

REVIEWS

Adam, M. (2013) *Presentation Sentences (Syntax, Semantics and FSP)*. Brno: Masaryk University. 225 pp.

The current study is the latest outcome of Martin Adam's long-term research interest in the theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP), which he explores faithfully and methodically time after time. Each of his contributions to this field of linguistics sheds light on some aspect of functional syntax or provides a more refined view on a particular issue and the one characteristic feature they all share is that they are firmly embedded in the Firbasian approach to FSP. In his latest book, Adam presents an extensive coverage of one of the basic dynamic-semantic scales distinguished in the FSP analysis of a sentence, namely the Presentation Scale (Pr-scale), the types of sentences that fall into this category and in particular the verbs operating in them.

The monograph draws on numerous papers dealing with the Presentation Scale that the author has published since 2010 and in its essence it is a modified version of his unpublished habilitation thesis (2012). The main research objective is twofold: first, the syntactic-semantic typology of Pr-sentences, and second, the semantic-syntactic character of the English verbs functioning within these Pr-sentences. The choice of material under analysis provides an interesting range of exclusively narrative texts which constitute two large sets: Subcorpus A contains fiction narratives (*The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis and *Changing Places* by D. Lodge), while Subcorpus B is represented by biblical narrative texts (all taken from the New Testament). The total size of the corpus is 207,366 words; in terms of FSP there are 11,395 basic distributional fields.

As one of the main research questions refers to the verb, Chapter 2 (titled accordingly *The English Verb*), takes a close look at the morpho-syntactic aspects of the verb and presents its syntactic-semantic classification (based for the most part on Huddleston and Pullum 2002, and Quirk et al. 1985) into five subtypes, i.e. (i) verbs in intransitive function, (ii) verbs with copular complementation, (iii) verbs with monotransitive complementation, (iv) verbs with complex transitive complementation, (v) verbs with ditransitive complementation. The two viewpoints are complemented with a final perspective – that of semantics – covering the static and dynamic approaches. The former, as interpreted by FSP, holds that “the English verb tends to have a relatively empty meaning and serves as a mediator between the subject and other sentence elements. [...] the verb either ascribes a quality to the subject, bridging its specification, or presents

something new on the scene [...]” (p. 31). The latter approach is presented through references to various works essential to the study of semantics, such as Levin (1993, 2009), Dušková (1988), Biber et al. (1999) and others. Adam explains his own treatment of the semantic characteristics of the verb, which is that of supplementing the dynamic semantic analysis with “the corresponding insights deriving from the area of static semantics of the verb”, thus aiming at a fuller picture of the analysed language (p. 34).

The overall theoretical framework of the study is pivoted on the theory of FSP, which gets fully treated in Chapter 3. The reader is given a brief overview of the history of the theory and its main supporters, followed by an introduction of the key notions, such as theme, rheme, communicative dynamism and FSP factors (pp. 39-40). The last mentioned are then presented in the habitual order as devised by Firbas (1992), starting with factors operating on the level of written language, i.e. from linear modification, through context to the semantic factor (also including the full set of dynamic-semantic scales), and concluding with the fourth – prosodic – factor applicable to spoken language, intonation.

The research results are laid out in the last two chapters; Chapter 4 opens with a broad classification of possible types (eight altogether) of Pr-sentences, followed by a narrowed set of four subtypes occurring in Subcorpus A (fiction narratives), which is then covered analogically for Subcorpus B, specifically:

- Subtype 1: Existential *there*-construction (e.g. *There'll be hawks.*)
- Subtype 2: Rhematic subject in preverbal position (e.g. *And now a very curious thing happened.*)
- Subtype 3: Fronted Adverbial & S – V inversion (e.g. *And here's a packet of tea.*)
- Subtype 4: Locative Th-subject & Rh-object (e.g. *The banner bore a red rampant lion fluttering in the breeze.*) (pp. 62-69)

The final comparison of the incidence of each subtype in the corpus brings most interesting results: while in the fiction narratives the most frequent type is the existential *there*-construction (65%) followed by the rhematic subject in preverbal position (25%), the biblical texts reveal exactly the opposite distribution, i.e. the rhematic subject in preverbal position ranks first with 64 per cent and the existential construction comes second (21%). The author accounts for this striking difference in terms of stylistic preferences typical of either genre but also points out the unique nature of the New Testament narratives combining a high level of formality with an ideological message (p. 82).

Concerning the last part of the research project – the syntactic-semantic analysis of the Pr-verbs – the author approached this major task with method and determination as can be seen from his own description of the procedure: “[...] the analysis will be conducted at the syntactic-semantic interface, i.e. both the

syntactic properties of the verb (valency, complementation) and its semantic load will be systematically taken into consideration. It is hoped that such an integrated approach will then reveal essential syntactic-semantic equipment of Pr-verbs that enables them to serve in the Pr-sentences” (p. 85). Indeed, Chapter 5 is the most extensive one, providing a thorough overview of the verbs appearing in the Pr-sentences (1,000 of them to be precise) in both subcorpora, and supporting the author’s claims with over 250 examples (English as well as Czech). On the one hand the findings confirm the expected, i.e. the most frequent verbs are *be*, *come*, *appear*, *go*, *rise* or their derivatives (ibid.), while on the other there is ample evidence of how rich and colourful the range of verbs with the potential to operate as Pr-verbs can be (e.g. *honk*, *rainbow*, *triumph*, *encircle*, *flash*, *bear*, *gather*, *gleam* and others). As for what it is that makes a verb a ‘Pr-verb’, Adam concludes that the decisive factor is the semantic subject-verb affinity.

The book represents a valuable contribution to the research in the field of FSP since it offers the most extensive and systematic treatment of the Presentation Scale sentences available up to date. The consistency of Adam’s three-level approach to the verb, i.e. syntax – lexical semantics – FSP has proved very beneficial as it allows for the picture to be complete.

To sum up, the study will undoubtedly provide its readers with a stimulating read, whether they are specialists in FSP or linguists extending their field of research or even students discovering the fascinating realm of dynamic-semantic scales in our speech.

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