



The Problem of Multiplicity and Overlap of Pragmatic Functions in Functional Grammar: Applied Examples and Proposed Solutions

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Abstract

This study addresses a significant and challenging issue in Functional Grammar, namely the multiplicity of internal pragmatic functions and the overlap between various internal and external pragmatic functions. Despite the limited total number of these functions collectively, they have not escaped the problem of multiplicity and intersection. What was originally a strength of Functional Grammar theory—achieving pattern adequacy within the broader goal of explanatory adequacy—has turned into a genuine problem that requires regulation, correction, and treatment. The article sheds light on some manifestations of this multiplicity and overlap by presenting applied examples and proposing certain solutions to these issues. And God is the Granter of success.

Keywords: overlap, multiplicity, pragmatic functions, internal functions, external functions, topic, predicate.

Introduction

Functional Grammar is distinguished from other structural grammars, particularly by its pragmatic functions: the internal ones ("Pivot" and "Focus") and the external ones ("Topic," "Tail," and "Vocative"). Despite the small and limited number of these functions—not exceeding five—they have not been immune to the problem of multiplicity within the same type, particularly for the two internal functions, as well as a second issue: the overlap between internal and external pragmatic functions.

This is natural given the relative recency of this theory, whose age does not exceed fifty years. However, this problem requires solutions to close these gaps, remedy oversights, and correct the path, with the aim of constructing a coherent and precise theory that achieves pattern adequacy in particular and explanatory adequacy in general.

In summary, we will address this problem in the present article, which includes two main sections in addition to the introduction and conclusion. In the first section, we will unpack the article's title and define the terms mentioned in it. In the second section, we will examine the issues of multiplicity in internal pragmatic functions and the overlap between them and external pragmatic functions, through the analysis of some applied examples and the presentation of proposed solutions. And God is the One whose help is sought.



1. Defining Concepts in Light of the Network of Relations

1.1. Problem

The verb *ashkala al-amr* means it became confused or entangled, and matters that are *ashkāl* are confused ones (Ibn Manẓūr, n.d., Vol. 11, p. 357). The terms *mushkila* and *ishkāla* refer to confusion or ambiguity. A book that is *a jamahu* or *ashkalahu* is one from which confusion has been removed (al-Fīrūzābādī, 2005, p. 1019). *Istashkala al-amr* means it became unclear to someone or raised a difficulty for them. *Ishkāl* denotes something that causes confusion in understanding, while *ishkāl al-tanfīdh* refers to disputes related to the execution of a ruling (al-Maʿjam al-Wasīṭ, 2004, p. 491). Thus, a problem or issue is something difficult and entangled—obstacles, difficulties, hurdles, knots, dilemmas, or predicaments that stand in the way of achieving a desired goal related to a person, issue, matter, topic, or specific thing. Examples include psychological problems, health problems, school dropout problems, unemployment problems, or research problems, and so on.

1.2. Multiplicity

Add means counting something; one counts it (*ʿaddahu yaʿudduhu addan* and *taʿdādan*). The term appears in the Qurʾān: (وَأَخْصَىٰ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عَدَدًا) "And He has enumerated everything by number" (Qurʾān, al-Jinn 72:28). It has two meanings: He has counted every thing as numbered, or it denotes abundance. People exceed him in number (Ibn Manẓūr, n.d., Vol. 3, pp. 281–282; al-Maʿjam al-Wasīṭ, 2004, p. 587). Thus, multiplicity of something refers to its increase, abundance, availability, and excess. Here, we mean the increase that shifts from being desired and sought-after to exceeding the required, possible, or sufficient limit. When something exceeds its proper bound, it becomes a problem rather than a solution, turning this excess into an issue or problem in need of resolution to restore its value.

1.3. Functions

Wazāʿif and *wuzuf* are the plural of *wazīfa*, a term in Arabic dictionaries signifying following, conformity, support, or adherence (e.g., "he obtained a position"). In Western thought, it relates to concepts such as functionalism, functionary, public function, functions, functional, and functionality.

Functionalism generally refers to a 20th-century linguistic approach that contrasts with descriptive or formal structuralism, which focused on describing linguistic forms. In contrast, functionalism emphasizes the function of these forms. This orientation emerged from within structuralism, notably from the Prague School of 1926, which began studying sound functions. Overall, functionalism views linguistic structure as a reflection of function and the speaker's intent. For functionalists, function is the value and position an element occupies in the discourse structure based on the overall context. Thus, the relationship between linguistic structure and its function is one of subordination, as noted by Simon Dik, and structure reflects function, as stated by Aḥmad al-Mutawakkil.

Accordingly, function can be patterned into three types based on the term's multiple meanings:

- **First pattern:** Languages perform multiple functions stemming from a basic communicative function (the linguistic function). Many functional linguists have addressed these, notably Roman Jakobson (1960), who identified six functions:



communicative, expressive/emotive, conative/directive, referential, poetic, and metalinguistic; and M.A.K. Halliday (1978), who identified seven: instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, heuristic, imaginative, and informative. This falls under function as "role," as discussed by Ahmad al-Mutawakkil.

- **Second pattern:** Function is reflected significantly in linguistic structure, realizing the speaker's intent, where semantic and pragmatic structures are mirrored in morphological-syntactic and phonological structures.
- **Third pattern:** The interdependence between function and structure is governed by language acquisition, language typology, and language evolution.

The latter two fall under function as "relation," i.e., the relation between components in a nominal or sentential construction. In functional grammars, functions denote all possible relations within constructions (semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic). These will be discussed further when defining Functional Grammar, with expansion in the article body, as this part is introductory.

Pragmatics

From *tadāwul*, meaning circulation among people. *Tadāwuliyya* is a modern term proposed by Ṭāha ‘Abd al-Raḥmān as equivalent to "pragmatique," from Latin *pragmaticus* (action, deed). It was originally an American philosophical doctrine before becoming a linguistic theory. Its development owes much to J.L. Austin, J.R. Searle, and H.P. Grice, advocates of ordinary language philosophy opposing formal language approaches. They focused on how communication occurs through language between discourse participants.

Another view attributes it to Charles Morris (1938), who used it as one branch of semiotics: syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (relation of signs to users).

Pragmatic functions most distinguish Functional Grammar. Simon Dik identified four: two internal (Pivot and Focus) and two external (Topic and Tail). Ahmad al-Mutawakkil added the Vocative as a fifth external function, making three external and five total pragmatic functions. Brief definitions:

- **Internal pragmatic functions** (Pivot and Focus): They occur within the predicate and are assigned contextually to constituents—core arguments (e.g., agent, patient) or peripherals (e.g., time, place).
 - **Pivot:** Assigned to the constituent referring to the entity forming the center of discourse, e.g., "‘Alī" in "‘Alī drank water."
 - **Focus:** Assigned to the constituent carrying prominent or new/corrective information, e.g., "a glass of milk" in "‘Alī drank a glass of milk," or "a glass of juice" in corrective contexts.
- **External pragmatic functions** (Topic, Tail, Vocative): They fall outside the predicate and are not required by it.
 - **Topic:** The fronted constituent, e.g., "‘Alī" in "‘Alī, his brother came." It represents the discourse domain, lies outside illocutionary force, is comma-separated, semantically linked (with acceptability), often resumed by a pronoun.
 - **Tail:** The appended constituent at the end, e.g., "‘Alī" in "His brother came, ‘Alī." It clarifies, modifies, or corrects, sharing most Topic traits but final position.



- **Vocative:** Added by Aḥmad al-Mutawakkil, e.g., "Yā 'Alī" in "Yā 'Alī, review your lessons." It has mobility (beginning, middle, end) as an independent syntagm.

1.4. Overlap

Tadākhul means intermingling, confusion, or overlap. Here, it refers to the prominent issue in Functional Grammar: overlap of functions, challenging the approach, affecting reception, and raising questions. Examples will be presented in the main body.

1.5. Functional Grammar

The term "Functional Grammar" is a compound consisting of two words: "naḥw" (grammar) and "waḏīfī" (functional). The word *naḥw* is an ancient, well-known Arabic term meaning path, approach, direction, or intention, as recorded in Arabic dictionaries (al-Fīrūzābādī, 2005, p. 1337). For example, Ibn Jinnī (d. 392 AH) described Arabic grammar as following the Arabs' way in their speech, including dualization, pluralization, diminutives, and syntactic constructions (Ibn Jinnī, 2000, Vol. 1, p. 34). Grammar was originally established to preserve the Arabic language from solecism (*lahn*), which became a threat especially after non-Arabs entered Islam and their errors increased. Fear for the language of the Qur'ān prompted the development of this science. It began simply as a pedagogical discipline focused on case endings (*i'rāb*) at word ends, but later evolved into a clear scientific approach, particularly with al-Khalīl (d. 175 AH) and especially Sībawayhi (d. 180 AH) after him. It expanded and branched out, yet it remained in people's minds primarily in its original formal-structural form. This perception has significantly influenced attitudes toward classical Arabic grammar.

The term "functional" derives from *waḏīfa* (function), as discussed earlier. It refers to an approach that investigates the functions performed by linguistic elements within constructions, and then the functions performed by constructions and sentences within discourse.

The compound term "Functional Grammar" specifically denotes the grammar founded by the Dutch linguist Simon Dik (1978). Dik built upon prior functional efforts and established a new conceptual framework for a linguistic theory describing natural languages. His major work, *The Theory of Functional Grammar* (published in two volumes in 1997, two years after his death), was completed and enriched by his followers, making Functional Grammar a fully independent theory. Among the most prominent contributors is the Moroccan linguist Aḥmad al-Mutawakkil.

The structure of Functional Grammar comprises three levels of functions (al-Sayyid, 2004, pp. 143–144):

- **Semantic functions:** Agent (al-Munfidh), Patient (al-Mutaqabbil), Recipient (al-Mustaqbil), Beneficiary (al-Mustafid), Instrument (al-Āla), Location (al-Makān), Time (al-Zamān).
- **Syntactic functions:** Subject (al-Fā'il) and Object (al-Maf'ūl).
- **Pragmatic functions:** Pivot (al-Muḥwar), Focus (al-Bu'ra), Topic (al-Mubtada'), Tail (al-Dhayl), and the Vocative (al-Munādā), which al-Mutawakkil added.

This study focuses primarily on the third type—the pragmatic functions (Pivot, Focus, Topic, Tail, and Vocative), God willing.



1.6. Applied Examples

Dictionaries define *mithl* as resemblance or likeness; its plurals are *amthila*, *amthāl*, and *muthul*. *Tamaththala bi-al-shay'* means to exemplify it; *tamthīl* (with kasra) means representation or image. The Qur'ān states: : (مَثَلُ الْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي وُعدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ) "The example of Paradise, which the righteous have been promised" (Qur'ān, al-Ra'd 13:35) (al-Fīrūzābādī, 2005, p. 1056; al-Ma'jam al-Wasīṭ, pp. 853–854). Thus, examples and illustrations are models, images, forms, or representations of something, used to clarify, simplify, and bring a topic closer to the mind for better comprehension and understanding.

Tatbīq (application) means to cover or spread over completely, as rain covering the earth (Ibn Manzūr, n.d., Vol. 10, pp. 209–212). It also refers to experimentation, implementation, or subjecting issues to scientific, legal, or similar rules (al-Ma'jam al-Wasīṭ, p. 550). Application is thus the practical testing, execution, or realization of a theoretical matter, placing it in real-world practice, or subjecting something untried to experimentation and implementation.

Applied examples and exercises are sentences and phrases related to the article's topic. They serve practical application by subjecting them to proposed rules for clarification and explanation, thereby facilitating understanding, assimilation, and mastery of the subject.

1.7. Proposed Solutions

In classical Arabic, *ḥalla al-'uqda* means to untie or solve a knot (Ibn Manzūr, n.d., Vol. 11, p. 169). *Ḥall* refers to resolving an issue or analyzing something into its elements—e.g., analyzing a sentence to explain its parts and the function of each element (al-Ma'jam al-Wasīṭ, p. 194). A solution is thus finding an answer to a problem, knot, or difficulty under discussion.

Muqtaraha (proposed) derives from *iqtaraha*, meaning to suggest or innovate something originally from oneself without prior hearing (Ibn Manzūr, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 558). Proposals are thus original ideas or opinions presented by their originator.

"Proposed solutions" here refer to suggestions, ideas, and opinions—whether from other researchers or the present author—for resolving the discussed problem: the multiplicity and overlap of pragmatic functions in Functional Grammar. And God is the Granter of success.

2. The Problem of Multiplicity and Overlap of Pragmatic Functions in Functional Grammar – Applied Examples and Proposed Solutions

One of the primary goals of Functional Grammar, as stated by its pioneers, is achieving explanatory adequacy—a legitimate and desired objective pursued by all linguistic theories. Explanatory adequacy encompasses three sub-adequacies (al-Mutawakkil, 2016, pp. 247–250):

- **Pragmatic adequacy:** Functional Grammar seeks to explore the properties of all occurring linguistic expressions without isolating language from its context of use.
- **Psychological adequacy:** It aims to account for production and comprehension—how speakers produce utterances and how hearers interpret and understand them.
- **Typological adequacy:** Functional Grammar takes a middle position between universality and typology, describing and explaining diverse linguistic phenomena across the widest possible range of language types through selection within a model of



language users. Typological adequacy is achieved when varied phenomena belonging to many language types are described and explained.

While expansion in analysis and exhaustive typologization of rules is desirable, the multiplicity and overlap of pragmatic functions constitute a real problem that demands attention. This issue may hinder the reception of Functional Grammar, making its comprehension and assimilation difficult. We know that proponents of Functional Grammar strive for it to be accessible and do not wish it to share the fate of classical Arabic grammar, which has been criticized—at least in some aspects—for complexity, intricacy, and formalism. One reason for the difficulty of classical Arabic grammar is its complexity, the ramification and breadth of its rules, and their overlap—a well-known fact.

2.1. The Problem of Multiplicity of Pragmatic Functions in Functional Grammar – Applied Examples and Proposed Solutions

2.1.1. The Problem of Multiplicity of the "Pivot" (al-Muḥwar)

According to Functional Grammar scholars, the Pivot has various types. Simon Dik distinguishes four: New Pivot, Given Pivot, Subordinate Pivot, and Resumed Pivot (al-Mutawakkil, 2001, pp. 112–116; Taghzāwī, 2014, pp. 164–165). This can be illustrated with the following improvised text:

«In the classical poetry competition organized in Algiers, an Algerian poet participated (New Pivot), an Iraqi poet (New Pivot), and a Palestinian poet (New Pivot). The Algerian poet recited a poem (Given Pivot), the Algerian poet also hosted a poetry morning (Given Pivot) and presented his new collection (Subordinate Pivot). The Palestinian poet was delighted (Resumed Pivot) to receive a copy of this collection.»

This simple text clearly shows multiplicity of the Pivot—an acceptable phenomenon (i.e., the Pivot having subtypes)—but it raises another issue: clear overlap among the different types of Pivot. Prominent manifestations include overlap between the New Pivot (linked to "introduction" – adding new information to the addressee's mind) and the Given Pivot (linked to "reference" – the same element already known and present in the addressee's mind, repeated to the end of the discourse with full reference). There is also overlap between New and Resumed Pivots (repeated mention with complete reference), and near-identity in naming between Given and Resumed Pivots. This appears more clearly in the text.

Notably, these different types have diminished the Pivot's primary pragmatic function, turning it into a merely structural-formal category with little value. In reality, these are conversational or communicative positions of a single Pivot repeated due to its occurrence in an extended communicative situation (e.g., a full text). This raises another problem for Functional Grammar: Is it a grammar of the sentence, the text, and full discourse simultaneously, or are we dealing with sentence grammar versus text/discourse grammar?

Scholars did not stop at these types; they further expanded them, introducing the Main Pivot, defined by Aḥmad al-Mutawakkil as "the Given Pivot that forms the longest pivot chain in a given discourse" (al-Mutawakkil, 2001, p. 116). Additional subtypes include Transient New Pivot, Persistent New Pivot, Continuous Given Pivot, Subordinate Given Pivot, and Resumed Given Pivot (ibid., p. 115). They also discussed Contrastive Pivot and



Contrastive Focus, and Contrast as an independent function—a separate issue to be addressed later.

Reclassifying the previous text:

«An Algerian poet participated (Persistent New Pivot) in the classical poetry competition in Algiers, along with an Iraqi poet (Transient New Pivot) and a Palestinian poet (Transient New Pivot). The Algerian poet recited a poem (Continuous Given Pivot), hosted a poetry morning (Continuous Given Pivot), and presented his new collection (Subordinate Given Pivot). The Palestinian poet (Resumed Given Pivot) was delighted to receive a copy of this collection.» In this case, the Algerian poet is the "Main Pivot."

Undoubtedly, these new classifications aimed to fill gaps and enrich the earlier system, yet they simultaneously increased subtypes, ramification, complexity, and overlap. In truth, they differ little from the previous classification and add nothing substantially new, making them harder for learners to understand and assimilate. Moreover, they steer grammar toward broad analytical tendencies that are difficult to apply as an approach to teaching and learning Arabic—the fundamental role Functional Grammar is proposed to fulfill as an alternative to classical Arabic grammar.

A proposed solution here is to suffice with the single term "Pivot," especially in analyzing independent sentences, and to retain only the initial classification for textual analysis: New, Given, Resumed, and Subordinate. The second classification is largely formal and already subsumed in the first. The term "Main Pivot" can be accepted, as it replaces "Persistent Pivot" and necessarily eliminates "Transient Pivot." Simon Dik's view should be followed: neither Contrastive Pivot nor Contrast should be treated as an independent function.

2.1.2. The Problem of Multiplicity of the "Focus" (al-Bu'ra)

Focus is an important internal pragmatic function in Functional Grammar, representing the most prominent or important information unknown to the addressee ("New Focus") or requiring modification or correction ("Contrastive Focus," often linked to interrogative sentences). Focus has been logically classified parallel to Pivot classification, yet certain problems persist in this division.

Focus is divided functionally into New Focus and Contrastive Focus. New Focus branches into Request and Completion; Contrastive Focus branches into five types: Substitution Focus, Restriction Focus, Extension Focus, Cancellation Focus, and Selection Focus (al-Mutawakkil, various works). Al-Mutawakkil also mentions other types such as Reversal Focus, Addition Focus, and Parallelism Focus, noting that Addition Focus can be dispensed with (as it differs little from Completion Focus) and Parallelism Focus (similar to Substitution Focus) (al-Mutawakkil, 1993, p. 148). This is clear evidence and acknowledgment from al-Mutawakkil that excessive multiplicity can become problematic for any theory, including Functional Grammar, as types overlap, rendering abundance unhelpful and even problematic.

Focus is also classified by scope into Constituent Focus and Predicate/Sentence Focus, applying to both New and Contrastive types. The first division poses no issue, but the second—especially Predicate/Sentence Focus—is not free of problems. Examples cited by al-



Mutawakkil in *Pragmatic Functions in the Arabic Language* (1985, p. 27) will be analyzed and discussed in due course.

Sentences with Predicate/Sentence Focus

The following sentences are presented as examples of sentences containing predicate focus (or focus on the entire sentence):

- Zayd is traveling.
- Has Zayd returned from travel?
- Indeed, Zayd is traveling.
- Zayd is traveling only (or: It is Zayd who is traveling / Zayd alone is traveling).

These sentences are claimed to contain focus on the predicate or the sentence as a whole: new focus in sentences (1) and (2), and contrastive focus in sentences (3) and (4).

The problem with these examples lies in their presentation out of context. Isolated from actual usage, such analysis leads to difficulties. It is problematic to claim that they involve focus on the entire predicate without a pivot function, because in natural linguistic context, such focus is not acceptable in this way. In sentence (1), “Zayd” functions as the **pivot**: it is known to the addressee and constitutes the center of the discourse—the topic about which something is predicated (the informant in classical Arabic grammar terms). The word “traveling” serves as the adjectival predicate, since the sentence is nominal with a compound adjectival predicate (active participle). In sentence (2), “Zayd” is likewise the pivot: known and the subject of discourse, while the rest poses the question.

Sentence (3) raises a special issue due to the particle *inna*, which causes a structural case change (accusative) that overrides functional case assignment. According to al-Mutawakkil in *Functional Constructions: Issues and Approaches* (2005, p. 38), the constituent “Zayd” loses two original features—the nominative case of subjecthood and sentence-initial position—and is assigned accusative by *inna*, a feature not explained by any pragmatic function. This constitutes a clear contradiction.

Sentence (4) is similar to the first in that “Zayd” is its pivot and “traveling” its adjectival predicate.

If we accept that these sentences have focus on the entire predicate/sentence while containing internal pivots, we are dealing with overlap between focus and pivot functions—an additional established problem. This contradicts the principle of uniqueness of assignment formulated by al-Mutawakkil: “No constituent may bear more than one function at the same functional level within the same predicate.” Thus, no element can simultaneously be pivot and focus, or agent and patient, and so on.

➤ *Proposed solution here:*

It is essential to bind sentences strictly to actual contexts of use and real communication. Analysis should be conducted through dialogue patterns (question–answer) or paired sentences in complete communicative situations. This aligns with the core principles and slogans of Functional Grammar and the functional approach in general, which insist on linking language to usage. Analyzing the four sentences above in isolation resembles structural or probabilistic analysis, which contradicts Functional Grammar’s emphasis on



language in use. As al-Mutawakkil states, structure is a reflection of function. Contextualized analysis would be more fruitful, accurate, and convincing.

2.1.3. The Third Internal Function: “Contrast” (al-Muqābala)

Among the issues raised in Functional Grammar is the proposal of a third internal pragmatic function: **contrast**. Hengeveld and Mackenzie—prominent figures in Functional Grammar theory—argue that contrast is an independent, autonomous internal pragmatic function, distinct from pivot and focus, and that it can co-occur with either within the same constituent. Al-Mutawakkil cites examples in this regard (al-Mutawakkil, 2010, p. 130):

- Examples of contrast combining with pivot, as in “detailing” constructions: “I met Khālid and Ibrāhīm. As for Khālid, he was happy, and as for Ibrāhīm, he was sad.” Here, the sentence contains two contrasted pivots: “Khālid ... happy” and “Ibrāhīm ... sad.” This illustrates co-occurrence of pivot and contrast.
- Examples of contrast combining with focus: “The one who won is ‘Alī.” Here, “‘Alī” represents a combination of focus and contrast.

Simon Dik opposed this view, considering contrast a subtype of focus (new focus versus contrastive focus). Al-Mutawakkil did not oppose Dik on this point and presented the following schema for internal functions, treating contrast as an independent function (al-Mutawakkil, 2010, p. 131).

➤ Proposed solution in this regard:

Adopt Simon Dik’s position and refrain from recognizing contrast as a third autonomous internal function. Contrast cannot be equated with pivot and focus because it is primarily structural-formal in nature. It is organically linked to contrastive focus (in opposition to new focus), and it is possible to speak of a “contrastive pivot” or contrasted elements when two parallel pivots appear in a sentence or discourse—as in the example provided by Hengeveld and Mackenzie—without making contrast an independent function.

As for the external pragmatic functions, the problem of multiplicity is not raised. However, overlap occurs between Topic (al-Mubtada’) and Tail (al-Dhayl) with the internal functions Pivot and Focus, and between Vocative and the predicate as a whole. This will be the subject of the following section.

2.2. The Problem of Overlap of Pragmatic Functions in Functional Grammar – Applied Examples and Proposed Solutions

2.2.1. Overlap of “Pivot” in “Focus”

Al-Mutawakkil cites an example in *Pragmatic Functions in the Arabic Language* (1985, p. 66), claiming that “yesterday” is the pivot in: “Zayd returned yesterday.”

The pivot is the pragmatic function assigned to the entity that forms the center of discourse (the about-which in the predicate). However, “yesterday” is closer to being new focus, because the entity spoken about is “Zayd”—the center and pivot of discourse—even though it appears later in the sentence. Al-Mutawakkil himself provides a similar example in the same book (p. 27): “Zayd returned from travel yesterday.” Here he considers “yesterday” new focus, which is logical: “yesterday” is the new information for the addressee. This highlights terminological overlap between “new pivot” and “new focus,” which may cause further confusion.



This overlap between pivot and focus—if not a spontaneous error by al-Mutawakkil—stems from sentences being detached from context. This contradicts the fundamentals of Functional Grammar, whose pioneers insist that the object of study and analysis must be language in actual use and circulation. While we understand the difficulty of always representing real usage (hence analyzing isolated sentences), we propose that the pivot should be linked to a clear entity (person or specific thing), especially in context-free sentences. Adjuncts (peripherals) should generally be treated as new information presented to the addressee, unless the entity is implicit or deleted. If al-Mutawakkil means in “Zayd returned yesterday” that “yesterday” is the pivot of the predicate, this is unconvincing: Zayd is known to the addressee and is the discourse center, while the new information is his return “yesterday,” which the addressee presumably does not know.

2.2.2. Overlap of “Pivot” in “Topic” (al-Mubtada’)

In Functional Grammar, the pivot is an internal pragmatic function falling within the illocutionary force and scope of the predicate; it is one of the predicate’s arguments (verb, nominal compound, adjectival, adverbial, or prepositional). Accordingly, it may also bear syntactic and semantic functions in addition to its pragmatic pivot function.

The topic, however, is an external pragmatic function: it represents the discourse domain, lies outside the predicate’s illocutionary force, and does not constitute an argument of the predicate. It may have its own illocutionary force (e.g., in questions) and carries neither syntactic nor semantic function.

There is clear overlap between pivot and topic as pragmatic functions—or between pivot and topic as syntactic functions in classical Arabic grammar (not our concern here). Both are “about-which” elements and known to both interlocutors (shared knowledge). To illustrate this overlap, we examine examples cited by Aḥmad al-Mutawakkil in *Pragmatic Functions in the Arabic Language* (1985, p. 68), which we analyze and discuss:

- Zayd, his father is traveling.
- The book, I read it. (with nominative “al-kitāb”)
- Zayd, I met him. (with nominative “Zayd”)
- The guests, they arrived.
- The two students, they succeeded.

In sentence (1), “Zayd” is the topic, while “his father” is the pivot—a logical distinction: topic represents the discourse domain (external pragmatic function), and pivot falls within the predicate scope as an argument of the adjectival predicate “traveling” (internal pragmatic function). The discourse concerns Zayd’s father, not Zayd.

However, overlap and confusion appear in the remaining sentences, where “the book,” “Zayd,” “the guests,” and “the two students” function as pivots of the predicates—internal to the discourse—yet do not represent the discourse domain as a topic would. The addition of a comma creates further difficulty: commas are originally used to separate the predicate from external functions (topic, vocative, tail), a significant formal issue.

The source of confusion is the fronting of the pivot and its nominative case, making it resemble the topic—especially in sentence (1), where the topic precedes the predicate (discourse domain), while the pivot is internal to the predicate’s components and arguments,



even when fronted phonologically. In sentence (1), the topic is external and does not enter the predicate scope; in the others, despite fronting, the pivot remains internal to the discourse (predicate) and does not represent the domain as topic does. Yet the similarity and overlap remain evident, causing problems for the addressee that must be addressed.

Al-Mutawakkil provides another example for topic (al-Mutawakkil, 1993, p. 142): “The person who does not love for others what he loves for himself—no good is hoped from him.”

He considers the entire phrase “the person who does not love for others what he loves for himself” as topic, because “the person” alone is not referential in Functional Grammar except within the full predicate that qualifies and specifies it. This raises a problem: the topic entering the predicate scope, even though as a whole it represents the discourse domain relative to the following predicate. Treating “the person” separately clearly indicates overlap between pivot and topic—especially since it is definite, generic, referential, and sentence-initial.

In our view, despite the logical differences al-Mutawakkil presents between pivot and topic, the fundamental problem for Functional Grammar remains the very adoption of the topic function. It is originally a formal function in the functional approach and thus external—unlike pivot and focus, which are the most important pragmatic functions in Functional Grammar. Yet the topic is crucial in speech (the noun on which speech is built, in Sībawayhi’s terms), deserving definiteness and fronting. This causes confusion when the pivot is fronted at the predicate’s beginning, resembling the topic’s natural position.

➤ ***Proposed solutions here:***

Either consider the topic a function capable of becoming internal and co-occurring with pivot when the latter is fronted—making it simultaneously topic and pivot (a proposal discussed by the Iraqi researcher Salāf Muṣṭafā Kāmil, 2022, p. 28). This is logical: it is topic at the sentence beginning and pivot around which discourse revolves. Although this violates the uniqueness of assignment principle (“no constituent bears two functions of the same type”), exceptions and conditions could be allowed if they help rectify imbalances in Functional Grammar, which is still under construction (less than half a century old).

Alternatively, reclassify external functions separately from pragmatic functions, because external pragmatic functions (topic, tail, vocative) cannot be compared to pivot and focus—the core of Functional Grammar, which play active pragmatic roles in discourse. External functions are primarily structural-formal (evident from their names: “topic” = beginning of speech, “tail” = end, “vocative” = often linked to vocative particles), despite their communicative importance.

2.2.3. Overlap Between “Focus” and “Tail”

The focus is an internal pragmatic function assigned to the constituent carrying the most prominent and important information. In contrast, the tail is an external pragmatic function assigned to the constituent that clarifies, modifies, or corrects information present in the predicate.

Despite this clear distinction, significant overlap appears in many of the examples provided by al-Mutawakkil for both functions. We present some of these examples below, attempting to analyze, discuss, and highlight the points of overlap. These include examples

cited by al-Mutawakkil in *Function and Structure: Functional Approaches to Certain Issues of Syntax in Arabic* (1993, pp. 145–146), as well as by the Algerian researcher Yaḥyā ‘Ayyūṣh in his doctoral dissertation *Toward a Functional Theory of Arabic Grammar* (2006, p. 412):

- Khālid did not buy only shoes; he also bought a coat.
- What Khālid bought was not shoes, but a coat.
- The exam is not tomorrow, but the day after tomorrow.
- The exam is not tomorrow but the day after tomorrow, and at ten o’clock.
- Fāṭima did not study medicine; rather, she also studied literature.

Compare these with the following examples of tail, also cited by al-Mutawakkil in the same book (al-Mutawakkil, 1985, p. 144):

- I met Zayd today, rather Khālid.
- Khālid visited me, rather ‘Amr.
- Zayd traveled this summer, rather he stayed at home.

The overlap and similarity are evident between extension focus, substitution focus, and restriction focus on one hand, and corrective tail on the other. This confirms that the problem of overlap among pragmatic functions in Functional Grammar is acute and requires regulation and treatment.

In defining substitution focus, for example, al-Mutawakkil states that it is assigned to the constituent indicating information that replaces information assumed by the addressee, appearing before or after *lā* or *bal*. In contrast, he defines corrective tail as providing an initial piece of information to the addressee, then the speaker realizing it is not the intended one (i.e., erroneous information), and adding a second, new piece of information that corrects the first—appearing in adversative constructions with the particle *bal*.

This is the primary source of overlap: both involve a form of opposition between two pieces of information. Contrastive focus involves two contrasted elements, and corrective tail likewise involves two elements—an initial erroneous piece contrasted with a second correct one. This is the core issue.

One might argue that focus can enter within the tail when the tail consists of a clause or predicate. This raises another problem similar to that of the topic when it consists of a clause (as in the earlier example: “The person who does not love for others what he loves for himself” constitutes one or more predicates). The same applies to the vocative, which may form an entire predicate, as in the recurring Qur’ānic phrase: “Yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū...” (“O you who have believed...”), treated in Functional Grammar as a vocative function despite constituting a complete predicate. This illustrates overlap among the three external pragmatic functions (tail, topic, vocative) with the predicate, even though they are fundamentally external to it.

➤ ***Proposed solution in this regard:***

Strict terminological regulation is needed, along with preserving the comma as an important formal marker and indicator of external functions (such as tail). The comma should be abandoned in cases involving any type of contrastive focus mentioned above.



2.2.4. Overlap Between Topic and Tail

Topic and tail are both external pragmatic functions. They resemble each other to the point of near-identity in some cases, differing only in position: topic precedes the predicate, tail follows it. This is primarily a structural-formal distinction.

In Functional Grammar, the topic performs the function of delimiting the discourse domain, with the predicate presented relative to it. The tail performs clarification, modification, or correction of information. Al-Mutawakkil distinguishes three logical types of tail. He also stipulates that tail must be non-extractable: it cannot be considered moved from one position to another via shifting (as in classical Arabic grammar), where topic and tail often overlap and merge into a single type—the topic, whose default position is initial but may be postponed for specific reasons (not discussed here).

This situation can create difficulties in handling the topic. Overlap appears in examples such as:

- Zayd, his father stood up.
- His father stood up, Zayd.
- Zayd, his father is ill.
- His father is ill, Zayd.

These examples clearly illustrate the strong similarity—particularly between topic and clarificatory tail. In sentence (1), “Zayd” is topic: a referential definite noun appearing before the predicate. In sentence (2), “Zayd” is tail: also a referential definite noun, but appearing after the predicate. This is a formal issue involving horizontal movement in the construction.

Despite the functional distinction between them, sentences of this type demonstrate overlap that is not resolved by the structural-formal aspect of fronting or postponing. As noted earlier, the external pragmatic functions are primarily structural-formal in nature. Although these constituents perform certain roles, those roles are secondary and less central compared to the prominent functions of pivot and focus.

If “Zayd” in sentence (1) contributes to delimiting the discourse domain—thereby enhancing discourse clarity and addressee comprehension—the tail, upon closer examination, performs the same role: primarily clarification of discourse that was previously ambiguous for the addressee. This mirrors the topic’s role in delimiting the domain for clarity. Without the topic in sentence (1) (“...his father stood up!?”), the discourse would be ambiguous and unclear; the topic is introduced to specify the domain and achieve clarity. This is clear, unambiguous overlap: both ultimately serve the single function of clarifying the discourse.

➤ Proposed solution:

As previously indicated, reclassify the external pragmatic functions or allow certain exceptions. Treating postponed topic (as in classical Arabic grammar) may be preferable in such examples, at least. The very name “tail” suggests something of this postponed or appended nature.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study does not aim to diminish the value of Functional Grammar by focusing on the problem of multiplicity and overlap of pragmatic functions. On the contrary,



we seek to highlight this issue and call upon specialized researchers in the field to raise and investigate it, with the aim of regulating and correcting it in a way that achieves greater efficiency and coherence in the theory. This study is a modest contribution, and our presentation of some proposed solutions falls within this context.

We have noted that such problems are justified, natural, and logical given the relative newness of Functional Grammar theory—whose age does not exceed half a century—compared to classical Arabic grammar, which spans over fourteen centuries yet still has many issues that provoke rejection, debate, and non-acceptance.

Proponents of Functional Grammar must clarify the theory's objective: Is it an approach to the sentence, to the text, or an approach to the sentence that can be extended and typologized to encompass the text, as the theory's leading figures—Simon Dik, Hengeveld, and al-Mutawakkil—maintain?

In our view, the multiplicity of internal functions (pivot and focus) primarily stems from attempts to analyze texts. We observed this in the subtypes of pivot, for example. This means that analyzing simple sentences used in discourse generally differs from analyzing complete texts or discourse as a whole. This may necessitate developing a pedagogical functional grammar specific to the sentence as a first stage, and an expanded functional grammar for text and discourse as a second stage.

As for overlap, it is a general problem affecting pragmatic functions of all types, impacting both sentence and text analysis alike. Its main cause is that Functional Grammar is an analytical-explanatory grammar, not a rule-based pedagogical one—as we have stated. This raises the larger question: Can Functional Grammar, in its current form and with these evident imbalances, serve as a suitable alternative to classical Arabic grammar for teaching and learning Arabic? Or is it an approach specific to researchers specialized in linguistic theories? Or has it not yet reached this stage due to such problems that require correction and adjustment? The road is long to achieving this goal, as it is a young science still in the process of formation, with its terminology not yet stabilized. Or is it a Western science developed in harmony with Western languages and unsuitable for Arabic? In that case, the solution for teaching and learning Arabic might lie in re-presenting the rules of classical Arabic grammar itself in a new form that relies on the language of discourse and usage at its simple, eloquent level—saving time and achieving the desired goal that brooks no delay. And God is the Granter of success.

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