

Hornová, Libuše

Czech equivalents of English ing-forms as noun postmodifiers

Brno studies in English. 1991, vol. 19, iss. 1, pp. [119]-126

ISBN 80-210-0310-3

ISSN 0231-5351

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/104411>

Access Date: 30. 11. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

CZECH EQUIVALENTS OF ENGLISH ING-FORMS AS NOUN POSTMODIFIERS

Libuše Hornová

This paper is one part of a comprehensive study dealing with the various functions of English *ing*-forms as they affect the sentence structure in comparison with their Czech equivalents.

I compiled excerpts from eleven books out of which eight were novels and three professional texts of various types. I also used excerpts from English newspapers translated into Czech by the Czechoslovak Press Agency. Since the main aim of this comparative work was to find typical Czech equivalents of English *ing*-forms (mainly sentence condensers), I started to look for these collocations in the English texts (6 novels and 1 professional book) and then compared them with their Czech counterparts. To verify some of the conclusions at which I had arrived, I later added to the list of English books two Czech novels and two professional texts (translated into English by English translators). The excerpts from the way in which *ing*-forms are translated into Czech or prove that ferent writing styles, which could provide either some new facts about the way in which *ing*-forms are translated into Czech or prove that there were, in fact, not many differences in the Czech varieties of English *ing*-forms, regardless of style.

In this paper my attention will be focussed on the postmodification of nouns (or noun phrases) by English *ing*-forms which follow a preposition (mostly "of") in comparison with their Czech equivalents. The aim of this work is to find structural and lexical similarities and differences in both languages.

Quirk (1972) refers to the sentence structure in question as an "appositive postmodification, which is fairly common by means of infinitive clauses: *The appeal to join the movement was well received* which would correspond to the finite *that people should join the movement*, ... The *ing*-clause does so only as head of a prepositional phrase (as in *The problem of learning English*)".

The same kind of English sentence structure is viewed by Curme (1953) in the following way: the gerund can be used

“a- As an attributive genitive: the love of indulging self, the fear of losing his friendship.

Though the attributive genitive gerund is very common, it cannot be used at all when the idea of desire, wish, demand, intention, or modality is present, in which case the prepositional infinitive is usually employed: *there is a public demand for him to take the place, not — of his taking the place, . . .*

b- As an appositive genitive: I now have the very pleasant work of preparing boys for college.

c- As an attributive prepositional phrase: his joy on account of . . . my coming.”

Dušková (1969), listing different functions of the gerund in the English sentence, mentions its role as a noun modifier positioned both before and after the noun. Postmodification of a noun by the gerund occurs after prepositions. The gerund often alternates with the infinitive or a clause.

The above-mentioned grammar book authors are just three of many others who refer to the postmodification of the noun by some of the English sentence condensers as quite a frequent means of noun modification. As regards the *ing*-form condenser, however, the authors may differ in the terminology used to identify it, depending on its function in the sentence. Accordingly, it may be called gerund, participle or verbal noun. Some grammarians (Jespersen, Kruisinga, Poldauf, Trnka, Vachek, et al.) prefer to use just the term “*ing*-form” or “*ing*-verbid”, which I would like to hold to in this paper.

In the compiled excerpts of the observed sentence structure, the relation of the head noun and its modifier is often so close that it tends to become a semantic unit. This lexical-grammatical interdependence of the two members of the structure is kept in many Czech equivalents, while in some cases it is loosened to a certain extent and occasionally even changed. These shifts may influence the structure of the Czech sentence in such a way that we can no longer speak about the modification of the noun.

In most excerpts, *ing*-forms follow the preposition “of”; there are only a few examples of structures with the prepositions “for”, “in”, “to”. The Czech translational variations from English fiction, listed according to their number, are the following:

1. finite verb form (86)
2. infinitive (68)

3. noun; noun + preposition (30)
4. zero equivalent (6)
5. adjective (5)

(1) The excerpts wherein the Czech finite verb form is the equivalent of the English *ing*-form can be divided into three groups. In one group, the largest, there are complex sentences, where the noun of the examined prepositional phrase is a part of the main clause and is further modified by a dependent clause — mostly attributive:

SM: ... our faith can give us hope of building up this society again. (p.201)
 ... naše víra nám dává naději, že svou kolej opět povzneseme. (p.209)

However, the equivalent of the English head noun is not always a noun in Czech, and due to this, the dependent clause is of a different kind — mostly objective:

WAA: I' ve got an idea of offering Pelican a directorship ... (p. 204)
 Napadlo mě, že bych Pelicanovi nabídl ve firmě místo ředitele, ... (p.229)

Translations, using a noun with an attributive clause, express the same idea, yet adhere to the tendency of the Czech language. The English attributive structure is expressed by a dependent finite clause whose relation to the head noun is the same as in English. The Czech translational variations with verbal equivalents of the head noun in which there is an objective clause have a different syntactic structure, but their meaning, too, comes close to the original.

There are also two excerpts with Czech compound sentences:

MS: The Moirs continued their custom of dining with him regularly. (p.9)
 Moirovi zachovávali starý zvyk a chodili k němu pravidelně na večeři. (p.12)

Here the shift of structure is greater and, moreover, in the two independent sentences the close relationship between the head noun and the *ing*-form disappears totally.

Still greater structural change can be seen in excerpts where the *ing*-form equals a finite Czech verb form in a simple sentence. The head noun is either not translated at all or its meaning only influences some other element in the Czech sentence:

BRT: ... our laughter had the effect of drawing me into their circle. (p.20)
 ... a ten družný smích mne vtáhl do jejich kruhu. (p.17)

This may have been caused by the fact that the English nouns in these excerpts are not as meaningful as elsewhere — e.g. “way of (thinking, talking), point of . . . , habit of . . . etc.”

(2) A further translational variation of the *ing*-form in this type of col-

location is the Czech infinitive. Here too the compiled excerpts must be divided into three sections. The majority of excerpts with the Czech infinitive are only structural variations of the sentences with the Czech finite verb form. In the most numerous group of examples, the infinitive is a part of the predicate within a simple sentence. The postmodified English noun is sometimes translated, sometimes omitted or included in the finite verb form preceding the infinitive:

SM: ...Nightingale was just on the point of sending round another flysheet.
(p.216)

...Nightingale se právě chystá rozeslat další leták. (p.231)

In some cases the infinitive is the complement of the finite verb form, in which case it is called its object, but many times the whole verb phrase is considered to be a simple predicate — “uměl se rozložit, dokázala odpovědět, neznamená jen sednout” etc. Supposing that in the Czech sentence the English head noun is omitted or its meaning is transformed into the meaning of the finite verb form, there arises a structural difference in both cases: in English, the *ing*-form modifies the noun which is part of an expanded predicate phrase, while in Czech, the infinitive is an integral part of a simple predicate.

There are two more structural variations with the infinitive. In the first, the infinitive modifies the noun, and thus the similarity of structure and meaning in both languages is the greatest:

BRT: There's remarkably little opportunity of changing it. (p.166)

... má pozoruhodně málo příležitostí ji změnit. (p. 153)

In most cases the English noun is of clear-cut meaning (interest, privilege, gift, sensation, etc.), which may be the reason for using the same noun in Czech, while the meaning of verbs in this set of excerpts is rather vague:

SM: I have had the privilege in particular of hearing the views of Dr. Jago —
(p.206)

Zvláště pak jsem měl tu čest vyslechnout názory pana dr. Jaga... (p.214)

The second group with the infinitival equivalent of the *ing*-form in a dependent clause consists of sentences which are similar to the above-mentioned sentences where the Czech equivalent was a finite verb form in a dependent clause. Mostly, the verb phrase of the Czech clause consists of a modal verb + the infinitive. The majority of the Czech clauses are attributive on condition that the modified English noun is translated:

WAA: He smiled at the possibility of Donald's supposing them to be more. (p.220)

Rozesmál se nad možností, že by to Donald mohl považovat za něco více.
(p.225)

Some clauses are objective, dependent on the finite verb form which is the equivalent of the English noun.

(3) The third above-mentioned Czech translational variation comprises sentence structures where the Czech equivalents of the *ing*-forms are nouns or nouns with prepositions. The way of postmodifying the head noun is the same as in English: structurally it is very close to the Czech sentences with the infinitive as the head noun modifier:

MS: ... his sense of belonging to his previous life became a little stronger, ... (p.232)

... jeho pocit náležitosti k předešlému životu byl trochu silnější, ... (p.205)

The choice between a noun or a noun with a preposition is determined by the case relation between the head noun and its nominal modification. In three excerpts from this group, the noun equivalent of the *ing*-form follows the verb as an object; it is once even its subject:

WAA: ... Rose Lorimer was in danger of losing her reason under the stress of scepticism ... (p.186)

... Rose Lorimerové hrozí ztráta rozumu, když se bránila oprávněné skeptisi ... (p.209)

In all cases the English sentence elements and their Czech equivalents take up the same position as regards functional sentence perspective (FSP) — i.e. in the rhematic part of the sentence.

(4) In this small group of excerpts, the English *ing*-form is not translated at all. When these excerpts are compared with the previous ones, in which the amount of action inherent in the *ing*-form was expressed in some way, we find that in the Czech translational variations of this group that quality is missing. Even in nominal equivalents, especially in verbal nouns, there was still some action (přemlouvání, jednání, litání, zastrašování, etc.). Here, however, there is none:

SM: "Now you have got this responsibility for presiding over the college till the elections ... " (p.237)

Teď, když máte tu odpovědnost za kolej až do voleb ... (p.247)

(5) There are also several Czech equivalents with the premodification of the noun by an adjective which is the counterpart of the *ing*-form:

BRT: ... we both retained the lightness of dancing in our feet; (130)

... taneční lehkost nám dosud hrála v nohou; (p.120)

In Czech, the collocation is shifted to the subject of the sentence, but the Czech verb, which is more dynamic than the English, helps the Czech sentence keep equality as far as action is concerned.

In Czech the *ing*-forms of the English professional literature are most

often translated with the use of nouns (there are also a few examples of finite verb forms — in main or dependent clauses — and infinitives; one equivalent is an adjective):

AFP: (We) ... must return to the general question of coding ... (p.170)
 ... je proto třeba se vrátit k obecné otázce kódování ... (p.167)

Other similar Czech collocations can be found: problém konfrontace, diferenciace podmiňování, procesu objevování, prostředky výuky etc. These collocations are typical of professional language; thus a lesser degree of action is not here felt as a negative feature. On the contrary, a sentence with the finite verb form as the equivalent of the *ing*-form is closer to narrative, not professional style:

AFP: We all have the experience of forgetting to answer letters ... (p.18)
 Všichni máme zkušenost, že zapomináme odpovědět na dopisy, ... (p.20)

The infinitive, on the other hand, seems to be a very suitable means of translation for the professional style.

In newspaper excerpts — even if they are few — there is a variety of translations — finite verb forms, nouns, infinitives:

NR: ... It's when you get the question of firing at a burglary suspect ...
 Když vznikne otázka, zda střílet v tmavé uličce na podezřelého z vloupání ...

Having come to certain conclusions about the Czech equivalents of the English *ing*-forms as postmodifiers of the noun, I examined the sources for the same English sentence structure in Czech texts translated into English. I found that the most frequent sources for the *ing*-form were again finite verb forms, infinitives and nouns. There were also zero sources.

Thus the way of modifying the head noun in Czech is analogous to that in English, while, nevertheless, adhering to the tendencies of the Czech language:

CLE: ... dostalo se mi radosti jíst se studenty ... (p.49)
 ... I was vouchsaved the joy of eating with students ... (p.86)

Zero source for the *ing*-form is rather surprising, but in most cases it is the *ing*-form of the verb "to be", which only links the modified noun with the one that follows it. Exceptionally, there is one example of a meaningful verb with zero source — "to find":

BJS: ... šlo mu o jistotu tvaru. (p.17)
 ... it was a question of finding a sureness of form. (p.21)

Except for the excerpts where the Czech source is a finite verb form,

the English way of conveying the event (idea) seems to involve more action.

To summarize the comparison of the Czech translational equivalents of the English sentence structures where the *ing*-form postmodifies the noun after a preposition, the following can be stated:

(1) There is great structural similarity in both the languages when the Czech equivalents of *ing*-forms are: (a) attributive clauses; (b) infinitives as non-concordant attributes; (c) nouns as non-concordant attributes.

(2) In a great number of Czech equivalents the modified noun is omitted entirely, or its meaning is included in the finite verb form and, as such, the sentence structures of the two languages differ. Thus, a hypothetical conclusion can be drawn that the *ing*-form is a more important part of the collocation, even if it functions only as a modifier.

(3) Unlike in fiction, the prevailing method of translating the *ing*-form of the examined collocations into Czech, in the professional style, is by using the noun; in the newspaper style the results are similar to those in fiction.

(4) The majority of Czech translational variations of the English *ing*-forms keep the same position in the sentence in both languages as regards FSP.

ABBREVIATIONS

AFP — Adcock, C. J., *Fundamentals of psychology* (Penguin Books, 1956); *Základy psychologie* (Prague, 1963). BJS — Josef Suk (Prague and Bratislava, 1968); *Josef Suk*, transl. by Layton-Eisler (Prague and Bratislava, 1969). BRT — *Room at the top* (Penguin Books, 1959); *Místo nahoře*, transl. by F. Vrba (Prague, 1960). CLE — Čapek, K., *Anglické listy* (Prague, 1925); *Letters from England*, transl. by P. Selver (London, 1944). MS — Murdoch, I., *The sandcastle* (Penguin Books, 1968); *Hrad z písku*, transl. by H. Prokopová (Prague, 1972). NR — *U.S. News and world report; Světový tisk*. SM — Snow, C. P., *The masters* (Penguin Books, 1963); *Profesoři*, transl. by E. Hornátová (Prague, 1963). WAA — *Anglo-Saxon attitudes* (Penguin Books, 1968); *Anglosaský postoj*, transl. by J. Urbánková (Prague, 1960).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Curme, G. O. (1953). *English grammar* (New York).
- Dušková, L. et al. (1988). *Mluvnice současné angličtiny na pozadí češtiny* [A grammar of contemporary English with Czech as a background] (Prague).
- Dušková, L. (1969). Some remarks on the syntax of the *ing*-form in present-day English, *Philologica Pragensia* 12.94—9.
- Firbas, J. (1959). Thoughts on the communicative function of the verb in English, German and Czech, *Brno studies in English* 1.39—68.

- Firbas, J. (1962). Poznámka k místu funkční perspektivy větné ve struktuře jazyka [A note on the place of functional sentence perspective in the structure of language], *Otázky slovanské syntaxe* 1.201—3 (Prague).
- Hladký, J. (1961). Remarks on complex condensation phenomena in some English and Czech contexts, *Brno studies in English* 3.105—18.
- Hrabě, V. (1964). Polovětné vazby a kondenzace „druhého sdělení“ v ruštině a češtině [Semicausal structures and “second predication” condensation in Russian and Czech] (Prague).
- Knittlová, D. (1967). K problematice španělských kondenzorů [On the problem of Spanish condensers], *Časopis pro moderní filologii* 49.223—31.
- Marková, M. (1986). On the relationship between gerund and verbal noun, *Philologica Pragensia* 29.83—91.
- Mathesius, V. (1975). *A functional analysis of present-day English on a general linguistic basis* (Prague).
- Nosek, J. (1954). Notes on syntactic condensation in modern English, *Travaux linguistiques de Prague* 1.281—8.
- Nosek, J. (1954). Několik poznámek k polovětným vazbám v angličtině XVII. století [Some remarks concerning “semi-sentence” constructions in 17th century English], *Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Philologica et historica* 7.23—36 (Prague).
- Poldauf, I. (1954). Infinitiv v angličtině [The infinitive in English], *Časopis pro moderní filologii* 36.9—23 (Prague).
- Poldauf, I. (1955). O konkurenci infinitivu a gerundu v angličtině [On the rivalry between the infinitive and the gerund in English], *Časopis pro moderní filologii* 37.203—23 (Prague).
- Poldauf, I. (1959). Děj v infinitivu [Action expressed by the infinitive], *Slovo a slovesnost* 20.183—202 (Prague).
- Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G. and Svartvik, J. (1972). *A grammar of contemporary English* (London).
- Svoboda, A. (1988). Functional perspective of the noun phrase, *Brno studies in English* 17.61—86.
- Vachek, J. (1955). Some thoughts on the so-called complex condensation in modern English, *Sborník prací filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity* A3.63—77 (Brno).
- Vachek, J. (1961). Some less familiar aspects of the analytical trend of English, *Brno studies in English* 3.9—78.

ČESKÉ EKVIVALENTY ANGLICKÉHO TVARU NA -ING VE FUNKCI POSTMODIFIKACE SUBSTANTIVA

Článek se zabývá srovnáváním anglických větných struktur, kde substantivum je postmodifikováno tvarem na *-ing* po předložce “of” s jejich českými ekvivalenty. Vychází se z dokladů tří stylových rovin: beletrie, odborná literatura a noviny. Cílem srovnávání bylo hledat strukturální a lexikální shody a rozdíly ve zkoumaném jevu v obou jazycích s přihlédnutím k různým stylovým rovinám.

Největší strukturální rozdíly jsou v dokladech, kde v českém překladu je zcela pominuto anglické postmodifikované substantivum nebo jeho obsah pouze obohatil význam určitého tvaru slovesného ve větě jednoduché.

Pořadí českých překladových variant anglických tvarů na *-ing* ve zkoumané jazykové struktuře z beletrie a noviny je shodné: finitní tvar slovesa, infinitiv, substantivum, nula, adjektivum.

V odborném stylu jednoznačně převažuje překlad substantivem.