# The Meaning and Usage of the Aspect Auxiliary *Ei* in Shunde Dialect

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**Abstract:** Aspect is one of the important concepts of grammatical category, and it is the way of observing the events in the course of time. The expression of aspect category may vary greatly in different languages or dialects. Common forms of expression are affix, clitic, aspect auxiliaries, and aspectual marks. Yue dialect is one of the important types of Chinese dialects, and Shunde dialect is an important branch of Yue dialect. From the perspective of comparison with Putonghua and Yue dialects, this article explores the aspectual meaning of the aspect auxiliary EI in Shunde dialect. The six kinds of aspect are summarized: Perfect aspect; Perfective aspect; Realization aspect; Completive aspect; Partial Performance aspect; Continuous aspect. Then, this paper analyzes its aspectual usage according to its syntactic environment, pragmatic function, and level of grammaticalization. On the one hand, the obvious commonality is that with regard to the usage and meaning of the first six aspectual categories, the aspect auxiliary EI in Shunde dialect can roughly correspond to ZUO in Guangzhou dialect. Moreover, the two dialects can roughly correspond to the aspect auxiliary LE in Mandarin in terms of usage and meaning of the first six aspectual categories. On the other hand, the significant difference is that the expression of continuous aspect in Shunde dialect is much more complicated than Guangzhou dialect and Mandarin. Specifically, in the Shunde dialect, the continuous aspect auxiliary EI must appear when expressing static continuance, but the continuous aspect auxiliary ZHU does not necessarily appear; in Guangzhou dialect, ZHU can only be used; in Mandarin, the continuous aspect auxiliary ZHE must be used. The complexity of the dialects and Mandarin in term of aspectual system illustrates the complex relationship between grammatical categories, grammatical means, and forms of expression: these three are not simple one-to-one relationships. That is, that a grammatical category uses a grammatical means and form to express is almost non-existent. Since there is no morphological change in Chinese in the strict sense, Chinese tends to express a grammatical category with more than one lexical item or construction, or a lexical item or construction expresses more than one grammatical category. The similarities and differences between aspect auxiliary EI in Shunde dialect, ZUO in Mandarin and Le in Mandarin represent the diversity of means and ways of expressing aspect in Chinese. This study demonstrates the identity between the difference and commonality of the grammatical system of Chinese dialects.

**Keywords:** Shunde Dialect, Aspect Auxiliary, *Ei*, Meaning, Usage

## 1. Introduction

Shunde District is located in the southern part of Guangdong Province and is affiliated to Foshan City. It is 32 kilometers away from Guangzhou and Yue dialect is Popular used. [1].

This article studies the meaning and usage of the aspect auxiliary EI in Shunde dialect from the perspective of comparison with Mandarinand and Guangzhou dialect with analysis of its syntactic environment, pragmatic function, and level of grammaticalization. Using field survey methods, the example sentences are from "The Ascept and Appearance of Verbs" in "The Ascept of Verbs" edited by Zhang Shuangqing. [2] The speaker is a native male from Shunde. Luo Jinbiao, born in 1967 in Luosha Village, Lecong Town, Shunde District, Foshan City, Guangdong Province., speaking Cantonese and not so fluent Mandarin, has lived in the place of birth since childhood. His parents and spouse are authentic Shunde. Thus, this native speaker can ensure the authenticity of the pronunciation.

## 2. Perfect Aspect

Perfect aspect indicates that the event or act has occurred and completed before the base point time, and its impact continues to the base point time [3]. In Shunde dialect, EI is used as a perfect aspect auxiliary, which is equivalent to ZUO in Guangzhou dialect.

The grammatical meaning of the aspectual category refers to the way and state of event or act during a certain span. Here, "span" refers to the internal time structure, which runs counter to the concept of "external point of time"[4]. Therefore, its external point of time can be the present, the past, or the future, such as: (01) for the past, (02) for the present, and (03) for the future.

(01) ŋ ɐ ta lan ɐ t ɐ ɐ k un.

I broke-EI a bowl.

'I broke a bowl.'

(02) Ky jiɐt jiɐt ə ∫ɪk ɛ tou t'an ə t∫'yt xy ə la.

He every day has-EI breakfast and then goes out.

'He has breakfast and then goes out every day.'

(03) ŋɔ sœŋ ∫ɪk ɛ man xak t'an p'an ɕin t∫i uan xy.

I want to after having-EI dinner go back.

'I want to go back after having dinner.'

(04) tɪt p'an tʊŋ ma t'ɔ ə tʊŋ ɛ lə.

The dishes are frozen-EI.

'The dishes are frozen.'

EI in (04), which is added after the verb DONG (frozen), indicates the change of the status of the event and is equivalent to LE-1 in Mandarin; LE, which is added at the end of the sentence, indicates the realization of the state of events and is equivalent to LE-2 in Mandarin. Since LE-1 and LE-2 are the same in written form and in pronunciation, they are merged together and placed at the end of the sentence [5]. While in Shunde dialect, perfect aspect uses realization aspect uses LE. That is, this two aspect auxiliaries differ in written form and pronunciation.

The (04) sentence explains another characteristic of EI: the perfect auxiliary EI has different origin from the realization auxiliary LE.

## 3. Perfective Aspect

There is a slight difference between perfective aspect and perfect aspect. The former focuses on the actual termination point of the event, while the latter focuses on the result of the completed event.

Perfective aspect refers to that the event has its boundness as long as it has occurred [6]. EI in the construction of "Verb -EI + time complement" is a perfective auxiliary, and the time complement points out the actual termination time of the event, thus illustrates the boundness of the event:

(05) Ky kɔŋ ɛ pɔn jiɐt ə m t∫i ky kɔŋ mɐt iɛ.

He talking-EI for a long time but didn't make it clear.

'He has been talking for a long time but didn't make it clear.'

(06) ŋɔ xɐp ɛ jiɐt kɐn ə sɛŋ ɛ lɔk.

I after sleeping-EI for a while woke-EI up.

'I woke up after sleeping for a while.'

Guangzhou dialect still uses ZUO and Mandarin uses LE-1. The usage and function of the two are consistent with those of Shunde dialect.

## 4. Realization Aspect

It focuses on the achievement of the result of the action [7].

The structure of "Verbs+ complement" is used for realization aspect in Shunde dialect and the complement specifies the achievement of the result of the action.

EI must be added after "Verbs+ complement" to indicate realization aspect. But EI must be followed by this structure, otherwise it can only indicate perfect aspect or perfective aspect. Such as:

(07) ɕiu mɪŋ la t∫y ɛ ɕiu wɔŋ, m pei ky uan ʊk k'i.

Xiao Ming stop-ZHU-EI Xiao Wang from letting him go home.

'Xiao Ming stopped Xiao Wang from letting him go home'

Guangzhou dialect still uses ZUO and Mandarin uses LE-1. The usage and function of the two are consistent with those of Shunde dialect.

EI in Shunde dialect is used for the three types of aspect mentioned above, which is a grammatical means because it has lost its lexical meaning.

## 5. Completive Aspect

Instead of indicating the mere completion of an event, completive aspect emphasizes the whole completion. In Shunde dialect it can be expressed as "Verb-EI", but "Verb-WAN" or "Verb-SHAI " is better:

(08) lei sɐɪ ɛ/sa ∫am mɛn a？

You finished-EI/SHAI the laundry？

'Have you finished the laundry?'

Therefore, "Verb-EI" is not a typical form of completive aspect.

Completive aspect originally evolved from the verb of WAN. WAN in the construction of "Verb-WAN" still retains a certain real meaning, SHAI has a more vague meaning. Therefore, although both WAN and SHAI are vocabulary means, the degree of grammaticalization of SHAI is higher than WAN.

In addition, added after verbs, DIAO in Mandarin is a completive complement with the word meaning of "to remove". In Shunde dialect, there is no corresponding vocabulary means, and the aspect auxiliary "欸" EI is still used to correspond to DIAO. See (09):

(09) t ɕ'ɐt ɛ xak pan tit ty ky ə.

Please eras-EI on the blackboard those words.

'Please erase those words on the blackboard.'

Guangzhou and Shunde dialect have the same usage and functions in completive aspect: both can use ZUO, preferably Verb-WAN or Verb-SHAI. The same case in Mandarin: Verb-LE1, Verb-WAN.

# 6. Partial Performance Aspect

Partial performance aspect, based on the observation of the whole event, indicates the action or the event is done one part, with another remaining. In Shunde dialect it still uses the auxiliary EI to mark the compled part.

(10) ŋɔ i kiŋ ma ɛ tit ka ʃy ə lə, tʃʊŋ tʃɸn pɐi ma tit t'im.

I bought-EI some furniture and am planning to buy some more-TIAN.

'I have bought some furniture and am planning to buy some more.'

The completion of the remaining part is marked by the auxiliary TIAN, added at the end of the sentence. The original meaning of TIAN is "to add" and it is extended as "to supplement". Therefore, TIAN in sentence (10) still retains a certain real meaning. However, as TIAN cannot be added after a verb, it cannot be regarded as a complement, but a subtle aspect auxiliary.

Guangzhou dialect still uses ZUO and Mandarin LE-1. The usage and function of the two are consistent with those of Shunde dialect.

# 7. Continuous Aspect

According to PENG Xiao-chuan [9], verbs are divided into dynamic verbs and static verbs according to actionability. Therefore, the aspectual meaning of continuous aspect is correspondingly divided into these two types: the continuance of action and the maintenance of state. Some scholars call them dynamic continuous aspect and static continuous aspect relatively [10].

Firstly, in Mandarin, both types use ZHE as a continuous aspect auxiliary after verbs. For example, (11) a expresses dynamic continuous aspect and (11) b static one.

(11) a Wo Pao-ZHE Bu. (Pao (run) is a dynamic verb)

'I am running.'

b Ni Ai-ZHE Ta. (Ai (love) is a static verb)

'you love him.'

ZHE is a grammatical means because of lost of lexical meaning.

In Shunde dialect, these two types are expressed by ZHU which is added after verbs. Because ZHU (solidity) also retains a certain lexical meaning, it is considered an aspect auxiliary with a low degree of grammaticalization.

Unlike Mandarin, however, these two types in Shunde dialect are limited by a specific syntactic environment: either ZHU is adjunct to a clause, or the verb in the sentence is preceded by a modifier. See (12):

(12) a ŋɔ p'au ʧy bou tɐŋ lei. (p'au (run) is a dynamic verb)

I running-ZHU and waiting you.

'I'm running and waiting for you.'

b lei tʃʊŋ ɔi ʧy ky. (ɔi (love) is a static verb)

You still love-ZHU him.

'You still love him.'

However, it cannot be expressed like this:

* ŋɔ p'au ʧy bou.

I running-ZHU.

* lei ɔi ʧy ky.

You love-ZHU him.

The same is true of the difference between Guangzhou dialect and Mandarin.

Moreover, there is a distinction between continuous aspect and perfect aspect in Mandarin. The former uses ZHE, such as (13) a and the latter uses LE, such as (13) b; while in Shunde dialect, both are marked by the perfect aspect auxiliary EI, such as (13) c:

(13) a Men Kou Ji-ZHE San Ge Ren.

At the door is crowding-ZHE a lot of people.

'A lot of people is crowding at the door.'

b Men Kou Ji-LE San Ge Ren.

There are a lot of people crowding-LE at the door.

'There are a crowd of people at the door.'

c mun xɐu pɪk ɛ xou tɔ jiɐn.

At the door is crowding-EI a lot of people. / There are a lot of people crowding-EI at the door.

'A lot of people is crowding at the door.' / 'There are a crowd of people at the door.'

Similarly, Guangzhou dialect also distinguishes between continuous aspect and perfect aspect: the former uses ZHU and the latter uses ZUO. While in Shunde dialect, both static continuous aspect and perfect aspect uses the perfect aspect auxiliary EI. Thus, the speaker insists that (14) does not use ZHU:

(14) a k'ɐu ʃɛk xak ɛ tit ty.

on the stone are carved-EI some characters.

'There are some characters carved on the stone.'

However, ZHU is also used to mark continuous aspect in some occasions, probably due to the influence of Guangzhou dialect. Therefore, in Shunde dialect, EI and ZHU are mixed used in continuous aspect. Even so, the usage of ZHU in Shunde dialect is very different from that in Guangzhou dialect: in Shunde dialect, the perfect aspect auxiliary EI must be added after ZHU n order to highlight the aspectual meaning of ZHU, while Guangzhou dialect does not need to add EI. For instance:

(15) P'ʊk t'œŋ kʷa ʧy ɛ P'ʊk wa. (Shunde dialect)

on the wall is hanging-ZHU-EI a picture.

'There is a picture hanging on the wall.'

P'ʊk t'œŋ kwa ʧy P'ʊk wa. (Guangzhou dialect)

on the wall is hanging-ZHU a picture.

'There is a picture hanging on the wall.'

# 8. Conclusion

The aspect auxiliary EI in Shunde dialect can represent six types of aspectual meanings, which roughly correspond to the aspect auxiliary ZUO in Guangzhou dialect with the same usage and meaning, but continuous aspect in Shunde dialect is obviously more complicated than that in Guangzhou. Similarily, ZUO and EI in these two dialects roughly correspond to the aspect auxiliary LE in Mandarin, but continuous aspect of the two are more complicated than that in Mandarin.

By comparing Shunde dialect with Guangzhou dialect and

Mandarin, we can find out the interactive relationship between grammatical categories, means and forms. An aspectual category can be represented by different lexical forms. In turn, a lexical form can represent more than one aspectual category. And because it might have different levels of grammaticalization in different aspectual categories, one lexical form can serve as lexical means or grammatical means. Therefore, we must observe grammatical phenomenon from a comparative perspective, and devote ourselves to studying the similarities and differences between dialects and mandarin language, and to further illustrating the diversity of Chinese grammar.

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