

REJOINDER:

A BRIEF COMMENT ON "THEME: TOPIC OR DISCOURSE FRAMEWORK?"

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In the article of the above title (*Miscelánea* 17), María A. Gómez González (MGG for brevity) discusses *inter alia* some of my own work in the area of Theme and Topic, together with Halliday's (1994 [1985]) notion of Topical Theme; her aim is that of "forging some sort of consensus" with regard to the notion of "aboutness" as expressed by these and other authors (1996:136). Whether such a consensus is achieved, or even achievable, is not my concern here. It is cheering to feel that one's work has contributed, in however small a way, to the ongoing debate on the validity of certain categories and functions proposed now long ago for the analysis of texts, and which continue to evoke re-interpretations. Furthermore, a good deal of her summary is sound. Nevertheless, there are in MGG's article a few references to my own work which could lead to error or confusion regarding my own stance; they therefore require clarification. It is in this spirit that the following comment is made.

On pages 128-129 MGG compares two analyses of a short extract from a book review on Freud made in Downing (1991) and Downing and Locke (1992) respectively, imputing to me in the latter work an analysis that the co-authors of that volume did not make, namely that "*Towards the end of his life* is analysed as Topical Theme despite its not being a referential participant, while *he*, the initial referential participant in the two subsequent clauses, is barred from this category" (*sic*) (MGG 1996: 129). This misconception appears to rest on the false assumption that the two analyses shared the same textual and interpersonal objectives. The reality is quite different.

In Downing (1991), a research article published in *Word*, my aim was to propose a modification of the Hallidayan concept of Theme and in particular, to call into question the suitability of the identification of topical Theme as

the first ideational element of the clause (Halliday, *op. cit.*). My proposal included two features: first, the retention of Theme as initial constituent whose discourse functions I attempted to specify as setting up different kinds of frameworks (participant, spatio-temporal and discourse frameworks); second, the adoption of Topic (what the message is about) as a discourse category, but dissociated from Theme as initial constituent. This separation of the Theme from Topic responds to the fact that in texts the first ideational element (Halliday's Topical Theme) may be realised, among other possibilities, by a circumstantial Adjunct which sets, for instance, a spatial or temporal framework (for the notion of "framework" cf Chafe 1976, Lowe 1987). Such a framework does not respond, in my opinion, to the notion of "aboutness" as expected of a topical Theme which might, presumably, set up a topic chain.

The first sentence of the Freud text illustrates this: *Towards the end of his life, Freud concluded that he was not a great man but that he had discovered great things.* According to Halliday's criterion, *Towards the end of his life* would be analysed as topical Theme of the first clause, while *he* would be topical Theme of the second and the third clauses, yet *Freud* would not be analysed at all. This seems to me counter-intuitive. While *Towards the end of his life* sets up a temporal framework, it is *Freud* that sets up a topic chain. *Freud* would therefore appear to fit better the notion of topical Theme (were Halliday's term to be retained); yet since *Freud* is not initial and Halliday does not allow for more than one ideational element as Theme, this avenue of analysis is excluded.

Consequently, there is in my view a disadvantage in tying Topic to initial element. I therefore suggested "a dissociation of Theme in the sense of 'initial element' from Topic. . . . In other words, while all topics would still be ideational, the first ideational element is not necessarily the topic" (Downing 1991: 127). Significantly, my own analysis of the Freud text in the article "An Alternative Approach to Theme: A Systemic-functional Perspective" (1991: 127-128) illustrated both Theme and Topic, and included the analysis of *he* as topic in the subordinate clauses. Incidentally, this analysis is reproduced in Downing (1990b), with similar comments, a fact which MGG fails to mention. She also fails to include this publication in the Works Cited.

The analysis of the same extract in Downing and Locke (1992: 233), by contrast, addresses exclusively the notion of Theme. This responded to a deliberate methodological strategy, since the context of the analysis is a brief subsection on Multiple Themes in a university grammar for students, in which Topic is accorded a separate section, with different illustrations. In ad-

dition, the authors state explicitly that "Themes in subordinate and embedded clauses are not indicated" (1992: 233); consequently, *he . . . he* in lines 1 and 2 of the text are not analysed.

A more attentive reading would have enabled MGG to have appreciated these differences and to avoid attributing to me an unwarranted analysis, despite evidence to the contrary. This evidence can be specified as follows: i) my own analysis of *Towards the end of his life* as Adjunctive marked Theme is correctly reproduced below the text in her article; ii) Topical Theme does not figure as an option in Downing and Locke (1992). Indeed, with the exception of Downing (1995), which followed Martin's (1992) terminology and restricted the term to important participants which establish a referential chain, I no longer use it.

As regards recursive thematic elements, it is indeed the case that recursive ideational (representational) Themes are not explicitly indicated in the 1992 grammar. This is for reasons of economy. Recursion as "the property of language to repeat any unit indefinitely" is introduced in the first chapter, dealing with basic concepts, as one of the means of linguistic expansion. There is, therefore, no question of abandoning recursion in that volume. Such an analysis based on recursive elements might in fact be preferable in spatio-temporal Themes such as the italicized elements in "*In the east before the time of Buddha there had been ascetics,*" rather than considering the spatial and temporal Adjuncts as one single point of departure as in Downing (1991: 134). One could likewise posit a whole string of circumstantials, including Manner, Cause etc. I am grateful to MGG for triggering this speculation, which I do not pursue further here. Admitting recursive circumstantial Adjuncts is quite a different matter, however, from analysing these Adjuncts as topical Themes.

To round off this clarifying comment, I will add that my view of Theme as expressed in Downing 1990a, Downing 1990b and Downing and Locke 1992 is basically the same as the conclusion reached in my 1991 proposal (which was given in a shorter version in the 1990a paper). My view of Topic, however, is developing, and the changes involved may well be reflected in recent and future publications. While for my part, I will do my best to make my position clear, I can only trust that future interpretation does not derive from misconception. ✎

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REVIEWS

RESEÑAS

Alfred Arteaga
Chicano Poetics: Heterotexts and Hybridities
 Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.

Since its inception in the 60s, Chicano criticism, as well as Chicano literature, has grown in sophistication and volume. With titles such as Ramón Saldívar's *Chicano Narrative*, Héctor Calderón and José David Saldívar's *Criticism in the Borderlands*, not to mention Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, it is not an exaggeration to suggest that we are rapidly moving into an "age of Chicano criticism," as Angie Chabram remarks (1991: 128). Alfred Arteaga's *Chicano Poetics* adds to Chicano criticism a dialogic relationship with Western criticism, and a deep preoccupation with a kind of criticism that is politically and socially relevant. As opposed to some Chicano critics who do not see how Western criticism (be it French feminism or Poststructuralism, among many other possibilities) can dictate what Chicanos find in their literature (Yabro-Bejarano 1996: 208), Arteaga, like Saldívar in *Chicano Narrative*, José Limón in *Mexican Ballads*, *Chicano Poems*, holds a dialogue with Western criticism (especially Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*), with poetic devices in Nahuatl, and with (Lesbian) Feminism to create a "hybrid" critical discourse which he alternates with his own poetry from *Cantos*. Arteaga's hybrid text moves easily between "the two alliances" of Chicano literature and criticism: Western culture and education, and deep cultural bonds with the Mexican and Latin American tradition (Héctor Calderón, qtd. by Angie Chabram 1991: 138). In *Chicano Poetics* Arteaga offers an elegant prose and an inspired poetry to flesh out the nature and importance of this hybrid identity, its formal features and meanings, together with its alliances and political implications.

In "Mestizaje/Difrasismo," the first chapter, Arteaga sets out his poetic task in writing his book of poetry, *Cantos*, as "working out poetically some