Using English Modality by Thai EFL Learners
การใช้กริยาช่วยของผู้เรียนชาวไทยที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

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Abstract

English verbs have many forms. One of them is modal verbs which must accompany a main verb. They do not change form or inflect for tense and person.   From past to present, a number of studies have been done to examine how EFL/ESL learners deal with English modal verbs.   This study investigates the understanding in underlying meaning of English modality from Thai EFL leaners. Fifty third-year English major participants from the Faculty of Humanities, Naresuan University took a test to examine nine modal verbs: *will, would, shall, should, can, could, may, might,* and *must.* The focus was on five major functions, namely requesting, offering, possibility, ability, and suggesting/advising. The findings revealed that the participants had a moderate percentage in the overall performance on the nine modal verbs.

Keywords: EFL, English modality, English modal verbs

Background / Rationale of the Research

English modal verbs are one of the daily grammatical usages and daily communication skill (Torabiardakani, Khojasteh, and Shokrpour, 2015). They are used to indicate modality: ability, permission, request, suggestion, order, possibility, and the like. Used to make the writer's claims more or less tentative, English modal verbs are very different from other verbs in that they cannot be followed by gerund, prepositions, present and past participles. In other words, modal verbs usually accompany a main verb, and do not change form or inflect for tense and person. Below are five major functions of modal verbs.

1.   Requesting

To make requests is a part of social use. Modal verbs serve this function as well. Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (2015) posit that there are two types of request. One is a request of a general nature, as in:

Will/Would/Can/Could + you help me with this math problem? (p.144)

The other is a specific request for permission, as in:

May/Might/Can/Could + I leave the room now?   (p.144)

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2. Offering permission

To ask or give permission in the form of questions does not appear in published academic writing. However, academic correspondence such as e-mails and proposals expresses a form of question (Writing Center). 'May' is regarded as the most polite and formal form (DeCapua, 2017). 'Can' refer to ability, but nowadays people gradually use it to show a sense of permission.   Here are two examples of offering permission: *You can go now, you may go now.*

3. Possibility

May, might, could express possibility and probability. For example, we may/might/could go to Venice next year (DeCapua, 2017). The Writing Center at University of North Carolina, at Chapel Hill suggest a scale of possibility. The stronger the modal, the stronger the possibility. 'Must' is the strongest logical possibility or the most probable (but still not guaranteed). Below is a scale of possibility from the lowest possibility on the right to the highest possibility on the right.

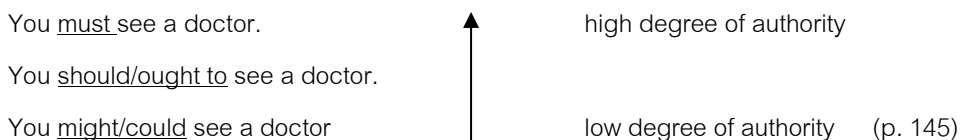| Might | could | can | may | should | would | will | must |

Low ⟶ High
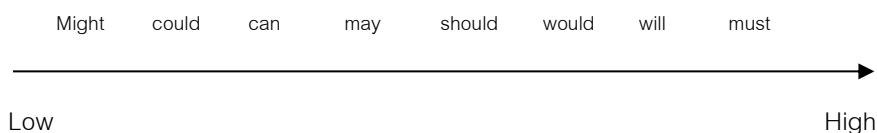
4. Ability

DeCapua (2017) claims that 'can' and 'could' are one of the first modals that EFL learn. 'Can' expresses either present or future ability, specifically physical ability. For example, Tom is very strong. He can lift that heavy box. 'Could' is a past form of 'can' in the sense of ability. Regarded as a polite form not a past form, 'could' is used in asking for permission or in making a request. For instance, could you give a me hand?

5. Suggesting and advising

Azar (1998) posits that 'could' and 'should' can be employed to make a suggestion. However, Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (2015) provide more details based on the speaker's degree of authority.

You <u>must </u>see a doctor.   ⬆   high degree of authority

You <u>should/ought to</u> see a doctor.

You <u>might/could</u> see a doctor   low degree of authority   (p. 145)

There are many studies related to the modal verb in various ways. Some scholars examine the utterances as appropriate use of English modal by being more euphemistic and politer, together with strengthen the mood by being more authoritative and imperative (Leech, 1983). Besides, differences between first (L1) and second languages (L2) may produce interference problems of English modality use for L2 learners. Similarities in L1 and L2, on the other hand, probably contribute to the facilitation of language learning (Corder, 1981).

The significant meaning of modality creates issues for Thai EFL learners in communication, conversation, reading, and writing. The distinction of each modal verb is conveyed and learned complicatedly. Each modal

verb carries nuanced meaning to a listener/ reader; besides, it enables misconception and misapplication of a modality. Taking this fact into consideration, this study aims to investigate the distinction of English modality by Thai L2 learners of English. Additionally, there was a few studies on English modality used by university participants in English major in Thailand. Thus, this study can fill the gap and bring awareness to not only teachers, but also students.

Research Objective

To examine Thai learners' abilities in using English modality.

Research Question

To what extent are Thai learners able to use English modality?

Significance of the Study

The research results reflect how much participants understand the underlying meaning of English modal verbs. In additional, this study could bring awareness on the problem of the underlying meaning of English modal verbs. This might lead to the teachers to develop their teaching by emphasizing how to use modal verbs correctly.

Review of Related Literature

Modality is one of the EFL learning English issues. EFL learners are confused the shades of modality meaning by their mother tongue since each English modal comprise more than one meaning. Modals are special verbs which behave irregularly in English. They not only are different from normal verbs but also provide additional information semantic connotations and communicative functions of the main verb that follows it such as permission, ability, obligation, prohibition, lack of necessity, advice, possibility, and probability. Having a great variety of communicative functions, modal verbs are followed by an infinitive without "to" and combined with "not" in negative sentences. Normally, the question form begins with modal verbs and reply by yes/no answer (Cavendish, 2005, p.42-74). Cook (1978) posits that the problem lies not in the surface positioning of modals nor in their wide range of meanings, but in associating the right modal with the right meaning. Moreover, English modalities could be a problem of learners who learns English as a foreign or second language.

Jabbari and Sedghi (2015) examined the acquisition of modal auxiliaries in appropriate contexts among the essential aspects of L2 acquisition for investigating the acquisition of English simple and perfect modal auxiliary verbs by adult Persian EFL learners. The participants were divided into two groups: intermediate (n=30) and advanced (n=30). They were asked to do the modal verb test. It was found that the participants could not distinguish the nuanced meaning of the modal verbs by the obstacles of L1 transference. The participants of both groups had an acceptable performance in epistemic contexts and primary application of modal auxiliaries.

Yangklang (2012) investigated the proficiency in modality use by 69 sophomores in the Faculty of Management Science, Silpakorn University. Data gained from the questionnaire responses. Results showed that some of the participants were able to discriminate the deontic modal statements from the epistemic modal

statements but most of them did not know that the modal statements with aspect markers. A certain modal statement is OK or NOT in felicitous and infelicitous contexts.

Dutra (1998) found that the current textbooks in Florida, USA were not suited to participants and the participants did not fully understand the nuanced meaning of the modal verbs. They were not to know the proper meaning of various kinds of the verbs that can indicate its root. The common meanings of root modality are a necessity, obligation, and advisability; they are too complicated. Dutra's study suggests simplifying such difficulties. The participants partook in several data collection process. The results clearly showed that the non-native speakers form-function mappings differed from the native speaker's usage. These new grammars seem to have different starting points depending on learner's L1. Some textbooks suggest that how to conceptualize participants about the use of root modalities by showing them how to use the structures in real life. Showing learners which concepts of root modality that the native speakers uses may help them understand better and more correctly.

Saeed (2009) found that the overall performance of the subjects in the study was quite low. The researcher used questionnaire to collect the data. There were 50 English major university participants who had studied English for 12-14 years and had scored 500 or more on the TOEFL as participants. The average percentage of correct responses in the recognition part is 64% against 49% in the production part.

Al-Qudah and Yasin (2016) investigated the acquisition of English modality among Arab learners of English as a foreign language. They analyzed the productive use in the written text of 26 fourth-year participants majoring in Applied English at the University of Jordan; furthermore, the participants were asked to translate the given sentences into their native language to investigate the effect of the native language on the perception of modality. The results show that the participants cannot understand the underlying meaning of English modality and also cannot discriminate the nuanced meaning of English modality correctly.

Torabiardakani, Khojasteh, and Shokrpour (2015) examined the ways in which advanced adult EFL Iranian participants of English used modal auxiliaries focusing specially on nine modals' semantic functions. They analyzed 136 compositions written by 136 advanced adult EFL Iranian participants of English. The findings showed that the participants did not use the English modal verbs in the proper context and could not distinguish the meaning correctly.

These studies above explore in two ways: quantitative and qualitative aspects. They aim to investigate the problem of English modal verbs use among the EFL leaners. The result of Jabbari and Sedghi (2015) shows that the EFL learners could not fully distinguish all shade meanings of English modal verbs; moreover, the proficiency of the participants was not affected to their performances but their L1 structure had an impact on their performances the most, which is compatible with Saeed (2009) and Yangklang (2012)'s studies. In terms of qualitative studies, some previous studies analyzed the written tasks to explain the problematic English modality usage. They found that the participants did not understand the underlying meaning of English modality and could not use suitable English modal verb in the proper context meaning (Torabiardakani, Khojasteh, & Shokrpour 2015;

Al-Qudah and Yasin, 2016, and Dutra, 1998). Moreover, a few studies explored the understanding of underlying of English modal verbs by English major or advanced English major student whose performance should be impressive. But the results revealed quite high flaw (Saeed, 2009; Al-Qudah & Yasin, 2016; Al-Qudah & Yasin, 2016).

According to the research mentioned above, all of these studies examine participants' understanding of English modalities through test, questionnaire, and data analysis. The results showed that the overall performance of the subjects was quite poor. There are a few research studies related to the modality use by the Thai English-major participants in comparison by using the test in Thailand. Therefore, there is some room to expand in modality use by Thai learners.

Research Methodology

This part covers participants, instrumentation, data collection procedure, and data analysis.

Participants

The test was collected from 50 third-year English-major participants at the Faculty of Humanities, Naresuan University who took the Intensive English Grammar Course (205101.

Instrumentation

The modality test was employed to measure and evaluate the participants' understanding in the underlying meaning of English modality. Designed to cover all English modality and all major shades of meaning of English modality, the test was checked by an English instructor. Before employed with the target group, it was tested by 26 participants in English major, Faculty of Education, Naresuan University as a trial test which consisted of 60 items. After the pilot test, 15 items were removed since the item of difficulty was not between 0.2-0.8 and the item of discrimination was not more than 0.2. Finally, the test contained 45 items to measure and evaluate the understanding the underlying of English modal verbs. The test comprised of English modalities, namely *can, could, shall, should, will, would, may, might,* and *must.* In addition, the focus was placed on five functions: requesting, offering, possibility, ability, and suggesting/advising.

Table 1: Model verb items and their five functions in 45 items on the test

No	Function	Can	Could	Shall	Should	Will	Would	May	Might	Must
1	Requesting		44				1			17, 35, 36
2	Offering Permission	7, 32		25		3		21, 23, 27		
3	Possibility			28, 29		4, 39		22, 24, 26	10, 11, 12, 15, 38, 43	16, 20, 30, 33, 34

No	Function	Can	Could	Shall	Should	Will	Would	May	Might	Must
4	Ability	8	5, 31, 42				2, 40			
5	Suggesting /Advising		6		9, 13, 14, 18, 19, 37, 41		45			

Data Collection

The procedure of data collection began when the researcher asked for a permission from the lecturer of the class to conduct the study. Then, the test was distributed to the participants. Next, the researcher explained the purposes and the directions of the study in Thai (their mother tongue) to ensure that the participants understood what they were expected to do. Later, the participants spent sixty minutes completing the test in the same room at the same time. Finally, the researcher collected the test for further analysis.

Data Analysis

The participants' responses were inspected and each correct answer in the test gained 1 point, and wrong responses gained 0 point. The percentage of the participants' responses were calculated to individual uses of modals in the test by using the statistical analysis software, Microsoft Excel; moreover, the results were presented through percentage, mean, maximum, and minimum scores.

Results and Discussion

The following part answers the major research question–*To what extent are Thai learners able to use English modality?*

Table 2: Rank of the difficulty of modality function use

No	Function	No. of Token	No. of Correct Answer	%	Difficult
1	Requesting	250	134	53.6	
2	Possibility	900	522	58	
3	Ability	300	183	61	
4	Suggesting/Advising	450	310	68.8	
5	Offering/Permission	350	285	81.4	
	Average	450	286.8	64.5	Easy

Noted: High percentages of correct answer refer to how easy it was and low percentages mean how difficult it was for the participants to use each function of modality.

The findings, as shown in Table 2, show that the participants have a significant troublesome conception in the appropriate usage functions of modal verbs. The average correct answer of the whole functions is 64.5%.

The rank of the difficulty of each modality function use from the most difficult to the least difficult is requesting (53.6%), *possibility* (58%), *ability* (61%), *suggesting/advising* (81.4%), and *offering/permission* (81.4). The percentage of using modal verb functions correctly in *requesting, possibility,* and *ability* are lower than the average percentage of using all modal verb functions correctly.

Table 3: Percentages of correct modal verb use ranked from the lowest to the highest (Individual Modal Verbs)

Rank of Difficulty	Modals	No. of Token	No. of Correct Answer	%
1 (the most difficult one)	Shall	150	59	39.3
2	Could	250	124	49.6
3	Must	400	224	56
4	May	300	178	59.3
5	Might	300	182	60.6
6	Should	350	251	71.7
7	Would	200	148	74
8	Can	150	133	88.6
9 (the easiest one)	Will	150	135	90
	Average	250	159.3	65.4

Noted: High percentage of correct answer refers to how easy it is and low percentage means how difficult it is for participants to use each modal verb.

Table 3 shows the rank of the difficulty of each modality use through a percentage of the correct answer. The average percentage of correct answers is 65.4%. The order of the most difficult to the least difficult modal verb are *shall* (39.3%), *could* (49.6%), *must* (56%), *may* (59.3%), *might* (60.6%), *should* (71.7%), *would* (74%), *can* (88.6%) and *will* (90%) respectively. The percentages of correct modal verb use of five out of nine modal verbs; *shall, could, must, may and might* are lower than the average percentage of using all modal verbs correctly. The results of the individual modality usages are discussed below.

Shall

The most difficult modality use is *shall* (39.3%). It might be explained that *shall* is the most difficult modality use because of the uncommon use in daily life. "In fact, *shall* occurs nowadays only in a few restricted linguistic contexts. In virtually all of these contexts that *shall* could be replaced by a different modal verb or other verbal construction." Leech (2004, p.74). The findings of the study support Leech's (2004) statement. Additionally, nowadays, people rarely use *shall* and they tend to use another similar modal verb such as *will* in any virtual conversations, Leech (2004, p.74).

The test used in this study has three questions related to the use of *shall*. One of the examples is shown below.

Table 4: Sample item 18

No.	Question	Correct Answer	Choices	No. of Student	%
28	We _____ no longer suffer the injustice of oppression.	shall	may	13	26%
			shall	8	16%
			must	29	58%

The most appropriate answer of this question is *shall* but the participants chose *shall* only 8 persons or only 16%. While *must* receives 29 persons or 58% as the most selected answer; moreover, 13 persons or 26% chose *may*. Certainly, *may* and *must* are incorrect answers because the meaning of this situation refers to a sense of *possibility* in the future action.

Could

Could receives the second place (49.6%) in the rank of difficulty (modality). The ambiguity of tense would be the reason that makes *could* hold the second position of the rank of difficulty of modality use. *Could* usually overlap its meaning with *can*, especially when it refers to ability (Murphy, 2004, p.54). There are five situations which convey three meanings to describe the understanding of *could* as the following examples.

First of all, Item 31 clearly expresses the meaning of ability that does not seem to be problematic. The participants are supposed to answer *could* because this situation happens in the past. On the other hand, 24 of them chose *can* the most (48%), 15 of them selected *could* (30%) and 11 of them marked *might* (22%). It is surprising that they chose the wrong answer in spite of having a clear signal about tense in the subordinate clause. In the first situation, participants might be confused with using *can* and *could* in the proper tense. Consider the following example:

Table 5: Sample item 31

No.	Question	Correct Answer	Choices	No. of Student	%
31	Susan _____ not hear the speaker because the crowd was cheering so loudly.	could	can	24	48%
			might	11	22%
			could	15	30%

Table 6 reveals that *suggesting/advising* meaning and the best answer is *could*. The most reply is *should* (33 participants, 66%), follows by *could* (12 participants, 24%) and the third is *must* (5 participants, 10%). It seems that the participants understood the meaning of the situation that is *suggesting/advising* but they are confused with the modal verbs use. The possible choices are *should* and *could* which convey *suggesting/advising* meaning but both terms have a nuanced meaning. That is, *should* provides a stronger meaning than *could* and

it is not suitable for this situation. Why is *should* not a good choice? There is a clue in the first sentence *'The book is optional'*. Although *should* looks apt on the surface, it is not as appropriate as *could*.

Table 6: Sample item 6

No.	Question	Correct Answer	Choices	No. of Student	%
6	The book is optional. My professor said we _____read it if we needed extra credit. But we don't have to read it if we don't want to.	could	should	33	66%
			could	12	24%
			must	5	10%

Opting *could* reflects the problem of choosing modal in the right meaning and appropriate situation. The findings are consistency with Torabiardakani, Khojasteh, and Shokrpour (2015) and Saeed (2009) in that the participants tend to use *could* incorrectly in the meaning of ability and possibility. However, the findings are in compatible with other studies, namely the use of could in in spoken and written British English Corpus (Kennedy, 2002), the British component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-GB) and British English corpus (Romer, 2004). The participants are unaware of the modal property that differentiates between similar modal verbs in any similar situations; moreover, they should use less sense and pay more attention to the possibility of truth, grammar and suitability.

Should and Must

Must reveals *possibility* and *requesting* meaning on the current test. It gains 56% on the rank of difficulty as the third position. On the other hand, 'should' ranks the sixth position on the rank of difficulty. Although their position is quite far, their meaning is quite similar and overlap to each other.

In general, "must" is a modal verb most commonly used to express certainty; it can also be used to express necessity or strong recommendation. However, native speakers prefer the more flexible form "have to." "Must not" can be used to prohibit actions, but this sounds very severe; speakers prefer to use softer modal verbs such as "should not" or "ought not" to dissuade rather than prohibit.

Should has the same kind of meaning as must, except that I expresses not confidence, but rather lack of full confidence, in the fulfillment of the happening described by the main verb (Meaning and the English Verb, p.100). *Must* has the overlapping meaning with *should* in the situation of negative recommendation form. In our test convey two meanings in eight situations that will be discussed some in the following examples:

Table 7: Sample items 33 & 34

No.	Question	Correct Answer	Choices	No. of Student	%
33	I've redone this math problem at least twenty times, but my answer is wrong according to the answer key. The answer in the book _____ be wrong.	must	can	8	16%
			should	4	8%
			must	38	76%
34	You _____be kidding! That can't be true.	must	will	7	14%
			should	8	16%
			must	35	70%

According to Table 7, the participants are able to differentiate between *should* and *must*. In item 33 *must* gets 76 % and *should* gets 8%. Like item 34, *must* gets 70 % and *should* gets 16%. Next, consider *should* in the following example:

Table 8: Sample items 14 & 18

No.	Question	Correct Answer	Choices	No. of Student	%
14	New research suggests that exercise can reduce the chance of heart disease as well as cancer. That's why I told my father that he _____ start walking once a day.	should	might	1	2%
			should	41	82%
			must	8	16%
18	At first, my boss didn't want to hire Sam. But because I had previously worked with Sam, I told my boss that he _____ take another look at his resume and reconsider him for the position.	should	might	6	12%
			should	37	74%
			must	7	14%

In *should*, the participants can identify the use of *should* as in Table 8. In item 14 *should* gets 82% and *must* gets 16%. Likewise, in item 18, *should* gets 74 % and *must* gets 14%. It can be said that *should* does not seem to be the problem.

The problem emerged in the modal verbs *must* and *might* as in Table 11.

Table 9: Sample item 20

No.	Question	Correct Answer	Choices	No. of Student	%
20	I would love to go on the cruise to Tahiti with Robin and Michelle. But such a luxurious trip _____ cost a fortune. I doubt I could afford something like that.	must	might	27	54%
			should	3	6%
			must	20	40%

Must is the best answer; moreover, it receives quite a high percentage (40%, 20 people). Although it has quite a high percentage, it is still below the highest percentage of *might* (27 people, 54%). The participants are expected to answer *must* since the core meaning of the whole situation tends to reply *must*. However, scores on *might* and *must* are so different. *Should* also reflects some difficulty for them. So, let's focus on the item of *should* below:

Table 10: Sample item 37

No.	Question	Correct Answer	Choices	No. of Student	%
37	Terry and Frank said they would come over right after work, so they _____ be here by 6.00.	should	would	21	42%
			should	27	54%
			can	2	4%

In Table 12, *would* gains 42% while *should* gains 54%. They do not correspond to one another in the sense of *suggestion*. Nonetheless, in the sense of desire, they seem to share the same meaning. In item 37, the meaning of this situation fits the sense of *suggestion*. So, *should* is the most appropriate answer when compared to the other two choices. *should* and *must* are one of the most confusing modal verbs in the function of recommendation and confidence in that *should* usually expresses a sense of softer confidence than *must*, which holds a stronger confidence and prohibition. The participants clearly understand the function of obligation; this is congruent with a study from Leech et al. (2009) in taking the sense of obligation/advice as a monosemous in modern English. The finding also correspond to a study from Torabiardakani, Khojasteh, and Shokrpour (2015) which claim that *should* is mainly understood as obligation/advice. In case of *must*, it has the same meaning of obligation but it reveals a stronger meaning of necessity. Our finding is very close to those in Torabiardakani, Khojasteh, and Shokrpour (2015). But it goes against the studies of Biber et al. (1999), Leech et al. (2009), and Saeed (2009) in that *must* is not a difficult modal verb use.

May and Might

Both of them are on the fourth (59.3%) and fifth (60.6%) position in the rank of difficulty; they are ranked under the average percentage (65.4%). Though both of them are under the average percentage, they are still slightly above 50%. The meaning of *possibility* can be applied to both verbs; moreover, *may* is conveyed a sense of *offering permission* and it is overlapping to other modal verbs such as *can*, *will* and *would* particularly in terms of inference. Consider Table 11.

Table 11: Sample item 23

No.	Question	Correct Answer	Choices	No. of Student	%
23	_____ I try a little of your Black Forest cake? It looks absolutely delicious – I have got to taste it!	may	may	36	72%
			shall	14	28%
			must	0	0%

In item 23, the best answer is *may* (72%). The participants might be confused with a modal verb *shall* (28%) with the meaning and the use of them. *Shall* and *may* can be employed in the *offering permission* situations as well. Nonetheless, there is some slight difference between *shall* and *may*. In other words, if *you "shall" do something, that means you must do it the way the statute says; you have no options or discretion. If you "may" do something, it is an option, but there could be other options.* (www.bakkenorman.com, Shall vs. May). In short, the most appropriate answer is *may*.

Table 12: Sample item 10

No.	Question	Correct Answer	Choices	No. of Student	%
10	Debbie said she was really busy this week, but I think she _____show up at the party if she doesn't have to work overtime on Friday.	might	might	36	72%
			should	7	14%
			must	7	14%
26	I'm not really sure if Susan is going to go snowboarding with us or not. She _____ decide to stay here and study for her Japanese final. She has got to get a good score on the test if she wants to qualify to study abroad in Tokyo next semester.	may	may	27	54%
			would	5	10%
			can	18	36%

Both items 10 and 26 are clearly conveyed a sense of *possibility*. In item 10, *might* gains 72%*; should* and *must* share the same percentage (7%). In item 26 *may, can, and would receive* 54%, 36%, and 10%, respectively. In short, the most appropriate answer is *may* that we can also replace *might* in the same meaning as in item 23. Based on their answers, the participants understand the meaning of modal verbs. Indeed, may and might carry the function of possibility and offering permission. Their responses support the findings that participants cannot figure out the underlying meaning in both of them that much.

Would

The seventh position in the rank of difficulty is *would* with 74%. It reflects that participants quite understand the shade of meaning. But there is some misunderstanding of the overlapping meaning with *will*. See Table 13 for more information.

Table 13: Sample item 40

No.	Question	Correct Answer	Choices	No. of Student	%
40	I haven't decided yet. Is there anything you _____ recommend?	would	will	25	50%
			should	2	4%
			would	23	46%

The use of *will* instead of *would* in this instance is not very appropriate because this situation is expressed politely and this modal verb conveys the meaning of *ability* in the restaurant context. In this case, participants are confused with the sense that *will* can replace *would* because would should be used in the past events not the present ones. The result of would in this study corresponded to Saeed (2009).

Can

The difficulty of *can* ranks in the eighth position with the high score of 88.6% and it gets over the average percentage. In the test, *can* is used to indicate the function of *offering permission* and *ability*, as in Table 14.

Table 14: Sample items 7 & 8

No.	Question	Correct Answer	Choices	No. of Student	%
7	Ned: _____ I borrow your lighter for a minute? Stephen: Sure, no problem.	can	can	50	100%
			might	0	0%
			should	0	0%
8	I _____ believe she said that to Megan! She insulted her cooking in front of everyone at the party last night.	can't	can't	41	82%
			shouldn't	7	14%
			mustn't	2	4%

As you see in item 7, the most selected answer is *can* (100%). It means participants clearly understand the meaning of *ability*. By the same token, the participants did well in item 8 with the function of *ability*. *Can* is supposed to be the easiest modality since it is used widely in the meaning of *ability and possibility* (Seaton, *Grammar a Course for participants*, 2009, p.100). The result of *can* is compatible with Saeed (2009) in the production part and recognition part. Moreover, the findings agree with Biber et al. (1999) and Kennedy (2002) in that 'can' widely involves ability and possibility in spoken and written English.

Will

The modal *will* reveals the easiest performance in the lowest rank of difficulty (90%). In other words, *Will* is the easiest modality use. Although it gets 90%, the remaining 10% should be taken into consideration.

Table 15: Sample items 3 & 4

No.	Question	Correct Answer	Choices	No. of Student	%
3	Can't you do your homework? Don't worry, I _____ come and help.	will	must	0	0%
			may	1	2%
			will	49	98%
4	We _____ go fishing at the weekend if the weather is good.	will	will	42	84%
			would	5	10%
			should	3	6%

These examples illustrate the extent to which *will* can represent the meaning of *offering permission* and *possibility*. Item 3 presents the meaning of *offering permission* that learner definitely understands the shade of the meaning with the very high percentage (98%). The function of *possibility* in item 4 obviously occupies the understanding of the meaning in the situation with a high percentage as well (42%). This study reveals that will is the easiest modal verb according to the result above; furthermore, it is also consistent with Saeed (2009) and Yangklang (2012). Both studies confirm that *will* is the easiest modality and their participants clearly understood the meaning functions and the uses of *will* in any situation, especially in daily communication.

Conclusions and Implications

This research examines the understanding of the shade meaning of modal verbs in EFL learners, specifically third-year English major students, Faculty of Humanities, Naresuan University. The findings of the study reveals that the participants' performance are not high (65.4%). According to Table 3, the average percentage of the difficult use of individual modal verbs is 65.4% against 64.5% the difficult use of meaning functions of modal verbs. The percentage of five out of nine modal verb use; *shall, could, must, may and might,* is lower than the average percentage of all modality. The easiest modality of this study: *will, can and would*, is consistent with Römer (2004). Moreover, three functions—*requesting, possibility,* and *ability*—receive a lower percentage than average percentage. The overlapping meanings confuse learners to choose the proper modal to the suitable situation. It is possible that the participants were confused with the meaning between Thai and English while they did the test. The results of the study reflect the misunderstanding and misuse of modal verbs that Thai participants perform.

The EFL learners should be aware of the nuanced meaning of each modal verb to produce more professional work. The shade of meaning should be considered in the classroom to prevent the misuse of modal verbs. The important modal verbs in daily communication should be heightened in textbook and the teacher's teaching in class; furthermore, the teacher should inform the misuse and misunderstanding of modal verbs to illustrate the distorted meaning. Nowadays, a little research has been conducted on the modal verbs. Further research should continue with a massive and diverse subject for the more significant results.

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Appendix A

	Questions	Correct An	Incorrect A	Frequency	Percent
1	It's quite late, I _____ rather have a cup of tea than coffee now.	would	will	5	10%
			would	39	78%
			should	6	12%
2	When we were kids, we _____ hang around the playground every afternoon.	would	should	3	6%
			would	40	80%
			might	7	14%
3	Can't you do your homework? Don't worry, I _____ come and help.	will	must	0	0%
			may	1	2%
			will	49	98%
4	We _____ go fishing at the weekend if the weather is good.	will	will	42	84%
			would	5	10%
			should	3	6%
5	I _____ speak Arabic fluently when I was a child and we live in Egypt. But after we mo	could	could	50	100%
			might	0	0%
			should	0	0%
6	The book is optional. My professor said we _____ read it if we needed extra credit. Bu	could	should	33	66%
			could	12	24%
			must	5	10%
7	Ned: _____ I borrow your lighter for a minute? Stephen: Sure, no problem.	can	can	50	100%
			might	0	0%
			should	0	0%
8	I _____ believe she said that to Megan! She insulted her cooking in front of everyone	can't	can't	41	82%
			shouldn't	7	14%
			mustn't	2	4%
9	Nancy said you didn't need to buy her anything for her birthday, but I really think you __	should	might	5	10%
			must	4	8%
			should	41	82%
10	Debbie said she was really busy this week, but I think she _____ show up at the party	might	might	36	72%
			should	7	14%
			must	7	14%
11	Oh my god, he's unconscious. Don't move him-he _____ have internal injuries. Someb	might	might	27	54%
			must	19	38%
			should	4	8%
12	Fiona: I don't know. It _____ be under the couch. Or, perhaps I absent-mindedly took in into the kitchen. I'll check in there.	might	might	38	76%
			should	8	16%
			must	4	8%
13	For most people, learning a language is a challenging undertaking. Experts agree that to r	should	might	1	2%
			should	31	62%
			must	18	36%
14	New research suggests that exercise can reduce the chance of heart disease as well as c	should	might	1	2%
			should	41	82%
			must	8	16%
15	We should invite Sally and her husband to come to the picnic on Saturday. We haven't se	might	might	24	48%
			should	4	8%
			must	22	44%

#	Question	Answer	Option	n	%
16	Tim: While I was a student, I spent a year and a half studying Pygmy culture in the Central African Republic. My research focused on unique aspects of their social structure and religion. Simon: That _____ have been absolutely fascinating!	must	might	7	14%
			should	14	28%
			must	29	58%
17	We had better call Tony to see if he's at home before we go over to his house. He ____	must	might	36	72%
			should	7	14%
			must	7	14%
18	At first, my boss didn't want to hire Sam. But because I had previously worked with Sam,	should	might	6	12%
			should	37	74%
			must	7	14%
19	You _____ not worry so much. It doesn't do you any good. Either you get the job, or	should	might	2	4%
			should	38	76%
			must	10	20%
20	I would love to go on the cruise to Tahiti with Robin and Michelle. But such a luxurious trip	must	might	27	54%
			should	3	6%
			must	20	40%
21	I know it's rather rude, but _____ I ask you where you purchased that pocket watch?	may	may	32	64%
			should	7	14%
			shall	11	22%
22	It's pretty hot in the desert at this time of year. If we are going to do some hiking, we ha	may	may	23	46%
			could	13	26%
			would	14	28%
23	_____ I try a little of your Black Forest cake? It looks absolutely delicious – I have got	may	may	36	72%
			shall	14	28%
			must	0	0%
24	You had better take along some cash. The restaurant it _____ not accept credit cards	may	may	23	46%
			could	26	52%
			shall	1	2%
25	_____ we move into the living room? It's more comfortable in there and there's a bea	shall	may	9	18%
			would	2	4%
			shall	39	78%
26	I'm not really sure if Susan is going to go snowboarding with us or not. She _____ dec	may	may	27	54%
			would	5	10%
			can	18	36%
27	_____ I have a look at that necklace there in the display case? It's exactly what I've	may	may	36	72%
			shall	10	20%
			must	4	8%
28	We _____ no longer suffer the injustice of oppression.	shall	may	13	26%
			shall	8	16%
			must	29	58%
29	Ian, Evelyn and Deborah will be attending the conference. I _____ be attending as w	shall	may	15	30%
			shall	12	24%
			could	23	46%
30	Ted's flight from Amsterdam took more than 11 hours. He _____ be exhausted after s	must	can	7	14%
			shall	4	8%
			must	39	78%
31	Susan _____ not hear the speaker because the crowd was cheering so loudly.	could	can	24	48%
			might	11	22%
			could	15	30%
32	_____ you hold your breath for more than a minute? Jack: No. It's impossible.	can	can	43	86%
			might	2	4%
			should	5	10%
33	I've redone this math problem at least twenty times, but my answer is wrong according to	must	can	8	16%
			should	4	8%
			must	38	76%
34	You _____ be kidding! That can't be true.	must	will	7	14%
			should	8	16%
			must	35	70%
35	You _____ leave the table once you have finished your meal and politely excused you	must	would	6	12%
			may	18	36%
			must	26	52%
36	You _____ forget to pay the rent tomorrow. The landlord is very strict about paying	mustn't	won't	8	16%
			can't	12	24%
			mustn't	30	60%

#	Question	Answer	Option	Count	%
37	Terry and Frank said they would come over right after work, so they _____ be here	should	would	21	42%
			should	27	54%
			can	2	4%
38	The lamp _____ not be broken. Maybe the light bulb just burned out.	might	could	17	34%
			should	5	10%
			might	28	56%
39	Tony: How long _____ you be staying in Paris? Andy: For a week.	will	will	44	88%
			should	0	0%
			can	6	12%
40	I haven't decided yet. Is there anything you _____ recommend?	would	will	25	50%
			should	2	4%
			would	23	46%
41	Is there anything you think I _____ try?	should	might	9	18%
			should	36	72%
			could	5	10%
42	You _____ try the Cajun catfish – or perhaps the Gumbo.	could	might	18	36%
			would	17	34%
			could	15	30%
43	That sounds wonderful, but that _____ be a little too spicy for me.	might	might	29	58%
			would	11	22%
			could	10	20%
44	Umm, (44) _____ I have the barbecued prawns?	could	might	6	12%
			should	12	24%
			could	32	64%
45	Sure, _____ you like a salad with that?	would	would	47	94%
			should	2	4%
			could	1	2%