Asian Journal of Technology and Applied Sciences
ISSN: 2301-xxxx (online) | IF: 10.01 | Vol: 1, issue 1
Available: http://asiansciencejournal.org

THE SEMANTIC OPPOSITION OF THE PARTICLES 才 AND 就

Bobonorov Abdurauf
PhD Candidate, Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages
rauff1388@mail.ru

Abstract: The article systematically analyzes the semantic opposition between the particles 才 **(cái)** and 就 **(jiù)** in Modern Chinese. It is demonstrated that these two particles consistently form a polar semantic opposition in terms of time, quantity, condition, emphasis, and their combination with the sentence-final particle 了: 才 denotes a point that is lower than or later than the expected norm, whereas 就 denotes a point that is higher than or earlier than the expected norm. The unified scalar basis of this opposition and its incomplete symmetry (asymmetry) are discussed, and the correspondence of their meanings in the Uzbek language is examined.

Keywords: Chinese language, particles 才 and 就, semantic opposition, scalar operator, subjective quantity.

Introduction

才 (cái) and 就 (jiù) are among the most frequently used function words of Modern Chinese, and they are often regarded as a single pair (close to a minimal pair): occurring in the same syntactic position, they frequently convey opposite meanings. The aim of the present study is to give a systematic description, along several dimensions, of the semantic opposition between these two particles and to identify its single underlying basis. The study employs comparative-semantic and descriptive methods.

This pair's semantic opposition has been studied separately in Chinese linguistics. Shi Xiyao showed the relation of "opposition and complementarity" of the meanings of 才 and 就 (as well as 都)[53]; Bai Meili formalized this opposition as a decrease in value (减值) and an increase in value (增值)[54]. In Western linguistics, Lai unified the two particles on the basis of a single scalar mechanism, locating their difference in the direction of deviation[55].

才 and 就 both belong to the 副词 (adverb) class, occur before the predicate, and are focus-sensitive scalar operators. Both mark a change in the truth value of a proposition relative to an expected point. It is precisely this common basis that makes their comparison possible: the difference lies not in the type of operator but in the direction of deviation from the expected norm.

In the temporal meaning the opposition is most clearly manifested: 才 evaluates the event as occurring later than expected, while 就 evaluates it as occurring earlier than expected. Compare: 他八点才来 — "He came only at eight o'clock" (late) and 他八点就来

[53]史锡尧. 副词"才"与"都"、"就"语义的对立和配合 // 世界汉语教学. — 1991. — 第 1 期. — 第 18–22 页.

[54]白梅丽. 现代汉语"才"和"就"的语义分析 // 中国语文. — 1987. — 第 5 期. — 第 390–398 页.

[55]Lai H.-L. Rejected expectations: the scalar particles cai and jiu in Mandarin Chinese // Linguistics. — 1999. — Vol. 37, No. 4. — P. 625–661.

Asian Journal of Technology and Applied Sciences
ISSN: 2301-xxxx (online) | IF: 10.01 | Vol: 1, issue 1
Available: http://asiansciencejournal.org

了 — “He already came at eight o’clock” (early). Although the time marker is the same (八点), 才 and 就 give it opposite subjective evaluations.

When occurring with quantity, 才 decreases the value (减值) and expresses a subjective small quantity, whereas 就 increases the value (增值) and expresses a subjective large quantity: 他才十岁 — “He is only ten years old” ↔ 他一个人就吃了五碗 — “He alone ate five bowls.” This opposition is explained within the framework of subjective-quantity (主观量) theory[56]. Chen Xiaohe shows that the forward (前指) or backward (后指) orientation of the particle relative to the quantity determines the type of subjective evaluation[57].

In conditional sentences the opposition manifests itself in the type of condition: 才 marks a necessary condition and occurs in the 只有 … 才 pattern (只有努力，才能成功 — “Only through effort can one succeed”), while 就 marks a sufficient condition and occurs in the 只要 … 就 pattern (只要努力，就能成功 — “As long as one makes an effort, one will succeed”). Thus, 才 occupies the pole of necessity and 就 the pole of sufficiency.

In the emphatic meaning too, the opposition is preserved. 才 reinforces a counter-expectational (反预期) negation: 我才不去呢 — “I am absolutely not going!” (rejecting the interlocutor’s assumption). 就, by contrast, expresses firm affirmation or identity: 这就是我要的 — “This is exactly what I want”; 我就不去 — “I just won’t go” (stubborn firmness). These meanings have been compared in detail by Chen Liming[58].

The opposition is also observed at the grammatical level: 就 combines freely with the sentence-final perfective 了 (他就来了), whereas 才 usually rejects such a combination (他才来了 is unnatural). Yue Zhongqi shows the “opposite distribution” of 了 in 才 and 就 sentences and its connection with aspectual meaning[59]. This phenomenon is directly related to the “incomplete/late” semantics of 才 and the “complete/early” semantics of 就.

All the oppositions across the above dimensions are connected to a single mechanism. According to Lai’s analysis, both 才 and 就 mark deviation from the expected norm (rejected expectation); they differ only in the direction of deviation: 才 — below/late relative to the norm, 就 — above/early. This opposition is consistently explained within the framework of focus-background theory[60] and the force-dynamics approach[61]. At the same time, the

[56]周守晋. “主观量”的语义信息特征与“就”、“才”的语义 // 北京大学学报 (哲学社会科学版). — 2004. — 第 41 卷, 第 3 期. — 第 121–131 页.

[57]陈小荷. 主观量问题初探——兼谈副词“就”、“才”、“都” // 世界汉语教学. — 1994. — 第 4 期. — 第 18–24 页.

[58]陈立民. 也说“就”和“才” // 当代语言学. — 2005. — 第 1 期. — 第 16–34 页.

[59]岳中奇. “才”、“就”句中“了”的对立分布与体意义的表述 // 语文研究. — 2000. — 第 3 期.

[60]Hole D. P. Focus and Background Marking in Mandarin Chinese: System and Theory behind cái, jiù, dōu and yě. — London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004.

[61]姜毅宁, 陈振宇. 力动态视角下“就”和“才”的语义对比研究 // 辞书研究. — 2023. — 第 3 期.

Asian Journal of Technology and Applied Sciences
ISSN: 2301-xxxx (online) | IF: 10.01 | Vol: 1, issue 1
Available: http://asiansciencejournal.org

opposition is not fully symmetric: Wang Qun shows the bidirectionality and asymmetry in the semantic change of 才 and 就[62] — for example, 就 can sometimes express both large and small quantity, whereas 才 is mainly restricted to small quantity.

We present the opposition in summarized form in the table below.

Table 1. Opposition of the particles 才 and 就 across dimensions

Dimension	才 (cái) — below/late relative to the norm	就 (jiù) — above/early relative to the norm
Time	late: 他八点才来 — "only just came"	early: 他八点就来了 — "already came"
Quantity	few (减值, subj. small): 才十岁 — "only ten years old"	many (增值, subj. large): 就吃了五碗 — "ate five bowls"
Condition	necessary condition: 只有…才 — "only if …"	sufficient condition: 只要…就 — "as long as …"
Emphasis	counter-expectational negation: 我才不去呢 — "absolutely not going"	firm affirmation/identity: 这就是… — "this is exactly …"
With 了	rejects: 才 … 了 unnatural	natural: 就 … 了 occurs freely
Scalar direction	below/late relative to the expected point	above/early relative to the expected point

Since Uzbek is an agglutinative language, the 才/就 opposition is rendered in it not by a single pair of particles but by various means. On the temporal dimension, 才 is most often expressed by "endigina," -gina, while 就 is expressed by "allaqachon," "darhol," -(i)boq. On the quantitative dimension, 才 is expressed by "atigi/bor-yo'g'i," and 就 by "...ning o'ziyoq/hatto"; on the conditional dimension, 才 is rendered by the pattern "faqat …-sagina," and 就 by "…-sa bo'lgani." This asymmetry requires preserving the opposite subjective-evaluation component in translation and often leads to a partial loss of the expectational meaning.

Conclusion

The analysis shows that the particles 才 and 就 form a regular semantic opposition along the dimensions of time, quantity, condition, emphasis, and combination with 了. This opposition has a single scalar basis: both particles mark deviation from the expected norm and differ only in the direction of deviation — 才 below/late, 就 above/early. However, the opposition is not fully symmetric, which requires further research. In Uzbek this polar relation is rendered by scattered means, and therefore the 才 / 就 opposition remains a promising topic for comparative linguistics and translation pragmatics.

[62]王群. 试论"才"和"就"语义变化的双向性和不平衡性 // 语言科学. — 2005. — 第 4 卷, 第 6 期. — 第 18–26 页.

REFERENCES

1. Lai H.-L. Rejected expectations: the scalar particles cai and jiu in Mandarin Chinese // Linguistics. — 1999. — Vol. 37, No. 4. — P. 625–661.
2. Lai H.-L. Rejected expectations: the scalar particles cai and jiu in Mandarin Chinese: PhD dissertation. — Austin: University of Texas at Austin, 1995.
3. Hole D. P. Focus and Background Marking in Mandarin Chinese: System and Theory behind cái, jiù, dōu and yě. — London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004.
4. Biq Y.-O. From focus in proposition to focus in speech situation: cai and jiu in Mandarin Chinese // Journal of Chinese Linguistics. — 1988. — Vol. 16. — P. 72–108.
5. Biq Y.-O. The Semantics and Pragmatics of cai and jiu in Mandarin Chinese: PhD dissertation. — Ithaca: Cornell University, 1984.
6. Li Ch. N., Thompson S. A. Mandarin Chinese: A Functional Reference Grammar. — Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.
7. 王还. 就和才 // 汉语学习. — 1956. — 第 12 期.
8. 史锡尧. 副词“才”与“都”、“就”语义的对立和配合 // 世界汉语教学. — 1991. — 第 1 期. — 第 18–22 页.
9. 白梅丽. 现代汉语“才”和“就”的语义分析 // 中国语文. — 1987. — 第 5 期. — 第 390–398 页.
10. 陈小荷. 主观量问题初探——兼谈副词“就”、“才”、“都” // 世界汉语教学. — 1994. — 第 4 期. — 第 18–24 页.
11. 岳中奇. “才”、“就”句中“了”的对立分布与体意义的表述 // 语文研究. — 2000. — 第 3 期.
12. 周守晋. “主观量”的语义信息特征与“就”、“才”的语义 // 北京大学学报 (哲学社会科学版). — 2004. — 第 41 卷, 第 3 期. — 第 121–131 页.
13. 陈立民. 也说“就”和“才” // 当代语言学. — 2005. — 第 1 期. — 第 16–34 页.
14. 王群. 试论“才”和“就”语义变化的双向性和不平衡性 // 语言科学. — 2005. — 第 4 卷, 第 6 期. — 第 18–26 页.