

Corpus-based Research on Physical and Figurative Uses of *come* and *go*

Naoki TAKASHIMA

(Received October 15, 1998)

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to investigate on the basis of some corpora the principles that govern the figurative uses of *come* and *go* referring to change of state, and present unified principles which could explain both physical and figurative uses of *come* and *go*. Firstly, we present the summary of Clark (1974), which comprehensively treats the latter uses. Secondly, we present and discuss the relevant data extracted from the Bank of English¹, and some other corpora. Thirdly, we compare the principles which govern the physical and figurative uses of *come* and *go*. Finally, we will show that it is necessary to revise the principles so far proposed for the physical uses of *come* and *go* in order to get unified principles.

2. Brief Summary of Clark (1974)

The change of body temperature is upward both in (1a) and (1b), and downward both in (1c) and (1d). What, then, are the differences between them?

- (1) a. Duncan's temperature went up today.
- b. Duncan's temperature came up today.
- (2) a. Duncan's temperature went down today.
- b. Duncan's temperature came down today.

Clark (1974: 316-319) states that the direction of change is away from the normal or desirable state in (1a) and (2a), and is towards the normal or desirable state in (1b) and (2b). On the basis of these examples and the like, she hypothesizes that the interpretation of such idiomatic or figurative uses is governed by the assumption that the deictic center is a normal state of being. This hypothesis predicts that idioms with *come* should always indicate entry into some normal state and ones with *go* should occur only to indicate departure from a normal state. This hypothesis also explains the difference

of acceptability between the following sentences:

- (3) a. John went into a coma yesterday.
 b.*John came into a coma yesterday.
- (4) a. John came out of the coma yesterday.
 b.*John went out of the coma yesterday.

The same can be also said about the figurative uses of *come* and *go* with the following adjectives as in (5) and (6):²

- (5) a. He {went/*came} {insane/mad/berserk}.
 b. The motor {went/*came} dead.
 c. Matilda {went/*came} {pale/livid} with rage.
 d. The fruit has {gone/*come} bad.
 e. The milk {went/*came} sour.
 f. Angus {went/*came} bald at the age of thirty.
- (6) a. The motor {came/*went} alive again.
 b. All their {dreams/hopes/fears} {came/*went} true.

Furthermore, Clark (1974: 326-327) considers the sentences in which both *come* and *go* can replace each other as in (7).

- (7) a. Look at all he came through.
 b. Look at all he went through.

She calls these uses evaluative and states that the choice of *come* consistently carries with it a positive connotation, while the choice of *go* in an otherwise identical utterance carries a neutral, or occasionally negative, connotation.

3. Data from the Bank of English and Discussion

The following data are from the Bank of English. Adjectives which appear immediately after *come* and *go* are listed in (8) and (9), respectively.

- (8) *come* + Adjective (including comparative forms)

alert, alive, available, awkward, base, bigger, blander, blessed, bold, bolder, broader, cheap, cheaper, clean, clear, complete, cooler, correct, dear, dependent, desperate, due, easy, empty, equal, expensive, fine, free, good, great, greener, hard, laden, loose, old, open, ready, real, receptive, right, ripe, safe, short, small, smaller, softer, solid, special, stern, striking, stronger, supercharged, tardy, true, unadorned, uncomfortable, unstuck, useful, vacant, wide

(9) *go* + Adjective (including comparative forms)

*active, amiss, bad, baggy, bald, ballistic, bankrupt, barmy, bawdy, berserk, big, black, blank, blind, blue, bonkers, bright, brighter, brittle, broke, brown, canny, cellular, cheaper, clean, clear, cloudy, coarse, cold, comatose, commercial, cordless, coy, crazy, critical, curly, daft, dark, darker, dead, deaf, decent, demented, different, digital, dim, dirty, dizzy, domestic, dotty, downmarket, dry, dull, dumb, eclectic, ecstatic, electric, electronic, elemental, elfish, extinct, faceless, faint, fantastic, fascist, feral, fertile, firmer, flat, frantic, free, frizzy, full, funny, gaga, gay, giddy, global, gold, golden, good, goofy, green, grey, hairless, haywire, hollow, hostile, hot, hungry, independent, insane, insolvent, international, invisible, kaput, kosher, lame, legal, legit, loopy, luminous, mad, mental, misty, moist, mouldy, naked, narrow, national, native, negative, nice, nude, numb, oily, opaque, open, pale, piggy, pink, positive, potty, pregnant, private, professional, psychedelic, public, purple, quiet, rampant, rancid, raunchy, red, retrograde, rigid, rusty, senile, septic, short, shy, sick, silent, simple, slack, slimy, soft, soggy, solid, sour, spare, sporty, stable, stale, stationary, steady, stellar, stellar, stiff, strong, stupid, sweet, tacky, taller, taut, temperamental, tender, thin, thirsty, tight, tighter, topless, unabated, unbuilt, underco-
ver, upmarket, vague, weak, weird, white, wide, wider, wild, wrong, yellow*

Some adjectives such as *alive, correct, good, receptive, right, safe, true*, etc. in (8) represent desirable states. Many adjectives such as *bankrupt, berserk, comatose, stupid, loopy, inumb, potty*, etc. in (9) represent undesirable states, and some adjectives such as *big, black, brown, cold, dark, strong, wide*, etc. neutral or objective states. These examples are to be expected from the hypotheses in Clark (1974).

This paper treats two problems. Firstly, we consider adjectives which can occur with both *come* and *go*. Secondly, we select opposite pairs of adjectives from (8)

and (9), and investigate their occurrence with *come* and *go*.

Comparing the adjectives listed in (8) and (9), we find that some adjectives are used with both *come* and *go*. They are listed in (10).

(10) *big, clean, clear, free, open, solid, green, soft, strong, wide*

On the assumption that the hypothesis of Clark (1974) is correct, the choice between *come* and *go* reflects the speaker's viewpoint.

Further comparison of (8) and (9) gives us some pairs of opposite adjectives and we list them with their co-occurrence relations with *come* and *go* in parentheses and their frequencies in square brackets below in (11), and show examples of usage in (12):

(11) (*go*) *bad* [12] - (*come*) *good* [83] (*go*) *black* [4] - (*go*) *white* [7]
 (*go*) *cold* [14] - (*go*) *hot* [5] (*go*) *dark* [4] - (*go*) *bright* [3]
 (*go*) *dead* [4] - (*come*) *alive* [195] (*come*) *loose* [9] - (*go*) *tight* [2]
 (*go*) *moist* [2] - (*go*) *dry* [7] (*go*) *narrow* [1] - (*go*) *wide* [9]
 (*go*) *negative* [1] - (*go*) *positive* [1] (*go*) *weak* [1] - (*go, come*) *strong* [1,1]

(12) i . *bad* - *good*

a. <p>³ Q. You mean my computer might not crash at all? <p> A. Heavens, no. Hard disks *go bad*⁴ as night follows day.

b. <p> I now need them to start showing their character. There's no point in saying things will *come good* in time.

ii . *black* - *white*

a. <p> We spoke to Pentax and were assured that 'LCD panels do not fade-end of story'. If exposed to heat, an LCD panel will *go black*, but Pentax hasn't as yet come across any of the problems that Mr Ramsey writes about.

b. But I think my career wouldn't have gone the way it should have gone if I had let my hair *go white*.

iii . *cold* - *hot*

a. <p> That instant Mishka felt his legs *go cold*. He'd seen one person sorted out" already. <p>

b. my dropping clothes, hoping she'll burn and collapse in passion and be mine, but she does none of those things. Her cheeks *go hot* and a shine of tears

comes into her eyes but she gathers control, pushes her rich hair back, and keeps looking at me

iv . *dark - bright*

a. see that the paper they were covering is still white. In other words a negative image has formed: those areas exposed to light **go dark**, those areas kept dark stay white. <p>

b. I would never admire or smile upon those whose depredations would or might touch the poor. My eyes **go bright** only when the really stinking billionaires are in question, and

v . *dead - alive*

a. than his salary from subscribers who know the futility of lodging official complaints. He is suspected of making phones **go dead** so he can fix them. <p>

b. It is the liturgy that makes the stones speak, the liturgy that makes dead stones **come alive**. It is the liturgy that discloses and realizes the secret of the cathedral.

vi . *loose - tight*

a. Waves covered the small porthole. The battered ship creaked. In her imagination Steffie could see bolts and screws **come loose** and whole metal panels crash into the sea. <p>

b. Stay close!" shouted Mr Peck, and he stepped forward to meet the biker's charge. Jupe felt his stomach **go tight** with fear.

vii . *moist - dry*

a. Riefenstahl's gestures are grand, dramatic, like a silent-movie star's; her eyes often **go moist** as they search the middle distance, and she dips in and out of the most fervent emotion at the drop of a hat.

b. <p> As she stared at him, she felt her throat **go dry**. <p>

viii . *narrow - wide*

a. If you continuously mate Cinnamon to Cinnamon your birds may **go narrow** at the shoulders and pinched in the head. <p>

b. ... they promptly announced that they had no intention of listening in future. <p> The implications **go wider** than Ashdown recognised.

ix . *negative - positive*

a. If-if Bill Clinton is going to have to respond to the negative attacks of

George Bush, perhaps Bill Clinton will have to *go negative* himself. <p>
 b. ... Cadbury expects the takeover to have a "broadly neutral" effect on group
 earnings during the first year and to *go positive* in 1996 ...

x . *weak - strong*

- a. <p> Huge, loud music pervades the studio-Elisabeth Schwarzkopf belting out
 an aria or Placido Domingo making Sandra *go weak* at the Knees.
 b. Then we *go strong*, for all we're worth. Don't we, Bassett!" We do that,
 Master Paul." And when are you sure?" said the uncle, laughing.
 c. <p> Yet could it be that Ecuador's 16-year-old democracy has *come stronger*
 out of the crisis? Many political leaders think it has.

Considering the opposite pairs of adjectives in the Bank of English, we notice that
 they are classified into three groups as follows:

(13)

Group A	go + Adjective - go + Adjective
Group B	go + Adjective - come + Adjective
Group C	go + Adjective - go/come + Adjective

The following is a list of pairs of adjectives which belong to each group:

- (14) Group A: *black - white, cold - hot, dark - bright, moist - dry, negative - positive*
 Group B: *bad - good, dead - alive, loose - tight*
 Group C: *short - tall, weak - strong*

The fact that another possibility of the combinations, *come + Adjective - come + Adjective*, cannot be found in the data from the Bank of English is easily predicted, because opposite adjectives, which present a contrast in regard to some semantic feature(s), generally cannot both be regarded as representing normal/desirable state.

Among these three groups let us pay attention to Group B. Except for the neutral use of *go*, this combination, *go + Adjective* and *come + Adjective*, is a typical one. In the opposite pair of adjectives which have desirable and undesirable connotations respectively, the former combines with *come* and the latter with *go*. This correctly predicts

the co-occurrences of *good* and *alive* with *come* and *bad* and *dead* with *go*. In the opposites *loose* and *tight*, however, this does not seem to apply. Let us see the example (12. vi. a), repeated below for convenience:

(15) *come loose*

Waves covered the small porthole. The battered ship creaked. In her imagination Steffie could see bolts and screws *come loose* and whole metal panels crash into the sea. <p> (The Bank of English)

In this example the change of state from “tight” to “loose” surely means undesirable change in spite of its co-occurrence with *come*. This implies that in addition to “normal” and “desirable”, another concept is necessary to get full explanation of the usage of *come*. We define it as “original”. Thus, when something goes back to its original state, *come* can be used. When, on the contrary, something departs from its original state, *go* is used. Though it may be said that the concept “normal” could include “original”, we suppose “normal” should be distinguished from “original” in that the former is a subjective concept, and the latter an objective one. With this new concept added, the combination of *tight* with *go* can also be explained naturally. The same concept, moreover, explains the use of *come* in the following:

(16) *come vacant*

... is an obvious exception. Bryan Robson was appointed to Venables's coaching staff to be groomed for the top job. It may have *come vacant* a couple of years earlier than he, or England, would have liked, but there is a lot to be said for the dynamism of ... (The Bank of English)

4. Physical and Figurative Uses of *come* and *go*

4.1 Principles of Physical Uses of *come* and *go*

Fillmore (1972) and Oe (1975) propose similar principles concerning the basic physical uses of *go*.

Fillmore (1972:6) represents the principle as follows:

- (17) a. For GO, it is assumed that the Sender is not located at the Goal at coding time.
- b. For COME, it is assumed

- i . that the Sender is at the Goal at coding time;
- ii . that the Sender is at the Goal at arrival time;
- iii . that the Addressee is at the Goal at coding time;
- iv . that the Addressee is at the Goal at arrival time.

The acceptability judgements of the following sentences can be accounted for by principle (17a):

- (18) a. Go away!
- b. *Go here!

The principles under (17b) give the following sentence four possible contexts.

- (19) John will come to the department tomorrow.

Oe (1975:14) adds a provision to principle (17a) as follows:

- (20) The Sender is not at the arrival place at either coding time or arrival time.

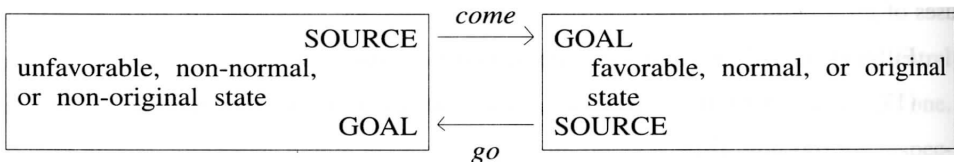
This modification is necessary to account for the unacceptability of (21) in the context in which the sender (speaker) was in Tokyo at John's arrival time.

- (21) John was in Osaka on February the first. He went to Tokyo the next day.

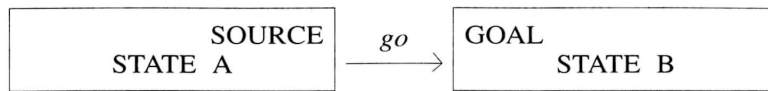
4.2 Principle of the figurative uses of *come* and *go*

We have seen the principles of the figurative uses of *come* and *go* of Clark (1974) in section 2. Let us illustrate them with the slight modification of section 3.

- (22) a. Evaluative Description of Change of State



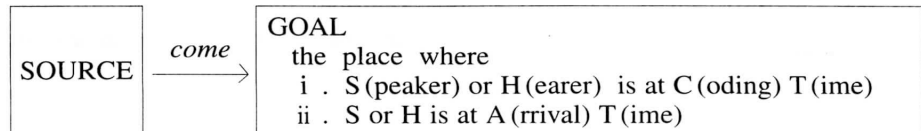
b. Neutral Description of Change of State

4.3 Unification of the Principles of Physical and Figurative Uses of *come* and *go*

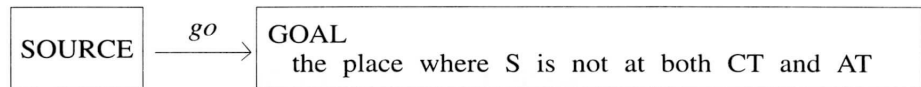
To make the comparison easier between the physical and figurative uses of *come* and *go*, let us illustrate the above principles of their physical uses in (23) in the same way as (22):

(23) Description of Physical Movement

a.



b.



The goal of the figurative uses of *come* is the normal, favorable, or original state. This corresponds to the place where S or H is in the physical uses of *come*. We can say from this correspondence that the normal, favorable, or original state is the place where S is in referring to change of state using *come*. Thus, roughly speaking, one and the same principle seems to be working in both physical and figurative uses of *come*. Fillmore (1972: 10) adduces interesting examples in (24) which seem to be relevant to the present argument.

(24) a. I came to the front door to let you in, but you had already left.

b. She came to the corner where we were going to meet, but I'd got stuck in traffic and never made it.

In these physical uses of *come*, H was not at the Goal of the Agent's movement in (24a) and S was not there in (24b) at either CT or AT. In spite of these facts, (24a)

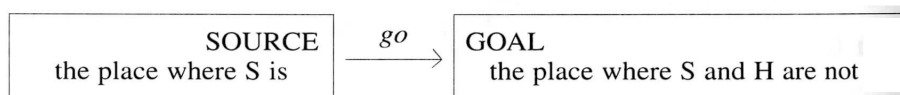
and (24b) are both acceptable. The reason is that respective H and S were at the Goal in the S's mind. In the figurative uses of *come* as well, S puts himself/herself in "normal, favorable, or original state" in his/her mind and describes change of state.

Thus the same recognition process as in the figurative uses seems to be working in some physical uses of *come*.

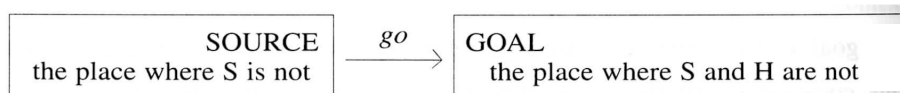
Now let us attempt a comparison between the physical and figurative uses of *go*. As shown in (22a) and (22b), figurative *go* has two uses: evaluative and neutral. On the other hand, physical *go* has only one. As for the demonstratives *this* and *that*, which are deictic words like *come* and *go*, Lakoff (1974:355) states that the rules that correctly predict the spatial uses of *this* and *that* should somehow also serve to account for their discourse and emotional uses. Likewise, we wish to conflate the separate principles of physical and figurative uses of *go* into one. To achieve this purpose, it would be necessary to divide the physical use of *go* shown in (23b) into two cases as follows:

(25) Description of Physical Movement by means of *go*

a.



b.



This revised physical use of *go* in (25a) corresponds to the figurative evaluative use of *go* in (22a), and the one in (25b) to the figurative neutral use of *go* in (22b). The examples of *go* in these uses are shown respectively in (26):

- (26) a. In the cricket-chattering dusk, John Kneubuhl, a grand old man of the island, who *went* from here to Yale and then to a screenwriting career in Hollywood, recalls how he used to play hide-and-seek in the ghost-filled dark as a boy. (*Time*, May 15 1989⁵)
- b. He is suspected of making phones *go* dead so he can fix them. (The Bank of English)

- c. And he *went* from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria. (King James Version of the Bible, Second Kings: 25⁶)
- d. I waited at the corner for the lights to *go* green and lost patience and dodged through the traffic. (The Bank of English)

Thus, apparently unnecessary division of the physical use of *go* in (23) makes it possible to treat the physical and figurative uses of *go* in a unified way.

4.4 Differences between the Principles of Physical and Figurative Uses

There are two problems to be considered in the above proposals. One is H's involvement in the principles and the other is the differentiation between CT and AT. As it is obvious that H is involved in the principles of physical uses of *come* and *go*, and that the differentiation between CT and AT is necessary in them, let us concentrate our attention on the principles of the figurative uses.

To investigate these problems, let us consider the following examples⁷:

(27) Situation A: The speaker is already mad.

- a. John will also go mad sometime in the near future.
- b.*John will also come mad in the near future.

Situation B: The speaker is sure he/she will be mad before John is.

- a. John will also go mad.
- b.*John will also come mad.

Situation C: The hearer is already mad.

- a. I will also go mad in the near future.
- b.*I will also come mad in the near future.

Situation D: The speaker is sure the hearer will be mad before he/she is.

- a. I will also go mad.
- b.*I will also come mad.

That all the sentences in which *come* is used are unacceptable seems to show that both H and AT are irrelevant to the principles. In other words, what is indispensable in the principles of the figurative uses seems to be S and CT. This is natural from the consideration that the choice between *come* and *go* in their figurative uses (except for neutral description) reflects the S's evaluation of the state described by adjectives

at CT. In the case of particular adjectives, however, such as *mad*, *dead*, *alive*, *good*, H can be said to be involved in the principles, because S and H both evaluate the states described by these words in the same way. It is supposed to be socially and culturally determined, not by the Speaker that some adjectives such as *dead*, *mad*, *insane*, etc represent non-normal/unfavorable/non-original state, and ones such as *alive*, *good*, etc. normal/favorable/original state. Thus the principles of the basic physical uses are more elaborate than the ones of the derived figurative uses.

5. Closing Remarks

In this paper we have tried to conflate the principles of physical and figurative uses of *come* and *go*. In physical uses of them the English language restricts its user by its strict rules but in figurative uses of them its user defines the language to a high degree. Concretely speaking, adjectives used with *come* and/or *go* should be classified into four types as follows:

- (28) a. Type A: generally represents normal, favorable, original state such as *alive*, *good*, *loose*, etc.
- b. Type B: generally represents non-normal, unfavorable, or non-original state, such as *dead*, *bad*, *tight*, etc.
- c. Type C: represents objective state typically found in colour terms such as *green*, *red*⁸
- d. Type D: cannot be defined in advance with regard to normal/non-normal, favorable/unfavorable, or original/non-original contrast such as *soft*, *strong*, *wide*, etc.

The English language determines the co-occurrence of the adjectives (28a), (28b), and (28c) with *come*, *go* and *go*, respectively. In the case of adjectives (28d), on the other hand, it is the speaker that determines the choice between *come* and *go*. Therefore, by investigating the uses of *come* and *go* with adjectives, we can learn both cultural and individual aspects of the English language, that is, we can come to understand the way by which English speakers capture the states adjectives represent. Thus the interaction between language and its user brings creativity to language use.

Notes

- * I would like to thank my colleague, Martin Gore, who kindly acted as an informant and made stylistic and grammatical corrections. All inadequacies, of course, belong to me.
1. The Bank of English is an enormous corpus stored by COBUILD (a division of Harper Collins Publishers) and The University of Birmingham. The number of words stored in the corpus became 329 million on 20 July 1998 and it continues to grow with the constant addition of new material. The data used in this paper were collected on 20th June, 1977. The extracted data concerning *come* + Adjective and *go* + Adjective each comprise 3000 lines. They are respectively abstracted from the total 4502 and 9723 matching lines, and each line contains 256 characters (spaces included).
 2. These examples are from Clark (1974: 320-321, 325-326).
 3. The examples include <p>. This is a Cobuild text mark-up code meaning a paragraph break.
 4. Italic and bold characters are mine throughout the paper.
 5. This example is extracted from the text files contained in CD-ROM titled *THE 1991 TIME ALMANAC* produced by Compact Publishing Inc. This CD-ROM contains full texts of every issue of *TIME* from Jan. 2 1989 to Sept. 30 1991.
 6. This is from a text file included in BSEARCH, a FREE Bible search program by Chuck Hamilton.
 7. These sentences are artificial and the judgement of acceptability is M. Gore's. He suggests that these generally unacceptable sentences may become acceptable when uttered with intention of producing a humorous effect.
 8. The colour terms in this class genuinely represent colour. Some colour-adjectives such as *white*, *pale*, however, can also be used in Type B as follows:
 - (i) ... wealthy ones, the trend-setters, have decided they want to be healthy. They drink Perrier water instead of champagne. They **go white** if they see a piece of red meat. (The Bank of English)
 - (ii) They were the first enemy troops he had ever seen and the sight of them had made him **go pale**. (*Ibid.*)

References

- Clark, E. V. 1974. Normal States and Evaluative Viewpoints. *Lg.* 50. 316-332.
- Fillmore, C. J. 1972. How to know whether you're coming or going. *Studies in descriptive and applied linguistics* (International Christian University, Tokyo), 5.3-17.
- Hofmann, T. R. and T. Kageyama. 1986. *10 Voyages in the Realms of Meaning*. Tokyo: Kuroshio Syuppan.
- Lakoff, R. 1974. Remarks on *This* and *That*. *CLS* 10. 345-356.
- Oe, S. 1975. *Nichiei no hikaku kenkyuu: Syukansei wo megutte*. Tokyo: Nanundo.