



A Study of Errors in Using Modal Auxiliary Verbs by Standard 8th Students in Shirpur City Schools

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Abstract:

The aim of this research study is to identify and analyze common errors that students do while using modal auxiliary in their writing. Being descriptive in its nature, this study followed simple random sampling for the selection of sample of 40 students learning in four secondary schools in Shirpur city. A self-structure test having variety of question patterns focusing application of modal auxiliary was the only tool used. The findings of the study shows that Omission (29.50%) was the highest frequency of errors committed by the students, following deception and wrong use of verb form. 22.50 and 19%. Following errors in specific modals, 'can' (32.50%) observed the highest error rate while using them. The study on the basis of evidences further suggests functional grammar practices to be conducted in the classrooms.

Key Words: *Modal auxiliary, practice-based grammar, second language, mother tongue, functional grammar.*

Introduction:

Learning grammar plays significant role in learning language. Knowledge of grammar enables students use correct structure of sentence and understands each word within clearly. Without grammar, it is difficult to either write or speak English language properly. Learning English grammar offers students correct track to write or form sentence correctly. When students understand grammar properly, they feel confidence in writing sentence correctly, to speak using correct sentences. Studies have proven that grammar is the base of good communication (spoken and written). Thornbury writes from this point of view that 'grammar is not just a set of rules to follow, but is a way to help students to express their thoughts using correct language.'

Auxiliary verbs are a type of verb that takes a supportive role in a sentence, second to the main verb. They are mainly to create complex grammatical tenses which show different aspects. In other words, a verb that assists a main verb in a sentence to express tense, voice,



mood, or for forming questions and negatives. The three primary auxiliary verbs in English are be, have, and do, and they, along with modal verbs like can, should, and will, help create more complex grammatical structures. These verbs show ability, permission, possibility, necessity etc. For instance, modal auxiliary, 'can' is used to express ability of something or someone, while 'must' expresses strong support in doing something. But using them continuously from this point of view is not easy as they may differ in different situation, for example 'It can rain tomorrow', can here states possibility rather than ability. Another thing regarding this is that modals do not necessarily change in different tenses; lead students towards confusion. According to Larsen-Freemen, "modals are one of most complex areas of English grammar for students who learn it either L2 or L3.

Shirpur is one of the cities of Dhule District and a taluka place of itself in Maharashtra state where number students learn in Marathi Medium Secondary schools and English subject or language is not their first language. Most of students communicate using regional language Marathi or local dialects in their daily life. This non-use of English language in their day to day life can make harder for them to learn and understand English language, its grammar, especially modal verbs. Teachers teaching English at Standard 8 in these schools though follow direct method and other relevant methods of teaching grammar, they focus on textbook content rather than real-life use of grammar. Consequently, these lead students to make number of mistake while using modal verbs in their writing. The aim of this study is to rectify what kind of errors do they commit while writing sentences of specific tense or in general use. Another purpose of this study is to help teachers to understand the level their students learning English grammar and ways to improve their writing following modal auxiliaries. This form research and findings form it can help students to improve their English writing and for school to improve their teaching. Nunan's (2003) study from this point of view mentions that understanding learner's error in writing correctly is an important element for better language learning-teaching process.

Significance of the Study:

This study is important as it draws attention on understanding common errors that students learning in standard 8th in Secondary schools of Shirpur city commit. These errors are rightly associated to modal auxiliary verbs. Understanding students' errors in writing correct sentences followed by auxiliary verbs, teachers can modify their teaching practices, especially methods they adopt while teaching English language. It also helps students to



build confidence in using English correctly, which is necessary for their academic growth and communicative competence. In short, this study is an attempt to improve English learning among the students and schools where learning takes place using regional language.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To identify common errors made by students learning in Standard 8th while using modal auxiliary verbs.
2. To investigate the frequency of these errors.
3. To find possible reasons behind their errors in using modal auxiliaries.
4. To suggest motivated ways for teachers to improve their teaching methods.
5. To help students to use modal auxiliary verbs correctly in speaking and writing skills.

Review of Literature:

Vijay, Singh (2017) conducted a research study to identify the errors while using modal auxiliary verbs by the 10th class students from Gonda district of UP. This study collected 120 written scripts from 3 schools as the researcher used written tool for collecting evidences. The study revealed unnecessary use of modal auxiliary verbs in 3 sentences out of 68 sentences. On the other hand students fail to use proper form of verb after the modal auxiliary this happened in 10 sentences out of 120, out of which 1 sentence received 3 modal. Study found almost 77% Interlingua errors.

S. Khan (2021) attempted to identify errors in spoken English of adult Indians and identified lexical, grammatical, and structural errors of learners. This study does not only focus on identifying errors in auxiliary verbs but observed errors in their oral English. Comparatively this study tried to rectify errors in both written and oral language use.

Research Methodology:

Research Design: Present research study followed Descriptive Research Design as it aimed identify errors in English Grammar. It also aimed in identifying and categorizing as well as analyzing the grammatical (modal auxiliary verbs) errors made by students learning in standard 8th in Shirpur city. This research design is suitable and commonly used as it systematically observes, classify and interpret data collected through varied tools. It analyses the evidences without manipulating the study environment.



Population and Sampling:

Population: The population of present study integrates all students learning standard 8th class from Marathi medium secondary schools in Shirpur city. The students learning at this level of learning belonged to the age group from 12 to 13 and learn English as Second Language.

Sampling:

Sample comprised in this study was 40 in total and were selected from 4 Marathi Medium Schools in the city. 10 students from each school was the proportion of sampling and made total sampling size 40.

Sampling Method:

Using probable sampling technique, this study followed simple random sampling in which all students from the 8th class were put together alphabetically and 10 students were selected following lottery random sampling technique. In this way 10 students from each school were selected following the same technique. Thus this sampling method offered equal opportunity to all students to participate by avoiding bias and improving the quality of participation.

School No.	Total Students	Selected Students
School No. 1	47	10
School No. 1	44	10
School No. 1	61	10
School No. 1	55	10
Total	207	40

Research Tool:

In order to collect systematic evidences, the researcher used following research tool.

Grammar-based Test:

The research used self-prepared structured test comprising use of modal auxiliary verbs and it included varied questions sets.

- Fill in the blanks using suitable modal auxiliary including *can, may, must, should etc.*
- Sentence Correction: Students have to read sentence and identify and use correct modal auxiliary verb.



- MCQ: this form of assessment followed selecting proper verb form from the given options.
- Making verbal question using Modal Auxiliary: this form of question allowed students to convert sentence from assertive to interrogative or negative using proper modal auxiliary.

Procedure:

- Formal permission from the school administration sought initially to follow ethics.
- School working hours were utilized for administering test.
- Selected students were taken to separate class to administer test in fair environment.
- 30 minutes to each class from all schools were given to go through the test.
- Initially clear instructions were given by the researcher to all students.

Data Analysis:

Table-1
Students Distribution

School No	Selected Students	Percentage
School A	10	25%
School B	10	25%
School C	10	25%
School D	10	25%
Total	40	100%

Table-2
Frequency of Types of Errors in Modal Auxiliary:

Criteria	Frequency of Errors	Percentage
Omission	119	29.50%
Addition	58	15%
Misuse	49	12.50%
Incorrect Verb Form	77	19%
Deception	90	22.50%



Table-3
Mean and SD of Types of Errors

Criteria	Mean	SD
Omission	3.0	1.1
Addition	1.48	0.8
Misuse	1.23	0.7
Incorrect Verb Form	1.90	0.8
Deception	2.25	1.0

It is with reference to the data from the above table it reveals that **Omission** is the highest error committed by the study of standard 8th in the city schools, accounting almost 30% of total errors, having average of 3 omission per student (SD=1.1), shows a high and significant difficulty while recognizing the correct form of modal auxiliary used in sentences.

Addition error percentage (15%) indicates a marginal significant difficulty having average of 1.48 per student with SD 0.8.

Misuse is another frequent error that has been counted indicates 12.50% among all errors committed by the students. Mean score 1.23 and SD 0.7 indicates confusion in the use of modal auxiliary verb due to the interference of mother tongue while writing in English as well as insufficient contextual understanding.

Incorrect Verb Form is another frequent error that students committed. The proportion of 19% in total frequency of errors is counted following 1.90 Mean and 0.8 SD. This indicates students struggle while using proper auxiliary form in either given sentence or choosing proper option.

Deception is the second largest error after the omission with 22.50% having 2.25 Mean and 1.0 SD.



Table-4
Error in Specific Modal Auxiliary

Modal Auxiliary	Frequency	Percentage
Can	130	32.50
Must	92	23.00
Shall	68	18.25
Will	54	13.75
May	56	15.50

Mean and SD of Types of Errors

Criteria	Mean	SD
Can	3.25	1.2
Must	2.35	1.10
Shall	1.65	0.8
Will	1.60	0.7
May	1.30	0.7

The modal **can** has the highest number of errors (32.5%). Students made an average of 3.25 mistakes with this modal, showing confusion in expressing ability or possibility. The high SD (1.2) means the number of errors varied a lot among students. Errors with **must** were also frequent (23%), with an average of 2.35 mistakes per student. This shows difficulty in expressing obligation. The SD of 1.10 indicates moderate variation in student understanding.

With 18.25% of total errors, **shall** was also confusing for many students. The average errors were 1.65 with a low SD (0.8), meaning students made similar mistakes. It may reflect unfamiliarity with its formal use.

Errors in **will** use made up 13.75%. The average mistakes were 1.60, with a small SD (0.7), showing students have some basic understanding but still make regular errors. Confusion may come from future tense use.

The modal **may** had the lowest number of errors (15.5%), with an average of 1.30. The SD of 0.7 shows consistency in performance. Students are likely using it correctly for permission and possibility in most cases.



Interpretation of Errors:

- In omission error, students leave out the necessary modal auxiliary in their sentence. E.g. They go the school. (Here they omit the auxiliary 'must')
- In addition, students added unnecessary modal auxiliary like: She can do dance well.
- Wrong use of verb error followed wrong use of verb after the modal auxiliary like: She can went home after her work. (here went is wrong verb and should be 'go')
- Misuse of modal auxiliary followed incorrectly in view of meaning and sentence. He can have gone. (Here can is incorrect and should be 'must'.)

Findings of the Study: On the basis of the above data analysis and its interpretation, following findings have been drawn.

- Omission found the most frequent and common error that students committed while using them in sentences or selecting proper option. (29.5% frequency with 3.0 mean)
- Deception and Incorrect Verb Form, respectively 22.50 and 19.00% were also major challenges for students while using modal auxiliary. Data also reveals confusion among the students while using them.
- Misuse and Addition of unrelated verb forms were another challenges faced by the students as they added unnecessary form or used them in wrong context.
- The modal auxiliary 'can' found highest frequency of error as compared to the other modal with 32.50% of frequency.
- Modal auxiliaries will and may show better understanding among the students as the frequencies of error of them were low within them.
- Errors in using modal auxiliaries while writing sentences was uniform in all selected schools of Shirpur city; suggest general need to improve students writing grammatically correct.

Conclusion:

This study shows that maximum students learning in standard 8th in Shirpur city secondary schools make mistakes when they wrongly or incorrectly use modal auxiliary. This is not in case of writing only, they even make mistake in selecting proper option. The highest frequency of error in using this form was omission and wrong verb, while modals like can



and must and shall were wrongly used by them. These high frequencies of errors are due to weaker knowledge about grammar and its use as well as less practice sessions in their learning. Therefore, teacher should focus on organizing practical language use sessions instead of engaging grammar on forms.

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