


Adverbial Adjectives: A Usage-based Approach

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While adjectives and adverbs, of course, typically have separate functions within a sentence and are formed differently, they are similar in one key way: they each modify the nucleus of their phrase. Adjectives modify nouns and adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. However, there is a type of adjective that seems to perform the function of both an adjective and an adverb, aptly known as the adverbial adjective.

Some authors refer to these adjectives as predicative complements (Hernández Carbó, 1988) or descriptive predicative complements with subject orientation (Demonte, 1999). For the purpose of simplicity, I will refer to these adjectives as adverbial adjectives. This term is consistent with its use by Luján (1980).

Adverbial adjectives modify both the verb and the subject of that verb. Their purpose is to describe a quality that pertains to both the subject and the way the subject is performing the verb. Because they modify both the verb and the noun, adverbial adjectives agree with the noun in number and gender.

- (1) Las chicas duermen *tranquilas*.
- (2) Los trabajadores llegaron *cansados*.

It is crucial to fully understand the role of adverbial adjectives in order to know how to treat them, especially in light of the fact that there also exist adjectives that function in some contexts as adverbs of manner and so appear to function similarly.

- (3) Ella corre *rápido*.
- (4) Ellos hablaron muy *claro*.

These adverbs are called adjectival adverbs by some authors (Demonte, 1999) and simply adverbs by others (Luján, 1980). Here I will refer to them as adverbs because, though they have the form of an adjective, they modify only the verb and do not agree in gender or number with the subject. In sentence (3) for example, “rápido” refers only to the way the subject ran, not to the subject herself. By way of contrast, in sentence (2), the adverbial adjective “cansados” refers both to the state of the workers (“están cansados”) and to the way they are arriving (“cansadamente”).

Sometimes the difference between the adverb and the adverbial adjective serves to create different meanings (Butt, 1988). Consider the following pairs of sentences:

(5) Las niñas dormían *tranquilas*.

(6) Las niñas dormían *tranquilamente*.

(7) Pilar canta *alegre*.

(8) Pilar canta *alegremente*.

Sentence (5) means the girls were feeling peaceful and the girls slept in a peaceful way. The quality “tranquil” applies to both the girls and to how they were sleeping, so the adverbial adjective is used. The second sentence, however, means the girls were sleeping peacefully. While implicitly this sentence conveys, in most contexts, that the girls are sleeping peacefully because the girls in fact feel peaceful, grammatically this is not what the sentence expresses. In the same manner, example (7) means Pilar sang happily; Pilar is happy and this is reflected in the way she is singing. However, in example (8), “alegremente” only modifies the way Pilar is singing; she may or may not be feeling happy, despite the fact that she is singing happily.

A few grammarians have attempted to explain the phenomenon of adverbial adjectives, most through the lens of generative grammar. In this paper, I argue that a usage-based construction grammar approach provides a better explanation of how adverbial adjectives behave. Additionally, I utilize a usage-based approach to attempt to create a category for adverbial adjectives and the verbs they are used with in order to better understand why these grammatical features are chunked together. To the best of my knowledge, there does not yet exist a usage-based explanation like this for adverbial adjectives.

Generative Approaches

Predicate Complements

Before taking a look at a usage-based explanation, a few generative explanations need to be considered in order to provide a foundation for a usage-based approach and to understand the need for one. I will start with the interpretation outlined by Demonte and Masullo (1999). According to their research, only certain adjectives can be used adverbially. Demonte and Masullo refer to these as adjectives of manner. Some examples include *inocente*, *confuso*, *feliz*. These adjectives can modify a noun as well as a verb: *Yo estoy feliz*, *Habla feliz(mente)*. Adjectives like *azul* would not work as adverbial adjectives because they only modify nouns: *El cielo es azul*, **Habla azul*. In addition, Demonte and Masullo note that these adverbial adjectives are episodic or stative. In other words, they refer to situations and properties that are transitory, that imply change, and that have limited aspect. Being *inocente*, *confuso*, or *feliz*, for example, can change. However, adjectives like *azul*, though they can change, describe qualities or properties that are generally considered inherent, permanent, or stable.

As far as the types of verbs that adverbial adjectives can be used with, Demonte and Masullo state that this classification of adjectives can only occur in sentences with verbal predicates of event, not with ones of state. For example, we could say *Corre feliz* but not **Sabe feliz*. The verb must be one of process, realization, or accomplishment—i.e. non-stative—rather than stative, or the sentence will be ungrammatical.

However, for some verbs of state there appears to be a little leeway. For example, while **Joaquín sabía la noticia cont-*

tento is ungrammatical, ?*Marta ama deprimida* seems to be more acceptable. While *amar* is stative when it is considered alone, when considered in the context of a whole predicate, it may become, as in the case of ?*Marta ama deprimida*, slightly less stative. The same phenomenon occurs with phrases like, ¡Ódialo todo lo que puedas! (Demonte, 1999, footnote 23).

Further evidence that there can be ranges of acceptability for combinations of certain verbs and adverbial adjectives is found in categories. According to Demonte and Masullo, the categories to which verbs like *saber* and *ver* belong are stative, but within these categories are words like *analizar*, *entender*, and *mirar*, which describe more of an activity than a state. According to this interpretation, semantics play a large role in which grammatical structures are allowed and which are not. I will return to this idea of semantics and gradience of acceptability further on. From the parameters outlined above, Demonte and Masullo create two rules to govern the usage of adverbial adjectives: (1) the predicate has to be transitory, or episodic, and (2) both predicates (the verb and the adjective) have to be lexically compatible; they both need to predicate events (p. 2476).

Features and Trees

Hernanz Carbó (1988) uses features and phrase markers to explain adverbial adjectives. Citing Luján (1981), she describes three categories of adjectives: [+perfective], [-perfective], and [+/-perfective]. Adjectives that are [-perfective] can be used only with the copula *ser* and include words like *inteligente*, *capaz*, *modesto*, *rico*, *mortal*, *prudente*, *falso*, *increíble*, *honesto*, *constante*, *estúpido*, etc.

(9) *María es inteligente.*

(10) **María está inteligente.*

Adjectives that are [+perfective] are used only with the copulative *estar* and include adjectives like *lleno*, *perplejo*, *solo*, *roto*, *vacío*, *ausente*, *contento*, etc.

(11) **María es contenta.*

(12) *María está contenta.*

Adjectives that are [+/-perfective] have double aspectual valence and can be paired with either *ser* or *estar*. These adjectives include *gordo*, *delgado*, *limpio*, *sucio*, *alegre*, *silencioso*, *guapo*, *feo*, *elegante*, etc.

(13) *Este niño es gordo.*

(14) *Este niño está gordo.*

According to Hernanz Carbó (1988), the pairing of these categories of adjectives with certain copulas demonstrates that copulas lexically reflect the aspect of predicative adjectives. Adjectives that are [-perf.] cannot be used with *estar* and therefore cannot be used as adverbial adjectives (Hernanz Carbó refers to them as predicative complements or secondary predicates). All adverbial adjectives must have the feature [+perf.]. Those adjectives that are [+/- perf.] have their [-perf.]

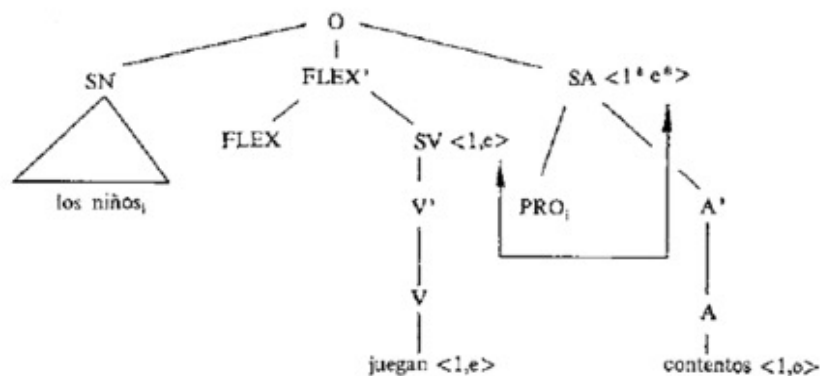
feature filtered by the conjugated verb in the primary predication. For example, in the phrase “Todos los días los niños se acostaban sucios” the conjugated verb “se acostaban” filters the [-perf.] feature of *sucio*, leaving us with the [+perf.] feature and allowing it to act as an adverbial adjective.

The question is, of course, how is it that the conjugated verb can block the [+/-perf] aspect of an adjective? To explain this, Hernanz Carbó looks to the Theory of Events begun by Davidson (1967) and developed by Higginbotham (1982). Davidson proposes that ordinary predicates—specifically action verbs (which are the verbs that allow for adverbial adjectives)—include, in addition to assigned positions for the open arguments that correspond to the subject, a position for “events.” According to Davidson, events are individual entities that make up another argument of the verb and therefore form part of the verb’s “thematic network.” As Higginbotham explains, “Action sentences involve implicit existential quantification over events” (1982, p. 8). For example, the sentence “María canta” could be represented as $[\exists x : x \text{ es un evento}] \text{ cantar } [\text{María}, x]$. This representation can be interpreted as “for some x, such that x is an event....”

According to the Theory of Events, complex expressions are interpreted through the application of a restricted set of operations based on “unloading.” Unloading is essentially the elimination of open theme positions of lexical units and of complex phrases (Speas, 1986). There are four types of unloading, according to Higginbotham, but Hernanz Carbó only discusses two: thematic assignment and thematic identification. Thematic assignment occurs in the relation between the predicate and the argument, while thematic identification occurs in the relation between adjective and noun.

Adjectives, because they are predicates, says Hernanz Carbó, include a position *e* (event) in their thematic network, just like verbs. So, in a sentence that contains an adverbial adjective, the position *e* of the verb phrase (SV) identifies with position *e* of the adjective phrase (SA), allowing for a predicate that agrees in number and gender with the noun. This is represented in the graphic below:

(15)



While this explanation presents a tidy visual of what is occurring in these constructions, we are not really left with more information than we had before. Besides position *e*—which appears to be a somewhat arbitrary theorized position—this explanation is essentially a circular description of the fact that the verb phrase and the adjective phrase match in gender and number. This is one of the issues with using a generative approach to this phenomenon.

Reduced Gerund Phrase

Luján (1980) explains the phenomenon of adverbial adjectives a bit differently. According to Luján, sentences that con-

tain an adverbial adjective, for example “Viajábamos solas,” derive from gerund adverbial phrases whose principal verb is a copula. Therefore, adverbial adjectives can be considered transformed or reduced versions of the original adverbial clauses (Luján 153). In other words, sentences that contain an adverbial adjective are similar to sentences such as the following:

(16) Ana llegó *corriendo*

(17) Mi amigo llegó *trayendo regalos*

(18) Me esperaban *mirando la televisión*.

The difference between the sentences above and sentences like “Viajábamos solas” is that the principal verb in the gerund form of “Viajábamos solas” (see below) is a copula. So, the deep structure of sentences like this, says Luján, is

(19) [nosotras viajábamos [nosotras estando solas]]

The subject of these clauses is eliminated in a later stage by the EQUI operation. The gerund form of the copulative *estar* is also eliminated, in a cyclical process shown below. The following is an outline of the reduction process of the sentence “La maestra llegó cansada”:

(20) [la maestra llegó [ella estando cansad-]]

ella estando cansada CONCORDANCIA

(Ciclo 1)

la maestra llegó \emptyset estando cansada EQUI (Ciclo 2)

la maestra llegó \emptyset cansada ELISIÓN-Cop (Ciclo 2)

‘La maestra llegó cansada.’

Luján argues that “Pedro busca a Ana preocupado” is the same in meaning as, and is a reduced form of, “Pedro busca a Ana estando preocupado.” While at first glance these sentences seem to say the same thing, if we really consider them, we will find that they are not really equivalent. From “Pedro busca a Ana preocupado,” we understand that Pedro is worried and that this emotion is reflected in the way he is looking for Ana. But in “Pedro busca a Ana estando preocupado,” “estando preocupado” seems to only modify “Pedro.” It doesn’t really modify “busca” like the adverbial adjective does. Further evidence that these are not equivalent is that we can rearrange “Pedro busca a Ana estando preocupado” to “Pedro, estando preocupado, busca a Ana.” But we cannot change “Pedro busca a Ana estando preocupado” to create “*Pedro, preocupado, busca a Ana.”

The Need for a Usage-Based Approach

These generative approaches to adverbial adjectives provide fairly thorough explanations for this grammatical phenomenon. However, there are two substantial issues with them. The first is that at the end of these generative approaches, as mentioned before, we are not left with much more information than we had before.

The second concern with the generative approaches, I believe, is that they do not focus enough on the importance of

semantics in these adverbial adjective constructions. Demonte and Masullo (1999) do touch on the role of semantics, but the main focus in the majority of generative approaches to this phenomenon is the underlying syntactic and grammatical rules. I believe the meaning of particular verbs and adverbial adjectives is perhaps the most important factor in understanding the combinations that speakers create. A usage-based approach focused on semantics would provide a more accurate description of what speakers are actually doing when they create verb + adverbial adjective phrases.

A Usage-based Approach

Chunking

I believe that these verb + adverbial adjective sequences occur because speakers chunk together verbs and adverbial adjectives that they know go together because of their semantic values. According to Bybee (2002), sequences of words that have a high frequency of repetition become automated into a single chunk that can then be accessed as a unit. Several pieces of evidence exist for the chunking phenomenon, Bybee says. First, there is ample evidence that one unit of a chunk automates the other unit in the chunk. For example, hearing *supreme* leads most hearers to think *court* and *sesame* to think *street*. Second, the original internal structure of a set of words tends to be lost in chunking. This is why the English phrase *going to* is so often pronounced as “gonna.” Third, the morphemes within a chunk tend to become separate in the mind of speakers from other uses of these morphemes. As evidence of this, most speakers cannot identify the meaning of *of* in phrases like “kind of.” Finally, chunks tend to experience phonological reduction. This is most easily seen in English phrases such as “gonna,” “wanna,” “hafta.”

One piece of evidence for the chunking of adverbial adjectives is the fact that they ignore constituent boundaries. So-called “normal” adjectives—i.e. non-adverbial ones—can be pronominalized. For example, we can say, “María es *feliz* y Ana también *lo* es.” But we cannot do the same with adverbial adjectives. We cannot say, “*María vive *feliz* y Ana también *lo* vive.” Adverbial adjectives ignore the traditional constituent boundaries for adjectives because they serve a unique purpose, which will be discussed further on.

Token Frequencies

Perhaps the most compelling evidence that verb + adverbial adjective combinations are an example of chunking is the token frequency with which particular combinations occur. Below is a list of several possible verb + adverbial adjective phrases and the token frequencies with which they appear in the BYU Web/Dialects *Corpus del Español* created by Mark Davies. The symbol “^” represents examples provided by the articles cited in this paper. The other combinations were created based on these examples, using synonyms of some of the most frequent adverbial adjectives and verbs. I also performed several different corpus searches based on common Spanish verbs to find as many high-frequency combinations as I could.

Llegar

Phrase	Frequency
^[llegar] cansad*	573
[llegar] tranquil*	63
[llegar] content*	57
[llegar] san*	458

[llegar] nuev*	974
[llegar] junt@s	443

Dormir

Phrase	Frequency
^[dormir] cansad*	30
[dormir] tranquil*	2122
[dormir] satisfech*	12
[dormir] acompañad*	109

Salir

Phrase	Frequency
^[salir] cansad*	35
[salir] tranquil*	158
[salir] content*	479
[salir] satisfech*	356
[salir] viv*	1096
[salir] airos*	2520
[salir] victorios*	2434
[salir] indemne*	577
[salir] car@(s)	1993
[salir] positiv*	1652

Ir(se)

[ir] satisfech*	245
[ir] content*	22
[ir] tranquil*	19
[ir] cansad*	65
[ir] unid*	2326
[ir] junt@s	3376
[ir] destinad*	2020
[ir] perfect*	1048
[ir] sol*	5131
[ir] armad*	608

Vivir

Phrase	Frequency
[vivir] junt@s	7225
[vivir] tranquil*	2002
[vivir] content*	348
[vivir] satisfech*	61
^[vivir] feli*	3385
[vivir] inmers*	731
[vivir] enferm*	75

Habitat

[habitar] tranquil*	6
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Morir

[morir] pobr*	329
[morir] inocent*	92
[morir] congelad*	161
[morir] esbelt*	30
[morir] quemad*	454
[morir] asesinad*	1183
[morir] tranquil*	289
[morir] ahogad*	1141
[morir] envenenad*	317
[morir] crucificad*	182

Mirar

Phrase	Frequency
^[mirar] agresiv*	2
^[mirar] atónit*	139
[mirar] desconcertad*	107
[mirar] curios*	50
[mirar] preocupad*	67
[mirar] junt*	196

Trabajar

Phrase	Frequency
[trabajar] cansad*	10
[trabajar] tranquil*	442
[trabajar] content*	25
^[trabajar] silencios*	6
[trabajar] junt@s	10,607
[trabajar] unid*	1220

Venir

[venir] list*	169
[venir] junt@s	279
[venir] sujet*	55
[venir] llen*	296

Esperar

Phrase	Frequency
[esperar] tranquil*	193
[esperar] content*	12
[esperar] ansios*	717
^[esperar] impacient*	668
[esperar] junt*	45

Comer

Phrase	Frequency
[comer] cansad*	0
[comer] tranquil*	138
[comer] content*	5
[comer] preocupad*	0
[comer] ansios*	3
^ [comer] callad*	57
[comer] junt*	932

Partir

Phrase	Frequency
[partir] cansad*	0
[partir] tranquil*	12
[partir] content*	5
[partir] satisfech*	4
[partir] preocupad*	0
^[partir] feli*	16
[partir] raud*	45
[partir] junt@s	49
[partir] viv*	3

Acercar(se)

Phrase	Frequency
[acercar] cansad*	0
[acercar] tranquil*	5
[acercar] content*	2
[acercar] preocupad*	22
[acercar] ansios*	4
^[acercar] solicit*	1
[acercar] expectant*	3

Acostar(se)

Phrase	Frequency
[acostar] cansad*	16
[acostar] tranquil*	31
[acostar] content*	3
^[acostar] satisfech*	4
[acostar] preocupad*	4
[acostar] rendid*	2

Leer

Phrase	Frequency
[leer] cansad*	0
[leer] tranquil*	73
^[leer] content*	2
[leer] satisfech*	1
[leer] preocupad*	5

Bailar

[bailar] libre*	12
[bailar] diferent*	24
[bailar] alegre*	22
[bailar] feli*	33
[bailar] desnud*	93
[bailar] descalz*	66
[bailar] content*	7
[bailar] junt@s	234

Caer(se)

[caer] muert*	1120
[caer] simpátic*	440
[caer] abatid*	401
[caer] rendid*	1320
[caer] derrotad*	691
[caer] herid*	428
[caer] junt@s	62

Caminar

[caminar] tranquil*	241
[caminar] unid*	90
[caminar] libr*	153
[caminar] erect*	28
[caminar] descalz*	660
[caminar] desnud*	101
[caminar] liger*	86

Correr

[correr] junt*	499
[correr] descalz*	348
[correr] desnud*	205
[correr] paralel*	516
[correr] despavorid*	289
[correr] libr*	201

Escuchar

[escuchar] atent*	371
[escuchar] absort*	21

It is interesting to note that many of the phrases that were used in generative approaches as examples of verb + adverbial adjective constructions have frequencies that are very low or even nil: [acostar] satisfech* (4), [acercar] solicit* (1), [partir] feli* (16), [mirar] agresiv* (2), [dormir] cansad* (30), [trabajar] silencios* (6), etc. The exceptions are [llegar] cansad* (573) and [vivir] feli* (3385). Some of the constructions used as examples in the generativist articles that are used little or not at all by native speakers may have been included by the authors simply as alternatives to the constructions that are frequently used, in order to avoid excessive repetition of the same phrases. However, this does suggest that generative approaches to adverbial adjectives focus more on syntactic possibilities than on constructions that are actually in use by speakers.

Several questions still remain: If all of the above combinations are possible, why do certain combinations exist in speech and others do not? Why are certain combinations more frequent than others? Can a category be created that explains the existing combinations? To answer these questions, I will explore each of the constituents of these verb + adverbial adjective phrases individually (including possible subjects) and then attempt to create a category that explains the existence and frequency of some combinations over others.

The Adjective

The first aspect of these adjectives that stands out is that many of them describe social states: *juntos*, *airosos*, *victoriosos*, *unidos*. Along with these adjectives of social state that appear with high frequency are high-frequency emotional adjectives: *felices*, *tranquilos*. There are also many instances of adjectives that describe physical states: *destinados*, *muerdos*, *rendidos*, etc. The social and emotional adjectives are not either one more frequent than the other; however, they are both more frequent than the adjectives describing physical state. Thus it seems safe to say that, according to the data above, the most common adjectives used in these constructions are those that describe a social or emotional state, followed by those that describe a physical state.

However, it is crucial to note that this is only true when looking at these constructions as a whole. When looking at each verb with its several possible adverbial adjective combinations, it is not always true that the adjectives of social state and emotional state are used more frequently than those of physical states. For instance, [llegar] + cansad* (573) is a more frequent construction than [llegar] junt@s (443), and [caer] muert* (1120) is more frequent than [caer] abatid* (401). This suggests that, overall, adjectives describing social states and emotional states lend themselves well to these constructions—perhaps better than adjectives of physical state do—but that frequencies also depend on an adjective's relationship to the verb. Thus the gradience of acceptability of different combinations depends on the type of adjective as well as the type of verb being used. This will be discussed in the next section.

The Verb

There are three main conclusions to be gathered from the data above about the verbs in these constructions. First, there exists an inherent semantic and possibly pragmatic connection between the verb and the adverbial adjective used that determines which combinations are possible and which of those which are most frequent. As stated above, the main piece of evidence for this is the fact that certain adjectives appear with higher frequency when attached to some verbs

than attached to others. This is seen even when combining the same adjective with supposed synonyms. For example, [salir] viv* provides 1096 hits in the corpus, while [partir] viv* only three. Another example of this is [vivir] tranquil* (2002) versus [habitar] tranquil* (6).

One possible explanation for the difference in frequencies between these combinations is that certain verbs appear to have a broader semantic range than others. *Vivir*, for example, has myriad meanings, and the use of *vivir* in several colloquial phrases shows that *vivir* can be used both literally and figuratively (*vivir a todo tren, no dejar vivir, mujer de mal vivir, un sinvivir, vivir al margen*). The verb *habitar*, on the other hand, does not have this same sort of semantic range. Though considered a synonym of *vivir*, *habitar* is typically used literally and does not make up part of many colloquial phrases. This suggests that *habitar* cannot be considered a true synonym of *vivir*, or, at the very least, it is possible to say that semantically *habitar* is not equipped to express as much about a person's emotional state as *vivir* is. The same appears to be true of *salir* and *partir*. Though *partir* is used in a handful of figurative phrases (*a partir de, partir en dos*), its figurative use is much more limited than that of *salir* (*salir a flote, no entrar ni salir, salir a la palestra, salir bien librado, salir bien parado, salir con domingo siete*, etc.). There appears to be some connection between verbs that can take radial semantic extensions and their likelihood to be paired with adverbial adjectives (Robertson, 1998).

Another factor in verb + adverbial adjective pairings may be the transitivity of a verb. The verbs in the list above that have the highest frequency adverbial adjectives (*ir, dormir, salir, vivir, trabajar, caer*) are used either exclusively or primarily intransitively, while many of the other verbs (*caminar, correr, bailar, acostarse, acercarse*, etc.) are often used transitively. More research is needed to determine the frequency of the transitive and intransitive uses of these verbs compared with the frequency of their pairing with adverbial adjectives. What we can conclude from the evidence above, however, is that the verbs in these verb + adverbial adjective constructions are often intransitive verbs with a broad semantic range that allows them to be used figuratively and that creates an inherent semantic relationship with the adjectives they are paired with.

The Subject

Working backwards through the verb + adverbial adjective constructions makes it easy to see that the range of possibilities for the subject is fairly narrow. The adjective is mostly likely to describe a social or emotional state; these adjectives require a subject that can socialize or experience emotion, in other words, an animate subject. Most adjectives of physical state used in these combinations also require an animate subject (*muerto, vivo*, etc.); however, some verb + adverbial adjective combinations can be used with an inanimate subject. For example, “Los cuadernos llegan nuevos” would be possible. Thus, the subjects of verb + adverbial adjective combinations are likely to be animate subjects, but can be inanimate ones as well.

Conclusion

In considering the role of semantics and the frequencies with which certain verb + adverbial adjectives appear, I have narrowed the parameters for the use of these constructions from those set by generative grammarians. Assuming the information above is correct, and relying on usage-based construction grammar principles, it seems that verb + adverbial adjective constructions are made up largely of animate subjects that perform a verb of broad semantic range that is typically intransitive and that has an inherent relationship to a specific adjective, which tends to describe the social, emotional, or physical state of the noun. Verb + adverbial adjective phrases are a unique construction that speakers have created to serve a certain purpose. Ignoring constituent boundaries, they have chunked these phrases together and found a way to express a phenomenon that traditional grammar shakes its head at but that semantically makes perfect sense.

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