Manner Adverbials in German - a Semantic and Conceptual Approach

With few exceptions, Manner Adverbials have not been considered in the linguistic discussion as much as e.g. temporal, local or sentential modifiers. Having raised some interest in the context of the semantics of event structure some time ago, the study of this kind of verbal modification has then been only sparingly considered\(^1\). Since manner modifiers reveal relevant facets of verb semantics and has implications for the semantics of event structure, it is important to stay on top of the issue.

The analysis presented in this contribution aims at a detailed account of the semantic and conceptual interpretation of the verbal modification by Manner Adverbials in contemporary German. The analysis is based on empirical investigations of the interpretation of Manner Adverbials in German. The data is collected from different types of text, e.g. newspapers, journals, recipes and manuals. An important insight of the empirical studies is that the target unit of Manner Adverbials is not always the same, but varies according to the context. The variation, however, is not unrestricted or arbitrary, but can be restricted to a number of alternatives. The examples in (1)-(6) illustrate this point\(^2\).

(1) Sie sammelte die Nägel laut auf. (1') She gathered up the nails loudly.
(2) Sie färbten den Stoff schön ein. (2') They coloured the tissue beautifully.
(3) Sie färbten den Stoff großzügig ein. (3') They coloured the tissue generously.
(4) Sie zogen das Kind bunt an. (4') They dressed the child colourfully.
(5) Das Auto fuhr langsam.  (5') The car went slowly.
(6) Er übte das Musikstück gründlich. (6') He rehearsed the piece of music thoroughly.

A close look at the examples in (1)-(6) allows us to point out the unit to which the adverbial applies in different sentences: in (1), the process of gathering takes place in a loud way. This reading is possible in (2) as well, although it is not the only possibility: the sentence can also be interpreted that the colouring of the tissue, i.e., the result state of the colouring process, is beautiful. In (3), none of these readings is plausible. Instead, großzügig (generously) specifies the quantity of an implicit entity involved in the colouring process, namely the colour. A similar implicit entity, the clothing, is specified by bunt (colourfully) in (4), but here the quality, not the quantity, is qualified. Langsam (slowly) in (5) modifies the process of going just as in (1), but here it particularly specifies an inherent parameter of the semantics of the verb of motion go, to wit „speed“. Similarly, the rehearsing process is modified by gründlich (thoroughly) in (6) just like in (1), but the modification more precisely touches upon a parameter of the internal structure of the underlying event and indicates the iteration of ‘his’ playing of the piece of music. These target units are analyzed in terms of their respective relationship to the underlying event denoted by the sentence. The internal structure of this event is thereby taken into account.

Sentences similar to the ones in (1)–(6) are those in (7)–(8):

(7) Sie tanzte widerwillig einen Waltzer. (7') Reluctant, she danced a waltz.
(8) Ich gehe schnell zum Laden, bevor er zumacht. (8') I’ll go the shop quick before it closes.

The question arises whether they are to be considered as cases of manner modification or not. I argue for the position that cases like those in (7)-(8) are not belonging to this kind of modification, but are rather examples of attributive predication and of another kind of adverbial modification, respectively (Frey & Pittner 1998).

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\(^1\) Cf. however Bartsch (1976) and Eckardt (1998).

\(^2\) The English examples are directly translated from German without considering their semantic adequacy in English.
The variation in the interpretation presented in (1)-(6) leads us to conclude that a detailed model of the semantics and the conceptual structure of the modification by Manner Adverbials is required in order to account for the data.

A principled account of this type of modification further requires taxonomies of the word classes involved, namely verbs and adjectives, which allow us to capture the relevant distinctions. Therefore, corresponding taxonomies are suggested as a prerequisite for the formal model.

Another insight from the empirical studies is that correlations between the different readings in (1)–(6) and certain properties of the sentential context can be observed. These properties and the way in which they co-occur with a particular interpretation of the manner adverbial are taken up to discussion.

The semantic part of the suggested model is formulated in a lambda-predicate calculus format relying on event semantics, whereas the representation of the conceptual structure is accounted for in a unification-based format (Koch & Rosengren 1996). The general principle underlying the semantic account of this kind of modification is that of theta-unification, i.e. the unification of the external argument of the modifier with the referential argument of the modified by conjunction of the denotation sets of the two constituents involved (Higginbotham 1985). In the proposal put forth here, this device is slightly modified and made more precise in order to obtain an adequate description of the relationship between the modifier and the modified, i.e. the Manner Adverbial and the component of the underlying event it applies to. The main characteristic of the proposal, relying on the empirical data, is the assumption of a partial instead of a complete intersection between the modifier and the modified. Due to the more precise format of the conceptual structure than that of the semantic structure, a more detailed account of the data can be achieved within the conceptual part of the proposed model than in the semantic part.

Selected references:
Eckardt, R. (1998), Adverbs, Events and Other Things. Tübingen
Maienborn, C. (1996), Situation und Lokation. Tübingen