

A Note on “*Pat NP Dry*” and “*Beat NP Clean*”*

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1. Introduction

This paper deals with the resultative construction as in (1). The adjectives *dry* and *clean* act as a resultative phrase. (1a) means that John patted the rug, and as a result of patting, the rug became dry. (1b) means that John beat the rug and as a result of beating, the rug became clean. The sentences are examples of literal resultative constructions for the meanings of both sentences can be calculated just by adding the literal meanings of words.

- (1) a. John patted the rug dry.
b. John beat the rug clean.

Oddly enough, one adjective cannot be switched for the other as in (2).

- (2) a. *John patted the rug clean.
b. *John beat the rug dry.

What makes the difference between these sentences? In the following, firstly, I observe the difference of verbs' meanings and adjectives' meanings. From the observation of verbs and adjectives, I claim that the grammaticality of V NP *dry* and V NP *clean* sequences are determined by the inherent lexical meanings of the verbs and adjectives. I also compare the sentences in (1-2) with the verb particle construction.

2. The verbs *pat* and *beat*

In this section I briefly observe the meanings of the verb *pat* and *beat*. According to dictionaries, these verbs have the following meanings.

(3) *pat*

to strike lightly or gently with something flat, as with a paddle or the palm of the hand, usually in order to flatten, smooth, or shape

(dictionary.com)

(4) *beat*

to strike violently or forcefully and repeatedly.

(dictionary.com)

The verb *pat* means to strike lightly and gently, while the verb *beat* means to strike strongly and repeatedly. It seems that the basic difference of these two verbs is the strength of striking. Furthermore, according to Levin’s (1993) classification of verbs, *pat* is classified as “verbs of contact” or “touch verbs,” and *beat* is classified as “verbs of contact by impact” or “hit verbs.”

(5) Verbs of Contact: *Touch Verbs*

caress, graze, kiss, kick, lick, nudge, pat, peck (=kiss), pinch, prod, sting, stroke, tickle, touch

(Levin (1993:155))

(6) Verbs of Contact by Impact, *Hit verbs*

bang, bash, batter, beat, bump, butt, dash, drum, hammer, hit, kick, knock, lash, pound, rap, slap, smack, smash (where no effect implicated), strike, tamp, tap, thump, thwack, whack

(Levin (1993:148))

Interestingly, Levin (1993) observes that a resultative phrase does not follow “touch verbs” as in (7), while it follows “verbs of contact by impact” as in (8).

(7) a. *Carrie touched the door open.

(Levin (1993:155))

- b. *Midas touched the tree gold/into gold. (Simpson (1983:154))
- (8) a. Paula hit/kicked the door open.
- b. Paula banged the window shut.
- (Levin (1993:149))

Supposing Levin’s (1993) classification is correct, we need better explanation for the grammaticality of (1a). That is, the grammaticality of (1a) apparently goes against Levin’s (1993) observation.

3. The resultative phrases *dry* and *clean*

In this section, I observe the resultative phrases *dry* and *clean*. In the previous research, both adjectives are treated as a resultative phrase and we can find quite a few examples of resultative constructions with *dry* and *clean* as in (9).

- (9) a. I painted the tin dry. (McIntyre (2002:100))
- b. He wiped the table clean. (Goldberg (1995:189))

Then, why does *pat* prefer *dry* and *beat* prefer *clean*? An important difference is whether the resultant state is acquired on its own or not. The state of dryness is achieved in the course of nature, even if nobody acts on an object which is supposed to be dried. On the other hand, the state of cleanness usually needs some kinds of actions to clean an object. This fact is shown in (10).

- (10) a. Let the rug dry.
- b. *Let the rug clean.

The rug can become dry by itself after a while, but the rug cannot become clean without cleaning it. Hence, (10a) is acceptable while (10b) is not. In (1a), John’s patting the rug is not so crucial for the rug to become dry. That’s why the verb like *pat* which does not infer the strong effect is selected. In (1b), on the other hand,

John’s beating the rug is indispensable for the rug to become clean. That’s why the verb like *beat* which infers the strong effect is selected.

This line of argument can be applied to (7). Generally speaking, a door needs force to be opened. It does not usually open by itself. However, the verb *touch* does not provide enough force to open the door. Therefore, the sentence in (7a) is ungrammatical. In a similar fashion, a tree cannot become gold by itself. Possibly, we need some operations to make the tree gold even if we live in an imaginary world. Therefore, the sentence in (7b) is ungrammatical if the verb *touch* is selected.

4. A comparison with the verb particle construction

As shown in (11), the adjective *clean* can be replaced with the particle *off* while *dry* cannot.

- (11) a. John patted the rug *dry*/**off*.
 b. John beat the rug *clean*/*off*.

This is not surprising at all. As Bolinger (1971) states, the adjective *clean* and the particle *off* are synonymous, but *dry* is not a synonym of *off*. That is, the rug does not become the state of “off” by itself. To become the state of “off,” the rug needs to be affected by an action denoted by the verb. That’s why the verb *beat* is selected.

Furthermore, (12b) can select Figure (in Talmy’s (1985) sense) as a direct object, while (12a) cannot. This confrontation is seen in the case of verb particle constructions, too. When a rug is patted *dry*, moistness goes off of the rug. Therefore, the rug is Ground, and the moistness is Figure.

- (12) a. *John patted the moistness *dry*/*off*.
 b. John beat the dust *clean*/*off*.

Here, what becomes dry is not the moistness itself, but the object which is moist. Therefore (12a) is unacceptable. On the other hand, the dust becomes clean if it is gotten rid of. Therefore, (12b) is acceptable.

5. Conclusion

In this article, I claim that if the resultant state is achieved in the course of nature like *dry*, a verb with less strength of action such as *pat* is selected, and if the resultant state cannot be achieved in the course of nature like *clean*, a verb with more strength of action such as *beat* is selected. Since the adjective *clean* is synonymous with the particle *off*, but the adjective *dry* is not, a Figure object such as *dust* can only appear in the “verb NP *clean*” sequence.

NOTES

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