

The Unmarked Word Order of Free Verbal Modifications in Czech

(With the Main Reference to the Influence of Verbal Valency in the Utterance)

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The aim of the paper is to verify the unmarked sequence of the chosen contextually non-bound free verbal modifications (adverbials) in Czech depending on, particularly, valency, semantics, form, length and the type of utterance in which they occur. The results reported in the present paper are based on linguistic analysis of more than 1, 700 utterances from the data of the *Prague Dependency Treebank*.

The utterances selected have the form of declarative sentence without negation and they contain two (or more) contextually non-bound free verbal modifications (for example, *Narodila se roku 1984 v Praze – She was born in 1984 in Prague*). It was examined which order of modifications is more frequented (for example, if it is more typical in Czech to use *He was born when where or where when*) and which factors influence this order.

The existing research on unmarked order of free verbal modifications (Sgall, Hajicova, Buranova 1980; Uhlirova 1974; Firbas 1979) explored this matter without regard to the verb (and its valency characteristics) the modifications are connected with. Also the other factors such as the form of modification were explored only marginally rather than systematically. Up to now, the investigations assumed that the main factor influencing the order of verbal modifications is the semantics of the modifications concerned.

In the paper we argue that the factor of the verbal valency has a stronger impact on the unmarked word order sequence than is that of their semantics (the membership in the semantic category, for example, of location, time, manner and so on). In the canonical word order in Czech, the contextually non-bound optional free verbal modifications come first and only then the obligatory follow. The semantics decides the order of the optional free verbal modifications (not expressed by the dependent clause):

The established unmarked order of contextually non-bound examined free verbal modifications in Czech:

1. optional time (when)
- 2.–3. optional location (where)
- 2.–3. optional cause (why)

4. optional manner (how)
- 5.–8. optional direction (to where)
- 5.–8. obligatory location (where)
- 5.–8. obligatory manner (how)
- 5.–8. obligatory direction (to where)

In contrast to the optional free verbal modifications, the obligatory contextually non-bound free verbal modifications also have exhibited a clearly stronger tendency to appear in the role of rheme (focus) proper, i.e. the element carrying the highest degree of communicative dynamism.

At the same time, optional contextually non-bound free verbal modifications occur in both the anteposition and postposition. However, similar behaviour as that of the obligatory free verbal modifications may be also observed in case of the optional free verbal modifications expressing direction (to where).

The position of the contextually non-bound free verbal modification in the word order is also partially influenced by its form (the optional free verbal modifications expressed by adverbs occur in the anteposition more often than those expressed by a prepositional phrase), length (in average, the free verbal modifications in the anteposition tend to be one word shorter than in the postposition) and the type of the utterance (the utterance with the predicate in the second place versus the “appearance-on-the-scene” type of utterances).

The research reported on in the present paper is the initial phase of a more broader investigation on the influence of verbal valency as a word order factor in other (not only Slavic) languages.

Sources:

Sgall, P.; Hajicova, E.; Buranova, E.: *Aktualni cleneni vety v cestine*. Prague 1980.

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