

## ADVERBS AND PARTICLES: PART-OF-SPEECH HOMONYMY IN CORPUS DATA AND MEDIA DISCOURSE

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**Abstract:** The study addresses the part-of-speech homonymy between adverbs and particles in Slovak, with a focus on linguistic data from corpora and media discourse. Four lexemes were analysed: *absolútne*, *konečne*, *očividne* and *prirodzene*, examining differences in their frequency, collocations, and contextual functions. The results revealed that lexical and pragmatic factors are crucial for distinguishing adverbs from particles, and that the meaning of the context plays a significant role in their interpretation. The study contributes to the debate on the exact criteria for distinguishing parts of speech and highlights the importance of a comprehensive approach in corpus and media linguistics.

**Keywords:** adverbs, particles, part-of-speech homonymy, corpus linguistics, media

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The study explores the adverb-particle relationship using the Slovak National Corpus<sup>1</sup> and media texts on words that are classified as both adverbs and particles: *absolútne* ‘absolutely’, *konečne* ‘finally’, *očividne* ‘obviously’, and *prirodzene* ‘naturally’. It aims to examine the differences and similarities between four words in the corpus and media discourse, focusing on part-of-speech homonymy, adverb collocations, and the role of context. It also sought to identify inconsistencies in distinguishing adverbs from particles and propose criteria for their differentiation across the corpus, dictionaries, and media discourse.

In monographs on Slovak morphology, the distinction between adverbs and particles is described in functional, syntactic and semantic terms (Dvonč 1966, pp. 27–32; Oravec, Bajziková and Furdík 1984, pp. 13–17; Závodný 2016, pp. 61, 142). Adverbs are one of major word classes with both lexical and grammatical meaning

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<sup>1</sup> Omnia Slovaca IV Maior Beta corpus (23.01). Status as of 07/03/2025.

and can function as sentence constituents, while particles lack these properties, therefore, are classified as grammatical words. According to M. Šimková, this classification is problematic, and she considers particles semantic and textually-communicative words (2003, p. 234). J. Šindlerová and B. Štěpánková confirm a similar state in Czech linguistics, arguing that particles, compared to adverbs, have a partially weakened or modal meaning (2021, p. 444). The weakening of meaning and the subsequent reduction of syntagmatic combinability of adverbs lead to their secondary transformation into particles (Oravec, Bajžíková and Furdík 1984, p. 176). M. Ološtiak refers to the transition of adverbs into particles as *deadverbial particulization* (2017, p. 70).

The specific relationship between adverbs and particles, as well as the problematic identification of word classes, is mentioned in academic morphology (MSJ; Dvoňč 1966, pp. 804–805) and in the textbook *SSJ: Morfológia* (Oravec, Bajžíková and Furdík 1984, pp. 201–202).

In the study of part-of-speech homonymy, J. Kačala (1984) examined the word *těžko* ‘hardly’ and its adverb/particle classification based on substitution and its relationship to the verb. M. Šimková (2002) analysed the category of state, while J. Šindlerová and B. Štěpánková focused on “intensifiers” (2021).

According to academic literature, we have outlined potential criteria for differentiating adverbs from particles:

Area	Property/Function	Adv.	Part.
Morphosyntax	Sentence constituent	●	
	Predicate	●	
	Grammatical meaning	●	●
	Core of the utterance	●	
	Gradability	●	
	Positional flexibility		●
	Formal distinction		●
	Relation to the verb	●	
Pragmatics	Context		●
	Intention/Attitude		●
Semantics	Full meaning	●	
	Communicative potential	●	●

**Tab. 1.** Criteria for part-of-speech classification

2     **METHODOLOGY**

Our study focuses on comparing corpus data with examples from media to characterize the adverb-particle part-of-speech homonymy. From the corpus database, we randomly selected 100 instances of the selected words: *absolútne*, *konečne*, *očividne* and *prirodzene*, separately classified as adverbs and particles, including occurrences in media discourse. Subsequently, this sample was manually verified in the context of information from the dictionaries: *Krátky slovník slovenského jazyka* (KSSJ 2020), *Ortograficko-gramatický slovník slovenčiny* (OGSS 2022), *Pravidlá slovenského jazyka* (PSP 2013), *Slovník slovenského jazyka* (SSJ 1959–1968), *Slovník súčasného slovenského jazyka* (SSSJ 2006–2021), as well as MSJ.

Then, we examined the collocational profiles of the adverbs, focusing on their most frequent combinations with verbs, adjectives and other adverbs. The third phase of the research was aimed at comparing corpus data with occurrences in media texts<sup>2</sup>, from which we collected a total of 40 instances. The examples from journalistic texts also serve to demonstrate the importance of context in differentiating between adverbs and particles.

3     **FINDINGS**

3.1   **Corpus data**

Based on the corpus search results, we present the relative frequency of the analysed expressions as adverbs and particles. The results indicate that while the words *absolútne* and *očividne* occur notably more frequently as adverbs, the words *konečne* and *prirodzene* show a more balanced distribution between the two word classes.

	Adverb	Particle
<i>absolútne</i> (‘absolutely’)	285,389	2,210
<i>konečne</i> (‘finally’)	370,476	357,843
<i>očividne</i> (‘obviously’)	94,260	200
<i>prirodzene</i> (‘naturally’)	117,415	124,769

**Tab. 2.** Relative frequency

<sup>2</sup> The analysed data are extracted from commentaries published on the websites of *Denník N* and *SME*. We selected five examples of each examined word from the published commentaries in both media (as of 10/03/2025).

The deadjectival adverbs *absolútne*, *konečne*, *očividne*, and *prirodzene* were analysed, primarily using lexicographical data.

### ***Absolútne***

The word *absolútne* can be found in both KSSJ and OGSS as an adverb. In SSSJ (A–G, 2006), the adverb has three meanings: “with unlimited power, as an autocrat, self-ruler”; “independently of any conditions, unconditionally” and as a colloquial word meaning “completely, fully, entirely”. It is a qualitative adverb expressing degree (MSJ 1966, p. 603). According to Šikra (1991), it expresses the maximum possible degree. In the media, we encounter the following usage:

*Školstvo je a. kľúčové.* ‘Education is absolutely crucial.’

*Krajina je a. závislá od ruského plynu a ropy.* ‘The country is absolutely dependent on Russian gas and oil.’

*Žiadny zákon však nie je a. dokonalý.* ‘No law is absolutely perfect.’

The lexical meaning of degree is found in all the listed examples. The lexeme *absolútne* is synonymous with terms like *úplne* ‘completely’ and *celkom* ‘entirely’, but it is considered a colloquial lexical unit, which may be related to the gradual determinologization of the words *absolútne* ‘the absolute’ and *absolútny* ‘absolute’. In journalism, the adverb *absolútne* often appears in clichés with adjectives, as shown by corpus data:

*A. kľúčovou zložkou treného cesta je teplota.* ‘An absolutely key component of choux pastry is temperature.’

*Ale na podobu týchto pravidiel už nemá mať a. nijaký vplyv.* ‘But it should have absolutely no influence on the form of these rules anymore.’

The word *absolútne* also functions as an emphatic focusing particle, which “emphasizes the extreme degree of the following specification, meaning ‘at all’ or ‘by no means’” (SSSJ A–G 2006), although in KSSJ and PSP, it is classified solely as an adverb. Focusing particles resemble adverbs more than introductory particles, making classification harder for users. They modify statements, add expressiveness, emphasise key parts and allow the author to express a subjective attitude or emotion:

*Nepredviedli sme a. nič.* ‘We didn’t show absolutely anything.’

*Spartak Trnava získal titul a. čestne a korektne.* ‘Spartak Trnava won the title absolutely fairly and correctly.’

*„A zrazu zisťujeme, že z toho, čo povedal pán Uhliarik, neplatí a. nič,“ konštatoval dnes Fico.* “‘And suddenly, we realize that nothing Mr. Uhliarik said is absolutely true,” Fico stated today.’

## Očividne

According to the interpretation in MSJ (1966, p. 603), the qualitative adverb *očividne* primarily conveys the meaning of manner and expresses degree indirectly, often in an expressive or hyperbolic way. According to SSSJ (2021), it indicates degree and means “in a visible, distinct and clear manner”. The particle *očividne* “expresses conviction about a certain assumption” (SSSJ) and is synonymous with the words *zjavne* ‘manifestly’ and *evidentne* ‘evidently’. In KSSJ (2020, p. 419), the adverb is illustrated with the example *o. chradol* ‘o. waste away’, while the particle is explained using the equivalents *navidomoči* ‘visibly’ and *zjavne*. The interpretation solely through synonyms may be confusing for an ordinary language user.<sup>3</sup>

Based on *corpus* data, the word is used in the media as:

### a) adverb:

*Verejnosť tomu o. rozumie a prejavilo sa to aj na eurovoľbách.* ‘The public obviously understands this, and it was reflected in the European elections.’

*Nemci zo severu sú o. milovníci architektúry so symbolikou.* ‘Germans from the north are obviously lovers of architecture with symbolism.’

*Podľa novinárov bol o. znechutený.* ‘According to journalists, he was obviously disgusted.’

### b) particle:

*Dôvod na radosť mali o. obe finálové súperky.* ‘Both finalists obviously had reason to be happy.’

*Niektorým stuhol o. úsmev na tvári, ale nikto sa nesťažoval.* ‘Some obviously had their smiles frozen on their faces, but no one complained.’

*Medzi jeho voličov patrili o. i organizátori petície na podporu rodiny.* ‘His voters obviously included the organizers of the petition in support of the family.’

The adverb *očividne* characterizes the predicate in terms of its meaning (*Verejnosť tomu o. rozumie.* – ‘The public obviously understands this.’), it only modifies the meaning of the verb and forms a syntagm with the superior sentence element. The presence of the adverb can also be verified by asking *How?* However, the situation changes if we modify the sentence: *O., verejnosť tomu rozumie.* ‘Obviously, the public understands this.’ Here, *očividne* is not syntactically related to any sentence element. Instead, it functions as an independent utterance referring to a broader context, from a word-class perspective, it is classified as a particle.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This statement is based on questions addressed to the language advisory service of E. Štúr Institute of Linguistics of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

<sup>4</sup> For this type of word, which expresses an attitude toward the entire statement, the term sentence adverb or (semi)particle is used (compare: Šikra, 1991; Uhlířová, 1979).

### ***Prirodzene***

The qualitative adverb *prirodzene* is processed in KSSJ (2020, p. 583) in the form of examples. Secondly, it holds the function of a delimitative evaluative particle expressing certainty or assurance. According to MSJ (1966, p. 788), it is synonymous with words such as *samozrejme* ‘of course’, *isteže* ‘certainly’ or *pochopiteľne* ‘understandably’. In SSJ (1963), the adverb *prirodzene* means “in a natural, unforced, unconstrained way”, while the particle is characterised by synonyms such as *pravda* ‘indeed’, *pravdaže* ‘of course’ and *zaiste* ‘certainly’, with the qualifier “colloquial”. As a particle, it is typically separated by commas in a statement, which emphasizes its subjectivising potential and contextuality.

The position of an adverb in a sentence can serve as a clue for distinguishing the part of speech, since its position next to the verb is neutral. In contrast, the position next to an adjective or another adverb is syntactically indicated by the adverb’s close placement to the superior sentence element. Let us examine the following two examples:

*V nasledujúcich rokoch ceny p. rástli.* ‘In the following years, prices naturally increased.’

*Súčasťou servisu je pre nás p. aj pomoc klientom s likvidáciou poistných udalostí.* ‘As part of our service, we naturally also assist clients with the settlement of insurance claims.’

In the first sentence, the adverb is linked to the verb *rásť* ‘increase’. In contrast, in the second sentence, there is no such connection between *prirodzene* and the verb. Another criterion is whether the adverb can be further syntactically expanded, e.g. *veľmi p. rástli* ‘they grew very naturally’. A similar expansion of the adverb can also be found in corpus examples:

*Geostratégom však vzhľadom na politiku i ekonomiku celkom p. prichádza na myseľ rok 1989.* ‘To geostrategists, however, the year 1989 quite naturally comes to mind in the context of politics and economics.’

*Ak politici dostanú právomoc regulovať médiá, budú úplne p. v pokušení zneužiť svoje právomoci.* ‘If politicians are given the power to regulate the media, they will be completely naturally tempted to abuse their authority.’

### ***Konečne***

The lexeme *konečne* is defined as an adverb meaning “after a certain period of time” (SSSJ 2011), with the addition of “often with a sense of satisfaction from the speaker”, thus approaching the meaning of a particle. The particle *konečne* is also characterized in KSSJ and SSSJ as a statement of a certain fact, a summary of a certain finding, a synonym for the particles *napokon* ‘eventually’ and *koniec*

*koncov* ‘altogether’, and as an expression of satisfaction from the completed action. As a delimitative explanatory particle, it is synonymous with expressions like *napokon* and *naostatok* ‘ultimately’ (MSJ, p. 775).

*Podnikatelia a živnostníci by mali k. dostať servis na úrovni.* ‘Entrepreneurs and business owners should finally receive proper service.’

*Rokovania o budúcnosti Le Monde prichádzajú v čase, keď sa noviny k. dostali do zisku.* ‘Negotiations about the future of Le Monde come at a time when the newspaper has finally become profitable.’

*Grécka finančná kríza stále spôsobuje ľuďom bolesť a mári ich nádeje a sny, aj keď krajina vlani v auguste, po ôsmich rokoch, k. vystúpila zo záchranného programu.* ‘The Greek financial crisis still causes pain for people and shatters their hopes and dreams, even though the country finally emerged from the bailout program last August after eight years.’

In the first case, both parts of speech can be considered, but in the other two, the word is better treated as an adverb due to its reference to an adverbial time expression or temporal subordinate clause, which *konečne* often relates to. Corpus examples of the particle confirm its explanatory character:

*Možno nastal k. čas na verejnú diskusiu aj na tému, či chceme, aby spoločnosť z pozadia riadili oligarchovia.* ‘Perhaps the time has finally come for a public discussion on whether we want oligarchs to run society from behind the scenes.’

*Siahol po jazyku, ktorému jeho volič k. rozumie.* ‘He adopted a language that his voters finally understand.’

*Ministerka školstva a vláda k. priznali, že pre situáciu na ministerstve školstva vedci prichádzajú o ďalšie milióny eur.* ‘The Minister of Education and the government have finally acknowledged that due to the situation at the Ministry of Education, scientists are losing millions of euros.’

3.2 Collocations

In the next step, we identified the most frequent collocations.<sup>5</sup>

Collocations	Number of occurrences	Collocations	Number of occurrences
<i>a. súhlasiť</i> (‘a. agree’)	1,168	<i>a. nesúhlasiť</i> (‘a. disagree’)	789
<i>a. chápať</i> (‘a. understand’)	200ñ	<i>a. nechápať</i> (‘a. not understand’)	848

<sup>5</sup> Given the scope of the work, we select only some of the examples that were relevant in journalistic texts.

<i>a. rozumieť</i> (‘a. comprehend’)	134	<i>a. nerozumieť</i> (‘a. not comprehend’)	927
<i>a. zaujímať (sa)</i> (‘be a. interested’)	18	<i>a. nezaujímať (sa)</i> (‘be a. disinterested’)	1,353
<i>a. zaujímavý</i> (‘a. interesting’)	49	<i>a. nezaujímavý</i> (‘a. uninteresting’)	410

**Tab. 3.** Collocations with the adv. *absolútne*

The adverb *absolútne* is often used in journalistic texts with adjectives and verbs carrying a negative meaning, formally expressed with the prefix *ne-*. Therefore, we also examined the usage of their “non-negative” neutral forms, and it turned out that the combination with the verb *súhlasit* ‘agree’ (1,168 occurrences) predominates over the negative form *nesúhlasit* (789 occurrences).

We again observe the tendency for redundant evaluative or intensifying expressions in media discourse. As corpus data cannot distinguish between news and journalism, this will be revisited in section 4.3.

Regarding the adverb *očividne*, the following word combinations were significantly represented:

Collocations	Number of occurrences	Collocations	Number of occurrences
<i>o. spokojný</i> (‘o. satisfied’)	584	<i>o. nespokojný</i> (‘o. dissatisfied’)	72
<i>o. páčiť (sa)</i> (‘o. like’)	338	<i>o. nepáčiť (sa)</i> (‘o. dislike’)	175
<i>o. prekážať</i> (‘o. bother’)	57	<i>o. neprekážať</i> (‘o. not bother’)	218
<i>o. nervózny</i> (‘o. nervous’)	193	<i>o. zaskočený</i> (‘o. startled’)	130
<i>o. vadit’</i> (‘o. be a problem’)	30	<i>o. nevadiť</i> (‘o. not be a problem’)	164

**Tab. 4.** Collocations with the adv. *očividne*

Although, in the case of the adverb *očividne*, collocations with words with the negative prefix do not predominate, expressions with a negative meaning are found among the most frequent collocations. Based on presuppositional semantics, it can be assumed that the context in which the word combinations *o. neprekážať* ‘o. not bother’ and *o. nevadiť* ‘o. not be a problem’ are used refers to negative facts. This is confirmed by examples:



*Nemeckému ministrovi o. neprekážalo, že zhromaždenie na Majdane bolo v rozpore s platnými ukrajinskými zákonmi.* ‘The German minister obviously didn’t mind that the gathering at Maidan was in violation of the applicable Ukrainian laws.’

*To, že zaberajú miesto ďalším vodičom, im o. neprekáža.* ‘The fact that they occupy space for other drivers obviously doesn’t bother them.’

*Hoci Ye trvá krátko a celý album si vypočujete cestou do práce, fanúšikom to o. nevadilo.* ‘Although Ye is short and the entire album can be listened to on the way to work, it was obviously not a problem for the fans.’

The adverb *prirodzene* is often accompanied in texts by additional synonymous adverbs, which express an extreme degree. Also, it is frequently combined with verbs that express sensory and emotional impressions, e.g. *pôsobiť* ‘to appear’. Copular verbs expressing existence or the pretense of existence (see MSJ, pp. 374–376). For example:

*Umožňuje mu to podľa nej atakovať exguvernéra a vyzerat’ p.* ‘It allows him, according to her, to attack the ex-governor and appear naturally.’

Collocations	Number of occurrences
<i>celkom p.</i> (‘quite n.’)	5,773
<i>úplne p.</i> (‘entirely n.’)	3,353
<i>p. vyskytovať sa</i> (‘n. occur’)	2,071
<i>p. vyzerat’</i> (‘look n.’)	1,980
<i>p. pôsobiť</i> (‘appear n.’)	1,676
<i>p. nachádzať sa</i> (‘be n. found’)	1,118

**Tab. 5.** Collocations with the adv. *prirodzene*

The first two adverbs mainly pair with words of evaluation or approach, while *prirodzene* primarily collocates with expressions of existence and form. Its four most frequent verbs form two synonymous pairs, and it often combines with intensifying adverbs.

The adverb *konečne* is commonly associated with verbs that have a temporal meaning (e.g. *začať (sa)* – ‘to begin’, *dočkať sa* – ‘to wait for’), as well as verbs that refer to the fundamental meaning of this adverb related to the passage of time.

Collocations	Number of occurrences
<i>k. začať (sa)</i> (‘f. begin’)	14,019
<i>k. dostať</i> (‘f. get’)	11,608
<i>k. nájsť</i> (‘f. find’)	8,138
<i>k. dočkať sa</i> (‘f. wait for’)	6,459
<i>k. prísť</i> (‘f. come’)	7,915
<i>k. podať sa</i> (‘f. succeed’)	7,822

**Tab. 6.** Collocations with the adv. *konečne*

### 3.3 Media discourse

There are three reasons for supplementing our corpus data analysis with data from commentaries: we aimed to determine (1) whether the genre is reflected in the predominance of particles over adverbs; (2) whether the results of the corpus analysis would differ from those in journalistic texts; and (3) what role context plays in the analysis of part-of-speech homonymy.

Despite the genre’s evaluative nature, particles did not notably dominate; 26 of 40 examples were particles, 14 were adverbs. Both media sources showed a tendency to separate particles with commas, sentence positioning, or isolation as sentence adverbs, particularly with *očividne* and *prirodzene*.

Regarding collocations, the corpus data did not overlap significantly with our “media” research sample, which is understandable given its limited size. Still, similar principles emerged – adverb *konečne* was more frequently paired with dynamic verbs, while *očividne* tended to co-occur with stative verbs. Also, the adverb *absolútne* was often used with words carrying a negative meaning, most frequently adjectives (e.g. *a. nevhodná* ‘absolutely inappropriate’). In terms of collocations, the use of modal verbs is prominent in the sample (e.g. *a. nevedeli odpovedať* ‘they absolutely could not answer’, *a. musíme* ‘we absolutely must’, *musíme k. precitnúť* ‘we must finally wake up’ or *o. chcú* ‘they obviously want’).

The sample showed a tendency to use adverbs like *absolútne* in questions, answers, and interview references (e.g. *a. nevhodná otázka* ‘an absolutely inappropriate question’, *a. nevedeli odpovedať* ‘they absolutely could not answer’, *a. kritické otázky* ‘absolutely critical questions’). All four analysed words occasionally acted as contextual connectors, linking extralinguistic reality and enhancing text coherence.

## 4 CONCLUSION

Determining part-of-speech category requires considering multiple aspects, as the “classic” factors presented in morphologies are not always sufficient. The difficulty of distinguishing between individual adverbs and particles is also stressed by the ambiguous description of the lexical meaning in dictionaries with examples.

Part-of-speech homonymy is not a marginal phenomenon in the grammars of inflected languages, and thus, it deserves both academic and didactic consideration. The aim of this text was to highlight possible, established, as well as relatively innovative principles for determining part-of-speech category in the case of homonymy between adverbs and particles. It has been shown that although this phenomenon may initially seem to belong solely to the domain of grammar, its analysis and study must be conducted at the semantic level (including lexical and presuppositional semantics), always taking context into account. Particles primarily refer to what is outside the utterance, and thus modifying its meaning.

From a practical point of view, our study has shown that the formal separation of particles by commas within an utterance may not always be justified. Hence, we consider such exercises inappropriate for pedagogical practice in secondary or higher education. In media discourse, the consistent separation of particles by commas may rather reflect the preferences of a particular language proofreader or the editorial style of the given media.

Based on the analysed examples, we believe that efforts to simplify and generalise the rules for distinguishing between adverbs and particles may have the opposite effect. This issue is even more pronounced in mechanical or automated distinctions made during the annotation of texts into linguistic corpora.

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