

INTERPRETATION OF SECONDARY PREDICATE CONSTRUCTIONS AND POLYPREDICATIVITY IN ENGLISH LITERARY TEXTS

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Abstract. This article examines intensional polypredication in English literary discourse as it is realized through secondary predicate constructions. The study focuses on the syntactic and semantic behavior of secondary predicates (depictives, resultatives, and qualifying constructions) and their role in increasing descriptive density, evaluative force, and narrative depth. The discussion synthesizes key insights from De Maerschack’s corpus-based account of qualifying constructions, Saurenbach’s constructional treatment of secondary predication, Irímia’s event-structural and evidentially grounded model that challenges a purely “small clause” analysis, and Napoli’s predication-theoretic view of meaning as an interface between syntax, semantics, and interpretation.

Keywords: intensional polypredication; secondary predication; depictive construction; resultative construction; qualifying construction; small clause; anti-reconstruction; literary discourse; evaluation and intensity.

INTRODUCTION

In recent English linguistics, predication has increasingly been approached not only as a clause-level relation between a subject and a predicate, but also as a layered phenomenon that may be distributed across multiple predicative components inside a single sentence. In literary texts, such layering is especially productive because it enables an author to compress several propositional or evaluative meanings into one syntactic unit. Secondary predicate constructions are a prominent mechanism for this compression: while the sentence formally contains one finite predicate, it simultaneously encodes an additional predicative relation that modifies the event, the participant, or the resulting state. This “more-than-one-predicate” effect is what we refer to as intensional polypredication, since the additional predication often carries the speaker/author’s stance, evaluation, or intensifying perspective.

De Maerschack links intensional polypredication to the semantics of qualifying constructions, showing that the secondary predicate contributes a covert predicative relation that can be paraphrased as an independent clause. For instance, in a sentence such as “He left the room a happy man”, the qualifying phrase a happy man licenses an implicit proposition comparable to “He was a happy man”, while simultaneously being integrated into the main event of leaving. This integration is crucial for literary style: the narrator can present a background state or evaluation without interrupting the narrative flow with an additional sentence.

Saurenbach treats secondary predicates as constructional patterns rather than as isolated syntactic add-ons. From this perspective, secondary predication is a systematic pairing of form and meaning that allows the speaker to encode complex event descriptions. In literary language, such constructions function as compact “complex descriptions”: the main predicate presents the event, while the secondary predicate adds an intensified, vivid, or evaluative characterization of a participant or a state associated with the event. The result is a higher degree of informational density and stylistic impact.

Resultative constructions express a state that arises as a consequence of an action, and they often provide an intensifying interpretation by making the endpoint salient. In “He shouted himself hoarse”, the result (hoarse) serves as evidence of the degree of shouting, thereby strengthening the meaning of the event via its outcome. Such structures are frequent in narrative prose because they convey both action and consequence in one clause, which heightens dramatic effect.

As-depictive constructions, commonly realized in the pattern “as + NP”, introduce comparison-based depiction and thus intensify characterization through imagery. In “He stood as still as a statue”, the comparison supplies a concrete visual model that strengthens the reader’s perception of stillness. In literary contexts, these constructions work as a bridge between grammatical structure and figurative description, producing intensification through an iconic scenario rather than through degree morphology alone.

Qualifying constructions often occur with stative predicates and attribute a stable, evaluatively loaded property to a participant. They may present the property as persistent and hence rhetorically strong. In “She remained unmoved, a cold observer”, the secondary predicate frames the participant’s stance as enduring and categorical. This rhetorical stability is one reason why qualifying constructions are widely used in literary portraits and psychological characterization.

Irimia (2012) argues that an exclusively “small clause” treatment is often too narrow to capture the semantics and pragmatics of secondary predication. She proposes a model in which secondary predicates are closely tied to event structure, participant roles, and evidential or perspectival anchoring. Under this view, intensionality emerges because the secondary predication is interpreted relative to a discourse situation (e.g., narrator viewpoint, character perspective), yielding more explicitly subjective readings. This explains why secondary predicates in literary discourse frequently signal stance, evaluation, or the narrator’s evidential framing.

An additional phenomenon discussed in analyses of secondary predication is anti-reconstruction: interpretive dependencies (for example, binding or scope relations) may behave as if the secondary predicate remains in its surface position rather than being reconstructed to a lower syntactic site. In literary prose, this can reinforce the immediacy of depiction because the reader processes the secondary property as tightly attached to the visible event description, which increases perceived intensity.

Napoli views predication as more than a purely syntactic relationship: it is an interpretive mechanism operating at the interface of syntax and semantics. Secondary predicates illustrate this interface particularly well, because they are syntactically dependent yet semantically predicative. In intensional polypredication, the secondary predicate contributes a second predicative layer that shapes interpretation through evaluation, categorization, and discourse perspective.

CONCLUSION

The reviewed approaches converge on a common point: in English literary texts, secondary predicate constructions are a productive grammatical resource for intensional polypredication. They allow authors to (i) compress multiple predicative relations into a single clause; (ii) encode degrees of intensity indirectly through results, imagery, or stable characterization; and (iii) increase vividness and stylistic individuality. De Maerschallck, Saurenbach, Irimia, and Napoli collectively show that the phenomenon is best explained through an integrated account of syntax, semantics, and discourse interpretation.

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