



Sudan University of Science and Technology
College of Graduate Studies



**Exploring the Difficulties of Using English Modal
Auxiliaries among the Tertiary Level Students**
تقصي صعوبة استخدام الأفعال المساعدة لدى طلاب الجامعة
**A research Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of
M.A Degree in Applied Linguistics**

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family members especially my mother – the source of kindness and to my father whose care and guidance will never be forgotten.

It is also dedicated my husband who supported me greatly

Acknowledgements

First of all I thank my God for giving me the courage and endeavor to fulfill this research in spite of all the obstacles that I face and my gratitude is to my supervisor Dr. Nada Sid Ahmed Eljack who helped and supported me in conducting this research to the fullest. My gratitude is to those who lent me a hand until this research has been finished.

Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the difficulties encountered by the university second year students at Sudan University of Science and Technology in using the English Modals in writing and their ability in differentiating between these verbs in terms of their syntactic functions. The researcher used the descriptive analytical approach to describe the data collected via using a test given to the second level students at Sudan University, College of Languages. The sample was sixty students. The sample of this study was chosen randomly. The study used the SPSS to analyze the data. The study found out that the majority of the students were unable to use the modal English verbs correctly and they are confused by some of these verbs. It also found that, the students could not differentiate between the functions of some modal verbs. As a result of such findings, the researcher recommended that the students should read more grammar patterns especially in the case of auxiliaries and verbs to identify the use of modals in different contexts. As well as presenting some suggestions for the teachers and syllabus designers to conduct training sessions concerning the ways of teaching English modal verbs.

مستخلص الدراسة (Arabic Version)

هدفت الدراسة إلى تقصي الصعوبات التي تواجه طلاب المستوى الثاني في جامعة السودان للعلوم والتكنولوجيا في استخدام الأفعال الإنجليزية المساعدة في الكتابة وعدم المقدرة على التمييز بين هذه الأفعال من حيث الوظيفة النحوية. استخدم الباحث المذهب الوصفي التحليلي لتحليل البيانات التي تم جمعها باستخدام الاستبيان الذي قُدم لطلاب المستوى الثاني والذي بلغ عددهم ستون طالبا اختيرا عشوائيا من العدد الكلي. استخدمت الدراسة طريقة التحليل الإحصائي لتحليل البيانات. وأوجدت الدراسة أن أغلبية الطلاب يواجهون مشاكل في استخدام هذه الأفعال بصورة صحيحة وأنهم لا يستطيعون التمييز بين هذه الأفعال من حيث وظيفتها النحوية. ونتيجة لما توصلت إليه الدراسة، قدم الباحث مجموعة من التوصيات أهمها حث الطلاب على القراءة المكثفة فيما يختص بالأفعال المساعدة من حيث استخداماتها في الكتابة. كما قدم الباحث عددا من الإقتراحات للأساتذة ومعي المناهج إلى تطوير آليات للكيفية الصحيحة لتدريس هذه الأفعال.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

The term grammar generally concerns the structure of any language. It is either: descriptive or prescriptive. We are concerned here with the second type. The topic under discussion comprises a set of rules to be discussed to facilitate to the second language learner acquire English language easily.

This research aims to focus on using the English modal verbs. Their variations, sometimes creates problem to the non – native speakers in using and understanding them. It also focuses on the use of English modals among the learners of English language as a second language. In general, this research tries to measure the errors which are made by students at the university level.

To achieve the objectives of such a study, the researcher surveys the literature in the second chapter to further clarify the difficulties arise from the modal auxiliary verbs in dealing with the grammar of the target language.

Modal verbs were studied from different perspectives, such as the formal linguistics, semantics or pragmatics (Thomson, 1983). Modal verbs

are frequently used in every day communication. Hence, the study will handle the forms and uses of modal verbs.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

It is noticed that non – native speakers usually encounter some difficulties in dealing with English modals in terms of structure and meaning. This may create slight problem in understanding the correct structure. That is to say, the modals like “should” and “must” and others have different meanings in different contexts. This is a problematic area for second language learners in learning.

This problem is known when we as students were learning at the university in that some students couldn’t differentiate between the modal verbs. At that time we come to know the essence of the problem concerning such verbs.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives behind this research are as follows:

1. To show the areas of ambiguity in using modals.
2. To explain the different usages of modals
3. To draw the attention of the teachers to the importance of teaching modal verbs in English classroom in terms of meaning and usage.
4. To shed light upon the difficulties that face EFL learners when using English modals

1.3 Questions of the Study

The questions that help accomplishing this research:

- 1) To what extents do students at the tertiary level have confusion when using English modal verbs?
- 2) To what extents can the students at the university level differentiate between the meanings of some modals?
- 3) What kind of modals that constitute difficulty to the EFL learners in writing?

1.4 Hypotheses of the Study

The study is based on the following hypotheses:

- 1) Students at the tertiary level have confusion when using English language modals.
- 2) Some students at the university level cannot differentiate between English Modal verbs in terms of meaning.
- 3) Students are faced with difficulties when using modal verbs in writing

1.5 Methodology of the Study

The researcher adopts qualitative and quantitative methods as a tool of data collection. The population of this research is the second year students at the College of Languages, majoring in English Sudan University of Science and Technology. 60 students represents the study. The sample of

the study are selected randomly. The test is designed to measure the students' ability in dealing with modal verbs in writing.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The importance of this study is that it shows how English modals are essential when expressing the intended meaning and help students to use them appropriately. The focus of this research is significant because of the complexity of modal verbs in their syntactic form and semantic meaning, which make them challenging for EFL learners when using them in writing or speaking. This study will contribute in explaining this important category of grammar (Modals). This research is also important for the teachers to help them deliver the target materials to the students according to their needs.

1.7 Limitation of the Study

The study is limited to the investigation of the challenges that face the EFL second class university students at Sudan University of Science and Technology in the batch of the year (2018 – 2019). Such modal verbs as [should – might – will – must] and the extents to which these modals confuse the students in both using and understanding their meaning.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND PREVIOUS STUDIES

2.0 Introduction

The study investigates the uses of English modal verbs by university students. It is helpful in this sense to highlight the topic under discussion. This could be done through reviewing the literature. Here the researcher presents the theoretical framework which includes a number of uses of modal verbs directly followed by what has been said by other writers and researchers concerning this topic.

This chapter is intended to give a thorough background about the topic and to pave the road for the analysis done in the fourth chapter. It enriches the researcher's knowledge about the English modal verbs and the extents such a background knowledge relates to the topic of the research.

2.1 The Theoretical Framework

In this section below, the researcher will give brief definition to the term "Modal Verbs" in order to clarify the topic and further gives a number of rules and forms to shed light upon the term under discussion to justify the statement of the research.

2.1.1 Definition of Modal Verbs

Modal verbs are a group of verbs such as (*can, could, may, might, must, need, ought to, shall, should, will, would, used to*) that give information about such things as possibility, necessity, and obligation.

It could be logical to help the reader by defining the term grammar, because it is the core of this research. This is because modals constitute part of grammar whether formally or informally.

Numbers of definitions were cited in almost all the books of grammar. The study presents some of these definitions. (Alexander 1997: 68) defined grammar as " the branch of linguistics that deals with the structure and forms of words and their interrelations within sentences". Also, it is defined as " the term that refers in the explicit theory constructed by linguists and proposed as speakers' competence. (Chomsky & Hale 1965:294).

The definitions above stated clearly what the term grammar means. But what is important in this study is what constitutes the grammar of a language – the modals – as part of that grammar and to know the forms of modals.

2.1.2 Basic Auxiliaries

The basic modal auxiliaries in English language are: can, could, had better, may, might, must, ought to, shall, should, will and would. As seen in the table below:

Table (2.1) Modal Auxiliaries

Auxiliary + simple form of a verb	can, could, had better, may, might, must, ought to, shall, should, will and would are always followed by simple form of verb:
Can (a) <i>Olga can speak English</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are not followed by [to] • INCORRECT: Olga can to speak English • The verb doesn't have a final [s] • INCORRECT: Olga can speaks English • The verb is not in the past • INCORRECT: Olga can spoke English • The verb is not in its -ing form • INCORRECT: Olga can speaking English
Could (b) <i>He couldn't come to class</i>	
May (c) <i>It may rain tomorrow</i>	
Might (d) <i>It might rain tomorrow</i>	
Should (e) <i>Mary should study harder</i>	
Had better (f) <i>I had better study tonight</i>	
Must (g) <i>Joe must see a doctor today</i>	
Will (h) <i>I will be in class tomorrow</i>	
Would (i) <i>Would you please close the door?</i>	

(Raymond Murphy 1994: 89)

The verb in the above are called modal auxiliaries. They are helping verbs that express a wide range of meanings. (ability – permission – possibility etc.). Most of them have more than one meaning:

- Phrasal modals such as be able to – be going to – be supposed to – have to – have got to – and, used to are common expressions

whose meanings are similar to those of some of the modal auxiliaries.

Examples: be able to is similar to [can] and "be going to" is similar to [will]. Other examples cited in the tables below for the different modal verbs and their uses:

2.1.3 Polite Request with "I" as a Subject

Table (2.2) Polite Request

<i>May I</i>	May I please borrow your pen?	<i>May I</i> and <i>could I</i> are used for permission
<i>Could I</i>	Could I borrow your pen please?	In polite request, <i>could</i> has present meaning
<i>Can I</i>	Can I borrow your pen?	<i>Can I</i> is used for permission It is less polite than <i>may I</i>

(Raymond Murphy 1994: 91)

2.1.4 Polite Request with You as a Subject

Table (2.3) Shows Polite Request with (you) as a Subject

<i>Would you</i>	Would you pass the salt please?	The meaning of "would you" and "will you" is the same in polite request "Would you" is more common and more polite
<i>Will you</i>	Will you please pass the salt?	
<i>Could you</i>	Could you pass the salt please?	"Could you" and "would you" have the same meaning
<i>Can you</i>	Can you please pass the salt?	"Can you" is often used informally

(Raymond Murphy 1994: 92)

2.1.5 Modal Auxiliaries and Yes / No Questions

If the sentence has a modal verb and a main verb, the question is formed as follows:

Modal + subject + main verb

Example: I may visit you tomorrow

May I visit you tomorrow?

Example: you can repeat it

Can you repeat it?

Example: We should stay here

Should we stay here?

If we want to make negative for the Yes/ No questions for modals, the form will be as follows:

Modal + Not + subject + main verb

Example: we can be friends

Can't we be friends?

Example: You should be in school

Shouldn't you be in school?

When we give a reply to the questions, we can use short forms or long forms:

Yes + subject + Modal verb+ Not

Example: Can we get married?

Answer: Yes. / Yes we can / Yes, we can get married

Example: Will you sit down?

Answer: Yes. Yes, I will / Yes, I will sit down

2.1.6 Differences in Meanings and Structures

Modals differ from one to another in meaning and usage. If we take an example, the modal [should – may – must – might] we notice that when speaking about advice, [should] is the suitable choice, but if we speak about certainty, [must] carries the highest degree of certainty. However, [may] and [might] are less certain than [should] (Murphy 1994: 95)

The other parts of speech are the nouns that name creatures, things or ideas. Nouns may be divided into four classes:

Common nouns – proper nouns – abstract nouns – collective nouns. The second part of speech is the verbs which express the action. It is either finite or infinite. Verbs are also divided into main verbs: main verbs and modal verbs.

The adverbs and adjectives are also parts of speech that modify the verbs and nouns respectively. The above mentioned are called the open class. However, the conjunctions, prepositions and articles and determiners are the close class

Certain modal verbs change as follows:

will> would

He said, *'One day I'll be able to afford a car.'*

He said (that) one day he **would** be able to afford a car.'

can> could

He said, 'I **can** speak French.'

He said (that) he **could** speak French.

can > could/would be able to (future reference)

He said, 'We **can** meet tomorrow.'

He said (that) we **could I would be able to** meet
the next day.

may -> might

He said, 'I **may** call you.'

He said (that) he **might** call us.

shall* should (asking for advice)

->offer (expressing offers)

He said, 'When **shall** I come?'

He asked when he **should** come.

He said, '**Shall** I help you?'

He **offered** to help me.

must > must/had to (obligation)

He said, 'You **must** finish this.'

He said (that) I **must/had to** finish it.

needn't -> needn't/didn't need to/didn't have to

He said, 'You **needn't** pay in cash.'

He said (that) I **needn't / didn't need to/didn't have to**
pay in cash.

Would, could, might, should, ought, had better,

"used to" and *"mustn't"* do not change. *Must* does not change when it expresses a logical assumption.

e.g. a) He ***might*** talk to her,' Danny said.

Danny said (that) he ***might*** talk to her.

b) 'You ***must*** be tired,' Paul told Susan.

*Paul told Susan (that) she ***must*** be tired*(Jenny 1999: 103)

Some modal verbs are also used to *advise* or make *recommendations*, but the list of modals used for recommending is not exactly the same as that for expressing degrees of certainty. This time they can be listed in order of strength of advice - from obligation to suggestion:

- ***Must*** (also *have to*) absolute obligation / duty
- ***Should*** firm advice or obligation
- ***Can*** opportunity / possibility
- ***Could*** suggestion
- ***might*** tentative / polite suggestion (Jenny 1999 : 85)

Other uses are exemplified below:

Need, needn't, and don't need to / don't have to

"Need" can be used as a modal verb (before a bare infinitive) or as an ordinary verb. Compare:

- You ***needn't*** *speak* so loudly. (= modal verb)

- She **needn't** *come* with us if she doesn't want to. (= modal verb)
- She's thirsty. She **needs** a drink. (= ordinary verb)
- Jim and Bob are here. They say they **need** to see you urgently. (= ordinary verb)

When it is a modal verb need is most commonly used in negative sentences, although it is sometimes also used in questions:

- Need you go home so soon? (*or, more commonly* Do you **have to** go...?)
- Need I say more? (*or, more commonly* Do I **have to** say...?)

Another author (Graver 1963:132) commented on the forms of modals by saying that “ modals are not used with the word ‘ to ‘ “ the author gives an example to this:

We can't say : he can to want speak English . however , uses [be able to] instead : he wants to be able to speak English.

The same author stated that modal verbs are the type of auxiliary which are used to indicate an attitude about an action or a state. Most modal can be used when discussing present, past or future. However, modals have only two forms: one form is used for the past; the other is for present or future.

On the other hand, modals have a morph-syntactic peculiarity in English: they are defective verbs they don't possess all that forms . Especially [will] and must] and they must always be followed by infinitive verbs.

It could also be said that modals encounter students in terms of meaning when taught to them, that is because each modal can have more than one meaning. So , it is in most cases difficult for the students to associate the meaning of modals. (Shepherd 1973: 46)

Inside the verb system, the optional slot is reserved for modal verbs (e.g.,can, may, should) or the future tense marker, will. If this slot is occupied, the rest of the slots can contain only the base form of the main verb (e.g., I/he should go, we/she can sing). If the slot is not occupied, the form of the main verb depends on the tense and number of the subject noun (e.g., / walk, he walks, they walked; I go, he goes, they went).

However, as noted in the examples earlier, the verb phrase can include more slots than just those for modals/future markers and the main verb. For this reason, the slot system has to allow for more options to account for various tense auxiliaries, such as was, have/has, or been because all sentence verbs have some sort of tense. For instance, even in the case of modal verbs, two options are possible (e.g., should cook or should havecooked, not to mention such complex constructions as will be cooking or willhave finished/sung). (Hoye 1997: 169)

Instead modal verbs such as may, can, or could represent the hedging devices of choice to project an appropriate amount of hesitation and cautious claim making (see chap. 12 on Hedges 1994?).

Studies of L2 writing and text have noted that NNS academic prose often creates an impression of a high degree of certainty (Hyland & Milton, 1997). Among other textual features that convey an exaggerated degree of definiteness is the fact that L2 writing employs significantly more markers of the future tense than NS college-level writing does. For example, the differences in the degree of certainty and definiteness expressed by means of the future marker will and the modal verbs may and can is readily apparent in the following contrasting sentences:

- a) When goals are hard to define, managers may tell employees to do their best.
- b) When goals are hard to define, managers can tell employees to do their best
- c) When goals are hard to define, managers will tell employees to do their best. (151)

The future tense is rarely used in academic writing—more commonly, modal verbs (e.g., can, may) are used to express future expectation. Progressive tenses are rarely found in academic writing, and perfect tenses are employed only occasionally and mostly with a limited class of verbs. (DeCarrico 1986)

2.2 Modal Functions

Butler (1990) looked specifically at the functions of certain auxiliary verbs and found "*may*" and "*might*" were frequently epistemic while can

is less likely to be epistemic. His corpus had only one occurrence of an epistemic can. Most instances of will referred to future time, and some were used to show inanimate ability (intrinsic), or a deductive relationship between two statements. Only one example of will served as pure prediction (extrinsic).

Only two uses of would were found in expressions of tentativeness, co-occurring with verbs such as "seem", "appear" and "expect". And "should", "shall" and "must" were all more likely to function as expressions of obligation, although "must" also did serve epistemic/extrinsic functions.

Let's examine more closely this common misconception about a possible future tense for English. First of all, it is crucial to understand that grammatical tense is a functional feature that can only be borne from an Aux and inflected onto a V. In other words, only main Verbs in English can carry Tense as an inflection.

The old story goes that English has Future tense via the modal "will"--as in the example, "*I will see you tomorrow*". "*She will take the class next term*". The president will talk on the economy this evening. etc. These are indeed all good English sentences, and there is a flavor of truth in that they constitute some notion of a Future time. However, notion of time and grammatical time are two very different entities. For instance, consider how readily accessible it is to say a mere lexical word such as

"*Yesterday*" or "*Tomorrow*" (lexical/form class in that it has semantic meaning, as opposed to functional/structure class) without any discourse to Grammatical Tense on the main verb and still make out the notion that the event took place in the past or future (respectively)? (This is an aspect of speech common both in Child Language and Pidgin: e.g., Yesterday, I go there. Tomorrow, I talk to him) (Rutherford 1984)

The argument that English has Future Tense relies on a confusion about (i) notion of referential time/tense as compared to (ii) grammatical time/tense--the former belonging to semantics (and perhaps pragmatics) while the latter exclusively belongs to the functional category of tense morphology [+/-Past]. The idea that modal verbs can project tense would mean that all modals would be able to project tense--as a category of 'part-of-speech'. Language is not structure independent, nor is it piecemeal with isolating words taking on structure independent tasks. Rather, language is rule driven and if we attribute a class of words with a grammatical role, then we must look very carefully at assigning that role to the entire class of words.

As stated, if we establish the modal "*will*" as a future marker, then we ought to establish other modal verbs as well--e.g., "*can*", "*should*", "*may*", etc. There is no sense to be made in taking such modals as tensed: token elliptical sentences e.g., I should... today, I should...tomorrow, I should have... yesterday seem to skirt the full tense paradigm with little

problem. Moreover, the proposed future modal “will” is mostly used for functions other than time reference as in the examples below:

- a) I will come, if you want me to (willingness)
- b) She will (would) typically study all night (habit)
- c) (doorbell) Right, that would be John (probability / expectance)
- d) We will surely all die one day (truth)

In short, modals can’t take inflection in any way, shape or form. Part of their unique intrinsic feature value (sub-categorization) is that they, as a class,

- a) Select to have no inflection onto their stems, and that they
- b) Allow no inflected morphology on an adjacent stem positioned as their complement.

There are a number of reasons for this--the main one being that modal verbs are functional/structure class words, so if you attribute some reference of tense to them, that still doesn’t buy you any meaning. And it goes without saying that Tense without a meaningful stem carries very little proposition worth. Having cleared up some common misconceptions about grammatical tense vs. referential tense, let’s proceed in examining how one should go about drawing tree diagrams that incorporate the three features of Tense/Agreement as presented above(Halliday 1994).

2.2.1 Auxiliaries, Modals and Grammars

The Auxiliary Verbs “Do-Be-Have” each play a particular role and have individual tasks in English Grammar. In addition to their specific grammatical tasks of Do--simple, Be--progressive/passive, Have--perfect, all three auxiliaries (as well as modals here) may serve out two general tasks of providing operations that include (i) supporting Question formation, and (ii) supporting Negation formation. Taking Question formations first, there are two types of question operations that need to be discussed.

2.2.2 Questions

It is especially noteworthy here to mention that only functional structure-class Auxiliary verbs (and Modals) in English can undergo such abstract movement--the abstract qualities of the functional categories auxiliary and modal serve us well here in accounting for such possible movement. The fact that main verbs can't undergo movement operations creates a tidy account for the classifications of structure vs. form class words and such operations provide interesting theoretical analyses. However, not all languages abide by the same tidy parameters.

2.2.3 Modals

On the heels of the Auxiliary Verb, we have a class of verb-like items called modals (or modality verbs). While these verb are also functional (and hence somewhat abstract) like their Auxiliary verb counterparts, they however cannot take on verbal inflection such as Tense and/or Agreement. The class of modals tends to denote abstract states such as--e.g., the giving of advice (should), possibility (might/may), potential (can), non-grammatical future time reference (will) etc. We shouldn't think of modal "will" being our Future tense in English since, as a grammatical rule, only the verbs (not Modals) take on Tense and Inflection. Besides, "will" seems to be used for a number of possible modalities aside from our commonly conceived future reference--e.g. (cited from Palmer 1984: p. 198):

- 1) I'll come if you want me to. (modality =willingness)
- 2) She'll sit for hours. (modality = habit)
- 3) That'll be John. (modality = probability)

Recollecting our badly conceived notion that modal "will" provided English with a future grammatical Tense, consider the counter examples below which similarly provide future reference with or without the modal "will".

- a) John willstart/work/talk Monday (modality = future reference)

b) John starts/works/talksMonday (main verb = future reference)

The overall syntactic functions of the Aux/ Modal is that they introduce Verbs. Recall, in our earlier discussions, that Auxiliaries are viewed as playing a functional/grammatical role in that they introduce Lexical Verbs, [Aux + V] and that Determiners are said to function in a similar way in that they introduce Lexical Nouns [Det+ N].

So, here we have gone full circle in expressing the roles of the two functional items. One side note is in order here. Since Modals seem to have their own word classification, they are entitled to link-up with their Auxiliary counterparts to form two types of modality expressions:

- a. She might be sleeping at this early hour.
- b. This book should not have been written by
John.
- c. Will Mary have studied for ten years.

2.2.4 Will Versus Can and May

The meaning differences among modals largely deal with the degree of certainty, probability, and/or possibility. For instance, (*will*) refers to the future with a high degree of certainty, and *may* indicates a possibility. Therefore, because the function of *will* is to predict the future, unless the writer can assure the reader of the outcome certainty, the uses

of the future tense in academic texts is considered to be somewhat inappropriate (Biber 1988).

In composition writing, the line between the meanings of modals of possibility, necessity, and prediction can be blurred (Raimes, 1992; Smoke, 1999). However, in general terms, in L2 academic writing modal verbs can be used effectively to moderate claims and avoid strong predictions and implications of certainty (Swales & Feak, 1994).

Analyses of academic corpora have shown that *can* and *may* are by far the most common modals, whereas *must*, *should*, and *have to* are less frequent as are *will* and *would* (Biber et al., 1999; Hyland, 1998). For this reason, when teaching modal verbs as hedges, it is important to concentrate on the contextual meanings of only some, but not necessarily all, modal verbs.

Despite these clear characteristics, Biber et al. (1999) argue that the distinction between modal verbs and lexical verbs is not completely clear. Some normally non-modal lexical verbs can also function as modal verbs, especially in spoken contexts. These forms are classified in two categories. One category is marginal auxiliary verbs and includes *need to*, *dare to*, and *used to*.

These verbs have features which are characteristic of modal verbs, such as similar negative and interrogative forms: "needn't, dare not, need we?." Biber et al. (1999) also include *ought to* in this group. The other

category is called semi-modals or quasi-modals:(had) better, have to, (have) got to, be supposed to, be going to. These idiomatic expressions act as forms of modality but can also be marked for tense and person and can co-occur with modal verbs (Biber et al., 1999).

2.3 Challenges of Modal Verbs

As useful as modal verbs are in communication, including academic and scientific writing, they are not easy to learn or to use appropriately for nonnative speakers of English (Gibbs, 1990). English L2 learners may have a relatively simple time learning the surface positions of modal verbs but may have a bigger problem recognizing and using modal verbs properly with respect to their underlying meaning (Cook, 1978).

There are a few possible reasons for this trouble. One problem with modal verbs, and all expressions of modality, is that the linguistic forms do not have a one to one relationship with meaning (Holmes, 1988). Furthermore, categories involved in expressing modal meaning are not clear, but rather are better understood as "degrees of certainty or epistemic commitment to the validity of a proposition." (Holmes 1982). Another challenge for non – native speakers is the fact that the use of modality, like other pragmatic features, is culturally determined. Since epistemic modality is used both to express the speaker's perspective about a proposition, as well as deference to one's addressee, students need to

develop sociocultural sensitivity to learn to use it appropriately(Holmes, 1983).

Not only do learners struggle with using modal forms, but also with recognizing their meaning and range of meanings in reading, causing confusion between accepted facts and objective statements, especially in scientific writing(Adams Smith, 1984).

2.4 Previous Studies

One of the studies in the concern of grammar is entitled "investigating the Difficulties in Using and Understanding Central Modal Auxiliary Verbs conducted by Meshkat Mohamed Al Zaki(2016). The study is conducted at Sudan University of Science and Technology. The main question of this study is (*To what extents do EFL learners find difficulties in Using and understanding English central modal verbs?*). the researcher used a test as a tool of data collection.

The study hypothesises that learners find difficulties in understanding and using modal verbs and they could not differentiate between these verbs and their functions.

The study found out that the students overgeneralize the rules of central modal verbs when they want to express their ability. It also found that some of the students are unfamiliar with the rule of modal verbs as the ones who use [must] for permission.

In addition to the above findings, it is noticed that some of the students use only one modal auxiliary verb for all occasions as well as a very important finding that the majority of the students are at risk of making interference while studying second language by using the rules of Arabic in dealing with English.

In her study, the researcher recommends the students to deeply concentrate on practicing modal verbs and identifying the different functions that could be attained by using such verbs.

Another study was conducted by AzizThabitSaeed (2009) at the University of Sharjah under the title "ArabEFL learners' acquisition of modals". He reported in his study that the Arab EFL learners' acquisition of modal verbs is hindered by many difficulties at the mastery of modals at the levels of both recognition and production. The study posed the question that stated (How well can Arab learners of English language select the proper modal verb to express certain function?). this study used a questionnaire to collect the data.

The findings of his study show that the overall performance of the subjects in the study was quite low especially in the overlap in meaning and function that exists among most modals emerged as one of the major difficulties resulting in the misuse of modals.

The study also found that the lack of an equivalent modal verbs system in Arabic contributes to the difficulty encountered by Arab EFL

learners when learning modals, especially in the pre-advanced stages of learning the language.

So, the research recommended the learners should be exposed to a great deal of contextualized situations that enable them to decipher the subtle nuances that modals, and particularly those that tend to overlap, can convey and that the teachers and textbooks should raise the level of students' consciousness to the importance of modals in daily communication. Teachers should alert learners to the negative consequences of misusing modals. For instance, they could show them how a misuse of a modal can result in altering the meaning intended.

A third study carried out by Sadam Mohamed (2014) under the title "*An analysis of use of conditional sentences by Arab students of English*" reported that the aim of this study was to analyze the use of conditional sentences by Arab students of English in semantic and syntactic situations. For the purpose of this study, 20 Arab students took part in the questionnaire; they were all studying different subjects and degrees (bachelor, master and PhD) at Coventry University. The main question of his study was (*in what sense modal verbs constitute difficulties to non-native learners?*). The data were collected by using a questionnaire to justify the study.

The results showed that the use of type three conditionals and modality can be classified as the most difficult issues that students

struggle to understand and use. Finally, Sadam presented some recommendations of which he urged the students practice more grammatical structures including modalverbs.

It could be said that the trio studies above have something in common with the study under discussion. That is to say, they have nearly similar hypotheses and questions. This makes some sort of emphasis to the importance of the using of modal verbs. The three studies aimed to identify the difficulties in using medal English verbs.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter includes the method of collecting the data and the procedure used in the analysis of the topic. The researcher also gives background knowledge about the number of the subject population upon whom the study is carried out. In addition to this, the study highlighted the instrument used by the researcher in collecting the data. The chapter further includes the validity and the reliability of the study.

3.1 Method of the Study

3.1.1 Population and Sample Size

The population of this research is the second year students of college of languages majoring in English at Sudan University of Science and Technology. They are specialized in learning English by having formal courses. Their mother tongue is Arabic language. Their ages ranged between 22 – 26 years old. The researcher selected 60 students randomly from the total number 150 students to represent the sample of the study. These students come from different geographical background.

3.1.2 The Instrument

In this research, the researcher uses a test as a tool of data collection. The test consists of three parts. The structure of the first part was multiple – choice questions. It consists of ten items. The second part is the form of true / false. It also consists of [10] items. The third part is a gap filling question. The test was designed accurately to agree with the three hypotheses based on the questions of the study.

The sample of the questions in the test is extracted from one of the grammar website which is concerned with multi-choice questions. It is the spark notes site.

3.1.3 The Procedure

This section gives a detailed description of the actual steps taken in collecting data through the test given to the second class at Sudan University of Science and Technology, college of Languages. The researcher adopted this procedure to achieve the reliability and constant responses of the test. This is by giving this test to the supervisor to approve it and three other PhD Holders who made their amendments and comments. After that, the test is given to experimental group consists of ten students.

3.1.4 The Test

The test is distributed to group of (60) students as an experiment to make sure that it will achieve its goal. It is mainly conducted for research purpose to collect data about the English modal auxiliary verbs in terms of usage and meaning among students and how types of verbs develop among them.

3.2 Validity of the Test

The test is valid because it tackled the topic of the study according to the approval of PhD holders namely Dr. Mahmoud Ali Ahmed, Dr. Arej Othman and Dr. Abbas Mukhtar. The test highlighted every aspects of the English modal verbs.in this sense, according to Brown (1999) "an instrument is said to be valid if it is meant to measure what is to be measured".This test, which is consisted of three partsdiscussed the use of modal verbs each of which is specified to a precise piece of information without any interference from any other points.

3.3Reliabilityof the Test

The test is reliable according to some PhD holders who commented and amended the questions included in the three parts of the test. This is reinforced by the fact that the test was given to an experimental group consisted of (10) students, then it was distributed to the targeted number which is (60) students.

In this research, the test instrument applied in data collection, measured its reliability because the same test when given to another group, it achieves the same or nearly the same results. Reliability was measured by adopting a simple manual statistics analysis. The test's reliability indicates a significant level of reliability in the responses provided by the subjects in the two groups.

3.4 Summary

The overall chapter discusses the way data are collected and the method of the study through which it will be handled. Moreover, the researcher highlights the subjects of the research and the validity of the test designed in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

In this part, the researcher used tables and figures to illustrate results. The variation between the results of the instrument, responses in the test was measured by making simple comparison using percentages for measuring positive variables and negative variables.

4.1- The Modal Verb Test

This instrument was adopted to measure students' performance in dealing with English modals in terms of meanings and usage. The test consists of two parts. Each part consists of a number of questions concerning modal verbs.

4.1.1- Data Analysis

Table (4.1):Multi – choice Question [Circle]

Students No	Section No	Item	Percentage %			
			Correct Answer	Incorrect answer	Total	
60 students	1	Couldn't	46.6%	53.4%	100%	
	2	Should	56.6%	44.4%	100%	
	3	Must	46.6%	53.4%	100%	
	4	Will have to	50%	50%	100%	
	5	Might	28.3%	71.7%	100%	
	Total	5		228.1%	272,9%	500%

Table (4.1) shows that the average of learners' correct answers range between 28.3% to 56.6%, while the incorrect answers range between 44.4% to 71.7%. This is clear in the first item (*couldn't*) in which 36.6% achieves correct answers, while 53.4% have incorrect answers. In the second item (*should*), 56.6% correct answers, while the incorrect 44.4%. The third item (*must*) the correct answers 46.6% and the incorrect is 53.4%. In the fourth item (*will have to*) 50% correct answers and 50% as incorrect. On the fifth item (*might*) the incorrect reached 71.7% while the correct is 28.3%.

Table (4.2): Multi – choice Question [Circle]

Students No	Section No	Item	Percentage %		
			Correct Answer	Incorrect answer	Total
60 students	6	Must	43.3%	46.7%	100%
	7	May	45%	55%	100%
	8	Be able to	56.6%	43.4%	100%
	9	can	48.3%	51.7%	100%
	10	Having to	43.3%	56.7%	100%
	Total	5	238.5%	257.5%	500%

Table (4.2) shows that the 6th item above, (*Must*), 43.3% achieve correct answers and 46.7% fail to give the targeted answer. The 7th item (*May*) correct answers 45%, while 55% as incorrect answers. The 8th item (*Be able to*) shows 56.6% as correct answers 53.4% as incorrect one. The 9th item (*can*) gives 48.3% as correct answers, while 51.7% as incorrect answers. Whereas the tenth item (*having to*), shows is 43.3% as correct answer while 56.7% incorrect answers.

4.1.1.2- Part Two Questions

Table (4.3) True / False Question

Students No	The sentences <i>Items from 1 – 6</i>		Percentage %		
			Correct	Incorrect	Total
60 students	I can't go to the cinema with you		40%	60%	100%
	You mustn't wear that suit now		35%	65%	100%
	In England, you don't have to...		50%	50%	100%
	My brother must to work....		45%	55%	100%
	May you open the window...		42.3%	57.7%	100%
	Total	5	232.3%	287.7%	500%

Table (4.3) shows the [True / False] results, it is clear from the above table that the range of incorrect answers varies between 50% - 60%.

The first sentence with [*Can't*] shows 40% correct answer while 60% incorrect ones. The second sentence with [*mustn't*] reflects 65% incorrect answers and 35% correct answers. The third sentence with [*don't*] have 50% for both correct and incorrect answers. The fourth sentence with [*mustn't*] However, has 45% correct and 65% incorrect answers. The last sentence with [*may*] shows 42.3% as correct answers and 57.7% as incorrect answers.

Table (4.4) True / False Question

Students No	The sentences <i>Items from 6 – 10</i>	Percentage %		
		Correct	Incorrect	Total
60 students				
	You shouldn't put your feet	43%	57%	100%
	If you continue practice like...	40%	60%	100%
	You shouldn't eat so much ...	45%	55%	100%
	Shall I go to the bathroom....	44.5%	55.5%	100%
	you shouldn't believe everything you read ...	45%	55%	100%
	Total	5	217.5%	282.5%

Table (4.4) shows that in the case of the first sentence [*would you mind....*] the correct answers 43% and the incorrect is 57%. The second sentence with [*may you ...*] has 40% correct answers and 60% incorrect. The third sentence with [*shouldn't put your feet*] has 45% correct and 55% incorrect answers. The fourth sentence with [*shall*] 44.5% correct and 55.5% incorrect answers. The last item [*shouldn't*] has 45% correct and 55% incorrect.

4.1.1.2- Part Three Questions

Table (4.5) Filling Gap Question

No	Items from 1 – 5		Percentage %		
			Correct	Incorrect	Total
60 students	May		47%	53%	100%
	Could		44%	56%	100%
	Must		40%	60%	100%
	Might		42%	58%	100%
	should		50%	50%	100%
	Total	5	223%	277%	500%

Table (4.5) shows that the first item [*may*] has 47% correct answers and 53% incorrect answers. The second item [*could*] shows 44% correct and 56% incorrect answers. The third item [*must*] shows 40% correct and 60% incorrect answers. The fourth item [*might*] shows 42% correct

answers whereas 58% as incorrect answers. The last item [should] shows that the correct and incorrect answers are similar 50% for each.

4.2 Discussion

According to (Holmes 1983) modal verbs constitute challenge for non – native speakers is the fact that the use of modality, like other pragmatic features, is culturally determined. This is clear from the above analysis and discussion. This is also can be linked to the findings of the previous studies mentioned the last part of the literature review in chapter two.

One could say that the modal auxiliaries constitute difficulties to the students in forming the correct structure of the sentences because they carry a functional role in producing correct structure. It is clear from the above tables that the incorrect answers ranged between 60% to 70%. This gives a clear picture to the readers that English modals cause some difficulty in dealing with English language grammar.

In the second part of the test (True/ False) question, the students find difficulties in differentiating between the modal verbs to the extents that they do not know the functions of each verb. This led to the use of [may] as in the sixth sentence, instead of using [would] assuming [may] to be correct and suitable for expressing polite request. At the same time [would] is stronger than [may]

It is clear from the analysis that over 60% of the students are encountered by difficulties in using and understanding the modal auxiliaries. This could be reached at from the performance of the students in the test. Using modals is to some extents problematic in the sense that the majority of the respondents in this study perform badly. Some of them could not differentiate between the modals in terms of functions and usage. Some auxiliary modals like [*should – would*] are used differently in different positions. If we take for example the expression [*would you mind...*], we come to know that it is used for polite request. However, [*should*] which is used for expressing advice and obligation has a completely different role to carry within the sentence.

The third part of the test includes a number of modal verbs (*may*) (*could*) (*must*) (*might*) and (*should*) to be used to complete the spaces in the paragraph. It is clear that the inability of the students in identifying the functions and uses of these modal verbs resulted in the weak performance in that the correct answers ranges between 42% to 47% for the majority of the students. This means that such a test uncover the problematic areas in using modal verbs in English.

The above could be carefully dealt with. This means that, students should have the ability to identify which is the suitable auxiliary to use in certain environment in order to convey the intended meaning.

One could say that the results explained in the above tables match clearly the hypotheses of the research and this verifies and justifies the statement of the problem mentioned in the first chapter of this study.

4.3 Testing the Hypotheses

It could be clear to say that the discussion and analysis proved the hypotheses of the study in that "*Students at the tertiary level have confusion when using English language modals*". This could be achieved through the fact that the majority of the students have problems with English modal verbs.

The second hypothesis which states that "*Some students at the university level cannot differentiate between English Modal verbs in terms of meaning*" is also verified due to the fact that many students cannot differentiate the meaning of the modal verbs in dealing with language functions.

The third hypothesis stated that "*Students are faced with difficulties when using modal verbs in writing*" and it is also proved to be true because the students who undergo the test face difficulty in dealing with the correct answers.

CHAPTER FIVE

MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS & SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

5.0 Main Findings

Based on the analysis and the discussion made by the researcher in the previous chapter, the researcher found out with the following results:

- 1- Using and understanding the meaning of certain modal verbs is not clear to most of the university students namely in the case of obligation as using [must] and request as using [would] or any other word that could make someone does something politely.
- 2- Identifying the functions of some modal auxiliaries such as when used to express certainty or probability is to some extent confusing to the students.
- 3- It is clear that meaning constitutes difficulty to the non – native when dealing with the English modals.
- 4- The fact that some auxiliary modals have different meaning depends on the contexts in which they occur.

- 5- Students are weak in understanding grammar rules concerning modal verbs and other ordinary verbs as well as auxiliary.
- 6- The weakness in grammar is due to the absence of gradable syllabus in the previous schooling years.

5.1 Conclusion

The study investigated the difficulties in using the English modal verbs by setting a number of questions and hypotheses. The first question which is stated as " *To what extents do students at the tertiary level have confusion when using English modal verbs?*". This question is obviously answered in different ways. According to the tables of the results this questions comes alongside with the hypothesis " Students at the tertiary level have confusion when using English language modals.". This is really justified and proved by the weak performance of the students.

The second question which is posed by the researcher is " *To what extents can the students at the university level differentiate between the meanings of some modals?*" is also dealt with in accordance to the test and the result manifested in the tables above.it could be clearly stated that the students as referred to in the second hypothesis that states that "Some students at the university level cannot differentiate between English Modal verbs in terms of meaning.". This is showed in the inability of the a considerable number of the students to differentiate between

[may],[would] [must] and [should] in terms of request and advice respectively as represented in the percentages.

The third question which enquires about the types of modal verbs that constitute problems to the students as "*What kind of modals that constitute difficulty to the EFL learners in writing?*" is also expressed in the hypothesis "Students are faced with difficulties when using modal verbs in writing". In this last question, the researcher identifies the group of modal verbs that cause difficulties to the second class university students in dealing with such kinds of verbs. It is argued that [should] [can] [could] and [may] are confusing to the students in both meaning and structure while writing.

5.2 Recommendations

- 1- Teachers should encourage their students to enrich their background in the field of grammar.
- 2- Students should read more grammar patterns especially in the case of auxiliaries and verbs to identify the use of modals in different contexts.
- 3- Special priority must be given to the practical English in real contexts to help the students overcome such problems.
- 4- Students should dig deep in the functions of grammatical categories to know the differences between such items as modals concerning meaning and usage.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Studies

- 1- Syllabuses designers should make contrastive studies to show the similarities and differences between English and Arabic verbs.
- 2- Teachers should be supplied with the grammar reference such as "*English Grammar in Use*" series to enable them clarifying these types of verbs to their students.
- 3- There should be a workshops by reflecting previous studies and researches about how to teach English Modal Verbs
- 4- There should be studies that can cover all the aspects of modal English verbs that are not included in this study.

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