Revisiting the information structure of English prepositional phrases in predication

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ABSTRACT

The theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP) is centred on communicative dynamism and its distribution among communicative units, i.e. individual sentence elements (Firbas, 1964; 1992). When a context-dependent subject is further specified by more dynamic elements, the sentence follows the Quality Scale. Conversely, if a context-independent subject is the most dynamic element, it follows the Presentation Scale. This corpus-based study, building on Adam & Headlandová Kalischová (2022), examines English sentences with prepositional predications of the pattern BE + PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE (specifically, *be at fault, be at large, be in full swing, be in place, be on guard, be on display*). Unlike our 2022 study, which categorized these structures based on semantic interpretation and paraphrasing potential, the present analysis explores their textual, syntactic, and information structure characteristics irrespective of typological classification. The aim is to determine whether and under what circumstances these predicates express existence or appearance on the scene. The findings suggest that the FSP status of verbo-nominal prepositional structures is best understood as a continuum, ranging from predominantly presentational to primarily qualitative, rather than a strict binary categorisation.

KEYWORDS

FSP, lexical semantics, prepositional, presentation, quality, scale, verbo-nominal

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1 INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental principles of the theory of functional sentence perspective (FSP) holds that a sentence functions as "a field of semantic and syntactic relations that, in turn, provides a distributional field of degrees of communicative dynamism (CD)" (Firbas, 1992, p. 7–8). Firbas defines a degree of CD as "the relative extent to which an element contributes to the development of communication" (Firbas, 1964, p. 270). The degrees of CD are determined by the interplay of key FSP factors: linear modification, context, and semantic structure (Firbas, 1992, p. 14–16). Based on the dynamic-semantic roles of individual clause elements, sentences are classified according to the Presentation Scale (henceforth Pr-Sc) or the Quality Scale (henceforth Q-Sc) (Firbas, 1975, p. 45–70; 1992, p. 41–77; 1995; Svoboda, 2005).

It follows that within the domain of the semantic FSP factor, the verb, with its ability to align the sentence with either the Presentation Scale or the Quality Scale, plays a pivotal role in shaping sentence perspective (Dušková, 1999, p. 247 ff, 2008, 2015, p. 256–268; Chamonikolasová, 2010, p. 86–93; Adam, 2013, p. 51–53, 157–165, 2019; Chamonikolasová et al., 2015, p. 9–18). Specifically, it either ascribes a quality

to the subject, bridging its specification, or presents something new on the scene, expressing the existence or appearance of the phenomenon with "explicitness or sufficient implicitness" (Firbas, 1995, p. 65). While many verbs can function across both dynamic semantic scales, certain English verbs are predisposed to operate within a specific scale due to syntactic and semantic characteristics, such as transitivity, heaviness of complementation, and subject-verb semantic affinity (for the complexity of the syntax — information structure interface, see e.g. Lambrecht, 1994; Erteschik-Shir, 2007; Büring, 2012; Dušková, 2015; Davidse et al., 2023). Thus, for instance, verbs denoting existence and appearance typically lean towards presentation, while verbs of utterance attribute qualities to context-dependent entities (Dušková, 1999, p. 248–250). Verbs of motion, however, exhibit versatility in scale usage based on their syntactic-semantic configurations (Adam, 2013, p. 32–35, 93–95; Van Rompaey et al., 2015, p. 234–236).

In exploring the syntactic and semantic characteristics of verbs within FSP, certain structures present challenges in interpreting sentence perspective. The predications following the pattern Be + Prepositional Phrase (e.g. *be in place*) raise questions regarding their capacity for presentation, and specifically whether they can introduce a context-independent subject, thus shaping the sentence as presentational (cf. Bouveret & Fillmore, 2008; Van Rompaey et al., 2015). The interpretative uncertainties arise from the apparent syntactic similarity of the way prepositional phrases (in this case featuring prepositions *at*, *in*, *on*) generally function (most recently in Adam & Headlandová Kalischová, 2022). While verbo-nominal prepositional structures typically attribute qualities to context-dependent subjects, predominantly aligning with the Quality Scale (e.g. *He had been* ***on the run*** *a mere two days*), certain syntactic-semantic configurations allow these structures to introduce context-independent subjects, thus aligning with the Presentation Scale (e.g. *A convicted murderer is* ***on the run*** *tonight*).

Previous research (Adam & Headlandová Kalischová, 2022) has conclusively demonstrated that be + prepositional phrase structures in predication function as homogeneous verbo-nominal prepositional configurations at the level of FSP, rather than copular structures consisting of a copula and a prepositional phrase; the data indicate that such structures may alternatively undergo a verbal/adjectival transformation, while maintaining their original meaning (e.g. *be at fault* paraphrased as *be responsible for a mistake*). These prepositional phrases influence sentence perspective both towards and away from the subject. Contrary to initial assumptions regarding the type of scale employed by such configurations, it was found that they not only attribute quality to a thematic subject but can also introduce a context-independent one. The FSP status of these phrases depends on contextual relevance, lexical semantics, and linear modification. Three out of the six configurations examined in Adam and Headlandová Kalischová (2022, viz. *be on the move*, *be on the run*, and *be in order*) were found to operate predominantly within the Quality Scale, showing over 80 per cent inclination towards subject specification. Conversely, *be at hand* exhibited a clear preference for the Presentation Scale (89%), often introducing a context-independent subject. The remaining two phrases, *be in the air* and *be at stake*, demonstrated varying abilities to mediate both presentation and qualification.

It was concluded that it is lexical semantics that constitutes a decisive criterion in determining the FSP potential of these phrases, with each particular lexical load shaping the sentence perspective; another key role is the usage of the phrase — whether it acts as a metaphor or is used literally. Syntactic features, such as the length and complexity of pre- and post-verbal modification, also contribute to FSP status, with shorter post-verbal modification typically associated with Presentation Scale sentences. However, the syntactic semantic types identified in the analysis (originally classified into Types A, B, and C) exhibited heterogeneity, with no consistent pattern in their preference for particular sentence perspectives.

The present corpus-based investigation aims to explore a wider range of representative examples to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this kind of phrase within functional sentence perspective. It looks at a new set of verbo-nominal prepositional configurations (viz. *be at fault, be at large, be in full swing, be in place, be on guard, be on display*) in terms of their textual, syntactic, and information structures, with the intention to identify the circumstances under which the predicates in such sentences express existence or appearance on the scene (implementing the Presentation Scale), and which structures tend to favour the Quality Scale.

2 PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES AND FSP

As previously noted, within the two dynamic semantic scales, each element is assigned a specific dynamic-semantic function (DSF). Unlike static semantics, DSFs may change during the act of communication, with the same element performing different roles in individual sentence perspectives (e.g. Svoboda, 2005, p. 221; Dušková, 2015, p. 199). While the Pr-Scale sentences are oriented towards a context-independent subject (Phenomenon), the Q-Scale sentences attribute a Specification to a context-dependent subject (Firbas, 1992; Dušková, 1999; Chamonikolasová & Adam, 2005). Admittedly, the distinction between the Presentation and Quality Scales may seem blurred at times, sparking uncertainties in FSP interpretation. A key challenge arises with sentences that allow both presentation and qualitative readings, such as those with an initial rhematic subject (Adam, 2013; 2019), or — as is the topic of the present paper — sentences featuring prepositional phrases in predication.

Syntactically, prepositional phrases in predication exhibit heterogeneity: besides configurations with locative or temporal adverbials (*she may* ***be at school***) and those expressing action (*the car* ***was in motion***), particular attention is given to qualifying predications with nominal or adjectival components (*The river* ***is*** *now* ***at rest*** *after days of rushing downstream.*) (Dušková, 2012, p. 412–413; cf. Quirk, 1985, p. 402 ff; Vachek, 1994, p. 18–21; Lambrecht, 1994). Incidentally, Quirk et al. (1985, p. 1150) also interpret such multi-word verbs as units that behave "lexically or syntactically as single syntactic constituent[s]". Similarly, Bouveret and Fillmore (2008, p. 298) describe verbo-nominal constructions as "complex lexical units linked as wholes to their semantic frames, or as instances of special grammatical constructions" (cf. also Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Consequently, in line with the approaches brought up above, the present research will treat structures such as *be in full swing* as single communicative

units of a verbo-nominal prepositional nature. These qualifying predications often permit nominal or adjectival periphrasis (e.g. *The river is now* ***calm***.). Our selection criteria for research purposes were guided by the structures' verbo-nominal nature with the verb *be* and a preposition followed by a nominal element as a complement, as well as the potential presence of both literal and figurative meanings. Although the selection process was partially random, it aimed to ensure representativeness.

Concerning their information structure, the prepositional predications under scrutiny pose an interpretative question regarding their functional segmentation. Research by Chamonikolasová et al. (2015) highlighted the debate over whether these constructions function as copular predications (two separate units) or as a single unit with verbo-nominal characteristics. While Firbas (1992, 1995) initially favoured a syntactic division approach, recent studies (Svoboda, 2005; Adam, 2013, 2019; Chamonikolasová et al., 2015) tend to interpret verbo-nominal structures as a single unit (cf. Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Bouveret & Fillmore, 2008). This interpretation hinges on static semantic analysis and verbal/adjectival paraphrases, demonstrating that these structures convey similar meanings to single-word verbs. Consequently, this research treats these structures as single communicative units of a verbo-nominal prepositional nature. Dušková (2015) notes that qualifying predications with nominal or adjectival components typically serve as rhemes due to their nominal character (see e.g. the periphrases *be at stake* = be threatened, *be at hand* = be available, *be in order* = be relevant, appropriate, etc.), aligning with the DSF of Specification (cf. Dušková, 2020, p. 26). Therefore, the present study aims to elucidate the FSP status of selected verbo-nominal prepositional structures, particularly their potential to operate within Pr-Sc sentences.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As was explicated above, the principal research question remains whether verbo-nominal prepositional structures, such as *be in place,* conform to the Presentation or Quality Scale. This investigation aims to examine their presentational capacity and explore the syntactic and semantic conditions under which these structures operate in the respective dynamic semantic scales. It is vital to adhere to Firbas (1992, 1995), who posits that a predicate's ability to present an independent subject correlates with its capacity to express existence or appearance on the scene, either explicitly or implicitly. In contrast to our previous research (Adam & Headlandová Kalischová, 2022), where we categorised the relevant structures into three types based on their static semantic interpretation and potential paraphrases, our current investigation focuses on analysing individual items in terms of their textual, syntactic, and information structure characteristics irrespective of their typological classification. This unrestricted approach is intended to shed light on the FSP status of the phrases under examination, potentially identifying specific determiners that enable a phrase to operate on either the Quality or Presentation Scale. Additionally, the present investigation aims to ascertain whether the utilisation of specific prepositions might influence the information structure of the verbo-nominal prepositional phrase. Within our data-

set, three distinct prepositions are observed (each of them represented twice): *at*, *in*, and *on*.

The research dataset was drawn from the *British National Corpus* (*BNC*), and partly analysed using the Sketch Engine tool. Altogether, including the dataset from our research in 2022, the entire corpus contains 1,748 basic distributional fields, which were manually scrutinised with respect to the following aspects: the lexical meaning of the phrases (this was consulted in the *Cambridge Dictionary*, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* and *The Free Dictionary*[1]), syntactic features, and FSP (i.e. assessing the interplay of the context, linear modification and dynamic semantics). The manual analysis primarily centred on the discernment of sentences implementing the Q-Scale on the one hand, and on the other hand, Pr-Sc sentences with an initial rhematic subject (such as ***Love** is in the air.*) and those with a fronted adverbial followed by subject-verb inversion (such as ***At stake** was his dignity.*); existential *there*-constructions (such as *There is too much at stake.*), which formally also fall under Presentation Scale sentences, were excluded for their prototypical (and thus equivocal) syntactic and information structure.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *BE AT FAULT*

The dictionary entries give one possible denotation of *be at fault*, which may be aptly summarised as follows: "to have done something wrong" (*Cambridge Dictionary*). Other dictionaries add synonymous meanings, such as "responsible for a mistake, trouble, or failure; deserving blame; guilty or accountable".

This part of our corpus was initially represented by 157 examples from the *BNC* (i.e. 1.4 hits per million). However, the number had to be reduced to 132, as the dataset included 25 communicative units that were realised by cleft sentences proper (such as *It wasn't Robert Bolt who was at fault*). These are complex sentences in which the phrase in question occurred in the subordinate relative clause, in other words at the distributional subfield (minus 1 level of analysis), and as such, these clauses are not subject to our investigation.

As shown in Table 1 below, out of the total of 132 concordances, 110 sentences (83.3%) implemented the Q-Scale, while the remaining 16.7 per cent (22 distributional fields) are examples of the Pr-Scale (examples (1) and (2)).

Scales	**Abs.**	**%**
Pr	22	16.7
Q	110	83.3
Total	132	100.0

TABLE 1. Pr-Scale vs Q-Scale representation: *be at fault*

1 *The Free Dictionary* was chosen as its content is based on American English and it aggregates information from other sources, e.g. *Collins Dictionary*.

(1) *(David Southby, the light-middleweight, lost his first fight against the eventual winner, Korea's Byung-Ju Kim.) Here, lack of confidence* ***was at fault*** *more than anything else.* [F52][2] Pr-Sc
(2) *(... but finally admitted) he* ***was at fault*** *(and ...).* [F8] Q-Sc

The lexical-semantic analysis of this dataset yielded some interesting observations. Perhaps most remarkably, a closer examination has revealed that, instead of the expectable singular noun phrases with indefinite articles, the Pr-Sc sentences demonstrate a characteristic use of a specific set of context-independent subjects. These include plural forms (*the police, parasites, other organisms, schools, policies*, etc.), uncountable/abstract noun phrases (*lack of confidence, recollection, comprehension, water, authority*, etc.), collective nouns (*management, department, the Crown,* etc.), and proper names (*Fairclough, Madison*, etc.).

This observation seems to stem from the fact that context-independent subjects collocating with *be at fault* typically relate to the existence or appearance of particular people, groups of people (such as institutions), or other organisms, as well as abstract entities, as opposed to "traditional" Pr-Sc sentences, in which an individual person or thing is presented (cf. *A cup of coffee steamed on the desk.*). We argue that this specific preference for a certain type of context-independent subjects might be triggered by the static semantic load — namely, that of responsibility, guilt, accountability, and blame — associated with the phrase *be at fault*. It typically involves a negative phenomenon, a concrete person, or a group of people who should, in one way or another, be held responsible or accountable for something.

In accordance with the information structure of Q-Sc sentences, examples (2) above and (3)–(4) below exhibit a classic structure: the lexical meaning of the context-dependent subjects (typically realised by personal pronouns or nouns given in the immediately relevant context) as Bearers of Quality is complemented — via the transitional verbo-nominal phrase *be at fault* — by the most dynamic elements of the sentences, namely Specifications. Interestingly enough, apart from the expectable syntactic configurations of Q-Sc sentences, the dataset yielded a statistically significant number of sentences (27 instances) in which the post-modification (the DSF of Specification) is realised by a prepositional structure; thus, this syntactically varied prepositional complementation may take the form of a prepositional *that*-clause as in example (3), or prepositional phrases as such (using prepositions *for, over, by, in*), at times accompanied by a participial clause (example (4)).

(3) *(...) the minister* ***was at fault*** *in that he had failed to lay down adequate procedures and systems of control.* [F84]
(4) *She* ***was at fault*** *for not taking a hand in the business before now, (...).* [F114]

2 Please note that the code in square brackets at the end of each example sentence refers to the name of the relevant subpart of the corpus and the item number. Furthermore, examples may be marked as representing one of the dynamic semantic scales, i.e. Q-Sc or Pr-Sc, when necessary.

The presentation sentences, on the other hand, introduce context-independent subjects that embody the DSF of the Phenomena to be presented, typically positioned at the beginning, which perfectly aligns with the concept of a Pr-sentence featuring an initial rhematic subject. Following the prepositional predication, adverbials referring to time or place are regularly included, alongside comparative clauses (as shown in example (1) above), serving the dynamic semantic role of establishing the Setting in the presentation sentences. At times, the *be at fault* phrase performs the DSF of Presentation itself and is not followed by any Setting (example (5)).

(5) *(But immediately the violence started, everybody said: 'There must be grievances.) Authority must* ***be at fault****. (Therefore authority must remedy the grievances.')* [F57]

In such Pr-Sc sentences, out of the three FSP factors at play, it is only the dynamic semantic load and the immediately relevant context (preceding as well as following) that testify to the presentative interpretation of the sentences. Conversely, the linear modification factor cannot assert itself fully, as the English word order principles in sentences with an initial context-independent subject do not allow for its full realisation: linearity acts counter to the basic distribution of communicative dynamism here. It follows that *be at fault* in these sentences expresses existence/appearance on the scene with sufficient implicitness, occupying the final position.

4.2 *BE AT LARGE*

The *Cambridge Dictionary*, in accord with the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, defines the verbo-nominal prepositional structure *be at large* as a state in which a dangerous person or animal "is free when they should not be" or "not captured", i.e. escaped, fugitive, at liberty, or on the run.

As far as the ratio of the dynamic semantic scales is concerned, the *BNC* yielded a total of a mere 15 concordances which contain the lemma *be at large*, i.e. 0.15 hits per million. This refined dataset provided two sentences that implement the Pr-Scale (13.3 %), whereas the Q-Scale was represented by 13 hits, amounting to 86.7 per cent (see Table 2 and examples (6) and (7) below).

Scales	**Abs.**	**%**
Pr	2	13.3
Q	13	86.7
Total	15	100.0

TABLE 2. Pr-Scale vs Q-Scale representation: *be at large*

(6) *Something****'s at large*** *(and coming near).* [L6] Pr-Sc
(7) *He* ***had been at large*** *in occupied France.* [L4] Q-Sc

As already stated, most sentences implement the Q-Scale: the verbo-nominal structure attributes a quality to a context-dependent subject (signalled, as a rule, by the

definite article), introducing new information about the subject. Whereas the subjects within the Q-Scale typically appear as personal pronouns, definite noun phrases, or context-dependent proper names (the semantic field of someone on the run being clearly prominent — *the murderer, the gunman, one of those in the escape, Barry Morton* etc.), predication is often expanded, with the post-verbal section providing rhematic Specification or additional temporal or spatial Setting (*in the black Sea* in example (8), *in occupied France, in certain parts of the Kingdom*, etc.).

(8) *<u>They</u> (...)* ***were at large*** *in the black Sea.* [L3]

Interestingly enough, in two out of the total of 15 hits (i.e. 13.3 %), *be at large* is used in a recurring idiomatic phrase (in both cases within Q-Sc sentences, example (9)):

(9) *(...) the law is that <u>the damages</u>* ***are at large***. [L16]

In legal terms, *damages at large* are "compensation for other than material loss", such as damages of general character, encompassing non-economic loss, e.g. loss of reputation, emotional distress, conduct of either party, or punitive measures (definitions.uslegal.com). In other words, to relate the phrase to its information structure, it means that the amount of damages awarded is not precisely defined or limited by specific criteria, hence the prepositional phrase *at large* denotes a quality of the damages and is clearly rhematic. The sentences thus implement the Q-Scale.

As has been noted above, only exceptionally, and under specific circumstances, do the sentences with the phrase *be at large* in predication present a new Phenomenon on the scene. In contrast to Q-Sc sentences, those implementing the Pr-Scale in the corpus exhibit a distinct interplay of FSP factors. In example (6) above, for instance, which is an extract from a poem, the theme of an uncertain, threatening evil is introduced: the phrase *be at large* contextualises its imminent and approaching nature. The context-independence of the subject *Something* is further supported by the verb of motion (*come near*) featured in the other part of the compound sentence. Incidentally, the existential transformation would render the sentence as *There is something at large coming near*. The prepositional predication *be at large* could functionally be rephrased as "be released", "be in the air", "be lurking, threatening", etc. As mentioned earlier, for the predication to present a Phenomenon on the scene, it must, in Firbasian terms, express "existence or appearance with explicitness or sufficient implicitness" (Firbas, 1995, p. 65). In example (6) above, the appearance on the scene is expressed implicitly.

The other occurrence of Pr-Scale in the dataset is represented by example (10):

(10) *<u>Serial killer Hannibal the Cannibal — alias Sir Anthony Hopkins</u> —* ***was at large*** *in the corridors of Buckingham Palace today.* [L11]

This communicative unit is actually the very first sentence, a classic lead-in, extracted from a news report. The key focus is on Sir Anthony, who earned an Oscar for his memorable portrayal of the man-eating doctor Hannibal Lecter in the acclaimed

film "Silence of the Lambs", receiving his knighthood from the Queen. The transitional element *be at large* serves as a playful journalistic metaphor (or even clickbait in modern terms), suggesting that the fugitive criminal was seen in the halls of Buckingham Palace. Consequently, from the perspective of information structure, *be at large* introduces the context-independent Phenomenon onto the scene, thus implementing the Pr-Scale. The sample in question is also a perfect example of how the contextual factor can decide the way to interpret a given sentence. In this case the piece of information about Buckingham Palace could not be understood as the key element of the message: as Queen Elizabeth II used to award knighthoods and damehoods only twice a year, it always received full attention of the national media, and was therefore known to the general public. The news then is *who* received the honour, i.e. Anthony Hopkins. In Firbasian terms, we would talk about "the context of knowledge and experience shared by the interlocutors" (1992, p. 21–40), while applying the concept designed by Chafe, the term "activation cost" could be used. Chafe suggests that it is "impossible to understand the distinction between given and new information without taking consciousness into account" (1994, p. 69–81), i.e. the author of the news report had counted on the readers' awareness of certain facts.

4.3 *BE IN FULL SWING*

The dataset of texts containing the lemma *be in full swing* ranks average in our research material with 64 hits (i.e. 0.57 per million), and all three dictionaries provide almost identical lexical definitions, i.e. "to be at a very high (the highest) level of activity", which could be supplemented with more general "taking place/happening".

The distribution of dynamic semantic scales is rather uneven as almost 80 per cent is represented by the Q-Sc sentences (example (12)) while the Pr-Scale (example (11)) is implemented in the remaining 20 per cent of instances (see Table 3).

Scales	**Abs.**	**%**
Pr	13	20.3
Q	51	79.7
Total	64	100.0

TABLE 3. Pr-Scale vs Q-Scale representation: *be in full swing*

(11) *(...) and a deafening concert* ***was in full swing*** *(...).* [FS28] Pr-Sc
(12) *By nine-thirty the dance* ***was in full swing.*** [FS29] Q-Sc

An interesting feature of this subset, however, is that most of the examples, regardless of which scale they represent, actually share very similar characteristics in all three areas assessed, i.e. lexical semantics, syntax and partly even FSP.

The most frequent collocating expression in this part of the corpus is the word *party* specified by a range of attributes, closely followed by the names for different types of events (see Table 4 and examples (13) and (14)):

Collocations	Incidence %
party (Christmas p., cocktail p., surprise p., wedding p. and others*)*	17
events *(dance, Industrial Revolution, strike, Copenhagen Summer Festival, championship, picnic lunch* and others*)*	28

TABLE 4. Collocations with *be in full swing*

(13) *(Sure, that's over,) but the Copenhagen Summer Festival* ***is in full swing*** *in July, (...).* [FS13] Pr-Sc
(14) *The all-women party* ***was in full swing*** *(when ...).* [FS60] Q-Sc

Syntactically, most of the sentences contain the phrase *in full swing* as their last element and do not extend any further; this is the case of 92 per cent of Q-Sc sentences and 69 per cent of Pr-Sc sentences. In the few instances where the phrase is not placed finally but other units follow, these tend to be adverbials of time and place, e.g. *within ten minutes, later on, in a large church hall*, etc.

The last feature which can be applied to both types of sentences is the use of the determiner *the*. In FSP theory, presentation sentences differ from Q-Sc ones in that they introduce a contextually-independent subject (Phenomenon), hence these subjects frequently employ the indefinite article as it refers to something not mentioned before and irretrievable from the previous context. At the same time, Q-Sc sentences would contain the definite article for the exactly opposite reasons. Yet, as this subcorpus revealed, in 74 per cent of Q-Sc sentences and as many as 54 per cent of Pr-Sc sentences (i.e. 38 and seven instances respectively), the subject is expressed by a noun phrase with the definite article, which amounts to 70 per cent of the entire dataset in question (cf. examples (15) and (16)).

(15) *The morning session at the law courts* ***was in full swing****, (...).* [FS6] Q-Sc
(16) *But now that) the Nineties* ***are in full swing****, (...).* [FS24] Pr-Sc

On closer inspection, though, this occurrence, seemingly incongruent with the basic characteristics of the Presentation Scale, can be explained. As mentioned earlier, many of the analysed sentences refer to specific events, which will often contain *the* as part of their full name, so the determining nature of the article does not convey contextual dependence but a unique denotation, as can be seen in example (17), referring to a provincial festival for traditional music, song, dance and language for Ulster.

(17) *(I met a few of them at my own destination, Cushendall,) where the Co Antrim fleadh* ***was in full swing****, (...).* [FS7]

In the remaining six Pr-Sc sentences (out of the total 13 instances) we can find the — expected — indefinite article or the absence of one in the case of, for instance, plural nouns (cf. examples (11) above and (18) below).

(18) *(It is unrealistic to plan a teaching session for a busy day) when operations and doctors' rounds* ***are in full swing****.* [FS32]

4.4 *BE IN PLACE*

By far the largest dataset of the entire corpus is constituted by the examples of the phrase *be in place* with 462 hits (i.e. 4.11 per million). This number was further reduced to 448 in total, after excluding duplicate entries, the plural form of the phrase (*in places*) and sentences containing the existential *there*-structure.

The meaning of the phrase is two-fold: it either refers to something being "in its usual, appropriate or correct position", or being "organised or functioning properly". This was clearly evidenced by the different types of grammatical subjects as some denoted concrete objects while others referred to abstract concepts.

The implementation of the two dynamic semantic scales showed a rather uneven distribution of 73.4 per cent of Q-Sc and 26.6 per cent of Pr-Sc sentences (see Table 5 and examples (19) and (20)).

Scales	**Abs.**	**%**
Pr	119	26.6
Q	329	73.4
Total	448	100.0

TABLE 5. Pr-Scale vs Q-Scale representation: *be in place*

(19) *Instead, a donation box* ***is in place****.* [P100] Pr-Sc
(20) *Their information technology* ***is*** *correct and* ***in place****.* [P89] Q-Sc

As mentioned above, different lexical items could be found in the role of subjects with respect to which of the two meanings was in operation. In both types of sentences, the majority were nouns expressing various abstract concepts, e.g. *arrangements, procedure, standards, safety, programme, infrastructure, legislation, reform, values* and many others (see examples (21) and (22) below), which is also in perfect correspondence with the examples provided by the *Cambridge Dictionary*. Concrete objects (or rarely also people) were represented by words such as *rails, disc, barrier, buoy, stretcher,* or *director*, to name but a few, and their being *in place* suggests they were attached, secured, installed, etc., as implied by a particular context.

(21) *(...) and that an adequate risk management programme* ***is in place****.* [P152]
(22) *But once these new mechanisms* ***are in place****, (...).* [P378]

Apart from nouns, there were also other words used as subjects (or their parts) and these deserve a special mention because their occurrence is typical of the Q-Sc sentences only; they are the expressions *all, everything* and *everybody*, identified in 40 cases (i.e. 12% of all the Q-Scale implementations), example (23).

(23) *All the pieces of the puzzle* ***were in place****: (…).* [P249]

Similarly, there was a clear distinction between the frequency and type of certain determiners and their appearance in one or other of the two dynamic semantic scales. While the definite article *the*, mostly used to make reference to something known, previously introduced in the context, was counted as many as 118 times in the Q-Sc sentences (exemplified in (24)), it only occurred 20 times in the presentation ones (also as part of the phrases *the first* and *the next*). At the same time, however, the indefinite article *a/an* (or its absence in plurals) was present in 81 nominal subjects in the Pr-Sc sentences (examples (25) and (26) further below).

(24) *The original cross* ***had been in place*** *since the fifteenth century (…).* [P304] Q-Sc
(25) *(Serbia will remain a pariah state until) a peace* ***is in place****.* [P370] Pr-Sc

At the syntactic level, both types of sentences displayed a strong tendency to put the phrase *be in place* in a final position (altogether this was evidenced in almost 40 per cent of the entire dataset); with the Pr-Sc sentences, this was the case in 71 examples, and an even higher score was noted in those where the Q-Scale was implemented, i.e. 103 cases. The last-mentioned number of occurrences is in full agreement with the different function each scale performs: the Q-Sc sentences provide new information about the already known, given subject, and in many cases this new information is about *being in place* (i.e. organised, attached, in effect, etc.), which is why there was no need for any other sentence element to further extend the information flow. Nevertheless, when there was more to follow, both types of sentences made frequent use of temporal adverbials, introduced mostly by the prepositions *by, for* or *in* (examples (26) and (27)); the DSF of these phrases was that of Setting in Pr-Sc sentences, and Setting or Specification in Q-Sc ones.

(26) *(Overall goals and responsibilities for the group, (…) are under review. It hopes organisational changes) and a new director will* ***be in place*** *by the end of next year, (…).* [P346] Pr-Sc
(27) *(Under the new arrangements there would be an 'intermediaries offer' to increase the distribution of new shares by giving private clients priority (…). These changes are likely to* ***be in place*** *in 1991.* [P277] Q-Sc

Finally, this part of the corpus yielded the largest number of occurrences of Extended Presentation Scale (see Chamonikolasová & Adam, 2005) implementation, i.e. the sentence structure presents Phenomenon on the scene and further extends to its Specification. In all eleven instances that were identified in this dataset (i.e. 9% of all Pr-Sc sentences), the Specification took the form of a full infinitive clause (see examples (28) and (29)).

(28) *(…) a secure back-up system* |Ph| ***is in place*** |Pr| *to eliminate mistakes* |Sp|. [P259] Pr-Sc Ext

(29) *A subject committee* |Ph| ***is in place*** |Pr| *to assist the development of the initiative* |Sp| *(and ...).* [P300] Pr-Sc Ext
(30) *Wright* |B|, *(...), will* ***be in place*** |Q| *to receive official recognition of that achievement* | Sp|. [P300] Q-Sc

At the same time, the *to*-infinitival structure was detected in only one of the Q-Sc sentences; example (30) above is a perfect illustration of the Quality Scale with all its constituents arranged according to their communicative weight from the least to the most dynamic one (i.e. Bearer of Quality, Quality, Specification). This distribution of communicative dynamism is perfectly consistent with observations made in the early days of the theory of FSP when the focus was primarily on the linear modification factor; for instance, Bolinger (1952) noted that "gradation of position creates gradation of meaning when there are no interfering factors" (as cited in Firbas, 1992, p. 10).

4.5 *BE ON GUARD*

In terms of lexical semantics, the *Cambridge Dictionary* defines the phrase *be on guard* as "to be careful to avoid being tricked or getting into a dangerous situation," aligning with the definition provided by the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, which explicates the phrase as "to be very careful and prepared for something difficult or dangerous". In other words, being *on guard* — originally related to fencing — metaphorically signifies that one is vigilant, alert, watchful, cautious, wary, or on duty to protect or defend something.

In total, this relatively small subset of our corpus yielded 19 instances of the lemma *be on guard*, representing 0.2 hits per million (Table 6). Only a marginal number of sentences (two out of 19) implemented the Pr-Scale (10.5%, example (31)); the majority of sentences (17 in total, 89.5%; example (32)) attributed a quality to the subject and therefore operated on the Q-Scale.

Scales	**Abs.**	**%**
Pr	2	10.5
Q	17	89.5
Total	19	100.0

TABLE 6. Pr-Scale vs Q-Scale representation: *be on guard*

(31) *Mother****'s on guard*** *while young ferrets nestle contentedly together.* [G11] Pr-Sc
(32) *She* ***was on guard*** *all the time (and not used to having any kind of affection.)* [G15] Q-Sc

As demonstrated in example (32), the Q-Sc sentences typically attribute a quality to context-dependent subjects. These subjects are commonly represented by personal or relative pronouns, or by proper nouns or noun phrases preceded by the definite article. The prepositional predication *be on guard* serves the DSF of Quality, thus con-

necting the Bearer (subject) to its Specification, which is the most dynamic element of the sentence, often realised by adverbials referring to time, place, manner, and similar aspects. A frequent occurrence related to the lexical semantic load of the verbo-nominal phrase is prepositional complementation with *be on guard + against* (example (32) above).

From the point of view of lexical semantics, another typical pattern within the Q-Sc sentences (six times out of 19, i.e. 31.6%) is one connected to an expression of necessity or need to be on guard; these are realised with various modal or semi-modal structures, such as:

(33) *Government should always* ***be on guard*** *against that danger.* [G911]

An analogous effect of urgency and persuasive appeal is achieved by the use of imperative mood (four times out of 19, i.e. 21%), such as in:

(34) ***Be on guard*** *against hidden and built-in expenditure escalators.* [G13]

The basic statistics of this dataset suggest that it is only exceptionally that the sentences implement the Pr-Scale (two sentences out of 19, i.e. 10.5%). As a rule, the presentation sentences introducing context-independent subjects onto the scene make use of the indefinite article; the two instances from the subcorpus, however, feature proper names of the Phenomena (coincidentally, even if originating from different sources, these two comprise *Mother* and *Mother Bombie,* respectively; see the examples (35) and (36) below). In both the sentences, individuals are presented within a narrative (see the extended context in the examples), and are invariably placed initially, thus perfectly corresponding to the definition of Pr-sentence with an initial rhematic subject. The information structure of the sentences is completed by descriptive Settings, which provide further details on the individual who is being presented on the scene:

(35) *(At that time the young ferrets are being handled regularly and this process of getting them accustomed to human touch and handling continues through every cleaning-out stage. The result is that the growing ferrets show no shyness to human contact.)* *Mother****'s on guard*** *while young ferrets nestle contentedly together.* [G11]

(36) *(Evelyn did not dare approach, though she longed to offer the girl a mouthful of water or a corner off her shrivelled lump of cheese. She went outside in search of Sam.)* *Mother Bombie* ***was on guard****, hands on hips, the ancient black pipe jutting from her gums.* [G8]

4.6 *BE ON DISPLAY*

The result of the concordance search for the lemma *be on display* was 153 hits (i.e. 1.36 per million), although the final total came to 150 entries, as there were three cases of identical texts listed twice.

The lexical meaning of the phrase refers to the way something "is arranged to be seen, viewed or watched publicly", each dictionary being more or less specific as to what it is that can be shown. We had expected the meaning to be also used figura-

tively about people and their personal traits or feelings; this expectation, however, did not prove correct. Only three instances of this kind could be identified, while all the others referred to concrete objects, animals, and various kinds of shows.

The analysis of the dynamic semantic scales implemented in this subset provided a rather balanced ratio of the Pr-Sc sentences (45.3%, example (37)) being only slightly outnumbered by the Q-Scale ones (54.7%, example (38)), see Table 7.

Scales	Abs.	%
Pr	68	45.3
Q	82	54.7
Total	150	100.0

TABLE 7. Pr-Scale vs Q-Scale representation: *be on display*

(37) *Both freshwater and marine fish* ***are on display*** *(...).* [D29] Pr-Sc
(38) *So all this stuff* ***is on display*** *at the moment (...).* [D92] Q-Sc

As stated above, the lexical-semantic analysis of the dataset with respect to the grammatical subjects of the sentences did not yield the expected results, as the vast majority of cases were denotations of objects (including products, works of art, technology, or documents), crafts or animals (see examples (39)–(41)). Only in three samples of fiction writing and journalism did we find more abstract notions related to people and their traits and qualities (example (42)).

(39) *(...) where the poster* ***will be on display*** *in shops and clubs.* [D15]
(40) *The plans of the Grand Hall* ***were on display*** *throughout the fair, (...).* [D152]
(41) *(...) a fine example of a renovated pump trolley* ***is on display***. [D135]
(42) *Sampson's usual strengths and weaknesses* ***are on display***. [D10]

Syntactically, there was a clear difference between the structures of Pr-Sc and Q-Sc sentences in that the former tended to place the verbo-nominal phrase as a final element (in 36 instances) while the latter did so only 18 times. By the same token, when adverbials were present in the final position, they appeared mostly in the Q-Scale, namely temporal adverbials (15 cases, e.g. *over the weekend, during the conference*, or specific dates), locative adverbials (37 cases, e.g. *in the hall, museum, club, market*, etc.) or both (five cases), compared to six temporal adverbials, twelve locative, and only two cases of both types present in the Pr-Sc sentences (see example (43), an announcement from a periodical's arts section).

(43) *The art of clog dancing* ***was on display*** *in Darlington at the weekend*. [D103]

The thorough analysis also yielded an interesting finding that was not discovered (at least not to such an extent) with any other of the phrases under examination, and that was the occurrence of discontinuous modification of the subject. In eleven in-

stances, all of which were Pr-Sc sentences (i.e. amounting to 16%), a prepositional or participial structure further modified the head noun of the subject (cf. examples (44) and (45)). This syntactic discontinuity can be explained by the general tendency of a predicate to occupy the second position in a sentence after a relatively short subject, as well as the end-weight principle.

(44) *A new 'Euro' bottle* ***was on display*** *from BDH laboratory supplies*. [D30]
(45) *Forty-two cartoonists* ***are on display****, ranging from the simple to the bizarre*. [D81]

In accordance with the syntactical characteristics (the linear modification) of each sentence type, even their information structures and the ways to signal context (in)dependence were as expected. The Pr-Sc sentences express the most dynamic elements (the Phenomena to be Presented) with initially placed context-independent subjects, typically using the indefinite article (29%), plural form of nouns (47%) or proper nouns (six cases), cf. examples (46) and (47) below. Additionally, there were two cases of Extended Pr-Scale implementation in this dataset; in example (48) we can find the presented Phenomenon (*every aspect of the world of horticulture*) further specified by a *to*-infinitive clause.

(46) *(...) what a wealth of aircraft and engines* ***were on display***. [D145]
(47) *Exhibitions including local craftwork will* ***be on display*** *in the exhibition area.* [D43]
(48) *(Floriade is a festival of gardening held in the Netherlands only once every decade,) when every aspect of the world of horticulture* |Ph| ***is on display*** |Pr| *to amuse, inform, surprise and delight* |Sp|. [D32] Pr-Sc Ext
(49) *The restored objects* |B| ***are on display*** |Q| *in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo* |Sp|. [D50]

As can be seen in the last example (49), the Q-Sc sentences typically made use of the definite article (28%), as well as pronouns (relative and personal) amounting to 45 per cent in total. The information structure of these sentences often implemented most of the required constituents ordered appropriately from the least to the most dynamic one, i.e. Setting (usually omitted), Bearer of Quality, Quality, and Specification (possibly even Further Specification), thus ensuring a perfect correspondence between the interpretative and actual arrangements.

5 CONCLUSION

First and foremost, it is crucial to emphasise that the present study has yet again yielded conclusive evidence supporting the initial assertion that, at the FSP level, prepositional structures such as *be at fault* exhibit syntactic behaviour akin to homogeneous verbo-nominal prepositional configurations; this claim derives from the possibility of alternative verbal/adjectival transformations (see also Chamonikolasová et al., 2015).

Regarding their FSP status, as evidenced by the analysis, the prepositional phrases under examination have the capacity to influence the perspective of the sentence, either towards or away from the subject. It is noteworthy that these phrases not only attribute qualities to a thematic subject but can also introduce a context-independent subject into the narrative. However, the current dataset has shown that the general tendency of the six prepositional structures was to ascribe quality to a context-dependent subject, and only to a lesser extent to help convey the notion of existence or appearance on the scene.

On closer inspection, we could divide the analysed structures into three basic types, each with a different level of potential to implement the Presentation Scale. Thus, the majority of them, namely *be at fault, be at large, be in full swing* and *be in place* demonstrated a moderate capacity to affect the presentative interpretation of a sentence (see Table 9 below). The structure *be at fault* appears to primarily operate within the Q-Scale, with limited presentational potential. Its ability to present effectively is constrained, but specific advantageous conditions — such as context-independent subjects of a certain type accompanied by immediately relevant context — can enable it to defy the linearity principle and achieve its presentational potential. For the most part, the verbo-nominal construction *be at large* denotes the state of being fugitive or free, and is therefore inclined towards attributing quality to a context-dependent subject within the Q-Scale. However, as has been shown, the phrase can also introduce a Phenomenon onto the scene under favourable circumstances: such usage is prompted by the presence of a context-independent subject and a conducive immediate context. The lexical-semantic load of the phrase *be in full swing* (i.e. "to be very active, taking place") seems to be the determining factor in the predisposition of this structure to occur in Q-Sc sentences, where — mostly as a finally placed element — the predicate ascribes Quality to a context-dependent subject and so becomes the most dynamic communicative unit. The last structure, *be in place,* may be ranked as carrying the highest presentational potential within its category as it conveyed the notion of introducing a novel entity in discourse in 27 per cent of the concordances; yet its major function remains to develop the information flow away from the thematic subject, hence, to implement the Q-Scale. In fact, this was also corroborated by the finding that nine per cent of all the presentational sentences were actually of the extended type, in other words they included a Specification, normally the weightiest communicative unit of the Q-Scale.

The only verbo-nominal prepositional structure that demonstrated an almost equal ability to perform in either of the dynamic-semantic scales was *be on display* (45% Pr-Sc vs. 55% Q-Sc). Semantically speaking, it is not dissimilar to the structure *be at hand* analysed previously (Adam & Headlandová Kalischová, 2022) as both phrases manifest a clear inclination to express the meaning of existence. This was also evident in the syntactical arrangement of more than half of the presentational sentences where the phrase itself was the last constituent, enhancing the appearance of the Phenomenon. Contrary to the shared characteristics of the structures described so far, the configuration *be on guard* operates almost exclusively within the Q-Scale due to its lexical-semantic characteristics. It effectively conveys specifications of context-dependent subjects, providing details concerning threats or dangers and reasons

for vigilance. Conversely, it has become evident that its dynamic semantic load does not naturally predispose the phrase *be on guard* to express existence or appearance on the scene, thus severely limiting its presentational potential.

The preliminary typology of the first stage of our research (Adam & Headlandová Kalischová, 2022), based on polar distinctions between presentational and qualitative functions, did not consistently align with the actual presentational/qualitative potential exhibited by these phrases in context. On the contrary, it highlighted the need for a more nuanced (and less categorical) understanding of the factors at play in determining the functional perspective of prepositional phrases within discourse. A five-point scale to assess these phrases' potential to present and/or qualify (Table 8 below) was developed based on the frequency of occurrences of the Pr-Scale and the Q-Scale respectively within the dataset. It delineates five distinct bands, which range between the polar assessments labelled as "definitely qualitative" (i.e. 0–10% of Pr-Sc occurrences) and "definitely presentational" (i.e. 90–100% of Pr-Sc occurrences).[3] The final assessment of individual phrases from both stages of our research can be found in Table 9.

%	0–10%	> 10–45%	> 45–55%	> 55–90%	> 90–100%
Pr/Q continuum	definitely Q	prevalently Q	equal potential	prevalently Pr	definitely Pr

TABLE 8. Assessment Scale (Pr-Scale vs. Q-Scale continuum)

Phrase	**Pr-sc (%)**	**Q-sc (%)**	**Potential**
BE AT FAULT	17	83	prevalently Q
BE AT HAND*[4]	93	7	definitely Pr
BE AT LARGE	13	87	prevalently Q
BE AT STAKE*	47	53	equal
BE IN FULL SWING	20	80	prevalently Q
BE IN ORDER*	17	83	prevalently Q
BE IN PLACE	27	73	prevalently Q
BE IN THE AIR*	47	53	equal
BE ON DISPLAY	45	55	equal
BE ON GUARD	10	90	definitely Q
BE ON THE MOVE*	4	96	definitely Q
BE ON THE RUN*	20	80	prevalently Q

TABLE 9. Results

3 For the sake of clarity, the individual bands of presentational/qualitative potential of the phrases are marked by different degrees of grey shading, both in Table 8 and Table 9.

4 The results marked with asterisks were obtained in the first stage of the research, i.e. Adam and Headlandová Kalischová, 2022.

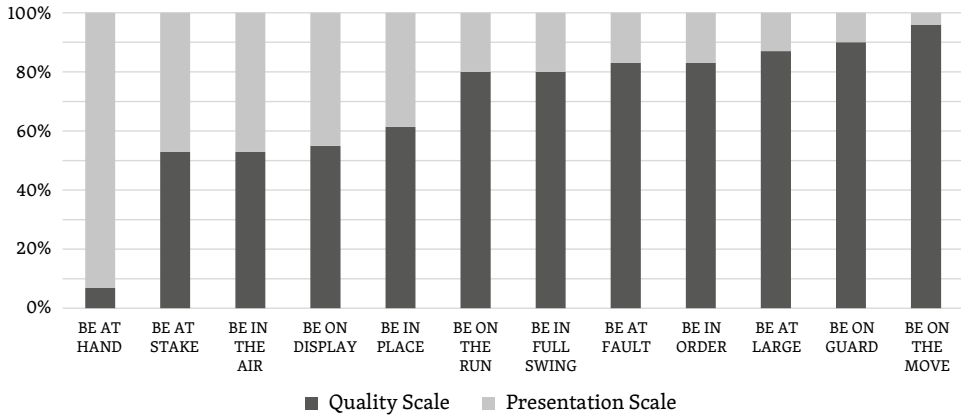

FIGURE 1: Frequency-ordered results

The findings, as summatively presented in Table 9 and Figure 1 above, convincingly show that the FSP status of the prepositional phrases, instead of adhering to a strict binary categorisation, is better understood as existing along a continuum ranging from predominantly presentational to primarily qualitative, with most phrases inclined towards qualitative potential. This continuum underscores the subtle nature of how these phrases operate within sentences, with their FSP status hinging primarily on lexical semantics, which emerges as the foremost factor and often serves as the decisive element. Additionally, the immediately relevant context, whose various situational aspects contribute to the overall interpretation of the communicative effect, exerts significant influence and further shapes the FSP status of these phrases. In the structures that allowed for a presentational interpretation, the prepositional phrases invariably expressed — explicitly or implicitly — existence or appearance on the scene. Within the actual manual analysis, this aspect is most evident against the background of the preceding verbal context, which can tip the scales in favour of quality or presentation.

In contrast, syntactic features, including the type of preposition used, play a secondary role in determining the information structure. The data analysis indicates that there is no direct correlation between the choice of a particular preposition (we deliberately selected four representatives of each preposition: *at*, *on*, *in*) and the function of the phrase in which it appears with respect to their qualitative or presentational potential. Instead, the selection is contingent upon the lexical semantics of the phrase and its syntactic valence and collocation constraints. While these syntactic features contribute to shaping the overall syntactic structure of the sentence, their impact on the information structure is relatively less pronounced.

To obtain an even wider and more representative picture of the operation of prepositional phrases within the theory of functional sentence perspective, future research should focus on a greater variety and number of samples. The current paper has expanded the analysis of originally six phrases to a total of twelve in order to map out the situation more thoroughly. This expansion advances the understanding of the nuances and variations in the information structure of these phrases, underscoring

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the need for continued exploration in this area to fully capture their functional potential within discourse.

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