

# “She elbows her way to the forefront” – A corpus-based analysis on the productivity and usage of the *way*-construction in PDE

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This study focuses on the resultative *way*-construction, as instantiated in (1)-(3), which, to a certain extent, contrasts with the resultative reflexive-*self* construction, as instantiated in (4):

- (1) She made her way to the front door, sliding off her slippers (2012, COCA\_WEB)
- (2) He *elbowed* his way to the door, swinging his fists like they were axes (2014, COCA\_FIC)
- (3) ... they *snore* their way to the wee hours. (2016, NOW)
- (4) Well, I *drank* myself to the point that I literally couldn't function. (1999, COCA\_SPOK)

As these examples show, the *way*-construction usually consists of the possessive determiner and the noun *way* followed by a prepositional phrase. The construction is usually used metaphorically and describes scenarios in which an agent somehow moves along a path that is difficult to navigate. Interestingly, the construction allows for “unverby” elements in the verb slot, as for instance verbs converted from nouns as in (2), and it may also license a direct object for prototypically intransitive verbs like *snore* as in (3). In this respect, the *way*-construction displays a valency-increasing property.

Previous literature on the *way*-construction (as, e.g., Israel 1996 or Mondorf 2011) has shed light on the re-organization of the system of English resultatives including the *way*-construction and the reflexive *self*-construction. As Mondorf (2011) has shown, *way* has started to replace the reflexive *self*-construction in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, there has been a split of functions performed by both resultative constructions, since *way* tends to be used to convey concrete meanings, whereas the reflexive *self* is rather used in abstract contexts. Also, the *way*-construction continues to gradually replace the reflexive *self* as it acquires new domains, which were formerly related to the reflexive *self*. These observations show how the examined construction continuously increases its productivity and how it developed over time in relation to other similar constructions.

Our research project on the *way*-construction concentrates on the construction itself and its competitive resultative construction with *-self*. Against the backdrop of Mondorf's (2011) study, we decided to use the Corpus of Contemporary American English and retrieved examples of both the *way*-construction and the *self*-reflexive constructions with pronominal subjects and thus checked how variable the two constructions are in the first place and to what extent they allow for non-canonical verb uses or unverb elements. In a second step, we then identified those verbs that occurred in both constructions in order to see whether we find a similar overlap as in Mondorf's study.

### References

- Israel, Michael (1996). "The Way Construction Grow". In: Goldberg, Adele (ed.). *Conceptual Structure, Discourse and Language*, 217-230. Stanford: CSLI.
- Mondorf, Britta (2011). "Variation and change in English resultative constructions". In: *Language Variation and Change*, 22 (3): 397-421.