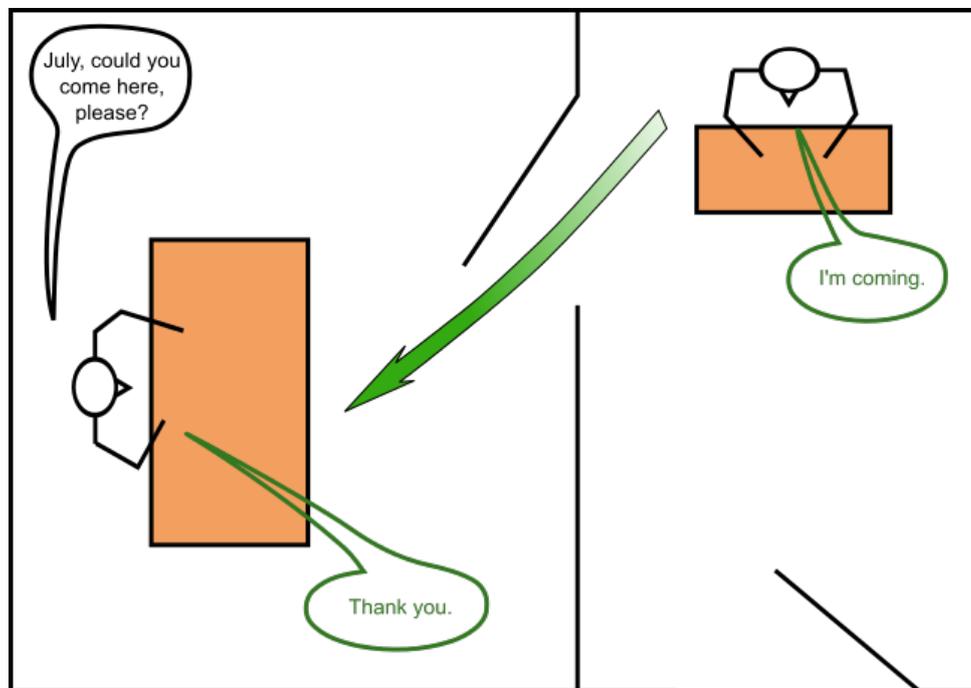


Come & Go: partial inversion



The correct use of the verbs **come** and **go** causes problems for speakers of Portuguese. Depending on the context, **come** and **go** indicate a direction opposite to the corresponding words in Portuguese. There is a partial, context dependent inversion, of the direction indicated by **come** and **go**. Correct use is shown in Figure 1. Incorrect use and possible resulting problem is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 1: I'm coming. Thank you.



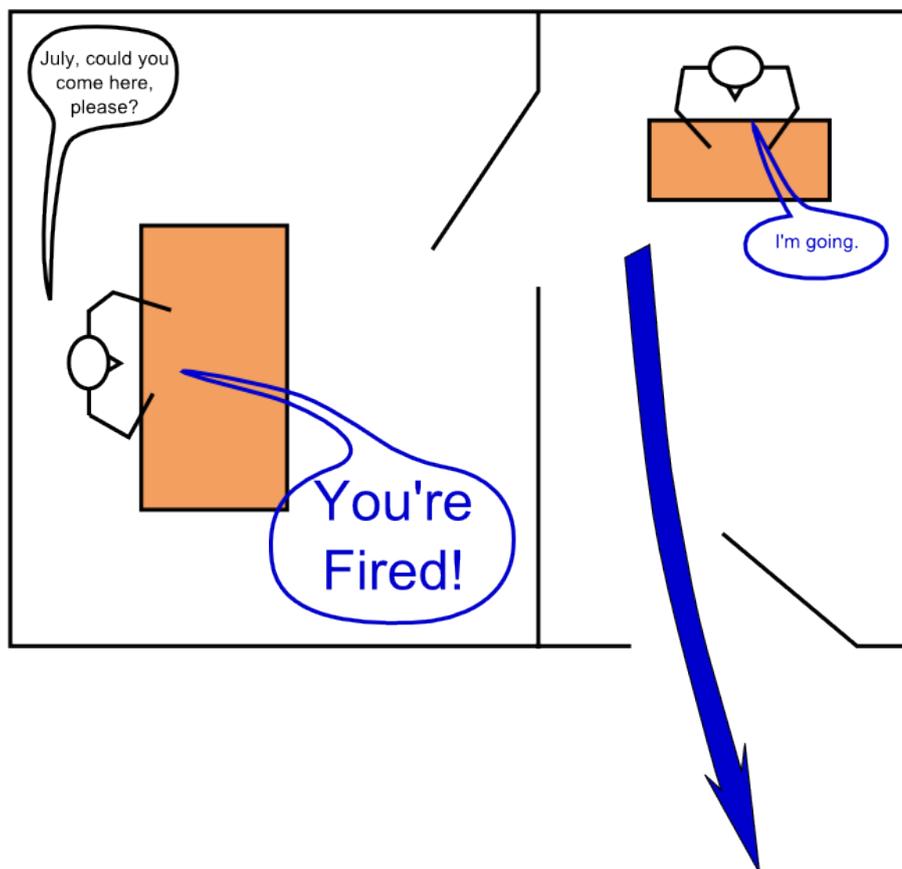
This context dependent inversion of **come** and **go** is probably result of the fact that Portuguese has a preposition indicating 'there where you, the listener, are', while English doesn't have a preposition with this meaning. When responding to a request to come, one communicates 'there where you are' by placing oneself in the place of the person who made the request. As a result, the direction indicated by **come** and **go** are inverted in these cases.

Answering “I’m coming” means “I’m moving to the place where you, who made the request, are” (See Figure 1). Answering “I’m going” means “I’m moving to a place where neither of us is” (Figure 2).

Enfos

The same context dependent inversion happens with **bring**, which means ‘come and have something or somebody with oneself’ and **take**, which means ‘go and have something or somebody with oneself’.

Figure 2: I’m going. Your fired.



Not applying this context dependent inversion correctly in English, causes that a person who makes a request thinks the request is refused. This can lead to unpleasant situations, like in Figure 2.

The idea of placing oneself in the situation of the other also helps to find out which word to use when referring to a place where none of the speakers is at the time of requesting or suggesting. This can happen for instance when making an appointment and deciding where to meet.



The following ways of making suggestions are all possible but there are differences in connotation.

Yesterday I met Julie. She wants to go to the open-air museum. Do you want to go with us?

Explanation: We all move in the same direction.

Yesterday I met Julie. She wants to go to the open-air museum. Do you want to come with us?

Explanation: We go and take you with us.

Let's meet in the afternoon at Julie's. I'll meet her at lunch. When do you think you can come?

Explanation: In the afternoon, I and Julie are already there so at that time you will be moving in my direction. That is why the word **come** is used.

The problem of mixing up **come** and **go**, can be avoided by using alternatives like the following.

When do you think you can arrive.

When do you think you will be there.

They are common expressions for situations like this.

This tekst can be downloaded for free from:

http://www.tonvanhattum.com.br/material/ComeGo-partial_inversion.html

A version in Dutch can be downloaded from:

<http://www.tonvanhattum.com.br/material/KomenGaan-ContextAfh0mk.pdf>