PROCESS AS RHEME PROPER IN LITHUANIAN AND ENGLISH SENTENCES

Eglė Petronienė

Studentų g. 39
LT-2034 Vilnius, Lietuva
Tel.: +370 5 2751746
El. paštas: akf@vpu.lt

The article presents an analysis of Lithuanian and English sentences perspectived towards a process. The communicative function of the process depends on whether the sentence is contextualized or not: the communicative structure of context-independent and contextualized sentences may differ considerably.

In context-independent intransitive sentences expressing processes which are not accompanied by circumstantials, the process is communicatively neutral: it may function as the theme or the rheme. When accompanied by a circumstantial, the process is less informative than the circumstantial which is the rheme proper. In context-independent transitive sentences, the process is extended to partici- pants which take the communication further and thus function as the rheme proper. In context-independent sentences, processes function either as the theme or as the rheme. In Lithuanian, there is a strong tendency to arrange sentence elements in accordance with a gradual rise of CD. Thus, the process takes a position in the sentence depending on its informativity. When it is most communicatively important, the process is expressed by the verb in sentence-final position. When it is not, the verb is followed by more informative sentence elements.

English does not differ from Lithuanian as regards intransitive sentences with a thematic subject. In transitive sentences, the verb whether thematic or rhematic takes non-final position in the sen- tence. Its actual function is determined by the context.

1. Introduction

The article presents an analysis of Lithuanian and English sentences perspectived towards a process. The aim of the analysis is to identify the English means of realization of the communicative (pragmatic) structure of Lithuanian sentences on the basis of translations of literary texts.[1]

According to the so-called three-level approach to syntax, the production of a sentence involves semantic, syntactic and communicative level. The semantic level is responsible for the generation of sentence meaning which is a combination of appropriate semantic functions. The syntactic level organizes the semantic components into a sentence. The communicative level adapts the sentence to a concrete situation which depends on how the speaker/writer projects his/her thought: what is chosen as 'a point of departure', or the theme, and towards what the sentence is perspectived, or what is the

---

[1] see References

rheme. That is to say, sentence elements are assigned certain communicative values, or they display different degrees of Communicative Dynamism (CD).[2]

In regard to the cross-linguistically recognized notions of the communicative sentence structure, thematic sentence elements carry low degrees of CD, because they are context-dependent, and rhematic sentence elements carry high degrees of CD, because they are context-independent. "The sentence serves as a field within which the degrees of CD are distributed, the distribution inducing the sentence to function in a particular perspective" [Firbas 1995, 1]. The sentence element towards which the sentence is perspectived is *the rheme proper (focus)*. The sentence element which represents a link to the preceding sentence is *the theme proper*. Depending on their contextual status, the other sentence elements may convey either given information or new information, i.e. they may carry a low (not the lowest) degree of CD or a relatively high (not the highest) degree of CD.

Consider the sentence *Yesterday John invited Mary to dinner.* If this sentence is the answer to the question *What did John do yesterday?*, the elements *invited Mary to dinner* carry a high degree of CD. As *invited* is the explication of *do,* it carries a lower degree of CD than *Mary.* In its own turn *Mary* carries a lower degree of CD than *dinner,* which is the rheme proper (focus). As for the sentence elements *Yesterday John, Yesterday* carries a lower degree than *John* since it is *Yesterday* that represents a link to the preceding sentence.

This goes to say that a degree of CD is a relative notion. A sentence element becomes a carrier of a certain degree of CD when it takes a position in relation to the other elements of the sentence. Thus, one sentence element is either more or less communicatively dynamic than the other sentence elements.

There may be two models of describing sentences from the communicative or pragmatic point of view. We can base our description on the syntactic structure of the sentence and we can base it on the semantic structure. The former is a traditional approach, the latter is new. In the present analysis, we will use the semantic structure of the sentence as the basis, which means that the components of the semantic structure of a Lithuanian sentence will be evaluated in terms of theme and rheme. The next step will be the identification of linguistic means which are used to realize the communicative (pragmatic) structure of the Lithuanian sentence in English.

Means of realization of the communicative sentence structure are generally assumed to be logical stress (intonation) in spoken language and word order in written language. Logical stress, or intonation, is disregarded since it operates in spoken language - this study is confined to written texts. As for word order, it largely depends on the peculiarities of the grammatical structure of a language.

As already indicated, the sequence of sentence elements may reflect a gradual rise of CD in the sentence. Yet, the distribution of the degrees of CD over sentence elements may not necessarily be in the direction of a gradual increase of CD, that is to say the distribution of CD may not be directly related to the position of a sentence element in the sentence. Compare, for example:

(1) *Į kambarį įėjo vyriškis.*
      theme   rheme

Into the room walked a man.   *A man walked into the room.*
  theme   rheme   rheme   theme

(2) *Ką tu vakar matei?*
     - Vakar aš mačiau Joną.   *Aš mačiau Joną vakar.*
        theme   rheme   theme   rheme theme

---

[2] Communicative Dynamism (CD) is "a phenomenon constantly displayed by linguistic elements in the act of communication. It is an inherent quality of communication and manifests itself in constant development towards the attainment of a communicative goal." [Firbas 1995, 7]

- Whom did you see yesterday?
- *Yesterday I saw John.*   vs.   *I saw John yesterday.*
   theme   rheme   theme rheme theme

According to Firbas, the communicative structure of sentences should be viewed as an interpretative arrangement of sentence elements, which is based on, but does not always coincide with, the actual arrangement of sentence elements or word order. The interpretation of the sentence is determined by an interplay of *the factors of FSP*: the factor of word order, the semantic factor and the contextual factor.

In regard to context, the theme is generally constituted by context-dependent (ie given) sentence elements, and the rheme is constituted by sentence elements which are context-independent (ie new). We adhere to Firbas' approach to the notion of immediately relevant context [Firbas 1995, 21–40]. The so-called immediately relevant context is that to which the writer refers at the moment s/he produces a sentence. In practice, it is the context formed by the immediately preceding text. In other words, the property "immediately relevant" is assigned to the information the writer uses for the expression of further communication, and thus separates it from the information given in the entire preceding linguistic context as well as from all the knowledge and experience shared by the writer and the reader.

2. Material Process as Rheme Proper in Intransitive Sentences

As already indicated, our analysis is meaning-based. In this article it concerns the exploration of the communicative (pragmatic) function of the process. As the process participates in forming more than one semantic sentence type, we will focus on sentences expressing material, or doing processes. It should also be noted that the sentences analyzed contain processes expressed only by finite forms of the verb.[3] The sentences are text-developing and belong to the first-instance level of FSP,[4] ie they are contextualized.

Material processes are processes carried out by the Agent only or in association with other participants. One-participant processes are realized by intransitive sentences. When the process is more informative than the Agent, the Agent is expressed by the subject which is context-dependent or presented as context-dependent and carries the lowest degree of CD, thus constituting the theme. The process is expressed by an intransitive verb which is context-independent and functions as the rheme. In a non-extended sentence, it is also the carrier of the highest degree of CD and is referred to as the rheme proper, or the focus. For example,

    (3a) *["Dėde, dėde! Kelkis! Metas jau ginti." Tai šaukia jį Petriukas ir Barnaska, du didžiausiu jo piemeniu, su kuriais jis gano miške...]* **Lapinas atsisėdo.** (Kr. 72)

    (3b) *["Uncle! Uncle! Get up! Time to herd out!" It was Petriukas and Barnaska calling him, the biggest among his shepherds who helped him with cattle in the woods...]* **Lapinas sat up.** (transl. 120)

---

[3] Processes can also have the form of nouns, ie they can be nominalized.

[4] According to Firbas, there are three levels of FSP: the basic instance level, the first-instance level and the second-instance level. Sentences operating on the basic-instance level are viewed as context-independent. They reflect a gradual rise of CD. The first-instance level comes close to the basic-instance level, the difference lying in the fact that one or more sentence elements are context-dependent and thus communicatively thematic, while the other sentence elements are context-independent and rhematic. The so-called second-instance level deals with emphasis and contrast.

In an extended sentence, the verb, if context-independent, functions as a rhematic sentence element: it may or may not carry the highest degree of CD. Its actual function depends on the informativity of the circumstantials that accompany the process. Consider:

(4a) *[1942-43 metų sanvartoje Štuthofo lageryje buvo 3 500-4 000 kalinių.] Tame laikotarpyje kalinių sąstatas keisdavosi 3-4 kartus per metus.* (Sr. 24)

(4b) *[From 1942 to 1943 there were 3 500 to 4 000 prisoners in the Stutthof Camp.] In that time the prisoner census changed three to four times a year.* (transl. 13).

The adjuncts "tame laikotarpyje" and "in that time" are thematic and do not exceed the verbs in CD, while the adjuncts "3-4 kartus per metus" and "three to four times a year" take the development of the communication further than the verbs, thus functioning as the rheme proper.

3. Material Process as Rheme Proper in Transitive Sentences

Transitive sentences are used to describe processes which involve more than one participant: the Agent, the Affected, the Effected, the Recipient, and the Beneficiary. In a transitive sentence, the process, if context-independent, is rhematic by nature, or includes an element of novelty. Yet, it is not necessarily the rheme proper: the other context-independent sentence elements may take the communication further than the verb and exceed it in CD. That is to say, they naturally amplify the meaning of the verb and function as the rheme proper. For instance,

(5a) *[Kas vieną vasarą Lapinas ganė gyvulius...] Žiemą vyras mezgė tinklus...* (Kr. 50)
                                theme   rheme (rheme proper)

(5b) *[Every summer he herded the cattle of the villagers...] In the winter Lapinas made fishing nets...*
(transl. 88)   theme   rheme (rheme-proper)

On the whole, the analysis of the collected sentences has shown that the verb carries the highest degree of CD when the other sentence elements are context-dependent. Thus, the participants of such a process are thematic.

In Lithuanian, this perspective is implemented through the patterns SOV or OSV, leaving the final sentence position to the verb. The Agent and the Affected function as the theme. They are accordingly expressed by the subject and the object whose thematic character is determined by their position in the sentence and the context. Consider the following:

(6a) *[Pasibaigus vokiečių-lenkų karui, vokiečiai jį tučtuojau suėmė, iškėlė jam bylą, kaltindami, kad jis veikęs prieš Trečiojo reicho interesus.] Vietos teismas jį išteisino.* (Sr. 252)

(7a) *[...Heidelis gavo mėnesį atostogų. Jo pavaduoti atvyko kitas gydytojas...Jis atvežė naują metodą klipatoms gydyti...Heidelis grįžo iš atostogų greičiau, negu reikėjo...] Gydytoją reformatorių [jis] pravijo. Naują gydymo metodą tuojau atšaukė.* (Sr. 147)

In English, the verb, if used in an active-voice transitive sentence, does not occur in sentence-final position, which suggests that the verb in a text-initial sentence is rhematic, but not the rheme proper. It is only in text-developing sentences or in passive sentences that the verb can be the rheme proper. This can be accounted for by the structural peculiarities of English: being deprived of inflections, English grammaticalizes sentence positions: the subject takes sentence-initial position, the verb follows the subject and then the object follows the verb. When the sentence is perspectived towards the information expressed by the verb, the subject and the object are context-dependent and are marked by definite restricters, such as the definite article, personal, possessive, and demonstrative

pronouns.[5] In addition, the context determines their thematic character as well as the rhematic character of the verb. Consider:

(6b) *[Following the Polish defeat, the Germans arrested him and brought a suit against him accusing him of working against the interests of the Third Reich.] The local courts cleared him.* (transl. 160)

(7b) *[...Heidel was granted a month's vacation. Another physician arrived to relieve him...He brought along a new method of curing cripples...Heidel returned from vacation sooner than he had to.] He chased out the reformist physician and immediately called off the new method of healing.* (transl. 93)

As the examples illustrate, the participants of the process are easily retrievable from the immediately relevant linguistic context. What cannot be retrieved from the context is the process. In sentence (6b), the pronominal object *him* does not exceed the verb *cleared* in CD. It merely refers to some entity mentioned before. In (7b), the object *the reformist physician* relates to *another physician* and, naturally, includes retrievable (given) information. However, sentence (7b) can be interpreted in another way. The status of retrievable, or given, information may not guarantee the sentence element the status of theme: a retrievable sentence element may enter into a new relationship with another sentence element and thus function as rhematic. Such a situation we can observe in the English version *He chased out the reformist physician,* where the focus is on *physician,* which is the rheme proper. Hence the English version does not unambiguously reflect the communicative structure of the corresponding Lithuanian sentence. Compare *The reformist physician he chased out* which fully corresponds to the source sentence in which the process is the rheme proper.

Although word order as a means of realization of FSP is not as operative in English as in Lithuanian, English can use syntactic transformations which order sentence elements in the direction of a gradual rise of CD, the final sentence element expressing rhematic information. The resulting structures are called 'information packaging constructions' [Huddleston, Pullum 2002, 1365-1447].

One such construction results from the transformation of preposing. By shifting thematic objects to front position, we can place the rhematic process in its legitimate position. Consider:

(8a) *[Jam rūpėjo tiktai bibelfiolšeriai. Būdavo, kai ateina į lagerį koks naujokas bibelfiolšeris, Špeideris tuojau atgyja, išsitiesia, net jam nosis ima blizgėti.] Nauj¹ bibelfiolšerį jisai ir paguodžia, ir pamoko, ir priglaudžia...* (Sr. 69)

(8b) *[He was concerned only with other Jahova's Witnesses. When a new Bible student arrived in camp, Speider immediately revived, stretched, his nose even began to shine.] Each new Jahova's Witness he would comfort and coach and console...* (transl. 43)

However, preposing, as well as other information packaging constructions, have the so-called pragmatic constraints (i.e. they must be felicitous) and cannot be freely applied in every situation. Consider:

(9a) *[Aš atidaviau valstybei prievoles, vokietis mano duoną valgo,] bet žmonių nešaudžiau, žydų su šautuvu nevarinėjau.* (Av. 92)

(9b) *[I delivered what I have to the authorities, the Germans are eating my bread,] but I haven't killed any people, nor chased the Jews with the rifle.* (transl. 90)

---

[5] In English, thematic sentence elements tend to be definite. To quote Lyons, "... the overlap between definite and given is remarkably strong. It is this overlap, and the resultant tendency for topics (themes) to be definite, which makes it possible to say that definiteness serves partly to guide the hearer in working out how the information in an utterance is organized. Thus, definiteness marking... overlaps in function with topic (theme) marking." [Lyons 1988, 233].

(9c) *[I delivered what I have to the authorities, the Germans are eating my bread.]* but **people I haven't killed and Jews I haven't chased with the rifle.**

From the point of view of FSP, (9b) is not quite appropriate as an English counterpart sentence of (9a), because it does not reflect the communicative structure of the corresponding Lithuanian sentence.

Sentence (9c) may seem to be infelicitous, too, because *people* and *Jews* do not follow explicitly from the preceding sentence. The general rule is: to be fronted, the sentence element, with the exception of the subject, must be discourse-given – explicitly or implicitly. In the situation to be examined, *people* may be interpreted as implicitly given: *I delivered what I have to the authorities, the Germans are eating my bread, [if you ask me about killing people] people I haven't killed...[I'm breadwinnwer, not a killer]*. But we cannot front, for instance, *my bread* in *the Germans are eating my bread* (cf *vokietis mano duoną valgo*). The sentence element *my bread*, if fronted, would contrast with *people* and *Jews* and would not serve a link to the preceding text.

As shown by the examples, one of the purposes of fronting is to thematize the object and thus reserve end position for the process.

When the participants of the process are less informative than the process itself, English may also use passive transformations. The following examples illustrate the application of short passives to render the process rheme proper.

(10a) *[Jų gyvenimo tvarka buvo visiškai kita. Kėlėsi jie 2-3 valandos vėliau, negu mes visi. Jokio darbo jie nedirbo –] niekas jiems jo ir nesiūlė.* (Sr. 371)

(10b) *[Their daily schedule was very different than ours. They rose two or three ours later than we did, and (they) did no work.] They weren't even asked.* (transl. 235)

It should be noted, however, that long passives are not felicitous when the process is the most important information in the situation. From the communicative point of view, the by-phrase, i.e. the prepositional object, expresses less familiar information than the subject and the verb of the sentence.

4. Conclusion

The communicative function of the process depends on whether the sentence is contextualized or not: the communicative structure of context-independent and contextualized sentences may differ considerably.

In context-independent intransitive sentences expressing processes which are not accompanied by circumstantials, the process is communicatively neutral: it may function as the theme or the rheme. When accompanied by a circumstantial, the process is less informative than the circumstantial which is the rheme proper. In context-independent transitive sentences, the process is extended to participants which take the communication further and thus function as the rheme proper.

In contextualized sentences, processes function either as the theme or as the rheme. In Lithuanian, there is a strong tendency to arrange sentence elements in accordance with a gradual rise of CD. Thus, the process takes a position in the sentence depending on its informativity. When it is most communicatively important, the process is expressed by the verb in sentence-final position. When it is not, the verb is followed by more informative sentence elements.

English does not differ from Lithuanian as regards intransitive sentences with a thematic subject. In transitive sentences, the verb whether thematic or rhematic takes non-final position in the sentence. Its actual function is determined by the context.

REFERENCES

Ambrazas V. 1997. *Dabartinės lietuvių kalbos gramatika.* Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos institutas.

Daneš F. 1994. The Sentence-Pattern Model of English. *The Prague School of Structural and Functional Linguistics* ed. by P.A. Luelsdorf. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Firbas J.1974. Some Aspects of the Czechoslovak Approach to Problems Of Functional Sentence Perspective. *Papers of Functional Sentence Perspective* ed. by F.Daneš, Prague.

Firbas J.1995. *Functional Sentence Perspective in Written and Spoken Communication.* Cambridge University Press.

Huddleston R., Pullum G.K. 2002. *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language.* Cambridge University Press.

Labutis V. 1998. *Lietuvių kalbos sintaksė.* VU.

Lyons C. 1998. *Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics. Definiteness.* Cambridge University Press.

Sinclair J. 1997. *English Grammar.* Collins Cobuild.

Valeika L. 1998. *An Introductory Course in Semantic Syntax.* Vilnius.

The evidence has been drawn from:

1. Avyžius J. 1970. *Sodybų tuštėjimo metas.* Vilnius.
2. Krėvė V. 1958. *Skerdžius.* Kaunas.
3. Sruoga B. *Dievų miškas.* Vilnius.
4. Avyžius J. 1974. *The Lost Home.* Moscow.
5. Krėvė V. 1964. *The Herdsman and the Linden Tree.* New York.
6. Sruoga B. 1996. *Forest of the Gods.* Vilnius.

PROCESAS KAIP TIKROJI REMA LIETUVIŲ IR ANGLŲ KALBOSE

Eglė Petronienė

Santrauka

Remiantis darybinio proceso sakiniais (angl. material process sentences), analizuojama proceso komunikacinė (pragmatinė) funkcija.

Nekontekstualizuoto sakinio komunikacinė struktūra gali žymiai skirtis nuo kontekstualizuoto. Nekontekstualizuotų intranzityvinių sakinių absoliutūs procesai (t.y. procesai, neturintys aplinkybių) komunikaciniu požiūriu yra neutralūs: tokie procesai gali būti ir tema, ir rema. Jeigu procesas yra konkretizuotas aplinkybės, tikroji rema yra ne pats procesas, bet aplinkybė. Nekontekstualizuoti tranzityviniai sakiniai komunikaciniu požiūriu yra paprastesni: čia procesas nėra tikroji rema - tikroji rema yra to proceso komplementas.

Kontekstualizuotų sakinių (intranzityvinių ir tranzityvinių) procesai gali funkcionuoti kaip tema arba kaip rema. Lietuvių kalboje, kur sakinio elemento vieta nėra fiksuota, rematinis procesas skiriasi savo vieta nuo tematinio. Predikatu einantis veiksmažodis, žymintis rematinį procesą, paprastai eina po Agento ir kitų savo palydovų, t.y. atlikdamas tikrosios remos funkciją, jis užbaigia sakinį. Tematinis procesas paprastai eina po tematinio Agento, tačiau prieš kalbamuosius palydovus, kurie yra rematiniai.

Anglų kalboje, kur sakinio elemento vieta yra fiksuota, rematinis procesas paprastai savo vieta nesiskiria nuo tematinio proceso: abu eina po Agento, prieš kitus savo palydovus. Proceso informatyvumą atskleidžia kontekstas. Taip pat vartojamos gramatinės struktūros, kuriose tikrosios remos funkcija yra žymėta poziciniu požiūriu.

Daroma išvada, kad proceso komunikacinė funkcija priklauso nuo to, ar sakinys kontekstualizuotas ar ne.