

CASE STUDY OF ADVERB OCCURRENCES AND THEIR POTENTIAL TO INFLUENCE READERS' OPINION

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Abstract: When writers feel the need to persuade the readers to a particular point of view, they employ specific techniques, structures, as well as explicit parts of speech. The present article attempt to show that adverbs are an important part of this process, occurring essentially when journalists need to evaluate the accuracy of deeds or observations and present them compellingly enough so that they can stand a validity test from the part of potential readers. Two newspaper articles have been chosen, from a tabloid and a 'highbrow' newspaper, respectively, to illustrate how a specific style of presentation influences adverb occurrence as well as its distribution and lexical realisation.

Keywords: adverb occurrence, adjuncts, disjuncts, involvement features, stance adverbs

1. Introduction

Even though social media have become increasingly not only immensely popular but especially influential in our life, the written register of journalism can still be claimed to have a significant impact on people's opinions and attitudes. Newspapers are a source of information about what is happening at the global and local level, covering important political, economic and social issues or, rather, being dedicated to analyzing 'trivial' gossip about rising film or pop stars as well as adorning their articles with love advice columns. Some of these news items are presented to convince the reader of a particular point of view. Therefore, it stands to reason to assert that the main function of journalism is to convert information, comments and events from their pure form into a completely different outline by means of various filtering and editing processes.

When writers feel the need to persuade the readers of a particular point of view, they employ specific techniques, structures, as well as explicit parts of speech. The present article shows that adverbs are an important part of this process, occurring essentially when journalists need to evaluate the accuracy of deeds or observations and present them compellingly enough so that they can stand a validity test from the part of potential readers.

2. General presentation

When it comes to evaluating statements, an important role is assigned to specific adverbs, such as attitude and style stance adverbs. On the other hand, when there is the need to contextualize events, ideas, information, or contradictions, writers can make use of circumstance adverbs as well as linking adverbs.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been employed to illustrate the allocation and use of specific register features. Several selected articles are under

scrutiny in trying to identify how the distribution of adverbs as well as their lexical functions and semantic categories depend on the nature and the level of how structurally integrated the style is when coordinated with the involvement features specific to articles presented in tabloids.

The formulated assumption is that articles published in 'serious', more sombre newspapers or magazines will differ in terms of adverb distribution and realization when contrasted against articles specific to tabloid format. It is posited, therefore, that dramatically and rather entertainingly presenting news or incidents will elicit a higher percentage of adverb occurrence and their manifestation and impact is intended for specific purposes. There is, presumably, no such need for adverb employment in terms of emphasizing the truth value of what is being stated when the facts are presented rather objectively. This tendency is supported both quantitatively and qualitatively throughout the article by means of adverb analysis and the degree of similarities between the forms of adverb realizations and their semantic, positional and grammatical attributes.

Several studies have been used as a point of reference, including the ones conducted by Biber et al. (1999) and Jacobson (1978). They serve as a benchmark against which this paper's findings are constantly contrasted, the conclusions reached being qualitatively and quantitatively motivated when discrepancies occur. According to Biber et al. (1999), who consider the distribution of morphological forms of common adverbs, i.e., simple, compound, *-ly* suffix other suffixes, or fixed expressions, the occurrence of adverbs in the written register of news accounts for 2.2 per cent of all word realisations (see Tabel 1 below).

| | Percentage |
|--|------------|
| adverbs | 2.2 |
| Frequency of adverbs according to semantic categories | |
| circumstance | 95 |
| stance | 2.5 |
| linking | 2.5 |
| Semantic realisation for Circumstance adverbs | |
| time | 7.5 |
| place | 31 |
| addition/restriction | 31 |
| manner | 23 |
| extent/degree | 7.5 |
| Position | |
| initial | 10 |
| medial | 75 |
| end | 15 |
| Position | |
| simple and compound | 60 |
| <i>-ly</i> adverbs | 38 |
| other suffixes | - |
| adv phrases | 2 |

Table 1. Biber et al.'s (1999) findings

Since simple adverbs are mainly used to create time or place relationships, this ratio is quite expected. Most adverbs function as adjuncts or disjuncts, be they attitudinal, style or stance adverbs which qualify the nature of the utterance and its validity in the face of reality, expressing at the same time the speaker's attention to the style and form of what is being said in a specific way, usually acting as a statement of 'authority'. Such instances may include adjuncts or disjuncts of the kind: *truly, undoubtedly, essentially, astonishingly, or bluntly, truthfully*, respectively.

Attitudinal disjuncts (cf. Greenbaum 1969:95; Vereş et al. 1998:129), coined also content disjuncts (cf. Hoyer 1997:182; Quirk et al. 1985:615), comment on the actual content of the utterance and its truth conditions. When these kinds of statements are considered, they are rarely objective if such adverbs are encountered. In most situations, it usually involves the speaker's attitude, his/her evaluation of what is being said, or a shadow of confidence, conviction or even skepticism about it. Value judgment disjuncts distinguish among opinions and usually express an assumption or attitude toward what is said. They contain many adverbs that appear to be completely different. There are usually several groups depending on the type of assessment they envisage (cf. Bonami and Godard 2008:275, Croitoru 2002: 306). Adverbs such as the following ones may validate whether something is correct or not: *justly, rightly, wrongly* or is deemed wise or artful: *shrewdly, cunningly, foolishly, reasonably, cleverly, prudently*, etc.

According to Corum (1975:134), it is entirely plausible to employ adverbs in order to manipulate and influence the reader. She notices that such adverbs are 'sprinkled throughout the speech of some speakers, but the content of the adjoining proposition is not always obvious at all. (...) they occur in precisely those areas where speakers have something to gain or lose by their addressee's acceptance or rejection of what they are saying'.

As far as their position is concerned, adverbs assuming the characteristics of attitudinal disjuncts can appear in almost any position, but they are used initially in their vast majority. This has, however, considerable effect on the utterance, as noticed by Hoyer (1997:187) who analyses attitudinal disjuncts in association with thematization. He posits that 'the constraining factors which affect adverbial placement are not just a matter of syntax and prosody: their distribution is also a matter of pragmatics and discourse or information structure and the contexts in which they are actually used. Placing a content (attitudinal) disjunct such as *obviously* in initial position provides the speaker with the means to characterize his attitude towards what he is saying, where the effect is to focus the entire propositional content. It is normally the case that a speaker expects the addressee to believe what he asserts; the fronting or topicalization of modal values facilitated by placing a disjunct at *I* (initial position), is both a means of establishing the speaker as the source of authority and signaling his underlying attitude to the content of his utterance'.

3. Corpus findings

3.1 Study case of *Part Devil, Part Angel*¹

The article *Part Devil, Part Angel* in the *Time*, a weekly American newsmagazine, presents a review of Robert Caro's book *Master of the Senate*. Two different subregisters come to the fore, namely of book reviewing mixed with politically related semantic realizations specific to politically interrelated texts. The anticipated style will not lean towards the spectacular but rather neutral, objective presentation (confined, however, to the author's intention and purpose) with descriptions relevant for the text.

The relatively high frequency of adverbs per all other word classes, 27 occurrences for 771 instances, results in a percentage of 3.5 per cent (cf. Table 2 below). The unexpectedness is evident when considering the anticipated scenario of unbiased, impartial tone pervading in the text. Given more attention, the adverbs encountered, though many quantitatively, retain in their vast majority, only the value of temporal specification. Of the 26 circumstance adverbs, making up for 96 per cent of all adverbs, half of them denote time position. They are, if not grammatically compulsory in the sentences, at least necessary for clarity in the discourse. Moving up and down on a temporal scale, from the former times to the present encounters of the character in the book, the text must inevitably employ relatively numerous time adverbs so that the discourse stays well embedded in the present or past realities presented. Interestingly enough, the author of the article makes use of only one linking adverb for the scope of listing, enumeration; and then, he uses a temporal adverb to correlate it with: *firstlater*.

Linking adverbs and especially stance adverbs are well within the reason of anticipation when performing a book review, as from time to time, personal opinion, though disguised as objective presentation, surfaces. Only one linking adverb appears in the text, whereas there are no stance adverbs, be they epistemic, attitude or style

| | no. of instances | percentage |
|--|------------------|------------|
| words | 771 | |
| adverbs | 27 | 3.5 |
| Frequency of adverbs according to semantic categories | | |
| Circumstance | 26 | 96 |
| Stance | | |
| Linking | 1 | 4 |
| Semantic realisation for Circumstance adverbs | | |
| Time | 13 | 50 |
| Place | 1 | 4 |
| Addition/restriction | 1/0 | 4 |
| Manner | 6 | 23 |
| degree | 5 | 19 |
| process | | |
| Position | | |
| Initial | 4 | 15 |
| Medial | 8 | 30 |
| end | 15 | 55 |
| Form | | |

¹ <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1002331,00.html>

| | | |
|---------------------|----|----|
| Simple and compound | 19 | 70 |
| -ly adverbs | 7 | 26 |
| Adv phr | 1 | 4 |

Table 2. Adverb occurrence in *Part Devil, Part Angel!*

As already mentioned, time adverbs account for half of all adverbs encountered in the text. They mainly denote a span of past or present time, with occasional future reference when considered from a standpoint in the past (*later*). Even though depicting duration or continuous frequency (*always*), low frequency (*never*), temporal sequence (*eventually*), time position (*now, today*), etc., they are necessary in the text to pinpoint position in time.

Manner adverbs take a dominant position, almost all of them being applied to the character presented in the book, a very successful politician. As the author of the book is extremely enthusiastic about his character's charisma and opportunism, it is expected to encounter manner adverbs and also extent/degree adverbs:

During his rise to power, Johnson sucked up *relentlessly* to powerful older men.

(...) Johnson as the great white hope of the die *hard* Confederacy (...)

Johnson (...) *almost* never took the time to read a book.

There is only one instance of place adverb which is employed to denote direction upwards:

These elders mentored Johnson and propelled him *upward*.

The choice of adverb agrees with the intended meaning of taking the character from his early period to the crowning days and therefore gives evidence of his climbing up the scale.

Additive/restrictive adverbs are represented, again, by only one instance. The addition expressed by *also* places the character in good light exactly as intended:

He *also* saw that the civil rights bill was just and necessary.

End position is the most frequent position for adverbs in the text, around 55per cent. Some adverbs of time are also used in this position especially to carry weight:

(...) rise from freshman Senator in 1949 to the youngest Senate Democratic leader *ever*

Others are, however, employed in middle position even though, at times, they are expressed by means of an adverb phrase:

(...) in which Johnson *eventually* neutralized the South's best weapon, the seniority system, and pushed through the civil rights bill.

(...) he could *never* be elected President if he was perceived as merely a Southerner;

(...) who *now and then* metamorphoses into an angel of compassion and statesmanship.

Middle position is assumed in some instances by adverbs of degree and addition, which contextually happen to modify an item in mid position:

(...) in his historical way, *almost* never took the time to read a book.

He *also* saw that the civil rights bill was just and necessary.

Initial position is rare and when it does occur, it is restricted to the linking adverb *first* or to some adverbs of time:

Some years *later*, he emerged as the hero of the Civil Rights Act of 1957.

There is also an instance of *always* assuming initial position. Even though its place is highly irregular, being accepted only in imperative clauses of the kind:

'*Always* look in the mirror before starting to drive',

the emphasizing effect it intends to carry apparently takes the whole weight of the clause:

Always, front and centre (first desk, middle aisle, the Democratic leader's spot) stood Lyndon Johnson ...

Although the percentage of adverbs in the text is relatively high (3.5 per cent), and even though the anticipated expectations failed to foresee the number of adverb occurrences, the explanation is well within reach. Time adverbs account for half of all instances in order to pinpoint accurately the evolution, in time, of a man who made politics his career.

3.2 Study case of *Bong! News at Ten to return*

The Sun is a tabloid with a very high circulation in the world. Its simple writing style is directed at the more sensational end of the market. Normally, such articles tend to be simply and sensationally written, and this provides a perfect opportunity for adverb and adverbial usage. Generally, the ratio of adverbs per all the other occurrences of word classes should be higher than the norm. These features would sometimes appear even in articles dealing with finance and banking, which although supposedly are rather sombre in character, their style changes when employed in tabloids.

The article *Bong! News at Ten to return* presents some 'secret plans' concocted by ITV to reintroduce a former news programme. The article is relatively short, 266 words, and the number of adverbs to be found or their semantic realizations are scarce. There are only ten adverbs, covering the fields of time, manner, restriction, and degree. Quantitatively, however, it comes as a surprise that three of them are realizations of the stance epistemic adverbs and linking enumerative adverb (two instances). This accounts for a 70 per cent ratio for circumstance adverbs, 20 per cent for linking and 10 per cent for stance adverbs. The atypical proportion is mainly influenced by two factors. First, even though the number of adverbs is restricted to only ten items, the shortness of the text (266 words) gives them a representation of 3.8 per cent when compared with the other word classes (cf. Table 3 below). When considering this, it becomes apparent that any irregularity in terms of semantic feature, position or syntactic realizations dramatically affects the percentage. And secondly, on a closer look, it is noticeable that the linking adverb of enumeration *finally* is iterated two times in the exact combination. The item '*and finally*' is not even employed to maintain the cohesion of the discourse but has rather a more sentimental value related to reminiscent times when the above phrase was uttered by a famous character. The semantic implication of this adverb yields no contribution to the style of the article nor does it end an argumentation in favour of the subject under discussion.

The stance epistemic adverb *possibly*, employed in middle position in the sentence:

He would *possibly* share his duties with star presenters like Mark Austin and James Mates, denotes the semantic implications of doubt, again in connection to the envisaged return of a former famous news programme run by a renowned character.

Time adverbs account for 43per cent of all circumstance adverbs. Even though the percentage is, again, relatively high, it is sustained by only three items, *never* and the iterated *again*. Both instances of *again* are used in connection to the news programme: either its commence or its demise. They share the same similarity even in terms of the assumed position, namely end position, as in the following example:

News at Ten was axed in 1999, resurrected in 2001 and killed off *again* in 2004.

The use of *never* is to support the idea that the decision was not for the benefit of the newspaper and thus a negative decision is highlighted in the text by an adverb denoting time frequency with negative semantic implications. Time adverbials are much more frequently employed in the text, but as their realizations is not by means of adverbs, they are not under the scope of this study.

Two extent/ degree adverbs, *just* and *exactly*, constitute 29per cent of adverbs used with a circumstance value. Not only is their semantic implication identical but they are also used in almost identical contexts:

He wants the former flagship news programme to be *exactly* as it was.

(...) and wants to bring it back *just* as it was.

The manner adverb *firmly* is used in connection to the envisaged come back of the news programme which can only have firm implications.

The last adverb to be used in the text carries semantically the feature of restriction being therefore appropriate to conclude the text as well as underline the final idea related to the envisaged return of the news programme:

Last night ITV would *only* say: "We have no such plans."

| | no. of instances | percentage |
|--|------------------|------------|
| words | 266 | |
| adverbs | 11 | 4.1 |
| Frequency of adverbs according to semantic categories | | |
| Circumstance | 8 | 73 |
| Stance | 1 | 9 |
| Linking | 2 | 18 |
| Semantic realisation for Circumstance adverbs | | |
| Time | 3 | 37.5 |
| Manner | 2 | 25 |
| degree | 3 | 37.5 |
| Position | | |
| Initial | 3 | 28 |
| Medial | 4 | 36 |
| end | 4 | 36 |
| Form | | |
| Simple and compound | 5 | 45.5 |
| -ly adverbs | 5 | 45.5 |
| Adv phr | 1 | 9 |

Table 3. Adverb occurrence in *Bong! News at Ten to return*

4. Conclusions

The paper has shown that articles published in newspapers or magazines with a high standard of journalism tend to contain fewer adverbs when personal involvement in the objective presentation of reality is deemed unnecessary. However, when emotional turmoil is expected, when there is a tendency which seems to favor more personal implication and subjective expressions, a relatively more frequent adverb occurrence has been noticed, as adverbs are expected to emphasize or reinforce the utterances.

Although the adverb percentages do not always precisely predict the degree of subjectivity on the part of the writer in the expressions employed as well as personal involvement in what is being written or said, at least they can definitely assume that the writer's implication in the text is relatively high or relatively low.

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