

A NOTE ON THE RELATION BETWEEN THE ARTICLE IN ENGLISH  
AND WORD ORDER IN POLISH

Part 2 (questions)

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At the end of the first part of the Note (Szwedek 1972a) I suggested a few problems to be investigated within the study of Polish equivalents of the English article<sup>1</sup>. Among others I mentioned word order in questions. The present paper attempts to describe a few facts concerning this problem.

YES-NO questions

According to the traditional point of view we would expect that word order in the following two questions (read with a normal interrogative intonation)

(1) Czy w pokoju siedziała dziewczyna?

(Whether in room was sitting girl)

(2) Czy dziewczyna siedziała w pokoju?

(Whether girl was sitting in room?)

is irrelevant, and that they mean the same. We will find, though, that this is not the case, and that (1) can be used as a sequence sentence to

(3) Wszedłem do dużego pokoju.

(I entered to large room)

but not to

(4) Wśród ludzi na korytarzu szukałem dziewczyny.

(Among people on corridor I was looking for girl)

which, in turn, can only be followed by (2).

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<sup>1</sup> This work was sponsored by the Center of Applied Linguistics, Washington, D. C. and Ford Foundation.

In both (1) and (2) the NP's preceding the verb are coreferential with the NP's in final position in (4) and (3) respectively.

For (1) (with the same intonation) another reading seems to be possible. The initial sentence, then, could be something like

- (5) *Widzisz tu dziewczynę i chłopca.*  
(You see here girl and boy)

It is obvious that the two interpretations have two different meanings — noncoreferential (indefinite) and coreferential (contrastive) (both, of course, are alternative questions). It is only superfluous to say that the choice of one interpretation or the other depends on the preceding context. It may also be indirectly connected with whether the two sentences are uttered by the same speaker — which seems to be the case with the sequence (5) - (1) — or by two different speakers, as it seems to be the case with the sequence (3) - (1). The investigation of such a possibility is beyond the scope of the present paper.

The conclusions of this very short discussion are as follows: in YES-NO questions

- I) the NP preceding the verb in the sequence question is coreferential with the NP in the initial sentence.  
 II) the NP in final position in the sequence question has two interpretations:  
 a) a more general, noncoreferential one.  
     With (3) as the initial sentence, (1) is, then, paraphrased as  
 (6) *Czy w pokoju siedziała jakaś dziewczyna czy ktoś inny?*  
 (Whether in room was sitting some girl whether somebody else?)  
 b) a more specific, coreferential one, with limited choice.  
     (1) is, then, paraphrased as  
 (7) *Czy w pokoju siedziała dziewczyna czy chłopiec?*  
 (Whether in room was sitting girl or boy?)

III) The difference between IIa and IIb depends on the preceding context.

The facts presented above lead to a more general observation explaining the difference between examples (1) and (2). First we have to note that there is a NP-alternative in (1) and no such alternative exists for the NP under consideration in (2) (unless the stress is changed). Thus it is quite natural to hear

- (3) *Wszedłem do dużego pokoju. (6) Czy w pokoju siedziała dziewczyna*  
 (I went in to large room. Whether in room was sitting girl  
 czy ktoś inny (or czy chłopiec)?  
 whether somebody else (whether boy))?

while we cannot have a sequence like

- (4) *Wśród ludzi na korytarzu szukałem dziewczyny. (8) Czy dziewczyna*  
 (Among people on corridor I was looking for girl. Whether girl  
 siedziała w pokoju czy chłopiec?  
 was sitting in room whether boy?).

Instead we expect

- (9) *Czy dziewczyna siedziała w pokoju czy na schodach?*  
 (Whether girl was sitting in room whether on stairs?),

i.e. we have the last element alternation. This is also valid for verbs, for example

- (10) *Czy płakała dziewczyna czy chłopiec?*  
 (Whether was crying girl whether boy?)

but (11) *Czy dziewczyna płakała czy się śmiała?*  
 (Whether girl was crying or laughing?).

It is interesting to see that in all the examples above the intonation structure remains unchanged, but with the change of the word order the relation of the intonation to the sentence structure becomes different, rendering different semantic readings. Notice that if the sentence stress stays with the word the meaning of the sentence remains the same regardless of word order (see examples (12) and (13) below).

Since alternation in YES-NO questions is connected with the last element it becomes clear why there can be only one, coreferential interpretation of the NP preceding the verb.

Since word order shifts are normally impossible in English the distinction discussed above must be expressed in a different way. It is intonation. Intonation is available for the same distinction in Polish, too. For example, (2) with sentence stress on *dziewczyna* can be paraphrased as

- (12) *Czy dziewczyna siedziała w pokoju czy ktoś inny?*  
 (Whether girl was sitting in room whether somebody else?),

and with the stress on the verb, as

- (13) *Czy dziewczyna siedziała w pokoju czy stała?*  
 (Whether girl was sitting in room whether standing?),

and (2) with the stress on *w pokoju* can be paraphrased as (9).

#### Specific questions

In view of what was said in Szwedok (1972b) and about YES-NO questions above we would expect the difference between

- (14) *Kiedy chłopiec wyszedł?*  
 (When boy left?)

and (15) *Kiedy wyszedł chłopiec?*  
 (When left boy?)

to be the same as between, for example

(16) Kobieta wyszła z domu.  
(Woman went out from house.)

and (17) Z domu wyszła kobieta.

(From house went out woman.) (Cf. Szwedek 1972b)

Analysing (14) and (15) we note that they are not synonymous.

(14) may be a sequence sentence to, for example

(18) O godz. 10<sup>00</sup> do domu wszedł chłopiec.  
(At 10 : 00 into house went boy.)

and (15) a sequence sentence to, for example

(19) O godz. 10<sup>00</sup> do domu wszedł chłopiec i dziewczyna.  
(At 10 : 00 into house went boy and girl.)

It is clear that specific questions are similar to YES-NO questions in that

a) the sentence stress falls on the last word (at least in the examples in this paper),

b) word order expresses a similar difference in that the last NP in the question implies a choice. Except that (15) has only one, contrastive (and coreferential) interpretation.

It is worth noting that there are cases in which the last NP can have two interpretations. Compare

(20) Kiedy chłopca widziałeś?  
(When boy you saw?)

and (21) Kiedy widziałeś chłopca?  
(When you saw boy?)

(20) is clearly coreferential with the NP in an initial sentence.

(21) seems to have two interpretations:

a) coreferential (contrastive) with (22) as its initial sentence.

(22) Znam i chłopca i dziewczynę.  
(I know and boy and girl.)

b) noncoreferential which in the case of (21) seems to be generic. Two remarks are in order with regard to b). First, genericness seems to depend on the verb and its form<sup>2</sup> since a generic reading is inconceivable for (15). Secondly, I suspect that there is a difference in intonation between the two readings the initial pitch being higher in b).

Leaving interpretation b) aside we may conclude that YES-NO questions and specific questions are alike in that

A) The NP preceding the verb always has a coreferential interpretation (examples (2), (14), (20)) (the various possibilities offered by the application of contrastive stress are ignored here),

B) the NP in the final position always presents an alternative (examples (1), (10), (15)).

They differ in that the NP in the final position in YES-NO questions has two readings while in specific question one reading. This is only natural since it is the nature of specific questions to ask about details of some already mentioned object. Since, as I wrote before, it is the last element that is stressed and connects with the question word, in the case of final NP in specific questions (as in (15) and (21)) the only possible interpretation is the coreferential one.

In view of what was said in my earlier paper (Szwedek 1972b) and above, an interesting conclusion may be drawn about the nature of the change of the word order. The significance of the change of the word order does not consist in the change itself but in that it alters the relations between the segmental and suprasegmental structures of the sentence<sup>3</sup>.

#### REFERENCES

- Szwedek, A. 1974.a "A note on the relation between the article in English and word order in Polish". *Papers and studies in contrastive linguistics* 2. Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University.
- Szwedek, A. 1974.b "Some aspects of definiteness and indefiniteness of nouns in Polish" *Papers and studies in contrastive linguistics* 2. Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University.

<sup>2</sup> In Polish two possibilities exist with regard to the above mentioned relation. Either the word order changes and the intonation structure remains or vice versa. In English there is only one way — to change the intonation structure.

<sup>3</sup> I leave this statement as a mere suggestion here since a paper on genericness in English and Polish is in preparation and I hope to come to some more definite results.