

## Aleš Svoboda in My Memories

My acquaintance with Aleš Svoboda goes back to the late sixties of the last century, when his first scholarly works began to appear in print. I was greatly impressed by his – to my knowledge – very first study in which he extended the current FSP research to a lower distributional field, that of the noun phrase. Drawing on the work of his teacher Jan Firbas, the main elaborator of Mathesius's concept of FSP, whose co-worker he was later to become, Aleš Svoboda presented a functional description of the noun phrase as a theme-transition-rheme structure. The study appeared in a memorable volume of *Brno Studies in English* in 1969, dedicated to the founder of English linguistic studies at Masaryk University, Josef Vachek. In a later treatise (*BSE* 1987) Aleš Svoboda revised his earlier conception, but his initial treatment retains an important position in the development of the theory of FSP.

A chance to become acquainted with all his publications up to then presented itself when I acted as one of the opponents in the proceedings for his DrSc. degree. On that occasion, Aleš sent me all his works – it was quite a parcel – and I deeply regret that afterwards, assuming them to be only lent to me, I sent them back. At that time his work presented a consistent theory (expounded in his doctoral dissertation *From mezzostuctures to microstructures in functional syntax*), but to this day I remember one point that struck me as profoundly insightful – his treatment of the manner adjunct. This element is not easy to place in the clausal distributional field because, although as a clause element it is a carrier of an FSP function and though it is largely context-independent, it rarely belongs to the rheme. Aleš Svoboda pointed out the similarity between the modification of the verb by a qualifying adverb and modification of the noun by an adjective, and proposed treating an unintensified manner adjunct and the verb as one FSP unit, with its own lower distributional field, in the same way as he treated modified noun phrases. Appropriately at this point, Aleš's concept of diatheme should have been mentioned first, but it is so well known that it hardly needs to be recalled. I even introduced it early into students' simplified FSP analyses, but my own full appreciation of the concept came when I tried to relate it to Mathesius's terms 'starting point' and 'what is spoken about'.

Among Aleš Svoboda's major publications, another book that surely deserves mention is a volume unrelated to his work on FSP. Aleš was not only a brilliant scholar, but also a dedicated teacher who always kept in mind the needs of his students. He was the main author of a reference book that lists and explains the basic concepts (*An ABC*) of theoretical and applied linguistics. Covering a wide range of subjects which are graded according

to the stage of study, it is useful for all three degree programmes: BA, MA and PhD. To enable his students to become acquainted with scholars from other Czech universities, he used to invite members of other English departments to give lectures, in addition to displaying their photographs on the walls of the Ostrava Department.

Correspondingly with his scholarly and pedagogic work, I knew Aleš Svoboda as an enthusiastic initiator and organizer of academic events and projects. Two memorable conventions stand out in my mind: the conference on postgraduate studies in Opava and the 6<sup>th</sup> Conference of British, American and Canadian Studies. The first of these was intended as the introduction to a project designed to keep teachers in doctoral programmes and supervisors of PhD dissertations in touch with the situation at other universities, with a view to students' mobility. The 6<sup>th</sup> Conference of British, American and Canadian Studies took place in 2000, when Aleš Svoboda was also teaching in Prešov. In connection with the decennium of the existence of the English Department at the Faculty of Arts in Prešov University, he initiated and played an important role in the organization of the conference in two parts and at two venues, the first in Opava and the second in Prešov. It was on such occasions that I got better acquainted with him personally.

Unfortunately the greatest of his projects, the edition of *Collected Works of Jan Firbas*, remains to be completed by his successors, both his and Jan Firbas's former students. The appearance of the first volume at the beginning of 2010 came too late for him to see in print.

Having drawn, from my memories, a very inadequate professional picture of Aleš Svoboda, I can only try to draw a truer picture of him as a friend and colleague. I always found him to be friendly, cheerful, full of ideas, always ready to spare me or other colleagues any inconvenience, always ready to offer his services regardless of his time. Whenever I came to Ostrava or Opava, he drove to meet me at the station, which in the case of Opava meant quite a distance – just to spare me the inconvenience of having to change to a local train.

My memories of his most friendly act are connected with the ESSE Conference in Glasgow in 1997. By coincidence we had taken the same flight, so that even during the journey there was plenty of time for friendly conversation. Towards the end of the conference week, our sections had programmes only in the morning, which gave us free afternoons for sightseeing. Having a poor sense of direction I wasted one of them by failing to find what I wanted to see. I happened to mention it while Aleš was present. He immediately offered to show me round on the following day, although he had already acted as guide to Jan Firbas on that very same walk. He was indeed one of the most welcome well-wishers at the celebration of my anniversary in 2005 – characteristically having travelled all the way from Ostrava to Prague and back just to give me his best wishes in person.

I last met him on the sad occasion of Josef Hladký's funeral in Brno in 2008. In the following year disquieting news began to come about his health. All of us who knew him kept receiving it with the unwavering hope that the next news would bring better tidings. And indeed good news did come towards the end of 2009 when there was even talk of his resuming his work at the Faculty. I was happy to be able to send him a copy of Mathesius's *Memoirs*, which had just come out, and I felt even happier when he phoned to thank me

and tell me about the improvement of his health. Alas, the good news was soon followed by the very worst.

Aleš Svoboda's loss is an irreparable blow to English studies in this country in many respects, but it will be most felt by the younger scholars working in the field of FSP theory who have lost in him – a co-founder of FSP – their only remaining resort in theoretical problems.

Libuše Dušková  
Charles University, Prague