

Reference point constructions in Tai Khamti using the proximal deictic *mai*²

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Tai Khamti, a northern tier language of SW Tai in the Tai-Kadai language family, has a proximal deictic *mai*² 'here' appearing in a wide variety of constructions. The deictic *mai*² in (1) is found as a locative postposition with the function of marking *tsuang*⁴ 'school' as a location in (2). *Mai*² is also a postposition marking *man*⁴ '3SG' as the possessor in (3) and goal-like argument in (4):

- (1) *mai*² *kaw*¹ *maeu*² *kin*³ *khau*² *nai*¹ *uu*⁵ 'you can also eat here'
here also 2SG eat.dinner can IMPF
- (2) [*tsuang*⁴ *mai*²] *man*⁴ *yang*⁴ *yau*¹ 'she was at school'
school LOC 3SG be PERF
- (3) [*man*⁴ *mai*²] *heeun*⁴ *suang*⁵ *an*³ *yang*⁴ *uu*⁵ lit. 'two houses are at him'
3SG POSS house two CLF exist IMPF 'he has two houses'
- (4) *kau*³ [*man*⁴ *mai*²] *bap*¹ *haeu*² *kaw*⁵ 'I will give the book to her'
1SG 3SG OBJ book give INTENT

In the ditransitive construction, both the goal and patient/theme arguments are preverbal and only the goal is marked with *mai*². The patient/theme is never marked in the ditransitive clause. However, in monotransitive clauses, postposition *mai*² marks patient/themes, as shown in (5).

- (5) *meeu*³ *nan*¹ *kau*³ [*kaa*⁴ *mai*²] *han*⁵ *yau*¹ 'I saw the car yesterday'
yesterday 1SG car OBJ see PERF

Whereas goals of ditransitives are obligatorily marked with *mai*², not every patient/theme of monotransitives is so marked. Many examples of monotransitive patient/themes without the marker *mai*² can be found.

In this paper, I describe *mai*² as a proximal deictic that grammaticalizes as a postposition to signal different functions within a variety of constructions. I claim that the reason *mai*² grammaticalizes in these ways is due to its characterization as a schematic cognitive reference point (Langacker 1993). In its lexical meaning, *mai*² signals the speaker as a (R)eference point. When *mai*² functions to mark a location, however, the construal of speaker as R is shifted to that of a context-independent nominal in the clause. *Mai*² also signals clausal possessor and ditransitive goal as Rs, respectively. In monotransitive clauses *mai*² construes a nominal as a foregrounded referent R in the information structure of the sentence (Mel'čuk 2001). In all of the constructions mentioned, the (D)ominion of R establishes a context in which to construe a relationship that extends from R to a (T)arget nominal. While possessives have been clearly shown to emerge from locatives (Langacker 2009), I contend that in Tai Khamti, a ditransitive patient/theme is a T that is "located within" the D of the *mai*²-marked goal R. Furthermore, in monotransitives, the *mai*²-marked patient/theme (the foregrounded object) is an R whose D contains all other non-foregrounded object referents. The monotransitive T, then, is the non-foregrounded counterpart of R in a (foregrounding) contrast relationship with R. More specifically, the relationship between R (foregrounded) and its counterpart T (non-foregrounded) is one of psychological contrast from the viewpoint of the speaker.

This research shows how a proximal deictic with the speaker as R is a well-suited source morpheme for extension as a central component in a variety of reference-point constructions. Typologically, this research offers an alternative analysis to what has been recognized in Tibeto-Burman as a primary object/secondary object distinction.

References

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