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## **Functional *Macrofield* Perspective?**

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The principles adopted in FSP as explored by Professor Jan Firbas can be applied, apart from the level of clause, also to higher hierarchical levels of discourse, such as paragraphs. The paper deals particularly with the area of the thematic and the rhematic layers that run throughout a text structure. Any integral text may be viewed as a communicative ‘macrofield’, in which different degrees of communicative dynamism are distributed over different parts of the text according to the extent to which the parts contribute towards the development of communication. For the purpose of analysis, an extract from the New Testament (Lk 2:1-20) is used.

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In my ongoing research, I have been dealing with the theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP), deriving from the findings introduced by Jan Firbas. A thorough survey of FSP is presented in Firbas’ *Functional Sentence Perspective in Written and Spoken Communication* (Firbas 1992); all the concepts and terms used or referred to in this paper can be found there.

Although FSP has been understood primarily as a phenomenon operating on the level of a clause or a sentence, its principles can be applied in an analogical way to other hierarchical levels of discourse. Firbas (1995) made this precious observation in his study on the thematic and the rhematic layers. He deals with the dynamic-semantic functions of separate clauses, forming thus tracks that are capable of showing the perspective of the whole text. Following the discussion of the layers, the reader is able to perceive the message the author is communicating.

In the present study – based on the research carried out for the purpose of my Ph.D. dissertation (Adam 2003) – I propose to look at the text from the higher-level point of view. I set out to investigate the area of a chapter, as a stand-alone piece of text. Deriving from detailed analyses of separate clauses (that represent basic distributional fields), I will go on examining whole paragraphs (chapters), i.e. **distributional macrofields**. I owe this term to Aleš Svoboda (1989: 9) who illustrated the application of the FSP theory in two new dimensions: distributional micro- and macrofields. The key question may be stated as follows:

**does the development of the degrees of communicative dynamism (CD) behave the same way at a higher level of text as it does within a clause?**

For the purpose of the FSP analysis I will use an extract from the Gospel according to St. Luke (Lk 2:1-20) as offered by the New International Version of the Bible (Kohlenberger 1997). First, let me present the text to be analyzed in its full length to provide the reader with the context; the numeral superscripts mark the original verse numbers in the Bible.

**THE BIRTH OF JESUS II (Luke 2:1-20)**

<sup>1</sup>In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup>(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup>And everyone went to his own town to register.

<sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and <sup>7</sup>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.

<sup>8</sup>And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup>An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup>Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

<sup>13</sup>Suddenly a great company of heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests."

<sup>15</sup>When the angels had left them and gone to the heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

<sup>16</sup>So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup>and who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

(Kohlenberger 1997)

At this point the whole stretch of the text analyzed will be presented in the form of an analysis chart; the horizontal lines of the chart represent individual distributional fields, while the columns follow the structure of the thematic and the non-thematic layers. The order in which the elements are presented shows the gradual increase in the degrees of CD (with the exception of the conjunctions). The actual linear arrangement of the individual constituents is suggested by numerals attached to the elements (for full interpretation of the chart layout, see Adam 2003: 33-34).

Table 1 FSP Analysis of Lk 2:1-20

Verse	Clause	TrPr (conj)	ThPr (Set/B)	DTh (Set/B)	TrPr/Tr (Q/Pr)	RhPr (Q)	Rh/RhPr (Sp/FSp)	RhPr (Ph)	Scale
2:1	1			In those days <sup>1</sup> Caesar Augustus <sup>2</sup>	issued <sup>3</sup>		a decree that... <sup>4</sup>		Q
	1a				should be taken <sup>2</sup>			a census of the entire Roman world <sup>1</sup>	Pr
2	2			This <sup>1</sup>	was <sup>2</sup>		the first census <sup>3</sup>		Q
3	3	And1		everyone <sup>2</sup>	went <sup>3</sup>		to his town <sup>4</sup> to register <sup>5</sup>		Q
4	4	So1		also <sup>4</sup> from the town of Nazareth in Galilee <sup>5</sup>	went <sup>3</sup>		to Bethlehem <sup>6</sup>	Joseph <sup>2</sup>	Pr
5	5		there <sup>3</sup>	He <sup>1</sup>	went to register <sup>2</sup>		with Mary, who... <sup>4</sup>		Q
	5a		to him <sup>4</sup>	who <sup>1</sup>	was pledged <sup>2</sup>		to be married <sup>3</sup>		Q
	5b	and1	^		was expecting <sup>2</sup>		a child <sup>3</sup>		Q
6	6			While they were there <sup>1</sup>	came <sup>3</sup>			the time for the baby to be born <sup>2</sup>	Pr
7	7	and1		she <sup>2</sup>	gave birth <sup>3</sup>		to her firstborn, a son <sup>4</sup>		Q
	8		She <sup>1</sup>	him <sup>3</sup>	wrapped <sup>2</sup>		in cloths <sup>4</sup>		Q
	9	and1	^ him <sup>3</sup>		placed <sup>1</sup>		in a manger <sup>4</sup> because there was no room for them in the inn <sup>5</sup>		Q
8	10	And1	there <sup>2</sup>	out in the fields <sup>5</sup>	were <sup>3</sup>			shepherds keeping watch over their flocks at night <sup>4</sup>	Pr
9	11			to them <sup>3</sup>	appeared <sup>2</sup>			An angel of the Lord <sup>1</sup>	Pr
12	12	and1	around them <sup>4</sup>		shon <sup>3</sup>			the glory of the Lord <sup>2</sup>	Pr
13	13	and1	they <sup>2</sup>		were <sup>3</sup>		terrified <sup>4</sup>		Q
10	14	But1	to them <sup>4</sup>	the angel <sup>2</sup>	said <sup>3</sup>		"..." <sup>5</sup>		Q
	14a		^		Do...be <sup>1</sup>		(not) afraid <sup>2</sup>		Q

Verse	Clause	TrPr (conj)	ThPr (Set/B)	DTh (Set/B)	TrPr/Tr (Q/Pr)	RhPr (Q)	Rh/RhPr (Sp/FSp)	RhPr (Ph)	Scale
14b			I1 you3		bring2		good news of great joy that...4		Q
14b'					will be1		for all the people2		Q
14c			to you5	Today1 / in the town of David2	has been born4			<i>a Saviour</i> 3	Pr
14d				He1	is2		Christ the Lord3		Q
14e			for you4	This1	will be2		a sign3		Q
14f			You1		will find2		a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger3		Q
13-14	15		with the angel4	Suddenly1	appeared3			<i>a great company of the heavenly host praising God...</i> 2	Pr
15	16			When the angels had left and gone into heaven1 the shepherds2 to one another4	said3		"... "5		Q
16a			us2		Let...go1		to Bethlehem3		Q
16b		and1			see2		this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about3		Q
16	17	So1	they2		hurried3		off4		Q
18		and1			found2		Mary and Joseph and the baby, who was lying in the manger3		Q
17	19		they2	When they had seen him1	spread3		the word concerning what had been told them about this child4		Q
18	20	and1		all who heard it2	were amazed3		at what the shepherds said to them4		Q
19	21	But1		Mary2 all these things4		treasured up3			Q
20	22	and1	them3		pondered2		in her heart4		Q
20	23		The shepherds1		returned2		glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told3		Q

Examining the FSP analysis of Luke 2:1-20, we can delimit exclusively the rhematic track, which is constituted by all rhemes proper (RhPr); the RhPr constituents are those carrying the highest degree of communicative dynamism. The outlines of RhPr elements themselves, as it were, narrate the story; a mere enumeration of the RhPr-layer members is capable of expressing the author's communicative purpose:

**Table 2 Rheme Proper Layer of Lk 2:1-20**

<p><b>a decree</b> → <b>a census</b> → the first census → to his town / to register → <b>Joseph</b> / to Bethlehem → with <b>Mary</b> → to be married → <b>a child</b> → the time for the baby to be born → to her firstborn, <b>a son</b> → in cloths → in a manger /because there was no room for them in the inn → <b>shepherds</b> keeping watch over their flocks at night → <b>An angel of the Lord</b> → the glory of the Lord → terrified → not afraid → <b>good news of great joy</b> → for all the people → <b>a Savior</b> → <b>Christ the Lord</b> → <b>a sign</b> → <b>a baby</b> wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger → <b>a great company of heavenly host</b> praising God → [the shepherds] to Bethlehem → and see this thing that has happened... → [hurried] off → Mary and Joseph and the baby... → the word concerning what has been told them about this child → at what the shepherds had said to them → [Mary] treasured up → in her heart → [the shepherds] returned / glorifying God...;</p>
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As has been noted already, 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 1968 and Firbas 1992: 16ff). The following discussion applies an analogical 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 the 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 FSP analysis of the passage of Luke 2:1-20 has inspired me to a more or less experimental approach towards the text. The dynamic flow of communication may be traced literally throughout all basic distributional fields, going vertically (paradigmatically) "downwards" (for details see Adam 2003: 161-164). It seems that the particular sections of the text have similar qualities as the elements within the clauses do; **the structure of the text resembles the theme-rheme structure in a sentence.**

Looking at the rhematic elements, we find a remarkable phenomenon in the initial part of the passage: the first distributional fields, as it were, set the necessary contextual background for the action to come in the following verses. In the first clause, we get to know about 'a decree' that was issued in the Roman Empire in the first century AD. We also know that this act was done by 'Caesar Augustus'. Thus, the basic scene is set – we get the information of *when* and *where* the future action will take place. In the next distributional field, the fact concerning the decree is further specified: 'a census / of the entire Roman world / should be taken.' The facts in terms of the census are completed by the information that 'This / was / the first census'. The last bit of information giving the reader the "props" is found in clause 'And / everyone / went / to his own town / to register.' Apparently, the scene of the story is – within the first three distributional fields – introduced.

From the functional viewpoint, this opening part of the passage acts like a dynamic-semantic element performing the Setting-function. In its nature, it introduces something context-dependent (the Roman world, the person of the Emperor, etc.). It may be argued, of

course, that this kind of information is not retrievable from the immediately relevant context; in this case, it will be beneficial, however, to deal with a wider understanding of context. The introductory section of the text under examination provides the reader undoubtedly with the least dynamic pieces of information. As the elements in question do not appear exclusively in the thematic sphere but at the same time, form the scenic background of the story, I would regard them, similarly as in the FSP interpretation of a clause, the diatheme of the macrofield. This interpretation is actually in harmony with Firbas' approach: due to their irretrievability, the elements cannot be considered themes proper, but diathemes.

Let me proceed to the next section of the passage where a whole set of individual participants of the communication enter the story, one by one. The first one is 'Joseph' and his fiancée 'Mary', followed by the main character of the narration – the baby Jesus, who comes to the stage. Then, having been born, he is visited by the shepherds. At the moment of the visit, another "actor" appears on the scene: 'an angel of the Lord', later followed by 'a great company of the heavenly host...'. These elements, though in the actual distributional fields performing the Ph functions, may be seen from a different perspective within the scope of the whole passage: together with the "props" of the opening section, they delimit the scene. In them, the reader is given the information concerning the participants of the communication. Viewed from this angle, they are thematic, performing the function analogical to that of a Setting. They are part of the diatheme.

In FSP terminology, the high point of the message is presented in the moment when the angel announces the shepherds the 'good news of great joy / that will be / for all the people: a Savior / has been born / to you'. It is the message that came to be referred to as *gospel* (or *εὐαγγέλιον* in Old Greek, i.e. "good news"); it represents the absolute climax of the passage and in it, the communicative purpose is fulfilled. Hence this peak (culminating in 'a Savior') may be considered as the rheme proper, performing the corresponding dynamic semantic function of a Phenomenon. The same principle is reflected by the clause 'He / is / Christ the Lord' (i.e. the Messiah).

The information conveyed by the Ph-element is further developed in the following verses – the angel speaks of the 'sign' and so the shepherds are given the clue and they 'will find / a baby wrapped in the cloths and lying in a manger'. From the view of FSP something is said about the "subject", and hence is specified by an element of a higher degree of CD. In this way, the units found within the above mentioned distributional fields might be regarded as Sp-elements.

It may be rightly asked whether a transitional layer is also functioning in the higher-level approach within the passage. In my opinion, it is the section dealing with the angel coming to the shepherds that performs the role of transition. Within the clauses describing this situation, we may observe information of transitory character: apart from carrying a clear notional content it connects – similarly to the temporal and modal exponents of verbs – the theme and the non-theme. I would say that the shepherds' fear and investigation is a context-independent carrier of meaning, but in the presence of a successful competitor ('a Savior'), it is not rhematic. Also from the thematic point of view it is clear that this section represents a natural transition between the exposition (the census, Joseph, Mary) and the climax of the story (the birth of Jesus Christ). These transitory elements naturally present the rhematic units and are thus performing the DSF of a Presentation.

To sum up the discussion of the distribution of the degrees of CD over the whole passage as seen "from above" (from the viewpoint of a higher level of text with a high degree of abstraction), let me draw the reader's attention to a remarkable phenomenon. What we may observe in the FSP analysis of the discussed passage is an unusual dynamic-semantic scale: **Set – Pr – Ph – Sp – FSp**. This pattern resembles the Combined Scale (cf. Firbas 1992: 67), but corresponds more precisely to the **Extended Presentation Scale** (cf. Chamonikolasová

(2005), because it does not include any Quality element. The Phenomenon is classically presented on the scene and, at the same time, is further developed by a Specification; both the rhematic notions (Ph and Sp) are present. I encountered such a type of scale in my Ph.D. dissertation, when examining texts of religious discourse (Adam 2003) – I labeled it as a **double rheme within a Presentation Scale**. I agree with Chamonikolasová, who considers the Ph-element to be “the dominant dynamic-semantic function” in this scale, contrasting it to the dominant role of a B-element within the ‘Combined Quality Scale’ (Chamonikolasová 2005). Examples of such an extended type of Presentation Scale have been traced in varied text samples; the question deserves, however, further research.

Below is a chart of a functional overview of the analyzed text, showing the key Rh-elements of the text, the ascribed dynamic-semantic functions, as well as dynamic-semantic tracks. The fact that the rheme proper is – somewhat unexpectedly – placed rather in the middle of the story, not towards the end (cf. Svoboda 1996: 199), has led me to a more-or-less hypothetical conclusion that it is possible to compare the text structure to that implemented in the classical drama: exposition – collision – crisis – peripeteia – catastrophe. The roles performed by individual sections as well as their corresponding dynamic semantic functions are shown in the following chart (the individual relations between the roles are approximate):

**Table 3 A Functional Overview of Lk 2:1-20**

<i>Element</i>	<i>Dyn.-Sem. Function</i>	<i>Dyn.-Sem. Track</i>	<i>Drama Structure</i>
<b>(Roman Empire)</b>	<b>(Set)</b>	<b>(DTh)</b>	<b>exposition</b>
<b>a census Augustus Joseph Mary</b>	<b>Set</b>	<b>DTh</b>	
<b>An angel shepherds good news</b>	<b>Pr</b>	<b>Tr</b>	<b>collision</b>
<b>a Savior a baby Christ the Lord</b>	<b>Ph</b>	<b>RhPr</b>	<b>crisis</b>
<b>a sign a baby in the manger</b>	<b>Sp</b>		<b>peripeteia</b>
<b>heavenly host</b>	<b>FSp</b>		<b>catastrophe</b>

Examining Table 3, it becomes clear that each section of the text under analysis may be interpreted also from the point of view of FSP and ascribed corresponding dynamic-semantic functions. We may even distribute the degrees of CD within the whole passage.

To conclude, the FSP analysis appears not to be restricted to the level of individual clauses, but to exceed them to operate on the suprasentential level of a communicative macrofield. The dynamic-semantic layers seem to play a significant role within the whole flow of communication in its entirety. Having analyzed a number of religious texts (see Adam

2003) and drawing on Svoboda (1996), I am now ready to define a **paragraph (a chapter) as a communicative distributional macrofield, which follows the same structural principles as their lower communicative counterparts (a clause, a noun phrase).**

I am aware of the fact that the results derived from the FSP principles applied to a higher level of text may seem farfetched. I admit the suggested interpretation is a simplification to a certain extent; its overall structure, however, proves it is well founded on the solid base of functional and systemic approach to language. It seems that the functional approach applied by the theory of FSP need not to be restricted to the level of individual clauses but can be applied to the hierarchical level of texts.

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