

Saudi Tertiary Level Students' Cognition of Modal Auxiliaries Expressing Epistemic Possibility in English

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Abstract

The importance of studying modality as a tool that speakers use to convey their attitudes and evaluations is well documented. However, research on learners' cognition of modality is at its beginning. This paper concentrates on the cognition of possibility in epistemic modal auxiliaries. It relies on what it calls utterance completion test to study the cognition of epistemic modality by 29 Saudi students and by 3 native speakers – one British and two Canadians. The data analysis shows that while the native speakers' cognition is largely in line with linguists' descriptions, the Saudi students' cognition conforms very less to the linguists' descriptions. It reveals that students tend to confuse epistemic modality with deontic modality, and within epistemic modality itself, they confuse possibility with necessity. Saudi students also have difficulties with past epistemic possibility and they confuse the present perfect with the past proposition residue carried by modals. The study attributes this confusion to L1 transfer and lack of familiarity with some pragmatic aspects related to the target language culture. To help learners develop their cognition of modality, the study recommends that grammar textbooks and grammar teachers focus in the first place on the semantic subtleties of modal auxiliaries, without ignoring the pragmatic dimension that accompanies the utterances in which they occur. The study does not question by any means teaching language in context to develop speaking, listening, writing, and reading skills.

Key words: cognition, epistemic modality, language acquisition, meaning cognition, semantics

Cite as: Rouissi, I., & Abdesslem, H. (2015). Saudi Tertiary Level Students' Cognition of Modal Auxiliaries Expressing Epistemic Possibility in English. *Arab World English Journal*, 8 (1).

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol6no1.16>

I- Introduction

Unlike many aspects of grammar, modality crosses the boundaries of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (Harris et al., 2002: 1). Textbooks for teaching speaking and listening to second and foreign language learners give importance to the pragmatic dimension of modal auxiliaries. Textbooks for teaching grammar often concentrate on the semantic dimension of modal auxiliaries (e.g. Werner's textbook, 1996). Textbooks for speaking stop short of covering their pragmatic significance in contextualized speech acts and in exchanges (Elenezi, 2004: 22). Textbooks for teaching reading and writing often pay little attention to modality (Hyland, 2000). As a consequence, defects are glaringly evident in students' composition (Rouissi and Abdesslem, 2010) and academic writing (Chen, 2012; Rouissi, 2014).

Epistemic modal auxiliaries are means the lexico-grammar of English makes available for the assessment of the likelihood of the proposition (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, 116). They contribute to the progression and validity of the ideas (propositions) in the text. This paper concentrates on foreign language learners' cognition of epistemic modal auxiliaries expressing possibility; it seeks to answer the following questions: Do features of epistemic modal auxiliaries expressing possibility which teaching materials provide correspond to the features basic semantics books ("the classics") provide? Does students' cognition of semantic features of these modal auxiliaries differ from those features available in teaching materials and basic semantics books? How different is students' cognition of semantic features of modality from native speakers' cognition? To answer these related questions, (i) we reviewed possibility in epistemic modal auxiliaries in basic semantics books (Palmer, 1979; Perkins, 1983; Palmer, 1986; Huddleston, 1984); (ii) designed an utterance completion test on possibility in epistemic modal auxiliaries; (iii) administered the test to Saudi learners and to native speakers of English; and (iv) examined the grammar textbook (Werner's book, 1996) used in teaching Saudi students at the College of Languages and Translation, King Saud University.

II- Mood and modality: an overview

Palmer (1979: 4) distinguishes between "mood" and "modality". He maintains that mood is a grammatical term while modality is a semantic term relating to the meanings that are usually associated with mood. Mood, for him, refers to the grammatical system of the verb, i.e. indicative, subjunctive, imperative, interrogative, while modality refers to function, i.e. assertion, non-assertion; factuality, non-factuality.

Huddleston (1984: 166-176) distinguishes between three kinds of modality: deontic, dynamic, and epistemic. Other scholars group deontic and dynamic modals in what they call root modals (e.g. Perkins, 1983).

Deontic modality has the character of an action (Huddleston, 1984: 168), i.e. something to be done.

- 1- You must work harder.
- 2- You may take as many as you like.

Example 1 represents deontic necessity, i.e. "Speaker S requires that action A be performed by hearer H" while example 2 represents deontic possibility, i.e. "Speaker S gives permission to hearer H to perform action A."

Perkins (1983:12) defines deontic modality in terms of social or institutional laws,

- 3- You must appear before a magistrate (in case you have committed a driving offence in Britain).

He also defines it in terms of relations between individuals; where S has authority over H, as examples 1 and 2, above testify.

Palmer (1979) uses the term dynamic modality, which he borrowed from Von Wright (1951: 28, cited in Palmer, 1979), "to refer to the relationship which exists between circumstances and unactualized (sic) events in accordance with natural laws."

4- John can speak German

John has the ability to speak German and he has demonstrated it at least once. He is also disposed to speak German if circumstances arise, i.e. if he meets a German person whose English is poor, for instance. Palmer (1979: 4) maintains that "under dynamic modality we shall consider not only "possible for" but also "necessary for" ... and in addition the volitional sense of will." Epistemic modality "is often concerned with the speakers' assumptions or assessment of possibilities, and in most cases, it indicates the speaker's confidence (or lack of confidence) in the truth of the proposition expressed" (Salsbury and Bardovi-Harlig, 2000: 58). Palmer refers to epistemic modality as an "indication by the speaker of his (lack of) commitment to the truth of the proposition expressed" and "as the degree of commitment by the speaker to what he says" (1986: 51). Perkins (1983: 8) asserts that epistemic modality has to do with what S knows about a state of affairs in the world. Huddleston (1984: 166) notes that the residue in epistemic modality has the status of a proposition. That proposition could be either true or false.

5- John must have lost his way.

5a- L (j,w)

5a is the proposition residue (p), according to Huddleston (1984). It can be deciphered in these terms: "a person, John (j) and a location/direction, way (w) are related by a predicate / verb, lose (L)." X, the speaker knows/believes that p.

Huddleston (1984: 167) affirms that with epistemic possibility "I imply that, minimally, I do not know that the proposition is false." For him, the auxiliaries "may", "might", "can", and "could" are the typical modals that express epistemic possibility. "May" is usually paraphrased as "It is possible that p" and is used to refer to states of affairs either in the present or the future. "Might" usually expresses either factual or theoretical possibility, (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973: 53). "Could" may refer to what is theoretically possible. "Can" is preferred in non-assertive contexts, (Palmer, 1979: 157).

III- Teaching materials and informants

The grammar textbook in use to teach Level Four students (corresponds to second semester of second year) at the College of Languages and Translation, King Saud University, is Werner's (1996) Mosaic Two: a Content Based Grammar. The book is one in a series of textbooks called Mosaic Two. The series, which the College of Languages and Translation has been using to teach language skills, contains books in reading, in writing, in speaking, and in grammar. The series claims that it targets students who have high-intermediate to advanced proficiency in English. It is designed for students who are capable of scoring 480 points and above on the TOEFL. It anticipates that students who use Mosaic Two have already reached a stage where they are comfortable in taking part in conversations, but who may experience some difficulties in rapid discussions. Students can read authentic materials with ease, but may experience some difficulties when topics are unfamiliar to them.

Werner's (1996) grammar book has a chapter (Chapter 4) on modal auxiliaries, but the chapter is by no means exhaustive as shall be shown in the data analysis and discussion section, below. For

instance, epistemic “can” is not included, while deontic “can” and dynamic “can” are, and “must” is included as an epistemic modal auxiliary that has just the function of probability.

The subjects were Fifth Level (corresponds to first semester of third year) Saudi students of English at the College of Languages and Translation, King Saud University. They were from the male section, and their ages ranged from 20 to 22. All the subjects who participated in this study passed their language and grammar skills exams at Level Four. Levels Five to Ten are devoted to content subjects, with a concentration on linguistics (introduction to linguistics, stylistics, semantics, and text-linguistics) at Level Five, and nothing but translation and interpreting at the remaining levels, i.e. from Level Six to Level Ten. Our choice of Level Five students was motivated by the fact that the subjects completed their language skills modules, including their grammar module. Studying students' cognition of epistemic modal auxiliaries expressing possibility could contribute to an appraisal of the success of the grammar module and the language skills modules that are taught at the College of Languages and Translation. It could lead to decisions, such as (i) to improve the teaching of the language skills modules or (ii) to introduce more advanced or remedial language skills modules in parallel with the content modules.

The number of the students who participated in the study was 29. The total number of Level Five students was 35. Three native speakers – one British and two Canadians – took the same the test. The participants were male university students aged between 20 and 22, and none of them was registered in a department of English language or linguistics. By involving male adult native speakers, we sought to add additional insight to the data analysis and discussion. It was not possible to involve these native speakers in the assessment of the students' work, especially that contact with the three informants was done by e-mail and through a third party; a university professor at the University of Leicester, UK. And in any case, native speakers' assessment of non-native speakers' modal auxiliary selections would make access to the non-native speakers' cognition even more remote.

IV- Methodology

The utterance completion test did not intend to focus on the students' ability to write modals correctly, i.e. spelling and order of auxiliary / auxiliaries and past participle. However, cases where past modality was not written correctly (spelling and order of auxiliaries) were found. The test looked like a cloze-test, or to put it less technically, a fill in the blanks exercise. But unlike in traditional cloze-tests, the omissions were not random. Random deletions yield inconsistent results (Bachman1982: 64). The test was not a discourse completion test (Nurani, 2009) either, because it did not provide the informants with hypothetical contexts and then asked them to produce a speech act, e.g. to apologise, to promise, or to request. A discourse completion test would have gauged learners' use of modals rather than their cognition. The test was between a cloze-test and a discourse completion test. We prefer to call it a utterance completion test. It tried to make sure that each sentence would be treated by itself and in itself as an unambiguous utterance . It provided students with a sentence-long utterance for each blank they had to fill in, but as shall be seen below, in some cases, an utterance with two sentences was judged necessary to provide optimal (i.e. prominent, minimal, and sufficient) elements of context that anticipated the use of one possible modal auxiliary. However, as the literature shows, optimal elements of context do by no means block alternative modal auxiliaries, because some modal auxiliaries are interchangeable while retaining each subtle nuances of meaning, (see discussion of “could” and

“might” in Palmer, 1979: 156, and discussion of 13, below). The informants were thus instructed to write down alternatives they thought applied to filling each blank.

The data obtained could be considered “clean data”, as the test tried to exert control over elements of context within and around the sentences /utterances. It contained sentences/utterances from the students' Level Four grammar book written by Werner (1996). It also included examples of sentences/utterances from classic books (e.g. Perkins, 1983) and maintained the semantic description of the auxiliaries provided in those books.

We made some sentences/utterances easier to read and understand. That was meant to prevent diversion from the task in which the subjects were engaged. We changed, for example, sentence 6 (in the students' book, p. 105) by 6a.

6- Physically fit people should be able to stay the same weight.

6a- Healthy people should be able to keep the same weight.

We thought that the preposition phrase “to stay the same weight” might be difficult to process at least for some students. We added some elements of context to some sentences to reduce the use of appropriate alternative auxiliaries to a minimum. We changed 7 (students' book) by 7a.

7- You cannot treat a disease unless you know its cause.

7a- “You cannot treat a disease unless you know its cause,” says a professor of medicine to his students.

By adding the reporting clause “says a professor of medicine to his students”, we thought we could block auxiliaries such as “could”, “should”, or “may” on account of the professor's “solid knowledge and unchallengeable authority” and the students' “noviceness”.

The original test covered both epistemic and deontic modality and lasted for two hours. A male teacher at the College of Languages and Translation administered the test to 29 students. All the 29 students completed the Fourth Level modules and accepted to take part in the test. All the students who took part handed in the sentence/utterance completion test when they felt they had completed the whole test. The students who handed in their papers were allowed to leave the classroom. This prevented “exchanges of answers”! However, those who could not finish on time were granted extra time. We thought that by giving students ample time to do the test, we did not prevent them from digging into their cognition.

As said earlier, this paper concentrates on the cognition of possibility in epistemic modality. We maintain that epistemic modality is least subjective and we believe that its cognition helps students produce accurate translations, especially when it comes to the translation of technical and scientific texts. It also prepares those among them who choose to engage in graduate studies to produce research work where they “weigh propositions” with accuracy (Hyland, 2000, Rouissi, 2014).

V- Analysis and discussion

We will refer to each sentence/utterance as listed in the test (see appendix I), discuss the learners' answers and refer to the literature and the native speakers' responses. Because the instructions suggested that informants could provide more than one possibility for the utterances they thought allowed for alternatives, the number of the answers was in some cases superior to the number of the subjects. In a fewer cases, the number of answers was less than that of the Saudi subjects. In these latter cases, difficulty in filling the blank with an auxiliary was encountered.

(i) Epistemic can

Utterance/sentence 8, (1 in the test, see Appendix I), was taken from Quirk and Greenbaum (1973: 53 and Palmer, 1979: 153).

8- Anybody can make mistakes.

According to Quirk and Greenbaum (1973: 53), modality here expresses theoretical possibility. It indicates what is conceptually true and theoretically possible, but not what is factually possible. Palmer (1979: 153) paraphrases 8 above as "It is possible for people sometimes to make mistakes." Only 7 (21.8%) out of 32 responses provided by the 29 students (informants) contained the modal auxiliary "can" (Table I in appendix II). Most students' responses went for "may" (13 out of 32). With reference to the total conformity of the native speakers' responses (3 out of 3) and the literature, it is safe to claim that "may" and "can" are not interchangeable here. They are interchangeable in deontic modality: hence, perhaps the Saudi informants' erroneous answers.

Utterance/sentence 9 (2 in the test) was taken from the students' textbook, but received more contextualisation (see discussion in relation to 7, above).

9- "You can not treat a disease unless you know what has caused it," says a professor of medicine to his students.

This utterance/sentence has the paraphrase: "You never treat a disease unless you know its causes" or "It is not possible that you treat a disease if you do not know its causes." Although many students' answers were in conformity with the native speakers' – 15 answers with "can", 3 with "must", and 3 with "should" – bringing thus the total of correct answers to 21 (63.63%) out of 33, the wrong answers represented 36.37% of the total of the students' answers. Some informants opted for "could" (6 out of 33) which is clearly inappropriate here since "could" has a deontic flavour and expresses a high level of indeterminacy, which the context available excludes. One of the 4 responses provided by the three native speakers opted for "should", and that may be in conformity with the literature, but definitely not in conformity with the context of the utterance: a professor of medicine speaking to his students can not be tentative. One of the native speakers used "must" (Table II, Appendix), and this indicates that she confused necessity with possibility.

Utterance/sentence 10 (6 in the test) was adapted from the students' grammar book (p. 104).

10- "By changing your eating habits, you can lower the risk of having high blood pressure," says the doctor to her patient.

A possible paraphrase for the above utterance is "It is possible for you..." Another interpretation that is dynamic and does not concern us here is "You have the ability/capacity..." According to Palmer (1979: 157), "[T]he epistemic can would not be used to refer to a proposition in the present which is known to be untrue." The doctor in 10 has enough evidence, we think, to assert that what she is saying is true. Her use of "may" may lower her patient's trust in her. Furthermore, as Palmer (1979) maintains "can" emphasises the speaker's engagement, while "may" is more discourse-oriented. The native informants' responses were rather varied: 2 answers had "can", 1 "may", 1 "might", 1 "will", and 1 "could". This variation indirectly boosted the correct answers that the students produced to 25 (86.20%) out of 29. The answer with "can" was high among the students' responses (12 out of 29). It can be considered high among the native speakers too, since two out of the three informants opted for it. It seems that medical doctors can be less assertive and less authoritative today without losing their patients' trust in them. We suggest that that epistemic modality, which, given its nature, is least controversial, may very well be affected by cultural changes in society. Whether the doctor is

female in the utterance has something to do with the “may”, “might”, and “could” options requires confirmation and further investigation.

Utterance/sentence 11 (8 in the test) was from Perkins (1983).

11- Pigs can eat anything.

Like 10 above, this utterance/sentence expresses epistemic possibility and dynamic ability. The latter does not concern us here. The utterance is an assertion. “Can” is very appropriate here. “Will” is also very appropriate because it conveys the speaker's confidence. The native speakers' responses were in conformity with the literature: 1 use of “can” and 2 uses of “will”. Although more than half of the students' answers were correct, 16 (55.17%) out of 29, there was no choice of the modal auxiliary “will”. The students' textbook does not introduce “will” as an epistemic modal auxiliary expressing possibility. We are not sure that when the Saudi students chose “can”, they thought of it as expressing epistemic possibility. It is more likely that they considered it as expressing dynamic ability. Meziani (1981: 270) observes that modals in Arabic “express ‘obligation’ and ‘permission’ in the decision component and ‘ability’ in the knowledge component”. There were 6 uses of “may” out of 29. This may very well point to a cultural phenomenon: the students' background makes their knowledge of the eating habits of pigs vague.

(ii)- Epistemic may

Utterance 12 (4 in the test, Appendix 1) was originally from the students' grammar book.

12- One person may need more calories than another. People's metabolisms are not the same.

The modal auxiliary “may” here has the paraphrase “it is possible that p”. Perkins (1983: 38) asserts that “the epistemic use of may indicates that the evidence available to the speaker is such that the proposition expressed by the sentence can not currently be inferred to be true, but nor can it be currently inferred to be false.” The three native speakers opted for “may”, but they mentioned other alternatives: 1 “should”, 1 “might” and 1 “could”. One native speaker was more imaginative than the other two. He seemed to have thought of people who are either cautious about what nutrition specialists say, or people whose knowledge about health matters is not very firm, or people who do not want to offend an interlocutor who is very thin or perhaps too fat. The native speakers' overall variation made the overall variation of the Saudi students' responses seem quite in order: 26 out of their 29 answers were with “may” and 7 with “might”. However, the Saudi students' responses did not show unanimity on the use of “may” as is the case with the native speakers, and it is hard to imagine that the Saudi students thought of a number of contexts, as did their native counterparts.

Utterance/sentence 13 (5 in Appendix 1) was originally from the students' grammar book.

13- “The patient is dizzy and bleeding, he may have a head injury,” says the nurse to the doctor on the phone.

The use of “may” in the utterance above indicates that the speaker expresses an objective epistemic possibility, where she formulates a conclusion that is not a mere opinion or tentative inference, but rather presents itself as an objective fact. The nurse-doctor relationship is very important here. If two doctors were speaking on the phone, then necessity, which the auxiliary “must” expresses, becomes possible (see V.I.II., below). If a passer-by were speaking to a doctor, then modal auxiliaries such as “could” or “might” would be adequate. Indeed, if the degree of probability is low, “might” becomes appropriate. According to Palmer (1979: 156), “could” and “might” are interchangeable, but while “might” commits the speaker to a judgement

about the possibility of the truth of a proposition, “could” says that such a judgement would be a reasonable one, without committing the speaker. The native speakers’ responses represented very well the nuances discussed above: 2 uses of “may”, 3 uses of “could”, 1 use of “must” and 1 use of “might”. Although 21 (63.63%) out of 33 of the Saudi students’ answers had modal auxiliaries that native speakers’ responses included, there was only one answer with “could” and most of the answers (20 out of 21) were with “may” (14) and with “must” (6) (Table I, in appendix). The Saudi students did not seem to have internalised the subtle expression of the possibility of a reasonable judgement that does not go as far as committing the speaker. Such possibility is weaker than that expressed by “may” and is expressed by “might”. Lack of cognition of such subtlety is compounded by what Meziani (1980: 250) and Badran (2001: 5) consider a paucity of Arabic in terms of modal auxiliaries .

So far, we could deduce that although the discrepancy between the literature and the native speakers’ responses was little, that between the Saudi students’ responses and the literature was sizable.

(iii)- Past epistemic possibility

Utterance 14 (number 3 in the test, Appendix I, below) was not taken from the literature or the students’ grammar book. It was fabricated.

14- He was not at home when I went to see him. He might have gone away for the weekend.

Because the proposition residue is in the past, the anticipated modal auxiliaries were “may”, “might”, and “could” followed by “have + verb-en”. The native speakers chose the three possibilities (Table II in Appendix I), but there was one choice of “must” + “have” which the literature does not include in epistemic possibility. The Saudi students’ responses contained 13 erroneous answers (out of 32). The 13 answers that we classified as “Others”, (Table I, below), contained forms such as “has”, “would be”, and “has been”. This may very well reflect the expression of modality in Arabic without modal auxiliaries. It might also point to a difficulty in producing syntactically correct complex auxiliaries. Only 6 answers out of the 32 answers corresponded to the native speakers’. They represented 18.75% of the Saudi students’ total answers. This meager result confirms the students’ lack of cognition of the subtleties encoded by the modal auxiliaries “may”, “might” and “could” to express epistemic possibility, let alone past epistemic possibility.

Utterance 15, (7 in the test), like the previous utterance, was not taken from the students’ grammar book or the literature. The comparatively abundant elements of context that come with this utterance were not sufficient to give rise to one single choice of modal auxiliary.

15- The little girl does not know what caused the pain in her wrist. Her mum says, “Mariam might have sprained her wrist when she fell off the chair the other day.”

The Saudi students’ answers that corresponded to the native speakers’ responses were 6 (11.53%) out of 26. Past modals, whether they express epistemic possibility or epistemic necessity, represent a major obstacle for learners of English as a second / foreign language. First, students tend to confuse the present perfect, where the action has a past time reference that stretches to present time, with the past conditional (modal + have + past participle), where the propositional residue is in the past. Second, as Fehri (2003: 1) points out, in Arabic “simple past/perfect forms of normal verbs can be interpreted either as simple pasts or present perfects.” Third, students, perhaps owing to the above-mentioned semantic difficulties, do not find it easy to produce formally correct verb groups that have past epistemic modal auxiliaries.

VI. Implications and suggestions

Saudi students confused epistemic modality with deontic modality, and within epistemic modality itself, they confused possibility with necessity. As far as epistemic possibility is concerned, they had some difficulty in distinguishing subtle differences conveyed by the auxiliaries “may”, “might”, and “could”. They did not know that the auxiliary “will” expresses assertion or factuality. Their cognition of past epistemic possibility rendered by modal auxiliaries was often inadequate. The difficulties could be attributed to the fact that often the same auxiliary is used to express deontic modality and epistemic modality, and often it expresses specific features and nuances within deontic or epistemic modality. The difficulties could also be due to the fact that within the same sentence/utterance two or three modal auxiliaries are interchangeable. All these difficulties are compounded by fewer modal auxiliaries in Arabic and an absence of tense forms that equal (or correspond to) the present perfect and the past perfect in English and contribute to realisations of past modality.

Though there was little discrepancy between native speakers' cognition and linguists' descriptions, the small differences between the two groups could be taken as lending additional support for corpus-based research, but they do not rule out intuition-based research in linguistics, and particularly in semantics. We believe that both methods combine to help researchers have access to native speakers and non-native speakers' cognition of language.

To develop solid cognition of the various semantic traits of modality and its realisation in English, Saudi students need explicit teaching/learning of the meanings carried by modal auxiliaries, especially epistemic modality, in addition to implicit teaching/learning that takes place when language is in use. This contributes to making them efficient translators and prepares them to become competent academic writers.

Notes

1. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 116-118), in dealing with the Clause as Exchange, consider Subject and Finite (present, past, future) as elements of Mood and Predicator (the infinitive Verb), Complement, and Adjunct as elements of Residue.
2. The borderline between semantics and pragmatics is fuzzy (Brown and Yule, 1983, 25-26, cited in Abdesslem, 1992, 58) ask, “Do we not immediately and quite naturally, set about constructing some circumstances (i.e. ‘context’) in which the sentence could be acceptably used?” The present paper claims that cognition can be gauged at the semantics border with pragmatics.
3. Martin and White (2005, 98-99) use the term Proclaim, as writer (speaker) engagement, which presents the proposition as compelling, valid, and agreed upon.
4. Arabic has syntactic and lexical means to express modality.

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Appendices
Appendix A

I- Read each of the following sentences and then fill in the blank with the appropriate modal auxiliary. In some cases, there might be more than one alternative, please write the possible alternatives.

Epistemic modality

Possibility

- 1- Anybody make mistakes.
- 2- "You not treat a disease unless you know what has caused it," says a professor of medicine to his students.
- 3- He was not at home when I went to see him. He gone away for the weekend.
- 4- One person need more calories than another. People's metabolisms are not the same.
- 5- "The patient is dizzy and bleeding, he have a head injury," says the nurse to the doctor on the phone.
- 6- "By changing your eating habits, you lower the risk of having high blood pressure," says the doctor to her patient.
- 7- The little girl does know what caused the pain in her wrist. Her mum says: "Mariamsprained her wrist when she fell off the chair the other day".
- 8- Pigs eat anything.

Appendix B

	C an	M ay	Mig ht	W ill	M ay ha ve	Mig ht hav e	Co uld Ha ve	Co uld	Mu st	Mu st Ha ve	Sh all	Sho uld	Wo uld	Oth ers	Tot al
1	7	13	4					6			1		1		32
2	15	2						6	3		1	3			33
3		4	5		2	2	1	2	1	1			1	13	32
4	2	17	9											1	27
5	9	14						1	6			1	1	1	33

6	12	3	1	2				8	1			2			29
7		3	6			3	1	3	1	2			1	6	26
8	16	6	1					2					2	2	29

Table I: Epistemic possibility; students' responses.

	Can	May	May have	Might	Might have	Will	Must	Must have	Should	Could	Could have	Total
1	3											3
2	2						1		1			4
3			1		1			1			1	4
4		3		1					1	1		6
5		2		1			1			3		7
6	2	1		1		1				1		6
7			1		2			1			1	5
8	1					2						3

Table II: Epistemic possibility; native speakers' responses