

Prague School Functionalism as a Precursor of Text Linguistics

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0. THE LIVELY TEXT-LINGUISTIC activities in our country in the last several decades appear as an organic continuation and development of some of the older “classical” ideas and initiatives of the Prague functional-structural School. The simultaneous influence of certain trends in contemporary world linguistics, or more precisely, their mutual influence on one another, represents a second characteristic feature of the situation.

Even though the Saussurian dichotomy of *la langue* (the language system) and *la parole* (the speech) belonged, in principle, to the theoretico-methodological equipment of the Prague Circle, the conviction that only the former aspect of the overall phenomenon of *le langage*, that is, the system of language, should represent the object proper of linguistic science, was never fully accepted and later one younger member of the Circle, V. Skalička (whose writings on typology are well-known), argued, in 1948 (Czech 1936), for the need for a *linguistics of la parole* and put forward some thoughts on how the postulated discipline could be developed.

Maybe that Skalička's proposal appeared to many linguists of those days as a daring (or even problematic) innovation; but its significance was understood by some post-war Prague linguists and it inspired them on their way towards text-linguistics studies.

Nevertheless, Skalička, in fact, explicitly formulated and tried to develop some fundamental ideas of V. Mathesius, in whose approach utterance and discourse were regarded as an integral, legitimate, and even necessary object of linguistic study. Therefore I find it suitable to present here the relevant ideas of Mathesius in some detail.

First of all, let us quote his characterization of the functionalism in linguistics :

The new linguistics conceives language as something living; underneath the words it sees the speaker or the writer from whose communicative intention they have resulted. It realizes that in a large majority of cases the words are aimed at a hearer or reader

(1983 : 122f)

The communicative approach appears here very clearly.

Also his concept of « language » is very instructive. In his book *A functional analysis of present-day English* (1961/1975), in which his university lectures from the pre-war period are published, we read the following formulations :

In our conception, *language* is a system of the means of expression, a system of signs, which, in fact, appears to us as the sum total of the possibilities available to the members of the same language community [...] for the purpose of communication through speech, and identifiable from their realizations in particular utterances. [...] What can be observed directly are individual utterances, on the basis of which the recognition of the system (*la langue*) can be attained. Direct recognition of this system occurs only occasionally.

(13)

Other important questions are what constitutes an *utterance*, through what stages it arises and how comprehension is accomplished.

(13)

As for the stages, Mathesius describes them in the following schema : a certain content of thought is encoded by the speaker and expressed (by means of language forms) in an utterance, which is heard/read by the hearer (receiver) and decoded by him, so that the content of the utterance will be comprehended by him. But it is not possible to discern the different stages by introspection, and their existence can be proved negatively, by the obstacles that may arise in the formation of an utterance. From the linguistic point of view, the most important stages are those of encoding and decoding.

Now if we add some further statements of Mathesius concerning the nature of utterance, namely that any utterance has its content, springs from a concrete situation, and that in each utterance the particular speaker's momentaneous attitude toward the reality he is conveying, and toward the hearer is reflected, then, I think, we can truly claim that Mathesius in fact sketched the kernel of the program of text linguistics, as we understand it in our days.

It also appears that the *psychological* orientation, which is so typical for contemporary text linguistics, was not alien to Mathesius. Thus he characterized his solution of the problem of the sentence as « undertaken from the standpoint of psychologically well-informed

linguistics. » And in his predictive article « New currents and tendencies in linguistic research » (1926) he foresaw that

psychology cannot be expected to afford an easy and direct help to linguistics

nevertheless,

modern linguistics with its activistic conception of language will have an intensely psychological attitude towards linguistic problems so far as it will always hear or see the speaker or the writer behind linguistic material.

(1929, 1983 : 62f)

And let us add that even his conception of *functional grammar* has a psychological (linguistic) background. He starts from the assumption that

every communicative act of speech involves, before it comes to the real utterance, two fundamental processes, namely a process of naming selected elements of reality by means of the vocabulary, and a process of putting the particular naming units into mutual relations so as to constitute a sentence whole.

Thus he arrives at two major sections of grammar, called *functional onomatology* and *functional syntax*. Mathesius was convinced that language phenomena should not be unduly separated from the activity of speaking. (Cf. Strawson (1970) « As theorists we know nothing of human language unless we understand human speech ».)

There then were the general features of Mathesius' conception of linguistics, its object and aims.

Out of the classical Praguian research resources, assumptions and initiatives, the two following conceptual domains seem to me highly relevant and productive in the case of text studies. Firstly, let us mention the *functional stylistics* (including also Mukařovský's poetics and aesthetics), and secondly the conceptual cluster of the *functional sentence perspective* (aktuální členění, « aktuelle Satzgliederung »). Both of them may be viewed as a kind of precursor of text-linguistics studies.

1. *Stylistics* has stood at the centre of interest of the Praguian scholars from the beginnings and it was treated as a *linguistic* discipline (linguostylistics — cf. also Enkvist 1973). B. Havránek (1942) defined « style », in a concise formulation, as « the singularizing organization of a language utterance in its wholeness (taken as a whole) ». A more

explicit explication of this concept was presented by Mathesius (1942/1982). According to him, style is

a significant manner in which the linguistic means of expression have been employed or will usually be employed for a concrete purpose.

From this it follows that when speaking about style we may take it either as a property of a completed piece of text (ranging from an elementary utterance to a work of art), or as a mere possibility (potentiality), determined by the situation of text production. (It involves three important factors : language material, the speaker's or writer's individualities, and the aim of speech.) Thus we have, on the one hand, the style of an author's individuality (or of one of his works or of a group of works), i. e., the *individual style*, and on the other hand, the *functional style(s)*, i. e., the manner in which texts respond to the demands of functional objects. When studying functional style(s), we start from the style *in concreto*, i. e., from the style of particular texts (taken as *functional objects*) and by way of abstraction and generalization we arrive at the style *in abstracto*, i. e., at a set of general *functional norms* of different functional styles and of their subclasses.

In this conception, *style* comprises not only the stylistic differentiation of particular linguistic means of expression (words, forms, constructions...), that is, not only the selection of linguistic devices, but also — and in fact primarily — their arrangement, ordering, organization into a structural whole, into a *Gebilde*.

This does not mean, however, that the systematic functional differentiation of the Standard Language was neglected. On the contrary, it was proposed and elaborated by Havránek (1932) and further developed by his successors. Havránek differentiated between :

- I. Functions of the Standard
 1. communication (intercourse)
 2. work-a-day technical communicative
 3. theoretical technical
 4. aesthetic

- II. Functional languages (dialects)
 1. conversational
 2. matter-of-fact
 3. scientific
 4. poetic

III. Functional styles of the Standard

A. According to the *specific purpose* of the utterance

1. matter-of-fact communication; information
2. exhortation (appeal), suasion
3. general (popular) explanation
4. technical explanation (exposition, discussion, argumentation, proof)
5. codifying formulation

B. According to the manner of the utterance

private / public

oral / written

- | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| oral : | 1. private : (monologue) | dialogue |
| | 2. public : speechmaking | discussion |
| written : | 1. private | |
| | 2. public : | a) notice, poster |
| | | b) journalistic |
| | | c) book (or magazine) writing |

COMMENTS ON THE SCHEMA

1. The notion of *functional languages* bears on the *registers* of British linguists (« varieties of a language distinguished according to use » — Halliday et al., 1964). Registers are distinguished according to field of discourse, mode of discourse, and style of discourse (relation among the participants). We may state here an affinity to the « style creating factors of postwar Prague linguistics.— According to E. Beneš, Havránek's typology has the advantage that it allows for an abstractive generalization and a classification of various text sorts under unifying hyper-concepts.
2. With the classification of *functional styles*, two problems are connected. First, the distinctions presented under B are not « functional », in fact. And secondly, the particular items of A appear as *text sorts* rather than *kinds of style*.

The further development of Prague functional stylistics tried to clear up and further develop these points. There are differences between individual scholars, but the following schema finds a more or less general acceptance :

Style creating factors are either *subjective* (individual), or *objective* (interindividual).

OBJECTIVE FACTORS

1. The *form* of the discourse (communicative channel) : oral (phonic)/ written (graphic)
2. Specific *conditions* of the discourse :
 - a) prepared/ unprepared
 - b) situation : private/ public
 - c) personal relations between the partners
 - d) the kind of contact between the partners : direct/ indirect
 - e) monologue/ dialogue
 - f) the subject-matter of discourse
3. The *function* (aim, objective) of discourse — *functional styles* (as a subclass of *objective styles*) — cf. Havránek's classification).

The major functions of discourses will be conceived by K. Hausenblas, one of the outstanding scholars of the post-war Prague linguistics, in a somewhat different way. He reckons with the following four functions : 1. *nunciative* (« informative », « reporting » f., with subclasses such as: purely informative, descriptive and narrative, on the one hand, and the explanatory f. on the other, 2. *conative* (« influencing ») f., 3. *aesthetic* f., 4. *contact* f. In concrete discourses, one of them is dominating. — There are also complex styles, such as *instructional (didactic)* and *essayists*.

In addition, a further concept from the set of Praguian stylistic conception should be mentioned. I call it *stylistic modes of subject-matter presentation* (Cz. « stylové postupy », G. stylistische Aufbauverfahren), that is, typical ways in which the thematic material will be grasped and, in the construction and production of a text, processed and presented. The following modes may be distinguished: descriptive, expository, reflective, argumentative, narrative, and some others. — In a concrete text, there are often passages that are based on different modes, but one of them appears as dominant or typical. When its predominance in the text is very conspicuous, then the given text may be characterized as a description, a narration, etc. But this kind of characterization may not be identified with *text types (sorts)* or *genres* : they are organized according specific *text patterns*. (I mean such formats as historical novel, business letter, lecture, impromptu dialogue, memorandum, etc.)

Finally, let us mention the general question of the *relationship between stylistics* (and *rhetoric* — cf. J. Kraus' monograph (1981) and Mathesius' notion of the « rhetorical build-up of texts ») on the one hand, and *text linguistics* on the other. K. Hausenblas, who has contributed to the theory of stylistics in a significant way, took the following stand : the principle of the « stylistic build-up of text represents one of several other build-up principles of text structure (or *texture*, as he says). Text linguistics underlines especially *coherence* as an essential property of text. The principle of style just contributes, in an important and specific manner, to text coherence. Hausenblas (1985) reckons with the following general functions, which the style fulfils in discourse : the basic function is that of integrating, in a global way, text organization; as subsidiary functions he names the aesthetic, the semantic (contributing to the *sense* of a text), and the characterizing/ differentiating ones. Summarizing he says : text science has to take into account the phenomenon of style as one of its main principles. On the other hand, stylistics should accept and follow the impulses of the science of text. A stylistics without textological foundations would be imprecise, and a science of text neglecting the style of texts would be incomplete.

Let us add that Hausenblas and some of his students and younger colleagues significantly contributed to the analysis of *literary texts*, following especially some pioneering ideas of J. Mukařovský, mainly his concept of *semantic gest* (a specific, singularizing manner of organization of the semantic material of a work of art.), his analysis of dialogue, and some others.

2. Now I will turn to the second major source of the inspiration of text-linguistics studies in our country, namely the so-called *functional sentence perspective* (FSP). It is not unknown to you, I think, so I will only briefly rehearse its main principles of it.

The concept of FSP was suggested and elaborated, in its essence, by Mathesius (though under the name of *aktuální členění větné*, rendered in the French version of *Theses* as « division actuelle de la proposition », and as « Satzperspektive » in a German article) in the process of his studies on the word-order principles in English and under the influence both of Weil's book on word-order from 1844, and of the dichotomy *psychological subject and predicate*, known from some older linguistic approaches (Mathesius, 1939); cf. also Mathesius 1983 (1929).

Mathesius started from the distinction between the *sentence* as a grammatical (and semantic) structure and the actual use of this structure, its functioning, in a speech act in the form of an utterance (enunciation, message, communication). Such utterance units appear in a context and situation, are associated with a certain speaker's intention and with a communicative effect, and it is precisely the regular outcome of the operation of these factors in the sentence that the term FSP refers to. Within an utterance (as an elementary communicative unit, enunciation) two portions can be distinguished : the theme (what the speaker is speaking about) and the *enunciation proper* (later on called the rheme — what the speaker says about the theme). From the point of view of the context, however, another aspect of FSP comes to the fore, namely the fact that one portion of the utterance content represents a piece of information presumably known to the hearer from the preceding context or at least easily derivable from it (or from the situation), called the known (old, given) piece of information and representing the « point of departure » of the utterance, connecting it with the context. This is in distinction to that content portion of the utterance which is presented by the speaker as a piece of new (unknown) information (seen from the point of view of the hearer). In fact, the two aspects of FSP often partly coincide (theme-known, rheme-new). Nevertheless they should, in principle, be distinguished. Mathesius further investigated different means of signalling FSP-structure (word-order, intonation, and some constructions) as well as ways of the employment of FSP principles in utterances and texts of different types.

Mathesius' fundamental ideas have been further developed by a number of Czech scholars, most systematically by J. Firbas and his group (in Brno; cf. his recent book from 1992), who advanced and refined the FSP-analysis by introducing the notion of different degrees of communicative dynamism of utterance components (and who also, in a paper from 1957, replaced the inconvenient English term *actual sentence division (analysis, bi-partition)* by the nowadays current term *functional sentence perspective*). Later the Prague group of P. Sgall began consistently to inquire into FSP, critically following Firbas' suggestions and developing the concept of FSP in the frame-of-reference of their « functional » generative approach. F. Daneš and recently J. Firbas devoted some of their studies to the investigation of intonational aspects of FSP (as a device complementary with word-order) and Daneš (1974) elaborated the concept of the so-called types of thematic progression in text, thus introducing FSP into the newly developing text linguistics (cf. Gülich and Raible, 1977 : 60-89; its

influence and employment may be traced in a number of works of world linguists and it was also applied to the analysis of literary texts by M. Červenka.) — An original monograph on Russian word order (as well as further works) by P. Adamec had a stimulating influence on Russian studies, while the papers of E. Beneš found their echo in German linguistics.

The ideas of Mathesius and his Czech followers have also been developed, mostly in an original way, by some scholars abroad. At least the names of several Soviet scholars (Kovtunova, Lapteva, Sirotinina, Raspopov and some others), of M. A. K. Halliday, and of S. Kuno deserve to be mentioned here. Of course, the influence of and response to Mathesius' ideas may be traced in the works of a number of other scholars as well, dealing (sometimes under various labels, such as topic (theme) — comment or focus (rheme) articulation, Thema-Rhema-Gliederung) with the FSP phenomena.

Even the development of Chomsky's transformational generative grammar deserves to be mentioned here, since even this approach seems to have been influenced by the ideas of FSP (presupposition — focus, intonation centre).

3. Of the further issues (or points of interest and study) of contemporary Czech functional text linguistics at least the following deserve to be mentioned :

- a) As early as 1962 Hausenblas inspired the study of spontaneous oral communication. Nowadays, *dialogue research* is one of the most developed subdisciplines of Czech text linguistics and the works done especially by O. Müllerová, J. Hoffmannová, S. Čmejrková and some others goes on in a lively and productive international cooperation. (Several monographs, e. g. Müllerová 1994 and 1992, and a number of articles and conference papers have appeared.)
- b) The study of the relation between *written and spoken language* and communication follows the tradition of the pioneering studies of J. Vachek (reprinted in 1985) and also finds inspiration in contemporary linguistics and philosophy. In October 1992 an international conference on this topic was held in the Czech Language Institute in Prague; the Proceedings appeared in 1994 (Čmejrková et al., eds., 1994).

- c) The topic of *emotion* in discourse also had a predecessor in the Prague School realisations (especially in Trnka's concept of *prožívání jazyka* (involvement with language or experiencing language). In several works by Daneš (1991, 1994) the ubiquity of emotion was demonstrated and analysed and its discourse functions and means of indication (esp. of those of prosodic character) studied.
- d) From other points of interest some further issues may be mentioned : contrastive linguistic studies, functions of intonation in discourse, problems of text interpretation (with several analyses of literary texts), problems of the classification of texts (text types), problems of text coherence, and the composition of texts (text patterns). The topical issue of cross-cultural communication is also studied, together with other, sociolinguistic phenomena.

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