

## INVERSION IN ENGLISH

*Daniela PASCARU**Catedra Limba Engleză*

Inversiunea în limba engleză este caracteristică atât propozițiilor interogative, cât și enunțiative, în dependență de acest fapt inversiunea poate fi parțială sau totală. Inversiunea din propoziția enunțiativă nu este o excepție de la norma topicii engleze, dar se manifestă ca o evoluție logică a acestei norme. În unele cazuri, inversiunea este singura variantă posibilă a topicii în propoziția enunțiativă. Inversiunea poate fi considerată ca un sinonim gramatical al topicii directe care are drept scop de a exprima mai exact anumite fenomene și relații ale realității obiective.

Speakers of English and some other languages commonly assume that the normal way of constructing a clause is to place the subject of the clause first, then the verb-predicate and after them the rest of *the clause*.

Of course, not all English clauses follow the order SVO. There are some cases when inversion is used for stylistic purposes and not only for them.

Inversion gave rise to some controversial matters concerning its importance and place in the system of the English word order. Firstly, inversion is examined as word order characteristic of interrogative sentences opposed to the direct word order of declarative sentences. For example, H.Poutsma (1928) states that "The placing of the subject before the finite verb of the predicate may be called the *declarative arrangement*, the other the *interrogative arrangement*. The latter is often called inverted word order or inversion as opposed to the regular word order which is used in the majority of sentences and clauses. Secondly, inversion is opposed to the direct order of words as not expressing grammatical relations between words: "In languages which have both a normal and an exceptional order, the latter is due to a variety of causes, the most important of which is emphasis. In such languages the normal order is grammatical (syntactic), serving to show the grammatical relation between words". (H.Sweet, 1898)

From the above-mentioned opinion it is stated that the inversion does not express grammatical relations between words in contrast with the direct word order.

The same point of view about inversion is held by A. Bain, J.C. Nesfield, R.W. Zandwoort. A. Bain states that the subject always precedes the predicate and the cases of inversion are exceptions to the norm.

Generally it is considered that two types of inversion occur in English: *partial inversion* and *full inversion*.

Partial inversion is a type of inversion where only the auxiliary is moved to the left of the subject.

*Have you been listening to the radio?*

If the finite verb is the main verb (if there are no auxiliaries) it is the auxiliary *do* which is introduced to the left of the subject.

In Old and Middle English the inversion transformation involved in the formation of yes/no questions could apply to all verbs, not just auxiliaries, yielding forms that would be unacceptable in Modern English.

*Speak they the truth?*

During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the inversion rule was changed to apply solely to auxiliary and modal verbs.

*Can they speak?*

With this change, structures such as *speak they truth?* were no longer possible. The corresponding question came to be formed with the auxiliary *do*.

1) Partial inversion is used in interrogative main clauses whose subject is not an interrogative pronoun and in tag questions (where the main verb is understood).

*Will you read me the book?*

*You are singing wonderfully, aren't you?*

2) It is also used if the clause is introduced by a negative or restrictive constituent. H.Poutsma (1928) states that inversion is the rule in clauses that open with a negative adverbial adjunct or conjunction.

*Not a single word did she say.*

3) Partial inversion occurs in elliptical clauses after *neither, nor, so*; the meaning is «the same goes for».

*I read this book and so does my sister.*

4) We find this type of inversion when the clause is introduced by an adverbial or complement, containing an expression of degree.

*Well do I know that you are both spies sent by her that she might mock.*

Muriel Spark *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.

*So unwilling had he suddenly become to encounter Helene that he considered hanging about outside for a few minutes.*

Kingsley Amis *One Fat Englishman*.

5) It occurs in conditional clauses without *if*. Such clauses always contain *had*, *should* or *were* as the finite verb.

*Should you want any help, let me know.*

6) It occurs in negative imperative clauses which have a subject.

*Don 't you dare touch me again!*

7) Finally, it occurs when *may* expresses a “wish”.

*May we live to go there!*

We consider these cases the most obvious examples of partial inversion.

As far as full inversion is concerned the whole VP is moved to the left of the subject, including the main verb.

Full inversion never involves the use of auxiliary *do*, nor is it usually obligatory. Instead it may be chosen for stylistic purposes as a manifestation of the end-weight principle that long and important constituents tend to appear in clause-final position: the subject is usually long and weighty, as compared with the VP, which is often simple.

1) Full inversion is frequently used after a «direct speech» object-though it is just as common for the subject to precede the VP.

*«I saw his car outside her house», said the boy.*

2) Inversion also occurs when *so* replaces initial direct speech governed by *say* or *think*. *And so say all of us.*

3) Full inversion is used in clauses without a complement which are introduced by an adverbial.

*Now is the time to think about it.*

In the literary language there are fewer restrictions on the length and type of the initial adverbial.

4) Full inversion is used in clauses introduced by an emphatic subject complement.

*Far more effective would be the presentation of the book.*

5) In the formal style inversion can occur optionally in clauses introduced by *as* and *than*.

*The boys played football, as did the men.*

H. Sweet and H. W. Fowler speak about the third type of inversion the so-called *link inversion*, by which it is understood the inversion of the predicate after conjunctions: *as*, *so*, *thus*.

*It was disconcerting. as was too his spontaneous vision of her as uncorrupted.*

J. Murdoch *The Unicorn*.

Link inversion also occurs in a sentence when the same verb-predicate is repeated.

*«I'd rather be hanged» he says; and hanged he was.*

B. Shaw *Too True to Be Good*.

This inversion is also true for subjects and objects:

*When the cost, if cost there were, would fall, not on Mont, whose land was heavily mortgaged, but on himself, whose property was singularly realisable.*

G. Galsworthy *White Monkey*.

Inversion of the object:

*The gentleman required lodgings for a lady. Lodgings for a lady Mrs. Berry could produce.*

G. Meredith *The Adventures of Harry Richmond*.

The most frequent inversions that occur in English clauses are those held by the verb *to be*.

The inversion with the verb *be* in construction with adverbials:

1) *Somewhere inland were the mountains.*

John le Carre *The Looking Glass War*.

The inversion of *be+nominals/adjectivals*.

2) *More severe was the emotional pain of not having got a look.*

Kingsley Amis *One Fat Englishman*.

Fronting in both examples is thematic and the thematic fronting of adverbials is much more common than thematic fronting of nominals, adjectivals.

The inversion of *be* in construction with present or past participle.

*Standing beside it was Alec Leomas.*

John le Carre *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold.*

From our experience concerning the use of inverted structures the Romanian learners can run into problems trying to form interrogatives as they do in Romanian.

They can simply add a question mark or by using question intonation.

\* *You are coming this evening?* or by using inversion:

\* *When think you to leave England?*

In interrogative questions which began with a pronoun or with an interrogative adverbial, when the predicate is a nominal one, the subject is placed after the predicate.

*Cine ești dumneata?*

The main differences that characterize the inversion in English and Romanian questions are: subject-verb inversion structures in Romanian interrogatives versus the subject-auxiliary inversion that occurs in the English direct questions; the subject NP inversion is optional in Romanian, whereas in English, it is obligatory.

Romanian can use inversion in subordinate clauses if the subject of the subordinate clause is a noun.

\* *I told her what wanted the others.*

Romanian uses inversion after *see, hear, let* and *perhaps*.

\* *I saw go out a short man.*

\* *I heard open the living room door.*

Another instance where the subject is moved in inverted position is offered by Romanian infinitives.

*Cu greu începe a pricepe elevul notele muzicale.*

One can also find subject-verb inversion in exclamatives when the predicate is a nominal one:

*Afurisită muiere ești!*

Z.Stancu *Descult.*

Being acquainted with the main points concerning interference in using interrogatives and other inverted constructions learners of English will try to reduce the number of mistakes.

Having analysed the given examples we can conclude that inversion is characteristic of both declarative and interrogative sentences. Inversion in the declarative sentences differs from that of interrogative ones. This difference lies not only in the structural aspect but also in the semantic one. Inversion in the declarative sentences is not an exception to the rule, but it is the manifestation and logical development of the same rule.

Our investigation has proved that in some statements inversion is an appropriate means of connecting the parts of the sentence like the direct order in some other cases. In this context we can define inversion as a grammatical synonym of the direct word order with the function of expressing certain phenomena and relations of objective reality more exactly.

#### **Bibliography:**

1. Bain A. A Higher English Grammar. - London, 1896. - 395 p.
2. Fowler A.W. The Kong's English. - Oxford, 1906. - 178 p.
3. Nesfield J.C. Errors in English Composition. - London, 1939. - 214 p.
4. Poutsma H. A Grammar of Late Modern English. Part I, First Half. - Groningen, 1928, VIII, §5.
5. Sweet H. A New English Grammar, Logical and Historical. - Oxford, 1898. - 301 p.
6. Zandvoort R.W. A Handbook of English grammar. - Groningen; Batavia, 1948. - 285 p.

*Prezentat la 16.03.2007*