Compound vs phrasal resultatives: the view from Mandarin Chinese

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In Mandarin V-V resultatives, V1 may fail to project its agent (1) or its theme (2).

(1) *Yīfú$_i$* **xǐ**-*gānjìng-le* t_i.
   clothes **wash**-clean-PFV

   'The clothes got clean from washing
   [i.e. being washed].' (Williams 2005)

(2) *Lǎo Wèi* **qiē**-*dùn-le càidāo.*
   Lao Wei **cut**-dull-PFV knife

   'Lao Wei made the knife dull by cutting
   something.' (adapted from Williams 2005)

Agent omission is not restricted to V-V resultatives, but is more widely attested in Mandarin, including in phrasal V-*de* resultatives. However, omission of an otherwise obligatory theme is unexpected.

Main claim: In V-V resultatives, V1 does not project any arguments because V-V resultatives are compounds.

Proposal: I claim that V-V resultatives are compounds built in morphology rather than syntax. They contain a null affix $\varnothing$ that selects a causing event to its left (V1) and a caused event to its right (V2), as well as a causer argument where present. $\varnothing$ selects all available arguments of the caused event (V2) but none of the arguments of the causing event (V1). Any argument variables of the causing event must therefore undergo existential closure. The arguments of $\varnothing$ – and hence, those of the compound – can, but need not, be interpreted as identical to the existentially closed arguments of V1.

Prediction 1: Mandarin V-V resultatives are inaccessible to syntactic operations
V1 and V2 cannot be independently modified or independently coordinated (see Fan 2016).

Prediction 2: Since V-*de* resultatives are not compounds, V1 must project its theme
At first glance, V-*de* resultatives appear to be as flexible as V-V resultatives in terms of argument realisation. Indeed, Williams (2005) and Huang (2006) make precisely this claim and argue that V1 does not select any arguments in either V-*de* or V-V resultatives. This claim is supported by examples like (3), where the overt DP following *de* (hereafter "DP2") cannot be interpreted as the internal argument of the otherwise obligatorily transitive V1 *qiē* 'cut' but must be contained in the result phrase.

(3) *Wǒ (qiē nà gēn gǔtóu)* **qiē** *de [càidāo dùn-le].*
   I cut that CL bone **cut** DE knife dull-PFV

   'I cut (that bone) and as a result the knife became dull.'

But these analyses fail to explain why V-*de* resultatives headed by an obligatorily transitive V1 (4) are degraded compared to those headed by an intransitive V1 (5).

(4) **Mǎlì* **rǎn** *dé [tóufà hóng-le].*
   Mary **dye** DE hair red-PFV

   Intended: 'Mary dyed her hair red.'

(5) *Mǎlì* **kū** *dé [yǎnjīng hóng-le].*
   Mary **cry** DE eye red-PFV

   'Mary cried her eyes red.'

This contrast can be explained if we assume that: (i) V-*de* and V-V resultatives have different structures, and (ii) transitive V1 must project its internal argument in V-*de* but not in V-V resultatives. Suppose we assume that an obligatorily transitive V1 invariably projects its theme in a V-*de* resultative. If this theme intervenes between *de* and V1, it cannot be overt, but must be *pro* (or a trace). When *pro* cannot successfully refer to its antecedent, the V-*de* resultative is degraded. No such issue arises for V-*de* resultatives headed by an intransitive V1 because V1 never has *pro* as its internal argument.

Cross-linguistic extensions: Japanese is another language that has both compound and phrasal resultatives. If my account is correct, we would expect that V1 need not project its internal argument in Japanese compound resultatives but must do so in Japanese phrasal resultatives. This prediction is borne out. In a compound resultative like (6), V1 *sime* 'choke' need not project its otherwise obligatory internal argument *kubi* 'neck'. But in a phrasal resultative like (7), V1 must project its internal argument.

(6) *John-wa niwatori-o **sime**-korosi-ta.*
John-TOP chicken-ACC **choke**-kill-PST
'John choked the chicken to death.'
(Nishiyama 1998)

(7) **J.-ga huku-o buruu-ni **nut**-ta.*
J.-NOM clothes-ACC blue-NI **paint**-PST
Intended: 'John painted something (e.g. the wall) and as a result his clothes became blue.'

Conclusion: Whether V1 projects its arguments in a Mandarin resultative depends on the the structure of the resultative in which V1 appears. It may be possible to generalise this conclusion to explain the differences between compound and phrasal resultatives cross-linguistically.

References: Fan, Ying. 2016. Serial verb constructions in Mandarin Chinese and Jinjiang Southern Min. U of Manchester dissertation. ● Huang, James. 2006. Resultatives and unaccusatives: A parametric view. *Bulletin of CLSJ* 2006:1-43. ● Nishiyama, Kunio. 1998. V-V compounds as serialisation. *JEAL* 7:175-217. ● Williams, Alexander. 2005. Complex causatives and verbal valence. UPenn dissertation.