

## Chapter 5

# **General Adverbial Clauses**

A general adverbial clause modifies the main verb in the sentence. It is often used to set the scene for the rest of the sentence. The following two examples are taken from a speech made by the representative of Belarus at the 48th session of the UN General Assembly. First is a translation following the original phrasing or structure, then the official English translation as it appeared in the UN Official Records after being interpreted and edited.

### Example 1

Original structure: Let us take a look at this experience and potential in those areas which, **as is widely recognized and attested to even by this current debate**, have become very important for preserving world peace and security.

Official English version: Let us take a look at this experience and potential in those areas which have become very important for preserving global peace and security, **as is widely recognized and attested to even by this current debate**.

### Example 2

Original structure: Taking an authoritative position on these issues, Belarus intends to present **during this session** of the General Assembly, **on behalf of and on the instructions of** the states of Commonwealth of Independent States, a joint declaration of the CIS on issues of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems.

Official English version: Taking an authoritative position on these issues, Belarus, **on behalf of and on the instructions of** the states of the Commonwealth of Independent States, intends **during this session** to present a joint declaration by the CIS on issues of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems.

These two passages illustrate a feature which is very important to translators and invaluable to interpreters: the fact that a general adverbial clause modifying the main verb (also known to some grammarians as an “absolute phrase” because it can stand alone) can be put in any one of several different positions (regardless of where it appears in the original language) without doing violence to the meaning. In Example 1 the basic subject–complement structure of the sentence is “areas are becoming”, and in English the general adverbial clause (marked in bold type) could go before the verb, or after the verb, or even at the end of the sentence, as has been done in the official version. In Example 2, the basic subject–complement structure of the sentence is “Belarus intends to present a declaration”, and the two general adverbial clauses (marked in bold type) could also go in several different positions, or could be combined together (“Belarus intends, during this session, on behalf of and on the instructions of . . .”), or could even be combined and inserted at the end in a separate sentence (“We shall do so during this session, on behalf of and on the instructions of . . .”). A short adverbial clause can also be squeezed in between two parts of a composite verb, as has been done with “during this session” in Example 2 above (between the auxiliary “intends” and “to present”).

Notice that this feature gives one much greater leeway in interpreting than if one were forced to follow the original sequence of phrases. If the adverbial clause is short, one can slip it in before or after the verb (“We intend, **at this session**, to declare . . .” or “We intend to declare **at this session** . . .”) or place it before the subject (“**At this session** we intend to declare . . .”). If it is long enough that leaving it in the middle tends to disrupt the sentence (as in Example 1 above), one can save it for the end of the sentence. Or, if speed is a problem, one can save it, making an independent sentence out of the adverbial clause and slipping it in during the speaker’s pause between sentences (“We shall do so at this session.”).

### Exercises

1 In the sentences given below, identify the basic subject-complement structure of the sentence; identify the general adverbial clauses that modify the main verb; then, translate the sentences into English in as many different ways as you can without altering the basic meaning:

- Teniendo en cuenta todos los antecedentes, debemos proceder con suma cautela en una materia tan delicada.
- Dada la urgencia del problema, mi país no ha escatimado ningún esfuerzo para resolverlo dentro de un plazo razonable.