The Grammaticalization of “dao” in Mandarin Chinese

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Abstract—An examination to dao (arrive) in different syntactic environments helps to reinforce the multi-functionality of Chinese verb dao and the grammaticalization of it. Examples from Chinese suggest that 1) dao has changed to a preposition in Dao-NP-VP when V is lai (come) or qu (go); 2) dao is still a verb in V-Dao, the main function of which is directional complement or resultative complement; 3) dao has grammaticalized to a complement marker in V-Dao-C if dao precedes a predicate structure. It is found that dao has developed from a notional word to a functional word, but it has not totally grammaticalized to be a typical functional word and is still on the process of further grammaticalization.

Keywords—dao; grammaticalization; multi-functionality; path

I. INTRODUCTION: AIMS AND ORGANIZATION

Grammaticalization is subject to the influence of the overall structural change of a language in a particular period of time. In this article, we explore this theoretical issue by analyzing the multi-functionality of Chinese verb dao and the grammaticalization of it. Dao is originally an independent verb, which means arriving. Having been used in Chinese with high frequency, dao owns more multi-functional roles besides independent verb. In Eight Hundred Words of Modern Chinese Language, Lv Shuxiang[6][15] defines that dao is both an independent verb and directional verb. Three usages can be found in the Contemporary Chinese Dictionary (the seventh edition): verb, adjective, and noun[13][306]. Dao may change over time into more functional roles such as a verb and preposition[11][1]-10, 4][44][45], an auxiliary[5][30]-36, and a complementary marker[6][30]-61.

The functional role of dao is controversial in the academic circle, so this paper investigates the multi-functionality of the Chinese verb dao from lexical source to various functional roles from a grammaticalization perspective. The following questions will be concerned:

(1) Is dao in Dao-NP-VP a preposition?
(2) Is dao in V-Dao a verb or a preposition?
(3) Is dao in V-Dao-C a complement marker?

This paper is organized into five sections. Section 2 gives some background to the concept of grammaticalization. Section 3 defines the functional roles of dao in three syntactic environments, offering the answers to three questions above, and introduces a new usage of dao, while Section 4 sums up the previous discussion, focusing on describing a grammaticalization path for dao. Section 5 provides a conclusion.

II. GRAMMATICALIZATION: DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS

The term ‘grammaticalization’ goes back to Meillet[7][3] and is traditionally understood as a process whereby a lexical item is reanalyzed as a grammatical morpheme or construction. This syntactic reanalysis is accompanied by a semantic reinterpretation of a very specific, lexical meaning into a more general, grammatical one. The relevant process is referred to as semantic bleaching, erosion, or reduction, or as desemanticization etc.[2][579] Later, Givon places great emphasis on the dynamic process by suggesting ‘today’s morphology is yesterday’s syntax.’[1][43] Today, many scholars question the classic definition and hold that the study of grammaticalization should be widened. Therefore, they have redefined the term ‘Grammaticalization refers to that part of the study of language that focuses on how grammatical forms and construction arise, how they are used and how they shape the language.’[9][1] All these definitions may have differences in expression, but they both confirm that grammaticalization belongs to the diachronic evolution process of language.

As for the motivations of grammaticalization, scholars hold different views in their works. The main relevant elements are semantic changes, pragmatics, psychology, language contact, cognition, and change of syntactic environment, etc.

III. THE GRAMMATICALIZATION OF CHINESE VERB DAO

A. Verb —> Verb-directional —> Preposition

In this part, we try to answer the first question: Is dao in Dao-NP-VP a preposition? Let’s read the following two sentences:

(1) a. 我们强烈要求学校去参观。
   We strongly demand a visit to school.
   (People’s Daily, 2006-01-28)

b. 两位“妈妈”则坚持每天到学校看望孩子。
   Two mothers insist on visiting their children at school every day.
   (People’s Daily, 2006-01-28)

1 Verb-directional refers to the former verb of conjunction predicate structure.
Dao in (1a) is followed by the verb qu (去)，while dao in (1b) is followed by the verb kan wang (看望). We need to define whether dao in (1a) and (1b) is still a verb, or it has been changed to a preposition.

1) The functional role of dao in Dao-NP-VP
Shi Yuzhi,[11-10] Zhang Wangxi,[15-11] and Tong Guobin[14,94] regard dao as a preposition in some syntactic environments. Here’s an example listed by Shi Yuzhi.

(2) a. 他到北京了。
   He has arrived in Beijing.

b. 他到北京去了。
   He has gone to Beijing.

Shi Yuzhi regards that dao in (2a) is a verb and in (2b) a preposition. When dao appears simultaneously with the strong moving verbs like lai and qu, the displacement meaning of the whole sentence will be expressed by lai (来) and qu. Meanwhile, the directional characteristic of dao is enhanced, but the displacement meaning is reduced. So, dao has been grammaticalized to a preposition.

Zhu Dexi[17,174] defines preposition as follows: 1. A pure preposition can only be used in conjunction predicate structure, and it can’t be the only predicate in one sentence; 2. A preposition can’t be repeated and be followed by le (了), zhe (着) and guo (过). Dao in (2b) comply with the definitions given by Zhu. We agree with Shi Yuzhi’s view that dao in (2a) is a verb and in (2b) a preposition.

2) Motivation of grammaticalization
For most of the time, grammaticalization is first induced by the change of syntactic position of a full word. Functional words are mostly grammaticalized from verbs and adjectives. A verb in Chinese is usually put in the structure of SVO as a predicate. In this structure, only one verb acts as predicate, which is the core constituent of the sentence, so the action or state this verb expresses is real and notional. When the verb is no longer in the structure of SVO, it is not the only verb in the sentence, because another verb replaces its position to be the predicate of the sentence. This verb whose property of verb gets weak is no longer the main verb in the sentence (like dao in 2b), but used as a secondary verb in serial verb construction. When a verb frequently used as a secondary verb, its grammatical position will be gradually fixed, its meaning will become more and more abstract. If it keeps going, its grammatical function will change from the constituent of the predicate to the modifier or complement of the sentence. The further bleaching of word leads to the grammaticalization of verb, from lexical unit to grammatical unit. So, in the process of grammaticalization, the change of syntactic position and the influence of the structure is very important.

Here’s an example provided by Tao Zhenwei[12,155-157];

(3) a. 副汉中议张鲁
go to Hanzhong and launch an attack towards Zhang Lu

b. 副学校去开会
go to school and have a meeting

Tao Zhenwei claims that dao in (3a) has been degraded to a secondary verb and in (3b) has been grammaticalized to a function word. Two verbs in serial verb construction express the time sequence of actions. The meaning of dao in (3a) has been bleaching, which can be understood as the preposition wang (往), because the phrase dao Hanzhong does not mean that they have arrived in Hanzhong, but Hanzhong is the destination of their action. When dao’s grammatical position is fixed, the function of dao is reanalyzed and the serial verb construction is changed to adverbial head noun structure. The grammaticalization keeps going, dao in (3b) is no longer the constituent of the predicate, but the modifier of the sentence.

The conclusion can be drawn for defining the functional role of dao in Dao-NP-VP. When dao appears simultaneously with lai and qu in one sentence, dao is placed before the verbal phrase, emphasizing the grammatical features of preposition. Dao has changed to be a preposition in (1a). When dao appears simultaneously with other verbs, it hasn’t been fully bleaching, but still remains the meaning of motion, expressing the syntactic function of verbs like dao in (1b).

B. Verb-direction

1) Controversial argument towards dao in V-Dao
Scholars hold different views towards the functional roles of dao in V-Dao. Some claim that dao in V-Dao is a preposition[15]; here V, the main verb of a sentence, can be replaced by most verbs, and dao, a preposition, refers to the ending point of a certain action. Liu Ziyu[10,52-53] argues that dao in V-Dao is a verb with two reasons: 1. By checking the meaning of dao in historical documents and mandarin Chinese, when V in V-Dao is a walking verb, dao is a verb expressing the real action. Dao means to reach a place, especially at the end of a journey. 2. The construction V-Dao-O can be changed to predicate-complement structure by adding de (得) or bu (不). For example, when inserting de or bu into the phrase pa dao shu shang (爬到树上), we are certain that both pa de dao shu shang and pa bu dao shu shang are acceptable and understandable. Expanding a construction by adding de or bu is

2 Verb-direction refers to the latter verb of conjunction predicates structure.
an important characteristic of predicate-complement structure. We agree with Liu Ziyu that *dao* in V-Dao is a verb.

Huang Borong and Liao Xudong argue that verb-direction expresses the direction of motion. Zhu Dexi defines that directional complement is a complement acted by verb-direction and is read in a light tone. Then, we come to a conclusion that *dao* in (4a) is regarded as verb-direction, in (4b) as directional complement and in (4c) as resultative complement.

2) Motivation of grammaticalization

The change of syntactic relations causes the change of semantic meaning, leading the notional words to grammaticalize, and finally play the functional role of a construction. So the change of semantic meaning is one of the important factors of grammaticalization. In the process of grammaticalization, a notional word grammaticalizes into a function word, generally because it usually appears in some grammaticalization, a notional word grammaticalizes into a function word, generally because it usually appears in some grammaticalization, a notional word grammaticalizes into a function word, generally because it usually appears in some grammaticalization.

Let’s examine *dao* in the following two syntactic positions: V\(_{\text{walking}}\)-Dao+place and V\(_{\text{non-walking}}\)-Dao+place.

\[(5)\ a. \ldots, \text{need to pick up the package in town.} \quad \text{(People’s Daily, 2018-05-26)}\]

b. \ldots, Father was sent to one of Dezhou’s big hospital in time.

\text{(People’s Daily, 2018-06-06)}

\text{Dao in (5a) is a verb-direction and the verb \textit{pao} (run) is a walking verb. The notional verb \textit{pao} expresses the motion meaning, while \textit{dao} points out the motion direction of the agent, but the displacement meaning is still remained. \textit{Dao} in (5b) has been grammaticalized. \textit{Dao} doesn’t point out the motion direction for agent, but the ending point of the patient. Thus, \textit{dao} has been grammaticalized from verb-direction to directional complement.}

Metaphor is a cognitive approach of using one concrete concept to understand another abstract concept. The cognitive principles determine that the direction of metaphoric transfer is from the concrete to the abstract. When metaphorization enters into grammaticalization, it also motivates unidirectionality in change. Heine et al. argue that there is unidirectionality in metaphorical mappings as follows:

\[\text{Person > Object > Space > Time > Quality}\]

In following constructions, the meaning of *dao* gradually becomes more abstract from top to bottom, which can demonstrate the drive of metaphorical mapping in the grammaticalization.

\[(6)\ a. \text{V-Dao + place} \quad \text{I went back to Beijing.} \quad \text{(People’s Daily, 2006-01-28)}\]

b. \text{V-Dao + time}
expresses the degree or state of V-Dao, dao will be syntactically closer to V, and finally the construction is reanalyzed to [V dao+ C]. Here’s some instances.

(8) a. 我把自己逼到没有退路。
I let myself in such life without a turning back.  
*(People's Daily, 2017-04-14)*

b. 爱树爱到骨子里
frantically love trees  
*(People's Daily, 2017-03-03)*

c. ……危险到一只乌鸦过就会要了阿汤的命。
It is dangerous to such an extent that Tang will be killed if a bird hits him.  
*(People's Daily, 2015-07-24)*

According to Zhang Yisheng’s criterion discussed above, dao in (8a, 8b) can be followed by le, which means that dao is a verb, remaining the motion function and tense aspect property. C in (8c) is a predicate structure. Dao in (8c) attaches to the preceding verb, which can’t be followed by le, so its transitivity is reduced and has been totally grammaticalized to a complement marker.

D. Resultative Complement → Preposition

1) A Buzzword: gei dao (给到)
This part introduces a new expression which is popularly used recently. Let’s take a look at the following examples:

(9) a. 我这边给到平台的资金成本要达到30%。
The cost of funding I gave to the platform reaches to 30%.
*(People's Daily, 2018-05-21)*

b. ……, 能够给到别人一种健康的感觉。
It can give others a healthy feeling.  
*(People's Daily, 2018-05-21)*

Gei has the arriving meaning of dao, so dao is the component of semantic redundancy, and then becomes a preposition.

2) Motivation of grammaticalization
Language contact is one of the motivations of grammaticalization, especially on new grammaticalization phenomenon. This contact includes connections between language and another language or dialects of a language itself. Language contact can enrich language expression. In order to enrich language expression, people will use language creatively to generate the grammaticalization. Dao in (9a, 9b) expresses more vividly, which is often used in Cantonese, but now emerges in Mandarin. Dao in gei dao has been grammaticalized from resultative complement to preposition.

IV. THE MULTI-FUNCTIONALITY OF DAO AND ITS GRAMMATICALIZATION PATH

A. The Multi-functionality of dao
Through the changing process from the lexical verb in Pre-qin dynasty to the complement marker in Chinese structure V-Dao, dao has experienced a series of semantic change and grammaticalization process. Answers to three questions I proposed at the beginning of this article are: 1. Dao in Dao-NP-VP becomes a preposition; 2. Dao in V-Dao is a verb; 3. Dao in V-Dao-C is a resultative complement when C is a noun phrase; Dao in V-Dao-C is a complement marker when C is a predicate structure. There is not only one grammaticalization path for dao because dao hasn’t been totally grammaticalized to preposition, but it has been gradually developed to a function word.

B. The Grammaticalization Path of dao
According to what we have discussed, we reconstruct three grammaticalization path of dao in synchronic perspective as follows:

The first path: Verb → Verb-direction (the former verb of conjunction predicate structure) → Preposition.

The second path: Verb → Verb-direction (the latter verb of conjunction predicate structure) → Directional complement → Resultative complement → Complement marker

The third path: Verb → Verb-direction (the latter verb of conjunction predicate structure) → Directional complement → Resultative complement → Preposition

V. CONCLUSION

It is widely acknowledged in the general grammatical theory that the cline is one of the grammaticalization features. The development of language can be described by the process of grammaticalization, moving in the direction of “word > function word / enclitic morpheme > suffix”. The grammaticalization of dao is not the same direction, for example, dao as a complement marker is not grammaticalized from the function word. The preposition function and complement marker function of dao are formed because of the different developing direction of lexical verb. In the process of grammaticalization, the motivations are the change of syntactic environment, semantic change, metaphor mapping, and reanalysis.

REFERENCES


