

THE STYLISTIC FUNCTION OF WORD-ORDER IN ENGLISH

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In modern English affirmative sentence structure has a fixed order, namely, subject first and predicate second. This generally accepted, natural sentence structure may be changed a) to give emphasis or prominence to any one part and b) for the sake of variety, which, since it is usually done to hold or keep or regain the attention of the hearer or reader, may also be termed affective (Charleston, 1960, 141). The placing of a word or word-group out of its usual and expected order and giving it prominence draws the hearer's or reader's attention. The position of such words or word-groups, however, may be varied only within certain limits and with quite definite affective results. It is not possible to place words in any incorrect or arbitrary order, such as, for example, the definite article after its substantive, etc.

Modifications of word-order in written language are different from those in spoken language. G. W. Turner points out that writing is „a special, careful, elaborated, shuffled, pruned, and tidied form of language, very different from the everyday, spontaneous, precarious adventures of speech...“ (Turner, 1977, 8). The spoken language depends on the intensity of the speaker's emotions, his/her joy or distress, and his/her excitement or anxiety, whereas the written language is dependent upon reason, logic, and objective thinking. Quoting J. Vendryes B. Charleston remarks (op. cit. 137) „spoken language has its logic, but this logic is primarily affective, and the ideas are arranged in accordance with the subjective importance the speaker gives to them or wishes to suggest to his listener, rather than with the objective rules of an orthodox process of reasoning.“

Any change in word-order is significant. It usually indicates the speaker's feelings regarding his/her utterance. Under the influence of strong emotion

the speaker may place „the emotionally dominant element“ (Bloorfield, 1993, 114) into the front position without any logical considerations. Jespersen writes that, as a general rule, speakers tend to give utterance first to the idea or group of ideas that urges them to express themselves at all and this may be called their „psychological subject“ (Jespersen, 1948, 147). In such cases the grammatical subject, object, and predicate do not often coincide with the psychological subject, object, and predicate. This can be illustrated by exclamatory statements as „*Horrible, that man!*“ or „*A nice boy, John!*“ where the emotional attitude is expressed very clearly, while in „*That man is horrible*“ or „*John is a nice boy*“ has the effect of a calmer statement; it is less impulsive.

It is a generally accepted fact among linguists that in English the beginning and the end of the sentence are positions of greater importance than the middle, but there is also some disagreement as to which – beginning or end – is more important or weighty and gives greater emphasis or prominence to the words placed there. B. Charleston observes (op. cit. p. 142) that „... in fact, neither beginning nor end as such, but merely the fact of the unusual, i.e. „abnormal“, position that gives the affective value of the word(s) so placed, e.g. subject after the verb, direct object before the subject, etc.“

The following patterns of emphatic word-order were observed in the English language of written and spoken variety:

1. The inversion of subject and verb.¹ The subject is placed at the end though the hearer is expecting to be informed of it at the very beginning of the utterance, e.g.:

Inside the cavernous hall, beneath a giant stained-glass window, stood the future leaders of the world (Segal, 26).

On and on through the dark went the mile-eating miracle. (Smith, 371).

In front of one window was a huge table with many plants and a couple of piles of papers. At the angle to it stood a typewriter on a stand. In front of another window was a big soft chair... (Rossner, 50).

¹ Inversion describes the reversal in normal word order of the major sentence elements, i.e. subject and verb. Katie Wales. *A Dictionary of Stylistics*. London and New York: Longman, 1989. P. 262.

And into this seething, palpitating cauldron of enslaved humanity came Gay Burnett, half-mad with terror (Robins, 70).

The inverted word-order of this kind is usually made with intransitive verbs. It is an affective inversion causing a certain „tension“ to the utterance. The adverbial group normally following the verb in these constructions is placed at the beginning of the sentence.

Verbs of saying, thinking, etc. may occasionally be inverted with the subject after or between the parts of direct speech, e.g.:

„Four years you have been engaged,“ said she with a firm voice (Austen, SS, 128).

„Well,“ said I, „all I can say is, that if it is true, he had used a young lady of my acquaintance abominably ill...“ (Austen, SS, 185).

To all appearances, thought Penny later as she undressed, if Jason had been falling out of love, he had jumped back in again (Dunn, 156).

In the case of inversion, whether the subject is a substantive or a pronoun the emphasis falls on the subject giving it a tone of liveliness, sprightliness, and vivacity.

Inversion is also very frequent after a negative or restrictive word or word-group placed in the front position, e.g.:

Never had Marianne been so unwilling to dance in her life as she was that evening..(Austen, SS, 165).

No sooner was his father's funeral over, than Mrs. John Dashwood... arrived with her child and their attendants (Austen, SS, 4).

Little had Mrs. Dashwood or her daughters imagined, when they came first into Devonshire... (Austen, SS, 50).

Not only was Mrs. Penelope Bryant interested in history, she was knowledgeable about modern commerce., (Dunn, 57).

Julia was left to her own devices. Rarely had she ever felt more alone (Macomber, 206).

The above cases of inversion are not frequent in speech; they usually belong to the written language. In speech there are other means of emotive expression, such as intonation, gestures, etc.

In colloquial English two negatives are sometimes used. It is quite incorrect but very effective, showing that negation is most important in the speaker's mind. In literary English the inversion is also observed in exclamatory sentences expressing some strong emotion: surprise, anger, pleasure, etc:

How barbarous have I been to you! – you, who have been my only comfort. (Austen, SS, 256).

2. The front position may be given to the direct object for the sake of prominence. Usually in such cases there is no inversion of the subject and verb, e.g.:

Courage Dan had (Plain, 589).

But what was very necessary to Gay's heart was love ... and love she had now in plenty (Robins, 187).

The salad she didn't touch (Roding, 177).

Derek she had flayed with condemnation (Jensen, 209).

In the above given sentences full emphasis is given to the direct object and it becomes the so-called 'psychological subject'.

3. The substantial or adjectival predicate may be given prominence by placing it at the beginning of the sentence, e.g.:

And a lady she was – Mrs. Gordon had seen to that (Hiatt, 12).

Jew that he was, he shared the antipathy of his race towards Adolph Hitler (Robins, 176).

Idiot that I was, I believed my own image as one of the screen's greatest lovers (Stanford, 55).

Worse yet was the fire that ignited inside her.. (Stanford, 97).

Different they might be but surely they could mend their differences for one evening? (Fitzgerald, 166).

4. When prominence is given to the adverbial groups by putting them to the front position they also obtain certain stylistic variations, e.g.:

Ahead stood a dark figure, very tall and shrouded in a black cloak (Fitzgerald, 104).

On to the boat came a tall European wearing dungarees, white shirt, and with a pack over his back... (Robins, 142).

Silently, she had let herself out of his flat and driven herself home...(Fitzgerald, 18).

Unwanted came the memory of a foggy night, a pine-odored hill and Alexander's hard hand gripping her arm (Briskin, 384).

Unhappy is he who trusts only to time for his happiness (Websters, 128).

Always and only there was the longing for him (Plain, 82).

Here ceased the rapid flow of her self-reproving spirit... (Austen, SS, 340).

Summers I worked in the construction camps (Briskin, 98).

Adverbs of definite time, place, and manner placed at the beginning of the sentence bear the chief emotional emphasis, especially with the inverted form of subject and verb. Such sentences as *Happy had it been for her...* (Austen, SS, 244), *Rarely have I met anyone...* (Fitzgerald, 58) etc., with the adverb of manner in the front position for the sake of greater prominence may be considered to be examples of 'exclamatory inversion'; and abbreviated form of exclamation, as if the word 'how' had dropped out at the beginning. This is also less common in the colloquial language than in the written language (Charleston, 1960, 15).

When the prepositional adverb is given prominence, and placed in placing it to the front position, the whole sentence gets some emotional tone; it expresses the speaker's feelings – liveliness, jollity, friendliness, excitement, irritation, etc:

Off with you, now... (Dunn, 59).

Out you get! (Armstrong, 78).

In danced the village girls in their straight dove-grey dresses... (Fitzgerald, 52).

So out came the brooms and buckets and in went Missis... (Smith, 229).

An emotional tone is also created when the adverbs of indefinite time take either the front or the end position of the sentence:

Always and only there was the longing for him (Plain, 82).

... *they are extremely civil and obliging to us, the Wallises, always* (Austen, E, 224).

5. There are cases when the auxiliary verb and the main verb are given prominence by placing the main verb first, then the subject and the auxiliary verb afterwards: Vm + S + Vaux, e.g.:

Except, of course, that would never get the story. And get the story she would (Sutherland, 18).

... *even doubted to what place he should go when he left them – but still go he must* (Austen, SS, 97).

She knew I had no regard for her when we married. Well, married we were, and came down to Combe Magna to be happy... (Austen, SS, 322).

Teach the language we must, for English is the international language... (Times, 19).

In the above sentences extra attention is called to the auxiliary verb; it undoubtedly has the biggest emotional stress, full pronunciation, and the whole utterance is very affective.

6. Extra prominence may be given to any word or word-group in a sentence if it is introduced by the unstressed words *it is, it was, that is, and that was*, e.g.:

It's not you I'm worried about. (Jensen, 208).

That's the man I was telling you about (Longman, 1147).

So that's why you've taken to going out so often? (Maugham, 144).

In this way a noun, pronoun, adverb, or adverbial phrase of place or time may be emphasized and receive full stress in the sentence.

7. Word-order may be affected by strong emotion in the speech of less educated people. Usually such speech is spontaneous, emphasizing the main lines of thought, e.g.:

Benjamin shook his head. „Mar, is this interesting,“ he said (Webb, 83).

„Paul, tell me, is everything all right between you and Mariam?...“

„It's all right. She's a good girl, Mimi“ (Plain, 413).
 „I feel sorry for Alfie,“ Hennie said. „He looked so crestfallen.“
 „I know“ Dan got up...„ He's a good sort, Alfie“ (Plain, 409).
 ...she began to cry...„I love him – the jerk“ (Jensen, 194).
 „Mum, I've asked a young lady to come in to tea tomorrow. Is that all right?“
 „You done what?“ asked Mrs. Sunbury, for a moment forgetting her grammar“ (Maugham, 144).

In such sentences the striking words (*is, Mimi, Alfie, etc.*) are prominently placed, they become psychological subjects and dominate the sentence.

In conclusion it could be said that there is a general tendency in modern English to introduce inversion of all kinds, to give prominence to any word or word-group in a sentence with the idea that the sentences will appear more impressive, affective, and rouse the reader's attention.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Armstrong – Armstrong, L. *Heat of the Moment*. New York, 1984.
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ŽODŽIŲ TVARKOS STILISTINĖ FUNKCIJA ANGLŲ KALBOS SAKINYJE

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Reziumė

Straipsnyje aptariami įprastinės žodžių tvarkos keitimai bei jų stilistinė funkcija anglų kalbos sakinyje. Veiksniu, tariniu, papildinio ar aplinkybės išskėlimas iš įprastos vietos – dažniausiai į sakinio pradžią ar pabaigą – išryškina bei pabrėžia loginį arba emocinį sakinio kirtį, jo intonaciją. Inversija, kaip stilistinė kalbos išraiškos priemonė, būdinga tiek šnekamajai, tiek ir rašytinei anglų kalbai.

Vilniaus universiteto
Humanitarinių mokslų fakultetų
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Įteikta
1997 m. birželio 30 d.