

ON SOME SPECIFIC FSP FEATURES OF PRESENTATION SCALE SENTENCES IN THE *GOSPEL OF LUKE*

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1. Introduction

Biblical texts have supplied a semantically and syntactically rich source for FSP analysis (most notably Firbas, 1992, 1995, and 1996; Svoboda, 1989; Adam, 2009b; Chamonikolasová – Adam, 2005). It has been repeatedly evidenced that they manifest numerous remarkable language phenomena: both generally linguistic and text-specific.

The present paper proposes to look at the *Gospel of Luke*, focusing on some FSP issues of the sentences implementing the so-called Presentation Scale (hereafter Pr-Scale). Being a part of a larger tagged corpus under the author's current investigation, the *Gospel of Luke* was chosen owing to its predominantly narrative character. As a New Testament text type, the gospel is obviously a genre *sui generis*, representing an example of primary religious discourse, which was written for the original purpose – to serve the believers (members of a religious community) as a source of worship material (Ghadessy, 1988).

2. Corpus and objectives

For the purpose of the present investigation the *New International Version of the Bible* (hereafter abbreviated *NIV*) will be used. The *NIV* translation is widely quoted and represents by far the most popular translation nowadays. The corpus used for the purpose of this paper consists of 24,799 words and their FSP analyses. It contains altogether 1,643 basic distributional fields, out of which there are 152 distributional fields that implement the Pr-Scale, i.e. 9.3 percent (a distributional field is technically counted as finite clauses; non-finite clauses are regarded as separate communicative units within the basic distributional fields). Apparently, a relatively low number of the basic distributional fields in the corpus follow the pattern of the Pr-Scale. It is possible to claim, however, that the number of Pr-scale occurrence is – in comparison with e.g. fiction narratives – still relatively high. To illustrate, in other fiction narrative texts under scrutiny in terms of FSP, the incidence of sentences implementing the Pr-Scale is usually about 5–7 percent (see the results published in Adam, 2009, Adam – Kudrnáčová, 2010). Consequently, the overall number of Pr-Scale sentences may substantially differ in terms of various text types; interestingly enough, religious written discourse generally displays higher percentage of Pr-Scale sentences, such as ca 9–12 percent in the New Testament gospels and Pauline epistles (see Adam, 2011).

Below is a table that represents in absolute numbers and percentage the statistics of occurrence of sentences implementing Pr- or Q-Scale respectively in the corpus.

<i>Luke</i> (total 24,799 words)		
	Occurrence	%
Q-scale sentences	1,491	90.7
Pr-scale sentences	152	9.3
Basic distributional fields (total)	1,643	100.0

Fig. 1 *Luke*: Make-up of the Corpus

The principal research objectives of the present paper can be formulated as follows: (1) FSP specifics of Pr-Scale sentences within the New Testament narrative (so far the author's investigation into Pr-scale sentences has dealt with fiction narratives, cf. Adam, 2011); and (2) the syntactic semantic typology of Pr-scale sentences occurring in the corpus.

3. The notion of presentation

In the course of his FSP research, Firbas introduced the idea of the so-called dynamic semantic scales that are implemented in sentences (Firbas, 1992). Generally speaking, every sentence implements one of the dynamic semantic scales, which functionally reflect the distribution of communicative dynamism and operate irrespective of word order. Firbas distinguishes two types of dynamic-semantic scales: the Presentation Scale and the Quality Scale (Firbas, 1992). The Presentation Scale, which is under investigation in the present paper, includes three basic dynamic semantic functions: Setting (abbreviated Set) of the action, i.e. typically temporal and spatial adverbials, the Presentation of Phenomenon (Pr) conveyed typically by the verb, and, finally, the most dynamic element – Phenomenon (Ph):

- (1) *Later (Set) a temple helper (Ph) came (Pr) to the same place (Set).* [L10:32]
- (2) *While he was speaking (Set), a cloud (Ph) appeared (Pr).* [L9:34]

Although within the theory of FSP the English transitional verb is typically seen as relatively weak, semantically, however, it seems to play a vital role in constituting and perspectivising the sentence. It follows that the verb operating in Pr-Scale sentences (Pr-verb) presents something new on the scene. It is important to recall that in relation to its presentation role, Firbas claims that it does so “if it expresses the **existence or appearance on the scene with explicitness or sufficient implicitness**” (Firbas 1995). Prototypically, these are verbs such as *come, appear, occur, come down, be born, turn up*, etc. Research has convincingly shown that also other types of verbs are capable of expressing the existence/appearance even though not in a straightforward manner; in other words, they do so with sufficient implicitness (Firbas, 1992, 1995; cf. Adam, 2009b).

In the corpus under discussion, apart from the verbs expressing the existence or appearance on the scene explicitly, a relatively large group is made up with Pr-verbs that express the existence/appearance in a rather implicit way. All different sorts of verbs, such as *overshadow, seize, shine, pour, feed, blow or preach* were identified in the research corpus. Seemingly, they come from different semantic groups and do not have much in common. So, what is the implicit semantic load that enables a verb to serve as Pr-verb in the Pr-Scale? This legitimate question will be, at least partly, answered in this paper dealing with particular features of FSP of religious narrative.

4. Classification of Pr-sentences

Among other aspects, the corpus data were processed in terms of different syntactic subtypes. To be precise, four separate syntactic patterns were identified (see below). It should be said that the relative incidence of the four subtypes appears to be dependent on the text genre and register. Recently, also other text types have been examined in regards to such a classification especially in the discourse of fiction narrative (see e.g. Adam, 2011) and so the results gained will be, at times, functionally compared with the following ones.

4.1. Existential construction

The existence/appearance on the scene may be logically expressed by means of the existential phrase, in which the existential *there* is invariably assigned the Set-function and is entirely context-dependent (its notion is permanently present in the situational context). It follows that the existential construction explicitly indicates existential predication, which is a constitutional component of the syntactic-semantic structure of the Presentation Scale (cf. Dušková, 2005). On top of that – unlike most Pr-scale sentences – in the existential configuration of sentence elements the notional subject is postponed towards the end of the sentence and so the English grammatical principle requiring the *SVO* wording is thus overridden by the linear modification FSP factor. Cf.:

- (3) *There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel.* [L2:36]
(4) *In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit.* [L4:33]

Traditionally, the existential construction is ranked as by far the most frequent subtype of Pr-Scale sentences (see e.g. Dušková, 2005; or Adam, 2011). Nevertheless, unlike non-religious narrative texts under scrutiny, in the present corpus (*Luke*) the incidence of Pr-sentences containing the existential phrase is only 22.7 percent (mostly at the expense of Subtype 2, i.e. the rhematic subject in preverbal position). This surprising finding is apparently connected with the stylistic disposition of the gospel narratives, viz. formality and almost absolute absence of colloquial language; even spoken, conversational language used in scripted dialogues in the New Testament is rather stylised (see Adam, 2009a). In the fiction narrative examined in Adam (2011), for instance, the existential construction was used in an overwhelming majority of 64 percent of all Pr-sentences.

Another difference in comparison with fiction narrative may be observed in the total absence of the existential construction realised as *there* + verb other than *be* (this is unprecedented in fiction narratives) or a relatively low number of existential clauses containing a negative element, such as *no*, *not*, *nothing*, *none*, *never*, etc., which are remarkably frequent in fiction narratives (Adam, 2011). It seems that both the lack of phrases such as *there existed* and the low occurrence of negation in existential constructions has to do with the character of the New Testament writings: on the one hand formal and sacral nature and, on the other hand, their tendency towards unequivocal, straightforward or even patterned expression that is obviously related to the theologically didactic purposes (cf. Adam, 2009).

4.2. Rhematic subject in preverbal position

Untypically, this subtype of Pr-sentences matchlessly overrides all other three subtypes in numbers, covering 74.7 percent of all Pr-sentences (the incidence in case of other New Testament narrative texts examined is comparable). This most recurring subtype of the Pr-Scale sentence pattern is formed by a rhematic subject in initial, preverbal position. In its character, it is sometimes labelled as prototypical or even canonical type in connection with the Pr-Scale (Dušková, 2005). In it, the initial sentence element is represented by a context-independent subject, which is only then followed (in concord with the requirements of the English word order principles) by the verb, which expresses existence/appearance on the scene (Adam, 2011). The sentence may be also opened/closed with a scene-setting temporal or spatial thematic adverbial, the position of which is quite volatile – cf. (5) and (6):

- (5) *A squall came down on the lake, (so that the boat was being swamped).* [L8:23]

- (6) *Suddenly a great company of heavenly host **appeared** with the angel.* [L2:13]

A special subcategory is represented by sentences in which the Pr-verb manifests itself in a passive form, such as in (7) below. Passive constructions follow the same pattern of a context-independent subject and a Pr-verb; the scene is prototypically set by an adverbial. The passive construction within Pr-Scale sentences obviously allows for detachment from the agent of the action and so enables the grammatical subject to stand out. Unlike fiction narratives though, such Pr-verbs are extremely rare in the corpus under discussion and are not recruited from the lexical field of so-called *verba efficiendi* such as *build* or *make*, the result of which is a particular production (Adam, 2011; cf. Firbas, 1992, 62–63).

- (7) *As he approached the town gate, a dead person **was being carried out** – the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.* [L17:12a]

The analysis of the corpus shows that one of the most significant features of the Pr-verbs occurring in Subtype 2 is a certain degree of semantic affinity between the Pr-verb itself and the clause subject (cf. Firbas, 1992, 60). In other words, the action conveyed is so semantically inherent and subject-related that it is the subject that takes over the communicative prominence at the expense of power of the verbal content (Adam, 2011). The static semantics of the verb then – even if expressing a specific type of action – is reduced to that of presentation. Cf.:

- (8) *A large herd of pigs **was feeding** there on the hillside.* [L8:32]
(9) *A spirit **seizes** him and he suddenly screams.* [L9:39]
(10) *And when the south wind **blows**, (you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is.)*[L12:55]

The action content of the verbal element is so natural of the agents employed that the full verb serves to denote a form of existence or appearance on the scene. The verb that operates in semantic affinity with its subject semantically supports the character of the subject. In other words, feeding is an inbred activity for pigs and thus in (8) the highest degree of communicative dynamism is definitely carried by the subject; similarly, it is quintessential for an evil spirit to seize someone (9), or for wind to blow (10). Thus, the dynamic semantic role of the verb used is reduced to that of presentation and the communicative lead is taken by the respective subjects/agents. Such Pr-verbs almost prototypically originate from the semantic category of verbs denoting natural or even supernatural phenomena that are typically unaffected by people, such as weather or the transcendental – see (9) and (10). Furthermore, it seems that unlike fiction narratives such an implicit expression of existence or appearance on the scene is much more frequently achieved through non-sensory verbs in the present corpus. The fiction narratives, on the contrary, display a high percentage of verbs denoting visual, acoustic and other sensory manifestation of an action (for details see Adam, 2011).

4.3. Fronted adverbial & S–V inversion

In this subtype of Pr-sentences, an adverbial is fronted and, as a result, the subject–verb inversion takes place; the subject is, of course, context-independent and the verb fulfils the role of presentation on the scene.

- (11) *At his gate **was laid** a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table.* [L16:20]

(12) *See, Lord, here are two swords.* [L22:38]

In (11), apart from *S-V* inversion and fronted adverbial, also passive voice construction is employed, which is, as a rule, not observed in other occurrences of this subtype.

It should be noted that the incidence of such Pr-sentences in the corpus is very low: 2.6 percent. Contrary to this finding, the previous research showed that parallel constructions are used more frequently in fiction (cf. 13 percent in a fiction narrative discussed in Adam, 2011). It follows that every use of inversion (understood as the reverse order of subject and predicate, cf. Crystal, 1988, 200) provides the piece of text with a hallmark of stylistic markedness. In harmony with the present findings, also Tárnayiková (2002, 104) sees inversion as a tool that contributes “to the vividness of the events described” especially in narrative texts.

4.4. Locative Th-subject & Rh-object

For the sake of completeness, let me also comment on the Subtype 4 which has been traced in other FSP analyses in terms of the classification of the Pr-scale sentences (Adam 2011), namely the constructions containing the so-called locative thematic subject along with a rhematic object. Cf.:

(13) *The banner **bore** a red rampant lion fluttering in the breeze.* [N123d]

As usual, narrative texts manifest about 1–2 percent of such sentences (see the example (13) above); in the present corpus, however, this subtype has not been traced at all.

This peculiar transitive construction – at least at first sight – seems to implement the Quality, rather than the Presentation Scale as it contains a thematic subject. Nevertheless, such an approach would adopt only a surface stance. In its deep structure (stipulated both by FSP and its semantic roles), it should be regarded as a clear implementation of the Pr-scale (Adam, 2011). Dušková, in concord with my findings, claims that “the scene-setting nature of the subject (the theme) finds expression in adverbial construction, while the phenomenon appearing on the scene (the rheme) assumes the syntactic function of a subject” (Dušková, 1998, 40). It will be fair to note that in other New Testament narratives that were a subject to similar (yet not published) analysis (*Gospel of Matthew* or *Book of Acts*), several instances of this subtype were usually detected, even though their occurrence was low.

Below is a summative chart with the individual incidence of the four subtypes of Pr-sentences discussed above:

Pr-Scale Sentences	Occurrence	%
Subtype 1 – Existential construction	34	22.7
Subtype 2 – Rhematic subject in preverbal position	112	74.7
Subtype 3 – Fronted adverbial & S-V inversion	4	2.6
Subtype 4 – Locative Th-subject & Rh-object	0	0.0
Total	150	100.0

Fig. 2 Subtypes of Pr-sentences in *Luke*

5. Special FSP features of Gospel narrative

As has been noted several times, contrary to fiction narrative texts (cf. esp. Adam, 2011 or Dušková, 1998), the New Testament narrative seems to employ a slightly different set of FSP as well as purely syntactic configurations in terms of the sentences implementing the Pr-scale.

Above all, striking is the overwhelming **preponderance of Subtype 2** (virtually 3/4 of all cases), i.e. the clauses featuring a rhematic subject in preverbal position, at the expense of other subtypes, including the existential construction, which in fiction narrative occupies a clearly prominent position. The question remains why it is particularly this subtype that is so frequent in the New Testament discourse. Firstly, the core of such high occurrence of Subtype 2 appears to be connected with the style of biblical gospels, namely with its formality and literary nature. The most dynamic element – the rheme embodied in the subject – is fronted and so the classical arrangement of the English sentence (following the end-focus principle) is functionally violated. So, secondly, such a pattern makes it possible for the reader to watch the scene with a special focus on the actors coming and leaving; individual participants of communication as if parade in the setting of the scene, appearing one by one. One almost feels as a detached observer of a puppet play, watching individual figures that are being moved by the invisible hand of the Creator. This simplistic idea of presentation on the scene is prototypical for most New Testament texts (see Adam, 2009b, 2011); the configuration with a rhematic subject in preverbal position seems to be able to depict it best.

The second special aspect detected repeatedly in the FSP analysis of the *Gospel of Luke* (and analogously in other New Testament writings, see Adam, 2009), may be labelled as the use of the so-called **generic presentation**. By a generic presentation I understand a contextually bound, genre-related transitional verb that is untypically capable of presenting a Phenomenon on the scene, even if under normal conditions this would not happen. The coordinate system of such generic presentations is prototypically the religious discourse. The point is that the verb “believe” in (14) would – outside the religious context – almost invariably perform the dynamic semantic function of a Quality, i.e. a transitional verb through which a Specification is ascribed to a Bearer of Quality in the sentences implementing the Q-Scale. Cf.:

(14) *They believed what suited them.*

Nevertheless, in the context of the Bible, for instance, the verb “believe” (both transitive and intransitive) tends to serve the function of a Pr-verb in the scope of the Pr-scale. Its meaning then denotes “coming to Christ”, i.e. the act of conversion. The following two examples are taken from the New Testament Book of Acts for illustration:

(15) *... and a great number of people believed (and turned to the Lord).* [A11:21b]

(16) ***Crispus, the synagogue ruler...** believed in the Lord;* [A18:8a]

Analogously, the subject complement “blessed” may be understood as an example of such generic presentation:

(17) *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.* [L6:20]

(18) *Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!* [L23:29]

In (17), the whole clause is perspectived towards the subject (“you who are poor”), performing the rhematic dynamic-semantic function of a Phenomenon and entering the

communication for the first time. The very fact that these people are blessed can be viewed as something implied or even taken for granted.

Also from the viewpoint of the wider context of the Bible, the act of beatitudes itself is not entirely unknown: perhaps most notably, it is the famous passage of the so-called the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1–12), which starts “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven...*” In the context of this quote, Jesus apparently specifies who is blessed and why in the New Testament times. Seen from this perspective, the verbal expression (“are blessed”) constitutes the transition only and may be considered to be a part of the predication suggesting “existence or appearance on the scene with sufficient implicitness” (Firbas, 1992, 88–9; for details on the Beatitudes see also Adam, 2009).

The third syntactic semantic feature related to the corpus-based FSP analysis of the Pr-sentences has been treated in some detail in section 4.2. above: certain degree of **semantic affinity** between the Pr-verb itself and the clausal subject. On a comparative note, it should be said that unlike fiction narratives (in which about 30 percent of Subtype 2 display semantic affinity), the gospel text manifests a relatively low occurrence of such sentences (ca 9%). Interestingly enough, these cases, however, may be characterised by a typically religious affinity *sui generis*: the Pr-verbs convey existence but, much more frequently, appearance of a Phenomenon on the scene as such via peculiar presentation concepts. As a rule, such clauses deal with transcendental, supernatural, religion-bound phenomena. Prototypically, the reader is confronted with angels, i.e. God’s messengers, heavenly hosts, and the like. Their coming onto the scene (realised nearly exclusively through the verb “appear”) is then happening as appearance par excellence:

- (19) *Then an angel of the Lord **appeared** to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.* [L1:11]
- (20) *Suddenly a great company of heavenly host **appeared** with the angel, praising God and saying, (...)* [L2:13]

Such a semantic propinquity between the subject and the Pr-verb in fact exactly reflects the definition of the Firbasian idea of appearance on the scene with explicitness.

6. Conclusions

The present paper tried to look at the Pr-sentences within the discourse of New Testament narratives. Four basic subtypes of such sentences were identified, discussed and illustrated by corpus examples. In other words, the paper searched for answers to the questions *what?* and *how?*. Logically, the conclusive comments will try to shed light on possible interpretation of the findings presented and hereby provide answers to the question *why?*

All that has been said above about the specific features of Pr-sentences within the discourse of *Luke* (and more generally of all the New Testament narratives) seems to have one common denominator: the special role of the text in question, especially its **stylistic and ideological nature**. The tendency towards a straightforward presentation of different phenomena on the scene is apparently related to the communication of ideology in the Gospel. Ideology reflects and fulfils the main purpose of the religious communication: to persuade the reader of the veracity of the Christian doctrine (Adam, 2009a). According to van Dijk, discourse “has a special function in the expression, implementation and especially the reproduction of ideologies, as it is only through language use, discourse or communication... that they can be explicitly formulated” (van Dijk, 1998, 316–317). The research presented indicates that to achieve this, Christian ideology – apart from linguistic phenomena such as

lexical and semantic density, a high degree of persuasion, explicitness, or syntactic reiteration (Adam, 2009b; cf. van Dijk, 1998) – is effectively presented also via peculiar FSP (syntactic semantic) patterns, namely **preference of the rhematic subject in preverbal position, generic presentation, or semantic affinity of the verb and subject**.

Regarding the outlook for future research, a more detailed analysis of the syntactic semantic features Pr-verbs should be conducted; besides their semantic make-up, especially their syntactic characteristics such as valency, complementation or transitivity should be thoroughly explored. I believe that such issues studied on a larger corpus represent promising steps in FSP research into the Pr-sentences.

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In the framework of the theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP), every sentence implements one of the dynamic semantic scales, which functionally reflect the distribution of the degrees of communicative dynamism (Firbas, 1992). Firbas distinguishes two principal types of dynamic semantic scales: the Presentation Scale and the Quality Scale. The present paper discusses the FSP make-up of the sentences that implement the Presentation Scale and operate within the New Testament narratives. Namely, it proposes to look at the *Gospel of Luke*, focusing on some specific FSP issues of the Pr-sentences employed in the text. The corpus-based analysis also aims at a syntactic semantic typology of the sentences implementing the Presentation Scale.