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Vilém Mathesius

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Historical survey

Vilém Mathesius (1882-1945), founder of the Prague Linguistic Circle (PLC), was a representative of functional linguistics. Independently of de Saussure, he described the principles of function-structural language description in his paper *On the potentiality of language phenomena* (M 1911). He observes about the limited statistical dispersion of language phenomena, for which values are determined experimentally e.g. in phonetics, that such values always centre around one value, i.e. they show a certain characteristic trend. Therefore, according to Mathesius, the variability of speech is not unlimited. On the basis of many tokens a certain type can thus be discovered (an invariant, in PLC terminology), which covers again other potential tokens. Mathesius thus distinguished between the two forms of language which de Saussure called *langue* and *parole*. The novelty of Mathesius' approach becomes all the more apparent from the fact that Jan Gebauer, his Czech studies teacher at the Czech university in Prague, was a representative of the neo-grammarians school of linguistics.

More of a synchronic approach to language was offered to Mathesius in his course in English Studies at the German University in Prague. There, the predominant tone in humanities was that of "Brentano's phenomenological psychology which presupposes the inherent intentionality of human consciousness. Concrete intentional acts are contrasted by their contents, the intersubjectivity of which is secured by their communicability" (Leška 1995: 83). This very intersubjectivity and communicability are pragmatic categories, which presuppose a speaking position considerate of the addressee, an intention and its possibilities of signalization, and to a lesser degree a point of view on what is called objective reality. Also inspiring for Mathesius was Brentano's student Masaryk (1885) with the distinction of *static* and *dynamic*, which Mathesius (1927a) would later approximate to the Saussurean terms of *synchrony* and *diachrony*. However, he continued to use the terms *static/dynamic*, especially in general contexts (cf. e.g. Mathesius 1928b). Saussurean structuralism was never a dogma for him, and he followed his own path in functional linguistics throughout the life of the Prague Linguistic Circle.

Mathesius was founder of English Studies in Czech university education (he became a professor in 1912): He initiated also the linguistic society that went into history under the name of the Prague Linguistic Circle in 1926 and was editor-in-chief of its periodical *Slovo a slovesnost* (1936). As a professor of English Studies, he wrote about word order in modern English and worked on a history of English literature. His doctoral thesis, *Tainova kritika Shakespeara* (Taine's critique of Shakespeare), was dedicated to literature, and during the first half of his academic life, articles concerned with theory and the history of literature were predominant. However, this historical survey never got beyond Chaucer. A severe eye ailment kept Mathesius from completing it and transferred his interest to present-day Czech and to topics of general linguistics.

This consideration of Czech and of its confrontation with English and German brought Mathesius to insist on the synchronic comparison of unrelated languages. This gave rise to the contrastive method, the *tertium comparationis* of which is function or communicative needs in general. The variations in nature, character, and frequency in different languages' uses of means of expression led him to the formulation of what he called linguistic characterology (Mathesius 1926b, 1928a). It is in this that any specific language (for English, cf. Mathesius 1961/1975) differs most characteristically from any other. With this concept (Mathesius 1928a), Mathesius can be situated into the context of structural typology in the tradition of Wilhelm von Humboldt, Georg von Gabelentz. Working with English as a background, Mathesius (1939b) worked out and described for Czech what he called the "functional sentence perspective" (*aktuální členění věty*), which was later successfully transferred to other languages as well. However, Mathesius' functional linguistics was not restricted to syntax, but became a complex description of language on all levels of language structure, including stylistics and cultivation of language, as well. Functional linguistics in this sense is considered a precursor of text linguistics (cf. Daneš 1994).

Mathesius acted also as an organizer of academic community life; he was interested in culture in a very broad sense and actively supported a desire to culture, especially on a national basis (Mathesius 1925, 1939a, 1940a, 1944).

Functional linguistics

Mathesius' accentuation of living language and, with it, of synchrony, intensified an awareness of functional alternatives in language(s). According to him, the functional interdependence of synchronic phenomena, understood as a complex of coherent facts that condition each other, has the character of an elastic stability (a dynamic system) with different outcomes (cf. Mathesius 1927a), in which both the linguistic development of one specific language and its formations, and typologically different languages are reflected.

The starting point of Mathesius' functional linguistics, and of his functional grammar, the final shape of which is known thanks to Vachek (Mathesius 1961/1975), is basically psycholinguistic (cf. also Daneš 1994). According to Mathesius, functional linguistics "takes the viewpoint of the speaker" (Mathesius 1929b/1982: 34f). Occasional obstructions and pathological disorders in the course of utterance formation indicate, according to Mathesius, two stages in the preparation of every informative message, on which rest "the systems of all languages": *naming* and *interrelation*, matching Marty's (1908) distinction of inner and constructive forms (*innere/konstruktive Form*; cf. also Funke 1924). According to Mathesius (1936b-c), *functional onomatology* deals with naming, and *functional syntax* with purport, and with the interrelating sentence-forming act; these two are linked semantically. This distinction is made for analytic purposes, of course. One and the same linguistic unit can be viewed from both angles; for example, the category of tense has mainly a naming function, the sequence of tenses also one of interrelation.

The contribution of *functional onomatology* lies, among other things, in its distinction of system meaning (conceptual or in a context of; what in analytical language philosophy is called literal meaning) and its concretization (fulfillment) in contexts of speech (i.e. in a context consisting of verbal, non-verbal, and situational components). Another element of Mathesius' conception that points beyond the views expressed in the linguistics of his time is his distinction of four components of meaning (Mathesius 1942: 23-35): fact-related contents (cognitive: Czech *proutek* means 'small elastic wooden sapling'), symbolic validity (connotations: in Czech, *proutek* is a metaphor for slimness), emotional assessment (feelings, evaluation), and local flavouring (function-stylistic rating: e.g. familiar, colloquial, terminological, official).

Functional syntax is, in Mathesius' view (1929b), mainly concerned with the sentence-forming act and "concentrates its attention mainly on the investigation of predicate forms in any language", on the description of its "sentence patterns" (Mathesius 1936b-c) as they are defined by the linguistic meaning of a *langue*. These sentence patterns, which in *parole* are projected into "sentence formation in the course of the concrete act of speech" (Mathesius 1938/1947: 218), are the backbone for utterance-forming acts. According to Mathesius (1942), an utterance is thus the result of (intentional) states of mind, and a resource for the fulfillment of communicative needs. Mathesius thus clearly makes a distinction between structural and functional phenomena.

Obviously, functional syntax is not identical with the concept of functional sentence perspective (cf. also Daneš 1991). Still, the concept of functional sentence perspective is present in Mathesius' functional syntax, for within the framework of functional syntax he distinguishes sentence and utterance, and it is the latter that is in the focus of his attention, especially with respect to word order. Discussing the concept of utterance, Mathesius states that "it has its own specific fact-related contents, springs from a specific situation, and always mirrors the speaker's actual view of the reality that he expresses in his speech, and his

relation to the listener, whether that is a real or imagined one." (Mathesius 1942: 15) The theory of functional sentence perspective later focused on the speaker's actual view of reality (cf. Sgall 1995).

Mathesius' functional grammar is still very much at the heart of functional linguistics. In the context of the work of Mathesius and the Prague Linguistic Circle, it was formed around a description of the sound shape of language (phonemes) and words, which are, according to Mathesius (1929: 493/1947: 60f), distinct from mere varieties of realization by virtue of their functional meaning: the exchange of a phoneme results in a change of lexical or grammatical meaning (*advice - advise, build - built*).

Pragmatics

If the analytic philosophy of language defines pragmatics as the discipline that is concerned with the interrelations between language, reality and action, then Mathesius has had a clear impact on pragmatics in the essay *Speech and actuality* (Mathesius 1942): "...in speech, we do not express actual reality in all its immediacy, but process it under a directive of simplification" (Mathesius 1942: 14). This general comment, variations of which turn up again and again, must not be understood solely as a statement in a neo-Humboldtian tradition. In that tradition, language conveys categories of thought and perception, and for Mathesius it was obvious that chaos and the indistinct outlines of the world are only further aggravated by language (cf. Mathesius 1911). But for Mathesius it is more a question of accentuating the constitutive role of the context in the production and interpretation of linguistic output that is related to it and structures it linguistically (for the role of context for the interpretation of utterances, cf. already Mathesius 1911). In his statements about the relation of language and reality, Mathesius does not, of course, work with the terminology of modern analytical philosophy. Nonetheless we find in his work an understanding of those components of language output and speech situation that have been focused on in recent linguistics: context, encyclopedic and situational knowledge, semantic (existential), and pragmatic presuppositions, etc. (cf. Mathesius 1945: 6). Thus, with this background one can understand why it would be important for Mathesius to mention that his teacher in grammar school, Čeněk Dušek, was a subscriber to the journal *Mind* (Mathesius 1982: 413). This is a magazine that has been influential in language-analytic philosophy since the beginning of the twentieth century, and which Mathesius, due to his prior experiences, probably referred to during his stays in Oxford and Cambridge in 1908, 1910 and 1912.

In a more narrow definition, linguistic pragmatics deals with the speaker's views of reality, speech, addressees, and himself, as these are articulated in language. In line with this

definition, Mathesius explicitly distinguishes two components of speech: on one side "fact-related contents", which, according to him, "grow out of the specific situation" (Mathesius 1942: 15), on the other "the speaker's actual view of the reality that is expressed in the utterance, and his relation to the listener, whether he be real or imaginary" (Mathesius 1942: 15). In connection with the speaker's view, Mathesius speaks of *informative speech* with a communicative function that, according to him, conveys facts to the addressee, and of *expressions* with an emotional function, which covers a whole range of sentences (utterances). With this, Mathesius certainly goes beyond the ideas of his time about modality. But in contrast to Bühler, whose terminology *Ausdruck*, *Darstellung*, and *Appell* has been creatively expanded by Jakobson (cf. Leška 1984; Nekula & Ehlers 1996), Mathesius' distinction does not allow for a theory of language functions and a protostadium of the model of communication. It is closer to Bally's conception of expressivity (cf. Bally 1909) and shows how all types of sentences can be reduced to propositions with truthfulness as the decisive characteristic. This reduction is later criticized in a philosophical context by Austin (1962). Nonetheless Mathesius points towards the theory of utterances and to a pragmatic understanding of language and speech.

With respect to Mathesius' functional grammar, and to his distinction of *naming* and *interrelation*, we can observe that he understood utterance contents propositionally: In the background of referencing, there is, according to Mathesius "the entirety of namings that are present in a given language and, all taken together, constitute its vocabulary, whereas in the background of a sentence-forming act, there are sentence patterns in accordance with which the language shapes all kinds of sentences, and in general everything that somehow deals with sentence construction." (Mathesius 1942: 17) According to Mathesius (1936b), the function of sentence-forming interrelations (predication) is an informative message. Mathesius (1936c: 106) adds: "We can say that in language we have the word in the conceptual meaning and the sentence as an abstract pattern, whereas in speech we have the word as referring to concrete reality and the sentence as concrete utterance."

Noteworthy furthermore in this context is Mathesius' conception that mental activity precedes the realization of a concrete utterance. According to Mathesius, the mind is organized in a way that allows the accomplishment of communicative needs (intentions). Thus, the speaker takes a communicative approach (standpoint), simultaneously selectively analyses the situation (or experience) for its segments, correlates these and forms them into a sentence. This anticipates not only the theory of speech acts, but even an interconnection of the theories of speech act and phenomenological theory of intentionality and intentional states, as e.g. Searle (1983) practises it.

But most importantly, Mathesius gives us a number of impulses for the description of (pragmatically active) means of expressions: e.g. the intensification of the evaluative function with accentuation of the role of context and interaction in the interpretation of language output (Mathesius 1938), or the aspect and its role in politeness (Mathesius 1942), etc.

Text linguistics (functional sentence perspective)

Mathesius' original conception of functional sentence perspective, as it continues to be developed today especially in the work of František Daneš, Jan Firbas (cf. Firbas 1999) and Petr Sgall (cf. Sgall 1995) and others, mainly grew from Mathesius' affinity to spoken language, and from his contrastive approach in finding solutions to linguistic problems. In his interpretations of linguistic phenomena, he started from the text itself, but for making interpretations he also allowed situational context to be taken into account. Mathesius himself (1947: 435f.) derives his interest in the word order of utterances from his own poetic experimentations. His conception of his functional perspective had a precursor in Zubatý who, in 1901, observed that there are "psychological rules" that determine word order, and he even speaks of "psychological subject and predicate". Mathesius found similar thoughts in the work Philip Wegener, as well (cf. Leška & Nekvapil & Šoltys 1987). Eventually, even Mathesius' term 'functional sentence perspective' - if read in the light of what we know today – points towards psycholinguistics, with the concept of actualization of certain (lexical) units combined with a certain speech intention.

Taking speech intention into consideration, Mathesius by functional sentence perspective understands the speaker's current view of reality as reflected in the arrangement of semantic information about the image of reality in mind and in utterances. Within a sentence, one can distinguish a *theme* (*základ*), i.e. the known element (this terminology is specific to Mathesius, cf. also Daneš 1974), and a *rheme* (*jádro*), i.e. the new, as yet unknown element. This distinction of meaning is prominent in the word order of Czech sentences. Thus in the utterance *Tatínek už jde!* (Dad is already going!), *tatínek* appears as the known information (theme), whereas in the utterance *To jde tatínek!* (There goes Dad!) it figures as the new information (rheme). In addition to utterance theme and rheme, Mathesius assumes a further distinction within them into central and peripheral theme or rheme and mentions transitory components. This thought has been developed by the followers of Firbas with the terms *theme proper*, *diatheme*, *transit*, *rheme proper* (cf. Firbas 1999).

Especially for Czech, Mathesius has also staked out 2 main types of functional sentence perspective: a) objective order (from context-embedded to non-context-embedded: *Tatínek už jde!*) b) subjective order (from non-context embedded to context-embedded: ***Tatínek** už jde!*). The position of words or phrases in the sentence decides, according to Mathesius, together with sentence type and position of centre of intonation, whether they are theme or rheme. Perceptibly, these fundamental types of functional perspective are equally applicable to assertion, question, explanation, wish and exclamatory sentences, and also in initiating sentences. This understanding of the importance of functional perspective for Czech as the crucial principle of Czech word order, as opposed to grammatical and rhythmical principles, convinced Mathesius that Czech does not have a free, but only a shapeable word order.

Daneš (1968) takes up Mathesius' thoughts about the role of the theme within a paragraph and the distinction of inner and outer deixis (Mathesius 1926a) and elaborates on functional sentence perspective for utterances where the context is not situative but verbal. In text linguistics, Daneš's extension is known briefly as "thematic progression" (cf. also Daneš 1985); in connection with Daneš's thematic progression, e.g. Brinker (1988) attempts to distinguish stylistic procedures approaches (*narrative* with repeated reference to current rhemes, *descriptive* with what is called a repeated theme, etc.)

The students of Firbas (Svoboda 1989), but also Sgall et al. (1983), however, assume that functional sentence perspective is not a matter of utterance, as Mathesius (not always unambiguously) put it, but one of sentence. This is possibly also due to the fact that Mathesius does not initially distinguish clearly between the terms sentence and utterance. But this distinction is fundamental for the followers of Mathesius and for the development of Czech linguistics after the war. In simple words: "Mathesius defines the sentence both by langue and, especially, parole features" (Leška & Nekvapil & Šoltys, 1987: 90). Still, he distinguished these more and more clearly over the years (Mathesius 1936c: 106). The difference in approach to functional sentence perspective sometimes projects itself into its own terminological web, as for example in Firbas (1992) or Hajičová & Partee & Sgall (1998). But where Firbas (1992) works with the term communicative dynamism, this is a term in the tradition of Mathesius' distinction of static (language system) and dynamic (concrete utterance).

Stylistics

Mathesius' stylistics must be seen in the context of his functional linguistics. Mathesius (1942: 36) distinguishes: a) the style of the linguistic basis (Czech, German, English), structurally predetermined by the language system, b) the style of an individual author (concrete personality), and c) the style of the functional object (e.g., a confidential vs. an official letter). Moreover, Mathesius speaks of an *individual style*, referring to the concrete realization of a text - i.e., how means of expression *are used* (selection, arrangement) with respect to given communicative needs. *Functional style*, by contrast, is his concept of the ways in which certain means of expression *can be used* for a given communicative need; the use of the terms *langue* and *parole*, however, would be contestable here, for functional style is a matter not of system but of usage.

The situation as context decides about the choice of an appropriate functional style, and this is determined by language material, speaker personality, and speaker-intended communicative aim (intention). Mathesius understands announcement, proclamation, offer, persuasion, etc., as functional styles, and is close in this to distinctions in terms of the typology of texts according to their dominant illocutionary function (cf. Heinemann & Viehweger 1991). He tries to classify these styles into major types: a) announcement,

narration, explanation (assertive), b) persuasion, demand, invitation (directive), c) various types of emotional statements (expressive). Common to all these is - according to Mathesius - the existence of "content". For this reason, the "simple elucidating style" is for Mathesius the basis of any style. In the perspective of the Oxford school, this is of course an inadmissible reduction of all types of speech acts to the constative.

Possibly in the spirit of Mathesius' concept of functional linguistics, Bohuslav Havránek (1942) made endeavours in another direction, by distinguishing communicative, practical specialist, theoretical specialist, and aesthetic style. The idea of functional styles has been further developed in the context of Czech linguistics.

Sociolinguistics

Mathesius' comments on the cultivation of language (Mathesius 1932, 1933, etc), the politics of language (Mathesius 1922), and similar topics, can be read in the contexts of both stylistics and sociolinguistics. From a sociolinguistic point of view, Mathesius' observation that no community is socially and linguistically homogenous is of fundamental importance; any language community is usually a mixture of social dialects and slangs (Mathesius 1911). A good knowledge of English in context (e.g. Mathesius 1921, 1925, 1927b) brought Mathesius to the study of the degree to which linguistic phenomena are bound to social phenomena, and the inclusion of speaker personality into utterance interpretation (Mathesius 1942). He is aware of the attachment of linguistic phenomena to both generation and class (Mathesius 1910). According to Mathesius (1940b), in a socially stable community such issues as pronunciation standards are set by the higher classes of society, whereas "social changes in the Czech community impeded the formation of uniform higher classes and of higher forms of social life that could bring forward prestige positions that would determine the direction of language changes." Repeatedly, Mathesius observes the linguistic influence of schooling and of the newly-emerging media, especially radio broadcasting.

Conclusion

Mathesius played a decisive role in the Prague Linguistic Circle. He founded the Circle, anticipated de Saussure's distinction of *langue* and *parole* and, taking into consideration the necessity of scientific communication on an international level, adjusted to de Saussure's terminology. He shaped the Circle and Prague Structuralism not only as far as organization is concerned, but also theoretically, and in a number of ways. His work on linguistic characterology resounded both in typology (cf. e.g. Skalička 1935, 1979, Sgall 1986) and in contrastive linguistics (e.g. Dušková 1988). His theory of functional sentence perspective

even initiated (FSP) three schools of FSP within the Czech context: those of Jan Firbas (1957, 1992), František Daneš (1968, 1974, 1985), Petr Sgall (1967); cf. also Sgall et al. 1986, Hajičová, Partee & Sgall 1998. Through his pupils, his theory found its way into international linguistics, as well. In Mathesius' functional approach to linguistics, the concept of function was attributed pivotal significance. This is evident especially in his functional grammar which is explicitly related to by B. Trnka (1988), another of Mathesius' pupils and fellow scholars. Yet Mathesius' concept of function has shaped Czech linguistics much more deeply (cf. *Mluvnice češtiny*, 3 vol., 1986-1987). In functional-generative description of language it is innovatively re-interpreted, as well (cf. Sgall et al. 1969, 1986, Hajičová 1972, 1992). It is precisely functionalism that seems to find a very special resonance in international linguistics (cf. Novák-Sgall, 1968, Vachek 1982, Daneš 1987, 1991, 1994). Through Bohuslav Havránek (1929, 1932, 1942) and his theory of functional styles, the concept of function has - in the context of the Prague Linguistic Circle - even been introduced into stylistics and continues to be maintained in the contexts of functional linguistics (cf. Hausenblas 1983, Chloupek & Nekvapil 1993) and sociolinguistics (cf. Chloupek & Nekvapil 1986, Sgall et al. 1992).

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[See also: Communicative dynamism; Functional grammar; Functional sentence perspective; Prague School; Structuralism; Text linguistics]