ON THE USE, MEANING, AND SYNTAX OF ENGLISH PREVERBAL ADVERBS

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

(Only the main sections of the various chapters are included)

PREFACE

The present book is based on research work which I have really enjoyed doing. At an early stage I set up certain principles, e.g. the division of preverbs according to function. When I tried to apply these principles systematically, it was exciting, and in some cases also disillusioning, to watch the result. For example, I had believed earlier that English had several homonyms of the adverb first, but I found to my astonishment that from a strictly semantic point of view these homonyms can be regarded as the same lexical item, which, however, has several different pragmatic functions. Similarly, in preparing the chapter on preverb generation I was intrigued by how often I found that the regular application of well-known transformations in cyclical order generated preverbs in exactly the surface positions where my earlier quantitative studies had shown them to be most frequent.

My friends and colleagues Alarik Rynell and Karin Aijmer have been kind enough to read my entire manuscript and I thank them heartily for their valuable corrections and comments. I am also very grateful to those American and British lecturers at the English Department of Stockholm University with whom I have discussed the acceptability of my examples and to Irja Sanden for the way in which she has helped me with type-writing and the drawing of diagrams.

Sven Jacobson

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Title and Aim of the Present Book

In the Introduction to my book <u>Factors Influencing the Placement of English Adverbs in Relation to Auxiliaries</u>, which was published in 1975, I declared that it was the first of an envisaged trilogy of studies on the preverbal category of English adverbs. I also said that the preliminary title of the second study was <u>On the Classification, Generation, and Positioning of Preverbs</u>. However, now that this second study is ready for publication in the form of the present book, the title, as appears from the front page, has been considerably changed. The main reason for this is that the pragmatic aspect of preverbs is discussed to such an extent that I thought this should be shown in the title in the form of the word "use". I have also preferred the term Preverbal Adverb in the title, since the term Preverb, which I use as an abbreviation of it, is not so well-known. For the sake of euphony the title includes the debatable word meaning, although a term like semantic content, with special reference to the way this content is revealed by componential analysis, would have better expressed what the book deals with.

The book has seven chapters. In chapters 2 - 5 I discuss the use, meaning, and syntax of preverbs from the point of view of classification and in chapter 6 from the point of view of generation.

Adverbs have traditionally been divided into classes like Time, Manner, Degree, and Place. In chapters 2 - 5 the aim is to make an attempt to keep pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic criteria for classification apart to see what classes then emerge.

In chapter 6 I continue my earlier attempt to bridge the gap between transformational grammar and computational linguistics by giving generative rules that take the quantitative aspect into account. Cf. Jacobson 1975:13.

1.2. The Term Preverb

The grammatical term preverb, which according to Mario Pei's <u>Glossary of Linguistic Terminology</u> (1966) traditionally denotes a verbal prefix or particle occurring before a verb base, e.g. <u>be</u> in <u>become</u>, seems to have been

first used by the transformationalist Robert Lees in the new sense of refer-
ring to a preverbal adverb. Thus according to Lees 1960:5 a constituent Prev
is optionally generated when the verb phrase is rewritten as in the follow-
ing phrase-structure rule:

(1) VP $\longrightarrow$ (Prev) Aux + MV

The other constituents that are generated are Aux (= auxiliary) and MV
(= main-verb phrase). In his book of 1960 Lees calls the following words
preverbs: not, scarcely, hardly, never, always, sometimes (e.g. pp. 5, 18,
19, and 44). In an article published in 1962 he uses, however, the word
almost in We are almost finished to exemplify the preverb category (Lees
1962:13). It is worth noting that not is included among the preverbs gener-
ated by rule (1); Chomsky, on the other hand, had introduced not by means
of a transformational rule (Chomsky 1957:61-62).

In his famous article on negation in English Edward Klima uses the slight-
ly longer term preverbal adverb about almost any adverb that can occur with-
in the verb phrase before the main verb (Klima 1964:254). Not, on the other
hand, is considered by Klima to be a particle derived from a constituent
neg (p. 267); such preverbal adverbs as never, seldom, rarely, scarcely,
hardly, barely, and little are also supposed to contain this negative con-
stituent (p. 269). As an inclusive term for the negative particle not and
the negative preverbal adverbs he uses the term negative preverb (p. 262).
As positive preverbal adverbs he mentions, for example, always, usually,
frequently, commonly, often, almost, probably, really, surely, fortunately.
The preverbal adverbs are assumed by Klima to be lexical representations of
the optional constituents Adv (= adverbial), Time and Place. In the deep
structure he gives Adv sentence-initial position and the other two sentence-
final position, which means that they must be transferred to their Aux posi-
tion by means of transformations (pp. 260 and 316).

In the section on preverbs in his pedagogical transformational grammar
Owen Thomas repeats Lees' rule (1) but he follows Klima in treating not as
derived from a negative morpheme Ng. As preverbs he regards words such as
often, seldom, rarely, always, never, ever, almost, and hardly. See Thomas
1965:134 and 163.

Charles Fillmore, in an essay called "On the Syntax of Preverbs" (1967),
says that his discussion will be basically concerned with the words not,
sometimes, ever, never, often, always, usually, rarely, seldom, barely,
hardly and scarcely. Whereas Lees (and with him Thomas) had introduced the
preverb constituent by the phrase structure rule that expands VP, Fillmore
lets his optional constituent Prev appear sentence-initially in the deep

structure:[1]

(2) S ⟶ (Q) (Prev) NP + Aux + VP

where Q is an optional question symbol (Fillmore 1967:104).

According to Fillmore a preverb can remain in its sentence-initial posi-
tion, but it is usually moved by transformational rules to a position before
or, as is always the case with <u>not</u>, after the first Aux element (pp. 117-18).

Baker (1971:167) uses the term preverb in the sense "preverbal element"
and includes not only "(a) frequency adverbs (<u>always</u>, <u>usually</u>, <u>ever</u>, <u>never</u>,
<u>sometimes</u>, <u>often</u>, <u>rarely</u>); (b) epistemic adverbs (<u>actually</u>, <u>probably</u>, <u>ad-
mittedly</u>, <u>undoubtedly</u>); (c) perfective adverbs (<u>finally</u>, <u>already</u>, <u>at last</u>)"
and "(d) special words having some subpart of the verb phrase as their scope
(<u>only</u>, <u>also</u>, <u>even</u>)" but also "(e) universal quantifiers (<u>both</u>, <u>each</u>, <u>all</u>,
<u>all four of them</u>, <u>none of them</u>)". According to Baker it is the auxiliary
rather than the preverb that is moved when the word order of (3 a) is trans-
formed into that of (3 b).

(3) a. Kate probably will come.
    b. Kate will probably come.

Stockwell et al. (1973:267) discuss Fillmore's and Klima's generation of
preverbs. In their enumeration of "items which can occur in preverbal posi-
tion" they also include conjunctive adverbs like <u>thus</u>, <u>therefore</u>, and <u>never-
theless</u>, which none of these grammarians had referred to as preverbs. One
of their main objections concerns the treatment of preverbs as a natural
syntactic class:

> Obviously, "preverb" is not a syntactic category: it comes closer to
> being a feature shared by all one-word sentence adverbs.... Most of
> them belong to categories which also contain non-preverbs.

I agree with this statement and would even like to go a step further. Once

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1. This is in line with the phrase-structure rule given in Klima 1964:316,
which runs as follows:
    S ⟶ (wh) (neg) (Adv) (neg) (Adv) Nominal   Predicate
where wh is a question symbol and Nominal and Predicate correspond to NP
and VP, respectively. This rule differs from Fillmore's in giving two
optional Adv constituents, each of them preceded by a neg constituent. It
accounts, after due transference to post-nominal positions has taken place,
for the preverbs in such a surface structure as <u>John unfortunately has
never been interested</u>. It is, however, possible to put in yet another pre-
verb, e.g. <u>John unfortunately has never really been interested</u>, which shows
that even Klima's constituent structure is not sufficient. This is one rea-
son why in the present work an entirely different approach to the genera-
tion of preverbs is used.

it has been recognized that "preverb" is not a syntactic category but a positional feature, there seems to be no point in restricting it only to sentence adverbs. For this reason I have defined preverb in Jacobson 1975:7 and 17-23 simply as an abbreviation of "preverbal adverb", i.e. any adverb in preverbal position. Like those other grammarians who have used the term preverb, I mean by preverbal not only placement before verbs proper but also such equivalents of verbs as predicate complements, since it is obvious that e.g. a Negative Preverbal Adverb (Grinder and Elgin 1973:79) like <u>never</u> functions in the same way in both the sentences of (4) and (5).

(4) a. I <u>never</u> succeeded in beating him at tennis.

    b. I was <u>never</u> successful in beating him at tennis.

(5) a. Jane <u>never</u> taught at a school.

    b. Jane was <u>never</u> a teacher at a school.

One distinction, however, is called for. Preverbs can be pure verb-modifiers, e.g. <u>completely</u> in (6), but they cannot be pure adjective- or noun-modifiers, like <u>very</u> and <u>there</u> in (7).

(6) Jack <u>completely</u> misunderstood my intention.

(7) a. I was <u>very</u> proud of my achievement.

    b. The man <u>there</u> is my brother.

Naturally, the definition of preverbs as preverbal adverbs excludes the universal quantifiers that Baker enumerates and also such words as <u>himself</u> in <u>Dick himself came</u>. Moreover, in this book I will only use the term preverb about adverbs that occur in post-subject, i.e. medial, position in sentences where the subject precedes the predicate and corresponding positions in other sentences. This means that I will not follow Fillmore in calling also sentence-initial adverbs preverbs. For further details see Jacobson 1975:17-23.

1.3. <u>Why a Special Treatment of Preverbs</u>?

The present work is meant to continue the treatment of preverbs started in Jacobson 1975, where a quantitative analysis of preverb placement in relation to auxiliaries was made. The fact that preverbs form an elusive group of adverbs is well-known and therefore no justification for devoting a second book to them should be necessary. However, I will point to some reasons that are especially worth mentioning.

1. While adverbs in the sentence-initial and sentence-final positions are usually easy to describe from a functional point of view, medial adverbs

form a multifarious group with a number of different functions which often
almost imperceptibly shade into each other. For example, <u>certainly</u> in both
the <u>a</u> and <u>b</u> versions of (1) applies to the truth-value of what is said but
in <u>b</u> it has the additional function of emphasizing the negation, which then
receives more than its normal stress. See 3.8.

(1) a. <u>Certainly</u>, he had not forgotten about it.

   b. He had <u>certainly</u> nót forgotten about it.

In (2) <u>carefully</u> in the <u>a</u> version only denotes the waiter's manner in con-
nection with the airing, whereas in <u>b</u> it is ambiguous between that sense and
the sense that he took care to air the wine, i.e. that his carefulness caused
the airing. Cf. (14) in 3.5 and (10) in 3.6.3.5.

(2) a. The waiter aired the wine <u>carefully</u>.

   b. The waiter <u>carefully</u> aired the wine.

The description of <u>carefully</u> as ambiguous in (2 b) means that the preverb
does not have both its possible senses simultaneously, but that these vary
according to context. However, there are cases where an adverb in mid-posi-
tion exhibits a blend of two ideas. Thus <u>still</u> in (3 a) indicates only con-
cession, whereas <u>still</u> in (3 b) indicates both concession and time. Cf.
(22) - (24) in 3.6.4.1.

(3) a. He had been asked to pay many times. <u>Still</u> he had not
     paid the money.

   b. He had been asked to pay many times and he <u>still</u> had not
     paid the money.

2. The function of an adverb in initial or final position usually does
not differ very much according to how the adverb is placed in relation to
other constituents that occur there. However, in mid-position there are
often one or more auxiliaries and the choice between pre-, inter-, and post-
auxiliary placement can be a clue to the most plausible interpretation of
the function of a preverb, as in the following examples.

(4) a. John <u>only</u> had underlined the word. (Nobody else had done so.)⎤ Cf.

   b. John had <u>only</u> underlined the word. (He had not copied it.) ⎦ 3.6.4.2,f.

(5) a. They would <u>otherwise</u> have been informed by him. (Cf. 3.6.4.2,i)

   b. They would have been <u>otherwise</u> informed by him. (Cf. 3.6.6)

3. When the sentence is negated with <u>not</u>, adverbs in initial position are
outside its scope, whereas almost all of those in final position are inside
it.[1] In mid-position many preverbs have both possibilities, and sometimes

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1. Adverbs pronounced with tail-intonation, e.g. <u>however</u> and <u>apparently</u> as

their meaning is greatly affected, as in (6), sometimes rather little, as in (7). For further discussion see 2.3.

(6) a. I <u>deliberately</u> didn't take your books.

   b. I didn't <u>deliberately</u> take your books.

(7) a. Jill <u>often</u> did not turn up at these meetings.

   b. Jill did not <u>often</u> turn up at these meetings.

1.4. Exemplification

Many of the examples have been taken from Jacobson 1964 and 1975, where references to sources are given. As documented examples are often more complex than is suitable for illustrative purposes, the extracted text has in several cases been abridged or simplified except in the immediate surrounding of the preverb exemplified. Whenever non-documented examples are given they have been checked by native informants as regards acceptability. In the examples the preverbs or other adverbs discussed have been underlined.

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in (i), are outside the scope of <u>not</u> also in final position:

(i) Jack did not come, $\left\{\begin{array}{l}\underline{\text{however}} \\ \underline{\text{apparently}}\end{array}\right\}$.

2. ON THE CLASSIFICATION OF PREVERBS

2.0. The purpose of chapters 2 - 5 is to discuss the use, meaning, and syntax of preverbs from the point of view of a classification of them according to pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic function. This approach has been chosen, first of all, because a classification of adverbials on these lines has not before been attempted. Secondly, so many things can be said about the use, meaning, and syntax both of individual preverbs and of groups of them that a survey in the form of a classification that covers the whole field of preverbs is desirable as a basis for more detailed description.

2.1. Different Approaches to Adverbial Classification

Preverbs are included in the survey of adverbials which is given by Lees 1962:13-14 and which in its essentials is repeated by Thomas 1965:162-71. This survey shows a remarkable degree of inconsistency as regards terminology. Thus Lees enumerates the following categories: (1) Sentence-adverbials, (2) Preverbs, (3) Locative and Time Adverbials, (4) Manner Adverbials, and (5) Attributive Adverbials. It is not difficult to see that this enumeration is based on a mixture of three different types of adverbial classification, for it must be possible to classify all adverbials (incl. preverbs) according to

(a) syntactic function, as in the case of categories (1) and (5),

(b) position, as in the case of category (2),

(c) semantic function, as in the case of categories (3) and (4).

Several other ways of classifying adverbials also occur in the grammatical literature, e.g. according to

(d) syntactic form (i.e. adverbs, adverbial phrases, and adverbial clauses, as in Jacobson 1964:18-21),

(e) morphological derivation (e.g. adverbs with such suffixes as -ly and -wise as opposed to root-forms like fast; see Schibsbye 1965:149 ff.),

(f) similarity to other parts of speech (e.g. pronominal adverbs like here and there, prepositional adverbs like since and before, and adjectival adverbs like seriously and slowly; see Schibsbye 1965:148),

(g) integration in clause structure (adjuncts vs. disjuncts and conjuncts,
as in Greenbaum 1969:25 and GCE 1972:421),

(h) manner of modification (incidental vs. essential components, as in
Palmer and Blandford 1939:176-78),

(i) intonation (e.g. adverbs with emphatic intonation and adverbs with
tail-intonation; see Hartvigson 1969:41).

The distinction between adverbs and adverbial phrases is often disregarded
by present-day linguists. For example, Owen Thomas (1965:164) calls both
in his new home and today adverbs. As regards the semantic classification of
adverbs opinions often differ widely. Thus Nilsen 1972:87 calls completely
and decidedly in (1) and (2) adverbs of manner.

(1) He resembled her completely.

(2) He is decidedly a Harvard graduate.

However, Greenbaum 1969:128 and 203 calls completely an intensifier and
decidedly an attitudinal adverb expressing conviction, and this agrees on
the whole with the classification of them in Jacobson 1964:82 and 85.

2.2. The Present Classificatory System

As mentioned in 2.0, the classification of preverbs in this book is based
on their pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic functions. This means that the
same preverb is classified from three different viewpoints in order that a
full picture of its linguistic functions may be obtained.

The term function is here used as in the following quotation from Heath
1975:90, where it denotes the role of an item irrespective of whether this
role belongs to pragmatics, semantics, or syntax:

There are many different kinds of functions: an element may convey
semantic information in the surface, it may help simplify the
predication and decoding of utterances, it may have sociolinguistic
or affective functions, etc.

Naturally it is difficult to draw a strict line of demarcation between the
three functions, since they are highly integrated. Thus when the meaning of
a word is described as dependent on the context or use in a particular situ-
ation (cf. Lyons 1968:410), we see how its pragmatic and semantic functions
are combined. An example of a corresponding combination of semantic and
syntactic functions can be found in Chomsky 1965:102, where one of the alter-
native ways of rewriting VP runs as follows:

V (NP) (Prep-Phrase) (Prep-Phrase) (Manner)

Here Manner, which Jackendoff (1972:49) regards as a purely semantic marking
of an adverb category, is used as a syntactic as well as a semantic term.
According to Allwood 1976:235,

> Pragmatics could be viewed as the study of the factors which
> determine what information is actually communicated by a sender
> and apprehended by a receiver; ... Further, it should study the
> relationship between conventional content and the intended content
> of a sender or the apprehended content of a receiver.

The terms sender and receiver are used by Allwood in the specific sense
of human beings in verbal or non-verbal (e.g. gestural) communication with
each other. Sender thus includes both speaker and writer and receiver both
hearer and reader. Since preverbs involve only verbal communication and
since it is cumbersome always to say explicitly speaker or writer and hearer
or reader, the terms speaker and hearer will be used in what follows in the
case of written as well as spoken communication, unless the character of
the examples shows that only speech is referred to. The term utterance will
be used in a similar way.

The PRAGMATIC FUNCTION of a preverb, then, has to do with the content a
speaker intends to communicate to his hearer/s/. An important factor deter-
mining this content is the inherent content of the preverb, which can also
be referred to as its basic sense (Fillmore 1969:111). The pragmatic func-
tion specifies the inherent content for a particular situation or context.
For example, the inherent content of firstly in (1) is to denote that some-
thing is "number one in relation to other things". (cf. 4.3.8)

(1) Harry, firstly, is not an engineer.

The function of firstly here from a communicative point of view, however,
is to play a role in the serial arrangement of the exposition to which (1)
belongs by pointing to its first part. This pragmatic function of firstly
has come to be so general that it can be said to convey its conventional
content.

Very often a preverb has more than one pragmatic function in the same
utterance. Thus in (1) firstly can have the additional function of implying
that the speaker gives this part of his message first because he thinks it
is the most important one. The extent to which his hearers actually appre-
hend this additional intended content depends on the speech situation, which
may show that the speaker can be expected to give his arguments in descend-
ing order of importance. Such an order also seems to be presupposed by the
common phrase "last but not least". However, many speakers prefer to save

their strongest argument for the final position, so a hearer of (1) may have to postpone his ultimate determination of the full pragmatic force of <u>firstly</u> until the whole series of arguments has been given by the speaker, unless, of course, the latter chooses to be explicit on this point by saying, for example, (2) after uttering (1).

(2) That is my most important point.

The idea of importance, then, does not belong to the conventional content of <u>firstly</u> since it is only present in certain situations.

There are cases where the pragmatic function of a preverb can be said to be based entirely on what is denoted by its inherent content, as in (3).

(3) This country, <u>economically</u>, is in a very awkward situation.

Here the pragmatic function is to restrict the utterance about the awkward situation to the economic aspect, and this function is fulfilled by the choice of a preverb whose inherent content concerns the field of economy (cf. 4.2.1).

By contrast, there are also cases where the pragmatic function totally disregards the inherent content, as in (4), which is supposed to be an answer by a fictitious Minister of Finance at a press conference a few days before devaluation.

(4) We are <u>certainly</u> not going to devalue.

Normally <u>certainly</u> expresses certainty, but both the speaker and his hearers in the case of (4) know that a Minister of Finance cannot be expected to tell journalists about his real intentions as regards devaluation. The pragmatic function, then, of <u>certainly</u> in (4) is not to underline the certainty of what is said but to increase the possibility of the lie being taken as the truth.

The SEMANTIC FUNCTION of a preverb is to convey its inherent content. As shown above in connection with (3), a speaker's intended content in using a preverb can be based entirely on this inherent content. However, as a rule, the semantic function of a preverb is a narrower concept than its pragmatic function.

On the sentence level the relationship between the semantic and pragmatic functions of a preverb has its correspondence in the relationship between a proposition and the utterance that contains it. It is the latter that has illocutionary force, i.e. can be used as an assertion, question, or request, whereas the former only gives the descriptive informational content. Just as in the case of preverbs, the pragmatic function of an utterance can dif-