

Adverbial placement in English: some guidelines*

Every Slovene translator is aware of the word order differences between his/her own language and English; in this article I propose to look at some of the consequences of such differences for adverbial placement. The term adverbial is here used to denote adverbs and adverbial phrases which modify the verb or the whole clause/sentence. In semantic type they are comparable with *prislovna določila* as treated by J. Toporišič in his *Slovenska slovnica* (i.e. adverbials of place, time, manner, etc.).

Of all the English clause elements, adverbials have the most variety of position within the fairly fixed word order of subject – verb – object, and some adverbials are mobile enough to be capable of occupying more than one position. The following formula shows the three basic positions, the variants of medial position depending on the type of adverbial and the number of auxiliaries (**A** = adverbial, **S** = subject, (aux) = auxiliary (if present), **V** = main verb, **O** = object):

(subord. conjunction) – A-S-A (aux) A (aux) A (aux) A-V – (A) – O – A

initial *medial* *final*

(Note: Unlike the situation in Slovene, the adverbial position between V and O (here indicated by (A)) is normally avoided in English unless the object is lengthy and/or complex, as in »The atmosphere on Venus creates **on its surface** a pressure comparable to that exerted on a submarine 1000 m. below sea level.«)

Some examples to illustrate medial position in sentences with complex verb phrases:

- (1) I think that version of events **originally** must have been circulated quite widely to put people off the scent.

* Članek, ki je bil natisnjen v Mostovih št. 2/88, ponovno objavljamo in se avtorici opravičujemo za tiskarske napake pri prvi objavi (op. uredništva).

- (2) It should **never** have been left out all night.
- (3) Such evidence will have been **very carefully** examined by the police.
- And an example of a »mobile« adverbial:
- (4) **Sometimes** I † can't help giving him a piece of my mind. †
(The arrows indicate alternative positions.)

Characteristics of English adverbial positions

(a) *Initial position.* The adverbial functions as a *sentence modifier* and typically expresses a »setting« for the whole clause/sentence. This function can be appropriately realized by adverbials of time (those answering *when? how long?*), place (those answering *where? where from?*), means/instrument, viewpoint, etc:

(5) **All his life** he had lived on a farm, just like his father and grandfather before him.

(6) **Financially**, this new scheme seems set for success.

(b) *Final position.* Overall, this is the most common adverbial position in English.

(i) It is the normal position for adverbials which modify only the predicate (i.e. *predicate modifiers* as distinct from the sentence modifiers mentioned above). Typical predicate modifiers are those expressing goal or direction, manner, etc:

(7) He flung the stone **at the snarling dog.**
through the window.
with all his might.

Obligatory adverbials (i.e. those required after certain verbs to complete the sense of a sentence) are also predicate modifiers:

(8) He lived **in Canterbury.**
in the fifteenth century.

(9) They treated him **shamefully.**

(10) Sandra dresses **very elegantly.**

(11) He keeps his prize geraniums **in the greenhouse.**

(12) You'd better put the birthday cake **out of sight** for now.

Traditional grammarians found it difficult at times to distinguish between sentence and predicate modification but the following examples should help to clarify the difference:

(13) **For 3 years**, Susie lived in Paris.
sentence mod. predicate mod.

(14) **?In Paris**, Susie lived for 3 years.

The verb *live* obligatorily requires an adverbial of place and/or time, the former type being more closely bound to the verb (and thus occupying postverbal position). Hence the oddness of example (14), which would require the verb to mean something like 'experienced life to the full', 'really came alive compared with merely existing elsewhere'.

(15) Susie made a special point of reading Molière **in Paris.**

(*in Paris* modifies *reading Molière* – she read Molière in Paris and not in Birmingham or Berlin).

(16) **In Paris**, Susie made a special point of reading Molière.

Notice how the same adverbial (*in Paris*) can function as predicate modifier (15) or sentence modifier (16), depending on the intended meaning of the sentence.

(ii) It can be a neutral position for sentence modifiers. It is now seen that sentence modifiers can occupy either initial or final position:

(17) He had lived on a farm **all his life**, just like his father and grandfather before him. (cf. (5) above)

and choosing the more appropriate position may prove a tricky task for Slovene translators (but see Reasons for choosing final/initial position, pp. 43–44).

In contrast to the notion of »setting« (for initial adverbials), we may here introduce the notion

of »specification«, i.e. the adverbial specifies some necessary information, which is the main point of the communication – and in this case it must be final. Both sentence and predicate modifiers can function as specification:

- (18) He has lived in Iceland **since 1950**. (sentence mod. – specifies the answer to »Since when has he lived in Iceland?«)
- (19) She has gone **to her uncle's**. (predicate mod. – specifies the answer to »Where has she gone?«)
- (20) I went to bed **at 8 o'clock** last night. (predicate mod. – specifies the answer to »When did you go to bed last night?«)

If the nuclear tone falls on »eight«, the adverbial *at 8 o'clock* will represent specification, while the sentence modifier *last night* could be final or fronted to initial position (see pp. 43–44).

In clauses with two or more auxiliaries, sentence modifiers stand nearer the beginning of the verb phrase, while predicate (especially verb) modifiers precede the main verb: see examples (1) and (3) respectively.

Some adverbs show a difference in meaning according to the difference between initial and final position – and the difference between sentence and predicate modification:

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| (21) Clearly , John had written the report. | J. had written the report clearly . |
| (Očitno je napisal poročilo Janez. | J. je (zelo) jasno napisal poročilo.) |
| (22) Wisely , he nodded his head. | He nodded his head wisely . |
| (Bilo je (čisto) pametno, da je prikimal. | Modro je prikimal.) |
| (23) Naturally , I want you to behave. | I want you to behave naturally . |
| (Seveda želim, da se pametno obnašaš. | Želim, da se naravno obnašaš. |
| | da se obnašaš naravno.) |

(c) *Medial position*. This is mostly limited to adverbs and short (set) phrases, and is most common with certain semantic types, e.g. those expressing frequency and indefinite time (but not definite time – cf. *I **yesterday** went to the bank), degree, and manner in passive sentences (cf. *very carefully* in example (3)). The following examples from English texts written/translated by Slovenes show typical mistakes (i.e. an adverbial phrase, and of inappropriate semantic type, placed in medial position):

- (24) † Echocardiography has **in recent years** been documented as an effective examination in the diagnosis of organic heart diseases.
- (25) In the case of an AE phenomenon, the source is most frequently of infinitesimal size, so that † the displacement field can be **everywhere outside the source** represented † by the elastic response.

The sentences could be corrected by moving the adverbials to the positions indicated by the arrows.

In terms of the scope of modification medial position can accept both sentence and predicate modifiers. »Mobile« adverbials (see example (4)) are sentence modifiers.

Comparison with Slovene

Slovene word order is governed by the principle of *členitev po aktualnosti* (functional sentence perspective – for a fuller explanation see J. Toporišič, *Slovenska slovnica*, pp. 532–34), denoting the segmentation of individual parts of the sentence according to their communicative function. Explained most simply, a sentence in neutral word order is divided into two parts: *izhodišče* (departure point) and *jedro* (kernel). *Theme* and *rHEME* respectively are terms commonly used in English for these notions.

The choice of *jedro* is important for the development of the communication, while any clause element – including any kind of adverbial – can be selected as *izhodišče*. The distinction

between sentence and predicate modification, which, as seen above, affects the placement of adverbials in English, seems not to be significant in Slovene:

(26) **V Ljubljano** pride vlak ob 17.00.

The train arrives **in Ljubljana** at 17.00. (predicate modifier).

Cf. ***In Ljubljana** the train arrives at 17.00.

Slovene being a »free word order« language, there is no scheme of adverbial positions in Slovene grammar, but for practical purposes of comparison I will propose the simple framework of

(a) initial position – the first »slot« in the clause

(b) final position – the last »slot« in the clause

(c) medial position – occupying any »slot« between initial and final position.

An important difference between Slovene and English is that in the former, adverbials are placed finally only if they function as jedro/rheme (specification). Generally speaking, if an adverbial is final in a Slovene clause/sentence, the equivalent adverbial in the English translation will be final, too. So the main problem for translators is what to do with adverbials which are initial or medial in Slovene. Can the same positions be used in English or not? As we have already seen, initial position in English is typically reserved for sentence modifiers; predicate modifiers are exceptionally fronted to achieve special effects of parallelism, contrast or emphasis:

(27) **In Egypt** he lived and **in Egypt** he died. (cf. (8) and (13))

(28) Their's not to reason why

Their's but to do and die:

Into the valley of Death

Rode the six hundred ...

Stormed at with shot and shell

Boldly they rode and well,

Into the jaws of Death,

Into the mouth of Hell

Rode the six hundred. (Tennyson, 'The charge of the Light Brigade')

The biggest difference between the two languages, and the one we will now concentrate on, is to be found in medial position, which is rather restricted in English¹ but is widely used in Slovene (even if we limit it to the same concept of verb phrase related medial position as in English). Slovene medial position usefully »absorbs« any adverbial which does not function as rheme and is not selected as theme (theme position tending to be rather more distinctive than medial position). Firstly, however, medial position can correspond in the two languages under the conditions for English adverbials mentioned under (c) p. 41.

For example:

(29) Antraks je kužna bolezen, ki **včasih** napade pristaniške delavce.

Anthrax is an infection which **sometimes** affects dock workers.

(30) Crngrobske orgle so sicer **dolgo** pripisovali ljubljanskemu mojstru Tomažu Kreku.

The Crngrob organ was **long** ascribed to the Ljubljana master Tomaž Krek.

(The duration adverb *long* is restricted to medial position.)

When these conditions do not apply, the English adverbial equivalents of Slovene medial adverbials will need to be placed either initially or finally. What guidelines should influence the choice of position?

Reasons for choosing final position

(a) predicate modification. Note the further phenomenon of object related adverbials, i.e. they modify V + O:

- (31) Tako bi lahko trdili, da je tehnično najboljše izpeljana trasa ... tista trasa, ki se bo **najbolje in najbolj naravno** prilagodila terenu, ter bo zato tudi estetsko najboljša.
It can be argued that the best engineering line will be ... the one which fits the ground **most closely and naturally** and which is therefore aesthetically the most pleasing.
- (b) verb complementation. Although it is possible for the verb to be final in an English clause/sentence, there is a tendency to complement the verb by means of elements placed postverbally. Adverbials can suitably complement intransitive or passive verbs:
- (32) ... Ta spoznanja se **trenutno pri nas** nakazujejo, saj se **v zadnjih 8–10 letih** povečuje zanimanje mladih za študij agronomije in živinoreje.
... This realization can be seen **here at present**, for the interest among young people in studying agriculture and animal husbandry has increased **in the last 8–10 years**.
(Apart from the translation of medially placed Slovene adverbials, this English feature of verb complementation can be relevant, too, regarding the translation of short Slovene clauses of A–V–S pattern, as the corresponding English pattern is often S–V–A:
- (33) Prizadeta je kontrola za selektivno izvajanje gibov. Na eni strani se pojavljajo nepotrebne motorične aktivnosti, na drugi strani pa obstaja odsotnost potrebne aktivnosti. **V različnih kombinacijah** se pojavijo vzorčni mišični odgovori.
... Patterns of muscle responses appear **in different combinations**.)
- (c) sentence modification. As already mentioned, this is a neutral, commonly used position for sentence modifiers, especially when the alternative initial placement might inappropriately imply some contrast (see example (38) below):
- (34) Podatkov o vzporednih raziskavah bovinih in humanih izolatov Str. agal. je **v literaturi** zelo malo.
There are very few data on parallel investigations of bovine and human isolates of Str. agal. **in the literature**.
- (d) the elimination principle. Initial position, which might come into consideration, is already occupied:
- (35) Kot edini administrator, ki je imel v novi upravi sploh kaj izkušenj, je Buffarini Guidi **že od začetka** opozarjal na posledice tega položaja.
As the only administrator of any experience in the new administration, B.G. pressed the consequences of this situation **from the beginning**.
(Cf. **From the beginning**, B.G. pressed the consequences of this situation.)

Reasons for choosing initial position

(a) it provides a setting, especially in longer clauses that already have postverbal complementation (see (b) below). Such placement is also relevant when the adverbial modifies more than one clause:

- (36) Čeprav smo **vse do današnjih dni** ta spoznanja proučevali, razvijali in jih uvajali v prakso, še ne moremo trditi, da ...

Although **right up to the present day** we have examined and developed this realization, and put it into practice, we still cannot claim to ...

An anaphoric adverbial (i.e. referring to something in the preceding text) can well be initial:

- (37) **In such/these cases** echocardiography is the most useful diagnostic method.

Depending on the context, however, an adverbial transposed to initial position may imply some contrast. »**Last night** I went to bed at 8 o'clock« (as a variant of example (20)) could appropriately serve to introduce some anecdote (Last night ... at 8 o'clock, and I was just dropping off to sleep when suddenly ...) or could appropriately indicate a contrast with other nights (Normally I go to bed rather late but **last night** ...). But in the following example:

(38) To problemsko področje je **pri nas** še premalo proučeno.

This area is still too little studied **in Slovenia**.

the adverbial if fronted (**In Slovenia** this area is still too little studied) might overemphasize the sense of contrast, implying Slovenia is sadly different in this respect from other countries.

(b) the principle of »weight distribution«, which does not appear to be relevant to Slovene. In English, the undesirable accumulation of too many elements at the end of the clause can be avoided by fronting a sentence modifier:

(39) 23-letni pacient je bil **10. 2. 1986** sprejet v tukajšnjo ustanovo na kompleksno rehabilitacijo stanja po poškodbi torakalne hrbtenice:

On **10. 2. 1986** the 23-year-old patient was admitted to this institute for complex rehabilitation following injury to the thoracic area of the spine.

(c) the avoidance of wrong modification or possible ambiguity. In example (39) the English adverbial of time should not be placed finally since it refers to the patient's admission and not to the occasion of his injury.

¹ The use of medial position is rather restricted for English adverbials of the semantic types dealt with here, though not necessarily for those which are roughly equivalent in meaning to Slovene particles (*členki*), as treated by J. Toporišč (Slovenska slovnica, pp. 384-85).