

Fachfragen

Ein Schüler schrieb in einer Arbeit folgenden Schlußsatz: "They found an old, dirty chest, in which a treasure had been."

Es herrscht unter den Fachkollegen unserer Schule Unstimmigkeit darüber, ob die Wortstellung in diesem Relativsatz möglich ist. Müßte es nicht besser heißen: "... , in which had been a treasure"? Oder: "... in which a treasure had been put (laid, hidden)"?

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This is a very unlikely sentence, in its present form; but the reasons for this are not solely connected with problems of word order. To reverse the order does produce an acceptable sentence, of course (i. e. "in which had been a treasure", or, more likely, "in which there had been a treasure"); and if one chooses this way out, then it avoids having to state which particular action was involved (e. g. "put", "hidden", "laid"), and leaves the statement completely inspecific. If, however, one retains the same order, then whether the sentence needs to be modified or not depends really on the interpretation of the verb "be" which was intended. In the sentence as it stands, the absence of a main verb at the end, and of any complement following, disallows the usual copulative sense of the verb "be" and forces an existential interpretation (i. e. "in which a treasure had been existing" - cf. "God is", that is, "exists"). In speech, a strong intonational movement would have to be given to "been". This is semantically rather odd, as one does not usually refer to the capacity for indefinite existence of inanimate objects, and this is why the sentence seems anomalous in this form. But note that a more explicitly durational verb could substitute for "been" here without difficulty: "in which a treasure had

lain (for many years, without being seen by anyone)" is perfectly alright.

Incidentally, the use of "treasure" in its countable sense, i. e. "a highly valued object or person", as opposed to its general sense of "wealth", is not particularly common in present-day English, and it would be worth checking to see that this was the sense intended.

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