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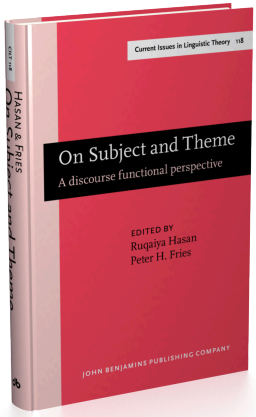

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Reflections on Subject and Theme: An introduction

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1. Ideas about language

The papers in this volume represent a selection from amongst those heard at the 19th International Systemic Functional Congress 1992 which was held at Macquarie University in July of that year. They are concerned with two descriptive categories – subject and theme – both of which have attracted much attention in modern linguistics, and both are surrounded by questions which are still in search of answers. For example: is subject a universal category? Is theme? If so, what definition of these categories will hold universally, and how can the categories be recognised across languages? Is there any specific relation between subject and theme? For example, are there some languages which are best described as ''subject-predicate languages'', and others which are really ''theme-rheme languages''? Linguists do recognise that sometimes in a language a clause constituent may not only be a subject but also an agent/actor. Does a comparable situation exist with respect to subject and theme, with the same clause constituent having both these functions? And what difference, if any, does it make for the same constituent to have both these functions as opposed to simply one or the other? Given that agency, long-recognised as a grammatical category (see, for example, Lyons 1968: 295 ff), is granted a semantic value, could the grammatical categories of subject and theme be said to have some semantic value as well? If so, what is this value and is it the same across languages?

If it is suggested that the categories of subject and theme do not have any semantic value, it seems pertinent to ask why this should be so, and whether as linguists we are able to recommend any criteria for differentiating those grammatical categories that have a semantic value from the others that do not enjoy this privilege?

Reflection on such issues leads us to suggest that in the last resort these and other such questions derive from a more fundamental one the answer to which is grounded in the linguists' conception of language. This fundamental question may be phrased as follows: is everything in the linguistic system – its words, phrases, its elements of structure, the sequential order of these elements and their conflation which, according to the systemic functional model, derives from the simultaneous operation of distinct metafunctions – necessarily meaning-construing? Linguists have answered this question differently depending on their ideas about language. If they think of language as a mirror which simply reflects a pre-existing (material) reality, they are bound to attach a different and privileged status to just those categories which correspond to what they perceive as reality. In such a view, the concept of ''meaning'' is naturally limited to that of correspondence to pre-existing reality: the categories of language, being grounded in some language-independent reality, are thus taken to mirror the categories of nature. This approach denies the meaning creating power inherent in language – the potential of language to construe meanings so that the meanings are essentially an artefact of the linguistic system. So, not surprisingly, in this perspective the term *meaning construal* is devoid of meaning. We will refer to this view as the *correspondence* perspective on language. If, on the other hand, one thinks of language not as a mirroring device but as a potential for creating a semiotic reality which stands in some systematic relation to material reality without actually mirroring it, then language becomes a powerhouse for construing meaning, and the concept of meaning itself bursts the bonds of representation, extending to include both interpersonal and textual meanings which are largely, if not entirely, linguistically created. This perspective, which we shall refer to as *constructivist*, grants an equal status to all formal devices, including those whereby the so called ''non-referential'' meanings are construed. We need to emphasise that these ''non-referential'' meanings – the interpersonal and the textual – do relate to important aspects of reality: in fact, we can claim with confidence that this order of reality concerns phenomena that are specifically human, viz.,

an intersubjectivity which is based not on instinct but on social interaction, and modes of social interaction which are based not on pre-programmed communicative devices but on an open ended, socially sensitive verbal system for the exchange of meaning. The reality to which interpersonal and textual meanings relate is, thus, very real to human beings, even if it is not material.

The interpretation of functionalism in the systemic functional model suggests an acceptance of the *constructivist* view; the adoption of this point of view in its turn creates an object of study for the SF linguist which looks remarkably different from any that the *correspondence* perspective has given rise to. Failure to appreciate these fundamental differences has resulted in a good deal of mis-reading of the SF position; its descriptive categories have often been judged by reference to a view of language which from the point of view of the SF model would be rejected as entirely untenable. We will draw attention here to three points fundamental to the SF approach, pursuing their implications which appear most relevant for our purposes.

(i) Since language is a potential for creating meanings which bear a systematic relation to the conditions of human existence, the primary goal of linguistics is to explain not only how meanings are construed but also how they maintain a systematic relation to the already linguistically construed socially defined world. Reflection shows that in the construal of this world, all meanings – experiential, logical, interpersonal and textual – are equally important, and all are first and foremost semiotic in nature. This removes all justification for treating logical and experiential meanings – ie., those traditionally known as referential – as the only/primary meanings relevant to linguistic form. Human language evolves only as its speakers use it for the living of their life, and speakers live just as much by the semiotically created interpersonal and textual meanings as they do by the referential ones.

(ii) Since language is seen as a powerhouse for the creation of these different sorts of meaning, the description of language logically demands attention to what a lexicogrammatical device does, ie., the meaning(s) it construes for some speakers, somewhere, under some conditions. The observation that a given lexicogrammatical device might construe different meanings for different (groups of) speakers is not an argument

against viewing language as a meaning potential; it is simply an argument against monolithic descriptions that ignore variation. It follows that inquiry into the (semantic) value(s) of a category is an essential aspect of the SF approach, and attention to this aspect is not something peripheral. From this point of view there are no descriptive categories which are purely "notional" or "teleological", just as there are none which are purely "formal". It follows from this discussion that in a truly functional model the forms of a language do not exist simply as form; they have some function, some semantic value, and it is this semantic value of a category such as subject or theme that is viewed as its *definition criteria* (Halliday 1985).

(iii) Equally important, and in no way in opposition to the former view, is the need to focus on the formal properties of a lexicogrammatical category, ie., what identifies it as that type of descriptive category. This is an essential step without which we cannot hope to establish which formal patterns have the potential for construing which meanings. It is these formal properties that furnish what Halliday (1985) refers to as the *recognition criteria* of a lexicogrammatical category. The identification of formal criteria by which some category type is recognised often constitutes the only preoccupation of formal grammars, and, perhaps somewhat unthinkingly, this limited concern with form is sometimes pitted against a concern with meaning. Clearly, from the point of view of the SF model the relation between meaning and form is not that of mutual exclusion – either this or that; rather, it is a relation between the manifested and the manifesting, the construed and the construing, where one without the other is either an impossibility or an absurdity, and both are essential for the description of the whole. The grammatical description produced within the framework of the SF model is, thus, REQUIRED to be both functional AND formal; it cannot be just the one or the other. This has the significant consequence that whereas for some linguistic approaches being "purely formal" is a desirable goal, for the systemic functional model being purely formal is something to be avoided.

Taking these three points together it is obvious that in the SF model the linguist's object of study, language, is viewed as a highly complex phenome-

non. By the same token the definition of ''linguistics proper'' current in many of the formal approaches begins to appear quite inadequate. So far as the SF linguist is concerned, the job of linguistics is to describe the entire complex phenomenon of language, not just some specific aspect eg., its formal syntax, to which a privileged status has been ascribed on grounds the validity of which remains far from proven. It may appear a practical convenience at a first glance to relegate specific components of the study of language to distinct (sub-)fields, such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and/or pragmatics; but this step, far from creating out of the residue an objective and scientific linguistics, in fact poses a serious problem: where, when, and how do we ''synthesise'' the aspects of language – its social cognitive basis; its active power – which have been ''analysed out'' in order to create a ''pure'' science of language? We believe that the catholic view of the goals of linguistics accepted in the SF model is necessary if we are to avoid an undesirable fragmentation of the object of study in linguistics. If linguistics is the study of language, then the goal of linguistics has to be the description of language in its entirety. To describe this requirement as a form of ''linguistic imperialism'' (cf Leech 1983) seems to miss the real point. Each of the three issues discussed above is relevant to theory and practice in linguistics; as such it should be relevant to the discussion of subject and theme as conceptualized in the SF model.

1.1 Ideas about language and the definition of a linguistic category

It is notable that the categories of subject and theme have been interpreted in the SF model as relating to interpersonal and textual meanings respectively. This already poses a problem for linguistic models with a correspondence perspective; such models only recognise representational meaning, with the obvious consequence that there is nothing comparable to the interpersonal and/or textual meaning in these models. But the situation is made even more problematic because of the peculiar nature of these latter categories of meanings. What these meanings relate to in the social conditions of human existence is far more abstract than is the case with either the logical or the experiential meanings – the mainstay of the correspondence approach. For example, in prototypical cases, the situational referent of most entities with the representational/ experiential role of Agent can, at least in principle, be physically observed by someone somewhere as the agency

acting to bring about some process. By contrast, it is not very easy to physically apprehend a "resting point of the argument" which is how Halliday (1985: 77) glosses the meaning of the grammatical category Subject. Nor is it easy to figure out, as Fries points out in his contribution to this volume, what "the point of departure" or "the starting point of a message" looks like, which is the offered meaning of the category of Theme by Halliday (1985: 39); the same applies to Mathesius' gloss of theme (1939) as "that which is known or at least obvious in the given situation and from which the speaker proceeds". We suggest that the source of the problem lies in the nature of interpersonal and textual meanings. The "reality" to which such meanings relate "exists" itself only by virtue of semiotic activity – the question of correspondence to something in the extra-linguistic world cannot be raised very sensibly. However we doubt if it helps to reject the very possibility of the existence of such abstract meanings simply because their "referents/correlates" are not easy to point to; nor does it seem to be a sufficient reason for rejecting the postulated semantic value of these descriptive categories for some language such as English. What might help in this situation is to establish somehow, if we can, what actually happens *in* the language as it gets used. It is this kind of inquiry that might be capable of creating a more tangible sense of what these abstract semantic characterisations mean. In other words, while for reasons to which Halliday (1984) drew attention, it may be problematic to provide an easily intelligible gloss for the semantic characterisations of a category, it may yet be possible to show what one means through apt illustrations of how the category works in use.

To provide an example of this process we turn to Halliday, who has shown what he means by semanticising the Subject in English as "the resting point of the argument" (1985) or "the modally responsible element" (1992). He does this by illustrating the central role that Subject plays in an English dialogic exchange (Halliday 1985: 71ff; see also comparable discussion both in Caffarel and Hori, this volume). So long as the experiential meaning of the (declarative) clause initiating a dialogic exchange remains constant, any subsequent dialogic move eg., acknowledging, contradicting, accepting, rejecting, or enquiring into the why, how, when of the case, if realised by a major clause, will involve invoking the same entity as Subject. This can be seen by comparing the appropriateness of (a) and (b) as rejoinders to the initial clause in example (1):

(1) Mum, my teddy wants another scone.

(a) oh, does he (want...)?	(b) oh, is it (wanted by him)?
(a) no, he doesn't (want...).	(b) no, it isn't (wanted...).
(a) why does he (want...)?	(b) why is it (wanted...)?

In this example the (b) rejoinders appear 'suspect'; they are definitely not typical of how exchanges go in English, and yet note that the referential/experiential meanings of the (b) response – its "content" – is not different from that of the (a) response. We note then that to describe the Subject as "modally responsible" is to say that its choice is "interactionally central". Note also that the semantic value accorded to Subject is made tangible not by considering single isolated clauses on their own but by examining snatches of dialogic exchange. Similarly, the semantic description of Theme as the "point of departure" can be understood only in the context of textual organisation, for it is this aspect of language use to which the patterns of thematic selection bear some non-random relation, as pointed out in this volume by Fang, McDonald and Cheng for Chinese, Cummings for Old English, Fries for mostly monologic discourse and Cloran for dialogues in modern English. What this aspect of the present discussion clearly draws attention to is the fact that the semantic value of categories such as Subject and Theme cannot become available if one's scope for evidence is limited to single, simple sentences. And focus on such inadequate evidence tends to be the norm rather than the exception in most formal linguistic models, whether or not they are also inspired by the *correspondence* perspective. Whatever the impetus, whatever the motivation, that such linguistic models have for remaining imprisoned in single often simple sentences while deliberating on the deep universal features of human language, this artificially limited example of "language in use" cannot provide the environment for checking out the validity of the sort of semantic phenomena to which SF draws attention in defining the categories of Subject and Theme in English. Note also that the commitment of SF to discourse has a motivation that harks back once again to its constructivist perspective. Our insistence on appeal to discourse as furnishing the necessary environment for apprehending the semantic value of Subject and Theme is not fortuitous: what is largely semiotically created must be investigated in a semiotic environment, which is, properly speaking, discourse. This explains the subtitle in the title of this volume *On Subject and Theme: A discourse functional perspective*.

1.2 Ideas about language and linguistic universals

Linguists often debate whether or not a category such as subject or theme is universal. This formulation renders invisible the fact that someone somewhere actually *postulated* this or that descriptive category as a means of 'accounting for' some aspect of some specific language; it objectifies the category, giving it a spurious quality of existence while hiding the history of its genesis. The resulting reification of grammatical categories divorces them from the sort of languages with which speakers and hearers live their lives, which, in its turn, has the effect of catapulting the categories into a qualitatively different universe of discourse. Instead of being seen as having their genesis in some specific language or language group, the categories of grammar begin to be seen as deriving from some other system, some other structure – a *lingua mentalis*, perhaps. And yet, it is notable that no convincing evidence for the existence of a lingua mentalis can be adduced at all without recourse to *lingua vocalis*.

We are of course not suggesting that comparison across languages is either invalid or impossible – simply that the nature and basis of this comparison needs to be better understood. If it is accepted that every descriptive category has a (semantic) value and a (formal) identity, then comparison across languages is a complex operation rather than simply a matter of matching morphemes or seeking the similarity of suffixes, though these may be important too! In any event, we do need to be aware which aspect of the category is at issue in the comparison. Are we concerned with locating the category across languages simply in terms of what it does for the speaker/hearer of the languages being compared – ie., in terms of the definition criteria – or are we attempting to find equivalent formal properties – ie., in terms of the category's recognition criteria? The results of our inquiries are likely to be different depending on which of these goals is adopted. And, irrespective of which goal is targeted, it is highly unlikely that the categories being compared across two (or more) languages will be identical in either their meaning or their form: at best, one operates on the basis of similarity, with the implication that some sort of compromise is inevitable in the decision to call by the same name a pair of formal patterns identified as the ''same'' in two different languages. These points may be briefly exemplified by reference to Subject in English and French.

2. The category Subject: A cross-linguistic comparison

Let us ask first if both English and French can claim to "have" the formal category Subject; that is to say, our concern is with the recognition criteria for Subject in these two languages. Since in any comparison one has to begin somewhere, we will honour the dominant (though dubious) tradition in linguistics by using English as the starting point. The five major features of the constituent typically regarded as Subject in English can be listed as follows:

(i) The English Subject is a nominal group or nominalisation;
(ii) it is anaphorically presupposed by the pronoun in the Mood-Tag; if the latter occurs, its pronoun will be co–referential with Subject (on Mood-Tag, see Halliday 1985 and McGregor this volume for further discussion; the latter does not treat the co-referentiality of Subject and Mood-Tag pronominal as a necessary feature);
(iii) Subject occurs in close contiguity with the element Finite; if an intervening element occurs at all, it will prototypically be a Modal Adjunct eg., *usually, normally, surely* … (on Finite and Modal Adjunct as clausal elements, see Halliday 1985: 68ff);
(iv) when Subject is instantiated by a pronoun, in some cases the pronoun will be marked for case (nominative); and
(v) under certain conditions, the Subject nominal will display person and number concord with the primary tense, ie., with the Finite element.

2.1 Comparing recognition criteria across languages

Is there a category in French that "has" all the above formal features? We gather from Caffarel's account of the interpersonal organization of the French clause in this volume that the only truly IDENTICAL feature shared by what is traditionally known as Subject in the two languages is the first one: Subject in English as in French is a nominal group or a nominalisation. However it should be noted that this feature is hardly criterial: a nominal group/nominalisation clearly does not have to be Subject. The position concerning feature (ii) is just as clear-cut: it is a feature that is entirely irrelevant to French, since a formal pattern having the properties of Mood-Tag cannot be found in the language. So far as features (iii–v) are concerned,

we may offer one generalisation: they display similarity but not identity. For example, with respect to (iii), although the two elements, Subject and Finite, typically occur in close contiguity in French as in English, what may intervene between the two in French is rather different as shown by the clause *je le lui ai donné* – something that would be totally untenable in any dialect of English. Feature (iv) like (iii) is similar without being identical: Subject if instantiated by a pronoun will under certain conditions display the nominative case; but the conditions are not identical with those in English (cf *it, you* in English and *nous, vous* in French). Finally so far as feature (v) is concerned it goes far beyond anything we find in English, the concord in French being far more regular and wide spread than it is in English. Speaking literally, then, the features which constitute the recognition criteria for Subject in English are replicated so far in French and no further. The categories are not formally identical in every respect, and from the point of view of formal criteria alone, the decision to label *je* in *je le lui ai donné* and *I* in *I gave it to him* as Subject is, strictly speaking, a kind of compromise. Further, underlying this compromise there is an unspoken assumption that the formal differences we have observed across the two languages with regard to features (ii–v) are immaterial, or at least less material to the Subject status of a constituent. We would claim that, irrespective of the myths perpetuated by formal linguistics about formal categories that share the ''same'' formal criteria across the languages of the world, the type of compromise we have noted here is not at all unusual: in fact, every time we look closely into the formal properties of the ''same'' category across languages, we are likely to find evidence of some compromise. Given the nature of human language, it could hardly be otherwise.

Clearly, then, we intend no criticism in saying that the labelling of two formally non-identical categories by the same name, as for example Subject in English and French, is a compromise; in fact we applaud this compromise. But at the same time we would like to understand what makes it a good compromise; why it is ''intuitively satisfying''. And an equally relevant question is: on what grounds do we decide that formal differences of the kind that exist between the English and French Subject can be safely ignored, or treated as immaterial to their status as formal equivalents? To explore these issues, we will turn to the definition criteria for the category Subject.

2.2 Comparing definition criteria

Let us begin once again with English. According to Halliday (1985; 1992) the category Subject in English specifies that which functions as the "resting point of an argument"; as we have illustrated above (cf example 1), it is modally responsible, ie., interactionally crucial and together with the Finite it functions as the interactional nub in a dialogic exchange (we offer the term *interactional nub* as the semantic value of the clausal element Mood in English, which as Halliday (1985) points out is the element that is typically tossed back and forth in any dialogic exchange). It should perhaps be asserted quite clearly that the fact that the English language "has" such meanings for the grammatical categories Subject and Mood is no argument for supposing that all languages must have such meanings too, or that if they do have such meaning, these must be realised by grammatical categories having the formal properties of the English Subject and Mood. Observation shows, however, that speakers everywhere do conduct dialogic negotiations; this raises the expectation that something comparable in function to an interactional nub might be present in all languages, irrespective of how it is realised. We may ask then: how is dialogic exchange effected in French, if it is? Is there something comparable to the interactional nub? If so, how is it realised? What part, if any, does the category called Subject in French play in this realisation?

Turning to Caffarel again, her suggestion is that the function of interactional nub in French is realised by the grammatical category that she refers to as Negotiator: it is the Negotiator that acts as the interactional nub in the French dialogic exchange and functionally, ie., from the point of view of the definition criteria it is comparable to the Mood element in English. Caffarel claims that although the internal formal structure of the French grammatical category Negotiator differs considerably from that of the element Mood in English, nonetheless the elements, Subject and Finite, form part of the former as they do of the latter: in both languages, the formal category having the function of interactional nub "has" Subject and Finite as its important constituents.

2.3 Cross-linguistic comparison: The basis for compromise

If we accept Caffarel's analysis, then the critical and primary fact would seem to be that in both languages there is a "bonding" of the two elements,

viz, Subject and Finite; further, this bonding is significant both formally and functionally. In English this bonding is formally construed by a strong sequential contiguity criterion (cf formal features ii-iii above); in French, it is construed by the extensive concord between the elements Subject and Finite. In both languages the two bonded elements play an important role as (part of) the interactional nub, and we would claim that the formal means of realising this bonding in the two languages are, in fact, formal equivalents. The justification for making this claim is quite obvious: in general terms, human languages have but limited means for identifying their formal categories. These are: (i) syntagmatic means, ie., sequential ordering; (ii) morphological means eg., inflection and concord; and (iii) phonological prosodic means, eg., rhythm and intonation (for *phonological prosodic* realisation of grammatical categories, see Halliday 1967a; 1985). It is simply different configurations of these same three realisational means that constitute the recognition criteria for formal categories in languages all over the world. From this point of view, the recognition criterion (ii) for English formally does the same job which is done in French by means of extensive and regular concord: both achieve the same result of bonding the Subject to the Finite element. Note that underlying this observation there is a powerful principle for deciding which of the formal differences are criterial: what is important is not the actual realisational means but the relation established between categories. Thus the means by which the bonding between Subject and Finite is effected – by syntagmatic means or by morphological ones – is a secondary matter; the fact of both formal bonding and functional similarity is criterial. This is, of course, not to say that the meaning of the French and English Subject or Mood is identical: in fact, the meaning of grammatical categories, being highly abstract, is not easy to "pin down" or "gloss" effectively (on the ineffability of grammatical categories, see Halliday 1984); it is however possible to observe points of similarity. And so far as the English and French categories of Subject and Mood are concerned, there does seem to exist reasonable similarity between them.

If these arguments are accepted then it would seem that there is good formal and functional reason for the compromise we have applauded. Moreover, we do not need to make a mystery out of our intuitive satisfaction with this compromise as if this intuition is an inexplicable phenomenon that lies beyond the reaches of linguistic analysis, forcing us to recognise divine intervention. To say that on occasions we are intuitively satisfied with the

compromise of calling non-identical but similar formal patterns by the same name is simply to say that as speakers of the language we have an unconscious sensitivity to the prehension between form and meaning which, due to our adherence to received ideas about language, often fails to get recognised in our conscious analyses. The possession of such sensitivity is obviously beyond dispute, for in its absence, we would be just as hopeless at using language as most grammars are at explaining how we do it. Let us also add in passing that we do not find it useful to suggest, as some linguists have done (see, for example, Huddleston 1984), that cross-linguistic comparison might typically be "notional". In the first place, we recognize no "notions" in the description of language, which are not construed by the form of language; thus there can be no notional comparison without some (overt or covert) formal comparison. Secondly, unless the grammar of each language already recognizes the dialectics of function and form, meaning and lexicogrammar, it is rather difficult to imagine how a notional ie., meaning-based comparison of grammatical categories could be effectively carried out across different languages. In our view, it would be misleading to suggest that any valid semantic comparison of languages is possible where as a matter of principle intra-linguistic grammatical categories are seen as devoid of semantic value. Nor is it helpful to be told that a category in some language merits the label of Subject more or less depending on the place it occupies on some imaginary scale of quintessential, idealised "Subjecthood", which is itself described in terms of a large number of formal features (Keenan 1976). Notably, these features appear to bear no necessary logical relation to each other; but amazingly, they are still treated as if together they were capable of defining some absolute quality of "subjecthood" towards which each language is striving with greater or lesser success! To set up universal categories along these lines is to practice a dangerously reductive linguistics which is incapable of shedding any light on what is truly universal to human language. Our discussion of Subject in English and French shows that underlying the allocation of the same nomenclature is a complex process of comparison and of compromise both in terms of form and of meaning, and the ways in which, say, French differs from English are at least as important to the semantic potential of that language as the ways in which it resembles English; and what is common to both languages – thus a possible candidate as a universal – is very much deeper than morphological marking or syntagmatic order. For these reasons, we question the value of current ideas about

universality; we believe that a theoretically more viable approach to language universals is needed, which respects the humanity of the human species without disregarding its most outstanding characteristic, viz, its infinite capacity for variation.

3. Theme

In our discussion so far, we have focussed mainly on the category of Subject, but our approach to the concept of Theme across languages and in any specific language would be along similar lines. Although like Subject, Theme is not a new concept – in fact, if anything, it is an older concept than Subject (see for example Halliday 1977a) – its discussion in modern linguistics is still surrounded by unresolved problems. In this section, we will draw attention to certain problems specific to the description of Theme in the SF model, which revolve around its definition and its recognition criteria. Like Subject, the semantic characterisation of Theme in the SF model is highly abstract. It therefore stands in need of similar clarification. The formal identification of the category, at least so far as English is concerned, is primarily syntagmatic viz. Theme is that which occupies a specific position in the sequence of elements in some unit type(s); unlike the English Subject, here we find no "associated" features with morphological markings, such as case and concord.

3.1 Theme: Definition criteria

Let us begin with the definition criteria for Theme – what Theme does. As pointed out in the last paragraph, Theme is realised in English by means of syntagmatic ordering. So taking English as our point of reference once again, we may ask less metaphorically: what is the speaker of English doing by putting certain constituents in one order as opposed to another? (cf Halliday 1967a; 1977b). As Fries (1981) has pointed out, the answer to this question is itself a matter of dispute. Mathesius (1939) assigns two distinct functions to Theme by describing it as (i) "that which is known or at least obvious in the given situation" and (ii) that "from which the speaker proceeds". Fries refers to Mathesius view of Theme's function as the "combining approach", which he contrasts with Halliday's definition of the concept as "the point of departure for what the speaker is going to say," (1985: 36). Halliday's

formulation abstracts out Mathesius' second function for Theme, separating it from the first. In the SF framework, Mathesius' first function is ascribed not to Theme but to the element Given. Most SF linguists adopt these views, using as their justification the fact that the two functions identified by Mathesius as the functions of Theme can, in fact, be dissociated from each other. A constituent with the function of Theme does not necessarily have the function Given as well; instead, under certain conditions, Theme might be conflated with New, thus no longer functioning as "that which is known or .. obvious" (cf Mathesius, ibid.).

While the issue of the choice between the "combining" and the "separating" approaches appears to have been resolved easily, this is not to say that, as a result, the semantic characterisation of Theme in the separating approach of the SF model has become clearer. The abstract semantic characterisation of Theme as "the point of departure" – and its other equivalent glosses not only by Halliday but also by other SF linguists eg., Matthiessen (1995) who talks of Theme as "the resource for manipulating the local **contextualization** of the clause .. for setting up a local context for each clause in a text" still stand in need of clarification. And notwithstanding the principle of ineffability (cf Halliday 1984), this abstract semantic value ascribed to Theme in the SF literature does need to be made concrete at least to the same extent as in the case of the element, Subject. This seems to be a reasonable demand, whose satisfaction is however beset with serious problems. To render concrete the thrust of the abstract semantic characterisation of Subject – to show what happens in the language as it gets used – we were able to use illustrations which extended over a mere adjacency pair (see example 1). Subject, let it be recalled, is concerned with interactional exchange, and while examining the interactional function of Subject by considering a single adjacency pair is not an ideal procedure, at least it suffices for the purpose. Theme, on the other hand, is said to construe some variety of textual meaning – a point that Halliday (1977b) demonstrated by an exercise in "theme scrambling" and Fries (1981) elaborated on by examining Theme in relation to a text's method of development. To adduce an illustration of the operation of Theme, the efficacy of which might be at least comparable to that of the adjacency pair for Subject, the textual segment that needs to be used has to be very much more extensive than just an adjacency pair: Fries (1981), for example, used two medium length paragraphs from a naturally occurring text. The need for a more extensive stretch

of language as example arises because the nature of textual meanings can be appreciated only when enough of the textual environment is taken into account to demonstrate the contribution, if any, that Theme might make to textual organisation. The practical difficulty of having to use extensive snatches of text is serious enough – as all editors and publishers of discourse oriented linguistics are painfully aware!! – but here one encounters a much more fundamental problem, which itself arises due to the state of the art in text analysis: it is to be doubted if linguists really know what counts as ''enough of the textual environment''.

Even though much progress has been made in the field of text linguistics since the appearance of the first few studies in the late 60s (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Hasan 1967; van Dijk 1972; Grimes 1975; Halliday and Hasan 1976; Schank and Abelson 1977; Halliday 1977b; Hasan 1978), we are still far from having a powerful framework for the analysis of text, and while our framework for the analysis of clause is far from perfect, that for text analysis lags even further behind. This has the consequence that we cannot be very certain what that unit and/or aspect of textual analysis is, if there is one, to which the pattern of Theme selection is primarily relevant. Does Theme choice construe method of development in a text, as Fries (1981) suggests? Does it play a part in identifying elements of text structure? Fries (this volume) explores aspects of this issue among others, bringing positive evidence from a number of studies. Fang, McDonald and Cheng suggest that the patterns of thematic progression could be systematically related to a textual unit they refer to as the paragraph (see Appendices to their contribution). We may pause at this point to ask: what relation, if any, is there between elements of structure and such thematically identified paragraphs? Cummings' paper suggests that the patterning of Theme selection non-randomly correlates with register variation in Old English. Cloran shows that a text can be segmented into constituents each having a specific character of its own while playing a part in conjunction with other such constituents within the structure of the text. She refers to this textual unit as ''rhetorical unit''. The theoretical question in text analysis is: what is the relation of her rhetorical unit to Fang *et al*'s paragraph, to text, to text structure, to genre and finally to register? Notably, each of these is an area as yet not certain of its own identity. Cloran goes on to suggest that the different patterns of Theme-Rheme selection at the boundaries of rhetorical units ''signal'' various kinds of relations between such textual units. The

functions of (the patterns of) Theme selection thus provide us on the one hand with an *embarras de richesse*, and on the other hand they reveal our uncertainties in text analysis. The rich results claimed by the scholars researching Theme inevitably raise the question: are all of these indicative of the semantic value of Theme? If so, how might we conceptualize and formulate that value so that it accurately reflects these varied findings? At present, at least, it is not easy to see how the rather varied functions of Theme selection in the economy of the text may be logically related to a Theme's being the point of departure for what the speaker is going to say (cf Halliday 1985) or its being a resource for setting up the local context of each clause in a text (cf Matthiessen 1995).

These issues concern the SF linguists deeply, as the constructivist interpretation of language necessarily predisposes them to the understanding and description of discourse. By the same token, these SF concerns are almost impossible to 'translate' in the metalanguage (cf Martin 1996) of those frameworks which do not accept the assumption basic to SF, namely that explaining the property of textuality is a legitimate and proper concern of linguistics. If being limited to isolated simple sentences is a handicap in appreciating the meaning of Subject, it is a much worse handicap where an understanding of the semantic value of Theme is concerned. It is obvious that SF linguists lack clarity in their discourse on theme; but it seems to us equally clear that the credentials of formal linguistics for understanding these problems or for criticising their solutions are not exactly impressive. Sometimes the notion of Theme in SF has been equated with that of topic in formal models. However, because in a formal model meanings are typically constrained to be referential, the concept of topic has been assimilated to an aspect of representational meaning. If the initial constituent of a sentence is about the referential meaning "x" then within the limits of the formal model it can be easily treated as the topic of that sentence; if reference to "x" occurs in subsequent sentences, it is, again, viable to talk of topic continuity. But items such as *anyway, still, however*.. in sentence initial position can hardly be regarded as topic, since according to these models topic must have "content" and, of course, cohesive conjunctives have no referential meaning. It follows that the textual organisation that is indicated by the thematic status of much of what SF linguists refer to as textual or interpersonal Theme bears no relation to what is known as topic. This seems to suggest that the SF concept of Theme and the formal model's notion of topic differ significantly, and no

useful purpose is served by equating the two. This is not to say that work being carried out at present in formal models on the description of the clause initial position occupied by contentful items is irrelevant to scholarship on Theme; simply that there is no direct ''translatability'' across these notions.

3.2 Theme: Recognition criteria

Turning to the recognition criteria for Theme in English, the position is again not as settled as, for example, in respect to Subject. The recognition criterion for the English Theme appears very simple at first glance: Theme equals clause initial constituent(s). But the meaning of this simple-seeming criterion is not as straightforward as one might expect. The problems arise because the SF framework recognises (i) distinct sub–categories of Theme, which may co-occur within the same clause, thus putting the familiar lay meaning of *initial* under stress; and (ii) the system of THEME is relevant to units of different ranks, thus suggesting that the recognition criteria might be complex. Let us take each of these in turn.

Theme is classified by reference to the different metafunctions in the SF model. Since all metafunctions operate simultaneously, this opens up the possibility of more than one Theme occurring in the same clause, as in (2) *well but then Anne surely wouldn't the best idea be to join the group?* (Halliday 1985: 55); the Theme elements are italicized and only the onset of Rheme is shown:

(2)	well	but	then	Anne	surely	wouldn't	the best idea	be to..
	cont	str	conj	voca	modal	finite	Subject	Pred..
——Textual——				———Interpersonal———			—Topical—	
	——————————Theme——————————							Rheme..

The clause here has multiple Themes: *well but then* are Continuative, Structural and Conjunctive themes respectively; they derive from the textual and the logical metafunctions, and are together referred to as Textual Theme; *Anne surely wouldn't* are Vocative, Modal Adjunct and Finite Themes respectively; these derive from the interpersonal metafunction, and are known as Interpersonal Theme; *the best idea* is Topical Theme which is said to derive from the experiential metafunction. A topical Theme always conflates with both an interpersonal and an experiential role: for example, *the best idea* in (2) is Theme/Subject/Value.

The formal behaviour of textual and interpersonal Themes differs markedly from that of the topical Theme. Two possibilities are open to interpersonal and textual Theme: (i) that the occurrence of either and/or both in a clause is optional; clauses are not constrained to have an interpersonal and/or a textual Theme (though there are certain exceptions, eg., structural Theme in a finite hypotactic clause, and finite Theme in a polar interrogative clause is very likely to occur); and (ii) that with certain restrictions, the same clause may have an iterative choice of Theme from either or both subcategories – the textual and the interpersonal (cf example 2). This is in contrast to the situation regarding topical Theme where (i) every major non-hypotactic and some specific hypotactic clause types must have at least one topical Theme; and (ii) iterative selection of topical Theme is possible only under certain conditions, and only if Theme is marked. This point is discussed later in this section; (3i) provides an example of a non-iterative single marked Theme:

(3) i Last year I bought those same shoes for eighty dollars in LA.
Top:mkd ——————————Rheme——————————

Note that all Theme elements in the preceding discussion are realised by a group/phrase rank constituent. However, some categories of clausal Theme may be realised by an embedded clause as illustrated by examples (4i) and (4ii), both taken from Halliday (1985: 42):

(4) i *What the duke gave to my aunt* was that teapot.
ii *This teapot* is what the duke gave to my aunt.

Here in (4i) the Theme is a marked equative, while in (4ii) it is unmarked equative. Another parameter for Theme categorisation is the possibility of its predication. Compare (5i) and (5ii):

(5) i *John* blamed Leonie.
ii *It was John* who blamed Leonie.

In (5i) *John* is unmarked topical Theme that is also unpredicated, whereas in (5ii) *it was John* is an unmarked topical Theme that is predicated. (See Halliday 1985: 59ff for further discussion of predicated Theme).

The distinct sub-categories of Theme we have referred to in the last few paragraphs can be summarised briefly as follows:

I:	metafunctional basis:	
	a: interpersonal	vocative; finite; modal; comment
	b: textual	continuative; conjunctive
	c: logical	structural eg., *if, since,... and, but...*
	d: experiential	topical
II:	expectancy basis:	
	a: unmarked	S/Th in indicative; Pred/Th in imperative
	b: marked	anything else (see Halliday 1985: 44ff)
III:	equation basis:	
	a: non-equative	as I; II
	b: equative	with 'psuedo-cleft' clause embedding
IV:	predication basis:	
	a: non-predicated	as I; II
	b: predicated	with 'cleft' clause embedding
V:	co-occurrence basis:	
	a: simple	(Theme must be topical)
	b: multiple	(topical and textual and/or interpersonal)

The postulate of these distinct categories (which are not presented here in terms of systemic choices, but clearly systemicity is implied) raises two interesting issues, which are briefly examined before turning to the question of its effects on the interpretation of the term ''initial''. The first of these issues seems to be relevant to the definition rather than the recognition of Theme: it seems reasonable to ask whether the semantic value of all these various categories of theme is the same so far as their function in the economy of textual organisation is concerned? While there is a discussion of the local meaning of equative and predicated Themes, and remarks will also be found on the local meaning of marked Theme (as for example in Halliday 1985; see also Cloran, this volume for some comments), the question of whether or not they function variably within the economy of discourse has, to the best of our knowledge, not been addressed by SF linguists. As for the Themes metafunctionally classified, only sporadic remarks (eg Fries and Francis 1992) have been made about the relevance of some category of

Theme (logical and topical respectively) to some specific aspect of textual organization. There are some fairly obvious grounds for suggesting that the patterns of thematic progression (on thematic progression, see Fries and also Cloran, this volume) concern only topical theme, and that these may be primarily relevant to some aspect of the field of discourse. This is in fact an issue discussed by several SF linguists, though without any conclusive results (see for some details Fries, this volume). Textual theme, especially its subcategory structural, on the other hand appears to be systematically related to what has been referred to as the "rhetorical structure" of the text in Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST), for which a better name might have been "logical Structure Theory" (for details, see Thompson and Mann 1987; Matthiessen and Thompson 1989; Mann, Matthiessen and Thompson 1992). These studies are, in fact, simply indicative not providing any firm hypotheses about the role of the metafunctionally differentiated subcategories of Theme in textual organisation. Again, one might ask if multiple theme selection is systematically different in its textual function from simple theme selection? For example, is there a textually significant location where the choice of multiple Theme is at risk? All of these issues are relevant to the clarification of the semantic value of Theme. The second issue to which attention is drawn here is more general in nature: note that hypotactic and paratactic conjunctions eg., *if, since*, *but, and* ... etc. which pertain to the logical metafunction have been grouped together with conjunctives such as *well, anyhow, anyway* ... etc. which pertain to the textual metafunction. Together, they realise a textual Theme (see the analysis and discussion of example (2) above). This grouping for the purposes of the analysis of Theme, dissociates the logical metafunction from its usual grouping with the experiential one, but in so doing, it raises a question about the significance of this step: why are logical and textual items grouped together here? What principle guides such re-alignments?

In view of the possibility of multiple themes occurring in a clause, the question about initial position merges into that of where this position ends. We, then, have two questions: what counts as an initial position, and what is the principle for determining the boundary between Theme and Rheme. In our understanding of Halliday's position, topical Theme plays a significant part in providing the answer to both these questions. As pointed out before, this category of Theme pertains to the experiential metafunction. The concept of initial position can be stated very clearly by reference to the

experiential structuring of the clause: initial position in the clause is defined as the very first constituent of the clause with some experiential function. In clauses that are said to have simple Theme, it is this initial constituent that will function as topical Theme; everything else – ie., all that follows this initial constituent in such clauses – will automatically fall into Rheme. What this means is that topical Theme will always conflate with some TRANSITIVITY element – a position not applicable to any other category of Theme, as can be checked by a quick look at the textual and interpersonal Themes in example (2). Note two relevant points here: first, the exact experiential function of the initial constituent is completely immaterial to the identity of topical Theme as a topical Theme; ie., the constituent may be a Participant, or a Circumstance or a Process, without having any repercussions for topical Theme as such. Secondly, every clausal constituent having an experiential function is bound to conflate with an interpersonal function as well – the reverse is not true eg., consider the interpersonal Themes in example (2) none of which have any TRANSITIVITY function. And it is the specific nature of this interpersonal – ie., MOOD – function of the initial constituent that plays a crucial role in determining the status of the topical Theme. For the systemic option [marked] versus [unmarked] is directly related to what MOOD function conflates with topical Theme. To elaborate on this point let us take the declarative clause as the prototypic case since it is this clause type which is the most hospitable to the co-occurrence of different categories of Theme. Typically, in this clause type, the initial constituent has the MOOD function of Subject, which is conflated with some participant role in TRANSITIVITY. To say that a constituent is a topical Theme in a declarative clause is to say that Theme is realised by a clause initial constituent which has *both* a TRANSITIVITY *and* a MOOD function in the clause; to say that a topical Theme in a declarative clause has the feature [unmarked] is to say that it occupies a clause initial position where it conflates with the MOOD function of Subject and the TRANSITIVITY function of some Participant role. The implication is that if the initial constituent has a MOOD function other than that of Subject, then the topical Theme would be [marked], a position illustrated by (3i) where *Last year* has the textual functions of marked topical Theme, the interpersonal function of Adjunct and the experiential function of temporal Circumstance. One position taken in the SF model was that under certain conditions a marked Theme of this type – ie., where Theme conflates with Adjunct/Circumstance – could be iterative, which is to say that more

than one marked topical Themes could occur in the clause so long as they all conflated with Adjunct/Circumstance. This is exemplified in (3ii):

(3)	ii	*last year*	*in LA*	I	bought....
		Adjunct	Adjunct	Subj	F Pred.....
		Circ:temp	Circ:loc	Ac	Process
		Th:top:mkd	Th:top:mkd	——Rheme——	

It is, however, not difficult to imagine cases where more than one marked topical Themes occur such that they conflate with distinct MOOD functions. An imaginary example is given below in (3iii):

(3)	iii	*last year*	*in LA*	*those same shoes*	I..
		Adjunct	Adjunct	Complement	Subj
		Circ:temp	Circ:loc	Goal	Ac
		Th:top:mkd	Th:top:mkd	Th:top:mkd	..
		——————Theme——————			Rheme..

In example (3iii) two Adjuncts followed by a Complement occur in the clause initial ie., pre-Subject, position. These are analysed as three marked topical Themes; the first two are conflated with Adjunct, while the third is conflated with Complement. (3iii) is an imaginary example and it is an open question whether the clause type instantiated by this example actually does occur in English, a matter that can now be, perhaps, more easily settled since large size corpora of naturally occurring discourse are now more readily available. Based on his personal observation of English, Halliday (1967b; 1968) has suggested that this configuration of marked Themes is not very likely in English; in other words, it was expected that multiple marked Themes in a clause would either conflate with Adjuncts or with Complement, but not with both.

Be that as it may, what matters to our discussion here is the fact that in the context of the recognition criteria for topical Theme the element Subject is relevant at least in the indicative clause type for stating the meaning of the term *clause initial position*, since as our analysis shows in all these cases marked topical Theme precedes the element Subject. If we assume that marked Themes exhaust the thematic potential of the clause, and additionally, that textual and/or interpersonal Themes in such a clause will ONLY precede the element Subject, not follow it (consider *Well but Tom last year in LA those same shoes I bought*…by analogy with (2)), then the criterion

for determining the extent of Theme may be expressed in two steps:

(i) Everything up to and *including* the element Subject is Theme so long as there is no marked Topical Theme (cf example 2);
(ii) Everything up to and excluding Subject is Theme so long as there is a marked Topical Theme (cf examples 3i-iii, and variant in last paragraph).

Note that in conformity with these generalisations, in example (2) the Subject *the best idea* is analysed as Theme while in (3i-iii) the Subject *I* is not analysed as Theme, but forms part of Rheme. It would seem that this is a perfectly clear view of how Theme is to be recognised in the English clause, what the term ''initial position'' means in this context, and what the extent of Theme in the case of multiple Theme selection is.

But as Ravelli in this volume points out there are alternative views to those presented above on both issues: what counts as Theme and on where the element Theme stops and Rheme begins. Some scholars (eg., Berry 1987, 1992a, 1992b) have treated the especial status of the element Subject in the context of Theme in indicative clauses as the ground for arguing that Subject should always be treated as thematic, whether or not preceded by marked Theme. If this principle is followed, then the two steps stated above would have to be revised as: *everything up to and including the element Subject is Theme*. In the majority of cases, this alternative recognition criterion for Theme in English does not lead to very different analyses. And all else being equal, different analyses will be offered only for clauses with marked Theme such as exemplified by (3i) through to (3iii): in all these cases, whereas in the position ascribed to Halliday, Subject would fall into Rheme, in this alternative position it would form part of Theme, functioning, presumably, as an unmarked topical Theme. However, all else is seldom equal, and there is some indication that scholars such as Berry do not accept the proviso about textual and interpersonal Themes always and only occurring prior to the element Subject. Ravelli, in this volume, quotes Berry's example (Berry 1992a) which is itself taken from VandeKopple:

(6) *The alternative to dogmatic realism, fortunately,* is not…

Here, Ravelli points out, Berry's recommendation would be that the entire italicised portion should be treated as Theme, with *fortunately*, presumably

analysed as interpersonal Theme. It seems to us that both these recommendations raise some questions to which, at least, we ourselves have not encountered clear answers. For example, what is gained by claiming that Subject is *ipso facto* also Theme? What can the constituent in question "do" as a result of being Theme which it is prevented from doing simply as Subject? And in any event how can an answer to this question be validated since in this position the dissociation of Subject and Theme becomes logically impossible? Again, how does the status of Subject as unmarked topical Theme in (3i-iii), where it follows marked topical Themes, differ from the status it has in clauses such as *John left before lunch* where again *John* would be unmarked topical Theme, but this time not preceded by any marked Themes? It seems also that in this view the concept of initial position as a relevant recognition criterion for Theme must be abandoned; it seems rather that one is being asked to assume the existence of some "basic" or "typical" order of sequence for clausal constituents, any departure from which has to be viewed as thematic. As our discussion shows, the postulate of multiple Themes – especially the textual and the interpersonal Themes – complicates the statement of recognition criteria, both for Theme and Theme extent. The presence of alternative views is an indication of the problematic nature of these recognition criteria; and, these alternative views themselves, further complicate the picture. We leave this debate with two observations. The first concerns a significant comment made by Halliday (1967b; 1979; 1985) that the Theme-Rheme structure, like other textual structures, is "periodic" or wave-like. Therefore, the entire debate of where Theme "stops" and where Rheme "begins" is itself perhaps an artefact of how analysis is represented. This brings to the fore one of the biggest challenges for SF linguists – to devise some mode of representation for wave-like structures which does not assimilate them to the segmental/particulate ones that characterise experiential structures. Secondly, in an interesting way, this entire debate and the disagreements emphasise the importance of being clear about the semantic value of Theme: the order of sequence of the constituents of primary unit types is seldom, if ever, entirely fixed, in any language. In English Comment Adjuncts eg., *fortunately, surprisingly, luckily...* can "move around" in the clause apparently quite freely, but of course in a functional model there is no such thing as "free word order," and all these variations would be taken to make some difference to the construal of meanings (see discussion in Halliday 1994: 83). If order of sequence is being

invoked as a recognition criterion for Theme, as it is in English, then we need to be clear which cases of the variation in order of sequence should be treated as Theme? And if Theme is what Theme does, then naturally we have to be clear about what this function is. For a discussion of some of these same issues, see Ravelli in this volume, who attempts to give us an explication in terms of her dynamic framework.

We turn now to the second source of complexity in the recognition criteria for Theme, viz., what unit type acts as the entry point to the system of THEME? According to Halliday, at least three different unit types enjoy this privilege: the clause complex, the clause, and the group/phrase. It is however, hardly likely to be the case that the terms of the system in all three cases remain the same. We would expect that choices in the system for one unit would be critically different from those at another rank. This raises the question: what are the details of these differences? For example, does Theme at the clause complex rank show the systemic contrast of [marked] versus [unmarked]? And again is it the case that at this rank, the distinction between textual, interpersonal, and topical is neutralized? If not, how are these distinctions realised? And if the distinction is neutralised, what arguments support the postulate of this neutralisation? We believe these questions have not yet been addressed in SF. Turning to Theme selections at the group rank, it is probably not an exaggeration to say that, apart from some initial exploratory studies (eg., see Fries and Francis 1992), very few SF linguists have analysed these. An exception is Cloran's work, who has found such an analysis fruitful in her hypotheses about the rhetorical unit, as her contribution to this volume indicates. Clearly, however, so far as recognition criteria are concerned, these will have to be different for Theme in clause complex, from Theme in clause, from Theme in groups.

Theme is not a new concept: in fact, Halliday (1977a) traces it back to the Sophists. Its revival first in Prague School linguistics and then in Halliday's work on English in the 60s (Halliday 1967a; 1968) has resulted in a good deal of attention to the concept. But it is clear from the above discussion that both its definition and its recognition criteria stand in need of further clarification. It is significant that there is an uncertainty about both sorts of criteria: it is, in fact, not easy to figure out what some device does without some idea of what the device actually looks like; and there is little reason for singling out something as a formal device unless it at least promises to reveal some regularity in significance. We believe that enough

indication has been provided of the textual relevance of the notion of Theme as conceptualized in the SF model not only in the seminal work of Halliday (eg 1967a; 1968; 1977) but in later studies such as by Fries (1981; 1992; 1993), Berry (1987; 1992a; 1992b), Martin (1992a; 1992b; 1995), and others (see for other useful references, chapters 7-10 this volume) to suggest that attention to the problems highlighted in our discussion would make a useful contribution. It is perhaps true to say that at least partial answers to many of the questions we have raised here are already implicit in the practices of SF linguists. What is needed is to develop these underlying assumptions and to make them explicit. This represents a major research agenda.

4. About the chapters in this volume

The foregoing sections conclude our reflections on subject and theme, the discussion of which is offered here as background material relating to the studies presented in this volume. These studies themselves are largely descriptive, and they concern not simply English but other languages. As a concluding move to this introduction, we will add a few words about each of the ten chapters in the volume.

Caffarel's paper, as earlier references to it show, examines the interpersonal organization of the French clause, attempting to highlight the respects in which the interpersonal grammar of the French and the English clause converge and diverge. Thibault's treatment of the English MOOD system uses the semantic level as its point of reference, arguing that the grammar of MOOD must faithfully represent each significant semantic fact as a step in the construal of the subjectivity of the speaker and the addressee. McGregor's chapter is concerned with "Tag Questions"; his use of the term "Tag" is somewhat wider than what is referred to as Mood-Tag in the discussion of Subject above. McGregor provides examples to support his case that the semantic value of "Tag Questions" is not invariant; this value differs according to the varying MOOD choice in the main clause to which it is related in a "whole–whole" relation. Boxwell's contribution moves away from a consideration of the MOOD system as such: it is concerned, instead, with exploring how the absence (and presence) of the element Subject is textually deployed in the Weri language. In formal linguistics Weri would be described as a "pro-drop" language; so would, of course, Japanese, which is discussed by Hori in this volume. Interestingly, to describe Weri,

Japanese and a host of other languages as ''pro-drop'' tells us very little about these languages themselves; it simply draws attention to the fact that they differ from a small handful of Indo-European languages, notably English and French, where Subject does not simply have to be selected, it has also to be heard/seen to have been selected. In Weri, as in Urdu (Hasan 1984) or Italian (Piccioli 1988), the situation is comparable to that described by Hori for Japanese: ''Subject appears on the surface in a Japanese clause only when it is marked.'' Boxwell argues that Subject-ellipsis in Weri establishes the textual relation of co-referentiality, whereby the absence of an overt Subject comes to have the textual meaning ''identity of referent'' across the Subject elements presupposed by ellipsis. Hori's contribution too focuses on ''Subjectless'' clauses; however, she is concerned with showing how certain morphological devices permit the speakers of Japanese to deduce the specific characteristics of the underlying Subject even in the absence of an overt Subject selection. The bonding of the element Subject by morphological means to some other element of the clause – typically a verbal constituent or a particle – opens up a resource for language to construe meanings out of both the presence and absence of that element. This meaning is over and above the semantic value of that element *per se*. Thus in Urdu the modal responsibility of the Subject is ''there'' even in the case of clauses with Subject-ellipsis; the ellipsis itself is a means for indicating the textual function Given on the one hand and on the other hand for pointing to the relevance of the ''same, specific identical referent'' as that which is also referred to by the presupposed Subject (see Hasan 1984). As Boxwell concludes ''*Nothing* makes sense in Weri''; and, one might add, it does this in most languages of the world.

While Subject-ellipsis points us into the direction of the textual metafunction, with Ravelli's chapter we move into a somewhat different domain. Ravelli brings a dynamic perspective to the examination of some of the problems in establishing the recognition criteria for Theme. She suggests that the synoptic approach which is typical of mainstream SF linguistics is incapable of producing the description of language as process, and attempts to show that some of the problems in the description of Theme can be better understood with the help of the dynamic approach. Fang, McDonald and Cheng provide a somewhat condensed picture of the grammar of the clause in Chinese, attempting to relate the concepts of Theme, Subject and Actor. They suggest that the interpersonal organization of the Chinese clause is not

brought about by syntagmatic or morphological means, the rhetorical choices being realised phonologically. According to these authors both the semantic characterisation of Theme in Chinese and its recognition criteria approximate those in English: Theme, they claim, "normally comes first in the clause, and may be marked off from the Rheme by a pause and/or textual particle such as *a, ba, me, ne*." They go on to explore the relevance of patterns of thematic progression to the clustering of clauses in a text, suggesting that most probably a unit intermediate between the clause complex and the text could be established by reference to patterns of thematic selection. Cummings is concerned with the comparability of descriptive categories across distinct diachronic stages of the same language, English. To this end he applies the SF framework for the analysis of Theme to the Old English clause. He concludes that in general the categories designed to describe today's English also serve Old English well, permitting some interesting generalizations about patterns of Theme selection in relation to register variation in Old English. As Cummings himself points out, conclusions such as these based on fairly limited data size have to be treated cautiously; nonetheless, such explorations are valuable not only for their indicative results but also for the questions which they raise about the description of Theme, for example: is the frequent conflation of topical Theme with Predicator in OE declarative clauses to be regarded as a case of marked Theme as it would be in contemporary English? In effect, Cummings' questions too call for further explication of the concepts relevant to Theme analysis to which we have already drawn attention in section 3. Fries in his chapter examines Thematic patterns and patterns of thematic progression (ie., where did the information in a subsequent Theme come from). He continues to explore the usefulness of Theme in accounting for the nature of texts, demonstrating both through the summary of the work of others and by adding his own data that texts of different genre tend to use different patterns of thematic development, and that they also tend to place different sorts of information in the Themes of the clauses. The latter point cannot be simply explained by saying that certain sorts of texts contain more instances of, say, temporal information than do other texts: this is of course one of his findings. However, in addition, his data show that the different genres display shifting percentages of thematic and non-thematic uses of locative and temporal information. His results predict that a greater percentage of the locatives in the text will function as Theme if that text describes a scene than

will be the case if that text describes a series of events. This is precisely what we meant by saying earlier that topical Themes are typically field-sensitive. The central concern of this volume with Subject and Theme is brought together in Cloran's contribution, through her examination of their role in discourse. Her analysis makes contact with many of the points in the earlier chapters. For example, the notion of Central Entity – a semantic concept – bears a realisational relation to the concept of Subject as the modally responsible element. The rhetorical identity of chunks of discourse – ie., what the speakers are trying to achieve eg., an account, a recount, a commentary etc. – according to Cloran is largely recognised by properties of Subject and Finite in the clauses realizing these rhetorical units. Theme comes into play in her examination of how some specific rhetorical units may form part of the larger ongoing discourse through the relation of expansion and/or embedding. Cloran's analysis demonstrates that the specific nature of this relation is typically indicated by the patterns of theme-rheme selection at the boundaries of the relevant units. To Daneš's three thematic progression patterns, she adds a fourth one, which is in effect based on the regularity of Rheme-Rheme relation.

The ten papers in this book are offered on the one hand as a contribution to the study of the concepts of Subject – or perhaps, more accurately of MOOD – and THEME, and on the other hand they form an example of the growing literature in linguistics which attempts to see language as a meaning potential the meanings-wordings of which are instantiated daily in our verbal give and take – that is to say, in our discourse. And it is in the discourse of its speakers that language has its origin, its evolution, the source of its control over the speakers' social universe, and thus over the speakers' ideas about what is real.

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