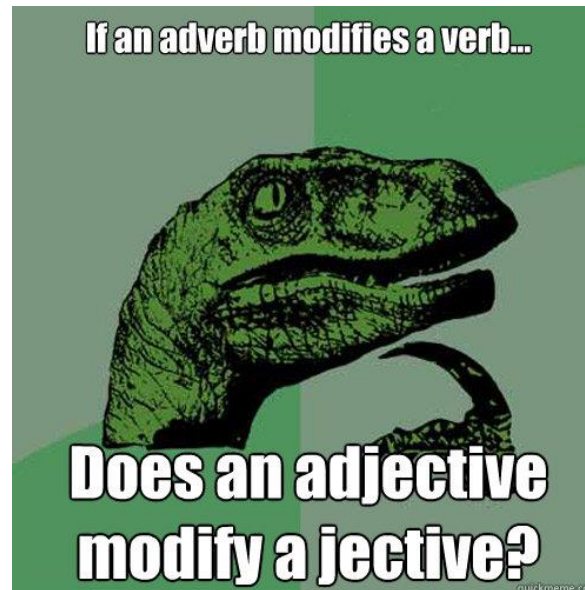


The (in)coherence of the English adverb class



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Introduction

[1] And they **also** believed in something **very** important — that when you’ve worked **hard**, and done **well**, and you **finally** walked through that doorway of opportunity, you don’t slam it shut behind you. (*Applause.*) **No** — you reach **back**, and you give other folks the same chances that helped you succeed. <COCA 2012: BLOG>

In English: different forms, different distributions, different semantic categories

No unified treatment of “traditional adverbs” (e.g. *very*, *back*)

- How heterogeneous is the traditional adverb class?
- Do adverb subclasses have a semantic ground?
- What is the relationship between traditional adverbs and other word classes?

Adverbs in reference grammar works

	<i>very</i>	<i>slowly</i>	<i>abroad</i>	<i>from</i>	<i>because</i>	<i>whether</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>oh</i>
Jespersen (1924)	PARTICLE							
Fries (1952)	GROUP D	CLASS 4		GROUP F	GROUP J		GROUP E	GROUP K
Quirk et al. (1985)	ADVERB			PREPOSITION	CONJUNCTION			INTERJECTION
Biber et al. (2002)	ADVERB			PREPOSITION	SUBORDINATOR		COORDINATOR	INSERT
Huddleston & Pullum (2002)	ADVERB			PREPOSITION		SUBORDINATOR	COORDINATOR	INTERJECTION
Kolln & Funk (2012)	QUALIFIER	ADVERB		PREPOSITION	CONJUNCTION	EXPLETIVE	CONJUNCTION	INTERJECTION

Table 1. Invariable word classes in grammatical descriptions of English.

Lumpers (Jespersen) vs **Splitters** (Fries, Kolln & Funk)

Establishing word classes

Necessary in grammatical description to predict morphosyntactic behavior (*wug test*, Berko 1958)

Top-down approach: assign word to one of several predetermined classes

- [2] i Brothers and sisters, our Lord Jesus Himself warned us, “Beware of false prophets who come in sheep’s clothing,” for inwardly, they are ravenous wolves. <COCA 2017: MOV>
- ii I’m a nice person! And anyone who doesn’t think so can have a sock in the eye. <COCA 2012: BLOG>

Bottom-up approach: create class if several words have enough properties in common

Word classes should be based on generalization (Crystal 1967: 26–27) & be used only if they are powerful enough to make predictions.

- Unclassifiable units: *beware, not, so*
- Hybrid units: *close & near, for, many* (syntactic gradience, Aarts 2007)

Criteria of variation

Morphology

Internal structure (⟨ADJECTIVE·ly⟩, ⟨X·Y⟩)

Comparative form (—*er than*)

Privative prefix (*in—, un—*)

Possible dependents

Can be complemented by (i) NPs, (ii) PPs headed by a specified preposition (*for, from, of, to, with*), (iii) *that* and bare content clauses, (iv) *to*-infinitive clauses, (v) gerund-participial (*·ing*) clauses

Can be modified by (i) degree modifiers (*as — as possible, very —*); (ii) typical modifiers of prepositions (*right —, straight —*); (iii) NPs (*3 days —*)

Syntactic distribution

Can complement (i) *be*, (ii) *behave*, (iii) *treat*, (iv) *go*, (v) *put*, (vi) *until*

Can modify :

verbs: (i) initial position (— S V X); (ii) initial position with compulsory subject–auxiliary inversion (— Aux S V); (iii) central position (S Aux — V); (iv) final position (S V X —); (v) final position with prosodic detachment (S V X, —)

adjectives: (i) attributive position (*the — good thing*), (ii) predeterminer position (— *good a thing*)

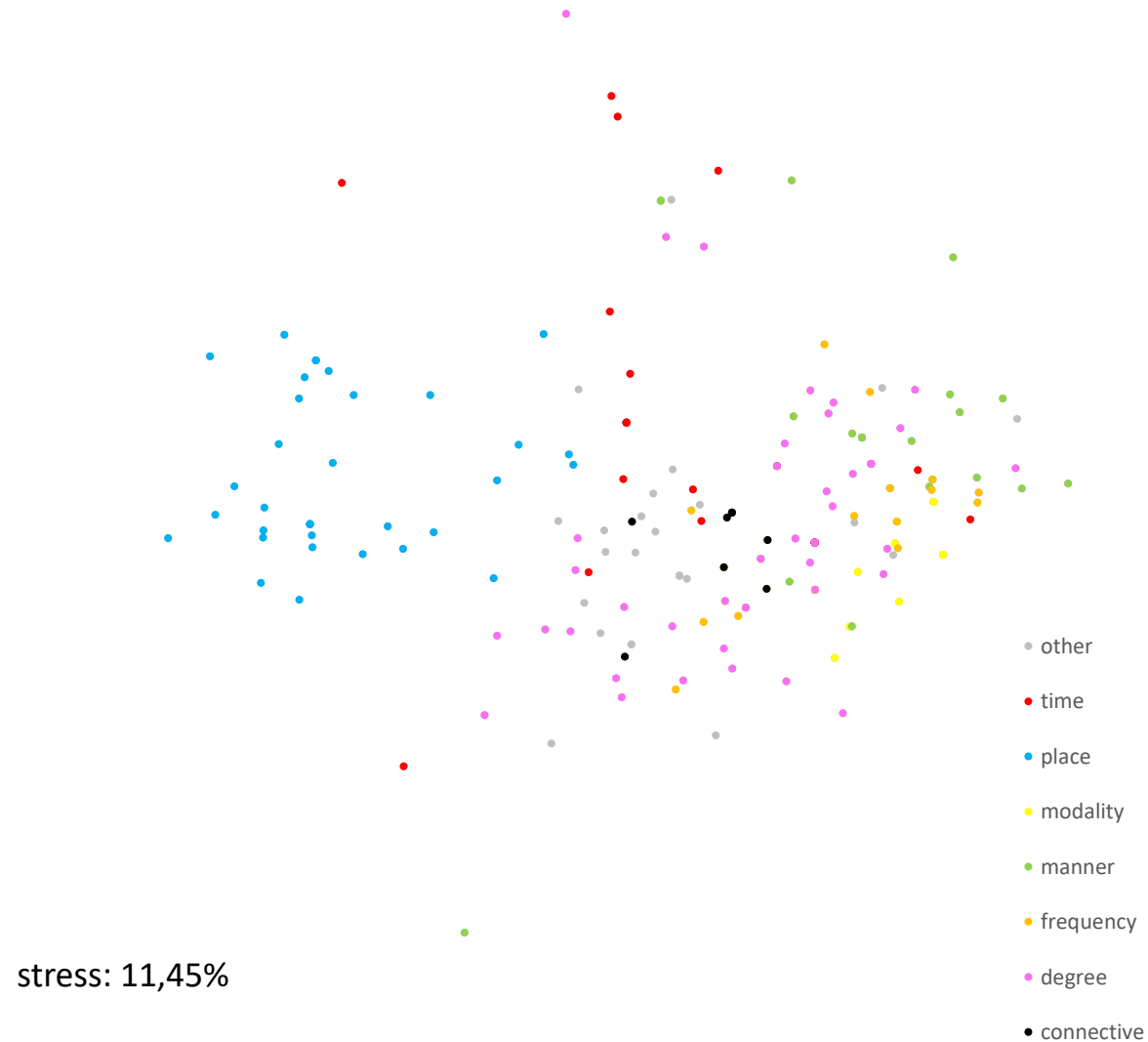
prepositions

nouns: (i) post-head position (*the room — is large*); (ii) pre-head position (*the very — thing*)

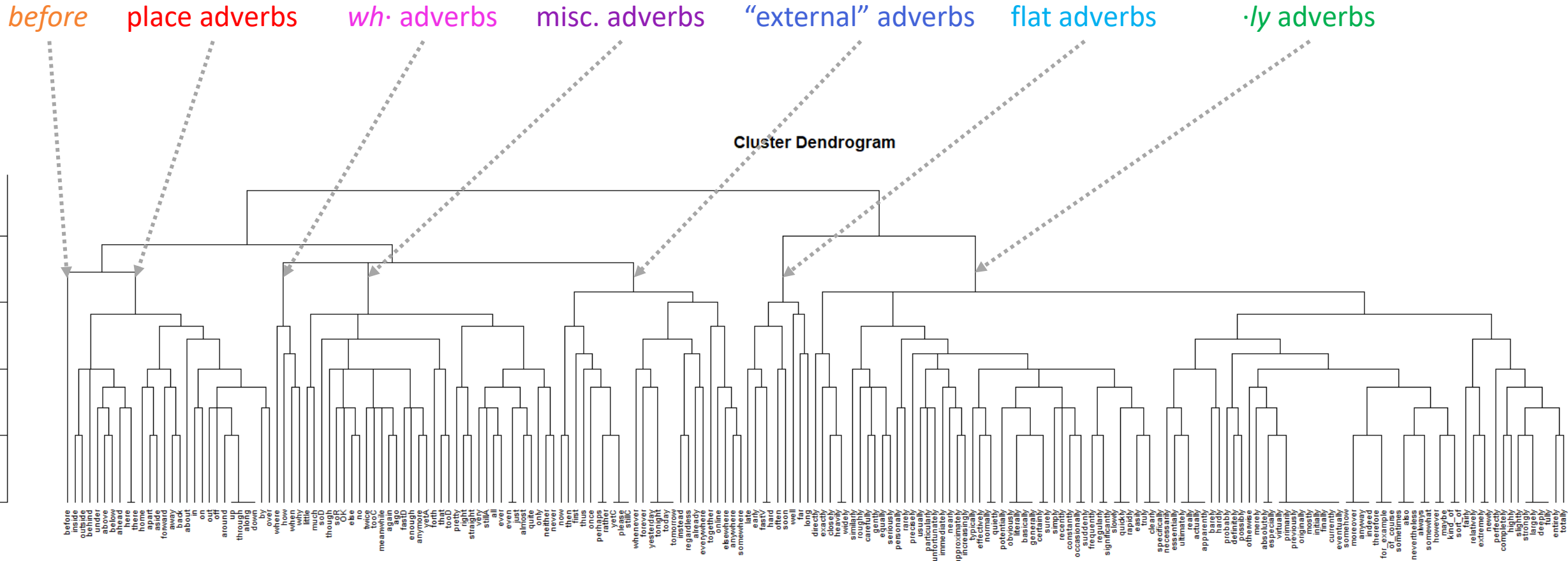
Method

- 200 most frequent lexemes tagged as adverbs in the Corpus of contemporary American English (COCA), incl. 4 polylexematic units (*for_example, kind_of, of_course, sort_of*)
- Distinction of homonyms (*so, still, too, yet*) [Blank 2003: 270–271]
- COCA: morphosyntactic contexts for the 200 units
- Gower distance between these units
- Multidimensional scaling
- Semantic annotation [Mittwoch *et al.* 2002]

Mapping traditional adverbs



Dendrogram



Traditional adverbs and other classes



Discussion and conclusion

- No good reason to establish a separate “intensifier” class
- If prepositions and adverbs are distinct, then “place adverbs” are prepositions
- “Flat adverbs” should be considered adjectives that can modify anything
- Subordinating conjunctions (although, if, unless, whether, while) are either a distinct micro-class or part of the same class as prepositions
- If the term “adverb” is maintained, then typical adverbs express manner, frequency and modality
- New adverb class still semantically heterogeneous; many adverbs have several interpretations depending on their linear position (e.g. *truly*)
- More units > clearer results because less frequent lexemes tend to be less polysemous (Pawley 2006)

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