

## On the Concept of Emphatic Rheme



*Yelena Mkhitarian*

The notion of Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP) suggested by the Czech linguists has been of great importance to the description and interpretation of the semantic-informative structure of the utterance. According to their theory, parts of the sentence, representing the given information, i.e. the theme, have a much lower degree of communicative dynamism (informative charge) than parts representing new information, i.e. the rheme.<sup>1</sup> M.A.K. Halliday notes that all languages are characterized by FSP, but the means of its actualization are different for different languages.<sup>2</sup> In English word order plays a crucial role in distinguishing between the theme and the rheme. The rheme occurring at the end of the utterance carries a

higher degree of communicative dynamism (CD) than when occurring initially. The degree of CD may still be heightened by the use of a special stylistic device known in linguistics as parcellation. It is a type of syntactic arrangement in which the most expressive part (predominantly the rheme) of the utterance is separated from the base by intonation (in writing by a period) and presented as an isolated structure. This kind of segmentation implies the highest degree of communicative dynamism, adding more significance and emphasis to the rhematic part of the utterance. We would suggest a special term for it – Emphatic Rheme as opposed to its syntactically-neutral, i.e. non-parcellated counterpart.

This function of parcellation can be explicitly illustrated by an example taken from V.Woolf's novel "Mrs.Dalloway": *He was in love. Not with her. With some younger woman of course*, in which *He was in love* is the theme and the rest of the utterance is the rheme.

If we change this sentence into a non-parcellated version *He was in love not with her, but with some younger woman of course*, we will see that transformation clearly deprives the parcellas *Not with her. With some younger woman of course* of their position of greater prominence and emphasis, turning them into an ordinary stylistically less coloured part of the utterance.

The results of the study provide evidence that a greater amount of parcellas do not represent the whole rheme but only a part of it, which we propose to name Emphatic Rheme Partial as opposed to Emphatic Rheme Full including the whole of the rhematic part of the utterance. It is a fragment separated from the rhematic base in the main body of the utterance, which is characterized by the highest peak of communicative dynamism and strongest emphatic impact.

Consider the following sentence:

*Whatever he had expected had not come true. Yet.*  
( E.Segal)

If we transform this sentence into a non-segmented structure, we will have a non-emphatic rheme, with the predicate negated - *had not come true yet*. With the parcella *Yet*, however, the idea is emphasized that although the hero's expectations had not come true, there was some hope they would materialize some day.

Some researchers, studying the phenomenon of parcellation from the syntactic-stylistic point of view, rank it among devices of extensive syntax such as insertion, repetition, syntactic parallelism, etc. This statement needs to be interpreted. On the surface it may seem that as a result of parcellation, we have two separate structures though the number of words making up the sentence remains the same. But it is evident that we gain economy of language means by introducing the most direct and effective way of indicating the most essential part of the information.

Compare the above example containing Emphatic Rheme Partial with its non-segmented version, in which the impact of the parcella *Yet* may be expressed hypothetically in the following way:

*Whatever he had expected had not come true yet, but still he hoped he would soon be able to realize it .*

So we see that parcellation does not extend the sentence. Rather the contrary: it condenses the linguistic means of the expression plane.

Some linguists claim that from the semantic point of view a sentence and its segmented version are quite identical: they mark only the stylistic aspect as a distinctive feature between them.<sup>3</sup> But this is not always the case. If we analyze the previous example from this point of view we will come to the conclusion that the parcellated version has a strong emphatic effect, which makes the negation sound less categorical, less decisive, underlining the idea that the failure has a temporary character.

Consider another example:

*The housekeeper said that they had left for Israel on the previous night's plane. To attend the funeral.*  
(E.Segal)

The Emphatic Rheme Partial expressed by the infinitive phrase *To attend the funeral* stresses the idea that it was not for the first time they (Jason's parents) left for Israel (They had been there before to visit their daughter-in-law and grandchildren). But this time it was a most tragic occasion: their son Jason was killed in the war with the Palestinians and they went to attend the funeral.

The research shows that in some cases the splitting of the sentence may be so great that it can bring about certain modifications in the semantics of the emphatic parcella. Here is an example to prove it:

*I got the message and happily entertained her for the next few days. And nights.*

(E.Segal)

While *days* in the rhematic base retains its denotational meaning (time), the second component of the phrase *And nights*, when parcellated, acquires an additional meaning: intimate relations. Otherwise introduced this phrase implies “all the time” as we see it in the following sentence:

*I got us on my mind, Sid. Day and night.*

(Odets)

The parcellated phrase *Day and night* emphasizes the idea that the speaker is thinking about herself and Sid all the time, without cessation, with something worrying her continuously.

This kind of segmentation occurs not only on the level of a simple, but also composite sentence.

Consider an example of a complex sentence with an adverbial clause of reason:<sup>4</sup>

*You're staying with him? Because of what people might say?  
Have you gone crazy?*

(Cook)

The parcellation affects the secondary clause, which in this context is the rhematic part of the utterance: *Because of what people might say?* If we eliminate the parcellation, the utterance may be taken for a question: the speaker wants to find out whether the interlocutor is staying with that man for fear of the public opinion. In case of parcellation, however, we feel indignation and resentment on the part of the speaker in connection with the interlocutor's decision, which becomes still more evident by the succeeding sentence *Have you gone crazy?*

The Emphatic Rheme may have a most unusual position when it breaks the linear arrangement of the parts of the sentence and occurs on a new line, occupying a vertical position as to the remaining part of the utterance. Here is an example to illustrate it:

*This was the beginning of the end. They had met once more and just had time enough to learn that they liked one another.  
And to say good-bye.*

(E.Segal)

The parcellation highlights the importance of the contradicting idea expressed in the second part of the antithesis (*And to say good-bye*), which comes up as quite a sudden, unexpected and disappointing fact.

Summing up, parcellation is an effective syntactic-stylistic device, which helps point out the rhematic part of the utterance in a most expressive way by separating it from the base and presenting it either wholly (Emphatic Rheme Full) or partially (Emphatic Rheme Partial). In some cases the detachment of the rhematic part of the utterance from the base may be so powerful that it can entail certain changes in the meaning of the parcellated structure.

### References:

1. Firbas, Jan. Some Aspects of the Czechoslovak Approach to Problems of Functional Sentence Perspective.- In: Papers on Functional Sentence Perspective ed.by F.Danes, Prague: Academia, 1974.
2. Halliday M.A.K. The Place of "Functional Sentence Perspective" in the System of Linguistic Description. In:Papers on Functional Sentence Perspective ed.by F.Danes, Prague, Academia, 1974.
3. Стрельцов В.Н. Парцелляция в структуре сложно-подчиненного предложения в английском языке, М., 1973.
4. Филонова Н.К. Парцелляция полипредикативных высказываний в современном английском языке, Л., 1982.

### Շեշտված ռեմայի հասկացության շուրջ

Տարանջատումը արդյունավետ շարահյուսական հնար է, որն օգնում է մատնանշել ասույթի ռեմատիկ մասը անենաարտահայտիչ ձևով՝ առանձնացնելով այն նախադասության հիմքից և ներկայացնելով այն կան անբողջությամբ, կան մասամբ: Որոշ դեպքերում տարանջատումը կարող է լինել այնքան ազդեցիկ, որ կարող է առաջացնել իմաստային փոփոխություններ տարանջատված կառույցում: