
Martin Adam

Structural Dichotomy in the Theory of Functional Sentence Perspective

1. From Sentence to Text

1.1.

Text linguistics has played a crucial role in the development of discourse analysis. It views texts as elements strung together in definable relationships (see e. g. van Dijk 1977 and 1985 or de Beaugrande, Dressler 1981), dealing with the analysis of the ›surface‹ structures that unify the text (cohesion) on the one hand and the ›deep‹ semantic relations between the elements (coherence) on the other. These concepts derive basically from the British discourse analysis approach represented by Halliday (Halliday, Hasan 1989). Text linguistics treats the text material from different perspectives; it is, however, unified by interest in describing language from the higher-level, suprasentential perspective as well as in the role of context and communicative approach.

1.2.

Closely related to the study in the field of text linguistics is the information processing theory developed by the Prague (and Brno) School of Linguistics, most notably by Jan Firbas – the theory of functional sentence perspective. Generally speaking, it explores the theme-rheme structures and the relationships between the units of information in the utterance. The theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP) and its analytical methods have been considered one of the prominent tools of discourse analysis and information processing.

Combining the approaches adopted both by formalists and functionalists, the theory of functional sentence perspective draws on the findings presented by the scholars of the Prague Circle. The founder of FSP himself – Jan Firbas – drew on the findings of his predecessor, Vilém Mathesius. As early as 1911, Mathesius noticed the language universal of every utterance having a theme (topic) and a

rheme (focus), and formulated the basic principles of what was to be labelled FSP only later.

In Firbas's view, 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 defines a degree of CD as »the extent to which the element contributes towards the development of the communication« (1964, 270). The most prominent part of information is the ›high‹ point of the message, i. e. the most dynamic element; other elements of the sentence are less dynamic (have a lower degree of CD). The degrees of CD are determined by the interplay of FSP factors involved in the distribution of degrees of CD: linear modification, context and semantic structure (Firbas 1992, 14–16). In spoken language, the interplay of these factors is joined by intonation, i. e., the prosodic factor.

It is the continuum of the degrees of CD along with the interplay of the basic FSP factors that make FSP specific within the field of text linguistics. One is able to analyse and interpret a clause making use of exactly given criteria. CD operates on the level of a clause; the individual thematic and non-thematic elements – when viewed from the level of a macro-structure – then form thematic and non-thematic strings (see below). In other words, the theory of FSP transcends the domain of text grammar, enriching it with the approach adopted by the study of information processing.

The domain of the theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP) has been explored mostly on the sentential level, i. e. in the area of the basic distributional field created by the clause. Recently, however, attention has also been paid to the functional picture of higher hierarchical levels of text; the research has shown that an FSP analysis of a distributional macrofield (a paragraph, a chapter) is a promising step taken in the study of FSP and that it can reveal significant characteristic features of a whole text (cf. Adam 2004 and 2006).

This chapter proposes to examine the distributional macrofield from the point of view of functional sentence perspective, focusing on the horizontal and vertical relations operating within the text.¹

1 The concepts and terms used or referred to in this paper can be consulted in Firbas' summarizing monograph *Functional Sentence Perspective in Written and Spoken Communication* (1992).

2. FSP Analysis of the Basic Distributional Field (Horizontal)

2.1.

Since the pioneering work of Jan Firbas' research into the theory of functional sentence perspective, the interpretative analysis of the clause has been the corner-stone of FSP. Indeed, it is the FSP analysis of a basic distributional field (clause) that is the starting point of the functional interpretation.

The very Firbasian notions connected with the functional and dynamic approach towards text derive from the functional analysis of the clause; Firbas claims that the central position in FSP interpretation »is occupied by distributional fields provided by independent verbal sentences« (1992, 11 – 12). He views a clause as »a field of relations« (syntactic and semantic above all) that determine the distribution of communicative dynamism (CD) over individual communicative units of the clause. Units carrying a lower degree of CD form the thematic part of the clause and those carrying a higher degree of CD form – together with the so called transition – the non-thematic part of the clause (Firbas 1992, 80 – 81). Also Svoboda (1989, 25) considers the functional study on the level of the sentence a basis of functional syntax; he labels the sentential level units »mezzo-structures« hierarchically occupying the sphere between micro-structures and macro-structures.

Since the sentence is a field of relations, it is necessary to define what is meant by a basic distributional field. Firbas (1992, 15 – 17) agrees with Svoboda (1989, 88) that »a sentence, a clause, a semi-clause and even a nominal phrase serve as distributional fields of CD in the act of communication, and their syntactic constituents (e. g. subject, predicative verb...) serve as communicative units«. Through the interplay of FSP factors (context, semantics and linear modification), it is then possible to identify the degrees of CD carried by the communicative units: according to the gradual rise of CD, it is theme proper (ThPr) – diatheme (DTh) – transition proper (TrPr) – transition (Tr) – rheme (Rh) – rheme proper (RhPr).

To sum up, the functional analysis of a basic distributional field is, in its essence, a horizontal process and the relations between individual segments are purely syntagmatic. The table below displays the interpretative arrangement of a clause – according to the gradual rise in CD irrespective of the positions the segments occupy within the sentence (Firbas 1986, 47). It consists of six communicative units represented by black dots: the degree of CD they carry is symbolised by the size of the dots.

Table 1 Symbolic FSP analysis of the clause

ThPr	DTh	Tr	TrPr	Rh	RhPr
●	●	●	●	●	●

3. FSP Analysis of a Macrofield (Vertical)

3.1.

As has been mentioned above, the principles adopted in the FSP analysis of a clause are also applicable to higher hierarchical levels of text, such as paragraphs or chapters. The dynamic relations appear not to be restricted to the level of individual clauses but to exceed them, to operate on the suprasentential, macro-structure level of a communicative macrofield (for details see Adam 2004, 17–18).

Looking at an integral piece of text, we may – apart from the horizontal FSP analysis of individual clauses – identify two types of vertical relations that ›chain‹ into strings: co-referential strings and dynamic-semantic tracks.

3.2.

For the purpose of the following FSP analysis, I will use an extract from the *New Testament of the Bible* (see below). Biblical texts have repeatedly proven to be a rich and suitable source of discourse analysis studies (most notably Firbas 1992 and 1995, Svoboda 1983, Adam 2004 and 2006a). The later studies published by Firbas in particular dealt with a number of *Old* and *New Testament* texts. Firbas made it clear in his works that such text material represents a set of written discourse (of narrative, dialogic and poetic types) manifesting numerous remarkable language phenomena: both generally linguistic and text-specific. Let me recall, by means of illustration, his treatise on the establishment and the function of the dynamic-semantic layers of *Luke 2:1–20* (Firbas 1995), the case study in linear modification discussing the translation of the *Book of Revelation 21:6b* (Firbas 1996) or his congenial interpretation of *Psalms 91* based exclusively on FSP (Firbas 1989).

By means of illustration, let me give an example of an FSP chart of analysis, where both types of chains are indicated. First, the text under analysis (discussed in detail in Adam 2006b) will be presented in full, so that the reader may see the

piece of writing in context (it is an extract taken from the New Testament, namely a passage from the *Gospel according to Luke*, chapter 2, verses 4–9).

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.
(Kohlenberger 1997, 387)

In Table 2 below, the referential strings of the notions of ›Joseph‹, the ›baby Jesus‹ and the ›shepherds‹ respectively are presented in CAPITALS, whereas the dynamic-semantic track created in the rheme-proper layer is indicated by the use of *italics* (both these categories will be discussed separately below).

Table 2 An example of FSP analysis

Verse	Clause	TrPr (conj)	ThPr (Set/B)	DTh (Set/B)	TrPr/Tr (Q/Pr)	RhPr (Q)	Rh/RhPr (Sp/FSp)	RhPr (Ph)	Scale
2:4	4	So1		Also4 from the town of Nazareth in Galilee5	went3		<i>to Beth- lehem6</i>	<i>JO- SEPH2</i>	Pr
5	5		there3	HE1	went to register2		<i>with MARY, who...4</i>		Q
	5a		TO HIM4	Who1	was pledged2		<i>to be married3</i>		Q
	5b	and1			was expecting2		<i>a child3</i>		Q
6	6			While they were there1	came3			<i>the time for the BABY to be born2</i>	Pr
7	7	and1		she2	gave birth3		<i>TO HER FIRST- BORN, A SON4</i>		Q
	8		She1	HIM3	wrapped2		<i>in cloths4</i>		Q

Table 2 (Continued)

Verse	Clause	TrPr (conj)	ThPr (Set/B)	DTh (Set/B)	TrPr/Tr (Q/Pr)	RhPr (Q)	Rh/RhPr (Sp/FSp)	RhPr (Ph)	Scale
	9	and1	HIM3		Placed1		<i>in a manger4 because there was no room for them in the inn5</i>		Q
8	10	And1	there2	out in the fields5	were3		<i>SHEP- HERDS keeping watch over their flocks at night4</i>		Pr
9	11			TO THEM3	appeared2		<i>An angel</i>		Pr
	12	and1	AROUND THEM4		shone3		<i>the glory</i>		Pr
	13	and1	THEY2		were3		<i>terrified4</i>		Q

3.3. Co-referential Strings

It is of crucial importance to distinguish between the co-referential strings on the one hand and the dynamic-semantic strings on the other. The co-referential strings are chains of individual communicative units with the same referent; the string usually starts in the rhematic sphere and, moving across the transition, it finally establishes itself in the thematic layer (Firbas 1992, 27–29). In the thematic sphere, if the notion remains context-dependent, the process may continue within a number of distributional fields. In Table 2, one can easily follow the vertical run of four co-referential strings: those of ›Joseph‹, ›Mary‹, the ›baby Jesus‹ and the ›shepherds‹. These strings may be presented in a simplified way as follows:

Table 3 Co-referential strings of Lk 2: 4–9

JOSEPH (RhPr)	MARY (RhPr)	BABY (RhPr)	SHEPHERDS (RhPr)
↓	↓	↓	↓
HE (DTh)	SHE (DTh)	HER FIRSTBORN, A SON (Rh)	TO THEM (DTh)
↓	↓	↓	↓
TO HIM (ThPr)	SHE (ThPr)	HIM (DTh)	AROUND THEM (ThPr)
		↓	↓
		HIM (ThPr)	THEY (ThPr)

Firbas defines the co-referential strings as »linguistic elements naming or indicating the same extralinguistic phenomenon, in other words having the same referent« (1992, 32). In the flow of communication, »co-referentiality links elements together, producing co-referential strings« (Firbas 1992, 63).

Apparently, the co-referential strings – in contrast with the syntagmatic quality of the FSP analysis of the clause – run in the text in vertical direction, thus forming a field of paradigmatic relations. The general character of the co-referential strings is demonstrated in Table 4 (the black dots symbolise the movement of the referent from the rheme-proper layer – via the transition – to the thematic layer):

Table 4 Analysis of a co-referential string

Th	DTh	Tr	Rh
○	○		●
○	●		○
●	○		○
●	○		○
●	○		○
●	○		○
●	○		○

3.4. Dynamic-semantic Tracks

The other type of vertical chain – the dynamic-semantic tracks – is not based on such inter-layer relations as the co-referential strings are, but on the links established within one of the tracks exclusively. The existence and function of the dynamic-semantic tracks was first described by Firbas in relation to the concept of notional homogeneity of the RhPr layer (Firbas 1992, 77 and 1995, 64–66). The tracks are formed by all the thematic, transitional and rhematic elements of the text respectively. In other words, the rhematic track of a text, for example,

may be described as a complete set of all the rhematic elements found in the given passage. Let me add that since the rhematic sphere is the most dynamic section of every piece of text (Rh-elements carry the highest degrees of CD), it is usually the rhematic track that is central to the functional analysis of a text. The thematic and even transitional tracks are, however, also capable of chaining into separate dynamic-semantic tracks.

By way of a digression, let me note the following. To name the vertical dynamic-semantic strings, two different labels have been used: *layers* and *tracks*. In his key monograph (Firbas 1992) and preceding works, Firbas consistently uses the term *layer*. In Firbas 1995 (an article dealing for the first time with the FSP principles adopted in higher-level approach) and the following articles, he replaces this label by *track*; this term, in his opinion, depicts the dynamic character of the strings. The term *layer* is then used for the whole bodies of the thematic, the transitional and the rhematic spheres. In the present chapter, I am using the terminology accordingly.

Going back to Table 1, we can identify, for example, the following rhematic track constituted by all the rhematic elements (due to space limitations, I will present the track in lines, although its character is, of course, rather vertical):

Table 5 The rhematic track of the text analysed

RhPr: Joseph → to Bethlehem → with Mary → to be married → a child → the time for the baby to be born → to her firstborn, a son → in cloths → in a manger → because there was no room for them in the inn → shepherds keeping watch over their flocks at night → An angel of the Lord → the glory of the Lord

At this point let me comment on the semantic character of the rhematic track: a mere outline of its prominent members ›tells the story‹ and contains the information necessary for the reader to follow the narration. Thanks to this notional homogeneity, the dynamic-semantic strings are capable of summarising and communicating the main points of the message conveyed (for details see Adam 2003, 48 – 50). The enumeration of the rhematic elements neatly shows the semantic structure of the text and, at the same time, corroborates the significance and prominence of the rhematic layer.

To be more specific, the scene of the text under discussion is gradually entered by four participants: Joseph, the baby, shepherds, and an angel – i. e. the elements that enter the course of communication for the first time and so carry the highest degree of CD. These RhPr notions are accompanied and semantically developed by the elements occupying the Rh-sphere, to be found in Table 2 in the third column from the right.

As has already been mentioned above, the dynamic-semantic tracks may be viewed as a vertical phenomenon – they run through all the distributional fields

›downwards‹. Following a track (for instance a rheme proper track), we get a vertical ›cut‹ through all the text, creating a line of successive members of the RhPr layer. It is then possible to make use of simplified outlines of all the members of the respective dynamic-semantic track. In this sense, they are – together with co-referential strings – a vertical field of paradigmatic relations, though each of them is of a different character.

The paradigmatic chaining of three dynamic-semantic tracks (thematic, transitional and rhematic) can be observed in Table 6 reflecting the FSP analysis in a symbolic way:

Table 6 Analysis of dynamic-semantic tracks

Th	Tr	Rh
◆	●	■
◆	●	■
◆	●	■
◆	●	■
◆	●	■
◆	●	■

3.5. Syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations within FSP

At this point, by way of a summary, let me recall that the functional analysis of the basic distributional field created by the clause is a horizontal phenomenon characterised by syntagmatic relations between individual elements, whereas the FSP picture of a distributional macrofield formed by higher levels of text operates on the vertical axis and is characterised by two sets of paradigmatic relations (co-referential strings and dynamic-semantic tracks).

Such a two-directional system of relations operating within the discourse logically corresponds with Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of the structure of the language system (de Saussure 1993). De Saussure was the first one to come up with the idea that language – as any other signifying system – is based on the relationships that can occur between the units in the system – basically relations of difference and similarity.

The most important kind of relationship, according to de Saussure, is a syntagmatic relation, i. e. a linear (or as I say horizontal) one. He points out that in language – whether in spoken or written form – words come linearly one by one, forming a chain, by which one unit is linked to the next (de Saussure 1993, 170 – 172). For instance, word order in English – the position of a word in a chain of signification – contributes to meaning: in a neutral clause it is the subject that occupies the first position, following the SVO principle, etc. This concept ob-

viously reflects what has been said above in regards to the dichotomy of the horizontal – vertical relations in FSP analysis: in the interpretation, the syntagmatic relations are primary. Furthermore, de Saussure claims that individual ›syntagms‹ acquire their value only because they stand in opposition to all elements before or after them. Similarly enough, the degrees of communicative dynamism are distributed over individual units of the basic distributional field according to the degree to which they contribute to the development of communication; in this sense, the syntagmatic relations are in concordance with one of the central factors in FSP, linear modification. In the development of communication, the meanings of individual elements continually move closer to the high point of the message to finally fulfil the communicative purpose of the author (Firbas 1992, 105). The elements, showing different degrees of CD, differ in the extent to which they contribute to the development of communication.

The other type of Saussurean relationships that functions in the language system is labelled ›associative‹. From the point of view of de Saussure's dichotomy, the associative relation ›unifies individual notions into a virtual mnemonic chain«, in other words, it creates associations of meaning among other members of the text that are not a part of the syntagmatic unit (de Saussure 1993, 171). In this way, the associative relations correspond with the paradigmatic relations described in the theory of FSP; both are non-linear and associate notions in dynamic chains that – if arranged in a logical sequence – carry meaning.

Let me now summarise the results deriving from the discussion above in Table 7.

Table 7 multi-dimensional relations within FSP

distributional field	functional level	type of relations	axis of direction	
basic distributional field	clause	Syntagmatic	horizontal	
macrofield	co-referential strings	Paradigmatic (associative)	vertical	dynamic-semantic tracks
		text (discourse)	paradigmatico-syntagmatic	horizontal-vertical (mutli-dimensional)

3.6. Functional Structure of the Text on the Macrofield Level

As mentioned above, the research into FSP has proved that the theory works at different levels of text units, whether lower or higher (for further details on the hierarchy of units in FSP, see Svoboda 1989 and Firbas 1992, 16 ff). The following discussion applies an analogous approach to the material of a functional macrofield, i. e. within larger units of text. The idea is in harmony with Firbas' conclusions in terms of the function of the thematic and rhematic layers in a text. He showed that the dynamic-semantic tracks run through individual distributional fields and convey meaning not only in the clauses proper, but create a string of a higher level, which is across the layers (Firbas 1995).

The dynamic flow of communication may be traced literally throughout all basic distributional fields, going in the vertical (paradigmatic) direction. It seems that particular sections of the text have similar qualities as the elements within clauses do; the structure of the text resembles the theme-rheme structure in a sentence. This – once hypothetical – phenomenon was traced within a limited stretch of narrative passages of the *Gospel according to St. Luke* (Adam 2004). In it, I showed that the passage under examination contained inner dynamism that is capable of distributing the degrees of communicative dynamism over higher hierarchical units; the paper was focused on functional units within the rheme proper layer, in which the most dynamic development of communication takes place. The whole communicative macrofield implemented, in that case, a Combined Scale (Table 8).

Table 8 The functional structure of the sample narrative

Exposition	collision	crisis	peripeteia	catastrophe	
(DTh) (Set)	DTh B	Tr Q/Pr	RhPr Ph	RhPr Sp	RhPr FSp
(Roman empire)	a census Augustus Joseph Mary	an angel shepherds good news	a Saviour a baby Christ the Lord	sign baby in a manger	heavenly host praising God

The subsequent part of the research attempted to trace analogous dynamic semantic tracks in the texts of scripted sermons (Adam 2007). Having discussed the distribution of degrees of CD over the whole macrofield, it was then possible to conclude that the whole rhematic track of the text implemented a sort of a Quality scale with rising degrees of communicative dynamism. Similarly as in the case of the macrofield analysis of *St. Luke's Gospel* (Adam 2004), I would compare the functional picture of the sermon to the structure implemented in

classical drama. Namely, it would be *exposition* (induction into the problem; introduction) – *collision* (the problem exemplified) – *crisis* (failure to solve the problem satisfactorily) – *peripeteia* (solution found, though not sufficient) – *catastrophe* (the climax, final solution). It seems that such a gradual development is typically traceable both in narratives and sermons. The roles performed by individual sections as well as their corresponding dynamic semantic functions are shown in Table 9.

Table 9 The functional structure of the sample sermon

exposition	collision		crisis	peripeteia	catastrophe
<i>ThP</i>	<i>DTh</i>		<i>Tr</i>	<i>Rh</i>	<i>RhPr</i>
Set	B1	B2	Q	Sp	FSp
the topic set background (survey)	Marlene's breast cancer	hurricane Katrina	inadequate answers (fate / God's freewill)	right answer (God included)	suffering with God who underwent the same suffering

Having analysed a number of religious texts (see e.g. Adam 2003) and drawing on Svoboda (1996), I defined a text as a communicative distributional macrofield, which follows the same structural principles as its lower communicative counterparts (a clause, a noun phrase). Text as such thus may be viewed as one communicative macrofield with the degrees of CD distributed to the extent to which it contributes to the development of communication in the functional macrofield. It is apparently the narrative that can be naturally divided into an initial part, the body and a closing part of the story, and also analogically transformed into the functional outlook of the Th – Tr – Rh structure. Whether this perspective may be adopted on a larger scale is still to be shown. Nevertheless, the above interpretation seems to suggest that the functional approach is not confined to the boundaries of clauses, but exceeds them into the domain of paragraphs and chapters.

4. Conclusions

4.1.

As has been shown in this chapter, it is not merely the clause that may be analysed within the theory of functional sentence perspective – the same principles of FSP may be readily applied also to the higher level of text, i.e. distributional macrofields (such as paragraph or chapter). The present chapter has focused on the horizontal and vertical relations operating within the macrofield as opposed to lower levels of text (the clause). The main concern has been the

difference between the co-referential strings and the dynamic-semantic tracks. It follows that the above-mentioned horizontal – vertical relations are transparently traceable within FSP analysis; the multi-dimensional characteristics has been discussed also with regards to the dichotomy concepts offered by de Saussure.

Let me share an observation concerning the functional comparison of FSP and de Saussure's teaching. As has become clear, the vertical-horizontal concepts of study adopted in the theory of functional sentence perspective are in their function identical with the corresponding dichotomy introduced by de Saussure's theory. This may raise a legitimate question: why is that? How is it that the structuralist principles are, in an analogical way, reflected in Firbas's functional approach? In my opinion, both theories are well founded on the very nature of language. They both study the same material, i. e. the living language used as a tool of communication. Only with this provision may the two theories draw similar conclusions. In the same way as de Saussure looks at the meaning of an individual lexeme or a whole sentence both from the syntagmatic and associative point of view, the researchers in the field of FSP may analogically explore a text both from the horizontal and vertical angle.

4.2

Finally, I would like to highlight the benefits derived from a multi-dimensional approach to the FSP study of text. When both directions – horizontal and vertical – are applied, the functional picture of the text becomes more plastic and distinct. Such an approach apparently enriches the set of methodological tools available. Besides, the present chapter has shown that the essential principles adopted in the theory of FSP are also applicable to higher levels of text, i. e. distributional macrofields; one is able to trace both the co-referential strings and the dynamic-semantic tracks running through the text.

This chapter is meant to be a contribution to research in the field of functional sentence perspective, above all to the function of the thematic and the rhematic layers and the facts resulting from such analysis. It seems that functional implementation of the vertical axis (to broaden the FSP analyses) is worth investigating and that the multi-dimensional approach to FSP opens new vistas to further research within text and corpus analysis.

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