

A Study of Errors in Using Modal Verbs Made by Grade 11 Students of A Government School in Nintavur Educational Division

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Abstract

This study at investigating the errors in using modal verbs made by grade 11 students of a government school in Nintavur educational division. In English modal verbs are used to show if we believe something is certain, probable or possible and we also use models to do things like talking about ability, asking permission, making requests and offers and so on.

Although the students have learnt English language for many years in a government school of nintavur educational division they make a lot of errors while using modal verbs in writing. Without having the proper knowledge on how to use modal verbs to create sentences the students won't be able to improve the writing skills.

With regards to this research a grade 11 students of a government school in Nintavur educational division which consists of 25 students has been chosen for the study as they are currently in great 11 finding extremely difficult to use modal verbs in writing. They have learnt 11 years but it is still difficult to create meaningful sentences by using modal verbs. The objective of this research is to identify the errors while using modal verbs and provide useful guidelines and instructions to overcome the problems and errors and enhance the writing skills.

Keywords: modal verbs, government school, errors, writing skills, educational division

Introduction

English is a universal language like all languages is full of problems for the foreign learners. While defining second language learning, Lado (1964) says- "Second language learning is as acquiring the ability to use its structures within a general vocabulary, essentially under the condition of normal communication among native speakers at normal conversational speed".

It is true that English Language has become an undetectable part of our Sri Lankan life in its all sectors still, the fact remains that it is a foreign Language, a second language for us. English is a compulsory subject at the school, college, and at university level. English, still, occupies an important place in our educational system as well as in our law, business, economic, medical, commercial, media, transport and so many other areas in our country.

It is expected that the students should be acquainted with the grammar aspect of English language like, phonology morphology and syntax. And they should be able to express themselves through written and spoken English.

In English Modal verbs operate like other aspects of language; they are used to indicate different meanings or acts like request, obligation, order, permission, etc. With all the various shades of meaning and the highly contextualized uses, modals provide tremendous challenge to students. Modal's misunderstanding is the type of miscommunication that goes unnoticed, and allows misunderstanding and awkward interaction to continue.

If students misuse a modal even slightly, it will change the perceived intention or tone of their statement, making them appear rude or uncertain. For example, they could also drastically misinterpret statements in subtle yet vital ways.

English is taught in Sri Lanka through the schooling years as a major subject, and the Ministry of Education provides well-designed text books based on developing curriculum. Although the English curriculum consists of a teachers' guide, a students' book, a workbook and teaching materials, and teachers of English are supplied with training courses, the outcome of the whole process seems to be weak and below expectations, especially in grammar usage. This study aims at investigating the errors in using modal verbs made by grade 11 students of a government school in Nintavur educational division.

Problem of the Study

The use of modal verbs is one of the most problematic areas of English grammar. Modal verbs have more than one meaning, and there is a wide range of ways to use them. Furthermore, a modal verbs' meanings can be expressed in a number of different ways involving other grammatical and lexical elements. Although the students have learnt English language for many years in a government school of Nintavur educational division they make a lot of errors while using modal verbs in writing.

Research objectives

The researcher hopes that this piece of work will serve the following purposes

1. To find out the errors in using modal verbs made by students in written.
2. To identify the ways that should be followed to overcome the errors and difficulties

Population

The researcher used the Grade 11 students in ordinary level of Km/Imam Qazzali Vidyalaya Nintavur as the population of this research. The total number of the population in ordinary level 25 students only in this school. The data was collected from all of them including male and female.

This study tested their ability and understanding level of modal verbs production in permission, offer, obligation and possibility to investigate error categories and to analyze the cause of errors by students.

Sampling

At this quantitative research, the sample of the research is the all grade 11 students of Km/ Imam Qazzali Maha Vidyalaya Nintavur. There are 25 students in ordinary level in this school. They all will be tested in the research.

Methodology

The study employed quantitative methodology of data collection and data analysis. The purpose of this section is to describe materials and techniques employed in the gathering of the data. The material used as the research instrument for data collection was composed of an English grammar test

The test used in this study consisted of three types of proficiency tests to identify the problems in using modal verbs. they were as follows:¹

1. Making the sentence test consisting of 04 items
This part was to test the knowledge of grammar structure in the form of the modal verbs
2. Multiple choices test consisting of 20 items with four choices
This part was to test the ability to understand the use of modal verbs.
3. Fill in the blank test consisting of 20 blanks
This part was to test the ability to use modal verbs with correct forms in proper situations.

1 Djulaikah, siti. 2016. error analysis on the auxiliary verbs made by tenth grades of man samarinda, lingua & saber ahmed al – hessa, the use of modal verbs in permission, offer, obligation, possibility by english BA major students at middle east university

Importantly, English grammar test was developed to gather data and was analyzed by descriptive statistics to obtain the students' problems and grammatical errors.

Results of the study

The researcher presents the results of the test which aimed at investigating the errors in using modal verbs made by grade 11 students of a government school in Nintavur educational division. The questions under investigating were as follows:

1. Is there any significant difference and inability in making the sentences by using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by the students of Km/Imam Qazzali Maha Vidyalaya?
2. Is there ability among students to understand the use of modal verbs?
3. Is their ability among students to use modal verbs with correct forms in proper situations?

Detailed results of the test Table (01)

Students	Marks	
1	A	25
2	B	31
3	C	37
4	D	47
5	E	47
6	F	30
7	G	45
8	H	14
9	I	21
10	J	34
11	K	42
12	L	45
13	M	27
14	N	31
15	O	24
16	P	34
17	Q	30
18	R	24
19	S	29
20	T	32
21	U	33

22	V	24
23	W	37
24	X	40
25	Y	41

Table (02) criteria of the scores

Criteria	Frequency	%
Fail = less than 40 marks	18	72%
Fair – 40 to 49 marks	07	28%
Good = 50 to 59 marks	0
Very good = 60 to 69 marks	0
Excellent = 70 to 100 marks	0
Total	25	100%

Table (02) shows that 72% of the students obtained scores less than the test cut – off level. This result reveals the students' inability to use modal verbs correctly. The same table show that 28% of the students got scores ranging from 40 to 49.

Again, this result is confirmed by the fact that none of the students could reach a good, very good and excellent grades. This percentage confirms the idea that most of the student who could pass the cut – off level of the test could not get high scores and this reflects their shaky ability to use modal verbs

Summary of the test results

The researcher has identified a number of errors made by the students while using modal verbs. They are as follows.

Addition

The students have done the errors of addition which are indicated by the presence of an 'unwanted' item in sentences. The unwanted items do not appear in a well-formed utterance. This happens when the learners overuse certain grammatical rules of the target language.

For examples

In this case the students failed to identify some unwanted items in sentences

- I must to go
- They can to come tomorrow
- You are should eat

Reconstruction of sentences should be
I must go
They can come tomorrow
You should eat

He mustn't smoke
I can't do this work
She may not come to my home

Omission

The researcher has found some Omission errors which are indicated by the absence of certain item that must appear in sentences. This usually happens in the early stages of second language acquisition.

For examples

You must knowledge about that
He would done this work
They should money
Reconstruction of sentences should be
You must have knowledge about that
He would have done this work
They should have money

Misformation

They are also misformation errors among students which are indicated by the use of wrong forms.

For examples

He don't must smoke
Me can't do this work
She not may come to my home
Reconstruction of sentences should be

Misordering

The students have made errors of misordering which are indicated by the incorrect placement of certain morphemes.

For examples

I am not can listening
I not would like to go
Reconstruction of sentences should be
I can't listening
I wouldn't like to go

Results related to the questions

Results related to the first question

The first question of the study "Is there any significant difference and inability in making the sentences by using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by the students of Km/Imam Qazzali Maha Vidyalaya? Results are presented in table (1)

Investigating the ability to make the sentences by using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility.

Table (01) – making the sentences test

Function	Correct sentences		Wrong sentences	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
permission	14	56%	11	44%
Offer	09	36%	16	64%
possibility	08	32%	17	68%
Obligation	06	24%	19	76%
Total	37	37%	63	63%

Table (1) above shows that 37% of the sentences created by the students were correct and 63% of the sentences were wrong. The lowest percentage of the correct sentences for obligation was 24%. On the other hand, the highest percentage of wrong sentences was 76% on obligation.

The results in table (1) show that of the students have created correct sentences for permission whereas the students on offer Birati and an application have created wrong sentences due to lack of the

grammatical structure of the modal verbs in making sentences. This shows that the students have the insufficient knowledge of grammar structure in the form of the modal verbs.

Results related to the second question

The second question of the study "Is there ability among students to understand the use of modal verbs?" results are presented in table (2)

Multiple choices test for investigating the ability to understand the use of modal verbs.

Table (02) - Multiple choices test results

Question numbers	Correct answers		Wrong answers	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
01	08	32%	17	68%
02	10	40%	15	60%
03	07	28%	18	72%
04	12	48%	13	52%
05	06	24%	19	76%
06	05	20%	20	80%
07	11	44%	14	56%
08	09	36%	16	64%
09	14	56%	11	44%
10	03	12%	22	88%
11	05	20%	20	80%
12	16	64%	09	36%
13	7	28%	18	72%
14	9	36%	16	64%
15	17	68%	08	32%
16	10	40%	15	60%
17	6	24%	19	76%
18	4	16%	21	84%
19	6	24%	19	76%
20	11	44%	14	56%
Total	176	35.2%	324	64.8%

Table (2) above shows that 64.08 of the students' answers were wrong whereas 35.2 of the students' answers were correct. The highest percentage of wrong answers was 88% on statement no.10.on the other hand, the lowest percentage of correct answers was12 %.

The results in table (2) show that 64.8 % of the students has the inability to understand the use of modal verbs.

Results related to the third question

The second question of the study “is their ability among students to use modal verbs with correct forms in proper situations”? Results are presented in table (03)

Fill in the blank test for investigating the ability to use modal verbs with correct forms in proper situations.

Table (03) – fill in the blank test results

Question numbers	Correct answers		Wrong answers	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
01	12	48%	13	52%
02	9	36%	16	64%
03	6	24%	19	76%
04	16	64%	9	36%

05	5	20%	20	80%
06	7	28%	18	72%
07	17	68%	8	32%
08	4	16%	21	84%
09	9	36%	16	64%
10	3	12%	22	88%
11	11	44%	14	56%
12	4	16%	21	84%
13	5	20%	20	80%
14	6	24%	19	76%
15	8	32%	17	68%
16	11	44%	14	56%
17	4	16%	21	84%
18	6	24%	19	76%
19	8	32%	17	68%
20	9	36%	16	64%
Total	160	32%	340	68%

Results reported in table (3) show that 68% of the answers were wrong. The highest percentages of wrong answers here was 88%, 84% and 80% on statements no 10, no 08, no 17 and no 05. while the lowest percentage of correct answers was 12%.

The table shows that 32% of the students have answered correctly whereas the 68% of them have the troubles and difficulties to use modal verbs with correct forms in proper situations.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the errors while using the modal verbs by grade 11 students of a government school in Nintavur educational division. This chapter presents a summary and a short discussion of the findings of the three questions. The chapter concludes with recommendations and suggestions for future research.

Discussion of findings related to the first question

Is there any significant difference and inability in making the sentences by using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by the students of Km /Imam Qazzali maha vidyalaya?

The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant difference and inability in correctly making the suitable sentences by using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and the possibility by the students.

Discussion of findings related to the second question

Is there ability among students to understand the use of modal verbs?

The results show that majority of the students (64.8%) has the difficulties and troubles to understand the usages of modal verbs.

Discussion of findings related to the third question

Is their ability among students to use modal verbs with correct forms in proper situations?

Results revealed that the students have answered correctly whereas the 68% of them have the troubles and difficulties to use modal verbs with correct forms in proper situations.

Conclusions

This study aims at investigating the errors in the use of modal verbs by grade 11 students of Km/Imam Qazzali Maha Vidyalaya in Nintavur educational division.. It is clear that 68 % of the students could not pass the test. Students' performance in grammar and using modal verbs accurately is very poor as reflected in their low scores on the test. It was found that students had difficulty deciding on the appropriate modals with appropriate functions; most modals have more than one function. Most functions use more than one modal to express them.

Recommendations For Future Research

Based on the result of this study, the writer would such as to offer some suggestions to minimize the students' errors dealing with modal verbs.

1. when teaching English, the teachers should give clear explanations about modal verbs
2. Training the students to learn how to use model verbs in speech and writing.
3. Teachers and curriculum designers should raise students' awareness to the importance and negative results of misusing modals.
4. Teachers must emphasize modal auxiliary verbs in order to develop better comprehension and understanding among students to use modals appropriately and more frequently.
5. Introducing more courses that deal with modal verbs and focus on the teaching them in English grammar books.
6. Textbook writers need to be in line with the English language syllabus so that the necessary modals will be stated in the syllabus.
7. For lower-level students, teachers can design activities that allow students to explore and be familiar with the formal properties of modals and semi-modals.
8. The students should do more writing exercises and should be encouraged to use correct forms of modal verbs
9. More research is needed to investigate students' ability in using modal verbs.
10. Future research should expand the sample size to include students of public and private universities and students of public and private schools.

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