

A Functional Characterology of English Transitional Pr-Verbs: Presentation or Appearance on the Scene Revisited

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Abstract

In the framework of the theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP), aptly elaborated by Jan Firbas (summarised in Firbas 1992), the English verb tends to be the mediator (i.e. transition) between the theme and the rheme. Every sentence implements one of the dynamic semantic scales, which functionally reflect the distribution of communicative dynamism and operate irrespective of word order. In principle, Firbas distinguishes two types of dynamic semantic scales: the Presentation Scale and the Quality Scale. The present paper discusses the dynamic as well as the static semantic characteristics of the English verb operating in the transitional sphere of the clause, with special regard to its Presentation Scale occurrence. The author examines especially the Firbasian phenomenon of presentation or appearance on the scene, exemplifying this phenomenon by means of a statistical and FSP analysis of a sample corpus based on religious discourse.

Keywords: presentation, scale, english, verb, FSP, Firbas, transition, existence, appearance.

1 The Topic of the Paper

The theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP) is an integral part of research into information processing. Following the tradition established by the late Jan Firbas, the present author's research into the area of the theory of FSP has predominantly dealt with the textual material of religious discourse. His research has focused especially on the establishment, development, and function of the dynamic semantic tracks (within the thematic and non-thematic layers) which operate on a suprasentential level within texts (see e.g. Adam, 2004, 2008 and 2009).

The present paper aims at a functional characterology of the English verb, which typically occurs within the transitional sphere of the clause. Above all, attention will be paid to

the semantic characteristics of such verbs in the sentences where the so-called Presentation Scale is implemented. The paper will discuss the Firbasian understanding of presentation or appearance on the scene in the context of primary religious discourse, making use of particular examples from the corpus.

The Saple Corpus

For the purpose of the FSP analysis, several extracts from *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (hereafter abbreviated *NIV*) will be used. The theory of FSP has been applied to various discourses; it is not restricted to any specific text types. Nevertheless, my research into the area of FSP principles on the textual level has predominantly dealt with the textual material of religious discourse as offered by the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Biblical texts have proved to be suitable for the purpose of FSP research, and have supplied a syntactically rich source of discourse analysis studies (most notably Firbas, 1992, 1995; Svoboda, 1983; Adam, 2004, 2009, Adam, and Chamonikolasová, 2005). Especially the later studies published by Firbas dealt with a number of Old and New Testament texts (Firbas, 1989, 1995, 1996). Besides its linguistic value, the Bible is also particularly interesting thanks to its canonical – and thus fixed – character and the variety of translations that are available.

The sample corpus (derived from the author's long-term research into the field of religious discourse) consists of the following passages from *NIV*: six chapters from the *Gospel According to St. Matthew* (sections Mt 1:18–4:25, 5:1–12, 6:9–13); three abridged chapters of the *Gospel According to St. John* (verses J 1:1–9+14, 1:19–28, 3:1–18, 4:1–42); an extract from the *Gospel According to St. Luke* (Lk 2:1–20, 10:30–34); two passages from the *Book of Acts of the Apostles* (Acts 2:1–4, 4:31–35); *Psalm 145*; and finally three short pieces from the New Testament epistles, i.e. the *Epistle to Colossians* (Col 1:15–20), the *Epistle to Philippians* (Phil 2:5–11) and the *First Epistle to Corinthians* (1Cor 15:24–28). The corpus covers all the main biblical genres: narratives, historical accounts, dialogues, poetic texts, and doctrine (for the corpus in full, see Adam, 2009).

To sum up, the analysis explores altogether 245 biblical verses containing a total of 525 distributional fields (out of which there are 326 clauses as basic distributional fields, and 199 clauses or semi-clauses as distributional subfields). This makes up a corpus of over 31,000 words.

2 The Fundamentals of the Theory of FSP

Generally speaking, the theory of FSP – rooted in the functional-structural teaching of the Prague School and especially of its Brno branch – explores the information structure (theme-rheme articulation) of utterances and the relationships between the units of information in the utterance. The analytical methods of the theory are considered to be among the most prominent tools of discourse analysis and research into information processing. According to Firbas, who elaborated the theory into its fully-fledged and widely renowned form (summarised in Firbas, 1992), the sentence is a field of semantic and syntactic relations which in 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

the information is the high point of the message, i.e. the most dynamic element; 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: 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 degrees of CD along with the interplay of the basic FSP factors that make FSP specific within the field of text linguistics.

2.1 The Hierarchy of Communicative Units

At the very moment of communication, the communicative value of an element may be determined only on the basis of the interplay of the FSP factors; one has to consider all the factors in action, taking into account their relative power. In English, for example, the governing factor is context, which is followed by semantics and linear modification. In accordance with the distribution of the degrees of CD, each sentence constituent corresponds to one communicative unit. Units carrying a lower degree of CD form the thematic part of the sentence, while those carrying a higher degree of CD form – together with the so-called transition – the non-thematic part of the sentence. Firbas (1992), substantially amended by Svoboda (1968 and 1981), elaborated a sophisticated set of dynamic semantic units. The interpretative arrangement of the communicative units (which does not, as a rule, coincide with the actual linear arrangement), starting from the unit carrying the lowest degree of CD, is the following:

Tab. 1

| Theme | | Transition | | Rheme | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| theme proper Th | diatheme DTh | transition proper TrPr | transition Tr | rheme Rh | rheme proper RhPr |

In sentences (basic distributional fields), the **thematic** units provide a foundation for the message to be conveyed. The least dynamic thematic elements perform the function of theme proper (ThPr). The most dynamic thematic elements, on the other hand, perform the function of diatheme (DTh). The **rhematic** elements exceed the Tr- and Th-units in their degrees of CD. They include rheme proper (the most dynamic element of the whole sentence) and rheme, which comprises any elements carrying a higher degree of CD than Tr and a lower degree of CD than RhPr. Through the interplay of FSP factors, an element can become rhematic if it conveys entirely irretrievable information.

The **transitional** layer – which is the focus of the present paper – consists of the transition proper (TrPr) and the most dynamic transitional element, transition (Tr). The transitional sphere as a whole adds to the information set out by the thematic elements, and at the same time forms a transition to the rhematic section. Typically, the transitional layer is made up of the predicative verb. The transitional layer is formed by the so-called Temporal Modal Exponents (TMEs) of the verb: categorial exponents and notional components (Firbas, 1992, 70–1).

The TrPr layer is constituted by the categorial exponents (i.e. formal realisation) of the verb (tense, mood, aspect, person, number and polarity); these categorial exponents

are signaled e.g. by auxiliaries, endings or suffixes. The categorial exponents of the verbs have a threefold linking role in the sentence: firstly, they link the subject with the predicate (syntactic level); secondly, they link the Th and Rh (FSP); and thirdly, they link the content of the sentence with the extralinguistic reality.

The Tr layer, in turn, is made up of the notional component (lexical meaning) of the verb – the semantic content – or, rarely, by the nominal part of the predicate. It performs the dynamic semantic function of Quality or Presentation. Interestingly, as long as the notional component of the verb is irretrievable from the immediately relevant context, it carries a higher degree of CD than the categorial exponents do. Under favourable conditions (when there is no successful competitor in terms of CD), the notional component of the verb abandons the transitional layer to complete the message as the most dynamic element of the distributional field (Firbas, 1992).

2.2 The Presentation Scale

Firbas (1992) introduced the idea of the so-called dynamic semantic scales that are implemented in sentences; these scales functionally reflect the distribution of CD and operate irrespective of word order. In contrast with the static approach towards the semantic functions of sentence constituents (e.g. affected participant, 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. In principle, Firbas distinguishes two types of dynamic-semantic scales: the Presentation Scale and the Quality Scale. In the scales, each element is ascribed one of the dynamic-semantic functions (DSFs) (Firbas, 1992). The elements in both scales are arranged in accordance with a gradual rise in CD from the beginning to the end of the sentence, reflecting the interpretative arrangement.

Since this paper deals with the role of the English transitional verb operating exclusively within the framework of the Presentation Scale, only this type will be discussed in detail here. The Presentation Scale (Pr-Scale) includes three basic dynamic semantic functions. Firstly, there is a scene (Setting; Set) of the action, usually temporal and spatial items stating when and where the action takes place. Secondly, the existence or appearance on the scene is typically conveyed by a verb (Presentation of Phenomenon; Pr). Thirdly, the major, most dynamic element (Phenomenon; Ph) is ushered onto the scene. The patterns below are accompanied by illustrative examples from the corpus:

Ph

An angel of the Lord

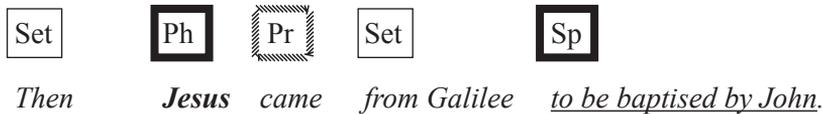
Pr

appeared

Set

to Joseph / in a dream.

Recently, a special sub-type of Pr-Scale was detected and described (see especially Adam and Chamonikolasová, 2005); it was labelled the Extended Presentation Scale. The structure of sentences implementing this type of interpretative scale actually corresponds very closely to the Presentation Scale, differing only in the presence of the Specification, which is not part of the pure Presentation Scale as defined by Firbas. In the following example, the Phenomenon Presented is in bold, and the Specification is underlined:



3 The English Verb and FSP

It has been largely taken for granted that – within the realm of FSP – the verb in English is usually semantically weak; it has a relatively emptied meaning, and serves as a mediator between the subject and other sentence elements. For instance Vachek claims that “in English the old Indo-European function of the verb i.e. that of denoting some action has been most perceptibly weakened” (Vachek, 1995, 23). Besides, as English is an analytical language, “the English finite verb form appears to be much less dynamic in character (...) and frequently ceases to be the unmatched instrument of predication, being often reduced to something that very closely resembles a copula” (Vachek, 1976, 342). This fact corresponds with what was described by Firbas in his writings (see e.g. Firbas, 1992, 69–71; 88–93). As he puts it, “performing the Pr, the AofQ or the Q-function, the verb tends to mediate between elements participating in the development of the communication” (Firbas, 1992, 69). Firbas also points out that the English verb can “point in two directions – in that of the Th and the Rh – and simultaneously to link the Th and the non-Th” (Firbas, 1992, 91).

In relation to this phenomenon, it will be useful to refer the reader to Firbas’ treatment of the verb within his theory of FSP. In the context of FSP, the English verb tends to be the mediator (or transition) between the theme and the rheme. Depending on the circumstances, the verb either ascribes a quality to the subject, bridging its specification, or presents something new on the scene if it expresses the existence or appearance on the scene with “explicitness or sufficient implicitness” (Firbas, 1995, 65; cf. Adam, 2009, 92–4).

4 FSP Analysis based on the Corpus

As has been stated above, the present analysis is focused on the English verbs that operate (i) in the sentences in which the Presentation Scale is implemented, and, at the same time, (ii) in the transitional part of the sentences only. Such verbs will be hereafter referred to as **Pr-verbs**. In other words, non-transitional verbs and those found in the Q-Scales will be excluded for the purposes of our discussion. The procedure will be as follows: firstly, a statistical analysis of the sample corpus will be presented and commented on, and secondly, I will attempt to provide a dynamic semantic characterology of the Pr-verbs found in the corpus, accompanied by illustrative examples.

4.1 Statistical Analysis of the Sample Corpus

Below is a table that represents, in absolute numbers and percentages, the statistics of occurrence of sentences implementing the Pr- or Q-Scale respectively in the corpus. Drawing on what was written above about the character of the so-called Extended Presentation Scale (see section 2.2 of the present paper), I decided to include its occurrence under the

general heading of Presentation Scale. Analogously, the Quality scale also covers its subtype, labelled Combined Scale (cf. Adam and Chamonikolasová, 2005).

Tab. 2

| Scale Implemented | No. of Fields | % |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|--------|
| Pr-Scale (including Extended subtype) | 64 | 12.19 |
| Q-Scale (including Combined subtype) | 461 | 87.81 |
| Total | 525 | 100.00 |

It appears that a low number of the basic distributional fields in the corpus follow the pattern of the Pr-Scale. However, it is possible to claim that the number of Pr-scale occurrences is – in comparison with other text types – still relatively high. To illustrate, in fictional narrative texts analysed in terms of FSP (works by Čapek, Leacock, and Wilde), the incidence of sentences implementing the Pr-scale is usually about 5 to 8 percent (see the results published by Řezníčková; Wachsmuthová; Tillhonová). This tendency may also be corroborated by the findings presented by Lingová, who detected an analogous occurrence of sentences implementing the Pr-scale in biblical theological texts, arriving at 7.7 percent of Pr-scale sentences. By contrast, the biblical texts in the corpus under discussion indicate 12 per cent of this subtype. However, due to space limitations, a deeper discussion of this disproportion is outside the scope of the present paper.

4.2 Dynamic Semantic Characterology of the Pr-Verbs

Following the Prague tradition (see especially Mathesius; Vachek, 1995), the term *linguistic characterology* is used here to denote a holistic and functional description of linguistic phenomena. Below is a chart that offers a basic outline of the individual types of Pr-verbs detected in the corpus, classified according to their dynamic as well as static semantic character:

Tab. 3

| Pr-verb category | No. of items | % | Examples detected in the corpus |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------|---|
| verbs of going & coming | 24 | 37.50 | went out; was coming; came; followed; happened to be going; is coming; returned; will come; has come; |
| verbs of appearance proper | 13 | 20.31 | had appeared; came about; was created; were made; has been born; be done; appeared; |
| static & positional verbs | 1 | 1.56 | stands; |
| copular “be” + quality | 10 | 15.63 | be hallowed; blessed are; |
| existential “be” | 12 | 18.75 | (there) is; (there) were; (there) was; (there) were not; |
| miscellaneous | 4 | 6.25 | shone; attacked; took control; said; |
| Total | 64 | 100.00 | |

The individual dynamic semantic groups of Pr-verbs found in the corpus will now be discussed in greater detail; each of the categories will be illustrated by one or two examples with reference to the corpus.

A. Verbs of going & coming

Along with the B and E types, type A is clearly the most frequent one found in the corpus material. The Tr-verbs falling into this category are dynamic (as opposed to static), and carry the meaning of motion. Logically, they correspond with the Firbasian idea of existence on the scene, but mediate this existence from the dynamic point of view, placing emphasis on the motion process proper. For example:

Then / Jesus / came / from Galilee / to be baptised by John.
(Matthew 3:13; distributional field 69)

Large crowds from Galilee / followed / him.
(Matthew 4:25; distributional field 112)

The Pr-verbs identified in the corpus under examination usually denote a simple movement-type action performed by the phenomenon that is being presented on the scene of communication. The set of verbs is not extremely varied in terms of the meaning carried by the verbs; it denotes simple motions such as that of going, coming, following, or returning – which actually lack any further specification of a more subtle meaning. Kudrnáčová, for instance, in her monograph on the syntactic semantic interface of directed motion, speaks – when discussing the idea of verbs of going and coming – of “path verbs”, the semantic focus of which “lies on the directionality of motion” (Kudrnáčová, 2008, 44–45). In her opinion, and in accord with the present findings, it is the final localisation of the mover that

is semantically most prominent. Such verbs deal with translocation, rather than manner of motion; the culmination point is thus usually highlighted (cf. Kudrnáčová 2008).

In this connection, it will be interesting to recall the observations of Firbas regarding the semantic affinity of verbs operating as Presentations in Pr-scales. In his research material (based more or less on fictional texts), he identified a number of motion-specific verbs (such as *drift* or *gleam*) which, as it were, semantically support the character of their subjects (*a wave* or *spots of light* respectively). The noun *wave* along with the verb *drift* expresses, in his opinion, “the idea of motion” in *A wave of the azalea scent drifted into June’s face*. Analogously, *gleam* preceded by *spots of light* conveys the notion of illumination in *And now big spots of light gleamed in the mist* (Firbas, 1992, 60). In other words, it seems that via such semantic affinity “the verb prepares the way for the phenomenon to be presented” (Firbas, 1992, 61).

B. Verbs of appearance proper

This type precisely complies with the Firbasian definition “appearance on the scene with explicitness”. One could also say that Tr-verbs in this category represent a somewhat dynamic verb type; however, these Tr-verbs are concerned more with the appearance *per se* rather than with the motion involved. If we take Tr-verbs from category A above as those based on the process of motion, here, by contrast, it is possible to speak of appearance as a non-scalar, polar phenomenon – somebody or something appears on the scene without any prior presence, i.e. from zero to full existence.

When they had gone / an angel of the Lord / appeared / to Joseph / in a dream.
(Matthew 2:13; distributional field 43)

Today / in the town of David / a Saviour / has been born / to you.
(Luke 2:11; distributional field 14c)

The set of Pr-verbs falling into category B is (similarly to A) relatively homogeneous in its content; most of the verbs simply carry the meaning of the appearance of the Phenomenon to be presented on the scene. Besides different forms of *appear* or *come*, we also find verbs such as *be born*, *be done*, or *occur* in the corpus.

Again, it will be beneficial to examine Kudrnáčová’s observations on the topic of the verbal appearance on the scene. Analogously to the findings discussed in the present paper, she views appearance as “a markedly contrastive concept because it presents the entity’s change of location as a sharp change of its original position” (Kudrnáčová, 2008, 47). Furthermore, she goes on to claim that “the intrinsically contrastive character of (dis)appearance is underlain by the strict bipolarity of the path, lacking a transitional phase”; cf. my claim on the change from zero to full existence above (Kudrnáčová, 2008, 47, and 2006).

C. Static & positional verbs

With the exclusion of existential *there*-constructions, the corpus contains only one item in this category; it was felt that – from the functional point of view – this does not denote existence in the classical sense. Moreover, it does not follow the existential *there*-pattern

(even though, theoretically, such verbs may also occur in there-clauses). In the example below, the verb *stand* can be said to fulfil the function of an existential *there*-construction (cf. *There stands...*).

(...) *but / among you / stands / one you do not know.*
(John 1:26; distributional field 11b)

In his monograph of 1992, Firbas gives further examples of Pr-verbs that might fall into category C, such as *have* or *hold* (Firbas, 1992, 62–63). He relates their FSP function to the idea of “production”, though he claims that they represent a group of transitive verbs of production. Drawing on Hatcher (44–5), he says that e.g. *have* “indicates the existence of a phenomenon in somebody’s possession” (Firbas, 1992, 63).

D. Copular “be” + quality

Syntactically speaking, the Tr-verb “be” falling into this category can be seen as a copula, because as a rule, a quality (carried by a complement) is ascribed through it to the subject. From the point of view of functional syntax, however, we must see the *be* + *quality* pattern as a representative of a transitional Tr-verb. It may be argued that such verbs might fulfil a somewhat ambiguous role – being potentially capable of perspectivising the sentence in both Pr and Q-scale directions. The examples of type D were found above all in the poetic texts of the *Lord’s Prayer* (Mt 6:9–13) and *The Beatitudes* (Mt 5:1–12).

Our father in heaven / your name / be hallowed.
(Matthew 6:9; distributional field 1)

At first sight, due to potentiality, it is not quite clear whether the notion of *your name* is ushered onto the scene here for the first time, or, whether it forms the scene and is thus thematic, even though it is context-independent. Such verbs may be regarded as having a reduced or even zero notional component. Nonetheless, the interplay of all FSP factors disambiguates the interpretation of such sentences almost invariably towards the Pr-scale.

Blessed are / the poor in spirit / for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
(Matthew 5:3; distributional field 5)

The whole clause is perspectivised towards the subject (*the poor in spirit*), and thus the unit is rhematic, performing the dynamic-semantic function of a Phenomenon. The fact that these people (*the poor in spirit*) are *blessed* is context-independent, yet less dynamic than the Ph-element; the Phenomena entering the communication are actually introduced for the first time. The fact that these people are blessed can be viewed as something implied or even taken for granted. As a result, the verbal expression (*are blessed*) constitutes the transition only, and may be considered to be merely a verb suggesting “existence or appearance on the scene with sufficient implicitness” (Firbas, 1992, 88–9; for a thorough discussion on the topic see Adam, 2003).

E. Existential “be”

Existential *there*-clauses represent a somewhat specific phenomenon in the area of FSP interpretation; it may be difficult to assign dynamic-semantic functions to the units. In this connection, Firbas speaks of the “permanent obviousness” of *there*-constructions in the immediately relevant context (Firbas, 1992, 24). For the writer and the reader it is obvious what this *there*-element means, and hence its notion is permanently present in the situational context. Firbas argues that this construction, “though semantically very weak, is not totally stripped of all meaning, ... and acts as an indicator of a scene expressed by a genuine adverbial of place” (Firbas, 1992, 24). That is why the existential *there* is assigned the Set-function and is entirely context-dependent. It is, furthermore, worth mentioning that the existential *there*-clauses are specific in their linear modification, i.e. their word order arrangement: unlike most sentences that implement the Pr-scale, in the existential clauses the notional subject is typically postponed towards the end of the sentence. In other words, the Phenomenon is not presented in the initial part of the sentence; on the contrary, it actually represents the culminating peak of the information structure. The English grammatical principle requiring the SVO wording is thus overridden by the linear modification FSP factor:

In the beginning / there / was / the Word.
(John 1:1; distributional field 1)

And / there / were / shepherds keeping watch over their flocks at night / out in the fields.
(Luke 2:8; distributional field 10)

In the first sentence, the notional subject (*the Word*) is context-independent (N.B. irrespective of its position in the sentence) and conveys the information towards which the communication is perspectived. Thus it carries the highest degree of CD and performs the Ph-function. The verb *was* is then transitional and mediates between the theme and the non-theme. The rest of the sentence is thematic, forming the diatheme: *In the beginning* (for a detailed discussion of the existential *there*-clause, see also Firbas, 1992, 59, and Breivik).

F. Miscellaneous

The last Tr-verb category covers the FSP interpretation of verbal elements such as *shone*; *attacked*; or *took control*. Occurring in the sentences implementing the Pr-scale, also these verbs should definitely express appearance or existence on the scene with “explicitness” or, at least, with “sufficient implicitness” (Firbas, 1995, 65). Obviously, the Tr-verbs have a more specific meaning than just that of existence or appearance on the scene. This uncertainty might thus open the door to potentially differing interpretations (Firbas, 1992, 108–110 and 181–6). At first sight it seems that verbs such as *shone* do not express appearance with sufficient implicitness, and so the subjects of the clauses should be assigned the B-function, not the Ph-function.

The Holy Spirit / took control / of everyone.
(Acts 2:4; distributional field 7)

(...) and / the glory of the Lord / shone / around them.
(Luke 2:9; distributional field 12)

At this point it should be emphasised that an entire complex (interplay) of FSP signals is needed to properly interpret the distribution of degrees of CD. In addition to the three basic FSP factors, two more (auxiliary) means of interpretation have been demonstrated (Firbas, 1995, 65; cf. Adam, 2009). The first involves comparison with other translations (e.g. in Slovak, the factor of linear modification asserts itself more powerfully than it does in English):

... a ožiarila (Tr) / ich / Pánova sláva (Ph).
[...and shone / them / the Glory of the Lord]

The verb in the Slovak translation is definitely a Pr-verb, unequivocally perspectivising the sentence toward the subjects and ushering the phenomenon (subject) onto the scene.

Secondly, the interpretation can take account of the pressure of notional homogeneity developing in the rheme proper layer. In the examples above, the clauses are obviously perspectivised towards the newly appearing participants of the communication – *the Holy Spirit* and *the glory of the Lord*. We may also speak of “the pressure potentially exerted by the tendency to induce the notional component of the verb to serve in the transitional layer” (Firbas, 1995, 65). This aspect of the FSP interpretation of the sentence is also maintained. In Firbas’ opinion, these two aspects can “tip the scales in favour of the Pr-interpretation” (Firbas, 1995, 65).

Let me conclude the discussion of possible types of Pr-verbs and their dynamic semantic characterology by emphasising that even Firbas was well aware of the fact that it is entirely impossible to enumerate a full set of verbs that may occur in the transitional sphere of Pr-scale sentences. In his summarising monograph he lists a number of Pr-verbs identified in his corpora, though (with a few exceptions) he does not comment on the set in greater detail. To present just a few, here are some of the Pr-verbs detected by Firbas in alphabetical order: *exist, be in sight, arrive, become plain, come forward, come up, crop up, come into view, emerge, evolve, develop, grow out of, happen, issue, recur, rise, spring up, show up, take place*, etc. (for further reference and a full account of the Pr-verbs given by Firbas, see Firbas, 1992, 60–64). We may readily say that all of these verbs are invariably in full concordance with what the present analysis suggests.

5 Conclusions

The present paper has discussed the functional characterology of so-called Pr-verbs, i.e. the verbs that operate in the transitional part of the sentences implementing the Pr-scale. The functional analysis of the Pr-verbs appearing in the corpus provides some principal data on the dynamic semantic makeup of Pr-verbs. The Pr-verbs occurring in the corpus were classified according to their dynamic semantic content and split up into six sub-categories: verbs of going & coming; verbs of appearance; static & positional verbs; copular

“be” mediating a quality; existential “be”; and a few specific Pr-verbs falling into the category of miscellaneous.

As has been mentioned several times above, Firbas characterises the Pr-verbs as those that present something new on the scene; this property is then defined as an expression of “the existence or appearance on the scene with explicitness or sufficient implicitness” (Firbas, 1995, 65). Below is a table summarising the results of the functional analysis of the corpus, specifying individual groups of Pr-verbs as well as their role in expressing existence or appearance on the scene with explicitness or sufficient implicitness. The table presents the tentative data derived from the dynamic (and static) semantic analysis in the sense of the Praguian set of binary oppositions, i.e. the signs + or – (+ as presence, – as absence of the feature):

Tab. 4

| Pr-verb category | Existence | | Appearance | |
|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| | with explicitness | with sufficient implicitness | with explicitness | with sufficient implicitness |
| verbs of going & coming | – | + | – | + |
| verbs of appearance proper | – | + | + | – |
| static & positional verbs | + | – | – | + |
| copular “be” + quality | – | + | – | + |
| existential “be” | + | – | + | – |
| miscellaneous | – | + | – | + |

The research clearly shows that all of the groups identified within the transitional Pr-verbs manifest – to different extents – at least one of the two qualities examined: existence or appearance. The varying degree of the property is partly reflected by the fact that the property in question may be actually expressed either with explicitness or different degrees of implicitness. It follows that even though the functional characterology of the Pr-verbs set has been further specified (compartmentalising the Pr-verbs into a number of sub-types), the analysis proves that all of the categories may be readily labelled as those expressing existence or appearance on the scene, either with explicitness or with “unmistakable” implicitness (cf. Firbas, 1992, 59). The Pr-verbs then, in accordance with their tendency to recede into the background, perform the presentation function, ushering the phenomenon onto the scene of the communication.

As has been noted above, the analysis deals with the author’s corpus, which is taken from religious discourse. It is possible to claim, though, that the current findings suggest that – when comparing religious and fiction discourse – there seems to be a substantial difference even in the ratio of the sentences implementing the Q- or the Pr-scales respectively. Also, the question whether the dynamic semantic characterology of the Pr-verbs is identical with other types of discourse (such as fiction narratives, non-fiction texts, etc.) is still left open for further discussion and research.

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