TWO CHAPTERS ON SCENE

Aleš Svoboda

Volume 14 of Brno Studies is published in honour of Jan Firbas and his both intensive and extensive work in the field of functional sentence perspective (FSP). This paper is a modest contribution to Firbas' concept of scene (see pp. 37—79 of the present volume) viewed in the light of a detailed contextual and statistical examination of a continuous text. The present conclusions are drawn from a more extensive study (Svoboda 1981) based on an analysis of AElfric's Sermon on the Lord's Epiphany (Thorpe 1971). The text of 450 clauses was examined from the grammatical, the semantic, and the contextual points of view. In order to make the analysis as consistent as possible, we deliberately chose only two theoretical sources, which accord well with each other: Firbas' theory of FSP (perfectly summed up in Firbas 1979) and Daneš' concept of thematic progression (as presented in Daneš 1974). For a detailed treatment of the phenomena of FSP, we refer the reader to the above two sources and references therein. In the following, we shall briefly introduce only such concepts as are of major importance in the course of the subsequent discussion.

Non-thematic elements: *Transition proper* is the least dynamic (conveying the lowest degree of communicative dynamism [CD]) of all the non-thematic elements. (It is currently expressed by the temporal and modal exponents of the finite verb.) More dynamic than transition proper is *transition* (non-proper). Transition proper and transition constitute the transitional sphere of the clause. Elements conveying a higher degree of CD than transition are called *rhematic elements,* and constitute the rhematic sphere of the clause. The most dynamic element within the clause is *rheme proper.*

Thematic elements: Elements conveying a lower degree of CD than transition proper are called thematic elements and constitute the thematic sphere of the clause. The least dynamic element of the thematic sphere is *theme proper,* the most dynamic element of the thematic sphere is *diatheme.* Clauses containing only one thematic element should have both diatheme and theme .proper fused into one. In theory, it is tempting to regard the function of diatheme and that of theme proper (in such cases, of course) as neutralized. In practice, however, even a sort of preliminary analysis of clauses containing two or more thematic elements clearly shows

that grammatical, semantic and contextual features of diathemes differ considerably from those displayed by themes proper. A similar analysis of clauses containing only one thematic element shows that this element displays rather distinctly either the features of diathemes or those of themes proper found in clauses with more thematic elements. Hence in clauses with only one thematic element, we label this element either as diatheme or as theme proper according to what features it tends to display. Roughly speaking, diatheme usually expresses some new aspect of the thematic sphere and stands — as it were — in its foreground. Theme proper, on the other hand, usually expresses the item most derivable from the context, and stands in the background.

Hypertheme is an element which remains within the thematic sphere of two or more clauses without its extralingual reference being changed. In other words, hypertheme consists of two or more thematic elements that display contextual ties. These elements create contextual strings which are called hyperthematic. The members of one hyperthematic string may perform different thematic roles (diatheme, theme proper) within their respective clauses. Being always contextually tied, ellipted themes (i.e., thematic elements not expressed explicitly, but signalled by the structure of the clause) are always members of a hyperthematic string. Each member of a hyperthematic string has either a thematic or a rhematic or no predecessor, as well as a thematic or a rhematic or no successor.

The contextual flow-diagram is a graphical arrangement of elements according to their membership in clauses, their FSP-roles and their contextual ties. It has 10 columns representing free slots for 5 thematic (ellipted themes proper, themes proper, theme proper-oriented themes, diatheme-oriented themes, diathemes) and 5 non-thematic (ellipted transitions proper, transitions proper, transitions, rhemes, rhemes proper) elements. According to the FSP-roles of their elements, the respective clauses are presented as marked slots on successive horizontal lines. The contextual ties between elements are marked by connecting lines. The whole body of AElfric's text was "transcribed" as a contextual flow-diagram, which facilitated the statistical examination of the number of elements of different kinds, their contextual ties, the kinds of their predecessors and successors in hyperthematic strings, the number of strings and their length, etc. In the present paper, we shall adduce only such results as are relevant to our discussion.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NARROW SCENE

In his paper Scene and Perspective (see the present volume, pp. 37 to 79), Firbas treats the narrow scene as a complex phenomenon and offers a detailed explanation of what the components of the narrow scene are and how these components cooperate in co-creating the FSP-structure of the clause. In short, he approaches the narrow scene from the viewpoint of its text-creating "activity". In dealing with the same phenomenon, we approach the narrow scene from the viewpoint of its text-created result. In the present paper, we do not inquire into how the narrow scene contributes to the distribution of CD over elements in a clause, but we take a text that forms a complete unit and has already been analysed from the point of view of FSP, and describe the results of the narrow scene operation in terms of thematic elements and their contextual ties.

The thematic sphere of the clause represents a scene in the narrowest possible sense. Such a narrow scene can be quantitatively characterized by the number of thematic elements occurring in a particular clause. To take into account that the narrow scene of one clause ties — in one way

or another — with the preceding text, we can make the quantitative characteristics more precise by also considering the number of preceding contextual ties concerning the thematic sphere of the clause. For the purpose of the statistical inquiry, let us introduce the following definition:

The narrow scene of a clause is given by the (explicitly) expressed thematic elements of the clause and by the preceding contextual ties concerning both the expressed and the ellipted thematic elements (the ellipted theme proper also representing a contextual tie) of the clause.

The statistical results (of AElfric's text) show that the average of the expressed thematic elements per clause is 1.40, and the average of ties is 1.16. The contextual flow-diagram, however, enables us to go beyond such general statements and to follow the narrow scenes of the separate clauses in progress, in their perpetual change, as reflected in the number of thematic elements and their contextual ties. *The narrow scene progression* can be illustrated by an oscillogram in which the trough of the wave indicates the number of realized (preceding) contextual ties, while the crest gives the number of expressed thematic elements, one cycle representing the narrow scene of one clause. The following is the narrow scene progression in paragraph 15 (29 clauses) of the analysed text:
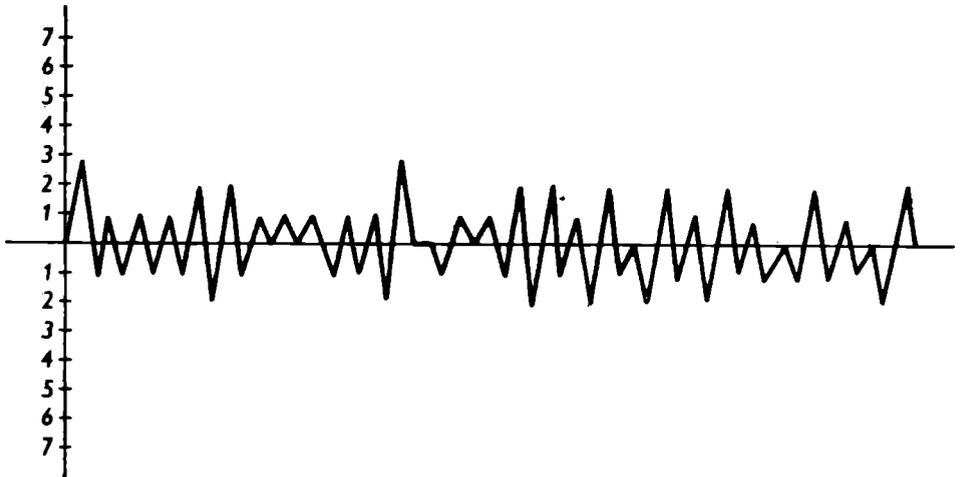
If we connect the crests and troughs of the waves, the upper curve will show the changing "breadth" of the narrow scenes in progression, while the lower curve will indicate the "strength" of contextual ties between successive clauses. Seen against the background of the average of expressed thematic elements and realized ties per clause, these two curves taken together can be regarded as the main characteristics of the narrow scene progression:
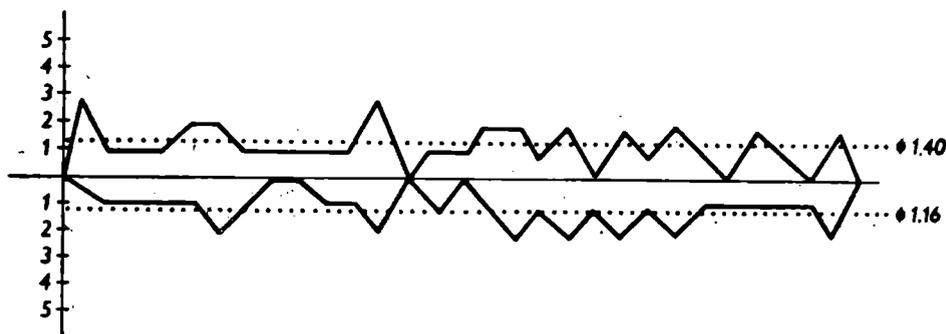
As the above diagram is based on data available to the listener at the moment of hearing the clause (expressed thematic elements, ties realized at that very moment), we shall speak about *the listener's narrow scene.* (The term listener is to be understood here as listener/reader.) It follows that all the preceding discussion of the narrow scene and the narrow scene progression was presented from the listener's point of view and for this reason it is imperative to remember that what has been said so far holds good only for the listener's narrow scene.

There is, however, an alternative approach to the narrow scene: The narrow scene may be considered to include not only expressed thematic elements, but also ellipted thematic elements and (thematic) contextual ties that — as it were — run through the given clause without being realized in it, but are realized in one of the subsequent clauses. (What we have in mind here is a contextual tie between the element that has appeared in the text before and the element that occurs not in the examined clause, but in one of the subsequent clauses.) This is, in fact, the speaker's point of view. In the narrow scene progression, the speaker keeps "in mind" not only the elements and ties he employs at the given moment, but also the preceding elements that he intends to tie with the thematic elements in the subsequent clauses. The evidence of this is that the speaker does use these elements later on.

Our contextual flow-diagram gives us the possibility to trace the latent presence of such elements, because their contextual ties (connecting lines) can be clearly seen to run through the thematic sphere of a given clause.

Hence *the speaker's narrow scene* is given by all the thematic elements (both expressed and ellipted) and contextual ties present at the given moment in the thematic sphere of the respective clause as well as by all the contextual ties concerning the thematic elements of both the respective clause and the subsequent clauses.

In plain words, we can characterize the speaker's narrow scenes of the separate clauses by counting the thematic elements and the connecting contextual lines at such points of the flow-diagram as correspond to the respective clauses at the moments of their utterance on the one hand, and by counting the connecting contextual lines between the clauses in the thematic half of the diagram, which correspond to the contextual ties the speaker currently keeps in mind, on the other.

Like the listener's progression, *the speaker's narrow scene progression* can be illustrated by an oscillogram, where the crests show the number of thematic elements and ties (latent elements) in clauses, while the troughs are determined by the number of ties between clauses. The following is the oscillogram of the same paragraph (15, 29 clauses) as above, this time, however, showing the speaker's narrow scene:
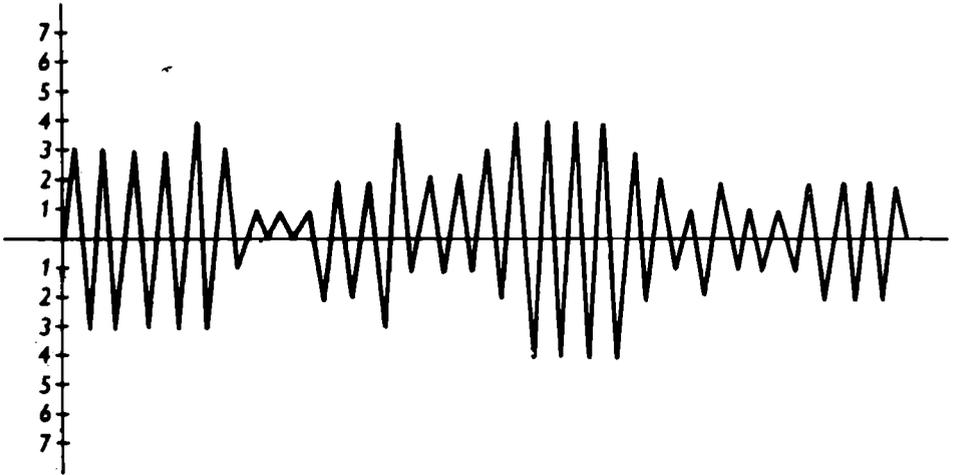

If we connect the crests and the troughs, we again arrive at curves showing the changes in "breadth" of the speaker's narrow scenes and characterizing the "strength" of their contextual bonds, respectively.
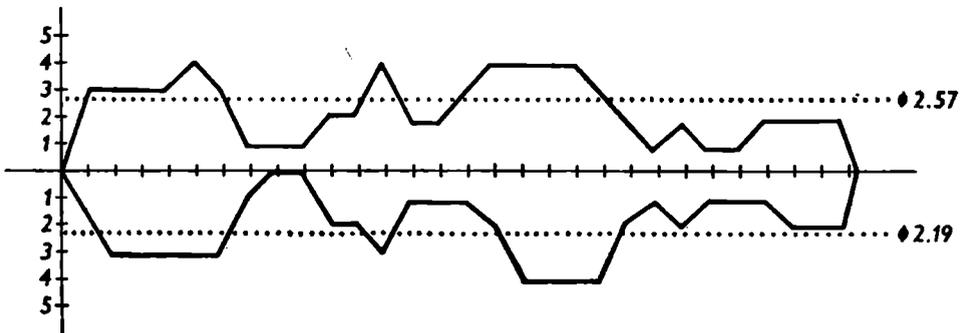
In the body of AElfric's text the average of thematic elements and "through-running" ties in clauses (at the moment of their utterance) and the average of ties between clauses are substantially higher than in the case of the listener's narrow scene: 2.57 in clauses, 2.19 between clauses. Within the analysis, the whole contextual flow-diagram was provided with the speaker's narrow scene track, which was compared with the listener's. Apart from the obvious fact that the speaker's narrow scene

is broader than the listener's, the comparison reveals the tendency of the speaker's narrow scene to be more stable and to display lesser differences as to its breadth and strength of ties. Very often it keeps the same level of oscillation (the same total of elements and ties) even when the listener's scene displays lesser or bigger differences. (This may be due to the fact that the speaker must know beforehand what narrow scenes he is going to create in the near future or — more precisely — which of the elements mentioned before he intends to include in the narrow scene of the nearest clauses, while the listener can only go by the explicit thematic elements and ties after their realization in the separate subsequent clauses.)

The greater breadth and the higher stability of the speaker's narrow scene progression can be seen from the following graph, mapping the speaker's and the listener's narrow scene tracks onto each other. (For the sake of simplicity, we adduce the oscillogram of paragraph 15 again. The stabilizing tendency of the speaker's narrow scene progression is more pronounced with some other paragraphs of the analysed text.)
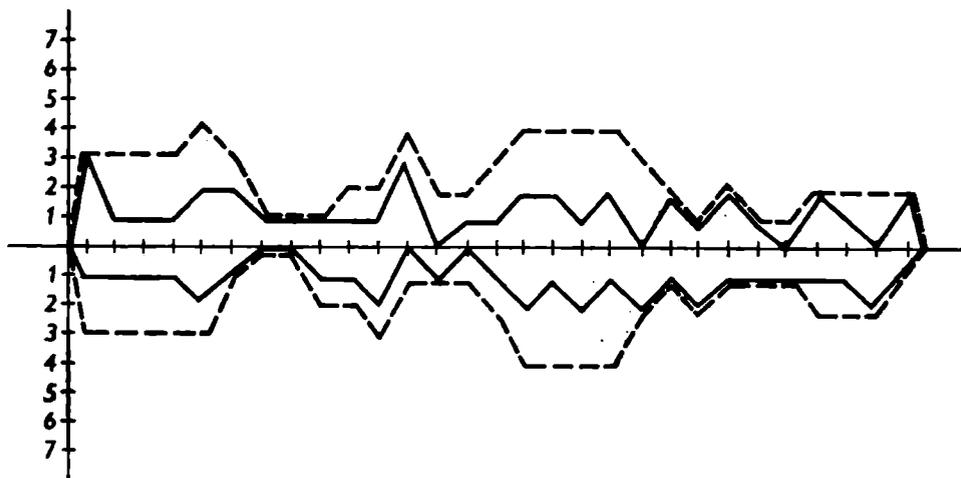
It is to be borne in mind that the narrow scene progressions as presented above reflect the quantitative aspect of the narrow scene rather than the qualitative one. For example the mutual exchange of thematic and rhematic elements in successive clauses representing one of the most striking qualitative changes of the narrow scene need not be shown in the oscillogram at all, because the number of thematic elements and the number of ties may remain the same. Despite this defect, the clear-cut extent of the above narrow scenes offers a reliable basis for dealing with the more delicate question of the broad scene, in which the narrow scenes are — as it were — embedded.

THE BROAD SCENE

What we intuitively understand by the broad scene is the extralingual situation which accompanies a given text or which is created by the given text itself. This extralingual situation is often referred to as situational context, which is, of course, relative to the given text. Even for a short stretch of text, is seems impossible to enumerate all the items belonging to the respective situational context in order to delimit the broad scene of discourse. A closer look into the problem will show that not all the items supposedly belonging to the situational context are of equal importance in regard to the given text. Some of them (perhaps the majority) will prove to be practically irrelevant to the contextual conditioning of the text. (In other words, some of them will never have a direct influence on whether the separate elements of the text will be regarded as context dependent or context independent.) Some of them, however, will appear to be relevant to the contextual conditioning of the separate elements within the text and it is these elements that are at the focus of our attention and are to be regarded as members of the broad scene.

It is outside the scope of the present paper to describe the procedure of "finding" the relevant items of the situational context. Suffice it to say that the FSP-analysis of AElfric's sermon and the work on the contextual flow-diagram have shown quite convincingly that the relevant items of the situational context become — in one way or another — elements of the text and all of them reveal a common feature: they are prospective members of the (listener's) narrow scene in the course of its progression.

Hence *the broad scene (relative to the given text)* is a collection of elements that are prospective members of the listener's narrow scene, i.e. they may or they may not enter the narrow scene within a certain — at present unspecified — part of the narrow scene progression. They are latently present in the text for either an unlimited or a limited space of time.

According to how well these elements are established in the broad scene, we can distinguish the following three kinds:

(i) *eternal themes* (potential hyperthemes related to any kind of text)
(ii) *long-lived themes* (potential hyperthemes related to the given text)
(iii) *short-lived themes* (non-thematic elements as prospective themes)

Ad (i). Some elements display a very strong tendency to appear as themes proper without predecessors. Four of them are probably present in the broad scene of any kind of text: the speaker (*I, we*), the listener (*you*), "man" in general (cf. general subjects), and "nature" in general (cf. impersonal subjects). These elements are so well established in the broad scene of the text (the speaker and the listener are so well aware of their presence) that they need not be introduced into the discourse as rhematic elements first (which is usual with elements of other kinds), but can function directly as themes proper at any point of the text. They —

as it were — constitute an imaginary hyperthematic string running through the whole text, and for this reason they are called eternal themes. This is not to say that they (especially the first two) cannot play the role of diathemes or even rhemes proper. Such functions, however, have to be always clearly signalled by word order, semantics and the immediate verbal context of the respective clause. Without special signals (i.e. in their unmarked use), these elements remain thematic.

Ad (ii). With the development of the discourse some elements develop a tendency to become exclusively thematic. They are often introduced as rhematic elements first, and then — after creating one or more hyperthematic strings — they start appearing as thematic elements without predecessors, which may testify to the fact that they have acquired permanent membership in the broad scene. These elements become part of the broad scene gradually. In the examined text, the amount grows from 1 element at the beginning to 19 towards the end. Especially at the beginning of the text, the elements of this kind need not always be introduced as rhematic, but they may immediately play the role of themes, most often diathemes. They are presented as quasi context dependent, i.e. they appear in a way showing that they are regarded as matter-of-course items relating to the given text. The total of 19 elements at the end of the text, which consists of 450 clauses, may seem rather low, but it is due to the fact that different words and phrases rendering the same conceptual contents (synonyms, e.g., *Christ, Jesus, God's Son*) are regarded as one element of the broad scene. No matter which of them is established in the broad scene first, the other (synonymic) elements automatically acquire the same status and appear as themes without (rhematic) predecessors. (The clues to recognizing certain items as synonyms are often given not by the verbal and the situational context, but by the most general context of all — the context of experience.) In contradistinction to eternal themes, these elements are closely related to a particular text; different texts will develop different collections of these elements. As they are — in fact — the elements that are most often spoken about, they tend to form hyperthematic strings again and again, and that is why they are called potential hyperthemes. From the point at which they appear as well-established elements of the broad scene (which is signalled by their direct thematic occurrence at the beginning of a hyperthematic string), they accompany the text as latent themes till the end and may, therefore, be regarded as long-lived themes (relative to the given text).

Ad (iii). The transitional and rhematic elements of a given clause are also introduced onto the broad scene and — in fact — become its members, because they may play the role of thematic elements in the subsequent clauses and are, therefore, prospective members of the narrow scene. Some of them are made part of the narrow scene of the very next clause, some of them remain latent in the broad scene and join the narrow scene of the next but one clause or one of the clauses coming afterwards, and some do not join any of the following narrow scenes at all. However, the span of time these non-thematic elements remain within the broad scene is not unlimited. It happens quite often that the non-thematic elements which have not entered the narrow scene of (at least) one of the

following 6 or 7 clauses appear later on not as thematic but as transitional or (more often) rhematic elements, which means that they have to be introduced onto the broad scene again. This may be taken as (indirect) evidence of the fact that they are latently present in the broad scene for the span of 6—7 clauses and then — if not used — leave the broad scene. With the exception of the non-thematic elements that become potential hyperthemes (long-lived themes), the other non-thematic elements are the least established in the broad scene: they hold the status of prospective members of the narrow scene for a comparatively short time (6—7 clauses) and are therefore called short-lived prospective themes. In AElfric's text, the average of rhematic and transitional elements (without transitions proper) per clause is 1.77. Generally speaking, this means that in terms of the elements introduced onto the broad scene as non-thematic, the broad scene grows from 1.77 at the outset of the text to 12.39 in the seventh clause, and then remains at this level, because the average intake equals the average drop-out. Hence the part of the broad scene constituted by short-lived prospective themes may be said to contain about 12 elements (except at the beginning). In contradistinction to the part of the broad scene constituted by the long-lived themes [sub (ii)], the part constituted by the short-lived themes is numerically constant but is, in fact, subject to perpetual change as to the concrete elements (with their semantic contents) present at a given moment. For this reason we shall call the part constituted by the short-lived themes *the ever-changing periphery of the broad scene,* as opposed to *its kernel part* represented by the eternal and the long-lived themes.

Elements represented by adverbial diathemes appearing without predecessors and without successors deserve special mention. They display some features of all the above three groups of elements constituting the broad scene in its progress. What they share with eternal themes is their presupposed presence in any kind of text. (Any appearance of a new quality takes place under some circumstances.) In contradistinction to eternal themes, they are only presupposed in their general circumstantial meaning, but the concrete instances of temporal, spatial and other indications bring a new aspect of the narrow scene, and that is why they appear, not as themes proper, but as diathemes. The common feature shared with long-lived themes is that these adverbial diathemes appear as diathemes without predecessors and may be potentially present within the broad scene for a comparatively long time (usually till the validity of the respective circumstance is abolished by the introduction of a new circumstance of the same kind). What they have in common with short-lived themes is that they appear only once, have no successors, and are present in the broad scene not as concrete temporal, spatial and other circumstantial items, but as a kind. The concrete instances of these indications may change indefinitely, which reminds us of the ever-changing periphery constituted by the short-lived themes. In our analysis, the adverbial diathemes of the above kind are included in the broad scene within the average number (1.4) of expressed thematic elements per clause.

After having made a rough estimate of the number of elements representing the broad scene of the whole text and having divided the broad

scene according to the kinds of elements it contains, we can make an estimate of the broad scene progression within the whole body of AElfric's text. This time the progression will be based not on the data concerning the separate clauses in succession, but on the average of occurrence of the elements dealt with above. (In view of the total number of elements of the broad scene, the possible differences between the separate clauses are practically irrelevant). The graph on page 91 illustrates the broad scene progression in AElfric's sermon, and the explanation is given below.

On the average the broad scene at the beginning of the text consists of 4 eternal themes, 1.40 thematic elements (the average of thematic elements per clause), and 1.77 non-thematic elements (the average of non-thematic elements per clause without transitions proper), which makes a total of about 7 elements at the very beginning of the broad scene progression. Owing to the non-thematic elements introduced onto the broad scene in the following clauses, the broad scene extends at the rate of 1.77 elements per clause till the number of these short-lived themes amounts to 12.4. Hence the average breadth of the broad scene at the seventh clause is about 18 elements. If the intake and the drop-out of the non-thematic elements (short-lived prospective themes) were the same, the broad scene would remain at this level. In the course of progression, however, some of the short-lived prospective themes become more established in the broad scene and begin to play the role of long-lived themes. They leave the sphere of ever-changing periphery (constituted by non-thematic elements currently introduced onto the scene) and enter the kernel part of the broad scene. Since the number of these new arrivals ranges from 1 at the beginning to 19 at the end, the average increase is 1 element per 25 clauses (0.04 element per clause). As the number of elements in the ever-changing periphery remains constant, the broad scene gradually grows, owing to the fact that some peripheral elements are not dropped out but remain within the broad scene, entering its kernel sphere at the rate of 0.04 per clause. Based on the above data, the extent of the broad scene towards the end of our text is 37 elements.

REFERENCES

Daneš, F. (1974). FSP and the text organization, *Papers on Functional Sentence Perspective* (ed. F. Daneš) (Prague).

Firbas, J. (1979). A functional view of 'ordo naturalis', *Brno Studies in English* 13.29—59 (Brno).

Firbas, J. (1981). Scene and perspective, the present volume of *Brno Studies in English* (Brno).

Svoboda, A. (1981). *Diatheme*, Brno University Monographs (Brno).

Thorpe, B. (ed.) (1971). The Sermon on the Lord's Epiphany, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church, Homilies of AElfric* II.36—52 (London).

DVĚ KAPITOLY O SCÉNĚ

V teorii funkční perspektivy větné zavedl J. Firbas pojem úzké a široké scény. Autor článku konkretizuje tyto dva pojmy na základě výsledků analýzy souvislého textu a dochází k těmto závěrům:

Úzkou scénu věty je možno číselně vyjádřit jako soubor tematických prvků věty
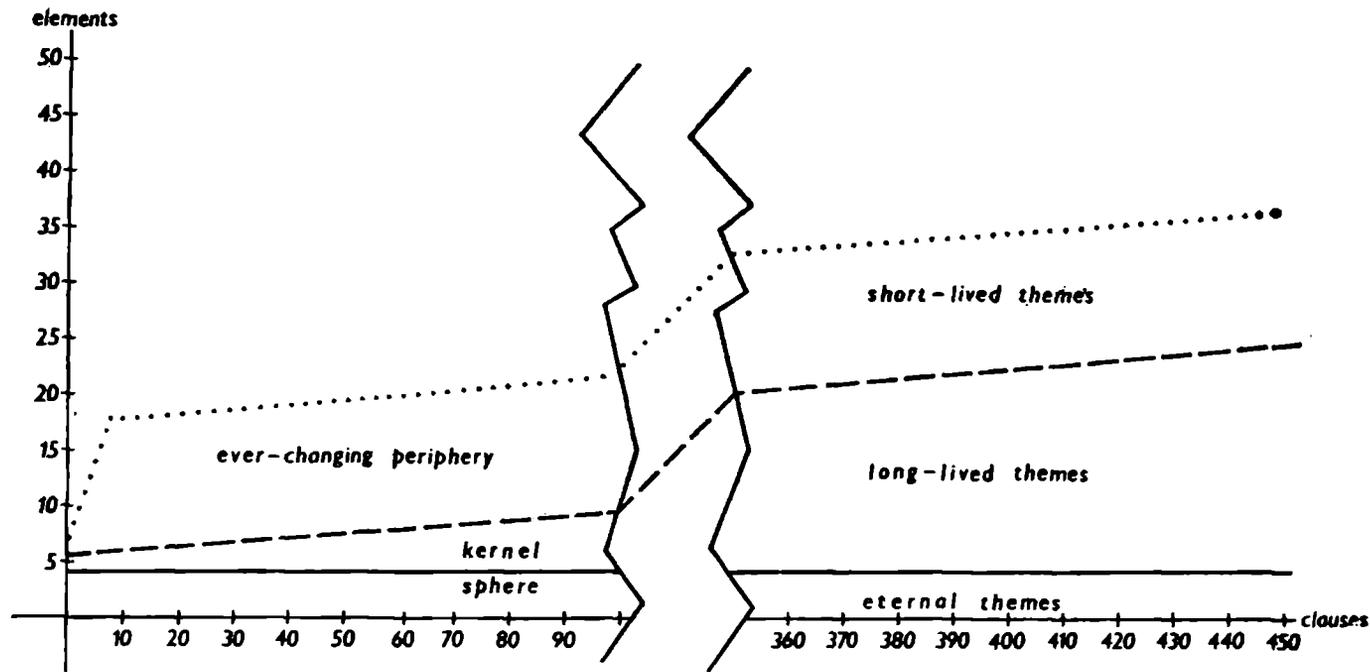
na straně jedné a soubor jejich kontextových vazeb k předešlému textu na straně druhé. Zachytíme-li pořadí vět souvislého textu jako sled bodů na horizontální ose, můžeme vertikálně nanášet počty prvků v jednotlivých větách jako body prostoru nad touto osou a počty kontextových vazeb jako body pod touto osou. Spojením jednotlivých bodů prostoru dostaneme dvě křivky, z nichž horní charakterizuje rozpětí úzké scény a spodní její kontextovou sepjatost v celé délce zkoumaného textu. Podle toho, zda počítáme jen explicitně vyjádřené tematické prvky a vazby, či také zahrnujeme tematické prvky a vazby implicitní, hovoříme (v uvedeném pořadí) buď o úzké scéně posluchače/čtenáře nebo o úzké scéně mluvčího/pisatele.

Široká scéna je dána prvky, které jsou potenciálními tématy nebo tuto vlastnost v průběhu souvislého textu nabývají. V podstatě lze rozlišit (i) tzv. věčná témata (4 prvky), (ii) dlouhodobá témata, jejichž počet se v průběhu zkoumaného textu zvyšuje od 1 prvku na začátku k 19 prvkům na konci, (iii) krátkodobá témata, která se z hlediska sémantické náplně neustále obměňují, avšak jejich počet zůstává relativně konstantní (ve zkoumaném textu 12,4 prvku). Široká scéna zkoumaného textu o 450 větách je vyjádřena křivkou, která charakterizuje jejich růst od 7 prvků na začátku k 37 prvkům na konci textu.