

## THE DIFFICULTY FACED BY THE STUDENTS IN LEARNING MODAL AUXILIARIES

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### **Abstract**

*The objective of this research is to know the students' ability in learning modal auxiliaries, especially in using forms and understanding meanings of modals. This research was conducted at SMPN 184 East Jakarta. In sample, the writer used purposive or selected random sampling, she just took 43 out of 160 second year students. She gave a test to the students, it was focused on modals. In conclusion, most of the second year students have difficulty in learning modal auxiliaries. It shows that mean score in using the form of modals is 5.90 and the mean score in understanding the meaning of modals is 5.84. Based on Gronlund standard of six, it is bad because it has not got 6. While many students got low score in the meaning is 51.16% and in the form of modals is 46.51%.*

*Key words: Kinds of modal auxiliaries, forms of modals, meanings of modals*

### **Kesulitan yang Dihadapi Siswa dalam Mempelajari Modal Auxiliaries**

#### **Abstrak**

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui kemampuan siswa dalam mempelajari "modal auxiliaries" khususnya dalam menggunakan bentuk dan pengertiannya. Penelitian ini dilakukan di SMPN 184 Jakarta timur. Pada sampelnya, penulis hanya memilih 43 siswa dari keseluruhan 160 siswa kelas 2 secara acak. Penulis memberikan tes ke siswa yang difokuskan pada "modal". Kesimpulannya, siswa kelas 2 kesulitan dalam mempelajari "modal auxiliaries". Hal ini terlihat bahwa nilai rata-rata dalam menggunakan bentuk modal adalah 5.90 dan nilai rata-rata memahami arti modal adalah 5.84. Berdasarkan standar 6 gronlund nilai tersebut jelek karena belum mendapatkan 6. Sementara pada prosentasenya siswa mendapatkan 51.16 % dalam memahami arti modal dan 46.51 % dalam menggunakan bentuknya.

Kata kunci : Macam – macam modal auxiliaries, bentuk modal, arti modal

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

##### **1. Background of the study**

Grammar is one of the language aspects which is taught to every language learners. It is as the basic knowledge and as important role in

understanding English language. As said by Veit (1986:123) that we use some conscious knowlegde about language when we speak and write and conscious grammatical knowledge can help us to understand what we are doing and allows us to move some enlightened choices. Knowledge of grammar can also give as a tool for analyzing our writing and vocabulary.

There are many aspects discussed in English grammar, one of them is “modal auxiliaries”. The “modal auxiliaries verbs” or “modal verbs” are can, could, will, would, shall, should, may, might and must. These auxiliaries make the verb become special semantic component such as ability, obligation, possibility. They have special grammar features (for instance: they have no infinitive and the third person singular has no – s). Most modal verbs have not only a grammatical function, but also a dictionary meaning (for instance: must can mean “be obligate to”. ( for example in sentence : I must study hard, in order to pass in exam).

But in reality, some students still make mistakes and find difficulty in identifying modals. Here are examples of wrong sentences that are often made by students in using the form of modals.

The students **must to** study for the English test.

She **wills** come to the party.

These sentences above are wrong, they should say:

The students must study for the English test.

She will come to the party.

In these cases, they should not add anything after modals because those always followed by **verb I** (the simple form of the verb) and they should not add S on the modal will.

Besides, the students often make mistakes in understanding meanings of modals as well. For examples:

If you want to have good score, you **will** study hard.

It's cold outside, you **can** wait in my room.

These sentences above are wrong, they should say:

If you want to have good score, you must study hard.

It's cold outside, you may wait in my room.

In these cases, they should use modal must and may because they are appropriate modals used based on the context of sentences.

From that background, the writer is interested in analyzing their problems in grammar test on modals.

## 2. Scope of the study

The writer restricts this study in learning modal auxiliaries, either the forms or the meanings.

## 3. Statement of the study

The writer formulates this study : which difficulty faced by the students in learning modals, the forms or the meanings?

## B. DISCUSSION

### 1. Kinds of Modal Auxiliaries

There are many kinds of modal auxiliaries. Here, the writer would like to write kinds of modals. Biber et al (1999:483) stated that “there are nine central modal auxiliaries : **can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will and would**”.

Meanwhile Azar (1989 : 195) said that “the modal auxiliaries in English are : **can, could, had better, may, might, must, ought to, shall, should, will and would.**” Another source mentioned, Swam (1984 : 202) modal auxiliaries verbs are : **can, could, may, might, must, will, would, shall, should, ought to, dare and need**”. And according to Schmidt (1995:51) that the modal auxiliaries are : **will, shall, can, may, should, must, could, might, would, had better, would rather.**

In this research, the writer adjusts the students’ English curriculum is nine central modal auxiliaries (can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will and would).

## 2. Forms of Modal Auxiliaries

According to Beaumont & Granger (1989:62) the forms of modals are :

- a. We form the affirmative by putting the modal verb between the subject and the full verb. I can swim.

We should go now.

Modal verbs have no – s in the third person singular.

She can swim. (not: she cans.....)

We should go. ( not : we shoulds....)

- b. We form the negative by putting n’t / not after the modal verb.

She can’t swim.

We shouldn’t go.

- c. We form questions by inverting the subject and the modal verb.

Compare:

She can swim       $\longleftrightarrow$       can she swim?

We should go       $\longleftrightarrow$       Should we go?

Firsten and Killian (1994 : 160) added that the forms of modals are:

- a. Modals never take the – ed ending for the past (we shoulded)
- b. They never have – ing attached to them (by oughting)
- c. They never use forms of “do or be” to make negative (x you don’t can/ x he isn’t mighting) instead they use the word “not” after them for the negative (you can not / he might not).

### 3. Meanings of Modal Auxiliaries

We do not use modal verbs for situation that definitely exist or for things that have definitely happened. We use them, for example to talk about things which we expect, which are possible, which we think are necessary, which we are not sure about, or which did not happen.

She will be here tomorrow.

I may come tomorrow if I have time.

She could be in London or Paris or Tokyo – no body knows.

You should see a doctor when you feel ill.

You must come and have dinner with us some time.

Each modal has more than one meaning. Here are examples the meaning of modals are presented below.

The Modality Types	The Modals
1. Physical / mental ability	can – could
2. Making request & granting permission	could – may – will - would
3. Possibility	can – could – may - might
4. Probability	may – should - must
5. Supposition	should
6. Wishing	may
7. Inevitability	must
8. Solicitation of opinion	shall - should
9. Obligation	should - must

Table I. The Nine Modality Types And The Modals Representing Them

Here are examples of each type of modality:

a. Physical and / or mental ability : can – could

- We use “can” to talk about ability. The negative of “can” is can not (contraction : can’t)

**Can** you swim?

He **can** play the guitar

I **can’t** open this bottle

- We can use “could” to say that someone had the generally ability to do something in the past.

I **could** swim when I was four years old.

My grandmother **could** speak Italian and Spanish.

There is an exception with the verbs of perception see, hear, smell, taste, feel, and some verbs of thinking e.g., understand, remember. We use could with these verbs when we actually did these in particular situations.

We **could** see a men in the garden.

She didn’t speak very clearly but I **could** understand what she said.

We use could not (contraction : couldn’t) for both general ability and situations.

My grandmother **couldn’t** speak German.

He tried very hard but he **couldn’t** swim back to the boat.

b. Making request / granting permission : can – could – will – could – may

1) Making requests

a) Asking for something

We can ask for things with can, could and may

**Can** I have a glass of water, please?

**Could** I have the bill, please?

**May** I have some more coffee?

b) Asking for permission

We also use can, could, and may to ask for permission

**Can** I borrow your dictionary?

**Could** I ask you personal question?

Excuse me, **may** I have a look at your new paper?

c) Asking someone to do something

We often use can you? To ask someone to do something for us

**Can** you help me?

**Can** you switch on the light, please?

We use could as a less definite, more polite form of can in this meaning

**Could** you lend me some money

We also use will you? To ask someone to do something

**Will** you switch on the light, please?

We use would as a less definite, more polite form of will this meaning.

**Would** you post this letter for me?

The phone is ringing. "Would you answer it?"

We also use would with the verb mind ('object to' or 'dislike') to make polite requests.

**Would** you mind switching on the light?

We sometimes make requests by using would like as a polite way of saying what we want.

**I'd like** to ask you personal question.

2) Granting for permission

a) Asking for permission

We can use can, could, and may to ask for permission

**Can** I use your phone?

**Could** I ask you a personal question?

**May** I make a suggestion?

## b) Giving permission

When we give permission, we use **can** or **may** (but not **could** or **not might**)

**Can** I use your phone? Yes, of course you **can**

You **can** borrow my camera if you want to

**Could** I make a suggestion? Of course you **may**

## c) Taking permission

When we talk about things that are already permitted or not permitted (e.g. when there is a law) we use **can** ('t).

You **can** drive a car in Britain when you are 17 (that's the law).

The children normally go to bed at 09 o'clock, but they **can** stay up late on Saturday, their parents have decided this.

c. Possibility : **can** – **could** – **may** – **might**

We use **can** to talk about theoretical possibility

Anyone **can** learn to swim .( it is possible for anyone to learn to swim).

We use **could** to talk about theoretical possibility in the past.

My brother **could** be really horrible when he was a child.

We use **may**, **might**, and **could** to talk about present or future possibility.

'There is someone at the door.' It **may** be Sarah' (perhaps it is Sarah).

We aren't sure what we are going to do tomorrow, we **might** go to the beach. (perhaps we will go to the beach).

'Where is Simon?' 'He **could** be in the living room'. (perhaps he is in the living room).

**Might** is normally little less sure than **may**. **Could** is normally less sure than **may** or **might**.



We use the negative may not and might not (contraction = mightn't) with this meaning but not could not.

Simon **may not** be in the living . (perhaps he is not in the living room).

We **might not** go to the beach. (perhaps we will not go to the beach)

d. Possibility : may – should – must

May expresses the greatest uncertainty. Should suggests a reasonable degree of probability ; however, it can only be used where the idea of expectation is possible. Must denoted the greatest degree of probability.

He left home an hour ago

He **may (or might)** possibly be at the office by now (uncertainty)

Or He **should** be at the office by now (expectation)

Or he **must** certainly be at the office by now (certainty)

e. Supposition : should

I really **should** be happy if my mother is here.

f. Wishing : may

‘**May** God bless you’

This modality is limited to expressing – often as either a curse or as a blessing something you want to happen. The modal is always may and always appears at the beginning of the clause.

g. Inevitability : must

‘All human being **must** die.’

h. Solicitation of opinion (about an intended action) : shall – should for something, should that expresses solicitation of opinions always occurs in question.

“**Shouldn't** I do the dishes?”

i. Obligation : must – should

Weak obligation

I **should** go now.

Medium obligation

I **had better** go now.

Strong obligation

I **must** go now.

All modals of obligation express a sense of duty that ranges from weak to strong.

#### 4. Research Findings

The writer gets the data from the application test of modals. She gives the test to forty three students of second year, it consists of 25 items which are divided into form items (10 items) and meaning items (15 items). Each part (form and meaning) is given score. For the form part, the writer gives 1 point every correct items, and for the meaning part, the correct item is multiplied 10 then divided 15.

##### a. Form Difficulty

The writer uses a formula to find the mean, as follow:

$$M = \frac{TS}{N}$$

$$\frac{254}{43} = 5.90$$

Note : M = mean score

TS = total of the score

N = number of the score

According to data above, it is found that the mean score is 5.90

The writer also uses the percentage the test formula, as follow:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Notes : P = Percentage

F = Frequency

N = Number of students

No	CS	F	P
1	The high score	7	16.28 %
2	The midle score	16	37.21 %
3	The low score	20	46.51%
		43	100%

Table II. The percentage of the form scores

Notes : CS = Clasification of the scores

F = Frequency

P = percentage

b. Meaning Difficulty

To find the mean score, the writer uses the formula:

$$M = \frac{TS}{N}$$

$$\frac{251.3}{43} = 5.84$$

According to data above, it is found out that the mean score is 5.84

No	CS	F	P
1	The high score	7	16.28 %
2	The middle score	14	32.56 %
3	The low score	22	51.16 %
		43	100%

Table III. The percentage of meaning scores

Mark	Classification
9	Very good
8	Good
7	More than good
6	Enough
5	Bad
4	Very bad

Table IV. Standard of six by Gronlund

The mean score in using the form of modals is 5.90 and the mean score in understanding the meaning of modals is 5.84. Based on Gronlund standard of six, it is bad because it has not got 6.

Then the writer would like to present the classification of the students' scores, as the table below:

No	CS	Total Percentage of the Students' Score	
		FM Test	MM Test
1	The high score	16.28 %	16.28%
2	The middle score	37.21 %	32.56 %
3	The low score	46.51%	51.16%

Table V. The classification of the students' scores

Notes : CS = the classification of the score

FM = the form of modals

MM = the meaning of modals

The comparative percentage between the high, the middle, and the low scores of the students in answering the question about using the form and understanding meaning of modals are:

The form of modals = 16.28 % - 37.21 % - 46.51 %, many students get low score, it is 46.51 %.

The meaning of modals = 16.28 % - 32.56 % - 51.16 %, many students get low score, it is 51.16 %.

It shows that most of the second year students have difficulty in the meanings rather than in the forms of modals auxiliaries.

### C. CONCLUSION

The writer concludes that the second year students of SMPN 184 East Jakarta in learning the meanings of modal auxiliaries are more difficult than the forms. It is listed in the table above that 51.16 %, many students get low score in the meaning, and 46.51 % many students get low score in the forms of modal auxiliaries. While the mean score in using the form of modals is 5.90 and the mean score in understanding the meaning of modals is 5.84. Based on Gronlund standard of six, it is bad because it has not got 6.

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