Preface

My first encounter with the theory of Functional Sentence Perspective, the topic of the present study, came about in 1995, when I was a student of a bachelor degree course in English language teaching. If memory does not fail me, it was halfway through the spring semester of that year when I stumbled across a new item in the linguistics section of our institute library. It was Jan Firbas' monograph entitled *Functional Sentence Perspective in Written and Spoken Communication*. I remember quite clearly that I spent several days unsuccessfully trying to grasp the philosophy of language communication it presented and its key concepts, such as the notion of *communicative dynamism*, which some linguists would describe as "unquestionably 'linguistic' in any reasonable sense of the term" (Beaugrande 1991a: 11), while others as based on "metaphorical formulations" (Sgall 2003: 280) or "vague terms" (Sgall 2000: 639).[1] In retrospect, the book was definitely a bit of an enigma to me at that time.

The turning point in my understanding of the theory of Functional Sentence Perspective (hereinafter also referred to as *FSP* or *the FSP theory*) came approximately two years later, when I had a rare chance to attend a lecture by Professor Jan Firbas in which he presented the key points of his theory with such brilliance and clarity that I picked up the book once again and, in 2000, I eventually chose FSP to be the main topic of my final-year diploma thesis (Drápela 2000), in which I used the FSP theory to compare some aspects of information flow in short news articles related to the same event. Upon a successful defence of the thesis and graduation, I was given an opportunity to continue the investigation of the FSP phenomena in a doctoral degree programme at Masaryk University in Brno, which I gratefully accepted after submitting a doctoral project that, as I see it now, was just too grandiose.

At that time, though, I deemed it absolutely necessary to keep pace with the new trends of doing linguistics, heavily influenced by a momentous book on the structure and use of the English language, *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber *et al.* 1999). This grammar has undeniably set the bar very high for linguists: register-oriented investigation of language structure and use by making sense of data obtained from very large computerized language

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[1]Sgall (2000) is a review of the monograph. For other reviews, see for example Chafe (1994), Geluykens (1994), Goutsos (1994), Uhlířová (1993), and Yoon (1995).

corpora. Without any doubt, the transition towards large-scale electronic language corpora was a logical step in linguistics at the turn of the millennium. The technology that facilitates this type of research was already there and the linguists were entering an era of information inflation.[2]

In light of this context, it looked quite natural for a researcher working within the FSP field to demand access to electronic language corpora that would contain also the FSP layer, in addition to the morphological, syntactic, and prosodic layers. Unfortunately, no such electronic corpus existed in those days. In fact, no such corpus has been compiled to this day.[3]

Thus, it became clear to me that the language corpus of the doctoral project, and consequently also of the present study, had to be constructed and FSP parsed manually. Furthermore, given the relative complexity of doing an FSP analysis, it was inevitable to reduce significantly the quantitative dimension of the project from, originally, a corpus of sixty register-differentiated texts intended to be analysed from the point of view of FSP. The resultant language corpus examined, therefore, comes nowhere near the 40 million words forming the corpus of the above-mentioned Longman's English grammar bible. Still, I strongly believe that the many years spent on the design and analysis of the relatively miniature corpus used in the present study not only allowed me to fulfil the stated research objectives and to gain better understanding of the principles governing the FSP phenomena, but also, as a by-product, gave me a chance to pave the way for computerised FSP analysis of texts in the future.

The text of this study is virtually identical with the text of my PhD dissertation submitted to Masaryk University in Brno in February 2009, except for a few mistakes corrected and statements rephrased, some minor updates in the References section, several newly added footnotes reflecting recent research developments relevant to the topic, and also footnotes fielding some of the detailed and thought-provoking comments on my dissertation from Profes-

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[2]The inflation has been truly enormous to the extent that even the British National Corpus, a 100 million word collection of samples of language, would resemble a tiny grain of sand compared with the amount of information produced by mankind during a single year: "Print, film, magnetic, and optical storage media produced about 5 exabytes of new information in 2002. Ninety-two percent of the new information was stored on magnetic media, mostly in hard disks. *How big is five exabytes?* If digitized with full formatting, the seventeen million books in the Library of Congress contain about 136 terabytes of information; five exabytes of information is equivalent in size to the information contained in 37,000 new libraries the size of the Library of Congress book collections." (Lyman & Varian 2003: Part 1.I.1.).

[3]It should be noted that within the framework of *Functional Generative Description*, which has been developed by the linguists adhering to the Prague branch of the Linguistic School of Prague, core elements of the *Topic-Focus Articulation*, a sister theory in relation to FSP, have been included into the *Prague Dependency Treebank*. See especially Buráňová, Hajičová and Sgall (2000), Hajičová, Panevová and Sgall (2002), and Hajičová (2003). Nonetheless, several conceptual differences between the FSP theory and the Topic-Focus Articulation make it less convenient to use the tagging scheme of the Topic-Focus Articulation for the purpose of FSP analysis. Unfortunately, the same can be said about recent approaches by several research projects abroad to include the description of the information structure of sentence into electronic corpora, for instance Baumann *et al.* (2004), Brunetti *et al.* (2009), Calhoun *et al.* (2005), Götze *et al.* (2007), and Paggio (2006a, 2006b).