

ENGLISH PHRASAL VERBS AS A RESULTATIVE CONSTRUCTION

This paper analyzes one of the syntactic devices English uses to express the concept of result. Cross-linguistically, resultatives may constitute part of other verbal categories, for example, tense forms (as in Archi, where it is called the perfect) or voice forms (as in German), appear as one of the functions of either the voice, or aspect, or tense system (as in Russian, Chinese or Selkup), or occur at a juncture of two categories (e.g., in Evenki it is represented by passive forms in the perfect only) (Nedjalkov 1988: 22).

In English, the concept of result, or resultativeness, and its manifestation has not been treated very consistently in linguistic study, and the term 'resultative' is freely applied to many different language elements, ranging from inflections and auxiliaries to lexical markers and syntactic constructions.

I wanted to attempt to show that resultativeness may occupy a special position in the grammar and lexicon of contemporary English as a cognitive-linguistic construction reflecting the perception of actions as either resultative or not, cutting across multiple lexical, morphological, syntactic, and other categories.

English has not developed any specific morphological tools for resultative derivation, but uses the semantic feature of Result as a basis of numerous oppositions, both grammatical and lexical. The concept of result underlies the oppositions of synonyms (*do* versus *make*), inflections (*-ing* versus *-ed/-en*), grammatical categories (*Progressive* versus *Passive* forms), and auxiliaries (*be* versus *have*). But the most interesting form of its representation is the syntactic one – resultative constructions where resultative meaning is expressed by the fixed word order and signaled by a secondary predicate that names the end-state of the object sharing “the single ternary syntactic configuration” (Carrier & Randall, 1992):

He watered the tulips flat.

Let's caffeine our problems away.

The resultative construction using the verbal particle as a secondary predicate can be regarded as differing in function and meaning from the verb-particle construction of an uninterrupted (continuous) type:

He turned down the offer vs. He turned the offer down

My data contrast the two types of verb-particle constructions and show how the meaning is conveyed by the type of a construction. To further validate my hypothesis, I also looked into the translation of phrasal constructions into Russian, where the meaning of result is expressed morphologically. English reflects the human perception of actions and events in general as process- or result-oriented using many linguistic tools, the fixed word order of resultative constructions being one of the most important among them.

References:

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