

Drápela, Martin

Conclusions

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5 Conclusions

The present study examines selected aspects of functional syntax of two texts representing two registers of contemporary written English, the news register and the register of academic prose. The theoretical framework for this study is *the Brno approach* to the theory of *functional sentence perspective* described mainly in monographs by Firbas (1992) and Svoboda (1981a, 1989), and the concept of *thematic progressions* originating in studies by Daneš (1968 and 1974). These two theoretical components of the framework, which are briefly outlined in Section 2.1 and Section 2.2, were applied to an analysis of a corpus of 588 finite clauses of which 196 represent the news register and the remaining 392 represent the register of academic prose.

On a general level, this study presents results obtained from functional analysis of a language corpus in an attempt to answer hypotheses raised by Firbas (1974: 32), Daneš (1985: 188) and Fries (1995: 7) claiming that patterns of thematic progressions and other phenomena operating under the theory of functional sentence perspective are stylistically relevant, in other words, able to distinguish different register types from each other.

To address the stated claims, the present study provides statistical results of functional analysis carried out within the following six specific research areas: information contour of text, occurrence of communicative units and communicative fields, violation of the FSP Linearity Principle, occurrence of dynamic semantic scales, dynamics of broad and narrow scenes, and types of thematic progressions, including simple linear thematic progressions, progressions with continuous (constant) themes, and progressions with derived themes.

A survey of available literature pertaining to these research areas points to the fact that there are, unfortunately, only a handful of studies from a few researchers who have carried out their research using the FSP framework and methods similar to those used in the present study. A description of these studies is provided in Section 2.3. The survey leads to a conclusion that there are two major drawbacks that hinder making wider comparisons of the results offered in the analytical part of this study (Chapter 4) with the results of studies discussed in Section 2.3: the authors of the few available studies either describe different registers of English (predominantly the register of fiction) or they deviate in their FSP taxonomy from the key FSP concepts devised by linguists

adhering to the Brno approach to such a degree that it makes their taxonomy, including functional categories like *theme* and *rheme*, virtually incompatible with identically termed concepts used in the Brno approach.

Chapter 3 gives more details about the language corpus and the methods applied to the analysis. Striving to carry out the analysis of the selected texts in strict conformity with the concepts developed within the bounds of the Brno approach to functional sentence perspective, I propose only minor terminological modification of the well-established terms used in the FSP theory. The incentive for the modification is to facilitate a transition to computerised or computer-assisted FSP analysis of language data in foreseeable future. Thus, three new sets of FSP tags were devised for the analysis of the texts forming the corpus of this study. The three sets, termed *the C-DEF tags*, *the DSF tags*, and *the CD tags*, are defined in Section 3.3.

Chapter 4, which constitutes the core part of this study, presents statistically oriented results of FSP analysis of the selected texts.

The first section of this chapter briefly describes the information contour of the two texts in the corpus. Drawing on recent research in the field (namely Adam 2009), the discussion suggests that it is possible to see a textual paragraph as a communicative field composed of communicative units provided by the clausal communicative fields of the given paragraph. The results of the analysis indicate that the average number of communicative units constituting the communicative field of a paragraph is notably higher in the academic article (8.91 clausal communicative fields per paragraph) than in the news article (4.17 fields per paragraph). Unlike in the news article, there appears to be a correspondence between the segmentation of the academic article into sections and the average length of the paragraph communicative fields. This results in giving the academic article a more distinct information contour than in the case of the news article.

Section 4.2 provides an answer to a question about the inner structure of the representative communicative field which might be used to describe each of the two examined texts, and, possibly, also each of the two registers in general. The question is approached in two ways: by considering the frequency of occurrence of communicative units and the frequency of occurrence of communicative fields. The latter viewpoint requires making a further distinction between *surface distribution of CD* and *deep distribution of CD*. These two notions are, again, only minor terminological refinements of the already existing FSP terms *actual linear arrangement* and *interpretative arrangement* respectively. The statistical results suggest that seen from the point of view of communicative fields, and indirectly also from the point of view of communicative units, the two articles do not differ that much. The two articles share the patterns *T1r1R2R3* and *t1r1R2R3* as two most frequently occurring patterns of clausal communicative field. There is, nevertheless, a strikingly greater variability of the pattern in the academic article than in the news article – 137 vs 85 patterns at the level of surface distribution of CD and 45 vs 28 patterns at the level of deep distribution of CD.

Section 4.3 deals with the degree of violation of (or deviation from) the generally observed tendency in many Indo-European languages to arrange the surface sentence elements as tightly as possible in accordance with the gradually rising degrees of communicative dynamism, i.e. in harmony with the sequence *T-R*. Similarly to the previous section, the statistical data suggest here that the two articles do not stand apart from each other, both actually violating the *T-R* sequence by the same number (23 per cent) of clausal communicative fields.

Slight differences between the articles are, nevertheless, observable in the occurrence rates of three types of dynamic semantic scales: *the presentation scale*, *the quality scale*, and *the combined scale*. This is the subject matter of Section 4.4. By far the most frequently occurring type of dynamic semantic scale is the quality scale (87 per cent in the news article and 95 per cent in the academic article). The occurrence rates of the presentation scale are almost identical (3 per cent vs 4 per cent, respectively). The significantly higher occurrence rate of combined scale in the news article (10 per cent) is due to the appearance of *reporting clause – direct speech* pairs, which are given a different functional assessment in this study (in Section 3.2) and in other FSP studies.

The statistical results in Section 4.5 also seem to confirm the similar information status of the two articles. The analysis of the two articles from the point of view of broad and narrow scene dynamics, discussed in this section, yields very similar average value ratios: 4.57 communicative units vs 4.75 communicative units forming the broad scene of the news article and the academic article respectively, and 1.45 communicative units vs 1.44 communicative units forming the narrow scene. From the point of view of narrow scene, there is also a tendency in the academic article to cluster its communicative fields in a manner which is opposite to the tendency described in Section 4.1, i.e. to reduce the number of communicative units in communicative fields belonging to the middle sections of the academic article. This tendency is, nevertheless, much less pronounced than the information contour based on macrotexual communicative fields of paragraphs.

The last section of Chapter 4 characterizes the two articles in terms of the occurrence of different types of thematic progressions. The two articles differ in the ratio of simple linear thematic progressions. This type of progression appears to be less frequent in the news article (36 per cent) than in the academic article (46 per cent). As regards the thematic progression with continuous theme, the dissimilarity is less striking: 58 per cent in the news article and 50 per cent in the academic article. The thematic progressions with derived themes occur at the rate of 6 per cent in the news article and 4 per cent in the academic article, which is not an overwhelmingly large difference either. The frequencies related to the academic register seem to corroborate the findings by Libuše Dušková (2008: 239 and 2010: 256). The conclusions may also be considered to address Fries' (1995: 7, 8) hypothesis and observation regarding the correlation between patterns of thematic progressions and register types.

The presented analysis of selected aspects of functional sentence perspective in texts representing the news and academic prose registers of contemporary

written English suggests that these two registers appear to come very close to each other informationally. Nevertheless, owing to the fact that only a very small corpus of texts was used for the analysis, further research will be necessary to verify the findings presented in this study. Also, further investigation into the FSP phenomena will have to evaluate the proposed methodological adjustments to the current FSP framework, namely the system of FSP tags and its suitability for the already existing electronic language corpora. A good way to start may be a functional analysis of the language of fiction and the language of conversation, the other two major registers dealt with in LGSWE but not in the present treatise.