

Lesson 7

The semantics and grammar of adverbials – Introduction

The adverbial element = A has got a wider range of **positions, forms, meanings, and grammatical functions** than the other four elements, S, V, O, and C. It is also reflected in our ability to include several adverbial elements within a single sentence:

Next Tuesday [A1], I shall *probably* [A2] visit her mother *in London* [A3] *for an hour or so* [A4] *to see if she's feeling better* [A5], *unless she telephones me before that* [A6].

A1 = adverbial of time (position) expressed by a NP

A2 = adverbial of modality (approximation) expressed by an AdvP

A3 = adverbial of space (position) expressed by a PP

A4 = adverbial of time (duration) expressed by a PP

A5 = adverbial of purpose expressed by a NONFINITE CLAUSE

A6 = adverbial of condition expressed by a FINITE CLAUSE

FORMS = FORMAL REALIZATION

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

- **an adverb phrase:** *just then, carefully, somewhere, ...*
- **a noun phrase:** *this week, a very long way (They have travelled a very long way.)*
- **a prepositional phrase:** *at home, across the field, in the house, ...*
- **a verbless clause:** *when in doubt, if possible, ...*
- **a nonfinite clause:** *lying there, ... having done all the homework, ...*
- **a finite clause:** *...because you were sad, when I've finished my homework, ...*

POSITIONS

As compared with other sentence elements, the A-element can be placed with relative freedom in several positions in a sentence:

Normally, we distinguish 3 main positions: ***I = initial, M = medial, E = end***

I and ***E*** positions are self-explanatory, but the ***primary M*** position may need clarification. It is the position **immediately following the operator** or **the copula *be*** (also so called ***not*** position):

*Susan has **at last** finished her thesis. Susan is **at last** a doctor of philosophy.*

Where no operator is present, ***M*** position is simply the position between the S and V:

The play *daringly* explores a hitherto forbidden subject.

The choice of position for an adverbial is determined by semantic and grammatical factors, but also by the demands of information processing and the principle of end-weight. If no special factors determine otherwise, the adverbial position is placed at *E*, the position in fact taken in the majority of cases.

MEANINGS = SEMANTIC ROLES

According to their semantic roles, it is possible to distinguish the following classes of adverbials:

- **space** (spatial meaning): *on the grass, down the hill, to the station, from the library, much further* (position, direction, goal, source, distance)
- **time** (temporal meaning): *in 1978, until Sunday, very seldom, still* (position, duration, frequency, relationship between one time and another)
- **process**: *very clearly, by her insight, with chopsticks, by Shakespeare* (**manner**, means, instrument, agency)
- **respect**
- **contingency**: **cause, reason, purpose, result, condition, concession**
- **modality**: *certainly, probably, only* (emphasis, approximation, restriction)
- **degree**: *badly, a little* (amplification, diminution)

The most common ones: adverbials of *space, time, manner, cause, reason, result, purpose, condition, concession*.

GRAMMATICAL FUNCTIONS

In terms of their grammatical functions, adverbials fall into 4 main categories:

adjuncts subjuncts disjuncts conjuncts

... *to be continued next lesson*

References:

Greenbaum, S. and R. Quirk (1990) *A Student's Grammar of the English Language*. Harlow: Longman. (pp. 158-162)