My doctor said what?
A study of language attitudes towards the double modal

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Language Attitudes

• Little known of language attitudes towards individual linguistic features
  – Holistic approach involving a set of features
  – Whole languages taken as monolithic

• Even fewer studies of morphosyntactic features
  – Bender (2005) copula absence in AAE
  – Campbell-Kibler (2007) (‐ing)

• No previous studies of attitudes towards the double modal
Double Modal

• Examples:
  – You know what **might could** help that is losing some weight. (Verilogue id:53207)
  – My bones **might not can** take that. (Verilogue id: 33896)
  – We **may can** just hold it for a while.

• Pragmatic conditioning
  – Preserving face in the negotiation of wants or needs (Mishoe and Montgomery 1994:12)
Previous Studies of Double Modals

• Focus on the syntactic structure

• Social conditioning
  – Indication that DMs used by all social classes
    • Feagin 1979, Di Paolo 1989
  – Used by doctors
    • 63% of double modals in Verilogue corpus used by doctors (Hasty et al. 2011)

• Possible low prestige evaluation
  – Acceptability judgment show Age, Education and Gender conditioning
    • With the 20-30 year olds most likely to accept a dm
    • Men and the respondents without a college education
Research Question

• How do community members evaluate someone who uses a double modal?

• Hypothesis:
  – Based on the association of dm acceptance with men and lack of education and its status as a nonstandard feature
  – Double modal carries a low prestige evaluation
  – Language attitudes would exhibit a mixture of linguistic insecurity and covert prestige
Methodology

- **Verilog Inc. Database**
  - Doctor-patient interactions in over 45,000 office visits across the US
- **4 30-second recordings of doctors using double modals (2 male, 2 female)**
- **Matched Guise Technique (Lambert et al. 1960)**
  - Experimental Guise: double modal (*may can*)
  - Control guise: digitally removed second modal (*may can to may*)
• We may can just hold it for a while...(male)

• We may can always add...(female)

• Isolation of the double modal
Evaluation

• Between subjects design
  – Experimental group (n 20)
  – Control group (n 20)

• Evaluated speaker for 19 paired, polar opposite adjectives

• In response to the frame of evaluating the doctor’s bedside manner
Adjectives

- Polite—impolite
- Confident—not confident
- Genuine—not genuine
- Educated—uneducated
- Trustworthy—not trustworthy
- Friendly—unfriendly
- Honest—dishonest
- Responsible—not responsible
- Comfortable—uncomfortable
- Likable—not likable
- Intelligent—not intelligent
- Helpful—not helpful
- Thoughtful—not thoughtful
- Above average—below average
- Good manners—bad manners
- Humble—not humble
- Easy going—not easy going
- Successful—not successful
- Sociable—unsociable
Speaker Questions

- State of origin
- Urban, suburban, or rural area
- Overall impression of the doctor:
  - Excellent, above average, average, below average, or poor
Respondents

• Previous studies of Language attitudes use groups of college students
  – Accessible, large amount of data
  – Yields a homogeneous sample

• 40 respondents from Northeast Tennessee
  – Balanced by gender, education, and with a mixture of ages
Findings

• Overall a significant difference for adjectives measuring solidarity ($p < 0.01$)
• No difference for Competence adjectives
• No observable social differences among respondents
Competence

• No observable downgrading of a doctor’s competence based on the use of a double modal

• Explanation:
  – The respondents knew that the speaker was a doctor:
    • A highly educated and successful profession
Factor Analysis

- Competence
  - Educated 0.84
  - Successful 0.63
  - Responsible 0.59
  - Confident 0.58
- Socially Attractive
  - Likeable 0.72
  - Comfortable 0.68
  - Genuine 0.58
  - Above.average 0.54
  - Helpful 0.53
  - Confident 0.51

- Friendliness
  - Friendly 0.91
  - Easy.going 0.58
  - Likeable 0.5
- Independent
  - Polite
  - Honest
  - Humble


Specific Factors

- Competence
- Socially Attractive
- Friendliness
- Polite
- Honest
- Humble

Note: p 0.02
## Politeness Upgrade

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<td>(intercept)</td>
<td>3.95</td>
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<td>0.39</td>
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R-squared 0.05
p 0.02
Discussion

• Double modal is associated with politeness
  – When used by a doctor

• Face preservation
  – Confirms analysis of Mishoe and Montgomery (1994)
Areas for expansion

• Social meaning of double modal in different social situations
  – No negative reaction for doctor but perhaps for other interactions

• No social differences among the respondents
  – Expand study to include greater numbers of respondents

• Single instance of a double modal produce a significant difference in language attitudes ratings
  – Encouragement for studying other low frequency morphosyntactic features
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