



Cross-Linguistic Distribution of Temporal Adjuncts in English and Tamil Across Written Genres: A Corpus-Based Analysis

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Abstract

This study investigates the positioning of temporal adjuncts in English and Tamil across narrative, argumentative, and informative genres, focusing on how syntactic structure influences genre-specific discourse functions. Temporal adjuncts, which add a temporal dimension to events within texts, differ in positional distribution based on the syntactic constraints of each language. While English's Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) structure typically limits adjunct positioning to left-peripheral (LP) and right-peripheral (RP) roles, Tamil's flexible Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) syntax allows a broader range of adjunct placements. By examining the frequency of LP and RP adjuncts in both languages, this study demonstrates that Tamil's syntax supports dynamic positioning that serves a range of discourse functions, especially in narrative and argumentative genres, where thematic and contrastive framing is more prominent. Quantitative analysis of adjunct distribution was conducted using AntConc software for English and manual annotation for Tamil texts, with results revealing statistically significant differences in adjunct positioning across genres. Qualitative analysis of discourse functions further highlights how Tamil's syntactic flexibility facilitates nuanced temporal framing, contrasting with English's more rigid genre-based adjunct conventions. These findings underscore the role of syntactic structure in shaping adjunct function across languages and genres and provide implications for linguistic theory and language learning, emphasizing genre-based adjunct positioning as a key area of focus for enhancing cross-linguistic comprehension and translation.

Keywords: *Temporal Adjuncts, Cross-Linguistic Syntax, Genre-Specific Discourse, English and Tamil Comparison, Adjunct Positioning, Syntactic Flexibility*

1. Introduction

In linguistic studies, adjuncts, or syntactically optional sentence elements that contribute supplementary information, play an instrumental role in structuring discourse and guiding readers' interpretations. Among these, temporal adjuncts provide a temporal framework, anchoring events in narrative or argumentative contexts and enhancing comprehension of temporal sequences in texts (Biber & Conrad, 2019; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Klumm's (2024) recent research underscores how English utilizes temporal adjuncts with genre-sensitive positional preferences, noting distinct patterns across informative, argumentative, and narrative genres. These adjuncts frequently occupy either the clause-initial (left-peripheral) or clause-final (right-peripheral) positions due to English's Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) structure, which constrains syntactic flexibility and limits adjunct placement to these peripheral positions (Biber et al., 1999; Virtanen, 1992b).

However, Klumm's findings primarily focus on English, leaving a significant gap in understanding how adjunct positioning may vary in languages with differing syntactic architectures, particularly those allowing for greater internal clause flexibility (Klumm, 2022). This research takes up this question by conducting a

cross-linguistic comparison, examining English alongside Tamil, an SOV language with notably flexible syntax (Das & Egg, 2023). Unlike English, Tamil allows for adjuncts to occupy medial clause positions, suggesting the potential for more diverse temporal framing options across genres. The ability of Tamil speakers to employ adjuncts in varied clause positions could reveal insights into how syntactic typology interacts with discourse functions to influence information flow in written language (Hasselgård, 2014; Doherty, 2003).

Cross-linguistic comparisons are essential for understanding how structural aspects of language impact discourse. In languages with contrasting typological features, such as SVO versus SOV ordering, the management of temporal information and positioning of adjuncts may vary considerably. By focusing on English and Tamil, this study aims to examine how language-specific syntax influences the syntactic placement and discourse functions of temporal adjuncts across genres. Tamil's clause flexibility may enable nuanced adjunct positioning that English's more rigid structure does not support, which could have implications for discourse interpretation in varied written contexts (Givón, 1995; Enkvist, 1981).

Research Questions

1. How does the positional distribution of temporal adjuncts vary between English and Tamil across written genres?
2. What language-specific factors influence adjunct positioning and its functions in different genres?

Hypothesis

This study hypothesizes that the syntactic flexibility inherent to Tamil permits a broader range of positional variation in temporal adjunct placement compared to English, particularly within narrative and argumentative genres. Given Tamil's tolerance for clause-medial adjuncts, it is anticipated that Tamil texts will display a higher frequency of non-peripheral adjunct placements, facilitating richer temporal framing and potentially more dynamic discourse structuring. This stands in contrast to English, where adjuncts are more predictably constrained to clause boundaries (Ford, 1993; Doherty, 2001).

Contribution and Objectives

This paper contributes to our understanding of how syntactic typology influences discourse strategies, focusing on the interaction between syntax and discourse in written language. By conducting a corpus-based analysis of temporal adjuncts in English and Tamil, this research seeks to deepen cross-linguistic insights into adjunct use across genres, exploring how different syntactic structures shape discourse patterns and the genre-specific functions of temporal adjuncts in each language (Hofmockel et al., 2017; Fetzer, 2017b). Through this comparative approach, the study aims to enhance the understanding of how language-specific features and genre-related demands interact to guide adjunct positioning in written discourse.

2. Literature Review

This literature review contextualizes the current research through three main sections: Section 2.1 examines adjunct positioning in English, focusing on genre-based discourse functions; Section 2.2 explores cross-linguistic studies on adjunct placement, emphasizing flexible syntax in other languages; and Section 2.3 reviews theoretical frameworks relevant to genre-specific discourse grammar.

2.1 Adjunct Positioning and Discourse Functions in English

Research on adjunct positioning in English has underscored significant variations according to genre, particularly in the case of temporal adjuncts, which anchor events temporally and contribute to discourse coherence. Klumm's (2024) corpus-based analysis reveals that in English, which follows an SVO syntactic structure, adjuncts frequently appear in clause-final (right-peripheral) positions within informative genres. However, in narrative and argumentative texts, clause-initial (left-peripheral) placements are more common, serving to guide readers' interpretations of sequential events by setting temporal frames (Biber & Conrad, 2019; Fetzer, 2017b). This positional flexibility aligns with the discourse strategies of each genre, where clause-initial adjuncts provide temporal or thematic emphasis (Ford, 1993; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Additional studies by Doherty (2001, 2003) and Hasselgård (2010) support Klumm's findings. They confirm that while English's syntactic constraints typically favor clause-final adjuncts, genre-specific demands allow left-peripheral positioning to achieve pragmatic effects, such as foregrounding temporal elements or emphasizing thematic content. This genre-related variability highlights how adjunct positioning in English is both syntactically influenced and strategically flexible, depending on discourse needs (Virtanen, 1992b; Fries, 1995).

2.2 Cross-Linguistic Perspectives on Adjunct Positioning

Cross-linguistic analyses reveal that languages with flexible syntax allow for more positional diversity in adjunct placement. Studies on languages like Japanese and Korean, with SOV ordering and structural adaptability, illustrate how such languages accommodate adjuncts in clause-initial, medial, and final positions, enhancing discourse functions tied to sequential or thematic emphasis (Biber et al., 1999; Diessel, 2005). For example, in Japanese, adjuncts can appear mid-clause, providing discourse continuity or emphasis without disrupting syntactic flow, a function more constrained in SVO languages like English (Enkvist, 1981; Hasselgård, 2017).

Tamil, an SOV language, demonstrates similar flexibility. Annamalai (1997) and Asher (2002) describe how Tamil's clause structure, characterized by particle-based syntactic markers, allows for adjuncts in clause-medial positions. This flexibility enables Tamil speakers and writers to position temporal adjuncts strategically for discourse purposes, particularly in genres requiring detailed temporal or thematic organization (Das & Egg, 2023; Fetzer & Speyer, 2018). The findings from SOV languages suggest that syntactic flexibility may enhance discourse adaptability, allowing genre-driven adjunct placements that serve diverse discourse functions without compromising coherence (Hofmockel et al., 2017; Hasselgård, 2014).

2.3 Theoretical Framework and Genre-Specific Discourse Functions

Discourse Grammar Theory, as proposed by Quirk et al. (1985) and developed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), offers a theoretical foundation for analyzing the interaction between syntax and discourse. This framework posits that discourse structures and syntactic functions dynamically interact, especially in contexts where adjunct positioning can vary. The theory's emphasis on pragmatic and syntactic flexibility makes it especially relevant to adjunct studies across languages with differing syntactic rigidity, such as English and Tamil (Virtanen, 1992; Givón, 1995).

Supporting this view, Virtanen (1992) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) discuss how adjunct positioning reflects genre-specific discourse strategies. For instance, temporal adjuncts in narratives help

mark shifts in time and sequence, while in argumentative texts, they structure contrasting viewpoints (Hasselgård, 2010; Fetzer, 2017a). These studies suggest that while adjunct positioning is language-specific, genre-driven discourse functions—like foregrounding and emphasis—are universal. Consequently, adjuncts adapt to genre requirements in both syntactically flexible and rigid languages, supporting discourse functions critical to narrative, argumentative, and informative genres (Fries, 1995; Biber et al., 1999).

This review of literature establishes that languages with syntactic flexibility (e.g., Tamil) provide greater positional freedom for adjuncts, allowing for enhanced discourse adaptability compared to syntactically rigid languages (e.g., English). Genre, meanwhile, plays a significant role in shaping adjunct functions, with temporal adjuncts crucial to maintaining coherence across diverse discourse types. This study seeks to extend these insights by analyzing how English and Tamil use temporal adjuncts across genres, exploring the extent to which syntactic structure influences discourse functions in written language.

3. Methodology

This section details the research design, data sources, data selection criteria, and analytical methods applied to investigate cross-linguistic variations in temporal adjunct positioning between English and Tamil across narrative, argumentative, and informative written genres.

3.1 Research Design

To address the research questions and examine the hypothesis regarding positional flexibility between English and Tamil, this study employs a mixed-method approach. Quantitative analysis provides statistical insights on the distribution of adjuncts in left-peripheral (LP) and right-peripheral (RP) positions across both languages and genres. This is complemented by qualitative analysis to interpret how adjuncts function within specific genres and linguistic contexts. This dual approach allows a comprehensive examination of syntactic patterns and discourse functions (Biber & Conrad, 2019; Klumm, 2024).

3.2 Data Sources

The corpus consists of narrative, argumentative, and informative texts from English and Tamil.

- **English texts:** Narrative texts were selected from student-written personal stories available on university websites, while argumentative texts comprise opinion pieces from *The Guardian*, and informative texts were sourced from news reports within the same publication.
- **Tamil texts:** Narrative samples include short stories and autobiographical excerpts from Tamil literary journals, while argumentative samples were drawn from opinion columns in *Dinamalar* and *The Hindu Tamil*, and informative texts from news reports in *Dinamani* and *The Hindu Tamil*.

These sources were chosen to ensure consistency across genres and to maintain comparability in the use of adjuncts across English and Tamil texts (Annamalai, 1997; Asher, 2002).

3.3 Data Selection Criteria

To ensure comparability, the data was selected based on the following criteria:

1. **Genre Consistency:** Texts were classified strictly by genre—narrative, argumentative, or informative—to align with established definitions in genre studies (Biber et al., 1999; Klumm, 2024).

2. **Temporal Adjunct Inclusion:** Only texts with a minimum of five instances of phrasal or clausal temporal adjuncts were selected to ensure sufficient data on adjunct positioning across each genre.
3. **Length Standardization:** Each text was standardized to a length of 200-300 words to control for variations in adjunct frequency, which could be impacted by text length (Das & Egg, 2023).

3.4 Analytical Methods

3.4.1 Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis primarily addresses the frequency and positional distribution of temporal adjuncts (left-peripheral or right-peripheral) within each genre.

1. **Position Classification:** Adjuncts were classified by their position within the clause, with LP indicating clause-initial and RP indicating clause-final positions.
2. **Statistical Testing:** A chi-square test was used to determine the significance of positional differences between English and Tamil within each genre, with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$. This allowed for statistical validation of observed patterns in adjunct positioning, enabling comparisons across both languages (Doherty, 2003; Fetzer & Speyer, 2018).

3.4.2 Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis involved a close reading of temporal adjuncts in representative samples from each genre.

1. **Discourse Function Coding:** Adjuncts were coded based on discourse functions, including frame-setting, temporal sequencing, and contrastive emphasis, guided by Klumm's (2024) framework, which highlights genre-related discourse roles of adjuncts, such as backgrounding and thematic emphasis (Virtanen, 1992).
2. **Cross-Linguistic Comparison:** After coding, cross-linguistic comparisons were conducted to identify language-specific functions of adjuncts within similar genres, focusing on how Tamil's flexible SOV structure might enable unique adjunct functions compared to English (Enkvist, 1981; Givón, 1995).

3.5 Limitations

The study's methodology has several limitations. First, the manual coding of Tamil texts introduces subjectivity, particularly in identifying nuanced discourse functions. Furthermore, limitations in NLP tools for Tamil mean that adjunct parsing is conducted manually, relying heavily on linguistic expertise rather than automated processing. Future research could benefit from more advanced NLP tools for Tamil to improve the replicability and scalability of findings (Diessel, 2005; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

This mixed-method approach and carefully curated data allow for an in-depth exploration of adjunct positioning in English and Tamil, providing valuable insights into how syntactic structure and genre influence temporal adjunct placement and function.

4. Results and Analysis

This section presents the study's findings, organized by quantitative and qualitative analyses, to compare temporal adjunct positioning across English and Tamil in narrative, argumentative, and informative genres. The analysis focuses on how genre and language structure influence temporal adjunct usage.

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis examines the frequency and distribution of left-peripheral (LP) and right-peripheral (RP) temporal adjuncts across English and Tamil, testing the hypothesis that Tamil's flexible syntax supports greater positional variation than English.

4.1.1 Temporal Adjunct Distribution Across Genres

Genre	Language	Left-Peripheral (LP)	Right-Peripheral (RP)	Total Adjuncts
Narrative	English	64%	36%	100%
	Tamil	78%	22%	100%
Argumentative	English	58%	42%	100%
	Tamil	72%	28%	100%
Informative	English	35%	65%	100%
	Tamil	49%	51%	100%

The table highlights significant patterns. In English, narrative and argumentative genres favour LP positioning of adjuncts, with informative texts showing a preference for RP, supporting findings by Klumm (2024) on narrative framing. In Tamil, LP positioning is more prevalent across genres, especially in narrative and argumentative texts where LP usage surpasses 70%. Informative texts in Tamil exhibit a balanced LP-RP distribution, emphasizing the syntactic flexibility that permits Tamil adjuncts to convey background information flexibly (Annamalai, 1997; Asher, 2002).

4.1.2 Statistical Analysis

Chi-square tests confirm significant differences in adjunct positioning between English and Tamil across genres, particularly in narrative and argumentative texts ($p < 0.05$). These results support the hypothesis that Tamil's syntactic flexibility facilitates a broader range of adjunct positions than English (Biber & Conrad, 2019; Diessel, 2005).

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis explores how temporal adjuncts fulfill distinct discourse functions in English and Tamil, emphasizing genre-specific functions influenced by language structure.

4.2.1 Narrative Discourse

In English narratives, LP adjuncts predominantly set scenes and sequential events, functioning as temporal frames (Klumm, 2024). Conversely, in Tamil, LP adjuncts dynamically frame narrative contexts and often introduce contrastive elements within the same clause, leveraging positional flexibility for thematic variation and discourse shifts (Asher, 2002; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

4.2.2 Argumentative Discourse

In English argumentative discourse, temporal adjuncts often appear in RP to provide contrast or sequence, particularly when introducing counterarguments. Tamil argumentative texts feature more LP adjuncts, facilitating thematic contrasts early in sentences, setting a rhythm that supports complex argumentative structuring. This positioning underscores Tamil's capacity for flexible adjunct placement to foreground

contrasting views while elaborating or opposing them within the sentence (Das & Egg, 2023; Doherty, 2003).

4.2.3 Informative Discourse

In informative texts, English RP adjuncts support dense, structured information by following main statements, aligning with journalistic conventions. Tamil informative texts balance LP and RP positioning, with RP adjuncts primarily serving to clarify or expand the main information without overly rigid positioning requirements. This flexibility in Tamil reflects a more fluid approach to presenting background details, allowing additional context without the strict clause-peripheral constraints observed in English (Givón, 1995; Virtanen, 1992).

5. Discussion

The findings highlight key contrasts between English and Tamil in temporal adjunct positioning across genres, with Tamil's SOV structure supporting greater flexibility.

- **Narrative and Argumentative Flexibility in Tamil:** Tamil's syntax allows for varied discourse strategies, such as thematic framing and contrastive positioning, particularly useful in narrative and argumentative genres where LP adjuncts enhance context adaptability (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Klumm, 2024).
- **Informative Genre Constraints in English:** English informative discourse shows a preference for RP adjuncts, aligning with a focus on clarity and information density that emphasizes the primary content followed by secondary details (Biber & Conrad, 2019; Ford, 1993).

Overall, the results support the hypothesis that Tamil's SOV structure enhances positional and functional flexibility in adjunct usage, providing insights into how syntactic structures influence genre-based discourse patterns across languages.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the cross-linguistic distribution of temporal adjuncts in English and Tamil across three genres: narrative, argumentative, and informative. The findings confirm that Tamil's SOV syntax affords greater positional and functional variability for adjuncts compared to English's SVO structure, particularly in genres with flexible discourse demands like narrative and argumentative texts.

- **Genre and Language-Driven Distribution:** Both languages exhibit genre-based adjunct distribution, but Tamil demonstrates greater flexibility in placing temporal adjuncts. English particularly shows RP preference in informative genres, while Tamil maintains a more balanced LP-RP use, reflecting its syntactic adaptability (Biber & Conrad, 2019; Klumm, 2024).
- **Positional Preferences and Syntactic Flexibility:** Tamil's flexible syntax allows adjuncts to serve multiple functions, including thematic framing and contrastive emphasis. English adheres more closely to genre conventions, restricting adjuncts to framing or concluding roles, particularly in informative contexts (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Virtanen, 1992).
- **Cross-Linguistic Influence on Discourse Strategies:** Tamil's flexibility supports diverse discourse strategies, with adjuncts adding dynamic thematic shifts and argumentative contrast. English's rigid SVO syntax positions adjuncts discretely, aligning with its narrative and informative conventions (Doherty, 2001; Diessel, 2005).

7. Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers insights into cross-linguistic adjunct positioning, there are limitations and potential avenues for further exploration:

- **Sample Size and Data Scope:** A larger corpus spanning additional genres and languages could expand understanding of adjunct variability across linguistic frameworks.
- **Spoken vs. Written Discourse:** This research is limited to written texts. Future studies could explore spoken discourse, where adjunct positioning may vary due to real-time processing demands (Ford, 1993; Virtanen, 1992).
- **Interaction with Other Syntactic Elements:** Exploring the relationship between adjunct positioning and other syntactic features, such as thematic roles and stylistic conventions, could deepen insight into cross-linguistic adjunct functions (Givón, 1995; Annamalai, 1997).

8. Implications for Linguistic Theory and Language Learning

The study contributes to understanding the role of syntactic flexibility in discourse functions. For linguistic theory, these findings illustrate how genre and language structure influence adjunct positioning. For language learning, they suggest that teaching genre-specific adjunct use can aid comprehension, particularly in narrative and argumentative contexts, where adjuncts carry discourse-pragmatic weight.

Building on Klumm's (2024) genre-based approach, this analysis highlights the value of integrating syntactic structure with genre considerations in adjunct use, offering insights that may support both linguistic theory and applied language studies. Future work could extend these findings to further investigate adjunct functions across languages and genres, enhancing the understanding of syntax-discourse interactions.

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