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“General Conference talk”: Style Variation and the Styling of Identity  
in Latter-day Saint General Conference Oratory

Stephen Thomas Betts

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### “General Conference talk”: Style Variation and the Styling of Identity in Latter-day Saint General Conference Oratory

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Master of Arts

Despite its exceptional importance as a cultural performance event in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, General Conference has received little attention in Mormon studies, to say nothing of sociolinguistics. Situated within the larger question of how the public language of Mormon authorities has changed over time, this thesis seeks to discover style features of what impressionistically appears to be a unitary General Conference style since 1960 (the era of church “Correlation”). Statistical analysis is then used to determine which of five sociolinguistic factors and three pairwise interactions between four of the five sociolinguistic factors most saliently conditions the use of these style features in General Conference. Findings indicate that older male speakers are more likely to perform the majority of these style features, which opens the possibility that a new style may be emerging. Finally, this study attempts to give a theoretical account of style in General Conference by appealing to Alan Bell’s (1984; 2001) “audience design” framework, and Nikolas Coupland’s (2007) refinement of Bauman’s cultural performance theory. The unique conditions of General Conference are best described as a “high performance event” in which speakers converge stylistically on an uncharacteristically present “in-group referee,” namely the General Authorities of the church present in the LDS Conference Center during the live broadcast of General Conference.

Keywords: Mormon, General Conference, sociolinguistics, style, syntax, cultural performance, adult language socialization, audience design

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## Chapter 1—Introduction

*“This morning I...visited with a brother and sister from Michigan who thought that ‘a Prophet is always a Prophet’, but I told them that a Prophet was a Prophet only, when he was acting as such—”*

*—attributed to Joseph Smith, 8 February 1843 (History, 1464)*

Among the many concerns that late modernity has forced upon the religious, one of the least anticipated may be the effects that the World Wide Web would have on religious knowledge and practice. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (also known in academic research as the Mormon church, LDS, or Mormons) represents a religious organization that has been fundamentally altered by the internet in a host of ways, but one in particular that deserves mention here: it has made the language of all its prophets immediately available for public scrutiny. This situation has resulted in a generational wave of dissent and defection as some curious Mormons encounter unexpected prejudice, human foibles, or contradictions in prophetic speech. However, it has also begged the question of when a prophet (the religious leader believed to receive revelation from God for the church) or other high-level church leader is “acting as such” (see above), and thus what speech is binding on individuals’ religious praxis.

Answering such a consequential question is best left, of course, to practitioners of the faith, but the religious question “when is a prophet a prophet?” has an interesting linguistic corollary. Quite apart from the question of when a prophet is speaking *truth*, we might ask what it *sounds like* when a prophet “speaks like a prophet.” While it is outside the scope of this thesis to fully probe this question, the present study seeks to situate itself as a sociolinguistic probe into the larger question of how the language used in the public (General Conference) oratory of high

level Mormon authorities (prophets and General Authorities) changes over time, and what implications this might have for Mormon conceptions of the nature of scriptural (General Conference oratory is considered oral scripture) and ecclesiastical authority. As such, this thesis will examine the sociolinguistic factors that affect the linguistic *styling* (Coupland 2007:2) of church authorities' speech in their public oratory in the church's semiannual General Conference. In particular, this thesis will examine several lexico-syntactic features found in General Conference talks and determine what sociolinguistic factors (age, gender, native speaker status, convert status and whether they attended the church-sponsored Brigham Young University). However, before introducing the style features and sociolinguistic factors, it will be useful to introduce the central topic of this thesis, LDS General Conference, in detail.

### 1.1 General Conference and the General Conference "talk"

Perhaps owing to its unique self-distinction from other Protestant denominations, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has generated a vast number of unique terms to accommodate theological and organizational innovations over the years. Because this thesis focuses on one such term, "General Conference," as its central topic, it will be useful to introduce this and related terms up front before moving into analysis. Other important terms will be introduced as necessary. For reference, please see the glossary in Appendix D.

Conferences, or large-scale gatherings, have been a preferred medium for Mormon preaching since the earliest days of the LDS Church. Historians Reid Neilson and Scott Marianno note that

From the church's 1830 founding, Latter-day Saints were directed to hold regular conferences. Early Mormon conferences in New York, Ohio, and Missouri were not systematized on an annual and semiannual basis until after 1840, when the Mormon settlement at Nauvoo, Illinois, had become sufficiently established. The

unpredictable timing of these initial conferences was shaped by expediency: Mormon leaders generally convened sessions as ecclesiastical business dictated. The current model of formal sermonizing developed slowly, since early conferences privileged administrative functions over the reinforcement of Mormon belief and practice through discourse (Neilson & Marianno 2018:13).

“General Conference,” as it has been known since the 1840s, today refers to a semi-annual, mass-mediated (through TV, radio, internet, and eventually church magazines) gathering of members of the LDS church and interested outsiders. Conferences convene every six months on the first weekends (Saturday and Sunday) of April and October. Significantly, the April conference, termed the “annual” conference—as opposed to the “semi-annual” October conference—is timed to coincide with the anniversary of the church’s founding, April 6, 1830. General Conference is divided into “sessions” or meetings each lasting two hours, and presently consists of four general interest sessions—i.e. those intended for all members—and two targeted sessions, the “General Priesthood Session,” and the “General Women’s Session.” As of 2017, the current model of General Conference features two general interest sessions per day, and one special interest session on Saturday evening, which alternates between the General Women’s session in October and the General Priesthood session in April. The General Women’s session features a mixture of high-ranking female and male church leaders, and, since 2017, has been oriented toward females in the church ages 8 and older.

Before 2017, the analogue of the General Women’s Session was known by various names beginning with the inaugural “General Relief Society Meeting” in October 1980 and alternating between that title and “General Women’s Meeting” until it was renamed the General Women’s session in October 2017. Before October 2017, although nominally a part of the conference

schedule, this meeting took place one week prior to the main block of meetings on the first weekends of April and October.

The General Priesthood Session (previously known simply as the “Priesthood Session”) features an all-male speaking lineup of senior “priesthood” leaders typically including the three members of the First Presidency—the highest level of church leadership—as well as select members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (Q12)—a group of twelve second-tier leaders—and the First and Second Quorums of the Seventy (who comprise the third tier of church leadership). Together, the First Presidency, the Q12, and the First and Second Quorums of the Seventy constitute a group collectively known as “General Authorities.” Members of this group are considered to have the authority to adjudicate orthodox belief and practice within the church, although the First Presidency and the prophet-president in particular has the final word on doctrine and policy. The General Priesthood session differs from being merely the “male version” of the General Women’s session in that its audience is not just as men or males as such, but the body of the all-male priesthood made up of orthodox male members of the church over the age of twelve. Thus, there is a perceived priestly dimension to this meeting that is not present in other General Conference sessions.

The lay priesthood is responsible for administering church ordinances (sacraments) such as baby blessings (christening), baptism, confirmation, the sacrament (Eucharist), priesthood ordination, temple rites (including the LDS marriage ritual), civil marriages, and other functions. Men also preside over most church meetings and serve as the leaders of wards (parishes), stakes (dioceses), and larger, regional areas, as well as overseeing church missions, temple operations, and other central church operations.

The obvious gender imbalance in church administration has been a source of perennial tension surrounding General Conference, both in principal, and regarding women's involvement in General Conference in particular. In recent years, no doubt in response to the increasing public outcry of concerned women and men, the church has made at least token efforts to include women more frequently as speakers and prayer-givers in the general interest sessions of General Conference, and allowed women to conduct the General Women's meeting. One of the most significant recent changes has been the church's decision to publicly broadcast the General Priesthood session, previously only available to men either in person, or over the church's private satellite broadcast system in church meetinghouses. This, along with the 2017 scheduling change which alternated the Women's session and the Priesthood session on Saturday evening, established a nominal parity between the two sessions, granting access of either to any interested party.

Since 2000, General Conference talks have taken place in the LDS Conference Center in Salt Lake City, UT, USA. Before that time, they took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century "Tabernacle" on Temple Square just across the street. Until April 1977, General Conference consisted of (at least) 3 days featuring 2 conference "sessions" each, with each session lasting approximately 2 hours. Additional General Conference meetings (see above) included the "Welfare Services" or "Welfare" session until 1983.

Sessions typically consist of between 5 and 7 sermons or "talks", interspersed with choral music. Speakers prepare talks in advance and read from teleprompters, although high-ranking leaders in particular seem to sometimes deviate from or add to prepared texts to comment on a previous talk, express thanks to the choir, or interact with the audience. Talks seem to follow a relatively standard structural pattern: "[a talk] often begins with a personal address to the

audience ('My dear brothers and sisters...') or with a humble admission of the awesomeness of the occasion ('It is a humbling experience to speak before you today')...It always ends, of course, with a testimony" (Elliott 1989:70–71).

Unlike modern General Conference talks, which are read from pre-composed and polished texts, early Mormon preaching was often spontaneous, a practice conditioned by the Latter-day Saint ideological commitment "immediate revelation," or the ability to "speak" scripture by the agency of the Holy Spirit (Neilson & Marianno 2018:14; see also Jarvis 1958:606). The shift toward the formalization and ritualization of the temporal, spatial, and ultimately the linguistic dimensions of General Conference seems to have begun with the construction of permanent meeting structures in pioneer-era Utah (Neilson & Marianno 2018:17). Catalyzed by spatial demarcation, it was probably the publication of orally performed sermons that did the major work of shifting Mormon sermonizing from a spontaneous and unrehearsed genre of cultural performance to its current status as a rehearsed, read form.

The shift toward publication had implications beyond determining the code of General Conference performance: in a sense, published sermons represented an addition to the scriptural canon itself. "The conference reports," write Neilson and Marianno,

generally published by the church-owned Deseret News Press, retained some of the by-products of their oral production, but they also came edited and standardized as polished text. The passage of the Mormon sermon was thus complete: conference sermons transitioned from their oral-ritual context into Mormonism's textual canon. They were read alongside the traditional canon, not always as new official revelation or printed scripture in the traditional sense, but as a form of quasi-scripture (2018:20).

The "quasi-scriptur[al]" status of General Conference talks remains salient to this day for many members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, among whom it is common to read,

watch, or listen to Conference talks as part of regular personal devotions. Conference talks are also commonly featured as source-texts for sacrament meeting talks and Sunday school (Gospel Doctrine) lessons and other adult church meetings (Priesthood and Relief Society).

In addition to structural performative norms, the language ideology of Latter-day Saint leaders is important for understanding the General Conference talk genre. One of the defining characteristics of contemporary Mormon leadership ideology is its emphasis on unanimity. While precedent for this exists in the canonized writings of Joseph Smith (e.g. Doctrine & Covenants 107:27), it does not seem to have been as central in the early church as it is today. Indeed, discord and defection were common among early Mormon leaders (see, e.g. Bushman 2005:178), and, in fact, contributed directly to Joseph Smith's murder in 1844. The ideal of meek unanimity may have clashed with the self-realizing spirit of Jacksonian America, the spirit that vivified the very sorts of risky frontier enterprises that made the Mormon dream of a Zion kingdom a reality. Whatever its history, the ideology of unity and unanimity is very important in contemporary church leadership. In 1989, then President James Faust of the First Presidency observed, "The requirement of unanimity provides a check on bias and personal idiosyncrasies. It ensures that God rules through the Spirit, not man through majority or compromise. It ensures that the best wisdom and experience is focused on an issue before the deep, unassailable impressions of revealed direction are received. It guards against the foibles of men" (Faust 1989: n.p .).

While no study to date has performed a systematic study of style variation among General Conference talks to determine their degree of stylistic similarity, impressionistic analysis indicates that few leaders choose to style their talks as divergent from the expectations of the genre, thus perhaps inviting further study of the connection between the "ideology of unanimity"

and the practice of style-convergence in General Conference. For the purposes of this study, it will be useful, at a minimum, to keep in mind the importance of this ideology and how it might affect style production.

## 1.2 Rationale for Research

Latter-day Saint (hereafter LDS) General Conference is a unique cultural performance, and an attractive subject for sociolinguistic study for several reasons. First, to my knowledge, no sociolinguistic studies have ever been performed on the language of LDS General Conference, which makes this thesis the first of its kind. Second, one of the distinguishing characteristics of late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century General Conference is the demographic diversity of speakers. In a single conference, speakers may include men and women from multiple continents, languages, races, socioeconomic classes, levels of education, duration of membership in the church (i.e. some are converts; others were born in the church), and level of involvement in church worship and social life. This makes the seemingly near-universal performance of a more-or-less unitary style fascinating and worth investigation.

## 1.3 Research Purpose

This study will analyze a linguistic corpus from the General Conferences talks of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1960–2018. My goal will be to identify the sociolinguistic factors that most saliently affect the lexico-syntactic *styling* of what we will term “the General Conference style,” and to theoretically account for how this style functions.

In particular, this study will examine 22 style features identified through a qualitative analysis of marked (non-standard) speech in a sample of General Conference talks (all talks from each Sunday, April session, every five years starting in 1960). I will calculate the normalized



frequency (per thousand words) of each feature in every General Conference talk by every speaker since 1960 using a custom Python script (computer program). I will then use these normalized frequencies as dependent variables in multiple-effects linear regressions (performed in the statistical software R) to determine how each of eight sociolinguistic factors and potential factor-interactions (English L1/L2, male/female, attended BYU/did not attend BYU, birth decade, convert/not convert, interaction of L1/L2 and convert, interaction of convert and BYU, and interaction of L1/L2 and birth decade) may significantly condition the use of each feature.

Chapter 2 reviews the development of audience design theory and introduces the importance of adult language socialization and cultural performance theory for this study. Chapter 3 will lay out our methodology for collecting and analyzing data. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the findings, and attempt to account for which theoretical model of style best fits the unique characteristics of the “General Conference genre” and its performance. Chapter 5 contains the implications of our research and frame possibilities for future research on the sociolinguistics of Mormon cultural performance.

## Chapter 2—Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction.

This chapter is divided into four sections: first, an introduction to previous research on LDS General Conference, second, the background for Bell’s theory of “style as audience design”, third, a discussion of adult style acquisition, and fourth, an introduction to the concept of “cultural performance” in anthropological theory and some suggestions of the ways in which this can be productive for thinking about the sociolinguistics of General Conference.

### 2.2 Previous Research on General Conference

While studies of Mormon public speaking are in no short supply (see, e.g. Bateman 1947; Bateman 1950; Benson 1952; Bitton 2002; Clinger 1946; Gilkey 1994; Greaves 1941; Hiatt 1956; Higdon 1961; Jones 1992; Myers 1940; Smith 1965; Smith 2006; Wilkin 1941). Studies that have specifically treated General Conference are relatively rare, and have focused on rhetoric and themes (Hellebrand 2012; Shepherd & Shepherd 1984a; 1984b; 2016), discourse (Elliott 1989), architecture/place (Petersen 2002), general history (Jarvis 1958), and documentary history (Neilson & Marianno 2018). Given this sparseness of coverage, it hardly needs to be remarked that there has been (to my knowledge) *no* sociolinguistic studies of General Conference to date.

The upside of approaching General Conference from a sociolinguistic perspective is the wealth of theoretical resources available for analyzing oral performance media. These include discourse analysis, genre analysis (including corpus-based), style theory, as well as theories from cognate disciplines such cultural performance theory, and adult language socialization. This

thesis will especially utilize style theory, cultural performance theory, and adult language socialization, for reasons that will be made clear below in 2.3.

## 2.3 Why Syntax

This study focuses on the stylistic use of certain syntactic patterns in LDS General Conference oratory since 1960. The primary rationale for examining syntax in this study is twofold. First, my initial impressionistic judgment was that lexico-syntactic patterns seemed to be a central part of “General Conference style,” and second, this was a corpus-based study, and syntax lent itself readily to corpus-based analysis. Admittedly, most sociolinguistic studies tend to focus on linguistic features other than syntax (although, see Yale 2019), although corpus-based genre analysis (e.g. Biber 1992) has worked on syntax. Despite some inherent limitations (such as the fact that the syntactic patterns were identified impressionistically by a single researcher), the strength of this study is that it connects sociolinguistic factors to the performance of each syntactic pattern.

## 2.4 Audience Design: Background & Development

### 2.4.1 *Justification for Using Style Theory*

This thesis might have benefitted from utilizing Biber’s multi-dimensional analysis approach (see, e.g. Biber 1992; Biber et al. 2006; Biber 2009; Biber & Gray 2013; Biber 2014a; Biber 2014b; Biber & Egbert 2016; Conrad & Biber 2001), which “combines the resources of computational tools, large text corpora, and multivariate statistical tools (such as factor analysis and cluster analysis). It has been used to address issues such as the relations among spoken and written genres in English, and the historical development of genres and styles” (Biber 1992:331). Instead this thesis utilized style theory because of the ways that it usefully interfaces with

cultural performance theory, and the question of how audiences are constituted by speech acts, all of which are a strong fit for this thesis's treatment of General Conference.

Below, sections 2.3.2 through 2.3.7 lay out the genealogical development of Bell's "audience design" framework, including Labov's "attention-to-speech," Giles's speech/communication accommodation theory, as well as an account of audience design itself.

#### *2.4.2 Attention to Language*

Style variation has been a growing interest in sociolinguistics since Labov's iconic study, "The Social Stratification of (r) in New York City Department Stores" (Labov 1966). In that study, Labov explained intra-speaker style variation—i.e. uses of preconsonantal and word final [r] by department store employees—on a "carefulness/casualness" axis. He hypothesized that a speaker's "emphaticness" or "casualness" in their attention to their speech co-varied directly with (a) speakers' evaluation of the socioeconomic prestige of their store (Saks 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. employees), or (b) their desire to project themselves as being a part of a particular socioeconomic class (Macy's employees) (Labov 1966). In other words, for Labov, style variation indexes social variation.

#### *2.4.3 Speech/Communication Accommodation Theory*

Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT), now known as Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) was a style theory pioneered by social psychologist Howard Giles in the 1970s as a response to Labov's classic New York City study (Giles 2016:2; Giles 1973). Giles' original "accommodation" argument for Labov's (1966) data was that Labov's informants' style-shifting may have been influenced by Labov's own speech (as Labov was the person who carried out the data collection). In the decades since, CAT has developed into a robust functional model for

describing the psychological aspect of style variation. CAT has been highly influential in the development of the other two major theories of style discussed in this chapter, and thus it will be useful to review the basic principles of CAT below.

There are three basic forms of accommodation in CAT: 1.) convergence, 2.) divergence, and 3.) maintenance (Dragojevic et al. 2016:36–37). Simply stated, convergence occurs when one speaker alters their speech style such that it is more similar to their interlocuter(s); divergence occurs when a speaker deliberately distinguishes their style from that of interlocuters, and maintenance describes a situation where a speaker neither converges nor diverges from the style of her interlocuter(s).

#### 2.4.4 *Audience Design*

One of Labov's most influential early critics vis-à-vis style variation was Allan Bell. Bell's groundbreaking article, "Language Style as Audience Design" (Bell 1984) argued that "speakers design their style primarily for and in response to their audience" (Bell 2001). Bell critiques Labov's "attention to speech" axiom as a "non-starter," arguing that Labov seems to have misinterpreted (and grounded his assumptions on) a previous study measuring the effects of aural and visual monitoring on formal vs. informal speech (Bell 1984:148–49). Labov interpreted the loss of aural monitoring—and the consequent loss in ability to pay attention to speech—as the cause of a style shift from formal to informal. However, Bell suggests that Labov has missed critical evidence by neglecting the visual data. Bell finds that "reanalysis shows that in Mahl's experiment, loss of aural monitoring is on balance less important than the loss of visual attention to the person of the interviewer." Contrary to Labov's analysis, "it is the subject's awareness of the *addressee*—the interviewer—which proves stronger than the 'pure' attention factor itself" (Bell 1984:149).

Bell's analysis of Mahl's experiment was confirmed in his own research on New Zealand radio newscasters' speech (Bell 1984:171–72) in which he found that the same newscasters in a particular studio broadcasted on two different stations to audiences of different social statuses. Importantly, nothing except the broadcasters' style changed between their speech on the two stations: the location and people were the same, and even most of the content was nearly identical. However, the “notional...addressee,” or ideal type of listener (high or low class) directly and significantly altered the broadcasters' style.

Based on this research, Bell formulated what is known as the “audience design” framework. In this framework, a speaker stands in relation to four levels of audience, who each exert differing levels of influence on the speaker's style. “The main character in the audience is the second person, the *addressee*, who is known, ratified, and addressed. Known and ratified interlocuters in the group, I term *auditors*. Third parties whom the speaker knows to be there, but who are not ratified participants, are *overhearers*. Other parties whose presence is unknown are *eavesdroppers*, whether intentionally or by chance” (Bell 1984:159). Added to these three direct audience types is a fourth, which Bell calls “referees,” who refer to “reference groups who are absent but influential on the speaker's attitudes” (Bell 1984:161). Although addressees exert the most direct influence on speakers, auditors also exert some, though not as much as addressees. Bell contends that style is not affected directly by overhearers or eavesdroppers. (Bell 1984:176).

While difficult to qualify exactly, Bell proposes that the “influence” of the audience may consist of any of three possibilities:

1. “Speakers assess the personal characteristics of their addressees, and design their style to suit.
2. “Speakers assess the general style of their addressees' speech, and shift relative to it.

3. “Speakers assess their addressees’ levels for specific linguistic variables, and shift relative to those levels” (Bell 1984:167).

The interaction between speaker and audience consists of two manners or “dimensions” which Bell calls “responsive” and “initiative.” Responsive audience design is the unmarked condition, in which the speaker is responding to the perceived influence of his or her direct audience. In the marked case, called initiative audience design, we find “in-group”- and “out-group”- referee-design. In-group referee-design (Bell 1984:186–88) marks a situation in which a speaker deliberately diverges (rather than converging, as would be expected) in style from her addressee by “shifting toward the style of the speaker’s own (absent) in-group” (Bell 1984:187), whereas out-group referee design occurs when a speaker “diverge[s] from the speech of their in-group—and thus in some sense from their own ‘natural’ speech—towards an outgroup with whom they wish to identify” (Bell 1984:188).

Of particular interest to the present study, audience design dynamics can become complicated in cases of mass communication. Bell notes that in cases such as these, the auditors, rather than the addressees become the primary “audience” of the speaker, “invert[ing] the normal hierarchy of audience roles” (Bell 1984:177). This shift is conditioned by the fact that speaker/broadcasters “must cater to an unknowable, heterogenous audience,” and are thus influenced in their style choices by that consideration.

#### 2.4.5 Audience Design and General Conference

The table below lists audience roles for participants in General Conference as described through the audience design framework:

Audience role	Description
<i>1. Addressees</i>	Constituted by the in-person audience at the LDS Conference Center. This audience is “known [and] ratified” in that audience members are visible to the

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	speaker, and limited to ticket-holders. This group constitutes the “second person” for the speaker.
<b>2. Auditors</b>	Non in-person audience. This group is “known [and] ratified,” but not addressed. Primarily constituted by the broadcast audience who are watching or listening, but are not physically present in the LDS General Conference center (e.g. could include audience members on Temple Square or in the Old Tabernacle, or those participating from church buildings or homes)
<b>3. Overhearers</b>	This group is “known” but not “ratified.” In other words, this group consists of anyone known to be present in the Conference Center, but not participating as addressees. Members of this group may include ushers, support staff, camera, sound, or light operators, security, other general authorities, or the choir
<b>4. Eavesdroppers</b>	This group is neither “known” nor “ratified.” Thus it includes any person who is either present in the Conference Center or participating as part of the broadcast audience, but who are not part of what Bell would call the “notional...addressee” group.
<b>5. In-group referees</b>	Other General Authorities. This is the group towards which General Conference Speakers converge their style.

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*Table 1 Audience design framework as applied to General Conference*

Though it could be argued that apparent non-audience factors such as topic or setting may influence style-shifting, Bell hypothesizes that “style shift according to nonpersonal factors derives from audience design” (Bell 1984:179). As such we will not discuss these factors further in this review.

## 2.5 Second Style Acquisition

### 2.5.1 *Second Style Acquisition in Religious Contexts*

Benor (2012) outlines what she calls “adult language socialization” among Jewish converts to Orthodox Judaism (known as “ba’alei teshuva”, or “BTs”) in the United States. Her thesis centers on two qualities that she observed about BT language socialization during her ethnographic research: 1. BTs “hyperaccommodate” Orthodox language and cultural practices,



and 2. BTs practice what Benor calls “deliberate distinctiveness” in linguistic and cultural practices, i.e. they intentionally hybridize their pre-Orthodox speech or culture practices with their acquired Orthodox ones (2012:3). About this process of language socialization Benor helpfully observes that

The Orthodox socialization process can be illuminated by anthropologist Jean Lave and social learning theorist Etienne Wenger’s model of learning as ‘legitimate peripheral participation.’ The learners, or ‘apprentices,’ observe the ‘masters’ and other apprentices, and they gradually gain increased access to roles and responsibilities within their new ‘community of practice.’ As linguists Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet define it, ‘a community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement as an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations—in short, practices—emerge in the course of the mutual endeavor.’ Through their participation in communities of practice and through their increasing access, apprentices are able to try out the new practices and sometimes get feedback from the masters and other apprentices. Eventually they become so skilled at the practices expected of them that they are considered experts or masters (2012: 146).

This description of language socialization among Orthodox Jews is also very applicable to Latter-day Saints, and particularly those who, as in this study, become high-level leaders of the church. Understanding the ways that Mormons acquire stylistic competency in “General Conference style” is important for determining which set of sociolinguistic factors may be useful to test as possibly affecting the use of particular style features. In order to get a better sense for what Mormon language socialization “apprenticeships” look like, it will be useful to review the effects of “Church Correlation”—originally a church committee tasked with standardizing and “correlating” church curricula and instructional materials—on the ways that Mormons experience language socialization.

### 2.5.2 “Correlation”: Church Language Socialization in post-1960 Mormonism

By the early 1960s, LDS church president David O. McKay knew he had a problem on his hands. The ad hoc committees that had arisen over time to serve the needs of various demographics in the church—Relief Society (the women’s organization), the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association, the Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Association, Primary (children ages 3-12), and Sunday School—had grown independent and powerful. Each organization funded itself and exerted great autonomy in operation, and—troubling to McKay and some of his predecessors—editorial control over church curricular publications. This autonomy had resulted in considerable duplication of content in instructional materials. In early 1960, McKay tasked senior apostle Harold B. Lee, then chairman of the General Priesthood Committee, to head up a committee to eliminate this duplication (Prince 2005:146).

What began as a simple mandate to consolidate and “correlate” the content of print materials suffered rapid scope creep under Lee’s leadership of what eventually came to be known as the “Correlation Committee.” While content correlation remained a priority, Lee aimed at and ultimately succeeded in fundamentally altering (despite the reservations of McKay and his counselors in the First Presidency) the power structures of church government (Prince 2005:143–58).

In 1971, after only seven years of the Committee’s formal operation, Lee was pleased with their progress (much to the chagrin of his detractors). Writes historian Gregory A. Prince, “At a meeting of church leaders in 1971, Lee reported an impressive list of accomplishments:

Even as I repeat them now it seems unbelievable that we have been able to do what we have done in this time: priesthood home teaching; family home evening; unified social services; the expansion and clarification of the missionary responsibilities of the seventies quorums; expansion of the home-study seminary

course; bishops' training course; priesthood teacher development; libraries and how to use them; definition of a closer relationship between the Aaronic Priesthood and the MIA; improving and making more effective preparation, editing, translating, and distributing teaching materials, and the distribution to meet the deadlines at seasonal beginnings; introduction of a Church-wide library program; the experimental study of the Church membership all over the world to achieve a feeling of closer relationship with the full Church program; the correlation and clarification of the LDS Student Association role to meet the unmet youth needs using the existing structure rather than a separate professional staff; and the correlation of military relations programs using existing Church structure instead of professionals. So we go on and on, and all of this under the direction of the Twelve (Harold B. Lee, as quoted in Prince 2005: 157, orig. from Goates 1985:368)

The triumph of Lee's "Correlation" redefined how Mormons encountered their religious language. While seemingly unrelated to language socialization, the restructuring and centralization of church government meant that, moving forward, not only was language in church publications standardized, but it passed through far fewer authorizing hands than before. Whereas previously, large committees for each auxiliary organization would have had input on the language of curricular materials, now it fell to a small group of demographically homogenous males to decide. While it would require further research to confirm, the likely result would seem to be that a unitary "Church" style emerged in church publications as the result of Lee's correlation efforts.

The emergence of a unitary style (whether actually or only perceptually so) would no doubt have had a profound influence on language socialization in the growing number of church-sponsored social programs that also emerged from Correlation, each of which makes extensive and frequent use of church curricular materials. Today, for example, children born into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints experience extensive family, congregational, and peer socialization from their earliest years. In a given week, a child or youth will spend many

hours in church-related contexts learning the language and cultural scripts of Mormonism. Such contexts include church services (comprising both congregational and class settings), Family Home Evening (a family-focused night of the week mixing family spiritual formation with recreation), family worship practices such as prayer and scripture study, “Mutual” (a weeknight activity for teens), “seminary” (a weekday spiritual formation class for high-school aged teens), and Cub Scouts or Activity days (weekly activities for boys and girls under twelve). Young adults might participate in “institutes of religion” (similar to seminary), “Young Single Adult” organizations at the ward, stake, and even regional levels, “devotionals” (homiletic broadcasts from high-level church leaders), mission service, and attendance at church-owned universities. In short, Correlation has created a totalizing linguistic “apprenticeship” with increasing levels of “legitimate peripheral participation,” with the result that, particularly in the United States, it exerts considerable influence on language socialization.

For the small minority who go on to serve as General Authorities or other high-level church leaders (and who thus, presumably have the obligation or opportunity to eventually speak in General Conference), the “apprenticeship” looks different. While the specific titles and responsibilities differ, men and women who become high-level leaders follow a pattern of increasing “legitimate peripheral participation,” which progresses from relatively low-risk, low-commitment “callings” (unpaid ministerial service), to full-time, paid service. Some of those serving in local ward (“congregational”) callings (e.g. Bishops, Relief Society Presidents) regularly dedicate 20 to 40 hours per week to their callings, in addition to career and family responsibilities, while other ward calling (Elders Quorum President, Primary President) may require less time. However, while there may be some parity between men’s and women’s time

commitments to callings at the ward level, here is where the similarities diverge with respect to opportunities for language socialization.

Owing to the male-exclusive nature of the lay-priesthood, and the requirement of ordination to the lay-priesthood for almost any church leadership calling, men receive many more *formal* and *institutional* opportunities for “legitimate peripheral participation” than women do. At the ward level, an Elders Quorum President (the leader of the adult-male priesthood group in a ward) will not only participate in meetings and trainings with his counselors (assistants), but will likely conduct ministerial visits with the ward Bishop (similar to a Catholic priest), and have personal interviews with the Stake President (similar to a Catholic bishop). Elders Quorum Presidents are frequently preferred candidates to become Bishops or Bishopric counselors when vacancies occur. Bishops attend trainings with the Stake Presidency (the Stake President and his counselors), as well as periodic “regional” trainings given by General Authorities. The process of recruiting local leaders to greater responsibility (and involvement in language socialization opportunities) proceeds from Bishop to Stake President/Presidency, from Stake Presidency to Mission Presidency (responsible for supervising young-adult missionaries), Area Presidency (immediate supervisor of multiple Stake Presidents), or even General Authority Seventy (the lowest designation of leader given authority anywhere in the church, but typically given specific jurisdiction) or from either of the penultimate two to the last. From General Authority Seventy, a select few will be raised to Apostle (one of the fifteen members of the church’s two highest administrative bodies, the “Quorum of the Twelve,” and the “First Presidency”).

The leadership progression for women can proceed from ward level (Primary president, Young Women’s president, Relief Society president) to cognate stake level positions (e.g. Stake Primary president, etc.). Beyond the stake level, women frequently serve “with their husbands”

in mission and area presidencies, meaning that they serve semi-officially in sometimes very time-intensive roles, but receive no formal calling-designation. With this caveat, however, there *are* General Authority *type* callings in which women serve, which, unlike their male cognates, correspond at the “General” level to ward and stake level callings. These include the General Primary presidency, the General Young Women’s presidency, and the General Relief Society presidency, and at various times have also included “boards” or committee attendant to those presidencies. No doubt owing to the male-centric hierarchy of the church, the language socialization “apprenticeship” for women is more opaque than that for men, and thus I cannot speak specifically to the kinds of “legitimate peripheral participation” that women may encounter in the women-administered “auxiliaries” (Primary, Young Women, Relief Society) of the church. However, in addition to the opportunities shared with their male counterparts, there is reason to suppose that female leaders, particularly those serving in “General” positions, receive individualized “apprenticeship” type training and mentorship similar to that of men at most levels of leadership which would presumably have a similar effect on language socialization/style acquisition. One such example has recently opened up in a low-level female leadership setting with the innovation of the “sister training leader” missionary. In 2013, in response to a dramatically increased worldwide missionary force, including “sister” or female missionaries, the church created a new leadership role for sister missionaries, the “sister training leader” (Church 2013) where before there had been very limited opportunities for leadership. While not interrupting the male-centric mission leadership hierarchy, which consists of “district leaders” (male missionaries supervising 6-8 missionaries), “zone leaders” (male missionaries supervising about 14 missionaries), and “assistants to the Mission president” (male missionaries supervising zone leaders), this innovation created a role for women which would make them

“responsible for the training and welfare of female missionaries assigned to them and will be members of and participate in, the new mission leadership council” (Church 2013). In other words, despite a male-dominant hierarchy, there do exist female-specific “apprenticeships” (in at least a limited sense). Before using these accounts of LDS language socialization to distill down some sociolinguistic factors to test for saliency in the use of “General Conference style” features, it will be useful to consider General Authorities for whom English is a second language (English L2). English L2s are interesting from the perspective of second style acquisition because it seems likely that for them, any acquisition of English style features is deliberate, based on perceptions of saliency.

### *2.5.3 Second Style Acquisition in the LDS Church: English L2s As Limit Case*

As noted above, General Conference speakers comprise a diverse group including many for whom English is a second language (L2). While an accounting of second style acquisition in the specific context of English L2 socialization is outside the scope of this thesis, I *am* interested in what processes of L2 acquisition of style variants in a second language may illustrate. Benor observes of second style acquisition,

Trudgill (1986) says that more salient features are more likely to be acquired, barring other factors...I found that, in general, salient features are more likely to be acquired. But I also found that some frequently heard non-salient features can be acquired and that some salient features are avoided because of negative ideology. Speaker’s views about language, as well as their desire to align themselves with some people and distinguish themselves from others, are important factors in the acquisition of new styles. (2004:9)

For the purposes of this study, I hypothesize that L2 status will significantly affect second style acquisition and should thus be tested as a sociolinguistic factor potentially affecting the use of style features. Schmidt (2012) has, for example, shown that Spanish L2s with

less experience with the target dialect acquire geographic-specific dialect (style) features of Spanish at different rates than both L1s and L2s with experience of that dialect.

Ringer-Hilfinger (2013:v) found that even after immersion in a target L2 dialect in a study-abroad trip, “while study abroad learners produce a similar range of forms, they do so at frequencies that are different from those of native speakers. Studies of second style acquisition in native language contexts have similarly indicated that level of experience with the target dialect is salient for identifying dialect features (see, e.g. Baker et al. 2009). All things being equal, then, L2 status and level of experience with the target dialect seem to be salient for the rate of style acquisition. Therefore, since information about time of experience with “General Conference style” is not readily available for the speakers in this data set, this study will include the binary of English L1 versus English L2 as a sociolinguistic factor to be tested for saliency in the use of each style feature.

#### *2.5.4 Sociolinguistic factors to be tested in this study*

Based on the discussions above about language socialization and second style acquisition in Mormon contexts, this study will test the following sociolinguistic factors that seem most likely to affect General Authorities’ acquisition of General Conference style, whether they were raised in the church or joined as adults. These are: native speaker status (English L1/L2), gender (male/female), age (decade of birth), convert status (convert or not), attendance at church-owned Brigham Young University (BYU), and three interaction variables. An interaction variable in a mixed-effects linear regression test measures whether the interaction between two independent variables significantly conditions the frequency of the dependent variable. This study will measure the effects of the interactions between native speaker status and convert status, convert status and BYU attendance, and native speaker status and age.



The reason for examining native speaker status is given at 2.5.3. Gender and age are both standard sociolinguistic factors that have particular relevance in a church hierarchy dominated by older males. Convert status and attendance at BYU are both factors that seem likely to affect adults' opportunities for "legitimate peripheral participation." Given the findings of Benor's research on BTs, converts likely exhibit a variety of "hyperaccommodation" to and "deliberate distinctiveness" from salient forms (Benor 2012:2). For similar reasons, attendance at BYU may also affect different speakers in different ways, leading some to converge toward more "Mormon" styles, and others to diverge. Reasons for examining L2 status are given in 2.5.3. Because L2s are more likely to be converts (60% of English L2s in this study are converts, compared with 9% of L1s), this study will use native speaker status and convert status as an interaction term. Since attendance at Brigham Young University involves intensive exposure to LDS-specific language styles in a variety of forms (weekly devotionals, prayer in classes, church attendance on campus, as well as constant interaction with Latter-day Saints), and since 92% of the 156 of General Authorities in this dataset who attended BYU are *not* converts, this study will also examine convert status and BYU attendance as an interaction term to see if, for example, there is anything about being a convert who attended BYU that significantly conditions style feature use. Finally, since many of the style features impressionistically seem to sound "archaic," and thus may be conditioned by L1 birth decade, I will also examine whether the age of English L2s has a significant effect on style feature use.

## 2.6 Cultural Performance and High-Performance Events

According to anthropologist Richard Bauman, one of the leading students of performance theory in linguistic anthropology,

Cultural performances tend to be the most prominent performances contexts within a community and to share a set of characteristic features. First of all, such events tend to be *scheduled*, set up and prepared for in advance. In addition, they are *temporally bounded*, with a defined beginning and end; they are also *spatially bounded*, that is, enacted in a space that is symbolically marked off, temporarily or permanently such as a theater, a festival ground, or a sacred grove. Within these boundaries of time and space, cultural performances are *programmed*, with a structured scenario or program of activity, as in the five acts of an Elizabethan drama or the liturgical structure of an Iroquois condolence ceremony. These four features are in the service of an additional one, which is part of the essence of cultural performances, namely, that they are *coordinated public* occasions, open to view by an audience and to collective participation; they are occasions for people to come together. Moreover, involving as they do the most highly formalized and aesthetically elaborated performance forms and the most accomplished performers of the community, such performance events are *heightened* occasions, available for the enhancement of experience through the present enjoyment of the intrinsic qualities of the performative display.” (Bauman 1992: 45–46)

In brief, then, cultural performances have the following essential attributes: they are 1.) scheduled, 2.) temporally bounded, 3.) spatially bounded, 4.) programmed, 5.) coordinated public occasions, and 6.) heightened occasions.

Cultural performance theory has been refined by sociolinguist Nikolas Coupland, who refers to cultural performances as “high performance events” (contrasted with “mundane performance events”). Coupland (2007: 147–48) outlines “seven dimensions” of high-performance events in addition to the situational/contextual attributes:

Dimension	Explanation
1. <i>form focusing</i>	“The poetic and metalinguistic functions of language come to the fore and considerations of ‘style’ in its most commonplace sense become particularly salient.”

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2. <i>meaning focusing</i>	“There is an intensity, a density and a depth to utterances or actions, or at least this is assumed to be the case by audiences.”
3. <i>situation focusing</i>	“Performers and audiences are not merely co-present but are ‘gathered’, according to particular dispositional norms. People know their roles.”
4. <i>performer focusing</i>	Performers hold a ‘floor’ or a ‘stage’, literally or at least in participants’ normative understandings of speaker rights and sequencing options.
5. <i>relational focusing</i>	“Performances are <i>for</i> audiences not just <i>to</i> audiences. Although audiences are often public, performers will often have designed their performances for specific groups.”
6. <i>achievement focusing</i>	“Performances are enacted in relation to more or less specific demands. ‘Stakes’ (gains, losses and risks) are involved, with potential for praise or censure for good or bad performance.”
7. <i>repertoire focusing</i>	“Performers and audiences are generally sensitive to what is given and what is new in a performance. Performances may be versions of know pieces, or at least known genres. Innovative interpretation can be commanded. Rehearsal is relevant.”

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*Table 2 Coupland’s (2007) seven dimensions of “high-performance events”*

### 2.6.1 *General Conference as High-Performance Event*

In light of Coupland’s seven dimensions of high-performance events above, it makes sense to interpret General Conference as a high-performance event. In the table below, I will analyze each dimension of high-performance events in light of the unique features of General Conference.

Dimension	Explanation
1. <i>form focusing</i>	‘[S]tyle’ in its most commonplace sense become particularly salient” for General Conference oratory. Viewers and listeners are aware that General Conference speakers use a non-everyday style of speaking.
2. <i>meaning focusing</i>	“There is an intensity, a density and a depth to utterances or actions,” in the General Conference talk. Speakers and audiences alike believe that “[r]evelation...pass[es] through that conference from every angle—through the speakers, through the listeners, through the wide array of authorities from which any given speech may draw” (Holland 2015:152). Speech is thus assumed to transcend the speaker and to come directly from God.
3. <i>situation focusing</i>	General Conference is aptly termed a “gathering” of “[p]erformers and audiences [who] are not merely co-present but are ‘gathered’, according to particular dispositional norms.” An example of such dispositional norms includes the in-present audience members spontaneously standing when the “prophet” enters or exits the building.
4. <i>performer focusing</i>	Performers in General Conference speak from an architecturally central, prominent podium, and hold the sole focus (“stage”) of the gathering (both in-person and by broadcast) in sequencing orders understood by both speakers and audience.
5. <i>relational focusing</i>	Drawing on Bell’s audience design theory General Conference speakers can be described as designing their style to diverge from addressees, and to converge on in-group referees (other General Authorities)
6. <i>achievement focusing</i>	While it would be strange to describe General Conference talks as have “stakes,” it is common “for good or bad performance” to be evaluated as a centrally important part of General Conference talk performance.

*Table 3 The seven dimensions of high-performance events applied to General Conference*

## 2.7 Research questions

This study will investigate the following research questions:

- (1) Is there a set of syntactic features that characterizes the linguistic style of General Authorities (and other high-level leaders both male and female) in the General Conferences of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?
- (2) What sociolinguistic factors most saliently affect the performance of General Conference style in General Conference?
- (3) What theory/model of style best fits the use of “General Conference style” by General Authorities (and other high-level leaders both male and female) in the General Conferences of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

## 2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced Bell’s (1984; 2001) audience design framework and its major precedents including Labov’s “attention-to-speech” and Giles’s “speech/communication accommodation theory. This chapter also introduced the relevance of Benor’s (2012) work on adult language socialization in second style acquisition in a religious context. An examination of language socialization pathways in the church led to distilling down eight relevant sociolinguistic factors to be tested for salience in the use of General Conference style features in General Conference talks. Finally, this chapter introduced Bauman’s cultural performance theory and Coupland’s (2007) refinement of it which he terms “high performance events.” General Conference was then described as a “high performance event,” which will be the working

assumption moving forward in this thesis. Further, within the context of the dimensions of a high-performance event, this thesis will assume that the mode by which speakers employ General Conference style is aptly described by in-group referee design, or what Bell (1984) refers to as the “initiative” component of audience design.

## Chapter 3—Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This study seeks to identify a set of lexico-syntactic features that may characterize the General Conference style, and to determine which sociolinguistic features most saliently affect the use of these style features in General Conference talks. Below I will detail the three phases of data collection and analysis that were used to conduct this study: 1.) exploratory qualitative study, 2.) corpus creation and annotation, 3.) statistical analysis.

### 3.2 Qualitative study: Identifying General Conference lexico-syntactic markers

The first and most consequential step of this study consisted of a qualitative study of the language of General Conference from 1960 to the present conducted by the researcher. A comprehensive human-based survey of every conference talk during this period proved prohibitive because of the sheer number of talks ( $n \approx 4000$ ). Consequently, I opted to sample instead. It is critical to note that the procedure used to identify potential style features was an impressionistic one, based on my perceptions that a given lexico-syntactic pattern, such as “said he” constituted a marked use of English. Using this procedure, I identified many instances of marked language, which I subsequently analyzed for structural similarities, and consolidated into fifty unique patterns. For instance, recorded instances of THAT WE MIGHT, THAT HE MIGHT, THAT GOD MIGHT were generalized to the pattern THAT \* MIGHT. Each pattern was coded using part-of-speech abbreviations from the Penn Treebank tagset (see Marcus et al. 1993:317). Each of the 50 patterns identified was then searched in the LDS General Conference Corpus to quantitatively verify the qualitative intuition that it occurred frequently enough to justify inclusion in the final set of style features. I arbitrarily defined the “significance threshold” of inclusion in the style set as a double-digit normalized frequency (per million words) of feature use in at least four of the

six decades tested. See Table 2 below for original data. Data that did not meet the significance threshold is highlighted in gray. Three of the original set were removed: SO THAT \* MIGHT was eliminated because of the potential crossover with similar pattern THAT \* MIGHT, TO THIS was subsumed under TO NN[P] and SO TESTIFY was eliminated because I did not wish to include a style feature so overtly colored by religious lexis (i.e. “testify”). Additionally, the pattern “, EVEN NN[P]” was added later despite not being originally included in the test set.

While not a truly random sample, the sampling procedure attempted to approximate randomness by sampling all talks from every April Sunday session of conference every fifth year beginning in 1960. Those who, by their listed title are obviously not church leaders (e.g. 1960A “Mr. Sumner G. Whittier, National Administrator of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.”) were not surveyed. Others, such as members of the church who were not leaders at the time of speaking were eliminated later during corpus cleaning. Figure 1 below lists talks the number of talks that I sampled per year.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of talks</b>
1960	10
1965	9
1970	11
1975	12
1980	11
1985	14
1990	14
1995	12
2000	13
2005	13



2010	14
2015	14
<b>Total =</b>	<b>147</b>

Table 4 Talks surveyed in qualitative analysis

Table 5 below lists normalized feature counts (per million words) for each of the style features as verified in Davies’ (2018) LDS General Conference Corpus.

<b>Feature</b>	<b>1960s</b>	<b>1970s</b>	<b>1980s</b>	<b>1990s</b>	<b>2000s</b>	<b>2010s</b>
THAT * MAY	371.35	398.36	359.64	367.66	307.15	378.21
THIS DAY	147.93	152.29	105.91	90.49	71.39	42.88
May PRP V	118.10	143.93	130.29	141.79	111.33	108.92
OF OLD	91.32	77.04	58.67	42.04	42.57	27.44
HE WHO	70.01	69.28	89.15	66.26	48.46	48.88
MAY DT	60.27	56.74	54.10	49.88	50.43	28.30
YEARS OF AGE	60.27	41.81	32.76	39.90	32.75	17.15
THAT * MIGHT	51.75	40.61	41.91	49.16	40.6	44.6
To NN/NNP	48.09	36.43	41.91	29.21	30.13	30.87
How JJ	45.66	77.64	70.86	80.51	69.42	53.17
HIM WHO V	43.22	66.29	54.10	58.43	33.40	31.73
, EVEN THE NN[P]	43.22	57.33	52.57	51.30	40.60	43.74
THERE C?M*S?	42.61	56.74	43.43	36.34	34.06	18.87
THERE VB VBD	42.01	33.45	28.19	24.23	17.68	6
MAY NN[P] V	35.31	18.51	21.33	27.08	12.44	7.72
THIS PRP V	33.48	26.28	27.43	12.11	15.72	4.29
SAID *	30.44	29.26	41.91	37.05	51.08	32.59
WHAT A[N] JJ	23.74	39.42	36.57	55.58	51.74	32.59
WHAT A[N] NN	15.22	25.08	41.91	34.91	32.75	19.73
SO THAT * MIGHT	14.61	14.93	19.05	7.84	11.13	12.01

TO THIS	14	16.13	18.29	10.69	9.82	5.15
JJ VB	11.57	13.14	12.95	19.24	12.44	6.86
OF * PRP V	9.74	13.74	31.24	32.06	27.51	32.59
MAY THIS	10.35	7.76	3.05	4.99	5.24	5.15
WHAT JJ	10.35	10.15	9.14	14.96	7.2	8.58
OURS VB	9.74	7.76	3.81	14.25	5.24	10.29
IN ORDER THAT * MIGHT	9.13	7.76	3.81	0.71	1.96	0.86
IN ORDER THAT * MAY	7.91	5.38	3.05	3.56	1.31	1.72
HOW MUCH	7.31	7.17	5.33	9.26	5.24	8.58
SO TESTIFY	6.7	10.75	13.72	23.51	40.6	44.6
WE OF THE	6.7	2.39	2.29	4.28	1.31	0
THESE ARE THEY	6.09	11.35	11.43	4.99	3.27	4.29
IN THIS, THE NN	4.26	4.78	3.05	4.99	0.65	0
SO MUCH OF NN	4.26	0.6	12.19	14.96	7.2	2.57
FEEL OF	3.04	7.17	9.91	14.25	3.27	12.01
THEIRS VB	3.04	2.99	3.05	3.56	1.31	0.86
HOW I V	3.04	2.99	14.48	9.26	13.75	6.86
HE IT VB WHO	3.04	4.18	11.43	1.43	0.65	0.86
MAY * EVER	3.04	2.39	4.57	7.84	10.48	17.15
OF PRP	3.04	7.76	4.57	7.13	5.89	10.29
MUST EVER BE	2.44	1.19	2.29	1.43	0	1.72
OF NN	2.44	2.39	7.62	5.7	7.2	5.15
IN HIM WHOSE	2.44	7.17	14.48	4.99	3.27	6
YOURS VB	2.44	1.19	3.81	9.98	4.58	4.29
SAID DT NN	1.83	7.76	11.43	10.69	9.82	9.43
OF THESE	1.83	4.18	3.05	2.85	5.24	14.58
WE MUST EVER	1.22	2.39	4.57	2.14	1.96	0.86
HOW DT NN	0.61	1.19	4.57	0	0	1.72
OF PRP	0	2.39	6.1	4.28	4.58	3.43
SO DECLARE	0	1.19	0.76	4.99	0.65	1.72

Table 5 Normalized frequency (per million) of GC features in Davies' (2019) LDS Gen. Conf. Corpus

### 3.3 Corpus creation

The first challenge that this study posed was finding a (digital) archive that contained all of the texts desired for our analysis, which included General Conference reports from 1960 to 2018. While the official website of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints contains conference reports beginning in January 1971, their archive does not predate 1971. To help address this issue for researchers, corpus linguist Mark Davies has helpfully created the LDS General Conference Corpus (Davies 2018), but this proved insufficient to meet the current study's research needs, since the proposed analysis of the normalized frequency of General Conference style features per speaker would require access to the full text of the corpus, which is not available through Davies' subscription-based corpus because of copyright/fair use restrictions.

In order to meet the needs of the study I created a custom General Conference corpus by using a Python script (Brown 2019; see Appendix A) to webscrape the comprehensive General Conference archive at [scriptures.byu.edu](http://scriptures.byu.edu) using a Selenium webdriver. This resulted in approximately 10,000 text files (all conference talks since 1851) which included metadata for speaker name, talk title, calling, and the conference session (April or October, Year). After cleaning the corpus to include only the talks in the target time range (1960–2018), a Python script (Betts 2019; see Appendix B) was used to analyze the corpus.

### 3.4 Corpus annotation and processing

My custom Python script (Betts 2019) used the Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK) to tokenize and part-of-speech tag (using the PennTreeBank tagset) each text before using regular expressions to find each syntactic feature and calculate its frequency per talk (normalized to 1000 words), following which speaker metadata and normalized feature counts were written out to an Excel spreadsheet via a Pandas DataFrame, then added by hand data for each speaker for

each of the following target sociolinguistic factors: 1.) English L1 or L2, 2.) Gender, 3.) Decade of Birth, 4.) whether the speaker attended BYU, 5.) whether the speaker is a convert to the church. The first few lines of the final structure of the spreadsheet appear in Table 3 below:

Name	Talk title	Year	Feature	Norm freq	L1/L2	M/F	Birth	BYU?	Convert?
Angel Abrea	The “Little	1981	that * may	0.54436581	L2	M	1930s	N	Y
Angel Abrea	The “Little	1981	this day	0.54436581	L2	M	1930s	N	Y
Angel Abrea	The “Little	1981	May PRP V	0	L2	M	1930s	N	Y
Angel Abrea	The “Little	1981	he who	0	L2	M	1930s	N	Y
Angel Abrea	The “Little	1981	of old	0	L2	M	1930s	N	Y
Angel Abrea	The “Little	1981	May DT	0	L2	M	1930s	N	Y
Angel Abrea	The “Little	1981	years of age	0	L2	M	1930s	N	Y
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

Table 6 Sample of raw data from corpus

### 3.5 Statistical analysis

Using the raw data from the spreadsheet, mixed-effects linear regressions were performed on the data using a custom script (Brown 2019; see Appendix A) in the statistical software R. Mixed effects linear regression is useful for assessing the effects of multiple explanatory factors on a continuous variable. Additionally, it is possible to assess situations in which “the effect of an explanatory variable on the outcome depends on the value of another variable” (Levshina 2015: 162). In the case of our data, we wish to know the effects of English L1/L2, gender, decade of birth, BYU attendance, and convert status on the use of each syntactic feature identified above (see 3.2), but we also want to measure interactions between variables, such as cases where the use of particular features may be conditioned by both English L1/L2 status *and* BYU attendance, or English L1/L2 and convert status.

## Chapter 4—Results

### 4.1 Introduction

Below is the output of the mixed-effects linear regression tests performed in R. The output data have been filtered to only include regressions with at least one independent variable that significantly predicts the use of the feature in question at the alpha level ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). Below I will analyze each feature for significant effects from explanatory factors, or for significant interactions between factors, and then will discuss the implications of the data for the research questions.

Feature	Term	estimate	std.error	statistic	df	p.value
, EVEN_NN/NNP	GenderM	0.0380	0.0134	2.83	125.	0.00536
, EVEN_THE_NN/NNP	`Convert?'Y	0.0464	0.0183	2.53	254.	0.0119
, EVEN_THE_NN/NNP	GenderM	0.0300	0.132	2.27	851.	0.0235
_JJ_IS/WAS/WERE	`BYU?'Y	-0.159	0.0548	-2.90	241.	0.00407
_MAY_NN/NNP_V	birth	-	0.000178	-3.05	280.	0.00253
_MAY_PRP_V	birth	0.000543				
_MAY_PRP_V	birth	-0.00120	0.000574	-2.09	211.	0.0376
_OF_*_PRP_V	`Convert?'Y:'BYU?'Y	0.102	0.0329	3.11	1622.	0.00190
_THIS_PRP_V	`L1/L2`L2	4.13	1.51	2.73	1205.	0.00640
_THIS_PRP_V	birth	-	0.000155	-3.04	129.	0.00283
_THIS_PRP_V	birth	0.000473				
_THIS_PRP_V	`L1/L2`L2:birth	-0.00211	0.000780	-2.71	1208.	0.00683
HE_WHO	GenderM	0.0497	0.0149	3.35	516.	0.000882
HIM_WHO_V	birth	-	0.000209	-2.05	229.	0.0412
HIM_WHO_V	birth	0.000429				
HIM_WHO_V	GenderM	0.0335	0.0122	2.74	727.	0.00631
MAY_DT	birth	-0.00105	0.000395	-2.65	275.	0.00844
OF_OLD	birth	-	0.000334	-1.99	318.	0.0477
OF_OLD	birth	0.000664				
THAT_*_MAY	birth	-0.00306	0.000922	-3.32	225.	0.00104
THAT_*_MIGHT	GenderM	0.0933	0.0334	2.80	299.	0.00548
THERE_C*MES?	`L1/L2`L2	8.98	2.06	4.36	1040.	0.0000141
THERE_C*MES?	birth	-	0.000218	-2.04	129.	0.0432
THERE_C*MES?	birth	0.000444				
THERE_C*MES?	`L1/L2`L2:birth	-0.00463	0.00106	-4.36	1043.	0.0000141
THERE_IS/WAS/WERE_VBD	birth	-0.00140	0.000301	-4.66	312.	0.00000476
THIS_DAY	birth	-0.00188	0.000436	-4.30	205.	0.0000261
YEARS_OF_AGE	`L1/L2`L2	7.07	1.98	3.57	1492.	0.000370

YEARS_OF_AGE	birth	-	0.000193	-2.37	122.	0.0192
		0.000459				
YEARS_OF_AGE	`L1/L2`L2:birth	-0.00363	0.00102	-3.55	1495.	0.000397

Table 7 Results from mixed-effects linear regressions

## 4.2 Discussion

The results of the regressions indicate that 17 of the set of 22 identified features had significant effects from or interactions with explanatory factors. Before discussing results in detail, it will be useful to introduce in Table 8 below the coding scheme (the Penn Treebank tagset) used to identify each style feature.

Tag	Part of speech
DT	Determiner
JJ	Adjective
NN	Noun, singular or mass
NNS	Noun, plural
NNP	Proper noun, singular
NNPS	Proper noun, plural
PRP	Personal pronoun
VB	Verb, base form
VBD	Verb, past tense

Table 8 Relevant tags from the Penn Treebank tagset

The discussion of which sociolinguistic features have significant interactions with the use of General Conference style features is conducted below using these symbols to describe part-of-speech names.

#### 4.2.1 Feature 1: “, even\_NN/NNP”

The use of the “, even\_NN/NNP” (e.g. “even Jesus Christ”) feature is significantly conditioned by gender. Results indicate that men are more likely than women to use this feature.

#### 4.2.2 Feature 2: “, even\_the\_NN/NNP”

The use of the “, even\_the\_NN/NNP” (e.g. “even the Lord”) feature is significantly conditioned by both gender and convert status. Converts are more likely than non-converts to use this feature, and men are more likely than women.

#### 4.2.3 Feature 3: “\_JJ\_is/was/were”

The use of the “\_JJ\_is/was/were” (e.g. “happy is the man”) feature is negatively affected by the BYU variable, such that speakers who attended Brigham Young University are less likely to use this feature than speakers who did not.

#### 4.2.4 Feature 4: “\_May\_NN/NNP\_V”

The use of the “\_May\_NN/NNP\_V” (e.g. “May God bless”) feature is negatively affected by birth decade. Younger speakers are less likely to use this feature than older speakers.

#### 4.2.5 Feature 5: “\_May\_PRP\_V”

The use of the “\_May\_PRP\_V” (e.g. “May we pray always”) feature is negatively affected by birth decade. Younger speakers are less likely to use this feature than older speakers.

#### 4.2.6 Feature 6: “\_of\_\*\_PRP\_V”

The use of the “\_of\_\*\_PRP\_V” (e.g. “of this I testify”) feature is positively affected by the interaction of Convert and BYU factors, such that converts who attended BYU are considerably more likely to use this feature than any other group (converts who did not attend BYU, or non-converts regardless of BYU attendance). In fact, converts who attended the church owned school

are nearly four times as likely (.131 vs. 0.0339) as converts who did not attend BYU to use this feature. Furthermore, non-converts BYU attendance did not significantly affect the use of this feature (0.028 for attendees vs. 0.0299 for non-attendees). Therefore, this feature can confidently be said to be more characteristic of converts than of non-converts.

#### *4.2.7 Feature 7: “\_This\_PRP\_V”*

The use of the “\_This\_PRP\_V” (e.g. “This I say”) feature is conditioned by three factors: birth decade, L1/L2 status, and is affected by the interaction of L1/L2 status and birth decade such that the effect of birth decade is greater on English L2s’ use of this feature than on English L1s, although for both English L2s and L1s, younger speakers are less likely to use this feature.

#### *4.2.8 Feature 8: “he\_who”*

The use of the “he\_who” feature is conditioned by gender. Men are more likely to use this feature than women.

#### *4.2.9 Feature 9: “him\_who\_V”*

The use of the “him\_who\_V” (e.g. “him who leads this church”) feature is conditioned by gender and birth decade. Men are more likely to use this feature than women, and older speakers are more likely to use it than younger speakers.

#### *4.2.10 Feature 10: “May\_DT”*

The use of the “May\_DT” (e.g. “May the Lord”) feature is conditioned by birth decade. Younger speakers are less likely to use this feature than older speakers.

#### *4.2.11 Feature 11: “of\_old”*

The use of the “of\_old” feature is conditioned by birth decade. Younger speakers are less likely to use this feature than older speakers.



#### 4.2.12 Feature 12: “that \*\_ \_may”

The use of the “that \*\_ \_may” (e.g. “that we may”) feature is conditioned by birth decade.

Younger speakers are less likely to use this feature than older speakers.

#### 4.2.13 Feature 13: “that \*\_ \_might”

The use of the “that \*\_ \_might” (e.g. “that we might”) feature is conditioned by gender. Men are more likely to use this feature than women.

#### 4.2.14 Feature 14: “there \_come/came/comes”

The use of the “there \_come/came/comes” feature is conditioned by three factors: birth decade, L1/L2 status, and the interaction of L1/L2 status and birth decade. English L2 speakers are more likely to use this feature than English L1s, and younger speakers are less likely to use it than older speakers, while the interaction between native speaker status and birth decade is stronger in the case of L2s, meaning that older L2s are less likely to use this feature than younger L2s.

#### 4.2.15 Feature 15: “there \_is/was/were \_VBD”

The use of the “there \_is/was/were \_VBD” feature is conditioned by birth decade. Younger speakers are less likely to use this feature than older speakers.

#### 4.2.16 Feature 16: “this \_day”

The use of the “this day” feature is conditioned by birth decade. Younger speakers are less likely to use this feature than older speakers.

#### 4.2.17 Feature 17: “years \_of \_age”

The use of the “years of age” feature is conditioned by three factors: birth decade, L1/L2 status, and the interaction of L1/L2 status and birth decade. English L2 speakers are more likely to use this feature than English L1s, and younger speakers are less likely to use it than older speakers.

Additionally, the effect of birth decade is stronger among L2s than among L1s, meaning that while older L2s are more likely to use this feature than older L1s, both younger L2s and younger L1s are less likely to use this feature.

### 4.3 Summary of Findings

Sociolinguistic Factors & Interactions	Style Features Affected	Total Features Affected (of 22)
Birth decade	1; 4; 5; 7; 9; 10; 11; 12; 14; 15; 16; 17;	12
BYU attendance (Y/N)	3	1
Convert status (Y/N)	2	1
Gender (M/F)	2; 8; 9; 13;	4
Native speaker status (L1/L2)	7; 14; 17;	3
Native speaker status : Convert status	—	0
Convert status : BYU attendance	6	1
Native speaker status : Birth decade	7; 14; 17;	3

*Table 9 List of style features significantly affected by each factor and pairwise interaction*

In Table 9 above, we can see that birth decade exerts the strongest effect of any explanatory variable on the use of General Conference style features (n = 12 of 22). After birth decade, the next strongest effects are exerted by gender (n = 4), native speaker status (n = 3), and the interaction between native speaker status and birth decade (n = 3). Importantly the interaction between native speaker status and convert status, contrary to expectations, had no effect on the use of General Conference style features. Despite the intriguing possibility that features 7, 14, and 17—all of which are affected by birth decade, native speaker status, and the interaction between them—may have similar syntactic features, there does not appear to be any clear similarity. An equally intriguing possibility is that, given the large number of features affected by birth decade (n = 15, counting the interaction of native speaker status and birth decade), and the

relative explanatory weakness of other factors, that what we are observing is a dying style that largely indexes advanced age. While this seems likely, it will require further research (perhaps including more than the 22 style features analyzed in this study) to confirm.

## Chapter 5—Conclusion

### 5.1 Introduction

The results of this study suggest that there is a set of lexico-syntactic features (separate from marked lexical items as such) that seem to be part of what we have termed “General Conference style,” or the style used by leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the church’s semi-annual General Conference events. By building and computationally analyzing a corpus of General Conference talks from 1960–2018, I found that the use of 17 of the 22 syntactic features identified as part of the General Conference style were significantly affected by sociolinguistic factors. The most salient of these factors were the speaker’s decade of birth (12 of 17 features), and gender (4 of 17 features). For the data analyzed (and I acknowledge the limitations of the impressionistically identified style features), these effects indicated that overall, younger speakers and women are less likely to use the features identified than older speakers and men. This finding seems to indicate that a new “General Conference style” may be emerging as older speakers are replaced in the ranks of the General Authorities.

### 5.2 Answering the Research Questions

Below is a review the implications of the above findings on the three research questions proposes in Chapter 2: 1.) Is there a set of syntactic features that characterizes the linguistic style of General Authorities (and other high-level leaders both male and female) in the General Conferences of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? 2.) What sociolinguistic factors most saliently affect the performance of General Conference style in General Conference? 3.) What theory/model of style best fits the use of “General Conference style” by General Authorities (and other high-level leaders both male and female) in the General Conferences of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

### *5.2.1 Research Question 1*

The first research question asked whether there was a set of syntactic features that characterized the “General Conference talk” genre. Based on our findings in 3.2, it would seem that we can confidently assert that there are in fact, syntactic features that are at least included in the General Conference talk genre. It may be going too far to say that these features “characterize” the style, but they do seem to be consistently used. However, one of the major questions that has gone unanswered in this thesis is whether there is a “unitary” General Conference talk style at all, given the considerable diversity of General Conference speakers. The implications of there not being a unitary “General Conference style” may be that more fine-grained classification is needed to describe the styles at play here.

### *5.2.2 Research Question 2*

Our second research question asked what sociolinguistic features most saliently affected the use of “General Conference genre” features. According to the results of the 22 multiple-effects linear regressions performed in 4.1, we can see that the number of salient sociolinguistic factors is very low. Many of the features are negatively affected by birth decade. In fact, 12 features are inversely correlated with birth decade, indicating that younger speakers are less likely to use these features than older speakers, which seems to indicate that a significant percentage of “General Conference talk” features may be dying out. Additionally, 4 of the features are more commonly used by male speakers, which unsurprisingly confirms that male speakers both numerically and stylistically dominate this genre.

### *5.2.3 Research Question 3*

Question three asked which sociolinguistic theory of style best accounts for the mechanics of the General Conference genre. As noted above, two theories, taken together, nicely account for style

variation in General Conference. As an event, General Conference can be profitably described as a “high performance event,” (a subset or refinement of Bauman’s “cultural performance”) including the seven dimensions of those events theorized by Coupland (2007): form focusing, meaning focusing, situation focusing, performer focusing, relational focusing, achievement focusing, and repertoire focusing. The action of the speaker with respect to constituting an audience is well described by “in-group referee design,” an element of Bell’s (1984) audience design framework which describes a situation in which a speaker *diverges* (remember Giles’s communication accommodation theory) from his or her addressee and *converges* on the style of members of his or her in-group, with whom s/he wishes to identify.

### 5.3 Caveats

This thesis has provided valuable data on the sociolinguistic factors that influence the use of certain style features in Mormon oratory. However, they should be accepted with caution, in that the set of syntactic features were identified qualitatively, and likely do not represent the full range of features in the style. Results may, for example, look different if all 50 features originally identified were included in the analysis. More importantly, this study assumed (mostly for purposes of analytical convenience) that *there is a unitary style* used by all or most church leaders in General Conference, which seems improbable (although, perhaps, possible) given the demographic diversity of General Conference speakers.

### 5.4 Limitations

One of the potentially major limitations of this study is that it relied on aggregated data. Coupland (2001:192) argued against the use of aggregate data for style research, precisely because aggregated data smooths the distinctions between individual speakers’ variation, but that style is “inherently established at a local level which makes aggregation inappropriate”

(2001:192). It is unclear whether this is a critique of all aggregation, or just of aggregation that facilitates what Coupland calls *unidimensional* (e.g. 2001:199) analysis, such as the Labovian assumption that all variation takes place on a single axis of formality/informality. Whether Coupland's criticism entirely applies to this study, his point is well taken that accounting for style-variation becomes more difficult through aggregate study. Nevertheless, at least on the score of local variation, this study's use of multiple-effects linear regression should account for the excessive influence of any one speaker's style use on the aggregated data. The second major limitation, as mentioned previously, is the fact that the style features analyzed in this study were impressionistically identified based on the imprecise quality of "markedness." A more computational approach to style-feature identification, such as Biber's (1992, etc.) use of cluster analysis, may be a more fruitful method.

### 5.5 Future research

It would be valuable to combine a broader survey of syntactic features with other features such as Utah-based phonetic variation, as well as to try to ascertain whether there is a "unitary style," something which seems unlikely. Further, since I have argued above that the language socialization of church leaders depends so much on Correlation, it would be valuable to analyze a corpus of print materials put out by Correlation since its inception in 1960 to confirm whether this hypothesis holds up. Finally, future research could profitably engage with Gilkey's (1994) work on verbal performance in Latter-day Saint worship services and could compare General Conference style with that of worship services, which have the unique characteristic of often being spontaneous rather than scripted speech events. Also needed is a comparative study of General Conference style with other styles of religious speech used by church leaders in the LDS Church, as well as those used by leaders of other churches. Such a study would allow us to

understand better how General Conference style is being used to assert “distinctiveness” from other groups (Irvine 2001). Finally, it would be valuable to further examine the corpus of General Conference texts using Biber’s corpus-based multidimensional (MD) genre analysis approach.



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## Appendix A—Webscraping Scripts

### 6.1 Introduction

This section includes the Python scripts used to create and analyze the General Conference corpus used in this thesis. Scripts were written by Brigham Young University Linguistics professor Earl K. Brown. To access Brown’s github repo, visit <https://github.com/ekbrown>

### 6.2 Webscraping

The structure of scriptures.byu.edu, the archive from which we constructed the corpus for this thesis, required several scripts to scrape. The script “collect\_speaker\_names” scrapes speaker names, “collect\_session\_names” gets the names of each session, and “scrape\_gen\_conf” retrieves the actual text of each talk and its metadata.

#### 6.2.1 *collect\_speaker\_names*

```
"""Python script to use Selenium to scrape the names of the speakers in General Conference
```

```
Earl K. Brown, ekbrown byu edu (add the appropriate characters to create email)
```

```
"""
```

```
from selenium import webdriver
```

```
from time import sleep
```

```
import string
```

```
dur = 3
```

```
driver = webdriver.Chrome(CHROMEDRIVER_PATH)
```

```
driver.get("https://scriptures.byu.edu/")
```

```
sleep(dur)
```

```
driver.find_element_by_partial_link_text("Speakers").click()
```

```
sleep(dur)
```

```

with open("speaker_list.txt", "w") as outfile:
    for let in string.ascii_uppercase:
        print(let)
        try:
            driver.find_element_by_link_text(let).click()
            sleep(dur)
        except:
            print(f"\tNo speakers with a last name beginning with {let}.")
            continue

    spkrs = driver.find_elements_by_xpath("//ul[@class='speakerlist']/li/a")
    for i in range(len(spkrs)):
        spkrs = driver.find_elements_by_xpath("//ul[@class='speakerlist']/li/a")
        print(spkrs[i].text)
        outfile.write(spkrs[i].text + "\n")

    driver.execute_script("window.history.go(-1);")
    sleep(dur)

driver.close()
driver.quit()

```

### 6.2.2 *collect\_session\_names*

```

"""Python script to use Selenium to scrape the names of the speakers in General Conference
Earl K. Brown, ekbrown byu edu (add the appropriate characters to create email)
"""
dur = 3
driver = webdriver.Chrome(CHROMEDRIVER_PATH)
driver.get("https://scriptures.byu.edu/")

```

```

sleep(dur)
driver.find_element_by_css_selector("#scicrumb > div > ul > li.tab.conttab > a > span").click()
sleep(dur)
driver.find_element_by_partial_link_text("General").click()
sleep(dur)

```

with open("session\_list.txt", "w") as outfile:

```

    sessions = driver.find_elements_by_xpath("//ul[@class='conflist']/li/a")
    for i in range(len(sessions)):
        spkrs = driver.find_elements_by_xpath("//ul[@class='conflist']/li/a")
        print(sessions[i].text)
        outfile.write(sessions[i].text + "\n")

```

```

    driver.execute_script("window.history.go(-1);")
    sleep(dur)

```

```

driver.close()
driver.quit()

```

### 6.2.3 *scrape\_gen\_conf*

```

"""Python script to use selenium to scrape the General Conference talks from scriptures.byu.edu
Earl K. Brown, ekbrown byu edu (add appropriate characters to create email)
"""
import re
from selenium import webdriver
from time import sleep
# specify duration in seconds of pauses to allow pages and parts of pages to load
# the time you specify will depend on your internet connection speed
# if you get errors about elements not being found, then you should try

```



```

# increasing the duration of pauses to allow the page to fully load
dur = 2
# pathway to your chromedriver file (on Mac) or the directory with it (on Windows)
driver = webdriver.Chrome(CHROMEDRIVER PATH)

# pathway to file with list of speakers, created previously with a different script
with open("FILEPATH/session_list.txt") as infile:
    # loop over list of speakers
    for ln in infile:
        cur_talk = ln.rstrip()
        #####
        #if you want to collect the talks incrementally,
        #uncomment the next two lines and specify a letter
        #if cur_spkr[0].upper() != "Z":
            #continue
            #####
            print(f'Collecting talks by {cur_spkr}')

# start from the top of the webpage
driver.get("https://scriptures.byu.edu/")
sleep(dur)

# find element with list of speakers
driver.find_element_by_css_selector('#scicrumb > div > ul > li.tab.conttab >
a > span')
sleep(dur)
driver.find_element_by_partial_link_text("General Conference").click()
sleep(dur)

# find list of speakers with current speaker's initial

```

```

driver.find_element_by_link_text(cur_talk[0].upper()).click()
sleep(dur)

    # find list of talks about current speaker
spkr = driver.find_element_by_partial_link_text(cur_talk)
# sleep(dur)
    spkr_name = spkr.text # get current speaker's name as written on website
    spkr_name = re.sub(r"^[a-z0-9]+", "_", spkr_name, flags=re.I) #make speaker's
        name pathway-friendly

spkr.click() # go to list of talks
    sleep(dur)

# grab list of talks
    titles = driver.find_elements_by_xpath("//ul[@class='talksblock']/li/a[starts-
        with(@onclick, 'getTalk')])
# sleep(dur)
# loop over titles of talks by current speaker
for title in titles:
    # click on current title
    title.click()
    sleep(dur)

    # find element with text of current talk
talk = driver.find_element_by_xpath("//div[@id='talkcontent']")
# sleep(dur)

# create filename and write current talk to TXT file
    filename = spkr_name + "_" + re.sub(r"^[a-z0-9]", "_", title.text, flags=re.I)
filename = f"FILEPATH/{filename}.txt"

```

```
with open(filename, mode = "w", encoding = "utf8") as outfile:  
    outfile.write(talk.text)
```

```
driver.close()
```

```
driver.quit()
```

## Appendix B—Linguistic Feature Counting

### 1.1 Introduction

The following Python script tokenizes and part-of-speech (POS) tags each text file in the corpus, then uses regular expressions to find and count any instances of the target syntactic features.

These are written out to a Pandas DataFrame.

### 7.2 featureCounter

```
"""Python script to count targeted syntactic features in a custom corpus
```

```
Created by Stephen Betts; stephenbetts byu edu (add the appropriate characters to create email)"""
```

```
import os, nltk, re, pandas
```

```
from nltk.tokenize import RegexpTokenizer
```

```
df = pandas.DataFrame()
```

```
tokenizer = RegexpTokenizer(r'[\w,"]+') #r'\w+'
```

```
path = 'PATH/GCcorpus/'
```

```
feat_1 = "that *_ _may" #regex works
```

```
feat_2 = "this_day" #regex works
```

```
feat_3 = ". _May_PRP_V" #regex works
```

```
feat_4 = "he_who" #regex works
```

```
feat_5 = "of_old" #regex works
```

```
feat_6 = "May_DT" #regex works, but POS tagger labels sentence initial "May" as NNP
```

```
feat_7 = "years_of_age" #regex works
```

```
feat_8 = "that *_ _might" #regex works
```

```
feat_9 = ". _To_PRP" #regex works
```

```
feat_10 = ". _How_JJ" #regex works
```

```

feat_11 = "him_who_V" #regex works
feat_12 = ",_even_the_NN/NNP" #regex works
feat_13 = ", even_NN/NNP" #regex works
feat_14 = "there_c*mes?" #regex works
feat_15 = "there_is/was/were_VBD" #regex works
feat_16 = "._May_NN/NNP_V" #regex works, but tagger may mis-tag the verbs as nouns
feat_17 = "._This_PRP_V" #regex works
feat_18 = "._Said_NN/NNP/PRP" #regex works, but sometimes mis-tags "said"
feat_19 = "._What_a[n]_JJ" #regex works
feat_20 = "._What_a[n]_NN" #regex works
feat_21 = "._JJ_is/was/were" #regex works, but sometimes mis-tags the JJ as NNP/NN
feat_22 = "._of_*_PRP_V" #regex works

```

for filename in os.listdir(path):

```

with open(f'PATH/{filename}', encoding = "utf-8") as fin:

```

```

    #GET WORD COUNT, DEFINE WDS, WDS_ONLY STRINGS

```

```

    print(f'working on {filename}')

```

```

    wds = fin.readlines() #read in file

```

```

    wds_str = ".join(wds) #create string of file text

```

```

    wds_only = tokenizer.tokenize(wds_str)

```

```

    tokens = nltk.word_tokenize(wds_str)

```

```

    tagged = nltk.pos_tag(tokens)

```

```

    word_count = len(wds_only)

```

```

    #DEFINE METADATA

```

```

    title = wds[0]

```

```

    author = wds[1]

```

```

    calling = wds[2]

```

```

    year = re.search(r"[0-9]{4}", filename).group()

```

#DEFINE FEATURE COUNTERS

```
count_ft1 = 0
count_ft2 = 0
count_ft3 = 0
count_ft4 = 0
count_ft5 = 0
count_ft6 = 0
count_ft7 = 0
count_ft8 = 0
count_ft9 = 0
count_ft10 = 0
count_ft11 = 0
count_ft12 = 0
count_ft13 = 0
count_ft14 = 0
count_ft15 = 0
count_ft16 = 0
count_ft17 = 0
count_ft18 = 0
count_ft19 = 0
count_ft20 = 0
count_ft21 = 0
count_ft22 = 0
```

#REGEX FEATURE COUNTERS

```
for i in range(len(tagged)):
```

```
    #feature 1 = that * may
```

```
    if re.search(r"\bthat\b", tagged[i][0], flags = re.I) and re.search(r"\bmay\b", tagged[i + 2][0]):
```

```

#print("Working on feature 1 in {filename}")
count_ft1 += 1

    #feature 2 = this day
if re.search(r"\bthis\b", tagged[i][0], flags = re.I) and re.search(r"\bday\b", tagged[i +
1][0]):
    #print(f"working on feature 2 in {filename}")
    count_ft2 += 1

    #feature 3 = . May PRP V
if re.search(r"\bMay\b", tagged[i][0]) and re.search(r"\bPRP\b", tagged[i + 1][1], flags =
re.I) and re.search(r"V", tagged[i + 2][1]):
    #print(f"working on feature 3 in {filename}")
    count_ft3 += 1

    #feature 4 = he who
if re.search(r"\bhe\b", tagged[i][0], flags = re.I) and re.search(r"\bwho\b", tagged[i +
1][0], flags = re.I):
    #print(f"working on feature 4 in {filename}")
    count_ft4 += 1

    #feature 5 = of old
if re.search(r"\bof\b", tagged[i][0], flags = re.I) and re.search(r"\bold\b", tagged[i + 1][0],
flags = re.I):
    #print(f"working on feature 5 in {filename}")
    count_ft5 += 1

    #feature 6 = May DT
if re.search(r"\bmay\b", tagged[i][0], flags = re.I) and re.search(r"\bDT\b", tagged[i +
1][1], flags = re.I):
    #print(f"working on feature 6 in {filename}")
    count_ft6 += 1

```

```

#feature 7 = years of age
if re.search(r"\byears\b", tagged[i][0], flags = re.I) and re.search(r"\bof\b", tagged[i +
1][0], flags = re.I) and re.search(r"\bage\b", tagged[i + 2][0], flags = re.I):
#print(f"working on feature 7 in {filename}")
count_ft7 += 1

#feature 8 = that * might
if re.search(r"\bthat\b", tagged[i][0], flags = re.I) and re.search(r"\bmight\b", tagged[i +
2][0], flags = re.I):
#print(f"working on feature 8 in {filename}")
count_ft8 += 1

#feature 9 = . To PRP
if re.search(r"\bTo\b", tagged[i][0]) and re.search(r"\bPRP\b", tagged[i + 1][1], flags =
re.I):
#print("working on feature 9")
count_ft9 += 1

#feature 10 = . How ADJ
if re.search(r"\bHow\b", tagged[i][0]) and re.search(r"\bJJ\b", tagged[i + 1][1], flags =
re.I):
#print("working on feature 10 in {filename}")
count_ft10 += 1

#feature 11 = him who VBZ/VBD
if re.search(r"\bhim\b", tagged[i][0], flags = re.I) and re.search(r"\bwho\b", tagged[i +
1][0], flags = re.I) and re.search(r"V", tagged[i + 2][1]):
#print("working on feature 11 in {filename}")
count_ft11 += 1

```



```

#feature 12 = , even the NN/NNP
if re.match(r",", tagged[i][0]) and re.search(r"\beven\b", tagged[i + 1][0], flags = re.I) and
re.search(r"\bthe\b", tagged[i + 2][0], flags = re.I) and re.search(r"\bNN[P]?b",
tagged[i + 3][1]):

#print("working on feature 12 in {filename}")
count_ft12 += 1

#feature 13 = , even NN/NNP
if re.match(r",", tagged[i][0]) and re.search(r"\beven\b", tagged[i + 1][0], flags = re.I)
and re.search(r"\bNN[P]\b", tagged[i + 2][1]):

#print(f"working on feature 13 in {filename}")
count_ft13 += 1

#feature 14 = there come[s]
if re.search(r"\bthere\b", tagged[i][0], flags = re.I) and re.search(r"c*mes?", tagged[i +
1][0], flags = re.I):

#print(f"working on feature 14 in {filename}")
count_ft14 += 1

#feature 15 = there is/was/were VBD
if re.search(r"\bthere\b", tagged[i][0], flags = re.I) and re.search(r"VB", tagged[i + 1][1],
flags = re.I) and re.search(r"V", tagged[i + 2][1]):

#print(f"working on feature 15 in {filename}")
count_ft15 += 1

#feature 16 = .May NN/NNP V
if re.search(r"May", tagged[i][0], flags = re.I) and re.search(r"NN[P]?", tagged[i + 1][1])
and re.search(r"V", tagged[i + 2][1]):

#print(f"working on feature 16 in {filename}")
count_ft16 += 1

```

```

#feature 17 = .This PRP V
if re.search(r"\bThis\b", tagged[i][0]) and re.search(r"\bPRP\b", tagged[i + 1][1]) and
re.search(r"V", tagged[i + 2][1]):
#print(f'working on feature 17 in {filename}')
count_ft17 += 1

#feature 18 = .Said NN/NNP/PRP
if re.search(r"\bSaid\b", tagged[i][0]) and re.search(r"\b(NNP?|PRP)\b", tagged[i + 1][1]):
#print(f'working on feature 18 in {filename}')
count_ft18 += 1

#feature 19 = .What a[n] JJ
if re.search(r"\bWhat\b", tagged[i][0]) and re.search(r"\ban?\b", tagged[i + 1][0], flags =
re.I) and re.search(r"\bJJ\b", tagged[i + 2][1]):
#print(f'working on feature 19 in {filename}')
count_ft19 += 1

#feature 20 = .What a[n] NN
if re.search(r"\bWhat\b", tagged[i][0]) and re.search(r"\ban?\b", tagged[i + 1][0], flags =
re.I) and re.search(r"\bNN\b", tagged[i + 2][1]):
#print(f'working on feature 20 in {filename}')
count_ft20 += 1

#feature 21 = . JJ is/was/were
if re.search(r"\bJJ\b", tagged[i][1]) and re.search(r"VB", tagged[i + 1][1]):
#print(f'working on feature 21 in {filename}')
count_ft21 += 1

#feature 22 = . of * PRP VERB
if re.search(r"\bOf\b", tagged[i][0]) and re.search(r"\bPRP\b", tagged[i + 2][1]) and
re.search(r"V", tagged[i + 3][1]):

```

```

#print(f'working on feature 22 in {filename}')
count_ft22 += 1

#NORMALIZED FREQS FOR FEATURE COUNTS
try:
    norm_1 = count_ft1 / word_count * 1000
except:
    print("Feature 1 count = 0")
    norm_1 = "None"
    continue

try:
    norm_2 = count_ft2 / word_count * 1000
except:
    print("Feature 2 count = 0")
    norm_2 = "None"
    continue

try:
    norm_3 = count_ft3 / word_count * 1000
except:
    print("Feature 3 count = 0")
    norm_3 = "None"
    continue

try:
    norm_4 = count_ft4 / word_count * 1000
except:
    print("Feature 4 count = 0")
    norm_4 = "None"
    continue

```

```

try:
    norm_5 = count_ft5 / word_count * 1000
except:
    print("Feature 5 count = 0")
    norm_5 = "None"
    continue

try:
    norm_6 = count_ft6 / word_count * 1000
except:
    print("Feature 6 count = 0")
    norm_6 = "None"
    continue

try:
    norm_7 = count_ft7 / word_count * 1000
except:
    print("Feature 7 count = 0")
    norm_7 = "None"
    continue

try:
    norm_8 = count_ft8 / word_count * 1000
except:
    print("Feature 8 count = 0")
    norm_8 = "None"
    continue

try:
    norm_9 = count_ft9 / word_count * 1000
except:
    print("Feature 9 count = 0")
    norm_9 = "None"

```

```
    continue
    try:
        norm_10 = count_ft10 / word_count * 1000
except:
    print("Feature 10 count = 0")
    norm_10 = "None"
    continue
    try:
        norm_11 = count_ft11 / word_count * 1000
except:
    print("Feature 11 count = 0")
    norm_11 = "None"
    continue
    try:
        norm_12 = count_ft12 / word_count * 1000
except:
    print("Feature 12 count = 0")
    norm_12 = "None"
    continue
    try:
        norm_13 = count_ft13 / word_count * 1000
except:
    print("Feature 13 count = 0")
    norm_13 = "None"
    continue
    try:
        norm_14 = count_ft14 / word_count * 1000
except:
    print("Feature 14 count = 0")
```

```

norm_14 = "None"
continue
    try:
norm_15 = count_ft15 / word_count * 1000
except:
print("Feature 15 count = 0")
norm_15 = "None"
continue
    try:
norm_16 = count_ft16 / word_count * 1000
except:
print("Feature 16 count = 0")
norm_16 = "None"
continue
    try:
norm_17 = count_ft17 / word_count * 1000
except:
print("Feature 17 count = 0")
norm_17 = "None"
continue
    try:
norm_18 = count_ft18 / word_count * 1000
except:
print("Feature 18 count = 0")
norm_18 = "None"
continue
    try:
norm_19 = count_ft19 / word_count * 1000
except:

```

```

print("Feature 19 count = 0")
norm_19 = "None"
continue

    try:
norm_20 = count_ft20 / word_count * 1000
except:
print("Feature 20 count = 0")
norm_20 = "None"
continue

    try:
norm_21 = count_ft21 / word_count * 1000
except:
print("Feature 21 count = 0")
norm_21 = "None"
continue

    try:
norm_22 = count_ft22 / word_count * 1000
except:
print("Feature 22 count = 0")
norm_22 = "None"
continue

```

#CREATE DICT OF ALL TALK DATA FOR EACH FEATURE

```

ft1_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year": year, "Feature":
feat_1, "Norm_Freq":norm_1}

```

```

ft2_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year": year, "Feature":
feat_2, "Norm_Freq":norm_2}

```

```

ft3_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year": year, "Feature":
feat_3, "Norm_Freq":norm_3}

```

```

ft4_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year": year, "Feature":
feat_4, "Norm_Freq":norm_4}

```

ft5\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year": year, "Feature":  
feat\_5, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_5}

ft6\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year": year, "Feature":  
feat\_6, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_6}

ft7\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year": year, "Feature":  
feat\_7, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_7}

ft8\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year": year, "Feature":  
feat\_8, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_8}

ft9\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year": year, "Feature":  
feat\_9, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_9}

ft10\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year":year, "Feature":  
feat\_10, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_10}

ft11\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year":year, "Feature":  
feat\_11, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_11}

ft12\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year":year, "Feature":  
feat\_12, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_12}

ft13\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year":year, "Feature":  
feat\_13, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_13}

ft14\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year":year, "Feature":  
feat\_14, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_14}

ft15\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year":year, "Feature":  
feat\_15, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_15}

ft16\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year":year, "Feature":  
feat\_16, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_16}

ft17\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year":year, "Feature":  
feat\_17, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_17}

ft18\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year":year, "Feature":  
feat\_18, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_18}

ft19\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year":year, "Feature":  
feat\_19, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_19}

ft20\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year":year, "Feature":  
feat\_20, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_20}

ft21\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year":year, "Feature":  
feat\_21, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_21}

ft22\_tot = {"Name" : author, "Calling": calling, "Title": title, "Year":year, "Feature":  
feat\_22, "Norm\_Freq":norm\_22}



```

#WRITE OUT DICTS TO PANDAS DATAFRAME
df = df.append(ft1_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft2_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft3_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft4_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft5_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft6_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft7_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft8_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft9_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft10_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft11_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft12_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft13_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft14_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft15_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft16_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft17_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft18_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft19_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft20_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft21_tot, ignore_index = True)
df = df.append(ft22_tot, ignore_index = True)
#DEFINE INSTANCE OF EXCEL WRITER
writer = pandas.ExcelWriter(FILEPATH/GenConfCorpus.xlsx)
df.to_excel(writer)
writer.save()

```

## Appendix C—Statistical Analysis with R

### 8.1 Introduction

The following R script uses the General Conference Corpus Excel spreadsheet created by the feature counter script in above (see Appendix B) to perform a mixed-effects linear regression test on the counted features. For the purposes of this thesis, we added additional factors to the spreadsheet before executing the script.

### 8.2 R Script for mixed-effects linear regressions

```
#### Script to analyze Stephen Betts' thesis data

# Earl K. Brown, ekbrown byu edu

# load libraries
library(readxl) # to load Excel file
library(tidyverse) # to manipulate data
library(lme4) # to do mixed effects regression
library(lmerTest) # to get p-values for mixed effects linear regression

#### load data and clean it ####

# load data
gen_conf <- read_excel("FILEPATH/GenConfCorpus.xlsx")

# change column with decade of birth from character to integer
gen_conf <- gen_conf %>%
  mutate(birth = as.integer(str_sub(`Decade of Birth`, 1, 4)))
```

```
# change column with language background from character to factor
```

```
gen_conf <- gen_conf %>%  
  mutate(`L1/L2` = as.factor(`L1/L2`))
```

```
# remove NAs at the bottom of the data frame
```

```
gen_conf <- gen_conf[complete.cases(gen_conf), ]
```

```
### visualize the data ###
```

```
# barplots of mean frequency of 22 features by L1/L2
```

```
gen_conf %>%  
  group_by(Feature, `L1/L2`) %>%  
  summarize(mean_freq = mean(Norm_Freq)) %>%  
  ggplot(aes(`L1/L2`, mean_freq)) +  
  geom_bar(stat = "identity") +  
  facet_wrap(~Feature)
```

```
# boxplots of 22 features by L1/L2
```

```
gen_conf %>%  
  ggplot(aes(`L1/L2`, Norm_Freq)) +  
  geom_boxplot() +  
  facet_wrap(~Feature)
```

```
# boxplots of mean frequencies of 22 features by L1/L2
```

```
gen_conf %>%  
  group_by(`L1/L2`, Feature) %>%  
  summarise(mean_freq = mean(Norm_Freq)) %>%  
  ggplot(aes(`L1/L2`, mean_freq)) +  
  geom_boxplot() +
```

```

facet_wrap(~Feature)

### 22 mixed effects linear regressions of mean frequencies ###
# Only variables with p <= 0.05 are displayed.
# Categorical variables (i.e., convert, L1/L2, and BYU) with a positive estimate value means that
# the level given correlates with higher mean frequencies of the feature than does the other level.
# Positive estimate values with continuous variables (i.e., birth) mean there is a positive
# correlation, that is, "the more... the more", while negative estimate values mean there is a
# negative correlation, that is, "the more...the less". So, a negative estimate value for birth
# with a given Feature means that as birth year increases, mean frequency of the feature
decreases.

gen_conf %>%
  group_by(Feature) %>%
  do(
    lmerTest::lmer(Norm_Freq ~ `L1/L2` + `Convert?` + `L1/L2`:`Convert?` + `BYU?` +
`Convert?`:`BYU?` + birth + `L1/L2`:birth + Gender + (1 | Name), data = .) %>%
    broom.mixed::tidy()
  ) %>%
  filter(!str_detect(term, "Intercept")) %>%
  filter(p.value <= 0.05) %>%
  select(-c(effect, group)) %>%
  print(n = nrow(.))

```

## Appendix D—Glossary of LDS Terms

### 9.1 Introduction

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has generated a rich—and to outsiders, no doubt bewildering—variety of original terms. This glossary explains the LDS terms used in this thesis.

### 9.2 Glossary

**ALL-CHURCH COORDINATING COUNCIL** – see CORRELATION COMMITTEE

**APOSTLE** – see QUORUM OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES

**BISHOP** – Ecclesiastical leader of a ward; comparable to Catholic parish priest.

**CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS** – A restorationist church founded by frontier prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. in Fayette, New York in 1830. The Church’s popular (but institutionally eschewed) moniker “Mormons” derives from the name of its unique book of scripture, “The Book of Mormon,” which Smith claimed to have translated from an ancient set of metal plates delivered to him by an angel, and translated by “the gift and power of God.”

**CORRELATION COMMITTEE** – Committee formed in 1960 by church president David O. McKay to address curricular duplication. Eventually grew (under the leadership of then apostle Harold B. Lee) to effect sweeping structural changes in church government and curricula.

**ELDERS QUORUM** – Ward-level men’s (priesthood) organization. Includes men aged 18 and up.

**FIRST PRESIDENCY** – The highest administrative and ecclesiastical body in the church. Consists of the three ordained apostles who serve as the senior leadership of the church under the direction of the prophet-president.

**GENERAL AUTHORITY** – High-level male (“priesthood”) leaders of the church (Seventy, Apostle, Prophet) with global ecclesiastical jurisdiction (as opposed to local leaders).

**GENERAL CONFERENCE** – Semi-annual meetings of the church in which General Authorities and officers of the church deliver homilies (talks) on a variety of practical and spiritual topics to Latter-day Saints both present in the church’s Conference Center in Salt Lake City, UT, USA, and broadcasted to Saints throughout the world.

**GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION** – Sequential unit of General Conference. Contemporary General Conference sessions last two hours, and a Conference consists of five sessions.

**GENERAL CONFERENCE TALK** – Mormon terminology for the homilies given in General Conference sessions.

**GENERAL PRIESTHOOD SESSION** – General Conference session for males age 12 and up.

**GENERAL WELFARE SESSION** – Now defunct, this session was held until 1982, and addressed the ways that the gospel interfaced with workaday issues such as employment.

**GENERAL WOMENS' SESSION** – Also known at various times as the General Women's Meeting and the General Relief Society Meeting, this session is currently oriented toward girls and women ages 8 and up.

**LATTER-DAY SAINT** – Member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

**MORMON** – SEE LATTER-DAY SAINT; CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

**RELIEF SOCIETY** – Ward-level women's organization. Includes women ages 18 and up. Can also refer to superordinate administrators in this organization at the stake and "general" levels.

**PRIESTHOOD** – All male members of the church in good standing ages 12 and up are eligible for lay ordination to the church's priesthood. This group has the responsibility for supervising congregations, administering ordinances (sacraments), and generally performing the responsibilities that would normally be done by a paid clergy.

**PRIMARY** – Ward-level children's organization. Includes children ages 3–12.

**PRESIDENT OF THE CHURCH** – Institutional title for the most senior apostle of the church who has been ordained to the "priesthood office" of prophet.

**PROPHET** – Ecclesiastical title for the most senior leader of the church. The prophet is considered to receive continuous revelation from God for the church.

**QUORUM OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES** – Second highest administrative body of the church. This group of 12 men (15 counting the members of the First Presidency, who are still nominal members) conduct much of the preaching and administrative work of the church around the world.

**SESSION** – see GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION

**STAKE** – Multi-ward unit comparable to the Catholic diocese.

**WARD** – Local LDS congregation comparable in size to the Catholic parish; administered by a ward Bishop.

**YOUNG LADIES' MUTUAL IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION** – A church organization intended for teenage girls in the early to late-mid twentieth century.

**YOUNG MENS' MUTUAL IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION** – A church organization intended for teenage boys in the early to late-mid twentieth century.