

Dick Whittington yet again: A multi-parallel analysis of a CD ambiguity

Martin Drápela (The Vilém Mathesius Society)

In the Firbasian approach to the issues connected with *functional sentence perspective* (FSP, for a list of contributions to this approach see e.g. Drápela (ed.) 2015), it is held that in written language, the contextual factor and the semantic factor, “together with linear modification, ... participate in modifying the communicative value of a linguistic element in regard to its place in the development of the communication, in other words, its degree of CD [communicative dynamism]” (Firbas 1996: 24). It has also been argued in this approach that, under circumstances, a cooperation of these factors may give way to ambiguities in the assignment of the degrees of CD within a sentence: “If equivocal, the interplay of factors potentially leads to more than one interpretation.” (Firbas 1992: 11).

In spoken language, it is usually prosody that may serve as a successful disambiguating device – a fourth FSP factor – in cases like these. For written language, Firbas (especially in 1995, 1999) suggested that, for instance, the concept of *semantic homogeneity* may lend itself to provide the reader with some clues that lead to the correct or to the more probable perspectivization of the problematic sentence. An example of the operation of this concept was published more than thirty years ago in Firbas (1984) in the form of a short FSP analysis of the introductory part of the story of *Dick Whittington and His Cat*. In an attempt to verify Firbas's application of the concept in the analysis, Drápela (2013) concludes that Firbas's solution can be supported by the results of a parallel FSP analysis of the same stretch of text carried out by nine Czech post-graduate students of English linguistics.

This contribution to the round-table will present the results obtained from even a broader parallel FSP analysis of the same text, this time carried out by thirty-six student-annotators who had zero or very little previous knowledge of the FSP theory and five of whom were native speakers of English.

References

- Drápela, M. (2013) “Testing semantic homogeneity of the rhematic track through parallel annotation of information structure (A case study in FSP potentiality)”, *philologica.net* [online], 2013-12-30 [cited 2016-07-04]. Available from World Wide Web: <<http://philologica.net/studia/20131230123000.htm>>.
- Drápela, M. (ed.) (2015) *A Bibliography of Functional Sentence Perspective 1956-2011 (Czech and Slovak Authors, Firbasian Approach Oriented)*, Brno: Masaryk University
- Firbas, J. (1984) “Scene and perspective”, *Brno Studies in English* 14, 37-79.
- Firbas, J. (1992) *Functional sentence perspective in written and spoken communication*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Firbas, J. (1995) "On the thematic and the rhematic layers of the text" in B. Wårvik, S-K. Tanskanen & R. Hiltunen (eds): *Organization in Discourse. Proceedings from the Turku Conference*, Turku: University of Turku, pp. 59-72.
- Firbas, J. (1996) "A case study in linear modification (On translating Apoc. 21.6b)", *Brno Studies in English* 22, pp. 23-48.
- Firbas, J. (1999) "On dynamic semantic homogeneity in functional sentence perspective" in U. Carls & P. Lucko (eds): *Form, Function and Variation in English: Studies in Honour of Klaus Hansen*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, pp. 305-317.