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Word order in English and Czech

Bakalářská práce

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**Abstract**

This thesis analyzes the capability of Czech high school students to translate the given sentences from Czech to English focusing on the word order of adverbials. We found out that what causes them the most problems are sentences with multiple adverbials. On the other hand, sentences with common adverbials used on daily basis are easier and they proved to form them correctly.

Obsah

[1 Theory 7](#_Toc454528889)

[1.1 English Word Order 7](#_Toc454528890)

[1.2 Czech Word Order 7](#_Toc454528891)

[2 Adverbs 8](#_Toc454528892)

[2.1 Adverbs in English 8](#_Toc454528893)

[2.2 Adverbs in Czech 8](#_Toc454528894)

[2.3 Adverbials 9](#_Toc454528895)

[2.4 Classes of adverbials 9](#_Toc454528896)

[2.4.1 Circumstances adverbials 9](#_Toc454528897)

[2.5 Adverbials of manner 9](#_Toc454528898)

[2.6 Adverbials of place 10](#_Toc454528899)

[2.7 Adverbials of time 10](#_Toc454528900)

[2.8 Position of adverbs in the sentence 11](#_Toc454528901)

[2.8.1 Initial position 11](#_Toc454528902)

[2.8.2 Medial position 11](#_Toc454528903)

[2.8.3 Final position 11](#_Toc454528904)

[3 Practical Part 12](#_Toc454528905)

[3.1 Introduction 12](#_Toc454528906)

[3.2 Research Questions 12](#_Toc454528907)

[3.2.1 Hypotheses 12](#_Toc454528908)

[3.3 Methodology 13](#_Toc454528909)

[3.3.1 Research instrument 13](#_Toc454528910)

[3.3.2 Data collection 14](#_Toc454528911)

[3.3.3 Participants 14](#_Toc454528912)

[3.3.4 Questionnaire analysis 14](#_Toc454528913)

[3.3.5 Analysis of the results 14](#_Toc454528914)

[4 Results 15](#_Toc454528915)

[4.1 Introduction 15](#_Toc454528916)

[4.1.1 First sentence 15](#_Toc454528917)

[4.1.2 Second sentence 16](#_Toc454528918)

[4.1.3 Third sentence 17](#_Toc454528919)

[4.1.4 Fourth sentence 18](#_Toc454528920)

[4.1.5 Fifth sentence 19](#_Toc454528921)

[4.1.6 Sixth sentence 20](#_Toc454528922)

[4.1.7 Seventh sentence 22](#_Toc454528923)

[4.1.8 Eight sentence 24](#_Toc454528924)

[4.2 Answers to research questions 26](#_Toc454528925)

[5 Conclusion 27](#_Toc454528926)

[6 Resumé 27](#_Toc454528927)

[7 References 27](#_Toc454528928)

[8 Appendix 28](#_Toc454528929)

Introduction

This thesis focuses on the word order in English and Czech. The main aim of this thesis is to analyze whether the Czech learners are able to construct a sentence in correct way in given situation. We also going to do a research on books they used during their studies and how it affected their outcomes.

This thesis consists of two parts. The aim of the first part is theoretical and focuses on general, subsequently more complex differences between Czech and English word order from both syntactic and lexical field. Furthermore, we will deal with word order of adverbials. The second part consists of research and discussion of the given results. The aim of the research is to check whether the students were given enough background knowledge during their studies from the textbooks to complete the survey successfully and establish what makes them the most troubles.

English and Czech word order are different in many instances. However English has fixed word order, Czech word order is relatively free, even though there are some restrictions. There is a basic rule how to form a sentence according to English word order that can be colligated to five letters as SVOCA. This acronym refers to subject, verb, object, complement and adverbial. SVO is standard word order, CA occurs in more complex sentences. However Czech word order has the same basic SVO pattern as English word order, other sentence elements can be ordered variously, not arbitrary.

# Theory

In this part, a theoretical background is set in order to provide sufficient amount of materials for the practical part.

## English Word Order

English has fixed word order

The basic pattern how to form an English sentence, SVO, is not sufficient, because it does not deals with questions, imperatives, etc. The verb often consists from more elements such as auxiliary or modal and then this pattern described above will not work: “Martin is drinking tea.”Another case where SVO pattern seems to be weak is in negations, since the particle “not” must be used and neither the particle is used in the pattern: “Peter will not go out”. In so-called yes/no questions, constructed using fronting or even inversion, the same pattern based struggle occurs: “Do you like chocolate and peanuts?” Least but surely not last think is initial and medial position of adverbs such as in these two sentences: Unfortunately, we missed the bus and

The subject of the English sentence must not be always expressed. There are three exceptions, where the omission of the subject is possible. Among these exceptions are ranged e.g. imperative sentences, diary style and exclamations.

As an example of imperative sentence, we can say simply: “Don’t give up!” or “Never give up”.

## Czech Word Order

Czech word order is free or in other words flexible, however that does not mean it has no order. The newest information should go at the end of the sentence and the information we already known is put at the beginning of the sentence. In Czech sentence, the subject can be expressed, but it is not necessary.

# Adverbs

## Adverbs in English

Adverbs together with subject, predicate, object and complement create five basic sentence elements. We call them open, which means they can modified or they modify other sentence elements. ‘They are morphologically derived from adjectives by adding the suffix *– ly*. However in contrast with adjectives that modify nouns, adverbs can modify adjectives, verbs or even other adverbs ’ (Huddleston, Pullum, 2005, p. 112).

Adverbs might be also gradable, although so called degree adverbs cannot be. Examples of degree adverbs includes almost, enough, highly, quite, rather, totally, very and many others (Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 457). Among gradable adverbs are ranged all the adverbs which are possible to be modified by adjectives *very* or *extremely*. Some adverbs creates comparative and superlative form using affixes *– er* and *– est*, e.g. monosyllabic *long* with comparative *longer* and superlative *longest*. Nevertheless, not all of them can be gradable with this or the other method mentioned above. Another group of adverbs use adjectives *more, most, less* and *least* to form comparative and superlative (Thornbury, 2004, p. 89), whereas adverbs as *well* with comparative *better* and imperative *best*, or *much* with comparative *more* and superlative *most* use completely different and unique system of formation and therefore we call them irregular (Dušková, 1994, p. 162).

## Adverbs in Czech

However adverbs are open class in English, they are not gradable in Czech. Among the Czech gradable or open sentence elements we range subjects, adjectives, pronouns, numbers and verbs. In sentences, adverbs are linked as a subordinate article with verbs, adjectives or with other adverbs and form adverbials. This phenomenon is similar to English adverbs since they modify adjective, verbs or other adverbs as well. Furthermore, it is possible to pair adverbs and nouns. The adverb can form the basis of monomial sentence especially with verb ‘is’ (*je*), such as ‘it’ is evening (*je večer*). When the adverb is placed at the end of the sentence, it always modifies the verb (Uhlířová, 1987, p. 77). Most of the adverbs are morphologically derived by adjectives by suffixes as in English.

## Adverbials

“Adverbial is a sentence element that modifies especially verb in similar manner as adverbial modifies subject. There are two sentences for comparison. *Došlo k rychlému poklesu teploty,* ‘There was a rapid fall in temperature’ – ‘The temperature fell rapidly,’ *Teplota rychle klesla*. Adverbial might by various manners modify the content of the whole sentence, e.g. Surprisingly, she didn’t keep us waiting, *Kupodivu nás nenechala čekat.*”(Dušková, 1994, p. 445).

Even though some adverbials have strict positioning in the sentence, lot of them may occur in a greater range of positioning within the clause. Further on we will deal with the the main classes of adverbials.

## Classes of adverbials

### Circumstances adverbials

Circumstances adverbials are the most used ones, since they answer WH- questions. E.g. Where were you? We were at the park. These adverbials can modify the clause a lot.

‘Among these adverbials we range adverbials of place, time, process, contingency, degree, addition and recipient with all their subcategories’ (Biber, Conrad, Leech, 2002, p. 362). We will discuss only adverbials of place, time and manner since these are part of the research part.

## Adverbials of manner

There are four subcategories that form these adverbials, manner, means, instrument and agent (Biber, Conrad, Leech, 2002, p. 364).

Swan mentions (2005, p. 18) that adverbs of manner say how something happens or is done. E.g. ‘fast’ (*‘rychle’*), ‘badly (*‘zle’*), ‘quietly (*‘tiše’*), ‘softly*‘něžně’*). Therefore they answer the question ‘How?’ The adverb of manner should be usually placed after the verb, if an object is linked to the verb, then it takes place after that object. Whether the adverb does not carry the main focus, it can be placed in the medial position.

Adverbials of manner, as Biber, Conrad and Leech state (2002, p. 364), has special subcategory called adverbials of comparison. They compare the manner of one state/action to another: “Then I would go through the refrigerator like a vacuum cleaner, sucking in whatever there was”, where the person describes how he would act in the exact situation.

## Adverbials of place

At first, these adverbials can express distance, answering the question “How far?” The answers we get on this simple question might seems to be similar as: “I had to go *a long way* to put the camp behind me” or “A woman who *fell 50 feet* down a cliff was rescued by…” As we can observe, the answer will carry the information about distance.

Next option these adverbials can express is direction, answering the question “From where?” or “In what direction?”. The answer which we can expect might be: “I came here *from Europe*” or “You must go *along the street and take third turn left*”.

Position adverb is the one that is left, answering the question “Where?”. These adverbs occurs with stative verbs as “*be*” and communication verbs as “*discuss*” (Biber, Conrad, Leech, 2002, p. 363)

## Adverbials of time

These adverbials have four main meanings. All these four options are quite similar and thus some examples will be given. First group tells when the event will take place: “I will meet you *in week* on the festival”. We were given the information that the festival starts in one week from this day.

We know, when the festival occurs, now it is important to find out, how long the event last: “The Czech famous festival Rock for People will last *for four days*.”

Another example of adverbials of time meaning is frequency, in other words, how often some action or even repeats: “I brush my teeth *twice a day*” or “After we broke up she called me very *often*.”

Last case when we deal with adverbial of time is in time relationships. Since it contents a word relationship, it compares two values together “Few minutes before the earthquake, all the animals started to run away do not mind the people in their way”.

## Position of adverbs in the sentence

### Initial position

We distinguish between three positions of adverbs in the sentence. There is initial position in the beginning of the sentence, before all the other sentence elements: “*Finally*, the kids went sleep”. ‘In the direct questions, it is the position immediately before the operator or *wh*-element: “*Seriously*, do you believe in ghosts?”. If the clause has two initial position adverbs, the sentence the right word order is: “*Anyhow*, *by then*, she was very ill” ’(Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, Svartvik, 1985, p. 491). Biber, Conrad, Leech (2002, p. 360) point out that in the initial position of adverbial, linking adverbials such as: *However, nevertheless or while*, are the most common ones.

### Medial position

“This position of adverb can be simply described as between subject and verb, although not in the case when verb is realized by a verb phrase or involving an operator such as: The driver has *suddenly* start the engine” (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, Svartvik, 2002, p. 492). In interrogative sentences, the position of medial adverb is just after the subject, e.g.: Did the teacher just lost his mind? For imperative sentences, the example is following: “Do not *suddenly* start the engine! or, *Never* remove the cover” (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, Svartvik, 1985, p. 493)

Biber, Conrad, Leech (2002, p. 360) say that this is the most common position for stance adverbials.

### Final position

End position is the position following all elements of the sentence and it is the position of obligatory adverbials. Very often more than one final adverbial occur in one sentence: We eat *out every Friday.* Absolute majority of the adverbials occur at the position. (Biber, Conrad, Leech 2002, p. 360)

# Practical Part

## Introduction

The main aim was to ascertain whether the L2 high school students are able to translate correctly the given sentences focused on word order of adverbials. Further on we wanted to examine whether the textbooks used in their lessons affected the outcome in any way. We also wanted to verify whether the third year students will prove to have better results than the first year students and whether the progress is significant. Both of the classes of L2 students use textbooks called New English File differing in the level of the language proficiency appropriate to the given class. The first year students completed the New English File Pre-Intermediate corresponding to the Common European Framework of Reference to A2-B1 levels. The third year students finished the New English File Upper Intermediate corresponding to Common European Framework of Reference to B2 – C1 levels. We have not chosen more schools to make it easier to assess how the textbook affected their outcomes.

## Research Questions

1. Which type of adverbials were the most problematic for the learners and which of them were the least problematic ones?
2. Where did the learners tend to place the adverbials of time?
3. Does the language proficiency influence the placement of the adverbials in the sentence?

### Hypotheses

At first, let us form some hypothesis based on both theoretical part and deduction related to selected participants. We might deduce that:

1. The first year learners might have worse results simply because they work with lower level of the textbooks and that they spend less years studying English. On the contrary, the third year students might achieve better results in all the target sentences since they already finished textbooks that the first year students deal with. Third year learners have probably already started to prepare themselves for their graduating, if not by their own, definitely with their teacher, thereby their success rate should be higher.
2. Unlike the English word order, the Czech word order is relatively free, and even if we change or switch some sentence elements, the sentence can still make a good sense. For example, in a sentence number three in my questionnaire *Naštěstí se mu nic nestalo* ‘Fortunately, nothing happened to him’, we can form it in various ways without changing a meaning, such as *Nic se mu naštěstí nestalo* ‘Fortunately, nothing happened to him’, *Nestalo se mu naštěstí nic* or *Jemu se nic naštěstí nestalo*. In the Czech word order, the adverb *naštěstí* ‘fortunately’ may occur on many positions, such as after the subject, before or after the verb*.* Thus we can assume that less advanced Czech learners might tend to translate sentences word by word and not to follow the rules of word order, because they might be distracted by the Czech word order. This can occur especially in the case of adverbials of time, when we give them a Czech sentence that begins with the adverbial of time, they might front it.

## Methodology

This thesis focuses exclusively on adverbials. Therefore, we do not evaluate other mistakes and thus we intentionally disregard them in our survey. The correct translation can have more variants, however we focus only on those mentioned above, related to the topic.

### Research instrument

For this research, we decided to use questionnaires since that is the least expensive form of research and provides a huge amount of data collected in a short period of time. We chose an anonymous questionnaire to prevent the fear of wrong answering.

The research for both groups consisted of 11 sentences which were randomly organized and given in a form of questionnaire as it is mentioned above. The questionnaire contained sentences that focused on word order of initial, medial and end adverbials. The sentences for both groups were the same in order to assess whether there was any progress over the next two years of study. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix.

### Data collection

All the participants were given a paper containing all the sentences in their English lessons without previous notification so they could not prepare in advance. The instructions were given them both orally and in writing in the questionnaire to prevent any possible misinterpretation. Each participant sat independently to prevent any kind of cooperation. They were given enough time to translate all the sentences without pressure.

### Participants

The participants in this experiment were divided into two groups. The first group consisted of first year high school learners with English as second language. They ranged in age from 15 to 16 years. The second group consisted of third year high school learners with English as a second language. They ranged in age from 17-18 years. All the participants were from the Grammar School Tomkova Olomouc.

### Questionnaire analysis

Once the collection of questionnaires was done, we analyzed them, eliminated unfilled ones, and divided gathered information into logically ordered groups. We separated the initial adverbial, the medial adverbial, the final adverbial and the multiple adverbial sentences to be able to evaluate them. We put the data into colourful figures to make it easier to read through them. We decided to evaluate the results in a percentage scale, since both researched groups have a slightly different amount of respondents. We used a chi- square analysis to determine the significance of our findings.

### Analysis of the results

We distributed a hundred questionnaires equally between both groups of participants and evaluated 48 questionnaires out of the first year students and 41 questionnaires of the third year students. 11 questionnaires were not taken into consideration because of its incomplete filling.

# Results

## Introduction

In this chapter, all the sentences from the questionnaire are introduced and analysed. We decided to discuss each sentence separately to simplify it for possible readers.

### First sentence

*Figure 1:* The percentage of correct and incorrect translations in the first sentence by the first year and the third year learners

At first, participants were supposed to translate a sentence *Osobně bych raději zůstal doma* into English. The correct translation should be ‘Personally, I would rather stay at home’ or ‘I personally would rather stay at home’. When evaluating, we focused exclusively whether the learners placed adverbial *osobně* ‘personally’ in first place before subject, because it is an initial adverb as well as right after subject since it is as well the viewpoint adverb. The second adverb in this sentence is *raději* ‘rather’and surprisingly all the participants used it correctly. The results turned out that first year students answered correctly only half of the sentences. The third year students answered correctly in 93 % and incorrectly in the remaining 7 %. The most common mistake was placing the adverbial on position after the verb or omission of the adverbial.

### Second sentence

*Figure 2:* The percentage of correct and incorrect translations in the second sentence by the first year and the third year learners

In the second question, the students were supposed to translate a sentence *Skoro jsme se ztratili* into English. The correct translation is ‘We almost got lost’. During the evaluation, we concentrated mainly on the adverbial *téměř* ‘almost’ and its position in this sentence after subject, since it is the adverb of medial position. As it can be seen in figure, the first year students answered correctly in 58 % and incorrectly in 42 %, whereas the third year students were successful in 85 % of their translations and failed in 15 %. Several students have chosen a different adverbial than ‘personally’. The adverb used was mostly ‘nearly’, which has the same meaning. From the correct answers, 7 % chose this option among the first year students and 29 % chose adverb ‘nearly’ among the third year students. The mistake that occurred most often was placing the adverb before subject instead of between subject and verb or omission of adverbial.

### Third sentence

*Figure 3:* The percentage of correct and incorrect translations in the third sentence by the first year and the third year learners

The third question was aimed again at initial placement of adverbials. The subjects were given a sentence *Naštěstí se mu nic nestalo* and the correct translation was ‘Fortunately, nothing happened to him’. The adverb ‘fortunately’ must stay before subject because it is the example of an initial adverb. Among the first year learners, 92 % translations were correct and only 8 % of them were incorrect, however among the third year learners, 95 % translation were successful and 5 % were not. In the third sentence has appeared a variation of the adverb “fortunately”, an adverb ‘luckily’ which is the initial adverb and it does not change the word order of the sentence. 18 % of the participants of the first year learners and almost half of the respondents of the third year learners (44 %) used adverb ‘luckily’.

### Fourth sentence

*Figure 4:* The percentage of correct and incorrect translations in the fourth sentence by the first year and the third year learners

In the sentence number four, the learners were given a question *Dorazili jsme asi před 15 minutami* to be translated. The translation should be ‘We have arrived about 15 minutes ago”. The task was to place the adverbial “about 15 minutes ago’ to the end of the sentence after verb. This is called final position of adverbial. 83 % of the first year learners and 90 % of the third year learners translated it correctly. There was again a possibility to choose a different structure of adverbial, ‘approximately before 15 minutes’ and only 11 % of the third year learners chose this option.

### Fifth sentence

*Figure 5:* The percentage of correct and incorrect translations in the fifth sentence by the first year and the third year learners

As well as the question four, the fifth question also deals with the final position of the adverbials. The sentence *Minulý týden jsem byl nemocný* should be translated as ‘I was ill last week’. We have chosen this example because students use similar sentences very often and we intended to verify whether it affects the success ratio. Both groups of participants translated this sentence without major problems (only one participant has translated it incorrectly). It is also possible to place the adverbial phrase ‘last week’ at the beginning of the sentence, therefore 46 % of the first year participants and 15 % of the third year participants placed it at the beginning before the subject. We assume that they did so because they translated the sentence word by word instead of focusing on the sentence as a whole unit. Even though it is not a mistake, it is more common to place adverbials of time at the end of the sentence (manner, place, time).

*Figure 6:* Participants who used the adverbial of time before the subject

### Sixth sentence

*Figure 7:* The percentage of correct and incorrect translations in the sixth sentence by the first year and the third year learners

The sixth question is a bit tricky. It deals with medial position of the adverbial. A Czech sentence *Zajímá tě to vůbec?* is translated as ‘Do you even care?’ where the adverb ‘even’ stands between subject and verb (and after ‘do’ support). On the other hand, the sentence can be translated as ‘Are you interested in it at all?’ or ‘Do you even care about that’ and then we talk also about final position of the adverbial ‘at all’ or ‘about that’. Almost 90% of the participants from both groups successfully translated this sentence. From the figure under this paragraph can be seen the exact number of the participants for all the cases described above.

*Figure 8:* How many of the first year participants and the third year participants translated the sentence by using the medial position and how many of them were using the final position of the adverbial

### Seventh sentence

*Figure 9:* The percentage of correct and incorrect translations in the seventh sentence by the first year and the third year learners

The question number seven has multiple adverbials included and its translation caused surprisingly fewer problems, than we expected. We asked them to translate a sentence *Obvykle v sobotu večer jíme v restauraci*. The correct translation is ‘We usually eat in a restaurant on Saturday’s evening’. This sentence consists of three adverbials, ‘usually’ (medial position), ‘in a restaurant’ (final position) and ‘on Saturday’s evening’ (final position). The patter to be followed is again to place the adverbs in position as place, manner and time. We accepted also a variation with “On Saturday’s evening’ placed firstly, right before subject in the initial position. There were 92 % students of the first group and 90 % students of the second group who successfully translated this sentence. The amount of participants who placed adverbial of time before the subject was equal to 32 % for the first group and 16 % for the elder group. We can observe the same phenomenon as in the sentence number five, less advanced learners tend to place the adverbial of time before the subject, in the initial position.

*Figure 10:* Participants who used the adverbial of time before the subject

### Eight sentence

*Figure 11:* The percentage of correct and incorrect translations in the eighth sentence by the first year and the third year learners

As well as the question number seven, the eighth question deals with more adverbials within it. On the contrary, this question caused students much more problems, since only 42 % of the first year learners and 52 % of the third year learners managed to translate it correctly. It was a sentence *V září byli všichni společně lyžovat v alpách.* The right solution for its translation was ‘All of them went skiing together to Alps in September’, because we should again follow the rule of positioning adverbs (manner - together, place – in Alps, time – in September). The most common mistakes in this question were switching adverbials of manner and place. From all the answers, correct and incorrect, 63 % of the first year learners and 17 % of the third year learners placed the adverbial of time before subject in initial position, same as in sentences five and seven.

*Figure 12:* Participants who used the adverbial of time before the subject

## Answers to research questions

1. Which type of adverbials were the most problematic for the learners and which of them were the least problematic ones?

According to survey, the medial adverbials were the most problematic for both groups, whereas the possibilities of their usage are wide a complex. Taken into account, these learners were attending high school and half of them for first year, they surprisingly achieved good results.

Based on the theoretical part, most adverbials occur in the final position, and the outcomes prove it, because even though, they placed any of those circumstances adverbials to the end position, in most cases it was possible to do so.

1. Where did the learners tend to place the adverbials of time?

Most of the learners from the first year tend to place the adverbials of time to the initial position. We deduced it might occur because younger learners often translate sentences word by word instead of translating it as a complex concern. On the other hand, it is not a mistake to place the adverbial of time in the initial position. However, it might still slightly change the meaning or rather understanding of the sentence.

1. Does the language proficiency influent the placement of the adverbials in the sentence?

Yes it does and we can revalidate it through the research again. From the figures is obvious, that learners who were using upper intermediate book and spent two more years at the high school must end with better results. Third year students translated most of the sentences in correct word order and in critique sentences followed the rule manner, place, time.

# Conclusion

This thesis focuses on word order of English and Czech of L2 learners. The special attention is paid on adverbials, which are known to be one of the most problematic elements in composition of the English word order. The aim of this thesis was to examine whether the L2 learners are able to translate the given sentences into English with correct word order.

We found out that third year high school students achieved better results in comparison with first year students especially in sentences with multiple adverbials as it was deduced. The textbooks, the third year students worked with, were more advanced (pre intermediate by 1st year learners and upper intermediate by 3rd year learners) and it gave them advantage.

If we were able to repeat the survey, we would probably attempt to gather more questionnaires and we would also double the sentences for more valuable data. We calculated a mathematical operation called chi-square just for our own needs and this operation measures whether the research is significant and it was in all three scales. That is how we verified if the research has any purpose.

# Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývala tématem slovosledu v české a anglické větě se zaměřením na anglické příslovce nebo příslovečná určení. V teoretické části se zaobírá problematikou slovosledu zvlášť věty anglické a zvláště pak i věty české. Následně se potýká s umístěním příslovečných určení v anglické větě. Praktická část se zabývá výzkumnými otázkami a dotazníkem zacíleným na příslovečná určení času, místa a způsobu.

Před zahájením výzkumu byly stanoveny dvě hypotézy, a jak se ukázalo, obě byly pravdivé. První hypotéza zněla, že studenti prvního ročníku budou mít více chyb než studenti ročníku třetího. Druhá hypotéza předpokládala, že prvního ročníku budou umísťovat příslovečné určení času na první místo.

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# Appendix

Vážení respondenti,

obracím se na Vás s žádostí o vyplnění krátkého dotazníku, který bude sloužit při výzkumu pro Bakalářskou práci na téma „Word order in English and Czech.“ Dotazník je zcela anonymní. Vyplňte ho prosím, co nejlépe dokážete. Předem děkuji za spolupráci.

Přeložte prosím následující věty do angličtiny tak, aby zůstal co nejpřesněji zachován jejich význam.

1. Osobně bych raději zůstal doma.

1. Skoro jsme se ztratili.

1. Naštěstí se mu nic nestalo.

1. Dorazili jsme asi před 15 minutami.

1. Minulý týden jsem byl nemocný.
2. Zajímá tě to vůbec?

1. Obvykle v sobotu večer jíme v restauraci.

1. V září byli všichni společně lyžovat v Alpách.