

An Argument Against the Functional Specifier Approach to Adverb Distribution

There are two dominant approaches to explaining the distribution of adverbs, the first based on semantic factors, and the second on syntactic. ‘Semantic adjunction’ theories (Ernst 2002, 2004, 2006; Svenonius 2002) allow adverbs to adjoin to any projection, contingent on the satisfaction of their individual semantic requirements. Syntactic ‘functional specifier’ theories (Cinque 1999, 2004; Alexiadou 1997) place adverbs in the specifiers of a fixed series of functional heads, with each adverb base-generated in a single position.

The functional specifier approach is based on the observation that adverbs consistently appear in the same order with respect to each other, both within languages and cross-linguistically. Cinque (1999) presents an array of evidence consisting of adverb pairs that may not be freely ordered. The ordering of such pairs is assumed to be transitive, such that it is possible to sequence all categories of adverbs with respect to each other without having to show the order of every individual adverb pair. For instance, *unfortunately* may precede *probably*, but the reverse is ungrammatical.

- (1) a. He **unfortunately** has **probably** left.
 b. *He **probably** has **unfortunately** left. (Cinque 1999)

Cinque posits that verbal morphology has similar universal ordering properties. Matching adverbs with related verbal morphology (e.g. epistemic *probably* and epistemic *should*), he elaborates a clause structure in which there is a one-to-one correspondence between functional heads and the adverbs that appear in their specifiers.

Certain adverbs, however, appear to have different pre- and postverbal readings. In (2), for example, the lower *cleverly* denotes the way in which John answered the questions, while the higher *cleverly* implies that it was clever of him to answer the questions.

- (2) John **cleverly** has answered their questions **cleverly**. (Cinque 1999:19)

Under the functional specifier approach it is necessary to account for this distinction by associating such adverbs with two corresponding functional heads, as opposed to the usual one (Cinque 1999:20). Frequentive or repetitive adverbs (*often*, *twice*), celerative adverbs (*quickly*), certain manner adverbs (*cleverly*), and completive adverbs (*completely*) may thus be base-generated in two positions, each corresponding to a different interpretation. These two-position adverbs may be freely ordered, as with *frequently* and *suddenly* in (3).

- (3) a. She **frequently** was **suddenly** being rejected by publishers.
 b. She **suddenly** was **frequently** being rejected by publishers. (Ernst 2006:1018)

However, the flexibility allowed by having two positions for each of these adverbs is still not sufficient to account for their distribution. It is possible, for instance, for *frequently* to precede two instances of *suddenly*, and vice versa.

- (4) a. She **frequently** was **suddenly** being rejected by publishers **suddenly**.
 b. She **suddenly** was **frequently** being rejected by publishers **frequently**.

Given the possible permutations of the two fixed positions in which each of the two adverbs may be generated, the functional specifier approach predicts that (4)a. and (4)b. cannot both be grammatical. As both configurations are, in fact, possible, it is necessary to allow at least one of these adverbs to be generated in three positions.

I will therefore argue that the functional specifier cannot account for cases such as (4) while maintaining a one-to-one correspondence between the interpretation of an adverb and the position in which it is generated. More generally, I take this as evidence that the functional specifier approach neglects generalisations that would be better accounted for under a semantic approach to adverb distribution.

References

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