

4. Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP)

4.1 The theory of FSP

In this thesis I deal with English articles and their translation into Czech with respect to the theory of FSP. For that reason I find it necessary to pay attention to this issue and to explain the most important notions and concepts of FSP derived from the ideas of the Prague School of Linguistics. The main source I grounded this part on was *Functional Sentence Perspective in Written and Spoken Communication* by Jan Firbas (1992).

The Prague School of Linguistics - as a representative of a functional approach to language - devoted a considerable attention to the theory of FSP. The founder of the so called „aktuálního členění větného“¹³ in Czech context is Vilém Mathesius (1947). He introduced a twofold interpretation of sentences and distinguished two content elements which every utterance consists of:

- 1) the element about which something is stated = **the basis** (theme);
“východisko/téma/základ”
- 2) what is stated about the basis = **the nucleus** (rheme); “jádro/réma”

The unmarked sequence of these two elements is Th – Rh = **objective order**, the reverse sequence Rh – Th is called **subjective order** and is perceived as marked with emotiveness.

For the further discussion, it is useful to draw a line between the formal and the functional description of a sentence. In the former approach the sentence is assumed to be a part of the language system (langue), in the latter it is regarded as an utterance, as a part of a context (on the level of parole). As Firbas (1974: 15) emphasizes, the theory of FSP constitutes a part of the so called three-level approach to syntax which includes the semantic level, the grammatical level and the level of contextual organization (FSP). If a sentence is uttered, it necessarily has a context. So, the utterance is seen as embedded in its context. FSP is a property of uttered sentences (utterances), which means that it always operates within a context.

¹³ the Czech “aktuální” has the meaning of “being of immediate interest and concern”, which is not associated with the English “actual”; that’s why the term “functional sentence perspective” (FSP) was introduced as an equivalent to the Czech “aktuální členění větné” = AČV (Firbas 1974: 11).

4. 1. 1 Communicative dynamism

The two following chapters describe the theory of FSP as was elaborated by Jan Firbas (1992). He continued in the tradition of Mathesius but introduced a new concept of as the ground of FSP – **Communicative dynamism** (CD). Every sentence contains an element toward which it is orientated (perspectived) and which contributes most to the development of the communication and completes it. Such an element carries the highest degree of CD = the most **dynamic element**. Any linguistic element (a clause, a phrase, a word, a morpheme) can become a **carrier of CD**, as long as it conveys information (meaning) and participates in the development of communication (Firbas 1992: 7 – 8).

From this point of view, FSP is defined as the distribution of dynamic elements over a sentence. CD is in the sentence realized in **degrees**¹⁴. As was said above, FSP - and thus CD as well - are phenomena of an act of communication (parole), hence it is impossible to set its degrees objectively by a particular figure; it is not measurable, its value is always given in relation to other elements involved. On that account it has to be viewed rather as a **relative** value (Firbas 1992: 8). That obviously differs by individual elements; some elements contribute less (are less dynamic), other more (more dynamic elements) to the development of CD. The extent of contribution of the elements depends extensively on the character of information they convey, whether it is **retrievable** or **irretrievable** from the immediately relevant preceding linguistic context. This will be discussed in more detail later on (section 4. 1. 2).

Each sentence can be interpreted in regard to the hierarchy of carriers of CD, from those with the lowest degree to those with the highest degree of CD. This is called by Firbas (1992: 12) **interpretative arrangement** and it always takes into account the relative value concerning the elements in that particular utterance. The interpretative arrangement corresponds to the gradual rise in CD. It may coincide with linear arrangement (word order from the grammatical point of view), but needs not.

To summarize the information found out so far in Firbas's own words:

Communicative dynamism (CD) [is] a phenomenon constantly displayed by linguistic elements in the act of communication. It is an inherent quality of communication and manifests itself in constant developments towards (...) the fulfilment of a communicative purpose. (...) by a degree of communicative

¹⁴ Firbas differs from Mathesius in this respect; Mathesius suggested a twofold division into elements: theme and rheme.

4. 1. 2 Factors of FSP

Every language is accessible through FSP, because every language is here to fulfil the purpose of communication. However, the strategies how to achieve this goal may differ. FSP is a result of interplay of three factors which have to be taken into consideration while analysing a written text (Firbas 1992: 10 – 11). The means for expressing FSP may differ from language to language; each language may be dominated by a different factor. The three factors contributing to FSP are¹⁵:

- a) **contextual factor**
- b) **semantic factor**
- c) **linear modification factor**

ad a)

The matter under discussion is the delimitation of the context which plays a decisive role within the theory of FSP. I will deal with this topic quite in detail because it is involved among categories examined in the analysis. Firbas's (1992: 21 – 40) conception is narrowed to the **immediately relevant context** - expressed explicitly in the preceding discourse, as opposed to the rest of the complex of context - context created by the general experience and knowledge shared by the speaker and the addressee.

It is important to distinguish between information marked as known (given) by the definite article and given in the sense of FSP. In the latter case, the sentence element is classified either as **context-dependent** = retrievable or as **context-independent** = irretrievable from the immediately relevant verbal and situational context¹⁶. Context-dependent information then cannot express information towards which the sentence is perspectived, it cannot be the rheme.

The retrievability is signalled by co-reference¹⁷ (repetition, pronouns, morphological exponents, ellipsis). Similar function is displayed by synonyms, expressions with associative meaning or cohesive ties. But these expressions, as Firbas

¹⁵ On the level of spoken language (which is though not in the focus of our interest) another factor is added: **intonation**, taking into account the prosodic prominence (weight) of individual elements.

¹⁶ Firbas's (1992: 23 – 26) conception of context distinguishes between the notions *verbal* and *situational*. Verbal context is explicitly expressed by means of linguistic elements. Situational context (immediately relevant) includes, firstly, notions of "permanent obviousness" such as the participant in the communicative act: the speaker and the listener, and secondly, information retrievable from the extra linguistic situation at the moment of utterance.

¹⁷ referential identity = two elements have the same referent (Firbas 1992: 31).

(1992: 35) explains, usually convey some additional meaning that is not retrievable from the immediately relevant context and are as a result not fully context-dependent.

In some cases – especially in the introductory sentence of a story – a context-independent piece of information is presented as known, as context-dependent (e.g. by using the definite article). This is called by Firbas (1992: 40) “the in media res effect”. Consider the opening sentence in the analysed text:

(51) *The mole had been working very hard all the morning, spring-cleaning his little home.*

In conclusion, let me point out the discrepancy of context dependence by Firbas and other linguists. Sgall operates with the notion “contextual boundness” which is based on “*notions that at the moment a sentence is pronounced ... are activated from the stock of knowledge shared by the interlocutors*” (Firbas 1992: 38 – 39). Nor Chafe’s criterion of the context-dependence can be equated with that of Firbas:

his [Chafe’s] criterion is based on the speaker’s assumption of the state of the addressee’s consciousness. My criterion [Firbas’s], on the other hand, is based on the actual presence of an element in, or its absence from, the immediately relevant context. (Firbas 1992: 37)

ad b)

Under semantic factor, Firbas (1992: 41 – 65) understands the impact of the semantic character of a linguistic element and of the character of its semantic relations on the distribution of CD. Firbas starts in his inquiry by the semantic content of a verb and examines its relation to its potential competitors.

I would like to pay more attention to Firbas’s scales of **dynamic semantic functions** (Firbas 1992: 86). The qualification “dynamic” means that the semantic content is linked with a particular contextual situation and is actively participating in the communication, which can be perspectived towards (Firbas 1992: 66 - 7):

I) the phenomenon presented → **Presentation Scale** (PS)

II) the quality ascribed to the phenomenon or to its specification → **Quality Scale** (QS)

So, two sets of dynamic functions are involved:

PS - Setting (Set), Presentation of Phenomenon (Pr), Phenomenon presented (Ph)

(52) *Linnets (Ph) sang (Pr) in the trees (Set).*

QS – Setting (Set), Bearer of Quality (B), Ascribing a Quality (AofQ), Quality (Q), Specification (Sp), Further Specification (FSp)

(53) *Ages ago (Set) a young king (B) ruled (Q) his country (Sp) capriciously and despotically (FSp).*

(54) *A writer (B) felt (AofQ) despondent and disillusioned (Q).*

They can be combined with the following interpretative arrangement:

Set – Pr – Ph – B – AofQ – Q – Sp – FSp

ad c)

Firbas (1992: 117 – 140) deals with the problem of relationship between word order and FSP. He was inspired by Mathesius's approach to word order as a system of mutual relations of word-order-principles that he slightly modified:

- 1) the grammatical principle
- 2) the FSP linearity principle: Th – Tr- Rh
- 3) the emotive principle
- 4) the rhythmical principle

Firbas remarks to this: “*At least in respect of the written language - Mathesius regarded the word order as the only means of FSP*”, whereas he ranks it among other factors which contribute to FSP: “*apart from word order there are other means in written language that are capable of signalling FSP*” (Firbas 1992: 120). It follows that in the hierarchy, word order is inferior to FSP.

4.2 The Czech vs. the English language system

As far as FSP is concerned, Mathesius (1975) regarded English as less susceptible to it than Czech. Firbas (1966), on the other hand, came to an opposite conclusion, seeing FSP as a central phenomenon in both languages. They both express somehow the FSP but each uses various means and strategies. The differences are caused by distinct structures of the two languages; different systems of word order being the most important one (Firbas 1992: 254).

As pointed out, word order is influenced by several factors, from which different ones are dominant in individual languages. Mathesius captures the main distinction in English and Czech word order as follows:

In Czech, word order is the most important device available for the clear expression of functional sentence perspective. Czech word order is well suited to perform this function owing to its flexibility. On the other hand, English word order is much more fixed, since it has grammatical function. (Mathesius 1975: 85)

Languages maintain to reconcile the clash between grammatical (actual linear arrangement) and psychological level (pieces of information ranked from the less important to the most = interpretative arrangement). According to Mathesius (1975: 100), English goes very far in this reconciliation. Mathesius ascribes to English a strong tendency to make the grammatical subject express the theme:

In Czech the subject has largely the function of the agent In English, on the other hand, the subject has to a considerable extent acquired thematic function.

(Mathesius 1975: 101)

Firbas (1966), on the other hand, shows in his article that non-thematic subjects are not as rare in English (this topic is discussed in more detail in the following chapter). The subject in English may be both thematic and rhematic, nonetheless, its position is grammatically fixed; therefore the pragmatic function can't be identified on account of its position in the sentence. The communicative function may be signalled by articles.

4.3 English articles and FSP

Chapter 3 dealt with the relationship of definiteness and FSP which asserted itself – to a limited extent - even in Czech.¹⁸ Now, I am getting to the very point of the present study: the inquiry into the function of English articles in FSP. This will be supported in the analysis; nonetheless, I find it useful to mention some facts from previous research in advance.

Articles could be, without doubts, counted to means of FSP. The question is, to what extent are they capable of making an element thematic or rhematic – this is how Firbas (1966) put the question. Viewed from another perspective – as it examined Dušková (1985) - in what hierarchy they stand to other means of FSP. The last aspect matters above all if definiteness operates against FSP.

In general we can say that the definite and indefinite articles are, with respect to their semantics, predetermined to express theme and rheme, respectively. This is especially true about definite article in anaphoric use and non-generic indefinite noun phrase, as Dušková (1985: 58) points out. But it is not their permanent quality, and a deeper inquiry into this problem reveals that it is not as simple as that. FSP of a concrete utterance is a result of interplay of three factors: context, linearity and semantics, the

¹⁸ Zabor's (1999: 239) observation about Slavic languages without articles (like Polish and Czech are) raises an interesting point. In these languages, the features such as specific referent and contextual givenness or newness are de facto marked by FSP and by other linguistic devices: verb aspect and demonstratives. This fact just proves the interconnection of the category of definiteness and FSP.

last one including the semantic quality of articles or let us say definiteness. So Firbas (1966) emphasize that the function of articles in discourse depends on all these FSP factors.

4.3.1 The indefinite article in FSP

The indefinite article can be understood as a simple signal of rhematicity – but only under certain conditions. Dušková's (1985: 62) results of the inquiry into non-generic indefiniteness includes the following common occurrences of the indefinite article in rhematic position: first mention, the so called “referential non – identity” (the noun is repeated with new modifying elements), post-verbal elements such as objects, complements, and adverbials. Nevertheless, the rhematic subject with indefinite is also possible.

Firbas (1966: 243) devoted his attention to non-thematic subjects and formulated the basic conditions under which a noun or noun phrase in subject position may become rhematic: the noun in the NP is irretrievable = context independent and the verb conveys the meaning of “appearance on the scene”.

(55) *A fly settled on his hair.*

(56) *A girl came in.*

(57) *A goldfinch flew over the shepard's head.*

All the verbs *settle*, *come* and *fly* represent verbs expressing appearance on the scene. Their semantic content implies a kind of existence or coming into existence, hence the addressee's attention is logically drawn to the phenomenon presented on the scene (expressed by the subject) rather than to the verb, and the subject carries a higher degree of CD. It typically occurs with indefinite noun phrase.

The zero article with plural nouns is considered to be a counterpart of the indefinite article and in relation to FSP behaves in the same way. In his paper on non-thematic subjects in English, Firbas sums up the basic function of the indefinite article:

The non-generic, but not the generic, indefinite article always marks its substantive as contextually independent, i. e. as conveying new, unknown information; under favourable conditions, in co-operation with other FSP means, it may even mark it out as the rheme of the sentence. (Firbas 1966: 245)

4.3.2 The definite article in FSP

One aspect of the semantic content of the definite article - familiarity - is of great importance in FSP, since the criterion of known and unknown information plays here an important part (context dependence is one of the FSP factors). It is evident that “*the definite article cannot by itself render its substantive more dynamic*” (Firbas 1966: 247).

(58) ***The girl*** came in, brushing him with her shoulder as she went past.

Compared with example (56) we must interpret the subject in (58) as theme. Even if Firbas (Firbas 1966: 246) adds that raising of CD can be - in the presence of *the* - achieved by other means.

(59) ***The word “fisherman”*** came into his head.

Here the sentence is perspectived towards the NP *the word “fisherman”*. So example (59) demonstrates that *the* is not prevented from being rhematic. It is only in the case when it marks its noun as theme. Coming back to the anaphoric use (which is a “context – related” sub-type of familiarity), anaphoric definites are mostly thematic (Dušková 1985: 66) - it logically follows from the essence of anaphoric reference: the referent must be mentioned in the previous context and thus context – dependent, which prevents it from being rhematic. Although from Dušková’s (1985: 66) findings follows, quite surprisingly, that an anaphoric definite article in thematic NP is not as often as would be probably expected because it has a strong competitor in more common anaphoric devices like demonstrative pronouns *this* and *these*.

In conclusion Dušková summarizes:

The types of definiteness relevant from the FSP point of view mostly operate in the same direction as the other means of FSP in that anaphoric devices are mostly found in the subject, non-generic indefinite determiners with post-verbal sentence parts. (Dušková 1985: 70)

4.3.3 FSP of the noun phrase

Finally, I would like to add a brief comment on functional perspective of the noun phrase, as was elaborated by Aleš Svoboda in *Functional Sentence Perspective of the Noun Phrase* (1987). Following the Firbas’s (1992: 17) conception of a sentence as a distributional field which may consist of subfields, Svoboda (1987) concentrates on the noun phrase (NP) as an information field (or subfield) within which the elements of FSP are distributed. The basic NP usually serves as an introduction of a phenomenon into the discourse, which is called “the presentation on the scene” (Pr). Svoboda applies

the same patterns (semantic role of elements and their function in FSP) on the analysis of the NP, (cf. Svoboda 1987: 64):

(60) ***The girl*** is standing in the corner?

The girl functions as one unit in the sentence. It may be further divided into separate communicative units as well:

ThPr..... the article (*the*)

TrPr number and case signals¹⁹ (singular and object-case)

RhPr the notional content of *girl*

The headword, if context-independent, performs the Ph-function and is rhematic, the article (or rather the determiner) performs the Set-function and is thematic. By complex NPs the analysis can be extended to the Quality Scale including the bearer of quality (headword), quality, specification and further specification (attributives), which then function as transitional or rhematic elements. For the present paper is interesting the classification of articles, which - within a NP - always performs the semantic role of delimiting the scene (Set) and functions as theme proper²⁰:

The scene is often represented by the definite and indefinite article, signalling the presence or the absence of a tie with a given verbal, situational or experiential context at the very moment of communication, and – therefore – locating the presented phenomenon in a most general way. (Svoboda 1987: 63)

In the analysis, however, I didn't apply this approach. The analysis deals with the noun phrase as a whole, as one communicative unit within the whole sentence.

¹⁹ As TrPr, number and case signals fulfil the corresponding function as temporal and modal exponents in verbal phrase (Svoboda 1987: 65).

²⁰ As ThPr, articles (and possessive determiners) are regarded as counterparts to personal pronouns in the verbal phrase. This is in full accord, as Svoboda (1987: 65) points out, with the same prosodic features they all display: they are unstressed and subjects to reduction.

III. Analysis

1. Introduction

In the first part of this thesis, I examined various aspects of the use of articles in English in theory. The second part is based on a comparative analysis of parallel English and Czech texts included in the corpus Kačenka/K2. The analysis concentrates especially on the function of articles in FSP and maps the means of their translation into Czech.

I proceeded in two steps: first, I listed all occurrences of definite and indefinite noun phrases and determined certain characteristics concerning definiteness and the role in FSP. The second step consisted in summarizing and drawing conclusions from the corpus findings.

I put several research questions which I tried to answer on the basis of the information gained from the analysis. What is the function of English articles with respect to functional sentence perspective? In what extent do they contribute to the distribution of communicative dynamism over the elements within a sentence? How is this signalled in the parallel Czech text?

The text I analysed is an introductory chapter from the novel *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame (1908). It was translated by Míla Grimmichová as *Žabákova dobrodružství* [The Adventure of the Frog] (1987). Both the English and the Czech versions are included in the corpus Kačenka/K2. The text is divided into single sentences which made the analysis easy. The reader can thus read and compare each English sentence with its Czech translation “simultaneously”, another reason for the choice of this particular text was the clarity and relative simplicity of sentence structure. Grahame’s novel belongs to the genre of literature for children; therefore clear structure and simple sentences, that don’t involve a lot of ambiguous expressions, can be expected in such a novel.

The text is included in the appendix of this thesis.

2. Categories examined

The analysis itself is presented in two tables. I examined the definite and the indefinite noun phrases separately and with the focus on noun phrases that operate within verbal predication.²¹ I did not take into consideration occurrences of articles in subordinate position within a noun phrase. Such instances would require an interpretation from another point of view – FSP of nominal phrase as was described by Svoboda (1987). There were not enough occurrences of this type in the analyzed text, so it would not be possible to draw any conclusions, thus I left them completely from the analysis.

I decided for several categories that should be determined by the articles in the text. The categories include:

- reference: generic x specific
- context: context-dependent x context-independent
- linearity: pre-verbal x post-verbal position (pre-head x post-head)
- communicative dynamism: theme x rheme
- types of non-generic definiteness (only with the definite NP):
anaphoric x cataphoric x situational

The subcategory “situational” is to be understood as a fusion of the situational and associative reference which were presented in the theoretical part (see p. 13). For the purpose of this thesis I did not find it necessary to distinguish these two types of specific definite reference²² and took them as one which represents the reference to extra-linguistic reality as opposed to the anaphoric and cataphoric references, which refer to some entities present in linguistic context.

I also looked for parallels of English articles in the Czech text. Nonetheless, they were rare, so I comment on them separately and did not include them into the tables.

I would like to emphasize that I focused on common nouns by which it is felicitous to ask about the relation of the given article to its function in FSP. I left out vocatives completely, since they are special units. Dušková (1994: 98) classifies them as separate units that are not involved in the sentence structure and are morphologically characterized by absence of articles. Nor do I take into consideration proper nouns, idiomatic expressions and expressions labeled as “special cases of article usage”

²¹ Either in the basic distributional field or in the distributional subfield (e.g. subordinate clauses). It was not necessary for the present analysis to distinguish between these two types of occurrences.

²² Moreover, the associative (or bridging cross-reference) as such is a borderline; both the situational and associative uses are based on general knowledge (see p. 14).

in Chapter 2. 3. 3. In these cases - as was shown in the chapter devoted to theoretical background - the use of articles is given by morphological rules, conventions or other motivations (Dušková 1994: 80) and the choice of article is therefore excluded from signaling the degree of CD. These instances are involved in the overview (they are marked with an asterisk) but not in the statistics.