

## Adverbs and Adverbials. General Aspects

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**Résumé:** Le terme qui définit cette classe d'unités lexico-grammaticales situe au premier plan une particularité syntaxique définitoire: l'adverbe est un déterminant du verbe. La perspective syntaxique ne peut pas, quand même, fixer l'identité spécifique de cette classe. De fait, du point de vue de la position syntaxique, d'une part, l'adverbe entre également dans des syntagmes verbaux et nominaux, d'autre part, il peut réaliser un syntagme autonome, sous l'aspect syntaxique, par lui-même. Le but de ce travail tient à la mise en évidence de certains aspects, plus ou moins controversés, repérables dans de diverses situations d'occurrence de l'adverbe.

**Key-words:** adverb, adverbial phrase, adverbial clause

### Introduction

The term “adverb” comes down from antiquity. It is the English cognate to the *adverbium* of the Roman grammarians, who themselves translated the Greek *epirrhēma*. The term transparently suggests that an adverb is a word that is placed with the verb or, in semantic terms, modifies the verb. Though it is now realized that the link between verb and adverb is not as close as suggested, the term remains in general usage and has even led to new terminology, such as the noun “adverbial”, which is generally used to denote both simple adverbs as well as phrases and clauses that have the same function as adverbs.

### 1. Adverbs

The familiarity of the term “adverb” is deceptive, for the class of adverbs does not have a homogeneous membership and sometimes words seem to be assigned to the class of adverbs for no better reason than that they do not fit any other class. This does not mean that there are no criteria, but only that they seem more problematic than for other categories. Consider the case of *carefully* in *John had carefully opened the door*. Here *carefully* can be argued to have the following four properties:

- a. it is invariable;
- b. it modifies the verb;
- c. it is optional and
- d. it occurs in a position that is reserved for adverbs.

Each of these properties is strongly associated with adverbiality and is candidate for being criterial. Yet each property is problematic.

**Adverb as an invariable:** It is correct that *carefully* is invariable, in the sense that its shape does not vary depending on case, number, and gender, the dimension that are typically relevant for nouns and adjectives, nor for person, voice, tense or aspect, the typically verbal dimensions.

At this point, we should take into consideration several issues:

First, from ancient times up to at least Hjelmslev (1935), grammarians have proposed that what is usually called an *adverb* is not really a separate word at all, but rather a case form, an “adverbial case” of another word. Thus *carefully* would be analyzed as the adverbial case form of the adjective *careful*, or Latin articulatim “piecemeal” would be the adverbial case of the noun *articulus* “member”. The majority view, however is to condemn the “inflectional” theory of adverbs as being highly ad hoc, at least for Standard Average European. It is true that many adverbs are morphologically related to words of other categories, but many are not thus related (e.g., English *soon* or latin *clam* “secretly”). Second, for the adverbs that have this relation, it may not be the result of any productive adverb formation process (e.g. *only*, *yesterday*, *perhaps*) and third, for the adverbs that are the result of a productive

adverbialization process (eg. *eurocratically*), this process is best taken to be derivational rather than inflectional. (see Pinkster 1972:63-70).

The second problem is that, even though invariability may be a necessary feature of the adverb, it may be not sufficient. The English adjective *careful* is not less invariable than the adverb *carefully*.

**Adverbs modifies a verb:** In the case of *John had carefully opened the door*, the idea that an adverb modifies a verb has some plausibility, and *carefully* does seem to specify the manner of the event of opening that John was involved in. However, precisely because it is not just any event of opening that was careful, but rather the specific one of opening the door, one may feel that what is in the scope of the adverb is not merely the verb *opened* but the entire verb phrase *opened the door*.

When John sang his aria beautifully, John was not beautiful, but it remains the case that what was beautiful was not merely a singing but John's singing of his aria. To conclude, even with simple manner adverbs there are reasons to think that the adverb does not merely modify a verb, but rather a verb phrase or an entire clause.

In *He will meet me here*.

*He will certainly meet me.*

and

*Briefly, he will meet me.*

the adverbs again modify an entire clause rather than merely its verb, but these examples also indicate that it is not sufficient to identify the scope of an adverb in syntactic terms ("clause" versus "verb"), but that one needs semantics as well. *Here* in *He will meet me here* says something about *He will meet me*. *Briefly* once again concerns an entire clause, but this time it is the illocutionary act associated with it. What is brief is neither the meeting nor the speaker's belief, but the speaker's assertion. One could say that *briefly*, *certainly* and *here* have the same syntactic scopes, but a different semantic scope (speech act versus propositional attitude versus state of affairs). (see Dik, et al. 1990). Variation exists both with respect to semantic and syntactic scope. Therefore, in

*The Meeting here was never a success.*

*here* has same type of semantic scope as in

*He will meet me.*

but they differ in syntactic scope.

*Even* in *Even John was there* also combines with a noun phrase. So it has same type of syntactic scope as *here* in the *meeting here*, but it has a different type of semantic scope: *even* modifies an ordinary first-order entity. Different still are *very* in *I saw him very briefly* and in *the meeting was very brief*. In the former, *very* has another adverb in its syntactic scope and, in the latter, an adjective. In *The nail went right through the wall*, finally, *right* seems to combine with a prepositional phrase.

The general conclusion is that the suggestion carried by terminology that the adverb modifies the verb, that it is the "adjective" of the verb, is not correct. Perhaps it should not be ruled out that an adverb exclusively modifies a verb. This analysis is plausible for the function of *over* in the phrasal verb *hand over* as in *The policeman handed over the evidence*.

**An Adverb is Optional:** If one deletes the adverbs in *John had carefully opened the door* or in *Very briefly, he will certainly meet me here* the resulting sentences remain grammatical. So all of these adverbs are optional. But it does not follow that all adverbs are optional. On the one hand, in *John lived here*, the adverb *here* is obligatory: the predicate *live*, when meaning "reside", can be said to be subcategorized for co-occurrence with a place adverbial. Similarly, intransitive *wash* as in *My shirt washes easily* needs a manner adverbial, and presentative *there* in *There is a man* is obligatory too. On the other hand, a predicate such as *to be dead* cannot co-occur with a place adverbial at all (\**John was dead here*). Cases like these make it

impossible to use optionally as a criterion for adverbiality. Thus one finds linguists claiming that *here* in *John lived here* is a locative “object” or “argument” rather than an adverb or that presentative *there* should be divorced from its adverbial origin and merely called a dummy subject.

**Position:** A language may reserve a certain position for adverbials. The English ‘middle field’- the area between the finite and nonfinite verb is such a position. The adverb *carefully* need not go into the middle field (*John opened the door carefully*) and one may remark that in general the position of adverbs is rather flexible. At the same time, it remains true that the English middle field only hosts adverbials. The possibility of occurring in the middle field can thus be taken to be a sufficient condition for adverbiality. It is not, however, a necessary condition. *Upstairs* and *too* are both adverbs, yet they cannot occur in the middle field (\**John had upstairs / too opened the door*).

Depending on the language, the typical adverb may well be invariable (except for the derivational expression of gradability), modify most other categories, be optional, and obey certain word order restrictions. There is a large cross-theoretical consensus about when some word is an adverb. Most importantly, there is a strong German tradition, exemplified in linguists such as König (1990) and Abraham (1990), and influential in continental linguistics as a whole that advocates a peculiar division of labor between the terms ‘adverb’ and ‘particle’, such that, e.g., neither *even* in *Even John was there* nor *just* in *He just won’t listen* are adverbs, but rather particles. One may also point to recurrent claims, inspired by Jespersen (1924), to the effect that *before* as in *I saw him before* is a preposition rather than an adverb. What is behind the latter claims is the hypothesis that prepositions can be transitive as well as intransitive.

**Universality of adverb:** Little is known about the universality of the adverb and of its uses (see Hengeveld 1992:47-72). In English, a construction such as *The soup tastes terrible* has no need for an adverb; *terrible* is an unmistakable adjective, and it cannot be replaced by an adverb (\**The soup tastes terribly*).

## 2. Adverbial Phrases and Clauses

Adverbials that are not adverbs are either adverbial phrases or clauses. In *I saw him very briefly*, *very briefly* is an adverbial phrase with an adverbial head. There are also adverbial noun phrases, such as the *whole day* in *I talked to him the whole day*, ordinary prepositional phrases, such as *in the city* in *I meet him in the city*, and discontinuous prepositional phrases, such as *which city...in* in *Which city did you meet him in?* Phenomena intermediate between adverb and adverbial are the „pronominal adverb” and the ”prepositional pronoun”. Just as ordinary pronouns are standardly taken to be words that function like noun phrases, so pronominal adverbs and prepositional pronouns are words that function like prepositional phrases. In Germanic linguistics the term „pronominal adverb” refers to a complex lexem consisting of a locative adverb followed by a postposition, for example the English *wherewith* or *hereby*. If one paraphrases a Germanic pronominal adverb with a phrase, the postposition becomes a preposition and the locative adverb often changes into a demonstrative pronoun. Thus *wherewith* becomes *with that* and *hereby* becomes *by (means of) this*.

The adverbial clause is a subtype of the subordinate clause. It may contain a finite verb and then the type of adverbial relation is often expressed by a subordinated word or phrase.

Eg. *He was happy because / in that he could leave his car at home*. Especially for the expression of time, place and manner, the subordinating phrase may have the shape of a noun phrase and then the adverbial clause may be analyzed as a relative clause. Thus, English allows *the moment we arrived* next to *when we arrived*. (see Thompson and Longacre 1985:178-185).

Nonfinite adverbial clauses contain either an infinitive (*He took the car in order to avoid the train strike*), a participle (*Knowing about the train strike, he took the car*), a special adverbial form of the verb, sometimes called “adverbial participle” or “converb” (see Haspelmath and König 1995), or a nonverbal predicate such as an adjective or a prepositional phrase (*Their father dead / in the hospital, the children left*). The exact semantic relation between the main clause and the adverbial one is often unexpressed and left to be inferred from the context. *Their father dead*, for example, could be merely temporal but also causal.

Some adverbials are intermediate between a phrase and a clause. An adverbial gerund, as in *He succeeded with his continuously asking the right question* has both phrasal and clausal characteristics. A similar structural intermediateness is found in participial and nonverbal constructions as in *With John driving, we won't have any fun* and *With their father dead / in the hospital, the children left*.

Much as there is no universality in the uses of adverbs, so there is none with respect to the uses of adverbial phrases and clauses either. For example, English can express purpose with both a finite and an infinitival subordinate clause: *John came in order to take the knife / so that he could take the knife*.

**Adverbial Notions:** The various notions that are typically expressed by adverbs and adverbials, time, place, manner, condition, cause etc, may be classified in various ways. Thus time, place and manner have been considered (see Thompson and Longacre 1985:177) more elementary than the other dimensions, for only time, place and manner can typically be expressed by monomorphemic, nonaphoric adverbs (e.g. *here, now* and *fast*). Adverbials may also be classified in terms of their syntactic and semantic scope. Propositional attitudes, for example, can be modified by adverbials that further specify the attitude (e.g. *He will hopefully return*), its source (e.g. *According to John, Mary has already left*) or the evidence (e.g. *Giving the absence at the office, she must be sick*), but not by any place, time, purpose or instrument adverbial. Adverbial notions are also connected through general semantic relations such as hyponymy, converseness and blending. Thus point of time, duration and frequency are hyponyms of temporal setting, purpose is easily thought of as a special case of causation and some conditions are also anterior circumstances.

e.g. *When you turn on the radio, you will hear music*.

Concession as in *John left although Mary was there too* seems a kind of converse of an after clause. Concessive condition, finally, as expressed by an *even if* clause is a blend of conditionality (*if*) and concessivity (*even*). The above examples also illustrate that semantic relations may or may not be lexically transparent. Thus while the lexemes *although* and *because* do not betray any converse relation, the lexical make-up of *even if* is an indication of the blending and the fact that *when* is ambiguous between a purely temporal and a conditional reading is indicative of a relation between time and condition.

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