

Hummatova A. E.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6882>

Baku Eurasia University

TEXT-FORMING FUNCTIONS OF ADVERBIAL CLAUSES OF TIME IN ENGLISH

This article examines the text-forming functions of adverbial clauses of time in English from the perspective of discourse and text linguistics. The study determines the role of adverbial clauses of time in establishing chronological sequence, ensuring coherence and consistency of the text, forming thematic transitions, and structuring information. A comparative analysis of the functional properties of temporal connectors (when, before, after, while, as soon as, until, since, etc.) in various types of discourse is provided. The scientific novelty of the study lies in the systematic analysis of adverbial clauses of time not only as syntactic constructions but also as text-forming and discourse-forming mechanisms, as well as in the generalization of the functional differences between their prepositional and postpositional positions in various types of discourse. The study was conducted based on a generalization of the results obtained in modern linguistics, using corpus, pragmatic, and discursive approaches. It has been established that adverbial clauses of time are not only syntactic units but also an important discursive mechanism, ensuring the temporal integrity, communicative consistency, and semantic coherence of the text. The article is based on contemporary literature. It has been established that the position of adverbial clauses of time directly influences their discursive function. It has been determined that presuppositional adverbial clauses of time primarily create a temporal framework for events, provide transitions between parts of the text, and direct the development of the narrative. Postpositive adverbial clauses of time, on the other hand, complement the semantic interpretation of the main predication, clarifying its temporality. The study also demonstrates that the function of temporal connectors is not limited to expressing only temporal relations. It has been proven that in various discursive settings, they also perform additional functions, such as cause-and-effect relationships, background narration, discursive transitions, and the hierarchical organization of information. This indicates that the text-forming potential of adverbial clauses of time is broader than their formal syntactic properties.

Keywords: English language, tense clause, temporal conjunctions, text-forming function, cohesion, coherence, discourse, narrative.

Introduction. Adverbial clauses of time in English are one of the syntactic tools that play an important role in the semantic and structural organization of the text. This type of branch sentences, in addition to expressing the interaction of events in terms of time, ensures the logical sequence of the text, the gradual development of information and communicative integrity. Time branch sentences not only create a grammatical connection, but also act as one of the main text-creating elements that strengthen the cohesion and coherence of the text [11].

Thus, adverbial clauses of time are not only grammatical constructs in English, but also functional mechanisms that provide discourse organization of the text. They determine the temporal sequence of events, strengthen the coherence of the text, provide thematic

development, and allow the author to structure information in a way that is consistent with the communicative purpose. Modern corpus and discourse studies show that the use of these constructions serves to increase logical coherence and readability, especially in academic and narrative texts.

It can be said that in English, adverbial clauses of time perform three main functions: they provide coherence to the text, indicate the temporal sequence of events, and organize the main and secondary parts of the information. According to the general conclusion of the studies, adverbial clauses of time used at the beginning of the sentence mainly organize the text, while those used at the end of the sentence specify the time of the event and complete the main idea [8; 20; 6].

Analysis of Recent Research and Publications.

Analysis of the recent research and publication. In this article, we relied primarily on the work of foreign authors: Altshuler D., Truswell R., Castañeda D.A., Carduner J., Chen X., Alexopoulou T., Tsimpli I., Couper-Kuhlen E., Thompson S., Diessel H. and etc. In their work, we found reasoning and conclusions that are relevant to our topic. Indicators of the prepositional position of the adverbial clauses of time and adverbial clauses of time create cohesion and coherence within the text, because they can establish a chain of sequential signals that connect events in a line [20]. Especially in narrative discourse, this chain is one of the main pillars of the temporal text strategy [20]. Adverbial clauses of time also mark text boundaries and create transition points at different hierarchical levels [20; 8]. When used in the initial position, the adverbial clause of time is especially active in structuring the discourse consisting of consecutive events [8; 14].

From the point of view of text creation, one of their important functions is the alignment of chronological order with the principle of iconicity: the ordering of events in the text often reflects the real time sequence [6; 14]. For this reason, branch clauses tend to come before the main clause when denoting an event that happened before, while those denoting posteriority are more likely to remain in the last position [6]. However, it does not seem sufficient to describe the function of initial positional time branch sentences only as a “discourse organizer” [13; 14].

Task statement. The purpose of the article is to determine the role of adverbial clauses of time in establishing chronological sequence, ensuring coherence and consistency of the text, forming thematic transitions and structuring information.

Outline of the main material of the study. Adverbial clauses of time indicate the time of the action and event that occurred in the main clause. It is included in the main sentence with the help of conjunctions such as *when, before, after, as*. The position of the adverbial clauses of time in relation to the main sentence is manifested in two ways: prepositive and postpositive [1, p. 272]. In English, when the branch clauses have a prepositive or postpositive position, they are connected to the main clause with the conjunctions *when, before, after, as, as soon as, while* and so on.

Let's pay attention to the examples of the prepositional position of the branch sentence. “*When I was alive and had a human heart*”, *answered the statue*, “*I did not know what tears were...* (O.Wilde). *When she had finished he nodded gravely* (A.Cristie). *When the moon rose, he flew back to the Happy Prince*

(O.Wilde). *When they reached the ground, Arrowhead intimated his intention to go towards the fire, and...* (J.F.Cooper). *When day broke, he flew down to the river and had a bath* (O.Wilde).

A more accurate explanation is that they are used to maintain the temporal line in the narrative and to recalibrate (correctly measure) when necessary the natural sequence expected by the reader [13; 14].

Let's take a look at the examples where the branch sentence is used in the postpositive position: *And he was sorry and surprised when she passed from his sight through one of the hundred doors* (J.Galsworthy). *I've been talking to such a delightful person – just the type you see when go into the cities* (J.Galsworthy). *He just heaved a sigh of relief when the war took me off* (A.Cristie). *I made up my mind to marry money when I was quite young* (A.Cristie). *I hear that Mr. Stone ... is writing a book which will create quite a sensation when it comes out* (J.Galsworthy).

Adverbial clauses of time in the postpositive position have a more local semantic narrowing function: they “lower” the situation in the main sentence in time, but often do not create a wider discourse connection or a turning point [8; 14; 13].

The text-generating functions of adverbial clauses of time can be summarized as follows:

1. Ensuring chronological order. These sentences form the time axis of the text by clearly showing the temporal relationship of the events - before, after or simultaneously. For this purpose, *before, after, when, while, as soon as, until* and other time conjunctions are used. For example, such a sentence is used in “A Tale of Two Cities” by Charles Dickens: *When the mail got successfully to Dover, in the course of the forenoon, the head drawer at the Royal George Hotel opened the coach door as his custom was* (Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities). In this example, the conjunction *when* provides the chronological development of the text by indicating the time conditions in which the main event occurred.

2. Ensuring text coherence and topic transition. Adverbial clauses of time create a transition between the previous event and subsequent information and direct the reader's attention to a new stage. This feature ensures the dynamic development of events, especially in artistic and journalistic texts. For example: *After they had crossed the bridge, they continued their journey in silence*. Here, the conjunction *after* presents the previous event as a completed fact and indicates the beginning of a new stage in the main clause. *After the experiment had been completed, the researchers compared the results with the previous data*. In this example, the conjunction *after* creates

a sequential transition between the previous step and the next scientific operation.

Formal-pragmatic studies on temporal conjunctions show that the same temporal structure does not always create the same discourse coherence; coherence depends on the context, how the presuppositions are “placed”, and the background knowledge of the reader [16]. For this reason, conjunctions such as *before*, *after*, *when* do not just indicate a time relationship, but also determine how text parts will be connected to each other [16]. Corpus studies show that the processing of subordination varies mainly with text type, degree of formality, and discourse function, rather than with spoken-written contrast [19]. Therefore, the text-creating role of adverbial clauses of time is not realized in the same way in narrative, academic, journalistic and conversational discourse [19].

3. Unity of cause-effect and time relations. Some time conjunctions, notably *since*, *as*, and in certain contexts, *when*, express not only a sequence of time, but also a causal relationship between events. This multifunctionality allows the author to establish more complex semantic relationships between events [12]. For example: *Since you have finished your work, you may leave*. In this sentence, the conjunction *since* indicates both the time of the action and the reason for the result. *Since the data had already been verified, the authors proceeded to the next stage of analysis*. Here, *since* is not only a time indicator, but also indicates the cause of the event.

Recent research shows that adverbial clauses of time can express not only temporal relations but also *continuative*, *contrastive*, and other discourse relations. Therefore, they play an important role in maintaining the structural integrity of the text [15].

Adverbial clauses of time are discourse mechanisms involved in the structure of a text [17; 18]. Adverbial clauses of time act as text units that accompany, frame, and interpret the main predicate [17; 18].

4. Rhythm of the text and the flow of information. When used before the main sentence, a adverbial clause of time prepares the reader for the main idea, facilitates the reception of information, and enhances the rhythmic organization of the text. Such syntactic structure allows the author to place emphasis correctly and present information in a step-by-step manner. For example, in Charlotte Bronte’s novel “Jane Eyre” we read: *When we had walked two miles, we reached the village*. Here, adverbial clause of time creates a background for the main event and ensures that information is presented in a coherent manner. Typological studies show that the position of the clause is determined not only by syntactic but also by pragmatic

and discourse factors [7, pp. 433-455]. For example: *Before the meeting began, the participants reviewed the agenda*. This structure creates the necessary temporal background before presenting the main news and directs the reader’s attention to the main event.

Main conjunctions and their role in the text

Adverbial clauses of time are divided into the following groups according to their functions:

Table 1

Groups of adverbial clauses of time based on function

Function	Main connectors	Role in the text
Simultaneity	<i>when, while, as</i>	It shows that two events are happening in parallel. It creates a background in descriptive texts.
Precedence / Postcedence	<i>after, before, until, till</i>	It establishes a logical sequence by ensuring the chain development of events (the before/after principle).
Starting point	<i>since, as soon as</i>	It marks a turning point, indicating the moment at which a new situation or action begins.

Note: Syntactically, if a subordinate clause precedes a main clause, it has an introductory function in the text.

The table below summarizes the main textual functions of subordinate clauses by position.

Table 2

Textual functions of subordinate clauses by position

Position	Main function	Typical discourse	Source
preposed	Chronological framing	Directs the story line, creates transition	8; 14
chain-forming	Cohesion and boundary signaling	Connects and segments parts of the text	20
postposed	Time localization	Reduces the meaning of the main predicate	8
narrative-complementary	Adding temporal information	Provides information without disrupting the temporal line	14; 13

The creative function of adverbial clauses of time in various texts

In English narrative texts, adverbial clauses of time are used to provide additional or background information rather than the main event. They explain, frame, and show the temporal relationship between events rather than advancing the event [9]. The results of educational and academic (learned) corpora show

that the main function of time expressions is to present events in chronological order, and the secondary function is to organize the text [3]. At the same time, in some texts the sequence of events is clear even without time indicators. This shows that adverbial clauses of time, although not always mandatory, are a very useful tool in structuring the text [3].

Research shows that different clauses perform different functions and develop in different ways [4]. Therefore, adverbial clauses of time should be evaluated not only as syntactic elements, but also as functional units that contribute to the structure of the text and the formation of meaning [4].

According to new research, clauses often express secondary information, not main information. Therefore, they are less prominent in discourse and play the role of complementing the main clause [2]. This result explains why adverbial clauses of time in English provide mainly background information.

However, this division is not always clear-cut. Sometimes the adverbial clauses of time may express the main content of the text, while the main clause may only have a connecting or explanatory function [18]. In spoken English, adverbial clauses of time are not used independently like if-subordinate clauses and are usually dependent on the main clause [5].

From a syntactic point of view, adverbial clauses of time also have their own unique features. Their structure is closely related to both syntactic and discourse functions [10]. Studies on the genre show that, for example, adverbial clauses of time are used frequently in cooking recipes and are often located at the end of the sentence [21].

In English, sequence of tense plays an important role in preserving the temporal integrity of the text. This principle ensures the systematic expression of temporal relations between the components of a complex sentence and allows the reader to correctly interpret the temporal plane in which events occur. If

the main clause is used in the past tense, the selection of verb forms adapted to that time point in the subordinate clause (Past Simple, Past Continuous, Past Perfect, Future in the Past, etc.) serves to maintain temporal consistency within the text. At the same time, corpus materials of modern English show that the sequence of tense agreement is not always applied mechanically. In particular, in clauses expressing general truths, scientific facts and unchanging situations, the preservation of present tense forms is considered normative. Thus, sequence of tenses acts not only as a grammatical norm, but also as a functional mechanism that ensures the coherence of the text and the continuity of discourse. For example: *The teacher explained that water boils at 100°C*. Although the main sentence here is in the Past Simple form, the Present Simple is used in the part *water boils at 100°C* because it is a general scientific fact. Another example: *She said that she had finished the report before the meeting started*. In this sentence, Past Perfect preserves the temporal logic of the text by clearly indicating the sequence of events.

Conclusions. The analysis shows that in English, adverbial clauses of time are not only a means of syntactic subordination, but also one of the important discourse mechanisms that ensure the structural and semantic integrity of the text. They form the chronological sequence of events, strengthen cohesion and coherence between parts of the text, serve to logically organize the flow of information, and enable the reader to correctly interpret events.

Thus, adverbial clauses of time in English can be considered one of the main functional means ensuring the temporal integrity, communicative consistency and semantic coherence of the text. In future studies, the study of these constructions on the basis of various genres, corpus materials and cross-linguistic comparison will allow for a more complete determination of their discourse properties.

Bibliography:

1. Tahirov İ. Azərbaycan və ingilis dillərində zaman kateqoriyası. Bakı: Nurlan, 324 səh.
2. Altshuler D., Truswell R. Coordination and the Syntax–Discourse interface. Oxford University Press, 2022, 336 p.
3. Castañeda D.A., Carduner J. Un estudio sobre la expresión de la temporalidad en narrativas personales escritas por estudiantes angloparlantes de español de nivel de adquisición más allá del básico. *Estudios de lingüística aplicada*. 2020, p.103–142.
4. Chen X., Alexopoulou T., Tsimpli I. Automatic extraction of subordinate clauses and its application in second language acquisition research. *Behavior Research Methods*. 2020, No 53, p. 803–817.
5. Couper-Kuhlen E., Thompson S. Can temporal clauses be insubordinate? *Interactional Linguistics*. Vol. 2, 2023, pp.165–189.
6. Diessel H. Iconicity of sequence: A corpus-based analysis of the positioning of temporal adverbial clauses in English. Vol. 19, 2008, pp. 465–490.
7. Diessel H. The Ordering Distribution of Main and Adverbial Clauses: A Typological Study. *Language*, 2001, 77(3), pp.433–455.

8. Ford C.E. Grammar in interaction: adverbial clauses in American English conversations. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. xvii + 165.
9. Giuliano P., Anastasio S. Subordination in Italian and English: Implications for Second Language Acquisition. *Discours*. 2021, pp. 3–28.
10. Haegeman L. The internal syntax of adverbial clauses. *Lingua*. Volume 120, Issue 3, 2010, pp. 628–648.
11. Halliday M.A.K. Hasan R. Cohesion in English. London: Longman, 1976.
12. Heycock C., Newman E., Truswell R. Ambiguity of temporal adjuncts and the limits of operator movement. *Linguistic Inquiry*. 2026 May 7. https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/en/publications/ambiguity-of-temporal-adjuncts-and-the-limits-of-operator-movement/?utm_source
13. Ji Shaojun. On the Discourse Functions of Preposed and Postposed Temporal Adverbial Constructions. *Hwa Kang Journal of English*. 19/1, 2013, pp. 109–130.
14. Ji Shaojun. The iconicity assumption and the functional distribution of English temporal adverbial clauses: A textual perspective. In *Journal of Pragmatics*, vol. 42, 2010, pp. 3163–3171.
15. Klumm M. Discourse relations and temporal adjuncts in written Present-Day English // In: Coniglio M., Müller K., Steinbach M. (eds.). *Adverbs and Particles at the Form-Meaning Interface. Linguistik Aktuell/ Linguistics Today*. Vol. 292. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2026, pp. 330–351.
16. Lascarides A., Oberlander J. Temporal Connectives in a Discourse Context. *EACL'93: Proceedings of the sixth conference on European chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics*. 1993, pp. 260–268.
17. Matthiessen C., Thompson S. The structure of discourse and 'subordination' // *Typological language in studies*. Vol. 18. 1988, pp. 275–330.
18. Pavlovic V. On the Blurred Boundaries Between Superordinate and Subordinate Clauses in English. *Belgrade English Language and Literature Studies*. Vol. 10, 2018, pp. 85–103.
19. Rafajlovicová R. Syntactic structures of subordinate clauses in English oral and written discourse. *XLinguae*. Vol. 11/2, 2018, pp. 738–757.
20. Virtanen T. Temporal Adverbials in Text Structuring: On Temporal Text Strategy. *Nordic Research on Text and Discourse. NORDTEXT Symposium* (Espoo, Finland, May 10–13, 1990). 1992, pp. 185–197.
21. Wongkittiporn A. Adverbial Clauses in English Cookbooks. *Thoughts*. Vol. 1, 2021, pp. 72–104.

Гумматова А. Е. ТЕКСТОТВОРНІ ФУНКЦІЇ ПРИСЛІВНИКОВИХ РЕЧЕНЬ ЧАСУ В АНГЛІЙСЬКІЙ МОВІ

У цій статті розглядаються текстотвірчі функції прислівникових речень часу в англійській мові з точки зору дискурсу та лінгвістики тексту. У дослідженні визначено роль прислівникових речень часу у встановленні хронологічної послідовності, забезпеченні зв'язності та узгодженості тексту, формуванні тематичних переходів та структуруванні інформації. Наведено порівняльний аналіз функціональних властивостей часових сполучників (коли, до, після, поки, як тільки, до, з тих пір тощо) у різних типах дискурсу. Наукова новизна дослідження полягає в систематичному аналізі прислівникових речень часу не лише як синтаксичних конструкцій, але й як текстотвірчих та дискурсивних механізмів, а також в узагальненні функціональних відмінностей між їх прийменниковими та постпозиційними позиціями в різних типах дискурсу. Дослідження проведено на основі узагальнення результатів, отриманих у сучасній лінгвістиці, з використанням корпусного, прагматичного та дискурсивного підходів. Встановлено, що обставинні речення часу є не лише синтаксичними одиницями, а й важливим дискурсивним механізмом, що забезпечує часову цілісність, комунікативну узгодженість та семантичну зв'язність тексту. Стаття базується на сучасній літературі. Встановлено, що позиція обставинних речень часу безпосередньо впливає на їхню дискурсивну функцію. Визначено, що пресупозиційні обставинні речення часу насамперед створюють часову рамку для подій, забезпечують переходи між частинами тексту та спрямовують розвиток наративу. Постпозитивні обставинні речення часу, з іншого боку, доповнюють семантичну інтерпретацію основної предикації, уточнюючи її часовість. Дослідження також демонструє, що функція часових сполучників не обмежується вираженням лише часових відношень. Доведено, що в різних дискурсивних контекстах вони також виконують додаткові функції, такі як причинно-наслідкові зв'язки, фонова нарація, дискурсивні переходи та ієрархічна організація інформації. Це вказує на те, що текстотвірчий потенціал обставин часу ширший за їхні формальні синтаксичні властивості.

Ключові слова: англійська мова, обставина часу, часові сполучники, текстотвірна функція, когезія, зв'язність, дискурс, наратив.

Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 06.07.2026
Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 27.07.2026
Дата публікації (оприлюднення) статті: 09.10.2026