

Folklinguistic explorations of modals and quasi-modals in Australian English

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Changing usage patterns of modal and quasi-modal auxiliaries in English varieties in the past 50 years (Collins 2009; Leech 2003; Millar 2009) have been given explanations in terms of theories of politeness, democratisation and decolonisation (Collins 2005; Leech 2003; Millar 2009; Myhill 1995). This paper uses a folklinguistic approach to explore how Australian English speakers attend to these ideas in their associations with these words. An online survey and eight interviews were conducted, containing an imitation section, which looked specifically at what modal auxiliaries participants thought the identity categories BOGAN, LARRIKIN, and POSH would use in both a high and low obligation context; and an interpretation section, which asked participants for their views on the speakers in four quotes containing a modal auxiliary verb. The results indicate that participants held three main associative groupings around the modal and quasi-modals, which are discussed in this paper in conjunction with *ought to*, *must*, *had better* and *need to*.

Keywords: modality, folklinguistics, Australian English

1. Introduction

Over the last century the frequency with which modals and quasi-modals are being used in English has changed dramatically, with some dropping sharply in frequency while others are steadily on the rise (Collins 2005; Leech 2003; Millar 2009). Additionally, it appears that there is a folklinguistic awareness of these

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changes, as extract (1), taken from the interview data of this project (Macfarlan, 2013), illustrates with respect to a participant's noticing of a declining use of *ought to*:

(1) Kelly 00:45:27.854 - 00:45:35.373 (On the declining use of *ought to*.)

- 1 Kelly: I just they'd--
 2 if someone said that I'd think they were an idiot.
 3 Alice: @@@.
 4 Kelly: what are you playing at?
 5 nobody speaks like that anymore.

This paper presents a small section of the results of my Honours' thesis (Macfarlan 2013). It investigates what folklinguistic associations speakers of Australian English hold towards the modal and quasi-modal auxiliary verbs *must*, *ought to*, *had better*, and *need to*¹ and how these link to the identity types BOGAN, LARRIKIN, and POSH². The links that participants made tie in with suggestions by Collins (2005), Millar (2009) and Myhill (1995) that processes of democratisation, decolonisation and colloquialisation in society have played a part in the changing frequencies of modal auxiliary verbs over the last century.

These modal auxiliaries emerged in the data as examples of three main associative groupings that participants were aligning to in their folklinguistic judgements. The first group, which *must* and *ought to* are members of, involves associating certain modal auxiliaries with a POSH, authoritative image associated with a high, quite

¹ The original thesis (Macfarlan 2013) investigated a wider range of modal auxiliaries, the choice of which to include dependent primarily on their selection by participants for the imitation tasks and discussion. The full list of modal auxiliaries used includes *ought to*, *must*, *be to*, *had best*, *had better*, *have to*/*hafta*, *got to*/*gotta*, *ought to*/*oughta*, *should*, *need to*, and *can*. The modals *must*, *ought to*, *had better*, and *need to*, were selected for discussion in this paper as they emerged as prime examples of the three associative groups that arose from the data in Macfarlan (2013) due to the amount of qualitative discussion participants gave to them.

² The HIPSTER identity, which was also examined in Macfarlan (2013), will not be discussed specifically in this paper, as there were less data to suggest that participants were associating this identity type with a particular group of modal or quasi-modals, although there were some weaker links made between this identity type and the quasi-modal *want to*.

old fashioned register; *had better*³ is an example of the second group, which was often described as being in direct opposition to the first, due to its less formal, more relaxed and to a certain degree more ‘Australian’ associations. A final group of modal auxiliaries emerged which did not have clear and distinct identity associations, but rather the modal auxiliaries in this category were seen as being associated with the level of directness and subjectivity the modal auxiliaries contained. *Need to* is a prime example of this group.

In this paper, I will first give an overview of some of the frequency changes relevant to the modal auxiliaries discussed, before briefly outlining the methodology. Finally, a discussion will be given of how the results of this study fit the modal auxiliaries of this paper into three main associative groupings, and how participants’ discussions relate to wider ideas in the literature about why the usage of these modals and quasi-modals is changing.

2. Changes in modality and society

Modality corresponds to a speaker’s expression of commitment to the truth proposition of a statement (Turnbull & Saxton 1997: 147). This paper discusses the modal and quasi-modal auxiliaries of obligation, which Collins (2005) calls *root necessity* and which involve “the social world of obligations, duties, directives, recommendations and the like” (251). This category can further be divided into different types of obligation: subjective obligation, where the obligation’s source is the speaker, and objective obligation, where the obligation originates externally (Collins 2005: 251). In terms of terminology, Collins (2009) calls ‘modals’ what Leech (2003) terms ‘core modals’ and Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik (1985) call ‘central modals’, and include *must*, *may* and *shall*. Collins (2009: 12) notes that modals differ from lexical verbs in that they can be used in ‘NICE’ constructions⁴, as well as having the properties of no non-tensed forms, no person-number agreement, bare infinitival, unreal conditionals, and unreal

³ In this paper, the forms referred to or used by the participants will be the forms that are discussed in Chapter 4. For example, the full form, *had better* is often referred to by participants as *better*, and when this is the case the discussion focuses on this form.

⁴ NICE constructions include: negation, inversion of subject and auxiliary, code and emphasis (Collins 2009: 12)

preterite. Quasi-modals are formally distinguishable to this group but are linked semantically. The category of quasi-modals can be further divided, and Collins (2009: 16) distinguishes between ‘semi-modals’ (called ‘modal idioms’ by Quirk et al. 1985), those which have as their first element an auxiliary e.g. *had better*, and ‘lexico-modals’ (called ‘semi-auxiliaries’ by Quirk et al. 1985), a group of “idiomatic expressions” carrying modal meanings which, apart from *have to*, *need to* and *want to*, begin with *be* (e.g. *be likely to*) (Collins 2009: 17). In this paper both modals and quasi-modals will be referred to simply as ‘modal auxiliaries’.

Diachronic studies have shown considerable change in the usage of the auxiliaries over the past century. Leech (2003) shows a decline from 1961-1991 in the use of core modals in British English of 9.5% and an overall American English decrease of 12.2% (228) while finding the quasi-modals to have increased, with the exceptions of *be to* and *had better* which show a decline and *have to* which remains fairly constant. Millar (2009: 205) also finds an overall rise in frequency of semi-modal auxiliary verbs.

In regard to the modals discussed in this paper, both *must* and *ought to* have been shown to be in decline. Comparing the 1961 British LOB and American Brown data with the 1991 British FLOB and the American Frown corpora, Leech (2003) shows a decline from for *must* of 29% in British English and 34.4% in American English. Millar (2009) finds a sharper decline in the American TIME corpora of 48.4% between the 1920s and the 2000s. *Ought to* is similarly receding across the varieties, dropping 44.9% in the TIMES corpora, while Leech (2003) shows it to have dropped 30% in American English and 44.2% in British English. For both these modal auxiliary verbs Collins (2005) shows Australian English to be situated between US and British usage in terms of frequency. Looking more closely at *had better*, Collins (2005: 269) finds that it has a low frequency in American, British and Australian English, but that Australian English shows the highest frequency of the varieties. Despite its quite low frequency, it is, according to Millar (2009), on the rise, with its frequency in the TIMES corpora rising 127% from the 1920s to the 2000s. It should be noted however that Leech (2003) finds *had better* to be declining. In contrast, the modal auxiliary verb *need to* has drastically increased in use across English varieties over the last century. Leech (2003) shows an increase of 249.1% in British English and 123.2% in American English, while Millar (2009)

shows it increasing by 904%. In Australian English, Collins (2009) shows that *need to*'s frequency sits between American and British Englishes.

While the focus of the above studies is not on how sociolinguistic factors affect the rates of change, Tagliamonte & D'Arcy (2007) and Tagliamonte & Smith (2006) find that age is a factor in terms of usage frequencies of modal auxiliaries in Canadian English and English, Scottish and Northern Irish Englishes respectively. *Must*, in particular is shown to be used primarily by the older generations, while other modal auxiliaries, such as *have to* are in use amongst the younger generations. Interestingly, Tagliamonte & D'Arcy (2007) find no particular difference in the frequency of *need to* across generations.

In terms of why these changes are occurring, 'colloquialisation' has been put forth as one factor. In regard to the TIMES Corpora data, Millar (2009: 210) posits that written genres are conforming more to the norms of speech, especially with the rise of new technologies and their associated genres such as email, which are generally less formal. 'Democratisation' of society (Myhill 1995) is also suggested as a factor in the changing usage frequencies of certain modal and quasi-modal auxiliary verbs, as words associated with a high level of authority are falling by the wayside and replaced by less authoritative alternatives. This changing method of managing authority links with notions of politeness, and both Brown & Levinson (1987) and Turnbull & Saxton (1997) suggest that modal auxiliary verbs are an important method of managing risk to face by hedging or impersonalising face-threatening acts.

In an Australian context, this democratisation can be viewed as being paralleled by de-colonisation. Decolonisation and de-stratification as described by Mair (2006) result in society focusing less on authority and commands and more on equality and advice, necessitating different ways of making commands in keeping with changing standards of what is polite and acceptable. Schneider's (2003) Dynamic Model of the evolution of Postcolonial Englishes traces Australian English's development away from British English into its own respected variety as cultural and political connections decreased in importance over the last century. Linguistically, the effect of this was the emergence of a new Australian style that was markedly distinct from its British English, and which highlighted the Australian cultural ethos of egalitarianism (Schneider 2010). Ward (1958) remarks

on this egalitarian ideal as developing from the conditions of Australia's settlement, which spurred the creation of an "independent" Australian character "who hates officiousness and authority" (2). Greig, Lewins & White (2003) see the ANZAC's experience at Gallipoli as an important point in extending the notion of egalitarianism into the idea that "the Australian identity had freed itself from the more 'class-conscious' British cultural moorings" (171).

3. Methodology

3.1 Participant selection

The results discussed in this paper were drawn from a series of eight interviews and an online survey. Interview participants were all known personally by myself, a restriction that was put in place in order to ensure that the interviews had a relaxed and casual nature. All participants were aged in their 20s and living in Melbourne. Participants' age, gender, education level and occupation are set out in Table 1, along with the length of the interview:

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Education level	Occupation	Interview Length (hr:min:sec)
Callum	26	Male	Bachelor (Health)	Health policy advisor	00:22:02
Sebastian	26	Male	Bachelor (Music)	Cheesemonger	00:39:44
Max	25	Male	Bachelor (Arts/Ed.)	Relief teacher	00:36:08
Justina	26	Female	Certificate IV (Hospitality)	Barista	00:41:14
Miles	26	Male	Bachelor (Creative Arts)	Student	00:58:52
Chloe	28	Female	Diploma (Arts)	Graphic Designer	00:59:53

Jason	27	Male	VCE	Realtor	00:39:04
Kelly	25	Female	Bachelor (Arts/Ed.)	Secondary school teacher	00:49:05

Table 1. Interview participant information.

The survey was distributed online via social media and hosted by the online survey making site Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com), and had 68 survey participants, of a wider age range than the interviews and from around Australia, although the majority were under 44 and living in Melbourne also. Figures 1-3 show the distribution of survey participants' age, gender and state or territory.

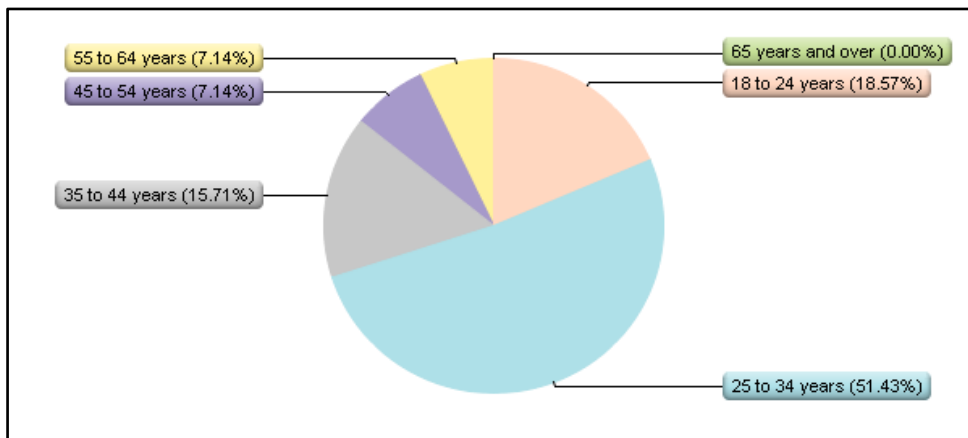


Figure 1. Survey participant age distribution.

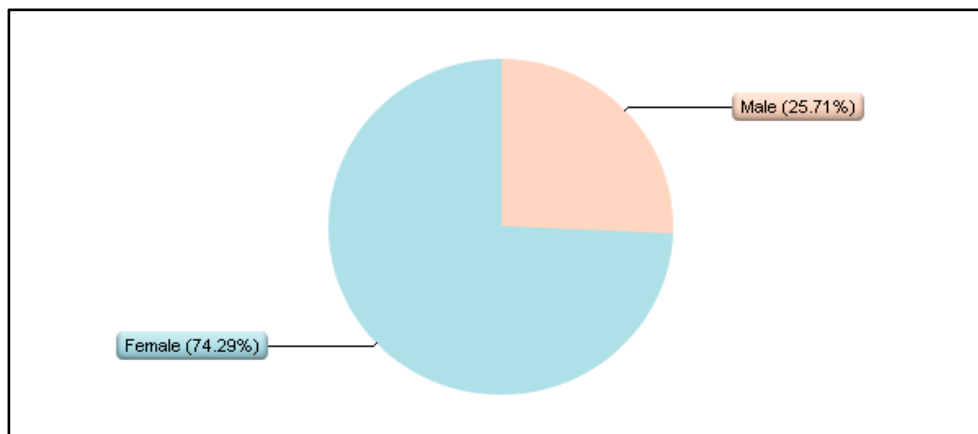


Figure 2. Survey participant gender distribution.

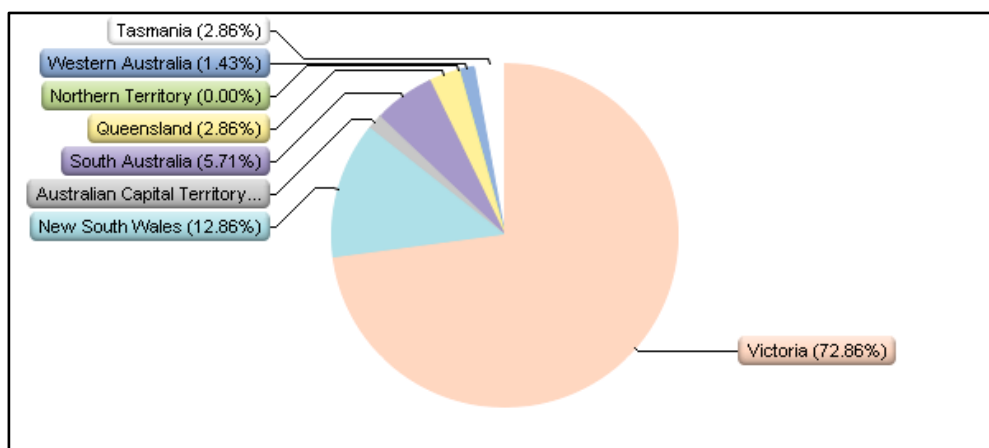


Figure 3. Survey participant state distribution.

While the differences in participant selection between the survey and the interview does cause some limitations by not having an absolute match between survey and interview participants, within the scope of this study, which did not focus on regional or age variation, I felt that a larger number of participants was of more importance than perfectly corresponding samples. Additionally, the study is greatly weighted towards younger generations, living in Victoria, and, in the survey's population, females. Given this, it would be interesting to replicate this study in which regional or age variation in this type of folklinguistic associations were the focus, especially given Tagliamonte & D'Arcy (2007) and Tagliamonte & Smith (2006) findings that age variations did affect modal auxiliary usage.

3.2 Research design

3.2.1 Overview

Drawing on Penry Williams' (2011) approach in her folklinguistic study of Australian English, this project drew its data from two main avenues: a survey and a series of informal interviews. The interview and the survey mirrored each other, with some differences necessary for each format. Both had two main sections: an imitation section, which aimed to tap into participants' conscious and semi-conscious language ideologies (for further discussion of the use of imitation in the field of folklinguistics, see Preston 1993 and Brunner 2010), and an interpretation section, in which participants were asked to explore more conscious associations of a range of specific modals.

3.2.2 *Imitation section*

In the imitation section, participants were asked to imitate what four identity types might say in a high obligation context, with a prompt such as “How would [identity type] tell someone to do something quite forcefully?” and a low obligation context, with, “How would [identity type] tell someone to do something that was for their own good?”. The identity types were: a BOGAN, a LARRIKIN and a POSH person. In the interviews this was done verbally, while in the survey participants selected an appropriate modal auxiliary verb from a list.

These identity types were chosen as it was felt that they might represent fairly distinct attributes that participants would be able to tap into in their discussions about the links between language and identity.

For this reason, it was important that it was the participants’ own ideas about these identities which were being attended to, and for this reason the identity descriptions given by participants (presented in §4.1) are taken as the primary source for these identity types⁵. To make sure that participants did have an awareness of these identity types, and to make sure that their perceptions were what were being attended to in this study, participants were asked to describe each identity type (see Section 4.1). If participants expressed trouble with this, they were excluded from the study, as happened with two survey participants.

Following the imitations, participants were asked to explain why they chose the modals they did for their imitations in order to further develop an understanding of what connections between modal auxiliary verbs and identity they were making.

As this study was meant as a starting point for discussion about the folklinguistic associations of modal auxiliaries, having pre-chosen categories was deemed necessary, with any additional studies of this nature being able to draw on the findings of this study and expand the choice of identity categories looked at. It is a possibility that having these pre-chosen categories may have influenced participants discussions in regards to what associations they discussed. However,

⁵ For further reading, see Penry Williams (2011) for a discussion of BOGAN and POSH, Rickard (1998) for a discussion of LARRIKIN.

as the analysis in this paper is drawn primarily from the participants' explicit discussion of the which particular attributes of the modal auxiliaries and the identity types that shaped their folklinguistic assumptions around the modal auxiliaries and why this may be, this is hoped to negate any strong bias as participants were able to justify and explain their associations.

3.2.3 Interpretation section

The second section of the interviews and survey was an interpretation section, which asked participants for their views on what the use of a particular phrase containing a modal auxiliary verb said about the speaker. For this, examples of actual audio containing modal auxiliary were taken from Pawley's (1972-1989) Tasmanian Vernacular English data.

- (1) a. "*You oughtn't to, you know*"
- b. "*I must congratulate you*"

Interview participants were then asked open-ended questions about the speaker's identity and characteristics, based particularly around their use of the modal phrase. Survey participants were given a text-box with a prompt to elicit similarly open-ended data ("Do you have anything more to add about the identity of the person discussed above?" and "If you are able, try and describe what about the statement exactly made you select the answers you gave above."), as well as a series of Likert scales asking them to rate the speakers' Australian-ness, British-ness, and American-ness, as well as their formality, friendliness and old-fashioned-ness. Survey participants were then further asked to either select attributes from a list or to write their own which they felt might apply to the speaker.

3.2.4 Theoretical perspectives used in the analysis

This analysis in this paper draws on *folklingsuistics*, wherein speakers form opinions about language features based on social and political understandings (Macfarlan 2013; Penry Williams 2011). This incorporates Silverstein's (2003) notion of indexicality, which posits that particular features of speech carry connotations between the speaker and various identities and associations. Similarly, Ochs (1993:

289) suggests that speakers construct and interpret social identities through an understanding of how acts and stances work as resources for creating particular identities. Irvine & Gal (2000) extend this through iconisation, in which a strong associative link is formed between linguistic features and social groups, even when the connection “may only be historical, contingent, or conventional” (2000: 37). Through these processes, differing linguistic styles are seen as arising from perceived differences in social groups. These ideas are drawn upon in Section 4 of this paper, as participants deploy these ideas in their discussion of the links between linguistic forms and social meanings.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 *Overview of participant descriptions of identity types*

Before turning to a discussion of the three main associative categories, I present the descriptions of each identity type that was drawn from survey and interview participants’ descriptions and associations.

4.1.1 *BOGAN*

In terms of personality, interview participants described BOGANS as rough, narrow minded, and simple individuals, and associated them with low education, Australian-ness, and (often, but not always) low socioeconomic backgrounds and swearing. The survey results were similar, with many associating BOGAN with roughness, a low level of education and informality. Other attributes selected by the survey participants were friendliness, directness, unsophistication, and low socioeconomic background.

4.1.2 *LARRIKIN*

Nearly every interview participant mentioned the joker nature of the LARRIKIN, and noted the overlap with BOGAN, differing in the LARRIKIN’S jovial and old-fashioned nature. Associations with maleness and Australian-ness also emerged. Survey participants also saw the LARRIKIN identity as primarily a joker, who is

friendly and casual, though a little bit rough and, again, similar to a BOGAN but marked out by their well-meaning nature.

4.1.3 POSH

Interview participants discussed primarily the associations between POSH people and high socioeconomic status and education, although some noted that this may be put on for show. Pretentiousness, snobbishness and making an effort to seem superior or polite were attributes participants mentioned. There was also an idea that POSH people were “careful with words” and proper. The survey participants saw POSH as being old-fashioned in manner or language, snobbish, having a high socioeconomic status and a high level of education, and being strict and arrogant. Formality, Britishness, being proper and articulate were also drawn upon.

4.2 *Three folklinguistic associative groups*

The comments of participants in the interviews and the survey around the auxiliary verbs converged into three main strands. These are illustrated below with a discussion of how *ought to*, *must*, *had better* and *need to* fit into these groups and into the motivations for change put forth in the literature.

4.2.1 *Must and ought to: POSH associations and notions of authority*

The first category of folklinguistic comment centres around the connotations of the modal auxiliary verbs *must* and *ought to* and their relationship to an authoritative, POSH identity. As discussed above, both these auxiliary verbs are in sharp decline in usage frequency (Leech 2003; Millar 2009). Wider trends in society are often suggested as a cause. Myhill (1995) suggests that ‘democratisation’ has pulled societal attitudes away from its earlier focus on hierarchy and authority resulting in the use of modal auxiliary verbs associated with these qualities declining. Leech (2003: 237) concurs, and suggests that *must* is receding reflects a tendency of speakers to avoid claims to power and authority. Collins (2009) suggests that *ought to*’s decline is similarly due to this process, arguing that the need in English for subjective modal auxiliary verbs has reduced,

and so *ought to* has become less useful and less frequent. Colloquialisation is also posited as a factor for both these modal auxiliary verbs, with Collins (2009) showing that *ought to* and *must* are more common in writing than in speech in Australian English.

In terms of what participants were drawing on in their folklinguistic understandings of these two words, many participants noted a deep-rooted indexicality between these words and the POSH identity described above. As one interview participant said in relation to *must*, “I can just picture more old, proper ladies saying that rather than the other forceful words”. This strong indexical link between these words and a POSH identity were seen clearly in the imitation results. In the interview imitations, *must* was used only with the POSH identity type, five times in total. *Ought to* was not used at all in the interview imitations, possibly reflecting the lower frequency of its usage in speech (Collins, 2009). In the survey imitations, *must* was used in 20% of the POSH imitations in a high obligation context, and in 50% of the POSH imitations in a low obligation contexts. For *ought to*, both the high and low obligation context imitations used *ought to* just over 30% of the time with the POSH identity.

In explaining this usage, participants discussed the type of register these modal auxiliaries belonged to and their connotations of authority. Fitting in with the suggestions of colloquialisation, *ought to* was viewed as belonging to an old-fashioned, educated and of a literary register, which does not sound natural in speech. One survey respondent stated in a qualitative response in the interpretation section: “I’ve rarely heard ‘ought’ in speech ... It’s something I associate with old novels.” The use of *must* also sounded like it belonged to a register not found as frequently in modern speech. One survey participant, for example, wrote that:

“Must” as a modal auxiliary verb seems more old-fashioned and formal to me – it seems to have largely been replaced by “have to”, particularly in younger speakers, though I feel they would say “must” in a more formal situation.

Connotations of authority, consequence and sternness were also drawn upon, as another survey respondent states in relation to the use of *ought to* in the

interpretation section: “I had the feeling that someone was looking down their nose at me, judging me, and telling me what I should do.” Other participants directly drew upon the authoritative connotations that they saw in the modal *must*, with one interview participant labelling it as “very direct and very much an order”, and linked closely with the idea that someone using it would be in a position of power.

These responses show that participants’ views on the connotations of these modal verbs are linked to notions of power and old-fashioned-ness, and as a result many discussed these modal auxiliaries as something that they themselves would not use⁶.

4.2.2 *Had better: Egalitarian notions and the BOGAN and LARRIKIN*

The second associative group was viewed by participants as being in direct opposition to the previous category in terms of its major connotations. Instead of formality, educated language, power and authority, the associations of these modal auxiliary verbs fit them solidly into a lower register valuing informality, casual language, friendliness and, to a certain extent, a rough kind of directness. It was through these associations that participants linked the modal auxiliary verb in this category, *had better*, to the BOGAN and LARRIKIN in the imitation tasks.

A note should be made that many of the comments made by both interview and survey participants directly describe the LARRIKIN as similar to the BOGAN. However, while they were both described as Australian, rough and friendly, the comments that participants made about these personalities placed LARRIKIN further towards the friendly end of this continuum and BOGAN towards the rough and aggressive end. While these differences are of note, in participants’ folklinguistic comments about *had better*, it was the shared attributes of these two identities which were being drawn upon, and thus these two identities are discussed together in this category in terms of their folklinguistic attributes.

⁶ Although, as noted above in Section 2 and 3, the young age of the majority of the participant sample may have had an effect on this.

While *had better* did not feature largely in the survey results for the imitations, it was quite prevalent in the interview imitations, featuring seven times in imitations of a BOGAN and four times with a LARRIKIN, while never with a POSH person.

In the discussions, a number of participants distinctly disassociated *had better* from the POSH identity. This was cited as being due to a perceived incorrectness of the reduced form *better*, which made it appear to be ‘working class’, as well as connotations of *had better* as a rather direct and unsubtle modal auxiliary, which some saw as bordering on impoliteness. Others discussed this further and noted a strong, perceived threatening aspect to the modal auxiliary. One interview participant suggests, “it’s ... that threatening thing which makes me put it to BOGANS, cause BOGANS are more likely to threaten people.”

Interestingly, given its comparative frequency in Australian English compared to American and British English (Collins 2005), *had better* was also linked to an Australian identity in the interview discussions. One participant particularly discussed an association with *had better* as being directly linked to the cultural shift in Australia away from perceived British cultural values, which were seen as being authoritative and very proper, into a more nationalistic identity, which the participant linked to the BOGAN and LARRIKIN identities, containing a “distrust of those in authority, distrust of those who are different ... [and] espousing far more nationalistic ideals”. This association between the modal auxiliary and this Australian identity, as well as the general comments above about *had better* being more direct and less subtle, can be linked to Mair’s (2006) and Schneider’s (2003) suggestion that decolonisation has been a factor for language changes. As discussed above, the Dynamic Model of the Evolution of Postcolonial World Englishes (Schneider 2003) posits that Australian English has moved away from British English as a result of growing cultural and political independence. Going hand in hand with the processes of democratisation described earlier, this new Australian identity has been widely seen as placing a high value on the notion of egalitarianism, where traditional hierarchies and values were left behind.

Overall, these connotations built up a picture of a category of associations which were linked to a way of being direct and not mincing words. Participants’ folklinguistic understandings about how linguistic tokens indexed certain values rather than others came into the discussion. For participants, *had*

better indexed values which were more ‘working class’ and ‘Australian’ and which were in opposition to British and posh values of subtlety and politeness.

4.2.3 *Need to: The unmarked group and the need for politeness*

In this last section I turn to the modal auxiliary *need to*, which emerged in the results as part of a group of modal auxiliaries which were seen as not strongly associated with one particular identity. Instead, the fact that many different identities could use these modal auxiliaries was talked about, along with attributes of varying levels of directness, strength of obligation and whether that obligation was seen as coming from the speaker or from somewhere external.

Section 2 shows *need to* as being sharply on the rise in terms of frequency. Collins (2009: 260) suggests that this might be due to the fact that *need to* serves the role of subjective obligation, but carries an indirectness that implies that the resulting action is to the benefit of the doer. Politeness has also been put forth by Mair (2006: 108) as an explanation of the increase, citing specifically the development of *need to* taking over the usage of *must* or *have (got) to*, positing that this form may be preferred as a command as the phrase shifts the emphasis onto a satisfaction of the needs of the recipient.

Need to’s popularity among participants as a versatile modal auxiliary was seen in the interview imitations, in which *need to* was used for all four identity types in both high and low obligation contexts. It was also the most frequently used of any modal auxiliary in the interview imitations, being used in 20 out of the total 64 imitations, three times with the BOGAN, six times with the LARRIKIN and six times with the POSH person.

The focus of the qualitative discussions about *need to* in the interviews was on the fact that, although it indicated quite a strong obligation with a possible consequence attached, it did not hold the threat that *had better* did. Instead, it implied a subtler importance on carrying out the action, with the onus on the doer to avoid the consequence, rather than on the speaker to have to enforce the obligation. Additionally, participants discussed the fact that *need to* has implications of urgency, but without being confrontational. Indeed, one interview paraphrased the meaning of *need to* as: “it’s really important that you do this, but, if you don’t,

well, you know, it's your life." It was these qualities that made participants see this modal auxiliary as acceptable for use in different situations by each identity type.

5. Conclusion

Ought to, *must*, *had better* and *need to* represent three lines of folklinguistic associations relating to modal auxiliary verbs in Australian English, and feed into the wider trends of democratisation, colloquialisation and decolonisation that are taking place in society. The data to have emerged from this project show that Australian English speakers are attuned to some extent to how these changes are affecting their language patterns. While further studies along this line which had the scope to include a larger range of participants would widen the significance of the results and allow for a closer look at the sociolinguistic factors at play, for the purposes of this project, the views and attitudes expressed by participants are taken as a good starting point for the examination of folklinguistic views of modal and quasi-modal auxiliaries. It is likely that the way in which modal auxiliary verbs are used will continue to change, with some of the auxiliary verbs discussed above falling to very low frequencies in common usage while others are on the rise (Collins 2005; Leech 2003; Millar 2009). The folklinguistic comments and data offered here provide some insight into why this may be.

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