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ON SOME PROBLEMS OF ATTRIBUTE POSITION IN CZECH AND ENGLISH

(An Attempt at a Contrastive Czech–English Approach)

The present article deals with two questions which due to their practical application seem to be very important and cannot simply be taken for granted. They also become quite complex, though not perhaps complicated, if viewed diachronically and examined in two or more languages. The first question is the position of an attribute, namely whether it precedes or follows its head–noun, the other question, perhaps much more interesting and noteworthy, is the mutual order of attributes in a string.

I. It is commonly known that in both Czech and English the attribute stands in front of its head–noun, while in Spanish (and other Romance languages) it usually follows. Yet the situation may sometimes be reversed – under certain circumstances; the 'specific' position is then believed to be functional, it becomes marked. We should ask ourselves (1) what is it that governs the generally unmarked position of the attribute, and (2) what are the circumstances that make the attribute occur in the functionally marked position?

(1) We can see that whilst in Old English the adjectival attribute was placed before its noun,¹ in Czech it has stood both in front of and

¹An examination of Anglo–Saxon texts gives proof of this; perhaps in some cases, such as with 'eall' and exceptionally also with genitive forms, postposition occurred. But in Gothic, postposition is statistically more frequently used, though there is also a certain tendency or preference for anteposition. Moreover, both in Gothic and Old English the NP need not be a compact unit, that is, sometimes the attribute was separated from its head by other sentence members. These statements, fairly general as they are, should of course be viewed only in the limits of actual syntactic possibilities, because of the lack of written records of informal style. In

after the head. As was shown by ERTL (1918) and others, even as early as in Old Czech there was a tendency towards changing the postposed nominal attribute into the congruent adjective-like attribute which has a fixed position before the head-noun.² According to J. BEČKA (1932), anteposition of the attribute now accounts for some 80–90 per cent of cases, and the spoken language definitely tends to make full use of this unmarked position. Regular anteposition has perhaps much to do with the fact of fixed wordorder, which is very patent in English³ and has been recognized, to some extent, in the development of Czech syntax, too. But this explanation is not satisfactory: it does not explain the fact in Czech the adjectival attribute is morphologically distinguishable and yet is still syntactically fixed; and it is also unsatisfactory as regards the situation in Romance languages – by pointing to the Latin origin, we only shift the problem back, facing the very same question: why in Latin, a highly inflected language, does postposition predominate? Unfortunately we have not found, in the literature, any unequivocal tendency, based in

the middle period of the development of English, however, postposition of attributes became more frequent, especially with participles and learned words; we can admit that this was due to the influence of French and Latin (which was not excluded, of course, even in older times).

²Old Czech inherited from Old Slavonic a lot of adjectives based on nominal expressions and these were also derived in the same way, e.g. *nedostatek vodný* (i.e. *vody*), *vinné sbieranie* (i.e. *vína*), evidently with a strong tendency to anteposition. The abundant postposition of attributes in later stages is explained by the influence of Latin.

³PALM (1911), for instance, claims that in the oldest periods of the development of languages postposition of attributes was taken to be general, that is unmarked. And he points to the process of 'wiping off' characteristic, clear-cut morphological signals with adjectives (inflected for hundreds of years), and to the process of fixing word order. He even argues that adjectives do not differ from predicatives more than perhaps participles from supines; and indeed, the category of adjectives has always been somewhat neglected, from Dionysius through to Allan, Lakoff and others.

linguistic terms, which might govern the unmarked position of the attribute. Some sort of attempt was made only by adherents of psychological trends in linguistics in the 19th century, but their opinions should not be overestimated.⁴ Nevertheless, the functional approach to the problem does not, ultimately, require a definite answer: we follow the conviction that the more important point is what makes a speaker choose the position that is not typical at the contemporary stage of language development. Certainly, if the reasons for marked positions become less specific, then marked positions may become unmarked, and vice versa, provided that the grammatical system of the given language allows for this. It may therefore be feasible to accept general postposition of attributes in the oldest stages of languages, if we consider the problem in broader outline. And at the same time we can rely upon the relative stability of synchronic data, as far as the discussed problem is concerned. It is evident that anteposition has been and surely will be unmarked functionally both in Modern Czech and in Modern English. (From now on we shall leave other languages aside.)

(2) The marked position of attributes can be defined quite easily and also with great accuracy. In English it signals either collocations of Romance origin, or certain grammatical condensations, e.g. *Court Martial*, *knight errant*; *any case possible*, *people present*. In Czech, postposition of attributes exists in certain fixed word units (a list of which can be found in TRÁVNÍČEK, 1951, par. 607). Moreover, and more important still, it is a matter of stylistic differentiation: if the attribute stands after its head, its position is felt to be looser, more independent – that is why

⁴Thus McKNIGHT (1897), PALM (1911) and others, referring to universality of the principles governing word order, want us to believe that the way of ordering words reflects the national character: anteposition of adjectives is said to require more attention and therefore it is characteristic of a phlegmatic nature, while postposition points to a sanguine temperament, which disregards the whole and concentrates more on what is just being uttered.

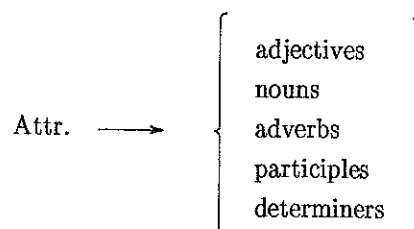
postposition is used to express emphasis (especially with the connotation of contrast), to render unsteadiness (i.e. of properties expressed by adjectives) and to create scientific terms.⁵

II. If we want to deal in greater detail with the problem of mutual ordering of several attributes, we do not have to carry on the discussion on ante- or postposition in general. What we are obliged to do, however, is to make an analysis of identical sentence tracks in English and Czech; it seems that these can best be determined by means of the tagmemic approach. Briefly, what the method entails is that the tagmeme is defined at different levels (sentence, clause, phrase, word) as a correlation of function and means fulfilling the function. The function proper exists in a certain place denoted as a SLOT (S); that is to say, at the level of the noun phrase (NP) S_0 must be considered a minimal representation of the NP, and a number of further S_s , in both the positive and negative direction, are available for an expanded NP.

$$NP \rightarrow S_0 + \left\{ \begin{array}{l} S_{-1} + S_{-1} + \dots S_{-x} \\ S_{+1} + S_{+2} + \dots S_{+x} \end{array} \right\}$$

Further on, we shall agree on a definition of attribute, by which we shall understand an entirely grammatical category; its juncture with the head-noun tagmeme (T) is expressed in terms of the relationship of grammatical dependence. And now the sphere of our study may be defined quite precisely: it will cover attributes in positions S_{-1} to S_{-2} which have mainly the following grammatical forms:

⁵Here we follow the distinctions stated in BAUER-GREPL's *Skladba spisovné češtiny* (Syntax of Standard Czech, Praha, 1970, pp. 130-131), where postposition of adjective attribute is classed as topical (motivated) or non-topical (in Czech: aktuální - neaktuální). In the former case postposition is preferred in order to stress the property expressed by the adjective rather than the meaning of the head-noun, in the latter case traditionalisms (of the type *Království české*) are referred to.



No matter how narrow this sphere may be, it offers great scope for further investigation. First of all, we would like to know whether the ordering of attributes is, from the point of view of their functions, unchangeable in either language, i.e. whether it may be considered universal, and whether it is possible to make out any general tendency or regularity which controls ordering.

The problem of mutual ordering has been discussed by many linguists; we have to admit, however, that the observations made by Anglo-American authors are influenced largely by subjectivism, while Czech linguists do not wish to admit that there may be more than two attributes in one string. (Contrary to older stages of the Czech language, grouping of attributes may occur quite freely nowadays and is accepted as normal even by stylists.)

The first thing we find in analysing an English NP is the presence of a 'minimum' attribute, known as the article, which signals the existence of the NP. If there is no other attribute, the NP may be referred to as minimal. In Czech no article exists, but since articles are included in a more general category of 'determiners' (D), there are evident parallels in the two languages:

D →	{	the, a(n), ∅	/	—	}
		no, any ...	/	žádný, kterýkoliv ...	
		this ...	/	tento ...	
		my, John's...	/	můj, Janův ⁶ ...	

⁶According to SPANGLER and others, further grammatical forms could be included here, i.e. numerals, intensifiers, etc. Nevertheless, as determi-

The presence of D divides the whole string of attributes into two parts, i.e. inner and outer:

outer string	T_D	inner string	T_H
$S_x \dots$	S_D	$\dots S_{-1}$	S_0

Having carefully examined a few hundred excerpted NPs we come to a number of conclusions which we shall briefly comment on.

(1) Positions in the outer string of an NP in English are obligatory and there are three of them: S_x , S_{-x+1} , S_{-x+2} . The position S_{-x+2} precedes that of determiners, e.g. *all these years, such a (nice) man, rather a (big) question*. The next position, S_{-x+1} is occupied by certain intensifiers, such as 'so, too', which determine a following attribute, e.g. *so large a baby, too small an area*. As can be observed, these intensifiers generally attract their attribute and therefore exclude the class of pre-determiners. Finally, the position S_x is reserved for what may be termed limiters, e.g. *even a little touching, only too vague an indication, not too serious a tone*.

S_x	S_{-x+1}	S_{-x+2}	S_D
even		rather, what, all, both,	the
only		such, half, quite, many	this
not			my
	so too	adj.attribute	a(n)

Note: It should be observed that the ordering presented in the table holds for the classes of tagmemes in their entirety (in a horizontal direction), but only partly indicates the compatibility of concrete lexical items.

ners we only consider those forms that are mutually incompatible.

In Czech only two functional slots can be taken into account; they seem to be parallel, both functionally and with regard to the equivalence of lexical items (except 'half'), to the English positions S_{-x} and S_{-x+2} , e.g. *mnohým svým tvrzením, jen celý ten (nesmírný horizontální) cinžák*. The Czech language does not possess the S_{-x+1} position, simply because there is no article as a form of D. Should we accept the existence of a complex T in the position $\{S_{-x+1} \approx S_{-x+2}\}$, i.e. a T_{-x+1} determining T_{-x+2} on a hierarchically lower level, then in English, too, we might consider there to be only two functional slots in the outer string. (We can note that with Ds other than the article, the potential positions $S_{-x+1} \approx S_{-x+2}$ may be realized functionally within the inner string, as in Czech, e.g. *this so desperate a plan, (její) tak zařívá pleť*. This also holds, as a matter of fact, for some lexical items in S_{-x+2} , such as 'quite' and 'rather'.) A somewhat more difficult problem is the compatibility of the concrete lexical items of the given function. Nevertheless, we believe that the clue may be looked for in answering the primary question on determiners: where determination is carried out by deixis to the context, no further determination in terms of the extra-linguistic situation can be made simultaneously within the same S. In Czech the function of the article is absent, and therefore the selection and mutual compatibility of concrete lexical items of the D class is dependent on the regularities of so-called 'sememic syntax'. Thus, unlike in English, we come across such wordings as *nějaký ten románský kostel, těch jeho časů*.

(2) In either language the inner string may be coherent, if every single attribute is related to the head, or complex, if the attribute is determined first and only then related to the head, e.g. *a powerful shaping force* vs. *entirely distinct types*; *zavalité transportní lodi* vs. *velmi pěkný obraz*. We enquired into the question whether the presence of a complex T had any influence upon the ordering of attributes, and having examined a sufficient number of excerpts we came to a definitely negative answer. Both in Czech and in English a proportionally equal number of

complex Ts occurred at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the inner string. Hence the T may be defined as any 'slot-filler' that is related, syntactically and semantically, to the expression functioning as a minimum representation of the NP as well as this expression proper. And consequently, the positional ordering within the complex (inner)string is basically the same as in the coherent one.

Treated from the same functional point of view, Ts seem to reveal a strong tendency to be repeatedly placed within the same slots of the inner string. Thus those opening the inner string represent the category of number in the widest sense of the term: here we consider not only numerical indications of number, order or sequence, but also extra-numerical references, e.g. *the six pink roses, our first romantic poet; sedm českých montérů, každý jiný lidský tvor*, etc. The superlative, as a definitely formed semantic class, is also associated with the above-mentioned category, namely the extra-numerical indication of number, or the function of individualization. Together with the comparative, where the function of placing on a scale can be identified, it stands very close to the beginning of the inner string. Examples: *the roughest Channel gale, her most important foreign relationship, the richer eastern portions; nejhustší živé ploty, větší gotická jídelna*, etc. The common function of all these Ss is the limitation of occurrence, which is achieved, as pointed out above, by means of reference (i.e. deixis; here some points of contact with the D class may be observed), quantification and placing on a scale. Let us denote the tagmemes within this part of the string as T_{Lim} . A far more complex class is constituted by attributes displaying a descriptive function in the narrow sense of the word; these T_{Desc} 's are believed to follow T_{Lim} 's:

$$\text{NP} \rightarrow \text{T}_D + \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{T}_{\text{Lim}} \\ \text{T}_{\text{Desc}} \\ \text{T}_{\text{Lim}} + \text{T}_{\text{Desc}} \end{array} \right\} + \text{T}$$

The descriptive function proper is fairly extensive and may be understood as referring to physical properties, such as size, colour and the like, or to material, provenance, similarity, place, time, appurtenance, etc. In more abstract terms it will suffice to describe the semantic functions under the heading 'qualifying' and 'referential', respectively. It should be borne in mind that there are no sharp boundaries between the classes and subclasses of either the semantic or the grammatical categorization of attributes, and there is a fairly close affinity between the two categories.

As we have stated, this categorization is far from exhaustive, yet it may be considered to suffice for defining mutual ordering. Let us consider the T_{Desc} with a qualifying function. We can possibly make a hypothesis based on the observations made hitherto and confront it with actual usage. Namely, if the transition between T_{Lim} and T_{Desc} is represented by forms of comparative and superlative, which are in fact a semantic expression of integration of quality and quantification (in the sense of individualization) or position on a scale, then the actual quality has to be able to show its degrees. Hence it follows that the denoting of colour should not precede that of time and size; and indeed, excerpts give proof of the order $\{\dots\text{T}_{\text{size}} + \text{T}_{\text{col}}\dots\}$, e.g. *a nice big white cap; ohromná černá ušovka*. Sporadically, in English texts only, we come across a reverse order, too, e.g. *white narrow roads*, and we feel that even in Czech the ordering *bílé úzké cesty* might also be acceptable (while, most probably, we should not accept '*černý mocný mrak*' or '*černá velká služebná*'). The category of time is also worth noting: it seems to occur closer to the beginning of the inner string or closer to its end – statistically, these

tagmemes mostly stood in front of T_{col} , e.g. *a new dark suit, a quiet old rectory garden; a splendid old place; nová červená střecha, starý hliněný hrnec; bohatý mladý muž*. The concrete lexical items 'young/old' tend to form, with their T_{H} , words on the level of compounds, e.g. *an old man/stařec, a young lady/slečna*; it might seem that this position occurs in English only, but even in Czech these attributes go close to the T_{H} .

Finally, it may be observed that a T_{Desc} of referential function stands closest to the T_{H} , e.g. *the newly drained river valleys, včerejší cigaretový kouř*, etc. Hundreds of such instances also show that reference by means of proper names is usually made prior to any other referential means, e.g. *English prose literature, anglická chrámová architektura*, etc.

Without presenting further excerpted instances, we can argue that English and Czech are highly parallel in the sphere of semantic relations within NPs. Moreover, we are inclined to declare that there is total concord in the deep structure of the two languages and to support MARTIN's opinion on universality in the choice of adjective order,⁷ in linguistic terms. Obviously, the surface structure will exhibit differences, such as forms of determiner, possessive forms of nouns, relational nouns, compound words, possibilities for conversion of parts of speech, and the like.

III. What is it that controls the ordering of Ts? We cannot reject the view that it must be a result of various factors, namely phonetic (rhythm, euphony), grammatical (forms of attributes) and lexical. Nevertheless, if we have limited the sphere of our investigation to the string S_{-1} to S_{-x} , we

⁷MARTIN says that if the constraints on the order of adjective choice are independent of particular syntactic constraints and dependent upon psychological constraints affecting accessibility, the order of choice of adjectives may well be universal for speakers of all languages.

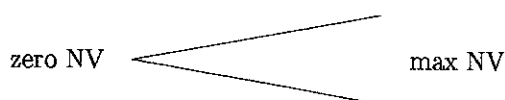
do not necessarily have to deal with morphological criteria; and moreover, supporting COLE's opinion that certain syntactic rules are based on semantics, we are convinced that the primary, decisive criterion will always be the semantic viewpoint.⁸

By means of appropriate application of the functional sentence perspective to the complex NP, we arrived at a theory of the principle of 'onomasticity distribution' (OD), which identifies the degree of naming value (NV) existing between the given T and T_H' . To a certain extent the ordering of premodifying attributive tagmemes may be regarded as a mirror image of the predicative order of clausal elements; nevertheless, even though attributive determination is nowadays generally regarded as predication without temporal and modal exponents⁹, the distinction at the level of semantics cannot be denied. Therefore we support the Prague School idea of defining predication as a process of creating a new naming unit which is homogeneous and adequate to the basic expression (i.e. to T_H in our case) and which expresses but one notion again. We suggest that, semantically, the given T of the NP occurs at a certain point on the scale of onomasticity in relation to its T_H . There must, naturally, exist a zero NV, which represents an element before the speech proper; and there must be a minimum NV, applying to the grammatical rather than the semantic function, i.e. to articles and related means (T_D). Maximum NV, on the other hand, can be seen in those functions which are indubitably naming units proper, both in and outside the given context, e.g. *high*

⁸Even those who do not draw any definite conclusions, for instance MARTIN, claim that normal preferred adjective ordering is neither syntactically nor pragmatically based.

⁹This is the opinion of CHOMSKY and his followers; but even as early an author as PALM (1911) writes that the attributive use of adjectives is a later stage of development from the predicative use.

blood pressure; vysoký krevní tlak. Every T is believed to occur in a certain position within the range



We also claim that the principle of OD can be applied generally, under any circumstances, and that it makes it impossible for Ts to show equal NV. This fact is reflected in the very linear ordering of Ts: that is, NV and the position of a given T are interdependent phenomena. Furthermore, we argue that NV rises constantly and continuously, with obviously smooth transitions:

$$(zero) \quad NV(T^x) < \dots < NV(T^3) < NV(T^2) < NV(T^1) < \begin{matrix} < \\ \max \end{matrix}$$

It is natural that a higher NV is found in T_{Desc} 's of referential function than in those with a qualifying function, since there is a better chance of creating a new naming unit in those functions which can be ascribed repeatedly. It means that the closer $NV(T^x)$ approaches MAX, the more difficult it will be to separate the respective attribute from its T_H . In other words, if the link between T^x and T_H is perceived as forming a compound, interposition of a further T will normally be rejected. A skeletal model of the normal preferred ordering is believed to read as follows:

$$T_D + T_{Lim}^{dex} + T_{Lim}^{quant} + T_{Lim}^{scale} + T_{desc/qual}^{time} + T_{Desc/qual}^{size} + \\ T_{Desc/qual}^{phys} + T_{Desc/qual}^{col} + T_{Desc/ref}^{proper} + T_{Desc/ref}^{place} + T_H$$

The statements above can be documented by hundreds of examples, of the type *jejich vysoké huňaté kožešínové čepice*; *their tall hairy fur caps*. It is interesting to note that in certain cases the attributes may be swapped: thus, besides the examples already discussed, *white narrow roads*, *mocný černý mrak* and the like, similar occasional shifts of position can be considered in, for instance, (1) *his long white pipe*, (2) *their dark long robes*, (3) *menší štíhlá holka*, (4) *holý vysoký skalnatý břeh*, (5) *mnohé jubilejní divadelní adaptace*, (6) *pět tisíc takových ubikací*, (7) *peasants' burned-out hovels*, etc. Nevertheless, we must be aware of the fact that native speakers would normally accept only certain switches such as (1) *his white long pipe*, and conversely (2) *their long dark robes*, (4) *vysoký holý skalnatý břeh*, possibly also (3) *štíhlá menší holka*, while they would, most probably, hesitate over (4) *vysoký skalnatý holý břeh* or (5) *mnohé divadelní jubilejní adaptace*. Moreover, they would not change the ordering, in one and the same meaningful context, of (6) and (7), because (6) *takových pět tisíc ubikací* and (7) *burned-out peasants' hovels* express, respectively, quite different ideas. What is the clue to acceptability or unacceptability of positional switches? We would venture to claim that the explanation is in the above-stated thesis of a smooth, constant rise in naming value. To keep to this smooth transition it is necessary, at the same time, to consider and eliminate the potential tension which might occur at boundaries between functional slots, say between T_{Lim} , $T_{Desc/ref}$ and $T_{Desc/qual}$. In practice, the swapping of attributes is more flexible within the framework of the same more generalized function and in cases where NV tends to be close to minimum. But if such swapping is carried out elsewhere, and over those potential boundaries especially, then any offence against the smooth progression of NV results in inappropriate positioning. In this connection we must also recall what follows from our theory: the characteristics of T function need not have anything in common with morphological signals. Thus, for instance,

menší, though a form of comparative, performs a descriptive rather than limiting function in (3) and it may easily be swapped with *štíhlá*, evidently with the same descriptive qualifying function. On the other hand, *peasants'* in (7) can be regarded either as T_D or T_{Desc} , giving the NP quite different meanings.¹⁰

CONCLUSIONS

Only after completing the present contribution can I see that another mammoth piece of work could be started straightaway. Perhaps it is not a strange, original idea to take so-called problematical things for granted until they are approached scientifically. Then the potential problems become genuine problems, calling for even more satisfying solutions. Attribute position is no exception. I wonder how many people have ever even thought of these things. Even interpreters probably do not take much care, and rely on what is usually called 'intuition'. Luckily enough, they are mostly quite capable of handling the complex NP. It should be a linguist's concern to ask what processes, more or less complicated and ultimately linguistic as they are, have to take place in order that an utterance in one language may convey exactly the same information as the corresponding utterance in the other language. Or is it really easy for everyone to render such NPs as *devět Sokratových hlav*, *these nasty women's employer's clothing*, *the pleasant house property tax office furniture*?

¹⁰In cases like this we cannot expect identity between Czech and English in surface-structure ordering, though functionally they may be described in the same way.

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