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Modal Verbs in Indonesian and Malaysian English Textbooks for Secondary Schools: A Corpus-Driven Study

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Abstract

Modality is a salient notion in language, manifested through modal verbs. However, modal verbs are complex grammatical units since they have multiple functions and meanings. Previous studies have shown mismatches between actual language use and its presentation in textbooks, including modal verb representation in both EFL and ESL contexts. This study explored the distributional frequencies of modal verbs in Indonesian EFL textbooks compared to those in Malaysian ESL textbooks. It compiled the textbook conversation corpora from secondary education levels in Indonesia and Malaysia: two Indonesian EFL textbooks (IET) and two Malaysian ESL textbooks (MET), which are nationally endorsed. The corpora comprised 4,548 tokens collected from the conversations in the textbooks. Data collection involved corpus queries focusing on nine core/central modal verbs: 'can', 'could', 'may', 'might', 'shall', 'should', 'will', 'would', and 'must'. The results show that Indonesian and Malaysian textbooks shared the same most frequent modal verb distribution; however, other distributions differed. Besides, English modal verbs in Indonesian textbooks are more static with one-to-one correspondence, while Malaysian textbooks present more dynamic modal verb meanings. Notably, Indonesian EFL textbooks have complete modal meaning representation, which is

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absent in Malaysian textbooks. Interestingly, the modal verb distributions in both textbooks differ from those in a native corpus, representing actual English use. These results highlight the need for more careful consideration when designing and developing teaching materials, especially in ESL and EFL contexts.

Keywords: Corpus, modal verbs, secondary schools, textbooks.

1. INTRODUCTION

Humans must communicate their truth-value conditions, possibilities, and necessities, referred to as modality (Collins, 2009, 2014; Oktavianti, 2019). Language users utilise modalities to qualify a proposition (Nordberg, 2010; Oktavianti & Fajria, 2021; Perkins, 1982). While there is a modality deficit over time and a decline in the usage of modal verbs in written registers (as demonstrated by written corpora), these developments are not as evident in spoken registers where spoken corpora do not support the modality deficit (Leech, 2014). As a result, modal verb study is still essential and required, particularly in spoken circumstances.

The realisation of modality in English can be seen using diverse linguistic forms, such as modal verbs (Leech, 2014). However, some studies demonstrated some difficulties in learning modal verbs, including native speakers of English (Bouhlal et al., 2018; Holmes, 1988; Römer-Barron, 2004). Considering the challenge, modal verbs must also be considered when teaching and studying the English language (Holmes, 1988; Mukundan & Khojasteh, 2011; Oktavianti & Fajria, 2021; Römer-Barron, 2004). The modal verbs should be presented in instructional materials (e.g., textbooks) by instructors and textbook authors appropriately to provide learners with authentic English usage in daily life so they can be competent communicatively (Gilmore, 2007; Timmis, 2015, 2022).

Surprisingly, native speakers also find some difficulties using modal verbs (Collins, 2009; Holmes, 1988). For instance, the modal verbs ‘may’ and ‘might’ convey uncertainty. However, they are primarily associated with the meanings of ‘possibility’, ‘ability’, and ‘permission’ (Collins, 2009) and can also serve as politeness markers (Holmes, 1988). As expected, modal verbs have become one of the grammatical issues in the EFL environment (Römer-Barron, 2004). To overcome this, non-native English speakers should not depend on their sole intuition when utilising modal verbs in educational materials. The process of creating EFL teaching materials must, therefore, consult the corpus, which serves as a representative of the English language, because it offers a vast collection of texts illustrating language usage in real-world contexts (Burton, 2012; Timmis, 2015, 2022).

Some earlier studies have revealed language mismatches between textbook language and actual English use (Arellano, 2018; Burton, 2012; Leung, 2016; Oktavianti et al., 2020; Oktavianti & Sarage, 2021; Phoocharoensil, 2017). More specifically, previous studies have demonstrated the mismatch between modal verbs presented in textbooks and authentic English. However, modal verbs in Indonesian EFL textbooks are less studied compared to those in other countries, e.g., Japan, Malaysia, and Iran (Mukundan & Khojasteh, 2011; Nozawa, 2014). Several previous studies on textbooks in the Indonesian context focused on jobs, cultural values, and the depiction of gender roles (Agni et al., 2020; Ayu & Indrawati, 2018; Lestariyana et al., 2020; Prastikawati & Yonata, 2022). In Malaysia, where English is a second language, mismatches are also found. As exemplified in a study by Khojasteh and Kafipour (2012), modal verbs in Malaysian textbooks differ from how they are used in a native corpus.

The present study explored the distributional frequency of modal verbs in textbook conversations since frequency does matter in language learning. Ellis (2002) argued that learners are sensitive to linguistic units or the frequency of constructions from the language input or exposure, which will later attest to why learners are better at some regular forms than irregular ones. In addition, the present study aims to investigate the use of modal verbs expressing modality in Indonesian secondary school English textbooks compared to those used in Malaysian ESL textbooks using a corpus approach. The comparison can exhibit the differences in modal verbs

used in textbooks in two different learning contexts. However, the present study focused on conversation texts, as they are fundamental to human interactions. As humans, we show our existence and pass life stages through conversations (Clift, 2016). Therefore, the conversation materials in English language teaching should be as realistic as possible.

To assess the quality of textbooks, many previous studies have employed a corpus-based approach, comparing textbooks to native reference corpora, such as the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) or the British National Corpus (BNC) (Akhofullah & Oktavianti, 2023; Bouhlal et al., 2018; Ketabi & Karimi, 2019; Khojasteh & Shokrpour, 2015; Nordberg, 2010; Oktavianti & Fajria, 2021; Römer-Barron, 2004). This approach upholds the importance of corpus consultation in designing and developing teaching materials, also known as corpus-informed materials (Burton, 2012; McCarthy & McCarten, 2022). Therefore, the existing textbooks should be evaluated using a corpus-based study to identify what is missing from textbooks compared to authentic English usage, including the usage of modal verbs.

Despite the fact that English is a foreign language in Indonesia, it is also valuable to compare how modal verbs are presented in the ESL textbooks and how both EFL and ESL textbooks differ from a native corpus. These comparisons can help textbook authors improve the quality of the textbooks. However, little is known about the comparison of modal verbs in the EFL and ESL textbooks. Thus, this study addressed these research questions: (1) What is the distributional frequency of the core/central modal verbs ('will', 'can', 'would', 'could', 'should', 'may', 'must', 'might', 'shall') in Indonesian and Malaysian English textbook conversations compared to the native corpus?, and (2) How are the meanings of the central/core modals distributed in the EFL and ESL textbook corpora? The results of this study are crucial for improving the quality of Indonesian EFL textbooks, which in turn can enhance English teaching and learning in Indonesia and facilitate learners' competence and fluency in real-life contexts. Indonesian EFL learners will then be prepared to encounter global competitions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Modal Verbs

Modal verbs in the English language are under the category of auxiliaries that express modality (Bouhlal et al., 2018; Chen, 2022; Leech, 2014; Li, 2022; Yang, 2018), as opposed to the auxiliaries that do not express modality, e.g., 'do', 'have', 'be'. Modal verbs qualify propositions and embrace various modal meanings, such as 'possibility', 'ability', 'permission', 'obligation', 'necessity', and 'hypotheticality' (Collins, 2009). Those modal meanings share something in common, that is, they involve some non-factuality, or the situation being represented is not a straightforward fact (Collins, 2009). As a grammatical category, morphosyntactically, modal verbs exhibit a set of properties distinguishing them from lexical verb categories (Collins, 2009). Although classified as auxiliaries in English, modal verbs differ from lexical verbs.

Biber and Quirk (2012) classified modal verbs into central modals, marginal modals, modal idioms, and semi-auxiliaries. Meanwhile, Collins (2009) divided modal verbs into two significant categories: core modals and quasi-modals. Central modals are equivalent to core modals, encompassing nine modal verbs – 'may', 'might', 'can', 'could', 'shall', 'should', 'will', 'would', and 'must'. On the other hand, quasi-modals are periphrastic modal forms with more less-defined traits akin to modal verbs yet semantically align with the modal verb category (Collins, 2009; Oktavianti, 2016). Morphosyntactically, quasi-modals conform to the subject, unlike core/central modals, which may result in finite forms in the past tense (Oktavianti, 2016). Semantically, quasi-modals do not epitomise modal meanings, unlike their modal counterparts (Collins, 2009; Oktavianti, 2016).

2.2 Corpus and Textbooks in Indonesian Context

Studies on textbooks employing the corpus approach are common. Several previous studies have investigated linguistic features and gender representation in textbooks. [Oktavianti and Prayogi \(2020\)](#), for example, analyse future tense markers in textbooks in comparison to a reference corpus as a representation of real-life English. Beyond tenses and written register, conversational features in textbook conversations have also been studied. [Oktavianti et al. \(2020\)](#) reported that conversations in textbooks are not authentic and do not align with natural conversation, differing significantly from conversations in corpus-based textbooks. Some studies have also focused on collocates in textbooks, including those by [Intamanjana and Sada \(2021\)](#), [Oktavianti and Sarage \(2021\)](#), [Samudra et al. \(2022\)](#), and [Sarjono et al. \(2022\)](#). [Oktavianti and Sarage \(2021\)](#), for instance, argued that the adjective collocations used in textbooks are inconsistent with those in a native corpus. Similarly, [Samudra et al. \(2022\)](#) reported some discrepancies in verb collocates in Indonesian EFL textbooks compared to a native corpus. Another study by [Ardi et al. \(2023\)](#) focused on lexical bundles in English textbooks. Additionally, a corpus approach has been utilised to research gender representation in textbooks, as demonstrated by [Suwarno et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Adawiyah and Oktavianti \(2023\)](#). These studies revealed imbalances or biases in gender representation within Indonesian EFL textbooks, highlighting the need to re-examine teaching materials and enhance the quality of textbooks.

2.3 Previous Studies on Modal Verbs in Textbooks

Numerous studies have reported the differences between modal verb usage in textbooks and their use in real-life English ([Akhofullah & Oktavianti, 2023](#); [Bouhlal et al., 2018](#); [Ketabi & Karimi, 2019](#); [Khojasteh & Kafipour, 2012](#); [Khojasteh & Shokrpour, 2015](#); [Li, 2022](#); [Nozawa, 2014](#)). [Khojasteh and Kafipour \(2012\)](#), for instance, investigated the introduction and presentation of modal verbs in texts and activities across Form 1 to Form 5 of Malaysian English language textbooks. They found that the use of modal verbs in Malaysian English textbooks differs from their use in everyday speech. This finding is interesting given that English is already a second language in Malaysia. As a result, adjustments are strongly advised to teach English in ways that reflect everyday language use. Additionally, only a few of the same modal verbs were consistently used in Malaysian English textbooks to describe recurring semantic functions.

More specifically, [Nozawa \(2014\)](#) investigated how modal verbs convey politeness in English textbooks. It was reported that only 11% of politeness requests in two EFL textbooks employ modal verbs, and this lack of modal verbs needs further attention. Given what occurred in the EFL setting, it is impossible to meet the learners' needs to improve target language exposure from teaching materials. Similarly, [Khojasteh et al. \(2014\)](#) investigated how accurately Malaysian English textbooks portray the semantic functions of the modals 'obligation/necessity' and 'volition/prediction'. Five English-language textbooks for secondary schools in Malaysia served as the corpus data. The results showed that the five textbooks focus more on less common use of modals rather than their more typical uses, creating a skewed representation of modal verbs.

Similarly, [Khojasteh and Shokrpour \(2015\)](#) explored the use of permission, possibility, and ability among modal verbs 'can', 'could', 'may', and 'might' in Malaysian ESL textbooks and examined the alignment with those of native speakers. English-language textbooks with 280,000 words were employed as the pedagogical corpus in five secondary schools in Malaysia. The findings of this study indicate that real-life language is inadequately reflected in Malaysian English language textbooks. [Bouhlal et al. \(2018\)](#) made a similar comparison by exploring the semantics of four modal verbs ('must', 'can', 'may', and 'should') used in textbooks. The study found that the modal meanings in textbooks are less ideal than native speakers' usage. Despite the wide variety of modal use in the textbooks, the semantic coverage is limited, and there seem to be discrepancies between modal meanings in the textbooks and the native corpus. This could pose challenges for English language learners since they are exposed to a restricted set of modal meanings, leaving them unequipped with the actual use of modal verbs.

Furthermore, [Ketabi and Karimi \(2019\)](#) compared nine core/central modal verbs in the textbooks of Iran and Malaysia, especially in the three grades of lower secondary levels. The results of the study showed some similarities in the frequency distribution. However, some modal verbs were identified more frequently in the Malaysian textbooks compared to the Iranian textbooks. Furthermore, there were discrepancies between the frequency distributions in the textbooks and those in BNC. The results suggest revisiting teaching materials to better reflect actual English use as recorded in BNC.

Recent studies on modal verbs and textbooks include research conducted by [Oktavianti and Fajria \(2021\)](#), [Li \(2022\)](#), and [Akhofullah and Oktavianti \(2023\)](#). [Oktavianti and Fajria \(2021\)](#) claimed that there are some misrepresentations of modal verbs in Indonesian EFL textbooks, identified by the different frequencies of modal verb use in textbooks compared to those in the native corpus, COCA. Some modal verbs were identified as frequently used in the spoken sub-corpus of COCA, such as ‘would’, ‘can’, ‘will’, and ‘be going to’. This result differed from those found in the Indonesian EFL textbooks, which reported modal verbs ‘can’, ‘will’, ‘have to’, and ‘should’ with the highest frequencies. Regardless of the frequencies, this study also claimed that the use of quasi-modals in textbook conversations is limited, and the textbooks lack the contracted forms that are characteristic of colloquialism. What is more surprising is the absence of the modal verb ‘would’ in the textbook, even though it is the most common modal verb in spoken sub-corpus of COCA. The results from the textbook do not align with those in the COCA, which makes textbook conversations less natural.

[Li \(2022\)](#) compared modal verbs in textbooks used in mainland China and a reference corpus, BNC2014, by investigating their frequency, meaning, and co-occurrence. This study emphasised the mismatches between textbook presentations of modal verbs and their actual use in a native corpus. Similarly, in a more recent study, [Akhofullah and Oktavianti \(2023\)](#) explored the distribution of nine central modal verbs and compared it to their distribution in COCA. The study concluded the discrepancies were inevitable as the presentation of modal verb usage in Indonesian EFL textbooks did not align with that in COCA.

Considering all those previous studies, the present study compared similar textbooks and a native corpus by analysing modal verbs in textbooks of grades 7 and 8 of secondary levels in Indonesia and Form 1 and Form 2 of Malaysian textbooks to a native corpus, COCA. The comparison can shed light on the differences in language teaching materials in the EFL, ESL, and native contexts, thereby improving the quality of teaching materials in the EFL context.

3. METHODS

This study employed a corpus approach by collecting textbook conversations from Indonesian EFL and Malaysian ESL textbooks. This study also utilised a corpus tool and conducted corpus analyses. This section provides detailed descriptions of the methods.

3.1 Corpus Construction

The corpus was constructed from four English textbooks, i.e., two Indonesian EFL textbooks and two Malaysian EFL textbooks for secondary schools, containing a total of 4,548 tokens. These textbooks were selected as they are nationally endorsed textbooks in Indonesia and Malaysia, which means they are widely used in both countries. The focus of the study is on the conversations in the textbooks; thus, the collected data consisted of spoken content from the textbooks. The textbook corpus construction was assisted by AntFileConverter, which converted the files from PDF to plain text file format. The conversion was done by importing the textbooks to the software. Given the diverse registers and text types within the textbooks, it was crucial to clean the corpus. Subsequently, the converted plain text files were cleaned to retain only the conversational content. Table 1 presents the details of the corpora under study.

Table 1. Corpus details.

No.	Corpus	Size of tokens
1.	English for Nusantara - Grade 7	1,244
2.	English for Nusantara - Grade 8	1,405
3.	Pulse 2 - Form 1	1,153
4.	Pulse 2 - Form 2	746
Total		4,548

3.2 Corpus Tool

The present study utilised AntConc developed by Anthony (2022) to conduct corpus queries and other data collection processes. AntConc was chosen because its features are required for analysis, such as KWIC (Keyword in Context) and File. When using the KWIC feature, the specific keyword must be entered – in this case, the modal verbs under study. In order to have fuller contexts of use, this study also employed the File feature in AntConc. In addition, AntConc is quite compatible with any operating system, making it easy and accessible to use.

3.3 Modal Verb Queries

This study focused on delineating core or central modal verbs, namely ‘can’, ‘could’, ‘may’, ‘might’, ‘shall’, ‘should’, ‘will’, ‘would’, and ‘must’, which were selected for specific reasons. Previous studies have demonstrated that those core/central modal verbs are among the most frequently used in English (Biber et al., 2021; Leech, 2014; Oktavianti & Fajria, 2021; Römer-Barron, 2004). Therefore, it is important to study them further.

3.4 Data Collection and Data Analysis

The selected queries were processed in AntConc during the data collection stage using the KWIC and File features. KWIC was used to investigate the frequencies and concordance of the queries. The File feature was used to gain deeper insights into the linguistic unit, enabling the description of the sample. To determine whether the modal verb ‘can’ conveys the meaning of ‘ability’ or ‘possibility’, a fuller context of the queries is needed, which can be provided by the File feature in AntConc. After the data collection stage, frequency information was also gathered and calculated as percentages using the KWIC feature in AntConc. The analysis interpreted the frequencies of modal verbs in the textbooks and the native corpus, COCA, to identify the distribution of modal verbs in the textbook corpora and COCA. In addition, the present study analysed the meanings of the modal verbs based on Collins (2009). Collins (2009) categorised three major meaning categories of modal verbs, namely (1) ‘possibility’, ‘ability’, ‘permission’, (2) ‘necessity’ and ‘obligation’, and (3) ‘prediction’ and ‘volition’. The meaning classification utilised the context of the modal verbs used in the utterances. Although modal verbs are polysemous, their meanings cannot co-exist; they are discrete (Collins, 2009). Moreover, the present study compared the distribution and meanings of modal verbs in Indonesian EFL and Malaysian ESL textbooks. Lastly, conclusions were drawn after addressing each research question.

4. RESULTS

The current study presented results encompassing the distributional frequencies of modal verbs in the textbook corpora compared to COCA and the meanings of modal verbs in textbook corpora.

4.1 Distributional Frequencies of Modal Verbs

4.1.1 *Distributional frequencies of modal verbs in Indonesian textbooks and Malaysian textbooks*

In the Indonesian EFL textbooks, the most frequent modal verb is ‘can’ (52%), and the least frequent one is ‘would’ (8%). Some modal verbs are absent from the textbooks, such as ‘could’, ‘may’, ‘might’, and ‘shall’. Conversely, within the Malaysian ESL textbooks, modal verb ‘can’ also emerges as the most prevalent (48%), while ‘will’ appears the least (3%). The Malaysian textbooks do not feature some modal verbs, such as ‘may’, ‘might’, ‘would’, and ‘must’. Figure 1 provides more complete information on the distributional frequencies.

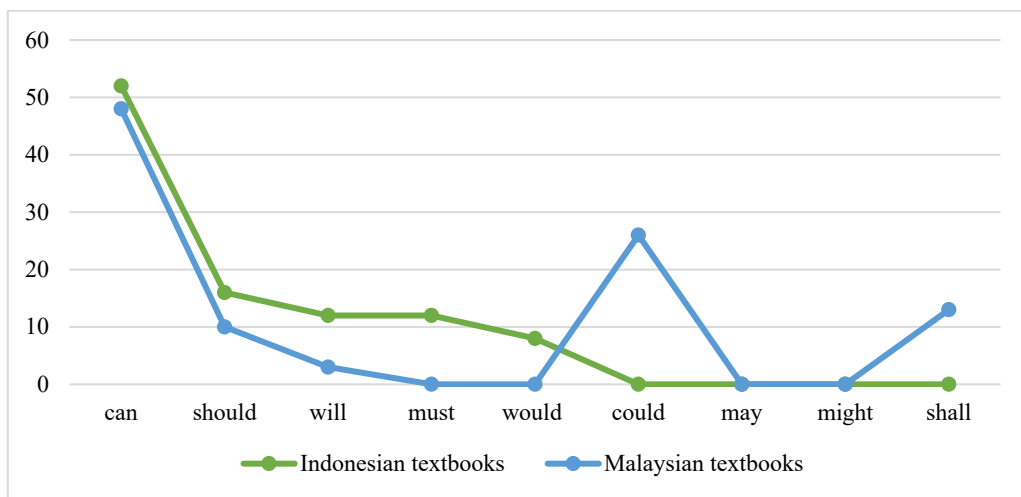


Figure 1. Distributional frequencies of modal verbs in both textbook corpora.

Figure 1 shows that, in general, English textbooks from Indonesia and Malaysia are dominated by the use of the modal verb ‘can’. However, the more specific description of the modal verb distribution in Indonesian EFL and Malaysian ESL textbooks reveals slight discrepancies. The modal verb ‘will’ emerges as the least frequent in both Indonesian EFL and Malaysian ESL textbooks. This indicates that discrepancies can also be found between a native corpus and a textbook corpus.

Missing modal verbs in Indonesian EFL textbooks, such as ‘could’ and ‘shall’, can be found in Malaysian ESL textbooks. On the other hand, some missing modal verbs in Malaysian ESL textbooks, such as ‘must’ and ‘would’, can be identified in Indonesian EFL textbooks. Apart from the discrepancies, there is a necessity to include two modal verbs, such as ‘may’ and ‘might’, in Malaysian and Indonesian English textbooks. This distribution is noteworthy as these two modal verbs have relatively similar meanings and fall under the same modal meaning category. In some contexts, the modal verb ‘might’ is used as the preterit form of ‘may’ (Biber et al., 2021).

4.1.2 *Comparison with the corpus of contemporary American English*

The distributional frequencies in the present study were compared to those found in COCA as the control corpus. As the native corpus, COCA reflects the actual use of modal verbs in the English-speaking settings. Figure 2 compares modal verb frequencies in three different corpora under study.

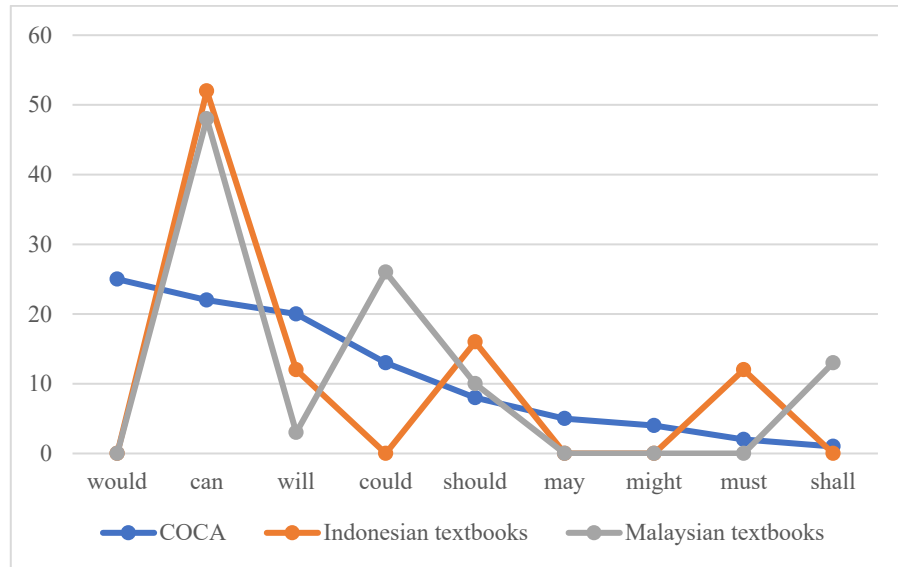


Figure 2. Distributional frequencies of modal verbs in both textbook corpora and COCA.

Figure 2 shows some notable discrepancies regarding modal verb usage across corpora. In COCA, the most frequent modal verb is ‘would’, occupying 25% of the whole corpus of modal verbs, followed by ‘can’ (22%) and ‘will’ (20%). Meanwhile, the least frequent modal verb is ‘shall’, with a frequency of just 1%. Apart from this matter, as a large corpus, it is common that all modal verbs are found in COCA, which differs from the condition in a small corpus, such as a textbook corpus. These distinct distributions indicate mismatches in modal verb usage among different types of English speakers, including native speakers, ESL speakers, and EFL speakers.

4.2 Meanings of Modal Verbs in Indonesian Textbooks vs. Malaysian Textbooks

There are some notable findings regarding the meanings of modal verbs in Indonesian EFL and Malaysian ESL textbooks. In Indonesian EFL textbooks, all modal verb meanings are presented. Meanwhile, the representation of modal verb meanings in Malaysian ESL textbooks is incomplete and requires improvement. Figure 3 presents the distributional frequencies of modal verb meanings.

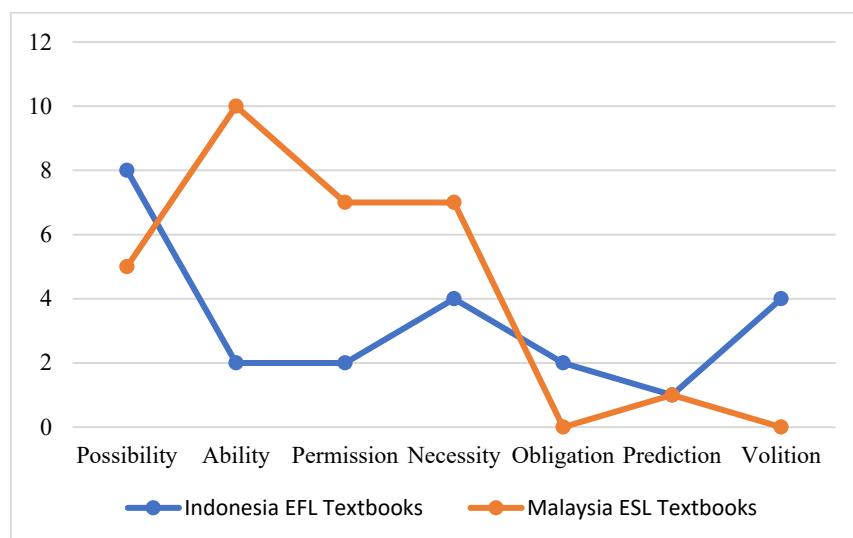


Figure 3. The distributional frequencies of modal verb meanings.

Figure 3 illustrates the discrepancies in modal verb meanings in Indonesian EFL and Malaysian ESL textbooks. As mentioned, all modal verb meanings can be identified in Indonesian EFL textbooks, such as ‘possibility’, ‘volition’, ‘necessity’, ‘ability’, ‘permission’, ‘obligation’, and ‘prediction’. In Malaysian ESL textbooks, the meaning categories of ‘obligation’ and ‘volition’ are absent, while the remaining modal meanings—‘possibility’, ‘ability’, ‘permission’, ‘necessity’, and ‘prediction’—are covered.

Concerning the distribution of meaning categories, it is interesting to note that modal verbs in Indonesian EFL textbooks are more static. This observation suggests that there is a one-to-one correspondence between form and meaning. For example, the modal verb ‘can’ is exclusively used to represent ‘possibility’. Similarly, the meanings of ‘ability’ and ‘permission’ meaning are also conveyed by ‘can’. The complete description is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Distributions of meaning categories in Indonesian EFL textbooks.

No.	Meaning category	Modal verb	Sample
1.	Possibility	can	Yes, we <u>can</u> play with my siblings, too.
2.	Ability	can	I love manga. But, I <u>can</u> ’t draw.
3.	Permission	can	Monita, <u>can</u> you tell me where the teachers’ office is?
4.	Necessity	should	Well, I’m quite hungry now. <u>Should</u> we grab something at the canteen before going home?
5.	Obligation	must	... I <u>must</u> go to the toilet first. Do you know where it is?
6.	Prediction	will	We <u>will</u> learn at the science laboratory.
7.	Volition	will	OK, I <u>will</u> join the pencak silat club next Tuesday.
		would	<u>Would</u> you take us on a house tour?

On the contrary, the meaning categories of modal verbs in Malaysian ESL textbooks appear more varied as they include more than one modal verb for each meaning. For instance, the ‘possibility’ meaning is represented by the modal verbs ‘can’ and ‘could’. Similarly, the meanings of ‘ability’ and ‘permission’ are conveyed by two modal verbs: ‘can’ and ‘could’. Table 3 presents a detailed description of meaning distribution in Malaysian ESL textbooks.

Table 3. Distributions of meaning categories in Malaysia ESL textbooks.

No.	Meaning category	Modal verb	Sample
1.	Possibility	can	... we <u>can</u> write an interview with Sally Ride and act it out. What do you think?
		could	We <u>could</u> also put in a copy of today’s newspaper so people can see what happened in the world.
2.	Ability	can	Parkour is the only urban sport that you <u>can</u> do without any equipment.
		could	This play was in modern English, so we <u>could</u> easily follow it
3.	Permission	can	Hello there, how <u>can</u> I help?
		could	... but I don’t really like water! <u>Could</u> I feed the animals?
4.	Necessity	shall	What <u>shall</u> we put in the time capsule?
		should	I think we <u>should</u> revise our draft before we do that.
5.	Prediction	will	Then people in the future <u>will</u> know what kind of music we listened to.

However, one notable difference between the portrayal of modal verb meanings in both countries lies in the variation of meanings. All modal verb meanings can be identified in Indonesian EFL textbooks, despite the limited number of modal verbs expressing each meaning. Meanwhile, some meanings are missing in Malaysian ESL textbooks, specifically ‘obligation’ and ‘volition’.

5. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of the present study compared to those of previous studies. Regarding distributional frequency, the most frequent modal verb is ‘can’ in both

Indonesian EFL and Malaysian ESL textbook conversations. This aligns with [Oktavianti and Fajria \(2021\)](#), who reported that the modal verb ‘can’ outnumbers other modal verbs in the Indonesian textbooks. However, this result does not correspond to COCA, which indicates that the modal verb ‘would’ is the most frequent modal verb in the spoken sub-corpus. More interestingly, the modal verb ‘would’ is absent or infrequent in both textbook corpora. These discrepancies are consistent with the findings of [Oktavianti and Fajria \(2021\)](#), who noted that modal verb distributions in Indonesian EFL textbooks do not align with COCA.

Although the modal verb ‘can’ occupies the first rank in modal verb frequency in Indonesian EFL and Malaysian ESL textbooks, there are discrepancies in the least frequent modal verbs. In Indonesian EFL textbooks, the least frequent modal verb is ‘would’, while it is ‘will’ in Malaysian ESL textbooks. Interestingly, both fall under the category of ‘prediction’ and ‘volition’ modal verbs ([Collins, 2009](#)). Meanwhile, the least frequent modal verb in COCA is ‘shall’, which differs from the textbook findings. This result aligns with the findings by [Sujatna et al. \(2019\)](#), and it is consistent with [Khojasteh et al. \(2014\)](#), [Khojasteh and Shokrpour \(2015\)](#), and [Oktavianti and Fajria \(2021\)](#), who reported discrepancies in distributional frequencies, including the least frequent modal verb between textbooks and a native corpus, COCA.

In general, the analysis identified mismatches in modal verb usage between Indonesian EFL and Malaysian ESL textbooks. The two textbook sets differ in their least common modal verbs but share the same results for the most common modal verb, i.e., ‘can’. Moreover, the investigation of Malaysian ESL textbooks reveals discrepancies in modal verb usage compared to COCA, which represents actual English usage. This is unsurprising as English language presentation in Malaysian ESL textbooks, including modal verbs, is regulated ([Khojasteh & Kafipour, 2012](#); [Khojasteh & Shokrpour, 2015](#); [Mukundan & Khojasteh, 2011](#)).

Although Indonesian EFL textbooks also display frequency differences compared to COCA, this is not attributed to the regulation of language presentation in textbooks. As evidenced by previous studies, there are some mismatches between actual English usage and textbook language presentation, often reflecting a lack of quality input. This issue is not limited to modal verbs but also extends to other linguistic units, such as lexical bundles and collocation ([Ardi et al., 2023](#); [Aziez & Aziez, 2018](#); [Oktavianti & Prayogi, 2020](#); [Oktavianti & Sarage, 2021](#)). These results highlight the poor quality of language in Indonesian EFL textbooks due to the absence of native corpus consultation or expert judgment by native speakers in the development of teaching materials.

Regarding meaning variations, the present study shows that Indonesian EFL textbooks provide complete modal verb meanings. Interestingly, Malaysian ESL textbooks still lack complete modal verb meanings. However, Malaysian ESL textbooks convey more dynamic modal meanings since one meaning is expressed through more than one modal. On the other hand, Indonesian EFL textbooks exhibit a more static modal meaning system, with a one-to-one correspondence between form and meaning. Despite the distinct frequency of modal verbs compared to a native corpus, Malaysian ESL textbooks present a more realistic language usage, especially regarding modal verbs. As stated by [Perkins \(1982\)](#), [Holmes \(1988\)](#), [Römer-Barron \(2004\)](#), and [Collins \(2009\)](#), modal verbs are complex linguistic units in English, and their meanings are intricate, as various modal verbs can express a single meaning, and one modal can convey multiple meanings ([Depraetere, 2010](#)).

From the findings of this study, Indonesian EFL textbook writers tend to oversimplify modal verb meanings. This may result from the absence of a direct modal verb equivalent in the grammatical system of the Indonesian language ([Oktavianti, 2019](#)). In addition, Indonesia’s EFL status leads to a lack of exposure to the language, which may distort the intuition of the textbook writers when designing and developing materials. These discrepancies can affect learners’ understanding of the use of modal verbs in real-life settings and hinder their ability to become communicatively competent. Therefore, the textbook writer should consider consulting a native corpus to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of their materials, especially in the EFL context. Language educators should also ensure that the language presented in textbooks is both suitable and authentic for learners to maximize its benefits.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study revealed some discrepancies in the use of modal verbs in Indonesian EFL and Malaysian ESL textbooks at the secondary school level. Furthermore, some frequently used modal verbs in COCA are either less frequent or absent in the Indonesian EFL textbooks, emphasising the mismatch between modal verb usage in the textbooks and the actual use of English. In terms of meanings, Indonesian EFL textbooks convey more limited meanings compared to Malaysian ESL textbooks. These results highlight the gap between modal verb usage in Indonesian EFL textbooks and their counterparts in native and ESL contexts.

Despite their importance, modal verbs in English remain challenging to learn and teach. As the primary source of language input in the EFL context, textbooks often fail to present authentic modal verb usage. Some discrepancies are found in modal verb distributional frequencies and meanings in both EFL and ESL textbooks. Additionally, mismatches exist between the use of modal verbs in ESL textbooks and a native corpus. This underscores the complexity of modal verbs as prominent auxiliary verbs in English, which must nonetheless be taught and learned effectively. Thus, textbook writers should consider corpus consultation to make the presentation of modal verbs more realistic in textbooks. However, the present study only focused on analysing grade 7 and grade 8 textbooks of junior high schools, excluding senior high school textbooks. This limitation makes the study's coverage narrower. Future studies should expand the analysis by including more corpora from grade 9 and senior high school (grade 10-12) textbooks for a more comprehensive understanding. Additionally, building textbook corpora from privately-published English textbooks in Indonesia is necessary to enrich the corpus and enhance the breadth of analysis.

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