



A corpus-based study of modal verbs in academic writing of English native speakers and Saudis

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Abstract

This study is a corpus-based analysis of modal verbs in the English academic writing of Saudi Arabian advanced learners whose mother tongue is Arabic. The aim of this study is to develop a better understanding of the uses of modal verbs in academic writing by non-native speakers of English as compared with native speakers. The writing analyzed is a corpus created from Master of Arts (MA) dissertations. The study compares the use of modal verbs by these writers with that of the writing of native speakers of British English using the British Academic Written English (BAWE) corpus. The results show that the category of modal verbs is generally underused by Saudi writers when compared with native speaker writers. An exception occurs with the modal *should* which was the only modal verb found to be considerably overused by Saudi writers. The modal verbs *would*, *could* and *may* are significantly underused. The absence of an organized modal verbs system in the Arabic language may influence Arabic speakers' use of modal verbs. The overall analysis has demonstrated that Saudi writers use a restricted repertoire of modal verbs. The analysis also points to some pedagogical implications that needs to be taken into consideration by English for Academic Purposes (EAP) material writers, particularly for Saudi learners.

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