

Metaphorical Meaning Extension of the Motion Verbs “Go” and “Come”

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ABSTRACT

Spatial motion, that is, movement of physical objects through space, is fundamental to our experience, which is mostly expressed by motion verbs. The two motion verbs “go” and “come” are especially fundamental in the sense that they just contain the very basic meaning elements of movement shared by other motion verbs. They are essentially deictic and show directionality in their nature. These two verbs are frequently extended metaphorically from their original spatial motion to motion in abstract domains, such as time, change of state, and so on. They even show some grammatical function. These phenomena seem to have close relationship with the notion of directionality. In this paper, some aspects of metaphorical meaning extension of these two English verbs “go” and “come” are investigated in view of directionality, comparing them with their Japanese counterparts *iku* (go) and *kuru* (come).

1. INTRODUCTION — NATURE OF SPATIAL MOTION

Spatial motion is a phenomenon where some entity changes its location in space as time passes. Therefore, there must be a mover, path, and time, which are the essential elements comprising movement. Langacker shows the following figure as “the minimal set of cognitive events required for the conceptualization of spatial motion.”

Figure (1)

$$\left[\begin{array}{c} [m / l_0] t_0 \\ C \end{array} \right]_{T_0} > \left[\begin{array}{c} [m / l_1] t_1 \\ C \end{array} \right]_{T_1} > \left[\begin{array}{c} [m / l_2] t_2 \\ C \end{array} \right]_{T_2} > \dots$$

(Langacker 1987:167)

The upper part of the figure represents the essence of spatial motion itself where a mover (m) stands in a conceived location (l) at moment of conceived time (t). So, $l_0 > l_1 > l_2 \dots$ is a moving path and $t_0 > t_1 > t_2 \dots$ is a span of conceived time. The capital letters indicate that a conceptualizer C conceptualizes a phenomenon of spatial motion at moment of $T_0 > T_1 \dots$ of processing time.

Motion events expressed by motion verbs are not only composed of these essential components, but also often accompanied by other elements of motion, such as directionality, manner, cause and so on. Each motion verb lexicalizes a different combination of these components in its meaning, and focuses on different aspects of motion. Motion verbs are, therefore, classified into some groups as to what kinds of components they lexicalize in themselves and what kinds of elements they focus on.

The motion verbs “go” and “come” are said to be most basic and fundamental because directionality is the only element they contain in addition to the essential elements of motion, without any manner nor cause. They are often metaphorically extended to more abstract domains, where directionality seems to play an important role. In this paper, the domains of time, change of state, and some grammatical functions are investigated, comparing with the Japanese counterparts *iku* (go) and *kuru* (come).

2. DIRECTIONALITY AND DEIXIS

A motion event starts at some point and ends at another point. So a starting point (or source) and a terminal point (or goal) should be taken account of, together with path and directionality.

The basic sense of “go” describes motion away from a starting point and the basic sense of “come” describes motion towards a terminal point. The starting point in “go” and the terminal point in “come” serve as reference points even if they are not manifested. They are presupposed. Typically the position of a speaker (or encoder) plays a crucial role as a reference point, though in some cases of “come”, an addressee is also focused on. In this sense, these two verbs are deictic. Some more details must be considered, in relation to the reference point and coding or reference time.

- (1)(a) It’s late; I must go. ⁽¹⁾
- (b) Come here and look at this.
- (c) I’ll come there right away.

In the sentences (1)(a)(b), it is prototypically evident that “go” indicates motion from the speaker’s location and “come” indicates motion towards the location of the speaker at the coding time. But as seen in (1)(c), “come” sometimes shows motion towards the location of the addressee at the coding time. In this sentence “there” means the place where the addressee is at the coding time. As Radden (1996:430) says, it is taken to be derived from the prototypical sense by a deictic switch from the speaker to the hearer and shows politeness or respect.

There are cases where reference time must be taken into consideration.

- (2)(a) Johnny went to the office yesterday morning.
- (b) Johnny came to the office yesterday morning.

In (2)(a), the destination for “go” is a place which is distinct from the speaker’s location at the coding time as well as the reference time (in this case “yesterday morning”). The sentence (2)(b) includes cases where the speaker or the addressee is at the office at the coding time, or

the speaker or the addressee was at the office at the reference time.

(3)(a) Sharon told her boy to go at once.

(b) Sharon asked the repairman to come immediately.

There is also a use of these verbs in a third-person narrative in which neither speaker nor addressee figures as a character, the subject of the narrative or the location of the central character being the reference point at the reference time. But behind the narrative, the presence of the narrator (or speaker) and his point of view must not be neglected. He himself puts a spotlight on the subject.

In Japanese, both *iku* (go) and *kuru* (come) refer basically only to the speaker, and *kuru* never takes a standpoint of the addressee. As is often exemplified, when Mother calls her son to the dinner table, he says, “*ima ikimasu*” (“I’m going” in literal translation) and never uses “*kuru*”, in spite of “I’m coming” in English.

3. TIME

Time is really an abstract concept but it is often recognized metaphorically by the human mind as moving as in saying, “Time passes”. The movement metaphor for time draws two kinds of images; one (A) is the image of a person being stable and time passing by him or her, and the other (B) is the image of a person moving through time that is static. These two images are never contradictory, as they take different reference points, which are reflected in actual language expressions. Some expressions take the former metaphor and others take the latter one.

The motion verbs “go” and “come” are among those which are metaphorically extended from space to time. As for the case (A), if it is time that is moving, it has front-back orientation. The part that has proceeded earlier is the front and is in the past from the reference point (the observer’s standpoint) at the reference time (the present). The part that is yet to follow is behind and in the future. As stated in the preceding section, “go” and “come” contain directionality in their meanings, where “go” means a depart from the reference point and “come” means an arrival at it, which is reflected in the following time expressions.

(4)(a) The summer is going fast.

(b) The evening went pleasantly enough.

(5)(a) Christmas is coming soon.

(b) The time has come for us to make a decision.

(c) Let’s go this coming Friday.

From these examples it can be read that time proceeds to the speaker’s standpoint from the future and then departs from it to the realm of the past.

In the case (B), a person moves through time leaving the past behind, never to return, and heading the future as in (6),(7) and (8).

(6) She came to the age of marriage.

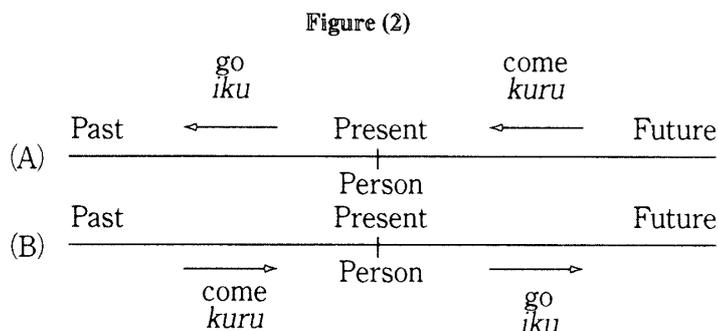
(7) All winter we just go through the weeks waiting for spring.

(8) I wish I could go back to my school days.

The following example is also a question about our past and future.

(9) Where did we come from and where are we going?

Figure(2) shows how directionality is reflected in the time domain.



The examples (10) and (11) are also considered to be in the case (B).

(10) He's going to buy her daughter some shoes.

(11) I'm going to be a teacher.

The phrase "be going to" plays a role of grammatical function showing the future. Originally it must have described motion through space with progressive aspect. As for (10), a scene can be imagined where, for example, Tom is walking along the street looking for a shoes shop and some friend taking a glimpse of him on the opposite side of the street asks his wife where he is going. And his wife tells that he is going to buy his child some shoes. In this case Tom is moving through space, for the purpose of buying a pair of shoes. To-infinitive means his objective of going, which implies the future, as it has not yet be done. This moving-through-space image can be easily be mapped onto the time domain, where a person is going through time toward the future. Once the expression is fixed as a set phrase, it becomes a kind of future sign of grammatical function. In (11), only a future plan is described, never spatial motion. Further it can be used with a non-personal subject as in (12).

(12) It's going to rain.

Thus the motion verb "go" has changed its role from a content word to a grammatical function word through metaphorical mapping from space to time.

As for Japanese, *iku* and *kuru* are also extended to time, but these verbs are not always translated into their counterparts "go" and "come" respectively in a natural way. The examples (13) and (14) are in the type of (A).

(13) (a) *toshi ga iku* (get old)

(b) *iku toshi wo oshimu* (missing the passing year)

(14) (a) *haru ga kuru* (Spring is coming)

(b) *jiki ga kita* (The time has come)

A further example is found in the first sentence of the prologue of *Okuno Hosomichi* [Narrow Road to a Far Province] by the famous *haiku* poet Basho.

(15) *tsukihī wa hakutai no kwakaku nishite, ikikau toshi mo mata tabibito nari* (The

passing days and months are eternal travellers in time. The years that come and go are travellers too. — translated by D. Britton)

Few examples have been found of the type of (B).

(16) *mirai ni mukatte ikou* (Let's go ahead to the future.)

(17) *yatto kokomade kita* (I've just reached this point.)

In (16), persons are proceeding through time to the future, and in (17) a man has just arrived at the present situation travelling through time from the past.

Thus both in English and Japanese, “go” and “come”, and *iku* and *kuru* are transferred from space to time in both images (A) and (B), though there may be difference in their frequency.

4. CHANGE OF STATE

The motion verbs “go” and “come” are commonly transferred metaphorically from spatial motion to more abstract change of state, as in the following examples.

(18) This milk is about to go sour.

(19) His dream of winning a gold medal has come true.

Langacker (1987:170) explains that (18) can be interpreted in the frame of figure (1), saying that in the case of milk going sour, [m/l_i] represents the conception of the milk (m) having one particular degree of freshness (l_i) along a graded scale. The motion image derived from figure (1) can be mapped to changing condition of milk.

In general, a schema where a mover changes its place as time passes can be mapped to change of state where a thing changes its condition as time passes. As seen in (18) and (19), expressions with “go” and “come” mapped into the change-of-state domain metaphorically are idiomatic, not created freely, and seem to show some meaning contrast, which may be connected with the directionality of these two verbs as verbs of motion.

Such idiomatic expressions are grouped into several patterns. But in this paper the adjectival construction (verb+adjective) is going to be examined. These two verbs seem to take different adjectives and to be unable to change their partners each other. The number of adjectives used with “go” found in the dictionaries and other sources seems much larger than with “come”.

(20) Go + bad / bald / bankrupt / blank / blind / crazy / flat / free / gray / independent / mad / national / native / pale / private / public / right / rusty / short / silent / soft / sour / stale / steady / straight / white (with anger) / wild / wrong / etc.

(21) Come + alive / clean / loose / right / true / unstuck / etc. ⁽²⁾

Some frequently used idioms such as “go mad” and “go sour” imply negative meanings, but on the other hand “come alive” and “come true” mean positive change. It is impossible to exchange adjectives; *go alive / true, *come mad / sour. ⁽³⁾ As “go” indicates a departure from the speaker and “come” indicates an arrival at the speaker or the addressee in the spatial domain, so in the change-of-state domain, it seems convenient from the speaker's viewpoint that negative states should go away from him, and that positive states should come to him.

Clark (1974:316-7) proposes the hypothesis that deictic center is a normal state of being, and that normal states always involve acceptable or expected behavior of some kind, while non-normal ones do not. Since the destination of the motion “go” is specified as somewhere other than the deictic center, idioms with “go” should occur only to indicate departure from normal states and are either neutral or negative in connotation from evaluative point of view. The motion “come” always has as its destination the deictic center itself and idioms with “come” should always indicate entry into some normal states, therefore end up in some speaker-approved or public approved states.

Opposing her hypothesis, Radden (1996:316-7) argues that there are many counter-examples; “go” denoting positive connotations such as “go free”, “go straight” and “come” denoting negative connotations such as “come loose”, “come unstuck” and so on. His interpretation that the evaluation is not inherent but the result of the perspective from which a scene is viewed sounds persuading. It may be that the directionality of the two verbs, departure from the focus point and entry in it, is reflected on various aspects of change of state, a large part of which have evaluative meanings in the result.

The following examples with “go” imply departure from a given state of affairs or course of events and focus on the source part.

(22) He’s gone mad.

(23) The company has gone bankrupt.

(24) He went white with anger.

(25) He was a former gang member who had gone soft.

(26) Some day the guns will go silent.

(27) Jim and Mary have been going steady for a year now; are they going to get married?

(28) This used to be a state school, but it’s gone independent.

(29) Some rock music critics are saying they have the potential to go national.

If it is a change from normal or favorable states, the change will be unexpected, abnormal or unfavorable as in (22), (23) and (24), and such cases are often found. If it is a departure from an undesirable state, the change will be desirable as in (25) and (26). Also in (27), the situation seems to be going better. Sometimes it may be a change to an opposite direction as in (28) and (29), from “state-governed” to “independent” and from “local” (though unstated) to “national”.

Expressions with “come” realize transition to a new state, gradual development to pleasant or unpleasant state or achievement of some expected state.

(30) Don’t worry — it’ll all come right in the end.

(31) Can you fix this handle? It’s coming loose.

The example (30) together with (19), implies gradual transition to a pleasant state, but (31) to some unpleasant state, though examples of the former case are often found. Comparing with “go”, the adjectival construction with “come” is less found in number. Rather reaching a termination is often conveyed by the goal-marking preposition “to” and to-infinitive.

(32) The dull play really came to life in the performance by these young people.

(33) She had come to realize that he couldn't be trusted.

As for Japanese, “go” and “come” in change of state cannot be replaced by *iku* and *kuru*. If they are translated, the verb *naru* is commonly used. It means the change of state in its origin and its English counterpart may be “become”. The sentences (18) and (19) are translated as follows.

(18)' *kono miruku wa suppaku narikakete iru*

(19)' *kareno kinmedaru wo toru yume wa genjituni natta*

The inflectional forms of the verb *naru* are properly used in both cases. Many other cases are also replaced by *naru*. Here the directionality of the motion verbs is not implied. This is also the case with “become”, though it contains “come” as its component with a prefix (be- + come). Clerk (1974:325) makes a note that “become” seems to be the neutral verb for indicating change of state, and that it can replace both “go” and “come” in many examples.

In Japanese *iku* and *kuru* are not commonly transferred to change of state. A few exceptional examples, which are all idiomatic, are as follows.

(34)(a) *manzoku ga iku* (come to be satisfied)

(b) *gaten ga ikanai* (cannot be persuaded)

(c) *umaku iku* (go well)

(35)(a) *gata ga kuru* (come loose)

(b) *pin to kuru* (come to realize suddenly)

(c) *atama ni kuru* (get angry)

It can be generally said that Japanese motion verbs are scarcely transferred to change of state. From typological point of view, Ikegami (1981:249-83) argues that in English not only “go” and “come” but also other motion verbs such as “run” or “fall” are transferred from spatial motion to change of state (The well ran dry. John fell ill.), but that it is not the case with Japanese. He takes this point as one of the grounds of his argument that these two languages are typologically different; English is a “Do-language” and on the other hand Japanese is a “Become-language” according to his naming.

5. *IKU* AND *KURU* AS DIRECTIONAL COMPONENTS OF COMPOUNDS

In this section, the role of *iku* and *kuru* as components of compounds will be taken, in relation to the English motion verbs “take” and “bring”. Dixon (1991:98) explains that “take” and “bring”, the transitive correspondents of “go” and “come”, have as part of their meaning the specifications ‘to there’ and ‘to here’ respectively. Thus “take” is represented as “CAUSE to go” and “bring” as “CAUSE to come”, which means that these two verbs contain “go” and “come” in their own meanings.

(36) He took the book to the library. — [He caused the book to go to the library.]

(37) He brought me the book. — [He caused the book to come to me.]

When (36) and (37) are put into Japanese, the Japanese verbs can't be single verbs, but must be compounds, *motteitta* and *mottekita* with the past tense inflections respectively. The base

verb *motsu* (hold) plus *iku* or *kuru* makes a compound *motteiku* (take) or *mottekuru* (bring). The verb *motsu* alone never shows any direction. When the indirect object is personal, the base verb is *tsureru*.

(38) He took his child to the park.

(39) He brought his child to the party.

The verbs in (38) and (39) are put into *tsureteitta* and *tsuretekita* with the past tense inflection respectively. Also in this case the verb *tsureru* (accompany) plus *iku* or *kuru* makes a compound *tsureteiku* (take) or *tsuretekuru* (bring), which for the first time obtains directionality.

Generally in Japanese, *iku* and *kuru* are used as post-position components of compound verbs and play what is called a suffix-like function of adding directionality to other pre-posed verbs in the cases where English verbs contain directionality in their own meanings.

Following is the contrastive chart summarized.

	direct object	components	compound
take	thing	<i>motsu</i> (hold)+ <i>iku</i> (go)	<i>motteiku</i>
	person	<i>tsureru</i> (accompany)+ <i>iku</i> (go)	<i>tsureteiku</i>
bring	thing	<i>motsu</i> (hold)+ <i>kuru</i> (come)	<i>mottekuru</i>
	person	<i>tsureru</i> (accompany)+ <i>kuru</i> (come)	<i>tsuretekuru</i>

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the metaphorical meaning extension of “go” and “come” from the domain of spatial motion to the domain of time and change of state was examined in comparison with Japanese counterparts *iku* and *kuru*. Some common and different aspects between the two languages were discussed and further some grammatical function was referred to. It is clearly said that the original deictic directionality of these motion verbs are preserved in the extended metaphorical meanings and grammatical function.

NOTES

- (1) In this paper, English examples are extracted from *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, *Longman Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs*, Clerk (1974), Fillmore (1975), Langacker (1987), Quirk et al. (1985), Radden (1996), The Japan Times, *Challenge TOEIC* (1998: Tokyo, Seibido)
- (2) Go right / steady / straight / wrong / are marked V + adj. in *Longman Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs*, though they are V + adv. in *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*.
- (3) The only exception is “right”, which is used both with “go” and “come”.

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