

# What is *ke* and if so how many?

## The Persian modal particle *ke* and its diachronic development

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In this paper, I will argue that the polysemous Persian conjunct and relative pronoun *ke* (PIE \*k<sup>w</sup>ís/\*k<sup>w</sup>ós) has acquired the additional function of a modal particle in colloquial Persian. This stands in direct contrast to previous accounts which have rendered the particle a focus particle or an emphatic marker (Oroji and Rezaei 2013; Sadat-Tehrani 2002), claims that can be refuted based on the examples and restrictions of *ke* presented here. Due to their impalpable nature, modal particles (henceforth MPs) and discourse markers (DMs) were long neglected in linguistic research but have increasingly gained traction in recent years. While both MPs and DMs express the attitudes of the speaker towards a proposition - for which they have also been called "Würzwörter" ('words that add spice') in German - and do not change its truth value, MPs differ from DMs in that they are often well integrated in a phrase and have scope over only the proposition they appear in. The MP at hand *ke* can both appear after the topic as well as at the right periphery. Akin to the German MP *doch*, the basic properties of *ke* can be summarized as follows: ADVERSITY, (also sometimes referred to as CORRECTION (Döring 2016)), UNCONTROVERSIALITY (also described as COMMON GROUND/BACKGROUND) (Grosz 2016; Diewald 2006), and what I refer to as RELEVANCE/SALIENCE, such that:

$[[ke]](p) = p$  and the current question  $q$  stands in conflict with  $p$  which the speaker renders uncontroversial/part of the common ground but is retrieved for purposes of salience (cf. (Grosz 2016))

Consider the following examples: Person A: Shall I make lamb curry for Ali? Person B:

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|---|--|
| (1) Ali <i>ke</i> gusht nemikhore.<br>Ali <i>ke</i> meat eat:NEG.3SG.PRS<br>(But) Ali doesn't eat meat. | (2) Ali isst doch gar kein Fleisch.<br>Ali eat.3SG <i>doch</i> no meat.<br>(But) Ali doesn't eat meat. |
|---|--|

In the example given, *ke* highlights the adversity of  $p$  toward the current question  $q$  (eating a dish containing meat) and that person B thinks  $p$  should be known to A (common ground) but that  $p$  was apparently not salient enough or momentarily forgotten (relevance). In a quest to answer the hitherto unanswered question of how *ke* might have acquired the function of a MP, I will propose a diachronic development from a conjunction through a process of grammaticalisation along the path of (referential function) → (text-connective function) → (discourse function) as suggested by Diewald (2006) based on (Traugott 1995, 1999). I will argue that this development was especially facilitated by the deictic function of conjuncts as described by Hentschel (1986) and Diewald (2006) and the coordination of Persian subjunctive sentences in the form [A co][B] (Haspelmath 2004).

As shall become clear, the existence of an Old Turkish emphatic particle *är-ki* seems to seriously challenge this theory at first as it has been argued that the Turkish modal particle *ki* is derived from this Old Turkish particle (Karakoc 2010) thereby insinuating that the Persian MP is in fact borrowed from Turkish and not vice versa. However, this theory can be dismissed on the basis of further, comparative evidence from the North-Afghan Badākhshāni dialect of Persian as well as due to the strong anchoring of second position MPs in other Indo-Iranian languages such as Pashto *kho*, Urdu *to* and Marathi *tār* (Bayer 2018; Deo 2022). Not only are these particles almost identical in function to *ke* but, coincidentally, are all also used as conjuncts denoting "but" and "then"/"so" respectively. This strongly suggests similar paths of grammaticalisation triggered perhaps by an Indo-Iranian predisposition for this kind of development. Even if one is to dismiss a development of MPs *out of* conjuncts, one cannot deny the intricate relationship that exists between the two, a matter worthy of further investigation.

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