

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

Doug Inglis
University of Alberta

ICLC 12
June 23-28 2013



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Tai Khamti (Khamti Shan)

- 14,000
- NE India
- NW Myanmar

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3



Endangered Language

Community-based
Language Project

(2005-present)



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

**Also:
Assam region,
NE India**

**Chindwin River Valley
NW Myanmar**

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

မိုဝ်း;တၢ်, မိုဝ်း'တၢ်တုယးကုဝ်း,။ တုယး,မိုဝ်း'မံ'ဝးကု။ “
မိုဝ်း'ပျး ပံ,တုယးတိုဝ်းတၢ်းတၢ်း;တၢ်း။ “ကုဝ်း,တၢ်း;တၢ်း;ပေ.တံ,
ကုဝ်း,တၢ်း;တၢ်း;မဝ်ပေ,မံ'ကိတ်း”။ တၢ်းဝး;ကိတ်း မိုဝ်း'ကေ, “
တံ;ကု” တၢ်းတိုဝ်းကု။ မိုဝ်း'ယ, “လံး;တံ,တံ'ကုဝ်းကုဝ်း;” တၢ်း
တုယ, တံ;ပေ,လံး'မိ “ကဝ်း;တၢ်း: ကုဝ်း;တၢ်း:ကုဝ်း”
တၢ်းဝး;မိ မိုဝ်း;တၢ်း;ကုဝ်းကုဝ်း, ကုဝ်းတၢ်း:ကု။ ...

A long time ago, it was said there was a cat and mouse. The mouse said to the cat, “Hey, cat, let's us two play counting the stars. The one who wins counting eats the one who loses counting,” he said. The cat said, “Good.” When the cat said, “who will start first” the mouse wanted to win so badly so said, “I will start first.” and he started to count when the stars first came out...

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*² ‘here’ is a polyfunctional conoun in Tai Khamti.

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(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*² ‘here’ is a **polyfunctional conoun in Tai Khamti**.

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

[illegible]

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

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

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

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

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

- 6) *Mai*² 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*² and the DO is never marked.

<i>kau</i> ³	[	<i>man</i> ⁴	<i>mai</i> ²	]	<i>pap</i> ¹	<i>haeu</i> ²	<i>kaw</i> ⁵
1SG		3SG	IO		book	give	INTENT

‘I will give her a/the book’

One pattern is marked with *mai*² and two are not marked.

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

One pattern is marked with *mai*² and two are not marked.

a.	<i>kau</i> ³	[<i>paa</i> ⁵ <i>tsa</i> ¹	<i>mai</i>²]	<i>kaw</i> ¹	<i>han</i> ⁵	<i>saa</i> ⁵ <i>saa</i> ⁵	<i>nam</i> ⁵			[O- <i>mai</i> ² V]
	1SG	cemetery	FGD	then	see	clearly	CONT			
	‘I, then, clearly see a/the CEMETERY’									
b.	[<i>haang</i> ⁵	<i>ngoo</i> ⁴]	<i>too</i> ³	<i>leeung</i> ³	<i>tiap</i> ⁵	<i>yau</i> ¹				[OV]
	tail	cow	CLF.BODY	one	lop.off	PERF				
	‘(he) lopped off a cow’s tail’									
c.	<i>uaa</i> ⁴	<i>yum</i> ⁵	[<i>khaam</i> ⁴	<i>man</i> ⁴]	<i>sii</i> ⁵	<i>lian</i> ³	<i>meeu</i> ⁴	<i>kaa</i> ⁵	<i>uu</i> ⁵	[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*² 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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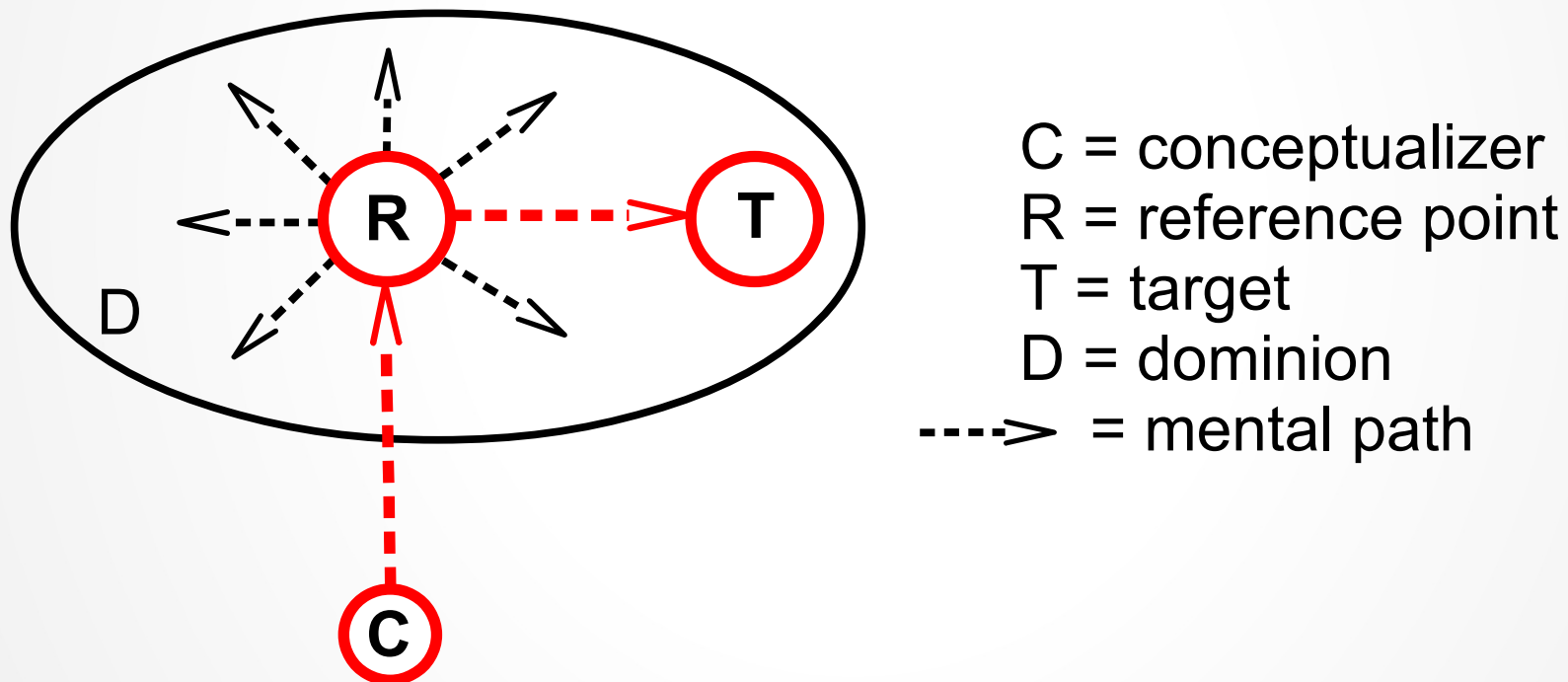
[OV] is *neutral* and signals a referent that has no special importance for communication, and

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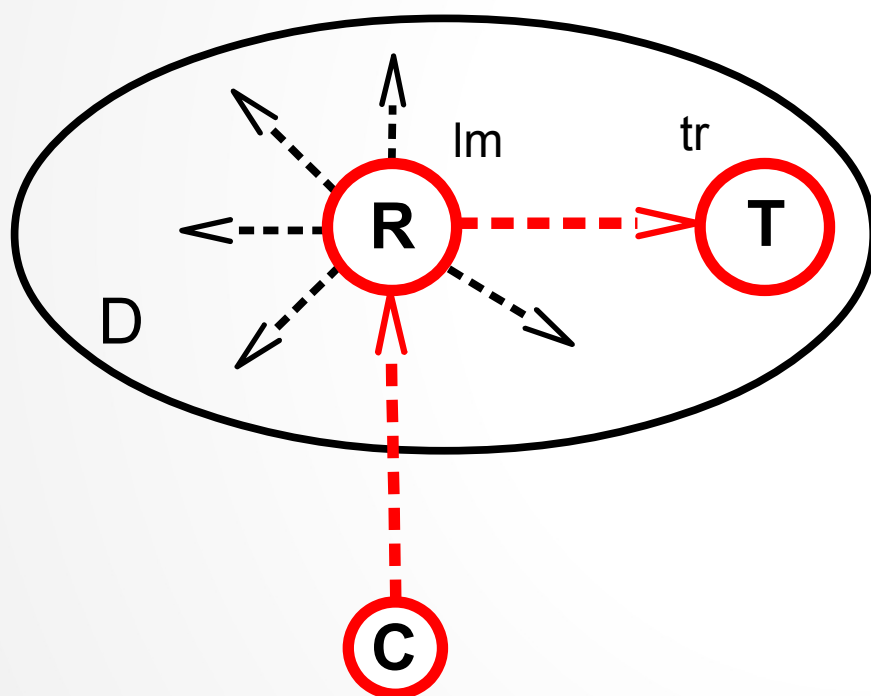
9) **Why *mai*² ?**

In this paper, I propose that *mai*² 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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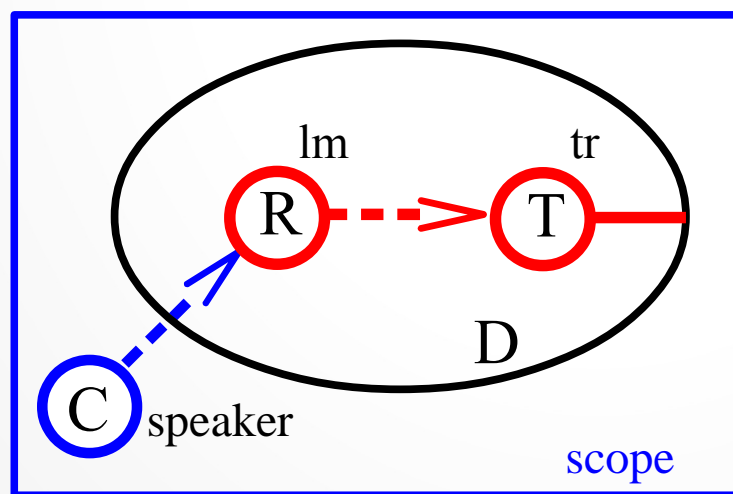
C = conceptualizer
R = reference point
T = target
D = dominion
----> = mental path

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

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

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

subjective



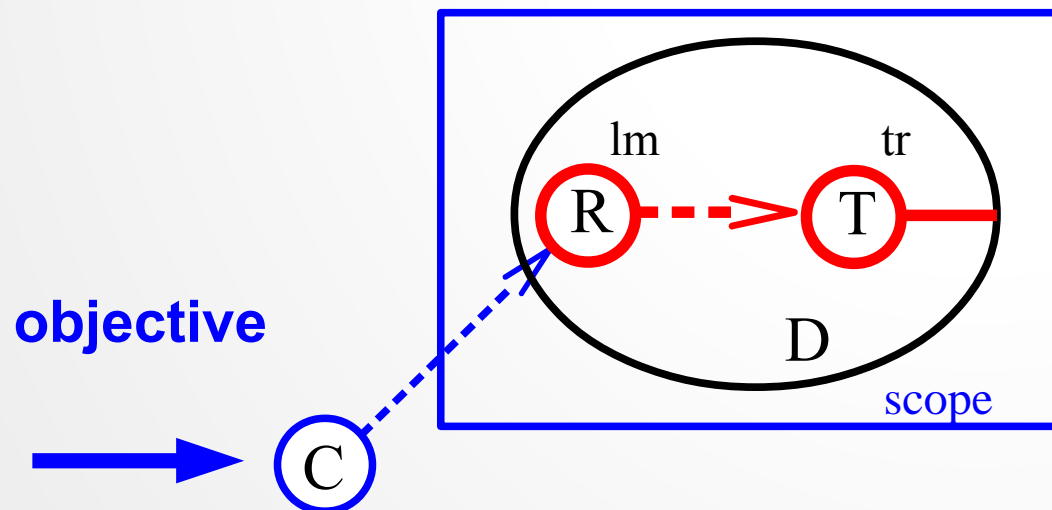
3a. R= speaker T= ‘he’

3b. R= speaker T= ‘you can eat’

Deixis and Subjectivity (Langacker 2002)

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

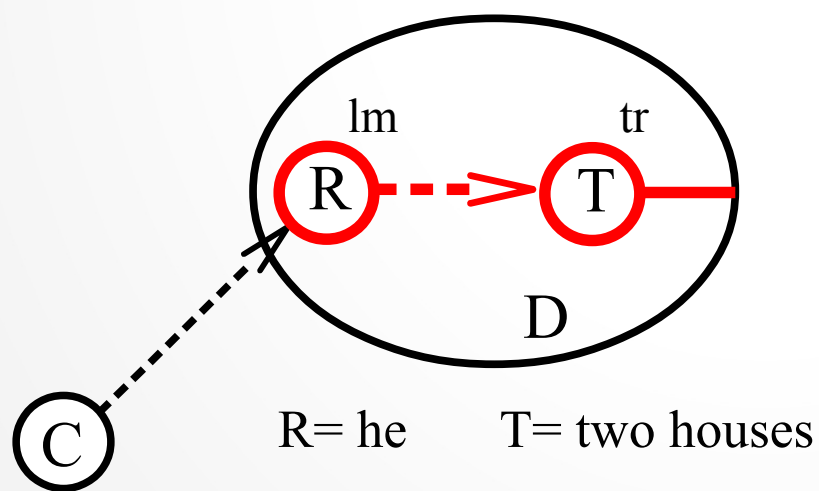
- 4a. [tsuang⁴ **mai**²] man⁴ yang⁴ yau¹
 school LOC 3SG be PERF (topological coincidence)
 ‘she’s at school now’
- 4b. meeu³nai¹ [kat⁵ **mai**²] kau¹ kaa⁵ yau¹
 today market LOC 3SG go PERF (allative)
 ‘she went to the market today’



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

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

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

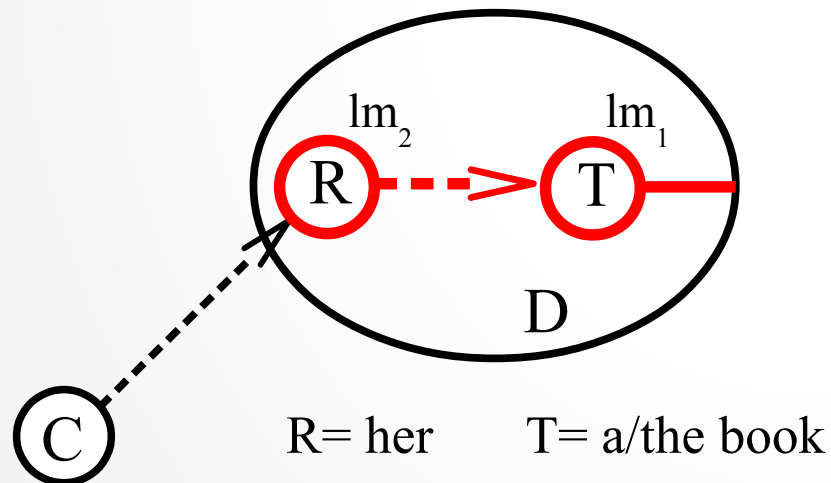


*mai*² as a locative source for a
 BE possessive (Langacker 2009:98)

POSSESSOR is LOCATION
 POSSESSEE is MOVER

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

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

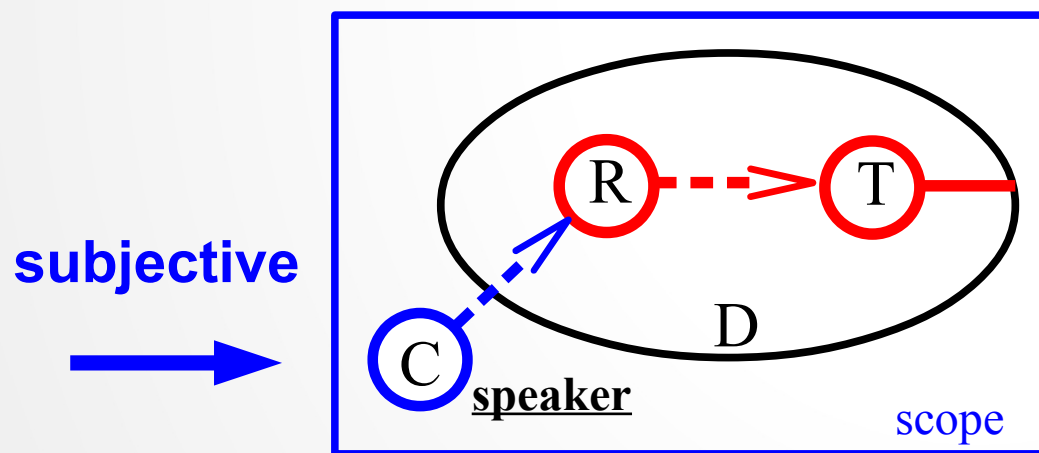


*mai*² as a spatial goal source with a verb of transfer (Rice and Kabata 2007:482)

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



*mai*² 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*², 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*² as source morpheme for grammaticalization processes is because of its underlying characterization as a schematic cognitive reference point.

18) References

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University of Alberta

Thank you

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Aknowledgements

Sally Rice
David Beck

Mann Han
Sai Thi Ha
Lwin Lwin Maw
Kun Ne Win Tun

