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Journal-Name: Anglia

Article-DOI: [10.1515/ang-2024-0031](https://doi.org/10.1515/ang-2024-0031)

Article-Title: Carolin Hartnan. 2022. Medially-Placed Linking Adverbials in Written Academic English: Usage Patterns and Functions. Munich Studies in English 49. Berlin: Lang, 340 pp., 41 figures, 51 tables, €83.20.

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Book Review

Carolyn Harthan. 2022. *Medially-Placed Linking Adverbials in Written Academic English: Usage Patterns and Functions*. Munich Studies in English 49. Berlin: Lang, 340 pp., 41 figures, 51 tables, €83.20.

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<https://doi.org/10.1515/ang-2024-0031>

Starting from the observation that adverbials are the only mobile constituents in unmarked declarative English sentences, Harthan's study investigates the placement patterns of a selection of linking adverbials (e.g. *however*, *therefore*, *moreover*) in three corpora of academic language. The rationale behind the study is that the mobility of adverbials is one of the few resources that Present-Day English has at its disposal to explicitly signal information structure. As such, adverbial placement is said to often compensate for an otherwise rigid SV(X) word order. Drawing on a combination of quantitative and qualitative corpus methods, Harthan aims to test whether linking adverbials used medially tend to be associated with specific discourse effects, and whether medial linking adverbials (henceforth: LA) perform similar focusing functions to devices such as focusing adverbs (e.g. *only*, *mainly*) or clefting.

Building on previous research in the field (e.g. Altenberg 2006; Lenker 2010, 2014; Dupont 2018), Harthan's study offers valuable new insights into the mechanisms underlying LA placement through the consideration of a range of relevant factors of influence (e.g. formal realization of the subject, polarity of the matrix clause, presence and type of auxiliaries in the matrix clause) and thorough qualitative analyses supported by a wealth of authentic examples. The study clearly demonstrates the significance of choices related to LA placement, while grammars and style guides offer little or no information on the functional differences between the various possible slots. The analysis of LA is complemented with that of other syntactically flexible constituents (e.g. markers of modality such as *I think*, *it seems*; reporting clauses like *he said*), and the author even includes prosodic analyses of some examples, which makes for a rather comprehensive account of the phenomena at hand.

The book consists of fourteen chapters. After a general introduction stating the object and the aims of the book, Harthan addresses the theoretical part of the study, made up of two chapters. Chapter 2 is devoted to the description of adverbials. It starts with an overview of the main features and classifications of adverbials, in-

cluding a description of the various positions that adverbials may occupy in the sentence. Chapter 2 then focuses more specifically on the category of LAs, stating how they differ from other types of adverbials, going over some of the main semantic classifications of LAs, and tackling issues such as their positional and register preferences. While it covers many relevant aspects of LAs, this second part of Chapter 2 tends to stick to a few, very general reference grammars of English. For example, the section on the semantics of LAs is based solely on Biber et al. (1999) and Quirk et al. (1985), which makes the issue sound almost straightforward, although the number and types of meanings expressed by LAs, as well as the ways to classify them, has been at the core of numerous publications and conferences (e.g. Mann and Thompson 1988; Sanders et al. 1992; Prasad et al. 2019 for seminal studies on the topic; see also Zufferey and Degand 2024 for a recent overview). A slightly more extensive account would have been welcome in a study having LAs as its main research construct.

Chapter 3 is devoted to information structure – a concept that is to play a central role in the following corpus analysis – and its interaction with adverbial placement. The first part of the chapter undertakes to define information structure, along with a series of associated terms such as topic, comment, frame-setting, focus or givenness. Harthan goes on to present the typical information-structural configuration of Present-Day English, where a strong correlation exists between the subject, on the one hand, and topic and given information, on the other. She goes over a range of devices that allow English users to highlight parts of the message, i.e. focusing adverbs and marked syntactic constructions such as inversion, extraposition, dislocation or clefting. Harthan offers a well-documented and theoretically-grounded account of information structure, which makes clear the diversity of approaches to the concepts under discussion. In the second part of Chapter 3, Harthan takes stock of previous research on the placement of circumstance, stance and linking adverbials, and explains how this phenomenon has often been explained with reference to information structure, with different adverbial positions often being associated with specific information packaging and focusing strategies. Harthan's objective is to expand on previous findings on LA placement to get a more precise understanding of the discourse effects associated with the range of medial positions.

The data and methodology are presented in Chapter 4. The study is based on three corpora of “conceptually written” academic English, drawn respectively from (i) the Reith lectures of the BBC (RL), made up of series of “conceptually written but medially oral” (94) radio lectures (c. 1.5 million words); (ii) the academic prose subpart of the British National Corpus (BNC; c. 16 million words); and (iii) the academic subpart of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA; c. 112 million words). The selection of LAs extracted from the corpus is based mostly on Quirk et

al. (1985) and supplemented with a few other inventories from the literature. After pruning the list along a range of criteria (e.g. exclusion of the LAs supposedly fixed in a single position), Harthan decides to focus her attention on the following 12 LAs: *however, by contrast, in contrast, on the contrary, on the other hand, nevertheless, therefore, thus, in other words, in short, furthermore, moreover*. For each adverbial, Harthan works on randomised samples including the same number of instances in the BNC and the COCA corpora as she has found in the smaller RL corpus. Each LA instance in the dataset is coded along the following variables: (i) position – following a classification that is largely inspired by Greenbaum (1969) and distinguishes between 13 slots: initial position, nine medial positions, pre-end, final and ‘other’ positions; (ii) formal realization of the subject; (iii) presence of a negation in the matrix clause; (iv) number and type of auxiliaries in the matrix clause; and (v) special syntactic structure (e.g. cleft, dislocation). In a more qualitative stage, Harthan also codes her data for information structure, indicating (i) information status (given, accessible, new); (ii) topic (aboutness or frame-setting); and (iii) focus (new-information focus or contrastive focus). In this part, Harthan rightly draws attention to the difficulty of applying such concepts, which have mainly been discussed in purely theoretical terms, to large amounts of authentic data. Finally, in the RL corpus, her analysis of placement is complemented with that of prosody.

Chapter 5 provides a succinct discussion of the frequency of each position per LA. The corpora are used as aggregate data to confirm what had been shown in previous studies, i.e. (i) initial appears to be the most common position for LAs overall; (ii) medial position is also frequent for some LAs (including highly frequent *however* and *therefore*), while end and pre-end positions are rare; and (iii) different LAs display different placement preferences and degrees of mobility.

Detailed discussions of LA placement are provided in Chapters 6 to 11, where some adverbials (*however, nevertheless*) are discussed independently, while others are grouped on the grounds of (perceived) semantic and/or functional similarities (e.g. *by contrast, in contrast, on the contrary, on the other hand; thus, therefore*). Each chapter follows roughly the same structure, with a semantic description of the LAs under study, followed by an overview of their positional distribution in each corpus. Harthan then looks at the typical realizations of the subject constituent for each LA with a view to uncovering possible correlations with LA placement. Such an assumption is at least partly confirmed by the data. For example, she finds that when LAs expressing contrast are placed right after the subject (Harthan’s positions M2–M3), that subject is almost never realised as a personal pronoun. She also shows that different LA categories call for different subject realizations. For instance, while the subject is almost never realised as a personal pronoun with LA of contrast in M2–M3, such subject realizations are rather frequent with *therefore* and *thus* in this position. Lexical variation also emerges as a significant factor: within the cate-

gory of contrastive LAs, *nevertheless* stands out by displaying a comparatively high proportion of personal pronouns in M2–M3 (12.5 %, against 0 to 2 % for other LAs of contrast). Here and at other points of the analysis, the author tends to make perhaps too much of patterns that represent only few instances in the data (e.g. only 3 instances of *nevertheless* in the previous example), and never verifies the significance of observed differences by means of inferential statistics. It is also a little unclear at times how the author deals with the three corpora included in the study. While in some discussions, they are viewed as aggregate data, they are compared to each other in other parts of the analysis. Although this is not necessarily a problem in itself, it might have been useful to be more explicit about such issues. For all that, Harthan's analyses provide important new insights into the use of LAs, pinpointing the influence of factors that have seldom been considered in previous research on LA placement. Her results reveal truly interesting patterns and certainly raise many relevant questions for further research.

Harthan then provides very detailed qualitative descriptions of the functions of LAs in the different medial positions, supported with numerous illuminating examples. These discussions undoubtedly constitute the main asset of Harthan's study, in that they both deepen and qualify the findings presented in previous, smaller-scale studies on the same topic. She resorts to a wide array of the information-structural concepts discussed in the theoretical part of the book (e.g. focus, frame-setting, topic shift/continuity, comment) to convincingly demonstrate how LAs used medially tend to take on further functions than simply expressing a logical relationship – such as contrast or addition – between two segments (e.g. emphasise a shift or continuity in topic, draw attention to a previously mentioned topic to draw a logical conclusion, focus on the new information in the message, highlight an auxiliary or a negation). Each medial position is shown to be associated with specific discourse effects. In addition, Harthan shows how lexis seems to be at play as well, with some LAs (e.g. *therefore*, *however*) having a stronger focusing potential than others (e.g. *thus*, *nevertheless*) in medial positions. Such analyses, which lie at the interface between syntax and discourse, are innovative and truly fill a gap in research, where many grammars and writing guides merely draw attention to the potential of LAs for syntactic mobility, without making clear the implications of such choices. What is particularly praiseworthy is the thoroughness of Harthan's descriptions: looking at a wide range of parameters, she provides a highly detailed account of the rhetorical potential of LA placement and takes care to explore the variety of effects associated with each of the slots under discussion. While doing this, she successfully answers her main research question: medial placement of LAs does indeed serve focusing functions.

In Chapter 12, Harthan attempts to identify what factors may account for the choice between initial or medial positions for LAs. She mentions nativeness, author

preferences, the influence of style guides and discipline conventions. The contribution of this chapter is a little unclear, as with the exception of discipline, most discussions remain speculative, nor is it evident why the author chooses to restrict her discussion to either the RL or the COCA for certain aspects. However, the factors mentioned are likely influential and this chapter surely opens avenues for future studies.

Finally, Chapter 13 investigates a set of medially-placed epistemic stance adverbials, to uncover possible similarities with the category of LAs. After providing a definition of epistemic modality, Harthan looks into the medial instances of (i) epistemic adverbs (*perhaps, of course, probably, certainly*); (ii) comment clauses *I think, I believe, it seems*; and (iii) reporting clauses (e.g. *he said*). She observes that these structures have similar effects to those of linking adverbials, such as highlighting a topic shift, focusing on new information or bringing a previously mentioned topic back into focus.

As a conclusion, Harthan argues that in Present-Day English, LAs – and probably also epistemic stance adverbials – used medially may be used as a focusing device akin to clefting or focusing adverbs, to compensate for a rigid word order. Based on the regularity of the patterns observed in her data, Harthan makes the rather strong hypothesis of an ongoing grammaticalization of linking adverbials in medial positions, which would be in the process of becoming a fixed syntactic device – as opposed to an open choice – signalling information structure.

In summary, Harthan makes a significant contribution to her field of research by providing very thorough descriptions of the implications of using linking adverbials medially. The book conclusively demonstrates that LA placement – as well as placement choices related to a selection of stance markers – can be regarded as a focusing strategy in Present-Day English, which compensates for the syntactic fixedness of most other sentence constituents. The value of the book lies primarily in its comprehensive qualitative discussions, supported with ample exemplification. Harthan's study is certainly an invaluable resource for anyone interested in linking adverbials, English syntax and information structure.

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