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# VERB-FORM FREQUENCY IN ENGLISH

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Stylostatistics, which is concerned with the investigation of quantitative features of style, is an important branch of quantitative linguistics. It allows us to penetrate into the ways of the distribution of language phenomena in particular stylistic strata and tries to ascertain what this distribution of language phenomena is depending on. Is the use of certain language means a deliberate choice or is it a chance? That is a problem which many scholars have already tried to solve, but so far we have no definite answer to it. Certain conclusions have been reached by G. Herdan<sup>1</sup> who regards as one of the characteristic features of style the stability of relative frequencies of occurrence of more frequently used words. The choice of particular words for expressing certain ideas is, according to Herdan,<sup>2</sup> to some extent at least, of the nature of a probability, and therefore a 'chance event' which means that what we regard as choice of words is subject to chance.

Another question is that of grammar phenomena. Even on this level Herdan<sup>3</sup> postulates the law of the stability of the distribution of grammar forms. The results of a statistical investigation of the frequency of occurrence of several grammatical categories in Russian by which both considerable discrepancies and a great extent of agreement in conversational and non-conversational material have been found are interpreted by Herdan as the result of the author being subject to certain common laws in the use of grammar forms, according to which, though determination or choice makes the individual decide to use particular forms, their different frequency of use is part of language structure which is beyond the control of the individual. The grammar element must therefore, according to Herdan, be regarded as a chance factor for linguistic expression. Herdan is undoubtedly right when he writes (op. cit., 127): '...since grammar and lexicon are not kept in water-tight compartments, neither is either purely "chance" or purely "choice". Each contains both elements, though in significantly varying proportions.'

However, the situation seems to be different when the frequency of occurrence of particular verb-forms is being ascertained than when the frequency of occurrence of all word categories is concerned. In the latter case the deviations between particular styles cannot be too great, as the use of particular word categories such as nouns, adjectives, verbs, etc., has a certain limit: a certain utterance cannot be composed of nouns solely, or of verbs solely, etc., but it is possible to imagine that in a certain, even long passage of a text in a certain style the present tense only will be used. Therefore we are of the opinion that the frequency of occurrence of particular verb-forms can be a significant feature of style.

The aim of our study is to ascertain the frequency of occurrence of particular verb-forms in English in the style of fiction, in colloquial style, and in the style of specialized

and scientific texts. There exist more stylistic strata, but we have purposely limited our investigation to these three kinds of style, as we regard them as most clean-cut.<sup>4</sup> This investigation is also important for foreign language instruction, as its results can establish the order of importance of particular verb-forms and the extent of their drill in language instruction.

For our frequency count we have investigated about 20,000 words for each style, the total count reaching 61,785 words and 7,550 verb-forms. For the style of fiction we have chosen samples from Charles Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist* (Chapters 1—2, total 5,028 words) and from the novel *The Italian Wife* by Emyr Humphreys (pp. 29—48, 54—64, 89—125, total 18,036 words), total 23,064 words. The colloquial style is represented by three plays: Harold Pinter, *The Homecoming* (pp. 7—34, 5,002 words), John Arden, *The Workhouse Donkey* (pp. 15—38, 5,031 words), and Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (the whole play, 8,300 words), total 18,333 words. The style of specialized and scientific texts comprises samples of a linguistic text by H. E. Palmer, *The Principles of Language-Study* (pp. 1—15, 5,125 words), of a psychological text from the book *Theories of Motivation in Personality and Social Psychology*, ed. R. C. Teevan and R. C. Birney (pp. 10—22, 4,842 words), and of a physical text from *Primer of Electronics and Radiant Energy* (pp. 170—175, 278—330, 10,421 words), total 20,388 words.

When doing a statistical investigation we should ascertain the representativeness of the scope of the investigated material. We can do it by means of the relative admissible error  $\delta$  which can be determined according to the equation

$$\delta = \frac{u_{\alpha}}{\sqrt{N \cdot p}}$$

where  $u_{\alpha}$  is the coefficient of reliability,  $\alpha$  is the significance level,  $N$  is the total scope of the sample, and  $p$  is the relative frequency. The reliability of the estimate is given by the probability with which a certain estimate can be regarded as correct. In this case we choose the reliability  $\alpha = 0.95$  which is a reasonable reliability (95%). To this reliability corresponds the coefficient  $u_{\alpha} = 1.96$ . If the relative error is about 10%, it can be said to be unimportant and the scope of the sample can be said to be adequate. When we ascertain the representativeness of material in which we investigate the relative frequency of occurrence of a single phenomenon, the problem is a simple one as we can easily determine the extent of the sample necessary for the relative error not too much exceeding 10 per cent. In our case, however, it is more complicated as we investigate the relative frequency of occurrence of a considerable number of phenomena, each having a different relative frequency of occurrence. For verb-forms of a small frequency of occurrence an extremely extensive material would be necessary. Table 1 gives, for the material from the novel *The Italian Wife* by E. Humphreys, apart from the absolute and relative frequency of occurrence also the relative admissible error  $\delta$  in samples gradually increasing in number, that is 1,000, 2,000, 3,000, 5,036 and 10,000 words. The given numbers of words are not quite correct as some of the verb-forms are compound forms consisting of two or three words. However, we presume this fact to be negligible. According to the table the greatest difference in the value of the relative admissible error is between the sample counting 1,000 words and the sample counting 2,000 words and more. In this case  $\delta$  is very high, with the exception of two most frequent verb-forms, that is to say the simple preterite active (8.4) and the simple present active

Table 1

	Humphreys														
	words 1.000			words 2.000			words 3.000			words 5.036			words 10.000		
	abs.	%	$\delta$	abs.	%	$\delta$	abs.	%	$\delta$	abs.	%	$\delta$	abs.	%	$\delta$
Pres. simp. act.	40	27.02	11.9	82	28.5	8.2	125	28.80	7.6	281	37.12	4.5	430	30.07	3.6
Pres. simp. pass.	1	0.68	75.0	2	0.70	52.4	2	0.46	54.1	1	0.13	76.5	3	0.21	42.8
Pres. cont. act.	1	0.68	75.0	2	0.70	52.4	10	2.31	23.5	30	3.96	13.9	38	2.66	12.0
Pres. cont. pass.										1	0.13	76.5			
Pret. simp. act.	80	54.05	8.4	141	49.12	6.3	211	48.62	5.1	314	41.48	4.3	694	48.53	2.8
Pret. simp. pass.	1	0.68	75.0	2	0.70	52.4	7	1.61	28.3	8	1.06	27.6	31	2.17	13.3
Pret. cont. act.	5	3.38	33.6	14	4.88	19.8	17	3.92	17.9	13	1.72	21.1	33	2.31	12.9
Pret. cont. pass.													2	0.14	52.4
Perf. act.	6	4.05	30.9	10	3.48	23.6	11	2.53	22.5	24	3.17	15.5	44	3.08	11.1
Perf. pass.				2	0.70	52.4	2	0.46	54.1	1	0.13	76.5	5	0.35	33.1
Perf. cont. act.															
Pluperf. act.	4	2.70	37.6	10	3.48	23.6	14	3.23	19.9	21	2.77	16.6	73	5.10	8.7
Pluperf. pass.	1	0.68	75.0	2	0.70	52.4	2	0.46	54.1	2	0.27	53.1	2	0.14	52.4
Pluperf. cont. act.				1	0.35	74.2	1	0.23	74.5				1	0.07	73.9
Future I act.	2	1.35	53.4	6	2.09	30.3	11	2.53	22.5	13	1.72	21.1	18	1.26	17.5
Future I pass.										1	0.13	76.5	2	0.14	52.4
Future I cont. act.				1	0.35	74.1	1	0.23	74.2	3	0.40	43.6	1	0.07	73.9
Condit. pres. act.	6	4.05	30.9	10	3.48	23.6	20	4.61	16.6	33	4.36	13.2	44	3.08	11.1
Condit. pres. pass.	1	0.68	75.0	2	0.70	52.4				4	0.53	37.9			
Cond. pres. cont. act.										7	0.92	28.7	9	0.63	24.7
Cond. past act.															
<b>Total</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>100.00</b>		<b>287</b>	<b>100.00</b>		<b>434</b>	<b>100.00</b>		<b>757</b>	<b>100.00</b>		<b>1430</b>	<b>100.00</b>	

(11.9). Also in samples of 2,000 and 3,000 words the relative error is adequate only in present and preterite, but in the other verb-forms there is, in comparison with the sample of 1,000 words, a considerable decrease of the value of  $\delta$ . Comparing the samples of 2,000 and 3,000 words we find, in general, a small decrease of  $\delta$ . In the sample of 5,036 words the relative error is adequate in three verb-forms: simple present (4.5), simple preterite (4.3), and conditional pres. act. (13.2), and possibly also in present continuous active where the value of the relative error amounting to 13.9 may be, with reserve, regarded as relatively adequate. In the sample of 10,000 words the relative error may be regarded as adequate in 7 verb-forms: simple present act. (3.6), continuous present act. (12.0), simple preterite active (2.8), continuous preterite act. (12.9), perfect act. (11.1), pluperfect act. (8.7), and present conditional act. (11.1). Thus the sample of 10,000 words can be regarded as representative enough for our aims. The more satisfactory will be the total number of words of all samples of each style taken together, which makes about 20,000.

Let us now consider particular samples of a certain style. In the style of fiction we will compare the relative frequency of occurrence of particular verb-forms in Dickens and Humphreys. In Table 2 we see, for the most part, great differences between the styles of Dickens and Humphreys. The greatest difference is in the use of simple present active: 17.03% in Dickens compared with 31.16% in Humphreys. Dickens, on the other hand, has more preterite forms (active forms 52.38% against 45.47% in Humphreys; passive forms 7.88% in Dickens, 1.72% in Humphreys). This can be explained by the fact that Dickens has more descriptions; Humphreys, on the other hand, has more direct speech which contains many present forms (essentially also more continuous forms of present, preterite and perfect). Dickens has also more forms of pluperfect (active 6.78% against 4.02%; passive 7.88% against 1.72% in Humphreys), of past conditional active (2.75% against 0.60% in Humphreys), and of present future active (2.93% against 1.57% in Humphreys).

As far as the colloquial style (Table 3) is concerned, the samples of three modern authors are compared: Pinter, Arden, and Beckett. Here, too, we meet with differences in the frequency of occurrence of simple present, especially between Pinter (43.97%) on the one hand and Arden (59.68%) on the other hand, Beckett being in the middle between both (50.13%). Lower frequency of occurrence of simple present act. in Pinter is balanced by a higher frequency of preterite simple act., counting 26.59% against 12.26% in Arden and 16.20% in Beckett. Major difference is there further in the frequency of occurrence of present future act. in Beckett (11.73%) in comparison with the other two authors (5.06% and 5.97%).

In comparing three samples of the style of specialized and scientific texts (Table 4) we find the most striking difference in the use of passive forms of simple present, which are most frequent in physical texts (23.63% as against 5.74% in the linguistic text and only 2.90% in the psychological text). In the frequency of occurrence of active forms of simple present there are, on the whole, no major differences. In the use of simple preterite act. there is a difference between the physical text (1.42%) on the one hand and the linguistic and psychological texts (both about 10%) on the other hand.

Let us now compare all three styles (Table 5). Simple present act. is least frequent in the style of fiction (28.75%), most frequent in the style of specialized and scientific texts (62.82%), the colloquial style approximating it (50.58%). Passive forms of simple present are most frequent in the style of specialized and scientific texts (13.71% against 1.51% in colloquial style and 0.25% in the style of fiction). The

Table 2

	Fiction			
	Dickens		Humphreys	
	abs.	%	abs.	%
Present simple act.	93	17.03	836	31.16
Present simple pass.	2	0.37	6	0.22
Present contin. act.	2	0.37	78	2.91
Present contin. pass.			1	0.04
Preterite simple act.	286	52.38	1220	45.47
Preterite simple pass.	43	7.88	46	1.72
Preterite contin. act.	7	1.28	63	2.35
Perfect active	11	2.01	79	2.94
Perfect passive			33	1.23
Perfect contin. act.			34	1.27
Perfect contin. pass.			2	0.07
Pluperf. active	37	6.78	108	4.02
Pluperf. passive	10	1.83	6	0.23
Pluperf. contin. act.	1	0.18	2	0.07
Future active	18	2.93	42	1.57
Future passive	2	0.37	3	0.11
Future contin. act.			5	0.19
Conditional pres. act.	19	3.48	97	3.61
Conditional pres. pass.	1	0.18	2	0.07
Condit. pres. contin. act.	1	0.18	4	0.15
Conditional past act.	15	2.75	16	0.60
<b>Total</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>2683</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 3

	Colloquial style					
	Pinter		Arden		Beckett	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%
Present simple act.	339	43.97	370	59.68	594	50.13
Present simple pass.	8	1.04	7	1.13	24	2.03
Present contin. act.	39	5.06	25	4.03	62	5.24
Present contin. pass.			1	0.16	1	0.08
Preterite simple act.	205	26.59	76	12.26	192	16.20
Preterite simple pass.	4	0.52	5	0.80	1	0.08
Preterite contin. act.	11	1.43	4	0.65	22	1.86
Perfect active	54	7.00	31	5.00	64	5.40
Perfect passive	1	0.13	4	0.65		
Perfect contin. act.	12	1.55	6	0.97	1	0.08
Pluperf. active	14	1.87	8	1.29	8	0.68
Pluperfect passive					2	0.17
Pluperfect contin. act.	1	0.13				
Future I active	39	5.06	37	5.97	139	11.73

Table 3 continue

	Colloquial style					
	Pinter		Arden		Beckett	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%
Future I passive	2	0.26	1	0.16		
Future I contin. act.					1	0.08
Future II active					5	0.42
Conditional pres. act.	30	3.89	41	6.61	57	4.81
Conditional pres. pass.	2	0.26				
Condit. pres. contin. act.					2	0.17
Conditional past act.	10	1.30	3	0.48	9	0.76
Conditional past pass.			1	0.16	1	0.08
<b>Total</b>	<b>771</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>1185</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 4

	Style of specialized and scientific texts					
	Palmer		Teevan		Caverly	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%
Present simple act.	302	61.89	279	67.55	514	61.04
Present simple pass.	28	5.74	12	2.90	199	23.63
Present contin. act.	17	3.48	9	2.18	16	1.90
Present contin. pass.					3	0.36
Preterite simple act.	48	9.84	42	10.17	12	1.42
Preterite simple pass.	9	1.84	10	2.42	16	1.90
Preterite contin. act.	2	0.41			1	0.12
Perfect active	35	7.17	20	3.84	12	1.42
Perfect passive	11	2.25	2	0.49	11	1.31
Perfect contin. act.	1	0.21				
Pluperfect active	3	0.62	5	1.21		
Pluperfect passive	1	0.21				
Pluperfect contin. act.	1	0.21				
Future active	16	3.26	10	2.42	42	4.99
Future passive			2	0.49	3	0.36
Conditional pres. act.	14	2.87	20	4.84	11	1.31
Conditional pres. pass.			2	0.49	1	0.12
Conditional past act.					1	0.12
<b>Total</b>	<b>488</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>842</b>	<b>100.00</b>

continuous form of present act. has a rather higher frequency of occurrence (4.89%) in the colloquial style compared with the two other styles (about 2.40% each); however, in comparison with non-continuous forms it is surprisingly low. Considerable differences are in the frequency of occurrence of simple preterite active: against 46.61% in the style of fiction there is 18.36% in the colloquial style and

Table 5

	Style							
	fiction		colloq.		special.		total	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%
Pres. simple act.	929	28.75	1303	50.58	1095	62.82	3327	44.07
Pres. simple pass.	8	0.25	39	1.51	39	13.71	286	3.79
Pres. cont. act.	80	2.48	126	4.89	42	2.41	248	3.28
Pres. cont. pass.	1	0.03	2	0.08	3	0.17	6	0.08
Pret. simple act.	1506	46.61	473	18.36	102	5.85	2081	27.56
Pret. simple pass.	89	2.76	10	0.39	35	2.01	134	1.77
Pret. cont. act.	70	2.17	37	1.44	3	0.17	110	1.46
Pret. cont. pass.	2	0.06					2	0.03
Perf. act.	90	2.79	149	5.78	67	3.85	306	4.05
Perf. pass.	33	1.02	5	0.19	24	1.38	62	0.82
Perf. cont. act.	34	1.05	19	0.74	1	0.06	54	0.71
Perf. cont. pass.	2	0.06					2	0.03
Pluperf. act.	145	4.49	30	1.16	8	0.46	183	2.42
Pluperf. pass.	16	0.50	2	0.08	1	0.06	19	0.25
Pluperf. cont. act.	3	0.09	1	0.04	1	0.06	5	0.07
Future I act.	58	1.80	215	8.35	68	3.90	341	4.52
Future I pass.	5	0.15	3	0.12	5	0.29	13	0.17
Future I cont. act.	5	0.15	1	0.04			6	0.08
Future II act.			5	0.19			5	0.07
Condit. pres. act.	116	3.59	128	4.97	45	2.57	289	3.83
Condit. pres. pass.	3	0.09	2	0.08	3	0.17	8	0.11
Condit. pres. cont. act.	5	0.15	2	0.08			7	0.09
Condit. past act.	31	0.96	22	0.85	1	0.06	54	0.71
Condit. past pass.			2	0.08			2	0.03
Total	3231	100.00	2576	100.00	1743	100.00	7550	100.00

5.85% in the style of specialized and scientific texts. Passive forms of preterite are a characteristic feature of the style of fiction and of the style of specialized and scientific texts. Perfect active counts 5.78% in colloquial style, 3.85% in the style of specialized and scientific texts, and 2.79% in the style of fiction. The use of pluperfect is, on the other hand, a characteristic feature of the style of fiction (4.49%) compared with the colloquial style (1.16%) and the style of specialized and scientific texts (0.46%). The present future act. is most frequent in the colloquial style (8.35%) as against the style of specialized and scientific texts (3.90%) and the style of fiction (1.80%). Present conditional is most frequent in colloquial style (4.97%) in comparison with the style of fiction (3.59%) and the style of specialized and scientific texts (2.75%). The order of four most frequently used verb-forms is, consequently, according to the relative frequency in particular styles as follows: 1. the style of fiction: simple preterite act., simple present act., pluperfect act., present conditional act.; 2. the colloquial style: simple present act., simple preterite act., present future act., perfect act.; 3. the style of specialized and scientific texts: simple present act., simple present pass., simple preterite act., present future. Thus the simple present act. takes the first place in colloquial style and in the style of specialized and scientific texts, and the second place in the style of fiction. Simple preterite act. takes the



first place in the style of fiction, the second place in colloquial style and the third place in the style of specialized and scientific texts. Present future takes the third place in colloquial style and the fourth place in the style of specialized and scientific texts. The other verb-forms occur on one of the four places only in one style, not in the other two styles. Generally, the following verb-forms may be regarded as most frequent: simple present act., simple preterite act., simple present pass., present future, perfect act., present conditional and continuous present active. The other verb-forms have only a slight frequency of occurrence.

Let us add to our analysis that the frequency of occurrence of infinitives, participles and imperative is not included in the table. Of these forms an important part is played by participles, especially in the style of specialized and scientific texts. The imperative, on the other hand, plays rather an important part in colloquial style, but to a certain degree also in the style of fiction, even when it does not dominate over the frequency of occurrence of participles.

Now it remains to make a comparison with other works dealing with the frequency of occurrence of verb-forms. The above mentioned paper by Libuše Dušková and Věra Urbanová analyses about 24,000 words of John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger*, which was chosen as representative of colloquial style. The paper gives a table including absolute and relative frequency of occurrence of all indicative forms but not of conditional forms, the latter being registered outside the table (only absolute frequency of occurrence). Including conditionals in the table, we get the following results:

	simple forms		continuous forms	
	absol.	%	absol.	%
Present	1666	53.86	150	4.85
Preterite	643	20.79	31	1.00
Perfect	167	5.40	12	0.39
Pluperfect	48	1.55	2	0.07
Future	180	5.82	6	0.19
Present conditional	163	5.27	—	—
Past conditional	25	0.81	—	—
	2892		201	

We can see that so far as the relative frequency of occurrence is concerned there is a considerable agreement between both investigations. Thus in the relative frequency of simple forms (including active and passive forms) the difference is only 1.77% with present, 2.04% with preterite, 0.75% with perfect, 0.31% with pluperfect; with future the difference is relatively greater (2.65%), with present conditional it is 0.22%, with past conditional 0.12%, with continuous present 0.12%, with continuous preterite 0.44%, with continuous perfect 0.35%, with continuous pluperfect 0.03%, and with continuous future 0.15%.

The paper by Dušková and Urbanová further contains the results of E. B. Konstantinov's investigation,<sup>4</sup> which may be compared with our results for the style of fiction.<sup>5</sup> Konstantinov's material includes passages from 10 works of literature including 4 classics from the 18th and 19th cent., 3 works of fiction by important

contemporary authors and 3 novels covering the period of World War II. The results stated by Konstantinov differ considerably from those of our investigation, even though the basic feature of the style of fiction, the predominance of preterite forms over present forms remains preserved. In Konstantinov's results (cf. Table 6) the difference between the frequency of occurrence of present and preterite forms is much greater. This can be explained by the fact that more extensive material from classical novels has been included in the count which are characterized by the predominance of descriptions of past events. This is why the results may rather be compared with those obtained by the examination of a sample from Dickens.

Table 6

	absol.	%
Present simple act.	1396	19.1
Present simple pass.	59	0.8
Present cont. act.	44	0.6
Present cont. pass.	1	0.01
Preter. simp. act.	4660	63.8
Preter. simp. pass.	281	3.85
Preter. cont. act.	126	1.70
Preter. cont. pass.	3	0.04
Perfect act.	128	1.75
Perfect pass.	12	0.16
Perfect cont. act.	5	0.07
Pluperf. act.	336	4.6
Pluperf. pass.	44	0.6
Pluperf. cont. act.	6	0.08
Present future act.	205	2.8
Present future pass.	6	0.08
Perfect future act.	4	0.05

Another investigation mentioned in the paper by Dušková and Urbanová is that done in Hyderabad where some extremely extensive material comprising 108,783 verb-forms has been examined. It contains samples from an encyclopedia, 3 novels, 2 plays, 1 book of travels, 5 books of a popular, factographic nature, 2 numbers of newspapers and a conversational handbook. The results of this investigation can therefore be compared with our total results for all three stylistic strata. However, the differences are rather great: the Hyderabad investigation gives the frequency of occurrence of present forms 38.4%, our investigation 47.86%; for preterite forms the results are 48.2% and 29.33% respectively. Dušková and Urbanová further compare the Hyderabad results for plays with their results for Osborne's play. In this case the degree of agreement between both results is greater; nevertheless in most frequent verb-forms there are differences that cannot be neglected: for present forms the difference is 10.25%, for preterite forms 7.73% (Hyderabad 67.6%—Dušková 57.35% for present forms; 14.4% and 22.13% respectively for preterite forms). Dušková and Urbanová are of the opinion that the minor frequency of occurrence of present forms and major frequency of occurrence of preterite forms in Osborne's play is a specific feature of this play, as the total frequency of occurrence of present, past and future tenses in English plays, according to the Hyderabad material (72.0%,

21.6%, and 6.4%), shows a considerable agreement with frequency results for Czech and Spanish plays. The results of our investigations of three modern English plays do not seem to confirm this assumption. On the contrary, the relative agreement between the results obtained from the investigation of Osborne's play and of the plays by Pinter, Arden, and Beckett do confirm that modern drama is characterized by approximately the same frequency of occurrence of principle verb-forms as we have ascertained it.

We can conclude by stating that our investigation has shown a considerable dependence of the frequency of occurrence of different verb-forms on style and has thus confirmed our assumption that the frequency of occurrence of verb-forms is a significant characteristic feature of style. Moreover, the analysis of particular samples gives evidence of a certain, though limited, dependence of the frequency of occurrence of verb-forms on the individual style of the author of the analysed sample.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. Herdan, *The Advanced Theory of Language as Choice and Chance*, Chaps. 5, 6.13, 6.14 (Berlin—Heidelberg—New York, 1966).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. op. cit., 114.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. op. cit., 121—7.

<sup>4</sup> A number of papers have already been written on the frequency of occurrence of verb forms, but only a few have given a fairly thorough comparison of different styles. Let us mention two works of the kind. E. B. Konstantinov makes investigation of 7,316 verb forms (cf. his paper 'O grammatičeskom minimume dl'a srednej školy', *Inostrannyje jazyki v škole* 1952: 1. 71—3 [Moscow]). A very extensive investigation was done by a group of linguists at Hyderabad (cf. H. V. George, *Report on a Verb-Form Frequency Count, Monograph of the Central Institute of English*, No. 1 [Hyderabad, 1963]; cf. also a report in *English Language Teaching* 18: 1. 30—7 [London, October 1963]). For details about these works we refer to the paper of L. Dušková and V. Urbanová, 'A Frequency Count of English Tenses with Applications to Teaching English as a Foreign Language', *Prague Studies in Mathematical Linguistics* 2. 19—36 (Prague, 1967). This paper presents an analysis of 2,905 verb forms including those of the present, preterite, perfect, pluperfect, future, and future perfect, both simple and continuous; it draws upon John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* (New York, 1959), which has served as a source of colloquial speech.

<sup>5</sup> The results must be slightly corrected as Konstantinov does not include relative frequency of occurrence of conditionals.

## RESUMÉ

### Frekvence slovesných tvarů v angličtině

Autor zjišťuje frekvenci jednotlivých slovesných tvarů v angličtině ve stylu beletristickém, hovorovém a odborném. Pro každý styl byly vybrány vzorky přibližně o 20 000 slov, což je rozsah pro hlavní frekventované slovesné tvary dostatečně reprezentativní. Výzkum zjistil značnou závislost frekvence různých slovesných časů na stylu a potvrdil tak předpoklad, že frekvence slovesných tvarů je význačnou charakteristikou stylu. Rozbor jednotlivých vzorků však prokazuje i určitou, byť ne tak velkou závislost frekvence slovesných tvarů na stylu autora.