

# Literature Review of Modal Verb Teaching Research on Chinese as a Second Language

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**Keywords:** Acquisition of vocative verbs, Error analysis, Chinese students

**Abstract:** This paper further combs the existing literature from the three dimensions of the noumenon, error analysis and acquisition of vocative verbs. On the basis of reviewing the literature of predecessors, this paper puts forward some concrete countermeasures for the teaching of Chinese as a second language.

## 1. Introduction

Modal verb has many shortcomings both in the ontological study of modern Chinese and in the study of teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Under such circumstances, it is very difficult to explain the meaning and usage of these words to Chinese learners without language environment. Thai students use modal verb with high frequency of errors, mixtures and errors. Because the explanations of grammar points in some textbooks are not exhaustive, even if there are more detailed explanations, students' understanding ability is limited. Especially for Thai students at the stage of interest cultivation, pure grammatical explanation has little effect on them. Therefore, this paper makes a detailed ontological and comparative study of the semantics of Chinese and Thai modal verb from the microscopic perspective of meaning items, and makes some corrections to the existing research. According to the results of ontology analysis, error analysis and acquisition analysis, specific teaching strategies are obtained. On this basis, teaching Chinese as a foreign language and compilation of teaching materials are promoted to provide theoretical and practical basis for teaching Chinese as a foreign language modal verb. As for Chinese as a foreign language, the research literature on modal verb has been an immense number of books, but the research on Thai students at the primary stage, especially the research on middle school students in Thailand, is rarely involved. This paper provides a study of Thai students modal verb corpus and related learning situation in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. It can help Chinese teachers in China and Thailand to teach Chinese to Thai students. It can also help Thai students better grasp the differences between their mother tongue and their target language.

## 2. Ontology Study of Modal Verb

Modal verb is a common category in verbs, which has a small number, but it is very important. It has a unique value and important function in Chinese syntactic structure. In Ma Shiwentong, the discussion of "auxiliary word" can be regarded as a model, "Ke, Zu, Neng, De and other words, auxiliary word is also. If we don't talk about the action of verbs, but only about the tendency of action, then there will be the action of verbs to continue, that is to say, the action it helps. Ma Jianzhong (2007) has a very clear understanding of such words, which are placed in front of verbs and combine with verbs to express grammatical meaning. Its function is "not to speak out and move words, but to move words." [1] On this basis, the concepts of "auxiliary verb" and "modal verb" were formally formed in grammatical works. Xing Fuyi (2002) also pointed out that "modal verb is a word that indicates possibility, necessity and willingness in front of verbs or adjectives". [2] Huang Borong (1994) and Liao Xudong (1999) clearly defined the concept of "auxiliary verb" in the textbooks of Modern Chinese, but their explanations of grammatical function and distribution are

not different from those of other scholars on modal verb, and the list of terms is not very different.[3, 4] These explanations, although scholars have the same meanings for both concepts, the concept of “modal verb” is more rigorous for language research and language teaching. This article also uses the concept of “modal verb”.

In the 1980s and 1990s, with the gradual deepening of grammar research, the academic research on modal verb mainly focused on the study of its syntactic function. For example, Wen Lian (1982), Ping Jiang (1983) and Zhou Xiaobing (1989). In addition, many scholars have discussed this topic and pushed the research on modal verb further. Academics have a clearer understanding of the syntactic function and distribution of modal verb. At the same time, in order to serve the needs of language teaching and language comparison, the research on modal verb semantics is also deepening.[5-7]

Many of the related researches are aimed at comparing several words or several related words of the same semantics, or meticulously discussing the meanings of specific modal verbs. The research results of the basic modal verbs in these studies are particularly significant. Among them, the most basic is reference books such as “800 Words of Modern Chinese” and “Practical Grammar of Modern Chinese”, which clearly sort out the meanings of each word, but the results of the two books are different. Even the semantic classification of modal verb is divided. For example, Hu Yushu (1995) is divided into subjective will and objective requirement.[8]

### **3. Research on Error Analysis**

At present, the research on the errors of foreign students' modal verb is the most important aspect of the research on modal verb. Many dissertations analyze the errors of foreign students' modal verb, analyze the types of errors, explain the causes of errors, and finally propose teaching strategies.

Lu Zhaoge (2003) analyzed the errors of foreign students' Chinese modal verb on the basis of the comparison between Chinese, English, Chinese and Japanese.[9] Lai Peng (2006) predicted and analyzed modal verb's interlingual transfer errors from two aspects of formal function correspondence and context built-in by comparing the cross correspondence between English modal verbs and Chinese modal verb in form and function, so that teachers can guide English native speakers in their Chinese learning.[10] Ma Jingjing (2013) made an analysis of the errors in the acquisition of modal verb by foreign students from Asia, Africa, Europe and the United States.[11] Based on corpus data and questionnaires, Zhang Min (2013) analyzed the errors of English-speaking students in acquiring modal verb “neng”, “hui”, “Keyi”. [12] Li Yuanyuan (2014) also focused on the error analysis of modal verb “Hui”, “Neng” and “Keyi”. [13] Zhang Qiao (2014) focused on “Keyi”. [14] Yang Jiali (2013) focuses on the errors in the acquisition of Chinese modal verb by native English speakers. [15] Wang Dan (2012) focused on the errors of the negative form of Chinese modal verb used by foreign students. [16] Duan Xiaoman (2013) studied the modal verb errors of foreign students on the basis of the oral corpus of “Chinese Bridge” and “Great Difference in the World”. [17] Lu Xiaoyan (2001) made error analysis on the acquisition of modal verb by Japanese, European and American, Madagascar, Sri Lanka and Korean students respectively. [18] Hu Jianjun (2014) studies the errors of foreign students' modal verb “Neng” and “Hui” from the perspective of pragmatic functions. [19]

### **4. Research on Acquisition**

On the basis of error analysis, many dissertations have studied the acquisition sequence of modal verb. Wang Lu (2011) conducted a study on the acquisition sequence of Chinese modal verb by Korean students at intermediate level. Based on the comparison between Chinese and Korean modal verb, he conducted a bias analysis and acquisition investigation. [20] Liu Huan (2013) studied the acquisition order of Chinese modal verb by Central Asian students, and compared the expression of vocabulary in Chinese, Russian, Tajik and Kazakh from the perspective of semantics. [21]

The study of modal verb acquisition has gradually become nationalized. Among them, the study of Thai students is mainly from the following perspectives: Wang Yan (2009), based on the analysis

of Chinese modal verb semantics and the comparison between Chinese and Thai, makes a grammar test questionnaire survey to analyze the errors in the acquisition of Thai primary students' Chinese modal verb. Research.[22] Chen Yingxin (2010) based on 11 Chinese modal verb grammar tests, investigated the acquisition of Chinese modal verb by senior Thai students through statistics and analysis of test papers and questionnaire survey results, and constructed the acquisition sequence of modal verb according to the correct rate of students. Finally, the acquisition strategy of Thai students was analyzed, and the corresponding teaching strategy was put forward. The “learning” of students and the “teaching” of teachers were considered as two important aspects.[23] This article divides some modal verbs into different meanings when examining the acquisition order. It combines the performance of each meaning to queue the acquisition order of modal verb, and focuses on the strategies of “teaching” and “learning”. On the basis of combining the grammar and semantics of modal verb in Chinese, Liu Quan made an error analysis on the use of modal verb by Chinese majors in Thai universities.

## 5. Main Conclusions and Prospects

Reviewing the above research literature, the above scholars have made a useful attempt to study modal verb teaching in Chinese as a second language. On this basis, the following basic conclusions and prospects can be drawn:

(1) Acquisition research is a new concept and perspective for the development of Chinese international education. In the past, most of the studies on modal verb learning for foreigners were aimed at overseas students, and a few of them were for Chinese majors in foreign universities. The same is true for Thai students, while the research on Thai primary and secondary school students is still relatively small. Before the Chinese language teaching, it was mainly for foreign students in China. At present, it has gradually increased the teaching of foreign students at all levels. Foreign countries have become one of the main battlefields of Chinese language teaching, especially the development of Chinese language teaching in primary and secondary schools, which has become the main direction of Chinese international communication. The study of secondary school students' acquisition proposed by us is a new concept and new perspective to conform to the development of “Chinese international education”.

(2) Facing the international education of Chinese, the results of ontology research cannot be accepted completely, but the basic and key items in Chinese should be selected for teaching. The past research did not take this into account, thus causing waste. We suggest that we can adopt the method of corpus and select the meanings needed in Chinese teaching in foreign middle schools according to the self-built corpus at the initial stage of Chinese language. After such simplification, it will be helpful for the analysis and research of the problems.

(3) Selection of diversified research materials. When selecting materials for teaching and research of modal verb as a second language, it can be done simultaneously in a variety of ways, for example, questionnaire materials, homework and spoken language materials can be used, on the basis of which teachers' questionnaire materials can be combined at the same time.

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