The argument status of result phrases

Since Simpson (1983), result XPs in phrases such as hammer the metal flat are typically treated as arguments of the verb. For example, based on how it combines with intransitive verbs, Rappaport Hovav and Levin (2001) argue that the result phrase is an argument of the verb. Similarly, based on evidence from long-distance extraction, Carrier and Randall (1992) argue that result phrases are arguments. However, Ernst (2002: 498) points out that the argument-status of result XPs is far from clear. Furthermore, Iwata (2006) and Mateu (2011) argue that the results in some classes of resultatives are arguments, whereas others are adjuncts. This paper examines the argument-status of result phrases in depth, based on a number of tests previously proposed in the literature.

We adopt the classification of resultatives outlined in Goldberg and Jackendoff 2004. They divide resultatives into four classes: causative property (1), noncausative property (2), causative path (3) and noncausative path resultatives (4). In causative resultatives ((1) and (3)) the subject of the verb, Kelly, is an active agent that causes the result state. However, in noncausative resultatives ((2) and (4)) the subject is not an agent causer. In property resultatives, the result phrase denotes a state (e.g., flat in (1) or solid in (2)). In path resultatives, the result phrase denotes a source, path or goal (e.g., down the hill in (3) and (4)).

We examine each class of resultative in turn based on twelve argumenthood diagnostics from the literature: optionality, verb specificity, extraction out of the XP, long-distance extraction of the XP, core participant status, prepositional content, fixed preposition status, iterativity, VP anaphora, word order, VP preposing, pseudoclefting, and wh-word conjunction. These tests are adapted from Baker (1978), Bresnan (1982), Carnie (2002), Hedberg and DeArmon (2009), Huang (1982), Koenig et al. (2003), Kroeger (2004), Lakoff and Ross (1966), Needham and Toivonen (2011), Pollard and Sag (1987), Wechsler (1995) Zaenen and Crouch (2009), and others.

We conclude that the result phrase patterns overwhelmingly with arguments, as shown in Table 1. However, the two most commonly applied diagnostics (core argument and optionality) classify the result as an adjunct. We argue that these mixed results can be explained if we assume that the result phrase is not part of the verb’s basic argument frame. Instead, the result is an argument added by a lexical rule or construction. In other words, we argue that the core argument and optionality tests differentiate between basic or initial arguments and other phrases. The other tests, however, differentiate between any argument (basic or derived) and non-arguments.

We also find that path resultatives pattern with adjuncts according to the two tests that concern the choice of preposition (fixed preposition and prepositional content). We relate this observation to the generalization that arguments that refer to locations typically pattern like adjuncts with respect to these two tests.