



The Syntactic and Concurrent Aspects of Emphasizers

Nada Azeez Yousuf AL-Muttalabi (M.A in English Language)

AL-Kindy College of Medicine

University of Baghdad

Baghdad, Iraq

nadayousif2003@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The reinforcing effect of emphasizees can hardly be denied, hence their importance , hence the justification for writing this paper. As a particular type of adverbials , emphasizees form part of a major syntactic class. This study, thus, introduces the topic by first discussing a grammatical category characterized by being 'mobile' and 'optional'. The paper duly shows the scaling effect of emphasizees, their kinds and the transformational selectional rules that are operative in moving them to the right or left of the VP. It also handles their syntactic role as modifiers, their syntactic features, their occurrence or non- occurrence with negation and imperative and the position they occupy in the sentence.

The paper also dwells on the agreement restrictions on emphasizees .These constraints are shown to connect with the possible semantic interpretation of the sentence in which they occur. It also tackles the particular requirements called for by emphasizees.

Keywords : emphasizees, concurrent, disjuncts, conjuncts, scaling.

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1. ADVERBIALS AS A MAJOR SYNTACTIC CLASS

Traditionally, an adverb functions as a subjunct (i.e. a subordinate qualifier of a sentence, a verb and adjective or another adverb). Schibsbye (1965: 148), who traditionally speaks of adverbials in general, likes to refer to this function. He also recognizes that, in content, adverbs “differ considerably”, that “it would be difficult to find a common denominator for such words” and that “they can be classified into main types according to their similarity in content to other parts of speech.”

In Grammar, we do not only have categories of elements but also sub-categories of the same element. The adverbial category is being looked at as the most *peripheral* category. However, Quirk et al (1985: 51) regard it “a heterogeneous category within which there are relatively central and relatively peripheral types of adverbial” and that “most adverbials are both *mobile* and *optional*”.

In tackling the grammatical area of emphasizers, we need to refine certain terms. Interestingly Quirk et al (1985:52) show that adverbials are subdivided into *disjuncts* (those adverbials that comment on the form or content of the clause as exemplified by *to my regret*) *conjuncts* (that have a connective function as exemplified by *however*). These are sentence adverbials that are to be distinguished from *adjuncts* and *subjuncts* which are quite *integrated* with the rest of the clause. The latter are shown to include familiar categories such as adverbials of *manner, place, time* and *degree*.

2. EMPHASIZERS :THEIR SCALING EFFECT

Emphasizers can be defined as subjuncts that reinforce the truth value of the statement or in Greenbaum and Quirk's words (1990:142) that “have a general *heightening* effect.”

The *test* that can be used to isolate emphasizers is that they do not require *gradable* constituents. Interestingly, *intensifiers* are operative only with gradable constituents. Quirk et al (1985 :583) give the following examples* where *really* is used to differentiate between an *emphasizer* and an *intensifier*.

- (1) He *really* may have injured innocent people
- (2) He may *really* have injured innocent people
- (3) He may have *really* injured innocent people.

It is assumed that we have “pure” *emphasizers* in (1) and (2). Both examples might be paraphrased as :

It is really possible that he has injured innocent people.

This interpretation, however, does not obtain with (3) where a *high degree* of injury is being implied, hence we have an *intensifier*.

*Except when stated otherwise, the examples are mine

Interestingly, with the emphasizers *really* and *indeed* when used with adjectives, the scaling effect appears to be obvious :

She is *really* foolish.

He is *funny* indeed.

‘really’ + adjective in the sentence above have the semantic value of a *big fool* whereas *indeed* + *funny* have the semantic value of *very funny*.

3. KINDS OF EMPHASIZERS

Quirk et al (1985:583) divide what they project as ‘common emphasizers’ into two groups : group (a) and group (b). Group (a) comprises items that can also function as *disjuncts* suggesting that what is being said is true. Group (b) is shown to consist mainly of items that can also function as *disjuncts*, having the value that what the speaker says is unequivocally true. Group (a) is being exemplified by the following adverbial emphasizers : *actually, certainly, clearly, definitely, indeed, obviously, plainly, really, surely, for certain, for sure, of course*. Group (b) is being exemplified by the following emphasizers : *frankly, honestly, literally, simply, fairly, just*.

It is shown that in the following example:

She *plainly* does not like the idea.

the emphasizer *plainly* is not singled out intonationally or by punctuation.



Significantly, Quirk et al (1985: 584 – 585) supply us with telling examples of emphazizers occurring in *informal speech* .They punctuate some responses in angry exchanges.Here are some specimens of the numerous examples given by Quirk et al :

I *never even* touch it.

You certainly DID.

You darned well DID. (very informal)

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---|-----------------------|---|---|--------------|---|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| What | { | on earth in heaven | } | [| + question + |] | { | for goodness sake for pity's sake | } |
|------|---|-----------------------|---|---|--------------|---|---|--------------------------------------|---|

I told them to *darned well* go.

Biber et al (1999: 763 – 765) speaks of three major types of adverbials. They divide them by their functions into (a) *circumstance adverbials* (b) *stance adverbials* (c) *linking adverbials*. Stance Adverbials are suggested to fall into three categories: *Epistemic Stance Adverbials*, *Attitude Stance Adverbials* and *Style Stance Adverbials*.

The examples given are stated as ACAD [Academic] , CONV [Conversation] , FICT [Fiction] and NEWS.

It is argued that *Circumstance Adverbials* are the most integrated ones into the clause structure .

e.g. Writers on style have differed [**a great deal**] [**in their understanding of the subject**] . (ACAD).

Epistemic Stance Adverbials are shown to focus “ on the truth value of the proposition”.

e.g. Well she **definitely** looks at her mobile. (CONV)

Attitude Stance Adverbials are suggested to express the speaker’s attitude towards things or to evaluate the content of the statement.

e.g. *Fortunately* ,this is far from the truth .(ACAD)

Style Stance Adverbials comment on the style or form of the utterance.

e.g. **Quite frankly** , we are having a bad year.

Linking Adverbials have a peripheral relationship with the rest of the clause and they are *connective* in function.

e.g. My objectives in this work are twofold : **first**, to set out a precise yet comprehensive analysis <....> (ACAD)

What is important to us here is *Stance Adverbials* as they are relevant to the topic of this paper. In them as Biber et al (1999 : 853) show , the speaker’s comment on the content of the statement is much more *overt* as revealed by the following examples

Ruth was **definitely** at Goosehill School. (CONV)

Regrettably, last night’s audience was a meager one , but what they got was impressive. (NEWS)

Speaking of the frequency of *Stance Adverbials*, Biber et al suggest (ibid : 765) that they are more common in *conversation* than in other registers.

4. TRANSFORMATIONAL RULES

Jackendoff (1972 : 49) looks at adverbial distribution as a consequence of semantic incorporation rules. Grammarians are now essentially interested in the form rather than in the semantic reality of constructions. However, we do encounter instances where the grammarians have to semantically account for things. Palmer (1974 : 86-93;passim 94-150) for example , in *The English Verb* do so with *The Modals* and with certain manifestations of passivisation in English.

Lyon, who speaks generally of tense and temporal adjuncts and not of adverbial emphazizers, seems to be aware of the workings of *selectional rules* . He suggests (1971 : 349) that “ in most current transformational work on English ... the rules are ordered in such a way that the prior selection of a particular tense subsequently restricts the choice of temporal adjuncts.Radford (1988: 141) who seems to be interested in the distribution of adverbials in general , fails to explain why some adverbs can appear in certain positions and why others cannot.



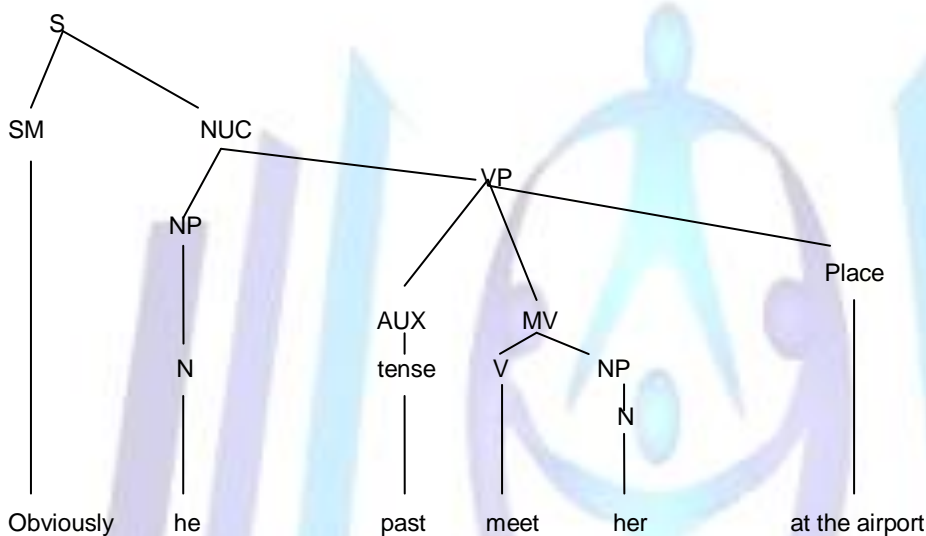
Those who follow the Chomskyan precepts transformationally account for [the classic] adverbials of *time*, *place*, *manner* and adverbial clauses. Jacobs and Rosenbaum (1972: 209 – 210), for instance, talk about *time – place deletion transformation*. This transformation, they argue, takes noun phrases like “at the time when...”, “at the place where ...” and deletes the head noun phrase along with the preposition. Thus, the *time – place deletion transformation* reduces a sentence like

Ludwig laughed at the time when her plane arrived.

into

Ludwig laughed when her plane arrived

Liles* (1971:14) shows (1971 :14) what is known as classic adverbs as *optional* elements when he speaks about the components of the VP (the verb phrase) VP → Aux + MV (Manner) (Place) (Time) (Reason). *This may, one conclude, could be extended to encompass emphasizees which are optional elements*. Liles suggests (ibid : 60-62) that the *phrase structure rules* introduces all adverbials after the MV (= main verb). Thus, following Lile’s argument, it is possible to derive *Obviously, he met her at the airport* from the deep structure by rearranging the elements.



“Figure 1”

*Note that Liles employs abbreviations of constituents that are somewhat different from those used by Jacobs and Rosenbaum.

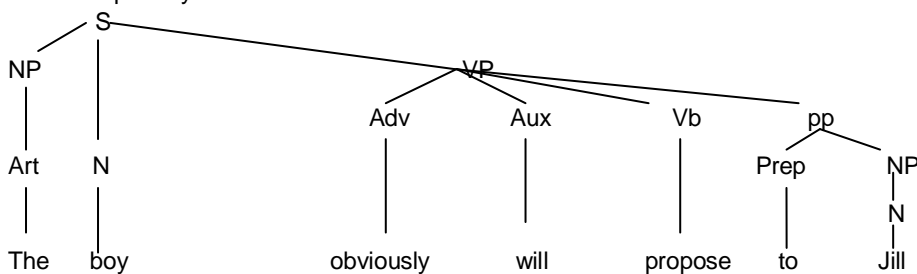
The transformation is clearly optional with ‘mono-and di-transitive’ verbs to borrow terms from Quirk et al (1973 : 167). In the phrase structure rule, the SM (sentence modifier) is optional :P1 : S → (SM) NUC* (Liles : 1971:11)

In sentences like

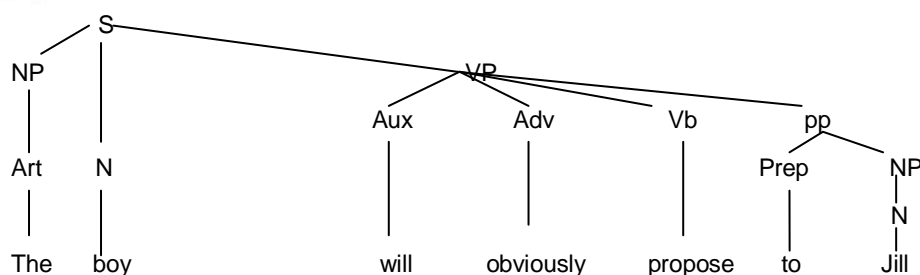
The boy *obviously* will propose to Jill.

The boy will *obviously* propose to Jill.

The adverbial movement transformation moves the adverbial emphasizee either to the left or right of the AUX. The following tree diagrams show the surface structures of the sentences. The abbreviations of the constituents used are those adopted by Jacobs and Rosenbaum:



“Figure 2”



"Figure 3"

Obviously as a disjunct emphasizer modifying the whole clause can be shifted to a front or an end position as shown, later.

Commenting on the Chomskyan Association Theory which is set to explain the position of adverbials, Shaer (2003: 265-285) argues that it is not a unified coherent theory but an umbrella term under which a number of insignificantly different analyses are subsumed.

* P1 means phrase structure rule 1. The arrow in this rule means 'consist of' or 'is to be rewritten as'. The parentheses around SM mean that the element is optional. NUC means nucleus.

5. SYNTACTIC POSITION AND FEATURES OF EMPHASIZERS

With the exception of *for sure*, *for certain*, most emphasizers precede the item they emphasize. In other words, they operate as premodifiers. Talking of the following adverbial emphasizers, Onions (1971: 15) recognizes that these adverbials "qualify the sentence as a whole rather than any part of it." The emphasizers referred to are *assuredly*, *candidly*, *admittedly*, *evidently*, *frankly*, *inevitably*, *needlessly*, *obviously*, *presumably*, *surely*, *undoubtedly*, *rightly*, *to be sure* (along with other adverbials).

Emphasizers cannot or are unlikely to be modified. *Definitely* is an exception in that it is sometimes premodified by *very* or *quite*.

They *quite definitely* know what they want.

A feature of these emphasizers is that they modify the whole clause and that semantically they have an "it is adj that" interpretation. Thus, *Suha has disclosed her mother's secret*, *obviously* can be interpreted as

It is obvious that Suha has disclosed her mother's secret

It is clear that an emphasizer like *obviously* appears to project the speaker's perception of the act.

e.g. *Frankly*, he is foolish.

Quirk et al (1985:586) recognize that emphasizers as *subjuncts* differ from *adjuncts* in several ways which are realized as follows:

- they cannot be contrasted with one another in alternative negation or alternative interrogation
- they cannot be the focus of focusing subjuncts or of a cleft sentence
- they cannot be the focus of clause comparison
- they cannot be premodified by *however*, *how*, *so*.

Thus, in the following example:

Helen will *certainly* reject his offer and so will Jill.

the interpretation will be something like (= It is equally *certain* that Jill will reject his offer).



It is also assumed that most emphazizers can precede a negated verb phrase (VP) except the adverbial emphazizer *fairly* which works smoothly with a non-negated verb:

She *fairly* cried for joy at his success.

*She *fairly* didn't cry for joy at his success.

Syntactically speaking, an emphazizer like *frankly*, as disjunct, usually occurs at the beginning of a sentence

Frankly, he has committed the crime.

When placed in other positions, the sentence becomes awkwardly unacceptable

*He has *frankly* committed the crime

Indeed as an emphazizer can be postposed i.e. can be shifted to an end – position.

He appreciates your work *indeed*

They are very diligent *indeed*

They adverbials *readily*, *comfortably*, *easily*, *with ease* are on the verge of being emphazizers.

He *readily* affirms his negligence

but in the sentence

He responded to our plea *readily*.

readily is an *adverbial of manner* (= an adjunct adverbial with the semantic value of *in a ready manner*) .

In *Honestly, they shouted at him*, *honestly* is a *disjunct emphazizer* with an assertive value ie emphasizing *the speaker's true faith*.

A noticeable feature of certain emphazizers (i.e. disjunct ones modifying the whole clause) is that they are often punctuated by commas at clausal boundaries . Their *mobility* is quite noticeable:

Obviously , Suha has disclosed her mother's secret.

Suha , *obviously* , has disclosed her mother's secret.

Suha has , *obviously* , disclosed her mother's secret.

Suha has disclosed her mother's secret , *obviously*.

The emphazizers *honestly*, *just* and *simply* precede the verb phrase (VP) with *clausal negation*.

He *honestly* didn't give the impression of being serious

All emphazizers (except *certainly*, *surely* and *fairly*) can show in *interrogative sentences*:

Does she {
really
definitely
*surely
*certainly
*fairly
} like to be a nurse ?

All emphazizers can operate as the focus of a *negation*

I don't *really* agree to what he says

They don't know *for certain*.

They don't *definitely* like it.



Emphasizers are not used with imperatives. However, there is a tendency now that some speakers use certain emphasizees (such as *definitely*, *actually*, *really*) in an imperative construction.

Definitely try it now.

Such emphasizees are called by Haegeman (1991: pp 232 – 254) and Cobb C. (2006) 'peripheral' adverbials.

6. CONCURRENT (= AGREEMENT) RESTRICTIONS ON EMPHASIZERS

Following Jackendoff's ordering constraints of certain adverbials, Van Valin, Jr. and La Polla in *Syntax, Structure, Meaning and Function* project (1997: 165-166) that "the position of an adverb in a sentence is only indirectly related to its possible interpretation(s)".

The emphasizee *evidently* in the following sentences is shown to be occurring with *completely*, a *booster intensifier* and *slowly* an *adverbial of manner*. It is clear that the unacceptable sentence, in the following examples (by Biber et al) are semantically awkward:

- a. *Evidently*, Leslie has slowly been completely immersing herself in the new language.
- a'. Leslie has *evidently* been slowly completely immersing herself in the new language completely.
- b. *evidently* [evidential: clausal] > [pace: core] > completely [aspectual: nuclear].
- c. **Evidently*, Leslie has completely been slowly immersing herself in the new language.
- d. *Slowly, Leslie has *evidently* been completely immersing herself in the new language.
- e. * Slowly, Leslie has completely been *evidently* immersing herself in the new language.
- f. *Completely, Leslie has *evidently* been slowly immersing herself in the new language.
- g. *Completely, Leslie has slowly been *evidently* immersing herself in the new language.

Quirk et al (1985:585-586) assume the free occurrence of emphasizees in group (a) with verbs and predications. However, the case is not so with those emphasizees in group (b). Thus, emphasizees such as *fairly* and *absolutely* are shown to require *exaggeration*. If this feature is absent, these emphasizees cannot operate.

In his distress, he absolutely shouted at her.

*In his distress, he absolutely told her.

With the emphasizees "honestly", "really" we need verbs that express an attitude or cognition:

She *honestly* admires his gallantry.

She *really* likes his punctuality.

With *gradable verbs*, emphasizees may have a scaling effect akin to that of *boosters* (a subset of intensifiers):

She *indeed* appreciates your sacrifice

With *non-gradable verbs*, emphasizees have an emphatic and reinforcing effect:

He *definitely* responded to her request

CONCLUSION

We may conclude that emphasizees are important items in that they enhance a way of grammatically realizing an emphasis. As assertive adverbials, they prepare the listener to accept the content of the speaker's statement or his/her good faith, hence their importance. Semantically speaking, the constraints on these heightening items could explain why certain sentences are acceptable or unacceptable. Their concurrence (=agreement) with certain verbs of attitude or cognition or their requirement of predications that articulate exaggeration are quite relevant to the grammaticality or non-grammaticality of a certain sentence. But one has to be aware of the grammatical nuances of Br.E versus American ones. On occasions, emphasizees realize intriguingly handy informal phrases that have reinforcing effect (as in a sentence containing an emphasizee *subunct* like *all right*. He's a good swimmer, *all right*). Significantly, in an *associative* sense, they capture the assertiveness of informal utterances, hence their syntactic and pragmatic relevance.

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Author’ biography with Photo



A lecturer of English Language at AL-Kindy College of Medicine / University of Baghdad

Education and Qualification:

- Bachelor of Arts Degree (English Language) 1992.
- Master of Arts Degree (English Language) 2006.

Experience:

- 8 years of teaching English Grammar, Morphology and ESP at University of Baghdad.
- Annual preparation of efficiency examination in English for postgraduate Students.