A Corpus-Based Analysis Of
Would in L2 Writings: A Comparison between
Asian EFL Learners and L1English Speakers

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Abstract

This paper examines the modal verb *would* in written essays produced by 200 L1 English speakers and 1,200 EFL learners in China, Japan, and Thailand. Previous studies on the modal verbs in general (e.g., *can, could, may, might, will, would*) offer ample evidence as to varied uses of these modals by L2 learners, suggesting that the modal verbs are extremely difficult to master for non-native speakers of English. By investigating a total of 2,800 essays obtained from the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (Ishikawa, 2013), the present study investigates the use of *would*—the modal verb found to be much less frequent compared with the other modals—with the aim of identifying the areas requiring pedagogical attention specific to each L2 group. The corpus-based analyses of the differences between L1 and L2 writings suggest that L1 English speakers and EFL learners exhibit rather different collocational patterns and sentence configurations. The results indicate a strong preference among the EFL learners for the formulaic pattern of *would like* to express politeness and conditional sentences involving *if*-clauses.

Keywords: would, modal verbs, L2 English writing, epistemic marker, corpus-linguistics