Grammar of Inversion after Fronting in English

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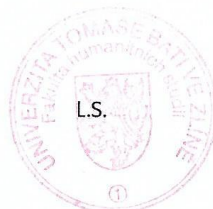
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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá inverzí po předsazení v angličtině. Teoretická část práce popisuje souvislost mezi předsazením a inverzí, pravidla a okolnosti podmiňující jejich použití. Práce také zmiňuje obecná pravidla slovosledu a struktury sdělení. Cílem následující části je analýza poznatků za pomoci korpusů BNC a COCA.

Klíčová slova: slovosled, předsazení, inverze, podmět, sloveso, pomocné sloveso, zdůraznění, struktura sdělení

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis deals with inversion after fronting in English. The theoretical part describes the connection between fronting and inversion, the rules and the circumstances under what they are used. This thesis also mentions general rules of canonical word order and information structure in a clause. The aim of the following part is an analysis of findings with the use of corpora BNC and COCA.

Keywords: word order, fronting, inversion, subject, verb, operator, emphasis, information structure

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Besides other things, people communicate with the use of words. They put them in some order and create a message. This thesis is about syntactical structures of fronting accompanied by inversion. These two devices are used quite rarely in English, though they are fully functional.

The theoretical part of the thesis describes the canonical word order, briefly reasons why is English considered to be a fixed word-order language and it describes the information structure in a sentence. The second chapter focuses on fronting, when it is used, its functions and more importantly it mentions different parts of sentences that can be fronted and which of them are accompanied by the inversion. In the third chapter the inversion is just shortly described.

The practical part should be based on research from British National Corpus and Corpus of Contemporary American English. The aim is to examine frequencies of using these two devices in both spoken and written language.

I. THEORETICAL PART

1 WORD ORDER

Word order is a term used in syntax and it is related to the order of elements in a sentence. Naturally, its importance from the grammatical point of view differs throughout languages, as well as its functions. (Dušková 2003, 518)

English is considered as "fixed word-order language" and the grammatical function is important. The reason is mainly determining types of sentences and sentence members. Since there are not many ways how to distinguish different sentence functions, in English it can be recognized by the position in a sentence. On the basis of the position of specific sentence members, it can be also identified whether it is a declarative, imperative or interrogative sentence. (ibid.)

1.1 Fixed word-order language

The reason why English is described as fixed word order language is mainly because of stern rules about placement of the core elements (S V O). The strictness of the word order, however, is relative. According to Quirk et al. (1985, 51) the word order is the less strict the more distant the element is from the main clause which means that some elements are more likely to move from their usual positions than others. Comparing the sentences in (1), it can be seen that adverbial phrase *very often* can be moved to almost every position, whereas it is not possible to do so with the core elements (S V O), as shown in (2).

(1)	a) I *very often* clean my room.	(2)	a) *Clean my room I very often.
	b) *Very often* I clean my room.		b) *I my room very often clean.
	c) I clean my room *very often*.		c) *Very often clean my room I.

Nonetheless, even the core elements may be moved under the certain conditions (3). This is an example of fronting and subject/verb inversion (which will be described in more detail later), (Biber et al. 1999, 898).

(3) "Clean your room," said my mother. O V S

1.2 Word order patterns

There are several basic rules of word order that should be mentioned. The fundamental canonical word order of declarative clause is subject, verb, and object – S V O, but for creating a sentence, subject and verb are sufficient (4), (Biber et al. 1999, 899). Additionally, besides the fact that there does not have to be any object, this general pattern does not

include negation or inversion in questions. Thus, as Veselovská and Emonds state in their Course in English Syntax (2011, 67), more accurate pattern would be S M/A V (O), where M/A is modal or auxiliary. Moreover, although subject and verb are obligatory, there is an exception in idioms (5a) and imperatives (5b), where the subject can be omitted (Platzack and Rosengren 1997, 178).

(4) A bird flies.

(5) a) Easy come, easy go.

   b) Do not step on the grass.

Whether there are some other elements, such as objects or adverbials needed or not, depends on the valency of a verb. Generally, an object comes after a verb and adverbials follow the object. Placing of more adverbials happens usually on the basis of its type. Adverbial of manner goes commonly first after a verb, then locative adverbial and after that temporal. Adverbials which work as a connection with the previous context are often in the initial position, for instance – *to begin with, firstly, secondly, moreover, therefore, however, in other words* etc. Next category, adverbials of frequency such as *often, always, usually, sometimes, never* etc., usually occurs between a subject and a verb. Intensifying adverbials are located in front of the word, they intensify – *completely, deeply, partly, very, hardly* etc. (Dušková 2003, 521 – 522)

A structure of interrogatives is the same as in declarative clauses - S M/A V (O). However, the compulsory feature is a subject-operator inversion. Thus closed alternative or yes/no questions normally start with an auxiliary verb. In open interrogatives, though, wh-words are put at the beginning of the sentence and an auxiliary comes after (Huddleston and Pullum 2005, 161 – 162). If the question asks about a subject, wh-word takes place of the subject as it is shown in (6) – it is a location that is requested here (Biber et al. 1999, 899).

(6) *Where* are you?

1.3 Information structure in a clause

When composing a sentence, there are two parts in a clause: one, which expresses information which is already known from the previous discourse (theme, topic), and new important information that a writer/speaker wants to present (rheme, focus). Basic principles describing the arrangement of information are called the given-before-new principle

or simply the information principle and the principle of end weight. (Aarts 2011, 315 – 316), (Biber et al. 1999, 896)

The first principle says that the clause begins with old information and the new one is at the end of the sentence. Biber and others (1999, 896 – 897) also point out, that this distribution makes the communication easier for all participants of a conversation because it is not that complicated to arrange and to decode. Apparently, it also helps to make a text cohesive by connecting the new information from the previous sentence and the one which is now familiar because they are closer to each other.

The end-weight principle suggests that complex and long elements are at the end of the sentence. Those elements are supplemented by pre and postmodifiers and they are often described as heavy (Aarts 2011, 316). Moreover, Biber and others (1999, 898) state that due to this rule it is simpler for the receiver to process this information since he/she does not have to remember the complicated phrase from the beginning. In addition, the complex phrase commonly holds also the essential information which supports the given-before-new principle, too.

Nonetheless, the main information does not have to be necessarily at the end of the sentence as well as complex phrases. Biber and others (1999, 897) also claim, that there could be more than 1 focal element in a clause. They suggest that a complex subject placed in its typical position before verb can gain focus and therefore also an emphasis even though it is characteristic for constituents at the end of the clause (end-focus). This prominence can be obtained also by other constituents including a non-restrictive modifier or a locative adverbial situated in the initial position as it is shown in the example (7). Initial locative adverbial – *in the corner*, is followed by complex subject – *a little blue-eyed child*, with non-restrictive modifier – *guilty of spilling the milk* and the verb phrase – *started to cry*. There are four elements in focus – *corner, child, milk*, and *cry*. (Collins and Hollo 2010, 151)

(7) In the *corner*, a little blue-eyed *child*, guilty of spilling the *milk*, started *to cry*.

As stated by Aarts (2011, 314), emphasizing is quite usual in English. In spoken form of communication, it could be easily done by intonation and putting a stress on a particular word. Nevertheless, it is not conceivable in written language, in this case, the word order has to be changed.

The information above follows that if the producer of a text wants to highlight something, it should be put at the beginning or at the end of the clause. In this way, the producer can direct the attention towards certain elements or adjust the information according to context and create the message that will be easier to decode for the addressee. Specifically, expected information may be reduced and the important ones may be highlighted. (Quirk et al. 1985, 88 – 89)

For changing the position of an element in a sentence, there are several different devices such as cleft sentence, extraposition or fronting. Cleft sentence allows any constituent to be prominent and to move to the initial position. There are different types of clefts (pseudo-cleft, reversed-pseudo cleft, etc.) but in the example (8b) and (8c), an expletive *it* is used (it-cleft). Extraposition is shifting a component which is normally supposed to be in nonfinal position to the final position, which is demonstrated in (9a) and (9b). On the contrary, fronting is moving a constituent into an initial position. (Quirk et al. 1985, 89)

(8)   a) The dog ate my lunch. (common word order sentence)

      b) It was *my lunch* that the dog ate.

      c) It was *the dog* that ate my lunch.

(9)   a) A diamond *of blue colour* was stolen. (common word order sentence)

      b) A diamond was stolen *of blue colour*.

To sum up, the word order plays in the English grammar a significant role especially in identifying sentence members and types of sentences because it is considered as fixed and the basic pattern for creating an English sentence is S M/A V (O). That means that noun in post-verbal position is probably an object. Nonetheless, elements can be shifted in order to change the information structure. This can have more reasons, e.g. to highlight the item, to contribute to the cohesion of the text or to make the text easier to decode and more understandable for the addressee. For changing the position of the elements there are devices, such as cleft sentences, extraposition or fronting which is going to be described in more detail in the next chapter.

2 FRONTING

As it was indicated above, moving some element, that is in canonical word order commonly placed after the verb, to the beginning of a clause is called fronting (pre-posing) – (1). It is used in order to highlight that constituent, to indicate contrast or to arrange information to make text cohesive, (Biber et al. 1999, 900). A comma is sometimes used after the fronted element to enhance its prominence even more. (Quirk et al. 1985, 1377)

(1) *Mushrooms* I cannot stand. (fronted object)

Quirk and others (1985, 1377 – 1378) claim that the only constituents that can be fronted are those which depend on a verb. It can be, for example, an object, a subject complement, or a nominal part of a predicate itself. Nevertheless, these are elements which are usually required by the verb. Biber and others add that pre-posing of core elements is in English quite unusual and Tárnyiková (2002, 101) declare that other facultative post-verbal elements, for instance, adverbials or adjuncts, should not be fronted because they are, contrary to the core elements, quite movable as such.

Another condition for using this syntactic device is an anaphoric reference to the preceding context. As a result, the information structure is changed because the fronted element creates a contrast with the preceding context, plus it makes the text cohesive, (Tárnyiková 2002, 101). The fact that the fronted information should depend on a context is supported by the rather frequent use of demonstratives (e.g. this, that, such etc.) together with fronted units, like in an example (2). With meeting these two conditions, all the functions of fronting which are mentioned by Biber et al. would be maintained.

(2) *Most of **these** problems* a computer could take in its stride. (Quirk et al. 1985, 1377)

2.1 Focus fronting and topicalisation

Fronting can be divided into two kinds according to intonation (in spoken language) and information structure: focus fronting and topicalisation, (Prince 1981, in Tárnyiková 2009, 101). In the first type, the fronted item bears the focus and it is stressed. This arrangement also puts two elements in contrast – (3).

(3) *A Welshman* I was born, and *a Welshman* I shall die. (Tárnyiková 2009, 102)

Furthermore, Tárnyiková (2009, 102) says that the fronted element is often used as an epitome of a high quality feature or some other relevant class, which can be derived from the

context. It is called epitomisation and she gives the following example (4), where *Julia Roberts* represents simply a good actress. A common use of this structure is likewise in advertisements because it has a high rate of expressivity, or it might be an echo of previous context – (5). Either way, the fronted element is emphasized and also depends on context. (Quirk et al. 1985, 1377), (Tárnyiková 2009, 103)

(4) So what do you say about her performance?

    Well, *Julia Roberts* she is not. (ibid.)

(5) Customer: Vegetarian pizza and large beer.

    Waiter: *Large beer* you ordered? (ibid.)

On the contrary, in the case of topicalisation, the fronted element is not in focus because its main purpose is to make the text cohesive. In (6), there is an example of anaphoric repetition of the word *learn* and the fronted verb, *learn,* is not a focal element of the clause. The focus is on emphatic auxiliary *did*. (ibid.), (Birner and Ward 1998, 52)

(6) As members of a Gray Panthers committee, we went to Canada to *learn*, and *learn* we did. (ibid.)

2.2 Fronted units

There are various rules and conditions for fronting of different parts of sentences. A lot of cases of pre-posing are, for instance, accompanied by an inversion, which is in simple terms shifting the position of subject and verb or auxiliary. It was also mentioned that fronting may have different purposes and it varies depending on the stress and information structure.

2.2.1 Fronting of nominals

Fronted nominal can have a function of direct object – (7), subject or object complement examples of which are in (8) – the prior one is a subject complement and the latter one is an object complement. Here Biber and others (1999, 901) point out that although some of the elements have different sentence functions they may be in contrast. Lastly, there can be an adjective complement – (9).

(7) *His face* not many admired, while *his character* still fewer could praise. (Quirk et al. 1985, 1378)

(8) *Traitor* he has become and *traitor* we shall call him. (ibid.)

(9) *Pretty* she is but *kind* she is definitely not.

Concerning the focus in these sentences, it is habitually on the fronted element and on a verb in the non-fronted part of the sentence. Nonetheless, there are cases with single focus which is only on the pre-posed item. As an example, Biber provides following sentence (14), where there is no focus on the verb *had.*

(10) *Only **one** saucepan* we had!

2.2.2   Fronting of objects

It was already indicated above that the object which is put into the initial position is frequently a demonstrative pronoun. Moreover, as an anaphoric link, it supports the information principle, and therefore it contributes to the cohesion.

Nevertheless, Biber and others (1999, 900) here emphasise that it is not a satisfactory reason for pre-posing them. They add that **unstressed** object pronouns (e.g. it, him or them) are never fronted – (11) a) and b), whereas a speaker would commonly stress a **demonstrative** pronoun in a canonical word order. This apparently supports the fact, that one of the functions of fronting is actually highlighting the constituent and also that the sentence can then be double focused. In fact, it is not possible to stress both elements in the regular word order when they are next to each other, either in spoken or written form, comparing examples a) and b) in (12).

(11) a) Toby is bruised because his dad beats *him* every day.

    b) *Toby is bruised because *him* his dad beats every day.

(12) a) I do not understand *this*.

    b) *This* I do not *understand*. (ibid.)

Another type of object that can be fronted is a complement clause. Despite the fact that this type of clauses holds new information because in canonical word order they would be at the end of a clause, there is always a pronoun which is related to the previous content. Pre-posing of complement clauses, as an example (13) shows, also breaks the principle of end-weight. Additionally, in most cases there is a negation in the main clause which results in contrast between these two utterances. This again creates a double focused sentence which would not be achievable without fronting the complement clause. However, the contrast may be achieved even without the negation, for instance with the use of verb or subject – in (14), *they* vs. *we*. (Biber et al. 1999, 901)

(13) *Why he came this way* I will probably never know. (ibid.)

(14) *What **they** can do,* **we** can do. (ibid.)

None of these examples showed that fronting of objects would be accompanied by the inversion because it would probably damage the balance of the sentence. (ibid.)

2.2.3   Fronting of predicatives

While no subject-verb inversion appears when the object is fronted, for some kinds of predicate fronting it is typical – (15). Furthermore, in agreement with Biber et al. (1999, 902), comparatives are used quite often with this kind of pre-posing, in example (16) there is a comparative item "*far more*", which has a cohesive function and it is joined by the subject-verb inversion.

(15) *Shot by nationalist guerrillas* were two entirely innocent tourists. (Quirk et al. 1985, 1379)

(16) **Far more** *serious* were the severe head injuries; in particular a bruising of the brain. (Biber et al. 1999, 902)

Another anaphoric linkage with preceding context might be also a definite noun phrase, fronted as a part of predicate – (17). *The meeting* is old information, known from the previous sentence and the new information is at the end, therefore, with this structure, the information principle is maintained as well.

(17) A group of councillors, along with council officials from North Down, recently met with representatives from the Board to discuss the move. *Present **the meeting*** were outgoing Mayor Ellie McKay, deputy mayor Jane Copeland... (ibid.)

Fronting of parts, which provide information about proportion is one of the special types and it is often introduced by *the.* The subject-verb inversion here depends on the form and complexity of the subject. The long subject usually shifts with verb – (18), but if the subject is a pronoun, it ordinarily stays in place – (19). (Biber et al. 1999, 903)

(18) The more general the domain, *the more general, selective and tentative* are the statements about its style.

(19) The larger the base, *the easier* it will be to perform the action.

Subject-verb inversion may occur as well in the sentences with fronted adjective intensified by an adverb *so*, although the subject is a pronoun. Again, *so* refers to the previous

information. As can be seen in the sentence (20), what follows is normally a comparative clause. (ibid.)

(20) **So** *preoccupied* was she at the moment, (*that*) she was unaware that Diana was standing in the arched doorway to the sitting room. (ibid.)

Fronting of non-finite predicates

In agreement with Biber et al. (1999, 905), there are three types of non-finite predicates that can be fronted. The first one is the infinitive predicate which cannot be joined by inversion because the operator (plus the other auxiliaries, if there are some) has to stay in place and make the clause finite. Biber also compares this kind of sentence (21) a), with the regular word order one – (21) b). The fronted verb usually echoes the foregoing context, which makes the text cohesive and it is therefore in agreement with the information principle. In the second sentence (21) b), the fronted constituent is omitted and the focus is just on the last item. Comparing that with (21) a), there is clearly a double focus (on *did* but also on *come down*), which means that pre-posed infinitive predicate can have an emphatic function, too.

(21) a) I had said he would come down and *come down* he did.

b) I had said he would come down and he did. (ibid.)

When fronting ed-predicates, the participle becomes an adjective. The action is supplemented with a subject-verb inversion (as an example (22) shows), which then supports the end-weight principle and the sentence is well balanced. Besides that, the definite noun phrase in the fronted part indicates old information and thereby also the information principle is kept. It is proved also by an indefinite noun phrase as a subject which means that the information is new. These two principles are, however, broke with a fronting of *gone* – (23). Not only the fronted part does not refer back to the previous text, but the subject is a definite noun phrase. The inversion, however, occurs here as well. (Biber et al. 1999, 906)

(22) Nothing on the walls, with one exception: *Tacked over* **the** *bed* was **a** yellow, deckle-edged photograph. (ibid.)

(23) *Gone* were **the** crises that had once produced banner headlines.

The last type is fronting of ing-predicates, which is, as far as the information principle is concerned, similar to fronting of ed-predicates. It again includes the subject-verb inversion that can be seen in example (24) because the subject is usually heavy. The in-

verted subject in the first sentence is then located at the beginning of the second one because it becomes known information. (Biber et al. 1999, 907)

(24) *Standing on the step* was **Father James Morrow**, the Roman Catholic priest (...). **Father Morrow** felt it his duty to try to appeal face to face to Tony's parents to allow their son to live. (ibid.)

2.2.4 Fronting in dependent clauses

Apart from dependent wh-clauses, where the fronting is quite ordinary, the other dependent clauses can be fronted only with the use of *as* or *though*. However, it is even more complicated because it is frequently joined by another type of fronting, usually adjectives and adverbs. It is indicated in the examples (25) and (26), and as it shows, there is no subject-verb inversion. There is no doubt that this structure is mainly for emphasizing the constituents. (Biber et al. 1999, 908 – 909)

(1) ***Astounded*** *though she was*, Francesca was thrilled and excited. (ibid.)
(2) ***Hard*** *as I tried*, I was not able to do it.

To sum up, the elements that can be fronted are required by the main verb. Fronting has three functions – to highlight, to contrast and to make the text cohesive. However, some elements do not meet all of them after they are fronted. Fronting can be divided into two groups: focus fronting, which gives focus on the fronted element, and topicalisation, in which case the fronted element does not gain the emphasis and works rather as an anaphoric link.

From all of the units that can be fronted and were described above, inversion appears mostly with pre-posed predicatives, particularly then with the element of comparison, ing-predicates and ed-predicates. The exception is when the subject is a pronoun and it is not stressed, in that case, the subject and verb cannot be inverted. Inversion also does not occur with fronted objects and infinitive predicates. It seems that whether the inversion is included or not depends a lot on the complexity of sentence members and principle of end-weight in order to keep the sentence well balanced.

3 INVERSION

Generally, inversion is placing the subject in post-verbal position. It is related to the fronting and as opposed to it, inversion can rhematize the subject and thus also give it the prominence – (1), (Tárnyiková 2009, 105).

(1) Up flies *the bird*. (Adv V S)

Biber and others (1999, 911) mention that in the past, it was not possible to place the verb in other than the second position in a sentence and the subject did not have to precede the verb. Thus, any other constituent could be in initial position, which basically entailed the subject-verb inversion. It was used mainly in dramatic narrative. Nowadays it does not really matter, how many elements are before the verb but following canonical word order (SVO), the subject should be in pre-verbal position.

There are two main types of inversion: full inversion, also known as subject-verb inversion and partial or subject-auxiliary inversion. They are quite different but both of them are usually a consequence of pre-posing of another part of the sentence.

II.   PRACTICAL PART

4 RESEARCH

To be added on the basis of research of corpuses BNC and COCA.

CONCLUSION

No conclusions can be made without the practical part.

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SEZNAM TABULEK

To be added