

The interpersonal grammar of job advertisements: Towards a meaning making for the new work order

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to identify the interpersonal linguistic changes in the register of job advertisements and to discuss how these changes may be related to the restructuring of the labour market. A corpus of sixty job advertisements was assembled from texts appearing in the daily press, evenly distributed between the years 1995, 2005 and 2017, with a focus on personal qualifications requirements. From the theoretical perspective of systemic functional linguistics, these parts of the advertisements were analysed for *mood*, *modality* and *modal assessment* in order to show how these three interpersonal lexicogrammatical systems together realise the semantics of speech functions, which in turn realises the tenor relation between the employer and the applicants (Holmberg 2011; Halliday & Matthiessen 2014). Special attention was paid to patterns of interpersonal grammatical metaphors with the potential to make visible, or invisible, the applicant as well as the employer. The three main findings are 1) that the use of the second-person subject *du* (Eng. *you*) had, by 2017, become obligatory in the parts of the advertisements where the requirements are expressed; 2) that modal operators such as *bör* (Eng. *must*) have almost disappeared entirely; and 3) that the use of modal assessment (e.g. “we request that you ...”) had increased. It is suggested that these trends may be interpreted against the background of the changes in the labour market which have been summarised as ‘the new work order’. One relevant aspect is the ideal of a more informal relation between employers and employees who are to work towards goals without detailed supervision; another is the new need for employer branding in a labour market with higher mobility.

Keywords: Interpersonal grammar, job advertisements, the new work order, Systemic Functional Linguistics.

1. Introduction: Job advertisements in society and linguistic research

A central function of a market economy is the negotiation of work contracts between employers who are looking to hire new staff and potential employees searching for new positions. In the last century, the initial interface between the two parties has typically consisted of written texts, job advertisements and job applications. The advertisements express the requirements regarding applicants, and the applications in turn express the applicants’ qualifications for the job. This is, also for the employer, a socially delicate task, since the potential readers of the advertisement comprise a large, heterogenous group of people. It is necessary to express the requirements in an accurate way, in order to induce the right kind of candidates to apply for the job. At the same time, the advertisement should preferably contribute to a positive image of the workplace, even for readers who do not intend to apply. It is therefore interesting how the writers of the job advertisements linguistically handle the challenge of expressing the requirements in this complex situational context. The question is even more interesting if we take the changes in the labour market over the past three decades into account. Thus, the aim of this study is to identify the interpersonal linguistic changes in the register of job advertisements, and to discuss how these changes may be related to the restructuring of the labour market.

Over the past 30 years, a number of important changes in the workplace and the labour market have occurred. In the 1990s, as a consequence of the increased focus on customer orientation and business processes, job content has tended to change from a narrow functional responsibility based on detailed instructions to a broader process responsibility and management by objectives. In this so-called reengineering of the workplace (cf. e.g. Champy 1995; Hammer 1996), middle level management has decreased and workers are supposed to be empowered and supervise themselves while working towards goals decided by management (cf. Cameron 2000). One way to refer to these changes is ‘the new work order’ (Gee, Hull and Lankshear 1996). In this new work order, written

language plays a more prominent role than before. In order to enable employees to reach the right objectives without detailed supervision, employers have to construct ideal identities for employees, which is done through written texts (cf. e.g. Karlsson 2004). Another aspect of the new work order and the marketisation of the labour market is the need for organisations to market themselves as attractive workplaces. Employer branding, “the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity”, becomes more important when political reforms support high labour mobility (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004: 502). There have also been important changes in the recruitment processes. In the 1990s job advertisements were still mainly published in the daily press, whereas in the 2010s they are mainly to be found on websites (Helgesson 2011a: 51–52). The prerequisites of job advertisements have thus changed. Whereas the paper advertisement was limited in space, the advertisement on a website could, at least in theory, be unlimited. In which way, if any, is the new work order and the new way of advertising to be understood in the register of job advertisements?

Research on job advertisements has primarily been conducted in the fields of business analytics and management studies, and the main focus has been on content analysis, making visible the strong impact of the new work order in the priority of general competencies (e.g. Rosén 2014; Marcusson & Lundqvist 2015). Similar results have been put forward by a few linguistically oriented discourse studies (Askehave 2010; Fairclough 1995; Helgesson 2011a: 191–249). Linguistic research on job advertisements has also investigated the structure of the texts (Källgren 1979; Rahm 2005; Helgesson 2011a: 59–90), and shows, for example, that the expression of required personal qualifications has become an obligatory element of this register. The unique contribution of linguistic research on job advertisement has, however, been the investigation of how the requirements are worded, not only of what is required in which parts of the text. In a case study of British university recruitment, Fairclough (Fairclough 1995: 147) showed how a less traditional (polytechnic) university seems to have been more open to the influences of the new work order. One linguistic trait that supports Fairclough’s conclusion is a new way of expressing requirements without any modality of obligation, which corresponds to the ideal of “the personalized, solitary and equal relationship claimed between institution and potential applicant”. This resonates with Helgesson’s findings in a longitudinal study of Swedish job advertisements from 1955 to 2005. The typical expression of requirements becomes, in the end of the period, clauses without any modality at all, as in the example below (from Helgesson 2011a:236):

- (1) Du är målmedveten, envis och har god förmåga att bygga personliga relationer
You are goal oriented, persistent and good at personal relations.

Helgesson shows how this pattern is the outcome of several grammatical trends: modality of obligation decreases and the employer becomes less linguistically visible, while addressing the applicant with *you (du)* becomes more common over the period and became more or less standard in the last three decades. In another study, Helgesson (2011b) discusses whether or not the clauses that address the applicant without modality express a high demand. Inspired by Hellberg’s analysis of similar grammar in school curricula (2002), she argues that in the context of job advertisements, these clauses, although without grammatical realisation of obligation, are in fact highly demanding (cf. Fairclough 1995: 147–147).

2. Systemic functional theory for understanding text in social practice

The study presented in this article is informed by systemic functional linguistics (SFL), both theoretically and analytically (the analytical aspects are presented in the following section). Our choice of SFL as theoretical frame for the study is motivated by the foundational idea of SFL that language functions in social meaning making (Halliday 1978; Halliday & Matthiessen 2014). Language has evolved, SFL argues, to enhance the possibilities of representing experiences and to

interact in different social situations. Linguistic choices are thus meaningful, as they do not occur with the same probability in any situational context, but are more likely in some than in others. With the notion of register, which is central to this study, a language may be conceived as a vast multitude of overlapping registers, functional varieties of language, connected to different types of situations (Halliday, McIntosh & Stevens 1964, 87; Matthiessen 1993, Matthiessen 2015a: 18 f.).

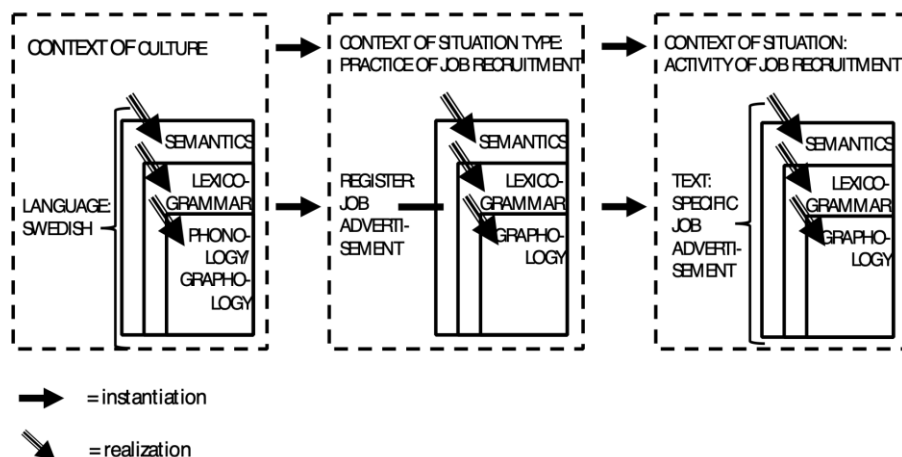
A register, such as a job advertisement, may in SFL be understood both on a cline of instantiation and in a hierarchy of stratification (see Figure 1). These two dimensions are invoked when register is defined by Halliday as “the semantic variety of which a text may be regarded as an instance” (Halliday 1978: 110–111).

On the cline of instantiation, register holds an intermediate position between a general language on the one hand (in our case the Swedish language) and a set of specific texts on the other (in our case texts which are published as job advertisements). As an instantiation of language, a register is a functional variety of language though if we focus on how a register is continuously instantiated in specific texts, a register could likewise be conceived as a text-type. Important for our study is the insight that every instantiation in specific texts contributes to the change of the linguistic probabilities of the register over time (cf. Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 27–30).

Register may also be understood as an intermediate notion in the hierarchy of stratification. It belongs to the semantic stratum – below context but above lexicogrammar. Thus, a register is seen as the semantic realisation of a type of situational context, realised by typical grammatical and lexical choices (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 24–27); it is “the configuration of semantic resources that the member of a culture typically associates with a situation type” (Matthiessen 2015a: 18). For the register of job advertisements, we can think of the situation type as the practice of recruitment, one of the many practices that constitutes our cultural context.

As is well known, SFL further elaborates how the relations between strata are systematically organised in three dimensions. The three dimensions of the context – the *tenor*, *field* and *mode* of the context – are taken to correspond to the semantic and lexicogrammatical systems of three different metafunctions: the interpersonal, ideational and textual (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 30–31). For the practice of job recruitment, the dimension of tenor may be primarily specified to the relation between employers and job applicants. The dimension of field is basically that of matching job requirements with applicants’ qualifications, and the dimension of mode is writing, either through print or digital distribution. In this study, the research interest is limited to how tenor, the historically shifting relations between employers and job applicants, has been realised in the register.

Figure 1. The register of job advertisement: instantiations and realisations.



A more in-depth study would of course also investigate the linguistic realisation in the other two metafunctions. Moreover, it should be noted that job recruitment is a very complex practice, whose realisation cannot actually be restricted to job advertisements. An alternative interpretation of the register for realising job recruitment would be to look for typical *chains of texts* in which the advertisements only function as one link in the chain, together with, for instance, job applications and employment interviews (cf. Holmberg 2012). Although the empirical scope of our study is limited, we think that the theoretical frame helps us to interpret our results against the background of a more complex idea of how the register functions.

Finally, it should be noted that we deliberately avoid using the term *genre*. Of course, job advertisements may be called a genre in the everyday sense of the word, however genre is not a theoretical concept in the theory of register we use (Halliday, McIntosh & Stevens 1964; Halliday 1978; Matthiessen 1993; Halliday & Matthiessen 2014; Matthiessen 2015a).

3. Systemic functional analysis of interpersonal grammar

A register can be investigated from three complementary perspectives: “from above” (from the perspective of the stratum of context), “from roundabout” (i.e. from the perspective of how items are organised on the semantic stratum) and “from below” (i.e. from the perspective of the lexicogrammatical stratum) (cf. Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 48–49).

From above, the register of job advertisements can be investigated based on observations of the choices made in the current context of recruitment. From roundabout, the register may be analysed as typical semantic stages within job advertisements, for instance the stage of job duties and the stage of required personal qualifications. On a higher semantic level, the typical linkage between texts in a text chain could be investigated, for instance the linkage between job advertisements and job applications. Finally, from below the semantics of the register may be investigated through an analysis of its realisation through grammatical and lexical choices.

This study gives priority to the perspective from below, and the analysis performed is primarily lexicogrammatical. As a starting point for the analysis, however, we use the perspective from roundabout, when we delimit the stage of required personal qualifications within job advertisements to form our corpus (see the next section). Further, we return to this perspective, as well as the perspective from above, in the discussion of how the lexicogrammatical results should be best

understood and explained.

Since this study focuses on the lexicogrammar as a realisation of the semantic realisation of tenor, the relation between employers and applicants, the analysis covers the three main interpersonal grammatical systems: mood, modality and modal assessment. Together these systems show how the clauses of the texts function as an exchange as they realise the semantics of speech functions.

The system of mood comprises the choice of subject and finite (along with any modal adjuncts) of the clause (see Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 134–150; and Holmberg 2011: 101–105 for Swedish). SFL understands these choices to form the grammatical base for linguistic interaction. In this study, the most interesting observation regarding mood is the choice of subject. In free clauses (main clauses in traditional terminology), SFL understands the function of the subject to be that of taking on modal responsibility for the success or failure of the proposition in interaction. Any confirmation or contradiction of the proposition will typically involve the element selected as subject in the first place. Our analysis differentiates three types of subjects:

First-person subjects, which in the corpus are always a *we* (Sw. *vi*), referring to the employer.

(Vi söker en självständig medarbetare. *We are searching for an independent employee.*)

Second-person subjects, which in the corpus are always a singular *you* (Sw. *du*), referring to the applicant.

(Du är självständig. *You are independent.*)

Third-person subjects, which are typically words, groups or clauses referring to the job in general or to specific tasks.

(Arbetsuppgifterna kräver självständighet. *The duties require independence.*)

When analysing the different types of subjects, we have included not only the subjects of free clauses but also the subjects of projected clauses, since they have the same interactive potential (cf. below regarding clause complexes with modal assessment).

The system of modality comprises resources which enable assessments of probability, inclination or obligation (to name just three central sub-systems). The key lexical modality resource in Swedish, just like in English, is the choice of modal operator as finite (see Holmberg 2011: 105–107; Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 176–183). The reason why SFL interprets modality grammar as interpersonal is the interactive consequences of these choices. A modal operator of obligation in a declarative clause, for example, invites not only for the typical response to a proposition, but makes it possible to respond as if a command was intended. It is against this background that SFL understands such modulated sentences as interpersonal grammatical metaphors (Holmberg 2011:103–105). In the corpus of this study, the only recurrent modality is the modality of obligation. Our analysis maps how this modality is expressed as high or median obligations through the choices of different modal operators:

Modal operators of high obligation express that a quality is required.

(Du måste/ska/behöver vara självständig. *You must/need to be independent.*)

Modal operators of median obligation express that a quality is supposed.

(Du bör vara självständig. *You should be independent.*)

The system of modal assessment may realise the same semantics as the system of modality, but also a wider and more delicate scope of assessments such as *weight* and *expectation*. Grammatically the modality is expressed in the free clause of a clause complex, which enables the assessments to be either explicitly subjective (*we request that ...*) or explicitly objective (*it is requested that ...*). In the context of job recruitment, we have found that weight and expectation, as well as probability, may well be analysed as variants of high and median obligation. Interactively it is not obvious that response should be given to the proposition of the free clause (*we request that you are independent > do you?*), but it could also respond to the projected clause (*we request that you are independent > yes, I am*). This is the argument for analysing modal assessment as interpersonal grammatical metaphors (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 184–186; and Holmberg 2011: 108–110 for Swedish).

4. The corpus of the study

Sixty job advertisements evenly distributed between the years 1995, 2005 and 2017 have been collected for the study. The advertisements from 1995 and 2005¹ are from the daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*. The job advertisements in this newspaper have a wide range, but the most common jobs are in marketing and engineering. During the past 15 years it has become less common to use daily newspapers for job advertisement, and more common to advertise on the internet. The advertisements from 2017 are therefore collected from the job website Monster, from the “Marketing” and “Engineering” categories. When job advertisements moved to the internet, they tended to become longer, and thus more words are used for describing the requirements of the candidate in the advertisements from 2017 than in those from 1995 and 2005.

The parts of the advertisements expressing required personal qualifications were selected to form our corpus. Since we are interested in the lexicogrammar of the requirements, advertisements without required personal qualifications are not included in the material.

In Table 1 the number of words and the number of clause complexes in the parts expressing required personal qualifications per year is presented. In 2017, when the advertisements were published on the Internet and not in the daily newspaper, the advertisers used significantly more words and clause complexes to describe the required personal qualifications. While the number of words and clause complexes in 1995 and 2005 are rather similar (534 words in 1995 and 553 words in 2005), the number of words used to express the requirements of personal qualifications in 2017 totalled 1,276.

¹ It was already common in 2005 to publish job advertisements on websites, though the daily newspaper was still the main channel. The advertisements in the daily newspaper were sometimes very short, since they referred to complete advertisements on a website. In this study we have not used such incomplete advertisements.

Table 1. The size of the corpus and its three sub-corpora (1995, 2005 and 2017).

	1995	2005	2017	TOTAL
Advertisement parts of required qualifications	20	20	20	60
Words	534 Avg 27/ad	553 Avg 28/ad	1,276 Avg 64/ad	2,363
Free or projected clauses	45 Avg 2.2/ad	48 Avg 2.4/ad	123 Avg 6.2/ad	216

5. Towards an interpersonal meaning making for the new work order

In this section we present the results of the analysis of the interpersonal systems of the study: the choice of subjects in free and projected clauses, modality of obligation, and modal assessment. We provide a general picture of how the interpersonal grammatical systems are used in our corpus, show how the realisations differ over time and comment on how the tendencies may be interpreted in relation to changes in the labour market.

5.1. Choice of subject

The predominant subject in the corpus is without doubt the singular second-person subject *du* (Eng. *you*). It is used in three-quarters of all free or projected clauses (on 162 occasions out of a total of 216). This is not surprising, since the analysed parts of the advertisements deal with the personal qualifications of the expected reader. The last quarter is fairly evenly distributed between the plural first-person subject *vi* (Eng. *we*) and different third-person subjects, typically referring to the advertised job.

The choice of subject is critical from an interpersonal point of view. The second-person subjects in the advertisements not only make the expected applicant visible, it also invites him or her to respond using the corresponding first-person subject (Eng. *I*; Sw. *jag*), thus making the interaction explicitly orbit around the individual applicant. The modal responsibility for the truth of a proposition like “You are analytical” is vested in the second-person subject.

Helgesson’s longitudinal study, which follows the history of the register until the year 2005, shows that the use of second-person subjects in these parts of the advertisements became more common over time (Helgesson 2011a: 230–234). This trend seems to have continued. Advertisements with only third-persons subjects in clauses expressing requirements have disappeared. In 1995 five advertisements used exclusively third-person subjects in this part, while not a single advertisement makes the same choice in 2017 (see Table 2). It seems to have been obligatory in 2017 that the applicant should be addressed with *du* (Eng. *you*) somewhere in this part of the advertisement. Interpersonally, the register is now an arena for negotiating the applicant’s personal qualifications, and not only a way to present a vacancy with specific requirements.

Table 2. Distribution of 1st/2nd vs 3rd person subjects in the advertisements of the corpus.

	1995	2005	2017
Advertisements with 1 st /2 nd person subjects	15	18	20
Advertisements with 3 rd person subjects only	5	2	-
Total	20	20	20

Two examples from 1995 of the avoidance of making the we – you relation grammatically explicit are provided below (2a and b). In the initial sentence of the first example (a), a word referring to the duties of the job (*arbetsuppgifterna*) has been chosen in favour of a first-person subject. In the latter sentence of the same example (a), a job title (*projektledare*) is used instead of a second-person subject. In a similar manner the second example also refrains from connecting the requirement to a first-person subject, as well as the required qualifications to a second-person subject.

(2)

(a) Arbetsuppgifterna kräver teknisk kompetens och stilistisk förmåga. Projektledarens skall också vara en god kommunikatör och ha hygglig kunskap om näringslivets förutsättningar samt god samhällskunskap (1995:7).

The duties require technical expertise and stylistic ability. The project manager must also be a good communicator, have decent knowledge of the business conditions and have good social knowledge.

(b) Ordningssinne och utpräglad känsla för service är ett krav (1995:15).

A sense of order and a distinct sense of service is a requirement.

These non-personal linguistic resources seem no longer to be “meanings at risk” in the register when negotiating qualifications. An example from 2017 (c) illustrates the contrasting pattern, i.e. how the relation between employer and applicant is established as a personal *we – you* relation, which is done without any hesitation.

(3) Vi kräver att du:

- har social och teknisk kompetens
- vill utveckla och utvecklas i ett expansivt företag
- är kommunikativ såväl som god lyssnare och lagspelare (2017:12)

We require that you:

- have social and technical skills
- want to develop, and develop in, an expansive company
- are communicative as well as a good listener and a team player

A more detailed analysis shows how the choice of *du* (Eng. *you*) as subject also increases in terms of relative frequency: from 56% in 1995, to 75% in 2005 and 81% in 2017 (see Table 3).

Table 3. Frequency (relative frequency), and distribution of different types of subject in the corpus.

	1995	2005	2017	Total
1 st person subjects (<i>vi</i>)	5 (11%)	4 (8%)	12 (1%)	21
2 nd person subjects (<i>du</i>)	25 (56%)	36 (75%)	101 (81%)	162
3 rd person subjects	15 (33%)	8 (17%)	10 (8%)	33
Total	45 (100%)	48 (100%)	123 (100%)	

The trend of the first-person subject decreasing in relative frequency can be interpreted in different manners. The number is clearly higher in 2017, but since the lists of required personal qualifications are much longer in the same year, the relative frequency decreases. It may however be argued that if one of the clauses establishes a grammatically explicit relation between *we* and *you* (as in the first sentence in (4) below), this relation is semantically valid for a longer part of the text (i.e. also for the following two sentences).

(4) Vi tror att du trivs med ett självständigt arbetssätt samtidigt som du har lätt att samarbeta med andra. Du är analytisk och skaffar dig lätt en helhetsbild av vad som ska göras samt sätter dig snabbt in i nya arbetsuppgifter och system. Vidare är du social, kommunikativ och bra på att skapa relationer (2017:7).

We think that you enjoy an independent way of working and that you are also good at working with others. You are analytical and easily form a complete picture of what is to be done and quickly get into new tasks and systems. Furthermore, you are social, communicative and good at creating relationships.

What does the establishment of the *we – you* relation in the register of job advertisements tell us about the new work order? It certainly supports the idea of a more informal relation between employer and employees, where the employers' control is exercised via the construction of ideal identities for the employees. One important aspect of this ideal identity is that the employees assume the responsibility for performing their duties. This responsibility is grammatically mirrored in the modal responsibility of the second-person subject.

To obtain a better understanding of what occurs interpersonally in, and with, the job advertisements, the analysis must include other linguistic resources. We therefore now turn to the grammar of modality.

5.2. Modality of obligation

Modality of obligation is, as one would assume, a well-utilised resource for expressing required personal qualifications. The choice of a modal operator of obligation as finite in mood, as illustrated in example (5) (bold indicates the modal operators) and is a typical grammar for stating what is required (in (a) and (b)) or supposed (in (c)). The meaning of the clauses thus shifts from common statements to commands.

(5)

(a) Du **måste** vara serviceinriktad (1995:2).*You **must** be service oriented.*(b) Sökande **ska** vara noggrann, flexibel och fördomsfri (1995:18).*Applicants **must** be accurate, flexible and open-minded.*(c) Du **bör** ha lätt för att kommunicera och knyta kontakter (1995:5).*You **should** be good at communicating and making contacts.*

Modal operators are usually combined in mood with a second-person subject, as in (a) and (c). The clause complex (b) depicts a rare exception. Only two of the twenty-three modal operators of obligation have a third-person subject. (The other instance is illustrated in example (2a) above.)

The distribution of modal operators in the corpus is presented in Table 4. The tendency is very clear: the modal operators decrease in use. A clear majority of the 1995 advertisements contain modal operators. Ten years later the relationship is the opposite, and in 2017 the modal operators have almost disappeared. The trend is also remarkable in light of the fact that the advertisements from 2017 are markedly longer. As will become evident below, this development of the register does not lead to texts where the requirements are more open or weaker in interpersonal strength; rather, the reverse is true.

Table 4. Distribution of modal operators in the advertisements of the corpus.

	1995	2005	2017
Advertisements with modal operators	13	6	1
Advertisements without modal operators	7	14	19
Total	20	20	20

In example (6) we illustrate the typical difference between 1995 and 2017. Both texts include the full requirements of personal qualifications. In (a) all the qualifications are modulated to a high obligation, with two instances of the modal verb *skall* (in bold; cf. Eng. *must* or *should*). In (b) the same grammatical operation could easily have been employed (“You must be ... You must be ... and must like ...”). However, all clauses in the latter example are unmodulated statements regarding the qualifications of the “you”.

(6)

(a) Förutom ekonomisk utbildning med inriktning på redovisning **skall** du ha praktisk erfarenhet av statlig redovisning, vara flexibel och kunna arbeta självständigt. Du **skall** ha lätt för att skapa kontakter och att samarbeta, kunna uttrycka dig väl i både tal och skrift (1995:8).

*In addition to financial education with a focus on accounting, you **must** have practical experience in government accounting, be flexible and be able to work independently.*

*You **should** be good at making contacts and collaborating, being able to express yourself well in both speech and writing.*

(b) Du är en sann lagspelare som gärna delar med dig av dina kunskaper till personer i din närhet. Du är noggrann och gillar att ha ordning och reda samtidigt som du inspireras av flexibilitet och oväntade utmaningar (2017:18).

You are a true team player who is happy to share your knowledge with people in your area. You are careful and like to be orderly and ready while you are inspired by flexibility and unexpected challenges.

Our conclusion is that in the context of job recruitment, the naked declarative becomes as demanding for the applicant as the modulated one. We will return to this point below.

The change over time of the frequency of the different modal operators is presented in Table 5. The development seems to be that *skall* (Eng. *must* or *should*) is the only regularly recurring modal operator in 2005.

Table 5. Frequency and distribution of different types of modal operators in the corpus.

	1995	2005	2017
Modal operators of high obligation:			
<i>skall</i> (Eng. <i>must</i> or <i>should</i>)	6	7	-
<i>måste</i> (Eng. <i>must</i>)	3	-	-
<i>behöver</i> (Eng. <i>need to</i>)	-	1	1
Modal operators of median obligation:			
<i>bör</i> (Eng. <i>should</i>)	4	1	-
Total	13	9	1

There is one exception not shown in Table 5: an advertisement from 2005 uses, in addition to the modal verb in the first clause, a modal adjunct (*gärna* without Eng. equivalent) which functions as an operator for median obligation (both modal operators and their translations in bold):

(7)

Du **behöver** vara stresstålig, klara av ett högt tempo, ha trevligt bemötande och du tar **gärna** egna initiativ.

*You **need to** be stress-resistant, cope with a high tempo, have a nice attitude and you **willingly** take your own initiative.*

This is the only example in our corpus where two different values of obligation are expressed in the same clause complex. The first clause expresses what is required, through the high obligation of *behöver* (cf. Eng. *need to*); the second expresses what is only supposed with the modal adjunct *gärna*

(translated to Eng. *willingly*).

As will be shown in the next section, the right conclusion of the analysis of modality is not that the semantics of obligation is totally avoided in contemporary job advertisements. The applicants are still explicitly obliged to fulfil the requirements for the job, although the grammatical realisation is no longer that of modality. Our interpretation is that modality of obligation (“you must ...”, “you need to ...”, “you should ...”, etc.) is no longer a relevant grammatical resource in job advertisements for two reasons, both relating to how this grammar metaphorically realises the speech function of command. Firstly, it contradicts the new work order ideal of self-governing employees: employees are not expected to carry out the work as an obedience of commands, but rather due to inner personal qualities and motivations. Secondly, the grammar of obligation does not match the new emphasis on employer branding. The latter point will be developed in the next section.

5.3. Modal assessment

While modality realised by modal operators decreases throughout the investigated period, the reverse is true of modal assessment. This system is only used in two advertisements from 1995. Ten years later, a modest doubling has taken place, while in 2017 we find this grammar in a majority of the advertisements (see Table 6).

Table 6. Distribution of modal assessment in the advertisements of the corpus.

	1995	2005	2017
Advertisements with modal assessment through projection	2	4	12
Advertisements without modal assessment through projection	18	16	8
Total	20	20	20

Modal assessment may either make explicit the subjective character of the assessment, or hide it through an objective grammatical choice. Therefore, it is worth looking at this system in detail. In Table 7 we have listed all realisations, both for subjective and objective obligation.

Table 7. Frequency and distribution of different types of modal assessment in the corpus.

	1995	2005	2017
Subjective high obligation:			
Vi kräver att du ... (<i>we require that you ...</i>)	-	-	1
Vi förutsätter att du ... (<i>we expect that you ...</i>)	1	1	1
Vi ser att du ... (<i>we see that you ...</i>)	-	-	3
Subjective median obligation:			
Vi tror att du ... (<i>we think that you ...</i>)	1	1	2
Vi vill att du ... (<i>we want you to ...</i>)	-	1	-
Vi sätter stor vikt vid att du ... (<i>we emphasize that you ...</i>)	-	-	1
Objective high obligation:			
Det krävs att du ... (<i>It is required that you ...</i>)	-	-	2
Objective median obligation:			
Det är viktigt att du ... (<i>It is important that you ...</i>)	1	1	3
Total	3	4	13

The strong increase in modal assessment in 2017 appears to consist of both more subjective cases and objective ones.

As noted above, the potential for different verbs or adjectives in the projecting clause allows for a wide variety of different alternatives. In Table 7 we illustrate how we have interpreted their function in the context of job recruitment. For instance, expressions of expectation have been interpreted as high obligation, while expressions of weight have been interpreted as median obligation. Although there are potential objections to these interpretations, it is undeniable that the 2017 advertisements utilises the system's potential to express demands to the applicant in a new way.

Example (8) illustrates some of the examples of modal assessment from the 2017 advertisements.

(8)

(a) Vi ser att du är van att lösa de uppgifter du ställs inför och inte är rädd för att ta egna initiativ (2017:4).

We see that you are used to solving the tasks you are faced with and are not afraid to take you own initiative.

(b) Vi tror att du trivs med ett självständigt arbetssätt samtidigt som du har lätt att samarbeta med andra (2017:7).

We think that you enjoy an independent way of working and that you are also good at working with others.

(c) Vi förutsätter att du har en stark drivkraft, är en kreativ problemlösare samt är samarbetsvillig (2017:15).

We assume that you have a strong drive, are a creative problem solver and are cooperative.

(d) Det krävs att du är en relationsbyggare och har förmågan att samarbeta med olika typer av personligheter (2017:8).

It is required that you are a relationship builder and have the ability to collaborate with different types of personalities.

It should be noted that the clause complexes with modal assessments fit very well with the unmodulated clauses which characterise the texts (“you are ...”, etc.). In this context, the natural interpretation of all these clauses is to read them as if they are in fact projected by an implicit clause of modal assessment, e.g. “we request that you are ...”. The fact that the clarification of the meaning through a modal assessment makes the text longer is not a serious problem since the introduction of digital distribution.

We interpret the switch from modality of obligation to modal assessment against the background of a new emphasis on employer branding. If the job advertisement should also function as a way for a company to illustrate and even advertise the high standard of its employees, it is less appropriate to address the future employee with commands (“you must ...”, etc) which invites a response of obedience (“yes, I promise ...”). The choice of modal assessment starts an interaction that is much more open to alternative interpretations due to different reader positions. The reader who does not identify with the “you” of the advertisement, but just wants to keep himself or herself updated about the company may well interpret clause complexes with modal assessment as pure statements which provide information about the preferences of the company. For the reader who will also be an applicant, the speech function is actually very demanding, though the demand may in the first place be taken as a demand for information. From this reader’s perspective, a clause complex such as “we think that you are independent” realises the speech function of question, and will probably be answered by the information provided in the application: “I am independent”. The same can be said about the naked declarative presented in the previous section: “You are independent” will be treated by the applicants as if it was formed as an interrogative clause. In this manner the ideal identity of the workplace is co-constructed by the employer and the employee.

6. Conclusions

In this concluding section we will summarise our main results and discuss how they can all be related to the last decades of change in the labour market. Finally, we will point to a need for more theoretical and empirical research in this field.

One of the clearest results of our study is that the use of the second-person subject *du* (*you*) has increased to such a level that by 2017 it became an obligatory choice in the parts of the advertisements where the requirements are expressed. This follows the trend noticed by Helgesson (2011a) in her longitudinal study of job advertisements from 1955 to 2005. In the 50s and 60s, the use of third-person subjects in these parts of the advertisement was much more common. The trend of an increased use of second-person subject is not, however, related to the disappearance of the employer from the

parts of the advertisements where the requirements are expressed. In 2017 we see signs of a grammatical return of the employer as a visible we with modal responsibility for the requirements.

Another main result is that the modal operators almost disappear from the clauses expressing requirements. In 1995 the most common resource for expressing requirements was to use a modal operator of obligation. In 2017 the advertisers used naked declaratives instead. The decreasing use of modal operators was noted by Helgesson (2011a), but since 2005 the use of modal operators has almost ceased. Semantically the change can be understood as an abandonment of commands as speech function.

The third of our main results of our grammatical analysis is the increased use of modal assessment. Instead of using modal operators, the advertisers often use modal assessment to express requirements. As noted above, this fits very well with the increased trend of naked declaratives, since the modality is not expressed within the clauses expressing requirements (“... you are independent”), but in a projecting clause (“We request that ...”). In terms of interpersonal semantics, the new priority of modal assessment can, we have argued, be explained by the more flexible possibilities. The non-applicant reader may well understand the speech function as a statement relating to the preferences of the company, while the applicant can respond as if the clause is formed as a question.

The interpersonal semantic trends in the register of job advertisements can be interpreted against the background of the changes in the labour market, which have been summarised as ‘the new work order’. We begin with the more informal relation between employers and employees who are supposed to work towards goals without detailed supervision. This obviously goes well together with the trend of an explicit *we – you* relation. For a long time, it was socially delicate to express the requirements of the applicant, and the explicit *we – you* relationship was avoided in this context. This is no longer the situation. On the contrary, the ideology of the new work order presupposes this explicit *we – you* relation. The employer assumes the role of setting goals, and supporting the employees in meeting these goals through constructing ideal identities for them. Subjective modal assessment is a grammatical choice that is iconic to this new relation between employer and employee: “We think that you are independent”. Given this change in the labour market it is, on the other hand, not surprising that modality of obligation disappears from job advertisements. The speech function of commands is not in line with the new work order ideal that management should do without specific instruction.

A further aspect of the new work order that we have found to have explanatory power for the change of the register of job advertisements is the new need for employer branding in a labour market with higher mobility. This need for employer branding in job advertisements is amplified by the digital distribution of the texts, since the digital distribution invites easy sharing to new readers in ways that cannot be foreseen by the employer. The ambition to create a favourable image of the company is seen in the same linguistic traits that we have discussed above: the new informal relation between employer and the applicant, and the new avoidance of modal operators of obligation. In the simultaneous communication with potential applicant and eavesdropper, the mix of naked declaratives and modal assessment has an interactive advantage over modal operators. The readers who do not plan to apply for the job can easily read the texts as a description of the company’s high standard of employees.

Finally, we want to propose some directions for research that would deepen our understanding of how the registers of the workplace has changed towards a meaning making for the new work order. Firstly, we would like to encourage theoretical work within the register-model. In several recent articles (e.g. Matthiessen and Kashyap 2014; Matthiessen 2015a, 2015b), a contextual framework has been developed which makes it possible to approach the analysis of register from above. This would have been a fruitful alternative to our priority of the perspective from below, with its painstaking climbing from lexicogrammar, to semantics and on to context. However, this framework has hitherto been developed for relating the contextual activities (field) to the ideational metafunction. Since our

study reveals interesting findings in the interpersonal metafunction, it would be worth the effort to develop a similar general contextual framework for types of roles and relations (tenor) that are realised primarily through interpersonal linguistic choices. It is possible that such theoretical development can be achieved only if registers are described on a wider time scale than the text. Secondly, we therefore propose that new research should investigate what is occurring interpersonally outside of texts within one text-type. An analysis of interaction must look to the response, and the response to job advertisement is provided in job applications (cf. e.g. Helgesson 2017), and also in, for example, texts where new employees are presented (cf. e.g. Gunnarsson 2014). Thus, new research on the meaning making of the new work order should also include such intertextual relations.

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