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**Why is the Given-Before-New Ordering Functional? A Reply to John A. Hawkins**

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In a criticism of FSP (Functional Sentence Perspective), Hawkins (1994) asks: “The Prague School theory of given-before-new ordering seems to be particularly *non-functional*: why should each sentence begin with what has already been presented, delaying the newest information till the very end?” The Praguian standpoint is clarified by Hajičová (1994), but discussions that eventually led to the decline of European functionalism are summarised by Newmeyer (2001).

I briefly discuss what is meant by functionality in the context. I then present my current research carrying out a discourse analysis of an English and a Czech text with a focus on the interplay of information structure and word order. The given-before-new ordering is proved to be prevalent in both texts or languages. To answer Hawkins’s question why it should be functional, I carried out two experimental discourse analyses where the topic—comment order of each text is reversed. This experiment shows an increase of ambiguity which is especially pronounced in relative pronouns. Such ambiguity is corrected by moving the relative clause close to its reference, but this comes at the cost of an overall increase in structural complexity.

Therefore, the answer to Hawkins’s question is that the given-before-new ordering is *functional* because it is the optimal arrangement considering the trade-off between economy and clarity, thus reiterating principles of functionalism proper (cf. Vincentini 2003). The results of the study are determined mathematically and therefore falsifiable in a straightforward way, inviting a critical scrutiny.