

# Towards a taxonomy of meta-linguistic commentary: The case of Utah English

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101<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the Linguistics Society of America

January 4–7, 2026

New Orleans, New York

# Language Regard

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- "individual beliefs about and affective responses to language details" (Preston 2018:3)
  - encompasses attitudes, ideologies, beliefs, perceptions, awareness, etc.
  - via matched-guise, draw-a-map, association tasks, labeling activities
  - related to attitudinal cognitorium, indexical field, indicators/markers/stereotypes
- Sociolinguists can expose language regard by analyzing metalinguistic comments.

# Utahns sound Utahn when they avoid sounding Utahn

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97<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Linguistics Society of America  
January 6, 2023  
Denver, CO

Most people with a strong Utah accent  
uh leave the *t* off a lot of words. I say  
*moun[?n]* instead of *moun[θɪn]*, uh so I  
do think I have that accent.

“Louis”, male, b. 1997, White, Bountiful,  
practicing Latter-day Saint, small town-oriented

# Goal

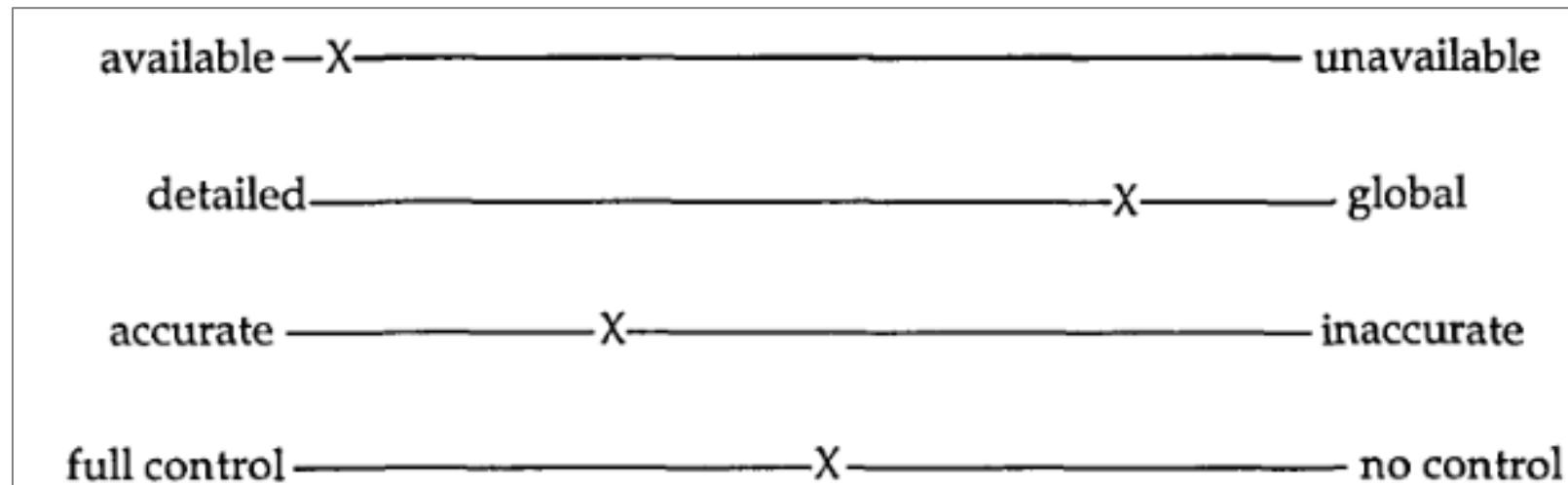
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Develop a taxonomy of meta-linguistic comments about local language.

# Types of Comments

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- Quantitative work on draw-a-map tasks (Lameli et al. 2008, Cukor-Avila 2019)
- Indicator, Marker and Stereotype (Labov 1972:178–180)
- Preston (1996) expounds on Silverstein's (1981) “limits of awareness”
  - Availability: what is available for non-linguists to comment on (cf. Eckert & Labov 2017)
  - Accuracy
  - Detail
  - Control



**Figure 1** Variable (independent) positions (hypothetical) on the continua of the modes of folk linguistic awareness

# Why Utah?

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1. It is somewhat well-researched.
  - Works by Cook > Di Paolo > (Baker-)Smemo, Bowie, Eddington, Johnson, Stanley
  - Not as well as AAE or Philly, but maybe more so than Alaska or New Orleans.
2. Linguistic work suggests it is distinct.
  - A unique combination of linguistic variants: prelateral mergers, cord-card merger, [t]-epenthesis, velar nasal plus, hypercorrection, etc.
3. It is not nationally salient.
  - Not on people's radar.
  - Reality TV might be changing that.

# The Study

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# Data and Analysis

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- Three sources of comments
  - Elicited through an online survey.
  - Searched on social media (namely Twitter/X and TikTok)
  - Other places on the internet
- Content analysis

# Preview

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- Accuracy
  - Is the comment correct?
  - Does the feature refer to something that is actually more common in Utah?
- Awareness
  - Overgeneralizing
  - Undergeneralizing
  - Allophony or reduction

# Accuracy: Correct

The Real Housewives of SLC  
@housewivesofslc

Heard them say “hilling” and “fillings” within the first 20 minutes of ep 1 so that’s all I need to continue watching  
[#TheSecretLivesOfMormonWives](#) 😂😃



3:45 PM · Sep 7, 2024 · 63.5K Views

see Di Paolo & Faber (1990)

Re: You'll never guess      Posted by: fallenangela ( Date: March 16, 2011 08:42AM what I heard at Crown Burgers today ....

My never-mo husband and daughter \*love\* it when I break into that little ditty! ;-)

On a separate note - it's a total Utah/Mormon thing to add an "s" to the end of store names where one doesn't really exist. Crown burgers. Victoria Secrets (note the "s" has been left off the appropriate place) Chuck-A-Ramas. You get the idea. You get a pass on Albertson's but it usually becomes The Albertson's.

Just one of those "You know you're from Utah when..." moments. Like adding a "T" sound in words that don't have "T"s which happens a lot on Scandinavian last names. HanTsen. JenTsen. OITson.

Because tone is difficult to decipher, I'm making an attempt at some light hearted observations and not anything mean spirited so I hope that is coming across.

Stanley & Vanderniet (2018)

# Accuracy: Not unique to Utah

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# Awareness: Overgeneralizing



[deleted] • 11y ago

Essentially, words with a long E sound, are pronounced (in the Utah accent) with a short I sound. As mentioned, that's just one example. Often "hard" sounds, which require more mouth/face movement are the words that are modified in the Utah accent....try saying "fill" instead of "feel" and you'll see how less physical effort is required. It's a matter of economy (some would say laziness). "Hundred" becomes "hunnerd", "interesting" becomes "inneresting". This doesn't even begin to discuss the sing-song cadence, ending of sentences with a question mark, the "lisping" of S's (a sad development among some women under 35). Someone mentioned that you can really hear the Utah accent best in southern Utah, and I'd agree with that. Or hit the far reaches of Davis county and you'll find it there for sure :-)

# Awareness: Undergeneralizing



Caleb

@esp3rtamente



...

There's something incredibly charming about the Oldhead Utah accent.  
My grandfather, raised in Ephraim, had it.

Examples:

President Neltzin

The Enzin

Worshington DC

Mondee, Tuesdee, etc.

The Book a Marman

Fiddler on the Ruff

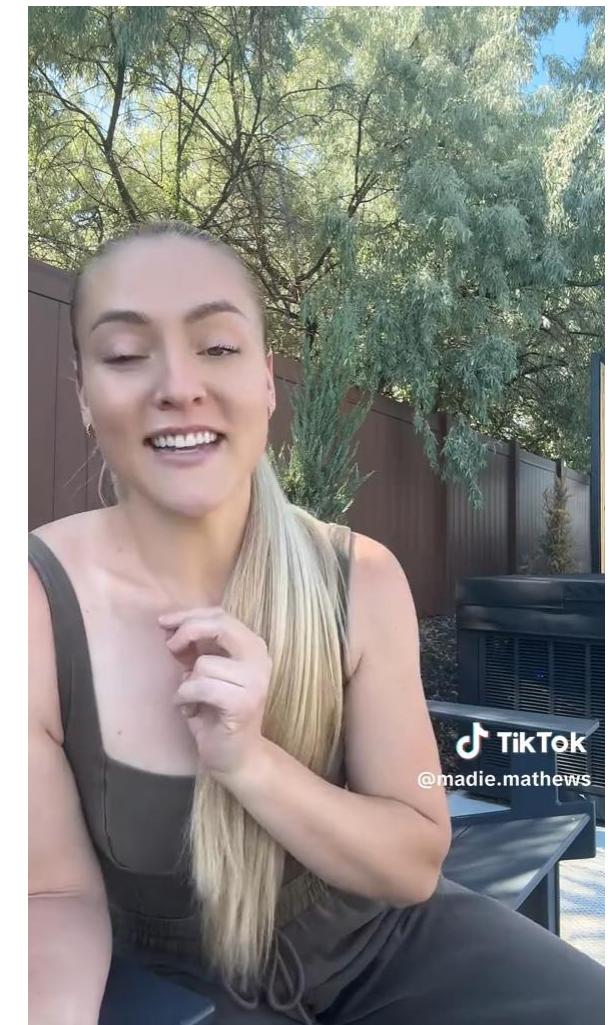
Melk

Pellow

The Ward organist

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# Awareness: Allophony/Reduction



# Discussion

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# Towards a Taxonomy

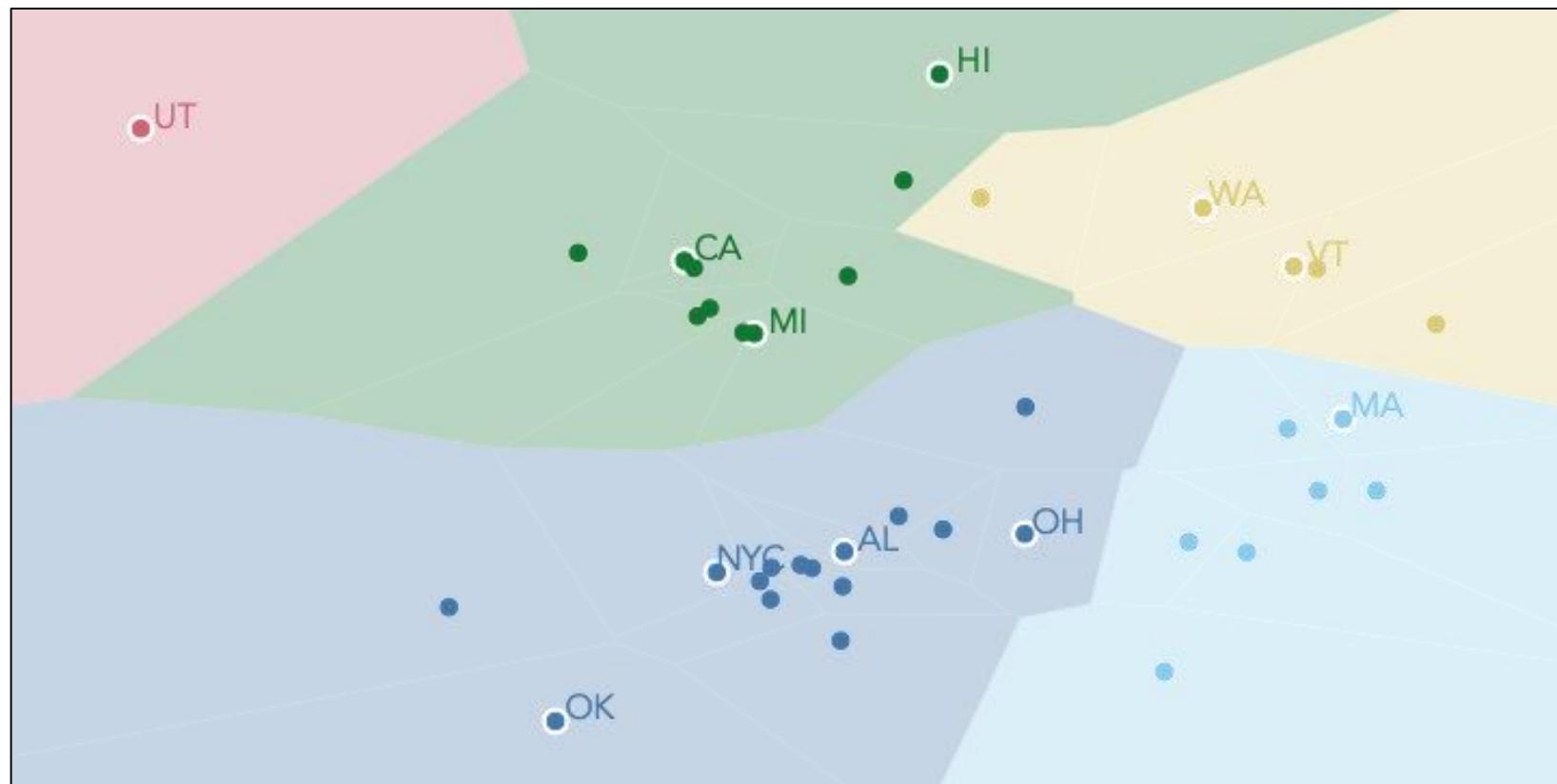
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- Preston's (1996) categories and others that emerge from the data seem to be a good starting point for developing a taxonomy.
  - More data from many more varieties will help determine a more universal set.
- Spoiler: We have done this analysis on four other varieties.
  - Baltimore: Many features with wider variety of example words.
  - Nebraska: The few comments are mostly about more lexical or GenAm features.
  - Seattle: Few features and lots of “no accent” ideology.
  - Hawaii: Mostly lexical or about Pidgin itself rather than anything more specific.
- Kansas: See also Wade, Hausthor, & Holliday (forthcoming)!

# Future Goals

Develop a taxonomy of meta-linguistic comments about local language.

variety	overgeneralizations	non-unique features
AL	-0.84	-1.92
OK	-2.96	-4.69
OH	0.49	-1.63
NYC	-1.77	-2.26
MA	2.83	0.25
UT	-6.14	5.02



# References

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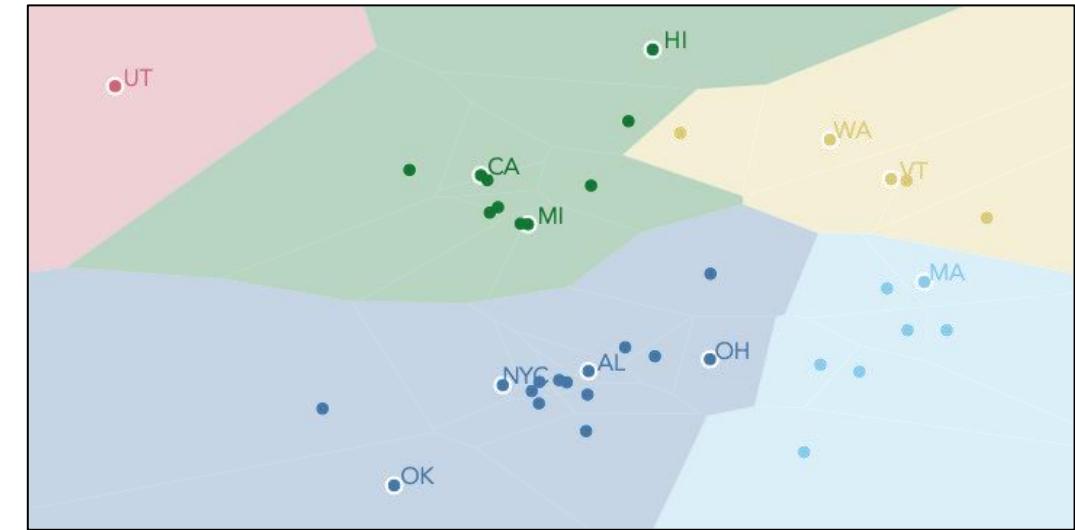
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A huge thanks to Abigail Mueller for doing so much of the data collection.  
(Watch out for her grad school applications!)

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