

Basic Distribution of Communicative Dynamism
vs.
Nonlinear Indication of Functional Sentence
Perspective

Libuše Dušková
Prague

0. The present paper is concerned with the interaction of two word order principles, the grammatical and functional sentence perspective (FSP). The respective hierarchic status of the two word order principles was first examined by Vilém Mathesius (1929, 1975: 153-160), who by comparing English and Czech revealed an essential difference in that English word order primarily serves to indicate grammatical relationships, whereas Czech word order is primarily governed by FSP. By functional sentence perspective is meant the distribution of information, or degrees of communicative dynamism (CD), over the elements of a sentence. Here a general principle appears to be found in a gradual increase in CD, culminating in end focus (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 18.3). Where the sentence structure is consistent with this gradual increase in CD, i.e. where the least dynamic element, the theme, occurs initially, and the most dynamic element, the rheme, or focus, is found at the end, with transitional elements coming in between, we speak of basic distribution of communicative dynamism (Firbas 1992: 10).

0.1 In what follows, I shall concentrate on different types of interaction between grammatical word order and the principle of FSP as they appear in English. Attention will be paid to the following types.

First, instances displaying both grammatical word order and basic distribution of CD.

Secondly, instances with deviations from grammatical word order traceable to the principle of FSP, i.e. word order arrangements in which the grammatical word order principle is overridden by the principle of end focus.

Thirdly, deviations from the basic distribution of CD due to the grammatical principle; here indication of FSP is to be sought in nonlinear devices.

Finally, instances with basic distribution of CD achieved by means of special syntactic constructions. These constructions will be considered with respect to whether they are complementary or commutable, and, in the latter case, with respect to which factors influence the choice.

0.2 The points to be discussed were investigated in three samples of contemporary fiction (see Sources), each providing 500 clauses taken from continuous text, i.e. a total of 1 500 clauses. To obtain a textually homogeneous sort, attention was paid only to the authors' monologues, whereas direct speech was left out. The exclusion of direct speech was moreover motivated by the fact that spoken language involves intonation as one of the means indicating FSP. In written language, on the other hand, intonation can be regarded as a concomitant feature of an FSP structure indicated by other means. Accordingly, FSP was determined on the basis of syntactico-semantic structure, contextual boundness and linear arrangement (Firbas 1992; Sgall, Hajičová & Panevová 1986).

An FSP analysis was carried out on the level of clauses, mostly finite, but nonfinite and verbless clauses were also included, provided they contained complementation or modification. The selection of communicative fields constituted by clauses appears to be justified by the fact that it is in clauses that different word order arrangements are primarily revealed. For this reason the higher communicative fields of complex sentences, as well as the communicative subfields of phrases (cf. Svoboda 1987) were left aside.

1. The first point under study involves clauses displaying both grammatical word order and basic distribution of CD. By grammatical word order are meant not only word order arrangements in which position is the primary indicator of syntactic function, but also arrangements which are customary: S-V-O-Adv(s), S-V-Cs-Adv(s), S-V-O-Co-Adv(s),¹ etc.

A problem was presented by adverbials insofar as their position in a sentence is relatively free, and subject to their degree of CD. Yet even adverbials tend to occur in certain positions, and this tendency may act counter to their

degree of CD. These instances are treated in section 3 as deviations from the principle of FSP, due to the operation of the grammatical word order principle; this principle here represents the more customary, albeit not obligatory, order. Where adverbials occur in positions consistent with their degree of CD, they are included, together with examples without adverbials, under the respective type. This notably applies to initial adverbials (120 instances, i.e. 8 % of the total) and adverbials in mid-position.

As for basic distribution of CD, I conceive it rather broadly in that all clauses with the thematic elements in the initial part and with the rhematic elements at the end are regarded as instances of this arrangement. Whether or not the intermediate elements are strictly ordered according to their degree of CD or whether in the thematic section the diatheme precedes the theme proper is considered of minor importance.²

Bearing these limitations in mind, the first group may be characterized as follows. Clauses displaying both grammatical word order and basic distribution of CD accounted for 62.2 % of all instances (933 out of the total of 1 500 clauses). Grammatical word order, as well as basic distribution of CD, was found not only in clauses with the subject in initial position, as in (1), but also in clauses with initial object or another postverbal element, appearing in this position as a result of relativization (ex 2). Ex (3) illustrates basic distribution of CD in a clause with an initial thematic adverbial (diatheme).

- (1) He was a nice funny little man. (Raverat 121)
- (2) (Benger's food,) which we called 'Uncle Richard's porridge' (Raverat 124)³
- (3) In this respect they are much the same as primitive people. (Adams 28)

The relatively high percentage of clauses displaying correspondence between grammatical word order and basic distribution of CD without the use of special re-ordering devices is presumably due to the fact that most instances of this group have a simple sentence structure with only one postverbal element: S-V-Cs (exx 1 and 3), S-V-O (ex 4) and S-V-Adv (ex 5).

- (4) they breathed the cool air which gave the illusion of country freshness (James 340)
- (5) The gate led into the lane. (Adams 15)

Where more than one elements occurred in postverbal position, the last represents a further specification, i.e. the rheme proper (exx 6 and 7).

- (6) (a smartness) which carefully combined professional competence with sexual allure (James 349)
- (7) the two rabbits went up to the board at a hopping run (Adams 19)

2. Proceeding to the second group, constituted by deviations from grammatical word order traceable to the operation of FSP, we find altogether 47 instances (3.2 % of the total). These may be classified into three distinct subtypes.

2.1 Reversal of the customary order of postverbal elements, viz a prepositional object, object complement or an adverbial before direct object, or an adverbial before the subject complement, cf. exx (8) to (10).

- (8) while the mourners pressed on him the traditional cooked ham and rich fruit cake (James 343)
- (9) anyone seeing this ... has seen at work the Angel (which drove the first Crusade into Antioch) (Adams 28-29)
- (10) Mrs Pitt-Cowley looked for a moment slightly embarrassed (James 357)

This subtype of deviant word order was the most frequent (30 instances out of 47, i.e. 63.8 %, and 2.1 % of the total).

2.2 Another subtype of deviant word order was found in clauses with an initial adverbial, inverted word order and final subject, cf. exx (11) and (12).

- (11) Behind the ornaments were two coloured photographs. (James 341)

There were altogether 12 instances of this word order arrangement, i.e. 0.8 % of the total.

2.3 A third subtype was constituted by instances of a fronted direct or prepositional object (5 instances, i.e. 0.3 %), cf. exx (12) and (13).

- (12) One of these, Buckhorn, Hazel knew well. (Adams 30)
- (13) But of one thing I am certain. (Raverat 122)

In all three subtypes the deviation is due to the principle of FSP. The final element is invariably the rheme proper. The elements preceding the rheme in (8)-(10) carry a lower degree of CD because of contextual boundness, as in (8), or as a result of semantic structure, as in (10). Apart from the operation

of the principle of end focus, a contributing factor is found in the principle of end weight, as in (8) and (9).⁴

Ex (11) illustrates the presentation scale (Firbas 1992: 66-69) with a contextually bound, scene-setting initial adverbial, a verb of existence on the scene, and a phenomenon being introduced on the scene, constructed as the subject in final, rhematic position.

As regards fronting, all instances are in accordance with "the function of so arranging clause order that end-focus falls on the most important part of the message as well as providing direct linkage with what has preceded". (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 18.20)

It should be noted that in none of the subtypes of deviant word order does the particular word order arrangement interfere with the grammatical function of the elements involved. In subtype 2.1 the syntactic function of the transposed elements is indicated by their forms (prepositional object, adverbial.) Subtype 2.2 involves an intransitive verb with only one participant, the subject, and in subtype 2.3 the subject is indicated by its position with respect to the verb, the syntactic function of the initial element being again signalled by its form, as in (13), and/or the valency of the verb.

The FSP structure of examples of this group suggests that the deviations are entirely due to the principle of FSP since what is achieved by each subtype of deviation is the basic distribution of CD. English here appears to display signs of free word order.

3. Examples of the third group, deviations from basic distribution of CD due to the operation of the grammatical principle, account for 13.8 % (207 out of the total). They again fall into three distinct subtypes.

3.1 First, there are clauses with a thematic object, placed in its regular postverbal position. Whether or not the object is followed by a more dynamic element, it is invariably less dynamic than the verb, and hence in the interpretative (Firbas 1992: 12), or deep, word order its position is within the thematic section. This subtype is represented by most instances of this group: 136, i.e. 65.7 % (9 % of the total). The thematic function of the object is invariably due to contextual boundness, mostly reflected in the object's pronominal form, cf. exx (14) and (15).

(14) The sight of this harmless vanity depressed him. (James 342)

(15) he talked to me (as if I were quite grown up) (Raverat 121)

Contextual boundness of thematic objects realized by nouns was indicated by anaphoric devices. Cf. ex (16).

- (16) Surely few people could pray that prayer with any sincerity.
(James 343)

Where contextual boundness failed to be signalled by overt devices the thematic function of the object resulted from its having been mentioned in the immediately relevant preceding context, as in (17).⁵

- (17) (Aunt Etty wrote to Charles ... asking him to look in the Down family Bible...) He was not able to find the Bible at once. (Raverat 124)

3.2 The next subtype comprises instances with a thematic postverbal adverbial (43, i.e. 21.7 % of this group and 2.9 % of the total). Where the thematic function of the adverbial is due to contextual boundness, this subtype is similar to 3.1. Cf. ex (18).

- (18) a great deal of illness was left undiagnosed in those days (Raverat 122)

Unlike subtype 3.1 there are also instances where the postverbal adverbial is not contextually bound, but whose thematic function is due to semantic structure; the adverbial operates as a setting, not as a further specification (cf. Firbas 1992: 49-59).

- (19) only just to be allowed to draw a little picture sometimes (Raverat 129)

3.3 The last subtype of deviation from basic distribution of CD includes instances with rhematic subject in initial position (Firbas 1966). This is one of the possible realizations of the presentation scale, in which FSP is primarily indicated by semantic structure; contextual boundness or nonboundness of a scene-setting adverbial, where present, does not play a role. This subtype is represented by 28 instances, i.e. 13.5 % of this group and 1.9 % of the total.

- (20) Hundreds of letters of Grandmamma's exist, and hundreds of Aunt Etty's (Raverat 121)
(21) and a tiny, frail figure, in a red dressing-gown and a white shawl, appeared at the end of my bed (Raverat 133)
(22) a kind of telepathic feeling has to flow through them (Adams 28)

- (23) Roosting birds rustled overhead (Adams 34)
 (24) here and there a dead twig fell (Adams 34)

All instances contain a context-independent subject, and a verb of appearance or existence on the scene (or a verb implying this meaning), which is less dynamic than the context-independent subject. Ex (20) illustrates the presentation scale without a scene-setting adverbial, in (21) and (22) the scene-setting adverbial is contextually bound, whereas in (23) and (24) it is not, its thematic function being due to semantic structure. Whether the thematic adverbial occurs in initial position, as in (24), or finally, as in (21), (22) and (23), its FSP function remains the same. On the whole, final placement of a scene-setting adverbial appears to be the more common (10 as against 3 instances). In this case there is a complete reversal of the basic distribution of CD, viz R-Tr-T. The deviation is thus the most pronounced. On the other hand where the scene-setting adverbial is placed initially, at least the placement of the theme is in agreement with the basic distribution (T-R-Tr).

4. The last group of examples includes clauses with special devices serving to change the order of elements in the underlying, simpler structure. Among these devices, the passive ranks the highest (127 instances, i.e. 8.5 % of the total). All the other devices had much lower frequencies of occurrence: existential construction 39 (2.6 %), extraposition 15 (1.0 %), cleft sentence 13 (0.9 %), tough movement and right dislocation 2 (0.1 %) and 1 (0.06 %), respectively. Also included were clauses with subjects of a semantically adverbial nature since these elements can also be constructed as adverbials, which usually involves a different sentence position (9 instances, i.e. 0.6 %).

4.1 The FSP structure of the passive clauses confirms the results of earlier studies (Mathesius 1975: 153-157; Dušková 1971) which have shown the passive to be a major device serving to achieve final placement of the rheme and preverbal placement of the theme. In all but three instances the subject, i.e. the object of the corresponding active clause is thematic, and it is by means of the passive that the preverbal position of this element is achieved. Where the agent is expressed (in the form of *by*-agent or quasi-agent in postverbal position: 50 instances, i.e. 39 % of the passive clauses), it is invariably rhematic, cf. ex (25).

- (25) But her interest was never tinged by self-pity. (Raverat 123)

In agentless clauses with the verb as the final element, the rheme is constituted by the verb, as in (26).

- (26) A little way in front of them, the ground had been freshly disturbed. (Adams 18)

Deviations from grammatical word order in passive clauses (three instances of thematic adverbials in postverbal position, as in ex 27) do not interfere with the function of the passive on the FSP level insofar as the passive involves only the participants in verbal action.

- (27) this was accepted between them (Adams 18)

Of more importance in considering the function of the passive in the FSP structure is the occurrence of the three rhematic subjects, cf. exx (28)-(30).

- (28) Near one of the posts, a hammer and a few nails had been left behind. (Adams 18)
- (29) If the truth must be told (still now, in my dreams at night, I am generally a young man). (Raverat 129)
- (30) But some attempt, even if misguided, had been made to make the room inviting. (James 344)

Here the use of the passive results in a deviation from the basic distribution of CD, whereas the corresponding active is in agreement with it. All three examples contain a context-independent subject which would stand in postverbal position in the active. Exx (28) and (29) may be regarded as instances of the presentation scale. Ex (30) represents discontinuous postmodification, a compromise solution of a conflict between the grammatical word order principle and that of FSP (cf. Dušková 1995). An explanation of these counterexamples of the function of the passive in FSP may be sought in the primary function of the passive, viz the suppression of the agent. It is presumably this function, together with the grammatical function of English word order, which involves deviations from the basic distribution of CD as a matter of course, that these passives with rhematic subjects are due to.

4.2 The existential construction is one of the realizations of the presentation scale. Existential *there* in the subject position serves to achieve postverbal placement of the notional, rhematic subject. In this respect, it contributes to the basic distribution of CD. Where the clause also contains an adverbial, its

function in the presentation scale is to set the scene, i.e. it is thematic. Nevertheless, scene-setting adverbials are mostly found in final position (16 final as against 9 initial adverbials). With one exception, where the final adverbial is given prominence by means of a focalizer, all final adverbials are thematic. Hence the existential construction here deviates from the basic distribution of CD in having the diatheme after the rheme (ex 31). Where the scene-setting adverbial occurs initially, as in (32), the clause displays basic distribution of CD. Ex (33) shows that where the final adverbial belongs to the rheme, it has to be reinforced by a focalizer.

- (31) there is some strain of the Woodhouses of Hartfield in us (Raverat 122)
- (32) everywhere there were clusters of dry droppings (Adams 15)
- (33) At this height there was no risk of prying eyes even from the top desks of buses (James 340)

4.3 Of the remaining devices, which have all too low frequencies of occurrence to allow generalizations, mention should be made of the subject construction of an adverbial element because it may provide an alternative for the expression of the presentation scale (see section 6). It is characterized by basic distribution of CD in having the theme at the beginning and the rheme at the end, cf. (34) and (35).

- (34) A few seconds brought him to the oak (Adams 35)
- (35) (the roll-top desk) which held her portable typewriter (James 341)

Owing to its adverbial semantics the element constituting the subject can also be constructed as an adverbial:

- (34') In a few seconds he came to the oak.
- (35') in which she kept her portable typewriter

5. Apart from the groups discussed so far, there was a small number of instances (2.2 %) whose FSP structure did not lend itself to unambiguous interpretation. The difficulty in assigning an FSP function to a clause element was mostly due to an uncertainty about the degree of contextual boundness. Thus in (36) the rheme proper is probably the object since it contrasts with *her house and husband* in the preceding context, but climax on the final prepositional phrase is also conceivable (in dependence on whether or not *manage* implies success).

- (36) (she had nothing on which to spend her ... energy except the management of her house and husband;) and she could have ruled a kingdom with success. (Raverat 123)

Examples of this kind were left out of account. So were four other constructions on account of involving special problems of different kinds: clauses with transitive phrasal verbs (29 instances; 1.9 %) and with ditransitive verbs (21 instances; 1.4 %) since they allow variable position of object / particle and indirect object / direct object, respectively; clauses containing lexical focalizers (14 instances; 0.9 %); and clauses with ellipted predication or predicate (10 instances; 0.7 %).

6. The last point to be discussed is the mutual relationship between the different types of word order arrangements and reordering devices.

Most of the subtypes treated in sections 2 - 4 appear to be complementary rather than commutable.

Subtype 2.1 (reversal of the customary order of postverbal elements) has an alternative only where the final element has no postmodification. In exx (8) and (10) they can be reordered in accordance with the grammatical principle without a change in FSP:

- (8´) while the mourners pressed the traditional cooked ham and rich fruit cake on him
 (10´) Mrs Pitt-Cowley looked slightly embarrassed for a moment

Ex (9), however, offers no such alternative.

Subtype 2.2 (initial adverbial - verb - subject) alternates with the existential *there* construction. Another alternative may occasionally be found in subtype 4.3. As shown by ex (37), these variants may be used as a stylistic device.

- (37) In the top drawer of the desk there was a file labelled investments...
 In another file was a copy of her will... Another file contained papers relating to her divorce fifteen years earlier. (James 347)

Replacement by subtype 3.3 (rhematic subject - verb of appearance or existence on the scene - scene-setting adverbial) is ruled out in the case of *be* insofar as the presentation structure changes into locative, cf. (11) and (11´).

- (11´) Two coloured photographs were behind the ornaments.

Subtype 2.3 (fronting) theoretically suggests the passive as an alternative. However, where passivization is possible, as in (12), it results in a different FSP structure, which may be inappropriate at the particular place in the text. While a fronted object acquires a certain degree of prominence (its FSP function being that of the diatheme, i.e. the most dynamic element within the thematic section), the subject of the passive is usually the theme proper (the least dynamic element of the thematic section). Other constraints arise from the necessity to express the agent.

As regards subtype 3.1 (thematic objects), again the passive suggests itself as an alternative, and indeed, passivization is often possible, as in (14) and (16):

(14') He was depressed by the sight of this harmless vanity.

(16') Surely that prayer could be prayed by few people with any sincerity.

However, where the subject of the passive is a personal pronoun, as is often the case, passivization is unlikely since personal pronouns rarely transform into *by*-agents, and omission of the agent is usually ruled out for semantic reasons. Moreover, the passive again displays a somewhat different FSP structure, which may be a textual misfit (in ex 14' the connective function of the subject is lost in the passive).

Type 3.2 (thematic postverbal adverbials) coincides with type 2.1 where the reversal of the customary order of postverbal elements involves an adverbial. The relative frequencies of occurrence of the two subtypes indicate a preponderance of the grammatical word order (43 instances as against 30, the latter including not only adverbials but also prepositional objects and object complements).

Subtype 3.3 (the presentation scale) where it includes a locative adverbial may alternate with subtype 2.2 (adverbial - verb - subject), e.g. ex (21) is conceivable in the form of (21').

(21') At the end of my bed appeared a tiny, frail figure in a red dressing-gown with a white shawl.

In fact the two realizations of the presentation scale are sometimes used side by side for stylistic variation (not attested in my sources).

(38) Odd scraps of paper lay about the floor, the wardrobe door stood open, across the dressing-table lay a trail of spilt powder.

In general, of the devices serving to alter the order of clause elements, alternatives to the types under discussion were found in the passive and the existential construction. The other devices did not provide conceivable alternatives, at least not within the material under study.

7. In conclusion, the points emerging from the foregoing discussion may be summed up as follows.

In most instances the interaction of the two major word order principles, the grammatical and FSP, appears to be cooperative, i.e. grammatical word order is in agreement with basic distribution of CD.

Where the two principles act counter to each other, English on the one hand resorts to special devices whereby the conflict is resolved (as in the case of the passive, 9%), or more or less resolved (in the existential construction, 2.6%). On the other hand, in about 17% of all instances the conflict between the two word order principles remains unresolved. While deviations from the basic distribution of CD account for 13.8%, deviations from grammatical word order represent only 3.2%. The preponderance of deviations from basic distribution of CD shows the importance of nonlinear means for indicating the FSP structure.

The different types and devices that have been discussed largely show a complementary distribution. Where alternative structures are available, they appear to serve as a stylistic device for varying the expression of the same semantic content.

NOTES

1. Cs = subject complement (complementation of a copula); Co = object complement (second complement of a transitive verb in copular relation to the object).
2. For the concepts of theme proper and diatheme, see Firbas (1992: 79-81) and Svoboda (1981).
3. Where preceding or following context is needed, it is added in brackets. All examples preserve the punctuation as found in the source, i.e. in the case of excerpts of clauses (components of sentences) they have no final punctuation mark and the first word is not capitalized.
4. For the principle of end weight, see Quirk *et al.* (1985: 18.9).
5. For the concept of immediately relevant context, see Firbas (1992: 23-25).

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