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On scones

R. Kirk Belnap Heidi Bay Stephen Fairbanks David Lager Jeana Yamamoto

1. Introduction

In her 1993 James L. Barker Lecture, Cheryl Brown pointed out that the fry bread known as scones in the Mormon West is not what most other native speakers of English think of when they use the word. In Utah, for example, a scone is generally made by frying pieces of bread dough in oil. Brown pointed out that Merriam-Webster's dictionary contains no such definition. Under scone (also listed as scon), we find:

1a: a quick bread made of oatmeal or barley flour, rolled into a round shape, cut into quarters, and baked on a griddle b: a quick bread made of a baking powder dough sometimes enriched with eggs, sugar, and currants, cut into various shapes (as rounds, diamonds, wedges) and usu. baked in an oven. (Gove 1963:2035)

In fact, no dictionary we have consulted contains a definition of scone matching the scones found in Utah. The denotation of the word scone is not the only difference one finds: outside North America scones is usually pronounced [skanz], not [sko:nz].

The Oxford English Dictionary indicates that scone probably entered English by way of Scottish from Middle Dutch schoonbrot or Middle Low German schonbrot "fine bread" (Simpson & Weiner 1989, 14:668). Among the varieties of scones listed is the "fried scone, one in which the ingredients are made into a batter and fried" (1989, 14:668). A recent article in the U.S. magazine Cooking Light claims they were traditionally "... slightly sweet and biscuit-like. They were triangular in shape and were baked on griddles in the ovenless kitchens in the rural village of Scone in 16th-century Scotland 1... today's versions, which can be either sweet or savory, come in all shapes and sizes and are almost always baked in the oven" (Taliaferro

1993:90). The recipes given in the article consist of both baking powder doughs and oatmeal doughs. Traditional scones are an essential ingredient of the British "cream tea" or "Devonshire tea." They are eaten with jam and Devon cream—which one American described as being "sort of a cross between thick, cold, whipping cream and ice cream, but better" (Jeff Adams, personal communication, 3 March 1993).

In this paper, we investigate possible origins of Mormon scones. The differences between traditional scones and Mormon scones suggest the following possibilities: (1) Mormon scones descend from a European method of preparing scones that has long since disappeared from Europe—or nearly so. (2) Mormon scones are the evolutionary product of European scones' contact with the New World. (3) Mormon scones are not direct descendants from traditional scones, but somehow scones came to be applied to a New World fry bread. Minor variations or combinations of these three options are also possible. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 focuses on the use of scones across the world and within the U.S. Section 3 reports the results of a search of cookbooks. Section 4 centers on U.S. varieties of fried bread. Section 5 presents a possible solution as to how Mormons came to call their fry bread scones. Finally, section 6 summarizes our findings.

2. Scones in the world and the U.S.

Our initial approach to investigating the possible origins of Mormon scones was to send out a query on LINGUIST, an electronic bulletin board with approximately 3200 subscribers (at the time) from around the world. We asked subscribers familiar with scones to tell us how scones are made, how common scones are in their experience, and

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how they pronounce scones. (A copy of this questionnaire is included in the Appendix.) We received 68 responses to our query (29 from the U.S., 17 from the United Kingdom, 8 from Canada, 4 from Australia, and 1 each from New Zealand, the Netherlands, South Africa, and Norway; 6 respondents did not designate where they were from). In addition to responding to our survey questions, many responded with a good deal of descriptive prose detailing their experiences with and feelings about scones.

Most respondents from the U.S. (24/28) reported only the long "o" pronunciation for the U.S. (rhyming with bone).² Four people reported familiarity with the short "o" pronunciation for the Eastern U.S.; one person indicated that this pronunciation is favored by "anglophiles or scottophiles." Canadian respondents differed considerably from U.S. respondents: three respondents from Quebec, Toronto, and Victoria indicated they use the short "o," while one respondent from Ontario reported using the long "o." Three Australians and one New Zealander (as well as another person born and raised in England but now living in New Zealand) all reported using short "o" as being general.

Pronunciation differed for the U.K., as can be seen in Figure 1. Not all respondents gave detailed information on where they were from. Of those who did, seven respondents reported only the short "o" pronunciation. Three mentioned the possibility of both pronunciations and two mentioned only the long "o" option. The long "o" option was more common in the South. Of those speaking of the UK in general (who did not give further detail on where they were from), three mentioned that both options are acceptable. One mentioned only the short "o" option, and one mentioned that the short "o" is general for Southern England. One mentioned only the long "o" option.

The pronunciation of scone in the U.K. is a matter of some import. An Englishman residing in the U.S. noted that:

The pronunciation of this word is, in common lore, supposed to be a marker of a class or regional distinction. Nobody is really sure, but just about everybody knows it shows *something* and will defend their particular pronunciation. (Colin Phillips, p.c., 2 March 1993)

Richard Ogden observed, "My mother says it with short, my father with long, and we used to argue in the school playground about it" (p.c., 3 March 1993). We sent a message to him asking for more information and he responded:

Both parents came from Manchester. My mother's parents were higher up the social scale than my father's. I always use my mother's pronunciation, i.e. short o.

I don't think it has to do with where you come from (at least not in England). I think it's more to do with social class? and I would associ-

ate short o with higher up the scale than long o? It's only a *vague* feeling. I hear short and long o in 'scone' all the time; I would say in about equal numbers. I think this has been my experience everywhere I've lived (Manchester, Cambridge, York).

Oh, I think the long o form feels like a spelling form, and that's part of the reason I don't use it. (p.c., 31 March 1993)

One respondent noted that a BBC television comedy program (*The Goodies*) devoted an episode to scones, strawberry jam, cream, and the pronunciation of scones. He concluded, "In general, rhyming scone with don is the 'best' i.e. higher class pronunciation (at least that's how I pronounce it!)" (Francis Bond, p.c., 3 March 1993).

Scottish perspectives illustrate how differently these pronunciations are evaluated. A Scottish respondent (from Fife and Lothian) mentions that he uses short "o" but noted that long "o" is "possible but upper-class/pretentious" (David Adger, p.c. 2 March 1993). A number of people commented on short "o" being the Scottish pronunciation and long "o" belonging to England (particularly Southern England). One woman (from England but now living in New Zealand, whose mother was of Scottish descent) summarized, "In Scotland, where I studied, short o is the local pronunciation, long o is seen as a sassenach (English, foreign) pronunciation" (Laurie Bauer, p.c., 3 March 1993).

None of the U.K. respondents were familiar with scones as fried pieces of yeast-leavened dough (some reacted adversely to the notion). In fact, only the 12 respondents with some Utah or Mormon connection were familiar with this type of scones. Figure 2 gives the distribution of baked, non-yeast leavened scones versus fried, yeast-leavened scones responses in the U.S. Respondents who grew up with Mormon scones also had strong feelings about the legitimacy (if not primacy) of their scones. For example,

I always assumed that my mother's folkways with scones were correct and that the local shop and my wife had some gussied up, yuppified version that might be an option for some people in England, but was some modern aberration—now I see I was too provincial in this. (Lyle Campbell, p.c., 2 March 1993)³

The LINGUIST survey strengthened our initial impression that the scones found in the Western United States are a Mormon phenomenon. An article by Raymond Sokolov, food editor of Natural History, lent further weight to this analysis (1985). His theory on the origin of "Utah scones" was essentially the explanation we (and others) arrived at independently. Sokolov presented arguments that Mormon scones developed through contact, that early Mormon settlers were influenced by one or both of the Southwestern fry breads: sopaipillas and Navaho fry bread.

Figure 1. Pronunciation Distribution in the United Kingdom

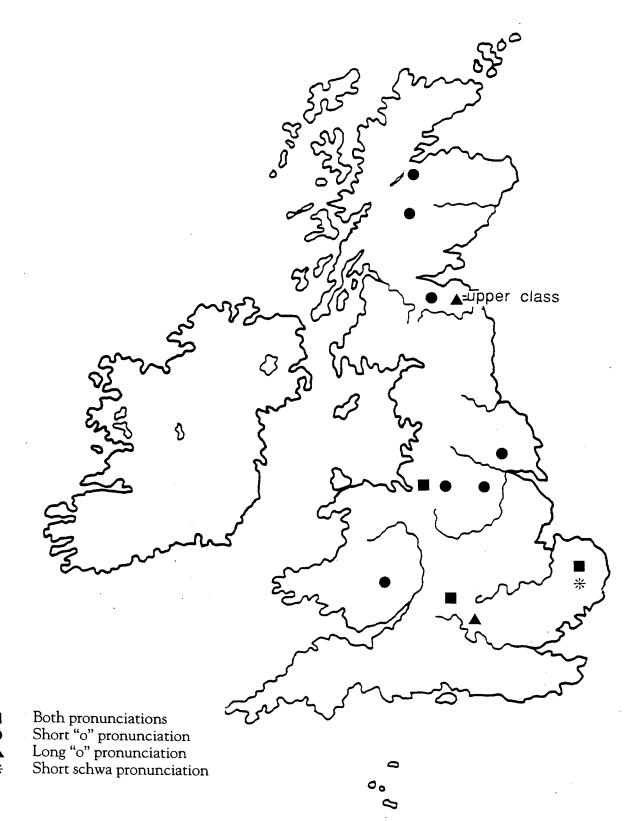
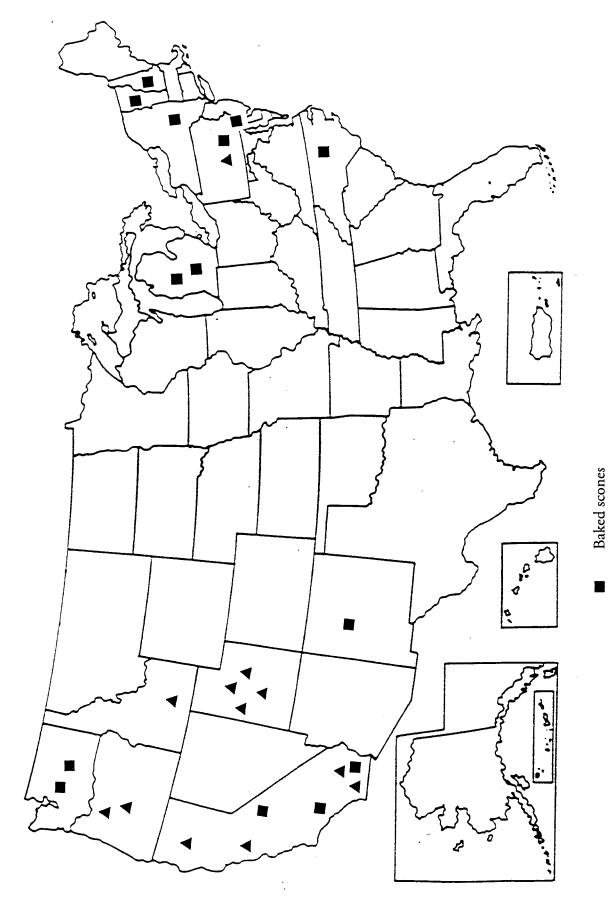


Figure 2. Baked vs. Fried in the United States



Fried scones with Mormon connection

Our study would probably have ended with this, but we came across two individuals here in Utah who told us about scones in the Midwest. A 45-year-old Catholic man who was born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska said that his mother made scones just like the Utah variety and called them scones. A BYU student distinctly recalls running across a scone vendor at a State Fair in Indianapolis, Indiana. As a result of this new information we designed a small telephone survey—similar to the survey sent out over LINGUIST—to investigate the possibility of Mid-Western origins for Mormon scones.

For the telephone survey we chose to contact bakeries, assuming that people working in bakeries would be likely to be aware of regional varieties of breads. We began by contacting 7 bakeries in Omaha, Nebraska; only one reported making scones: once a year they prepare a large order of scones for a local hotel. Many of the people we contacted at the various bakeries were unfamiliar with scones (traditional or Mormon). One woman told us that her mother used to make something similar to the Mormon scones that we described, but she did not remember them being called scones. The woman was from North Dakota so we contacted three bakeries in Bismarck, five in Fargo, and four in Grand Forks. The response was the same: people were unfamiliar with Mormon scones and sometimes the traditional variety as well. We next turned to Indiana, calling 5 bakeries in Terre Haute, 9 in Fort Wayne, and 6 in South Bend. We found no one familiar with Mormon scones, but one person mentioned that they did sound similar to elephant ears, a fried dough rolled in sugar.

3. Cookbooks and scones

We searched over eighty cookbooks looking for recipes resembling the Utah fried scone. These included historical cookbooks, specialty cookbooks (breads, breakfast foods, desserts), and regional cookbooks. The regional cookbooks included New England, the Southern States, the Mid-West, the Northern States, and Utah. We checked both LDS and non-LDS—authored Utah cookbooks. We also searched Irish, Scottish, and English ethnic cookbooks.

From this search, we found that frying bread dough is quite common. As James Beard, a well-known chef, said, this is probably due to the fact that this type of bread is

an old American food that dates back to the time when every household produced bread regularly. A housewife put her bread to rise overnight and in the morning took a piece of the risen dough, punched it down, rolled it out, cut it into odd shapes, and dropped the pieces into hot fat to cook until golden brown on all sides (1974:218).

A cookbook composed of recipes from a famous old Connecticut restaurant contained a recipe for *Baptist cakes* (Brown 1939:28). Beard recalled that "On

Nantucket there used to be, and may still be for all I know, a summer hotel where on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays one could go and have dough gobs for breakfast" (1974:218). Both Brown and Beard indicated this type of bread is eaten with maple syrup.

The fried breads listed in cookbooks were called by a variety of names, including Baptist cakes, dough gobs, fried dough, puffy sticks (Amish), and scones. Scone seems to be the least common name for fried bread. However, we did find one recipe for fried bread entitled scones in a non-Utah publication; it appeared in the proceedings of a symposium of the American Association of Cereal Chemists held in Chicago and published in Minnesota (Miller 1981:146).

In the course of a computer search of periodical contents, we discovered a noteworthy trend. With the exception of Sokolov's article on 'Utah scones' (1985), all of the recipes in periodicals were for traditional scones, and all appeared in print within the last four years. Furthermore, they occur with increasing frequency in recent issues. Apparently, traditional U.K scones are becoming something of a trendy, imported food. The responses to the LINGUIST survey and the telephone survey suggest that traditional scones are more common on the East coast and the West coast, and are moving inland.

4. U.S. varieties of fried bread

Our cookbook research and the reports of fried breads similar to Mormon scones in the telephone survey prompted us to consider the possibility that scones is merely one of many names found across the country for this type of fried bread. The best source on such regional or dialectal terms is the Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE). Item H18 of the DARE questionnaire (an open question among other questions on foods) asks, "Are there any special kinds of bread made now or in past years around here?" Unfortunately, only the first two volumes of DARE (vol. 1 A-C, vol. 2 D-H) have been published. As a result, we were unable to gain access to possible instances of DARE questionnaire respondents mentioning "scones." However, because DARE cross-references related terms we were able to compile a list of a number of terms for breads apparently similar or identical to Mormon scones. For example, under elephant's ear (where the variant elephant ear is listed), we found that for many the term refers to a "round, swirled, sugar-glazed pastry," but for Illinois and Indiana we found that elephant ears are "large oil-fried sheet[s] of dough, usually sprinkled with confectioners sugar" (Cassidy & Hall 1991:287). Although the Illinois and Indiana variety share some similarities, they are not Mormon scones.

Baptist cakes, a term occurring in a New England cookbook, proved to be a crucial link. Baptist cakes are defined in DARE as "Raised bread-dough fried in deep fat" (Cassidy 1985:150);

all references were to New England (particularly Massachusetts and Connecticut). A cookbook citation indicated that *Baptist cakes* are eaten with maple syrup; another mentioned that the name comes from the fact that they are immersed in deep fat. This entry further included: "Also called fried bread 1, holy poke, huffjuff" (1985:150). At least some Baptist cakes, huffjuffs, and holy pokes (all from New England) appear to be smaller than Mormon scones: huffjuffs were described as being "the size of large marbles" in a New England cookbook cited in DARE (Cassidy & Hall 1991:1143). Holy poke is listed for Connecticut only (1991:1063).

The first DARE definition of fried bread (also fry bread) is: "yeast-bread dough cut into pieces and deep-fried" (Cassidy & Hall 1991:573). Informants cited in the entry included individuals from Colorado, Montana, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and California. Fried dough is listed as "=fried bread 1;" informants cited were from Arkansas, Massachusetts, and Connecticut (1991:574).

Morning glory and spider bread were suggested as other references under fried bread but, of course, are not included in the published volumes of DARE. Morning glory and spider bread apparently derive their names from the instrument used to cook them. A Dictionary of American English lists morning glory as a type of stove and spider as a type of "iron frying pan or skillet, sometimes provided with long legs" (Craigie & Hulbert 1944:2191). The dictionary further notes that spider is used attributively "designating foods cooked in a spider" and gives the following citation: "1920 LINCOLN Mr. Pratt 33 She'd been...giving 'em spider bread and dried apple pie for breakfast" (1944:2191).

DARE lists two entries under dough gods. The first refers to a baking powder biscuit, usually cooked over an open fire. The second, native to the North and especially New England, refers to a raised dough that is fried. Related terms include dough goddy, dough gob, doughboy, and doughbelly (Cassidy 1985:158-59). A single entry for Northern Maine mentions that doughdab is another name for a dough god (1985:158). Speaking of dough biscuits, an informant from South-Eastern Wisconsin observed:

If bread was short and the housewife knew it would not be baked by mealtime, she used to cut off small biscuit-sized pieces of the dough, pat them flat, and fry them slowly on a greased griddle until lightly browned on both sides. These fried biscuits were served hot and buttered (1985:573).

Given that frying small chunks of bread dough was a common practice in many (if not all) regions of the country, there is no reason to assume that Mormon scones developed due to contact with Southwestern fry breads. Frying bread dough was clearly a common American practice. DARE entries and cookbook recipes indicate these varieties of fry bread were known by many names. The question

remains: How did scones come to refer to this common American fry bread?

5. A possible solution

A number of accounts of how Mormon scones came to be called *scones* are possible. The ingredients, method of preparation, and name might all have come from Europe with little or no change. We did find some evidence to support the possibility that Mormon scones directly descend from European scones. Sokolov noted a Northumbrian recipe for leavened whole meal scones (1985:82) and, in response to the LINGUIST query, Julie Vonwiller wrote:

...my mother's family came from Ireland and there they could also 'deep fry' a scone dough and these were called 'puff d'loons' or 'puff d'loonies'. (I have seen other similar names for this method of cooking the dough....) I don't think your scones are that different. The techniques for cooking dough this way is probably worldwide. Also, they are eaten with honey, hot. Delicious if a tad fattening (p.c., 4 March 1993).

More work remains to be done to establish a stronger case for direct importation of a European recipe. This solution, of course, would be near impossible to disprove; negative evidence is rather scarce. This explanation is unlikely, however, given that present-day (and apparently past) common European practices differ markedly from Mormon scones.

That scone-making evolved as immigrants adapted to the New World's conditions, materials, and practices seems more likely. Millward observed that:

three broad semantic areas in which British-American lexical differences are especially noticeable are food, clothing, and transportation. Historically, this is because new foods and new ways of processing and cooking foods have arisen since the separation of the two nations (1989:303).⁴

Among the examples listed, Millward noted that British scone is the equivalent of American biscuit or muffin, and that British biscuit is equivalent to American cookie or cracker. Some semantic shift appears to have occurred. However, this solution still requires some explanation as it requires an explanation of why scone, as used to refer to a type of fry bread, is restricted to the Mormon West. A more likely account of the origin of Mormon scones is that an Old World term came to be applied to an American product. But this still raises the same question: Why did Latter-day Saints come to refer to their fry bread variety as scones? An examination of the probable origins of many of the American fry breads and a consideration of the demographics of the early LDS settlers may help to answer this question.

The development of a name by association accounts for the origins of most, if not all, of the terms used for American fry breads. Some names reflect the means of cooking. For example, we have already discussed the origin of Baptist cakes, spider bread, and morning glory. Other names refer to the ingredients; for example, dough bread, dough gobs, and dough biscuits. A third method involves describing the shape of the finished product: beaver tails, elephant ears, and—perhaps—scones. The Scottish National Dictionary indicates that scone had come to mean "anything round, flat and soft resembling a scone" (Grant & Murison 1971:62); a similar definition is found in The English Dialect Dictionary (Wright 1905:255).

The question then remains: why would the early Latter-day Saints, but apparently not others in the U.S., be more apt to use the term scone (either as a term denoting the shape of the food or as an alternate for biscuit)? The answer to this question may be found in the ethnic composition of the settlers of the Mormon West. Of all the states in the union. Utah has the highest settlement rate by those of English ancestry; in addition, Utah has the highest percentage of recent (predominantly 19th-century) British immigration (see Di Paolo [in press] for a detailed summary of the evidence). Di Paolo's study of propredicate do presents evidence of British dialect influence on the speech of Utah Mormons. Given that the largest and arguably most influential ethnic group in Utah in the nineteenth century was of English ancestry, the adoption of scone, the English generic word for biscuit, to refer to an American fry bread should come as no surprise. As Di Paolo observed, "particular features of English English could have easily, but unconsciously, surfaced in the region as Mormon English. This development may have been spurred on because of the LDS need to show their separation" (manuscript, p. 12).

The idea that early Latter-day Saints came to call their fry bread scones due to the influence of English immigrants is not without parallel. Although flatbread (Norwegian flatbrød, fladbrød) is usually described as a thin, unleavened bread baked on the stove top, one informant from South Dakota described it as "fried bread dough" (Cassidy & Hall 1991:467). Apparently, the name used to refer to a variety of American fry bread may have been influenced more than once by the ethnic group that settled in large numbers in a given region. This, and other DARE references, also indicate the interchangeable nature of different raising agents and methods of cooking.

6. Conclusion

Sokolov observed that "until some researcher makes a lucky strike in a Mormon woman's diary or a pioneer cookbook, we are never going to know for sure how it is that Navajos, Chicanos, and Mormons ended up eating similar fried breads" (1985:83); our research indicates we can add

Americans from all across the country to Sokolov's list. The fact that similar American fry breads are known by so many names suggests an American innovation. While we cannot conclusively account for the origins of Mormon scones, the method of preparation appears to derive from a well-established American tradition, suggesting continuity rather than a contact-induced development. As for the name *scones*, the fact that this extremely common British term came to be used by the U.S. speech community with the greatest post-colonial English ethnic concentration seems beyond coincidence.

It is noteworthy that no one responding to the LINGUIST query reported any of these American regional names for fried breads. It may be that the survey was not framed in such a way as to make respondents think of other names for this type of bread. On the other hand, it may be that they do not have the type of background that would predispose them to knowing these terms. Many such terms are old forms that are dying out (this was noted in some of the DARE entries). One cause of their demise is that they are largely tied to home production. Latter-day Saints from the Intermountain West may preserve what was once common elsewhere. With the advent of mass-produced, inexpensive bread, and due to new employment trends, fewer people baked bread at home. (In our telephone survey, we noticed that older people were far more likely to be familiar with frying bread dough than younger people.) Due to the LDS ideology of self-sufficiency, traditional Mormon culture may have helped to preserve the practice of frying pieces of bread dough more than other areas of the country.6

Appendix

LINGUIST Scones Survey

Where are you from (or where did you become familiar with scones)?

Are they common there? yes somewhat no
I am accustomed to the following pronunciation with long "o" with short "o" with short schwa
I am accustomed to the following spelling: "scone" "scon"
Scones are (check all that apply): baked fried

"a quick bread made of a baking powder dough
"a quick bread made of oatmeal or barley flour
made from bread dough leavened with yeast"
other:

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This paper would not have been possible without the aid of many people, far too many to list individually. We are grateful to respondents to our e-mail query, as well as those we spoke with as part of our telephone survey. We also wish to express our appreciation to the many others (administrators, colleagues, students, relatives, friends, and strangers) who encouraged and helped us in our search for the origins of Mormon scones.

This paper contains a number of extracts from e-mail messages sent to us in response to our scones query. We have made no attempt to edit spelling, punctuation, capitalization or other 'errors,' thereby preserving the generally informal tone of the medium.

End Notes

¹Some would dispute the connection with the village of Scone. In a discussion of *scones* Max Wheeler noted that "Unconnected (apparently) is the town and abbey of Scone, Tayside, Scotland, the original keeping-place of the stone of Scone, on (or over) which kings of Scotland were crowned, before its removal to its present site in Westminster Abbey, London. Scone is pronounced [sku:n] in RP; in Scots it's /skun/ (there being no length or quality contrast between the vowels of *pull* and *pool* in Scots) (personal communication, 3 March 1993). In other words, the Scottish village of Scone is pronounced quite differently than the food.

²Rather late in the course of our research we became aware that a friend from Lovell, Wyoming (a small Mormon town) grew up with the short "o" pronunciation. He indicated that his family had always used the short "o" pronunciation; both of his parents were born and raised in Wyoming. Another linguist acquaintance had previously told us of a similar instance of the short "o" pronunciation (his aunt from Salt Lake City), but all of us had assumed that her pronunciation was acquired given that she is something of a Scottophile (though she's never traveled to Scotland). More research needs to be done on this variation in pronunciation. The short "o" pronunciation in referring to traditional scones is quite expected as it could easily have been introduced by those who have traveled to the U.K. The short "o" pronunciation in referring to Mormon scones came as quite a surprise.

³ Apparently some Latter-day Saints are quite aware of the geographic distribution of Mormon scones. The following excerpt from a bulletin board in the BYU bookstore used to respond to suggestions is indicative of this (These comments were apparently made toward the end of March, 1993.). The suggestion—by "My Sweet Tooth"—was to get more of the San Francisco Tradition brand ice cream sandwiches. The response from the bookstore rep-

resentative was, "Sorry, never heard of it!" Penned in above and to the right of the response were three informal counter-responses; below these were a number of off-hand comments, each responding to the previous response. In response to the third counter-response, "It's not available outside of CA. I want to find it too," someone wrote "CALIFO R-NIAN GO HOME!!" In turn, another person wrote, "UTAHN GO EAT A SCONE!!!"

⁴Stavros Macrakis, who responded to the LIN-GUIST query, noted that:

...cooking terms seem to have tremendous variation, and seem very amenable to transferring their meaning, for many reasons. One reason is simple misunderstanding, another is transfer of a preparation to a different culture, another is availability of ingredients. Metaphor and personal references are also common (p.c., 2 March 1993).

⁵ A further possible tie exists: *The Scottish national dictionary* indicates that *scone* also referred to the "slap of the hand or any flat surface, a smack, spank" (Grant & Murison 1971:62-63). As applied to Mormon scones, this could refer to the method of preparation in which the dough is "punched down" or "patted down" before it is fried (Beard 1974:218).

⁶ An informal survey of some BYU students and faculty members indicated that Mormon home

bread production decreased considerably in recent decades (though this trend may be reversing due to the increased popularity of such 'back-to-nature' hobbies). People approximately thirty years of age or older related memories of their mothers making bread—and scones. Younger people were generally familiar with Mormon scones as a result of their presence in restaurants. At least two Utah restaurants have incorporated scone in their name. The Rolling Scone, no longer in business, was located near the BYU campus. The Sconecutter has been quite successful and has become an expanding chain. In 1985, Sokolov noted there were two of these "twenty-four-hour drive-ins" in which "the Utah scone rises to challenge the doughnut and the hamburger bun as a fast-food commodity" (1985:82). When we spoke with the manager of a Sconecutter drive-in in Salt Lake City, he informed us that there were five in the Salt Lake Valley, one in Orem, and one in Baltimore, Maryland. Suspecting that few in Baltimore would recognize a Mormon scone as a scone, we asked him about the Baltimore restaurant. He replied that "English scones" and Mormon scones, re-named "Western-style scones," are both served; he added that the latter are quite well received. Unlike many of its other American cousins, the Mormon scone appears to be thriving.