

Chinese Grammar:才(cái) vs 就(jiù)

<https://youtu.be/855Y5Q0tNPE>

Dialogue

Nǐ kuài diǎnr, Zhōu Jié lún de yǎn chàng huì 7 diǎn jiù kāi shǐ le.

A: 你 快点儿, 周 杰 伦 的 演 唱 会 7 点 就 开 始 了。

Hurry up, Jay Chou's concert is going to start at 7 o'clock.

Bù jí, xiàn zài cái wǔ diǎn, hái zǎo ne!

B: 不 急, 现 在 才 五 点, 还 早 呢!

No hurry. It's only 5 o'clock.

(bàn xiǎo shí hòu)

(半 小 时 后)

(After half an hour)

Wǔ diǎn bàn le, wǒ men yào chí dào le.

A: 五 点 半 了, 我 们 要 迟 到 了。

It's half past five, we're going to be late.

Yǎn chàng huì qī diǎn cái kāi shǐ, wǒ men hái yǒu shí jiān ne.

B: 演 唱 会 七 点 才 开 始, 我 们 还 有 时 间 呢。

The concert is at 7 o'clock, so we still have time.

Content

	①	
Time Words + 才 + V + (O)	VS	Time Words + 就 + V + (O) + 了
later than expected		earlier than expected

First, when “cái” and “jiù” are placed after the time words, “cái” indicates that something happened or will happen later than the speaker expected; while “jiù” indicates that something happened or will happen earlier than the speaker expected often with a “le” at the end of a sentence.

【例句】

Yǎn chàng huì 7 diǎn cái kāi shǐ.

演 唱 会 7 点 才 开 始。

The concert will start at 7 o'clock.

Yǎn chàng huì 7 diǎn jiù kāi shǐ le.

演 唱 会 7 点 就 开 始 了。

The concert started at 7 o'clock.

Wǒ men bā diǎn bàn shàng bān, tā jiǔ diǎn cái dào.

我 们 八 点 半 上 班, 他 九 点 才 到。

We (usually) start to work at 8:30, but (today) he didn't arrive until 9:00.

Wǒ men bā diǎn bàn shàng bān, tā bā diǎn jiù dào le.

我 们 八 点 半 上 班, 他 八 点 就 到 了。

We (usually) start to work at 8:30, but he arrived at the office at 8:00 today.

Tā sì shí suì cái jié hūn.

他 四 十 岁 才 结 婚。

He didn't get married until he was 40 years old.

Tā èr shí suì jiù jié hūn le.

他 二 十 岁 就 结 婚 了。

He got married when he was only 20 years old.

Dà lì yòng le liǎng ge xiǎo shí cái xiě wán zuò yè.

大力用了两个小时才写完作业。

It took Dali two hours to finish his homework.

Xiǎo shēng yòng le 15 fēn zhōng jiù xiě wán zuò yè le.

小生用了15分钟就写完作业了。

It only took Xiaosheng 15 minutes to finish his homework.

Zhè běn shū tā huā le sān tiān cái dú wán.

这本书他花了三天才读完。

It took him three days to finish reading this book.

Zhè běn shū tā huā le yì tiān jiù dú wán le.

这本书他花了一天就读完了。

It only took him one day to finish reading this book.

②

才+(V)+Num.+M.W+N.,
a small quantity, etc.

就+(V)+Num.+M.W+N.
a large quantity, etc

Second, “cái” and “jiù” can be used in a sentence together indicating comparison. In this case, “cái” indicates a smaller quantity, extent, or a lower ability; while “jiù” indicates a larger quantity extent, or a higher ability.

【例句】

Nǐ mǎi le shí běn shū cái huā 200 kuài, wǒ mǎi le yì běn shū jiù huā le 200 kuài.

你买了十本书才花200块，我买了一本书就花了200块。

You only paid ¥200 for ten books, but I paid ¥200 for just one book.

Tā men yí ge xué xiào cái 50 ge xué sheng, wǒ men yí ge bān jiù 50 ge xué sheng.

他们一个学校才50个学生，我们一个班就50个学生。

They only have 50 students in the whole school, but we have 50 students in just one class.

Tā cái shí suì jiù huì shuō wǔ mén yǔ yán le.

他 **才** 十岁 **就** 会 说 五 门 语言 了。

Although he is only 10 years old, he can speak five languages.

③

就+(V)+Num.+M.W.+N.: only

就+N. +V. : only

Third, “jiù” can express “only” in common sentences.

【例句】

Wǒ jiù chī le bàn wǎn fàn.

我 **就** 吃 了 半 碗 饭。

I only ate half a bowl of rice.

Jīn tiān jiù 5 dù.

今 天 **就** 5 度。

The temperature today is only 5 degrees.

Zhè jiàn shì jiù tā zhī dào.

这 件 事 **就** 他 知 道。

Only did he know it.

④

S. + **才** + V.P vs S. + **就** + V.P + (了)

just happened be about to happen

Forth, “cái” can also indicate that something happened just now, while “jiù” indicates that something is about to happen.

【例句】

Wǒ men cái chī guo fàn.

我 们 才 吃 过 饭。

We had the meal just now.

Wǒ men yí huìr jiù chī fàn.

我 们 一 会 儿 就 吃 饭。

We're going to eat in a few minutes.

Wǒ cái dào jiā, gāng fàng xià shū bāo.

我 才 到 家, 刚 放 下 书 包。

I just got home and put down my school backpack.

Wǒ jiù dào jiā le, zài děng yí huìr.

我 就 到 家 了, 再 等 一 会 儿。

I'm almost home, wait a moment.

⑤

Fixed phrases

zhǐ yǒu cái

Pattern: 只 有…… 才……

only if

【例句】

Zhǐ yǒu duō shuō, nǐ de zhōng wén cái néng tí gāo.

只 有 多 说, 你 的 中 文 才 能 提 高。

Only if you speak more can you improve your Chinese.

Zhǐ yǒu nǔ lì cái néng zuò hǎo gōng zuò.

只 有 努 力 才 能 做 好 工 作。

Only if you work hard can you do it well.

rú guǒ jiù

Pattern: 如 果…… 就……

if...then...

【例句】

Rú guǒ yǒu kùn nán jiù gěi wǒ dǎ diàn huà.

如 果 有 困 难 就 给 我 打 电 话。

If you have any difficulties, just call me.

Rú guǒ nǐ men yǐ jīng bù xiāng'ài le, jiù fēn shǒu ba.

如 果 你 们 已 经 不 相 爱 了, 就 分 手 吧。

If you no longer love each other, maybe it's time to go separate ways.

zhǐ yào jiù

Pattern: 只 要…… 就…… as long as

【例句】

Zhǐ yào nǐ nǚ lì xué xí, jiù huì yǒu jìn bù.

只 要 你 努 力 学 习, 就 会 有 进 步。

As long as you study hard, you will make progress.

Zhǐ yào xià yǔ, tā xīn qíng jiù huì bù hǎo.

只 要 下 雨, 她 心 情 就 会 不 好。

she is in a bad mood whenever it rains.

yī jiù

Pattern: 一…… 就…… as soon as

【例句】

Mā ma yí dào jiā jiù qù zuò fàn le.

妈 妈 一 到 家 就 去 做 饭 了。

Mom started cooking right after she got home.

Lǎo shī yì lái dà jiā jiù bù shuō huà le.

老 师 一 来 大 家 就 不 说 话 了。

Everyone stopped talking when the teacher came in.

Conclusion

才	就
Time Words+才+V+(O): later than expected	Time Words+就+V+(O)+了: earlier than expected
才+(V)+Num.+M.W+N.: earliness, a small quantity, etc. cái wǔ diǎn 才 五 点 cái shí ge rén 才 十 个 人 cái sān ge yuè 才 三 个 月	1. When jiù is used in comparison sentences, 就+(V)+Num.+M.W+N.: a larger quantity or a higher ability, etc. 2. When jiù is used in common sentences, 就+(V)+Num.+M.W+N.: only
才+N. ×	就+N. +V. : only
S.+才+V.: just happened	S.+就+V. +了: be about to happen
zhǐ yǒu cái 只 有…… 才…… only if	rú guǒ jiù 1. 如 果……就…… if…then… zhǐ yào jiù 2. 只 要……就…… as long as yī jiù 3. 一……就…… as soon as