

On the Semantic Difference between Hyperbolic Resultatives and Resultatives with Ambiguous Readings in English*

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1. Introduction

This article is concerned with the following type of resultative constructions with the so-called fake object, as in (1):¹

- (1) a. Mary cried her eyes blind. (Miyata (2004:70))
 b. The joggers ran the pavement thin. (Goldberg (1995:184))

In (1), as the verbs are unergative, i.e. intransitive, the NPs *herself* and *the pavement* are not semantically selected by the verbs.

This type of resultative has been said not to express the literal meaning of the linguistic expression: the resultative phrase does not describe the actual result state of the object entity after the change of state. Rather, this type of resultatives has the meaning of “an excess” (cf. Goldberg (1995), Kageyama (1996), Jackendoff (1997), and Miyata (2004), among others). For example, in the event described by (1a), Mary cried so hard as if her eyes became blind; in (1b), so many joggers ran on the pavement as if it became thin. Thus, these resultatives allow a hyperbolic reading (henceforth, hyperbolic resultatives).

However, there is another type of fake object resultative in English, whose interpretation is ambiguous between a literal reading and a hyperbolic reading. Observe the following examples:

- (2) a. Mary cried her eyes red. (Miyata (2004:54))
 b. He ate himself sick. (Goldberg (1995:192))

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¹ A fake object is a kind of object which has no semantic relationship with the verb, for the verb itself cannot take a fake object as its own argument. Consider the following examples in (i):

- (i) a. * The joggers ran the pavement.
 b. * Mary cried her eyes.
(Miyata (2004:70))

For details, see Suzuki (2003) as for the relevant discussion.

These examples have literal and hyperbolic readings: for example, in the case of the literal reading in (2a), Mary cried, and as a result, her eyes literally became red; in the case of the hyperbolic reading, Mary cried as if her eyes became red. In the same way, (2b) also has both readings.

Given the semantic difference between (1) and (2), a question will arise here: what makes the difference in the possible interpretations between (1) and (2)? The purpose of this article is to propose an adequate criterion which differentiates resultatives with hyperbolic readings and ones with ambiguous readings.

The rest of this article is organized as follows: Section 2 considers a previous analysis presented by Miyata (2004) and points out an inadequacy of her analysis. Section 3 proposes an alternative criterion which accounts for the data more accurately. Section 4 is dedicated to the concluding remarks of this paper.

2. Miyata's (2004) Analysis

In this section, as a previous analysis of the interpretation of resultatives, we take up Miyata (2004). She explains the difference between resultatives with a literal reading (henceforth, literal resultatives) and those with a hyperbolic reading in terms of focalization of the semantics of resultatives. Under her approach, she classifies resultatives into three types. However, as will be shown in section 2.2, there is an inadequacy in her classification.

2.1. Classification of Resultatives

It has been pointed out that there are two types of resultative constructions with regard to their interpretations (cf. Simpson (1983), Goldberg (1995), Kageyama (1996), and Miyata (2004), among others): the one which receives a literal interpretation and the one which admits of a hyperbolic interpretation. First, let us consider the case of literal resultatives, as in (3):

- (3) a. Terry wiped the table clean. (Miyata (2004:55))
 b. John broke the door open. (Miyata (2004:35))

Sentence (3a) specifies the cleanliness of the table resulting from the action denoted by the verb. Likewise, sentence (3b) describes the result state of the door being open. As the examples illustrate, literal resultatives encode the specific result states of events.

Second, let us consider the case of hyperbolic resultatives. As mentioned above, this type of resultative does not encode the result state; they express the idea that the action performed was done to excess.

- (4) a. [...] if they drank themselves blind on champagne [...] (BNC EUU)
 b. The joggers ran the pavement thin. (= (1b))

In (4a), they did not become blind literally; rather, they continuously drank as if they became blind. Likewise, sentence (4b) does not imply that the state of the pavement became thin. In this case, as Jackendoff (1997) notes, the sequence of the object NP and the resultative phrase functions as an intensive adverb. Hyperbolic resultatives, thus, express the intensive action described by the verb.

Miyata (2004:41-42) suggests a semantic analysis for the difference in an interpretation of the resultatives. To begin with, following Nakau (1994), she assumes that predicates are divided into three types: action, process, and state. The action-type predicate represents a situation where an actor does something; the process-type predicate describes a situation in which something undergoes some change of state or position; the state-type predicate represents a situation in which something is in some place. Miyata further claims that these three situations have a sequence as follows: Action → Process → State (cf. Miyata (2004:42-43, 49-50)).

Assuming the same sequence of events for the semantics of resultatives, she proposes the ways of focalization in regard to an interpretation of resultatives. When a resultative receives a literal interpretation, Process and State are focalized. This is because literal resultatives put a focus on the result state caused by the action denoted by the verb. She calls this kind of resultatives Result-focused resultative constructions. In contrast, when a resultative is interpreted as hyperbole, Action and Process are focalized, since this type of resultative focuses on the process of an action denoted by the verb. She calls this type of resultative Manner-focused resultative constructions. These ways of focalization are summarized as the following schemata:

- (5) A: Result-Focused Resultative Constructions
 Action→Process→State
 RESULT
- B: Manner-Focused Resultative Constructions
Action→Process→State
 MANNER

(Miyata (2004:50))

According to Miyata (2004), literal resultatives, which encode the endpoint of the events, can co-occur with an *in*-phrase, which denotes the temporal completion of the events, and therefore describe telic events. Consider the following examples:

- (6) a. Terry wiped the table clean {in/*for five minutes}.
 (Van Valin (1990:255))
 b. John broke the door open {in/*for ten minutes}. (Miyata (2004:46))

The literal resultatives in (6) co-occur only with the *in*-phrase. This indicates that, as Miyata suggests, literal resultatives express completive events, so that RESULT is focalized. For example, sentence (6a) denotes that the table became completely clean, and co-occurs with the completive time adverbial. Hence, the focalization of RESULT. The same holds true of (6b). From the observation in (6), we can say that literal resultatives express completive events, select an *in*-phrase, and focuses on RESULT.

As, in contrast to the case of literal resultatives, hyperbolic resultatives do not encode the endpoint of events but an intensive action, they select a temporal *for*-phrase, which describes the continuity of events without a definite endpoint. Consider the following examples:

- (7) a. He drank himself blind {for/*in an hour}.
 b. The joggers ran the pavement thin {for/??in an hour}.
 (Miyata (2004:48))

As shown in (7), hyperbolic resultatives are compatible only with the temporal *for*-phrase. In (7a), it does not imply the result state of being blind, but describes the situation where he drank much alcohol continuously as if his eyes became blind. Hence, MANNER is focused on in the whole event. The same holds true of (7b). From the observation in (7), hyperbolic resultatives describe the continuity of events, select an *for*-phrase, and focuses on MANNER.

She further points out another case where the interpretation of resultatives is ambiguous between literal and hyperbolic interpretations. Consider the cases in (2), repeated here as (8):

- (8) a. Mary cried her eyes red.
 b. He ate himself sick.

Sentence (8a) may be interpreted literally: his eyes became fierce red as a result of crying. This sentence may also be interpreted hyperbolically: he cried as if his eyes became red. This is also the case with (8b). The ambiguity between these interpretations is attested by co-occurring time adverbials:

- (9) a. He cried his eyes red {for/in an hour}.
 b. She ate herself sick {for/in an hour}.

(Miyata (2004:47))

When the sentences in (9) receive a literal interpretation, the time adverbial *in an hour* is selected, and RESULT is focalized in the sequence of the events. In contrast, when the sentences receive a hyperbolic interpretation, *for an hour* is selected, and MANNER is focused in the sequence of the events. She claims that the focalization of events depends on whether or not these sentences describe situations where we can experience in the real world.

In sum, according to Miyata's classification, resultatives are classified into three types, relying on the way of focalization of MANNER or RESULT. The relevant examples of each class of resultatives are given in (10-12) (all examples from Miyata (2004)):

(10) Type 1:

- a. John wiped the table clean.
 b. The silversmith pounded the metal flat.
 c. John broke the door open.

(11) Type 2:

- a. He cried his eyes red.
 b. Mary ate herself sick.
 c. He talked himself hoarse.

(12) Type 3:

- a. Mary drank herself blind.
 b. He cried his eyes out.
 c. The joggers ran the pavement thin.

The resultatives which Miyata (2004) calls Type 1 receive only a literal interpretation. Those of Type 2 can receive either a literal or a hyperbolic interpretation. Type 3 resultatives only receive a hyperbolic interpretation. These three types of the interpretations of resultatives are summarized in (13):²

² Here, the term *degree* is used in the same meaning as hyperbolic.

(13)

Type/Interpretation	Resultative	Degree
Type 1	ok	-
Type 2	ok	ok
Type 3	-	ok

(Miyata (2004:86))

The next subsection clarifies an empirical inadequacy of this classification.

2.2. *A Problem*

As we considered in 2.1, Miyata (2004) classifies resultatives into three types according to the possible interpretation. A closer look, however, reveals that an actual interpretation of resultatives is not so clear-cut as Miyata claims. More specifically, the distinction between Type 2 and Type 3 resultatives is vague, because it may differ greatly in individuals. Indeed, some of the Type 3 resultatives receive a literal interpretation, which is attested by the “result-cancelling test.” Let us consider the following examples:

- (14) a. # John broke the door open, but the door did not open.
 b. Mary cried her eyes out, but her eyes were not out.

As in (14a), literal resultatives cannot be followed by a clause denying the actual result state, because this type of resultative entails that the result state is realized. On the other hand, as in (14b), hyperbolic resultatives can be followed by such a clause because they do not describe a situation in which the result state is actually realized, but describes how intensive the action is. Thus, the result-cancelling test can distinguish literal and hyperbolic resultatives.

If we apply this test to the Type 3 resultatives, the following results are obtained:³

- (15) a.(#) Mary drank herself blind, but she did not become blind.
 b.(#) He cried his eyes blind, but he did not become blind.

³ As with Miyata (2004), Goldberg (1995) considers that sentence (15c) receives only the hyperbolic reading:

- (i) This statement would not be used to describe an actual change in the thickness of the pavement, let alone to convey the idea that the pavement bore some kind of particular property which caused it to become thin from people running on it.

(Goldberg (1995:185))

The result-cancelling test in (15), however, reveals that this type of resultatives actually receives the literal interpretation.

- c.(#) The joggers ran the pavement thin, but the pavement did not become thin.

The judgments in (15) indicate that the result states implied in the sentences may or may not be cancelled. In other words, contrary to Miyata's classification, where these sentences are supposed to have only the hyperbolic reading, they actually receive a literal reading as well as a hyperbolic reading. Hence, these should be categorized into Type 2 resultatives, not Type 3.

The inadequacy of her classification is further endorsed by the following discourse data. According to Miyata's classification, the sentence in (12a) is only understood as a hyperbolic expression. However, it can actually receive a literal interpretation. This is attested by the co-occurrence with the adverb *literally* or *actually*, which induces a literal interpretation. Consider the following examples (italics and underlines are mine):⁴

- (16) a. In his new school *he drank himself blind* – literally – but the handicap sharpened his other senses.
(D. S. Lavender, *California: land of new beginnings*, p.310)
- b. Brad Geiger wins Party award as he actually *drank himself blind*, regaining sight only after switching back to beer for two consecutive hours. (http://www.frozenholefrenzy.com/ice_fishing/news.php)

The adverb *literally* in (16a) can co-occur with the italicized resultative. Furthermore, the underlined expression *the handicap* refers to the state of being literally blind. In the same way, the adverb *actually* in (16b) can co-occur with the italicized resultative. What is more, the underlined expression *regaining sight* presupposes the situation in which he once became blind. From the examples in (16), we can say that these examples constitute counterexamples against Miyata's classification.

The result-cancelling test in (15) and the discourse data in (16) suggest that Miyata's (2004) classification is empirically not valid, especially as for the classification between Type 2 and Type 3 resultatives.

There arises one question here: what factor determines whether a given fake object resultative gains a purely hyperbolic interpretation or an ambiguous interpretation? In the following discussion, considering the difference between these two types, we propose an alternative, more precise criterion for the classification.

⁴ I am indebted to Tetsuya Kogusuri for pointing out these data to me.

3. The Difference between Type 2 and Type 3 Resultatives

In this section, we clarify the difference between Type 2 and Type 3 resultatives. Resultatives which cannot receive a literal interpretation, i.e. Type 3 resultatives, take a fake object referring to a body part plus a particle such as *off* and *out* (cf. Suzuki (2003)). Observe the examples given below:

- (17) a. I laughed my ass off. (Suzuki (2003:231))
 b. We laughed our brains out. (Suzuki (2003:231))
 c. He cried his eyes out. (= (12b))

In (17), the object NPs refer to parts of the bodies of the subject referents and the particles imply the removal of the body parts from the entire body. This type of resultative receives only a hyperbolic interpretation, as confirmed by the result-cancelling test:

- (18) a. Mary cried her-eyes out, but her eyes were not out.
 b. Mary talked her {ear/head} off, but her {ear/head} did not off.

Sentences (18) demonstrate that the result states can be cancelled by the second conjuncts. Thus, the “true” Type 3 resultatives, which only permit a hyperbolic interpretation, take a fake object referring to a body part and a particle such as *off* and *out* as the resultative phrase.

By contrast, resultatives whose interpretations are ambiguous, i.e. Type 2, take a fake object plus an adjective as the resultative phrase. Consider the examples in (11), repeated here as (19):

- (19) a. He cried his eyes red.
 b. Mary ate herself sick.
 c. He talked himself hoarse.

In (19), the resultative phrases *red*, *sick*, and *hoarse* respectively express the result states of the fake objects *his eyes*, *herself*, and *himself* after the changes of the state in the sequence of events. This type of resultative receives a literal interpretation as well as a hyperbolic interpretation, as confirmed by the result-cancelling test in (15a, c), repeated here as (20):

- (20) a.(#) Mary drank herself blind, but she did not become blind.

- b.(#) The joggers ran the pavement thin, but the pavement did not become thin.

As shown in (20), the result state of this class of resultatives may or may not be cancelled. Thus, Type 2 resultatives, which admit of both literal and hyperbolic interpretations, are characterized as those that take a fake object and a resultant adjective.

From the observations above, a crucial difference between Type 2 and Type 3 resultatives is the categorial status of the result phrase: the former type takes an adjective as the result phrase in the construction; and hence the whole sentence encodes a result state after the change of state. On the other hand, the latter type takes a particle. As noted above, this particle describes the meaning of “removal” of a body part from the object referent. However, contrary to the prototypical constructional meaning of resultatives – the entity’s change of state and the subsequent result state represented by, say, X CAUSE Y to BECOME Z (cf. Goldberg (1995)) – the situation described is an abnormal, weird situation since it is almost impossible to actually remove our body parts by the activity such as laughing and talking. Thus, the Type 3 denotes situations regarded as impossible from our world knowledge (cf. Sawada (2000)) and does not tend to entail a change of state of the object denoting a body part. In short, we may safely say that the semantic difference between Type 2 and Type 3 resultatives results from whether they denote a change of state or not.

The difference between the Type 2 and the Type 3, i.e. the presence or absence of the change of state can be attested by empirical evidence introducing the adverb *gradually*. The definition of this adverb in LAAD is as follows (italics are mine):

(21) *gradually*:

In a way that happens, *develops*, or *changes* slowly over a long time.

(LAAD)

This adverb expresses the “develop” or “change” caused by the action denoted by the verb. To begin with, let us consider Type 3 resultatives, which only receive the hyperbolic reading, with the adverb *gradually*:

(22) a. * Mary gradually cried her eyes out.

b. * Mary gradually talked her {ear/head} off.

As illustrated by these examples, true Type 3 resultatives do not permit the co-occurrence with *gradually*. The fact suggests that there is no change of state in

this type of resultative. For example, in (22a), the event *her eyes out* does not imply the actual change of state of her eyes. The same holds true of (22b). Hence, it turns out that the events described by Type 3 resultatives do not include a change of state at all.

With the adverb *gradually*, let us turn to Type 2 resultatives, which can receive a literal interpretation. Consider the following examples:

- (23) a. The joggers gradually ran the pavement thin.
 b. He gradually drank himself blind.

In (23), the sentences *the joggers ran the pavement thin* and *he drank himself blind* can co-occur with the adverbial *gradually*. This fact indicates that Type 2 resultatives which can receive a literal interpretation describe the change of state of the entity denoted by the object NPs.

To sum up, Type 3 hyperbolic resultatives do not entail a change of state in the described whole event; Type 2 resultatives with an ambiguous reading entail a change of state.

4. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have concerned ourselves with the semantic difference between hyperbolic and ambiguous resultatives. We pointed out the inadequacy of the classification proposed by Miyata (2004) and offered counterexamples against her Type 2 and Type 3 distinction. Then, we introduced the new criterion which differentiates Type 2 and Type 3. The difference between these two types of resultatives is reduced to the presence or absence of the change of state. This claim has been testified by empirical evidence.

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