**A sociolinguistic perspective on root modality in Australian English**

This paper examines the distribution and sociolinguistic patterning of a set of modals and quasi modals which can express necessity and obligation in Australian English: *must*, *have to, have got to, got to* and *need to*.

Collins (e.g. 2009a, 2009b) has extensively discussed and quantified the distribution of (quasi) modals in corpora of Australian English (AusE). In terms of the root modality (deontic and dynamic) forms of concern here, he has found use is sensitive to genre and, for instance, *must* is rare in speech where forms like *have to* and *have got to* are increasingly common. Work focussing on the sociolinguistic dimension of their distribution has not previously been completed in AusE. Studies elsewhere, of multiple British varieties of English (Tagliamonte & Smith, 2006) and Canadian English (Tagliamonte & D’Arcy, 2007), have shown that the frequency of forms in speech differs by variety and they are sensitive to a range of social factors including age and gender. In a more recent study replicating these methods in Tyneside English however, Fehringer & Corrigan (2015) did not find these same relationships with social factors.

The current investigation is based on interview material from 87 AusE speakers, analysed in four age groups: adolescent, young adult, middle-aged and older participants. The aim is to explore the distribution of these (quasi) modals in AusE by firstly comparing the cross varietal differences after which the analysis centres on exploring whether AusE displays distribution of forms related to speaker age and/or gender.

The overall results confirm the reported increasing rareness of *must* in speech with it accounting for less than ten tokens while *have to* dominates the dataset. In terms of the sociolinguistic distribution, the data suggest that in AusE *have to* is sensitive to age and gender, with younger people and females favouring this construction. The association between males and *got to* is also supported by the data. These findings are both in line with the results of Tagliamonte and Smith (2006) and Tagliamonte and D’Arcy (2007).

By taking into consideration the importance of social factors, this study further contributes to the understanding of modality in AusE. In addition, it allows comparisons with sociolinguistic work on other varieties of English and with the use generational data highlights potential language change in progress.

**References**

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