

Evidential adverbs of *clearly* and *obviously*: a corpus-based analysis

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Kang, Soojin. 2017. Evidential adverbs of *clearly* and *obviously*: a corpus-based analysis. *SNU Working Papers in English Linguistics and Language 15*, 68-79. This paper explores the usage of the synonymous evidential adverbs *clearly* and *obviously*. It presents an analysis based on the data from Corpus of Contemporary American English by looking at both spoken and written context. Although *clearly* and *obviously* can be used interchangeably in contexts, the findings reveal some differences of the two. Both adverbs function as an epistemic adverb, however, its result reveals that the difference between the two is that *clearly* can also function as a manner adverb when collocated with several verbs. Regarding evidentiality of the two adverbs, *clearly* carries high evidentiality with truthfulness while *obviously* gives an evaluation of the information without guaranteeing truthfulness. (Seoul National University)

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1. Introduction

The adverbs *clearly* and *obviously* are closely related words which can be defined as synonymous adverbs. *Oxford English Dictionary* gives as the first meaning of *clearly* ‘in a clear manner; with clarity’ and second meaning ‘without doubt; obviously.’ The same dictionary defines *obviously* ‘in a way that is easily perceived or understood; clearly.’ As the dictionary points out, these two adverbs are closely related and thus, seem to occur in similar contexts. For instance, in the sentences (i) *He's clearly very upset about this* and (ii) *and he was obviously very angry, you know, about what was said about him*, (i) and (ii) are syntactically identical since *clearly* and *obviously* are collocated with *very upset/angry*. Since the two adverbs are interchangeable in the contexts, the current study attempts to find out their usage based on the data from the Corpus

of Contemporary American English (COCA) and differentiates their use in the perspective of evidentiality.

2. Previous Studies

2.1 Evidentiality and epistemic modality

According to Saeed (2016), “Evidentiality allows a speaker to communicate her attitude to the source of her information” (p. 140). With evidentiality, speakers are able to say a statement based on their personal first-hand knowledge. If the statement was acquired from another source, the source needs to be mentioned by the speaker. Epistemic modality, as Saeed (2016) defines, is the speaker’s way of signaling the degree of knowledge. From Saeed’s (2016) definition, the difference between evidentiality and epistemic modality seems quite clear in that evidentiality concerns the source of information whereas epistemic modality shows the degree of knowledge.

However, there is no consensus between scholars whether to view evidentiality and epistemic modality as two different categories or similar ones. For instance, Dendale and Tasmowski (2001) argue that the relationship between evidentiality and epistemic modality can be divided into three different aspects such as *disjunction*, *inclusion*, and *overlap*. From the *disjunctive* point of view, evidentiality and epistemic modality are seen as two independent categories. *Inclusion* considers evidentiality being regarded as falling within the scope of the epistemic modality. When evidentiality and epistemic modality partly intersect, it is defined as having an *overlap* relation.

Evidentiality, itself, can be divided into two parts. Cornillie (2009) distinguishes between direct evidentiality and indirect evidentiality regarding traditional classifications. Direct evidentiality concerns the speaker witnessing the action. Indirect evidentiality, on the other hand,

is when the speaker has not witnessed the action but has heard about the information from others.

2.2 Sentence initial adverbs of *clearly* and *obviously*

Almeida (2012) deals with sentence evidential adverbs of *clearly*, *intuitively*, *obviously*, and *experimentally* from a disjunctive approach. The paper examines four adverbs placed initially in the *Corpus of Specialized Research Papers in English*. Almeida (2012) argues that *clearly* shows the author's commitment towards the proposition and indicates inferential reasoning. Furthermore, *obviously* is described as showing how information is gained and that it falls into clarity together with *clearly*.

2.3 *Clearly* in academic discourse

Rozumko (2017) makes an analysis of *clearly* based on electronic collections of scholarly publications. Rozumko (2017) states that "*Clearly* tends to be used in discussions of data to show that the author's conclusions are empirically grounded and to demonstrate the author's way of thinking" (p.86). In addition, it also mentions that *clearly* is used in sentences in order to refer to the shared knowledge between the author and the reader.

3. Data

COCA is used as a data source in the paper. COCA contains more than 560 million words of text including almost all data from 1990 to 2017. Its texts are from spoken as well as written, namely fiction, magazine, newspaper, and academic.

According to COCA, *clearly* had the frequency of 62413 whereas *obviously* with 45298 frequency.

Figure 1. Overall frequency of *clearly*

SEE CONTEXT: CLICK ON WORD OR SELECT WORDS + [CONTEXT] [HELP...]

	<input type="checkbox"/>	CONTEXT	FREQ
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	CLEARLY	62413

Figure 2. Overall frequency of *obviously*

SEE CONTEXT: CLICK ON WORD OR SELECT WORDS + [CONTEXT] [HELP...]

	<input type="checkbox"/>	CONTEXT	FREQ
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	OBVIOUSLY	45298

However, when dividing the data into spoken and written, another difference between the two adverbs arises. Spoken data reveals that *obviously* is used more compared to *clearly* in the same data. For the written data, *clearly* is about twice as frequent as *obviously*.

Table 1. Frequency of *clearly* and *obviously* in spoken and written respectively

	SPOKEN	WRITTEN
<i>clearly</i>	16842	45571
<i>obviously</i>	24860	20438

This paper analyzes the usage of adverbs *clearly* and *obviously* in both spoken and written data. Furthermore, it will look specifically at how these two adverbs are used in terms of evidentiality.

4. Analysis

4.1 Clearly

4.1.1 Manner adverb

Clearly is used as a manner adverb when collocated with certain verbs as in *see clearly* and *speak clearly*. Simon-Vandenberg (2008) categorizes types of processes that the manner adverb qualifies with her analysis of *definitely* as a manner adverb. *Clearly* is discussed below with the approaches of Simon-Vandenberg (2008).

(a) Processes of communication: say, state, speak, hear, etc.

(1)

- Apt's expression said clearly to Smith that this phase of the conversation was over. (1990/WRIT/FIC/Bk:NightsSummer)

- Though top American intelligence and military officers state clearly that Iran has not decided to make a nuclear weapon, expectations of imminent conflict and constant threat warnings have been fanned by Republican presidential candidates and some in Congress, and furthered by the media. (2012/WRIT/NEWS/CSMonitor)

- As he fell, his leg snapped so loudly that it was heard clearly by those near him. (2014/WRIT/ACAD/PoliticsLifeSciences)

- The absence of any constructive reference to specific linguistic or racial identities in political rhetoric during the late 1980s and early 1990s speaks clearly to the Martinican bureaucrats' quandary. (1997/WRIT/ACAD/AnthropolQ)

(b) Processes of cognition and decision-making: identify, relate, think, know, etc.

(2)

- But it was hard to think clearly anymore. (2012/WRIT/FIC/Bk:HighlandAvenger)

- Then come the peals of delight and surprise when the hiding place is discovered and once again one's whereabouts are clearly known. (2009/WRIT/MAG/America)
- Worry and Felt Isolation appear to be less clearly related to the depression measure, perhaps tapping other constructs (for example, anxiety) not directly measured there. (2005/WRIT/ACAD/HealthSocialW)
- and I remember thinking very clearly that I cannot let the bullet of that gun take a downward trajectory. (2005/SPOK/PBS_Tavis)
- somewhere in the middle in the political spectrum, they don't identify very clearly with one side or the other. (1996/SPOK/PBS_Newshour)

In the examples of (1) and (2), *clearly* is used with the meaning of 'in a clear way.' The collocations of *clearly* indicate the usage of the adverb as a manner.

4.1.2 Response marker

As a response marker, *clearly* is used as an affirmative marker and as a negative response marker as in *clearly not*. *Clearly* here means 'without doubt.' These response markers commonly appear in spoken data as in the examples (3).

- (3)
- TANTAROS: That is in your own handwriting. (LAUGHTER)
 - BECKEL: It's not really. BOLLING: It's crayon. BECKEL: Clearly not. That's how they get to you. Say things like that. It's not in my handwriting. I don't write well. (2012/SPOK/Fox:TheFive)
 - WILLIAMS: Here is the ultimate question: even if there were oil, let's say, in Central Park, in the Everglades, in Yosemite Valley, in

the Redwoods, do we want to develop oil there? STAHL: Clearly not. (2002/SPOK/CBS_Sixty)

- CARLSON: You obviously have been listening to some famous members of the senate who describes those groups as freedom fighters. And still doesn't understand the breakdown. GABBARD: Clearly. This is the problem though, Tucker, only recently, this has been happening, have a few people in the media actually started talking about the truth of what we have been doing, about how our tax payer dollars have been spent there. (2017/SPOK/Fox:TuckerCarlsonTonight)

4.1.3 Emphasizer

As an *emphasizer*, *clearly* functions to reinforce the whole proposition. Its meaning is similar to response marker *clearly* 'without doubt.' Example (4) illustrates this use.

(4)

- By implying that they would be hunted down and killed, he clearly was not considering them British combatants. (2014/WRIT/ACAD/Georgia)

- Clearly, that's going to be the strategy of the Republicans. (2010/SPOK/ABC_ThisWeek)

The usage of *clearly* as a response marker in 4.1.2 and *emphasize* in 4.1.3 indicate the speaker's stance towards the utterance. It is used to signal speaker's strong certainty to the proposition.

4.2 Obviously

4.2.1 Intensifier

Aijmer (2008) argues that *definitely* used to modify adjectives serves as an intensifier. Aijmer (2008) gives an example of the sentence, *He is definitely funny*, to show that the adverb amplifies intensity. The adverb premodifies the adjective *funny* which makes *definitely* to have the meaning of ‘very.’ Example (5) demonstrates the use of *obviously* as an intensifier which functions similarly to the adverb *definitely*.

(5)

- My mom deserves to be happy. My dad is obviously happy... wherever he is. (2009/WRIT/ACAD/ScholScope)

4.2.2 Response marker

Just as *clearly* as a response marker, *obviously* is used similarly as an affirmative and negative response marker. In spoken data, *obviously* co-occurs with the interjection *oh* and the intensifier *well*.

(6)

- “They’re just jealous. You’ve got a real eye for beauty, Wozza.”

“Obviously.” (2016/WRIT/FIC/Antipodes)

- “Do you oversee each stage in the sequence of chemical reactions that transforms the flesh of the fruit into the flesh of Henghis Hapthorn?”

“Obviously not.” (2005/WRIT/FIC/FantasySciFi)

- GEORGE-ANTHONY: OK. You know, it’s just hard, I know, for you. It’s hard for us because none of us have ever been through any of this kind of stuff before. None of us, you know? CASEY-ANTHONY-: Well, obviously not. And we need to stick together in this, and it’s hard for us to at this point. (2011/SPOK/CNN_Grace)

- SCHIEFFER: I mean, would consultants have told Lincoln to try to repeal the amendment on slavery? GOODWIN: Oh, obviously

not. They said, you don't have the votes.
(2012/SPOK/CBS:FaceTheNation)

4.2.3 Emphasizer

Obviously as an emphasizee strengthens a proposition and reinforces the statement at the same time.

(7)

- This, obviously, is not the case - night invariably follows day.
(2002/WRIT/MAG/Astronomy)
- Obviously, you think crime at the academy is newsworthy and deserving of front-page coverage. (2002/WRIT/NEWS/Denver)

4.3 Evidentiality of *clearly* and *obviously*

Evidentiality of *clearly* can be seen in written context, especially in academic papers. For instance, *clearly* is widely used in academic paper while *obviously* is not. *Clearly* in academic paper strongly collocates with *research*, *study*, *work*, and *results*. In such sentences, it is structured as follows: *research has clearly demonstrated/established/shown*, *work/study/results clearly indicated/support/showed*. *Research*, *study*, *work*, and *results* are evidential markers of *clearly* which evidently shows where the source of information comes from. Therefore, it creates visual evidence and truthfulness of the sentence. Because of these noun collocations, it makes *clearly* as an adverb carrying high evidentiality. Example (8) shows the usage of *clearly* premodified by *study*.

(8)

- ... More Chinese students than American students believe a) cell phones should be turned off during university lectures and class discussions and/ or group work, and b) they can easily text and/or

make cell phone calls while working cooperatively with colleagues and not miss any work. The results of this study clearly show an increase in the level of mobile phone use from 2011 to 2012 in diversified environments causing aggravation, deterred learning, and threatening safety conditions to all (texting while driving). (2014/WRIT/ACAD/CollegeStud)

Before talking about the results, the writer lists the findings of his study. Then, finally, he concludes his overall argument with the phrase ‘the results of this study clearly show.’ The instance of (8) can be classified as a direct evidential since the writer is the only one who is witnessing the overall action.

(9)

- The present study underscores the need for preschool teachers to receive sound training in the instruction of early literacy skills and in assessment, for the purpose of data based decision making. Although the literature does not explicitly state that it is necessary to use a packaged curriculum, research has clearly demonstrated the salient early literacy skills that are predictive of future reading success. (2015/WRIT/ACAD/ReadingImprovement)

Example (9) is also another case of direct evidentiality. The writer uses the noun *research* as an evidential marker of *clearly* and further makes an argument on his own.

Obviously is frequently used in written context of newspaper. Examples (10) demonstrate the usage. Its use implicates that the proposition with *obviously* does not guarantee truthfulness of the sentence since the writer is making an inference through the previous sentences. Besides, *obviously* does not carry an explicit source of information. This finding supports Almeida’s (2012) analysis of *obviously* that it expresses an evaluation of the information which does not entail truthfulness.

(10)

- And it reflects a lack of all decency on the part of those hunters willing to take part in this slaughter. After all, these buffalo are used to being approached and surrounded by people. Obviously only the mightiest hunters will be able to slay targets such as these who will let you walk right up to them. (2005/WRIT/NEWS/Denver)

- “Given that it's an election year and we have a war going on, people are obviously going to be very reticent to challenge the president on his top priority,” says Stephen Young, Washington director for the Union of Concerned Scientists. (2002/WRIT/NEWS/USAToday)

5. Conclusion

This paper analyzed the adverbs of *clearly* and *obviously* in COCA. Although the adverbs seem to be related, contexts from corpus indicate the different usage of *clearly* and *obviously*. Two adverbs had almost the same use except for the fact that *clearly* also served as a manner adverb. Moreover, evidentiality of the adverbs was investigated to see the differences between the two and it found out that *clearly* had high evidentiality compared to *obviously* in the corpus. *Clearly*, specifically, guaranteed the truthfulness of the proposition with its noun evidential markers while *obviously* did not.

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