

**The Contrastive Analyses of Resultative Constructions in English and Chinese  
—Based on Washio’s Strong and Weak Resultative Divisions**

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**Abstract:** *Resultative constructions exist in many languages, such as English, Chinese, Japanese and French, etc., which makes contrastive studies on different resultative constructions become a hot topic in linguistics. In the paper, based on Washio’s strong and weak division, a sharp difference is focused on two types of Chinese resultative constructions through contrasting Chinese resultative constructions with English resultative ones, although there are some similarities between two types of Chinese resultative constructions, so as to let Chinese language learners deeply understand resultative constructions in Chinese.*

**Key words:** Resultative constructions, strong resultatives, weak resultatives

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## **INTRODUCTION**

With the enhancement of China’s international discourse power, more and more foreigners are learning Chinese now. The paper will not discuss the Chinese acquisition problems, such as the bias or generalization phenomena in language acquisition, in which will contrast Chinese resultative constructions with English ones from the perspective of Washio’s semantic divisions of resultatives into strong and weak ones to find the difference between two types of Chinese resultative constructions that helps the Chinese learners to master Chinese resultative constructions more deeply.

### **Resultative Constructions in English and Chinese**

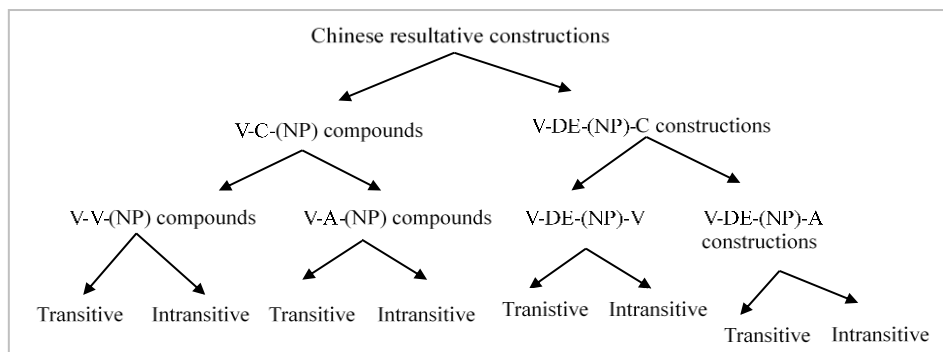
Because of illuminating the feature of lexical semantics and its close relationship with

syntax and conceptual semantics, resultative constructions attract many linguists to research in current linguistic theory. Generally, a resultative construction involves at least two events, that is, the cause and the result. According to Hoekstra (1988), in a resultative construction, a causative event followed by a resultative state that is denoted by a small clause embedded under the main verb, such as the sentence *He wiped the table clean* which means the action of wiping leads to the final state of the table's cleanness. In this sentence, the resultative state *clean* is embedded under the verb phrase *wipe the table clean*, governed by the causative verb *wipe*. English resultative constructions can be syntactically divided into two classes in terms of main verbs: transitive and intransitive.

- E.g. (1) a. The gardener *watered* the flowers *flat*. (V-A transitive)  
b. She *danced* her feet *sore*. (special V-A transitive)  
c. The lake *froze* *solid*. (V-A intransitive)

In the sentence (b), the postverbal NP *her feet* is not the logical object of the main verb *dance*, because the verb *dance* is not only an intransitive verb but also an unergative verb. In the sentence (c), the verb *froze* is an unaccusative verb, which is also an intransitive verb. The D-structure of this sentence is e(mpty) froze the lake solid. However, the sentence (c) describes a non-causative relation between the cause and the result.

The phrase “Chinese resultative constructions” is put up with first by Lv Shuxiang (2008), which means that a Chinese resultative construction is composed of two parts—the verb and the complement, in which the primary one denotes the event of an action and the secondary one denotes the event of a consequence or a state accompanied by the action. Li (2003) claims that a Chinese resultative construction can be divided into two types with or without *de* from the perspective of form, i.e., resultative V-C(omplement)-(NP) compounds and V-DE-(NP)-C constructions, as shown in the following tree diagram.



E.g. (2) a. Ta *qi-si* le. (V-V intransitive)

He anger-die ASP

“He angered himself dead.”

b. Ta *she-si* le laohu. (V-V transitive)

He shoot-die ASP tiger

“He shot the tiger dead.”

c. Ta *qi-lei* le. (V-A intransitive)

He ride-tired ASP

“He rode himself tired.”

d. Ta *kan-lan* le nabenshu. (V-A transitive)

He see-broken ASP that book

“He read that book so frequently that it was broken.”

e. Mary *qi* de *yaoyaqiechi*. (V-DE-V intransitive)

Mary anger DE gnash the teeth

“Mary gnashed her teeth with rage.”

f. Mary *qi* de wo *yaoyaqiechi*. (V-DE-V transitive)

Mary anger DE us gnash the teeth

“Mary angered me gnashing my teeth.”

g. Ta *shuo* de *kouganshezao*. (V-DE-A intransitive)

She talk DE completely dry.

“She talked so much that her mouth was completely dry.”

h. Ta *shuo* de kou dou *gan* le. (V-DE-A transitive)

She talked DE mouth even dry ASP

“She talked so much that her mouth was even dry.”

From the above examples, it can be said that both transitive and intransitive resultative constructions exist in Chinese and English. However, compared with Chinese resultative constructions, there is seldom no V-V compounds in English resultative constructions. In other words, Most of complements are adjectives in

English resultative constructions.

### Strong and Weak Resultatives in English and Chinese

Washio (1997) classifies resultative constructions into two types in terms of the relationship between the meanings of the main predicate and the secondary predicate. One type is called strong resultative constructions, while the other weak resultative constructions. In strong resultative constructions, the meaning of the main predicate and the meaning of the secondary predicate are independent each other, which means that the meaning of the main predicate cannot entail the end state of the resultative event that is illustrated by the secondary predicate, that is, the resulting state is expressed only by the result phrase. In weak resultative constructions, on the other hand, the meaning of the main predicate entails the meaning of the secondary predicate, that is, the main predicate entails the end state of the event, which is denoted by the secondary predicate, as shown in (3).

- (3) a. He *hammered* the metal *flat*. (English strong resultative construction)  
 b. The horse *dragged* the logs *smooth*. (English strong resultative construction)  
 c. He *painted* the wall *white*. (English weak resultative construction)  
 d. She *broke* the vase *into pieces*. (English weak resultative construction)

In (3a), the meaning of the main predicate *hammered* cannot entail the meaning of the secondary predicate *flat*, which shows the end state of the resulting event, so (3a) is a strong resultative construction. In (3c), the meaning of the main predicate *painted* entails the meaning of the secondary predicate *white*, so (3c) is a weak resultative construction. According to examples in (3), it can be said that there are strong and weak resultative constructions in English. How about strong and weak resultative constructions in two types of Chinese resultative constructions, i.e., V-C(omplement)-(NP) compounds and V-DE-(NP)-C resultative constructions?

- (4) a. Ta *jiao-ta* le hua. (Chinese transitive strong V-C-(NP) compound)  
 He water-flat ASP flower  
 'He watered the flower flat.'  
 b. Ta *pao-lei-le*. (Chinese intransitive strong V-C-(NP) compound)  
 He run-tired-ASP

- ‘He ran himself tired.’
- c. Ta *tu-bai* le qiang. (Chinese transitive weak V-C-(NP) compound)  
 He paint-white ASP the wall  
 ‘He painted the wall white.’
- d. Bingqilin *dong-ying* le. (Chinese intransitive weak V-C-(NP) compound)  
 The ice cream froze-solid ASP  
 ‘The ice cream was frozen solid.’
- e. Ta *chui* de jinshupian *bian-le*. (Chinese transitive strong V-DE-(NP)-C)  
 He hammer DE the metal flat-ASP  
 ‘He hammered the metal flat.’
- f. Mary *pao* de *lei-le*. (Chinese intransitive strong V-DE-(NP)-C)  
 Mary run DE tired-ASP  
 ‘Mary ran himself exhausted.’
- g. \*Ta *tu* de qiang *bai-le*. (Chinese transitive weak V-DE-(NP)-C)  
 He paint DE wall white-ASP  
 ‘He painted the wall white.’
- h. \* Qiang *tu* de *bai-le*. (Chinese intransitive weak V-DE-(NP)-C)  
 The wall paint DE white-ASP  
 ‘The wall was painted white.’

From the above examples in (4), based on Washio’s definitions of strong and weak resultatives, it can be found that both strong and weak resultative constructions are acceptable in Chinese V-C-(NP) compounds, which only strong resultative constructions are allowed in Chinese V-DE-(NP)-C constructions. A question arises here that why only strong resultative constructions exist in V-DE-(NP)-C constructions, which shows a sharp difference between Chinese V-C-(NP) compounds and V-DE-(NP)-C constructions. Before making clear of this question, it is necessary to make sure the function of the DE in V-DE-(NP)-C constructions.

### **The Previous Analyses of DE in Chinese V-DE-(NP)-C constructions**

Many linguists have given their opinions on the function of DE in V-DE-(NP)-A constructions, but in fact, most of the functions of DE remain a mystery nowadays. In the contemporary Chinese linguistics, DE has at least two usages: a pure lexical verb

and a constructional functional word. For example, Li (2009) proposes that V-DE must form a phonological word, i.e., a word-like unit which is independent of, but often coincides with, a syntactic or morphological word, such as the devoicing assimilation of /-s/ with the preceding segment in the auxiliary contraction of -'s, the plural -s, possessive -'s, and third person singular present tense -s in English. However, Li's analysis is untenable, which cannot explain why (5a) is ungrammatical and (5b) is grammatical.

- (5) a. \*Zhangsan *kan de dou lan le.*  
 Zhangsan read DE even broken ASP  
 b. Zhangsan *kan de nabenshu dou lan le.*  
 Zhangsan read DE that CL book even broken ASP  
 'Zhangsan read that book and as a result it was broken.'

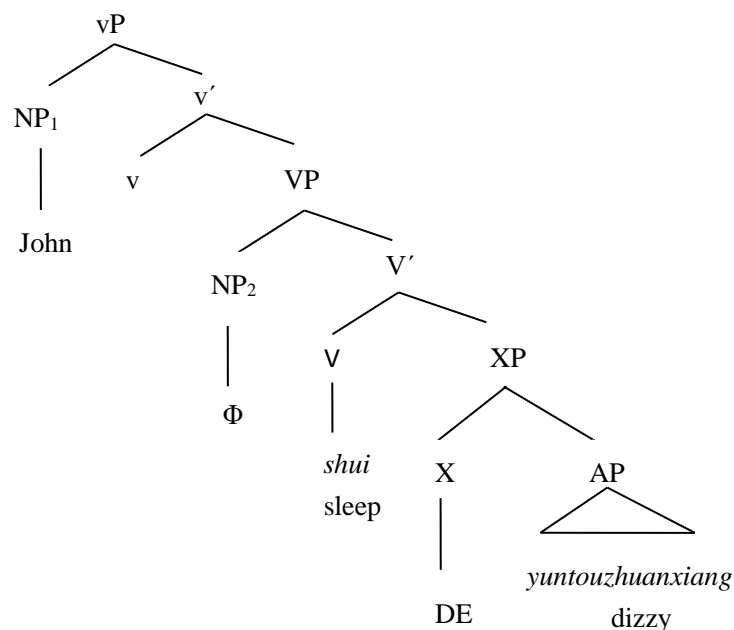
Depending on Li's analysis, (5a) should be grammatical and (5b) is ungrammatical, but in fact, (5b) is acceptable, not (5a), which is contradictory with his proposal.

Li (1998) proposes that DE in the V-DE-(NP)-A resultative constructions is a preposition, which is incorporated to the matrix verb. As is known to all, a preposition takes a nominal element as its complement, whereas with regard to the case of DE, it seems to take a sentential complement only, as shown in (6a). DE cannot take a nominal complement, as in (6b), which shows Li's analysis is not suitable for the case of DE.

- (6) a. He *qi DE toupǐ fa ma.*  
 He angry DE head-skin (scalp) get numb.  
 'He was angry to the point that his scalp got numb.'  
 b. \*Lisi *zhu DE meiguo san nian le.*  
 Lisi live DE America three years ASP  
 'Lisi lived in America for three years.'

Dai (1992) claims that DE in V-DE-(NP)-A constructions can be considered as a derived suffix and suggests that DE seems to change the argument structure of the matrix verb or the predicate and it adds an additional XP complement to the predicate, as shown in (7).

- (7) John *shui de yuntouzhuanxiang.*  
 John sleep DE dizzy  
 'John slept and as a result he felt dizzy.'



In (7), DE, as the head of the complement of the result predicate *yuntouzhuaxiang* ‘dizzy’, adds XP complement to the matrix verb *shui* ‘sleep’. AP can be considered as a complement introduced by DE, not selectionally restricted by the verb on syntax.

Unfortunately, Dai’s syntactic analysis may lead to ungrammatical sentences, for example:

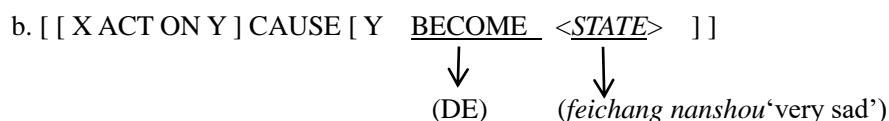
- (8) a. \*Zhangsan *qi* xiaowang de Lisi *yaoyaqiechi*.  
 Zhangsan anger xiaowang DE Lisi gnash the teeth  
 ‘?Zhangsan angers xiaowang, so Lisi gnash his teeth.’
- b. \*Zhangsan *qi* xiaowang de *yaoyaqiechi*.  
 Zhangsan anger xiaowang DE gnash the teeth  
 ‘?Zhangsan angered xiaowang to gnash his teeth.’

In (8), it can be found that if V *qi* ‘anger’ and DE are intervened by the postverbal NP *xiaowang*, the sentential complement or even a predicate cannot be selected.

Zhu (1982) argues that DE is a structural auxiliary word, which has no actual lexical meaning from the perspectives of its lexicalization and semantics, that is, if the structural auxiliary word DE can be filled in the syntactical position of result predicates, DE can be understood as the meaning of structural abstraction [BECOME] to get rid of the restrictions of the meaning of the construction. In this case, [BECOME] is a semantic element, which has no lexical meaning.

- (9) a. Ta *ma* de wo feichang *nanshou*.  
 He scold DE I very sad  
 ‘He scolded me very sad.’

The corresponding conceptual structure of (9a) is shown in (9b).



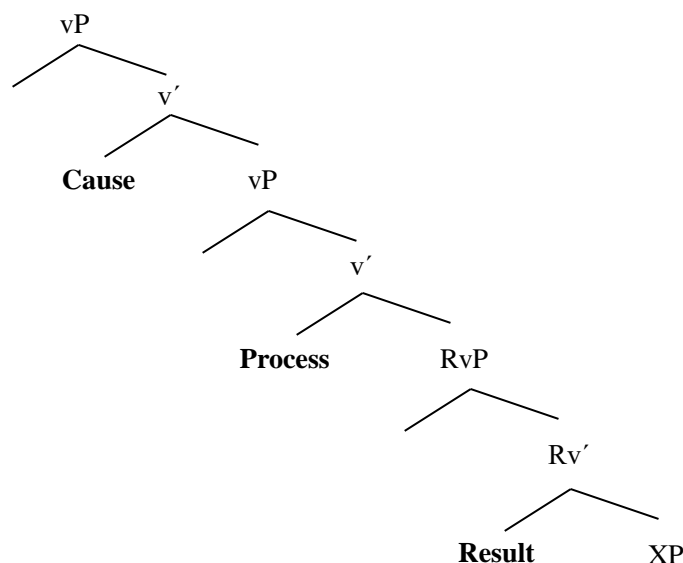
Although DE has no lexical meaning, it has constructional function in Chinese resultative constructions, which means that it cannot be deleted. If DE is deleted, the sentences will be ungrammatical, such as in the sentence \*Ta ma Φ wo feichang nanshou.

According to the above analyses of the function of DE in Chinese resultative constructions, it can be found that the previous analyses are somehow untenable. In the paper, the function of DE can be denoted from the perspective of syntax based on Folli's semantic three-layer analysis.

### The Proposal of DE as Process

Folli (2001) claims that in addition to the causing and resultative events, there is an intermediate event denoting a process in resultative constructions. Thus, a prototypical resultative construction has three semantic layers, i.e. the cause, the process and the result, which Folli claims to be reflected in syntactic structure, as shown in the following tree diagram.

(10)

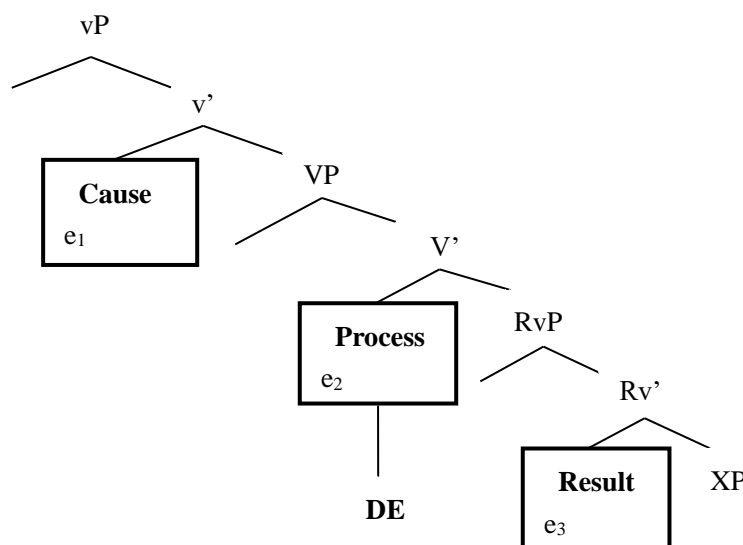


In the paper, Folli's analysis is adopted to Chinese resultative constructions and



proposes that DE is a process head in V-DE-(NP)-A constructions, which expresses a change of state, that is, it can be considered as the result of  $V_{\text{cause}}$  and further leading to  $V_{\text{result}}$ . Thus, the syntactic structure of the V-DE-(NP)-A construction in Chinese is shown in (11).

(11)

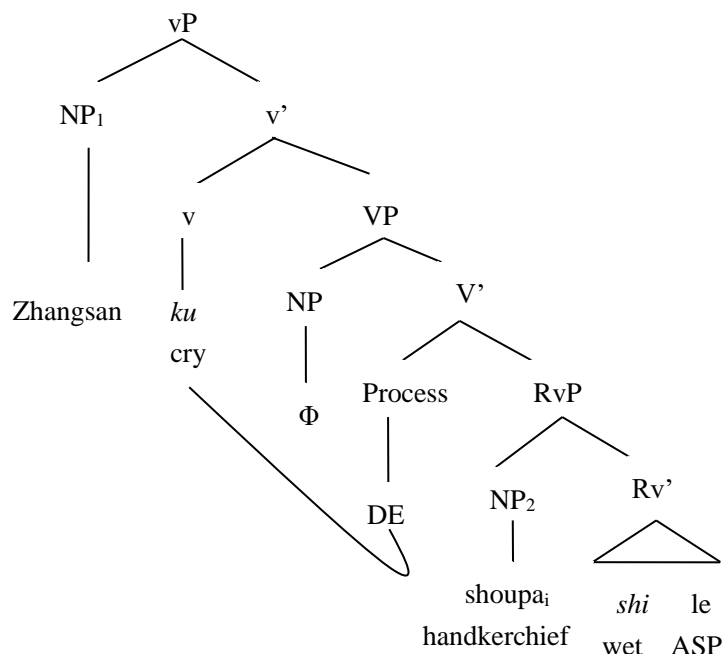


In (11),  $e_1$  refers to a subevent expressing the cause denoted by the head verb V.  $e_2$  represents a process denoted by DE. DE is a process that introduces an additional subevent, which is independent of  $e_1$ . And  $e_3$  is a subevent expressing the result denoted by the result predicate, the adjective (A) in Chinese V-DE-(NP)-A constructions.

### Only Strong Resultatives in Chinese V-DE-(NP)-C Constructions

In V-DE-(NP)-C constructions, DE appears in the position of Process based on the tree diagram (11), assuming that the process DE in  $e_2$  serves to add a subevent, that is, DE serves as the head of an additional and independent subevent when its meaning cannot be implied by the meaning of the main verb V in  $e_1$ . If so, in effect, DE is the marker of strong resultatives, as shown in (12).

- (12) Zhangsan *ku de shoupa shi le.*  
 Zhangsan cry DE handkerchief wet ASP  
 ‘Zhangsan cried to an extent as a result the handkerchief was wet.’



In (12), the main verb *V ku* ‘cry’ cannot clearly entail the meaning of the result phrase *shi* ‘wet’, so it is necessary to demand a function word representing the process to associate the meanings of the subevent *e<sub>1</sub>* and the subevent *e<sub>3</sub>*, that is *DE* in (11). Thus, the appearance of *DE* is required in strong *V-DE-(NP)-A* constructions, because it can add a subevent to associate the meaning of *e<sub>1</sub>* with *e<sub>3</sub>*.

From the tree graph of (12), it can be found that *DE* separates the secondary predicate from the primary predicate, which means the appearance of *DE* breaks the connections of the meanings of the primary predicate with the secondary predicate. Therefore, *DE* can be considered as the marker of strong resultative constructions in Chinese *V-DE-(NP)-C* constructions.

### Summary

The paper focuses on analyzing a sharp difference between two kinds of Chinese resultative constructions based on Washio’s strong and weak resultative division through contrasting Chinese resultatives with English ones. It can be found that both strong and weak resultatives are acceptable in English while both strong and weak resultatives are allowed in Chinese *V-C-(NP)* compounds but only strong resultatives are allowed in Chinese *V-DE-(NP)-C* constructions, which is a sharp difference between two types of Chinese resultative constructions. Meanwhile, the function of *DE* in *V-DE-(NP)-C* construction is fixed and *DE* can be considered as *Process* in the paper based on Folli’s three-layer semantic analysis. However, this is a question

arising that the weak resultative can be acceptable in Chinese V-DE-(NP)-C constructions when the adjective complement is a stative adjective or is modified by the degree words. In the future study, this question will be focused.

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