

On Theme in English and Spanish: a comparative study

JORGE ARÚS

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a contrastive study within the general, expanding context of applications of SFL (Systemic Functional Linguistics) to LOTE (Languages Other Than English). It compares thematic resources in English and Spanish, and thus seeks to contribute to the ever-widening understanding of the scope and functions of Theme and the different ways of organizing the message in the clause across languages¹.

The paper looks at issues such as the effect of Subject-drop – e.g. (i) *tengo frío* ([I] *am cold*) or (ii) *ayer te vi* ([I] *saw you yesterday*) – on thematic choices within the clause and, consequently, on the textual method of development. In particular, it will be argued that Subject-drop does not entail the existence of an implicit Subject Theme but rather the deployment of strategies different from those found in languages such as English. I will argue that the different thematic resources in English and Spanish are ultimately motivated by the different metafunctional tensions existing in each language.

Since the notion of *Theme* was first introduced (Mathesius 1924, 1939), many pages have been devoted to enhancing our understanding of this semantic category. Linguists within the sphere of the Prague School have discussed the role played by Theme, mostly in terms of its contribution to the communicative dynamism (CD) of the sentence and the establishment of the functional sentence

perspective (FSP). Among these studies, those by Trávníček (1961), Firbas (1964, 1965, 1966), Daneš (1964, 1974) and, again, Mathesius (1975) are the usual references in the literature. Drawing on this tradition, mostly in the line of Trávníček and Daneš, some of the most influential theoretical work comes from Michael Halliday within the context of Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL) in several insightful writings through the decades (e.g. Halliday 1967, 1968, 1970, 1985, 1994, and Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). Halliday's interpretation of Theme has in turn triggered a good deal of research seeking to shed some light on this sometimes elusive function, including monographic volumes (e.g. Ghadessy 1995; Hasan and Fries 1995).

Still akin to the general concept of Theme but adopting a more critical stance, authors such as Downing (1990, 1991) and Fawcett (2003) question some fundamental tenets of the standard approach to Theme, as we will see in section 2. In a less sympathetic position we find authors such as Huddleston (1988, 1991, 1992) or Hudson (1986), for whom the whole notion of Theme as we know it is questionable to the point of rejection.

Besides all the theoretical work for and against Theme, there is an increasing amount of application of the theory, notably to typological description (e.g. the thematic analysis of numerous languages in Caffarel et al. 2004). Rose (2001) is a good example of the combination of theory and description: comparing thematic analyses of different languages, he draws conclusions in terms of the global semantic roles of Theme. Rose's research shows how typologically oriented work can provide insights into the nature of Theme. The more languages we analyze in terms of their textual resources, in general, and thematic resources, in particular, the wider our understanding of the nature and role of Theme will be. This paper therefore presents a comparative study of thematic resources in English and Spanish with a twofold purpose. The first, descriptive goal is to compare thematic resources in both languages, which can be expected to reveal substantial contrast, given their different nature in terms of clause constituent ordering (see Arús 2004a, b). This contrast will have an effect on the second, theoretical goal, i.e. to contribute to the ever-widening understanding of the scope and functions of Theme and the different ways of organizing the message in the clause across languages.

This is not the first time that Theme theory and/or analysis has been applied to Spanish. Munday (1988, 1997), Taboada (1995) and McCabe (2002) offer thematic analyses of Spanish which in some respects are very close to the line followed in the present paper, notably as regards the assignation of thematic status to the Process, rather than the unexpressed Subject, in Subject-drop realizations. These authors operate within a comparative English-Spanish framework, like others dealing with a number of Theme-related issues, but less directly connected with our concerns here. McCabe and Alonso (2001), for instance, explore Theme in English and Spanish from a cognitive perspective, to see how far Theme selection is influenced by the way speakers perceive reality. Downing (1999, 2004) also chooses a comparative approach to focus on Absolute Themes and left-dislocated constituents, respectively. Lavid (2004) looks at a number of textual issues in English and Spanish, including thematic resources, in the application context of multilingual natural language generation.

Other, non-contrastive studies (e.g. Downing 1997; Hidalgo Downing 2003) exist, but a contrastive approach seems particularly helpful in the application of thematic analysis to Spanish. This is due, among other things, to the substantial differences between English and Spanish in terms of metafunctional interplay (see Arús 2004a), which makes contrastive study so productive.

The paper unfolds as follows. Section 2 presents a succinct overview of some of the main criticisms and alternatives suggested to the standard theory of Theme – i.e. Theme as described by Halliday – in the light of the more detailed study of the issue in Arús (2007). Section 3 presents and comments on the results of a thematic analysis of two stories, one in Spanish and one in English. Section 4 interprets those results, while the final section offers some conclusions both in typological, descriptive terms and, theoretically, in terms of the light that this contrastive account may shed on the understanding of Theme.

2. A SHORT HISTORY OF THEME

Arús (2006) deals with the problems around Theme; for a fuller account of the different approaches see Butler (2003:128-145). Nevertheless, it will be helpful to summarize my interpretation of the conflicts regarding Theme, pinpointing the reasons underlying, in my opinion, some of disagreements and to state my position, as background to the theoretical discussion deriving from the contrastive textual analysis in section 3.

Since I am particularly interested in the conflicts over the standard, Halliday-an interpretation of Theme I will not go into the early split into the combining approach – i.e. Theme as point of departure and as Given – and the separating approach – i.e. Theme as point of departure but not necessarily as Given – the latter being the most widely held SFL interpretation of Theme (for those unfamiliar with SFL terminology, see the definition of Given in section 4.1). These initial divergences are well explained in Fries (1981) and Davidse (1987), so we can focus here on other, more recent disagreements.

The standard description of Theme has been formulated by Michael Halliday rather consistently over time, starting in the late 60's (Halliday 1967, 1968, 1970) and running as recently as the first two editions of *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (henceforth *IFG*, Halliday 1985, 1994). The description, as it appears in both *IFG1* and *IFG2* is as follows: 'The Theme is the element which serves as point of departure of the message; it is that with which the clause is concerned' (Halliday 1985:38, 1994:37). In this 'double-sided' – as Downing (1991:122) calls it – description, it is the second part, i.e. the reference to the concern or 'aboutness' of Theme, that has triggered a number of reactions both within and outside SFL.

As I argue in Arús (2007), negative reactions to the mainstream description have perhaps been produced by a too literal reading of 'that with which the clause is concerned'. The most direct attacks have arrived from outside SFL, notably Huddleston (1988, 1991, 1992) and Hudson (1986), who are so troubled by the 'aboutness' of Theme that they are led to reject Theme altogether.

Within and close to SFL, two challenges to the standard theory of Theme also concern the pervasiveness of the 'aboutness' feature. Downing (1990, 1991)

suggests ‘a dissociation of Theme in the sense of “initial element” from topic’ (1991:127), thus stretching the line of the separating approach, on the grounds that the initial element is not always what the clause is about, as shown by (1) in Downing (1991:123):

- (1) In 390 B.C. *the Gauls sacked Rome*

Similarly, Fawcett (2003) also observes that Theme is very rarely what the clause is about, which is supported by his identification of ten kinds of Theme in virtue of their discourse purposes, only one - the Subject Theme - being what the clause is about.

The point made in Arús (2007) is that much of the disagreement over Theme seems to stem from a too literal reading of the second part of the standard description of Theme. I take the reference to the ‘aboutness’ of Theme to be an infelicitous rewording of the first part of the description. It is rather contradictory to say that a clause is concerned with or about **one** element of the same clause; the clause is not about a single element but rather about the chunk of experience that the **whole** clause construes. Even if we assume the description is a broad way of saying that the Theme is the element with which **the rest of the clause** is concerned, which would eliminate the incongruity, there are still reasons to think that the intended meaning is different. In fact, the more one takes that part of the definition at face value, the more another function is evoked: Subject. Eastwood (2004:132) defines Subject as ‘the starting-point of the sentence, the thing we are talking about’. The resemblance to the standard description of Theme is almost uncanny, but it is food for thought. We know that saying that the Subject is the starting-point of the sentence is an overgeneralization, taken simply to mean that the Subject position is grammaticalized in English. As for the ‘aboutness’ of Subject, it is undeniable that whenever this is placed in its unmarked initial position, the rest of the clause expresses something about it. It is no wonder, then, that Fawcett (2003) identifies Subject Theme as the only kind of Theme the clause is about.

The first part of Eastwood’s definition of Subject, therefore, shares something with the second part of the traditional description of Theme: neither is to be taken literally. My claim is that the latter simply divides the clause into two parts: the starting element – what the clause is (going to be) about – and what comes next, i.e. the rest of the clause. This seems an infelicitous way of rephrasing the first part of the description, i.e. that the Theme is what allows us to start the clause.² This has had a double adverse effect. Firstly, the ‘aboutness’ feature has sidetracked many linguists from the discursive function of Theme. The hardest dissents on Hallidayan Theme (Huddleston 1988, 1991, 1992; Hudson 1986) and the reactions to them, (Matthiessen and Martin 1991; Martin 1992, 1995) pivot around the ‘aboutness’ issue, i.e. they are the result of a misunderstanding of sorts, in which the discursive function remained, for a long time, rather neglected.

IFG3 represents a turn of events in this respect, and the description arguably appears much improved, avoiding any reference to ‘aboutness’ and stating the discursive role of Theme. This is identified now as ‘the element which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that which locates and orients the

clause within its context' (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004:64). Theme had already been similarly described by Matthiessen as 'the point of departure of the clause as message. It sets up the local context for each clause', adding that

'This local context often relates to the method of development of the text; that is, the Theme is selected in such a way that it indicates how the clause relates to this method and contributes to the identification of the current step in the development' (1995:794).

By hinting at the discursive function of Theme, the descriptions in Matthiessen (1995) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) achieve an additional goal. By explicitly assigning Theme the role of locating and orienting the clause within its context, and by referring to the method of development, the new definition successfully clarifies why the point of departure, i.e. the first part of the definition, is important. This not only keeps us from thinking of Theme in the misleading terms of 'aboutness' but also allows the different names used in the literature to refer to Theme to come into their own. It is easier to see now why Theme is the 'perch' (Martin 1992), on which speakers rest in the unfolding of text, or the 'peg' (Halliday 1970) which pins each clause to its context (or, rather, cotext); Theme is the foothold which permits us to advance in our logogenetic development, each clause representing one step.

As we see, there is no 'concern', no 'aboutness' in the true essence of Theme. In fact, systemicists, as well as other functionalists, seem to have been always aware of its true nature, even if this was not reflected in the explicit standard, original description. A look at the vast research on discourse, in particular on method of development, shows that the discursive function of Theme has always been clear. Only when discussing the nature of Theme, rather than doing Theme analysis, has the 'aboutness' issue posed problems, as in the references cited above, although authors like Fries (e.g. 1981, 1995a, b) have been able to do a large amount of research on theoretical questions related to Theme without allowing the 'aboutness' issue to distract them from its true discursive function. The *IFG3* description is thus particularly welcome, it being the main reference book in systemic theory. There are still contested issues around Theme, however, such as the extent of thematic potential within the clause, i.e. how far Theme extends, a point on which multilingual typological analysis has a lot to say (see Rose 2001) and which, as we will see in due course, is also clarified when looking at Theme discursively and not as 'what the clause is about'.

3. CONTRASTIVE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

In this section I will first present the results of the thematic analysis of two short stories, one in Spanish, *El Real del Sastre* 'The Tailor's Silver Coin' (henceforth *El Real*) by F. J. Briz Hidalgo, the other in English, *The Legend of the Bradford Boar* (henceforth *The Legend*) by E. H. Hopkinson. I have chosen two different stories rather than the bilingual version of the same story in order to avoid any kind of language transfer which may result from the translation and affect the thematic choices made in the target language. By looking at two texts in their original versions, we ensure that both of them are true instances of the meaning potential of

each language, thematic resources included. Both texts are available online (see bibliography), and their thematic analysis, with the corresponding English gloss for *El Real*, can be accessed on

http://web.me.com/teruyak/Systemic__Typology__Group/Spanish__Stories.html, hosted by the Systemic Typology Group website.

In the analysis, the focus is on ideational Theme at simple clause level, i.e. I have analyzed all clauses with a finite verb, disregarding non-finite clauses as well as clausal themes in a clause complex.³ By doing so, I am seeking to concentrate on Themes that really are the speaker's choice, since, as Halliday and Matthiessen point out, 'the further one moves from this most open-ended form of the clause, the more the thematic options are restricted by structural pressures from other parts of the grammar' (2004: 98). That will be the concern of future research.

Textual and interpersonal Themes have been left out; thus, in clause complex (2), from *The Legend*, two instances of Theme are counted, i.e. the two highlighted *you*, without bothering to analyze the textual Theme *If* or the clausal Theme *If you were to journey to the North of England*.

- (2) *If you were to journey to the North of England, you would come to a valley surrounded by moors as high as mountains*

As for the types of ideational Themes, these have been grouped into four categories according to their function in the clause: Subject Themes such as those in (2), Processes (3), Circumstantial Adjuncts (4), and Other, the latter comprising Complements (5) and non-circumstantial Adjuncts (6). Since there is no instance of a non-circumstantial Adjunct in the English text, this is illustrated by a clause from the Spanish text.

- (3) ... *and set out for the Manor House as quickly as he could*
 (4) *In this valley is the city of Bradford*
 (5) ..., *a strange device you might think*
 (6) *A mí me da igual que esté enfermo*
 to me me give PRES-3SG same that be-PRES SUBJ-3SG ill
 'I don't care if he's ill.'

The reason why ideational and interpersonal criteria are combined in my classification of Theme types is practical. Thematized ideational participants have, at the same time, an interpersonal function. Since we should be able in principle to thematize any ideational participant – that is certainly the case in both English and Spanish – a classification following ideational criteria would not be very relevant. Interpersonal criteria, therefore, seem to be the ones to consider and that is basically what I do in my classification. However, I refer to 'Processes' because it is more economical than referring to 'Finite + Predicator'; as for Adjuncts, I differentiate between circumstantial and non-circumstantial because it is among the former that we find those Themes which, according to some (e.g. Downing 1991), do not exhaust the thematic potential of the clause. The latter, on the other

hand, are participant functions realized by means of a prepositional phrase (e.g. Agents in passive constructions), thus exhausting the thematic potential.⁴

In the thematic analysis, two possibilities were considered: thematized circumstances a) exhaust the thematic potential, and b) do not exhaust the thematic potential and the theme includes the ideational constituent following the circumstance(s). This, because discrepancies exist on this point, epitomized by Downing's (1991) afore-mentioned distinction between initial element and topical Theme. Additionally, Rose, drawing on textual analysis by Teruya (2004), shows that languages such as Japanese often have a circumstantial Theme followed by a participant Theme, respectively serving the different discursive purposes of text staging and identity chains (Rose 2001:127). As Rose (2001:126) points out, this possibility is also considered by Halliday in the analysis of English clauses such as (7), adapted from Halliday (1994:64), where *Robert* is a displaced Theme which would be the unmarked Theme were the marked topical Theme to be reworded as a dependent clause (Halliday 1994:66):

(7) <i>For all his integrity and high principles,</i>	<i>Robert</i>	<i>pulled...</i>
Marked Theme	Disp. Theme	Rheme

By including both possibilities, i.e. only circumstance as Theme and circumstance plus nuclear participant as Theme, I am simply deferring the explanation of my position until the final section, when a number of conclusions will be drawn based on my interpretation of the results of the thematic analysis presented. For the time being this procedure should satisfy both those who stop their analysis at thematic circumstance and those who extend it to the following ideational element. In any case, as we can see in tables 1 and 2, the results do not vary greatly in terms of the percentages of each type of Theme.

THEMATIZED ELEMENT	CIRCUMSTANCE EXHAUSTS THEME	
	NO (83 Themes)	YES (71 Themes)
Subject:	25 (30%)	21 (30%)
Process:	29 (35%)	22 (31%)
Circumstantial Adjunct:	13 (16%)	13 (18%)
Other (Complement, non-circumstantial Adjunct):	16 (19%)	15 (21%)

Table 1. Theme analysis of *El Real del Sastre*: number of tokens and rounded-off percentage as compared to total number of Themes

THEMATIZED ELEMENT	CIRCUMSTANCE EXHAUSTS THEME	
	NO (102 Themes)	YES (85 Themes)
Subject:	69 (68%)	55 (65%)
Process:	15 (15%)	12 (14%)
Circumstantial Adjunct:	17 (17%)	17 (20%)
Other (Complement, non-circumstantial Adjunct):	1 (1%)	1 (1%)

Table 2. Theme analysis of *The Legend of the Bradford Boar*: number of tokens and rounded-off percentage as compared to total number of Themes

The figures in tables 1 and 2 show a considerable contrast between the two languages, however. Only the percentages for Circumstantial Adjunct as Theme are similar in both, which was to be expected, since there is in principle no reason why one language should thematize circumstances more than the other, above all when looking at texts of the same genre. The remaining figures, also as expected when one is familiar with both languages, are very different in the English and Spanish texts. Subject Theme is greatly favoured in English, in keeping with its condition of unmarked Theme (see Halliday and Matthiessen 2004:73), but not in Spanish, where its frequency – less than one half of the English 65 to 68 percent – is roughly similar to that of Process as Theme. This, in turn, is significantly higher in Spanish than the English 14 to 15 percent. It goes almost without saying that these figures are easily explainable by virtue of the Spanish tendency to leave pronominal Subjects unexpressed as a by-product of verbal inflection, whereas the situation is basically the reverse in English. Further implications of the contrasting figures will be discussed in the next section.

Finally, Complements and non-circumstantial Adjuncts as Theme, while being only slightly more frequent than thematic Circumstantial Adjuncts, are in Spanish overwhelmingly more present than in English. As we will see later, the explanation for this is once again related to the inflectional character of Spanish verbs and the implications thereof for the order of interpersonal constituents.

After this brief, preliminary evaluation of the figures resulting from the contrastive analysis, we now turn to the details of interpreting the implications for the purposes of this paper, i.e. the description of thematic resources in both languages and the contribution to a better understanding of Theme.

4. WHAT THE CONTRAST REVEALS: INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

4.1 SUBJECT-DROP AND THEME

As said above, different degrees of verbal inflection are highly accountable for a number of differences in the realization of English and Spanish processes, which ultimately affect thematic structure. For instance, as said, the fact that Spanish verbal inflection includes the specification of person in all tenses explains why pronominal subjects are left unexpressed in unmarked realizations, and hence the high incidence of Process as Theme in that language. Examples (8) and (9), from *El Real* and *The Legend*, respectively, illustrate this point. The inflectional suffixes *-aron* and *-o* in (8) indicate, among other things, third person plural and third person singular respectively, which makes the expression of the Spanish pronouns for *they* and *he* unnecessary. Conversely, the English clause complex in (9) requires the expression of the second person singular pronoun in both simple clauses.

- (8) *Cuando acabaron el reparto dijo: ...*
 when finish PAST-3PL the sharing said PAST-3SG
- (9) *If you were to journey to the North of England, you would come...*

As is also well known, the scarce person information provided by the English verb, if we exclude the third person singular in the present, has a lot to do with

the grammaticalization of the position of clause constituents, the Subject typically preceding the rest.⁵ In Spanish, by contrast, the inflectional manifestation of the agreement between Subject and verb facilitates the identification of the former on morphological bases, making Subject specification through relative positioning unnecessary. This explains the overwhelming difference in the percentage of thematized Complements and non-circumstantial Adjuncts in the two languages. Whereas roughly 20% of Themes in the Spanish story belong to this category, as illustrated by (10), there is only one such realization in *The Legend*, and a rather marked one for that matter, as we saw in (5), reproduced as (11) below.

- (10) *Tantas deudas acumuló que llegó un momento en que le resultó...*
 (lit.) 'So many debts (did he) accumulate that came a time in which him it resulted...'
 (11) ..., a strange device *you might think*

The Spanish example contains two Complements as Theme, i.e. *Tantas deudas* 'so many debts' and *le* 'him', if we take the circumstantial relative *en que* 'in which' as not exhausting the thematic potential of the relative clause. The very same example incidentally includes an instance of post-verbal Subject, i.e. *llegó un momento* (literally 'came a time'), one more by-product of the higher flexibility of Spanish in this respect. Process as Theme, therefore, is not only the result of Subject-drop, but also of Process ^ Subject realization. I will expound on this in 4.2.

Coming back to the clauses with Process as Theme as the result of unexpressed pronominal Subject, I would now like to explain why, like others (McCabe 2002; Taboada 1995), I have discarded the alternative possibility of considering their textual structure to be one of (Subject Theme) ^ Process, i.e. to see them as clauses with elliptical Subject Theme. There seem to be, in fact, a number of reasons why we should consider the Process rather than the elliptical Subject as Theme.

In the first place, and given that Spanish, like English, seems to be a language in which the Theme can be identified through its initial position in the clause,⁶ it would be highly problematic to assign thematic status to an unrealized element Second, in a language like Spanish, in which the Subject position is not grammaticalized, there is no reason why the unrealized Subject should be in initial position in the event of being expressed. Many of the instances of Process-initial clauses in the Spanish story are in fact not clauses with elliptical Subject, but rather clauses with Process ^ Subject order, as illustrated by (12, 13):

- (12) *Por la noche* *entraron* *en la Iglesia* *doce ladrones...*
 At night enter PAST-3PL in the church twelve thieves
 (13) *Se adelantó* *el más valiente de los bandidos*
 Step forward PAST-3SG the bravest bandit

This means that in clauses with unexpressed Subject we cannot simply assume that the Subject would be in thematic position in the case of being expressed.

Another argument for not needing to seek the Theme in the elliptical Subject is that the information conveyed by the Subject pronoun when it is realized is

in fact present through the verbal inflection, which is the same reason why the pronoun is left out. Thus, by thematizing the Process we are in a way doing likewise with the Subject, present in the inflection, resulting in a contribution to the method of development similar to what is achieved in English by thematizing the Subject. This position is also held by Matthiessen (2004), reporting on inflected languages such as Arabic. As Rose points out:

It is possible that these languages from around the Mediterranean thematise the verb in order to present affixed participant identities as 'backgrounded' points of departure for the message. This strategy would then serve a comparable discourse function as the cliticisation strategy of Pitjantjatjara, French and other languages. (2001:130)

In order to further understand the motivations behind Subject-drop, we also need to consider clause information structure. Theme tends to coincide with Given in English, and the same can be said about Spanish. The Given element being concerned with 'information that is presented by the speaker as recoverable' (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004:91, as opposed to the non-recoverable information, or New), we can see why pronominal Subjects are dropped in Spanish: Subject-drop is a way of presenting the Subject as **very** Given. In English, however, the grammaticalization of the Subject position precludes this phenomenon except in those cases where the 'givenness' is so obvious that it would make it redundant, notably in certain clause complexes with convergent Subject such as (14, 15) from *The Legend*:

- (14) *The huntsman leaped from his hiding place and shot the boar...*
- (15) *...the huntsman opened the boar's mouth and cut out its tongue, taking that as proof instead, and set out for the Manor House...*

In (14), the second clause presents elliptical Subject and thus has the Process *shot* as Theme, whereas in (15) this happens twice, with *cut out* and *set out*. Since this occasional Subject-drop in English takes place within clause complexes, it does not affect the method of development of the text significantly.

The fact that the Subject is dropped because of its high degree of 'givenness' has repercussions also at the level of cohesion. In this respect, Spanish behaves similarly to Portuguese, where 'in terms of cohesion, the presence of pro-forms referring to something else for their interpretation cannot be distinguished from their elision' (Barbara and Gouveia 2004:170). Although these authors argue in favour of the Theme-drop interpretation for Portuguese, we can safely apply their words on cohesion to Spanish. We simply need to understand that the elision of pro-forms does not entail Theme-drop but Given-drop. This – again borrowing terminology from Barbara and Gouveia (2004:171) – creates cohesion through non-deployed Reference, i.e. leaving out the Given implies that we are talking about a recoverable entity. This, in turn, allows us to see the very different nature of Theme and Given; the former has to be expressed so the text can develop, whereas the latter, by virtue of its very essence, is perfectly dispensable. What I mean by this is the following. Since English rarely presents Subject-drop, Theme and Given often conflate. In Spanish, conversely, every time the Subject is

left unexpressed, the Given – or part of it – is also left out, whereas the first realized experiential constituent functions as Theme. That the whole or only part of the Given is left out in Spanish, together with the dropped Subject, will depend, basically, on whether that Theme is the Process or a participant. If it is the Process, as in (16), the whole Given is dropped together with the Subject, and the entire clause, including the Theme, falls towards the New side of the information continuum:

- (16) *decidió* *fingir su muerte*
 Theme Rheme
 New \longrightarrow
 ‘he decided to fake his death.’

On the other hand, if the Theme is a participant, as in (17), only part of the Given goes away with the Subject, the starting element retaining the rest:

- (17) *Lo* *metieron en un ataúd*
 Him put into PAST-3PL a coffin
 Theme Rheme
 Given New \longrightarrow
 ‘they put him into a coffin.’

4.2 DIFFERENT METAFUNCTIONAL TENSIONS

I now turn to another phenomenon which further clarifies the motivations underlying thematic choices in both languages. The previous section’s discussion on Subject-drop was confined to justifying the assignment of thematic value to the Process rather than to the elliptical pronominal Subject in Spanish Process-first clauses. It also referred to the most salient reason why Spanish word order is less fixed than in English, i.e. the morphological Subject-verb agreement. This, however, is a rather superficial explanation, failing to account for the actual motivations behind the choice of the starting experiential element of the clause. A metafunctional approach allows a more thorough investigation of these, and this section, based on Arús (2004a, b), will pursue such an approach.

The results for Theme in table 1 showed that the percentage of clauses with Subject Theme in English (65 to 68 percent) is roughly the same as that of clauses with Theme other than Subject in Spanish (around 70%). As López Meirama (1997) tells us, the position of Subject is grammaticalized in English. Yet, as claimed in Arús (2004a, b), we cannot simply conclude that word order is more flexible in Spanish than in English and leave the issue at that. Spanish is more flexible only at the interpersonal level; experientially speaking, however, all languages need to be able to move participants in the clause in order to comply with thematic and information, i.e. textual, requirements. I follow Matthiessen’s (1992) idea that the textual metafunction uses the experiential and interpersonal metafunctions as carriers of textual waves, yet I argue that the way in which these waves affect the ordering of ideational and interpersonal constituents is different in English and in Spanish, owing to different metafunctional interplay in each language.⁷

The way in which metafunctional interplay affects thematization is as follows. When we want to thematize an experiential constituent in English, we have to ensure that we allow for interpersonal constraints, notably Subject ^ Finite order in declarative clauses. Thus, if in taking a process such as (18), from *The Legend*, we found ourselves compelled by a different local context to thematize the Goal *the boar's mouth*, we would naturally resort to a passive such as (19) so as to preserve the Subject ^ Finite order in the Mood element.

- (18) *The huntsman opened the boar's mouth*
 (19) *The boar's mouth was opened by the huntsman*

In Spanish, on the other hand, the picture is quite different as attested by the approximately 20 percent of processes in *El Real* thematizing Complements (e.g. 20):

- (20) *Lo metieron en un ataúd*
 Him put into PAST-3PL a coffin
 'they put him into a coffin.'

or non-circumstantial Adjuncts (e.g. 21) and the high number of clauses with Process followed by Subject, as in (22, 23):

- (21) *a mí me debe un real y me lo tiene que pagar*
 to me me owe PRES-3SG a real and me it must PRES-3SG
 'he owes me a silver coin and he must pay me back.'
 (22) *Por la noche entraron en la Iglesia doce ladrones...*
 'At night entered the church twelve thieves...'
 (23) *Se adelantó el más valiente de los bandidos...*
 Step PAST-3SG forward the bravest bandit...
 'The bravest bandit stepped forward.'

We see that we do not need to satisfy specific interpersonal requirements in the unfolding of the Spanish clause, which means that the textual waves can move experiential constituents around without keeping an eye on interpersonal structure.⁷ This does not mean, however, that the order of clause constituents is entirely motivated by textual reasons. Let us have a look at (24) from *El Real*, where the Process *llegó* precedes the Subject *el bandido*. López Meirama (1997) reports on how the order of Spanish clause constituents, notably the Subject, is to a great extent determined by features of control/volition (whether participants act intentionally), definiteness (whether participants are expressed as specific or as indeterminate) and animacy (whether participants are animate or inanimate), the presence of one or several of these features favouring pre-verbal and not post-verbal position.⁹ Of the three features, control/volition often seems to be the most influential, as illustrated by (24), where the process is not expressing what the Subject/Actor *el bandido* did, but rather what happened at a given moment, thus depriving the Subject of intention and pushing it to the end.

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| (24) <i>En ese preciso momento</i> | <i>llegó</i> | <i>el bandido...</i> |
| At that precise moment | arrive PAST-3SG | the bandit... |

Unlike what happens in English with the interpersonal and textual tension, the three parameters determining the relative order of Spanish clause constituents do not really conflict with textual requirements. The combination of degrees of control/volition, definiteness and animacy result in such an array of possibilities that it often allows the expression of a similar meaning with the Subject in different positions. For instance, the process in (24) could be re-expressed as *En ese preciso momento el bandido llegó...*, i.e. Subject ^ Process, by which *el bandido* would appear to be more in control of the situation. This, however, would not essentially alter the meaning of the process and could therefore be used instead of (24) without drastic consequences for the textual method of development. This contrasts with the grammaticalized character of the Subject ^ Process order of English declarative clauses, which is much less negotiable than what we have just seen for Spanish. This non-negotiability is shown by the English gloss provided for (24), 'at that precise moment arrived the bandit', whose Process ^ Subject instantiation is barely grammatically acceptable in English, unlike the non-literal translation, 'at that precise moment, the bandit arrived'. Additionally, the cline of newsworthiness in English can often be rather flat, since neither the Process nor the participant is more clearly New than the other mostly in processes with only one nuclear participant, i.e. middle. In such cases, English tends to respect the Subject ^ Process order dictated by the interpersonal structure, as illustrated by (25), whereas Spanish places the Subject before or after the Process according to the parameters discussed in the previous paragraphs.

- (25) *...as tales of the boar's atrocities grew.*

The process in (24), above, is an example of Process ^ Subject, whereas (26), below, exemplifies the order Subject ^ Process, again reversible if we wanted to deprive the Subject, *todos los vecinos*, of any trace of volition and thus present the process as a happening rather than as an action.

- (26) *todos los vecinos se le acercaban...*
All the neighbours would come up to him...

In the concluding section I will come back to the issue of flat information cline and its implications for thematic choice. Before that, having compared the rather different metafunctional interplay existing in English and Spanish, I would like to move beyond the clause and have a quick look at the effects of the differences discussed thus far on the method of development of text in both languages.

4.3 METHOD OF DEVELOPMENT

In section 2 I put forth my reasons for curtailing the 'aboutness' feature of Theme, which left us with a function whose main *raison d'être* is to be found at the discourse rather than clause level. This is why a contrastive study of Theme like this

has to finish by looking at Theme at work, i.e. contributing to the method of development in the unfolding text. The method of development was first defined by Fries (1981) precisely as the role of Theme in textual unfolding, a systemic version of what in other functional approaches (e.g. Downing and Locke 2006:246-249) is called thematic progression, after Daneš (1974).

Tables 3 and 4 show the thematic analysis of the clauses at the beginning of each story. As specified above, non-finite clauses are excluded because their context is narrower than that of the other clauses and they do not really allow choice of Theme. Progression is not looked at in terms of whether the Theme in each clause picks up a thematic or a rhematic participant from previous clauses; instead, the focus is exclusively on the resources employed by each language to set up the local context every time a new clause is added to the patchwork of discourse. For a better understanding of the communicative dynamism of the original, the English translation of Spanish clauses in table 3 reflects Spanish structure, which explains the oddity of some of the translations.

We can see by comparing tables 3 and 4 that both languages use different resources to achieve similar results. Where English resorts to pronominal Subject Themes every time there is a continuity of identities (*you, it, he, etc.*), Spanish thematizes Processes, whose verbal affixes serve to track the identities in the same way as the English personal pronoun (*se metió, se fingió, fingía, etc.*).¹⁰ As Rose says about a number of languages from around the Mediterranean: “Identities are then only lexicalised when they change or require foregrounding for any reason” (2001:130, see quote from the same source in section 4.1, above). The Themes in table 3, *Tantas deudas, todos los vecinos, todo el pueblo, etc.* are examples of lexicalized identities due to change, whereas *él* or *yo* illustrate lexicalization for foregrounding purposes.

<p>Uno de los habitantes de un pequeño pueblo de Castilla debía dinero a casi todo el mundo. ‘one of the inhabitants of a little town in castilla owed money to almost everybody.’</p>
<p>Tantas <u>deudas</u> acumuló... ‘so many <u>debts</u> (did he) accumulate...’</p>
<p>que <u>llegó</u> un momento... ‘that <u>came</u> a time...’</p>
<p>en <u>que</u> le resultó imposible pasear tranquilo por la calle... ‘in which <u>him</u> it resulted impossible to walk on the street...’</p>
<p>porque todos los vecinos se le acercaban reclamándole el dinero que les debía. ‘because all the neighbours would come up to him claiming back the money which he owed them’</p>
<p>Para <u>terminar con esta terrible situación</u> se <u>metió</u> en la cama y... ‘in order to end this terrible situation (he) <u>went</u> into bed and...’</p>
<p>se <u> fingió</u> enfermo. ‘<u>pretended</u> to be ill.’</p>
<p>Todo el pueblo pasó por su casa para visitarle. ‘the whole village stopped by his house to visit him.’</p>
<p>Él se quejaba tanto y... ‘he complained so much and...’</p>
<p><u> fingía</u> tan bien la inexistente enfermedad que... ‘<u>feigned</u> so well the invented illness that...’</p>
<p>daba mucha pena y... ‘(he) <u>gave</u> a lot of pity and...’</p>
<p>los vecinos, pensando que se iba a morir, comenzaron a perdonarle las deudas. ‘the neighbours, thinking he’d die, started to pardon his debts.’</p>
<p>¡Pobrecito, <u> qué enfermo</u> está! ‘poor guy, <u>how ill</u> he is!’</p>
<p><u> dijo</u> el molinero ‘<u>said</u> the miller’</p>
<p>yo le perdono <u> lo que</u> me debe. ‘I pardon him <u>what</u> he owes me.’</p>
<p>¡<u>Qué mala cara</u> tiene! ‘<u>what a bad face</u> he has!’</p>
<p>decía el lechero ‘<u>said</u> the milkman’</p>
<p>yo también le perdono. ‘I also pardon him.’</p>
<p>Y así, <u>poco a poco</u>, todos los vecinos del pueblo fueron perdonándole las deudas, todos menos uno: el sastre, que siempre decía... ‘and so, <u>little by little</u>, all the neighbours of the village pardoned his debts, all but one: the tailor, who would always say...’</p>
<p>¡Pues <u> a mí</u> me debe un real y... ‘well <u>to me</u> he owes a silver coin and...’</p>
<p><u> me</u> lo tiene que pagar! ‘(he) <u>me</u> must pay!’</p>

Table 3. Method of development of an excerpt from *El Real del Sastre*

If you were to journey to the North of England,
you would come to a valley surrounded by moors as high as mountains.
In this valley <u>is</u> the city of Bradford,
where <i>once</i> a thousand spinning-jennies hummed and clattered, spinning wool into money for the long-bearded mill owners.
And, if you were to go into the city and visit the fine City Hall,
you would see there the Crest of the City of Bradford, created by those same mill-owners to celebrate their achievements in the days of their pride.
It shows a boar's head sitting on top of a well,
<i>a strange device</i> you might think,
but the reason for it is a matter of legend.
There was once...a fearsome boar which lived in a wood just outside the manor of Bradford.
our forefathers tell us
It was a source of great trouble to the folk of that place, bringing terror to the peaceful flocks and ravaging the countryside around.
But, worst of all, it most liked to go about the well that was in the wood and drink its water,
so that the people of Bradford would not visit the well, for fear of the boar.
<i>Each day</i> , the situation became graver and graver,
as tales of the boar's atrocities grew.
<i>Eventually</i> , these reached the ears of the Lord of the Manor who , seeing the severity of the problem, proposed a solution.
Anyone...who could kill the boar and bring its head to the Manor House as proof, would be rewarded with land and with fame throughout the district.
he said
The people of Bradford rejoiced at this proclamation
but one question still remained: who would kill the boar?
Many felt tempted by the handsome reward,
but the thought of the boar with its deadly tusks and ferocious temper soon put paid to their ambitions.
However, there was one huntsman, a bold and cunning man, who was determined to claim the prize in spite of the boar's reputation.
He went to the wood with his good bow and his stout spear
and <u>lay</u> in wait by the well, for the creature to appear.

Table 4. Method of development of an excerpt from *The Legend of the Bradford Boar*

The chains of Themes in tables 3 and 4 also contribute to support the idea that Theme is not what the clause is about. For instance, the clauses in the first paragraph of the English text are not about *you* or *a thousand spinning-jennies* or *a strange device*, etc. These Themes undoubtedly **participate** in expressing what the sentence in which they occur is to be about (after Firbas 1987:142). Also following Firbas we can say that:

[The Theme] may **indicate** that the sentence is about one of the central actions of the discourse, or simply about the same notion as the preceding sentence(s) has (have) been concerned with. It may indicate that the notion concerned will be dealt with from a point of view that has already been mentioned ... or from a point of view that has not been mentioned before. (1987:142-143; my emphasis)

This for me is key to the misunderstanding around the notion of Theme. Theme certainly **indicates** what the clause is about, but always in relation to the textual chunk to which it belongs. This is different from taking Theme as what the clause is going to be about. Semantically speaking, therefore, we should not look from Theme **into** the rest of the clause but rather from Theme **out to** discourse. Once we make our discourse-motivated choice of Theme, we can then look into the clause to see how our thematic choice determines the unfolding of the rest of the clause.

Because Theme is not what the clause is about in the sense that 'being about' has too often been understood, I propose not to refer to ideational Theme as 'topical', which only further confuses the issue. Instead, calling it simply 'ideational Theme' or 'experiential Theme' will do more justice to its true nature. There is, however, one kind of ideational Theme that contains a higher degree of topicality, i.e. what (following Martin 1992b: 437-439) is usually referred to as 'hypertheme'. As Martin and Rose (2003:181) explain, hypertheme is predictive, establishing expectations about how the text will unfold. Downing and Locke (2006:248) identify as hyperthemes or 'global topics' those to which the different Themes of Theme-Rheme structures relate.

Martin and Rose (2003:184, following Martin 1992b: 437-439), also speak, at an even higher level, of 'macrothemes' which allow prediction of hyperthemes in the same way as hyperthemes allow the prediction of clause Themes. Since macrothemes set up the widest context of all Themes, they have the highest degree of topicality. Hyper and macrothemes do not have to be clause constituents; often they are whole clauses, called, in fact 'topic sentences' by Martin and Rose (2003:181). Among the Themes included in table 4, it would be hard to find a clause Theme also functioning as macro or hypertheme; the closest we may find to one is *in this valley*, which arguably sets up the global context where the whole story takes place. On the other hand, we find the 'topic' of the story, the Bradford Boar, introduced, as is often the case in stories, by means of an existential clause (27), which would be the story's macrotheme:

(27) *There was once ... a fearsome boar*

Several Themes in the story refer back to the boar, as we see in (28-33), until the beast is killed and the focus is shifted towards the two huntsmen, who become

hyperthemes, the first introduced by an existential clause (34) and the second thematically (35). Again, the clause Themes in (28-33) are not what the clause is about; they rather indicate that the clauses whose onset they represent relate to what the story is about as well as to the participants therein:

- (28) *It was a source of great trouble to the folk of that place*
- (29) *it most liked to go about the well that was in the wood*
- (30) *tales of the boar's atrocities grew*
- (31) *around noontime, the boar came grunting out of the trees*
- (32) *The boar was an enormous animal*
- (33) *The head was too heavy*

- (34) *there was one huntsman...*
- (35) *a second huntsman ... came on the scene*

I have allowed myself a little digression from the contrastive account of this paper in order to support my position on the nature of Theme by means of the discursive approach taken in this section. Coming back to the Spanish/English comparison, we have seen that the methods of development are rather similar in both languages in spite of the differences in interpersonal organization at clause level. This is only logical if we remember that both languages are equally flexible at experiential level, as we saw in 4.2, and the method of development of a text is created through the thematization of experiential constituents.

5. CONCLUSION AND FINAL REMARKS

This paper started with a twofold goal, i.e. to compare thematic resources in English and Spanish and to contribute to the understanding of the scope and functions of Theme and the different ways of organizing the message in the clause across languages. To achieve the first, descriptive goal, I compared the stories of *The legend of the Bradford Boar* and *El Real del sastré* in terms of the grammatical functions realizing ideational Theme. I have claimed that the frequent cases of Subject-drop in Spanish do not entail an elliptical Theme but rather that the first realized ideational element functions as Theme. Drawing upon other multilingual typological studies (e.g. Rose 2001; Matthiessen 2004), I have argued that the reason for analyzing clause-initial Process as Theme is that the inflected nature of Spanish verbs allows us to track constituents in the same way as the personal pronoun in English. The implication is that the substantial differences found between English and Spanish at instantiational level are more superficial than may appear, and result in different strategies for similar methods of development at discourse level. These similarities suggest, as McCabe and Alonso (2001) also conclude, that speakers of both languages organize reality in similar ways.

Figures 1 and 2 show the system networks specifying the different resources deployed by each language, based on the analysis of the stories. If English Subject Themes and Spanish Process Themes serve similar textual purposes, the main

difference is to be found in the relatively high proportion of Complements and, mostly, non-circumstantial Adjuncts as Theme in Spanish. This, as explained in section 4.2, is due to the different metafunctional interplay existing in each language. In English the interpersonal and textual metafunctions are in a constant tug-of-war concerning clause constituent order (e.g. [Subject/Theme:] *The boar's mouth* [Process:] *was opened* [Adjunct:] *by the huntsman*, but never *[Complement/Theme:] *the boar's mouth* [Process:] *opened* [Subject:] *the huntsman*). By contrast, Spanish interpersonal order is less demanding and allows the textually motivated movement of experiential constituents around the clause independently of their grammatical function (e.g. [Complement/Theme:] *Lo* [Process:] *metieron* [Circumstance: place:] *en un ataúd*). Hence the 20 percent of Complements and non-circumstantial Adjuncts as Theme in Spanish versus roughly 1 percent in English (and hence too the higher incidence in certain genres - e.g. journalistic - of the passive in English than in Spanish, though the lack of passives in the story genre investigated here in either language has kept me from looking at this issue). In any case, the thematization of Complements and non-circumstantial Adjuncts in Spanish presents some difficulties in the translation of texts from Spanish to English, as discussed in Arús (2004b), mostly in terms of balancing - in the target, English text - a moderate use of passives with the preservation of the communicative dynamism of those clauses.

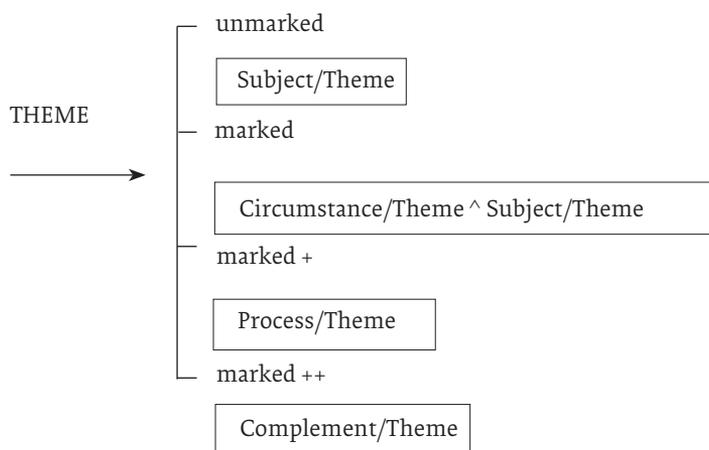


Figure 1. Most general system of THEME in English

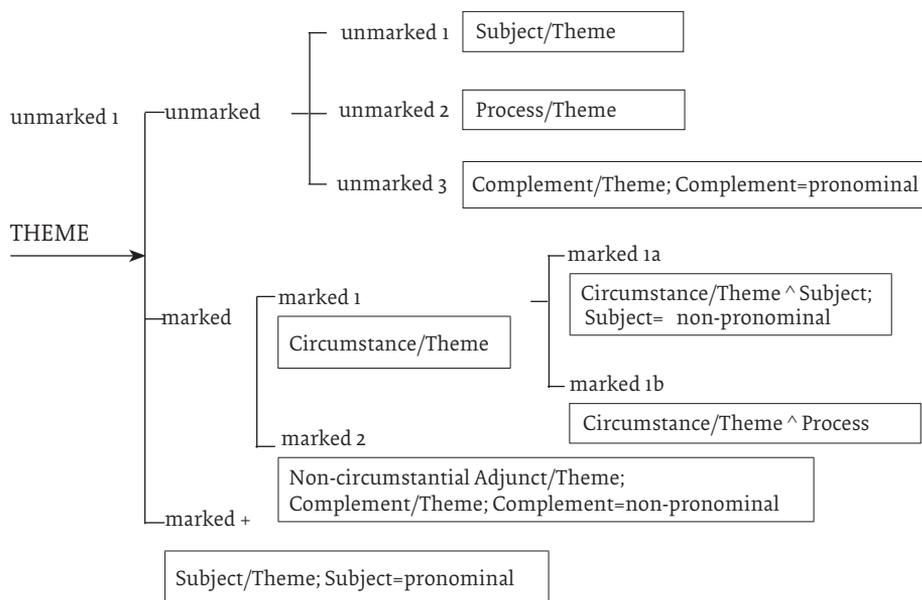


Figure 2. Most general system of THEME in Spanish

As figures 1 and 2 show, the approach taken to Theme in this paper has been rather general, without delving into questions of absolute Themes, Theme predication, etc. In the networks above I simply reflect the system of markedness in order to make the contrast more meaningful. The degrees of markedness included in the networks are based on the frequency results of the analyzed stories.¹¹ Although no one familiar with English and Spanish would frown upon these data, they will have to be ratified in the future with an extension of the contrast to a larger number of texts and a wider array of genres. This will allow a finer-grained specification of frequency rates, e.g. non-circumstantial Adjuncts as Theme and Complements as Theme separately rather than grouped under the single category 'Other' used in this paper, which in turn will lead to a higher degree of delicacy in the design of Theme networks.

The second, theoretical goal of this study is pursued early in section 2, based on Arús (2007), and the conclusions drawn from the overview of the method of development of the stories in section 4.3. In my attempt to streamline the description of Theme, I have queried the 'aboutness' of Theme as we know it, holding this concept responsible for much of the misunderstanding around the notion of Theme. I have claimed that Theme is not what the clause is about; it rather indicates what the clause is about with respect to the rest of discourse, which is conceptually very similar to the establishment of the 'local context' as expressed in Matthiessen (1995) and *IFG3*. In line with this contention, I have proposed relinquishing the label 'topical' Theme to refer to ideational Theme, the only topical Themes being hyperthemes and macrothemes.

One point still pending in my discussion is the extension of Theme. In my thematic analysis of *El Real* and *The Legend* I considered whether or not circumstantial Themes exhaust the thematic potential of the clause. If they do, the Theme stops there; if they do not, Theme extends to the next ideational constituent. The discussion undertaken in this paper allows me to take a position: circumstantial Themes do not exhaust the thematic potential; they do little more than set up what Downing (1991) calls a framework (temporal, spatial, etc.). They certainly help text to unfold and therefore have a say in the method of development, but they do not contribute to track identities. For this, we need to extend the Theme to the first experiential constituent after the Theme to ensure the complete establishment of the local context. From this point of view, and following Matthiessen's (1995) distinction between nuclear transitivity and circumstantial transitivity, I take ideational Theme to extend as far as, and including, the first ideational constituent of nuclear transitivity. If there is a Circumstance, the ideational Theme will comprise the Circumstance and the first nuclear participant or Process; if there is no Circumstance, the ideational Theme will consist of a single element. This is applicable to both English and Spanish.

In the discussion on metafunctional interplay, I commented on clauses, usually middle, with a flat cline of newsworthiness. In those clauses, it was argued, there seem to be no clear textual motivations, by which English can simply follow interpersonal constraints in constituent ordering, and Spanish can place the participant before or after the Process depending, for instance, on its degree of volition/control. In fact, it is often the case that the Spanish constituent order in these clauses is Process ^ Subject, as in (12, 13, 24) above. This seems to suggest that in languages like Spanish, where Process Themes are as frequent as Subject Themes, we do not find the peaks of textual prominence distributed in the same way as in English. As Matthiessen (1992) explains, the English clause tends to have a thematic peak at the beginning and an information peak at the end, with a textual trough in the middle corresponding to the Process, which is, in turn, the experiential peak of the clause. Since Spanish clauses often begin with the Process, the thematic and experiential peaks of prominence typically coincide at that point in those clauses, with no other textual peaks in the case of middle Process ^ Subject structures, on account of their flat information structure. Conversely, in English structures with a flat newsworthiness continuum, we find a thematic peak at the beginning, the Subject Theme, followed by the experiential peak of the Process. Examples (36) and (37) illustrate this contrast:

- | | | |
|------|---|--|
| (36) | <i>Se adelantó</i>
step forward PAST-3SG
Textual (thematic) peak
Experiential peak | <i>el más valiente de los bandidos</i>
the bravest bandit |
| (37) | <i>a second huntsman ...</i>
Textual (thematic) peak | <i>came on the scene</i>
Experiential peak |

From structures such as (36, 37) it can be derived that the canonical distribution of textual waves in a neat arrangement of peaks and troughs happens in proc-

esses with two instantiated nuclear participants. Otherwise, we are likely to get a conflation of textual and experiential peaks in Spanish or a succession of both kinds of peaks in English, without there having to be a peak for information.

This non-canonical distribution of textual waves will happen far more frequently in Spanish than in English since the latter tends to express all the participants in the process and processes with a single instantiated participant which will, for the most part, be middle, as (37) above. Conversely, the Spanish tendency to drop the Subject implies that the Actor, Senser, Speaker, Token or Carrier will often be left out of the instantiation of the process. Thus, processes with only one instantiated participant may be middle, pseudo-effective¹² or effective in Spanish. Therefore, the conflation of thematic and experiential peaks in Spanish will take place not only in processes such as (36) above, but also in a pseudo-effective such as (38) or an effective like (39), below. The difference between these two processes and (36) is that in the pseudo-effective and, above all, in the effective one, the cline of newsworthiness will no longer be flat, by which the conflated thematic and experiential peaks will be followed by an information peak as shown.

<p>(38) <i>gritó</i> scream PAST-3SG Thematic peak Experiential peak</p>	<p><i>con todas sus fuerzas:</i> with all his might:</p>	<p><i>¡Venid difuntos!</i> Come spirits! Information peak</p>
<p>(39) <i>desenvainó</i> unsheathe PAST-3SG Thematic peak Experiential peak</p>	<p><i>su puñal...</i> his knife Information peak</p>	

I conclude in the hope that the contrastive account of Theme in English and Spanish presented here makes a significant contribution to the literature, both in contrastive typological terms and from a general, theoretical point of view. The discussion throughout the previous pages has shown, once again, that Theme is not an easy category to deal with, probably due to its rather abstract nature, hence the frequent disagreements on thematic issues. It seems, however, that the application of the theory to the description of thematic resources of languages other than English helps to enhance our understanding of this crucial textual function.¹³

1 This contrastive exploration of Theme also aims to contribute to the development of the SFL-based comparative description of English and Spanish currently in progress at the Universidad Complutense, Madrid, carried out by members of the international Systemic Typology Group (STG): http://web.me.com/teruyak/Systemic_Typology_Group/Welcome_STG.html

2 Fries (1995b:4) offers a very useful rewording of the traditional description of Theme: "The Theme of a T-unit provides a framework within which the Rheme of that T-unit can be interpreted". This interpretation seems to be in a similar line to the one I am proposing here in the sense that it looks beyond the literal meaning of the 'aboutness' of Theme, relating it to – and enhancing – the concept of 'point of departure'.

3 We will see later, in section 4.3, why I prefer to avoid using the term *topical* for ideational Theme.

4 Other authors, such as Berry (1989) and Ravelli (1995), extend the Theme as far as, and including, the last element before the process. See also Butler (2003:131) for a relation of different interpretations regarding the extent of Theme.

5 This is, of course, a simplification of the matter. Bernárdez (1994) proposes an interpretation of the degree of flexibility of word order based on the likelihood for the recipient of the message to access the reality of the producer of that message. The more likely the access is, the freer the word order will be. In this light, we could see the marking of the Subject, whether through morphological agreement with the verb or through relative positioning in the clause, as two different ways of granting access to the reality which the speaker or the writer is (re)construing semiotically.

6 This claim is supported by the fact that the first element of the clause

allows the tracking of participants, and therefore contributes to the method of development, in Spanish as much as it does in English. This is briefly discussed in section 4.3.

7 Ideational constituents combine with textual waves to create the clause-initial peak of thematic prominence whereas the pitch prosody created by the interpersonal metafunction becomes meaningful thanks to the textual waves; together, they are responsible for the peak of prominence of newsworthiness, which, when unmarked, falls towards the end of the clause (see Matthiessen 1992: 44-47).

8 It should be specified, however, that there are occasions when a Complement must precede the verb in Spanish, i.e. when the Complement is pronominal, as in *la vi* (I saw her). For this reason, authors such as Taboada (1995) consider initial clitic pronouns as unmarked Theme choice, and the same is done here in figure 2 in the concluding section.

9 Other factors, such as the nature of the verb, also influence the position of clause constituents, as explained by Fernández Soriano (1993).

10 Not all of the Processes as Theme in the text, however, are illustrative of continuity of identities. Some of them (e.g. *llegó, dijo, decía...*) simply precede the Subject (*llegó un momento, dijo el molinero, decía el lechero*).

11 Table 1 in section 3 does not specify the proportion of pronominal Subject Themes in *El Real*. They represent about 13% of instances of Subject Theme, or 4% of all Themes in the text. That explains their high markedness in figure 2. The only license allowed in this figure is the inclusion, despite their low incidence in the sample text, of pronominal Complements among unmarked Themes. This is due to the already mentioned grammaticalized pre-Finite position of pronominal complements in Spanish declarative clauses.

12 Following Davidse (1992), I use the term ‘pseudo-effective’ to refer to Ranged structures. In (38), *Venid difuntos* is the Verbiage/Range; see Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:294) for a relation of the participants conflating with the general semantic category of Range.

13 I want to thank Donna Miller and Elizabeth Swain for their valuable comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper. Any remaining mistakes are entirely mine.

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