REVIEW ARTICLE

FUNCTIONAL SENTENCE PERSPECTIVE: TOWARDS A GREATER PRECISION?

ALEKSANDER SZWEDEK

Pedagogical University, Bydgoszcz

In a recent book by Milan Bílý *Intrasentential Pronominalization and Functional Sentence Perspective*, the author attempts to formulate rules of anaphora in the theoretical framework of Functional Sentence Perspective.

A linguistic work of the kind under review has to be evaluated from at least three points of view:
a) the theoretical framework,
b) the data,
c) the account of the data in the adopted theoretical framework. On such a basis one can evaluate the contribution of the work to linguistics, in particular from the point of view of economy and/or range of description.

The book consists of five chapters. Chapter I deals with the notion of coreference and various approaches to the phenomenon. Chapter II defines the basic assumptions and concepts of the FSP (Functional Sentence Perspective) approach. Chapters III to V describe coreference, reflexivization, pronominalization and cooccurrence.

The main aim, put forward in the first sentence of the book, is "to show how the rules of *anaphora* can be formulated in terms of *Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP)*". Understood literally, a mere reformulation of the phenomena under consideration is not an attractive or even justifiable goal. It has to be understood then, that the book aims at a formulation of rules of anaphora in a new, more adequate way than previous approaches.

Theoretical framework (FSP)

Chapter II, The Theory of Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP), rather than discussing the basic assumptions of the theory in the order of importance, in fact surveys the development of FSP (except a very sketchy summary in

2.8.0. and 2.8.1.). The following is a critical review of FSP theory as presented by Bílý.

Every sentence is "partitionable" into theme-section and rheme-section, with transition-section in between. In its most elaborate version the sentence consists of the following FSP elements:
ThPr (Theme Proper) — rest of Th(eme) — TrPr (Transition Proper) — rest of Tr(ansition) — Rh(eme) to the exclusion of RhPr (Rheme Proper) — RhPr (Rheme Proper) (Firbas 1975: 331).

Each one of the above mentioned elements has a certain degree of Communicative Dynamism (CD), i.e. a degree to which the element pushes the communication forward. "Elements conveying new, unknown information show higher degree of Communicative Dynamism than elements conveying known information" (Firbas 1964:270). On the scale of CD theme has the lowest and rheme the highest degree of CD).

In determining the degree of CD, context, linearity and semantic structure are the most important signals.

The context makes elements of an utterance either 'context-dependent' or 'context independent' understood in the narrowest sense possible. (Bílý 1981: 48).

Word order signals the so-called basic distribution of CD, i.e. the sentence starts with the theme proper (the element carrying the lowest degree of CD). The Communicative Dynamism successively increases through any other thematic elements, through transition and through other rhematic elements up to the rheme proper. (Bílý 1981:35).

The semantic structure, it is claimed, is the most important semantic realization of FSP. (Bílý 1981: 38). Generally speaking, all other things being equal, the Agent carries a lower degree of CD than the verb, and the verb carries a lower degree of CD than the Patient.

As if in passing Bílý also mentions intonation ("as the last item of FSP realization" (Bílý 1981: 43)) which is "seen as the automatic result of context" (ibid.). "If the context of a written sentence is not known, i.e. when we try to determine the gamut of CD in an isolated written sentence, we reconstruct the unmarked sort of context that corresponds to the unmarked interpretation of linearity and semantic means of FSP in the given sentence. Having done this, we can pronounce the sentence with an appropriate intonation" (Bílý 1981:43). One of the major objections that I want to raise at this point is that it does not seem correct to treat context, semantic structure and linearity on a par. Context does not manifest FSP ("Consituation (=context+situation) is the most important means for the manifestation of FSP." Bílý 1981: 34), does not signal the degree of CD (and consequently the FSP structure), context determines FSP structure, the structure that is manifested in the linear

and intonational phenomena on the surface. The semantic structure involves still another level and different problems. I want to suggest the following line of reasoning to criticize the approach proposed by FSP linguists:

Context is a crucial factor in determining the FSP structure. It makes elements either context dependent or context independent. The concepts context dependent and context independent should be understood as context recoverable and context nonrecoverable respectively, because in a general sense all elements are context dependent.

It follows then, that there is only one dichotomy in the thematic structure of the sentence based on the recoverability of elements, since we cannot have an element dependent on the context to a certain degree, i.e. partly recoverable. This is not equivalent with the depth of recoverability (cf. Szwedek 1980), i.e. such phenomena as the distance between items in the text, depth of associations, etc. This basic dichotomy has been referred to as given (known)/new, theme/rheme, datum/novum, etc. The degrees of CD, i.e. the degrees to which elements push communication forward, cannot be objectively determined, particularly the degrees intermediate between theme and rheme.

It is quite possible that the semantic structure plays a role in FSP interpretation, but certainly not in the simplistic way FSP theorists present the problem. For example, Firbas (1974), discussing sentences like *A lion killed a hunter*, claims, among others, that this word order reflects "the normal and natural order of phenomena as occurring in the extra-linguistic reality. Initiating an action, the actor necessarily exists before it. [...] The communication develops along the same line". (Firbas 1974: 35). Two difficulties arise in the interpretation of Firbas' statement: one is connected with the interpretation of the passive *A hunter was killed by a lion*; the other problem is the meaning of the verb *exist*: if it is to be connected with reality (the interpretation that seems to follow from the preceding context mentioning the extra-linguistic reality), then it makes no sense, as in many cases the goal may/must exist before the action and before the actor; if it is to mean as occurring in the planning phase (cf. Beaugrande & Dressler 1981), it makes no sense either, as planning necessarily implies existence of all elements prior to surface realization; if it is to mean existence at the level of realization, then it means no more than "actor comes before action" on the surface, shifting the whole problem to the linearization issue. The main difficulty here is a certain circularity of description. Bílý (1981:41) says, for example, that "the 'goal' of an action develops communication more than the action itself" and that means that it has a higher degree of CD. On the other hand the degree of CD is determined on the basis of the degree to which the element (here 'goal') develops communication ("pushes communication forward"), to which it is communicatively more important in relation to others. This in turn can be determined only on the basis of the context and so we return to the starting point.

It seems that it would be purely arbitrary to decide that *a hunter* in the above example contributes more to the development of the communication than *a lion*. In fact *a hunter* may not be mentioned (=may not develop communication) in the next few sentences. To my knowledge there is no reason why opening sentences like the one above could not have two or even more rhemes.

It is clear that the thematic interpretation of this kind is confused with semantic interpretation: the fact that almost every action must have an agent (the nature of which is additionally limited by selectional restrictions) creates an impression that it is communicatively less important. On the other hand, selectional restrictions do not determine the object as strictly as the agent, again creating an impression that introduction of an object contributes more to the development of communication. While the phenomena described above add to the complexity of the issue, it is not at all clear whether and how they can be used within the theory of FSP.

Linearity in Bílý (1981) (and also in other works on FSP) is also treated in a confusing manner. On the one hand, word-order is said to reflect the thematic structure and thus to be determined by context. On the other hand FSP theorists operate with the concept of "'context-free" sentences with objective word order" (Bílý 1981: 38; quoting other FSP theorists). This is a fundamental contradiction since FSP, being based on context, cannot even admit "context-free" sentences into the theory. Also, "context-free" sentences never occur in real life situation (unless as examples in works on linguistics). This is best illustrated by Bílý (1981:43) himself when he describes intonation in the following way: "If the context of a written sentence is not known, i.e. when we try *to determine the gamut of CD in an isolated written sentence* [emphasis mine. A. S.], we reconstruct the unmarked sort of context that corresponds to the unmarked interpretation of linearity and semantic means of FSP in the given sentence. Having done this, we can pronounce the sentence with an appropriate intonation". One immediately feels tempted to add "appropriate to the given context". It also means that it is impossible to adequately analyze a sentence in isolation and that the kind of analysis as proposed (by Bílý) above can only be in statistical terms (experiential frequency).

On the basis of the above discussion it is obvious that the theory as presented by Bílý is too inconsistent and subjective to be used as basis for a description of linguistic facts. An illustration of Bílý's approach is his description of paradigmatic differences (p. 94) in the degree of CD between proper names, definite descriptions, epithets and pronouns:

"To sum up the paradigmatic differences:

Proper names — DDs that are not epithets: small difference (cf. 62 and 63) DDs that are not epithets — epithets of natural subclasses: a small difference (cf. 54).

Epithets of natural subclasses — subjective epithets: a great difference (cf. 53 and 54).
Subjective epithets — pronouns: a big difference (cf. 77 and 81)".
One can only wish for a more precise and objective description.

The data

The languages used to illustrate the problems under discussion are Czech, Russian and English. However, a few examples from other languages are also discussed. A major objection of the reviewer at this point is that in view of the scarcity of the compared Slavic material one should not feel allowed to make such sweeping generalizations as, for example, that Czech unmarked word order is more determined by FSP principle than other Slavic languages (Bílý 1981: 39).[1]

Another objection is that certain examples are interpreted by the author without sufficient or any theoretical support, which is probably due to the weakness of the theory. For example, *A girl* in the sentence 12 a (p. 46) *A girl broke a vase* is said to be context-independent and at the same time to be the theme. While this is admissible in Bílý's theory, it is untenable on the grounds explained in the preceding section of the present review. A solution that a sentence (particularly an opening sentence) may have two (or more?) rhemes is not considered. On the other hand, however, such a possibility is mentioned in connection with answers to questions like *Who killed who? It is clear. His brother killed the count.* in which, Bily says, both "his brother" and "the count" belong to the rheme (Bílý 1981:106). Consequently there seems to be no reason why the whole *A girl broke a vase* can not be treated as rheme or as a sentence with two rhemes. Certain examples are discussed in a way that is difficult to follow, for instance sentences (166) and (167) on p. 113. First Bílý disagrees with Nilsson's (1979) claims that in Polish coreferentiality is unambiguously signalled by the zero subject in the subordinate clause (Wie, że żyje=(He$_x$) knows that (he$_x$) lives), while non-coreferentiality requires the pronominal subject (Wie, że on żyje=(He$_x$) knows that he$_y$ lives) on the grounds that Czech and Slovak are different in that respect ("I have no doubts that, at least in Czech and Slovak, the zero subject can be used even to refer to another person and vice versa [...] I presume the same must be true even for Nilsson's Polish examples." Bílý 1981: 113), and then he immediately says that (166) "may be unambiguous" if *on* is not stressed. Bily is also wrong about the Polish

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[1] I am not going to discuss a number of presumably typographical mistakes as, for example, (159) *Danka came on time but I had already waiting* (p. 110), (184) *Were are you running now?* (p. 116), *It can also interpreted ...* (p. 142), prefered, refered, commiting, etc.

sentence (150) *Marysia kupiła książkę i przeczytała* (Marysia bought a book and has read it through) which even with the stress (which is not mentioned at all in connection with this example) on *kupiła* sounds odd, if correct at all. The correctness of the example improves dramatically when *ją* (it) is added at the end.

The account of the data

The major part of the book is an attempt to reformulate rules of pronominalization according to FSP theory. I am not going to discuss details of Bílý's treatment for two reasons: (1) it is a restatement of well known facts (quotations and reports of other linguists' views take the better part of the book); (2) being based on the foundations criticized in the first section of the present review it would be subject to the same sort of objections. I want to raise only a few points simply to illustrate Bílý's problems in accounting for pronominalization (and other related phenomena) in terms of FSP.

The general rules (Bílý 1981: 91) based on relative differences of the degree of CD carried by elements under discussion, together with considerations of context dependence, semantic structure, linearization and intonation, do not provide any new insights into the problem of pronominalization. Particularly in the light of rule (C) which says that "In more complex sentence structures, which resemble more of a complex discourse than of a minimal utterance unit (=a sentence), the FSP rule of pronominalization can be overruled by the "renaming need"." (Bílý 1981: 91—92).

With all the difficulties that FSP theory brings, Bílý, trying to explain certain examples according to the theory, has to resort to ad hoc solutions like in the following statement: "In (104), it is much more difficult to interpret the pronominal subject as coreferential with the following NP. *This object is a sort of "semantic subject"* [emphasis mine. A. S.]. The sentence describes what the object experiences, which means that the "inherent CD" is lower than in (105)". (Bílý 1981: 97). Other vague notions introduced by Bílý, besides low/high degree of CD, are "lower/higher quality", for example, a "lower quality" of a Communicative Field (p. 138), low/high quality of the hidden predication (p. 143), lower/higher "predicative quality" (p. 138), etc.

In the light of the frequent reference in this part of the book to "traditional" linguistic notions such as Agent, Patient, surface subject, animate/inanimate, lower S, etc. which are used to explain pronominalization and reflexivization in FSP terms, the FSP part of the interpretation seems hardly necessary in the discussion.

All in all, if we remove the unnecessary part of interpretation based on a very weak (to put it mildly) version of FSP theory, what remains is a collection of reports on research on FSP, pronominalization and reflexivization.

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