

A Study of Resultative Constructions in English
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This joint research discusses the semantic properties of English resultative constructions (henceforth R-constructions) within the framework of construction grammar proposed in Goldberg (1995) where a construction is defined as a semantics-syntax pair, aiming to elaborate the semantics of R-construction.

Goldberg claims that an argument with which a resultative phrase is connected must be given an argument role (i.e., a semantic role of the construction itself) of patient. However, it seems misleading to uniformly label a postverbal NP patient, since the label patient is traditionally regarded as a thematic role, a notion related to a verb itself and postverbal NPs of some resultative sentences (the (a)-sentences of (2)-(5)) do not pass the following patienthood test proposed in Lakoff (1976):

- (1) What X did to <patient> was

Consider the following R-constructions, i.e. the (a)-sentences of (2)-(5).

- (2) a. John wiped the table clean.
b. What John did to the table was wipe it clean.
- (3) a. He ate himself sick.
b. *What he did to himself was eat himself sick.
- (4) a. The joggers ran the pavement thin. (Goldberg 1995:185)
b. *What the joggers did to the pavement was run the pavement thin.
- (5) a. She sang her child to sleep.
b. *What she did to her child was sing her child to sleep.

The postverbal NP in (2a) is connected with a patient, as shown by the acceptability of (2b). The postverbal NPs in the (a)-sentences of (3)-(5), on the other hand, should not be associated with patients, borne out by the ungrammaticality of the (b)-sentences of (3)-(5). Thus, the paradigm in (2)-(5) strongly indicates that it is not appropriate to label the postverbal NP patient in the semantics of the R-construction.

Our elaboration can solve this problem. We think of the semantics of the R-construction as follows: an event associated with a verb causes an event associated with a resultative predicate. We regard as a directly-affected (henceforth D-aff) entity an entity which is necessary for the semantic scene related to, and semantically subcategorized by, the verb;

we view as an indirectly-affected (henceforth I-aff) entity an entity which is not necessary for the semantic scene, but is indirectly affected by the event related to by the verb. On our account Goldberg's patient is thus divided into two type: D-aff and I-aff entities. Examples with D-aff entities are (2a) and (4a). In (2a) and (4a), the table and the pavement represent notions which are necessary for the semantic scenes of wiping and running, respectively; the action of wiping semantically requires something wiped and that of running someplace where one runs. On the other hand, examples with I-aff entities are (3a) and (5a). In (3a) what is necessary for the semantic scene of eating is something to be eaten, i.e., "food" and himself is not semantically related to that scene, counting as an I-aff entity; in (5a), similarly, a D-aff entity is something to be sung and her child is viewed as an I-aff entity.

We also examine argument roles which subjects in resultatives may be associated with. Although Goldberg claims that the roles are solely agents, the following sentences pose a problem to this claim:

- (6) a. The sun had baked the ground hard.
 b. The dog barked the chickens awake. (Goldberg(1995:185))

There is in addition a contrast between (7a-b) and (7c-d) in the compatibility of the adverb unintentionally.

- (7) a. John wiped the table clean (??unintentionally).
 b. She sang her child to sleep (??unintentionally).
 c. He ate himself sick (unintentionally).
 d. The joggers ran the pavement thin (unintentionally).

To capture this contrast, we introduce the notions of causer and actor instead of agent, and reduce the contrast to the difference in argument roles which the subjects are connected with. We define the alternative notions as follows: a causer (cf. (7a-b)) acts with the intention of the result caused by the action, but an actor (cf. (7c-d)) does not.

In conclusion, examining the postverbal NP and the subject in English resultatives in terms of semantic properties, especially argument roles, we claim that they both should be classified into two types, respectively: D-aff/I-aff entities and causers/actors.

References: Goldberg, A. (1995) Constructions: A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure; Lakoff, G. (1976) "Towards Generative Semantics". In J.D.McCawley, ed., Syntax and Semantics 7: Notes from the Linguistic Underground.