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From the Heritage of Vilém Mathesius and Jan Firbas: Syntax in the Service of FSP

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The paper discusses three syntactic constructions which were first noted by Vilém Mathesius from the viewpoint of functional sentence perspective, and further studied by Jan Firbas in connection with the elaboration of the FSP theory. The discussion of their ideas is supplemented by more recent findings by other writers. The three points under consideration are the passive, the cleft sentence and the existential construction. Of these the FSP aspect has been least elaborated in the case of the existential construction. Partial findings from works addressing other issues, and consistent application of the FSP framework suggest a promising line of further study, not least from the contrastive point of view.

As the title of this paper indicates, the following reflections have been initiated by two Czech scholars, Vilém Mathesius and Jan Firbas. However, to do the aspect of FSP full justice, the name of another Czech scholar should have been included in the title, viz. the name of Josef Vachek. The reason why he does not appear alongside the other two is that FSP was not the primary concern of his work. On the other hand, the reason why he cannot in the present context remain unnoticed is that but for him, Jan Firbas might never have taken up FSP as the leitmotif of his linguistic pursuits. Jan Firbas was of course familiar with and inspired by the works of Vilém Mathesius from his previous studies, but it was Josef Vachek who suggested FSP as a promising line of research, and this suggestion became seminal for further development of the FSP theory.

The subtitle “syntax in the service of FSP” implies the hierarchy of the two levels, which is not meant to purport that FSP is the only concern of syntax. In fact only a small number of syntactic constructions have been noted and/or partly treated as specific FSP devices. Apart from those discussed in the present paper (the passive, the cleft sentence and

the existential construction), attention has been paid to pseudo-clefts, fronting (of both thematic and rhematic elements, also sometimes referred to, respectively, as topicalization and focus movement), left dislocation, raising, emphatic and end-focus motivated word order configurations, alternative constructions of the verb's actants, and some minor types (Grzegorek 1984, Sgall et al. 1980: 4.25).

However, more detailed treatment of the FSP aspects of most of these points is lacking. The reason for choosing the passive, the cleft sentence and the existential construction is obviously due to the initiators of this paper: all three points have been addressed, to a greater or lesser extent, by both Vilém Mathesius and Jan Firbas, and moreover, they have received a good deal of attention in further research. Consequently, an outline of a fairly complex picture can now be presented.

Of the three constructions, Czech writers have been most concerned with the passive. In Mathesius' work (Mathesius 1915, 1947, 1975) it was a recurrent point, approached from different aspects. Mathesius' consistently functional conception of language even led him to disregard form to the extent of classing some active forms as special types of the passive: apart from formally passive forms (such as *The play is performed by our best actors, I have been told that ..., He will be well taken care of*) he regarded as passive, constructions like *to be subject to, to be the subject of*, further what he called adverbial predications, e.g. *the ship is under construction*, and possessive predications, e.g. *he had his reward at once*. The last type was of particular interest to him where it involved an indirectly affected subject: *persons who had relatives going out, I had one Colossus bulging over my shoulders*. Some of these constructions are also mentioned in connection with FSP as means facilitating movement in the position of sentence elements. However, the type of the passive which appears to be a word order device par excellence is the passive with an expressed *by-agent*, illustrated by ex. [1].

[1] The play is performed by our best actors.

In his account of English word order Mathesius (1975: 157) states, "In English ... the grammatical principle asserts itself especially with regard to the expression of the relation between the subject and the finite verb. The usual word order of the English sentence, viz. subject – finite verb – object cannot be changed at will. Hence in such a case the grammatical word order fails to comply with the principle of functional sentence perspective ... English resolves this conflict by resorting to the passive *At home I am helped by Father / Zu Hause hilft mir der Vater.*" This sentence is part of an often quoted passage which appears in Mathesius' account of the function of the subject in English (1975: 101-103).

[2] Jan velmi dobře prospíval. Ve škole horlivě naslouchal každému slovu svých učitelů a doma mu pomáhal otec [at-home him helped father], kdykoliv mu byla nějaká úloha příliš těžká. Práce všeho druhu se mu velice dařila a říkalo se o něm, že pracuje stejně přirozeně jako dýchá.
John prospered very well. At school he eagerly listened to every word of his teachers. At home he was helped by his father whenever he found his task too difficult. He was successful in any kind of work. He was said to be working as naturally as he was breathing.

As the passage demonstrates, Mathesius was primarily concerned with the thematic function of the English subject, which he also demonstrated in other types of the passive, and in the constructions of verbs of perception.

Jan Firbas's contribution to the insights into the functions of the passive (1966, 1992: Chapters 4 and 7) was initiated by Mathesius' views, which Firbas on the whole endorsed, except for one point: the insusceptibility of ModE to the requirements of FSP. Mathesius had

arrived at this contention as a result of the occurrence of nonthematic subjects in many English sentences; he was well aware of this fact despite the strong tendency of ModE to express the theme of the sentence by means of the grammatical subject. It was precisely this point, the nonthematic subjects, which led Jan Firbas to perceive another function of the passive, a function hitherto entirely unnoticed. In contrast to Mathesius, who regarded word order as the only means of FSP, Jan Firbas demonstrated the operation of two other factors in written language, context and semantic structure. Nonthematic subjects are indicated by context independence and semantic structure expressing existence or appearance on the scene. The latter feature is basically due to the semantics of the verb conceived on a fairly general level. This is of course well known, but what needs to be noted in the present connection is the conception of the semantic aspect from the level of general sentence semantics, which allows disregard of the grammatical form, and even of the basic lexical meaning. Only in this way could the following passives be included among the different surface realizations of what Jan Firbas later called the presentation scale:

- [3] a. Sometimes a terrible cry was to be heard (when the doctor was pulling out the teeth of some little boy).
b. New Zealand apples were being sold, or rice-brooms from Australia were exhibited or a billiard-table manufactured in the Bermudas. (Firbas 1966)
c. Quite a number of houses have been built in our town.
d. Powerful machines have been constructed.
e. An uncanny impression is thereby created.
f. A new method has been developed.
g. Ingenious new schemes have been devised in various institutes.
h. Monuments will be erected in the centre of the city. ... (Firbas 1992: 62)

These sentences can also be perspectived in a different way, but where the adverbial (if there is any) serves as a setting and the subject as the phenomenon to be presented, the meaning conveyed by the verbal forms is fully compatible with appearance / existence on the scene.

Jan Firbas concludes that these observations do not disprove the well-known fact that in a majority of cases the passive participates in perspectiving the sentence away from the subject.

Significantly, the different functions of the passive demonstrated on the one hand by Mathesius, and on the other hand by Jan Firbas, are closely connected with the respective types of the passive: whereas Mathesius described the most frequent FSP structure of passives with an expressed *by*-agent, i.e. a transitive verbal structure with two participants that exchange their positions, Jan Firbas was concerned with agentless passives, i.e. transitive verbal structures whose first participant is deleted owing to its general nature or irrelevance in the particular context.

Let me now briefly summarize how these findings appear in the light of further studies (Dušková 1971, 1999b, 2002b). According to statistical data English passives with an expressed *by*-agent account for some 10 per cent (10.53 per cent) of passive forms (63 out of 598 instances of passive forms from a total of 5 000 finite verb forms, Dušková 1971). In addition to the 63 instances of passives with a *by*-agent, there were 21 passives with a quasi-agent, construed with a preposition other than *by*, and 15 janus-agents. Nearly all of these examples testify to Mathesius' interpretation of the interaction of FSP and English grammatical word order, i.e. the subject is thematic and the *by*-agent rhematic, as in:

- [4] Such situations are characterized by varying degrees of bilingualism.

Nevertheless, in a small number of passives (less than 10, some 12 per cent) the construction displays a thematic *by*-agent and a rhematic subject, which in the active would exchange their

positions; their linear order would then be consistent with their degree of communicative dynamism (CD), i.e. in accordance with the basic distribution of CD.

- [5] a. In the six years 1956-61, a total of 81,079 applications for disablement benefit were made by coal miners.
b. In the six years 1956-61, there was a total of 81,079 applications for disablement benefit made by coal miners.

The *by*-agent of this sentence is context dependent (coal miners are what is being talked about in the preceding sentences), and there is no contrast with workers from other fields. Note that the verb in the passive is one of those displayed by Firbas's examples. The only context independent element in the sentence is the quantifier in the subject, which is what makes it rhematic, since miners' applying for disablement benefits has also been mentioned. The reason why the passive and not the active is used is presumably textual: since the rhematic subject is the only element that contains new information, it is expedient to introduce it as early as possible; all that follows merely repeats what is being discussed. The FSP structure of [5] a. would be indicated more distinctly by the corresponding existential extension of the sentence, adduced in [5] b.

Textual factors typically assert themselves where both participants of a transitive verb are context dependent, and the rheme is constituted by the verb, as in the following examples:

- [6] a. The sight of this harmless vanity depressed him. (James OS: 342)
a.' He was depressed by the sight of this harmless vanity.
b. Her initial testiness had surprised him. (James OS: 350)
b.' He was surprised by her initial testiness.

The change in the voice hardly affects the FSP structure, the context dependence of both noun phrases being clearly indicated by anaphoric devices and by the noncontrastive character of the context. The passive forms of the sentences are slightly more consistent with the basic distribution of CD in that the preverbal noun phrase is the theme proper and the postverbal element is the diatheme, while in the active the diatheme precedes the theme proper. But this is often the case in English, especially in sentences with initial adverbials followed by pronominal subjects. In these examples the choice of voice appears to be due to textual aspects which clearly manifest themselves in the following example, showing the hierarchically superordinate status of text construction with respect to the FSP structure within a sentence:

- [7] a. ["Are you all right, Blackie? I mean, do you want someone to go home with you?"] The thought appalled Blackie. (James OS: 195)
b. Blackie was appalled by the thought.

The subject resumes the most activated element from the immediately preceding context (*do you want someone to go home with you*), whereas the object refers to an element further to the left (more distant) in the text. Both noun phrases are context dependent, and have the same form of realization: there is no modification, and both are definite. Their respective positions appear to be due to the position of the sentence in the text: they present a mirror image of the order in which their antecedents occur in the preceding textual string.

In examples like the following a motivating factor is presumably to be sought in the more frequent use of the passive, due to the attitudinal meaning of the particular verbs: they form statal passives, whose past participles tend to recategorize as adjectives.

- [8] a. She was delighted at the news.
b. I am so terribly upset by all this.

Returning to ex. [5], which illustrates the configuration of a rhematic subject with a thematic *by*-agent, i.e. a presentation scale implemented by a passive with an expressed *by*-agent, it appears to be rare. Thematic *by*-agents themselves, though essentially less frequent than rhematic *by*-agents, more often occur with thematic subjects where the rheme is constituted by some other clause element. Exx. [8] a. and b. demonstrate rhematic verbs. The following examples illustrate rhematic adverbials other than *by*-agents.

- [9] a. The problem was extensively debated in ‘naturalistic’ ... terms by the Greek philosophers, and was of considerable importance in the development of traditional linguistic theory. It has been discussed at various times by philosophers since then, notably in the eighteenth century. (Lyons: 6)
b. ... Philosophers have discussed it at various times since then, notably in the eighteenth century.
c. ... Philosophers have since (then) discussed it at various times, notably in the eighteenth century.
d. ... Since then philosophers have discussed it at various times, notably in the eighteenth century.

In [9] a. the first sentence contains the prototypical passive with a thematic subject and a rhematic *by*-agent. In the second sentence the only new element is the temporal specification whose rhematic function is reinforced by the focusing subjunct *notably* in the further specification. The active counterpart would be more consistent with the basic distribution of CD, cf. the active alternatives [9] b., c. and d., but interferes with the presentation of the content as a thematic progression with constant theme, reflected in the maintenance of the same subject through several successive sentences. This tendency of English has also been pointed out by Mathesius in connection with ex. [2] and elsewhere.

The next example displays a similar structure:

- [10] The thesis of linguistic egalitarianism is now less widely accepted by linguists than it was a generation ago. (Lyons: 7)

The passage discusses the attitudes of linguists to egalitarianism, the new element being the specification of degree: *less widely*. Of particular interest is the following example which contains a *by*-phrase in initial position:

- [11] By the productivity of human language is meant its unboundedness, or, to use a looser but suggestive term, its ‘openendedness’ ... (Lyons: 14)

The sentence deviates from grammatical word order in displaying subject - verb inversion after an initial adverbial. The deviation is clearly motivated by the principle of basic distribution of CD: the initial *by*-phrase is thematic, and the final position displays the rheme, realized by the subject. However, the verb can hardly be interpreted as presentative: the conveyed meaning indicates equative relationship between the two noun phrases. Obviously, the *by*-phrase does not represent a *by*-agent but an adjunct of means modifying an agentless passive whose agent is implied by the preceding paragraph:

- [12] By duality of structure linguists refer to the fact that ... (Lyons: 4)

Firbas’s presentation scale involving a passive verb form is mainly found in passive sentences without an expressed agent, such as are adduced in his works. My sources have provided the following examples:

- [13] a. Near one of the posts, a hammer and a few nails had been left behind. (Adams: 18)
b. At the moment of his departure a telegram was handed to him.

- c. One more specific point should be made in this context. (Lyons: 2)
- d. Two general points may be made about recent developments in this area. (Lyons: 11)

To illustrate the relative frequency of occurrence of the different types, let me quote the results of a brief quantitative probe into the uses of the passive in Lyons's Introduction to *New Horizons in Linguistics 2*. The first 16 pages display 108 passive clauses, the majority of which represent agentless passives: 86 (80 per cent), the remaining 22 (20 per cent) being agentive. The percentage of agentive passives is here higher as compared with the data of the more extensive study of 1971, but owing to the much smaller size of the Lyons sample this may not be conclusive. Among the nonagentive passives there are two instances of the presentation scale (see exx. [13] c. and d. above; note that both contain the verb *make*). Sentences with agentive passives (22) include no instance of a presentation scale, but there are 2 instances (10 per cent) of agentive passives with a thematic *by*-agent (exx. [9] a. and [10]).

These and the previously adduced results show that what Mathesius pointed out was the prototypical type of a passive with an expressed *by*-agent, while Jan Firbas demonstrated the surface nature of the syntactic form by applying the same methodological apparatus to passive sentences as in the case of the active. Application of this approach in more recent research has provided further evidence to show that the passive is not an automatic device for placing the rheme at the end, but a structure subject to the operation of the same interplay of FSP factors as active sentences that have no claim to focusing (reordering) function. Any element of a passive sentence may constitute the rheme - the subject, the verb, an adverbial, not only *by*-agents, but also other semantic roles, just as any element may be thematized by the context. As regards the basic distribution of CD, passive sentences display similar deviations as active ones, thematic elements in final position being fairly frequent in both, cf. ex. [14].

[14] This was accepted between them. (Adams: 18)

However, against this background the two types of patterning revealed by Mathesius and Jan Firbas are clearly discernible.

A finding that has newly emerged from more recent research is the operation of textual factors which may override linear ordering determined by the FSP structure alone.

The last point to be mentioned in this part is the passive of ditransitive verbs. Although sufficient quantitative data are not available (in my study of 1971 there were 16 instances, i.e. 2.68 per cent from a total of 598 finite passive forms), the subject appears to be prevalently implemented by the thematic element, whichever object in the active it may be. Compare the following examples:

- [15] a. Plants are left in continuous light for a few days and then given a dark period of 7 1/2 hours –
- b. there is no reason why these assumptions and expectations should not be given full theoretical recognition from the outset. (Lyons: 2)
- c. We may yet be spared undue publicity.
- d. All these men had applied for compensation, but it had been granted to only two.
- e. The ring was left to the eldest daughter.

In the small sample the distribution of direct and indirect object as the subject of the passive does not greatly differ, a moderate predominance being shown by direct object: 56.76 per cent against 43.23 per cent accounted for by indirect object.

It may be concluded that the FSP function of the passive, primarily found in the type with an expressed *by*-agent and in the passive of ditransitive verbs, appears to be a major function, but should be seen against the background of a variety of other uses. Passive sentences are found to be subject to the operation of the same FSP factors as active sentences without a focusing device. In other words syntactic form, though serving as an FSP device, overrides neither context dependence, nor semantic structure, but is subordinate to both.

The second construction to be discussed, the cleft sentence, figures prominently in the work of Jan Firbas, while Mathesius gave it only a brief mention in connection with strengthening and emphasis (1975: 165). Here he describes the cleft sentence as a specific English device expressing emphasis by means of a whole clause after the fashion of the French construction, cf. ex. [16].

- [16] a. It is not conscience that makes me do so.
b. It was he who advised the King not to do so. (Mathesius 1975: 165)

Jan Firbas was concerned with the cleft sentence from the FSP point of view expounded in his well-known article ‘It was yesterday that ...’ (Firbas 1967). Discussing the sentence adduced in (17)

- [17] It was yesterday that George flew to Prague.

he first considers the question of the rheme, and assigns it to *yesterday* as the most natural interpretation. The *It-is ... that*-construction singles out *yesterday* for particular attention, throwing it into relief. At the same time he points out the conspicuous deviation from the basic distribution of CD: the rheme is found in the first part of the sentence. Assigning the other FSP functions to the remaining elements of the sentence, Firbas shows that the transition, the copula *be*, mediates between the subject *it* (the theme proper) + *that George flew to Prague* (the rest of theme) on the one hand, and *yesterday* (the rheme) on the other. The subordinate clause constitutes a communicative subfield of its own, in which respect it differs from the underlying noncleft sentence where the rheme is signalled – in this case – by extra-strong stress: *George flew to Prague YESTERDAY*. In the article this point is not specifically mentioned, but it was made explicit in a discussion.

As for the syntactic aspect, Firbas considers it from the viewpoint of potential ambiguity of the subordinate clause with a relative clause, illustrated by [18]:

- [18] a. It is the country that suits my wife best. (Firbas 1967)
b. She likes to spend her holidays in Italy. It (viz. Italy) is the country that she likes best.

The disambiguating factor is found in the FSP function of the subordinate clause: in the cleft sentence it is thematic – compare the question *What is it that suits her best?* Here *country* is put in contrast with town life. On the other hand, the relative clause carries new information, and constitutes the rheme in that it specifies the particular country with respect to other countries. This is reflected in the prosodic structure: in the cleft sentence the intonation centre (the nucleus) is on *country*, whereas if the subordinate clause is relative, the intonation centre is on *best*.

Just as Mathesius revealed the prototypical case of the passive that serves as a syntactic device of FSP, Jan Firbas identified, and insightfully interpreted the prototypical use of the cleft sentence: a structure involving one rhematic element, contained in the main clause and constituted by the subject complement in an identifying copular predication, and a presupposed, given subordinate clause, forming one FSP unit with the subject of the main clause, the initial *it*.

In more recent studies the cleft sentence has been given a good deal of attention from both the syntactic and the textual points of view.

As regards the distinction between the subordinate clause in the cleft sentence and a relative clause, apart from the FSP aspect demonstrated by Jan Firbas there is a difference in the function of the initial *it*. In the cleft sentence it is a syntactic component of the cleft construction anticipating the subordinate clause; in other words, the initial *it* and the subordinate clause constitute one syntactic unit. Actually in one approach (Carlson 1983: 230) the subordinate clause is regarded as an obligatorily extraposed relative clause whose head is the subject of the main clause *it*. On the other hand if the subordinate clause has relative function, its antecedent is the element that precedes it. The initial *it* in the main clause is referential, either anaphoric, pointing back in the text to what precedes, or exophoric, identifying an object in the situation of utterance. Hence it can be replaced by its antecedent or an explicit denomination of the object/notion being referred to. Compare [18] b.

Further distinctions between the subordinate clause in the cleft sentence and the relative clause are found in their constructional properties (cf. Quirk et al. 1985: 1386-87; Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1034-1035, 1046, 1055-1057, 1414-1420).

As regards textual studies of the cleft sentence, it has been shown that contrary to the general view which associates the focused element with new information, there are two major types of *it*-clefts, one containing new information in the main clause and the other in the subordinate clause (Prince 1978, Dvořáková 1988). If the main clause contains new information and the subordinate clause is context dependent, the degree of communicative dynamism in the main clause greatly exceeds that of the subordinate clause. This is the type described and interpreted by Jan Firbas: it is indeed to be regarded as the prototypical use of the cleft sentence. According to statistical data, this type somewhat predominates over the type with given information in the main clause and new information in the subordinate clause (55 per cent and 45 per cent, respectively, cf. Dvořáková 1988, and Note 15 in Dušková 1999a, Part 2: 332). Prince (1978) characterized these two types of *it*-clefts as stressed-focus *it*-clefts in which the subordinate clause conveys given information, and hence is weakly stressed; and informative-presupposition *it*-clefts which have a normally stressed subordinate clause and a short main clause focusing an anaphoric element (cf. discourse-old and discourse-new presupposition in Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1424). The information in the subordinate clause, though new, is presented as presupposed. The concept of presupposition thus appears to be distinct from that of familiar information (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1424).

Inquiries into the syntactic function of the focused element in the underlying non-cleft sentence suggest that *it*-clefts are used to give prominence to what would in the non-cleft sentence stand at the beginning and be mostly thematic, whether context-dependent or not. The most frequently focused element is the subject, which in English, as is well known, favours the FSP function of theme. This is due to its being largely bound to the initial or preverbal part of the sentence, i.e. to the position of the theme. The second most frequently focused element is the adverbial. Jan Firbas's example illustrates an adverbial operating as a specification; there are also *it*-clefts displaying a focused scene-setting adverbial, which would stand at the beginning in the noncleft form, cf.

- [19] a. [The servants were permitted to hold evening prayer in the kitchen ... Upstairs, Mrs Poulteney had to be read to alone;] it was in these more intimate ceremonies that Sarah's voice was heard at its best and most effective. (Fowles: 54)
 b. in these more intimate ceremonies Sarah's voice was heard at its best and most effective
 A právě při těchto důvěrnějších sezeních zněl Sařin hlas nejlépe a nejpůsobivěji. (Žantovská: 53)
 [And precisely in these more-intimate sessions sounded Sara's voice best_{adverb} and most-effectively]

In the cleft form the sentence acquires two information peaks, a minor one in the first part after the copula, and the main focus at the end of the subordinate clause. This structure explicitly indicates the relation to the preceding context, in particular the element with which the underlying theme of the cleft construction is contrasted. At the same time the presentation of the new information contained in the subordinate clause achieves a climax.

Apart from these two major uses (the type with discourse-old and the type with discourse-new presupposition), there are several minor ones. Examples [20] a. and b. illustrate, respectively, proverbial clefts (ex. a.) and stylistic clichés (ex. b.)

- [20] a. It is never a bad day that has a good night.
a'. A day that has a good night is never a bad day.
b. It was a very troubled wife that greeted Henry on his return that night.
b.' The wife that greeted Henry on his return that night was a very troubled wife.

Neither of these uses constitutes a cleft sentence since both lack one of the defining features of the cleft construction: exx. [20] a. and b. do not represent the equative, identifying type of copular predication but ascribe a quality to the subject, cf. [20] a.' and b'.

We may mention yet another use of the *it*-cleft found in sentences with multiple postverbal adverbials, as in the following example:

- [21] a. It was not by chance that Mrs S. arrived in town so early that morning.
b. Mrs S. did not arrive in town so early that morning by chance.
c. That morning Mrs S did not arrive in town so early by chance.

Here the use of the *it*-cleft relieves the cumulation of adverbials in the postverbal section – there would be four in the non-cleft form – and at the same time gives additional prominence to what would be the rheme proper even in the underlying form. The only other option is to place the temporal setting at the beginning, but then it would acquire a higher degree of CD within the thematic section, uncalled for from the textual point of view.

To conclude this brief account of *it*-clefts, two points will be mentioned: the counterparts of the cleft sentence in Czech, and the distinction between the cleft sentence and the passive.

The first point is presented in the light of syntactically divergent Czech equivalents of the English subject complement. Admittedly, this gives only a partial picture, but nevertheless it reveals one general finding. In Dušková (2005) a recurrent Czech counterpart of the English cleft construction was found in non-cleft, one-clause sentences. This interlingual relation appears to be fairly general despite the fact that a structural counterpart of *it*-clefts (*vytýkací důrazový opis* [the emphatic focusing periphrastic construction], Daneš et al. 1987: 537) does exist in Czech. The prevalence of one-clause counterparts is hardly surprising, considering that Czech is a synthetic language, whereas English is analytic. Compare ex. [19] a. and the following examples.

- [22] a. It's his ghost that people claim to see, still scrubbing away at the stain. (James OS: 32)
Prý₁ tu₂ lidé₃ dodnes₄ vídají₅ jeho ducha₆, jak₇ se₈ snaží₉ skvrnu₁₀ odstranit₁₁.
(Rovenská: 41)
[it-is-said₁ here₂ people₃ till-today₄ often-see₅ his ghost₆ as₇ reflexive particle₈ he-tries₉ stain₁₀ to-remove₁₁]
b. It was not concern for his only daughter that made him send her to boarding-school, but obsession with his own ancestry. (Fowles: 51)
Neposlal₁ svou dceru₂ do internátu₃ z přílišné péče o ni₄, ale₅ proto₆, že₇ byl₈ posedlý₉ myšlenkou₁₀ na vlastní předky₁₁. (Žantovská: 50)

[He-not-sent₁ his daughter₂ to boarding-school₃ from excessive care for her₄,
but₅ therefore₆ that₇ he-was₈ obsessed₉ with-idea₁₀ of own ancestors₁₁]
c. But it's Gerard who runs the firm. (James OS: 30)
Ale firmu vede Gerard. (Rovenská: 38)
[But firm_{accusative} runs Gerard_{nominative}.]

These instances reveal a difference not only in the FSP, but also in the explicitness of indicating the textual relations, as has already been suggested in connection with ex. [19] a. In English the bi-clausal realization of the propositional content produces two communicative subfields which allow more explicit indication of the connection with the preceding context, especially the signalling of a contrast. In the Czech rendition by a single clause, where no focalizer is present, this remains to be inferred from the context alone since the rhematic element is indicated in the same way as a noncontrastive rheme (intonation playing a role primarily in speech). In the case of informative presupposition *it*-clefts, the contrastive function also involves an underlying thematic element, highlighted by the construction. My data show that the information structure is mostly indicated by word order alone, and less frequently with the support of a focalizer (as in [19] a.). In my sources of the study, there was only one instance of an *it*-cleft with parallel structure in Czech, cf. [23].

- [23] a. ... it was the Ca' Foscari which his architect had been instructed to build.
(James OS: 33)
b. byl₁ to₂ Casa Foscari₃, podle₄ něhož₅ měl₆ architekt₇ vystavět₈ dům₉.
(Rovenská: 42)
[was₁ it₂ Casa Foscari₃ according-to₄ which₅ was₆ architect₇ to-build₈ house₉]

However, additional statistical data are needed to allow drawing other than tentative conclusions.

The last point concerns the potential overlap between a passive with an expressed *by*-agent and a corresponding *it*-cleft.

- [24] a. The book was written by X.Y.
b. It was X.Y. who wrote the book.

The two constructions differ in the presupposed part: in the case of the passive it may involve more or fewer elements, whereas in the case of the *it*-cleft the presupposed part generally involves all elements except one. In the passive, the only presupposed element may be the subject, as in answer to the question

- [25] What do you know / What can you say about *The Castle of Otranto*?
a. *The Castle of Otranto* / It was written by Horace Walpole.
b. *It was Horace Walpole who wrote *the Castle of Otranto*.

In FSP terms, the only context dependent element is the subject, whereas the entire predicate is context independent. The cleft sentence is here a textual misfit.

Now let us consider the two constructions as answers to the question

- [26] Who wrote *The Castle of Otranto*?
a. *The Castle of Otranto* was written by Horace Walpole.
b. It was written by Horace Walpole.
c. Horace Walpole.
d. It was Horace Walpole (elliptical cleft: who wrote it)

Since here the only context independent element is the author, the question arises whether this is not an instance of overlap between the cleft sentence and the passive, cf. [26] d. However,

in the passive there is no suggestion of a contrastive context. The question entails the existence of a writer, and the answer specifies the individual within the respective class.

On the other hand, the cleft sentence presupposes a contrast not between the class of authors and a singled-out writer, but one between two singled-out writers:

- [27] Who wrote *The Castle of Otranto*? – (*The Castle of Otranto* was written by) Mrs Radcliffe.
a. I'm afraid you're mistaken: It was Horace Walpole who wrote *The Castle of Otranto*.
b. No, *The Castle of Otranto* was written by Horace WALPOLE.

The passive is conceivable here if contrastively stressed, cf. [27] b.

The last point to be briefly discussed, the existential construction, is noted by Mathesius as “another device [besides the passive] that helps to reconcile the conflicting requirements of functional sentence perspective and the English grammaticized word order” (1975: 119). He points out that here both the subject and the predicate, construed as postmodification, frequently express something new.

- [28] a. There is a strong wind blowing outdoors.
b. There was no possibility of escape. (Mathesius 1975: 119)

Jan Firbas mentions existential *there* in connection with the immediately relevant situational context (1992: 24), described in terms of non-linguistic referents. Existential *there* is classed together with such notions as speaker/writer, listener/reader, people in general, nature in general, i.e. *I, you, one, it*, which can be introduced into discourse directly, without an antecedent. “With due alterations, the same applies to the pronoun, or rather proadverb, *there* of the existential construction. Though semantically very weak, it is not totally stripped of all meaning. As an integral part of the existential construction, it acts as an indicator of the scene expressed by a genuine adverbial of place.

- [29] There were books on the table / There were books there.”

The existential construction is noted at a further point, more relevant to the present discussion, in the Chapter “The semantic factor,” subsection “The context-independent subject” (1992: 59). “In the absence of any of the successful competitors so far discussed [=object, subject complement, object complement, and adverbial] the verb shows a strong tendency to recede into the background and to be exceeded in CD in the presence of a context independent subject.”

- [30] a. A boy came into the room.
b. There was a boy in the room.
c. In the centre of the room ... stood ... old Jolyon himself.
d. A very sweet look had come into the old lady's face.
e. There was little sentimentality about the Forsytes. (Firbas 1992: 59)

“In each sentence, the notional component of the finite verb expresses appearance or existence on the scene. ... The subject is context-independent and conveys the information towards which the communication is perspectived. (In the case of the *there*-clause, this applies to its ‘notional’ subject). ... The adverbial elements serve as settings. ... under the circumstances the subject carries the highest degree of CD irrespective of sentence position ...” (ibid.) The existential construction is here presented as one of the forms of the presentation scale. According to the findings of recent research (Dušková 1998) this realization form of the presentation scale is not only the most frequent, but also the only neutral form in the sense of being unmarked with respect to deviation from both the grammatical word order and the basic distribution of communicative dynamism.

Treatments of the existential construction in the literature are mostly concerned with other aspects than the role played by existential *there* in FSP, specifically with the relations between existential and non-existential sentences:

- [31] a. A friend of yours is at the door.
b. There is a friend of yours at the door.

- [32] a. No one was waiting.
b. There was no one waiting

Furthermore, attention is paid to semantic aspects, including the relations between locative, possessive and existential sentences, and to the type of definiteness conveyed by the notional subject (Breivik 1983, Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1390-1401; Quirk et al. 1985: 1402-1414; Grzegorek 1984: 29-30, 76-84). Rather as an exception, the FSP aspect is also taken into consideration by Grzegorek (1984: 78), who discerns two FSP structures in locative-existential sentences according to whether the locative element belongs to the focus or is context dependent. However, the only observation made in this respect concerns the difference between the two types in intonation: where the locative element belongs to the focus, it carries a secondary intonation centre; if context dependent, the sentence stress is on the notional subject alone.

- [33] a. There's a strange looking WOMAN in the HOUSE.
b. There's a strange looking WOMAN in the house.
b.' In the house, there's a strange looking WOMAN. (Grzegorek: 78)

Only the type with a context dependent adverbial allows the adverbial to be placed initially ([33] b.'). It is this type that appears to be the major one (cf. Dušková 1977). Evidently, Jan Firbas again described the prototypical case. The low degree of CD of such adverbials is occasionally reflected in a deviant word order configuration, displaying the adverbial element before the notional subject. Such word order arrangement is clearly motivated by the respective degrees of CD that the sentence elements carry. They are then found in positions consistent with the basic distribution of CD. Compare:

- [34] a. There was about the place that dead silence indicative of an untenanted house.
b. There were in his in-tray no fewer than thirty unpaid bills. (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1392)
c. There was in the vicinity a helpful doctor. (Quirk et al. 1985: 1404)
d. Despite all the intellectual activity of the time, there was in print no guide to the tongue, no linguistic vade-mecum, no single book that Shakespeare or Marlowe or Nashe, ... or any of their other learned contemporaries could consult. (Winchester: 71)

This position of a scene-setting adverbial is the least frequent one. Though mostly thematic, locative and temporal adverbials in existential constructions are commonly found at the end, cf. the following examples. The final position of thematic elements is here nothing exceptional, thematic elements in final and postverbal position being fairly frequent in English in general.

- [35] a. There was nothing alarming there. (Adams: 15)
b. Of course there were real mad dogs in those days. (Raverat: 51)
c. There is note on your desk. (James UJ: 10)

Initial adverbials are less common than final, but more common than medial. Compare ex. [36].

[36] Here there was a delay. (Adams: 19)

The relatively rare placement of a context dependent adverbial in the initial position is doubtless connected with the fact that any initial clause element other than the subject is more or less marked: it is more prominent than in its regular position, hence this position involves some motivation. In the case of initial adverbials a concomitant factor is frequently found in their connective function. It is to be noted that the position which is most consistent with the gradual increase in CD, illustrated by the examples listed under [34], is the least frequent, whereas the most deviant position in this respect (exx [35] a., b., c.) is to be regarded as the most regular. This clearly manifests the primary principle of English word order, its grammatical function. In this case it asserts itself in the customary order of the clause elements.

While the sentence position of scene-setting adverbials does not affect their thematic function (just as the sentence position does not affect the rhematic function of context independent subjects construed with verbs of existence or appearance), there are also instances where the position of an adverbial in the existential construction is decisive for its FSP function. This is manifestly connected with the semantics of the adverbial which disposes it to operate as a specification. Compare ex. [37].

[37] a. Everywhere there were clusters of dry droppings. (Adams: 15)
b. There were clusters of dry droppings everywhere.

If placed finally, the adverbial acquires the function of a specification and constitutes the rheme proper, cf. [37] b.

The importance of the semantics of the adverbial is shown by the following example which contains a final adverbial whose rhematic function is reinforced by a focalizer:

[38] At this height there was no risk of prying eyes even from the top desks of buses.
James (OS: 340)

Without the focalizer, in written language the FSP function of the final adverbial would be ambiguous. In speech, the ambiguity would be resolved by intonation.

Example [37] b. in itself does not disprove the defining features of the notional subject in the existential construction, viz. its context independence, and hence its rhematic function. In fact the most dynamic element is frequently not the subject itself, but its postmodification. Characteristically, notional subjects in existential constructions are expanded; there is then an extensive rhematic part, introduced by the head of the subject construction, as in [34] a. and d., [35] a., and [39].

[39] But there was a second bout of worship to be got through. (Fowles: 54)

However, modification does not constitute a separate FSP unit but operates within the FSP function of its head. As regards existential constructions with final rhematic adverbials, their FSP structure is similar to that of existential sentences with final postmodification of the notional subject as long as the notional subject is context independent. The only difference concerns the composition of the rhematic part which includes two FSP units instead of one, as in [37] b.

However, a question arises how to regard the FSP structure of existential constructions whose notional subject is context dependent; in particular whether the communication is perspectived away from the subject, as in [40] b. in contrast to [40] a.

[40] a. A girl entered the room.
b. The girl entered the room. (Firbas 1966)

This question presents itself in both the bare existential and the existential locative sentences. Confining ourselves to the latter case, let us consider ex. [41].

- [41] a. There is a restaurant on the top floor.
b. On the top floor there is a restaurant.
c. V nejhořejším poschodí je restaurace.
[On top floor is restaurant]

According to the context, the notional subject can be introduced into discourse for the first time, e.g. when describing the building and the services offered on the top floor. Only in this case can the adverbial be placed initially (cf. [41] b.). In Czech, this is reflected in word order, cf. [41] c.

However, in answer to the question *Is there a restaurant in the building?*, which asks about the existence of an object in a particular place, the object is introduced in the question, and can thus be regarded as context dependent.

- [42] Is there a restaurant in the building?
There is a restaurant on the top floor.
Restaurace je v nejhořejším poschodí.
[Restaurant is on top floor]

The answer responds to two points: it asserts the existence of the object and specifies its location. In respect of asserting the existence the Czech equivalent is defective because it answers only the part about the location and might also be used in answer to *On which floor is the restaurant?* the existence of the restaurant in the Czech answer is presupposed, and hence presented as given. The Czech sentence is locative, not existential-locative.

The existential construction in answer to the question in [42] may be replaced by a non-existential form, cf. [43].

- [43] Is there a restaurant in the building?
a. There is a restaurant on the top floor.
b. A restaurant is on the top floor

In the literature, the pair of sentences illustrated by this example is mostly discussed from the viewpoint of semantic and/or pragmatic constraints which may rule out the non-existential form (Grzegorek 1984: 79-80; Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1396-1397). The semantic restrictions mainly concern abstract entities, as in [44].

- [44] a. There's plenty of room on the top shelf.
b. *Plenty of room is on the top shelf. (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1397)

However, even physical entities may block the non-existential use, cf. [46].

- [45] a. There is one performance at noon.
b. One performance is at noon. (*ibid.*)
[46] a. There is a fireworks display tonight.
b. *A fireworks display is tonight. (*ibid.*)

As pointed out by Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1397), the acceptability of the non-existential form requires connection to prior discourse. In terms of FSP, the subject must be context dependent. Accordingly, ex. [45] b. represents an instance illustrated by ex. [43], whereas [46] b. is a case of [41]. What is pragmatically determined is the likelihood of a previous, connection-establishing context. Ex. [46] b. is unacceptable because it does not contain any indication of being connected to prior discourse.

From what has been said it follows that existential and non-existential forms are not synonymous: the former asserts the existence of an object in a location, whereas the latter

asserts the location of an object which has some relationship to previous discourse. The FSP of the non-existential form is straightforward: the subject is thematic and the final adverbial is the rheme. All the three factors operating in written language act here in the same direction: semantic structure (viz. a quality scale, or rather a combined scale with telescoped phenomenon and quality-bearer function, cf. Firbas 1992: 66-67), context dependence and linearity.

In the case of the existential sentence the situation is more involved inasmuch as the semantic structure still implements the presentation scale, but previous mention of the phenomenon whose existence is being established flouts the requirement of context independence. The contextual factor being as a rule hierarchically superordinate, the question arises whether the existential construction is an exception or is subject to the customary interplay of the two factors. Explicitly, is the notional subject a component of the rheme or is it thematic? If the latter, the sentence must be interpreted as a quality scale, i.e. not as presenting a phenomenon, but as assigning a feature to it, in this case localization at a particular place. However, this interpretation is flouted by the semantic structure. On the other hand if the sentence is a presentation scale, the notional subject must be a component of the rheme. An argument in favour of this interpretation may be found in discerning a feature in which the referents of *restaurant* in the question and the answer differ. In other words the objects denominated by the subject noun phrase in the question and in the answer are not identical: in the question, *restaurant* is used in the categorial sense, the indefinite article being nonspecific. There is no existential presupposition: there may be no restaurant in the place. On the other hand, the indefinite article in the answer is specific, in referring to a particular, though unspecified object.

This is demonstrated if the answer responds to each of the points of the inquiry separately (note that we cannot ask about existence and location at the same time: **Where is there a restaurant in the building?*):

- [47] Is there a restaurant in the building?
- a. Yes, there is a restaurant in the building. It is on the top floor.
 - b. Yes, there is one. It is on the top floor.
 - c. Yes, there is. (It is) on the top floor.
 - d. Yes, on the top floor.

In the last form the stages indicated in a., b., c. are ellipted but unequivocally implied. An argument in favour of context dependence as hierarchically superordinate to syntactic and semantic structure can be adduced from Firbas's conception of the presentation scale, including realization forms implemented by the passive. However, the problem can hardly be resolved without taking into account bare existentials, which were not included for lack of data. At this point, the question of the FSP structure of the case illustrated by [42] can only be answered tentatively to the effect that the rheme includes, apart from the adverbial specification, the polarity of the verb asserting the existence of the object, as shown by [47]. As for the notional subject, the elliptical, as well as the pronominal form indicate thematic function.

To conclude. In spite of what has been added to the findings of Vilém Mathesius and Jan Firbas, each of the points that have been discussed calls for further study. All three points promise further findings from taking into account textual aspects; in the case of the passive with an expressed *by*-agent a line of further study that presents itself is the potential overlap with the *it*-cleft; the FSP structure of the existential construction, including both existential-locative and bare existential sentences, may be insightfully illuminated by a contrastive approach, with respect to the reflection of context dependence in the free Czech word order. The contrastive approach promises worthwhile findings in general, especially when based on

parallel texts. However, the point which I have attempted to make is that without the early insights of the two scholars whose work has inspired the foregoing reflections we might still be puzzling over some of the essential points whose nature they had revealed.

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