

*English Possibility and Interrelated Modalities:
A Problem of Recognition*

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المستخلص

" الإمكانية والمفاهيم الأوجهية المتداخلة معها في اللغة الانجليزية "

لا تزال الأوجهية (Modality) بشكل عام ومفهوم الإمكانية والمفاهيم المتداخلة معها بشكل خاص تمثل صعوبة كبيرة لمتعلمي اللغة الانجليزية والترجمة في الجامعات العربية بالرغم من بحث هذه الظاهرة اللغوية بشكل معمق وإفراد مساقات النحو مساحة واسعة لها . هذه الدراسة مبنية على فرضية أن الصعوبة التي يواجهها طلبة اللغة الانجليزية والترجمة في هذا المجال تعود أسبابها إلى أن الموضوع معقد ومتداخل وان المفردات المستخدمة للتعبير عن هذا الموضوع متعددة المعاني وبالتالي تفتح المجال لتأويلات مختلفة . كما أن اللغة العربية لا تولي اهتماما كبيرا للأوجهية بل هي لغة يغلب عليها طابع التوكيد . وللتأكد من صحة الفرضية , فقد تم تصميم اختبار لقياس استيعاب الطلبة الخريجين لهذا الجانب اللغوي . وقد أشارت نتيجة الاختبار إلى انه بالرغم من التركيز على مفهوم الإمكانية والمفاهيم المتداخلة معها في اللغة الانجليزية في مساقات النحو إلا أن الطلبة لا يزالون يجدون صعوبة في فهم هذا الموضوع بشكل جيد , وهذا يعني الحاجة إلى تركيز أكثر وفهم أفضل لهذه المفاهيم .

*English Possibility and Interrelated Modalities:**A Problem of Recognition***Abstract**

Although intensively investigated and given good attention in grammar books, modality is still a major area of difficulty for students majoring in English and in Translation. Such difficulty is ascribed to the inherently complicated nature of modality, to the polysemous nature of the English modal auxiliaries, and to the different status it occupies in the linguistic systems of English and Arabic. Based on this, a number of forty four students specialized in English and in Translation in their final course study at the university have been subjected to a multiple choice test, in which they are asked to distinguish between "possibility" and interrelated modalities. The test has shown that the subjects of the test, although at this advanced stage of the specialization, are still in need of a better understanding of modality.

١. Introduction:

Modality is a universal notion. It indicates the speaker's/writer's assessment of how the world might be and should be (wikipedia). Bybee et. al. (١٩٩٤:١٧٦) define it as the "...grammaticalized expression of the subjective attitudes and opinions of the speaker including possibility, probability, necessity, obligation, permissibility, ability, desire, and contingency". A corollary to this speaker's involvement is the speaker's non-commitment to the truth of the proposition. Being a universal notion, it has been intensively investigated and its intricate nature necessitated a variety of categorizations depending on the semantic-pragmatic interrelatedness one can discern. The most widely recognized of such categorizations, according to the available literature on the topic, are: epistemic vs. deontic (Palmer, ١٩٩٠:٥), modality vs. modulation (Halliday, ١٩٧٦:١٨٩-٢١٣), subject orientation vs. discourse orientation (Palmer, ١٩٧٤:٩٤-١٤٩). Although the first categorization is the one in frequent use both in linguistics and in logic, what matters here is that they all share a common feature, that the first category usually includes the basic modal concepts, namely the



possibility and *necessity* of some piece of knowledge, whereas the latter is an indication of how the world ought to be according to certain norms, expectations, speaker's desire etc. (Kiefer, ١٩٩٤:٢٥١٤). Furthermore, *possibility* is more basic than *necessity* since any manifestation of the latter, at whatever level it be, presupposes the former. This entails that *possibility* is there in any modal concept.

In spite of its universal character, English and Arabic label *modality* differently in their linguistic systems. In English, *modality* occupies a more central position than in Arabic and this has led some to call English modality-oriented, whereas Arabic is assertion-oriented (Aziz, ١٩٩٢:١١٤). Moreover, although *modality* constitutes a major part in any grammar book on English, its recognition poses problems at two levels as indicated below:

١. At the conceptual level: modal concepts are deeply interrelated in terms of presupposition, especially between *possibility*, *permission* and *ability*.
٢. At the realization level. In this respect, modality is of two types: grammaticalized (realized by a set of auxiliary verbs called *modal auxiliaries* which possess a definite set of morphological and syntactic characteristics), and lexicalized (realized by a number of lexical items including adjectives *possible*, adverbs *possibly*, etc.) (Van linden et. al., ٢٠٠٨:٢٢٦). However, there is a general tendency towards the first sort of realization (Lyons, ١٩٧٧:٨٠٢). Kosur (٢٠٠٩) goes further in indicating that this feature is shared by all other Germanic languages (www.brightclub.com/education). This creates a problem motivated by the polysemous nature of the English modal auxiliaries (i.e. the same modal auxiliary can express more than one modal concept).

The present paper is intended to address this problem in relation to Arab university students majoring in English literature as well as English-Arabic translation represented by the first semester, ٢٠٠٩-٢٠١٠, graduates at the Departments of English Language and Literature and Translation at Irbid National University. It first surveys the available literature



on the realization of *possibility*, *ability* and *permission*. It, then, lays down a number of guidelines which are, to some extent, helpful in distinguishing between the three modalities. Finally a number of students sit for a test as described above. In this test, students are asked to choose between three alternatives. The test aims at checking the students' ability to use their previous knowledge of the topic to distinguish between the three modalities. The whole study is based on the hypothesis that students majoring in English and translation still encounter serious problems in dealing with English grammaticalized modalities although the obligatory courses they have studied contain a considerable coverage of this topic.

٢. Realization of Possibility, Ability, and Permission

This section is designed to give a thorough brief account of the realization of the English *possibility*, *ability*, and *permission* via modal auxiliaries. This account gives a clear picture of the inherent overlap of these three modal concepts at the realization level.

٢.١. Possibility

The modal auxiliaries that are used to express possibility are: *can*, *could*, *may* and *might*. On the basis of centrality to *possibility*, these four modal auxiliaries are usually divided into two groups when talking about them, the first includes *can* and *could* and the other includes *may* and *might*. There is a superficial agreement and a long dispute over which of these two groups is more basic in the expression of *possibility*.

Ehrman (١٩٦٦:١٢) considers the first group to be more basic in the expression of *possibility*. In this connection, he writes:

The basic meaning of can and could is that there is no obstruction to the action of the lexical verb of which can or could is an auxiliary ; that is to say, the action is free to take place. Any other meaning of the verb can be derived, more or less, directly from the basic meaning, though some have developed in such a way that they seem to say the converse, to make an assertion of ability or potentiality.

This opinion is enhanced by Coates (١٩٩٠:٥٧) in saying:



The modal auxiliary 'can' expresses possibility as its unmarked meaning, the meanings of permission and ability are linked to possibility through gradients of restriction and inherency respectively.

Halliday (١٩٧٦:١٩١), and his followers, adopt another stand in maintaining that *possibility* is mainly realized by *may* and *might*, and that it is occasionally realized by *can* and *could*. Halliday's stand can find historical support in what Robert (١٩٥٤:١٧٢-٤) states :

May had originally the meaning 'have the power' (of the noun might). Until the seventeenth century, may was used only in the sense of possibility, where American English uses can. Side by side with this meaning developed the meaning of permission for which may is still used.

A counter opinion is stated by Van Linden et. al. (٢٠٠٨:٢٢٧) who maintain:

The modal auxiliary, may, is known to derive from old English, mayan, "to have physical ability", and later developed the meaning of (moral) acceptability/permission.

Halliday (Ibid), moreover, speaks of degrees of *possibility* identifying two, namely *possible* and *less possible* realized by *may* and *might* respectively. This is shown in the interpretation of the following examples:

١. a. He *may* be at home.

b. He *might* be at home.

where (١.a) means 'it is possible that he is at home', and (١.b) means 'it is less possible that he is at home'. Some argue that *might* expresses *hypothetical possibility* to indicate a situation that has not in fact occurred. (grammar.ccc.comment.edu/GRAMMAR/auxiliary).

Whereas Halliday's second argument can be easily accepted, for it coincides with the general rule which maintains that the past tense form of the modal auxiliary expresses a lower degree meaning, his first argument concerning the exclusiveness of *possibility* to *may*



and *might* can hardly be justified, because it is neither logically nor statistically verified. However, Mindt (١٩٩٥:١٩٢) carried out a statistical analysis on the frequent meanings of *may* in some fictional texts of British English and found that ٩٧% of *may* occurrences express *possibility* and only ٣% express *permission*. If this is accepted to be indicative, then one can say that the major meaning, and not the exclusive meaning, of *may* is that of *possibility*. Even Robert's interpretation of historical evidence can by no means be counted on, as it has counter discussion as indicated above. Moreover, priority is given to synchronic analysis of linguistic phenomena, which is here in favour of Halliday's counter discussion.

Some linguists talk of a different categorization of *possibility*, namely *factual* and *theoretical*. The first kind is expressed by *may*, whereas the second is expressed by *can* as shown by the following examples (Quirk et al., ١٩٧٢:٩٧):

٢. a. The road *may* be blocked.

b. The road *can* be blocked.

These two sentences are interpreted as 'it is possible that the road is blocked' and 'it is possible to block the road' respectively. Leech (١٩٧١:٧٦) perceives the difference between (٢.a) and (٢.b) in that the latter describes a theoretical conceivable happening, whereas the former feels more immediate, because the actual likelihood of an event is being considered. Finally, he concludes that *factual possibility* is stronger than *theoretical possibility* (Ibid). Leech's distinction can be thought of as a difference on the time dimension, where the *factual* type is related to the present and the *theoretical* type is related to the future. The *factual/theoretical* distinction, however, is relaxed in the following cases:

١. In questions; here *may* in the possibility sense is replaced by *can*. Thus, we say:

٣. *Can* he be at home?

the corresponding statement of which is 'he may be at home'.



٢. In using the past tense forms *could* and *might*. The sort of possibility expressed by these two modal auxiliaries can be marked [\pm theoretical] (i.e. theoretical or factual) as in:

٤. We *could / might* visit him at home.

٢.٢. Ability

Various terms are used to designate this modal concept, namely *capacity* and *capability*, with almost no difference except for *capacity* which is widely thought of to refer to mental ability. However, *ability* is the term that is widely used and thus will be adopted here to refer to both, mental and physical sorts of ability. Ability indicates that:

١. There is an agent, the subject of the sentence, which has the ability to perform some sort of action expressed by the main verb of the sentence.
٢. The action in question is possible in some state of the world.

In terms of realization, *ability* is expressed by the modal auxiliaries *can* and *could*. *Can* expresses present or permanent ability, whereas *could* expresses past ability, as exemplified below:

٥. He *can* speak Spanish but he *can't* write it very well.

٦. I *could* always beat you at tennis when we were kids,

where sentence '٥' expresses present ability, and sentence '٦' expresses past ability which is not necessarily existent at present.

Can and *could* in the *ability* sense should be handled carefully, for they sometimes function non-modally. This happens when they are associated with verbs of sensation, as illustrated by the following examples:

٧. a. I *can* see a man coming towards us.

b. When he was in the kitchen, he *could* smell burning food.

Here the use of *can* and *could* is to express 'progressiveness', for such verbs lack the progressive form (Boyd & Thorne, ١٩٦٩:٧١). In other words, sentences '٧.a' and '٧.b' are



equivalent to the unlikely 'I am seeing a man coming towards us' and 'When he was a child, he was smelling burning food' respectively.

٢,٣. Permission

Permission, unlike *possibility* and *ability*, is part of the deontic system of modality. For any act to be permitted, it should be possible in some state of the world, and that led Palmer (١٩٧٩:٥٩) to refer to *permission* as 'deontic possibility'. Pragmatically, *permission* indicates the following:

١. possibility; the action permitted should be possible.
٢. authority of the speaker; giving *permission* requires that the *permission* giver has the authority to do so.
٣. desire of the listener; *permission* logically requires the listener to be willing to be given *permission*.

Permission is mainly realized by the modal auxiliaries *may* and *can*. There is a consensus among grammarians that *may* is preferred to *can*, for the latter is considered less formal and a bit less polite (Leech, ١٩٧١:٦٨-٧٠). Leech (Ibid), however, notices another difference between the two, namely that *can* is used to indicate 'general permission', whereas *may* is 'speaker-bound' permission. To elucidate, let us consider the following examples:

١. a. You *may* pet the lion.

b. You *can* pet the lion.

Sentence (١.a) indicates 'the rules allow petting the lion', whereas (١,٢) indicates 'I allow you to pet the lion'.

Might and *could* are also used to ask for *permission* and when *permission* is doubtful.

Consider the following example:

٢. *Could* I leave, Sir?

indicates that approval and refusal stand on equal footing.



٣. Possibility and Interrelated Modalities: Guidelines for Distinction.

Conceptual interrelatedness among modalities and the polysemous nature of the English modal auxiliaries make it very likely to confuse among the various modalities. This overlap is, in fact, the major query of modality, especially in modality-oriented languages like English. Realizing this difficulty, attempts have been made to distinguish among *possibility*, *ability*, and *permission*. This section is designed to review these guidelines critically to decide on the range of their applicability and the exceptions they have got.

١. The first guideline is related to the spoken level. When *possibility* is expressed by *may*, it confuses with *permission*. Emphaticness, however, relaxes such ambiguity, for a stressed *may* indicates *possibility* and an unstressed one expresses *permission* (Ibid). On the written level, on the other hand, the ambiguity remains unsolved.

٢. A second guideline is related to the subject of the sentence. An inanimate subject with *can* or *could* is to be interpreted in the *possibility* sense. With animate subject; however, the sentence requires a reading other than possibility, more specifically *ability* or *permission*. It should be noted that there are instances which seem to violate this guideline. To elucidate, let us consider the following example:

١٠. The wind *can* shake those shutters terribly.

where the subject is marked [- animate], but still refers to *ability*. Ney (١٩٧٩:١٢٣) comments on this point by saying 'For these instances, it would seem that certain classes of nouns in certain contexts behave as though they are marked [+ animate]'.

٣. The reading of *possibility* obtains when the main verb of the sentence is one of the class of *copula verbs* (Ibid: ١٢٠). In line with this principle, the following sentences require the reading of *possibility*:

١١. a. John *can/could* be at home.

b. If it is baked just right, carrot cake *can/could* taste very good.



This guideline needs some elaboration, for it has got some regular exceptions. First of all, *become* is a copula verb, yet when it is compounded with *can* or *could*, it indicates *ability*. For example:

١٢. He *can/could* become a doctor if he wants to.

Other *copula verbs* in construction with *action adjectives*, a term used by Ney (١٩٧٩:١٢١) to refer to adjectives similar to action verbs as contrasted with *stative verbs*, require the *ability* reading of *can* or *could*, as in:

seem

١٣. Sometimes, he *can/could* { be } strong, if he wants to.

appear

With other adjectives, the reading must be that of *possibility*, as indicated by the following example:

seem

١٤. Sometimes, he *can/could* { be } so tired in the morning.

appear

The adjectives which force the reading of *can* and *could* as *possibility* might be termed *stative* (as opposed to action adjectives mentioned above) since they are similar to stative verbs and since they seem to imply that the subject of the sentence is passive rather than active. The commonest adjectives of this latter type are (weak, cowardly, fable, frail, sick, shy, among others) (Ibid: ١٢٢).

٤. The fourth guideline is related to the voice of the sentence. *Can* or *could* in passive clauses requires the reading of *possibility*, as in:

١٥. This text *can* be read by children.

means 'it is possible for this text to be read by children', but its corresponding active sentence:

١٦. Children *can* read this text.



is to be interpreted in the *ability* sense (Leech, ١٩٧١: ٧١). It is worth mentioning at this point that the last two sentences could also be interpreted in the *permission* sense. Being so, this guideline captures the exclusion of *ability* reading. An immediate indication of this situation is that, unless context intervenes to disambiguate, the overlap between *possibility* and *permission* seems inevitable.

٥. The last guideline is related to the aspectual system of English. Quirk and Greenbaum (١٩٧٣: ٥٨) maintain that *can* or *could* is used with the perfective or progressive aspect to signal the meaning of possibility. However, these two modals require special attention in this respect. *Can* does not function in conjunction with *have* as the perfect tense marker in affirmative sentences. However, there is no such restriction on the function of *can* with *have* as the perfect tense marker in yes/no question inversion and in negative sentences, as shown in the following examples respectively:

١٧. a. *Can* John have had his breakfast?

b. John *cannot* have had his breakfast.

Could, on the other hand, functions freely with *have* as the perfect tense marker.

One noticeable thing is that the realization of *possibility*, according to the above guidelines, is almost restricted to *can* and *could*. *May* and *might*, which are given priority in the discussion of *possibility* by Halliday and his proponents, is mentioned in the first guideline only which is restricted entirely to the spoken language and thus lacks generality. This could be used as further evidence in support of those who give priority of realizing possibility through *can* and *could*.

To conclude this section, one can argue that these guidelines, which are scattered in various grammar books, stand as mitigating points in the face of the intricate nature of the English modal auxiliaries in spite of their limitation in several instances.



4. Test and Results

The whole study is based on the hypothesis that in spite of the intensive courses students majoring in English and in Translation, they still encounter difficulties in recognizing English possibility and the interrelated modalities. To verify this hypothesis, a test has been designed to measure the students' performance in this respect. Forty four students in their final term study career at Irbid National University participated in the test. The test consists of twenty questions, each with three alternatives and the students, based on their understanding of the topic, are asked to choose the correct item. The questions and the answer key are stated in the (Appendix). The results of the test, that are statistically calculated, are stated in this section in the form of tables.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Items (Qs)

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
٢	٤٤	٠	١	١٢	٠,٢٧	٠,٤٥٠
١٥	٤٤	٠	١	١٥	٠,٣٤	٠,٤٧٩
٦	٤٤	٠	١	٢٢	٠,٥٠	٠,٥٠٥
٢٠	٤٤	٠	١	٢٦	٠,٥٩	٠,٤٩٧
٤	٤٤	٠	١	٢٦	٠,٥٩	٠,٤٩٧
١٢	٤٤	٠	١	٢٧	٠,٦١	٠,٤٩٢
١١	٤٤	٠	١	٢٩	٠,٦٥	٠,٤٧٩
٨	٤٤	٠	١	٢٩	٠,٦٥	٠,٤٧٩
٩	٤٤	٠	١	٢٩	٠,٦٥	٠,٤٧٩
١٧	٤٤	٠	١	٣٠	٠,٦٨	٠,٤٧١
١	٤٤	٠	١	٣١	٠,٧٠	٠,٤٦١
٧	٤٤	٠	١	٣٢	٠,٧٢	٠,٤٥٠
١٠	٤٤	٠	١	٣٢	٠,٧٢	٠,٤٥٠
١٤	٤٤	٠	١	٣٢	٠,٧٢	٠,٤٥٠
١٦	٤٤	٠	١	٣٢	٠,٧٢	٠,٤٥٠
١٣	٤٤	٠	١	٣٣	٠,٧٥	٠,٤٣٨
١٩	٤٤	٠	١	٣٣	٠,٧٥	٠,٤٣٨
٥	٤٤	٠	١	٣٤	٠,٧٧	٠,٤٢٣
٣	٤٤	٠	١	٣٤	٠,٧٧	٠,٤٢٣
١٨	٤٤	٠	١	٣٨	٠,٨٦	٠,٣٤٧



Table (١) shows that students scored the lowest score on Item (٧), and the highest one on Item (١٨) . Item (٧) measures Possibility while Item (١٨) measures Ability .

Table ٢

Descriptive Statistics (Scores of Students)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Students' Scores	٤٤	٤	١٩	١٣,٠٩	٤,٥٦٨

Table (٢) shows that the lowest score is (٤) and the highest is (١٩) with a mean of (١٣,٠٩) and Std (٤,٤٦٨) .

Table ٣

Descriptive Statistics(Scores Frequency, Percentage of each Score to other Scores, Cumulative Percent of each Score)

Score	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
٤	١	٢,٢٧	٢,٢٧
٥	٣	٦,٨١	٩,٠٩
٦	١	٢,٢٧	١١,٣٦
٧	٢	٤,٥٤	١٥,٩٠
٨	٤	٩,٠٩	٢٥,٠٠
٩	٢	٤,٥٤	٢٩,٥٤
١٠	١	٢,٢٧	٣١,٨١
١٢	١	٢,٢٧	٣٤,٠٩
١٣	٢	٤,٥٤	٣٨,٦٣
١٤	٦	١٣,٦٣	٥٢,٢٧
١٥	٤	٩,٠٩	٦١,٣٦
١٦	٥	١١,٣٦	٧٢,٧٢
١٧	٣	٦,٨١	٧٩,٥٤
١٨	٧	١٥,٩٠	٩٥,٤٥
١٩	٢	٤,٥٤	١٠٠

Table (٣) shows that score (١٤) was the most frequent score and (١) was the least . (٧٠,٤٦%) of students passed the exam while (٢٩,٥٤%) failed it .



Table ٤

Descriptive Statistics and Percentages of (Permission, Possibility, Ability)

	N	Standard Deviation	Percentage
Permission	٧	٠,١٥٠	٠,٣٠٧
Possibility	٩	٠,١٥٨	٠,٣٢٤
Ability	٤	٠,٠٨٨	٠,٣٦٨

Table (٤) shows that students were more able to distinguish the meanings of the Modals, when the items measure (Ability) with a percentage of (٠,٣٦٨), whereas students were less able to distinguish items that measure (Permission) with a percentage of (٠,٣٠٧) .

Table ٥

Descriptive Statistics and Percentages of the Modals (Could , May , Might ,Can)

	N	Standard Deviation	Percentage
Could	٧	٠,١٥٨	٠,٢٣٤
May	٦	٠,١٦٤	٠,٢٣٨
Might	٣	٠,٠٩١	٠,٢٦١
Can	٤	٠,١٥٢	٠,٢٦٥

Table (٥) shows that students were more able to recognize the meanings of (Can) from other Modals with a percentage of (٠,٢٦٥) , and were less able to recognize the meanings of (Could) from other Modals with a percentage of (٠,٢٣٤) .

Table ٦

Correlations Between Students' Test marks and Students' University Averages

		Test Mark	Students' Univ. Aver.
Test Mark	Pearson Correlation	١	٠,٦٢٩
	Sig. (٢-tailed)		٠,٠٠٠
	N	٤٤	٤٤

Table (٦) shows that there is a statistically positive correlation between students scores on the test and students' university averages where the correlation coefficient between both



variables was (٠,٦٢٩) . The positive correlation coefficient means that if the students' university averages were high , students scores on the Test will be high and vice versa .

٥. Conclusions

In the light of the previous discussion, the following points have been arrived at:

١. Modality in English is mainly a grammaticalized system expressed by a definite set of modal auxiliaries.

٢. *Possibility, ability and permission* are strongly interrelated, a situation likely to create serious problems to EFL learners.

٣. The test has shown the following results:

a. The subjects of the test were able to recognize *ability* better than *possibility* and *permission* (Table ١).

b. There is a big variation between the highest and the lowest scores (Table ٢). This indicates big individual differences among students.

c. A total of (٧٠,٤٦٪) passed the test, while (٢٩,٥٤٪) failed (Table ٣). This means that two thirds of the test subjects passed the exam.

d. Testees have encountered uppermost difficulty with the modal auxiliary *can*, and the least difficulty with *could* (Table ٤).

e. There has been a positive correlation coefficient between the testees' university achievement and their scores in the test (Table ٥).

٤. Modality needs more attention in grammar courses, especially at the university level for students majoring in English and in Translation.

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Appendix ١

Irbid National University
First Semester / ٢٠٠٩

Name : -----
Date : -----

Choose the best answer **a**, **b**, or **c** .

١. **Could** I borrow your book, please? **Could** here means:

- a. possibility
- b. permission
- c. ability

٢. You **could** ride your bike across the country, but I advise against it. **Could** here means:

- a. ability
- b. permission
- c. possibility

٣. It **may** rain tomorrow. **May** here means:

- a. permission
- b. ability
- c. possibility

٤. They **might** give us free tickets. **Might** here means :

- a. ability
- b. possibility
- c. permission

٥. **May** I see the menu please? **May** here means:

- a. permission



b. possibility

c. ability

٦. **Can** we take more of these cakes? **Can** here means:

a. ability

b. permission

c. possibility

٧. She **could** speak French when she was young. **Could** here means:

a. ability

b. possibility

c. permission

٨. **Could** I ask you a question? **Could** here means:

a. ability

b. possibility

c. permission

٩. He **could** play football really well before the accident. **Could** here means :

a. permission

b. ability

c. possibility

١٠. **Can** she use your mobile phone? **Can** here means:

a. possibility

b. permission

c. ability

١١. Traffic **could** be heavy on weekends. **Could** here means:

a. ability

b. permission

c. possibility



١٢. **May** I accompany you? **May** here means:

- a. ability
- b. possibility
- c. permission

١٣. Hillary Clinton **might** be the next president of the USA. **Might** here means:

- a. possibility
- b. permission
- c. ability

١٤. He **may** be my advisor next semester . **May** here means:

- a. possibility
- b. ability
- c. permission

١٥. You **may** begin the examination now. **May** here means:

- a. possibility
- b. ability
- c. permission

١٦. She **might** arrive on the ٥ o'clock plane. **Might** here means:

- a. possibility
- b. permission
- c. ability

١٧. I **could** always beat him at table-tennis when we were kids . **Could** here means:

- a. ability
- b. permission
- c. possibility

١٨. Michael **can** fly a helicopter. **Can** here means:

- a. permission



b. possibility

c. ability

١٩. Life **can** be difficult in the coming few years. **Can** here means:

a. possibility

b. ability

c. permission

٢٠. He **may** go to the theater tonight. **May** here means:

a. ability

b. possibility

c. permission

Answer Key

١	b
٢	c
٣	c
٤	b
٥	a
٦	b
٧	a
٨	c
٩	b
١٠	b
١١	c
١٢	c
١٣	a
١٤	a
١٥	c
١٦	a
١٧	a
١٨	c
١٩	a
٢٠	b