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REVIEW ARTICLE AND DISCUSSION

FOCUS ON FOCUS[1]
A REVIEW ARTICLE OF *ASPECTS OF THE GRAMMAR OF FOCUS: A MINIMALIST VIEW* BY PRZEMYSŁAW TAJSNER

Motto:
"Chomsky's book *The Minimalist Program* is a sad example of spurious science, as it fails to satisfy basic scientific criteria, such as respect for data, unambiguous formulations, falsifiability, and also, on a different level, simple good manners" (Seuren 2004: 4).

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1. Introduction[2]

There are a number of reasons why I decided to write a rather extensive review article of Tajsner's book.

A. I was interested in the problem of focus for over 20 years during the 70s to 90s, publishing 2 books and some 30 papers on the subject. I have read Tajsner's book to learn what is new in this area.

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[1] I would like to express my thanks to my friends and colleagues whose help, as native speakers, has been invaluable. Special thanks go to Dwight Holbrook for proofreading the text and valuable comments.

[2] Square brackets indicate my consecutive numbering of examples. Original numbers are given in parentheses. References to pages of the reviewed book have the form (T 245). References to the questionnaire are marked (Q).

B. To my astonishment I discovered that none of my works, as well as many works of other authors, are even mentioned by Tajsner (one of my papers is mentioned in a footnote (p. 21), but it refers to iconicity, not to focus). Of many scholars of the Prague School for whom focus was the main theme in a span of 40 years of research, only Mathesius and Sgall are mentioned.

C. My astonishment became even greater when I found that practically all English and Polish structures discussed by Tajsner had been exhaustively discussed decades ago by many authors, including myself. I understand, of course, that the subtitle *A Minimalist View* limits the scope of the book, but the main title is *Aspects of the Grammar of Focus* which means that the book is on focus rather than minimalism. I consider it a non-academic practice (in the order of Seuren's "simple bad manners") to repeat examples and interpretations earlier research without citing them.

D. The situation appears to be even more perplexing in view of the fact that I have met Tajsner at conferences where we listened to each other's presentations on focus and word order, so Tajsner cannot claim ignorance of my views and works, just as he cannot claim ignorance of other research, for example, by Prague School linguists.

To my objections B and C, Tajsner answered in a private conversation that it is "common knowledge" ("a basis of language data") and that he does not have to make references to such previous research. What is "common knowledge" is a subjective judgment and far from clear, as there is no objective corpus called "a basis of language data". Tajsner makes frequent and highly inconsistent use of it.

By ignoring references to important and substantial research, Tajsner creates an impression that he is the first to introduce and discuss the problems in the field. The impression is exacerbated by his frequent use of expressions like "I (we) assume (…)", "An interesting example is (…)" before introducing topics discussed decades ago.

As I will demonstrate below this tendency not only applies to Tajsner only, but also to other proponents of minimalism in the last decade whom Tajsner quotes, accepting their views as original.

Another criticism is that in many places Tajsner expresses assumptions without offering support. They often turn out to be either wrong or ungrounded. This is at odds with his declaration that "the only proper way to form a theory of language is by applying the method of systematic, scientific and empirical study of the facts of language themselves (…)" (T 22). It seems that Tajsner considered unnecessary laboratory testing and consultations with native speakers of both English and Polish. This is quite odd, because the School of English

employs some 30 native speakers of English, and there is no shortage of speakers of Polish around. Adequate laboratory equipment is also available.

An example of Tajsner's careless statements is found on page 327 where he writes that "there is no change of canonical word order affecting the placement of nuclear stress, where, *as commonly assumed*, the canonical word order in Polish is SVO, and SVO_iO_d" (T 327; emphasis mine A.S.). The only source supporting this "commonly assumed" view is Witkoś (2007) mentioned in a footnote.

And at last, Tajsner's examples and their interpretation raise serious doubts. I am ready to accept the use of invented, unreal structures such as full answers to questions, as for example, when the question *Who told you to come?* is answered by *My mother told me to come* rather than *My mother* (*did*). The full structure serves to show the relation between topic and focus. However, sometimes Tajsner uses linguistically unacceptable structures, or interprets them wrongly (Seuren's "no respect for data").

I do not grant myself the right to discuss specific, model-internal solutions of minimalism, such as, for example, "scrambling", "merge" or "escape hatch", as I am not competent to discuss these issues. However, I do have the right to debate some theoretical foundations of minimalism from the general linguistics point of view, as for example, the relations between syntax and semantics. Any linguist can adopt a methodology that he thinks best serves his purposes. I expect the same attitude from my minimalist opponents. If they have serious arguments against cognitive linguistics, they have the right to bring them up. However, nobody has the right to criticize, as Tajsner does cognitive linguistics, any approach or field he lacks knowledge about, based on some antiquated (precognitive, in this case) notions.

This review consists of two separate parts. The first part is a critique of some general theoretical issues on which minimalism is founded. It has no effect on my assessment of the main issue of the book – that is, focus.

In the second part I address the phenomenon of focus, language data and their interpretation independent of any theory, though sometimes with questions about minimalist interpretation. Additionally I present results of a questionnaire I asked native speakers to fill out and results of interviews. In the concluding section I will repeat briefly my theses some 20-30 years old to enable the reader to assess their current relevance in comparison with Tajsner's interpretations.

2. Some theoretical reflections

I assume that Tajsner is right in claiming that the outburst of generative works on "the phenomenon of focus itself and other discourse-related phenomena such as topic and ellipsis has been unprecedented" (T 10). I can only express satis-

faction that the phenomena that had been discussed so frequently and thoroughly for many decades earlier, finally found the way to minimalism.

Defending the autonomy of language, Tajsner states that "It is only a methodological not an ontological thesis" and that "The fact that language should be studied in its own formal terms, without guidelines from observation of the surrounding reality does not implicate that the organization of language may not in essence be like the organization of other aspects of reality. What it postulates is that the only proper way to form a *theory of language* (not only syntax; emphasis mine A.S.) is by applying the method of systematic, scientific and empirical study of the facts of language themselves, without the recourse to the study of facts related to the surrounding extra-linguistic reality" (T 22).

As I declared earlier, minimalists are free to adopt such a methodological position as they wish, but, as they themselves admit, theirs has nothing to do with ontology, that is with the psychological reality of language use and also with the ultimate goal of linguistic research which is to build a model of language.

The quoted declarations are in conflict with the postulate of "systematic, scientific and empirical study of the facts of language themselves". What facts are they, if ontology is rejected? If they indeed study the "facts of language themselves", they should at least get the empirical analysis of language data and their interpretation right (Seuren's "respect for data"). Regrettably, some of the English and Polish examples (data) and their interpretation in Tajsner's book are questionable, and some are simply incorrect.

I want to argue that syntactic decisions, even in minimalism, are determined by semantics. The alternative would be to take a random set of symbols and manipulate them at will in meaningless combinations. Once a particular language category is selected, for example VP or PP adverbial, the choice becomes semantically charged, as every category involves a functional significance and representation by sets of meaningful lexical items. For example, the category of verbs corresponds to extra-linguistic reality by representing actions, activities, etc., (Langacker's 1986 "temporal relations"). Prepositions, on the other hand, represent mostly spatial relations. In other words, minimalists have no other choice but to draw from language categories which are everything but meaningless. Once such a choice is made, syntax is no longer autonomous.

I assume that initial structures and rules in the minimalist grammar are formulated so that at the end they produce semantically and pragmatically acceptable sentences.

Thus, a minimalist, as any other linguist, must first determine whether a structure is semantically/pragmatically acceptable, and then try to formulate rules which block unacceptable structures from the inventory of possible combinations. The assumption of the autonomy of syntax that minimalists have adopted reminds me of the American distributionists. At one point their main

claim was that language structures must be objectively described formally "in their own terms" without recourse to semantics. American structuralists believed that they could describe Indian languages objectively, being culturally alien to, and unfamiliar with the languages. However, they also had to adopt a procedure of asking native speakers whether a structure was correct. The native speaker was the ultimate judge, the "semantic component" in language analysis.

The formal approach advocated by minimalism has the same flaw. A language structure is analyzed only in terms of distribution and mechanical manipulations. However, the fundamental question is how minimalists select the initial structure for further manipulation. Do they create structures at random, or are there any reasonable criteria behind their decisions such that the final outcome of manipulations should be a communicatively functional utterance? "Function" is the key word here. It is function that is the essence of language. I assume that before minimalists start derivation, they have to select a language structure that will eventually function in communication, that is, make sense for language users. In other words, minimalists must first determine whether the structure they "scramble", for example, will produce a communicatively acceptable utterance. I use the term "acceptable" rather than "grammatical" on purpose. Beaugrande and Dressler (1980: 129) wrote that "uniform judgments about sentences were notoriously hard to obtain (cf. papers in Sebeok 1960). More comprehensive research has confirmed that difficulty beyond all dispute (cf. Heringer 1970; Ringen 1975; Greenbaum 1977; Snow – Meijr 1977)".

Tajsner's arguments for the autonomy of language are not convincing.[3] For want of positive arguments for the autonomy of grammar, he attacks cognitive linguistics, pointing out what he calls a flaw in the iconicity argument (T 21).

Tajsner's knowledge of cognitive linguistics is less than adequate. He mentions only a few works, not even the most important ones (T 21).

The radicalism and presumptuousness of the minimalist program surfaces in Tajsner's uninformed statements about cognitive linguistics. He writes that "(...) the speaker can do with words and stresses only what the grammar allows him to do", footnoting it with the following remark: "We abstract here from the obvious cases of the figurative use of language, poetry, word-play and other instances of the intended breaking of the rules of grammar" (T 12). In other words, figurative language breaks the rules of grammar and as such is outside the minimalist distributional grammar.

In another place Tajsner writes that "The point of departure for many explorations within CG is the formulation of the highly intuitive associations and analogies allegedly existing between language and other systems, external to

[3] See also Seuren (2004) or Lappin et al. (2000).

language" (T 23).[4] He adds in a footnote that "Examples of such analogies might be the concepts of a linguistic metaphor, schemata or a figure-trajectory dichotomy" (T 23, fn 9).

Tajsner's knowledge of cognitive linguistics comes, if at all, from the pre-cognitive era when metaphors were treated as linguistic, ornamental devices. This is indicated, among other instances, by the term "linguistic metaphor" which he uses to refer to the phenomenon. Far from this notion, for at least some three decades now cognitive studies have shown that metaphor is not linguistic but conceptual in nature, and that metaphorical expressions are not literary ornaments, but a matter of everyday language and, more importantly, of our conceptual system.[5] An informal estimation is that metaphors constitute some 80% (and metonymies even more) of language. Thus, Tajsner flippantly rejects some 80% of language as "intuitive associations" and ungrammatical. Take the following example as an illustration: *It's difficult for me to put my ideas into words* (Lakoff – Johnson 1980: 11). It is undoubtedly metaphorical and I should have thought also grammatical, but apparently not for minimalism. Regrettably, Tajsner does not offer any arguments why such sentences are ungrammatical (breaking the rules of grammar). I can only assume that minimalist grammar stopped at the selectional restrictions mechanism. Thus, minimalists would probably agree with the second part of Lambek's (1961) following observation: "At one extreme there are those who call every utterance a sentence, that is any string of words ever mouthed by poet or peasant. "*At the other extreme there are those who would declare cannibalism ungrammatical on the grounds that 'man' does not belong to the class of food-nouns*" (Lambek 1961: 167; quoted after Beaugrande – Dressler 1980: 129-130; emphasis mine A.S.). Rejecting figurative language as breaking the rules of grammar, the minimalist "would declare cannibalism ungrammatical".

Tajsner is also misguided when he uses the "figure-trajectory" dichotomy. Langacker (1986) introduced such well know dichotomies as "figure-ground", "profile-base" and "trajector-landmark", but not "figure" – "trajectory".

It is no wonder then that his arguments against Cognitive Linguistics are ill-conceived, based not on what Cognitive Linguistics is, but what Tajsner imagines or would like it to be.

There is one optimistic note, though. Tajsner writes (T 23) that "The existence of such analogies is not rejected *a priori* in recent generative projects, most notably in the latest versions of the minimalist program". This is probably

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4 Which I take to stand for "Cognitive Grammar", though a few lines earlier Tajsner uses the term "Cognitive Linguistics".

5 If we take Lakoff and Johnson's book of 1980 as the beginning; though the conceptual character of metaphors had been mentioned much earlier (see Fabiszak 2005).

what he later describes as "a new and inspiring research agenda". It is good news that minimalism seems to be opening up to other aspects of language, aspects that have been pursued since antiquity.

Tajsner is also wrong in claiming that "(…) the speaker can do with the words and stresses only what the grammar allows him to do" (T 12).

Language is replete with ungrammatical but acceptable utterances. As Beaugrande and Dressler (1980: 129) observed "(…) uniform judgments about sentences were notoriously hard to obtain (…)". They added that "It seems unlikely that theories of language can ignore the correlation between actual occurrences and theoretical models" (Beaugrande – Dressler 1980: 130). They conclude that "In effect, "grammaticality" becomes a partial determiner of acceptability in interaction with other factors" (Beaugrande – Dressler 1980: 131).

Finally, I think Tajsner's methodology in considering some expressions "out-of-the-blue" (e.g. T 63) is wrong. I refer the reader to various discussions of the problem by, e.g. Chafe (1976), Jackendoff (1972) and Szwedek (almost all papers). Instead of repeating arguments against the "out-of-the-blue" sentences, I will only quote the title of Lanin's (1977) paper: "You can take the sentence out of the discourse, but you cannot take the discourse out of the mind of the speaker".

3. Focus

Before discussing the treatment of focus in the book, let me explain briefly its nature. Focus has two aspects: the contextual, which indicates which part of the sentence is new and which is known from the context, and its intrasentential manifestation by means of sentence stress placement and word order.

The sentence stress may appear in two forms: the normal/neutral/non-emphatic and the emphatic. The emphatic stress placement is unpredictable and its role is contrastive in relation to the context, i.e. where the stressed item is in contrast to some other items that might be considered in its position.

The place of the sentence stress is within the new information section and, as I argued a few decades ago (Szwedek 1976, 1986), and will repeat my argument at the end of the present paper, in its non-emphatic form, it is associated with the category of nouns.

The phenomenon of focus and its relation to sentence structure were mentioned as early as the 17th and 18th century (see Szwedek 1986). One striking example is Barsov's Russian Grammar of 1783-1788 in which he discusses the sentence *Ja govoril t'eb'e* ('I told you') in all possible configurations of word order and stress placement giving appropriate explications comparable to those discussed by Jackendoff (1972). For example the sentence *Govoril ja t'eb'e* ('I *told* you') is followed by an explication *n'e umolčal* ('I did not remain silent').

Focus was one of the major issues of the Prague School, as well as of my own research of twenty years presented in two books and some thirty papers. And yet, this voluminous research, both of the Prague School and my own, has been given little or no attention by Tajsner, though most of his examples and analyses illustrating the focus phenomenon are strikingly similar to mine, as I will demonstrate below.

At the outset Tajsner states that "A practical problem for a formalistic approach is that the coding of focus must be independent of its interpretation within the so called information structure component, or else the postulate of grammar autonomy cannot be seriously sustained" (T 14).

As I indicated earlier, no language element is independent of its interpretation. If an element, like focus, is introduced in a language model, it is always for some purpose, and this purpose is communication whose main feature is semanticity. A simple question is why introduce focus into grammar in the first place, if at the initial stage of derivation it is devoid of any function (meaning). If we adopt the minimalist convention, we could insert any element into grammar, and then in the process of derivation delete it, because it has no function to perform. I want to assume, though I may be wrong, that minimalists choose not just any structure element that comes to their mind, but an element for some purpose.

Tajsner describes the process of focus insertion in the following words: "(…) a description of the phenomenon of focus starts at the lexical level, then its properties are crucially marked in narrow syntax and survive till after transfer to both phonology and semantics, to reach the above mentioned interfaces in the end" (T 19).

If the description of focus starts at the lexical level, then necessarily meaning is involved. If properties are crucially marked, what properties could they be? If purely formal, then possibly they are connected with the sentence stress and its distinctive acoustic properties. If, however, they are connected, for example, with the scope of focus, then a context is needed, and this takes us immediately to the meaning of focus in the given context.

Tajsner continues:

> Thus, we will not treat focus as a mere 'surface phenomenon', an incidental property of the output of syntactic derivation, an effect of the imposition of a marked intonation on a syntactic product leading to pragmatic and functional 'surface effects'. Rather we will attempt to show that the 'surface effects' of focus are a result of the grammar's precise, possibly 'optimal' or 'perfect' design, which infallibly leads to a generation of a class of sentences with a specific, marked focus interpretation and form. Thus, the derivation of focus sentences is seen as specifically 'crash-proof' and not simply a matter of the optional choice (Tajsner 2008: 19-20).

I am far from claiming that focus is an exclusively deep structure or surface structure phenomenon. What I believe is that such impressionistic statements, almost offensive expressions like "incidental", without any argument and support whatsoever, are discreditable in scientific discourse.

Let me only add that focus is a context-dependent phenomenon and as such cannot be an incidental matter of optional choice.

What is Tajsner's evidence for the incidental character of focus in the functional approach? If he ignored quite sizeable literature on the functional analysis of focus, and does not offer any arguments against it, his unsupported opinion has no value.

In this context I understand why Tajsner avoided Jackendoff's (1972) argument about the surface character of focus in the example *John is neither easy to please, nor eager to please, nor certain to please, nor inclined to please, nor happy to please*, in which none of the relevant phrases are deep structure constituents, though I assume that minimalist manipulations would account for this complex example with ease.

4. Scope of focus

Tajsner discusses the "scope of focus" in a number of places, but in some greater detail on pages 62-63 and 253.

On page 63 he concludes that "Thus, there is no difference in the way the cases of narrow and broad foci are pronounced" (T 63), with a natural consequence that "(...) there is no lexical semantic feature [new information], what is new may only be established in a context" (T 64). He repeats the latter thesis on page 253: "*What constitutes new information can only be determined from the context of the utterance and not from the utterance itself*" (emphasis mine A.S.).

Tajsner illustrates his claim with the sentence

1) Jack brought flowers to *Jill* (T [1])

in which the scope of focus will differ depending on the context. He contends that utterance (1) "is a felicitous response to question (2)".

2) What's up? (T [2])

"It provides information about Jack and Jill, who are individuals known to the hearer and the speaker from the universe of discourse" (T 253).

That interpretation raises some doubts. If *Jack* and *Jill* are known from the universe of discourse, they are not new information items, and so the stress cannot fall on either of them. A natural answer to (2) would be (1) with the

stress on *flowers* which is new information. If *Jill*, known from the universe of discourse, is stressed, the utterance is interpreted as contrastive: *Jill and not someone else*. The latter interpretation is unanimously confirmed by native speakers (Q).

Tajsner goes on saying that (1) can have different foci in different contexts:

[$_F$Jack brought flowers to *Jill*] as an "out-of-the-blue" utterance;
Jack [$_F$ brought flowers to *Jill*] in the context of "Jack's doing different things";

and

Jack brought flowers [$_F$ to *Jill*] in the context "Jack's bringing flowers to different people" (T 254).

Discussing these examples, Tajsner forgets to mention Chomsky (1972) whom he frequently quotes on other matters.

Chomsky (1972: 200) wrote that "The focus is the phrase containing the intonation center, i.e. the main stress. The phrase containing the intonation center could be any constituent which contains it, from the morpheme to the entire phrase or sentence". The sentence (also analyzed in detail by Jackendoff (1972: 232) that Chomsky uses as an illustration is (…) *Was it an ex-convict with a red SHIRT that he was warned to look out for?* with any of the following phrases as focus:

– (an) ex-convict with a red shirt
– with a red shirt
– a red shirt
– shirt.

Repeating what Chomsky (1972) and many other linguists have written, without acknowledging the source, Tajsner creates the impression that the analysis is the result of his own original research. How is the reader to know whether this is Tajsner's own original research or "common knowledge"?

Chomsky was not the first linguist to discuss the scope of focus. As early as 1967 Halliday stated that "Where the focus is unmarked, in other words, its domain may be the whole of the information unit. An item with unmarked focus may thus be represented as being ambiguous, as having the structure either given-new or simply new" (Halliday 1967: 208).

Similar observations were made by many other linguists. Reporting on an experiment, Pakosz (1981: 92) concluded that "The exact boundary line between the contextually bound and the non-bound (focused) parts of sentences (…) is less clearly marked, and in some positions it is virtually impossible to indicate its precise placement by means of phonetic cues only".

Further, Tajsner claims that (2) "may thus be understood as asking about different type of information, not available in the context. The distinguishing characteristic of information focus is thus that it may be understood broadly or narrowly, depending on the context" (T 254).

He adds that:

> The option of broad vs. narrow interpretation is conditioned by the placement of nuclear sentence stress in its canonical position. Information focus can thus *only* (emphasis A.S.) be associated with unmarked nuclear sentence stress, which in accordance with NSR [Nuclear Stress Rule], falls on the most embedded constituent in a structure, which in English coincides with the final, rightmost one (Tajsner 2008: 254).

We want to distinguish the situation described above from the one represented by the following exchange:

3) What did Jack bring to Jill? (T [6])

4) Jack brought *flowers* to Jill (T [7])

We see the role of focus in (4) as identificational, in that it specifically identifies a value of variable x (something) of a preposition [sic!]: *Jack brought x (something) to Jill*" (T 254).

If I understand Tajsner's argument correctly, information focus and identificational focus exclude each other. (1) represents information focus, that is, new information, and is not identificational, while (4) is identificational to the exclusion of information focus.

In other words, according to Tajsner, (1) in its narrowest scope interpretation (*Jill*), does not identify *Jill* (someone), and *flowers* in (4) is not new information.

Judging by these examples, the difference between the information focus and identificational focus is in the context, the difference between general questions (*What's up?*) and specific questions (*wh*-) which are naturally questions for specific identification which at the same time is new information. Thus, according to Tajsner, when we use *Jack brought flowers to Jill* as an answer to *What's up?*, it carries new information, but does not identify anything: neither the event, the subject, the verb nor the objects!

Additionally, I do not think that, as Tajsner claims, "(…) answer (4) might also be a felicitous answer to (5), but not to (6)". (4) is a felicitous answer to:

5) What did Jack do to Jill? (T [9])

but not to

6) What did Jack do? (T [10] 255).

First, (4) is unacceptable in the meaning intended by Tajsner, because it means that he brought flowers *to* Jill, but not necessarily *for* Jill. I think better versions would be with *for* instead of *to* or *Jack brought Jill flowers* (cf. Quirk et al. 1986: 54; "whenever there are two objects (in type *SVOO*), the former is normally the indirect object, and the latter the direct object").

Second, (5) is totally unacceptable in the context of (4). The question might be answered by *Jack spanked/hurt/offended Jill*, but not *brought flowers to Jill*. The incorrectness of (5) as a question to (4) has unanimously been confirmed by native speakers (Q 2).

5. Stress

As I noted earlier, one of the serious shortcomings of Tajsner's book is that it ignores earlier research. An example of this unprofessional lapse is the revelation which he finds in Reinhart (2006) and which he describes as follows: "Reinhart (2006) convincingly argues that there is nothing like absolute main stress, it is always established in relation to some other weaker (secondary) stress" (T 51: fn. 56). I do not know, of course, whether Reinhart reached this conclusion all by herself, but it needs to be pointed out that as early as 1942, Bloch and Trager (1942: 48) wrote that "it is not the absolute loudness of a syllable that is important, but the loudness relative to other syllables in the same utterance". This view was later repeated by *all* linguists dealing with stress (Lehiste 1970; Schmerling 1976, and many others).

Should Tajsner have written that Reinhart follows traditional description of stress, there would be no problem. However, the phrase "convincingly argues" creates an impression, which Tajsner obviously shares, that Reinhart was the first to discover that "there is nothing like an absolute main stress".

And again, why Tajsner treats this accepted knowledge as "uncommon" by quoting Reinhart, while treating identical observations of earlier scholars as "common knowledge" by ignoring them, is impossible to fathom.

Some of Tajsner's conventions are quite confusing. On p. 86 (fn. 18) Tajsner writes that he adopts a convention "by which main stress is marked with bold typed letters and secondary stress with regular-type capitals".

However, on p. 257 he states that "Unlike Kiss (1998), we would like to claim that contrastive focus can also be represented by non-cleft instances like (7)

7) *Jack* brought flowers to Jill (, not Billy)" (T [22]).

And he adds that "Thus, we propose to distinguish systematically cases like (8) from those like (9), where the use of capital letters in bold type indicates emphatic/contrastive stress which is audibly (and mentally) distinct from sentence nuclear stress assigned by NSR:

8) *Jack* brought flowers to Jill (identificational, non-exhaustive focus) (T [23]).

9) *JACK* brought flowers to Jill (identificational, exhaustive focus)" (T [24] 257).

The notation of these examples indicates that (8) is non-contrastive as compared with (9) which is contrastive (emphatic). However non-contrastive (8) does not differ from contrastive (7), apart from the following context "not Bill" that forces a contrastive interpretation, but then it is not the sentence that is inherently contrastive, but its interpretation that is contrastive due to the context!

Tajsner's claims tend to be rather careless with little regard to facts. On p. 257 he describes *JACK* as bearing an emphatic/contrastive stress which is audibly (and mentally) distinct from sentence nuclear stress assigned by NSR (Nuclear Stress Rule).

Tajsner offers no evidence for the above statement. It would be easy to determine acoustic parameters of emphatic stress, but Tajsner has made no attempt to ask or, even better, record native speakers to find out whether there really is an audible difference, or if it is only mental. There is no doubt that we indeed perceive some structures as emphatic, but as I suggested in 1986, discussing the two sentences:

10) I bought a *book* (T [2.75])

11) I *bought* a book (T [2.77])

"it is a matter of further research to determine whether it (interpretation) is emphatic because *bought* (11) has a larger than life" (Lehiste 1970: 151) realization of the same feature as *book* in (10), or because, in comparison with the normally expected stress on *book*, the stress on *bought* is unexpected and therefore perceived as (…) emphatic (Szwedek 1986: 88). I have to add that at the time when I was investigating the problem, the recording and analytic equipment was not as readily available as it is today.

Tajsner refers to the phonetic aspect in the footnote (T 60: fn. 76): "There is an open question of the phonetic (and acoustic) reality of such an (extra-long) contrastive stress. We tentatively assume its existence and, more importantly, we believe that its phonological presence is unquestionable".

This is an extraordinary declaration. First Tajsner *tentatively assumes* and *believes*, and then immediately finds his assumption and belief *unquestionable!?* As I remarked above, why not, in the first place, ask native speakers and phoneticians and do some relatively simple, laboratory homework?

On p. 60. Tajsner assumes after Kiss (1998) that there is a general distinction between *information focus* and *identificational focus*. He further claims that there is a difference between

12) My *mother* told me to come (T [52])

and

13) My *MOTHER* told me to come (extra strong stress)

The former answering the question:

14) Who told you to come? (T [54])

the latter answering the question:

15) Did your parents tell you to come? (T [55] 61)

A number of problems emerge from these examples. First, the phonetic difference, according to Tajsner, is that *MOTHER* has an extra-strong contrastive stress. I was refused access to an analysis of recordings of these two discourses made by native speakers. Therefore, I asked a number of native speakers for their judgment of the difference between the two stresses. The results are different from Tajsner's non-native intuition:

no difference	"more on" (12)	"very slightly greater" in (13)	"more on" (13)
7 speakers	1 speaker	1 speaker	2 speakers

In view of these results, Tajsner's claim is totally unsupported and his respect for data unprofessional (he did not even ask native speakers!).[6]

Of course, (13) may get an extra-strong stress, but so does (12), both in the contexts provided by Tajsner, assuming that some other persons could be involved.

Further Tajsner claims that the semantic difference lies in the fact that "(…) (12) identifies an individual inquired about by question (14) and (13) *exclusively* (emphasis A.S.) identifies the individual as the only (right) person who performed the action mentioned in question (15)" (T 61). Again, as in the case of *Jack brought flowers to Jill* this is contextual interpretation and not part of the meaning of (12) and (13).

I also have doubts as to the term "identificational". Can you identify an individual non-exclusively? If you say *My mother* as an answer to (14), does it mean it is not exclusive? Who else is then the individual who could have told

[6] I ignored answers that were simple interpretations of these discourses in terms of *My mother – My mother did – My mother told me to come* without mentioning the stress.

the child to come? To me Tajsner (he is not the only one) is affected and misled by the contrastive context of (15).

However, the mental aspect, which Tajsner, a strict minimalist, puts in parentheses, may be the most important factor in sentence stress perception as contrastive (emphatic).

If the normal/neutral sentence stress has its well-defined place (which I discuss in some detail below), then any departure from this position is perceived as non-neutral/non-normal, and thus emphatic (contrastive) regardless of the phonetic properties of the stress (intensity, frequency, time) which may be accompanying, but not decisive factors.

Basing on the native speaker's judgment as to the lack of difference in the phonetics of stress, the question is what is it. Certainly, one of the factors is the context, including the hearer's expectations based on world knowledge, the social and immediate situation.

Thus, the sentence stress is expected in a certain position in neutral interpretation. If it turns up in another position, the impression is that it is stronger – stronger that it would be in the neutral interpretation.

6. More examples

In the present section I am going to discuss more examples of what I consider to be serious faults of the book: referencing, language material, and its interpretation of all focus-related aspects: the relation of focus to sentence stress, the scope of focus and the neutral/emphatic stress distinction.

6.1. The sin of omission

As I mentioned earlier, very often, what Tajsner presents to the reader as new is in fact what was frequently discussed long ago and for decades. For example, he writes that "(…) there is no lexical semantic feature [new information], what is new may only be established in a context" (T 64). Such an observation has been noted in almost all works on focus and its scope (see Lanin 1977 mentioned above, Pakosz 1981, Prague School and Szwedek – almost every paper).

Sometimes Tajsner sets about defending a thesis that is a good candidate for "common knowledge". On p. 54 he writes that "(…) the thesis that topics can only be phrases which carry a [+definite] or [+specific] specification due to the presence of a lexical marker of definiteness (e.g. a definite article), or specificity (e.g. determiners like *cierta* or *pewien*) can hardly be defended. The right characterization of the situation is rather, that any type of phrase, whether equipped with a lexical marker of definiteness/specificity or devoid of such a marker can be fronted. After fronting, it may be interpreted as specific, definite, thematic, by the very virtue of appearing in a prominent position".

Tajsner does not say who he is defending the thesis against. Let me only recall Mathesius' (1939: 234) original characterization of theme as an element "from which the speaker proceeds" and many discussions of the "sentence initial position" in the later literature.

Another example of this cavalier attitude is the following statement: "We assume that sentence prosody may be marked or unmarked with respect to focus. The unmarked case is the situation in which no special focus intonation is used in the sentence (…) by contrast, a marked focus intonation will be a sentence melody in which the placement of a pitch accent is unpredictable from the general rule" (T 58).

Tajsner does not have to assume that sentence prosody may be marked or unmarked and that marked focus is unpredictable, because these facts have been known from the eighteenth century (Barsov 1783-1788; Bloomfield 1933; Bloch – Trager 1942; Schmerling 1976; Jackendoff 1972, to mention just a few).

As noted above, Tajsner has chosen to quote only relatively recent sources, passing over the earlier works, no matter how important they might be. One of the most frequent references is to Reinhart (2006). On p. 88 Tajsner writes that "Another interesting case mentioned by Reinhart is an instance of switch-reference like (16)

16) First Sue$_i$ [touched *Molly*] and then JACK [touched *her*$_i$] (T [22])

If Reinhart and Tajsner find this case interesting, they must think that this is something new ("uncommon knowledge") in linguistics. However, a structurally identical example was discussed by Akmajian and Jackendoff (1970: 125) as early as 1970 and elaborated by Szwedek (1976) for English and Polish. Here is the relevant text from Szwedek (1976):

> In 1970, Akmajian and Jackendoff noticed that the place of sentence stress determines the coreferentiality of pronouns. For example in:
>
> (4.67) John hit Bill and then George hit him.
>
> a) him refers to Bill if it is unstressed,[7]
> b) him refers to John if it is stressed. (Chomsky (1972) extended this to 'John or someone other than John or Bill').
>
> It is obvious that personal pronouns always have a coreferential interpretation and thus should not bear the sentence stress in normal intonation. Since all pronouns

[7] The text was typed in 1976 and therefore instead of italics words are underlined.

are coreferential, the interesting question is not whether they are coreferential (as in the case of nouns), but what their antecedents are. Let me first return to example (4.67) and modify it slightly to make it a bit more difficult, but at the same time more revealing.

(4.68) John hit Bill and then he hit him.

Assume first that he and him are interpreted as coreferential to John and Bill respectively and thus do not have sentence stress. The sentence stress would then have to fall on hit, identical to the verb in the first clause. In this form, the second clause, being identical to the first, would have no logical basis for existence. To receive a correct sentence we must change the verb. For example:

(4.69) John hit Bill and then he KICKED him.

with kicked as 'new' information and so stressed. Notice also that in this case both pronouns are unstressed and receive a coreferential interpretation.

If (4.68) can not have sentence stress on hit, then two other possibilities are left: with the sentence stress on he, as in

(4.70) John hit Bill and then HE hit him.

where a) him (unstressed) is coreferential to Bill , b) he is noncoreferential to John (Bill is excluded from consideration because his coreferentiality has already been determined), i.e., the stress denies a coreferential interpretation of the stressed item within the sentence. Thus, it seems necessary to distinguish extra- and intra-sentential coreferentiality (cf. non-linguistic and linguistic anaphora); with the stress on him, as in

(4.71) John hit Bill and then he hit HIM.

where a) he is coreferential with John, b) him is noncoreferential with Bill (John being excluded on the same grounds as Bill in b) above).

Notice first that the unstressed pronoun has a coreferential interpretation, and the stressed pronoun a noncoreferential interpretation within the sentence, regardless of their syntactic functions. Notice also that the sentence stress on any of the pronouns is of emphatic type. The explanation seems to be easy. In normal intonation the unstressed pronoun receives a coreferential interpretation. Therefore, what the sentence stress does in (4.70) and (4.71) is to deny the coreferential interpretation of the pronoun with the same-function noun in the preceding clause. That is, in (4.70 it means: specifically not-John, and in (4.71): specifically not-Bill. That John is excluded as a candidate-referent of him, in (4.71) is due to the fact that he is not stressed and must be interpreted as coreferential to John. However, if we remove the possibility of interpreting he as coreferential to John, as in (4.72)

(4.72) John hit Bill and then George hit HIM.

him will include John. But it will still have the meaning: not-Bill (Szwedek 1976: 88-90).

In 1980, I proposed that the "newness" of *HIM* (stressed) in (4.72), apart from "new" exophoric reference, lies in the signaling of the functional relation between *John* and *him*:

> It should be noticed that *John* is subject and agent, while *him* is object and patient [affected entity], which means that the relations between *him* and *John* are different than between *him* and *Bill*, the latter pair exhibiting agreement in grammatical function and semantic role. Similarly in a version of the above example:
>
> (8) John hit Bill and then he hit George
>
> when *he* is unstressed, it definitely refers to *John* (the same function and role), and if stressed, it may refer to *Bill* (different function and different role). Again the stress signals that the pronoun does not refer to the same function and the same role as in the preceding clause (Szwedek 1980: 426-427).

I called it "functional newness" "(…) in which referents are know from the preceding context, but their grammatical function in the sequence clause is different from in the preceding clause, (…)" (Szwedek 1984: 44), in other words the function is new in relation to the preceding clause.

One more remark concerning referencing. In a number of places Tajsner discusses the role of *only* in the interpretation of sentence stress. In one place he also mentions *even* and *too* (T 242). He describes their behaviour as a well known property of focus structures to associate with these "focus sensitive particles". It is to be regretted again that Tajsner's reference goes back only to Rooth (1992a), ignoring earlier, rather unique research on the subject – Horn (1969), Fraser (1971), Anderson (1972), Grochowski (1986), Jackendoff (1972) for *even*, and Szwedek (1986: 129-132, 144-145, 1990 and 1991) for *even*, *only* and *also*. Both Jackendoff and Szwedek discuss the relation between these particles and the stress in terms of association of focus. By Tajsner's criteria of what is common knowledge and what is not, it turns out that all the above mentioned authors belong to common knowledge, but Rooth's proposal is new, uncommon, as if the study of *even*, etc. began in 1992.

6.2. Weird interpretations

I find some of Tajsner's interpretation completely unconvincing and methodologically incorrect.

Tajsner (T 263) suggests that

17) The *baby* disappeared

is explained by postulating a structure of two identical subjects in one sentence, by introducing a copy of the subject ("baby"), as in

18) [$_{TP}$The baby disappeared {the baby}] (T [49])

Tajsner claims "that the application of the NSR [Nuclear Stress Rule] in (18) is automatically to the most embedded constituent, namely the copy of the raised subject" (T 263). "Next, of the two copies the one which carries less stress, i.e. the higher one, is deleted. The ultimate order is a result of a PF [phonetic representation] stylistic fronting of the subject which restores a canonical SV order" (T 264).

To put it bluntly, "the baby" is added in order to get the stress in the final position. Once the second "baby" gets the stress, the first "baby" is deleted and the second "baby" is raised to the subject position, so that the final result is (17).

Moreover, Tajsner holds that "The ultimate order is a result of a PH stylistic fronting (…)" What it means to me is that the difference between *The baby disappeared* and *Disappeared the baby* is stylistic only, and both are fully grammatical.

It would appear that in minimalist linguistics one can add, move, delete, etc. anything to satisfy some rules and to achieve the desired structural result without any regard whatsoever as to what functions such manipulations serve. Such is the result of fix on/putting methodology over ontology.

In Tajsner's opinion "The case (18) represents informational focus (i.e. to be used in an "out-of-the-blue" context, but it displays an effect of "stress shift" from the most embedded verb to the subject DP [determiner phrase]" (T 261).

As I have already mentioned above, there are no "out-of-the-blue" sentences. Everything is used in a context and/or co-text. Tajsner is right in claiming that (17) is all new information (information focus) and would be an answer to *What happened?*. However, I want to argue that "the exceptionality of the case" (stress in non-final position) stems not from "the defective nature of a VP headed by unaccusative verbs" (T 261), but from a general rule of stress assignment in particular contexts.

As I argued in many of my papers, in the "all new" information sentences (answering the question *What happened?*) the stress in *neutral* interpretation is associated with the nouns (even with definite reference) and thus cannot be placed on the verb. This is a general rule which also applies to other structures (see section 7. below).

It is also necessary to point out that the stress can also be put on the verb in (17), *The baby <u>disappeared</u>*, when the baby is known from the previous context, as an answer to the question *What happened with the baby?*

Another difficulty Tajsner mentions (after Cinque) is posed by "the unergative cases like (19) and (20) in which nuclear stress falls alternatively on the verb or the subject:

19) The boy *slept* (T [51])

20) The *boy* slept (T [52] 264)".

Tajsner follows Hale and Keyser's (1993) idea that "unergatives are hidden transitives". Their derivation involves a cognate object incorporated into the verb: *the boy slept* vs *the boy slept a sleep*" (T 264).

Clearly, Hale and Keyser did not notice that such structures, interpreted as transitive, are mentioned by Quirk et al. (1996) who describe them as containing O_d (that is, transitive) in such examples as *They fought a clean fight*, which is similar to *He slept a sound sleep*. However, while we can passivize the former – *A fierce fight was fought* – it would be very odd, if at all possible, to passivize the latter – *A sound sleep was slept*.

There are two problems that bother me in the discussion of this example. First, I would like to point out that the word "alternatively" implies that the stress can fall either on *boy* or *sleep* without a change in meaning and independent of context.

The other doubt I have is the way in which these sentences are derived. Tajsner explains that both (19) and (20) derive from

21) $[_{VP}[_{V}$ slept$][_{DP}$ a sleep$]]$ (T [53] 264).

He proposes to explain the difference in stress assignment, if I understand him, by the different time of deletion of the copy of the cognate object *sleep* in the derivational chain, again with absolutely no regard to the meaning of the two sentences. In other words, what is essential is the derivation not the speaker's intention.

(19) is explained in the following words: "If (…) V-to-v movement occurred in syntax, then the verb would be transferred to PF [phonetic representation] only at the CP [complementizer phrase] phase, and the copy of the cognate object would be immediately dropped at the lower phase, without NSR applying to it" (T 265). In other words the cognate object is added only to be immediately dropped.

(20) is explained as follows: "(…) the effect of the assignment of nuclear stress to the copy of the cognate object is lost, and no element gets nuclear stress at the vP phase. Next, at the CP phase, the subject DP [determiner phrase] gets a nuclear stress grid, and the option (20) is derived" (T 265).

I assume that these explanations are consistent with the minimalist program, but dropping an element at some phase, assigning the stress at another without explaining the motivation, appear to me like purely arbitrary decisions.

Of course, they are not, but only because such manipulations are semantically motivated, that is, they must produce a meaningful structure.

I would also like to add that such examples were discussed in detail by Schmerling (1976), Allerton (1978), and Szwedek (1986, 1997).

In her discussion, Schmerling asked which of the two, (22) and (23) has "normal" intonation.

22) *John* died (T [1])

23) John *died* (T [2])

She concluded that "it is not obvious that adopting a notion like 'normal stress' is going to prove useful" (Schmerling 1976: 56).

In 1986 and particularly in 1997 I proposed to analyze such sentences relative to the context.

John in (22) and (23) is obviously known to the discourse participants, hence the correctness of (25) and incorrectness of (26) in the context of (24):

24) Could I see John? (T [6])

25) John *died* (T [2])

26) *John* died (T [1])

and the correctness of (26) and (25) in the context of (24), although with different presuppositions.

27) What happened? (T [7])

28) *John* died (T [1])

29) What happened? (T [7])

30) John *died* (T [2])

In the latter case, prior mention of John being terminally ill and expected to die would be assumed (see the questionnaire for native speakers' similar judgment).

Exactly the same configurations and interpretations hold in Polish (see Szwedek 1997 for details).

The discussion of these examples shows that a mechanical manipulation of first adding and then deleting elements does not explain anything, because language in communication is not primarily structure, but meaning (cf. Langacker's 1986: 12 statement "Meaning is what language is all about").

At another place Tajsner claims that

31) Jack saw the *movie* (T [57])

is a case of pure information focus structure – "an unmarked interpretation in which the right-most constituent is focus, narrowly, or broadly interpreted, or alternatively, the whole sentence represents information focus (a case of "out-of-the-blues" utterance)" (T 267-268). If I read Tajsner correctly, his interpretation is completely wrong. I understand that the question which would generate a pure information structure, would be *What happened?* But the answer is incorrect in that form. (31) is contrastive or corrective and could answer such questions as *What did Jack see, the play or the movie?* (with *the play* and *the movie* mentioned earlier as possible events Jack had planned to see) or *Jack saw the play*; (*No*); *Jack saw the movie*.

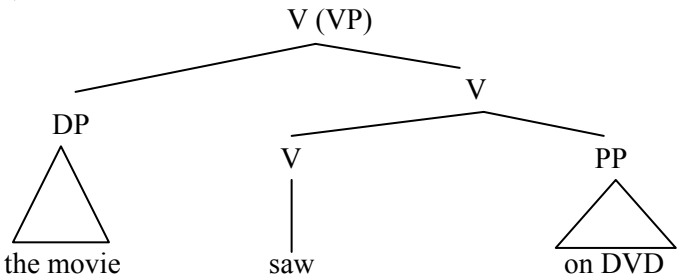
Having discussed (31) Tajsner states that "(…) the situation becomes even more complex in the case involving final adjuncts, like

32) Jack saw the movie *on DVD* (T [58])"

in which case "The crucial element of the analysis is the determination of the base position of the adjunct PP in (32)" (T 266).

He follows Chomsky (2001) in the interpretation of this example: "The PP is freely (which I read "subjectively", arbitrarily) adjoined 'at a separate plane' to V, or alternatively to VP, so that c-command relation between the verb and its complement is not interfered with. The structural option realized by example (32) could thus be as in (33) below, which accounts for the sentence final placement of nuclear stress on the adjunct PP"

33) (T [61])



(T 267)

I understand that the fact that "The PP is freely adjoined 'at a separate plane' to V, or alternatively to VP […] accounts for the sentence final placement of nuclear stress on the adjunct PP (…)", but it would also be nice to know what accounts for the "free adjunction" and "at a separate plane", not to mention such trivial, "maximalist" aspects as the meaning and context, which are carefully and explicitly avoided, as the following words testify: "Surely, we want to avoid any form of discourse linking, which might be implied by postulating a presence of some feature like [+ topic], or [+ old information] attached to a lexical item" (T 273).

Finally, Tajsner discusses

34) Jack *saw* the movie (T [62])

about which he makes "a crucial assumption" and sensational discovery: "Example (34) represents an instance in which a new informational effect is achieved. The verb becomes a focus of a sentence, while the elements *Jack* and *the movie* are presupposed parts, hence elements of discontinuous topic. This is a *crucial* (emphasis A.S.) departure from an unmarked interpretation in which the right-most constituent is focus, narrowly, or broadly interpreted, or alternatively, the whole sentence represents information focus (…)" (T 267-268).

A further claim Tajsner makes is

> that a new interpretive effect achieved in (34) and in other instances of "shifted focus" is not a result of the shift of nuclear sentence stress itself, but rather of the syntactic displacement of sentence constituents. Specifically, example (34) involves an instance of the movement of the object DP to an "escape hatch". a Spec. vP position (…) The result of the movement of a constituent from the most embedded position to the escape hatch is the avoidance of the assignment of nuclear stress under standard condition. (…) Under this proposal, the nuclear stress may be said to invariably fall in the same structural position in both types of sentences; those representing pure information focus and those representing non-exhaustive identificational focus. (…) In the latter case, a constituent base-derived in the most embedded site is raised to an escape hatch in syntax, hence some other element finds itself in the focus of nuclear stress (Tajsner 2008: 268).

As Tajsner states, the sole purpose of escape hatch and other manipulations is to avoid nuclear stress assignment. Tajsner has nothing to say about the ultimate aim to which all these manipulations should lead, that is, the differentiation of meaning. A sentence is for minimalists nothing more than a structure, the elements of which can be manipulated freely and at different planes within the minimalist theory of syntax, but not within any reasonable theory of language as a tool of communication among people.

I will offer a fuller explanation of the rules governing stress assignment later in the paper. At this point let me only say that, first of all, stress assignment is not due to structural manipulation, but is governed by what the speaker wants to say in a given context. And thus (34) can appear in the context of:

35) Let's go and see The Terminator

One of the rules of stress placement which I proposed as early as 1976 says that "In the presence of a definite noun the sentence stress falls on the final element (including nouns in adverbial phrases) following the noun (…) or on the preceding element if nothing follows the definite noun (…)" (Szwedek 1976: 74).

Both *I* and *the movie*/*The Terminator* are "given" nouns, so the only element the stress can fall on is the verb. Since, however, the verb is also mentioned in the previous sentence, the stress on "saw" is corrective. The sentence *Let's go and see The Terminator* clearly indicates that the speaker assumes that the addressee has not seen the movie, an assumption that the addressee corrects. Notice that this simple rule accounts also for the example (32).

By way of conclusion to this section, I wish to point out that if Tajsner had investigated earlier research, he would easily have found a number of my papers which discuss exactly the same structures. For example, in my 1976 book I analyze the sentences:

36) He bought a *book* yesterday

and

37) He bought the book *yesterday*

with the following comment: in the first sentence the stress falls on the indefinite noun (new information), while in the second sentence it falls not on the verb (which can also be new information), but on the adverbial, "in agreement with the general tendency to have the non-contrastive stress as far to the end of the sentence as possible" (Szwedek 1976: 73).

6.3. Focus in Polish

In the last chapter Tajsner discusses stress placement in Polish. In the Introduction to the book he postulates "that the variation of word-order alone in Polish is an effective strategy for deriving various options for identification focus. At the same time, any instance of "stress shift" on the non-canonical order should be analyzed as an instance of "polarity" focus in which the focused phrase is strongly emphatic and necessarily gains "contrastive" or "corrective" meaning"

(T 17). These are bizarre claims. Sentence stress is an integral part of any sentence, so separating word-order from the sentence stress is a purely speculative endeavor. Secondly, neither of these claims is true, as examples (50) (54) below clearly demonstrate. According to Tajsner's claims, (54) would be treated as non-canonical word-order and thus contrastive, which it is not.

Tajsner also assumes "that (his) earlier conclusions and predictions for English should also hold true for Polish insofar as they relate to the properties of the external C-1 system" and "(…) the model proposed for English will in general be applicable also to Polish" (T 323).

The specific problem that Tajsner has "to raise in the present context is how the variety of constituent order within the 'middle field' affects the 'focus interpretation' of Polish sentences" (T 324).

He would not have had to merely assume the similarity of behaviour of focus in English and Polish, and raise the problem of the variety of word order, had he read my papers and books in which I not only speculatively, but also experimentally demonstrated this similarity beyond doubt and discussed the variety of word order in detail. At this point I will refer to some of Tajsner's examples as compared to my proposals of some 30 years ago.

Discussing the following discourse (T 324):

38) Co się stało? (T [1])
What ref.-part happened
'What's happened?'

39) Dźwig uszkodził *spychacz* (T [2])
Crane damaged bulldozer
'A crane damaged a bulldozer'

Tajsner discovers that "There is zero case inflection on the nouns in (39) which may be taken to be either nominative or accusative. This should make sentence (39) truly ambiguous between two readings: 'a crane damaged a bulldozer' and 'a bulldozer damaged a crane'. In practice, however, the latter interpretation of (39) is suppressed, which shows a very strong preference for the canonical SVO order in the morphologically and contextually undetermined cases" (T 324-325).

I would like to point out that exactly the same phenomenon was reported by Świeczkowski as early as 1969 which I referred to in the following way in 1976. "In *Cielę widzi kurczę* ('A calf sees a chicken'), the subject and object are easily identified by the listener (subject – *cielę*, object – *kurczę*) on the basis of word order". Quoting Jakobson's formulation of phonological processes – transition from redundancy to distinctiveness, and from distinctiveness to redundancy – Świeczkowski (1969: 123) advances the following hypothesis: "ele-

ments which in Polish syntax are usually redundant (in this case word order), take over the distinctive function in constructions which do not possess the normally distinctive features (inflection)" (Szwedek 1976: 63).

Discussing the crane/bulldozer example further, Tajsner considers (39) in, among others, the context of (40).

40) Co dźwig uczynił? (T [9])
What crane did
'What did the crane do?'

This time, my objection is not directed at the analysis of focus, but at the very wording of (40). The Polish verb *uczynić* translates into English as 'perform', 'execute'. So as not to construe a crane performing a dance, the only alternative is to translate *uczynić* as 'to execute'. Without going into semantic details, such as, for example, the description of the verb *uczynić* as bookish in *Słownik Języka Polskiego*, I just wonder what reaction Tajsner would receive, if he decided to approach a crane operator and ask him *Co dźwig uczynił?* ('What did the crane execute?'), supposing, unlike the minimalist view, that language has something to do with reality.

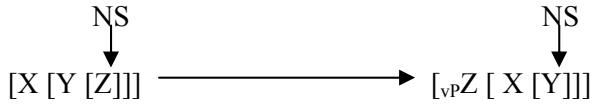
On p. 331 Tajsner proceeds to illustrate one of the possible strategies of nuclear stress placement in Polish:

> The second method uses the same philosophy; the stress falls always on the element most embedded in structure with different constituents allowed to occupy the position of most embedding. This can be achieved by allowing the constituents to "float" from their base position to some new location, with the nuclear stress steadily "anchored" in the same site. The illustration of this, which requires more relaxed word order patterns in a language, may be a Polish sentence (41)

41) Marek dał książkę *Ani* (T [13])
Mark_{NOM} gave book_{ACC} Anna_{DAT}
'Mark gave Anna a book'

> The canonical constituent order is changed in (41) so that the direct object precedes the indirect one. The nuclear stress falls on the final, rightmost element, which no longer is a direct but an indirect object (Tajsner 2008: 331).

The changes in the structure of example (41) are described as "stress-avoiding strategy" and shown in the following form:



The strategy is explained in the following way: "The constituent Z is placed in the escape hatch avoiding the effect of NSR and the nuclear stress falls now on a new element – Y" (T 331). However, no motivation is offered as to the why Z is put in the escape hatch in the first place. Avoiding the effect of NSR is not an explanation and without a motivation: hence this movement is purely arbitrary.

Tajsner also discusses sentence stress variants of (41):

42) Książkę dał Ani *Marek* (T [19])

43) Ani dał Marek *książkę* (T [23])

which he describes in minimalist terms. Almost accidentally he remarks, that (42) "fulfils the completive function by providing an answer to a potential *wh*-question: *Who gave Anna a book?*" (T 335). I wish to add that the same structure may also have a contrastive/corrective function. I discuss such constructions, with more variants, in contextual terms of coreferentiality in my 1976 book (Szwedek 1976: 55).

7. My views

In my books (Szwedek 1976, 1986) and many articles (e.g. Szwedek 1974) I discussed exactly the same structures and explained their meanings in particular context.

For example, as early as in my 1974 paper I discussed a transitive structure *Kobieta wzięła książkę* ('woman$_{Nom}$ took book$_{Acc}$') in all possible word order configurations and contexts. In that same paper I also discussed ditransitive structures like (42) and (43) above namely, *Chłopiec dał kotu piłkę* (boy$_{Nom}$ gave cat$_{Dat}$ ball$_{Acc}$) also in all possible word order variations (disregarding sentence stress at that point) and appropriate contexts.

My 1975 book has a separate chapter on *Coreference and sentence stress in Polish*, discussing, for example, transitive structures like *Czytałem wczoraj <u>książkę</u>*.

In 1986 I devoted a whole book (*A Linguistic Analysis of Sentence Stress*) to sentence stress in which I discussed the role of the sentence stress in, among many others, transitive structures (*Czytałem <u>książkę</u>*. p. 83) and ditransitive structures (*Mężczyzna dał chłopcu <u>książkę</u>* p. 79-80), as well as structures with complement PP (like Tajsner's examples in the footnote on p. 336) (*My cat liked to sleep under the <u>table</u>* p. 99).

One of the chapters in the 1986 book was devoted to various "association with focus" phenomena: *even*, *also*, *only*, and negation and question association with focus, which Tajsner almost totally ignores (except a mention of *even*).

Before a rather sour finale, let me present my conclusions which I began formulating as early as 1976, and summarized in my 1986 book.

> The principles of sentence stress assignment in neutral utterances can be formulated in the following way:
>
> 1. If there is a 'new' noun in the clause, it gets the sentence stress (cf. also Szwedek 1976: 74).
>
> 2. In the absence of a 'new' noun in the clause, the stress is assigned by default to other categories; in that case:
>
> a) the stress has to fall on an item as far towards the end of the clause as possible;
>
> b) the stress must not fall on a 'given' noun, if such is present, in which case it will fall either on the preceding lexical item, or on the following lexical item, if such is present" (Szwedek 1986: 86).

For contrastive/corrective stress there are no rules. It can fall on any lexical item in a clause, including an otherwise unstressed syllable: *I said <u>per</u>ceive, not <u>re-</u>ceive.*

Let me illustrate my conclusions first with a simple transitive clause

44) Czytałem książkę
(read$_{1\ sg\ past}$ book$_{Acc\ indef}$)

The context in which both constituents are new information is

45) Co robiłeś wczoraj wieczorem?
(what did$_{2\ sg\ past}$ yesterday evening)

The most common answer is

46) Czytałem *książkę*

As predicted by the rules above, "if there is a 'new' noun in the clause, it gets the sentence stress" (Szwedek 1986: 86).

However, given the relatively free word order in Polish, with both constituents "new", we should be able to change the word order and put the "new" verb at the end and stress it, like in:

47) Książkę *czytałem*

However, in this configuration the noun *książka* is interpreted as given in the previous context, and the "new" verb is interpreted as contrastive/corrective, answering a context like

48) Pisałeś wczoraj książkę?
(wrote$_{2\ sg\ past}$ yesterday book)

49) Nie. Książkę *czytałem*, a pisałem *wiersz*
(No. Book$_{Acc}$ read$_{1\ sg\ past}$, but write$_{1\ sg\ past}$ poem$_{Acc\ indef}$)

However, if we put the sentence stress on the noun, as in:

50) *Książkę* czytałem
(book$_{Acc\ indef}$ read$_{1\ sg\ past}$)

the sentence is perfectly correct as an answer to (45) *Co robiłeś wczoraj wieczorem?* And finally, if we place the sentence stress on the verb in:

51) *Czytałem* książkę
(read$_{1\ sg\ past}$ book$_{Acc}$)

the sentence has exactly the same corrective interpretation as in (47).

The same behaviour (this time with an adverbial) is illustrated by an English example. In the neutral interpretation, with the presence of a "new" noun the stress falls on it, in agreement with Rule 1, as in:

52) I was reading a *book* yesterday

Any other stress placement produces a contrastive/corrective interpretation. If the object is "given", the stress falls as far to the end of the clause as possible. When the "given" noun is followed by an adverbial the stress falls on the adverbial, as in:

53) I was reading the book *yesterday*

and the clause will get a corrective interpretation. If there is no adverbial the stress falls on the verb preceding the "given" noun, as in:

54) I was *reading* the book

and the clause will also result in a corrective interpretation, as predicted by Rule 2.

The stress may also be placed on *the book*, but then it is either corrective, or means "the Bible".

On p. 323 Tajsner writes that "(…) adjuncts may appear freely between the major constituents, and the superficial ordering of a direct object with respect to an indirect one is also free" (e.g. Tajsner 1997: 323). Again this is not true, as the example **Give me it* shows clearly.

Following Tajsner's "common knowledge" proposition, I understand that if Tajsner makes reference to his 1997 work, he treats it as "uncommon knowledge", revealing some hitherto unknown wisdom. I have to point out again that I discussed this problem in my 1976 book (pp. 55-56) in the form of examples with the direct and indirect object. I understand, of course, the natural tendency of people to emphasize their own contribution and ignore the contribution of others, but in Tajsner's current book this practice has taken on unacceptable dimensions.

8. Conclusions

Seuren's words in the motto to the present paper find full support in Tajsner's book.

1. Tajsner has no respect for data. Almost all his examples are invented, some are in incorrect English, many interpretations are questionable. Many of these faults could have been avoided if Tajsner had consulted native speakers and had done some simple but fundamental laboratory work, instead of providing us with intuitions and speculations.

2. Quite a few of his formulations are ambiguous, for example, about the reality of an extra-strong stress whose presence he *assumes* and *believes* and he immediately finds *unquestionable*.

3. Minimalist's explanations of the "insert X – delete Y – move X into the position of Y" (*The baby disappeared the baby*) are unfalsifiable.

4. It is "simple bad manners", unprofessional and unacademic to ignore earlier research while using exactly the same structures and interpretations. It looks like the aim of it is to pretend that all Tajsner's research on focus is original, his own. His argument of "common knowledge" does not hold water.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

To test the acceptability of some structures used in the book and discussed in the present paper I asked a number of native speakers both in the School of English and in Britain, to fill out the questionnaire below. Out of some 30 addressees only 12 answered (in paper or e-mail form). Some clearly misunderstood the questionnaire, answering, for example, "the stress is on X" indicating the stressed word which had already been indicated as stressed by bold type. To save space, I have chosen only 7 respondents.

Questionnaire and responses

I would appreciate if you could fill out the following questionnaire.
1. Please, mark the following dialogues as A(cceptable)/U(nacceptable)
2. Comment briefly on the acceptability of the dialogues and individual sentences.
3. Suggest a context in which unacceptable dialogues could be accepted.
4. Bold type indicates the sentence stress.

1. What's up?
   Jack brought flowers to *Jill*

DK *If it was a surprise that Jill received the flowers, rather than someone else.*
JK: *A. The emphasis on Jill suggests that the speaker is surprised that flowers were brought to Jill rather than someone else.*
AC: *ditto, but "took" sounds more likely than "brought".*
DH: *to Jill of all people!*
MD: *The stress on "Jill" seems to implicate that it's a surprise that Jack would bring flowers to her*
B: *The emphasis on Jill suggests that Jack brought flowers to her and not to someone else.*

2. What did Jack do to Jill?
   Jack brought *flowers* to Jill

DK: *If Jill was affected in some way by the flowers Jack brought her.*
JK: *U. This would be acceptable if the verb in the question were "bring"*

("What did Jack bring Jill?"). Alternatively it might be semi-acceptable (or rather nearly acceptable) if equal stress were placed on both the verb and the noun "Jack brought flowers to Jill". There remains a clash in terms of transitivity which (for me) cannot be fully reconciled.

AC: very unnatural exchange

DH: He didn't do anything to Jill

MD: the question implies a negative meaning. As a result, it doesn't seem as if the response fits the question.

B: The phrasing of the question ("do to") suggests some sort of violent act, physical or mental.

3. What did Jack do?
Jack brought *flowers* to Jill

DK: If we just don't know what happened.

JK: A / Semi-A though "brought" will also need to be at least slightly stressed. If a high level of stress were placed exclusively on "flowers" (as it might be, for example, in answering the question "What did Jack bring Jill?") the answer might appear somewhat unnatural.

AC: strange dialogue; the response is most unlikely, unless we know that Jill hates or is allergic to flowers, for instance, and therefore rejected Jack, who did not know this and is puzzled.

DH: acceptable

MD: acceptable

B: I would say "Jack brought Jill flowers", or "Jack brought flowers for Jill".