

COMBINATION OF ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

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Abstract: It has long been argued that the environments in which adjectives and adverbs occur are mutually exclusive. This claim is based on a superficial observation that adjectives modify nouns, while adverbs modify other categories. In this paper, we argue that there are a substantial number of environments in English where complementarity, thus defined, does not hold. One interesting such environment is the function of modifier of nouns, and in one section of this paper we present a detailed analysis of a rarely observed construction in which adverbs, like adjectives, have this function.

Keywords: Adverb, adjective, method, grammar.

INTRODUCTION: The notion that adjectives and adverbs occur in mutually exclusive environments has a long ancestry. It originates in the definitions of traditional grammars and dictionaries which represent adjectives and adverbs as complementary types of modifier: the way it is usually put, an adjective modifies a noun, and an adverb modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. The traditional view is perpetuated, either tacitly or overtly, in some modern accounts of English grammar.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: It would be possible to accept the complementarity claim while maintaining that adjectives and adverbs are distinct categories. In this case, the relationship between morphologically-related adjectives and adverbs such as angry and angrily would be category-changing and therefore a derivational one. This is essentially the traditional view, and it has been explicitly defended in depth by Zwicky (1995).

However, some work in linguistics has used the complementarity claim as the foundation for a further claim, namely that adjectives and adverbs are merely syntactically conditioned contextual variants of a single major category. The relationship between angry and angrily in this view would then simply be, like the relationship between write and written, an inflectional one.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: The use of complementarity as justification for the single category claim appears to originate for English with Lyons (1966). Considering manner adverbs such as beautifully in Mary dances beautifully, Lyons notes that they are, in Jespersen's (1929: 97) terms, 'tertiary' in rank: they function as modifiers of predicates. Adjectives by contrast are primarily 'secondary': they function as predicates in examples such as Mary is beautiful. The attributive modifier function is more complex however: the adjective beautiful in a beautiful dancer can be, at a deeper level, either secondary or tertiary. This accounts for the ambiguity of this expression, i.e. a 'beautiful dancer' is either a dancer who is beautiful or one who dances beautifully. A comparable but sharper example would be a heavy smoker, where the 'tertiary' interpretation (one who smokes heavily) contrasts markedly with the 'secondary' one (a smoker who weighs a lot).² Nevertheless, in both cases, only the adjectival variant can be selected in the noun modifier function, and thus there appears to be no possibility of contrast in English between the 'adjective' and the 'adverb'. Lyons notices superficial minimal pairs such as She smells nice and She smells nicely, but points out that these are distinct in 'deep' structure. Nice is obviously predicative, while nicely functions as a modifier of the intransitive verb smell. Having accepted complementarity, at least for this class of related adjectives and adverbs, Lyons then suggests: 'The obvious solution is to say that the "adverbs" are positional variants of the corresponding "adjectives" (the allotment of the "derivational" suffix *ly* being a matter of low-level transformational rules).'

In order to evaluate the complementarity claim, it is necessary to make some preliminary assumptions about the items that should be included in the set of adjectives and the set of adverbs respectively. Note that any decisions that are made at this stage do not prejudge the single category claim: we are simply interested in the distribution of two sets, irrespective of whether their members are eventually judged to stand in an inflectional or derivational relationship to each other. Our strategy will essentially be to assume that there are two basic environments in English in which complementarity does indeed hold and to use these environments as distributional test frames for establishing the membership of two sets, the adjective distributional core and the adverb distributional core.

Then, testing the two sets thus obtained in a wider range of environments, we will show that the complementarity claim itself must be false.

CONCLUSION: An analysis of the conceptual basis of the adverb category, together with the fact that at the heart of the category there are a number of simple monomorphemic items, leads us to conclude that there is a solid basis for postulating a major category of adverbs in English. If adverbs form a distinct major category, then the relationship between adverb and adjective must be one of lexical word-formation.

What then is strange about the adverb category? It is somewhat heterogeneous semantically (but then so is the adjective category). It contains fewer basic, monomorphemic items than other major categories (but this is a matter of degree). Most certainly its most salient feature is the pervasiveness of the formative *ly*, which can be used to derive adverbs in all semantic types. This indeed is a unifying characteristic of the category. While there are of course some other word-formation processes afoot, for example derivatives in *wise* and *ways* and compounds such as *maybe*, the affix *ly* is to a large extent a marker of category membership. Such general markers of category membership, whatever the category, have been claimed to be rare, except in pidgins (Bakker 2003: 13). However, perhaps languages with a fully differentiated adverb category are a good place to look for this phenomenon more generally.

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