MOOD IN BUSINESS ENGLISH

by

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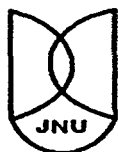
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CERTIFICATE

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This dissertation titled "**Mood in Business English**" submitted by me, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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ABSTRACT

This work is about finding the pattern in modal distribution in business text across L1 (British and American English) and L2 (Indian English) varieties of English. It presents the density (the number of modals against the total number of words) of modal in business text and analyses the interpretation of modals by L1 and L2 speakers. All these aim to provide us with an insight into how to use modals in business communication effectively.

The work is divided into four chapters. The first chapter gives a brief idea about the work and is followed by the chapter which describes business English and the status of it in India. The third chapter discusses the usages of modal verbs and also gives a review of studies conducted on modals in the past. The analysis of data is done in the fourth chapter, and this is followed by the last chapter, which puts down the findings from the research, some implications for business communication, and the conclusion.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

English is a widely spoken language in the world and an interesting fact about it is that this is a language which has more non-native speakers than native ones (Leitner, 2008), As a result of a huge number of speakers using it worldwide, it has grown several varieties, ranging from pidgin and Creole to a standard variety of English. No economy can do without it any longer because this language cuts across all domains of language use. It is a promise of global participation, benefits the economy and businesses, media information, culture, and careers. English dominates in international institutions, international communication, international relations, science and technology, military and peacekeeping actions, popular culture and elsewhere.

English is being used for business communication worldwide. Communication is integral to any business and successful communication determines the success of a business. Businesses do face problems in terms of communication given that the competency level of speakers of English is not alike. Since the majority of speakers of English are non-native, there is wide scope of studies on how communication takes place between native and non-native speakers of English. One of the areas of study is the complex system of modal verbs in English, and the reason for choosing them is they are used to perform many important functions in business text, not just in their epistemic senses but also in order to make expressions polite and customer friendly. So, one expects modal auxiliaries to be employed in almost every context of business communication.

English has a significant number of modal auxiliary verbs and each has a number of uses. This complexity takes considerable work for most learners to master. In the realm of grammar, teaching the modal system of English can be compared to walking a tightrope. The balance normally required in pedagogical grammars when presenting material that is simplified enough for students to understand is magnified twofold in the modal system. The teacher is required to present an extremely complex system with enough intricacy to illustrate the relationship of the modal auxiliaries to each other and their place in a semantic system. (Jarvis, 1972). When a speaker chooses to use one modal, they are deciding not to use any of the other modals, thereby indicating the degree of emphasis. (Byrd, 1995) "The problem lies neither in the surface positioning of modals nor in their wide range of meanings, but in associating the right modal with the right meaning." (Cook, 1978, p.5) The difficulties, in interpreting an already complex system, have often been compounded by teaching methods that present modals as a list. (Byrd, 1995) Students memorize the modals with their accompanying meanings, but they may have no idea of the subtle social and cultural information each choice conveys. The above account of the problems faced by second language learners while learning modal use is an indication that we may not find a similar pattern of modal use in the L1 and L2 varieties of English. Therefore, it is likely that we get a different pattern of modal use in the text we are going to study. This work is an attempt to gauge the use of modals in different varieties of English. Here, the attempt is made to assess both the distribution and perception of modals in the L1 and L2 varieties of English.

Further, the motivation for this research comes also from the latest finding that modal verbs are on the decline, and some modals have become marginal enough to be overlooked while teaching them to second language learners.

Leech (2003: 223) says that the English modal auxiliaries as a group have been declining significantly in their frequency of use and explicitly recommends to those involved in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language not to waste hours of valuable classroom time teaching *shall* and *ought to*. Therefore, before stopping to teach modals, we can look at the distribution pattern of modals in various genres (types of language use with special characteristics) of English to ascertain if the pattern remains similar or not. Since business communication is a significant genre of English, the findings of the study will be of great help.

Another area where the present research can help is to determine the impact of the variety of English on modal use. Katikar (1984) observes that a few systematic differences exist between different types of English. However, Kirk (1994) claims that text type is a more important factor in variation than regionality. Therefore, the objective of the present work is also to note the extent of variation in modal use across the language varieties as the text type here is similar for both L1 and L2.

1. **Hypotheses.** Against the backdrop of the discussion in the previous section, the main hypothesis, on which the present study is based, is that the density of distribution of modals remains stable in certain 'genres' of English, contrary to recent claims—for example, Leech (2003).

1.1. **Corollary Hypotheses.** The following are the corollary hypotheses for the present work.

(1) L1 and L2 have different distribution patterns of modal use.

(2) Certain modals have a higher density of distribution in the L2 variety, for example, *shall* and *would*.

(3) L2 speakers have a wider range of the interpretation of a modal.

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1.2.Justification. Business English uses modals for crucial purposes like assuring people of the possibility of something or ensuring certainty of an action or differentiating between formal and informal communication. The other contexts are where it is needed to state terms and conditions and policies and to elaborate on them. Being polite in business communication is incredibly important, and even here, modals play a crucial role. Business communication also relies heavily on modal verbs for the purpose of describing the products, features, and making offers.

Modals reflect cultural belief, power relation, and intention too, and these are not likely to be similar across countries. So, we can expect a variation in the distribution pattern of modals in two varieties. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) observe that modals that function as social interaction (root) modals require that the characteristics of the social situation be taken into account. Harris, McLaughlin, and Still in the online article 'Modals: A balancing act' say that a native speaker of Arabic has to overcome the dynamics of power relationships to understand the modal system in English. Leech's (2003) study also showed a difference in the modal distribution in BrE from AmE. While all the modal verbs declined in their frequency in American English (AmE), the frequency of two modals, *can and could,* increased in British English (BrE). Similarly, Andrew Wilson's (2005) study of an Indian English corpus showed the unique presence of *shall* in Indian science fiction. Therefore, this study should also reflect that the distribution pattern of modals in L1 and L2 varieties is not alike even when the genre of language use is similar.

For the subsidiary hypothesis that modals have a wide range of interpretations by L2 speakers, there is enough evidence of second language learners facing

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difficulty deciding on a modal verb in a given context. And as Cook 1978 says that second language learners find it difficult to associate the right modal with the right meaning, this can result in their getting various interpretations of a modal. Therefore, it is expected that L2 speakers will have a wider range of interpretations for a modal.

2. **Methodology.** There are two parts of the work: the first part discusses the distribution of modals in business text and the second part talks about the differences in the perception of a modal verb by L1 and L2 speakers. The present work in Sardinha's (2002) words is a study of small medium corpora of the L1 and L2 varieties. He says a corpus of over a 100,000 words can be considered a small-medium corpus, which is believed to be quite representative, especially considering the degree of specialization of the corpus, which is the case at stake. The data here exceeds this limit by a huge number. While corpus of 443,812 (318,504 from AmE and 125,308 from BrE) is taken for the L1 variety, a corpus of 113,646 words has been taken for L2 (Indian English). Websites of similar nature have been considered to avoid any variation due to the nature of the text. Most of these websites are either related to advertising or providing mobile service. Data has been collected from four L1 (AmE and BrE) websites, namely AdWords, Verizon, Vodafone, and Yell.com. An equal number of websites using L2 (Indian English) has also been taken. They are MTNL, BSNL, Tata Indicom, and Tata Sky. While AdWords and Yell are related to advertising, Verizon, Vodafone, Tata Indicom, MTNL, BSNL are mobile service providers. The only site, Tata Sky, is different than the others, and it is a leading provider of DTH service in India.

After deciding on the websites, data was divided into different sections as found on most of these websites. The reason for creating these sections has been discussed in the third chapter. The data helped find the density of modals that is the number of modals against the other words in the text. For the purpose of calculating the number of words and modals, the Word Count option in Microsoft Word was used. To ensure, only modals and not other words are counted, the data was checked even manually. This data has been used to determine the distribution of the primary and secondary modal verbs in different sections of the text. While analyzing the distribution of modals, the frequency and percentage of modals have been shown by means of pie charts. There are pie charts separately for the primary and secondary modal verbs depicting the difference in their use in L1 and L2.

For the second part of the study, which is about finding how CAN is interpreted by L1 and L2 speakers, a questionnaire was created with more than 100 sentences. The initial plan was to send these 100 sentences to informants in a word document requesting them to pass their judgment on these sentences. However, when the questionnaire was sent to US English speakers, the response was that nobody did more than 5 sentences. And then one of the informants who had tried filling out the survey asked me to use the tool on surveymonkey.com to create the survey. After the survey was created, this survey was sent to a mailing list in the US. There are around 4000 people in the US subscribed to this list. Out of which 16 people filled out the survey, and they did only twenty sentences. Data collected from them is the benchmark for the study. Next, I collected the responses of Indian English speakers for the same sentences.

Since the aim of the work is to find how a business text will be interpreted by L2 speakers irrespective of their age, sex, and similar other factors. These factors have not been taken into account as a business cannot afford to write separate texts keeping in mind the age, sex, and other factors of the reader. But going a step forward and looking at even these factors can be useful for businesses that want to target a specific age group or sex, and so on. But, for the present study, a random sample of 15 speakers of the Indian variety of English has been taken, and an attempt is made to see how differently a text is interpreted by them. This is because the businesses that have been studied don't target a specific class, age group, sex, and so on, but they have the same business text meant for everyone. The paper also tries to find whether people get multiple interpretations of a sentence, and so, informants were asked to write their preferences on a 3-point scale in case they get multiple interpretations.

3. **Reservations.** While the study does give a detailed account of the distribution of modal verbs in the business text and how a modal verb is perceived by speakers of different varieties, the results here are not conclusive. We can take larger samples to determine the gaps in the perception of modals by L2 speakers. Also, further research can consider more modal verbs for this purpose as I have worked only on the interpretation of *can*. Regarding the distribution of modal verbs, an equal number of websites from L1 and L2 varieties have been taken. Future research can consider data from various types of businesses and try to keep the amount of data from L2 similar to the L1 variety, which will help get more accurate results. This was not possible for the current work as the Indian websites had less content on them. Also, in the future, we can look at the meaning differences of modals in the business text from different varieties. Even the present corpora can be used for this purpose.

This will help find answers to questions about which meanings are common in business text and which ones are not so frequent. These findings will well-equip L2 learners to handle business communication effectively.

AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH IN THE BUSINESS CONTEXT

Effective communication results in better satisfaction levels for both the sender and receiver of the message. Harvard Business Essentials: Business Communication, 2003 writes "Communication is an essential function of enterprise. Whether written or oral, it is the conduit through which an enterprise speaks to its customer. It is management's mechanism for influencing employees and directing the work they do. And it is the means through which employees provide the information and feedback that management needs to make sound decisions." Therefore, everything in a business revolves around communication and everyone needs to communicate to someone for a business cycle to be completed.

The above explanation of communication aptly describes communication in the domain of business. In general, every enterprise has these three components that communicate with each other. However, communication between management and employees will be different than that between customers and customer service representatives (employees that are part of the customer support team). There can be several other employees that don't get to communicate with customers, and so, like management, they interact with only internal customers or employees.

Communication can occur in different ways. It can happen in a meeting where management addresses employees or even the other way when employees put their questions to management in a meeting. Communication can take place even in a one-on-one setting between two employees. Communication can also be made on display screens or through colorful posters pasted all over the place in the company. The other ways through which businesses communicate are by writing emails, sharing docs, and creating websites which can be updated on a regular basis. Finally, business communication in a foreign language is influenced by the corporate culture. Formats, communication styles, and even the choice of language are often dictated by the corporation. Students learning commercial language may be asked to communicate differently than they are traditionally taught depending on the corporate policy (Nickerson, 2000).

Business communication is a skill and the most sensitive area of use of language. Therefore, an organization that is clear, consistent, and effective in its communications with customers, employers, shareholders, creditors, and the community is in a good position to establish trust and to elicit their collaboration. Also, studies have shown that more than 60% customers stop using the services of a company when the company fails to communicate with them satisfactorily. This makes it obvious how important it is for any company to communicate well with customers. Therefore, apart from adding features to the product or service, a company will need to train their employees to communicate in a delightful manner to help retain and create new customers.

Before going any further, let us know what the scope of Business English is. It means different things to different people. For some, it is all about vocabulary related to the worlds of business, trade, finance, and international relations. In

the late 1960s and 1970s, specialist vocabulary was seen to be what distinguished Business English from General English, and there was a preoccupation with business-related words and terminology. Earlier textbooks-such as British Banking by J.Firth in the Peter Stevens series, published by Cassell in 1971, reflect this approach. The focus was more on comprehension of the text related to a specific area of business, and little attention was paid to how the user could apply the language in real life, and how to develop skills such as interacting in meetings or writing letters. By the mid-1970s and 1980s, the trends in Business English changed and the focus was more on functional areas-formulaic language for recommending, giving opinions, showing agreement, and so on. An example of such a book will be Functioning in Business by Knowles and Bailey (Longman, 1987). Business English, for people, now, evolved into something larger than merely a set of words that related to a specific business area. This expanded the area of Business English and programs teaching business communication began to include the communication skills used in the workplace and focus on the language and skills needed for typical business communication such as presentations, negotiations, meetings, talks, socializing, correspondence, report writing, and so on. These are a set of skills, and so, these can be important even for native speakers intending to effectively communicate in business meetings and to negotiate successfully.

As the demand for Business English has grown, it has become a business to teach these skills, and colleges and universities have also started offering modules in Business English. For example, the City and Guilds of London Institute offer International Business English examinations. However, because of the extensive growth of multinational companies, there has been a rapid increase in the number of institutions offering courses to help aspiring

professionals and also working professionals. However, a lot of these courses are not able to make a distinction between General English courses and Business courses. Some of these courses are not helpful for learners as they fail to analyze their needs. These courses as most books say should have their specific goals and at the end of the program learners should get some tangible takeaways unlike courses in general English.

Business English is professional communication but it's trying to become very casual to help a business connect well with their customers. Sometimes the difference between general English and Business English seems to be blurred. Multinational companies (MNCs) have defined business communication in a different way. While, in the past, businesses used very formal language, things have changed drastically and that is reflected in the ways business letters are drafted these days. Most companies start their business letters with 'Hello' and 'Hi' trying to build a rapport with their customers. Since the purpose of the present work is not to define Business English, let us know that whatever it may mean or comprise, it is the variety of English that helps businesses communicate without a breakdown. This is possible when we align this genre of language use with the business need and make some norms consistent across the globe.

1. **The state of business communication in India.** India is a country where English is a second language and most official communication is done in English. The school curriculum is also planned according to the needs of business. Students are trained in skills they will require when they are employed. Most school curricula in India include the following business writing skills in the syllabus of English for the classes 6 through 10: message writing, letter writing, diary writing, report writing, and so on. Going forward,

in college and professional courses, Indian students are exposed to various other things that are essential in a business setting. Books on business communication for Indian students cover almost every thing that an employee may need in the workplace. These are the broad areas that books comprise: communication in the workplace, fundamentals of business writing (selection of words, construction of clear sentences and paragraphs, and writing for effect) basic patterns of business messages (directness in good news, indirectness in bad news, persuasion, and sales messages), fundamentals of report writing, other forms of business communication (public speaking and oral reporting) cross cultural communication, correctness of communication, technology-enabled communication, and business research methods. As Indian students are exposed to using English for various purposes in advance, they are competent enough to handle different situations in any business context without breakdowns in communication. However, with the growth of business overseas, we need to look at the tiniest of detail of English so as to communicate convincingly with native speakers of the language. It's generally not possible for those whose second language is English to know every single nuance of the language and some people do believe it's not important to know all of them. However, the closer we can get to our audience, the more effective we will be while communicating with them.

2. **Features of Business Writing and Modals.** Business communication needs to be clear, concise, confident and persuasive. These are the prerequisites of any business text. Apart from these, keeping the tone of communication right is essential. This is incredibly important for any communication, but its significance is felt most in the business context. If we don't keep the tone of our message right, we can lose both money and

credibility. What is interesting is modals play a crucial role in making the text clear, concise, confident, and also help keep the tone right.

For example, when we say the following: *"If you choose Tokyo as your target area, your ads will appear to web users in Tokyo, but not to users in other cities."* or *"Verizon Wireless can assist your agency with deploying communication tools that will enable your people to be "in-touch" when they require or need to disseminate critical information,"* we try to sound confident and convincing to our readers. The first example is persuasive in a way that we make our readers feel that we have a good knowledge about our product, and the second example can make the reader feel that Verizon will be effective for their needs and serve their purpose.

Similarly, it is important when to use or not use *must, need* and *have to* to sound polite to the reader. Incorrect usage of these modals will sound discourteous, and readers will consider the business rude and unfriendly. Therefore, the appropriate use of modals is crucial to effective business writing.

A REVIEW OF MODALS AND STUDIES ON THEM

When I decided to study modal verbs to determine the mood[1] in Business English, I was not clear on how I would go about doing this research work. Soon after writing the synopsis, I read the book by Michael R. Perkins on Modal Expressions in English. Perkins, who is an authority on modal verbs, writes some interesting stuff about the study of modal expressions. He says, 'Doing research on modality is very similar to trying to move in an overcrowded room without treading on anyone else's feet.' It is, after all, through treading on the feet of one's predecessors (and sometimes through standing on their shoulders) that one discovers new doors to open. And he further says, "I trust, nevertheless, that I have managed to cross the crowded room of modality by means of one or two routes not formerly used, and that my feet have come to rest in several previously unoccupied spaces, waiting to be trodden on in their return."

Even I have felt the same thing after reading this excerpt from his book. Modality has been studied widely, and especially, a lot of research has been conducted on the modal verbs in English. However, every research work aims at treading some untrodden path, and I am sure I will touch on certain things that have not been talked about yet. But before discussing the current work, it will be a good idea to know mood, modality, and even English modal verbs.

Mood and modality relate to the linguistic expression of the speaker's attitude toward an utterance—a simple enough notion at this level of abstraction.

Mood, like tense is the grammaticalized expression of time, is the grammaticalized expression of modality, and modality is a facet of illocutionary[2] force, signaled by grammatical devices (that is, moods), that expresses general intent of a speaker, or a speaker's degree of commitment to the expressed proposition's believability, obligatoriness, desirability, or reality. Moods are commonly found in classical languages like Sanskrit, Classical Greek, and Latin. Among modern languages, mood is found in Slavic languages, certain Germanic languages (Icelandic and German), Bantu languages (Swahili), and Native American languages (languages from the Algonquian language family), and Australian languages like Gooniyandi and Mangarayi. Two most commonly found types of mood across languages are Indicative and Subjunctive. While Indicative describes real, factual events, the Subjunctive describes unreal, hypothetical events. Let me give an example of mood from Latin as English doesn't have a well-defined system of mood.

Cuneo	hoc	agmen	disici-as
Wedge.ABL	this	line	split-2SG.Subj

'With a wedge, one could split this (military) line.' (p.273, Hale and Buck 1903)

Unlike the languages mentioned above, English relies on modals for the purpose of expressing modalities. Most linguistic studies in English limit themselves to the study of the modal verbs. However, there are several other ways that English has to describe modalities. Let me give you an account of modals and various other marginal grammatical devices that together do what mood does in other languages. It is widely accepted there are two types of modals in English: Primary and Secondary. CAN, MAY, MUST, WILL, and SHALL are referred to as the primary modals, and COULD, MIGHT,

OUGHT TO, WOULD, and SHOULD are called the secondary modals. The other two modals NEED and DARE are different than the Primary and Secondary modals, and while we talk about need in this chapter, we have overlooked dare for the present study. Apart from the modals, there are other words *have (got) to* and *had better*, which are considered quasi-modal or semi-modals because they lack in some features that modals have. Then, there are modal adverbs, for example, surely, perhaps, most likely, etc. Modality is also expressed by means of modal adjectival and participial expressions like *be about to, be going to, be bound to*, and so on. That's not all; there are modal lexical verbs and modal nominal expressions, too, which help with modality. Affirm, postulate, declare, advise, prohibit are some of those verbs that are referred to as modal lexical verbs. In the category of modal nominal verbs, we have several subcategories, and we will talk about these in detail below. Affirmation, demand, exemption, conviction, likelihood are some of the nouns in this category. Since, before talking about individual modal expressions, we should get familiar with the concept of modality, let us know the types of modality widely acceptable in the linguistics literature.

1. **Various types of modality.** It is believed that Aristotle was the first person to write his ideas on the notion of modality and his discussions covered issues related to necessity, possibility, impossibility, etc (Perkins, 1983). And his ideas on modality have emerged as one of the most actively pursued branches of logic. In the modern times, one of the pioneering works on modality is done by Rescher (1968). He lists the following types of modalities:

(a) Alethic modalities, relating to the notion of truth itself:
It is necessarily true
It is actually true

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(b) Epistemic modalities, relating to knowledge and belief:

It is known that

It is believed

(c) Temporal modalities, relating to time:

It is sometimes the case

It is always the case

(d) Boulomaic modalities, relating to desire:

It is hoped that

It is regretted that

(e) Deontic modalities, relating to duties:

It is forbidden to bring it about that

It is permissible to bring it about that

(f) Evaluative modalities:

It is a good thing that

It is a perfectly wonderful thing

(g) Causal modalities:

The existing state of affairs will prevent

(h) Likelihood modalities:

It is likely that

It is probable that

As the type of modality depends on our interpretation of the world, we can think of various types of modality depending on how we want to interpret the world around us. But for the purpose of explaining the meanings of different modal expressions, we will look at the more comprehensive and widely acceptable division of modalities.

In most linguistics literature, three modalities epistemic, deontic, and dynamic are commonly discussed, and we will stick with this division for the present work. Modalities can be explained in terms of some general set of principles. There is a modality that conforms to the rational laws of inference, deduction, etc, that is, this is concerned with the interpretation of the world via the laws of human reason, and so, this modality is called epistemic derived from the word 'episteme' the Greek word for knowledge. Similarly, the modality defined in terms of social or institutional laws is called deontic modality. Here it's important to note these laws include both laws explicitly laid down by some legal authority or institution and less formal rules relating to social status, which decide how a person behaves in society. Another modality is the one that is concerned with the relationships between empirical circumstances or states of affairs and the states of affairs which are seen following from them. Von Wright (1951) calls such a modality dynamic. These are three modalities in terms of which we can interpret three possible worlds where the truth/actuality of propositions/events can be assessed. The nature of English modal auxiliaries can be assessed against these modalities, and we will explain them in terms of these modalities here. Let us also talk about the concept of the core meaning of modals right away as we are going to fall back on this while explaining characteristics of individual modals and other modal expressions.

2. **What is the core meaning of modals?** It is a common knowledge that modals suggest various meanings, more precisely various modalities. A lot of their meanings are possible because of the context they occur in. However, their core meanings are meanings that don't change per contexts. Wertheimer (1972) proposes a well-defined system of finding the core

meaning of a modal and this is further taken up by Miller (1978). Here are those components of the system:

1. A system of organized belief (K)

2. A set of circumstances under which the system is relevant (C)

3. The consequence (y) that the system specifies under those circumstances.

   Example: *The bell ought to ring when you close the circuit.*

> K= the laws of electricity

> C= the fact that the bell is connected to a source of power

> y= the ringing of the bell

The core meaning of a modal expression is based on the relationship that exists between these variables.

3. **Modal expressions in English.** Under this section, all the possible ways of expressing modality in English starting with the modal verbs are discussed.

3.1. **Primary modal verbs.** As explained above, modal verbs are divided into two categories primary and secondary. Let's look at the primary modal verbs first, and they are *can, may, shall, will,* and *must.*

CAN:

About this modal verb, there is a lot of confusion in the linguistics literature. Pullum and Wilson (1977: 784) regard can as sometimes being ambiguous between a root and an epistemic interpretation. For example,

Elephants can kill crocodiles.

> (a) *Elephants have the ability to kill crocodiles.* (Root)

> (b) *It can happen that an elephant kills a crocodile.* (Epistemic)

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Steele (1975: 38), Boyd and Thorne (1969: 71) hold a different view and think that CAN is a modal verb only when it suggests permission and acts as an alternative to may. There is a lot of confusion with regard to various implications of can too. However, as the purpose of the present work is not to try to establish can as a modal verb in all its usages, let me reiterate the commonly accepted view that the use of can is not limited to expressing only ability or permission, but in a given context it can be interpreted as any of them: deontic, dynamic, or epistemic.

MAY:

Like can may is also a polysemous modal verb. Huddleston (1971) suggests six different uses of May. Here are they:

(c) Qualified generalization: *The reproductive cells may encyst themselves and it has been suggested on this evidence --------*

(d) Exhaustive disjunction: *These anemones may be blue or dull green--*

(e) Uncertainty: *The study of luminescence ------- may provide a valuable test for long-distance geological prospecting............. '*

(f) Concession: *Whatever the relations may be .... '*

(g) Legitimacy: *This lacuna in our knowledge of the sea may be attributed in a large part to........... '*

(h) Ability: *It may be shown that............. '*

Linguists believe that Huddleston has exploited semantic cues in the sentences in different contexts to decide on different labels for may. They claim that all of these different uses can be accounted for in a less ad hoc

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manner. Their belief is that the core meaning of MAY is similar to can, but the difference in the two is that MAY most typically relate to epistemic and deontic modality against can that relates to dynamic and deontic modality. However, it's the fact that both of them can encroach on each other's territory. The following sentences substantiate that it's possible for these modal to make inroads into each other's domain of use.

(i) *May I speak to the manager, please?*

(j) *Can I speak to the manager, please?*

As this usage of can has gained currency, it has strengthened the deontic use of CAN. Similarly, in sentences like 'Where, in a secluded valley in the west, you may find the neat little Norman Church of Pennant Melangell,' MAY is used in the dynamic sense encroaching on the territory of CAN. Another important difference in the two modals is of the degree of formality.

WILL and SHALL:

These two are most discussed and researched modals and most linguists have agreed that WILL and SHALL are both realizations of the same core meaning. Palmer (1979a) states that these modals can express a wide range of meanings, for example, 'volition,' 'power,' 'habit,' 'futurity,' 'conditionality,' and 'epistemic.'

Examples:

(k) *I said 'why don't you go and see if Martin will let you stay?'* (volition)

(l) *So one kid will say to another, one kid will make a suggestion to another, he'll say the moon's further away from the earth than the sun.* (habit)

(m) *They'll be company for you, and whereas other old women might be terribly lonely, you will never be lonely.* (futurity)

(n) *If he feels like doing it, that'll save me the trouble.* (conditionality)

Regarding the difference between the meanings of WILL and SHALL, it is said that, in modern English, the status of SHALL is purely of a suppletive form of WILL which is used either in contexts where WILL might seem to be ambiguous or as a more formal variant. A study by Ehrman (1966) of contemporary American English Suggests that SHALL is most likely a stylistic device which the writer uses to reflect a quantity of formal education.

(o) *I will do as I like.* (non-formal)

(p) *I shall do as I like.* (formal)

MUST:

The core meaning of MUST is similar to those proposed for MAY, although there are a couple of important points to be noted. With MUST there are no formality contrasts with other members of the modal auxiliary system. More often than not MUST is a subject-oriented modal, but in some circumstances it is intrinsic to the referent of the subject.

(q) *You must go poking your nose into everything!* (p 42, Perkins, 1983)

3.2. **Secondary Modals.** Secondary modals are characterized by their expressing tentativeness as expressed by Palmer (1974). What linguists mean by this is that Secondary modal verbs are more conditional than Primary modal verbs. Here, the usage of the following modals is discussed: *would, could, should, might, ought to.*

WOULD:

WOULD is considered as the conditional counterpart of WILL. Let's look at the contexts where *would* can occur.

(a) *I would read more if I had the time* (hypothetical)

(b) *Before the new bus service started, he would catch the 8 o'clock train.* (past)

(c) *He would keep on all the time.* (Past emphatic)

(d) *Would Mr. Smith come to the information desk?* (formal)

(e) *Would you pass the harissa, please?* (polite)

(f) *Would you be Dr Livingstone?* (tentative)

(g) *He said he would be there.* (indirect)

(Perkins, 1983: 51)

COULD:

Like WOULD is the conditional counterpart of WILL, it's believed that in most cases, COULD is used as the past time counterpart of CAN.

(h) *Last year I could still fit into my clothes.* (Past)

(i) *Could you tell me the right way to the market?* (formal/polite)

(j) *Could Smith be the right man for the job?* (tentative)

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(k) *I could succeed, with the right financial backing.* (hypothetical)

(l) *He said I could go.* (indirect)

<p align="right">(Perkins, 1983: 53)</p>

It is pretty obvious that COULD is the past time counterpart of CAN. However, when we have a context like the one where the current relevance of the original deontic act overrides the significance of its being carried out in the past. In such a scenario, we will use the sentence, 'He said I can go.'

MIGHT:

- It is nearly always used as the conditional equivalent of MAY as a realization of epistemic modality.

(m)*I might go if my cold's better.* (hypothetical)

(n) *He said I might go.* (permission sense)

(o) *Might I have a light, please?* (polite request)

<p align="right">(Perkins, 1983: 54)</p>

MIGHT is the conditional equivalent of deontic MAY. In the deontic sense, however, MIGHT seems to be restricted to reported speech and polite requests. In its epistemic sense it cannot correlate with past time reference. The below sentence isn't an acceptable construction in English.

(p) *When 1 was ten, I might swim a mile.* *

SHOULD and OUGHT TO:

As we found that all the secondary modal verbs discussed above have their primary modal counterpart, even SHOULD has a primary counterpart in SHALL. Though OUGHT TO etymologically doesn't have a counterpart, it behaves like a conditional equivalent of MUST. Usually, they are used in a non-past deontic sense.

> (q) You should/ought to do as you're told.

But, they can also be used in a dynamic/epistemic sense.

> (r) That should/ought to be the postman now.

Apart from their most frequent usages as conditions of tentativeness, they can also correlate with conditions of formality/politeness.

> (s) Should I help myself to another slice?
> (t) You oughtn't to pick your nose in public.

SHOULD and OUGHT TO both are very similar in their usages. Except for some cases like 'should you go outside today, bring me a recharge coupon,' where should is a more polite or formal version of the corresponding If-clause or the conditional equivalent of epistemic/dynamic SHALL as in 'If I were to fail my exams, should I be the only one?,' SHOULD and OUGHT TO are very similar as conditional equivalents of either SHALL or MUST. The following example makes it obvious.

(u)   There ought to be a little window by there, shouldn't there?

However, Close (1962) doesn't seem to agree on this and states that OUGHT TO is generally felt to express a stronger sense of obligation than should. Apart from modal verbs, there are semi-modals, modal adverbs, modal adjectival and participles, modal nouns, and certain lexical verbs that carry modal meanings. Below, all these modal expressions have been discussed in brief.

3.3. Semimodal or quasimodal verbs. Modals are the most important devices for expressing modality, but they are not the only devices. These minor tools are integral to the language and are prominent ways of articulating modalities. In the linguistics literature have (got to), need to, and had better are categorized as Quasi-modal expressions. They are grouped together as quasi-modal auxiliaries as they are fairly similar to modals but they are not inexplicit indicators of the type of modality expressed like modals. Have (got) to is one of the quasi-modals listed by Perkins. On putting this quasi-modal against the modal MUST which it is very close to in terms of its sharing the deontic sense with it, we can note the difference that the core meaning of HAVE (GOT) TO is compatible only with a deontic source which is external to the speaker. Also, HAVE (GOT) TO is used in contexts where a degree of politeness or formality is required; MUST might appear too intrusive in certain contexts. The epistemic sense of HAVE TO is more frequently used in American English as against the British variety. The following sentence wouldn't be unusual in American English.

a)   This has to be the biggest ant-hill ever seen.

Another important point to note here is HAVE TO and MUST differ in their usage with negation. While a negative operator always negates the proposition/event, whereas HAVE (GOT) TO it is nearly always the modality which is negated, as in:

b) *You don't have to/haven't got to thank me.*

NEED TO is another quasi-modal verb, and it differs from HAVE TO in the way that while HAVE TO indicates that compulsion is from without, NEED TO indicates a compulsion which comes from within.

c) *I need to drink.*

However, though these compulsions come from within the subject, they are still explicitly objective as they come from a part over which a speaker has no conscious control. As in the above example, the speaker needs to drink because he cannot control his thirst.

Another quasi-modal is *had better* and is always used to express deontic modality, and it is objective in that the source is not identifiable as the speaker.

d) *We'd better dress up warmly.*

3.4. **Modal adverbs**. Greenbaum (1969) identified several modal adverbs like clearly, likely, maybe, seemingly, surely, obviously, and so on. All of them primarily express epistemic modality. A couple of them are used differently, for example, necessarily is primarily used to express alethic modality.

e) *Bachelors are not necessarily homosexuals.*

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Modal adverbs can occur in a number of different positions within the clause without affecting the meaning relation between clause and adverb.

> f)   *Possibly, Mr. Smith has been trying to phone us.*
>
> g)   *Mr. Smith has possibly been trying to phone us.*
>
> h)   *Mr. Smith has been trying to phone us, possibly.*
>
> i)   *Mr. Smith possibly has been trying to phone us.*
>
> j)   *Mr. Smith has been possibly trying to phone us.*
>
> k)   *Mr. Smith has been trying, possibly, to phone us.*

(Perkins, 1983: 90)

Modal adverbs enable the modality to be not only fronted, topicalized, or thematized as in (f) but also to be tagged on almost as an afterthought, as in (h). That's not all, a sentence can be modalized when the speaker is half way through the sentence as in (g), (j), (i), and (k).

3.5. **Some more ways to express modality in English.** Lexical verbs can also help convey modality. Fraser (1975) called such verbs performative verbs and listed them under the following categories:

l)   Acts of asserting: declare, state, argue, etc.

m) Acts of evaluating: conclude, regard, estimate, etc.

n)   Acts of stipulating: designate, call, nominate, etc.

o)   Acts of requesting: ask, demand, invite, order, etc.

p)   Acts of suggesting: advise, suggest, warn, etc.

q)   Acts of exercising authority: allow, authorize, permit, etc.

r)   Acts of committing: promise, swear, vow, etc.

These verbs are regarded as modal expressions as they indicate that the truth of a proposition or occurrence of an event is relative to some circumstance which involves a specific act in accordance with a set of socially defined laws.

Perkins has also noted the following as ways of expressing modality: tense, if-clause, and questions. Some of the usages of tense markers are not for the purpose of denoting a time period. These usages of tense are regarded as non-temporal modality and can be seen in the following examples.

s) *If I said that, you would hit me*

t) *I thought I'd come with you, if you don't mind.*

The above uses of past tense morphemes don't suggest past time, but the first one (s) indicates an unreal condition and the other one (t) suggests politeness rather than time. The past tense in (t) also reflects the tentativeness or even embarrassment of the speaker.

Similarly, *if* is regarded as a modal particle because it enables the speaker to qualify their commitment to the truth of a proposition or the actuality of an event.

(v) *If you were really hungry, you wouldn't refuse stale bread.*

As a marker of conditionality *if* is considered as an index of modality. Finally, even questions are modal expressions and, mostly, in the epistemic sense. This is possible because questions qualify the truth of a proposition by making it relative to the speaker's uncertainty.

Some other important linguistic devices to express modality are adjectival, participial, and nominal modal expressions. Even among adjectival, we have subcategories. There are expressions incorporating non-verbally-derived adjectives--for example, be sure to/that, be certain to/that, be possible to/that, be apparent that—verbally-derived adjectives and participles like be affirmed that, be implied that, be advised to be, be forbidden to, be assumed to/that, be surmised that, be allowed to, be doubtful that, and so on. These verbally- and non-verbally-derived adjectives are sizable in number and they can express epistemic, deontic, and dynamic modalities.

(v) *He's likely to inherit millions.* (epistemic)

Like adjectival modal expressions, there are some nominal modal expressions too. Words like allegation, assertion, command, demand, compulsion, certainty, expectation, likelihood, probability, and others are examples of such nouns. These nouns can also express all possible modalities like epistemic, deontic, and dynamic.

Another linguistic device that can be used for this purpose is an infinitive and 'Be' verb. Infinitives, often described in terms of 'purpose' or 'intention,' signal a state or event which is unattained or unrealized at a point in time, and so, they can complement adjectival modal expressions as in be possible to, be sure to, be certain to, and so on. Be verb also helps in a similar way by categorically asserting the modality expressed in the sentence.

(w) *Ali could defeat anyone he fought with when he was twenty-five.*

(x) *Ali was able to defeat anyone he fought with when he was twenty-five.*

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(y) Ali seemed able to defeat anyone he fought with when he was twenty-five.

We find only (b) implies that the ability was realized, and this happens because of the presence of the *be* verb, and this is how the modality itself is asserted in the sentence.

4. Modal expressions and politeness.

Let us talk about this aspect of modal expressions as it's an important aspect of them from the point of view of business communication. Everyone tries to be polite in a formal or professional communication, but is there a way we can determine what is polite and what is not. And more importantly how modality makes expressions polite is a pertinent question. Not many linguists have worked on this subject, but a couple of studies have been conducted on the analysis of the factors in various languages that make expressions polite. Brown and Levinson (1978) examined the concept of politeness and the various types of linguistic expressions used to convey politeness in a wide variety of languages. Though there is no separate study conducted on modals to rate their politeness levels, modals fall in one of the five categories of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson. Modal expressions are used for 'negative politeness,' that is, redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded (Brown and Levinson, 1978:134).

It has been found that modal auxiliaries can be used to soften the force of an assertion or directive. May is considered more polite than must as possibility and permission are less committal than necessity and obligation.

Secondary modal verbs are more polite than their primary counterparts. However, the politeness level of a modal verb cannot be absolute, and it depends on the context of utterance. But in general, it's observed that a secondary modal verb is relatively more polite.

(a) *Will you let me have a look?*

(b) *Would you let me have a look?*

(c) *Shall we think about going home now?*

(d) *Should we think about going home now?*

In the above examples, the secondary modal counterpart is considered a more polite alternative for the primary modal expressions. Another interesting finding is that objectivity and politeness go hand in hand. So, if we compare the two sentences a) 'You must wear evening dress to the reception' and B) 'You have to wear evening dress to the reception,' the first one is less polite than the second one. This happens because *have to* implies that the speaker is not the deontic source of obligation and, so, is not as intrusive and direct as *must*. Fielding and Fraser (1978) report that more nominal expressions (objective and polite) are used when addressing an unfamiliar listener and more verbal expressions (less objective and polite) when speaking to a familiar listener. This supports the idea that objectivity and politeness are reciprocal.

Another claim in the linguistics literature regarding modality and politeness is that we can make a rough assessment of the relative politeness potential of a given sentence by counting the number of modal expressions it contains. This also relates to the idea of directness as suggested above. The greater the number of modal expressions, the more difficult it is to construe the sentence

as a directive. The following sentences demonstrate the increase in the number of modal expressions corresponds to the increase in the level of politeness.

(e) Stop writing.

(f) It's necessary for you to stop writing

(g) It may be necessary for you to stop writing

(h) It may possibly be necessary for you to stop writing

(i) I imagine it may possibly be necessary for you to stop writing

(j) I would imagine it may possibly be necessary for you to stop writing.

Even if-clauses and questions make sentences polite. They give options to the addressee and allow an addressee their freedom of action.

(k) I'll be going now, if that's all right.

(l) Will you give me a cigarette?

The first sentence above (K) has become a polite expression as the if-clause gives the speaker an opportunity to seek permission from the addressee. Mohan (1974) has experimentally verified the considerable difference in politeness between interrogative and non-interrogative sentences.

5. A review of studies on modal verbs in the past. We know that a multitude of research works have been done on the English language, and a lot of them were done on modals too. English modal verbs are a class of words that have attracted attention of linguists for both semantic and syntactic reasons. Most semantics-based studies have tried to find various modalities that can be expressed by a modal. Even there have been several studies on types of modalities. There is a great amount of linguistics literature on how

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modality should be defined and how one type of modality differs than another. And this is one of the difficulties for the study of modals that there are several views on the concept of mood and modality. However, some of them epistemic and deontic are widely accepted. There have been studies on finding what other linguistic devices can be used to express modality and how different they are from the modals.

Studies have also been conducted on miscellaneous aspects of modals, for example, the use of epistemic modality in women's talk. Robin Lakoff, in 1975, gave an account of hedges in women's talk, which she believed was an important aspect of female speakers' style. Lakoff claimed that women used epistemic modality to indicate doubt or uncertainty because women are socialized to believe that asserting themselves strongly is not nice or lady-like. There have been even studies on the presence of modal expressions in child language too, and these studies show how modals are used only in their specific meanings at a certain age, and children acquire the other meanings at a later stage in their life. There is actually a great variety in the types of research done on modals so far.

One of the most popular kinds of research on modals in the recent past has been corpus study. Most of these studies have tried to account for the status of modals at different stages along the time_line. And they have been pretty insightful about the gradual changes that modal verbs have experienced and the implications they have for the English language. Since the present work belongs to this category of research work, it's necessary that we look at a couple of studies of this kind.

5.1. **Modality on the move: Geoffrey Leech.** One of the most frequent types of research on modal expressions is corpus study to evaluate the frequency of modal verbs in a certain variety of English. Geoffrey Leech's research is a representative work on the corpus study of modal verbs. He looked at four written corpora across two varieties of English, namely American English and British English. The four corpora--LOB corpus (BrE), Brown Corpus (AmE), F-LOB Corpus (BrE), and Frown Corpus (AmE)—spread over a period from 1961 to 1992. The corpora were taken from 15 different genres of language use. He also studied a corpus of spoken language consisting 80,000 words; the text belonged to different categories of communication covering conversation, discussion, sports commentaries, other commentaries, news, and talks.

Findings:

Table 1: Frequencies of modals in the four written corpora: modal counts in the million-word corpora (British English on the left and American English on the right)

	BrE LOB	BrE F-LOB	Diff (%)	AmE Brown	AmE Frown	Diff (%)
Would	3028	2694	-11.0	3053	2868	-6.1
Will	2798	2723	-2.7	2702	2402	-11.1
Can	1997	2041	+2.2	2193	2160	-1.5
Could	1740	1782	+2.4	1776	1655	-6.8
May	1333	1101	-17.4	1298	878	-32.4
Should	1301	1147	-11.8	910	787	-13.5

Must	1147	814	-29.0	1018	668	-34.4
Might	777	660	-15.1	635	635	0
Shall	355	200	-43.7	267	150	-43.8
Ought to	104	58	-44.2	70	49	-30.0
Need not	87	52	-40.2	40	35	0.3
Total	14667	13272	-9.5	13962	12287	-12.2

The study highlighted the sharp difference in the frequency of individual modals. Over the years there has been a consistent decrease in the modal use. The American corpus shows this decline across all the modals, but the British corpora showed the rise in the frequency of two frequent modal can and could, which increased by 2.2 and 2.4 per cent respectively. An important finding was the drastic fall in the percentage of the infrequent modals shall, ought to, and need. A similar decline was noted for the middle-frequency modals may and must. Would and should did not experience a steep fall, and the rest of the modals will, can, could, might did not change significantly in one or both of the corpus comparisons.

The study of the frequency of semi-modals like *be going to, need to, want to* suggested that the fall in the number of modals was probably because of the rise in the class of a new set of auxiliaries. This idea is promoted by Bybee et al. (1994) and Krug (2000), and they believe that this change in the modal verb use is because semi-modals are usurping the position of modal verbs in Modern English. However, this claim doesn't seem to be substantial as of now

given that the frequency of all the semi-modal collectively don't exceed a single common modal will or would.

The corpus of spoken language also suggests the same trend and here the decline of modals is far greater than the written text. The spoken language corpus backs up the claim of Bybee and Krug that the grammaticalization of certain modal expressions caused an increase in the frequency of their usage. The corpus also showed the growth of will.

Let's also look at the change in terms of density of modals. Whereas LOB (BrE, 1961) averages 1 modal per 68 words of running text, and Brown (AmE, 1961) averages 1 modal per 71 words, F-LOB (BrE,1991) averages 1 modal per 76 words and Frown averages 1 modal per 81 words. Leech believes this decline in the density of modals is gradual, and it can have a major impact on the syntax and semantics of modals in English. Also, across different genres of samples this trend was noticed. While a non-significant increase was observed in Learned and Mystery Fiction, the other categories experienced a decrease ranging from 31.2% (in religion) to 0.5% (in Miscellaneous)

Another observation made on the meanings of modal verbs is that some of them are becoming monosemous by losing the frequency of some of their marginal meanings. Leech notes that one of the dominant meanings of the modal, in the process, gains frequency. May and should show this tendency that their dominant senses in the 1960s have become more dominant in the 1990s whereas the minor senses have become more marginal. Let's take a look at the changing pattern in the usage of modal meanings of MAY. While the epistemic meaning of MAY has flourished and become stronger even in the 90s, the other two minor meanings the root sense of possibility and

permission have become feeble. This trend is not found for must, and both its root and epistemic senses have suffered a decline.

5.2. Modal verbs in written Indian English: Andrew Wilson (2005). This study is to a great extent similar in nature to that of Leech's. This study additionally includes a corpus of Indian English. The corpora used by Andrew Wilson were the Kolhapur Corpus of written Indian English, the Brown Corpus of written American English, and the LOB Corpus of written British English. Each of them contains approx. 1 million words of text, distributed across 15 genre categories. The corpora are sampled broadly according to the same criteria. There is a substantial difference in sampling criteria though. The texts in the Brown and LOB corpora date from 1961, whereas the texts in the Kolhapur corpus date from 1978. As regards text typology, the differences between the Kolhapur corpus and the Brown and LOB corpora are, for the most part, comparatively minor, although the number of individual text samples in some of the fictional categories vary considerably. More notably, however, the category of Mystery and Detective Fiction differs in content, in that it contains samples of stories which are about mysterious or miraculous happenings.

Findings:

All the 15 genres that were studied by Andrew can be broadly categorized as imaginative and informative literature. Fictional prose, which is the overarching category of all imaginative corpus texts apart from Humor, typically contains substantial amounts of direct speech and thought, and these are likely to contain many more future-oriented statements than informative texts. The presence of *would* is explained as the back-shifted form of *will*,

which is likely to be encountered in indirect speech and thought presentation. As for the presence of the Miscellaneous texts category, this is made up partly of rules and regulations, which dictate what people *shall* or *will* do. This finding mirrors Nakamura's findings on Brown and LOB. The two 'past-tense' modals *could* and *would* seem to be the verbs which are most characteristic of fictional prose, probably arising from a mixture of indirect speech and thought presentation and past-tense narrative (see above). *Shall* and *will* appear to characterize the Miscellaneous category, as just mentioned above. *Shall* seems also, for some unclear reason, very characteristic of Science Fiction. This finding is unique to the Indian corpus and may be due to some oddity of a single authorial style: the Indian Science Fiction category is not a large one, consisting of only two texts as compared to six in Brown and LOB. *May* and *should*, along with *can* and *ought* appear to be especially characteristic of Learned and Scientific writing, Religion, Skills and Hobbies, and Press Editorials. As noted earlier, these are mostly argumentative/expository text-types. Myers (1989) has discussed the use of the modals as hedging devices in scientific writing, where strong claims are being made. He cites *would* and *could* as prototypical examples of this practice, but the Indian corpus, like the Brown and LOB corpora, suggests that *may* and *can* may be more prototypical of scientists' hedging.

Nakamura found that *could* and *would* were good discriminators between British and American English fiction, and this finding is replicated here. It is interesting to note, therefore, the ambiguous position of the corresponding Indian genres: they are positioned more closely to British than American English, but they do not—especially in genres Mystery and Detective Fiction and Adventure Fiction—show quite the same degree of attraction towards the position of COULD. Aside from the very idiosyncratic Science Fiction genre,

it is notable that it is the genre on mystery and a category with no western sample that differ the most from their British counterparts (with General Fiction – and Romantic Fiction – being located very close to the corresponding British samples). The gross overall findings on the Indian corpus show a close similarity to those obtained by Nakamura for the Brown and LOB corpora, especially with regard to the importance of the informative/imaginative distinction. The study makes the following claim:

(a) A few systematic differences exist between the three types of English, and it seems to corroborate Kirk's (1994) claim that text-type is a more important factor in variation than regionality. It is also interesting to note in this context that more formal text-types (learned writing, rules and regulations, etc.) seem to show a greater degree of homogeneity across national varieties than other text-types, such as fiction.

This study suggests some areas of investigation in the future. For instance, in terms of text-types, it should be ascertained through wider-ranging stylistic studies, and also content analyses, how indigenous cultures and/or British and American influences may have affected the various Indian genres. Andrew thinks it will be particularly interesting in relation to fiction, which showed an intermediate position between British and American English.

One final factor which could be affecting the results in the present study is that of date. As observed earlier, the texts in both the Brown and the LOB corpora are sampled from the year 1961, whereas those in the Indian corpus are sampled from the year 1978. We found how significant changes took place in the modal usage between the 1960s and the 1990s. Therefore, Andrew says that as a good decade (1978–1991) separates the Kolhapur Corpus from Frown

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and FLOB, any such 'triangulation' findings would be suggestive rather than conclusive.

5.3. CAN and MAY: Monosemy or polysemy? Peter Collins. Let us look at one more corpus-based study, and this was conducted by Collins to determine the nature of two modal verbs. His database comprised every instance of CAN and MAY extracted from three parallel corpora: the million-word International Corpus of English British English corpus ('ICE-GB'), the parallel Australian English corpus ('ICE-AUS'), and a specially-assembled corpus of c.200000 words of American English ('C-US') designed to fill the gap caused by the non-availability hitherto of an actual ICE-US corpus. Each of the corpora comprises 60% spoken texts and 40% written. The frequencies of the two modals show that CAN was over three times more popular than MAY in the three corpora. The overall frequencies for *can* did not vary greatly across the three corpora, but those for MAY revealed a clear difference between BrE (1218 tokens) and the other two corpora (AusE: 881 tokens; AmE: 825 tokens per million words), reflecting the more advanced state of the decline of *may* in the latter (cp. Leech's 2003:231 finding that *may* has undergone a greater decline in American than British writing in recent decades).

For the purpose of study, Collins classified modal meanings following Palmer's (1990:37) tripartite distinction between epistemic modality (concerned with the speaker's commitment to the truth of the proposition), deontic modality (concerned with conditions relating to the completion of an action deriving from an external source), and dynamic modality (concerned typically with an individual's ability or volition). His scheme competes with various binary schemes – the most familiar being that which contrasts epistemic and root modality (the latter encompassing deontic and dynamic).

Findings:

This study reaffirmed that both MAY and CAN are polysemic in nature. With MAY, the range of meanings available suggests the plausibility of a polysemy-based account: while epistemic possibility is dominant (It's thought the man may have committed suicide) the (historically prior) dynamic and deontic senses still account for over 16.5% of tokens. By contrast the meanings of *can*, apart from a small percentage of epistemic cases, seem to be united through the concept of potentiality. Dynamic meanings dominate, while the deontic meanings which CAN expresses are predominantly objective and, thus, quite close to dynamic possibility. Having said this, there are signs that the epistemic possibility sense of CAN is becoming established (if you get a swelling of the whole gland it can't be a tumor [ICE-GB:S1B-010 #80:1:A]), as it sheds its syntactic/semantic restriction to non-affirmative contexts. This suggests that CAN, along with *may*, supports the existence of a polysemy approach.

The above studies have shown how the modals have declined across different varieties over the years and have also shown the differences in the frequency of modals across various genres of language use. They also focused on the growth of major modalities for certain modals. The present research work will be a step forward from here. One of the key differences in this work is that this study is not a diachronic study along the timeline, but it studies the status of modal verbs in contemporary business English. Another variation is that it does not look at different genres of language use like it was in case of Leech's and Wilson's works. Wilson's study makes this claim that the genre of language use is a more important determinant of modal usage than the variety of English. For the present work, though it's believed that a genre affects

modal usage, it's also assumed that the variety of English makes a big difference too. This study will explain how modals are distributed in business text and if there are any gaps in the modal usage across different varieties of English.

Chapter 4

THE DISTRIBUTION AND PERCEPTION OF MODALS IN BUSINESS TEXT

The present study does not consider text from different genres of language like the previous corpus studies that were based on various types of literature like Fiction, Learned and Scientific writing, Religion, Skills and Hobbies, and Press Editorials, and so on. However, the data here is divided into four sections: Frequently asked questions (FAQs), Policy, Terms & Conditions, and Other Pages. This was done as while reviewing websites, these were four major sections found on most of them. Moreover, there should be differences in the modal usage in these sections seeing as they have content that differs in nature. The idea behind this division is discussed in detail below.

FAQs are integral to any business process whether a service provider or product manufacturer or a retailer. While browsing through a multitude of business websites, I found that every business has a section dedicated to FAQs, and they are placed on the Home page of their sites. It's because they are directly connected with customer satisfaction as FAQs will help with a quick answer to questions a customer may have or will provide them with the solutions to their problems. Sometimes, it can save a user or customer from heavy revenue losses, and if that doesn't happen very often, they will solve the problem that is bothering a user or they will answer the user's question about the services or products offered by the business. Given that FAQs represent the company like a customer service representative, they should be the voice

of the business and they should be convincing enough for the user to follow the instructions. If the FAQs section is not clear and convincing, the user will not go through it leading to their frustration and contacting the service provider. It's found that the answers to 50-60 % questions asked by customers or users are available on the business website. In most cases users don't want to take the pain of understanding the instructions and prefer to contact a customer service representative instead. Also, sometimes users may feel that the solution given in the FAQ section doesn't seem to be persuasive enough for them to make an attempt to follow it. Modals do play a significant role in writing persuasive text, and so, my belief is that this section should have a typical modal distribution. And new businesses can learn from this and write their FAQs on the line of successful businesses.

The other two sections Policy and Terms and Conditions are very close in nature, and it was difficult for me to make a distinction between these two. However, policies, not always though, are different than Terms and Conditions. Wikipedia writes that a policy is a deliberate plan of action to guide decisions and achieve rational outcome(s). The term may apply to government, private sector organizations and groups, and individuals. Presidential executive orders, corporate privacy policies, and parliamentary rules of order are all examples of policy. It states that Policy differs from rules or law and here is where policies differ from terms and conditions. While law can compel or prohibit behaviors (e.g. a law requiring the payment of taxes on income) policy merely guides actions toward those that are most likely to achieve a desired outcome. Policies can be understood as political, management, financial, and administrative mechanisms arranged to reach explicit goals. Naturally, the modal usage will be different in these two sections. However, in certain ways policies are very close to terms and

conditions and so we can find mixed behavior of modals in these sections. The definition given by Keller Lowry Insurance Company[3] brings both of them very close and the differences get blurred. It states that policy is the legal document issued by the company to the policyholder, which outlines the conditions and terms of the insurance; also called the policy contract or the contract. However, that's a domain-specific usage of policies, and in general policy is close to what SLAC[4] has for their institute. Policy is a statement of principles and/or values that mandate or constrain the performance of activities used in achieving institutional goals. A policy in general has broad application and helps ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations. They promote operational efficiencies and reduce institutional risk. They are a governing principle that mandates or constrains actions. They change infrequently and set a course for the foreseeable future and they help ensure compliance, enhance SLAC's mission or reduce institutional risk.

On the other hand Terms and Conditions are rules or laws that a user or customer must comply with. University of San Francisco[5] defines terms and conditions in the context of finance based business and says these are the characteristics that spell out the rights and privileges of both the borrower and the lender and what actions each may or must take. Examples include interest rate, length of repayment, repayment options (equal or graduated repayments), deferment options, late payment charges, and delinquency or default consequences. In another context, a website "www.makeideas.com" explains terms and conditions as the terms of use that apply to a user and they also state that they have the right to make changes to their terms. What appears from these is terms and conditions are user-oriented rules set by a business. This view is subscribed to by even Sandton Convention Center, South Africa as they define terms and conditions as the document, updated as and when

necessary, covering all financial implications of the agreement entered into between the parties. So, while policies are guidelines for the company to function and decide the course of their action, terms and conditions are guidelines for users and apply more often to them and not the company. This vital difference is significant from the point of study of modals and this means that we can expect a lot of deontic modal verbs in the 'terms and conditions' text. Also, the modality most likely shouldn't be external to the speaker.

The last section named Other Pages consists of several types of pages. In most cases, data has been collected from the Home page or *About Us* pages of websites. The content on these pages is varied in nature, and they talk about features of the product or service, and tools and their applications. They also have testimonials of users and messages from entrepreneurs of the company, and similar stuff. Since it was difficult to put them in several categories because of two reasons: one, the data on these pages being insufficient and two, lack of bases to categorize them in several sections, all these pages have been put under the same head. Let's look at the frequency of modals in these sections of websites now.

1. **Modal density in business text in contemporary English.** Moving forward from where Leech concluded his work, let's look at the presence of modals in the business text. It's interesting to note the distribution of modals here and is exciting to note the differences in the frequency of modals in these texts. We know from the previous studies Leech (2003) that modal verbs have declined over the years, and some of them have become obsolete. Looking at the data from these websites can be thrilling for people with interest in the behavior of modal verbs or modality in English and for those who may have believed that modal verbs may become vestigial. Linguists believe modals are

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giving way to other ways of expressing modality and this can have effect on syntactic patterns in English. This is not going to happen soon because the results here are encouraging for modals, but before we look at individual modals and see the trend of their distribution, let's take a look at the overall presence of modals in the business text. Let us know here that the density of modals in the text taken by Leech for his study is 1 modal per 76 words in F-LOB (BrE) and 1 modal per 81 words in Frown (AmE).

Table 2: Modal density in business text L1 and L2 varieties

Name of the website	Word Count	Modal Count	Percentage of modal verbs	Density
Tata Sky (L2)	4,127	72	1.74	57.31
Tata Indicom (L2)	12,826	327	2.55	39.22
BSNL (L2)	81,899	1924	2.34	42.56
MTNL (L2)	14,794	495	3.35	29.88
Verizon (L1, AmE)	130,955	3,113	2.38	42.06
AdWords (L1, AmE)	187,549	4,281	2.28	43.8
Vodafone	94,345	2,393	2.54	39.42
Yell	30,963	634	2.05	48.83

The above table shows that on an average, texts have 1 modal verb per 40-50 words, which is a big difference when compared to Leech's work based on LOB and F-LOB corpus. The frequency of modal verbs is very high in the business text, and it is even higher than that it was in 1961 data (LOB). Modal density in LOB (1961) is 68 words. A pattern found here is that L2-based websites have a higher frequency of modals in the text. The highest density of modals, which is as high as 1 modal per 30 words is for the L2 website MTNL

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and interestingly even the lowest density is for an L2 website Tata Sky. Another interesting pattern is that L1 websites show a consistent pattern of modal use. While the US websites have very high modal density and show consistency in terms of modal density, the UK websites are also below 1 modal per 50 words. As Kennedy (2002) and Biber et al (1999) observe that modals' distribution varies according to text type, or genre, let's also look at the tendency of modals in different sections of these websites.

The table on the next page makes a few things about modal density pretty obvious. While the FAQs section has the highest frequency of modals, the Other Pages section has very low modal density. The gap appears to be wider in case of L2 websites. This means while L2 uses a high number of modals in the FAQs, they avoid modals in the content as we find in the Other Pages section. The discrepancy between the modal frequency in the Other Pages section and the other three sections can also be because FAQs need to express

Table 3: Modal Density in different sections of business websites

	FAQs	Terms and Conditions	Policy	Other Pages
AdWords	167,540/3,785= 44.26	2,174/48 = 45.29	16,012/412 = 38.86	1823/36 =50.63
Verizon	118,644/2892 = 41.02	1,505/28 = 53.75	7098/134 = 52.97	3,708/59 =62.85
Vodafone	14,348/452 = 31.74	68,360/1,712= 39.93	5,671/193 = 29.38	5,966/36 =165.72
Yell	6,441/129 = 49	8,055/172 = 46.83	13,380/290 = 46.13	3,087/43 =71.90
MTNL	9,009/299 = 30.13	2153/78 = 27.6	1354/78 = 17.36	2278/40 =56.95

BSNL	27,683/701 = 39.49	4,692/137 = 34.25	41,213/1052= 39.18	8311/34 =244.44
TATA SKY	2,043/30 = 68.1	460/14 = 32.85	765/26 = 29.42	859/2 =429.5
TATA Indicom	1,304/44 = 29.63	7,232/191 = 37.86	2,755/87 = 31.66	1,535/5 =307

epistemic and dynamic modality far more than the other sections and policies and terms and conditions need to use deontic and dynamic modality whereas Other Pages don't specialize in a certain type of modality and have fewer reasons for expressing it. The other thing that is possible is unlike while talking about policy and terms and conditions, businesses keep a soft tone here and avoid sounding domineering or authoritative by using deontic modality. Another finding from the data is, the trends here establish that Indian English is still closer to BrE (L1) than AmE (L1). From the table, we can conclude that, generally, FAQs and Policy sections are high modal density sections.

The above table has shown that modal verbs, as a whole, are not declining in their usage, and even if they have declined in other genres, we can be very sure they are not decreasing in number in business communication. We have seen the density of modals in business texts, sometimes, is as high as 1 modal per 18 words. Therefore, the modal usage in business communication needs to be studied carefully, and we can't ignore modals while teaching English to L2 learners, especially the use of modal in business communication.

2. **The distribution pattern of individual modals in the different sections of L1 and L2 websites.** As discussed in section 3 of chapter 3, modal verbs are divided into two categories: the primary modal verbs and the secondary

modal verbs. The same division of modals is followed for the purpose of the present study and we will talk about the primary modal verbs: *Must, Can, May, Shall,* and *Will* first. We will look at the distribution of these modal in the L1 context first and then move on to the L2 context.

2.1. The primary modals in FAQs. The below charts show the frequency and percentage of primary modal verbs in FAQs. There is a common trend that WILL and CAN have the highest percentage among all the primary modals. Interestingly, while the percentage of WILL is higher than CAN in AmE (AdWords, 41 and Verizon 46), the BrE sites show a reverse trend the percentage of CAN exceeds that of WILL.

Vodafone FAQs

Must, 13, 3%
shall, 0, 0%
Can, 196, 47%
Will, 186, 44%
May, 25, 6%

□ Will
□ May
□ Can
□ shall
□ Must

Yell FAQs

must, 3, 3%
may, 9, 8%
will, 42, 39%
can, 54, 50%
shall, 0, 0%

□ will
□ shall
□ can
□ may
□ must

AdWords FAQs

Must, 88, 3%
shall, 1, 0%
Can, 1269, 39%
Will, 1341, 41%
May, 572, 17%

□ Will
□ May
□ Can
□ shall
□ Must

Verizon FAQs

shall, 1, 0%
Must, 136, 5%
Will, 1236, 46%
Can, 955, 36%
May, 352, 13%

□ Will
□ May
□ Can
□ shall
□ Must
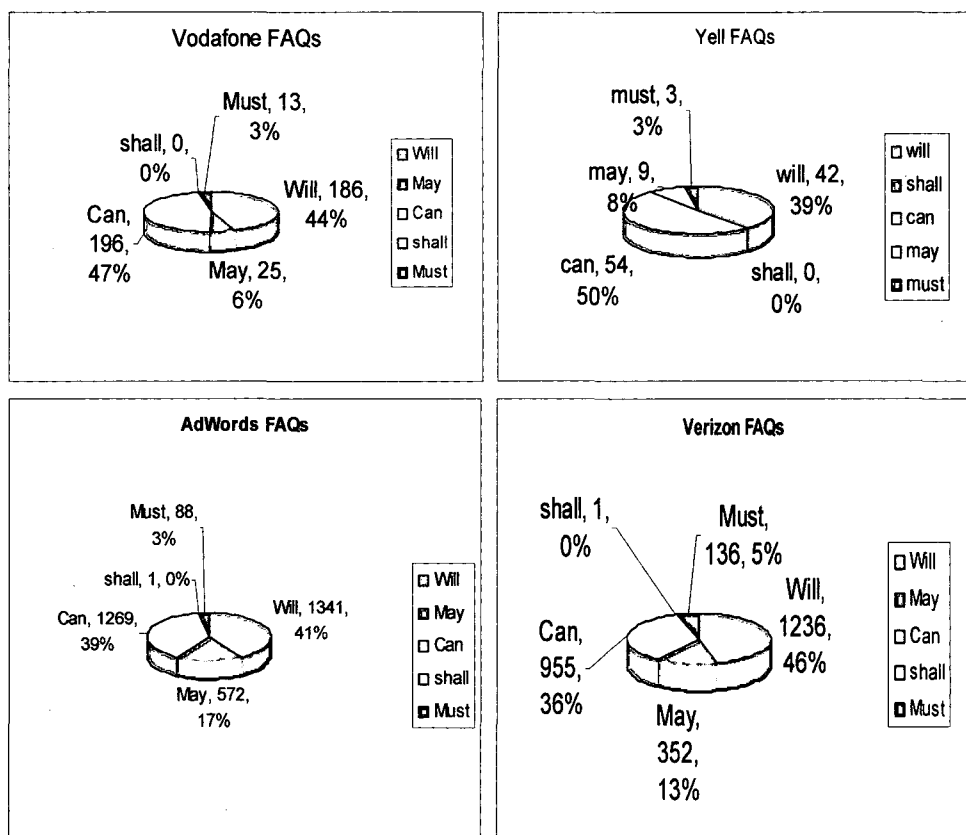
Chart 1 (a) The Primary Modals in FAQs (L1)

The other two trends are that MAY is more frequent than MUST, and SHALL is not used in L1 for FAQs. Let's see how L2 websites behave in terms of primary modal use.

Tata Sky FAQs

- Must, 0, 0%
- Will, 6, 22%
- May, 1, 4%
- shall, 0, 0%
- Can, 20, 74%

Legend: Will, May, Can, shall, Must

BSNL FAQS

- Must, 4, 1%
- shall, 46, 8%
- Will, 227, 39%
- Can, 270, 45%
- May, 42, 7%

Legend: Will, May, Can, shall, Must

MTNL FAQs

- shall, 10, 4%
- Must, 0, 0%
- Can, 114, 41%
- Will, 142, 51%
- May, 10, 4%

Legend: Will, May, Can, shall, Must

Tata Indicom FAQs

- May, 3, 8%
- Must, 0, 0%
- Will, 15, 38%
- Can, 21, 54%
- shall, 0, 0%

Legend: Will, shall, Can, May, Must
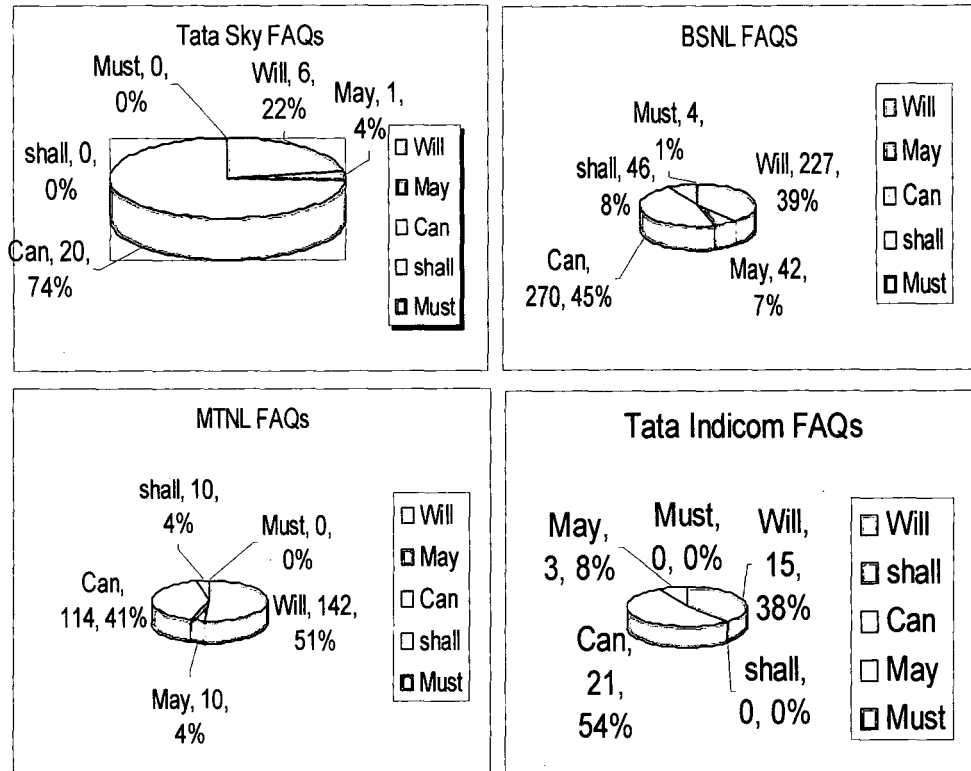
Chart 1 (b) The Primary Modal Verbs in FAQs (L2)

The pattern of modal use is different here. However, one of the things is common that even here WILL and CAN dominate the list of the primary modal verbs. Once again, Indian English appears to be closer to BrE (L1) as most of the L2 websites in this section have a greater percentage of *can* compared to *will.*. Whereas the frequency of *may* is similar to L1, it is not so high and unlike L1, L2 prefers not to use *must* in FAQs. SHALL is negligible but is used in the L2 context. Regarding the absence of *must*, I believe that L2 makes a deliberate attempt here not to sound impolite and pushy. This means that L2 believe that MUST is not business friendly.

2.2. The primary modals in terms and conditions. Terms and conditions don't follow the modal use pattern we saw in FAQs. The most important change is the rise in the frequency of *may* and *must*. Also, we can see the presence of *shall* here. Another difference is the decline in the percentage of *can* in this section. This means that we don't want users to think they have the option to do or not do. This may also mean we want to deliver the message with authority without making any exception.
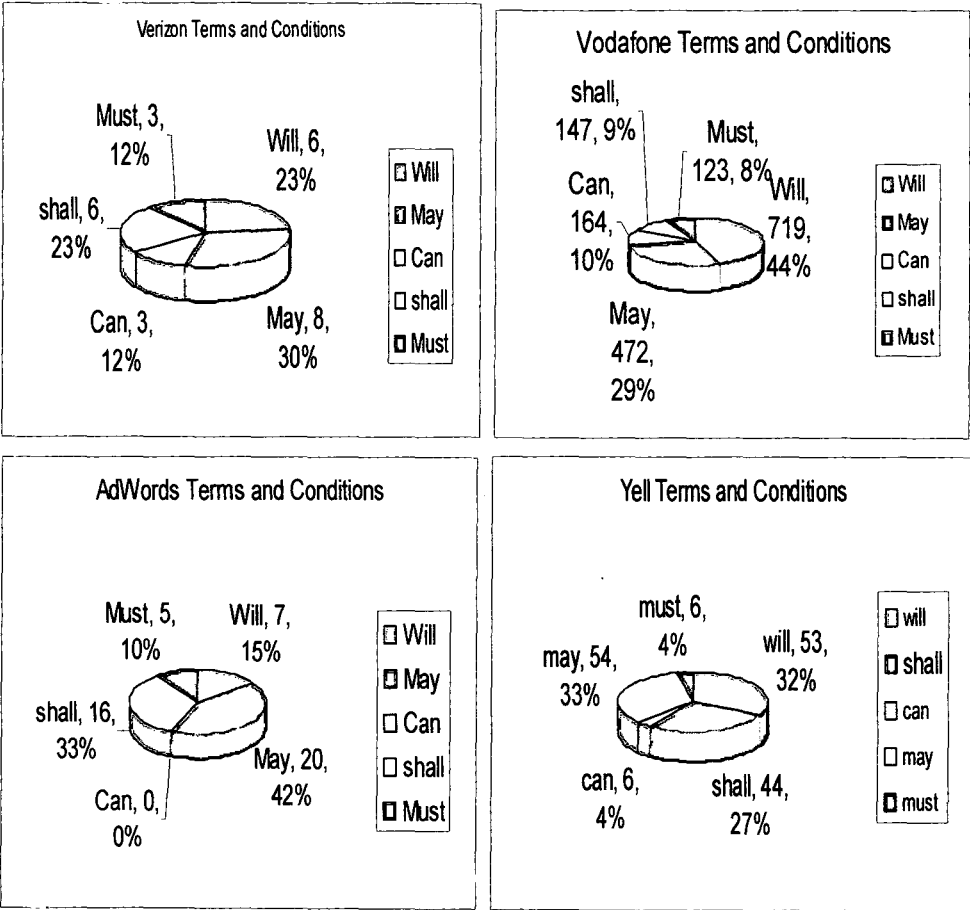
Chart 2 (a) The Primary Modal Verbs in Terms and Conditions (L1)

However, L2 shows a different pattern once again and the most significant modal here is *shall* which is around 50 percent on all these websites. MUST is negligible on L2 websites, but a similarity that we find between L1 and L2 is that in both cases MAY exceeds the percentage of *can*, which sometimes is close to zero.

BSNL Terms and Conditions

Must, 0, 0%
Will, 26, 22%
shall, 63, 53%
May, 18, 15%
Can, 12, 10%

☐ Will
☐ May
☐ Can
☐ shall
☐ Must

Tata Sky Terms and Conditions

Must, 0, 0%
Will, 4, 33%
shall, 5, 42%
May, 3, 25%
Can, 0, 0%

☐ Will
☐ May
☐ Can
☐ shall
☐ Must

Tata Indicom Terms and Conditions

shall, 85, 50%
Can, 8, 5%
Will, 44, 26%
Must, 1, 1%
May, 31, 18%

☐ Will
☐ shall
☐ Can
☐ May
☐ Must

MTNL Terms and Conditions

May, 7, 9%
Must, 0, 0%
Will, 12, 15%
shall, 59, 76%
Can, 0, 0%

☐ Will
☐ May
☐ Can
☐ shall
☐ Must

Chart 2 (b) The Primary Modal Verbs in Terms and Conditions (L2)

From the data we have found, it is evident that SHALL is not just a stylistic device in American English, which writers use to convey the quantity of formal education, but it also means that they are still used for expressing terms and conditions and can be found in similar official documents. About the absence of *must* from the L2 websites, they are not there because L2 prefers to use *shall* and it can occur in place of *must*.

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Example:

The subscriber shall take adequate care of the STB, during the period of the agreement. (MTNL Terms and Conditions)

Subscriber shall use BROADBAND services for lawful purposes only (BSNL Terms and Conditions)

2.3. The primary modals in policy. Now that we have already seen the frequency of the primary modal verbs in the FAQs and Terms and Conditions sections, let's see how the primary modal use varies here from the previous contexts. The common pattern is that MAY and WILL are high frequency modals and MAY exceeds CAN in all of them. SHALL is not as significant as it was in Terms and Conditions and is found only on BrE websites.
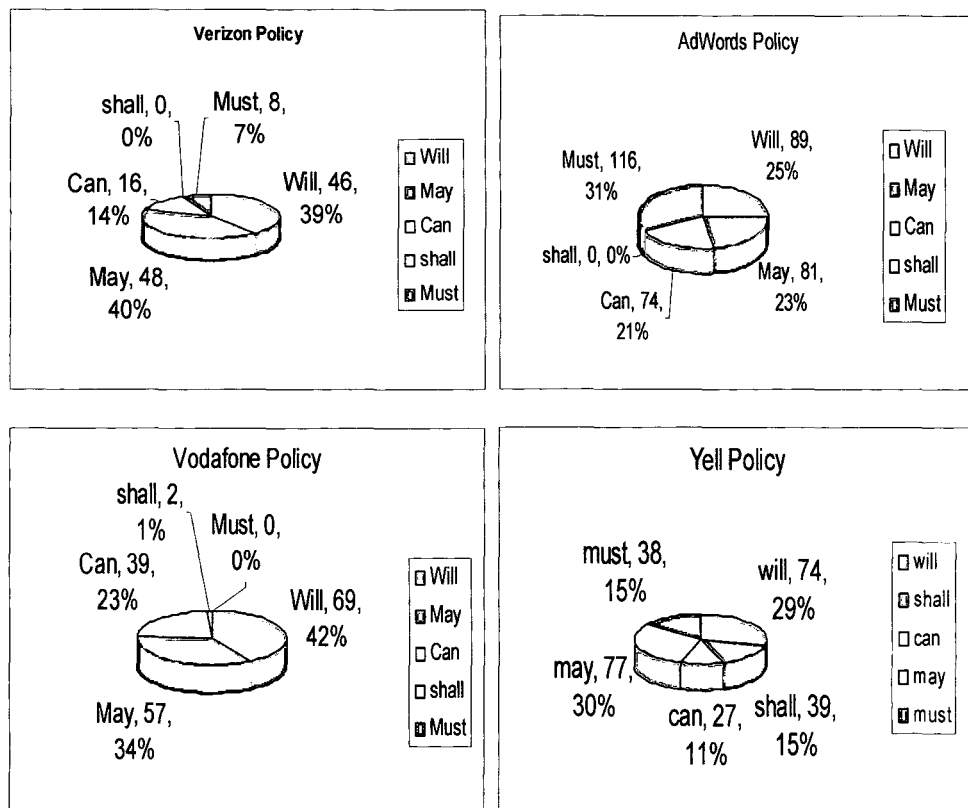
Chart 3 (a) The Primary Modal Verbs in Policy (L1)

L2 websites don't show a common pattern like L1 websites and give a mixed result. Though MAY exceeds other modals on the two websites Tata Indicom and Tata Sky, the same pattern is not seen for the other two sites. Between the rest of the two, while BSNL has an inclination toward SHALL, MTNL shows its preference for WILL. This mixed pattern may be indicative of lack of a standard in L2. There is a common pattern in L2 data, MUST is scarcely used in any of the above contexts.

Tata Indicom Policy

Must, 0, 0%
Will, 22, 29%
May, 37, 49%
shall, 11, 14%
Can, 6, 8%

☐ Will
☐ shall
☐ Can
☐ May
☐ Must

Tata Sky Policy

shall, 2, 8%
Must, 0, 0%
Will, 3, 13%
Can, 3, 13%
May, 16, 66%

☐ Will
☐ May
☐ Can
☐ shall
☐ Must

BSNL Policy

Must, 13, 2%
Will, 211, 26%
shall, 425, 53%
Can, 17, 2%
May, 140, 17%

☐ Will
☐ May
☐ Can
☐ shall
☐ Must

MTNL Policy

Can, 3, 4%
shall, 4, 5%
Must, 0, 0%
May, 1, 1%
Will, 70, 90%

☐ Will
☐ May
☐ Can
☐ shall
☐ Must
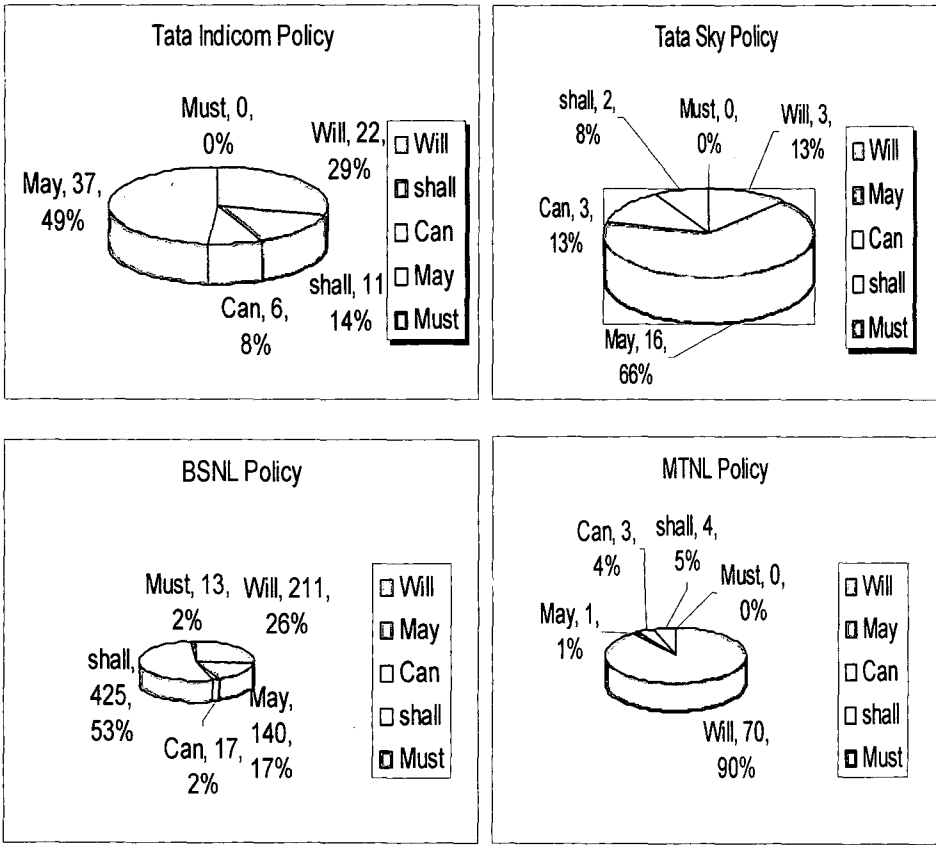
Chart 3 (b) The Primary Modal Verbs in Policy (L2)

2.4. The primary modals on other pages. This is a zone of low modal density and among the modals that are used here, CAN has the highest frequency. The other two modals are MAY and WILL. The high frequency of

CAN is because this section talks about products and their features and as such this discusses how useful the tool or product is and how that tool or product enables or empowers a user. While CAN has the sense of possibility similar to May, it also gives the sense of empowerment or ability and, so, has a high frequency in this section.
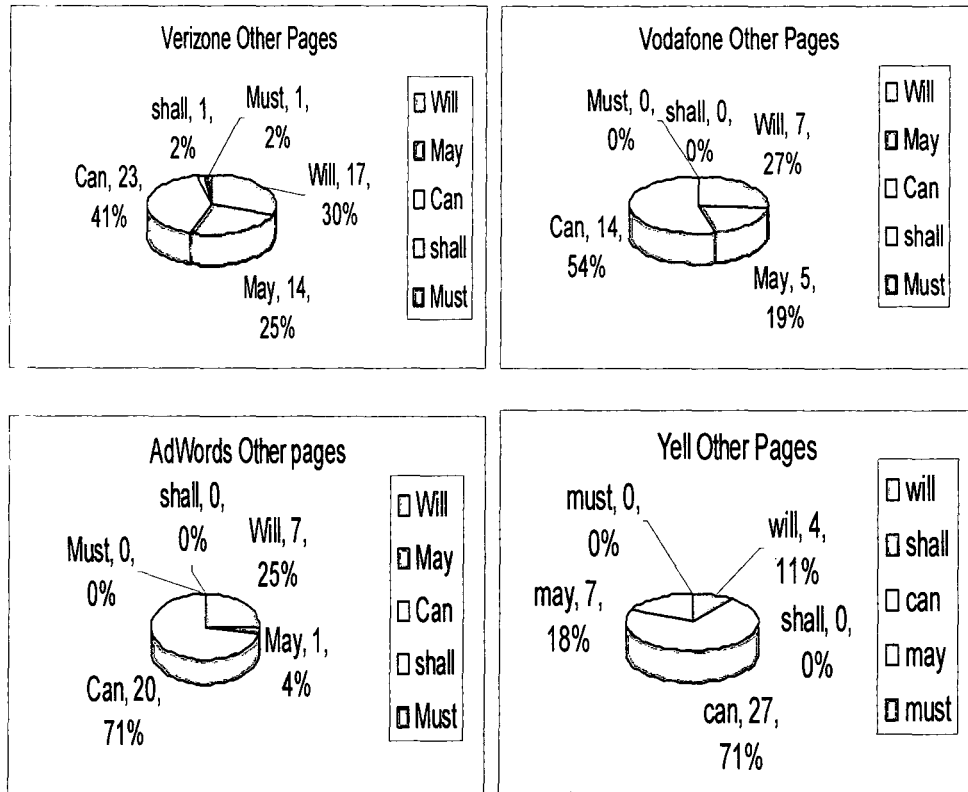
Chart 4 (a) The Primary Modal Verbs in the Other Pages section (L1)

Even L2 shows the same pattern here. We don't find many modal verbs in this section and among those that we have, CAN seems to be the most frequent one. WILL is also frequently used in this section and it is more frequent than CAN.

Tata SKy Other Pages

Will May Can shall Must

- Will
- May
- Can
- shall
- Must

BSNL Other Pages

shall, 4, 13% Must, 0, 0%
Can, 8, 26%
Will, 16, 51%
May, 3, 10%

- Will
- May
- Can
- shall
- Must

Tata Indicom Other Pages

May, 0, 0%
Must, 0, 0%
Can, 2, 40%
Will, 3, 60%
shall, 0, 0%

- Will
- shall
- Can
- May
- Must

MTNL Other Pages

shall, 2, 5% Must, 0, 0%
Will, 17, 44%
Can, 18, 46%
May, 2, 5%

- Will
- May
- Can
- shall
- Must
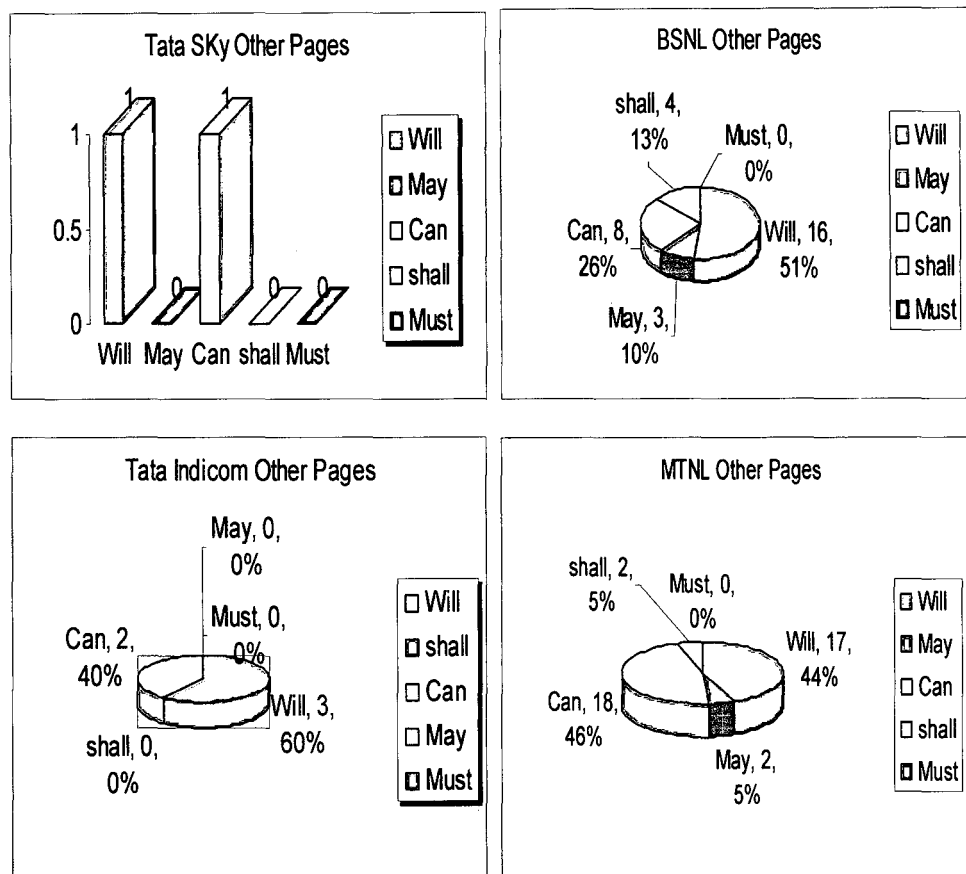
Chart 4 (b) The Primary Modal Verbs in the Other Pages section

3. **The distribution of secondary modals.** In the previous corpora studies, we found that the secondary modal verbs were on the decline, but the number of some of the secondary modals was greater than the primary modals. As per Leech's (2003) study, the two secondary modal verbs *might* and *ought to* are less frequently used modals. However, *would, could,* and *should* are not very low in number. As the secondary modals were on the decline, we can expect fewer secondary modal verbs here. Let's see how different the findings from the current study are.

3.1. The distribution of secondary modals in FAQs. Moving forward, let's discuss the distribution of the Secondary modal verbs. As OUGHT TO is not used by any of these websites, it is not included it in the graphs below. Among the secondary modal verbs SHOULD has the highest frequency followed by *would, could, and might,* which have very low presence.

Vodafone FAQs

Might, 2, 6%
Could, 2, 6%
Would, 8, 25%
should, 20, 63%

- Could
- should
- Would
- Might

Yell FAQs

could, 3, 14%
would, 9, 43%
should, 8, 38%
might, 1, 5%

- could
- should
- might
- would

Verizon FAQs

Would, 61, 28%
Could, 24, 11%
Might, 12, 6%
should, 121, 55%

- Could
- should
- Might
- Would

AdWords FAQs

Might, 104, 20%
Would, 156, 30%
should, 181, 36%
Could, 73, 14%

- Would
- Could
- should
- Might
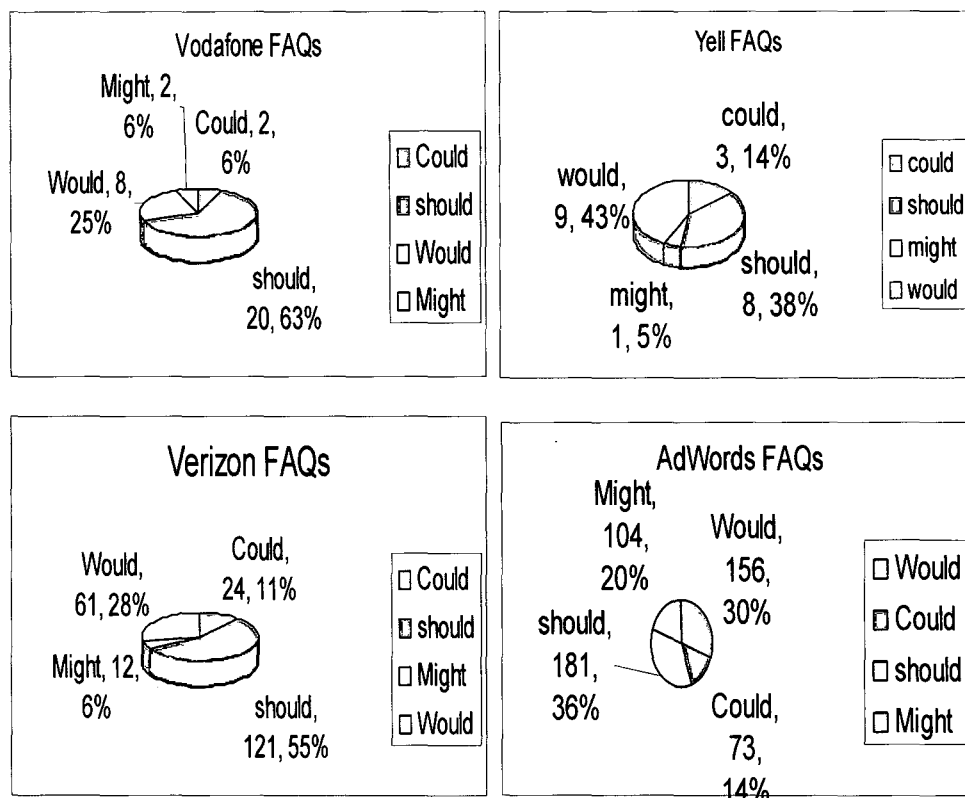
Chart 5 (a) The Secondary Modal Verbs in FAQs (L1)

L2 does not show affinity for the secondary modal verbs and there are very few secondary modals here, but the pattern of modals is similar to L1 in this section. The thing to note is COULD was a high frequency modal per the previous studies, but its frequency has gone down.

MTNL FAQs

Would, Could,
4, 19% 1, 5%

Might, 3,
14%

should,
13, 62%

☐ Could
☐ should
☐ Might
☐ Would

BSNL FAQs

Would,
33,
29%

Could,
19,
17%

Might,
1, 1%

should,
59,
53%

☐ Could
☐ should
☐ Might
☐ Would

Tata Sky FAQs

Could should Might Would

☐ Could
☐ should
☐ Might
☐ Would

Tata Indicom FAQs

Could should Might Would

☐ Could
☐ should
☐ Might
☐ Would
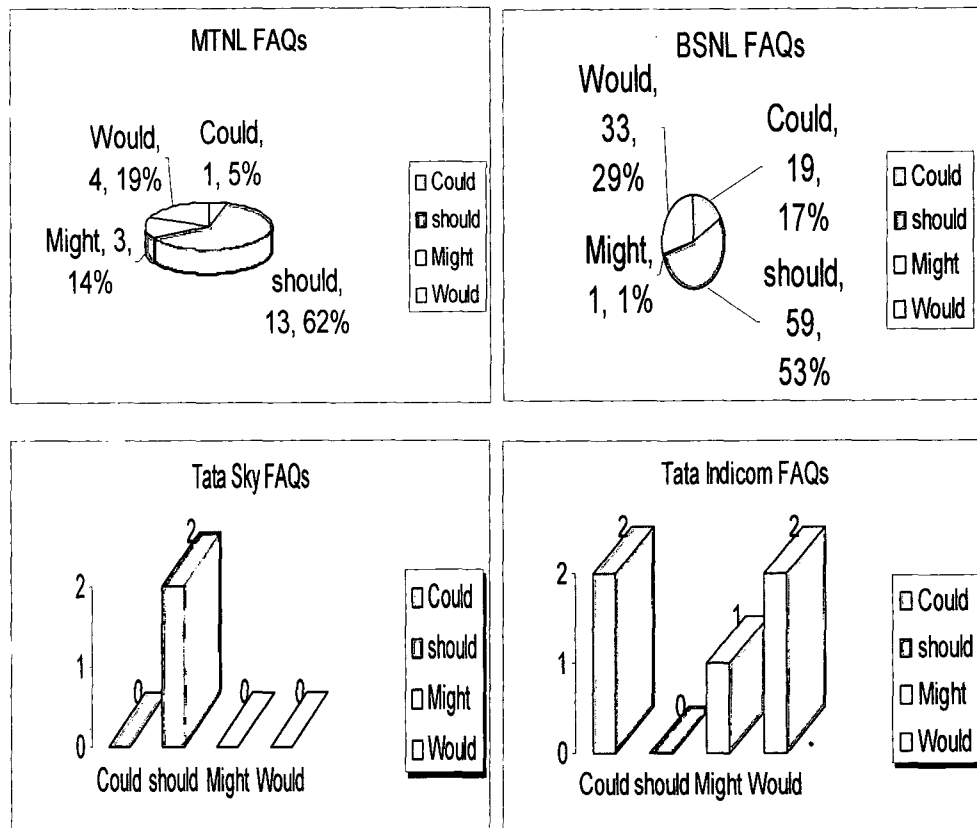
Chart 5 (b) The Secondary Modal Verbs in FAQs (L2)

3.2. **The secondary modals in terms and conditions.** The trend of the low frequency of the secondary modal verbs continues in terms and conditions too. AmE completely avoids these modals, and both AdWords and Verizon don't use the secondary modal verbs. However, BrE

Vodafone Terms and Conditons

Might, 3, 3%   Could, 7, 8%

Would, 17, 20%

should, 60, 69%

☐ Could
☑ should
☐ Would
☐ Might

Yell Terms and Conditions

would, 3, 33%   could, 2, 22%

might, 1, 11%   should, 3, 34%

☐ could
☑ should
☐ might
☐ would

Verizon Terms and Conditions

2
1.5
1
0.5
0

Could should Might Would

☐ Could
☑ should
☐ Might
☐ Would

AdWords Terms and Conditions

1
0.5
0

Would Could should Might

☐ Series1
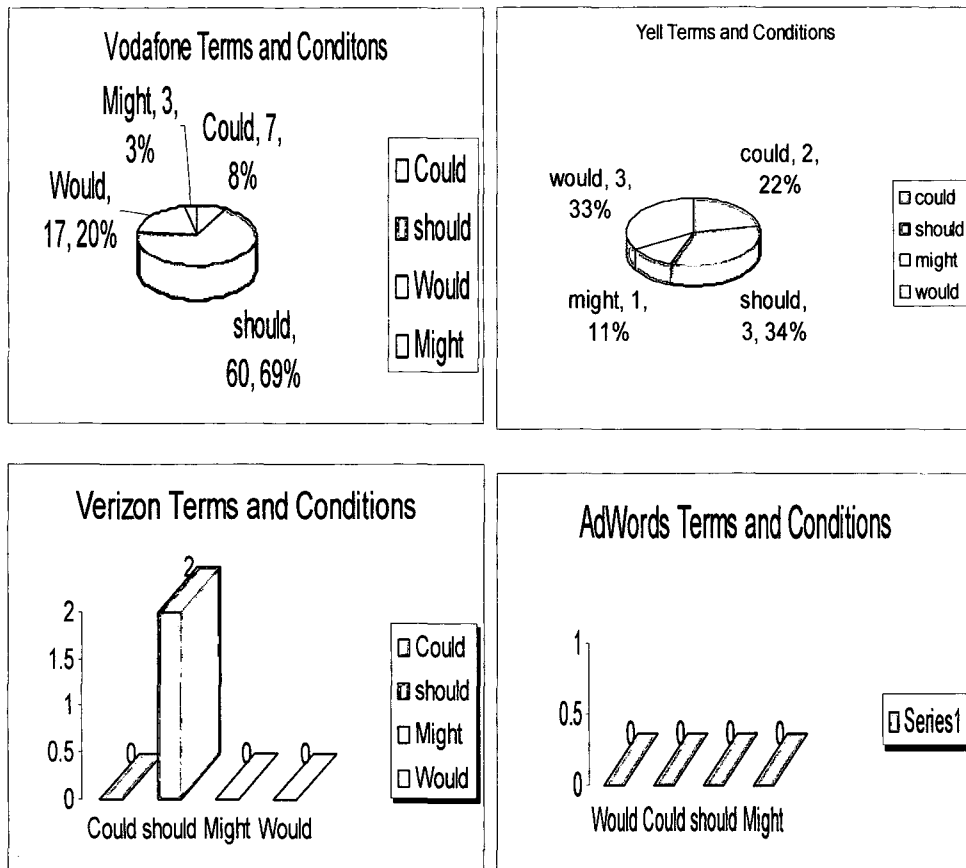
Chart 6 (a) The Secondary Modal Verbs in Terms and Conditions (L1)

sites do use a few secondary modal verbs. The pattern of these modals is the same as FAQs, that is, SHOULD and WOULD are higher in frequency than others. Even L2 behaves the same way and there are very few secondary modal verbs in terms and conditions. Unlike L1, WOULD outnumbers *should* in Indian English.

MTNL Terms and Conditions

Could: 0, should: 0, Might: 0, Would: 0

Legend: Could, should, Might, Would

BSNL Terms and Conditions

Could, 0, 0%   should, 2, 11%

Would, 16, 89%   Might, 0, 0%

Legend: Could, should, Might, Would

Tata Indicom Terms and Conditions

Could, 0, 0%   should, 8, 36%

Would, 14, 64%   Might, 0, 0%

Legend: Could, should, Might, Would

Tata Sky Terms and Conditions

Could: 0, should: 2, Might: 0, Would: 0

Legend: Could, should, Might, Would

Chart 6 (b): The Secondary Modal Verbs in Terms and Conditions (L2)

3. 3. The secondary modals in policy. On the policy pages too, we continue to have very few modals and the same pattern of *should* being the most frequent secondary modal verb followed by *would*. In case of Vodafone (BrE), MIGHT by far exceeds other modals.

AdWords Policy

Might, 7, 13%

Would, 9, 17%

Could, 2, 4%

should, 34, 66%

- ☐ Would
- ☐ Could
- ☐ should
- ☐ Might

Verizon Policy

Would, 7, 43%

Could, 0, 0%

should, 6, 38%

Might, 3, 19%

- ☐ Could
- ☐ should
- ☐ Might
- ☐ Would

Yell Policy

would, 0, 0%

might, 2, 6%

could, 4, 11%

should, 29, 83%

- ☐ could
- ☐ should
- ☐ might
- ☐ would

Vodafone Policy

Could, 0, 0%

should, 5, 19%

Might, 14, 54%

Would, 7, 27%

- ☐ Could
- ☐ should
- ☐ Would
- ☐ Might
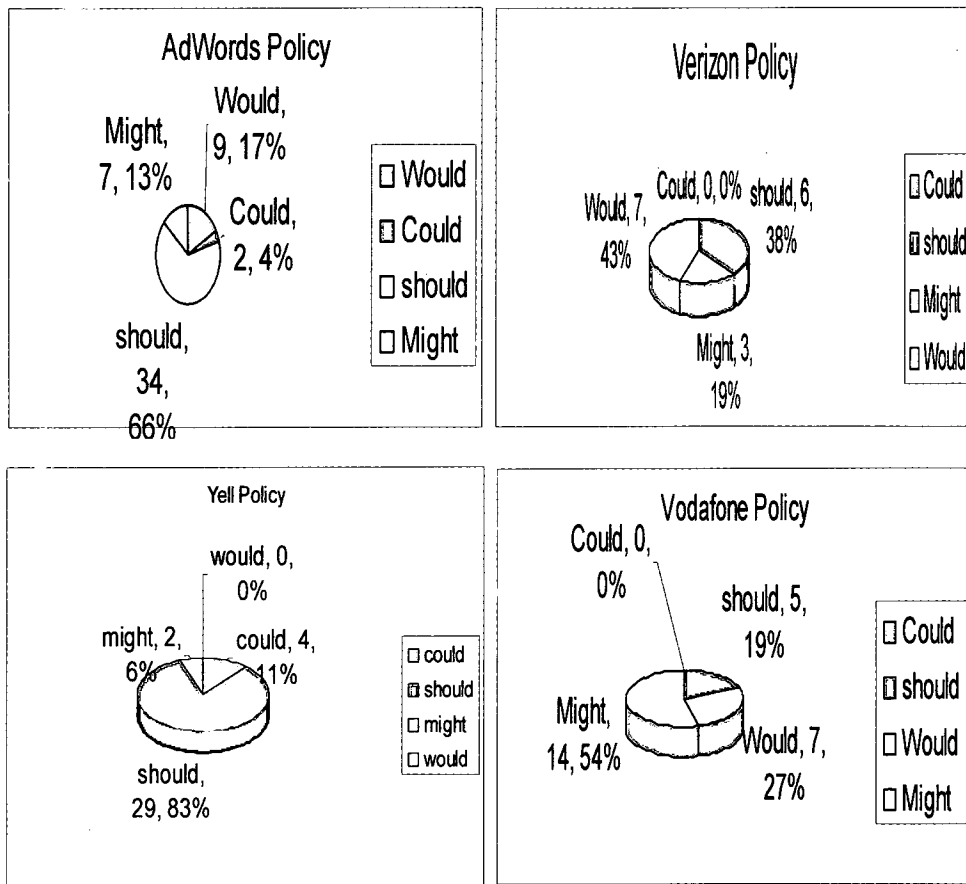
Chart 7 (a): The Secondary Modal Verbs in Policy (L1)

L2 doesn't have as many secondary modal as L1 even in Policy, but out of those that have been used, SHOULD is a prominent modal. BSNL suggests strong presence of *would* in Indian English.

64
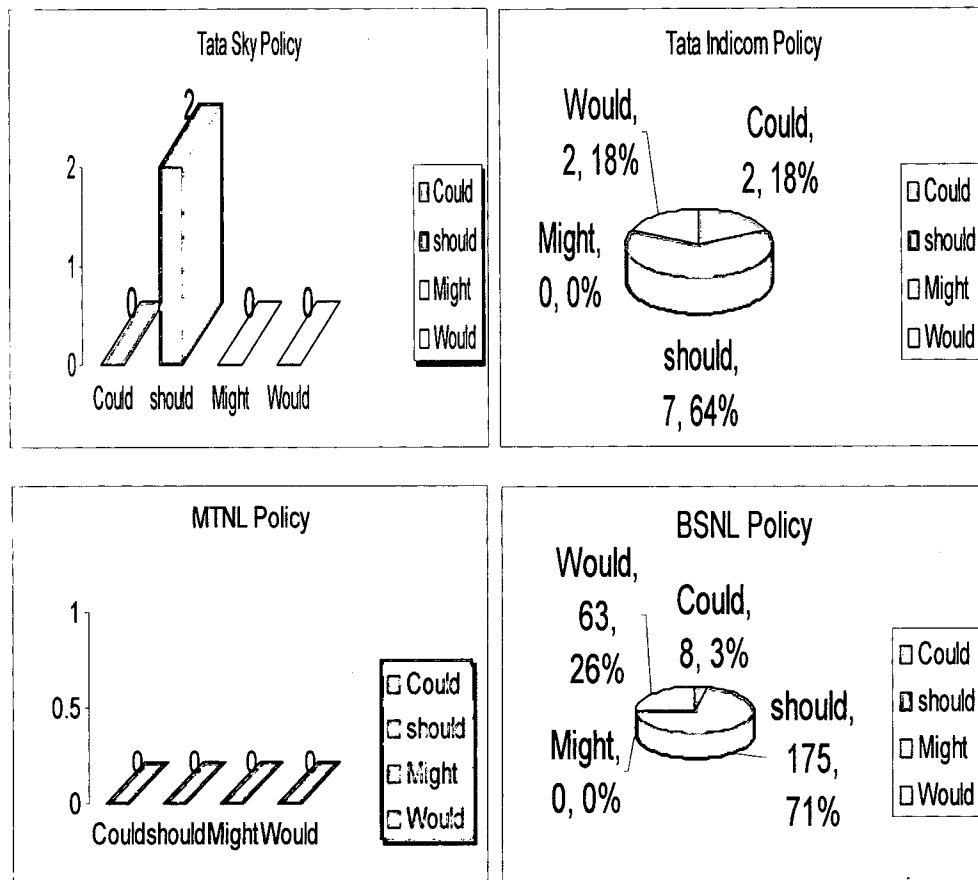
Chart 7 (b): The Secondary Modal Verbs in Policy (L2)

3. 4. The secondary modal verbs on Other Pages. Like we found there were a low number of the primary modal verbs in the Other Pages section, there is a similar condition for the secondary modal verbs too. Here, the number of the secondary modal verbs is much lower than that in the other three sections.

Vodafone Other Pages

Could, 0, 0%
Might, 3, 30%
should, 3, 30%
Would, 4, 40%

- ☐ Could
- ☐ should
- ☐ Would
- ☐ Might

Yell Other Pages

could, 1, 20%
would, 2, 40%
should, 1, 20%
might, 1, 20%

- ☐ could
- ☐ should
- ☐ might
- ☐ would

Verizon Other Pages

2
0
Could should Might Would

- ☐ Could
- ☐ should
- ☐ Might
- ☐ Would

AdWords Other Pages

Would, 2, 25%
Might, 4, 49%
Could, 1, 13%
should, 1, 13%

- ☐ Would
- ☐ Could
- ☐ should
- ☐ Might
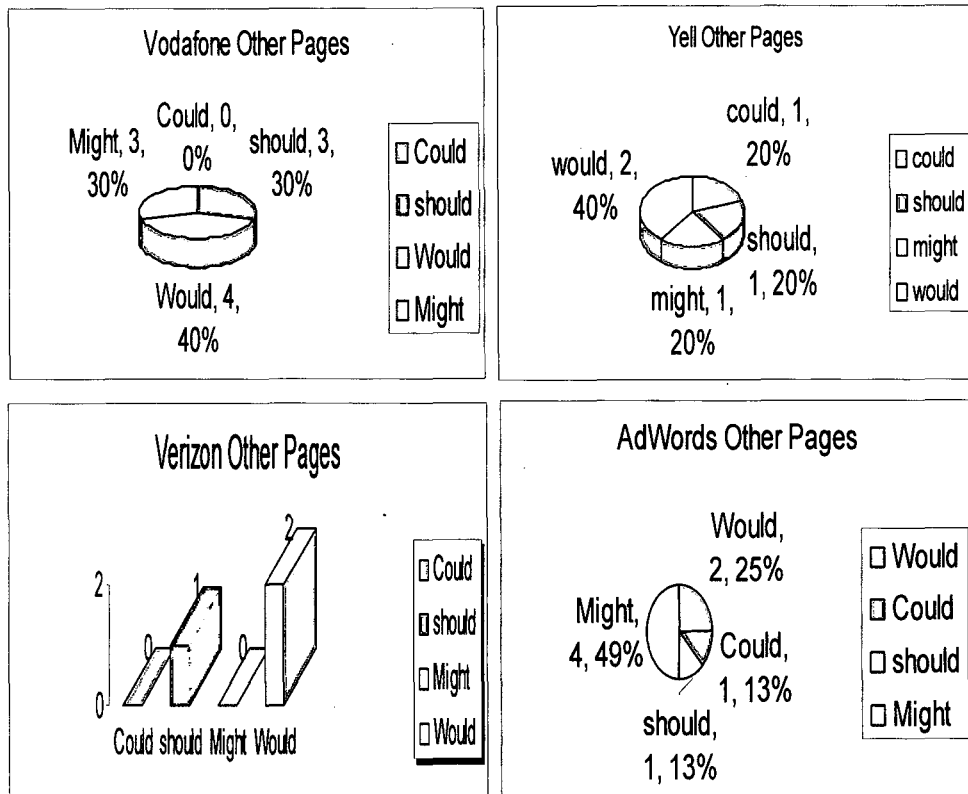
Chart 8 (a): The Secondary Modal Verbs in the Other Pages section (L1)

Similar behavior is seen even in L2. Compared to L1, L2 has much less or no secondary modal verbs on these pages. This is because less data is available for L2, and if we take a larger sample, we can find a few more modals, but in any case the pattern is that this section is not rich in terms of the secondary modal verbs.

BSNL Other Pages

Could should Might Would

☐ Series1

MTNL Other Pages

Could should Might Would

☐ Could
☐ should
☐ Might
☐ Would

Tata Sky Other Pages

Could should Might Would

☐ Could
☐ should
☐ Might
☐ Would

Tata Indicom Other Pages

Couldshould Might Would

☐ Could
☐ should
☐ Might
☐ Would
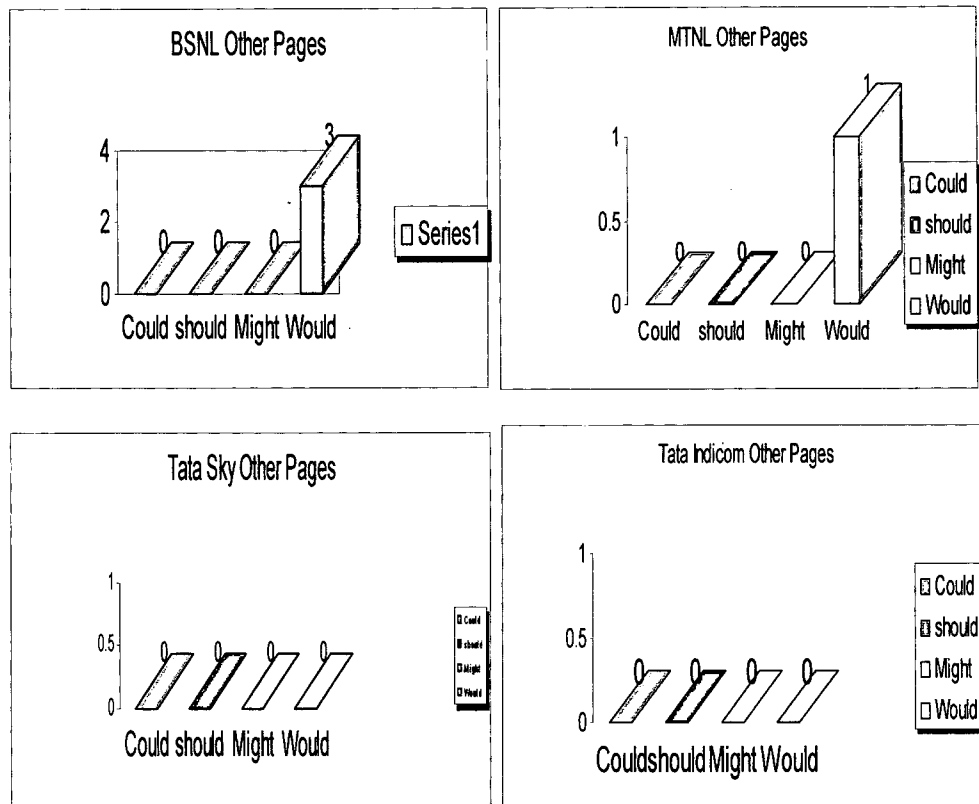
Chart 8 (b): The Secondary Modal Verbs in the Other Pages section (L2)

Also, the fewer number of modal verbs in the Other Pages section may be because modals are related to the speaker's 'opinion or attitude towards the proposition that the sentence expresses or the situation that the proposition describes' (Lyons, 1977:452), or in Palmer's (1986:16) words, modality 'is concerned with subjective characteristics of an utterance, and it could even be further argued that subjectivity is an essential criterion for modality. However, the content on these pages doesn't require that the writer make any subjective comment. This at least doesn't happen on the websites studied here, but the possibility of subjectivity in some cases can't be denied when users are allowed to give their feedback or write reviews or make some comments on the service or product. We should find a different pattern in that case.

4. The status of an individual modal among modals.

Table 4: A comparative account of individual modals in the business text from L1 and L2 varieties

Modal Verbs	AdWords (L1)	Verizon (L1)	Yell (L1)	Vodafone (L1)	MTNL (L2)	BSNL (L2)	Tata Indicom (L2)	Tata Sky (L2)
Will	1444	1305	173	981	241	480	84	14
May	674	422	83	559	20	203	96	20
Can	1363	997	114	413	135	307	37	24
shall	17	8	147	149	75	538	71	7
Must	209	70	47	136	0	17	1	0
Could	76	24	10	9	1	27	4	0
should	216	130	41	88	13	236	15	6

Might	115	15	5	22	3	1	1	0
Would	167	148	14	36	5	115	18	0
Need not	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Has/ have/h ad to	15	43	0	37	21	88	4	2
Ought to	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Used to	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total	4,281	3,113	634	2,393	495	1924	327	72

As we have already seen how in different sections, modals are used, we can now see their overall status in contemporary English in both L1 and L2. In Leech's (2003) work, the order of modals based on their frequency was this: *would, will, can, could, may, should, must, might, shall, ought to, need not*. There have been noticeable changes over around 17 years since the data Leech used was collected. Now, the high frequency modals are the following *will, can, may, should, must, would* (L1, AmE) and *will, can, may, shall, must, should, would,* (L1, BrE) and *will, shall, can, may, should, would, must* (IE). The current figures suggest COULD is no longer a high-frequency modal, and it's become a marginal modal in the business context. Like *might*, it's hardly ever used in all the varieties studied here. COULD was the least frequent modal in most cases, which is a drastic change from being among the most

frequently used modals. The other difference is the huge percentage of *shall* in IE and even BrE. Though it's almost negligible in AmE (L1), it's still a significant one in BrE (L1) and IE (L2). Looking at the numbers in Leech's data, we find SHALL was among the marginal modals and less frequent than even the secondary modal verb *might*. While we found some tokens of *ought to* in Leech's corpora, we have none in the present data, which may mean that this modal has become obsolete or at least is so in business contexts.

Let us compare the findings of this work with the results found from similar studies. One such study on modals using a small medium corpus was conducted at Lancaster University. The data for this corpus came from three BOEING 737 manuals, a maintenance manual (MM-addressed to aviation mechanics and technicians) consisted of 42,382 words, a Quick Reference Handbook (QRH- addressed to pilots) consisted of 29,928 words, and an Operations Manual (OM- also addressed to pilots) with 46,895 words so adding up to a total of 119,205 words. All the three publications were written by BOEING.

In this study on the Distribution of Modal Verbs in the Aviation Corpus (AC), *will, can, may,* and *must* account for 86.31% of all the modal verb tokens, *may* being the most frequent, with 27.62%. Another study before this one was conducted by Quirk et al, 1985;. Biber et al, 1999; Kennedy, 2002 and according to this study *will, would, can* and *could* were the most frequent, the results are not similar to the present work. Both these studies show that the frequency of *might* and *shall* is very low. In the AC, there is only one occurrence of *shall* and two of *might*. The findings of the present work match the previous studies on certain points, for example, the high number of *will, can,* and *may* and a low number of *might*. However, unlike the previous

studies, the present one shows that the primary modals exceed the secondary modals by far, and the only secondary modal verb that is frequent in business text is Should. Also, both the studies above suggest that SHALL is not found in their data, but the results here are different in this regard too.

5. **A note on difference in the usage of Must and Have To in the L1 and L2 varieties.** The present work has looked at only one semi-modal *have to*, which has made its significant presence in all the varieties of English, and the findings add to our understanding of modal behavior in the business context. It is believed that the only context where performative intrinsic *must* occurs in the LOB (London/Oslo/Bergen) corpus is where there is a clear universally acknowledged authority structure (e.g. the home: mother to child; or the school: teacher to pupil, and so on), and Coates comments that apart from a few rare contexts like the law courts, performative intrinsic *must* is rare in BrE because people are either seen as equals or are treated as such, since to do otherwise would be impolite, and often counter-productive.

Recent studies on the historical change in the use of modals in native varieties of English suggest a noticeable difference in modal use. Krug (2000) for example reports that the use of semi-modals appears to be generally on the rise in several registers in both AmE and BrE. In fact, Krug cites especially *(have) got* to and *have to* as the most frequent. These two trends are found consistently across all the Indian websites. This is one of the common features of the Indian business websites; they have a negligible number of *must* in their content but they all have around 4 percent of *has/have to* in their text, or at least, the number of *has/have to* is more than *must* in every case. This supports the idea that even in Indian English (L2) like BrE and AmE MUST is a 'face-threatening' expression, and so, it should be avoided in business communication.

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The other part of the work relates to the perception of modals in the L1 and L2 varieties of English. For this purpose, a questionnaire with 20 sentences from business sites was created. An online survey was conducted to get data from US native speakers. The survey templates on Surveymonkey.com were used for creating this survey, and then, the survey sent this survey to some mailing lists in the US that have around 5000 subscribers, but everyone on these lists is not a speaker of the US variety of English. So, only those who speak the AmE variety were asked to take the survey. With a lot of persuasion and continuous effort, I could get data from 16 of them. Some of the informants were more than helpful, and they wanted to know data for any other variety of English too. I must say I am impressed with the keenness people did the survey and guided me through it. One of those on this mailing list suggested that an online survey be used instead of a words doc. The data collected online is the benchmark for this study. Next, the same sentences were used to collect data from 15 L2 (Indian) speakers of English.

6. **Sentences used for data collection.** Following are the sentences used for collecting data from both L1 and L2 speakers.

(1) Your phone has been preprogrammed and can be activated by your-self by dialing *228 and talking to our OTA desk.

(2) The phone can be activated immediately by dialing *228.

(3) Garuda offers you Voice Mail, a private secretary who listens to your incoming calls and stores the messages left by the caller so that you can call them back later.

(4) Duplicate Bills indicating the bill amount and complete usage details can be obtained from the nearest Sanchar Haat.

(5) Can I transfer my Garuda Mobile/Fixed Wireless connection transferred in the name of Third Party?

(6) How quickly can I get my GPRS service activated?

(7) Now you can have your MTNL Wallet ready for us.

(8) Currently, you can pay using any Visa/MasterCard/Diners/Amex credit card.

(9) You can use credit cards or ITZ cash card for payment.

(10) You can register through your mobile (This may not be available on all mobile handsets) or by visiting www.irctc.co.in.

(11) Can I add a passenger while booking?

(12) Any existing subscriber of the BSNL can subscribe for the service.

(13) For registration he can follow the following approach:

(14) Using the Audio Conferencing Service the subscriber can have Audio conference with participants on PSTN and ISDN

(15) Select security type which can be "Pin required", "No Pin" etc.

(16) Any participant can enter into a conference any time by first dialing the bridge number (0124-2845600) and then the participant/chairperson's code.

(17) The subscriber can click on the *Monthly Bill* link to view his bill.

(18) Duplicate Bills indicating the bill amount can be obtained from the Customer Relations Officer of your Zone.

(19) The same can also be obtained from the Accounts Officer Telephone Revenue of your zone.

(20) Fax image of the bill can be obtained through IVRS.

7. How do L2 speakers perceive the sentences with modals, differently from L1 speakers? To know the answer to this question, we can look at the table below and since the table has a lot of data let us know what these figures in the table stand for. The first column lists the meanings of modals used for collecting data. The other two columns 2 and 3 have the responses collected from the L1 (US) and L2 (Indian) varieties of English respectively. Against each meaning, I have entered the sentence numbers (as written above) where this meaning is perceived by the informants. Right after the sentence number, we can find the count of people who got this meaning, and in parentheses, we can see the rating given by them, that is, if this meaning is their first or second or third choice.

Table 5: An analysis of responses of L1 and L2 speakers on the use of CAN in the business text

	L1 speakers' response (US variety)	L2 speakers' response (Indian English variety)
Senses of modals	Sentence number: number of people who got the given meaning, (their preference on a three point scale)	Sentence number: number of people who got the given meaning, (their preference on a three point scale)
Likelihood	Sen. 1: Nil Sen. 2: Nil Sen. 3: Nil Sen. 4: Nil Sen. 6: 2 (1), 1 (3) Sen. 9: Nil Sen. 10: Nil	Sen. 1: 3 (1), 1 (2) Sen. 2: 3 (1), 1 (2), 1 (3) Sen. 3: 2 (2) Sen. 4: 2 (1), 2 (2) Sen. 6: 4 (1), 2 (2) Sen. 9: 1 (1)

	Sen. 11: Nil	Sen. 10: 3 (1)
	Sen. 12: Nil	Sen. 11: 1 (2)
	Sen. 14: Nil	Sen. 12: 1 (1)
	Sen. 15: 1 (1)	Sen. 14: 3 (1)
	Sen. 17: Nil	Sen. 15: 1 (1)
	Sen. 18: 1 (1)	Sen. 17: 1 (1), 2 (1)
	Sen. 19: 1 (1)	Sen. 18: 3 (1)
	Sen. 20: 1 (1), 1 (2)	Sen. 19: 2 (1), 1 (2)
		Sen. 20: 1 (1), 1 (2)
Ability	Sen. 1: 12 (1), 1 (3)	Sen. 1: 5 (1), 1 (2)
	Sen. 2: 12 (1), 1 (2)	Sen. 2: 5 (1), 2 (2)
	Sen. 3: 9 (1)	Sen. 3: 3 (1), 1 (2)
	Sen. 4: 12 (1), 1 (2)	Sen. 4: 4 (1), 2 (2)
	Sen. 5: 6 (1), 2 (2)	Sen. 5: Nil
	Sen. 6: 4 (1), 3 (2)	Sen. 6: 2 (1), 1 (2)
	Sen. 7: 7 (1)	Sen. 7: 5 (1)
	Sen. 8: 13 (1)	Sen. 8: 5 (1), 2 (2)
	Sen. 9: 12 (1), 1 (2)	Sen. 9: 5 (1)
	Sen. 10: 14 (1)	Sen. 10: 4 (1), 1 (2)
	Sen. 11: 9 (1), 1 (2)	Sen. 11: 2 (1)
	Sen. 12: 12 (1), 2 (1),1 (3)	Sen. 12: 4 (1), 3 (2)
	Sen. 13: 5 (1), 1 (2)	Sen. 13: Nil
	Sen. 14: 14 (1)	Sen. 14: 7 (1), 1 (2)
	Sen. 15: 4 (1), 1 (2)	Sen. 15: 1 (1)
	Sen. 16: 12 9 (1)	Sen. 16: 4 (1), 1 (2)
	Sen. 17: 11 (1), 1 (2)	Sen. 17: 5 (1)
	Sen. 18: 10 (1)	Sen. 18: 3 (1), 1 (2)

	Sen. 19: 9 (1), 1 (2)	Sen. 19: 1 (1), 2 (2)
	Sen. 20: 11 (1), 1 (1)	Sen. 20: 1 (1), 2 (2)
Permission	Sen. 1: Nil	Sen. 1: 1 (1)
	Sen. 2: 1 (1)	Sen. 2 : 1 (2)
	Sen. 3: Nil	Sen. 3 : 1 (1)
	Sen. 4: 1 (2)	Sen. 4 : 2 (1), 1 (2)
	Sen. 5: 5 (1), 3 (2), 2 (3)	Sen. 5 : 9 (1), 3 (2)
	Sen. 6: 2 (1)	Sen. 6: Nil
	Sen. 7: 2 (1), 1 (2)	Sen. 7 : 1 (1)
	Sen. 8: 1 (2), 1 (3)	Sen. 8 : 3 (1), 1 (2)
	Sen. 9: 2 (2)	Sen. 9: 1 (1), 1 (2)
	Sen. 10: 2 (2)	Sen. 10: 1 (1)
	Sen. 11: 3 (3), 6 (2)	Sen.11: 4 (1), 2 (2),1 (3)
	Sen. 12: 5 (2), 2 (3)	
	Sen. 13: 1 (1), 3 (2)	Sen. 12: 2 (1), 1 (3)
	Sen. 14: 2 (2)	Sen. 13: 2 (1)
	Sen. 15: 1 (2), 1 (3)	Sen. 14: 1 (1), 3 (2)
	Sen. 16: 3 (2)	Sen. 15: Nil
	Sen. 17: 2 (2), 1 (3)	Sen. 16: 3 (1), 1 (2)
	Sen. 18: 3 (2), 2 (3)	Sen. 17: 2 (1)
	Sen. 19: 2 (2)	Sen. 18: Nil
	Sen. 20 : 2 (2)	Sen. 19: 1(1), 2 (2)
		Sen. 20: 1 (1)
Request	Sen. 5: 6 (1)	Sen. 5: 5 (1), 2 (2)
	Sen. 6: 6 (1)	Sen. 6: 4 (1), 1 (2)
	Sen. 8: Nil	Sen. 8: 1 (2)

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	Sen. 9: Nil	Sen. 9 : 2 (1)
	Sen. 11: 4 (1)	Sen. 11 : 7 (1), 4 (2)
	Sen. 12: Nil	Sen. 12 : 1 (2)
	Sen. 15: 4 (1)	Sen. 15: 3 (2)
	Sen. 16: Nil	Sen. 16 : 1 (1)
	Sen. 17: Nil	Sen. 17 : 1 (2)
	Sen. 18: 1 (1)	Sen 18: Nil
Suggestions	Sen. 1: 3 (1), 3 (3)	Sen. 1: 6 (1), 3 (2)
	Sen. 2: 3 (1), 3 (3)	Sen. 2: 4 (1), 2 (2)
	Sen. 3: Nil	Sen. 3 : 3 (1), 4 (2)
	Sen. 4: 1 (1), 2 (2)	Sen. 4: 2 (1), 2 (2)
	Sen. 6: Nil	Sen. 6: 1 (1)
	Sen. 7: 2 (1)	Sen. 7: 3 (1), 1 (2)
	Sen. 8: 3 (1)	Sen. 8: 5 (1), 1 (1)
	Sen. 9: 3 (1)	Sen. 9: 7 (1)
	Sen. 10: 2 (1), 1 (2)	Sen. 10: 5 (1)
	Sen. 11: 1 (2)	Sen. 11: 1 (1)
	Sen. 12: Nil	Sen. 12: 1(2)
	Sen. 13: 10 (1), 3 (2), 1 (3)	Sen. 13: 10 (1)
	Sen. 14: 1 (1), 2 (2)	Sen. 14: 2 (1), 1 (2)
	Sen. 15: 2 (1), 2 (2)	Sen. 15: 9 (1)
	Sen. 16: 3 (1), 2 (2), 2 (3)	Sen. 16: 5 (1)
	Sen. 17: 4 (1), 1 (2), 1 (3)	Sen. 17: 6 (1)
	Sen. 18: 2(1), 2 (2)	Sen. 18: 5 (1)
	Sen. 19: 3 (1), 2 (2), 1	Sen. 19: 9 (1), 1 (2)

	(3) Sen. 20: 2 (1), 3 (2), 1 (3)	Sen. 20: 3 (1), 1 (2)
Offer	Sen. 1: 1 (1) Sen. 2 : Nil Sen. 3: 6 (1) Sen. 4: 4 (1), 1 (2) Sen. 5: Nil Sen. 6: Nil Sen. 7: 2 (1) Sen. 8: Nil Sen. 9: Nil Sen. 10: Nil Sen. 11: Nil Sen. 12: 4 (1), 1 (2) Sen. 13: 1 (3) Sen. 14: Nil Sen.15: 1 (1) Sen. 16: 1 (2) Sen. 17: 2 (2) Sen. 18: 1 (1), 4 (2) Sen. 19: 1 (1), 2 (2) Sen. 20: 1 (1)	Sen. 1: 1 (1) Sen. 2: 3 (1) Sen. 3: 7 (1), 1 (12.5) Sen. 4: 5 (1), 2 (2) Sen. 5: 1 (1), 2 (2) Sen. 6: 1 (2) Sen. 7: 4(1), 1 (2) Sen. 8: 2 (1), 3 (2), 1 (3) Sen. 9: 1 (1), 3 (2) Sen. 10: 2 (1), 1 (3) Sen. 11: 1 (2) Sen. 12: 7 (1), 2 (2) Sen. 13: 1 (1), 1 (2) Sen. 14: 2 (1) Sen. 15: 2 (1), 1 (2) Sen. 16: 2 (1), 2 (2) Sen. 17: Nil Sen. 18: 1(1) Sen. 19: 1 (1), 1 (2) Sen. 20: 1 (1)
Can't Say	Sen. 3: Nil Sen. 6: 2 (1) Sen. 7: 3 (1), 1 (2) Sen. 10: Nil	Sen. 3: 1 (1) Sen. 6: 3 (1)\ Sen. 7: Nil Sen. 10: 1 (2)

	Sen. 12: Nil	Sen. 12: 1 (1)
	Sen. 14: Nil	Sen. 14: 1 (1)
	Sen. 15: Nil	Sen. 15: 1 (1)
	Sen. 17: Nil	Sen. 17: 1 (1)
None of these	Sen. 1 (1)	Sen. 1: Nil
	Sen. 5: 1 (1)	Sen. 5: Nil
	Sen. 6: 2 (1)	Sen. 6: Nil
	Sen. 7: 1 (1)	Sen. 7: 2 (1)
	Sen. 15: 3 (1)	Sen. 15: 1 (1)

8. Analysis. First of all, like we said in 3.1 chapter 3, while talking about *can*, it is one of the modals with many possibilities, which means we can expect several interpretations of a modal, and this is the reason the modal *can* was chosen for the present study. As was expected, we have found variations even in the results found from L1 speakers. While for most sentences L1 speakers have said that they sense the meaning of 'ability' in them, there are others who have got other interpretations like *'suggestions,' 'permission,' 'offer,' 'request,' 'likelihood.'* For example, most of the 16 informants think that the sense of CAN in sentences 3, 12, 18, 19 is *ability*, but there are some (around 20%) who have got different interpretations of the sentences. While about the sentences 3 and 12, the interpretation of many is they mean *offer*, about the sentences 18 and 19, they think the meanings are *suggestion* and *permission*. What is noticeable is the response of the L1 speakers is more convergent than the L2 speakers. Most people perceive the modal in the same way here, and even if there are variations, people's opinions seem to be polarized. On the other hand, L2 has given a scattered response to the modal meanings. The difference in the number of responses for two meanings is marginal. It appears

that the L2 speakers tend to have multiple interpretations of modals and are not sure of the meanings suggested in the sentence. It is also likely that the modal verbs are perceived differently in the L2 context, that is, some meanings of modals that have become marginal in L1 still survive in the L2 context. The results of the present survey are indicative that it's difficult to make a prediction which meaning is the dominant sense in L2. For example, in case of the sentences 8, 10, 16, and 17— the response of 5,4,4,5 (count of informants) respectively was *ability* whereas 5,5,5,6 (count of informants) respectively think the sentences convey the sense of suggestion. Another important observation is that the sense of *likelihood* is stronger in L2 (Indian English) as against the US variety data, we find more tokens of likelihood in the responses of L2 speakers. The use of *can* for suggestions and offers is more acceptable in L2. Also, there are more L2 speakers that find it difficult to figure out what the modal means in a given context. One more difference between the two samples is that in the US sample, *permission* is not the first thing that comes to mind, but it probably comes when the sentence is read carefully. On the other hand, the Indian sample shows people rate this as their first choice frequently.

FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study has looked at three aspects of modals: the density of modals in business text, the distribution of individual modals in such text, and the perception of modals by L1 and L2 speakers.

1. **Findings.** Following are the findings from the present study.

(a) Modal density in business text is very high, and it's far more than what we found from Lecch's (2003) study on four written corpora of BrE and AmE. Against 1 modal per 76 words in F-LOB (BrE,1991) and 1 modal per 81 words in Frown (AmE), the present work attests a much higher density of 1 modal per 40 words (L2), 1 modal per 41 words (L1, BrE), and 1 modal per 43 words (L1, AmE).

(b) Policy is a very high modal density section on most business websites. And the density here ranges from as high as 1 modal per 17 words to 52 words. Even FAQ and Terms and Conditions sections have very high modal density.

(c) The high frequency modals in different varieties are the following *Will, Can, May, Should, Must, Would* (L1, AmE) and *Will, Can, May, Shall, Must, Should, Would,* (L1, BrE) and *Will, Shall, Can, May, Should, Would, Must* (IE).

(d) The primary modal verbs CAN and WILL are the two most frequently used modal verbs in business text across varieties. MAY is next to the two modal verbs and is also very common in business text. SHALL has its widespread presence in every section of L2 business text.

(e) SHALL occurs in place of MUST in the Terms and Conditions section in L2.

(f) MAY and MUST rise in number in the Terms and Conditions section of business text.

(g) L2 hardly uses MUST and instead prefers to use the semi-modal HAVE TO.

(h) Among the secondary modal verbs SHOULD is the most commonly used modal. The other secondary modal verbs are not used very frequently in business text. The combined number of the other modal verbs does not exceed a primary modal verb like CAN and WILL.

(i) MIGHT and COULD are the least frequent modals.

(j) WOULD has higher density in L2 compared to its density in L1.

(k) L1 and L2 speakers don't perceive the modal CAN the same way. While L1 speakers have a polarized understanding of CAN, L2 speakers mostly don't agree on a particular meaning. They have a wide range of interpretations of the modal.

(l) While for L1 speakers *ability* is the most dominant usage of CAN in business text, L2 speakers have a divided opinion and for them the dominant sense is either *suggestion* or *ability*.

(m) L2 seems to use even not so frequent usage of CAN in L1-- for example, *likelihood*—as we have found many responses for this meaning of CAN.

2. **Business Implications.** Modal verbs do a very important function of conveying different modalities in the English language. These modalities are

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incredibly important in every domain where English is used, but the importance of modal verbs is more obvious in the Business English context. According to the US news and world report market research on lost customers by major companies shows that 14% for better product, 9% for cheaper product, 68% left because of poor service (service provider's attitude) which can be easily avoided by designing effective customer service process which enables the company to respond . The study clearly demonstrates the significance of soft service quality in relation to product quality. As studies have shown that the attitude of employees is the biggest factor that can affect a business, employees need to learn how to keep their attitude right while talking with customers. It is in this context we need to stress on the service quality part as 68% of the customers desert the service provider. The behavioral/attitude component of service is a major determining factor on the growth of the company which complements the performance for complete customer satisfaction. Attitude is something that is much affected by the use of modal verbs, and therefore, it will be very important to use modal verbs with great discretion. Developing the right trigger to express accurate modalities helps in deciding how a message is delivered. The correct modality will make an impression that we have the right attitude.

Modal verbs like other verbs play a vital role in the construction of a sentence and, so, are as important as any other verbs. Additionally, they determine how the sentence will sound to the reader, how the sentence will be perceived, how helpful the information will be for the reader, and so on. Incorrect usage of modal verbs can create a breakdown in communication, can be rude, and can also risk the credibility of the company. As all these are major concerns for any business, care should be taken while using modal verbs in a business context. There can be situations when a wrong usage of modals can annoy the

reader, which can be hazardous to a business. Sometimes, a wrong usage can create a gap in communication which is again not healthy for a business. Unlike a preposition or article error, which can create a bad impression of the company, incorrect modals can ruin the credibility of the company causing heavy losses to it. Modal usages may not be so important in general communication, but they are of great significance when it comes to delivering the accurate message.

Let us take a look at some sentences from business contexts and evaluate the use of some modal verbs that can be used to indicate almost the same kind of meaning with a variation in the degree of modality. It's important that we use these modals judiciously and avoid situations that can lead to any inconvenience for the customer. Though there are several modalities and a lot of modal verbs are used to express them in English, 'Possibility' is an important modality in business text and can be expressed by several modal verbs. Let's look at the careful choice of modal verbs that is made while expressing possibility. It can be a disappointing experience for customers when the company doesn't live up to their expectations. That's why, it's incredibly important for every business to set the right expectation to their users, and modal verbs come very handy here. A cursory look at the following sentences should help us understand the pattern in the usage of the modal verbs in the business context and notice the difference in the modal verb usage. Though all these modal verbs suggest possibility, we find that these modals are used in certain contexts assigned for them.

Examples of modal usage:

COULD:

- *If you choose very popular keywords (such as flowers or cars), there are millions of possible searches each day where your ad could show.*

- *For example, if you sell different types of garden tools, you could have a 'Garden Tools' campaign.*

- *So, for instance, if someone was searching for information about a local pizza parlor, relevant keywords might include "pizza delivery" or "pizza restaurants."*

MIGHT:

- *When you access the Traffic Estimator and analyze your keywords, you'll see, among other information, the approximate ad position and number of clicks you might receive each day.*

- *If your ads are displayed with an embeddable game, the ads might show on other sites (including sites outside of Google's content network) where that game is posted.*

WOULD:

- *Our technology draws upon our understanding of the billions of pages in our search index and our ability to crawl web pages to figure out which keywords would lead a user to the page.*

- *For instance, if you budget US$100 per day in a 30-day month, you may receive more than US$100 in clicks on a given day, but the maximum you would pay for that month is US$3,000.*

One of the things that we find common in the usage of these modal verbs is all of them can be used to give hypothetical examples, and these are used with

great caution as it's wise on the part of any business organization not to set wrong expectations to their clientele. Any gaps in communication can prove to be destructive and ruin its business prospects. Talking about one of the examples above, if a company tells its customers that they will pay only US$3000 if their budget is US$100 per day, this is not a structural error, and per regular English usage, this is a correct sentence. However, if in a certain month because of some reason, which happens in case of several services, the budget exceeds by a few dollars, it can cost a lot to the company. There can be many customers who are dissatisfied with this kind of service and sue the company for not keeping its words. Therefore, the impact of modals on a business can be really big. We can find a pattern in the usage of these three modal verbs: would, could, and might. They are used when businesses want to indicate less possibility of the promised action taking place, or when the action depends on several other factors. So, using them judiciously is incredibly important for every business.

WILL:

- *Website Optimizer will help you study the effects of different content on your users.*

- *Testing will enable you to identify what users respond to best so you can create a website that will be more effective in getting the business results you want.*

- *During the experiment, visitors will see a combination of page section variations.*

MAY:

- *If you're using an existing Analytics account, the maximum may be less, equal to four times the remaining number of unused profiles in your account.*

- *An A/B test may be best for you in these circumstances:*

- *You may find that certain keywords get a better return on investment (ROI) when their ad is in a specific position.*

On the other hand, when we look at the above sentences with '*may*' and '*will,*' we find that the indication is that these actions for sure will happen. However, we can argue that it's possible that the action is not fulfilled on the due date or in the manner suggested by the company. In that case, is it not going to cost a fortune to the company? On studying the examples above, we find that again, business organizations are wise enough and promise surety of the action when they think it's very likely to happen. At the same time, they make sure that they don't guarantee something that relates to monetary gains or losses. Also, a business with a brand image knows that they can't afford to tarnish their brand. Therefore, they will be very careful even while promising something that doesn't necessarily relate to monetary gains or losses but can affect the business of their clientele. They will not show a strong likelihood of things they have never tried or about things that are pretty dynamic and depend on several factors, but if they have some historical data to back them up, they can make claims with a bit of uncertainty involved in it. That's how the choice of '*may*' is made against '*might,*' '*could,*' or '*would*' in the above examples. The last example for *may* is a testimony to this business principle.

The density and distribution of individual modals also indicate that the secondary modal verbs are not frequently used in business text, and whenever they are used in such text, they are used with precision. A high number of the

secondary modal verbs will mean that the candidate won't appear convincing and confident to the reader. These are the qualities business personnel must have in them. This information is useful for businesses in two ways. While hiring a candidate, they can look at the frequency of modals in their writing samples. And also, they can ensure that whenever they write any text, it has more tokens of the primary modal verbs.

The second part of the study, which evaluates the perception of a modal verb by L1 and L2 speakers, also has important recommendations for business writing. The trends here will definitely give an insight into the minds of L1 and L2 speakers, which is essential for business communication. Let's talk about how we can tap these findings from the business perspective. While for a US English speaker, modals carry the sense of ability, they don't necessarily have this meaning for an Indian (L2) English speaker. As an L2 speaker is likely to interpret a sentence in various ways, it's necessary for businesses to limit the interpretation to suit their cause and avoid any misinterpretation of their text. At the same time, an L2 speaker working for a company targeting L1 speakers should be aware of the possibilities of the modal verb in the L1 context. However they interpret a sentence as L2 speakers, it won't be the same thing for L1 speakers, and they (L1) will get a different meaning out of the sentence. Therefore, they (L2) need to be aware of these nuances of the modal auxiliary and can use other means to suggest some meanings that are not the dominant senses in the L1 variety. It will be a good idea to not allow several interpretations of the text by being direct in expressions. Let's take an example from the questionnaire used for the study.

(a) Currently, you can pay using any Visa/MasterCard/Diners/Amex credit card.

While out of 16, 13 informants from the US believe that the dominant sense in the sentence is 'ability,' out of the 15 Indian informants 5 believe it's a case of ability, 5 others consider this as a suggestion, 3 of them think it's a permission, and so on. Now the point is if the business intends to send the message that the user will have this ability to pay using any credit card, its efforts are in vain when the user doesn't get that meaning and thinks they are getting permission or a suggestion to use credit cards. It gives a positive feeling to an individual to know they have the ability to perform an action, and the individual will think that they have got this privilege as a user of the company. On the other hand, the business will fail to make the same impact when readers don't get this interpretation of ability on reading this sentence.

It's easy and simple to use a modal verb, but business communication is about being user-friendly, and so if a user doesn't get the intended meaning, it fails the goal of communication. Given that many Indian speakers don't get the meaning implied in the sentence, while writing to Indian users, businesses should make sure that they phrase their sentences differently. One of the things can be using the semi-modal *be able to* instead of *can* when we want to convey the sense of ability. This can be done when chances are there that readers interpret the text as *permission* or *suggestion*. While doing this research, I got in touch with a technical writer, Joe Malin, at Google. Here's what he said about the use of modals in the business text:

"I have learned as a technical writer that modals, as well as anything else that can be variously interpreted, should be avoided. I try to avoid "can" when I'm writing procedures, and I always use it to mean "this action is possible in the

context". After all, what is the difference between ability and permission? Out of context, the two are nearly equal."

He has explained how he would write a sentence that was found on a business site, to avoid any misinterpretation.

Original Text:

Switch on your mobile set and dial 123 and you will be connected to IVRS, you can know the credit of your card, you can also select the language.

Revised Text:

(a) Switch on your mobile set.

(b) To connect to IVRS, dial 123.

(c) To find out the available credit on your card, enter ...

(d) To select the language you want to hear, enter...

He wrote to me about the imprecise nature of modals and said that, to write understandable business English, they should be used judiciously. The goal is that we be as clear as possible, so imperative sentences are used more often than modals. His opinion about another modal *should* is that it's too vague and writers sometimes happen to use it in place of *must*. About such usage, he feels that writers must write with authority when delivering crucial information because the user needs to know whether they have the option not to do or to do later. If they can do something later, it should be conveyed clearly in the text instead of writing should in the text. Always keep in mind any miscommunication can cost a business heavily.

A consistent pattern here is that the L2 speakers think the 'ability of a user' is similar to 'the suggestions' made by the service providers.

The findings can be useful while making decisions during hiring. While the focus of the recruiters at present is on structural accuracy, it should not be limited to it alone. A candidate is heavily penalized for not using the correct subject-verb agreement; they are hired in spite of incorrect usage of modal verbs. The present work shows that L2 speakers may interpret business content differently. So, a test based on this approach can be helpful for businesses running from India, in deciding on the right candidate.

3. Conclusion. This paper investigates some of the pertinent questions regarding modals. These are the questions the paper attempts to answer: has the density of modals turned low, which are the most frequently used modals in business text in L1 and L2, and how do L1 and L2 speakers perceive a modal verb in written text? We have learnt that the density of modals has not gone down and is rather higher in business text, but the frequency of some modals, especially the secondary modals has fallen heavily. This suggests that business text be written more carefully with regard to modal usage, especially secondary modal verbs. We have also learnt that L1 and L2 speakers don't have the same perception of the modal verb *can*, which may be the reason why we find a different pattern in the distribution of modals across varieties. In the future, we can conduct a similar study with a larger sample to ascertain how differently they perceive the other modals and whether this affects the distribution of those modals in business text or any other text.

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APPENDIX

(The Questionnaire used to collect data from L2 speakers. The same questions were used to create an online survey for L1 speakers)

Please fill out these details before you start:

Name: *Place (state):*   *Languages You Speak:*

Sex: *Age:*

This questionnaire aims at finding various meanings of modal verbs across two different varieties of English. Please type your preferences against the meanings you think is implied in the sentence. For your reference, the meanings are listed in a table on every page. You can type number '1' for your first choice and '2' for your second choice, for example, if you think the primary meaning is 'Ability' in the context, but the other interpretation may be 'Permission,' you can write '1' against 'Ability (B)' and '2' against 'Permission (C).'

For example,

1 Subscribers can get full call details by applying in writing at nearest Sanchar Haat.

   A. B. 2 C. 1 D. E. F. G. H.

2 Your phone has been preprogrammed and can be activated by your-self by dialing *228 and talking to our OTA desk.

   A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

3 The phone can be activated immediately by dialing *228.

A. Likelihood	The railways can be improved.
B. Ability	He can speak English fluently
C. Permission	Can we smoke in here?
D. Request	Can you possibly give me a lift?
E. Suggestions	You can read these two chapters before tomorrow.
F. Offers	Can I open the door for you?
G. Can't Say	Don't know what the meaning is.
H. None of these	Meaning not in the list..

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

4 Garuda offers you Voice Mail, a private secretary who listens to your incoming calls and stores the messages left by the caller so that you can call them back later.

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

5 Duplicate Bills indicating the bill amount and complete usage details can be obtained from the nearest Sanchar Haat.

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

6 Can I transfer my Garuda Mobile/Fixed Wireless connection transferred in the name of Third Party?

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

7 How quickly can I get my GPRS service activated?

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

8 Now you can have your MTNL Wallet ready for us.

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

9 Currently, you can pay using any Visa/MasterCard/Diners/Amex credit card.

A. Likelihood	The railways can be improved.
B. Ability	He can speak English fluently
C. Permission	Can we smoke in here?
D. Request	Can you possibly give me a lift?
E. Suggestions	You can read these two chapters before tomorrow.
F. Offers	Can I open the door for you?
G. Can't Say	Don't know what the meaning is.
H. None of these	Meaning not in the list.

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

10 You can use credit cards or ITZ cash card for payment.

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

11 You can register through your mobile (This may not be available on all mobile handsets) or by visiting www.irctc.co.in.

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

12 Can I add a passenger while booking?

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

13 Any existing subscriber of the BSNL can subscribe for the service.

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

14 For registration he can follow the following approach:

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

15 Using the Audio Conferencing Service the subscriber can have Audio conference with participants on PSTN and ISDN

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

16 Select security type which can be "Pin required", "No Pin" etc.

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

17 Any participant can enter into a conference any time by first dialing the bridge number(0124-2845600) and then the participant/chairperson's code.

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

A. Likelihood	The railways can be improved.
B. Ability	He can speak English fluently
C. Permission	Can we smoke in here?
D. Request	Can you possibly give me a lift?
E. Suggestions	You can read these two chapters before tomorrow.
F. Offers	Can I open the door for you?
G. Can't Say	Don't know what the meaning is.
H. None of these	Meaning not in the list.

18 The subscriber can click on the *Monthly Bill* link to view his bill.

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

19 Duplicate Bills indicating the bill amount can be obtained from the Customer Relations Officer of your Zone.

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

20 The same can also be obtained from the Accounts Officer Telephone Revenue of your zone.

A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

21 Fax image of the bill can be obtained through IVRS.
    A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H.

ENDNOTES

[1] Here mood is a regular English usage not a linguistic device.

[2] Illocutionary force is the property of an utterance to be made with the *intention* to perform a certain illocutionary act.

[3] http://www.kellerlowry.com/glossary/glossary_p.htm

[4] Stanford Linear Accelerator Center, US Dept of Energy

[5] www.usfca.edu/acadserv/academic/finaid/loans/alt_loan_glossary.html