

# Sentence-final adverbials\*

## Recurrent types and usage

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### 1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the analysis and interpretation of adverbials taking up sentence-final position in spoken American English, more specifically on disjuncts realized by single adverb phrases, as shown in examples (1) and (2) below<sup>1</sup>:

- (1) I'm sorry to hear that, *naturally*. <1994 (19940612)>
- (2) He would have killed me and her right there, *probably*. <2008 (080919)>

The study of adverbs as regards their position has been recurrently touched upon in the literature by scholars from different persuasions (e.g. Baltin 2007; Austin *et al.* 2004; Ernst 2002; Kim 2000; Jakobson 1980). In this introduction I will summarise the main points raised both by reference grammars and specialized research, focusing, in so doing, on end-positioning in particular. It should be first noted that in this paper I will follow the morphosyntactic distinction commonly established between “adverb”, defined as an element functioning at phrase level, and “adverbial”, referring to a phrasal element functioning at sentence level (Hasselgård, 2010). A further note on terminology: I will retain the denomination “disjuncts”, originally posed by Greenbaum (1969) and later endorsed by Quirk *et al.* (1985), to refer to wide-scope adverbials or sentence modifiers of the type of *naturally* and *probably* in (1) and (2) above.

Terminology and notational conventions for characterizing adverbial positions in the sentence vary from one author to another. The grammar of Quirk *et al.* (1985:490) offers one of the earliest and most fine-grained classifications of adverbial placement by distinguishing three basic positions, namely “initial”, “medial” and “end”, as well as four variants of the latter two (“initial medial”, “medial medial”, “end medial” and “initial end”). The examples that they use to illustrate these are well-known<sup>2</sup>:

- (3) *By then* the book must have been placed on the shelf. (I)  
The book *by then* must have been placed on the shelf. (iM)  
The book must *by then* have been placed on the shelf. (M)  
The book must have *by then* been placed on the shelf. (mM)  
The book must have been *by then* placed on the shelf. (eM)  
The book must have been placed *by then* on the shelf. (iE)

The book must have been placed on the shelf *by then*. (E)  
(Quirk *et al.* 1985:490)

These authors define “end” as the part in the sentence following all obligatory elements. They make a generalization that most semantic types of adverbials can appear in this position, with the exception of modality, and that disjuncts can appear almost anywhere in the sentence, although they most normally do so initially. Huddleston and Pullum (2002:575) maintain the configuration posed in (3), while introducing a shift in terminology. They postulate three positions that they call “front”, “central” and “end”. According to these authors, “end” is reserved for elements after the verb, and some or all of its dependents. In the same vein, finally, Biber *et al.* (1999:772) coincide with the division between the three basic aforementioned positions and, in describing the positional potential of adverbials, their focus is on the frequency analysis of the most recurrent type of adverbials in each of them. They conclude that initial is the most common position for linking adverbials (e.g. *nevertheless*), mid position is where adverbials expressing stance normally appear (e.g. *of course*) and final position is mainly the place for circumstance adverbials (e.g. *for a week*). Additionally, they note that final position is, in comparative terms, less commonly favoured in the case of linking and stance adverbials, although they refer examples that override this tendency, such as the comment clause in (4) and the linking word in (5) below:

- (4) Most of the others didn't, *I guess*. (Biber *et al.* 1999:873)
- (5) Well you didn't miss much *anyway*. (Biber *et al.* 1999:892)

In what follows, I will adhere to the classification among three major positions in the sentence, with the further specification, nevertheless, that this does not only apply to cases where the adverbial is integrated in the structure of the sentence, but also includes cases where the adverbial is either prosodically or orthographically detached from it. I will base this analysis on the assumption that elements peripheral to the contents of the proposition still form a core part of the message and, as a result, depend syntactically and pragmatically on it.

Parallel to the study of the distribution potential of adverbials, another related area of adverbial analysis has revolved around the factors either conditioning or affecting each position that these units can occupy. Research centred specifically on adverbials has rightly pointed out that there are three main factors governing end positioning. Firstly, adverbials' overall most frequent place at the end of the sentence relates to the fact that this is the common place for circumstantials, which are in turn the commonest type of adverbials (e.g. Biber *et al.* 1999:772; Breivik and Swan 1994:12). In this regard, it has been noted that this tendency to take up final position responds to the iconic principle by virtue of which the speaker uses language structure to depict the normal evolvment of events in a given context (Ji 2010)<sup>3</sup>. According to this principle, adverbials frequently appear in end position because they follow verbs, which are the units that adverbs normally modify. Secondly, language tends to relegate complex elements to end position, where they are normally processed more easily. This adaptation process of grammar to effective communication has been standardly called the “end-weight principle” (e.g. Costa 2004; Bache and Davidsen-Nielsen 1997; Quirk *et al.* 1985:323). Thirdly, in non-marked

language, end position is additionally reserved for elements, such as adjuncts, representing new or relevant information, and normally receiving prosodic prominence. By contrast, disjuncts are more likely to appear initially developing a thematic function, with the sentence they are attached to making up the comment (Buysschaert 1990:45; see also Nevalainen 1987).

This chapter explores which discourse factors contribute to the appearance of disjuncts in final position. I will show that, regardless of the aforementioned fair degree of movability of these units, speakers use the final position to convey specific personal attitudes, which are not so markedly supported in other positions. Furthermore, I will argue that not only do attested grammatical variables of the type mentioned above constrain the placement of these adverbs but also that pragmatics represents a decisive factor in the selection of final position.

## 2. Data and method

This chapter relies on the study of a sample dataset drawn from the spoken component of the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA). This reference corpus contains 410 million words, out of which 85 million belong to the spoken mode, mainly broadcasted and conversational language, while the rest corresponds to the written mode in some of its most representative genres, such as academic writing, in-press journalistic language and fictional literature.

In order to collect a pertinent sample of sentence-final adverbials, I followed a heuristic method. Using the interface to COCA and relying on the morphological tags in the corpus, I ran a random query to include any *-ly* adverb preceded by a weak pause (a comma) and followed by a strong pause (a full stop). This rule of thumb allowed not only to restrict the results to end-sentence adverbials, but also to minimize the possibilities of retrieving instances of pure-manner adverbs, which normally appear in final position. The resulting sample consisted of a list of 100 adverbs amounting to more than 10,000 examples. For the purpose of this study, this sample was further restricted to include, specifically, two of the most outstanding semantic groups of final adverbials, which were found to be made up by disjuncts showing certainty and disjuncts of uncertainty. Therefore, the final sample for the analysis contained 22 final disjuncts totalling 200 examples (100 out of each of the two semantic groups). Table 1 contains a summary of the units analysed:

Table 1. Elements appearing in final position in the COCA

<i>Certainty</i>	<i>Occurrence</i>	<i>Uncertainty</i>	<i>Occurrence</i>
Absolutely	2,201 (25.26)	Probably	178 (2.04)
Exactly	1,127 (12.94)	Apparently	148 (1.70)
Obviously	593 (6.81)	Hopefully	60 (0.69)
Definitely	520 (5.97)	Possibly	37 (0.42)
Certainly	289 (3.32)	Initially	17 (0.20)
Clearly	71 (0.81)	Potentially	17 (0.20)
Totally	43 (0.49)	Supposedly	17 (0.20)
Naturally	31 (0.36)	Luckily	13 (0.15)
Completely	21 (0.24)	Presumably	12 (0.14)

Surely	16 (0.18)		
Evidently	14 (0.16)		
Easily	14 (0.16)		
Effectively	4 (0.05)		

Note: The number in parentheses indicates figures per million words

### 3. Final disjuncts across modes and genres

This section presents an overview of the type of disjuncts found in end position in the sample and an account of their frequencies. Previous work has argued that final disjuncts mostly take place in spoken language (e.g. Biber *et al.*, 1999). The overall distribution of *-ly* final disjuncts in the COCA confirms this tendency, with a majority of cases belonging to this language mode, and the remainder of the uses clustering around the fiction, academic, magazine and newspaper written genres, respectively. Table 2 below shows the distribution as it appears in the corpus:

Table 2. Occurrences of final disjuncts in the COCA

<i>-ly</i> items in sentence end position			
	Freq	Freq pmw.	Total section
Spoken	10,602 (45.3%)	121.70	~ 87 m.
Fiction	6,618 (28.3%)	80.98	~ 82 m.
Academic	2,477 (10.6%)	29.87	~ 83 m.
Magazine	2,018 (8.6%)	23.15	~ 87 m.
Newspaper	1,704 (7.2%)	20.40	~ 83 m.

Note: "pmw." stands for "per million words" and "m" stands for "millions"

The normalized counts in each of the sections allow to conclude that the frequency of final disjuncts in the spoken genre is more than twice the amount of the same units in the fiction genre, the written section that sums the greater percentage of these units. This quantitative profile proves useful to show that the usage of these units must be explained mostly against the background of spoken and conversational discourse strategies.

#### 4. Pragmatic and conversational effects

In broad terms, final position gains special importance when compared to initial and medial, insofar as only the former allows the speaker to include last-minute information to discourse, usually short sentences or phrases containing either content-related assessments or personal comments as to the style and/or the truth of the proposition. The readings of sentence-end adverbs are not necessarily univocal, however, with some adverbs conveying multifarious nuances of meaning depending on the context. This section delves into a more qualitative and interpretative analysis of modal disjuncts by trying to answer the question of why these appear rightmost in the utterance and what their associated pragmatic effects are.

##### 4.1 Certainty

One of the main discursive functions of certainty disjuncts appearing at end position consists in seeking agreement with the interlocutor by establishing informative and emotional involvement with him/her. The sample corpus studied contains five markedly agreeing words among the first ten most frequent words, namely *absolutely*, *exactly*, *obviously*, *definitely* and *certainly*, and another additional eight agreeing words among the 100 most frequent final disjuncts in the whole COCA (e.g. *clearly*, *totally*, *naturally*, *surely*). In what concerns their semantic content, all these units coincide in the connotation of certainty they introduce in the utterance; however, they conceptualize such meaning rather differently. Firstly, some express that the information in the proposition is an exact portrait of the world (*exactly*, *naturally*); secondly, others stress that what has been mentioned in previous discourse involves some sort of gradient or scale of completion (*absolutely*, *totally*); thirdly, others invoke an end-point within a sequence (*definitely*); and, finally, some other disjuncts make an explicit claim that a given information does not need any clarification (*obviously*, *clearly*) or is not refutable (*surely*, *certainly*).

A major function of modal disjuncts in all four cases above is to contribute to reassuring information the speaker or the hearer have uttered in previous co-text. Under this view, final position appears as a reinforcing element placing the strongest certainty and agreement in the final part of the speaker's turn. Examples (6) and (7) are a case in point:

- (6) SPEAKER A: Well, I guess what I'm wondering is are you optimistic [...]  
SPEAKER B: We are optimistic, *absolutely*. <2010 (100315)>
- (7) SPEAKER A: I am quite different from my father in the sense that, you know, my sensibilities are completely different than his. However, in my family, we were fairly close, but he was always out, basically, most of the time, and I rebel against that.  
SPEAKER B: You rebelled against that, *clearly*. In fact, we're delighted you're here today. It got you out of the house. <1993 (19930721)>

In these examples above, “speaker b” employs final position to produce a highly emphatic utterance that complies with the contents of the speaker b’s message, ratifying it utterly. As part of that conformity reaction, in both examples, “speaker b” reproduces part of the previous interlocutor’s message literally, creating a lexical chain between “are you optimistic” and “we are optimistic”, in (6), and between “rebel against that” and “you rebelled against that”, in (7). The same discursive strategy of mimicking part of the interlocutor’s speech is consistently found with *exactly*. This expresses that what the speaker is saying coincides literally with part of a previous speech, as in (8) and (9) below:

- (8) SPEAKER A: Like the 24 bombers that have been sent to Guam.  
SPEAKER B: Like the 24 bombers sent to Guam, *exactly*. <2003 (20030308)>
- (9) SPEAKER A: Do you know something? Those are the people that are filled with hate, anyway, in my opinion.  
SPEAKER B: Or have a gimmick.  
SPEAKER A: Or have a gimmick, *exactly*. <1995 (19950623)>

The ultimate effect of disjuncts expressing certainty upon the ongoing conversation, however, may not be to support part or all of the hearer’s statement(s) solely. Rather on the contrary, the speaker may also allocate it finally in order to increase the convincing force of his/her own discourse, thus trying to attract the hearer into agreeing with the truth of the message, rather than agreeing upon any prior stated facts. Also in this use, final position has a decisive role of emphasizing the agreement. For example, in (10) below, which is an excerpt of an interview, the interviewee does not use the disjunct *obviously* to concur with the contents of a previous message; instead, s/he uses it to seek self-assurance as well as to force agreement with the hearer:

- (10) SPEAKER A: Did you have a sense of how the Obamas are viewed just in general by people in Haiti? I understand that that was not their most pressing concern at the time that you were covering the aftermath of the earthquake, but just overall?  
SPEAKER B: Oh, I mean, people are just absolutely thrilled to have an African-American as president of the United States, you know, *obviously*. And Haiti looks to the U.S. very much. You know, this is the outside world that Haitians look to the most. <2010 (100414)>

The introduction of *obviously* here does not pursue the kind of agreement seen with final disjuncts in (6) to (9). In this case, the interviewee’s underlying intention is that both the interviewer and the audience should abide by the truth of his/her opinion about people’s thrill regarding the presidency. This is most noticeable considering that the interviewer’s is a direct question concerning the people in Haiti and not mainly American citizens. In terms of Brown and Levinson (1987), examples from (6) to (9) appeal to the positive face of the listener, while (10) does not so much aim at agreeing as to persuading. The importance of final position here, therefore, lies in serving as a conditioning factor to what the speaker may add in the following turn shift.

## 4.2 Uncertainty

The major attested function of disjuncts is to make explicit the speaker's beliefs and opinion concerning the truth of a certain state of affairs. This general expression of stance is crucial in that it allows the speaker to attest or otherwise to downplay the contents of his/her own arguments or the interlocutor's. The placement of disjuncts in end position is the proper place for that type of function, since only when the speaker has put his/her arguments forward can s/he have a perspective on how the message uttered differs from the one originally intended, and evaluate whether it may have either a positive or a negative impact on the hearer. Final position is specific in that it allows the speaker to repair missing data adding a last chunk of information before the actual turn shift occurs, or before there is a move within his/her own discourse. One such addition consists in showing that what was just claimed should be considered as a rough statement which the speaker may concede to clarify or rephrase in the light of further input or correction on the part of the hearer.

The speaker can thus opt to follow two possible strategies to prepare the subsequent hearer's response. Firstly, s/he may use adverbs whose semantic tenor is closer to reassurance, as seen with certainty adverbs in the section above, in which case s/he emphasizes not only the content of the message, but, more importantly, the attitude towards how s/he perceives it. Secondly, s/he can use disjuncts which indicate doubt and approximation so as not to convey an authoritative attitude but to diminish certainty instead. In (11) and (12) below, for instance, the disjuncts *probably* and *possibly* have a bearing on the certainty of the event so depicted but, above all, on how the speaker signals how his/her arguments should be interpreted:

- (11) SPEAKER A: What do you think accounts for this evolution in talkativeness on the high court?  
SPEAKER B: I'm -- I think it's just a matter of personalities, *probably*. You know, some -- some Justices enjoy questioning, others don't. <2001 (20010528)>
- (12) SPEAKER A: [...] and they need medication? They need psychiatric care?  
SPEAKER B: [...] they need medication, *possibly*. They certainly need psycho -- psychological evaluation. <1999 (19991212)>

The main difference between the use of adverbs of uncertainty in final position in contrast to initial and medial position lies in the fact that the former has a boosting effect on mitigating the previous turn and predisposes the addressee to better evaluate the force of the speaker's speech. The importance of final position is to act as marker of temporal dimension of discourse, and to indicate that the certainty and factuality of events should be considered as highly tentative.

One remarkable case of uncertainty along these lines is the adverb *usually*. In its core sense, *usually* expresses recurrent habit or event taking place repeatedly within a defined period of time, as in (13) below:

- (13) I *usually* call myself Zacatecano because my parents are from the state of Zacatecas. <2009 (091214)>

By contrast, the occurrences of this word in the corpus show that, when it appears closing the sentence, its core meaning is extended to express that the speaker is not sure about the truth of his/her assertion and that the hearer should interpret information with some caution, as in (14) and (15) below:

- (14) So they're roving bands of between five and seven young people, *usually*. <2005 (20050901)>
- (15) SPEAKER A: From what you can tell, do they feel the same about you? SPEAKER B: Well, usually, because I tend to be also very - you can see, you know, I wear my emotions on my sleeve. You can tell exactly how I'm feeling, *usually*. <2010 (100614)>

In these two instances, the habitual reading of *usually* is somehow bleached in favour of a more attitudinal meaning. In (14), the disjunct takes backwards scope to imprint the whole preceding sentence with a connotation of doubt, which originates from the hesitation as to the exact number of young people invoked. In (15), by the same token, the speaker is showing an improvised and, at times, dubious description of some facets of his/her personality, for which s/he uses *usually* to suggest that the certainty or habitualness of "you can tell exactly how I'm feeling" should be taken as an imprecise evaluation of and about him/herself. In both examples, nonetheless, the differentiation between the core manner reading and the evaluative reading cannot be taken in absolute terms but only the context can properly help identify the meaning and the grammatical function operating in each case.

A similar, albeit less opaque, case of meaning extension is found with the adverb *easily*. In its most frequent use as a manner adjunct, *easily* expresses that certain action has been carried out with minimum physical or intellectual effort. Common instances of this use include sentences like (16) below:

- (16) They understand that this isn't just something that can be *easily* dealt with. < 2010 (100213)>

When it appears in absolute final position, however, this adverb undergoes a change from this original manner reading to a more epistemic sense, such that it indicates that the speaker is making a rough estimation about the contents of the message, specially when that involves a calculation or a quantitative judgement, as in (17) and (18) below (see Nykiel 2010 for an historical overview on this use):

- (17) I have probably sent out over a thousand resumes since July, *easily*. <2002 (20021228)>
- (18) SPEAKER A: How many e-mails might you get in one day?  
SPEAKER B: A hundred, *easily*. <1997 (19970821)>

In these examples, *easily* collocates with numerical expressions to mark a more or less remote possibility that the quantity alluded comes near to one known or hypothesised. The speaker uses the disjunct to establish that it is appropriate to assume that his/her approximate recount is only accurate and possible under the conditions contained in the rest of the proposition or under the perspective

of his/her personal knowledge. Again, *easily* can be considered to have taken on a new meaning from the domain of manner to epistemic modality.

The process by which a unit such as *usually* or *easily* loses some of its circumstantial meaning and becomes a discourse marker has been referred to in the literature as “pragmaticalization” (see Norde 2009 for a recent account and discussion). From the examples just referred to, position should be considered a contributing factor to this pragmaticalization. In the case of *easily*, the relationship between position and pragmaticalization seems to be further supported by the fact that in this use as a modal disjunct, this adverb allows initial position only marginally. In fact, in a search for cases of initial *easily* in COCA, only eight cases were found, among which one isolated case clearly qualifies as a disjunct, below shown in (19):

- (19) You can see the influence of feminism on this new radicalization.  
*Easily*, half the leaders and participants are female, and it's not just among the youth. <2001 (Aug/Sep)>

### 4.3 Cohesion

It is commonly agreed that initial elements appearing in the leftmost periphery of the sentence can function as logical and cohesive elements to previous parts of discourse. Recently, for example, Virtanen (2004) and Verstraete (2004) have contended that the initial slot in a sentence acts as a fundamental constructive element in tying part of the preceding text to subsequent evolvment of the utterance, while, at the same time, elements at that position are short and given information. The subcorpus of final disjuncts for this study points out that final position can also fulfil clear cohesive functions. Below, I will refer mainly to two, conclusion marking and connective backwards reference.

Final disjuncts can act as effective pointers of conversational turns, thus conferring the message with a sense of concluding remark and contributing to a more effective organization of the speaker-hearer interaction. Alternatively, both the prosody and the focal end position of these disjuncts contribute effectively to mark, in more or less emphatic degree, that a specific speaker's exposition has concluded. Disjuncts in final position have, therefore, the twofold job of contributing to the organization of discourse as well as enacting the cohesive development of a conversation. Take (20) below by way of example:

- (20) SPEAKER A: Many people feel and think that when you go to a rehabilitation center for addictions or other things that the people in there turn you into a linguine spine liberal and that's not true.  
SPEAKER B: That is not true, *evidently*. <2003 (20031117)>

In this example, there are several factors that conflate felicitously to convey a sense of cohesive whole. For one thing, the semantics of the adverb *evidently* denotes a high degree of certainty in what concerns the facts just exposed. “Speaker b” has focused his/her interest on agreeing on what s/he feels is relevant in the interlocutor's claim. In addition, the end position of the adverb forces the disjunct reading, which entails a more marked emphatic prosody.

Final disjuncts contribute not only to inserting the speaker's personal observations but they also help enhance textual dynamism, by stating that the message has been uttered completely and that the speaker has reached a final point in his/her argumentation. In words of Aijmer (2009:117) regarding the unit *of course*, the final disjunct is used as a device for closing off a topic and shifting to a new one. The adverbs that most clearly show conclusion are those showing certainty. In this case the speaker is putting an end to his/her argumentative posture, in turn acting as a turn-trigger or a floor for the speaker to open a new turn, as in (21) below:

- (21) SPEAKER A: I did try to speak out to her after the "American Music Awards". You know, I knew that was like the breaking point where she was just getting really bad.  
SPEAKER B: Like a public breakdown, *clearly*.  
SPEAKER A: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, to me, it was like a severe cry for help, you know. <2007 (20070410)>

The second main cohesive function identified in the sample for this study is backwards reference. As discussed in Bache and Davidsen-Nielsen (1997:143), disjuncts can enter discourse in order to introduce an afterthought, that is, a somewhat detached piece of information that speakers append to previous contents. To illustrate this point, this author proposes examples (22) and (23) below:

- (22) I wasn't worrying, *for Christ's sake*.  
(Bache and Davidsen-Nielsen 1997:143)  
(23) She fell for the old trick, *obviously*.  
(Bache and Davidsen-Nielsen 1997:143)

This additional material appended to the main clause can be conveniently introduced by means of a final disjunct, as in (23), which establishes how the afterthought should be interpreted. The importance of final disjuncts in suiting afterthoughts into spontaneous speech is that these allow to introduce a long-distance connection to one or several ideas that are present in the interlocutor's turn. The resulting effect is a more coherent discourse than its alternative without the disjunct. In (24) below, for example, the adverb *absolutely* has the important function of allowing the interviewee to make a backwards reference to a previous question:

- (24) SPEAKER A: Are you confident the stories in this book will stand the test of time?  
SPEAKER B: Oh, I'm so anxious for reporters to get out there and start talking to these people. And, you know, there's a lot of news in this book, really. I want the -- I want -- I've named all these people. I've told everybody where they live, go find them, ask their stories. Let's work it and see what this president was about. I'm willing to stand the scrutiny of my peers, *absolutely*. <1997 (19971111)>

Here, the interviewer prompts the guest to reveal further details, both to him/her and the audience, about the importance of the books written by the latter. In

his/her turn, the interviewee starts with a rather oblique answer that does not directly address the specific question that s/he has been addressed but, instead, s/he makes a rather lengthy exposition, only after which, s/he turns back to the primary question which s/he answers with a full expression of certainty supported with *absolutely*. The presence of this final disjunct, which in this context most properly appears following the last sentence, has an intrinsic cross-referential and cohesive power in that it ties together both turns. The result is a more complete message. Another case in point is (25) below:

(25) SPEAKER A: So your advice to him now is to get back on board and support Clinton 100 percent?

SPEAKER B: My- my advice- my advice to any Democrat is to- is to embrace change, to- to- to talk about the things that the President is doing, to talk about his pro-investment policies, to talk about the wide variety of political reform and other changes that he's making, *absolutely*. <1993 (19930516)>

The cross-reference and the liaison emerging from conjoining repetition plus a disjunct in final position should, under the appropriate contexts, have a parallel effect as the connective role of conjuncts.

One last effective way of achieving cohesion by means of final disjuncts is to echo the lexico-grammatical in the previous turn, which establish ideological parallels among the participants intervening in a conversation. In the above section dealing with modal disjuncts of certainty, for example, the mimicking has appeared as an implicit strategy for extra-agreement. Yet, in some other cases, the parallelism takes place in a more subtle way, that is, the speaker does not repeat literally part of the message but uses a final disjunct as a necessary element to include his/her own version of a certain state of affairs. That is the case of the following example, in which the adverb *effectively* marks the preceding stretch as a summary sentence that agrees on the hearer's view about a given states of affairs, while in turn emerges as a personal version of facts:

(26) SPEAKER A: [...] Many have struggled onto ships that will take them home. Sixty-seven thousand are still here, relying on the mercy of a poverty-stricken nation.

SPEAKER B: The scene is one of complete chaos, *effectively*. There are some 12,000 people crammed into a space that is intended for 3,000. <1990 (19900822)>

## 5. Conclusions

This paper has presented corpus evidence regarding the usage of English adverbs in sentence-final position. As I have tried to show, in order to fully account for adverbial movability and the selection of one position over the others, it is not only necessary to consider grammatical or semantic issues, but also to take discourse adequacy into account. One of the main points raised has been that, while final position cannot be assigned exclusive discursal functions, it can still be considered to have an important contribution to boosting the meaning of speaker-oriented disjuncts otherwise not so markedly expressed

from the initial or medial slots in the sentence. End-position proves to be a particularly useful pragmatic device that the speaker uses to reinforce his/her arguments about a certain state of affairs and to explicitly reassure his/her attitude in what concerns ongoing features of discourse. Final position is specific in that it is the only one that can add linguistic material before a turn shift or a move in the topic under discussion. Specifically, final position helps the speaker convey an utterance sense of certainty and agreement with respect to the interlocutor's intervention, or, otherwise, persuade him/her to agree on a particular aspect. In addition to agreement, a second type of adverbs that are foregrounded in final position include disjuncts of uncertainty, which find in end position the proper place for a last-minute evaluation of previously uttered discourse and do repairs if needed. Finally, final position favours (or is favoured by) specific contextual situations serving to attain cohesion and enhance coherence. On this view, the speaker uses final disjuncts not only to highlight the contents or the truth or the style of his/her own message but, more importantly, to establish a conversational trigger for the interlocutor's reaction message.

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\* This contribution is based on research currently carried out within the framework of the project entitled “Development of a subontology in a multilingual context (English, Spanish and Italian): Using FunGramKB in the field of international cooperation in criminal matters: terrorism and organized crime” funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, code no. FFI2010-15983. Additionally, I am truly indebted to my colleague Encarnación Hidalgo for her valuable reviews on earlier versions of this paper. The usual disclaimers apply.

<sup>1</sup> The examples in this paper belong to *The Corpus of Contemporary American English*. See the “data and method” section. Examples appear without any changes on the original. Nevertheless, suspension dots “[...]” are used in some cases to indicate that part of the example has been truncated to shorten its length and facilitate readability.

<sup>2</sup> *I* stands for “initial”, *M* (or *m*) for “middle or medial”, and *E* for “end”.

<sup>3</sup> The concept “speaker” will be used here to include any type of addresser who directs his/her message to a “listener” or “interlocutor”, either in the written or the spoken language.