

# The Modal Must in Philippine English: A Corpus-Based Analysis

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## Abstract

The present study investigated the dominant verb-phrase structure and the semantic functions of the modal *must* in research papers. It also determined whether the modal *must* conforms to or deviates from the standard modal usage in American English. A total of 122 graduate research papers were analyzed. The findings revealed that the dominant-verb phrase structure of the modal *must* was *must* + base form of the verb and Filipino graduate student researchers most favor the obligation/ compulsion/ advisability function of the modal *must*. Moreover, the results of the present study substantiated Morales' (2015) linguistic assumption that the obligation function of the modal *must* has a continuous usage in Philippine English and further confirmed the findings of Gustillo (2011) that the modal *must* in Philippine English maintains its conformity to the standard modal usage in American English.

**Keywords:** Modal *must*; Philippine English; research papers; corpus-based analysis.

## Introduction

The study of the system of modality in the English language has long been a significant focus of interest for some applied linguists (e.g., Abdul-Fattah, 2011; Gustilo, 2011; Hernández-Guerra, 2013; Morales, 2015) regarding its use in different varieties of English. Modality, as defined by Radden & Dirven (2007), is concerned with the codification of the speaker's attitude towards or with the "speaker's assessment of, or attitude towards the potentiality of a state of affairs." Moreover, modal verbs may express more than one type of modality and form an essential role on the grammar and semantics of most languages (McEnery and Kifle, 2002).

For students and researchers to recognize the significance of academic writing and reading, many linguists have studied the grammatical, lexical and rhetorical traits of research papers which include modality (Hyland, 2006). Research papers are tools used for disseminating new discoveries, knowledge, and

findings. Despite the notion that academic writing must have a neutral tone and should be objective and impersonal, the authors of research papers must aim to present their topics in a manner that their views and stand on the findings should encourage the readers to actively read and evaluate the text (Hyland, 2005).

With the use of various linguistic sources such as wordings which are commonly grouped into modality and hedging, the stance of the authors and the engagement of the readers can be encouraged and expressed (White, 2003). These wordings include modal verbs which are used to express modality and which through their modal meanings can express the author's qualification of commitment to or detachment from the claims they make.

There are different approaches to study modality in research papers. In a cross-linguistic or cross-disciplinary approach or a combination of both, some studies investigate the dichotomy between deontic and epistemic modality (e.g., Piqué-Angordans, Posteguillo, & Andreu-Besó, 2002), modalities of obligation (e.g., Giltrow, 2005) and the use of epistemic modality markers for hedging (e.g., Vold, 2006).

During the 1990s, the use of corpus linguistics in analyzing modal verbs has dramatically expanded (Schneider, 2000). This cutting-edge development regarding scientific techniques and methods lends itself to various investigations involving large quantities of data. The relevant information about the use of modal verbs in the different varieties of English is now available because of systematic corpus-based study.

For instance, Schneider (2000) used the Kolhapur Corpus to compare Indian English with British and American English through the investigation of subjunctives. His analysis revealed that the modal should is the dominant structural alternative to the subjunctives in the Kolhapur Corpus. Moreover, Indian English is more similar to British English than American English.

In 2010, Bautista replicated the study of Schneider (2000) using the ICE-SI and ICE-PHI. Philippine English and Singaporean English were compared to Indian English. In contrast to Schneider's findings, her analysis revealed that the modal should is not the dominant structural alternative to the subjunctive in ICE-SIN and ICE-PHI. Also, the two Englishes adhere more to the American English than to British English.

Likewise, Bautista (2004) conducted a corpus-based analysis on the modal would using local journals and newspapers. Her study showed the presence of the nonstandard usage of would in the data because of the writers' difficulty to recognize the nonstandard usage of would as revealed in the grammaticality test.

Gustilo (2011) described the semantic functions of nine modal verbs and examined if the features of these modal verbs conform to their usage in American and British English. The categories of text used in the study were editorials, social science, skills and hobbies, and humanities. The findings revealed that most of the

modal verbs conform to the standards of the American English except on the modal verbs would and shall. The association of shall with the 3rd person subject deviates from the exonormative use of shall which associates it with the first person subject.

Also, Morales (2015) attempted to determine the semantic functions of the modal *must* and identify its conformity to or deviation from the standard usage in American English. His analysis showed that there was a continuous usage of the modal *must*'s semantic function of obligation in Philippine English whereas the said usage steadily declines in American English (Jacobsson, 2008). This result provided partial explanations about the semantic functions of the modal *must* in the printed texts of persuasive writing. Thus, further studies should be conducted to substantiate the linguistic assumption of the modal *must* in Philippine English, thereby, further intellectualizing the Philippine English variety. Moreover, Morales (2015) recommended future researchers to investigate the modal *must* in research article introductions and any other subgenres of research articles written by Filipino academic writers.

Hence, as a contribution to filling this gap, the present study aimed to shed light on the use of the modal *must* in graduate research papers and ascertain the semantic functions of the modal *must* and its conformity to or deviation from the standard usage in American English. Moreover, the present study answered the following questions:

1. What are the dominant verb-phrase structures of the modal *must* in the graduate students' research papers?
2. What semantic functions attached to the modal *must* were identified in the graduate students' research papers?
3. Are there distinctive features found in the use of the modal *must* in the said research papers that do not conform to the standard modal usage in English?

## **Methodology**

### **Corpus**

The study utilized 122 unpublished theses of the graduate students of the Pampanga State Agricultural University.

### **Analytical Framework**

Coding of the semantic functions of the modal *must* was based on the chart of modal verbs by Azar (2001) which was modified by Gustilo (2011).

### **Unit of Analysis**

The dominant verb-phrase structures and semantic functions of the modal must were manually analyzed. Furthermore, sentences served as the units of analysis in the study.

### **Results and Discussion**

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distributions of verb-phrase structures of the modal must in the graduate students' research papers. As shown in the table, the verb-phrase structure must + base form of the verb obtained the highest frequency among other verb-phrase structures. This finding suggests that some Filipino graduate students may have chosen to write simple sentence structures in the active voice as shown in [14] and [15]:

[14] *The teachers must continue to enhance their professional competence.*

[15] *School administrators must involve the other stakeholders in conceptualizing programs for school development.*

<b>Modal Structure</b>	<b>Sample Text</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>must + be</i>	[16] The communication system in the school must be transparent and open to provide the teachers with precise information.	7	5.74
<i>must + base form of the verb</i>	[30] The DepEd must monitor the pre-school programs to determine their effectiveness in the total development of the child.	84	68.85
<i>must + be + past participle</i>	[82] The proposed career guidance must be presented to the school head and guidance counselor for refinement and implementation.	30	24.59
<i>must + have + past participle</i>	[19] The learner must have employed a good profile for establishing and maintaining a good level of fitness.	1	0.82
<b>Total</b>		122	100%

***Table 1. The frequency of Verb-phrase Structures of Modal Must in the Graduate Students' Research Papers***

Table 2 illustrates the frequency and percentage distributions of the semantic functions of the modal *must* in graduate students' research papers. The data in Table 2 were adopted from Gustillo's (2011) study.

As shown in the table, the semantic function of obligation/ compulsion/ advisability, which is exemplified in [34] and [42], is most favored by Filipino graduate student researchers.

[34] *For school heads to liquidate early, they must prepare the required documents for cash advance ahead of time.*

[42] *Remedial classes must be conducted to the low achievers in Mathematics.*

**Table 2. The frequency of Semantic Functions of Modal Must in the Graduate Students' Research Papers**

In line with the third research question, the present study supported the findings of Morales (2015) who did not find any distinctive features of the modal *must*. In other words, the modal *must* in the research papers of the graduate students did not yield nonconformity from the standard modal usage in English.

<b>Modal Function</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Obligation/ Compulsion/ Advisability</i>	122	100%
<b>Total</b>	122	100%

Similarly, the results of the present study further confirmed the findings of Gustilo (2011) and Morales (2015) that most of the modal verbs in Philippine English conform to the norms of the dominant English varieties especially American English.

The findings of the present study further substantiated the claim of Morales (2015) that Filipino writers most favor the employment of the obligation function of *must* and it is widely accepted in Philippine English, which is an outer circle English variety.

### **Conclusion**

The study attempted to examine the dominant verb-phrase structure and the semantic functions of the modal *must* to determine its conformity to or nonconformity from the standard usage in the English language. The findings

revealed that the dominant-verb phrase structure of the modal *must* was *must* + base form of the verb and Filipino graduate student researchers most favor the obligation/ compulsion/ advisability function of the modal *must*.

The study further substantiated Morales' (2015) linguistic assumption that the obligation function of the modal *must* has a progressive usage in Philippine English. Moreover, the modal *must* in the research papers of the graduate students did not yield nonconformity from its standard usage in American English. Hence, Gustilo's (2011) claim that the modal *must* in Philippine English maintains its conformity to the standard modal usage in American English was confirmed.

The findings above have implications for ESL/EFL teaching and future research. First, there is a need for language teachers to inform their students about the functions of the modal *must* in research articles written by Filipino writers and to make them aware of the distinct features of Philippine English and compare them with the norms of other varieties of English.

Second, further studies should be conducted to substantiate the linguistic assumption of the modal *must* in Philippine English by analyzing published research articles written by Filipino or Asian academic writers.

Lastly, since corpus-based analysis of language seems to be an effective approach to linguistic description, more studies of this nature must be done.

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