

Encoding information-structure through adverbial placement in written present-day English

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Since the fixation of English word order to SV(O) in Early Modern English, word-order variation can only be employed to a very limited extent to mark information structure in Present-Day English. The only flexible sentence constituent in unmarked declarative clauses is the adverbial – in particular linking adverbials such as *however* or *therefore* show great flexibility and can be found in initial (1), medial (2), and final position (3):

- (1) **However**, I don't believe [...]. (*RL_Giddens*)
- (2) The predicted rate of warming, **however**, is uncertain [...]. (*RL_Rees*)
- (3) We know a few things, **however**. (*RL_Gawande*)

My study focuses on such syntactic patterns, arguing that, in written language, where prosodic devices are not available, the positioning of linking adverbials in different medial positions provides a syntactic strategy used for signaling information structure, encoding contrastive topics and marking focus meanings (for first suggestions, see Greenbaum 1969 and, more recently, Lenker 2014). My corpus material is drawn from the academic-prose part of the *BNC* and the *COCA* and from the *Reith Lectures* of the *BBC*, since linking adverbials in medial position are almost exclusively attested in the register academic prose (Biber et al. 1999: 891).

In my talk, I present the results of a mainly qualitative investigation of distinct medial positions, analyzing topical elements with regard to their (non-)definiteness/anaphoricity. First results show that when contrastive adverbs are placed after the topical element, the topic is mostly realized by a more complex, definite noun phrase (cf. 2), which has enough contrastive material to function as a contrastive topic. In other medial positions, i.e. between auxiliary and verb, the topic is not contrastive and is frequently realized by an anaphoric (personal) pronoun, with the information focus in being on the right periphery of the sentence, which typically presents 'new information'. Based on the sound files of the *Reith Lectures*, several of these findings will then be discussed against their prosodic reflexes.

References: • Biber, D. et al. 1999. *Longman grammar of spoken and written English*. London: Longman.
• Greenbaum, S. 1969. *Studies in English adverbial usage*. London: Longman. • Lenker, U. 2014. Knitting and splitting information: Medial placement of linking adverbials in the history of English. In S. E. Pfenninger et al. (eds.), *Contact, variation, and change in the history of English*, 11–38. Amsterdam: Benjamins.