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The English sentence as a whole: Complex condensation and word order

Vilém Mathesius



Vilém Mathesius (1882–1945) was the founder of the Prague Linguistic Circle and the first professor of English language and literature in the country (1912). Both a linguist and a literary scholar, he was central in establishing the Prague School of Linguistics and inspiring a whole generation of scholars that shared the structuralist outlook on language as a functional system composed of mutually interrelated subsystems. His classic lecture *On the potentiality of language phenomena* (1911) established a modern, structuralist analysis of language that he developed alongside, but independent of, his more famous contemporary, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Mathesius pioneered an approach to language study that he called “linguistic characterology”, which concerns the analysis of a given language not in terms of a comprehensive description on all language levels but in terms of the specific characteristics of the language, with such characteristics emerging, most clearly, as a result of synchronic comparison. In Mathesius’s conception, linguistic characterology consists of functional onomatology (the process of naming) and functional syntax (the process of mutually relating units within the sentence-forming act). These are the two basic processes that ultimately underlie any act of communication that results in the production of some utterance.

This article is an extract from a chapter in A Functional Analysis of Present Day English on a General Linguistic Basis, edited posthumously by Josef Vachek from Mathesius's lecture notes and translated into English by Libuše Dušková. In his book, which has been a classic textbook for Czech students of English for decades, Mathesius describes the typical properties of modern English using the method of synchronic comparison, i.e. contrasting data in genetically unrelated languages. The juxtaposition of comparable data in English, Czech and other languages inevitably reveals many valuable properties that may remain unnoticed in accounts lacking such a comparative approach. The chapter reproduced below deals with the differences between English and Czech in the area of syntax. The first issue concerns the tendency of English towards non-finite expression, as manifested in the diverse means contributing towards "complex condensation", such as the infinitive, gerund, and nominalization. The second topic discusses the English word order, which is regulated by different rules than word order in Czech.

1. Means of complex condensation

a) General remarks

Having treated the most important elements of the English sentence (the subject, predicate, object, attribute, adverbial) we shall now consider some points concerning the structure of the English sentence as a whole. The first feature to be pointed out might be called *complex condensation*. We use this term to describe the fact that English tends to express by non-sentence elements of the main clause such circumstances that are in Czech, as a rule, denoted by subordinate clauses. This results in making the sentence structure more compact or, in other words, in sentence condensation, which may be called complex since in this way English can express entire complexes of content.¹

To begin with, attention should be paid to the manner in which English makes use of the gerund, the infinitive and the participles.

Even this question may be elucidated by a comparison with Czech. Czech, too, has the verbal noun, the infinitive and the participles. An examination of their uses in Czech shows that the Czech verbal noun behaves just as any other noun with the same ending. It displays no special features and consequently it does not call for special treatment in Czech grammar.

The Czech infinitive is a form that has a much more verbal character than the verbal noun, nevertheless its use is relatively limited. It can be used as an object if its subject

coincides with the subject of the predicative finite verb (*Učím se psát na stroji* [I learn to type]). It can be used as an object even if it has a different subject than the predicative finite verb, but then if the subject of the infinitive is expressed, it is invariably identical with the object of the predicative verb (*Matka učí dítě chodit* [The mother teaches the child to walk]). An important features of the Czech verbal noun and infinitive is the lack of temporal distinctions. As is well known, Czech can form neither a perfect infinitive, nor a verbal noun referring to the past. Contrariwise in English these forms are available. Moreover, the Czech verbal noun is neutral with respect to active or passive voice. In a construction like *mámení lidí* [the deluding of people] the form *lidí* [of people] may have the meaning of either the subjective or the objective genitive. Admittedly the Czech infinitive has the passive form, but it is very rarely used. On the other hand, both the Czech infinitive and the Czech verbal noun are capable of expressing aspectual distinctions, cf. *nést – nosit* [to carry imperfective, non-iterative – to carry imperfective, iterative], *nesení – nošení* [carrying non-iterative – carrying iterative], and the like.

Of the participles the most important form in Czech is the present participle. It is frequently used in the definite form which has acquired the function of a verbal adjective (*Na ulicích bylo vidět plno lidí spěchajících za svým denním zaměstnáním* [In the streets there were many people hurrying to work]). The definite form of the present participle replaces an attributive clause. The present participle in the indefinite form (*veda* [leading, masc. sg.], *nesouce* [carrying, pl.]) is restricted to instances where its subject is the same as the subject of the finite verb. In Present Day Czech its use is confined to semi-clausal statements of an action simultaneous with the action of the finite verb; expression of other meanings by means of the present participle is very rare. The meanings enumerated by V. Ertl in his revision of Gebauer's Czech Grammar are obsolete; in Present Day Czech they occur only in proverbs. Another significant restriction in addition to what has just been said about the uses of the present participle in Present Day Czech is the fact that it is found only in the literary language, which is slightly archaic. In colloquial Czech the participle does not occur at all, apart from fossilized expressions like *vyjma, nepočítajíc*, etc. [except, not counting].

What has been said about the present participle can also be said about the past participle, the only difference being that compared with its present counterpart the past participle is used still less, even in its definite form. A construction like *osoby zaplativší vstupné* [the persons having paid admission] sounds stilted; it is occasionally found in slipshod newspaper Czech. – The passive past participle has two forms (*dělán – dělaný* [done – done + adjectival ending]). The definite form is used in the same way as any other adjective; when freely linked to its noun it usually replaces an attributive clause (*Přístroje zhotovené v této továrně jsou dokonale přesné* [The instruments made in this factory are absolutely precise]). IN predicative uses, involving the indefinite forms of the participle, the passive past participle must be complemented by the participle of the verb *to be* (*jsa udělán, byv udělán* [being done, having been done]), the passive past participle alone being a gallicism; the periphrastic forms, however, are again felt as archaic and stilted.

German does not appreciably differ from Czech, as regards the uses of the participles. Even German has virtually lost the semiclausal present participle, whereas the attributive participle is in common use (*alle dort badenden Gäste*). In contrast to Czech, German present participles are also used as agent nouns: *die Reisenden*, etc. As for the German verbal noun, it has an entirely nominal character and is used like other nouns just as the verbal noun in Czech. The only difference from Czech consists in the fact that German, owing to its capacity to substantivize by means of the definite article, can also form verbal nouns in the passive voice and in the past tense. This form of expression is especially common in the language of philosophy (e.g., *das Wahrgenommenwerden*). The infinitive in German is essentially used in the same way as in Czech but somewhat more extensively. Infinitival constructions are found with a far larger number of verbs than in Czech. For instance, in Czech we have to say *Učitel vyzval žáka, aby se na příští hodinu dobře připravil* [The teacher asked to pupil that he should prepare...], which corresponds in German to *Der Lehrer forderte den Schüler auf, sich auf die nächste Stunde gut vorzubereiten*. Similarly the Czech sentence *Myslím, že mám v tom jistě pravdu* [I think I am sure right in this] corresponds in German to *Ich glaube, sicher darin recht zu haben*. German even has the perfect infinitive (*Ich glaube darin recht gehabt zu haben*). Despite these facts the use of the infinite in German is not much more extensive than in Czech. On the other hand, in English the uses of participles, infinitive and gerund offer greater possibilities.

Let us first say a few words on the inventory of their forms in English. As for the participle, it can be said that on the whole English does not differ from Czech or German. The present participle has the active and the passive form (*asking, being asked*), which are also displayed by the past participle (*having asked, having been asked, asked*). More significant differences are found in the forms of the infinitive and the gerund. English readily forms the present and the perfect infinitive both in the active and the passive voice (*to ask, to be asked, to have asked, to have been asked*), analogous forms being found in the verbal noun, or more exactly, the gerund (*asking, being asked, having asked, having been asked*).² The English gerundial system is thus seen to coincide formally with the participial. This brief survey will have shown that English has a considerably greater number of all these forms than Czech. An even greater difference between the two languages can be found in the respective uses of these forms.

b) English participles

Let us first consider the uses of the participles. Much more frequently than Czech, English employs the participle in the function of a semiclausal complement relating to the subject, e.g. *Going down the street I met John*. The same content can be expressed in Czech syntactically in the same way. In both languages the construction denotes temporal coexistence of two actions that have the same subject. The English participle, however, can express other shades of meaning that the Czech participle is incapable of conveying,

e.g. *Not having seen me for many years, he did not recognize me* – Protože mne mnoho let neviděl, nepoznal mne [As he did not see me...]. This sentence obviously expresses causal relation, which is the reason why Czech cannot employ the past active participle **Neviděv mne...* The participle is here inapplicable because in Czech it usually expresses no other shade of meaning but the temporal relation. Compare another example: *Happening at war time, this thing would be a real disaster* – Kdyby se tato věc stala za války, byla by to úplná pohroma [If this thing happened...]. Here the English participle conveys the meaning of condition. One might find even other shades of meaning extending beyond the category of temporal relations.

Note. It has been pointed out above that to avoid vagueness the English participle used in semiclausal function may be accompanied by a subordinate conjunction (*When going home I met a friend*).

Another point of difference between Czech and English is the use of the English participle in semiclausal predicative function even if its subject differs from that of the governing verb. These are the so-called absolute constructions, which have also been mentioned here before. Compare the English sentence *All possibilities having been taken into account it was decided that...* with its Czech equivalent *Když se uvážily všechny možnosti, bylo rozhodnuto, že...* [When all possibilities were taken into account...], or *This done he returned home* – *Když to vykonal, vrátil se domů* [When he did it...]. The participle with predicative function is the more applicable if it can find support in an actual element of the governing clause. In this case the expression of an accompanying circumstance is often introduced by the preposition *with*, e.g. *I wonder how you could sleep with that wind roaring around you*. *Rád bych věděl, jak jsi mohl spát, když ten vítr burácel kolem tebe* [...when the wind roared...]. A similar construction is found with the past participle: *With the new methods not yet tried it cannot be said what results may be reached* – *Poněvadž se ty nové metody ještě nevyzkoušely, nemůže se říci, jakých výsledků se dá dosáhnout* [Since the new methods were not tried...].³ Naturally none of these constructions can be imitated in Czech.

Finally, another remark should be added. English lacks the future participle (and of course the passive future participle). This form is replaced by the attributive passive infinitive: *With the new methods still to be tried it cannot be said what results may be obtained* — *Poněvadž se ty nové metody teprve mají vyzkoušet etc.* [Since the new methods are still to be tried...]. The examples given so far have contained the preposition *with*. However, there are also constructions with other prepositions: *At that time an immense prosperity arose in America from the resources of a continental area turned to account by the full employment of mechanic power*. *V té době vznikl v Americe nesmírný blahobyt tím, že toho, co poskytovala oblast celého kontinentu, bylo využito plným nasazením strojního pohonu* [At that time arose in America an immense prosperity by-that that what (accusative) provided a continental area (nominative) was turned to account...].

These examples show that as a matter of fact the participle used in predicative function and its noun form one unit, and this unit taken as a whole is governed by a preposition (*from the resources turned to account*). In such instances one can clearly see the very essence of what is meant by the term complex condensation.⁴ Herewith we conclude the chapter on the role played by the participle in complex constructions.

c) The infinitive and the gerund in English

Proceeding to a discussion of the infinitive in English⁵ we can refer to what has been said above concerning the object of the accusative type. English has a special construction of the accusative with the infinitive, e. g. *I don't believe him to have behaved like that* Nevěřím, že by se byl takhle choval [...that he would have behaved...]. Sometimes the construction includes the preposition *for*, especially after expressions like *it is difficult, late, etc.*: *It was too late for them to begin anew* – Bylo příliš pozdě, aby začínali znovu [...that they should start...]. Here the construction of the accusative with the infinitive (*them to begin*) is linked to the governing verb by the preposition *for*. Compared with Czech, these uses greatly contribute to the extension of the functions of the infinitive.

However, it is in the uses of the verbal noun that English differs from Czech and German most widely. In Czech and German the verbal noun is a genuine substantive, which is modified in the same way as any other noun, i.e. by an adjective or a genitive. The English verbal noun has a much more verbal character. It can operate as an actual verbal noun, i.e. it may take the article, e.g. *(The) having him for an unbidden companion in such a solitary place much increased her nervousness* – To, že jí byl nezvaným společníkem na tak osamělém místě, značně zvýšilo její nervozitu [That he was an unbidden companion to her...]. In other cases the nominal character of the verbal noun is due to modification by means of an adjective (or a pronoun) or by means of the genitive of a noun. Both kinds of modification are found in the following sentence: *Hurried reading of all sorts of books is simply waste of time.* – Chvatné čtení všemožných knih je prostě plýtvání časem. – Here the English verbal noun *reading* is used in exactly the same type of construction as the Czech verbal noun *čtení*.

However, the substantival use of the verbal noun is not its sole function. As is well known, the English verbal noun also displays verbal features; in this function it is usually called the gerund. It is especially this additional capacity to perform verbal functions that distinguishes the English verbal noun from that in Czech and German. The verbal character of the gerund primarily manifests itself in the form of the object, which is the same as after the finite forms of the verb; cf. *There are different ways of making money*, which may be translated into Czech literally (though with the object in the genitive, not in the accusative case, as in English): *Jsou různé způsoby vydělávání peněz* [making of money]. Usually, however, the content is rendered more freely by means of the infinitive: *Jsou různé způsoby, jak vydělávat peníze* [...how to make money]. English can form the

verbal noun even from the copula, which is then accompanied by a nominal predicate: *She was proud of being a mother* – *Byla hrda na to, že je matkou* [...that she is...]. In Czech the verbal noun in this case cannot be used. Moreover, as has been pointed out before, the English gerund has a wealth of forms. It has a special form for reference to the past: *He was nervous for having never before spoken in public*. Here Czech has to use a subordinate clause: *Byl nervózní, protože ještě nikdy nemluvil na veřejnosti* [...because he never before spoke...]. Similarly Czech cannot imitate the passive gerund: *He was proud of having never been beaten at chess* – *Byl hrdý na to, že ještě nikdy nebyl poražen v šachu* [...that he was never beaten...].⁶ The examples also show how often English employs the verbal noun in different prepositional constructions. However, the most important feature of the English constructions containing the verbal noun is the fact that the verbal noun may be modified by an element that corresponds to the subject of the respective finite verb. This is also possible in Czech, but there the modification has to be expressed possessively, just as in the case of a noun: *To Karlovo neustálé nařikání mi už jde na nervy* or *Jeho neustálé...* [That Charles's incessant complaining already gets on my nerves or His incessant complaining...]. The same construction is sometimes found in English: *You don't mind my smoking, I hope*, or *I was rather surprised at your asking that question*. In these instances one point is worth noting. Although possessive attributes undoubtedly emphasize the substantival character of verbal nouns, the gerund takes a direct object (*your asking that question*). However, if the verbal noun is preceded by an article, the strict norm of English grammar requires the genitive construction with the preposition *of* (*the asking of that question*) Compare another example: *He expressed some doubt of their ever having been married* – *Vyslovil pochybnosti o tom, zda vůbec kdy byli spolu oddáni* [...about it whether they were ever married]. However, the element operating as the subject of the verbal noun may be expressed not only by possessive qualification but also by juxtaposition, e.g. *He would not hear of that being possible*. If *being* is regarded as a gerund, then its subject is expressed by juxtaposition of the neutral form (common case) *that*. In Czech a dependent clause has to be used *Nechtěl slyšet o tom, že je to možné* [He would not hear about it that it is possible].

As has been mentioned before, it is not quite clear which grammatical form *being* represents in this construction. It may be the present participle if *that* is interpreted as an object dependent on the preposition *of* and *being* as its predicative complement. (It is for this reason that E. Krusinga does not distinguish between the gerund and the participle, referring to both as the “-ing form”.)⁷ The American syntactician G.O. Curme assumes that the construction illustrated by the examples under discussion has arisen on the analogy of participial constructions such as *I saw him coming*. Nevertheless the form *being* in our example is interpreted by Curme as a gerund. Whichever form it may be, exactly constructions of this type are characteristic of English and it is thanks to them that English has so many possibilities of complex condensation, e. g. *I am not surprised at men falling in love with her* – *Nepřekvapuje mne, že se muži do ni zamilovávají* [...that men fall in love...]. We can see that these constructions fully confirm what was stated

in the definition of complex condensation, viz. that a circumstance *that in Czech has to be expressed* by a subordinate clause is in English preferably denoted by a non-sentence element included in the main clause.

d) Complex constructions

The second major group of the means of sentence condensation to be considered is already known to us. As has been pointed out above, English can form the passive with an indirectly affected subject by means of the verb *to have* or by means of perceptive verbs (*to see, to find*, etc.). The verb *to have*, the causative verb *to make*, and the perceptive verbs are often employed in order to achieve complex condensation, i.e., they operate as links between the starting point constituted by the main clause and the expression of the circumstances that Czech has to formulate by a subordinate clause. Sometimes the two types are combined so that one sentence contains not only a verb of this kind but also a participle, infinitive or gerund in a complex construction, e. g. *I am used to having men fall in love with me*. Note the way this sentence is construed. On the one hand there is the starting point *I am used to*, on the other hand the infinitive construction denoting the circumstance to which the subject is said to be used, the two parts being linked by the verb *to have*. The fact that in this instance the verb *to have* operates only as a link is evident from the Czech translation in which it may be omitted altogether (*Jsem zvyklá na to, že se muži do mne zamilovávají* [I am used to it that men fall...]).

A similar situation is found with the other verbal categories listed above. Let us first adduce examples of the linking function of perceptive verbs: *We hope to see the whole quarter secured in time as the University quarter*. The starting point of the whole sentence is *We hope*, while what is hoped for is expressed by the participial construction, the link being provided by the perceptive verb *to see*, which is again missing in the Czech translation (*Doufáme, že celá čtvrť bude včas zajištěna jako čtvrť univerzitní* [We hope that the whole quarter will be secured...]). A similar construction of the participle with the verb *to have* appears in the following sentence: *I would have their bodily development so carefully watched and stimulated as their moral and intellectual growth* *Přál bych si, aby se jejich tělesný vývoj stejně bedlivě pozoroval a povzbuzoval jako jejich růst mravní a myšlenkový* [I would have that their bodily development were as carefully watched...]). An example of the verb *to find* in this construction is the sentence *It is a great encouragement to me to find you agreeing with my proposition* *Je mi velkým povzbuzením, že souhlasíte s mým návrhem* [It is a great encouragement to me that you agree...]. The starting point of the sentence is *It is a great encouragement to me*, the circumstance is *you agreeing with my proposition*, the linking being effected by the perceptive verb *to find*. – The causative verb *to make* in the linking function is illustrated in *No voice is needed to make me feel that* – *Není zapotřebí žádného hlasu, abych to cítila* [...that I should feel that].

We have thus discussed two groups of means by which an English sentence can include several circumstances that Czech and German have to denote by subordinate clauses. The examples were mostly taken from colloquial speech, where they are fairly common. The principal domain of these constructions, however, is the more intellectual style, especially the language of newspapers. It should be noted that the category of complex constructions represents in English syntax a feature analogous to a point observed in English onomatology; viz. to multiplex compound collocations arisen by mere juxtaposition, e.g. *Oxford University Summer Vacation Course*. As for the syntactic analysis of complex constructions, it is advisable to start with the verbal form, which is the starting point of the whole sentence, then to identify the elements expressing the circumstances, and finally the expression by which these two parts are linked.⁸

2. The word order of the English sentence

a) Principles determining the order of words in a language

The order of words⁹ is a subject of great interest. Unfortunately it is not always conceived in a sufficiently wide perspective. It can be treated from two different viewpoints. First, we can examine what position a particular sentence element usually occupies or, more exactly, what are the mutual positions of two particular sentence elements, the subject and the predicate, the object and the predicative verb, etc. The second approach consists in examining the general factors that determine the order of words in a sentence. The latter approach seems to be more expedient in as much as it shows that the arrangement of the words in a sentence is not determined by one principle, but results from the operation of several conflicting principles. The coexistence of several word order principles in a language is easily obscured if word order issues are treated in the former manner. This can be seen in the treatment of Czech word order in Ertl's edition of Gebauer's *Czech Grammar* (J. Gebauer – V. Ertl, 1914). The chapter on word order is one of the weakest parts of this otherwise valuable book, not only for lack of lucidity in the exposition but also because the presentation of Czech word order is entirely misleading.

Czech word order is very flexible. It is often referred to by the term “free”. This term, however, is objectionable, for it suggests that Czech word order is completely arbitrary, which is not correct. As has been said, it is flexible, which is manifest especially in comparison with the word order of English.

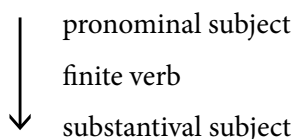
What are the principles that govern the word order of a particular language, often in a conflicting manner? The first principle might be called grammatical. It means that the position of a particular sentence element is determined by its grammatical function, i.e. by its being the subject, predicate, object, adverbial, etc. [...] In different languages

the grammatical principle asserts itself with different force. For instance, it plays a much greater part in English than in Czech. In some languages, such as Czech, the grammatical principle as a rule merely means that a particular sentence element occupies a particular sentence position unless this arrangement is prevented by the operation of another word order principle. In this case the grammatical word order represents only the neutral, i.e. the usual word order. In other languages the grammatical principle operates with much greater force than in Czech (as has been said above, this can be seen mainly in English).

The difference between the two languages is due to the fact that in Czech the grammatical function of a word is as a rule indicated by its form, whereas in English it is not. Thus in the construction *slaměný klobouk* [straw hat] the attributive function of the word *slaměný* [straw adj.] is signalled by its adjectival form and for this reason it does not greatly matter what position the attribute occupies. Though the normal position of an adjectival attribute is before its governing noun, the postsubstantival position is not inconceivable (it occurs, for example, in emphasis *On nosí klobouk slaměný*) [He wears a hat-sb. straw-adj.] or the two elements may be removed from each other (*On nosí klobouk obyčejně slaměný* [He wears a hat usually straw-adj.]). On the other hand the English expression *straw hat* does not admit of such rearrangement without an accompanying change in the meaning of the whole construction. *Straw hat* means, as is commonly known, a hat made of straw, whereas *hat straw* is a kind of straw from which hats are made. In a similar manner English distinguishes between the subject and direct object. In the sentence *John loves Mary* neither the noun *John*, nor the noun *Mary* shows by its form that the former is the subject and the latter the object. On the contrary the Czech nouns in the corresponding sentence *Jan má rád Marii* indicate their respective functions quite clearly. In English it suffices to change the word order for the sentence to convey a new meaning, while in Czech a change in the sense entails a change in the form of both nouns. Concluding our remarks on the grammatical principle of word order, we may sum up that it plays a much greater role in English than in Czech simply because it must. Owing to the simple morphological system of English, changes in word order are very often unfeasible since they would involve a change in the grammatical function of the words concerned.

The second principle determining the order of words in a sentence is the rhythm. This principle is well-known from Czech. Let us compare the following sentences *Já bych mu ji byl půjčil* – *Já bych mu byl tu knihu půjčil* – *Já bych byl tu knihu Karlovi půjčil* [I would to-him it have lent – I would to-him have that book lent – I would have that book to-Charles lent]. Note that the object in the accusative, when expressed by a pronoun, precedes the verb *byl*, but when expressed by a noun it is placed after the verb. If the pronominal object *mu* is replaced by the proper name, the word order changes again. These sentences clearly show the operation of the rhythmic principle. The position of the object depends on whether it is expressed by a pronoun or by a noun. The rhythmic principle plays a significant role in English as well, which can be shown by a comparison with German. In German, short sentences inserted in or following after direct speech have a special word order which is fixed in that the first place is occupied by the finite verb and the second by the subject: *Das*

Wetter wird sich ändern, sagte der Vater or *sagte er*. Whether the subject of the inserted or attached clause is expressed by a noun or a pronoun, it invariably occupies the same position, for in this case German applies the grammatical principle. On the other hand, in English the word order in these clauses is determined by the rhythmic principle, i.e. the first position is taken by the rhythmically lighter element: *The weather will change, said father* – but *he said*.¹⁰ If the three sentence elements (pronominal subject, finite verb, substantial subject) are arranged according to their rhythmic weight, there is an increase in weightiness from the pronominal, to the substantial subject, with the finite verb in between.



A quite analogous difference between German and English is found in sentences containing a verb with a prepositional adverb and an object. In such sentences German applies the grammatical principle (cf. *Er nahm den Hut ab*). The word order is the same, whether the object is expressed by a noun or a pronoun (cf. *Er nahm ihn ab*). On the other hand, in English the word order in these sentences is governed by the rhythmic principle. While in German, as we have seen, according to the grammatical principle the prepositional adverb occupies the final position (except in sentences with a perfect participle or an infinitive, in which case the adverb becomes a prefix), in English it appears in the closest proximity to the verb: *to take off*. The rhythmically possible positions are as follows. If the object is expressed by a noun, it is placed after the prepositional adverb (*He took off his hat*); if it is expressed by a pronoun, it comes between the verb and the adverb (*He took it off*). Apparently the object denoted by a noun is rhythmically too heavy so that if placed before the adverb it would remove the adverb too far from the verb, whereas the pronominal object which is rhythmically lighter has no such effect.¹¹

The third principle determining the order of words in a sentence is the principle of functional sentence perspective. It has been mentioned before in these talks. In essence it may be described as follows: when observing different utterances we find that they are more or less clearly composed of two parts. One part expresses what is given by the context or what naturally presents itself, in short what is being commented upon. As we already know, this part is called the theme of the utterance. The second part contains the new element of the utterance, i.e. what is being stated about something; this part is called the rheme of the utterance. The usual position of the theme of an utterance is the beginning of the sentence, whereas the rheme occupies a later position, i.e. we proceed from what is already known to what is being made known. We have called this *order objective*, since it pays regard to the hearer. The reversed order, in which the rheme of the utterance comes first and the theme follows is subjective. In normal speech this order occurs only in emotionally coloured utterances in which the speaker pays no regard to

the hearer, starting with what is most important for himself. We have already mentioned the usual procedure in fairy tales, which is objective: *Byl jednou jeden král* [Once upon a time there was a king] (*jeden král* [a king] being the rheme of the utterance) *a ten král mel krásnou dceru* [and that king had a beautiful daughter], (where *ten král* [that king] is the theme, and *měl krásnou dceru* [had a beautiful daughter] the rheme). *A ta dcera byla velice smutná* [And that daughter was very sad (*ta dcera* [that daughter] – the theme, *byla velice smutná* [was very sad] – the rheme).

It is natural that the order of words in a sentence should also be determined to a considerable extent by functional sentence analysis into the theme and the rheme. Here again languages display great differences. Czech complies with this principle very easily since its flexible word order makes it possible. The principle of functional sentence perspective often requires a Czech subject to follow after the verb if the subject belongs to the rheme of the utterance. This is the case, for example, in the sentence *Doma mi pomáhá tatínek* [at home to-me helps father] (*doma* [at home] – the theme, *mi pomáhá tatínek* [to-me helps father] – the rheme). Hence in Czech the requirements of functional sentence perspective are not brought into conflict with those of the grammatical principle. Nor are they in German: *Zu Hause hilft mir der Vater*. In English, however, the situation is different since the grammatical principle asserts itself especially with regard to the expression of the relation between the subject and the finite verb. The usual word order of the English sentence, viz. subject – finite verb – direct object cannot be arbitrarily changed. Hence in such a case the grammatical principle of word order fails to comply with the principle of functional sentence perspective.

As we have seen, English resolves this conflict by resorting to the passive construction: *At home I get the help of Father* or *At home I am helped by Father*. In this way both the requirements of the grammatical principle and those of functional sentence perspective are complied with. However, the influence of functional sentence perspective on English word order can also be seen in other cases, especially if the finite verb has two objects, an object of the accusative type and an object of the dative type, e. g. *dáti někomu něco* [to give someone something]. As a matter of fact this point can be demonstrated by Czech as well. The sentence *Já jsem půjčil svou knihu Karlovi* [I lent my book to Charles] is an answer to the question *Komu jsi půjčil tu knihu?* [Who did you lend the book to?]. The word *Karel* [Charles] is the rheme of the utterance (hence the dative object follows after the accusative). However, the answer to the question *Kterou knihu jsi Karlovi půjčil?* [Which book did you lend to Charles?] is *Já jsem půjčil Karlovi Wrightovu staroanglickou gramatiku* [I lent Charles Wright's Old English Grammar]. Here the rheme of the utterance is the accusative object (*Wrightovu staroanglickou gramatiku* [Wright's Old English Grammar]), which therefore follows after the dative object. The order of the two objects is thus seen to differ according to which of them constitutes the rheme of the utterance.

In English the grammatical principle determines the mutual position of the dative and accusative objects only inasmuch that the object of the dative type, if not expressed prepositionally, is placed immediately after the verb and is followed by the object of the

accusative type. If the object of the dative type is expressed by means of the preposition *to*, it is placed after the object of the accusative type. Thus the Czech sentence *On mi dal ty knihy* corresponds in English to *He gave me these books*. The object of the dative type (*me*) has no preposition and thus comes next to the verb, the object of the accusative type being placed after it (*these books*). This order complies with functional sentence perspective if the sentence is the answer to the question *What did he give you?* However, it is also conceivable that the question is *To whom did he give these books?* Then the order in the answer must be reversed: *He gave books to me*. But functional sentence perspective appears to exert an influence on the mutual position of the dative and accusative objects even in those instances where the dative object is denoted by the preposition *to*. The prepositional dative may precede the accusative object if it expresses something relatively familiar and the accusative denotes an element that belongs to the rheme of the utterance: *He went on paying to their remarks no attention*. Here the verb *to pay* is followed by the dative object expressed by the preposition *to*, as it belongs to the theme of the utterance.

It is hardly necessary to point out that in Czech functional sentence perspective also determines the mutual position of an adverbial and an object complement of the verb. Thus in the sentence *Já jsem potkal na Václavském náměstí Karla* [I met at Wenceslas Square Charles] we recognize that the adverbial is conceived as something relatively familiar, whereas the object is the rheme of the utterance. This sentence is the answer to the question *Koho jsi potkal* [Who did you meet?]. On the other hand the answer to the question *Kde jsi potkal Karla?* [Where did you meet Charles?] is *Já jsem potkal Karla na Václavském náměstí* [I met Charles at Wenceslas Square] for in this case the rheme of the utterance is the adverbial adjunct. Here the mutual position of the two elements appears to be governed by functional sentence perspective. In English such rearrangement of sentence elements is not feasible since English is averse to separating the object from its verb by an adverbial element. Hence the English versions of both Czech sentences must have the same word order, the difference in functional sentence perspective being indicated by different sentence stress: *I met Jack in Regent's Park* and *I met Jack in Regent's Park*.

Nevertheless now and then even English displays examples of the order finite verb – adverbial – object, e. g. *In returning he met on the plain of Caraci a scholar on a bay mule coming from Bologna*. This sentence has the order finite verb (*he met*) – adverbial (*on the plain of Caraci*) – object (*a scholar*). This order is in agreement with functional sentence perspective since the plain referred to is part of the return journey, which is regarded as a given fact, whereas the object *a scholar* clearly belongs to the rheme of the utterance. However, two other factors play a role. The adverbial is placed between the finite verb and the object contrary to the rules of English word order not only because this arrangement complies with the requirements of functional sentence perspective, but also because it is inconvenient to place it anywhere else. In English the adverbial usually occupies the initial or the final position of a sentence. In our example, however, the initial position of the sentence is already filled by another adjunct. It would be possible

to say *On the plain of Caraci in returning*, etc., but this word order is objectionable on rhythmic grounds. The second position that an adverbial may occupy is the end of the sentence; however, owing to the heavy modification of the object the adverbial would be removed too far from the verb. In other words, in our example the mutual position of the adverbial and the object is due not only to a positive factor, viz. functional sentence perspective, but also to a negative factor, viz. the impossibility of placing the adverbial elsewhere. Thus in the study of word order it should be borne in mind that apart from positive factors, negative factors may also co-determine the ultimate arrangement.

Sometimes, though such instances are rare, functional sentence perspective occasions initial position of the object, which is thus preposed to the subject and the verb. This order is found where the object is obviously a linking element (i.e. when it refers to an element mentioned in the preceding sentence). An object of this kind is usually expressed by a personal pronoun, which has the advantage of being formally identifiable as the object so that the possibility of its being conceived as the subject or attribute is eliminated. The sentence presented above as an example of the mutual position of the adverbial and the object continues as follows: *...and him he questioned about Tuscany*, which is a good example illustrating the theoretical consideration just advanced. It has already been said that the adverbial may occur at the beginning or at the end of a sentence. In some instances the choice between these two positions is determined by functional sentence perspective, viz. if the adverbial is a linking expression such as *on that day, then, there*, etc. [...].

The fourth factor determining the order of words is the principle of emphasis, i.e. the principle of putting special stress on some sentence element. In a Czech sentence the emphasized element is usually placed in the last place or in the next to the last place (*Častá krůpěj i kámen prorazí* [A frequent drop even a stone pierces] or *prorazí i kámen* [pierces even a stone]). The choice of one of these positions presumably depends on individual preference. The present writer prefers the final position; in popular speech, however, one increasingly meets with instances having the emphatic element in the last place but one, which results in a sort of final cadence (cf. V. Mathesius 1930). Only if the emphasis laid on a sentence element is very strong, the emphasized element is placed at the beginning. In the sentence *Častá krůpěj i kámen prorazí* [A frequent drop even a stone pierces] there is an emphasis on the object *kámen* [stone], but it is not especially strong. On the other hand, the word order *I kámen častá krůpěj prorazí* [Even a stone a frequent drop pierces] expresses an emphasis of a very high degree.

The situation in English is different. Here the position reserved for the emphatic element is the beginning of the sentence. This may be connected with the fact that the dynamic contour of the English sentence usually starts with unstressed syllables. As a result, the initial position of a stressed word is in itself conspicuous (cf. V. Mathesius 1931), e.g. *Right you are, Sorry I am to speak of it in the presence of your son; Colonel Lawrence gives us an account of his expedition there and a thrilling story it is*. In the last example the initial position of the sentence is occupied by the nominal predicate; in other cases

it may be taken by the object: *Colonel Lawrence gives an account of his expedition there and a thrilling story he tells*. Another sentence element that may be emphasized in this manner is the adverbial: *Little you care about my health*. An interesting instance of this kind is afforded by prepositional adverbs operating as constituent parts of the verb, e.g. *Off he went with a courageous look*. The normal word order is *He went off*, the emphatic order being *Off he went*. In this case there is an additional factor that plays a role in determining the word order, viz. the rhythmic principle, which determines the mutual position of the predicate and the subject, cf. *Off he went like an arrow* and *Off went the boy like an arrow*. (This difference is quite analogous to that observed in clauses inserted in or following after direct speech.) On the other hand, in German the mutual position of the verbal predicate and the subject is again decided by the grammatical principle, i.e. the first place is taken by the adverb, the second by the finite verb and the third by the subject, this order being the same whether the subject is a noun or a pronoun: *Ohne Verzug lief er weg wie ein Pfeil – Ohne Verzug lief der Knabe weg wie ein Pfeil*.

b) Other problems of English word order

Having dealt with the four major principles determining word order in English, we must mention some minor problems met with in this sphere.

To begin with, a few words should be added concerning the mutual position of the subject and the finite predicative verb. If the finite verb follows after the subject, i.e. if the order is S[subject] – P[predicate] it is referred to as normal, whereas if the order is reversed (P – S) it is considered to be less common (modified) and hence it is called inverted. These terms are not quite precise, for it cannot be claimed with any certainty that the order S – P is historically primary or that the order P – S has arisen from it by inversion. However, since these terms are established and convenient we shall avail ourselves of them in the present discussion.

Inversion in English raises the question as to when it takes place and how it is realized. Both these questions are of importance; the manner in which inversion is realized deserves attention because it often requires the use of the periphrastic verb *to do*.

Instances in which English has inverted word order, can be divided into two groups: 1) those in which inversion is obligatory, and 2) those in which inversion takes place only under certain conditions.

The first group includes the following instances:

- a) Inversion takes place after the expression *there* placed at the beginning of the sentence: *There have been many strange rumours about him*. The subject is *many strange rumours*, the predicative finite verb is *have been* the entire verbal form, including its nominal part, precedes the subject.

- b) Inversion occurs if the sentence starts with an emphatic negative element: *Never had England seemed so powerful as at that time*. In this case the constituent parts of the predicative verb are divided in such a way that the subject is preceded only by the finite part (*had*), the non-finite nominal part (*seemed*) following after the subject. In the sentence *Hardly were these words out of my mouth when the boy left the room* inversion affects the linking verb.
- c) Inversion further takes place after sentences that may conventionally be called confirmatory: they extend the validity of the statement made in the preceding affirmative or negative sentence to the element that operates as their subject. After an affirmative sentence they start with *so*: *My companions were dejected and so was I*. Similarly in dialogue: A: *I regard him as an honest man*. – B: *So do I*. If the underlying sentence is negative, the confirmatory clause begins with *nor* or *neither*, or *no more*: *He has not worked well, neither has his friend*. Similarly in dialogue: A: *I don't regard him as a bad man*. – B: *Neither do I (Nor do I either, No more do I)*.

These three types exhaust the first group in which inversion is obligatory.

2) Under certain conditions inversion may take place in clauses inserted in or following after direct speech, and further if an important sentence element that belongs to the predicate takes the emphatic initial position. In these two cases inversion does not take place if the subject is pronominal, but is regularly found if the subject is expressed by a substantive. We are primarily interested in the manner in which inversion is realized if it takes place.

There are two possibilities. Inversion is effected either by placing the subject after the verb or by means of the verb *to do*. In other words, the finite verb either remains unchanged or is replaced by the periphrastic verb *to do*. When is inversion with the periphrastic verb obligatory? It is in those instances where the verb is notional, i.e. where *do* is used in questions and negation, e.g. *Never did Wells speak of his authorship*. Note that the use of the auxiliary *did* (or *do* in other cases) prevents the verb from being removed from its object, as would happen in **Never spoke Wells...* This is also the case in sentences that we have called confirmatory, especially in dialogue: A: *I don't wish to have him here*. – B: *Neither do I wish to meet him*.

In instances of optional inversion, i.e. in the case of pronominal subjects, inversion need not take place: *Seven times did he repeat or he repeated the attack* (as compared with obligatory inversion in *Seven times did the general repeat the attack*, where the subject is a noun, and moreover the verb has an object); similarly *The general nodded and away did the guard take the prisoner*.

Secondly, inversion with the periphrastic verb *to do* is necessary to avoid the sentence-final position of an unstressed pronominal subject. Stressed pronominal subjects are admissible in this position (e.g. *So do I* – here the pronominal subject is stressed, for it contrasts with the subject of the preceding sentence). With unstressed pronominal

subjects, however, the situation is different. For example, in the sentence *Seldom did he smile* inversion is required in order that the rhythmic structure of the sentence may assume the form ' - xxx ' -. Thanks to inversion the sentence is rhythmically balanced. If it were construed without inversion, viz. **Seldom smiled he*, its rhythmic structure would be ' - x ' - x, which is incongruous with the usual rhythmic patterns of English. Accordingly, inversion is obligatory; cf. also *Scarcely did he nod*, etc.

We have observed that the periphrastic verb *to do* prevents the object from losing contact with its verb.¹² A similar effect was produced by the introduction of the periphrastic verb *to do* into questions, e.g. *Do you like this book?* As can be seen, the verb *like* and its object are placed next to each other. If the sentence, were construed without the periphrastic verb **How like you this book?*, the finite verb would be removed from its object. Note that the periphrastic conjugation's unnecessary if the question asks about the subject: *Who told you that?* (in contrast to *Did he tell you that?*). In a similar manner one can account for the verb *to do* in the negative conjugation. Though negation follows after the finite verb, the notional verb is again not separated from its object: *I don't like him*.

Let us add one more remark concerning word order. We have just seen that on the one hand English is averse to splitting sentence elements that belong together by their content, e.g. the verb and its object (cf. also the much criticized construction called the split infinitive, e.g. *to correctly say*). On the other hand, there exist quite opposite instances in which English tolerates the splitting of sentence elements that in Czech and German occur next to each other, e.g. *The visit to our shores of the German President may have far-reaching consequences*. The subject is the word *visit*, which is modified by the construction of *the German President*; this construction, however, is removed from its noun by the adjunct *to our shores*, which also belongs to the subject, but as we conceive it, not so closely as the genitive.

This is the most conspicuous instance of the splitting of elements that we feel as being closely connected. Other examples of this kind may be found in comparative sentences where the comparative is sometimes removed from what is being compared, or in sentences containing an attributive relative clause, which is sometimes separated from its noun. These facts seemingly contradict what has been said before, viz. that English is averse to splitting sentence elements that belong together through their content.¹³ Apparently there is another principle in play, viz. the principle of synthetism, which is clearly seen in German. In the latter language the infinitive or participle constituting a component part of a compound verbal form is placed at the end of the sentence: *Ich habe... gebeten*. This is synthetic word order; it is opposed to analytic word order in which the determinandum precedes the determinans. In some instances this synthetic tendency appears to operate even in English, the condition under which it can assert itself being that the function of the second element of the split pair is formally distinct. [...]

Notes

Reprinted from: Mathesius, Vilém (1975) *A Functional Analysis of Present Day English on a General Linguistic Basis*. Edited by Josef Vachek, translated by Libuše Dušková. Prague: Academia.

- ¹ On problems of sentence condensation see also the writings adduced here above, Note 81.
- ² Still, many ModE grammars continue keeping apart the gerund (*reading books*) from the verbal noun (*the reading of the books*) – see also further paragraphs of Mathesius' text.
- ³ To the parallelism *with – having* there also corresponds another parallelism *without – not having*, so that one has to do here, in Poldauf's opinion, with constructions corresponding to the possessive type of passive predications, discussed here earlier in Mathesius' above text.
- ⁴ Here, of course, one can again suppose, with G.O. Curme, that the form of copula has been dropped (*from the resources [being] turned to account*).
- ⁵ The onomatological aspects of the ModE infinitive were discussed in detail by I. Poldauf 1954.
- ⁶ From the onomatological viewpoint the ModE gerund was again discussed in detail by I. Poldauf 1955.
- ⁷ A similar view was also expressed in the writings of other syntacticians (e.g., of Otto Jespersen); in the Prague group, in those of I. Poldauf.
- ⁸ English complex condensations as well as complex constructions very efficiently support the nominal tendencies existing in the ModE sentence. Many facts adduced by Mathesius in his present book reveal (though the author himself does not expressly state so) that, unlike Czech and other languages of synthetic grammatical structure, the actional dynamism of the ModE predicative finite verb has been greatly reduced. Sometimes the reduction is so radical that the predicative finite verb resembles hardly more than a copula whose main function is, admittedly, to convey rather the formal grammatical categories (such as number, tense, mood, voice) than lexico-semantic information. Cf., on this point, J. Vachek 1961, Chapter IV, and particularly J. Firbas 1959a, 1959b and 1961. See also J. Macháček 1959.
- ⁹ Mathesius' interest in the problems of word order in the English sentence was manifested already in the first decade of this century when he devoted a series of papers to these problems. His last word on the subject dates from the early nineteen-forties (Mathesius 1942). The present-day approach of the Prague group to the same problems was very aptly outlined by J. Firbas 1962.
- ¹⁰ But sometimes also *father said* (this usage appears to be increasing).

- ¹¹ Here Mathesius leaves out of account the difference between a particle operating as an adverb (and thus constituting an integral component of a phrasal verb), and a particle operating as a preposition. In the latter case the particle always precedes the object, whether substantival or pronominal, cf. *He ran up a hill – he ran up it*. In the case of phrasal verbs the position of a pronominal object is fixed before the particle (*he gave it up*), whereas a substantival object may be placed either before or after it (*he gave the scheme up – he gave up all hope*), the mutual position of the two elements depending on the respective degree of their communicative dynamism. The adverb and the preposition are moreover distinguished by their respective patterns of stress (see Palmer 1965, 180–182). See also note 35.
- ¹² B. Trnka 1930 regards the function of the auxiliary *do*, i.e. the preservation of the normal pattern of the English word order, as ‘distributive’ (p. 45).
- ¹³ The adduced difference, of course, may be due to the fact that for the English linguistic consciousness the rules governing the closer or looser coherence of individual sentence elements are different from those governing the analogous coherence in Czech. Thus the word group *to our shores* may be interpreted as an object of the action implicitly covered by the substantive noun *visit*, and the *of*-construction simply expresses the agent of an action, like the *by*-construction.

Comprehension questions

1. What forms are typically used in Czech for rendering the various condensed elements found in English? What is the effect?
2. Why is it problematic to refer to Czech word order as “free”?
3. What principles regulate word order? Discuss their interplay in English and in Czech. Discuss how word order operates in other languages that you know.
4. What is the difference between objective and subjective word order?
5. What is the effect of the periphrastic *do* in inversion, particularly as regards the linear arrangement of sentence elements?