THEME: TOPIC
OR DISCOURSE FRAMEWORK?

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1. INTRODUCTION[1]

As is well known, Halliday uses a spatial metaphor, "point of departure"/"takeoff point," and a matter metaphor, "aboutness"/"concern," as two different, but equivalent, glosses of (*Topical*) *Theme*. Thus, he writes:

> In this teapot my aunt was given by the duke, the psychological subject is this teapot. That is to say, it is "this teapot" that is the CONCERN of the message—that the speaker has taken as POINT OF EMBARKATION of the clause. . . . The Theme is the STARTING POINT for the message; it is what the clause is going to be ABOUT. (1994 [1985]: 34, 39; my emphasis)

By contrast, Huddleston (1988, 1991, 1992) and Downing (1991) find that the spatial metaphor (i.e. "point of departure") and the matter metaphor (i.e. "aboutness") cannot be applied to the same category.[2] In my view, these two scholars interpret "aboutness" from a "referential" perspective (see Gundel 1988: 211-212), that is, as an intuitive context-dependent notion identifying

the main cognitive entity involved in a message, usually labelled as *Topic* and associated with different kinds of given information (cf. e.g. Prince's [1981] *Scale of Familiarity*, Chafe's [1976] *Scale of Topic Accessibility*). Accordingly, Huddleston and Downing draw the same conclusion: "what a clause as a message is about" does not necessarily constitute its point of departure. However, the two scholars differ as for the importance they confer to the notion "point of departure" and as to the way they identify "what a sequence is about." The main thrust of this paper is to show that most of Huddleston's and Downing's objections to Hallidayan (Topical) Theme can be overcome, provided that this category is approached from a *separating* perspective (see Fries 1983 1981]) and its feature of "aboutness" is interpreted in a *relational* sense.

2. DOWNING'S AND HUDDLESTON'S APPRAISALS OF HALLIDAY'S THEME

Huddleston (1988: 162) discards Halliday's spatial metaphor ("point of departure"), realized in English by clause initial position, as not being relevant enough (syntactically or semantically) to constitute a grammatical function by itself. Instead, he concentrates on the matter metaphor ("what the clause is about"), which he calls either *Topic* or *Theme*.[3] Downing (1991: 122), in her turn, "willingly goes along with" Halliday's spatial gloss, but she rephrases its deictic function as a *framework-setting* device.[4] In other words, like Halliday she considers Theme as signalling the speaker's semantic and mood angle on the message, but invoking Chafe (1976) and Lowe (1987), Downing suggests that this category sets up different types of frameworks within which a discourse span holds, as illustrated in (1) below:

(1)   i.   *The Gauls* sacked Rome (Downing 1991: 123; participant individual framework)
         ii.   *In the East long before the time of Buddha* there had been ascetics... (ibid.: 134; spatial circumstantial framework).[5]

The idea of analysing Theme as a framework-setting device accords well with Halliday's arguments. Yet, it should be noted that while his *Multiple Theme* sets discourse frameworks related to the three metafunctions of language (i.e. *textual*, *interpersonal*, *topical*), Downing's three types of frameworks (i.e. *individual, circumstantial* and *discourse*) are based on two

syntactic variables [+/- Participant], [+/- nuclear constituent] and on one semantic criterion [+/- experiential meaning] (see Table 1). Further field research should be undertaken to elicit and contrast the discourse implications of both approaches.

Table 1   *Halliday's Multiple Theme vs. Downing's frameworks*

Halliday's multiple Theme	Downing's thematic frameworks				
metafunctions	framework	participant	nuclear	experiential	Theme
ideational	individual	+	+	+	Participant (Subject, Object, Complements, *as for,* elements) Attribute
		-	-	+	Process
		-	+	-	
	circumstan-tial spatial temporal situational	- - -	- - -	+ + +	place Adjunct time Adjunct other Adjuncts (e.g., Participant-tied V-en clauses, participant-tied V-ing dependent situation clauses, to-infinitive clauses, etc.)
textual	discourse logical	-	-	-	Conjunctive Themes, continuatives, conjunctions, relatives and relational Themes
interpersonal	subjective	-	-	-	modal Themes

Turning to the "aboutness" feature, Huddleston agrees with Lyons (1977: 505), Chafe (1976), Comrie (1981: 58) and Reinhart (1982: 58) that, except for certain marked constructions such as those with *what about*, *as for*, etc., which take only *referential* (i.e. ideational or representational) *nominal items* as their complements, or some cases of fronting, Topic (i.e. "what a message is about") is not systematically encoded in English. Rather, this category is addressed as an intuitive concept that must be negotiated throughout discourse and that can only be inferred from its co(n)text(s), as illustrated in (2) and (3) below (from Huddleston (1988: 158-9, 1991: 99, 101):

(2)   *She broke it.* (Topic: *she,* as an answer to *What did she do ?*; or Topic: *it*, in answer to *What happened to it?*)

(3)   (i) *What about the battery?* (Topic: *the battery / it*)
        (ii) *It was OK.*
        (iii) *There was nothing wrong with it*.

(iv) *I had to replace it.*

Huddleston dissociates Topic from clause initial position (i.e. Halliday's (Topical) *Theme$_E$* , Theme expression, in English) on three grounds. First, he alludes to Schachter and Otanes' (1972: 81) observation that there exist languages in which the concern of the clause typically occurs in final position and is morphologically marked, if it is marked at all (e.g. the suffix *-ang* in Tagalog). The second reason adduced is that initial position may be filled by (an) item(s) other than referential and/or nominal, which therefore cannot express "what the clause is about," as can be seen in (4) below from Huddleston (1988: 158; 1991: 99):

(4)   (i) *Nothing will satisfy you* [? *As for nothing, it will satisfy you*]
       (ii) *You could buy a bar of chocolate like this for 6d before the War* [spoken to someone who was born before the War] [? *as for you, you could buy a bar of chocolate like this for 6d before the War*]
       (iii) *There's a fallacy in your argument* [* *As for there, it/there is a fallacy in your argument*]

And third, in Huddleston's (1988: 158, 1991: 97) view, the significance of being the "first element" or the "point of departure" for the message is a matter of further research, not current understanding. Taking the aforementioned arguments as his point of departure, he raises four debatable issues:

(1) that Halliday does not *demonstrate* (i.e. he gives no type of evidence, empirical, grammatical or semantic), but only asserts, that:
    (a) the Theme of a clause extends up to (and includes) the first ideational element;
    (b) there is a single invariant meaning attaching to this category (i.e. Theme$_C$);
(2) that the hierarchical constituent structure of (multiple) Theme is not a valid construct;[6]
(3) that the thematic structure of questions (and imperatives) and messages in general is not marked by what Halliday regards as Theme$_E$, but by the *construction* as a whole;
(4) that Halliday has failed to make any explicit and systematic distinction between Theme$_C$ and Theme$_E$.

Alternatively, Downing's Topic evokes a contextual referential interpretation of "aboutness." It invokes the referent / participant / constituent / idea that establishes a relationship of "aboutness" between a clause / utterance entity

and the overall discourse as determined by the co(n)text, which Givón defines as:

> the participant most crucially involved in the action sequence of the paragraph; it is the participant most closely associated with the higher-level "theme" of the paragraph; and finally it is the participant most likely to be coded as the *primary topic*—or *grammatical subject*—of the vast majority of sequentially-ordered clauses/sentences comprising the thematic paragraph. (1983b: 8)

Furthermore, adopting van Oosten's (1986) model, Downing distinguishes between *super-ordinate*, or text level, Topics (i.e. "what a text is about") and *clause level* Topics (i.e. "what a clause is about"). The former are defined as *cognitive schemata* (i.e. the organization of thoughts into schemes of things) that compress a whole text in a single proposition (e.g. titles of books, articles, lectures and so on). Clause level Topics, on the other hand, are described as individual participants prototypically endowed with the features of referentiality, definiteness and agentivity and acting as Subject or Object, given that both functions are valency-bound to the verb and they may affect the mood structure of clauses. Conversely, the other syntactic functions (viz. Complements, Attributes or circumstantial Adjuncts) do not involve such syntactic implications and are described as Attributes of, and therefore subordinate to, basic clause level Topics.[7] As a result, Downing's definition of topical "aboutness," in agreement with Huddleston's analyses above, leaves out from the category of basic clause level Topic the following (cf. Davison 1984: 827):

(1) Negative and impersonal Subjects actualizing *non-referential* participants (e.g. *nothing, nowhere* etc., *You can define a net in one of two ways, depending on your point of view* —Downing 1990: 123 [my emphasis]);

(2) Fronted circumstantial (including presentative) Adjuncts (e.g. *At seventeen, he announces ...* —Downing 1990: 124 [my emphasis])

(3) Existential-*There* constructions (e.g. *There was once an ugly bear who hid from the world*, Downing 1990: 126 [my emphasis]);

(4) Fronted Attributes (e.g. *Worst of all was the emasculation of the League of Nations* —Downing 1990: 127 [my emphasis])

Downing claims that the above represent some of the means available in English to mark *Topic discontinuity* in discourse, that is, to introduce *new* clause level Topics, which

(1) provide emphatic points of departure;
(2) infuse with rhematic (end weight) and/or focal (end focus) promi-
    nence an element (the new Topic) that otherwise would not re-
    ceive this type of prominence.

Downing makes three further points. First, like Huddleston, she seems to suggest that the label *Topical Theme* is not particularly felicitous, the implication being that only initial Subjects or initial Objects can behave as Topics and therefore properly be called Topical Themes. These are said to contribute to either the Topic continuity of texts (when cohesive) or to introduce new Topics over a discourse span (usually receiving focal prominence) [my emphasis], as is explained in (5) below:

(5)   (i) *Another thing he would probably never see, and that would be any sign of a mammal.* (Downing 1991: 130)
       (ii) *One half she ate herself, the other she gave to the child.* (Downing and Locke 1992: 231)
       (iii) *Lea asked me to bring some tea from London. This I did.* (Downing and Locke 1992: 231)

Second, Downing regards the label *displaced Topical Theme* as unnecessary, arguing that clause level Topics need not be thematic. Initial non-Object marked Themes are said not to behave as Topics, but to set up emphatic points of departure which contribute to either Topic discontinuity or to Topic continuity over a discourse span, as in (6) below [my emphasis]:

(6)   *For two hundred years the Roman soldier-farmers had struggled for freedom and a share in the government of their state; for a hundred years they had enjoyed their privileges.* (Downing 1991: 132).

And third, though accepting the concept of Multiple Theme, Downing suggests that the first experiential element need not represent the cut-off point between Theme and Rheme. She (1991: 127 (10)) suggests the possibility of recursive textual, interpersonal and ideational elements extending up to (and including) the clause level Topic, as reproduced in (7) below [my emphasis]:

(7)   1. ideational   *Towards the end of his life,* (1)
       2. ideational (+ topic) *Freud* (2) *concluded that (3)*
       3. structural   *he* (4) *was not a great man,*
       4. ideational (+ topic) *but* (5) *he* (6) *had discovered*
       5. structural   *great things. Arguably* (7),
       6. ideational (+ topic) *the reverse* (8) *might be true.*

7. modal
8. ideational (+ topic)

Elsewhere, however, Downing seems to abandon this hypothesis and return to Halliday's idea that Multiple Theme extends up to (and includes) the *first* experiential (their representational) element, as illustrated in (8), a re-analysis of the above excerpt:

(8) *Towards the end of his life*, [1] *Freud concluded that he was not a great man but he had discovered great things*. *Arguably*, [2] *the reverse* [3] *might be true*.

[1] adjunctive (marked) Theme [2] modal Theme [3] unmarked (Subject) Theme.

(Downing and Locke 1992: 233)

Here *Towards the end of his life* is analysed as a Topical Theme despite its not being a referential participant, while *he*, the initial referential participant in the two subsequent subordinate clauses, is barred from this category.

3. HALLIDAY'S THEME: TOPIC OR FRAMEWORK?

I believe that, like Huddleston and Downing, Halliday dissociates Theme from Topic. From his "separating" perspective (see Fries 1983 [1981]), Topic is considered as a non-structural category at the level of texts disentangling their top-down processing. Put differently, in SFG Topics may be regarded as telling us "what texts are about" *referentially,* that is, by means of non structural relationships of *presupposition*, or cohesion (viz. *situational* and/or *verbal*—see Halliday 1974). Conversely, Theme represents a structural (clausal) category that announces "what clauses as messages are about" relationally. As I see it, Hallidayan "aboutness" invokes a *message-centred* (as opposed to co(n)text-centred) and a *clause-based* (as opposed to sentence-based, group-based, etc.) syntactically coded relation deriving from the linear quality of language established between an *entity* (viz. referent, participant, constituent)/*proposition*, or (*beta*) *Theme*, and a clausal (complex) predication, or *Rheme*. Hence, "what a message is about" is said to be iconically coded by message initial experiential position (i.e. a Participant,

an Attribute, a Circumstance or a Process), unless syntactically specified otherwise (i.e. unless there is some syntactically-marked thematic substitute preceding it). I contend that it is because of this relational interpretation of "aboutness" that Theme has been glossed by means of such psycholinguistic expressions as the "point of departure / point of embarkation of the clause as a message," or "the hook / peg on which the message is hung." Likewise, the relational quality of Halliday's "aboutness" can be attested at the three levels of description acknowledged in SFG, namely:

(1) from above the linguistic system;
(2) at the same level in the linguistic system;
(3) and from below the linguistic system.

From above the linguistic system, the relational "aboutness" of Theme is said to impose universal patterns of textual organization that are *instrumental to* (i.e. help to express) ideational and interpersonal meanings. For Theme is said to express a textual (*deictic*) meaning: it links the speaker's thought with its expression in language, establishing the framework or perspective (*speaker's angle*) from which the rest of the message unit develops. Therefore, Theme contributes to the bottom-up processing of texts, i.e. to their *method of development* (see e.g. Halliday 1978: 134; 1994: 61, 67, 336, 387; Fries 1983: 135) as well as to their *thematic progression* (see e.g. Martin 1988, 1992b; Giora 1983; Eiler 1986). And at a larger scale, thematic choices are also said to be affected by such variables as *register*, *gender* and *ideology* (see Martin 1992). At the same level in the linguistic system, on the other hand, Matthiessen and Martin (1991: 43-48) remark that thematic "aboutness" sets out *thematic proportionalities*, or textual paradigmatic relationships. In other words, Theme represents the concern of messages at clause rank in relation to:

(1) different classes and types of Themes and Rhemes within clauses as messages;
(2) given and new information within the Theme system complex, in correlation with the principles of *end Focus* and *end Weight* to build up the discourse prominence of (an) item(s);
(3) grammar as a whole, particularly the systems of Transitivity and Mood (the former determining from which semantic perspective, or transitivity role, a particular process is to be viewed and the latter expressing the purpose of the message, that is, declarative, interrogative, imperative or exclamative).

Lastly, from below Halliday argues [personal communication] that, if the clause contains two information units, then the overwhelming probability is

that the boundary will fall between the Theme and the Rheme. To summarize, thematic choices help texts to be coherent with respect to themselves (i.e. *cohesive*) and coherent with respect to their contexts of situation or register (i.e. *consistent*).

Four conclusions which are summarized below might be drawn from this relational rendering of the "aboutness" feature of Hallidayan (Topical) Theme:

(1) Spatial metaphor ("point of departure") and "matter metaphor" are two different aspects of Halliday's theme.

(2) "As for" (and similar) constructions cannot be used as "tests" for thematic "aboutness."

(3) The meaning of theme must be obtained from the construction as a whole.

(4) Halliday's category of "displaced theme" should be revised, if not discarded.

Firstly, I contend that Halliday is consistent in treating the *spatial metaphor* (the "point of departure" of the clause as a message) and the *matter metaphor* ("what it is about") as two different aspects of Theme, i.e. the psycholinguistic-syntactic and its feature of relational aboutness, respectively.[8] Moreover, I think that the label *Topical Theme* is consistent with a relational interpretation of aboutness that identifies this category with the clause / message initial transitivity constituent (or with the final constituent in substitute Themes). Likewise, I would like to suggest that this analysis answers Huddleston's (1988, 1991) demand for an explanation in terms of "aboutness" of messages introduced by non-referential constituents such as those in (2) above. I concur with Martin and Matthiessen (1991: 43-48) that such messages may be said to be "about" and to have as "point of departure" *nothing*, *you*, and *there*, respectively: these items express the speaker's experiential / interpersonal attitude to the message to be constructed, whether or not evoking referential nominals. Their *valeur* (i.e. paradigmatic value) is established in connection with their corresponding Rhemes and with respect to the proportionalities in which they participate, that is to say, in terms of alternative choices in similar discourse co(n)texts, as illustrated in Tables 2 and 3 below.

Hence, negative Themes such as *Nothing* contrast with positive Themes (e.g. *something, somebody, everybody*, etc.) and with rhematic instances, thematizing the polarity of the clause (except that the negative feature is restricted to the Theme) as well as a participant, which, if not acting as Subject, leads to the inversion Finite-Subject (e.g., *Nowhere would you get a better*

offer, Matthiessen and Martin 1991: 44). Similarly, *there*-structures are described as ideally designed for introducing participants as unmarked news at the end of the clause. *There*, the unmarked Theme (i.e. the Subject) of this clause type does not realize a participant, but functions simply to map the meaning "existence" onto Theme. It acts as an anticipatory framework signalling that something is coming, namely a new participant in a story, which is often picked up referentially and thematically in the subsequent discourse. In turn, acting negatively, It-Themes and cases of postponed (or discontinuous) Themes endow with end-Focus and/or end-weight-prominence items that otherwise would not get this type of discourse prominence, easing, at the same time, the information processing of the sequence(s). Likewise, clauses like *And perhaps he's right* can be claimed to be simultaneously about "and," "perhaps" and "he," in that these items participate in, for instance, the proportionalities included in Table 3 overleaf.

Table 2   *Some thematic proportionalities*

Theme	markedness	samples
non special Themes Theme-Mood	unmarked	*You could buy a bar of chocolate like this for 6d before the War*
	-	*Nothing will satisfy you*
	-	*Your argument has a fallacy*
	marked	*A bar of chocolate like this you could buy for 6d before the War*
	-	*You nothing will satisfy*
Theme-Transitivity	-	*A fallacy your argument has*
	unmarked	*A bar of chocolate like this could be bought for 6d before the War*
	-	*You will not be satisfied*
	marked	*Before the war a bar of chocolate like this could be bought for 6d*

special Themes		
Theme-Predication	unmarked	*It was a bar of chocolate like this that you could buy for 6d before the War*
	-	*It is you that nothing satisfies*
	-	*It is your argument that has a fallacy*
	marked	*Before the war it was a bar of chocolate like this that you could buy for 6d*
	-	*You it is that nothing satisfies*
	-	*Your argument it is that has a fallacy*
Theme-Identification	unmarked	*What you could buy for 6d before the War was a bar of chocolate like this*
	-	*Who nothing satisfies is you*
	-	*What has a fallacy is your argument*
	marked	*A bar of chocolate like this was what you could buy for 6d before the War*
	-	*You are who nothing satisfies*
	-	*A fallacy is what your argument has*
Theme-Reference	unmarked	*As to chocolate, you could buy a bar like this for 6d before the War*
	-	*As for being satisfied, nothing satisfies you*
	-	*Regarding your argument, it has a fallacy*
	marked	*As to chocolate, before the war you could buy a bar like this for 6d*
	-	*Regarding your argument, a fallacy it has*
Theme-Substitution	unmarked	*You could buy it for 6d before the War, a bar of chocolate like this*
	-	*It has a fallacy, your argument*
	marked	*This you could buy for 6d before the War, a bar of chocolate like this*
	-	*A fallacy it has, your argument*
Existential Theme	unmarked	*There was a bar of chocolate that you could buy for 6d before the War*
	-	*There is nothing that satisfies you*
	-	*There is a fallacy in your argument*
	marked	*Before the War there was a bar of chocolate that you could buy for 6d*
		In your argument there is a fallacy

Table 3   Multiple Theme and textual proportionalities

Clause	Theme		
	logical	interpersonal	topical
And perhaps he's right	1	2	3
And he perhaps is right	1	0	2
perhaps he is right	0	1	2
he perhaps is right	0	0	1

Secondly, I agree with Halliday 1994 [1985]: 39) and with Matthiessen and Martin (1991: 46) that *as for* (or similar) constructions cannot be used as a "test" for thematic (Huddleston's topical) status, for they either question or disregard items that from a relational perspective would behave as Themes (e.g. those included in [2] above). Rather, such constructions seem to act as explicit markers of thematic items, which typically:

(1) function as Subjects;
(2) convey given information;
(3) play an experiential role in the ideational structure of the clause;
(4) either introduce an elaboration of some aspect of a general statement made earlier in the text (usually the second or later in a series) or signal a change of Topic in discourse (see e.g. Andrews 1985; Geluykens 1992; Downing and Locke 1992).

Thirdly, I think enough evidence has been presented to substantiate Bazel's (1973: 201) and Huddleston's (1991: 105) remark that the meaning of Theme should be derived from the meaning of the *construction* as a whole. To my knowledge, Halliday does not only imply this relational tenet (an entity plays the role of Theme because there is another playing the role of a rhematic predication), but he also explicitly states it on describing the thematic structure of subjectless imperatives (e.g., *Keep quiet*):

> Strictly speaking, these have no explicit Theme; the meaning "I want you to," which might have been thematised, by analogy with those above [Subject imperatives], or with the interrogative, is realised simply by the *form* of the clause. (1994: 49; my emphasis).

And fourthly, like Downing, I believe that the label *Displaced Topical Theme* is to some extent inconsistent with Halliday's argumentation. First, the idea of a displaced, or non initial, Topical Theme violates Halliday's description of this category as extending up to (and including) the first experiential / transitivity element. Hence, on not being initial, "displaced" transitivity constituents cannot be regarded as thematic. And second, Halliday's identification of a displaced Theme as that which "would be unmarked Theme in the ensuing clause, if the existing marked Topical Theme was reworded as a dependent clause" (1994: 66) is so vague that virtually all marked Themes could be considered to precede a displaced Theme. This would imply a shift in the theory that, to my knowledge, Halliday has never intended. Rather, the account of displaced Themes is restricted to just three examples of different types of marked (Adjunct) Themes as illustrated in (11)

(from Halliday 1994: 64-5), which reveals the account of this category as rather *ad hoc* and lacking self-consistency:

(10)   (i) <u>Apart from a need to create his own identity</u> «*having well and truly trained and educated and, indeed, used his father for so long, emotionally and practically*» *Robert* felt that at twenty the last thing he wanted to do was to join a family firm in Newcastle.*
(ii) <u>For all his integrity and high principles</u>, *Robert* pulled a slightly fast one over his father and business partners.*
(iii) <u>In a letter</u> [<u>written to Longridge</u>] <u>on 7 June, eleven days before Robert's departure</u>, *George* sounds distinctly miserable, even bitter, << though trying hard to hide it, >> at the prospect of travelling to Liverpool in time to see Robert off.*

Even if it could be admitted that the Topical Themes in (10: i, ii) do display some sort of semantic dependency on *Robert*, which could justify the analysis of this constituent as a displaced Topical Theme, that is not the case in (10: iii), where an independent place Adjunct is also analysed as displacing the Topical Theme. This could be a consistent analysis if, like Downing, Halliday interpreted Theme from a referential perspective, which would restrict "aboutness" to referential participants only. But, it seems to me, this is not Halliday's intention, for elsewhere initial circumstances are presented as a central type of marked Topical Theme, which to me indicates a relational semantic interpretation of "aboutness."

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have argued that, like Huddleston or Downing, Halliday separates out the categories of Topic (i.e. "what a text is about") and Theme (i.e. "what a clause as a message is about"): the former represents a non-structural category developed throughout texts by situational and/or cohesive relationships of presupposition, while the latter is treated as a structural category that is iconically realized by the first *experiential* constituent of the clause (viz. a Participant, an Attribute, a Circumstance or a Process). I have also defended Halliday's different, though equivalent, glosses of the latter category as the "point of departure" and the "concern" of the clause as a message. These have been taken to refer to two different aspects of Theme, i.e. the psycholinguistic-syntactic and its feature of relational aboutness, respectively. However, I have argued that only by interpreting "aboutness" in

a relational sense can the two glosses be applied to the same category. The claim has been made that Halliday uses "aboutness" relationally, so to speak, to gloss the function of Theme at clause rank in relation to other categories at the same level of description in the linguistic system, from above it and from below it. From above, "what a clause is about" has been said to express the speaker's angle on the clause as a message, its scope, or framework setting potential, extending over the ensuing discourse span (one clause or more). At the same level, clauses have been considered to be about their Themes with respect to their Rhemes and these, at the same time, to be rhematic in relation to their Themes. The thematic patterns derived therefrom acquire their *valeur* from the grammatical and discourse co(n)text(s) in which they occur. Thus, I suggest the label *Topical Theme* be interpreted in a *relational* sense, that is, with respect to other possible initial transitivity and/or textual and/or interpersonal elements staging the grammatical structure of clauses as messages against the background of a context. Finally, from below, it has been suggested that the information structure of messages typically marks their thematic (and rhematic) configuration. By contrast, I have contended that Huddleston and Downing endorse two different versions of a referential interpretation of topical "aboutness": the interactive and the contextual interpretation, respectively. Thus, Huddleston renders this notion as an intuitive-referential notion that is not grammatically coded in English, but must be inferred from discourse, whereas Downing identifies it with Subject and Object participants.

Therefore, I conclude that Huddleston's and Downing's Topic, coding two different kinds of referential "aboutness," can be reconciled with Halliday's Theme, a framework-setting device denoting relational "aboutness." My hypothesis admitted that these categories invoke different notions that may, but need not, coalesce in discourse, as illustrated in (11) and (12) below (re-analyses of [2] and [3] above, respectively; emphasis added):

(11) (i) *She broke it*
     Topic: *she*, *it*, *she broke it* (context dependent); Theme: *she*
(12) (i) *What about the battery?*
     (ii) *It was OK*
     (iii) *There was nothing wrong with it*
     (iv) *I had to replace it*
     Topic: *the battery*; Theme: *what about*, *it*, *there*, respectively.

The possible benefits of a relational interpretation of "aboutness" notwithstanding, I have detected five problems in relation to Halliday's account of (Topical) Theme, namely:

    (1) Two aspects related to terminology:

        (a) whether or not "the first *ideational* element" accurately defines / identifies Theme;

        (b) whether or not the label *Textual Theme* is a misnomer.

    (2) The accuracy of initial position as criterial for thematic status.

    (3) The type of structure imposed by thematic patterns.

    (4) The co(n)text-(in)dependence of thematic choices.

    (5) The separating nature of the approach as a whole.

Space constraints preclude further discussion of these five issues here. Yet I hope that this paper contrasting the "aboutness" feature of Halliday's Topical Theme with Huddleston's and Downing's Topic may contribute to the forging of some sort of consensus about the nature of these notions and about the relationships they may impose on discourse.a

NOTES

1. This is a revised edition of a paper presented at the 20th International Systemic-Functional Congress, July 19-23, 1993, Vancouver, Canada. The research for this paper was conducted in the framework of research project PB90-0370 (Spanish Ministry of Education and Science). I wish to thank M. A. K. Halliday, Peter Fries, Chris Butler, Teresa Fanego, Margaret Berry and Peter Collins for their suggestions and comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I am also grateful to Bari Samitta (Nottingham) for correcting my English.

2. Compare for instance Bazell 1973: 201; Firbas 1974: 25, 212; Gundel 1974: 47, 87; Dahl 1976: 48; Creiden 1978: 200; Kuno 1975: 326, Footnote 1; Allerton 1978: 166; Fronek 1983: 312; Taglicht 1984: 14; Davison and Lutz 1985: 33; Hudson 1986: 797, 798; Siewierska 1991: 149 note 3.

3. Huddleston favours the first label. He justifies this identification arguing that Halliday (Halliday 1985: 54) himself admits that Topical Theme "corresponds fairly well to the element identified as 'topic' in topic-comment analysis."

4. Chafe (1976: 50) was the first one to use the label (*spatial*, *temporal*, or *individual*) *framework* as limiting "the applicability of the main predication to a certain restricted domain." But he ascribed this function to Topic, rather than Theme. Lowe (1987: 6) and Downing (1991: 128) adopt Chafe's different types of framework, but they associate these with Theme and expand their scope of applicability over the *ensuing discourse span*, i.e. any unit, usually larger than the sentence, contributing to the topic continuity or discontinuity of texts.

5. Exceptions to this would be: (1) negative Adjuncts (e.g., *never, not often, not a soul*, etc.); (2) directional Adjuncts (e.g. *Off they go*, Downing and Locke 1992: 228 [my emphasis]); (3) *so, neither* and *nor* introducing elliptical clauses (e.g. *Ed passed the exam and so did Mary*, ibid. 229; my emphasis]); (4) *such* and *so* acting as Modifiers of Objects, Complements or Adjuncts (e.g *So depressed did he feel that nothing would cheer him up*, id.; [my emphasis]); and (5) subordinate clauses of condition and concession (e.g *Had I know the facts, I would not have employed him*, id.; [my emphasis]). These Themes are regarded as Attributes of basic clause level Topics, rather than basic level Topics, because, despite triggering inversion of Subject and Finite or Predicator, they are not participants.

6. Huddleston (1991: 106) δcannot make any sense of the ideaδ that the underlined sequences in *and perhaps he's right* or *well but then Ann, surely, wouldn't the best idea be to join the group* behave as a single Theme indicating what these messages are about [my emphasis])

7. In SFG texts are defined "semantically," as any passage of coherent and cohesive discourse (see Halliday and Hasan 1976: 23). By contrast, clauses are considered as structural units because they can be described in terms of functionally different *horizontal* (i.e. word order) and *vertical* (i.e. whole-part/part-whole) dependency relations.

8. This holds despite such observations as Matthiessen and Martin's (1991: 42, 49) that, as a notion derived from circumstances of matter in transitivity, "aboutness" proves difficult to apply to interpersonal meaning and gives only partial and ideationally biased accounts of the textual metafunction, as opposed to the more global implications of Halliday's notion of Theme =point of departure)

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