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ON SEMANTIC DETERMINACY OF DIALOGUES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF WRITTEN RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

1. Introduction

The paper draws on the results obtained in research carried out in the field of the theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP). For several years I have been investigating the process of the establishment, development and function of the thematic and the rhematic layers within a text and the place of FSP within the study of discourse and text linguistics in general. In my recent writings (see above all Adam 2005 and 2006), I have presented the idea of higher levels of text (paragraphs or chapters) functioning as **distributional macrofields**; it seems that such a macro-structural approach may reveal – among other things – essential syntactic-stylistic characteristics of a text.

The research has predominantly dealt with the text material of **primary written religious discourse** (see below) as offered by the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible. The biblical texts have proved to be suitable for the purpose of the research in FSP and thus have supplied a syntactically rich source for discourse analysis studies (most notably Firbas 1992 and 1995, Svoboda 1983, Adam 2004 and 2006, and Chamonikolasová & Adam 2005). Especially the later studies published by Firbas dealt with a number of Old and New Testament texts. Firbas made it clear in his studies that such text material represents a source of written discourse on narrative, dialogic and poetic texts manifesting numerous remarkable language phenomena: both generally linguistic and text-specific. Let me recall, by means of illustration, his treatise on the establishment and the function of the dynamic-semantic layers of *Luke 2:1–20* (Firbas 1995), the case study in linear modification discussing the translation of the *Book of Revelation 21:6b* (Firbas 1996) or his congenial interpretation of *Psalm 91* based exclusively on FSP (Firbas 1989). Apart from its linguistic value, the Bible is particularly interesting thanks to its canonical, and thus fixed character and a variety of translations that are available.

For the purpose of my investigation the *New International Version* of the Bible (*NIV*) will be used. The *NIV* translation is widely quoted and represents by far the most popular translation nowadays. Besides, only marginal discrepancies have been detected within the functional perspective of the English Bible translations that are available, for instance, in the parallel survey of biblical translations offered in Kohlenberger 1997 (for further details on the comparison and the differences described, see Adam 2000: 37–50).

2. Focus of the Paper

The aim of the present paper is to explore the domain of primary written religious discourse (specifically dialogues from the New Testament) in terms of **semantic (in)determinacy**, using tools offered above all by the **arsenal of FSP**. The preliminary FSP analysis will be followed by a discussion of the lexical and semantic means of expression typical of the discourse type under examination. Finally, conclusions will be drawn in regards to the semantic character of the text type.

3. Religious Discourse

The **primary religious discourse** covers the area of religious texts that were written for the original purpose – to serve the believers (members of a religious community) as a source of worship material (Ghadessy 1988). The primary Christian religious discourse is the Bible; the Old and the New Testaments are the most varied and universal basis for Christian teaching, interpretation, Church tradition, theological doctrines as well as practical everyday guidelines. Another example of primary religious discourse is different kinds of prayer and other liturgical texts, originally written for the primary goal of Christian faith – to worship God. The present study is concerned with the field of primary religious discourse only.

By contrast, we can speak of **secondary religious discourse**, i.e. writings commenting on, further discussing or interpreting the primary religious texts. Among the secondary ones, there are, for instance, biblical commentaries (i.e. a distinct genre of theological literature interpreting the Scriptures) or oral sermons delivered in a church. They actually build on the base formed by the "originally religious" texts and develop them in a certain way. This sphere will not be discussed in the article.

As has already been mentioned, it is primarily the members of a religious community who are the participants of the communication within religious discourse. Logically enough it is they who use the language of religion to express their general as well as particular ideas and beliefs. I agree with Webster when he says that "those who congregate together in a religious group are expected to agree on those usage rules governing the appropriate use of a group's technical vocabulary and style of expression" (Ghadessy 1988: 87).

4. Semantic (In)determinacy: Theoretical Background

4.1 Spoken Discourse

In her article on authentic English conversation, Urbanová discusses **semantic indeterminacy** as one of the most typical features of English informal conversation claiming that "semantic indeterminacy is an interpretation of the reality based on belief rather than knowledge, it is a verbalisation of modality" (Urbanová 2001: 53).

In her view, from the perspective of discourse functions, the language of conversation "is predominantly characterized by its **interactional** (expressive, emotive, interpersonal, social expressive) function" (Urbanová 1991: 134).

Urbanová goes on to present the following aspects of semantic determinacy: **indirectness** ("a modification of the illocutionary force of a certain speech act"), **impersonality** ("a manifestation of indeterminacy with regard to speaker-hearer identity"; backgrounding of the speaker), **attenuation** ("an intentional weakening of the illocutionary force of the utterance"; e.g. positive and negative politeness), **accentuation** ("a modification of the illocutionary force resulting in the reinforcement of utterance meaning") and **vagueness** ("an expression of approximation, tentativeness and lack of precision"; a semantic phenomenon operating on the level of the word) (Urbanová 2001: 53–54)**.**

4.2 Discourse of Biblical Dialogues

It will be necessary to throw some light on the genre of biblical dialogues. There are two essential reasons for that: firstly, biblical dialogues represent a somewhat specific discourse that apparently stands between typically spoken and typically written discourses; they are **recorded in a written form** (hence sometimes **'scripted dialogues'**); however, they were **primarily spoken** as genuine conversational texts. Secondly, as biblical dialogues create a substantial part of most writings of the Bible, they serve as a mediator of crucial theological values. It follows that it is important to treat dialogic texts of the Bible as a sub-genre *sui generis*.

As to the style and mode, the biblical dialogue differs in many respects from the biblical narrative: it comprises records of direct speech of two or more participants and the setting of the scene or reporting sentences occur in the text just to a limited degree. The development and the tension of the story are carried predominantly by the power of direct speech. It differs, however, from what is usually referred to as *genuine / authentic conversation* (see e.g. Urbanová 1988), i.e. a natural, spoken form of dialogue happening at a certain location and at a certain time. In the case of the Scriptures, it is not possible to speak of genuine conversation (implementing usually informal language), the core of which is depicted by Crystal as "the most fundamental and pervasive means of conducting human affairs" (Crystal 1987: 116). The dialogues in the Scriptures have to be treated as dialogues with their origin in writing.

Furthermore, in contrast to the narrative, the dialogic texts do not contribute much to the development of the story via narration, but they are suitable for treatment of abstract issues, such as explaining various concepts or ideas. In the scope of the four Gospels, for instance, this is the primary function; whenever a theological problem occurs, the narration stops and conversation takes over. It is usually Jesus who talks to someone; but in some dialogues Jesus is absent.

To use the FSP terminology and to depict another phenomenon typical of a dialogue, let me say the following: the dialogic text may be analysed either as a whole or it may be treated as a set of two (or more) utterances of individual speakers separately. In other words, each of the participants of the conversation may be restricted to one particular FSP analysis. Of course, both the lines should not be artificially separated and must be regarded as one dialogue consisting of a set of interwoven reactions; the split might be, however, functional for the purpose of tracing the individual dynamic-semantic strings.[1]

As has been noted above, the present paper is going to deal with one aspect of discourse characteristics, namely with the question of semantic (in)determinacy. Going back to what Urbanová says about semantic indeterminacy of the language of conversation, let me state the following hypothesis: **as the text material that is to be examined (biblical dialogues) falls into the category of primarily written texts, the degree of its semantic indeterminacy should logically be different from that of genuine English conversation.**

5. Biblical Dialogues: FSP Analysis

In this section, two different extracts taken from the New Testament will be explored and discussed; both of them are found in the opening chapters of the Gospel according to St. John. Before each interpretation a brief introduction of the textual context will be provided.

Due to space limitations, the texts in full will not be presented here; for that purpose, the reader is referred to Adam (2006: 83–84). In the scope of this study, only complete charts of FSP analyses will be used to illustrate the discussion.[2]

5.1 Jesus Teaches Nicodemus (John 3:1–18)

This story is recorded in the Gospel according to St. John and represents one of the first occasions when Jesus explains his teaching to a non-Christian. He speaks to Nicodemus, a Pharisee, who is a member of the Jewish ruling council (Douglas 182: 664). Nicodemus is confronted with Jesus' teaching and, at the same time, faces difficulties in comprehending the metaphors Jesus is using (Jonge 1970: 337). The discussion concerns one of the essential concepts of Christian faith: 'new birth'. The fallen man, when converting to Christ and receiving his mercy, needs to be 'born again'; Ringwald defines the new birth as "a radical act of the Holy Spirit on the sinful human nature, leading to a renewed approach

Verse	Clause	TrPr conj.	ThPr (Set/B)	DTh (Set/B)	TrPr/Tr (Q/Pr)	RhPr (Q)	Rh/RhPr (Sp/FSp)	RhPr (Ph)	Scale
3:1	1		there2	Now1	was3			a man of the Pharisees named Nicode-mus…4	Pr
2	2			He1 at night4	came2		to Jesus3		Q
	3	and1	*Rabbi1 we2*		*said2*		*" …"3*		Q
	3a				*know3*		*' …'4*		Q
	3a'		*you1*		*are2*		*a teacher who has come from God3*		Q
	3b	*For1*		*no one2*	*could perform3*		*the miraculous signs you are doing4 if …5*		Q
	3b'		*with him3*		*were not2*			*God1*	Pr
3	4		*Jesus2*	*In reply1*	*declared3*		*" …"4*		Q
	4a		**I1 you3**		**tell2**		**the truth4**		Q
	4b			**no one1**	**can see2**		**the kingdom of God3 unless …4**		Q
	4b'		**he1**		**is born2**		**again3**		Q
4	5		Nicodemus1		asked2		" …"3		Q
	5a			*How?1 a man2*	*can… be born again3*		*when he is old4*		Q
	5b		*he2*	*Surely1*	*cannot enter3*		*(not) a second time4 into his mother's womb to be born5*		Q

			Subject	Theme	Verb	be	Rheme	
5	6		Jesus1		answered2		" "3	Q
	6a		I1 you3		tell2		the truth4	Q
	6b			no one1	can enter2		the kingdom of God3 unless…4	Q
	6b'		he1		is born2		of water and the Spirit3	Q
6	6c		Flesh1		gives birth2		to flesh3	Q
	6d	but1	the Spirit2		gives birth3		to spirit4	Q
7	6e		You1		should not be sur-prised2		at my saying 'You must be born again'3	Q
8	6f			The wind1	blowes2		wherever it pleases3	Q
	6g		You1		hear2		its sound3	Q
	6h	but1	you2		cannot tell3		where it comes from or where it is going4	Q
	6i	So1	it2		is3		with everyone born of the Spirit4	Q
9	7		Nicodemus1		asked2		" …3	Q
	7a		this3	How?1	can2	be4		Q
10	8		Jesus1		said2		" …3	Q
	8a		You1		are2		an Israel's teacher3	Q
	8b	and1	you2		do not understand3		these things?4	Q
11	8c		I1 you3		tell2		the truth4	Q
	8d		we1		speak2		of what we know3	Q
	8e	and1	we2		testify3		to what we have seen4	Q
	8f	but1	you people3		still2 do not accept4		our testimony5	Q
12	8g		I1 to you3		have spoken2		of earthly things4	Q

Verse	Label							
						believe4		Q
	8h	and1	you2		do not3			Q
	8i		you3	How?1 then2	will...believe4		if...5	Q
	8i'		I1		speak2		of heavenly things3	Q
13	8j			No one1	has ... gone3 ever2		into heaven4 / except the one who...5	Q
	8j'		<		came1		from heaven2 / the Son of Man3	Q
14	8k	so2		Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert1 / the Son of Man3	must be4	lifted up5		Q
15	8l	s o that1		everyone who believes in him2	may have3		eternal life4	Q
16	8m	For1		God2 / the world4	(so) loved3		that...5	Q
	8m'		he1		gave2		his one and only Son3	Q
	8m''	s o that1		whoever believes in him2	will not3	perish4		Q
	8m'''	but1	<		have1		eternal life2	Q
17	8n	For1	God2	his Son4	did not send3		(not) to condemn the world4	Q
	8o	but1					to save the world2 / through him3	Q
18	8p			Whoever believes in him1	is not2		(not) condemned3	Q
	8q	but1		whoever does not believe2	stands3 already5	condemned4	because he ...6	Q
	8q'		<		has not believed1		in the name of God's ... / only Son2	Q

Figure 1 Jesus Teaches Nicodemus (John 3:1-18)

towards the world and following God" (Ringwald 1975: 176). In the dialogue of John 3:1–18, this theological principle is explored by Jesus and presented to Nicodemus.

Below (Fig.1) is the chart offering the functional analysis of the passage under discussion.

First of all, the dynamic-semantic string of 'Jesus' will be explored: Nicodemus is assuring him that the Jewish council is aware of him being 'a teacher who has come from God' (3a'); only God 'could perform / the miraculous signs...' (3b). Jesus takes the opportunity and explains: 'no one / can see / the kingdom of God / unless / he / is / born again' (4b). The same principle is recalled in (6b). **Repetition** is used throughout the whole passage; the table below illustrates the repetitive tendency within the text under examination. The chart contains a list of elements recurring in the distributional fields (4) - (8) and the frequency of their recurrence.

Figure 2 Key words of John 3:1–18

key words	number of occurrences
born (again) / birth	7
God	7
believe	6
Spirit	4
Son (of Man)	4
no one	4
whoever / everyone	4
heaven / -ly	3
the truth	3

Obviously, the passage (in fact two distributional fields only!) is especially dense in expressions referring to the theology of Jesus' teaching. Logically enough, some of the notions are close to each other semantically, and so the issue is viewed from several different angles. The concept of eternal life is referred to, for instance, as "entering the kingdom of God", or "new birth". In this respect we may observe the same approach to the explored topic – everything is examined from several perspectives, exemplified and gradually clarified. For one concept several specifying attributes are used at different stages of the discussion. The question-answer conversation is held in an unambiguous, **straightforward** manner.

It is worth noting that it is not only the lexical content that contributes to the persuasive power of the passage; the same forceful tendency is reflected in whole syntactic structures. It seems that certain patterns of sentence types are repeated on purpose:

'I / tell / you / the truth'. (The very same clause appears in 4a, 6a and 8c!)

'No one / can see (enter) / the kingdom of God / unless / he is / born again'. (4b, 6b).

'Everyone (whoever) / who / believes in him'. (8l, 8m'', 8p, 8q)

'Flesh / gives birth / to flesh'. (6c) ~ 'The Spirit / gives birth / to spirit'. (6d)

Let me come back to the establishment and the role of the dynamic-semantic layers of the passage. The following chart describes the inner development of the rheme-proper (RhPr) string and speaks of a high degree of **dynamic-semantic homogeneity**. The enumerated rhematic elements convey the basic message of the story.

> **RhPr:** the truth (4a) → the kingdom of God unless / born again (4b) → the truth (6a) → the kingdom of God unless / born of water and the Spirit (6b) → to spirit (6d) → [so it is] with everyone born of the spirit (6i) → the truth (8c) → ...what we know (8d) → what we have seen (8e) → our testimony (8f) → of earthly things (8g) → [you] do not believe (8h) → of heavenly things (8i') → into heaven (8j) → [everyone who believes in him] eternal life (8l) → [God gave] his one and only Son (8m') → eternal life (8m''') → not to condemn the world (8n) → to save the world / through him (8o) → in the name of God's one and only Son (8q')

To sum up, the biblical dialogue seems to be strikingly different from what we label as genuine face-to-face conversation. In the case of the New Testament conversation, we deal with a more-or-less **stylized text**; though deriving from a real dialogue, it is recorded with the aim to persuade. One of the most obvious concerns of the author is undoubtedly **to persuade** the reader that his values are the right ones; one can hardly think of a more open and direct presentation of beliefs than those recorded in the passage under examination.[3]

5.2 John the Baptist Denies Being the Christ (John 1:19–28)

The dialogue of John 1:19–28 introduces one of the crucial characters of the New Testament: John the Baptist. Theologians agree that he is the last Old Testament prophet and that his role was "to prepare the way for the Messiah and to initiate Jesus' ministry in public" (Brownlee 1958: 33). It was John the Baptist that started baptising people, including Jesus himself, and so he was considered incorrectly the coming Messiah. John the Baptist, however, denies being the Christ (=Messiah) several times (Douglas 1982: 383–384). One of these occasions is recorded in this passage.

The FSP analysis as offered by the chart shows the semantic-syntactic structure of the passage. First of all, I will explore the notional track of 'John the Baptist' (the elements are written in bold print in the chart). The notion of John the Baptist enters

Verse	Clause	TrPr conj.	ThPr (Set/B)	DTh (Set/B)	TrPr/Tr (Q/Pr)	RhPr (Q)	Rh/RhPr (Sp/FSp)	RhPr (Ph)	Scale
1:19	1			Now1 this2	was3		John's testimony4 when the Jews …ask him who he was5		Q
20	2		He1		did not fail2		to confess3		Q
	3	but1	^		confessed2	freely3	" …"4		Q
	3a		I1		**am2**		**not the Christ3**		Q
21	4		They1 him3		asked2		" …"4		Q
	4a		*you4*	*Then1 who?2*		*are3*			Q
	4b		*you2*		*are1*		*Elijah?3*		Q
	5		He1		said2		" …"3		Q
	5a		I1		**am2**	**not3**			Q
	6		*you2*		*Are1*		*the Prophet?3*		Q
	7		He1		answered2		**"No."**		Q
22	8		they2	Finally1	said3		" …"4		Q
	8a		*you3*	*who?1*		*are2*			Q
	8b		*us2*		*Give1*		*an answer … to those who sent us3*		Q
	8c		*you3*	*What1*	*do…say2*		*about yourself?4*		Q
23	9		John1		replied2		in the words of Isaiah " …"3		Q
	9a		I1		**am2**		**the voice of one calling in the desert3**		Q
	9b				**Make1**		**straight way2 for the Lord3**		Q

24	10	some Phari-sees who had been sent2 him4	Now1	questioned3	"…"5		Q
25	10a	you4	Why?1 then2	do...baptize3	if...5		Q
	10a'	you1		are2	not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?3		Q
26	11	John1		replied2	" ..."3		Q
	11a	I1		baptize2	with water3		Q
	11b	but1	among you2	stands3		one you do not know4	Pr
27	11c		He1	is2	the one who...3		Q
	11c'		^	comes1	after me2		Q
	11c''	I2		am not3	whose sandals1 worthy to untie4		Q
28	12	This1 all2		happened3	at Bethany ...4		Q

Figure 3 John the Baptist Denies Being the Christ (John 1:19-28)

the Rh-layer in the form of an Sp-element – 'John's testimony' (1). John was asked whether he was the Messiah by the Jewish priests and he confesses that he is not the Christ (3a). The Jews, however, keep asking him many more similar questions, investigating his identity and activities. John provides them with explanations and announces that the real Saviour is coming and is much greater than him: 'I / am / not worthy to untie the thongs of his sandals' (11c''). Before the scene and the dialogue reach their culmination in John's prophetic statement, he touches on the issue of baptism in (10) and (11) (for details see e.g. Brownlee 1958: 33ff).

From the point of view of functional syntax it can be said that the dynamic-semantic string of 'John the Baptist' follows a simple pattern: within ten basic distributional fields of the dialogue, there are four almost identical sentence structures. I will present those in the sequence they appear in the course of the communication:

> 'I / am / not the Christ'. (3a)
> 'I / am / not.' [Elijah] (5a)[4]
> 'I / am / the voice of one calling in the desert.' (9a)
> 'I / am / not worthy to untie the thongs of his sandals.' (11c'')

John the Baptist declares four times he is not the Christ: three times by a negative reference (3a, 5a, 11c''), in one case by means of a positive statement (9a). All the four structures follow the same syntactic structure: I + am + complement. At first sight, the repetitive use of this simple structure might seem monotonous and semantically weak, but the opposite is true: it is highly functional. The simplicity of the structure and its repetition contribute to the clarity of the message conveyed. The pattern used in the utterances of John the Baptist in this passage evokes the analogical structures of Jesus Christ (see the previous section)

If the dynamic-semantic string of John the Baptist is extracted, a simplified outline of the conversation comes forward; as usual, only the RhPr-elements are included:

> **RhPr:** John's testimony (1) → to confess (21) → not the Christ (3a) → am not (5a) → No (7) → the voice of one calling in the desert (9a) → [make] straight way / for the Lord (9b) → one you do not know (11b) → the one who comes after me (11c') → whose sandals I am not worthy to untie (11c'')

I will now turn my attention towards the dynamic-semantic string of the Jewish leaders, who represent the other participant of the conversation (the elements involved are italicised in the chart). In harmony with the preceding gospel passage under analysis, the role of the priests is reduced to that of asking questions and investigating into the topic. In the case of this text – John 1:19–28 – there are altogether seven questions; all of them are uttered by the religious leaders who try hard to find out about John's real identity. Being confused, they enumerate possible answers. In this respect, their

questions may even anticipate the potential questions and doubts of the readers. The typical question pattern is obvious also from the following outline of RhPr- and DTh-elements of the dynamic-semantic string of the priests:

> **RhPr/DTh:** who? (4a) → Elijah? (4b) → the Prophet? (6) → who? (8a) → [give us] an answer...(8b) → What... / about yourself? (8c) → Why? (10a) → not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet? (10a')

It is also worth noting that the notional homogeneity is not manifested only in the rhematic layer (as demonstrated by all the RhPr outlines above); a special semantic structure may be observed also within the transitional layer (Tr). Examining the Tr-layer in the chart, the question-answer pattern is found to be employed in the area of the verbs as well:

Figure 4 The question-answer pattern in the transition

Dynamic-semantic string	Transitional elements
John the Baptist	confessed (3)
	said (5)
	answered (6)
	replied (9), (11)
Jewish leaders	asked (4)
	said (8)
	questioned (10)

6. Biblical Dialogues: Summary

As is apparent from the outlines of the two passages, the RhPr-elements indeed communicate the core of the message. There are, however, some other aspects that deserve a more thorough commentary.

The first aspect has already been mentioned: **repetition.** By means of recurrence, the author succeeds in presenting the message in a lucid manner. The key notions (such as salvation, worship, life, etc.) are repeated many times in the dialogues of the gospels and so the **lexical density** (or **saturation**) of the theological terms is considerably high. The passages are equipped with a limited range of expressions of the same kind that recur throughout the whole text frequently. The words – related predominantly to the vocabulary of Christian theology (monothematic content) – form a substantial part of the text. The purpose is clear: the role of the text is to present a Christian concept to people and to convince them that it is the appropriate way for their lives. It actually seems that in the sub-genre of dialogue, the degree of **persuasion** is even higher than in narrative or poetic texts (on details, see Adam 2006: 46–47 and 55–56).

Another feature typical of the dialogues recorded in the gospel is their **explicit-
ness**. All points in the discussion are made openly and explicitly; there is hardly
any attempt to hide things. The participants of the conversation do not play with
words but get down directly to the issue. This method may be considered as un-
natural and too persuasive, but it depicts the very nature of the biblical message.
By means of emphasising and continuous clarifying, the text provides the reader
with a clear picture of theological concepts.

In the gospel, the texts usually explore the topic of salvation from several
different angles; the passages under examination show a high degree of **lexico-
semantic diversity**. For instance, Jesus uses a number of explanatory illustrati-
ons to make his ideas clear – water, food, and harvest – within a few verses. Only
exceptionally a term is clarified by means of just one simile or metaphor. Several
times, Jesus is referred to as God who redeems people: Messiah, Christ, Saviour,
Lord (in other words a hypertheme). The message could be expressed, as it were,
in one or two sentences; nevertheless, to avoid misunderstanding the author treats
the topic in a thorough and exhaustive manner.

It will be consistent to say that the purpose of religious writing, including the
dialogue, is naturally connected with **ideology**. Carter and Nash define ideology
as "a socially and politically dominant set of values and beliefs which are …con-
structed in all texts especially in and through language" (Carter and Nash 1990:
21). In their study, they sub-divide their with respect to style and ideology into
"the interested writer" and "the interested reader" domains – "writers are concer-
ned in varying degrees with: first of all persuading readers to pick up the text and
to read it; second, they are concerned with prompting readers to act in accordance
with a set of behaviours" (Carter and Nash 1990: 50–51). The reader, on the other
hand, should be challenged to take over and accept the values. Also in the case of
biblical dialogues, the linguistic means serve as a vehicle for communicating the
message; Carter and Nash speak of the fact that "ideology is encoded in the lin-
guistic organisation of the text" (Carter and Nash 1990: 59). Apart from the tools
described above (e.g. repetition), there is a whole range of methods applied: let
me remind the reader at least of the extreme explicitness and emotional appeal.

7. Conclusions

As has been anticipated, the character of religious communication derives from
one of its principal purposes: to present ideology explicitly and to persuade the
potential reader. The primary task of biblical texts is to offer Christian doctrines
in a clear way, to strengthen the faith of the believers, to provide a source of in-
formation on different issues of theology, and, last but not least, to convince the
readers – whether believers or non-believers – of the veracity of the Christian
principles presented.

The FSP analysis of the biblical dialogues indicates that there is actually a who-
le range of stylistic properties that may be related to the stylised character of reli-

gious texts; even if recorded according to actual utterances, the biblical dialogues manifest qualities of **stylised conversation** at the same time. In other words, whereas the primary aim of genuine conversation is human communication, the language of the Bible may be, in many ways, viewed as a counterpart to authentic conversation; its principal task is to present religious beliefs and to persuade the readers. This is not to say that there is no overlap between the two discourses; one should rather speak of opposite tendencies resulting from different motivations.

From the point of view of grammar, the stylized (primarily scripted, non-genuine) dialogues seem to differ from non-scripted dialogues at the syntactic level, i.e. in the complexity of sentences, and – as Chamonikolasová points out – also at the prosodic level: in the structure of the tone unit (cf. Chamonikolasová 2007). In connection to the ideological character of the biblical dialogue – as reflected in the dynamic-semantic analysis – it will be beneficial to recall the **question-answer pattern** (typically adjacency pairs) found throughout all the analysed dialogues. It is always the layman who asks questions (such as Nicodemus or the leaders), whereas the teacher (Jesus, John the Baptist) keeps explaining different issues and offers answers. It seems that the form of dialogue allows the author to present a theological concept most effectively. Using the devices of repetition, emphasis, and dense semantic-syntactic patterns, he manages to introduce the idea explicitly and fulfils thus the primary purpose of communication.

Urbanová, in her article on authentic English conversation, claims that a genuine (informal) dialogue displays a certain set of characteristics; she labels them under the heading of semantic indeterminacy. The concept includes the following features: indirectness, impersonality, attenuation, accentuation and vagueness (Urbanová 2001: 52–55). Within the New Testament dialogues, on the contrary, an almost opposite tendency may be observed: the texts lack the above mentioned indeterminacy qualities and are, in their nature, direct, rather personal, persuasive, clear-stated and unambiguous. Drawing on Urbanová (2001), I am ready to claim that **the sub-genre of biblical dialogues manifests clear features that might be labelled as semantic determinacy, namely: directness, personal involvement, persuasion, clarity and unambiguity.**

Below is a table reflecting the contrast between the two kinds of register: genuine versus stylised conversation:

Figure 5 Genuine vs. stylised conversation features

AUTHENTIC CONVERSATION	STYLISED CONVERSATION
indirectness	directness
impersonality	personality
attenuation	persuasion
accentuation	clarity
vagueness	unambiguity
⇩	⇩
SEMANTIC INDETERMINACY	SEMANTIC DETERMINACY

To conclude, I agree with Urbanová that the patterns of semantic indeterminacy are "an expression of modality resulting from the comparison of the expressed world (…) and the real world" (Urbanová 2001: 55). In this sense, the biblical dialogue cannot be viewed as genuine, authentic conversation; it is rather a means of presenting religious beliefs, aimed at persuading the readers. **The overall character of biblical dialogues may be seen as a stylised conversation manifesting a high degree of semantic determinacy**. Thus the preliminary hypothesis postulating the semantic determinacy of biblical dialogues (see above) has proved to be legitimate.

Notes

[1]   In the charts, the individual lines of the direct speech held by different speakers are differentiated by means of graphics: one participant's utterances are in bold print, while the other ones are italicised. The rest of the text (narrative and reporting sentences) is in casual print.

[2]   In the charts of FSP analyses, the superscripts mark the real sequence of the basic communicative units – in other words the actual linear arrangement of the clauses; the original verse numbers are to be found in the very first column of the charts.

[3]   It will be interesting to note that two other types of scripted (and so non-genuine) dialogues, namely theater play dialogues and textbook dialogues, have been studied by Chamonikolasová (1995) and (2007). The focus of these studies is the distribution of different degrees of prosodic prominence and degrees of communicative dynamism in English and Czech scripted and non-scripted spoken texts.

[4]   Elijah was another Old Testament prophet. According to Hebrew teaching, Elijah was to come before the real messiah and provide thus evidence of the Messiah's identity (see e.g. Ringwald 1975).

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