

# Temporal and spatial readings of pre- and postverbal adverbs in English

Wojciech Guz

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

wguz@o2.pl

Manner and non-manner (clausal) readings of adverbs are closely associated with adverb placement. Specifically, when pre- and postverbal placement is possible, manner readings are associated with the postverbal position while clausal interpretations are linked to the preverbal position (e.g. Ernst 1984, 2002; Cinque 1999).

- (1) Lynn raced down the hallway **quickly**. (manner)
- (2) Lynn **quickly** raced down the hallway. (clausal; aspectual)

(from Ernst 2002: 85)

The clausal readings can be of various semantic types and verbs such as *quickly* and *slowly* are said to yield a temporal or aspectual interpretation in the sense that the adverbs locate an event with respect to some reference time. Such temporal readings of postverbal adverb placement can also be shown to contrast with spatial readings associated with final placement, which is especially noticeable with verbs which readily allow spatial and temporal readings, such as *approach*.

- (3) Undecided and still bent over towards her he became aware of the patter of running feet, **approaching fast**. (spatial; from *British National Corpus*)
- (4) With a deadline **fast approaching**, he is madly trying to buff up his term paper on John Updike. (temporal; from *Corpus of Contemporary American English*)

Thus spatial and temporal notions can be encoded in word orders related to adverb placement. This includes *-ly* adverbs such as *quickly* and *rapidly*, but also the adverb *fast*, despite previous assertions that aspectual/temporal interpretations are unavailable to it (Eszes 2009, Schäfer 2001). When pre- and postverbal adverb positions are both available, the factors determining the selection of either include the speaker's intended semantic reading – temporal or spatial (Guz 2014). An interesting observation to make is that the correlation pairings preverbal–temporal and postverbal–spatial are in line with the more general semantic pattern that preverbal adverb positions can have non-manner clausal readings, while postverbal positions tend to have manner interpretations.

This paper will examine a number of adverb-verb combinations which can be read temporally or spatially, such as *(fast) approach (fast)*, to gauge the strength of the association of adverb placement and temporal/spatial reading. We will establish the frequency with which preverbal and postverbal adverb positions are associated with temporal and spatial readings respectively. As will be demonstrated with quantitative data, this is a statistically significant semantico-syntactic pattern in corpora of modern English.

## References

Cinque, Guglielmo. 1999. *Adverbs and functional heads: a cross-linguistic perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Ernst, Thomas. 1984. *Towards an integrated theory of adverb position in English*. Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University.
- Ernst, Thomas. 2002. *The syntax of adjuncts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eszes, Boldizsar. 2009. Aspect and adverb interpretation – the case of *quickly*. In Katalin E. Kiss (ed.), *Adverbs and adverbial adjuncts at the interfaces*, 269–296. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Guz, Wojciech. 2014. Non-*ly* adverbs in preverbal position: the case of *fast*.” *English Language and Linguistics* 18(01), 133–156.
- Schäfer, Martin. 2001. Pure manner adverbs. In Johannes Dölling & Tatjana Zybatow (eds.), *Ereignisstrukturen. Linguistische Arbeitsberichte* 76, 251–272. Universität Leipzig.