

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-51556-6 - Adjunct Adverbials in English  
Hilde Hasselgard  
Excerpt  
[More information](#)

---

## Part I

---

### A framework for analysing adverbials

# 1 Studying adjunct adverbials

---

## 1.1 Introduction

Adverbials may be regarded as a rag-bag category in the linguistic system. They tend to be negatively defined as elements that are not verbs and that do not have a participant function in the clause. In terms of a positive definition, adverbials are often said to provide the answers to questions such as *how*, *where*, *when*, *why*? (e.g. Crystal 2008: 14). In some ways *how*, *where*, *when* and *why* adverbials appear to be prototypical, and they are often given as examples in brief definitions of adverbials such as the one in Crystal (2008) or the following from Sinclair *et al.* (1990: 281): ‘An adjunct is a word or a group of words which you add to a clause when you want to say something about the circumstances of an event or situation, for example when it occurs, how it occurs, how much it occurs, or where it occurs.’ Some idea of the frequency of adverbials can be had from the following example, in which the adverbials have been highlighted using italics and with added underlining if an adverbial occurs inside another.

- (1) Radio was, and *still is*, good *to me*. *As an actor*, I had appeared in *innumerable schools broadcasts*, *in Saturday Night Theatre* and *in The Dales*. *For seven years* I had been broadcasting *regularly on Monday morning from the archives*. I had been made a ‘regular’ *by Brian Cook*, *who later became Controller of Radio City in Liverpool*. Of all my broadcasting, the Monday morning spot was perhaps the best fun. *Not only* was there the pleasure of listening to old recordings and the great names of the past, but there was an opportunity to write *almost* anything one liked.

The programme had a bigish audience *(in radio terms)* *because it followed the Today programme*, and *because people listened to it in their cars on the way to work*. They either loved it or loathed it. I *once* had a fan letter *from Neil Kinnock* saying what a good way it was to start Monday morning and asking me how I got away with it. On the other hand, I got a letter *from a regular BBC correspondent who said he always turned the radio off immediately if it was my turn on the programme*, but he would like to take issue *with something I had said last week* . . . <ICE-GB W2B-001>

#### 4 A framework for analysing adverbials

Readers may disagree with my identification of adjuncts in the above text, since definitions of adverbials vary (as will be discussed in chapter 2). However, two adverbials in (1) have not been highlighted on purpose; *perhaps*, and *on the other hand*. This is because they belong to the types of adverbials often referred to as disjuncts and conjuncts (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 503). These are often said to have a more peripheral connection with the clause than adverbial adjuncts (e.g. Biber *et al.* 1999: 765). The italicised elements in example (1) are all adjuncts. As is clear from the example, adjuncts express a broad range of meanings; not only time, place, manner and reason, but also, for example, role, agent, focus and approximation. The main meanings of the adverbials investigated in this book, as well as the criteria for distinguishing adjuncts from other clause elements, are outlined in chapter 2.

##### 1.2 Research questions

The questions that will be explored in this book are connected with four main aspects of adjunct adverbials, namely: (i) **syntactic and semantic categories**; (ii) the **frequency** of such adverbials and their subcategories; (iii) the **placement** of such adverbials; and (iv) **discourse functions** of such adverbials.

The first point has to do with the range of meanings that can be identified in adjunct adverbials and the means by which these are realised. Secondly, having identified the syntactic and semantic categories, one may ask how often different types of adjuncts are used and in what sort of contexts. Frequencies must be seen in relation to running text, in comparison with other types of adverbials and in the context of text type/genre.

The third point, placement, is closely linked to the positional flexibility of many adverbials. It is interesting to investigate what positions in the clause are available to different types of adjuncts and what factors determine their placement whenever more than one position is possible. Is syntactic realisation more important than semantic category for selecting an adverbial position? To what extent does information structure influence adverbial placement? Furthermore, adverbial positions are expected to differ as regards their role in cohesion and information management. For example, (2)–(5) are all perfectly acceptable English sentences, but because of their differences in adverbial placement they will answer different questions and fit into different contexts. This investigation will be concerned with the placement of adverbials as well as the semantic and textual implications of positional variation.

- (2) I met a girl on the train today. <S1A-020>
- (3) Today I met a girl on the train.
- (4) On the train I met a girl today.
- (5) Today on the train I met a girl.

## Studying adjunct adverbials 5

Related to the question of adverbial placement is the question of the order of adjacent adverbials. For example, it is often claimed that the usual order of adverbials is manner – space – time, as in (6); see, for example, Biber *et al.* (1999: 811). Quirk *et al.* (1999: 565) include more categories and claim that the usual order of adjuncts in a sequence is respect – process<sup>1</sup> – space – time – contingency. The study of corpus examples will reveal whether this is indeed the most common order and whether the same order can be found in sequences at the beginning as at the end of a sentence.

- (6) I say surprisingly, as while I was wandering *aimlessly around Grenoble on Sunday afternoon*, I got completely lost and didn't know where the hell I was. <W1B-002>

With respect to all these points it is relevant to compare the different categories of adverbials: do they differ from each other with respect to frequency, placement or other syntactic/semantic conditions for use? And further: how heterogeneous is the group of adjuncts? How much do the adjunct categories really have in common?

Discourse features of adverbials have not often been investigated thoroughly. Some exceptions are Virtanen (1992) and Hasselgård (1996), both of which were concerned with time and space adverbials, Altenberg's (1987) study of adverbials of cause and reason and Ford's (1993) study of adverbial clauses. Since the material for the present study contains six different text types (see section 1.3.4), it is possible to investigate the extent to which the use of adjunct adverbials varies according to text type. It is clear that the adverbials have a function at the ideational level, in specifying the circumstances in which processes take place (Halliday 2004: 175ff). But since most adjuncts are mobile in the sentence, their placement may be a reflection of thematic choice. In other words, adjunct adverbials also play a role at the textual level of language (Halliday 2004: 64). At clause level they may or may not be selected as clause theme (i.e. 'the point of departure of the message'), and their placement may furthermore reflect their status as given or new information. At text level adjuncts may be used by the speaker/writer as markers in the total build-up of the text (Virtanen 1992 and Hasselgård 2004a). In order to investigate such phenomena one must have access to the context of the sentences in which the adverbials occur. Ideally, one should also have access to sound recordings of the spoken material, in order to assess the function of prosody in addition to word order. Both of these possibilities are available with the corpus chosen for the investigation (see further, section 1.3).

<sup>1</sup> Process adjuncts include manner. See further, table 2.1.

## 6 A framework for analysing adverbials

### 1.3 Material and method

#### 1.3.1 *A corpus-based study*

The focus of this study is how adverbials are used in present-day English. The first step is to survey the types of adverbials that exist and the positions in the clause that may be filled by an adverbial, i.e. to establish what the possibilities are. But a more intriguing question is how the possibilities are exploited by native speakers of English. The adverbials thus need to be studied in their natural environment, i.e. in real text, and so it was decided to base the study on corpus material, more specifically, the British part of the International Corpus of English (ICE-GB), compiled at the Survey of English Usage, University College, London.

A general problem in using electronic corpora for the study of a syntactic phenomenon is the difficulty of searching automatically for syntactic functions. The ICE-GB is both tagged and parsed to facilitate such searches. However, it does not distinguish adjuncts from other types of adverbials. A search for all occurrences of adverbials in the ICE-GB (using ICECUP 3.1; see Nelson *et al.* 2002) tells us that the corpus contains 110,970 adverbials distributed over 46,032 'text units' (roughly corresponding to sentences). These are of course overwhelming numbers for most purposes and in this case prompted the decision to select a number of texts that could work as a 'core corpus' for the quantitative part of the study. These texts were then searched manually for adjunct adverbials.

Naturally, there are still advantages to working with a parsed corpus. The ability to search for specific syntactic structures is useful for finding supplementary examples of phenomena that are too rare in the core corpus to grant any kind of conclusions. Some examples of this are adverbials in cleft sentences (see chapter 7), sequences of adverbials in clause-initial position (section 4.6) and sentences in which an initial adverbial is followed by inversion (section 9.2.5). See further, Nelson (1998) and Nelson *et al.* (2002) for introductions to the ICE-GB corpus, the accompanying software and its search facilities.

#### 1.3.2 *Corpora used*

As mentioned above, the main material for the present study is the ICE-GB. This implies that the main focus is on British English. However, other corpora have also been consulted. The British National Corpus (BNC, see further <http://info.ox.ac.uk/bnc/>) has been used for supplementary examples. Furthermore, some examples have been taken from the London-Lund Corpus (LLC), a prosodically annotated corpus of spoken British English.

Cross-linguistic sidelights can be illuminating also in a predominantly monolingual study. Thus, the multilingual resources compiled at the University of Oslo and its sister project in Lund and Göteborg have been consulted

## Studying adjunct adverbials 7

when it seemed relevant to study how English adverbials have been translated into other languages. The English–Norwegian Parallel Corpus (ENPC) contains original texts in both English and Norwegian with translations into the other language. The Oslo Multilingual Corpus (OMC) overlaps with the ENPC, but includes more languages. The English–Swedish Parallel Corpus (Lund/Göteborg) is built up in the same way as the ENPC, with mostly the same English original texts.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.3.3 *Qualitative and quantitative description*

There are both quantitative and qualitative aspects to the present study. In my opinion, observations of frequency have an important place in a description of usage because they display the linguistic choices made by speakers and writers. Qualitative statements are often of little value for generalisations about language use unless they can be corroborated by quantitative observations. In the words of Halliday (1991: 31): ‘... the linguistic *system* [is] inherently probabilistic, and ... frequency in text [is] the instantiation of probability in the grammar’. Furthermore, corpus studies provide ‘evidence of relative frequencies in the grammar, from which can be established the probability profiles of grammatical systems’ (*ibid.*: 41).

The major part of this book, however, contains discussions of the qualitative aspects of the use of adjunct adverbials. The meaning of the adverbials and the significance of adverbial placement can of course only be discovered by studying each instance in context. The quantitative information is nevertheless of importance even to this kind of discussion because it provides a basis for establishing default and marked choices.

Most of the quantitative information is based on a 60,000-word subcorpus of the ICE-GB (see section 1.3.1), henceforth referred to as the ‘core corpus’. The core corpus, in which the clauses containing adjunct adverbials have been analysed in great detail, also provides the main material for the qualitative part of the study. However, whenever additional material was needed for some parts of the discussion, the whole ICE-GB, as well as the other corpora mentioned in the previous section, was consulted for supplementary examples. These examples may represent other text types than those found in the core corpus and are not included in the quantitative part of the study.

### 1.3.4 *Text types included in the investigation*

The core corpus taken from the ICE-GB includes six text types: conversation, sports commentary, social letters, fiction, news and academic writing.

<sup>2</sup> For further information on the multilingual corpora, see [www.hf.uio.no/ilos/OMC/](http://www.hf.uio.no/ilos/OMC/).

## 8 A framework for analysing adverbials

Previous studies have shown that text types may differ in grammatical structure or in the frequency with which a certain pattern occurs (Biber *et al.* 1999). The present study aims to investigate such differences in relation to adverbial usage.

Text types are defined according to external criteria, not according to linguistic features or discourse functions (unlike e.g. Virtanen 1992). The labels are taken over from the text classification in the ICE-GB (Nelson *et al.* 2002: 5ff) and are also well-known from, for example, Biber *et al.* (1999), where incidentally they are referred to as 'registers'. The present study mainly uses the term 'text type', but 'genre' also occurs without any distinction of meaning.

For purposes of comparison, both spoken and written English have been included. There are two types of spoken English (conversation and sports commentaries), three types of published written English (news, fiction and academic writing) and one type of unpublished written English (social letters). The latter text type consists of personal letters to and from people who know each other. Such informal writing can be expected to constitute an intermediate between public/published written English and informal spoken English. It was considered important to have at least two text types of each medium to avoid confusing medium and text type.<sup>3</sup>

The choice of text types for the core corpus was influenced by choices made in both Biber *et al.* (1999) and Hasselgård (1996), to facilitate comparison with those studies. Five of the text types are thus the same as those found in Hasselgård (1996) (conversation, commentary, letters, news and fiction). Four of them are also found in Biber *et al.* (1999) (conversation, fiction, news and academic writing). The six text types differ from each other in many respects. One parameter is speech versus writing; another is public versus private. Furthermore, the text types differ as to the degree of interaction, the extent of planning and/or editing involved and the extent to which the speaker/writer is free to choose the topics.

On-line speech production typically allows little or no time for advance planning. However, conversation and sports commentaries differ somewhat in this respect. The differences can be described along Enkvist's (1982: 15) variables for assessing the degree of 'impromptuness' of a text: (a) degree of scripting, (b) extent of planning and (c) degree of macrostructural boundness. Sports commentaries are likely to be planned but not scripted, and they involve a certain degree of macrostructural boundness; the sequence of events is to a large extent determined by the unfolding of a game or race, and speakers have to observe certain conventions for the form of broadcast commentaries. Listeners will also normally have quite strong expectations about what they

<sup>3</sup> Biber (1986) demonstrated that many of the contradictory results in investigations of differences between speech and writing were due to the use of different text types to represent each mode.

## Studying adjunct adverbials 9

are about to hear. Most of the words and expressions will be taken from the same lexical field. Sports commentaries are usually monologic in form; although there may be two speakers, they tend not to interact much. A conversation is obviously not scripted, nor does it normally involve a lot of planning. There is a minimum of macrostructural boundness, the most important factor being the presence of at least two speakers who interact and negotiate the topics being talked about.

The writing of a newspaper article involves a lot of constraints. Deadlines put the writer under severe time pressure. There may also be restrictions on the format of the article: a news item which is considered important is allotted a great deal of space, whereas another may be confined to a few lines. Genre conventions are also important: normally a newspaper article has to stick to a 'matter-of-fact' style in order to be taken seriously. In addition, a newspaper may have a 'house style', involving advice on spelling, grammar, paragraphing etc. Finally, the article may be edited by somebody other than the original writer.

Writers of fiction can determine the length as well as the contents of their texts. They also have more time at their disposal than journalists writing a news article, both for planning and editing, and can pay more attention to stylistic matters. Style is an important component of fiction, both for creating a frame of reference by means of language and in order to hold the reader's attention throughout the novel. One can thus expect the language of a novel to be carefully composed. Like news articles, however, fictional texts are written for a general audience, and they are not interactive. It may be noted that the fictional texts included in the ICE-GB vary in (sub)genre and in literary quality.

Academic writing differs from the other genres in being written by a specialist mainly for a specialist audience. It contains technical terms and other specialised vocabulary. Intertextuality is another feature of academic writing, in terms of references to, and quotations from, other people's work. Although the purpose of such texts is often to present new findings, there is also a great deal of common ground between writer and addressee. The 'academic writing' category in the ICE-GB is organised according to disciplines. The texts selected for close reading in the present study come from the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences.

Letters differ from the other three written categories in that they are not written for publication. A personal letter is intended for a specific and specified addressee. Despite not being physically present during the writing of the letter, the addressee is very much present in the writer's mind. If the writer and the addressee know each other well and communicate with each other regularly, they have a fairly large pool of shared knowledge. Thus a personal letter comes close to being dialogic in form, e.g. in containing questions and reference to earlier letters in the correspondence, or showing clear expectations of a reply.



10 A framework for analysing adverbials

Table 1.1 *Features of the text types in the material*

	Spoken	Participant interaction	Time constraint under production*	Planning and editing of text	Public
Conversation	+	+	+	–	–
Commentary	+	–	+	+/–	+
Letters	–	+	–	+/–	–
News	–	–	+/–	+	+
Fiction	–	–	–	+	+
Academic writing	–	–	–	+	+

\* For the spoken genres, ‘time constraint’ refers to the on-line speech production. As for the written news genre, this factor has a (partly) positive value because the journalist is under pressure to finish the text before a deadline.

The texts for the core corpus were chosen more or less at random within the selected text types in the ICE-GB. However, some adjustments were made. One of the texts originally selected from the ‘direct conversations’ in the ICE-GB had the character of an interview rather than a real conversation (text *StA-001*), so it was replaced by another, more purely conversational text. The sports commentaries were selected so as to represent different sports. Similarly, the academic texts were selected from different disciplines. As for the news category, I aimed at a spread of different newspapers as well as texts that can be described as ‘press reportage’. In one of the corpus texts (*W2C-002*), however, subtext 1 may be classified as a feature article. For a full list of the texts included in the core corpus, see the Appendix.

As regards the supplementary material from the ICE-GB and other corpora, no selection has been made as regards text type. It should be noted, however, that text type can be identified in each of the corpora used in the investigation.

Some central features of the text types included in the material have been summarised in table 1.1. These features bear on external or situational aspects of the text types, concerning conditions of text production as well as the final product. The table shows that the similarities and differences among the text types extend beyond the distinction between speech and writing.

1.3.5 *Excerpt, analysis, database*

As mentioned in section 1.3.1, a core corpus was selected in which all clauses containing at least one adjunct were analysed in detail. These clauses were stored in a database (FileMaker Pro) for ease of retrieval and further annotation. Table 1.2 shows the features that were recorded in the database for each clause and each adjunct. See chapter 2 for definitions and discussion of the categories.

Table 1.2 *Features of the analysis recorded in the database*

Category	Features
Text type	letter, conversation, commentary, fiction, news, academic writing
Sequence	single adverbial, cluster, combination, combination with cluster
Main category of adjunct	space, time, manner, contingency, respect, degree and extent, participant, situation, comparison/alternative, focus, viewpoint
Subcategory of adjunct	e.g. position, direction, distance, duration, frequency, relationship, manner/quality, comparison, accompaniment, means, method, instrument, attire, cause, purpose, result, condition, concession, matter, agent
Realisation	adverb phrase, single adverb, prepositional phrase, noun phrase, finite clause, non-finite clause, prepositional clause, verbless clause
Position	initial, M1, M2, M3, end, cleft focus
Scope of adjunct	sentential, predicational
Obligatoriness	obligatory, optional
Length	number of words in adverbial phrase/clause
Number of adjuncts	number of adjunct adverbials in (matrix) clause
Verbal process	material, relational, mental, verbal, behavioural, existential
Clause type	main declarative (+/- subject), <i>yes/no</i> interrogative, <i>wh</i> -interrogative, imperative, adverbial clause, relative clause, <i>that</i> -clause, indirect question, nominal relative, <i>-ing</i> participle, <i>-ed</i> participle, infinitive
Transitivity of verb	monotransitive, intransitive, copular, ditransitive, complex transitive with predicative, complex transitive with adverbial
Voice	active, passive, middle
Subject-verb inversion	yes, no

1.4 Theoretical and classificatory framework

A corpus-based approach to adverbials carries with it a number of challenges, largely caused by the enormous range of meanings that adverbials can convey. Inevitably, meanings crop up in the corpus examples that seem to defy classification into established frameworks. Moreover, it is debatable what constitutes an established framework for the classification of adverbials. A consultation of the three major reference grammars of English<sup>4</sup> reveals great variation in terminology as well as in the number of adverbial categories and their definitions (see further, section 2.3). The analyst thus faces the problem of striking the balance between a system that is sufficiently comprehensive and delicate and one that is manageable in the analysis as well as useful in generalisations about linguistic practice.

The classification scheme developed in this book is based mainly on those of Quirk *et al.* (1985) and Biber *et al.* (1999), but also borrows some terms and definitions from Huddleston and Pullum (2002) and Halliday (2004). In addition, the nature of the corpus material calls for some less well-established

<sup>4</sup> Quirk *et al.* (1985: ch. 8), Biber *et al.* (1999: ch. 10), and Huddleston and Pullum (2002: ch. 8).