# 布拉格学派

## (1945－1990)

## *PRAGUIANA*

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Edited by
Philip A. Luelsdorff
Jarmila Panevová
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# STUDIES IN SYNTAX AND SEMANTICS

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# Sentence Patterns and Verb Classes*

## Eugen Pauliny

[...] 10. The action by itself always presupposes the thing performing the action, on the one hand, and the thing affected by the action and being its goal, on the other. At the level of meaning, therefore, it presents itself in such a way that there is a performer of an action, the agent or actor (A), the action (event) itself (Event, E) and the object affected by the action, or patient (P). These are the attributes accompanying every action.

What does the level of linguistic form look like? It would be desirable if each semantic component of a sentence were denoted by a special independent expression. This is often the case. The agent, for instance, expresses the subject of a verbal action so often that many also define it in terms of this function.[1] This is not correct,[2] as we will see later, nevertheless, the types in which the subject is the agent of the action are frequent. The object is similar. An independently expressed object that is affected by the action resulting from the meaning of the verb is usually a grammatical object. The grammatical object is therefore spoken of as that semantic component of the sentence which corresponds to the object affected by the action. The sentence type *Otec nesie drevo* (Father is carrying the wood) is a nice example of a case where the subject = agent and the object = patient.[3]

But this is not the case with all types of sentences. Thus, in the sentence *Kostolník zvoní* (The-parish-clerk rings-the-bell) the subject is the performer of the action but the affected object is not expressed. And further, in the sentence *Otec starne* (Father is-growing-old) the subject is not the performer of an action on the contrary, it is affected by the action in a way similar to the object in the sentence *Otec nesie drevo* (Father is-carrying the-wood). In the sentence *Otec starne* (Father is-growing-old) the performer remains unknown and unknowable.[4]

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\*    Extract from E. Pauliny, *Štruktúra slovenského slovesa* [Structure of the Slovak verb], Bratislava, Slovenská akadémia vied a umení, 1943.

We can already conclude from these few types of sentences that the subject is not always identical with the agent of the action, it may sometimes even occur as patient. On the other hand, the object when present always operates as the patient of the verbal action (only the object in the accusative or in the genitive is meant here; the reasons for this limitation will become apparent later). These findings compel us to believe that the subject is an entity expressed in a sentence, which is able to exhibit a certain property, to perform some action or to be a patient of some action. The first case does not belong here as we are concerned only with those sentences in which the expressed action is a conjugated verbal predicate. The object, on the other hand, is a patient of the verbal action. Thus subject and object are in a certain opposition by the fact that the subject may be both agent and patient, while the object may only be patient.[5] The meaning of the verb (predicate) will decide whether a noun is agent or patient in a sentence and whether in the function of patient it is subject or object.

11. However, the meaning of the verb does not influence sentence construction in this aspect only. In the sentence *Otec nesie drevo* (Father is-carrying the-wood) and *Kostolník zvoní* (The-parish-clerk rings-the-bell) the subject is the agent. In this respect the meaning of the verb functions in the same way in both sentences. But the two sentences do not agree in the way the patient is expressed. In the first sentence it is denoted by means of a special independent expression, which is not the case in the second. We cannot say, however, that in the second sentence the object affected by the verbal event is not evident, because it is clearly understood that by its activity the subject affects a bell or an object on which ringing can be performed. The object affected by the event, however, is not expressed in the subject, therefore it has to be expressed already in the verb itself and is evident from it.[6] Similarly in sentences like *Pes vrčí* (A-dog is-growling), *Otec búcha* (Father is-banging), *Voda hrčí* (Water is-gurgling), etc. Here everywhere the object intention of the event is expressed by the very meaning of the verb.

Further, comparing the sentence *Otec nesie drevo* (Father is-carrying the-wood) and *Otec ide* (Father is-going), we can observe that the intention of the action is not identical. In the first sentence the subject as an agent directs its activity upon the object existing outside it. The subject is here only the actor of the event. The patient is denoted by means of a special

expression. In the second sentence the subject is also the agent of an event, but here it turns the event towards itself, rather than towards some other objects. By means of an event of which it is the actor it affects itself as a patient.[7] Again, all this follows only from the meaning of the verb. From these and similar cases, therefore, we can say that the semantic categories of verbs can be distinguished according to the extent and manner of expressing the agent and patient of an event - in other words, according to the intention produced by the verbal predicate with regard to its meaning.

12. Judging schematically on the whole, the following instances could occur:

I. (1) Agent, action (event) and patient are denoted by special independent expressions. Scheme: A - E - P.

(2) Agent is denoted by a special independent expression, but event and patient are denoted by a joint expression. Scheme: A - EP.

(3) Agent and patient are denoted by a joint expression, but the event is expressed independently. Scheme: AP - E.

(4) Agent and event are denoted by a joint expression but the patient is expressed independently. Scheme: AE - P.

(5) All three semantic components (agent, event, patient) are denoted by a joint expression. Scheme: AEP.

These types should exhaust all the possibilities of the basic sentence types with a definite agent. All these types are found in Slovak. Slovak, however, has at its disposal another type representing a sort of transition between types (2) and (3). That is to say, Slovak needs to express those cases where the predicate denotes the state of the subject but at the same time suggests that the subject is, in the state expressed by the predicate, an agent.

(6) Here the action predicates that the patient (affection) is expressed together with the actor, but the verb determines more closely the quality of the affection. Scheme: Ap - Ep.

13. These are the basic sentence types with a definite agent in Slovak. By presupposing a definite agent, these sentence types acquire the characteristics of action sentences. But these types do not exhaust all the possibilities, because often the demands of language do not call for knowledge of a

definite agent, they may even involve ignorance of a definite agent. Often stress lies on the fact that something is taking place but it is not important who the agent of the action is. This is connected, of course, with our knowledge of the world and with a limited possibility of cognition, so that we can often obtain knowledge of an action without knowing its performer. Therefore, parallel to the sentence types mentioned above, there are also sentence types related to them with the difference that in the types dealt with above the agent of the event is expressed (independently or together with other semantic components), while in the related sentence types the agent of the event is ruled out completely. Parallel to the types dealt with above, there exist the following types:

II. (1) Connected with the sentence type under I.(1) is a sentence type in which both the event and the object affected by the action are expressed independently. The agent is not expressed. Scheme: E - P.

(2) Connected with the type of sentence under I.(2) is the sentence type with common expression of action and patient. Scheme: EP. Agent is not expressed.

(3) Connected with the type of sentence under I.(3) is the sentence type in which only the action is expressed. Scheme: E. In the sentence type under (3) it is necessary to express both agent and patient according to the meaning of the verb by means of a common word, and therefore, when the agent is eliminated, the patient is also eliminated and the pure action remains.

To the types under I.(4) and I.(5) with an expressed agent there can be no parallels without an expressed agent because in these types the agent is included in the word by means of which the event is expressed. Thus, by eliminating the agent the event would also be eliminated, because the agent cannot be separated from the event. In this case, the verbal sentence and sentences of this type in general would no longer exist.

(4) Connected with the type of sentence under (6) is a sentence type in which there is a common expression of the event and of a certain degree of affection. Scheme: Ep.

In this way, proceeding schematically, we arrive at altogether ten sentence types that could exist in Slovak, and do exist, as will be shown below.

14. In the second group, however, further classification would be possible and even desirable. As we saw above, the second group of verbs (and sentence types) derives its existence from the fact that in the discourse emphasis is not always laid on the agent of the event. We also saw that this is the case either because the speaker does not demonstrate the need to utter who is the agent of the event, because the aim of the given discourse does not call for it, or because one can in a given case know of the event only while the agent of the event remains unknown and unknowable, and therefore one cannot refer to him. Thus it is possible in the second group to distinguish between sentence types in which the speaker does not refer to the agent as a result of his own decision and sentence types in which the agent is not referred to because he is unknown.

15. Whether the event is performed by a known or unknown agent follows, however, from the very meaning of the verb and its intention. The cases in which the affection is already involved in the very event (type E), or where at least the quality of affection is suggested (type Ep) are determined by the performer of an event, in fact they predicate inevitably that their event is performed by a definite agent because the event itself suggests here by its specialized meaning that the event may be performed only by a certain agent whom it is necessary to express - if the intention is not modified otherwise by the speaker himself. These types cannot, therefore, by reason of their semantic structure operate like those in which the agent is unknown and unknowable: they can only act like those in which the event is ruled out through the speaker's own choice.

But those cases in which the affection is not expressed do not even inevitably determine the performer of an event. Therefore in the types E - P and E we are concerned on the one hand with cases in which the speaker eliminates the agent of an event of his own decision, and on the other hand with cases in which he does not specify the agent because this is unknown, when he knows only the event not affecting a certain object, as with the types EP, Ep, but rather affecting now this and now that object.

Therefore, in the second group we have four types in which an agent is eliminated by the speaker's own choice and two types in which he is not specified because he is unknown and unknowable. It should be remarked

that the elimination of the agent with the type AE - P will be referred to
later in connection with concrete cases while when there is a change of
intention in the verb it is possible to express the intention towards the
affection also in a different way.

16. The general scheme is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Kinds of sentences according to semantic categories of the verb.*

| Sentence has a definite agent | | Sentence does not have a definite agent | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Agent is eliminated | Agent is unknown |
| A    - E   - P | | E - P | E - P |
| AP   - E | | E | E |
| A    - EP | | EP | - |
| Ap   - Ep | | Ep | - |
| AE   - P | | - | - |
| AEP | | - | - |

17. As follows from the results of the preceding paragraph, sentences can
be divided into two large groups according to whether the intention of the
verbal predicate does or does not require the agent of the verbal event to
be expressed in them:

   I. Sentences with a definite agent.
   II. Sentences with an indefinite agent.

Sentences with a definite agent fall again into two groups:

   A. Agent is denoted by a special independent expression.
   B. Agent is not denoted by a special independent expression.

Sentences with an indefinite agent can also be divided into two groups:

A. Non-expression of the agent does not depend on the speaker's choice.
B. Non-expression of the agent depends on the speaker's choice.

## I. Sentences with a definite agent

A. *Agent is denoted by a special independent expression*

18. Cases in which the meaning of the verbal predicate and the purpose of a discourse require the agent to be denoted by a special independent expression are not equivalent. It is necessary to take into account whether the intention of the verb calls for the expression of the affection by a special independent verb or not. Moreover, we must pay attention to whether the object affected by the event is different from the agent and whether an agent affects himself by the event he produces. With regard to these factors and recalling what has been said in the previous chapter, there are four cases possible:

(1) All three semantic components (agent, patient as well as event) are denoted by means of special independent expressions. In this case verbs indicated as transitive are concerned. This is the type: *Otec nesie drevo* (Father is-carrying wood). In sentences of this type the subject is a performer of an event and by its activity it affects the object. The affecting of the object by the activity is the aim of the event of the subject.[8]

(2) Agent and affection are denoted by a single common expression and the event is referred to separately. Here the subject is the agent of the event but it does not turn its event toward an object lying outside it but affects itself by its activity. This is the type: *Brat ide* (Brother is-going).

The verbs concerned are considered event verbs, like the verbs of the first group. However, they are said to differ from the latter by virtue of the fact that the activity of their subject does not relate to a definite object, instead they are held to express a verbal event in an absolute way - they simply state it.[9] They are therefore called intransitive verbs. As is evident, this approach is incorrect, because these verbs do not express the verbal event in an absolute way, but with an intention towards the subject.

(3) The agent is expressed independently but the verb involves also the object intention of the event, so that it is possible to speak about the fact that the object is included in the meaning of the verb itself. This is the type: *Kostolník zvoní* (The-parish-clerk rings-the-bell).

As has already been said in §11, from the meaning of the verbal predicate it is quite clear that the subject affects the 'bell' by its activity or some kind of an object on which 'ringing' can be performed. Therefore, it is only possible to speak of such a verb as an intransitive verb with respect to its form. According to its meaning it is a transitive verb. It differs from the type *Otec nesie drevo* (Father is-carrying wood) only by the fact that the object is already included in the verb itself and need not be denoted by means of a special expression.

(4) The cases with an independently expressed agent ought to be exhausted by these three types, but Slovak also needs to express the kind of event in which the quality of subject as agent is expressed. The event expresses the state of the subject and at the same time it expresses that the subject is in this state an agent and, with respect to the property assigned to it by the predicate, functions as agent. Hence we have the type: *Brat valaší* (Brother shepherds).

In this type, the agent is denoted by a special independent expression, but by the event it affects itself. Thus this type resembles the type *Brat ide* (Brother is-walking). Because the quality of the subject and its closer determination are also involved in the verbal predicate, this type exhibits common features with the type *Kostolník zvoní* with the difference that in the type *Kostolník zvoní* there is reference to the content of the object, while in the type *Brat valaší* reference to the content of the subject is involved.

19. There is the following mutual connection of sentences of these types: sentences of the type *Otec nesie drevo* and *Kostolník zvoní* differ from sentences of the type *Brat ide* and *Brat valaší* by the fact that the activity the subject pursues is not directed at the subject but towards an object not identical with the subject. Here the subject is not affected by the activity, it is free from the activity it pursues. These are the verbs of external event.

With the verbs of the second type, by pursuing the activity the subject does not influence some other object but itself. Brother with his walking and with the fact that he is a shepherd does not influence anyone else, only himself. Here the activity of the subject affects the subject. Internal action of the subject is concerned here.

On the other hand again sentences of the type *Otec nesie drevo* and *Brat ide* have certain common properties, which sentences of the type *Kostolník zvoní* and *Brat valáší* do not have. Verbs of the *zvoní* and *valáší* types involve the objects which they affect by their activity or through which they influence the subject. Because this is already involved in the meaning of the verb itself, the activity of the subject seems to stand in one place and not to move. Thus verbs of this type do not have a motion expressed but rather the affection (the thing affected by the activity of the subject or the thing by which the subject appears to affect itself). Verbs of *nesie* and *ide* types do not express by themselves what is affected by an activity. With verbs of the *nesie* type the thing affected by the activity has to be expressed by means of the object, whereas with the *ide* type it is expressed by means of the subject. In connection with the fact that the activity is related to the thing not expressed in the verb, the event of those verbs is in motion, namely that from the subject towards the object on the one hand and from the object towards the subject on the other.

Because sentences of the *nesie* type express external events, i.e. not directed at an object, and because the verbs of this type do not contain the thing affected by the activity in themselves, the object has to be denoted by means of a special independent expression. With sentences of the *ide* type it is not necessary to denote the object by a word determined especially for this purpose because the event turns upon the agent of the event and he is expressed by the subject.

The four types analyzed are characterized in contradistinction to each other as follows:

(1) The *nesie* type differs from the *zvoní* type by the fact that it does not involve the thing in itself affected by the activity and has to denote it by a special independent expression. The activity is, therefore, in motion while with the *zvoní* type the activity is static.

(2) The *nesie* type differs from the *ide* type by the fact that the action of the subject is directed at an object lying outside the subject (as

well as outside the predicate) while with the *ide* type it turns upon the subject.

(3) The *ide* type differs from the *valaší* type by the fact that with the *ide* type the object affected is not expressed by the verb while with the *valaší* type the way and the means by which the subject is affected are not expressed.

(4) The *zvoní* type differs from the *valaší* type by the fact that it does not direct its activity towards the subject, while the *valaší* type does.

On the whole there are the following relations, which can be distinguished as in Table 2.

Table 2.

| Action | dynamic | static |
|---|---|---|
| external | *nesie* | *zvoní* |
| internal | *ide* | *valaší* |

B. *Agent is not denoted by a special, independent expression*

20. All the categories of verbs mentioned in the previous paragraph have one thing in common. For the sake of completeness of meaning, they all presuppose an agent which they also denote by a special, independent expression. For the needs of discourse, however, it is not always necessary to know explicitly 'who' or 'what' is the agent of the verbal event (action). It is enough to know that the action is performed by someone 'definite'. Sometimes the agent is not expressed because the action he performs is more important than his individuality. More frequently this happens because we are not able to name the agent of the verbal activity in any exact way, although we feel that there is some definite and individual agent of the given event.[10]

The complete meaning of the 3rd person in subjectless sentences serves this kind of expression, when the action is performed by a definite agent and at the same time the need for naming the agent by means of a full denomination is avoided. That is to say, in these sentences, the formal subject is expressed. It is in the verbal suffix; but it is not a subject through denomination,[11] because it does not say anything about which object from