THE ESSENCE OF POSITION OF ADVERBIAL MODIFIERS IN THE DISCOURSE

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Abstract: *This article investigates one of the discourse functions that has been proposed for the variation in English of the position of adverbials within the clause. Objective methods are used to measure persistence of adverbial scope and how scope is cancelled. The cohesive role of adverbials is discussed with the help of a particular cohesive relation.*

Keywords*: adverbial/adverbial clause; initial position; textual function; discoursal functions; adverbiality; discourse markers; syntactic msrkers.*

Whenever we perceive, interpret, or – from a stylistic point of view – evaluate a piece of spoken or written language, we need a (mental) system of rules and categories to combine single word meanings to a total understanding of the text. This also applies to language production. Generally, we call such a system the grammar of a language.

One major part of any grammar is syntax, the system of rules and categories that underlies sentence formation. Referring to form and function of the sentence constituents, syntax tells us that some constituents are obligatory to simply make a bit of language a sentence. Most familiar are the subject and the predicate, both concepts that represent particular grammatical functions within the sentence. Syntactic considerations of the adverbial are even more interesting since some adverbials are obligatory, whereas most are optional, as their omission still leaves an acceptable sentence.

Greenbaum and Quirk states that sentences, in fact, are those units within language that “must be regarded as primary, in comprising a minimum sense of completeness and unity”. Texts carrying meaning and thus being larger semantic units are on a lower level realized by, say encoded in, sentences. Syntax in particular focuses on the structural integration among the constituents of a sentence. The structural integration of a text – its unity – is of a different kind, but it can be

influenced by constituents at sentence level, namely by adverbials. This is what cohesion is all about, not considering structural relations within sentences, but across sentences. The cohesive role of adverbials shall be discussed with the help of a particular cohesive relation examined by Halliday.

When talking of adverbials we talk of the grammatical function of a sentence constituent, not of a word class. Actually, adverbials can have a wide range of syntactic forms; they can be single adverbs, prepositional phrases, noun phrases, even whole clauses. Example (a) shows an adverb functioning as modifier of an adjective, which is not to be confused with an adverbial:

(a) *"Widely varying types of land are cultivated."*

Here, *widely* modifies the adjective varying and therefore is not an adverbial but an adverb. Example (b) shows a typical case of an adverb functioning as adverbial:

(b) *"She grinned widely*."

Example (c) provides an idea of how complex an adverbial can be, in this case consisting of a whole clause:

(c) *"She called me to say a lawyer was starting divorce proceedings."*

The adverbial in (c) represents a to -infinitive clause with an internal structure that can even be attributed to a sentence.

The grammatical functions of adverbials mainly lie in adding something about circumstances of an activity or state to the sentence, giving a speaker's comment about what a clause says, or serving a connective function. Moreover, adverbials are clause elements that can have several semantic meanings such as expressing location, time, agency, or attitude.

Adverbials can occur in various positions within clauses (initial, medial, final); and ultimately, we can have multiple adverbials within one clause, in contrast to other clause elements such as subject, predicate, or object. Whereas these elements represent a sense of grammatical completeness towards the internal structure of the sentence, most adverbials are optional, that is, most have no syntactic

obligation. As can be seen in (b), the sentence would still be syntactical correct if the adverbial would be left out. Yet, example (d) shows a case in which the verb takes obligatory adverbial complementation:

(d) *"Your toast is on the table."*

There is an impressive example given by Greenbaum & Quirk that "adverbial illustrates not only multiple occurrence but also a variety of meaning, forms, positions, and grammatical relations:"

(e) "*Next Tuesday [1], I shall probably [2] visit her mother in London [3] for an hour or so [4] to see if she's feeling better [5], unless she telephones me before that* [6]."

As is well known, adverbials are usually treated as a rag-bag category in grammar, and it is in fact questionable whether they should at all be regarded as one group in syntactic classification. It does not seem possible to find criteria that fit all members of the group. For the present purposes, a short characterization of the notion will be enough.

As five types of clause elements are distinguished: subject, verb, object, complement, and adverbial. Clause elements may be placed on a scale of centrality vs. peripherality, using criteria such as position, obligatoriness vs. optionality, mobility, and the potentiality of determining what other elements must occur in the clause. Adverbials as a group are situated at the peripheral end of the spectrum. They are usually optional, and frequently appear at the end of their clause. Also, they are relatively mobile. They offer more choice in their placement than other clause elements. Finally, they do not determine what other clause elements must occur.

In addition to these characteristics, adverbials are a special class also in view of the rang: of semantic and grammatical functions as well as the different structures available to them. Furthermore, the number of adverbials in the clause is not limited, and they appear very frequently in both written and spoken language. Tuija Virtanen examines the various textual and discoursal functions that a particular positioning of a particular adverbial in its clause may have, there is no need here to establish strict

syntactic criteria for "adverbiality", or to be concerned with the different definitions of the term in the literature. This is so, first, because adverbial is a syntactic concept. Sentences, as pointed out above, are not autonomous. They serve the discourse and text they appear in, and they thus look the way they do because they have a function in the text.

Secondly and more importantly, it will become evident that other types of syntactic elements also have to be taken into account once the focus is on textual phenomena. In a study of text and discourse, a continuous shift from a bird's-eye view to a worm's eye view and back again is a necessity rather than a choice. Both the top-down and the bottom-up approaches to the problems at hand will be used. Hence, the present article is concerned with the textual and discoursal functions of the initial placement of adverbials denoting 'time' and 'place'. Starting from syntactic signals an attempt is thus made to proceed towards text and discourse. On the other hand, it is of interest to study the way in which textual and discoursal phenomena are realized in clauses and sentences. Starting from global coherence in a text a similar attempt is made to proceed towards the linguistic manifestations of such coherence, towards its syntactic markers such as a particular adverbial placement.

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