

AN ANALYSIS ON STRUCTURES OF ENGLISH INVERSION IN THE VIEW OF TRADITIONAL GRAMMAR

PHÂN TÍCH CÁC CẤU TRÚC ĐẢO NGỮ TIẾNG ANH DƯỚI GÓC NHÌN NGỮ PHÁP TRUYỀN THỐNG

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ABSTRACT: *Inversion is a complex topic. There are a lot of types of inversion and a lot of ways to use inversions. The article aims to statisticalize the patterns of inversion in English and analyse their features of syntax and usages. Hence, it can help teachers and students have an overview on patterns of inversion in English and determine the ways to use them effectively in daily communication.*

Keywords: *Inversion, features of syntax and usages.*

TÓM TẮT: *Đảo ngữ trong tiếng Anh là một chủ đề phức tạp. Có rất nhiều loại cấu trúc đảo ngữ và có rất nhiều cách để sử dụng các cấu trúc đó. Bài viết nhằm thống kê các cấu trúc đảo ngữ trong tiếng Anh và phân tích đặc điểm ngữ pháp, cách dùng của chúng. Qua đó, có thể giúp người dạy và người học có cái nhìn tổng quan về các loại cấu trúc đảo ngữ trong tiếng Anh và xác định cách vận dụng chúng một cách hiệu quả trong giao tiếp hàng ngày.*

Từ khoá: *Đảo ngữ, đặc điểm ngữ pháp.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Sentence is the biggest concern in the language system but the smallest unit in text structure. Currently, there have been many research works on sentences with typical authors as Cao Xuan Hao, Diep Quang Ban, Nguyen Minh Thuyet, Nguyen Van Hiep, and Hoang Trong Phien... Anyway, sentences are still a problem for many people to interest and study.

From the teaching practice, we acknowledged that students always have needs to be explained the nature and functions of language structure such as stressed structures, passive sentences, repeated sentences, split sentences, inversion sentences... These types of sentences are very rich in English and are studied by many linguists with many

different schools. The understanding and using effectively English inversion structure will help learners diversify and enrich language expression in order to meet the needs of communication.

2. CONTENT

2.1. Definitions of inversion

- The inversion of language is a form of major change in the word order in a sentence with formal style to emphasize and increase the feelings of speakers. When it is necessary to specify any part of the item, we put it in the beginning of the sentence.

- When mentioning researches on English inversion, we often refers to Green's definition [1982; 120] that is “declarative structures in which the subject follows part or all of the elements of the

verb”.

Inversion is a syntactic process creates structures with functions of introducing entities into discourse. (Drubig 1988, Dorgeloh 1997)

- Being a universal linguistics, inversion relates to the movement of elements in a sentence, so it obviously connects with differences of order variants in a sentence. It is the difference of a basic order or standard order from a non-standard order. Certainly, changes in order will create changes in content (F.D. Sausure, 1986).

- From the perspective of a syntactic process, the phenomenon of inversion creates a shift that changes the order of elements in a sentence, at the same time it changes the sentence structure as well. It transforms a basic or “unmarked” structure, into a “marked” structure. Inversions also affect the semantic level of a sentence by creating additional meanings for the “non-descriptive” or “non-propositional meaning” of the sentence. Our understanding of this type of meaning is based on the concept of J. Lyons [1995] - those meanings are not important to the truth conditions of the sentence.

2.2. Analysis of English language models

- Each of these generalized models can be realized into smaller model, with certain characteristics in terms of formal structure and semantics of the elements participating in the model.

2.2.1. Subject - verb inversion:

- Subject - verb inversion means that the main verb inversion appears before the subject. Based on the word/word phrase

that starts a sentence, we have several types of sentence structures that are suitable for verbs that come before subjects:

+ Inversion in a sentence that begins with an adverb or phrase indicating direction.

When a clause begins with directional phrases, the main verb can be reversed before the subject, but no auxiliary verbs are used at all.

Example:

First comes friendship, then comes love.

Adv V S Adv V S

Down came the rain and

Adv V S

washed the spider out.

After A comes B, then comes

Adv V S Adv V

C, next comes D.

S Adv V S

In front of the school is a bank.

Adv V S

Into the room ran the girl.

Adv V S

Sometimes, we have an adverb, like “first” and “down” and sometimes we have an adverb phrase like “into the room” or “after A”, “in front of the school”. Adverbs and adverbial phrases often show position or direction.

We can put “first”, “next”, “now” and “then” in front of the verb “come” to introduce a new event, when the subject comes after the verb. But if there is a comma (or intonation sign intended to interrupt the utterance) used after the adverbs “first”, “next”, “now” and “then”, the main verb must follow the subject.

Example: At first there was noise.

Then came an explosion. (Not: Then an

Adv V S

explosion came.)

At first there was silence. Then, a voice comes.

Adv V

S

We can also put verbs before the subject when we use adverbs of direction, such as “along”, “away”, “back”, “down”, “in”, “off”, “out”, “up” with location verbs (such as “hang”, “lie”, “sit”, “stand”, etc.) and movement verbs (“come”, “fly”, “go”, “run”, etc). This pattern is found especially in narrative writing to mark a change in events or actions.

Example: The door opened and in came the lady. (Less formal: The door opened and the lady came in.)

Both these sentences express the change of events. In the sentence “The door opened and in came the lady”, the first event is the opening of the door and the second the arrival of the lady. Therefore, the inversion in this sentence emphasizes the appearance of the lady.

Example: Just when I thought I would have to walk home, **along came** Miguel and he gave me a lift. (Less formal: Just when I thought that I'd have to walk home, Miguel came along and he gave me a lift.)

Likewise, in this example, we use inversion here to emphasize Miguel's impending arrival. His arrival solved my problem.

In some cases of this type, we can rewrite another inversion that begins with an ing-verb.

Example:

In the door way stood a man with a gun.

Adv V S

= Standing in the door way was a man with a gun. **V-ing V S**

On a perch beside him sat a blue parrot.

Adv V S

= Sitting on a perch beside him was a blue parrot. **Adv V S**

In this example, we can rewrite the sentence that begins with the verb-ing and the verb “be” inverted before the subject.

Note: These inversions give us an effect of emphasis, but they mean the same as sentences that are not inverted.

Example:

David goes up again.

S V Adv

→ Up goes Peter again.

Adv V S

The beautiful scenery I had been told

S

about lay/was below me.

V Adv

→ Below me lay/was the beautiful

Adv V

scenery I had been told about.

S

In the first case, we have a directional verb. In the second case, the appearance of a transitive verb or verb “be” is required. Note that we do not use the auxiliary verbs “do/does/did” for this type of inversion.

- Inversion in a sentence that begins with the verbs of reporting.

Subjects can come after reporting verbs like “say”, “tell”, “ask”, etc. when they are in the middle or at the end of direct speech.

Example::

“I have three sons”, *answered* **the old**

Reporting-V S

man, “and they are all studying abroad”.

“I think it's time to go,” *said* **Mary**.

Reporting-V S

“It's time for you, but not for me,”

replied **Linda**.

Reporting-V S

“Maybe we should collect our thoughts for a moment,” *commented* **Lany**.

Reporting-V S

2.2.2. Subject-operator inversion

When the auxiliary verb comes before the subject and the rest of the verb phrase follows the subject, we have an inversion. For this type, we can divide it into:

- Inversion in question

The most common form of inversion is the question formation. When we look at the grammar of the English language, we see that the most common form of inversion is the change in the order of subjects and verbs in a sentence. In the sentence “Is she My Tam?” “She is My Tam”, the subject “she” must come before the verb “is”. This is a normal order. The most common examples of subject and verb inversion are seen in questions like “Is she My Tam?” English often uses these types of inversions to form questions, but this is not the only case where the normal order of subjects and verbs in a sentence is reversed. For this type, we use the following auxiliary verbs:

“be” (for the continuous or passive, present and past simple)

Example: What *are* **they** doing?

Where *was* **your key** found?

Is **she** My Tam?

Were **they** ready when you arrived?

+ “have/has/had” (for perfect forms)

Example: *Have* **you** ever visited Ho Chi Minh city?

Has **she** done this exercise?

Had **they** finished it when you came?

+ “do/does/did” (present and past simple forms)

Example: *Do* **you** enjoy reading magazine?

Does **she** learn English?

What *did* **you** do last night?

+ Modal verbs (should, can, might, etc.) can also be inverted to form questions.

Example: *Can* **you** help me?

- Inversion begins with a negative adverb or adverb of frequency

In formal English, it is quite common to use an inversion after a negative adverb to give a sentence a stronger effect. However, we sometimes have to change the normal word order of the subject and verb (usually using an auxiliary verb) because we want to emphasize the meaning of the adverb.

Example:

Ha *rarely* talks with us.

S Adv

= *Rarely* *does* **Ha** talk with us.

Adv Aux S

The adverb here is “rarely”... If it comes after the subject, there is no inversion (as in the first sentence), but if it comes before the subject, we need inversion (as in the second sentence). The word order is reversed and in the case of “Rarely does Ha talk with us” we use the auxiliary verb “does” in the same way we

do in the question (although this is not a question). Inversions seem more formal or academic, and this type of sentence is less common in casual conversation.

Some words and phrases that function as negative adverbs sometimes need an inversion. We can divide negative adverbs into the following groups:

* frequency: Rarely/Seldom/Never: “Rarely/Seldom/Never” ...

Example:

Rarely/Seldom/Never before have **I**
Adv Aux S
read such an interesting book.

+ Often:

Example:

Often have **I** heard it said that he is not
Adv Aux S
to be trusted.

+ Little:

Example:

Little do **you** know how much trouble
Adv Aux S
you are in.

* Time relation:

Hardly (most usual)/ scarcely/ barely... when: when there is a series of events in the past “Hardly/scarcely/barely... when” is used to refer to an event followed by another event quickly. The past perfect is often used in inversion clauses, in the other clauses we use the past simple.

Example:

Hardly/scarcely/barely had **we** walked
Adv Aux S
in the door when the phone started ringing.

+ No sooner...than:

Example:

No sooner had **I** opened one doll than **I**

Adv Aux S

found another one nested in it.

⇒ “No sooner... than” is used to refer to one event followed by another quickly. This can also be used with other tenses, but never for actions that will take place in the future. So we cannot say: “No sooner do I see her, I will invite him to my birthday party”.

+ Not until:

Example: Not until January will **I** have a holiday. Adv Aux S

Not until I got home did **I** realize that

Adv Aux S

my shoes were untied.

⇒ Sometimes inversion occurs immediately after the negative opening form and sometimes in the following subject and verb like “not until”.

+ Only:

“Only” is often used with a temporal phrase or a prepositional phrase such as:

Only then/ if/ when/ later/ after/ by.

“Only” is often used with a time clause or a prepositional phrase such as:

Only then/if/when/later/after/by.

Example:

Only then/if/when/later did **I** know

Adv Aux S

what I had got myself into.

Only at night can **I** study.

Adv Aux S

“Only then/if/when/later/after/by” is often used with the past simple and requires an inversion.

Example:

We accepted the invitation. Only later

Adv

did we suspect it might be a trap.

Aux S

Note that there is no inversion if the word after “only” is a noun. In this case, the word “only” modifies the subject.

Example:

Only Florida knew the answer to the question.

Adv S
└───┬───┘

Only he can speak English.

Adv S
└───┬───┘

- Inversion with “no”:

+ At no time:

Example:

At no time did he get permission for

Adv Aux S
what he was doing.

+ In no way:

Example:

In no way could I help you with
ADV Modal V S
your Japanese grammar questions.

+ Nowhere:

Example:

Nowhere had Susan seen a more

Adv Aux
beautifully decorated room.

+ On no account:

Example:

On no account should you be absent
Adv Modal V S
from your seminars.

+ Under no circumstances:

Example:

Under no circumstances will prisoners

Adv Aux S
be allowed to give interviews to the

media.

This form is used to describe rules without exceptions. The alternative without this inversion is “Prisoners will not be allowed to give interviews to the media under any circumstances”. So we can see that “not...any” is the same as “no”.

When we use negative adverbs at the beginning of a sentence, we must invert and put the auxiliary verb before the subject.
Note:

Note that there is no inversion if the negative adverb does not come before the subject.

Example:

Ha rarely talk with us. (No inversion)

S Adv

We use inversion when the adverb that modifies the verb is not the object of the noun.

Example:

Hardly had I gone to bed when the phone rang. (Inversion)

Adv Aux S V
└───┬───┘

Hardly anyone knows about it. (No inversion)

Adv S
└───┬───┘

Inversion in a sentence that begins with a predicate

Inversion is not only used in questions and sentences that begin with an adverb, but inversion is also used for emphasis. In this style, inversion is used with all verbs. We use this form mainly in conversational English to emphasize the predicate which is sometimes an adjective, noun, verb, an adverb, etc.

* The predicate is an adjective:

In English, an adjective (phrase adjective) usually comes after the subject. Predicate can also be placed at the beginning of a sentence to create emphasis. In this case, “to be” must follow the adjective (phrase adjective).

Example:

The problem is *difficult*.

S V Adj = P

= *Difficult* is **the problem**.

Adj = P V S

* The predicate is a noun

Example:

She did not say *a single word*.

S V N = P

= *Not a single word* did **she** say.

N = P Aux S

* The predicate is the past participle (Verb-ed)

The predicate can also be a past participle. When a sentence begins with a past participle, an inversion is required.

Example:

Gone are **the days** when I could have been happy.

V-ed V S

Lost among the old tables and chairs

V-ed phrase

was **the priceless Victorian desk**.

V S

This type of inversion usually occurs with the verb “to be” but sometimes also with linking verbs. It should be noted that the past participle phrase is the complement of the verb “be”.

* Predicate is a comparative word:

Inversion is required. Note that we can only use the inversion when the verb is “be”

in all cases, the comparison is the complement of the verb “be”.

Note: “less than” is also a comparative form

Example::

A school is *larger than a class*.

S V P = Comp

= *Larger than a class* is **a school**.

P = Comp V S

Romantic film is *more interesting than action film*.

S V P = Comp

= *More interesting than action film* is

romantic film.

P = Comp V

S

The development of the wheel was

S V

not less impressive than the invention of the laser.

P = Comp

No less impressive than the invention of the laser was **the development of the**

P = Comp V S

wheel.

*The predicate is a gerund (V-ing).

V-ing is used only with be-verbs. Notice that the V-ing phrase is the complement of the be-verb.

The gerund (V-ing) is only used with the verb “be”. Note that the phrasal verb V-ing is the complement of the verb “be”.

Example:

Coming in first in the race was **Mai**

V-ing V

Lan, a best student of this university.

S

Not helping the situation was **little**

V-ing V

Susie, who was throwing newspaper

on the spreading fire.

S

We can also rewrite these types of sentences starting with an adverb or an adverb phrase.

Example: Standing in the door way was a man with a gun.

= In the door way stood a man with a gun.

Sitting on a perch beside him was a blue parrot.

= On a perch beside him sat a blue parrot.

- Inversion in conditional clause

In formal English, the conditional (hypothetical) can be presented through an inversion to express formality. In this case, the word “if” or other conditional words such as: provided that, providing that, as long as etc. is omitted and we start the “if” clause with “should”.), “were” (type 2 condition), “had” (type 3 condition).

☑ Example: **Were** you to win the election, what's the first thing you'd do?

= If you won the election, what's the first thing you'd do?

Had we known what the weather would be like, we wouldn't have come.

= If we had known what the weather would be like, we wouldn't have come.

Should you need a hand, I will be more than happy to help you.

= If you should need a hand, I will be more than happy to help you.

This is a special kind of inversion. Note that we can only use these types of inversions when we are using an “if” and “should” clause, “were” and “had” are verbs that can only be inverted in this

case (“were” is also used with “he” “she”, “it” in type 2 conditions). In other words, “if” is omitted even if the word “If” does not appear in the clause, we still have the meaning of the conditional clause.

- Inversion in exclamation sentences

We can use inversions to express exclamations:

Example: **Is** it ever hot in here!

Aren't you a silly girl!

Isn't it a lovely day!

- Inversion begins with “there/here”

* *There*

Mrs John: I'm very hungry!

Mr John: *There* **is a good restaurant nearby.** V S

Most people often think of “there is” and “there are”. But we must also remember that there are verbs that we can use instead of “is” and “are”. The most common verbs are “exist”, “come”, and “go”.

Example: *There comes* a time in every person's life when she realizes that she is responsible for her own happiness, not other people.

Scientists hypothesize that *there exists* a certain type of particle that can travel faster than the speed of light. In conversation we use “There goes + noun” with inversion of verb and subject to talk about things and people that are not related to the speaker.

Example: *There goes* Nigel Salter, the footballer.

There goes the train.

“There goes...” is also used to talk about a lost object or something that is making a sound (phone, doorbell).

Example: My bike has been stolen!
There goes \$100! Or There goes the phone.
 Can you answer it?

* Here

Inversion of verb and subject, to talk about things and people just move towards the speaker.

Example: Here comes the bus!

“Here comes...” is also used to talk about something that is about to happen.

Example: Here comes lunch.

Note that there is no inversion of the subject and verb after “here” and “there” when the subject is a personal pronoun.

Example:

A: Where is my dictionary?

B: I don't know, but I'll help you to look for it.

(After a while)

B: Here is your dictionary! (But Here

V N=P

it is!)

Pro=S V

Example:

There goes Tom! (But There

V N=S

he goes!)

Pro=S V

- Inversion with the result clause (So/such...that...)

The way to introduce the result clause in formal English is to use: “so...that...” and “such...that...”:

* So...that...

We can use “so + adjective” at the beginning of a clause to emphasize the adjective.

“So...that...” is often used with the verb “be”. The clause “so... that...” must

appear before the verb in this inversion; in this model, the inversion is mandatory.

Example::

So exciting was the soap opera that I

Ad V S

for got to do my English homework.

It can also be used with “much”.

Example::

So much did she adore John that she

Aux S

would not give him up.

* Such...that...

We can use “such + be” at the beginning of a clause to emphasize the scope or level of something. “Such....that” is used with the verb ‘be’ and a noun, meaning “so much” or “so great”.

Example::

Such was the popularity of the soap

V S

opera, that the streets were deserted whenever it was on.

= So great was the popularity of the

V S

soap opera, that the streets were deserted whenever it was on.

- Inversion with comparative form: In formal style, we use inversion after “as” and “than” in comparative form.

* As:

In formal style, “as” expresses similarity and can be followed by an inversion.

Example:

The cake was excellent, as was the coffee

V S

Elisabeth was too shy to dance, as was Gerald

V S

In these examples, “as” indicates a

similarity between two things (cake and coffee) or people (Elisabeth and Gerald).

“As” can have many different meanings, but we can only use the inversion if “as” is used to indicate comparison.

Example::

John is from England, as is **Mary**.
(Inversio V S

As (= since = because) it is raining, I cannot go out. (Not inversion)

* Than

Example:

I like carrots more than does **my friend Carl**.
Aux S

Mary run faster than do **Anna**.

Aux S

Jessica is more interested in Computer Science than is **Benjamin**.

be-V S

Inversion is optional. We usually only have an inversion after “than” if we are using “than” to compare the subjects of the verb, not the object. For example, in the following sentence, we are comparing the subject (carrot and potato), not the subject (I), so an inversion is unnecessary:

Example: I like carrots more than I do potatoes.

(Not: I like carrots more than do I like potatoes).

We do not invert the subject and verb after “as” and “than” when the subject is a pronoun

Example: You speak Chinese better than I do. (Not: You speak Chinese better than do I.)

Pro=S

We use this inversion not only in

comparatives, but also in emphatic comparisons

Example:

The closer an object is to another object, the greater is **the gravity between**

V S

the two objects.

- Inversion in the structure: “Not only... but also”

Example:

Not only did **they** take care of me, but

Adv Aux S

they also treated me as if I were their own daughter.

Instead of “also”, we can use “too” or “as well”.

Example:

Not only did **they** take care of me, but

Adv Aux S

they treated me as if I were their own daughter too/as well.

- Inversion with structure: “So, nor and neither”

When “So, nor and neither” is used to make agreement or disagreement, they are followed by an inversion. “so” is used in affirmative sentences and “neither”, is used in negative sentences.

Example:

I'm from Turkey. So am I

V S

I don't like monsters! Nor/Neither do I.

Aux S

or:

Example: I learn French, and so does Mai.

Aux S

They do not mind the higher prices, and neither/nor do we.

Aux S

It should be noted that “nor” is considered a conjunction, but we use it to connect two sentences (not two elements like other conjunctions).

Example: No one has volunteered for the job, nor do we expect anyone to volunteer Aux S
in the future. (Between two sentences)

Do not use:

Lan cannot speak English nor Portuguese. (Between two elements)

Note that “So” and “Too” mean the same thing, but only “So” needs an inversion.

3. CONCLUSION

Linguists think that inversion is an aspect of language, represented by different types of sentences. Inversions allow subjects to appear after the rest of the sentence. In a sentence containing a negative word or phrase, that negative word/phrase is sometimes placed at the beginning of the sentence in formal English to create a more dramatic effect. Or when we want to put certain words or phrases at the beginning of a sentence for emphasis or to show rhetoric in more formal contexts,

an inversion is required.

Inversion is one of the grammar points used with high probability in the process of learning and teaching foreign languages as well as in daily communication. In particular, the inversion in question is used very often and naturally in our daily lives because it is the most useful sentence to make a request for information. However, the ways to use inversion are not easy. Many people always have difficulty in teaching and learning as well as using inversions in English.

In short, anagrams always play an important role in communication or in artistic texts, it is a means for speakers/writers to convey ideas and create certain effects to listeners. reader. Sentences in general and inversion sentences in particular are also a means to explore life, bringing a new, multi-dimensional perspective to readers/listeners, especially in modern life. Because “Language is a window into the world of the divinity of man, into its intellect, a means to reach the secrets of the thought process”. (38, p.20).

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