

On Expressing Contrast between the Come-V and Go-V Sequences

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Abstract

This talk examines the need for corpus-based, pragmatically informed instructions on how to express contrast between the *come-V* and the *go-V* sequences, drawing on linguistic descriptions of English grammar. This talk consists of four parts.

First, our corpus data from the Collins Wordbanks Online shows two main findings: (i) both sequences generally occur in informal spoken English; and (ii) imperatives form the majority of the come-V sequence but not in the go-V sequence.

Second, both sequences have two syntactic features: (i) only non-past forms of the verbs come and go are acceptable, and the second verb (V2) is always in a bare form; and (ii) no word can be inserted between come/go and V2.

Third, from a semantic standpoint, come and go retain their deictic interpretations. Both sequences are semantically divided into two groups. The first is the motion group, shown in (1)-(3).

- (1) a. She will manage to come see us.
b. You can go buy food somewhere else.
- (2) a. Come join us.
b. Go see him.
- (3) Go fly a kite!

The motion group has two characteristics: (i) V2 represents a purpose in relation to the verb come/go; and (ii) an agentive interpretation of come/go is required. With respect to deictic motion uses, come and go are goal-oriented and source-oriented, respectively. With respect to deictic evaluation uses, the destinations of come and go evoke positive and neutral/negative evaluations, respectively. The imperatives are closely related to the evaluative uses, shown in (2)-(3). The come-V sequence in (2a) retains friendly motives as pragmatic purposes. However, the go-V sequence in (2b) serves contextually neutral practices, and the one in (3) retains negative motives as pragmatic purposes. The second is the non-motion group. Only the go-V sequence occurs in this group, shown in (4)-(6).

Go shut the door.
He finally had to go ask for a loan.
'He didn't even leave a message.' 'Go figure.'

The non-motion group is further divided into two types. The first is the aspect type, as in (4), where go means 'to start to act so as to V2'. The aspect type which inherits the feature of the motion use retains the source-oriented interpretation. The second is the modal type, where go functions as a marker of evaluative modality, as in (5)-(6). The modal type conveys a speaker's attitude such as annoyance, stupidity, and the like. The modal type inherits the feature of the negative-evaluation use. Note that (4) and (5) can be interpreted not only as instances of non-motion but also of motion. Each of their interpretations necessitates an understanding of frame semantics.

Finally, the analysis presented here suggests that whether they express motion or not, both the go-V and come-V sequences are motivated by the primacy of motion in the human experience. The instructions discussed here are a pilot scheme that can be extended to other grammatical areas.

Consequently, this talk argues that the development of such instructions makes a clear and positive contribution to academic practice, particularly to grammatical instruction.