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“Why don’t you go and do something different for a year?”

Tracking change in constructions expressing advice in informal conversation

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"Why don't you go and do something different for a year?" Tracking change in constructions expressing advice in informal conversation

Recent decades have experienced an upsurge of research into various types of hearer-oriented directives, such as advice, suggestions and recommendations (e.g., Butler et al., 2009; Heritage & Sefi, 1992; Paradis, 2009, fc). This research, however, has been mainly concerned with advice in professional contexts, while advice in everyday conversation among family and friends has received very little attention (but see, Adolphs, 2008; Shaw et al., 2015), and we have very limited insights into how expressions used to give advice have changed over time. The goal of this study is to describe the constructions that interlocutors use to give advice in conversation in Present-Day British English, and how these constructions have changed over the past 50 years.

Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson (2017) identified five major formats for suggestions and advice in conversation, illustrated here with *do*: (1) imperatives (*do it*), (2) interrogatives (*why don't you do it*), and three types of declaratives: (3) *you should do it*, (4) *you could do it* and (5) *I would do it*. The formats are ordered on a cline of deonticity; imperatives are strongly deontic while declaratives are modalised and therefore come across as less direct. This is especially true for *I would do it* that construes the advice as a hypothetical action carried out by the advisor. These five format types will be adopted as the analytical model for this study.

The data for the analysis are two comparable corpora of Present-Day spoken British English, the London-Lund Corpus (LLC 1) and the London-Lund Corpus 2 (LLC 2). LLC 1 contains data from the 1950s–1970s, and LLC 2 from 2015-2017. This difference of time allows us to track changes in spoken English over more than half a century. The study focuses on casual conversation among family and friends and the sample contains approximately 500,000 words, equally distributed across LLC 1 and LLC 2. Access to the raw text files of these corpora allows us to use text processing tools such as part-of-speech taggers, parsers, and speech act taggers to extract the full range of constructions of interest. We also annotate the constructions for several formal and functional features (e.g. collocates, speaker commitment, addressee response) in the actual sequential and interactional contexts in which advice is given.

A preliminary comparison of constructions of advice in the two corpora suggests that although declarative constructions are still the most common format, there is an increase of advice expressed in more direct ways. For example, compared to LLC 1, there is a slight increase in the use of interrogative constructions in LLC 2, especially *why don't you (just)*. Among declaratives, there is a clear shift from less deontic to more deontic constructions, such as *you should*, as well as the semi-modals *you need to* and *you have to* (Leech et al., 2009). This suggests that, in everyday conversation among family and friends, there is an increased preference for constructions that make the act of giving advice explicit and that do not warrant a high degree of caution and tact.

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