

Topic: The semantics and grammar of adverbials - Handout

The adverbial element (A) in clause structure has a wider range of roles than the other four sentence elements, subject (S), verb (V), object (O), and complement (C). This is reflected in its having a wider range of meanings, forms, positions, and grammatical functions. It is possible to include several A-elements within a single sentence.

According to their semantic roles, it is possible to distinguish the following classes of adverbials: space (position, direction, goal, source, and distance), time (position, duration, frequency, relationship), process (manner, means, instrument, agency), respect, contingency (cause, reason, purpose, result, condition, concession), modality (emphasis, approximation, restriction), degree (amplification, diminution). For examples, see below or SGEL 8.2 - 8.8.

As to formal realization, the A-element can be realized by a wide range of structures:

1. an adverb phrase with a closed-class adverb as head (*never, ever, then*);
2. an adverb phrase with an open-class adverb as head (*carefully, quickly*);
3. a noun phrase (*a very long way, this morning*)
4. a prepositional phrase (*in the afternoon, in the house*), the most common form;
5. a verbless clause (*as soon as possible, when in doubt*);
6. a non-finite clause (*coming home, having done all the homework*)
7. a finite clause (*because he was happy*).

As to clause position, the A-element can be placed in several positions in a sentence:

- I *By then the book should have been returned to the library.*
iM *The book by then should have been returned to the library.*
M *The book should by then have been returned to the library.*
mM *The book should have by then been returned to the library.*
eM *The book should have been by then returned to the library.*
iE *The book should have been returned by then to the library.*
E *The book should have been returned to the library by then.*

In terms of their grammatical functions, adverbials fall into four main categories: adjuncts, subjuncts, disjuncts, and conjuncts.

Adjuncts

More than other adverbials, adjuncts have grammatical properties resembling the sentence elements S, C, and O. Like them, they can be the focus of a cleft sentence:

It is to the library that the book should have been returned.

It is possible to distinguish predication and sentence adjuncts.

Predication adjunct is most frequently placed at end (E) position. Its relation is not so much with a whole sentence as with its predication, e.g. *She put the letter on the table* (obligatory sentence element); *She found the letter on the table* (optional sentence element). Many predication adjuncts represent obligatory sentence elements.

Sentence adjunct can be placed at initial (I) as well as E position within a sentence thanks to its relatively 'peripheral' relationship to the rest of the sentence as compared with the relatively 'central' relationship of the predication adjunct.

John kissed his girlfriend on the cheek. (predication adjunct)

John kissed his girlfriend on the platform. (sentence adjunct, movement possible)

On the platform, John kissed his girlfriend.

Adjuncts of space (where? from where? how far?)

position: *She still lives where she was born.*

direction: *The boy kicked the ball through the open window.*

source and goal: *We flew from Prague to Paris.*

distance: *She walked four miles.*

If two or more adjuncts of space are clustered at E position, they are ordered as follows: *She walked a few steps (distance) towards him (goal) in her room (position).*

Adjuncts of time (when? how often? how many times? how long? till/since when?)

position: *I'll see you at nine on Monday.*

Like spatial adjuncts of position, time-position adjuncts can be in a hierarchical relation, usually the one denoting the longer or superordinate period coming second.

duration: *He waited until she returned.*

frequency: *Jane came to see me twice daily.*

It is necessary to distinguish frequency of occasion (how many times? - *twice*) from frequency of period within which occasions take place (how often - *daily*).

relationship: *You should complain about it again.*

If two or more adjuncts of time co-occur at E position, they are ordered as follows:

I was there for a short while (duration) every day (frequency) last year (position).

Adjuncts of process (how? with what? by whom?)

manner: *He walks like his father. I wish I could swim as you do. Speak in a nice way.*

means, instrument, and agency: *She influenced me by her example. (means)*

He was killed with a hunting knife (instrument) by a terrorist (agency).

Adjuncts of respect express the respect in which the truth value of a sentence is being claimed, e.g. *My friend is advising me legally/on legal issues/in respect to law/from a legal standpoint/so far as legal matters are concerned.*

Adjuncts of contingency

reason: *He did it because he was angry.*

purpose: *He did it to relieve his anger.*

concession: *She gave up her job despite her high salary.*

However, contingency relations are commonly expressed by respect disjuncts.

Subjuncts

have a subordinate and parenthetical role in comparison with adjuncts. There are two main types:

wide orientation subjuncts relate more to the sentence as a whole, but show their subjunct character in tending to achieve this through a particular relationship with one of the clause elements, especially the subject;

- **viewpoint subjuncts** are largely connected with the semantic concept of respect
e.g. *From a personal viewpoint, he is likely to take this job.*

- **courtesy subjuncts** (including *please*) convey a formulaic tone of politeness
e.g. *She kindly offered me a seat.*

narrow orientation subjuncts are chiefly related to the predication or to a particular part of predication;

- **item subjuncts** are most frequently connected with the subject of the sentence, e.g.
She has consistently opposed her father.

Many predication subjuncts are idiomatically linked with particular verbs and are best treated under phrasal verbs (*drink up, find out*). It is important to note a small set of subjuncts, associated with the expression of time (e.g. *already, still, yet, any/no more, any/no longer, just never, ever*) that are mostly placed within the verb phrase, e.g. *I still haven't finished my work.*

- **emphasizers** express the semantic role of modality with a reinforcing effect on the meaning of a sentence, e.g. *I really can't believe it. Yes indeed. Certainly not.*

- **intensifiers** are broadly concerned with the semantic category of degree, indicating an increase (**amplifiers**) or decrease (**downtoners**) of the intensity with which a predication (usually containing an attitudinal verb) is expressed. They typically appear at M position, e.g. *She is fully satisfied. I was only joking.*

- **focusing subjuncts** call special attention to a part of a sentence (as broad as predication or as narrow as a constituent within a phrase). There are two types, **restrictive**: *I merely wanted to know her opinion*; and **additive**: *I also invited my brother's family*.

Disjuncts

While subjuncts are seen as having a lesser role, disjuncts have by contrast a superior role to sentence elements, being somewhat detached from and superordinate to the rest of the sentence. There are two broad types: style and content disjuncts.

Style disjuncts (a relatively small group) convey the speaker's comment on the style and form of what is being said and define in some way the conditions under which 'authority' something is being uttered:

- **manner and modality disjuncts** involve items such as *frankly, honestly, truthfully*: e.g. *Frankly, I'm tired. (To put it) briefly, there is nothing we can do about it.*

- **respect disjuncts** involve items such as *generally, literally, strictly, personally*: e.g. *I would not, (speaking) personally, have followed his advice.*

Privately, was Henry ever in prison?

Respect disjuncts can be expressed by *if-*, *since-*, and *because-*clauses (e.g. *He was drunk, because he couldn't stand.*).

Content disjuncts comment on the content of an utterance. They can relate to:

- **certainty**, commenting on the truth value of what is said, such as *undoubtedly, perhaps, apparently* (*The novel was apparently written by Walter Scott.*); or

- **evaluation**, expressing an attitude to an utterance by way of evaluation, such as *strangely, unexpectedly, predictably, fortunately, happily, sadly, luckily, amusingly, understandably, pleasingly* (*Naturally, my husband expected me home by then.*).

Conjuncts

serve to conjoin two utterances or parts of an utterance, and they do so by expressing at the same time the semantic relationship (e.g. time, contingency) obtaining between them. They are usually placed at I position, but can appear also at middle (M) and E positions. According to their semantic roles it is possible to distinguish the following groups:

- **listing (enumerative)**: *in the first place, secondly*; **additive**: *moreover, in addition*);

- **summative** (*all in all, altogether, in sum, to sum up*);

- **appositive** (*i.e., for example, namely, in other words, e.g.*);

- **resultative** (*so, therefore, as a result, accordingly, in consequence, of course*);

- **inferential** (*in other words, in that case, otherwise, then, else*);

- **contrastive (reformulatory and replacive)**: (*or*) *better, more accurately, worse, alias*; **antithetic**: *on the contrary, by contrast, instead, on the other hand*;

concessive: *still, yet, nevertheless, however, all the same, anyhow, though*);

- **transitional (discoursal)**: *by the way, incidently, now*; **temporal**: *meanwhile, originally, subsequently, eventually*);

Some examples:

There was one snag; namely the weather. My age is against me: still, it's worth a try.

I like her because she is, by the way, a good player. I got up late, so I missed my train.