Hello everyone,

and welcome to another episode of Grammar Jargon, where we explain one of these cryptic nerdy terms that teachers and textbooks use, because for some strange reason they think it's ... helpful. Well... IT'S NOT! Stop it!! Stop feeding us stupid, yawn-inducing Latin vocabulary that half the class has no idea what it means, and that no one can remember because it so complicated, and that sucks out all the fun. You hear me? IT SUCKS IT OUT! THE FUN. ALL OF IT. oh... I uh... I think I'm getting a little worked up .... must ... breathe.. phaaaaaaaaaaaaa...

all right. I'm sorry. I hate jargon. I really do. But it's there, we have to cope. And there are some terms like verb or noun or subject that are so basic, well established and hard to replace that everyone should know them. Today we'll look at one of those terms. Today, we'll try to find out, once and for all, just what are

adverbs

To do that let's... take a detour and first look at adjectives. The term adjective comes from old Latin. At the core is the Latin verb iacere which meant to throw or to cast. This is where the word jet comes from by the way. The ad means... well... pretty much the same as at... or add. So, adjective literally means something like "thing that is thrown or slapped at stuff" and that is pretty much what they're used for. Adjectives are like little tags that are added to nouns to give us more information about them.

• Princess Lyra gazed at the flower.

Sounds interesting...but a bit bland. We need to be a little more descriptive. How is the flower? Beautiful ... and fair. That sounds nice.

• Princess Lyra gazed at the flower, fair and beautiful as it was.

Sure, I could have just said "the beautiful and fair flower", but there are different ways to include adjectives into a sentence, and the one I used is just more literarierier. But not literary enough. She just gazes. Princesses don't just gaze. And that's where adverbs come in. If adjectives are descriptive tags for nouns, adverbs are tags for... verbs. So ... let's see how she gazes...

• Dreamily, Lyra gazed at the flower, fair and beautiful as it was; as SHE was. Such beauty, ever so frail. She trembled as she felt the desire to pick it.

Yeah maaan. That's deep. And layered. It's from my upcoming novel, by the way; a story about a depressed princess who gets to know the royal forester and is cured by unicorn-therapy... it's an adult tale.
You can pre-order it [here](#) ... oh.. sure, sorry.
So *adjectives* describe *stuff*, they tell us *how* something IS. *Adverbs* describe *activities*, they tell us how something is DONE. The are *added* to *verbs*.

- The car is *fast*. (*fast* functions as an adjective)
- The car *drives fast*. (*fast* functions as an adverb)

That was easy.
But that was also only just a fraction of what adverbs do.
For example, adverbs also describe adjectives.

- Lyra sang *beautifully* (describing verb), while she combed her *beautifully* (describing adjective) long hair.

And that's still not all of it. Not even close. *There, whenever, therefore, soon, anyway, though* ... all those are adverbs too. Even *even*.
Now, how does that make any sense with the *added to verb* idea we had?
Well... back in the days (in Rome and before that in Greece) *verb* didn't just mean *verb* as we understand it. It comes from the *aineschant* Indo-European root *were* which meant something like *to speak* and *verb* was a much more general term for *word* or even *statement*. We can still see that in *verbatim* and of course *word* itself, which also comes from that root.
So, an *adverb* was not only a tag for a *verb*, it was a quite general information-tag for *words* or *statements*. And that hasn't changed.

- *I'm typing slowly* (describes the verb *to type*).
- *I'm typing painfully* (describes the adverb *slowly*).
- *I am not very funny.* (describes the adjective *funny*).

And finally, one example for a statement-adverb... or sentence adverb, if you will.

- *Today*, Thomas did a huge pile of dishes in 10 minutes.

Yes. *Today* is an adverb too. It kind of tags the statement about what Thomas did.
Like... Thomas instagrams himself in front of the huge pile and writes

- "did all that in 5 minutes" [#today #champ]

Or let's take a different example. It's been pouring down all day, your friends sit at home, wondering what you're doing, and then you upload a selfie of you in park, soaked but full of glee... [#regardless].
Okay.... of course this tag-analogy has it's limits. But I hope you get the idea.
The only thing that adverbs CAN'T refer to directly are *things and persons* (or *nouns*, if you will). Because if they did that, the moon would explode... okay no, they don't do that because the Romans were just like:

"*Adjectives are for nouns, adverbs for the rest!*"
"*But... I don't think that this is what the Greeks had in mind when they developed thes*..."
"Who?"
"The old Greeks! The ones that inven... oh wait... I get it."

So, adverbs can give information about verbs, adjectives, adverbs, sentences and whole statements. That's quite a bit, and the kinds of information they give is just as "quite a bit"-y. So let's make some categories. Actually let's make a coffee first... hmmm... coffee. I love it.

All right. The first big group are adverbs that give information about how? Let's call them... how-adverbs. In common English grammar terminatorgy, this group is actually divided into two groups... adverbs of manner and adverbs of degree.

- He talks slowly.
- I am very tired.

The first one is pure manner, the second is 100% degree... very just moves up the intensity-slider of tired. if that makes sense. But then, what about badly.

- He was badly injured.

I mean... that does tell us something about the degree of the injury, doesn't it. Yet, it's called a manner-adverb. And barely on the other hand is called a degree-adverb.

- He was barely injured.

Hodor. That don't make no sense to me.

Degree-adverb, manner-adverb... they all somehow answer to how and so as far as I'm concerned it's one group.

- How beautiful is the flower? Very/really/incredibly/stunningly beautiful.
- How does he dance? Elegantly/barely/mesmerizingly.

All right.

The next big group are the when-adverbs. Again, in the English grammar books I use (i.e. the internet) they make a distinction. Time-adverbs and frequency-adverbs ...

- He does that tomorrow.
- He does that often.

The first one is time, the second one frequency... but what is always? Or never? or Occasionally? Sure, they talk about frequency but they also answer the question when. They are definitely all related to time, so let's just call them when-adverbs or time-adverbs. And my god, are there many important ones... today, before, then, later, soon, never, sometimes, seldom, earlier, now, monthly... in fact, if you learn a new language, some time-adverbs should be among the very first 100 words you learn.

Same for the next big group... the where-adverbs.

- Here, there, left, right, up, down, forward...
Not much to say. They are tremendously useful, they answer to where, and there are more. Now, there are a few smaller groups like amount (much, little), or reason (therefor, hence) but the the last BIG group is formed by what I call meta-adverbs. You see, the ones we had so far added information that integrated into the statement itself, and we can ask for them.

- How pretty is it?
- How, where, when did I do something?

Meta-adverbs do other things. They connect a statement with something that has been said before, or they let us know what the speaker's thought are, or they feed us other rather complex information. In either case, they all kind of transcend the pure account of events.

- Unfortunately, my boss was really being a dick today. Oddly, he was also kind of smelly.

What happened today? My boss was a dick, and he was smelly. That's it. That's what happened. All the stuff the adverbs add is... well... meta. Let's see... the also connects the second sentence with the first especially with bit that is implied by unfortunately. The unfortunately is meta-info about what I think about his being dick and the oddly kind of implies that my boss usually smells nice, AND it can between the lines even imply that him being a dick is rather common in comparison. Not bad at all. 3 little words tell a whole world. And there are many adverbs like that.

- Sadly, luckily, too, also, though, however, anyway, regardless...

All right.
So, we've seen how-adverb, where-adverb, when-adverbs and a whole bunch of more or less crazy meta-adverbs. Those categories are not "official", but as a matter of fact, there are no official categories and German has others than English anyway. The groups were really just to give you an idea of what adverbs can do. Oh and one adverb does not belong to just one group. In fact, an adverb might not even be an adverb all the time. Many little words can have several functions.

- I put my book on the table.
- I turn my charm on.

The first on is a preposition, the second one is an adverb. But why? Well... that brings us to out next question.

**Spotting adverbs**

Adverbs are eclectic. And because they are, it is hard to say:

"Adverbs look like that, and they do this."
Now you might be like "Oh, that's totally fine with me." and turn away. But it is kind of useful to know when a word is or functions as an adverb. Why? Well... because.... you know... there's this certain language that tends to have different words for different functions and it also tends to be painfully uptight about that.

So, let's see how we can recognize adverbs.

The ones that describe other adjectives or adverbs are easy to spot. They are next to them and the connection is apparent.

- He was *almost* asleep.

*Almost* is an adverb because it modifies *asleep* here and *asleep* is an adjective because it tells us how *he* is.

The tricky ones are the adverbs that don't refer to their neighbor.

But there are two major features that *make* an adverb. The first one is this:

1. Adverbs *do not* refer to or stand for nouns directly

Behold the first example:

- The tree? Yeah I saw that *that*.
  It was not *that* high.

The first *that* is a pronoun, because it stands for *the tree*. It is a what-box, and adverbs cannot be what-boxes. The second that on the other hand, does answer to how? and yet it doesn't describe a thing and it describes an adjective... *high*. So it must be an adverb.

Now, behold the second example:

- *A new bar* opened down the street.
  I like *it* so I go *there* a lot.

Both words, *there* and *it* do refer to the same thing, right? The bar. So that means that *there* can't be an adverb here, because we've learned that adverbs don't directly stand for things. BUT... in fact it is NOT directly referring to the bar. Let's try:

- I liked *the bar* and I go *the bar* a lot.

The first one works, because *it* is truly just fills in for *the bar*. Both can be a what-box. *There* fills in for *to the bar*. So there stands for information about where. It's a where-box and the bar is just a part of that. As a little side note... all those boxes besides the who-box and the what-box, so the where-box and the when-box and the why-box and the with what box, all those smaller or larger chunks that answer one particular question besides who and what are also called... adverbials.

- *After I was done reading the chapter* I flushed.

In "real" grammar, the whole after-part is called a "time adverbial". It's the answer to when?. And we can replace that with a time-adverb. *Then*. In a way, adverbs one-word-
Where were we? Uh yeah... so two features that adverbs have in common... the first one was that they do not stand for nouns directly, or in other words they cannot answer to who or what.

Now, not all adverbs are boxes and they don’t always answer to one question. Just remember those crazy meta-adverb.

So, for those, the second feature is really really helpful and you really really need to understand this or German time and place words will be “unlearnable”.

2. Adverbs don't have a grammatical function. They don't "organize" things grammatically.

Once more, behold the example.

- **Before** I eat, I cook.
- I’ve done it in that order before and it has worked well.

Both *befores* do order things in time. But the first one also has a grammatical function. It integrates the "I eat " into the sentence and makes it a *when-box*.

- When do I cook? **Before I eat.**

I could say *when* or as or after because they have the same function, but I cannot put another time-adverb in there... like *today*.

- **Today** I eat, I cook.

That is nonsense. Or art. But it is not the same structure as before...*ahem... because the adverb does not job.

Now let's see with the other sentence...

- I have done this *before* and it has worked well.

Does this before introduce or organize anything? No. I can take it out and the structure is still the same.

- I have done this and it has worked well.

So, in this example before is a *when-box* alone.

- **When** have I done this? **Before.**

Now, let me say it again... the crucial takeaway is NOT that adverbs are boxes. The point is that they don't have a grammatical function like conjunctions or prepositions. Adverbs sit in their sentence, convey their message and that's it. They're not involved in the "mechanics".

Actually, let's do an example with a preposition.
Thomas pees **behind** the tree.
The wind comes from **behind**.

Thomas is lucky. Both **behinds** do tell us something about spatial relations. But the first one also has some grammar to do... it organizes **tree** and puts it into a **where-box**.

**Where** does he pee? **Behind the tree**.

Now, the second behind doesn't organize anything. Sure, it completes the **from**, but it can do that because it is a location... a **where-box**, alone.

**From where** does the wind come?
**From behind**.

Let's maybe do one more... with one of these so called phrasal verbs. One last time, behold the example

- I put **on** my charm.
- I put my book **on** the table

The sentences look **VERY** similar but the **ons** are **VERY** different. And which one is a an adverb? The first one. Because it does not do any organizing. Sure, without it the sentence would mean something different but the point is not that adverbs don't have meaning... they don't have grammatical functions. They are just meaning-vessels, if you will. The second **on** on the other hand integrates table and forms a **where-box** with it. The first one is free. It can even be moved around.

- I turn my charm **on**.
- **On** I turn my charm.... (theoretically)

So... again... the point is not that adverbs are boxes themselves. The time-adverbs are and the place adverbs are and if you're not sure about a word... see if it answers where or when alone. But the main main point is that adverbs ... do not fill in the blanks for you ;)

Ok, seriously, they don't do any grammar, if that makes sense.

- I want to do that **too**.

What is **also**? It doesn't refer to a noun, it doesn't stand for a noun, and nothing depends on it grammar-wise. It's an adverb.

- I'm tired **though**.

Same here.
Adverbs are kind of a when-in-doubt category... all the little words that you cannot tell what they are... try adverb. It's probably right ;).
All right. Now let's take a quick look at how it is in German and then we can wrap up. Sounds ... okay-ish? Awesome.
Adverbs in German

So ... the one main difference between German and English is that German does not have an adverb marker like -ly.

- Er ist langsam
- He is slow

- Er läuft langsam
- He walks slowly

Adverb and adjective look the same. But adverbs don't only get no special ending in German. They get NO ending. EVER. It's part of their official definition actually. Adverbs remain unsullied.

- Ich sehe die unglaubliche schöne Frau.
- Ich sehe die unglaublich schöne Frau.

The second unglaublich has no ending, so it cannot be an adjective and it cannot refer to the woman. It refers to schön.

- I see the incredible, beautiful woman.
- I see the incredibly beautiful woman.

An -e might not be much, you may think, but it does change the rhythmynm completely, so every native speaker will always hear it and process it correctly.

Other than that, there are no big differences. German adverbs are every bit as versatile as English ones. It probably doesn't surprise anyone that German has more adverbs. English tends uses adverbial phrases more often... like that's why or because of that or for that reason while German has all these darum, daher, deshalb, deswegen, nämlich, somit etc. Also, German rarely uses the same word for different functions. Before, the adverb is a different word than before, the preposition.

And then, there is of course the whole location thing not even think about location... hierin, dahin, hierher, daher, dorthin, hinauf, herunter, hinunter.

Boy... German really does have many adverbs. Well... at least German doesn't have phrasal verbs, right? But German has prefixes. And guess what a prefix is once it has detached from the "mother ship"...

- Ich mache das Fenster auf.

Let's do the checklist...

- Doesn't directly refer to a thing or person? Check
- Doesn't have grammatical function/doesn't organize things grammatically? Check
- Does it carry content? Check (just made that question up)

It must be an adverb. Just like it was with the phrasal verbs. So wait... does that mean that phrasal verbs and prefix verbs are actually the same... but I digress.
All right. Recap-time.
Adverbs are little cutsy putsy words that give us addition information about verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, side-sentences or full statements. The information is mainly about how, when and where but there are adverb-answers for all questions (except who and what) and then there is this HUGE group of meta-adverbs. Those tell us something about what the speaker thinks, they connect a sentence content-wise to something that has been said before, or they can evoke crazy implications that our stupid computers will never ever understand.
Recognizing adverbs is not simple because they are so divers, but it's not hard either... they don't directly refer to nouns and they don't have a grammatical/organisational function. They just give information. But that, they're good at.
And to show you just how good they are, I will go ahead and answer all your questions with only adverbs. Nah... just kidding. They're not THAT powerful. Anyway, please please let me know if this helped you understanding adverbs a little better or if you're more confused than before. And of course, if you have any questions or suggestion about adverbs or this post... just go ahead and leave me a comment.
I hope you liked it and see you next time.