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ON SOME SPECIAL FSP ASPECTS WITHIN THE NEW TESTAMENT PARABLES

(WITH REGARD TO LUKE 15:8-10)

1   Topic of the Paper

The present paper hopes to throw some light on the function of ideology and its aesthetic implications in a particular religious discourse, namely that of New Testament parables. It will try to show how ideology is manifested through language in the sample texts, i.e. how ideological appeal is achieved; the analysis will be based on an FSP analysis and interpretation of several sample texts. The sample texts under examination represent just a fraction of the main body of the corpora derived from the author's long-term research into the field of religious discourse; it makes use of one of Jesus' parables, viz. *The Parable of the Lost Coin* (Luke 15:8-10) in its *NIV* version (Barker, 1984)

The principal research question may be formulated as follows: How is discourse employed to express ideology? Traditionally, ideology is communicated in the persuasive discourse to the addressee through linguistic means such as lexical density, lexical reiteration, syntactic parallelism, patterning of different sorts, etc. (cf. e.g. van Dijk, 1998, 200-204). Recent research has indicated that the aesthetic function is undoubtedly fulfilled also by FSP means and seems to play a crucial role in communicating the message especially in persuasive discourses (Firbas, 1995; Adam, 2006; Svoboda, 2006; Hurtová, 2009). Svoboda argues that the dynamic nature of dynamic semantic functions thus allows the writer to implement specific communicative purposes – according to the relative degree of communicative dynamism (CD) of individual elements of the sentence.

The present paper examines three different aspects of the text under analysis, especially in terms of ideology and aesthetics employed within verbal realisation of the text and seen against the background of FSP analysis.

2   FSP Essentials

At this point it will be necessary to outline at least briefly the fundamentals, the terminological common ground and principles of the theory of functional sentence perspective as the leading method of the analysis to be discussed.

From the point of view of information processing, the sentence is the field of syntactic semantic relations, and – as such – is co-governed by the degrees of communicative dynamism distributed over its individual elements (see Firbas, 1992, 1995, Svoboda, 1989, or

Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004 [1985]; summarised also in Adam, 2007). As has been hinted above, the core of Firbas' theory of FSP lies in the functional approach towards sentences; they are viewed as phenomena operating at the very moment of utterance (Firbas, 1992). Firbas claims that every meaningful element of communication is a carrier of communicative dynamism and hence pushes the communication forward. By a degree of communicative dynamism of an element, he understands its relative communicative value within the utterance in the act of communication. In other words, the sentence is "a field of semantic and syntactic relations that in its turn provides a distributional field of degrees of communicative dynamism (CD)" (Firbas, 1992, 7-8). According to FSP, sentence elements serve as communicative units with different degrees of CD. The degrees of CD are determined by the interplay of FSP factors involved in the distribution of degrees of CD. The FSP factors (formative forces) are (1) linear modification, (2) context, and (3) semantics. In spoken language, the interplay of these factors is logically joined by a fourth factor – intonation (Firbas, 1992, 14-16).

Sentence elements serve as communicative units of different degrees of communicative dynamism – the most prominent part of information is the high point of the message, i.e. the most dynamic element; other components of communication are less dynamic and thus have lower degrees of CD. According to the different degrees of CD, one may divide a distributional field into two basic parts: theme and non-theme (which is subdivided into transition and rheme); the theme is not necessarily associated with the initial position in the sentence. Mathesius' two-fold functional division of the utterance (theme – rheme) was extended by Firbas into a structure of the tripartition of theme (Th) – transition (Tr) – rheme (Rh).

3 FSP and Ideology

In the course of the author's research into the religious discourse, ideology has appeared to be one of the most prominent phenomena existing in the analysis. Eagleton defines ideology as a "set of ideas and beliefs based on conditions and life experiences of a specific group of people" (Eagleton, 1991, 29). It follows that religious texts (spoken and written) undoubtedly represent a type of persuasive discourse and, as such, both create and reflect ideology. The task of religious discourses is two-fold: to record texts that serve as a source of ideology and, at the same time, to produce texts that legitimise particular acts conducted in the name of ideology. In other words, religious discourse analysis should include the study of both production and dissemination of the ideology contained in it. According to van Dijk,

discourse has a special function "in the expression, implementation and especially the reproduction of ideologies, since it is only through language use, discourse or communication (…) that they can be explicitly formulated" (van Dijk, 1998, 316-317).

Ideology is manifested in the religious discourse above all through its verbal realisation, i.e. the language employed. Logically, the ultimate goal of a religious piece of writing or speaking is to persuade the audience of the veracity of the Christian doctrine. Christian ideology, being related to faith, church doctrines, and personal beliefs, is therefore naturally and inevitably interwoven in religious discourse. Apart from discourse itself, ideology (sometimes viewed as a three-vertex triangle phenomenon) should also be associated with two other dimensions: society and (social) cognition. Such a multidisciplinary approach seems to capture the whole complex of ideology in its entirety (van Dijk, 1998, 12-15). It follows that in the case of biblical theological texts, the linguistic means serve as a vehicle for communicating the religious message. Carter and Nash speak of the fact that "ideology is encoded in the linguistic organisation of the text" (Carter and Nash, 1990, 59; cf. also Eagleton, 1991 and van Dijk, 1998).

4 New Testament Parables

Parables – (seemingly) simple and memorable stories that convey a message through particular imagery and a basic plot – represent a genre-specific literary discourse, which is not restricted exclusively to biblical texts. The New Testament parables told by Jesus Christ are, nevertheless, most referred to and known (cf. e.g. the *Parables of the Lost Son, of the Sower, of the Good Samaritan, of the Lost Coin, of the Growing Mustard Seed, of the Hidden Treasure*, etc.). By definition, the parable is "a simple, short story from which some teaching point can be derived (i.e. an extended simile or metaphor)" (Pfeiffer, 2001). Within the biblical context, Hunter views the parable as "a comparison drawn from nature or daily life and designed to illuminate some spiritual truth" and paraphrases his own definition into a deliberately simplistic formula: "what is valid in one sphere is valid also in the other" (Hunter 1960: 8).

Representing more than one third of Jesus' teaching in the three synoptic Gospels, the parables contain essential Christian doctrine (see also Fee and Stuart, 1993, 149-151; cf. also Wierzbicka, 2001, 257ff; Pfeiffer et al., 2001, 1275-1276). Linguistically, parables provide a syntactically and lexically rich text material, predominantly in terms of their function in the discourse (they do not follow the scholastic tradition of merely using similes or metaphors but rather call for a response on the part of the addressee, and their peculiar syntactic makeup. Fee

and Stuart assume that most of the hearers exposed to spoken parables "had an immediate identification with the points of reference that caused them to catch the point" (Fee and Stuart 1993, 153). How this goal is linguistically achieved by the parables under investigation will be discussed in the next section of the paper.

5 Sample Analysis: The Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)

Now *The Parable of the Lost Coin* will be analysed from the point of view of the theory of FSP, with regard to a few special aspects. After a brief introduction of the story, the text in full with biblical verse numbers adduced before individual verses will be displayed (including verses 1-3 for the sake of preceding context; verses 4-7 containing the account of *The Parable of the Lost Sheep* is left out). Then the analysis proper will be presented in the chart (see Fig. 1 below). Due to space limitations, for a detailed account on the content and arrangement of the chart below and the abbreviations used, the reader is referred to Firbas, 1992 and Adam, 2009.

The Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10) represents one of the most classical New Testament texts dealing with God's love towards sinners and the character of the Kingdom of Heaven (Snodgrass, 2008). In it, the sinner is likened to a valuable coin that has been lost. The woman does not take a lax attitude towards her lost possession; she searches carefully and diligently. This coin was valuable; she must find it at all costs. Jesus wanted the religious leaders to understand how he felt about those who were lost. Finally, the coin is found to a great joy of the woman; similarly God, having offered His Son to cleanse the sinner from sin and restore him to Himself, causes a great joy (Wierzbicka, 2001, 293-295 and Pfeiffer et al., 2001, 1275).

1 *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear him.* **2** *But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."* **3** *Then Jesus told them this parable:* (...)

8 *Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?* **9** *And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'* **10** *In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*

(Barker et al., 1984, 1601)

Verse	Clause	Conj.	ThPr (Set/B)	DTh (Set/B)	TrPr/Tr (Q/Pr)	RhPr (Q)	Rh/RhPr (Sp/FSp)	RhPr (Ph)	Scale
15:8	1	Or1			suppose2		...3		Q
	1a				has2		ten silver coins3	A woman1	Com
	1b	And1		one3		loses2			Q
	2			she2	Does...not light1		a lamp3		Q
	3		^		sweep1		the house2		Q
	4	And1		carefully3	search2		until she finds it4		Q
9	5	And1	she3	when she finds it2	calls3		her friends and neighbours4 together5		Q
	6	And1			says2		!..."3		Q
	6a			with me2		Rejoice1			Q
	6b		I1		have found2		my lost coin3		Q
10	7		I2 you4	In the same way1	tell3		...4		Q
	7a		there1		is2		rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents3		Q

Fig. 1 FSP Analysis of Lk 15:8-10

The FSP analysis (Fig. 1) definitely reveals a number of remarkable features of the analysed text; the discussion, nonetheless, focuses only on three aspects. The first of them is related to the progression and overall makeup of the individual dynamic semantic tracks within the distributional macrofield. The point is that the whole text is logically structured in a peculiar way, forming thus **logical (informational) patterns**. The patterns traced in the text – seen as schemes that are analogous to those of logic – are the following:

Th   Rh
A   **is**   **C**
lost coin   sinner

if A   **is**   **B**
lost coin   carefully sought after

then C   **is**   **B**
sinner   carefully sought after

The basic premise – mathematically speaking – is that A (lost coin) is C (a sinner); these display the relation of identity (simile). It follows that if A is B (if the lost coin is carefully sought after), then also C (sinner) is B (carefully sought after). This logical pattern

(employing a "**mirroring effect**") is typical of a large number of New Testament parables that Jesus uses to depict the characteristics of God's treating sinners, and that of the kingdom to come (cf. e.g. the *Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast* in Mt 13:31-33, etc.). The information conveyed by the passage is, in other words, thoughtfully structured and offered to the reader in a logical and appealing way; thus, ideology is legitimised through syntactic tools. In this respect, let me recall what Hunter says on the inherent, mirroring quality of biblical parables: "what is valid in one sphere is valid also in the other" (Hunter 1960: 8).

The second aspect of the FSP analysis that seems to be worth mentioning is the question of **ambiguity or potentiality in FSP interpretation**. In the text under discussion, at least two basic distributional fields manifest a relative degree of potentiality – i.e. the functional analysis does not occasionally lead to more than one interpretation (in most cases, the distribution of the degrees of communicative dynamism is unambiguous and individual communicative units may be ascribed an appropriate dynamic-semantic function according to their prominence). Below are the examples of interpretative potentiality extracted from the passage of Luke 15:8-10:

(3)	*Does <u>she</u> not*	*sweep*	*the house*
	<u>Th</u>	**Tr/Rh**	**Th/Rh**

(4)	*and*	*search carefully*	*until she finds it?*
		Tr/Rh	**Th/Rh**

The question arises, which elements are context-independent. If the verbal elements and the final elements of the two clauses are taken into consideration, both the sets appear to be able to complete the communication and thus be rhematic (hence the slashes above); is it the sweeping or the place that the woman is searching that carries the highest degree of CD? In this respect, most elements (with the exception of Th-elements) are potential rhemes proper. This phenomenon may be attributed to the **extreme density (saturation) of the information** conveyed by a religious text. Research has indicated that potentiality in FSP interpretation seems to appear more frequently in religious texts than in other text types, such as narratives or dialogues; the more a text is formally and culturally fixed (ritualised in its use), the less it is analysable by means of FSP methods and tends to have more cases of potentiality (see e.g. discussion on the potentiality of Matthew 6:9-13 in Adam, 2003, or on an intentional author's ambiguity in poetry in Svoboda, 2006).

The third aspect is again drawing on a somewhat mathematical approach towards language; it deals with the inter-relation between the structure and function of the **parable** on the one hand, and its corresponding mathematical counterpart, **parabola**, on the other. The two seemingly differing phenomena seem to have more in common than their morphologically related stems. By definition, a parabola is actually a locus of a point and a line. It is a type of quadratic function that always has one squared term (such as x^2) and one axis of symmetry. The vertex of a parabola is the highest or lowest point of the parabola. Interestingly enough, the literary genre of the parable is functionally reflected in the Th-Rh articulation (Fig. 2 below; see also the mirroring reversible pattern and the cases of interpretative potentiality discussed above):
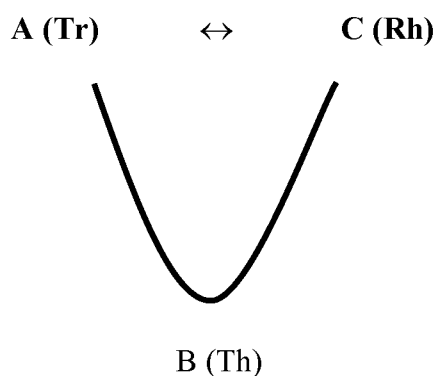
A (Tr)   ↔   **C (Rh)**

B (Th)

Fig. 2 The parabolic nature of the parable

To be more specific, the whole communication reads as if it had its solid foundation – in Mathesius' sense – on the point of departure (Th), having its **two complementary culmination points** (vertexes) in both Tr and Rh. As has been demonstrated above, just an inconspicuous incentive (such as lexical/syntactic density or the immediate religious appeal) is then capable of "turning" the parabola around its axis in the vertical direction and the communication is completed by the other respective element.

An analogous *quid pro quo* phenomenon operating in FSP was actually observed by Firbas: comparing the FSP function of the notional component of the finite verb and that of its categorial exponents, he detected a sort of functional heterogeneity due to which some of the components of the complex are transitional and occasionally rhematic. Firbas labels this unstable complementarity as a "Janus-faced character" (Firbas, 1992, 56). Firbas argues that such communicative units are able to point in two directions, concluding that "the uncertainty as to the adequate assessment is due to the referents occurring in the borderline area between

the immediately relevant portion and the rest of the situational context" (Firbas, 1992, 196-197).

It is worth noting that such a swappable structure of Tr- and Rh-elements has been identified in most New Testament parables, viz. *The Parables of the Hidden Treasure* (Mt 13:44), *of the Pearl* (Mt 13:45), *of the Leaven* (Mt 13:33 and Lk 13:20-21), or *of the Lost Sheep* (Mt 18:12-14 and Lk 15:1-7), and appears to be rooted in the literary genre of the biblical parable as such.

6   Conclusions

The present paper attempts to show that there seems to be a tight connection between the interpretative ambiguity in terms of FSP and the **genre-motivated logical patterns** traced in the New Testament parables. Apart from obvious and well-known features of ideology reflected in language (such as reiteration, lexical density, semantic saturation, or monothematicity), there are specifically syntactic phenomena that may be observed against the background of a dynamic analysis. Parables proved to be semantically saturated texts, which create, in effect, a functional tension and emotional appeal. The core of conveyance of ideological beliefs to the addressee is related to an omnipresent and manifold **informational density** and subsequent rhematising tendency of the discourse; this results – as a rule – in an unequivocal distribution of the degrees of CD, and ambiguous Th-Tr-Rh articulation. The effect of informational density may be corroborated also by the functional juxtaposition of the written vs. spoken modes: if in written discourse we generally say much more than in spoken discourse, then in theological (stylised) written discourse this tendency is even stronger.

Recent research is thus in concordance with Van Dijk's claim that "variation in the order or hierarchical relations of the structures of clauses and sentences is a well-known expression of dimensions of meaning as well as of other underlying semantic and pragmatic functions" (van Dijk, 1998, 202). It has indicated that such an artistic input (as a matter of fact employing the Jakobsonian poetic function of the text) is a vital part of the author's communicative intention as well as of the reader's impression (Adam, 2009, Svoboda, 2006 and Hurtová, 2009). However, to what degree this claim holds true on a larger scale still remains open for discussion.

In conclusion, it should be noted that Christian ideology found in the New Testament parables is obviously effectively presented via linguistic phenomena that strongly contribute to the ideological impact on the reader. Such an ideological appeal then helps to legitimate the set of values via language; i.e. the intended purpose of religious discourse is fulfilled.

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Resumé:

The present paper offers an analysis of *The Parable of the Lost Coin* (Luke 15: 8-10), which is discussed from the point of view of the Firbasian theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP). It looks at three different aspects of the discourse, especially in regard to the ideology and aesthetics employed within verbal realisation of the texts. Previous research has indicated (Firbas 1995, Svoboda 2006, Hurtová 2009; cf. Adam 2006) that the writer's communicative purpose is typically related to the aesthetic function carried by the text, and determines the writer's communicative strategies. The way the sentence is perspectived seems to determine the communicative purpose of the speaker as well as the conveyance of ideology. Special attention is paid to the phenomena of informational density, interpretative potentiality and aesthetic function implemented within the auctorial communicative strategy, and also to the functional comparison of the structure and function of the parable on the one hand, and its corresponding mathematical counterpart, the parabola, on the other.

Key words:
Parable; FSP; ideology; parabola; Bible;

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