



THE USE OF MODAL VERBS IN L2 WRITING OF IRAQI UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received 30 th March 2022	The current study describes the use of modal verbs in essays written by Iraqi B.A. students at Tikrit University (in Tikrit province, Iraq). The main aim of the present study is to discover how participants use modal verbs in essay writing to provide a detailed analysis that will assist them in improving their writing. 84 Iraqi B.A. students at Tikrit University participated in this study. The participants wrote Eighty-four essays; each participant wrote one essay on a different topic that was chosen. Adopting Palmer's (1990) classification, the modal auxiliary verbs used by the participants were classified into three categories; a) Epistemic modality; b) Deontic modality; c) Dynamic modality. The results of the current study show that the participants used 'can' (f=261) followed by 'will' (f=105), 'must' (f=86), 'may' (f=37), 'should' (f=34), and 'would' (f=28). It was concluded that the students had overused some modal verbs. In addition, it was also determined that they had misused some modal verbs in their writings. The present study also concluded that students' ability in using modal verbs must be developed to reach the proper academic level in their writing.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Many researchers focused on cross-cultural studies of modal verbs used in English and other languages, exploring how academic writers use different modal verbs from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Carrió-Pastor (2014) aimed to identify how language variation could be determined in Spanish and English communication when writers use modal verbs of possibility and ability with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Recent studies by Lee (2013), Hinkel (2013), Huschová (2015), and Yang (2018) have focused on the use of modal verbs in native speakers' writing.

For decades, modality, which is concerned with the speakers'/writers' view and attitude toward propositional information, has focused on many studies. In academic written discourse, adept manipulation of modality markers has been explicitly recognized as a means of communicating the authors' stance, affection, or judgment toward both the propositions they make and the readers, as well as modifying their statements and avoiding the risk of face-threatening communicative activity among the potential addressees (Almeida & Pastor, 2017, p. 281).

Proper use of modality would significantly bolster the pragmatic aspect of academic writing (Myers, 1989), aid scholars in accurately expressing their research findings (Yang, 2018), also reflect an advanced level of linguistic and pragmatic proficiency in the written mode (Yang, 2018; Chen, 2010).

According to Stamatović (2016), modality is "one of the few loose concepts used in linguistics that defies any adequate formal explanation" (p. 132). Numerous academics associate the term 'modality' with the subjective standpoint of the speaker/writer. Language, generally maintained, is employed to transmit factual information regarding the validity of a proposition in an utterance and to communicate one's attitudes, views, thoughts, and ideologies about those occurrences.

The focus of recent studies (Thompson 2001, Huschová 2015) has been on the usage of modal verbs in academic writing, where they emphasized modal verb use in thesis writing of native speakers. Modal auxiliary verbs are often used to show obligation, probability, necessity, possibility, and certainty, indicating that the writer presents something with greater or lesser modality (Leech, 2014).

English modals auxiliary verbs refer to speakers' viewpoints and attitudes, like in the aspect of probability, necessity, and obligation (Krug & Palmer, 2012, p. 2). Unlike the lexical verbs, every modal has multiple meanings and uses, which usually do not have this characteristic (Palmer, 2014, p. 1). English language modal auxiliary verbs, such as can, will, may, and must, are not similar to the periphrastic modals or quasi-modals such as: be able to, be going to, have to, and need to (Nordstrom, 2010, p. 15). Quasi-modals are like modal verbs in the semantic aspect, but syntactically, they

act like lexical verbs (Nordstrom 2010, p. 15). Modal verbs or quasi-modals pose a problematic obstacle for non-native English students. It is also because the forms, uses, and implications of modal auxiliary verbs are distinctive and usually different from lexical ones (Leech, 2014, p. 72). For that reason, it is essential to make non-native English students more familiar with modal auxiliary verbs to help them in their academic writing.

On the other hand, researchers debated the use of modals by native speakers versus non-native speakers. The previous notions concerning using modal auxiliary verbs were explored by researchers like Carrió-Pastor (2014), Akeel (2014), Ngula (2017), and Omer (2016). On the other hand, Akeel (2014) analyzed the use of modal verbs in the English academic texts of Saudi Arabian advanced students whose native language is Arabic to develop a deeper understanding of the way modal verbs are used in academic writing when done by Saudi Arabian non-native speakers of English in comparison with native speakers of English.

Vold (2006) also analyzed and compared modality in different languages such as English, French, and Norwegian. Moreover, Khoshshima (2016) studied modality application in English linguistics research articles cross-culturally and cross-linguistically.

Huschová (2015) explored the frequency and use of the English modal verbs (can and could) and (may and might) that express possible meanings in the academic writings in terms of linguistics and contextual aspects determining the interpretation of these modal auxiliary verbs. In his study, Lee (2013) attempted to address an essential issue in academic writing, the way teachers and professors hedge their remarks by using modal verbs. The study focused on written feedback from two Humanity departments in a British higher education institution. The researcher categorized four uses of the modal verbs: criticism, suggestions, possibility, and necessity.

Modal verbs in academic writing were also discussed by researchers like Lee (2013), Hinkel (2013), Yang (2018), and Huschová (2015). Modal auxiliary verbs have been the subject of many scholarly studies and articles that included native and non-native academic writers. Consequently, the present study will explore and discuss Iraqi students' use of modal verbs at Tikrit University to fill the gap that there are very limited studies on the use of modal verbs by Iraqi students at Iraqi universities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Modal verbs generally show how the meaning of a specific sentence is employed to express the speaker's degree of the probability conveyed in the sentence. Modals have many semantic implications, such as necessity, permission, certainty, and obligation. One can use many different devices in the English language to express modality through their speech. One could use nouns like the words (anticipation, determination, and hope). Also, adjectives could describe modality like the words (unsure, possible, guaranteed, and probable).

Moreover, verbs could be used to convey modality just as (belief, suppose and expect). In addition, adverbs are used to convey modality, such as (barely, maybe, probably, and obviously). However, modality is most regularly conveyed through the use of modal verbs.

2.1 Modal Verbs

Modality and modal verbs in English have intrigued theorists from different disciplines, including philosophy, logic, grammar, historical linguistics, semantics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, computational linguistics, etc. This interest stems from their central position in English grammar. Among other linguistic means, modal verbs help express the individuals' representation of reality and how they want this reality (Coates & Leech, 1980, p.25). With the advent of corpus linguistics, increasing attention has been directed to modal verbs in native and non-native English languages. In native English, many corpus studies of modal verbs in American and British English have been conducted. (e.g. Coates, 1983; Coates & Leech, 1980; Leech, 2004; Leech et al., 2009; Mair & Leech, 2006; Barber, 2002).

Likewise, various cross-linguistic corpus-based studies of learner modal verbs have been carried out. Chief among them are Römer (2004) on German Learners, Viana (2006) and Tenuta, Oliveira & Orfanó (2015) on Brazilian learners of English, Hsieh (2005) on Chinese learners of English, Khojasteh & Reinders (2013) on Malaysian learners of English, Orta (2010) and Carrió-Pastor (2014) on modal verbs used by Spanish learner of English, Wilson (2009) on written Indian English, Hinkel (1995) on modal verbs in Asian learners corpora. The attention paid to modality in general and modal verbs stems from their practical importance in successful communication. In L2 English, they have gained particular interest due to the tremendous difficulties in teaching and learning.

Though diverse, most definitions of modality generally describe it as a semantic construct used to express speaker's attitudes/stances (to the truth of a proposition and the hearer), opinions, beliefs, intentions, desires, etc. (Lyons, 1977; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik 1985; Orta, 2010; among others). Formally, modality manifests itself in various forms such as modal verbs, modal lexical verbs, modal adjectives, and modal adverbs. Modality is also realized by employing intonation patterns. Such devices convey the meanings of possibility, obligation, prediction, etc.; such devices simultaneously entail pragmatic aspects such as (im)politeness, sarcasm, seriousness, social involvement/detachment, doubt, conviction, etc. (Leech, 1971).

Various and controversial taxonomies of modal verbs have been proposed by some theorists (e.g. Palmer, 2001). In some taxonomies, modal verbs fall into three types: 1- deontic modals (those expressing obligation, allowance, permission, suggestions, desire, etc., in different degrees of certainty), 2- epistemic modals (those expressing speculations, deductions, inferences, assertions, etc. also in various degrees of confidence and possibility), and 3-

dynamic modals (those conveying factual propositions of ability, volition, etc.) (Hsieh, 2005; Abdul-Fattah, 2011). However, most studies prefer a two-type classification: epistemic and deontic, as there has been no consensus on the dynamic function (Leech et al., 2009). Modal verbs are further grouped under various semantic and discourse-oriented classifications such as speaker-oriented, subject-oriented, and discourse-oriented (Hsieh, 2005), intrinsic (deontic), and extrinsic (epistemic) (Biber et al. 1999, cited in Orta, 2010, p.80). Further, Hacquard & Wellwood (2012, p.1) argue that "the question of whether epistemic modals contribute to the truth conditions of the sentences they appear in is a matter of active debate in the literature". The result is that modality, and modal verbs continue to be a crucial and controversial issue in linguistic theory.

The diverse forms of epistemic modals make them challenging to use in L2. Epistemic modals generally fall into many forms, each having different degrees of certainty and possibility. Palmer (2001, p.22) suggests three forms: speculative (may), deductive (must), and presumptive (will). The latter form is the strongest in assertions. Some lexical items expressing modality, called boosters and down toners, either enhance or mitigate the core epistemic meaning of the verbs (Chen, 2010). Grammarians and semantics have a relatively common consensus on designating several semantic senses for each modal verb. Can expresses ability, general possibility, suggestions, offers, and permissions, all of which are deontic except for ability (dynamic/deontic) and possibility (epistemic). It could act similarly yet in the past, present, and future events. Must communicate senses of necessity, lack of necessity, obligation, prohibition, etc. Will and shall convey such meanings as prediction, in various degrees, volition (intention, desire, willingness), offer, instant decisions, promises, etc. Will "means that something is certainly true, even though we cannot see it true" (Eastwood, 2002, p. 121). Would give similar meanings in addition to hypothetical meaning, future time reference, habitual action in the past, wishes, polite requests, permission, determination, etc. May and might denote possibility, permission, requests, optative (for May). Should express possibility, necessity, and obligation.

2.1.1 Syntactic Aspects of Modal Verbs

Typically, modal auxiliaries have different functions and forms from lexical and talk, run, and open. Furthermore, even though semi-modal verbs act like modal verbs in semantic aspects, many semi-modal verbs act differently from modal verbs in syntactic elements. Consequently, many grammatical rules for lexical and semi-modal verbs cannot be applied to modal and semi-modal verbs like ought to.

The auxiliary verbs mainly represent modality can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, and would. Modal verbs have distinct features that are not shared with lexical verbs. The first characteristic is that the additions -ing, to, -ed are not attached to any modal verbs (Hykes, 2000, p. 7).

Secondly, there is no need to use the "to do" or "to be" formula in making questions or interrogative forms when using modal verbs (Hykes, 2000, p. 7). Another characteristic is that a modal verb can be used independently without the need of a lexical verb when there are two equivalent clauses, as in: "She can run. So can he." It means that the second (can) is used to replace the lexical verb (run). Moreover, modal verbs do not need a third-person singular -s: *"He coulds". Also, modal verbs do not come in the imperative form, and they do not come together in the same sentence (Hykes, 2000, p. 8).

Even though modal verbs have the above-mentioned indistinct features, the process of differentiation between lexical verbs and modal verbs is not apparent (Biber, 1998, p. 15). Lexical verbs may also be considered modal verbs in a few cases, at least in spoken situations. However, there are two types of these verbs. The first type is the marginal auxiliary verbs (need to, dare to, and used to). The marginal auxiliary verbs have characteristics similar to modal verbs since they have the same negative and interrogative formulas: (used not to, need not, dare we?).

According to Palmer (2001) and Hykes (2000), the verb (ought to) can also be considered as part of the marginal auxiliary verbs. On the other hand, there are quasi-modals or better known as semi-modals which consist of auxiliary verbs plus the preposition (to), such as the verbs: have to, (had) better, be supposed to, (have) got to, and be going to. These colloquial semi-modals function similarly to modal verbs do (Palmer, 2001, p. 219). However, nine verbs were recognized in earlier grammar books as essential modal verbs (may, might, will, would, shall, should, can, could, and must).

These verbs are different from other auxiliary verbs because modals do not change their spelling or form in all the clauses and do not have infinitive and participle forms. Otherwise, these verbs are auxiliary verbs, indicating that they change the meaning of another verb in the sentence. Other verbs that are sometimes, but not always, referred to as modal verbs include ought, had better, and, in some cases, dare and need.

2.1.2 Semantic Aspects of Modal Verbs

Modal verbs are mainly inserted in sentences to express meanings that are not described by using the main auxiliary verb. Modals generally convey probability, intention, obligation, permission, and necessity; for instance:

1. "John must travel to Mexico today."
2. "John travels to Mexico today" (Joshi, 2014, p.12).

The first sentence shows that "John" is obliged to travel to Mexico. Moreover, in the second sentence, "John" is not compelled to travel to Mexico, but he does anyway. Even though the central indication of the first and second sentence is the same, "travels to Mexico today," the modal verb 'must', gives semantic information, that is to say, obligation in the first sentence. However, all modal verbs have two characteristics: epistemic implications -common-sense probability-

and root - related to social interaction situations- implications (Yamamoto, 1999, p. 12).

The epistemic implications refer to the meanings of prediction or inference; the root implications are generally used in social interaction situations between two speech participants (Yamamoto, 1999, p. 12). For example, "should" regularly conveys probability in epistemic aspects but advisability when used in the interactional situation.

1. "It should rain this evening." (Joshi, 2014, p.13).
2. "You should make peace with him." (Joshi, 2014, p.13).

In the first sentence above, which has "should" in epistemic implication, the speaker expresses a common-sense probability about the weather and uses the modal verb should without its root meaning. On the other hand, the second sentence has "should" in its root implication; the speaker advises the other speech participant. Additionally, the second sentence has some social power over how the two speeches participants interact.

As a result, the speaker has authority over the speech participant since the speaker chooses "should" instead of "might" and "could" that convey a lesser source. Regardless of whether using the modals in the epistemic or the root aspect, it can generally be decided by considering the context of that particular sentence, the implication of the statement, and the conditions of the speech or conversation. However, modal verbs are mainly determined by considering the context, as shown in the following examples:

1. "You may borrow the guitar next Sunday."
2. "John is looking for the pen that you needed for you now".
3. You may take the pen two hours later." (Joshi, 2014, p.14)
4. "I need my car to go to the market today. You may take the car today."

In the first sentence above, the modal verb "may" can be taken to mean either in a likelihood aspect (epistemic implication) or in a permissive factor (root implication). If the reader does not know the context of the sentence, it is not easy to decide which importance of the modal the speaker means. In addition, the modal verb "may" in the second sentence can be taken to mean probability (epistemic implication) because another sentence followed that determined the context.

The second sentence can be restated as "John is looking for the pen now, so there is a possibility that you will take it two hours later." However, the modal verb "may" in the third sentence above, conversely, is taken to mean permission "root implication" as the sentence can be paraphrased into "the car belongs to me, and I allow you to take it today after I did with shopping in the market."

Moreover, modals have a significant characteristic: modal verbs such as can, could, may, might, should, and would in their epistemic or root implication, are taken to give theoretical implications, known as irrealis mood (Yamamoto, 1999, p. 14). Irrealis attitude relates to the modal verbs in the epistemic aspects (likelihood, possibility, and necessity) that do not usually include speakers' judgment of what is or is not expected to occur.

In addition, Irrealis can be defined as: Statements in which irrealis occur (sometimes referred to as "irreal" or "irrealized utterances") are often regarded as non-factive by grammarians; that is, they do not commit the speaker to the proposition's truth or falsehood. (Gaik, 1992). For that reason, the statement: "Mike could travel to Boston last night" could be interrupted as a simple past tense statement or as an irrealis mood. The sentence indicates that Mike could travel in the first case, and he did it last night. The second case would suggest that Mike could travel, but he preferred not to do it. Also, there is an additional meaning of the theoretical implication of modals, which can be observed in conditional sentences which sometimes contain "if" and sometimes not. For examples:

1. "If you play the guitar, he should play the violin."
2. "If I had arrived sooner, I would have played cards with my friends."
3. "I would not dance in this way."
4. "It could be wonderful." (Joshi, 2014, p.15)

Conditional sentences are typically made up of compound phrases like the first and second sentence above, even though there are some of those conditional sentences which are made up of one word, for example, in the third sentence, "I would not dance in this way" which means "if I were you." Also, the fourth sentence, "It could be wonderful", contains the meaning "if it were so". As already discussed, modal verbs can convey meanings that are not expressed by lexical verbs.

2.2 Research Questions

- 1-How are modal verbs employed to serve semantic and pragmatic purposes?
- 2-How do Iraqi undergraduate Students at Tikrit University use modal verbs in their writing?
- 3-What types of modal verbs are misused by Iraqi B.A. students, and how their L1 affect their use of modal verbs?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A quantitative approach was adopted in the current study to explore the use of modal verbs in L2 writing by Iraqi B.A. students. The semantic perspective of Palmer (1990) was followed in classifying the Modal verbs. The modal verbs are classified as follows into three categories:

- **Epistemic Modals**
 1. Modals of possibility: (*can, could, may, might*).
 2. Modals of deduction: (*could, may, must*).
 3. Modals of expectation: (*shall, should, will, would*).
- **Deontic Modals**
 1. Modals of permission: (*can, could, may, might*).
 2. Modals of obligation: (*must, shall, should, will*).
- **Dynamic Modals**
 1. Modals of ability: (*Can, could*).
 2. Modals of habit: (*might, would*).

3.2 Participants

The present study was conducted with 84 B.A. students studying the English language at Tikrit University. These participants were divided into two groups: 42 males and 42 females. Those students were volunteers for the experiment, and they were chosen randomly. The study was conducted specifically to explore the use of modal auxiliary verbs in the participant's essays. The researcher assured that all students had knowledge about this analysis and officially decided to participate. However, the student's ability and English proficiency levels were variant as they were chosen randomly. The students that participated in this study are from three different stages (first, second, and third years). The researcher asked the students to write descriptive essays on various topics. The students from three stages wrote their essays inside the classroom. Each stage took one week to submit their essays because of the pandemic of COVID 19. The stages that the researcher has taken are freshman, sophomore, and Senior. Since the students are learning English as a foreign language, students have passed specific courses in writing. The freshmen students have passed basic writing and grammar writing. Sophomore students have passed a course of writing and intermediate essay writing. Finally, senior students have passed a course in advance writing. The participants were divided into three groups; as mentioned before, the participants studying English as a foreign language at Tikrit University (42 males and 42 females) from P1 to P.14 are first stage males and from P.15 to P.28 are first stage females. In addition, from P.29 to P.42 are second stage males and from P.43 to P.57 are second stage females. Moreover, from P.58 to P.70 are third stage males and from P.71 to P.84 are third stage females. The participants are aged between 20-25 years.

3.3 Data collection

The present study uses Palmer's (1990) classification of modal verbs and the essays of Tikrit university students as instruments. The B.A. students who participated in the study were assigned to write a descriptive essay. The researcher asked the students on topics that they were familiar with ("Write about Education in your University" for freshman students, "Write about Smoking negative effects on Health " for sophomore, ("Write about Technology effects on Society)" for senior students. The explanation for the researcher's choice to write a descriptive essay was that the students were more familiar with descriptive essays.

Palmer's (1990) views about the modal auxiliary verbs will be applied to mark and assess the modal auxiliary verbs used in selected students' essays. He suggests that the modals more commonly used in English are *may, might, will, would, shall, should, can, could, and must*. However, other modals used less frequently are *had better, have to, need, and dare*.

Palmer (1990) differentiates between epistemic, deontic, and dynamic types of modal verbs. According to him, epistemic modality requires judgment on an argument based on facts and information by the speaker. Epistemic modality thus ultimately includes the assessment, points, and indices of the speaker. The deontic modality, on the other hand, involves what is compulsory, allowed, or prohibited. Epistemic and deontic modalities should also be viewed as reflecting the speaker's attitudes towards ideas and activities. Finally, according to Palmer, dynamic modality concerns the potential and commitment of the sentence subject.

The current study uses a quantitative research design to explore modal verbs in the students' writing. To increase the reliability of the data analysis, the researcher used AntConc for corpus analysis. AntConc is a freeware, multi-platform, multi-purpose corpus analysis toolkit explicitly designed for use in the classroom. The program will identify the modal verbs that Iraqi students in their writings used. It hosts a comprehensive set of tools, including a powerful concordancer, word and keyword frequency generators, cluster and lexical bundle analysis tools, and a word distribution plot.

4. Findings

The results are presented as follows, in the order of the research questions:

4.1 Research question 1

How are modal verbs employed to serve semantic and pragmatic purposes?

The total papers entered into the program AntConc were 84 (females and males- no specifications). The program came up with the results:

- A- Out of the eighty-four essays of the three stages, the total rating of the words was 40000 to 44000 words.
- B- The total number of modal auxiliary verbs is 588 used in 84 essays.
- C- Can is the most used modal auxiliary verb in the analyzed essays (261), and will is in the second place (105).

The result of the analysis that AntConc came up with is more clarified by the following tables

Table (1) The Frequency of Epistemic Modals according to their Functions

Epistemic Modals	
Modals of Possibility	Frequency
Can	113
Could	9
May	21
Might	7
Modals of Deduction	Frequency
Could	2
May	9
Must	55
Modals of Expectation	Frequency
Shall	3
Should	18
Will	70
Would	17

This table shows the use of modal verbs according to their function; as shown in this table, participants used a high rate of the can (F=113) as modals of possibility in writing their essays, followed by may (F=21) as modals of possibility in writing their essays. In addition, the participants used modal verbs as modals of deduction, such as must (F=55). Moreover, the participants used modal verbs as modals of expectation, such as will (F=70).

Table (2) the Frequency of Deontic Modals according to their Functions

Deontic Modals	
Modals of Permission	Frequency
May	14
Might	3
Can	84
Could	6
Modals of Obligation	Frequency
Must	33
Shall	2
Should	5
Will	36

This table shows the use of modal verbs according to their function; as shown in this table, participants used a high rate of the can (F=84) as modals of permission in their essays, followed by may (F=14) as modals of permission in writing their essay. In addition, the participants used modal verbs as modals of obligation, such as will (F=36) followed by must (F=33) as modals of obligation in writing their essays.

Table (3) The Frequency of Dynamic Modals according to their Function

Dynamic Modals	
Modals of Ability	Frequency
Can	64
Could	3
Modals of Habit	Frequency
Might	2
Would	12

This table shows the use of modal verbs according to their function as can be seen; this table shows that participants used a high rate of the can (F=64) as modals of ability in their essays, followed by could (F=3) as modals of ability in their essays. In addition, the participants used modal verbs as modals of habit, such as would (F=12) followed by might (F=2) as modals of habit in their essays.

4.1 Research question 2

How do Iraqi undergraduate Students at Tikrit University use modal verbs in their L2 writing?

Table (4) The Frequency of Epistemic Modal Verbs used by Male and Female Students

Epistemic Modal Verbs			
Modal verbs	Male	Female	Both
Can	40	74	114
Could	7	4	11
May	7	19	26
Might	2	5	7
Shall	0	3	3
Should	9	13	22
Will	25	45	70
Would	10	6	16
Must	20	35	55

This table shows the use of epistemic modal verbs that male and female students use. As can be seen, male and female students used a high rate of the can. Male students used can (F=40) and female students used can (F=74), followed by will. Male students used will (F=25), and female students used will (F=45). Moreover, the participants rarely used some epistemic modal verbs, such as Might. Male students used Might (F= 2), and female students used Might (F=5). In addition, a modal verb like shall was not used by male students at all.

Table (5) The Frequency of Deontic Modal Verbs used by Male and Female Students

Deontic modality			
Modal verbs	Male	Female	Both
Can	34	49	83
Could	4	2	6
May	7	4	11
Might	1	2	3
Shall	0	2	2

Should	5	7	12
Will	13	22	35
Must	12	19	31

This table shows the use of deontic modal verbs that male and female students use. As can be seen, male and female students used a high rate of the can. Male students used can (F=34) and female students used can (F=49), followed by will. Male students used will (F=13), and female students used will (F=22). Moreover, the participants rarely used some deontic modal verbs, such as might. Male students used might (F= 1), and female students used might (F=2). In addition, a modal verb like shall was not used at all by male students.

Table (6) The Frequency of Dynamic Modal Verbs used by Male and Female Students

Modal verbs	Dynamic modality		
	Male	Female	Both
Can	18	46	64
Could	2	1	3
Might	0	2	2
Would	8	4	12

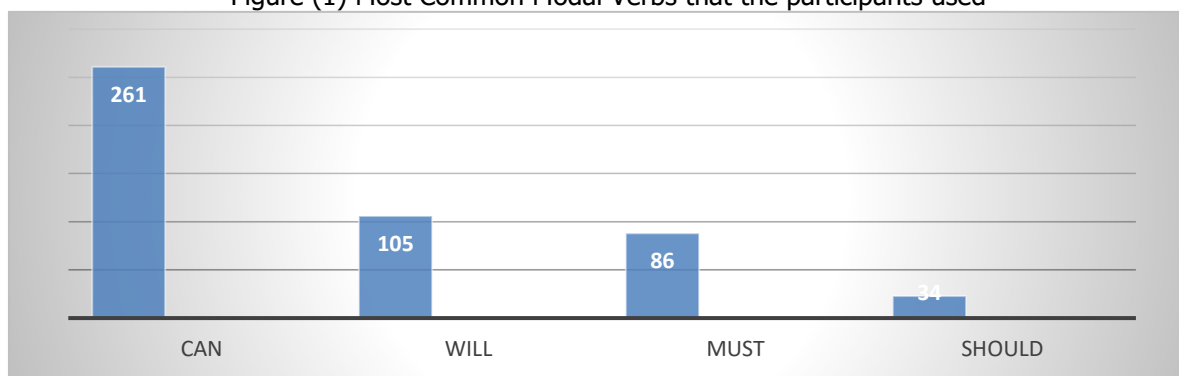
This table shows the use of dynamic modal verbs that male and female students use. As can be seen, male and female students used a high rate of can. Male students used can (F=18) and female students used can (F=46) followed by would. Male students used would (F=8), and female students used would (F=4). Moreover, the participants rarely used some dynamic modal verbs, such as: could. Male students used could (F= 2), and female students used could (F=1). In addition, a modal verb like might was not used at all by male students.

Table (7) The Use of Modal Verbs by Each Stage

Modal Verbs	First stage	Second stage	Third stage	Total
May	23	10	4	37
Might	0	10	2	12
Will	30	45	30	105
Would	5	10	13	28
Shall	0	2	3	5
Should	10	23	1	34
Can	132	93	36	261
Could	2	15	3	20
Must	14	59	13	86

This table shows the use of modal verbs at each stage; the students used a high rate of can followed by will. For example, first stage, students used can (F=132) and will (F=30). In the second stage, students used can (F=93) and will (F=45). Third stage students used can (F=36) and will (F=30). Moreover, three-stage students rarely used modal verbs such as shall (F=5) followed by might (F=12).

Figure (1) Most Common Modal Verbs that the participants used



This figure shows the most common modal verbs used by the participants in all stages; as can be seen in this figure, students used can (f=261), will (f=105), must (f=86), and should (f=34).

Figure (2) The Percentage of Each Category that the Iraqi B.A. Students used

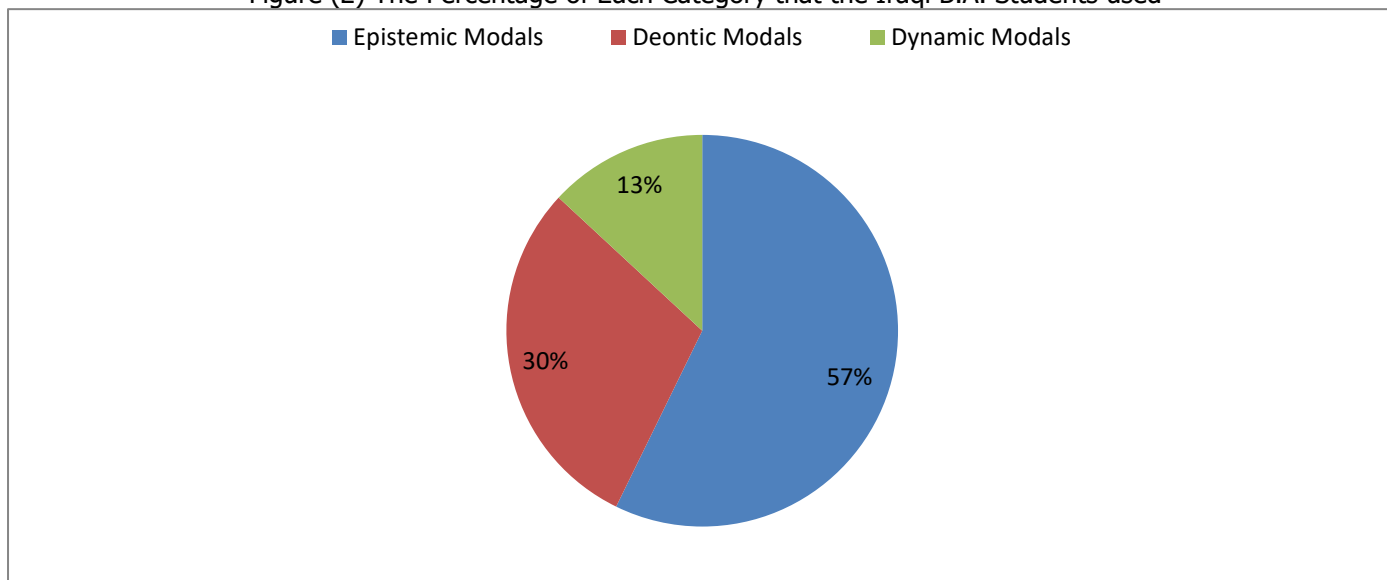


Figure (2) shows the percentage of modal verbs from each category used by the Iraqi B.A. students, as indicated by the categories of modal verbs utilized. Students utilized 57% Epistemic Modals, 30% Deontic Modals, and 13% Dynamic Modals, according to the conclusions of the data analysis performed using AntConc. The highest rate of the modal verbs is Epistemic.

Table (8) The Use of Each Category of Modal Verbs.

Modal Verbs		
Epistemic Modals	Deontic Modals	Dynamic Modals
324	183	81

This table shows all categories used by the participants; it can be seen that students used Epistemic Modals (F=324), Deontic Modals (F=183), and Dynamic Modals (F=81).

4.3 Research question 3

What types of modal verbs are misused by Iraqi B.A. students, and how their L1 affect their use of modal verbs?

Table (9) Modal Verbs that are misused by the three stages participants

Freshmen	<i>P.1</i> Education has a critical role to play in forming effective individuals. It must gives us the opportunit to become a productive member of a civilized society through the learning of all the requisite skills. We will learn how to face the difficulties and overcome the barriers. We may learn how to become an integrated individual and to sustain the perpetuation of our society.
Sophomore	<i>P.46</i> Today, everything we should use in our daily life is a gift of technology and without which we will not imagine our lives. This technology must organize engineering and manufacturing technology for the manufacture of machines. This would also make the manufacturing process simpler and more convenient. Also, we can not refuse the facts that it has caused severe damage to our surroundings.
Senior	<i>P.76</i> Over the years smoking has proven harm for our society and one such harm is at psychological level. Smoking can seem to take control of our mind and make us do illogical things. Some strong smoking people are increasing becoming threat for their families and a burden on the society. on the other side, those who might accept that smoking must be prohibited in public places argue that it is not always possible to walk away from smokers.

Table (9) shows the misused of modal verbs by the students at the three stages; as can be seen, the first-year students also made some grammatical and spelling mistakes. In addition, p.1 misused the modal verb will, making the sentence sound awkward and deformed. The student also misused the modal verb may. Also, participant p.46 made mistakes by using modal verbs such as should, which made his sentence weak rather than strong and effective. The participant also misused the modal must; he must use will to make his sentence strong and accurate.

However, the senior students made fewer mistakes in using modal verbs, such as the participant p.76 used the modal can in incorrect use, which made his sentence weak. These mistakes were that the students did not use English outside the classroom. In addition, when Arab students write essays or articles, they think first in Arabic; after that, they translate their thoughts to English and put them on paper; so the translation from L1 to L2 causes these mistakes because of the differences in the structure of English and Arabic language.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The current study has achieved its aim to explore the Modal Verbs that the Iraqi B.A. students used in their essay writing. The participants were B.A. students studying the English language at Tikrit University. The current study analyzed the essays that have been submitted by freshmen, sophomores, and seniors (first, second, and third years). The result of the data was that the participants involved have problems in their writing, especially with modal verbs. They have to work on their academic level to achieve the requirement of good writing. Considering cohesion and cohesive, all participants have problems in achieving them. They either overuse modal verbs in a particular place within the text or have misused them. This misuse and overuse of modal verbs have affected the quality of the writing. Students have introduced poor level essays which it filled with modal verbs issues. The current study found that most participants overuse can, will, and must because of their vocabulary limit. The result of this study is close to the result of other studies done by some researchers such as Carrió-Pastor (2014), Khoshsima (2016), Saleh Akeel (2014), Yang (2018), and Majeed and Hassoon (2016). In all the above studies, non-native speakers have specific difficulties employing modal verbs appropriately in their writings. Finally, the English Department at Tikrit University should provide a course in academic writing rather than depending only on the curriculum materials for the composition course to improve students' skills to fulfill excellent writing requirements. Also, as Jomaa (2019) suggests, cause of the complexity of both non-academic and academic discourses, several approaches and strategies should be used to gain both emic and etic perspectives from a writer by using different lenses.

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