



**The Use of Modal Verbs in Permission, Offer, Obligation, and  
Possibility by English BA Major Students at Middle East University**  
استخدام الأفعال الناقصة في الالتماس والعرض والإجبار والاحتمال من قبل طلبة البكالوريوس في

اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة الشرق الأوسط

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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the**

**Master of Arts Degree in English Language**

**Department of English Language and Literature**

**Faculty of Arts and Sciences**

**Middle East University**

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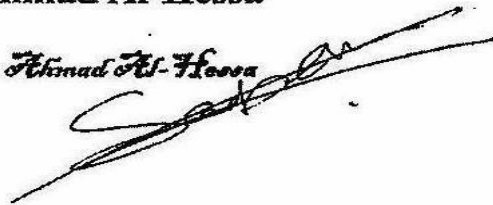
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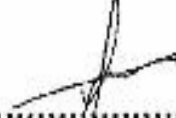
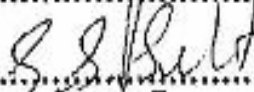
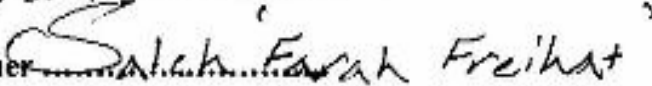
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**Thesis Committee Decision**

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## **Acknowledgment**

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I am also grateful to the thesis committee members Professor Sabbar Sultan and Dr. Saleh Freihahat for their fruitful discussion, constructive comments and invaluable suggestions.

## **Dedication**

### **My father**

To the strong and gentleman who taught me to trust Allah, believe in hard work, for earning an honest living for us and for supporting and encouraging me to believe in myself.

### **My mother**

To my mother, who continues to learn, and develop and who has been the source of encouragement and inspiration to me throughout my life.

### **My wife**

I lovingly dedicate this thesis to my wife, who supported me in each step of the way.

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**The Use of Modal Verbs in Permission, Offer, Obligation, and Possibility by  
English BA Majoring Students at MEU**

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**Abstract**

This study aimed at investigating the use of modal verbs in permission, offer, obligation and possibility by English BA majoring students at Middle East University. To achieve the objectives of the study, the study raised the following three questions:

1. Is there any significant difference in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation and possibility by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to their gender?
2. Is there any significant difference in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation and possibility by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to their level of BA education at the university?

3. Is there any significant difference in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation and possibility by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to the school they studied at?

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a sample of 50 male and female undergraduate students enrolled in the BA Program at Middle East University was selected. The researcher designed a test that comprised 40 statements of permission, offer, obligation and possibility by using modal verbs.

The results of this study revealed that there was a significant difference between males and females in correctly using of modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by students of MEU in favor of males. The results of this study showed that the highest percentage of correct answers was by fourth, third, second, and first year respectively. The results of this study also showed that the students of private schools used modal verbs more correctly than the students of public schools.

استخدام الأفعال الناقصة في الالتماس والعرض والإجبار والاحتمال من قبل طلبة درجة البكالوريوس في

اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة الشرق الأوسط

إعداد

صابر احمد الحيصة

بإشراف

الدكتورة فاطمة جعفر

الملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة استخدام الأفعال الناقصة في الالتماس والعرض والإجبار والاحتمال من قبل طلبة البكالوريوس في اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة الشرق الأوسط .

ولتحقيق أهداف هذه الدراسة ، قام الباحث بطرح الأسئلة الثلاثة التالية :

1 . هل هناك أي فروق في الاستخدام الصحيح للأفعال الناقصة في الالتماس والعرض والإجبار والاحتمال من قبل طلبة البكالوريوس في اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة الشرق الأوسط تعود إلى جنس الطلبة ؟

2 . هل هناك أي فروق في الاستخدام الصحيح للأفعال الناقصة في الالتماس والعرض والإجبار والاحتمال من قبل طلبة البكالوريوس في اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة الشرق الأوسط تعود لمستواهم في الجامعة؟

3 . هل هناك أي فروق في الاستخدام الصحيح للأفعال الناقصة في الالتماس والعرض والإجبار والاحتمال من قبل طلبة البكالوريوس في اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة الشرق الأوسط تعود لنوع المدرسة التي درسوا

فيها؟

ولإجابة هذه الأسئلة قام الباحث باختيار عينة من جامعة الشرق الأوسط/ قسم اللغة الانجليزية, وتكونت

عينة الدراسة من 50 طالبا وطالبة. كما قام الباحث بإعداد اختبار يتكون من أربعين جملة في الالتماس

والعرض والإجبار والاحتمال.

كشفت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن هناك اختلافا بين الذكور والإناث في الاستخدام الصحيح للأفعال الناقصة في الالتماس والعرض والإجبار والاحتمال من قبل طلبة البكالوريوس في اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة الشرق الأوسط لصالح الذكور. وأظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن أعلى نسبة من الإجابات الصحيحة كانت من قبل طلاب السنة الرابعة والثالثة والثانية و الأولى على التوالي. أيضا ، أظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن طلاب المدارس الخاصة استخدموا الأفعال الناقصة بشكل صحيح أكثر من طلاب المدارس الحكومية.

## Chapter One

### 1.0 Introduction

Hoffmann (1996) argues that people use language as a means to communicate with each other, and express their desires, emotions, thoughts, attitudes, and needs. Communication is formed by people everywhere at any time. However, even though people practice communication all the time, miscommunication still happens all the time especially when people have different cultures. Peoples' communication is always affected by the problem of cultural knowledge including backgrounds, habits of communication and languages, and all these factors cause miscommunication. Unfortunately, miscommunication is common – the listener or reader sometimes fails to understand what is said or written. Humans began speaking about 100,000 years ago, and writing began around 4000 B.C. Prior to written language, humans used pictures (cave drawings), which evolved to word symbols. When people intend to speak or write, they formulate what they say to be fit in the context or situation. This means that what they say is not always exactly what they intend to convey. The meaning beyond the words or sentences is sometimes different from the form of words.



Vergheese (1989) argues that English language belongs to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family of language. The English language was introduced to America through the British colonization in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, and it spread to many parts of the world because of the strength of the British Empire. Over the years, spoken English in the United States and in Britain started diverging from each other in various aspects. This has led to developing two dialects in the form of American English and British English. The biggest difference between British English and American English is in pronunciation. The English language became more dominant as it has become a lingua Franca in many regions throughout the world. English is the language of international business, diplomacy, professions, education, economy, politic, tourism, travel, science and technology. This important role of the English language contributes to the movement of teaching English as a foreign Language.

Modal verbs operate like other aspects of language; they can be analyzed from the pragmatic perspective, and they are used to indicate different meanings or acts like request, obligation, order, permission, etc. With all the various shades of meaning and the highly contextualized uses, modals provide a tremendous challenge to students. Modal's misunderstanding is the type of miscommunication that goes unnoticed, and

allows misunderstanding and awkward interaction to continue. If students misuse a modal even slightly, it will change the perceived intention or tone of their statement, making them appear rude or uncertain. For example, they could also drastically misinterpret statements in subtle yet vital ways.

It is important to remember that many uses of modal structures are extremely contingent on culture, which modal should be used in a given situation depends entirely on the speaking conventions of the discourse community. Even if the words are understood correctly, a language learner may continue to apply usage rules based on a misunderstanding of their own culture, appearing overly assertive, overly timid, or even rude as a result. It seems that teaching modals requires usage focused instruction that explores the diverse meanings of the words, and gives explicit instruction in the social rules.

English is taught through the schooling years as a major subject, and the Ministry of Education provides well-designed textbooks based on developing curriculum. Although the English curriculum consists of a teachers' guide, a students' book, a workbook and teaching materials, and teachers of English are supplied with training courses, the outcome of the whole process seems to be weak and below expectations, especially in

grammar, which tops the priorities of teaching English. Researchers refer this weak output to different reasons, such as negative attitudes towards learning English, inexperienced teachers, and many other factors affecting the process. This study aims at detecting the ability and capability of undergraduate students to apply knowledge of the language in real life situations by testing the uses of modals.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

The use of modal verbs is one of the most problematic areas of English grammar. Modal verbs have more than one meaning, and there is a wide range of ways to use them. Furthermore, a modal verbs' meanings can be expressed in a number of different ways involving other grammatical and lexical elements. There are certain differences among speakers of English in the use of modal verbs properly. The present study deals with the problems of their use.

### **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The researcher hopes that this piece of work will serve the following purposes:- To explore if there is any significant difference in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to their gender.

2- To explore if there is any significant difference in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to their level of BA education at the university.

3- To explore if there is any significant difference in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to the school that they studied at.

### **1.3 Questions of the Study**

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the researcher set the following questions:

1. Is there any significant difference in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to their gender?
2. Is there any significant difference in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to their level at the university?
3. Is there any significant difference in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to the school that they studied at?

## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

Many studies have investigated the modal verbs, and most of which have investigated the syntactic and semantic meanings of modal verbs. But still, to the best knowledge of the researcher, there is some shortage in this field. However, this study may fill in a gap of research in this field. Furthermore, it is hoped that this study be useful to educators and designers of curricula. It is also expected that this study may be useful to linguists in the field of sociolinguistics.

## **1.5 Limitations and Limits of the Study**

The findings of this study are limited to the sample and the instrument of this study. The study was conducted in Jordan during the academic year 2013 \ 2014.

## **1.6 Definition of Terms**

**Modal Verbs:** Ehrman (1966:1) defines modal verbs as: " that closed class of verbs which may occupy the first position of a verb phrase, which may not be immediately preceded by another verb, which may invert with the subject in interrogation, and which are negated directly by not."

The operational definition of the modal verbs for the purposes of this study is the use of the modals: *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *must*, *will*, *would*, *should*, and *shall* for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility.

# **Chapter Two**

## **Review of Literature**

This chapter includes two parts. The first part is about review of theoretical literature, and the second part is about some empirical studies that have dealt with modal verbs.

### **2.1 Review of Theoretical Literature**

Chomsky's (1965) Language Development Theory is based on the idea that all humans learn language through imitation and reinforcement. Chomsky theorized that all humans have a language acquisition device. This device allows humans to understand basic grammar precepts to whatever language they are listening to. According to him, language performance may be affected by such things as attention, stamina, memory, etc. Therefore, a theory of language should be a theory of competence. Once a full theory of competence is developed, it can be integrated into a theory of performance, which will also consider other cognitive abilities. Competence is a person's subconscious linguistic ability to create and understand sentences, including sentences have never been heard before, and it is a person's acquaintance with a set of grammatical rules which is different from the actual linguistic

activities. Performance is the real world linguistic output, which may accurately reflect competence, but it may also include speech errors. Performance may be flawed because of memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) or other psychological factors.

Ehrman (1966) distinguishes between basic meanings and overtones. The basic meaning is the meaning " that applies to all its occurrences" and "in a sense the lowest common denominator of all the occurrences", whereas the overtones are "subsidiary meanings which derive from the basic meaning but which add something of their own." (p. 10).

Resecher (1968) (in Perkins 1983) divides modality into eight types:

- A) Alethic modalities, relating to the notion of truth.
- B) Epistemic modalities, relating to knowledge and belief.
- C) Temporal modalities, relating to time.
- D) Deontic modalities, relating to duties.
- E) Evaluative modalities, relating to evaluation.
- F) Causal modalities, relating to causes.
- G) Likelihood modalities, relating to probability.
- H) Boulomaic modalities, relating to duties.



Halliday (1976) argues that modality can be expressed by using:

A) Modal verbs such as *can, would, should, or might*, as in:

- Omar *must* be at home.

B) Nouns such as *possibility, chance, hope, expectation, intention* and *determination*, as in:

- My buying a new car in July is a *possibility*.

C) Adjectives such as *conceivable, possible, likely, obvious, appropriate, necessary, sure, surprise, able, willing, doubtful* and *certain*, as in:

- It is *possible* that I will buy a new car in July.

D) Adverbs such as *hardly, perhaps, evidently, assuredly, fortunately, regrettably, surprisingly, etc*, as in:

- *Perhaps* I will buy a new car in July.

E) Verbs such as *doubt, think, believe, predict, suggest, want, prefer, desire, permit, forbid, etc*, as in:

- I *doubt* that he will win.

Modal verbs have syntactic and morphological properties which distinguish them from primary auxiliaries and full verb. Halliday (1976) lists the most important differences.

A) Modals occur as the first element of the verb phrase, as in:

- It *may* have been being cleaned.

B) Modal verbs don't have -s form, as in:

-\* He *musts* go.

C) Unlike other auxiliaries, modal verbs have only finite forms, as in:

-\*John has *musted* play the piano.

D) Modals cannot co- occur, as in:

- \*He *may will* come.

- He *will* come.

- He *may* come.

E) Modal verbs do not occur in the imperative.

-\* *Can* open the door.

Halliday (1976) distinguishes between modality and modulation which are a semantic system. "Modality is a system derived from the speaker interpersonal function of language, expressing the speaker's assessment of probabilities. " (p. 204). On the other hand, modulation " is ideational in function, and express factual conditions on the process expressed in the clause. " (p. 205).

Palmer (1979) defines modality as semantic information associated with the speaker's attitude or opinion about what is said. Palmer indicates that *will* and *shall* are usually used to mark future time and modality. He treats mood and modality as two opposite categories- the former is

grammatical whereas the latter is semantic. He rejects subjunctive and regards modal auxiliaries as its substitutes in English. He does not find any difference between subjunctive and simple present tense as their forms are the same.

There is no need to be much concerned with the subjunctive in English. The only possible candidate for this is the simple form (identical with the infinitive) that is used in formal language after verbs of ordering, requiring etc. This form has largely disappeared from English, and it can well be argued that it has been replaced by the modal verbs, though traditional scholars may still argue for its use (p. 7).

Perkins (1983) defines modality as the representation of either rational, social or natural laws. Perkins argues that "all the modal auxiliaries are compatible with either a subjective or an objective interpretation whereas the vast majority of non- auxiliary modal expressions- especially those containing be- are inherently objective" (p. 68). According to Perkins in the framework of modal logic "a given event or proposition may be made relative to, or may be qualified by, a particular world view, state of affairs, set of principles, etc" (p. 9).

Huddleston (1984) makes the distinction between three types of modality: epistemic modality, deontic modality and dynamic modality.

Epistemic modality has as its basis of what the speaker knows about the world, while deontic modality calls for an action to be taken, and dynamic modality indicates that an individual is capable of doing a particular action when the circumstances arise. He also gives a distinction between mood as a category of grammar and modality as a category of meaning.

Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985) classify verbs into three major verbs categories. The decisive factor for this division is the verb's function within the verb phrase. These are: open class of full verbs (also lexical verbs), a closed class of primary verbs (*be*, *have*, and *do*) and modal auxiliary verbs. They distinguish between four classes of modals which are:

A) Central Modals (*will*, *would*, *shall*, *should*, *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, and *must*.), as in:

- *Can* you run 100 meters in three minutes?

B) Marginal Modals (*dare*, *need*, *ought to*, and *used to*.), as in:

- *Need/Dare* we escape?

C) Modal Idioms (*had better*, *would rather/sooner*, *be to*, and *have got to*.),

as in:

- We *had better* leave soon.

D) Semi- Auxiliaries (*have to, be about to, be able to, be going to, be bound to, be obliged to, be supposed to, be willing to, etc.*) , as in:

- Brazil *is going to* win the World Cup.

Quirk, et al. (1985) claim that modality can be defined as "the manner in which the meaning of a clause is qualified so as to reflect the speaker's judgment of the likelihood of the proposition it expresses being true" (p. 219). The researchers state that all modals have intrinsic modality, which involves human control over events, and extrinsic modality, which does not primarily involve human control, but rather human judgment of what is or is not likely to happen. Intrinsic modality and extrinsic modality often overlap. They characterize mood as that thing which relates the verbal action to such conditions as certainty, obligation, necessity, or possibility. Quirk, et al.(1985) indicate that modals can be used to express mood, and they distinguish three types of mood: the indicative mood, which is the unmarked mood used to express statements in general, the imperative mood, which is used to express directive speech acts such as commands, and the subjunctive mood, which is used to express wishes and recommendations, as in

- Roger has known me for a long time. (Indicative Mood)

- I insist that the Council reconsider its decisions. (Subjunctive Mood)

- Listen to me! (Imperative Mood)

Leech (1987) divides modal auxiliaries in terms of frequency into three classes:

A) Very frequent modal auxiliaries (*will, would, can* and *could*)

B) Quite frequent modal auxiliaries (*must, should, may, might*, and *have (got) to*)

C) Infrequent modal auxiliaries (*shall, ought to* and *need*)

Leech (1987) lists the basic meanings of the modals *can, may* and *must*.

A) The modal *can* is used to express possibility, ability and permission, as in:

- He *can't be* working at this hour! (Possibility)
- Paula *can't* sing, but she *can* play the guitar. (Ability)
- *Can* I borrow your pen? (Permission)

B) The modal *may* is used to express possibility, permission and an exclamatory wish, as in:

- You *may* lose your way if you don't take a map. (Possibility)
- *May* I offer you a drink? (Permission)
- *May* he never set foot in this house again! (Exclamatory Wish)

C) The modal *must* is used to express obligation and logical necessity, as in:

- You *must* be back by ten o'clock. (Obligation)
- He *must* be working late at the office. (Logical Necessity)

Palmer (1988) distinguishes between epistemic modality, deontic modality and dynamic modality. He explains that epistemic modality expresses the speaker's opinion about a statement, and it is concerned with the necessary and the possible truth value of propositions. Deontic modality is concerned with obligation and permission, and dynamic modality predicts something about the subject of the sentence. Epistemic modals with the preposition may be marked as past time, by using have. With deontic modals, modality and preposition can't be marked for past time. With dynamic modals only the modality can be used to mark for past time.

- John *may* be in his office. (Epistemic Modality)
- John *may/must* have been in his office yesterday. (Epistemic Modality)
- John *may/can* come in now. (Deontic Modality)
- John *could* run ten miles with ease. (Dynamic Modality)

Jacobs and Roderick (1995) argue that modal verbs cause difficulties for non – native speakers. They suggest that many of the modals originally possess the same qualities as other ordinary verbs, however, these verbs have developed into a specialised category with distinctive features and functions. Nowadays modals embody a specific group and, according to

Jacobs and Roderick, one may doubt whether they still can be counted in the category "verb". They make a distinction between core modals and periphrastic modals. Core modals are composed of only one word, such as *can, must, will* or *shall*. On the other hand, periphrastic modals are groups of compound verbs that have a meaning similar to modals, such as *being able to, be allowed to, have (got) to* or *be going to*. Core modals are not marked for agreement. They do not receive any marking for person or number, but like other verbs they do carry tense features. Periphrastic modals tend to only have one shade of meaning, while simple modals generally have several different meanings.

According to Saeed (1997), modality "is a cover term for devices which allow speakers to express varying degrees of commitment to, or belief in, a proposition " (p.135) .He distinguishes between deontic and epistemic modals .Epistemic modality is an expression of the degrees of certainty and possibility in which an event will occur, whereas, deontic modality "is tied in with all sorts of social knowledge: the speaker's belief systems about morality and legality; and her estimations of power and authority" ( p 137) .



Yule (1998) argues that "English modals typically convey some indication of the speaker's perspective or attitude with respect to the situation or state of affairs being described" (p.88). He differentiates between epistemic and root modality. Epistemic modality is used when the speaker is talking about facts, things that are known or possibly might be known in the future. This type of modality is reliant on what the speaker thinks or knows. For this reason it is seen as being an internal type of modality as in these two examples:

- He *must* be crazy. Epistemic modality (Necessity)
- He *may* be crazy. Epistemic modality (Possibility)

Root modality is reliant on power within the prevailing social system. The meaning is coming from outside the speaker and can therefore be seen as being a type of external modality as in these two examples:

- You *must* leave. Root modality (Obligation)
- You *may* leave. Root modality (Permission)

Palmer (2001) lists criteria which characterize modal verbs, be, have, and do and it is used to distinguish auxiliaries from full verbs.

A) Negation, as in:

- He *will* not work.

- He *is not* coming.

B) Inversion with the subject in interrogation, as in:

- *Will* he work?

- *Is* he coming?

C) Code (the use of the auxiliary to avoid repetition of the whole verb phrase), as in:

- She *will* study, and so *will* he.

- He *has* come and so *has* she.

D) Emphatic affirmation, as in:

- You *must* speak to the teacher.

- He *has* come.

Declerck, Reed and Cappel (2006) give the following definition to the term modality:

a semantic category that comprises two types of meaning: the representation of the speaker's assessment of the likelihood that a proposition (i.e. the content of a clause) is true (or that the situation referred to by a proposition actualizes), and the representation of one of the factors affecting the (non) actualization of the situation referred to, such as (UN) willingness, (I'm) possibility, (in) ability, obligation, necessity, advisability, permission, prohibition, volition, etc. (p. 38-39)

## 2.2 Review of Empirical Literature

Huddleston (1971) investigated modals in a corpus of written scientific English texts. The sample consisted of 135,000 words from 27 texts. The researcher found that 17% of all finite verbs in the data contained modal verbs. The researcher found that modals used to express certain meanings (qualified generalization, exhaustive disjunction, legitimacy, ability and concession). Huddleston's study revealed that *will* and *would* were generally regarded as markers of prediction. He identified three major uses of *will*, namely futurity relative to present, induction and deduction.

Coates and Leech (1980) investigated the use of modal verbs in modern English and American English. The sample consisted of one million words of the Brown Corpus of American English, and one million words of the Lancaster University Corpus of British English. The researchers found that the modal verbs *should*, root *must*, epistemic *have to* and *can* were less frequent in British English than in American English. They also concluded that *ought to*, *can* and *must* were much more frequent in British English than in American English. The findings of the research revealed that there was a 'compensatory relationship' present in the use of certain pairs of modals in British and American English. The use of epistemic *have to* in American

English was equivalent to the epistemic use of *must* in British English. The American English use of epistemic *will* was balanced by the use of epistemic *shall* in British English. The use of the root *may* in American English was counterbalanced by the root *can* in British English.

Collins (1988) investigated *must*, *should*, *ought*, *need*, *have to*, and *have got to* in Australian English, and compared their use in the Australian data with uses in British and American English. The Australian corpus used for this investigation was made up of a total of 225,000 words. British English figures were from Coates (1983), and those that represent American English were taken from two sources: Francis and Kucera's (1982) frequency analysis of the Brown Corpus, and Hermeren (1978). The researcher found that epistemic *must* occurred more frequently in the Australian data, whereas the root *must* occurred more frequently in the American data. Epistemic *must* and the root *must* had the same frequency in British English data. Root meanings of *should* occurred more frequently in Australian and American English than in British English. Epistemic meanings of *should* occurred more frequently in Australian and British English than in American English.

Romer (1996) conducted a comparative study of British National Corpus and a German textbook series in order to see if there were differences between English grammar (modals) taught at schools and the English used by native speakers. The selected sample comprised of 10-million-words spoken part of the BNC. The results showed that modal auxiliaries occurred more frequently in spoken than in written English. The research revealed that *will*, *would* and *can* were identified as the most frequent modals followed by *could* in spoken English. The highest percentages of negations were found with *can* and *could*, and contracted forms were in all cases much more frequent than full forms. Semantically, the ability meaning of *can* and *could* had been overused in textbooks while in British National Corpus *could* was more frequently used to express a possibility than an ability. *Shall* with its prediction meaning was never used in textbooks while in BNC this was one of the most important meanings.

Kennedy (2002) investigated how the distribution of the modal verbs varied in the different genres within the written texts. The sample comprised of 1.45 million words from the British National Corpus. The results showed that *will*, *would*, *can*, and *could* were the most frequent modals accounted for 72.7% of all the modal verbs, with the most frequent modal verb *will*

accounted for almost 23% of all modal verbs in the corpus. Furthermore, the research referred to other results that showed the modal verbs occurred with much greater frequency in spoken texts than in written ones. In the spoken texts in the corpus there were 215,485 modal verbs in 10 million words. *Will*, *would* and *can* were all more frequent proportionately in spoken than in written texts. Negative modal verbs were over twice as frequent in spoken British English as in written British English.

Vine (2004) investigated the use and meaning of modal verbs and marginal auxiliaries. The selected sample consisted of 85,268 words. The researcher found that *can*, *could*, *might* and *be able to* accounted for 51% of the modal verbs and marginal auxiliaries. Modal verbs and marginal auxiliaries associated with an obligation and necessity account for a further 36% of the modals in the explicit directives. There were ten occurrences of *have to* and *can* was the most frequent of the modals and marginal auxiliaries, with 64 occurrences. The most frequent central modal in an 181,142 word sample of male interactions was also the most frequent in the overall women's data, i.e., *will*. The least frequent central modals also rank in the same order as in the women's data - *may*, *must* and *shall* being least common. The researcher found that gender was not an overriding factor.

A quantitative and qualitative research by Plaza (2005) dealt with the deontic modal verbs (must, and *should*) in English and Spanish (*tener que*, and *deber*). The sample of this study consisted of 106,665 words from British National Corpus and 107,312 words from Corpus de Referencia Del Español Actual. The researcher analyzed a comparable corpus in English and Spanish with the forms: *can*, *should*, *must*, *have to*, *need*, *ought to*, *poder*, *deber*, *tener que*, *haber de*, and *hay que*. The researcher found that *ought to* and *have got to* did not occur in the English written text. 32 uses of the modal verb *may* were epistemic and one occurrence of *need* had a deontic interpretation out of 31 linguistic tokens. *Be supposed to* was also less frequent in the data (with four examples). English and Spanish shared quite similar linguistic devices to express deontic modality. Plaza found that the English used *should* above all followed by *have to*, and *must*. In Spanish the most frequent token was *deber*, followed by *tener que*, *haber que* and *poder*.

Mair and Leech (2006) in (Leech 2009) tracked the differences in written English between 1961 and 1991. The sample of this study consisted of two million words for each time period. The researchers found that a quasi-modals rose of 10.0% in British writing with one of 17.3% in British

speech, and an overall fell of 9.5% of the modals in British writing with one of 17.3% in British speech. They indicated the frequency of quasi-modals was 62.5% greater than in that of modal verbs in American speech.

Risingerova (2006) investigated the use of modal verbs (*must*, *should*, *may* and *might*) in spoken English produced by men and women. The sample composed of 100 million words from the British National Corpus. The researcher found that women used *must*, *should*, *you mustn't*, *you should not* and *you shouldn't* much more often than men. Women also used the modal verb *must* expressing necessity/obligation as often as men, even slightly more. The verb *can* expressed possibility/high probability and ability. *May* expressed either possibility/high probability or permission and finally *might* expressed possibility/high probability. On the other hand, some verbs used by women expressed much stronger attitudes. *Must* was used for obligation, inference/deduction and necessity, *should* for advisability/desirability, hypothetical event or result and for politeness. *Could* occurred often with the modal's meaning of possibility/high probability and ability. There were significant differences between men and women in using modal verbs.



Vethamani, Manaf and Akbari (2008) conducted a qualitative study that aimed at investigating the use of modal verbs at the syntactic and semantic levels. The researchers used discourse analysis to analyze the data. The sample consisted of 210 narrative compositions written by students in the Malaysian school system. The research findings showed that *can*, *will* and *could* were more frequently in two levels. Modals of probability and possibility showed lower frequencies of use in the writing. A total of 386 counts of the modals identified were syntactically accurate and only 40 were not. Most Malaysian ESL learners were able to use appropriate verb forms on their own, but when a modal was present, meaning became indefinite in some sentences and the verb form tended to be incorrect.

Abu-Jarad (2008) analyzed the errors generated by English major students in a grammar test. The sample of the study consisted of 179 English major students. The researcher used an achievement test to answer the questions of the study. The results of the study revealed that there was a natural development in the students' control of the grammatical items tested as the students moved to the upper levels. The results had also shown statistically significant differences between the performance of males and females in favor of the females. The comparison of the scores has shown

significant differences among the students' performance due to class level. This indicates that the students' performance improves as they move from one level to another.

Orlando (2009) investigated the using of modal verbs in a corpus of written English (BNCW) and in a corpus of spoken English (BNCS). The sample consisted of 254,237 words. The results of the study showed that *can* and *will* were the two most frequent modal verbs in the textbook corpus. The researcher found that the frequencies of modal verb patterns in the textbook corpus were similar to those in spoken English.

Abu-Faraj (2009) worked on a thesis to find out the different types of modal verbs and whether they were used to express the same possible meaning of modals in general. The sample of this study consisted of more than ten national and international speeches of His Majesty King Abdullah II. In her study, the researcher found that the central modals were frequently used, whereas some others like the marginal modals were rarely used. Furthermore, the researcher referred to other results that showed the modal idioms and the semi-modals were never used.

Saeed (2009) investigated the extent to which university Arab learners of English have mastered modals at the levels of recognition and production. The researcher used a questionnaire, which comprises two versions, testing students' mastery of modals at the levels of both recognition and production. The sample of the study consisted of 50 English major university students. The results of the study showed that the performance of the students in both forms of the measuring instrument was low. The function of requesting emerging as the most difficult for learners. On the other hand, the function of offer and permission received the highest number of correct responses. The function of possibility received a low rate of correct responses; it ranked second in terms of difficulty with a percentage of correct answers as low as 57.5%. The functions of offering and permission ranked the highest with 77% of correct responses.

Schmied (2010) investigated whether female and male ESL students had different hedges and their frequency. The sample of this study consisted of ten Master theses written at Chemnitz University of Technology. The texts were analyzed according to four types of hedges, namely epistemic lexical verbs, epistemic adverbs, adjectives and epistemic modal verbs. All these hedge expressions were analyzed according to their frequency in the

theses separated by gender. The results showed that females used a slightly higher number of lexical epistemic verbs and epistemic adverbs, whereas males applied slightly more epistemic adjectives. The findings of the modal verbs indicated no difference between male and female in using modal verbs.

Close and Aarts (2010) investigated *must*, *have to* and *have got to* in Present-Day British English (1960s–1990s). The sample consisted of 421,362 words from the British component of the International Corpus of English collected in the early 1990s and 464,074 words from the London-Lund Corpus collected between the late 1960s and early 1980s. The corpora was explored by using the International Corpus of English Corpus Utility Program software. In their study, the researchers found that a dramatic decrease in frequency of the core modal *must* and a significant increase in the frequency of the semi-modal *have to* in the Diachronic Corpus of Present-Day Spoken English. Changes in the modal system affect both epistemic and root uses of *must*, although *have to* was only an active rival to root *must*; epistemic instances of *have to* (and *have got to*) were rare in the corpus.

A quantitative study by Cappelle and De Sutter (2010) analyzed *should* and *ought to* in contemporary spoken and written British English. For both modals, *should* and *ought to*, the researchers made sure that at least 500 occurrences in context were extracted from corpora of British English. Half of the occurrences were from the spoken part of the BNC, which was searched with the accompanying SARA software. The findings revealed that *should* was used much more frequently than *ought to* and that the frequency of *ought to* in spoken language was higher than its frequency in written language.

Chen (2010) investigated how epistemic modality was used by non-native speaker (NNS) writers compared with native speaker (NS) writers in both native speakers (NS) and NNS corpus data. The selected sample consisted of 1,100,000 words from British National Corpus and over one million words from the Chinese Learner English Corpus. The researcher used contrastive analysis to analyse the data. The results of the study showed that the epistemic modality appeared in the non-native and native corpora total 18.76 and 48.8 per 10,000 words respectively. Native writers used the particular epistemic devices of modal verbs (*may, might*), adjectives (*possible, likely, unlikely, certain*), and adverbs (*possibly, probably*) more

frequently than the non-native writers. The native writers, however, used the epistemic adjective *sure* less frequently than the non-native groups.

Feng and Liu (2010) explored the modal verbs in the opening speech which was given by President Obama at a prime time news conference commemorating his first 100<sup>th</sup> day. Results of the study showed that *will* was used most frequently and *will* was employed to provide information about what would exactly happen in the future and referred to the intention of Obama's administration based on the speaker's belief and perception. The modal verb *can* was used to express the expectation that American people should have for their government's efforts. The use of *can* indicated the possibility. *Have to* expressed obligation from the external factors and *should* expressed imperative suggestion or command.

One of the quantitative research dealings with the modal verb *can* was conducted by Smutna (2010). The sample of this research consisted of 45 newspaper reports. The findings of the research showed that 63 occurrences represented the possibility meaning, 26 represented the ability meaning, and 4 occurrences represented the permission meaning.

Hacquard and Wellwood (2012) explored the distributions of *might*, *can*, *have to* and *must* in antecedents of conditionals, questions, and complements of attitude predicates. The researchers selected the New York Times section of the English Gigaword Corpus as a sample which contained 15,691,859 sentences. Out of these, 149,219 contained *might*, 88,859 *must*, and 475,590 *can*. The results of the study showed that *might* was significantly less frequent in antecedents of conditionals and matrix questions than *can*, but more frequent in complements of attitude verbs. Epistemic *must* was significantly less frequent than root *must* in antecedents of conditionals and questions when compared to this baseline. *Can* was significantly more likely to appear in a matrix question than *might*.

Al-Natour and Hijazi (2012) compared private and public schools in terms of students' achievement in English Language and parents' attitudes towards teaching their children in private schools. The researchers used a test and a questionnaire to achieve the aim of their study. The sample of the study consisted of 165 students from two public schools and two private schools, and 66 parents. Results of the study showed that there were statistically significant differences in students' achievement in English language between students of private and public schools in favor of private

schools, it also showed that there were statistically significant differences in the parents' attitudes towards teaching their children in private schools due to the academic level, gender, and financial level variables.

Almeida and Cruz, (2012) investigated the usage of evidential and epistemic modals in English texts belonging to the genre of travel writing. The sample of the study contained four works written by female travelers and the other four by male travelers. The results of the study revealed that the evidential and epistemic modals appeared more frequently in texts written by women. Female travelers used evidential modals (*may*, *might*, *must*, *will* and *would*) more than male travelers. Male travelers used epistemic modality (*may*) massively more than female.

One of the quantitative and qualitative studies was conducted by Sahlberg (2012) who investigated the hedging in women's and men's research articles. The sample of the study comprised of two research articles, one written by a female researcher and one by a male researcher. The results of the study revealed that modal verbs (*would*, *might* and *could*) occurred 17 times in the male's article and 36 times in the female's article. *May* occurred 6 times in the female's article, whereas it occurred 19 times in the male's



article. Male writer used tentativeness markers more than the female writer because male was more uncertain of the truth of his propositions.

One of the comparative studies dealing with modal verbs was conducted by Mahmood, Batool, Shah, and Parveen (2013). The objective of their study was to investigate various aspects of modal verbs and their stylistic interpretation in a Pakistani English Fiction (PEF) and a British English fiction (BEF) . The sample of this study consisted of one million words. They found that the modal verbs *would*, *shall*, *may* and *must* were more frequent in PEF (with about 12380 modal verbs) than in BEF (with 11131 modal verbs).

Kader, Begi, and Vaseghi (2013) investigated the Malaysian ESL learners' use of modals in their written task. The sample of this study consisted of 406, 500 words. The researchers used discourse analysis to analyze the data. The results of the study showed that *can*, *could* and *should* were the most common modals. They found too, students used each modal to perform different functions in their argumentative compositions.

Zelenka (2013) analyzed the modal verbs in legal documents. The sample consisted of 52,000 words. The results of the study showed that

*shall* occurred totally 384 times out of all 764 verbs which was a bit over 50% of all modal verbs occurrences followed by the modal verb *may* with 138 occurrences (18%) , *shall not* and *may not* with 86 times and *will* with 55 occurrences (7%). Furthermore, the researcher indicated other findings that showed *must* with 27 occurrences and *can* with 21.

The present study is concerned with the use of modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by English major male and female students at Middle East University. Therefore, it is different from other because it will be conducted in Jordan among undergraduate EFL students at MEU. The review of studies which were conducted on modal verbs and modality provided the researcher with valuable and sufficient literature for this study. As a matter of fact, these rich studies enabled the researcher to form the questions for the present study and paved the way for the researcher to follow a certain methodology.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Method and Procedures**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter describes the research design, population and sample, instrument, validity, reliability, data analysis, and procedures of the study.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study investigated the use of modal verbs in permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by students majoring in English at Middle East University in Jordan. The study was carried out by using quasi- experimental research, as the sample of the study was a purposeful sample and not a random one.

#### **3.2 Population and Sample of the Study**

The population of the study consisted of all the undergraduate students who were enrolled in the English language B.A program during the second semester of the academic year 2013/2014 at the Middle East University, counting 120 students. A sample of 50 students was chosen representing both male and female students of different levels from first to fourth year. The demographic background of the sample included data related to their

gender, level of B.A education, school and nationality. Table (1) below describes the characteristics of the sample.

**Table (1)**  
**Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

Item		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	40	80%
	Male	10	20%
Total		50	100%
Nationality	Jordanian	39	78%
	Non Jordanian	11	22%
Total		50	100%
School	Public School	29	58%
	Private School	21	42%
Total		50	100%
Level of BA Education	First Year	24	48%
	Second Year	12	24%
	Third Year	7	14%
	Fourth Year	7	14%
Total		50	100%

Table (1) shows that the number of female participants exceeds that of male ones. Females constituted 40 ,whereas males were only 10 students. Moreover, first year students formed 48% of the participants, second year students formed 24%, third year students formed 14% of the participants, and fourth year students formed 14% of the participants. Jordanian students were 78% of the sample, while non-Jordanian students were 22%. Table (1)

also shows that students who graduated from public schools were 58% and 42% from private schools.

### **3.3 Instrument of the Study**

In this study, the researcher used one instrument to accomplish the objectives of the study. The instrument of the study was the test.

#### **3.3 .1 Test**

The researcher designed a test for collecting data. The test comprised two sections. The first section of the test elicited demographic data about the participants. The second section consisted of 40 statements where participants were asked to read the statements and choose the exact meaning of the modal verb. Each statement was followed by points namely: permission, obligation, possibility and offer. Students were asked to do the test in the classroom. They were asked to fill out the test independently within a fixed time ranging between 20 to 25 minutes. The researcher followed the model answer which the experts agreed on. The test was corrected by using a scoring system. A correct answer was given one point, whereas a wrong answer was given zero point. Students' scores were interpreted according to the following; less than 60% means fail, from 60% to 69% fair, 70% to 79% good, 80% to 89% very good, and 90% to 100% excellent.

### **3.4 Validity of the Instrument**

The researcher achieved the validity of the instrument by asking a panel of five university professors, (See Appendix B. p77) in English linguistics and applied linguistics to provide their comments and suggestions on the suitability of both the form and the content of the test. According to the professors' suggestions few statements were deleted, and modified.

### **3.5 Reliability of the Instrument**

The reliability of the test was determined by means of test-retest. The test was administered in the first week of March 2014 to a similar group from the similar population, out of the selected sample, who shared the same characteristics of the sample. One week later, the students were retested again to find out the reliability of the test using Cronbach alpha which resulted in (0.92).

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

The researcher collected the data by means of the test. The test was collected, corrected and presented in tables showing the frequency of each modal verb, and the different uses of modal verbs in permission, offer, obligation and possibility. The collected data was analyzed statistically by using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) .

### **3.7 Procedures of the Study**

In conducting this study, the researcher followed the following procedures:

1. Reviewing books and periodicals on the use of modal verbs in English.
2. Setting questions and objectives, which utilize readings from previous studies.
3. Selecting the sample of the study.
4. Preparing the test.
5. Establishing the validity and reliability of the test.
6. Obtaining a letter of permission from the Middle East University to facilitate and give assistance to the researcher.
7. Administering the test.
8. Collecting the data from the test.
9. Analyzing the data by using SPSS program, and answering the questions of the study.
10. Putting the findings in tables, numbers, percentages and frequencies with short comment on them.
11. Discussing the results and conclusions.
12. Suggesting a number of recommendations of the study for further research.

13. Listing references according to American Psychological Association (APA) style.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Results of the Study**

#### **4.0 Introduction:**

This chapter presents the results of the questions which aimed at investigating the use of modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by students of MEU. The questions under investigation were as follows:

1. Is there any significant difference in using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation and possibility correctly by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to their gender?
2. Is there any significant difference in using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility correctly by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to their level of BA education?
3. Is there any significant difference in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility correctly by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to the school that they studied at?

#### **4.1 Results Related to the First Question**

The first question of the study "Is there any significant difference in using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation and possibility correctly

by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to their gender?"

Results are presented in Tables (2), (3), (4), (5), and (6).

#### 4.1.1 Using modal verbs for permission by English BA majoring students at MEU.

**Table (2) Using modal verbs for permission by English BA majoring students at MEU.**

No.	Statements	Male				Female			
		Correct Answers		Wrong Answers		Correct Answers		Wrong Answers	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1	<b>Might</b> I ask whether you are using the typewriter?	8	80%	2	20%	18	45%	22	55%
5	<b>Could</b> I smoke here?	6	60%	4	40%	22	55%	18	45%
9	You <b>may</b> go now.	3	30%	7	70%	16	40%	24	60%
12	You <b>may</b> borrow my bicycle if you wish.	3	30%	7	70%	13	32.5%	27	67.5%
15	You <b>can</b> go outside after you finish your homework?	6	60%	4	40%	17	42.5%	23	57.5%
17	<b>Can</b> I make a quick telephone call?	7	70%	3	30%	25	62.5%	15	37.5%
23	<b>May</b> I see the letter? Certainly.	3	30%	7	70%	26	65%	14	35%
26	<b>Can</b> I leave now?	5	50%	5	50%	27	67.5%	13	32.5%
34	<b>Will</b> you allow it?	6	60%	4	40%	22	55%	18	45%
40	<b>Would</b> you mind if I watched the news?	6	60%	4	40%	23	57.5%	17	42.5%
Total		53	53%	47	47%	209	52.25%	191	47.75%

Table (2) above shows that 53% of the males' answers were correct and 47% of the males' answers were wrong. The lowest percentage of males' correct answers on statements number 9, 12, and 23 was (30%). On the other hand, the highest percentage of correct answers on statement No.1 was (80%). Results reported in Table (2) above also show that 52.25% of the females' answers were correct, and 47.75% of the females' answers were wrong. The lowest percentage of correct answers was (32.5%) on statement number twelve, whereas the highest percentage of correct answers was (67.5%) for statement number twenty-six.

The results in Table (2) show that 80% of the male participants answered statement No.1 correctly, whereas 45% of the female ones answered the same statement correctly. In answering statement No.5, 60% of the male participants produced a correct answer, while 55% of female participants produced correct answer. 30% of the male participants answered statement No.9 correctly, whereas 40% of female participants answered it correctly. 30% of the male participants answered the twelfth statement correctly, and 32.5% of female participants answered it correctly. Sixty percent of the male participants answered the fifteenth statement correctly, whereas 42.5% of female participants answered it correctly.

Seventy percent of the male participants answered the seventeenth statement correctly. In comparison with, 62.5% of females who answered it wrongly. Thirty percent of the males answered the twenty-third statement correctly, but 65% of the females answered it correctly. In answering the twenty-sixth statement, 50% of the males and 67.5% of females produced a correct answer. In answering the thirty-fourth statement, 60% of the males and 55% of females produced a correct answer. In answering the fortieth statement, 60% of the males and 57.5% of females produced a correct answer.

#### **4.1.2 Using modal verbs for offer by English BA majoring students at MEU.**

Results reported in Table (3) below show that 51% of the males' answers were correct, whereas 49% of the males' answers were wrong. The highest percentage of correct answers was (60%) on statements No. 6 and 24. On the other hand, the lowest percentage of correct answers was (40%) on statement No. 37. Results reported in Table (3) below also show that 57% of the females' answers were correct, while 43% of the females' answers were wrong. The lowest percentage of correct answers was (35%) on statement No. 8. On the other hand, the highest percentage was (65%) on statements number 13 and 24.

Sixty percent of the males provided a correct answer for statement No.6, in comparison with 62.5% of the females who provided a correct answer. In answering the eighth statement, 50% of the males and 35% of females answered it correctly. Fifty percent of the males and 45% of females answered statement No.10 correctly. Fifty percent of the males and 65% of females answered the statement No. 13 correctly. 50% of the males answered the statement No. 16 correctly. In contrast, 60% of females answered correctly. Fifty percent of the males answered statement No. 21 correctly ,but 62.5% of females answered correctly. Responses to the twenty-fourth statement show that 60% of the males and 65% of females answered it correctly. In answering the twenty-ninth statement, 50% of the males and 62.5% of females answered it correctly. In answering the thirty-third statement, 50% of the males and 60% of females answered it correctly. The thirty- seventh statement revealed that 40% of the males and 52.5% of females answered the statement correctly.

**Table (3) Using Modal Verbs for Offer by English BA Majoring Students at MEU.**

No.	Statement	Male				Female			
		Correct Answers		Wrong Answers		Correct Answers		Wrong Answers	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
6	I <b>can</b> carry your bag. Oh thanks.	6	60%	4	40%	25	62.5%	15	37.5%
8	<b>Can</b> we pay you the money now? Oh, there's no hurry.	5	50%	5	50%	14	35%	26	65%
10	<b>Shall</b> I pick you up at 8?	5	50%	5	50%	18	45%	22	55%
13	We <b>can</b> give you a lift if you like. Oh, thank you.	5	50%	5	50%	26	65%	14	35%
16	I <b>will</b> wait for you if you like.	5	50%	5	50%	24	60%	16	40%
21	<b>Shall</b> I get a taxi for you? Yes, please.	5	50%	5	50%	25	62.5%	15	37.5%
24	<b>Would</b> you like one of these chocolates? Yes, please. Thank you.	6	60%	4	40%	26	65%	14	35%
29	<i>May I carry your suitcase, Madam?</i>	5	50%	5	50%	25	62.5%	15	37.5%
33	<b>May</b> I help you?	5	50%	5	50%	24	60%	16	40%
37	<b>Shall</b> I help you with your luggage?	4	40%	6	50%	21	52.5%	19	47.5%
Total		51	51%	49	49%	228	57%	172	43%

#### **4.1.3 Using modal verbs for obligation by English BA majoring students at MEU.**

Results reported in Table (4) below show that 63% of the males' answers were correct, and 37% of the males' answers were wrong. The lowest percentage of correct answers was (40%) on statement No.18, while the highest percentage of correct answers was (80%) on statements No.3,

and 31. Results reported in Table (4) also show that 58.25 % of the females' answers were correct, and 41.75 % of the females' answers were wrong. The lowest percentage of correct answers was (35%) on statement No.7, whereas the highest percentage of correct answer was (75%) on statement No.3.

**Table (4) Using Modal Verbs for Obligation by English BA Majoring Students at MEU**

No.	Statement	Male				Female			
		Correct Answers		Wrong Answers		Correct Answers		Wrong Answers	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
3	You <b>should</b> leave today.	8	80%	2	20%	30	75%	10	25%
7	Candidates <b>must</b> answer all questions.	6	60%	4	40%	14	35%	26	65%
14	You <b>must</b> be there before five.	6	60%	4	40%	21	52.5%	19	47.5%
18	You <b>ought to</b> start at once.	4	40%	6	60%	15	37.5%	25	62.5%
22	I <b>should</b> see a doctor. I have a terrible headache.	7	70%	3	30%	29	72.5%	11	27.5%
27	I <b>must</b> stop when the traffic lights turn red.	6	60%	4	40%	25	62.5%	15	37.5%
30	You <b>ought to</b> write to your mother.	6	60%	4	40%	21	52.5%	19	47.5%
32	People <b>should</b> treat each other better.	8	80%	2	20%	25	62.5%	15	37.5%
36	You <b>should</b> do as he says.	6	60%	4	40%	26	65%	14	35%
38	You <b>must</b> be back by ten o'clock.	6	60%	4	40%	27	67.5%	13	32.5%
Total		63	63%	37	37%	233	58.25%	167	41.75%

Results reported in Table (4) above show that 63% of males' answers were correct, and 37% of the females' answers were wrong. The lowest percentage of correct answers was (40%) on statement No.18, whereas the highest percentage was (75%) on statements No. 3 and 32.

In answering statement No.3, 80% of the males provided a correct answer, whereas 75% of females answered the statement correctly. In answering the seventh statement , 60% of the males, and 35% of females answered it correctly. In answering the fourteenth statement, 60% of the males, and 52.5% of females answered it correctly. In answering the eighteenth statement, 40% of the males, and 37.5% of females answered it correctly. Seventy percent of the males answered the twenty-second statement correctly and 72.5% of females answered it correctly. The twenty-seventh statement was answered correctly by 60% of the males and 62.5% of the females. Sixty percent of the males answered the thirtieth statement correctly, whereas 52.5% of females answered correctly. The thirty-second statement was answered by 80% of the males, but 62.5% of females answered it correctly. The thirty- sixth statement was answered correctly by 60% of the males and 65% of the females. The thirty-eighth statement was answered correctly by 60% of the males and 67.5% of the females.



#### 4.1.4 Using of Modal Verbs for Possibility by English BA Majoring

Students at MEU.

**Table (5) Using of Modal Verbs for Possibility by English BA Majoring Students at MEU.**

No.	Statement	Male				Female			
		Correct Answers		Wrong Answers		Correct Answers		Wrong Answers	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
2	She hasn't telephoned; she <b>may not</b> know the number.	9	90%	1	10%	29	72.5%	11	27.5%
4	The road <b>may</b> be blocked.	8	80%	2	20%	29	72.5%	11	27.5%
11	He <b>may</b> be telling the truth.	8	80%	2	20%	26	65%	14	35%
19	Careful, that gun <b>may</b> be loaded.	6	60%	4	40%	26	65%	14	35%
20	<b>Can</b> there be life on Mars?	7	70%	3	30%	23	57.5%	17	42.5%
25	What he says <b>might</b> be true.	5	50%	5	50%	26	65%	14	35%
28	Her performance was the best that <b>could</b> be hoped for	7	70%	3	30%	22	55%	18	45%
31	You <b>should</b> take an umbrella, it <b>could</b> rain later.	7	70%	3	30%	21	52.5%	19	47.5%
35	It <b>could</b> be good fun.	5	50%	5	50%	27	67.75%	13	32.25%
39	She <b>can't</b> be in her office. The lights are off.	5	50%	5	50%	21	52.5%	19	47.5%
Total		67	67%	33	33%	250	62.5%	150	37.5%

Results reported in Table (5) above show that 67% of the males' answers were correct, and 33% of the males' answers were wrong. The lowest percentage of correct answers was (50%) on statements number twenty-five, thirty-five, and thirty-nine, whereas the highest percentage was (90%) on statement No.2. Results reported in Table (9) above also show that 62.5 % of the females' answers were correct, and 37.5 % of the females' answers were wrong. The lowest percentage of correct answers was (52.5%) on statements number thirty-one and thirty-nine. On the other hand, the highest percentage was (72.5%) on statements No.2 and 4.

As shown in Table (5), 90% of the males and 72.5% of females answered statement No.2 correctly. Eighty percent of the males, and 72.5% of females answered statement No. 4 correctly. Eighty percent of the males, and 65% of females answered the eleventh statement correctly. Sixty percent of the males and 65% of females answered the nineteenth statement correctly. Seventy percent of the males and 57.5% of females answered the twentieth statement correctly. Fifty percent of the males, and 65% of females answered the twenty-fifth statement correctly. The twenty-eighth statement was answered correctly by 70% of the males and 55% of the females. The thirty-first statement was answered correctly by 70% of the males and

52.5% of the females. In answering the thirty-fifth statement, 50% of the males and 67.75% of females answered it correctly. In answering the thirty-ninth statement, 50% of the males and 52.5% of females answered it correctly.

**Table (6): Participants' Detailed Results of the Test**

Criteria	Female		Male		All participants	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Fail = (Less than 60%)	20	50%	4	40%	24	48%
Fair = (60% to 69%)	5	12.5%	3	30%	8	16%
Good = (70% to 79%)	6	15%	1	10%	7	14%
Very Good = (80% to 89%)	5	12.5%	1	10%	6	12%
Excellent = (90% to 100%)	4	10%	1	10%	5	10%
Total	40	100%	10	100%	50	100%

Table (6) above shows that 48% of the participants obtained scores less than the test cut-off level. This result reveals the participants' inability to use modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility correctly. The same table shows that 16% of the participants got scores ranging from (60%) to (69%). In addition, 14% of the participants got scores ranging from (70%) to (79%). Again, this result is confirmed by the fact that

12% of the participants got 'very good' grade (80% to 89%). However, 10% of the participants could reach an excellent grade. This percentage confirms the idea that most of the participants who could pass the cut-off level of the legal test could not get high scores and this reflects their shaky ability to use modals.

**Figure (1): Participants' Detailed Results of the Test**

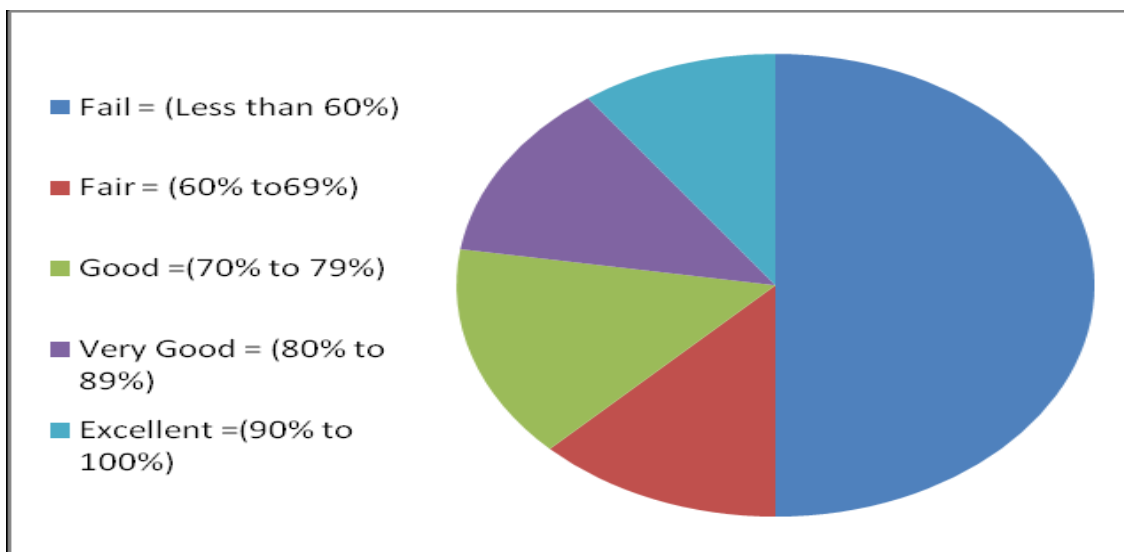


Figure (1) reveals that the students could not pass the test.

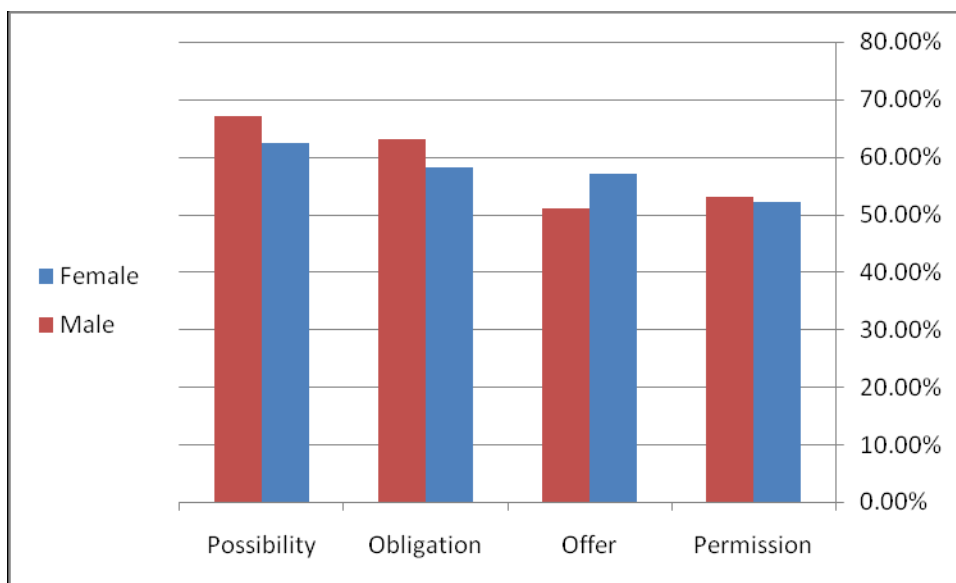
**Table (7) Using Modal Verbs for Permission, Offer, Obligation, and Possibility by English BA Majoring Students at MEU with regard to their Gender.**

No.	Function	Correct Answer			
		Female		Male	
		frequency	Percentage	frequency	Percentage
1	Permission	209	52.25%	53	53%
2	Offer	228	57%	51	51%
3	Obligation	233	58.25%	63	63%
4	Possibility	250	62.5%	67	67%
Total		920	57.5%	234	58.5%

Table (7) above shows that female and male participants had nearly a similar percentage in answering permission correctly, (53%) and (52.25%) respectively. Results revealed that there are not any significant differences between male and female participants in answering the permission statements. Females' answers were 57% on the offer statements, whereas males' answers were 51%. This result shows that the percentage of females' answers exceeded the percentage of males' answers. Female participants answered the obligation statements 58.25%, and male ones answered the obligation statements 41.75%. The results showed that the percentage of

females' answers exceeded the percentage of males' answers. Female participants answered the possibility statements 62.5%, whereas male participants answered 37.5%. It should be noted that females' answers exceeded the percentage of males' answers. Modals of possibility are the most common modals used correctly by male and female participants at MEU. Modals of permission were minimally correctly used. The lowest percentage of correct answers is on offer statements (51%) by male students.

**Figure (2): Using Modal Verbs for Permission, Offer, Obligation, and Possibility by English BA Majoring Students at MEU with regard to their Gender.**



**The answer to the first question is that there is a significant difference between males and females in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and the possibility by students of MEU in favor of males.**

## 4.2 Results Related to the Second Question

The second question of the study “Is there any significant difference in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to their level of BA education at the university?” Results are presented in Table (8).

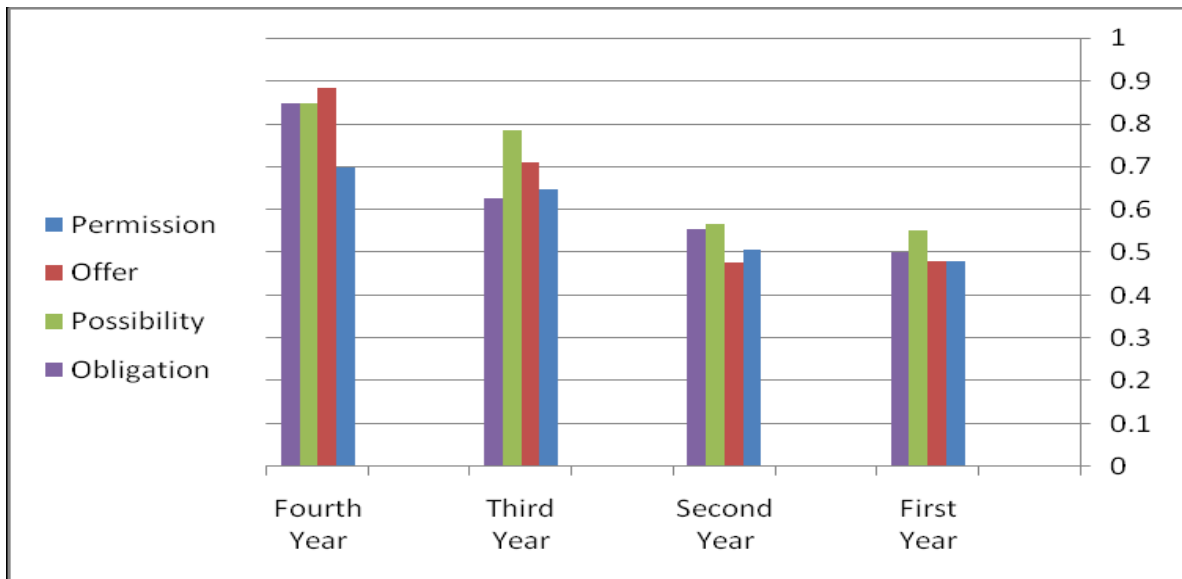
**Table (8) Percentage of Students’ Correct Answers According to Level of BA Education**

Level of BA Education	Permission	Offer	Possibility	Obligation
	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
First Year	48%	48%	55%	50%
Second Year	50.5%	47.5%	56.5%	55.5%
Third Year	64.75%	71%	78.5%	62.5%
Fourth Year	69.75%	88.25%	84.75%	84.75%

Table (8) below shows that students of the first year answered correctly the functions of permission (48%), offer (48%), possibility (55%) and obligation (50%). Second year students answered correctly the functions of permission (50.5%), offer (47.5%), possibility (56.5%) and obligation (55.5%). Students of third year answered correctly the functions of permission (64.75%), offer (71%), possibility (78.5%) and obligation (62.5%). Students of fourth year answered correctly the functions of

permission (69.75%), offer (88.25%), possibility (84.75%) and obligation (84.75%).

**Figure (3): Participants' Answers Related to Level of BA Education**



**The answer of the second question is that the highest percentage of correct answers was by fourth, third, second, and first year respectively.**

### **4.3 Results Related to the Third Question**

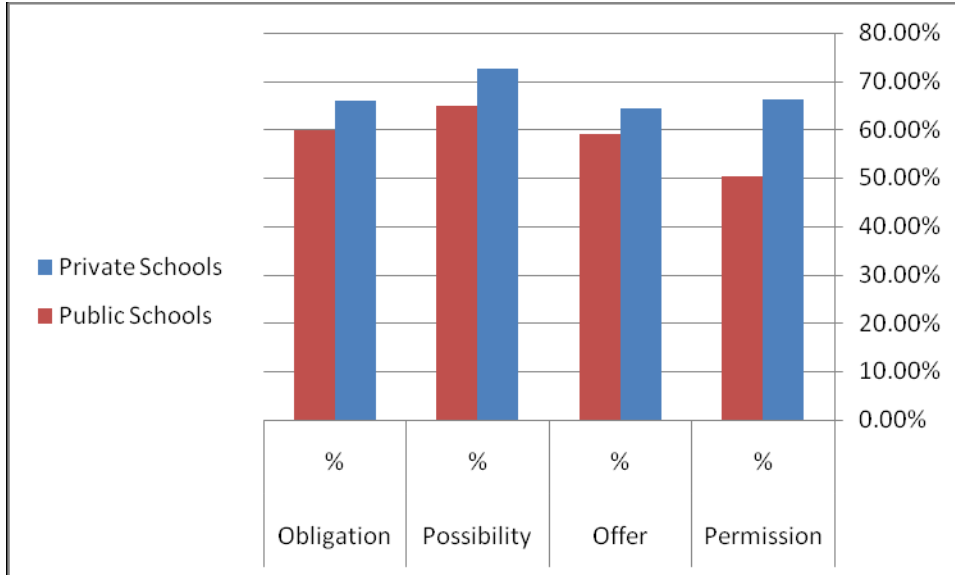
The third question of the study “Is there any significant difference in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to the school that they studied at?” Results are presented in Table (9).



**Table (9) Using Modal Verbs For Permission, Offer, Obligation, and Possibility by Students of MEU with regard to the School that They Studied at.**

Schools	Permission	Offer	Possibility	Obligation	Total
	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
Private Schools	66.25%	64.5%	72.5%	66%	67%
Public Schools	50.25%	59%	65%	60%	58.5%

Table (9) above shows that students of private schools answered the function of permission correctly (66.25%), whereas students of public schools answered the function of permission correctly (50.25%). Students of private schools answered correctly the function of offer (64.5%), whereas students of public school answered the functions of offer correctly (59%). Students of private schools answered the function of possibility correctly (72.5%). However, students of public schools answered the function of possibility correctly (65%). Students of private schools answered the function of obligation correctly (66%). On the other hand, students of public schools answered the function of obligation correctly (60%).

**Figure (4): Participants' Answers Related to School**

**The answer of the third question is that the students of private schools used modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility more correctly than the students of public schools.**

## Chapter Five

### Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

#### 5.0 Introduction

This study investigated the use of modal verbs in permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by English BA majoring students at MEU. This chapter presents a summary and a short discussion of the findings of the three questions. It also attempts to explain and interpret the results in light of the reviewed literature. The chapter concludes with recommendations and suggestions for future research.

#### 5.1 Discussion of Findings Related to the First Question

*Is there any significant difference in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to their gender?*

The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant difference between males and females in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and the possibility by students of MEU in favor of males. This result didn't agree with Schmied (2010) who claimed that there were no significant differences between males and females in using modal verbs. These results also agree with previous findings in the literature such as

Risingerovás' study (2006). Risingerovas found that there were significant differences between male and female in using modal verbs. The findings also revealed that male and female students could not get high scores and this reflects their shaky ability to use modals for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility. The result revealed that the function of possibility is the second highest percentage which was scored by male. This result was not in line that of Saeed's (2009) who claimed that the function of offer and permission received the highest number of correct responses, and the function of possibility received a low rate of correct responses.

Students' difficulties in using modal verbs are expected to be caused by four factors. The first one is misunderstanding of modal verbs, which means that students only remember a part of the grammatical rule of modal verbs and use it in every situation. The second one is the oversimplification of modal verbs. Students learn some meanings of modal verbs, but they only remember one of them. In other words, they think each modal verb only has one meaning. The third factor is the effect of frozen idiomatic usages. Jacobs and Roderick (1995), who argued that modal verbs cause difficulties for non – native speakers confirm this result.

## **5.2 Discussion of Findings Related to the Second Question**

*Is there any significant difference in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation and possibility by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to their level of BA education at the university?*

The results show that the level of BA education caused a difference in the student's achievement. The results of the study agree with Abu-Jarad (2008) who argued that there were significant differences among the students' performance due to class level and students' performance improves as they move from one level to another.

## **5.2 Discussion of Findings Related to the Third Question**

*Is there any significant difference in correctly using modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by English BA majoring students of MEU with regard to the school that they studied at?*

Results reveal that the students of private schools used modal verbs for permission, offer, obligation, and possibility more correctly than the students of public schools. Students of public school learn basic grammar at the school level for the purpose of passing tests and not to face any real -life situations. Application-oriented advanced grammar is not taught in schools.

Furthermore, adequate practice is not given to students to learn a language. On the other hand, students of private schools learn basic grammar at the school level for the purpose of experimental life. Public schools do not provide a particular kind of instruction that is available in private schools. Private schools provide the best possible education for their students. They attract higher-performing students and better teachers than public schools. This result is confirmed by Al-Natour and Hijazi (2012) who argued that there were statistically significant differences in students' achievement in English language between students of private and public schools in favor of private schools.

#### **5.4 Conclusions**

This study aims at investigating the use of modal verbs in permission, offer, obligation, and possibility by English BA majoring students at MEU. It is clear that 48% of the students could not pass the test. Students' performance in grammar is very poor as reflected in their low scores on the test. It was found that students had difficulty deciding on the appropriate modals with appropriate functions; most modals have more than one function. Most functions use more than one modal to express them.

## **5.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

1- Training the students to learn how to use modal verbs in speech and writing.

2-Teachers and curriculum designers should raise students' awareness to the importance and negative results of misusing modals.

3-Teachers must emphasize modal auxiliary verbs in order to develop better comprehension and understanding among students to use modals appropriately and more frequently.

4- Introducing more courses that deal with modal verbs and focus on the teaching them in English grammar books.

5-Textbook writers need to be in line with the English language syllabus so that the necessary modals will be stated in the syllabus.

6-For lower-level students, teachers can design activities that allow students to explore and be familiar with the formal properties of modals and semi-modals.

7- More research is needed to investigate students' ability in using modal verbs.

8- Future research should expand the sample size to include students of public and private universities and students of public and private schools.

9- The researcher suggests carrying out research on comparative studies between English and Arabic modals.



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## Appendices

### Appendix (A)

#### The Test

Dear participant,

I am Saber Ahmad Al-Hessa an MA student in the department of English Language and Literature at Middle East University. I am working on MA thesis. The topic of my research is **The Use of Modal Verbs in Permission, Offer, Obligation, and Possibility by English BA Majoring Students at MEU**. You are kindly requested to review the attached test. Your effort will highly be appreciated

Best Regards,

Saber Ahmad Al-Hessa



**Part A: Demographic Data: Personal Information**

Please, choose the suitable answer by putting (√) inside the brackets

**1) Gender :**

Male (        ) Female (        )

**2) Nationality:**

Jordanian (    ) Non-Jordanian (        )

**3) School:**

Private school (    ) Public school (        )

**4) Level of BA Education:**

First Year (    ) Second Year (        ) Third Year (    ) Fourth Year (    )

B. Read the following sentences and choose the exact meaning of the modal verb in the following sentences by putting (√).

No.	Statements	Permission	obligation	possibility	offers
1	<b>Might</b> I ask whether you are using the typewriter?	√			
2	She hasn't telephoned; she <b>may not</b> know the number.			√	
3	You <b>should</b> leave today.		√		
4	The road <b>may</b> be blocked.			√	
5	<b>Could</b> I smoke here?	√			
6	I <b>can</b> carry your bag. Oh thanks.				√
7	Candidates <b>must</b> answer all questions.		√		
8	<b>Can</b> we pay you the money now? Oh, there's no hurry.				√
9	You <b>may</b> go now.	√			
10	<b>Shall</b> I pick you up at 8?				√
11	He <b>may</b> be telling the truth.			√	
12	You <b>may</b> borrow my bicycle if you wish.	√			
13	We <b>can</b> give you a lift if you like. Oh, thank you.				√
14	You <b>must</b> be there before five.		√		
15	You <b>can</b> go outside after you finish your homework?	√			
16	I <b>will</b> wait for you if you like.				√
17	<b>Can</b> I make a quick telephone call?	√			
18	You <b>ought to</b> start at once.		√		
19	Careful, that gun <b>may</b> be loaded.			√	
20	What he says <b>might</b> be true.			√	
21	<b>Shall</b> I get a taxi for you? Yes, please.				√
22	I <b>should</b> see a doctor. I have a terrible headache.		√		

No.	Statements	Permission	obligation	Possibility	Offer
23	<b>May</b> I see the letter? Certainly.	√			
24	<b>Would</b> you like one of these chocolates? Yes, please. Thank you.				√
25	<b>Can</b> there be life on Mars?			√	
26	<b>Can</b> I leave now?	√			
27	I <b>must</b> stop when the traffic lights turn red.		√		
28	Her performance was the best that <b>could</b> be hoped for			√	
29	<b>May</b> I carry your suitcase, Madam?				√
30	You <b>ought to</b> write to your mother.		√		
31	You should take an umbrella, it <b>could</b> rain later.			√	
32	People <b>should</b> treat each other better.		√		
33	<b>May</b> I help you?				√
34	<b>Will</b> you allow it?	√			
35	It <b>could</b> be good fun.			√	
36	You <b>should</b> do as he says.		√		
37	<b>Shall</b> I help you with your luggage?				√
38	You <b>must</b> be back by ten o'clock.		√		
39	She <b>can't</b> be in her office. The lights are off.			√	
40	<b>Would</b> you mind if I watched the news?	√			

## Appendix (B)

### Panel of Experts

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Specialization</b>	<b>Place of Work</b>
Mohammad Irshaid Al-Khawalda	Professor	Linguistics / Syntax	Mutah University
Sabbar Sultan	Professor	Literature	Middle East University
Zakaria Abuhamdia	Professor	Sociolinguistics	Middle East University
Suhail Habashneh	Assistant Professor	Applied Linguistic	Hashemite University
Ahmad Mahmoud Saidat	Assistant Professor	Linguistics	Al-Hussein Bin Talal University

Dear Assistant Professor,

My name is Saber Ahmad Al-Hessa. I am currently an English language student at Middle East University. I am working on my MA thesis. The topic of my research is **The Use of Modal Verbs in Permission, Offer, Obligation, and Possibility by English BA Majoring Students at MEU.** My supervisor, Dr. Fatima Jafar, has recommended your names to serve as members of the panel of jurors to provide me with your comments, notes and recommendations on the adequacy of the content and its suitability to judge what intended to be analyzed.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours faithfully

Saber Ahmad Al-Hessa

## Appendix C

### Middle East University Permission Letter

جامعة الشرق الأوسط

MEU Middle East University

الرقم:ك أ ع\خ\1\63  
التاريخ: 2014/4/12

إلى من يهمه الأمر

تحية طيبة وبعد,

أرجو التكرم بالعمل على تسهيل مهمة الطالب صابر احمد الحيصة لتطبيق الأداة المعدة للبحث الذي سيتم تطبيقه على طلبة البكالوريوس في اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة الشرق الأوسط.

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام والتقدير

عميد كلية الآداب والعلوم

أ.د وليد عوجان