

## AN ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH MODALS IN EDUCATIONAL ESSAYS OF 'SHERRY JOHNSON' AND 'TAMJID MUJTABA'

**Ikrar Genidal Riadil**

Universitas Tidar, Magelang  
Corresponding Email: [ikrargenidal21@gmail.com](mailto:ikrargenidal21@gmail.com)

Received: 26<sup>th</sup> of April 2020, Accepted: 17<sup>th</sup> of May 2020, Published: 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2020

### Abstract

This research aimed to scrutinize the use of English modals in modal verb phrase structures in the educational essays of 'Sherry Johnson' and 'Tamjid Mujtaba,' and further to increase learners' awareness of modals in writing. This study was a qualitative study in which modal verb phrases in the educational essays written by 'Sherry Johnson' and 'Tamjid Mujtaba' were analyzed qualitatively. This research has found that the most frequently used modal verbs in these essays are can, may, will, should, would, and must. The researchers found twenty-three different modal verbs in both academic essays, and twelve of them are found in 'Tamjid Mujtaba' essays. These modal verbs indicate actions, states, and conditions associated with education. These results correspond with the definition of these documents. The findings show how language expresses the characteristics of an academic text type in a professional and academic domain.

**Keywords:** content, formatting, article.

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti penggunaan bahasa Inggris dalam struktur frase kata kerja modal dalam esai pendidikan 'Sherry Johnson' dan 'Tamjid Mujtaba,' dan selanjutnya untuk meningkatkan kesadaran peserta didik akan modal secara tertulis. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif di mana frase kata kerja modal dalam esai pendidikan yang ditulis oleh 'Sherry Johnson' dan 'Tamjid Mujtaba' dianalisis secara kualitatif. Penelitian ini telah menemukan bahwa kata kerja modal yang paling sering digunakan dalam esai ini adalah dapat, mungkin, akan, harus, akan, dan harus. Para peneliti menemukan dua puluh tiga kata kerja modal yang berbeda di kedua esai akademik, dan dua belas di antaranya ditemukan dalam esai 'Tamjid Mujtaba'. Kata kerja modal ini menunjukkan tindakan, kondisi, dan kondisi yang terkait dengan pendidikan. Hasil ini sesuai dengan definisi dokumen-dokumen ini. Temuan menunjukkan bagaimana bahasa mengekspresikan karakteristik tipe teks akademik dalam domain profesional dan akademik.

**Kata Kunci:** modals, modal verb phrase, educational essay, corpus analysis

Copyright © 2020 Ikrar Genidal Riadil

## INTRODUCTION

Language is a method of capricious, vocal symbols that allow all individuals in a given other individual cultures or those who have learned the scheme of that culture, to communicate or to cooperate and interact each other (Riadil, 2020). According to Fuertes-Olivera & Tarp (2011), it is a "specialized corpus includes demonstrative oral and written texts which imitate the kind of language of a particular domain of a function". Since the corpora which include specialized uses of English are not freely available, the researcher usually have to compile them on their own.

The limitations to consideration that must be taken during corpus compilation are the genre and the subject of the texts, the type of texts, and the corpus size and language variety. For instance, if corpus analysis to emphasis on language structures of communication in written way. The aim of this research paper is to present the findings of a study of modal verbs, modal verb phrase structures and to present discussions for each modals that have found by the researcher of modality in an academic type of professional texts, i.e. ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ education essays. Imparting knowledge on modal auxiliary verb to the learners has always been a complex and difficult task for EFL teachers. Likewise, the EFL learners face the exertion and difficulty in learning and using the modal auxiliaries properly and appropriately in their written tasks. Ritz (2012), in the expert studies, they discovered that the foreign learners use modal verbs more in context and situation as opposed to native learners. In other words, foreign learners use modals in a different way from native learners.

Besides, English language and linguistics learners are mandatory to know the perspective or point of view and descriptive rules of English in order to be capable, skillful, and proficient to perform language tasks more effectively. The language functions and procedures or forms need to be simplified for one to be more proficient, and EFL students need to know the different kinds of grammatical knowledge at different phases in their own language (Waters, 2012). The EFL learners need to be acquainted and more familiar with specific grammatical rules in order to do some language tasks. An expert known as Clancy & O’Keeffe (2015) explains that as the EFL learner developments, it is predictable for them to be aware of some grammatical rules or terms like what establishes a subject-verb agreement, sentence, and others, it is sufficient to make them know and able to discuss with the teacher the errors that have been made, and as modal auxiliary verb is one aspect of grammar, the rules need to be simplified for EFL learners to be able to use it in proper way. One of an expert known as (Genç, 2017), said that in his own study, proves that German students who learn English are also unsure and doubtful of some of grammatical aspects in English, especially in understanding and knowledge the pragmatic category of modals and modality in accounting for the differential contextual insinuations. Undoubtedly, the EFL learners could be opposite the similar problems.

In language teaching, it has been strongly doubtful whether unambiguous grammar lessons have a role in foreign language classrooms (Liu Sun, 2015). Nevertheless, there is an amount of indecisiveness as to what and what not to teach. Teachers have to be more positive and know what and how much knowledge to carry and transfer to these learners as to facilitate learners to more effectively obtain and gain all four skills in learning the foreign language. This will ensure that these learners ultimately become to be more proficient speakers of the target language.

In previous study, the researchers adapted this study from one of an expert (Hinkel, 2011). Firstly, Hinkel (2011) in the research entitled “*The effects of essay topics on modal verb uses in L1 and L2 academic writing.*” The researcher adapted from this journal because it related to this research. Besides, the study gap is to investigate and analyze the English modal verbs that occurred in both of educational essays. It is important to distinguish the problems among EFL learners in using modals and find actions and measures to correct them and given that modals as a key role in a sentence or expression. Hence, the first educational essay is (Johnson, 2017) entitled “*Essay: U.S. public education something to be proud of*” and the second educational essay is (Mujtaba, 2016) entitled “*Education in London: Challenges and opportunities for young people.*” Conversely, the present study intends to examine the use of in academic ‘Sherry Johnson’ in 2017 and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ in 2016 essay of EFL Learners in terms of their forms, types, token, and functions from data made available by the researcher.

The research of English modal auxiliaries has been the subject of a vigorous concern amongst linguists who are especially interested in classifying its usage in different English varieties and in various font-type genres (Lindquist, 2009). For one thing, the ambiguity of definitions connected with modals has presented challenges to both semantic theory and concise grammar (Hwang & Lardiere, 2013). This is no secret that various grouping categories have been created by multiple authors in an effort to examine the functional roles of modals. Verstraete (2001), talks about modals using deontic, epistemic, and dynamic categories. Yet some others such as (Azar, 2002), perceive the functional features of the modal verbs without much understanding of classifications. Given their discrepancies in marking, they both agree on the role of modal auxiliaries in the representation of language exchange modality.

As seems to be often that the case, researchers use various mechanisms and methods to explore modal auxiliaries in specific routes. For example, in the Contrastive Rhetoric system, modal verbs have been explored in order to show the role of culture in writing and the variations in writing styles across cultures. Measurement frequency variations is the reason for the inference of the various values added to the modals. Of interest is the work of Chan (2015), The contrasting study of the English, Bulgarian, and Bulgarian Language academic texts has yielded findings that point to the common usage of modal verbs to convey detachment when writing academic texts and to the lesser value provided to modal verbs in terms of stimulus or dedication to the proposition.

More interestingly, research in modal verbs has been enriched using an approach to linguistic analysis known as corpus linguistics which has greatly expanded especially during the 1990s (Deshors & Gries, 2016). This cuttingedge development in terms of scientific techniques

and methods lends itself to various investigations involving large quantities of data and computeraided analysis. Valuable knowledge on the usage of modals in various varieties of English has been made accessible via a comprehensive corpus analysis. According to Nesselhauf (2011), who used representative samples of about 200 tokens from each of the modals in the London-Lund and LOB corpora arrived at important findings which have become a baseline of comparative research on modals with other English varieties. Some of her findings include: (1) *Would* is the most frequent modal in written British English, while *will* is more favored in the spoken English; (2) *Shall* is used to express obligation much more in written than spoken texts; (3) there seems to be significant differences between genres in terms of relative frequency of the „root“ and „epistemic“ uses of some modals; and (4) the epistemic use of *must*, *should*, *may* and *shall* is more frequent than the „root“ use in spoken compared to written English.

On the first glance, the evaluation of the above-mentioned literature on modal verbs seems to indicate that a lot of information has already been provided to describe the modal auxiliaries in English. However, more needs to be understood regarding the structure of English modals in the sense of language. Specifically, the logical features and the dynamic verb-phrase arrangement of modal verbs in English is still an unseeded ground. This gap in research void has prompted me to explore the English modals in order to gain insight into how they are utilized in five separate subgenres of the English educational essays genre.

## **METHOD**

This is a qualitative research. Patton & Cochran (2007), defines qualitative research is categorized by its purposes, which belongs to understanding some feature of social life, and this technique which is generate the word, rather than numbers, as data for the analysis. Qualitative research is understanding of social phenomenon based on participant’s point of view. In order to increase information into a certain phenomenon, such as an environment, a process, or a belief. The purpose of this study was to the frequency of modals used in the ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ education essays and the functions are the modals used by the essays ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’. According to Wood & Kroger (2012), discourse analysis explained as a person’s insight that comprehends methodological and conceptual elements. Furthermore, they also maintain that discourse data includes spoken and written transcripts. In the other hand, Riadil (2019) add that discourse analysis concerns on language use. Therefore, the researcher showed a discourse analysis to study the frequency of modals used in the ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ essays and the functions are the modals used by the essays of ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’.

The object of this research were the ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ education essays. The entitles ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ essay is “U.S. public education something to be proud of” and the entitles of ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ essay is “Education in London: Challenges and opportunities for young people”. The words that counted on the ‘Sherry Johnson’ essay is 544 words and the words that counted on ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ essay is 1055 words. To instigate the study, the researcher defined what *modal* are rendering to some experts. Then, the researcher observed and looked for and chosen the essays which was used. After collecting the objects of this research, in the next part of the research process, the essays were analyzed by using the theories. In this process, the researcher used three steps. First, the researcher observed and looked for some essays, and then found the modal verbs in each of the essays. Second, the findings were analyzed and classified into the types and token of modal verbs. Third, the findings of classifications were defined and explained as the possible reasons why the modal on ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ essays are used on the essay. Those three steps to response and answer the research questions in this study. Finally, the researcher drew the conclusion based on the finding in this research.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

This part discusses the results of this research. It contains of two sections, namely the token of modals used in the ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ essays and for what functions are the modals used by the essays of ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’.

### **The Types and Frequencies of Modal**

This section answered the first project questions about types of modal used in the ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ essays. There are nine types of modals; those are Can, May, Shall, Will, Could, Might, Should, Would, and Must. From the data which were taken by the researcher by a recording of utterances in the ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ essays, there were nine types of Modals used by them. The data that were produced by a concordance search of modals used in ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ essays which the written academic work forms supplied the observed figures to distinguish the distribution of modals at the different levels.

Since this study was to investigate the modal and semi-modal verbs, the researcher just focused on the modal verbs. They were Can, May, Shall, Will, Could, Might, Should, Would, and Must modal with the total number of occurrences 11 in ‘Sherry Johnson’ essay and 12 in ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ essay. The details of the types of modal used in the ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ essays presented in the following table:

Table 1. The Token Count of Modals for ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ Essay

No.	Modals	Sherry Johnson Essay	Tamjid Mujtaba Essay
1.	Can	1	8
2.	May	-	-
3.	Shall	-	-
4.	Will	7	3
5.	Could	-	-
6.	Might	-	-
7.	Should	1	1
8.	Would	1	1
9.	Must	1	-
	<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>

The table above implies that the most token or frequent of modals used in the ‘Sherry Johnson’ essays was Can (1), May (-), Shall (-), Will (7), Could (-), Might (-), Should (1), Would (1), and Must (1), with total number of occurrences 11, and the most frequent of models used in the ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ was Can (8), May (-), Shall (-), Will (3), Could (-), Might (-), Should (1), Would (1), and Must (-), with total number of occurrences 12.

## Discussions

### The Functions of Modals

Actually, according to Diewald (2002) stated that modals have many functions argues that modals have some functions which depend on the situation of the text. There were at least nine functions of models which became the focus on this study. They were Can, May, Shall, Will, Could, Might, Should, Would, and Must. The researcher analyzed the use of modals and cleared the functions by considering the context of the condition from the utterances.

As already presented in the previous section, the essays produced modals in different functions. It used nine different types of modals based on some expert theories. In this study, modals as hesitation devices appeared the most in the selected essays. These were some function of models used in the ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ essays.

## A. Can

Passive

Corpus Findings:

1. In Academic prose, **can** is used in passive voice because most passive constructions are formed with the auxiliary *be* followed by an *ed*-participle.
2. In Academic prose, **can** is used in passive voice because that is used to avoid explicit identification of the person who is obligated to act.
3. The meaning of **can** is indicating ability or capacity to do

Active

Corpus Findings:

4. In Academic paper, **can** is used in active voice because the function of **can** in those sentences to describes the subject actually doing the action.
5. The meaning of **can** is indicating ability or capacity to do
6. In Academic paper, **can** is used in active voice because that is used to avoid explicit identification of the act that is obligated to person.

## B. May

Active

Corpus Findings:

1. In Academic paper, **may** is used in active voice because the function of **may** in those sentences to describes the subject actually doing the action.
2. The meaning of **may** is indicating ability or capacity to do
3. In Academic paper, **may** is used in passive voice because that is used to avoid explicit identification of the act that is obligated to person.

Present Perfect Tense

Corpus Findings:

4. In Academic paper, **may** is used in Present Perfect Tense, because the verb *been* is the most common present perfect form in all registers except conversation.
5. The meaning of **may** is indicating the activity that happens before another time or event..
6. In Academic paper, **may** is used in Present Perfect Tense, because the verb has/have is the single most common present perfect verb in any one register.

### C. Shall

There is no shall of modal verbs in each essays, but shall itself have two general function such as:

1. In Academic paper, **shall** used with “I” and “we” to talk about the future (especially in formal British English
2. In Academic paper, **shall** used with “I” and “we” to ask questions or make suggestions

### D. Will

Corpus Findings:

Passive

1. In Academic paper, **will** is used in passive voice because most passive creations are formed with the auxiliary *be* followed by an *ed*-participle.
2. In Academic paper, **will** is used in passive voice because that is used to avoid explicit identification of the person who is obligated to act.
3. The meaning of **will** is indicating the activity in the future.

Simple Future Tense

Corpus Findings:

1. In Academic paper, **will** is used in Simple Future Tense, because **will** in that sentence indicate what the subject are going to be in the future. .
2. The meaning of **will** is expressing the future tense.
3. In Academic paper, **will** is used to expressing the inevitable event.

### E. Could

Active

Corpus Findings:

1. In Academic paper, **could** is used in active voice because the function of **could** in those sentences to describes the subject actually doing the action.
2. The meaning of **could** is indicating ability or capacity to do
3. In Academic paper, **could** is used in active voice because that is used to avoid explicit identification of the act that is obligated to person.
4. In Academic paper, **could** is the past form of **can**, and more polite than **can**.

### F. Might

There is no might of modal verbs in each essays, but shall itself have two general function such as; might is used to express what is hypothetical, counterfactual, or remotely possible, might is also has function as used to be allowed to, possible or



probable as well. Might is also used when a person discussing something that has a slight possibility of happening, or it can used to ask for permission in a more polite way.

### G. Should

Active

Corpus Findings:

1. In Academic paper, **should** is used in active voice because the function of **should** in those sentences to describes the subject actually doing the action.
2. The meaning of **should** is indicating an intention.
3. In Academic paper, **should** is used in active voice because that is used to avoid explicit identification of the act that is obligated to person.
4. In Academic paper, **should** is the past form of **shall**, and more polite than **shall**.

### H. Would

Past Future Perfect Tense

Corpus Findings:

1. In Academic paper, **would** is used in Past Future Perfect Tense because the function of **would** in that sentence to describes the even that is hoped and predicted that it will be done before a certain time in the future from the perspective of the future , then it will be correct or not according to what is desired.
2. The meaning of **would** is indicating the effect or consequence of an imagined event or situation.
3. In Academic paper, **would** is the past form of will.
4. In Academic paper, **would** more polite than **will**.

Passive

Corpus Findings:

1. In Academic paper, **would** is used in passive voice because most passive creations are formed with the auxiliary *be* followed by an *ed*-participle.
2. In Academic paper, **would** is used in passive voice because that is used to avoid explicit identification of the person who is obligated to act.
3. In Academic paper, **would** is the past form of will.
4. In Academic paper, **would** more polite than **will**.

Past Future Tense

Corpus Findings:

1. In Academic paper, **would** is used in Past Future Tense because the function of **would** in that sentence to express the circu stance in the future from the perspective of the past.
2. The meaning of **would** is indicating the effect of an imagined event or situation.
3. In Academic paper, **would** is the past form of will.
4. In Academic paper, **would** more polite than **will**.

#### **I. Must**

There is no must of modal verbs in each essays, but shall itself have two general function such as:

1. In Academic paper, **must** To show that you have or need to do something, for example because it is very important and necessary to do or because it is a rule
2. The meaning of **must** “Must not” (or “mustn’t”) is used to show you are not allowed to do something
3. In Academic paper, **must** To show that something is very logical or very likely to be true.

### **CONCLUSION**

In a nutshell, this study that attempted to find out and investigate the used of modals in the ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ essays that the object produced modals for different functions. Based on the data that already investigated in the ‘Sherry Johnson’ and ‘Tamjid Mujtaba’ essays produce 24 modals which it produces nine different types of modals. The results of this study showed that there were nine types of modals; those were those are Can, May, Shall, Will, Could, Might, Should, Would, and Must. Furthermore, this study also showed nine functions of modals, namely Can, May, Shall, Will, Could, Might, Should, Would, and Must.

As the learners of foreign language (FL), we should know the modals not only as a distraction of writing but also as the way to improve our writing skill. The aims of this study are to introduce the types, frequencies and the functions of modals verbs and to increase the learners’ awareness of modals when they hesitate in the foreign language. Furthermore, the foreign language (FL) learners can learn and use modals which are good to use. It also helps foreign language (FL) learners to choose which modals can use proper for our writing. Henceforth, this study has revealed that how important the modals in the writing especially in academic or professional writing. Forthwith, to a certain extent, the findings of this study will also be expected to provide contributions to the development of the theory, especially to corpus linguistics and sociolinguistics study since this study is based on corpus linguistics.

## REFERENCES

- Azar, B. S. (2002). Understanding and Using English Grammar Third Edition. In *Executive's Guide to COSO Internal Controls*.
- Chan, T. H. T. (2015). A corpus-based study of the expression of stance in dissertation acknowledgements. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2015.09.005>
- Clancy, B., & O'Keeffe, A. (2015). Pragmatics. In *The Cambridge Handbook of English Corpus Linguistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/9781139764377.014>
- Deshors, S. C., & Gries, S. T. (2016). Profiling verb complementation constructions across New Englishes. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1075/ijcl.21.2.03des>
- Diewald, G. (2002). *A model for relevant types of contexts in grammaticalization*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1075/tsl.49.09die>
- Fuertes-Olivera, P. A., & Tarp, S. (2011). Lexicography for the third millennium: Cognitive-oriented specialised dictionaries for learners. *Iberica*.
- Genç, R. (2017). The Importance of Communication in Sustainability & Sustainable Strategies. *Procedia Manufacturing*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.promfg.2017.02.065>
- Hinkel, E. (2011). Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning. In *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203836507>
- Hwang, S. H., & Lardiere, D. (2013). Plural-marking in L2 Korean: A feature-based approach. *Second Language Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267658312461496>
- Johnson, S. (2017). Essay: U.S. public education something to be proud of. Retrieved June 5, 2020, from [democratandchronicle.com](http://democratandchronicle.com) website:  
<https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/opinion/guest-column/2017/06/23/us-public-education-top-notch/421069001/>
- Lindquist, H. (2009). Corpus linguistics and the description of English. In *Corpus Linguistics and the Description of English*. <https://doi.org/10.2478/icame-2020-0006>

- Liu Sun, K. (2015). There's no limit: Mathematics teaching for a growth mindset. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3132847.3132886>
- Mujtaba, T. (2016). Education in London: Challenges and opportunities for young people. *London Review of Education*, 14(2), 1–3.
- Nesselhauf, N. (2011). *Corpus Linguistics: A Practical Introduction*. University of Heidelberg.
- Quinn Patton, M., & Cochran, M. (2007). A Guide to Using Qualitative Research Methodology. In *Medecins Sans Frontieres*. Retrieved from <http://msf.openrepository.com/msf/handle/10144/84230>
- Riadil, Mar'ah, R. (2019). *INSERTS USED BY ARIANA GRANDE OF INTERVIEW IN*. 1937(October).
- Riadil, I. G. (2020). A Study of Students' Perception: Identifying EFL Learners' Problems in Speaking Skill. *International Journal of Education, Language, and Religion*, 2(1), 31–38.
- Ritz, M. E. (2012). Perfect Tense and Aspect. In *The Oxford Handbook of Tense and Aspect*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195381979.013.0031>
- Verstraete, J. C. (2001). Subjective and objective modality: Interpersonal and ideational functions in the English modal auxiliary system. *Journal of Pragmatics*. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(01\)00029-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(01)00029-7)
- Waters, A. (2012). Trends and issues in ELT methods and methodology. *ELT Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccs038>
- Wood, L. A., & Kroger, R. O. (2012). Doing Discourse Analysis: Methods for Studying Action in Talk and Text. In *Doing Discourse Analysis: Methods for Studying Action in Talk and Text*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452233291>