Icelandic and the Typology of Resultatives

The resultative construction (1) has been a source of enduring interest in formal (cf. Green 1973; Simpson 1983; Hoekstra 1988; Carrier & Randall 1992; Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995; Mateu 2005) and constructional (cf. Goldberg 1991, 1995; Boas 2003; Goldberg and Jackendoff 2004; Iwata 2006; Croft 2012) linguistics, as it requires an account of how the meaning of two predicates is integrated into an event description involving a notion of result that cannot be attributed directly to either predicate. The resultative in Icelandic shows a sensitivity to the distinction between AP and PP/particle predicates whose significance has been underestimated. In this paper, I review two significant cases: the first suggesting a non-resultative analysis of an inchoative “resultative”; the second suggesting an important semantic constraint on unergative resultatives relating to force-dynamics and causal chains.

Analyses of the resultative generally attempt to accommodate the English freeze solid/hard construction. However, the majority of Germanic languages, including Icelandic, exclude this pattern (2). The one striking exception to this in Icelandic is frjósa fastur ‘freeze stuck’ (3). In this paper, I argue that this exception is semantically motivated. This construction involves relative location and not change of state and is therefore analogous with caused motion constructions. I follow Goldberg (1995) in assuming that the caused motion construction is distinct from the resultative. Strikingly, in (3), the referent of the unaccusative subject need not itself become frozen: rather the connection between the figure subject and ground location is secured by frost. This is reminiscent of Hoekstra’s (1988) claim that verbs in the resultative do not formally select their objects (cf. also Kratzer 2005; Mateu 2005). However, such verbs do occur with resultative PPs and particles, as in (4). Again, this can be viewed as an abstract path construction (cf. Goldberg 1991, 1995), specifically an event path construction (McIntyre 2004).

A second case where there is a significant contrast between the behaviour of AP and PP secondary predicates occurs with unergative verbs. Icelandic has a number of idiomatic PP resultatives which occur with unergative verbs the reference of whose object is disjoint from the subject (5). However, again unlike English but typically for the Nordic languages, AP predicates strongly prefer simplex reflexive objects, cf. (6) and (7). I argue that this relates to the
forcedynamic profiling of the causal chain in resultatives (cf. Croft 2012).

Examples
(1) Járnsmiðurinn barði málmplötuna flata.
blacksmith=the beat metal-plate=the.F.ACC.SG flat.F.ACC.SG

(2) *Ísinn fraus gegnheill/harður.
icecream=the froze solid.M.NOM.SG/hard.M.NOM.SG
‘The icecream froze solid/hard.’

(3) Hann fraus fastur í ísnum.
he froze stuck.M.NOMC.SG in ice=the.DAT
‘He froze stuck in the ice.’

(4) Ísinn fraus í gegn icecream=the froze in through
‘The icecream froze through.’

(5) Kisan malaði mig í svefn.
cat=the purred me in sleep
‘The cat purred me to sleep.’

(6) *Hundurinn gelti mig vakinn.
dog=the barked me awake
‘The dog barked me awake.’

(7) *Kennarinn hrópaði bekkinn hljóðan.
teacher=the yelled class=the quiet
‘The teacher yelled the class quiet.’

References