CROSS-COMPONENTIAL CAUSATIVITY

ABSTRACT. Unlike their English counterparts, Chinese resultatives allow reverse theta role assignment under predictable conditions and do not demonstrate the effect of the Direct Object Restriction. Both differences are shown to result from a single structural factor: an empty subject is not permitted in the bare resultative phrase in English. The analysis also accounts for various subtle distinctions between the lexical and bi-clausal resultative constructions inside Chinese. An implication of this theory is that the causal relation in a resultative is computed directly off of the construction and that this computation takes place in different components of language: lexicon, syntax, and the post-syntactic semantics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Corresponding to the English resultative small clauses like (1), Chinese has the resultative compound verb (RCV) and the V-de construction, shown in (2) and (3) respectively:

(1) The farmer painted the barn red.

(2) wo didi shuai-sui-le yizhi huaping.

my brother smash-broken-aspect a vase

My brother smashed a vase into pieces.

(3) neige xiaoxi qi-de wo san-tian mei chi-fan.

that news anger-DE me three-day not eat-meal

That news angered me so much that I didn’t eat for three days.

In (2), two verbal morphemes form a compound, with the morpheme on the left (shuai ‘smash’) indicating the causing event and the second one (sui

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‘broken’) the resulting event. In (3), the causing event is indicated by the matrix verb qi ‘anger’ while the embedded predicate san-tian mei chi-fan ‘didn’t eat for three days’ is the result. This construction is characterized by the obligatory suffix -de on the matrix verb. In this article, the verbal morpheme for the causing event in all three resultative constructions is referred to as Vcaus, and the predicative morpheme for the resulting event in all of them is called Xres, abstracting away from categorial details. In English, the resultative phrase is typically an AP or PP, whereas the Chinese counterpart is most likely verbal.

In spite of the obvious similarities in the basic semantics of these three constructions, there are two remarkable differences between the English small clause construction and its two Chinese counterparts. First, it is well known that English respects what Levin and Rappaport-Hovav (1995) call the Direct Object Restriction (DOR):2

(4) A resultative phrase may be predicated of the immediately postverbal NP, but may not be predicated of a subject or of an oblique complement. (Levin and Rappaport-Hovav 1995, p. 34)

1 In this paper, I ignore the possibility that some predicative morphemes such as sui could be adjectives instead of verbs. The A-V distinction has never been fully justified in Chinese, but this uncertainty will have no effect on my discussion here. For some arguments in favor of treating these morphemes as verbs, see Y. Li (1990).

2 Strictly speaking, the DOR is a misnomer because the resultative phrase can be predicated not only of the direct object but also of some structurally ‘object-like’ NPs that nevertheless bear no thematic relation with Vcaus, as the examples in (6b–c) show. More will be said later about the precise characterization of such NPs. For literature bearing on the DOR, also see Simpson (1983), Hoekstra (1988), and Carrier and Randall (1992).

Also worth noting is that Bowers (1997) provides examples which he claims to be counterexamples to the DOR in English:

(i)a. Mary struggled (*herself) free/out of her bonds.
    b. The horse galloped (*itself) clear of the fire/away from the fire.

But note that the so-called resultative phrases in these examples all have the locative/path flavor. Crucially, unequivocally non-locative phrases can never serve as Xres in the same context:

(ii)a. Mary struggled tired. ≠ Mary became tired from struggling.
    b. The horse galloped limp. ≠ The horse got limp from galloping.

See Levin and Rappaport-Hovav (1995) for a similar argument against including the locative type of secondary predicates in the resultative construction.