

Is Idaho English really “the epitome of Average English”?

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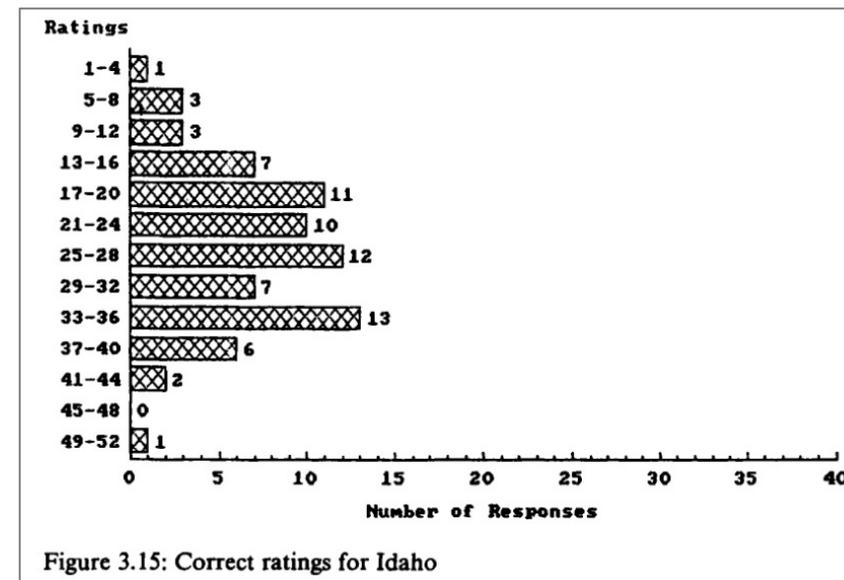
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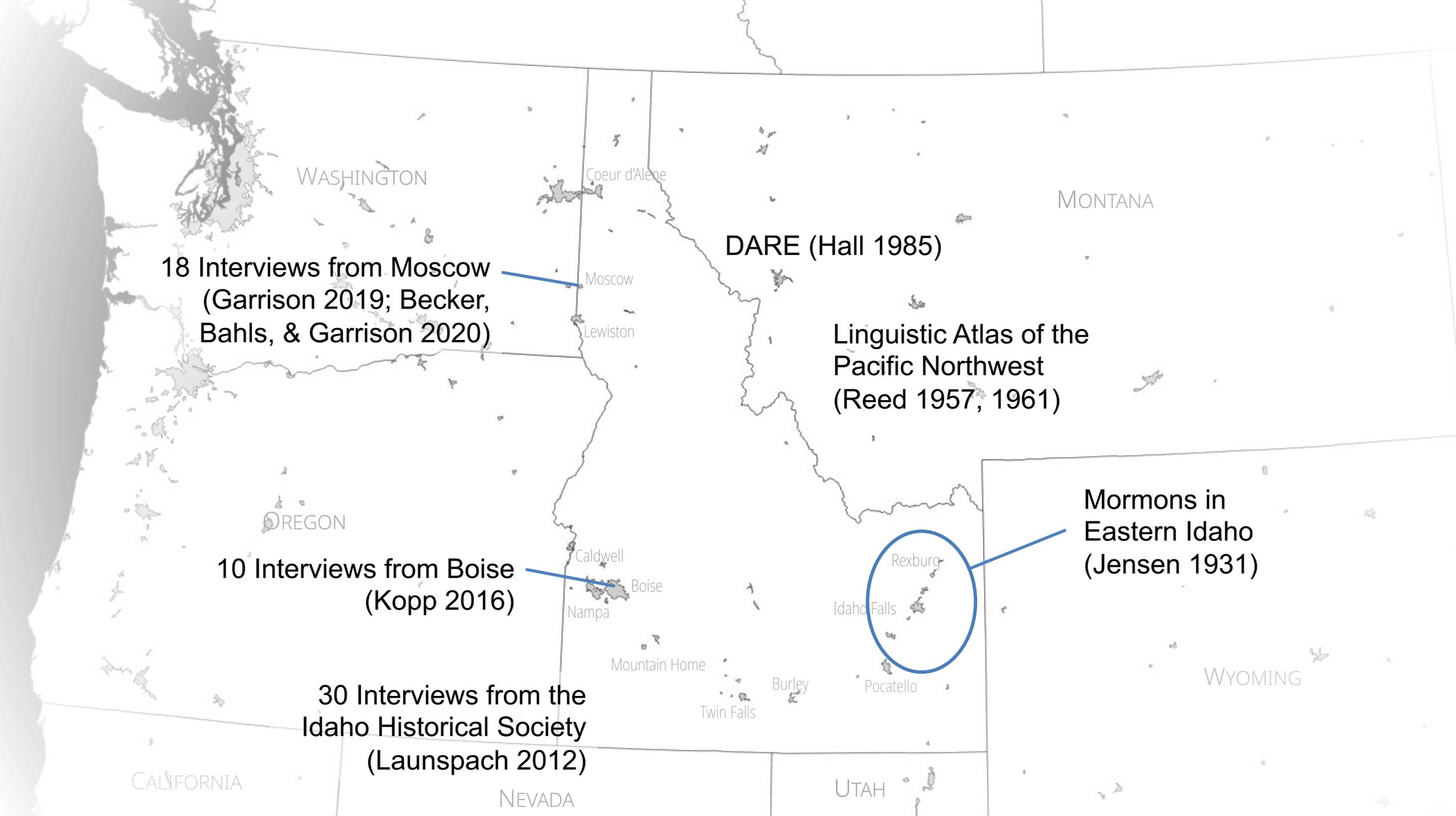
“Epitome of Average English”?

Preston (1989:64–65) chapter 3: “Where they speak correct English”

- Indianans ranked all 50 states’ English from most correct to least correct
- Mississippi’s ratings clustered low.
- Indiana’s ratings clustered high
- New York’s was bimodal.
- Florida’s was uniform.
- Idaho’s was normally distributed, centered around the middle.



“Idaho... [shows] a remarkably normal histogram... It is, apparently, the epitome of average English for these raters. Perhaps it is a least-caricatured state, meeting the negative definition of Standard English – the variety which displays no known non-standard elements.”



18 Interviews from Moscow
(Garrison 2019; Becker,
Bahls, & Garrison 2020)

DARE (Hall 1985)

**Linguistic Atlas of the
Pacific Northwest**
(Reed 1957, 1961)

10 Interviews from Boise
(Kopp 2016)

**Mormons in
Eastern Idaho**
(Jensen 1931)

**30 Interviews from the
Idaho Historical Society**
(Launspach 2012)

Our Research Questions

Is Idaho English just a northward extension of Utah English?

If not, is there anything that makes Idaho English stand out?

Methods

Linguistic Variables

Utah English features

- prelateral vowel mergers: *feel = fill* and *fail = fell* (Petersen 1988, Di Paolo & Faber 1990, Faber & Di Paolo 1995, Baker & Bowie 2010, Baker-Smemoe & Bowie 2015, Stanley & Johnson 2021)
- MOUNTAIN (*button, kitten, satin, etc.*): mainstream [ʔŋ], locally stigmatized variant [ʔɪn], hyperarticulated [t^hɪn] (Eddington & Savage 2012, Stanley & Vanderniet 2018, Eddington & Brown 2021, Stanley 2022)
- (ing): mainstream [ɪŋ], “g-dropped” [ɪn], VN+ [ɪŋk, ɪŋg], others [ɪn, ɪŋ^h, ɪŋ^ə] (Di Paolo & Johnson 2018)
- (thr)-flapping (*three, through, throw* etc.): [θɹɪ] vs. [θɹ] (Stanley 2019)
- t-insertion in /ls/ clusters: *fal[t]se, el[t]se, Nel[t]son, Che[t]sea, etc.* (Baker et al. 2009, Savage 2014, Stanley & Vanderniet 2018)

Pan-regional features

- *pull = pole = dull* (Baker & Bowie 2010, Baker-Smemoe & Bowie 2015, Strelluf 2016, Freeman & Landers 2021, Bowie 2000, Arnold 2014, Squizzero 2009, Labov, Ash, & Boberg 2006)
- LBMS (Becker 2019 and many, many others)
- back vowel fronting

Data

- Put these words into a 200-word wordlist
- Incorporated the wordlist into a survey
 - record themselves reading within the survey itself
 - Asked other questions too (not analyzed in this presentation)
- Distribution
 - Posted it to 14 Idaho-based subreddits (r/Idaho, r/Boise, r/NorthIdaho, r/BYUIdaho, etc)
 - 60 Idahoans, 119 Utahns, and 31 control

Processing

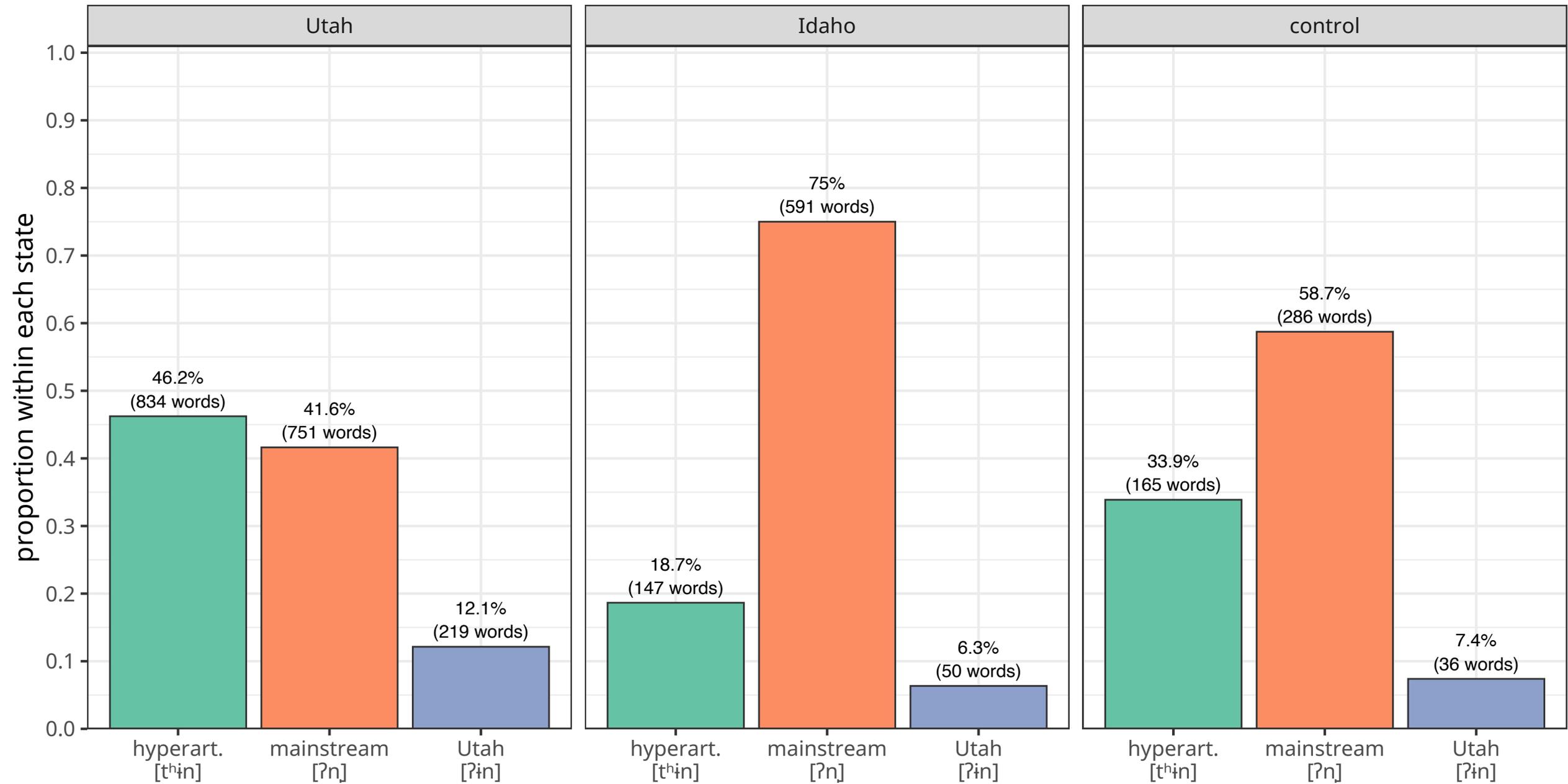
- Consonants
 - Listened to them, with the help of a spectrogram

- Vowels
 - Transcribed manually
 - Fast Track for formant extraction (Barreda 2021)
 - MFA for forced-alignment (McAuliffe et al. 2017)
 - Order of operations recommended by Stanley (2022)

Results

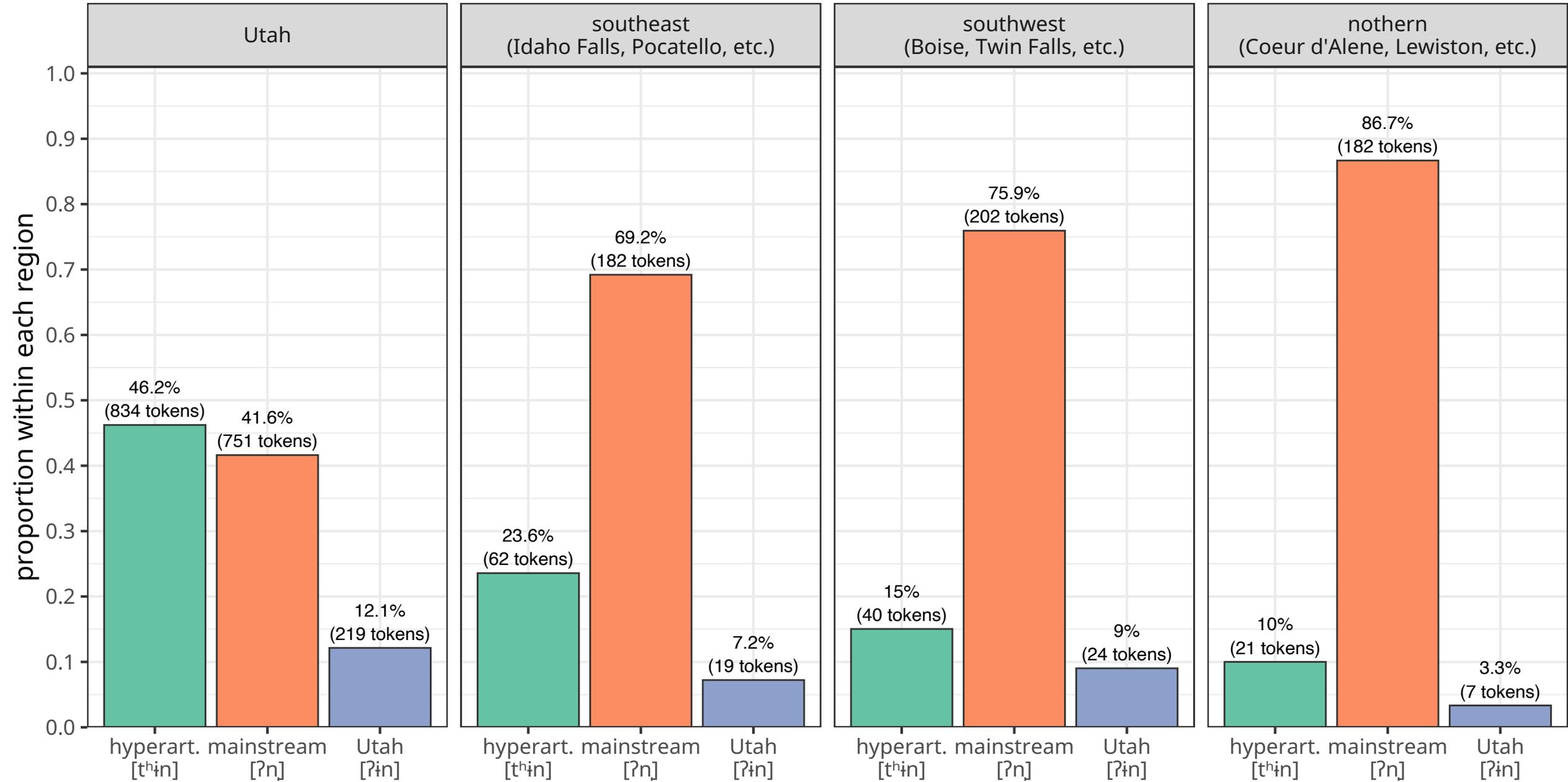
Realization of /tən/ in words like mountain, button, and satin

Based on 3079 words from 116 Utahns, 58 Idahoans, and 30 others



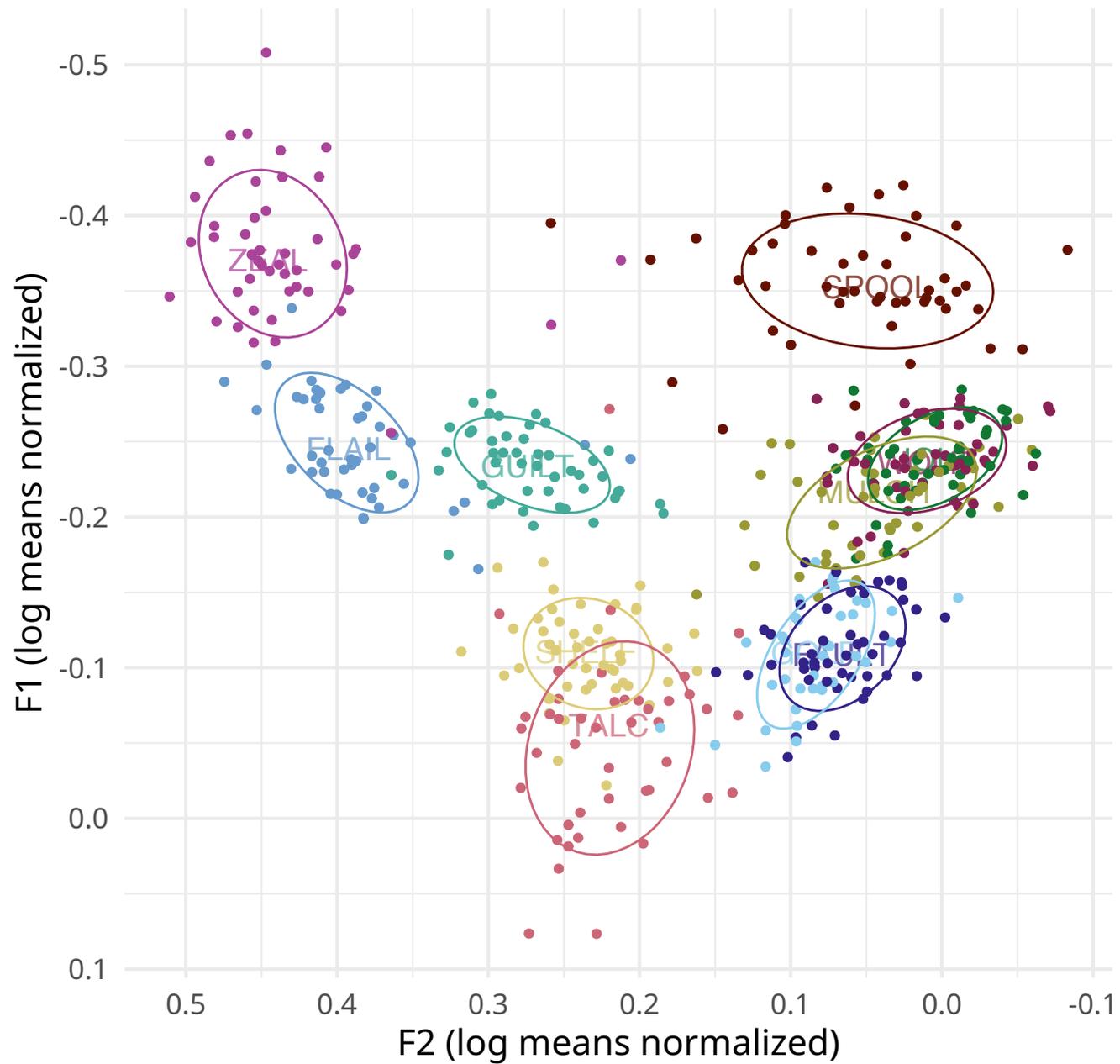
Realization of /tən/ in words like mountain, button, and satin by region within Idaho

Based on 2543 tokens from 116 Utahns and 55 Idahoans



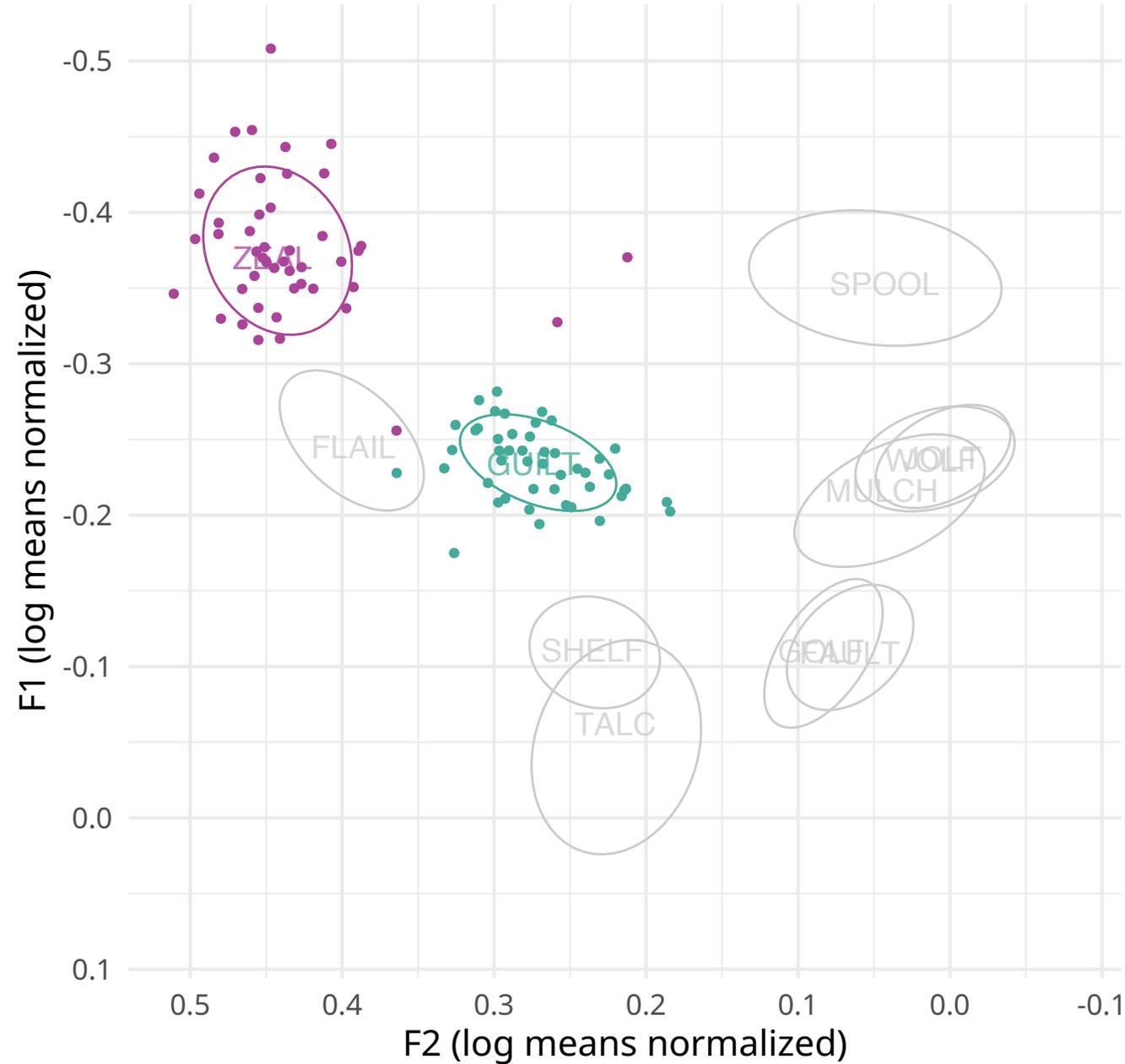
Prelateral allophones in Idaho

One point represents mean normalized F1-F2 measurements per speaker



ZEAL (/iɪl/) and GUILT (/ɪl/) in Idaho

One point represents mean normalized F1-F2 measurements per speaker

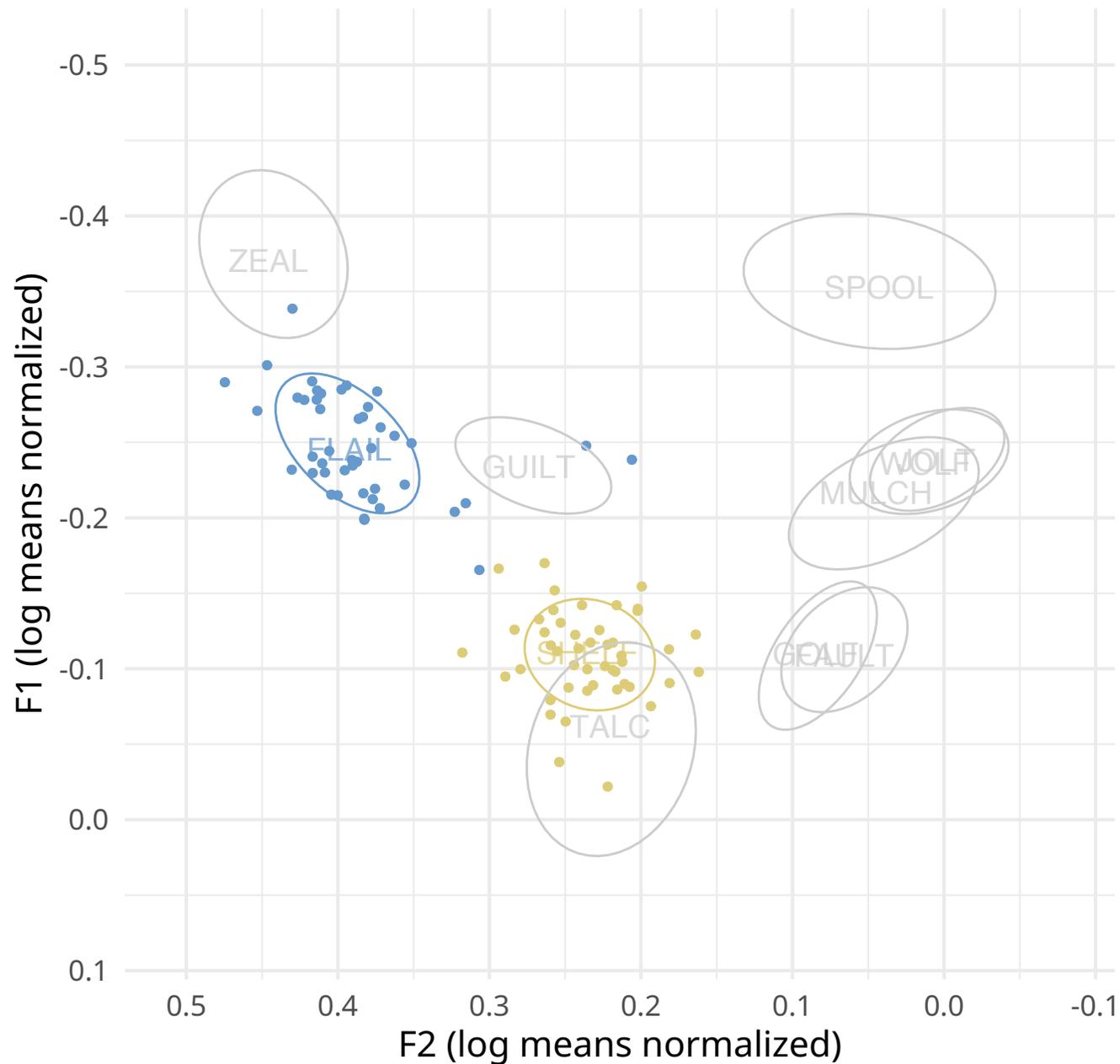


Pillai scores: 0.69–0.98
all p -values < 0.001

Calculated using the
bootstrapping technique
explained in Stanley & Sneller
(forthcoming)

FLAIL (/eɪ/) and SHELF (/ɛɪ/) in Idaho

One point represents mean normalized F1-F2 measurements per speaker

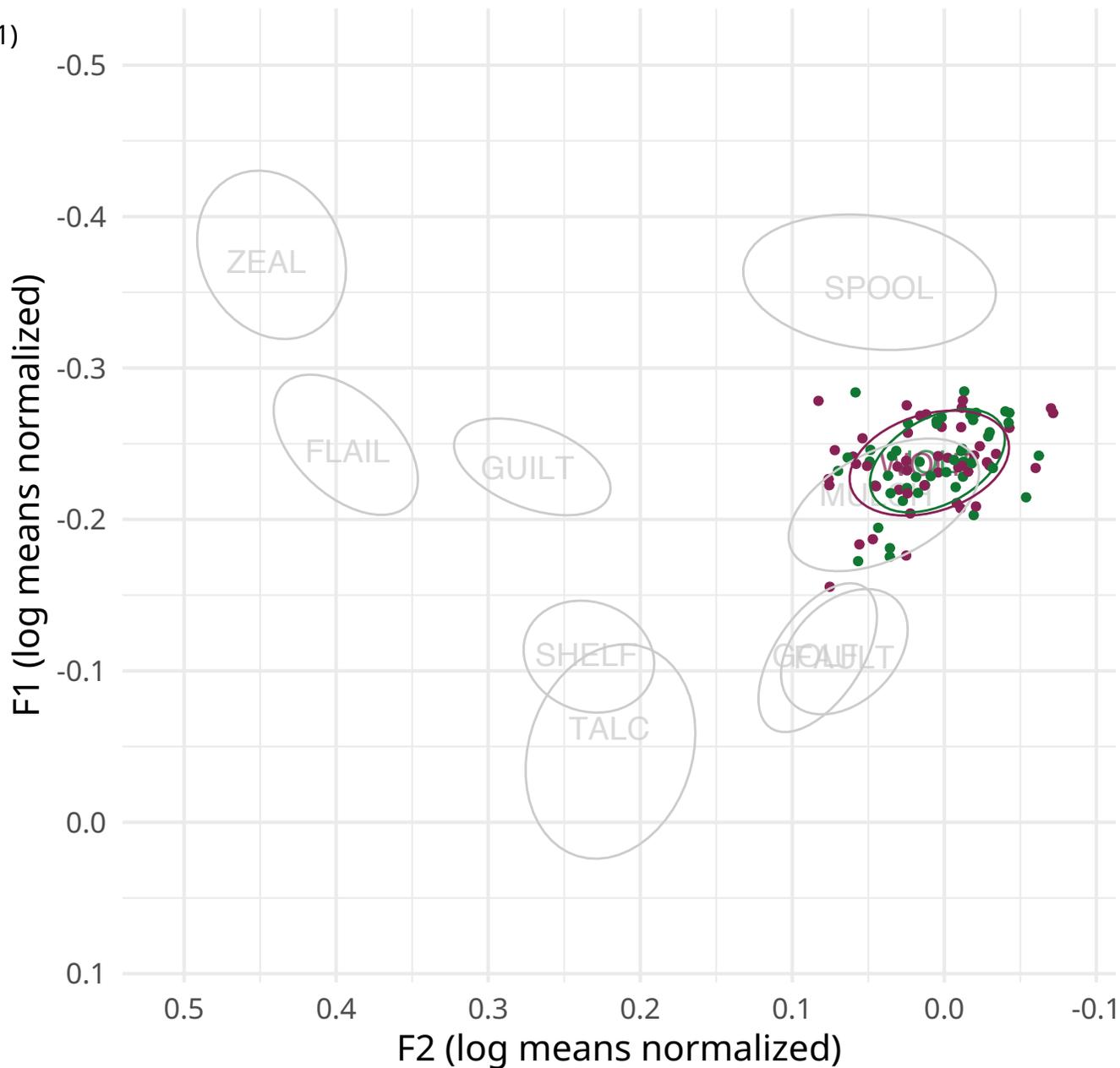


Pillai scores: 0.74–0.98
all p -values < 0.001

Calculated using the
bootstrapping technique
explained in Stanley & Sneller
(forthcoming)

WOLF (/ʊl/) and JOLT (/oɪ/) in Idaho

One point represents mean normalized F1-F2 measurements per speaker



Also found in:

Kansas City (Strelluf 2016)

Oklahoma (Freeman & Landers 2021)

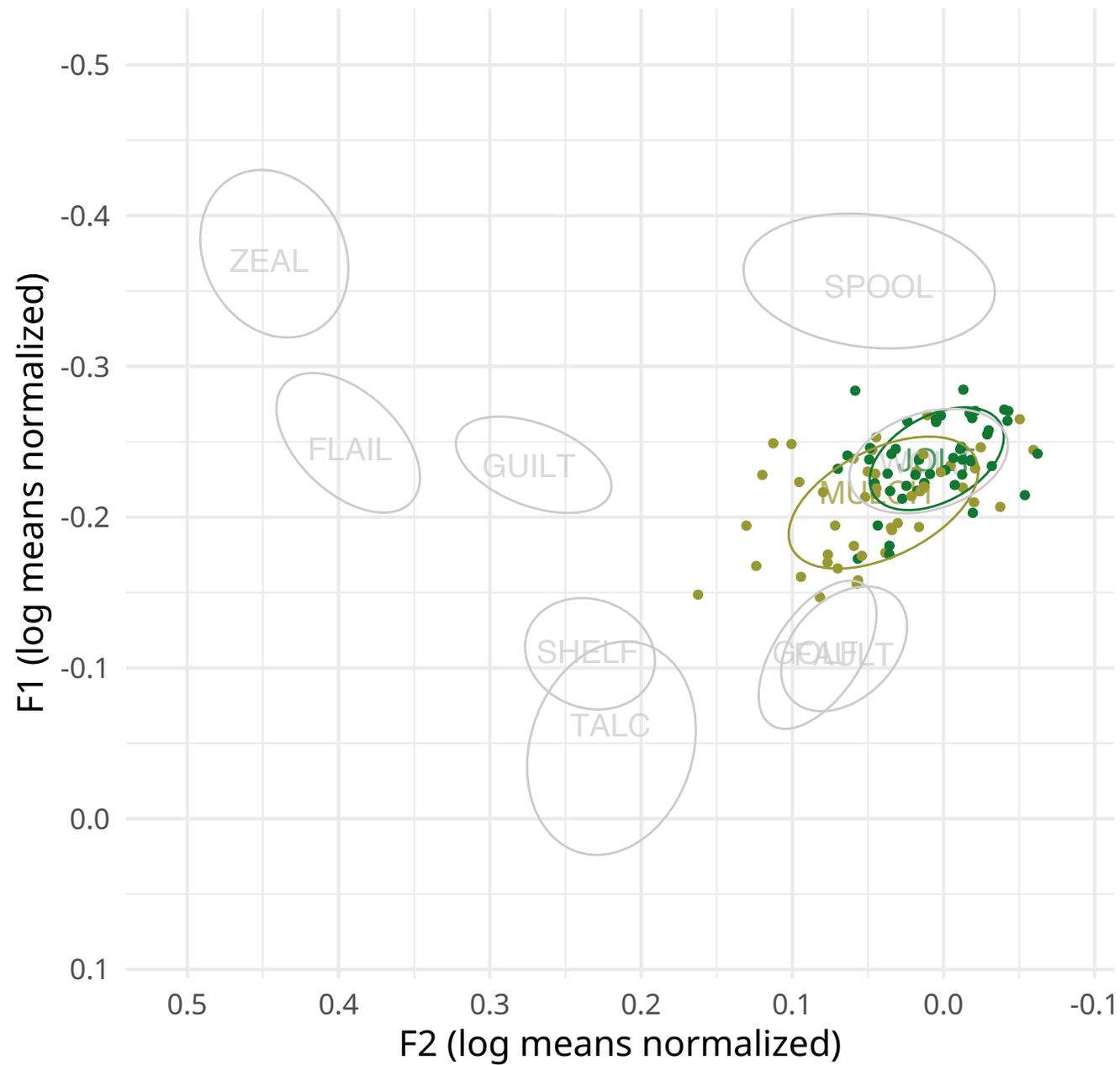
Maryland (Bowie 2000)

Ohio (Arnold 2014)

Washington (Squizzero 2009)

JOLT (/oɪ/) and MULCH (/ʌɪ/) in Idaho

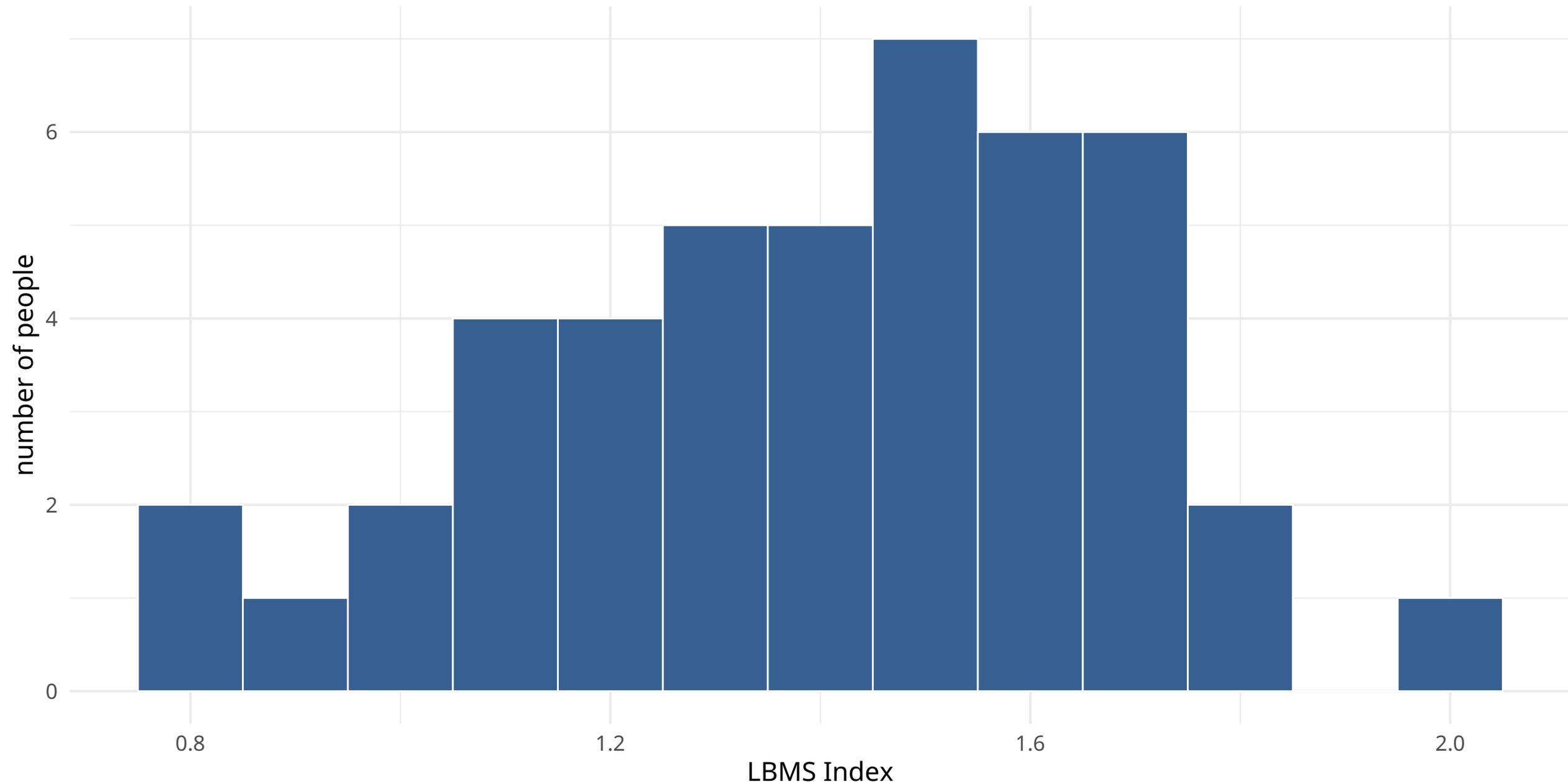
One point represents mean normalized F1-F2 measurements per speaker



LBMS Indices for 49 Idahoans

(cf. Becker 2019; Becker & Bahls 2019)

Calculated after following the order of operations in Stanley (2022)



Summary

- Utah variables

- *feel-fill* and *fail-fell* mergers: absent
- *mountain*: few stigmatized variants



Idaho avoids locally stigmatized variants.

- Pan-regional variables

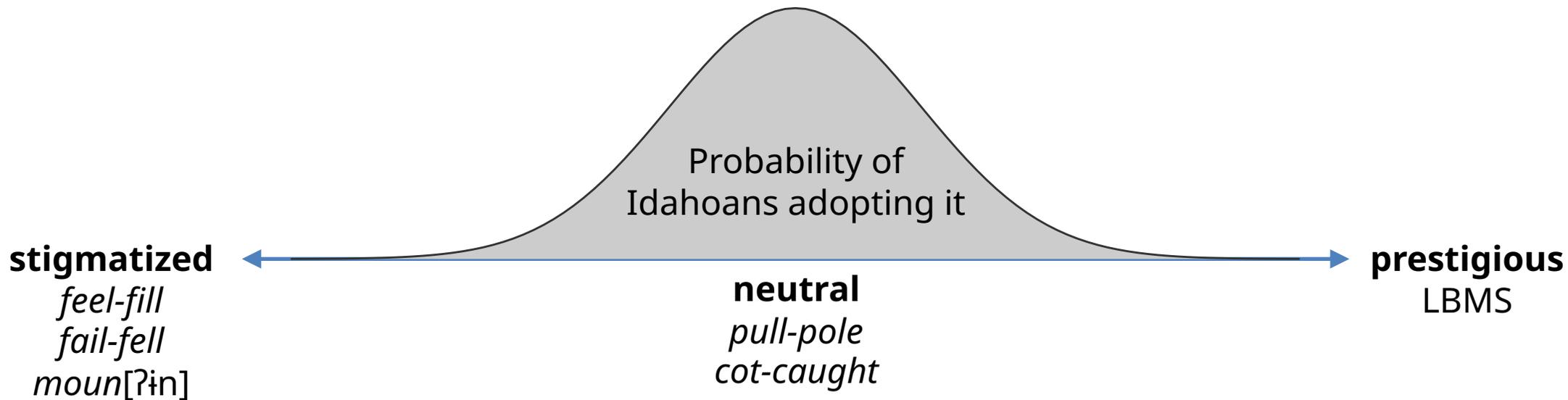
- *pull-pole* merger: widespread
- *pole-dull* merger: in progress
- LBMS: Relatively little shifting



For under-the-radar changes, Idaho is keeping up.



For socially charged changes, Idaho is behind the curve.



Discussion

Who cares?

- Our sample suggests there's nothing special about Idaho English.
- Perhaps avoidance of Utah-indexing features because of animosity towards Utah?
- Why is this oft-overlooked region so close to the standard?

Is Idaho English the epitome of average English?

“Idaho... is, apparently, the epitome of average English for these raters. Perhaps it is a least-caricatured state, meeting the negative definition of Standard English – the variety which displays no known non-standard elements.”

We find no evidence to suggest otherwise.

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*It sure
seems
like it!*

These slides are available at
joestanley.com/ads2023