

# Exploring the Effects of Cross-Cultural Variation and Tourism in Utah English

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Zoe Eldredge  
*Brigham Young University*

Joseph A. Stanley  
*Brigham Young University*

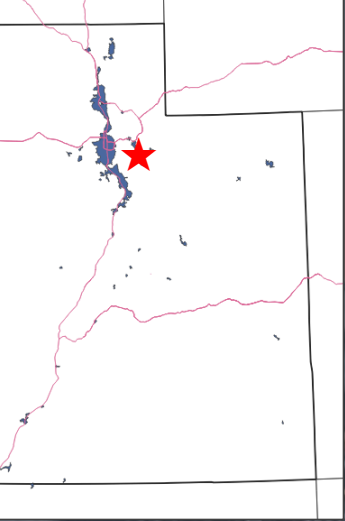
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# Emerging Social Meaning

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- Eckert (2016): sociolinguistic variation is not just a consequence of social change but helps contribute to it.
- Such changes become enregistered and are linked to groups or personae.
- Fractal recursivity (Irvine & Gal 2000) may contribute to the beginnings of such differences (e.g. Zhang 2021).



# Park City English

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- The 'Parkite' identity is quite specific and homogenous.
  - A particular type of person lives in/moves to Park City (it's not like switching neighborhoods in Salt Lake City).
  - Outdoorsy and affluent OR outdoorsy and working in the tourism industry
- Park City has one of the lowest amounts of practicing members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
  - People say Park City 'feels different' culturally than the rest of Utah.
- People from surrounding rural areas claim that Park City 'sounds snobby' or 'rich'.

# Research Questions

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- Does the Parkite accent exist?
  - If so, what linguistic features are different from elsewhere in northern Utah?
- Do people recognize a Park City accent?
  - If so, how is it perceived compared to general Utah English?
- Do touristy areas and more culturally diverse areas lead to language change?

# Study 1: Perception

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# Speaker Information

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- Audio gathered via brief sociolinguistic interviews
  - half Parkites, half from elsewhere in the Wasatch Front
- 13 speakers selected
  - mostly early 20s, with a few in 40s and 60s
  - all White
  - 12 straight, one gay
  - balanced low, mid, high socioeconomic statuses
  - even balance between male and female
  - balance for Latter-day Saint, Jewish, and other
- Selected a  $\approx$ 10 second clip

# Survey

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- For each clip, listeners evaluated the speaker on a 5-point Likert scale
  - friendly – unfriendly
  - professional – unprofessional
  - rich – poor
  - trustworthy – untrustworthy
  - laid back – uptight
  - whether they sound like they're from Utah (yes, no, maybe)
- To prevent burn-out, each person only heard three speakers
- Also meta-linguistic commentary about Park City English
  - friendly – unfriendly
  - pleasant – unpleasant
  - professional – unprofessional



# Listener Demographics

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- Distributed it via social media
- 434 participants
  - $\approx 96$  responses per audio clip
- 38 states, plus DC and PR: 40% from UT, 11% from CA, <5% the rest
- 87% White, 4% Native American, 4% Black, <2% other
- 49% male, 49% female, 2% non-binary or other
- 47% aged 25–34

# Listener evaluations by speaker and attribute, based on an average of 137 responses per speaker per attribute

What you should see: Parkites generally more positive than (at least some) non-Parkites



# Listener Perceptions: Overview

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- Overall, we don't find much of an effect.
  - This is a null result.
  - Or rather, we haven't found data to support our intuitions.
- Listener commentary suggests otherwise:
  - aloof, superficially friendly
  - laidback, casual
  - California influence
  - uptight, rich, spoiled

# Study 2: Production

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# Methods

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- 200-item wordlist
  - Utah vowels (prelateral mergers)
  - Utah consonants (mountain, NG+, THR-flapping, [t]-insertion)
  - non-Utah/general features (e.g. Mary-merry-marry merger, Low-Back-Merger shift)
- 19 Utahns read it as part of a sociolinguistic interview
  - 11 Parkites
  - 8 from northern Utah
- Transcribed manually, processed using MFA (McAuliffe et al. 2017) and FAVE (Rosenfelder et al. 2014) via DARLA (Reddy & Stanford 2015) and processed using Stanley's (2023) order of operations.
- Consonants listened and coded manually.

Category	Feature	Words	Sources	Summary
Utah vowels	WOLF-JOLT-MULCH merger(s)	<i>pull, fuller, pole, scold, bulb, culture</i>	Strelluf (2016), Baker & Bowie (2010)	Unmerged in 5 unrelated people
	CORD-CARD merger	<i>hoarse, horse, north, warm</i>	Bowie (2003, 2008)	Not attested
Utah consonants	NG+	<i>biking, hiking, driving, stealing</i>	Di Paolo & Johnson (2018), Johnson (2024—in about an hour from now!)	Minority variant in a few people
	THR-flapping	<i>three, thread, through, throw, throttle</i>	Stanley (2019)	2 people, half the time
	[t]-insertion in /ls/	<i>salsa, Olsen, pulse, also</i>	Stanley & Vanderniet (2018)	1 person, half the time
	MOUNTAIN	<i>mountain, gluten, cotton, satin, rotten</i>	Stanley (2023), Bowie (2023), Eddington & Savage (2012)	Variable, but no apparent pattern
Non-Utah	MARY-MERRY-MARRY merger	<i>hairy, caring, error, berry, arrow, parody</i>	Labov, Ash, & Boberg (2006)	All merged
	Low-Back Merger shift	<i>cat, pat, bet, peck, bit, fit</i>	Becker (2019), Bowie (2017)	Variable, but no apparent pattern

# Discussion

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- Two null results
  - Listeners don't distinguish between Parkite and non-Parkite Utah English
  - Speakers aren't noticeably different from each other.
- Possible explanations (typical of any null result)
  - Not enough data
  - Not the right kind of data
  - Not the right questions.
- This is still science and we still did a rigorous study.



# Interpreting Linguistic Null Results

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- Evans (2013) showed that null results are still results.
- Linguistic stereotypes persist, even when there is no objective support for them.
  - People think Park City English sounds a certain way, but it's all in their head.
    - "their brain gets in the way of their ear" (Preston 2018)
  - Perhaps a projection of how the people themselves are perceived.
  - They want to distance themselves, so will do so however they can.
- How does this bias affect perception of actual linguistic differences?
  - Perhaps this the the very beginning of the development of indexicality?

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