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### **The Acquisition of Modal Verbs "Hui", "Neng" and "Keyi" by the Sri Lankan Students: An Error Analysis**

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Using modal verbs correctly is a problematic area for the Sri Lankan students in learning Chinese, especially for the students in the primary level. One of the reasons for this is the number of Chinese modal verbs that are complex in their usage. Modal verbs are limited in number and they have characteristics different from the general syntax. "Hui", "neng" and "keyi" in Chinese represent the possibility of the auxiliary verb. Though their usage is similar, they can not be adjudged identical. Many Sri Lankan students use them in a bias prone manner. This paper analyses the semantic and grammatical features of "hui", "neng" and "keyi", studies the errors related to them and recommends suggestions to avoid them. The main method of investigation has been a questionnaire provided to the students learning Chinese. Data were collected from eighty students reading Chinese at Sri Lanka Sabaragamuwa University and the University of Kelaniya. On the basis of the analysis of errors, the author discusses the causes for errors and points out the main reasons for the negative transfer of mother tongue such as learning strategies, teachers and teaching materials, the difficulty of the target language itself...etc. According to the above analysis, some suggestions are put forward from different perspectives, hoping to improve the effectivity of teaching and the learning efficiency of the Sri Lanka students learning Chinese.

**Key words:** effectivity of teaching, error analysis, grammar, language learning, modal verbs