

CHARACTERISTICS OF ADVERBIAL CLAUSES IN DIFFERENT TEXT TYPES

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Abstract

The research paper presents the characteristics of adverbial clauses determined through the analysis of their use in text types containing less formal English. The use of adverbial clauses is described regarding the frequency of incidence, the distribution of semantic categories, and the range of the subordinators that introduce this type of subordinate clause. The aforementioned characteristics are determined using quantitative research method. The study also applies comparative analysis to identify potential differences in the use of adverbial clauses within a small-size corpus comprised of language samples from two text types, namely interviews and fiction. The paper aims to describe how language users employ adverbial clauses in less formal language and to correlate their characteristics with the potential character of less formal language. Based on quantitative analysis of adverbial clauses, the paper presents their characteristics and interprets them as the indicators of the character of less formal language in the text types.

Key Words: adverbial clauses, semantic categories, interviews, fiction, less formal language

Abstrakt

Predkladaná práca prezentuje vlastnosti príslovkových viet zistené cez analýzu ich používania v typoch textov, ktoré obsahujú menej formálnu angličtinu. Používanie príslovkových viet je opísané v súvislosti s frekvenciou použitia týchto viet, jednotlivých sémantických kategórií, a podradovacích spojok, ktoré ich uvádzajú. Tieto vlastnosti sú určené použitím kvantitatívnej výskumnej metódy. Práca aplikuje komparatívnu metódu na zistenie rozdielov v používaní príslovkových viet v dvoch typoch textov, konkrétne v rozhovoroch a beletrii. Práca ma za cieľ opísať ako používatelia jazyka využívajú príslovkové vety v menej formálnom jazyku a korelovať ich vlastnosti s potenciálnym charakterom samotného menej formálneho jazyka. Na základe kvantitatívnej analýzy príslovkových viet, práca prezentuje ich vlastnosti a interpretuje ich ako indikátory charakteru menej formálneho jazyka analyzovaných textových typov.

Kľúčové slová: príslovkové vety, sémantické kategórie, rozhovory, beletria, neformálny jazyk

Introduction

The present paper describes the characteristics of adverbial clauses as displayed through their use in two types of text, namely interviews and fiction. The two text types contain language produced in different media of production, but of similar formality level, specifically rather less formal. Adverbial clauses are analyzed as to the frequency of incidence, the range of semantic categories and the subordinators that introduce them. The data are presented in the form of tables

and figures that provide the view of the whole corpus and allow for the comparison of the text types, too.

The aims of the study might be summarized in three statements. Firstly, the aim is to provide the characteristics of adverbial clauses in general through the analysis of their actual use in language production. Secondly, the comparison of the data from the individual text types is to determine potential differences between them. Most importantly, the purpose of analyzing adverbial clauses is to correlate their characteristics with the character of less formal language in the text types. The analysis of adverbial clauses might provide an insight into the overall character of the language used in less formal contexts. It might be particularly useful to determine which semantic meanings are most frequently expressed through adverbial clauses in less formal language. This type of data can reveal what kind of content specification such language products usually require, which might indicate what less formal language is often used to express.

The analysis of adverbial clauses is carried out on authentic language material which comprises a small-size corpus. The obtained data regarding the distribution of adverbial clauses are also compared with those from large-scale corpora-based studies presented in large reference grammar works of contemporary English, such as *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* written by Biber et al. (1999). The paper proceeds from defining the key terms and characteristics of the corpus to the presentation of the results and their interpretation.

1 Characteristics of the corpus

The present study describes the characteristics of adverbial clauses in different text types, namely *interviews* (IW) and *fiction* (FC). The selected text types are assumed to contain language of similar formality level and might be considered less formal text types. The analysis of adverbial clauses may be used to reveal the character of less formal language of the text types. Biber (1988, p. 70) uses the term *text type* “to refer to groupings of texts that are similar with respect to their linguistic form,” and can thus be characterized as a “linguistically defined text category” (Biber, 1993, p. 245). However, as Kohonen (2012, p. 175) points out, “it only seems to make sense to talk about formally defined text types if we link them to some functional specification.” Accordingly, the texts that represent each text type in the present study were also selected based on external criteria relating to their functional motivation, i.e. purpose.

As mentioned above, the first analyzed text type is *interview*. The analyzed interviews were conducted in a dialogue form in speech. The language of interviews thus has characteristics closest to those of conversation. Biber et al. (1999, p. 4) define conversation and fiction as different varieties of English and claim that “each of these varieties is termed a register, and each extended sample of language from a register constitutes a text.” Rafajlovičová (2013, p. 14) claims that “any set of sentences which appear in a sequence and cohere in this way is called a text.” The present study, therefore, uses the term “text” even to refer to language samples from orally conducted interviews.

The present study characterizes adverbial clauses based on their actual use in authentic language material. The results stem from the analysis of empirical data. The analysis is carried out

on “a collection of authentic spoken and written texts, organized by register, which is called a corpus” (Biber et al., 1999, p.4). By analyzing authentic language samples, the study should lead to valuable results that objectively describe the use of adverbial clauses in actual language production.

The selected texts that represent each text type contain language produced by a variety of people of different gender, race, age, social background, nationality, occupation, etc. The individual texts included in the corpus differ in length, but all the texts within each text type combined are of approximately the same length (30,000 words). The whole corpus thus consists of approximately 60,000 words, equally divided between the two analyzed text types (interviews and fiction). Table 1 below displays the characteristics of the corpus including the analyzed text types, the number of texts within each text type as well as the number of words.

Table 1 Characteristics of the corpus

Text types	number of texts	number of words
Interviews	12	30 660
Fiction	3	30 665
Total	15	61 325

The character of interviews, which are conducted in speech, poses limitations for the analysis of adverbial clauses. For the analysis of clauses to be carried out, the language samples need to be divided into sentences. The absence of sentence signaling marks when the language is produced in speech complicates the analysis of adverbial clauses. The present study overcomes this limitation by using written transcripts of the orally conducted interviews. The transcripts were taken from available websites such as www.time.com of *the Time magazine*, *Oprah Winfrey interviews* (www.oprah.com), *Larry King interviews* (www.cnn.com) and from several others (www.foxnews.com, www.asapsports.com, etc.).

As for fiction, the language samples consist of several chapters taken from three books of various genres written by native English-speaking writers. The books used for the analysis are Mary Stewart’s mystery novel *Rose Cottage* (1997), Stephen King’s suspense novel *Under the Dome* (2009) and Diane Chamberlain’s romance *Reflection* (1997). The corpus contains samples of fiction written by British as well as American writers of both genders. The selection of texts written by authors with various characteristics should eliminate the potential impact of gender or variety idiosyncrasies and ensure the objectivity of the results.

2 Characteristics of adverbial clauses in the corpus

Subordinate clauses can occur in different positions and fulfill various functions within a sentence. According to Rafajlovičová (2013, p. 44), “subordinate clauses tend to be classified in grammars according to functional-semantic principles such as whether a clause functions as a noun phrase (nominal), modifies a noun phrase (relative), or has adverbial functions (adverbial clause).” The present study examines the characteristics of a single type of subclause, namely adverbial clause. Biber et al. (1999, p. 194) define adverbial clauses by stating: “Adverbial clauses are used as adverbials in the main clause, they are optional and have some freedom of positioning; both initial and final placement are common. Adverbial clauses are regularly marked by a subordinator indicating the relationship to the main clause.” Adverbial clauses as adverbials can express a variety of semantic meanings, namely *time*, *place*, *manner*, *reason/cause*, *purpose*, *result*, *concession*, *condition*, and *comparison* (Rafajlovičová, 2012). They can be introduced by a wide range of subordinators that signal what kind of semantic meaning the clause expresses, e.g. *although* (concession), *because* (cause-reason), *until* (time) etc. Adverbial clause is thus specific for the position in the sentence, the kind of function it can fulfill, the variety of meanings it can express, and the subordinators that introduce it. See an example (adverbial clause of time): *When she gets back from her holiday*, I will ask her out.

Since adverbial clauses can be considered optional, it might be intriguing to find out whether or not language users opt for this type of subordinate clause with considerable frequency in less formal text types. In addition, given the wide range of semantic meanings that adverbial clauses can express, it might be useful to find out which of them language users express most frequently through adverbial clauses. These characteristics of adverbial clauses might provide an insight into the overall character of less formal language used in the text types.

The selected texts are first analyzed for the incidence of adverbial clauses. The analysis revealed that there are 915 adverbial clauses in the corpus, which accounts for 35.73% of all identified subclauses. The figures show that adverbial clauses are used in interviews and fiction with considerable frequency. As mentioned above, adverbial clauses are grammatically optional, which means they are not a necessary part of every sentence. The considerable incidence of adverbial clauses in the texts suggests that the use of less formal language is often accompanied by opting for this form of expression. The fact that language users incorporate adverbial clauses into language production with such frequency suggests that they often need to specify the content of the sentence in this way when using less formal language. If we consider the character of the language that we use in less formal situations, it often revolves around the exchange of opinions, experiences, or daily news about our lives. The data show that the exchange of such information often requires further specification of content to ensure better understanding between the participants of the interaction. Adverbial clauses enable language users to provide content specification of various kind. Since adverbial clauses can be used to express a wide range of semantic meanings, their use is even more likely. Further investigation of the semantic meanings that are frequently expressed by means of adverbial clauses might more closely reveal the character of less formal language and what we use it for.

2.1 Semantic categories of adverbial clauses in the corpus

More detailed investigation of adverbial clauses revealed that language users employ adverbial clauses of various semantic categories. For better illustration, the data are processed in the form of tables and figures, which also reveal the differences between the analyzed text types. Table 2 below shows the distribution of semantic categories of adverbial clauses across the corpus as well as within the individual text types and the proportional representation of these figures.

Table 2 The distribution of semantic categories of adverbial clauses across the corpus

	IW	FC	Total	%
Cause-Reason	114	29	143	15.6
Comparison	44	53	97	10.6
Concession	12	26	38	4.2
Condition	77	60	137	15.0
Contrast	2	2	4	0.4
Manner	8	34	42	4.5
Place	3	10	13	1.4
Purpose	6	0	6	0.7
Result	6	13	19	2.1
Time	183	233	416	45.5
Total	455	460	915	100
%	49.7	50.3	100	

As Table 2 shows, the analyzed texts indeed include adverbial clauses of a wide range of semantic categories. There were identified as many as 10 different semantic categories of adverbial clauses in the corpus. The data show that by far the most common ones are adverbial clauses of time with 416 instances, which accounts for 45.5% of all adverbial clauses. Time clauses thus represent almost half of all adverbial clauses in the corpus, which means that almost every second adverbial clause in the corpus is a time clause. This finding might more closely reveal the character of the language in the text types and can be explained by it. The analyzed language is of less formal character and on less formal occasions in everyday communication, it is often necessary to specify time. Casual conversation often revolves around events that happen at a specific time and language

users frequently need to specify this time in conversation. Both text types contain dialogues of conversation, which might explain such a strong dominance of time clauses in the corpus. Moreover, in the fiction texts, it is also necessary to specify the time continuum of the events apart from direct speech since there is no immediate context. This characteristic feature of fiction might explain the prevalence of time clauses in fiction with 50 more instances if we compare the two text types. The substantial dominance of time over the other semantic categories is well demonstrated in Figure 1 below.

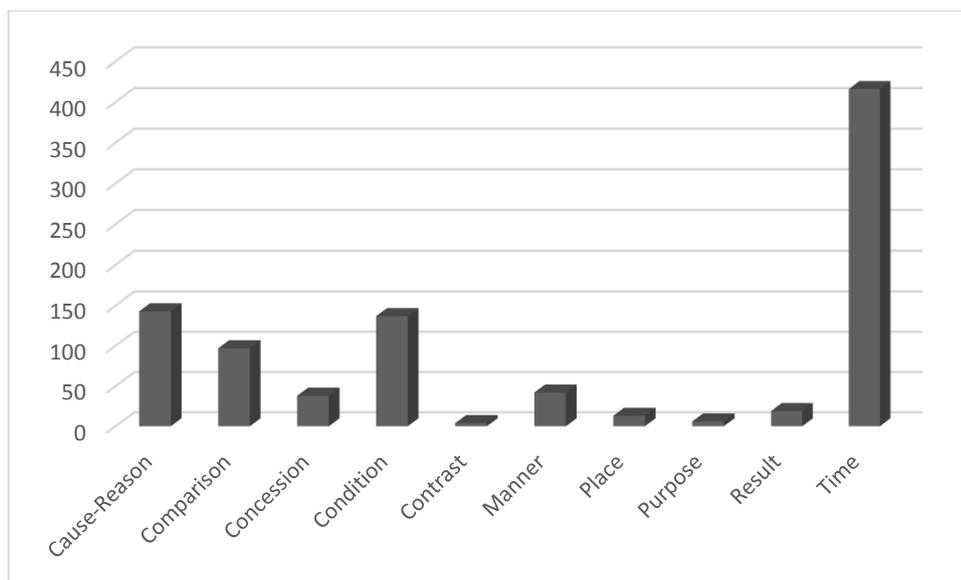


Figure 1 The distribution of semantic categories of adverbial clauses across the corpus

Based on the data, time clause appears to be the most characteristic type of adverbial clause in less formal text types. This finding reveals that on less formal occasions, language users most commonly need to specify the content of the sentence in terms of time. It might indicate that less formal language of the text types mostly revolves around the recounting of the events that happened or are going to happen in the lives of the protagonists in the interviews and fiction. Moreover, the character of the fiction texts, with their lack of immediate context, might lead to even more frequent use of time clauses [2.1.1], [2.1.2], [2.1.3].

- [2.1.1] He moved into my parents' neighborhood, *when I was a boy*. [A-IW]
- [2.1.2] *When I was 10*, I learned what unlocks creativity. [A-IW]
- [2.1.3] She was not looking at me *as she spoke*, but ... [A-FC]

The second most common semantic category of adverbial clauses is cause-reason with 143 instances, which accounts for 15.6% of all adverbial clauses in the corpus. Even though cause-reason clauses occupy the second place and occur quite frequently, we can see a large gap in the frequency of incidence between time clauses and cause-reason clauses. The former are almost three times as common as the latter. It reveals that the content expressed by language users on the

occasions that are rather less formal requires the specification of time more often than the specification of cause-reason. Despite that, the incidence of cause-reason clauses in the corpus is relatively frequent and can also signal the character of less formal language in the texts. As with time, the data show that the language users in both interviews and fiction often need to express causality, possibly to explain their own actions or actions of others. The text types contain language focused on everyday lives of either speakers or characters in fiction. When engaged in casual communication, we often explain to each other our motivations and reasons for acting in certain way. This might explain the considerable number of cause-reason clauses in the corpus. The position of cause-reason as the second most common semantic category of adverbial clauses also shows what language users often need to specify in less formal language. The data indicate that on less formal occasions, we are often required to provide justification. This kind of meaning specification might relate to expressing opinions or attitudes. The data thus suggest that besides the recounting of events, which requires the specification of time, less formal language might mostly be used for the exchange of opinions and attitudes towards certain things. The characteristics of adverbial clauses in the corpus might thereby more specifically reveal the character of less formal language in the text types.

The comparison of the text types shows that cause-reason clauses by far prevail in interviews as opposed to fiction. The former contain 114 instances while the latter only 29 instances of cause-reason clauses. The analyzed interviews thus contain almost 4 times as many cause-reason clauses as the fiction texts. It might to certain extent be related to the production of interviews in speech, where the communication is more centered on the exchange of opinions. However, these figures might rather result from the specific characteristics of interviews, which make them slightly different from common conversations. In addition to the dialogue form, the interviews are carried out in a very direct question-answer style. This might lead into the exchange of information that has almost interrogative character, where the interviewee is more often expected not only to state an opinion, experience, or attitude, but also to explain the reason behind it. The specific character of the interviews might explain the considerably more frequent use of cause-reason clauses [2.1.4], [2.1.5], [2.1.6] in interviews when compared with fiction.

[2.1.4] I don't worry about that, *because I think that the Democratic Party has stayed pretty grounded in fact and reality.* [A-IW]

[2.1.5] I'm probably more confident, *because I don't have to worry about certain things.* [A-IW]

[2.1.6] They figured that, *since she was a female,* she should have the more substantial building to live in. [A-FC]

The third most common semantic category of adverbial clauses in the corpus is condition. There are 137 instances of conditional clauses, which represents 15.0% of all identified adverbial clauses. The incidence of conditional clauses is almost as frequent as that of cause-reason clauses with only 0.6% difference. The relatively frequent incidence of conditional clauses in the text types with rather less formal language also indicates what we often use such language for. It demonstrates

that in interviews and fiction, language users often state both real and unreal conditions, possibly to speculate about the past or contemplate what they would do in certain situations in the future. The position of condition as the third most common semantic category of adverbial clauses might thus be considered correlating with the potential use and character of less formal language in the text types.

The comparison of the text types reveals that the distribution of conditional clauses is relatively equal, with only 17 more instances in the interviews. As with cause-reason clauses, this might be affected by the specific character of the interviews. The questions in the interviews are prepared beforehand and they stimulate the interviewee to speculate what would have happened in the past or what would happen in the future under certain circumstances. There might not be as much stimulation for the use of conditional clauses in the fiction texts, hence the slight dominance of conditional clauses [2.1.7], [2.1.8], [2.1.9] in the interviews.

[2.1.7] *If I were Pauletta*, I'd get sick of me! [A-IW]

[2.1.8] *If each partner wants the other to realize his or her potential*, the relationship will probably be okay. [A-IW]

[2.1.9] *If she had reconsidered*, everything in his life thereafter would have changed. [A-FC]

The rest of the semantic categories are represented only with moderate or low frequency. The categories represented with moderate frequency include comparison (97 instances), manner (42 instances), and concession (38 instances). The categories that adverbial clauses represent with relatively low frequency are result, place, purpose, and contrast.

Table 2 also shows the distribution of the total number of adverbial clauses across the text types. The comparison of the text types reveals that the interviews contain 455 instances (49.7%) and the fiction texts contain 460 instances (50.3%) of adverbial clauses. All adverbial clauses in the corpus are almost equally distributed between the two text types, with only 0.6% dominance of fiction. The text types contain language of similar formality level. The main difference between them is that each text type contains language produced in different medium of language production. The data show that the different medium of production does not affect the incidence of adverbial clauses in a considerable way.

The findings of the present study based on a small-size corpus were compared with the findings of the large-scale corpora-based research of Biber et al. (1999). Biber et al. (1999, p. 765) comment upon their corpus findings by stating that adverbial clauses “are most common in fiction and least common in news and academic prose. Conversation falls between the two extremes.” In the present study, adverbial clauses slightly prevail in the fiction texts, very closely followed by the conversation-interviews. The comparison thus reveals that both studies present corresponding findings in terms of the distribution of adverbial clauses across the text types.

2.2 *The most common subordinators in adverbial clauses in the corpus*

The analysis also involved the investigation of the subordinators that introduce adverbial clauses. Given the wide range of semantic categories and the variety of the subordinators that can introduce adverbial clauses of each category, the whole list of subordinators is very long. The paper presents the most common subordinators that introduce the adverbial clauses of the most frequently represented semantic categories. These subordinators introduce the majority of adverbial clauses in the corpus.

The most commonly occurring adverbial clauses are those of time (416 instances), cause-reason (143 instances), and condition (137 instances). Concerning time clauses, these are mostly introduced by *when* with 123 instances in the interviews and 104 instances in the fiction texts. However, an interesting contrast between the text types appears if we look at the second most common subordinator in time clauses, namely the subordinator *as*. While in the interviews *as* is used only 4 times to introduce a time clause, in fiction it is used as many as 55 times. The fiction texts exhibit much more frequent incidence of *as* in time clauses. It is thus much more common to use the subordinator *as* [2.2.1], [2.2.2] to introduce time clauses in the written text type. This is the most striking contrast between the text types in terms of the subordinators. Regarding cause-reason clauses, most of them are introduced by the subordinator *because* [2.2.3], [2.2.4] in both text types, with 112 instances in the interviews and 19 instances in the fiction texts. Although the gap in the incidence is apparent, it is the result of the difference between the text types in the total number of cause-reason clauses. The third most common semantic category is condition and both text types mostly contain conditional clauses introduced by *if* [2.2.5], [2.2.6] with 64 instances in the interviews and 51 instances in the fiction texts. In addition to the aforementioned subordinators, the adverbial clauses in the corpus are introduced by a wide variety of other subordinators (more than 20), including *although*, *since*, *as though*, *unless*, *until*, or *while*.

- [2.2.1] *As you get older*, you figure out some things you're good at and some things you're not. [A-IW]
- [2.2.2] Then it disappeared behind him *as his other foot strode out*. [A-FC]
- [2.2.3] One crap album is fine, *because you can pull back and try again*. [A-IW]
- [2.2.4] He had the loosest of grips on the tractor's steering wheel, *because he could see the road all the way to his house ...* [A-FC]
- [2.2.5] *If you're a good showman*, you're a master of the trick. [A-IW]
- [2.2.6] 'Maybe whatever it is only stops them *if they're coming from the south*.' [A-FC]

Conclusion

The present paper describes the characteristics of adverbial clauses through the analysis of their use in two text types, namely interviews and fiction. The text types contain language produced in different media of production, but of the same less formal character. Adverbial clauses are

characterized regarding three aspects, specifically the frequency of incidence, the distribution of semantic categories and the subordinators that introduce the clauses. These quantitative data are also interpreted as the indicators of the character of less formal language in the text types.

Regarding the incidence of adverbial clauses, there are 915 adverbial clauses in the corpus, which accounts for 35.73% of all identified subclauses. The comparison of the text types shows only insignificant difference in the incidence, which means that the medium of production does not influence the use of adverbial clauses. The overall figures demonstrate that adverbial clauses are used in interviews and fiction with considerable frequency. Although grammatically optional, adverbial clauses are often necessary for the specification of the meaning. The considerable incidence of adverbial clauses suggests that the use of less formal language often requires meaning specification for the achievement of successful communication. The distribution of the semantic categories of adverbial clauses shows which types of semantic meaning are specified most frequently in less formal language.

The semantic categories of adverbial clauses are interpreted as an index of the content that language users most frequently express using less formal language. The analyzed texts contain adverbial clauses of a wide range of semantic categories. The most common ones are time clauses with 416 instances, which accounts for 45.5% of all adverbial clauses in the corpus. The semantic category of time thus exhibits a strong dominance over the other semantic categories. On less formal occasions, language users most frequently specify the content of the sentence in terms of time. This finding suggests that less formal language is often used for the recounting of the events that happened or are going to happen at a specific time. It could represent reminiscing about the past or exchanging of future plans.

The second most common semantic category of adverbial clauses is cause-reason with 143 instances, which accounts for 15.6% of all adverbial clauses. The data show that on less formal occasions, language users often use adverbial clauses also to express causality. This kind of meaning specification might relate to expressing opinions, attitudes, or explaining one's actions. The analysis of semantic categories suggests that less formal language is also often used for the exchange of opinions and attitudes towards certain things or justification of actions.

The third most common semantic category of adverbial clauses in the corpus is condition. There are 137 instances of conditional clauses, which accounts for 15.0% of all identified adverbial clauses. The relatively frequent incidence of conditional clauses reveals that in interviews and fiction, language users often state both real and unreal conditions. It might indicate that less formal language is also often used for speculating about the past or contemplating what the language users would do under certain circumstances in the future.

Concerning the subordinators, time clauses are mostly introduced by *when* with 123 instances in the interviews and 104 instances in the fiction texts. The fiction texts are specific for considerably more frequent employment of the subordinator *as* in time clauses. Regarding cause-reason clauses, the subordinator *because* prevails in both text types, with 112 instances in the interviews and 19 instances in the fiction texts. Conditional clauses are most commonly introduced by *if* with 64 instances in the interviews and 51 instances in the fiction texts.

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