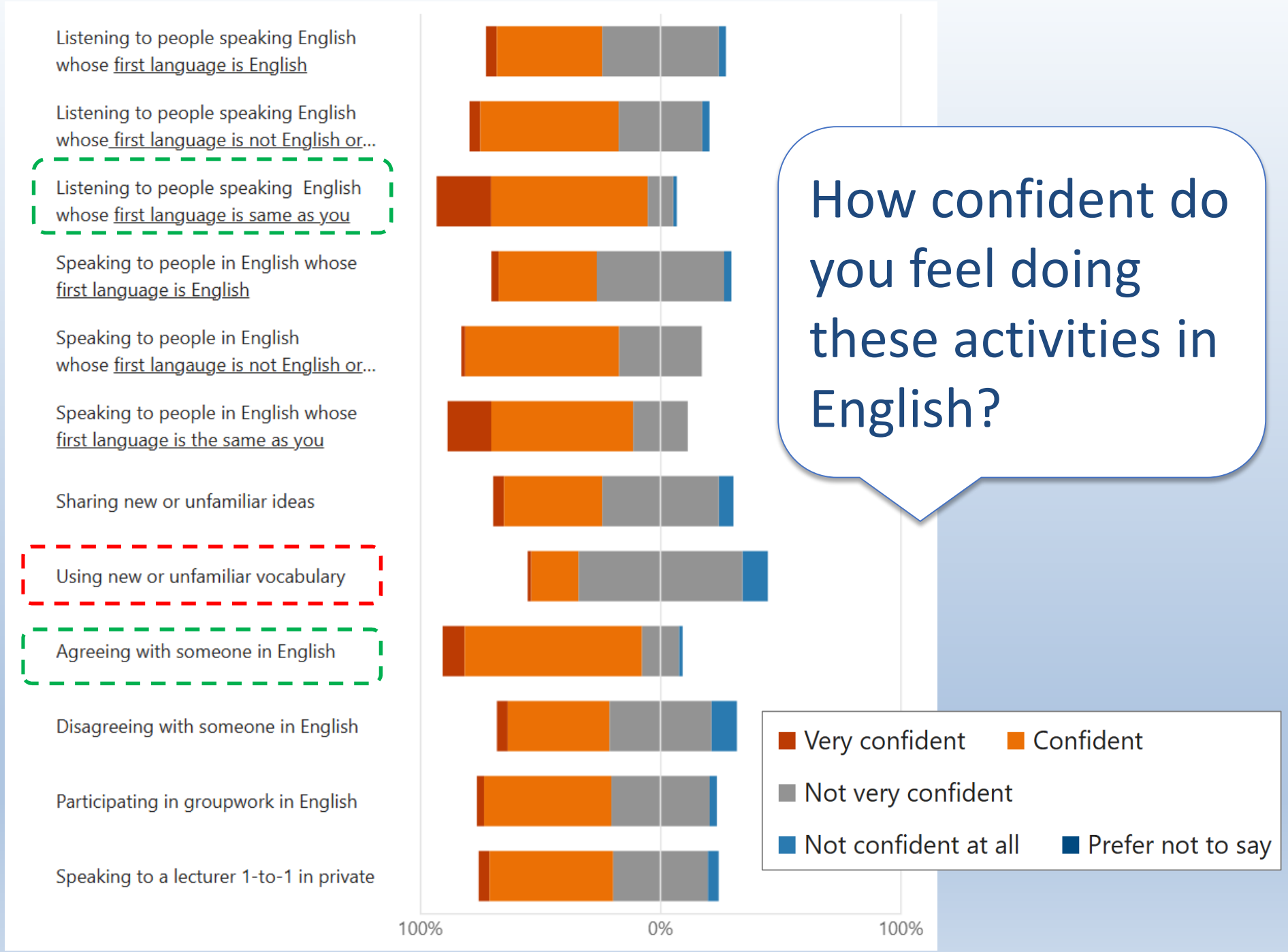




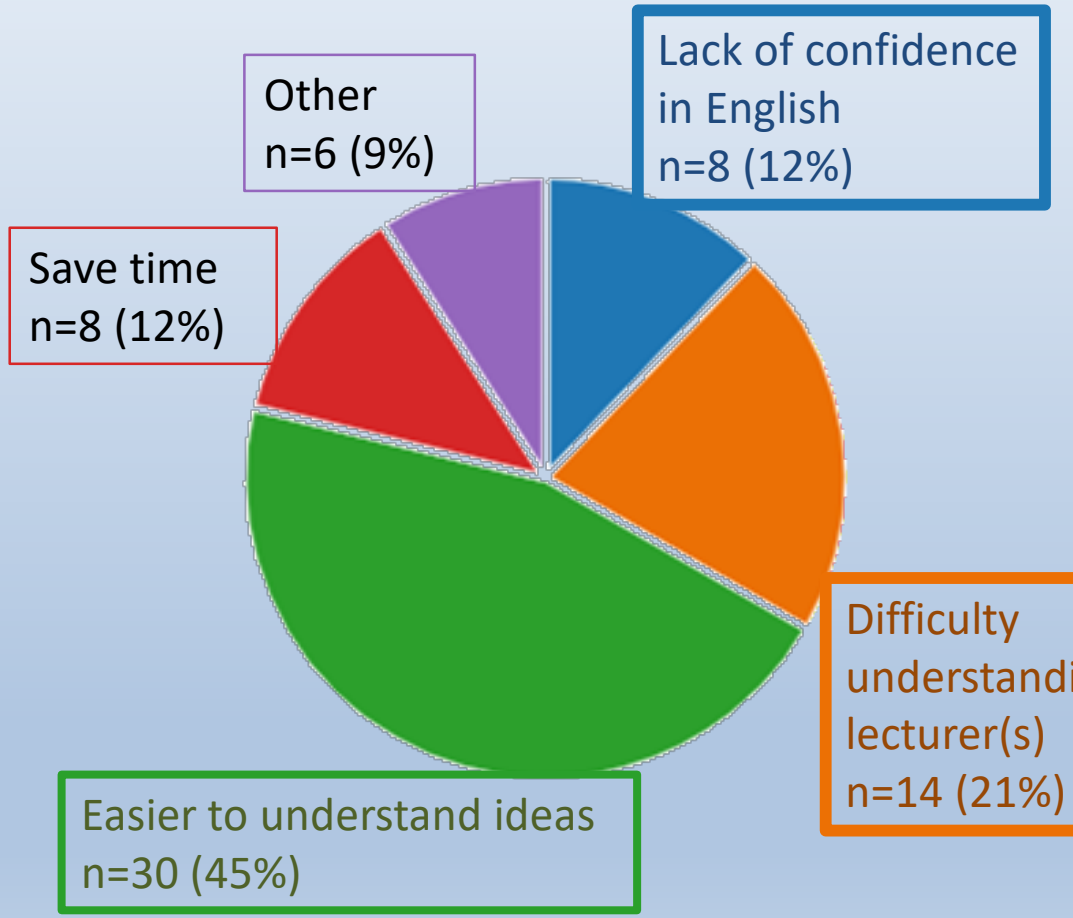
Moderate, positive correlation between test scores and confidence (Pearson's R):

- Listening: $r = 0.428$, $p < 0.05$
- Speaking: $r = 0.401$, $p < 0.05$
- Reading: $r = 0.538$, $p < 0.05$

- Except Writing: no correlations detected ($r = 0.091$, $p > 0.5$)

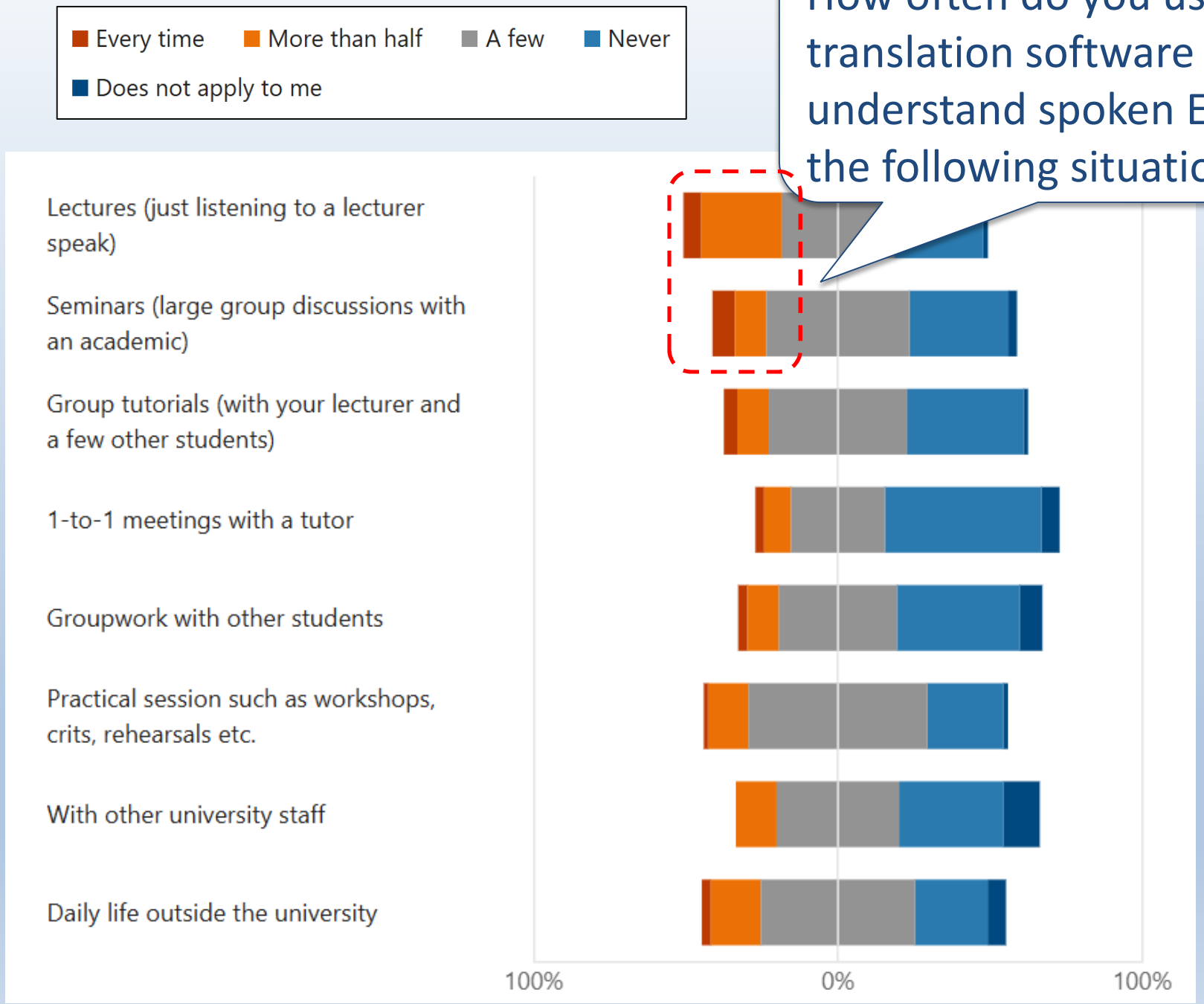

Listening to people speaking English whose first language is English
Listening to people speaking English whose first language is not English or...
Listening to people speaking English whose first language is same as you
Speaking to people in English whose first language is English
Speaking to people in English whose first langauge is not English or...
Speaking to people in English whose first language is the same as you
Sharing new or unfamiliar ideas
Using new or unfamiliar vocabulary
Agreeing with someone in English
Disagreeing with someone in English
Participating in groupwork in English
Speaking to a lecturer 1-to-1 in private
100%
0%
100%
How confident do you feel doing these activities in English?
Very confident
Confident
Not very confident
Not confident at all
Prefer not to say

Why use STTI?



Why did you choose to use translation software to understand spoken English? (n=66)

How often do you use translation software to understand spoken English in the following situations?



Next steps for project

- Analyse second survey to understand changes in use
- Dig deeper into decision making in focus groups
  - *Why do you think students choose to use STTI software?*
  - *What do you think the positive effects of using STTI software to support listening are?*
  - *What do you think the negative effects of using STTI software to support listening are?*
  - *How acceptable do you think using STTI software is and will this change in the future? Why?*
  - *How do you think the university could support students better in this area?*

Response at UoL

- Awareness raising though relevant academic and administrative groups.
- Review and alignment of policy.
- Procurement of alternative or more appropriate tools.
- *Amendments to student contract.*
- *Development of support materials for staff and students.*

Implications for EAP & Academics

- Pedagogical considerations: How to integrate STTI?
- Ethical concerns: Data privacy & transparency
- Practical recommendations for educators and institutions.

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