

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN GRAMMATICAL AND COMMUNICATIVE WORD ORDER IN ENGLISH AND THEIR BULGARIAN EQUIVALENTS

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The article discusses the correlations between grammatical and communicative word order and the potential problems which the divergence between them might pose in teaching and translation practices. The communicative analysis is based on the FSP (Functional Sentence Perspective) theory elaborated by the Prague linguists. The differences in word order between English and Bulgarian, as well as some similarities, are illustrated by examples from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the Bulgarian National Corpus (BNC). The focus is on some practical grammar issues and not on teaching methodology or translation theory and practice.

Key words: word order, FSP theory, inversion, communicative analysis

The topic of this article occurred to me as the result of some observations in my teaching experience, which involves teaching translation and English Syntax, in which areas word order is a central issue. Word Order (WO) can be discussed from two perspectives: the general principles universal for all languages¹, and the actual arrangement of the words in the sentence, i.e. the position of the basic sentence elements comprising the subject, verb, and object or predicative. In view of the second perspective, and taking into account the position of the verb, languages are typologically determined as having a verb initial, verb medial, and verb final word order. English has an SVO, or a verb medial type of word order, which is also characterized as highly grammaticalized and inflexible. In this it differs from

¹ Among these are the grammatical principle, the principles of adjacency, precedence, rhythm and emphasis, topicalization, FSP, and the heavier element principle.

languages which have a relatively free word order, such as Bulgarian², and which more easily comply with the requirements of communication and the distribution of communicative dynamism over the sentence elements.

However, English has compensatory mechanisms to reconcile the demands of grammar and communication and adapt the grammatical word order to the communicative word order. These can be grouped under two headings: word order changes (rearrangements) and fixed constructions. The first group includes the cases of dislocations, with or without inversion. In this article I will discuss only some interesting cases of inversion and leave the various dislocations and the fixed constructions for future research. Inversion is generally defined as the reversing the positions of subject and predicate (or operator). The basic elements outlining the grammatical WO are the Subject and the Verb (S-V), and of the communicative WO these are the Theme and the Rheme (Th-Rh)³. The Theme and Rheme are defined following the Prague School definitions (Firbas 1992), Grancharov's formal model (Grancharov 2010) for communicative analysis, and Grancharova's (Grancharova 2018) contribution to it, based on the following three criteria:

1. Informational – the Theme encodes old information (retrievable from the immediately preceding context), and the Rheme encodes new information including the focus (rheme proper).
2. Positional – the Theme precedes the Rheme in a neutral, unemotional statement.
3. Relational – also called the 'aboutness' criterion, according to which the Theme is what the sentence is about and the Rheme is what is said about the Theme.

The informational criterion is the most important one but when it is neutralized and the sentence contains elements carrying only old information or only new information, we resort to the other two criteria to identify the Theme and the Rheme. When analyzing isolated sentences without any context, for the purposes of illustration I will rely on the definite and indefinite articles to point to the Theme and the Rheme respectively. Thus, we can outline the following correlations between the grammatical and

² For a detailed survey of the research on word order in Bulgarian linguistic literature, see Balabanova (2020).

³ For simplicity I stick to only two elements to outline the direct and inverted WO, thus omitting the complementation of the verb in grammatical WO and the transition (Tr) in communicative WO.

communicative WO in a simple, declarative, positive, unemphatic, unemotional, objective sentence⁴:

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| 1. Direct grammatical WO | – | Direct communicative WO |
| S – V | | Th – Rh |
| 2. Indirect grammatical WO | – | Indirect communicative WO |
| V – S | | Rh – Th |
| 3. Direct grammatical WO | – | Indirect communicative WO |
| S – V | | Rh – Th |
| 4. Indirect grammatical WO | – | Direct communicative WO |
| V – S | | Th – Rh |

Indirect grammatical WO consists in inversion either full when the whole verb phrase is placed before the subject, or partial when only the auxiliary (also known as operator) changes places with the subject.

Inversion can be functional when its function is to form a certain type of sentence and in this case it is required by the grammatical rules of English. This is the type of inversion used in questions, exclamations, some conditional clauses, and optative sentences. However, the communicative value of inversion can become more obvious when there is an alternative structure without inversion, which illustrates the choice between neutral and emphatic use. Also, it is difficult to posit inversion in a language with a free or semi-free word order: if there is no fixed basic word order pattern, we cannot define any deviations from it. For that reason, inversion is rarely mentioned in Bulgarian linguistics, mainly as a stylistic device, in relation to the different styles and genres in which it can be found, the most popular examples being the postposition of attributes. In the Bulgarian online dictionary published by the Institute of the Bulgarian Language of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences inversion is defined as “a reversed order, a reversal, a change in the order of something”⁵. It is defined in literature, meteorology, chemistry, and music but there is no reference to inversion in grammar.

Therefore, the above-mentioned correlations between grammatical and communicative word order are expected to have a different effect in English and Bulgarian. Let us consider some examples bearing in mind that in an isolated sentence we accepted that the definite article would mark the

⁴ The canonical clause is usually defined as independent, non-coordinated, declarative, positive, unemphatic.

⁵ My translation

Quirk et al. (1985: 1408) describe the verbs, other than “be”, which are found in the existential sentences in the following way, “In the first place, the verb must be intransitive (exceptions are idiomatic or dubious), and of fairly general presentative meaning: verbs of motion (arrive, enter, pass, come, etc.), of inception (emerge, spring up, etc.), and of stance (live, remain, stand, lie, etc.)”. Here are some examples with the verbs mentioned by Quirk et al. The verbs in the Bulgarian translation equivalents present an equal readiness for inversion, the reason for which may be the relatively free word order in Bulgarian⁶:

Then arrived Michael, the media specialist that had a love for jigsaw puzzles, [...] – (Corpus of Contemporary American English, henceforth COCA, 2018, FIC, Fan Fic)

Товага пристигна Майкъл, който имаше слабост към картините за нареждане, [...]

So entered Donald Trump onto the American stage. – (COCA, 2018, MAG, The Atlantic)

И така излезе Доналд Тръмп на американската сцена.

And so passed my one chance to have something in common with our president. – (COCA, 2010, MAG, American Spectator)

И така отмина единственият ми шанс да имам нещо общо с нашия президент.

Thus passed the glory of the world. – (COCA, 2012, BLOG, ...kesworldmagazine.com)

Така премина световната слава.

Out came the cameras to capture what would become an infamous set of photographs: [...] – (COCA, 2019, FIC, Sci Fi & Fantasy)

Показаха се камерите, за да уловят това, което щеше да стане срамен комплект от фотографии: [...]

The floor parted, and from below emerged a giant screen that turned the parlor into a screening room. – (COCA, 2008, SPOK, CBS_Sixty)

Подът се разтвори и изотдолу се появи огромен екран, който превърна салона в зала за частни прожекции.

There once lived two large clans that lived side by side. – (COCA, 2012, BLOG, wisbites.com)

Там живели два големи клана, които живеели един до друг.

Underneath the modern cover there remained the older realities of sects, ethnicity, [...] – (COCA, 2008, ACAD, Middle EastQ)

⁶ The translations of the examples are mine.

Под модерното покритие оставаха старите реалности на секти, етноси, [...]

Nor in the city then Remained those rites of sepulture, with which That pious folk had evermore been wont^{7,8} [...] – (COCA, 2012, WEB, classics.mit.edu)

В града тогава не останаха онези погребални ритуали, с които беше привикнал този благочестив народ [...]

Here stood the real thing, the unvarnished truth. – (COCA, 2018, FIC, Antioch Rev)

Тук стоеше истинското нещо, неподправената истина.

It is clear that such cases of inversion in English present no difficulties for their Bulgarian translation. It is in inverse translation that students and translators feel uncertain and avoid using inversion in English. The prevailing view on English word order among them is that it is fixed and inflexible. By avoiding the various word order rearrangements, translators may misplace the communicative focus of the sentence, thus changing its overall information value.

Inversion is found in varying frequency across the styles and registers, mostly in written communication.⁹ Dorgeloh (1997: 3) claims that inversion is frequent in children's tales, crime stories, novels, or guidebooks: "sometimes, in these kinds of discourse, or in specific subparts of them, inversions occur in virtual clusters, while in others, for long stretches of or the entirety of a text, one finds no occurrence at all". Obviously, it plays an important role in creative writing with the possibility of localizing the focus and providing additional emphasis on certain sentence elements. Thus, it is also regarded as a stylistic device, especially when there is a choice between alternatives with and without inversion. Often inversion is grammatically determined but also choice between two structures is possible. This happens with the fronting of an inversion operator with locative or temporal meaning, or a postfix of a phrasal verb such as *then, next, now, later, last, up, out, away*, etc. E.g.:

Next came September 11, 2001. – (COCA, 2018, MAG, Vanity Fair)

После дойде 11-ти септември 2001.

Alternatively, we can have:

September 11, 2001, came next.

⁷ Translation mine

⁸ The spelling of the original is preserved.

⁹ There is also colloquial inversion which is not discussed in this article due to lack of space.

11-ти септември 2001 дойде после.

Away went the fisherman, and found his wife standing before a great castle. – (COCA, 2012, WEB, worldoftales.com)

Замина рибарят и намери жена си изправена пред голям замък.

Alternatively:

The fisherman went away and found his wife standing before a great castle.

Рибарят замина и намери жена си изправена пред голям замък.

Often, as in the above examples with operator inversion, the inversion is facilitated by the verbs of motion. There are other factors which facilitate inversion apart from the type of verb and the fronting of operators. In other cases, the fronted element may be a rather lengthy adverbial modifier and the postponed subject is also a rather long phrase, thus complying with the *Heavier element principle* of word order, and the principles of *Rhythm* and *Emphasis*. E.g.:

And out of the pickup came Robert Kincaid, looking like some vision from a never-written book [...]. (example borrowed from Dorgeloh (1997: 3))

От пикапа излезе Робърт Кинкейд, приличащ на видение от не-написана книга [...].

**And out of the pickup came he.*

**От пикапа излезе той.*

In the above examples the light pronominal subjects sound rather awkward at the end of isolated contextless sentences although in some contexts of connected texts they may be acceptable in varying degrees, especially in Bulgarian.

Another type of inversion is again facilitated by the verb “be”, which readily allows inversion and functions as an auxiliary in the progressive tense-aspect forms and in the passive. These structures allow full inversion and double inversion (verb phrase inversion). E.g.:

An elderly man was waiting in front of the hotel. (no inversion)

Възрастен мъж чакаше пред хотела.

In front of the hotel was waiting an elderly man. (full inversion)

Пред хотела чакаше възрастен мъж.

Waiting in front of the hotel was an elderly man. (double inversion)

**Чакащ пред хотела беше възрастен мъж.*

Bulgarian lacks progressive tense-aspect forms and in translation this is compensated for by other grammatical and lexical means. In English, the participle in the progressive forms has a strong verbal meaning. When it preserves its adjectival meaning, it functions as a predicative and the verb “be” functions as a copula. E.g.:

She is amusing. (copula + predicative)

But an object or an adverbial modifier would expose the verbal character of the participle:

She is amusing us. (progressive form)

In Bulgarian the present active participle has very strong adjectival characteristics and in initial position resembles a fronted predicative. The direct word order in the following sentences would lend a completely different communicative value to the message because the communicative focus would not be located on the participle *учудващ*:

Учудващ е не фактът, че загиват такъв голям брой кораби, а това, че този брой е толкова малък [...] – (Bulgarian National Corpus, henceforth BNC)

Фактът, че загиват такъв голям брой кораби, не е учудващ, а това, че този брой е толкова малък [...]

При жената водещи са слухът и чувството и тя иска ласка и романтичност. – (BNC)

Слухът и чувството са водещи при жената и тя иска ласка и романтичност.

The English sentence with double inversion in the progressive tense-aspect forms has no direct translation equivalent in Bulgarian and other options should be applied to render the action and the emphasis, depending on the context. However, I have found a few examples with a similar structure in Bulgarian, which may not be very common and may have different degrees of acceptability. It is possible that they have come to be used under the influence of English. The following sentence in Bulgarian comes very close to what in English is referred to as double inversion with the participle displaying its verbal character because it takes an object:

Водещ колоната е капитан Станко Велинов Станков (брат на известния вратар на ЦСКА по това време Георги Велинов) [...] – (from a Facebook post)

*Leading the column is captain Stanko Velinov ...*¹⁰

In the following sentence the coordinated clause, which has an active verb in the present tense, enhances the verbal meaning of the Bulgarian present active participle although there is no object or adverbial.

Водещи са груув рифовете на Alex, а ритъм-секцията играе само поддържаща роля. – (BNC)

Leading are Alex' groove riffs, and the rhythm section is playing only a supporting role.

¹⁰ The translations of the examples into English are mine.

Often the participle has both a verbal and adjectival character, so both readings are possible:

Подкрепящ е родителят, чието поведение включва освен забрани, но и окуражаване и обгрижване. – Toteva (Google)

Supporting is the parent whose conduct includes not only prohibitions but also encouragement and care.

Apart from progressive structures with the -ing participle, double inversion is also possible with passive structures. Here are some sentences in the passive illustrating the options without inversion, with full inversion, and with double inversion in English.

All the new books were arranged on the table. (no inversion)

Всички нови книги бяха подредени на масата.

On the table were arranged all the new books. (full inversion)

На масата бяха подредени всички нови книги.

Arranged on the table were all the new books. (double inversion)

Подредени на масата бяха всички нови книги.

The sentences with double inversion in the Passive voice are easily translated into Bulgarian with similar structures. This may be due to the strong adjectival character of the past passive participle in both English and Bulgarian, and the similarity between the passive voice and the structure *copula + predicative*. Thus, these structures resemble full inversion with fronted predicative. The semantics of the verb and the presence/absence of an adverbial modifier could reinforce the verbal or the adjectival character of the participle respectively, thus switching between the two possible readings: passive with double inversion or fronted predicative with full inversion. Here are some more examples from the Bulgarian National Corpus:

Обсъдени бяха въпросите, свързани с проблемите за развитието на рудодобива, ... – (BNC)

Discussed were the questions connected with the problems of the development of ore mining, ...

Предвидени са различни преходни периоди, с цел улесняване на влизането му в сила. – (BNC)

Planned are different transition periods, with the aim to facilitate it taking effect.

Проведени са консултации със заинтересовани страни по настоящия проектодокумент. – (BNC)

Conducted are consultations with the interested parties of this provisional document.

Направени бяха структурни и кадрови промени в правителството. – (BNC)

Carried out were structural and personnel changes in the government.

One type of inversion which has been grammaticalized is triggered by initial placement of negative adverbials, negative phrases, phrases with limiting or quantifying connotations such as *never, rarely, seldom, not only, barely, only, little, much*, etc. The alternatives present direct word order without fronting the negative and limiting phrases, with a different communicative structure and localization of the focus. In Bulgarian there is no inversion, only dislocation (fronting) of the negative adverbial which places the focus on it:

Never have I felt so strongly about the need to get out of the city. – (COCA, 2012, WEB therestofeverest.com)

Никога не съм чувствал толкова силно нуждата да напусна града.

Alternatively:

I have never felt so strongly about the need to get out of the city.

Не съм чувствал никога толкова силно нуждата да напусна града.

It was intriguing to find out whether there exist sentences in the corpora with fronted negative and limiting expressions in which the direct word order is preserved. I found very few examples in books and the search in the corpus yielded only a few sentences in spoken communication. This type of inversion has been grammaticalized and offers an alternative emphatic structure. The uses with fronted negative adverbial without inversion are rare and may be due to careless speech. Here the comparison with Bulgarian is irrelevant because in Bulgarian there is no inversion, only fronting of the adverbial.

Never I have done that. – (COCA, 1994, SPOK, ABC_PrimeTime)

I don't think so because, in fact, never it has been our intention to set up an independent Kurdish state in northern [...] – (COCA, 1991, SPOK, ABC_Brinkley)

Hardly I am quite capable¹¹ of doing for MYSELF. – (COCA, 2012, BLOG gofatherhood.com)

The hermit stepped forth From the boat And scarcely he could stand "Oh, shrive me, shrive me Holy man"¹² [...] – (COCA, 2005, TV, Justice League Unlim...)

¹¹ Original spelling preserved.

¹² Original spelling preserved.

Conclusion

The fact that English word order is rather fixed and inflexible has established the practice of avoiding the inversion allowed by some verbs and fronted operators in Bulgarian-English translation. This often brings about a change in the communicative value of the sentence from emphatic to neutral speech.

An understanding of the compensatory devices for reconciling the grammatical and communicative word orders in English and Bulgarian would help translators preserve the communicative value of the sentence and place the focus on the relevant sentence element.

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