



THE SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS' USAGE OF MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR NATIVE SITUATION AND LANGUAGE PATTERNS : A BRIEF NOTE

J.Kavithanjali

(Ph.D Scholar, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai – 625 021)

E.mail: shivakavitha1111@gmail.com

doi: <https://doi.org/10.33329/joell.62.76>

ABSTRACT



This paper is a humble attempt to project 'grammar' is both as an art and a science dealing with the inflections or other means of showing relation between words as used in speech or writing and the phonetic system of the language concerned with a focus on the second language learners' usage of modal auxiliary verbs in accordance with their native situation and language patterns. It throws light on the importance of grammar in the study of language recognized as an essential discipline and also explains the functions of various spots of speech and the way in which they can be put together to form sentences in order to help the second language learners to use modal auxiliary verbs in sentence formation and speaking also.

Keywords: *Second Language, Language Learner, Modal Auxiliary, Language Patterns, Phonetic Symbol, Grammar, Essential Discipline, Words & Phrases.*



It is generally held and accepted in all respects that 'grammar' is both an art and a science dealing with the inflections or other means of showing relation between words as used in speech or writing and the phonetic system of the language concerned. In other words, grammar describes the way in which words and phrases and even sentences behave in speech and writing. It explains the functions of various parts of speech and the way in which they can be put together to form sentences. At any rate, the importance of grammar in the study of language is recognised as an essential discipline. So, English grammar is first and foremost a matter of fact.

In India, English is learnt as a second language. Learning a language means mastering all the aspects of that language, like phonology, grammar, syntax and semantics. One of the major difficulties in learning English is said to have been the mastery of its grammar. This is considered the main aspect which is threatening many pupils to be away from the study of English. This is the area in which the teacher trains his pupils with full vigour and expects them to attain perfection. Practically speaking, from the students' point of view, this is a primary task in the examination where the enthusiastic teacher expects him to score full marks. There is a basic principle in learning. Everyone tends to make use of what one 'knows' in order to learn what one does not 'know'. Almost all learn at least one language – usually the mother tongue – as children, frequently, two or more languages are learnt simultaneously. These languages are of course 'learnt' informally. Later on when one is exposed to the 'formal' learning of some other language, there is a possibility of making use of the language systems which one already 'knows' in order to learn the new language. This phenomenon is known as inter-language interference (interference between different language systems). Inter language interference operates at all levels like phonological level, grammatical level and semantic level.

At the grammatical level, the learners make use of the rules of their own languages in the place of the rules of the target language. This may result in the errors and incorrect usage of certain grammatical model verbs by the second language learners is not

an exception to the above generalisation. This way of using model verbs in English gives mere confusion, frustration and even bafflement to the learners of English as a second language and this is the area in which the sense of correctness seems to be a 'confusion'. English grammar in general puzzles the non-native learners of English. They are confused of how and when to use or omit 'the' or 'a'; whether to say, 'I write or I am writing', 'have written or wrote or had written', how to use 'have been' and 'had been writing', how to use 'could' 'would' 'should', 'might' and 'must'.

English presents special difficulties in each country whose native language is not English and in different set of circumstances. But the problems mentioned above have risen in every part of the world. 'The exact degree and nature of each difficulty and particularly the treatment of it in teaching must depend largely on the structure of the student's own language' (Close 12).

Generally speaking, many difficulties are faced by the second language learners of English, especially the students whose mother tongue is Tamil and who learn English as a second language in using English modals. The prevailing feeling of the modals are interchangeable. For example, 'can' may be replaced by 'may' 'will' and 'shall'. It is very difficult to pinpoint a particular reason for such a notion, yet in a number of cases it can be attributed to the tendency among students to find out Tamil meaning equivalents to English modals which lead to the grouping of certain modals to go with Tamil meaning equivalents. No doubt, this poses hurdles in their mastery of English modals.

The position of English in India is a peculiar one. It is more than a foreign language and less than a second language, but in Tamil Nadu, it is learnt as a second language. Distinctions of verb –tense, and the use of the prepositions and of verbal groups are highly developed in English. The verb system in English has three major aspects.

- (i) Syntactic aspect related to the structure of the verb,
- (ii) Semantic aspect to the meaning of the verb.
- (iii) The tense aspect related to time and mood of the verb.



The temporal, aspectual and modal usages of the verb are improperly examined and ineffectively presented in the classroom, as a result of which many mistakes are committed even by the educated persons. The aspect related to time, tense and mood of the verb has been a difficult area both for teachers and learners of English as a foreign language. The differences in the categories used, to represent time aspect and mood in English and in Indian languages together with the ignorance on the part of the teachers and the taught, as the related concepts have been the major hurdles in the proper understanding in English by the Indian learners of English as their second language. The similarities and dissimilarities and the difficulties faced by the Tamil learners in using the English modals are abundantly found.

It is generally recognized that modals constitute not only one of the most important and interesting areas of English grammar, but also one of the most complex. English verbs can be either i) Non-Finites or ii) Finites. The Non-Finites are the 'Infinities' (Active English Grammar 173) – (present and perfect), the participles (present and past and the Gerund (also called verbal noun). For example, the Non-Finites of the verb 'be' are : (to) be, (to) have been, being and been" (Zandvoort 4). A verb which simply names the action denoted by the verb, and hence it is not limited by number and person. This verb is called 'Infinitive'. This infinitive may occur either with or without a prolific particle. This particle is written 'to' and pronounced 'tu' before a vowel, 'ta', sometimes 'tu' before a consonant. This infinitive without 'to' is known as 'Plain, Infinitive" writes R.W.Zandvoort. 'The Finites' are parts of the verb other than the Non-Finites". Finite verb is a verb in the present or past-tense" (Sledd 212). Such forms are called 'Finites' because they are limited by number and person unlike the Non-Finites. The term 'Anomalous Finite' is used for the twenty-four Finites given below:

am, is, are, was, were	shall, should, will, would,
have, has, had,	can, could, may, might,
do, does, did	must, ought, need, dare,
	used.

These anomalous Finites also function as 'auxiliaries'. An auxiliary is a helping verb. Of the twenty-four

Finites given above, 'am', 'is', 'are' 'was' 'were' 'have', 'has' 'had' 'do' 'does' and 'did' are primary auxiliaries and the other verbs like 'shall' 'should' 'ill', 'would', 'can', 'could', 'may' 'might' 'must' 'dare', 'ought' and 'need' are called 'modal auxiliaries'. When an auxiliary is used with purely modal function, it may be called Auxiliary of modality. Mostly, however, modal auxiliaries retain something of their character of auxiliaries of prediction. The primary auxiliaries are distinguished from the modals in that the former ones are used.

- (i) in the formation of tenses
- (ii) in the formation of the passive form of the verbs.
- (iii) in the formation of the negative and interrogative forms of the lexical verb.

While the modals are used to express various attitudes (i.e., 'mood' from which modal) or concepts like possibility, ability, willingness, probability, obligation, intention etc., As such, they always indicate potential events, not actual happenings 'modals' are also distinguished by the following characteristics:

- (i) In the verbal group, the modals come first and carry the tense. Whenever it occurs, it is the only finite form in the group.
- (ii) Modals are mutually exclusive in the sense that the two modals cannot occur in the same group.
- (iii) Modals do not have any non-finite forms or (S-forms. Some even do not have any past tense form.

Randal L. Whitman defines modals as "they are especially characterized by not having an – 'S' ending with a third person singular subject and by being followed by verbs that have no inflectional ending (P 33). When an infinitive or a past tense form of such a modal is required, usually an equivalent phrase (called an Analogue) is used. For example, "be able to' for one meaning of 'can' and 'have to' 'for 'must' etc".

As such, it is incorrect to use the two together. "can be able to', 'must have to' etc".

The modal auxiliaries are defined by Ehrman as "that closed class of verbs which may occupy the first position of a verb phrase, which may not be

immediately preceded by another verb, which may invert with the subject in interrogation and which are negated directly by 'not' "(Huddleston 294). The mistake of using the two things, the modal and the analogue is commonly committed by the second language learners whose mother tongue is Tamil. In Tamil, the word 'KbAk;' is equivalent for the word 'can' in English. For example,

mtdhy; mijr; nra;a 'KbAk;'

He 'can' do that

But in certain places to ascertain the action, the second language learners use 'can be able to' without knowing the rule that the two 'can' and 'be able to' which convey the same meaning, cannot be used together. If the second language learner whose mother tongue is Tamil, wants to express the meaning of the following Tamil sentence;

mtdhy; mijf; fl;lhakhf; nra;a KbAk;'

In English he is tempted to use the two words 'can' and 'be able to' together. In Tamil, the word 'fl;lhakhf' adds some more stress to the action of doing and finishing, (i.e., KbAk;), than the English verb 'can'. In English, the word 'can' implies both the meanings of 'fl;lhakhf' and 'KbAk;' but it seems to be a less emphatic word and this results in the temptation of the second language learners' wrong use of the two words 'can be able to' together. Another reason, for the wrong usage of the two forms 'can be able to' is due to the incorrect colloquial usage of certain words like 'since, because' and the combination of two words, in Tamil and English as 'eL centre', the words which have the same meaning but due to practice, it is thought to be correct. The other reason can be the second language learners need a verb before the word 'able to' and they find 'can' as an appropriate verb, since they think this 'can' will give more stress to their expression and therefore they use, 'can be able to'. The other modal verbs except 'can' can however be used with such equivalents, as

" 'will be able to', 'may have to' etc."

Though some modals have past tense forms, the two forms, past and present, should be regarded as separate words because the past tense forms are regularly used with a present or future time reference. The past tense forms are used in polite requests, tentative suggestions etc., as in

'Could I speak to you for a moment?'

Except 'ought' and 'used' modals are followed only by the bare infinitive of the verb as in " 'will go', 'might' go etc, but 'ought to go' 'I used to go'.

The book *Auxiliaries in Dravidian* defines modal verb thus:

"Auxiliary verb which takes tense are added to the verbal participle and infinitive form of the main verb Auxiliary verbs which do not take tense are added to the infinitive form of the main verb are called modals" (Agesthalingam 213)

In the English verb system, the 'modal' is probably the most peculiar entity, and its treatment varies widely from analysis to analysis. Generally speaking, there are two more or less unrelated problems, the relationship between tense and modals, and the meanings of the modals. "The modal auxiliaries, 'will', 'may', 'can', 'would', 'shall', 'ought', 'might', 'could', 'must', 'should', 'need', and 'dare' are called so because they are used to form certain moods for which English has no inflected verb forms. For example, the word 'will' is used as a noun, main verb and also as a modal auxiliary;

"He has a strong 'will' -will (noun)
God has 'willed' it so -will (verb) intended
He 'will' sing -will (modal auxiliary)"

(Krishnaswamy 109)

The moods expressed by the English modal auxiliary verb are as follows:

S.No.	Modal Auxiliary	Meanings added to the verb by the modal auxiliary
i.	can	ability, permission, request
ii.	could	ability, possibility, request
iii.	shall	futility, willingness, suggestion
iv.	should	obligation, necessity, expectation
v.	will	willingness, prediction, insistence
vi.	would	willingness, habitual action in the past, probability
vii.	may	Permission, purpose, possibility



viii	might	Permission, concession	possibility,
ix.	must	Necessity, certainty	obligation,

There are some equivalent modal verbs in Tamil. They are;

- i) 'U' – added to the past participle, it makes the perfect 'pluperfect' and future perfect tenses
gb – j;jpUf;fpNwd;
gb – j;jpUg;Ngd;
gb – j;jpUe;Njd;
- ii) " 'Mk;' contracted form of 'MFk;'.
 - a) Added to verbal nouns, 'at shows permission
Nghf'yhk;' nra;a'yhk;' (may do)
nra;a'ykhk?' (may I do it?)
 - b) '\$Lk;', 'khl;L' – show power or possibility
('nra;af;\$Lk;')
'nra;af;\$lhJ'> nra;a 'khl;Nld;' ('I cannot' or 'may not do')
 - c) 'Ntz;Lk;' – indicates necessity, entreaty 'Ntz;Lk;': jhq;fs; tu 'Ntz;Lk;'. It also means 'necessary inference' – mg;gb ,Uf;f Ntz;Lk;' (must)

These Tamil modal verbs are not consciously learnt by the second language learners, but they unconsciously acquire them even in their childhood. On the other hand, the rules and laws regarding the use of English modals are consciously learnt and practiced by the second language learners. While learning a second language, problems crop up at all levels like phonology, morphophonemic, Lexis and Grammar.

Generally speaking, there are two additional situations involving the use of 'should' and 'would' which must be mastered by careful speakers and writers. They are 1) "Conditional mood" and 2) "Obligatory mood". "The Conditional 'mood' as the name implies, involves a situation based on a hypothesis" (berry 2) as in

"If I were he, : 'should' not leave

"The obligatory mood" involves the situation in wherein one has a duty or an obligation" (P 3). The obligatory always employs the word 'should', as in

I 'should' visit my brother.

The modals 'will' and 'shall' are used in such various moods as,

Will

- i) Promise - I will see you next week
- ii) Intention - I will do all the work myself
- iii) Willingness - I will be glad to do that for you
- iv) Prediction - Driving will always be dangerous.
- v) Instruction - you will deliver this message to my friend.
- vi) Tendency, inclination -Some will praise from politeness and some will criticize from vanity.

Shall

- i) Suggestions and requests - Shall we sit here for some time?
- ii) Moral injunctions - Thou shall not do it.
- iii) Expressing simple futurity - He shall be twenty next July

The second language learners use 'would' 'might' and 'shall' in the place of the modal auxiliary 'should'.

'might' he come while I'm out, tell him where to find me.

'would' he come while I'm out, tell him where to find me.

'shall' he come while I'm but, tell him where to find me.

The main reason for this mistake is, the form and structure is new to the second language learners. In Tamil, there is no sentence construction or structure, having the modal auxiliary verb at the beginning. The sentence " 'should' he come while I'm out tell him where to find me" can be written only thus:

ehd; ntspNa nrd;wpUf;Fk;ngHJ mtd; te;jhy;> mtdplk; ehd; vq;F nrd;wpUf;fpNwd; vd;W nrhy;.

Further, the second language learners are more familiar with the 'if' construction than this 'should' construction. They are not aware of this rule which is a rare construction in their mother tongue that in Tamil. In Tamil, the specific equivalent word for 'if' is



'My;' and it indicates only the future time in the sense of possibility and supposition. There is no specific equivalent word or verb in Tamil for 'should', in the sense of 'if'. So the second language learners prefer the modal verbs such as 'might' 'would' and 'shall' indicate future time more preferably, then 'should' So, the second language learners are not wholly trained or practiced to think or understand a foreign situation in that foreign language itself. Instead, they first think and then understand in accordance with their native situation and language patterns.

WORKS CITED

- Agesthalingam, A. & G.Srinivasa Varma. ***Auxiliaries in Dravidians : Auxiliaries – A Comparison.*** Annamalai Nagar : Annamalai University, 1980.
- Berry, Thomas Elliott. ***The Most Common Mistakes in English Usage.*** Delhi: Tata McGraw Hill Publishing Company Ltd, 1980.
- Board of Editors, ***Active English Grammar and Composition.*** Delhi : Macmillan India Ltd, 1984.
- Close, R.A. ***English as a Foreign as a Foreign Language: Grammar and Syntax for Teachers and Advanced Students.*** London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1962.
- Huddleston, Rodney D. ***The Sentence in Written English.*** Cambridge : University Press, 1971.
- Krishnaswamy, N. ***Modern English : A Book of Grammar and Composition.*** Delhi: Macmillan, 1980.
- Pope, G.U. ***A Handbook of the Tamil Languages.*** New Delhi : Asian Educational Services, 1983.
- Sledd, James. ***A Short Introduction to English Grammar.*** USA : Scott Foresman and Company, 1959.
- Zandvoort, R.W. ***A Handbook of English Grammar.*** London : Longman Group Ltd, 1975.
-