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## REFUSAL FROM AUTHORITATIVE METALANGUAGE IN ENGLISH TEACHER'S WORK

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*The article examines recent transformations in the modality of grammatical models that are frequently employed by teachers of English. These changes are examined as the outcome of wider social influences shaped by key historical and societal developments of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In addition to long-standing social factors, including generational change, the study considers a set of extralinguistic conditions that arose in the aftermath of World War II and evaluates their role in shaping developments within the English language, with particular emphasis on grammatical structure. The post-war social environment is largely defined by processes of humanization and democratization, which contributed to the emergence of value orientations centred on politeness, reciprocity, and respect in interpersonal communication. The article argues that the expression of these values does not occur solely through phonetic or lexical means; the language also relies on a set of grammatical mechanisms that serve to express speakers' attitudes in communication. The grammatical means under consideration did not arise as entirely new forms but evolved from pre-existing linguistic units whose meanings were gradually reinterpreted, though at varying rates. Such semantic reanalysis has led to broader, system-wide morphological shifts in English. The study provides a detailed account of grammatical devices that support non-imposing and polite teacher's discourse, including modal verbs, modal expressions, and grammatical and lexical hedging strategies. Particular attention is given to semantic shifts and the changes in pragmatic functions of modal constructions commonly used in classroom interaction—namely can, may, should, ought, have (got), need, and must. A shared trait of these changes is a movement toward reducing hierarchical distance between speaker and addressee, thereby promoting a more equal communicative stance between teachers and students. The findings of the article can be applied in a classroom to help teachers of English exclude or at least minimize authoritative overtones and adopt more balanced and respectful modes of professional communication.*

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**Keywords:** humanization, democratization, metalanguage, patronizing, linguistic behaviour, hedging.

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## ВІДМОВА ВІД АВТОРИТЕТНОЇ МЕТАМОВИ В РОБОТІ ВЧИТЕЛЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ

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*У статті розглянуто найновіші зміни в модальності граматичних моделей, які часто використовують учителі англійської мови. Ці зміни схарактеризовано як результат ширших*

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соціальних впливів, сформованих ключовими історичними та суспільними подіями XX та XXI століть. Окрім традиційних соціальних факторів, що включають зміну поколінь, у дослідженні проаналізовано сукупність екстралінгвістичних умов, що виникли після Другої світової війни, та оцінено їхню роль у формуванні розвитку англійської мови з особливим акцентом на граматичній структурі. Повоєнне соціальне середовище значною мірою визначають процеси гуманізації та демократизації, які сприяли появі ціннісних орієнтацій, зосереджених на ввічливості, взаємності та повазі в міжособистісному спілкуванні. У статті стверджено, що вираження цих цінностей відбувається не тільки за допомогою фонетичних чи лексичних засобів; мова також спирається на набір граматичних механізмів, які слугують для вираження ставлення мовців у спілкуванні. Проаналізовані граматичні засоби не виникли як абсолютно нові форми, а розвинулися з уже наявних мовних одиниць, значення яких поступово переосмислювалися, хоча й із різною швидкістю. Такі семантичні зміни призвели до ширших, загальносистемних морфологічних зрушень в англійській мові. У дослідженні представлено детальний опис граматичних прийомів, що підтримують ненав'язливий та ввічливий дискурс учителя, зокрема й модальні дієслова, модальні вислови, а також граматичні та лексичні стратегії хеджування. Особливу увагу приділено семантичним зрушенням та змінам у прагматичних функціях модальних конструкцій, що зазвичай використовують у взаємодії в класі, а саме: *can, may, should, ought, have (got), need* та *must*. Спільною рисою цих змін є рух до зменшення ієрархічної дистанції між мовцем та адресатом, що тим самим сприяє більш рівноправній комунікативній позиції між учителями та учнями. Результати дослідження можуть бути застосовані в навчальному середовищі, щоб допомогти вчителям англійської мови викоренити або принаймні мінімізувати авторитарне спілкування та прийняти більш збалансовані й шанобливі способи професійної взаємодії.

**Ключові слова:** гуманізація, демократизація, метамова, зверхність, лінгвістична поведінка, хеджування.

**Defining the problem.** Irrespective of the setting in which it takes place – whether in educational contexts, public interaction, or online environments – communication is regulated by a system of principles that depend on its intended purpose. Within democratic societies that have instilled mutual respect among their members, politeness constitutes one of the basic principles of interaction. Participants in interaction typically recognize the normative expectation of respectful behaviour, which is realized through a range of communicative practices, such as the use of conventional politeness markers (e.g. *please, thank you, etc.*), adherence to turn-taking, refraining from interruptions, and to control of pitch and tone.

On the phonetic plane, politeness is conveyed through prosodic parameters such as intonation, pitch, stress, and speech tempo, which can indicate varying degrees of engagement or detachment on the part of the speaker, as well as express supportive or offensive meanings. Alongside lexical choices, these phonetic resources play a crucial role in shaping polite interaction. In contrast, grammatical means, used to adhere to the politeness principles tend to receive comparatively

limited attention in teachers' metalanguage, as educators more often rely on lexical and phonetic strategies to achieve polite communication.

It is a widely accepted knowledge that virtually all natural languages currently in use undergo continuous change [3; 4; 9], and English is no exception to these processes. Linguistic change affects all levels of the language, though at varying speeds. Lexical expansion is particularly rapid, with new items almost daily entering the vocabulary. Changes in phonetics, especially vowel articulation are also evident, as each generation of speakers exhibits distinct pronunciation features [2]. Considerable evidence indicates that processes initiated during the Great Vowel Shift are still ongoing.

By contrast, grammatical change in English – encompassing both morphology and syntax – proceeds at a considerably slower pace [6], with morphology demonstrating greater adaptability than syntactic structures. Research in historical linguistics [5; 6] suggests that large-scale, systematic morphological transformations tend to occur over spans of several centuries. On average, a subperiod within a major stage of English

linguistic history extends over approximately 200–300 years, if we follow the conventional division of the history of English into three major periods, with two subperiods each for Old and Middle English and three subperiods for New English (see [1: 91–92]).

Systemic syntactical changes happen over 500–700 years. This time interval is equal to a duration of a period in the aforementioned periodization

Grammatical and semantic analyses of literary texts across various genres, together with observations of contemporary spoken discourse, indicate that a number of social and cultural changes in the twentieth century caused systemic grammatical shifts in English during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

**The aim** of this paper is to identify and systematize grammatical forms that need to be excluded from the use in English teachers' metalanguage and to propose alternative grammatical and communicative patterns that align with the principle of polite communication.

**The object** of the study is the set of grammatical units, that can be employed to express polite communicative messages in English teachers' classroom discourse.

**Methods of research.** The study outlines linguistic parameters relevant to the investigation of morphological change and applies general scientific methods such as description, analysis, synthesis, comparison, and statistical assessment. Among the linguistic methods, employed in the research, are semantic analysis and substitution, which are used to trace developmental tendencies and to illustrate both ongoing and completed morphological shifts.

**Analysis of previous research.** As previously noted, all natural languages – grammar in particular – are subject to continuous evolution. English follows this general pattern; however, grammatical change is most often examined diachronically, that is, not only after such change has occurred but after it has survived through the unstable initial period of its use. In contrast, lexical and phonetic innovations tend to attract

scholarly attention immediately or shortly after they have been attested.

Generative linguistics, traditionally focused on syntactic structure, has also acknowledged the language change. In this school of thought emphasis is placed on intergenerational language transmission, where change is attributed to the reevaluation of grammatical structures by younger speakers, potentially resulting in the revision of existing grammatical rules [13: 230]. This approach rests on the assumption of incomplete linguistic transmission from older to younger generations. Such a hypothesis was articulated in its modern form by Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog in 1968 [15], though its foundations can be traced back to the nineteenth century and the work of Hermann Paul, who regarded individual linguistic competence as the primary object of linguistic inquiry [12].

Despite its long-standing influence and multiple interpretations, the so-called *child-based theory* [4: 44] raises several unresolved questions, including the following:

- how come children within an entire speech community independently engage in grammatical reanalysis at about the same time?
- why does the same reanalysis not occur in every generation?
- why do increasingly advanced educational standards of every next generation fail to preserve grammatical parameters?
- and why does grammatical structure often remain stable over extended periods?

The persistent inability of linguistic theory to provide final answers to these questions suggests that the child-based theory alone cannot fully account for mechanisms of language change, especially in the domain of grammar.

Moreover, even a cursory examination of adult language use reveals the emergence of linguistic innovations, especially within specific social groups. Empirical studies support the view that children do not play an exclusive or decisive role as agents of linguistic change [10: 21–36].

**Results and Discussion.** Though this study does not reject the child-based model, it argues that major cultural and historical developments constitute the decisive driving forces of language change. Within this framework, younger speakers represent the cross-section most susceptible to linguistic innovation (cf. [9]). Additionally, certain changes may arise naturally as a result of internal linguistic dynamics.

An illustration of such internally motivated change is the alternation between infinitival and gerundial complements described in [7]: *start* INF > *start* GER, *like* INF > *like* GER, but *intend* GER > *intend* INF, *cease* GER > *cease* INF.

These developments appear irregular and unsystematic, rendering their explanation complex and of limited sociolinguistic relevance.

By contrast, other grammatical changes are both systematic and explanatory, revealing the general direction of grammatical development and triggering broader innovations. These more recent developments can be explained primarily by extralinguistic influences that arose in the aftermath of World War II and have extended into the twenty-first century, most notably the intensifying processes of humanization and democratization, and, to a certain degree, demilitarization [14: 137]. Although these processes may appear external to linguistic inquiry, they have brought about significant humanitarian consequences, including transformations in science, governance, public institutions, lifestyles, and collective consciousness – especially in societies previously shaped by Cold War ideologies [14: 138]. These societal changes inevitably find linguistic expression across multiple levels of language structure.

While democratization has manifested differently across countries and political systems, it reflects a shared aspiration to abandon authoritarian and totalitarian governance and to establish just societies grounded in legitimacy and civil rights. Humanization, in turn, redefines political authority as a means of serving citizens' needs and safeguarding their freedoms rather than as an end in itself. On the

international level, humanization is associated with the growing influence of moral norms, fostering recognition of individual dignity and self-worth within environments that respect fundamental rights (cf. [14: 140]).

This study interprets humanization and democratization as post-war and post-colonial social characteristics shaped by major historical events, including resistance to or collapse of non-democratic regimes (fascism, nazism, communism, ruscism, etc.), the enactment of the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964, the dismantling of colonial empires, the weakening and eventual disintegration of the Soviet Union, as well as the overthrow of authoritarian regimes in post-Soviet countries. A common feature underlying these processes is the growing focus on the individual, whose dignity, rights, and freedoms are expected to be acknowledged and safeguarded by political institutions. Within such a sociohistorical framework, the norms of civil interaction and politeness have become especially salient.

Within sociolinguistics, politeness strategies are realized through speech acts that demonstrate consideration for interlocutors and remove or reduce potential threats to their self-esteem (often referred to as "*face*" [15]).

The most influential framework for analysing politeness is the model introduced by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson [2], commonly known as the "*face-saving theory of politeness*."

Effective social interaction requires cooperative efforts to preserve both positive and negative face (the need for approval and for autonomy correspondingly). Politeness strategies have thus evolved as communicative tools that help speakers manage interaction and achieve mutually favourable outcomes.

In the present article, politeness is defined as the observance of etiquette norms and respectful language use, intended to sustain positive interpersonal relations and to prevent communicative offence. A range of politeness strategies can be utilized, including humour, the mitigation of criticism through

compliments, honorifics, friendly forms of address, establishment of common ground, use of tag questions and discourse markers, jargon and context-appropriate slang, phraseological expressions, expressive vocabulary, explanation, questioning, framing disagreement as opinion, and hedging. Hedging is analysed, following O. Hyryn, 2020 [8].

It is evident that different speech communities prioritize different politeness strategies. Consequently, for teachers of English, native-like pronunciation or lexical proficiency are not enough for culturally appropriate communication, as politeness is determined by following specific pragmatic strategies.

Grammatical means are often viewed upon as secondary in discussions of politeness. However, grammatical correctness alone does not ensure non-offensive communication, just as grammatical inaccuracy does not necessarily imply rudeness.

The following table shows examples of critical comments from social media, reproduced with original spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Although these comments lack overtly offensive vocabulary, they demonstrate how propositions may still be perceived as rude, though there are no explicit lexical or phonetic markers of impoliteness.

**Table 1. Polite and impolite criticism comments**

Comments with polite criticism	Comments with impolite criticism
on a low resolution of a picture	
(1) <i>You guys always have the clearest text 😊</i>	(2) <i>Guys, improve the ... resolution of the pics you're posting</i>
on the complexity of Hungarian grammar	
(3) <i>What about Spanish? I am a native Spanish speaker and I studied Spanish in school for 13 years, and still can't comprehend a lot of the grammar</i>	(4) <i>Ehm, you most likely have no idea about Hungarian grammar - they have almost no grammar at all ... you should have put there Russian grammar instead</i>
about a picture: <i>Magnificent Linguistic Family Tree Shows How all Languages are Related</i>	
(5) <i>I majored in Linguistic ... in Japan. This tree I see quite closer to the accurate theories and historic data. Unfortunately the roots and the relation among East Asian languages both in spoken and written systems ... are still not clear.</i>	(6) <i>It actually shows that not all languages are related. ... It says all the languages are related. It's not all the languages. And they're not all related.</i>

Sentences (1), (3), (5) contain numerous politeness tactics, among which is a sarcastic, but still a friendly joke – sentence 1, questioning - *What about Spanish?*, grounding - *I am a native Spanish speaker and I studied Spanish in school for 13 years* and *I majored in Linguistic ... in Japan*, presenting disagreement as an opinions - *I see*, hedging - *Unfortunately, for example*.

Examples (2), (4), and (6), rely on grammatical constructions that

contribute to a rude interpretation. It is noteworthy that the authors of polite and impolite comments reveal linguistically and culturally distinct profiles: the former are predominantly associated with the global West, whereas the latter reflect russian linguistic backgrounds. This contrast highlights that communicative practices perceived as neutral within one cultural framework may be regarded as inappropriate in another. Consequently, teachers of foreign languages, who function as

intermediaries between cultures, need to demonstrate heightened awareness of such divergences.

Sentence (2) shows the use of an unmitigated imperative, which is generally perceived as impolite in both formal and informal contexts. To increase politeness, speakers typically reformulate imperatives using lexical markers such as – *please*, and *kindly* in oral and written communication respectively. From a grammatical perspective, several transformation strategies may be employed. The following examples contain classroom-appropriate alternatives for English language teachers:

-transformation of the imperative sentence into a request: *Could you open....? If you opened....*

- transformation of the imperative sentence into a question: *Why don't you/we....? Would you mind ...ING?*

-transformation of the imperative sentence into a statement: *It'd be great if you spoke up... I'll be grateful if you came up...*

-transformation of the imperative sentence into a statement with a modal auxiliary: *You might want to... You will need to ...*

-adding a conditional clause to the imperative: *Have a seat if it's fine with you. Send me your essay if you're ready.*

- transformation of the second-person imperative sentence into the one with the first-person pronoun: *Have a seat> Let's all have our seats*

- further expand the imperative with the first-person pronoun in a tag question: *Start reading>Let's start reading, shall we?*

As for the imperatives with a negation, in addition to the above mentioned ways expressing prohibition can be achieved with any of the three other ways: instead of *Don't say it!* teachers could use *You don't want to say it! Try not to say it!* Moreover, instead of prohibiting something a teacher can allow the opposite action: e.g.: ~~*Don't shout out your answers*~~ -*Please make sure you raise your hands before you answer.*

Sentence 4 Ehm, you most likely have no idea about Hungarian grammar has a case of bridging - Most likely. Bridging is a notion opposite to hedging, which is linguistic means – both lexical and grammatical – which a speaker (in our case – a teacher) can add to their sentences to sound less direct and undisputable [8]. Accordingly, bridging makes the emotional load of the sentence even more sharp than was initially. (compare: You are inattentive and You are highly/absolutely//immensely inattentive.)

Another softening grammar technique for sentences with criticism could be transforming the structure of a sentence, containing a negative particle (You are not trying hard enough), negative pronoun (You make no effort...), a negative affix (You are inattentive), or even a word with a negative semantics (You are so passive...). A teacher can try moving this negative particle, affix or pronoun to the position farther away from the criticized person and place it closer to themselves. Likewise the word with a negative meaning can be substituted with the antonym and a negation, that too will be moved closer to the subject of the main clause. Thus the criticism will sound less offensive and will not cause inappropriate associations for the student:

- You are not trying hard enough > I don't think you are trying hard enough;

- You make no effort... > I can't say that you are making a lot of effort;

- You are inattentive > I don't think that you are being attentive;

- You are so passive...> I can't say, that you are active enough

In the negative comments above, you should have put...in sentence (4) is an illustration of a modal expressing past advice/reproach. Both advice and reproach are speech acts that are commonly considered patronizing and judgemental [11]. One of our previous studies [7], states that condescending and critical linguistic behaviour gives away the speaker's sense of superiority and puts the interlocutor in a defensive position, forcing them to look for excuses

and reasons for their behaviour and/or actions.

There is a wide range of ways, that a teacher can use in their metalanguage to express advice without a condescending attitude:

-presenting an advice as an option; (*You can/could try...*)

-the use of a first-person pronoun; (*we / I should start.../ I would start reading...*)

- replacement of *should* with a modal, that is less imposing (*You might need to rewrite this exercise .../ You might want to memorize this instead...*).

- replacement of *should* with a passive structure (*The essay has to be completed by.../ It needs to be done by Friday.*)

Judgmentalism mentioned above, lacks tolerance, compassion, objectivity, etc. Compare – *You are mistaken* (judgment) and *I can't agree with you* (opinion).

Example (6) is perceived as rude because it presents a subjective evaluation as an objective fact, which is a common manipulative strategy: – *It's not all the languages. And they're not all related.*

In argumentative discourse, such framing is considered misleading and, moreover, impolite and patronizing, since it elevates personal opinion to the status of objective truth. Therefore interlocutors are generally expected to establish their epistemic authority or limit the scope of their claims. In classroom interaction, teachers can accomplish this by employing hedging strategies discussed earlier.

*It's not all the languages. And they're not all related.* – *I doubt that these are all the languages. And as far as I know not all of them are related*

It should be emphasized that the set of polite linguistic strategies outlined above, together with the accompanying examples, is not exhaustive and is intended solely for illustrative purposes. Beyond such speech acts as advising, prohibiting, and correcting, depending on the communicative context teachers may also employ acts of permission or hypothesizing. These discourse moves constitute a promising area for further research.

**Conclusion.** Semantic change arises as a result of the interaction between intralinguistic and extralinguistic factors, leading to modifications in the functional capacities of linguistic units. Although such transformations occur across all levels of language organization, they are particularly consequential at the grammatical level, where innovations tend to remain less overt than lexical changes. The period spanning the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is characterized by systemic linguistic shifts that mirror wider processes of humanization and democratization in communicative behaviour.

Accordingly, teachers' metalanguage may draw not only on polite lexical and phonetic means but also on a variety of grammatical resources. The outcomes of the present study, along with its prospective directions, may support foreign language teachers in adapting to changing norms of interpersonal communication, especially within modern multicultural environments. In this way, teachers, functioning as agents of cultural mediation, can contribute to the promotion of humanistic and democratic values in communication and social interaction more generally.

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