

**Investigating Algerian Use of English Modals: The Case of Second Year
Master Students of English at the University “Frères Mentouri”,
Constantine 1**

Abstract:

The acquisition and application of English modals in appropriate contexts are among the essential aspects of second and foreign language acquisition. Thus, the current study is carried out in order to investigate the use of English modal verbs by Algerian university learners of English. The study is intended to identify to what extent the participants could acquire the functional properties of modal verbs. It also explores the most challenging aspects in the acquisition of modal verbs. Our study is an attempt to shed more light on the proficiency level of learners' performance in acquiring modal verbs. In order to fulfill the intended aims, 116 second year master students of English were assessed on their use of modals. The data analysis revealed that the students showed a low performance and faced some ambiguities in identifying the appropriate English modal.

Keywords: deontic, epistemic, modality, English modal verbs, performance, competence.

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ملخص:

يُعد تعلم الأفعال الناقصة الانجليزية واستعمالها في سياقاتها المناسبة من أهم المظاهر التي تدخل في سياق تعلم أو اكتساب لغة ثانية أو أجنبية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معاينة استعمال الأفعال الناقصة الانجليزية من طرف طلبة الانجليزية بالجامعة الجزائرية، بحيث تكشف إلى أي مدى يمكن للطلبة أن يكتسبوا الخصائص الوظيفية للأفعال الناقصة. كما تهدف الدراسة إلى معرفة درجة اتقان الطلبة استعمال هذه الأفعال. لتحقيق هذه الأهداف، وضع 116 طالبا في الثانية ماستر، قسم الانجليزية، تحت الاختبار لمعاينة استعمالهم لهذه الأفعال. بينت نتائج تحليل المعطيات مستوى متدني للطلبة في هذا السياق، حيث اكتنف استعمالهم للأفعال الناقصة غموضا حال دون نجاحهم في اختيار الأفعال الناقصة الأنسب لسياقاتها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أخلاقي، معرفي، الجهة، الأفعال الناقصة الانجليزية، الأداء، الكفاءة.

Introduction :

The effective use of language involves in the first place the learners' ability to use the linguistic knowledge in order to interpret different language functions. In recent decades, the goal of most second language learning has been to become communicatively competent and use the language necessary for a given social context (Hymes, 1972).

The aspiration for this study stems from the fact that although learners of English can readily do the gap-fill type exercises that practise grammatical structures as usage, they do not often reproduce these structures when engaged in real life spoken or written communication. This is not true of all grammatical structures, but we find it so with English modal verbs.

Investigating our learners' command of English modal Verbs helps us to find out their difficulties if they have any, and identify the reasons underlying these difficulties. Many grammarians and applied linguistic researchers consider modal verbs as the most grammatical difficulty for learners and teachers. Palmer (1974) noted that the complexity of modal verb forms and their semantic functions cannot be compared with any other grammatical structures and highlights the difficulties learners usually have in handling this grammar feature. In his study, Kasper (1979) showed that German students of English are unsure of certain grammatical aspects of English, especially in understanding the pragmatic category of modals and modality in accounting for the differential contextual implications.

Despite the fact that many linguists have reported the countless difficulties non-native students face in terms of modal verbs, not many learner-corpus studies have covered the root of these difficulties by learners and more specifically in the Algerian context. There is not adequate research exploring the potential problems that learners encounter and the underlying reasons behind these troublesome issues. Subsequently, we assume that analyzing the use of English modal verbs in learners' production might be an effective way of teaching them. Thus, the present study is necessary to spot light on learners' errors of modal comprehension and production and therefore, provide teachers with implications regarding teaching English modal verbs.

1. Second/Foreign Language Learners' Errors in Second Language Acquisition

The study of error committed by second/foreign language learners is part of the investigation of the process of language learning. Corder (1974) asserted that such error studies enrich research with evidence as to how language is acquired or learned; and also give learners themselves resources assisting them in their language learning process. The study of learners' errors is 'an important ingredient of the teacher's role as monitor and assessor of the learner's performance is to know why certain errors are committed. It is on the basis of such diagnostic knowledge that the teacher organizes feedback to the learner and remedial work (James, 1980, p.148). Besides, even the learners should know why they have committed errors if they are to self-monitor and avoid these same errors in the future. Thus, this way of approaching errors has two objectives: one theoretical and another applied. Theoretically, it serves to 'elucidate what and how a learner learns when he studies a second language.' Practically, it serves to enable the learner 'to learn more efficiently by

exploiting our knowledge of his dialect for pedagogical purposes’ (Corder cited in Khan, 2011, p.105).

Discussing the errors of second/foreign language learners plays a significant role since they sometimes obstruct communication. It attempts to indicate the learners’ ignorance about the grammatical and semantic rules of the target language (James, 1988: 304). This implies that mastering a second/foreign language is a complex phenomenon and more research on the issue of grammatical difficulty would contribute to our understanding of it. Mac Arthur (1992) suggested that errors arise from inaccurate learning, inadequate teaching, wrong guessing, poor memory, the influence of mother tongue, and the process of learning. Although error analysis study alone does not provide a sufficient description or explanation of learner language, but it has a significant contribution to make as part of an analysis of this type of language because it can offer insights into the sequence of acquisition, the patterns of acquisition and the types of structures which learners find difficult (Hobson, 1999).

2. Grammar in Second Language Acquisition

Throughout history, grammar teaching has undergone many irregular changes due to a number of theoretical and empirical developments in the field of language teaching. Some exclusively focus on grammar, while others focus on both grammar and meaning. Whatever attitude we hold towards it, grammar is fundamental to language. It is a set of rules that serve in putting words together in order for us to communicate (Leech, Deuchar and Hoogenraad, 1982). However, as Quirk and Stein (1990) expressed the need to acquire grammar rules for communication, they added that these rules are difficult to learn.

The question of what constitutes difficulty in grammar acquisition has long interested second language researchers. Byrd (2004), for example, when discussing the teaching and learning of modals asserted that due consideration is needed to determine what is difficult and also easy and to whom it is difficult or easy. In a paper, DeKeyser (2005) ascribed the difficulty in grammar acquisition to three main factors: problems of meaning, problems of form, and problems of form-meaning mapping. According to him, the meaning expressed through a grammatical form can be difficult to learn due to its “novelty, abstractness, or a combination of both” (p. 5). English modal verb is an example of a form that is difficult to learn due to its multiple meanings.

3. English Modal Verbs

In English, modality is regarded by Palmer (2001) as the subjective opinion of speaker towards the topic. It consists of various semantic notions such as: “possibility”, “necessity”, “ability”, “obligation”, “permission”, and “hypotheticality” (Collins, 2009, p.11). It is expressed through diverse

grammatical and lexical means. It is conveyed through modal auxiliary verbs and “a set of periphrastic expressions” (Collins, 2009, p. 11). Periphrastic modals might also be referred to as “quasi-modals” or “semi-modals, which include marginal modals, modal lexical verbs, modal idioms, modal nouns, modal adjectives, modal adverbs, and hedges. Modality can be expressed by marginal modals including verbs such as *need*, *dare*, and *ought to*, and also modal lexical verbs which consist of *have/has to*, and *be going to*, us. Various lexical verbs such as *wish* and *advise*, and modal idioms including *have/has got to*, *had better*, *would rather*, and *be to* can also convey modality. Modality is also expressed through modal nouns like *necessity*, *request*, and modal adjectives like *likely* and *probable*, and modal adverbs such as *perhaps*, and *maybe*. Finally, hedges also express modality. They are “expressions that qualify a statement with regard to its truth” (Aarts, 2011, p. 311). Examples of hedges are *I think*, *I guess*, *I believe*, *sort of*, and *kind of*.

Modals, in some ways, play a role to the semantics of useful communication as it forms an essential aspect of the society and being the most important element in human language. They are used almost in all speech situations in order to convey different senses, including ability, possibility, request and permission, all of which are of paramount importance in daily communication. Though modals tend to have straightforward meanings, they can take on shades of meaning depending on the context in which they occur. This vagueness concerning modals semantic functions and lack of clear determination in their formal system has led to difficulty in defining modals. In what follows, we only refer to some of the basic formal and semantic features of English modals since it is not the aim of our research.

Modality is considered one of the most difficult English structures for second and foreign language learners to master (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). In accordance, Ferris (2002) stated that verb forms relating to modals are considered problematic and we need to identify the errors in written discourse, as well as to have a certain amount of knowledge on correcting those errors before dispatching the knowledge to students. The forms of English modal verbs differ from ordinary verb forms and vary in their own structure. Thus, it is indispensable to have a closer look at the morphological and syntactic properties that are laid down to determine modal verbs.

As a part of auxiliary verbs, modal verbs share the following grammatical characteristics of auxiliary verbs as follows:

- a. They are not inflected in the third person; that is, when the subject is singular third person, no subject-verb agreement realizes in inflection so the form should be “He must go” instead of “He musts go”.
- b. They are followed by the “bare infinitive”—the base form of the verb alone. In other words, after modal verbs, the infinitive without to of other verbs is used so the form is “I must go” but not “I must to go”.

- c. They are negated by the addition of “n’t” or “not”. They are not added to “don’t” as other verbs. That is, the negation of modal verbs is “I can’t” or “I cannot” rather than “I don’t can”.
- d. They are inverted with the subject to form a question without using “do”. For example, the interrogative sentence is “Should I do it?” but not “Do I should do it?”
- e. They have no non-finite forms—past and present participles.
- f. They can’t co-occur. In other words, two modal verbs can’t be used simultaneously so the correct form is “He may come” or “He will come” instead of “He may will come”.

Second or foreign language learners of English may find learning modals to be confusing due to the meanings depicted by each modal verb (Thompson: 2002). Meanings of modals are controversial, not only for learners and teachers of English but also for native speakers. Unfortunately, such vagueness exists in some theoretical approaches too. This leads both learners and teachers to find difficulty to properly use modals. Many semanticists have discussed modals as having two different meanings: epistemic” and “deontic”.

Epistemic meanings of modal verbs are related to the speaker’s subjective interpretation of the real world situation, which can be roughly divided into three categories: necessity, prediction and possibility. Epistemic necessity indicates the speaker’s certainty about the proposition; it is usually represented by ‘*must*’. Epistemic prediction, realized by ‘*will*’, ‘*would*’ and ‘*shall*’, often present a statement of “I predict that...” made by the speaker. The other group modal verbs of ‘*should*’, ‘*ought to*’, ‘*may*’, ‘*might*’, ‘*can*’, and ‘*could*’ are used to show epistemic possibility, which indicates the different levels of the speaker’s uncertainty about the proposition (Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. 1985, p.219-31, Jackson, 1990, p.99-101; Tang, 1992, p.86-87). According to Tang (1992, p.104), only ‘*shall*’ doesn’t have epistemic meaning because the speaker tends to use ‘*will*’ to represent his prediction about the future. However, Quirk et al (1985, p.229-30) still thinks that ‘*shall*’ has epistemic meaning, which is rarely used in present-day English.

Deontic modal verbs are associated with real world. By using them, the speaker may lay an obligation, give permission, and show his volition and ability. Modals like ‘*must*’, ‘*should*’, and ‘*ought to*’ belong to the deontic obligation category, while ‘*can*’, ‘*could*’, ‘*may*’, and ‘*might*’ belong to deontic permission. Still another group of modal verbs like ‘*will*’, ‘*would*’ and ‘*shall*’ are used to express willingness or intention about the events. Almost all the modals discussed in the study can be used epistemically or deontically at the same time as described by Groefsema (1995, p.53):

- (1) (a) She **can** only be 14 the way she behaves.

- (b) She **can** come with us if she likes.
(2) (a) You **must** be very happy now.
(b) You **must** be very quiet now.
(3) (a) You **may** win the lottery tonight.
(b) You **may** sit down.

All modal verbs in (a) sentences expressed 'epistemic modality'. The speaker utters assumptions and assesses possibilities against the background of available information or his own knowledge, and the various modals help to express degrees of certainty, probability or doubt. In contrast, in the (b) sentences modal verbs expressed 'deontic' meaning. The speaker seeks to exert an influence on the performance of actions.

4. The Study

The present study is an attempt to investigate how Algerian university students use English modals. It aims to find out the main difficulties related to their uses, forms and functions. The major aim is to explore areas of difficulty in teaching English modals and to draw teachers' attention to the importance of presenting the modals in association with their socio-cultural contexts. Our study could potentially provide a more comprehensive understanding towards assessing students' acquisition of English modals.

4.1. The Research Methodology

The current study is of an exploratory nature through which we thoroughly examine the phenomenon under investigation. Due to the complexity inherent in teaching and learning of English modals, this study provides insights into their comprehension and production. Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses were adopted to assess second/foreign language learners' use and interpretation of English modals with a special concern of the Algerian university students. Our research study addresses the following questions:

1. **Do Algerian university students of English face difficulties in the use of English modal verbs?**
2. **What are the major reasons behind the students' misuse of English modal verbs?**
3. **How do the students cope with deficiencies in their use of English modal verbs?**

With all the problems associated with the difficulties of teaching and learning modals, as well as the call for the necessity of finding out an approach to facilitate the teaching and learning of modals, we **hypothesize that Algerian university learners misuse English modal verbs, and the reason behind this misuse of English modals would be their inadequate competence in English.** In order to answer our research questions and assess our hypothesis, two major research instruments were used: a test and a questionnaire. Altogether, the test and questionnaires were analyzed and interpreted.

First, the use of the students' questionnaire is of great importance for our research in order to gather information about the participants concerning their knowledge and attitudes about the subject under investigation. The main objective is to obtain a general understanding of Algerian students' perception of the difficulty of learning English modals. 116 questionnaires were administered to our population to obtain information on areas the test could not properly cover. Such areas include their learning strategies, their attitudinal disposition towards their misuse of modal verbs. On average, the students took from 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Second, second year Master students of English are required to respond to a writing activity test. The latter consisted of nine envisioned real life situations. The aim was to assess the students' performance in the use of the English modal Verbs: **'will', 'would', 'should', 'can', 'could', 'may', 'must', 'have to', 'might', and 'ought to'**. **'Shall'** was excluded from the list since it is less frequent in English. They were asked to write down their responses to the situations in one sentence. The reason behind that was to allow us focus on the use of English modal verbs rather on their difficulties in writing. The activity was completed during class time, and students were asked neither write their names nor discuss it with others. At the end, Data was collected and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively per situation to assess the students' use of English modal Verbs.

4.2. The Population

For convenience and in order to investigate our topic, we have taken our second year master students of Applied Sciences, since they are available at the time when the study was undertaken. Our sample consisted of 116 students from the whole population of 360 second year Master students of English at the University “Frères Mentouri”, Constantine 1 during the academic year 2016-2017. Second year Master students of English were chosen for two reasons. First, they have been studying English for almost 10 years during their educational carrier, and second, they will major from English in few months. Thus, these students would provide us with a full picture of the development of our students' second language competence and their acquisition of English modal.

4.3. Discussion of the Results of the Students' Questionnaire

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages were employed to measure students' perceptions of the difficulties they face in the use of the modal verbs. The students answered all the questions of the questionnaire. They provided their attitudes towards their knowledge of English language, and their opinions towards the importance and difficulty towards grammar learning as well as the use of the modal verbs. They also emphasized the importance of practising them in real life situations, and the

importance that should be given to grammar sessions in the curriculum. They drew attention the fact that they may refrain from committing such errors by paying much greater effort to the fixed functional rules of this grammatical category, hence, using them appropriately.

First of all, in regard to the usefulness of learning grammar, the majority of the students (97.41%) agreed with no doubt that it is important, and useful to study grammar in order to learn the English language. This implies that our students hold positive attitudes towards grammar and aware of its significance of in the acquisition of English. However, there is a disagreement among students concerning its difficulty. 47.41 % students found it difficult, while 52.59% students found it not difficult at all. Second, With reference to modal verbs, the results showed that most of the students (60.34%) found them not difficult at all to use, while(39.66%) of them said the contrary. Those students who find them difficult claimed that the modal verbs' meanings as well as tense were the major elements underlying this difficulty. Furthermore, most students attributed the modal verbs' difficulty mainly to their multiple nature of their meaning, and tense but less to their affirmative, negative, and interrogative forms. The analysis of the results further revealed that most students emphasized 'practice', the difficulty inherent in the modals themselves, and the lack of knowledge about the rules of usage as the major reasons underlying the students' misuse of modals.

4.4. Analysis and Interpretation of the Results of the Test

All the results concerning the students' responses to the writing activity test were gathered in order to investigate the frequency of the participants' use of the English modal verbs as illustrated in Table 1:

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Answers	With English Modal Verb		Without English Modal Verb	
	N	%	N	%
Situation One	74	63.79	42	36.21
Situation Two	77	66.38	39	33.62
Situation Three	40	34.49	76	65.51
Situation Four	57	49.14	59	50.86
Situation Five	54	46.55	62	53.45
Situation Six	106	91.38	10	08.62
Situation Seven	26	22.41	90	77.59
Situation Eight	58	50	58	50
Situation Nine	94	81.03	22	18.97

Table 1: Frequency of the Students’ Use of English Modal Verbs

As clearly shown in Table 1, the participants preferred to use a modal verb. Out of the nine situations, modal Verbs were used in five situations. On one hand, they were used by the majority of the total participants in situation one (by 63.79%), in situation two (by 66.38%), in situation six (by 91.38%), and in situation nine (by 81.03%). On the other hand, they were chosen by the half of the participants in situation eight.

In responding to Situation One; “*You are going to Algiers for a weekend. Make suggestions about things to do there.*” (As shown in table 1), the large number of students (63.79%) produced sentences without modal verb, while 36.21% students provided the modal verbs. This indicated that many students avoided using the modal verbs due to their complexity which was explored throughout the study. Students who used no modal verbs replied to situation one through the planned future like “ am going to” to express their

intention, or verbs like “I want” or “I visit” .In the first case, some students produced sentences like:

Eg1: “I am going to visit Makam El - Chahid ”

Eg 2:“I am going to Algiers for shopping and see my friends”

Other students produced sentences like:

Eg2: I want to visit Makam El Chahid, go to EL Hamma zoo, and then see my sister.

Eg 4: I visit the garden of Al Hamma, eat in special restaurants and visit relatives.

Eg5: Definitely, I go to fashion shops.

Eg 6: I want to go to the beach, and then go visit my family.

When responding to situation two, “*You start school in September. Talk about the necessity to buy things you need for that*”. A great percentage (69.38 %) of the participants chose to use the modal verb in their written productions, but 33.62 % didn’t. The last category produced sentences as follows:

Eg 1: “A pen, a copy book is very necessary”.

Eg 2: “The most important things are school bag copy books and pens”.

Eg 3: “It is very important to buy the school staff”.

Eg 4: “At the beginning of the year, it is essential for me as students to buy the required things in order to be well prepared”.

Eg5: “I start buying books, copy books and pens”.

Eg6: “I am going to buy a dictionary and a laptop”.

In response to situation three, “Your sister is a very talented woman. Talk about her ability to speak different languages”, while 34,49 % used a modal verb, most students (65,15 %) didn’t. They produced sentences as:

Eg 1: “My sister has a talent of speaking different languages.”

Eg 2: “My sister masters three languages Spanish, German and English”.

Eg 3: “My sister master different languages as if she is a native speaker”.

Eg 4: “My sister is a talented woman, she masters two languages”.

She has the ability to deal with different people in all over the world”.

Eg 5: “My sister never uses our mother tongue at home, I always find a difficulty to understand her”.

Eg 6: “My sister is a talented bilingual. She is always passionate about learning languages and keeps getting better with that. She never gets sick and I love that about her”.

In Situation Four, “*A friend has invited you to a party. You are not keen to go, but there isn’t anything else to do, so you think you should go. What would you say?*”; more than the half of the students (50.86 %) chose not to use

the modal verbs, whereas 49.14 % of them did. Sentences were produced without the modal verbs as follows:

Eg1: “I am very happy to be there and joining you in this party”.

Eg2: “I am not in the mod to go for the party, but I just come for you”.

Eg3: “I am going to come to your party and enjoy myself since there is nothing else to do”.

The present simple and present continuous tenses were used to express modality.

.When responding to situation five; “*Your friend has got a headache and a congested nose. Give him/her some advice about how to deal with this problem*”, 53.45 % of the students preferred not to use modal verbs to give advice to their imaginarily ill friend. They expressed their advices through lexical words such as: ‘*advise*’ as a verb or ‘*advice*’ as a noun, as in the following examples:

Eg 1: “I advise you to drink hot water with lemon and get some rest”.

Eg 2: “My advice for you is to go see a doctor”.

Many students used the imperative and produce sentences like:

Eg 3: “Take some medicine, but it is better to see the doctor”.

Eg 4: “Buy yourself some medicine and stop complaining, you are not going to die”.

Eg 5: “Stay at home and drink some cup of tea and take a medicine”.

Eg 6: “Don’t rush to the doctor, infusions with honey and lemon help”.

In Table 1, the frequency of students’ use of modal Verbs in situation six; “*You want to borrow your uncle’s car. Ask for permission politely*”, indicated encouraging results. Opposite to the three previous situations, almost all students (91, 38 %) used an English modal verb in their written responses and only few students didn’t. Many sentences of this kind were produced:

Eg 1: “Dear uncle, I wonder if you do me a favor. Please, borrow me your car”.

Eg 2: “Uncle, I need your car”.

Eg 3: “I really need your car just for an hour, if you don’t mind”.

Eg 4: “Give me your car without any Barney”.

Eg 5: “Is it possible to borrow your car, please?”

In responding to situation seven; “*You have found out that your close friend has lied to you. Tell him/her you are very upset about this*”, again the majority of the students (77. 59 %) used no modal verbs, whereas 22.41 % did. The former produced sentences like:

Eg1: “I feel like you betrayed me because you were my best friend you were honest with me”.

Eg : “This is the last time; I’m very upset about this”.

Eg 3: “I have never expected that you lie to me; you have really disappointed me”.

Eg 4: “Don’t do that ever again because in friendship there is no place for lies”.
 Eg 5: “I get hot under my color because of you. Don’t lie on me anymore”.
 Eg 6: “Oh I really chocked why you lie? Don’t repeat again”.

When responding to situation eight; “*You are on the train. You have a seat, but a pregnant lady is standing. Offer her your seat*”, the students were asked to write a sentence to express the function of offer. The results summarized in table 1 indicated that half of the students used modal verbs, whereas the other half didn’t. They produced sentences as:

Eg 1: Lady! Come and sit.
 Eg 2: Do you come and sit?
 Eg 3: Have my seat please!
 Eg 4: It is a pleasure to take a seat.

The examination of the students’ answers to situation nine; “*You want someone to hold the door open for you. Ask him/her to do it for you*”, found that the great majority of the students (81.03 %) used the modal verbs in their productions. Only 18. 97 % produced sentences without them as in the following sentences:

Eg1: “Keep the door open for me, please!”
 Eg2: “Let the door open.”
 Eg3: “Please, hold the door?”

This implied that the participants were aware of need to use modal Verbs while expressing themselves in English. However, this doesn’t mean that they have successfully used them as noticed in Table 2 below which summarized the appropriate and inappropriate use of modal Verbs in the situations provided in the writing activity:

Answers	Appropriate Use		Inappropriate Use	
	N	%	N	%
Situation One	02	02.70	72	97.30
Situation Two	07	09.09	70	90.91
Situation Three	29	72.50	11	27. 50
Situation Four	01	01.75	56	98.25
Situation Five	37	68.52	17	31.48
Situation Six	50	47.17	56	52.83
Situation Seven	01	03.85	25	96.15
Situation Eight	16	32	42	68
Situation Nine	41	43.61	53	56.39

Table 2: Frequency of the Students’ Appropriate and Inappropriate Use of the English Modal Verbs

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The results as indicated in Table 2 were not satisfactory. In response to the nine situations, students had appropriately used the modal verbs in only two situations, whereas they failed in all others respectively; in situation one (by 97.30%), in situation two (by 90.91%), in situation four (by 98.25 %), in situation six (by 52.83 %), in situation seven (by 96.15%), in situation eight (by 68%), and also in situation nine (by 56.39%). However, in the remaining situations three and five, the participants had showed good performance in their written productions. The majority of the students under investigation used the expected modal verb ‘**can**’ in situation three (by 72.50 %), and the expected modal verb ‘**should**’/ ‘**ought to**’ in situation five (68.52 %). In the former situation, the participants found no difficulty to express the function of **ability**. Besides, they also didn’t find it difficult to respond to the latter situation to express **obligation**.

In Table 3, all the results driven from the students’ responses to the test were summarized. We aim to identify the most recurrent modal verb in the students’ written responses to the nine situations. Then, we analyzed the results per modal Verb in relation to the percentage of occurrence.

Situations	Possible Modal Verb	Preferred Modal Verb	Meaning	N	%
Situation 1	Should	Will	Intention	53	73.61
		Would	Probability	16	22.22
	Could	May	Possibility	01	01.39
		Need	Necessity	01	01.39
		Can	Ability	01	01.39
Situation 2	Have to	Need	Necessity	29	41.43
		Will	Intention	28	40
		Would	Probability	07	10
		Must	Strong Obligation	04	05.71
		Should	Weak Obligation	02	02.86
Situation 3	Can	Is able to	Physical Ability	09	81.81
		Could	Ability (past)	02	18.18
Situation 4	Might	Will	Intention	39	69.64
		Should	Obligation	08	14.29
		Would	Probability	06	10.71
		Can’t	Inability	03	05.36
Situation 5	Should	Have to	Obligation	12	70.59
	Ought to	Must	Strong obligation	05	29.41
Situation 6	Can	Would	Probability	35	62.50
		Could	Possibility	19	33.93

	May	Must	Obligation	02	03.57
Situation 7	Should have	Shouldn't	Obligation	08	32
		Could	Ability	04	16
	Ought to	Wouldn't	Probability	03	12
		Should	Obligation	03	12
		Will not	Unintentional	03	12
	Could have	Cannot	Inability	02	08
Mustn't		Prohibition	02	08	
Situation 8	Would	Can	Ability	29	69.05
		May	Possibility	10	23.81
		Should	Obligation	01	02.38
		Could	Ability	01	02.38
		Have to	Obligation	01	02.38
Situation 9	Will	Could	Ability	24	45.29
		Can	Ability	27	50.94
	Would	May	Possibility	02	03.77

Table 3: Distribution of the Students' Preferred Used English Modal Verbs 'Will'

The modal verb **'will'** convey a lower degree of modal meaning. It expresses futurity (epistemic). It can also express volition (determination) or willingness as it may express unwillingness to do something (Huddleston, 1995; Azar, 2000). The results showed that this modal verb was highly chosen by the participants in the study. They occur in four situations: situation one, two, four, and with its negative form will not in situation seven with less percentage. It is worth mentioning that this doesn't mean they used it appropriately, since it was not the expected the modal in these contexts.

In situation one *"We are going to Algiers for a weekend. Make suggestions about things to do"*, **'will'** was the most used by the students. 73.61 % of the total participants used it while the expected modal in this context were **'could'** or **'should'**, which expresses possibility/ability (Biber et al., 2002). Students wrote sentences like the following examples *"I will do shopping and try to discover the most beautiful places there"*. **'Will'** was also used by a great number of students in situation two: *"We start school in September. Talk about the necessity to buy things."*, when 40% of the total participants used it instead of **'have to'** expressing necessity. They answered *"I will buy new clothes, a bag and a new copy book"*. A larger number of the students (69.64 %) also chose it in situation four instead of the modal verb **'might'** in order to express possibility: *"A friend has invited you to a party. You are not very keen to go but there isn't anything else to do, so you think you*

should go. What would say?”. An example of students’ productions was “I am not hat kind which enjoys parties, but *I will come just to please you*”.

‘Would’

The modal Verb **‘would’** can express whether a speaker feels something is permissible (Swan, 1985; Azar, 2000).). According to swan, it cannot refer to past refusal. It is used rather to express instruction or order for more polite request (p.185). In this study, this modal verb occurred several times in students’ productions. The modal verb **‘would’** was used by 22.22 % of the students instead of **‘could’** or **‘should’** needed to express suggestions in situation one. They provided sentences as “I **would** visit the famous places and watch the sunset in the beach”, and “I **would** spend it visiting my uncle”.

10.71% of the students used **‘would’** also instead of **‘Might’** as required in situation four to express probability. Students instead provided sentences such as “I **would** apologize to you because I am not in a good mood”, or “I **would** go to the party and have fun and talk with my friends”. Worth noting **‘would’** seems to be highly preferred by sour sample. The majority (62.50 %) of them chose it instead of **‘Can’/ ‘may’** as required to express permission in situation six: “*You want to borrow your uncle’s car. Ask for permission politely.*” Sentences of this kind were recurrent “**Would** you borrow me your car, please?”Or “I **would** be thankful if you borrow me your car”.

‘Should’

The modal verb **‘should’** can express whether a speaker feels something is advisable (Azar 1995; Biber 2002) as it can be used to express an obligation or necessity (Huddleston 1995 However, in this study, **‘should’** was used instead of **‘might’** by 14. 29 % in situation four which required probability: “*A friend has invited you to a party. You are not very keen to go but there isn’t anything else to do, so you think you should go. What would say?*”. Students provided sentences like: “I have nothing to do this night. So, I **should** go”, and “I am not interested about going to the party, but I **should** go”. Additionally, this modal was used in its negative form **‘shouldn’t’** in situation seven where in **‘should have’/ ‘ought to’/ ‘could have’** were needed to express disappointment: “*You found out that your close friend lied to you. Tell him/her you are very upset*”. 32 % of the students used sentences as: “You **shouldn’t** have lied on me”.

‘Have to’

The modal verb **‘have to’** expresses speakers’ necessity towards something (Swan 1995; Azar, 2000). It was among the most preferred modal verb in situation five: “*Your friend has got a headache and a congested nose. Give him/her some advice*”. The majority of the students (70. 59%) chose it rather than the expected modal verb **‘Should’/ ‘ought to’** as required expressing advice in this context. Sentences like “You **have to** take 2 pills of

Rhumafed and sleep”, and “You **have to** go to the doctor” were written. However, they failed to provide it to express necessity as expected in situation two.

‘Could’

The modal Verb **‘Could’** can be used to express something permissible by the speaker (Swan 1995; Azar, 2000). It is used in more formal context to request permission. Many students used it to reply to the test. It was used instead of **“Can/ may”** by many students (33.93%) in situation six which request permission: *“can you give me your car uncle!”*. In situation seven, it was chosen in the second place after **‘shouldn’t’** by 16% of the participants in order to express disappointment instead of **‘Should have’/ ‘ought to’/ ‘could have’**, and instead of **‘Will’/ ‘would’** expressing order/instruction by 45,29% in situation nine: *“You want someone to hold the door open for you. Ask him/her to do for you”*.

‘Can’

‘Can’ is commonly used in speech to ask permission, especially in questions and negative sentences in less formal context. **‘Can’** was used instead of **‘will’/ ‘would’** by more than the half in situation nine. 50.94 % of the participants chose it in the first place instead of the expected modal verb. The participants wrote sentences of this kind **“Can you open the door, please?”**

In brief, the modal Verbs **‘will’**, **‘would’**, **‘can’**, **‘could’**, **‘should’** and **‘have to’** discussed above were the most used modal Verbs by the participants in the study. Other modal Verbs **‘must’**, **‘ought to’**, **‘may’**, **‘might’**, **‘ought to’**, **‘should have’** and **‘could have’** seem to be less preferred by them in regard their few occurrence (see Table 3). Results showed that our students preferred **‘have to’** more than **‘ought to’** express advisability. They have fewer tendencies to use **‘must’** and **‘ought to’** which expresses weak advisability. Besides, the results revealed that **‘may’** and **‘might’** which express permission/possibility//ability were less used by the participants in comparison with **‘can’** and **‘could’**. Important to add, **‘should have’** and **‘could have’** (perfect form verb) which expresses a failure to meet a social norm or expectation in a past situation were not used by our participants.

Conclusion

This study examined second year students of English use of modal verb modals. Major conclusions became apparent throughout the findings. First, the students are not aware of their difficulties in the use of English modal verbs. Second, the results of the test indicated that the majority of the students’ did not use modal Verbs and used lexical or tense to express modality. It was also found that students had difficulty in deciding on the appropriate modals with the appropriate functions. The students faced ambiguities in identifying the appropriate modal verbs in simple and perfective contexts. The present tense modals were most apparent in students’ productions indicating their inability in

using the perfect tense form. Modal verbs seem that they were not acquired simply as their superficial simplicity may show. Therefore, further research including at least some of the semi-modals that were intentionally excluded, is clearly needed on English modality in the Algerian context.

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