

# Reference point constructions in Tai Khamti using the proximal deictic *mai*<sup>2</sup>

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2



## Tai Khamti (Endangered)

- 14,000
- NE India
- NW Myanmar



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**A = Putao, Myanmar,  
the heartland of the Tai  
Khamti**

**Also:  
Assam region,  
NE India**

**Chindwin River Valley  
NW Myanmar**

## 1) Tai Khamti language characteristics:

- Isolating language of mainland Southeast Asia
- Tai-Kadai language family
- SOV basic word order
- Conouns are used instead of case, number, or gender affixation on nouns.  
(Conoun is a lexical word that has grammaticalized as a complete wordform and cooccurs with a head noun to signal case.)
- The proximal deictic *mai*<sup>2</sup> ‘here’ is a polyfunctional conoun in Tai Khamti.

- 2) In Inglis (2012), I describe the polyfunctional distribution of *mai*<sup>2</sup> using a 100,000 word corpus of natural text (Inglis 2006). The basic analysis is as follows:



4) *Mai*<sup>2</sup> is a conoun in a post-specifier position of the nominal that signals the location in a locative construction.

- a. [tsuang<sup>4</sup> **mai**<sup>2</sup>] man<sup>4</sup> yang<sup>4</sup> yau<sup>1</sup>  
 school LOC 3SG be PERF (topological coincidence)  
 ‘she’s at school now’
- b. meeu<sup>3</sup>nai<sup>1</sup> [kat<sup>5</sup> **mai**<sup>2</sup>] man<sup>4</sup> kaa<sup>5</sup> yau<sup>1</sup>  
 today market LOC 3SG go PERF (allative)  
 ‘she went to the market today’

5) *Mai*<sup>2</sup> also functions as a marker of the possessor nominal in a predicative possessive construction.

|                                 |                               |   |                            |                           |                         |                          |                        |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| [ <i>man</i> <sup>4</sup>       | <b><i>mai</i><sup>2</sup></b> | ] | <i>tsaang</i> <sup>1</sup> | <i>suang</i> <sup>5</sup> | <i>too</i> <sup>1</sup> | <i>yang</i> <sup>4</sup> | <i>uu</i> <sup>5</sup> |
| 3SG                             | POSS                          |   | elephant                   | two                       | CLF.THING               | be                       |                        |
| lit. 'two elephants are at him' |                               |   |                            |                           |                         |                          |                        |
| 'he has two elephants'          |                               |   |                            |                           |                         |                          |                        |



- 6) *Mai*<sup>2</sup> is a marker of all goal-like referents of a ditransitive construction. In a ditransitive, both objects are preverbal, the IO is obligatorily marked with *mai*<sup>2</sup> and the DO is never marked.

|                              |                           |                                  |                         |                          |                         |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>kau</i> <sup>3</sup>      | [ <i>man</i> <sup>4</sup> | <i><b>mai</b></i> <sup>2</sup> ] | <i>pap</i> <sup>1</sup> | <i>haeu</i> <sup>2</sup> | <i>kaw</i> <sup>5</sup> |
| 1SG                          | 3SG                       | IO                               | book                    | give                     | INTENT                  |
| ‘I will give her a/the book’ |                           |                                  |                         |                          |                         |

One pattern is marked with *mai*<sup>2</sup> and two are not marked.

|    |                                          |                                                   |                             |                            |                          |                                                 |                          |                         |                        |                                |
|----|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a. | <i>kau</i> <sup>3</sup>                  | [ <i>paa</i> <sup>5</sup> <i>tsa</i> <sup>1</sup> | <i>mai</i> <sup>2</sup> ]   | <i>kaw</i> <sup>1</sup>    | <i>han</i> <sup>5</sup>  | <i>saa</i> <sup>5</sup> <i>saa</i> <sup>5</sup> | <i>nam</i> <sup>5</sup>  |                         |                        | [O- <i>mai</i> <sup>2</sup> V] |
|    | 1SG                                      | cemetery                                          | FGD                         | then                       | see                      | clearly                                         | CONT                     |                         |                        |                                |
|    | ‘I, then, clearly see a/the CEMETERY’    |                                                   |                             |                            |                          |                                                 |                          |                         |                        |                                |
| b. | [ <i>haang</i> <sup>5</sup>              | <i>ngoo</i> <sup>4</sup> ]                        | <i>too</i> <sup>3</sup>     | <i>leeung</i> <sup>3</sup> | <i>tiap</i> <sup>5</sup> | <i>yau</i> <sup>1</sup>                         |                          |                         |                        | [OV]                           |
|    | tail                                     | cow                                               | CLF.BODY                    | one                        | lop.off                  | PERF                                            |                          |                         |                        |                                |
|    | ‘(he) lopped off a cow’s tail’           |                                                   |                             |                            |                          |                                                 |                          |                         |                        |                                |
| c. | <i>uaa</i> <sup>4</sup>                  | <i>yum</i> <sup>5</sup>                           | [ <i>khaam</i> <sup>4</sup> | <i>man</i> <sup>4</sup> ]  | <i>sii</i> <sup>5</sup>  | <i>lian</i> <sup>3</sup>                        | <i>meeu</i> <sup>4</sup> | <i>kaa</i> <sup>5</sup> | <i>uu</i> <sup>5</sup> | [VO]                           |
|    | father                                   | believe                                           | word                        | 3SG                        | CONJ                     | run                                             | back                     | GO                      | IMPF                   |                                |
|    | ‘father believes his word and runs back’ |                                                   |                             |                            |                          |                                                 |                          |                         |                        |                                |

- 8) For this DO-marking pattern, I proposed an information structure analysis where the three patterns concern **the degree of importance that a speaker places on a DO referent** (Inglis 1012; Mel'čuk 2001).

[O-*mai*<sup>2</sup> V] signals a *foregrounded* referent and is of special importance for communication,

[OV] is *neutral* and signals a referent that has no special importance for communication, and

[VO] is *backgrounded* and signals a referent that has a reduced importance for communication

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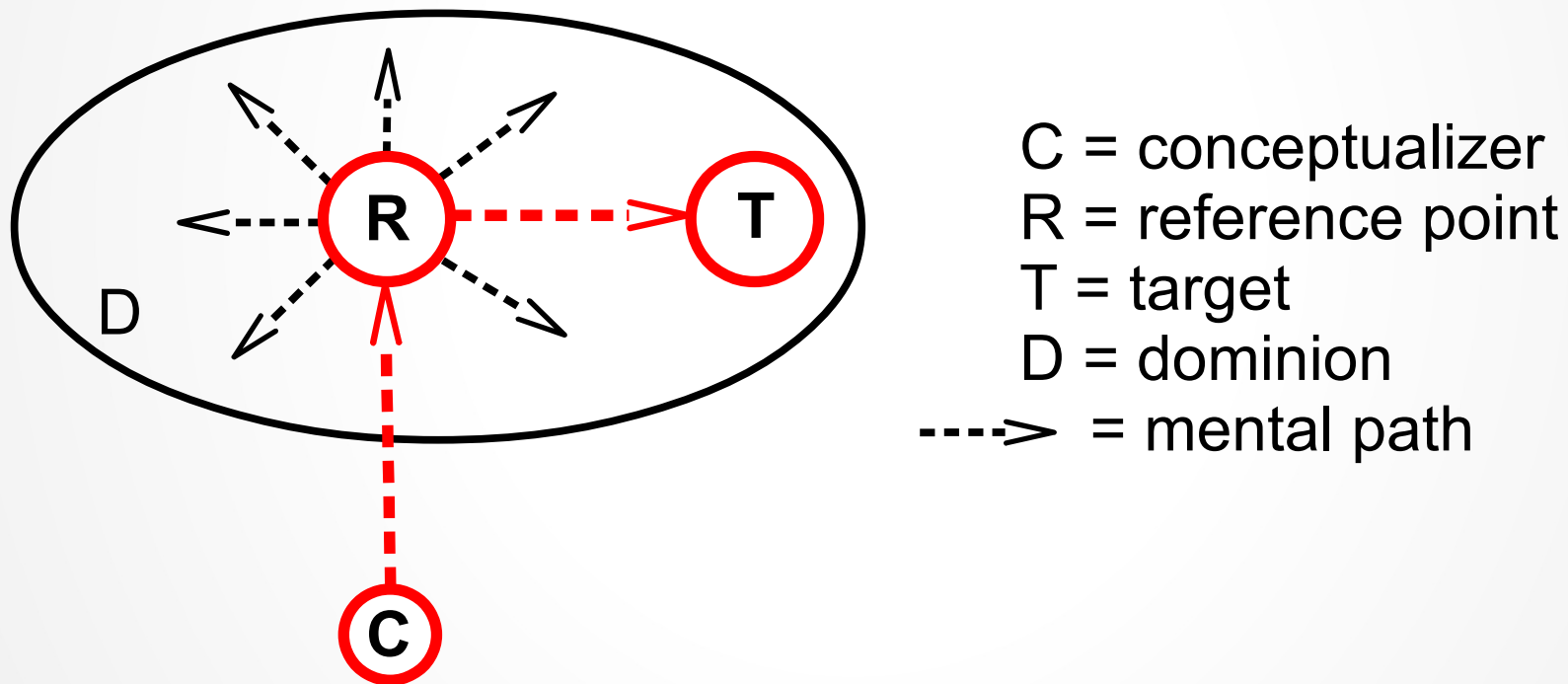
[VO] is *backgrounded* and signals a referent that has a reduced importance for communication



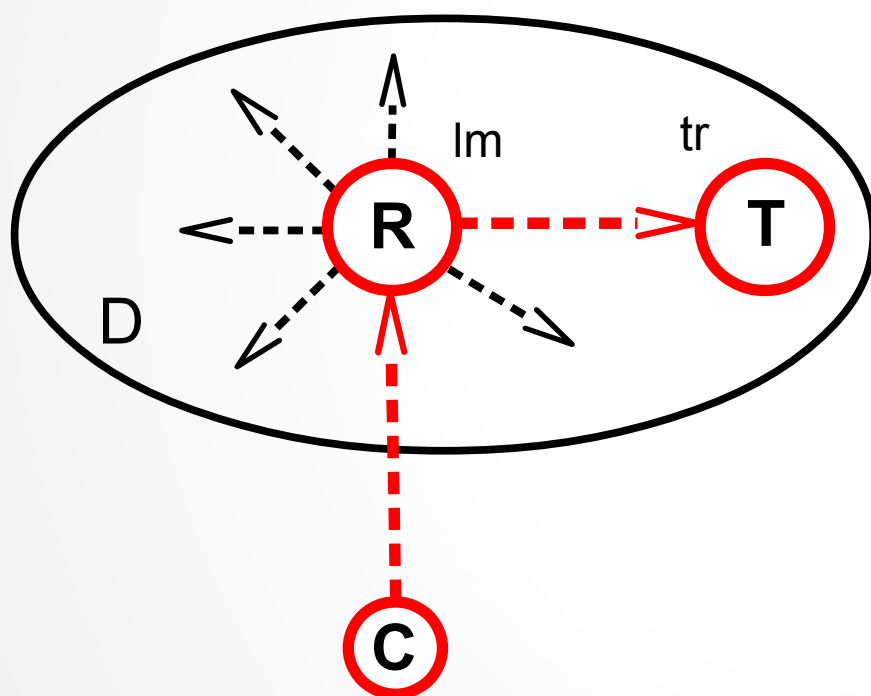
### 9) **Why *mai*<sup>2</sup> ?**

In this paper, I propose that *mai*<sup>2</sup> grammaticalizes as a polyfunctional nominal marker due to its schematization as a cognitive reference point.

10) The reference point ability (Langacker 1993:6, 2009:82) is as follows:



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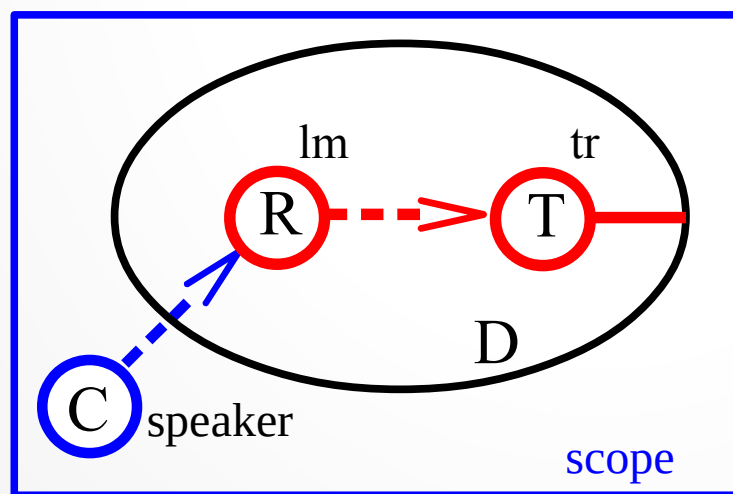
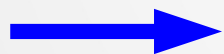
C = conceptualizer  
R = reference point  
T = target  
D = dominion  
----> = mental path

11) Reference point characterization of the Khamti proximal deictic *mai*<sup>2</sup> ‘here’

3a. *man*<sup>4</sup> *mai*<sup>2</sup> *yau*<sup>1</sup>  
 3SG here PERF (predicative use)  
 ‘he’s here now’

3b. *mai*<sup>2</sup> *kaw*<sup>1</sup> *maeu*<sup>4</sup> *kiin*<sup>3</sup> *khau*<sup>2</sup> *nai*<sup>2</sup> *uu*<sup>5</sup>  
 here also 2SG dine can IMPF (adverbial use)  
 ‘you can also dine here’

subjective



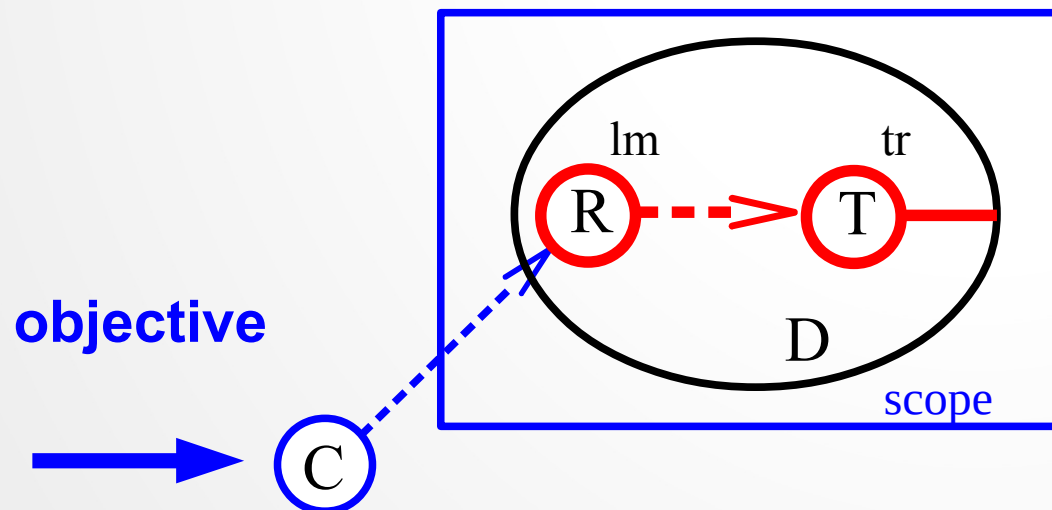
3a. R= speaker T= ‘he’

3b. R= speaker T= ‘you can eat’

Deixis and Subjectivity (Langacker 2002)

12) As location-marker in Khamti locatives, *mai*<sup>2</sup> signals a topological coincidence relation with ‘be’ and an allative relation with ‘go’.

- 4a. [tsuang<sup>4</sup> *mai*<sup>2</sup>] man<sup>4</sup> yang<sup>4</sup> yau<sup>1</sup>  
 school LOC 3SG be PERF (topological coincidence)  
 ‘she’s at school now’
- 4b. meeu<sup>3</sup>nai<sup>1</sup> [kat<sup>5</sup> *mai*<sup>2</sup>] kau<sup>1</sup> kaa<sup>5</sup> yau<sup>1</sup>  
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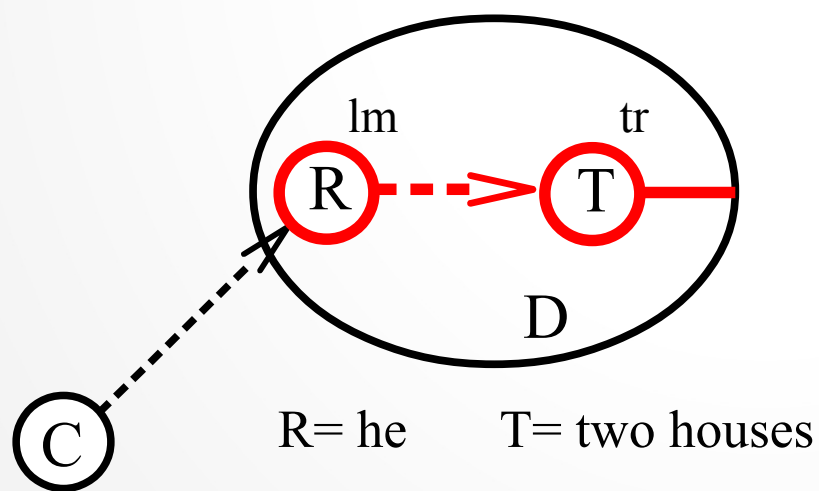


R= 4a. school/4b. market T= she



14) *Mai*<sup>2</sup> grammaticalizes as a possessor-marker in the ‘be’ possessive construction where the reference point is a metaphorical location.

5. [ *man*<sup>4</sup> *mai*<sup>2</sup> ] *tsaang*<sup>1</sup> *suang*<sup>5</sup> *too*<sup>1</sup> *yang*<sup>4</sup> *uu*<sup>5</sup>  
 3SG POSS elephant two CLF.THING be  
 lit. ‘two elephants are at him’  
 ‘he has two elephants’

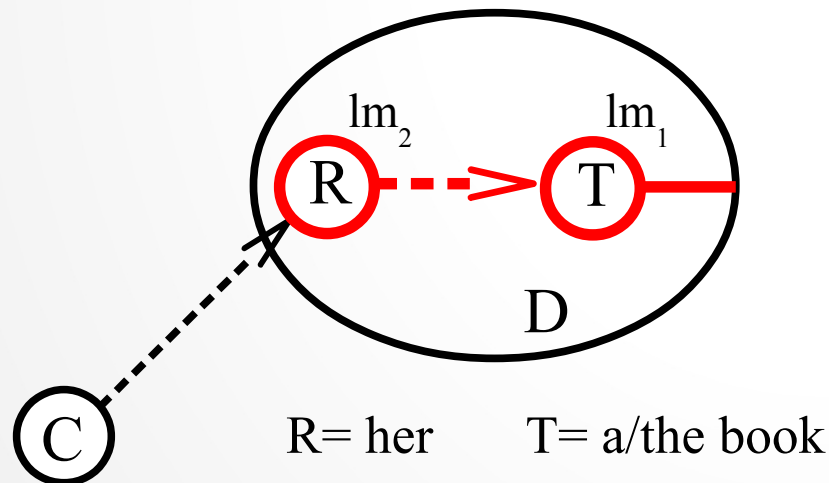


*mai*<sup>2</sup> as a locative source for a  
 BE possessive (Langacker 2009:98)

POSSESSOR is LOCATION  
 POSSESSEE is MOVER

15) IO-marker in the ditransitive construction extended from the allative function of the locative.

6. *kau*<sup>3</sup> [*man*<sup>4</sup> *mai*<sup>2</sup>] *pap*<sup>1</sup> *haeu*<sup>2</sup> *kaw*<sup>5</sup>  
 1SG 3SG IO book give INTENT  
 ‘I will give her a/the book’



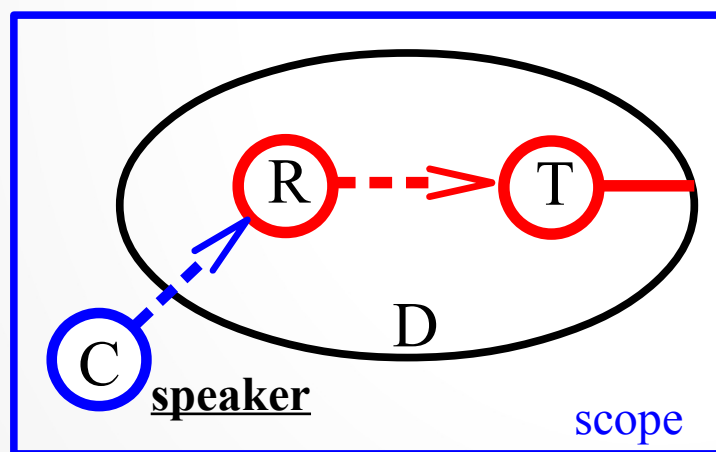
*mai*<sup>2</sup> as a spatial goal source with a verb of transfer (Rice and Kabata 2007:482)

RECIPIENT is GOAL  
 PATIENT/THEME is MOVER

16) Speaker importance in the foregrounded object construction extends from the subjective conception of the spatial deictic.

7a. *hau*<sup>4</sup> [*paa*<sup>5</sup>*tsa*<sup>1</sup> ***mai*<sup>2</sup>**] *kaw*<sup>1</sup> *han*<sup>5</sup> *saa*<sup>5</sup>*saa*<sup>5</sup> *nam*<sup>5</sup> [O-*mai*<sup>2</sup> V]  
 1PL cemetery FGD then see clearly CONT  
 ‘we, then, clearly see a/the CEMETERY’

subjective



R= speaker      T= cemetery

*mai*<sup>2</sup> as a maximally schematic  
deictic source for foregrounded  
 objects (Mel'čuk 2001:343)

R is SPEAKER  
 D is PSYCHOLOGICAL  
 IMPORTANCE  
 T is OBJECT REFERENT

## 17) Conclusions:

- a) Proximal deictic *mai*<sup>2</sup>, as a locative source morpheme, emerges as a functional marker in a wide variety of nominal constructions vis-à-vis conceptual metaphor.
- b) The motivation for *mai*<sup>2</sup> as source morpheme for grammaticalization processes is because of its underlying characterization as a schematic cognitive reference point.

## 18) References

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**Thank you**

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## **Aknowledgements**

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