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## Chapters from the history of Czech functional linguistics

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# *Chapters from the History of Czech Functional Linguistics*

Jan Chovanec

**Masarykova univerzita**

Brno 2014



evropský  
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EVROPSKÁ UNIE



MINISTERSTVO ŠKOLSTVÍ,  
MLÁDEŽE A TĚLOVÝCHOVY



OP Vzdělávání  
pro konkurenceschopnost



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# Introduction

This book presents a selection of several articles that characterize the main strands of linguistic thinking of Czech functionalists, particularly with respect to the English language. The aim is to bring together some well-known and classic papers, mediate them to current students of linguistics (particularly those focusing on English studies), and, thus, allow them to become acquainted with the major ideas and figures of the Prague School of Linguistics.

While some papers lay out the general linguistic theories proposed by their authors, others deal with quite specific features of English, typically in contrast with Czech and other languages. The selection of the papers is a matter of the editor's individual choice and personal preference: it does not make a claim to presenting the most canonical or the best known texts. With the first article published in 1932 and the last in 1999, the texts in this collection span a rather long period of time. However, although the references are obviously dated, it may come as a surprise to the readers to find how at present – two or three generations later – the papers have lost little of their power and general validity. On all counts, the papers could have been written at the present time, since the approach adopted by their authors is so modern: they all set out to explore the systematic structure of language, made up of mutually interrelated subsystems, with a close regard to the functional explanation of the phenomena of language. The papers are of more than mere historical interest: they do not cease to inspire.

As regards their presentation, the individual chapters open with brief biographical information about their authors. Since one cannot aim to do justice to the work and professional career of the major Czech linguists in a few lines only, the bio-notes are limited to the summing up of some of the most important ideas of each scholar. Each article is also prefaced with the editor's introduction and summary, in which the main points are highlighted. Finally, each text is followed by a set of comprehension questions intended to guide the readers through the core ideas of the texts and aid them in reflecting on the content. Because the chapters contained in this book originally appeared in earlier collections that were often published decades ago, the present publication hopes to make these texts available to current readers.

The papers are included in their original form. While the spelling of the originals has been preserved, some minor editorial adjustments have been made (particularly in the references sections and where typographical mistakes were evident). No attempt was made to include more up-to-date references. Thus, the chapters are presented as snapshots of the time in which they were either written or translated into English for the first time but that, as suggested above, will not detract from the readers' enjoyment and appreciation of the sophistication of the argumentation.

Brno, May 2014

# Approaching Czech linguistic functionalism

Jan Chovanec

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*This text outlines some of the basic theoretical concepts of Czech functionally-oriented linguistics as it developed in the first half of the twentieth century. At that time, the Prague School, as this approach came to be known, quickly assumed the position of the leading branch of structuralist thought in Europe and became immensely influential on account of its modern conception of the discipline. This text deals with its historical context, research programme, and main contributions to general linguistics. It closes with a brief discussion of the heritage of the discipline and a glossary explaining some of the major concepts.*

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*Language is a fortress that must be assailed  
from all sides and with every kind of weapon.*  
Vilém Mathesius

## 1. Setting the scene: linguistics in the olden times

At the beginning of the twentieth century, linguistic thinking in Europe was still heavily steeped in the theoretical paradigms of the previous era. The nineteenth century was a period of empirical research that was concerned mostly with sound. The study of meaning and language in communication was avoided. The positivist orientation of the mainstream discipline meant that linguists preferred to deal with tangible data – i.e. those phenomena of language that could be easily observed, measured and quantified. The strict empirical basis was connected to the linguists' efforts to develop linguistics as a true scientific discipline, on par with the objective methods of description found in the natural sciences. Phonetics and the study of sound change were the dominant disciplines.



The prevailing paradigm was historical linguistics – the diachronic study of language change over time. The main method of linguistics was ‘comparative grammar’, i.e. the analysis of genetically related languages carried out in order to identify similarities and differences and, thus, to establish common historical origins. The goal of many historical linguists was the reconstruction of earlier stages of their languages. The German linguist August Schleicher (1821–1868), for instance, attempted to reconstruct the proto-Indo-European language, the original ancestor language of many European languages. He also organized languages in a chart to show their gradual development, devising the family-tree model that indicates the mutual genetic relations between groups as well as between individual languages (known as ‘*Stammbaumtheorie*’ in German). The model, representing the historical diversification of changing languages, was directly inspired by the hierarchical organization of various phenomena found in the natural sciences, such as the system of botanical taxonomy. For Schleicher, language resembled a natural organism, going through periods of growth and eventual decay, with languages competing against one another in a way similar to evolutionary Darwinianism.

Other comparative linguists (philologists) addressed topics and offered explanations for various aspects of language change that are nowadays taken as some of the stepping stones of historical linguistics. Thus, for instance, Jacob Grimm (1785–1863) formulated the so-called Grimm’s law (elaborated in his 1822 book *Deutsche Grammatic* [Germanic Grammar]). Inspired by the findings of the Dane Rasmus Christian Rask, Grimm’s law (also known as the Germanic Sound Shift) provided a systematic explanation of the sound shift that occurred during the transition from Proto-Indo-European to Proto-Germanic (the latter being the common ancestor language of the Germanic branch of languages).

The idea of the regularity of sound changes became a programmatic statement with the next generation of Leipzig-based historical linguists, who assumed the name ‘Neo-Grammarians’ (*Junggrammatiker*). Scholars such as Hermann Paul (1846–1921) and Karl Brugmann (1849–1919) postulated the independence of the level of sound from other language levels, elaborated the principle of analogy of sound change, and declared historicism – the description of the historical change of a language – as the main goal of linguistics. A famous figure in the context of English linguistics was the Danish scholar Karl Verner (1846–1896), who formulated the so-called Verner’s law (1875). This served to explain the irregularities found in Grimm’s law (namely situations when voiceless fricatives became voiced) as a result of the presence or absence of stress in certain syllables in the Proto-Germanic language. This finding was taken to support the Neo-Grammarians’ belief that “sound laws are without exceptions”.

Needless to say, there were some linguists whose approach was different from the linguistic mainstream of the nineteenth century. For instance, the German scholar Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) studied synchrony and the relationship between language and culture; and the dialectologist Georg Wenker (1852–1911) was instrumental in documenting the extent of dialectal variation in Germany, thereby weakening the Neo-Grammarians’ principle of the regularity of sound change that he originally hoped to confirm.

## 2. Changing the scene: linguistics in the golden times

The first decade of the twentieth century was a period of change. The Swiss scholar Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) laid the ground in his lectures (published posthumously as *Cours de Linguistique Générale* in 1916) for a modern discipline based on a systematic analysis of language as structure. In addition to the ground-breaking conception of the arbitrary and conventional nature of the linguistic sign, Geneva structuralism was based, among other things, on the premise that language is to be seen as an underlying formal system of mutually related forms ('langue'), as opposed to the realization of this system in the actual act of speech ('parole'). After the publication of Saussure's work, the new conception became extremely influential and, apart from giving rise to the new discipline of semiotics, the structuralist methodology revolutionized some other scientific disciplines as well.

However, modern ideas challenging the previously dominant historicism, characterized by its atomistic approach to data, were also appearing in other places. A prominent role was played by a group of scholars who gathered around the figure of Vilém Mathesius in Prague. Together, they developed a conception of the discipline in the 1920s and 1930s that forms the basis of modern mainstream linguistics today. The structuralism of the Prague School developed alongside Saussure's Geneva structuralism, and alongside other branches of structuralism (e.g. Danish glossematics and American descriptivism).

Vilém Mathesius (1882–1945), the founder of the Prague School tradition, was the first professor of English language and literature at the Faculty of Arts in Prague (1912). He was not only a linguist but also a literary scholar. In 1911, he delivered a famous lecture called "On the potentiality of the phenomena of language" to the Czech Royal Society for Sciences. In this paper, Mathesius presented a radically new understanding of language that was to contribute significantly to the change of the theoretical paradigm in the decades to come. He arrived at his conclusions at about the same time as Saussure but, unlike Saussure's theory, Mathesius's ideas elicited no response within the local linguistic milieu of the time. Although the local situation was to change in the next few years with the foundation of the Prague Linguistic Circle in 1926, the early structuralist work contained in Mathesius' 1911 text remained virtually unknown abroad for decades.<sup>1</sup> As Roman Jakobson stated subsequently, Mathesius's work was so radical that – had it fallen on more fertile ground – it could have caused a 'linguistic revolution'.

Potentiality, the key concept in the whole paper, was defined by Mathesius as the static (i.e. synchronic) oscillation of linguistic phenomena, i.e. their inherent changeability and instability. This refers to the variation found in spoken language. Mathesius challenged the myth of the constancy of individuals' speech, giving evidence of such oscillation (variability) from various levels of language. In particular, he noted the variability in

the phonetic realization of individual sounds in the speech of single individuals. Using the metaphor of leaves on trees, he argued that while the same kind of leaves (or sounds) “resemble one another and differ from the varieties of other” leaves (or sounds), “no two of them are exactly alike”. This reveals the “potentiality, enclosed, however, within definite limits and certainly revealing... some static tendency” (1983[1911]: 13). This is a clear statement of the underlying systemic nature of the sound system that was to be later developed in the new discipline of phonology, one of the major innovations of the Prague School.

Mathesius argued against the earlier historicism, instead promoting synchronic linguistics. However, while he wanted to separate the static and the dynamic conceptions of language, understood as the difference between synchrony and diachrony, he also believed that the two are, in fact, complementary methods in linguistic analysis, a point on which he differed from Saussure. The synchronic oscillation, after all, is very often the cause of language change. Concerning the goal of linguistics, he stated that:

Linguistics is a science whose task is to analyse, in a static [i.e. synchronic] manner, the language materials used by a language community at a given time, and, in a dynamic [i.e. diachronic] manner, its historical changes. Consequently, linguists are obliged to ascertain the nature of these materials by means of examining the speech of individual speakers, so that the results of such examination may reveal the full extent of the potentiality of the concerned language. (Mathesius 1983[1911]: 30)

In his later work, Mathesius developed the theory of linguistic characterology – the synchronic description of a concrete language on the basis of its typical features that can be identified, among other ways, by means of the method of analytical comparison. He also postulated the basic concepts of the theory of functional sentence perspective, which was developed by Firbas in the second half of the century.

Mathesius’s conception of the interrelationship between language and reality and his emphasis on the role of the specific situation and language users make it possible to see him as a precursor of some of the topics studied half a century later in pragmatics (cf. also Nekula 1999). Needless to say, these aspects of his work have remained largely unnoticed, possibly due to the prevailing functionalist framework in Czech linguistics. Still, I believe we do not need to hesitate to identify certain strands in the work of many early Prague School scholars as ‘nascent pragmatics’ or ‘proto-pragmatics’, particularly on account of the strong emphasis paid by them to the goal-oriented nature of communication and its inevitable link with both the speakers’ intentions and the hearers’ reception situations.

Mathesius’s functional approach comprised all levels of language. He also had an active interest in stylistics, particularly in issues related to ‘language culture’ and the use of the standard variety of the Czech language in diverse public contexts. He was concerned about the situational appropriateness of utterances that are always recipient-oriented. These ideas emerge clearly, for instance, in his discussions of broadcast talk on the radio,

with which he himself had ample experience. All in all, Mathesius's work was so broad, modern and well-argued that it does not cease to inspire a hundred years later. Many of his ideas are truly timeless.<sup>2</sup>

The following sections provide a selective account of some aspects of the Czech functionalist tradition to allow the reader to get acquainted with some of its basic tenets. The exposition aims neither to repeat historical information that is available in numerous other sources nor to provide an all-encompassing encyclopaedic account of the Prague School. This information is to be sought and found elsewhere, for instance in the publications by Vachek (1983), Toman (1995) and again Vachek (1999), the latter reprinted in English in Hajičová et al. (2002).

### 3. Formative elements

One of the fortunate coincidences that contributed to the establishment of the Prague School was the presence in Prague of the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson (1896–1982). In the 1920s, Masaryk's Czechoslovakia was very open to emigré Russian and Ukrainian intelligentsia, who were encouraged to visit on government-sponsored grants. As reported in Toman (1995: 104), Prague was even called 'a Russian Oxford', with 94 professors and 3,500 students, a Russian academic press, the Russian National University and many other academic institutions.<sup>3</sup>

However, Jakobson – an extremely gifted young scholar – actually arrived on a diplomatic mission in 1920, which earned him a lot of initial suspicion (he was accused of being a spy). Because of his erudition, personality and sociability, he quickly became involved in the city's cultural and intellectual environment and assumed a leading role in many respects. Among other, he was instrumental in introducing into the Czech context the ideas of Russian formalism, a school of literary criticism that believed in the autonomy of poetic language and that was to prove very influential in the decades to come. While in Prague, Jakobson formulated some of his most famous theoretical work: the theory of markedness of distinctive features, the binary nature of oppositions of linguistic categories, the therapeutic effect of language changes, the contrast between the centre and the periphery in the language system, etc.

Eventually, Jakobson had to leave the country shortly before the beginning of the Second World War. He managed to escape to the USA, where he became professor of Slavic and general linguistics at Harvard and MIT. After the war, he went on to develop his conception of poetics, the highly influential six-fold typology of language functions and the structural-functional theory of phonology (with Morris Halle).<sup>4</sup>

## 4. Research as organized activity: The Prague Linguistic Circle and its programme

The history of Czech functional and structural linguistics is closely tied to the Prague Linguistic Circle (*‘Pražský lingvistický kroužek’*), which stimulated a fruitful exchange of ideas among scholars – not only linguists but also others applying the new methods of structuralist analysis. The beginning of the circle is dated in very precise terms: on October 6, 1926, a group of five linguists – Bohuslav Havránek, Roman Jakobson, Vilém Mathesius, Jan Rypka, Bohumil Trnka – met to attend a lecture by a visiting linguist, Henrik Becker from Germany. After that, the group met at irregular intervals, with 34 meetings held in the first three years. In 1930, the members of the circle organized themselves into an officially registered organization and started to regulate their activities with by-laws. This was the ‘classic period’ of the Prague School (1926–1939), characterized by the cross-fertilization of ideas between the scholars and the emergence of the main body of highly original theoretical work about the structural and functional nature of language.

The foundation of the Prague Linguistic Circle coincided with the time when European linguistics was in search of a new explicit paradigm for linguistic analysis. In April 1928, the First International Congress of Linguists was organized in the Hague, partly with the aim of dealing with this issue. It was convened in order to debate which method was the most suitable for a full description of language. At the conference, Jakobson, Trubeckoy, Mathesius and Karcevskij made a joint proposal for new analysis based on a synchronically-oriented description. The proposal was readily adopted by the other participants.

This stimulated the members to develop a more systematic programme, which they worked on for several months before presenting the outcome of their joint efforts at the First Congress of Slavic Philologists in Prague in 1929. The programme, known as *Theses*, was an extensive document drafted by Havránek, Jakobson, Mathesius, Mukařovský and Weingart.<sup>5</sup>

This programmatic statement of the Prague Linguistic Circle reads in a surprisingly modern way even now, almost 90 years after it was formulated. At the very beginning, the *Theses* express the functional premise of the whole discipline: language is a means of communication that is used to meet the specific communicative needs of individuals and the community. Thus, the very first part of the *Theses* states, in the introduction subtitled “Methodological problems stemming from the conception of language as a system and the significance of this conception for Slavic languages”, the following general conception of language:

Language like any other human activity is goal-oriented. Whether we analyse language as expression or communication, the speaker's intention is the most evident and most natural explanation. In linguistic analysis, therefore, one should adopt the functional perspective. *From the functional point of view, language is a system of goal-oriented means of expression.* No linguistic phenomenon can be understood without regard to the system to which it belongs. [...]

(*Theses*, Part 1, section a; original emphasis)

While Prague School structuralists have traditionally stressed the systemic character of language, i.e. accounting for linguistic phenomena as parts of the whole system, the above definition also indicates another important dimension, namely the connection between language and the speaker's intentions. In this sense, the proclamation anticipates the more local speech situations centring around individual speakers and, thus, points towards the research agenda of linguistic disciplines in the latter half of the twentieth century. This is regardless of whether the speaker's intention is understood in the physical sense as the realization of concrete utterances produced with some goal-orientation ('parole') or, more generally, whether such utterances are used as the point of entry for investigating the system available for communicating one's intentions ('langue').

Another very modern idea in the *Theses* concerns the call to investigate language variation in a more systematic manner. The following extract lays the ground for the study of functional dialectology:

An important factor in the stratification of language is *the relationship among the interlocutors*: the degree of their social cohesion, their professional, territorial, and familial connections, and also their membership in multiple collectivities, as expressed in the mixture of linguistic systems in the languages of cities. This category includes the problem of *languages for interdialectal communication* (so-called *general languages*), that of *specialized languages*, that of *languages adapted for communication with a foreign-language milieu*, and that of *urban linguistic stratification*. Even in diachronic linguistics one must devote attention to the profound reciprocal influence of these linguistic formations, i.e., not only to the regional influence but also to the influence of functional languages, modes of utterance, and languages of different groups.

(*Theses*, Part 3, section a, paragraph 5; original emphasis)

The quote can be seen as a very sociolinguistically-oriented definition of the goals of linguistic research, particularly inasmuch as it emphasizes some of the group characteristics of speakers. In addition, the 'mixture of linguistic systems' and the reference to 'specialized languages' potentially anticipates the attention much later paid by such disciplines as stylistics and genre analysis to situationally-based varieties of language (cf. the conception of systematic language variation in the tradition of Halliday's register analysis developed since the 1970s).

Obviously, language is not a single homogeneous entity but consists of the multiplicity of mutually overlapping varieties. The theory of functional styles was subsequently developed by the Prague School in great detail, particularly in Havránek's work, and it remains strong in the Czech bohemicist tradition up to today. One more thing is worthy of comment with respect to the quote above: while the mention of 'linguistic systems in the languages of cities' anticipates the discipline of urban dialectology, this specific point was most likely included in the *Theses* as a consequence of Jakobson's earlier interest in, and exposure to, the language of the Russian revolution. In a way, the broad statement can thus also be read as an encouragement of ethnographic, field-based research.

In another part, the *Theses* outline one of the subvarieties of language by discussing the distinctive role of the standard (literary) language. The standard language is construed as a specific entity since it is called upon to serve special functions – administrative, political, scientific, judicial and religious. As a result, its vocabulary becomes expanded and changed – 'intellectualized'. The intellectualization of the standard literary language is also related to its normative character and its elaboration of the social forms of language ('linguistic etiquette'; cf. Part 3, section b of the *Theses*).

Last but not least, the *Theses* also turn attention to the need for the study of poetic language. The occurrence of poetic language is seen as a linguistic instantiation in the sense of the Saussurean 'parole'. This is, in turn, related in a complex way to not one but two linguistic systems: (a) the existing poetic tradition (conceived of as the 'langue' in the structuralist framework), and (b) the contemporary communicative language (i.e., everyday language used for referential purposes). Since poetic language focuses on the expression itself, it deautomatizes various linguistic devices at all levels of language – these devices can become foregrounded. The Prague School demands that the specific nature of poetic language should have implications for literary historical studies: the discipline should start to look systematically at poetic language on all levels, rather than probe various heterogeneous historical, sociological or psychological concerns. This primary focus on the language form is evidently the heritage of Russian formalism, which was strong in the work of Jakobson and other Russian members of the circle. As pointed out in the *Theses*,

[...] *the organizing feature of art by which it differs from other semiotic structures is an orientation toward the sign rather than toward what is signified.* The orientation toward verbal expression is the organizing feature of poetry. The sign is the dominant feature of an artistic system, and if the literary historian makes what is signified rather than the sign the major object of his research, if he analyses the ideology of a literary work as an independent, autonomous entity, he violates the hierarchy of values of the structure that he studies.

(*Theses*, Part 3, section c, paragraph 5; original emphasis)



At the same time as the *Theses* were being prepared, it became obvious to the members of the circle that it would be useful to have a suitable platform for the publication of their research results. In 1929, the Prague Linguistic Circle thus launched the book series *Travaux Linguistique du Cercle de Prague*. Eight volumes were published between 1929 and 1939 (e.g. Vol. 1 – *Theses*; Vol. 7 – Trubeckoy's *Grundzüge der Phonologie*, 1939). In 1935, the Prague Linguistic Circle went on to establish the journal *Slovo a slovesnost*, which has been consistent in developing and cultivating the functionalist tradition ever since. Nowadays, it is one of the leading linguistics journals in Central Europe.

After the Second World War, the activities of the circle became more limited. With the death of Trubeckoy in 1938 and Mathesius in 1945, and the emigration of Jakobson to Scandinavia in 1939 and eventually to the USA in 1941, the work was continued by individual scholars rather than in the communal spirit that characterized the pre-war period. The group essentially disintegrated and some members became increasingly politically involved. One of the leading scholars, the Anglicist Josef Vachek, continued his earlier work on historical phonology and became the main populariser of the whole approach. He prepared several anthologies for publication in the West (Vachek 1964, 1966, 1983). During his years at the university in Brno, Vachek also founded the international journal *Brno Studies in English*, which became associated, for a long time, with the functionally-oriented work of many Czech and international scholars, particularly Jan Firbas (cf. Firbas 1992, which sums up his theory).

After the disbanding of the circle at the beginning of the 1950s, the unofficial meetings continued under the guidance of Trnka, who founded the group for functional linguistics ('*Odborná skupina pro funkční jazykozpyt*') within the organization *Kruh moderních filologů*. After Trnka's death, the group was presided over by Jiří Nosek. The members contributed to the international debate on structuralism, cf. Trnka et al. (1958).

In the 1960s, the pre-war traditions were revived, as was the book series (under the slightly modified title *Travaux Linguistique de Prague*). However, another period of politically-motivated suppression followed, stifling the organized activities of Prague School linguists for over twenty years. The circle was, once again, revived in 1990 by Oldřich Leška. The original book series appeared again, this time with the title *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague, nouvelle série/Prague Linguistic Circle Papers* (with four volumes published under the editorial leadership of Eva Hajičová, John Benjamins, volumes 1–4, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2002).



## 5. Main figures

As noted by Vachek (1999), while the label ‘functionally structural’ is used to describe the approach of the entire Prague School of scholars, it was actually the Czech linguists Mathesius and Havránek who embodied the functional perspective, while the Russian duo Jakobson and Trubeckoy had a much more structural orientation, being interested in theorizing the broader system. Together, these scholars understood language as a functional system consisting of mutually interrelated levels, with each level being analysed with a view to the role (‘function’) that it plays in the overall system.

Abroad, the name of the Prague School is associated with the syntactic analysis of language on a functional basis in Mathesius’s tradition and, above all, with the phonology of Trubeckoy and the markedness theory and poetics of Jakobson. The theory of functional sentence perspective has inspired, for instance, the systemic-functional theory of M.A.K. Halliday (cf. Halliday 1985).

In addition to Vilém Mathesius and Roman Jakobson, whose influence was mentioned more extensively in the previous sections, let us briefly introduce some of the other key historical figures of the Prague School of linguistics. Because of the limited scope of the present account, only a handful of the most important early scholars who developed and applied the functionally structuralist approach are mentioned here.<sup>6</sup> For information about other figures as well as the subsequent generations of scholars, see Vachek (1994) and (1999).

**Bohuslav Havránek** (1893–1978) was a Bohemist and Slavist. He is best known for his work concerning the standard language and functional styles. He believed that language correctness should be based on the function of the utterance and not on historical criteria (e.g. purity). He is also the author of many practical textbooks.

**Roman Jakobson** (1896–1982) was a general linguist and Slavist. He introduced the idea of the binary oppositions of distinctive features of phonemes and the theory of markedness. He believed in the therapeutic effect of language change, whereby the balance of the system is reinstated. As a literary scholar, he dealt with poetic language. He also refined our understanding of the functions of language in the act of communication.

**Vilém Mathesius** (1882–1945) was the key figure of the whole movement. He stressed the synchronic analysis of language and was interested in its functional aspects on all levels of language. He introduced the concept of elastic stability leading to language change and the readjustment of the system. Comparing Czech and English, he laid the grounds for the systematic syntactic analysis of word-order related issues in terms of there-rheme articulation.

**Jan Mukařovský** (1891–1975) was a literary scholar. He was interested in the aesthetics of verbal art. He developed a theory of poetic language, in which he argued for the primary importance of linguistic form over meaning. He also theorized the notion of normativity in verbal art, applying the concepts of habitualization and foregrounding in his analyses.

**Vladimír Skalička** (1909–1991) developed the conception of language typology. He classified languages into five types, depending on the kind of their prevailing morphological structure: inflectional, introflexional, isolating, agglutinative and polysynthetic. His model has been very influential in the international context.

**Bohumil Trnka** (1895–1984) was a historical phonologist. He worked with statistical methods and elaborated, among other things, the notion of the functional load (quantitative analysis) of phonemes. He wrote a description of the phonological system of Modern English (1935) and offered an explanation for the Great Vowel Shift in Early Modern English (1959).

**Nikolai Trubeckoy** (1890–1938) was the founder of phonology, based at Vienna University. He proposed the linguistic theory of phonology by formulating a system of generally valid laws that govern the structure of the phonological systems of languages. His phonological oppositions are defined as functional contrasts between phonemes. His main work (*Grundzüge der Phonologie*) was published posthumously in 1939.

**Josef Vachek** (1909–1996), an Anglicist, was the central figure of the Prague School in the second half of the twentieth century. As a historical phonologist, he argued that the system of any language is in a state of imperfect balance, with central and peripheral elements co-existing in a mutual tension that may motivate language change. His research on written language also led him to conclude that written language and spoken language constitute two independent functional norms.

It may come as a surprise to realize the extent to which the adherents of the Prague School approach dealt with such practical issues as the cultivation of language culture and the practice of (foreign) language teaching. This is partly because the Prague Linguistic Circle considered itself to be more than a group of linguists: it was an intellectual movement that played a wider role in the cultural life of the society, very much like some artistic movements of the early twentieth century. Members of the group got involved in social and cultural life outside of academia; Mathesius, for instance, made radio broadcasts on diverse topics related to the use of language in public, language culture, etc.

One strong aspect of the Prague School functionalists was their orientation to practical pedagogical applications of their work. In the area of foreign language teaching, this was precisely where some of the linguistic principles developed by the group could be

utilized very effectively. The method of contrastive analysis, in particular, was applied to reveal the specific characteristics of a given language (cf. Mathesius's characterology) as well as features that a target language shares with one's first language. Arguably, the language learning process becomes rationalized if the relevant findings are incorporated in the instruction because the pupils can then rely on their own mother tongue and their (pre-existing) 'linguistic consciousness'.

While the basis for teaching should be the living language, the rules taught should also reflect actual communicative practice. As pointed out by Vachek (1972), "[t]he theoretical rules to be utilized in the process of teaching have to be simple and always derived from typical specimens of living speech". The statement was directed as much against traditional grammar teaching methods of the past as against the emergent generative grammar and formalism of the post-war period. At its time, the reliance on authentic communicative language was definitely not taken for granted.

The contrastive method was used by many authors in their textbooks and other manuals that served pedagogic purposes. Havránek, for instance, is a well-known author of textbooks and grammars of Standard Czech. In the area of English studies, Mathesius and Vachek wrote many such texts aimed at the general public as well as university students. The tradition of the comparative approach has become the standard for decades; cf., for instance, the grammar of English by Dušková (1988), the lexical guide to false friends in English and Czech by Hladký (1990), and the usage guide to typical 'Czenglish' mistakes by Sparling (1990). These are some of the very tangible – and extremely useful – applications of the method for the needs of both scholars and those outside academia.

Let us conclude by adding the reflection that although the contrastive method has its undeniable benefits for the pupils, its application in the textbook production process requires a substantial degree of 'localization' (if we may borrow one of the current senses of the word). Many modern textbooks, however, are rather inadequate in this respect – they are often merely generic, 'one-size-fits-all' English-only textbooks that are mass-produced for the global markets. Thus, the textbook industry inevitably disregards the linguistic specificities of the target audiences in the individual countries (or language communities), sometimes constructing the hypothetical entity of some universal 'foreign learner'. However, the particular needs of pupils with different mother tongues are necessarily different. For instance, while the topic of modals and past infinities is hardly of any particular interest to German pupils of English, this area of grammar requires much more attention in the case of Czech pupils because their mother tongue lacks a corresponding structure. The comparative approach can identify such points of difference and lead to targeted language instruction and practice in areas that groups of pupils from specific language backgrounds particularly need.

## 6. The historiography of the approach

The list of primary sources and works interpreting and popularizing the work of the Prague School is very extensive, given the fact that it concerns over one hundred years of a consistent research tradition in various linguistic disciplines. Readers may be directed to some of the primary texts (the original series of *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague* and the follow-up series from the 1960s and 1990s mentioned earlier) and anthologies compiling the key texts (e.g. Vachek 1964, 1966). Lots of valuable information is provided in Mathesius (1982), Vachek (1994, 1999), Steiner (1982), Toman (1995) and others. Since it is hardly possible to do justice to the breadth of historiography on the Prague School, readers are encouraged to start with some of the classic texts referencing the movement, and then complement their readings with some of the more recent interpretations. Rest assured that this is a true voyage of discovery that promises to be highly inspiring to anyone who approaches the data with an open mind.

Out of the large number of books, let us perhaps mention a few of the most recent ones. Credit must be given to the members of the English departments at Charles University, who lately compiled several publications that document various aspects of Prague School structuralism as well as its modern heritage. These books include: *The Prague School and Theories of Structure* (Procházka, Malá and Šaldová, 2010), which discusses the relevance of traditional structuralism for contemporary linguistics; *A Centenary of English Studies at Charles University: From Mathesius to Present-day Linguistics* (Malá and Šaldová, 2012), which traces the key topics in linguistics investigated by the famous Anglicists at the English department; and *Prague English Studies and the Transformation of Philologies* (Procházka and Pilný, 2013), which probes the influence of Vilém Mathesius on a number of his colleagues and followers, as well as the subsequent development of Prague School structuralism. A good summary overview of the school and its history is to be found in Dušková (2013). Cf. also one of the recent issues of the journal *La Linguistique*, which is devoted entirely to the Prague School (e.g. Dušková 2014).

More than a hundred years after the first innovative ideas of modern linguistics were voiced by Mathesius, it is evident that the shared conceptual framework which the Prague School established in the 1920s is still viable and applicable for our understanding of how language works. At different times, different aspects of the extremely rich heritage tend to be emphasized; and only the future will show where the next generation of Czech functionalists will turn their attention to in order to keep the approach alive, operational and in contact with the world. One of the main legacies of Czech functionalism consists in the fact that it is a shared approach – an outlook on the general operation of language as a system – rather than a dogma that has to be followed in the exact footsteps of its forefathers. It is a shared perspective that we can mould in order to understand new challenges.

## 7. Key concepts

This section provides a selection of some of the key concepts that were either developed or used by Prague School scholars. Some of the terms below belong to the common vocabulary of modern linguistics (e.g. *phoneme*; *markedness*), others are more specifically tied to a particular theoretical framework (e.g. *functional sentence perspective*) or author (e.g. *elastic stability*). Still others may be used in somewhat different senses in different schools of modern linguistics (e.g. *theme*). The definitions provided here are, for the most part, not the literal definitions provided by the authors. The formulations are purposefully simplified in order to facilitate the basic comprehension of the concepts. Selectively, they also include the name of the scholar(s) who the concepts are most readily associated with. The English translations of the original definitions referencing some of these terms can be found in Vachek (2003[1960]).

**analytical comparison** (*analytické srovnávání*) – the comparative study of genetically unrelated languages, e.g. English and Czech. This method of analysis stands in contrast to the traditional method in historical linguistics of comparing closely related languages, typically from the same language group, which is applied in order to identify earlier common forms. The method of analytical comparison has significant practical implications, e.g. in applied linguistics concerned with the teaching of foreign languages. (Mathesius)

**automatisation (habitualisation)** (*automatizace jazykových prostředků*) – the use of linguistic means in a way that is expected by the communicators. This refers to uses that are conventional and expected. Since speakers/writers follow norms that are implicitly shared, hearers/readers pay attention to the content of the message rather than its linguistic form. This concept contrasts with foregrounding. (Mukařovský)

**communicative dynamism** (*výpovědní dynamičnost*) – a term in functional sentence perspective that denotes the relative extent to which an element contributes to the further development of communication. In other words, some elements in a sentence are comparatively less important than others, hence the contrast between thematic elements (contextually bound / given / known information) and non-thematic elements (contextually non-bound / new information). (Firbas)

**distinctive features of phonemes** (*distinktivní rysy fonémů*) – features that give rise to oppositions between phonemes.

**elastic stability (dynamic stability; pružná stabilita)** – at any given moment, a language is in a relatively stable situation, although it is simultaneously undergoing the slow process of change. The elasticity (changeability) of language is partly the result of the need of the language to deal with the changing communicative needs of the community and partly a natural internal process, with the system in an inherent need for readjustment or reorganization. When the stability of the language is affected, e.g. by means of external factors such as language contact, the system will reorganize itself in order to re-establish its balance again – a process also called the ‘therapeutic effect of changes’. In another sense, elastic stability refers to the variation of language among speakers in a speech community, cf. Mathesius’s famous dictum about the “oscillation of speech among individuals inside the communities of language”. (Mathesius, Jakobson)

**foregrounding (aktualizace)** – the use of the means of language in a way that is novel, creative or unusual, whereby the text draws attention to its own formal features in addition to the communicated content. Such creative use of language is found in verbal art but also in the media, advertising and other public domains. (Mukařovský)

**functional load (funkční zatížení)** – the relative degree to which an element of language is used, particularly in comparison with other elements. This notion is related to the contrast between the centre and the periphery: central elements typically have a high functional load. The high frequency of some items may also contribute to the preservation of irregular forms (e.g. certain morphemes)

**functional onomatology (funkční onomatologie)** – in Mathesius’s theory of language, this is the first step in linguistic analysis dealing with the nature of naming units. It comprises lexicology (semantics), morphology and word formation. (Mathesius)

**functional sentence perspective (FSP; aktuální členění větné, funkční perspektiva větná)** – a theory that analyses the distribution of communicative dynamism in units of language called distributional fields, which typically correspond to a sentence or a clause. Each element in a sentence contributes a different degree of information. Ranging from the least informative to the most informative elements, we distinguish thematic (Th) and non-thematic elements (non-Th), the latter consisting of transitional (Tr) and rhematic elements (Rh). The natural progression from known to new information (Th – Rh), known as ‘ordo naturalis’, is typically found in languages with a relatively free word order (as in Czech). The distribution of communicative dynamism in utterances is the result of several factors: linearity, semantics, context and prosody. (Mathesius, Firbas)

**functional styles (funkční styly)** – this concept emphasizes the functional differentiation of (standard) language into several subsystems, such as professional style, poetic style, colloquial style, etc. (Havránek)

**functional syntax** (*funkční syntax*) – in Mathesius’s theory, this is the second major area of linguistic analysis that focuses on how units of language become connected in the act of communication as a linear string of elements. On a different level, the concept refers to the syntactic analysis of language, mainly in the tradition of functional sentence perspective. (Mathesius)

**historical phonology** (*historická fonologie*) – a discipline that explores the diachronic dimension of the phonological system of a language. It considers how the system developed over time, with individual phonemes changing as a result of immanent factors or external influence. The phonological system of English was significantly affected by the Great Vowel Shift, a chain shift of vowels that reorganized the English vocalic system between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The current English spelling essentially reflects Middle English pronunciation before the Vowel Shift. Another major change currently underway is the Northern Cities Vowel Shift in the USA. (Vachek, Trnka)

**language functions** (*jazykové funkce*) – since language is defined as a system of goal-oriented means of expression, we can distinguish several functions in relation to the primary or dominant orientation of the utterance. The early model proposed by the Vienna-based psychologist Karl Bühler distinguishes three functions (referential – *Darstellung*; expressive – *Ausdruck*; conative – *Appell*, cf. his ‘organon’ model of communication). The later model proposed by Roman Jakobson adds three more functions into the typology: phatic, poetic and metalingual. (Bühler, Jakobson)

**linguistic characterology** (*lingvistická charakteristika*) – a synchronic description of a language that aims to deal with the characteristic or fundamental features of the language rather than to provide an exhaustive account of all of its levels. The typical features are often suitably revealed by means of a contrastive study using the method of analytical comparison. (Mathesius)

**markedness** (*příznakovost*) – a theoretical concept that is used to describe the contrast between two members of a pair. Thus, the unmarked member is characterized as the default category, with the marked member standing out as a more specific or complex member, sometimes characterized by the presence of a feature that is absent from the unmarked member of the pair. In linguistics, this applies to phonological, morphological and semantic oppositions. Jakobson (1932) also applied his theory of markedness to the analysis of the grammatical system of tenses in terms of binary categories. The marked v. unmarked contrast is also used in other social sciences.



**morphophonemic variation** (*morfonologická variace*) – this refers to the relationship between different phonemes that can be realized in a single morpheme as a result of the morphological structure of a word. This phenomenon is very common in Slavic languages (cf. the morphophonemic variation of k/č in *ruka* and *ruční*). Morphology studies the phonological structure of morphemes and words and the use of phonemes on the morphological level.

**neutralization** (*neutralizace*) – the loss of distinction between two phonemes in certain positions of the word. Thus, for example, the distinction between /t/ and /d/ is neutralized in Czech at the ends of words, where voiced consonants are realized in an unvoiced manner (cf. *led* ('ice') pronounced as [let]; but note the inflected genitive form *ledu* ('of ice') [ledu]). (Trubeckoy, Jakobson)

**organon model** – a model of the linguistic act proposed by Karl Bühler in 1934. Language is considered as an instrument whereby a speaker transfers a message (meaning, thoughts) to a hearer. The linguistic sign, which stands at the centre of the model, can be focused either on the speaker, the hearer, or the message. Hence, the following three basic functions are distinguished: expression (focus on the sender), appeal (focus on the recipient), and representation (focus on the message, i.e. the 'object' or content). This is a very dynamic view of language: it entails that linguistic analysis needs to consider the whole speech act, i.e. the interface between language and its users, and not the linguistic form only. (Bühler)

**origo (deictic centre; deiktický střed, origo)** – a conceptualization of the discourse space around a particular speaker. It is the speaker's here-and-now, which serves to anchor deixis in communication. The origo – as the deictic centre from which an utterance is produced – is a shifting entity that changes as a speaker switches his/her role into the recipient and vice versa (cf. the switch in personal deixis). It can also be projected along the temporal and spatial axes, allowing the speaker/writer to formulate an utterance from some other perspective. (Bühler)

**phoneme** (*foném*) – the basic phonological unit of the sound system. It is an abstraction of a speech sound that is perceived to have the same function and be meaningfully distinct from other phonemes. Each language has a distinct phonological system. There may be differences between individual dialects and other subvarieties of a given language (e.g. while Standard English has 24 consonantal phonemes, Scottish English also uses the voiceless velar fricative /x/). The number of vocalic phonemes is more variable, in case of English ranging from 20 in British Received Pronunciation to 14-16 in General American. (Trubeckoy, Vachek)



**phonological opposition** (*fonologický protiklad*) – the relationship between two sounds where the substitution of one for the other changes the meaning of the word. Depending on the nature of the mutual relationship between phonemes, phonological theory distinguishes several types of oppositions: isolated, proportional, bilateral, multilateral, privative, equipollent, and gradual. (Trubeckoy)

**phonology** (*fonologie*) – a discipline of linguistics that studies the sounds of language from the point of view of their function. It is interested in the sound system of the language and the mutual relations between phonemes, as long as there is some functional distinction between them. Phonic sounds without regard to their function, i.e. their acoustic or articulatory nature without regard to the systemic abstractions behind them, are studied by phonetics.

**poetic function of language** (*poetická funkce*) – the function of the message is directed towards the form rather than the content. This is the dominant function in verbal art where the linguistic means tend to be foregrounded. (Jakobson)

**poetics** (*poetika*) – the branch of linguistics that studies the poetic function. (Jakobson)

**privative opposition** (*privativní protiklad*) – the kind of phonological opposition in which one member of the pair is characterised by the presence and the other member of the pair by the absence of a specific feature, e.g. *voiced* v. *voiceless* or *nasalized* v. *non-nasalized*. The member with the presence of the relevant feature is referred to as *marked*, while the member with the absence is called *unmarked* with respect to the given feature. (Trubeckoy)

**rheme (rhematic element; *réma, jádro výpovědi*)** – a term in functional sentence perspective that denotes an element that carries the highpoint of the message. Since it conveys the most important information in the sentence, the sentence is ‘perspectived’ towards this element. (Firbas)

**theme (thematic element; *téma, základ výpovědi*)** – a term in functional sentence perspective that denotes an element that provides known or contextually bound information. It provides the starting point for some other, more important information in the sentence (i.e., the rheme). (Firbas)

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The work was published in English as late as in 1964 in Josef Vachek's translation (see Vachek 1964). The Czech title is "O potenciálnosti jevů jazykových" (*Věstník Královské české společnosti nauk* 1911).
- <sup>2</sup> A comprehensive account of Mathesius's life and work is provided in Mathesius (1982).
- <sup>3</sup> Toman refers to an article by Michailovskij in *Prager Presse*, September 1924, pt.1.
- <sup>4</sup> A good overview of Jakobson's years in Prague is provided in Vachek (1999, reprinted in English in Hajičová 2002). For a thorough general-linguistic discussion of some of his theoretical work (most notably the markedness theory), see Andrews (1990).
- <sup>5</sup> The full title of the document, presented in Czech and French, is *Theses presented to the First Congress of Slavists held in Prague in 1929*. The full text is available in *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague* 1, 7–29, reprinted in Vachek (1970), with the English version included in Vachek (1983) and reprinted in Steiner (1982).
- <sup>6</sup> More information about the Czech linguists Vilém Mathesius, Bohuslav Havránek, Josef Vachek and Jan Firbas is provided in the opening sections of the respective chapters in this book.

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# The functional differentiation of the standard language

Bohuslav Havránek



**Bohuslav Havránek** (1893–1978), a Czech Slavicist and Bohemist, was a professor at Masaryk University in Brno (1934) and at Charles University in Prague (1945). He is best known for his work on the theory of standard language, language culture and comparative analysis of Slavic languages. Among his many publications, he co-authored a textbook on Czech grammar (1952, with A. Jedlička) and *Pravidla českého pravopisu* (1957, with F. Trávníček), which have been widely used to teach standard Czech at primary and secondary schools for decades. In 1935, he founded *Slovo a slovesnost*. The journal, established for the promotion of the study of the theory and culture of language, quickly became one of the most prestigious linguistics journals in the country.

*This article is an English version of one of Havránek's classic texts, in which he makes a major contribution to general linguistics by setting out his theory of the standard language. The text clearly embodies the functionalism of the early Prague School scholars, for whom the primary principle for the classification and explanation of linguistic means is considered to be the purpose, i.e. the communicative function served by specific linguistic forms. Havránek's approach is likewise based on strictly functional criteria: after identifying the functions of the standard, he aligns them with 'functional dialects', i.e. systematic variations of language. In this treatise, he also discusses the concepts of intellectualization and automatization, which are helpful in understanding the specific role of the standard language.*

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In popular speech as well, the use (selection) of linguistic devices is in the concrete act of speech determined by the *purpose of the utterance*; it is directed towards the function of the act of speech. We can see a considerable difference in linguistic devices, according to whether it is, for instance, a matter-of-fact everyday communication or the occasional (solemn) recital of an event, or whether it is a conversation or the coherent recital of things remembered; also, whether it is a conversation among contemporaries or speech to children or to one's elders (cf., for instance, the immediate morphological differences in the use of grammatical person and number in terms of the person addressed), not to mention the lexical differences stemming from different occupations. In the standard language the linguistic devices are likewise determined in terms of the purpose served by the concrete act of speech, but with this difference: the functions of the standard language are more richly developed and more precisely differentiated; in folk speech (for a given community only, of course) practically all the means of expression are shared by everyone, whereas the standard language always will contain some linguistic devices not in general use.

I don't want to start here by enumerating schematically all the different functions of the standard language, but it should be made clear to everyone that the fields in which the standard language is used are more varied than is the case for folk speech and are, in part, such that the devices of folk speech simply are not adequate to serve them; its devices are, for instance, not adequate for purposes of a serious coherent presentation of epistemology or higher mathematics. On the other hand, in areas where folk speech is commonly used, the standard will serve more or less equally well. Utterances in folk speech can on the whole be assigned to the so-called *communicative* function, that is, they belong in the area of everyday communication; in the area of technical communication folk speech includes only some lexical areas, and at times may acquire an esthetic function. The area of *workaday technical* [odborné praktické] communication is almost entirely reserved to the standard language, and that of *scientific technical* communication, completely so; likewise, the regular foundation of *poetic language* is the standard.

In the *communicative function* proper to the domain of folk speech, even a member of a class which ordinarily uses the standard for speaking and writing may use a form of folk speech, such as the colloquial standard<sup>1</sup> or a local or class dialect, to the extent to which he knows how to speak it. But the standard can be used as well, usually in its so-called *conversational form*, that is, in the form used precisely in conversation only (the conversational functional dialect [funkční jazyk]). This conversational form is not, for Czech any more than for other languages, identical with the colloquial standard, although it shares some elements with it and often has some local coloration as well in spite of the fact that for Czech it is not very stable, and therefore has a rather variable scale of transition. The difference between the two is pointed up, among other things, by the conversational and social clichés included in the former which function almost as a mark of class. The difference between these and the clichés of folk speech is considerable, as shown, for instance, by greeting formulae, terms of address, and the like.<sup>2</sup> One would therefore be tempted to call this conversational form just another class dialect, but from that standpoint the standard as a whole is but a class dialect. We have spoken above about its exclusiveness in terms of class, different at different periods and in different nations: these social clichés are likewise a measure of its exclusiveness, or conversely, of its penetration into the broadest strata.

The *modes* and *situations* of the utterances are likewise more varied for the standard than they are for folk speech: folk speech is usually limited to oral communication and private conversation; the standard language, which is, of course, not excluded from utterances of the formed kind, then is usually made to serve for various kinds of public utterances and written communication.

The *functional and stylistic differentiation of language* is most conspicuously based on a utilization of its *lexical and syntactic* aspects, but *phonological and morphological* devices are used as well, though to a lesser extent. The latter are based primarily on variations in the phonological and morphological structure (the phonemic and morphological patterns), not counting the very clear-cut functional pronunciation styles treated in Weingart's paper. In terms of phonology and morphology, devices borrowed into the standard from another norm, especially from the norm of the popular colloquial standard (the vulgar layer which is, of course, also found in the lexicon),<sup>3</sup> are often used for differential purposes: in phonological terms, cl., for instance, functionally different doublets such as *úřad — ouřad* [office], *rypat — rejpat* [dig; gripe], *čichnouti — čuchnout* [smell], and the like, or words such as *ouško* [ear, diminutive], *upejpat se* [be coy] and the like for which there is no equivalent in the standard; here also belongs the functional utilization of certain phoneme groupings such as /č/, /š/, followed by /u/, /ou/ *čuměti* [gape], *šfourati* [poke], and the like,<sup>4</sup> which are uncommon in the standard, on the phonemic side, and such doublets as *tlučte, a bude vám otevřeno* [knock, and it will be opened for you] versus *netlučte tolik* [don't make so much noise], or the endings *-i* versus *-u* for the 1<sup>st</sup> p. sg. for verbs such as *káži, češi piji*, versus *kážu, češu, pijú* [I preach, comb, drink], and the like, on the morphological side.



Utilized also are such formal and, in part, syntactic doublets as arise in the norm of the standard as well as in the norm of folk speech, from the fact of the coexistence in them, in some respects, of an older and a newer stratum. Thus, a possible genitive instead of an accusative after a negative verb, or doublets of the type *béře* — *bere* [he takes], and the like, can be used for functional differentiation where one form is clearly archaic or bookish in the language. Stylistic variety, that is, avoidance of tedious repetition of the same form, as well as different rhythmic effects, can, for instance, be achieved by using the two forms of the infinitive ending, *-ti* and *-t*, doublets which are otherwise interchangeable in the standard.

These various devices, primarily lexical and syntactic, of functional and stylistic differentiation do not, however, consist merely of an *inventory of different words or grammatical forms*, but also of *different modes of utilization of the devices of the language or their special adaptation* to the different purposes of the standard language.

The major modes of this special utilization of the devices of the language in the standard and in its various functions can be designated, on the one hand, as the *intellectualization* of these devices, and on the other hand, as their *automation and foregrounding* [aktualisace] in terms of their functional differentiation.

## I. Intellectualization

By the *intellectualization* of the standard language, which we could also call its rationalization, we understand its adaptation to the goal of making possible precise and rigorous, if necessary abstract, statements, capable of expressing the continuity and complexity of thought, that is, to reinforce the intellectual side of speech. This intellectualization culminates in scientific (theoretical) speech, determined by the attempt to be as precise in expression as possible, to make statements which reflect the rigor of objective (scientific) thinking in which the terms approximate concepts and the sentences approximate logical judgements.<sup>5</sup>

This intellectualization of the standard language affects primarily the lexical, and in part, the grammatical structure. [...]

In terms of the lexicon, the intellectualization of the standard manifests itself not only by an expansion of the vocabulary by new terms, the abstract meaning content of which is alien to the common man such as *poznatek* [bit of knowledge], *pojmem* [concept],<sup>6</sup> *představa* [idea, picture], *jsoucno* [being], *podmět* [subject], *přísudek* [predicate], and the like, but also by changes in the structure of the lexicon since, although in the language of science, law, administration or business we talk of things in life around us, we express ourselves differently from the way we would in ordinary conversation:



(a) we need *unequivocal* words: hence, for instance, the use in biology of the word *živočich* [animal] instead of the word *zvíře* with its rather indefinite meaning content; in electrical engineering the word *lampa* [lamp] is not sufficient and there is need for the word *svítidlo* [lighting fixture], and the like;

(b) special distinctions are needed, such as *příčina — důvod — podnět* [cause — reason — stimulus], in legal language *přestupek — přečin — zločin* (contravention — délit — crime) or *vlastník — držitel — majitel* (dominus — possessor — detentor), and the like;

(c) *abstract summarizing terms* are needed, such as *plodina* [crop], *rostlina* [plant], *vozidlo* [vehicle], *výrobek* [product].

The intellectualization of the standard language is also brought about by the need to express the *interrelationships* and *complexity of thought processes*, especially those of judgment and consideration. This is done, first of all, by the creation of words or their adaptation to express various relationships, such as those of existence, possibility, necessity, the relations of causality, finality, parallelism, and the like, as shown by nouns such as *účel* [purpose], *záměr* [intent], *výsledek* [result], *důsledek* [consequence], *následek* [sequel], as well as many verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions such as *docílití* [achieve] next to *dosáhnouti* [reach], *odpovídati* [correspond], *sestávatí* [consist], *bezúčelný* [purposeless], *bezvýsledný* [without result], *bezpodstatný* [unsubstantiated], *následkem* [in consequence of], *za účelem* [for purposes of], and the like. This leads to an expansion in the standard language, or a formation and specialization, of word-formative patterns; thus, to express abstracted concrete events transferred into the category of substance of quality, verbal nouns (ending in *-ní*), participial expressions, and particularly verbal adjectives (ending in *-cí*), nomina agentis (ending in *-tel* and other suffixes), adjectives ending in *-telný*, and the like, the standard language tends in general towards nominal groupings brought about by combining nouns with attributes or by nominal predication using empty verbs.

In doing this, intellectualization, of course, is affecting the *grammatical structure* of the language and manifests itself particularly in *sentence structure* by the preference of the standard for the normalized sentence with the two constituents, the subject and the predicate, clearly differentiated formally so that linguistics, as long as its syntax was based on the standard only, saw this sentence type as the normal sentence type in general. The desire to achieve parallelism between the grammatical and the logical structure, for instance, contributes to the expansion of the passive voice in the standard. And finally we see in the standard, instead of the free sequence of sentences in the folk speech, a tightly knit and integrated structure of sentences and compound sentences with an elaborate hierarchy of superordination and subordination expressing different relations of causality, finality, parallelism, and the like; this tendency manifests itself in the specialization of conjunctions – thus, for instance, where in folk speech subordinate causal clauses are introduced by the multivalued conjunctions *že* [that], *dyš* (když [when]), in the standard they can be marked specifically by the conjunctions *protože*, *poněvadž* [because].<sup>7</sup>

Let me here add two notes that are important for the practical side of language.

1. The *definiteness* of an expression in an utterance in the standard language is a matter of *degree*: I have already mentioned that it culminates in the language of science in the requirement that words express concepts, if we call this unequivocality required by the language of science “accuracy” and thus differentiate it from the broader concept of “definiteness”, we can indicate these degrees schematically as follows: *intelligibility — definiteness — accuracy* thus gradually narrowing down the broader concept. Simple intelligibility is what we get in the language of everyday contact (conversational), where definiteness is given not only by convention, but also by the situation and the shared knowledge of various circumstances by the participants in the conversation so that the objectivity of the verbal response is quite limited even when the content is as factual as can be; one just has to think of the frequent use of pronouns in conversation, or of the simple fact of everyday experience that a conversation overheard by a non-participant is extremely unclear to him although the linguistic devices used are quite familiar. In workaday [pracovní] language (administrative, business, journalistic) we usually deal with definiteness; it is given by convention or by just so deciding, and by the objectivity of the utterance, that is, its independence of the concrete situation and of concrete personages, and it is much farther-reaching than in conversational speech; compare, for instance, a personal letter to an order for merchandise. In the language of science finally, we deal with accuracy; it is defined and codified and in accord with the accuracy of objective thinking, it tends towards a generally valid objectivity.<sup>8</sup>

It must be noted here that an unequivocal, accurate, or even just conventionally definite expression need not be clear to everyone, that is, intelligible: it may be a term, or have a content, which is simply alien to many speakers; thus, the general intelligibility and clarity cannot be the gauge for the accuracy of expression of a mathematical treatise on imaginary numbers, and the legal difference between *majitel* [owner] and *vlastník* [possessor] is not inaccurate or indefinite just because it is not clear to the layman. It might seem that I am belaboring the obvious, but the terms accuracy, clarity, and intelligibility are often used quite arbitrarily. [...]

## II. Automatization and foregrounding

Another mode of the special use of the devices of the language to meet the various functions of the standard has been designated by me as the differing *automatization* and *foregrounding* [aktualisace] of the devices of the language, sometimes of the same ones.

What do we understand by the different automatization and foregrounding of the devices of the language? Let me start with an example taken from the relationship between different languages where these differences are most conspicuous, if we, for instance,

translate the common Russian greeting formula “*zdravstvuyte*” into Czech by the phrase “*budte zdráv*” [be healthy], everyone who does not know the literal meaning of the greeting *zdravstvuyte*, but knows its use, will immediately note that such a translation is unsuitable; in Czech this greeting has a whole series of equivalents. Why is this? A common Russian greeting form has been translated into Czech by an uncommon form, that is, we have changed an automatized expression into a foregrounded one although, of course, the phrase *budte zdráv* for many other purposes, for instance at the end of a letter, in saying goodbye, and the like, will be a completely common and automatized expression.

Or, to cite the most popular example. When someone translates the French conventional formula “*s’il vous plait*” into Czech as “*líbí-li se vám*” [if you like], he has of course translated each individual word correctly, but has completely changed the meaning of the formula as a whole since the French formula has an automatized meaning more or less in the sense of Czech “*prosím*” please.

By *automatization* we thus mean such a use of the devices of the language, in isolation or in combination with each other, as is usual for a certain expressive purpose, that is, such a use that the expression itself does not attract any attention; the communication occurs, and is received, as conventional in linguistic form and is to be “understood” by virtue of the linguistic system without first being supplemented, in the concrete utterance, by additional understanding derived from the situation and the context.

We thus call automatization what, in the cases of phrases, is sometimes called the lexicalization of phrases. [...] In other words, we can speak of automatization only in those cases where the speaker’s intent does not fail to obtain the desired effect, where the link between intent and effect is not broken, unless there is a change in the environment to which the utterance was addressed, or unless we deal with different periods.

By *foregrounding*, on the other hand, we mean the use of the devices of the language in such a way that this use itself attracts attention and is perceived as uncommon, as deprived of automatization, as deautomatized,<sup>9</sup> such as a live poetic metaphor (as opposed to a lexicalized one, which is automatized).

Conversation yields good examples of both automatization and foregrounding: all conventional conversational devices are of course automatized, but to liven up the conversation and to achieve surprise (wonderment) foregrounded units are used, that is, linguistic devices that are uncommon in everyday speech, or are used with an uncommon meaning, or in an uncommon context (I am not concerned with content). They can, in accord with the fashion, be either the devices of poetic language or of slang, or other devices, perhaps even those of the language of science.

In a scientific treatise the author uses, on the one hand, words and phrases which have accurate meaning for specialists in the field, by scientific definition or codification or convention, so that he doesn’t have to worry about their meaning, that is, automatized expressions. On the other hand he uses new expressions which, though uncommon, have been given a definitely delimited meaning by himself or his school of thought and which he has

therefore automatized at least for purposes of a given work or a given school, in the sense of having made them intelligible. If, however, such expressions and modes of expression are included in utterances designed for non-specialists, they lose their original automatization in the new context (which in the old context we might have called “technical”), and become either unintelligible, if they are devices totally alien to the layman, or they become automatized in an entirely different way, if, indeed, they are not foregrounded. Thus, every technical term, of course, has an automatized meaning, but if it is transferred into a completely alien environment, it may be foregrounded immediately and even become a swearword (cf. the use as invectives of words such as *synfonie* [symphony], *fysiko* [physics] in [Jan] Holeček’s *Naši* [Our Folks] I, 32 and *passim*).

Such a transfer of the automatizations of a certain field into an entirely uncommon environment is at the root of many verbal jokes, which are instances of foregrounding. [...]

The *transfer of automatizations* can, however, not be affected even in the case of less conspicuous differences. Let us, for instance, compare a statement in the language of science for purposes of theoretical formulation to one for purposes of popularization or workaday communication, where the subject matter of the statement may be identical, but its purpose is different!

[...]

We see clearly that, with essentially the same subject matter (the same thematic plane) the linguistic shape of the utterance (the grammatico-semantic plane) changes in accord with its purpose, and that one of the basic components of this difference is the difference in automatization: a scientific subject matter must be rid of technical automatizations in a popular presentation (journalistic and the like) and be expressed, at least in part, by means of the automatizations of everyday language; an everyday subject matter acquires in scientific styling, instead of the automatizations of conversational speech which would be preserved in case of a popular presentation, the corresponding automatizations of technical language. It is, of course, also possible to use the automatizations of conversational speech in a technical paper, thus [the economist Jan] Koloušek in one of his papers speaks of a *vyhladovělý člověk* [starved, very hungry individual], but this is done for purposes of stylistic dissimilation (thus in essence a foregrounding of style) and more frequently in popular presentations than in strictly scientific ones; in the latter, it may be for a pedagogical purpose, when we repeat the same thing “in other words,” that is, in other automatizations. In this article, for instance, I am using, in addition to the technical terminology of a certain school of thought – that is, technical automatizations (which I am frequently citing only in parentheses) – also automatizations and terms of more general use.

On the other hand, the automatizations of the language of science, or even of just workaday technical speech, used in conversational speech (but not, of course, in a technical conversation or discussion) become foregrounded. [...]

We find *maximum foregrounding*, used for its own sake, not only in *poetic language*, but even in the language of *essays*, which is linked to technical speech by the

fact that the communicative intent is not completely in the background, and the devices are selected and arranged in such a manner, be they taken from technical or conversational speech, that they become foregrounded; the language of essays is directed towards the foregrounded expression of a given communication (content), but foregrounded according to a certain pattern just as in poetic language, whereas the language of science is directed towards an accurate expression of the content, the workaday technical language towards a definite expression, and conversational speech towards a generally accessible communication.

[...]

Even this brief and rather simplified comparison of different functional dialects and styles shows that each of them has its own linguistic devices and modes of their utilization; from this it follows that it is *impossible and incorrect to try to raise any one functional dialect or style to the status of a criterion for the others*. The professor who uses the language of science in ordinary conversation is a well-known humorous figure: neither workaday technical speech nor the style of written expression can properly be used in plain conversation.<sup>10</sup> And it is equally incorrect to recommend the so-called “natural” way of expression for other dialects and styles: this means forcing the automatizations of conversational speech, that is, a language suited for just one function, upon other functional dialects and styles. Poetic language can use these automatizations for its purposes in various ways (cf. Mukařovský’s article), but it cannot be limited to them; technical speech, both workaday and scientific, can use them only to a limited extent. One can obviously not ignore the significance for standard French of its conversational base, the usage of the court and society of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, but one should then not overlook what was the subject matter of conversation in that society, the usage of which served as the basis for Vaugelas’ *Remarques* (literature, philosophy), and what is the subject matter of the conversations recommended to the guardian of Czech usage (women on the market, river sailors, see *Naše řeč* [a purist journal] 1.266 [1917]). How this trend is based on a romantic idealization of the people, the “unspoiled” people of course, can be seen from the fact that in addition to constantly recommending popular conversational usage, there are constantly repeated complaints about every element of slang in the speech of students or young people in general, in spite of [V.] Ertl’s [a Czech historical linguist] ironical remark in *Naše řeč* (8.61 [1924]) that young people will evidently go on doing this as well as other mischief “until [children] will be at least forty at birth”.

[...]

Just as the automatizations of conversational speech cannot be forced upon other functional dialects and styles, so it is impossible to require *definiteness* or *accuracy* of the standard language as such, and use them as criteria to evaluate utterances made in it, as is sometimes done. We did show that definiteness and accuracy as a manifestation of the intellectualization of the standard are important properties of certain of its functions, but let us therefore not forget that *inaccuracy* or *indefiniteness* may be

functionally justified, if that happens to be the purpose of a certain verbal response. It is, for instance, sometimes used in the language of commerce, legal practice, politics, diplomacy, and the like. It is not, and cannot be, a simple *yes* or *no* language, and it sometimes wants to, or has to, express itself noncommittally (cf. the well-known “*I’ll see what I can do*”). Thus, in the *language of business correspondence* there is, in addition to some definite (unequivocal) expressions for the operations of business practice and for the objects of commerce, a need also for some rather neutral formulae which can be used in different situations and on different occasions, because the correspondence is in bulk and is not individualized. Such formulae must therefore be evaluated from the standpoint of their special purpose and not be rejected en bloc as “feeble, anemic expressions which only coarsely render one’s thinking, and where the writer avoids laborious thinking over, clarifying his concepts, and looking for an accurate expression” (*Naše řeč* 14.191 [1930], in [Jiří] Haller’s [a Czech purist] article on business Czech): a secretary cannot think over laboriously, if she wants to get her work done, neither can she “clarify her concepts” too much, since she often doesn’t know too well herself what is involved and might change the meaning of the statement. This is not only the reason, as Haller thinks in the above paper, of these maligned “feeble, anemic expressions,” but also the purpose of such formulae. These neutral formulae, as well as the accurate clichés for business operations and the terms for the objects of commerce, are of course automatized. There are few styles of language as highly automatized as the language of business; nonetheless, it has room for foregrounding, namely in the case of advertising. Then of course it will not avoid “conspicuous novelties and uncommon forms”, which should be avoided in accord with the advice given in the above article in *Naše řeč* (p. 195).

*Journalistic language* is likewise in need of a store of various formulae (clichés), but we shall speak of this in another connection.

A verbal response can be *evaluated* only in terms of its *adequacy to the purpose*, whether it meets the given objective suitably.

To these two practical remarks flowing for the critique of linguistic usage from the discussion of the functional differentiation of language, let me add a third: I am thinking of the *impossibility of evaluating individual words* detached from their functional utilization and automatized combinations, as well as the impossibility of considering the automatized meaning of a word in a single combination and in a single function its only possible meaning.

[...]

In conclusion to this section on the functional differentiation of the standard language, let me give a *schematic survey of this differentiation*. It is not a classification of all the functions of language, but a systematic listing mainly of those differences which have been mentioned and which are most significant for the various purposes of the standard language. It therefore does not include the otherwise important and basic difference between the emotional and the intellectual aspect of verbal responses, nor that between overt and subvocal speech; for these differences, see at least the thesis on the functions of language

presented by the Linguistic Circle of Prague to the First Congress of Slavic Philologists, Prague, 1929 (Section II, Thesis No. 3, in French in *TCLP* 1.14 ff. [1929]).

*Functions of the standard:*

1. communication
  2. workaday technical
  3. theoretical technical
  4. esthetic
- } communicative

*Functional dialects:*

1. conversational
2. workaday (matter-of-fact)
3. scientific
4. poetic language

Re 1. unified semantic plane

free relation of lexical units to referents  
incomplete verbal responses  
intelligibility, given by the situation and by conversational automatizations

Re 2. unified semantic plane

relation of lexical units to referents definite by convention (terms)  
relatively complete responses  
definiteness, given by defined or codified automatizations (terms and formulae)

Re 3. unified semantic plane

relation of lexical units to referents accurate (concepts)  
complete responses  
accuracy, given by defined or codified automatizations

Re 4. complex (multivalued) semantic plane

relation of lexical units to referents, completeness and clarity of the utterance determined by the structure of the literary work and given by its poetic foregrounding

*Functional styles* of the standard language:

A. According to the *specific purpose* of the response:

1. matter-of-fact communication, information
2. exhortation (appeal), suasion
3. general explanation (popular)
4. technical explanation (exposition, proof)
5. codifying formulation



B. According to the *manner* of the response:

private – public

oral – written

oral: 1. private: (monologue) – dialogue  
2. public: speechmaking – discussion

written: 1. private  
2. public: (a) notice, poster  
(b) journalistic  
(c) book writing (magazine writing)

*Notes on the Scheme*

1. I have classed *poetic language* with its esthetic function as a fourth functional dialect simply because I am giving here a mere listing. There is an essential difference between the first three functional dialects listed which are always used to communicate something (have a communicative function) and between poetic language which is not primarily communicative. – For the same reasons of listing I have simply included among the functional styles that of *exhortation and suasion*, although there is a fundamental difference between this style and all others. – The listing in terms of the manner of the response can hardly be considered complete.

2. The difference between *functional style* and *functional dialect* [funkční jazyk] consists in the fact that the functional style is determined by the specific purpose of the given verbal response – it is a function of the verbal response (of the act of speech, “parole”), whereas the functional dialect is determined by the over-all purpose of the structured totality of means of expression, it is a function of the linguistic pattern (“langue”).

In verbal responses, we thus encounter functional dialects in different functional styles.

3. The *completeness of the response* is evaluated in terms of the degree to which the linguistic aspects of the response are complete or have gaps as compared to what the response is intended to express (in terms of the relationship of the grammatico-semantic plane to the thematic plane). – In conversational speech, there are gaps in the verbal response from the standpoint of the gradual development of the subject matter which are filled in from the extralinguistic situation and by extralinguistic means. In the language of science and in workaday speech, the continuity of the linguistic aspects of the response (the grammatico-semantic plane) is given only linguistically; the language of science, especially in the case of codifying formulation, then attempts to achieve the maximum parallelism possible in the given language between the linguistic expression and the gradual development of the subject matter; in workaday speech, there rather seems to be a conscious disturbance of this parallelism, and thus the progression of linguistic expression as compared to the progression of the subject matter is interrupted by repeating things “in other words,” or by deliberately leaving gaps to be filled in by the listener or reader so that only part of the thematic progression (usually its high points) find their expression, without, of course, the automatic intervention of the extralinguistic situation.



A more naive point of view will, instead of the thematic plane, think of reality (facts) as the thing to be expressed; this is an improper oversimplification. The thematic plane is not to be held identical with extra-linguistic reality; the two may be variously related to each other.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> By colloquial standard is meant an overall dialect [interdialekt], that is, a dialect used over a larger area in which otherwise local dialects are used, for instance. Czech colloquial standard, but also Haná colloquial standard, Lašsko colloquial standard, etc. (dialect areas in Moravia) (cf. 51.265 [1924]).

<sup>2</sup> Misunderstandings often arise when such formulae are not well known.

Let us not forget that in Czech popular social clichés are quite elaborate; thus, the well-known supplement to the invitation formula to the fair: “and don’t you dare not come,” without which the invitation is a mere polite formality, in Josef Holeček (1853–1929, a rural novelist), *Naši* (Our Folks) I, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 123 (for another example, cf. *ibid.* 38).

On the other hand, the greeting “May the Lord help you” is perceived as a mark of class and its meaning changes if a member of another class uses it.

<sup>3</sup> On such a layer, but from a prehistoric standpoint, cf. V. Machek’s work *Studie o tvorbě výrazů expresivních* (A Study of the Formation of Expressive Forms), 1930.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. my article in *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague* IV (1931), p. 276, and V. Mathesius: *Naše řeč*, 15.38 ff. (1931). It is sometimes erroneously asserted that palatal phonemes in general have a certain (emotional) functional coloring: this view is rightly rejected by Fr. Trávníček: *Prace filologické* 15.2. 163 ff. (1931).

<sup>5</sup> We can thus speak of the logicity of language only when it has this function, and judge the manner in which the verbal expression is adapted to rendering logical thinking, with the reservation brought up below in note 8. Recognition of the essential difference between the logical evaluation of thinking in terms of correct or incorrect judgments, and between the structure of the language, its material, and the utterances

which by themselves are neither logical nor illogical, as well as of the fact that logical and grammatical categories are not identical, this recognition has long been part of the ABC of linguistics. [...]

- <sup>6</sup> The words *poznatek*, *pojem*, as well as *dojem* [impression], *rozsah* [range] and many others, were first introduced into the Czech standard language by Antonín Marek in *Logika* (Logic), 1820.
- <sup>7</sup> It could, for instance, be ascertained statistically what compound sentences and what types of subordinate clauses are found in folk speech. [...]
- <sup>8</sup> We must of course differentiate between accuracy of expression (of terms) and accuracy of concepts or thinking; we may have, for instance, arrived at an accurate concept and not yet found a term; I may reject a term as inaccurate and admit the concept as accurate, etc.
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. Jan Rozwadowski in *BSL* 25.106 (1925), where the term deautomatization is used, but in an evolutionary sense.
- <sup>10</sup> Cf. Vendryès' famous statement "un homme qui parle comme il écrit nous fait l'effet d'un être artificiel, anormal." (*Le langage*, 1921, p. 326).

### Comprehension questions

1. What does Havránek mean by the phrase "intellectualization of language expression"? What evidence does he give to lend support to his argument?
2. What attitude does Havránek have towards language change, e.g. in connection with the speech of young people?
3. What arguments does Havránek use against the linguistic purism common among some linguists of his time?
4. What is the distinction between "functional styles" and "functional dialects"?
5. Discuss the following statement by Havránek and put it into the context of contemporary linguistics: "A verbal response can be *evaluated* only in terms of its *adequacy to the purpose*, whether it meets the given objective suitably."

# Standard language and poetic language

Jan Mukařovský



**Jan Mukařovský** (1891–1975) was a literary scholar and aesthetician, one of the major figures of Czech structuralism and a member of the Prague Linguistic Circle. He was a professor of aesthetics (1945) and rector at Charles University (1948–1953). After World War II, he renounced his pre-war structuralism and became politically and ideologically active. In his work, he stressed the role of the aesthetic function, considering it the crucial characteristic of any work of art. The meaning of a work of art is the outcome of its dynamic structure, a sum of all component parts. Amongst others, he developed the notions of the aesthetic norm and the aesthetic function, pointing out the way works of art fulfil, as well as violate, existing norms. The violations of the norm, which arise from the foregrounding of some components of the work of art, ultimately have the potential to become new norms.

*This article explores the relationship between the poetic language and the standard. Mukařovský identifies poetic language as an entity separate and distinct from the standard language. In his view, the standard provides the background against which various distortions are produced with the aim of creating aesthetic effects. The notions of automatization and foregrounding are then introduced: the former refers to production of an utterance in an automatic manner, the latter is associated with a more conscious execution of the utterance that arises when the appropriate norms are violated. In a work of art, we may find the foregrounding of various components that are mutually hierarchically organized in terms of domination and subordination.*

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The problem of the relationship between standard language and poetic language can be considered from two standpoints. The theorist of poetic language poses it somewhat as follows: is the poet bound by the norms of the standard? Or perhaps: how does this norm assert itself in poetry? The theorist of the standard language, on the other hand, wants to know above all to what extent a work of poetry can be used as data for ascertaining the norm of the standard. In other words, the theory of poetic language is primarily interested in the differences between the standard and poetic language, whereas the theory of the standard language is mainly interested in the similarities between them. It is clear that with a good procedure no conflict can arise between the two directions of research; there is only a difference in the point of view and in the illumination of the problem. Our study approaches the problem of the relationship between poetic language and the standard from the vantage point of poetic language. Our procedure will be to subdivide the general problem into a number of special problems.

The first problem, by way of introduction, concerns the following: what is the *relationship* between the extension of *poetic language* and that of the *standard*, between the places of each in the total system of the whole of language? Is poetic language a special brand of the standard, or is it an independent formation? Poetic language cannot be called a brand of the standard, if for no other reason that poetic language has at its disposal, from the standpoint of lexicon, syntax, etc., all the forms of the given language – often of different developmental phases thereof. There are works in which the lexical material is taken over completely from another form of language than the standard (thus, Villon's or Rictus' slang poetry in French literature). Different forms of the language may exist side by side in a work of poetry (for instance, in the dialogues of a novel dialect or slang, in the narrative passages the standard). Poetic language finally also has some of its own lexicon and phraseology as well as some grammatical forms, the so-called poetisms such as *zor* [gaze], *oř* [steed], *pláti* [be aflame], 3<sup>rd</sup> p. sg. *můž* [can; cf. English *-th*] (a rich selection of examples can be found in the ironic description of "moon language" in [Svatopluk] Čech's [1846–1908, a realist] *Výlet pana Broučka do měsíce* [Mr. Brouček's Trip to the Moon]).

Only some schools of poetry, of course, have a positive attitude towards poetisms (among them the Lumír Group including Svatopluk Čech), others reject them.

Poetic language is thus not a brand of the standard. This is not to deny the close connection between the two, which consists in the fact that, for poetry, the standard language is the background against which is reflected the esthetically intentional distortion of the linguistic components of the work, in other words, the intentional violation of the norm of the standard. Let us, for instance, visualize a work in which this distortion is carried out by the interpenetration of dialect speech with the standard; it is clear, then, that it is not the standard which is perceived as a distortion of the dialect, but the dialect as a distortion of the standard, even when the dialect is quantitatively preponderant. The violation of the norm of the standard, its systematic violation, is what makes possible the poetic utilization of language; without this possibility there would be no poetry. The more the norm of the standard is stabilized in a given language, the more varied can be its violation, and therefore the more possibilities for poetry in that language. And on the other hand, the weaker the awareness of this norm, the fewer possibilities of violation, and hence the fewer possibilities for poetry. Thus, in the beginnings of Modern Czech poetry, when the awareness of the norm of the standard was weak, poetic neologisms with the purpose of violating the norm of the standard were little different from neologisms designed to gain general acceptance and become a part of the norm of the standard, so that they could be confused with them.

Such is the case of M. Z. Polák [1788–1856, an early romantic], whose neologisms are to this day considered poor neologisms of the standard. [...]

A structural analysis of Polák's<sup>1</sup> poem would show that [Josef] Jungmann [a leading figure of the Czech national renaissance] was right [in evaluating Polák's poetry positively]. We are here citing the disagreement in the evaluation of Polák's neologisms merely as an illustration of the statement that, when the norm of the standard is weak as was the case in the period of national renaissance, it is difficult to differentiate the devices intended to shape this norm from those intended for its consistent and deliberate violation, and that a language with a weak norm of the standard therefore offers fewer devices to the poet.

This relationship between poetic language and the standard, one which we could call negative, also has its positive side which is, however, more important for the theory of the standard language than for poetic language and its theory. Many of the linguistic components of a work of poetry do not deviate from the norm of the standard because they constitute the background against which the distortion of the other components is reflected. The theoretician of the standard language can therefore include works of poetry in his data with the reservation that he will differentiate the distorted components from those that are not distorted. An assumption that all components have to agree with the norm of the standard would, of course, be erroneous.

The second special question which we shall attempt to answer concerns the different *function* of the two forms of language. This is the core of the foregrounding of the utterance. Foregrounding is the opposite of automatization, that is, the deautomatization of an act; the more an act is automatized, the less it is consciously executed; the more it is foregrounded, the more completely conscious does it become. Objectively speaking: automatization schematizes an event; foregrounding means the violation of the scheme. The standard language in its purest form, as the language of science with formulation as its objective, avoids foregrounding [aktualisace]: thus, a new expression, foregrounded because of its newness, is immediately automatized in a scientific treatise by an exact definition of its meaning. Foregrounding is, of course, common in the standard language, for instance, in journalistic style, even more in essays. But here it is always subordinate to communication: its purpose is to attract the reader's (listener's) attention more closely to the subject matter expressed by the foregrounded means of expression. All that has been said here about foregrounding and automatization in the standard language has been treated in detail in Havránek's paper in this [book]; we are here concerned with poetic language. In poetic language foregrounding achieves maximum intensity to the extent of pushing communication into the background as the objective of expression and of being used for its own sake; it is not used in the services of communication, but in order to place in the foreground the act of expression, the act of speech itself. The question is then one of how this maximum of foregrounding is achieved in poetic language. The idea might arise that this is a quantitative effect, a matter of the foregrounding of the largest number of components, perhaps of all of them together. This would be a mistake, although only a theoretical one, since in practice such a complete foregrounding of all the components is impossible. The foregrounding of any one of the components is necessarily accompanied by the automatization of one or more of the other components; thus, for instance, the foregrounded intonation in [Jaroslav] Vrchlický [1853–1912, a poet of the Lumír Group, see above] and [Svatopluk] Čech has necessarily pushed to the lowest level of automatization the meaning of the word as a unit, because the foregrounding of its meaning would give the word phonetic independence as well and lead to a disturbance of the uninterrupted flow of the intonational (melodic) line; an example of the degree to which the semantic independence of the word in context also manifests itself as intonational independence can be found in [Karel] Toman's [1877–1946, a modern poet] verse. The foregrounding of intonation as an uninterrupted melodic line is thus linked to the semantic "emptiness" for which the Lumír Group has been criticized by the younger generation as being "verbalistic". – In addition to the practical impossibility of the foregrounding of all components, it can also be pointed out that the simultaneous foregrounding of all the components of a work of poetry is unthinkable. This is because the foregrounding of a component implies precisely its being placed in the foreground; the unit in the foreground, however, occupies this position by comparison with another unit or units that remain in the background. A simultaneous general foregrounding would thus bring all the components into the same plane and so become a new automatization.

The devices by which poetic language achieves its maximum of foregrounding must therefore be sought elsewhere than in the quantity of foregrounded components. They consist in the consistency and systematic character of foregrounding. The consistency manifests itself in the fact that the reshaping of the foregrounded component within a given work occurs in a stable direction; thus, the deautomatization of meanings in a certain work is consistently carried out by lexical selection (the mutual interlarding of contrasting areas of the lexicon), in another equally consistently by the uncommon semantic relationship of words close together in the context. Both procedures result in a foregrounding of meaning, but differently for each. The systematic foregrounding of components in a work of poetry consists in the gradation of the interrelationships of these components, that is, in their mutual subordination and superordination. The component highest in the hierarchy becomes the dominant. All other components, foregrounded or not, as well as their interrelationships, are evaluated from the standpoint of the dominant. The dominant is that component of the work which sets in motion, and gives direction to, the relationships of all other components. The material of a work of poetry is intertwined with the interrelationships of the components even if it is in a completely unforegrounded state. Thus, there is always present, in communicative speech as well, the potential relationship between intonation and meaning, syntax, word order, or the relationship of the word as a meaningful unit to the phonetic structure of the text, to the lexical selection found in the text, to other words as units of meaning in the context of the same sentence. It can be said that each linguistic component is linked directly or indirectly, by means of these multiple interrelationships, in some way to every other component. In communicative speech these relationships are for the most part merely potential, because attention is not called to their presence and to their mutual relationship. It is, however, enough to disturb the equilibrium of this system at some point and the entire network of relationships is slanted in a certain direction and follows it in its internal organization: tension arises in one portion of this network (by consistent unidirectional foregrounding), while the remaining portions of the network are relaxed (by automatization perceived as an intentionally arranged background). This internal organization of relationships will be different in terms of the point affected, that is, in terms, of the dominant. More concretely: sometimes intonation will be governed by meaning (by various procedures), sometimes, on the other hand, the meaning structure will be determined by intonation; sometimes again, the relationship of a word to the lexicon may be foregrounded, then again its relationship to the phonetic structure of the text. Which of the possible relationships will be foregrounded, which will remain automatized, and what will be the direction of foregrounding whether from component A to component B or vice versa, all this depends on the dominant.

The dominant thus creates the unity of the work of poetry. It is, of course, a unity of its own kind, the nature of which in esthetics is usually designated as "unity in variety", a dynamic unity in which we at the same time perceive harmony and disharmony, convergence and divergence. The convergence is given by the trend towards the dominant,

the divergence by the resistance of the unmoving background of unforegrounded components against this trend. Components may appear unforegrounded from the standpoint of the standard language, or from the standpoint of the poetic canon, that is, the set of firm and stable norms into which the structure of a preceding school of poetry has dissolved by automatization, when it is no longer perceived as an indivisible and undissociable whole. In other words, it is possible in some cases for a component which is foregrounded in terms of the norms of the standard, not to be foregrounded in a certain work because it is in accord with the automatized poetic canon. Every work of poetry is perceived against the background of a certain tradition, that is, of some automatized canon with regard to which it constitutes a distortion. The outward manifestation of this automatization is the ease with which creation is possible in terms of this canon, the proliferation of epigones, the liking for obsolescent poetry in circles not close to literature. Proof of the intensity with which a new trend in poetry is perceived as a distortion of the traditional canon is the negative attitude of conservative criticism which considers deliberate deviations from the canon errors against the very essence of poetry.

The background which we perceive behind the work of poetry as consisting of the unforegrounded components resisting foregrounding is thus dual: the norm of the standard language and the traditional esthetic canon. Both backgrounds are always potentially present, though one of them will predominate in the concrete case. In periods of powerful foregrounding of linguistic elements, the background of the norm of the standard predominates, while in periods of moderate foregrounding, that of the traditional canon. If the latter has strongly distorted the norm of the standard, then its moderate distortion may, in turn, constitute a renewal of the norm of the standard, and this precisely because of its moderation. The mutual relationships of the components of the work of poetry, both foregrounded and unforegrounded, constitute its *structure*, a dynamic structure including both convergence and divergence and one that constitutes an undissociable artistic whole, since each of its components has its value precisely in terms of its relation to the totality.

It is thus obvious that the possibility of distorting the norm of the standard, if we henceforth limit ourselves to this particular background of foregrounding, is indispensable to poetry. Without it, there would be no poetry. To criticize the deviations from the norm of the standard as faults, especially in a period which, like the present, tends towards a powerful foregrounding of linguistic components, means to reject poetry. It could be countered that in some works of poetry, or rather in some genres, only the "content" (subject matter) is foregrounded, so that the above remarks do not concern them. To this it must be noted that in a work of poetry of any genre there is no fixed border, nor, in a certain sense, any essential difference between the language and the subject matter. The subject matter of a work of poetry cannot be judged by its relationship to the extralinguistic reality entering into the work; it is rather a component of the semantic side of the work (we do not want to assert, of course, that its relationship to reality cannot become a factor of its structure, as for instance in realism). The proof of this statement could be



given rather extensively; let us, however, limit ourselves to the most important point: the question of truthfulness does not apply in regard to the subject matter of a work of poetry, nor does it even make sense. Even if we posed the question and answered it positively or negatively as the case may be, the question has no bearing on the artistic value of the work, it can only serve to determine the extent to which the work has documentary value. If in some work of poetry there is emphasis on the question of truthfulness (as in [Vladislav] Vančura's [1891–1942, a modern author] short story *Dobrá míra* [The Good Measure]), this emphasis only serves the purpose of giving the subject matter a certain semantic coloration. The status of subject matter is entirely different in case of communicative speech. There, a certain relationship of the subject matter to reality is an important value, a necessary prerequisite. Thus, in the case of a newspaper report the question whether a certain event has occurred or not is obviously of basic significance.

The subject matter of a work of poetry is thus its largest semantic unit. In terms of being meaning, it has certain properties which are not directly based on the linguistic sign, but are linked to it insofar as the latter is a general semiological unit (especially its independence of any specific signs, or sets of signs, so that the same subject matter may without basic changes be rendered by different linguistic devices, or even transposed into a different set of signs altogether, as in the transposition of subject matter from one art form to another), but this difference in properties does not affect the semantic character of the subject matter. It thus holds, even for works and genres of poetry in which the subject matter is the dominant, that the latter is not the “equivalent” of a reality to be expressed by the work as effectively (for instance, as truthfully) as possible, but that it is a part of the structure, is governed by its laws, and is evaluated in terms of its relationship to it. If this is the case, then it holds for the novel as well as for the lyrical poem that to deny a work of poetry the right to violate the norm of the standard is equivalent to the negation of poetry. It cannot be said of the novel that here the linguistic elements are the esthetically indifferent expression of content, not even if they appear to be completely devoid of foregrounding: the structure is the total of all the components, and its dynamics arises precisely from the tension between the foregrounded and unforegrounded components. There are, incidentally, many novels and short stories in which the linguistic components are clearly foregrounded. Changes effected in the interest of correct language would thus, even in the case of prose, often interfere with the very essence of the work; this would, for instance, happen if the author or even translator decided, as was asked in *Naše řeč*, to eliminate “superfluous” relative clauses.

There still remains the problem of *esthetic values* in language outside of the realm of poetry. A recent Czech opinion has it that “esthetic evaluation must be excluded from language, since there is no place where it can be applied. It is useful and necessary for judging style, but not language” (J. Haller, *Problém jazykové správnosti* (The Problem of Correct Language), *Výroční zpráva č. st. ref. real. gymnasia v Ústí nad Labem za r. 1930–31*, p. 23). I am leaving aside the criticism of the terminologically inaccurate opposition of style and language; but I do want to point out, in opposition to Haller's thesis, that

esthetic valuation is a very important factor in the formation of the norm of the standard; on the one hand because the conscious refinement of the language cannot do without it, on the other hand because it sometimes, in part, determines the development of the norm of the standard.

Let us start with a general discussion of the field of esthetic phenomena. It is clear that this field by far exceeds the confines of the arts. Dessoir says about it: “The striving for beauty need not be limited in its manifestation to the specific forms of the arts. The esthetic needs are, on the contrary, so potent that they affect *almost all* the acts of man”.<sup>2</sup> If the area of esthetic phenomena is indeed so broad, it becomes obvious that esthetic valuation has its place beyond the confines of the arts; we can cite as examples the esthetic factors in sexual selection, fashion, the social amenities, the culinary arts, etc. There is, of course, a difference between esthetic valuation in the arts and outside of art. In the arts, esthetic valuation necessarily stands highest in the hierarchy of the values contained in the work, whereas outside of art its position vacillates and is usually subordinate. Furthermore, in the arts we evaluate each component in terms of the structure of the work in question, and the yardstick is in each individual case determined by the function of the component within the structure. Outside of art, the various components of the phenomenon to be evaluated are not integrated into an esthetic structure and the yardstick becomes the established norm that applies to the component in question, wherever the latter occurs. If, then, the area of esthetic valuation is so broad that it includes “almost all of the acts of man,” it is indeed not very probable that language would be exempt from esthetic valuation; in other words, that its use would not be subject to the laws of taste. There is direct proof that esthetic valuation is one of the basic criteria of purism, and that even the development of the norm of the standard cannot be imagined without it.

[...]

Esthetic valuation clearly has its indispensable place in the refinement of language, and those purists who deny its validity are unconsciously passing judgment on their own practice. Without an esthetic point of view, no other form of the cultivation of good language is possible, even one much more efficient than purism. This does not mean that he who intends to cultivate good language has the right to judge language in line with his personal taste, as is done precisely by the purists. Such an intervention into the development of the standard language is efficient and purposeful only in periods when the conscious esthetic valuation of phenomena has become a social fact — as was the case in France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In other periods, including the present, the esthetic point of view has more of a regulatory function in the cultivation of good language: he who is active in the cultivation of good language must take care not to force upon the standard language, in the name of correct language, modes of expression that violate the esthetic canon (set of norms) given in the language implicitly, but objectively; intervention without heed to the esthetic norms hampers, rather than advances, the development of the language. The esthetic canon, which differs not only from language to language, but also for different developmental periods of the same language (not counting in this context other functional

formations of which each has its own esthetic canon), must therefore be ascertained by scientific investigation and be described as accurately as possible. This is the reason for the considerable significance of the question of the manner in which esthetic valuation influences the development of the norm of the standard. Let us first consider the manner in which the lexicon of the standard language is increased and renewed. Words originating in slang, dialects, or foreign languages, are, as we know from our own experience, often taken over because of their novelty and uncommonness, that is, for purposes of foregrounding in which esthetic valuation always plays a significant part. Words of the poetic language, poetic neologisms, can also enter the standard by this route, although in these cases we can also be dealing with acceptance for reasons of communication (need for a new shade of meaning). The influence of poetic language on the standard is, however, not limited to the vocabulary: intonational and syntactic patterns (clichés) can, for instance, also be taken over — the latter only for esthetic reasons since there is hardly any communicative necessity for a change of the sentence and intonation structure current until then. Very interesting in this respect is the observation by the poet J. Cocteau in his book *Le secret professionnel* (Paris, 1922, p. 36) that “Stéphane Mallarmé even now influences the style of the daily press without the journalists’ being aware of it.” By way of explanation it must be pointed out that Mallarmé has very violently distorted French syntax and word order which is incomparably more bound in French than in Czech, being a grammatical factor. In spite of this intensive distortion, or perhaps because of it, Mallarmé influenced the development of the structure of the sentence in the standard language.

The effect of esthetic valuation on the development of the norm of the standard is undeniable; this is why the problem deserves the attention of the theorists. So far, we have, for instance, hardly even any lexical studies of the acceptance of poetic neologisms in Czech and of the reasons for this acceptance; [Antonin] Frinta’s article *Rukopisné podvrhy a naše spisovná řeč* [The Fake Manuscripts (Václav Hanka’s forgeries of purportedly Old Czech poetry, 1813, 1817) and our Standard Language] (*Naše řeč*, vol. II) has remained an isolated attempt. It is also necessary to investigate the nature and range of esthetic valuation in the standard language. Esthetic valuation is based here, as always when it is not based on an artistic structure, on certain generally valid norms. In art, including poetry, each component is evaluated in relation to the structure. The problem in evaluating is to determine how and to what extent a given component fulfils the function proper to it in the total structure; the yardstick is given by the context of a given structure and does not apply to any other context. The proof lies in the fact that a certain component may by itself be perceived as a negative value in terms of the pertinent esthetic norm, if its distortional character is very prominent, but may be evaluated positively in terms of a particular structure and as its essential component precisely because of this distortional character. There is no esthetic structure outside of poetry, none in the standard language (nor in language in general). There is, however, a certain set of esthetic norms, each of which applies independently to a certain component of language. This set, or canon, is constant only for a certain linguistic milieu; thus, the esthetic canon of the standard is different from that

of slang. We therefore need a description and characterization of the esthetic canon of the standard language of today and of the development of this canon in the past. It is, of course, clear to begin with that this development is not independent of the changing structures in the art of poetry. The discovery and investigation of the esthetic canon accepted for a certain standard language would not only have theoretical significance as a part of its history, but also, as has already been said, be of practical importance in its cultivation.

Let us now return to the main topic of our study and attempt to draw some conclusions from what was said above of the relationship between the standard and poetic language.

Poetic language is a different form of language with a different function from that of the standard. It is therefore equally unjustified to call all poets, without exception, creators of the standard language as it is to make them responsible for its present state. This is not to deny the possibility of utilizing poetry as data for the scientific description of the norm of the standard (cf. p. 165), nor the fact that the development of the norm of the standard does not occur uninfluenced by poetry. The distortion of the norm of the standard is, however, of the very essence of poetry, and it is therefore improper to ask poetic language to abide by this norm. This was clearly formulated as early as 1913 by Ferdinand Brunot (*L'autorité en matière de langage, Die neueren Sprachen*, vol. XX): "Modern art, individualistic in essence, cannot always and everywhere be satisfied with the standard language alone. The laws governing the usual communication of thought must not, lest it be unbearable tyranny, be categorically imposed upon the poet who, beyond the bounds of the accepted forms of language, may find personalized forms of intuitive expression. It is up to him to use them in accord with his creative intuition and without other limits than those imposed by his own inspiration. Public opinion will give the final verdict." It is interesting to compare Brunot's statement to one of Haller's of 1931 (*Problém jazykové správnosti*, op. cit. 3): "Our writers and poets in their creative effort attempt to replace the thorough knowledge of the material of the language by some sort of imaginary ability of which they themselves are not too sincerely convinced. They lay claim to a right which can but be an unjust privilege. Such an ability, instinct, inspiration, or what have you, cannot exist in and of itself; just as the famous feel for the language, it can only be the final result of previous cognition, and without consciously leaning on the finished material of the language, it is no more certain than any other arbitrary act." If we compare Brunot's statement to Haller's, the basic difference is clear without further comment. Let us also mention Jungmann's critique of Polák's *Vznešenost přírody* [The Sublimity of Nature] cited elsewhere in this study (see above); Jungmann has there quite accurately pointed out as a characteristic feature of poetic language its "uncommonness," that is, its distortedness. – In spite of all that has been said here, the condition of the norm of the standard language is not without its significance to poetry, since the norm of the standard is precisely the background against which the structure of the work of poetry is projected, and in regard to which it is perceived as a distortion; the structure of a work of poetry can change completely from its origin if it is, after a certain time, projected against the background of a norm of the standard which has since changed.

In addition to the relationship of the norm of the standard to poetry, there is also the opposite relationship, that of poetry to the norm of the standard. We have already spoken of the influence of poetic language on the development of the standard; some remarks remain to be added. First of all, it is worth mentioning that the poetic foregrounding of linguistic phenomena, since it is its own purpose, cannot have the purpose of creating new means of communication (as Vossler and his school think). If anything passes from poetic language into the standard, it becomes a loan in the same way as anything taken over by the standard from any other linguistic milieu; even the motivation of the borrowing may be the same: a loan from poetic language may likewise be taken over for extra-esthetic, that is, communicative reasons, and conversely the motivation for borrowings from other functional dialects, such as slang, may be esthetic. Borrowings from poetic language are beyond the scope of the poet's intent. Thus, poetic neologisms arise as intentionally esthetic new formations, and their basic features are unexpectedness, unusualness, and uniqueness. Neologisms created for communicative purposes, on the other hand, tend towards common derivation patterns and easy classifiability in a certain lexical category; these are the properties allowing for their general usability. If, however, poetic neologisms were formed in view of their general usability, their esthetic function would be endangered thereby; they are, therefore, formed in an unusual manner, with considerable violence to the language, as regards both form and meaning.

[...]

The relationship between poetic language and the standard, their mutual approximation or increasing distance, changes from period to period. But even within the same period, and with the same norm of the standard, this relationship need not be the same for all poets. There are, generally speaking, three possibilities: the writer, say a novelist, may either not distort the linguistic components of his work at all (but this nondistortion is, as was shown above, in itself a fact of the total structure of his work), or he may distort it, but subordinate the linguistic distortion to the subject matter by giving substandard colour to his lexicon in order to characterize personages and situations, for instance; or finally, he may distort the linguistic components in and of themselves by either subordinating the subject matter to the linguistic deformation, or emphasizing the contrast between the subject matter and its linguistic expression. An example of the first possibility might be [Jakub Arbes [1840–1914, an early naturalist], of the second, some realistic novelists such as T. Nováková [1853–1912] or Z. Winter [1846–1912], of the third, [Vladislav] Vančura. It is obvious that as one goes from the first possibility to the third the divergence between poetic language and the standard increases. This classification has of course been highly schematized for purposes of simplicity; the real situation is much more complex.

The problem of the relationship between the standard and poetic language does not, however, exhaust the significance of poetry as the art form which uses language as its material, for the standard language, or for the language of a nation in general. The very existence of poetry in a certain language has fundamental importance for this language. [...]

By the very fact of foregrounding, poetry increases and refines the ability to handle language in general; it gives the language the ability to adjust more flexibly to new requirements and it gives it a richer differentiation of its means of expression. Foregrounding brings to the surface and before the eyes of the observer even such linguistic phenomena as remain quite covert in communicative speech, although they are important factors in language. Thus, for instance, Czech symbolism, especially O. Březina's [1868–1929] poetry, has brought to the fore of linguistic consciousness the essence of sentence meaning and the dynamic nature of sentence construction. From the standpoint of communicative speech, the meaning of a sentence appears as the total of the gradually accumulated meanings of the individual words, that is, without having independent existence. The real nature of the phenomenon is covered up by the automatization of the semantic design of the sentence. Words and sentences appear to follow each other with obvious necessity, as determined only by the nature of the message. Then there appears a work of poetry in which the relationship between the meanings of the individual words and the subject matter of the sentence has been foregrounded. The words here do not succeed each other naturally and inconspicuously, but within the sentence there occur semantic jumps, breaks, which are not conditioned by the requirements of communication, but given in the language itself. The device for achieving these sudden breaks is the constant intersection of the plane of basic meaning with the plane of figurative and metaphorical meaning; some words are for a certain part of the context to be understood in their figurative meaning, in other parts in their basic meaning, and such words, carrying a dual meaning, are precisely the points at which there are semantic breaks. There is also foregrounding of the relationship between the subject matter of the sentence and the words as well as of the semantic interrelationships of the words in the sentence. The subject matter of the sentence then appears as the centre of attraction given from the beginning of the sentence, the effect of the subject matter on the words and of the words on the subject matter is revealed, and the determining force can be felt with which every word affects every other. The sentence comes alive before the eyes of the speech community: the structure is revealed as a concert of forces. (What was here formulated discursively, must of course be imagined as an unformulated intuitive cognition stored away for the future in the consciousness of the speech community.) Examples can be multiplied at will, but we shall cite no more. We wanted to give evidence for the statement that the main importance of poetry for language lies in the fact that it is an art. [...]

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> It is important to note that Polák himself in lexical notes to his poem clearly distinguishes little known words (including obvious neologisms and new loans) from those which he used “for better poetic expression”, that is, as is shown by the evidence, from poetic neologisms.
- <sup>2</sup> M. Dessoir: *Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, Stuttgart, 1906, p. 112.

## Comprehension questions

1. What is the relationship between the standard and poetic language?
2. What is the relationship between the degree of stabilization of the norm and the potential for its violation?
3. In what sense does Mukařovský use the concept of “structure”?
4. What is the differential status of subject matter in poetry and in communicative speech?



# Remarks on the dynamism of the system of language

Josef Vachek



**Josef Vachek** (1909–1996) was a Czech Anglicist, one of the major figures of the Prague Linguistic Circle. He was professor of English linguistics in Brno (1946–1962), and later at various Czechoslovak universities (Prague, Bratislava and Prešov). Vachek was active mainly in the area of historical phonology and grammar. In his work, he used the method of analytical comparison, typically contrasting English and Czech. His most famous studies dealt with peripheral phonemes in English, the functional differentiation between spoken and written language (*Written Language: General Problems and Problems of English*, 1973). He was a prolific historiographer and great popularizer of Prague School linguistics, having written and edited several volumes both in his country and abroad (*A Prague School Reader in Linguistics*, 1964; *The Linguistic School of Prague*, 1966; *U základů pražské jazykovědné školy*, 1970; *Praguiana*, 1983; *Vzpomínky českého anglisty*, 1994; *Prolegomena k dějinám pražské školy jazykovědné*, 1999). In 1959, Vachek established the journal *Brno Studies in English*. Under his editorship, it quickly became one of the leading linguistics journals dealing with English philology in Central Europe.



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*In this article, Josef Vachek provides an overview of the notion of “dynamism”, as it was articulated in some of the major works during the classic period of Prague school functionalism. The chapter summarizes the understanding of dynamism as the non-static nature of language and explains the therapeutic effect which the dynamism of language has in respect to the language system as such. The chapter attests to the sensitive combination of the synchronic and diachronic approaches among early scholars of the discipline. This is based on their conviction that the two levels of analysis can hardly be separated in efforts to understand the complex systematic nature of language: the current state of the language is systematically being explained as a result of past developments.*

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It has been commonly admitted that one of the main assets of the Prague conception of language, as formulated by the Prague Circle, mainly in its Theses of 1929, was its combination of the structuralist approach to facts of language with consistent regard for their functions. It was for this reason that, e.g., V.A. Zvegincev (1965) did not hesitate to open the chapter dealing with the activities of the Prague School with the title “Functionalist Linguistics”. Still, the earliest conception, as formulated in the Prague Theses, was not quite free from some inaccuracies. One of them appears to have been the insufficient stress laid on the dynamic, i.e. non-static character of the system of any language at any moment of its existence.

The first member of the Prague group to realize the existence of the said dynamism was undoubtedly Roman Jakobson. As early as 1929 he declared that any change in any language, if its cause and its import are to be correctly grasped, must be examined with due regard for the whole language system affected by that change. To this was to be added, in another context, Jakobson’s well-known statement that many (though of course not all) changes of the system of language have what may be called “a therapeutic function”. This means that the *raison d’être* of such changes is to restore the jeopardized balance of the language system (for illustrations of such changes on the phonological level see Jakobson’s well-known monograph *Remarques* 1929). Even if not all changes in language can claim such therapeutic status (of which Jakobson himself was well aware as early as 1929), there can be no doubt that the application of the principle of systemic therapy has been able to throw some new light on a number of points so far enigmatic in the development of concrete languages. At least one such point deserves a passing mention here, viz. B. Trnka’s application of it to the first stages of the Late Middle English complex of vocalic changes known as the Great Vowel Shift – cf. B. Trnka (1959), J. Vachek (1974).

Here, however, one must point out another conclusion that may be drawn from the idea of therapeutic changes. Its author duly emphasized that the restoration of the jeopardized balance may give rise, in its turn, to the emergence of some other “weak point” of the given system, and such a new weak point may again “call for” some therapeutic change to restore the balance, and so *ad infinitum*. In this connection, Jakobson aptly

recalled, and brought to a more logical conclusion, Saussure's well-known comparison of the situation within the language system to the situation obtaining on the chessboard in the course of a game of chess. Still, there is one point in which Saussure's comparison fails; a game of chess will terminate, after a number of moves, in checkmate, whereas the series of the therapeutic changes in the system of language does not tend to such an end – it may be virtually unlimited in time (unless all users of the language die out or accept some other language system). In other words, since all living languages are subjected to such a continuous series of changes, one can justly regard this as evidence of the fact that the dynamic, non-static character of language at any stage of its development constitutes one of the universals of language.

If this is so, it is obvious that any language at any moment of its development can be qualified as system-striving rather than as consistently and perfectly systematic. To put the thing differently, the imperfect balance of the language system, too, must be admitted to figure as another item on the list of language universals – on this field of problems see interesting remarks by F. Daneš (1966). If one draws all necessary consequences from this fact, one will be able to eschew two errors which even some eminent linguistic thinkers were unable to avoid. One of them is the often asserted denial of the systematic character of language with which the presence of a number of non-systematic elements is believed to be incompatible. Those scholars who commit the other error are guilty of “emendating” the language system by altering or adapting some of its elements which appear to them to contradict its systemic character – it is interesting to find that even such a protagonist of the Prague conception as N.S. Trubetzkoy was sometimes not quite averse to such “emendations”, cf. Vachek (1933), p. 97.

The dynamic nature of the language system is, as a matter of fact, also clearly revealed by the well-known presence in that system of both archaisms and neologisms (see already Jakobson 1929). Admittedly, each of these two kinds of phenomena contradicts, in some way, the regularities otherwise obtaining in the given language system. In post-war Prague writings, such phenomena were also classified as peripheral elements of the system, as opposed to the central elements which reflect the regularities of the system without any exceptional deviations – as is well known, a whole volume of the post-war Prague *Travaux* was devoted to the discussion of the peripheral elements of the language system on all its levels (cf. Vachek, ed., 1966).

It is important to keep in mind that the dynamism of the system of language is inherent not only in its basic, phonological level (for peripheral elements of the Modern English phonological system see their detailed discussion by Vachek [1964], for phonological dynamism of Modern Czech, see Vachek [1968]), but also on the “higher” language levels. For the morphological level it may be referred here to Vachek (1980), analysing the structure of Old English declension and conjugation with a view to their further development in Middle and Early Modern English, and analogous remarks could also be formulated for the syntactic and lexical levels where, as is commonly known, deviations from the

systemic regularities are often employed for specific stylistic purposes – here also belongs the vast complex of the problems of poetic language, cf. J. Mukařovský (1964).

The just noted fact that the presence of dynamism can be ascertained on any language level has some important consequences. It is now generally admitted that language constitutes a complex system containing a number of subsystems or levels, some general problems of which were ably discussed by F. Daneš (1971). It will be easily seen that each of the subsystems has its own specific needs and wants, and it is clear that all such partial needs and wants must necessarily be coordinated if the language system taken as a whole is to smoothly perform its main task, i.e. communication in the broadest sense of the term. However, such coordination may at times present some difficulties resulting from the conflicting interests of two (or even more) levels of the given language system. The solution of such difficulties is necessarily affected for the benefit of one of the levels, while the interests of the other level(s) recede, for the given moment, into the background.

An interesting case of the prevalence of the interest of the morphological level over that of the phonological subsystem was discussed by Vachek (1963, 1968). It is concerned with the preservation in the Modern Czech phonological system of the consonantal phoneme /ř/ despite the powerful handicap resting in the very slight integration of that phoneme in the phonological system of Modern Czech (for the concept of systemic integration in phonology consult A. Martinet [1955]).

As a matter of fact, the phoneme /ř/ has been ranking, for a long time, as one of the candidates for elimination from the Modern Czech phonological system, just as it was already eliminated in the Polish and Sorbian systems of consonant phonemes. The reason for the survival of /ř/ in the Czech phonological system despite the said handicap should most probably be looked for in the specific needs and wants of the morphological system of Modern Czech, in which the opposition of /r/ : /ř/ has become firmly rooted as an important morphonological signal of some basic morphological relations, e.g. as a signal of the opposition of number in the Nom. sg. vs. Nom. pl. of animate masculine nouns as well as of adjectives; further as a signal of adverbs derived from adjectives, etc. – in all such cases, the opposition /r/ : /ř/ is propped up by other instances of morphonological oppositions of “hard” vs. “soft” consonant phonemes of Modern Czech, such as /t/ : /t̨/, /d/ : /d̨/, /n/ : /n̨/. (For the opposition of /r/ : /ř/ cf. instances like Nsg. *kocour* ‘tom-cat’: Npl. *kocouři*, *autor* ‘author’ : *autoři*; adj. Nsg. *starý* ‘old’ : Npl. *staří*; adj. *dobrý* ‘good’ : adv. *dobře* ‘well’; for further particulars see Vachek 1968, pp. 97–98). In this case, clearly, the needs and wants of clear morphological signalling prevailed over the structural needs and wants of the Czech phonological system.

In other cases, on the other hand, it is the needs and wants of the phonological system which may have the upper hand in their conflict with those of morphology. A well-known piece of evidence of such prevalence of the needs of the phonological level is provided by the fate of the English consonant phoneme /h/. As was demonstrated elsewhere (see Vachek 1964), this phoneme was still very firmly integrated in the phonological system of Old English, but in the later stages of the development of English it was to be

ousted from most of the positions in which it had been common, with the result that in Present Day English its occurrence is confined to one single place in the word, viz. to a morpheme-initial prevocalic position. As a consequence of this, the Modern English sound [h] ranks as a peripheral, only very slightly integrated element of the Modern English phonological system, and as a peripheral element tends to be eliminated in it. As a matter of fact, this eliminating process has already been effected in the substandard varieties of Modern English, i.e. in most territorial dialects, including Cockney, where the sound [h] now ranks as a phonostylistic feature (in the sense of Trubetzkoy [1939], p. 28), not as a full-fledged phoneme – for particulars see Vachek (1964, 1981).

It is interesting that one of the Early Old English changes which were to reduce the functioning of /h/ rather seriously was the well-known process of contraction in intervocalic positions, such as took place in words like *seohan* > *sēon*, *eohes* > *ēos*, *scōhes* > *scōs*, and the like. Such contractions, very naturally, were contrary to the needs and wants of the morphological system of Old English. One is faced here with a question of why the /h/-phoneme in the above-mentioned instances was not to be propped up by the presence in the Old English morphological system by the presence in it of instances like *weorþan*, *dæʒes*, *stānes*, etc., just as the Czech phoneme /f/, discussed here above, has been propped up by the morphological signalling function performed by the opposition of “hard” vs. “soft” phonemes in the Czech morphological system.

The answer to the given question is prompted by the all-encompassing view of the Old English grammatical, particularly morphological situation. One can say that even if the grammatical system of the period was still of synthetic character, it was already perceptibly weakened in many of its points, so that ground was already being prepared for its later thorough reorganization on an analytical basis (see, e.g., A.C. Baugh [1957], pp. 189f.). It is well known that already in Old English case functions were being increasingly expressed by auxiliary grammatical words (especially by prepositions), with the result that the structure of the old synthetic grammatical pattern was at that time already palpably undermined. Thus it will be easily understood that the morphological level of Old English had been so sensibly weakened that it could hardly interfere with the changes taking place on the phonological level, the aim of which was to solve the specific systemic problems of its own (concretely, the elimination of the slightly functionally charged element of its subsystem).

Instances of the interdependence of the needs and wants of various language levels could easily be multiplied – for a number of them see Vachek (1961 and 1964 for English, 1968 for Czech). Still, one must face here some objections that may be heard from time to time against the application of the principle of dynamism of language systems in an effort to throw new light on some of the problems of such systems, both from the synchronistic and –from the diachronistic viewpoint. First of all, we want to point out here, as briefly as possible, wherein lies, in our opinion, the importance of the study of the dynamism in language and of the peripheral phenomena ascertainable in its system. It will be seen that such study is of paramount importance both for general linguistic theory and for the practical sphere of linguistic usage.

As far as the theory of general linguistics is concerned, the examination of the dynamism of language and of peripheral language phenomena may be qualified as a significant return of linguistic theory to linguistic reality. From time to time one can meet in the history of linguistic research radical currents which try to cram into the framework of a prefabricated theory all facts of the examined language, without any regard to the carrying capacity of such a theory. Here belong, e.g., some of the attempts of mathematically oriented linguists who construe their models without due regard for the actual situation in the system of natural language, especially for the imperfection of its balance, so clearly due to the dynamism of language. It should be recalled here that as early as 1962 N.D. Andrejev laid stress on the fact that no mathematical model can do justice to the actual situation obtaining in natural language. One should also recall here the very apt statement of W. Haas (1967) that there are only two disciplines in which one does not find any border-line cases, i.e. any peripheral phenomena, such as are commonly found in social sciences – the two exceptional disciplines being mathematics and formal logic. Therefore, research in social sciences must be based on prerequisites very different from those of the two exact disciplines. As has already been noted here above, it is exactly the identification of the peripheral features of language systems which can lead to the recognition of the given system's specific dynamism, which also constitutes the driving force of that system's development. It will be recalled that the fact of all natural languages being subject to the process of development has been adduced here as evidence for the fact that no language system is free of peripheral elements. The identification of such system-peripheral elements must therefore be pinpointed as one of the most urgent tasks of the analysis of natural languages.

It is sometimes objected that the just formulated approach to the given problems deprives linguistics of the possibility (or, chance) to become an exact science. To this it should be answered that the fundamental requirement to be asked from any methodological approach is its ability to reflect, as adequately as possible, the events taking place within the examined area of facts and to find out the regularities lying behind these events. And it is undeniable that the events examined by the social sciences, events characterized by a relatively very rapid changeability of the studied structures, call for such a theory as will take this changeability into account and will be able to incorporate it, in the shape of systemic dynamism, into the basic framework of the structuralist and functionalist conception whose foundations were laid in the Prague Theses of the late nineteen-twenties.

As regards the fears that the exactness of linguistic analysis might be impaired by taking into consideration facts not fully systemic, such misgivings may be dismissed as wholly unfounded. Of course the admission of the existence of peripheral systemic elements cannot play the part of a *deus ex machina* providing the scholar with an easy way out of his analytical difficulties. It stands to reason that the identification of peripheral elements does not depend on the scholar's arbitrary choice but, on the contrary, on a most careful and delicate analysis of the relations obtaining in the examined complex of structural phenomena, relations of both the intralevel and the interlevel order. It would thus

be most unjust to qualify the linguistic analysis counting with peripheral phenomena as if it allowed for inadmissible facilitation of the linguist's task. On the contrary, such analysis, if adequately performed, turns out to be much more difficult than the one neglecting such phenomena: it can only be based on the linguist's fine sense of the tension existing at the given period in the examined system, and particularly on his ability of acutely observing the ways and means by which such tension becomes overtly manifested in concrete utterances serving as primary materials of the linguist's analysis. Besides, it should also be noted that the peripheral features of language often rank as something more essential than mere structural defects of the linguistic system: they rather serve as indicators showing the way towards a new structuration which in the future may replace the old one which no longer meets the systemic demands (for concrete instances of such indicators see Vachek [1966]; cf. also interesting remarks by G.Y. Shevelov [1967]). In our opinion, it is exactly because of this particular part played by system-peripheral elements in the process of reshaping the language system that one can evaluate the examination of such elements as an invaluable source of most rewarding information on both synchronic and diachronic forces operating in the system, and thus as a notable contribution to general linguistic theory.

What has just been said here refutes quite convincingly the objection that the concentration of the linguist's attention on system peripheral elements functioning as systemic "fuzzy points" might discredit the basic principle of modern linguistics, viz. the conception of language as a system "où tout se tient". Obviously, however, such concentration can only discredit a naive, arch-dogmatic conception of a perfectly balanced system of language, functioning as faultlessly as an electric switch (to quote V. Mathesius's ironic phrase often used in his university classes). Such a naive conception, of course, not only can but must be discredited, since it grossly misrepresents the language reality, while the conception of language taking into account its dynamism and allowing for its peripheral elements is able to do full justice to the real state of things. This, incidentally, was anticipated, even if not expressly stated, by Edward Sapir as early as 1921 in his often quoted dictum that "all grammars leak" (p. 39).

Finally, in the area of practical language usage the results of research on the dynamism of language can be found very useful in two domains: in that of language teaching and in attacking the problems of language standardization (particularly the fundamental problem of speech correctness). First, in language teaching it enables the instructor to distinguish the central elements of the system of language (the mastering of which saves both the teacher and the pupil lots of time and trouble) from the peripheral elements whose identification may enable the student to refine his knowledge by obtaining the proper stylistic perspective on the language system, mainly to realize the presence and function in it of archaisms and neologisms. In this way the student will be able to avoid the danger of viewing the studied language in a distorted way, i.e. in a perspective that would be rather flat and overschematized.



Second, in dealing with problems of language standardization (and, in general, with problems of the cultivation of language) the distinction between central and peripheral elements may again play a most vital part. Their formal as well as functional analysis will make the analyst conscious of the fact that the standardized norm of language very sorely needs both kinds of elements, central as well as peripheral, if it is to comply with the basic requirement of elastic stability, so competently and so persuasively voiced more than fifty years ago by Vilém Mathesius (1931). Here again, one should realize both the importance of the archaisms (which in the utterances of the standardized language can play a very essential stylistic role) as well as that of the neologisms which may very often foreshadow the direction of the future development of the examined system of language. As was duly stressed by B. Havránek as early as 1931, the identification of neologisms may often give useful hints to the linguistic theorist attempting to standardize the given language as to which forms or phrases should be chosen if the language to be standardized is to constitute a truly living, and not an unduly overconservative structure.

## Note

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### Comprehension questions

1. In what sense is Jakobson’s conception of “dynamism” linked to language diachrony?
2. Why is the non-static character of language considered to be one of the universals of language? What other language universals do you know?
3. What does the “imperfect balance of a language” mean? Can you think of some current examples?
4. Why is the English phoneme /h/ considered as peripheral? Why has it not disappeared from the phonological system, as might be expected to be the case?
5. In what sense is the methodology of the social sciences, according to Vachek’s view, different from such sciences as mathematics and formal logic?
6. Can linguistics be a true science, given the changeability (dynamism) of its subject?
7. How do you understand the phrase “all grammars leak”?

# On the interplay of external and internal factors in the development of language

Josef Vachek

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*This article deals with the relationship between the internal and external factors that affect the development of language. Vachek is primarily interested in the levels of phonology and grammar, providing ample examples from English, a language that has been affected by numerous external factors in its development. He considers how external factors affect the phonic level, but notes that the operation of the external factors is possible only as far as the internal factors actually allow the former to be asserted. More specifically, he discusses the difference between negation in Czech and English, noting the change from multiple sentence negation in Old English to single sentence negation in Modern English. On the level of phonology, he also notes how the historical fate of certain phonemes (their gradual disappearance, preservation, phonologization, etc.) depends on the internal arrangement of the system and its changing balance, which is sometimes upset by external factors, e.g. the need of the language to incorporate foreign elements coming into the system.*

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## I.

The question of the degree to which external (i.e. economic, social and cultural) factors can contribute to the development of language is undoubtedly one of the most complex and most controversial in linguistic theory. True, the impact of external factors upon the vocabulary of language has been only too obvious: the increasing complexity of the extra-linguistic reality, reflected in the corresponding increase, enrichment and differentiation of the word-stock of language, is preponderantly motivated by external factors.<sup>1</sup> Much less obvious, however, is the question if and how the influence of the external factors can assert itself in the development of other, non-lexical, levels of language, especially of its grammatical and phonic planes.

No serious student of language can easily overlook the said question, enforcing an answer, explicit or implicit. Among the answers proposed, even some extreme cases can be found. At the one end of the scale one finds the view of the followers of N.Y. Marr in whose opinion “all change in language is due to social causes”.<sup>2</sup> This statement, if thought out consistently, can only mean that even in the grammatical and phonic planes any change must be reducible to the operation of this or that external factor. At the other end of the scale one finds those linguistic groups which programmatically exclude any reference to the meaning of language utterance from their plan of research and demand – at least in theory – that the examination of language utterances should be exclusively confined to the formal structure of such utterances and their component parts.<sup>3</sup>

Fortunately, there were also scholars who did not allow themselves to be enticed by straightforward simplifying formulas. Such scholars duly realized that language never exists in a vacuum, and that some influence of the external factors must be allowed for even in the structural make-up of non-lexical levels of language. At the same time, however, they never lost sight of the fact that language constitutes a structural whole characterized by its own set of problems and by a specific tension of its component parts; consequently, they realized that the influence of external factors upon the given structure of language should always be examined with special regard to the inner laws governing that structure. Among the first who viewed the operation of external factors from such angle was B. Havránek, who, as early as in 1931, maintained that “ce ne sont que des raisons intrinsèques que peuvent résoudre la question de savoir pourquoi certaines influences étrangères agissent, tandis que d’autres restent sans effet”.<sup>4</sup> Two decades later, V.N. Yartseva put forward an analogous thesis: in her opinion, the grammatical system of language accepts only such foreign elements as are not contradictory to its structure.<sup>5</sup>

It may be said that Havránek’s and Yartseva’s theses appears basically sound. Evidence of this is supplied by some interesting observations we made in examining the historical development of English (and, to some extent, of Czech). They will be briefly discussed in the following lines with the intention of finding out whether the above formulas may be approved in full or whether they need some sort of readjustment.

## II.

A number of preliminary remarks, however, are due on some basic points. First of all, one should realize that the impact of external (i.e., economic, social and cultural) factors on the non-lexical planes of a language system is usually not a direct, immediate one.<sup>6</sup> Most frequently it is a secondary impact mediated by the operation of some other language system, acting as an exponent of the external forces influencing the affected language system. Such mediating operation of some other language system becomes most obvious in an historical situation in which a certain language community becomes politically and economically (and, subsequently, culturally as well) dependent on some

other language community. This is exactly what happened in England after the Norman Conquest, and in Bohemia after the military defeat at the early stage of the Thirty Years' War in 1620; the mediating languages in the two situations were, respectively, Norman French and German. At other times, however, one has to do with a dependence primarily motivated by cultural circumstances: the mediating language system, enjoying high cultural prestige, is regarded as a model to be imitated by the national language (though it should be admitted that even here cases may be found where political prestige is not entirely out of play). As a typical instance of this kind of mediating language may be mentioned Latin of the New Learning period (and, to some extent, of the classicist period as well), whose influence, e.g. upon the syntax of national languages, is too notorious to need detailed documentation.

Something should also be said on the manner in which the external factors may interfere with the development of the phonic level of language. It is only too clear that here again a direct interference is usually out of the question: structural changes in the phonic plane can mostly occur if a considerable number of loan-words has become domesticated in the affected language. If, that is, such loan-words reveal a positional distribution of some sounds that clearly differs from the one found in domestic words, this may ultimately result in the phonematic revaluation of such sounds in the affected language (as a rule, what used to be a mere combinatory variant may acquire the status of a phoneme).<sup>7</sup>

The last of our preliminary remarks wants to point out that the status of an external factor, interfering with the development of language, must also be ascribed to the influence exercised upon this development by the written norm of that same language.<sup>8</sup> All instances of what is commonly called spelling pronunciation fall under this heading. That one is really entitled to class the impact of the written norm as an instance of the operation of external factors is proved by the circumstance that optical factors here interfere with a structure that is essentially acoustic; in other words, the interfering factors are qualitatively heterogeneous to the structure interfered with. Besides, the rise and development of writing (and later of printing) are undoubtedly facts of cultural history, and as such they unquestionably rank as external factors influencing the development of language.

### III.

After clearing up some of the basic points concerning the manner in which external factors can assert themselves in language development, we want to discuss a number of specimen instances revealing how this assertion is concretely effected. The instances have been drawn from the development of English, a language whose system has been repeatedly exposed to a powerful impact of other language systems (Norman, later Central French, Latin of the New Learning and classicist periods, etc.), and also of its own written norm. The large amount of strong external factors influencing its development

makes English a particularly suitable subject of investigation for the purpose of testing the validity of Havránek's and Yartseva's theses mentioned above.

The first instance to be discussed is the penetration of simple negation in English negative clauses expressing universal propositions. Simple negation in such clauses became firmly rooted in English only in the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: Old English, Middle English and, to some extent, Early ModE favoured multiple negation, such as is still common in ModCzech (and other Slavonic languages). Thus OE *Nān monn nyste nān þing* fully conforms, from the formal point of view, with ModCzech *Nikdo nevěděl nic* ['Nobody not-knew nothing'], but fundamentally differs from ModE *Nobody knew anything*, containing simple negation. The replacement of multiple by simple negation in the course of the development of English was often explained as having been due to the influence of Latin whose negative clauses expressing universal propositions also allow of simple negation only (*Nemo sciebat aliquid*).<sup>9</sup> Other explanations believe that the abolishment of multiple negation is closely connected with the undeniable tendency ascertainable in the classicist and rationalist 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, i.e. with the effort to make language as "logical" (i.e. as rational) as possible.<sup>10</sup> Clearly, explanations of the two types reckon with the operation of external, extra-linguistic factors upon the development of English, and one can hardly dismiss such explanations as wholly unfounded. The probability of such explanations is increased by the state of things found in Cockney English. This dialect, unaffected both by the influence of Latin and by the rationalizing tendencies of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, regularly employs multiple negation in its universal negative clauses (as a rule, such multiple negation is evaluated as a signal of strong emotional approach, intentionally opposed to the intellectual sobriety of the standard language).

However high the degree of probability of such explanations may seem, a closer analysis of the given problem and of the historical circumstances under which the examined change was brought about<sup>11</sup> reveal that such explanations can only claim a part of the truth, not the whole of it. It appears that apart from the external factors, such as the influence of Latin and/or of the rationalizing tendencies of the age, one should take into consideration also an internal factor, viz. the readiness of the system of language to accept the influence of the external factors and to conform to it. The importance of this internal, receptive factor is evidenced by a comparison of English, in this particular point, with Czech, faced with an analogous situation. Czech, which commonly employs the "illogical" multiple negation in its universal negative clauses, also experienced a period of strong rationalist influence in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The influence was the stronger as, at that time (the period of the National Revival), foundations were being laid by a typically rationalist scholar J. Dobrovský for the new literary standard of Czech. And yet, all this influence of rationalist thinking failed to do away with multiple negation in Czech as it had done, if indirectly, in English. Obviously, Czech differed from English by lacking the internal factor whose operation had enabled English to conform to the operation of the external factor of rationalist influence.

A more detailed analysis of the problem, submitted in our treatise referred to above, note 11, shows that Czech, unlike English, lacked two important structural prerequisites which had been essential for the materialization of the change from multiple to single negation. The necessary pre-requisite for the rise of the English type *I have not anything* was the existence in the grammatical system of the indefinite pronouns of the type *any*. The meaning of this type is, that it combines the features of universality within certain limits and of potential realizability of the asserted relation in all implied individuals. No Czech indefinite pronoun, it will be noted, combines both above-mentioned semantic features: the pronouns *kterýkoli* ‘whichever’, *jakýkoli* ‘whatever’ lack the former, while the pronouns *každý* ‘every’, *všechn* ‘all’ miss the latter feature.<sup>12</sup>

To turn to the type *I have nothing*, co-existing in English by the side of *I have not anything*, the pre-requisite for its rise in English was the semantic neutrality of the finite verb form as regards the positive or negative quality of action. In other words, the actually positive meaning of the English finite verb form (i.e. its reference to the actual existence of the predicated action) or its actually negative meaning (i.e. its reference to the actual non-existence of that action) is not signalled by the finite verb form taken by itself but by the contextual absence or, respectively, presence of some other negating word within the given sentence. This pre-requisite of semantic neutrality of the finite verb form is again wholly absent from Czech: a Czech finite verb form is either intrinsically positive, signalling the actual existence of the predicated action, or intrinsically negative, signalling its actual non-existence – *tertium non datur*. This thesis of ours is corroborated by some rare cases of Czech sentences of the type *Nobody knows* which, however, do not refer to an absence but to a presence of the predicated action. Thus a sentence like *Nic se na něho šklebilo* is not an equivalent of ModE ‘Nothing grinned at him’ (referring to an absence of grinning) but of ModE ‘Nothingness grinned at him’ (referring to the presence of grinning, attributed to the hypostasized, personified ‘Nothing’). And it was exactly for the intrinsically positive character of the formally positive Czech finite verb that Czech multiple negation for the type *Nemám nic* [I not-have nothing] could not be replaced by the simple negation of the type \**Mám nic* [‘I have nothing’].

Our above analysis has shown that in Czech universal negative clauses, unlike in their English counterparts, multiple negation could not be replaced by the “more logical” simple negation, because the grammatical system of Czech was lacking some internal pre-requisites (possessed by the grammatical system of English), essential for the adoption of the external influence exercised by the Latin language and/or by rationalist thinking. In the examined instance, it was the grammatical level of language that was subjected to outside influence. Instances, however, can be found (though less frequently) in which external factors can bring about changes in the phonic make-up of words or even influence the phonematic system of language. One is faced here, as already stated, with the instances in which the written norm of language is seen to exercise some influence on the corresponding spoken norm. Two particularly interesting instances of the kind, again drawn from the history of English, will be discussed further on.

## IV.

The first of the two instances is concerned with the ModE words of the type *joint*, *point*, whose spoken form contains the diphthong [ɔi]. Till the end of the ME period, however, such words contained the diphthong *ui*. From the beginning of the EModE period, the first component part of that diphthong was developing on lines strictly parallel to those followed by the development of the ModE short u-sound.<sup>13</sup> Thus the diphthong *ui* gradually passed on to *oi*, *ɔi*; this latter stage is still evidenced for the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The poets of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries often rhyme word-pairs such as *joins—refines*. The latter word originally contained ME *ī* which, as is generally known, became gradually diphthongized into *Ii* > *ei* > *ɔi* > *ai* within the so-called Great Vowel Shift. The stage *ɔi* was reached in the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, so that at that period (and well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century) word-pairs like *refines—joins* made perfect rhymes. Under these circumstances, one might have expected the diphthongal *ɔi* of words like *joint*, *point* to develop into *ai*, along with the *ɔi* that had been traced back to ME *ī*. The ultimate merger of what were originally the ME sounds *ī* and *ui* really did take place in a number of dialects but not in the standard language. On the contrary, in words of the type *joint*, *point* one can note, from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the penetration of the diphthong [ɔi], which has remained characteristic of the standard pronunciation of such words until the present day.

This unexpected turn of development is commonly attributed to the influence of spelling<sup>14</sup>; as is well known, the written form of words like *joint*, *point* had contained the diagraph *oi/oy* since the ME take-over of these words from Norman French. There is no reason why this explanation should be refuted; and yet, it again contains only a part of the truth, not the whole of it. It is worth pointing out that the said explanation leaves one aspect of the process unaccounted for: why is it that the impact of the written norm upon its spoken counterpart has come to assert itself in this particular type of words, while in some other word-types in which the written *o* also corresponded to the spoken *ə* no such impact can be observed – see, e.g., words like *come*, *done*, *love*, pronounced in ME as [kum, dun, luv], in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as [kəm, dən, ləv], in ModE as [kam, dan, lav]. No trace of the influence of written *o* upon the pronunciation can be established here. How can the difference of development in the two word types be accounted for?

In attempting to answer this question one should again recall the fact that the impact of the written norm of language upon its spoken counterpart is only a specific instance of that more general phenomenon, viz. of the influence of external factors on the development of the system of language. Convinced as we are of the specific character of the system of the written norm (see above, note 8), the external character of the interventions of that norm into the structure of the corresponding spoken norm is not open to doubt: the interventions are qualitatively different from the internal changes going on within the structure of the spoken norm. As however, these internal changes often appear to be motivated by the structural needs and wants of the spoken norm, a hypothesis



may naturally emerge to the effect that the very intervention of the written norm may be somehow connected with the structural situation within the spoken norm. In other words, one should ask whether the spelling pronunciation [ɔi] in words like *joint*, *point* may not have been motivated by what Havránek calls “raisons intrinsèques” of the English spoken norm.

To answer this question adequately, one should recall the fact that the diphthong [ɔi] plays a very specific part in the ModE phonematic system. As has been shown in some detail elsewhere,<sup>15</sup> the ModE [ɔi] signals the synchronically foreign character of the word containing it.<sup>16</sup> It must have been felt as such signal since the EME period when the diphthong *ɔi* (and *ui!*) appeared for the first time in English in loanwords of Norman French origin. Graphically both diphthongs were recorded by one and the same digraph, viz. *oi/oy*. When words containing the ME *ui* reached the stage of *əi*, a concrete possibility arose of the definite merger of what originally had been ME *ī* and ME *ui*. It should be realized that such phonematic merger would have deprived the words of the type *joint*, *point* of their signal of foreign character; i.e. words of that type would have become virtually domesticated. This domestication would have drastically separated such words from those lexical items of French origin which had contained the diphthong *ɔi* (also a signal of foreign character) and were to preserve this diphthong also in the future (see e.g. *choice*, *joy*). One may thus conclude that in EModE a tendency emerged counteracting the possibility of domestication of words like *joint*, *point*; this tendency may have been aimed at strengthening the lexical and stylistic links joining the words of that type with those of the type *choice*, *joy*, equally felt as synchronically foreign, by the introduction of *ɔi* into the words of the former type. There can be no doubt that the diphthong *ɔi*, an outstanding and, on account of its structural asymmetry,<sup>17</sup> also a very striking phonematic item of the language, was particularly fitted for the purpose of underlining the synchronically foreign character common to both discussed word categories.

The need to differentiate, as clearly as possible, synchronically foreign words from those which were synchronically domestic was indicated in English with particular urgency, in view of the important stylistic part played in that language by foreign lexical items since the ME period.<sup>18</sup> But other languages, too, present analogous instances of increased differentiation: see e.g., the part played in vulgar Colloquial Czech by the phoneme /g/, unknown in domestic words but often introduced into synchronically foreign words, again for the purpose of underlining their synchronically foreign character (see inst. like *balgón* ‘balcony’, *cirgus* ‘circus’, *bicygl* ‘bicycle’, *plagát* ‘placard, poster’, for the first time pointed out by V. Mathesius).<sup>19</sup>

It appears, then, that the 18<sup>th</sup> century spoken norm of English readily conformed to the external influence of its corresponding written norm because the intervention of the latter was found acceptable by, and even beneficial to, the former, whose two lexical strata, so important for stylistic purposes, could in future be delimited and differentiated more effectively than before. At the same time, this functional conception of our problem can satisfactorily account for the fact that no spelling pronunciation asserted



itself in the above-noted instances like *come*, *done*, *love*, whose 17<sup>th</sup> century structure also opposed written *o* to spoken *ə*. It will be easily seen that in instances of this type there were no structural pre-requisites for the penetration of the spelling pronunciation. First, words like *come*, *done*, *love* do not belong to the synchronically foreign, but to the synchronically domestic lexical stratum which, being an unmarked member of the opposition foreign – domestic, needs no specific phonic signals to mark it off from the rest of the vocabulary. Second, the phoneme /ɔ/, which might have benefited from the assertion of spelling pronunciation in *come*, *done*, *love*, has never been characteristic of this or that stratum of the English vocabulary. It is frequently found in both the opposed strata and therefore, unlike the diphthong [ɔi], it is not fitted to act as a phonic signal characterizing any of the two.

To sum up, it appears that also the circumstances accompanying the penetration of the spelling pronunciation [ɔi] in words like *joint*, *point* fully confirm the validity of the above-quoted thesis of B. Havránek; it may be suggested, then, that the validity of the thesis is not confined to the grammatical level of language (as V.N. Yartseva's formulation of her analogous thesis might suggest) but applies to its phonic level as well.

## V.

Another interesting case of the assertion of spelling pronunciation in EModE is concerned with the unstressed suffix *-ing*, frequently added to verbal bases (such as *be-ing*, *mak-ing*, *speak-ing*). As is commonly known, the final [-ɪŋ] of that suffix became simplified into [-ɪ] (the change may have taken place as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century; in the standard pronunciation it must have penetrated by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century at the latest). In the EModE period (in some dialects even earlier) this [-ɪ] became simplified into [-ɪ] which also penetrated into the standard pronunciation. As, however, the written norm of the standard language retained the spelling *-ing*, English orthoepists made every effort to restore the original pronunciation [-iŋ]. The effort proved to be successful: by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century [-iŋ] came to be restored in the standard pronunciation, while the pronunciation [-ɪn] has been preserved only in dialects (and, to some extent, in the speech of conservative aristocracy).<sup>20</sup>

The assertion of the spelling pronunciation in this case presents some specific features which, from the general linguistic point-of-view, make it even more remarkable than the assertion of spelling pronunciation in words like *joint*, *point*. One had not to do here, that is to say, with the problem of differentiating two lexical strata, but with one of the structural problems of the English phonematic system considered as a whole, without any regard to stylistic differentiation.<sup>21</sup> The change of the suffixal [-iŋ] > [-ɪn], it should be noted, seriously jeopardized the very existence of the phoneme /ɪ/ in English. After that change, the phoneme /ɪ/ could only occur in one single position, viz. at the end of a stressed morpheme (as in *sing*, *tongue*, etc.). and even there the sound

[-ŋ] might have been interpreted differently, i.e. as a manifestation of the biphonemic group /ng/ (though it is fair to state that this alternative phonemic interpretation, too, would have involved some specific difficulties). Under the circumstances, the discarding of the phoneme /ŋ/ seemed to be near at hand, the more so that in words like *ink*, *tank*, *finger* the velar articulation of [-ŋ-] was clearly due to the following [k] or [g], so that these instances of [ŋ] could be easily explained away as combinatory variants of the phoneme /n/. The more surprising appears, then, the restoration of [-ŋ] in the suffix *-ing*, as this restoration obviously ran counter to the trend of development ascertainable in English before the time of that restoration. On the face of it, the external intervention of the written norm in this case looks like a factor that was not merely inorganic but even destructive, because it invalidated the impending solution of an urgent phonemic problem, i.e. it made impossible the abolishment of the phoneme whose functional yield had become extremely slight and which, therefore, must have appeared as a most uneconomic item of the language. In other words, the intervention of an external factor here appears to have been not only non-conforming to the needs and wants of the system of language, but even flagrantly opposed to such needs. And, of course, it also appears to be in glaring contradiction to Havránek's thesis referred to above.

Still, a more detailed analysis of the structural situation of EModE is bound to reveal that even in the case of the restoration of [ŋ] in the suffix *-ing* the external influence of the written norm could only be asserted because the EModE spoken norm had been possessed of an important structural pre-requisite, enabling it to conform to that external influence. This pre-requisite was what A. Martinet<sup>22</sup> calls the "full integration" of the phoneme /ŋ/. As is commonly known, as fully integrated within its phonemic system is regarded that phoneme which is opposed, by means of its distinctive features, to a greater number of phonemes co-existing with it in the system. Thus, /p/ may be regarded as fully integrated in English, because it is opposed not only to /b/ (from which it is differentiated as its tense counterpart), but also to /f/ and /t/ (the differentiating features being here, respectively, the explosive and the gravis articulation, of [p]).<sup>23</sup> The principle of economy, the importance of which for language Martinet duly points out, is responsible for the tendency aimed at having the phonemes of language integrated as fully as possible. In Martinet's opinion, the more integrated a phoneme is, the firmer is its foothold in the system and, *vice versa*, an unsatisfactory degree of integration of a phoneme may lead to a palpable weakening of its foothold in the system, and even to its ultimate abolishment in it.

Concrete investigation of language development seems to endorse Martinet's theory. Some time ago we tried to show<sup>24</sup> that one of the main reasons of the gradual but consistent process of abolishment of the ModE phoneme /h/ is its structural isolation among the ModE consonant phonemes (i.e., its lack of integration), and a similar comment of ours, though less radically stated, attaches to ModE /r/.<sup>25</sup>

The important part played by the degree of integration of this or that phoneme is also evidenced by the fact that fully integrated phonemes may often subsist in language

despite their low frequency of occurrence in actual contexts and despite their slight functional yield. Martinet himself mentions ModE /ʒ/ as a specimen case of this category. Statistical investigation has shown that /ʒ/ is the least frequent of ModE phonemes; its inability to occur in a number of important word-positions (e.g., word-initial and word-final) is responsible for its very slight functional yield. And yet, for all these grave handicaps, the phoneme /ʒ/ not only subsists in English but does not show any signs of its impending abolishment. In Martinet's opinion, its firm foothold in the system is due to the relatively high degree of integration: /ʒ/ is a member of two correlative series, being opposed to /ʃ/ and to /č/ (the concerned types of opposition being, respectively, those of lax—tense, and of continuant—discontinuous). Clearly, should the phoneme /ʒ/ become discarded from the ModE system of consonant phonemes, an empty space ("case vide", as Martinet calls it) would arise in the network of ModE phonematic relations. It appears that it is exactly the tendency to prevent the rise of such an empty space that is responsible for the continued existence of /ʒ/ in the ModE phonematic system, despite all its above-mentioned handicaps.

Let us take up again the problem of the ModE phoneme /ŋ/. It will be recalled that it is a fully integrated phoneme, and it has been such from the very beginning of its existence in English (i.e., from Late ME or EModE). This is clearly shown by the following scheme:

$$\begin{array}{l} /p/ - /t/ - /k/ \\ /b/ - /d/ - /g/ \\ /m/ - /n/ - /ŋ/ \end{array}$$

The scheme reveals that the phonologization of /ŋ/ has filled an empty space that existed in the English phonematic system before that phonologization, and that the abolishment of the phoneme /ŋ/ would re-establish that empty space. The above-discussed instance of ModE /ʒ/ has shown that the tendency aimed at the full integration of a phoneme may be so powerful as to render insignificant the troubles caused by low contextual frequency and slight functional yield. One may, therefore, venture to suppose that also in the case of ModE /ŋ/ its full integration in the system counted for more than its relatively small functional yield. Seen in this light, even the restoration of [-ŋ] in the suffix *-ing* does not appear to be a factor so inorganic and destructive as one might be tempted to think. Indeed, in view of the fact that the influence of the written norm, enforced by the effort of the orthoepists, helped to prop up the position of the jeopardized phoneme /ŋ/ by restoring one of its lost positions in English words, the operation of external factors appears, in this case too, to have been motivated by the needs and wants of the system of language. Exactly as in the case of /ʒ/, the full integration of /ŋ/ helped to preserve in language a phoneme whose foothold, judged by quantitative standards, had not been particularly firm. Under these circumstances, it appeared profitable to conform to the operation of external factors where this operation was able to underline the phonematic status of the jeopardized but fully integrated phoneme.

It is worth pointing out that in popular dialects (which, unlike the standard language, were free from the impact of orthoepists) the position of /ɲ/ in the system, despite its full integration, remained unstable; as has been shown in our paper quoted above, note 21, the process aimed at the abolishment of /ɲ/ as a phoneme (i.e., at the phonematic reevaluation of /ɲ/ into /ng/ or, in other positions, into /n/) is there in a fairly advanced stage.

Summarizingly, it may be said that the sound changes concerning EModE /ɲ/ furnish highly instructive evidence of the interplay of external and internal factors in language development. It will be noted that, for all the importance of the external factors, the decisive part in the interplay, here too, appears to be invariably reserved to factors of internal order. In other words, not even the sound changes concerning EModE are in contradiction to the thesis of B. Havránek; on the contrary, they may be said to be in full agreement with that thesis.

## VI.

Our rapid glance at three remarkable points of the historical development of English has confirmed that the influence of external factors upon the development of the structure of language could only assert itself because its assertion was in harmony with the needs and wants of the structure exposed to that influence. This conclusion, of course, will have to be checked by further research into the development of other languages before general validity can be attributed to it. At present, at least one objection should be briefly touched upon. It may sometimes be observed that in the development of a language evidence of such external influence may be found as cannot well be regarded as motivated by the structural needs and wants of that language. A remarkable instance of the kind is mentioned by Martinet (op. cit. p. 191): a foreign language (in the given case, Basque) may exercise an influence upon one of the dialects of the native language (in the given case, Catalanian) which, in some of its points, becomes changed in a manner which wholly lacks any structural motivation. In reflecting upon such instances, Martinet does not hesitate to give vent to his distrust of consistently functional explanations of language development. He says expressly that "...il y a des cas où, quoiqu'on fasse, elles [= les solutions fonctionnelles, J.V.] sont impuissantes,... elles ne sont pas un ensemble de recettes permettant d'expliquer tout à partir de n'importe quoi" (p. 191).

Still, as we have already pointed out elsewhere,<sup>26</sup> it is hardly necessary to draw from the given premises a conclusion so very sceptical. Instances of the type pointed out by Martinet certainly exist but they by no means suspend the validity of the thesis urging the necessity of the functional approach to the study of external influence upon language; they only impel the linguist to formulate the said thesis with some caution. Obviously, it will not be possible to maintain that a language system (and particularly its phonic level) submits *only* to such external influence as conforms with its structural needs and wants.

Clearly, a negative formula will be more up to the mark: a language system (and particularly its phonic level) does *not* submit to such external influence as would be incompatible with its structural needs and wants. To put the thing differently, language so to speak exercises the right of control with regard to the external influence with which it is faced. The role of the system of language is thus rather regulative than initiative.<sup>27</sup>

If our negative formula is confronted with the thesis of B. Havránek, repeatedly discussed in the above lines, it will be found that no basic difference exists between the two. Our final formula only specifies and makes more explicit Havránek's references to "des raisons intrinsèques". One may indeed say that Havránek's approach to the problem, though dating from more than three decades ago, was fundamentally sound. As regards V.N. Yartseva's formula, going back to 1952, it may be credited with having duly implied the regulative part played by language in conforming to outside influence. On the other hand, her thesis refers to the grammatical level of language alone. Our above observations show, however, that the thesis has a wider scope, and that it will have to be applied even to the phonic level of language.<sup>28</sup>

## Notes

- \* From *Lingua* 11 (Amsterdam, 1962), 433–448. Reprinted in Josef Vachek (ed.) (1976) *Selected Writings in English and General Linguistics*. Prague: Academia, 91–103.
- <sup>1</sup> For English see, e.g., the well-known fundamental works of O. Jespersen, A. C. Baugh, B. A. Ilyish, and many others.
- <sup>2</sup> I. I. Meshchaninov, *Pražské přednášky o jazyce* [Prague Lectures on Language] (Praha, 1950), 40.
- <sup>3</sup> E.g., B. Bloch and G. L. Trager, *Outline of Linguistic Analysis* (Baltimore 1942), 68.
- <sup>4</sup> *Travaux du CLP* 4 (1931), p. 304. – It is fair to state that some other scholars have anticipated this approach to the problem earlier, failing, however, to give it precise formulation (see esp. R. Jakobson, *Travaux de CLP* 1. Prague 1929, 97 et pass.).
- <sup>5</sup> *Izvestiya AN SSSR, otd. lit. i yaz.* 11 (Moskva, 1952), 193 if.
- <sup>6</sup> Cf. F. Engels, *Ausgewählte Briefe*, (Berlin, 1953), 503.
- <sup>7</sup> Tims, ME phonologized the voiced fricatives [v, z, ð], until then mere combinatory variants of the phonemes /f, s, þ/. One of the causes of this phonologization was the emergence in English of Norman loanwords in which [v, z] occurred in word-positions until then reserved for the fundamental variants of the concerned phonemes, viz. for [f, s]. Cf. *Ztschr. f. Anglistik u. Amerikanistik* (Berlin), 5, (1957), 22.
- <sup>8</sup> For the discussion of the problems of written norm see J. Vachek, *Brno Studies in English* I (1959), 7–38.

- <sup>9</sup> H. Sweet, *An English Grammar, logical and historical, I.* (Oxford, 1900), § 1520.
- <sup>10</sup> M. Knorrek, *Der Einfluß des Rationalismus auf die englische Sprache* (Breslau, 1938).
- <sup>11</sup> For an attempt at such an analysis see J. Vachek. *Obecný zápor v angličtině a češtině* [Universal Negation in English and Czech], *Facultas philosophica univ. Carolinae Pragensis, Práce z vědeckých ústavů* 51 (Praha, 1947), 7–72 (with a detailed summary in English).
- <sup>12</sup> Attempts at establishing a pronoun of the type were not lacking in the course of the historical development of Czech (see OCz. *ikto, žádný*), but ultimately they proved unsuccessful.
- <sup>13</sup> K. Luick, *Historische Grammatik d. engl. Sprache, I.* (Leipzig, 1914–40), § 544.
- <sup>14</sup> K. Luick, 1. c.; W. Horn and M. Lehnert, *Laut und Leben* (Berlin, 1953), § 185.
- <sup>15</sup> J. Vachek, Über die phonologische Interpretation der Diphthonge mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Englischen, *Facultas philosophica univ. Carolinae Pragensis, Práce z věd. ústavů* 33 (Praha, 1933), 87–170 (esp. 133, 1(55)).
- <sup>16</sup> On synchronically foreign words see V. Mathesius, *Englische Studien* 70, 1935, 21–35.
- <sup>17</sup> See our treatise quoted above, note 15, esp. 110.
- <sup>18</sup> A.C. Baugh, *A History of the English Language* (London, 1952), esp. 230 ff.
- <sup>19</sup> *Travaux du CLP* 1 (1929), 67–85.
- <sup>20</sup> K. Luick, op. cit. § 767; W. Horn and M. Lehnert, op. cit. § 408.
- <sup>21</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the problem see J. Vachek, *Notes on the Phonematic Value of the Modern English η-Sound* (in Honour of Daniel Jones, London 1964, 191–205).
- <sup>22</sup> *Économie des changements phonétiques* (Berne, 1955), 79 ff.
- <sup>23</sup> For the less common terms see R. Jakobson, M. Halle and C. G. M. Fant, *Preliminaries to Speech Analysis*, Technical Report No. 13 (Acoustics Laboratory, Massachusetts Technological Institute, January 1952).
- <sup>24</sup> See our paper quoted above, note 7, p. 11.
- <sup>25</sup> *Sborník prací filosofické fakulty brněnské university* A8, 1960, 79–93.
- <sup>26</sup> *Slovo a slovesnost* 19 (1958), 52–60. Cf. also P. Trost's observations *ibid.* 21, 1960, 7–9.
- <sup>27</sup> Incidentally, analogous regulative control seems to be exercised by the system of language with regard to the rules governing the mechanism of speech-organs. These rules undoubtedly motivate (or at least co-motivate) many a sound-change, e.g. various assimilations, reductions in unstressed syllables, etc. Sometimes it happens, however, that a change which might appear imminent, is not materialized, obviously because its materialization would interfere with the structural needs and wants of the language. (On this point, see also J. Vachek, *Brno Studies in English* 4, 1964, 21–29.)

<sup>28</sup> A. Sommerfelt's valuable paper *External versus Internal Factors in the Development of Language*, NTS 19 (1960) [in fact, late 1961], reached the present writer after the MS of the above lines had been handed over to the printer, and so could no longer be evaluated here.

### Comprehension questions

1. In what sense is spelling pronunciation the outcome of external factors?
2. Why is there only one negation in English sentences, as opposed to Czech?
3. What is, in Vachek's view, the difference between the English and the Czech verb, as far as the expression of negation is concerned?
4. Why do aristocrats in England "go huntin'"? Why was the earlier pronunciation of the suffix *-ing* restored in Standard English?
5. What is the mutual relationship between external and internal factors? Which of the two prevails? Why (not)?
6. Why has the English phoneme /ŋ/ been phonologized?

# On the functional hierarchy of spoken and written utterances

Josef Vachek

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*In this article, Vachek sets out his general linguistic theory of the relationship between spoken and written utterances. He argues that spoken language and written language constitute two independent, though complementary, norms. Spoken language reacts to a given stimulus in a dynamic way, i.e. in a ready and immediate manner, typically manifesting the speaker's emotional attitude. By contrast, written language reacts in a more static way: Not only is it characterized by preservability and "quick and easy surveyability", but it is also typically better suited to the expression of intellectual – rather than emotional – content. As regards the functional hierarchy between the two, the spoken norm is considered the unmarked member of the pair. That, however, does not imply subservience of the written language to the spoken, as both complement each other in their different functions.*

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One of the noteworthy features of modern linguistic research has been the growing interest taken in problems of written utterances, contrasted with their spoken counterparts on the one hand and with phonematically transcribed utterances on the other. [...]<sup>1</sup>

For all this interest, however, many of the problems cannot be said to have been definitely solved, and in some instances they do not even appear to have been adequately formulated. It is for this reason that the present writer has decided to review once more the field he has covered in a number of his earlier papers (some of them written in Czech, and therefore inaccessible to foreign workers in the field). In the following two chapters he presents what he believes to be a modest contribution to the solution of two partial problems which so far do not seem to have been satisfactorily settled. It will be seen that he also revises or modifies some of his earlier conclusions. The first of the two problems, a more general one, discusses the functional hierarchy of spoken and written utterances, the other one, more specific, deals with some important trends ascertainable in the development of Written English.

[...]



# I. On the functional hierarchy of spoken and written utterances

The fact that a relatively high number of important papers on problems of written English have appeared of late, should not be interpreted in the sense that the general interest in these problems is a matter of relatively recent date. Quite the contrary is true. The long series of scholars approaching these problems from a new, non-traditional angle, reaches far back into the early eighties of the nineteenth century. Already at that time, Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, comparing the graphical system of various Slavonic languages, succeeded in pointing out a number of typical features characterizing each of the examined systems.<sup>2</sup> He aptly remarked that such characteristic features allow of a purely external identification of any concrete Slavonic context of some length as written in this or that particular Slavonic language (in other words, that such identification can be effected even by a person who is totally ignorant of the meaning of the concerned context and of the given language in general). Baudouin's observation concerning the possibility of such purely formal identification is demonstrative not only of his ability to view written utterances as structures *sui generis*, but also – at that time, at least – of his disregard of the correlative relations undoubtedly existing between the written utterances and their spoken counterparts.

Such relations were clearly observed and duly, if occasionally, noted later by a number of other scholars, among whom the names of Henry Bradley and Antonín Frinta should be particularly singled out. Bradley, though strongly critical of the modern “un-phonetic spelling” of English, admits that it has “the merit of saving written English from a good many of the ambiguities of the spoken tongue”.<sup>3</sup> Bradley has in mind here the well-known instances of the type *write* — *right* — *rite* — *wright* which remain differentiated in written utterances, while in the spoken utterances their phonematic make-up, /rait/ in our case, is identical. Some five years later Frinta credited the Czech spelling with an analogous merit. He even went an important step further than Bradley (whose book had obviously been unknown to him) in trying to define the function of spelling in a linguistic community. As he puts it, this function is, “in a way to speak quickly and distinctly to the eyes, so that the due idea can be mobilized without any difficulties”.<sup>4</sup>

Leaving aside the fact that what Frinta says about spelling really refers to written utterances, one can hardly be in doubt that his above-quoted statement furnishes an important clue to the solution of some basic problems relating to written utterances, and especially to the relation in which they stand to their spoken counterparts. Unfortunately Frinta, like Bradley, never developed his illuminating remarks into a systematic theory. As a consequence, the vast majority of linguists of the twenties and early thirties continued to regard “writing” as a kind of imperfect quasi-transcription, hopelessly lagging behind scientifically accurate systems of phonetic transcription. Most of them have

expressed the belief (still held by many) that at some future date phonetic transcription is bound to replace conventional, traditional writing systems, on the simple ground that such transcription constitutes an infinitely finer, more consistent, and therefore more adequate, means for the fixation of spoken utterances on paper.

The fallacy of such belief will become obvious to him who realizes that the aim of the traditional writing system of language is not identical with that of its phonetic transcription. In one of his papers<sup>5</sup> the present writer hopes to have demonstrated the different aims of the two: while any system of phonetic transcription provides means for an optical recording of the purely acoustic make-up of spoken utterances, the traditional writing system increasingly tends to refer to the meaning directly without necessarily taking a *détour* via the corresponding spoken utterances.<sup>6</sup> This specific aim of traditional writing systems was undoubtedly implied by Frinta's statement about the "spelling" speaking quickly and distinctly to the eyes. Such quick functioning is obviously averse to any *détours*, and it can be more safely achieved, if the reference to meaning is as direct as possible. Clearly, the more direct such reference is, the less dependent an actual written utterance becomes upon its spoken counterpart.

This conclusion appears to have been fully realized, for the first time, by the Ukrainian linguist Agenor Artymovyč. In the early thirties of this century,<sup>7</sup> he called the attention of scholars to the systematic character of what he calls Written Language; what is even more important, he claims "writing" (*die Schrift*) not only to possess a systematic structure, but to be a system which to some extent is independent of Spoken Language.<sup>8</sup> Although in some of his theses Artymovyč undoubtedly went too far (as, e.g., in claiming for Written Language the autonomous status), he should always be remembered as the first scholar who was able to rise above the occasional observations of his predecessors and to view written utterances as systematic entities, governed by their own rules. Prior to Artymovyč, written utterances had been regarded as poor relatives, almost caricatures, of their spoken counterparts; he claims for them the status of respectable, co-equal partners.

Ingenious as Artymovyč's remarks were, they failed to specify the hierarchical relation of spoken and written utterances. We tried to establish these relations in one of our papers;<sup>9</sup> in our opinion Artymovyč failed to realize that the distinction between Written Language *in abstracto* and concrete written utterances should be formulated as one existing between a norm and its concretizations (or, manifestations). The existence of the written norm in language is amply evidenced by the unpleasant feeling one experiences in reading written utterances primitive in handwriting, in spelling (including punctuation), in the division of the text into paragraphs, or in the use of the space available for writing, etc. This enumeration of some of the primitivisms that can be met with has made it clear that the written norm of language should by no means be identified with its orthography; the facts covered by the concept of written norm considerably outstrip those covered by the concept of orthography. The difference of the two is not merely a quantitative one; essential qualitative differences are involved which will be discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

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The acknowledgement of the existence in language of a written norm besides the spoken norm (whose existence has never been doubted) is of fundamental importance. Seen in its light, our above-mentioned task of formulating the hierarchical relations existing between written and spoken utterances is best shifted to a higher level and restated as a task of formulating the hierarchical relations of the two language norms lying behind those utterances. It is obvious that speakers of cultural communities have a greater or smaller command of each of the two norms and that in their concrete utterances they sometimes make use of the means supplied by the one, but at other times switch over to the means supplied by the other. From this it follows that each of the two norms has its functional justification in the given cultural community. Under these conditions, it is clear that any hierarchic evaluation of the mutual relation of the two norms must be based on the recognition of the functions performed by them. As a consequence of this, two questions appear to be of fundamental importance:

- (a) What exactly is the functional justification of each of the two norms?
- (b) Does the answer to (a) allow of a functional subordination of one of the two norms to the other?

The answer to (a) has been prompted, to some degree at least, by Bradley and Frinta. In some cases written word-forms certainly speak more quickly and more distinctly to the eye than the corresponding spoken forms speak to the ear. In other words, the distinctness of perception of an isolated word form is often provided for more efficiently by the means of the written norm than by those of its spoken equivalent. As, however, consumers of written utterances are usually faced with the necessity of perceiving not isolated written words, but more extensive contexts, such as written sentences, paragraphs, pages and even books, it is imperative to view the problem from a broader angle than was the one adopted by Bradley and Frinta. A closer consideration of such longer written utterances reveals that, compared with their spoken counterparts, they prove to be "distinct" to a much higher degree than isolated written words. A concrete example will prove this.

Let us imagine a spoken utterance presenting a lecture which takes exactly one hour to deliver: A written utterance corresponding to it is a short paper comprising some 7 to 8 pages. The information supplied by the lecture and by the paper is virtually identical. There is, however, one important difference in the way in which the concerned information may be obtained from the two sources. In listening to the lecture, the person obtaining the information is bound to follow the speaker step by step, and under normal conditions it is virtually impossible for that person to check any of the previous points of the speaker's arguments by having their wordings presented again by the speaker. Likewise it is impossible to 'skip' some of the passages to come and to get hold of the speaker's conclusions before he has worked out his way to them through a jumble of arguments

and counter-arguments. Whether the listening person likes it or not, he is bound to follow the speaker's rate of developing the theme; one might also say that he is the speaker's fellow-prisoner within the dimension of time.

Contrary to this, in reading the equivalent printed paper the person obtaining the information finds himself emancipated from the chains of time, at least to a very high degree. The reading person, that is to say, may go through the paper in a quarter of an hour if his sole purpose is to obtain a very general kind of information about the problems discussed by the writer and about the solutions proposed. Or he may read it in a couple of hours, if he wants his information to be more accurate. Or again, he may study the paper for days (and possibly weeks), if he has embarked on the same problem as the writer and if he wants to check every detailed point of his line of arguments. Clearly the reading person, unlike the listening person, is fairly independent of the dimension of time, as he may quicken or slow down the rate of obtaining information according to the particular purpose he has in mind when obtaining it. Moreover, unlike his listening colleague, he can check any previous passage in the writer's line of argument whenever he feels it necessary, and he can skip any desired number of the following paragraphs in order to get an idea of the conclusion the writer is aiming at. The above facts may seem somewhat trivial, but it has been considered essential to register them here if the import of written utterances (and consequently, of the written norm of language) is to be realized in full. The conclusion that inevitably follows from those facts is that, as far as quickness and distinctness are concerned, written utterances really rank much higher than their spoken counterparts, and that with the increasing extent of the compared contexts the superiority of the written utterances becomes ever more obvious. It becomes particularly evident when a written utterance grows up to the size of a printed book<sup>10</sup> with a table of contents and possibly also with indexes of words, persons etc. The information presented by such an utterance can be surveyed in a manner so quick and so efficient as cannot be matched by any spoken utterance (or series of utterances) of comparable length. In answering our above question (a) one can assert, therefore, that quick and easy surveyability (if one may be pardoned for coining this new term) constitutes a functional feature which may fully justify the existence of the written norm in language, because in matters of surveyability the spoken norm of language cannot supply the language user with means that would serve the purpose with comparable efficiency.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from surveyability, the written norm can claim another feature that makes it highly useful and virtually indispensable. This other feature is the documentary, preservable character of written utterances, so strikingly contrasting with the ephemeral, easy-to-be-forgotten character of their spoken counterparts. This feature, which one may perhaps term 'preservability', has been appreciated by men since time immemorial, and in matters of law and in regulating human relations written pacts have always been preferred to oral agreements ("Littera scripta manet"). Most probably it was this very feature which was the most potent stimulus to call the written norm into being.

We have thus ascertained that in at least two functional features (or, perhaps better, in at least two kinds of situations) it is exactly the spoken utterances which are undoubtedly lagging behind their written counterparts. It is, however, high time to listen to the other party in the dispute. It will be only just to admit that in a fairly large number of situations it is the spoken norm of language which supplies the language user with more effective means that can be obtained from its written equivalent. It is a matter of common everyday experience that people find it more convenient to communicate in speaking than in writing. The reason of this is certainly the immediateness of the spoken reaction to the given stimulus: it always takes more time to resort to a written message than to express oneself orally. This immediateness is made possible, among other things, by the readiness of the organs of speech to function in any situation, while the instruments necessary for writing must usually be looked for, or at least taken out of the pocket and adapted for use.

The two outstanding features of spoken utterances appear then to be the immediateness and readiness of the reaction they provide. These features will be particularly appreciated if the stimulus (i.e., the extralinguistic situation upon which the utterance is to react) is felt to be urgent, as, e.g., if the language user wants to warn his partner of some imminent danger. It will have been observed that the stimulus enforcing a reaction by means of a written utterance is usually not very urgent. It should be added, however, that even in situations devoid of urgency language users regularly prefer to avail themselves of reactions based on the spoken norm, not of those based on its written equivalent, unless the requirements of surveyability *and/or* preservability should decide in favour of the latter. The regular preference of the former is undoubtedly due to reasons of technical order alluded to above (viz., greater readiness of the organs of speech compared with lesser readiness of writing instruments). But the fact of the preference undeniably points to some important theoretical consequences. In its light one is led to regard the spoken norm, and the spoken utterances based on it, as language facts of unmarked order, while the written norm and the written utterances unquestionably belong to the category of marked language phenomena.

The above conclusion already touches upon our question (b), concerning the hierarchic relation of the two norms. Before, however, this other problem is discussed at some length, it appears necessary to point out another important functional distinction which can be observed between the two discussed norms (and, analogously, the two kinds of utterances). This distinction lies in the fact that the spoken norm has at its disposal primary means not only for expressing the purely communicative component parts (the 'intellectual content') of the extralinguistic reality to be communicated, but also for expressing its emotional component parts; the means are, e.g., different patterns of sentence melody, varying rate of speech, differences of timbre in sounds, different degrees of intensity of sentence stress, etc. etc. The written norm, on the other hand, regularly lacks such primary means signaling emotional component parts. If need is felt to express them (e.g. in books of fiction), this must be done by employing secondary means. Passages written in direct speech are thus often introduced or accompanied by descriptive

insertions (sentences or sentence groups) which should evoke the impression of the corresponding primary means found in the spoken norm. (Here belong phrases like *He asked bitinglly; She said gently and sadly; He cried out stubbornly in a voice of authority;* etc.) As a result of their concentration on the purely communicative component parts of the transmitted information, written utterances are especially fitted to serve in those situations in which such concentration upon the ‘intellectual content’ (and, therefore, greatest possible restriction of emotional component parts) appears particularly desirable, e.g. in transmitting highly specialized information on scientific and allied subjects. On the other hand, everyday-life topics, simple narratives and the like, which are always more or less tinged with emotional elements, will be most efficiently conveyed by means of spoken utterances. It is also worth pointing out that concentration on ‘intellectual content’ is carried out most effectively in printed utterances which, unlike then-written counterparts, do not allow of direct identification of the author of the utterance from the material make-up of the utterance alone,<sup>12</sup> and are therefore “objectivized” to a distinctly higher degree than written utterances.

The facts that have so far been discussed here had served the present writer as a basis on which he built up, more than ten years ago, his definitions of the spoken and the written norms of language,<sup>13</sup> without, however, specifying his arguments in detail at that time, as has been done above. It may be found useful to give here what the present writer believes to be the improved version of the two definitions: The spoken norm of language is a system of phonically manifestable language elements whose function is to react to a given stimulus (which, as a rule, is an urgent one) in a dynamic way, i.e. in a ready and immediate manner, duly expressing not only the purely communicative but also the emotional aspect of the approach of the reacting language user.

The written norm of language is a system of graphically manifestable language elements whose function is to react to a given stimulus (which, as a rule, is not an urgent one) in a static way, i.e. in a preservable and easily surveyable manner, concentrating particularly on the purely communicative aspect of the approach of the reacting language user.

It will be noticed that the two definitions supply an answer to the above question (a), concerning the functional justification of the two norms of language. Our next task is to find out whether the above conclusions can open the way for answering the above question (b), concerning the hierarchic relation (co-ordination or subordination) of the two norms.

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A foretaste of the answer to our question (b) already emerged above when reference was made to the unmarked character of the spoken norm and the marked character of its written equivalent. This observation, however, should not be interpreted as a functional subordination of the written norm to its spoken counterpart, if subordination should imply inferiority. Our above analysis of the specific functions of the two norms

must have revealed two things with convincing clearness. One of them is the fact that in fairly advanced language communities higher cultural and civilizational functions (such as virtually all branches of literature and scientific research work, the operation of State administration, etc.) are simply unthinkable without continual recourse to written utterances. It is, then, obvious that the development of a community's higher culture and civilization is unquestionably conditioned by the existence in its language of a written norm, *the* vehicle of higher needs and wants of the community. It would, then, be completely out-of-place to brand the written norm as an inferior kind of structure. — The other thing that has come to light in the course of our discussion is even more important. It is the undeniable fact that in any kind of extralinguistic situations to which the language user finds it necessary to react, one of the two norms is found to supply much more adequate means than the other (and possibly the sole means applicable in that kind of situation). One is thus faced here with something that might almost be called a sort of complementary distribution of the two norms with respect to different kinds of extralinguistic situation. The conclusion to be drawn from this fact is that without the co-existing written norm the spoken norm of language would hardly be able to cope with numerous tasks imposed upon language in fairly advanced cultural communities. Under these conditions it would seem most unwise to regard as inferior that norm whose existence alone can guarantee that language will possess means enabling it to cope with all kinds of extralinguistic situation, and not with some of them only.

Besides, grammatical parallels show clearly that marked and unmarked character by no means implies superordination or subordination, respectively. The fact, e.g., that ModE progressive tenses must be regarded as marked counterparts of the simple tenses (14) does not stigmatize the former as functionally inferior to the latter: there are extralinguistic situations which can only be satisfactorily handled by making use of a progressive form. Rather one can regard the marked grammatical form as a kind of superstructure built up on the basis provided by its unmarked counterpart: the functional *raison d'être* of such superstructure appears to be the reference to a specialized kind of situation (in the case of the progressive form, to a specific kind of verbal action) which cannot be quite satisfactorily handled by the corresponding unmarked form. The above functional parallel is most instructive for the correct understanding of the relations existing between the written and the spoken norm: it will be readily admitted that the former, too, constitutes a kind of superstructure over the latter, and that the *raison d'être* of the former undeniably lies in performing specialized functions the means for which cannot be equally well provided for by the latter. In other words, the question of the hierarchic relation of the spoken and written norms must not be answered in terms of subordination or superordination, but in terms of more general or more specialized applicability.

What has just been said is at the same time our answer to the earlier formulated question (b). A number of objections might be raised against it, the most important of which will be briefly considered here. Particular attention must be paid to the argument stressing the non-existence of the written norm in many language communities; in the



opinion of those who avail themselves of this argument, such non-existence furnishes a proof of the dispensability, and so of inferior status, of the written norm. But the argument is far from convincing; the only thing that can be said about the language communities lacking the written norm is that so far they have failed to develop all latent possibilities of language. In other words, if such language communities dispense with the written norm, this should not be regarded as an example of the ordinary state of things, but rather as a defective state (in most instances, of course, such defects are only temporary). The matter can be put still more differently by stating that all languages tend to develop to an optimum stage at which they will have developed their latent structural possibilities in full. And it is this optimum stage alone which can furnish the analyst with materials capable of an adequate evaluation of the two discussed norms.

Incidentally, it is worth stressing that this optimum stage cannot be said to have been reached by a language community at the moment when that community was only embarking on its first attempts to record its spoken utterances in writing. As has already been pointed out elsewhere,<sup>15</sup> such early attempts (if they have not been imposed upon our languages by expert phoneticians) really constitute hardly more than imperfect, cumbersome quasi-transcriptions, sharing, however, one fundamental feature with genuine phonetic transcriptions. They are, that is to say, manifestations of a system of signs of the second order: they stand in no direct relation to the extralinguistic reality, but only in an indirect one, effected *via* the spoken utterances (which, in their turn, are manifestations of a system of signs of the first order). Only after some time, when what is commonly called scribal tradition has emerged in the concerned language community, direct links begin to be established between the written utterances and the extra-linguistic reality to which they refer, and only then one can speak about the existence in that community of the written norm “in its own right”; it is only then that the optimum stage of the development of the given language has been reached.

Our final answer to the question (b), then, stresses the mutually complementary relation of the two language norms; it classifies one of them as a marked norm and the other as unmarked, but is deeply opposed to branding any of the two norms as inferior (functionally or structurally) to its counterpart co-existing with it in the given community.

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The above answer is by no means of purely theoretical interest; it will also be found to have deep practical significance, if all consequences are duly derived from it, especially from what has been said here about the mutually complementary relation of the two norms of language. Since these norms can only have any sense if they serve the needs of actual communication within the language community, and since this communication is being carried on by individual members of this community, it is obvious that any such member has (or, at least, should have) a good command of the means of both these norms, so that he may be able to switch from one of the norms to the other, according



to the situation in which he finds himself placed, and according to the kind of intention with which he reacts to the extralinguistic reality facing him in that situation. If one may venture to coin another new term, one might put the matter briefly by saying that a member of a cultured language community is (or, at least, should be) a “binormist”.

The binormism of members of cultured communities again entails an important consequence. It is the necessity of a certain parallelism in the structures of the two norms;<sup>16</sup> clearly, without an appreciable degree of such parallelism an adequate command of the written norm is bound to be most difficult. In the practice of everyday life this necessity finds its expression in the demands calling for orthographical reforms. Most of the voices calling for them, however, are guilty of oversimplifying the relations existing between the two norms. It is usually demanded that written and spoken utterances should very closely correspond on the lowest level, i.e. that there should be a consistent correspondence of phonemes, which are the basic elements of spoken utterances, and graphemes, which occupy an analogous basically important place in written utterances.<sup>17</sup> It is for this reason that voices demanding reforms of traditional spellings usually regard “phoneticization” of such spellings as the only effective remedy that can do away with all their deficiencies. As a matter of fact, what is advocated by such voices is not a ‘one-symbol-per-sound’ principle but rather what may be called “phonemicization”, i.e. an establishment of consistent correspondence between a particular symbol and a particular phoneme. Undoubtedly this kind of correspondence seems at first sight to be the most efficient and very easy to establish. The interesting point is, however, that in by far the greatest number of language communities the actual correspondence of phonemes and graphemes falls considerably short of the “desirable” state of things. Nor can the actual state of things be simply branded as primitively conservative; rather it can be demonstrated that exceptions to, and deviations from, the correspondence on the lowest level can usually be explained by correspondences on the higher levels of the two norms.

Two such correspondences on higher levels deserve particular attention. In a Czech paper published some 25 years ago,<sup>18</sup> the present writer showed in detail that most of the points in which Modern Czech conventional spelling violates the “one-grapheme-per-phoneme” principle can be easily accounted for by a tendency to preserve the optical make-up of a morpheme unchanged throughout the paradigm or in derived forms, even in those situations in which the phonematic make-up of the morpheme has appreciably changed. Here also belong, among other things, Frinta’s instances of “unphonetic” writing (such as *let* ‘the act of flying’: *led* ‘ice’, both pronounced [let]) which he excuses by the function of spelling “to speak quickly and distinctly to the eyes”. It should be observed that the difference of the word-final graphemes in such spellings helps to preserve the optical make-up of the phoneme found in the greatest part of the paradigm (see *letu*, *letem*, *lety* etc. as opposed to *ledu*, *ledem*, *ledy* etc.; note that in these forms the graphematic difference *t* : *d* is also phonematically justified). — In our paper referred to above in Note 5 (the Czech version of which had been published as early as 1942) an analogous tendency was demonstrated for English, where again graphematic uniformity of

morphemes is sometimes in sharp contrast with the diversity of their phonematic structures. See instances like *equal, equal-ity* — /i:kwəl, i:'kwol-iti/; *comfort, comfort-able* — /kʌmfət, kʌmft-əbl/; *lack-ed, play-ed, want-ed* — /læk-t, plei-d, wont-id/, etc. etc. (Similar instances of preserving the graphematic uniformity of morphemes might be drawn from Russian and some other languages.) All instances of this category reveal that sometimes a tendency may be observed in languages to underline the correspondence of morphemes<sup>19</sup> in the spoken and written norm, even if this underlining is done at the expense of correspondences belonging to the lowest level of language. It should be emphasized that the fact of correspondences on the morphematic level was also noted, independently of our findings, by the American scholar D. L. Bolinger.<sup>20</sup>

The other type of correspondence on a higher level which deserves registering here is based on still higher elements of language, viz. upon words,<sup>21</sup> spoken and written. In its purest form this correspondence type would imply the presence in the written norm of as many symbols as there are words in the corresponding spoken norm. Needless to say, this purest form of the correspondence can never be found in concrete language communities. Relatively closest to this purest form is the instance of Chinese with its “ideographic” script (although even in Chinese symbols sometimes refer not to ‘ideas’ but simply to groups of sounds). The non-existence of this type of correspondence in its purest form is clearly due to technical difficulties which would be connected with the acquiring of such a writing system by members of the concerned language community.<sup>22</sup> Still, some analogy of the described situation may be found in those written norms which are otherwise based primarily on the correspondence of phonemes and graphemes. Thus, in English and in French a fairly high number of homonymous spoken words may be found which in the written norm are differentiated by various graphematic make-ups. Here belong Bradley’s instances like *right—write—rite—wright*, and many others, like *sea—see, I—eye* etc.<sup>23</sup> It may be convenient to speak here of the assertion of a “quasi-ideographic” principle (in contrast to the “ideographic” which may be found asserted, at least to a high degree, in Chinese).

A closer scrutiny of the existing written norms reveals that a vast majority of them embodies a sort of compromise among correspondences based on various language levels. Such compromise can also be ascertained in the written norms of Modern English, Modern Czech, and Modern Russian. In all these languages the correspondence on the lowest level (i.e. of phonemes and graphemes) had undoubtedly furnished the basis on which their written norms came to be built up. In none of these languages, however, was this correspondence free from interference of other factors. In Czech the correspondence on the lowest level has managed to assert itself on a relatively very wide scope, but its operation is sometimes limited by regard paid to correspondences on the level of morphemes.<sup>24</sup> In Modern Russian the interference of such correspondences on the morphematic level is still more conspicuous than in Czech. This is due to phonematic differences arising through the operation of dynamic stress but unregistered in writing (see, e.g., Nom. sg. *vod-a*: Acc. sg. *vod-u* – phonematically /vað-a: ‘vod-ul. In ModE the

interference of correspondences on higher levels into the operation of the correspondence on the lowest level is still more powerful than in Russian. This follows not only from the preservation of the graphematic make up of some morphemes despite changed phonematic circumstances (examples of such preservation were given above), but especially from the above-noted instances of “quasi-ideographic” writings, so numerous in English and virtually unknown to Russian.<sup>25</sup>

A detailed analysis of the written norms of individual languages would most probably reveal that the originally heterogeneous elements composing these norms have become more or less harmonized and co-ordinated in them,<sup>26</sup> so that, as a rule, they do not strike the reader as chaotic agglomerations. It is, of course, true that voices demanding the reforms of current orthographic systems might be quoted as very strong arguments to the contrary. But such voices only show that something is wrong with the written norm; they do not necessarily prove that the co-ordination of its various elements has not been carried through. In order to be able to understand such voices one must realize which qualities of the written norm are of personal importance for any language user.

The first of the two qualities, surveyability (“speaking quickly and distinctly to the eyes”), was amply commented upon in the former part of the present paper. The other of the two commented qualities, preservability, does not count in this connection, because preservability is inherent in any kind of written norm, whether the latter is functionally adequate or not. But there is another quality of the written norm which is of particular personal importance to any language user, viz. the easiness or the difficulty with which it affects the person trying to acquire it (at the risk of coining another barbarous neologism, one might term it “learnability”). A written norm is easily learnable if the correspondences linking it to the corresponding spoken norm are relatively simple, and it is difficult to acquire when these correspondences become too complex. This may again sound like a truism, but there are two consequences that follow from it and which have not always been fully realized. One of them is the non-identity of two things which are often mistakenly identified, viz. of the written norm and traditional orthography (popularly, but by no means exactly, referred to as “conventional spelling”).<sup>27</sup> As has already been pointed out elsewhere,<sup>28</sup> orthography is a kind of bridge leading from spoken to written utterances. More exactly, it is a set of precepts enabling the language user to transpose spoken utterances into written ones. (Conversely, what is popularly called “pronunciation”, that means actual reading of printed texts, can be denned as a set of precepts enabling the language user to transpose written utterances into spoken ones.)

The other consequence to be drawn from the above truism is perhaps even more interesting. The two requirements imposed upon the written norm by the needs of the language user (i.e. the requirements of surveyability and ‘learnability’) are often found to be basically contradictory: what suits the needs of the reader is often felt as uncomfortable by the writer, and yet the requirements of both must be satisfied. It appears that the tension arising out of the difference of the two standpoints supplies the main motive for the demands of orthographical reforms especially in cultural language communities

of the present-day period in which the growing democratization of culture has been increasingly tending to stress the demands of the writing individual at the expense of his more passive reading colleague. Obviously the task of any orthographic reformer boils down to the task of complying with reasonable requests that want to make a given written norm more learnable, without jeopardizing the other function of that written norm, i.e. its surveyability. In other words, the above-mentioned co-ordination of originally heterogeneous elements of the written norm need not, and most probably should not, be given up in orthographic reforms, although, naturally, too complicated co-ordinations may (and most probably should) be replaced by simpler ones, if external factors make such replacement feasible.<sup>29</sup>

The task of the orthographic reformer appears thus particularly difficult in language communities whose written norms reveal a co-ordination that is particularly complex. Such undoubtedly is the case of the written norm of English. This is not only because its basic correspondence on the lowest level is abundantly interfered with by correspondences on the two higher planes, but also because even on the lowest level different ties may be established between graphemes or groups of graphemes on one hand and phonemes or groups of phonemes on the other, according as the former occur in words of domestic or of foreign character (see, e.g., relations like *c* — /k/; *ch* — /č/ in domestic words, *c* — /s/, *ch* — /k, š/ in foreign words). There can be no doubt that even in English some kind of co-ordination exists, but it is an extremely complex one. The reason of this complexity is well-known: it is mostly due to powerful external influences exercised upon English in the course of its history by languages whose written norms had been built up on correspondences often differing from those found in English. If, in addition to this, it is realized that the complex co-ordination typical of ModE has been sanctioned by long centuries of tradition, one can easily understand that doubts are often expressed as to the possibility of any “spelling reform” in English.<sup>30</sup>

It is not the present writer’s intention to approach here the very difficult subject of the English spelling reform. — There is, however, another important issue that emerges from the preceding paragraph, viz. the problem of when and how (and, of course, why) the written norm undergoes changes in relation to its equivalent spoken norm during the development of the language comprising the two. Our Chapter II will undertake a modest attempt at tracing the changing relations of the two norms during the development of English.

[...]

## Notes

Originally published in *Brno Studies in English* 1 (1959), 7–36 under the title “Two chapters on written English”. The text reprinted here contains the first part of the article, subtitled “On the functional hierarchy of spoken and written utterances”. The second part of the text, entitled “Some remarks on the development of the written norm in English”, describes the phonological development of modern English and its divergence from the spelling. This chapter has been omitted.

- <sup>1</sup> Some less relevant contemporary references omitted.
- <sup>2</sup> Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, *Nekotorye otdeley “sravnitelnoy grammatiki” slovyanskikh [sic] yazykov*, *Russ. Filol. Vestnik* 5 [1881], pp. 265–243 (see esp. pp. 277 ff.).
- <sup>3</sup> Henry Bradley, *The Making of English* (London, 1904), p. 212.
- <sup>4</sup> Antonín Frinta, *Novočeská výslovnost [= Pronunciation of Mod. Czech]* (Praha 1909), esp. p. 36.
- <sup>5</sup> Josef Vachek, *Some Remarks on Writing and Phonetic Transcription*, *Acta Linguistica* 5, (1945–1949), pp. 86–93.
- <sup>6</sup> The validity of this statement is clearly endorsed by the well-known fact that there are quite a number of people who can comfortably read and understand texts written in a foreign language without being able to speak that language at all.
- <sup>7</sup> Agenor Artymovyč, *Pysana mova [= Written Language]*, *Naukovy Zbirnyk Ukrain-skoho Vys. Ped. Institutu v Prazi* 2 (1932), pp. 1–8. See also his paper *Fremdwort und Schrift in Charisteria Gu. Mathesio quinquagenario... oblate* (Pragae 1932), pp. 115–117. Our quotation below is taken from the latter paper.
- <sup>8</sup> In Artymovyč’s own words, “daß die Schrift jeder sog. Schriftsprache ein besonderes *autonomes* System bildet, zum Teil unabhängig ven der eigentlichen gesprochenen Sprache” (*Fremdw. u. Schrift*, p. 114; italics ours).
- <sup>9</sup> Josef Vachek, *Zum Problem der geschriebenen Sprache*, *Travaux du CLP* 8 (1948), pp. 94–104.
- <sup>10</sup> Printed utterances form a specific sub-category of written utterances (see J. Vachek, *Written Language and Printed Language*, *Recueil linguistique de Bratislava* 1, 1948, pp. 67–75), but, for the present moment at least, the difference of the two may be disregarded as non-essential; there will be an opportunity to come back to it further below.
- <sup>11</sup> The comparison of more extensive spoken and written utterances reveals another notable difference between the two, viz. the monodimensional character of spoken utterances (noted for the first time by P. de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, Paris 1922, p. 103) as opposed to the regularly polydimensional character of written utterances. Such utterances as fill up more than one written or printed line, are

two-dimensional, the longer ones, such as extend over two pages, are three-dimensional. Undoubtedly, the polydimensional character of written utterances essentially contributes to their superiority over their spoken counterparts in matters of quick and efficient surveyability. (A more detailed discussion of this point can be found in J. Vachek's Czech treatise *Psaný jazyk a pravopis* [Written Language and Orthography], *Čtení o jazyce a poesii* (Praha) 1, 1942, pp. 231—306, see esp. pp. 242 ff.)

- <sup>12</sup> In other words, the author of a written utterance can be identified by his or her handwriting, whereas the printed utterance, effacing the differences of handwritings by the uniformity of printer's types, renders such direct identification impossible. (See also our paper referred to above, Note 10.)
- <sup>13</sup> See his papers referred to above, Note 5, p. 87, and the paper quoted in Note 10, p. 67. It should be noted that in their earlier version the definitions were somewhat inaccurate owing to their use of the terms "spoken language" and "written language"; the present version replaces these terms by the more correct wordings "the spoken norm of language", and "the written norm of language", respectively.
- <sup>14</sup> On this point see especially V. Mathesius, On some problems of the systematic analysis of grammar, *Travaux du CLP* 6, Prague 1936, pp. 95–107 (esp. p. 102).
- <sup>15</sup> See our paper referred to above, Note 5, p. 91.
- <sup>16</sup> This necessity was duly stressed by J. Berry in his Oslo lecture (The Making of Alphabets, *Reports for the Eighth International Congress of Linguists*, Oslo, 1957, pp. 5–18) in which he insists that any system of writing should be based "on some attempt at a systematic correlation with the spoken language". He voices this demand, as he puts it, "despite eloquent pleas, especially by Bolinger, Vachek and others, that writing can and should be considered as basically a visual system independent of the vocal-auditory process" (p. 6). Berry overlooks, however, that the same necessity had been emphatically voiced by the present writer in the very two papers which are referred to in Berry's Note 6.
- <sup>17</sup> The parallelism of phonemes and graphemes was consistently, if not always quite adequately, developed by E. Pulgram, *Phoneme and Grapheme: A Parallel*, Word 7, 1951, pp. 15–20.
- <sup>18</sup> Josef Vachek, *Český pravopis a struktura češtiny* [= Czech Spelling and the Structure of Czech], *Listy filologické* (Prague) 60, 1933, pp. 287–319.
- <sup>19</sup> The above instances have also made clear that by the term morpheme is meant here, in accordance with the conception prevailing in linguistics, the smallest utterance element that refers to some meaning and cannot be analyzed into smaller elements of the same quality.
- <sup>20</sup> D.L. Bolinger, Visual Morphemes, *Language* 22, 1946, pp. 333ff.
- <sup>21</sup> By the term word is meant here an utterance element that refers to some meaning and that, acting as one indivisible whole, can more or less freely change its position

with regard to other elements of the utterance, or at least can (again acting as one indivisible whole) be separated from those elements by the insertion of some additional, more or less freely interchangeable utterance-element.

- <sup>22</sup> It was exactly these difficulties that had acted as a motive for the decision of the Chinese authorities to introduce alphabetic (i.e. more or less phonematic) writing, despite the complications of the Chinese language situation which are most likely to follow the reform. See esp. B. Karlgren, *Sound and Symbol in Chinese*, Oxford 1925; also M. Swadesh in *Science and Society* 1952.
- <sup>23</sup> See also the interesting remarks by V. Fried, Je reforma anglického pravopisu vůbec možná? [= Is English Spelling Reform Possible?], *Časopis pro moderní filologii* (Praha) 39, 1957, pp. 257–270.
- <sup>24</sup> More detailed information on the compromise solution found in the written norm of Czech can be obtained from the paper referred to above, Note 18.
- <sup>25</sup> Before the orthographic reform of 1917, Russian possessed a very limited number of instances of word-pairs distinguished in writing on the ground of the ‘quasi-ideographic’ principle, e.g. мир ‘peace’ — мир ‘world’, Есть ‘to eat’ — *есть* ‘is’, etc. In Czech the quasi-ideographic principle can be ascertained in a limited number of cases (see, e.g., *vír* ‘torrent’ — *výr* ‘owl’, phonematically /vi:r/ in both instances; *bílí* ‘he whitewashes’ — *býlí* ‘weeds’, i.e. /bi:li:/, etc.). Cf. B. Havranek, Influence de la fonction de la langue littéraire sur la structure phonologique et grammaticale du tchèque littéraire. *Travaux du CLP* 1, 1929, pp. 106–120 (esp. p. 111 f).
- <sup>26</sup> The remarkably harmonized, co-ordinated character of the elements entering into the structure of the Czech written norm was discussed in detail in our paper referred to above, Note 18.
- <sup>27</sup> It would be most useful if the term ‘spelling’ could be reserved for only one of the meanings covered by it today: it should refer to individual graphemes, manifesting the written norm, by phonic means available in manifestations of the spoken norm (see, e.g., *a* /ei/, *b* /bi:/, *c* /si:/ etc.). An exact functional antipode of spelling so defined can be identified in phonetic (or phonematic) transcription whose task is to refer to individual sounds (or phonemes), manifesting the spoken norm, by graphical means based on manifestations of the written norm. For more details, see our paper quoted above, Note 5; it should be pointed out that some of the arguments found in it have been slightly revised and modified here.
- <sup>28</sup> In our paper quoted above, Note 5.
- <sup>29</sup> Interesting specimens of various kinds of external factors which do not allow of an establishment of (theoretically possible) simpler orthographical systems are mentioned in Berry’s paper referred to above. It should be pointed out that Berry, too, takes a fully justified liberal view in admitting exceptions to the rigorous application of the correspondence on the lowest level; he speaks of “a marked trend towards tolerance of synthetic writing systems and away from the illusory concept of the



‘pure’ phonetic or phonemic transcription” (p. 14). For all these sound observations, Berry’s attitude remains more or less pragmatic, lacking the firm ground of linguistic theory. Incidentally, the above-mentioned tension arising out of the contacting requirements of the reader and writer only reflects a tension on a higher level, i.e. in the substance of the written norm itself. Its task “to speak quickly and distinctly to the eyes” acts as a centrifugal force, making for a conspicuous differentiation of written utterances from their spoken counterparts. On the other hand, the necessity of preserving a fair amount of correspondence between the written and the spoken norm co-existing in the same language community acts as a centripetal force, not allowing the differentiation of the two kinds of utterances to exceed certain limits.

<sup>30</sup> See V. Fried’s paper quoted above, Note 23.

### Comprehension questions

1. What are some of the benefits of the “unphonetic spelling” of modern English?
2. What does Vachek mean when he argues that written language and spoken language are two functionally different norms?
3. Which of the norms is subservient to the other? Why (not)?
4. What are the major functional features of spoken language?
5. What are the major functional features of written language?
6. Explain the mutual relationship between intellectual content and the emotive content of utterances.
7. Why is there a tension between surveyability and learnability in written language? How is this related to problems faced in orthographic reforms?
8. What does the quasi-ideographic principle of English mean?
9. Find out about the main attempts and proposals made in the past for the reformation of English spelling.



# The English sentence as a whole: Complex condensation and word order

Vilém Mathesius



**Vilém Mathesius** (1882–1945) was the founder of the Prague Linguistic Circle and the first professor of English language and literature in the country (1912). Both a linguist and a literary scholar, he was central in establishing the Prague School of Linguistics and inspiring a whole generation of scholars that shared the structuralist outlook on language as a functional system composed of mutually interrelated subsystems. His classic lecture *On the potentiality of language phenomena* (1911) established a modern, structuralist analysis of language that he developed alongside, but independent of, his more famous contemporary, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Mathesius pioneered an approach to language study that he called “linguistic characterology”, which concerns the analysis of a given language not in terms of a comprehensive description on all language levels but in terms of the specific characteristics of the language, with such characteristics emerging, most clearly, as a result of synchronic comparison. In Mathesius’s conception, linguistic characterology consists of functional onomatology (the process of naming) and functional syntax (the process of mutually relating units within the sentence-forming act). These are the two basic processes that ultimately underlie any act of communication that results in the production of some utterance.

*This article is an extract from a chapter in A Functional Analysis of Present Day English on a General Linguistic Basis, edited posthumously by Josef Vachek from Mathesius's lecture notes and translated into English by Libuše Dušková. In his book, which has been a classic textbook for Czech students of English for decades, Mathesius describes the typical properties of modern English using the method of synchronic comparison, i.e. contrasting data in genetically unrelated languages. The juxtaposition of comparable data in English, Czech and other languages inevitably reveals many valuable properties that may remain unnoticed in accounts lacking such a comparative approach. The chapter reproduced below deals with the differences between English and Czech in the area of syntax. The first issue concerns the tendency of English towards non-finite expression, as manifested in the diverse means contributing towards "complex condensation", such as the infinitive, gerund, and nominalization. The second topic discusses the English word order, which is regulated by different rules than word order in Czech.*

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## 1. Means of complex condensation

### a) General remarks

Having treated the most important elements of the English sentence (the subject, predicate, object, attribute, adverbial) we shall now consider some points concerning the structure of the English sentence as a whole. The first feature to be pointed out might be called *complex condensation*. We use this term to describe the fact that English tends to express by non-sentence elements of the main clause such circumstances that are in Czech, as a rule, denoted by subordinate clauses. This results in making the sentence structure more compact or, in other words, in sentence condensation, which may be called complex since in this way English can express entire complexes of content.<sup>1</sup>

To begin with, attention should be paid to the manner in which English makes use of the gerund, the infinitive and the participles.

Even this question may be elucidated by a comparison with Czech. Czech, too, has the verbal noun, the infinitive and the participles. An examination of their uses in Czech shows that the Czech verbal noun behaves just as any other noun with the same ending. It displays no special features and consequently it does not call for special treatment in Czech grammar.

The Czech infinitive is a form that has a much more verbal character than the verbal noun, nevertheless its use is relatively limited. It can be used as an object if its subject

coincides with the subject of the predicative finite verb (*Učím se psát na stroji* [I learn to type]). It can be used as an object even if it has a different subject than the predicative finite verb, but then if the subject of the infinitive is expressed, it is invariably identical with the object of the predicative verb (*Matka učí dítě chodit* [The mother teaches the child to walk]). An important features of the Czech verbal noun and infinitive is the lack of temporal distinctions. As is well known, Czech can form neither a perfect infinitive, nor a verbal noun referring to the past. Contrariwise in English these forms are available. Moreover, the Czech verbal noun is neutral with respect to active or passive voice. In a construction like *mámení lidí* [the deluding of people] the form *lidí* [of people] may have the meaning of either the subjective or the objective genitive. Admittedly the Czech infinitive has the passive form, but it is very rarely used. On the other hand, both the Czech infinitive and the Czech verbal noun are capable of expressing aspectual distinctions, cf. *nést – nosit* [to carry imperfective, non-iterative – to carry imperfective, iterative], *nesení – nošení* [carrying non-iterative – carrying iterative], and the like.

Of the participles the most important form in Czech is the present participle. It is frequently used in the definite form which has acquired the function of a verbal adjective (*Na ulicích bylo vidět plno lidí spěchajících za svým denním zaměstnáním* [In the streets there were many people hurrying to work]). The definite form of the present participle replaces an attributive clause. The present participle in the indefinite form (*veda* [leading, masc. sg.], *nesouce* [carrying, pl.]) is restricted to instances where its subject is the same as the subject of the finite verb. In Present Day Czech its use is confined to semi-clausal statements of an action simultaneous with the action of the finite verb; expression of other meanings by means of the present participle is very rare. The meanings enumerated by V. Ertl in his revision of Gebauer's Czech Grammar are obsolete; in Present Day Czech they occur only in proverbs. Another significant restriction in addition to what has just been said about the uses of the present participle in Present Day Czech is the fact that it is found only in the literary language, which is slightly archaic. In colloquial Czech the participle does not occur at all, apart from fossilized expressions like *vyjma, nepočítajíc*, etc. [except, not counting].

What has been said about the present participle can also be said about the past participle, the only difference being that compared with its present counterpart the past participle is used still less, even in its definite form. A construction like *osoby zaplativší vstupné* [the persons having paid admission] sounds stilted; it is occasionally found in slipshod newspaper Czech. – The passive past participle has two forms (*dělán – dělaný* [done – done + adjectival ending]). The definite form is used in the same way as any other adjective; when freely linked to its noun it usually replaces an attributive clause (*Přístroje zhotovené v této továrně jsou dokonale přesné* [The instruments made in this factory are absolutely precise]). IN predicative uses, involving the indefinite forms of the participle, the passive past participle must be complemented by the participle of the verb *to be* (*jsa udělán, byv udělán* [being done, having been done]), the passive past participle alone being a gallicism; the periphrastic forms, however, are again felt as archaic and stilted.

German does not appreciably differ from Czech, as regards the uses of the participles. Even German has virtually lost the semiclausal present participle, whereas the attributive participle is in common use (*alle dort badenden Gäste*). In contrast to Czech, German present participles are also used as agent nouns: *die Reisenden*, etc. As for the German verbal noun, it has an entirely nominal character and is used like other nouns just as the verbal noun in Czech. The only difference from Czech consists in the fact that German, owing to its capacity to substantivize by means of the definite article, can also form verbal nouns in the passive voice and in the past tense. This form of expression is especially common in the language of philosophy (e.g., *das Wahrgenommenwerden*). The infinitive in German is essentially used in the same way as in Czech but somewhat more extensively. Infinitival constructions are found with a far larger number of verbs than in Czech. For instance, in Czech we have to say *Učitel vyzval žáka, aby se na příští hodinu dobře připravil* [The teacher asked to pupil that he should prepare...], which corresponds in German to *Der Lehrer forderte den Schüler auf, sich auf die nächste Stunde gut vorzubereiten*. Similarly the Czech sentence *Myslím, že mám v tom jistě pravdu* [I think I am sure right in this] corresponds in German to *Ich glaube, sicher darin recht zu haben*. German even has the perfect infinitive (*Ich glaube darin recht gehabt zu haben*). Despite these facts the use of the infinite in German is not much more extensive than in Czech. On the other hand, in English the uses of participles, infinitive and gerund offer greater possibilities.

Let us first say a few words on the inventory of their forms in English. As for the participle, it can be said that on the whole English does not differ from Czech or German. The present participle has the active and the passive form (*asking, being asked*), which are also displayed by the past participle (*having asked, having been asked, asked*). More significant differences are found in the forms of the infinitive and the gerund. English readily forms the present and the perfect infinitive both in the active and the passive voice (*to ask, to be asked, to have asked, to have been asked*), analogous forms being found in the verbal noun, or more exactly, the gerund (*asking, being asked, having asked, having been asked*).<sup>2</sup> The English gerundial system is thus seen to coincide formally with the participial. This brief survey will have shown that English has a considerably greater number of all these forms than Czech. An even greater difference between the two languages can be found in the respective uses of these forms.

## b) English participles

Let us first consider the uses of the participles. Much more frequently than Czech, English employs the participle in the function of a semiclausal complement relating to the subject, e.g. *Going down the street I met John*. The same content can be expressed in Czech syntactically in the same way. In both languages the construction denotes temporal coexistence of two actions that have the same subject. The English participle, however, can express other shades of meaning that the Czech participle is incapable of conveying,

e.g. *Not having seen me for many years, he did not recognize me* – Protože mne mnoho let neviděl, nepoznal mne [As he did not see me...]. This sentence obviously expresses causal relation, which is the reason why Czech cannot employ the past active participle \**Neviděv mne...* The participle is here inapplicable because in Czech it usually expresses no other shade of meaning but the temporal relation. Compare another example: *Happening at war time, this thing would be a real disaster* – Kdyby se tato věc stala za války, byla by to úplná pohroma [If this thing happened...]. Here the English participle conveys the meaning of condition. One might find even other shades of meaning extending beyond the category of temporal relations.

Note. It has been pointed out above that to avoid vagueness the English participle used in semiclausal function may be accompanied by a subordinate conjunction (*When going home I met a friend*).

Another point of difference between Czech and English is the use of the English participle in semiclausal predicative function even if its subject differs from that of the governing verb. These are the so-called absolute constructions, which have also been mentioned here before. Compare the English sentence *All possibilities having been taken into account it was decided that...* with its Czech equivalent *Když se uvážily všechny možnosti, bylo rozhodnuto, že...* [When all possibilities were taken into account...], or *This done he returned home* – *Když to vykonal, vrátil se domů* [When he did it...]. The participle with predicative function is the more applicable if it can find support in an actual element of the governing clause. In this case the expression of an accompanying circumstance is often introduced by the preposition *with*, e.g. *I wonder how you could sleep with that wind roaring around you*. *Rád bych věděl, jak jsi mohl spát, když ten vítr burácel kolem tebe* [...when the wind roared...]. A similar construction is found with the past participle: *With the new methods not yet tried it cannot be said what results may be reached* – *Poněvadž se ty nové metody ještě nevyzkoušely, nemůže se říci, jakých výsledků se dá dosáhnout* [Since the new methods were not tried...].<sup>3</sup> Naturally none of these constructions can be imitated in Czech.

Finally, another remark should be added. English lacks the future participle (and of course the passive future participle). This form is replaced by the attributive passive infinitive: *With the new methods still to be tried it cannot be said what results may be obtained* — *Poněvadž se ty nové metody teprve mají vyzkoušet etc.* [Since the new methods are still to be tried...]. The examples given so far have contained the preposition *with*. However, there are also constructions with other prepositions: *At that time an immense prosperity arose in America from the resources of a continental area turned to account by the full employment of mechanic power*. *V té době vznikl v Americe nesmírný blahobyt tím, že toho, co poskytovala oblast celého kontinentu, bylo využito plným nasazením strojního pohonu* [At that time arose in America an immense prosperity by-that that what (accusative) provided a continental area (nominative) was turned to account...].

These examples show that as a matter of fact the participle used in predicative function and its noun form one unit, and this unit taken as a whole is governed by a preposition (*from the resources turned to account*). In such instances one can clearly see the very essence of what is meant by the term complex condensation.<sup>4</sup> Herewith we conclude the chapter on the role played by the participle in complex constructions.

### c) The infinitive and the gerund in English

Proceeding to a discussion of the infinitive in English<sup>5</sup> we can refer to what has been said above concerning the object of the accusative type. English has a special construction of the accusative with the infinitive, e. g. *I don't believe him to have behaved like that* Nevěřím, že by se byl takhle choval [...that he would have behaved...]. Sometimes the construction includes the preposition *for*, especially after expressions like *it is difficult, late, etc.*: *It was too late for them to begin anew* – Bylo příliš pozdě, aby začínali znovu [...that they should start...]. Here the construction of the accusative with the infinitive (*them to begin*) is linked to the governing verb by the preposition *for*. Compared with Czech, these uses greatly contribute to the extension of the functions of the infinitive.

However, it is in the uses of the verbal noun that English differs from Czech and German most widely. In Czech and German the verbal noun is a genuine substantive, which is modified in the same way as any other noun, i.e. by an adjective or a genitive. The English verbal noun has a much more verbal character. It can operate as an actual verbal noun, i.e. it may take the article, e.g. *(The) having him for an unbidden companion in such a solitary place much increased her nervousness* – To, že jí byl nezvaným společníkem na tak osamělém místě, značně zvýšilo její nervozitu [That he was an unbidden companion to her...]. In other cases the nominal character of the verbal noun is due to modification by means of an adjective (or a pronoun) or by means of the genitive of a noun. Both kinds of modification are found in the following sentence: *Hurried reading of all sorts of books is simply waste of time.* – Chvatné čtení všemožných knih je prostě plýtvání časem. – Here the English verbal noun *reading* is used in exactly the same type of construction as the Czech verbal noun *čtení*.

However, the substantival use of the verbal noun is not its sole function. As is well known, the English verbal noun also displays verbal features; in this function it is usually called the gerund. It is especially this additional capacity to perform verbal functions that distinguishes the English verbal noun from that in Czech and German. The verbal character of the gerund primarily manifests itself in the form of the object, which is the same as after the finite forms of the verb; cf. *There are different ways of making money*, which may be translated into Czech literally (though with the object in the genitive, not in the accusative case, as in English): *Jsou různé způsoby vydělávání peněz* [making of money]. Usually, however, the content is rendered more freely by means of the infinitive: *Jsou různé způsoby, jak vydělávat peníze* [...how to make money]. English can form the

verbal noun even from the copula, which is then accompanied by a nominal predicate: *She was proud of being a mother* – *Byla hrda na to, že je matkou* [...that she is...]. In Czech the verbal noun in this case cannot be used. Moreover, as has been pointed out before, the English gerund has a wealth of forms. It has a special form for reference to the past: *He was nervous for having never before spoken in public*. Here Czech has to use a subordinate clause: *Byl nervózní, protože ještě nikdy nemluvil na veřejnosti* [...because he never before spoke...]. Similarly Czech cannot imitate the passive gerund: *He was proud of having never been beaten at chess* – *Byl hrdý na to, že ještě nikdy nebyl poražen v šachu* [...that he was never beaten...].<sup>6</sup> The examples also show how often English employs the verbal noun in different prepositional constructions. However, the most important feature of the English constructions containing the verbal noun is the fact that the verbal noun may be modified by an element that corresponds to the subject of the respective finite verb. This is also possible in Czech, but there the modification has to be expressed possessively, just as in the case of a noun: *To Karlovo neustálé nařikání mi už jde na nervy* or *Jeho neustálé...* [That Charles's incessant complaining already gets on my nerves or His incessant complaining...]. The same construction is sometimes found in English: *You don't mind my smoking, I hope*, or *I was rather surprised at your asking that question*. In these instances one point is worth noting. Although possessive attributes undoubtedly emphasize the substantival character of verbal nouns, the gerund takes a direct object (*your asking that question*). However, if the verbal noun is preceded by an article, the strict norm of English grammar requires the genitive construction with the preposition *of* (*the asking of that question*) Compare another example: *He expressed some doubt of their ever having been married* – *Vyslovil pochybnosti o tom, zda vůbec kdy byli spolu oddáni* [...about it whether they were ever married]. However, the element operating as the subject of the verbal noun may be expressed not only by possessive qualification but also by juxtaposition, e.g. *He would not hear of that being possible*. If *being* is regarded as a gerund, then its subject is expressed by juxtaposition of the neutral form (common case) *that*. In Czech a dependent clause has to be used *Nechtěl slyšet o tom, že je to možné* [He would not hear about it that it is possible].

As has been mentioned before, it is not quite clear which grammatical form *being* represents in this construction. It may be the present participle if *that* is interpreted as an object dependent on the preposition *of* and *being* as its predicative complement. (It is for this reason that E. Krusinga does not distinguish between the gerund and the participle, referring to both as the “-ing form”.)<sup>7</sup> The American syntactician G.O. Curme assumes that the construction illustrated by the examples under discussion has arisen on the analogy of participial constructions such as *I saw him coming*. Nevertheless the form *being* in our example is interpreted by Curme as a gerund. Whichever form it may be, exactly constructions of this type are characteristic of English and it is thanks to them that English has so many possibilities of complex condensation, e. g. *I am not surprised at men falling in love with her* – *Nepřekvapuje mne, že se muži do ni zamilovávají* [...that men fall in love...]. We can see that these constructions fully confirm what was stated



in the definition of complex condensation, viz. that a circumstance *that in Czech has to be expressed* by a subordinate clause is in English preferably denoted by a non-sentence element included in the main clause.

#### d) Complex constructions

The second major group of the means of sentence condensation to be considered is already known to us. As has been pointed out above, English can form the passive with an indirectly affected subject by means of the verb *to have* or by means of perceptive verbs (*to see, to find, etc.*). The verb *to have*, the causative verb *to make*, and the perceptive verbs are often employed in order to achieve complex condensation, i.e., they operate as links between the starting point constituted by the main clause and the expression of the circumstances that Czech has to formulate by a subordinate clause. Sometimes the two types are combined so that one sentence contains not only a verb of this kind but also a participle, infinitive or gerund in a complex construction, e. g. *I am used to having men fall in love with me*. Note the way this sentence is construed. On the one hand there is the starting point *I am used to*, on the other hand the infinitive construction denoting the circumstance to which the subject is said to be used, the two parts being linked by the verb *to have*. The fact that in this instance the verb *to have* operates only as a link is evident from the Czech translation in which it may be omitted altogether (*Jsem zvyklá na to, že se muži do mne zamilovávají* [I am used to it that men fall...]).

A similar situation is found with the other verbal categories listed above. Let us first adduce examples of the linking function of perceptive verbs: *We hope to see the whole quarter secured in time as the University quarter*. The starting point of the whole sentence is *We hope*, while what is hoped for is expressed by the participial construction, the link being provided by the perceptive verb *to see*, which is again missing in the Czech translation (*Doufáme, že celá čtvrť bude včas zajištěna jako čtvrť univerzitní* [We hope that the whole quarter will be secured...]). A similar construction of the participle with the verb *to have* appears in the following sentence: *I would have their bodily development so carefully watched and stimulated as their moral and intellectual growth* *Přál bych si, aby se jejich tělesný vývoj stejně bedlivě pozoroval a povzbuzoval jako jejich růst mravní a myšlenkový* [I would have that their bodily development were as carefully watched...]). An example of the verb *to find* in this construction is the sentence *It is a great encouragement to me to find you agreeing with my proposition* *Je mi velkým povzbuzením, že souhlasíte s mým návrhem* [It is a great encouragement to me that you agree...]. The starting point of the sentence is *It is a great encouragement to me*, the circumstance is *you agreeing with my proposition*, the linking being effected by the perceptive verb *to find*. – The causative verb *to make* in the linking function is illustrated in *No voice is needed to make me feel that* – *Není zapotřebí žádného hlasu, abych to cítila* [...that I should feel that].



We have thus discussed two groups of means by which an English sentence can include several circumstances that Czech and German have to denote by subordinate clauses. The examples were mostly taken from colloquial speech, where they are fairly common. The principal domain of these constructions, however, is the more intellectual style, especially the language of newspapers. It should be noted that the category of complex constructions represents in English syntax a feature analogous to a point observed in English onomatology; viz. to multiplex compound collocations arisen by mere juxtaposition, e.g. *Oxford University Summer Vacation Course*. As for the syntactic analysis of complex constructions, it is advisable to start with the verbal form, which is the starting point of the whole sentence, then to identify the elements expressing the circumstances, and finally the expression by which these two parts are linked.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. The word order of the English sentence

### a) Principles determining the order of words in a language

The order of words<sup>9</sup> is a subject of great interest. Unfortunately it is not always conceived in a sufficiently wide perspective. It can be treated from two different viewpoints. First, we can examine what position a particular sentence element usually occupies or, more exactly, what are the mutual positions of two particular sentence elements, the subject and the predicate, the object and the predicative verb, etc. The second approach consists in examining the general factors that determine the order of words in a sentence. The latter approach seems to be more expedient in as much as it shows that the arrangement of the words in a sentence is not determined by one principle, but results from the operation of several conflicting principles. The coexistence of several word order principles in a language is easily obscured if word order issues are treated in the former manner. This can be seen in the treatment of Czech word order in Ertl's edition of Gebauer's *Czech Grammar* (J. Gebauer – V. Ertl, 1914). The chapter on word order is one of the weakest parts of this otherwise valuable book, not only for lack of lucidity in the exposition but also because the presentation of Czech word order is entirely misleading.

Czech word order is very flexible. It is often referred to by the term “free”. This term, however, is objectionable, for it suggests that Czech word order is completely arbitrary, which is not correct. As has been said, it is flexible, which is manifest especially in comparison with the word order of English.

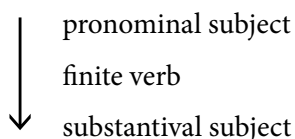
What are the principles that govern the word order of a particular language, often in a conflicting manner? The first principle might be called grammatical. It means that the position of a particular sentence element is determined by its grammatical function, i.e. by its being the subject, predicate, object, adverbial, etc. [...] In different languages

the grammatical principle asserts itself with different force. For instance, it plays a much greater part in English than in Czech. In some languages, such as Czech, the grammatical principle as a rule merely means that a particular sentence element occupies a particular sentence position unless this arrangement is prevented by the operation of another word order principle. In this case the grammatical word order represents only the neutral, i.e. the usual word order. In other languages the grammatical principle operates with much greater force than in Czech (as has been said above, this can be seen mainly in English).

The difference between the two languages is due to the fact that in Czech the grammatical function of a word is as a rule indicated by its form, whereas in English it is not. Thus in the construction *slaměný klobouk* [straw hat] the attributive function of the word *slaměný* [straw adj.] is signalled by its adjectival form and for this reason it does not greatly matter what position the attribute occupies. Though the normal position of an adjectival attribute is before its governing noun, the postsubstantival position is not inconceivable (it occurs, for example, in emphasis *On nosí klobouk slaměný*) [He wears a hat-sb. straw-adj.] or the two elements may be removed from each other (*On nosí klobouk obyčejně slaměný* [He wears a hat usually straw-adj.]). On the other hand the English expression *straw hat* does not admit of such rearrangement without an accompanying change in the meaning of the whole construction. *Straw hat* means, as is commonly known, a hat made of straw, whereas *hat straw* is a kind of straw from which hats are made. In a similar manner English distinguishes between the subject and direct object. In the sentence *John loves Mary* neither the noun *John*, nor the noun *Mary* shows by its form that the former is the subject and the latter the object. On the contrary the Czech nouns in the corresponding sentence *Jan má rád Marii* indicate their respective functions quite clearly. In English it suffices to change the word order for the sentence to convey a new meaning, while in Czech a change in the sense entails a change in the form of both nouns. Concluding our remarks on the grammatical principle of word order, we may sum up that it plays a much greater role in English than in Czech simply because it must. Owing to the simple morphological system of English, changes in word order are very often unfeasible since they would involve a change in the grammatical function of the words concerned.

The second principle determining the order of words in a sentence is the rhythm. This principle is well-known from Czech. Let us compare the following sentences *Já bych mu ji byl půjčil* – *Já bych mu byl tu knihu půjčil* – *Já bych byl tu knihu Karlovi půjčil* [I would to-him it have lent – I would to-him have that book lent – I would have that book to-Charles lent]. Note that the object in the accusative, when expressed by a pronoun, precedes the verb *byl*, but when expressed by a noun it is placed after the verb. If the pronominal object *mu* is replaced by the proper name, the word order changes again. These sentences clearly show the operation of the rhythmic principle. The position of the object depends on whether it is expressed by a pronoun or by a noun. The rhythmic principle plays a significant role in English as well, which can be shown by a comparison with German. In German, short sentences inserted in or following after direct speech have a special word order which is fixed in that the first place is occupied by the finite verb and the second by the subject: *Das*

*Wetter wird sich ändern, sagte der Vater* or *sagte er*. Whether the subject of the inserted or attached clause is expressed by a noun or a pronoun, it invariably occupies the same position, for in this case German applies the grammatical principle. On the other hand, in English the word order in these clauses is determined by the rhythmic principle, i.e. the first position is taken by the rhythmically lighter element: *The weather will change, said father* – but *he said*.<sup>10</sup> If the three sentence elements (pronominal subject, finite verb, substantial subject) are arranged according to their rhythmic weight, there is an increase in weightiness from the pronominal, to the substantial subject, with the finite verb in between.



A quite analogous difference between German and English is found in sentences containing a verb with a prepositional adverb and an object. In such sentences German applies the grammatical principle (cf. *Er nahm den Hut ab*). The word order is the same, whether the object is expressed by a noun or a pronoun (cf. *Er nahm ihn ab*). On the other hand, in English the word order in these sentences is governed by the rhythmic principle. While in German, as we have seen, according to the grammatical principle the prepositional adverb occupies the final position (except in sentences with a perfect participle or an infinitive, in which case the adverb becomes a prefix), in English it appears in the closest proximity to the verb: *to take off*. The rhythmically possible positions are as follows. If the object is expressed by a noun, it is placed after the prepositional adverb (*He took off his hat*); if it is expressed by a pronoun, it comes between the verb and the adverb (*He took it off*). Apparently the object denoted by a noun is rhythmically too heavy so that if placed before the adverb it would remove the adverb too far from the verb, whereas the pronominal object which is rhythmically lighter has no such effect.<sup>11</sup>

The third principle determining the order of words in a sentence is the principle of functional sentence perspective. It has been mentioned before in these talks. In essence it may be described as follows: when observing different utterances we find that they are more or less clearly composed of two parts. One part expresses what is given by the context or what naturally presents itself, in short what is being commented upon. As we already know, this part is called the theme of the utterance. The second part contains the new element of the utterance, i.e. what is being stated about something; this part is called the rheme of the utterance. The usual position of the theme of an utterance is the beginning of the sentence, whereas the rheme occupies a later position, i.e. we proceed from what is already known to what is being made known. We have called this *order objective*, since it pays regard to the hearer. The reversed order, in which the rheme of the utterance comes first and the theme follows is subjective. In normal speech this order occurs only in emotionally coloured utterances in which the speaker pays no regard to

the hearer, starting with what is most important for himself. We have already mentioned the usual procedure in fairy tales, which is objective: *Byl jednou jeden král* [Once upon a time there was a king] (*jeden král* [a king] being the rheme of the utterance) *a ten král mel krásnou dceru* [and that king had a beautiful daughter], (where *ten král* [that king] is the theme, and *měl krásnou dceru* [had a beautiful daughter] the rheme). *A ta dcera byla velice smutná* [And that daughter was very sad (*ta dcera* [that daughter] – the theme, *byla velice smutná* [was very sad] – the rheme).

It is natural that the order of words in a sentence should also be determined to a considerable extent by functional sentence analysis into the theme and the rheme. Here again languages display great differences. Czech complies with this principle very easily since its flexible word order makes it possible. The principle of functional sentence perspective often requires a Czech subject to follow after the verb if the subject belongs to the rheme of the utterance. This is the case, for example, in the sentence *Doma mi pomáhá tatínek* [at home to-me helps father] (*doma* [at home] – the theme, *mi pomáhá tatínek* [to-me helps father] – the rheme). Hence in Czech the requirements of functional sentence perspective are not brought into conflict with those of the grammatical principle. Nor are they in German: *Zu Hause hilft mir der Vater*. In English, however, the situation is different since the grammatical principle asserts itself especially with regard to the expression of the relation between the subject and the finite verb. The usual word order of the English sentence, viz. subject – finite verb – direct object cannot be arbitrarily changed. Hence in such a case the grammatical principle of word order fails to comply with the principle of functional sentence perspective.

As we have seen, English resolves this conflict by resorting to the passive construction: *At home I get the help of Father* or *At home I am helped by Father*. In this way both the requirements of the grammatical principle and those of functional sentence perspective are complied with. However, the influence of functional sentence perspective on English word order can also be seen in other cases, especially if the finite verb has two objects, an object of the accusative type and an object of the dative type, e. g. *dáti někomu něco* [to give someone something]. As a matter of fact this point can be demonstrated by Czech as well. The sentence *Já jsem půjčil svou knihu Karlovi* [I lent my book to Charles] is an answer to the question *Komu jsi půjčil tu knihu?* [Who did you lend the book to?]. The word *Karel* [Charles] is the rheme of the utterance (hence the dative object follows after the accusative). However, the answer to the question *Kterou knihu jsi Karlovi půjčil?* [Which book did you lend to Charles?] is *Já jsem půjčil Karlovi Wrightovu staroanglickou gramatiku* [I lent Charles Wright's Old English Grammar]. Here the rheme of the utterance is the accusative object (*Wrightovu staroanglickou gramatiku* [Wright's Old English Grammar]), which therefore follows after the dative object. The order of the two objects is thus seen to differ according to which of them constitutes the rheme of the utterance.

In English the grammatical principle determines the mutual position of the dative and accusative objects only inasmuch that the object of the dative type, if not expressed prepositionally, is placed immediately after the verb and is followed by the object of the

accusative type. If the object of the dative type is expressed by means of the preposition *to*, it is placed after the object of the accusative type. Thus the Czech sentence *On mi dal ty knihy* corresponds in English to *He gave me these books*. The object of the dative type (*me*) has no preposition and thus comes next to the verb, the object of the accusative type being placed after it (*these books*). This order complies with functional sentence perspective if the sentence is the answer to the question *What did he give you?* However, it is also conceivable that the question is *To whom did he give these books?* Then the order in the answer must be reversed: *He gave books to me*. But functional sentence perspective appears to exert an influence on the mutual position of the dative and accusative objects even in those instances where the dative object is denoted by the preposition *to*. The prepositional dative may precede the accusative object if it expresses something relatively familiar and the accusative denotes an element that belongs to the rheme of the utterance: *He went on paying to their remarks no attention*. Here the verb *to pay* is followed by the dative object expressed by the preposition *to*, as it belongs to the theme of the utterance.

It is hardly necessary to point out that in Czech functional sentence perspective also determines the mutual position of an adverbial and an object complement of the verb. Thus in the sentence *Já jsem potkal na Václavském náměstí Karla* [I met at Wenceslas Square Charles] we recognize that the adverbial is conceived as something relatively familiar, whereas the object is the rheme of the utterance. This sentence is the answer to the question *Koho jsi potkal* [Who did you meet?]. On the other hand the answer to the question *Kde jsi potkal Karla?* [Where did you meet Charles?] is *Já jsem potkal Karla na Václavském náměstí* [I met Charles at Wenceslas Square] for in this case the rheme of the utterance is the adverbial adjunct. Here the mutual position of the two elements appears to be governed by functional sentence perspective. In English such rearrangement of sentence elements is not feasible since English is averse to separating the object from its verb by an adverbial element. Hence the English versions of both Czech sentences must have the same word order, the difference in functional sentence perspective being indicated by different sentence stress: *I met Jack in Regent's Park* and *I met Jack in Regent's Park*.

Nevertheless now and then even English displays examples of the order finite verb – adverbial – object, e. g. *In returning he met on the plain of Caraci a scholar on a bay mule coming from Bologna*. This sentence has the order finite verb (*he met*) – adverbial (*on the plain of Caraci*) – object (*a scholar*). This order is in agreement with functional sentence perspective since the plain referred to is part of the return journey, which is regarded as a given fact, whereas the object *a scholar* clearly belongs to the rheme of the utterance. However, two other factors play a role. The adverbial is placed between the finite verb and the object contrary to the rules of English word order not only because this arrangement complies with the requirements of functional sentence perspective, but also because it is inconvenient to place it anywhere else. In English the adverbial usually occupies the initial or the final position of a sentence. In our example, however, the initial position of the sentence is already filled by another adjunct. It would be possible

to say *On the plain of Caraci in returning*, etc., but this word order is objectionable on rhythmic grounds. The second position that an adverbial may occupy is the end of the sentence; however, owing to the heavy modification of the object the adverbial would be removed too far from the verb. In other words, in our example the mutual position of the adverbial and the object is due not only to a positive factor, viz. functional sentence perspective, but also to a negative factor, viz. the impossibility of placing the adverbial elsewhere. Thus in the study of word order it should be borne in mind that apart from positive factors, negative factors may also co-determine the ultimate arrangement.

Sometimes, though such instances are rare, functional sentence perspective occasions initial position of the object, which is thus preposed to the subject and the verb. This order is found where the object is obviously a linking element (i.e. when it refers to an element mentioned in the preceding sentence). An object of this kind is usually expressed by a personal pronoun, which has the advantage of being formally identifiable as the object so that the possibility of its being conceived as the subject or attribute is eliminated. The sentence presented above as an example of the mutual position of the adverbial and the object continues as follows: *...and him he questioned about Tuscany*, which is a good example illustrating the theoretical consideration just advanced. It has already been said that the adverbial may occur at the beginning or at the end of a sentence. In some instances the choice between these two positions is determined by functional sentence perspective, viz. if the adverbial is a linking expression such as *on that day, then, there*, etc. [...].

The fourth factor determining the order of words is the principle of emphasis, i.e. the principle of putting special stress on some sentence element. In a Czech sentence the emphasized element is usually placed in the last place or in the next to the last place (*Častá krůpěj i kámen prorazí* [A frequent drop even a stone pierces] or *prorazí i kámen* [pierces even a stone]). The choice of one of these positions presumably depends on individual preference. The present writer prefers the final position; in popular speech, however, one increasingly meets with instances having the emphatic element in the last place but one, which results in a sort of final cadence (cf. V. Mathesius 1930). Only if the emphasis laid on a sentence element is very strong, the emphasized element is placed at the beginning. In the sentence *Častá krůpěj i kámen prorazí* [A frequent drop even a stone pierces] there is an emphasis on the object *kámen* [stone], but it is not especially strong. On the other hand, the word order *I kámen častá krůpěj prorazí* [Even a stone a frequent drop pierces] expresses an emphasis of a very high degree.

The situation in English is different. Here the position reserved for the emphatic element is the beginning of the sentence. This may be connected with the fact that the dynamic contour of the English sentence usually starts with unstressed syllables. As a result, the initial position of a stressed word is in itself conspicuous (cf. V. Mathesius 1931), e.g. *Right you are, Sorry I am to speak of it in the presence of your son; Colonel Lawrence gives us an account of his expedition there and a thrilling story it is*. In the last example the initial position of the sentence is occupied by the nominal predicate; in other cases



it may be taken by the object: *Colonel Lawrence gives an account of his expedition there and a thrilling story he tells*. Another sentence element that may be emphasized in this manner is the adverbial: *Little you care about my health*. An interesting instance of this kind is afforded by prepositional adverbs operating as constituent parts of the verb, e.g. *Off he went with a courageous look*. The normal word order is *He went off*, the emphatic order being *Off he went*. In this case there is an additional factor that plays a role in determining the word order, viz. the rhythmic principle, which determines the mutual position of the predicate and the subject, cf. *Off he went like an arrow* and *Off went the boy like an arrow*. (This difference is quite analogous to that observed in clauses inserted in or following after direct speech.) On the other hand, in German the mutual position of the verbal predicate and the subject is again decided by the grammatical principle, i.e. the first place is taken by the adverb, the second by the finite verb and the third by the subject, this order being the same whether the subject is a noun or a pronoun: *Ohne Verzug lief er weg wie ein Pfeil – Ohne Verzug lief der Knabe weg wie ein Pfeil*.

## b) Other problems of English word order

Having dealt with the four major principles determining word order in English, we must mention some minor problems met with in this sphere.

To begin with, a few words should be added concerning the mutual position of the subject and the finite predicative verb. If the finite verb follows after the subject, i.e. if the order is S[subject] – P[predicate] it is referred to as normal, whereas if the order is reversed (P – S) it is considered to be less common (modified) and hence it is called inverted. These terms are not quite precise, for it cannot be claimed with any certainty that the order S – P is historically primary or that the order P – S has arisen from it by inversion. However, since these terms are established and convenient we shall avail ourselves of them in the present discussion.

Inversion in English raises the question as to when it takes place and how it is realized. Both these questions are of importance; the manner in which inversion is realized deserves attention because it often requires the use of the periphrastic verb *to do*.

Instances in which English has inverted word order, can be divided into two groups: 1) those in which inversion is obligatory, and 2) those in which inversion takes place only under certain conditions.

The first group includes the following instances:

- a) Inversion takes place after the expression *there* placed at the beginning of the sentence: *There have been many strange rumours about him*. The subject is *many strange rumours*, the predicative finite verb is *have been* the entire verbal form, including its nominal part, precedes the subject.

- b) Inversion occurs if the sentence starts with an emphatic negative element: *Never had England seemed so powerful as at that time*. In this case the constituent parts of the predicative verb are divided in such a way that the subject is preceded only by the finite part (*had*), the non-finite nominal part (*seemed*) following after the subject. In the sentence *Hardly were these words out of my mouth when the boy left the room* inversion affects the linking verb.
- c) Inversion further takes place after sentences that may conventionally be called confirmatory: they extend the validity of the statement made in the preceding affirmative or negative sentence to the element that operates as their subject. After an affirmative sentence they start with *so*: *My companions were dejected and so was I*. Similarly in dialogue: A: *I regard him as an honest man*. – B: *So do I*. If the underlying sentence is negative, the confirmatory clause begins with *nor* or *neither*, or *no more*: *He has not worked well, neither has his friend*. Similarly in dialogue: A: *I don't regard him as a bad man*. – B: *Neither do I (Nor do I either, No more do I)*.

These three types exhaust the first group in which inversion is obligatory.

2) Under certain conditions inversion may take place in clauses inserted in or following after direct speech, and further if an important sentence element that belongs to the predicate takes the emphatic initial position. In these two cases inversion does not take place if the subject is pronominal, but is regularly found if the subject is expressed by a substantive. We are primarily interested in the manner in which inversion is realized if it takes place.

There are two possibilities. Inversion is effected either by placing the subject after the verb or by means of the verb *to do*. In other words, the finite verb either remains unchanged or is replaced by the periphrastic verb *to do*. When is inversion with the periphrastic verb obligatory? It is in those instances where the verb is notional, i.e. where *do* is used in questions and negation, e.g. *Never did Wells speak of his authorship*. Note that the use of the auxiliary *did* (or *do* in other cases) prevents the verb from being removed from its object, as would happen in *\*Never spoke Wells...* This is also the case in sentences that we have called confirmatory, especially in dialogue: A: *I don't wish to have him here*. – B: *Neither do I wish to meet him*.

In instances of optional inversion, i.e. in the case of pronominal subjects, inversion need not take place: *Seven times did he repeat or he repeated the attack* (as compared with obligatory inversion in *Seven times did the general repeat the attack*, where the subject is a noun, and moreover the verb has an object); similarly *The general nodded and away did the guard take the prisoner*.

Secondly, inversion with the periphrastic verb *to do* is necessary to avoid the sentence-final position of an unstressed pronominal subject. Stressed pronominal subjects are admissible in this position (e.g. *So do I* – here the pronominal subject is stressed, for it contrasts with the subject of the preceding sentence). With unstressed pronominal



subjects, however, the situation is different. For example, in the sentence *Seldom did he smile* inversion is required in order that the rhythmic structure of the sentence may assume the form ' - xxx ' -. Thanks to inversion the sentence is rhythmically balanced. If it were construed without inversion, viz. *\*Seldom smiled he*, its rhythmic structure would be ' - x ' - x, which is incongruous with the usual rhythmic patterns of English. Accordingly, inversion is obligatory; cf. also *Scarcely did he nod*, etc.

We have observed that the periphrastic verb *to do* prevents the object from losing contact with its verb.<sup>12</sup> A similar effect was produced by the introduction of the periphrastic verb *to do* into questions, e.g. *Do you like this book?* As can be seen, the verb *like* and its object are placed next to each other. If the sentence, were construed without the periphrastic verb *\*How like you this book?*, the finite verb would be removed from its object. Note that the periphrastic conjugation's unnecessary if the question asks about the subject: *Who told you that?* (in contrast to *Did he tell you that?*). In a similar manner one can account for the verb *to do* in the negative conjugation. Though negation follows after the finite verb, the notional verb is again not separated from its object: *I don't like him*.

Let us add one more remark concerning word order. We have just seen that on the one hand English is averse to splitting sentence elements that belong together by their content, e.g. the verb and its object (cf. also the much criticized construction called the split infinitive, e.g. *to correctly say*). On the other hand, there exist quite opposite instances in which English tolerates the splitting of sentence elements that in Czech and German occur next to each other, e.g. *The visit to our shores of the German President may have far-reaching consequences*. The subject is the word *visit*, which is modified by the construction of *the German President*; this construction, however, is removed from its noun by the adjunct *to our shores*, which also belongs to the subject, but as we conceive it, not so closely as the genitive.

This is the most conspicuous instance of the splitting of elements that we feel as being closely connected. Other examples of this kind may be found in comparative sentences where the comparative is sometimes removed from what is being compared, or in sentences containing an attributive relative clause, which is sometimes separated from its noun. These facts seemingly contradict what has been said before, viz. that English is averse to splitting sentence elements that belong together through their content.<sup>13</sup> Apparently there is another principle in play, viz. the principle of synthetism, which is clearly seen in German. In the latter language the infinitive or participle constituting a component part of a compound verbal form is placed at the end of the sentence: *Ich habe... gebeten*. This is synthetic word order; it is opposed to analytic word order in which the determinandum precedes the determinans. In some instances this synthetic tendency appears to operate even in English, the condition under which it can assert itself being that the function of the second element of the split pair is formally distinct. [...]

## Notes

Reprinted from: Mathesius, Vilém (1975) *A Functional Analysis of Present Day English on a General Linguistic Basis*. Edited by Josef Vachek, translated by Libuše Dušková. Prague: Academia.

- <sup>1</sup> On problems of sentence condensation see also the writings adduced here above, Note 81.
- <sup>2</sup> Still, many ModE grammars continue keeping apart the gerund (*reading books*) from the verbal noun (*the reading of the books*) – see also further paragraphs of Mathesius' text.
- <sup>3</sup> To the parallelism *with – having* there also corresponds another parallelism *without – not having*, so that one has to do here, in Poldauf's opinion, with constructions corresponding to the possessive type of passive predications, discussed here earlier in Mathesius' above text.
- <sup>4</sup> Here, of course, one can again suppose, with G.O. Curme, that the form of copula has been dropped (*from the resources [being] turned to account*).
- <sup>5</sup> The onomatological aspects of the ModE infinitive were discussed in detail by I. Poldauf 1954.
- <sup>6</sup> From the onomatological viewpoint the ModE gerund was again discussed in detail by I. Poldauf 1955.
- <sup>7</sup> A similar view was also expressed in the writings of other syntacticians (e.g., of Otto Jespersen); in the Prague group, in those of I. Poldauf.
- <sup>8</sup> English complex condensations as well as complex constructions very efficiently support the nominal tendencies existing in the ModE sentence. Many facts adduced by Mathesius in his present book reveal (though the author himself does not expressly state so) that, unlike Czech and other languages of synthetic grammatical structure, the actional dynamism of the ModE predicative finite verb has been greatly reduced. Sometimes the reduction is so radical that the predicative finite verb resembles hardly more than a copula whose main function is, admittedly, to convey rather the formal grammatical categories (such as number, tense, mood, voice) than lexico-semantic information. Cf., on this point, J. Vachek 1961, Chapter IV, and particularly J. Firbas 1959a, 1959b and 1961. See also J. Macháček 1959.
- <sup>9</sup> Mathesius' interest in the problems of word order in the English sentence was manifested already in the first decade of this century when he devoted a series of papers to these problems. His last word on the subject dates from the early nineteen-forties (Mathesius 1942). The present-day approach of the Prague group to the same problems was very aptly outlined by J. Firbas 1962.
- <sup>10</sup> But sometimes also *father said* (this usage appears to be increasing).

- <sup>11</sup> Here Mathesius leaves out of account the difference between a particle operating as an adverb (and thus constituting an integral component of a phrasal verb), and a particle operating as a preposition. In the latter case the particle always precedes the object, whether substantival or pronominal, cf. *He ran up a hill – he ran up it*. In the case of phrasal verbs the position of a pronominal object is fixed before the particle (*he gave it up*), whereas a substantival object may be placed either before or after it (*he gave the scheme up – he gave up all hope*), the mutual position of the two elements depending on the respective degree of their communicative dynamism. The adverb and the preposition are moreover distinguished by their respective patterns of stress (see Palmer 1965, 180–182). See also note 35.
- <sup>12</sup> B. Trnka 1930 regards the function of the auxiliary *do*, i.e. the preservation of the normal pattern of the English word order, as ‘distributive’ (p. 45).
- <sup>13</sup> The adduced difference, of course, may be due to the fact that for the English linguistic consciousness the rules governing the closer or looser coherence of individual sentence elements are different from those governing the analogous coherence in Czech. Thus the word group *to our shores* may be interpreted as an object of the action implicitly covered by the substantive noun *visit*, and the *of*-construction simply expresses the agent of an action, like the *by*-construction.

### Comprehension questions

1. What forms are typically used in Czech for rendering the various condensed elements found in English? What is the effect?
2. Why is it problematic to refer to Czech word order as “free”?
3. What principles regulate word order? Discuss their interplay in English and in Czech. Discuss how word order operates in other languages that you know.
4. What is the difference between objective and subjective word order?
5. What is the effect of the periphrastic *do* in inversion, particularly as regards the linear arrangement of sentence elements?

# Dogs must be carried on the escalator

## (A case study in FSP potentiality)

Jan Firbas



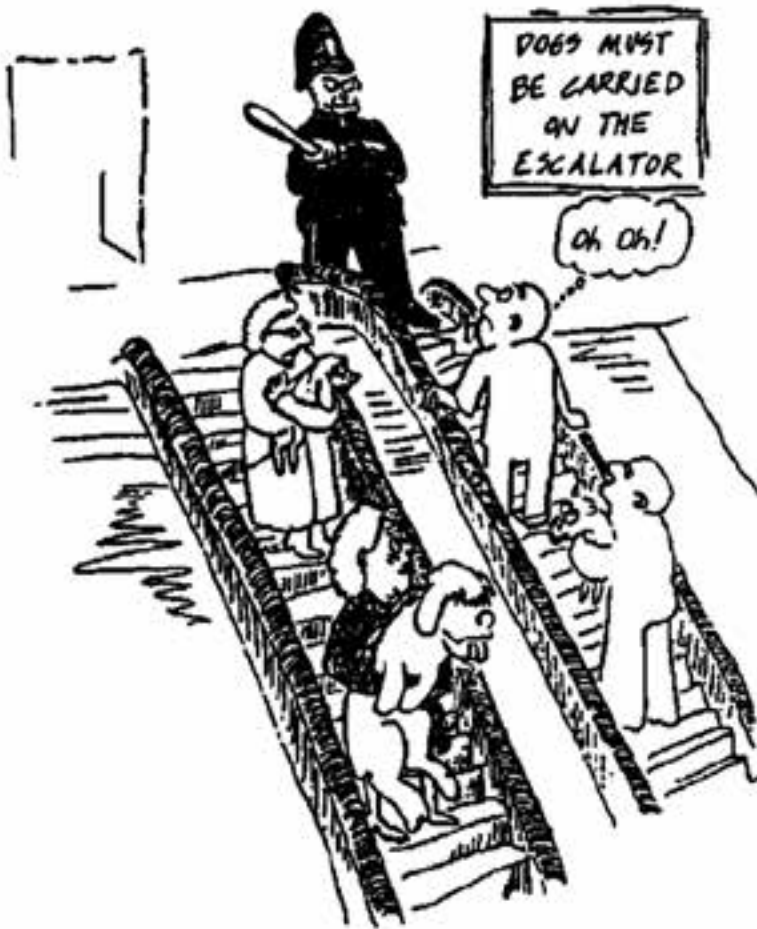
**Jan Firbas** (1921–2000) was a Czech Anglicist, who systematically developed Vilém Mathesius's ideas on known and new information into the widely acknowledged theory of functional sentence perspective. Firbas was a professor in the English Department in Brno and is one of the best known Czech linguists internationally. In Firbas's view, the functional sentence perspective of an utterance arises from the combination of four factors: linear modification (word order), semantics, context and, in the spoken language, also intonation. These factors are responsible for the ultimate distribution of communicative dynamism, i.e. the relative extent to which elements contribute to the further development of the message. While broadly distinguishing between thematic (contextually-bound, known) and non-thematic (context-independent, new) elements, Firbas's methodology allows for a minute analysis of thematic, rhematic and transitional elements, arranging them in several scales according to their linear sequences.

*This article presents a case study in functional sentence perspective. Here, Firbas applies his theory to a potentially ambiguous brief text – a public notice – as it is rendered in a humorous cartoon. The present study is one of only a few in which Firbas deals with some other than serious texts, which in his case were usually texts of a literary or technical nature. His analysis is valuable in that he meticulously sets out, among other things, the contrasting interpretations of the text from the different points of view of the cartoon characters and the encoder. In that sense, the study, while being one of the last papers written by Firbas, is remarkably modern: it notes the potentiality of the functional sentence perspective of an utterance by locating the actual meaning within the nexus between the text's producer and its ultimate recipients (interpreters). Although Firbas eventually argues for the disambiguating role of intonation that assists in what might be seen as the "correct" or "preferred" interpretation of the actual utterance, it is evident that this article can be read as an indication of Firbas's ability to shift from a strictly positivist structural analysis of data towards a much more context-bound interpretation that involves the subjective, and potentially clashing, interpretations of various discourse participants.*

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After my lecture on functional sentence perspective (FSP) delivered in the Linguistics Department of the State University of New York at Buffalo on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 1998, Mrs Colleen Maloney-Berman drew my attention to a cartoon suggesting intriguing questions to an FSP theorist. The cartoon is reproduced below. It depicts a group of people on an escalator. With the exception of one man, everybody on the escalator carries a dog. The man is upset, because he fears that the policeman posted at the escalator may take him to task for not carrying a dog as well. Above the escalator there is a one-sentence notice running: *Dogs must be carried on the escalator*. What is the functional perspective of this notice? Which of its constituents conveys the high point of the message? Is the message perspectived to *on the escalator*, *must*, *carried*, or *dogs*? These questions create a welcome opportunity to offer a case study demonstrating how the problems posed can be handled from the viewpoint of the theory of FSP.

The aim of the present paper is to present such a case study. Bearing in mind that the cartoon and the questions suggested by it may rouse the interest even of scholars not so well acquainted with the theory of FSP, I will remember briefly to account for the basic concepts of the theory wherever in the discussion it may appear to be necessary. As these explanations cannot be exhaustive, I have to refer the interested reader to an exposition of the FSP theory presented in Firbas 1992. The cartoonist's interpretation perspectives the notice, *Dogs must be carried on the escalator*, to *Dogs*. According to this interpretation, somebody wishing to use the escalator, can only do so if they carry a dog. The notice does not, of course, require this, and the cartoonist knows it. It requires that, if dogs are transported on the escalator, their owners carry them. The cartoonist has produced an ingenious pun that, strictly speaking, is a play on functional perspectives. However, does the request placed above the escalator really permit of two interpretations?



**Getting Caught on the Escalator Without a Dog**

I

One of the chief concerns of the FSP theory is to account for the different conditions under which one and the same (semantic and syntactic) sentence structure can function in different perspectives. Let me just recall that FSP is determined by an interplay of factors reflected by an interplay of signals they yield. There are four such factors. Three operate in an interplay both in written and in spoken language, the fourth joining them in this interplay in spoken language. They are the contextual factor, the semantic factor, the factor of linear modification and – in spoken language – intonation. In order to account

for a perspective of a sentence, these factors and the signals they yield must be taken into account. (For a detailed discussion of the interplay, see Firbas 1992.)

Accounting for the application of the sentence structure examined, *Dogs must be carried on the escalator*, let me first pay attention to the operation of the contextual factor, which plays the dominant role in the interplay. The signals it yields are the actual (“tangible”) presence of a piece of information in the immediately relevant context (verbal and/or situational) and its re-expression in the sentence produced and/or perceived. In the sentence structure examined such a piece of information is conveyed by the adverbial *on the escalator*. The piece of information conveyed by it is retrievable from the immediately relevant situational context and in this narrow sense of the word context-dependent. In regard to the development of the communication, a context-dependent element contributes less to the further development of the communication than an element that is context-independent, i.e. conveying information absent, and therefore irretrievable, from the immediately relevant context. It follows that the sentence structure examined cannot be perspectived to *on the escalator*. Let me note that an element becomes context-dependent irrespective of sentence position and irrespective of the character of its semantic content and the character of the semantic relations (pattern) into which it enters. This is due to the hierarchical superiority of the contextual factor to the other factors.

It must be decided whether *Dogs* and *carried* convey retrievable or irretrievable information. The pieces of information they convey are irretrievable from the immediately verbal context. There is no such context. They are not retrievable from the immediately relevant situational context either. It must be borne in mind that the request expressed by the notice has general validity. The notice stays in its place all day no matter whether the escalator is used by people with dogs or without them. Seen in this light, the pieces of information conveyed by *Dogs* and *carried* are to be regarded as irretrievable from the immediately relevant situational context.

It remains to decide whether the sentence structure, *Dogs must be carried on the escalator*, is perspectived to *Dogs* or *carried*. Before I offer an answer, let me recall some relevant conclusions arrived at by FSP enquiries. The contextual conditions under which a sentence structure operates in the act of communication are of primary importance. For instance, the most natural contextual application of the sentence structure *A dog appeared on the escalator*, consisting of a subject, a predicative verb and an adverbial, fulfils conditions that can be worded as follows: the subject is context-independent; the verb is context-independent and expresses appearance or existence on the scene explicitly or with sufficient implicitness; and the adverbial is context-dependent and expresses the scene or some background information co-setting the scene. If these conditions are fulfilled, the following functional perspective results. Whereas the adverbial setting the scene, *on the escalator*, contributes least to the development of the communication, the subject expressing the phenomenon appearing on the scene, *A dog*, contributes most to it. The verb, *appeared*, ranks between them. By expressing appearance or existence on the scene it introduces the phenomenon that is to be presented on it. It follows that



it is the subject, *A dog*, which conveys the high point of the message and to which in consequence the sentence is perspectived. Under the conditions stipulated, the following sentence structures can serve as further illustrative examples: *Dogs appeared on the escalator, A little pack of greyhounds appeared on the escalator, A dog found itself on the escalator, Dogs were seen on the escalator, Ein Hund erschien auf der Rolltreppe, Auf der Rolltreppe erschien ein Hund, Auf der Rolltreppe ist ein Hund erschienen, Ein Hund befand sich auf der Rolltreppe, Auf der Rolltreppe befand sich ein Hund, Auf der Rolltreppe wurde ein Hund gesehen, Ein Hund wurde auf der Rolltreppe gesehen.*

In spite of different word orders, the functional perspective remains the same. This is due to the operation of the contextual factor and that of the semantic factor. The context-dependent adverbial conveys least to the development of communication irrespective of sentence position. Owing to the semantic character of the verb and the character of the semantic pattern in which it occurs, the context-independent verb contributes less to the further development of the communication irrespective of whether it precedes or follows the context-independent subject. Likewise a context-independent verbal notional component contributes more, and an auxiliary less, towards the further development of the communication; cp., *Auf der Rolltreppe ist ein Hund erschienen* and *Ein Hund befand sich auf der Rolltreppe* vs. *[Ich wußte nicht,] daß auf der Rolltreppe ein Hund erschienen ist* and *[Ich wußte nicht,] daß sich ein Hund auf der Rolltreppe befunden hat*. The example sentences illustrate the capability of the contextual and the semantic factors to operate counter to linear modification. It is only when unhampered by these two factors that linear modification can fully assert itself. It is only then that through the successive positioning of the elements in the actual linear arrangement it can signal a gradual increase in the extent to which the elements contribute towards the further development of the communication. (Cf. Bolinger's observation – 1952: 1125 – that “gradation of position creates gradation of meaning when there are no interfering factors.”) If in the following sentences only the subjects are context-dependent, the sentences illustrate the operation of linear modification unhampered by the contextual and the semantic factors: *The dogs/They appeared on the escalator, The little pack of greyhounds/It appeared on the escalator, The dogs/They were seen on the escalator, Der Hund/Er erschien auf der Rolltreppe*. The subject cannot convey the high point of the message, because the information it conveys is context-dependent. It is the context-independent location of the dog(s) that completes the development of the communication. The preceding comments and examples illustrate the hierarchical relationship of the FSP factors spoken about. The contextual factor plays the dominant role. As for the relationship between the semantic factor and linear modification, the former is hierarchically superior to the latter. Within the context-independent section of the sentence, the semantic factor either permits or does not permit linear modification fully to assert itself.

It is important to note that under the above stipulated conditions the indefinite article undoubtedly signals irretrievability. As an FSP signal, however, it does not operate on its own. Owing to the operation of the contextual factor, it can accompany a noun conveying retrievable information. For instance, in the sentence string that follows, it

is only in the first sentence that the zero variant of the indefinite article, accompanying *dogs*, is linked with context-independent information: *There were dogs on the escalator. In fact, dogs were on the platforms, dogs were on the trains, dogs were everywhere.* With due alterations, the same can be said about the definite article. It can effectively co-signal retrievability, but like the indefinite article, it does not operate on its own. For instance, in the sentence string adduced below, the definite article is prevented from signalling retrievability: *We heard some scratching at the door. We opened it. And what did we see? The missing dog stood outside.* True enough, *the door* and *the missing dog* convey information known both to the sender (producer of the sentence, speaker or writer) and the addressee (the perceiver of the sentence, listener or reader). This information, however, is not retrievable from the immediately relevant context. It is in this narrow sense that “retrievable” is used in my discussions unless explicitly qualified otherwise. Additional qualifications are necessary if a piece of information is actually retrievable from a wider section of context than that constituted by the immediately relevant context. It is certainly possible to say that under the circumstances the pieces of information conveyed by *the door* and *the dog* are retrievable from the section of context constituted by the common knowledge shared by the sender and the addressee.

The fact, however, remains that the section of context that plays the decisive role in regard to the immediately relevant communicative step to be taken is played by the immediately relevant context. (To a certain extent the immediately relevant context forms part of the wider contextual sphere constituted by the common knowledge shared by the sender and the addressee. What is, however, of primary concern is to establish objective signals yielded by the immediately relevant context and enabling its delimitation.) The examples adduced have illustrated the two FSP functions of the grammatical subject. In the act of communication, a sentence is either perspective towards the subject, which conveys the high point of the message, or away from the subject, the high point of the message being conveyed by another sentence constituent: *A/The DOG has appeared on the escalator* vs. *The dog/it/he/she appeared on the ESCALATOR.* These functions are not linked with the subject outside context. They are acquired in the course of the development of the communication. They affect the meaning conveyed by the subject when it comes to serve as information in the dynamics of communication. For these reasons they have been qualified and referred to as dynamic semantic functions (DSFs). It is, however, not only the subject, but the other sentence constituents as well that in consequence perform different DSFs. As these functions are highly pertinent to the questions in hand, I find it necessary to add some comments on them.

It is important to note that, if the subject conveys the high point of the message and in this way completes the development of the communication reflected by the sentence, then nothing more is said about the subject within the limits of the sentence. The situation is different if the subject does not convey the high point of the message. In that case, something is said about it in the development of the communication. By way of illustration let me comment on two contextual applications of the sentence structure *John has come to*

*the dining room*. It follows from what has already been pointed out that 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. Whereas in (i) *to the dining room* merely expresses background (“scenic”) information, in (ii) it highlights the goal of John’s movement to a particular place. In (i) it performs the DSF of expressing a Setting (Set); in (ii) it performs the DSF of expressing a Specification (Sp). Whereas in (i) *come* prepares the presentation of John as the person appearing on the scene, in (ii) it develops the communication by saying something about him. In (i) it performs the DSF of Presentation (Pr); in (ii) it performs the DSF of expressing a Quality (Q). “Quality” is to be understood here in a wide sense of the word, meaning anything that is ascribed to a subject that does not convey the high point of the message.

Finally, whereas in (i) *John* expresses a person to be presented on the scene, in (ii) it expresses a person about whom something is going to be said. In (i) it performs the DFS of expressing the Phenomenon to be presented (Ph); in (ii) it performs the DSF of expressing a Bearer of quality (B). (For a detailed discussion of DSFs, see Firbas 1992: 66–87.) It has already been pointed out that the semantic content or feature of appearing or existing on the scene can operate as an effective signal in perspectiving a sentence. The extent to which it can do so, however, depends on the interplay of the signals in which it participates. The operation of *come* in the two applications – (i) and (ii) – will illustrate. In (i) the feature of appearing on the scene, conveyed by *come*, effectively participates in perspectiving the sentence towards the subject, *John*. It enables *come* to perform the Pr-function. In (ii) it recedes to the background, and the semantic feature of motion, equally present in the semantic content of *come*, is foregrounded. The goal of a motion represents an essential amplification of the meaning of the verb. If the information of the goal is context-independent, it contributes more to the development of the communication than the information of the motion. Under the changed contextual conditions producing application (ii), *come* has been enabled to perform the Q-function.

The preceding discussion has illustrated that verbs capable of expressing explicitly or with sufficient implicitness appearance or existence on the scene can effectively perform the Pr-function if induced to do so by the interplay of the FSP factors. Under different contextual conditions, however, they can be induced by this interplay to perform the Q-function. The presence of the semantic feature of appearance or existence in the semantic content of the verb is not obliterated thereby. This feature is an inherent characteristic of the semantic content of the verb. It is the modificatory power of the FSP factors that ultimately determines to what extent the feature can assert itself in FSP. As an FSP signal, the semantic feature of appearance or existence on the scene does not operate on its own irrespective of other FSP signals. In contrast with verbs expressing appearance or existence explicitly

or with sufficient implicitness, there are verbs that do not express this semantic feature with sufficient implicitness or do not express it at all. Such verbs are therefore capable of effectively performing the Q-function. Analyses of texts, however, have shown that they are not excluded from performing the Pr-function. I shall be able to demonstrate this further below when dealing with the anxious man's interpretation of the notice.

It follows that the Pr-function is not exclusively performed by verbs of existence or appearance. Neither is the Q-function exclusively performed by verbs not displaying the semantic feature of appearance or existence on the scene. The absence or presence of this feature is a semantic signal, which does not operate on its own in the interplay of signals yielded by the interplay of FSP factors. It must be borne in mind that this interplay permits one and the same sentence structure to appear in different functional perspectives.

I am now in a position to decide whether the notice *Dogs must be carried on the escalator* is to be perspectived to *Dogs* or *carried*. As has been pointed out, the notice, appealing to the public using the escalator, has general validity. The context-dependent adverbial *on the escalator* serves as a Setting. Neither *dog* nor *carried* conveys information that is retrievable from the immediately relevant context. The context-independent *carried* is not a verb that expresses appearance or existence explicitly or with sufficient implicitness. Nothing prevents it from performing the Q-function on this account. It does not participate in perspectiving the sentence towards the subject, but away from it. In regard to the further development of the communication it says something about the dogs. In consequence, *Dogs* performs the B-function and the notice is perspectived to *carried*.

## II

The interpretation offered by the cartoon is a different one. Its comment runs: "Getting caught on the escalator without a dog". It reflects the man's interpretation who finds himself on the escalator without a dog. He has evidently read the notice, for the anxiety he shows stems from the awareness of an obligation decreed by the *must* of the notice and enforced by the menacing frown of the policeman on duty. The anxious man and the composer of the notice, however, are not on the same wave length regarding the signals determining the functional perspective of the notice. Like the composer of the notice, the anxious man considers *escalator* to convey context-dependent information. He does not, however, fully appreciate the general character of the notice. The immediately relevant context in which he puts the message is not exactly the same as that observed by the composer of the notice. He is strongly influenced by the very situation he finds himself in. He is struck by the presence of the number of dogs on the escalator. He is worried by the fact that while each of the other users of the escalator carries a dog, he carries none. The presence or absence of a dog or dogs on the escalator plays a decisive role in his interpretation. It plays a role not accorded to it by the contextual conditions under which the notice has been composed. The contrast of the presence and absence of dogs

on the escalator so strongly suggested to him by the actual situation, taken by him for the immediately relevant situational context, induces him to perspective the notice to the subject, *dogs*. Under these circumstances, the verb, *carry*, does not perform the Q-function, but the Pr-function; the subject, *dogs*, in its turn, does not perform the B, but the Ph-function, expressing the Phenomenon to be presented. In this way, *carry*, which – statically speaking – does not convey appearance or existence on the scene, has come to perform the Pr-function in the dynamics of the communication. In the end, the notion of “appearance or existence on the scene”, in fact, tips the scales in favour of the subject, *Dogs*. Perspectiving the sentence structure *Dogs must be carried on the escalator* to *Dogs*, the anxious man offers a description and interpretation of the event as he experiences it.

What is the policeman’s interpretation of the functional perspective of the notice? His menacing frown does not allay the man’s fear of being taken to task or even fined. On the contrary, it confirms it. It follows that the policeman’s interpretation of functional perspective of the notice is the same as that of the anxious man. It must be remembered, however, that the frown has been put on the policeman’s face by the cartoonist. Both the anxious man and the policeman in the cartoon perspective the notice to *Dogs*. Nevertheless, a policeman standing at his post near the escalator can be expected to view the matter differently. His view is certainly not that of the anxious man. Standing at his post, the policeman can see people coming up the escalator with or without dogs. There are certainly moments when none of those finding themselves on the escalator has a dog. This does not affect the validity of the notice. Interpreting it, the policeman goes by the signals observed by its composer. The notice is perspectived to *carried*. If anybody with a dog uses the escalator, the dog must be carried by them. As this interpretation tallies with that of the composer, who must be seen as a person in authority, it must be regarded as authoritative.

One of the questions posed in the introductory paragraph of the paper has not been answered yet. Could the notice be perspectived to *must*? The answer is in the negative. *Must* cannot convey the high point of the message because of the presence of context-independent constituents that take the development of the communication further than *must*. One of the chief concerns of the theory of FSP is to account for the different contextual applications of one and the same semantic and syntactic sentence structure. This term applies to a structure viewed out of context, in other words, to a structure that is regarded as decontextualized. If used in the act of communication in order to serve a particular communicative purpose, such a structure becomes a sentence. The communicative purpose it serves is revealed by its functional perspective. (Some regard such a decontextualized structure as a sentence, speaking of it as an utterance when it is employed to serve a definite communicative purpose.) The FSP theory has been investigating the contextual conditions and the signals determining the functional perspective. As for the language users, the contextual conditions and the signals yielded by the interplay of FSP factors are binding on them. An unequivocal use of the signals by the sender (producer of the sentence, speaker or writer) and a faithful appreciation of them by the addressee (the perceiver of the sentence, listener or reader) ensures successful

communication. The binding character of the signals enable the language users constantly to exchange the sender's and the addressee's roles. Needless to say, inadequate handling of the signals on the part of the sender naturally fails to convey his/her communicative purpose adequately. In the light of what has just been said, it is possible to account for possible different interpretations of the functional perspective of a sentence as presented by different addressees. An unequivocal outcome of the interplay of the FSP factors only admits of one interpretation. An interpretation that does not take account of all the signals offered by such an unequivocal interplay is a misinterpretation.

An equivocal outcome of the interplay of the FSP factors creates the phenomenon of potentiality and opens the door to two or more potential interpretations. (For a discussion of the phenomenon of potentiality, see Firbas 1992: 108–10, 181–2, 183–6, 221–21.) An interpreter always, rightly or wrongly, goes by the signals yielded by the interplay of the FSP factors. A good knowledge of the operations of the FSP factors, reflected by the signals they yield, is a key to the discrimination between correct, faulty and potentially acceptable interpretations. Further enquiries may throw more light on the interplay of the factors, reflected by the interplay of the signals yielded by them, and reduce the number of types of potentiality. In any case, the likelihood of acceptance of two or more potential interpretations of the functional perspective of a sentence may not be the same. Tendencies operating in the system of language prefer some solutions to others to a greater or less extent.<sup>1</sup>

The phenomenon of potentiality as presented above is conceived of in a narrow sense, being understood as based on all the signals available at the moment of production and/or perception of a sentence. It could be conceived of in a wider sense, being also based on signals inadequately chosen by an interpreter who simultaneously fails to take account of all the proper signals available. Distinguishing between these two types of potentiality, one can speak of genuine and non-genuine potentiality. To a certain extent, this is reminiscent of a distinction pointed out by Randolph Quirk between a perfect and an imperfect pun (1950–1). The latter would occur if one of two applications of an expression employed in producing the pun did not faithfully mirror all the relevant features of the other application. For instance, it can be claimed that the spoken words *They got married in the first place* mean either that first of all they got married or that they got married in the first place they had come across. The pun is imperfect, because two different intonations can distinguish the two meanings. In terms of FSP, the two different meanings can be traced back to two different DSFs of *in the first place*. In the first application of the sentence structure, *in the first place* serves as a Setting, in the second as a Specification. This distinction is duly signalled by intonation. Coming back to the sentence structure *Dogs must be carried on the escalator*, the cartoonist has produced an irresistibly stringing pun. The pun, however, is not a perfect one. Seen in the light of FSP, the interpretation of the anxious man represents a case of non-genuine potentiality. His interpretation and that of the composer of the notice are not based on the same contextual conditioning. This is duly reflected by intonation. The composer's contextual conditioning places



the intonation centre (i.e. the most prominent prosodic feature) on *carried: Dogs must be CARRIED on the escalator*. The contextual conditioning chosen by the anxious man places it on *Dogs: DOGS must be carried on the escalator*.<sup>2</sup>

## Notes

\* This paper was originally published in *Brno Studies in English* 25 (1999), 7–18.

<sup>1</sup> Enquiries into FSP have shown that it is the immediately relevant context, verbal and situational, that plays a decisive role in determining the functional perspective of a sentence. What is known as part of the common knowledge shared by the sender (producer of the sentence, speaker or writer) and the addressee (the perceiver of the sentence, listener or reader) need not be known in regard to the immediately relevant communicative step to be taken. John may be a person well known both to the sender and to the addressee, but unless he is mentioned in the immediately relevant verbal context or unless as an object of immediate concern shared by the two of them he becomes part of the immediately relevant situational context, a mention of him conveys new, unknown information. If, for instance, A opens the conversation by saying to B, *I met John yesterday*, or by asking B, *Where is John?*, the name *John* conveys new, unknown information. Or, if, for instance, the English great vowel shift is discussed in an early chapter of a book on the history of English, its remention later on in the book in a sentence running *Let us recall the great vowel shift* conveys new, unknown information as well.

This raises the problem of the delimitation of the immediately relevant context, verbal and situational, a section of the wide and complex phenomenon of context (cf. Firbas 1992: 22–3, 39–40; 1994 *passim*). Analyses of texts of modern English fiction prose (Firbas 1995) have come to the following conclusions. The moment a piece of information appears in the flow of written communication, it becomes retrievable. The stretch of text in the course of which it retains its retrievability without re-expression constitutes its retrievability span. Through examining the frequencies of the distances between the members of co-referential strings (strings of expressions having the same referent), the analyses have set the length of the retrievability span at six through eight sentences. The immediately relevant written context, then, is constituted by all the retrievability spans that are open (live) at the moment a sentence is to be produced and/or perceived. There is, of course, a borderline area between the immediately relevant context and the rest of context.

As for the immediately relevant situational context, it is an equally narrow section of context. It is constituted by two groups of referents. One group contains phenomena whose first mention in a written or spoken text can be directly pronominalized without creating any ambiguity. For instance, the personal pronouns *I* and *you*, referring to the sender and the addressee, respectively, can appear in a text without antecedents. Their references are unambiguous. Other pronouns performing the same function are



the indefinite pronouns E *one*, F *on* and G *man*. The same meaning can be conveyed by *they* and *people*, for that matter. Expressions so used refer to phenomena permanently present in the immediately relevant context. Their list can be expanded. It is, however, neither a long nor open one. It is a closed list. Another group is constituted by referents that have become objects of immediate common concern shared by the sender and the addressee. For instance, a waitress happens to drop a tray of drinks. The clatter of bottles and glasses falling and breaking attracts everybody's attention. Turning to B, A says, *I hope she won't have to pay for all the things*. Though not the only woman present, the waitress is the person referred to by the pronoun *she*. The common concern shared by the sender and the addressee is an absolutely essential characteristic. If the presence of the waitress is to serve as a signal yielded by the FSP contextual factor, it must be recognized as such by both interlocutors.

- <sup>2</sup> For the interested reader who may not be well acquainted with the theory of FSP, let me add brief explanations of some essential concepts not employed in the preceding discussion. These brief explanations are to outline the wider framework within which the present case study has been presented. (For a fuller treatment, see Firbas 1992.) As has been demonstrated by the comments so far offered, linguistic elements differ in the extent to which they contribute to the development of the communication. In regard to the dynamics of the communication, they carry different degrees of communicative dynamism (CD). Communicative dynamism (CD) is an essential inherent property of communication. It manifests itself in constantly developing the communication and in aiming at the attainment of its communicative goal. By a degree of CD carried by a linguistic element of any rank I understand the relative extent to which such an element contributes towards the further development of the communication (Firbas 1992: 7–8). (The designation “element of any rank” indicates that “element” is used here in a wide sense of the word. For a discussion of the hierarchy of elements as carriers of CD, see Firbas 1992: 16–20.) It is important to note that only such linguistic elements can participate in the development of the communication as convey some meaning. In other words, it is through their semantic contents that linguistic elements operate in the development of the communication. The distribution of degrees of CD is determined by the interplay of FSP factors, whose operation, as well as the operation of the signals they yield, has been described in the present paper. The distribution of degrees of CD implements the functional perspective of the sentence. Apart from other things, enquiries into the distribution of degrees of CD have thrown revealing light on the relationship between the grammatical subject and the verb in FSP. In the development of the communication as reflected by the sentence, the predicative verb, or rather its notional component, participates in perspectiving the sentence either towards the subject or away from it. The verb, or rather its notional component, shows a strong tendency to mediate between elements carrying lower degrees of CD on the one hand, and elements carrying higher degrees of CD on the other. In the development of the communication,

the elements carrying the lower degrees of CD perform different functions from those carrying the higher degrees of CD. As for the verb, or rather its notional component, it performs different functions in dependence on whether it participates in perspectiving the sentence towards or away from the subject. As these functions are not displayed outside context, but operate in the development (dynamics) of the communication, they are qualified as dynamic semantic functions (DSFs). They have already been dealt with in the present paper. Let me add that the constituents carrying lower degrees than the verb provide the foundation (the theme) upon which the core of the message (the non-theme) is built up. The theme is constituted by a context-independent or context-dependent B-element and/or a context-dependent or context-independent Set-element and/or any other element that is context-dependent. The number of Settings is not limited. The non-theme is constituted by a Pr-element, an AofQ-element, a Q-element, a Sp-element or a F(urther)Sp(ecification)-element. The number of Specifications is not limited. (The dynamic semantic function of AofQ – Ascription of Quality – is performed by copulas; e.g., *John/He is a good boy.*) When performing the Pr or Qfunction, the verb, or rather its notional component, functions in the non-theme. When it performs the mediatory function, it acts as transition within the non-theme. The rest of the nontheme serves as the rheme. The element that within the rheme conveys the high point of the message carries the highest degree of CD and serves as rheme proper.

Under different contextual conditions, one and the same semantic and syntactic sentence structure displays different functional perspectives. The constituents perform different DSFs. This entails differences in the thematic and the non-thematic functions. Under the conditions observed by the composer of the message, the notice *Dogs must be carried on the escalator* is to be interpreted as follows. The context-dependent Setting *on the escalator* and the context-independent Bearer of quality *Dogs* constitute the theme. The context-independent notional component of *carried* acts as a Quality element. It belongs to the non-theme. As carrier of the highest degree of CD, it conveys the high point of the message and serves as rheme proper.

As to the verbal categorial exponents, implemented by the auxiliaries *must* and *be* and the ending *-ied*, they act as transition proper. (Let me point out in this connection that whereas the notional component of the verb shows a strong tendency to act as transition, its categorial exponents – especially though the exponents of tense and mood, or TMEs. for short – do so invariably. They serve as transition proper, providing simultaneously a link and a boundary between the theme and the non-theme; Firbas 1992: 71–3, 89–93, 202.) The anxious man, who does not actually follow the contextual conditioning observed by the composer of the notice, perspectives the notice differently. As in the composer's interpretation, *on the escalator* is regarded as a context-dependent Setting and therefore as thematic, and the verbal categorial exponents—especially though their TMEs—as serving as transition proper. In the anxious man's interpretation, however, the transitional notional verbal

component of *carried* serves as a Pr-element and the context-independent subject *Dogs* as a Ph-element. In consequence, the subject conveys the high point of the message and therefore serves as rheme proper.

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\* To my regret, I have failed in my efforts to trace the cartoonist and the publisher of the cartoon. My apologies and thanks are due to both.

### Comprehension questions

1. What is communicative dynamism?
2. What does Firbas mean by "perspectiving a sentence"?
3. How do the semantic scales affect the distribution of thematic and non-thematic information?
4. By way of concluding, Firbas seems to indicate that the ambiguity of the utterance would, in fact, be disambiguated in the spoken mode through intonation. In this way, he seems to point in the direction of the "correct" or "preferred" interpretation. If the aim was to explain the humorous effect of the cartoon, how would you formulate the conclusion – what is it that makes the humour successful?

# **Chapters from the History of Czech Functional Linguistics**

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