Adverbial Distinctions that Matter and Others that Don’t

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1. Introduction

On more than one occasion, linguists dealing with the topic of adverbs or adverbials have complained about the complexity of the issues involved. A major source of concern has been the heterogeneous nature of the grammatical function class of adverbials. Accordingly, there have been several attempts at distinguishing subclasses of adverbials. The present article reviews some of the distinctions that have been made and attempts to assess them as either relevant or not relevant. Relevance is judged by the contribution that the distinction can make towards explaining the positional potential and/or the intonation of adverbial constituents.

Adverbials were the topic of my doctoral dissertation (Buysschaert (1979)), part of which was published as Buysschaert (1982). A summary of my standpoint was published as Buysschaert (1987) (also reprinted as Buysschaert (1990)). With the exception of a couple of reviews (Buysschaert (1989, 1998)) and a number of guest lectures, I discontinued my research into this topic from the mid-eighties onwards, though it has remained a favourite chapter in a grammar course that I have continued to teach. In many ways, the present article is a reassessment of my former views in light of examples that have come up during my teaching and reading.

2. Preamble: Factors Affecting Adverbial Position and Intonation

The introduction suggests that distinguishing between subclasses of adverbials will help in formulating rules that explain their positional and prosodic potential. While this is undoubtedly true, it is important to realise from the outset that the position and intonation of adverbials is affected by an interplay of (sometimes competing) factors, of which membership of a particular subclass is only one.

In fact, one of the main claims of the present survey will be that a more robust account of adverbial behaviour can be given if the number of adverbial categories is drastically restricted and if the rest of the explanation is done in terms of a number of overriding principles. A comprehensive analysis of the factors involved is beyond the scope of this article. Some of the syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and textual factors that can be held responsible for adverbial position are reviewed in Hasselgård (1996: 57–70). A number of them will be explicitly elaborated on in the course of this article, when their discussion becomes pertinent (as in sections 5.1 and 5.10).

3. The Traditional Semantic Subclasses

The first set of distinctions that this paper will hold up to light are the semantic subclasses of Time, Place, Cause, Circumstance, Reason, Manner, Modality, Degree, etc. They are the oldest and best known. Their advantage is that in many cases they can be easily recognised, although some of the labels are ambiguous:

\[(1)\] a. George did it for the money. \((\text{Reason or Purpose?})\)
b. Two runners were disqualified at the Special Olympics. \((\text{Time or Place?})\)
c. Generally people are hostile to change.
Adverbial Distinctions

Frequency or Viewpoint?

A serious disadvantage of the semantic classification is that it is virtually open-ended, as it is often possible to identify further subclasses on the basis of meaning (popular subclasses of Time include frequency, duration, location in time, but Quirk et al. (1985: 8.72), for example, distinguish a further subcategory of time relationship as in up to that moment).³ If rules have to be formulated for each (sub)category separately, the number of rules will become unwieldy, with the risk that a number of useful generalisations will be missed.

It is striking, for example, that the following adverbials have a similar potential despite the fact that they belong to different semantic categories:

(2) a. {"Frequently,"} the judges {frequently} drew the wrong con’elusions {(-frequently)}. (Time/Frequency)
b. {"Probably,"} the judges {probably} drew the wrong con’elusions {(-probably)}. (Modality)
c. {"Un”fortunately,"} the judges {unfortunately} drew the wrong con’elusions {(-unfortunately)}. (Fact-evaluating disjunct)

It will be argued below that this generalisation can be captured by assigning all three adverbials to the category of S-modifiers (section 5.2 below).

Conversely, some members of the same semantic class appear not to share all of their positional potential. Consider the different behaviour in front-position of the following Place adverbials:

(3) a. *In Paris, she lives. (where live = reside)
b. In Paris, she bought two new hats.
c. *In the shoulder, Big Billy got himself shot.

³ The category is also mentioned in Declerck (1991: 221), who also names repetition adjuncts alongside frequency adjuncts and makes further distinctions into definite and indefinite instances of the various temporal adverbials.

Curly brackets are used to show alternative positions. The symbol ‘‘’’ indicates the start of a falling tone, ‘‘’’ signals the start of a low rising tone, ‘‘’’ the start of a falling-rising tone.

Despite its intuitive descriptive nature, then, the traditional semantic taxonomy of adverbials does not offer a reliable basis for explaining adverbial position and intonation.

It may be objected that a time-honoured mnemonic like the Manner-Place-Time rule is a useful criterion for adverbial order in end-position, and that it is based on the traditional semantic distinctions. Yet for one thing, the rule sometimes breaks down:

(4) a. Jane washed the car carefully in front of the garage last Saturday. (Manner-Place-Time)
b. Jane stayed there quietly all day. (Place-Manner-Time)
c. We have a habit of starting at 9am in our department. (Time-Place)

A more powerful explanation of adverbial order in end-position is relative scope or, to use the term coined in Buysschaert (1982: 158), hierarchy of modification. The adverbial with the broadest scope tends to come right-most:

(5) a. ((Jane washed the car carefully) in front of the garage) last Saturday).
b. ((We have a habit of starting at 9am in our department).

c. This principle is more powerful because it also explains other cases that do not involve Manner-Place-Time-sequences.⁵

(6) a. ((Jill will join us at half past three) tomorrow).

b. ((We appreciate your concern very much), of course).

⁵ In the case of (4b), a further rule is needed to explain the order Place-Manner-Time. Here, the Place adverbial is a verb complement. As explained in section 4, verb complements follow the verb closely.
The conclusion remains that, even with respect to the rules on adverbial order, the semantic subclassification of adverbials does not qualify as one which is directly relevant to word order and intonation.

4. Verb Complements versus Free Modifiers

Examples (3a) and (3b) above illustrate an important difference between adverbials that are actually objects—we may call them verb complements—and adverbials that are not. The verb *to live*, in the sense of ‘to reside’ suggests a ‘location’ much in the same way as the verb *to eat* suggests ‘food.’ Accordingly, *in Paris* in *She lives in Paris* is as much an object as *fish* is in *They’re eating fish*.

Not surprisingly, verb complements share the positional and intonation potential of objects, which basically means that they tend to follow the verb immediately and have less freedom to roam around. For example, it is equally marked to say (7a) as it is to say (7b):

(7) a. ?In *Paris* I would never want to *live*  
   b. ?*Fish* I would never *eat*

‘True’ adverbials—we may call them free modifiers, in the sense that they are not prompted by the verbal meaning—are not similarly tied to post-verbal position, as the felicity of (3b) illustrated.

Grammarians have been slow to accept the relevance of this adverbial distinction despite its importance. Buysschaert (1982: 33–38) surveys a number of accounts that have, some of them half-heartedly, some of them more convincingly, recognised the radically separate status of object-like adverbials. The distinction has gained further recognition since then but is still insufficiently reflected in the accounts of, for example, standard reference grammars. Declerck (1991: 225) does recognise the existence of obligatory space adjuncts (cf. (8) to (10) below), but sees them as just one subtype of the adjuncts rather than as a major category in their own right. He does not mention other examples of object-like adverbials (cf. (11) and (12) below). A more recent major grammar book like Huddleston and Pullum (2002) admittedly classifies a limited number of traditional adverbials as *complements* (individual examples of interest will be found on pages 222, 224, 257 and 703) but does not present complement-type adverbials as a major category.

The following are further examples of verb complements (the (a)-examples) in contrast with similar looking free modifiers (the (b)-examples):

(8) a. Joe rushed *to the office*. (Marked: ?*To the office* Joe rushed.)  
   b. Joe typed two letters *in the office*. (In the office, Joe wrote two letters.)

(9) a. Hilary has remained *in Paris*. (Marked: ?*In Paris* Hilary remained.)  

(10) a. Jack and Jill sat *in the car*. (?*In the car* Jack and Jill sat.)  
    b. Jack and Jill discussed the situation *in the car*. (In the car, Jack and Jill discussed the situation.)

(11) a. The show lasted *for two hours*. (*For two hours, the show lasted.*)  
    b. He kept nagging about the cost *for two hours*. (For two hours, he kept nagging about the cost.)

(12) a. Jake has behaved *professionally*. (*Jake has professionally behaved.*)  
    b. Jake has performed the Hamlet scene *professionally*. (Jake has professionally performed the Hamlet scene.)

Example (12a) is undoubtedly the most controversial one in the series. Yet, it cannot be denied that *behave* means ‘act in a certain manner.’ Accordingly, the constituent that expresses this manner is bound to be a verbal complement.

The distinction between verb complements and free modifiers is a very important one and its range has probably been underestimated.
5. **S-modifiers versus V-modifiers**

5.1. **Subclassifying Free Modifiers: Introductory Remarks**

Although free modifiers—the ‘true’ adverbials—clearly behave differently from verb complements, not all free modifiers have the same positional and prosodic potential. In part, this can be explained by differences in formal make-up and hence ‘syntactic weight.’ Adverbial clauses (e.g. *when they left the show*) are bulky and enjoy the least freedom. They will mostly be left in end position though they may get moved to front position if they have topic-function (cf. section 10). Adverb phrases (*time and again*) often suffer the same fate though in journalese style time phrases regularly also occur in mid position (*Attorney David Durkee this morning announced during a press conference that etc.*). Mid position is the position of choice for unobtrusive adverbs (*The Millers often complained about the noise*). Adverbs in -ly enjoy the greatest freedom because they are lightweight and carry a marker that makes their function and status clear (cf. the examples in (2)).

Syntactic weight, however, is one of the ‘overriding’ factors alluded to in section 2 and I will not go into the niceties of this factor as this may involve reiterating rules and tendencies that are sufficiently known.

5.2. **S-modifiers**

More importantly for this article, the difference in positional behaviour appears also to be influenced by differences in the syntactic status of the free modifiers. In accounts using tree diagrams, the different status has usually been described in terms of different positions in the sentence tree. A number of these opinions were reviewed in Buysschaert (1979: 142–144), but the practice of assigning different adverbial categories to different tree nodes has continued since, see e.g. Frey and Pittner (1998) and Frey (2003).

My main criticism of the attempts to subclassify free modifiers in this way is that confusion has often arisen between syntactic status per se and interfering factors like information structure and hierarchy of modification. Sometimes, there has also been confusion with purely semantic and pragmatic issues. I will try to illustrate some of these aspects below.

A distinction that seems to me syntactically very important is that between S-modifiers and V-modifiers. I consider S-modifiers to be a broad category of free modifiers whose defining characteristic is that they say something about the *fact, event* or *claim* described in the *clause as a whole*. The sentences in (2) were illustrations in point; I repeat them as (13) below with some comments:

\[
\text{(13) a. } \{\text{Frequently,}\} \text{ the judges } \{\text{frequently}\} \text{ drew the wrong conclusions } \{\text{frequently}\}. \quad (\text{The event was a frequent one.})
\]
\[
\text{b. } \{\text{Probably,}\} \text{ the judges } \{\text{probably}\} \text{ drew the wrong conclusions } \{\text{probably}\}. \quad (\text{The claim is a probable one.})
\]
\[
\text{c. } \{\text{Unfortunately,}\} \text{ the judges } \{\text{unfortunately}\} \text{ drew the wrong conclusions } \{\text{unfortunately}\}. \quad (\text{The fact was an unfortunate one.})
\]

The similarity in positional and intonational behaviour of these adverbials is striking and is a compelling reason for uniting them in one and the same category. The category of S-modifiers is large. In terms of the traditional classifications, it includes, among others, adverbials of time (and its subclasses) and place as major *event-modifiers*, the modality adverbials as *claim-modifiers* and the causality adverbials (*cause, reason, purpose*) as well as the evaluating disjuncts as *fact-modifiers*.

The fact that there are restrictions on the mutual order of S-modifiers has prompted many other grammarians to speculate that different syntactic categories are involved (with different positions in the sentence tree). However, the ordering restrictions can usually be explained in terms of hierarchy of modification (cf. section 3 above). The time adverbial as well as the place adverbial modify the ‘whole clause’ in (14) below and are

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6 End position is the position after the object(s) or verb complement(s) or after the intransitive verb. Front position is the position before the subject. Mid position is the position between the subject and the main verb. When there are auxiliaries, adverbials may occur before, after or in between auxiliaries.
both S-modifiers in that sense. Only, in the case of the time adverbial that ‘whole clause’ also includes the place adverbial:

(14) a. ((Jane washed the car in front of the garage) last Saturday).

There are also other apparent differences in behaviour between members of the set of S-modifiers that can be explained in other than syntactic terms. Consider (15) and (16):

(15) a. Vincent took the wrong ‘key probably.
   b. *Vincent took the wrong key ‘probably.
   c. That Vincent took the wrong key is probable.
(16) a. Vincent took the wrong ‘key last night.
   b. Vincent took the wrong key last ‘night.
   c. *That Vincent took the wrong key is/was last night.

In section 10 below I will observe that claim-modifiers tend not to be comment-prone, which explains why (15b) is an unlikely message. As to the that-clauses, they may take the meaning of ‘the claim that’ or ‘the fact that’ but not ‘the event that,’ which explains why (16c) is infelicitous. It is, in other words, semantic and pragmatic factors rather than truly syntactic ones that explain the different behaviour here.

5.3. V-modifiers

There is also a broad category of V-modifiers. Their defining characteristic is that they say something about the process, action or state described in the verb. V-modifiers often correspond to the traditional categories of Manner, Degree and Instrument:

(17) a. Amanda sang the hymn beautifully. (the singing was beautiful; Manner)
   b. The earthquake destroyed the building completely. (the destruction was complete; Degree)
   c. They sliced the cake with a pen-knife. (the slicing was done with a pen-knife; Instrument)

Again, an important generalisation can be captured if all the free modifiers of this type are assigned to one and the same category. Their behaviour is very similar. To begin with, V-modifiers, unlike the average S-modifier, feel uncomfortable in front-position, though prepositional phrases may be found there (their position is freer) if the topic-function is very clear:

(18) a. *Beautifully Amanda sang the hymn.
   b. With great zest, Amanda sang the hymn.?
   c. *Completely, the earthquake destroyed the building.
   c. With this pen-knife, they were able to slice the cake.

Secondly, if their syntactic weight allows it (cf. section 5.1) and if the information structure of the sentence is such that they do not constitute the comment, V-modifiers can be found in mid-position (unlike verb complements; cf. (12a) versus (12b) above):

(19) a. The hymn was beautifully sung by a young girl called Amanda. (the by-adjunct is the comment)
   b. The earthquake completely destroyed the ambassador’s residence. (The object is rich in meaning and is therefore comment-prone. The information value of the adverbial is now lower and it feels more comfortable in mid-position than it would in (17b).)

5.3. A Conclusion on S- and V-modifiers

The conclusion so far is that distinguishing between the broad categories of S-modifiers and V-modifiers makes good sense and leads to useful generalisations of rules for the position and intonation of a good many adverbials.

7 With great zest could alternatively be interpreted as an S-modifier, i.e. Amanda’s move to start singing came about with great zest. On similar cases of structural ambiguity, see Buysschaert (1982: 151). A third alternative is to classify it as a Su-modifier, see section 7.
6. A Transitional Category between Verb Complements and V-modifiers?

Many linguists (including myself) like their distinctions to be clear-cut. Yet there is always at least the theoretical possibility that some distinctions display a cline rather than a clean break between categories. In Buysschaert (1982: 152) I speculated that such a cline may exist between verb complements and V-modifiers. Both categories are elements that refer to the verb. Verb complements are suggested by the meaning of the verb (they are arguments of the relationship expressed in the verb), V-modifiers are not. There may, however, also be half-way cases.

The borderline cases are typically the third arguments in a relationship, the other two being the subject and an object or verb complement. The indirect object (whether prepositional or oblique) is an example:

(20) a. Sue donated a painting to *Harry.

It is easier to leave out the indirect object than the direct object, suggesting that the former is less intimately connected to the verb than the latter:

(20) b. Sue donated a painting.
   c. Sue donated to *Harry.  (context required)

Some of the other criteria used in Buysschaert (1982: 79) to recognise verb complements are also less convincing in the case of indirect objects than in the case of direct objects:

(20) d. *Sue donated a painting to Harry but Hilda did so a chest of drawers.
   e. Sue donated a painting to Harry but Hilda did so to Stephen.
   f. *Sue donated a painting to Harry but she didn’t do so a chest of drawers.
   g. Sue donated a painting to Harry but she didn’t do so to Stephen.

Similar doubts arise for the third argument in (21):

(21) a. She copied the text to the other document.
   b. She copied the text.
   c. ?She copied the text to one document but he did so to another.
   d. ?She copied the text to clipboard but she didn’t do so to the other document.

The sentences with a question mark are at worst a bit odd but do not seem implausible. This would take the ‘third arguments’ nearer to the free modifiers.

There are a number of place adverbials that seem to belong to this transitional category:

(22) a. He scribbled a few notes in his *diary.
   b. He keeps the mower in the *shed.
   c. He lost all his jewels in the *wash.  (Halliday (1970: 150))
   d. Hans saw the evening star in the *West.  (Bartsch (1976: 124))
   e. The gunmen hit Bill in the *shoulder.  (after Hasselgård (1996: 60))
   f. She was stabbed in the *chest.  (after Hasselgård (1996: 60))

What these place adverbials have in common is that they do not say where the event took place. They are, in other words, no S-modifiers like in Paris in the sentence She bought two new hats in Paris. But whether they are V-modifiers or verb complements remains unclear.

A possible argument in favour of an in-between category could be that the order of the second and the third argument seems fixed, which one could take to be a decisive word order criterion:

(20) h. *Sue donated to Harry a painting.

Yet this may alternatively be explained by the difference in the composition of the constituents, where the rule could be that noun phrases precede prepositional phrases. In fact, when neither constituent has a preposition, the order may be reversed for reasons of syntactic weight, witness sentences like She gave him a letter.

The question whether a separate in-between category—which might be
called the Third Argument Adverbial—should be sanctioned remains undecided. On the one hand, one may argue that ‘donate something to someone,’ ‘keep something somewhere,’ ‘hit someone somewhere’ are valid conceptual units—more so than ‘buy something somewhere.’ This would be an argument for saying that the third arguments are also verb complements but possibly somewhat less integrated than the second argument. On the other hand, it is true that the constituents under discussion are much like V-modifiers; arguably, their seemingly closer relationship to the verb stems from an orientation towards the second argument:

(23) a. He keeps the mower in the shed. (also means: the mower is in the shed)
    b. He cleans the mower with petrol. (does not similarly mean: the mower is with petrol)

The contentious constituents are not unlike complements to the object in this respect, i.e. like blue in She painted the door blue.

7. Subject-Oriented Adverbials, Su-modifiers

A second difficult case is that of subject-orientation and the question whether subject-oriented adverbials constitute a class of their own. In Buyssehauert (1982: 150–151) I contend that subject-orientation is a concomitant feature that does not influence the position or intonation of a free modifier. This may be true of carelessly in:

(24) Carelessly, John trod on the snail.

The utterance implies that John was careless, but this subject-orientation does not affect the potential position and intonation of the adverbial, which is in the first place an S-modifier (The fact that John trod on the snail was careless [of him]), explaining why front-, mid- and end-position are all possible (bearing in mind that the intonation of a non-comment-prone adverbial will be needed; see section 10).

Yet in some cases the subject-orientation seems to make front-position more likely than in the case of non-subject-oriented adverbials of the same syntactic category. The adverbial in (25a) is, in principle, a V-modifier and so is that of (25c). Yet front-position does not seem all that impossible for attentively, which has an orientation towards the subject, whereas it is clearly excluded for completely, which is not subject-oriented.

(25) a. She listened to all the instructions attentively.
    b. ?Attentively, she listened to all the instructions.
    c. The job has now been finished completely.
    d. *Completely, the job has now been finished.

Arguably, attentively in (25b) is not used as V-modifier but rather as a Subject Adjunct, a category mentioned in Quirk et al. (1972: 465ff). Declerck (1991: 228) also has a typical example (though he does not use the term Subject Adjunct):

(26) Enthusiastically, he mounted the platform and addressed the crowd.

He paraphrases this utterance as ‘He was enthusiastic when he mounted etc.’ Enthusiastically can hardly be called an S-modifier here: a paraphrase like ‘The fact that he mounted etc. was enthusiastic’ would not be appropriate. A V-modifier reading is also doubtful. Probably, the mounting was performed in an enthusiastic manner but this is not what the speaker wants to say in the first place. The only valid paraphrase is Declerck’s.

It is also significant that the effect tends to disappear when enthusiastically is no longer in front-position. The versions in (27),

(27) He {enthusiastically} mounted the platform {enthusiastically}.

rather suggest the V-modifier meaning, though there is admittedly only a thin line between the readings.

The conclusion may be that, despite claims to the contrary in my earlier accounts of adverbials, a separate category of Subject Adjuncts is in order after all. Since I will not accept a category of adjuncts (cf. section 9 below), it would be more logical to use a term that is more in line with the
terms I have proposed for other free modifiers. I suggest using the new term Su-modifier.

Su-modifiers say something about the subject but rather than giving a more or less stable characteristic as an adjective would, they describe a state that the subject is in while performing the activity described in the utterance. On the surface, Su-modifiers behave like an S-modifier with a strong topic-function, which means that they will be found in front-position with a falling-rising intonation.

8. U-modifiers

S-modifiers were described above as saying something about the fact, event or claim described in the clause as a whole. This seems not to include examples like the following:

(28) a. Frankly, no-one knows what Bill has in mind.
    b. Theoretically, all bankers are sinners.

These two adverbials comment on the clause as an utterance. They say that it is a frank utterance, or that it is one with a theoretical value only. Does this warrant the creation of a separate category of Utterance-Modifiers (U-modifiers) or should we rather add these free modifiers as a further semantic subcategory of the S-modifiers?

In my teaching, I have so far worked with a separate category of U-modifiers, because unlike ‘real’ S-modifiers, the examples above seem reluctant to take mid-position:

(28) c. *No-one frankly knows what Bill has in mind.
    d. *All bankers are theoretically sinners.

One may argue, however, that this is because frankly and theoretically are very topic-prone (see section 10 for this concept). This makes front-position the preferred place-to-be, with end-position—as an afterthought—the second best option:

(28) e. No-one knows what Bill has in mind, frankly.

f. All bankers are sinners, theoretically.

Also, I have since come across examples where the U-modifier seems unproblematic in mid-position after all:

(29) I frankly/honestly don’t know what you’re talking about.

Possibly mid-position becomes more plausible with light subjects, when mid-position is not all that different in effect from front-position. If this is true, it would mean that (30) is less acceptable than (29):

(30) ?Jim and Sam frankly/honestly don’t know what they are talking about.

Quirk et al. (1985: 615) and Declerck (1991: 232) call the former category (frankly, honestly) Style Disjuncts and the latter (theoretically, in theory, technically, etc.) Viewpoint Adverbials, which they regard as a subcategory of Subjuncts (Quirk et al. (1985: 448), Declerck (1991: 227)). This means that they miss out on a generalisation. Both types of adverbials can be paraphrased using the expression ‘speaking’ ((frankly) speaking (frankly), theoretically speaking) and they share positional-intonational characteristics.

The question, however, whether they are a separate category of free modifiers or just a somewhat special type of S-modifier remains unresolved.

9. Other Categories of Adverbials

The adverbials that we have discussed so far are either verb complements (objects, in fact) or free modifiers, though a transitional category of Third Argument Adverbials may also be recognised. The free modifiers can be further subdivided into three or four categories:

—S-modifiers
—V-modifiers
—Su-modifiers
—U-modifiers (though these might also be a subtype of S-modifiers)
All the other categories that grammarians have enumerated—and there are many—have been brushed aside. More categories are admittedly needed if the analysis goes beyond or below sentence level. At interclausal/intersentential level one should add the conjuncts. They are conjunctions that masquerade as adverbials:

(31) Our staff are hopeless. The secretary, however, does a perfect job.

*However* can be found in front-, mid or end-position (always with ‘comma-intonation’ though), mimicking the behaviour of an S-modifier despite its very different status as a clause- or sentence-(if not paragraph-)linker.

At phrase level, there are **A-modifiers** (Buysschaert (1982: 87)). They say something about the characteristic described in an adjective or adverb (or an adjectival/adverbial phrase):

(32) They were *very* old and worked *very* hard.

Their position is unproblematic: they remain close to their head. Traditionally, they have also been called adverbials, though their role is rather akin to that of an adjective within a noun phrase.

A more special category that works at phrase level are the **focussing adverbials**. Rather than qualifying a constituent, they put it in focus:

(33) a. *Only* John knows where the key lies hidden.
    b. *Even* Mary refused to tell us where to look.

The constituent focussed upon always bears a nuclear accent (unless the focussing adverbial itself has the nucleus). If that constituent is not the subject, the focussing adverbial may also be found in mid-position but nevertheless remains linked to the element that has the nucleus:

(34) a. John only wanted to ‘scare them.
    b. John only wanted to scare their ‘mothers.

Focussing adverbials are an interesting category (see Nevallainen (1991) for a historical perspective) but had better be considered as rather different from other adverbials. They are another example of how the category of adverbials has been broadened into a ‘dustbin of grammar.’

Finally, a word may be said on the distinction adjunct-subjunct-disjunct originally introduced by Greenbaum (1969) and taken over in the Quirk grammars as well as by Declerck (1991: 214–215). The idea behind this distinction is that some adverbials, the *adjuncts*, are better integrated in the clause than others, which have been called *disjuncts* and *subjuncts*. Viewpoint adverbials and fact-evaluaters like *fortunately* are believed to be among the less integrated adverbials. Detailed criticism of this distinction is beyond the scope of this article. It is true that some adverbials give additional, somewhat parenthetical, remarks rather than specific information; but this has to do with meaning rather than syntax and may also be influenced by context (see section 10 below).

Declerck takes front position with comma-intonation to be uncharacteristic of adjuncts, but those of his adjuncts that can occur as topics can also take this position and intonation:

(35) *Yesterday Mary called him a `fool and now she wants to marry him.*

Another test that is meant to potentially single out adjuncts and is illustrated in (36a) fails in (36b):

(36) a. John arrived yesterday but Mary did not (= but Mary did not arrive yesterday).
    b. They take the `metro in Paris but Glaswegians still prefer the `car to go to work (= but Glaswegians still prefer the car to go to work in Paris).

Degree of integration in the clause as defined in the adjunct-subjunct-disjunct distinction may well have to do with factors of information structure rather than true syntactic factors.

10. **Topic-Proneness, Comment-Proneness**

Buysschaert (1982: 116–140) devotes an entire subchapter to the importance of information structure in the discussion of adverbial position and
intonation. A major dichotomy in information structure is the distinction between the part of the utterance that is presented as the subject-matter of that utterance and which is often referred to as the topic (though definitions differ); and that part of the utterance which asserts something (or asks something) about the subject-matter and which is therefore called the comment. Furthermore, utterances may contain parts that are neither topic nor comment.

Some adverbials are likely to become comments because they hold very specific information, others are unlikely to be comments because their information content is low or because they constitute additional remarks rather than real assertions.

V-modifiers indicating a manner in which, or an instrument with which, something happens or is performed are comment-prone in this sense and so are S-modifiers that qualify the clause as an event. Many utterances in which these adverbials occur are used specifically to indicate manner or instrument, or place, time or reason. This explains why end-position with falling intonation is very popular with such adverbials:

(37) a. She sang the hymn `beautifully.

b. The janitor sliced it with a `pen-knife.

c. Look, I’ve bought these in `Paris.

S-modifiers that evaluate the fact or assess the probability of the claim expressed in the clause are additional remarks rather than central comments. Their favoured place will be mid- or end-position without a nucleus or end-position with a low rising tone (the latter is called post-clause position in Declerck (1991: 216)).

(38) a. They’re {fortunately} not at `home {fortunately/`fortunately}.

b. They’re {probably} not at `home {probably/`probably}.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that we need two more adverbial categories, i.e. one of comment-prone adverbials and one of non-comment-prone adverbials. The likelihood that an adverbial will or will not become a comment is not a syntactic characteristic but a semantico-pragmatic feature which ultimately depends on context. If the sentence contains other comment-prone elements, the chances of the adverbial to make it as the comment will diminish accordingly:

(39) a. After she’d beautifully sung that ancient `hymn, … (contrast with (37a): the manner in which the hymn was sung is no longer a crucial part of the message).

b. Many people take the `metro in Paris/in `Paris (contrast with (37c)).

Similarly, a number of adverbials have a meaning that makes them eligible to function as topics. Su-modifiers, U-modifiers and Conjuncts are among them; so are fact-evaluating S-modifiers. They are typical sentence-openers and often occur in front-position with a falling-rising intonation, called the pre-clause position in Declerck (1991: 216). Again, this does not mean they constitute a separate syntactic category.

11. In Conclusion

In this article I have tried to discuss which adverbial distinctions are useful in predicting word order and intonation, and which distinctions are not useful. I have argued that the traditional semantic categories (time, place, manner, etc.) are not useful, because they offer an open-ended, not always transparent classification that misses out on a large number of generalisations. I have also discounted the adjunct/disjunct/subjunct distinction because it confuses syntactic integration with issues of information structure and again misses out on generalisations.

I end up with far fewer ‘useful’ categories of adverbials than traditional accounts have used. To begin with, I separate verb complements from free modifiers. The verb complements are actually objects, the free modifiers are not similarly tied to the verb. There may admittedly be an in-between category of Third Argument Adverbials.

Within the free modifiers, those that modify the clause (S-modifiers) should be distinguished from those that modify the verb (V-modifiers). Possibly, we should also regard those that comment on the utterance as a separate category (U-modifiers), though they might also be a subtype of
S-modifiers. In this article I also admit that some free modifiers seem to concentrate specifically on the subject and that therefore a further category of Su-modifiers may be in order.

Apart from these categories, there are also other elements that have traditionally been called adverbials but that are of a rather different nature. They include modifiers of adjectives and adverbs (A-modifiers); clause-linkers (conjuncts) and focussing adverbials.

Each of the ‘useful’ categories mentioned above has its potential and preferred positions and intonations. Which of these positions/intonations is actually chosen depends on a number of overriding factors. Some of these have been illustrated in the article: they include syntactic weight, topic-proneness and comment-proneness. A systematic account of the interplay of these factors was beyond the scope of this article but the illustrations that have been given will, it is hoped, be sufficiently instructive.

References


