

On the Periphery of the English Adverb

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Abstract

The prototypical approach is one of the important achievements of cognitive grammar. According to it, a lot of intricate phenomena observed in the English part-of-speech system can find explanation of their nature. The English adverb is not either a typical notional or formal part of speech, it combines the characteristic features of both these groups. Besides, its borders are not clearly defined as a lot of words often referred to as adverbs belong to the intermediary zones sharing properties with other parts of speech which is manifested in their semantic, morphological and syntactic peculiarities. The meaning of some adverbs is close to that of pronouns; adverbs are either invariable or form degrees of comparison; together with its most characteristic syntactic function of adverbial modifier the adverb can be used as practically any part of the sentence except the predicate.

Keywords – *prototype, periphery, intermediary zone, notional parts of speech, formal parts of speech, adverb, semantic group, adverbial modifier.*

I. INTRODUCTION

At present time cognitive grammar has become an effective instrument of language study. However, the interpretation of this term is rather wide; some linguists think it is not a single theory but an approach that “has adopted a common set of core commitments and guiding principles, which has led to a diverse range of complementary, overlapping (and sometimes competing) theories” [3].

The principles of cognitive grammar are widely applied nowadays in different spheres of language: phonology, lexical semantics and syntax [1].

One of the basic notions of cognitive linguistics is the prototype; its nature has been studied by a considerable number of scientists. According to the linguistic investigations it is characterized by certain features frequently mentioned in the literature on the subject, among which there is a family-resemblance structure; different degrees of category membership (as not every member is equally representative for a category); blurriness at the edges [5]. Several hypotheses have been put forward to account for the existence of prototypes. From the point of view of the referential theory formulated by E. Rosch and developed by other linguists, the cause of prototypicality lies in the fact that some examples of a category have more in common with other examples of the category than certain members of the

category belonging to the periphery. They share characteristic features with more other examples than these peripheral instances). The peripheral cases of a category share characteristics with fewer other cases, they have less in common with the other members of the category which are to be found close to the prototype [5].

II. THE PROTOTYPICAL NATURE OF THE ADVERB

The principles of cognitive grammar, among them the prototypical approach, can work well in description of the English part-of-speech system. Parts of speech are often characterized as classes of words which differ in grammatical meaning, the set of morphological categories (or form), and syntactic properties (combinability and the role in the sentence). Within any part of speech the prototype and the periphery can be found; besides, there are intermediary zones where we can find units combining properties of two or even more parts of speech. The word *much* presents an example of the kind: basing on the criteria mentioned above we see that in its meaning it has a lot in common with pronouns as it does not nominate, its function is not nominating but deictic. It points to some quantity, and this peculiarity makes it close to numerals. In some contexts it functions like an adverb of degree. As to its paradigm, it has degrees of comparison and shares this category with adjectives. So the word *much* combines a lot of features and is to be found in the intermediary zone formed by the periphery of adjectives, adverbs, pronouns and numerals. The use of the prototypical method gives us an opportunity to treat such cases not as exceptions but as evidence of interaction between parts of speech.

The adverb occupies a special position in the system of parts of speech as a lot of problems are connected with it which concern the prototypical essence of this part of speech. These problems, grammatical as to their nature, are closely connected with the lexical meaning of adverbs. From this point of view adverbs have been classified more than once which is natural for classifications of linguistic phenomena based on the semantic criterion. Henry Sweet described the following semantic types of adverbs: those of place, time, order, quantity, manner, cause, and assertion [8]. The classification suggested by D. Biber a century later differs from this one to some extent and presents another list of types: place, time, manner, degree, additive / restrictive, stance, linking, the three major classes being circumstance, stance, and linking ones [2]. In each of these types the prototype and the periphery are to be found, and

besides, in each of them there are some phenomena that can be qualified as belonging to the intermediary zones.

III. ADVERBS OF PLACE AND TIME

Adverbs of place and time can be referred to as circumstantial because they describe some external factors of an action. Some of them are invariable while others have degrees of comparison. They perform the function of an adverbial modifier and in this case they can modify either an action alone or the whole situation. In other words, among them there are modifiers proper as they modify a verb or an adjective; and adverbials which are elements of a clause [2]. Among these adverbs there are some pronominal adverbs which resemble pronouns as the lexical meaning of some of them can be rather vague: they do not name time or place but just point to them (*now, then; here, there*). Like formal words, they are invariable and have high frequency. The same features of most pronouns make them also close to formal words.

Their intermediary position in the system of the parts of speech results in the variety of their syntactic functions: mostly adverbs are used as adverbial modifiers of time, place, manner, degree which corresponds to their semantic groups. However, sometimes they perform other functions, and such phenomena result in blurring the borderline between different parts of the sentence. In such cases they display their nominal nature and are used in some functions typical of nouns and adjectives:

- 1) *Right now isn't the time to go away and leave him (R. Pilcher).*
- 2) *Still, anywhere you recommend is sure to be pretty comfortable (A. Christie).*

In sentence 1 *now* which is mostly used as an adverbial of time performs the function of the subject. However, it has a clear temporal meaning, so this type of subject is to be found on the periphery of this part of the sentence which expresses a thing (in the widest sense of the word). In a similar way the subject of sentence 2 can be described, as it is also expressed by an adverb, this time rendering spatial relations. Examples in which the adverb is one of the homogeneous subjects and stands next to a noun are especially obvious: *Here and his bedroom were the only rooms in the house she allowed his toys (C. Ahern).*

- 3) *She believed that if only you concentrated on the here and now, tomorrow didn't so much matter (J. Picoult).*

Sentence 3 presents an example of adverbs expressing place and time used as objects. Such examples are to be classified as belonging to the periphery of this part of the sentence as well because objects usually express things involved into an action. No wonder the adverbs are preceded by the article which testifies to their partial substantivization.

- 4) *Sandwich outdoors isn't a sandwich any more (R. Bradbury).*

- 5) *It was now or never, she decided (N. Roberts).*

In sentences 4 and 5 adverbs are used in the functions of an attribute and of a predicative which are typical of adjectives as they describe property of a thing denoted by the subject.

All these instances illustrate the periphery of the parts of the sentence expressed by adverbs. So the use in these unusual syntactic roles makes such seemingly typical adverbs as *now, here* belong to the periphery of the corresponding parts of the sentence.

The notions of time and space are closely connected; it is often mentioned that they belong to the same philosophical category – temporal / spatial localization of some event or action. That is why *here*, being an adverb of place, can render temporal meaning and this tradition goes back to the Old English period. So the borderline between adverbs of place and those of time sometimes tends to disappear.

Another problem concerns the status of the second element of the so-called composite verbs like *stand up, give up*. A lot of theories have been put forward to define their nature. The question arises whether they are separate words or just morphemes, like in German. Most grammarians, however, treat them as separate words but give them different names: postpositions, postpositives, preposition-like adverbs, etc. It is hardly possible to explain their nature unambiguously because their roles are various: they can be used in the adverbial meanings expressing the direction of motion: *"Jump in, inspector," I said, opening the door of the car (A. Christie).* Besides, they can intensify the meaning of the verb: *I always mix up those two words (A. Christie).* What is more, they can completely change the original meaning of the verb: *We each put up with the little quirks of the people we love (C. Ahern).* At any rate, all these peculiarities make it necessary to treat such words as peripheral elements or even belonging to the intermediary zones.

IV. ADVERBS OF MANNER

Adverbs of manner admit of forming degrees of comparison; on the one hand, the part of speech becomes declinable which makes it close to the notional ones; on the other hand, such phenomena are to be qualified as elements of the intermediary zone between adverbs and adjectives. Adverbs denoting manner of an action have a lot in common with adjectives as they both denote quality though in case with adverbs the referent is non-substantive. It is here that the boundary between the two parts of speech is not so distinct. Adverbs and adjectives can coincide in form, and in many cases of the kind they differ in meaning: *clean, pretty, sharp*. If their meanings are identical, we distinguish between them relying on their combinability: *We went by a fast train (adjective). Don't speak so fast (adverb).*

In spoken English adjectives are often used instead of adverbs: *The big one went so slow. Well it was hot but it didn't come out quick* [2]. So the choice between the adverb and the adjective can depend on register; e.g. *easy, fine, tight* are used as adverbs in some informal expressions: *Easy come, easy go. That suits me fine* [7].

It is difficult to state which part of speech we deal with in sentences like *A rainbow stood high in the sky (I. Dinesen)*. The verb *to stand* should be naturally accompanied by an adverbial modifier; however, some verbs can be used as the first element of the specific type of predicate which contains a predicative preceded by a verb with a full lexical meaning: *The pool lay dark and silent at their feet (D. du Maurier)*. In this case they are normally followed by an adjective or a noun as in the example above. The problem is that the adverb *high* and the adjective *high* coincide both in form and meaning so it is hardly possible to distinguish between them in contexts of the kind and to state whether we deal with a simple predicate accompanied by an adverbial modifier of place or with a compound predicate whose nature has not been unanimously defined yet and which is often referred to as “double”.

V. OTHER SEMANTIC TYPES OF ADVERBS

Adverbs of degree are numerous; being typical adverbs, they are unchangeable. They can also modify a word or the whole clause / sentence. One of their peculiarities is that they display rich combinability not characteristic of other semantic types. They are capable of forming phrases with nouns: *quite a surprise*, pronouns: *almost nobody*, prepositional phrases: *well into their seventies*, the second element of phrasal verbs: *filled the room right up, etc.* [2]. Some words of this group can be used both literally and metaphorically: *awfully, perfectly, dead*.

Additive and restrictive adverbs *also, too, especially, only* are mostly used to draw attention to some element of the sentence. They can combine with practically any part of speech; besides, they can refer to the sentence as a whole. However, they do not represent any part of the sentence and are used as parentheses. Their part-of-speech status is ambiguous: e. g. the word *only* is often considered to be a particle.

Stance adverbs express the assessment of the statement (epistemic, attitudinal and stylistic) [2]. Epistemic stance adverbs can show some degrees of certainty or of doubt (*maybe, probably*), emphasize the reality of the action, show imprecision or approximation. Attitude stance adverbs express emotions (*unfortunately, surprisingly*). Style stance adverbs show whether the speaker's manner is simple, or honest, or sincere, etc. They can modify the whole sentence, or a word, or a phrase. They do not function as a separate part of the sentence either.

Some linguists describe stance adverbs as a separate part of speech – modal words – which express the speaker's attitude to the reality, likelihood of the action spoken about. They do not perform any meaningful syntactic role in the sentence and are invariable: *It was possibly in South Africa. Obviously it was not true*. So in their grammatical meaning, morphological and syntactic properties they differ greatly from typical adverbs. Sometimes it is the position of the word alone that helps us understand whether we deal with an adverb or a modal word: *Strangely, he answered all the questions* (modal word). *He answered the questions strangely* (adverb). However, most grammarians regard them as adverbs, but their existence presents an example of a peripheral group of this part of speech.

Linking adverbs are used to connect words, phrases, or clauses. They are not declinable; due to their function they are close to conjunctions. Sometimes it is hardly possible to say what part of speech we deal with; it is the context alone that helps us treat it properly: *I have no idea when he will come* (linking adverb). *When he comes, we'll speak* (conjunction). What is more, the word *when* can also function as a pronominal adverb of time: *When will he come?*

Examples of the kind are not infrequent: it is not always easy to draw a borderline between adverbs and other parts of speech. Such words as *before, after, since* can display in different contexts the features of adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions due to their distribution: *Shortly after, they heard the story of how he had lost his wife. Two years after that they left London. After they moved to Paris, they opened the contemporary arm of the gallery (D. Steel)*. There is a problem whether we deal here with one word belonging to different parts of speech (which is hardly possible) or these are homonyms (which is doubtful either as homonyms should differ in their lexical meaning). The problem still remains unsolved.

This is not a complete list of semantic groups of adverbs, as some of them do not fall under any of the classes described above. According to D. Biber, the word *symbolically* can be used as an adverb of purpose (though this meaning is created not by the adverb alone but by the whole construction), the meaning of *kindly* is similar to that of *please* (whose part-of-speech status presents a special problem) [2].

So the definition of the adverb as a part of speech lacks precision which is observed in the description of its meaning, form, and function. Definitions of meanings of other notional parts of speech can be formulated in a laconic way: the noun expresses a thing, the verb expresses a process; the meaning of the adjective is property of a thing. But speaking about the adverb it is necessary to mention such shades of meaning as circumstances and manner of an action, its intensity; the meanings of stance, linking adverbs should also be included here. The

adverb is usually characterized as an indeclinable part of speech; however, some have degrees of comparison. It is typically combined with verbs and adjectives but in fact it can make phrases with many other parts of speech and it is capable of modifying not a word but a sentence or a clause. Its typical function is that of an adverbial modifier; besides, it is used as any part of the sentence (except predicate) and in many cases it is not a part of the sentence proper but a parenthesis. So the part-of-speech description of the adverb shows the presence of numerous peripheral zones.

VI. A NOTIONAL OR A FORMAL PART OF SPEECH?

Another problem concerning the adverb is connected with its nature as a notional or a formal part of speech. It is often considered to be a notional part of speech; however, it can't be treated as a typical representative of this group like nouns, adjectives, verbs. The adverb shares some characteristics with formal words.

A characteristic feature of notional parts of speech is their nominating function. However, among adverbs of different semantic groups there are pronominal adverbs whose meaning is rather deictic, so they lack the function of nomination.

One of the features of the notional parts of speech is their ability to be used as a separate part of the sentence. Adverbs are often used as adverbial modifiers of time, place, manner, which depends upon the peculiarities of their lexical meaning. However, a lot of adverbs, mostly stance ones, do not perform any syntactic function and are parentheses: *I lost the manual that goes with it, unfortunately*. The same can be said about additive and restrictive adverbs: *Oh, my dad was a great guy, too* [2].

Another characteristic feature of adverbs is that a lot of them do not form degrees of comparison. Due to their invariability Henry Sweet included adverbs into indeclinable words and treated them at the same level as prepositions and conjunctions whose main function is "to serve as adjunct-words to verbs and to other particles, as in *The snow melted quickly, very quickly*." [8]. In works by other linguists the nature of the adverb is also treated as ambiguous: E. Hall considers adverbs to be one of the four main classes of words (like nouns, verbs and adjectives); on the other hand, he treats some words traditionally referred to as adverbs (*very, much*) as intensifiers which make a subdivision of functional words [6]. Ch. C. Fries names adverbs among the four main classes of words practically corresponding to nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs; besides, he mentions adverbs of degree and interrogative adverbs as elements of function words [4].

Formal words constitute classes closed in membership. The same can be said about some groups of adverbs: e. g. the number of linking ones is limited and hardly grows.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

To sum it up, the adverb displays its many-sided character which becomes clear while dealing with its position among parts of speech and while analyzing its semantic groups as to their meaning, form and function. So the description given above illustrates the prototypical nature of the English adverb.

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