



Sketch of a Pragmatic Framework to Teach the Meanings of the Negative Forms of Modals

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Abstract : Modal verbs are frequent in the English language and their forms, the NICE properties, are taught to EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners at early stages of their apprenticeship. The meanings of modals are taught at the intermediate level. Nonetheless, at university, even in faculties where English is used as a medium of instruction, many students fail to use modals with negation appropriately or to understand the right meanings of the negative forms of modals. This failure is partly due to the fact that teachers use inappropriate frameworks to teach them. It raises the question of the existence of a scientifically-based framework to teach modals. This paper tackling the issue of teaching the meanings of the negative forms of English modals in an EFL context provides a framework based on a pragmatic approach. The framework is fostered by earlier data collected in the Department of Anglophone Studies at Joseph Ki-Zerbo University in Burkina Faso. It is built on errors made by students in the production and comprehension of the negative forms of modals through Written Completion Tasks and Multiple-Choice Questions. Ultimately, a four-step framework takes shape for an effective teaching of the meanings of the negative forms of modals.

Keywords: pragmatics, modals, negation, EFL

Esquisse d'un cadre pragmatique pour enseigner les significations des formes négatives des modaux

Résumé : Les verbes de modalité sont fréquents dans la langue anglaise et leurs formes, les propriétés NICE sont enseignées aux apprenants ALE (Anglais comme Langue Etrangère) aux premières heures de leur apprentissage. Les sens des modaux sont enseignés au niveau intermédiaire. Malgré tout, à l'université, même dans les facultés où l'anglais est utilisé comme moyen d'instruction, beaucoup d'étudiants n'arrivent pas à utiliser de façon appropriée les modaux avec la négation ou de comprendre correctement les sens des formes négatives des modaux. Cet échec est partiellement lié au fait que les enseignants utilisent les cadres inappropriés pour les enseigner. Cela soulève la question sur l'existence d'un cadre scientifique pour enseigner les modaux. Cet article traitant de la question de la didactique des sens des formes négatives des verbes de modalité dans un contexte d'apprentissage de l'anglais comme langue étrangère fournit un cadre fondé sur une approche pragmatique. Le cadre s'est nourri de données précédemment collectées dans le Département d'Etudes Anglophones à l'université Joseph Ki-Zerbo au Burkina Faso. Il est construit sur la base des erreurs faites par les étudiants dans la production et la compréhension des formes négatives des verbes de modalité à travers des tâches écrites de complètement ou des questions à choix multiple. En définitive, un cadre à quatre étapes s'est dessiné pour un enseignement efficace de l'enseignement des sens des formes négatives des modaux.

Mots-clés : pragmatique, modaux, négation, ALE

Introduction

The modal verbs CAN, MAY, MUST, WILL and SHALL are ascertained in English and are diversely called in literature. Modal auxiliaries, or “core modals” or “principal modals” or “central modals” or “primary modals” as they have been called by R. Facchinetti et al. (2003, p. vi), or “modals” as G. N. Leech (1987, p. 71) called them, are frequent in English (G. Leech et al., 2009; F. Seggewiß, 2012; S. Kranich and V. Gast, 2015) but they are less frequent in writing than in speech (Leech et al. 2001). Therefore, they are part of the English language and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners should be instructed about them. Unfortunately, English teachers note that they are difficult to learn, or even to teach (M. Celce-Murcia and D. Larsen-Freeman, 1983) because their meanings are intricate (G. N. Leech, 1987; R. Wardhaugh, 2003). If students easily master the syntactic rules of modals as introduced early in textbooks, they face problems in producing and understanding the meanings of the affirmative forms of modals (M. Ouattara, 2009) or those of their negative forms (M. Ouattara, 2015) even at university where English is used as a medium of instruction. In EFL contexts, few resources are provided for the teaching of the meanings of modals, and those dealing with the teaching of the meanings of the negative forms of modals are rather rare. Teachers use different methods and frameworks to teach them but the question of a scientifically based framework to teach the meanings of these forms of modals remains. This paper tackling the issue of teaching the meanings of the negative forms of modals sketches a framework that EFL teachers can use systematically. It is based on a pragmatic approach because modals are context-dependent as “they depend on inferential pragmatic processes to complement the information they semantically encode” (A. Papafragou, 2000, p. 64). The framework is built on the errors made by first-year students of the Anglophone Studies Department at Joseph Ki-Zerbo University in Burkina Faso. The data were collected through Written Completion Tasks and Multiple-choice Questions. There were analyzed to found out students’ errors and their modality tendencies in relation with the use and the comprehension of the negative forms of modals. Ultimately, a four-step framework takes shape for an effective teaching of the meanings of the negative forms of English modals. Before presenting that generated framework, the key concepts and the methodology are described.

1. Pragmatics, modality, and negation

This section provides definitions of pragmatics, modality and negation and the scopes of these concepts. It also sheds light on the relation between them and particularly that between speech acts and modals.

1.1. *Defining pragmatics, modality, and negation*

Pragmatics, modality and negation are linguistics concepts belonging to the more arduously defined as their scopes embrace miscellaneous and scattered aspects.

- Pragmatics

There is no common definition of pragmatics as some authors defined it by referring to its scopes whereas others restrict it to language usage. For D. Crystal (1996), Pragmatics is

the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication. (p. 301)

Crystal's definition enlists the choice of the speaker, the social constraints and the effects of language in relation to speech. In the same vein, M. McCarthy (1991) defines pragmatics as "the study of how meaning is created in context" (p. 2). He highlights the relation between meaning and context.

However, S. C. Levinson (1983) suggests that any definition of pragmatics should take into account deixis, implicatures, presupposition and speech acts. That view is shared by J. Richards, J. Platt, and H. Weber (1985) as they state that

Pragmatics includes study of:

(a) how the interpretation and use of utterances depend on knowledge of the real world

(b) how speakers use and understand speech acts

(c) how the structure of sentences is influenced by the relationship between the speaker and the hearer. (p. 225)

Though pragmatics has not been definitely defined, there is a common agreement that it deals with language in contexts and its interpretation. As R. Matthews (2003) notes, "modal interpretations are very strongly dependent on pragmatic factors" (p. 65), for both pragmatics and modality are in close contact in the domain of language subjectivity. R. Salkie (2014) is more categorical when he states that "The different types of modality often distinguished - epistemic, deontic, dynamic, etc - are not semantic types but pragmatic ones" (p. 325). There is here a need to define modality.

- Modality

Modality is "the different linguistic features (e.g., modal verbs and adverbs) through which speakers and writers may express their attitudes toward the events depicted by the sentences in which they occur" (K. C. Schröder, 2009,

p. 585). The speaker subjectively encodes his attitudes in what he says by using specific verbs, adverbs or adjectives.

Modality is divided into many categories (F. R. Palmer, 1986 and 2001; A. Papafragou, 2000; R. Matthews, 2003): alethic, epistemic, deontic, existential, dynamic, temporal, boulomaic or volitive, evaluative, causal, subjunctive substitute, logical, teleological, and dispositional modality.

Modality includes grammatical devices and lexical items, but M. McCarthy (1991) remarks that modality is often restricted to modal auxiliary verbs (*can, could, may, might, ought to, shall, should, will, would and must*) and treated as part of grammar of English.

The fact of reducing modality to modal auxiliaries leads some researchers to limit their studies to deontic modality and epistemic modality. This paper adopts the same viewpoint by limiting its scope to deontic modality and epistemic modality expressed through modal auxiliaries. It is agreed that only modal auxiliaries express both the deontic or root modality and the epistemic modality; but another issue is to know how they combine with negation.

- Negation

Negation is at the border of semantics and pragmatics. The study of negation is as unwieldy as the study of modality and pragmatics because modality also calls for subjectivity. M. Israel (2004) remarks that “Affirmative sentences are objective and relate directly to the world; negative sentences are subjective and relate merely to the affirmative sentences which they deny” (p. 706). Though there is an agreement on the definition of negation, the literature on the concept is nonetheless abundant as it has been studied from a philosophical point of view by Aristotle and through semantic and pragmatic angles by L. R. Horn (1989) or as a grammatical category (G. Tottie, 1991).

Many strategies are used to negate a proposition, but as M. Miestamo (2007) remarks, in English, the construction that adds the particle “not” after the auxiliary verb is the standard negation strategy. However, it does not suffice to add “not” to a modal verb to find a negative modality. Dealing with the negation of modality, one should rather have in mind the negation of speech act, that is the negation of the speech act expressed with the positive form of the modal verb. This matter of fact leads M. Israel (2004) to state that negation suited negative speech act such as denial, refusal, or rejection.

To interpret the negation with modals in a sentence or proposition (P) one must know whether the modal has scope over the negation (MOD(NEG(P))) or the negation has scope over the modal (NEG(MOD(P))). In the former case, it is the proposition which is negated, and in the latter case, it is the modal which is

negated (F. De Haan, 2013). When the modality is negated, the negation is illocutionary because it entails a speech act different from that of the positive assertion, but when the proposition is negated, the negation is propositional as it does not modify the initial speech act (J. Moeschler, 2010).

An efficient analysis of negation and modality should take into account the roles and status of participants as well as the context of situation, that is some pragmatic elements. The next point displays the interaction between pragmatic, modality, and negation.

1.2. *Interaction between pragmatics, modality, and negation*

The useful pragmatic concepts to the interpretation of the negative forms of modals are deixis, presupposition, conversational implicature and speech acts.

- Deixis and the negative form of modals

The term deixis is used to refer to “those features of language which refer directly to the personal, temporal or locational characteristics of the situation within which an utterance takes place” (D. Crystal, 2008, p. 133). The study of deixis enables to situate a stretch of discourse in its context. Five types of deixis are distinguished (S. C. Levinson, 1983): person deixis, time deixis, spatial deixis, discourse deixis, and social deixis.

Deictic expressions are used to signal the different types of deixis in discourse. The analysis of deictic expressions helps the pragmaticist to interpret the negative forms of modals.

For example, in the following sentences, the meaning of the negated modal **MUST NOT**, which is prohibiting someone, can be socially appropriate or not, depending on the person and spatial deictic expressions.

a) John: “You *must not* be here now.” (The sentence is ambiguous because neither the person deictic expression *you* nor the temporal deictic expression *here* nor the temporal deictic expression *now* are defined.)

b) John (talking to his wife): You *must not* be here now. (The sentence is appropriate if John is a surgeon working in a surgery room now and his wife comes to pay him a visit. The deictic expression *here* refers to the surgery room and the deictic expression *you* refers to John’s wife.)

c) John (talking to his wife): You *must not* be here now. (The sentence is not appropriate if John is a surgeon lying down in his conjugal room and his wife comes in to see him. The deictic expression *here* refers to the conjugal room and the deictic expression *you* to John’s wife.)

d) John (talking to his boss): You *must not* be here now. (The sentence is appropriate if John is a surgeon lying down in his conjugal room and his boss

comes in to see him. The deictic expression *here* refers to conjugal room and *you* to John's boss.)

e) John (talking to his boss): You *must not* be here now. (The sentence is not appropriate if John is a surgeon working in a surgery room now and his boss comes in to see him. The expression *here* refers to the surgery room and *you* to John's boss.)

The same utterance is found to be appropriate in sentences b) and d) but not in sentences c) and e) depending on the places and persons the deictic expressions *here* and *you* refer to. The prohibitions of entrance in sentences b) and d) are said to be appropriate because they do not shock the hearers: John's wife cannot enter the surgery room without a special permission when he is working but his boss can; likewise, the boss cannot enter John's conjugal room without a special permission whereas his wife needs no permission. However, this appropriateness is also based on pragmatic presuppositions.

- Presupposition and the negative form of modals

Pragmatic presupposition is a "relation between two utterances whose truth/factuality is taken for granted in a given context due to the mutual knowledge of the speaker and the addressee(s)" (B. Kryk-Kastovsky, 2009, p. 514). It is the implicit truth shared by the different participants in a conversation. Both the speaker and the hearer assume that some events are true before the conversation starts.

Example: Speaker A: Peter must be at home now.

Speaker B: He can't be there by now.

The relevance of the conversation in the above example relies on the presuppositions that there is a subject named 'Peter', that Speakers A and B know Peter, that he is going home. Even though both speakers implicitly agree with one another's basic truth, they need to infer the intended meaning of what the other says.

- Conversational implicature and the negative form of modals

H. P. Grice (1975) uses the term "implicature" to explain what a speaker can imply, suggest, or mean, as distinct from what is literally said. In conversational implicature the speaker means much than what he says. In using modals, participants respect the cooperative principle by obeying the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner. In the following example, the conversation is taking place at home:

Daughter: Peter is calling me on the telephone.

Mother: You may not go out.

An analysis of the conversation reveals that the daughter informs her mother that Peter is calling her. The mother infers what the daughter implies (maxim of quality), that is, asking implicitly the permission to go out, and therefore explicitly (maxim of quantity) refuses her the permission to go out (maxim of relevant) using the negative form of the modal (maxim of manner). The mother's utterance prevents the daughter to go out. The daughter may obey or not, but the effect of the utterance on her is evident and the evidence is dealt with in speech act theory.

- Speech Act Theory and the negative form of modals

Speech Act Theory was first developed by J. L. Austin (1962) who argued that whenever an utterance is produced, the speaker performs some act known as an illocutionary act, and each illocutionary act is associated with a force called an illocutionary force which produces some effect on the hearer, a perlocutionary act. Austin's theory will be developed later so that A. Capone (2009) defines speech act as the vocalization of the thought of a speaker to "inform the hearer of a certain situation, express an inner state of mind (emotions and feelings), or modify the behavior of the recipient" (p. 1015). Any speaker intends to impact the world through his utterances.

J. L. Austin's (1962) speech acts will be reduced to illocutionary act and divided into many categories such as assertives, directives, commissives, declarations, expressives (F. R. Palmer, 1986). Speech Act Theory is a general framework for the study of modality because epistemic modals are included in assertives whereas the commissives cover deontic modals. The next point presents some speech acts stated through the use the negative forms of modals.

1.3. *Speech acts and the negative form of modals*

The use of the negative forms of modals produces some speech acts corresponding to the opposite speech acts expressed through the affirmative forms of modals. These negative speech acts are those performed through deontic modals and epistemic modals. The difference between the two types of modality is described in M. Ouattara (2009).

- Speech acts expressed through the negative forms of epistemic modals

Epistemic modality is "a type of grammatical marking that encodes the speaker's judgement relating to his or her knowledge about the possibility, likelihood or certainty of the proposition expressed by the sentence" (V. Evans and M. Green, 2006, p. 625). R. Matthews (2003) distinguishes subjective epistemic, objective epistemic and objectivized epistemic.

This paper adopts G. Radden’s (2009) and M. Ouattara’s (2015) framework wherein epistemic modals are ranked increasingly such as certainty, probability and possibility depending on whether the occurrence of an event is believed to be certain, probable or possible by the speaker. These authors divided the speech acts expressed in relation with the negative form of modals into two categories: speech act expressed through the negation of modality and speech acts containing the negative form of modals but where the proposition is negated instead of the modality. The speech acts involved in both categories are certainty and its negation, probability and its negation, and possibility and its negation as shown in table 1.

Table 1

Speech acts expressed through the negative form of epistemic modals (M. Ouattara, 2015, p. 20)

Speech acts of negative modals			
Modality		Proposition	
Speech act	Negative form	Speech act	Negative form
Stating impossibility that something is the case	Cannot	Stating certainty that something is not the case	Cannot
Stating impossibility that something is the case	Cannot*	Subjectively stating possibility that something is not the case	May not*
---	---	Stating probability that something is not the case	Ought not
---	---	Stating probability that something is not the case	Should not
---	---	Stating certainty that something is not the case	Cannot
Stating uncertainty that something is the case	Do/does not have to	---	---
---	---	Stating certainty that something will not be	Will not
---	---	Stating certainty that something will not be	Shall not

Note: The symbol * is a special case where the modal MAY is used in the positive form but negated as CANNOT and MAY NOT (cf. Ouattara, 2015).

The table 1 shows that the negation with modals may not be available for modality or proposition, that is, it may happen that the modality or of the proposition, though expressed with modals in the positive form cannot be negated with modals.

- Speech acts expressed through the negative forms of deontic modals

Deontic modality “expresses the speaker’s judgement relating to obligation (moral or social), permission or prohibition” (V. Evans and M. Green, 2006, p. 625). It is made up of subjective deontic, performative deontic, objective deontic, and objectivized deontic (R. Matthews, 2003).

The speech acts expressed through the negation in relation with modals can be ranked decreasingly, as presented in the following table, from more obligation to less obligation in the following order: obligation and its negation, necessity and its negation, advisability or recommendation and its negation, and permission and its negation (G. Radden, 2009; M. Ouattara, 2015).

Table 2

Speech acts expressed through the negative form of deontic modals (M. Ouattara, 2015, p.15)

Speech acts of negative modals			
Modality		Proposition	
Speech act	Negative form	Speech act	Negative form
Preventing of enablement	Cannot	Externally giving permission not to act	Can not
Refusing permission to act	May not	Subjectively giving permission not to act	May not
---	---	Advising someone not to act	Ought not
---	---	Advising someone not to act	Should not
---	---	Prohibiting someone from acting	Must not
Stating lack of necessity to act	Need not	---	---

Exempting from obligation to act	Do/does not have to	---	---
---	---	Prohibiting someone from acting	Must not
---	---	Refusing to act	Will not
---	---	Obliging someone not to act	Shall not

The table 2 reveals that modals are not always available to express negated modality or negated proposition. This does necessary mean that there is no other way to negate them but these instances are out of the scope of this paper.

2. Methodology

In a previous research, M. Ouattara (2009) assessed the pragmatics competence of students of the Department of Anglophone Studies at the University of Ouagadougou (current Joseph Ki-Zerbo University) in relation with the affirmative forms of English modals. He later assessed those students' pragmatic competence in relation with the negative form of modals (M. Ouattara, 2015). In both assessments, he found that students' performances are low with the regard to their level of EFL learning. He then proposed a semasiological approach to teach the affirmative form of modals (Ouattara, 2022).

The current paper exploits Ouattara's (2015) data to assess students' pragmatic competence. A Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) was used to collect the data related to the comprehension of the negative forms of modals and the production of the negative forms of modals to perform speech acts.

To collect the data related to the comprehension of speech acts, an awareness test containing gap filling and multiple-choice answers was used. The participant had to choose the appropriate speech with regard to the situation described. In another test students were asked to produce the appropriate negative form of modals to fit the situation described with regard to the discourse participants. The tests enabled to account for students' pragmatics competence, that is their pragmlinguistic as well as their sociopragmatic failures.

3. Results and the proposed framework to teach the meanings of modals

In general, about 90% of students failed in the tests in the comprehension as well as in the production of the meanings of the negative forms of modals. In comprehension, they succeeded better in the deontic modality (23%) than in the epistemic one (7%). Students not only confused the speech acts of meanings in each type of modality, but also the types of modality themselves. Some meanings

were more confused than others. In production, students succeeded more in epistemic modality (23%) than in the deontic one (15%). Some modals were used more appropriately than others. Confusion was found between modals and between the kinds of meanings as well as the types of modality. Moreover, some modals were used more frequently than others and they confused the contexts of use. Further details on students' failures can be found in Ouattara (2015).

Knowing students' errors in the comprehension and production of the negative forms of modals, a framework is proposed in this paper to teach modals step by step taking into account students' modality tendency and the degrees of difficulties.

The framework primary addresses the needs of teachers of advanced EFL as a guide to the systematic teaching of the negative form of modals. The steps should be rigorously followed for a successful teaching.

3.1. Step 1: Describe the context of the use of modals

After raising the conscious of students about the importance of context in the interpretation of modals, the teacher should provide the different features of context including the elements of deixis, presupposition, implicature and speech act.

First of all, the teacher should situate the discourse in its context by providing information about the discourse participants and the relationship between them, the place, and the time. The awareness of deictic expressions helps students to grasp the role of the discourse participants and gives clues on whether the modals used or to be used are about future oriented actions (deontic meanings) or state of facts (epistemic meanings).

Secondly, the teacher should draw the students' attention on what the participants presuppose as it helps them to interpret modals or to produce them appropriately. Presupposition entails that the participants know the dos and don'ts, what they are allowed to say and to do or what is possible and what is not. The knowledge of the participants' presuppositions will avoid misunderstandings or inappropriate production.

Thirdly, the teacher should draw his learners' attention on the intention of the speaker who uses modals as the knowledge of implicatures gives ideas about the real intention of the speaker, that is, what is implied. The study of implicatures is fundamental in the interpretation of the meanings of modals.

Finally, the teacher should raise his learners' awareness on speech acts because they will help learners to master the pragmatic meanings of modals. Speech acts encode what the speaker expects from their utterances. The mastery of the speech acts of the negative form of modals enables learners to react

accordingly or to use the appropriate modal in real situation, demonstrating so their high pragmatic competence in the negation with modals.

A complete apprehension of the context of the use of the negative form of modals is set up when the student knows who is talking to whom of who/what, when, where, why, what for, and with which modal. After the description of the setting, the teacher can then explain the differences between the types of meanings.

3.2. *Step 2: Explain the differences between the types of meanings*

The types of meaning refer to the deontic meaning and the epistemic meaning. Modals express both deontic and epistemic meanings. That makes their learning and their teaching difficult all the more the negative form of modals as the negative meaning does not always correspond to the negation of the affirmative form.

The teacher should draw the attention of the learners about the differences between the deontic meaning and the epistemic one. To know the difference between the types of meanings, Ouattara (2009) suggests finding the speaker's subject social status, the speaker's action orientation, the focus of his intention, and the paraphrase of the modals or their periphrastic equivalences.

Once learners have understood the differences between the deontic meaning and the epistemic one, the teacher can explain the differences between the kinds of meanings.

3.3. *Step 3: Explain the differences between the kinds of meanings*

Having explained the differences between the types of meanings, the teacher should then tell the learners the differences between the kinds of meanings within each type of meaning and provide details on modals which are more confusing to learners.

The explanations of the kinds of meanings are systematic as they take into account the degrees of difficulties in relation with type of meaning and the kind of language skill involved. When teaching the comprehension of modals, the teacher should put emphasis on the understanding of deontic modals in the following order: may not (giving permission not), cannot, do not have to, may not (refusing permission), will not, shall not, need not, must not and should not.

There should be the order of explanation of the meanings of deontic speech acts: obliging someone, withdrawing obligation, prohibiting someone, interdicting or preventing of enablement, advising someone, giving permission, formal refusal, and stating lack of necessity.

The emphasis should be laid on modals in this order when the understanding of epistemic meaning is concerned: may not, can not (stating certainty that something is not the case), should not, cannot (stating impossibility), will not, do not have to.

The meanings of epistemic speech acts need to be enlightened in the following order by the teacher: stating impossibility, stating probability, stating certainty that something is not, stating uncertainty, stating possibility, stating certainty that something will not.

The order of explanation of the speech acts expressed through the negative form of deontic modals is the following one: must not, may not, should not, ought not to, cannot, do not have to, need not, will not, and shall not.

Dealing with the epistemic meaning, the teacher should lay emphasis on modals in the following order: should not, will not, must not, may not, cannot, do not have to, ought not to, need not, and shall not.

It is also important to tell learners how modals are negated pragmatically, not syntactically. The teacher needs to teach the meanings of the affirmative form and then give the opposite meaning for the learners to realise that it is not sufficient to put the particle "not" after a modal to find the opposite meaning of an affirmative form. When teaching the opposite meanings of modals, the order of emphasis should be as follows: must not, should not, may not, do not have to, will not, ought not, cannot, and need not.

Modals are often used haphazardly to express speech acts. The speech acts expressed by the negative form of modals should be clarified according to the ones expressed by the following deontic modals in a strict order: speech acts expressed with the modals MUST NOT, MAY NOT, OUGHT NOT TO, DO NOT HAVE TO, CANNOT, NEED NOT, and SHOULD NOT.

As for the epistemic meanings, the speech acts of the following modals should be clarified successively: speech acts expressed with the modals MAY NOT, CANNOT, WILL NOT, SHOULD NOT, MUST NOT, OUGHT NOT TO, DOES NOT HAVE TO, and NEED NOT.

The teacher should finally move from the meanings of the negative form of modals to those of the affirmative forms. When teaching the opposite meanings of the negative form of modals, the teacher should insist on modals in the following order: MUST NOT, MAY NOT, SHOULD NOT, DO NOT HAVE TO, WILL NOT, CANNOT, OUGHT NOT TO, and NEED NOT.

The first three steps are devoted to the teaching of the meanings of the negative forms of modals, specifically the speech expressed through them as well as the contexts of their uses. The last step is about how the teacher should introduce and develop the drills.

3.4. Step 4: Encourage the use of modals

Beyond the description of the conversational context and the explanation of the meanings of modals, the teacher should make his students learn the meanings of modals actively through many drills after having explained the contexts of use and shown the differences between the types of meanings and those between the kinds of meanings. So, he should regularly ask learners to use the negative form of modals to express speech acts.

The teacher should regularly expose students to the negative forms of modals to express speech acts and more emphasis should be laid on comprehension than on production. In teaching about comprehension skill, emphasis should be laid on epistemic modality, whereas in developing the production skill emphasis should be laid on deontic modality.

English being taught as a foreign language, the teacher can compare the modality systems of English and the second language so that the learners will perceive the common features and the differences. If possible, the teacher compares the modality system of English with that of the mother tongue of the learners. There is no need for differential pedagogy based on gender or on the series of the baccalaureate because these factors do not influence the production or comprehension of modals at advanced level (M. Ouattara, 2015).

Conclusion

Though the forms of modals are taught at a beginning level to EFL learners, the mastery of their meanings is challenging at advanced level as, at university, students are found to be less proficient in the use and understanding of English modals. A qualitative research method showed that they confused the negative forms of modals with one another as well as their meanings. The areas of difficulties have been identified together with degrees of difficulties. A sketch of a pragmatic framework has been elaborated on the basis of the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic failures in order to improve the teaching methods of deontic and epistemic modality in relation with negation. The framework takes into account pragmatics concepts such as deixis, speech act, presupposition, and conversational implicature. The approach demands to teach the meanings of the negative forms of modals systematically in four steps to advanced EFL learners. For the method to be efficient, teachers should be trained in pragmatic instructions in EFL classroom context.

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