VERB-PHRASE STRUCTURES OF THE MODAL WOULD IN THE NON-PROFESSIONAL WRITINGS IN THE PHILIPPINES: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY

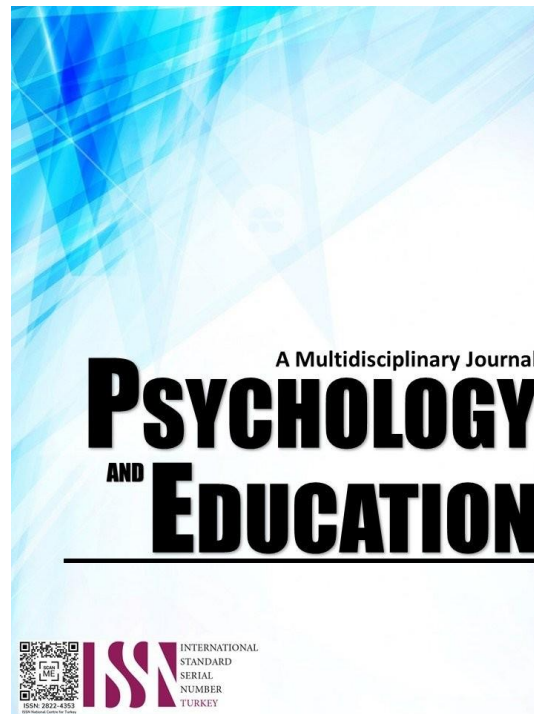# Verb-Phrase Structures of the Modal Would in the Non-Professional Writings in the Philippines: A Corpus-Based Study

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the frequency distribution of the verb-phrase structures of the modal would in the written texts of non-professional Filipino users of English and whether these structures resemble or deviate from the standard American English. The data, which composed of 132 script texts, were taken from the Philippine component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-PHI) compiled by Bautista, Lising, and Dayag (2004). AntConc 3.5.7 was employed to determine the occurrences of modal would in the chosen texts. The findings revealed that the most occurring verb-phrase structure of modal would is "would + base form of the verb". In addition, this study found out that there are varieties of verb-phrase structures of the modal would used in Philippine English.

Keywords: *modals, modal would, corpus-based research, philippine english*

Introduction

The Philippines is a bilingual country, with English and Filipino as its official languages. Aside from the latter, the former has become more prevalent in the country, and it is now widely used specifically in education, business, and government (Cabigon, 2015; Santos, Fernandez & Ilustre, 2022). Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that English is considered as a second language for most Filipinos (Kirkpatrick & Deterding, 2011; Rajik, 2022). However, in some cases it is often taught as a subject in schools rather than used as a medium of instruction. This reality has resulted in the development of unique linguistic features within the language specially among its non-native speakers.

One of the linguistic features of Philippine English that is distinct from the standard English is the verb-phrase structure of the modal verbs. Modal verbs are a key component of English grammar, and they have varying structures depending on their intended meaning and context. Previous studies have shown that there are specific forms and structures when using modal verbs, such as must, would and shall, in Philippine English that deviate from standard English (Bautista, 2004; Gustilo, 2011; Morales, 2015).

There has been some research on the structure and usage of modal verbs in Philippine variety of English, much of this research has focused on professional writing such as newspapers, book reviews, etc. (Gustilo, 2011; Morales, 2015). This investigation however, examines the verb-phrase structures of modal verbs in non-professional writing. Non-professional writing is an important area of investigation because it provides insights into the English language abilities of the general population and their sociocultural attitudes towards the language, which differ from those of professional writers. Additionally, the use of modal verbs in non-professional writing is different in terms of frequency, distribution, and degree of variation. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap in the literature by examining the verb-phrase structures of modal verbs, particularly the modal would in non-professional written texts in the Philippines.

Literature Review

Modal Verb Phrase Structures in English

Modal verbs are essential components of English grammar as they are used to express various meanings, moods or attitudes, including ability, permission, obligation, necessity, etc. (Alcaraz, 2000; Ivanovska, 2014). There are several modal verbs in English such as can, could, may, might, would, will, must, and should among others (Swan, 2005; Riadil, 2020). These modal verbs are commonly used in spoken and written language and are essential to understanding the nuances of the English language. Modals in standard English are always followed by the base form of the main verb, and this combination forms the verb phrase (Ryan, 2023). There are other varieties of English, which are similar to the standard English. For example, in African, British, Canadian, and Australian Englishes, the verb phrase structure for modal verbs can include the modal verb followed by the base form

of the main verb, or the modal verb followed by the base form of the verb.

In contrast, Kennedy (2002) identified nine modal verb phrase structures in English language. These are: modal alone, modal + infinitive, modal + be + past participle, modal + be + present participle, modal + have + past participle, modal + be + being + participle, modal + have + been + past participle, modal + have + been + present participle, and modal + have + been + to + past participle. Likewise, in other varieties of English, the structure of the modal verb phrase differs from the standard English based on the specific context and usage. For instance, in Indian English, the verb phrase structure for modal verbs can include the modal verb followed by the infinitive with "to" or the modal verb followed by the gerund form of the main verb (Kachru, 1985). Likewise, Singaporean English deviates from the standard English in a sense that the modal verb is followed by either the infinitive with "to" or the bare infinitive (Ho, 1998). South African English differs also from the standard English as the modal verb is noted to be followed by the infinitive with "to" (Wissing, 1998). Furthermore, Morales (2015), listed modal verbs in Spanish. The verb phrase structures she described are: modal verb + infinitive, modal verb + que + subjunctive; modal verb + gerund; modal verb + infinitive + que + indicative; and modal verb + past participle among others.

Modal would

Modal would is a versatile verb appears frequently in spoken and written English to express a variety of meanings and functions. Its meanings and usages can be influenced by context, register, and discourse conventions. In this section, I reviewed some studies concerning frequency distributions of the modal verbs in different varieties of English, different context and different forms of discourse.In the study of Smith (2010), he investigated the use of the modal would in spoken English and identified eight verb-phrase structures of would, which include would + base form of the verb, would + infinitive, would + present participle, would + perfect infinitive, would + past participle, would + perfect participle, would + have, and would + be. He found that the verb-phrase structure would + base form of the verb had the highest frequency of all structures.

On the other hand, Biber et al. (1999) identified three basic constructions of the modal verb would. These are would + base form of the verb, would + be + present participle, and would +have + participle. Would + base form of the verb structure was recorded to be the most

frequent structure of would in both spoken and written English. However, one of the interesting findings was the frequency distribution of different modal structures varied across different registers and genres. For example, the would + base form of the verb structure was more frequent in conversation and less frequent in academic writing. Whereas, the would + have + past participle structure was more frequent in written narrative fiction and less frequent in spoken conversation.

Another study was conducted by Hundt et al. (2009) providing a systematic investigation of the frequency and variability of the modal verb would in different varieties of English, demonstrating the complexity of modal verb usage across different context and registers. The authors found that the would + base form of the verb structure was the most commonly used structure of would across different varieties of English. However, they observed that the frequency of would varied significantly across the different genres and registers. For example, would was found to be more frequent in conversation and fiction, and less frequent in academic writing and newspapers.

In contrast, in the study on the use of modal verbs in different genres in written English, including academic, writing, fiction, news, and blogs conducted by Ghassedy and Henry (2020), they found that would + be + past participle structure appeared more frequently specifically in academic writing. In addition, Collins and Amvrosiev (2016) investigated the frequency and meanings associated with modality in conversational speech and found that the would + be structure was more common than would + base form of the verb. Furthermore, Lewis (2019) examined the use of modal verbs in spoken and written British English, and his findings suggest that the would + infinitive structure is the most frequent among all the structures of would.This study, however, adhered to Morales (2015) categories of structures of the modal would. In his investigation of the use of modal would in Philippine fiction, he found that the most common verb-phrase structure would was would + base form of the verb followed by would + be + infinitive.

Methodology

This study utilized the descriptive design using quantitative approach to investigate the verb-phrase structures of the modal would. It used the Philippine component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-PHI) compiled by Bautista, Lising, and Dayag (2004), particularly the corpora under student essays

and examination scripts, with text category and numbered texts as shown inside the parentheses (W1A-001 to W1A-010, W1A-011 to W1A-020). The student essays category is made up of 10 texts which are composed of 16 subtexts, as follows: six reaction papers, three term papers, two book reviews, two thesis proposals, one position paper, one case analysis, and an extract from a thesis. On the other hand, the ten texts under the category of examination scripts are made up of 32 subtexts, all written under time constraints. The ten texts include one text from quizzes in Sociolinguistics (graduate level), one for mid-term exams in International Relations (graduate level), one each for undergraduate final exam in Political Science, Economics, Philosophy, Literature, and Film, two texts for comprehensive exams in Linguistics and Language Teaching, and one text made up of short compositions in an undergraduate Freshman English class. A total of 132 script texts were used. AntConc 3.5.7 was employed to determine the occurrences of modal would in the chosen texts. To identify the verb-phrase structures of modal would, the study used Morales (2015) categories of structures. The verb-phrase structures were then identified manually.

Results

Table 1. *Frequency of Verb-phrase Structures of Modal Would in the ICE-Phi Student Essay Texts*

Modal Structure	Sample Text From ICE-PHI	Frequency	Percentage
would +be	a pared-down core curriculum to which they *would be* free to add their choices from a… <ICE-PHI:W1 W1A-002.txt	7	11.9%
would + base form of the verb	a product of the deliberation on what policy *would accommodate* the most number of sectors, <ICE-PHI:W1A-001#93:4>	37	62.7%
would + be + past participle	In the process, trust *would be built* in the human-computer relationship. <ICE-PHI:W1A-010#62:1>	3	5.1%
Others: would + adverb	Some *would even* say that we are the epitome of… <ICE-PHI:W1A-007#40:2>	12	20.3%
Total		59	100%

The analysis revealed that there were 132 occurrences of modal *would* in the chosen texts, 59 from student essay and 73 from examination scripts. Tables 2 and 3 present the frequencies and percentages of verb-phrase structures of modal would in the corpora students' essays and examination scripts respectively. Each table is provided with explanations.

Table 1 reveals that the verb-phrase structure *would + base form of the verb* obtained the highest frequency among other verb-phrase structures (62.7%) followed by structure *would + be* (11.9%) and lastly the verb-phrase structure *would + be + past participle* (5.1%).

Table 2. *Frequency of Verb-phrase Structures of Modal Would in the ICE-Phi Examination Scripts*

Modal Structure	Sample Text From ICE-PHI	Frequency	Percentage
would + be	Politics *would be* just a stairway to power for Juan. <ICE-PHI:W1A-011#57:1>	13	17.8%
would + base form of the verb	Jobs will be created and the unemployed *would decrease.* <ICE-PHI:W1A-013#84:6> V.	43	58.9%
would + be + past participle	and the good which uses the abundant factor *would be exported.* <ICE-PHI:W1A-013#22:3>	1	1.4%
would + be + present participle	start a simple conversation with him his reply *would be-- looking* at you saying that… (W1A-012.txt)	1	1.4%
Others. would + adverb	Societies *would probably fall* down and not be able to… <ICE-PHI:W1A-011#60:1>		
would + pronoun you	How *would you* explain the concept of Politics to Juan. <ICE-PHI:W1A-011#X42:1>	15	20.5%
would + have +to	The swimmer in this manner *would have to* swim with the belly facing the… -PHI:W1A-012#85:4>		
Total		73	100%

Table 2 reveals that the verb-phrase structure *would + base form of the verb* obtained the highest frequency among other verb-phrase structures (58.9%), followed by structure *would + be* (17.8%) and lastly, the structures *would + be +past participle* and *would + be + present participle* which obtained the same frequency and percentage distribution (1.4%).

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Discussion

This study aimed to examine the verb-phrase structures of modal verbs, particularly the modal would in non-professional written texts in the Philippines. This was addressed using a quantitative research method which involves counting of the frequency distribution of different verb-phrase structures of the modal verb would.The results in tables 2 and 3 revealed that the verb-phrase structure would + base form of the verb had the highest frequency among other verb-phrase structures with would + be appearing after it and finally would + be + past participle having the lowest frequency. There was an occurrence of would + be + present participle in the ICE-PHI examination scripts, however, it only occurred once. It did not occur in the ICE-PHI essay scripts.Moreover, it was observed that aside from the verb-phrase structures framework of Morales (2015), there are other verb-phrase structures came out as revealed in tables 2 and 3. These modal verb-phrase structures are would + adverb, would + pronoun you, and would + have + to. The researchers classified them as others for they do not fit in any of the verb-phrase structures used in this study.

The results of this present study is consistent with previous researches that have also examined the frequency of verb-phrase structures of the modal would in English. For instance, Smith (2010) found that the verb-phrase structure would + base form of the verb was the most frequently used form of the modal would in spoken English. Similarly, Biber et al. (1999) also reported that this structure was the most frequent in both spoken and written English. In addition, Hundt et al. (2009) investigated the use of would in a variety of English, including British English, Irish English, and New Zealand English. The authors found that the would + base form of the verb structure was the most common among the varieties of English. These findings coincide with the results of the present study and further support the validity of its findings.

While this present study found that verb-phrase structure would + base form of the verb had the highest frequency among other verb-phrase structures, previous studies have reported some variations in frequency of different structures. For example, Ghadessy and Henry (2020) and Lewis (2019) found that the would + be + past participle, and would + infinitive structures, respectively appeared more frequently in written English. Whereas, Collins and Amvrosiev (2016) reported that the use of would + be structure was more frequent than other structures in spoken English.

However, it is important to note that the difference in findings between the present study and that of Collins and Amrosiev (2016), Ghadessy and Henry (2020), and Lewis (2019) may be attributed to some limitations in the present study. For instance, the corpora utilized in this study was relatively small, which may not accurately represent the entire non-professional writings in the Philippines. Another limitation is that the study only focused on the frequency of verb phrase structures of the modal would and did not explore the possible reasons behind the frequency distribution.

Conclusion

The present study attempted to determine the verb-phrase structure of the modal would and to identify its conformity to or deviation from the standard usage in the English language. In summary of the salient findings of this study, it reveals that the most occurring verb-phrase structure of modal would in the non-professional writings is would + base form of the verb. With this, Gustilo's (2011) findings were further confirmed by the results of the present study, substantiating that constituting the greatest percentage is the modal + base form of the verb conforms to the modal usage provided by dominant English varieties. Secondly, there are varieties of verb-phrase structures of the modal would used in Philippine English. Moreover, the findings of this corpus-based study of verb-phrase structure of modal would suggest that the patterns of use of modal would in the texts considered mirror some characteristics of Philippine English in relation to other English varieties. Also, some of the verb-phrase structures of the modal would do not conform to the standard American English usage. Such findings could serve as an eye opener to researchers and might prompt them for further investigation.

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