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## ON SOME BASIC ISSUES OF THE THEORY OF FUNCTIONAL SENTENCE PERSPECTIVE

### Comments on Alexander Szwedek's critique

Jan Firbas

In a paper entitled 'Some problems of contrastive analysis and text linguistics', prepared for the Conference on Contrastive Projects, Charzykowy, 3—6 December 1980, and distributed in pre-print form to the participants of the conference, Alexander Szwedek offered a number of critical remarks on my approach to functional sentence perspective (Szwedek 1980b). As these remarks concern some basic issues of the theory of functional sentence perspective, I feel convinced it will not be without interest to discuss them in detail.

In the first part of his paper, which I shall not discuss, Szwedek deals with problems of relation between sentences and presuppositions. One of the problems involved is 'that deep (semantic) structure categories and relations often converge in the surface structure, and one constituent may have more functions than one'. He finds that a clear description and classification of these categories and the relations between them is often rendered difficult by the interaction between two or more functions of the same constituent. In his opinion, this difficulty accounts for the vagueness and inconsistency of the description of such concepts as 'theme', 'rheme', 'given', 'new', etc. He maintains that the ambiguity may be traced back to Mathesius' conception of 'aktuální členění větné' ('aktuelle Satzgliederung', referred to by me as 'functional sentence perspective' or 'FSP' for short). He further maintains that the complexity of the problem has been increased with the introduction of the concept of 'communicative dynamism'. It is in the second part of his paper that the problems related to this and other concepts of FSP are taken up.

Szwedek's call for clarification of concepts and categories is undoubtedly justified. It is, however, unfortunate that his presentation of my views and conclusions is not always accurate and may even mislead those unacquainted with my researches into FSP. Nevertheless, his critique, starting on the fifth and ending on the eighth page of the pre-print, provides a welcome opportunity to return to some basic issues of the theory of FSP. In order not to misinterpret the critic's views, I shall quote his critique in full. It will be printed here in italics and accompanied by my

comments. For easier reference it will be divided into sections, which will be numbered by me. Longer quotations drawn from other sources than the critique will appear in small print.

Szwedek's critique of my approach to FSP starts as follows.

*(i) The complexity of this problem has increased with the introduction of the concept of Communicative Dynamism (CD) (Firbas 1964). It seems that Communicative Dynamism was introduced to provide matching elements for the semantic and grammatical structure of the utterance. Those structures in their simple form consist of three elements each. The original matching of the elements can be shown as follows (Daneš 1964):*

<i>Grammatical structure</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>V</i>	<i>O</i>
<i>Semantic structure</i>	<i>Ag</i>	<i>Ac</i>	<i>G</i>
<i>Thematic structure</i>	<i>T(opic)</i>		<i>C(omment)</i>

### INTRODUCTION OF CONCEPTS

Two minor points are involved here. They concern the introduction of the concepts of 'communicative dynamism' and 'transition' (cf. here p. 12).

Strictly speaking, the concept of 'communicative dynamism' was introduced earlier than 1964. Together with its Czech counterpart 'výpovědní dynamičnost' the term 'communicative dynamism' (= CD) was used for the first time in 1956 (see the Czech paper Firbas 1956 and its Engl. summary). The concept of CD was introduced to capture the non-static quality displayed by communication in its development (unfolding) of the information and consisting in advancing this development.

As to 'transition', it has not been introduced by me, but employed by other scholars before me. For instance, Mathesius speaks of 'přechod' (transition) and 'přechodní členy' (transitional elements) (Mathesius 1947.375), Kopečný of 'tranzitní výrazy' (transitional expressions), 'tranzitní členy' (transitional expressions) (Kopečný 1952.25, 238), Daneš of 'přechodný člen' (transitional element) (Daneš 1957.70). (Cf. also Paul's 'Bindeglied' in Paul 1909.284.)

### ORIGINAL MATCHING OF FUNCTIONS

The wording 'Communicative Dynamism was introduced' and the wording 'the question of matching at that stage' (occurring in the first sentence of section (ii)) seem to indicate that the phrase 'original matching' is meant to refer to the early stages of the research into FSP.<sup>1</sup> It must, however, be emphasized that neither Daneš nor myself have ever claimed that there is perfect (invariable) congruence between the semantic function of Agent, the syntactic function of Subject and the FSP function of Theme, or between Goal, Object and Rheme, or between Action, Predicative Verb and Transition. For the semantic and grammatical sentence structure Agent-Subject — Action-Verb — Goal-Object, the con-

<sup>1</sup> Spaced out by myself.

gruence Agent-Subject-Theme — Action-Verb-Transition — Goal-Object-Rheme holds good if this structure is entirely context-independent or context-dependent merely through its Subject-Agent element. This is explicitly stated, for instance, in the very Firbas 1974.20 quotation, adduced by the critic further below (see section (v) of the critique). The relevant part of this quotation is the following:

If the semantic agent-action-goal pattern expressed by means of the grammatical subject-verb-object pattern are contextually independent in its entirety or contextually dependent merely through its agent-subject element (*A/The girl broke a vase*), the following interpretation applies. The verb will carry a lower degree of CD than the object, but a higher degree of CD than the subject. — Firbas 1974.19—20

It would therefore be wrong to conclude that invariable congruence between the discussed functions has ever been claimed at any stage, original or later, of the inquiry into FSP.

At this point, it will not be out of place if I turn the reader's attention from the original to the latest stage of my inquiry into FSP.

Developing the ideas of Dokulil and Daneš (1958.238), I have come to distinguish between static semantics and dynamic semantics. By the latter I mean the functioning of semantic contents and semantic relations in the act of communication, i. e. at the moment a definite communicative purpose is being fulfilled. In fulfilling it, various semantic functions induce the semantic contents to contribute to the development of the communication in an uneven manner, making them carry different degrees of CD.<sup>2</sup> The rise in CD displayed by the functions is reflected by two tentatively established scales (Scale A, Scale B), which can be fused into one Fused Scale — A: SCENE (SETTING(S)) — EXISTENCE/APPEARANCE on the scene — PHENOMENON existing/appearing on the scene; B: SCENE (SETTING(S)) — BEARER of quality — QUALITY — SPECIFICATION of quality — FURTHER specification(s); Fused Scale: SCENE (SETTING(S)) — EXISTENCE/APPEARANCE on the scene — PHENOMENON appearing/existing on the scene — BEARER of quality — QUALITY — SPECIFICATION — FURTHER specification(s). In principle, the scales cover functions performed by context-independent elements. Context-dependent elements tend to neutralize the functions and to become merely scenic. They may continue to perform non-neutralized functions (esp. that of BEARER of quality, but not those of SPECIFICATION) provided the context-independent elements are capable of co-signalling these functions with sufficient clarity. Various neutralization processes necessitate the establishment of an archiscale suggested in Firbas 1981.44. The way the scales are implemented has been discussed and illustrated

<sup>2</sup> Let me recall that by a degree of CD I mean the relative extent to which a linguistic element contributes towards the further development of the communication. Development is not to be understood as a word-order concept. Linear arrangement is merely one of the factors through the interplay of which the degrees of CD are signalled (cf. here pp. 17, 23, 27—8).

esp. in Firbas 1975 (quoted by Szwedek)<sup>3</sup>, 1975b,<sup>4</sup> 1981 and Svoboda 1982.

Provided the contextual conditionings given in Firbas 1974.20 (see the quotation above) apply, the grammatical S-V-O structure will enter into the following congruence relations:

Semantic structure	Ag	Ac	G
Syntactic structure	S	V	O
FSP	B	Q	Sp
	Th	Tr	Rh <sup>5,6</sup>

(ii) *The question of matching at that stage involved the problem of whether and when the verb belongs to the theme or to the rheme. To partly answer that question Firbas introduced the notion of transition (Tr) or transitional element. Now the problem was not simply defining theme and rheme (equivalent to given and new information on the basis of Mathesius' description (a) above)<sup>7</sup> but also defining Transition. Thus there could be no longer a bipartite but gradual distinction between the elements under discussion. According to Firbas (1964) the degree of CD carried by a sentence element is defined as "the extent to which the sentence element contributes to the development of the communication, to which it 'pushes the communication forward' as it were. It is obvious that elements conveying new, unknown information show higher degrees of CD than elements conveying known information" (270). Theme is defined as having the lowest and rheme as having the highest degree of CD, Transition being defined as having a higher degree of CD than theme, and lower than rheme.*

### MATCHING OF FUNCTIONS IN GENERAL

It is not correct to say that I had recourse to the notion of transition in order to contribute towards the solution of the problem whether and when

<sup>3</sup> In the bibliography attached to his paper, Szwedek quotes four papers of mine (Firbas 1964, 1972, 1974, 1975). Let me add that my papers on FSP published before 1973 are listed and annotated in Firbas and Golková 1975; Golková 1981 lists my papers up to 1981.

<sup>4</sup> Firbas 1975 should be understood as Firbas 1975a. The 'a', however, has not been added to make the reference Firbas 1975 applicable both in Szwedek's critique and in my comments. (Szwedek refers only to Firbas 1975a, using the reference Firbas 1975).

<sup>5</sup> Semantic structure: Ag(ent), Ac(tion), G(oal of action). Syntactic structure: S(ubject), V(erb), O(bject). A(dverbial element). FSP: B(earer of quality), Q(uality), Sp(ecification of quality), Th(eme), Tr(ansition), Rh(eme).

<sup>6</sup> Let me emphasize again that the dynamic semantic functions are not invariably linked with certain grammatical functions or with certain types of semantic context. For instance, the semantic 'Ag, Ac, G' set could be implemented by the passive 'S-V-Agency' structure (*The vase was broken by a girl*). Under the contextual conditions stipulated above (in the Firbas 1972.79 quotation), it would enter into the following congruence relations:

Semantic structure:	G	Ac	Ag
Syntactic structure:	S	V	A <sub>ag</sub>
FSP:	B	Q	Sp
	Th	Tr	Rh

<sup>7</sup> A reference to a preceding section of Szwedek's paper; this section does not form part of the extensive quotation adduced in the present discussion.

the verb belongs to the theme or to the rheme. Following Mathesius, I employed the term 'transition' already in my first paper on FSP (Firbas 1956), but at the same time emphatically demanded that a grammatical element should not be invariably linked with a certain function within the communicative perspective.<sup>8</sup> This is borne out by the quotation adduced below and is in harmony with what has been said on the congruence (matching) of functions in the comments on section (i) of the critique. It was only in the course of further research that it became clear to me that the finite verb form shows an unmistakable tendency to carry an amount of CD that ranks between the lowest and the highest degrees of CD, in other words, tends to be transitional. This finding was not at variance with observations made earlier, for instance by Paul (1909.287). The following quotation is drawn from my first paper on FSP.<sup>9</sup>

... we should like to issue an emphatic warning against the conclusion that certain grammatical elements must perform certain functions in the communicative perspective. Such a conclusion might be prompted by an overvaluation of the unmistakable existence of points of contact between the grammatical structure and the communicative perspective (cf., e. g., the English tendency to render the subject thematic). The last court of appeal, however, remains the contextual situation at the very moment of utterance. In this way, even a pronominal subject, which usually shows a very low degree of CD, can — in a certain contextual situation — come to carry the highest degree of CD. This, for instance, applies to *I am writing letters* (, not he), in which the initial *I* is undoubtedly rhematic, i. e. carrying the highest degree of CD. Etc. — Firbas 1956.98

The question of the congruence between the semantic, grammatical and FSP functions is evidently very important. Mathesius himself stressed that the way the syntactic and the FSP phenomena are related is one of the most characteristic features of a language (Mathesius 1947.235). It can be expected that further inquiries into the congruence of functions will throw valuable light on how the semantic and the syntactic structures operate in fulfilling the communicative purpose imposed upon them in the act of communication.

One problem is of particular interest here, that of the functions of the temporal and modal exponents of the finite verb (or for short, the TMEs) at the semantic, the syntactic and the FSP levels. An extensive inquiry (Firbas 1965, 1968, 1975) has shown that within first instance<sup>10</sup> the TMEs

<sup>8</sup> Translating 'aktuální linie', a designation meaning the distribution of degrees of CD over the linear arrangement of sentence elements. The term 'functional sentence perspective' could be used here. Its first appearance, however, occurred later: in the English summary of a Czech paper of mine published in 1957 (Firbas 1957).

<sup>9</sup> An English translation of the original Czech text.

<sup>10</sup> Let me recall that a semantic and grammatical sentence structure operates within second instance if it is repeated or creates the impression of being repeated, at the same time standing in sharp, heavy contrast on account of one semantic content or even only one semantic feature of such a content (*He HAS gone to Prague, HE has gone to Prague*). The heavily contrasted semantic content or semantic feature functions as rheme proper, the rest of the semantic content of the entire sentence as an extensive theme. Sentence structures that do not come to stand in such sharp, heavy contrast operate within first instance. There are, of course, borderline cases. (Cf., e. g., Firbas 1968.15-18.)

display wellnigh perfect congruence between these functions. Within first instance they invariably carry the lowest degree of CD within transition. (The notional component of the finite verb tends to be transitional as well; it can, however, become rhematic or — less frequently — even thematic.) In this way, they come to serve as a link, and at the same time as a boundary, between the thematic and the non-thematic section of the sentence. Though very often occurring in the middle of the sentence, the link/boundary is not ultimately to be interpreted in word-order, but in relational terms; relational in regard to the gamut of degrees of CD, that is. It is not invariably linked with any particular position within the sentence.

The congruence of functions displayed by the TMEs is a highly important phenomenon. As the very implements of predication, they constitute the centre of the syntactic relations within the sentence. At the same time they serve as centre in regard to the distribution of degrees of CD within the sentence. (N. B. In neither case has 'centre' been used as a word-order term here, although the phenomenon denoted by it indeed frequently operates within the centre of the sentence. As used here, 'centre' is ultimately a relational term.) This plays a role of paramount importance in the delimitation of the theme.<sup>11</sup>

### MATHESIUS' CONCEPTION OF TRANSITION

One further point deserves special mention. Mathesius not only used the term 'transition', he also described the phenomenon he denoted by it. The following quotation contains this description. (The English translation is mine.)

As to a clear separation of the communicative basis [i. e., theme — J. F.] from the communicative core [i. e., rheme — J. F.], it is best if the interspace between these two basic elements of the semantic structure of the sentence is filled by transitional elements. They are elements that, though still belonging to the sphere of the communicative core, occur on its periphery and constitute a transition between the communicative core and the communicative basis. I have explained their character in the paper on functional sentence perspective.<sup>12</sup> — Mathesius 1947:375

### BIPARTITION

The division of the sentence into theme, transition and rheme and a partly or fully implemented gamut of degrees of CD indeed permit to speak of tripartition or even pluripartition. But tripartition, or pluripartition for that matter, does not do away with bipartition. Owing to the

<sup>11</sup> The described central position of the TMEs is in harmony with the central position of the verbal sentence within the system of language. In a separate paper (Firbas 1982). I have attempted to show how against this background it is possible to answer the question whether a sentence can be themeless, transitionless or rhemeless. (Cf. also here pp. 15—6.)

<sup>12</sup> Translating 'aktuální členění větné'. Cf. here note<sup>8</sup>.

central position of the TMEs serving as a boundary between the thematic and the non-thematic section of the sentence, bipartition hierarchically ranks above tripartition and pluripartition in general.<sup>13</sup> The analyst, however, can select and concentrate on any of the three types of partition to good purpose. All this has been stated in Firbas 1974, a paper quoted in the critic's bibliography. Let me recall here at least some of the relevant statements made in that paper.

The problem of the theme is naturally related to that of the segmentation of the sentence on the level of FSP. Is there a bipartition of theme and rheme, or a tripartition of theme, transition and rheme? It is possible to proceed even further ... — Firbas 1974.25

The delicacy of segmentation depends on the purpose of the investigation. — Firbas 1974.25

In their [the TMEs are meant]<sup>14</sup> non-marked [first-instance]<sup>14</sup> use, they mediate between the thematic and the non-thematic section of the sentence... If this interpretation is correct, the temporal and modal exponents of the finite verb would constitute a boundary between the thematic and the non-thematic section of the sentence occurring in sharp, ad hoc contrast on account of one of their elements [i. e. sentences occurring within second instance]<sup>14</sup>. — Firbas 1974.26

### DELIMITATION OF THE THEME

In my researches I have continued to deal with the problem of the theme. I still hold that the element(s) constituting the theme carries (carry) the lowest degree(s) of CD within the sentence. But continuing the researches, I have attempted to answer two legitimate questions.

First, as the theme can consist of more than one element, the question arises as to its delimitation from such elements as can no longer be regarded as carriers of the lowest degrees of CD. As has already been pointed out, it is the TMEs that provide the boundary between the thematic and the non-thematic section of the sentence. Moreover, in delimiting the theme, it should be taken into account that context-dependent elements (see here pp. 29—31) are always thematic, and under certain conditions even context-independent elements acquire thematic status. They can do so if they serve to express (a) settings and/or quality bearers or (b) — in the absence of settings — appearance/existence on the scene. The outlined delimitation of the theme has been demonstrated in my paper 'On the thematic and the non-thematic section of the sentence' (Firbas 1975), quoted by Szwedek in his bibliography. The demonstration consists in an analysis of a text of 29 sentences, the sentences being examined in regard to their semantic and syntactic structures, their FSP and their prosodic (intonational) features. In still greater detail, though only within the sphere of written language, the outlined delimitation of theme has been discussed and illustrated in Firbas 1981.

Second, the question may be raised whether every sentence has a theme. In answering this question, the following should be taken into

<sup>13</sup> This hierarchical relationship is already reflected by Mathesius' delineation of transition quoted above.

<sup>14</sup> The comment adduced in square brackets does not occur in the original text.



account: the central role of the TMEs within the sentence, the functions characterizing the thematic elements (see above), and the central position taken up by the verbal sentence within the system of an Indo-European language. Against this background, verbless sentences can be found that are to be interpreted as themeless, cf. *Outrageous!*, *The telephone!*, *Fire!* The problem has been discussed and illustrated in a separate paper (Firbas 1982).

In delimiting the theme I have not had recourse to the notion of 'aboutness'. This does not imply that I dispute the 'aboutness' feature of the theme. Generally speaking, the information conveyed by the sentence may be about any of its items. (*The girl has broken a vase* tells not only something about the girl, but also about a vase and about breaking.) In regard to the development of the communication, however, the theme constitutes a foundation upon which the core of the information is to be built. It is in this respect that the thematic, i. e. foundation-laying, elements indicate what the core of the information will be about. In my approach, the establishment of the 'aboutness' feature of the theme is the outcome of the interpretation, not its starting point.<sup>15</sup>

*(iii) So now, in addition to the question which elements belong to theme, transition and rheme, we also have to be able to determine the degree of each element. The distinctions have become even more subtle, full form of CD being ThPr (Theme Proper) — rest of Th — TrPr (Transition Proper) — rest of Tr — Rh (Rheme) to the exclusion of RhPr (Rheme Proper) — RhPr (Firbas 1975.331). The distinction and description of these constituents is a complex procedure that has to consider all levels, interactions between elements of different levels and within the same level, context and situation.*

## SUBTLETY OF DISTINCTIONS

Quite recently, a further refinement on the gamut of CD has been added by Svoboda (1981, 1982, 1983), a fact unknown when the critic wrote his paper. Svoboda distinguishes the thematic elements into theme proper (the element carrying the lowest degree of CD within the theme), diatheme (the element carrying the highest degree of CD within the theme), theme-proper-oriented elements and diatheme-oriented elements (elements ranking between theme proper and diatheme and standing closer to theme proper and diatheme, respectively). Needless to say a full implementation of all the possible thematic elements is not the rule. An example will illustrate the functions of theme proper and diatheme.

The most natural interpretation of *Yesterday he went to Prague* would be *Yesterday* (diatheme) *he* (theme proper) *went* (the TMEs constituting transition proper, the notional component belonging to the rest of transition) *to Prague* (rheme proper). Under the circumstances, the theme proper *he* is context-dependent and indicates what together with the preced-

<sup>15</sup> Cf. the second paragraph of the section 'Subtlety of distinctions' below.

ing sentence(s), the present sentence is about. It incorporates the present sentence into the flow of the communication. The diatheme *yesterday* is context-independent and particularizes what the present sentence is about, narrowing down the 'aboutness' feature to a temporal setting.

### COMPLEXITY OF PROCEDURE

I wish the critic had found a more appropriate way of acquainting the reader with the basic concern of my investigation — the interplay of context, linear modification and semantics in signalling degrees of CD. In a nutshell, the idea of the interplay could be presented as follows.

Context 'dedynamizes' sentence positions. Irrespective of position and of semantic character, context-dependent elements (i. e., roughly speaking such as convey information derivable from the immediately relevant preceding verbal context and the immediately relevant situational context)<sup>16</sup> will carry the lowest degrees of CD. (Cf. the personal pronouns in the following sentences: *I have known him, Ich habe ihn gekannt, Je l'ai connu*. If context-dependent, they will remain so irrespective of position. The same holds good for the non-pronominal elements: *John has known Helen, Hans hat Helene gekannt, Jean a connu Hélène*.) In this way context is capable of working counter to linear modification, which — if not interfered with — gradually raises the degrees of CD in the direction towards the end of the sentence (*Je l'ai connu, He has made a discovery*). Another factor capable of working counter to linear modification are certain types of semantic content and semantic relation (cf. *Er machte eine Entdeckung, Er hat eine Entdeckung gemacht*, where the context-independent object expressing the goal of the action will carry a higher degree of CD than the verb no matter whether preceding or following it). All this is in harmony with Dwight L. Bolinger's observation that 'gradation of position creates gradation of meaning when there are no interfering factors' (Bolinger 1965:288). In other words, linear modification will operate provided it is not worked counter to ('interfered with') by context and semantics, the latter asserting itself only if not 'dedynamized' by context. It follows that context is hierarchically superior both to linear modification and semantics. I believe that the basic idea of the interplay is essentially a very simple one. Further inquiries into the operation of linear modification, semantics and context, of course, remain urgent and imperative.

(iv) *To illustrate this procedure, let me take an example from Firbas (1975). According to him context, linearity and semantic structure are the most important means involved in determining degrees of CD. The context makes elements of an utterance either 'context dependent' or 'context independent', concepts that are to be understood in the 'narrowest sense possible' (p. 318). An element is context dependent if the piece of information it conveys is derivable (or recoverable) from the preceding verbal context and/or refers to some element of the immediate situational con-*

<sup>16</sup> For a more detailed discussion of context-dependence, see here pp. 18-20, 29-32.

*text. That description does not seem to be very precise. On the one hand the preceding context may stretch from the immediately preceding utterance to a more distant one, and it is obvious that the distance factor will influence the interpretation of the element of the utterance (cf. for example, results of Osgood's (1971) research, and also Szwedek (1980)). On the other hand a distinction between verbal and situational context must be made, since it is reflected in language (cf. the distinction between 'linguistic' and 'non-linguistic' anaphora in Stockwell et al. (1973), and the discussion of textual and situational anaphora, and of unique nouns in Szwedek (1976, 75 ff)).*

## CONTEXT DEPENDENCE, DISTANCE FACTOR AND SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

The next issue that presents itself is the problem of context dependence and context independence. I will return to it later and continue the discussion (see pp. 29—32). At the moment, the points to be dealt with can be summed up as follows.

The critic does not find my description of context dependence very precise, pointing out that the distance factor must be taken into account and a distinction made between verbal and situational context.

In the first place, does the critic himself give a sufficiently precise account of my conception of the operation of context? Let me concentrate here on a minor, but by no means unimportant point.

The critic's quotation from Firbas 1975 does not follow the original in spacing out the qualification 'narrowest'. (The quotation occurs in the following sentence: 'As used in this paper, the description "context-dependent" and "context-independent" are to be understood in the narrowest sense possible.') The spacing draws attention to the restriction 'narrowest', which implies that only the immediately relevant verbal and situational context is meant. In regard to the preceding verbal context, this indicates the existence of a derivability span, i. e. a section of the preceding verbal context that yields derivable elements. With due alterations, the situational context is narrowed down to items of immediate relevance. The restriction 'narrowest' further implies that an element cannot be regarded as derivable (context-dependent) even if present within the derivability span, but coming to convey a new aspect not derivable from that span. (In *The head-master has then chosen me*, *me* refers to an item that by itself is undoubtedly derivable, but has been induced to convey underivable information, i. e. the result of the head-master's choice.) The immediate relevance is ultimately determined by the communicative purpose arising out of the contextual situation, and imposed upon the semantic and grammatical sentence structure in the act of communication.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Strictly speaking, a distinction should be made between the communicative purpose imposed on the semantic and syntactic sentence structure by the speaker/writer, the interpretation of this purpose inferred by the listener/reader, and the communicative purpose objectively signalled by linguistic and non-linguistic means including

It can hardly be denied that the outlined approach is acutely aware of what the critic felicitously terms 'distance factor'. It remains, however, to solve the problem of the extent of the 'derivability span'. The literature quoted by the critic may certainly contribute to its solution, but it has not solved it yet. Let me add that a considerable step towards an explication of the problem has been made by Svoboda (cf. the reference in the quotation below).

The outlined approach is linked with the concept of the narrow scene, which I introduced in 1957 (Firbas 1957.36) and have utilized ever since. Special attention has been paid to it in a recent study of mine (Firbas 1981). To substantiate the argument that the narrow scene approach is acutely aware of the distance factor, it may not be without interest to quote a relevant passage from this study.

The qualification 'immediately relevant' (or of 'immediate relevance') used with 'preceding verbal context' (or 'preceding flow of verbal communication') and 'situational context' is of utmost importance. It serves to emphasize that derivability applies neither to the entire preceding verbal context (flow of communication) nor to the entire situational context. Let us first turn our attention to the immediately relevant preceding verbal context (preceding flow of verbal communication).

The qualification is necessary, because a semantic content or feature cannot be regarded as derivable if it appears in the flow of the preceding verbal communication, stays in it for a shorter or longer span of its development, leaves it, remains absent from it for a time, and reenters it (is reintroduced into it) only under contextual conditions that have considerably developed and changed in the meantime. Such a re-entry perceptibly contributes towards the further development of the communication, carries a new aspect and the semantic content concerned cannot be but considered underivable from the immediately preceding verbal flow. The condition of derivability remains equally unfulfilled if though present in the immediately preceding verbal flow a semantic content or a semantic feature comes to express some evidently new aspect, such as contrast, not mentioned before.

The extent of the span of communication during which a particular semantic content or semantic feature remains overtly or latently present in the verbal flow may vary. But examining one of Aelfric's homilies, Svoboda (1981 and in print) found that in this text the maximum length of communication during which a semantic content or a semantic feature remains unmentioned, but derivable (and therefore latently present) did not normally exceed seven sentences (see Svoboda 1981.88—9). (It follows that 'remaining in the flow' does not necessarily involve continuous presence throughout the span, i. e. a regular recurrence in each sentence constituting the immediately relevant preceding verbal flow.) 'Normally' is an important limitation here, for a unique position — as Svoboda has established — may be held by an exceedingly small number of semantic contents that practically never or for a considerably long span do not leave the flow of communication. The longer a semantic content or a semantic feature remains in the verbal flow, the stronger its ties to what precedes appear, and the higher the degree of its derivability becomes.

Like the preceding verbal context, the situational context cannot be regarded as immediately relevant in its entirety either (cf. Firbas 1975a.318; 1979a.31—2). Only those phenomena existing in the situation can be considered relevant that present themselves as strikingly obvious at the moment of communication, simultaneously attracting the speaker's and the listener's attention and becoming objects of their immediate common concern. Only such situational phenomena are regarded as de-

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the immediately relevant context (preceding and following). It cannot be expected that these three aspects will invariably show perfect congruence, but it is certainly desirable that, for instance, in scientific prose they should coincide. The problems touched upon here are discussed in greater detail in Firbas 1981.45-8.

rivable. Situational phenomena that fail to become so strikingly obvious are introduced into the flow of communication as underivable. — Firbas 1981:39—40<sup>18</sup>

True enough, the quotation comes from a study (Firbas 1981) that was not accessible to the critic when he wrote his critical remarks. On the other hand, the study of 1981 organically develops ideas linked with the concept of the 'narrow scene,' introduced as early as 1957 (Firbas 1957). When continuing the discussion of context-dependence and context-independence, I shall quote papers published earlier than 1981.

It is now possible to pass on to the critic's insistence on a distinction between verbal and situational context. He is certainly right, but his remark may unfortunately create the impression that this distinction has not been observed by me. This, however, has not been the case.

*(v) As to the participation of the grammatical and semantic structures in the thematic interpretation Firbas says that 'If the semantic agent-action-goal pattern expressed by means of the grammatical subject-verb-object pattern are contextually independent in its entirety or contextually dependent merely through its agent-subject element (A/The girl broke a vase), the following interpretation applies. The verb will carry a lower degree of CD than the object, but a higher degree of CD than the subject. This is because a known or unknown agent appears to be communicatively less important than an unknown action and its unknown effect or result' (1974:20) and also because an object 'expresses an essential amplification of the latter, and consequently becomes communicatively more important' (1972:79).*

*Discussing examples like A lion killed a hunter Firbas (1974) says that it is remarkable how a 'reader or hearer will most naturally interpret it as actor-action-goal, subject-verb-object, theme-transition-rheme sequences' (1974:35). He goes on arguing that 'linearity being a very primitive (though efficient) means cannot but reflect the normal and natural order of phenomena as occurring in the extralinguistic reality. Initiating an action, the actor necessarily exists before it. Only after it has started, can the action reach or effect its goal or produce some altogether new object.' (p. 35). This argument cannot be taken too seriously because, as Firbas must well know, in Slavic languages in the most natural order the actor does not necessarily precede the action in the linear representation. What is more, however, many goals also exist before the action and even before the actor.*

## NATURAL ORDER

The quotation concerning the operation of linearity (adduced in the second paragraph of (v)) is not accurate. Its first sentence leaves out three words conveying an important reminder absolutely essential to the ad-

<sup>18</sup> In the meantime the item referred to as 'Svoboda, in print' (please correct to 'Svoboda, in the press') has been published; see Svoboda 1982. — The reader is also asked to replace the expression 'sentence' (occurring in the eighth line of the third paragraph of the quotation) by the more appropriate term 'clause'.

vanced argument. Its third sentence misquotes one word, which results in a misrepresentation of the original text.

The first sentence of the quotation runs as follows: 'Being a very primitive (though efficient) means, sentence linearity cannot — under the circumstances — but reflect the normal and natural order of phenomena as occurring in the extralinguistic reality' (Firbas 1974.35). It is the limitation 'under the circumstances' that has been left out. This is regrettable because it reminds the reader that the advanced argument is claimed to be valid only under particular conditions. These conditions are explicitly stated in the paragraph in which the cited sentence occurs. The critic, however, pays no heed to them and draws the conclusion that the argument cannot be taken too seriously.

The idea is that in the absence of any semantic signals, any grammatical signals and any assistance coming from the verbal and/or situational context, the reader/hearer will most naturally interpret the sentence structures *A boy liked a girl*, *A lion killed a hunter*, *A dog bit a wolf* as actor-action-goal, subject-verb-object, theme-transition-rheme sequences at the semantic, the grammatical and the FSP levels, respectively. (The theme-transition-rheme arrangement displays a gradual rise in CD and is in harmony with what has been termed the basic distribution of CD.) It is under these circumstances (conditions) that linearity can fully assert itself and act as the only device signalling relations at the mentioned levels. This constitutes the core of the argument and should not have been disregarded by the critic.

Another point at issue is the question whether in regard to the implementation of an action affecting or effecting a certain goal, the actor-action-goal sequence reflects the normal and natural order of phenomena in the extralinguistic reality. It can hardly be denied that an action is initiated by an actor and in this respect comes after him. Nor can it be denied that only after having been initiated, an action can affect or effect a goal and in this respect occur between the actor and the goal. The following question may certainly be asked in this connection. Is it a mere coincidence that in the absence of any other signals — semantic, grammatical or contextual — linearity serves to indicate a sequence that is in harmony with the speaker/hearer's described experience of the extralinguistic reality? Is not this case of harmony rather a necessity if language is to function as a reliable tool of communication?

The devices employed by language are of course not invariably determined by the natural order of phenomena in the extralinguistic reality. This has been explicitly stated in the paragraph immediately following the one from which the discussed quotation has been drawn. Let me quote this paragraph in full.

Language is, of course, a pliant tool. In the presence of semantic and/or grammatical signals linearity may become inoperative and deviations from the basic distribution of CD may take place. Moreover, context may intervene and some of the items, for instance, the object, may become contextually dependent and the extralinguistic reality in consequence viewed and presented from a different angle, the degrees of CD changing accordingly. — Firbas 1974.35

As has already been pointed out, the described natural order of phenomena in the extralinguistic reality is reflected by the order of linguistic elements only under certain conditions. It has therefore never been claimed in my writings that a natural order of linguistic elements is invariably determined by the natural order of the referents in the extralinguistic reality. The problems of natural order ('ordo naturalis') have been dealt with in a separate paper of mine (Firbas 1979). The following two quotations are drawn from it.

We have now proceeded far enough to be in a position to draw the following conclusion. From the point of view of specific languages, an order that is natural in one language may not appear so in another. In fact, it is possible to speak of language specific natural unmarked orders and language specific natural marked orders. — Firbas 1979.55

The existence of a relation between linguistic phenomena and extralinguistic reality can hardly be doubted. The language user's experience of the natural order of extralinguistic phenomena cannot stay unreflected in language. Only the language user is free to view the extralinguistic phenomena in different perspective and language is a pliant enough tool to function accordingly. Viewing word order as a 'physei' phenomenon in the ancient sense of the word ends in a failure to duly appreciate the flexibility of language and word order. — Firbas 1979.56

One further point should be clarified. It also concerns the misquoted word.

In some respects, goals indeed exist before the action and even before the actor. This is reflected by the distinction between the affected and the effected goal, which is observed in my writings as, for instance, the correct version of the third sentence of the discussed quotation shows (see below). But this is not at variance with what has already been pointed out, i. e. with the fact that when two items of the extralinguistic reality are related through action as actor and goal, i. e. when an action is implemented, the action will be initiated by an actor and directed towards a goal. It is from this point of view, i. e. in regard to the implementation of the action, that the third sentence of the discussed quotation has been formulated: 'Initiating an action, the actor necessarily exists before it. Only after it has been started, can the action reach or affect ['affect', not 'effect' as erroneously quoted by the critic] its goal or produce some altogether new object'. An item that is to become the goal of an action may well exist before the action. But an affected or effected goal can hardly exist before the implementation of the action that is to affect or effect it.

*(vi) As to the relation between the verb and the object, the description seems to be circular: an object has a higher degree of CD (contributes more to the development of communication, i. e. is more important for communication) because it is communicatively more important. It would be totally arbitrary to claim that a hunter contributes more to the development of the communication than a lion. In fact a hunter (the object with the highest degree of CD, which means that it 'pushes the communication forward') may not be mentioned, i. e. may not 'push the communication forward', in the next few sentences at all. I suspect that all three*

*constituents of this utterance contribute equally to the development of communication. The stress seems to be equally distributed at least over the two nouns. To my knowledge no reason has been given why a sentence cannot have two rhemes, like in the above example, carrying equal degrees of CD, i. e. both being able to push the communication forward.*

## THE VERB-OBJECT COMBINATION

### Basic issue

The critic does not inform the reader with sufficient clearness under which conditions the object has been claimed to carry a higher degree of CD than the verb. His presentation of the problem may in fact suggest the conclusion that every object has been interpreted as carrying a higher degree of CD than the verb. But such a claim has never been made. The object will carry a higher degree of CD than the verb provided certain conditions are fulfilled. Once again, the interplay of factors is to be taken into account. This is a basic issue which must be clarified first.

Examining the verb-object combination in English, German and Czech more than two decades ago (Firbas 1959), I came to the following conclusion: 'Entering into the sentence together with a non-thematic partner that carries an essential amplification of its meaning, a non-thematic verb will carry a lower amount of CD than its described partner' (Firbas 1959.46). The fundamental point of the argument is the non-thematicity of the partner carrying an essential amplification. Needless to say, it will make the partner carry a higher degree of CD than the verb no matter whether the verb is non-thematic or thematic. The object undoubtedly is such an essential partner of the verb.

In terms of context-dependence it can be said that with the exception of special cases of low frequency (cf., e. g., Firbas 1979a.192) a context-independent object will carry a higher degree of CD than the verb no matter whether it precedes or follows it. (It is most natural to regard the object *knihu* /a book/ein Buch in the following sentences as context-independent: *Koupil jsem si včera knihu, I bought a book yesterday, Ich kaufte mir gestern ein Buch, Ich habe mir gestern ein Buch gekauft.* In each case, the object will consequently carry a higher degree of CD than the verb; under the circumstances it actually comes to carry the highest degree of CD within each of the four examples.) The conclusion to be drawn is that I do not invariably assign a higher degree of CD to the object than to the verb.

### Circularity of argument

The degree of CD carried by an element has been defined as the relative extent to which an element contributes towards the further development of the communication. It should be noted that the notion of 'contributing towards the further development of the communication' serves as a defining item; it does not constitute or form part of the item to be defined. The same applies to the notion of 'greater communicative importance'; it does not constitute or form part of the item to be defined



in my approach. Disregarding this, the critic offers a formulation to the effect that an element has a higher degree of CD (contributes more to the development of communication, i. e. is more important for communication) because it is communicatively more important, and indeed does produce a circular statement. Respecting the definition given above, however, one has to say that an element 'has a higher degree of CD because, being communicatively more important, it contributes more to the development of the communication'. It is this wording that represents my argument, not the wording employed by the critic.

Recurrence or no further occurrence of an element

The element *a hunter* may not be mentioned for a second time. In this respect it will not further develop the communication. But its leaving the flow of the communication does not invalidate its contribution towards its development, in other words the amount of CD it carries, within the sentence, i. e. the distributional field of CD. *A hunter* will participate in putting the sentence in a definite kind of perspective no matter whether it leaves the flow of communication or stays in it.

The preceding and even the following context may co-determine the degrees of CD within the distributional field (cf. Firbas 1981:47), but under the conditions stipulated for the semantic and grammatical sentence structure *A lion killed a hunter*, it is highly improbable that *a hunter* would be deprived of its highest degree of CD.

Two points should be added. First, importance can be judged from different viewpoints, which should not be confused. Otherwise it would not be possible to establish or to refute relations between them.

Second, it must be remembered that in an overwhelming majority of cases, a recurring element is usually derivable, not conveying an underivable new aspect, and therefore contributing little to the further development of communication. Other, new elements enter into the flow of the communication, exceeding it in CD.

#### Arbitrariness of interpretation

In the critic's opinion, regarding *a hunter* as the carrier of the highest degree of CD within the structure *A lion killed a hunter* is an entirely arbitrary interpretation. (Let me recall that in my view this is the most natural interpretation provided certain conditions are fulfilled.) He believes his opinion to be substantiated by an equal distribution of stress over the nouns *a lion* and *a hunter*.

Is the argument advanced by the critic convincing? Are the prosodic (intonational) features borne by the two nouns of equal value if the sentence structure *A lion killed a hunter* is used under the conditions stipulated above and shows an unmarked intonation? Is their prosodic weight the same? Both nouns will be stressed. Yet one of them — under the circumstances, the one occurring later — will become a nucleus bearer. What is the conclusion to be drawn?

A nucleus bearer carries greater prosodic weight than a bearer of mere non-nuclear stress. Under the circumstances, the nucleus is the weightiest prosodic feature within the sentence. In consequence, it will serve as the

intonation centre of the sentence. Its bearer, the noun *a hunter*, simultaneously carries the highest degree of CD. It follows that the distribution of prosodic weight does not corroborate the claim that the three constituents of *A lion killed a hunter* are of equal communicative value. On the contrary, the distribution of prosodic weight is in harmony with the distribution of degrees of CD. It corroborates the claim that under the circumstances, the object carries a higher degree of CD than the verb.

Naturally, other contextual situations may place the intonation centre on either of the two remaining constituents. Different distributions of prosodic value would, however, reflect different distributions of degrees of CD.

Two minor points should not be left unmentioned. The fact that two elements contribute to the further development of the communication does not entitle us to the conclusion that they carry equal degrees of CD. Far from it. As a rule, the interplay of FSP factors varies the extent to which different elements contribute to the further development of communication and induces them to carry different degrees of CD.

As to the number of rhematic elements within a sentence, let me just recall that a sentence may certainly contain more rhematic elements than one. The gamut of CD distinguishes between rheme proper and the rest of the rheme.

*(vii) It is obvious that the thematic interpretation as presented by Firbas has been influenced by and confused with the semantic interpretation: since almost every action must have an agent we take the latter for granted, and this to Firbas means it is communicatively less important. But just as well, in X gave Y to Z, all X, Y and Z must exist before the action can take place. And yet this does not mean that X, Y and Z have the same (lowest) degree of CD. Firbas' explanation may also have been influenced by selectional restrictions. Every verb can take a restricted type of agent, and to a lesser degree a restricted type of goal. The so-called syntactic feature of the noun and features of the verb have to match only if the noun is an agent. For example the verb read can take a noun marked [+ Human] as an agent, while there is no parallel restriction on the goal of the verb read (anything that can be 'read': book, paper, word, thoughts, etc.). Thus, certain crucial, essential part of meaning is repeated in both the agent-noun and the verb which may create an impression that the agent-noun has a low degree of CD.*

## THEMATIC INTERPRETATION AND SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION

By 'thematic' interpretation the critic evidently means the interpretation of what is sometimes termed the 'theme-rheme structure of the sentence' and what here and in other writings of mine has been referred to as 'functional sentence perspective'. How has FSP been confused with semantic interpretation in my writings? First, a general note recalling what has been said on the 'Agent-Subject — Action-Verb — Goal-Object' structure.

That almost every action must have an agent and that the latter is taken

for granted is known from our experience of the extralingual reality and commonly accepted. As has been demonstrated, this observation is in harmony with the gradually rising distribution of CD over the 'Agent-Subject — Action-Verb — Goal-Object' structure (implemented in the indicated order), provided certain conditions are fulfilled. As has also been demonstrated, this distribution is the most natural distribution of CD over this sentence structure, but as has been emphasized, language is a pliant tool and under different conditions the sentence will display different distributions of CD: no invariable link can be established between the semantic content of Agent, the grammatical Subject, the carrier of the lowest degree of CD and the initiator of the action in the extralingual reality. Congruence between all or some of these phenomena can be established provided certain conditions have been fulfilled.

As to the 'X gave Y to Z' structure, situations can certainly be thought of in which X, Y and Z exist before the action. (This would not apply to cases in which Y comes to express an effected object; cf. *Peter gave Mary a pleasant smile*. In such cases Y is the outcome of the action and cannot exist before it.) But in regard to the implementation of the action, it is X that initiates it and in this sense comes before it; and it is Y and Z that become involved only after the action has been initiated and in this sense come after it. This is in harmony with the distribution that assigns the lowest degree of CD to X, the highest degrees of CD to Y and Z and the transitional degrees to *gave*. This distribution takes place if the entire sentence structure is context-independent or context-dependent only through X or X and *gave*. But once again: language is a pliant tool and under other conditions other distributions are possible; the structure will accordingly function in other perspectives.

It is now possible to return to the issue raised at the beginning of the present section: the confusion of FSP with the semantic interpretation. In this connection, a question must be asked. What is meant by a study of the conditions under which semantic and grammatical sentence structures function in the flow of communication and in consequence appear in certain perspectives? Such a study involves the inquiry into how various semantic contents and the semantic relations into which they enter are implemented at the grammatical (syntactic) level and how they behave under varying contextual conditions. Such inquiries cannot be severed from the extralingual reality, which the semantic and grammatical sentence structures reflect and express in the flow of the communication. Nor can they disregard how the extralingual reality is experienced by the speaker/writer and the listener/reader. Taking all these aspects into consideration does not mean confusing them. This naturally implies the following conclusion. Examining how the semantic structure behaves in regard to the further development of the communication, i. e. the function(s) it assumes at the level of FSP, does not mean confusing semantic structure with FSP.

## SELECTIONAL RESTRICTIONS

Selectional restrictions have so far not been taken into consideration in my writings. They have not influenced my interpretations.

*(viii) In any case Firbas bases his hypothesis on three concepts:*

*(a) contextual boundness (context bound vs. non-bound)*

*(b) order of elements (sentence initial vs. sentence final)*

*(c) degree of CD (from lowest in theme to highest in rheme).*

*It seems that the features in (a) and (b) are relatively easy to identify, while as we have seen above, the elements of (c) are not.*

### THE DEGREE OF CD AND THE THREE FACTORS OF THE INTERPLAY SIGNALLING IT

The relationship between the central concepts of my approach has not been correctly presented by the critic, one essential concept having been omitted altogether.

The degree of CD has indeed been a central concept in my writings. Another paramount concern of my approach has been the interplay of factors determining the degrees of CD (cf. here pp. 17, 23). Let me recall that essentially, three factors are involved:

context (context-dependence and context-independence),  
linear modification and  
semantic structure.

The critic mentions the three factors at the beginning of section (iv) above, but in enumerating the central concepts in section (viii) above, he makes no mention of semantic structure, although the inquiry into its operation as a co-determiner of the degrees of CD in the flow of the communication has constituted a substantial part of my investigation. In discussing the question of susceptibility of English to FSP, I emphasized and demonstrated the important part played by semantic structure in signalling FSP (Firbas 1957). I have held this view and applied it in my approach ever since.

In what way has the critic misinterpreted the relationship between the factors determining the degrees of CD and the degrees of CD themselves?

The degrees of CD and their distribution over the sentence elements are the outcome of the interplay of three factors. The more we shall know about the operation of context, linear modification and semantic structure in the flow of communication, the more efficiently we shall be able to determine the degrees of CD. The three factors (their interplay) are the identifiers, the degrees of CD the phenomena to be identified. Hence it is not possible to place the factors and the degree of CD on one and the same level, and treat them as equal (a, b, c, d) items under one heading. But this has been done by the critic, who — leaving out semantic structure altogether — places context-dependence (introducing it under (a) and referring to it as 'contextual boundness') and linear

modification (introducing it under (b) and referring to it as 'order of elements') alongside with the degree of CD (introducing it under (c)). In doing so, he accords equal status to phenomena participating in a process (the factors of the interplay) and to a phenomenon emerging as the outcome of this process (the degree of CD).

(ix) *However, the relation between the elements of (a) and (b) is not so simple as Firbas claims. If we take Akmaijan and Jackendoff's (1970) example:*

(6) *John hit Bill and then George hit HIM.*

*(with the interpretation in which HIM = John) we have to recognize the following relations:*

(a) *HIM is definitely context bound,*

(b) *HIM is stressed, i. e. has the highest degree of CD (if that means anything), i. e. is the rheme.*

*Thus, what we have here is a context bound rheme which contradicts Firbas' (1972) description of the relation between the two features: 'non-thematic elements are always contextually independent' (p. 82).*

*Example (6) shows that one of the main problems that badly needs clarification is what is new and what is given information in the sentence. Chafe (1976) vaguely says that 'givenness is a status decided on by the speaker' and that 'it is fundamentally a matter of the speaker's belief that the item is in the addressee's consciousness, not that it is recoverable (Halliday)' (p. 32). Similarly vague is Firbas' (1975) description of the 'narrow scene' and context-dependent elements. Elements are context-dependent, according to him, when the piece of information they convey is derivable (or recoverable) from the preceding verbal context and/or refers to some elements of the immediate situational context. Also Dahl (1976) distinguishes between ON-STAGE CONCEPTS and OFF-STAGE CONCEPTS which, he says, are similar to CONTEXTUALLY BOUND and CONTEXTUALLY NON-BOUND elements. On the other hand he makes a distinction between ON-STAGE elements and definite elements when he says: 'known concepts — whether they are on-stage or off-stage — are referred to with the help of definite noun phrases' (p. 41). If, however, we accept the distinction between ON-STAGE AND KNOWN (= DEFINITE), then Dahl's description of ON-STAGE concepts as already present in the addressee's consciousness, and OFF-STAGE concepts as those that must be activated, i. e. retrieved from some deeper place in his mind (such as his long-term memory) (p. 40), has also a high degree of vagueness of which Dahl accuses Chafe.*

*The problem of the context and its relation to theme/rheme seems to be even more complex as the discussion of Akmaijan and Jackendoff's (1970) example will show. On the other hand it is hoped that the discussion will indicate ways of solving the problem of criteria for given/new distinction. Akmaijan and Jackendoff's examples are pretty straightforward. In the sentence*

(7) *John hit Bill and then George hit him.*

*if him is unstressed it refers to Bill, if it is stressed it may refer to John or some outsider. In any case it does not, when stressed, refer to Bill. With*

the standard definition of 'given', however, we would not be able to get the interpretation where *him* refers to John, because *him* referring to John could not be treated as new information and thus stressed. Therefore, in such a case we have to look for 'new' information in other features of the relation between John and *him*. It should be noticed that John is Subject and Agent, while *him* is Object and Patient, which means that the two relations between *him* and John are different than between *him* and Bill, the latter pair exhibiting agreement in grammatical function and semantic role. Similarly in a version of the above example:

(8) John hit Bill and then he hit George.

when he is unstressed, it definitely refers to John (the same function and role), if stressed, it may refer to Bill (different function and different role). Again the stress signals that the pronoun does not refer to the same function and the same role item in the preceding clause.

### CONTEXT DEPENDENCE AND NARROW SCENE

On what grounds does the critic assume that my interpretation of the relation between (a) and (b) is a simple one? He regards the stressed *him* of (6) as context-bound (context-dependent), and yet as the carrier of the highest degree of CD. He then refers to my observation that 'non-thematic elements are always contextually independent', and believes to have proved it to be contradicted by example (6). No contradiction, however, is involved, for according to my approach I consider the stressed pronoun *him* (6) to be conveying underivable, and hence context-independent information. This interpretation follows from my conception of context-dependence discussed here on pp. 18—20. It would perhaps suffice to refer the reader to this discussion, but I will avail myself of the opportunity and take up the problem of context-dependence again and explain in greater detail why I regard *him* of (6) as context-independent.

My interpretation respects the requirements of the 'narrow scene', dealt with here already on pp. 18—9. In a paper published in 1976, which discusses the functional perspective of the interrogative sentence, I offered the following explanation (Firbas 1976.13), applying what was originally stated in regard to declarative sentences (Firbas 1957) also to questions.

It follows that elements that may be looked upon as known in regard to the common knowledge shared by the speaker and listener cannot be equated with information regarded as known at the moment of utterance. They may not appear as known in regard to the narrow, ad hoc context as it is set at the moment of utterance, or in other words, in regard to the narrow scene created by the act of communication, or in still other words, in regard to the very communicative purpose of the question (cf. Firbas 1966.246).

As I have explained elsewhere, elements that do not appear as known in regard to the communicative purpose of the sentence are to be regarded as context-independent (e. g., Firbas 1966.246). The following observation may further illustrate. In the sentence *John has gone to the window*, the 'window' may be well known from the preceding context. But if the purpose of the communication is to express the direction of the movement, a specification of the place reached or to be reached, the 'window' necessarily appears to be context-independent. In Halliday's very appropriate terms, context-independent elements could be described as conveying information that is not derivable, not recoverable from the preceding context (Halliday 1967: Part 4.3). — Firbas 1976.13

In accordance with the interpretation just outlined above and the discussion of context-dependence offered earlier in this paper (see pp. 18—20), a piece of underivable, and hence context-independent information may be merely a new aspect of a phenomenon that has already occurred in the immediately relevant context. Like *window* in the above example and *me* of the example adduced on p. 18, *him* of (6) refers to a derivable item, but conveys a new aspect on account of which it becomes context-independent. Before specifying this aspect, let me recall that though usually conveying derivable information, a personal pronoun may occasionally come to express an underivable piece of information. If it does so, it is stressed.

To show that the phenomenon of stressed context-independent pronouns is not dealt with by me in this paper for the first time, but has been dealt with by me before, let me adduce the following table and comments concerning the replaceability of count-nouns by personal pronous. (The table and comments were originally published in Firbas 1979:36. The page references given at the end of the second paragraph of the quotation are internal references to pages of the study the quotation has been taken from.) In fact the possible rhematicity of personal pronous was taken into consideration by me as early as 1956 (cf. the quotation from Firbas 1956, adduced here on p. 13).

The personal pronouns equally bear out the described distribution of CD. Under one contextual conditioning, it is not possible to choose between a personal pronoun and a context-independent count noun accompanied with a non-generic indefinite article. The two mutually exclude each other.

Provided there is no danger of ambiguous reference and rhythmical and stylistic considerations permit it, it is possible to choose between a personal pronoun and a context-independent count noun accompanied with a non-generic definite article; the pronoun, however, appears in its stressed (strong) form.

Finally, it is as a rule possible to choose between a context-dependent noun accompanied with the definite article and a personal pronoun. It is the pronoun that is mostly selected in such a case. It usually appears in its unstressed (weak) form.

In tabular form, the participation of articles and personal pronouns in signalling degrees of CD, respectively accompanying and replacing count nouns, can be presented as follows. The two provisos mentioned above (cf. here pp. 34—5) naturally apply.

Table 1

COUNT NOUN		
Its CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONING	Its non-generic ARTICLE	Its REPLACEABILITY BY PERSONAL PRONOUNS
1. independent	indefinite	irreplaceable
2. independent	definite	replaceable by a stressed strong form
3. dependent	definite	replaceable <sup>1</sup> by an unstressed weak form

<sup>1</sup>most naturally

## Examples

- |                            |                                  |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. A boy came.             | *He came.                        |
| A girl broke a vase.       | *She broke it.                   |
| 2. The boy came to see us. | *He [unstressed] came to see us. |
| He chose the books.        | He [stressed] came to see us.    |
|                            | *He chose them [unstressed].     |
|                            | He chose them [stressed].        |
| 3. The boy came.           | He came.                         |
| The girl brok the vase.    | She broke it.                    |

In consequence, if S and O in *The girl broke the vase* is respectively context-dependent and independent, *She broke the vase* is possible, but *\*The girl broke it* impossible. Under reverse contextual conditions (S being context-independent, but O context-dependent), *The girl broke it* is possible, but *\*She broke the vase/\*She broke it* impossible.

What is the new aspect conveyed by the stressed pronoun *him* of (6) *John hit Bill and then George hit HIM*? The critic accounts for it in a very plausible way (see end of section (ix)).

Couched in my own terms, the explanation could be presented as follows. In essence, it is in harmony with the critic's account. 'John' and 'George' have been introduced as agents into the flow of the communication. 'Bill', on the other hand, is presented as goal of action. Under these circumstances, *him* is most naturally interpreted as referring to 'Bill', who remains as affected goal of action in the flow of the communication. Consequently, it can be regarded as conveying derivable information, i. e. as context-dependent, and replaceable by an unstressed personal pronoun. *Him*, however, can evidently convey a different development of the communication involving a change in 'John's' status, former agent becoming affected goal of action. Such change cannot be derived from context and is to be regarded as context-independent. Consequently, to secure its unambiguous expression, context-independence is indicated by stress. The critic is, of course, not right in maintaining that 'HIM is definitely context-bound' (see his comment on example (6) at the beginning of section (ix)).

To sum up. The critic's objections concerning simplicity and contradiction can hardly be looked upon as justified.

## CONTEXT DEPENDENCE AND NARROW SCENE CONTINUED

I will not go into analyses of Chafe's, Dahl's and Halliday's conceptions of given and new information. The fact is that their discussions as well as those of mine, of the critic and other scholars, for instance, Daneš (1979), Sgall (1975, see also Sgall, Hajičová and Benešová 1973, Sgall, Hajičová and Buráňová 1980) and Svoboda (1981, 1982) testify to the paramount importance of context. We all know what a crucial role it plays in determining the form and function of the sentence in the act of communication and what an uphill task it is to account for its operation. It must therefore be repeated that it is a pity that the critic does not give the reader a sufficiently reliable appreciation of my inquiry into its operation.



In touching upon the narrow scene, he refers the reader to Firbas 1975 and remains within the scope of this paper. The reader of the critic's discussion is misled into thinking that the paper offers a description of the narrow scene. But this is not the case. In the body of the text of Firbas 1975, the term 'narrow scene' does not occur at all. It occurs only in note<sup>5</sup> which refers the reader to Firbas 1966, an abridged English version of Firbas 1957. As has already been pointed out, these papers contain the very beginnings of the concept of the narrow scene, later taken up by other papers of mine (cf., e. g., Firbas 1979a and esp. Firbas 1981). Svoboda's researches (1981, 1982) bear out the heuristic usefulness of the concept. Let me now quote the most relevant passage of Firbas 1966.

As is well known, the function of the definite article is to indicate that a substantive is sufficiently determined. On the part of the reader/listener, determination presupposes familiarity with what the substantive denotes. This is highly relevant to the theory of FSP, in which the criterion of known and unknown information plays a significant role.

The degrees of familiarity, however, vary. Roughly speaking, there are basically two of them. Thus (i) in regard to the common knowledge shared by the speaker/writer (the author of the message) and the listener/reader (the receiver of the message), the notion conveyed by the noun accompanied by a definite article may be known, well determined, familiar, and yet in regard to the narrow, *ad hoc* scene, it may appear as unknown, new, contextually independent. This is due to the fact that on the narrow scene, familiarity is judged by a far more rigid criterion. This rigid criterion is complied with in that contextual independence is indicated through other means of FSP than the definite article, the latter being free to indicate familiarity within the sphere of common knowledge shared by the speaker and the listener... On the other hand, (ii) substantives with definite articles convey notions that may be considered familiar in the fullest sense of the word, i. e. both in regard to the common knowledge of the speaker and the listener and in regard to the narrow scene. It is this type of familiarity that renders the substantive contextually dependent, the definite article referring back to the previous context. The more evident this reference, the more manifest the thematizing effect of the definite article. — Firbas 1966.246

One of the main aims of Firbas 1957 and 1966 was to show that the definite article, signalling familiarity, does not exclusively operate within the thematic section of the sentence, but that it operates also within its non-thematic section. The papers inquired into the conditions under which the definite article operates in one or the other section. It is not without interest to note that in his monograph published in 1976, Szwedek holds a similar view as the following quotation shows. The quotation comes from the very passage referred to by Szwedek at the end of section (iv) of the extensive quotation adduced in this paper.

What the sentence stress reflects is the organization of the message according to the new/given information distribution. A noun may be situationally definite but not necessarily 'given' in the text (textually coreferential). The definite article signals that the object referred to by the noun (except for idioms) is known to the speaker and to the listener either from the situation (including our earlier experience, as in the case of *the sun*, etc.) or from the preceding text. In the former case, we have to do with what could be called implicit coreferentiality. — Szwedek 1976.76-7

## IDENTITY OF REFERENCE AND NARROW SCENE

In the light of what has been said about the narrow scene and context-dependence and context-independence, I can certainly subscribe to the following formulations offered by Szwedek in the closing paragraphs of his paper.

*The analysis of examples (6) — (8) shows that identity of reference is not the only criterion for given/new distinction. It means that the concept of 'new' information has to be revised and its definition will require taking into account the context in all aspects.*

Szwedek is certainly right in claiming that identity of reference is not the only criterion of given/new distinction. This has in fact been established by the narrow scene approach, which for instance shows that in the case of the non-generic definite article and the repeated use of a noun (cf. the example containing the underivable *the window*), repetition — which normally involves identity of reference — need not be a sufficient signal of context-dependence. Let me add that the narrow scene approach has been motivated by the attempt to arrive at a more adequate way of establishing context-dependence. Needless to say, Rome was not built in a day and none of us can claim to have already solved all the problems involved.

## CONTRAST AND STRESS

Let me select one more passage from the closing paragraphs of Szwedek's paper for comment.

*I am not as sure as Chafe (1976) that the feature 'new' and 'contrastive' are totally unrelated phenomena. Chafe says: 'Presumably the chief reason for believing that contrastive items carry new information has been the fact that they are given high pitch' (p. 118). The brief analysis presented above shows that stressed items introduce some new elements of meaning and that is precisely why they have to be marked by stress.*

'New' and 'contrastive' can certainly be brought into mutual relation. Contrast that is expressed for the first time in the flow of the communication is underivable from the preceding context and is undoubtedly to be regarded as new, i. e. a context-independent piece of information. In terms of the narrow scene, it conveys a new aspect which is to be looked upon as underivable no matter whether borne by an element that taken by itself is derivable or an element that taken by itself is underivable. May I once again draw the reader's attention to the interpretation of the pronominal subject *I* in the example *I am writing letters* (, not he), adduced in the quotation from Firbas 1956 (see here p. 13)?

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Concluding his paper, Szwedek emphasizes that context is a crucial factor in determining what is 'new' and what is 'given'. It is indeed the most important of the factors in the interplay determining functional sentence perspective, which in the Czechoslovak linguistic literature has also been referred to as 'the contextual organization of the sentence.' The study of context as well as the other factors of the interplay must, of course, continue, although the end of the investigation may not be quite in sight. It is, however, my conviction that a better knowledge of the interplay contributes to a better knowledge of how a sentence functions in fulfilling a communicative purpose imposed upon it in the very act of communication. This involves the necessity of clarifying the basic issues and also that of a correct interpretation of conclusions already arrived at. It has been the aim of the present discussion to offer at least a modest contribution towards such a clarification and interpretation.

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## **K NĚKTERÝM ZÁKLADNÍM OTÁZKÁM TEORIE FUNKČNÍ PERSPEKTIVY VĚTNÉ KOMENTÁŘ KE KRITICE ALEXANDRA SZWEDKA**

Stať pojednává o některých základních otázkách teorie funkční perspektivy větné (aktuálního členění větného), a to otázky kongruence funkcí na rovině sémantické, gramatické a funkční perspektivy větné; otázky dvojčlennosti, trojčlennosti a vícečlennosti věty z hlediska funkční perspektivy větné; souhry činitelů signalizujících stupně výpovědní dynamičnosti; kontextové zapojenosti a úzké scény; sledu složek mimojazykové skutečnosti a sledu větných členů aj.

Popudem k napsání stati byla kritika Alexandra Szwedka týkající se Firbasova řešení výše uvedených otázek. Kritika tvoří část Szwedkova příspěvku uveřejněného v předběžných materiálech konference o úkolech v kontrastivním zkoumání jazyků (Conference on Contrastive Projects), konané od 3. do 6. 12. 1980 v Charzykovech, a je v resumované stati otištěna v plném znění. Její podrobný rozbor ukazuje na zkreslující a zavádějící nepřesnosti kritikových formulací a dovozuje jejich neoprávněnost. Kritika poskytla vítanou příležitost shrnout a podtrhnout některé ze stěžejních závěrů, k nimž se dospělo při zkoumání funkční perspektivy.