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Kristin Lems
NLU

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A Warm wELLcome for Language Learners

Kristin Lems

About This Column

In this issue's column focusing on adverbs and English language learners, columnist Kristin Lems explores some of the basic but not-so-obvious features about adverbs that readers and writers need to learn in order to take advantage of these powerful levers of language. The odds are very good that your native English speakers will also benefit from this information—and you might learn a thing or two as well.

Truly, Madly, Deeply: Adverbs and ELLs

How do I love thee, humble adverb? Let me count the ways! I love the way your dense little nugget explodes after a verb, lighting up the sentence like fireworks. I love the way you reveal the intensity of the adjective you precede. I love the way you stuff a whole world into your little wonton and let us explore it by lifting it up with chopsticks. Meaning-packed adverb, it is such a pity that students usually learn about you merely as an “ly tail” tacked on to the end of an adjective. You are so much more than that! After all, an adjective just sits there primly in front of its noun, whereas you, powerful adverb, spring mightily into action, propelled by your verb.

Having expressed my unapologetically positive bias toward adverbs, I will continue my homage by showing how they can be used as a portal, not only into new vocabulary, but also as a reading comprehension strategy for English language learners (ELLs). I will use some examples from the Harry Potter books to illustrate how effectively they can be used. Before that, however, I will give a brief overview of how English adverbs work.

Adverbs – How They Work

Adverbs occupy a vast room in the mansion of English grammar. To avoid getting stuck in a broom closet, we will limit our focus to the single words that are usually taught as adverbs in the classroom, the adverbs that show how something happens. They are sometimes called “adverbs of manner” (ESL Grammar, 2020). Here are a few generalities about adverbs which you may know, not know, or think you know but cannot put into words:

1. Adverbs come after an *action verb* or between two parts of a verb, but they can also come in front of adjectives as in *highly* contagious, *greatly* exaggerated, and *well-known*.
2. Although adverbs often end with *-ly*, some common adjectives do, too. Since they cannot be changed into adverbs by adding an additional *-ly*, we do not use them after action verbs (e.g., *friendly*, *lovely*, *lowly*, *likely*, *motherly*, and *gingerly*).
3. Some of the most common adverbs are also adjectives. These do not end with *-ly* (e.g., *hard*, *fast*, *fine*, *long*, *far*, and *well*).
4. Verbs of the senses use adjectives instead of adverbs (e.g., I feel *good*; that looks *new*; the choir sounds *beautiful*; and your soup tastes *delicious*).

5. The word *well* has different meanings as an adjective and as an adverb. As an adjective, it means “healthy.” As an adverb, it means “successful” or “good.”

ELLs make more adverb errors than native speakers of English for a simple reason. Adverbs are very common, so native speakers hear them all the time. Gradually, native speakers unconsciously figure out their meanings and where they go in a sentence by virtue of being part of an English speech community. ELLs, on the other hand, inhabit a speech community with a different first language, so they have to learn English adverbs more intentionally. It is a manifestation of the “acquisition” versus “learning” concept that is so important in teaching ELLs—acquisition “just happens,” whereas learning is more conscious, intentional, and takes longer (Krashen, 1982).

That does not mean, of course, that native English speakers—or native speakers of any language—can necessarily explain what they know! It takes lots of training and practice to know how language works and to help learners to use forms effectively.

Many English grammar sites and grammar books cover adverbs in detail, and not all linguists or educators frame adverbs the same way. If you want to take a deeper dive, you can find some excellent grammar books for teaching ELLs at the end of the column.

Let’s see if you can apply the generalities listed above! Each of the following sentences has an adverb problem. See if you can explain the error, and then figure out what the correct form would be (answers at the end of the column in the boxed text):

- A. I did my homework for 3 hours. I worked hardly.
- B. The orchestra sounded beautifully.
- C. We need good-paying jobs.
- D. He spoke very friendly.
- E. I felt sadly when I lost my job.
- F. The movie ended bad. The hero died.
- G. I did good on my test.
- H. You finished quicker than I did.

Unpacking Adverbs in Connected Text

Author J. K. Rowling is a master in the use of evocative adverbs. If you have the opportunity to use any of her books in your teaching, you will find a cornucopia of great adverbs. Even if you do not use those books (and they can be very challenging for ELLs who are not at a highly proficient reading level), spending time on adverbs can positively affect students’ vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing. I have chosen three excerpts from *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Rowling, 2000) and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling, 2003) to demonstrate some possible techniques that can be turned into mini-lessons focused on adverbs. Techniques include morpheme analysis (Jozwik & Gardiner-Walsh, 2019), instructional conversation (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999; Waxman & Tellez, 2002), total physical response (Asher, 1988), identifying cognates (Freeman & Freeman, 2014), and fun word games (Lems et al., 2017).

Example #1

“Really,” Hermione said loftily as they passed the girls, now squabbling over the lipstick. (Rowling, 2000, p. 249)

- Ask students to find the root word (loft) and find pictures of different kinds of lofts—a barn loft, an artist’s loft, etc. Discuss what different lofts have in common (they are up high or at least their roof/ceiling is up high). Students might draw a loft and draw what they imagine in it.

- Ask students to think of other words that have the root *loft*. They might discover, or you might help them discover, that two adjectives can be formed from it—by adding an initial *a-* (*aloft*) or by adding a *-y* at the end (*lofty*). Talking about their meanings, students can discover that both of these are connected to the idea of height. You can share common phrases that use the words or find a video whose characters show *lofty ambitions* or *lofty ideals*. Students might connect the phrases to memorable characters from previous texts you have read together.
- Although many words have Latin roots, *loft* comes from Old English and German, so it cannot be used for finding cognates for Latinx students. However, students might notice that it sounds and looks a lot like the word for the German airline, Lufthansa, and this is not a coincidence: *luft* means “air” in German. In addition, we have the English word “lift.”
- Looking at the sentence within the passage and the chapter, the class can discuss Hermione’s character and behavior; they can find a lot of text support for the idea that she is not a “girly” girl and has no interest in makeup or adolescent girl talk. Out of that discussion, students can then infer what the adverb *loftily* might mean—that Hermione considered herself “above” the other girls.
- It’s also a natural opportunity to notice that *-ly* changes to *-ily* because *lofty* ends with a *y*. Ask students to think of other examples of adjectives that end with a *y* and become *-ily* when they change to adverbs (e.g., *easy* → *easily* or *lazy* → *lazily*).
- Before moving on, engage in instructional conversation, using the new word with questions such as “When a person volunteers to help others during the pandemic, are they acting loftily?” or “Can you think of a time you didn’t act loftily and regret it?” or encourage students to generate their own sentences,

either orally or in writing. When instructional conversation is a regular feature of the classroom, ELLs’ literacy increases dramatically (Waxman & Tellez, 2002).

Close reading like this can be applied to more words and more passages until it becomes an automatic process.

Example #2

[Professor Trelawney] stared pointedly at Harry, who yawned very widely and obviously. (Rowling, 2000, p. 372)

- If possible, have students read the whole sentence—silently or aloud. It is a sentence which is easy to read and pronounce, and its place in the progression of Harry Potter books can be easily understood through general knowledge about them.
- Ask students to identify the three adverbs in the sentence. Ask them how they know they are adverbs. Ask them to give the adjective form of each one. Have them find the verb that precedes each of them (*stared* and *yawned*) and confirm that they know their meanings.
- Ask learners to find the root morpheme in the word *pointedly*, which is *point*, and talk about its meanings. Students can demonstrate their understanding of the word through a TPR (total physical response) activity: ask them to *point* to the ceiling, *point* to their nose, etc. Mention that *point* is both a verb and a noun, and then ask if they can find something that has a point (e.g., a pencil; hopefully not a classmate’s head!). As you discuss the meanings of points, be sure to include common idioms such as *point out* and *what’s the point?*, and look at how it is used figuratively.
- Talk about how the word *point* changes to an adjective (adding *-ed*). Ask students to

think of other adjectives that end with –ed (e.g., *interested*, *amused*, *tired*, *infected*, *saved*, etc.). These can be written on a chart in the classroom or a Google Doc and be added to over the weeks.

- This is a natural opening to talk about the three different pronunciations of the –ed ending, which is super important for ELLs. The three pronunciations apply to literally millions of words in English—(1) regular verbs in past tense, (2) regular past participles, and (3) adjectives—so it is well worth the time to introduce and practice them. In brief, when preceded by a voiceless consonant, the –ed letters are pronounced as /t/; when they are preceded by a voiced consonant or vowel, the –ed letters are pronounced as /d/; and when preceded by the sounds /t/ or /d/, the –ed is a separate syllable, pronounced as /əd/ (Lems et al., 2017, p. 117). This important pronunciation rule should be introduced early and practiced often. It is completely unneeded for native speakers of English who acquire it as part of the English speech community, but it has a huge impact on ELL pronunciation.
- Ask students the adjective form of *point*, and then ask them to provide examples of it in phrases, including literal ones such as *pointed roof*, and more figurative meanings such as *pointed remarks* or a *pointed look*. Ask them to guess what the figurative words would mean based on their understanding of the word *point*.
- If students have read or are reading the book, they know by now that this professor is a fraud. Ask students to find and share examples, in their own words, of when Professor Trelawney misled students or was an ineffective teacher.
- Ask students about the verbs in the sentence. Why would a teacher stare at a student? What does the adverb *pointedly* do to

its verb? What does a yawning student show about the student’s interest or respect for the teacher? What additional information does adding the adverbs *widely* and *obviously* do to the verb *yawn*?

- Discuss together how teachers expect students to behave at Hogwarts and how Harry’s attitude is changing. Talk about what teachers expect in classrooms at your own school and what students think about it. If appropriate, discuss how schooling differed in a country from which the students have come.

Example #3

For this final excerpt, here is a series of adverbs all connected to the behavior of Mr. Weasley, a well-meaning, foppish wizard with a weakness for Muggles, across pages 124-125 of Rowling’s (2003) *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*:

“Simply fabulous,” he whispered, indicating the automatic ticket machines. “Wonderfully ingenious” . . . beaming fondly at them . . . [on the Muggle train, Mr. Weasley] kept anxiously checking and rechecking the Underground Map. . . . When they get off the train, “Where are we?” said Mr. Weasley blankly . . . and finally arriving at the Ministry of Magic, “Here we are,” said Mr. Weasley brightly . . .

- Before showing the sentences, if copies of the book are available, ask the students to read the two pages to find the adverbs and put them into two categories: (1) adverbs that come before an adjective and (2) adverbs that come after a verb (or between parts of a verb as in “kept anxiously checking”).
- Now, display the columns (on the board, on the screen, or in a handout), and check to see whether students have found the adverbs about Mr. Weasley in this passage.
- Look at the column with the adverbs which precede an adjective, which are both direct quotes by Mr. Weasley. Check that students

know the meanings of the adjectives (*inventive* and *ingenious*) and apply morpheme analysis to them. Then, discuss how Mr. Weasley's choice of adverbs intensifies the adjectives he uses.

- Ask students to say the two phrases with appropriate vocal intonation as if they are imitating Mr. Weasley. This is a good time to talk about vocal intonation as a measure of emotional intensity, including language-specific features such as pitch, volume, and length of words (Lems et al., 2017, p. 60). This can introduce teaching intonation patterns for declarative sentences (rising/falling), information questions (rising/falling), and yes/no questions (rising). These patterns differ from intonation patterns of other languages—importantly, Mexican Spanish, whose speakers use rising intonation for some declarative sentences. Students can practice saying words and phrases with differing intonation patterns, or they can listen to phrases modeled by the teacher.
- Now look at the adverbs which come after verbs: *anxiously*, *blankly*, and *brightly*. Ask students to find the adjective forms of the words and show their understanding of them by using them in sentences. Then, look at the adverbs again and talk about in what kinds of situations a person would say something *anxiously*, *blankly*, or *brightly*.
- Two of the three adverbs after the verbs have Latin origins (*anxiously* and *blankly*), and the third is from old English (*brightly*, with its telltale *gh*, which is found in so many English words). Taking into account the language backgrounds of the students, see if students can think of cognates for any of the adverbs and share them with the class. One good way to make a visual representation of the cognates is to create a Venn diagram showing the root in the middle, with English words based on the root on one side and words using the root in the students' first language

(if a Latin-based language) on the other side (Jozwik & Gardiner-Walsh, 2019, p. 81).

- Now, talk about what these high-frequency adverbs reveal about Mr. Weasley's changing emotions as he tries to unravel the confusing world of Muggles and then finally succeeds in getting Harry to the Ministry of Magic by non-magic transportation. What kind of portrait of Mr. Weasley do these adverbs paint?
- What would Mr. Weasley look like as he said and did these things? What would he sound like? What does it look like to beam *fondly*? To check a map *anxiously*? To look *blankly* around? These can be used in a classroom Reader's Theatre in which one student reads these actions while another pantomimes them.

It is remarkable how many nuances and how much background information these brief adverbs add to the excerpt. We see Weasley's childlike enthusiasm using Muggle transportation, his disorientation about reading a subway map or knowing where he is going, and his subsequent relief as they arrive safely at the Ministry, his home turf. Students can talk about whether they have ever been confused or disoriented by going somewhere new or doing something they have never done before.

In the Manner of the Word

An adverb game that can be fun and useful in your classroom is called In the Manner of the Word. To prepare this game, you need to have a fixed number of adverbs already known to the class, writing each one on a slip of paper. A student volunteer draws a slip of paper without showing it to the others, and then performs a simple poem, perhaps one by Dr. Seuss or Shel Silverstein, "in the manner of the word." As the student reads the poem, the rest of the class tries to guess the adverb. You might have two teams or just have students raise their hands to guess.

For less proficient students, the adverbs should be put on the board so that students do not have to come up with them. For more proficient students, you might see if they can simply supply them on their own. In general, the adverbs you choose should be easy for students to act out such as *fearfully*, *proudly*, *shyly*, *joyfully*, or *angrily*. Not every student has theatrical talents, but some do! Acting out adverbs can add a lot of pizzazz to a classroom while demonstrating the way that adverbs give dramatic clues about

the way something is done (Lems et al., 2017, p. 76).

Adverbs in ELL Writing

How do we move from understanding how adverbs work and unpacking them while reading to employing them in writing? I suppose it would be by incentivizing them. Teachers need to give ELLs rewards for trying out daring and bold writing to give their writing flavor and originality.

Answer Key and Explanations

- A. I did my homework for 3 hours last night. I worked hardly.
#3 – Should be “worked hard.”
The word *hard* doesn’t need *-ly* to become an adverb. It has the same form whether it is an adjective or adverb.
- B. The orchestra sounded beautifully.
#4 – Should be “sounded beautiful.”
Sound is a stative verb—a verb of the senses—and is followed by an adjective.
- C. We need good-paying jobs.
#1 – Should be “well-paying” jobs.
Paying is an adjective, and the adverb *well* tells us how the job should pay (a job that pays well is a well-paying job). This is a common native English speaker error.
- D. He spoke very friendly.
#2 – Should be “spoke in a friendly way” or “He is very friendly.”
Friendly is an adjective and comes before a noun or after a stative verb (such as “be”).
Adjectives that end with *-ly* can’t be changed into single word adverbs.
- E. I felt sadly when I lost my job.
#4 – Should be “felt sad.”
Feel is a verb of the senses or stative verb. After one of them, we use an adjective, not an adverb.
- F. The movie ended bad. The hero died.
#1 – Should be “ended badly.”
Ended is an action verb and should be followed by an adverb, not an adjective.
- G. I did good on my test.
#1 – Should be “did well.”
Did is an action verb and should be followed by an adverb, not an adjective.
- H. You finished quicker than I did.
#1 – Should be “more quickly than” or “faster than.”
Finished is an action verb and needs to be followed by an adverb. This is a little trickier than the others because students might know that the verb should take an adverb after it but not know that the comparative form of “quickly” is three words—more quickly than. On the other hand, the one syllable adverb *fast* takes the short form of the comparative (adding *-er*). This is a very common native speaker error, too! (Sorry, this was a trick question!)

This includes taking risks with adverbs! Writing rubrics for ELLs should include points for being bold with word choices rather than harping on dreary “correctness.” In fact, how about having a rubric that specifically gives points for using adverbs?

I hope that, like the song from Savage Garden (2020), you have “truly, madly, deeply” come to view the adverb with a newfound respect. I leave you for now, “sincerely yours,”
Kristin Lems.

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About the Authors

Joyce R. Bojko-Jeewek, EdD, is an associate professor at Benedictine University and teaches children's literature and reading & language arts methods and assessment courses for both undergraduate and graduate Special Education and Elementary Education majors. She has experience as a classroom teacher for 1st through 8th grades and as a Title I reading instructor, REI teacher, Special Education Intervention Manager, Principal, and Curriculum Director. With special interests in differentiated instruction and assessment, Joyce is a frequent presenter at both state and national conferences.

Sara L. Jozwik, EdD, is an assistant professor in the Department of Special Education at Illinois State University. Her research interests focus on improving literacy outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities.

Kristin Lems, EdD, is a professor in the ESL/Bilingual Education Endorsement program at National Louis University, where she has directed two five-year grants from the U.S. Department of Education in ESL teacher education. A two-time Fulbright Scholar, Dr. Lems consults on literacy and ESL and presents nationally and internationally. Lems' popular textbook, *Building Literacy with English Language Learners: Insights from Linguistics*, was released in its second edition by Guilford Press in 2017.