

## GO and COME Revisited: What Serves as a Reference Point?

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### 0. Introduction

This paper develops an analysis of GO/COME (English *go/come* and their counterparts in other languages) which improves on existing analyses. I propose that GO/COME refer to a contextually provided *set* of individuals, which I call *RP* (reference point(s)), rather than to a specific entity that serves as the “deictic center”, and that GO requires that no member of the RP be at the goal (of the described motion) while COME requires that some member thereof be at the goal.

The proposed analysis makes empirically correct predictions where existing analyses fail, and further allows us to identify the possible range of cross-linguistic variation in terms of two implicational hierarchies: (i) the person hierarchy for RP inclusion: **1st < 2nd < 3rd**, and (ii) the relevance hierarchy for deictic verbs: **an RP member’s location at the utterance time < an RP member’s location at the event time < an RP member’s “home base”**.

### 1. Previous Analyses of GO/COME

There have been two major approaches to the semantics of deictic motion verbs: (i) the classical approach based on the concept of “deictic center”, and (ii) the person-based approach along the lines of Fillmore (1997). This section provides a brief review of the two approaches and point out their empirical problems.

#### 1.1. Motion from the Center vs. Motion to(ward) the Center

It has been commonly believed that GO describes motion *from* the deictic center, whereas COME describes motion *to(ward)* the deictic center (Talmy 1975, 2000; Oe 1975, among others; cf. Wilkins and Hill 1995). While the deictic center is understood to match the speaker by default, it can be “shifted” to some other entity too, as in (1).

- (1) a. Can I come visit *you*?
- b. John was preparing a meal. Then, the cat came to *him*.

The “deictic shift” is subject to various restrictions (e.g., topicality), and some restrictions are language-specific; for example, when a situation is described where the speaker is moving toward the addressee, the addressee can be the “center” in English but not in Japanese (see section 4.1). This line of analysis suffers from at least two problems:

(i) *Asymmetry between go and come*:

In the following pair of English sentences, the one with *come* is preferred to the one with *go*. In other words, “shifting” of the deictic center to the addressee is preferred.

(2) Can I {a. ??go/b. come} visit you?

This is already intriguing, as under the classical analysis the pattern where the speaker and the deictic center match must be the conceptually most unmarked. Data like (3) pose an even more serious problem.

(3) Will you {a. \*go/b. come} visit me?

If it is possible for the deictic center to be shifted from the speaker to the addressee, (3a) must be acceptable. The classical analysis cannot explain why shifting is preferred in (2) but is blocked in (3).

(ii) *Multiple reference points*:

In a sentence like (4b), the described motion is neither toward the speaker nor a particular individual that serves as the deictic center.

(4) At least two students {a. went/b. came} to talk to three professors.

It is not clear how the classical analysis can deal with such cases.

## 1.2. Fillmore’s Person-based Analysis

Fillmore (1997, among others) characterizes the distribution of English *go* and *come* as follows:

- (5) a. *Come* indicates motion towards {the location at the utterance time, the location at the event time, or the “home base”} of {the speaker or the addressee}.
- b. *Go* indicates motion toward a location distinct from the speaker’s location at the utterance time.

These generalizations make correct predictions for a wide range of data, including the following:

(6) a. Can you {go/come} to the station tomorrow to pick me up?

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- b. John {went/come} to my office [= the speaker's "home base"] last week, but I was out of town.

Although Fillmore's analysis of *go* and *come* has been highly influential in the literature, it has certain problems too:

(i) *Motion toward the addressee:*

Fillmore's generalizations predict that when the speaker is the moving entity and the addressee is at the goal (at the event time or the utterance time), *go* and *come* would be equally acceptable. However, in this configuration, generally *come* is strongly preferred to *go* (Nakazawa 1990).

- (7) a. (on the phone) Is it hot there? I hope it will be cooler by the time I {come/\*go}.
- b. (on a street) Should I {come/\*go} and help you tomorrow?  
(Nakazawa 1990:103; the judgments are Nakazawa's)

(cf.) I {came/went} to you last night. Don't you remember it? (Oe 1975:44)

Similarly, in many contexts, *come* is preferred to *go* when the moving entity is not a speech-act participant (SAP) and the addressee is at the goal point (Oe 1975).

- (8) a. John will {come/??go} to help you tomorrow.
- b. Did Mr. Yamada {come/\*go} to you yesterday?  
(Oe 1975:43,88; the judgments are Oe's)

(cf.) She'll {go/come} there to meet you. (Fillmore 1997:88)

The preference for *come* in such configurations (which is affected by various factors<sup>1</sup>) does not follow from Fillmore's generalizations.

(ii) *Third person narrative:*

As illustrated in (9), it is possible for *come* to describe a motion toward a place where neither the speaker nor the addressee is located.

- (9) (**Situation:** Neither the speaker nor the speaker is or was at Bill's place.)  
John {a. went/b. came} to Bill's place.

To deal with such data, Fillmore (1997:99) adds: "[c]ome also indicates, in discourse in which neither speaker nor addressee figures as a character, motion toward a place taken as the subject of the narrative, toward the location of the

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<sup>1</sup> Oe (1975) observes that when a motion toward the addressee is described, the preference for *come* increases when (i) the sentence is an interrogative or imperative rather than a declarative (*ibid.*:85ff), (ii) the moving entity contacts or intends to contact the addressee (*ibid.*:43), and/or (iii) the sentence describes a future event rather than a past event (*ibid.*:44).

central character at reference time [(event time)], or toward the place which is the central character's home base at reference time". Thus, for Fillmore's analysis, it is crucial to separate third person narrative, where "neither speaker nor addressee figures as a character", as a special case for the use of *go/come*. However, the distinction between "(third person) narrative" and "non-narrative" does not seem to be a crucial factor for the use of *come* exemplified in (9). In sentences (discourses) given in (10), for example, reference to the speaker is made with a first-person pronoun (i.e., the speaker "figures as a character"), yet the occurrences of *come* are not particularly awkward, which describe motion toward a location distinct from the speaker's and the addressee's location.

- (10) a. It seems that John *came* to my sister's place yesterday.  
b. Yesterday, John *came* to Mary's place. He might come to my place as well.  
c. A lot of guests *come* to Mary's place, unlike my place.

Also, in a sentence like (4b) above, there seems to be no particular individual that serves as the "central character" of the narrative or the place that "is taken as the subject of the narrative", and thus it is not clear how the use of *come* is licensed.

### 3. An Alternative Analysis: Reference Point as a Set

The two lines of analyses reviewed above share the assumption that the appropriateness of *go/come* is determined by the location(s) of a particular, single individual, or at most two (i.e., the speaker and the addressee). Instead, I propose that deictic verbs refer to a contextually salient *set* of individuals: RP (reference points). Semantically, an RP can be understood as part (a coordinate) of the context of utterance in the Kaplanian sense; accordingly, deictic verbs can be treated as kinds of indexicals, on a par with *I, here, now*, etc. (see Oshima 2006a,b).

With this setting, the pragmatic meanings of English *go* and *come* can be formulated as follows:

- (11) a. *Go* requires that no member of the RP be at the goal at the utterance time.  
b. *Come* requires that (i) there be some member of the RP at the goal at the utterance time or at the event time, or (ii) the goal be the home base of a member of the RP (at the event time).

The selection of members of the RP is subject to the following, person-based constraints:

- (12) Constraints on the RP in English:  
a. The speaker is always a member of the RP.

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- b. It is preferred for the addressee to be a member of the RP as well. The degree of preference is affected by various factors (see fn.1); under certain conditions, the inclusion of the addressee in the RP is almost obligatory (e.g. *Can I {??go/come} see you?*).
- c. A non-SAP (third person) entity can be chosen as a member of the RP if it is discourse-salient. Inclusion of a non-SAP entity is marginal, however, when the speaker or the addressee is the theme (i.e. the moving entity or group) or a member thereof.

These conditions correctly predict the asymmetry between *go* and *come* illustrated in (2)/(3) above, and the preference for *come* in a configuration where the addressee is at the goal point (e.g., (7)/(8)). They also correctly predict that a sentence like the following is marginal.

- (13) **(Situation:** Neither the speaker nor the addressee is at John's office at the utterance time, or will be there at the event time.)  
?\*{a. I/b. You} should come to John's office.

Note also that there is no limit on the number of members of the RP. In (4b), for example, all individuals who satisfy the property of being a professor are taken to be members of the RP (i.e., RP = {speaker, addressee, professor<sub>1</sub>, professor<sub>2</sub>, professor<sub>3</sub>, ...}).<sup>2</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that, under certain conditions, the effect of (12c) seems not to be categorically strong. (14b), for example, would be excluded by (12c), but nevertheless some speakers consider it not entirely unacceptable:

- (14) John may be fired from his job if I don't {a. go/b. ?~\*come} to give him a hand.

This suggests that it is possible for the proposed person-based restrictions (in particular (12c)) to be overridden by other factors like (a high degree of) discourse salience.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Considering the acceptability of an utterance like *About 27 million tourists come to Paris each year* (uttered by and addressed to a person not located in Paris), it would probably be necessary to allow non-sentient entities (e.g. the city of Paris) to be included in the RP.

<sup>3</sup> In an attitude/speech report, the choice of GO/COME can be made with respect to either the primary (external) speaker's perspective or the secondary agent's (Hockett 1990; Oe 1975).

- (i) **(Situation:** The speaker is in Tokyo; John and Linda are in New York.)
  - a. John told Linda that he would come to Tokyo on Thursday.
  - b. John told Linda that he would go to Tokyo on Thursday.
  - cf. \*John will go to Tokyo on Thursday.

See Oshima (2006a,b) for detailed discussion of this "deictic perspective shift" phenomenon.

#### 4. Cross-linguistic Comparison

Not only does the proposed, set-based analysis make empirically correct predictions for the English data presented above, it also has an additional advantage from the typological perspective: it allows us to understand differences among motion deictic systems across languages in a simple fashion (cf. Gathercole 1978; Nakazawa 2005, 2006). I propose that motion deictic systems in many, if not all, languages follow conditions derived from the following two principles based on implicational hierarchies:

(I) **The person hierarchy for RP inclusion**

Inclusion of X in the RP (i) implies inclusion of Y, and (ii) sometimes further requires that Y be not the theme (or a member thereof), where X outranks Y in the hierarchy of person: **1st < 2nd < 3rd**.

(II) **The relevance hierarchy for deictic predicates**

A given deictic verb refers to some lower portion or the totality of the following hierarchy: **an RP member's location at the utterance time < an RP member's location at the event time < an RP member's "home base" (at the event time)**.

The first principle dictates that the sets in (15a), among others, are possible RPs (in some languages, under certain conditions) while those in (15b), among others, are not (in any language):

- (15) a. {speaker}, {speaker, addressee}, {speaker, addressee, non-SAP<sub>1</sub>, non-SAP<sub>2</sub>}  
b. {addressee}, {speaker, non-SAP<sub>1</sub>}, {non-SAP<sub>1</sub>}

From principle (II), we can derive three varieties of GO and three varieties of COME:

- (16) GO<sub>1</sub>: No RP member is at the goal at the utterance time.  
GO<sub>2</sub>: No RP member is at the goal at the utterance time or at the event time.  
GO<sub>3</sub>: No RP member is at the goal at the utterance time or at the event time, and the goal is not an RP member's home base (at the event time).
- (17) COME<sub>1</sub>: Some RP member is at the goal at the utterance time.  
COME<sub>2</sub>: Some RP member is at the goal at the utterance time or at the event time.  
COME<sub>3</sub>: Some RP member is at the goal point at the utterance time or at the event time, or the goal point is an RP member's home base (at the event time).

Note that *go* is an instance of  $GO_1$ , and *come* is an instance of  $COME_3$ . When a language has  $GO_m$  and  $COME_n$  where  $m < n$ , it is possible to find a configuration in which either *GO* or *COME* can be used under the same RP (as in (6a,b) above); when  $m = n$ , *GO* and *COME* are in complementary distribution under the same RP. If a language has  $GO_m$  and  $COME_n$  where  $m > n$ , then there will be “ineffable” situations, which can be described neither by *GO* nor *COME*; it seems quite likely that such a language does not exist.<sup>4</sup>

In the following, the proposed hypothesis will be tested against data from languages other than English, namely, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, and Sive.

#### 4.1. *Iku* ‘Go’ and *Kuru* ‘Come’ in Japanese

There have been extensive comparative studies on English *go/come* and Japanese *iku/kuru* (Oe 1975; Gathercole 1978; Nakazawa 1990, among others). The major differences between the motion deictic systems in the two languages can be reduced to two points: (i) in Japanese, the preference for inclusion of the addressee is not as strong as in English (i.e., the status of the addressee is closer to that of a third person entity) and (ii) English *go* refers to the utterance time only, while Japanese *iku* refers to both the utterance time and the event time.

- (18) a. Asita,       watasi-ga anata-no tokoro-ni {iki/\*ki}-masu.  
           tomorrow I-Nom   you-Gen   place-Dat go/come-Polite.Pres  
           ‘I will come to you tomorrow.’  
       b. Asita,       Taro-ga anata-no tokoro-ni {iki/ki}-masu.  
           tomorrow T.-Nom you-Gen place-Dat go/come-Polite.Pres  
           ‘Taro will come to you tomorrow.’
- (19) a. Asita,       watasi-ga Taro-no tokoro-ni {iki/\*ki}-masu.  
           tomorrow I-Nom   T.-Gen   place-Dat go/come-Polite.Pres  
           ‘I will go to Taro tomorrow.’  
       b. Asita,       anata-ga Taro-no tokoro-ni  
           tomorrow you-Nom T.-Gen place-Dat  
           {iku/(?kuru)-nodesu-ka?  
           go/come-Aux.Polite.Pres-Q  
           ‘Will you go to Taro tomorrow?’  
       c. Asita,       Hanako-ga Taro-no tokoro-ni {iki/ki}-masu.  
           tomorrow H.-Nom   T.-Gen place-Dat go/come-Polite.Pres  
           ‘Hanako will go/come to Taro tomorrow.’
- (20) Asita,       eki-made watasi-o mukae-ni-{\*itte/kite}-kudasai.  
           tomorrow station-to I-Acc   pick.up-go/come-Ben.Polite.Imper  
           ‘Please go/come to the station to pick me up tomorrow.’

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<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Dmitry Levinson for pointing this out.

These data suggest the following conditions on the motion deictic system in Japanese:<sup>5</sup>

- (21) Constraints on the RP in Japanese:
- a. The speaker is always a member of the RP.
  - b. The addressee can be a member of the RP only if the speaker is not the theme (or a member thereof). The preference for inclusion of the addressee is not as strong as in English, although it may be affected by similar factors (sentential force, etc.).
  - c. A non-SAP entity can be chosen as a member of the RP only if the speaker is not the theme (or a member thereof). Inclusion of a non-SAP entity is not entirely blocked but marginal when the addressee is the theme (or a member thereof).

- (22) a. *Iku* is an instance of GO<sub>2</sub>.                      b. *Kuru* is an instance of COME<sub>3</sub>.

#### 4.2. *Qu* ‘Go’ and *Lai* ‘Come’ in Mandarin Chinese

Chen (2004) observes that, although *lai* ‘come’ typically describes motion toward the speaker, motion toward the addressee too can be described with *lai* under certain conditions.

- (23) Bu yao huang,      ni deng zhe, wo mashang (guo) {qu/lai}.  
 not need be.anxious you wait Asp I right.away Asp go/come  
 ‘Don’t be anxious. Wait there. I am coming.’                      (Chen 2004:159)
- (24) Ni gei songdian gongsi    da ge dianhua, songdian gongsi    hui  
 you to power company do one telephone power company will  
 you ren {qu/lai} de.  
 be man go/come SFP  
 ‘If you call the power company, somebody will come to your place.’  
 (Chen 2004:161)

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<sup>5</sup> The acceptability of *iku* in a sentence like (i) (adapted from Nakazawa 2005:45) appears to contradict the proposed analysis.

(i) Watasi-wa raigetū      Hokkaido-de    sigoto-desu-ga,                      Tanaka-san-mo  
 I-Top      next.month    H.-Loc                      work-be.Polite.Pres-and    T.-Mr.-too  
 {iku/kuru}-koto-ni-natte-i-masu.  
 go/come-be.supposed-Asp-Polite.Pres  
 ‘I’ll be working in Hokkaido next month, and Mr. Tanaka will go/come there too.’

I believe that the use of *iku* in (i) indicates that Tanaka and the speaker are construed as forming a single group or unit that collectively moves to Hokkaido (although they may not actually travel “together”) (cf. “My team will go to Hokkaido. Tanaka, Suzuki, and I will go there in two weeks, and the rest of the team will go there in three weeks.”). This explanation is resonant with the fact that *iku* is unacceptable in (20), where the speaker himself is construed as the destination point.

Motion toward a place where neither the speaker nor the addressee is located can be described with *lai* too, but only when the theme is a non-SAP entity.

- (25) (**Situation:** Neither the speaker nor the speaker is at Lisi's home at the utterance time or was there at the event time.)  
 {?\*Wo/?\*Ni/Zhangsan} bu lai Lisi jia bu cheng.  
 I/You/Z. not come L. home not become  
 'I/You/Zhangsan should come to Lisi's home.'

Also, *qu* 'go' can be used when the speaker is located at the goal at the event time (and not at the utterance time).

- (26) Wo zai chezhan deng zhe, sandian ni {qu/lai}.  
 I at station wait Asp three.o'clock you go/come  
 'I'll be waiting at the station. Please go/come at three o'clock.'  
 (Nakazawa 2005:57)

These observations lead to the following analysis of the motion deictic system in Mandarin Chinese:

- (27) Constraints on the RP in Mandarin Chinese:  
 a. The speaker is always a member of the RP.  
 b. The addressee can be a member of the RP, whether the speaker is (a member of) the theme or not. The inclusion of the addressee is not as preferred as in English (see also (34)/(35) below).<sup>6</sup>  
 c. A non-SAP entity can be chosen as a member of the RP only if neither the speaker nor the addressee is the theme (or a member thereof).
- (28) a. *Qu* is an instance of GO<sub>1</sub>.                      b. *Lai* is an instance of COME<sub>3</sub>.

#### 4.3. *Genembi* 'Go' and *Jimbi* 'Come' in Sive

Kubo (1997) reports that, in Sive (a language closely related to Manchu; it is also known as Sibe, Sive Manchu, etc.), verbs corresponding to *go* and *come* (*genembi* and *jimbi*, respectively) both refer to the speaker's location at the utterance time only, and not the addressee's location, the speaker's "home base", etc.

- (29) (**Situation:** The speaker is not at home.)  
 a. si cimare mon-i bo-de {gene/\*ji}-me-na  
 you tomorrow we(Excl)-Gen house-Dat go/come-Fin.Impf-Q  
 'Are you coming to our house tomorrow?'

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<sup>6</sup> Chen (2004:161) notes that motion toward the addressee tends to be described with *lai* when the described event is temporally/spatially proximate to the context of utterance, as in *Ni deng zhe, wo mashang xialai* 'Wait a second, I'm coming down right away'.

- b. tere cixsé      mon-i              bo-de      {gene/\*ji}-make  
 he yesterday we(Excl)-Gen house-Dat go/come-Conv.Pf  
 mi-maqe gisun gisere-xei  
 I-Com talk talk-Fin.Pf  
 ‘Yesterday he came to our house and talked to me.’  
 (adapted from Kubo 1997:22)

From these data, it seems reasonable to hypothesize the following:

- (30) Constraints on the RP in Sive:  
 The speaker is always a member of the RP, and no other individual can be a member of the RP (i.e. RP = {speaker}).
- (31) a. *Genembi* is an instance of GO<sub>1</sub>.    b. *Jimbi* is an instance of COME<sub>1</sub>.

**5. Fine Tuning**

So far, I have discussed general conditions (in four languages) under which the use of GO and COME is required, acceptable, or unacceptable. As much as these general conditions are not violated, the choice between GO and COME (the choice of RP members) are affected by various additional factors, which include: linguistic empathy, topicality, tense, sentential force, and temporal/spatial proximity of the described motion event to the context of utterance; also, how exactly each of such factors affects the use of GO and COME may differ across languages (see fn.1 and fn.6). It is beyond the scope of the present work to present the exhaustive list and detailed discussion of such factors. I would like, however, to mention one factor that seems to have quite a conspicuous effect on determination of motion deixis:

**(III) The mode of goal specification**

The preference for inclusion of individual X to the RP increases when X himself (rather than the place where X happens to be located) is specified as the goal.

The following data from English and Mandarin support this claim.

- (32) **(Situation:** On the phone. The speaker knows that the addressee is and will be in San Jose.)  
 You know what, I’ll {go/come} to San Jose next week. (Maybe we can hang out together.)
- (33) I’ll {??go/come} visit you next week.

- (34) **(Situation:** On the phone. The speaker knows that the addressee is and will be in Beijing.)  
 Wo xiazhou yao {qu/(? )lai} Beijing.  
 I next.week will go/come B.  
 ‘I will go/come to Beijing next week.’
- (35) Wo yao {(?)qu/lai} bang ni.  
 I will go/come help you  
 ‘I will go/come to help you.’

**6. Conclusion**

The proposed analysis of GO and COME is “two-dimensional”, in the sense that the core meanings of deictic motion verbs and the constraints on the choice of reference points are separated.

In the four languages taken up in the present paper, we found instances of GO<sub>1</sub>, GO<sub>2</sub>, COME<sub>1</sub>, and COME<sub>3</sub>, but not GO<sub>3</sub> or COME<sub>2</sub>:

(36)

	GO	COME
1	<i>go</i> (E), <i>qu</i> (M), <i>genembi</i> (S)	<i>jimbi</i> (S)
2	<i>iku</i> (J)	
3		<i>come</i> (E), <i>kuru</i> (J), <i>lai</i> (M)

I leave it open for future research whether we can find varieties of GO/COME that fill the missing two cells, and if not, why that is the case.

Finally, it is worth noting that the proposed analysis makes certain predictions as to possible felicity conditions for a given deictic verb (in a given language), which do not follow from analyses along the lines of Fillmore (1997). It predicts, for example, that there can be no deictic verb which can be felicitously used iff (i) the speaker is at the goal at the utterance time, (ii) the speaker is at the goal at the event time, or (iii) the addressee is at the goal at the utterance time. A prediction like this, if borne out, would lend strong support to the current analysis.

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