

The Meaning and Usage of Marker “Kai” in the Ingressive Aspect of Xi’an Dialect

Hang Qiao^{1,a,*}

¹*Faculty of Liberal Arts, Northwest University, Xuefu Avenue, Xi’an, China*
a. qiaohang1999@stumail.nwu.edu.cn

**corresponding author*

Abstract: In the Xi’an dialect of China, the auxiliary word “Kai(开)” is often used after a verb or adjective, indicating the beginning of a certain behavior or a certain state, which is a Ingressive Aspect marker. The combination of Verb and “Kai” has two coexisting structures, which is “Verb+ Kai + Object” and “Verb + Object + Kai”. The usage of the two forms are similar but different, and is closely related to the “Verb + Complement + Object” and “Verb + Object + Complement” structures in the ancient Chinese. When adjectives are combined with and “Kai”, only qualitative adjectives can be used. The grammaticalization path of the aspect marker “Kai” was that it was first derived from the notional verb to the use of the complement, thereby developing into the marker of the Ingressive aspect.

Keywords: Xi’an dialect, the ingressive aspect, semantic, predicate-object structure, grammaticalization

1. Introduction

Xi’an is a city which is located in the middle of Shaanxi Province on Guanzhong Plain, with Weinan City in the east, Baoji City in the west, Xianyang City in the north, and Shangluo, Ankang, Hanzhong in southern Shaanxi in the south. Xi’an dialect belongs to the Guanzhong Subdialect of the Central Plains Mandarin.¹

Previous scholars have not studied much on the aspect auxiliary “Kai(开)” in Xi’an and its neighboring dialects [1-4]. Luo’s master’s degree thesis has made a detailed description and analysis of the appearance auxiliary word of “Kai” in Ningxian dialect of Gansu Province, which is a category used to describe the state of action [1]. When Cao described the Tense-Aspect Expression System in Shanxi Linyi dialect, she compared it with some tense expression in Guanzhong dialect, and mentioned the usage of “Kai” in Guanzhong dialect [2]. Meng has briefly described the auxiliary words “Kai” and “Tuo” in the Hui Chinese of Yuanzhou District of Ningxia [3]. Wang has described and analyzed the Ingressive auxiliary word “Kai” in Urumqi dialect [4]. These above objects either belong to the Guanzhong Subdialect of the Central Plains Mandarin, or adjacent to part of it. Similarly, as the Xi’an dialect “Kai”, but of course, there are differences. This paper discusses the usage of the auxiliary word “Kai” as the Ingressive marker in Xi’an dialect, mainly analyzes its structure and

¹ The Xi’an dialect involved in this paper does not include the language spoken by the Hui people in urban Xi’an.

meaning, and speculates grammaticalization path of “Kai”. If appropriate, the use of “Kai” in the surrounding counties and cities of Xi’an will be used as a reference.

2. The Semantics of “Kai”

The pronunciation of “Kai(开)” in Xi’an dialect spelling in IPA is [k^hɛ²¹]. As a aspect auxiliary word, “Kai” is often weakened and read as a soft tone [k^hɛ⁰]. Lv’s *The Modern Chinese Eight Hundred Words* summarized that “Kai” have the usage of Main Verb and Directional Verb. When people use “Kai” as a Directional Verb, there is a usage for “verb + Kai [+noun]”. This structure indicates the beginning of the action, but also means “not being constrained”, such as “一见到亲人他就哭开了(He started to burst into tears at the sight of his relatives)” and “掉开雨点了(It’s starting to rain)” [5]. It can be seen that the use of “Kai” after the general verb as a trend complement has been used in Mandarin. In Wang’s *Xi’an Dialect Dictionary*, the ninth meaning of “Kai” is used after verbs or adjectives, which can indicates expansion or extension, such as “话传开快得很(Words are spreaded quickly)”; or it can also mean to start an action and carry on, such as “货装开咧(It’s start to load goods)” and “天热开咧(It’s starting to get hot)”. The second usage mentioned here in *Xi’an Dialect Dictionary* is “Kai” as an aspect auxiliary word to indicate the beginning of an event or state [6]. Liu pointed out that the Ingressive Aspect which is an aspect that highlights the starting point of a event without specifying its end point [7]. This paper holds that the auxiliary word “Kai” in Xi’an dialect is used after a verb or adjective to indicate the beginning of a certain action or state, so from the grammatical meaning it expresses, this paper can be sure that “Kai” is a Ingressive marker.

3. Structure and Significance

In Xi’an dialect, adding “Kai” after a verb or adjective means the beginning appears in both simple sentences and complex sentences. Taking “Kai” used after a verb as an example, the structure in a single sentence is “V + Kai + Lie “². “V+Kai” must coexist with the modal “Lie(咧)” at the end of the sentence, which is equivalent to “Le₂(了₂)” in Putonghua³, means “already”; In complex sentences, “V+Kai” appears as a clause in complex sentences. The following is the specific use of “Kai”:

3.1. Verb + “Kai”

“V + Kai” means starting a behaviour or an action which can be continued, so any verb that can be used before “Kai” must has a continuous meaning. The basic format of the “V + Kai” is “V + Kai + Lie(咧)”, which mainly has the following four common forms of expression:1

Table 1: Common forms of “verb + Kai”.

(1)	V + Kai + Lie	Example 1) 他两个打开咧 The two start fighting.
(2)	V + Kai + O + Lie	Example 2) 干开活咧 It’s start to work.
(3)	V + O + Kai + Lie	Example 3) 下雨开咧 It’s starting to rain.
(4)	O + V + Kai + Lie	Example 4) 货搬开咧 It’s start to move goods.

The difference between the above four forms mainly lies in the existence or absence of the object and its position. The form (1) has no object, because the object can be omitted in the particular context,

² In all structures mentioned in this paper, Verb is abbreviated to V, Object is abbreviated to O, and Complement is abbreviated to C.

³ In modern Chinese, there are two “Le(了)”. Le₁ is a modal word, and Le₂ is an auxiliary word for “already”.

and this omitted object can also be filled out. The object of form (4) is at the beginning of the sentence, and its essence is the Infinitive Form of (2) and (3). That is, the object is advanced to the beginning of the sentence as the topic, which plays the role of emphasizing the Patient. Among the above four forms, the main difference between form (2) and form (3) is that the object is located between the predicate verb and the “Kai”, or after the “Kai”. According to the investigation, these two forms now coexist in Xi’an dialect, and the use is roughly the same, but there are still subtle differences. By making sentences for “V+Kai+O” and “V+O+Kai” specifically, we can analyze the similarities and differences between the two.

Table 2: Use of “V Kai O” and “VO Kai”.

	V + Kai + O	V + O + Kai
Group1	1a) 下开雨咧。Xia kai yv lie.	1b) 下雨开咧。Xia yv kai lie.
Group2	2a) 她一学开习，就啥都不管咧。 Ta yi xue kai xi, jiu sha dou bu guan lie.	2b) *她一学习开，就啥都不管咧。 Ta yi xue xi kai, jiu sha dou bu guan lie.
Group3	3a) 他看开书咧么？Ta kan kai shu lie me?	3b) 他看书开咧么？Ta kan shu kai lie me?
Group4	4a) 我们还没有吃开饭呢。Wo men hai mei you chi kai fan ne.	4b) *我们还没有吃饭开呢。Wo men hai mei you chi fan kai ne.

From the above examples, it is noticeable that the two forms in use follow the following principles: First, the two forms of “V + Kai + O” and “V + O + Kai” have the same conceptual meaning and can be used in a single sentence to represent a statement, as shown in the first set of examples in the table above. However, if it is to be used in complex sentences, it can only be used in the “V + Kai + O” form, as shown in the second set of examples in the table 1 and 2, the example 2b is not accepted. Second, in the interrogative sentences, “Verb + Kai” is often used to express as “yes or no”, in which case both two forms can be used, as shown in the third set of example sentences in the table 1 and 2. Third, “Verb + Kai” can be used in negative sentences to express an event which hasn’t happened yet, in which case only the “V + Kai + O” form can be used, as shown in the fourth set of examples in the table 1 and 2.

In addition, through comparing the dialects of Xi’an urban areas and the surrounding counties and cities during the investigation⁴, the author found that when the two forms of “V + Kai + O” and “V + O + Kai” are both available, people in Xi’an urban area use “V + Kai + O” more, while the using frequencies of the two forms in the surrounding areas are almost equal. As mentioned above, the use of “Kai” in *The Modern Chinese Eight Hundred Words* as an auxiliary word in Putonghua is only “V + Kai + O” form. Therefore, although these two forms coexist in Xi’an dialect, we can preliminarily guess that the two forms appeared successively in ancient Chinese, and the “V + O + Kai” form still used in dialects today should be the Archaic Usage that is not influenced by Putonghua.

“V + Kai + O” and “V + O + Kai” come from the ancient Chinese predicate-complement structure, which can correspond to the non-separated predicate-complement structure “Verb + Complement + Object” type (VCO for short) and separated predicate-complement structure “Verb + Object + Complement” type (VOC for short) respectively. Jiang and Cao have been pointed out that from the time of appearance, most scholars believe that the separated structure (VOC) is earlier than the non-separated structure (VCO). The latter is formed on the basis of the former by object shifts or verb contractions. After the Song and Yuan dynasties, the VOC structure began to be gradually used less

⁴ The author compared the use of the two forms by issuing questionnaires to the native speakers of Guanzhong dialect, and collected 30 valid samples, including 15 samples from Xi’an city and 15 samples from other cities around Xi’an city. Other surrounding cities include Xianyang, Weinan, Shangluo, Tongchuan and Baoji.

and even declined in the language [8]. In the modern Chinese Mandarin, basically only the VCO type was used. However, in some dialects, the VOC structure still exists, such as:

5a) 烧其酥, 拆尿出 Boil the crisp, remove and urinate out (Shanghainese)

5b) 洗脸完了 finished washing face (Guangxi vernacular)

5c) 打其煞 hit it with the evil spirit (Ningbo dialect)

Hence, this point of view can also be used to explain the new and traditional level of “V + Kai + O” and “V + O + Kai” in Xi'an dialect. The older level “V + O + Kai” is a legacy of the VOC type predicate-complement structure in the dialect after further grammatizing.

3.2. Adjective + “Kai”

In Xi'an dialect, the meaning of “adjective + Kai” is to indicate the beginning and continuation of a state or condition of certain items, which is a special usage. Its particularity is firstly reflected in the difference with Putonghua, that is, Putonghua does not use the adjective before “Kai” to indicate the beginning of the state; Secondly, the particularity is reflected in the similarities and differences with other surrounding the Zhongyuan mandarin. For example, the Ningxian dialect in Gansu Province, which is also belong to the Guanzhong Subdialect of the Central Plains Mandarin, also has the structure of “adjective + Kai”. But from Cao, as can be seen in the time expression system of Linyi dialect in Shanxi Province (Linyi dialect belongs to the Fenhe Subdialect of the Central Plains Mandarin), there is no this usage [2]. Therefore, it can be seen that “adjective + Kai” is not a common structure in the Mandarin Areas.

Although adjectives can be used with aspect marker “Kai” in Xi'an dialect, not all adjectives can be so. First, above all, only mono-syllable and two-syllable qualitative adjectives can be used in this structure, and state adjectives cannot be entered. For example, when people want to express the meaning “the weather starts to get hot”, they can say “天热开咧”, but not “天燥热开咧”; when people want to express “flowers start to get red”, they can say “花红开咧”, but not “花鲜红开咧”. Secondly, the overlapping of adjective or adjective with suffix can not enter this format. For example, people can say “天暖和开咧 the weather is start to get warm” and “天黑开咧 it is start to get dark”, but we cannot say “天儿暖洋洋开咧” and “天乌漆嘛黑开咧”.

As to why only qualitative adjectives can enter the “adjective + Kai” structure, while state adjectives and special forms of adjectives cannot enter the structure, this is determined by the grammatical features of different kinds of adjectives. First of all, qualitative adjectives have both distinction and dynamic meaning, and the structure of “adjective + Kai” is to distinguish the difference between the later state and the previous state, so qualitative adjectives can be used to express this semantic. Secondly, the combination of adjectives and “Kai” is used to indicate a certain state, but the state adjectives itself is the word describing the state of things, so if the state adjectives are used in the structure, it will produce the repetition and redundancy in semantics; Similarly, the overlapping and suffixes of adjectives also have the meaning of highlighting the state, if placed in the structure of “adjective + Kai”, the language expression is not concise enough.

“Adjective + Kai” is more influenced by Putonghua than “verb + Kai”. The survey found that many younger native speakers have gradually given up using the “adjective + Kai” structure, instead, they use the Putonghua verb “Kai shi(开始)” to express the meaning of “start” in Xi'an dialect, such as “花开始红咧 flowers start to be red” and “天儿开始暖咧 the weather starts to warm”.⁵ It can be seen that the promotion of standard language has a strong impact on Xi'an dialect, and the using

⁵ The author investigated the use of “adjective + Kaiing” by issuing questionnaires to the native speakers of Guanzhong dialect, and collected 35 valid samples, including 15 from Xi'an city and 20 from other cities around Xi'an. Among them, 29 samples chose “start” rather than “Kai”.

frequency of “adjective + Kai” is lower than the predicate-complement structure mentioned above, so the impact seems to be greater.

4. The Synammization of “Kai”

“Kai” is originally a verb, and its basic meaning as a content word is “to open something”, that is, “to make that which is closed no longer close” [9]. The grammaticalization path of the Ingressive marker “Kai” in Xi’an dialect is similar to that of the Ingressive marker “Qi” in Jin dialect of northern Shaanxi. Xing Xiangdong, when discussing the auxiliary words of Shenmu dialect in northern Shaanxi, said-- The basic meaning of “Qi 起” was to indicate the upward movement, acting as the object of the Directional Complement and the preposition “Wang 往”. for example, “Bei qi 背起”, “Zhuo qi 捉起”, “Wang qi tai 往起抬”, “Wang qi fu 往起扶” and so on. On this basis, “Qi” was further vacuumed into a complement representing the result of the action, and “Qi” had the meaning of completion at this time. The completion of one action is the beginning of another. By the further extension of “result meaning”, which means “completion”, “Qi” can be placed after the verb, adjective or between the verb-object, indicating the Ingressive [10]. Similarly, the auxiliary word “Kai” in Xi’an dialect was also derived from the verb to serve as a complement, and then the usage was expanded to serve as a result complement, and finally further vacuumed to the auxiliary word of the Ingressive. The completion meaning of “Kai” in its role as a result complement is crucial, because this step of evolution highlights the connotation of the preceding and the following, and thus develops into the starting aspect, which indicates that the previous state ends and the next state opens.

5. Conclusions

In general, this paper mainly describes the use and significance of the aspect mark “Kai” in Xi’an dialect, focuses on the coexistence of “V + Kai + O” and “V + O + Kai”, as well as the principles to be followed by “adjective + Kai”, and briefly deduces the grammaticalization path of “Kai”, which is helpful for the author to further understand the evolution of “Kai” and use of other aspect marks. Of course, there are some problems in this paper. Because of the limitations, it cannot be generalized into the whole field. It is hoped that further research can be done in the future.

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