Reference point constructions in Tai Khamti using the proximal deictic \( \text{mai}^2 \)

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

(1) \( \text{mai}^2 \ kaw^1 \ \text{maeu}^2 \ \text{kin}^3 \text{khau}^2 \ \text{nai}^2 \ \text{uu}^5 \) here also 2SG eat.dinner can IMPF ‘you can also eat here’

(2) \( [\text{tsuang}^4 \ \text{mai}^2] \ \text{man}^4 \ \text{yang}^4 \ \text{yau}^1 \) school LOC 3SG be PERF ‘she was at school’

(3) \( [\text{man}^4 \ \text{mai}^2] \ \text{heeun}^4 \ \text{tsuang}^6 \ \text{an}^3 \ \text{yang}^4 \ \text{uu}^5 \) lit. ‘two houses are at him’

(4) \( \text{kau}^3 \ [\text{man}^4 \ \text{mai}^2] \ \text{bap}^4 \ \text{hau}^2 \ \text{kaw}^5 \) 1SG 3SG OBJ book give INTENT ‘I will give the book to her’

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

(5) \( \text{meeu}^2 \text{nan}^1 \ \text{kau}^2 \ [\text{kaa}^4 \ \text{mai}^2] \ \text{han}^2 \ \text{yau}^1 \) yesterday 1SG car OBJ see PERF ‘I saw the car yesterday’

Whereas goals of ditransitives are obligatorily marked with \( \text{mai}^2 \), not every patient/theme of monotransitives is so marked. Many examples of monotransitive patient/themes without the marker \( \text{mai}^2 \) can be found.

In this paper, I describe \( \text{mai}^2 \) as a proximal deictic that grammaticalizes as a postposition to signal different functions within a variety of constructions. I claim that the reason \( \text{mai}^2 \) grammaticalizes in these ways is due to its characterization as a schematic cognitive reference point (Langacker 1993). In its lexical meaning, \( \text{mai}^2 \) signals the speaker as a (R)efERENCE point. When \( \text{mai}^2 \) functions to mark a location, however, the construal of speaker as R is shifted to that of a context-independent nominal in the clause. \( \text{mai}^2 \) also signals clausal possessor and ditransitive goal as Rs, respectively. In monotransitive clauses \( \text{mai}^2 \) 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 \( \text{mai}^2 \)-marked goal R. Furthermore, in monotransitives, the \( \text{mai}^2 \)-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