

# Presentational capacity of English transitive verbs: On some semantic and FSP aspects of *SEIZE*

Martin Adam (Brno)

## ABSTRACT

Even though a number of verbs, owing to their syntactic-semantic characteristics, tend to operate primarily in Presentation or Quality Scales respectively, most verbs generally appear to be capable of acting within both the scales. In authentic communication, the sentence perspective is determined by various criteria: apart from the relative “weightiness” of the postverbal modification, it is especially the context-independence of the subject along with the presentational capacity of the verb that plays a crucial role. This paper sets out to explore the syntactic and semantic qualities of the transitive verb *SEIZE*. Making use of two large corpora, the proposed case study tries to delimit under what conditions *SEIZE* tends to operate in one of the two dynamic semantic scales. Model sentences are contrasted in terms of their presentational/qualitative features with special regard to the phenomenon of subject – verb semantic affinity.

## KEYWORDS

FSP, presentation, quality, verb, transitive

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## 1. OPENING REMARKS

Drawing on Firbas’s insightful observations (e.g. Firbas 1975: 45–70; 1992: 41–65, 77ff; 1995: 5–8), recent research into the theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP) has demonstrated that the syntactic-semantic characteristics of the English transitional<sup>1</sup> verb play a crucial role within the overall sentence perspective (e.g. Dušková 2008: 67–77; 2015: 256–68; Chamonikolasová 2010: 86–93; Adam 2013: 51–53, 157ff; 2014: 179–194; 2016: 9–15; Chamonikolasová et al. 2015: 9–18). In the framework of the theory of FSP, sentences implement either Presentation or Quality Scale (summarized e.g. in Firbas 1992: 66–69); it follows that — under favourable conditions — most verbs generally appear to be capable of acting within both the dynamic semantic scales. However, it has become clear that certain verbs tend to operate in one of the scales, mainly thanks to their syntactic and semantic properties (e.g. the verb categories related to transitivity, complementation, etc.). Thus, for instance, verbs of existence and appearance manifest an obvious inclination towards presentation, while others, such as verbs of motion, appear to be capable of acting within both the scales depending on their syntactic semantic configuration. Incidentally, it is therefore more precise to speak

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1 Unlike the term “transitive” used in connection to the transitive character of the verb (syntactic valency) elsewhere in the text, the term “transitional” refers to the FSP concept of the transition (i.e. the transitional unit operating between the theme and the rheme).

of “verbs in presentation or quality use” rather than of the simplifying distinction of purely presentation or quality verbs. Transitional verbs of either character act, as it were, as “pivot pins” around which the remaining sentence elements are arranged, thus giving the communicative unit one of the two perspectives (Adam 2013: 162–165).

Aptly elaborating on the famous appearance of the two-faced Ancient Roman god named Janus (Adam 2016: 8–9), the god of transitions (gates, doors, passages etc.), who was able to look both to the past and to the future, Firbas (1992: 91) stresses the transitional verb’s “capability to point in two directions — in that of the Th and in that of the Rh — and simultaneously to link the Th and the non-Th”; this special character, in Firbas’s opinion, places the transitional verb in the centre of the sentence, which “serves both as a field of syntactic relations and as a field of FSP relations” (*ibid.*). Such a two-sided character of the transitional verb may also be readily observed in the area of the sentence perspective as such, in its essential communicative orientation: whereas the typically transitional verb represents the solid centre of the sentence (hence the “pivot pin” idea in Adam 2016: 8), the theme and the rheme take different positions under given circumstances (FSP factors), altering the two spheres.

The current research findings have shown that the most promising step at this point is the case analysis of individual verbs that appear in both the scales within the corpora under examination. It is believed that investigating their syntactic-semantic properties in context may shed light not only on potential common denominators but also on functional differences.

## 2. RESEARCH TOPIC, METHOD AND CORPUS

The present paper offers a corpus-based analysis the aim of which is to examine the syntactic and semantic qualities of the verb *SEIZE* in different FSP contexts, indicating under what conditions it tends to operate in one of the two dynamic semantic scales. (*SEIZE* was repeatedly identified as one of those verbs that can appear in both dynamic semantic scales; see e.g. Adam 2013: 97–105; 2016: 7–9, 14ff.) It is necessary to note that the verb *SEIZE*, obviously in line with its transitivity, displays a traceable inclination to occur predominantly in the Quality Scale; its operation in presentative contexts is therefore of paramount importance since it can adumbrate the subtle processes and factors that determine the perspective of the sentence in the given syntactic and semantic coordinates. Another related aspect that has proved to play a significant role in the complex phenomenon of sentence perspective is the SV semantic affinity; the point is that transitive verbs are, by nature, prototypically predisposed to operate within the Quality Scale and their latent presentation potential can be triggered by their semantic affinity with the subject (see e.g. Firbas 1992: 60–61; Svoboda 2005: 225ff; Dušková 1999: 247ff; 2008: 72–73; Adam 2013: 109–131).

To sum up, the corpus-based contrastive analysis carried out in the scope of the present study should provide an answer to the following research question: What, in terms of its syntactic-semantic characteristics, predisposes the English transitional verb *SEIZE* to serve in the Presentation and Quality Scales respectively? A contrastive analysis of one verb capable of operating in two distinct sentence perspectives seems

to be an auspicious stride in depicting the distinctive features of the verb's tendency to operate in the Presentation and/or Quality Scale sentences.

Due to the current absence of a tagged English FSP-oriented corpus and for the sake of a statistically relevant size of the corpus (cf. Chamonikolasová et al. 2015: 9–18), model sentences, extracted from the British National Corpus (henceforward BNC) through the SKETCH ENGINE concordance as well as the English-Czech parallel corpus INTERCORP (abbreviated hereafter IC), will be contrasted and discussed in terms of their presentational/qualitative features. The sample sentences were selected randomly from the corpus-driven data. More specifically, firstly all sentences featuring the verb lemma “seize” were extracted electronically irrespective of the FSP structure of the sentences. The search was carried out in order to receive a complete list of such sentences; nevertheless, to make the corpus selection statistically representative as well as manageable in terms of the contrastive analysis the results were then thinned at random to 2,500 items in both the sub-corpora (5,000 in total), which then constitute the research sample.

For the purposes of the FSP analysis, individual distributional fields were ascribed corresponding dynamic semantic functions and presented in a graphically simplified chart (the number of the token in the electronic corpus, the preverbal section — the dynamic semantic functions of the Phenomenon (Ph) or the Bearer of Quality (B) depending on the type of scale, the transitional verb — functioning as Presentation (Pr) or Quality (Q), and finally, the postverbal section featuring the Setting (Set) or Specification (Sp) respectively (Firbas 1992: 66ff; cf. Chamonikolasová and Adam 2005: 59–69; Chamonikolasová 2010: 86–94). Apart from the number of the hit in the first column, the table displays the sentence containing the query lemma (i.e. SEIZE), around which the rest of the text is centrally split up, thus providing the necessary context. If needed, the context available may be easily expanded in the electronic online version. Below, in Table 1, is a sample demonstration of the corpora (the rhematic elements are in bold print):

	Ph / B	Pr / Q	Set / Sp
BNC2484	into the frost-gleamed blue of the night. <b>An idea</b>	seized	her. For her life's sake Chesarynth turned
BNC218	Rioms. In April 1295, however, the French	seized	<b>the town after a riot among the English troops.</b>
BNC224	fog was thinner out here. Suddenly <b>a coughing fit</b>	seized	him, and a stab of agony lanced through

TABLE 1. Corpus sample

The FSP analysis itself had to be executed manually. As regards its statistical results, the sentences which implement the Presentation Scale amount to a mere 1.28 percent (64 items out of 5,000 in total); this finding is associated with the verb's transitivity — and, consequently, with its natural inclination to operate in the Quality Scale. The remaining communicative fields are logically represented by Quality Scale sentences (98.72 percent) — for details see Table 2 below:

Corpus	SEIZE (total)	SEIZE in Pr Scale		SEIZE in Q Scale	
BNC	2,500	27	1.08%	2,473	98.92%
InterCorp	2,500	37	1.48%	2,463	98.52%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,000</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>1.28%</b>	<b>4,936</b>	<b>98.72%</b>

TABLE 2. Corpus findings

### 3. PRESENTATION VS QUALITY

The relatively indistinct borderline between the Presentation and Quality Scales has raised a number of questions in recent FSP research (Firbas 1999: 305–317; Dušková 1999: 249–262; 2015: 202–208, 256–268; Svoboda 2005: 225–230; 2006: 215–220; Chamonikolasová and Adam 2005: 59–69; Chamonikolasová 2010: 86–93; Adam 2013: 157–165; 2016: 10–18; Drápela 2012: 43–49; Rohrauer 2015: 148ff, 162–164; Brůhová and Malá 2017: 19–38). Whatever the main issues, all the authors, as a matter of fact, ultimately attempt to solve intricacies associated with FSP interpretation, and the quality vs presentation scale distinction in particular. In this respect, perhaps the most troublesome configuration of the theme-rheme structure is posed by sentences that are potentially capable of both a presentation and qualitative interpretation, viz. communicative units featuring an initial rhematic subject (e.g., *Panic seized me*). Deriving from the interplay of all the FSP factors involved (viz. context, linear modification and semantics in written discourse, accompanied by intonation in spoken discourse) the sentence perspective then reflects the distribution of the degrees of communicative dynamism. Cf. the two possible FSP interpretations of identical syntactic structures below (individual units display the basic Rh-Tr-Th structure and are ascribed corresponding dynamic semantic functions; the rhematic units are presented in bold):

- (1) **Panic (Rh | Ph)** seized (Tr | Pr) *me* (Th | Set).      Presentation Scale  
 (2) *Panic* (Th | B) seized (Tr | Q) **me (Rh | Sp)**.      Quality Scale

In example (1) the second most recurring subtype of presentation sentence pattern, viz. that with a rhematic subject in the initial, i.e. preverbal position, is exemplified. Such a configuration is perceived as the prototypical, canonical type of presentation (Dušková et al. 1988: 62, 531–532). In it, the initial sentence element is represented by a context-independent subject, which is only then followed (in concord with the requirements of the English word order principles) by the verb expressing existence or appearance on the scene (cf. Dušková 1999: 248–250); the sentence may also open with a scene-setting temporal or spatial thematic adverbial, the position of which is rather volatile. As a result, the end-focus principle is not applied. It should be noted, however, that sentences with a rhematic subject in a preverbal position are, as a rule, considered unmarked by native speakers of English.

Example (2), perhaps somewhat artificial, yet contextually plausible, presents a sentence that implements the Quality Scale: under the circumstances, the context-dependent subject (*Panic*) serves as a Bearer of Quality and is elaborated by the most

dynamic element of the communicative unit (rheme), i.e. the Specification (*me*), the possible context being perhaps a contrast between the speaker and another person (...*me*, not him, etc.). As mentioned above, *SEIZE* represents a transitive verb and so prototypically operates in the Quality Scale. In ex. (2), something new, decontextualized is said about the subject, and so the highest degree of communicative dynamism is carried by the direct object (*me*).

Yet, it must be noted that it is sentence (1) that is extracted as an authentic piece of language from the corpus, not example (2), which has been modelled for the sake of comparison only. Generally speaking, the English verb can operate in the Presentation Scale if it “expresses the existence or appearance on the scene explicitly or with sufficient implicitness” (Firbas 1995: 65; cf. Adam 2013: 107–115). Whereas the explicit presentative verbs represent a relatively homogeneous set typically recruited e.g. from the verb classes of the verbs of existence/appearance on the scene, verbs of emission, verbs of creation, verbs of motion and the like (Adam 2013: 115–116, 160, 164; for a fine-grained classification of verbs see also Levin 1993: 25off), the verbs that express presentation implicitly are semantically much more varied. As mentioned above, the common denominator that is capable of enhancing their presentative potential is the **semantic affinity** between the context independent subject and the presentative verb (Firbas 1992: 60–62; Svoboda 2005: 224ff; Dušková 1999: 248ff; Adam 2011: 23–30; Drápela 2012: 43–49). Such SV semantic affinity is typically observed in the fields of natural/supernatural phenomena, fauna and flora, sensory actions, inherent qualities of inanimate objects, etc. (Adam 2013: 109–116, 121ff). Cf. example (3) below:<sup>2</sup>

- (3) *Soon (Th | Set), **two cups of tea (Rh | Ph)** were steaming (Tr | Pr) on the table (Th | Set).*

The verbal action is so semantically inherent to the subject (*cups of tea — steaming*) that it is the subject that takes over the communicative prominence at the expense of power of the verbal content (cf. Adam 2013: 113–115; 2016: 7–18). The static semantics of the verb — even if expressing a specific type of action — is reduced to that of presentation; in other words, the semantic content of the verbal element is so natural of the agent employed that the full verb serves to denote a form of existence or appearance on the scene.

2 Other subtypes of SV semantic affinity may be illustrated by the following examples extracted from Adam 2013: 146ff (the rhematic subject is in bold, the transitional verb is underlined, and the sort of affinity is specified in the parentheses): **A dark spidery shadow** flashed across the gardens on the hillside. (sensory effects — visual, acoustic, olfactory, etc.); **A ghost of a smile** hovered on Mrs Swallow’s lips. (facial expressions and bodily feelings); **A light breeze** sprang up. (natural and supernatural phenomena); **A bird** suddenly chirped from the branch of a tree. (fauna and flora), etc.

#### 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

As clarified at the beginning of the present paper, the current research is intentionally focused on the conditions and circumstances that make it possible for a transitive verb to operate within the Presentation Scale, viz. the verb SEIZE. The analysis below will thus compare and contrast authentic sentences with SEIZE that were detected in both the dynamic semantic scales: the presentation and Quality Scales respectively. Special attention will be paid both to their syntactic characteristics and to the potential role of SV semantic affinity.

Table (3) below features a randomized selection of the corpus hits (not a complete list) in which the sentences implement the Presentation Scale (for the sake of transparency, the rhematic Phenomena — the context-independent subjects — are in bold):

Corpus	Ph	Pr	Set
BNC2116	<b>A sudden fear</b>	seized	him: (...)
BNC2324	<b>A wave of panic</b>	seized	her.
BNC2381	<b>A great longing for Toby</b>	seized	me.
BNC2484	..., <b>an idea</b>	seized	her.
BNC224	..., <b>a coughing fit</b>	seized	him, (...)
BNC1453	..., <b>another spasm</b>	seized	him.
BNC1705	<b>Such a despair</b>	seized	him.
BNC1962	<b>Alarm</b>	seized	her.
BNC2090	..., <b>a sudden, hot wave of panic</b>	seized	her.
IC24	<b>A ghastly stage-fright</b>	seized	him.
IC25	<b>Terror</b>	seized	me.
IC26	<b>A temptation</b>	seized	him.
IC30	<b>A touch of hysteria</b>	seized	her.
IC31	<b>An impulse of generosity</b>	seized	him.

TABLE 3. SEIZE: Pr-scale corpus examples

It is obvious that all the hits given in Table 3 are marked by a peculiar syntactic structure: the verbs are transitive, yet the direct objects do not perform the dynamic semantic function of Specification (which would be theoretically assumable), but that of a Setting. Furthermore, all these Settings are invariably realized as single-word personal pronouns (*him, her*); such striking conciseness of the postverbal section definitely has to do with the sentence perspective. The point is that it is the context-independent subjects that carry the highest degree of communicative dynamism. Consequently, the sentences are perspectived towards their subjects and implement the Presentation Scale.

As has been recalled above, research has convincingly indicated that in presentation sentences with rhematic preverbal subjects it is often the semantic affinity between the subject and the verb that plays a crucial, if not decisive, role in the sentence perspective (Adam 2013: 118ff; 2014; cf. Dušková 2015: 267–8). Similarly here, the subjects are unan-

imously represented by relatively strong mental, physical and spiritual phenomena that are related to human body and mind, both positive and negative: panic, thought, idea, demon, cramp, and the like. In other words, “seizing somebody or something” is the *modus vivendi* of these entities and so they can implicitly express existence on the scene. It seems that it is the SV semantic affinity that made it possible for the transitive verb SEIZE to present a phenomenon on the scene; without the obvious affinity, the sentences would be interpreted as those implementing the Quality Scale.

In the sample sentences in Table 3, the action is obviously so semantically inherent to the subjects (i.e. so strongly subject-related) that it is the subject that takes over the communicative prominence at the expense of power of the verbal content. The static semantics of the verb SEIZE then — even if expressing a specific type of action — is reduced to that of presentation. In other words, the semantic content of the verbal element is so natural of the agents employed that the full verb serves to denote a form of existence or appearance on the scene in an implicit way (cf. the Firbasian concept of implicit expression of existence/appearance, especially in Firbas 1992: 88–89; 1995: 65). It follows that the verb that operates in semantic affinity with its subject semantically supports the character of the subject: one may readily say that *seizing* is an inbred way of existence, or rather appearance, for coming diseases, bodily symptoms, mental or spiritual seizures, etc.

Table 4 below offers a full, exhaustive enumeration of all the context independent phenomena traced in the corpus that are presented on the scene through the verb SEIZE. In the table, the individual rhematic subjects are classified into several categories in terms of their lexical semantics (if the item appeared more than once in the corpus, its occurrence is given in the parentheses):

Semantic field	Rh (Phenomena)	Pr-verb
FEAR	panic (8x), terror (6x), fear (4x), despair (3x), grief (2x), anxiety (2x), alarm, restlessness, self-pity, agoraphobia, a ghastly stage-fright, a feeling of stinging melancholy, a black rage, a touch of hysteria	SEIZE
DESIRE	desire (2x), longing, loathing ambition, temptation, a reckless daring	
PHYSIOLOGICAL PROCESS	a coughing fit / a bout of coughing (2x), spasm, shudders, fever, a deadly nausea, climax	
MENTAL PROCESS	idea (3x), thought, madness, religious mania	
SPIRITUAL POWER	demon, evil spirit	
BODY	a pair of hands, several pairs of strong grey hands, hot small fingers, a grip stronger and colder than iron	

**TABLE 4.** Semantic fields of the Phenomena presented by SEIZE

Obviously, all the context-independent rhematic subjects outlined in Table 4 above report a striking semantic affinity with the verb SEIZE. Their common semantic denominator can be ascribed a label of “human, strong, prevalingly negative physical and mental processes”, with fear being by far the most frequent semantic field. Admit-

tedly, even though it is possible to classify the individual Phenomena into a number of semantic categories, these may at times overlap; incidentally, this observation also testifies to the overall high degree of semantic affinity with the verb. It follows that such SV affinity thus constitutes one of the vital features that enhance, if not determine, the ability of the transitive verb SEIZE to present a Phenomenon on the scene.

Furthermore, the sentences under examination display an extremely analogous minimal syntactic pattern: PHENOMENON — SEIZED — PRONOUN: *Panic seized me / Terror seized her*, and the like. Whereas the preverbal part invariably features the context-independent subject, whether realized by a single word or developed by an attribute, the post-verbal section is, on the contrary, extremely short, and often minimal. On top of that, the surprisingly unified set of the forms of the verb SEIZE (viz. the past simple tense SEIZED) also adds to the overall uniform character of the sentences under scrutiny. To sum up, the dynamic semantic functions of sentence elements seem to be closely related to the lexical semantics of both the verb and the subject, in the SV semantic affinity in particular. In the area of FSP research, apart from the interplay of the three factors (context, linear modification and semantics), there are two more aspects that may corroborate (or, alternatively, refute) a sentence interpretation: (i) intonation (above all the placement of the nuclear stress on the rhematic subject in English), which of course joins the interpretation in spoken discourse only, and (ii) the translation to another language, such as Czech, which — owing to different FSP priorities — primarily reflects the gradual rise of the degrees of communicative dynamism in unmarked sentences. Thus, by scanning (potential) Czech equivalents that strictly follow the end-focus principle one may utilize another indicator of the FSP interpretation. Table 5 below contrasts the two language mutations extracted from the parallel corpus INTERCORP (the non-parallel corpus BNC logically does not provide translations):

English original	Czech translation
<b>Despair</b> seized me.	Zmocnilo se mě <b>zoufalství</b> .
<b>Panic</b> seized her.	Propadla <b>panice</b> .
<b>Terror</b> seized her.	Zachvátil ji <b>děs</b> .
...as an <b>extraneous wave of anxiety for the child</b> seized him.	..., kterého popadla <b>nepatřičná úzkost o dítě</b> .
<b>Self-pity</b> seized him.	Upadl do <b>sebelítosti</b> .
Now a <b>bout of coughing</b> seized him.	Vzápětí se <b>rozkašlal</b> .
For the first time in my life a <b>feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy</b> seized me.	Poprvé v životě se mě zmocnil <b>drtivý pocit bolestně doléhající melancholie</b> .
A <b>ghastly stage-fright</b> seized him.	Zmocnila se ho <b>příšerná tréma</b> .
... until <b>heroin</b> seized her.	... a skončila <b>u heroínu</b> .
A <b>touch of hysteria</b> seized her.	..., zvedla se v ní <b>vlna skoro až jakési hysterie</b> .
A <b>temptation</b> seized him.	Ale najednou dostal <b>jiný nápad</b> .

TABLE 5. English Pr sentences and their Czech translation equivalents (INTERCORP)



The mere functional comparison of the two counterparts reveals the two types of linear modifications in a clear-cut juxtaposition. Whereas the English presentation sentences display their rhemes (context-independent subjects) logically in the initial position due to the requirements of English grammar, actually violating the end-focus, the Czech translation equivalents place their most dynamic communicative units invariably in the final position in line with the Czech word order principles. Thus, the FSP interpretation of the English communicative fields — that of Presentation Scale — is reflected, and supported, by the comparative analysis. Incidentally, this interpretation is equally applicable to all the cases offered by INTERCORP — in all the Czech translations of English presentation sentences the rheme is placed in the final position and thus reflects the gradual rise of communicative dynamism.

In accordance with what has been said above, Dušková (2008: 72–73) also mentions semantic affinity observed between the verb and the subject as an accompanying phenomenon of presentation sentences. Commenting on various possibilities favouring the presentational interpretation, she claims that the presentation verbs manifesting affinity may be — with identical effect — functionally replaced by verbs that express existence/appearance on the scene in a purely explicit manner. Thus, the corpus sentence *A sudden fear seized him*, for instance, could be analogously expressed by means of an explicit presentation verb (4), by a locative adverbial construction in the object position (5), by a passive construction (6), not to speak of an existential *there*-construction proper (7). Cf. the paraphrased modifications:

- (4) *A sudden fear appeared in him / his mind.*
- (5) *He had a sudden fear in him / his mind.*
- (6) *He was suddenly seized by fear.*
- (7) *Suddenly, there was a fear in him / his mind.*

A parallel transformation is naturally unheard-of in the sentences implementing the Quality Scale; in them, something new is said about the context-dependent Bearer of Quality and the predication does not express existence/appearance on the scene any more. It follows that the verb(s) used cannot be replaced by a Pr-verb without changing the FSP of the sentence.

The corpus data, of course, display a totally opposite set of semantic-syntactic features in the case of SEIZE sentences implementing the Quality Scale. However, to get a complete picture of the semantic and FSP aspects of the verb SEIZE, it is also necessary to discuss this parallel (and actually much more frequent) possibility of sentence perspective. Firstly, cf. a randomized selection of sample sentences identified in the corpus:

Corpus	B	Q	Sp
BNC141	... the rebels who	seized	<b>an air force base are at a stalemate.</b>
BNC164	... the order	went out to seize	<b>the unpublished texts and plates.</b>
BNC218	In April 1295, however, the French	seized	<b>the town after a riot among the English troops.</b>

Corpus	B	Q	Sp
IC77	He	seized	<b>a copy of Defensive Magical Theory and pretended to be looking something up in the index.</b>
IC88	..., he	would seize	<b>his chance to use you as a means to spy on me.</b>
IC139	Ron	seized	<b>him under the armpits.</b>
IC147	Harry	seized	<b>her hand to make sure they weren't separated as a streak of light whizzed over their heads.</b>
IC161	..., who	seized	<b>his last chance to do as Fred had instructed.</b>
IC167	They	haven't seized	<b>my lord cardinal's barge yet.</b>

**TABLE 6.** SEIZE: Q-scale corpus examples

Apparently, the information structure of the sentences presented in Table 6 manifests an absolute counterpart of what was observed in the sentences that implement the Presentation Scale. As a rule, quality sentences report a relatively more ample verb complementation, while the left part of the sentence is commonly less syntactically varied since the subject is context-dependent and not in need of detailed specification. As a matter of fact, a mere glimpse at the table indicates that the right, postverbal section of the sentences is obviously heavier than the left, preverbal part. Furthermore, interestingly enough, the verb forms of SEIZE manifest more heterogeneous structures that those operating in presentation sentences, including varied tenses.

Not only do the qualitative configurations above represent a natural FSP structure of SEIZE but they also convey meanings that are inherently disposed to qualification. To be more specific, the context-dependent subjects are expressed either by personal pronouns or a known referent (e.g. *Harry*); they are typically very light in terms of syntactic weightiness. The sentences are perspectived away from their subjects and, as a result, the communication is developed toward the postverbal complementation, i.e. the direct object that is ascribed the dynamic semantic function of Specification. In this respect, the verb's transitivity is full-fledged: Specifications typically feature a multi-word communicative unit (basically a direct pronominal object optionally elaborated e.g. by an infinitive clause), which is, incidentally, so lexically heterogeneous and complex that it is not plausible to identify a distinct affinity operating between the verb and its complementation. Needless to say, it is entirely unfeasible to compile an exhaustive list of such postverbal Specifications; let me recall that the situation is remarkably different in the case of presentation sentences, where it was not impossible to enumerate all the rhematic elements, let alone their semantic typology.

One aspect similar to presentation sentences may in a sense be also observed within the area of Quality Scale sentences: owing to its lexical semantics, the verb SEIZE operating in the Quality Scale insinuates a specific inclination to collocate with

the physical meanings of seizing something, e.g. an air force base, a town or an object, such as texts, her hand, etc. It appears, however, that this tendency should be ascribed primarily to the lexical semantics of the verb, not to verb-object semantic affinity as such. All in all, the right, postverbal weightiness undoubtedly represents another key circumstance that differentiates quality from presentation.

Firbas (1975: 68; 1992: 60ff) and Dušková (see e.g. her summary in Dušková 1999: 247ff) also naturally see the role of the subject, along with the role of the predicate, as a crucial semantic and FSP factor acting in the English sentence perspective. The point is that unlike the Czech sentence the English one manifests a strong tendency “to construe the theme as the subject” (Dušková 1999: 247). To be more specific, research proves that what matters most in fact is the extent to which the static semantic load of the subject is semantically linked to the predicative verb; the stronger the interconnection (e.g. in the case of SV affinity), the more likely the verb is capable of performing the presentation function. Such a link is also typically demonstrated in the syntactic plan: the presentation verb is semantically linked to the left, i.e. to the subject, and, consequently, the presentational potential comes to the fore. It follows that the lexical semantics of the presentation verb is thus partly reduced to that of presentation. Conversely, the verb operating in the transition of the Quality Scale is syntactically more complex in its right complementation, and so more load is semantically added to the expression of existence.

In authentic communication, the two polar types of sentence perspective (presentation or quality) are naturally determined by the actual setting of the given contextual, semantic as well as syntactic coordinates. In Adam (2013: 163–164), this decisive moment is likened to a real set of scales with two balancing trays, on which it is either the cluster of the subject + its link to the verb, or the cluster of the verb + the heavy right complementation, that “outweighs” the other side of the scales. Incidentally, Firbas speaks about “tipping the scales” in relation to the question of an unequivocal FSP interpretation (see e.g. Firbas 1995: 65).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The paper attempted to contrast two corpus-driven sets of sentences featuring the transitional verb *SEIZE* that implement the Presentation or the Quality Scales respectively. The main goal was to identify the semantic and FSP conditions under which sentences containing an identical verb are oriented either away from or towards the subject. Besides the classic FSP factors, viz. context, linear modification and semantics, especially the role of SV semantic affinity and translation equivalent were examined in greater detail.

The sentences implementing the Presentation Scale (e.g. ***A wave of panic Rh|Ph seized Tr|Pr me Th|Set.***) are perspectived towards their invariably context-independent subjects, which are syntactically richer. Conversely, the objects are context-dependent and are constituted, as a rule, by short, often pronominal, forms. The preverbal rhematic sections (the subjects) are semantically strikingly homogeneous: an obvious SV semantic affinity has been traced in all the cases. Such affinity in presen-

tation sentences conveys a prototypically **metaphorical sense related to intensive bodily or mental processes, prevailingly negative**, such as fear, disease, physiological problems, desire, mental process, negative powers, and the like.

Contrary to this, the Quality Scale sentences ascribe a context-independent Specification to a context-dependent Bearer of Quality (e.g. *The French Th|B seized Tr|Q **the town after a riot among the English troops Rh|Sp***). Here, it is the subjects that are typically short and often pronominal, whereas the context-independent objects carry the highest degree of communicative dynamism and are, logically enough, syntactically richer. On top of that, the postverbal rhematic complementation — above all against the background of its presentation counterparts — proves to be much more heterogeneous: with a certain degree of simplification one might even speak of a sort of SO semantic affinity, which is nevertheless inherently connected with the lexical semantics of the verb. The point is that the verb SEIZE in Quality Scale sentences conveys **the literal meaning of physical seizure, such as captivity or usurpation**, e.g. of an air-force base, the town, the bottle. Admittedly, the collocation *seize the opportunity / chance* also appeared in the data a few times; nevertheless, it is construed as a fixed phrase, not an *ad hoc* configuration.

To sum up, it appears that the decisive key that determines and differentiates between the qualitative or presentational perspective of sentences featuring the verb SEIZE in transition is inevitably associated with the somewhat **peculiar status of the direct object**. Thus, whereas under normal conditions it performs — as the most dynamic element — the dynamic semantic role of Specification (Quality Scale), in the Presentation Scale sentences, the direct object constituted as a context-dependent unit unorthodoxly performs the dynamic semantic function of a mere Setting; the rheme is — counter to the classic requirements of the English sentence — represented by the initially placed subject. In this respect, apart from the above-mentioned violation of end-focus the presentational use of the transitive verb contradicts the very concept of transitivity at the syntactic level, the main semantic load being carried by the subject, not the object.

As a result, based on the data analysis above, it may be concluded that the sentence perspective is determined by various criteria, out of which the key aspects are definitely (i) the relative weightiness of the postverbal modification, (ii) the context-(in)dependence of both the subject and, especially, the direct object, and (iii) the presentational capacity of the verb, which is largely associated with the potential absence or presence of the **SV semantic affinity**. Overall, the SV affinity proved to be the key criterion that makes it possible for the transitive verb to act as a presentation verb in the sentence (which would normally be impossible), a truly formative force operating in the constitution of the presentation sentences. Generally, it is possible to conclude that, semantically speaking, the greater the lexical load added to the presentational capacity of the verb, the more probable it is that the verb will operate in the Quality Scale sentences, and vice versa. The present paper is, of course, a case study of the verb SEIZE only and so assumptions about other verbs may be implied, although they would have to be explored thoroughly in further research. Nonetheless, the present results convincingly testify to the principles discussed above and it is strongly believed that these are applicable to English transitive verbs in general.

Apparently, the verb's presentational capacity is practically "dormant" even in configurations which use a transitive verb in their surface syntactic structure. It is especially their metaphorical use that can, under favourable conditions, activate the presentational potential in a verb; cf. e.g. metaphorical structures such as *An idea / Terror / Panic seized him*. As shown above, such latent capacity of the transitional verb can be awakened if the verb displays semantic affinity with the subject and other criteria permit (most importantly, the interplay of FSP factors permits); otherwise the capability of a transitive verb to present a Phenomenon on the scene appears to be substantially limited if not impossible.

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### **Martin Adam**

Department of English Language and Literature  
Faculty of Education, Masaryk University  
Poříčí 9, 603 00 Brno  
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9130-9983  
e-mail: adam@ped.muni.cz