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S–V Semantic Affinity in Presentation Sentences with Preverbal Rhematic Subject

Summary

Firmly anchored in the Praguian theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP), the present paper discusses the prototypical type of sentences implementing the so-called Presentation Scale (i.e., that containing a rhematic subject in preverbal position) within fiction narrative discourse. Special attention is paid to the semantic affinity operating between the subject and the predicate; in such distributional fields (cf. *A bird chirped on the twig*) the verbs seem to semantically support the character of their subjects. Thus, the S–V affinity appears to play a significant role in enabling the English verb to express existence or appearance on the scene in an implicit way. The phenomenon of semantic affinity is discussed on the basis of FSP investigation of a sample corpus of narrative texts compiled and processed by the author. Apart from the syntactic–semantic analysis, S–V affinity is also examined through the prism of eminent Czech representatives of the Prague School legacy, such as Vilém Mathesius, Jan Firbas, Aleš Svoboda and Libuše Dušková.

Key words: presentation, scale, affinity, FSP, Firbas, existence, appearance

Prisojevalno razmerje v predstavitevnih povedih z jedrnim osebkom pred glagolom

Povzetek

Članek, zasnovan na praški teoriji členitve po aktualnosti, obravnava prototipske povedi v literarnem pripovednem diskurzu s pomočjo t. im. predstavitevni tipov (t.j. povedi, ki vsebujejo jedrni osebki v predglagolski poziciji). Posebej se posveča prisojevalnemu razmerju, ki je vzpostavljeno med osebkom in povedkom; zdi se, da v takšnih distribucijah (gl. *A bird chirped on the twig*) glagoli pomensko usmerjajo tip osebkov. Tako se zdi, da prisojevalno razmerje med osebkom in povedkom v veliki meri omogoča angleškemu glagolu, da implicitno izrazi bivanjskost ali pojavnost. Pojem prisojevalnega razmerja obravnavamo na osnovi aktualnostno–členitvene raziskave izbranega korpusa pripovednih besedil, ki jih je avtor zbral in obdelal. Poleg skladiščno–pomenske analize je prisojevalno razmerje obravnavano tudi skozi perspektivo pomembnih čeških naslednikov praške šole, npr. Viléma Mathesia, Jana Firbasa, Aleša Svobode in Libuše Duškove.

Ključne besede: predstavivni tipi, prisojevalno razmerje, členitev po aktualnosti, Firbas, bivanjskost, pojavnost

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1. Fundamentals: the corpus and the method

Exploiting the theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP) and drawing on the findings presented especially by Mathesius (1975), Firbas (1992), Svoboda (2005, 2006) and Dušková (1998, 2005), the paper looks at one of the most frequent types of sentences implementing the Presentation Scale (Pr–Scale), i.e., that containing a rhematic subject in preverbal position. It deals with the phenomenon of so-called semantic affinity of the verb with the subject, the principal focus being the semantic classification of the Pr-sentences that display an obvious degree of such a semantic affinity.

For the purpose of analysis two novels are used: C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (in the corpus abbreviated as N) and D. Lodge's *Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses* (in the corpus abbreviated as C). As a mere fraction of a larger tagged corpus under our current examination, the present subcorpus consists of ca 125,000 words and their FSP analyses. Within the corpus, there are 5,946 basic distributional fields, which are technically counted as finite clauses; non-finite clauses being regarded as separate communicative units within the basic distributional fields. Out of all the basic distributional fields in the corpus, 488 instances of sentences that implement the Presentation Scale were identified, which represents 8.2 percent. Apparently, a low number of the basic distributional fields in the corpus follow the general occurrence pattern of the Pr–Scale; it is possible to claim, however, that such an incidence is in full compliance with other findings and other genres examined so far (see e.g., Adam 2009, 2010, 2011).

In Firbas' view (for further information on FSP the reader is referred especially to Firbas 1992), the sentence is a field of semantic and syntactic relations that in its turn provides a distributional field of degrees of communicative dynamism (CD); Firbas defines a degree of CD as “the extent to which the element contributes towards the development of the communication” (Firbas 1964, 270). The most prominent part of information is the ‘high point’ of the message, i.e., the most dynamic element (rheme proper); other elements of the sentence are less dynamic (have a lower degree of CD). The degrees of CD are determined by the interplay of FSP factors involved in the distribution of degrees of CD: linear modification, context and semantic structure (Firbas 1992, 14–6). In spoken language, the interplay of these factors is joined by intonation, i.e., the prosodic factor. It is the continuum of the degrees of CD along with the interplay of the basic FSP factors that make FSP specific within the field of text linguistics.

In his opus magnum, Firbas (esp. 1992, 66–9) introduced the idea of the so-called dynamic semantic scales that are implemented in sentences; they functionally reflect the distribution of CD and operate irrespective of word order. In principle, Firbas distinguishes two types of dynamic-semantic scales: the Presentation Scale (Pr–Scale) and the Quality Scale (Q–Scale). In these scales, each element is ascribed one of the dynamic-semantic functions (DSFs) (Firbas 1992). In contrast with a static approach towards semantic functions of sentence constituents (e.g., agent, instrument etc.), the dynamic semantic functions may change in the course of the act of communication; the same element may thus perform different functions in different contexts and under different conditions (cf. also Svoboda 2005, 221).

What follows is a summarising account of the Presentation Scale sentences (hereafter abbreviated Pr-sentences), i.e., the theoretical framework of the present paper. The prototypical Pr-Scale includes three basic dynamic semantic functions. Going in the interpretative arrangement from left to right (from the least to the most dynamic element), the first position is taken by the thematic Setting of the action (Set), usually temporal and spatial items of when and where the action takes place. Second, the existence or appearance on the scene is typically conveyed by a verb by means of the Presentation of Phenomenon (Pr). Finally, the major, most dynamic element, Phenomenon to be Presented (Ph) is literally ushered onto the scene (cf. Chamonikolasová and Adam 2005):

- (1) *A police car* (Ph) *drew up* (Pr) *beside them* (Set). (C191a)
- (2) *Three men* (Ph) *entered* (Pr) *the room* (Set). (C223c)

Before a thorough discussion on the phenomenon of semantic affinity between the verb and the subject in the Pr-sentences is presented, it is necessary to outline the basic syntactic semantic subtypes of the Pr-sentences. In the present corpus (as well as in other corpora under the author's examination), four principal syntactic patterns were identified and labelled as Subtypes 1–4 (see examples 3–6 below). Incidentally, though carried out independently, the classification acquired is virtually in harmony with what Dušková offers in her study on differentiation of the syntactic forms of the Presentation Scale (cf. Dušková 1998). Also Svoboda tackled the area of syntactic semantic types of sentences implementing the Pr-Scale within his functional treatment of parallel sentences both in Czech and English (Svoboda 2005). Nevertheless, he does not classify their syntactic make-up in a systematic way, focusing instead on the word order issues emerging in the comparative background, such as the question of (emotional) markedness of certain types of Pr-sentences (Svoboda 2005, 224–5).

The following four examples will shed light on the four syntactic semantic subtypes of Pr-sentences detected in the corpus; the examples are followed by tables showing the findings obtained in the course of the corpus analysis (for details on individual subtypes see e.g., Adam 2011):

- (3) *There are* (Pr) *streaks of soot* (Ph) *on the engine cowlings* (Set). (C9b)
- (4) *A slow cruel smile* (Ph) *came* (Pr) *over the Witch's face* (Set). (N99b)
- (5) *And next to Aslan* (Set) *stood* (Pr) *two leopards of whom one carried his crown and the other his standard* (Ph). (N125)
- (6) *The walls of his room* (Set) *bore* (Pr) *plentiful evidence of his marksmanship in the form of silently snarling stuffed animals* (Ph). (C23b)

Pr-Scale Sentences	Occurrence	%
Subtype 1 – Existential construction (ex. 3 above)	317	65.0
Subtype 2 – Rhematic subject in preverbal position (4)	122	25.0
Subtype 3 – Fronted adverbial & S–V inversion (5)	40	8.2
Subtype 4 – Locative Th–subject (6)	9	1.8
Total	488	100.0

Table 1. *Subtypes of Pr-sentences in the Corpus.*

2. The presentation scale: subtype 2

As has been suggested above, only Subtype 2 of the Pr-sentences will actually be discussed in the scope of this paper, as in it examples of semantic affinity of the verb with the subject may be traced. As a rule, Subtype 2, viz. the **rhematic subject in preverbal position**, represents the second most recurring subtype of the Pr-Scale sentence pattern (Adam 2011). It is usually referred to as the prototypical, canonical type connected with the Presentation Scale (Dušková 1988, 62, 531–2). In it, the initial sentence element is typically represented by a context-independent subject, which is only then followed (in concord with the requirements of English word order principles) by the verb, which expresses existence or appearance on the scene (cf. Dušková 1999, 248–50). The sentence may also begin with a scene-setting temporal or spatial thematic adverbial. As for FSP articulation, the word order of such configurations actually violates the end-focus principle observed in English. Nevertheless, sentences with a rhematic subject in preverbal position are considered unmarked by native speakers of English (exceptions may be observed in connection to prosodic re-evaluating intensification; cf. Firbas 1992, 154–6). For instance in Czech, in contrast, end-focus principle is most respected, and a rhematic subject is untypical, if not highly exceptional, and can be justified only under special prosodic or other emphatic conditions (cf. Dušková 1999, 281).

It follows that the verb operating in Pr-Scale sentences (Pr-verb) presents something new on the scene. It is important to recall that in relation to its presentation role, Firbas claims that it does so “if it expresses the existence or appearance on the scene with explicitness or sufficient implicitness” (Firbas 1995; cf. Adam 2011). In the present corpus (and also in other corpora under our investigation), two types of verbs classified in this respect have been detected. Most Pr-verbs clearly express the existence or appearance on the scene in an explicit way. Prototypically, these are verbs such as *come, arrive, step in, come down, be born, enter, appear, occur, turn up, rear up* etc. (Adam 2010, 2011). The Pr-verbs falling into this are, in their nature, dynamic, mostly intransitive, and carry the meaning of appearance, both as a result of a dynamic process or seen in the process of motion proper. Such verbs actually reflect precisely the definition of Firbasian appearance on the scene with explicitness.

However, research has convincingly shown that other types of verbs are also capable of expressing existence or appearance on the scene even though they do not convey the meaning of appearance in a straightforward manner; in other words, they do so with sufficient implicitness (Firbas 1992, 1995; Adam 2009, 2010). A relatively large group in the corpus is made up of Pr-verbs that express existence or appearance on the scene in a rather implicit way; all different sorts of verbs, such as *overshadow, send, strike, await, buzz, wake (the silence), chirp, shine, seize, shine, pour, feed, blow* or *preach*, were identified in the research corpus (cf. Adam 2010). Seemingly, the verbs come from different semantic groups of verbs and do not have much in common.

3. S–V semantic affinity

The point is that research has shown that one of the most significant features of such Pr-verbs occurring in the prototypical Pr-sentences may be described as a certain degree of semantic affinity between the Pr-verb itself and the clause subject (cf. Firbas 1992, 60). To be more specific, the corpus findings seem to reveal a significant semantic feature of what may be considered to express existence or appearance on the scene in an implicit way: the semantic affinity observed between the verb and the subject. In a number of previous papers (see esp. Adam 2010 and 2011), several sentences with a certain sort of semantic affinity were detected. The present paper, however, attempts

a more delicate typology of such sentences and a possible revelation of some of the underlying (syntactic and/or semantic) principles. To embark on the discussion, compare the following three sentences (from now on, the rhematic subjects will be presented in bold whereas the Pr-verb will be underlined for the sake of transparency):

- (7) ***A bee** buzzed across their path.* (N120e)
 (8) *At that moment **a strange noise** woke the silence.* (N128)
 (9) ***The sun** shone.* (C20)

In examples (7)–(9), the action is so semantically inherent to the subjects (subject-related) that it is the subject that takes over the communicative prominence at the expense of the power of the verbal content (cf. Adam 2011). The static semantics of the verb then – even if expressing a specific type of action – is reduced to that of presentation. The semantic content of the verbal element of the agents employed is so natural that the full verb serves to denote a form of existence or appearance on the scene. In other words, the verb that operates in semantic affinity with its subject semantically supports the character of the subject. One may readily say that buzzing is an inbred activity for bees and thus in (7) the highest degree of communicative dynamism is definitely carried by the subject. Similarly, it is most natural for a strange noise to wake silence (8), or for the sun to shine (9).

As has been mentioned above, the dynamic semantic role of the verb used is reduced to that of presentation and the communicative lead is taken by the respective subjects/agents. A crucial role when interpreting the sentences as to the dynamic semantic function implemented is undoubtedly played by the immediately relevant verbal and situational context (Firbas 1992, 59–61; Adam 2009). In his discussion on such cases, Svoboda also takes it for granted that “context will decide whether the Pr-scale or the Q-scale is employed” (for details along with examples see Svoboda 2005, 225). The presentational interpretation of Pr-sentences with subject-verb affinity (which may be legitimately questioned at first sight) can be – apart from the major role of the context – additionally corroborated by two facts. First, it is the placement of the nuclear stress on the rhematic subject in English (the intonation centre is noted by capital letters):

- (10) *And **THE MOON** came out.* (N92c)

Second, the rhematic character of the subjects under examination can be supported by the corresponding Czech (or other functionally analogous) equivalent translation of the clauses in which the rhematic subject – according to the principle of end-focus – invariably occupies the final position in the sentence – cf. (10a) and (11a).

- (11) Czech (Lewis 1950)
*A vyšel **Měsíc**.*
 And came out Moon
 ‘And the Moon came out.’

Commenting on various possibilities which favour the presentational interpretation, Dušková (2008, 72–3) maintains that the Pr-verbs manifesting such an affinity may be – with identical effect – functionally replaced by verbs that express existence/appearance on the scene in a purely explicit manner. Thus, sentence (12) below could be analogously expressed by means of an explicit Pr-verb accompanied by a locative adverbial construction in the object position (12a), not to mention an existential construction proper (12b). Cf.:

(12) *A **bee** buzzed across their path.* (N120e)

(12a) *A **bee** appeared / perched on their path.*

(12b) *There was a **bee** on their path.*

The point is that a parallel transformation is naturally unheard of in the sentences implementing the Q–Scale; in them, something new is said about the Bearer of Quality and the predication does not express existence/appearance on the scene any more. It follows that the verb(s) used cannot be replaced by a Pr–verb without changing the FSP of the sentence. Cf. the two examples of sentences that implement the Q–Scale below; whereas example (12c) introduces a basic distributional field in which the most dynamic element is the verb itself (*buzzed*), in example (12d) the verb *buzzed* is transitional and the high point of the message (i.e., the rheme) is represented by the adverbial of manner (Specification). The unit *the bee* is then, of course in both the sentences, a thematic element (Bearer of Quality).

(12c) *On the windowsill (Th), the bee (Th) **buzzed** (Rh) [and flew away].*

(12d) *Suddenly (Th) the bee (Th) buzzed (Tr) **in a scary way** (Rh).*

Semantically, the Pr–verbs that manifest semantic affinity with their subjects are almost prototypically recruited from a relatively limited semantic category of verbs that are generally related, to a certain extent, to sensory (acoustic, visual etc.) perception. Below is a tentative (because partly overlapping in places) classification of these categories, examples adduced. Although due to space limitation the examples of Pr–sentences are decontextualized, all of them congruently implement the Pr–Scale:

3.1 Natural/supernatural phenomena unaffected by people, such as weather

(13) *A **light breeze** sprang up.* (N119d)

(14) *And **the moon** came out.* (N92c)

(15) *A **cloud** swirls round Philip Swallow's plane. (C53c)*

Let us at least briefly comment on one particular aspect of example (14) cited above, in which the subject is *the moon*. Closely related to its syntactic make–up is the question of definiteness of the subjects in Pr–sentences. Contrary to the “prototypical” use of the indefinite article in Pr–sentences, subjects in these two examples make use of the definite article, apparently not used in the anaphoric way. This, nevertheless, does not violate the concept of context–independence of the subjects but obviously denotes the uniqueness of the phenomenon (the Sun, the Moon and the like).

3.2 Fauna (and flora)

(16) *A **bee** buzzed across their path.* (N120e)

(17) *Close beside the path they were following, a **bird** suddenly chirped from the branch of a tree.*
(N74d)

(18) *In the wood behind them a **bird** gave a chuckling sound.* (N148b)

The examples adduced above clearly fall into the semantic category of animal acoustic manifestation, which can be readily connected with their typical, most natural manner of being; their prototypical existence.

3.3 Facial expressions, bodily feelings

Another relatively frequent type of sentences with context-independent subjects that display a semantic affinity with the verb is represented by the area of the human body, such as facial expressions, or bodily feelings. Due to its corresponding semantics, example (18) is listed here even if the verb *come* expresses the existence/appearance on the scene rather explicitly and the semantic affinity is not a necessary condition for the verb to be capable of denoting presentation:

- (19) *A searing pain bored into his hand.* (C84)
 (20) *A ghost of a smile hovered on Mrs Swallow's lips.* (C86c)
 (21) *A slow cruel smile came over the Witch's face.* (N99b)

Likewise, Firbas offers several examples of Pr-sentences in which there is “a context-independent subject presenting a phenomenon appearing on a human body, the element(s) expressing the body or some part of it performing the role of a setting” (Firbas 1992, 61). In his examples below, “appearance on the scene is metaphorically expressed by a verb-object combination” (Firbas 1992, 61 quoting Svobodová 1966), claiming that in such sentences the object expresses a phenomenon that is “filled, permeated or covered by another phenomenon. The latter appears within the space provided by the former. The latter is the phenomenon to be presented; the former serves as the setting (scene) for the presentation” (ibid.). Actually, all three verbs used represent items with untypically large valency; *force* is in fact trivalent (*force its way through Aunt Ann's lips*). Firbas argues that via such semantic affinity “the verb prepares the way for the phenomenon to be presented” (ibid); notation and underlining mine:

- (22) *Through Aunt Ann's compressed lips **a tender smile forced its way.***

Generally, it could be said that the configuration with a transitive verb and a direct object prototypically occurs in sentences in which predication is construed as a figurative expression. It should be noted that examples of Pr-sentences in which appearance is expressed metaphorically will be dealt with separately in the present treatise in Section F below.

3.4 Inherent qualities/actions of inanimate objects

- (23) *Two cups steamed on the bedside table.* (C230)
 (24) *A bomb exploded in the men's john on the fourth floor.* (C121b)
 (25) *...and to his right **the oil refineries of St Gabriel fumed** into the limpid air.* (C56c)
 (26) *Another joint was circulating.* (C96b)

By far the most frequent semantic area of Pr-sentences displaying a degree of semantic affinity between the verb and the subject may be characterised as inbred, inherent qualities of inanimate objects. It seems that this affinity subtype (i.e., inherent qualities/actions of inanimate object) lies at the core of the S- semantic affinity. As has been stated several times above such qualities are so typical of the context-independent entities that the lexical semantics of the verb is actually reduced to that of presentation; the remaining semantic load is – thanks to the high degree of communicative dynamism carried by the subject as well as the semantic affinity – backgrounded and functionally suppressed. In other words, in example (23), for instance, steaming is so inherent for cups of tea that the sentence can be functionally rephrased in the following way (analogously, the affinitive pairs such as *bomb – explode* or *refineries – fume* clearly follow the same syntactic-semantic pattern):

(23a) *There were two cups (steaming) on the bedside table.*

Sometimes, the pairs are realised as S–_{transitive} (*nuns – sing a hymn, solitary security man – lift a lazy hand in salute*); the necessary verbal context is given in square brackets:

- (27) [*Returning to the living-room to fetch a cigar, he found O'Shea asleep and Bernadette looking sullenly bored.*] *On the screen **a lot of nuns, photographed from behind**, were singing a hymn.* [*'Seen your aunt yet?' he inquired. Bernadette shook her head.*] (C91a)
- (28) [*The buzz of a helicopter told him he was now in the militarized zone, though you wouldn't otherwise have guessed that there was any trouble at the University on this side of the campus, he thought, as he steered the car through the broad entrance on the West perimeter, past lawns and shrubberies where the spume of rotating water sprinklers rainbowed in the sun and*] **and a solitary security man in his shelter** *lifted a lazy hand in salute.* (C181d)

In examples (27) and (28), we may observe a strong tendency to actually express an intransitive action in the deep structure (in this interpretation *sing a hymn* can be understood as intransitive *sing*, and *lift a lazy hand in salute* could be decoded as intransitive *salute*). The power of S– semantic affinity observed along with the immediately relevant context in which the sentences appear only tentatively makes us arrive at the conclusion that we are most probably dealing with sentences which are perspectived in accordance with the Presentation Scale.

3.5 Sensory effects/perception (acoustic, visual, olfactory etc.)

- (29) *A dark spidery shadow flashed across the gardens on the hillside.* (C171b)
- (30) *A National Guard helicopter clattered over the Euphoric State campus yesterday, spraying tear gas over some 700 students.* (C162)

It should be admitted that some of the semantic categories (Sections 3.1–3.6) naturally overlap, such as in the case of the affinitive pair *bird – chirp*, which may be listed both in Section 3.2 (Fauna) and in Section 3.5 here, as we are dealing with an acoustic effect. Another illustration may be seen in the pair *pain – bore*, which can be logically related both to Section 3.3 (Bodily feelings) and to Section 3.6 (Figurative expressions). It is believed, nevertheless, that even such a rough and to a certain extent simplifying categorisation reflects the principal semantic areas that display a tendency towards S– affinity in Pr–sentences. After all, the lexical semantics of the English Pr–verbs is not black and white or one sided, but, on the contrary, rather multifaceted, and so overlaps are only natural.

3.6 Figurative expressions (metaphor or personification)

- (31) *There **a beautiful sight** met their eyes.* (N120e)
- (32) ***A spotlight** threw a pool of violet light on to the stage.* (C112)
- (33) *At that moment **a strange noise** woke the silence.* (N128)
- (34) *On Sunday **a huge procession of Garden supporters** coiled its way through the streets of Plotinus.* (C160)

As mentioned, a relatively high number of Pr–sentences base their predication on a figurative expression, namely a metaphor or personification. Such a figurative content appears to have

something to do with the deep ‘intransitive understanding’ of S–V transitive structures: *meet sb.’s eyes* (31), *throw a pool of light* (32), *wake the silence* (33), or *coil sb.’s way* (34). In other words, apart from the S–V semantic affinity, it is the metaphorical character of the semantic load that turns a commonplace V–O syntactic combination into a structure that is capable of expressing existence/appearance on the scene in an implicit way. Without the figurative sense, the constructions would implement the Quality Scale; the direct objects would perform the DSFs of Specifications and the subject in such sentences would of course be context–dependent. Compare the presentational examples (32) and (33) from the list above with their functional counterparts clearly implementing the Quality Scale extracted from another FSP corpus – examples (32a) and (33a) below. The framed areas suggest what has been called the ‘primary semantic link’:

- (32) ***A spotlight** threw a pool of violet light on to the stage.* (C112)
- (32a) *[There was a spear in his hand] and so he **threw it** at David.* (1Samuel 18:10–11)
- (33) *At that moment **a strange noise** woke the silence.* (N128)
- (33a) *[The disciples went] and **woke him**, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!”* (M8:25)

At this point in the discussion, a more general and summarising remark concerning the purely syntactic make–up of Pr–sentences is in order, namely a commentary on transitivity. It has been noted above that the Pr–verbs typically tend to originate in the intransitive (though they can sometimes act as transitive) group of the English verb; such sentences usually follow the SV or SVA sentence types patterns (see also Quirk et al. 1985, 1169–70). Research has indicated that Pr–verbs appear to tend towards relatively simple syntactic structures, whereas a more complex modification of the verb (i.e., a multiple valency) usually speaks in favour of quality verbs (Q–verbs). However, especially in the area of S–V semantic affinity, the Pr–verbs are recruited also among transitive verbs (ordinarily patterned as SVO or SVOA). Some of the examples above obviously fall into the semantic category of Pr–verbs expressing existence or appearance on the scene with sufficient implicitness in a metaphorical way and following the SVOA pattern in the present corpus. To sum up, the transitive character of the verb seems to go hand in hand with the metaphorical nature of the phrase. Though the observations above seem to be in accord with the general linguistic tendencies, the conjectures concerning the role of transitivity in the framework of syntactic semantic characteristics of Pr–verbs inevitably remain a subject of further research.

4. Conclusion

Research has convincingly proved that it is the *static* semantic load of the verb that as a matter of fact vitally determines the sentence functional perspective; it can be argued that the English (Pr–) verb acquires its dynamics in the immediately relevant context, the base being its static semantic equipment. The present paper discussed the prototypical type of sentences implementing the Presentation Scale (i.e., that containing a rhematic subject in preverbal position) within fiction narrative discourse with special regard to the semantic affinity operating between the subject and the predicate. In such distributional fields the Pr–verbs seem to semantically support the character of their subjects, preparing “the way for the phenomenon to be presented” (Firbas 1992, 61). On the basis of an array of corpus examples, a number of semantic categories of semantic affinity were identified and, in addition, some special syntactic aspects of such sentences were examined, such as the tendency towards intransitivity (even in the case of transitive verbs) as seen from the perspective of the deep structure. Most often this happens in sentences with metaphorical semantic load or in passive constructions.

The text material explored has indicated that it is such affinity that typically makes it possible for a verb to serve as the Pr–verb in the Pr–Scale; in other words, it seems to constitute the common denominator of the verbs that can express existence/appearance on the scene in an implicit manner. As has been shown, the verb’s presentational capacity is practically ‘dormant’ even in configurations, which in their surface syntactic structure use a transitive verb or in syntactically complex phrases (cf. e.g., metaphorical structures such as *On Sunday a huge procession of Garden supporters coiled its way through the streets of Plotinus.*). Such a potential capacity of the transitional verb can be awakened, i.e., activated, if the verb displays the semantic affinity with the subject and other criteria permit (e.g., the passive, metaphorical nature, underlying or surface transitivity) and, most importantly, if the interplay of FSP factors permits (apart from semantics and the ‘contradictory’ linear modification, it is the immediately relevant context, of course). Otherwise the capability of a transitive verb to present a new phenomenon on the scene appears to be substantially limited if not impossible.

To conclude, it should be highlighted again that semantic affinity of the English Pr–verb with the subject seems to stand at the root of the question concerning the (semantic and syntactic) criteria that make it possible for the verb to act as a Pr–verb in the sentence. In this respect, such semantic affinity proved to be a truly formative force operating in the constitution of the Presentation Scale sentences.

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