

Frequency and Use of Modals in Cameroon English and Application to Language Education*

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ABSTRACT

This contribution investigates the frequency patterns of the modal verbs as they occur in the one-million-word corpus of Cameroon written English. An analysis of dominant senses of some of the modals is also attempted. I have used results and statistical figures from British and American English (as reported in studies such as Biber et al. 1999 and Coates & Leech 1980) for comparison, where necessary.

Findings show that overall the modals occur less frequently in Cameroon English. Furthermore, there is evidence of contextualisation of the use of certain modals in Cameroon English, with a greater tendency towards "specialisation". The paper argues that such cases of contextualisation and/or "specialisation" may owe their origin to aspects of the rhetorical style of Cameroonian indigenous languages. Other features seem to reflect stylistic choices within specific register(s) and present interesting evidence, nevertheless, of the use of these verbs within Cameroon. Finally, the relevance of the frequency profile of modals to language education is highlighted and a practical way in which language teachers may approach the teaching of these verbs is suggested.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses the frequency and meaning of modals in Cameroon English (CamE), focusing on nine central modals (*will, can, may, shall, would, could, might, should, must*) and twelve semi-modals (*have to, be able to, used to, be going to, ought to, dare, better, need, had better, be willing to, be supposed to, have (got) to*). An extended discussion of *must, should* and *will* is further attempted, highlighting how local indigenous languages may have influenced the use of these verbs.

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