

AN OVERVIEW OF ADVERBS FOR THE PROFICIENT USE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study highlights an in-depth study of adverbs for easy understanding and appropriate use. The paper introduces the adjective to distinguish it from the adverb. Sequel to this explanation of what adverbs are, types, their functions, the words or groups of words they modify and their notable significance in the English language are established. An adverb is perhaps the most difficult element to identify in an English sentence. This could be attributed to the fact that an adverb can usually be shifted around (a movable modifier) and as such it is often difficult to pin it down to a fixed position in the sentence structure. Furthermore, only one type of adverbial adjunct (Adjunct of place) may occur as obligatory element in the structure. To make matters more complicated, any one of the four major classes of words can also perform the function of an adverb in the sentence. It is, therefore, often taken that if a word cannot be placed with any of the three other classes, it must be an adverb. As a result of this negative test, the different items that are generally labeled as adverbials have acted as a dustbin of English grammar. Again, both adjectives and adverbs as modifiers have different uses. People and ESL learners in particular are not always certain about which modifier to use in a particular situation. The misuse and ignorance prevalent in the use of adverbs prompted this paper. This study will be of immense help to both students and teachers in the second language situation.

Introduction

Words are the basic rudiments of the human language. They follow a logical pattern in sentence formation with each performing a peculiar function. Eyisi (15) observes that when we group them into various classes by taking cognisance of their different functions, we refer to each class as a part of speech. Norwood (67) notes however that the part of speech of a word depends on how the word is used in a sentence. He explains that the same word can be one of several parts of speech, depending on its use in a particular sentence. He illustrates this with the word 'but' which is commonly used as a conjunction, as in the sentence:

Mary went to the beach but I stayed at home.

On the other hand, the same word 'but' is a preposition in the sentence

Everyone went to the championship game but me.

The English language according to Eyisi (15) has seven well-defined parts of speech although some grammarians recognize eight or more.

The English parts of speech are divided into two main categories, namely:

- i. The major parts of speech
- ii. The minor parts of speech

The major parts of speech include the nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. They are so referred because they belong to the open system and so can admit new members. Words that constitute each of these word-classes are unlimited because they continue to grow as new words are added to their groups.

The minor parts of speech on the other hand include pronouns, prepositions and conjunctions. They are referred to as the closed system because they do not admit new members. The number of English words called

pronouns, prepositions and conjunctions are more or less fixed. Some characteristics which distinguish the major parts of speech from the minor ones as pointed out by Eyisi (16) are:

1. It is only the major parts of speech that have lexical or dictionary meanings.
2. They constitute an open system and so admit new members.
3. They constitute the largest part of the vocabulary of the English language.
4. They undergo inflectional changes. This implies that each of them can change its form according to the demands of sentence construction.

The minor parts of speech she states, lack all the above characteristics for which the major parts of speech are recognized.

1. They do not have dictionary meanings
2. They do not admit new words; they constitute a closed system.
3. They are limited in the English vocabulary
4. They do not undergo inflectional changes.

The adverbs as already noted belong to the major parts of speech which are also described as the open system.

Adverb according to *The Complete English Companion* is "a term used in the grammatical classification of words to refer to a heterogeneous group of items whose most frequent function is to specify the mode of the verb".

What are Adverbs?

Adverbs like adjectives describe other words or make other words more specific. An adverb is a word that modifies a verb, an adjective or an adverb. Langan (485) points out that the adverb in describing verbs, adjectives and other adverbs usually end in -ly:

The referee suddenly stopped the fight (The adverb *suddenly* describes the verb stopped). Her pink dress is *absolutely* beautiful (The adverb *absolutely* describes the adjective beautiful).

The auctioneer spoke so *terribly* fast that I couldn't understand him. (The adverb *terribly* describes the adverb fast).

Recognizing and Using Adverbs

It is often widely thought especially by ESL learners that the ending -ly is a sufficient sign that a word is an adverb but this is not true. Much as a large number of adverbs do end in -ly, this does not mean that the -ly ending is wholly a dependable guide to identifying an adverb. According to Boadi, et al (102-103), there are some reasonable number of words with -ly endings which are not adverbs. These include words like brotherly, sisterly, fatherly, masterly, deadly, sickly. Although they have -ly endings, these words are classed as adjectives not adverbs.

On the other hand, there are many adverbs such as here, there, seldom, up, down, never, often, which do not end in -ly. Certain formal markers according to them however do exist although none of them is a certain indication that a particular word is an adverb:

1. A-prefixed to nouns, adjectives and verbs, e.g aloud, abroad, away, astern, ahead, astir, anew etc,
2. wise affixed to nouns: lengthwise, air wise etc.
3. wards or -ward affixed to a limited sub-class of nouns: backwards; forwards; homewards; etc.
4. Some-, any-, every-, and no- prefixed to certain nouns and structural words: anyway; somewhere; anywhere; everywhere; nowhere; sometimes; anyhow etc.,

5. Certain adverbs are identical with prepositions except that in a sentence the adverb usually receives a primary stress and the corresponding prepositions a weak one.

The guard stood [] by (adverb)

The guard [], stood by the [] wall (preposition)

Others in this sub-class are: in, out, up, down, over, under, inside, outside, out, around, about, above, across, after, along, before, behind, below, beneath, between, beyond, near, off, on, to, underneath, with, within, past, round, since, through, etc.

Types of Adverbs

According to World Bank Reference Set Grammar and Style Guide (79) adverbs usually answer the questions How? When? Where or To what extent?

Examples

Mark walked slowly

(Slowly modifies the verb walked and tells how)

I will leave soon

(Soon modifies the verb leave and tells when)

Let's go out.

(Out modifies the verb go and tells where)

Sally is not late.

(Not modifies the adjective late and tells to what extent)

The elderly man moved quite gingerly.

(Quite modifies the adverb gingerly and tells to what extent)

Adverbs that tell 'how' are called adverbs of manner. Some examples are beautifully, energetically, happily, quickly, fast. Adverbs that tell 'when' are called adverbs of time. Some examples are now, soon, then, before, later. Adverbs that tell 'where' are called adverbs of place. Some examples are in, out, near, up, down, forward, there. Some

adverbs of place can also function as prepositions.

Examples:

Let's climb up

The kitten climbed up the tree (preposition)

Adverbs that tell to what extent are called adverbs of degree. Some examples are very, extremely, rather, somewhat, quite, and almost. The above terms (adverbs of manner, time, place, and degree) classify adverbs according to their meaning. Another way to classify adverbs according to Grammar and Style Guide (80) is by their function. Interrogative adverbs introduce questions. Some examples are:

Why, when, where and how

When did you go?

Where have you been?

Relative adverbs introduce subordinate clauses. Some examples are: when, why.

I will meet you when classes are over.

Do you know why Max was angry?

Conjunctive adverbs (sometimes called transitional adverbs) join two independent clauses or sentences and modify them. Some examples are: hence, however, moreover, nevertheless, otherwise, still, therefore, thus.

We followed the recipe; however, the casserole was not so good as we'd hoped.

Sara liked the dress; nevertheless, she did not buy it.

Functions of Adverbs

As noted in Houghton Mifflin English Grammar and Composition (39, 42), the most common function of an adverb is to modify a verb. An adverb that modifies a verb

modifies the entire verb phrase which includes the main verb and its auxiliary verbs.



The driver was honking his horn desperately.

An adverb that modifies a verb does not always appear next to the verb in the sentence.

Next to VERB The police suddenly arrived at the scene.



AT BEGINNING Suddenly the police arrived at the scene



AT END The police arrived at the scene suddenly



An adverb sometimes interrupts a verb phrase.

An adverb in this position modifies all parts of the verb phrase.

Adverbs may also modify adjectives. An adverb that modifies an adjective usually comes just before the adjective that it modifies. Examples

Our dog is quite deaf [*Quite* tells to what degree the dog is deaf]

Your ideas are usually brilliant [*Usually* tells how often the ideas are brilliant]

Adverbs that modify adjectives are sometimes called qualifying adverbs or qualifier (Glencoe English 279). Sometimes adverbs modify adverbs. Such adverbs usually come just before the adverbs that they modify, and they usually tell to what degree or extent: Examples:

We were laughing quite loudly. [Loudly is an adverb that modifies 'were laughing'. 'Quite' tells to what extent we were laughing loudly]

The principal spoke rather sharply. [Sharply is an adverb that modifies 'spoke'. 'Rather' tells to what extent the principal spoke sharply].

An adverb, because it specifies the degree or intensity of the modified adjective or adverb, such an adverb according to Prentice Hall Writing and Grammar (390) is often called an intensifier. Quirk and Greenbaum (127) add that the most frequently used intensifier is 'very'. Others include so, pretty, rather, unusually, quite, unbelievably (tall). Many are restricted to a small set of lexical items e.g. deeply (anxious), highly (intelligent), strikingly (handsome), sharply (critical). Many intensifiers, they note, can modify adjectives, adverbs and verbs alike.

Adverbs as premodifiers of adjective may also be 'view point' as in politically expedient ('expedient from a political point of view'), technically possible, theoretically sound. They pointed out that viewpoint adjuncts that appear after the noun phrase are related to the pre-modifying adjective within the phrase.

A good paper editorially can also be a good paper commercially.

Or

An editorially good paper can also be a commercially good paper.

Adverbs as Parts of Verbs

Adverbs also function as parts of verbs. As explicated in Prentice Hall Writing and Grammar (390), some verbs require an adverb to complete their meaning. Adverbs used this way are considered part of the verb. However,


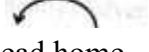
an adverb functioning as part of a verb does not answer the usual questions for adverbs.

Example: The tractor backed up alongside the field.

Nouns Functioning as Adverbs

Several nouns can function as adverbs that answer the questions Where? or When? Some of these words are home, yesterday, today, tomorrow, mornings, afternoons, evenings, nights, week, month, and year.

Nouns used as Adverbs

Nouns	As Adverbs
Evenings are restful times.	 <p>I work evenings</p>
My home is miles from here.	 <p>Let's head home</p>

Adverbs as Adverbials

Quirk and Greenbaum (126) note that an adverb may function as adverbial, a constituent distinct from subject, verb, object and complement, Adverbials according to Woodsand Coppieters (75) give additional information about an action, happening or state as described by the rest of the sentence. Oji adds that the adverbials include not only single-word adverbs but also particles and phrases. The term, he notes, is therefore more embracing than 'adverb' (60).

They have a number of different forms:

- Adverbs, adverb phrases, noun phrases, prepositional phrases.

- Finite clauses, non-finite clauses (infinitives, -ing and — ed participles), verbal clauses.

Quirk and Greenbaum (126) on their part postulate three classes of adverbial: adjuncts, disjuncts and conjuncts. Adjuncts are integrated within the structure of the clause to

at least some extent.

Example: They are waiting outside.

I can now understand it.

He spoke to me calmly.

Disjuncts and conjuncts however are not integrated within the clause. According to them, semantically disjuncts express an evaluation of what is being said either with respect to the form of the communication or to its content.

Example: Frankly, I am tired.

Fortunately, no one complained

They are probably at home.

Semantically, conjuncts have a connective function. They indicate the connection between what is being said and what was said before.

Example: We have complained several times about the noise, and yet he does nothing about it.

I have not looked into his qualifications.

He seems very intelligent though.

In the structure of the sentence, the adverbial function is crucial. When the adverbial is absent, the sentence is not complete. For instance:

John is in the park SVA

S	V	A

I put the food in the pot . SVA

 | | |
S V OA

Adverbial Group Types

Baruah (120), expositing with the headed groups, limited the term adverbial group to cover only those groups that have an adverb as their head. He states that the adverbial group usually consists of a single adverb, with or without an intensifier. According to him, the adverbial group and all other items that can function as an adverb are together known as adverbials. Since an adverb too can have degree form just like an adjective, the head may also be preceded by the structural words such as more, most, less, least or as/so. The common adverbial group-types may therefore be

Type I Head alone, e.g; frequently

Type 2 intensifier + Head, e.g; very soon

Type 3 More/most, etc + Head, e.g., more often, as often (as).

More than one adverbial group may occur in the same sentence or in the same position in the sentence. Further, as already mentioned, many other items may occur in these positions and function as an adverb.

The following according to him are the common adverbials:

- i. The adverbial group, e.g. He will come very soon.
- ii. The prepositional phrase, e.g. He opened the box with a knife.

- iii. Finite clause, e.g. When I reached the station, the train had already left.
- iv. Non-finite clause, e.g. He came to see me.

Classification of Adverbials

Adverbs are, usually, classified according to their meaning or their position in the sentence. The classification according to meaning as posited by Baruah (123) is essentially a logical one and can be extended or sub-divided according to necessity. Some of the familiar classes of this type consists the adverbials of time, adverbials of place, adverbials of frequency, adverbials of manner etc.

He points out that adverbials can also be classified according to the three adverb positions (End-position, Mid-position, Front-position). But as already mentioned, adverbials are highly mobile elements and the same adverbial may occur in all the three positions. However, some adverbials have their favourite position in the sentence and on this basis it is possible to assign them to these positional classes. Here are some common adverbials with their typical positions.

- i. Front-position Adverbials
 - Interrogative Adverbs: although, besides, generally, 'however, kindly, otherwise, unfortunately, usually, therefore etc.
- ii. Mid-position Adverbials: Already, always, ever, frequently, just, merely, never, often, actually, yet etc.,
- iii. End-position Adverbials

Prepositional phrases, clauses, badly, carefully, easily, recently, soon, there, well, yesterday etc. (Baruah 123).

Comparison of Adverbs

According to Quirk and Greenbaum (135) for a small number of adverbs, the inflected forms used for comparison are identified with those for adjectives. As noted in Grammar and Style Guide (80-81) adverbs of manner like adjectives may be compared upward and downward in three degrees: positive, comparative, and superlative. Like adjectives, adverbs can be compared upward by two different methods

1. Most adverbs are compared by using "more" for the comparative degree and "most" for the superlative degree.

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
Happily	more happily	more happily
Quickly	more quickly	most quickly
Accurately	more accurately	most accurately

A few adverbs are compared upwards by using -er for the comparative degree and -est for the superlative degree.

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
Soon	Sooner	Soonest
Near	Nearer	Nearest
Early	Earlier	Earliest

All adverbs are compared downward by using "less" for the comparative degree and "least" for the superlative degree.

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
Early	less early	least early
Happily	less happily	least happily

Quickly	less quickly	least quickly
Accurately	less accurately	least accurately
Some adverbs are compared irregularly.		
Positive	Comparative	Superlative
Badly	Worse	Worst
Far	Farther	Farthest
Little	Less	Least
Much	More	Most
Well	Better	Best

Distinguishing between Adjective and Adverbs

It is sometimes difficult to determine whether a word is an adjective or an adverb. A large number of adverbs end in -ly but so do some adjectives.

Adverb The guide yelled loudly

Adjective The bear seemed friendly.
Sometimes the same word may be used as either an adjective or an adverb.

Adverb ... Everyone worked hard

Adjective This is hard work

To decide whether a modifier is an adjective or an adverb, figure out what part of speech the modified word is. If the modified word is a noun or a pronoun, the modifier is an adjective or an adverb, the modifier is an adverb.

You can also tell whether a modifier is an adjective or an adverb by deciding which question the modifier answers.

Adjective

1. Which
2. What kind?
3. How many?
4. How often?
5. To what extent or degree?

Adverb

1. How or in what manner?
2. When?
3. Where?

Adjective- Jan is .an early riser

[**Think:** Early tells what kind of riser, which is a noun. Early is therefore an adjective]

Adverb Jan left early.

[**Think:** Early tells when Jan left, which is an adverb. Early is therefore an adverb] (Culled from Houghton Mifflin English Grammar and Composition 43 - 44)

Significance of Adverbs

Adverbs are useful tools of language. Apart from giving or expanding information about the verb, adverbs specify the degree or intensity of the modified adjective or adverb in which case it is called an intensifier. For example: He worked very competently (Adverb modifying adverb). They are also required to complete the meaning of some verbs. In this position, they are considered as part of a verb. An adverb functioning as part of a verb does not answer the usual questions of adverbs e.g. 'The tractor backed up alongside the field. Adverbs, when they function as adverbials, talk about the whole clause. For

example, Definitely, that is what they meant. They could also be used to portray attitude of movement indicating negativity as in He walked slowly to the police cell.

Conclusion

An adverb is a word that modifies a verb, an adjective or another adverb. Functionally, adverbs describe other words or make other words more specific. A good knowledge of this major part of speech will enhance the proficient use of the English language.

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