# Utahns sound Utahn
# when they avoid sounding Utahn

Joseph A. Stanley

*Brigham Young University*

joeystanley.com

@joey_stan

# MOUNTAIN

- Today's sociolinguistic variable: realization of post-tonic, unstressed /tən/
  - e.g. *mountain*, *button*, *kitten*, *satin*
  - Hereafter, a Wellsesque inspired label: MOUNTAIN
  - Three main variants:

| [tʰɨn] | [ʔn̩] | [ʔɨn] |
|---|---|---|
| • aspirated alveolar stop + reduced vowel + nasal | • glottal stop + syllabic nasal | • glottal stop + reduced vowel + nasal |
| • AmE citation form, formal, careful | • AmE standard, casual, typical. | • Non-mainstream: found in Utah, New York, and scattered elsewhere |
| • Probably accessible by most speakers. | • The most common for probably all speakers. | (Roberts 2006, Freeman et al. 2012, Eddington & Brown 2021, Davidson et al. 2021) |

# MOUNTAIN in Utah

- In Utah, [ʔɨn] occurs ≈15% of the time
  - Eddington & Savage (2012): 17%, mostly in young females
  - Eddington & Brown (2019): 12%, mostly in younger people
  - Stanley & Vanderniet (2018): 12.7%, only among women

- But, [tʰɨn] is not analyzed in depth
  - Stanley & Vanderniet (2018) point out that it's used more than [ʔɨn] is.
  - Other work on MOUNTAIN in Utah has not acknowledged this third variant.

# Today, I want to show you that…

1. Hyperarticulated [tʰɨn] is the most common variant in Utah.

2. This pattern is uniquely Utahn.

3. This arose because of stigma "erroneously" associated with the glottal stop.

# Data and Methods

# Acoustic Data

- 200-item wordlist
  - Included 17 MOUNTAIN words: *Britain, button, certain, Clinton, cotton, fountain, gluten, kitten, Latin, mitten, mountain, potent, satin, Scranton, sentence, threaten, titan*

- Remote audio collection
  - Qualtrics survey with a Phonic plug-in allowed for audio collection
  - Participants recorded on their own devices
  - Audio quality was variable but overall pretty good (cf Stanford 2019)

- Distribution
  - Posted it to 38 Utah-related subreddits (r/Utah, r/SouthernUtah, r/BYU, r/SaltLakeCity, etc)
  - 116 born-and-raised Utahns completed the survey: 1,808 tokens

# Processing

I just listened to each one, using spectrograms when necessary.

(I'd love your ideas on what acoustic measures I could take to quantify this better!)
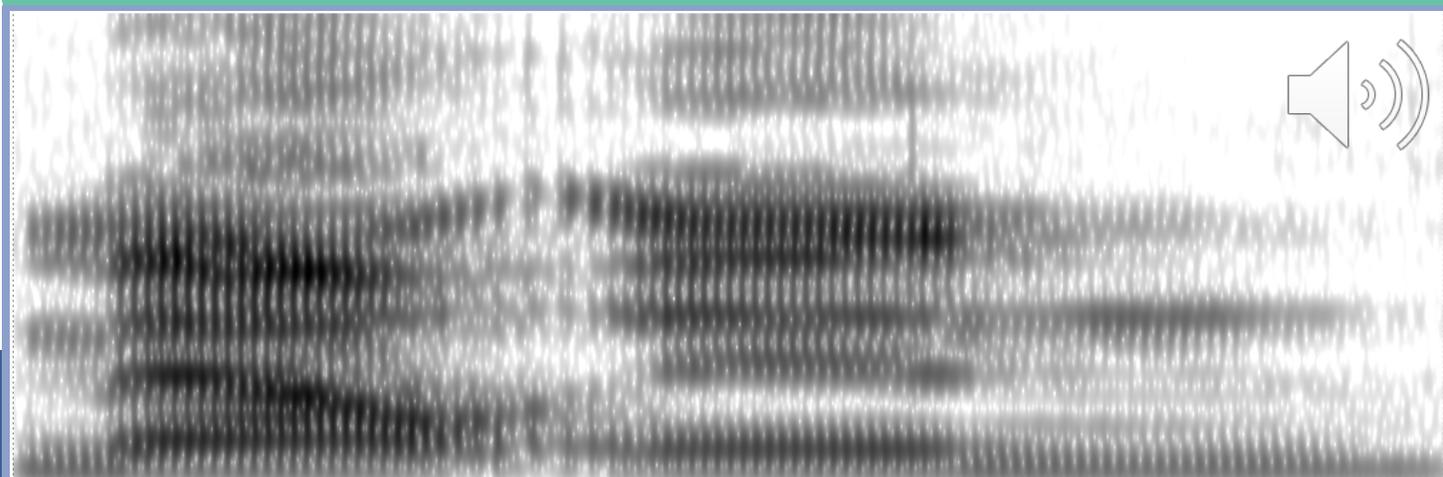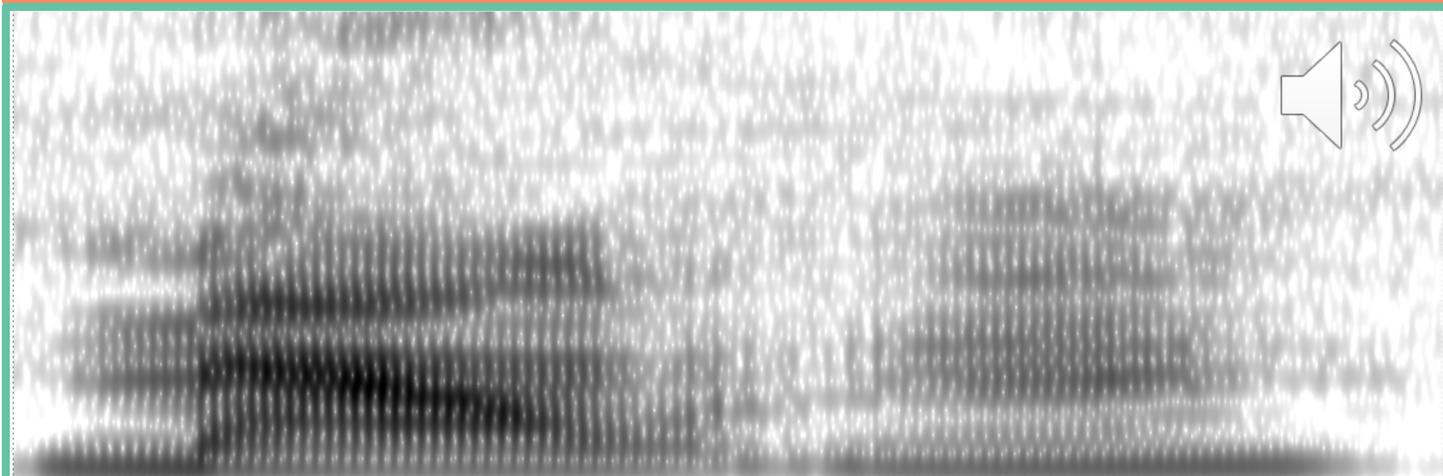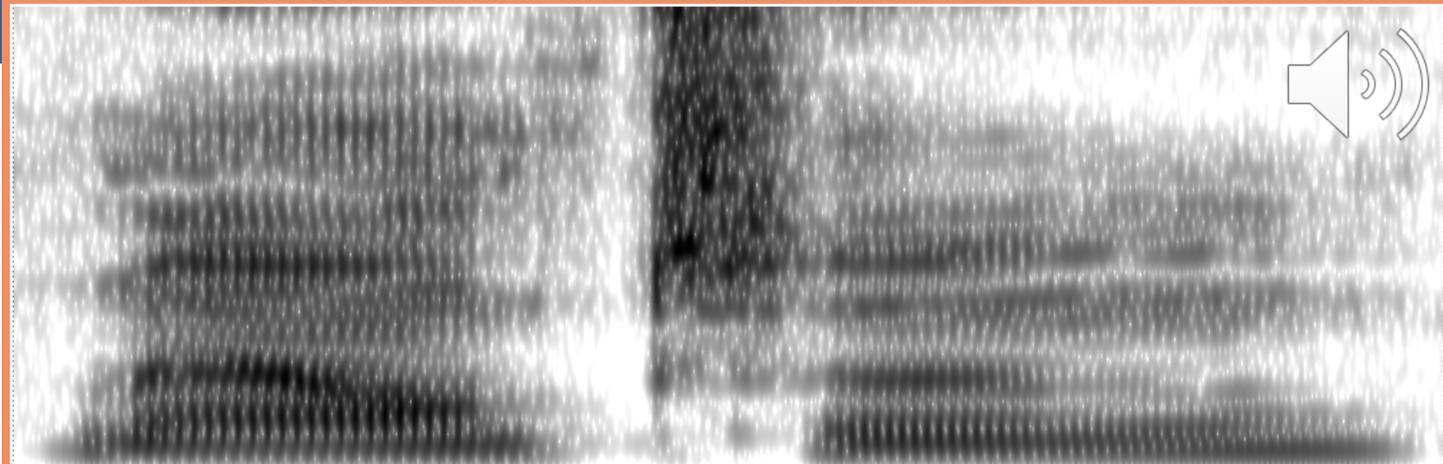
# Attitudinal Data

- After the wordlist, they were asked to respond to several open-ended questions (cf. Holland & Brandenburg 2017)
  - Most important for this study: "Do you think Utah has its own accent?"
  - Total: 18,530 words, 2h 4m of audio
  - Median response: 143 words, 74 seconds

- Qualitative coding
  - Does Utah have an accent?
  - Was rurality mentioned?
  - Specific places that were mentioned.
  - Linguistic features mentioned, alluded to, imitated, etc.
  - What specifically about MOUNTAIN was mentioned?

# Results

# Mainstream vs. Utah variants
## Based on 1808 wordlist tokens from 116 Utahns
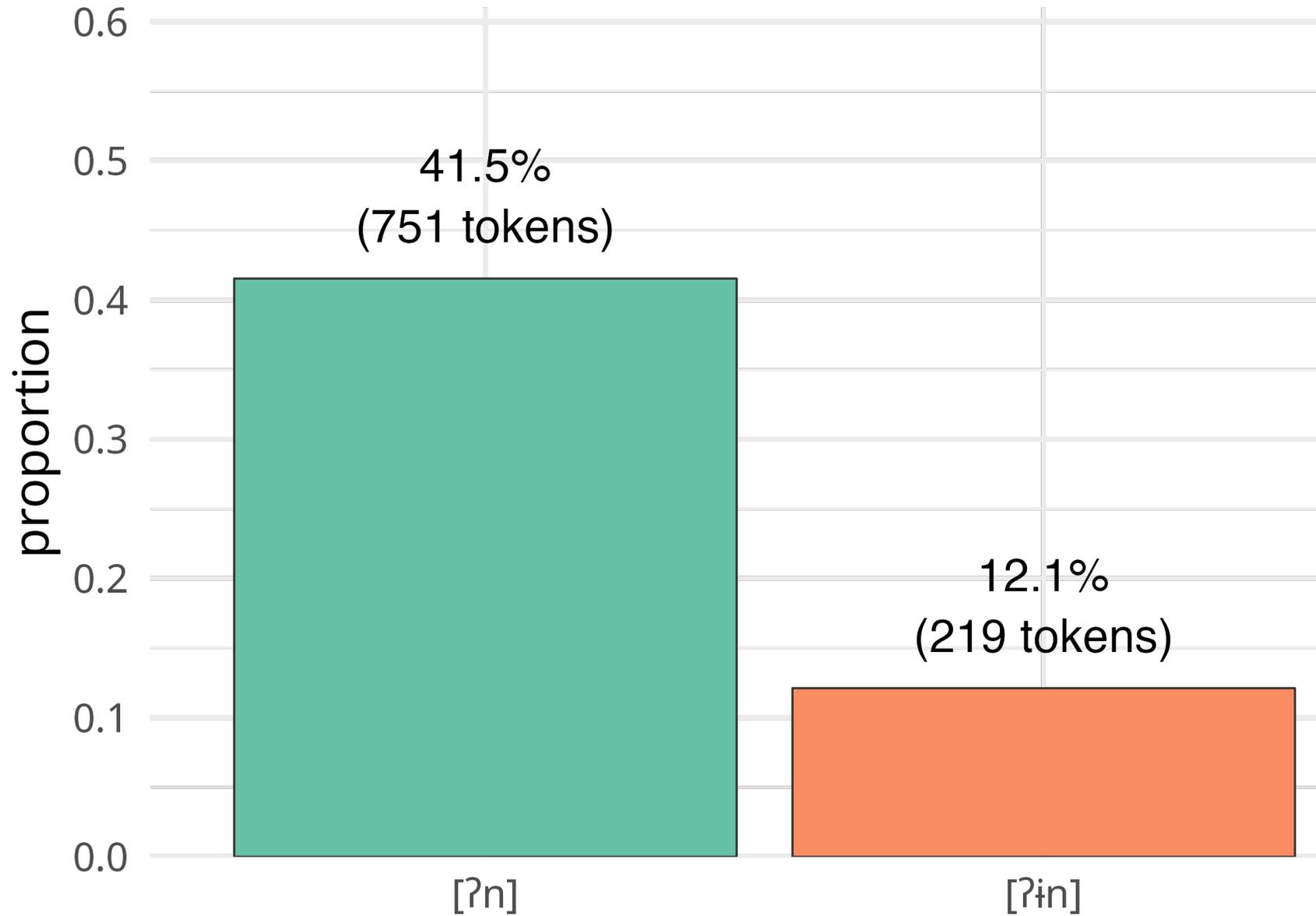
# Proportion of people who mentioned MOUNTAIN
## Based on the 104 Utahns who completed that portion of the survey



This checks out
(cf. Stanley 2022)

proportion of participants

yes

no

did not mention
specific linguistic features

Did they mention MOUNTAIN?
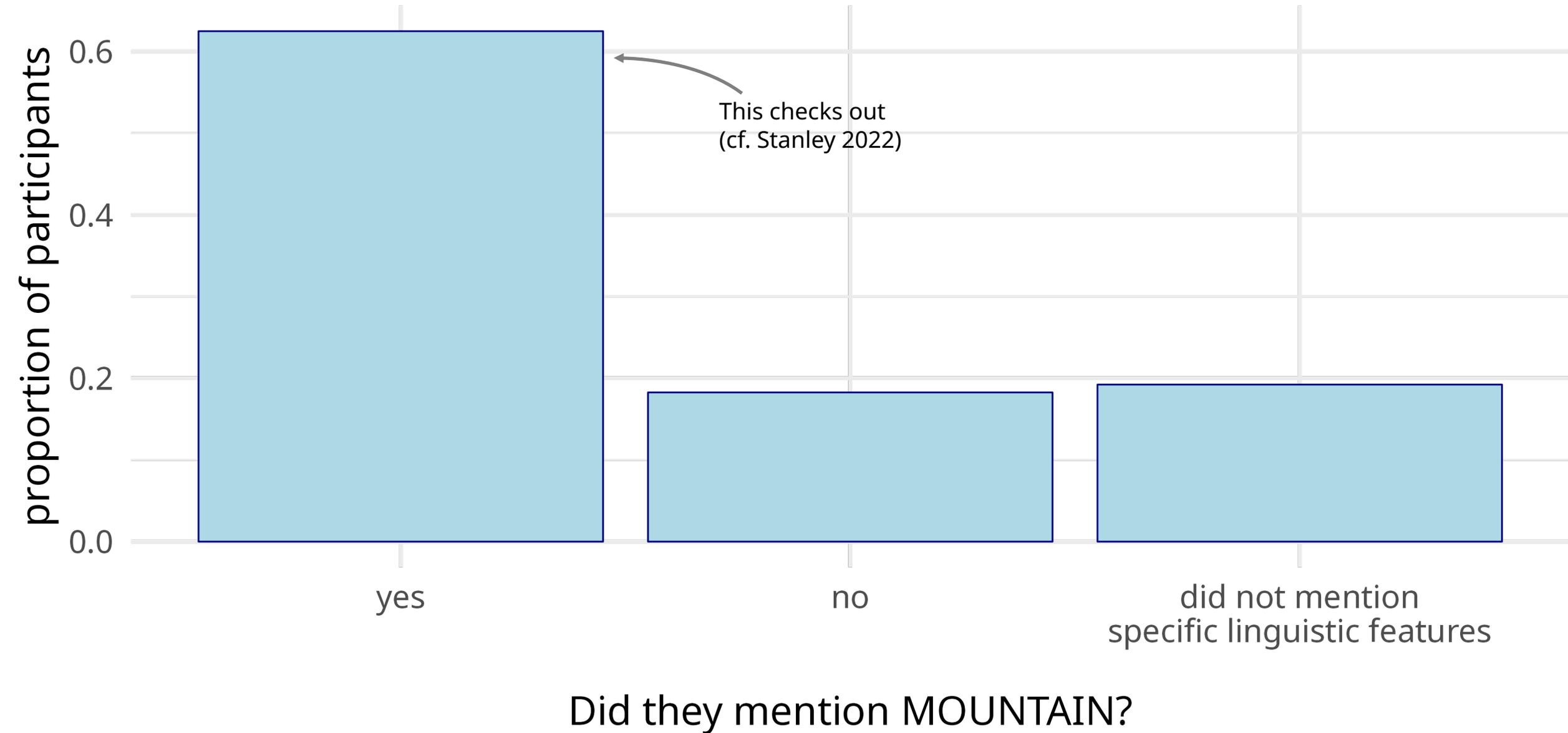
# Mainstream vs. Utah variants
## Based on 1808 wordlist tokens from 116 Utahns

# Mainstream vs. Utah variants
Based on 1808 wordlist tokens from 116 Utahns



proportion

41.5%
(751 tokens)

12.1%
(219 tokens)

46.3%
(838 tokens)

[ʔn]                    [ʔɨn]                   [tʰɨn]
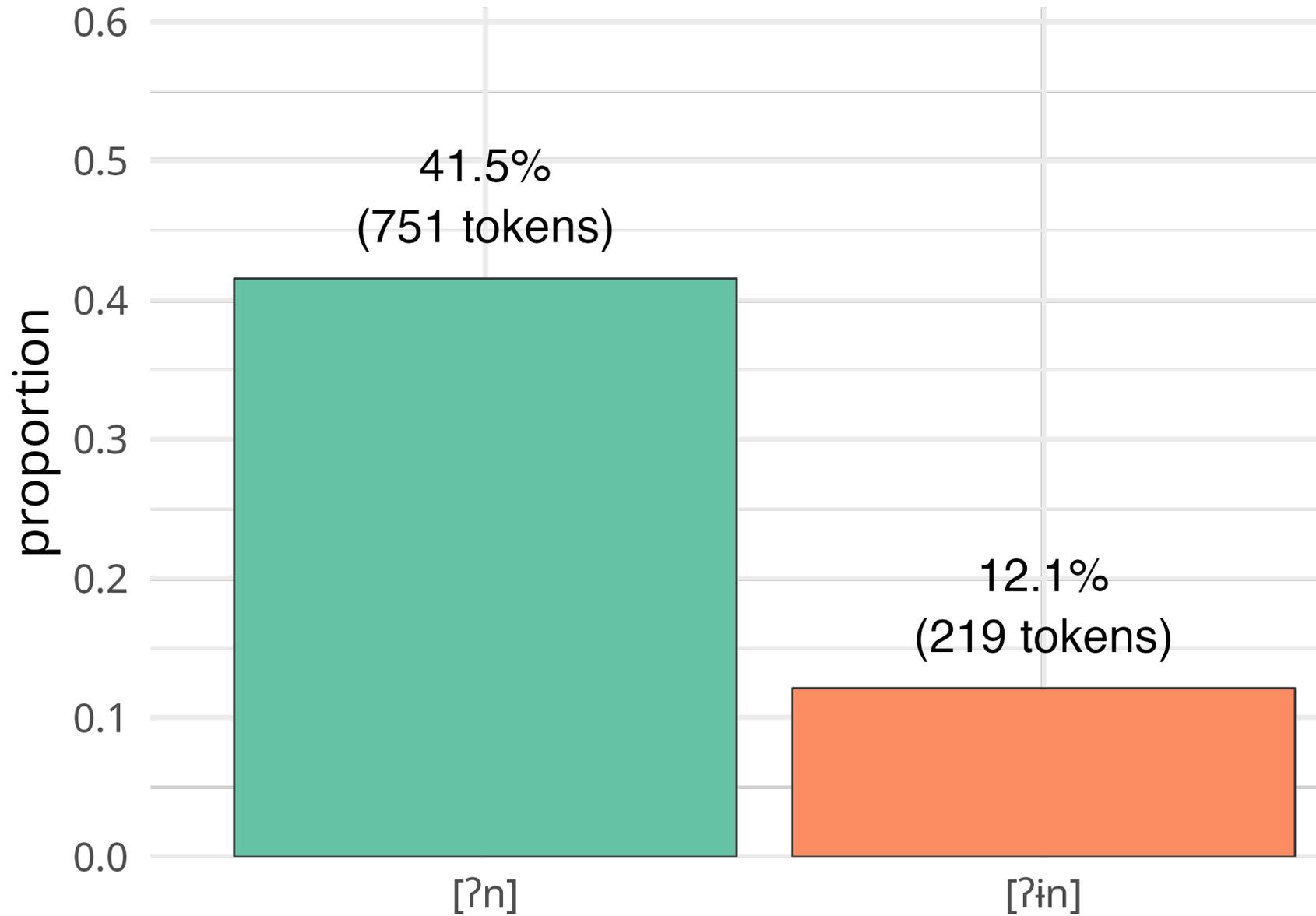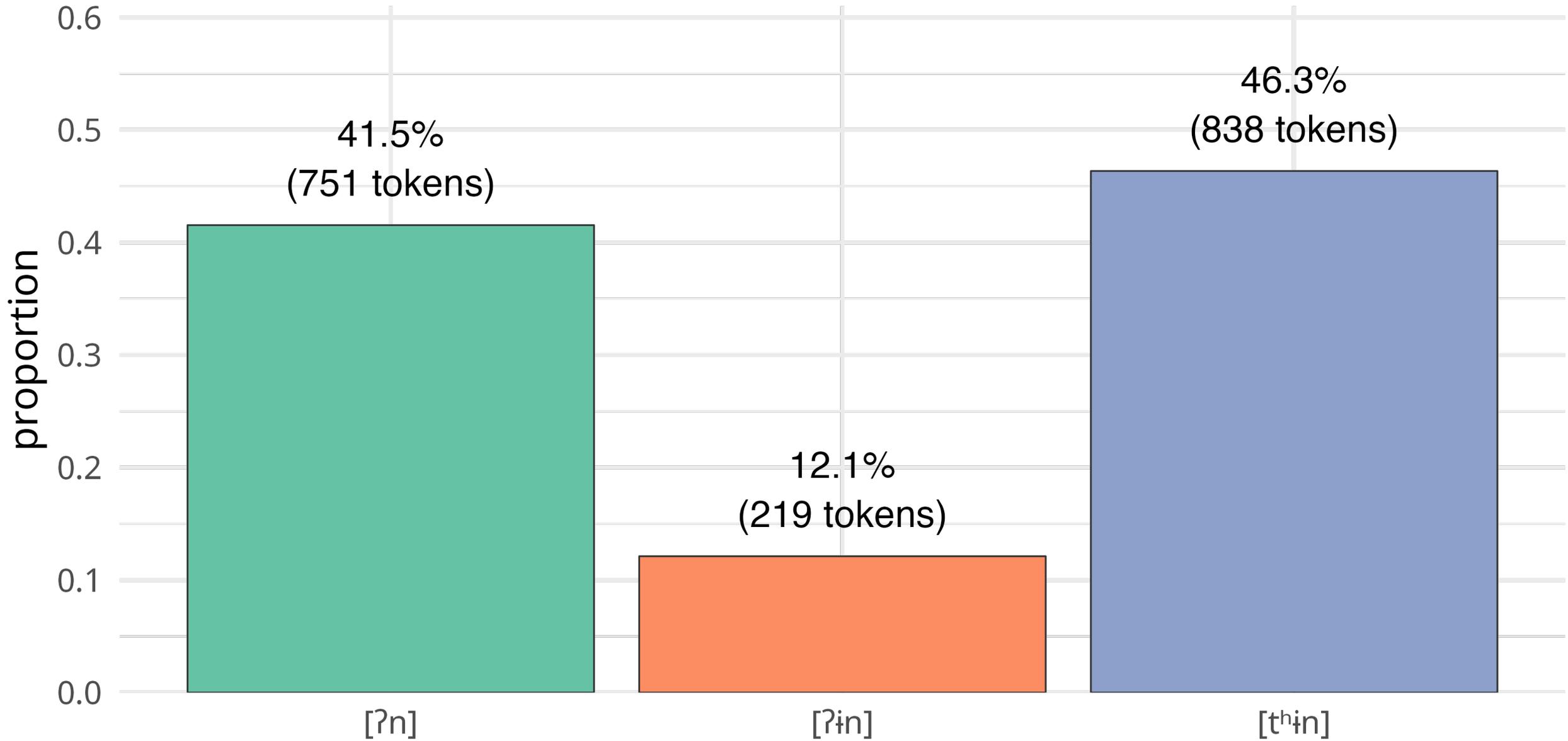
# Control Group

- Also posted it to Idaho-, Montana-, and Wyoming-based subreddits.

  – Same questions and a similar wordlist, though not identical.

  – 162 people across the three states

- Also posted it to r/SampleSize

  – Same wordlist; abbreviated questionnaire

  – 31 people

# Overall proportion of variants
## Based on 4,517 words from 299 people



Figure: Grouped bar chart showing proportion within each state for the variants [ʔn], [ʔɨn], and [tʰɨn] across Utah, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and elsewhere.

**Utah**
- [ʔn]: 41.5% (751 tokens)
- [ʔɨn]: 12.1% (219 tokens)
- [tʰɨn]: 46.3% (838 tokens) — "style effects" / ?

**Idaho**
- [ʔn]: 71.2% (593 tokens)
- [ʔɨn]: 6% (50 tokens)
- [tʰɨn]: 22.8% (190 tokens)

**Montana**
- [ʔn]: 75% (748 tokens)
- [ʔɨn]: 1.5% (15 tokens)
- [tʰɨn]: 23.5% (234 tokens)

**Wyoming**
- [ʔn]: 61.5% (241 tokens)
- [ʔɨn]: 9.9% (39 tokens)
- [tʰɨn]: 28.6% (112 tokens)

**elsewhere**
- [ʔn]: 58.7% (286 tokens)
- [ʔɨn]: 7.4% (36 tokens)
- [tʰɨn]: 33.9% (165 tokens)

y-axis: proportion within each state

# The Story of MOUNTAIN

# The Story

1. Utah [ʔɨn] develops.
2. Utah [ʔɨn] is stigmatized
3. Hyperarticulated [tʰɨn] is correct and glottal stops are bad
4. Utah has no accent
5. Mainstream [ʔn̩] is Utahn
6. Mainstream [ʔn̩] is stigmatized

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I'm pretty sure that before I moved here I said *moun*[ʔɨn] and *Lay*[ʔɨn]. But I have been made aware of them. And so I have said them correctly now.

"Jane", female, b. 1963, White, Logan, practicing Mormon, rural-oriented

So I have like a memory being being at Disneyland wanting to ride Space Moun[ʔɨn]. And my mom said she didn't know what that ride was. And I did not understand that she was trying to get me to say the *t* in *moun*[tʰɨn]. So it was like a big fight. Slight meltdown. She laughed a little bit. Apologized. And said, "I was just trying to get you to say *moun*[tʰɨn] instead of *moun*[ʔn̩]."

"Skylar", female, b. 1998, White, South Weber, practicing Mormon, suburban-oriented

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Do I think I have an accent? Yeah, I actually do. Like when I say words like *moun*[ʔɨn]. *chuckles* Um, I know a lot of other people say *moun*[tʰɨn]. I think we're just a little bit lazy on our pronunciation.

"Sylvia", female, b. 1984, White, Blanding, "other" religious affiliation, suburban-oriented

Um, Utah County is pretty heavy on the glotteral [sic] stop. That ugly *t.* *chuckles* Um, uh, or lack thereof, I suppose.

"Deborah", female, b. 1989, White, Highland, ex-Mormon, suburban-oriented

However, I try very hard to not sound, uh like I'm from the country or like I'm a hick. I often run into that in Utah, people don't pronounce their *t*'s. My mother was very specific about us speaking, um, formally, I suppose.

"Anastasia", female, b. 1987, White, Logan, ex-Mormon, urban-oriented

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My like most natural speaking tone, the way that I'm talking now, I wouldn't say is a noticeably different speech pattern from, yeah, the kind of accent that's used on TV or on the news.

"Kelsie", female, b. 1994, White, Payson, non-practicing Mormon, small town–oriented

Yeah, I feel like I have an accent. Uh, the Hollywood accent. Super lucky that pretty much everywhere we go, our English accent is super understandable.

"Deborah", female, b. 1989, White, Highland, ex-Mormon, suburban-oriented

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

"Louis", male, b. 1997, White, Bountiful, practicing Mormon, small town–oriented

What I've noticed is that there's a swallowing of *t*'s a lot more in younger people these days. That- I don't recall that as much from when I was a kid. Y'know people will say *moun*[ʔn̩], *Clin*[ʔn̩], that kinda thing, where the *t* is swallowed.

"Douglas", male, b. 1965, White, West Jordan, non- Mormon, urban-oriented

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There have also been some conscious things over my life. Like, I've cons- consciously tried to say the word *moun*[tʰɨn] instead of *moun*[ʔn̩]. But I feel like my natural tendency is to- is to say *moun*[ʔn̩]. But I prefer saying *moun*[tʰɨn] because I think it sounds better. And so there are little things over the t- my time um, being alive that I've just adjusted um to kinda be more neutral and more pleasing.

"Mayra", female, b. 1990, White, Orem, ex-Mormon, suburban-oriented

There's certain words that I've tried not to say. Like I used to have more of a Utah accent with *moun*[tʰ]- *moun*[ʔn̩]. And then people kinda made fun of it. So I started trying more to pronounce the *t* and I specifically say *moun*[tʰɨn] with the *t*.

"Charity", female, b. 1986, White, unspecified Utah, ex-Mormon, suburban-oriented

# Overall proportion of variants
## Based on 4,517 words from 299 people



Utah | Idaho | Montana | Wyoming | elsewhere

proportion within each state

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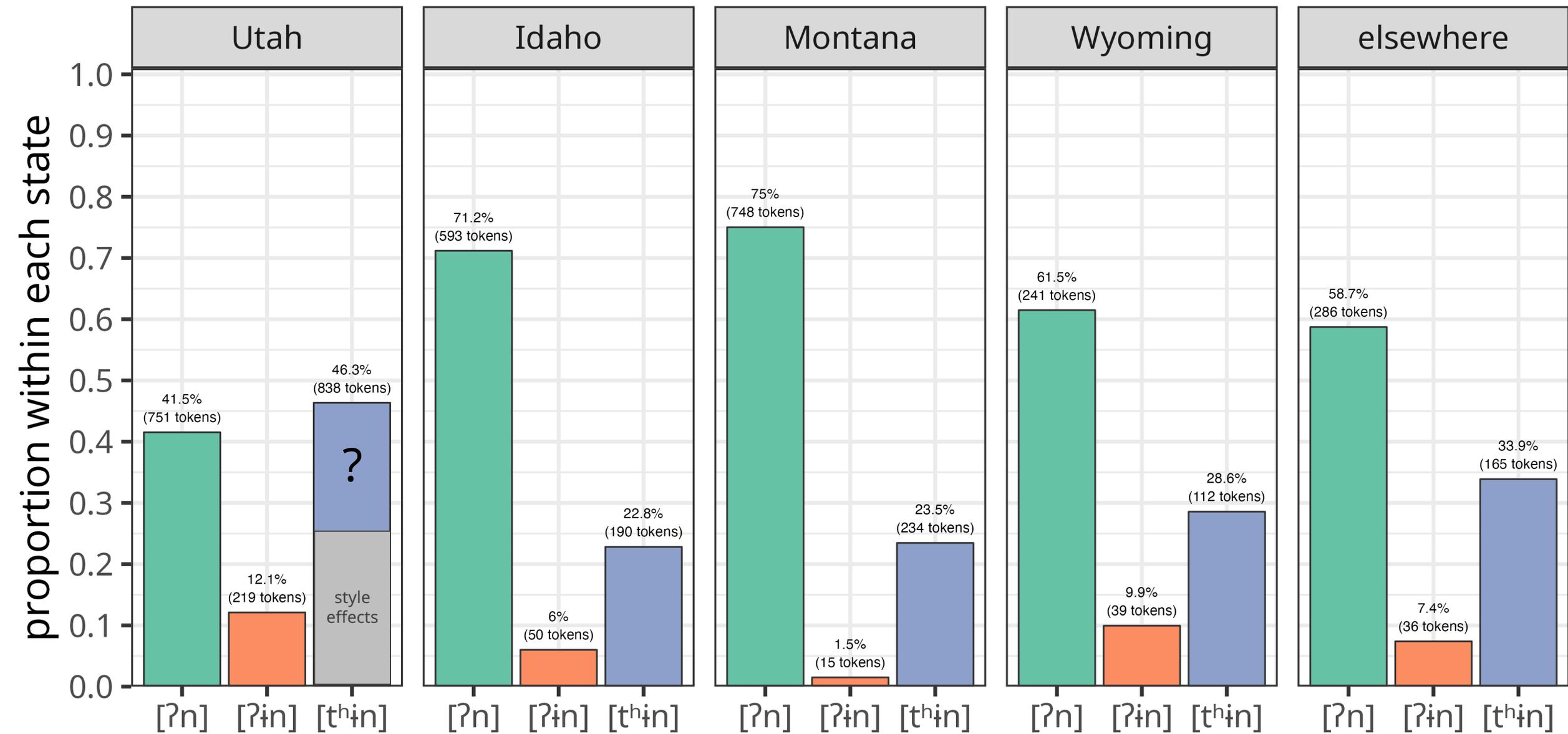
# Discussion

# Shibboleth in Utah

- A rare(?) case of the mainstream variant being so overtly stigmatized.

- Unlike other areas, where they don't hear the non-standardness of their speech (Niedzelski 1999), they fail to hear the "non-standard" variants in others' speech.
  - They're unaware of what the mainstream variant even is.
  - "Your brain gets in the way of your ear." (Preston 2018)

- They hypercorrect towards a fictitious standard.

# Hopefully, I've convinced you that…

1. Hyperarticulated [tʰɨn] is the most common variant in Utah.

2. This pattern is uniquely Utahn.

3. This arose because of stigma "erroneously" associated with the glottal stop.

# References

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# when they avoid sounding Utahn

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*Brigham Young University*

joeystanley.com

@joey_stan

These slides area available at

joeystanley.com/lsa2023

# Bonus Quotes

You don't believe in 'T'. Not tea, but the letter 't' — because as far as you can tell from your neighbors, **you live in 'Lay'on' by the 'moun'in.'**

Dan Kunz. MatadorNetwork.com.
March 13, 2015.

**Mountain= Mown'un: How could this NOT be the number one Utah-ism?** The dropped T is infamous. But it doesn't just drop, it almost makes a staccato sound where the T should be when pronounced.

20 words you need to know how to pronounce in Utah. *Daily Herald*. December 20, 2016.

Another thing I notice about Utah accents is that **we drop or swallow the "nt" combination - as in mountain** - which ends up sounding like "mou in".

UtahRoots. Comment to a post on city-data.com. January 13, 2011.

I have noticed that, in some cases, people from Utah **omit the 't' from words such as 'Layton' and 'mountain.'**

bill999. Question asked on English Language & Usage Stack Exchange. July 22, 2014

exmo88: My ex-mo family left Utah in 1964. Over the years, I couldn't help but notice the accent people from Utah have. Is it predominately Mormon or is it all of Utah? One thing's for sure, it's very distinct.

Readbooks6: **Moun-en instead of mountain. The "t's" disappear.**

bananajr6000: Yup, that's a classic one

Reddit exchange in r/exmormon. 2015.

**"Mou'uns" is a dead giveaway you're talking to a Utahn.**

Comment by BizarroBednar on a Reddit post in r/exmormon by exmo88. 2015.

The most egregious of course that, I'm sure that you and other people who talk about this are aware is, the Utah accent when people drop the *t*'s that are in the middle of words like *moun*[ʔɨn] and *cur*[ʔɨn].

Unfortunately, even though I'm from Utah I was raised by a father that really, really hated when I said stuff like that. And so I actually do say *moun*[tʰɨn] and *cur*[tʰɨn].

"Cooper", male, b. 2002, White, Orem,
ex-Mormon, unknown rural/urban orientation

Even from like a young age I got kind of scolded by my parents because I'd say *moun*[ʔɨn] instead of *moun*[tʰɨn].

"Makenna", female, b. 2002, Asian American, Salt Lake City, non-Mormon, suburban-oriented

Um, but most of the time I feel like especially my generation or my age and younger have very like normalized, that takes out all of more of the variation in language, um, in pronunciation.

"Cecilia", female, b. 1995, White, Orem, nonpracticing Mormon, urban-oriented

Going to high school with a bunch of kids from Hill Air Force Base, so they'd been all over the United States, and um, they talked, like, just kinda y'know like, y'know how people talk on TV, I mean, I would say that they talk more of a American standard I guess just from living all over the United States and sometimes overseas.

But the longer they lived here I notice that they would start dropping *t*'s.

"Skylar", female, b. 1998, White, South Weber, practicing Mormon, suburban-oriented

People say like *moun*[tʰɨn] is pronounced differently in Utah. Like some people say *moun*[ʔn̩] and like *drinking foun*[ʔn̩] and stuff like that.

"Antonio", male, b. 2000, Latino, Provo, ex-Mormon, urban-oriented

I feel like the accent is typically demonstrated in words like *moun*[tʰɨn]. Uh, I'm saying it there with, with correct diction. Uh, but I feel like often the Utah accent skips over the *t* in *moun*[tʰɨn] and in other words as well, uh, like *bu*[ʔn̩], *bu*[tʰɨn], *bu*[ʔn̩].

"Braxton", male, b. 1998, White, North Logan,
practicing Mormon, suburban-oriented

I do think I have an accent. And I kinda embrace it. I tried not to have it for a long time. But I definitely say *moun*[ʔn̩] and I say *bu*[ʔn̩]. And I have no shame about it.

"Lynn", female, b. 1969, White, Provo,
nonpracticing Mormon, suburban-oriented

But, definitely Utahns are known for dropping the *t*'s in *Lay*[ʔn̩], *moun*[ʔn̩], stuff like that and I, I know I do that. Um I catch myself doing that. And I do correct myself depending on who I'm with. For example, I work with ESL kids at a middle school during the school year and I am very careful when I'm reading with them to pronounce words correctly as they are writ[ʔn̩], rather than defaulting to my normal spoken accent. Um, so it's something that I'm aware of and I know that I can correct it.

"Charlene", female, b. 1982, White, Salt Lake City, practicing Mormon, suburban-oriented