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Theory

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2 Theory

This chapter provides a concise account of the selected theoretical framework, i.e. the theory of FSP, including the concept of Thematic Progressions, and a review of literature dealing with the defined research objectives.

2.1 The Theory of Functional Sentence Perspective

As has already been stated in the preceding chapter, the main theoretical framework that I chose for my analysis of the texts is the theory of Functional Sentence Perspective, which has been systematically developed since the publication of Vilém Mathesius' treatises on the subject matter.¹ Mathesius' thoughts on FSP have been further elaborated mainly by Jan Firbas and Aleš Svoboda. The results of their extensive investigation of the FSP phenomena can be found in the monographs of Svoboda (1981a, 1989) and Firbas (1992).² Despite the ongoing scientific enquiry into the FSP phenomena, especially recent attempts³ to elucidate the operation of the semantic factor of FSP, the three monographs are to be still regarded as the most authoritative accounts of the FSP theory available to this day. Therefore, I will now offer only a brief outline of the main aspects of the theory.

2.1.1 The Theme and the Rheme, Bipartition and Pluripartition

In general terms, the FSP theory looks at language communication, both written and spoken, as a dynamic system of information carrying packages that language users exchange in order to fulfil a particular communicative function (goal of

¹See primarily Mathesius (1939), reprinted in Mathesius (1947: 234-242).

²A number of Jan Firbas' pivotal studies on FSP have been made available to the scientific community in a set of posthumously published volumes entitled *Collected Works of Jan Firbas* beginning with Volume One (Firbas 2010) with articles originally published from 1951 to 1967.

³For example by Chamonikolasová (2005, 2007, 2008, 2010a), Chamonikolasová and Adam (2005), and Svoboda (2005).

communication). In literature on FSP, these packages, or *communicative units*⁴ are referred to by either *the theme* or *the rheme*. In other approaches to the study of sentences as information carriers, these communicative units may be termed *topic* and *focus*, or *topic* and *comment*. In one of his definitions, Vilém Mathesius uses also the terms *the basis* and *the nucleus*, synonymously with *the theme* and *the rheme*, to explain their nature:

“A closer examination of sentences from the point of assertiveness shows an overwhelming majority of all sentences to contain two basic content elements: a statement and an element about which the statement is made. . . . The element about which something is stated may be said to be the basis of the utterance or the theme, and what is stated about the basis is the nucleus of the utterance or the rheme. . . . The patterning of the sentence into the theme and the rheme is here called functional sentence perspective because this patterning is determined by the functional approach of the speaker.”

(Mathesius 1975: 81–82)

Identifying only the theme and the rheme in utterances is, in fact, a *bipartitional* approach to FSP analysis, because only two types of communicative units are recognized. Mathesius (1947: 238–239) was, nevertheless, well aware of the fact that other (sub)types of communicative units can be identified in a more detailed analysis. He used the following names for them:

- *the center of the basis*,
- *the center of the nucleus*, and
- *the accompanying expressions*.

Further investigation of these communicative units, carried out mainly by Jan Firbas and Aleš Svoboda, paved the way for today’s *pluripartitional* approach to FSP analysis. In pluripartitional analysis, a distributional field can be broken down into communicative units of the following types:

⁴For the definition of the term *communicative unit* and also the term *communicative (distributional) field*, see Svoboda (1968: 57–58).

Table 2.1: Communicative units in pluripartitional analysis

Unit Name	Abbreviation in Firbas (1992)
Theme Proper	ThPr
Theme-Proper Oriented Theme	ThPro
Diatheme Oriented Theme	DTho
Diatheme	DTh
Transition Proper	TrPr
Transition	Tr
Rheme	Rh
Rheme Proper	RhPr

The top-bottom ordering of the units in this table reflects the gradually rising degrees of *Communicative Dynamism*, i.e. “the relative extent to which a linguistic element contributes towards the further development of communication” (Firbas 1992: 8).⁵ In pluripartitional FSP analysis, the communicative units listed in Table 2.1 are identified and assigned to the elements of discourse on the basis of co-operation of four factors of FSP:

- *sentence linearity (linear modification)*,
- *Firbasian semantics*,
- *context*, and also
- *prosody* (in spoken discourse).

These four factors will now be briefly explained using Firbas’ example sentence *John has come to the dining room*.⁶

2.1.2 Sentence Linearity

Sentence linearity, or linear modification, co-determines the distribution of the degrees of communicative dynamism over sentence elements in a fairly straightforward way: by the “...position in the sentence. Roughly speaking, front-position would render them foundation-laying, end-position core-constituting” (Firbas 1981: 43). Thus, not taking into consideration the other three factors, the elements of the sentence *John has come to the dining room* would display gradually rising degrees of communicative dynamism, with the subject *John* carrying the lowest degree and the adverbial *to the dining room* the highest degree.

⁵See Firbas (1987) for further clarification of the concept.

⁶From Firbas (1999: 11).

2.1.3 Firbasian Semantics and Context

Assuming that all of the elements of the sentence *John has come to the dining room* are context independent, the semantic factor takes over the linearity factor. In this case, the adverbial functions merely as setting and the verb perspectives the sentence towards the subject. The subject then becomes communicatively more important (more dynamic) than the verb itself and the adverbial, it functions as the core (the rheme) of the message. Under these conditions, the degrees of communicative dynamism are assigned to the elements of this sentence in reverse order to sentence linearity, i.e. with the adverbial carrying the lowest degree and the subject carrying the highest degree.

Nevertheless, occurring within context, the very same sentence structure may function in different perspectives depending on the actual contextual conditions existing for the individual sentence elements at the time the sentence is heard by its recipient. In Firbas' own words,

“... if the adverbial, *to the dining room*, is the only context-dependent constituent, the sentence structure under discussion is perspectived to the subject: (i) *JOHN has come to the dining room*. If, however, the subject, *John*, is the only context-dependent constituent, the sentence structure is perspectived to the adverbial: (ii) *John has come to the DINING ROOM*. In regard to the dynamics of the communication, the different perspectives modify the meanings, which have come to serve as information, accordingly. The constituents perform different DSFs [= Dynamic Semantic Functions].”

(Firbas 1999: 12–13)

It follows that within context, the degrees of communicative dynamism are assigned to the elements of the sentence *John has come to the dining room* in accordance with the mutual co-operation of the contextual conditions and dynamic semantic functions. In the case labelled in the above quotation as (i), it is the subject *John* that would be carrying the highest degree of communicative dynamism. In the case labelled as (ii), it is the adverbial *to the dining room* that would become the core of the message and would, as a result, carry the highest degree of communicative dynamism. Only in this second case does sentence linearity work in unison with context and semantics, unequivocally rendering the final element of the sentence as the rheme.

2.1.4 Prosody

As an FSP factor, prosodic features in spoken language can significantly contribute to correct identification of the foundation (the theme) and the core (the rheme) of a message. Primarily, prosody tends to function as a non-re-evaluating factor: prosody does not usually cause a change in the distribution of communicative dynamism over sentence (clause) elements. In this case, prosody is in

harmony with the other factors of FSP so as to completely disambiguate the communicated message. Under certain conditions, however, prosody can work counter to the co-operation of sentence linearity, Firbasian semantics and context. In other words, it can re-evaluate the status of communicative units determined by the non-prosodic FSP factors. This can be achieved, for example, by placing stress on a sentence constituent which is under normal circumstances unstressed, with the intention to produce a sharp contrast, as in *John HAD come to the dining room*. In this sentence, the placement of primary stress on *HAD* results in reassigning the highest degree of communicative dynamism to the auxiliary verb, making it the rheme of the sentence. Of course, for the sentence to make sense, i.e. to induce the desired effect of correcting a factual or grammatical aspect of the communication, the immediately relevant verbal context for the just described re-evaluation of functional perspective would have to include the original utterance *John has come to the dining room*.

In the present treatise, the prosody as an FSP factor is not further discussed since the analysed texts represent only written English.⁷

2.2 Thematic Progressions

Thematic progressions, which constitute one of the objectives of my research, have been systematically studied by Czech linguists for nearly half a century. A key figure in the investigation of the subject, František Daneš, presented his concept of thematic progressions in detail in his contributions of 1968 (in Czech) and 1974 (in English). As he explains in one of his later studies dealing with the topic (Daneš 1985: 207), he does not consider himself a pioneer in this field. He attributes this role to Vilém Mathesius, namely his assertions regarding the process of writing good paragraphs and their relationship to the development of topics (themes) in the text (see Mathesius 1966: 60).

Nevertheless, it was Daneš who was the first to offer a typology of thematic progressions.⁸ As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the concept of thematic progressions derives from the observation that within a text, the choice and sequence of thematic elements is not totally random. Rather, their choice and ordering, together with their relation to hyperthematic elements identifiable in the text, will reveal regular patterns of, at least, the following three basic types:

⁷Prosody as a factor of FSP is described in detail in Firbas (1992: 141-224). The role of prosody in FSP has been recently studied in detail by Chamonikolasová (2007).

⁸As was rightly pointed out to me by Eva Hajičová, a discussion on the history of concept of thematic progressions should not leave unacknowledged Henri Weil's introduction of the terms *parallel* and *progressive march of discourse*, cf. Weil (1978) – an English translation of the 1844 original.

- *simple linear thematic progression*
- *thematic progression with a continuous (constant) theme*, and
- *thematic progression with derived themes*.

According to Daneš, these basic types of thematic progressions are

“...to be considered as abstract principles, models, or constructs. The implementation (manifestation) of these models in particular languages depends on the properties of the given language, especially on different means available for expressing FSP”.

(Daneš 1974: 121)

This statement serves particularly useful for the purposes of the present study, since the term *languages* used by Daneš, is in the present study, in fact, used to denote registers within a single language, in this case English.

Using the very same examples that are presented in Daneš (1974), I will now briefly describe the inner structure of the three basic types of thematic progressions (hereinafter also abbreviated as *TPs*).

2.2.1 Simple Linear Thematic Progression

Simple linear thematic progression represents, according to Daneš, “the most elementary, basic TP” in which “each R [= rheme] becomes the T [= theme] of the next utterance” (Daneš 1974: 118). The thematic progression of this type can be symbolized as follows, with an example text below:

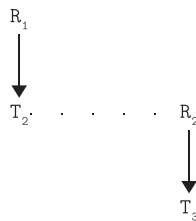


Figure 2.1: Structural representation of simple linear thematic progression

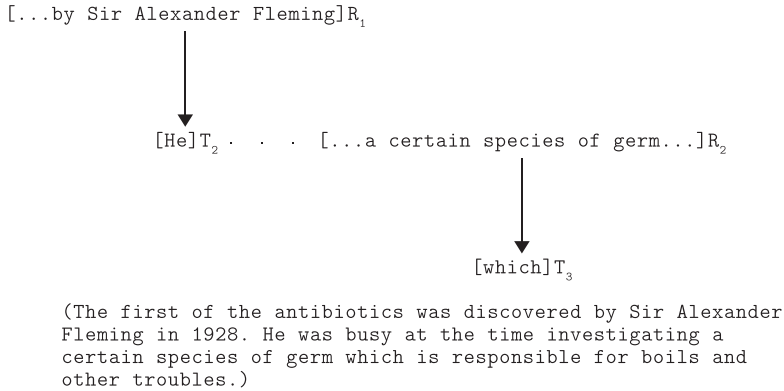


Figure 2.2: An example of simple linear thematic progression

The rhematic agency adverbial *by Sir Alexander Fleming* of the first sentence becomes the thematic subject (*He*) in the second sentence.⁹ In this second sentence, the rhematic node *a certain species of germ* appears to have a thematic successor in the form of the relative pronoun *which* in the relative clause of the second sentence.¹⁰

It is also worth noticing that in this very short stretch of text, another thematic progression is potentially beginning to develop through the adverbials *in 1928* and *at the time*, provided that the former is regarded as a rhematic element, i.e. an element toward which the message is perspectived.

2.2.2 Thematic Progression with a Continuous (Constant) Theme

In the thematic progression of this type, “...one and the same T appears in a series of utterances (to be sure, in not fully identical wording), to which different R’s are linked up” (Daneš 1974: 119). A structural diagram for this type of progression is shown in Figure 2.3. An example follows immediately below as Figure 2.4.

⁹All of the example sentences are taken from Daneš (1974) where the structural diagrams and the sentences are laid out side-by-side, but without obvious links made between the elements of the texts and the values of the T/R nodes in the diagrams.

¹⁰Strictly speaking, the rhematic node of the second sentence should include not only the part *a certain species of germ* but also the whole postmodifying relative clause. Therefore, the simple linear thematic progression presented in this diagram is structurally heterogeneous, beginning at the clausal level and ending at the phrasal level.

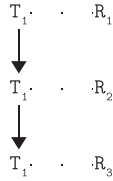
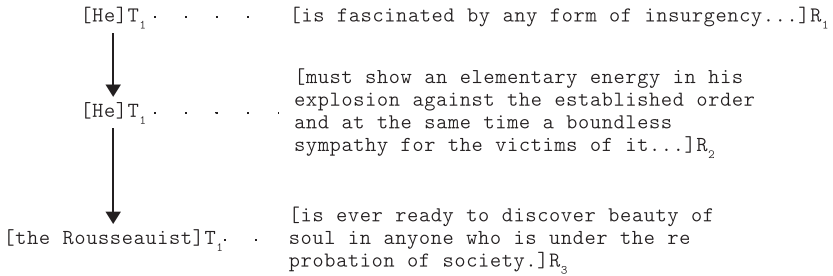


Figure 2.3: Structural representation of thematic progression with continuous (constant) theme



(The Rousseauist especially feels an inner kinship with Prometheus and other Titans. He is fascinated by any form of insurgency... He must show an elementary energy in his explosion against the established order and at the same time a boundless sympathy for the victims of it... Further the Rousseauist is ever ready to discover beauty of soul in anyone who is under the reprobation of society.)

Figure 2.4: An example of thematic progression with continuous (constant) theme

In an ideal case, the T nodes in this type of thematic progression will be distributed in such a way that each consecutive T node will be immediately following the preceding, referentially identical T node. Daneš (1985: 209) calls this distribution of T nodes “contact”. However, the consecutiveness of the T nodes may be interrupted by one or more distributional fields not containing a referentially identical T node. In this case, the thematic progression will typically span¹¹ a distance of one or more paragraphs, sentences (clauses) or phrases, depending on the chosen level of analysis, and such a distribution of T nodes will be called “distant” (Daneš *ibid*).

¹¹See Firbas (1995a) on retrievability span in functional sentence perspective.

2.2.3 Thematic Progression with Derived Themes

In this third type of thematic progression, the T elements “are derived from a ‘hypertheme’ (of a paragraph, or other text section)” (Daneš 1974: 120), which is illustrated in the following diagram:

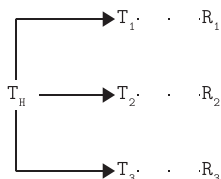
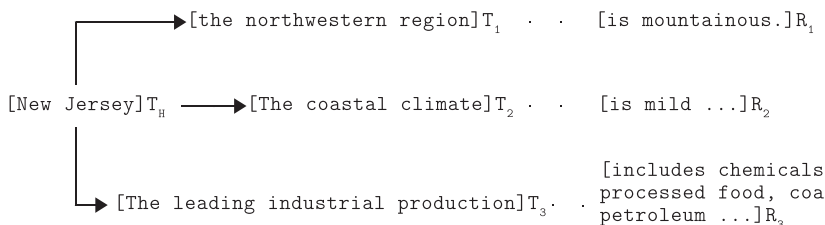


Figure 2.5: Structural representation of thematic progression with derived themes

Unlike in Figure 2.3, where the T nodes denote the same referent, the T nodes in Figure 2.5 refer to different aspects of the hyperthematic T_H node. As can be seen from the following example, the T_H node denoting a US state (*New Jersey*) is not synonymous with the derived nodes T_1 , T_2 , and T_3 . Rather, they present different aspect of the state, which can be verified by substituting the definite articles in the derived T nodes with the possessive pronoun *Its*.



(New Jersey is flat along the coast and southern portion; the northwestern region is mountainous. The coastal climate is mild ... The leading industrial production includes chemicals, processed food, coal, petroleum ...)

Figure 2.6: An example of thematic progression with derived themes

Apart from the above presented three basic types of thematic progressions, a number of other types can be identified in texts, such as *TP exposing a split rheme*, or *TP with thematic jump*. These and other types of “... TP’s are often complicated by various insertions (supplements, explanatory notes) or asides.

They may also occur in incomplete or somewhat modified form” (Daneš 1974: 121).

2.3 Literature Review

In the following four subsections, I present a review of literature dealing with the investigation of language registers in general and an overview of studies dealing with FSP phenomena and their relationship to language registers in particular.

2.3.1 Registers and Functional Styles

As mentioned earlier, current trends in the investigation of language structure and its use have been heavily influenced by the corpus-based *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber *et al.* 1999), which in its many-sided descriptions of the structure and use of English widely adopts an approach that characterises the phenomena of grammar according to *registers*.¹²

“Register distinctions are defined in non-linguistic terms, with respect to situational characteristics such as mode, interactiveness, domain, communicative purpose, and topic. . . . The situational characteristics that define registers have direct functional correlates, and, as a result, there are usually important differences in the use of grammatical features among registers.”

(Biber *et al.* 1999: 15)

The attribute *functional* connects the approach adopted by Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (hereafter also referred to as *LGSWE*) with the functional approach to the study of language elaborated by linguists adhering to the Linguistic School of Prague, and particularly with the terms *functional language* and *functional style*.¹³ Quoting Havránek (1932: 69), Leška *et al.* explain the meaning of these two terms as follows:

“The difference between functional language and functional style consists in the fact that functional style is intended for concrete

¹²On the term *register* in general, see for example Yunick (1997). It should be pointed out, and I agree with Libuše Dušková on this, that the term *register* have many times come under some form of criticism from linguists. For instance, referring to Halliday (1964), Crystal and Davy (1969: 61) state that the term register “has been applied to varieties of language in an almost indiscriminate manner, as if it could be usefully applied to situationally distinctive pieces of language of any kind. The language of newspaper headlines, church services, sports commentaries, pop songs, advertising, and football, amongst others, have all been referred to as registers in one work.” For further discussion on the usage of this term and also the terms *style*, *genre*, and *sublanguage*, see for example Zwicky and Zwicky (1982) or Urbanová (2005).

¹³For more information on conceptual differences between the Praguian theory of functional linguistics and the theory of stylistic registers, a domain of British linguistics, see especially Esser (1993), Křístek (2003), and Urbanová (2005).

aims of each linguistic communication; it is a function of linguistic communication (of the act of speech, “parole”) while functional language is determined by the general purpose of a standardized set of linguistic means, i.e. it is a function of language (“langue”). Accordingly, linguistic communication involves functional languages in different types of functional styles.”

(Leška *et al.* 1993: 31)

Yet the attribute *functional* is not the only aspect that connects LGSWE’s notion of register with the concept of functional styles of the Linguistic School of Prague. It is also the situational aspect mentioned in the above definition of *register* which brings the two together. Treating *functional styles* as “function[s] of ... parole”, in other words, as functions of utterances, the situational aspect (constraint) can be seen to form an essential part of the Praguian concept of functional styles:

“Every utterance has its own referential content and stems from a particular situation in which the current attitude of the speaker to the reality expressed by the utterance is reflected, together with the attitude to the concrete or envisaged hearer.”

(Mathesius 1966: 9, translated by Urbanová 2005: 74)

A particularly apt definition of register, paying due attention not only to the functional and the situational aspects but also to the fact that register is to be perceived as a sort of a *non-random cluster of language features* (cf. Halliday’s definition below), is provided by Fowler:

“Register is . . . a distinctive use of language to fulfil a particular communicative function in a particular kind of situation, but the text need not be saturated with consistent use of a typical vocabulary and syntax. It exists for language users as a model or schema, a package of sociolinguistic knowledge which can be activated by relatively slight textual cues.”

(Fowler 1996: 191)

The overall reason why I attempt to make visible the connections between the terms *register* and *functional style* is to show that not only is there a considerable degree of convergence in the Czech and British approaches to the study of language and style, but that by using predominantly the term *register* throughout the present study, I am trying to follow the research trends set forth in LGSWE, as well as develop the legacy of the Prague School.

2.3.2 The News and Academic Prose as Registers

The term *register* was, of course, introduced into linguistics decades before the publication of LGSWE. According to Beaugrande, “it was a pupil of Firth’s, Michael Halliday, who, along with his associates, eventually gave currency to the term ‘register’ as such” (Beaugrande 1993).

In broad terms, Halliday defines register as “a cluster of associated features having a greater-than-random (or rather, greater than predicted by their unconditioned probabilities) tendency to co-occur; and, like dialect, it can be identified at any delicacy of forms” (Halliday 1988: 162). The individual names or labels used for different registers, such as *news* or *academic prose* in the title of the present monograph, “can be taken to denote a semiotic space within which there is a great deal of variability at any one time, as well as continuing diachronic evolution” (Halliday *ibid.*). To further describe this semiotic space, Halliday uses the terms *field*, *tenor* and *mode*. Not incidentally, these terms can be equated with the aspects summarising main situational characteristics of registers included in the corpus of LGSWE, i.e. the registers of conversation, fiction, news, and academic prose.

With respect to the object of investigation in the present study, the following table (derived from Table 1.1 in LGSWE on page 16), lists the main situational differences between the registers of news and academic prose:

Table 2.2: Summary of major situational differences between the registers of news and academic prose

	news	academic prose
mode	<i>written</i>	<i>written</i>
main communicative purpose (field)	<i>information, evaluation</i>	<i>information, argumentation, explanation</i>
audience (tenor)	<i>wide-public</i>	<i>specialist</i>

Even though the above mentioned aspects of the news and academic registers are relatively well documented using concrete language data at the grammatical and semantic levels of syntax, in terms of Daneš’ three-level approach¹⁴, a survey of literature provided in the following section reveals a considerably smaller number of publications documenting the registers at the level of organisation of utterance. xxx

2.3.3 FSP and Register Variation (Individual Authors)

Research into the relations between FSP and language registers can be traced back to the work of Vilém Mathesius (1966: 56-63) and Jan Mukařovský (1982:

¹⁴For a description of the approach, see Daneš (1964).

124-130)¹⁵. While later FSP studies originating mainly in the former Czechoslovakia do pay attention to the issues connecting FSP and language registers, the majority of them, unfortunately, concentrate exclusively either on the Czech (or Slovak) language, or on FSP features characterising single register only, for example Jelínek (1966) describing contemporary Czech poetry, Uhlířová (1983) considering aspects of FSP in present-day Czech publicist prose, Horecký (1958) theme-rheme arrangement of sentences in Slovak technical language, Červenka (1969) and Daneš (1968) investigating thematic progressions in the registers of Czech fiction and academic prose, respectively.¹⁶

As regards the English language, the investigation of FSP phenomena bearing on register distinctions has been taken up primarily by the scholars following the Brno approach to the study of FSP. Most of their research is aimed at a comparison of stylistically relevant FSP features of English and Czech texts. Among these we find research articles, for example, by Golková (1987), studying functional properties of sentence (clause) beginnings on a corpus of fictional and factual prose, and concluding that

“...the difference between the styles of fiction and non-fiction are quite striking. While in English fictional style the most typical sentence beginning is theme proper expressed by a personal pronoun, English informative and concise non-fictional style prefers diathematic sentence beginnings, the diathemes being implemented mostly by grammatical subjects expressed by expanded noun phrases.”

(Golková 1987: 94)

Stylistic aspects of FSP have also become a subject of extensive research into the syntax and semantics of the passive voice carried out by Libuše Dušková:

“...two factors operating in favour of the passive are common to both styles [scientific and conversational], viz. the functional sentence perspective and non-existence or vagueness of (or intentional avoidance of explicit reference to) agency.”

(Dušková 1999: 141)

In one of her recent studies on FSP, she compares thematic progressions in the academic register and in fiction. As regards the academic register, she offers the following observation:

¹⁵Mathesius' collection of essays entitled *Language and style* was originally published in 1942; Mukařovský's treatise *On poetic language*, part of which entitled *Významová dynamika kontextu [The semantic dynamics of context]* is referred to herein, was originally published in 1940.

¹⁶Now a somewhat outdated but a relatively complete list of studies on FSP can be found in Firbas and Golková (1976).

“Three types of thematic progressions were identified in the academic text, of which the most frequent type was the progression with constant theme. ... the simple thematic progression came second; ... the progression with derived theme was least frequent.”

(Dušková 2010: 255-256; translated by M.D.)

These results are supported by data from another study by Libuše Dušková in which she also examines the types of thematic progressions in academic writing:

“The ascertained quantitative data appear to confirm the assumption that the tendency of English to preserve the same subject in successive clauses, together with its largely thematic character, provides favourable conditions for thematic progressions with a constant theme.”

(Dušková 2008: 241)

Within the area of narrative prose, important contributions to the understanding of information flow have been made by Aleš Svoboda, especially by establishing the notion of *diatheme* as the most dynamic element within the thematic section of the clause, and also by describing the nature and the dynamics of development of narrow and broad scenes in Old English and Middle English texts (Svoboda 1981a, 1981b, and 1983).

Svoboda’s monograph *Diatheme* (Svoboda 1981a) deserves a special attention since in it he not only directly utilizes Daneš’ thematic progressions, but also fully employs the pluripartitional approach to the analysis of a very specific register – the register of religious texts. This register has been in the centre of FSP research in a number of studies by Martin Adam (see esp. Adam 2003, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010), who also uses the pluripartitional approach to the FSP analysis.¹⁷

The TP typology has become the centre of research for other investigators in the field of functional sentence perspective. In the line of authors adhering to the Brno approach we further find a study by Svobodová (1971).¹⁸ Even though she works within the frame of tripartitional FSP analysis, i.e. distinguishing only three types of communicative units – *theme*, *transition*, and *rheme*, she offers the following conclusions in her investigation of thematic progressions in short stories of Katherine Mansfield:

“... two types of TP in particular are very frequent, namely ‘TP with a continuous /constant/ theme’ and ‘simple linear TP’. The third

¹⁷Another representative of the pluripartitional approach is Jana Chamonikolasová, who applies a synchronic, as well as diachronic perspective in her research; she pays attention to the function of thematic and rhematic elements in different periods of English (Chamonikolasová 2009a and 2009b) and to the diversity of the transitional section of the sentence (Chamonikolasová 2010b and 2010c).

¹⁸A diploma thesis which was supervised by Jan Firbas.

type of TP, TP with derived themes, seems to be rare in comparison. Each of these three main types of TP occurs almost invariably in various combinations. The combination of ‘TP with a continuous /constant/ theme’ and ‘simple linear TP’ is especially frequent.”

(Svobodová 1971: 89)

Not directly employing Daneš’ TP types but coming very close to the idea, Ondrová (1989) attempts to characterize the information flow in a piece of non-factual, artistic text, and presents the following findings on the basis of tripartitional FSP analysis of Shakespeare’s sonnets:

“Tematické podložie sonetu tvoria dve tematické línie, jednu tvorí zámeno ‘I’ v 1, 2, 3, 5 a 9 verši, vyjadruje vnímanie rýchleho toku času osobou, ktorá sa pod týmto zámenom nachádza, pravdepodobne básnik. Druhá tematická línia je vyjadrená zámenom ‘thou’ a jeho tvarmi v 9, 10 a 14 verši, začína tam, kde končí prvá, vyjadruje osobu, priateľa, na ktorú sa básnik obracia, apeluje na pominuteľnosť jeho krásy a života, ktorý sa môže uchovať len v jeho potomkovi. Tieto dve tematické línie vytvárajú bezprostredný aktuálny kontext, tvoria základné ‘foundation-lying elements’ (J. Firbas) daného sonetu.”

(Ondrová 1989: 61)

The issues connected with the realization of FSP in different types of register (or genre), and especially the distribution of thematic progressions, have also become a subject of research of many foreign scholars. For example, following closely the FSP framework, Nwogu and Bloor (1991) investigate the distribution of thematic progressions within professional and popular medical texts, more precisely, in research articles, their abstracts and journalistic report versions found in *New Scientist*, *The Times*, and *Newsweek*. Nwogu and Bloor conclude that “the simple linear and the constant thematic progression patterns occur frequently in all three genres” Nwogu–Bloor (1991: 375).

It may be of interest to note that Nwogu–Bloor also point out the relative scarcity of other studies on this topic:

“To the best of our knowledge, though, no work has been published to date which compares professional and popular science texts in terms of their thematic structure.”

Nwogu and Bloor (1991: 370)

It should be stressed, however, at this point that there appear to be considerable differences as to how the term *theme* is defined and used by scholars abroad to identify and classify thematic progressions. While the majority of the

researchers mentioned below draw their analyses directly on Daneš' typology, the term *theme* is usually defined by them in the Hallidayan sense. According to Halliday,

“As a general guide, the Theme can be identified as that element which comes in first position in the clause.”

(Halliday 1994: 38)

Halliday further states that

“First position in the clause is not what defines the Theme; it is the means whereby the function of Theme is **realized**, in the grammar of English.”

(Halliday, *ibid.*)

The examples he presents to support his concept of the theme would be, however, interpreted differently in the FSP framework (Halliday 1994: 38-39):

Table 2.3: Thematic and rhematic sections in the Hallidayan framework

theme	rheme
that teapot	the duke has given to my aunt
very carefully	she put him back on his feet again

In an investigation of patterns of thematic progressions in three sub-genres of journalistic discourse (the genre of news reports, the genre of analytical exposition represented by editorials, and the genre of hortatory exposition represented by letters of complaint), Francis (1990) follows exactly this type of research approach, i.e. an amalgam of the Hallidayan concept of the theme and Daneš' concept of thematic progressions. Nevertheless, the conclusions offered are rather disappointing:

“Pattern 2 [= TP with continuous theme] is common in News [reports] but it is by no means universal; ... turning to the expository genres, the picture becomes considerably less clear. By all accounts the *first* pattern [= simple linear TP] should hold more predominantly; ... however, there are breaks in the pattern. ... In Letters, too, there is no neat way of characterizing the patterns of thematic progression.”

(Francis 1990: 68-69)

Ventola (1995) also follows the Hallidayan concept of the theme in her search for differences in the structure of thematic progressions in parallel versions of English and German academic texts. According to her,

“In academic papers, the Theme-Rheme patterns are important in guiding the reader through the logical paths constructed by the writer. If little attention is paid in translation to these rhetorical effects, writers’ attempts to help the readers are destroyed.”

(Ventola 1995: 102)

She further states that “in fairly recent handbooks on translation theory ... progression issues are not extensively covered” (Ventola *ibid*).

A more complex study on the relation of genres and theme development has been carried out by Ghadessy (1995). Unlike the previous authors, though, he does not attempt to characterise the genres in terms of Daneš’ TP types. By using the term *thematic development*, he is more interested in the grammatical and lexico-semantic features of themes:

“Themes in written sports commentary are more like Themes in narratives and obituaries and different from Themes in programmes and expository prose. Thus there are similarities between this register and the language of narration and obituary because in all of them presentation of sequential events is one of the major functions of the language. On the other hand, written sports commentary differs from programme language and expository prose because in the latter two other language functions are paramount.”

(Ghadessy 1995: 144)

Another study contributing to the TP field is Downing (1995). Contrary to Ghadessy, Downing draws her investigation of textual organisation on Daneš’ concept of thematic progressions, but concentrates more on the third basic type, the thematic progression with derived themes. Applying this TP type in her analysis of Chaucer’s *General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales*, she finds that

“a fourfold layering of Themes (macro-Theme, hyper-Theme, topical Theme and sub-Theme) represents the textual scaffolding of the *General Prologue*, each layer of Themes predicting the subsequent layer.”

(Downing 1995: 161)

More recently, Downing has extended her TP research into other genres such as ‘leisure’ sections of newspapers and magazines, confirming that “... Daneš’ model appears to be fully applicable in helping to reveal the internal organization of the text” (Downing 2001).

Finally, even though the investigation of thematic progressions in the conversation register does not fall within the main research aims of this study, it is not without interest to mention that research into the phenomena of thematic

progressions in dialogues has also recently come to the attention of linguists, for example in studies by Geluykens (1991), Ping (2005), Becková (2007), and Strnadlová (2007).¹⁹ Topics related to FSP, dialogues and intonation are also dealt with in detail in Chamonikolasová (2007).

The above overview of selected papers dealing with the problems of FSP, thematic progressions and language registers is by no means exhaustive. It could be extended, for example, by a glimpse of studies considering pedagogical aspects of TP structuration of text. After all, we find hints of these aspects already in Mathesius (1966), with further suggestions to be found, for instance, in Weissberg (1984) and Berry (1995). Nevertheless, such an extension would greatly exceed the scope of the present treatise. For this reason, I shall close this section by giving a few remarks in the following subsection about the treatment of FSP and thematic progressions in modern academic grammars of English.

2.3.4 FSP and Register Variation (Academic Grammars)

It is without surprise that the research of FSP phenomena has also found its way to large academic grammars of English, such as *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Quirk *et al.* 1985), *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber *et al.* 1999), and *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Huddleston and Pullum 2002). While these grammars do pay attention to the phenomena related to FSP, usually under one of the following headings,

- *theme, focus, and information processing*
- *information flow*
- *information packaging*

they either fail to capture the nature of thematic progressions or they deviate from the FSP taxonomy to the extent that, for example, the term *theme* is, as a result, largely incompatible with its use within the FSP framework.

As regards the English grammar mentioned first, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (hereinafter abbreviated as CGEL), it describes several important areas of language use that deserve consideration from the point of view of functional sentence perspective, including existential *there* sentences, fronting, or cleft-sentences. This major volume on the English language

¹⁹Ping states on page 702 that "...the Prague school approach has been termed a *combining* approach, as opposed to the *separating* approach of the Hallidayan framework which does not equate theme with given information ...". This statement, however, is not entirely correct. Addressing a question about whether he regarded himself a *combiner* or a *separator*, Firbas (1995b: 221) replied: "Am I a combiner in the sense indicated in the question put to the panel? Not really, because in my approach even a context-independent element can be thematic. Nor am I a separator in the sense indicated above. For I do not separate context dependence from thematicity, nor context independence from rhematicity. But while separating context dependence from rhematicity, I do not entirely separate context independence from thematicity."

operates even with one of the central notions of the FSP theory – *communicative dynamism*:

“COMMUNICATIVE DYNAMISM refers to the variation in communicative value as between different parts of an utterance. And ... it is common – though by no means necessary – for the range of such communicative dynamism to increase from low to high in accordance with the linear progression of the information unit.”

(Quirk *et al.* 1985: 1356)

Even though it may seem that the inclusion of the concept of communicative dynamism into CGEL renders its account of information processing fully compatible with the FSP framework, there are at least two major drawbacks in CGEL’s description of the issue that make it less convenient to be used by an FSP researcher.

The first is the fact that the way the degrees of communicative dynamism are determined in CGEL is less pronounced than in the case of FSP framework and, what is more, CGEL does not seem to account for one of the key FSP factors, the dynamic semantic scales. Thus, for instance, in a description of the following two sentences

She gave her brother a signet ring.
She gave him a signet ring.

CGEL informs the reader that

“... whether or not the O_i is pronominalized, the implication is that it carries less communicative dynamism (is relatively ‘given’) as compared with O_d .”

(Quirk *et al.* 1985: 1396)

It certainly holds true that the indirect objects carry less communicative dynamism than the direct objects. Seen from the point of view of the FSP framework, though, the two indirect objects are functionally different communicative units: the element *her brother* is diathematic, but its pronominalized equivalent is theme proper oriented.²⁰

The second problem with the account of information arrangement offered in CGEL is that the term *theme* is construed in a way that is similar to the notion of the *theme* in Halliday (1994), i.e. “... usually, we apply the term ‘theme’

²⁰According to Svoboda (1981a: 47), “... the diatheme (here subject-object diatheme) is a newly introduced scenic element, an element that has just been made the centre of the scene and – as such – is frequently expressed by a grammatical form more informative than the pronoun in its prevailing referential role.”

to the first element of a clause ...” (Quirk *et al* 1985: 1361),²¹ permitting a conclusion of the type

“Clearly, theme and focus will coincide in one-word utterances, whether these are replies, questions, or military commands.”

(Quirk *et al.* 1985: 1375)

As far as the notion of thematic progressions is concerned, in CGEL we only find a brief remark in section **Thematic connection** (ibid.: 1430), coming near to the definition of the *simple linear thematic progression* in Daneš’ typology. Nevertheless, CGEL does not provide the reader with a systematic characterization of the individual registers in terms of thematic progressions, and, unfortunately, neither do the two remaining and more recent grammars of English.

In *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* we can find topics in which it is suggested that a connection exists between grammatical and information sentence structures,²² or even corpus statistics dealing with the information status of subjects and agent phrases (Biber *et al.* 1999: 941), but without any direct association with the registers described in this grammar.

What is more, despite the fact that also this grammar seems to acknowledge the existence of graded distribution of communicative dynamism, the authors of this grammar completely avoid using the term *theme*. The basic premise introducing the chapter that deals with information aspects of word order is formulated in the following way:

“In any clause, some elements normally express, or refer back to, information that is familiar from the preceding discourse, i.e. **given**, while others present **new** information. There is a preferred distribution of this information in the clause, corresponding to a gradual rise in information load. This could be called the **information principle**: ...”

(Biber *et al.* 1999: 896)

However, viewed from the point of view of FSP, the GIVEN – NEW distinction is only one aspect of functional sentence perspective. Generally speaking, it alone cannot determine the distribution of the degrees of communicative dynamism. The concept of *thematic progressions* is absent in *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*.

Neither is this concept mentioned in the third grammar, *Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Furthermore, the authors of this grammar use

²¹Cf. also the following note in CGEL (Quirk *et al* 1985: 1362): “In contrast to ‘given’ and ‘new’, which are *contextually* established and to that extent ‘extralinguistic’, ‘theme’ and ‘focus’ are linguistically defined, in terms of position and prosody respectively.”

²²See especially the chapter **Word order and related syntactic choices** (Biber *et al.* 1999: 895).

the term *theme* to refer to "...the entity that moves or is located", a semantic role assigned to arguments of semantic predicates (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 232). The terms presented by the authors to refer to the concepts similar to those used in the FSP framework are rather clumsy: *discourse-old constituent/information*, *discourse-new constituent/information*, *addressee-old information*, and *addressee-new information* (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1368-1369).

Considering all that was mentioned above, this chapter can be concluded by saying that the range of available literature dealing with the aspects of information flow and thematic progressions is considerably limited in respect to the framework adopted in the present study, i.e. the framework of functional sentence perspective described in Firbas (1992). On the other hand, the apparent lack of reliable corpus data in the field of information flow in various register types may be regarded as an excellent opportunity for further research and investigation of this area.

