

Two properties, four types: a classification of adverbs of quantity

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Abstract

There are different adverbial expressions which are used to express quantity. Frequency adverbs such as *often*, degree expressions such as *a lot* and *a bit*, and cardinal adverbs such as *three times* are examples of what I will call from now on Q-adverbs. In this paper I will divide Q-adverbs in four classes on the basis of two criteria. The first criterion is the type of quantity that is expressed by the Q-adverb. This can be an absolute quantity, as is the case for *three times*, or a relative quantity, as is the case for *often*. I will refer to this as $[\pm\text{RQ}]$, where RQ stands for Relative Quantity. The second criterion is whether the Q-adverb introduces an iterative reading. This will be referred to as $[\pm\text{QT}]$, where QT stands for quantification over times. Q-adverbs that have this property say something about the number of times an event or a situation took place. I will mainly concentrate on French, but the classification can be extended to other languages, such as Dutch and English. On the basis of the two criteria I will distinguish the following four classes of Q-adverbs:

1. $[\text{+RQ}], [\text{+QT}]$: frequency adverbs (*souvent* ‘often’)
2. $[\text{+RQ}], [\text{-QT}]$: relative degree adverbs (*beaucoup* ‘a lot’)
3. $[\text{-RQ}], [\text{+QT}]$: *x-times* adverbs (*trois fois* ‘three times’)
4. $[\text{-RQ}], [\text{-QT}]$: absolute degree adverbs (*un peu* ‘a bit’)

It will be shown that the two properties can account for the (non-)acceptability of these expressions in a number of contexts. The property $[\text{-RQ}]$ correlates, for instance, with the impossibility to use an expression in habitual contexts. $[\text{-QT}]$ turns out to correlate with the impossibility to take wide scope, and with the possibility to be used as a determiner (as in *beaucoup de livres* ‘a lot of books’). The combination of $[\text{+RQ}]$ and $[\text{+QT}]$ will be shown to be necessary in order to obtain a so-called relational reading in conditionals, in which the restriction of the Q-adverb is determined by an *if/when*-clause.