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The Study of Modal Verb in L2 Learners' Writing: Focusing on Certainty/Uncertainty

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This study attempts to explore the occurrence and the use of modal verbs which is a challenge for L2 learners for its various functions in English writing. Thus, this study examines whether the students are correctly aware of the modal verbs and can write their meanings, especially *will* and *would* expressing certainty. For methodology, this research begins with a test of Korean L2 learners to identify their knowledge of the modal verbs. Then they are asked to write their life goals using the modal verbs. Finally, their corpus will be examined and analyzed focusing on the frequency and accuracy of modal verbs. The results show that although Korean L2 learners were able to choose the correct answer on their multiple choices, they have difficulty applying it in their writing, especially *will* and *would* with a certainty meaning. These findings cast a light in terms of the pedagogical implications. It is suggested that Korean education should focus on productive learning such as writing and speaking rather than receptive learning such as reading and listening in studying English. Consequently, L2 learners will be able to write English more precisely and verbalize their ideas more fluently.

[certainty/uncertainty/modal verb/L2 learners/writing]

I. INTRODUCTION

There has been considerable previous research on the use of modal verbs by English learners and native speakers. Modal verbs have been researched in the different perspectives, such as the syntax and semantics. Many researchers have discussed that EFL learners have trouble in using appropriate modal verbs depending on the synthetic and semantic differences from their mother tongue. Bautista (2004) states that the modal

verbs *will, would, can, could, may, might, shall,* and *should* are in a picky field for EFL learners though they have spent a lot of time learning how to use the modals in the Philippines (p.122). Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) mention that the study of the characteristics of modals is complex by their semantics, and these meanings interact with the present or past forms to indicate degree of politeness or degree of certainty. Maximiliano (2009) argues that intuition is needed to identify modals because modals have a lot in common semantically. English native speakers are aware of the modals as a set.

There has been a common belief among Korean EFL learners that modal verbs *would* and *might* are similar in meaning to *will* and *may* but have a difference in tense as present and past. However, Bautista (2004) states, "Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1983) prefer to call modals tenseless auxiliaries although acknowledging the fact that historically the members of the different pairs were related as present and past forms" (p. 81). Lock (1996) also argues, it is more accurate to treat *would*, *could, might,* and *should* as separate modals than as past forms of other modals. Jung and Min (1998) examined the use of Korean English in Korean newspapers with regard to the other versions of English and analyzed it in terms of frequency and semantic functions. The findings revealed *will* and *would* are the most frequent modal forms.

The usage of *would* and *might* in Korea is taught in the conditional sentence with "If I were . . . , I would/might …". However, Lock (1996) argues that many times a conditional sentence may not appear with the *if* conditional. It may not be apparent and have to be inferred from the context of the sentence such as *The entry price for consumers would be 20 percent more than in their existing shops in larger cities*. EFL learners may not be conscious of implied unreal conditions such as *would*. Consequently, *would* and *might* is one of the most difficult points in English grammar for EFL learners. As a whole, the modal *would* and *might* has been taught poorly in Korea, and even teachers do not appropriately recognize the importance of their complicated meaning. Korea tends to provide an English reading and grammar class for the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) for university entrance. However, English textbooks in middle and high school have not highlighted the meaning of the modal verb *would* in the conditional sentence without *if*. It is uncommon to use *would* to express uncertainty in Korea.

This study is primarily focused on the usage of modals in writing by Korean EFL learners. Accordingly, the most common modals and the least are examined and listed in the essay written by them. The purpose of this study is to identify EFL students' knowledge of modal verbs, especially *will, would*, and enhance the usage of modal verb in order to achieve better understanding of English writing without lots of errors. The clinical portion of this study begins with a test to identify the knowledge of the modal verbs of L2 learners. They then write a one-page essay with the theme of their goal in life. Finally, their corpus will be examined and analyzed focusing on the frequency and

accuracy of modal verbs. Subsequently, the errors they made in the writing are corrected and analyzed.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. The Usage of Modal Verbs in English

Modality is considered as "the most important concept that cuts across the area of hedges" (Markkanen & Schröder, 1997, p. 5). Modals have been approached in different perspectives for a long time. Swan (1998) calls *can, could, may, might, will, would, shall, should, must, and ought to* modal auxiliary verbs. *Need* and *dare* are called modal auxiliary verbs, and *had better* is called a modal auxiliary. As another approach to the modal verbs, as the same line with Sinclair (1990), Viana (2006) mentions "modals are special kinds of auxiliary verbs encompassing *can, could, may, might, will, would, must,* and *ought to*. Other verbs such as *dare*, *need,* and *used to* are grouped in a subtype labeled semi-modals" (p. 80).

According to Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan (1999), modals are divided into three groups which are 'modals', 'marginal auxiliary verbs', and 'semi-modals'. Modals include *can, could, may, might*, *will, would, shall, should,* and *must*. *Need (to), ought to, dare (to) and used to* are called marginal auxiliary verbs. *Had better, have to, (have) got to, be supposed to* and *be going to* are called semi-modals. Wilson (2005) refers to the nine modals *can, could, may, might*, *will, would, shall, should,* and *must* as central modal verbs which are focused on by scholars because of their high semantic complication. Biber et al. (1999) divide the modals into two groups: non-past time and past time. The former include *can, may, will, shall* and the latter *could, might*, *would, should.* Modals are also divided into three groups in terms of meaning: (a) permission, possibility, and ability (*can, could, may*, and *might*), (b) volition or prediction (*will, would,* and *shall,*), and (c) necessity or obligation (*should* and *must*). However, as mentioned earlier, some researchers would rather call modals tenseless auxiliaries than tense ones and tend to deal with *would*, *could, might,* and *should* as individual modals.

Brown (2003) mentions that there is a myth in Singapore that *would* is similar to *will* in meaning but is more polite. Alsagoff (2001) states, "tentativeness is a logical extension of the polite use of *would*…" (p. 53). As an example of this, she gives this sentence: "*I will help you, but I am not sure if my brother would,* where the speaker has control over his own willingness to help but is less certain about his brother" (p. 53). Gustilo (2011) notes, "*would* may express non-assertion when talking about an uncertain future or an uncertain outcome for which the writer lacks complete certainty" (p. 101).

Palmer (1979) argues, "[...] a semantic term ... to refer to the meanings of the modals" (p. 4). Though all modals convey meaning, the only concept that conveys modality does not convey enough to define them. Both syntax and semantics do not suffice to identify modal verbs. For instance, *have to* expresses obligation or necessity as does *must*, but it is not regarded as a modal verb by many linguists. Following the suggestion by Lock (1996), this study is concentrated on the semantics of modals apart from their tense.

2. The Frequency of the Modals

Mindt (1996) argues *will, would,* and *can* are the most common modals in his research and suggests that these modals are taught in the first year of study rather than in the second year for EFL students prior to the modals such as *must* and *may*. Coates (1983) mentions that *would* is the most common modal in written British English and *can* is next. *Shall* and *might* are the least frequent. Maximiliano (2009) mentions Debbie′s (2009), ″Native speakers are inclined to use *could* and *would* for requests due to the fact that the use of these modals is perceived to be more tentative, more polite and less assertive than the use of present tenses.″ (p. 26). Li (2017) states that as *can* means different functions in a variety of contexts, both English learners and native speakers use *can* most frequently among all the modal verbs. It is also shown that both learners and native speakers use *can* and *will* as the most frequent modals, and *might, ought to,* and *shall* are used as less frequent modals. In contrast, Ringbom′s (1998) research shows some differences depending on the subjects.

As the result of studying the essays written by seven different nationalities (Dutch, Finnish-Swedish, Finnish, French, German, Spanish and Swedish), they overuse *can* and underuse *would* and *will* except for the French, who overuse *will*. Biber et al. (1999) shows the frequency of each modal verb in their research as follows in Table 1:

TABLE 1
Frequency of Modals in the EFL (Biber et al., 1999)

Ideas	Modals	Occurrences
1. Permission	can	253
2. Possibility	could	47
3. Ability	may	20
	might	3
4. Volition	will	202
5. Prediction	would	64
	shall	0
6. Necessity	should	58
7. Obligation	must	31

On the other hand, Viana (2006) argues that the Brazilian EFL learners underuse not only necessity and obligation but also permission, possibility, and ability. They overuse the modals showing volition or prediction. Montero, Watts, and Garcia-Carbonell (2007) show Spanish EFL learners prefer *will* and *can* to *would* and *could*. *Will* is the most frequent modal verb which takes up 32.62% out of all modal frequencies. They prefer *can* in contexts where English native speakers could use *may* or *might.*

Gustilo (2011) researched the data bank of the Philippine component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-PHI) and found the modals frequency as follows in Table 2:

TABLE 2
Modals Frequency Percentage (Gustilo, 2011)

Modals	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. will/'ll	343	23.50
2. can	327	22.40
3. would	202	13.90
4. should/'d	163	11.20
5. may	153	10.50
6. could	119	8.20
7. must	111	7.60
8. might	33	2.30
9. shall	6	0.40
Total	1,457	100

This finding shows that the most frequent modals are *will/'ll* and *can*, respectively 23.50% and 22.40%. This result seems to agree with Montero et al. (2007) observation that Spanish EFL learners prefer *will* and *can* to *would* and *could*.

Hinkel (1995) argues that EFL learners' cultural background is important to use of modal verbs. The Asian EFL learners including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, and Vietnamese used *must* and *should* when they wrote topics about the family and traditions.

3. The Distinction Between *Will* and *Would*

Koh and Kim (2014) demonstrate that English native speakers make more use of modal verbs than EFL learners in Korea, especially *will* and *would*. They mention that L2 learners do not know "how to express likelihood via modality, or more specifically, prediction using *would*" (p. 365).

Will and *would* have a wide variety of communication functions and indicate different functions in multiple contexts. *Would* has several functions. First, it can be used as a past form of *will*, particularly in reported speech: *He said he would buy a good bag.*

Second, *would* doesn′t always have a past meaning, which functions as the conditional use of *will*: *He would help her if she asked him*. Third, *would* can be used to be more polite than *will*: *Would you open the door?* Finally, it can be used to express willingness after *I wish* and *if only …*: *I wish you would buy it for me.* Then, let′s consider the following examples:

(1) a. I hope that you *would* get well soon.
b. I hope you *will* get well soon.
(2) a. I *wish* that you *would* get well soon.
b. I *wish* that you *will* get well soon.

Both (1) and (2) are grammatically correct. However, Carillo (2008) states that *hope* needs the modal verb *would* rather than *will* for the verb because the result of the action is uncertain or conditional, that is, it is desired but is not certain to occur or take place. In the same way, when *hope* takes the place of a similar verb such as *wish* and *expect*, *would* is also needed: *I expect that you would get well soon.* On the other hand, when the verb with certainty in the expected result, the modal verb *will* is used: *I am certain that you will get well soon*.

Gustilo (2011) found that *would* has high frequency in press reportage and editorial texts and mentions, ″there is a greater need for the writers in press reportage and editorials to show non-assertion or less definiteness when they write about events that may have an uncertain outcome or when they talk about topics for which they lack certainty″ (p. 99). The data is as follows in Table 3:

TABLE 3
Frequency of the Semantic Functions of *Would* (Gustilo, 2011)

Function of *would*	Skill and hobbies	Press News	Editorials	Humanities	Social science
1. Past Prediction	1	31	9	3	8
2. Future in the past habitual prediction	3	5	2	10	6
3. Volition/ Preference	3	1	3	0	4
4. Polite for 'want'	0	0	0	1	4
5. Hypothetical	3	3	13	6	7
6. Non-assertion /less definite form of *will*/ hedging	5	16	24	9	12
7. Others	0	3	3	1	3
Total	15	59	54	30	44

Based on the previous research that shows the modal verbs *will/would* and *can/could* most frequently occur with the most common errors for EFL learners, the hypothesis of this study is that the EFL learners in Korea have a hard time in distinguishing the usage modals *will* and *would,* especially in essay writing. This research was led by these questions.

1. Do ESL learners know grammatical correctness of the sentences using *will* and *would* in the test?
2. What are the most frequent grammatical errors of the modal verbs that were made by ESL in essay writing?

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Participants

The participants in this study were 83 Korean EFL college students (male: n = 52, female: n = 31) who attended English classes in college in Seoul, South Korea. The classes mainly focused on general English skills for reading and writing. Participants in this course were enrolled in two different classes, with each class registering a maximum of 45 students. Students who were absent or did not finish the tests were excluded from the study. For this study, the participants in each class were assigned to take a test and then write an essay within a maximum of one page. The essays vary in terms of length. The shortest one had 264 words and the longest, 824 words (average 457 words). Their English proficiency ranged from 500 to 800 for TOEIC scores.

2. Data Collection and Procedures

Since this study is to explore the use of modal verbs by EFL learners, especially *will* and *would*, it is necessary to collect the corpus regarding basic knowledge. For the first step of this research, I investigated whether the EFL learners knew the usage and differences of *will* and *would*. For this study, three kinds of questions are used through a written examination. First, students determine whether the given seven sentences are right or wrong. Next, they clarify the distinction between *will* and *would* through translation from English and Korean. Then, they choose the correct answer in the ten questions concerning *will* and *would*. The time limit was 20 minutes.

After the examination regarding the basic knowledge of EFL learners through three kinds of tests, the participants in each of the two classes were assigned to write an essay

about their goal in life. After the participants typed their essays in the computer, they submitted them through e-mail within three days. The data were collected and analyzed using the Excel Program. To analyze the errors in the English essays, a native English-speaker′s intuition was also needed. The data was verified by an experienced native speaker and a researcher through cross-check from the view of an EFL learner and a native English-speaker to determine validity or accuracy.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Grammatical Correctness of *Will* and *Would*

The first questionnaire objective was to find the right and wrong use of *will* and *would* in sample sentences. This is to confirm they are able to distinguish the difference between *will* and *would* and know the usage of each of them. The first test shows that the EFL students do not know much about the ′uncertain meaning′ of *would*. For example, they do not notice right or wrong sentences at least in the following.

(3) a. I hope that it will stop raining.
b. I wish that it would stop raining.

Although both (3a) and (3b) are grammatical, 63% of the subjects thought that (3a) is a wrong sentence while 27% of them thought that (3b) is wrong.

(4) a. Would you open the door?
b. Will you open the door?

In general, (4a) is regarded to be more polite than (4b). However, Hirano (2017) states that L2 learners need to understand the core meaning of the past tense, which is unclearness. (4a) implies ‘uncertainty’ that the speaker is saying that the possibility is low while (4b) the possibility is clear. The finding shows that 25% responded (4a) is a wrong sentence while 45% responded (4b) is wrong.

(5) a. Would you mind posting this letter?
b. *Will you mind posting this letter?
c. Do you mind posting this letter?

(5a) is grammatical and (5b) is ungrammatical because *would* and *mind* do not contradict whereas *will* and *mind* contradict each other. According to Hirano (2017), *will* means ″liability" or tendency toward something, while *mind* emphasizes the present moment. *Will* moves forward, while *mind* dwells on the current moment. (5a) implies that the present conscious (*mind)* is only ambiguous (*would*). This study shows that 20% of the subjects responded (5a) is a wrong sentence, whereas, 79% responded (5b) is right. 40% of the subjects responded (5c) is a wrong sentence. This demonstrates that EFL students do not exactly know the difference between *will* and *would.* The overall questionnaire and percentage of the right answers are as follows in Table 4:

TABLE 4
Questionnaire 1

Questions	Percentage of correct answers (%)
1. I hope that it will stop raining.	37
I wish that it would stop raining.	73
2. Would you open the door?	75
Will you open the door?	55
3. Would you mind posting this letter?	80
* Will you mind posting this?	21
4. Do you mind posting this letter?	60

The second questionnaire is to translate from English to Korean to ensure whether the EFL learners exactly know the uncertain meaning of *would*. The questionnaire is as follows in Table 5:

TABLE 5
Questionnaire 2

Questions	Percentage of correct answers (%)
1. The entry price for consumers ***would*** be 15 percent less than in Adidas's existing shops in larger cities.	66
2. In addition to the items you sell at your booth, you ***would*** be required to submit three works to be included in an auction on the final night of the event.	42
3. Let us know when this problem has been taken care of, and we ***would*** be glad to resume our business with you.	63

The first and third questions′ responses were over 60% right. Most of the wrong answers translated *would* as a simple past tense without including the uncertain meaning. The second question had a lot more wrong answers translating *would* as a simple past tense without including the uncertain meaning. The result assumes that, for the EFL

students, the longer the sentence, it is the harder for them to distinguish correct usage of modal verbs between *will* and *would*.

The final questionnaire is to choose the answer which has two choices, either *will* or *would*. Overall, they had the highest score on this. The reason could be that these questions are related to the 'tense', and EFL students are more likely to choose *will* related to the present tense rather than *would* and choose *would* related to the past tense rather than *will*. The highest score is *for the question: I ____ like some coffee, please,* which has 96.3% of correct answers. The reason is that Korean students learn the phrasal verb 'would like' at the middle school level. The lowest score is for the question*: Do you think they ____ come if we asked them?* This consists of three clauses, and EFL students are more likely to be confused as to which clause should be agreed with between the present tense *Do you think* and past tense *if we asked them* in the middle of the sentence. As a result, this finding shows that ESL students are able to choose *will* or *would* in the sentence, but they do not recognize the difference between them exactly when they read and write *will* and *would* as shown in Table 6.

TABLE 6
Questionnaire 3

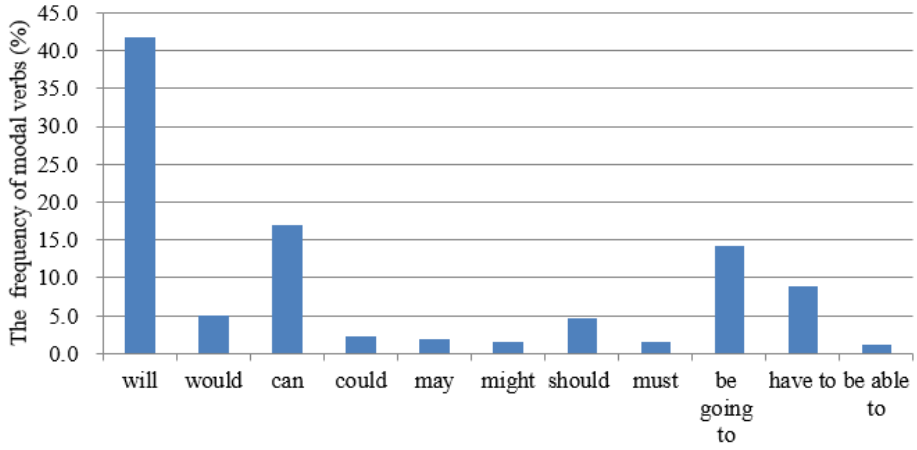
	Questions	Percentage of correct answers (%)
1.	If I have time, I ____ do it.	71.0
2.	I ____ like some coffee, please.	96.3
3.	I promise I ____ be there.	86.7
4.	I didn't expect that she ____ be there.	77.1
5.	I hope we ____ be able to do it.	60.2
6.	I ____ do it if I knew how.	59.0
7.	Do you think they ____ come if we asked them?	49.3
8.	I'm really not sure whether I ____ be free tomorrow.	61.4
9.	What do you think ____ happen at the meeting this afternoon?	50.6
10.	If you had to make a choice, what ____ you decide on?	68.6

2. The Frequent Grammatical Errors of the Modal Verb in English Writing

The result of the present study shows that the EFL learners use average of 12.3 modals in their essays. The EFL learner using the highest number uses 23 modals out of 846 words. The learner who used the least modal verbs, used only 4 modals in 264 words. This study also reveals that EFL learners overwhelmingly prefer to use *will* of all the modal verbs at 41.7%. The second one is the modal verb *can*. The order is as follows: *will >can> be going to> have to > would > should > could > may > might, must > be able to.* Although *be going to, have to,* and *be able to* are not modal verbs but phrasal

modals combined with modals, these are included here because they have the same meanings as *will, must,* and *can* and are the quasi-modal associated with them (Whitty, 2017, p.3).

FIGURE 1
Frequency of the Modal Verbs



As mentioned earlier in Li's (2017) finding, this result of the current study shows *will* and *can* were the most frequent and *ought to* was never used. Li (2017) argued that British students also had a tendency to use *would* and *could* much more frequently while their L2 learners seldom used them. This finding also has the similar result. *Would* and *could* are much less frequent than *will* and *can*. The most noticeable thing is the gap between *will* (41.7%) and *would* (5%) compared to other past tense forms such as *can, could* and *may, might*. The finding shows that, overall, Korean EFL learners overuse the modal verb *will*. The ratio gap (36.7) of *will* and *would* use is twice that (15.3) of *can* and *could*.

The interesting thing is the EFL students' use of *be able to*. *Can* and *be able to* can be used to talk about ability, and they are interchangeable. Coates (1983) argues that *be able to* covered the same meaning as *can* while Westney (1995), Collins (2009) and Whitty, (2017) state *be able to* cannot be replaced by *can* in all range of meaning categories. Whitty (2017) mentions, "*be able to* had more than only an 'ability' meaning, yet was not used in all of the meaning categories that were associated with *can*" (p. 163). This data revealed that they used it only when preceded by the modal verb *will*. EFL students did not use *be able to* instead of *can* except for *will be able to.* The data are shown in Table 7:

TABLE 7
The Use of *be able to*

1. I *will be able to* experience an important thing in my life.
2. I *will be able to* both improve my health and correct my unhealthy lifestyle.
3. I *will be able to* have a routine lifestyle.
4. I am not sure if I *will be able to* keep all my promises.

Facchinetti (2000) mentions that *be able to* is ″preferably used in the written code″ (p. 118). Collins (2009) states *be able to* was used more frequently in spoken rather than in written texts. Even so, in this data, *be able to* was never used in writing except for *will be able to,* and this finding could mean Korean EFL learners are not used to writing *be able to* instead of *can.* This implies Korean EFL learners need to enlighten the use of *be able to* instead of *can.*

3. Discussion

As frequency of the modal verbs shown in the previous chapter, the most common in the use of modal verbs are related to the use of *will/would*. In particular, it is the most frequent errors that *would* should be changed to *will* or *will* should be *would*. The overall total error percentages of the highest three cases rank is 43.2 %, which is overwhelming figures among all the errors as follows in Table 8:

TABLE 8
Errors in the Use of Modal Verbs

Before correction (BC)		After correction (AC)	Percentage (%)
1.would	→	will	16.6
2. will	→	would	16.6
3. Φ	→	will insertion	10.0
4. would	→	would deletion	6.66
5. could	→	can	6.66
6. can	→	may	6.66
7. should	→	will	3.33
8. have to	→	can	3.33
9. had to	→	have to	3.33
10. do	→	can	3.33
11. can	→	could	3.33
12. could	→	could deletion	3.33
13. must be	→	are	3.33
14. Φ	→	should insertion	3.33
15. can	→	may	3.33
16. would	→	might	3.33

As shown in the following sentences, *I think historical ones will make me want to give up studying Chinese,* L2 learners in this study used *will* rather than *would* in spite of the fact that the result of the action is uncertain or conditional and made an error. The sentence such as *I have never travelled alone before; so, it is a very memorable trip* is the same error because of having the uncertain or conditional meaning and it should be *I have never travelled alone before; so, it would be a very memorable trip*. On the contrary, the sentence such as *I would not eat between meals or drink liquor. Also, I do jump rope and jog every night,* should be *I will not eat between meals or drink liquor. Also, I will jump rope and jog every night* because it means ′future willingness′.

This sentence, *This might seem like a small plan; but, it will certainly make a huge difference in my life* means ′uncertainty′, so it should be *This might seem like a small plan; but, it would certainly make a huge difference in my life. This year′s vacations would be really short for me* should be changed into *This year′s vacations will be really short for me* because *This year′s vacations are short* means ′the fact about the short period vacation, not uncertainty.

The sentence, *My parents told me that currently Chinese children are eager to learn English; so, it will be a good experience to open a class* means uncertainty, not certainty or sureness. ′*The parents′* in the sentence talk about ′the current tendency of the Chinese children′ and it means ′to teach a class′ could happen, it should be like this: *My parents told me that currently Chinese children are eager to learn English; so, it would be a good experience to teach a class.* The data are shown in Table 9:

TABLE 9
Examples of the Errors in the Use of the Modal Verbs *Will/Would*

Before correction (BC)	After correction (AC)
1. If they make goals, however, they ***would*** likely try to pursue them.	1. If they make goals, however, they ***will*** likely try to pursue them.
2. This year′s vacations ***would*** be really short for me.	2. This year′s vacations ***will*** be really short for me.
3. I really hope that this time ***would*** be different, and I can achieve all the goals I set.	3. I really hope that this time ***will*** be different, and I can achieve all the goals I set.
4. I ***would*** not eat between meals or drink liquor. Also, I ***do*** jump rope and jog every night.	4. I ***will*** not eat between meals or drink liquor. Also, I ***will*** jump rope and jog every night.
5. This might seem like a small plan; but, it ***will*** certainly make a huge difference in my life.	5. This might seem like a small plan; but, it ***would*** certainly make a huge difference in my life.
6. My parents told me that currently Chinese children are eager to learn English; so, it ***will*** be a good experience to open a class.	6. My parents told me that currently Chinese children are eager to learn English; so, it ***would*** be a good experience to ~~open~~ teach a class.
7. I thought it ***will*** be better to be taught by a professional teacher because I want to play it more delicately	7. I thought it ***would*** be better to be taught by a professional teacher because I want to play it more ~~delicately~~ precisely

8. I used to imagine that in the daytime we ***will*** sit on the sand.	8. I used to imagine that in the daytime we ***would*** sit on the sand.
9. Every night, we ***will*** roast pork belly over hot coals, drink some juice, and then talk about everyday life.	9. Every night, we ***would*** roast pork belly over hot coals, drink some juice, and then talk about everyday life.
10. I think historical ones ***will*** make me want to give up studying Chinese.	10. I think historical ones ***would*** make me want to give up studying Chinese.
11. I have never travelled alone before; so, it ***is*** a very memorable trip.	11. I have never travelled alone before; so, it ***would*** be a very memorable trip.

This finding shows that L2 learners misunderstand the usage of *will* and *would*, especially whether the result of the action is uncertain, conditional or future willingness. They seem to use *would* in the 'future in the past' semantic function.

V. CONCLUSION

The result of this study demonstrates two indications. One is that although EFL students are good at choosing the correct answer between *will* and *would* in the sentence, they are not conscious of the exact difference between them when they write *will* and *would*. Another indication is that Korean EFL learners have difficulty in writing modal verbs, especially *will*, and *would* with a certainty meaning. When writing modal verbs, L2 learners tended to use *can* and *will* most frequently, and they made errors the most frequently when writing *will* and *would* with a certainty meaning.

These findings may cast a light in terms of the pedagogical implications of this study. The exact meaning and usage of modal verbs should be taught to Korean L2 learners of English. Teachers should raise their students' awareness of the modal verbs, in particular the misuse of *will* and *would* with certainty and the misuse of *may* and *might* with possibility. Also, since Korean students are used to receptive learning such as reading and listening in studying English, that should be turned toward productive learning such as writing and speaking. By doing this, L2 learners will be able to write English more precisely and proficiently and verbalize their ideas more affluently and fluently in a variety of discourse.

Gustilo (2011, p. 105) mentions, "It might prove beneficial if language curriculum 'designers', as well as language teachers, take a deeper look at how modals are given importance and taught in our schools". That is, this kind of research could make it possible for teachers to recognize the most challenging areas of the English language. This study suggests that teachers are aware of the poor performance in writing modal verbs by L2 learners, and modal verbs need to be taught independent of context. Consequently, L2 learners need to pay attention to the subtle differences of modal verbs

with similar meanings. On the other hand, L2 learners need to be informed of the semantic features of modal verbs and fluently apply them in different contexts. The proper use of modal verbs by L2 learners lays the foundation for natural and fluent communication in the globalization age. To recognize the crucial differences among the modal verbs, teachers and L2 learners should make every effort to find some methodological and pedagogical way to teach and learn English effectively and efficiently as mentioned above.

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Examples in: English

Applicable Language: English

Applicable Levels: secondary and college education

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