

SUMMARY

THE THEMATIC ASPECT IN THE INFORMATIONAL STRUCTURE OF UTTERANCES.

How Knowledge is Made Broader and Integral

This study presents a number of analytic claims concerning an important category of expressions belonging to the system of contemporary Polish and used in everyday language contacts with astonishing frequency. The category has been distinguished on the basis of semantic criteria, therefore the presented approach is onomasiological. The aim of the study is to identify and describe, as accurately as possible, various relativizing expressions, i.e. exponents of different aspects of objects that are spoken about. The author claims that the thematic aspect should be treated as one of the components belonging to the thematic-rhematic structure of any utterance.

Every person, object or phenomenon has many properties; each of them can be characterized from numerous points of view or different angles. These are either the inherent inalienable properties that make it possible to distinguish someone or something from other objects, or random features that reflect contingent relationships between someone or something and other elements of the reality. It is, of course, not possible to provide an exhaustive

characteristic of a given subject in one sentence or even many sentences. The speaker has to focus on certain selected features; his or her choice cannot be simply limited to the topic s/he is personally interested in; what is important is to specify the overall direction in which the utterance is embedded. Purely linguistic questions make us aware of the broad area of fundamental philosophical, ontological and epistemological problems that are closely related to each other in the given perspective. Tools for identifying the thematic aspect of utterances can be treated as a specific response the natural language gives to: (a) the multiplicity and variety of the reality; (b) the proportionality of its components; (c) the complexity of cognitive processes of speaking beings; (d) the cognitive relativism.

Exponents of the thematic aspect are a kind of linguistic remedy for cognitive limitations of speaking beings. Neither a speaking individual nor all speakers are able to reach an ultimately complete and systematic rendering of whatever there is to be known in statements. However, language offers instruments accompanying presentation of just a part of the truth about an object, as if it were all knowledge about it, which prevents inadequacy or even obvious falsehood. When we grasp a problem from different points of view and in its various aspects, we discover new truths about it, something which allows us to get closer, step by step and as much as possible, to a relatively comprehensive knowledge on a given subject. *Is this book interesting? It depends for whom. From my point of view, yes, from yours, certainly not. In a way, it might be interesting... As an academic study it is of no particular value, but as a popular publication will certainly be usefully read. Linguistically, it seems quite clumsy.*

Such relativity ensures, paradoxically, the desired amount of objectivity. For what is unattainable for an individual who

grasps a given object from one perspective, becomes attainable if it is perceived from different points of view by different people. Different views of the same item bring us closer to achieving fairly complete knowledge about it and, in any case, allow us to avoid excessive subjectivity in perception of the reality. Thus, the expressions that are analysed in this study are related to the values of maximization of knowledge.

In philosophy, apart from well-known general questions of relativism, also specific properties of relativizing expressions have been targeted. Currently, philosophical investigations into such expressions are called *qua*-theories. The Latin *qua* is a label reminiscent of the English *as* and the Polish *jako*, the main exponent of the thematic aspect, to which a large part of this study is devoted. However, problems of relativity and subjectivity of our views of the reality have been discussed in ontology and epistemology since ancient times, especially when it came to capturing the difference between an object “in itself” and an object “for the epistemic subject”. The problem of aspects occupies an important place in works on the philosophy and psychology of perception, as inspired, in particular, by Ludwig Wittgenstein’s works. In recent years, it has also become an object of intensive interest for cognitive scientists; for them, *qua* is one of the basic conceptual categories of their discipline.

In Polish linguistics, the issue of the thematic aspect was foremostly addressed by Jadwiga Wajszczuk (1997) in connection with her research on functions and meanings of conjunctions. The author of this study claims that the concept of the thematic aspect should be treated independently from descriptions devoted solely to conjunctions, that is, it should be taken into account in the course of investigation into the thematic-rhematic structure of any utterance. The main purpose of the presented work is to

demonstrate that the thematic aspect is not a theoretical construct, but a linguistic fact. This meaning component is not always revealed on the surface of the sentence. However, it can be made explicit, because every natural language is endowed with its lexical or operational exponents.

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The book consists of three chapters divided into subchapters. Some of them had to be broken down into even smaller fragments, corresponding to sections, subsections, paragraphs, etc. The number of division levels of the text is not identical in all parts of the work: it depends on the properties of matters discussed.

Chapter 1 is devoted to the place of the thematic aspect among other categories related to the thematic-rhematic structure of sentences, as these categories are understood by the author of the monograph. Her approach is inspired, first of all, by the theoretical thought of Andrzej Bogusławski (1977, 1998, 1999, 2007, 2020). In paragraph 1.1. the main concepts and terms referring to the thematic-rhematic structure of language expressions have been defined. Neither a systematic presentation of extensive literature on the informational structure of utterances, nor a methodological debate on other authors' writings is to be expected. The research goals of the author's enterprise are different. Section 1.2. provides knowledge about the main exponents of *theme* (T), thematic *dic-tum* (TD) and *rheme* (R) in Polish. It also includes an overview of their typology, as well as the initial positioning of expressions used to signal the thematic aspect against the background of theme and rheme exponents, much better recognized in the relevant literature. In section 1.3. the author shows the usefulness of the T-R category to describe the meaning of linguistic units.

Chapter 2 focuses on lexical exponents of the thematic aspect. The most important and most common units in this field have been analysed. Both semantically general expressions (e.g. *pod względem*, *w aspekcie*, *w płaszczyźnie*, *w zakresie*) and more specialized ones (*w charakterze*, *w roli*, *w kategoriach* *w terminach*, *z punktu widzenia*, *w świetle*, *pod kątem*, *dla* [ko-goś]) have been given attention.

Apart from prepositional phrases, the most interesting and puzzling word related to the thematic aspect, viz. the unit *jako* ‘as’, has received the price of pride in the longest section of Chapter 2. This fascinating word which is practically unamenable to a conclusive description in terms of “parts of speech” ultimately boils down, in its meaning, to a structure that resembles conditional constructions.

Other expressions that are worth mentioning in the present context are: the unit *z jednej strony*_, *z drugiej strony*_ ‘on the one hand, on the other hand_’ and the unit *o tyle* , *o ile*_ ‘insofar as_’. These units are directly related to the issue of means of expressing the thematic aspect.

In Chapter 3, the author turns to expressions of a grammatical, rather than lexical, nature. Here, relativizing expressions, whose character is largely regular and categorial, have been described.

Section 3.1. discusses the properties of adverbials which, despite their typical endings *-o* and *-e*, have functions different from that of ordinary adverbs. They specify the way in which a given object will be characterized in the rhematic part of the sentence (e.g. *Teoretycznie masz rację* ‘Theoretically you’re right’). In paragraph 3.2. the author addresses the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features of constructions whose expression plane is a special noun form of instrumental (e.g. *Kształtem ten przed-*

miot przypomina stożek ‘In terms of shape, this object resembles a cone’). In paragraph 3.3. prepositional operations based on the prepositions *w* and *z* are discussed (e.g. *Z wykształcenia jestem nauczycielem* ‘I am a teacher by education’). In section 3.4. selected repetitions are commented upon. In their representation the thematic aspect should not only be taken into account; it requires a special emphasis (e.g. *Spać to my wcale nie spaliśmy* ‘As for sleeping, we didn’t sleep at all’).

A phenomenon that seems to be particularly important in the area of expressions directing attention to various aspects of the characterized objects, is their multiplicity, diversity and, in some cases, far-reaching specialization. Due to its theoretical significance, the problem of relativity in natural language deserves attention and in-depth analysis. A comparative study of exponents of the thematic aspect in typologically different languages would be particularly interesting.