

# THE USE OF MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS IN HOROSCOPE: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

Horoscope is a regular content in women's magazine. Horoscope contains modal auxiliary verbs which are used to establish familiarity and relationship. As modal auxiliary verbs are among the most problematic grammatical items in teaching and learning of English, horoscope can be used as authentic teaching and learning material. The present study is a corpus-based approach which seeks to investigate word frequency and examine the use of modal auxiliary verbs in the horoscope section of English women's magazines. Three bestselling Malaysian female magazines from the year of 2011 to 2013 were analysed. The corpus consists of horoscope from 108 magazine issues. The data were analysed using AntConc and Editpad Pro to generate frequency lists and concordance lines. Both the frequency lists and the concordance lines were analysed to discover the use of modal auxiliary verbs in horoscope. It was found that the most frequent modal auxiliary verbs used in horoscope are *will* and *may* to express prediction and possibility. The least used modal auxiliary verbs are *should* and *must* which are modals of necessity and obligation. The pronoun *you* is the most frequent lexis in every horoscope entry. Based on findings from this study, horoscopes can be used to teach the modal auxiliary verbs in addition to prescribed Malaysian textbooks.

**Keyword:** corpus linguistics, corpus-based, horoscope, modal auxiliary verbs

## Introduction

Horoscope, favoured by the contemporary mass media around the world, is a regular content in women's magazine. It appears in the content page under the headings such as "in every issue" or "regulars". A quick survey by Chang (2002) shows that horoscopes appear in the printed media such as newspapers and in at

least 25 English magazines sold in Malaysia. A quick survey performed for this current research indicated that none of the men's magazine contains horoscopes. Most women's magazines in Malaysia have a horoscope section but none of men's magazine contains horoscopes. Horoscope is a forecast of a person's future based on the zodiac. Horoscope is personal yet it addresses the general readers.

Horoscopes consist of manageable short text which can be easily read by learners of all ages. They are less formal texts and have their own lexical characteristics. Horoscopes in magazines are usually rich in pronouns, modal auxiliary verbs and idiomatic language. They share similar text structures, raise similar topics and utilise particular linguistic devices. Engler (2003) found that auxiliary verb patterns are usually used in horoscope pages in women's magazine. Auxiliary verbs are used to establish familiarity and relationship between the writer and the reader. Auxiliary verbs also identify the mood of the horoscope entry which includes doubt, possibility or obligation (Engler, 2003).

Students can learn modal auxiliary verbs through authentic materials such as horoscopes. Martinez (2002) defines authentic materials as real-life materials that students encounter in everyday life but they were not created for educational purposes. When teachers use authentic materials, students are exposed to the language used in real life (Guariento & Morley, 2001). Besides, authentic materials promote meaningful learning (Tomlinson, 1998). Students are more motivated to learn English language because they find learning the language more meaningful when they see the language used in real life. Students are able to relate to the teaching material and learn modal auxiliary verbs better. Horoscopes are rich in modal auxiliary verbs (Watts, 1984), so they can be used in the language classroom to teach modal auxiliary verbs. They are a good textual source to teach modal auxiliary verbs as they occur in natural contexts (McCarthy & Carter, 2014).

Modal auxiliary verbs are among the most problematic grammatical item in the teaching and learning of English as a second language (Khojasteh & Reinders, 2013; Mukundan & Khojasteh, 2011; Vethamani, Umi Kalthom Abd Manaf, & Omid Akbari, 2010). One of the problematic grammatical items faced by Malaysian ESL learners is the correct use of modals (Hughes & Heah, 1993). Students in both urban and rural areas have difficulty in using verb forms including modal auxiliaries. This is evident in an error analysis of Form Four English composition by Rosli and Edwin (1989) and this is further supported by Ferris (2002) who stated that verb forms related to modal auxiliaries are problematic to both L1 and L2 speakers. In standard formal English, the same modal can express different notions, ranging from probability through permission to obligation.

The complexity of modal auxiliary verbs causes confusion among learners. Modal auxiliary verbs express events or actions which are in the mind and it may or may not happen in the future (Hoye, 1997). Although there are only a few modal auxiliary verbs, they share similar core meanings, making them confusing to the users. Thompson (2002) states that modal auxiliary verbs are a complex entity that cannot be easily segmentalised into meaningful chunks for information to be presented to learners. As a result, the complex English modal auxiliary system becomes a problem in the teaching and learning of English (Vethamani et al., 2010). Modal auxiliary verbs are an important part of grammar and semantics in English.

Language users express their intentions, emotion and expectancy to influence other's decisions through the use of modals (Liao & Liao, 2009). Thus, learners need to be clear about the meaning and use of modal auxiliary verbs to enable them to communicate effectively in the language. Teachers, therefore, play an important role in teaching and explaining modal auxiliary verbs to students.

Horoscopes would also be an interesting teaching material because the content is related to the readers' daily lives and concerns. The common topics discussed in horoscopes are things that apply to people in daily lives such as love, relationship, friendship, marriage, family, health, work, luck, self-control, self-reflection, spending money, going out, change and fine food and drinks (Zareva, 2013). The horoscope columns aim to flatter readers, give advice, warn, reproach and give predictions about future events. A horoscope text is an attractive resource for language learning because it is easy to read. The text consists of simple sentence constructions as it is targeted at a general audience. The use of positive emotion words flatters the reader (McLoughlin, 2000). When students see the relevance of materials in their lives, they are more motivated to learn the language.

Horoscopes are fun and engaging to read, making it a good catalyst for discussion and self-expression. Besides, they also contain extensive use of modal auxiliaries which is the feature of interest to this study. In view of the important potential of horoscopes as a language teaching material, there is a need for a thorough investigation of the language used in horoscopes. Thus, this current study will focus on the analysis and the use of modal auxiliary verbs in horoscopes and discuss the contribution of horoscopes to the teaching materials teachers can use in the language classroom to teach modal auxiliary verbs.

In view of the objective mentioned, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the most frequent lexis used in horoscopes in the three women's magazines?
2. What are the modals auxiliary verbs used in horoscopes in the three women's magazines?
3. What is the use of the modal auxiliary verbs in the three women's magazine?

## **Literature Review**

### ***Corpus Linguistics***

Corpus linguistics is a method of carrying out linguistic analysis where naturally occurring text is analysed. It takes into account language usage that is collected and analysed in the corpora (Wynne, 2005). The corpus approach is empirical, as it analyses the actual patterns of language used in natural texts (Biber, Conrad, & Reppen, 1998). Corpus linguistics can be either corpus-driven or corpus-based. Corpus-driven linguistics aims to discover facts about language, free from the influence of the existing theoretical framework. The observed patterns in the corpus data are used as a basis to derive insights about language. The corpus itself is therefore the sole source of hypothesis about language (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001). On

the other hand, corpus-based linguistics uses corpus data to explore a theory or hypothesis aiming to validate it, refute it or refine it (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001). This study is corpus-based as it starts with a pre-existing theory formulated from previous researches (Chang, 2000; Zareva, 2013) that have indicated the high occurrences of modal auxiliary verbs in horoscopes. Hence, this study looks at modal auxiliary verbs that are present in horoscopes.

### **Modal Auxiliary Verbs**

In English, there are nine modals verbs which are the central modal auxiliary verbs. They are *will, would, can, could, may, might, shall, should* and *must* (Biber, Conrad, & Leech, 2002; Hoyer, 1997). In addition to the nine central modals, there is a small group of “marginal modals” – *ought to, need to, used to, need* which can in some ways behave like modals and in some ways like main verbs (Kennedy, 2002; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985). There is also a small group of expressions known as “semi-modals” which also function as modals, namely, *(had) better, (have) got to, be about to, be going to* and *be supposed to* (Kennedy, 2002).

The occurrence of modal verbs is influenced by text types. *Will* has been found to be the most frequent of the central modal verbs, while *will, would, can* and *could* occur a lot more often than other central modals (Biber, Conrad, Leech, & Finegan, 1999; Kennedy, 2002). However, the distribution of modals differs between written and spoken texts and context (Vine, 2004). A search of the one-million word Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English (WSC), shows that the modal *would* is the most frequent central modal, followed by *will, can* and *could*. When focusing on transactions and meetings in the WSC, *will* rather than *would* is the most frequent central modal. Besides, modal verbs carry important information about the sender’s attitude to the message and other interpersonal meanings (McCarthy, 1991). Therefore, the modals in the corpus of this study will be explored and analysed. Quirk et al. (1985) categorised modals into three classes according to their similar and overlapping meanings. Modals that show permission, ability, possibility are *can, might, could* and *may*. *Should* and *must* show necessity and obligation while *shall, would* and *will* show prediction or volition.

### **Studies on Modal Auxiliary Verbs**

Studies show that the distribution of modal auxiliary verbs is determined by text types. A study on relative distribution of core and epistemic uses of modals in British English found that the four most frequent modals were *will, would, can* and *could* (Coates, 1983). *Will* represented 22% of all the modals found. Quirk et al. (1985) discovered that the frequency of individual modals varied greatly in the Brown, LOB and SEU corpora. Modals were more frequent in spoken than in written English. The four most frequent modals were *will, would, can,* and *could*.

Kennedy (2002) in his study on the variation of the distribution of modal verbs in the British National Corpus (BNC) found that 1.45 % or 1457,721 of the word token in BNC are tagged as modals. *Will, would, can* and *could* account for 72.7% of all the modal verb tokens. The most frequent modal was *will*; accounting

for almost 23% of all modal tokens in the corpus. Results also showed that modals occurred in greater frequency in spoken texts than in written texts.

A comparative analysis of BNC and a German textbook series by Romer (2004) found that there were huge discrepancies between the use of modal auxiliaries taught in school and in authentic English. There were overuse of the modals *will/'ll*, *can* and *must* and underuse of *would/'d*, *could*, *should* and *might*. There were also differences in meaning distribution of each modal verb. Percentage of *can* and *could* expressing ability in the text book (52.5% and 78.3%) was much higher than in the BNC (36% and 34%). *Could* in BNC was more frequently used to express possibility than ability. A similar corpus-based comparative analysis of modal auxiliary verbs in prescribed Malaysian English textbooks with the BNC carried out by Mukundan and Khojasteh (2011) found mismatch between frequency order in the textbook corpus and the BNC. *Will*, *would*, *can* and *could* were considered the most frequent modals in BNC.

Previous corpus based researches on modal auxiliary verbs were focused on textbooks while researches on horoscopes leaned towards stylistic analysis on the representation of the women. Women's magazine has been the subject of many studies but there are limited studies on horoscope. This present study focuses on the modal verbs used in horoscopes using the corpus approach and will discuss how horoscopes can be used in the language classroom to teach modals. The incorporation of authentic materials rich in modal auxiliary verbs in the language classroom will expose students to actual usage of modal auxiliary verbs. The most frequently used modals would be identified from the analysis and this information can help teachers decide which modals to be dealt with first in teaching. Besides, horoscopes would provide plenty of opportunities for learners to read and use modal auxiliary verbs.

### **Methodology**

This corpus-based research was designed to investigate the frequent lexis, analysing modal auxiliary verbs and the use of modal auxiliary verbs in horoscope. The qualitative data of the concordance analysis will complement the quantitative data from the frequency list.

#### ***Data Description***

For this study, the data is a corpus which is compiled using 108 issues of three magazines, namely, CLEO, Female and the Malaysian Women's Weekly from the year 2011 to 2013. All three magazines provide astrological descriptions and advice for each star signs: Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces, Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio and Sagittarius.

As the corpus was intended to be a mini corpus, one which is manageable, 108 magazines were selected. The total size of the corpus examined in this study is 110,111 words. There is no minimum size for texts to be considered a corpus (Reppen & Simpsons, 2002; Sinclair, 2005). The magazines were chosen due to its popularity among students and affordability in the market. Magazines from years,

2011 to 2013 were chosen as they were the latest publication three years from when the research was conducted and the corpus would reflect current issues and contemporary usage of modal auxiliary verbs.

Table 1  
*Corpus data*

Magazine	Number of years in publication	Number of issues sampled	Total word tokens
CLEO Malaysia	19	36	57654
The Malaysian	14	36	28173
Women's Weekly			
FEMALE	40	36	24284
	TOTAL	108	110111

### ***Instruments***

For this study, three computational tools, namely, CLAWS tagger, AntConc and EditpadPro were used. CLAWS, a part of speech tagger, was later used to tag the lexis found in the data. The data in the form of .txt was tagged using C7 tagset by Lancaster University CLAWS which has over 160 tags. Editpad Pro is a text editor that can be used to clean up texts. It is supported with powerful regular expressions. The regular expression `\S*_[^VM]\S*` was used to identify the modal auxiliary verbs in the data and other unrelated words were eliminated. AntConc was used to generate frequency list for frequent lexis and frequent modal auxiliary verbs and generate concordance.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Frequent Lexis in Horoscope***

The analysis of data collected from the horoscope section of three magazines reveals a similar pattern in word lexis. WordList function in AntConc sorted the frequent words in descending frequency order. For all three magazines, the highest frequency is shown by the pronoun *you* (Table 2).

Table 2  
*Frequency count of frequent lexis*

CLEO			Women's Weekly			Female		
Lexis	Frequency	%	Lexis	Frequency	%	Lexis	Frequency	%
you	2891	5.01	you	1394	4.95	you	1138	4.69
your	2337	4.05	the	967	3.43	to	788	3.24
and	2147	3.72	your	870	3.09	your	702	2.89
the	1790	3.10	to	855	3.03	it	694	2.86
to	1729	3.00	and	835	2.96	and	658	2.71

will	1420	2.46	a	689	2.45	for	646	2.66
be	1014	1.76	of	528	1.87	the	634	2.61
a	878	1.52	be	489	1.74	a	546	2.25
'll	698	1.21	in	329	1.17	go	460	1.89
of	649	1.13	will	322	1.14	days	421	1.73

For CLEO, the pronoun *you* has the highest frequency 5.01 per cent of total occurrences in the CLEO corpus data. The second most frequent word is the possessive adjective *your* accounting for 4.05 per cent. For Women’s Weekly, the word with the highest frequency is the pronoun *you* constituting 4.95 per cent of total occurrences in the Women’s Weekly corpus data. The second most frequent word is the article *the* which constitutes 3.43 per cent of total occurrences. For FEMALE, the word with the highest frequency is the pronoun *you* with 4.69 per cent in the total occurrences in the *Female* corpus data. The second most frequent word is the infinitive marker *to* representing 3.24 per cent of the total occurrences.

In horoscopes, the writer communicates with the reader through a one-way simulated conversation in written form. Various ways are used by the writer to create this interactive discourse. The high usage of pronoun *you* shows that it is deliberately used to address each of the potential readers personally. The second personal pronoun *you* has a wide range of potential reference. *You* could be used as a singular or plural reference and a specific or a generalised reference. Despite the language vagueness, horoscopes attempt to motivate readers and persuade them to change their negative aspects. By using the pronoun *you*, the writer seems to be communicating directly with the readers by generating a feeling of uniqueness. As a result, readers feel that the text is addressed at them and this makes them feel important and unique. Therefore, the writer appeals to the readers in general and also speaks to the reader specifically. With this power, horoscope writers are able to give readers advice and motivation.

**Frequent Modal Auxiliary Verbs in the Horoscope of Three Magazines**

The data of the three horoscopes collected and analysed show different distribution of frequency in modal auxiliary verbs. Frequencies can show us words or structures that are prominent in a language (Romer, 2004). Some modal verbs are used far more frequently than others. The most frequent modal verbs for all three magazines is the modal verb *will*. All the central modal verbs (*will, would, can, could, shall, should, may, might* and *must*) are present in all three magazines. The frequency of modal verbs for each magazine is shown in the Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3  
Distribution of modal auxiliary verbs in three magazines

Modal s	CLEO		Women’s Weekly		Female	
	Frequenc y	Percentag e	Frequenc y	Percentag e	Frequenc y	Percentag e
will	2118	76.46	597	56.59	248	46.97

may	223	8.05	162	15.36	127	24.05
could	194	7.00	74	7.01	16	3.03
should	31	1.12	68	6.45	34	6.44
must	17	0.61	13	1.43	1	0.19
would	12	0.43	8	0.76	19	3.60
might	11	0.40	23	2.18	23	4.36
shall	1	0.04	0	0	0	0
Total	2770	100.00	1053	100.00	528	100.00

Table 4  
The distribution of modals in corpus

Modals	Frequency	Percentage	Occurrence per ten thousand words
will	2963	2.69	269
may	512	0.46	46
can	331	0.30	30
could	284	0.26	26
should	133	0.12	12
might	57	0.05	5
must	31	0.03	3
would	39	0.04	4
shall	1	0.00	1
Total	4351	3.95	386

The frequency list generated reveals interesting patterns in data. All nine central modal verbs are used in CLEO. There is a significant difference in the use of the various modal verbs. The modal verb *will* is greatly used by the writer compared to the other modal verbs. *Will* accounts for 76.46 per cent of total modal verbs occurrences. The least used modal verb form is *shall* accounting for 0.04 per cent of the total modal verbs. The total occurrence of modal auxiliary verbs is 4.80 per cent of the total 57,654 word token in the CLEO corpus.

In all three magazines, the modal auxiliary verb *will* has the highest frequency compared to other modal auxiliary verbs. This is similar to the findings by Kennedy (2002) who reported that the modal frequent modal *will* accounts for almost 23% of all modal tokens in the British National Corpus. *May* is the second top modal auxiliary verb used. Both modal auxiliary verbs are modals of probability. *Will* can be used to refer to future time or it can be used to mean volition or prediction (Biber et al, 1999). In horoscopes, *will* refers to future time and also prediction and some volition. On the other hand, *shall* is the least frequent modal verb used. This is supported by Coates (1983) and Quirk et al (1985) that *shall* is far less frequently used in contemporary English compared to *would*, *will*, *could* and *can*.

### **The Functions of Modal Auxiliary Verbs**

Each modal auxiliary verbs used by the writer has different functions. To identify the different functions of the modals, sentences which contain modals were listed using



concordance and sorted according to similar modals. Then, the modals were analysed and tabulated according to their functions as stated in the Curriculum specifications for English language (Malaysian Curriculum Specification, 2003). The functions of the modal auxiliary verbs are categorised as modals of ability, modals of probability and modals of necessity/ certainty or obligation. Table 5 shows the aggregated counts of modal use and function in horoscopes in the three magazines. From the table, it is shown the modals or probability is far more often used in horoscope, followed by modals of ability and modals of necessity and obligation.

Table 5  
*Aggregated counts of modal use and function*

Modals	CLEO	Women's Weekly	Female	Total occurrences	%	Occurrence per ten thousand words
Modals of Ability ( <i>can, could</i> )	357	182	76	615	0.56	56
Modals of Probability ( <i>will, would, may, might, shall</i> )	2365	790	417	3572	3.24	32
Modals of Necessity//Obligation ( <i>should, must</i> )	48	81	35	164	0.15	15
TOTAL	2770	1053	528	4351	3.95	103

### **Modals of Ability**

Table 6  
*Modals of ability in different magazines*

Modals	Can		Could	
	ability	possibility	ability	possibility
CLEO	143	20	34	160
Women's Weekly	94	20	4	70
Female	37	22	6	10
Total (count)	274	62	44	240
Total (%)	81.55%	18.45%	15.49%	84.51%

The modals of ability is demonstrated by the modals *can* and *could*. The feature of the function of ability is that the subject is animate and has the potential to perform actions or abilities (Coates, 1983). The meaning of *can* is commonly glossed by "be able to". *Could* functions as the past tense form of possibility, ability and permission.

Out of the 274 uses of *can*, 81.55 per cent were used to express "ability" and 18.45% were used to express "possibility". The modal *could* found in the corpus is more often used to show possibility. This is shown from the data where 84.51 per cent of *could* is used to show possibility. This is due to the context the modal

auxiliary verb is used. In horoscopes, the writer tries to predict. Thus, there is vast possibility and nothing is definite. The functions of the modal *can* as listed by the CDC (Malaysian Curriculum Specification, 2003), are ability, possibility and permission. According to Hoyer (1997), the permission/possibility/ability modals express the writer's judgement. In the context of horoscope, the modal *could* is used more for possibility, compared to ability and permission. On the other hand, the modal *can* is used more frequently for ability rather than possibility or permission.

Examples of *can* that shows ability:

The only person who *can* make a big difference to your life is you. (CLEO 0111)

Remind yourself that you *can* work hard and play as hard too. (Female, 0612)

Examples of *can* that shows possibility:

A competitive streak *can* be healthy. (CLEO, 0611)

This *can* be a good thing. (Female, 0512)

Example of *could* that shows ability:

Short trips will lead to more adventure than you *could* anticipate. (CLEO, 0611)

Example of *could* that shows possibility:

Your flighty nature *could* prove disastrous to your relationship. (Female, 1012)

### **Modals of Probability**

Table 7

*Modals of probability in different magazines*

	Possibility		Prediction/volition		
	may	might	will	would	Shall
CLEO	223	11	2118	12	1
Women's Weekly	160	23	597	8	0
FEMALE	127	23	248	19	0
Total	510	57	2963	39	1

Table 8

*Functions of the modal will and would*

	will		Would	
	prediction	volition	prediction	volition
CLEO	2013	105	12	0
Women's Weekly	588	9	8	0
Female	228	20	17	2
Total (count)	2829	134	37	2
Total (%)	95.48	4.52	94.87	5.13

Modals of probability indicate future event. The most frequent modal of probability in the horoscopes of all three magazines is the modal *will*. *Will* is used to show

prediction or volition. The degree of certainty is strong. Volition refers to the free will of a person to do something. The sense of willingness usually involves animate subjects and some physical actions or events taking place in the future. However, Biber et al. (1999) stressed that the distinction between volition and prediction is often blurred. The analysis of *will* shows that the prediction function is far greater than the volition function in the context of horoscope. Most uses of *will* (95.48 per cent) is used to show prediction compared to 4.52 per cent used for volition whereas 94.87 per cent of *would* is used to show prediction compared to 5.13 per cent to show volition.

The modal *will* functions to refer to future time and also prediction. Whether for futurity or prediction, the degree of certainty is strong. *Will* expresses a confident statement. The statements are not necessarily true but they are presented as valid by the writers. Besides, many of the sentences are attached with a conditional clause. *Until you shed your old baggage, it'll be hard to love and have fun.* This shows that the prediction is dependent on the fulfilment of future conditions. The use of temporal clause also adds to the certainty of prediction. *By the 27<sup>th</sup>, you'll have respect and romance.*

The modal *may* indicates permission or possibility. Longman Spoken and Written English (KSWE) Corpus states that *may* is rarely used to indicate probability (Biber et al., 2002). However, in the data, the modals *may* indicate possibility and not permission. *Might*, like *may*, has the primary function to express possibility. However, *may* and *might* demonstrate the writer's lack of confidence in the truth of what is expressed. It indicates a certain level of uncertainty in the truth that is expressed.

*Shall* is the least used modal auxiliary verb in the corpus data. Romer (2004) found that *shall* is very frequently used in questions in BNC and is usually accompanied by a first person subject *I* or *we*. That might be the reason *shall* is the least used modal auxiliary verb used in the corpus data. In the corpus data, the most frequent pronoun is the second person pronoun *you*.

Examples of *will* that shows prediction:

The 26<sup>th</sup> will bring new clarity and direction. (CLEO, 0811)

Business dealing will be lucrative as you receive unexpected financial gains. (Female, 0513)

Examples of *will* that shows volition:

He will know how to push hard enough to get what he wants at work. (CLEO 0211)

Before you lose your cool, bear in mind that it's only a phase and he will snap out of it in due time. (Female, 0612)

The modal *may* indicates permission or possibility. Longman Spoken and Written English (KSWE) Corpus states that *may* is rarely used to indicate probability (Bieber et al., 2002). However, in the data, the modals *may* indicate possibility and not permission. *Might* also shows possibility.

Examples of *may* that shows possibility:

You *may* give a lot but it's rarely for nothing and you have high expectations! (CLEO, 0711)

A close friend *may* be down in the dumps and need a reboot. (Female, 1112)

Example of *might* that shows possibility:

There might be some tension with your partner. (Female, 0111)

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Example of *shall* that shows possibility:

Like what they say, ask and you *shall* receive. (CLEO, 0212)

### Modals of Necessity/Obligation

Table 9

Modals of necessity/obligation in different magazines

	Necessity/obligation	
	should	must
CLEO	31	17
Women's Weekly	68	15
FEMALE	34	1
Total	133	33

The modals categorised as modals of necessity and obligation include *should* and *must*. Table 9 shows the frequency of modals of necessity/obligation. Out of the two modal verbs, the modal *should* is more frequently used. The obligation/necessity modals emphasize social obligation to compel readers to react. Besides, the obligation/necessity modals strengthen the writer's statements and at the same time establish objectivity (Meyer, 1997). Both central modals which express obligation and necessity are infrequent in the horoscope data compared to other modals. This is not surprising because modals of obligation and necessity are much less frequent in spoken English than modals of probability and modals of probability and ability/permission/possibility (Bieber et al., 1999). The modal *should* connotes obligation or duty at its strongest and at its weakest refers to offering advice or giving suggestion. *Should* that occurred more frequently is of "weak obligation". The modal *should* is regarded as more polite (Bieber et al., 1999). In horoscopes, the writer tries to be more polite and less forceful when giving advice.

Example of *should* that shows necessity/obligation:

Join ventures *should* be avoided and if you are already in one, proceed with caution. (CLEO, 1011)

Table 5 shows the most frequently used modals are modals of probability. The most frequently used modal is the modal *will*. This is due to the nature of the text which is horoscopes that predicts one's future and gives advice to readers. Horoscope writers greatly utilise modals of probability to influence readers. The low frequencies of the modals of necessity and obligation do not signify its lack of importance. It is still wisely used by horoscope writers to convince the readers.

### Conclusion and Implications

This study investigated the use of modal auxiliary verbs in horoscope. From the findings, it is concluded that the most frequent lexis used in horoscope is the pronoun *you* which is used to establish rapport with readers in order to give advice and convince them. The most frequent modal auxiliary verb used in horoscope is the modal *will* followed by *may* which is evident in all these magazines. Both *will* and *may* are modals of probability used to predict. Modals of probability that includes *will, would, may, might* and *shall* are more frequently used by writers in all three horoscopes to predict and state possible future events. The least used modals are modals of necessity and obligation. A more polite approach is employed by writers to give suggestion and advice.

The frequency list generated from this study is useful for teachers because it helps teachers to decide which item to emphasise when using horoscopes in classroom teaching. As the frequency list shows that the most frequent modals are modals of probability, horoscope entries could be utilised to teach the related modal auxiliary verbs such as *will, would, may, might* and *shall*. High occurrences of modals of probability and modals of ability indicate frequent repetition of words. When a structure is taught repeatedly, it enhances students' memory and understanding of the matter. Repetition of words is essential to acquire a word. When reading, words are likely to be remembered if they are read at last seven times over spaced intervals (Thornbury, 2004). The vast occurrence of modals in horoscope provides students with ample exposure to the language to gain sufficient input.

The use of horoscopes could help overcome the difficulties students face in using modals. It is found that students have difficulties when it comes to the meaning and function of modals, due to the lack of an equivalent modal verb system in Bahasa Melayu, hence hindering the learning of modals (Mohammad Ismail Abdul Kader, Begi, & Vaseghi, 2013). Incorporating horoscopes which contains high number of modal auxiliary verbs in the language classroom could raise students' awareness of using modals accurately. Engaging topics in horoscope entries would also attract learners' interest and make them realise the relevance of modal auxiliary verbs to them.

Furthermore, the inclusion of authentic texts such as horoscopes can supplement the existing Malaysian textbooks. As corpus studies of Malaysian textbooks found no implicit teaching of modals *would, could* and *shall* in the entire lower secondary level (Mukundan & Khojasteh, 2011; Khojasteh & Kafipour, 2012), various examples found in horoscope entries could reinforce students' learning of the forms and functions of modal auxiliary verbs. The concordance lines generated

from concordance could be used to show students the appropriate use of modal auxiliary verbs in real-life context.

Horoscopes should be treated as an authentic reading text. Authentic text illustrates the grammar being taught (Gardner, 2008) and they can be motivating because it proves that language is used in real life for real purposes (Nuttall, 1996). Therefore, it is important that modal auxiliary verbs are taught in a meaningful context (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Teachers of second language learners should select or adapt appropriate teaching materials so that grammar is taught in an entertaining way where students are motivated to learn, understand and are able to apply them. Horoscopes can be used as an alternative teaching material in the classroom when there is a need to teach certain language items such as modal auxiliary verbs.

Reading various texts is beneficial for students although horoscopes are mostly written for female readers. The common topics discussed such as love, relationships, friendships, family, self-control and work are general topics which both male and female learners can relate to. Therefore, horoscopes should not be seen as a gender biased material. Incorporating horoscopes in classrooms does not require students to believe in horoscopes. Instead, it is an opportunity to encourage students to read for pleasure in a non-threatening environment.

Learning should be meaningful, in which students learn and are able to transfer knowledge to real life situations. Teachers can assign communicative tasks that require students to use modal auxiliary verbs when completing the task. One example is role play. Students can be given situations to role play; in which they give advice and make predictions. The role play can be carried out in the form of conversation or through advice column. Another activity teachers can use in the classroom to teach *will* for predictions is "fortune teller" or "fortune cookies". One person will be the fortune teller and the other person is the client. Students can carry out the role play, making use of modals in conversation or write out fortunes for each other, applying the use of modal verbs.

To promote noticing of grammatical structure, teachers are encouraged to bring students' attention to modal auxiliary verbs. A way to promote students' awareness of a particular grammatical structure is to highlight it in a text (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999) and in the case of modal auxiliary verbs, through horoscopes. Students can be asked to circle all the modal auxiliary verbs found in the text to draw students' attention to the occurrences of modal auxiliary verbs. This is because enhancing input is an effective way to focus students' attention on grammatical structure (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Consequently, the teacher can use a consciousness raising task where students induce a grammatical generalisation from the text. Teachers can assign students to work in groups or individually to induce the rules and functions from the modal auxiliary verbs that were circled in the text. The 21st century education is discovery learning as opposed to retelling of rules. A table with the functions of modals can be provided. Students can be asked to list the modal auxiliary verbs and tick the functions it best fits. This includes ability, obligation, necessity, possibility, probability, certainty, request, permission, advice, suggestion or warning. Students will find that functions overlap and the same modal auxiliary verb can have multiple meanings.

Lack of exposure to modal auxiliary verbs may cause problems in understanding them and result in the inability to use them in writing and speech. Problems using modals may result in difficulty in conveying intended interpersonal meaning. In communication, learners need to select the appropriate modal auxiliary verbs they use to prevent miscommunication. Therefore, with empirical findings that horoscope contains high frequency of modal auxiliary verbs, teachers can use horoscopes as an alternative in their classroom teaching in order to expose students with modal auxiliary verbs where students are confronted with natural language. Both teachers and students can gain insights from this study.

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