Marginal modals in New Zealand English

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1 Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to present information gleaned from an elicitation experiment[1] designed to provide data on various points of grammatical usage in New Zealand English. This paper reports only on those points connected with the use of the marginal modals *need, dare, ought* and *used to*.

A questionnaire was presented to informants, who were paid NZ$3.00 to complete it. All the respondents were students at Victoria University of Wellington, and were speakers of New Zealand English. 110 useable completed questionnaires were received, of which 103 were from students aged 25 or under. It is these 103 which form the basis for the results presented here.

The questionnaire was based on one used in a similar experiment ten years ago, and reported on in Johansson (1979). A pilot test using this questionnaire format has already been run in Wellington, and the results of that experiment were published in Bauer (1987). Some modifications to the experimental format were made as a result of that pilot test (see the discussion in Bauer 1987), but they are not of direct relevance to the experiment reported on here.

The questionnaire was made up of 74 questions. Although the questions were put in random order by being alphabetized by their fourteenth to twenty-fifth letters, the results were not particularly effective as far as the marginal modals were concerned, and there was an unfortunate degree of clumping, which may have affected the experimental results. For each question, informants were asked to judge its 'normality' or acceptability on a five-point scale and, where relevant, to correct the sentence to the form which they would use themselves. The sentences were ostensibly produced by non-native speakers of English, and in some items (including all those reported on in this paper), non-native-like errors were introduced, to give this claim some plausibility. This means that the acceptability judgements do not have any great diagnostic value for these items, and only the changes made (or not made) to the presented sentences can be used to judge informants' reactions. Items are referred to in this paper by the running number they were given in the questionnaire.

The results of the questionnaires were entered into the University's IBM 4381 computer, and analysed using the SAS statistical package software.

In some cases, comparison is possible with the results from Johansson's questionnaire. Johansson compared responses of British and American informants. Johansson had 93 American informants and 92 British informants. The British informants were all students aged 18-22. The American informants were made up of approximately one-third students aged 18-22, and two-thirds senior students and graduates aged 20-30. The British informants (but not the American ones) were paid for their participation in the experiment (Johansson 1979:197). The three groups are thus very similar in make-up, but there is a ten-year time-lag between Johansson's experiments and my own.

2 Need

Four sentences containing *need* were presented to informants. Two of them used *do*-support and two treated *need* as an auxiliary. There was one question and one negative sentence in each class. The items used are listed below:

(3) You don't need to worry about he come on time.
(43) Need he finish his essay for Linguistics lecturer today?
(46) Does the dentist really need to see you again so soonly?
(59) You needn't go until my mother get back home.

Quirk *et al.* (1985:138) comment that the auxiliary construction (i.e. with no *do*-support and no infinitival *to*) is rarer in American English than in British English, but rare in both for both *need* and *dare*. They also note that blends between the auxiliary construction and the main verb construction can occur, especially with *dare*. They also say that such blends are more common in American than in British English. Lass (1987:169) calls the auxiliary construction in questions 'recessive'.

The results from these four items are presented in Table 1. The results here are not dramatic. There does seem in general to be a slight preference for the main verb construction with *do*-support, in that, for example, fewer other responses are given when informants are presented with a main verb construction. This preference for the main verb construction also seems to be marginally greater in questions than in negatives. However, the number of informants retaining the pattern with which they are presented, whether the main verb pattern or the auxiliary pattern, suggests that both constructions are recognized in New Zealand English, even if they would not actually be used equally frequently.

Table 1				
Patterns with 'need': summary of results				
	ITEM			
RESPONSE	(3)	(43)	(46)	(59)
	NEG	Q	Q	NEG
auxiliary construction	8	*63	1	*84
main verb construction	*89	16	*98	2
other response	3	23	2	17
NOTE: asterisked values are those for the items presented to informants.				

Item (43) above is directly comparable with Johansson's (1979) item (32), *Need he go now?*, and item (59) with Johansson's item (9), *He needn't go yet*. The comparative figures for responses for Johansson's British and American informants and my New Zealand ones are given in Tables 2 and 3, along with the probability that the New Zealand responses come from the same distribution of responses as the other responses, calculated by a chi-squared test. It can be seen that the differences between the New Zealand and British

responses to item (59) are not significant, though all others are.

Table 2			
Item (43): responses from three varieties			
RESPONSE	NZ	GB	US
need he	63	53	37
does he need to	16	7	10
does he have to	13	16	17
must he	3	14	16
other	7	2	13
test = NZ		$p < 0.007$	$p < 0.001$

The results here can also be compared with the findings from other elicitation tests reported in Greenbaum (1974). Greenbaum (1974:252) found that while British and American students recognized both the modal and the main verb patterns with negated *need*, the British students preferred the modal pattern, the Americans the main verb pattern. This pattern is not reflected clearly in the results from Johansson's experiment, and makes the New Zealand responses sound marginally more like the American ones than the British: the converse of what was concluded above on the basis of Johansson's data.

Table 3			
Item (59): responses from three varieties			
RESPONSE	NZ	GB	US
needn't	84	84	64
doesn't/don't need to	2	3	11
doesn't/don't have to	12	5	15
other	5	0	3
test = NZ		$p < 0.06$	$p < 0.03$

3 Dare

Five items were used to elicit reactions to *dare*. Four of these contained the same patterns as those containing *need*. The fifth was a sentence in which

dare was used as a full main verb, followed by the infinitive marker *to*. The items used in the experiment were:

> (4) She dares not go out alone in evenings because of all the rape cases.
>
> (5) Does she dare hand in her rough draft and pretend it a finished essay?
>
> (7) Dare you come into the haunted house with we right now?
>
> (14) Will she dare to tell him that she think all the essay topics are awful?
>
> (62) He doesn't dare float currency without any restraints.

For comments on constructions with *dare* by Quirk *et al.* (1985), see above section 2.

The results for *dare* are considerably different from those for *need*. In particular, more mixed forms were used: that is, forms which were neither purely the main verb pattern, nor purely the auxiliary pattern. The results are presented in Tables 4 and 5. It will be seen that the construction *Auxiliary dare Verb* is the preferred one, especially when a presented construction is changed. The tendency to retain the presented pattern, however, is extremely strong, and indicates that all patterns are recognized within New Zealand English.

Table 4 Patterns with 'dare': summary of results Negative items		
PATTERN	ITEM	
	4	62
dares not V	*69	1
dares not to V	3	-
dare not V	6	2
doesn't dare V	14	*79
doesn't dare to V	3	4
other	8	14
NOTE: asterisked items are those presented to the informants.		

Item (5) is directly comparable to Johansson's item (58) *Does he dare do it?*, and item (62) above is directly comparable with Johansson's (14) *He doesn't dare do it*. Tables summarizing the comparisons between responses from speakers of three varieties of English are given below (Tables 6 and 7). It can be seen from these that the pattern with the negative was indistinguishable for the New Zealand and American informants, but all other patterns were significantly different.

Table 5			
Patterns with 'dare': summary of results			
Interrogative items			
PATTERN	ITEM		
	5	7	14
dare Subject V	1	*51	-
dare Subject to V	1	6	-
Aux Subject dare V	*66	14	25
Aux Subject dare to V	7	13	*67
other	26	16	11
NOTE: asterisked items are those presented to the informants.			

Again comparisons can be made with the results of elicitation experiments reported on in Greenbaum (1974). Greenbaum's results on the negative of *dare* are confusing, in that when his American informants were asked to negate a positive sentence containing *dare* the preferred response was *do not dare to*. However, when the same informants were asked which of two negative constructions they preferred, *did not dare V* received higher rankings. *Dared not V* received intermediate rankings on both tests. When British students were given the same preference test, they too ranked *didn't dare to* lowest. The British students, though, ranked *dared not V* higher than *didn't dare V*. The New Zealand results agree with the American results of the preference test and with the American results from Johansson's elicitation experiment, in that they show a preference for *didn't dare V*. Other values are less clear.

8

Table 6			
Item (5): responses from three varieties			
RESPONSE	NZ	GB	US
does s/he dare V	66	48	79
does s/he dare to V	1	14	8
dare s/he V	1	24	2
other	27	6	4
test = NZ		$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$

Table 7			
Item (62): responses from three varieties			
RESPONSE	NZ	GB	US
he doesn't dare V	79	42	77
he doesn't dare to V	4	17	2
he dare not V	2	17	2
other	15	16	12
test = NZ		$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.9$

4 Ought

The main question that it was hoped to answer about *ought* was the form of the tag question it takes. Four of the items in the questionnaire presented different tags. The fifth item concerning *ought* presented it with *do*-support. The items used were:

(6) Mary ought to have leaved by now, shouldn't she?
(8) I ought to do it completely straight away, didn't I?
(12) You ought not to be at this room at all, ought you?
(35) We ought to leaving soon, hadn't we?
(45) People like that didn't ought to be allowed onto New Zealand.

Trudgill & Hannah (1982:20) comment that

> In AusNZEng, *do* is not used in such cases [i.e. in tags following *ought*]; instead *should* or *ought* would occur.

The only support for the use of *do* in British English that I have found comes from Scheurweghs (1959:362) who says that 'In very colloquial English even *ought* is sometimes found with *to do*'. Quirk *et al.* (1985:140) comment on the fact that use of *do*-support with *ought* is regarded as non-standard in Britain, and 'proved to be the least popular alternative in a[n elicitation] test with BrE teenagers'. They also (1985:812) say that '*shouldn't* is sometimes substituted for *oughtn't* as an abbreviated form' in tag questions. Palmer (1974:128) says that

> in tag questions [*should*] may in fact be used with *ought to* (and is even the more usual form).

It is thus not clear to what extent Trudgill & Hannah's presumed distinction between EngEng and AusNZEng can be upheld. Lass (1987:169) comments that *ought* does not occur in the negative in many American dialects.

The results of the questionnaire are presented in Table 8. It can be seen there that the use of *should* in the tag is the preferred option, with the use of *should* in both the main clause and the tag a close second. Support for this general use of *should* also comes from responses to item (45), where 62 informants changed the main verb to *shouldn't*. The use of a form of DO in the tag is extremely limited, though it should be recollected, of course, that the questionnaire did not elicit what we could call, in Scheurweghs' terms, 'very colloquial English'. *Pace* Trudgill & Hannah, we do not appear to have real evidence here for any difference between New Zealand and British English in the use of tag questions with *ought*.

Where item (45) was concerned, only three informants maintained the construction *didn't ought*. 17 used *ought not*, 15 used the abbreviated *oughtn't*, and 62 changed the verb to *shouldn't*. There were 4 other responses. Again, this appears to conform to the British pattern.

One surprising item revealed in Table 8 is the high number of informants who left a tag with *have* in item (35). There are a number of possible interpretations of this, including great insecurity in the use of tags with *ought* amongst the informants, or that the distractors worked too well in hiding the real purpose of the test. The most likely interpretation, though, in my opinion, is that there is pressure built in to the test format to resist changes, and possibly to resist multiple changes in particular. Consequently, changes made should be seen as far more important in determining actual usage than number of forms left unchanged.

MAIN VERB	TAG VERB	I 6	T 8	E 12	M 35	TOTAL	CHANGES TO PATTERN
	Table 8						
	Tag questions with 'ought': summary of results						
ought	ought	5	13	*49	10	77	28
ought	should	*78	54	14	13	169	91
ought	do	-	*2	1	-	3	1
ought	have	-	3	-	*48	51	3
should	should	15	22	32	12	81	81
other		-	1	-	1	2	2

NOTE: asterisked values are those for the items presented to informants.

5 Used to

The questionnaire was designed to elicit two things about *used to*: whether it is followed by *to*, and whether *do*-support is used with it. The six items presented to the informants were:

> (22) I usedn't be able to write with either hands, but now I can.
> (31) He didn't used to have a scar, but I think improves him.
> (58) He used not to smoke, before he start studying medicine.
> (67) Used he to attend lectures, or have he always passed just by reading?
> (69) Did you used to go to cinema every week?
> (70) Used they go to shopping on Thursdays?

Trudgill & Hannah (1982:19-20) make the following comment:

> In EngEng, the following negative forms of *used to* are all possible: *He used not to go*
> *He usedn't to go*
> *He didn't use to go*
> with the first (older and more formal) construction being the most usual in writing. In AusNZEng, the third form is less usual than in EngEng, while the second form is probably more usual than in EngEng. Contracted forms without *to – He usedn't go –* are also more usual in AusNZEng than in EngEng.

Quirk *et al.* (1985:140) comment that the construction *He used not to smoke* (or with contracted *usedn't*) is restricted to British English, while *do*-support is found in both British and American English. They also note that the spelling *did ... used to*, which is phonetically indistinguishable from *did ... use to*, of course, is 'often regarded as nonstandard'. They also comment on the possibility of *never used to* which avoids the problems of negating *used to*.

The results are presented below in Tables 9 and 10. It can be seen there that *do*-support is overwhelmingly preferred, both in the negative and in the interrogative. *Never* is found as a minority way of forming the negative. Use of *to* after the *used* is virtually obligatory: in (70) only one informant maintained the form with no *to*. The form *used* is preferred to *use* in all cases, though, of course, the data at my disposal says nothing about any style difference between *use* and *used*.

Unfortunately, it is here that the results of random ordering of examples have been least successful, and all the interrogative *used to*'s came very close to each other. This may well have had an effect on the results here. If it did, it is most likely to have increased the number of *did used to*'s in item (70). This could well have happened. Note, however, that despite this effect, there were still 27 'Other' responses for (70). The high number of 'Other' responses in all of these items is the result of paraphrases with adverbials such as *before, previously*.

Items (58) and (67) above are directly comparable with Johansson's items (19) *He used not to smoke* and (55) *Used he to attend lectures?* respectively. The results of comparisons between New Zealand, British and American English are given in Tables 11 and 12 below. It can be seen from the data there that New Zealand usage on these points as measured by the questionnaire is not distinct from American usage, and distinct from British usage only in the case of the negatives.

Table 9			
Patterns with 'used': summary of results			
Negative sentences			
PATTERN		ITEM	
	22	31	58
usedn't be	*1	-	-
usedn't to be	2	-	-
didn't use to be	14	12	17
didn't used to be	14	*66	24
used not to be	13	-	*18
never used to be	10	11	9
other	47	14	34

NOTE: asterisked items are those
presented to the informants.

Table 10			
Patterns with 'used': summary of results			
Interrogative sentences			
PATTERN		ITEM	
	67	69	70
used to V	*5	-	-
used V	-	-	*1
did use to V	27	11	21
did used to V	47	*79	54
other	23	13	27

NOTE: asterisked items are those
presented to the informants.

Table 11			
Item (58): responses from three varieties			
RESPONSE	NZ	GB	US
used not to	18	37	11
didn't use to	17	26	18
didn't used to	24	23	19
never used to	9	4	9
other	34	2	36
test = NZ		$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.75$

Table 12			
Item (67): responses from three varieties			
RESPONSE	NZ	GB	US
used he to	5	6	7
did he use to	27	24	19
did he used to	47	45	39
other	23	17	28
test = NZ		$p < 0.88$	$p < 0.47$

6 Conclusions

6.1 Need

The preferred structure in negative and interrogative sentences using *need* appears to involve *do*-support. However, both the auxiliary pattern and the main verb pattern are recognized, with little evidence that the auxiliary pattern is 'recessive' as claimed by Lass for other varieties. It is the failure to change away from the auxiliary pattern that makes the New Zealand usage approximate more to the British than to the American in this area.

14

6.2 Dare

Similar comments hold for *dare*, but here the use of mixed constructions (neither the purely auxiliary construction nor the purely main verb construction) is striking. This is, however, not a purely New Zealand phenomenon, and is mentioned, for example, by Greenbaum (1974:250) in relation to American English and by Quirk *et al.* (1985:138) in relation to British English.

6.3 Ought

The use of tag questions with *ought* appears to favour the use of *should*. *Pace* Trudgill & Hannah (1982), there is little evidence to suggest that this is any different from the British pattern, although the differences may appear in less formal styles. The construction *didn't ought* is clearly not standard New Zealand English.

6.4 Used to

While Trudgill & Hannah's conclusions on *used to* are phrased in terms of particular constructions being 'more usual' in one variety than another, and thus ideally require a much larger data base to be judged fairly, there is little support in my data for their statements about the New Zealand English usage of *used to*. The use of *do*-support is the preferred construction, particularly in interrogatives, but the results on interrogatives are indistinguishable from those obtained by Johansson for British and American subjects. Indeed, *used to* shows fewer signs of differing from other varieties of English than any of the other marginal modals considered.

6.5 Overall

The use of the questionnaire, particularly when presented to university students in writing, has the effect of eliciting fairly formal responses. It seems that, at this level of formality, the patterns of tolerance with the marginal modals in New Zealand English differ less from the patterns found in British English than might be thought from Trudgill & Hannah (1982), the only source to comment seriously on these points of usage. That there are differences is clear, particularly from the comparisons that have been made with

Johansson's earlier elicitation experiment: New Zealand English is not simply British English exported. Some of these differences may indicate changes in progress. But the similarities are at least as striking as the differences. It can, of course, be asked how far these patterns of tolerance reflect actual usage. All that can be said in this regard is that Johansson found a good correlation between what is reported for a particular variety and what is accepted in a test such as that described here. The test is unlikely to show what happens in informal New Zealand English, but there is no real reason to suppose that it does not reflect, possibly in a slightly distorted way, educated formal usage.

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