

## REVIEWS

**Pípalová, R. (2008) *Thematic Organization of Paragraphs and Higher Text Units*. Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Pedagogická fakulta, 357 pp.**

The study of organisation of paragraphs as well as thematic progression have been an integral part of research into information processing. Renata Pípalová's recent monograph titled *Thematic Organization of Paragraphs and Higher Text Units* – remaining faithful to the author's principal research scope – summarises, further explores and brings new insights into the area of textual paragraphs, especially in the field of their thematic build-up.

In Pípalová's view, paragraph is viewed as a double-edged phenomenon existing predominantly in the written discourse: it "seems to be both a unit of separation as well as that of linkage" (p. 11). Based on an extensive research corpus containing eighteen authentic sources, the study examines different paragraphing tendencies in present-day English, adopting a multi-faceted approach. It studies the internal structure of paragraphs as well as their external relationships in the text. From the theoretical point of view, Pípalová's study finds its solid ground in the teaching of the Prague School of linguistics and several generations of its followers (Mathesius 1911, Havránek 1932, Skalička 1935, Daneš 1966, 1987, 1995, Neústupný 1966, Hausenblas 1993, Dušková, Firbas 1992, 1995, Hajičová, Sgall, Svoboda, Uhlířová, etc.). Apart from that, it draws on other relevant contemporary linguistic trends and achievements in the area of varied linguistic disciplines (Bublitz et al. 1999, Halliday & Hasan 1976, 1985, Van Peer 1989, Brown & Yule 1983, etc.).

The main body of the book is organised into four individual parts, which are then complemented by Conclusions, Notes, Symbols and Abbreviations, Bibliography, Author Index and Subject Index. In Part 1, the author monitors the previous research in the field giving many relevant names and concepts, delimits the term of the paragraph, and presents the topic of the paragraph in the context of other linguistic areas, such as register, discourse modes, cohesion or translation. Pípalová also summarises the linguistic terminology used and, last but not least, strives to throw light on the relation between the paragraph and the theme (and hyper-theme).

The theoretical framework for Pípalová's monograph is found, in its extensive form, in Part 2 of the book. Drawing traditionally and logically on the findings presented by Daneš, Pípalová sets out to present her own view of the phenomenon

of paragraphs, introducing key terms and concepts of her research. Employing an illustrative case study, she goes on to describe the internal organisation and the build-up hierarchy of paragraphs, arriving thus at an evaluating set of criteria for the paragraph typology. One of the foci of Part 2 is also the issue of macrotextual organisation and textual hyperthemes. Another case study presented opens a new vista to the differences between so called narrow P-theme paragraphs and broad P-theme paragraphs. In her conclusions to Part 2, Pípalová admits, “the two supratypes of paragraphs represent solely two extremes of a relatively continuous cline” (p. 141).

Part 3 of Pípalová’s monograph provides the reader with a thorough treatment of the research corpus; it focuses especially on its overall composition, length of individual subcorpora, description of samples, delimitation of paragraph boundaries and paragraph length. In quantitative terms, the corpus includes 2,070 paragraphs (made of 7,452 utterances) of contemporary British English and covers three register corpora (academic corpus, journalistic corpus, and fiction corpus), each of them representing 690 paragraphs. For the sake of an even and representative distribution, the author decided to delicately compose each of the registers of two subcorpora, each encompassing 345 paragraphs, striving thus to “reduce the potential impact of the authors’ idiolects” (p. 153). To be more specific, the academic register, for instance, includes a subcorpus of samples dealing with natural sciences and another one covering the area of humanities. Altogether, eighteen different authentic text sources published in the two last decades were used in the study, which makes up a truly representative corpus. Individual sample texts are transparently labelled. In connection with the scrutiny, it is worth noting that by a paragraph the author basically means the graphical paragraph; in most cases it coincides with what could be described as the paragraph viewed as a content unit. As far as the external parameters of paragraphs under examination are concerned, Pípalová discusses the problem of paragraph boundaries (as opposed to utterance boundaries) and – comparing two basic methods – specifies crucial quantitative aspects of paragraphing (such as number of main clauses). In addition, she presents data on paragraph length in the source subcorpora. Finally, essential factors that affect outer parameters of paragraphing are enumerated and discussed in detail: graphic conventions (capitalisation of initial graphic words or indenting of individual paragraphs), boundaries of prototypical paragraphs, as well as paragraph length in both the register corpora and register subcorpora. In addition, the chapter deals also with minor, though relevant aspects of paragraphing, such as the general graphical layout, paragraphing rhythm and their stylistic effect. The data concerning the corpus are clearly presented and summarised in statistic charts.

In Part 4 of her monograph, Pípalová presents the main body of her research into the realm of thematic organisation of paragraphs and higher text units, paying attention to five distinctive paragraph subtypes respectively: I. Paragraphs featuring direct speech, II. Central paragraphs with a stable paragraph theme (P-theme), III. Transition and periphery of paragraphs featuring a stable P-theme, IV. Paragraphs where the P-theme is unfolded, and V. Gravitational field of paragraphs where the P-theme is unfolded. Thus, on the one hand, Pípalová adopts the original Daneš's framework of paragraph classification (Daneš 1994, 1995), yet, on the other hand, she adds a lot of her own insight into it and makes the time-tested typology even more systematic and versatile (e.g. the unique inclusion of paragraphs marked by portions of direct speech).

Pípalová's research shows that a prototypical corpus paragraph featuring direct speech is a Stable P-theme paragraph, which, in most cases, "embodies a speech stretch of a single producer" (p. 192), and the reporting clause of which contains a transitive dicendi verb, usually in the past simple tense. In terms of style-specific features, the author makes distinctions among the three main registers: while the fiction sample manifests a relatively high degree of lexical diversity, the journalistic corpus may be characterised by greater lexical monotony traced in the dicendi verbs. Sharply contrasted to the two previous registers remains the academic corpus, which employs direct speech for highly specific purposes, such as in cases of intertextuality and the incidence of direct speech is thus very scarce.

The author maintains – in harmony with Daneš – that a central paragraph with a stable P-theme exhibits paradigmatic coherence, which lies in the presence of a reiterative, continuous and constant theme. Her investigation suggests that such paragraphs tend to be rather short; this quality seems to "follow from their extreme stability" (p. 208). Pípalová assumes that central paragraphs with a stable P-theme thus run the risk of being too monotonous or even "stereotypical and tiresome" (p. 208). This excessive uniformity is exemplified and commented on in Section 4.2 of the monograph.

Unlike the paragraph subtype discussed above, Section 4.3 discusses the non-central counterparts of central, consistently constructed paragraphs displaying a Stable P-theme: those that form the transitional and peripheral subtypes of a Stable P-theme. Obviously, the centre-periphery dichotomy goes back to the first generation of the Prague School and, especially, to Daneš's understanding of the concept (Daneš 1966). Drawing on Daneš, Pípalová presents a tentative typology of this paragraph subtype and compares its occurrence throughout the four different registers from the research corpus. In this section of the book, she monitors how different authors "counteract the impending danger of

stylistic infantility, monotony or stereotypical pattern detected in the central, consistently constructed paragraphs” (p. 228). She concludes that by employing such paragraph variations such as transitional or even peripheral subtypes they may “remain focussed in much longer passages compared to the absolutely consistently constructed (...) paragraph” (p. 228) and thus stylistically refresh the monotonous build-up of the paragraph. Interestingly enough, such paragraphs appear to be – statistically speaking – less frequent, though much longer than their central counterparts.

In her chapter on research into the area of prototypical paragraphs where the P-theme is unfolded, Pípalová first recalls several pioneering studies by Mathesius (1942/1982) and, above all, Daneš (1994, 1995). In the latter case, the author tackles the topic of a P-theme unfolded by different utterance themes (U-themes) and their basic classification (viz. derived themes and split partial themes). Pípalová suggests a modification of this typology, arguing that the boundary between paragraphs where the P-theme is unfolded and those where it has the character of a content frame should be somewhat alternated. Hence she offers a specific set of criteria to delimit the paragraph type in question. In her understanding, such a paragraph contains above all a Topic sentence, a Paragraph Theme, and may involve a Paragraph Hypotheme. Unlike Stable P-theme Paragraphs, in a paragraph where the P-theme is unfolded, the P-theme coincides with a “single major thematic Discourse Subject, which is not reiterated (...), but instead, its various constituents, parts, examples (...) are thematized”, forming a thematic paradigm (p. 231). Consequently, such paragraphs manifest some degree of thematic instability; each of the individual U-themes may thus “bear only a restricted measure of novelty, being anchored in the umbrella of D(iscourse) S(ubject)” (p.232). Pípalová then presents an innovated, refined semantic typology of this paragraph type, compartmentalising it into four subsequent subtypes, namely focussing, split, inclusive and subsuming ones. The analysis of the research corpus shows that the most frequently implemented semantic type is that of the focussing and inclusive groups. In terms of register variation, journalistic instances outnumbered other subcorpora in the scrutinised corpus. Typically, the central paragraphs with unfolded P-theme display a general tendency towards relative brevity and a serial arrangement. As far as the types of thematic progression are concerned, the derived thematic progressions were most numerous.

The last paragraph type studied was labelled as gravitational field of paragraphs where the P-theme is unfolded. To delimit this category, Pípalová recalls Daneš’s criteria for paragraph types and concludes, “if a paragraph fails to meet at least one (...), it falls into the Non-Central area of the gravitational field.

This area generally embraces the Transitional and Peripheral Zones”, i.e. non-central ones (p. 255). Pípalová then provides a semantic typology, classifying the gravitational field of paragraphs where the P-theme is unfolded into specific types appearing both in the transitional and peripheral zones respectively. The analysis indicates that within the whole gravitational field, the most frequent semantic subtype proved to be the inclusive one, occurring – as it seems to be “rather static and primarily descriptive” – predominantly in the academic subcorpora (p. 266). The final part of Section 4.5 is, in turn, devoted to the discussion of non-central paragraph groups where the theme unfolds. Such paragraphs, in the author’s opinion, manifest “greatest diversity of all the narrow Theme paragraph groups” and so tend to be “extremely heterogeneous in their build-ups” (p. 267). In her analysis, Pípalová, applying the criterion of the rising degree of the build-up stability, succeeds in isolating and exemplifying five distinctive sub-groups. Finally, she admits that this subcategory of paragraphs (paragraphs displaying an unfolding P-theme) does not appear to form a quantitatively significant group.

In her global conclusions, Pípalová summarises her research methods along with the set of criteria applied, reviews terminology, describes the corpus and the subcorpora used throughout her research, and, finally, systematically comments on the research findings presented in previous chapters of the monograph. Not only does she recall the results of her minute analyses, but also meritoriously arrives at functional conclusions and provides interpretations of her research. Many of her observations and modifications to *status quo* in the field are definitely innovative and – to a large extent – revealing. What is especially worth the reader’s attention is the elaborate, strictly systematic and precise paragraph typology; the classification provided represents one of the greatest benefits of the present volume. It should be also pointed out that the study may have a practical impact on the reader: to name at least one of all, one can find the writing tips concerning which paragraphs are most suitable for a particular register very useful. Moreover, Pípalová managed to present convincingly both the theoretical background and the practical research in a complex, yet readable and transparent way.

In conclusion, it remains to be stated that Renata Pípalová’s monograph *Thematic Organization of Paragraphs and Higher Text Units* is undoubtedly a precious and inspiring contribution to the realm of text linguistics. Significantly expanding the scope of inquiry of the phenomenon of paragraphs in British English, and following in the footsteps of Daneš, the study reckons its author among the true followers of the tradition and legacy of the Prague School.

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