

8 The semantics and grammar of adverbials

8.1 The adverbial element (A) in clause structure has a wider range of roles than the other four elements, subject (S), verb (V), object (O), and complement (C). This is reflected in its having a wider range of meanings, of forms, of positions, and of grammatical functions; not least, it is reflected in our ability to include several adverbial elements within a single sentence. The following example illustrates not only multiple occurrence but also a variety of meanings, forms, positions, and grammatical relations:

Next Tuesday [A1], *I shall probably* [A2] *visit her mother in London* [A3] *for an hour or so* [A4] *to see if she's feeling better* [A5], *unless she telephones me before that* [A6].

Semantic roles

Space

8.2 Adverbials can express five different types of spatial meaning:

(a) *Position*, as in:

The dog was asleep *on the grass*.

(b) *Direction*, as in:

They walked *down the hill*.

(c) *Goal*, as in:

She hurried *to the station*.

(d) *Source*, as in:

This book cannot be taken *from the library*.

(e) *Distance*, as in:

We mustn't go *very much further*.

Time

8.3 Adverbials distinguish five types of temporal meaning and there are analogies both semantic and formal with the spatial meanings of 8.2:

(a) *Position*, as in:

She was born *in 1980*.

(b) *Duration of forward span*, as in:

I shall be in Chicago *until Thursday*.

(c) *Duration of backward span*, as in:

We have been at the airport *since midday*.

(d) *Frequency*, as in:

They *very seldom* went to see their parents.

(e) *Relationship between one time and another*, as in:

She *must still* be in her office.

NOTE

Duration may indicate a span that does not distinguish between 'forward' and 'backward'; for example:

I forget exactly when I arrived but I am staying here *for six months altogether*.

Process

8.4 Here we have four types of meaning:

(a) *Manner*, as in:

The minister explained his policy *very clearly*.

(b) *Means*, as in:

By her insight, she grasped the patient's real problem.

(c) *Instrument*, as in:

I have difficulty eating *with chopsticks*.

(d) *Agency*, as in:

Penicillin was discovered *by Sir Alexander Fleming*.

Respect

8.5 An adverbial can be used to provide a point of reference with respect to which the clause in question derives its truth value. For example:

She helped him *with his research*.

In the following, if *legally* meant 'lawfully, not illegally', the adverbial would be the manner subclass of process (8.4(a)); normally, however, it would mean 'on points of law, with respect to law':

They are advising me *legally*.