

The grammar and semantics of disjuncts in World Englishes

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Abstract

Adverbs have become the ragbag in grammar in which all uncategorized items are relegated. Over the years, there have been several studies (e.g., Biber et al., 1999; Halliday, 1994; Hasselgard, 2010; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Quirk et al., 1985; Sinclair, 1990) that looked into the syntactic and semantic functions of adverbs. This paper focuses on what Quirk et al. (1985) call ‘disjuncts’ (which refer to the overt expression of an author's or speaker's attitudes, feelings, judgments, or commitment concerning the message. There are various terminologies in literature that have emerged: ‘stance adverbs’, ‘conjunctive adjuncts’, ‘evaluative adjuncts’, ‘sentence adverbs’, to name a few. The common denominator of all these adverbs is that, syntactically, they occupy the most peripheral position in the clause and that, semantically, they distinguish how the propositional content of the clause relates to the context.

Using 12 matching corpora of the International Corpus of English (ICE), that is, 5 from the Inner Circle (Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand) and 7 from the Outer Circle (East Africa, Hong Kong, India, Jamaica, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Singapore), the present study aims at presenting the findings on the frequency and distribution of disjuncts across world Englishes.

This study supports the disagreement on the labelling of disjuncts as presented in literature in terms of their functions by showing evidence of such claims. Further, it argues that there exist several semantic functions apart from what are presented in literature and that - these functions are culture-specific.