

Grammar: widening the scope

(As World Englishes take centre stage, it is no longer appropriate to insist that learners simply master the limited range of grammatical features found in the so-called 'standard' languages. In a welcome initiative, the Chilton Research Association for Psycho-Pedagogical Orientation is producing a range of materials designed to widen the scope of grammar teaching. The following sample lesson from 'Grammar ain't as hard as what you think' (Didcot Academic Press, forthcoming) introduces students to a useful structure that is common not only in southern US speech, but in many other English varieties world-wide.)

Double modals: you might better revise your ideas

Double modals are used in many varieties of spoken English. The most common are: *might could, might should, might oughta, should oughta*.

Examples:

- We **might could** get tickets for tomorrow night.*
- We **might should** mosey down and see old Polly.*
- You **might oughta** check the oil.*
- Somebody **should oughta** do something about that kid.*

Exercise 1 Put the beginnings and ends together.

BEGINNINGS	ENDS
1. Maybe we might oughta	A. fry up some of that pork after the Bible meeting.
2. We might could	B. rescue granpaw from the burning whiskey still.
3. You might should	C. smoke that stuff while you're playing poker.
4. You shouldn't oughta	D. put your panties back on before the Minister gets here.

Note also the structures *had oughta* and *might better* (like *had better*, but more polite).

Examples:

- People **had oughta** learn to talk right.*
- You **might better** get out of town while you can.*

Exercise 2 Put in words from the box with *had oughta* or *might better*.

be do put untie

1. You kids Aunt Mildred.
2. The government something about them pointy-headed perverted red commie homosexual university professors.
3. Do you think we the alligator back?
4. You more careful who you shoot.

Like other modals, all of these structures can be followed by **perfect infinitives**.

Examples:

- We **might should've opened** the gate before we druv out.*
- I **hadn't oughta've done** that.*

Exercise 3 Make sentences with *might should've*.

1. Lucille totalled the pickup. (*stop at the red light*)
2. BJ got et by a bear. (*read the notice*)
3. Donny had a real bad trip. (*buy better stuff*)
4. Mary-Lou's pregnant again. (*get him to write down his name*)

More complex combinations exist, but students should avoid using these until they reach a more advanced level.

Example:

*He **might woulda hadn't oughta brung** his horse into the church.*

Sentences with a **perfect progressive passive infinitive** are uncommon.

Example:

*I thought the hogs **might oughta've been being fed**, but I didn't rightly reckon.*