

The "-Ly Manner Adverb Opposability Theorem"

Sam Clymer

clymersam@gmail.com | sec288@cornell.edu

Abstract

This paper introduces the "-Ly Manner Adverb Opposability Theorem," which states that any "-ly" adverb describing the manner in which an action is performed must possess a definable scalar opposite to carry semantic meaning. A thorough review of English manner adverbs reveals strict adherence to this rule with only one exception: the consciously/nonconsciously pair. This paper reviews the theorem put forth and the edge case.

1. Introduction

This paper proposes a simple, formal test - the -Ly Manner Adverb Opposability Theorem - to evaluate whether manner adverbs meaningfully specify how an action is performed.

2. The "-Ly Manner Adverb Opposability Theorem"

An "-ly" adverb that describes the manner of an action must have a clear, definable opposite. If no opposite exists, the adverb does not differentiate a mode of action and becomes a rhetorically empty addition.

Examples

- - Quickly vs. Slowly -> valid, informative contrast
- - Carefully vs. Carelessly -> valid, informative contrast
- - Awkwardly vs. Gracefully -> valid, informative contrast

Special Case: Time-Based "-Ly" Adverbs

Adverbs like "hourly," "daily," "monthly," "yearly," "regularly," "intermittently" are not manner adverbs but time-frequency markers. These terms specify when an action occurs, not how it is performed. As such they are exempt from the -Ly Manner Adverb Opposability Theorem

Special Case: Consciously and Nonconsciously

Merriam-Webster defines Nonconscious as a perfect synonym to Unconscious. This is a misunderstanding. Freud's conception of the unconscious is a phenomena associated with living people/creatures. The correct definition of nonconscious is a state associated with something that is not alive; for example, a rock could be considered nonconscious.

"Consciously" and "Nonconsciously" present an edge case to the -Ly Manner Adverb Opposability Theorem because these words are not true opposites of each other. While a rock contrasts with a human in manner, it is not a true opposite of a human.

Franz Brentano previously argued against the terms "subconscious" and "unconscious" as incoherent understandings of the mind. To support Brentano, I would argue that "conscious" is the only word to describe the state of a human. Self-reporting your conscious state is impossible because the act of reporting itself constitutes a new conscious event that can not be reported itself. The inability to self-report lends itself to creating new words like "subconscious" and "unconscious" to explain what we can't. It is simpler to accept that self-reporting is not possible, while maintaining that consciousness is the only state of a human.

I am proposing that "consciously" and "nonconsciously" be categorized not as manner adverbs but as a new form of adverb called a "State Adverb." These words do not describe the manner in which an action is performed, but rather the state in which the person or object acts/is acted upon. In "the train moved quickly," "quickly" says something about how the train moved. In "my mother consciously ate breakfast," "consciously" says something about how my mother ate as well as saying something about her absolute state.

An action can never be considered to be both conscious and nonconscious, differing from all the other -ly adverbial pairs. A train can move quickly or slowly, but a human cannot do something consciously and nonconsciously.

Categorizing these words as state adverbs as opposed to manner adverbs is a novel understanding, and fits nicely under the -Ly Manner Adverb Opposability Theorem as exceptions - similar to time-based adverbs. It is proposed that -ly state adverbs do not require a definable opposite to carry semantic meaning.

3. Conclusion

The -Ly Manner Adverb Opposability Theorem is a strict linguistic rule that English follows. This understanding may better inform large language models on the explicit structure that English follows. The new categorization of consciously/nonconsciously as state adverbs differs from current knowledge. These new rules-based analyses of English should better inform us and large language models on categories of words and their purpose.

References

- Brentano, F. (1874). Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint