



Mathesius's Study of the Subject-Verb Relation from A Dual Perspective

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Abstract: *By making a thorough study and comparison of the parts concerning verb and subject in Mathesius's linguistic characterology, this paper argues that his approach to subject-verb relation takes two different perspectives. Based on detailed analysis, the present study argues that Mathesius's interpretation of the subject-verb relation not only takes the perspective of verb while focusing on the sentence's argument structure, but also takes the one of subject and emphasizes the utterance's information structure. This reflects not only the difference between the sentence potential and the utterance actualized, but also reflects one of Mathesius's basic thoughts of functional linguistics, i.e. taking the speaker's standpoint in language analysis.*

Keywords: Vilém Mathesius; Linguistic characterology; Functional onomatology; Functional syntax; Subject-verb relation.

Cited as: Li, X., & Han, Z. (2024). Mathesius's Study of the Subject-Verb Relation from A Dual Perspective. *Journal of Theory and Practice in Linguistics*, 1(2), 9–17. Retrieved from <https://woodyinternational.com/index.php/jtpl/article/view/134>

1. Introduction

On more than one occasion, Mathesius mentioned that functional grammar, or a functional linguistic study, should include functional onomatology and functional syntax. According to Mathesius, functional onomatology is “the study of naming units” (1975/2008:16), i.e. linguistic units applied to name the elements of “the content of thought” “subjected to selective analysis.” (ibid: 15) Functional syntax is “the study of the means by which naming units are brought into mutual relation” (ibid: 16). Both functional onomatology and functional syntax involve a study of the verb. In the classification of words, both ontological and syntactic considerations are necessary, as “the verb is best defined as the naming unit denoting the changeable aspect of things in the form required by the predicative function” (ibid: 58-59). This paper investigates the relationship between the verb and the subject which is elaborated in functional onomatology and functional syntax.

2. Verb-center in Mathesius's Functional Onomatology

Before analyzing Mathesius's study of the verb, the role of functional onomatology in his theoretical system will be discussed. When Mathesius introduced the components of functional linguistics, he mentions morphology, which he takes as a branch of linguistic study that “runs across” (Mathesius, 1929: 134) functional onomatology and functional syntax rather than ranks next to them. He believes that what morphology studies is a system of “word forms resulting from onomatological and syntactic activities” (ibid: 134). According to this definition, it seems that Mathesius has a view on morphology similar to Jespersen. Jespersen also takes morphology as a study from the formal point of view. To Jespersen, morphology here is an OI study, which “takes a form as given and then inquires into its meaning or function”, while syntax is an IO study, which “takes the meaning or function and asks how that is expressed in form” (Jespersen, 1924: 39-40). Thus compared with his morphology, Mathesius's functional onomatology mainly deals with, or at least emphasizes, the meaning of words which includes semantic and pragmatic meaning. If this is tenable, the basic unit of functional onomatology, then the naming unit is in essence a linguistic denotation of the discrete atom of the speakers' “content of thought” (Mathesius, 1975:16). When speakers solidify them by using words, a linguistic unit combining a formal expression and a concept, they build a relationship between the linguistic system/world and the extra-linguistic world. This is exactly what modern functional semantics means (Harder, 1996). This is also why Mathesius created the term “naming units” besides



the then existing concept, “word”. Mathesius once asserted that morphology is about “word forms resulting from onomatological and syntactic activities” (1929: 134). This means that the various forms of a word found in a concrete utterance are motivated by, or the result of, the speakers’ “selective analysis providing the elements capable of being denominated by language” and the further activity of bring these elements “into mutual relation in the act of sentence formation” (Mathesius, 1975: 16). This is a dynamic process, in which the tangible and concrete words or word forms, are just the result or endpoint of the encoding process, a component of verbal communication, which takes as its immanent feature the fulfillment of a communicative or an expressive function (ibid: 13-15). This also explains why Mathesius puts “the meaning of the naming unit” at the very beginning of his functional onomatology, for without the need of communication and the specific needs of expression there is no means of expression generated.

In the description of different classes of words, three types of categories are developed i.e. formal classification, aspectual classification, and categorial transition, which are different depending on whether there is a semantic consequence or not. There is a paucity of formal modification with the English verb and the genuine aspectual modifications of verbs only include tense, aspect, and mood. Thus in functional onomatology, the classification of the verb does not take the relationship between the verb and the subject as the criterion; instead they give more weight to the speaker’s interpretation of the action itself, e.g. its course, its position on the time axis, and its relation to reality. Different from this, the categorial transitions of the verb in English involve a change of the relation between the verb and the subject, as well as the object. Special attention will be given to this part in order to illustrate Mathesius’s view on the verb and the subject in the domain of functional onomatology.

2.1 Subject-verb Relations Elaborated in Categorial Transition

There are different views on whether the subject or the verb is the decisive element in the sentence construction. For instance, to Otto Jespersen (1924) and K. F. Sundén (1916), subject takes a more of a central role than the verb. Jespersen takes nominal phrases, i.e. subject and object as the primary, while the verb is secondary. This seems a little bit difficult for the modern reader to accept, but if we scrutinize Jespersen’s delimitation, we may have the answer. According to Jespersen, a junction is “a unit or single idea, expressed more or less accidentally by means of two elements,” (1924: 116) while a nexus “contains two ideas which must necessarily remain separate: the secondary term adds something new to what has already been named.” (ibid: 116) The primary is “of supreme importance to which the others are joined as subordinates” and it is “defined” (ibid: 96) by the other words in them. The function of an adjunct, i.e. the secondary in a junction is “to specialize or define” (ibid: 109) the primary, and “A[a]djunct and primary together form one denomination” (ibid: 116). In Jespersen’s analysis, he used the term “adnex” little, but his examples tell us that it refers to the verbal phrase in a nexus, including the finite and infinite forms, which are believed to add “fresh information imparted about” (ibid: 116) the primary. At this point, we can see the commonness of the secondary in junctions and nexuses, i.e. to define the primary or to make it more specific. Although Jespersen also admitted that the primary was more specific than the secondary, he always believed that “a less special term is used in order to further specialize what is already to some extent special” (ibid: 109). Hence, the identification of the verbal part rather than the nominal part as the secondary in a nexus is a logically consistent assumption based on Jespersen’s system.

Sundén also took a subject-center view. In his analysis of the two sentences *this book owns Charles* and *this book belongs to Charles*, he remarked that they “have the same substantial elements, and these elements must be considered to have the same degree of substantiality. The import of the predicate is not such that it can determine the subject as an agent of an action or the bearer of a quality” (1916:9). In other words the predicate verb is not the decisive factor. He claimed that in English ‘the word-order may be a linguistic criterion for distinguishing the grammatical subject from the nominal part of the predicate’ (ibid: 9). Danilenko also mentioned that Sundén subscribed to the subject-centre view (1988).

Mathesius took a different view from the above mentioned authors. To him, onomatology is about how the content of the speaker’s thought can be named by appropriate linguistic units. The verb as a naming unit is to ‘denote the changeable aspect of things in the form required by the predicative function’ and ‘the most significant factor in their classification is the syntactic function’, while ‘the contribution of ontological categories to the classification of words is the most evident in nouns’ (1975/2008: 58-9). That is to say, although both of the ontological and syntactic categories are reflected in different word categories, in the process of sentence formation nouns are linguistic units mainly applied to denote the entities or objects in the extra-linguistic reality. Verbs, especially in their finite form, are ‘the specific means of predication’ (ibid: 39). While verbs ‘express the changing aspect of an object’ (ibid: 39), Mathesius did not elaborate on the relation between the entity involved and the action in his

study of the categorical transition of the noun. Rather, what is involved is the transition of abstract into a concrete noun, of subjective into objective conception, and of permanent into temporary quality etc. (ibid: 54-55). This takes the ontological properties of the entity itself as a major consideration. On the contrary, the categorical changes of English verb focuses on its possible effect on the arrangement of the sentence structure, i.e. the different relations between the participants and the activity in the extra-linguistic reality may be denoted in the different relations between the subject and the verb. This illustrates the syntactic function of the predicate verb.

Mathesius not only noticed the central position of verb but also noticed that there are different meanings or relations between the subject and the action denoted by the verb, which can be presented by a scale of ‘performing’ - ‘experiencing’ - ‘suffering’. ‘Performing’ means the action denoted involves ‘something that the subject does of his own will’, ‘suffering’ means ‘the subject is affected by an action issuing from some other agent’, while ‘experiencing’ means the subject ‘experiences what is not within his power’ (ibid: 74-5). There is also a fourth type between the second and the third type, i.e. ‘neutral’, which is related to ‘an action irrespective of its active or passive status’ (ibid: 75).

An important point mentioned here is that “English allows a verb to pass from one category into another without any formal change” (ibid: 75). This can be taken as the syntactic consequence of the verb’s polysemy. Jespersen’s research also involved abundant examples of this phenomenon, but he did not give any overt explanation to the following sentences, e.g. ‘*the garden swarms with bees*’ & ‘*bees swarm in that place*’; ‘*this stream abounds in fish*’ & ‘*fish abound in this stream*’ (1927: 214-220). According to Mathesius, aspectual modification does not change the basic meaning of a verb, while the categorical transition may entail “a change in the meaning of the word” (1975/2008: 45). The analysis and the examples given reveal that what is changed here is not the lexical meaning of the verb but its syntactic meaning. For instance, in the following sentences, ‘*He continued his walk*’ and ‘... *he continued to be visited* ...’ (ibid: 75), the verb ‘continue’ in these two sentences means ‘keep doing it and do not stop’ (COLINS). However, in the first sentence, the verb denotes the subject’s “intentional activity” while in the second sentence, it “does not express an action dependent on the will of the subject, but mainly denotes being in a neutral relation to a continuing activity” (ibid: 75). In today’s terminology, the difference between these two subject-verb relations lies in the volitionality or causativity of the entity denoted by the subject. These are essential semantic components studied in different approaches of today’s syntactic semantics research, which includes Fillmore (1968), Dowty (1991), Jackendoff (1990), Kuno & Takami (2004), Langacker (1991), Talmy (2000), among others. Another pair of sentences from Mathesius ‘*He reads English very well*’ & ‘*This book reads very well*’ shows that his concern of the subject-verb relation is closely related with that part of verb meaning. The semantic difference mentioned here is brought by the change of the verb’s categories and may affect its syntactic realization. In other words, it is the semantic property of the verb that determines the relation between the verb and the nouns occurring in the same sentence.

An achievement that Mathesius’s made here was that he noticed that the subject is not always an agent and that there may be other possibilities than the three-element semantic scale mentioned above. A brilliant point of Mathesius’s analysis was that no concrete semantic roles were given to the sentence subject, rather he demarcated these different roles by either exploiting the relations between the arguments and the verb, or by taking the verb meaning as a reference. This is what some current approaches in the syntax-semantic interface adopt to remedy the shortcoming of the semantic role approach, such as Fillmore’s frame analysis (1977, 1985), Van Valin’s macrorole (van Valin & LaPolla, 1997), Levin and Rappaport’s event templates (2005) and Goldberg’s constructional approach (1995), among others.

2.2 Asymmetry between the Subject-verb and Verb-object Relations

A close investigation of Mathesius’s analysis shows asymmetry between the subject-verb relations and the verb-object relation. Although the three subject-verb semantic relations focus on causation and affectedness, the semantic relationship between the verb and the object is explained from a different aspect in functional onomatology. The verb-object relations are fully analyzed in the section of ‘the object in English’ in the functional syntax (ibid: 120ff). Mathesius’s analysis of object can also be taken as a consideration of the relationship between the predicate verb and its arguments co-occurring in the sentence. Under the title of accusative, dative, genitive, and double objects, his analysis developed more than ten different relations between the object and the predicate verb. And in functional onomatology, from the verb’s perspective, the object is taken as a complement to the verb, thus the verb can be categorized in terms of whether it is complete in of itself or not (Mathesius, 1975/2008: 76). For instance, in ‘*to attend a course*’ the verb ‘attend’ is an objective verb, which denotes an action not complete in itself and requires a complement. While in ‘*many civil officials attended*’ the verb ‘attend’ is a subjective verb,

which denotes an action complete in itself (ibid: 76). This shows that the object here is more basic to the event denoted by the predication and thus may have a closer relationship with the verb. A similar view can be found in Halliday's analysis on the relation between the verb and medium (2004) and Talmy's analysis on the complexity of different types of semantic situations (2000).

The semantic motivation of this approach encouraged some scholars to compare it to Tesnière's syntactic theory. For instance, Danilenko put forward the view that with regard to approaches to sentence-forming, Tesnière's theory is predicate-centred and monocentric, while Mathesius' theory is not only predicate-centred, but also subject-centred, hence bicentric (1981). Although we may find some similarity between the two analyses, they are quite different in nature. Mathesius's approach is one of constituency, while Tesnière's theory is one of dependency. In Mathesius's analysis words as naming units are at the same time constituents, and thus they are combined into larger constructions or phrase structures, which are then combined into even larger constructions. This constituency entails asymmetry between the object and the subject semantically and syntactically. This asymmetric relation echoes the different analysis of subject and object in functional syntax. While the focus of the study of subject is its thematic role, the study of object still focuses on the verb specific relation with it as what is 'affected by or somehow involved in the action expressed by verbal actional predication' (Mathesius 1975/2008: 120).

While in a dependency approach, there is no constituent structure; it usually shows a construct structure. 'Construct is the concrete manifestations of constructions and cannot be broken down into their constituent parts in such a manner that allows consistent compositional meaning assignment to these parts' (Osborne & Gross, 2012: 166). In Tesnière's discussion of the structure of the simple sentence, he mentions '...while the subject-object distinction is motivated from a semantic point of view, there is no structural opposition between the first and the second actant, just a simple distinction'. 'From the structural point of view, the subordinate ... is always a complement that completes the governor in one way or another'. He even expressed overtly that 'the subject is a complement like the others' (Tesnière, 1965/2015: 103). Accordingly, the verb-center approach here is both structural and semantic. The nouns are presented as actants structurally and as a subject and object semantically which develop a symmetric relation with the predicate verb.

2.3 Summary

To sum up, in functional onomatology in taking the different semantic relations between the verb and the subject as a categorical change of the verb, Mathesius assigned an essential role to the verb in context-free sentence formation. This difference is circumscribed as the categorical transition of the verb, rather than the noun involved. It is the nuance of the verb that has an effect on the different construction of a sentence rather than the noun. This can be taken as a representation of the verb-central view in sentence formation. The choice of the verb may bring different possibilities for the realization of the subject and the related sentence pattern potential (Mathesius, 1911). In today's syntax-semantics interface research, this belongs to the study of argument realization, i.e. the realization of the argument structure at the surface level (this term is not used in the generative sense). One of the current cruxes may lie in the decisive semantic element of the argument realization. While the projectionist approach takes verb meaning as the decisive element, the constructionist approach takes the construction meaning as the core (Levin and Rappaport, 2005). At this point, traces of the first approach can be found in Mathesius's thought. His research shows that one grammatical sentence pattern may match with several different semantic sentence patterns. This can also be found in Daneš's three-level approach (1964).

3. Subject-center in Mathesius's Functional Syntax

As mentioned before, in Mathesius's linguistic characterology, functional onomatology deals with the selection of possible elements from the extra-linguistic reality and how they are expressed by linguistic units in a given language. Functional syntax deals with how the selected linguistic units are put into mutual relations, so as to constitute a sentence. According to Mathesius, sentence is defined as 'an elementary communicative utterance through which the speaker reacts to some reality or several items of the reality in a manner that appears to be formally customary and subjectively complete' (1975/2008: 79). Thus, sentence in functional syntax is not a static notion; rather, it is a dynamic unit in communication, which is a reaction to some reality and entails the requirement of being an appropriate part of a whole or utterance. Meanwhile a sentence is formally conventional and complete, which may put the encoding process under further constraint. Compared to Skalička, Mathesius emphasizes the speaker's judgment on the completeness of his thought. This is also evidence of his functional point of view, for language here is taken as a tool to fulfill its function of human communication. Although phrase structure is also important and may be more basic to human language (Fukui, 2000), a pure description and explanation of the

constituent structure is not the pursuit of Mathesius's present work. Thus, after the possible sentence potential has been established, the next step is to build the linear structure of the utterance, or the realized sentence potential in real communication, which boils down to the choice of the initial point and the word order. Accordingly, in Mathesius's interpretation of the subject-verb relation in the functional syntax, the leading role here is the subject. It is not that the verb is not important here, rather that priority is given to the consideration of subject. This view can be seen in at least three aspects of his study of functional syntax.

3.1 The Function of the Subject

In functional syntax, Mathesius tried to account for the selection of subject in terms of a sentence as basic communicative unit. According to his theory, almost every sentence contain two basic 'content elements', i.e. 'a statement and an element about which the statement is made'; the former is named 'the theme' or 'the basis of the utterance' and the latter 'the rheme' or 'the nucleus of the utterance' (1975/2008: 81). The patterning of a sentence into this distinction is termed Functional Sentence Perspective, which 'is determined by the functional approach of the speaker' (ibid: 82). Mathesius mentions that 'the presumable origin of the grammatical subject' in English is 'that it probably arose from a formally fixed manner of expressing the theme of the utterance' (ibid: 100). Traditionally, subject is taken as a structural or formal unit and although it coincides with the agent, it is difficult to explain why it usually takes the initial position in the English sentence. Jespersen once explained this from the diachronic perspective, saying that the obscurity in the distinction between the object and the subject results in the transition of the original object into the subject. For instance, in the Middle English sentence '*pam cyng licodon peran*', the noun '*peran*' is a plural subject and the verb '*lician*' is also plural. Later on the sentence changed into '*the king likeden peares*' and then '*the king liked pears*'. Consequently, modern English lost the dative case mark for '*pam cyng*' while its initial position in the sentence remains the same. This can be seen as an account for English subject's preference in the sentence (Jespersen 1927: 207). On the other hand, Mathesius's explanation is more functional and closely related to the speaker's basic encoding process. In other words, when we take a sentence as an utterance, its performance on the one hand is constrained by the possible subject-verb & verb-object relations developed in the functional onomatology; while on the other hand the selection of the theme and the rheme may be the major concern in the functional syntax. Since the subject in English usually expresses the theme of the utterance and the choice of the subject it may entail a change in the 'sentence patterning' which reflects the speaker's 'functional approach' (ibid: 82). The subject plays the decisive role in the performance of an utterance in a discursive stream. After the subject is selected its semantic relations with the predicate verb are constrained, and in this way one of the important aspects of an utterance, as an appropriate part of the whole, may also be decided, i.e. the order of the words in the sentence. The next section will discuss the relation between the subject and the sentence word order in more detail.

3.2 Subject-center and Word Order

The leading role of the subject in a sentence formation is closely related with the four principles determining the order of words in a language, developed by Mathesius, i.e. 'the grammatical principle', 'the rhythm principle', 'the principle of Functional Sentence Perspective (henceforth FSP)' and 'the principle of emphasis' (1975/2008: 154-159). A close investigation of his analysis reveals that all of them are closely related to the subject. The present paper will focus on a discussion of the first and the third principle. Just as Mathesius expressed overtly, the 'tendency to express the theme by the subject is connected with the fixed grammatical word order of English, which cannot otherwise satisfy the requirements of functional sentence perspective in the objective sense, viz. that a sentence should start with the theme' (ibid: 103). The paucity of the morphological change of the nouns in English attaches great importance to the grammatical principle in English, and its interaction with the FSP principle. In other words, FSP is a device to achieve the different linear orders in various sentences and it has a similar status to the grammatical factor in Mathesius's system. This is different from Firbas's analysis. In Firbas's approach to FSP, the three factors, i.e. linear modification, semantic factors and contextual factors may interplay and explain the FSP of the sentence, specifically each element's value of Communicative Dynamism (henceforth CD) in the utterance. In this system the linear other is just one device to achieve FSP.

These two views are different, but not contradictory. While Firbas took FSP as a starting point and tried to explain its multifarious varieties fully in real communication, Mathesius's concern is to explain how the selected naming units are put into mutual relations so as to constitute a sentence. Although he took a sentence as a communicative unit, most of his research focused on context free sentences rather than a sentence in communicative stream. The relatively fixed word order of English sentences was the focus here and the natural SVO order became a point of reference, hence FSP is just a part of the functional explanation of the English word order. Context as an influential

factor was represented in a few examples (Mathesius 1975/2008: 81ff, 84, 101ff) and was not fully studied. In terms of the four principles of word order, the FSP factor is a consideration of the contextual factor compared to the constraint developed in the grammatical principle. Only when a sentence is put in the context as an utterance is it necessary to talk about the base and the nuclear of a sentence. In the functional syntax, Mathesius mentioned the role of the semantic factor in a few cases saying ‘the local determination is selected as theme’ and ‘the speaker tells a piece of news to which the hearer response’ etc. (ibid 82ff) but still it was not fully studied. Although in another section in functional syntax, he explained in detail the semantic relations between the verb and the object; he did not link them with his discussion of the FSP, which became an essential part of Firbas’s later study (1992). The focus in Mathesius’s study is the relationship between the syntactic functions and the patterning of FSP, which also supports our view that in the study of the subject-verb relation in functional syntax Mathesius took the subject as its center.

3.3 Subject-center and the Special Constructions

Based on the fact that the theme’s preference of the sentence’s initial position may naturally lead to the initial position of the English subject, the functional syntax has a close investigation of the different special constructions that may be applied to assign the subject status to different nouns possibly occurring with the verb. Take for instance: the passive construction, the *there* construction, the different alternatives of the same verb, and the inverted construction. Here we take Mathesius’ interpretation of the *passive* construction as an example to show the change of subject which may be the motivation for the existence of such special constructions. Although before Mathesius, Henry Sweet (1898), and Otto Jespersen (1924) had developed an explanation of the passive voice at the sentence level, it seems that Mathesius’s explanation is at the text level. Just as is claimed by Mathesius in the general remark “the voice, however, does not represent a feature concerning the verb as such” and “the voice of the verb simply results from a different formal perspective of the sentence” (1975/2008: 61). The second point is worth noticing, because according to Mathesius the major function of the passive in English is to change the word order of the sentence so as to meet the requirements of the functional sentence perspective (ibid: 85). Therefore, in both Mathesius’ and Jespersen’s research, passive is sometimes used to refer to the grammatical form, while sometimes it is referred to as a semantic relation between the action and the participants. For instance, Mathesius mentioned “a noun with active meaning becomes a noun with passive meaning” (ibid: 45). But what deserves notice is the decisive role of the subject in the syntactic performance of the sentence. On the one hand, the frequent use of the passive in English ‘makes it possible to distinguish constructions where the subject expresses the theme of the utterance from those in which it denotes the patient directly affected by the verbal action’ (ibid: 103). On the other hand, it is the construction that is adopted to resolve the conflict between the requirements of functional sentence perspective and the grammatical principle in English (ibid: 157).

Duškova’s further study on the passive form showed a similar view with some differences. With regard to the role of the passive voice, he maintained that “passive voice is made use of in different styles of a language” (1971, 113). His criterion to identify passive is different from the one adopted by Mathesius. Duškova’s criterion is ‘testing the subject of the construction as the object of the corresponding active’ (ibid: 113), which he believed to be better than the one taking the active object as the starting point, because not every object in an active sentence can become the subject of the passive (ibid: 114). Mathesius’s criterion is a semantic one, and it was rejected, because “it does not set any limits to what should be regarded as the passive voice” (ibid: 114). For instance, if Mathesius’s criterion is followed, *suffer* and *be loved* “must be regarded as exponents of the same function” (ibid: 114). To sum up, for Duškova three elements are of great importance to the use of passive structure, i.e. ‘the systemic relations in English’, the functional sentence perspective, and the functional style. An important point that deserves mention is that ‘[t]he differences between the two voices should of course be examined against the background of their basic equivalence (synonymy)’ and ‘[a]dditional explicit semantic features’ are not allowed in this transformation (ibid: 118). This is exactly what I am concerned with at this point. If this is true, then the special construction used as special devices to achieve the FSP should be investigated again.

In another paper, Dušková studied the interaction or interrelationship between the grammatical principle and the functional sentence perspective. He mentions that “indication of FSP is to be sought in nonlinear devices” and “special syntactic constructions” are also interpreted in a different way or taken as a special group (1999: 250). When the grammatical word order principle is overridden by FSP, what Dušková found is that none of the deviant word order arrangement “interfered with the grammatical function of the elements involved” (ibid: 253). This implies the grammatical principle dominates and the proper operation of FSP presupposes the grammatical legitimacy. He also mentions the primary function of the passive is “the suppression of agent” (ibid: 256) and illustrated this by giving some examples in which the usage of the passive results in a deviation of the basic

distribution of CD (Firbas, 1992). This echoes the basic function of the passive derived from Dušková's (1971) and Mathesius's previous studies, i.e. "to be a major device serving to achieve final placement of the rheme and preverbal placement of the theme" (ibid: 255).

Although, in the last section of his 1999 paper, he discusses different special devices adopted "to change the order of elements in the underlying, simple structure" (ibid: 255), he does not emphasize the role of the passive and the existential construction as a device to achieve the final placement of the rheme. Instead, he focused his study more on the differences among the different arrangements or variations of the existential construction, rather than the difference between a SV or SVO sentence and the existential construction. Daneš has already noticed this in many of his researches. The difficult point here is that for languages like English the word order assumes the role of expressing part of the semantic structure, both the syntactic structure as well as the FSP, which are different levels in sentence analysis (Daneš 1964). Additionally, 'the semantic structure of the sentence is not a mere combination of particular syntactic meanings' (e.g. actor, action and goal) and it displays 'a hierarchical order' (Daneš 1968/2004: 80), which is also different from FSP in many cases. In today's functional syntax, compared with the SVO or SV construction, the existential construction is also believed to have the meaning of introducing the occurrence or existence of an entity or object in a particular circumstance (Kuno & Takami, 2004). Therefore, it is more convincing to base the FSP or functional analysis of a sentence on the varieties of the same construction.

3.4 Summary

In the study of FSP, Mathesius illustrated a more dynamic aspect of a sentence as an actualized utterance in discourse. The subject-verb relation at this point is explained by focusing on the subject's major function to express the theme of an utterance. In other words, by taking the form of subject as a nominal expression it can perform the function of introducing the base of a statement, and impose on the finite verb the role of unfolding the development of message or the involvement of the participants introduced in the event. Such a change of the subject-verb relation here may entail a shift of the perspective adopted in an utterance and a different departure or starting point of message.

4. Conclusion

The above analysis reveals that in his functional analysis of English Mathesius took the subject-verb relation as the nucleus of an utterance providing relatively new information about the settled base. What is emphasized in this paper is that Mathesius's interpretation of the subject-verb relation in English is of double perspectives. One the one hand in functional onomatology he analyzed the sentence from the perspective of verb and developed a new approach in the description and explanation of the categories of verbs, i.e. taking the effect of verb's meaning on its structural relations with the nouns occurring in the same sentence or the argument realization of the verb. While in functional syntax, he took the perspective of subject and illustrated how the change of the sentence's initial part, which is usually the subject, may bring a change to the arrangement of the words in the utterance or the utterance's information structure. The former can be taken as the more static side of a sentence and as a potential, while the latter can be taken as the more dynamic side and as what is actualized in the discourse. The study also reveals that although language function is the main thread here, in the former aspect what is highlighted is the inner function of a language, i.e. the position an element may occupy in a larger linguistic unit; while in the latter aspect what is emphasized is the communicative functions that a language may serve in use. Thus, by taking these two aspects of subject-verb relation into consideration, Mathesius convincingly demonstrated his taking a speaker's viewpoint in language analysis, which is one of his basic thoughts of functional linguistics.

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