

THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE, COMMUNICATIVE VALUE AND PROSODIC WEIGHT OF THE ENGLISH OBJECT

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More than 15 years ago Jan Firbas started an inquiry into the means of functional sentence perspective (= FSP) employed by the spoken language, with a view to testing the results achieved by functional analysis at the non-prosodic level (Firbas 1968). In his article 'On the prosodic features of the modern English finite verb-object combination as means of functional sentence perspective' (1969), he put to the proof and corroborated his earlier conclusion that in English (and possibly in all Indo-European languages) the object contributes to the development of the communication more (carries a higher degree of communicative dynamism) than the finite verb provided it is context independent (Firbas 1959a). He examined how the difference in the communicative values of the object and the verb is reflected at the prosodic level.

In this paper I shall link up with Firbas' article of 1969. I shall leave the question of the finite verb-object combination aside and concentrate on the object, this time paying attention to both the object of the finite and the object of the non-finite verb. I shall deal with the relation between the formal structural complexity of the object, its communicative value, and its prosodic weight.

For this purpose I have analyzed the text of MacCarthy's *English conversation reader* (1956), which represents about 900 clauses and contains a total of 463 direct, indirect and prepositional objects. The main part of the discussion and all the conclusions presented in this paper are based on an analysis of 412 objects (to be discussed in sections I and III). The remaining 51 objects will only be touched upon as special cases in section II. The examples adduced for discussion will be accompanied by two figures, the first indicating the page, the second the line on which the object begins (headings are not included). Where necessary, at least the minimum context will be given in brackets.

I. CRITERIA OF CLASSIFICATION

For the purpose of the present paper I do not consider it necessary to make a distinction between objects functioning within the principal clause and objects functioning within a subordinate clause or a semi-clause. The objects in the exam-

ined text have been analyzed from, and grouped according to, the viewpoints of their internal structure, their function in FSP and their prosodic features.

1. Internal structure

The internal structure of an object ranges from a mere pronoun to a subordinate clause. From the viewpoint of the internal structure the non-special objects in the examined text have been divided into the following groups (for examples see p. 54—6):

	no. of cases
(A) objects containing no modification	145
(B) objects containing closed-system premodification	112
(C) objects containing attributes	58
(D) (semi-)clausal objects	97
total	412

Objects containing no modification (A) are represented by 128 pronouns (98 personal, 2 reflexive, 7 possessive, 10 demonstrative and 11 indefinite pronouns) and by 17 non-pronominal elements (5 proper names, 4 numerals, 6 adverbs and 2 infinitives).

Objects containing closed-system (= c-s) premodification (B) are represented by 73 nouns with a determiner and by 29 nouns with a c-s premodifier, i.e. with a predeterminer (e.g. *all, both*), a quantifier (e.g. *many, a few*), an ordinal or a cardinal. (For c-s premodification means, cf. Quirk et al. 1976.136—46.)

The subdivision of objects containing attributes (C) is based on Svoboda's (1968) division of attributive constructions, which have the following representatives:

simple attributive construction

— (c-s premodification) + open-class premodifier¹ + N

— ((c-s premodification) + (open-class premodifier)) + N + postmodifier²

semi-clausal attributive construction

— NP + NP (= apposition)

— NP + infinitival semi-clause

— NP + participial semi-clause

clausal attributive construction

— NP + substantive clause

— NP + relative clause

The objects with attributes (C) in the examined text are represented by 44 simple, 8 semi-clausal and 6 clausal attributive constructions.

The group of (semi-)clausal objects (D) contains 14 infinitival, participial and gerundial semi-clauses and 83 object clauses.

For the purpose of the present paper, I regard the above structure-types (A, B, C, D) as a graded scale of complexity of internal structure.

¹ An open-class premodifier can be a noun, an adjective, a Saxon genitive and a participle.

² A postmodifier can be an *of*-genitive, a prepositional phrase, an infinitive and an adverb.

2. Function in FSP

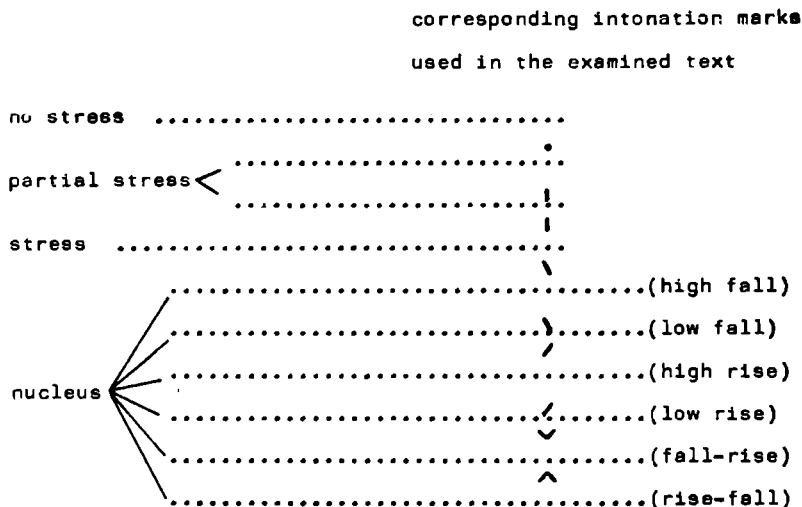
Sentence constituents (subject, verb, object, subject complement, object complement, adverbial) represent communicative units, functioning within the distributional field of the sentence, clause or semi-clause (Svoboda 1968). According to Firbas (e. g. 1981), communicative units differ in the relative extent to which they contribute to the development of the communication, i.e. they carry different degrees of communicative dynamism (= CD); the degree of CD is determined by the interplay of the linear modification, the semantic structure and the immediately relevant verbal and/or situational context. Different degrees of CD are reflected by the following scale of thematic, transitional and rhematic functions (based on Firbas, e.g. 1981, and — with regard to the thematic sphere— on Svoboda 1981): theme proper (Th_p), theme-proper oriented theme ($Th_{(p)}$), diatheme oriented theme ($Th_{(d)}$), diatheme (Th_d), transition proper (Tr_p), transition (Tr), rheme (Rh), rheme proper (Rh_p).

For the purpose of this paper I regard themes proper and theme-proper oriented themes as one group denoted by Th_p and referred to as themes proper. Analogically, diathemes (Th_d) also cover diatheme oriented themes.

The non-special objects in the examined text represent the following FSP functions: Th_p (100 cases), Th_d (80 cases), Rh (22 cases), Rh_p (210 cases). The transitional sphere is only represented by some of the special cases.

3. Prosodic features

A sentence (clause) represents a distributional field of CD and, at the same time, provides a distributional field of prosodic weight (Firbas 1980). Gimson's (1962) gamut of prosodic weight consists of the following prosodic features:



(In addition to the above normal partial stresses, stresses and nuclei, the examined text contains emphatic partial stresses (\mathbb{N}), stresses (\mathbb{N}) and nuclei (e.g. \mathbb{N} , \mathbb{N})).

The prosodic weight of a clause constituent is determined by its weightiest prosodic feature (Firbas 1980.126, note 4). The last nucleus within the distributional field — with the exception of a low rise after a fall — represents the most prominent prosodic feature, i.e. the intonation centre; the low rise is functionally and prosodically lighter than the fall preceding it within the same distributional field (Firbas 1969.51 and 1980.126). The functional and the prosodic analyses of the examined text (presented in section III.3) make it necessary to classify objects bearing a low rise after a fall not only as lighter than objects bearing other nuclei, but also as lighter than objects bearing stress (cf. Table 4).

From the viewpoint of the prosodic features, the examined non-special objects have been divided into the following groups (objects with more prosodic features than one being classified according to the weightiest feature they bear): no stress (118 cases), partial stress (20 cases), a low rise after a fall (33 cases), stress (18 cases), a nucleus (223 cases).

II. SPECIAL CASES

Apart from 412 non-special objects, the examined text contains 51 special cases: 19 objects as question-focus anticipators, 21 objects as (semi-)clausal antecedents and 11 multiple objects. Since the scope of the present paper is limited, I shall confine myself to illustrating the basic differences between the special cases on the one hand and the non-special objects on the other.

Question-focus anticipators serving as objects have been separated from other objects because of the heterogeneity of the functions they perform:

$$\begin{array}{r}
 \text{S.1} \quad \overset{i}{\text{What}} \quad \text{d}^{\text{}} \text{you} \quad \text{mean?} \quad (68.06) \\
 \hline
 \text{Th}_d + \text{Tr}_p \quad \text{Tr}_p \quad \text{Th}_p \quad \text{Rh}_p
 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r}
 \text{S.2} \quad \text{What} \quad \text{did} \quad \text{you} \quad \overset{*}{\text{say?}} \quad (56.06) \\
 \hline
 \text{Rh}_p + \text{Tr}_p \quad \text{Tr}_p \quad \text{Th}_p \quad \text{Tr}
 \end{array}$$

According to Firbas (1976) and Svoboda (personal communication), question-focus anticipators as a rule (in unmarked use) function within the thematic section of the distributional field (as Th_d), at the same time being oriented to and linked with Rh_p (cf. S.1). In marked use they can become the focus of the question themselves, losing their diathematic feature and functioning as Rh_p (S.2). In addition to their thematic and rhematic functions, question-focus anticipators participate, unlike other objects, in the function of Tr_p (co-signalling modality). (The offered formulation does not take second-instance uses into consideration.)

The specificity of an object serving as a (semi-)clausal antecedent will be illustrated by the following examples (the functional analysis is based on Svoboda 1968; i = indicator of inferiority):

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{Th}_d^0 \\ \hline \text{Tr}_p^0 \end{array} \quad \text{Tr}^0$$

S.3 They're 'all 'stuck

$$\text{Rh}_p^0$$

in an album that I got as a Christmas present. (67.16)

$$\text{Th}_d^1 \quad i \quad \text{Th}_p^1 \quad \text{Tr}_p^1 + \text{Tr}^1 \quad \text{Rh}_p^1$$

$$\text{Th}_d^0 \quad \text{Tr}_p^0 \quad \text{Rh}_p^0$$

S.4 The flat we had before was so tiny, ... (73.26)

$$\text{Th}_d^1 \quad \text{Th}_p^1 \quad \text{Tr}_p^1 + \text{Tr}^1 \quad \text{Rh}_p^1$$

In the above examples the relative clauses, together with their antecedents (*an album, the flat*), function as communicative units of zero rank. These communicative units represent distributional fields of the first rank (subfields), in which the antecedent serves as Th_d . The prosodic features of the antecedent do not seem to be determined by its function within the distributional subfield, where it is an object, i.e. an item to be examined here, but rather by the very antecedental function performed within the main distributional field.

Multiple objects cause certain difficulties in interpretation. Grammatically, they seem to represent two (or more) elements rather than one. Semantically, multiple objects range from undoubtedly two (or more) elements, over possibly two (or more) elements, possibly one element, to undoubtedly one element. The contextual evaluation of multiple objects often depends on their semantic interpretation:

S.5 You know abstract and concrete, (don't you?) (64.08)

$$\text{Th}_p \quad \text{Tr}_p + \text{Rh}_p \quad \text{Th}_d$$

S.6 (I think) one of them had a bad fall or something. (62.10)

$$\text{Th}_d \quad \text{Tr}_p \quad \text{Rh}_p \quad \text{Th}_d$$

S.7 ... and lots of people we know have had bronchitis or worse.

$$\text{Th}_d \quad \text{Tr}_p (+\text{Tr}) \quad \text{Rh}_p \quad \text{Rh}_p$$

(71.15)

III. ANALYSIS

1. Internal structure and function in FSP

Before discussing the relation between the formal structural complexity of the object and the communicative value of the object, let us have a look at the following examples of the formal and the functional classification of the examined objects, together with their prosodic features (which will be discussed later on):
 (A) modificationless objects

S.8 Would you just get it for me? (65.19)
 $\text{Tr}_p \quad \text{Th}_p \quad \text{Tr}_p \quad \text{Rh}_p \quad \text{Th}_p \quad \text{Th}_p$

S.9 (No, they gave me this wrist-watch.) I've always wanted
 $\text{Th}_p \quad \text{Tr}_p \quad \text{Tr}_p \quad \text{Tr}_p + \text{Rh}_p$
one. (67.20)
 Th_d

S.10 (I'll see if) I can get Dick to give it me for my birthday.
 $\text{Th}_p \quad \text{Tr}_p \quad \text{Tr} \quad \text{Rh} \quad \text{Rh}_p$
 / (58.16)

S.11 (I couldn't read my father's for long time. Now I've got
 used to it.) — Has he got used to yours? (68.22)
 $\text{Tr}_p \quad \text{Th}_d \quad \text{Tr}_p + \text{Tr} \quad \text{Rh}_p$

(B) objects containing c-s premodification

S.12 (Couldn't we have a better fire in here? This one's only got
 one bar.) It really hardly heats the room at all. (70.05)
 $\text{Th}_p \quad \text{Tr}_p \quad \text{Tr}_p \quad \text{Tr}_p + \text{Tr} \quad \text{Th}_d \quad \text{Rh}_p$

S.13 (Our chief trouble at the moment seems to be curtains.)
Most of the ones we brought with us don't fit
 $\text{Th}_d \quad \text{Tr}_p \quad \text{Rh}_p$
these windows, ... (75.02)
 Th_d

S.14 (The ^vbest places were 'more than we could af\ford, of course. And there were ^vothers that ...) I 'checked lup the ad\resses

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{Th}_p & \text{Tr}_p+\text{Tr} & \text{Rh} \end{array}$$
on the \map they ,gave me. (60.10)

$$\text{Rh}_p$$

S.15 (... 'what would you 'like to \do, 'go up and 'take off your 'things - ... - or 'how about a \drink first, ... — \Well,) I'd ^vlove a \drink. (62.21)

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{Th}_p & \text{Tr}_p & \text{Tr} & \text{Rh}_p \end{array}$$

S.16 ('Are you on the 'telephone yet? — \No, ... They 'never seem to have enough ,instruments or ^vlines or something to go \round. — Well the 'fact ^vis,) 'so many 'more 'people want a \telephone.

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{Th}_d & \text{Tr}_p+\text{Tr} & \text{Rh}_p \end{array}$$
(75.18)

(C) objects containing attributes

S.17 (^vMost people 'nowadays think it's an \antiquated form of ,heating, but I ,must say) 'I \like an ,open ,fire. (74.15)

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{Th}_d & \text{Tr}_p+\text{Rh}_p & \text{Th}_d \end{array}$$

S.18 (So you ,see) they've 'all got the 'same i'dea at the ^vback of them, (though it's a 'bit hard to \see in ,some cases.) (65.28)

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \boxed{\text{Tr}_p} & \text{Tr}_p+\text{Tr} & \text{Rh} \\ \text{Th}_d & & \end{array}$$

$$\text{Rh}_p$$

S.19 (... \brevis, meaning \short.) We ,get

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{Th}_p & \text{Tr}_p+\text{Tr} & \end{array}$$
the 'abstract 'noun \brevity" from it. (65.02)

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{Rh}_p & & \text{Th}_p \end{array}$$

(D) (semi-)clausal objects

S.20 ("No ,sugar, thanks.) I've given \up taking ,sugar in ,coffee
 Th_p Tr_p+Tr Th_d

 since the \days of the \sugar shortage. (78.10)

 Rh_p

S.21 (Oh,) I ex\pect we shall go to the \sea as \usual. (67.03)
 Th_p Tr_p+Tr Rh_p

The thematic objects within the above examples are — from the viewpoint of the narrow scene (cf. Firbas 1981) — context-dependent (derivable from the immediately relevant verbal or situational context) (cf. S.8, 9, 12, 17, 20) or at least presented as such (S.13 — *these windows* has not been introduced in the preceding text). The objects carry a low degree of CD. Th_d 's are functionally more important than Th_p 's. The rhematic objects are context-independent. Context-independent elements are either completely underivable from the context (S.10, 14, 18, 19, 21) or they are contextually tied and have become disengaged by means of contrast (S.11), selection (S.15) or recapitulation (S.16) (cf. Firbas 1982.283). Contrast, selection and recapitulation represent underivable information, which makes the contextually tied elements function as context-independent. The rhematic objects carry a high degree of CD; the highest degree of CD is represented by Rh_p 's.

The proportions of the functions performed by the examined objects at the level of FSP are given in the following table:

Table 1

Structure type	No. of cases	FSP functions in per cent				Total
		Th_p	Th_d	Rh	Rh_p	
A	145	69.0	15.9	2.0	13.1	100.0
B	112	0.0	38.4	12.5	49.1	100.0
C	58	0.0	10.4	8.6	81.0	100.0
D	97	0.0	8.2	0.0	91.8	100.0
total	412					

Modificationless objects (A) are prevailingly thematic, with a high percentage of Th_p 's. Objects with c-s premodification (B) are more rhematic than thematic, the thematic units being represented only by Th_d 's. Objects with attributes (C) show a clear shift in favour of the rhematic functions, and a decrease of Th_d 's. Semi-clausal and clausal objects (D) show a clear tendency to be rhematic; as Th_d 's they represent an evident minority.

The overall tendency displayed by the objects is the following: the more complex the internal structure, the stronger the tendency to function as a rhematic unit.

The modificationless objects that are rhematic as well as the (semi-)clausal objects that are thematic (i.e. the types of objects that represent deviations from the above tendency) testify to the operation of the interplay of linear modification, semantic structure and context (and prosodic features), which signals the degree of CD of the communicative unit. Through the interplay of these factors even a pronoun (characterized by simple internal structure) can, in accordance with the communicative aim of the speaker, carry a very high degree of CD; similarly, a whole (semi-)clause (characterized by complex internal structure) can carry a low degree of CD.

In the above discussion no distinction was made between direct objects (O_d 's), indirect objects (O_i 's) and prepositional objects (O_p 's). Within the objects of types B, C and D, the proportion of O_i 's and O_p 's is too small to allow of any generalizations concerning the differences between O_d 's, O_i 's and O_p 's in regard to their functions in FSP: O_i 's and O_p 's represent 4.1 % of the total of 267 objects of the types B, C and D. Within group A, represented by the total of 145 objects, O_d 's represent 76.6 %, O_i 's 13.1 %, O_p 's 10.3 %. As to O_d 's, 84.7 % are thematic and 15.3 % are rhematic. With O_i 's the tendency to function as thematic units seems to be stronger than with O_d 's: 100 % of O_i 's are thematic (Th_p). O_p 's, on the other hand, tend to be more rhematic than O_d 's (and than O_i 's): 33.3 % of them are rhematic (Rh_p).

2. Internal structure and prosodic features

The different kinds of prosodic features occurring with the examined objects show the following ratios:

Table 2

Structure type	No. of cases	Prosodic features in per cent					Total
		no stress	partial stress	low rise	stress	nucleus	
A	145	77.2	2.8	4.8	1.4	13.8	100.0
B	112	5.3	12.5	13.4	12.5	56.3	100.0
C	58	0.0	3.4	5.2	3.4	88.0	100.0
D	97	0.0	0.0	8.2	0.0	91.8	100.0
total	412						

Modificationless objects (A) contain a high percentage of unstressed units (cf. S.8, 9); weightier prosodic features than the absence of stress occur with a minority of cases (S.8, 10, 11). A majority of objects with c-s premodification (B) bear partial stress, a low rise after a fall (S.13), stress (S.12) and, most fre-

quently, a nucleus (S.14, 15, 16). No stress is represented by a small percentage of objects. Most of the objects containing attributes (C) occur with a nucleus (S.19), a minority bear partial stress (S. 17), a low rise and stress (S. 18). Semi-clausal and clausal objects (D) display a clear tendency to bear a nucleus (S. 21); an evident minority occur with a low rise after a fall (S. 20).

The analysis suggests the following tendency in the relation between the internal structure and the prosodic weight: the more complex the internal structure, the higher the prosodic weight.

3. Function in FSP and prosodic features

The preceding analyses have demonstrated that with the increasing structural complexity of the object both the CD and the prosodic weight of the object rise. From the viewpoint of the relation between CD and prosodic weight, this conclusion testifies, though indirectly, to Firbas' (1980.126) observation that there is a high degree of congruence between the gamut of CD and the gamut of prosodic weight. Let us now have a closer look at the actual realization of this congruence. The following table gives the proportions of the different kinds of prosodic features within the FSP functions performed by the examined objects:

Table 3

FSP functions	No. of cases	Prosodic features in per cent					Total
		no stress	partial stress	low rise	stress	nucleus	
Th _p	100	97.0	3.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Th _d	80	26.3	21.3	41.2	11.3	0.0	100.0
Rh	22	0.0	0.0	0.0	40.9	59.1	100.0
Rh _p	210	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0
total	412						

The vast majority of Th_p's are unstressed. The 3.0 % of partially stressed Th_p's (cf. S.8) represent three pronominal prepositional objects. (In a more detailed functional analysis these objects would be qualified as theme-proper oriented themes). Th_d's occur with all the kinds of prosodic features except the nucleus. The low rise after a fall (S.13, 20), absence of stress (S.9) and partial stress (S.17) represent the majority of cases. Rh's only occur with the nucleus (S.10, 14) and stress (S.18); in both cases they are followed by Rh_p (adverbial phrase or prepositional object) bearing the intonation-centre nucleus. All Rh_p's occur with a nucleus (S.11, 15, 16, 19, 21).

The above paragraph presents a prosodic characterization of different FSP functions performed by the examined objects. Proceeding in a reverse direction, let us now present a functional characterization of the different prosodic features:

Table 4

Prosodic features	No. of cases	FSP functions in per cent				Total
		Th _p	Th _d	Rh	Rh _p	
no stress	118	82.2	17.8	0.0	0.0	100.0
partial stress	20	15.0	85.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
low rise	33	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
stress	18	0.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	100.0
nucleus	223	0.0	0.0	5.8	94.2	100.0
total	412					

Unstressed objects function exclusively within the thematic sphere; most of them are Th_p's. Partially stressed objects are, again, all thematic but they tend to carry a higher degree of CD: the majority of them are Th_d's, Th_p's representing a minority of cases. (The partially stressed Th_p's should be referred to as theme-proper oriented themes; they are represented by three pronominal prepositional objects.) The low rise is a powerful signal of the diathematic function. Stress is the only prosodic feature that functions within the thematic sphere (as Th_d) as well as the rhematic sphere (as Rh). The nucleus functions exclusively within the rhematic sphere, in the vast majority of cases accompanying Rh_p.

It should be borne in mind that like the inquiry into the relation between internal structure, CD, and prosodic weight, the above characterizations of FSP functions and prosodic features are based on an analysis of objects. The other sentence constituents have not been examined; the present conclusions cannot, therefore be regarded as generally valid. (For the functional analysis of other constituents cf. Firbas 1957, 1959a, 1959b, 1961a, 1961b, 1968 and 1969, Golková 1968 and Hladký 1968.)

Abbreviations

- BSE Brno studies in English
 CD communicative dynamism
 c-s closed system
 FSP functional sentence perspective
 N noun
 NP noun phrase
 O_d direct object
 O_i indirect object
 O_p prepositional object
 Rh rheme
 Rh_p rheme proper
 Th_d diatheme
 Th_p theme proper
 Tr transition
 Tr_p transition proper

Symbols

- A objects containing no modification
- B objects containing c-s premodification
- C objects containing attributes
- D (semi-)clausal objects

Graphic marks

- indicating an object
- indicating a sentence element other than object

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VNITŘNÍ STRUKTURA, SDĚLNÁ HODNOTA A PROZODICKÁ ZÁVAŽNOST ANGLICKÉHO PŘEDMĚTU

Článek je příspěvkem k funkční analýze mluveného jazyka. Autorka zkoumá vztah mezi strukturální složitostí předmětu, jeho funkcí ve větné perspektivě (v aktuálním členění vět-ném) a jeho prozodickými rysy. Výsledky analýzy, provedené v textu opatřeném zápisem prozodických rysů, podává ve formě tabulek a vyvozuje z nich tyto závěry: Výpovědní dynamičnost i prozodická závažnost předmětu úzce souvisejí s jeho strukturální složitostí. Předměty s jednoduchou vnitřní strukturou (např. předměty zájmené) mají nízkou výpovědní dynamičnost a malou prozodickou závažnost. S rostoucí složitostí vnitřní struktury se zvyšuje výpovědní dynamičnost i prozodická závažnost předmětu. Nejvyšší funkční a prozodickou závažnost vykazují předmětné věty. Stupeň prozodické závažnosti odpovídá stupni výpovědní dynamičnosti. Vlastní téma je ve většině případů nepřízvučné, diatéma nese všechny prozodické rysy kromě nukleárního tónu, réma je nositelem plného přízvuku a nukleárního tónu, vlastní réma vždy doprovází nukleární tón.

