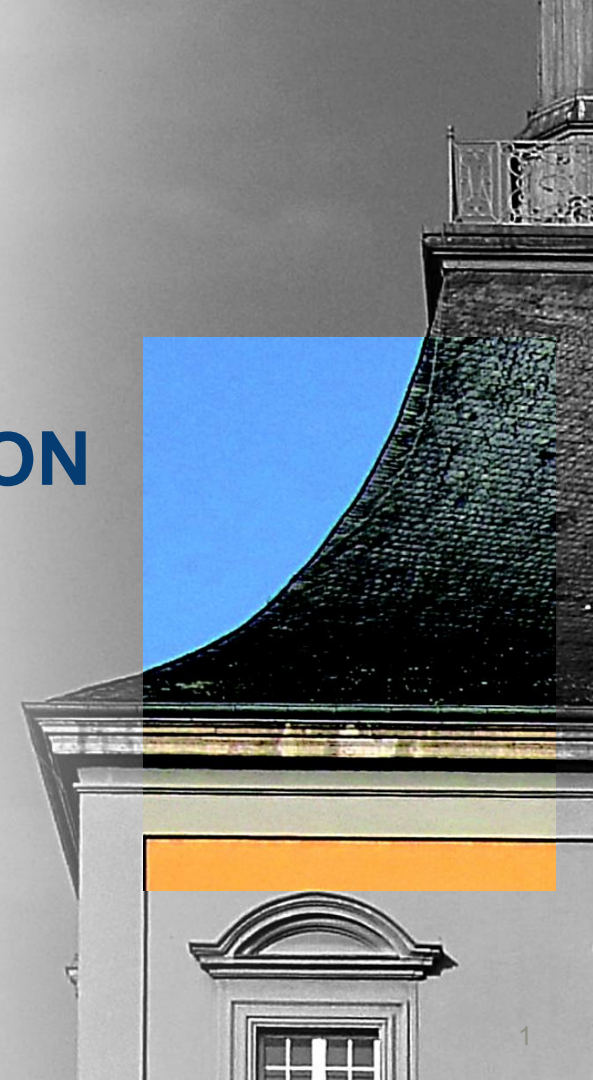


EFFECTS OF DEMOCRATIZATION ON LANGUAGE USE

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Hanna Bruns
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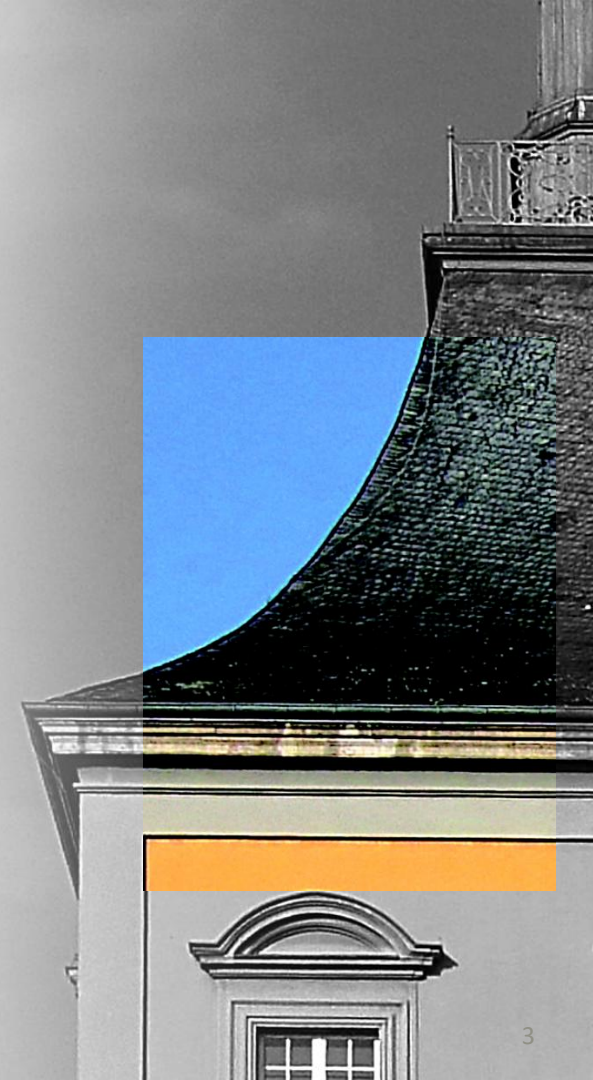


STRUCTURE

1. Introduction: Socio-cultural impact on recent language change
2. Changes in the modal domain: A corpus-based study of *may* and *must*
3. Effects of power, distance, and weight of imposition on requests
4. Conclusion and outlook

1. INTRODUCTION

**Socio-cultural impact on recent
language change**



LINK BETWEEN SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGES AND RECENT LANGUAGE CHANGE

- Changes in society between 1960 and today:
 - Decline of overt attention to hierarchy
 - Democratization
 - Globalization of knowledge
 - Globalization of communication (Internet)
 - [...]

(cf. Mair 2006: 1-11)

DEMOCRATIZATION

- In the linguistic sense, democratization refers to a "rise of more congenial, less face threatening alternatives in a society apparently more egalitarian, democratic, and antiauthoritarian", leading to "speakers' tendency to avoid unequal and face threatening modes of interaction" (Farrelly & Seoane 2012: 393)
- Note: Less overt power markers in language may not mean that less power is being exercised, but that it is simply exercised more implicitly (cf. Fairclough 1992: 1-29)

LINK BETWEEN DEMOCRATIZATION AND LANGUAGE CHANGE

"Language and social contexts influence one another, and together constitute social processes." (Culpeper & Nevala 2012: 372)

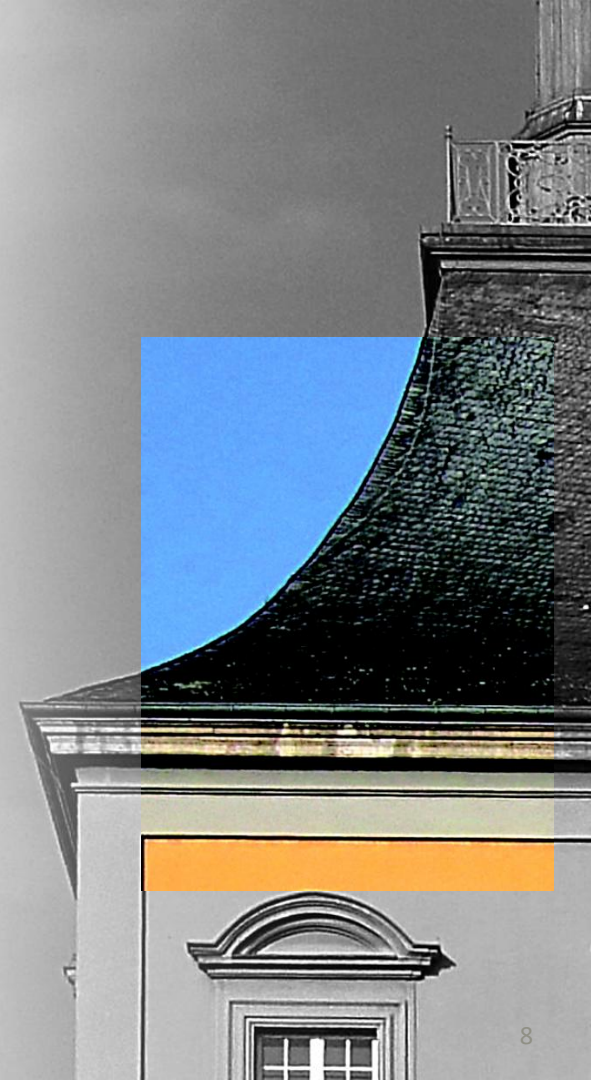
- Problem: "Sociocultural processes and their related concepts are often introduced into works on the history of English in a piecemeal fashion [...] social contact can be partially analyzed empirically [...], but a sociocultural process such as democratization cannot." (365)
- But link between culture of origin, linguistic choices and attitudes in individual speakers (e.g. towards social hierarchies) can be.

LINGUISTIC MARKERS AFFECTED BY DEMOCRATIZATION

- Modals (both deontic uses, as permission and obligation are expressed differently if hierarchies are more or less overtly focused on, and epistemic uses, which are often used as a hedge; cf. e.g. Hyland 1996, Kranich 2011).
- Other hedges as well as boosters (lesser need to downtone, more freedom to boost one's opinion if hierarchies are flatter)
- Terms of address (more equality-oriented, less hierarchy-oriented)
- FTAs, e.g. requests (Power: changes in conceptualisation of hierarchical relations should affect realisation of FTAs; previous research has shown interesting culture-based contrasts across linguacultures, cf. e.g. Blum-Kulka et al. (eds.) 1989, and across varieties of English, cf. e.g. Schneider & Barron (eds.) 2008)

2. CHANGES IN THE MODAL DOMAIN

A corpus-based study of
may and *must*



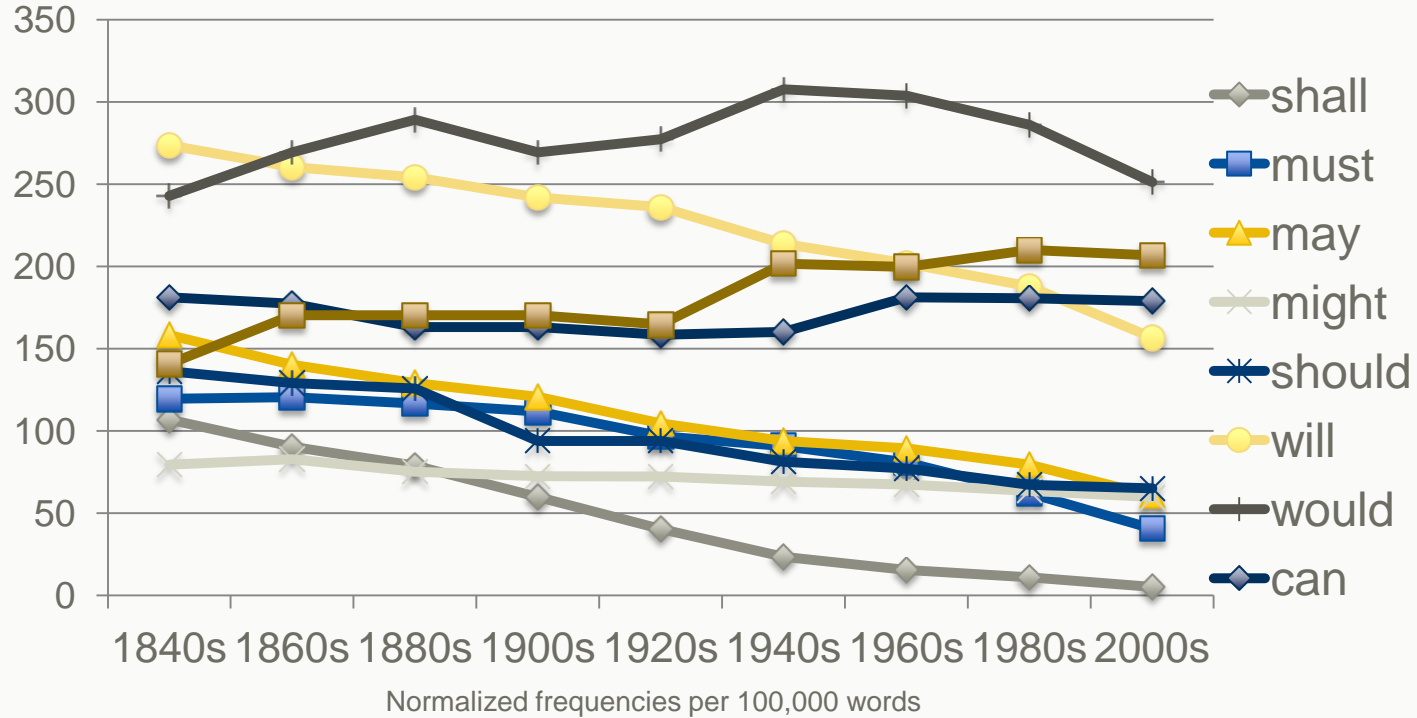
Modality in present-day English

- Most common and most grammaticalized expression of modality in present-day English: The modals - a small closed class of elements. Core members: *can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would*
- Other grammaticalized expressions of modality include quasi-modals or semi-modals (e.g. *have to, had rather, be supposed to*).

The decline of the modals and their different functions

- Previous research shows: Modals decline, semi-modals on the rise (cf. e.g. Mair 2006).
- Modals seem to decline more sharply in some functions than in others (e.g. *may* and *must* in British English more in the deontic function, but *should* more in the epistemic function, cf. Leech 2003)
- Modals decline at different rates in different global varieties (Collins 2009a, 2009b) and in different genres (compare Millar 2009 with Leech's response to Millar (2009))
- Socio-cultural changes such as democratization may well be responsible!

THE MODALS IN COHA (1840-2009)



see also Leech (2009)

A closer look at *may* and *must* (1960-2000)

- Method: Functional analysis of 400 random instances of each *may* and *must*.
- 200 from 1960s
- 200 from 2000s
- 100 each from Fiction and Non-Fiction
- Functions (dynamic, deontic, epistemic) of these instances analyzed.
- Comparable to Leech's (2003) analysis of *must* and *may* in BrE, which showed for both decline in proportion of deontic use, increase in proportion of epistemic use.

The functions of PDE *may* and *must*

I. Dynamic necessity, ability/possibility

must = expression of an internal need

may = be able to/be possible

II. Deontic

must = have to

may = be allowed to

III. Epistemic

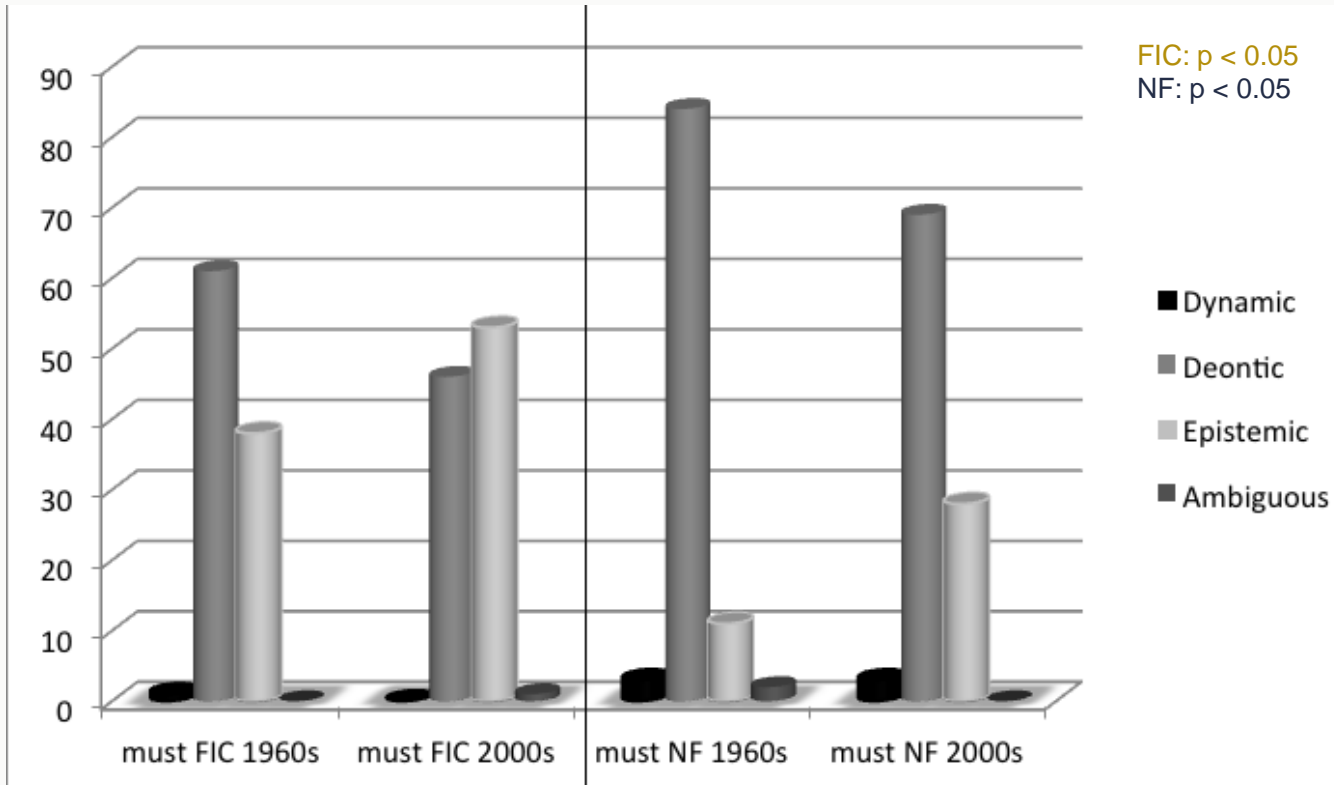
must = very likely

may = perhaps

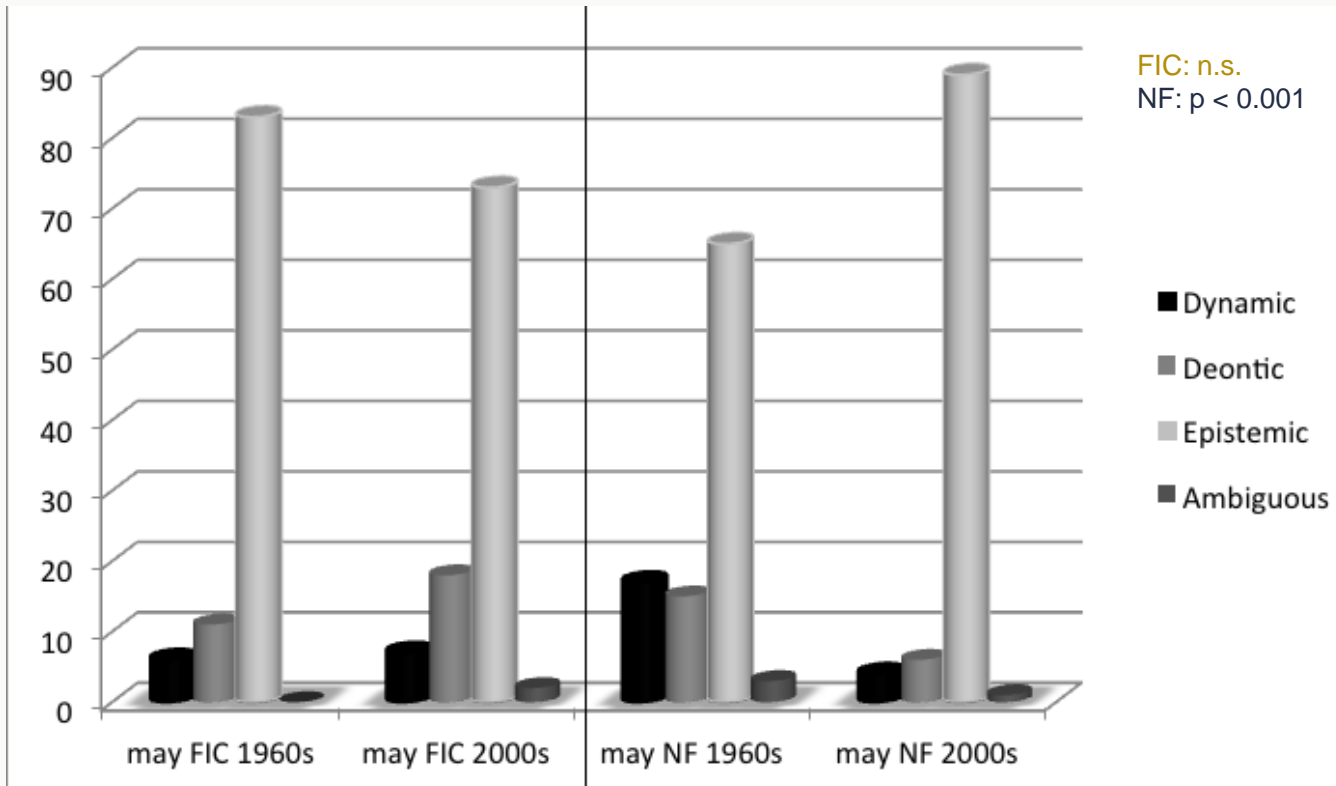
Ambiguous:

With all the books we're taking, we may sink the island (1960sNF)

Must in COHA 1960s vs 2000s



May in COHA 1960s vs 2000s



What is non-epistemic *may* doing in the non-fictional texts in the 1960s COHA data?

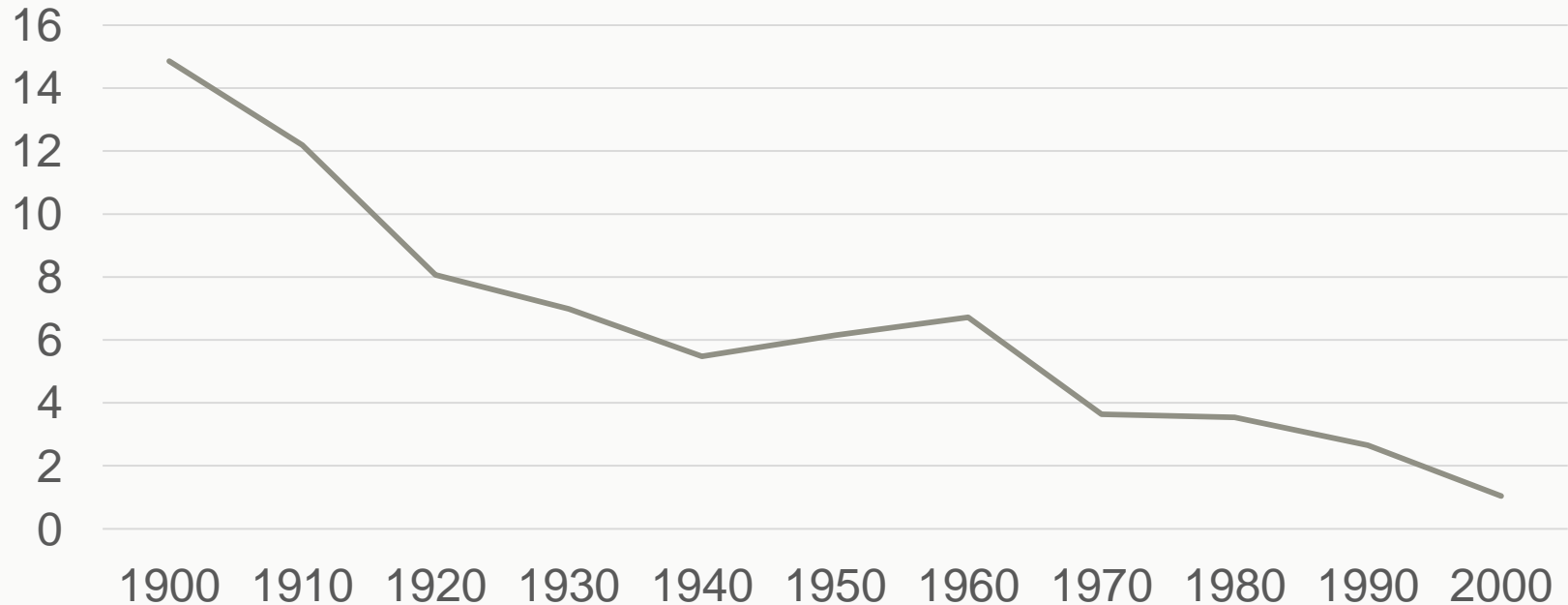
1. Sounds may be divided into musical sounds and noises. (*The Science of Language*)
2. ...this may be called a study of thinking. (*The Great Psychologists*)
3. ... which we may call the sentiment attitude. (*Introduction to the Science of Sociology*)
4. For instance, we may tentatively put: (I) a believes that p = in all possible worlds... (*Perception and Identity*)

Decrease of a hedging construction

- Depraetere and Cappelle (2014) outline a web of constructions based on collocation patterns for the modal *may*.
- Decrease of *may* seems mostly have to do with the construction *we may* + verb of saying/reasoning.
- Looking at this pattern with 48 verbs (e.g. accept, add, agree, argue, claim, compare, conclude, consider, correct, classify, describe, disagree, exclude, explain...).

Decrease of a hedging construction

Frequency (pmw) of all investigated verbs in COHA (1900 - 2009)



Conclusions from this study

- Clear changes in proportion of non-epistemic and epistemic uses
- Sharper decrease of non-epistemic *may* mostly due to decrease in a hedging construction.
- This decrease is only due to a sharp decrease in non-fiction. No significant decrease in fiction.
- Genre and specific modal constructions are crucial to the changes → impact of socio-cultural factors seems very likely.

3. EFFECTS OF POWER, DISTANCE, AND WEIGHT OF IMPOSITION ON REQUESTS



Previous findings (1)

- Kranich & Schramm (2015) showed that previously established contrasts between English and German (cf. e.g. House (1996)) seem to be no longer in place concerning younger speakers
 - Methods used: DCTs, 8 situations, request elicitation, focus on power and weight of imposition
 - Distributed to British and German university students (age 20-26)
 - Method comparable to CCSARP, thus results comparable to the ones reported e.g. in House (1996) using data from British and German students from the 1970s and 1980s.
 - Main finding: The contrasts established by House (1996) that German speakers prefer direct request strategies and British speakers conventional indirectness were not replicated.
 - Instead, all participants preferred conventional indirectness. Imperatives hardly occurred.

Previous findings (2)

- Bruns (2017) used DCTs to compare German and Indian English university students' request behaviour
- Main finding: German students prefer conventional indirectness (as in Kranich & Schramm (2015)); Indian students often use more direct strategies in situations of no power difference, but conventionally indirect strategies in +P situations .
 - Hypothesis: Differences in sociocultural norms concerning hierarchical relations

STUDY DESIGN AND METHOD

- **DCT**, using the 8 situations of Kranich & Schramm's (2015) questionnaire to elicit requests
- Focus on power difference, social distance and weight of imposition
- Informants (n = 232): speakers of AmE, BrE, IndE and German, 18-30 and 50+ years
- Coding: CCSARP coding manual (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989, cf. Economidou-Kogetsidis 2010)
- **Interviews** with 8 participants in UK (n = 3) and Germany (n = 5)

Sit. 3: Boss – employees, + Power, + Distance, - Weight

It's really noisy in the office, so the boss asks the workers to be quiet.

- Boss: _____
- Other workers: Sure, sorry.

RESULTS: HEAD ACT STRATEGIES

All situations

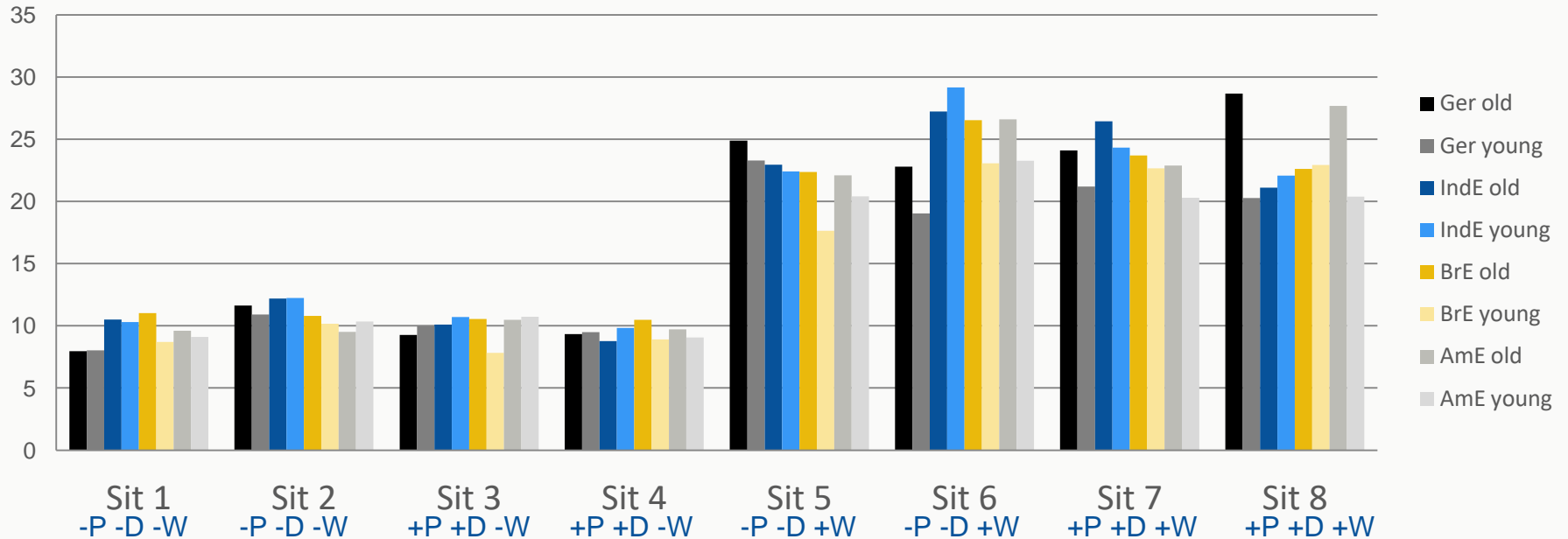
German O/Y: $p < 0.001$
All others: n.s.



Coding following Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989) & Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010)

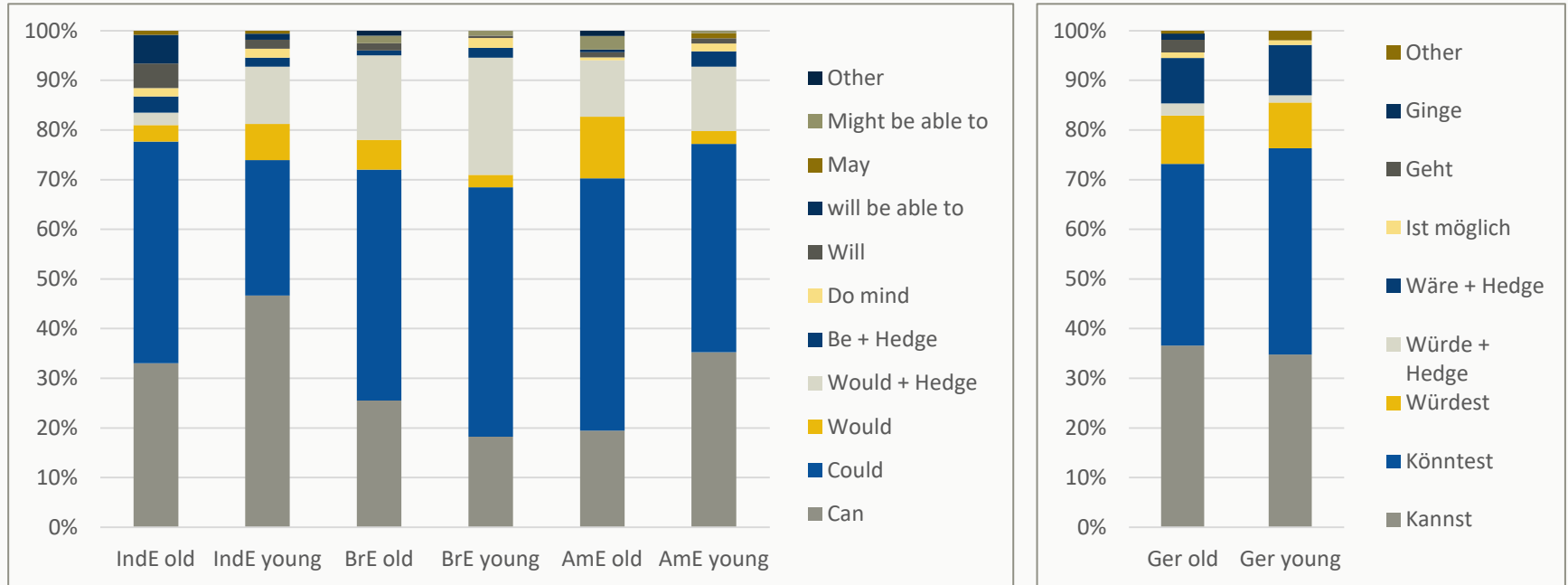
RESULTS: WORD COUNT

Mean number of words



MODALS AND OTHER MODIFIERS

Preparatory Condition in all Query Preparatory head acts



QUALITATIVE FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS

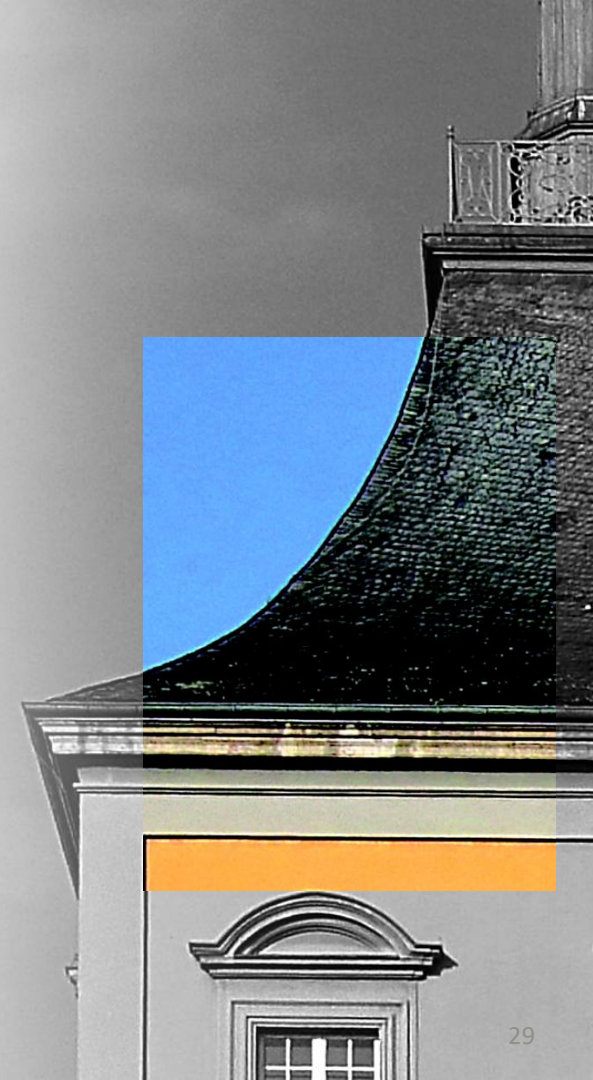
English, UK: **F, 25, student & F, 24, international relations degree**

- "I think you got a better response from people if you sort of look like you're working with them and not, you know, just demanding them to do things."
- „...nowadays there's a lot more of like office culture and people like being told of like people's/ other people's sensitivities that I don't think back then there were so maybe their boss would just kind of like, um, not verbally abuse, but you know, kind of be more like „Shut up!“, you know, straight forward with their employees.“

English, UK: **F, 45, sales employee**

- "we have a couple of young ones, and they don't listen. They're rude. [...] And they are not very respectful.“

4. CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK



Preliminary Conclusion

- Changes in functional distribution and genre distribution of the modals *may* and *must* point to socio-cultural factors as an important driving force of the frequency changes in the modal domain
- Preliminary findings from the DCT pilot study support the notion of changes in directness-related conventions, again most likely due to socio-cultural factors, though concerning Indian English, L2 competence might also play a role.
- Generational and cross-cultural differences
- Older German speakers tend to be more direct than British and American English speakers (confirming results by e.g. House 1996), but this pragmatic contrast seems to be changing in the younger generation (esp. in situations where speaker is in power position), confirming findings by Kranich & Schramm (2015) and Bruns (2017).

OUTLOOK (1)

- **Aim:** A more fine-grained perspective on the changes in the domain of modality, as well as on the reasons why more direct and more indirect strategies are chosen
- **Hypothesis:** Frequency changes of the relevant linguistic expressions closely connected to changes in cultural, social conventions and the ensuing changing genre norms. → Differences between different varieties of English and German explicable partly as differences in cultural norms. Impact of language structure (e.g. with regard to types of hedging) will also become visible because of the English-German contrastive perspective.

OUTLOOK (2)

Plans:

- further analysis of modals, other hedges, boosters, personal pronouns and address terms, as well as different speech acts (FTAs) > corpus-based, DCTs.
- Supplemented by interviews and questionnaires on attitudes towards hierarchical relations in society to see connection more clearly between linguistic choices and attitudes
- inclusion of Austrian German (pragmatically very different according to e.g. Muhr 1995, 2008; e.g. clear differences concerning terms of address, cf. Kretzenbacher 2011)

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