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Prague School

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The Prague linguistic circle was founded in 1926 and the Prague school, which it represented, was soon acknowledged as having systemized phonology. Its members played a crucial role in several basic branches of linguistics. A characterization of the school was presented by Vachek (1964, 1966) and by Leška (1995, 1996), see also Sgall (1997) and especially Vachek's (1960) *Dictionary,* published in English by Dušková (2003) with the inclusion of Čermák and Hajičová (2003), where relevant bibliographical data can be found. The School formulated its findings neither in a unified framework nor in a fully explicit way, but they were fruitful and still offer many substantial starting points for a systematic description of language as an essentially interactive system. Even earlier the main founder of the school, Mathesius (1911) analyzed issues of synchronic variation; having found inspiration with O. Jespersen, F. Brunot, A. Marty, and others. Ideas of the Moscow school and of the Russian formalists were brought to Prague by R. Jakobson.

The earlier prevailing Neogrammarian views, with their basically diachronic understanding of language, were changed toward what was best specified by F. de Saussure in his program of a synchronic

analysis of language as a system of signs (in the sense of 'sign' as a pair of 'signified' and 'signifying'), *langue,* distinguished from the use of language in discourse, *parole.* It was understood as necessary to see the collection of language phenomena as a structured whole (the structural view), i.e., as system, based on many kinds of relations or oppositions, between its units. N. Trubetzkoy's set of four types of distinctive oppositions, namely, bilateral–unilateral, proportional–isolated, privative–gradual–equipollent, and constant–neutralizable, is best known. Following de Saussure, the Prague linguists have always understood the language system in a sense similar to 'I-language,' i.e., neither as just a set of sentences, nor as a set of rules of an individual (ideal) speaker, but rather as a hierarchy of the building blocks of lexical and other complex units, with their features of different layers, which has been understood as shared by a body of speakers in general. Jakobson's general opposition of un/markedness was fundamental for the center–periphery distinction, understood as a gradual, scalar relation (see Battistella, 1995).

This structured whole, language, was understood as a functioning means of communication (the functional view). In one of the interpretations of the concept of function, functions of more or less elementary language units within complex wholes are studied, in the syntactic sense. In another understanding, 'function' is contrasted with 'means' ('tool'), and language as a whole is seen as a tool of communication. In still another sense, 'function' is opposed to 'form,' which comes close to de Saussure's binary understanding of sign. This offers a basis for understanding language as a set of levels, ordered either from meaning to expression (close to the speaker's view, stressed by Mathesius), or in the opposite direction. Thus, the levels of phonetics, phonemics, morphophonemics, morphemics, surface, and underlying syntax ('the meaning of the sentence') were established. In various discussions some of the pairs have been characterized as less fundamental than others; as for syntax, in Prague as well as elsewhere, a development from stressing surface to deposing it can be found.

Differing from the Bloomfieldian descriptive linguistics, the Praguian functionalists have also used criteria connected with oppositions intrinsic to meaning. Thus, they have been able to throw light on most different subdomains of language, from the distinction between phonetic sounds and phonemes to issues of sentence structure and linguistic meaning. Under the functional viewpoint, language was found to be of a teleonomic nature, i.e., to constitute a means–ends, or goal oriented, system as a tool serving a certain function and adapted to its requirements, i.e., to

the needs of human communication. Enriching K. Bühler's approach, Jakobson (1960) distinguished six functions of language (and/or discourse), according to whether attention is primarily paid to relationships of an utterance to the context (referential function), to the speaker (emotive), to the message (poetic), to the addressee, to the communicative contact, or to the code. Jakobson's analysis of the teleonomic character of language was further discussed especially by O. Leška, M. Shapiro, F. Čermák, P. Trost, and P. Sériot. Inspired by this view, Jakobson opened new horizons in disclosing the systematic character of language development, determined by its goal-oriented nature, not just causally. The development of the intersubjective system is influenced by individual intentions of the speakers, who want to be both easily understood (avoiding too much ambiguity) and economical (reducing redundancy). Jakobson's 'therapeutic' changes restore the balance in the phonological and other subsystems, so that language can cope with the needs of communication. It remains to find means to identify the boundaries of these needs; if language behaves as a goal-oriented system, what is its regulating mechanism?

Functionalism was soon effectively applied on the two sides of the system of language concerning its minimal and maximal units, namely, handling both the nature of their sound patterns and the sentence structure in its relationships to communication. On the one hand, phonemics or phonology was created by Trubetzkoy (1939) and Jakobson as a new theory that regarded the sound patterns of languages as specific subsystems analyzed from the functional angle. The phoneme was established as the basic unit of this subsystem, the decisive criterion being that an opposition between sounds is linguistically relevant only if it serves to distinguish between semantically different words or other morphemes. In Saussurean terms, language was seen as basically consisting of a hierarchy of oppositions, and a general classification of oppositions was offered – prototypically based on markedness, binary or not, often constituting correlations, etc. On the other hand, Mathesius not only outlined a functional view of grammar (with important contributions by S. Karcevskij and others), but also devoted a concentrated effort to a structural description of the sentence understood as comprising a patterning primarily conditioned by the interactively based role the sentence plays in the context in discourse; thus, he integrated the topic–focus articulation (TFA, information structure) into the structural analysis of the sentence.

Also issues of poetic style and of the semiotics of arts were studied in close connection with the teleonomic view of language. R. Jakobson, J. Mukařovský,

and R. Wellek presented many-sided analyses of the interface between linguistics and aesthetics. These aspects of the Prague school theories, which have been of substantial impact on the theory of literature and on the semiotics of arts in many countries, cannot be pursued in detail in the present article. The relationships between linguistics and aesthetics are much looser today, although in certain domains the interface still is the object of revealing interdisciplinary studies, such as M. Červenka's analysis of functional sentence perspective (TFA) in poetry and fiction.

The approach to language as a means of human communication led to analyzing pragmatic aspects of the use of language and its varieties. Issues of stylistics, the functions and properties of standard language, 'functional languages' (comparable to what more recently has been called 'sublanguages'), other varieties of national language, and (individuating) styles were analyzed especially by B. Havránek, whose studies have been important for what preceded modern sociolinguistics and text linguistics. The intrinsic closeness of stylistics and the functional stratification of language is clearly to be seen in the complex situation of Czech, with its rich and controversial variety of the speakers' attitudes toward non-standard items in everyday speech (recently discussed by P. Sgall, F. Čermák, L. Bayer-Nerlich, and others).

Starting with the 1940s, both a considerable geographic expansion of the Prague school views and an extension of its research to most different subdomains of linguistics was achieved, although during the Nazi occupation the activities of the Prague linguistic circle were substantially restricted. R. Jakobson, who had to emigrate, found a possibility to deepen the principles of the school, applying them to fundamental issues of language structure (in part together with M. Halle), and initiating a large-scale deployment of research based on Praguian principles in the United States in the domains of Slavistics, general phonemics, and semiotics, concentrated around the journal *Word* and including the personalities of C. H. van Schooneveld, A. Martinet, L. Matějka, M. Shapiro, D. Worth, E. Stankiewicz, and many others. Also in Europe the impact of the school continued to be felt. Although scientific and personal contacts between the different parts of the continent were difficult, linguists such as J. Kuryłowicz, A. A. Reformatskij, R. I. Avanesov, P. S. Kuznecov, E. M. Uhlenbeck, M. A. K. Halliday, K. Heger, Y. Tobin, and others in different countries contributed substantially to the school's work and impact. Holenstein (1975) presented a deepened analysis of Jakobson's work. Schools of functionalist linguistics that came into existence in different parts of the world, as well as

approaches of several Slovak and Czech linguists working abroad, such as A. V. Isačenko, L'. Ďurovič, J. Neustupný, and J. Toman, differ from each other, but nevertheless reflect Praguian views and methods to a higher or lower degree, and have substantially enriched Praguian traditions, which have found regular and broad reception in most Slavonic countries.

The development of the school in Czechia can be followed first of all thanks to various contributions and collections of articles published in the West; see Vachek (1983), Luelsdorff (1994), and Luelsdorff *et al.* (1994). The activities of the Prague linguistic circle, reassumed in 1945, were stopped at the beginning of the 1950s, but in fact, the tradition did not get lost, although the name of the circle was mentioned only rarely in Czech publications. The series of *Travaux du cercle linguistique de Prague* was virtually revived in the 1960s (thanks to J. Vachek and F. Daneš) in the shape of the *Travaux linguistiques de Prague*, which was stopped with its fourth volume after the Soviet-led invasion. In 1989 O. Leška initiated the revival of the circle, and the publication of its *Travaux;* four volumes have been published already by J. Benjamins (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, with a parallel English title: *Prague linguistic circle papers*).

A structuralist approach to the typology of language was elaborated by V. Skalička, who – inspired by the teleonomic approach, Jakobson's implicational laws, and V. Mathesius's 'characterology of languages,' – worked with probabilistic relations. As P. Sgall pointed out, a single predominant feature of each of the types can be specified, from which the probable presence of other features can be deduced and which concerns the way of expression of grammatical and derivative values (by free or bound morphemes, by alternations, and by the order of the lexical items).

The understanding of the levels of the language system was deepened especially by B. Trnka and O. Leška. Trnka's writings, which already earlier started the phonological analysis of English and contributed to a characterization of the role of structural linguistics in the thought pattern of the first half of the 20th century, were continued by J. Vachek, whose work has been equally significant for an explanation of the role of written language. I. Poldauf's inquiry into syntax (postulating a level of evaluational expression of the speaker's attitudes) and L. Dušková's analysis of the verb system confirm how fruitful a comparison of Czech and English has always been for Czech linguistics. A systematic approach to word formation (derivology) was formulated by M. Dokulil, and the morphophonemics of Czech

found a profound analysis in the writings by M. Komárek.

Most important for the fundamentals of structural syntax have been the writings of a French member of the circle, L. Tesnière, representing the first systematic elaboration of dependency (valency-based) syntax. E. Pauliny understood the valency ('intention') of the verb as being primarily linked with functions of cases. Inspired by the Saussurean opposition between linguistic (literal) meaning and cognitive content, also discussed by L. Hjelmslev, E. Coseriu, and others (not without connection with Jakobson's view of meaning invariants), M. Dokulil and F. Daneš characterized the level of 'sentence meaning' (one of the first versions of underlying syntax) as a linguistic patterning of the layer of ontological content, i.e., in recent terms, a level of interface between the system of language and the semantico–pragmatic interpretation, helping to distinguish the language system from both its underlying cognitive categorization and its semantic interpretation. The present-day theory of valency (P. Sgall, J. Panevová) is being extended from the domain of verbs to nouns and other word classes and includes a distinction between two oppositions: along with the classification of the types of dependency themselves (valency frames or grids, i.e., inner participants and 'free' circumstantials, or arguments and adjuncts), another opposition concerns the relationships between a valency grid and the (larger or smaller classes of the) head words; prototypically, but not always, an argument is obligatory, and an adjunct is optional (peripheral cases are, e.g., obligatory adjuncts, such as with *to behave somehow, to arrive somewhere*). Syntax has been studied as reflecting the impact of factors originating in everyday speech esp. by M. Grepl and P. Karlík in Brno.

The division of the sentence into topic and focus (theme and comment or rheme), based on the cognitive opposition between 'given' and 'new' information, was analyzed by Firbas (see 1992), who introduced the opposition of contextually bound and nonbound items and 'communicative dynamism' as a scale proceeding from theme proper (typically at the beginning of the sentence) to rheme proper (marked by the sentence stress), as well as by F. Daneš, A. Svoboda, and others. Attention has been paid to the issues of negation and presupposition, to which E. Hajičová added the concept of allegationas a specific type of entailment. It has been demonstrated the dichotomy is relevant for the truth conditions of the sentence (cf. e.g., *She writes her dissertation on SATURDAYS* vs. *On Saturdays, she writes her DISSERTATION.*); thus, the dichotomy is an inherent part not only of an interpretation of an utterance (sentence occurrence in a discourse), but

also of the underlyingsentence structure. F. Daneš pointed out how the 'thematic progressions' relate the theme–rheme dichotomy of an utterance to its position in a discourse (the theme often being coreferential either with the rheme or with the theme of the preceding utterance). Daneš and his collaborators have contributed many-sided analyses of relationships between sentence structure and various aspects of discourse patterns.

A new support for lexical as well as grammatical inquiries has been offered by the recent progress in corpus linguistics, achieved by the build up of the Czech National Corpus, which allows for providing online information on most different properties of individual word forms, lexical items, and other units in written Czech. A complex system of semiautomatic grammatical annotation of texts from the corpus has been prepared as a basis for the Prague dependency treebank, designed by J. Hajič and others. The treebank includes a morphemic tagging, the 'analytical' or 'surface' representations (having the shape of dependency trees, the nodes of which correspond to all word occurrences, including function words and punctuation marks), and the underlying tectogrammatical representations (TRs) in the sense of FGD (see below). A difficult work aiming at a corpus of spoken Czech has started already in Prague as well as at Masaryk University in Brno.

Discussions about the arbitrary character of the linguistic signs have led to a modified form of the Saussurean tenet, taking into account a limited intralinguistic motivation. This view, reflected already in V. Mathesius's distinction of descriptive (motivated) vs. simple nomination, has been further elaborated primarily in the domain of idioms. The difference between Praguian approaches and the framework of sign-based linguistic theory as known from the Schooneveldian trends might not be that large as is sometimes believed.

One of the major controversies in the past was whether de Saussure's distinction of synchrony–diachrony is satisfactorily established. Jakobson and Trnka especially raised numerous objections against this distinction, not linking this opposition with the crucial notion of the state of language, which in each of the historical periods must have its own system.

The discussions briefly characterized above offered an appropriate basis for a fully explicit, formal, and electronically implementable formulation of the framework of language description, which, initiated by P. Sgall in the 1960s, was elaborated by the research group of theoretical and computational linguistics at Charles University, Prague (E. Hajičová, J. Panevová, P. Pit'ha, Z. Kirschner, J. Hajič, A. Bémová, E. Buráňová, and others) as functional

generative description (FGD; see Sgall *et al.,* 1986; Hajičová, 1993; Sgall, 1993); the empirical adequacy of FGD is being checked with the help of the work on PDT. FGD uses a dependency based syntax with which the underlying, tectogrammatical representations (TRs) of the sentence core have the form of dependency trees. The complex labels of the nodes of these trees indicate (a) lexical meanings, and (b) values of grammatemes, i.e., morphological categories such as tense, aspect, number, etc. The labels of edges indicate the valency slots or kinds of the dependency relation, i.e., arguments (actor, addressee, objective, origin and effect in Czech as well as in English, French, German, Russian, and other languages) and adjuncts (means, locative, manner, different directions and temporal modifications, conditions, cause, aim, comparison, etc.). Other kinds of syntactic relations are those of coordination (conjunction, disjunction, and others) and apposition. Their interplay with dependency cannot be accounted for by trees, for more than two dimensions are needed. However, the relationships of the different dimensions are strongly restricted by such conditions as that of projectivity (adjacency) and similar restrictions holding for the relationships between coordination and the two basic dimensions of the tree. Thanks to these restrictions (not relevant for the morphemic representation, which has the form of a string of morphemes and their parts), the representations can be handled by limited means; they can be denoted by a linearized version of the TRs, namely by a parenthesized string of complex symbols, which is not substantially more complex than the formulas of the proposition calculus. Thus, the core of the sentence can be understood as patterned in a way that does not substantially surpass general human mental abilities. This may help understand why the child's acquisition of language is relatively easy, being supported more by the interactivity of language use than by a complex innate mechanism.

The TRs include a specification of the topic–focus articulation, expressed mainly by an interplay of word order and sentence prosody (especially the position of the intonation center); in the TRs it is represented by the left-to-right order of the nodes, with the topic standing to the left of the focus. The systemic ordering of the complementations underlies their canonical order, which determines the degrees of communicative dynamism within the focus. Thus, if A precedes B under the systemic ordering, B can only be less dynamic than A in a sentence, if B is contextually bound, i.e., primarily belongs to the topic: compare, e.g., *We came from a small village to an industrial town* (where the *from* group belongs to the focus on one reading and to the topic on another) vs. *We came to an industrial town from a small village* (where the *to* group belongs to the topic on all readings). The prototypical position of such specific items as negation and particles such as *only, even, also* is such that they semantically operate on the focus. On the basis of a principled discussion, these issues have been investigated by Hajičová *et al.* (1998), together with an analysis of the relevant aspects of the semantico–pragmatic interpretation of the sentence using the framework of formal (intentional) semantics.

Prague linguists always have paid attention to issues of discourse. An utterance, i.e., an occurrence of a sentence in a discourse, has been understood as an act of *la parole* that is identified by the unity of the speaker, time, and place and may be interpreted as an elementary semiotic reaction to an impulse of some sort; its study represents the first major breakthrough into the territory of the process of communication. The theoretical approach to discourse has been connected in Prague with several other aspects of the functional structuralism, from the attention paid here to stylistics down to the teleonomic views mentioned above. Relationships between sentence structure and discourse have been discussed by Sgall, who points out that underlying representations (TRs) may only serve as a starting point for semantico–pragmatic interpretation if the reference of the individual referring items is specified, on the basis of which a proposition as a function from possible worlds to truth values is determined. The way toward discourse semantics can then be traced, especially if the notion of discourse referent is enriched in what concerns the contextual boundness of the given item. Another enrichment concerns the basis for the choice of antecedents in cases of coreference, consisting of the hierarchy of salience of the elements of the set of referents that are understood by the speaker to be easily accessible to the addressee in the given time point of the discourse. This set, called the stock of shared knowledge, displays dynamic properties, certain aspects of which have been studied by Hajičová *et al.* (1998) Further contributions devoted to the nature of communication and to different aspects and kinds of discourse, from everyday dialogue to the language of advertising, have been recently presented by F. Daneš, J. Kořenský, S. Čmejrková, J. Hoffmannová, and others.

It may be claimed that all of the notions referred to above, representing an organic and compact blend of both prewar and postwar thinking, have become international and are also being used, in varying degrees, in non-Prague milieus. Their impact may be different in different countries, but all of them seem to have remained stimuli for others.

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Prayer and Meditation

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Language plays a major role in prayer and meditation in all the world's religious traditions. However, there are enormous differences in what might be understood by the terms language, prayer, and meditation in different religious traditions. This article explores aspects of these understandings in a variety of religious traditions.

The earliest forms of prayer and meditation which we can investigate are those of the religious traditions of hunter-gatherer peoples whose cultures survived into modern times. Studies of cultures such as those of the Amazonian Indians have shown that activities akin to prayer and meditation form an integral part of these traditions. Indeed, it is also clear that language plays an important role in these activities, both in terms of spoken supplications to spirits and in terms of descriptions of states of spirit possession which are a feature of the religious traditions of hunter-gatherer peoples.

It is also apparent that in these religious experiences there is reversal of what might be seen as the normal role of language, to be a system of symbols by which communication about the nature of the world we live in is carried out. Instead language becomes an act through which the world is created. It could be argued indeed that this is a distinctive feature of language in prayer and meditation, language takes on the role of that which summons up the world and creates the reality in which the religious practitioner exists.

This idea of the word actually creating the world is at the heart of the Judeo-Christian tradition where it is the word of God which sets in motion the creation of the world itself. The power of the act of speech is also integral to earlier Middle Eastern religious traditions. Thus in Egyptian and Babylonian traditions, prayer forms a major part of religious activity. Indeed, the earliest written prayers may well be those from Egyptian tombs where, during the fifth dynasty in around 2400 B.C., written lists of offerings to the gods developed into written versions of prayers to the gods asking for their blessings for those who were beginning the journey into the afterlife.