Another look at the maximal end-point constraint on resultatives

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Since Green’s (1972) observation in (1), it has been well-known that not every adjective can appear as a result phrase.

(1) He wiped it {clean/dry/smooth/*damp/*dirty/*stained/*wet}. (Green 1972)

Wechsler (2005a, 2005b) argues that this restriction can be accounted for in terms of a maximal end-point constraint: clean, dry, and smooth are all maximal end-point closed-scale adjectives, whereas damp, dirty, stained, and wet are minimal end-point adjectives.

There are apparent counter-examples to this constraint as in (2), where minimal end-point adjectives do appear in the result phrase.

(2) a. The shadows stretched long over the road.
   b. & and then the door opened wide. (both from BNC)

But since these resultatives are known to be different from resultatives like hammer the metal flat (Pustejovsky 1991, Rapoport 1999, Horrocks & Stavrou 2003, Iwata 2006, among others), they may not count as true counter-examples. This suggests that the maximal end-point constraint should be better regarded as applicable only to resultatives like hammer the metal flat, whose syntax and semantics are to be attributed to argument structure constructions, rather than to verbs (Goldberg 1995).

But even this revised version of maximal end-point thesis suffers from a number of counter-examples. Thus in (3) slightly less damp cannot possibly be taken to indicate a maximal end-point.

(3) Sandra surely must have felt she would be losing face today as she towed the kids hair only slightly less damp &

Furthermore, the adjective can be modified by almost or somewhat, and be in a comparative form.

(4) a. & then sensor 3 is wiped dry or almost dry &
    b. I used a hacksaw to cut off the head of the bolt, then hammered this end somewhat flat on an anvil, &
    c. & the tables can be wiped much cleaner & (all from web)

Thus even resultatives like hammer the metal flat are not subject to the maximal end-point constraint.

This paper argues that once we realize that change of state is to be regarded as entering into a new state, rather than reaching a goal, it becomes clear why resultatives are not subject to the maximal end-point constraint. Also, this paper considers where the restriction against dirty and wet as observed in (1) ultimately comes from.