

CHAPTER THREE

CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

There are five parts included in this chapter. First, the contrastive analysis theory will be introduced. Then, the second part is about English modal verbs. However, it only focuses on *can* and *will* in this section. The third part of this chapter is about Chinese modal verbs—“hui” whose semantic and function will be emphasized. The fourth part of this chapter is the contrastive analysis of English and Chinese modal verbs. In this section, the differences and similarities of English modal verbs—*can* and *will*—and Chinese modal verbs—*hui*—will be analyzed through contrastive analysis theory. The last part is the conclusion of this chapter.

3.1 Contrastive Analysis Theory

Contrastive Analysis Theory has two different ways to explain the learners' learning difficulty. One is the strong version—prediction, and the other is the weak version—explanation. The former is proposed because some researchers believe that all L2 errors could be predicted by identifying the differences between the learners' native language and the target language (Ellis, 1994, p.367). These researchers think of learners' native language as the sole or the prime cause that results in difficulty and error in foreign language learning. That is, they believe that learners' errors are interfered by their native language. For learners already have the knowledge of their native language, they may make errors if the features of the target language are different from those of their native language. However, learners' errors are not all the result of L1 transference. Besides, many errors that Contrastive Analysis Theory

predicts do not actually happen. As a result, a weaker form of this hypothesis is proposed.

The weaker form of Contrastive Analysis Theory is proposed to explain, but not predict, learners' errors. Some researchers assert that only some errors made by learners are traceable to transfer, and contrastive analysis could be used only a posteriori to explain rather than predict (Ellis, 1994, p.308). James (1980, p.148) also makes the following statement.

An important ingredient of the teacher's role as monitor and assessor of the learner's performance is to know why certain errors are committed. It is on the basis of such diagnostic knowledge that the teacher organizes feedback to the learner and remedial work. Even the learner should know why he has committed errors if he is to self-monitor and avoid these same errors in the future.

It is obvious that Contrastive Analysis Theory provides an access for teachers to diagnose students' errors. Teachers may not predict students' errors in advance, but at least they can explain or diagnose students' errors through Contrastive Analysis Theory. They can find out the features of L1 and L2, compare their differences and similarities, and explain if students make such errors on account of interference from their native language. Thus, they can devise some ways to prevent students' errors.

In this study, both of the strong form and weak form of Contrastive Analysis Theory are adopted. In the next chapter, there are two analyses. After the first analysis, the teacher can figure out explanations for some errors made by students. Then, before the second analysis, the teacher can predict some errors and devises some questions about modal verbs to testify the assumption. After the two analyses, the teacher can explain why students make such errors through Contrastive Analysis.

3.2 Can, Could, Will, and Would

English modal verbs, as mentioned in chapter 2, are somewhat difficult for

students to learn. In semantics, one modal verb may denote both epistemic and deontic meanings. Besides, some modal verbs also have similar meanings. In this section, only *can*, *could*, *will*, and *would* are emphasized because these four modal verbs are used more often than other modal verbs (Kennedy, 1998, p.130). And in the data collected for this study, a similar situation is also found. Therefore, these four modal verbs confuse Chinese students in meaning much more seriously. Their meanings and functions are discussed separately in detail in the following sections.

3.2.1 Can and Could

Of all the modal verbs discussed above, *can* and *could* have more meanings than other modal verbs. They not only mean possibility in the epistemic sense, but they also mean permission and ability in the deontic aspect (Ney, 1981, p.1; Quirk et al, 1985, p.221-23; Tang, 1992, p.90-93; Frank, 1972, p.96-98; Kuo, 1983, p.528-29; Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca, 1994, p.191-94). In addition to the meanings mentioned above, they have other meanings used not so widely. According to Swan (1995, p.104), “*can* and *could* are both used to talk about ability and possibility, to ask for and give permission, and to make requests and offers. And they can be used in a special way with see, hear and some other verbs to give a kind of ‘present progressive’ meaning”. Bowen and McCreary (1977, p.285) also point out that *can* and *could* “have the meaning of ‘inferred certainty’, but they are only used in the negative form, standing in semantic opposition to affirmative certainty inferred with *must*”. Furthermore, Alexander (1994, p.353) mentions that *can* and *could* have the meaning of suggestion and offer. To sum up, *can* and *could* have the following meanings—possibility, permission, ability, request, offer, and suggestion. Below is detailed discussion of the meanings denoted by *can* or *could*.

Can is used to say whether situations and events are possible theoretically in general¹, and *could* is used to talk about past possibility. Besides, *can* is used to talk about the choices that someone has now or in the future or to suggest opportunities, while *could* is used to make suggestions sound less definite. Please look at the following examples to get a clearer understanding.

- (1) Anyone who wants to *can* join the club.
- (2) It was a place where anything *could* happen.
- (3) There are three possibilities: we *can* go to the police, we *can* talk to a lawyer, or we *can* forget all about it.
- (4) When you are in Spain, you *could* go and see Alex. (Swan, 1995, p.106-07)

Can in example (21) denotes theoretical possibility; *could* in example (22) represents past possibility. Example (23) and (24) are some suggestions or opportunities for the hearer to choose from. They both express a kind of possibility. As for interrogation and negation, *can* is usually used to talk about the logical possibility that something is true or that something is happening as in example (25). Nevertheless, it is not used in affirmative sentences with this meaning. Instead, *could* is used as in example (26).

- (5) ‘There is the doorbell. Who *can* it be?’ ‘Well, it can’t be your mother. She’s in Edinburgh.’
- (6) ‘Where is Sarah?’ ‘She *could* be at Joe’s place.’ (Swan, 1995, p.107)

Besides, *can* and *could* are used in negation to show that the speaker is certain about something not going to happen. In the past tense, *can have + past participle* and *could have + past participle* are used; the latter show lower certainty than the former. Please look at example (27) to (30)

- (7) He *can’t* be serious. (Bowen, & McCreary, 1977, p.285)
- (8) It *couldn’t* possibly rain tomorrow. (Swan, 1995, p.107)
- (9) He *can’t* have said that. (Sinclair, 2000, p.124)
- (10) He *couldn’t* have understood. (Swan, 1995, p.108)

¹ *Can* is usually used to talk about “theoretical” or “general” possibility, which means something is possible through logical reasoning. As for the meaning of the chances that something will actually happen or is actually true at this moment. it is usually expressed by *may*, *might* or *could* (Swan, 1995, p. 106).

Can and *could* used in negation are very strong modality to express the speaker's rather high certainty that something is not going to happen.

Next, *can* and *could* are used to ask for permission; the latter is more polite or formal than the former. (31) and (32) provide good examples. In addition, *can* is also used to give permission, but *could* is not used in this way. That is to say, *can* in the reply of example (31) and (32) can't be replaced by *could*. *Could* suggests respect so it is more natural in asking for permission than in giving it.

(11) 'Can I ask you something?' 'Yes, you *can*.'

(12) 'Could I ask you something, if you are not too busy now?' 'Yes, of course, you *can*.' (Swan, 1995, p.109)

Furthermore, *can't* is used to refuse permission as in example (33) and used to show a desire to get a positive response in interrogative sentences as in example (34).

(13) 'Can I have some more drink?' 'No, I'm afraid you *can't*.' (Swan, 1995, p.109)

(14) *Can't* I stay out till midnight please? (Alexander, 1994, p.341)

In talking about the past, *could* is used to say that someone had permission to do something at any time. That is "general permission" as in example (35). *Could* is not used to talk about permission for one particular action but *couldn't* is. Please look at example (36)

(15) When I was a child, I *could* watch TV whenever I wanted to.

(16) Peter *couldn't* watch TV yesterday because he was naughty. (Swan, 1995, p.109)

The third type of usage for *can* is to talk about present, future, or general ability as in example (37), while *could* is used for general ability to say that someone could do something at any time, whenever he/she wanted as in example (38). However, *could* is not normally used to say that someone managed to do something on one occasion. Instead, *was/were able*, *managed* or *succeeded (in...ing)* is used (Swan, 1995, p.104-05).

(17) I *can* read Italian, but I *can't* speak it. (Swan, 1995, p.104)

(18) She *could* read when she was four. (Swan, 1995, p.105)

Can in example (37) is used to express general ability. *Could* in example (38) is an ability that someone had at a past time.

Can and *could* have the fourth usage. They are used to present request, suggestion, and offer. *Can* is used when one asks people to do things as in example (39). But *could* is often used for making suggestions and it is more polite, more formal and less definite than *can*. Example (40) provides a good example. Both *can* and *could* are used to offer to do things for people as in example (41) (Swan, 1995, p.109).

(19) *Can* you put the children to bed? (Swan, 1995, p.109)

(20) If you haven't got anything to do you *could* sort out your photos. (Swan, 1995, p.109)

(21) *Can* I help you with dishes? (Sinclair, 2000, p.126)

In this section, the usages of *can* and *could* are discussed in detail. There are four different meanings—possibility, permission, ability, and interpersonal usages. In other words, *can* and *could* are used to show that something is possible or impossible. They are used to give permission and express one's ability. Besides, they are also used to make a request or suggestion and to give an offer.

3.2.2 Will and Would

Will and *would* have the meaning of prediction in epistemic and volition in deontic. Besides, they are used to ask people to do things, to ask for help, or to give offers. Also, they can be used to talk about habits and characteristic (typical) behavior (Swan, 1995, p.626-27). These usages are presented in detail in the following discussion.

The basic meaning of *will* and *would* is to express the speaker's prediction about

something in the future. When the person is certain about something or confident of present or future situations, he uses *will* to make predictions as in example (42) and (43). When the person is not so sure about something, he uses *would* to show softer and less definiteness. Please look at example (44). In addition, *would* is often used in indirect speech as in example (45). On the other hand, *will have + past participle* is used to express certainty or confidence about the past, whereas *would* is used to express the idea of “future in the past”—to talk about a past action which had not yet happened at the time the person was talking about as in example (46) and (47) (Swan, 1995, p.626-33).

- (22) He *will* be glad to hear from you.
- (23) She *will* sit talking to herself for hours.
- (24) Sometimes she *would* bring me little presents without saying why.
- (25) The forecast said the next day *would* be fine.
- (26) We can't go and see him now—they *will* have gone to bed.
- (27) In Berlin, he first met the woman whom he *would* one day marry. (Swan, 1995, p.626-33)

Will is also used to express the speaker's willingness to do something, or to express a firm intention, a promise or threat. Please look at example (48) and (49).

- (28) I *will* give you anything you want.
- (29) I *will* kill her for this.

Besides, the negation of *will* is used to talk about unwillingness or refusal as in example (50). *Would* is used to show past willingness and *wouldn't* to show past unwillingness and refusal (Swan, 1995, p.626-33). They are shown in example (51) and (52).

- (30) She *won't* open the door.
- (31) She *would* Hoover, dust and iron, but she didn't like doing windows.
- (32) I asked her very politely, but he *wouldn't* tell me. (Swan, 1995, p.626-33)

What's more, *will* and *would* have interpersonal uses as *can* and *could*. When *will* and *would* are used in interrogative form, they usually serve to make a request, to order, or to make an offer. In requests, *would you* is more polite than *will you*. In offer,

won't you express a pressing meaning. Example (53) is making a request. Example (54) is an order. (55) is an example of polite request and (56) is an example of making an offer.

- (33) *Will* you send me the bill, please?
- (34) All staff *will* submit weekly progress reports.
- (35) *Would* you open the window, please?
- (36) *Won't* you have some more wine?

In this section, the usages of *will* and *would* are discussed in detail. There are three different meanings and functions carried by *will* and *would*: prediction, volition, and interpersonal usages. That is to say, *will* and *would* are used to make prediction about something, to express one's willingness, or to make a request, an order, and an offer. The meanings and functions of *can*, *could*, *will* and *would* are so complicated for students, no wonder they have difficulty using these modal verbs correctly.

3.3 Chinese Modal Verb—Hui

Studies on Chinese modal verbs are mainly from two perspectives: syntax and semantics. From the syntactic perspective, Chinese modal verbs, like English modal verbs, have some grammatical properties similar to both verbs and auxiliary verbs. However, when it comes to contrast to English modal verbs, it is semantics that is emphasized. According to Li and Thompson (1981, p. 182-83), Chinese modal verbs include the following:

yinggai, yingdang, gai	應該，應當，該	ought to, should
neng, nenggou, hui, keyi	能，能夠，會，可以	be able to
neng, keyi	能，可以	has permission to
gan	敢	dare
ken	肯	be willing to
dei, bixu, biyao, bidei	得，必須，必要，必定	must, ought to
hui	會	will, know how

From the list above, it is clear that Chinese modal verb “hui” has the meaning “be able

to” (with the same meaning as *can*) and “will”. In other words, the Chinese modal verb “hui” denotes meanings associated with English modals *will* and *can*. As a result, it confuses students when they are trying to use English modal verbs. The meanings of “hui” are going to be researched.

From the previous studies, “hui” has many different meanings. For example, Tang (1979, p.1) denotes that “hui” has two different meanings—assertiveness and ability. However, Gao (1981, p.45-77) argues that “hui” has at least four meanings—ability, probability, contrary-to-expectation, and tendency. As for Huang (1999, p.53-54), she also points out that “hui” has four different meanings—epistemic, personal deontic (promise), ability, and generic. From the different classifications, the meanings and functions of “hui” are divided into three categories—ability “hui”, assertive “hui”, and tendency “hui” in this study. The different meanings and functions of “hui” are discussed in detail.

The first meaning of “hui” is ability “hui”. In Chinese modal verbs, the ability “hui” denotes physical ability or learned ability or the knowledge of how to do something. Tang (1979, p.3) points out that the ability “hui” only co-occurs with action verbs². For example:

(37)	Ren	hui	shuo	hua
	People	can	speak	language
	人	會	說	話
	People	can	speak	language. (Tang, 1979, p.3)

(38)	Ta	hui	kan-xiang.
	He	can	look appearance.
	他	會	看相
	He can tell the fortunes. (Chang, 2001, p.9)		

Example (57) means that people have the ability to speak and example (58) means the person knows how to tell the fortunes.

² Tang defines action verbs as those denote situations controlled by agents.

The second meaning of “hui” is assertive “hui”. The assertive hui expresses the speaker’s judgment toward the possibility of the occurrence of the event (Chang, 2001, p.8). Gao follows Tang’s definition. For example:

(39) Ming-tian hui chu tai-yang
 Tomorrow can out sun
 明天 會 出 太陽
 It will be sunny tomorrow. (Chang, 2001, p.13)

From example (59), it is obvious that the speaker holds the belief that it will be sunny the next day. However, Wu (1996) sub-classifies assertive hui into two types—future potential and dubitative (Chang, 2001, p.19). Then she further divides future potential into temporal future and prediction. Example (60) expresses temporal future and (61) represents the speaker’s prediction.

(40) Zhang-san ming-tian hui qu xue-xiao
 Zhang-san tomorrow will go school
 張三 明天 會 去 學校
 Zhang-san will go to school tomorrow. (Chang, 2001, p.19)

(41) Ta jiang-lai hui shou-dao bao-ying
 He future will accept retribution
 他 將來 會 受到 報應
 He will³ suffer retribution in the future. (Chang, 2001, p.19)

Although she argues that there is a subtle difference between the temporal future and prediction, they are both related to the possibility that the speaker expects toward the event. As for the dubitative, it expresses the uncertainty toward the possibility of the occurrence of the event, often combining with a question marker. In other words, the difference between future potential and dubitative is the different degree of possibility that the speaker has toward the event. Look at example (62).

(42) Ta ming-tian hui qu xue-xiao ma?
 He tomorrow will go school MA
 他 明天 會 去 學校 嗎
 Will he go to school tomorrow? (Chang, 2001, p.20)

³ In the thesis of Chang (2001, p.19), she uses “may” here. However, *may* and *will* both have the meaning of possibility; the former represents lower possibility than the latter.

Example (62) expresses that the speaker holds an uncertain attitude toward the proposition.

Another meaning of “hui” is personal deontic hui proposed by Huang (1999). Huang emphasizes that this kind of “hui” is discourse-oriented because the speaker is making a promise to the hearer. For example:

- (43) (wo bao-zheng) Ni zhe yang hui gan-mao de
 (I promise) You in this way hui catch a cold DE
 (我保證) 你 這 樣 會 感冒 的
 (I promise) you will catch a cold in this way. (Chang, 2001, p.23)

However, this meaning is close to that of assertive “hui” because making a promise means that the speaker has rather high certainty about his statements. If the speaker doesn’t have a strong belief in his words, he won’t use such a strong term as “wo bao-zheng”. Therefore, this meaning can be classified into assertive “hui”.

Another meaning of “hui” is Contrary-to-expectation hui discussed in Gao (1981). He especially adds this meaning in order to distinguish it from the probability hui. This hui indicates that the speaker presupposes that the opposite of the proposition expressed by the utterance is true (Chang, 2001, p.15).

- (44) Mei xiang-dao ta ming-tian hui lai
 Not think he tomorrow hui come
 沒 想到 他 明天 會 來
 I didn’t expect him to come tomorrow. (Chang, 2001, p.16)

In this example, the speaker was somewhat surprised at his coming because the speaker didn’t expect he would come originally. Therefore, this usage of “hui” is also classified into assertive “hui” because it is nothing but the opposite of the speaker’s assertiveness.

In addition to ability “hui” and assertive “hui”, the third usage of “hui” is the tendency “hui”. Tendency hui means someone is apt to do something or something is apt to happen. It doesn’t have the function of referring to the future. It usually

co-occurs with the degree word “hen” (很) and the deletion of this degree word will cause a probability reading (Chang, 2001, p.16).

(45) Ta hen hui gan-mao
He very hui⁴ catch cold
他 很 會 感冒
He catches a cold easily.

(46) Ji-long hen hui xiz-yu
Ji-long very hui rain
基隆 很 會 下雨
Ji-long is apt to be raining. (Chang, 2001, p.21)

Example (64) shows that the person is apt to catch a cold and example (65) means Ji-long is apt to be raining. If the degree word “hen” is omitted, the meaning of “hui” in both sentences is changed to assertive rather than tendency.

To sum up, Chinese modal verb “hui” has three different meanings and functions. They are ability, assertive, and tendency “hui”. The ability “hui” denotes physical ability, learned ability or the knowledge of how to do something. The assertive “hui” means the speaker believes that something will happen, including personal deontic “hui” and contrary-to-expectation “hui”. The last meaning of “hui” is tendency “hui”, which means that someone tends to do something or something is apt to happen. In the following section, a contrastive analysis of the Chinese modal verb “hui” and English modal verbs, *can*, *could*, *will*, and *would*, will be conducted to show their similarities and differences.

3.4 Contrastive Analysis of English and Chinese Modal Verbs

From the previous sections, the English modal verbs—*can*, *could*, *will*, and *would*—and the Chinese modal verb—*hui*—are discussed respectively. As students have learned that the Chinese equivalent of *can* and *will* is “hui”, they may get

⁴ The tendency hui can't find its counterpart in English, so the word “hui” is still placed here.

confused at distinguishing them. Therefore, in this section, the contrastive analysis of the semantics of these modal verbs is going to be presented.

3.4.1 *Can and Could VS Ability Hui*

Can and *could* mean possibility, permission, ability, request, offer, and suggestion. However, these meanings have different Chinese counterparts. The first meaning—possibility is translated into “ke neng (hui)⁵” (可能會). Look at this example.

(47) (Someone is knocking at the door.) It can be John.

Example (67) is translated into Chinese as in example (68).

(48)	(Yiu ren	zai qiao men)					John
	(Someone	knock at the door)			possibly	be	John
	(有人	在敲門)			有可能	是	John
	(Someone is knocking at the door.) It can be John.						

As for the negation of possibility, the Chinese counterpart is “bu ke neng” (不可能).

(49)	Ta	bu ke neng	shuo guo	na xie hua de
	He	impossible	say	those words
	他	不可能	說過	那些話的
	She can't have said that.			

In example (69), it is found that the negation of possibility in Chinese is “bu ken eng” rather than “bu hui”. “Bu hui” in Chinese means inability. On the other hand, the meaning—permission—is translated into “ke .yi” (可以) in Chinese. For example:

(50)	Mei shih	yiao zuo,	ni	xian zai	ke yi	zou le
	Nothing	to do	you	now	can	go le
	沒事	要做	你	現在	可以	走了
	There is nothing to do; you <i>can</i> leave now					

As for the meanings “request, offer, and suggestion”, their counterparts in Chinese can be “ke yi” (可以) or “yiao bu yiao” (要不要). Look at example (71) and (72).

⁵ Hui may be deleted in different context.

(51) Ni ke yi guo lai bang wo zhuen bei wan can ma?
 You can come help me prepare dinner ma?
 你 可以 過來 幫我 準備 晚餐 嗎?
 Can you come and help me prepare for dinner?

(52) Yào bu yào wǒ bāng nǐ xǐ yī fu?
 Can I help you wash clothes?
 要 不 要 我 幫 你 洗 衣 服
 Can I help you wash the clothes?

From what has been discussed above, it can be concluded that the English modal verbs—*can* and *could*—are not equal to Chinese modal verb “hui” except for the “ability” meaning, which is usually translated into “hui” in Chinese. It means “learned ability, physical ability, or the knowledge to do something”. Consequently, *can* and *could* with the meaning of ability is the “ability hui” in Chinese.

3.4.2 Will and Would VS Assertive Hui

In English modal verbs, *will* and *would* have the following meanings—prediction, volition, requests, offers, and orders. Like *can* and *could*, these meanings have different Chinese counterparts. The first meaning—prediction—is translated into “hui” (會) in Chinese. For example:

(53) Ta hui lai can jia yian hui
 He will come join party
 他 會 來 參加 宴會
 He will come to the party.

Please look at the previous example (43), “She *will* sit talking to herself for hours.” Its Chinese counterpart is shown in example (74).

(54) Ta hui zuo zhe gen zì jǐ shuō huà hǎo jǐ ge xiǎo shí
 She will sit with oneself talk for hours
 他 會 坐著 跟 自己 說話 好幾個小時
 She *will* sit talking to herself for hours.

Both example (73) and (74) represent prediction that the speaker predicts something going to happen.

On the other hand, the meaning—volition—is translated into “hui” (會) or “yuan yi” (願意) in Chinese. (75) and (76) provide good examples.

(55) Wuo	<i>hui/ yuan yi</i>	wui ni	zuo	ren he shih
I	will	for you	do	anything
我	會/願意	為你	做	任何事
I will do anything for you.				

(56) Ta	<i>bu hui/bu yuan yi</i>	kai	men
She	won't	open	door
她	不會/不願意	開	門
She won't open the door.			

In example (75), it is found that either “hui” or “yuan yi” share the same meaning in Chinese. However, example (76) can be translated into “ta bu yuan yi kai men”, indicating that she does not want to open the door, or “ta bu hui kai men”, with the meaning that indicates the prediction that she is not going to open the door. It is obvious that “bu hui” and “bu yuan yi” in example (76) do not have the same meaning. One is prediction and the other is involuntariness. Then the meanings of “offers”, “requests”, and “orders” don't have a consistent translation in Chinese. Look at example (53) shown in the previous section in page 27, “Will you send me the bill, please?” Its Chinese counterpart is shown in example (77)

(57) Qing ba	zhang dan	gei	wuo
Please	bill	give	me
請把	帳單	給	我
Will you send me the bill, please?			

In example (77), *will* here is a polite request so it is hard to find its Chinese counterpart. As for example (54) in page 28, its Chinese counterpart is listed below.

(58) Suo yiu de	gong zuo ren yuan	<i>dou yao</i>	ti chu	mei ge	xin qi de
All	staff	will	submit	every	weekly
所有的	工作人員	都要	提出	每個	星期的
jin du	bao gao				
progress	reports				
進度	報告				
All staff <i>will</i> submit weekly progress reports					

In example (78), *will* here is translated into “dou yao” (都要). It’s an order here. To sum up, *will* and *would* with the meaning of prediction, sometimes with the meaning of volition, are like assertive “hui” in Chinese, which expresses the speaker’s judgment toward the possibility of the occurrence of the event or his willingness to do something.

3.5 Conclusion

From what has been discussed, it can be found that English modal verbs “*can*, *could*, *will*, and *would*” can be translated into “hui” in Chinese. *Can* and *could* with the meaning of ability are similar to the ability hui. And *will* and *would* with the meaning of prediction, sometimes with the meaning of volition, are close to the assertive “hui”. If teachers and the textbooks don’t have a clear definition and explanation about the differences between the ability “hui” and assertive “hui”, students may be confused with them. Then, when students want to use these modal verbs, they may have difficulty distinguishing the ability “hui” from the assertive “hui”. The following chapter will represent students’ difficulty in using these modal verbs.