

Utah English Pronunciation

Contemporary Utah English

- Most work is based along the urbanized Wasatch Front.
 - Salt Lake Valley (Di Paolo & Faber 1990, Sykes 2010, Borders 2015)
 - Utah Valley (Baker & Bowie 2010, Reeves 2009)
- Unspecified/many regions (Lillie 1998, Antieau 2011, Eddington & Savage 2012, Eddington & Brown 2021, Eddington 2023, Stanley & Vanderniet 2018, Stanley 2019)
- Relatively little focus on rural Utah (though see Call 2022, Jepson 2024)

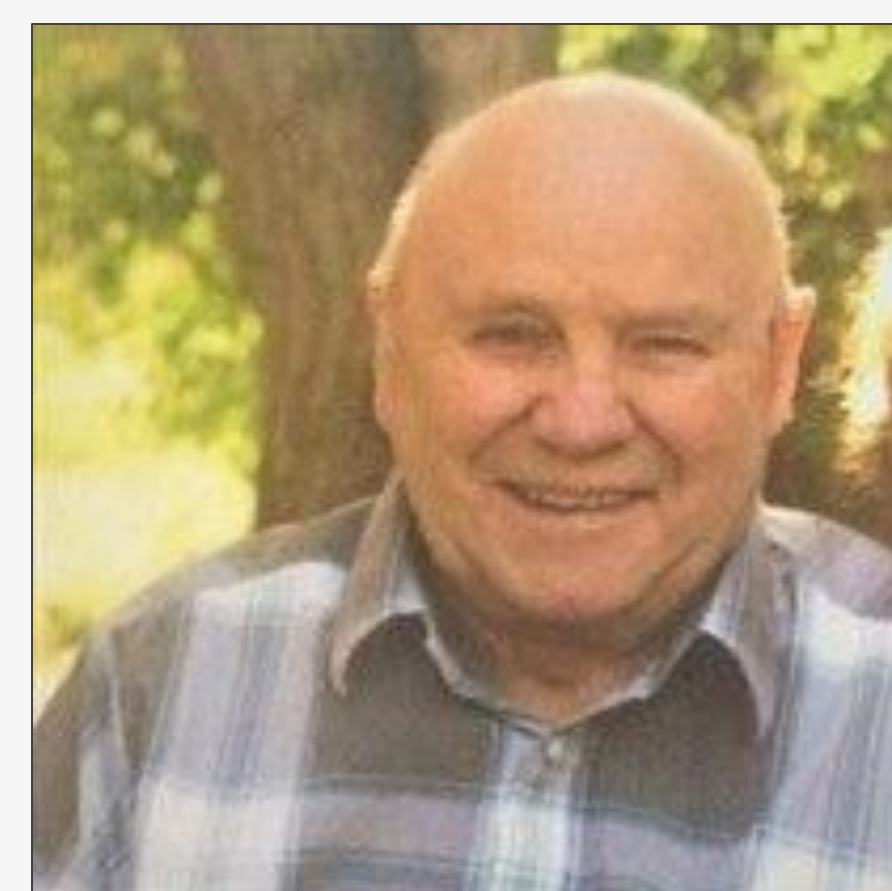
Early 20th Century Utah English

- Early work (Cook 1969, Helquist 1970) compares rural Utah to Salt Lake City.
- Bowie (2003, 2008, etc) analyzes archival recordings of religious sermons.
- Primary focus in those studies: the decline of the CORD-CARD merger.

Introducing the Kohler Tapes

Background

- Norm Kohler, a middle school teacher in Heber in 1980s–2000s. ▶
- He had students to interview a local older person, like a grandparent.
 - He provided questions to ask, akin to sociolinguistic interviews.
- Collected 1200+ cassette tapes.
- Intended to write a history based on these oral narratives.



Passing the torch

- Norm was not able to write the book he dreamed of.
- In late 2017, he returned ≈500 tapes to his former students.
- The remaining 751 were given to the Wasatch Historical Society.
- They contacted Stanley, who now has custody of them.

Processing

- Digitized in 2021 at BYU's Office of Digital Humanities.
- Metadata extracted from each tape (by Jessica Shepherd)
 - We filled in the rest using a genealogy website.
- Manual transcription has been very slow and arduous.

Recent developments in transcription!

- We are training Whisper to transcribe the rest.
 - This is possible thanks to BYU CS PhD student, Alex Lyman.
 - Preliminary output is very encouraging.
- Many fascinating applications once those transcriptions are done.
 - Summaries of each interview.
 - Social network analysis based on named-entity recognition.
 - High-dimensional clustering to predict language variation.
- A proof-of-concept for other large-scale transcription tasks!

Results based on impressionistic notes from listening to portions of 63 interviews.

Features we anticipated finding (because they occur in older descriptions of Utahns)

Feature	Result	Notes
CORD-CARD merger (Cook 1969; Helquist 1970; Bowie 2003, 2008)	widespread ≈53%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some had unconditioned but partial lowering. • Some had full lowering but in only a few words. • Raising of CARD in seven people.
[t]-insertion in /ls/ clusters (Stanley & Vanderniet 2018; Davidson & Stanley 2024)	present ≈22%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Particularly common in the town name <i>Charle[t]ston</i>.
off-glide in lax vowels: <i>pit</i> [pɪ ^ə t] or <i>pet</i> [pɛ ^ə t] (Krahnke 1979, Jepson 2024)	present ≈10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rare, but rather salient when present. • Can occur before nasals (<i>cents</i>) and obstruents (<i>kid</i>)
Glide-weaking in PRICE (Morkel 2003)	present ≈11%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly found pre-/r/ • Another 9% of people were diphthongal but with backed nuclei.
(wh)-aspiration	present ≈20%	
Tensing of unstressed vowels	present ≈9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chiefly in <i>him</i>

Features we anticipated NOT finding (because they're mostly are described in younger Utahns)

Feature	Result	Notes
<i>feel-fill</i> merger (Baker & Bowie 2010, Di Paolo & Faber 1990)	virtually non-existent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One token of /ɪl/-lowering to [ɛɫ] in <i>Wilson</i> • Seven people (11%) occasionally raised towards [i] in <i>milk, mill, built, building, bills, kill</i>.
<i>fail-fell</i> merger (Baker & Bowie 2010)	virtually non-existent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five people (8%) raised towards [e] in <i>help, sell, well, bell, Ella</i>.
Velar nasal plus: /ŋ/ as [ŋk] (Di Paolo & Johnson 2018)	very rare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two people had it very occasionally.
/ʌn/ fronting (Baker & Bowie 2010)	very rare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One person had it rather saliently in <i>fun</i>.
(thr)-flapping (Stanley 2019)	very rare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One person had it.
fortition in /θ/ (Davidson & Stanley 2024; Stanley & Shepherd ms)	very rare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A similar process in <i>con[ʔ]ference, in[ʔ]fantry</i> in one person.
/tən/ as [ʔn] (Eddington & Savage 2012)	not attested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every time we noticed words like <i>mountain</i> it was [ʔn].
BEG-raising (Stanley 2022)	present (≈14%)	

Kohler Tapes Metadata

Audio

- 631 hours of audio on 751 cassette tapes.
- Average of 51.7 minutes per tape.

People: 1,474 (807 interviewees plus 667 students)

Genders: 56% female, 44% male

Interview year ▶

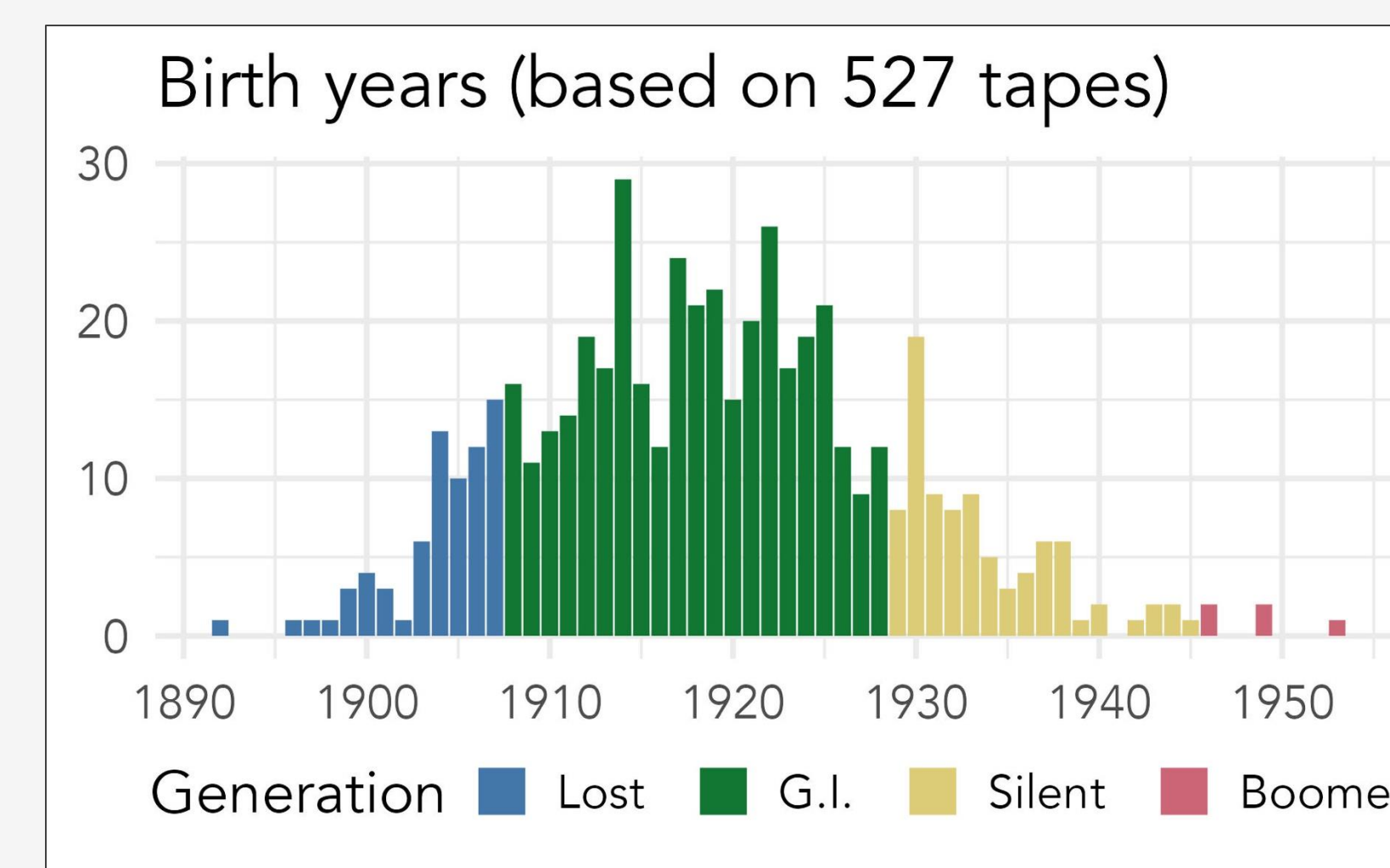


Birth counties (and the most well-represented cities)

- 47% Wasatch County (Heber, Charleston, Midway, Wallsburg)
- 14% outside of Utah
- 10% Salt Lake County (Salt Lake City, Muraay, Magna, Riverton)
- 8% Utah County (Provo, Springville, American Fork)
- 5% Summit County (Park City, Kamas)
- 2% Duchesne County (Tabiona, Altonah)
- 2% foreign-born
- 10% elsewhere in Utah

Birth years ▶

- Mostly between 1905 and 1935.
- Oldest: 1892; youngest: 1953
- All but 5 born before the end of WWII.



Discussion

Another timepoint to analyze Utah English diachronically

- Minimal attestation of some features suggests they're recent developments.
- Robust attestation of now-rare features suggests decline.

A massive dataset to analyze early 20th Century Utah English synchronically

- Early work was focused on a few variables and was largely impressionistic.
- Bowie's descriptions are based on upper class Salt Lake City-based men in religious settings and are not necessarily representative of informal Utahns.
- This collection will (soon) provide a more comprehensive look at Utah English from this time.
 - Even as a standalone dataset, it's rich and complex.

Variation is everywhere!

- Most people in this collection sound distinctly Utahn, but they all do so in different ways.
- Even in a small town like Heber, there is quite a lot of variation!
 - So, what drives that variation??

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