

Was Older Czech Really Verb-Final?

1. Introduction¹

- in the Czech in the period of humanism, a predicate verb was often placed in the final position (Encyklopedický slovník češtiny, 2002 : 79, Havránek, 1979 : 58–60, Lamprecht – Šlosar – Bauer, 1986 : 371–372, Cuřín, 1985 : 49).
- Meyer (2005): "... see a development from verb-second (14th/15th century) to verb-final (16th–18th century) in Old Czech and back to verb-second in the 19th century."
- Havránek (1979: 58): "According to the example of Latin, the final position of a verb is predominant..."
- impressionistic descriptions of the word order, based on the New Czech competence
- how frequent was the final position of the verb? Was Older Czech a SOV-language?

2. Research of the word order in Older Czech

- quantitative analysis of the placement of a verb in Older Czech
- predicate synthetic (one-word) verbal forms in the indicative main clauses
- basis for a larger description of the word order in Older Czech

3. Linguistic material

- from reliable editions from 19th–21th century
- text genres:
 - administrative texts and official letters (e. g. official proclamations by sovereigns)
 - private letters
 - historiography
 - scientific texts
 - technical and educative literature
 - religious texts
 - entertaining literature
 - political texts, polemics, commentaries to the present events
 - prefaces and dedications
- excerption database: 2082 indicative sentences consisting of more than two word order units

4. Theoretical background

- a slightly modified theory of the topic-focus articulation in the theoretical frame of the functional generative description (Šgall – Hajičová – Buráňová, 1980; Mikulová et al., 2005).
- syntactic analyses of the Older Czech according to the Prague Dependency Treebank

4.1. The deep and surface word orders

- **the deep word order:** a structure of nodes in dependency trees on the tectogramatic (deep) layer. The nodes are arranged from the left to the right, from the contextually bound ones (topic) to the contextually unbound ones (focus), according to the rising communicative dynamism. The verb constitutes a border line between topic and focus.

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- **the surface word order:** influenced not only by the topic-focus articulation, but also by other factors (e. g. grammatical connection of two members, phonetical organization of the text, stylistics etc.).

4. 2. Possible values of the topic-focus articulation at the verb node:

- theme (the meaning of the verb is known from the previous context, the verb doesn't bring new information to the sentence)
- transition (the verb is contextually unbound, it brings new information to the sentence, but it is not the main piece of new information)
- focus (the verb is contextually unbound, it brings the most important piece of new information to the sentence)

4. 3. Surface word order positions (modification of the Svoboda's system, 1984):

- beginning of a clause
- middle of a clause
- position in front of the postponed member (i.e. in front of a subordinated clause, a transgressive construction or a part of a comparison using conjunction *než* or *jako*, whenever each of these constructions appears at the end of a sentence)
- end of a clause

5. General results

Table 1 – Placement of the verb in Older Czech, disregarding the topic-focus value of the verb

Placement of the verb	Occurrence	%
At the beginning and in the middle of the clause	863	41,45
In front of the postponed member	444	21,33
At the end of the clause	775	37,22
All	2082	100

Table 2 – Placement of the transition verbs in Older Czech

Placement of the verb	Occurrence	%
At the beginning and in the middle of the clause	756	42,4
In front of the postponed member	427	23,95
At the end of the clause	600	33,65
All	1783	100

- (1) <Službu svú.**FOCUS** **vzkazují**.**TRANSITION**,> *múdrí a opatrní přátelé milí!* (RožmitPís)
 lit.: <Service my.**FOCUS** I_announce.**TRANSITION**,> *wise and prudent friends dear!*
 <I affirm.**TRANSITION** I am ready for any service to you.**FOCUS**,> *my dear wise and prudent friends!*

Table 3 – Placement of the verbs in focus in Older Czech

Placement of the verb	Occurrence	%
At the beginning and in the middle of the clause	90	34,22
In front of the postponed member	8	3,04

At the end of the clause	165	62,74
All	263	100

- (2) Ó pro Buoh, pro matku boží, nechod'te tam, <za to.TOPIC vás.TOPIC **prosím.FOCUS.**>
(FrantPráv)
lit.: *O my God, o God's mother, don't go there, <for that.TOPIC you.TOPIC I_beg.FOCUS>*
O my God, o God's mother, don't go there, <I beg.FOCUS of you.TOPIC for that.TOPIC>
- In total, most verbs **do not** stay at the end of the sentence (62,78 %, table 1). This allows to refute the Havránek's statement about the predominant final position of the verb in Older Czech (1979: 58).

6. Placement of the verb in specific constructions

6. 1. Strong tendency towards the final position of the verb in constructions with a negative verb in focus

- (3) *Podle pak těla mají je [matky své děti, Š. Z.] uměle a rozšafně chovati, včas mírně pokrmíti a časně také položití a zase zdvihnouti.*
<Čehož.TOPIC mnohé matky.TOPIC **neumějí.FOCUS,**>
ale do nich pokrm dcpají bezděky, až zase vracejí, lecjaks položí, nic nešetří, kdy jeho čas. (AugKáz)

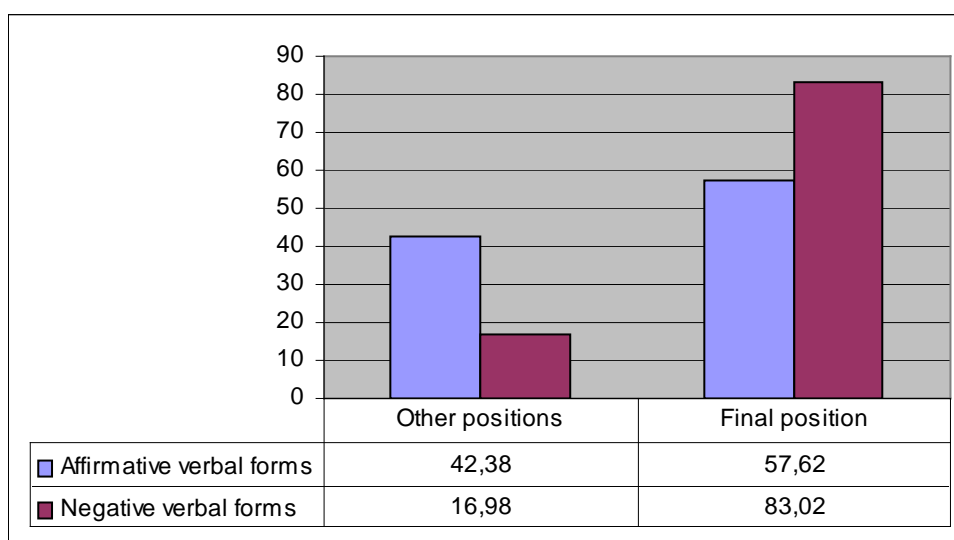
Mothers should raise their children carefully and prudently, with respect to the age and bodies of children, they should feed them adequately in time and put them to bed in time and wake them again.

lit. <*This.TOPIC many mothers.TOPIC **cannot.FOCUS,***>

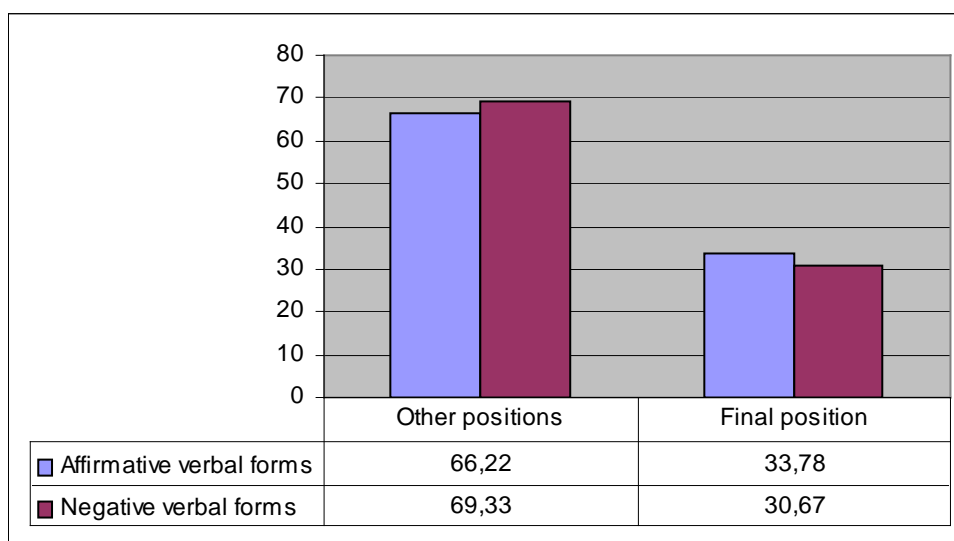
<*Many mothers.TOPIC **cannot do.FOCUS** this.TOPIC*>

but they stuff the children with food without any limit, and so the children are sick, they put them to bed anyhow, they don't care for the right time.

Graph 4 – Placement of the affirmative and negative forms of verbs in focus (in %)



Graph 5 – Placement of the affirmative and negative forms of transition verbs (in %)



6. 2. Strong tendency towards the initial position of the verb in constructions with a connecting particle *i*

(4) <*I řekla*.**TRANSITION** *Maria*.**TOPIC**:>

Aj, služebnice Páně, staniž mi se podlé slova tvého.

<*I odšel*.**FOCUS** *od ní*.**TOPIC** *anděl*.**TOPIC**> (BiblKralL)

lit.: <*And told*.**TRANSITION** *Mary*.**TOPIC**:>

<*Mary*.**TOPIC** *said*.**TRANSITION**, >

“Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it to me according to your word.”

lit.: <*And departed*.**FOCUS** *from her*.**TOPIC** *the angel*.**TOPIC**>

<*The angel*.**TOPIC** *departed*.**FOCUS** *from her*.**TOPIC**.>

(5) „Milý hosti, jestliže chceš obvyknúti, co duom má za právo, chciť rád přieti.“

<*I poděkoval*.**FOCUS** *mu*.**TOPIC** *bratr*.**TOPIC**>

a když bylo u večer, ustlali sú tomu bratru na kamnách. (FrantPráv)

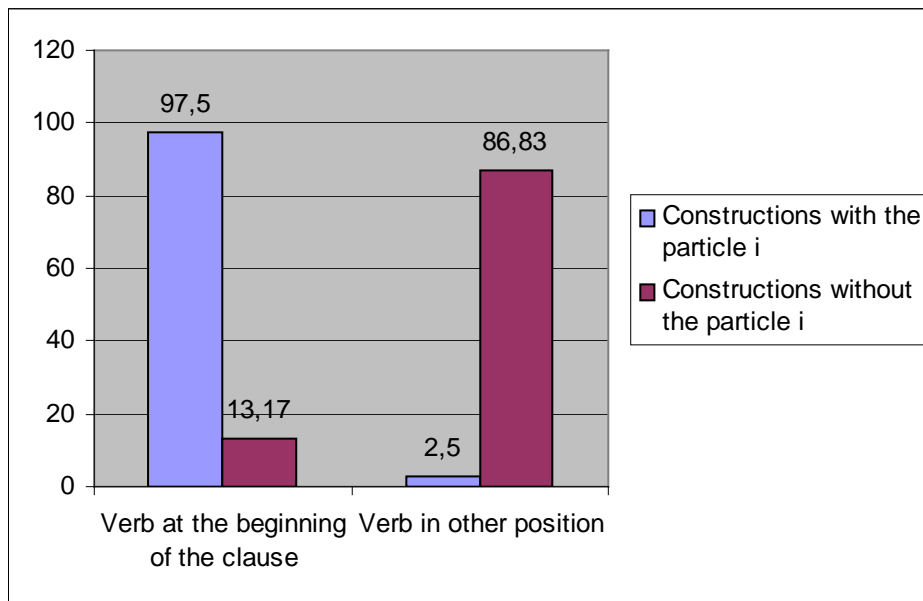
Dear guest, if you want to respect the customs of our house, I welcome you with pleasure.

lit.: <*And said thanks*.**FOCUS** *to him*.**TOPIC** *the brother*.**TOPIC**, >

<*And the brother*.**TOPIC** *said thanks*.**FOCUS** *to him*.**TOPIC**>

and in the evening, they made the bed for the brother on the stove.

Graph 6 – Placement of the verbs in constructions with the connecting particle *i* (in %)



- the only type of construction in Older Czech where the position of the verb is grammaticalized

6. 3. Further constructions with a specific placement of the verb analyzed

- sentences with parallel structures
- sentences with coordinated verbs
- sentences with expressions of the quantification, qualification and comparison
- epistolary formulas (e. g. greetings, wishes)
- sentences with nominal content clauses
- sentences with unexpressed subjects
- quotation sentences
- sentences introducing new elements to the scene

7. Conclusion

- the SOV order was not the predominant order during the period of Older Czech
- the final position of the verb was not grammaticalized; it is to be treated as a matter of stylistics, not grammar
- the only case of grammaticalization is the initial position of the verbs in constructions with the connecting particle *i*

8. Literature

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