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Register Variation With Regard to the Use of the Auxiliary Shall

Modal auxiliaries in English besides morphological differences among themselves (contracted and non-contracted form with the negative particle: *can't* but *may not;* the use and the omission of the particle to: *can go* but *ought to go;* special forms for "past" and present and lack of such forms *can-could* but *must*); also show a considerable variation in usage manifested by the frequency of their occurrence in texts, and by the type of syntactical unit in which they occur. Students of English usage whose interest goes beyond an economical statement of the fundamental grammatical function of these auxiliaries as e. g. demonstrated by *M* in the well known formula: $Aux \rightarrow C(M)$ (have + en) (be + ing) (be + en),[1] and whose studies are based on the evidence from texts, are aware that long stretches of written or recorded spoken English have to be searched in order to collect a small number of examples of certain modals. Notable among these is *dare*, while the modal auxiliary *shall*, which will be discussed here, comes up with sufficient frequency in the pattern 1st *person shall*, but rather seldom in the context of the second and third persons.[2]

It is my impression that owing to this low frequency of occurrence less detailed study has been devoted to the use of these patterns than to the more frequent *shall* with the first person. It is logical to suppose that this fact must have pedagogical implications. The mentioned low frequency of occurrence

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[1] Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures*, Mouton, 1957, p. 39 (iii).

[2] Cf. C. C. Fries, "The Periphrastic Future with Shall and Will", PMLA, XL, pp. 963—1024. D. Kalogjera, *Upotreba anomalnih glagolskih oblika shall, should, will, would u današnjem književno-razgovornom engleskom*, unpublished Doctoral Dissertation presented to the University of Zagreb, 1965.

plus the lack of adequate rules covering the use of *shall* with the second and third persons have made these patterns a taboo to a foreign learner even at the advanced stages of the learning process, although they represent a valuable means for the precise expression in British English.

Certain modal auxiliaries, then, or some of their patterns, are characteristically rare in English in general, but, depending on the situation in which language is used, they show a varying degree of frequency, and also in this connection their wider syntactical context vary. Language varieties which are functionally orientated are known as *registers,* and have been linguistically better understood only comparatively recently through the works of several American and British linguists[3] and through some empirical studies which have shown how the principle works on the language material.[4] Lexicographers became aware of the levels of language usage much earlier, and their marks in dictionaries like sl., colloq., fam., poet., etc. express exactly such differences of register. The selection of special lexical features is the most evident register variation, but some (admittedly not numerous) grammatical features my characterize a register as well. The present paper will try to point out that the frequency of certain grammatical words and their pattern, and certain types of clauses can also contribute to register distinctions.

Although this type of language variety is often referred to by linguists, very little is known about formal properties of registers in English, and much work remains to be done in this field. But one thing is clearly understood, namely, that register boundaries can never be clear-cut and that register distinctions are relative, not absolute.

2. For the investigation reported in the present paper the modal auxiliary *shall* has been collected from two different functional varieties of English with the aim of establishing possible variations in its use in these two texts. Both varieties are well established registers of English.

The first is *impromptu talk* over the wireless by a number of nationally prominent personalities answering a variety of questions. The transcript at our disposal consists of about four and a half hours of such talk, or of about 40.000 words.[5] Perhaps

the best term available for this register is *public-colloquial* since the speakers talk rather informally to a wide audience.[6]

The other text investigated consists of the dialogues of ten novels and plays written by British authors after 1950. This imitation of spoken conversation is usually labelled *literary--colloquial* register.

3. The *public-colloquial* text has yielded a total of 69 examples of the verb *shall*. Table 1 shows its distribution over the three persons:

Table 1

subject	affirm.	neg.	total	%
1st p.	45	8	53	77
2nd p.	—	—	—	—
3rd p.	13	3	16	23
total	58	11	69	100

The *literary colloquial* text which has yielded 456 examples of *shall* shows the following distribution of the auxiliary:

Table 2

subject	affirm	neg.	total	%
1st p.	380	61	441	96,8
2nd p.	8	1	9	1,9
3rd p.	5	1	6	1,3
total	393	63	456	100,00

Two sets of data require a comment when the distributions of shall in the two texts are compared.

Although our material is not perfect statistically, and the tendencies expressed in it should be taken as tentative, the absence of the *2nd person shall* pattern in the *public-colloquial* text could be, perhaps, acounted for by the peculiarity of the register. The speakers are addressing a large audience but they have little need or opportunity of using the pattern "you shall etc." in such a situation.[7]

Rather unexpected for a variant of spoken language is the high frequency with which *3rd person shall* occurs in it. It represents one third of all the occurrences of shall. Compared

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[6] Leech uses the term *public-colloquial* for advertising style and includes in his definition of that register the proviso that its origin is collective. The *public-colloquial* discussed here is, of course, different.

[7] In advertising English, e. g., the most frequent auxiliary patterns are *you can* and *you will*. Cf. *o. c.* under 4, p. 125.

to the same pattern in the *literary-colloquial* its frequency in the *public-colloquial* is substantially higher. Our records show that the 16 examples of the *3rd person shall* have been used by ten different speakers and thus the question of idiosyncrasy should be excluded. And the spoken language variant is normally les "edited" than the written variant.

The point that could be made here is that the *3rd person shall* finds considerable employment in the language variant we call *public- colloquial,* and that the mentioned pattern is one of the language features that give to this register its peculiar character.

4. The *3rd person shall* which has drawn our attention by its frequency in the *public-colloquial* register, does, not occur in a great variety of clauses but in a limited number of types. As the context of our collection of the *3rd person shall* examples may be of interest we shall quote them grouping examples according to the syntactical unit in which they occur.

Relative clauses with the *3rd person shall are* introduced by who, which, and that, and there are eight of them in our material:

1) "... and therefore they remain a continuing tradition which *shall* never change because it can not grow old ..." AG 7, JR 5.

2) "... there're those who say we ought to have some unified form of education in which the state *shall* decide what is good or bad for us ..." SM 5, XAR 2.

3) "... I think it's a good thing that you should have a Lord Chamberlain who *shall* say that this particular film or play ... (is) not suitable for certain types of audiences." SM 9, VIII.

4) "... they say that the last enemy that *shall* be conquered is death ..." NF 10, JR 5.

5) "... what a heraldic symbol does is embody something which is continuing, it represents something, these people who *shall* not grow old ..." AG 7, JR 3.

6) "... Sunday should be a holiday for the largest possible number of people, but as to the way in which they *shall* spend their Sunday or amuse themselves — it seems to me that there should be no compulsion." MS 18, XXIII.

7) "The real effect is not the literal effect, the real effect is the metaphorical one, it is the memory which *shall* not grow old." AG 9, JR 5.

8) "... there must be somewhere in this world where a man can say something (for) which he *shall* not be brought before the court and have to prove." RW 8, IX.

In the following group of sentences the *3rd person shall* is found in dependent that — clauses. There are six of them:

9) "But we are going to say that if a woman is artificially inseminated that the children born in that way *shall* inherit in the same way as children born by the union between the husband and a wife." CC 12, VI.

10) "I am greatly relieved that ... there *shall* be talks with Russia before that fatal decision is made ..." JF III, 22—23.

11) "It seems to me of the really capital importance that Great Britain and the United States *shall* continue to work together about atomic energy ..." CC 4, VI.

12) "And then, as to old age, medical science is keeping people going a very long time now, and we've got to find some way that they *shall* enjoy it." AK 9—10, JR 5.

13) "What the government are now proposing is this — that so far as these controlled houses are concerned the rents *shall* be allowed to go up" CC 5, JR 2.

14) "The question is whether the government should as a matter of national policy lay it down that in industrial disputes generally there *shall* be compulsory arbitrations." CC 22 JR 3.

There are only two occurrences of shall outside the above two groups of clauses:

15) "It seems to (be) self-evident that the divorce law needs to be modified, altered, so that a woman who uses AID *shall* be in the position of being sued by her husband for divorce ..." CC 8, VI.

16) "It seems to me to demonstrate ... that it has to descend to the depth of talking about women's foundations how they *shall* be advertised." GN 8, XXIII.

From the above citations it follows that every example of the *3rd person shall* occurs in the dependent clause, and that the most frequent dependent clauses are that-clauses and relative clauses.

This finding gains in importance when we compare it with the type of clauses in which *3rd person shall* occurs in the *literary colloquial*. I shall quote all the six examples from our material.

1) "Let me fill your glass. Which *shall* it be?« MBr 155.

2) "And the sitting room *shall* be vacant!" CH 129.

3) "They're all liars in this house. Fire and brimstone *shall* be their portion." PFRRams. 125.

4) "It *shall* be a secret between us." SaCa. 48.

5) "She *shan't* know what I am like if I can help it." Sa 29.

6) "I propose to proceed with the other evidence in order that Court *shall* have a complete picture." MDHoll. 144.[8]

Except for the last example, which represents a court formula, all the other occurrences of the *3rd person shall* are found in independent simple statements.

5. The result of comparing the types of clauses in which the *3rd person shall* occurs in the two texts points to the connection between the register and the use of shall.

The evidence suggests that in the case of both texts we come across certain *register restrictions* which consist in the use of *shall* only in a definite syntactic context.

The tendencies that our material has shown so far could be formulated as follows: the relatively frequent pattern *3rd person shall* in the *public colloquial* register occurs, as a rule, in dependent clauses, while the same pattern in the *literary colloquial* register is less frequent and occurs mostly in simple, independent statements.

The 3rd person shall pattern has been chosen to deal with separately in the present paper because the variations it has shown in the two texts have been most conspicuous. But variations are also noticeable in the type of clauses in which the 1st person shall ocurs. Thus in the *literary colloquial* material *1st person shall* is predominantly found in independent statements and only in 16,6% of cases in dependent clauses. *1st person shall* in public colloquial comes in 54% of the cases in dependent clauses. We cannot say how much the type and frequency of the clauses in which *shall* occurs reflects the complexity of the type of sentence in the two registers, but the above mentioned data suggest that a simple statement is found more frequently in the imitation of the spoken conversation i. e. in the *literary colloquial* register, and that more complex structures are found in real spoken language i. e. *public colloquial*.

Two further points should be noted. First, basing any statements about the use od shall on single register in English (and that is not rare in the literature) is very dubious. Second, although several studies have suggested a decline in the use of shall in general and *3rd person shall* in particular our material has shown that in certain types of educated British English it has remained an indespensable auxiliary.

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[8] In quoting examples of spoken English I have marked them according to the way the transcripts are marked and filed at the *Survey of English Usage,* University College, London. The following is the clue to the abbreviations following the examples from the dialogues of fiction and plays: MBr: C. P. Snow, *The Masters,* Penguin, p. 155; Ch: P. H. Johnson, *The Humbler Creation,* Penguin; PFR: A. Christie, *A Pocket Full of Rye,* Fontana; SA: I. Murdoch, *The Sandcastle,* Penguin; MD: H. Innes, *The Mary Deare,* Fontana.