

Deictic path elements in Cantonese directional motion constructions

Cantonese has two deictic path elements *lai*⁴ ‘come’ and *heoi*³ ‘go’, which frequently appear in directional motion constructions to denote motion with respect to the location of the speaker (Yiu 2013). This study describes the special properties of these deictic elements and addresses the question of how these properties arise from their position in an articulated structure within vP.

These two deictic elements are often compared to non-deictic directional elements such as *ceot*¹ ‘exit’, *jap*⁶ ‘enter’, *soeng*⁵ ‘ascend’, *lok*⁶ ‘descend’ (Yiu 2013, Lamarre 2008, Hu 2022). Both deictic and non-deictic elements may take locative objects (1–2), and both may appear either as the only predicate (allowing aspect marking) (1) or after a manner verb (and aspect) (2) (Yiu 2013).

- (1) *aa*³-*ming*⁴ *heoi*³/*jap*⁶-*zo*² *tou*⁴*syu*¹*gun*². (2) *aa*³-*ming*⁴ *haang*⁴-*zo*² *lai*⁴/*ceot*¹ *tou*⁴*syu*¹*gun*².
 ah-Ming go/enter-PFV library ah-Ming walk-PFV come/exit library
 ‘Ming went to / entered the library.’ ‘Ming came to / exited the library by walking.’

However, they are distinguished in several ways. When a non-deictic element co-occurs with a deictic element, the deictic element always follows the non-deictic element (3) (Yiu 2013). This suggests that they are in distinct syntactic positions and that their relative positions are fixed.

- (3) *ngo*⁵ {*jap*⁶-*zo*² *heoi*³ / **heoi*³-*zo*² *jap*⁶ } *tou*⁴*syu*¹*gun*².

1SG enter-PFV go go-PFV enter library ‘I went into the library.’

In addition, deictic elements allow omission of their locative object (4a), while non-deictic elements do not (4b) (Yiu 2013). Relatedly, a postverbal deictic element may be stranded by relativization, while postverbal non-deictic elements resist stranding (5). These two pieces of evidence suggest that deictic elements are optionally transitive while non-deictic elements are obligatorily transitive.

- (4) a. *aa*³-*ming*⁴ *lai*⁴-*zo*² (*saan*¹-*deng*²). b. *aa*³-*ming*⁴ *soeng*⁵-*zo*² ?(*saan*¹-*deng*²).
 ah-Ming come-PFV hill-top ah-Ming ascend-PFV hill-top
 ‘Ming came (to the top of the hill).’ Int.: ‘Ming ascended (to the top of the hill).’

- (5) [*ngo*⁵ *haang*⁴-*gwo*³ *heoi*³/**jap*⁶ ____i] *ge*³ [*go*² *gaan*¹ *pou*³*tau*²]_i *hou*² *daai*⁶-*gaan*¹.
 1SG walk-EXP go enter GE that CLF store very big-CLF
 ‘That store that I have walked to/into before is very big.’

Marrying the extended PP structure of Svenonius (2010) with Harbour’s (2016) account of spatial deixis, I propose that deictic elements are exponents of Path when its complement is π P, which optionally takes PlaceP as its complement. The π head hosts a [\pm author] feature to specify physical regions that include/exclude the speaker: Path is spelled out as *lai*⁴ ‘come’ (= ‘to a region with the speaker’) or *heoi*³ ‘go’ (= ‘to a region without the speaker’) when π is valued with [+author] or [–author], respectively. Non-deictic elements represent roots that adjoin to Dir[ectional], a prepositional head above Path. When there is no manner verb, the highest element conflates to *v* (cf. Hale & Keyser 2002), “recategorizing” it as a verb ((1) vs. (2)). The proposed structure is shown in (6).

- (6) [_{vP} *v* [_{DirP} Dir [_{PathP} FIGURE [_{Path} Path [_{π P} π [_{PlaceP} Place GROUND]]]]]]]

Since Dir (adjunction site for non-deictic roots) dominates Path (deictic elements), this accounts for the strict ordering in (3). While both Path and Dir are P heads that require a complement (cf. Lam 2013), the requirement is seemingly lax for deictic Path because Compl,Path is always saturated with π P. This option is unavailable to non-deictic Dir, yielding obligatory transitivity.

This study challenges existing views on deictic path elements in Cantonese (and other Chinese languages), which often treat them as inherently verbal and lexical (Matthews 2006, Paul 2022). This analysis sheds light on the microvariation in morphosyntactic properties of deictic path elements in Chinese. It also contributes to ongoing crosslinguistic research on the special syntactic status of deixis in motion event description (Matsumoto & Kawachi 2020, Sarda & Fagard 2022).

Selected references

- Hale, Ken & Samuel Jay Keyser. 2002. *Prolegomenon to a theory of argument structure* (Linguistic Inquiry Monographs 39). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Harbour, Daniel. 2016. *Impossible persons* (Linguistic Inquiry Monograph 74). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hu, Xuhui. 2022. Same root, different categories: Encoding direction in Chinese. *Linguistic Inquiry* 53(1). 41–85.
- Lam, Chi Fung. 2013. *The cartography of spatial adpositional phrases in Mandarin and Cantonese*. Venice: Università Ca' Foscari Venezia dissertation.
- Lamarre, Christine. 2008. The linguistic categorization of deictic direction in Chinese—with reference to Japanese. In Dan Xu (ed.), *Space in languages of China: Cross-linguistic, synchronic and diachronic perspectives*, 69–97. New York: Springer.
- Matsumoto, Yo & Kazuhiro Kawachi (eds.). 2020. *Broader perspectives on motion event descriptions* (Human Cognitive Processing 69). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Matthews, Stephen. 2006. On serial verb constructions in Cantonese. In Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald & R. M. W. Dixon (eds.), *Serial verb constructions: A cross-linguistic typology* (Explorations in Linguistic Typology 2). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Paul, Waltraud. 2022. SVCs in disguise: the so-called “directional verb compounds” in Mandarin Chinese. In Andrew Simpson (ed.), *New explorations in Chinese theoretical syntax: Studies in honor of Yen-Hui Audrey Li* (Linguistik Aktuell/Linguistics Today 272), 133–162. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Sarda, Laure & Benjamin Fagard (eds.). 2022. *Neglected aspects of motion-event description: Deixis, asymmetries, constructions* (Human Cognitive Processing 72). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Svenonius, Peter. 2010. Spatial P in English. In Guglielmo Cinque & Luigi Rizzi (eds.), *Mapping spatial PPs*, 127–160. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Yiu, Carine Yuk-man. 2013. Directional verbs in Cantonese: A typological and historical study. *Language and Linguistics* 14(3). 511–569.