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Jan Firbas

Excerpt

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# **Part I**

## **Functional sentence perspective in written communication**

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# 1 Introduction

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## *In medias res*

What do we understand by functional sentence perspective (FSP)? An analysis of the following four versions – French, English, German and Czech – of the first paragraph of the closing chapter of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* will help to answer this question. The concepts used by the analysis as well as others linked with them, and together with them forming a theory of FSP, will be the object of the present study.

(1) Il y a, au cimetière du Père-Lachaise, aux environs de la fosse commune, loin du quartier élégant de cette ville des sépulchres, loin de tous ces tombeaux de fantaisie qui étalent en présence de l'éternité les hideuses modes de la mort, dans un angle désert, le long d'un vieux mur, sous un grand if auquel grimpent, parmi les chiendents et les mousses, les liserons, une pierre. (2) Cette pierre n'est plus exempte que les autres des lèpres du temps, de la moisissure, du lichen, et des fientes d'oiseaux. (3) L'eau la verdit, (4) l'air la noircit. (5) Elle n'est voisine d'aucun sentier, (6) et l'on n'aime pas aller de ce côté-là, parce que l'herbe est haute et qu'on a toute de suite les pieds mouillés. (7) Quand il y a un peu de soleil, les lézards y viennent. (8) Il y a, tout autour, un frémissement de folles avoines. (9) Au printemps, les fauvettes chantent dans l'arbre (Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, Paris: Nelson, 1935).

(1) There is, in the cemetery of Père Lachaise, in the neighbourhood of the poor side, far from the fashionable quarter of this city of tombs, far from those fantastic sepulchres, which blazon in the presence of eternity the hideous fashions of death, in a deserted corner alongside an old wall, under a lofty yew upon which bindweed climbs, and amid couchgrass and moss, a tombstone. (2) This stone is no more exempt than others

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from the ravages of time. (3) Water turns it green, (4) and the atmosphere blackens it. (5) It is not near any path, (6) and people do not care to visit that part because the grass is long and they get their feet wet. (7) When there is a little sunshine, lizards disport themselves on it. (8) All round there is the rustling of wild oats, (9) and in the spring linnets sing on the trees (Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, London and Glasgow: Collins; translator and date of publication not given).

(1) Auf dem Friedhof Père-Lachaise, in der Gegend des Massengrabs, fern dem vornehmen Viertel dieser Gräberstadt, fern der mit Bildhauerphantasie prangenden Gruften, die vor dem Angesicht der Ewigkeit die häßlichen Moden des Totenkults zur Schau stellen, in einer verlassenen Ecke, an einer alten Mauer, unter einer großen Eibe, an der Winden hochklettern, zwischen Quecken und Moos, steht ein Stein. (2) Er ist so wie die anderen vom Aussatz der Zeit versehrt, von Schimmel, Flechten und Vogelunrat. (3) Das Wasser färbt ihn grün, (4) die Luft schwärzt ihn. (5) Kein Pfad ist nahe, (6) und man geht nicht gern nach dieser Seite, weil das Gras hoch ist und man sofort nasse Füße hat. (7) Wenn etwas Sonne scheint, kommen die Eidechsen. (8) Ringsherum beben die Halme des wilden Hafers. (9) Im Frühling singen die Grasmücken auf einem Baum. (Victor Hugo, *Die Elenden*, translated by Paul Wiegler and Wolfgang Günther, Berlin: Verlag Volk and Welt, 1983).

(1) Na hřbitově Père-Lachaise, poblíž společného hrobu, daleko od elegantního oddělení tohoto města hrobů, daleko ode všech domyšlivých náhrobků, které před tváří věčnosti vystavují na odiv nehezké formy zániku, v opuštěném koutě u zdi, pod velkým tise, po němž se pne svlaček, leží mezi plevelem a mechem kámen. (2A) Ten kámen stejně jako ostatní náhrobky čas neušetřil (2B) a pokryl jej plísní, lišejníky a ptačím trusem. (3) Voda jej barví na zeleno, (4) vzduch na černo. (5) Nevede k němu pěšinka (6) a lidé v tu stranu neradi chodí, protože je tam vysoká tráva, v níž se hned urousají. (7) Když svítí sluníčko, mihají se tam ještěrky. (8) Kolem dokola se chvěje metlice. (9) Na jaře zpívají na stromě pěnkavky (Victor Hugo, *Bidníci*, translated by Zdeňka Pavlousková, Prague: Odeon, 1984).

For the benefit of those who are not familiar with Czech, a literal English translation follows.

(1) In cemetery Père-Lachaise, near common grave, far from elegant section of-this of-city of-graves, far from all pretentious-looking sepulchres, which before face of-eternity make of parade (make a parade of) ugly forms of-decay, in deserted corner near wall, under big yew-tree, upon which climbs bindweed, it-lies amid weed and moss stone. (2) This stone (acc.) in-the-same-way as other tombs (acc.) time (nom.) has-not-spared and has covered it with-mould, with-lichen and with-bird-droppings. (3) Water it colours to green, (4) air to black. (5) Leads-not to it path (6) and people to this part not-eager they-go, because is there long grass, in which *refl. pron.* immediately they-draggle. (7) When shines sun, they-dash-to-and-fro *refl. pron.* there lizards. (8) Round about *refl. pron.* they-sway wild-oats. (9) In spring sing in tree finches.

### Two perspectives

In each version, the communicative purpose of the first sentence is to present one particular phenomenon – a tombstone (*une pierre/a tombstone/ein Stein/kámen*). It is towards this phenomenon that the development of the communication is oriented (perspectived). In each version, such presentative orientation (perspective) is also displayed by sentences 7, 8 and – with a proviso to be taken up below – 9. Sentence 7 is oriented to *les lézards/lizards/Eidechsen/ještěrky*; 8 to *un frémissement de folles avoines/the rustling of wild oats/die Halme des wilden Hafers/metlice*; and 9 to *les fauvelles/linnets/pěnkavky* (for *die Grasmücken*, see pp. 11–12). Moreover, in each version, 1 and 7 contain subclauses showing the presentative orientation as well; the elements presented are *les liserons/bindweed/Winden/svlačec* and *un peu de soleil/a little sunshine/etwas Sonne/sluníčko*.

The same applies to the German and the Czech versions of 5; they are oriented to *Kein Pfad* and *pěšinka*, respectively. A phenomenon presented is also expressed by the expanded subject of the *protože* subclause in the Czech version of 6: *protože je tam vysoká tráva, v níž se [lidé] hned uroušají*.

As for the remaining sentences and subclauses, they display another orientation: they ascribe a quality to a phenomenon, the development of the communication being oriented towards this quality, or towards its specification if it is present as an amplifying piece of information. Quality is to be understood here in a wide sense, covering an action or a state, permanent or transitory, concrete or abstract.

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In this way, the French, English and German versions of 4 are oriented towards a quality (*noircit*, *blackens* and *schwärzt*), but the Czech version of 4 towards a specification (*na černo*). The French version of 3 is oriented towards a quality (*verdit*), but the English, German and Czech versions of 3 towards a specification. A quality orientation is shown also by the subclause of 6 in the Czech version (*urousaji*).

The rest of the sentences and the subclauses within them are orientated towards specifications; see *les hideuses modes de la mort*, *the hideous fashions of death*, *die häßlichen Moden des Totenkults* and *nehezké formy zániku* in 1; *des lèpres du temps...et des fientes d'oiseaux*, *from the ravages of time*, *vom Aussatz der Zeit*, *von Schimmel, Flechten und Vogelunrat*, *plísni, lišejníky a ptačím trusem* in 2; *voisine d'aucun sentier*, *not near any path* in 5; *haute*, *long* and *hoch*, and *mouillés*, *wet* and *nasse Füße* in 6.

**Communicative dynamism and linear modification – one of the factors of functional sentence perspective**

The element towards which a sentence or subclause is oriented conveys the information that completes the development of the communication taking place within the sentence or subclause. It contributes most to this development and is therefore the most dynamic element within the sentence or the subclause.

It is important to note in which sense the words *orient* and *orientation* have been used here. They have been used with regard to the completion of the development of the communication within the sentence. In this respect, the point of orientation is the element that contributes most to the development of the communication and in this way consummates or completes it. Used in this sense, the words *orient* and *orientation* have helped to explicate the meaning in which *perspective* is employed in my writings. If this sense is involved, I shall henceforth replace *orient* with *perspective* in the present study.

It may be asked in what way and to what extent the elements that do not complete the communication contribute towards its development.

Among them, it is necessary to distinguish between those conveying information retrievable, and those conveying information irretrievable, from the immediately relevant preceding context. It is undoubtedly the former that contribute less, and the latter that contribute more, to the further development of the communication. The former are less

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dynamic than the latter. Retrievable information is conveyed by *cette pierre/this stone* of 2 and the pronominal references to it, *la, elle, y, it*, in 3, 4, 5 and 7; *de ce côté-là/that part* of 6 and the pronominal reference to it, *y*, in 7; and the relative pronoun *qui/which* of 1.

A particular kind of retrievability is shown by the pronominal constituents of the existential construction *il, y* and *there* (see 1, 7 and 8) and the general subjects *on* and *people* (see 6). It is worth observing that the pronouns mentioned are not pronominalizations of notions previously occurring in the text. This points to their permanent retrievability from the immediately relevant situational context. In this respect, *people* serving as a general subject corresponds to *on*.

Coming back to irretrievable elements, let me emphasize that those of them that do not complete the development of the communication are less dynamic than those that do. This will be illustrated by the role played by the finite verb in the development of the communication.

In the texts under examination, all the finite verbs convey irretrievable information. But a finite verb completes the development of the communication and hence serves as the most dynamic element only if it operates in the absence of an element expressing a phenomenon to be presented or one expressing a specification. In this way, such elements act as successful competitors of the finite verb in the dynamics of communication: they prevent it from becoming the most dynamic element within the clause, independent or dependent. In the texts under examination, the following finite verbs have no competitors: *verdit* of 3; *noircit, blackens, schwärzt* of 4; and *urousaji* of 6. (The term *competitor* was suggested to me by Valerie Adams.)

All this shows that the elements of a clause, independent or dependent, differ in the extent to which they contribute towards the further development of the communication. In the act of communication some elements are more and others less dynamic. This induces me to speak of communicative dynamism (CD), a phenomenon constantly displayed by linguistic elements in the act of communication. It is an inherent quality of communication and manifests itself in constant development towards the attainment of a communicative goal; in other words, towards the fulfilment of a communicative purpose. Participating in this development, a linguistic element assumes some position in it and in accordance with this position displays a degree of communicative dynamism.

It follows that by a degree of communicative dynamism I understand

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the relative extent to which a linguistic element contributes towards the further development of the communication.

Let me add some comment on the notions ‘element’, ‘relative’ and ‘development’. ‘Element’ is used in a broad sense. Together with the hierarchy within which it operates, it will be accounted for on pages 16–20. Any linguistic element can become a carrier of CD as long as it conveys some meaning, and hence information, in the development of the communication. (‘Information’ covers not only purely factual content, but also attitudes, feelings and emotions.)

The qualification ‘relative’ is important. The degree of CD carried by a linguistic element is not measured or measurable in terms of bits of information. In the course of the development of the communication perspectived towards the fulfilment of a communicative purpose, in other words, towards the goal of the communication, a linguistic element may attain, come close to, or merely approach, this goal. The position it assumes in this process in relation to the other elements engaged in fulfilling the same communicative purpose (attaining the same goal of communication) determines the relative extent to which it contributes towards the further development of the communication. It follows that the degrees of CD are ‘relative’ in that the degree of CD carried by an element within a sentence is always determined in relation to the contributions that the other elements within the sentence make to the further development of the communication.

It is important to note that ‘development’ is not understood here as a purely linear notion. Sentence linearity is undoubtedly involved, but it cannot be claimed that the actual linear arrangement of sentence elements is always in perfect agreement with a gradual rise in CD. Let me illustrate this by the following observations.

The involvement of sentence linearity is borne out, for instance, by the fact that the element towards which the communication within a clause, independent or subordinate, is perspectived tends to occupy the final position. This is invariably the case in the Czech text, in which the element that expresses a phenomenon to be presented, or a quality further unspecified, or a specification of a quality, always occupies the final position. In this way, the element carrying the highest degree of CD closes the clause. The French text shows two, the English four, the German eight deviations, *die häßlichen Moden des Totenkults* of 1, *Winden/bindweed* of 1, *blackens/schwärzt* of 4, *Kein Pfad* of 5, *hoch* and *nasse Füße* of 6, *Sonne* of 7, *les lézards/lizards* of 7, and *les*

*fauvettes/linnets/Grasmücken* of 9, not appearing in end position. (Sentence 9 raises a problem to be taken up on pp. 11–12.) In spite of these deviations, the presentative perspective and the quality/specification perspective remain unaffected in the four languages. This is due to the semantic character of the verb as well as the character of the semantic relationship between the verb and its competitor expressing the phenomenon presented, or its competitor expressing the quality or its specification. With a proviso concerning sentence 9, which will be discussed below on pp. 11–12 and 29–30, this relationship asserts itself irrespective of sentence position (linearity).

Unaffected by sentence position are also the degrees of CD carried by elements conveying retrievable information. Irrespective of sentence position, the degrees of CD carried by them are lower than those carried by elements conveying irretrievable information; compare, for example, the positions of *that part* and *v tu stranu* in *people do not care to visit that part* and *lidé v tu stranu neradi chodí* (6); and those of *la* and *it* in *l'air la noircit* and *the atmosphere blackens it* (4).

As the above observations illustrate, the development of the communication, which is reflected by the distribution of degrees of CD over the sentence elements, is not invariably signalled by sentence linearity, in other words by the actual linear arrangement of the sentence elements. Nevertheless, even if not to the same degree, there is evidence of a tendency to arrange the sentence elements in accordance with a gradual rise in CD in each of the four texts under examination.

In these texts, for instance, all the clauses (independent or subordinate) perspectived towards a quality or its specification place the expression of the entity to which the quality is ascribed (the quality bearer = B) before the expression of the quality (Q) as well as that of its specification (Sp) if it is present. In each case the quality and the specification (if present) convey irretrievable information; compare, for example, *people* (B) *do not care* (Q) ... *because the grass is long and they get their feet wet* (Sp); *the grass* (B) ... *long* (Q); *they* (B) *get* (Q) *their feet* (Sp) *wet* (Sp); in 6. The quality bearer carries a lower degree of CD than either an irretrievable quality or its irretrievable specification.

If, in the Czech clauses perspectived towards and closed by a phenomenon presented (Ph), the expression of such a phenomenon concurs with an adverbial element expressing a local or temporal setting (Set) against the background of which the presentation takes place, the Set always precedes the Ph (see sentences 1, as well as its second



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subclause, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9). The same feature is displayed in the French text by four clauses (see 1, its second subclause, 7 and 8), in the English text by two clauses (see 1 and 8) and in the German texts by two clauses (see 1 and 8). The order described places an element carrying a lower degree of CD (a Set) before the element carrying the highest degree of CD (the Ph).

An interesting example is provided by the string of settings occurring in sentence 1. The settings identify the place of the tombstone, gradually narrowing down the location originally stated to the very spot in which the stone is situated. By gradually narrowing down the location the narrator actually leads the reader step by step to the spot occupied by the phenomenon that he wishes to present: the cemetery – one of its sections – a corner within this section – the yew in this corner – the place beneath it – the tombstone occupying it. In all the four texts, the development of the communication tallies with the linear arrangement of the settings and the phenomenon presented. Their linear arrangement displays a gradual rise in CD.

This raises the question of the relationship between degrees of CD and sentence linearity. Bolinger's important paper 'Linear modification' (1952) has demonstrated that linearity is endowed with modificatory power. He holds that 'gradation of position creates gradation of meaning when there are no interfering factors' (1952: 1125). His observation can be squared with the observations on the texts examined. In terms of degrees of CD, linear modification as a factor gradually raising degrees of CD can assert itself provided no other factors work counter to it.

If no other factors work counter to it, linear modification can fully assert itself, and the resultant distribution of CD has come to be referred to as basic. As viewed in my approach, the basic distribution of degrees of CD, reflecting a gradual rise in CD, is not language specific. It is implemented in every Indo-European language, but the extent to which it is implemented can differ from language to language. 'Basic' does not therefore necessarily mean 'the most natural', 'most frequent' or 'unmarked'.

The analyses of the written texts adduced point to two factors capable of operating counter to linear modification. One is semantic and the other contextual. It follows that in assessing degrees of CD, the analyses of the written texts have taken into consideration (i) linear modification, (ii) the character of the semantic content of the linguistic element as well as the character of the semantic relations involved, and (iii) the

retrievability of the information from the immediately relevant preceding context. An interplay of these three factors determines the distribution of degrees of CD over the written sentence. It determines the perspective in which a semantic and grammatical sentence structure is to function in the act of communication; that is, it determines its functional sentence perspective.

But language is not a rigidly closed system. It cannot therefore be expected that the outcome of the interplay of factors will always be invariably unequivocal.

### Potentiality

If equivocal, the interplay of factors potentially leads to more than one interpretation. To some extent, the English version of sentence 9 can serve to illustrate. But let us first have a look at the Czech, French and German versions of this sentence.

In the French and the Czech versions, the adverbials *dans l'arbre* and *na stromě* refer to the yew tree mentioned in 1 (*un grand if/velký tis*). They convey retrievable information and hence irrespective of sentence position and semantic content carry low degrees of CD. They serve as settings. Settings are also expressed by the adverbials *Au printemps* and *Na jaře*. In the presence of these settings, the verbs *chantent* and *zpívají* perspective the communication towards the notions – phenomena to be presented – conveyed by the subjects *les fauvettes* and *pěnkavky*. Though not expressing existence or appearance on the scene explicitly, the verbs do so at least implicitly. In this way the subjects complete the development of the communication and act as competitors of the verbs. In Czech, linear modification asserts itself through placing the subject in end position. The dynamic function of the subject as well as the unequivocal outcome of the interplay is thereby underlined.

In the English and the German versions, the adverbials *on the trees* and *auf einem Baum* are not co-referential with the yew tree of 1 (*a lofty yew/einer großen Eibe*). This makes them convey irretrievable information. In spite of it, the German adverbial is best treated as a setting. Treating it as a specification and thereby perspectiving the sentence towards it would produce an undue emphasis. The reader's attention would be drawn to the fact that the linnets (*die Grasmücken*), of whose existence the reader is informed for the first time, congregate on one particular tree. It is worth noticing that the definite article (*auf*