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## INTONATION CENTRE IN ENGLISH AND CZECH SENTENCES

The present paper is a study of the most prominent accent in a sentence, the *intonation centre*. It attempts to define the main semantic, syntactic and communicative features of the elements carrying the intonation centre in English and Czech sentences.

The study is based on an analysis of the dialogues included in O'Connor and Arnold's book *Intonation of colloquial English* and their translation into Czech. The dialogues consist of 784 tone groups which form 630 sentences. Each sentence contains one intonation centre. The tonetically transcribed texts are accompanied by cassette recordings. The analysis of the Czech translation of these dialogues is based on the reading of the translation by an amateur actor. (A precise system of tonetical transcription of Czech spoken texts does not exist.)

The following passage of the dialogues contains examples of some semantic, syntactic and communicative features of the intonation centre that will be discussed in this paper. Examples will be referred to by the number of the line on which each example begins. Words carrying the intonation centre of a sentence are underlined. (Some of the English sentences allow different translation. The author has chosen what she considers, in the given context, the most natural translation of the English sentences.)

The passage presents a particular context in which the speakers have given the words that are underlined a very high priority by making them the intonation centre of the sentence. The intonation centre always occurs on an element carrying a nuclear tone. The different types of nuclei signalling the intonation centre (high fall, low fall, high rise, low rise, fall-rise, rise-fall and mid-level) are part of different tunes but their prosodic prominence is the same. In the theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP) developed by Jan Firbas (especially 1985, 1987, 1989, 1990 and 1992) the words carrying the intonation centre are the *rheme proper* (or part of the *rheme proper*).

*Intonation of Colloquial English* (p. 275):

- (1) I say, | ,Arthur. || 'Seen anything of \*Jack, Taylor \*recently? ||  
 (2) — Naylor, did you \*say? || — No, Taylor. || With a T. ||  
 (3) — 'Who's that? || — Oh, ,you re,member him. || The 'man  
 (4) who \*gave you those driving lessons, | 'just be'fore your  
 (5) test. || — Oh, him! || 'No, | I haven't, I'm a,fr<sup>o</sup>id. || ,Why  
 (6) d'you ask? || — Well I was ~wondering | if he'd got 'any \*free  
 (7) time during the ,next few ,weeks. || — But you ,don't need  
 (8) ,more lessons, \*do you? || I ,thought you passed your ,test. ||  
 (9) — 'So I did, | 'just after Christmas. || No, I don't ,need  
 (10) ,lessons. || My 'sister Janet ,does. || — ,Oh? || But 'didn't you  
 (11) \*say your ,father was \*teaching her? || — He ~was. || But he  
 (12) 'couldn't \*stand the pace. || — 'Couldn't \*stand the 'pace? ||  
 (13) 'How's that? || Janet ,mustn't go ,faster than thirty, |  
 (14) surely. || She's a learner. || — Oh, but 'you don't know  
 (15) Janet! || At least 'not as a driver. || — She's got ,no i<sup>o</sup>dea of  
 (16) \*speed at all. || — You ,mean she 'really does \*drive too  
 (17) \*fast? || — I'll say she ,does! || 'Every bit of ~practice, ||  
 (18) — well it's ,more like an \*inter<sup>o</sup>national car race. ||

- (1) Poslouchej, Arture. Neviděls náhodou v poslední době  
 (2) Jacka Taylora? — Cože, Naylora? — Ne, Taylora. Na začátku  
 (3) je T. — A kdo to je? — Ale toho si přece pamatuješ. To je  
 (4) ten, cos u něho dělal jízdy v autoškole, těsně před  
 (5) zkouškama. — Jo ten! Ne, toho jsem teda neviděl. Proč se  
 (6) ptáš? — No, chtěl jsem se ho zeptat, jestli by v příštích  
 (7) pár týdnech neměl někdy čas. — Ale ty snad přece  
 (8) nepotřebuješ další jízdy?. Já měl dojem, žeš tu zkoušku  
 (9) udělal. — Taky že ano, hned po vánocích. Já opravdu další  
 (10) jízdy nepotřebuju. Ale má sestra Janeta ano. — Jak to?  
 (11) Vždyť jsi říkal, že ji učí váš otec. — On ji učil. Ale  
 (12) špatně snášel tu její rychlost. — Špatně snášel její  
 (13) rychlost? Jak to? Janeta nesmí jezdit rychleji než  
 (14) padesátkou, přece. Vždyť je začátečník. — To ale neznáš  
 (15) Janetu. Aspoň ne jako řidičku. Ona nemá sebemenší smysl  
 (16) pro rychlost. — Chceš snad říct, že opravdu jezdí moc  
 (17) rychle? — To bych teda řek. Každá její jízda, to je jak  
 (18) mezinárodní rallye.

It has to be noted that not all nuclear tones necessarily indicate an intonation centre. In the first sentence of the passage above (1) *I say, Arthur*, for instance, the word *say*, carrying a high fall, is the intonation centre of the sentence; *Ar-*

*thur*, carrying a low rise, occurs in the post-intonation-centre prosodic shade (cf. Firbas 1980) and cannot compete in prosodic prominence with *say*. In (6) *Well I was wondering if he'd got any free time during the next few weeks*, on the contrary, the nucleus carried by *time* is more prominent than the nucleus carried by *wondering* because it represents prosodically the entire object clause which further develops the concept of *wondering* and completes the message of the sentence. In most cases, the most prominent nuclear tone in a sentence is the one that occurs nearest the end of the sentence (cf. Firbas 1989). In some specific tunes, like the one of the first sentence of the passage above, for instance, the second nucleus is subdued by the first nucleus and recedes into the background.

The English text and its Czech translation have been analyzed and compared from the point of view of the position of the intonation centre in a sentence, the participation of different parts of speech as intonation-centre carriers and the use of prosodic means of expressing emotiveness.

Table 1 below shows the positions of the intonation centre in English and Czech sentences. Distinction is made between the initial, medial, and final position in a sentence. Independent elements like short yes/no answers and short comments or afterthoughts that are too loosely connected to the preceding sentence are not included in the table because they do not qualify for any of the positions *initial*, *medial*, *final*. For example *No* in (5) *No, I haven't* was treated in the present study as an independent unit, an independent intonation centre whose position cannot be specified. (In the English text, independent intonation centres form 12.5%, in the Czech text 15.7%, of all intonation centres.)

Table 1

Position of the intonation centre in a sentence:

	Initial	Medial	Final
English	5%	47%	48%
Czech	2.5%	11.5%	86%

The percentage of intonation centres occurring on the very first element of a sentence is very low in both English and Czech sentences. Most of the sentences with an intonation centre on the first element are imperative sentences and short questions and answers, e.g.

(2) *Naylor*, *did you say?*

(1) *Poslouchej*, *Arture*.

Medial position in the English text (47%) is about as frequent as the final position (48%). In the Czech text, the final position with its 86% is unmistakably the most frequent position of the intonation centre.

The shift of the intonation centre from a medial position in an English sentence to the final position in its Czech translation can be observed in the following examples:

(1) *Seen anything of Jack Taylor recently?*

(1) *Neviděls náhodou v poslední době Jacka Taylora?*

(6) *Well I was wondering if he'd got any free time during the next few weeks.*

(6) *No, chtěl jsem se ho zeptat, jestli by v příštích pár týdnech neměl někdy čas.*

(8) *I thought you passed your test.*

(8) *Já měl dojem, žeš tu zkoušku udělal*

A speaker of Czech stresses a certain word by awarding it the most prominent accent of the sentence and by placing the word in the final position, which is psychologically the most natural order. In many situations the speaker of English cannot place a certain word at the end of a sentence because of the high degree of grammaticalization of word order. Different degrees of grammaticalization of word order and a different hierarchy of word-order principles are probably the main cause of the different tendencies in English and Czech in regard to the position of the intonation centre in a sentence.

Table 2

Participation of different parts of speech as intonation-centre carriers:

	Noun	Verb	Adjective	Pronoun	Adverb	Other
English	43%	22%	12%	10%	9%	4%
Czech	47%	26%	9%	6%	8%	4%

Table 2 shows the representation of different parts of speech as carriers of the intonation centre in the analyzed text. There does not seem to be any striking difference between English and Czech in employing different word categories to express an important piece of information and to carry the intonation centre of a sentence. Nouns prevail in both languages, second comes the verb, then the adjective, the pronoun, the adverb and the other categories (numerals, particles, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections).

Looking more closely at the examples of sentences in which translation from English to Czech was accompanied by a shift of the intonation centre from one word category in English to some other category in Czech, we find out that there are two different types of situation in which this shift takes place. In about 40% of cases, the shift is only a formal change determined by syntactic differences between English and Czech, not accompanied by any semantic change, e.g.

(9) *So I did, just after Christmas.*

(9) *Taky že ano, hned po vánocích.*

The remaining 60% of cases, however, cannot be explained by differences in syntactic structure. They are cases in which the shift is not only from one category to another but also from one semantic element to another, e.g.

(3) *Oh, you remember him.*

(3) *Ale toho si přece pamatuješ.*

(17) *I'll say she does.*

(17) *To bych teda řek.*

In the English sentences above, the intonation centre is placed on an element which has been mentioned in the preceding text and which does not seem to deserve the prominence of becoming the intonation centre. In the corresponding Czech sentences, the intonation centre is situated on an element which is context independent and which conveys some new information. Both the English and the Czech sentences are emotively coloured. In English, the emotive effect has been achieved by the discrepancy between the relative semantic weakness of the pronoun and the high prosodic prominence attributed to it. In Firbas 1987 and 1992, this phenomenon is referred to as *emotive re-evaluating intensification*. (Emotiveness is here the new, irretrievable information which enables its contextually tied carrier to become the rheme proper of the sentence.) In the Czech sentences, emotiveness seems to be expressed by lexical means (*přece*, *teda*) rather than by intonation; there is no discrepancy between the semantic and contextual structure of the element carrying the intonation centre and its prosodic prominence.

Pronouns as carriers of the intonation centre in English sentences are almost twice as frequent as in Czech sentences (cf. *Table 2*). The higher percentage in English is due to the occurrence of the intonation centre on the pronoun in English emotive sentences.

Verbs as intonation-centre carriers are only slightly more frequent in Czech than in English (cf. *Table 2*). *Table 3* below provides a closer look at the employment of two different subcategories of the verb in carrying the intonation centre.

Table 3

Participation of different categories of verb as intonation-centre carriers:

	Auxiliary and modal	Lexical
English	30%	70%
Czech	7%	93%

Although English and Czech do not differ too much in the frequency of the intonation-centre carrying verb in general (*Table 2*), a closer analysis (*Table 3*)

reveals that auxiliary and modal verbs as carriers of the intonation centre are far more frequent in English than in Czech; in the former they represent 30% of all verbal intonation centres, while in Czech, the percentage is only 7%. The examples below suggest that this difference is due to the different grammatical character of the two languages.

(5) *No, I haven't. I'm afraid.*

(5) *Ne, toho jsem teda neviděl.*

(11) *He was.*

(11) *On ji učil.*

The words *haven't*, *neviděl*, *was* and *učil* are carriers of the intonation centre because they convey the only new, context independent piece of information in the sentences and have therefore been given the highest prosodic prominence. This new information is the 'negation' of

(1) *Seen anything of Jack Taylor recently.*

(1) *Neviděls náhodou v poslední době Jacka Taylor?*

and the 'confirmation' of

(10) *But didn't you say your father was teaching her?*

(11) *Vždyť jsi říkal, že ji učí váš otec.*

The structure of the English language requires the expression of polarity by the auxiliary verb and therefore in the situations described above it is the auxiliary that becomes the focus of the sentence. Polarity in Czech is in most cases expressed by negative particles which are part of the lexical verb. (Compound verbal forms, in which polarity is, like in English, expressed by the auxiliary, are not very frequent in Czech.) It is therefore the lexical verb that becomes the intonation-centre carrier.

## SUMMARY

The present article was a study of certain relations between the grammatical and textual structure and prosody. The analysis of an English spoken text and its Czech translation has suggested that different word-order principles operating in English and Czech are reflected in different prosodic patterns of the two languages. There is a very strong tendency in Czech to put the intonation centre at the end of a sentence. In English, final position of the intonation centre is not more frequent than medial position. Prosodically 'light' endings of sentences are much more natural in English than in Czech, where 'heavy' endings seem to be preferred. The analysis has shown that the prosodically 'heaviest' word categories both in English and Czech are nouns and verbs. The vast majority of the intonation-centre carrying verbs in Czech are lexical verbs. Owing to its analytical structure, English accentuates auxiliary and modal verbs much more frequently than Czech, especially in contexts where the expression of polarity or temporal relations becomes the rheme

proper of a sentence. There is a strong tendency in both English and Czech to accentuate semantically prominent and context independent elements. Accentuating semantically weak and contextually tied elements, e.g. personal pronouns, is more frequent in English than in Czech. English seems to employ intonation as a means of expressing emotiveness to a greater extent than Czech. Emotive effects achieved in English by a discrepancy between the low semantic and high prosodic prominence of an element are often expressed in Czech by lexical means (e.g. modal particles like *přece* or *teda* in sentences (3), (17) and (5)).

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## INTONAČNÍ CENTRUM V ANGLICKÝCH A ČESKÝCH VĚTÁCH

Článek se zabývá vztahem mezi gramatickými a prozodickými rysy jazyka. Srovnává pozici větného přízvuku (intonačního centra) v anglické a české větě a zastoupení jednotlivých slovních druhů ve funkci nositele větného přízvuku. Zvláštní pozornost věnuje vztahu mezi intonací a vyjádřením emotivnosti. Čeština má velmi silnou tendenci klást větný přízvuk na konec věty. V anglických větách je mediální pozice větného přízvuku stejně častá jako pozice finální. Iniciální pozice je v obou jazycích velmi výjimečná. Ze všech slovních druhů se nositelem větného přízvuku stává nejčastěji podstatné jméno a na druhém místě sloveso. V angličtině se častěji než v češtině stávají nositelem větného přízvuku slova nízké sémantické závažnosti a slova kontextově vázaná (např. pomocná slovesa a osobní zájmena). Příčinou tohoto jevu je v některých případech gramatická struktura angličtiny (např. závislost některých sémantických kategorií na pomocných slovesech), jindy se takto umístěný větný přízvuk stává prostředkem vyjádření emotivnosti. V odpovídajících českých větách je emotivnost vyjádřena spíše lexikálními prostředky.



