MARKED OR UNMARKED, THAT IS NOT THE QUESTION. THE QUESTION IS: WHERE'S THE THEME? [1]

Carlos A. M. Gouveia
Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Leila Barbara
Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, Brazil

Abstract

The definition of theme is not entirely uncontroversial within systemic linguistics. Furthermore, the application of the notion of theme to languages other than English is even more problematic. Portuguese is one such a language, not only because of its specificity, but also because, depending on the definition of theme, its two main varieties may not go entirely together when it comes to what is marked or unmarked. The purpose of this paper is to raise arguments for a definition of theme that may also be useful for languages such as Portuguese, where the subject is often elided leaving the predicator as clause initial. The structure shown by this type of clause and the way it casts doubts on the organisation of the clause as message, seem to be related to the core of the controversy over the definition of theme.

Keywords: Theme; markedness; unmarkedness; Subject; co-referentiality.

1. Introduction

Within systemic functional linguistics the definition of Theme has not been entirely uncontroversial, as a brief survey of the literature will demonstrate, with definitions such as: it is "what the clause is about" (Halliday, 1985, p. 39); it "is the starting point for the message; it is the ground from which the clause is taking off" (Halliday, 1994, p. 38); it "is simply the label that we use to suggest what meaning is attached to first position in the clause. [...] The theme extends from the beginning of the clause up to (and including) the first element that has a function in transitivity." (Halliday, 1994, p. 53); or, again, "that which occupies a specific position in the sequence of elements in some unit type(s)" (Hasan & Fries, 1995, p. xxvi). These definitions, however, do not say exactly the same thing; in fact, in them Theme is either considered a function or a position, which may lead to the conclusion that both things are one and the same thing.

In order to deal with these different aspects of Theme, Eggins (1994, pp. 274-275), for instance, distinguishes "between the <u>definition</u> of the constituent we call Theme and its <u>identification</u>", with the former associated with function and the latter with position. Although this may prove to be an ingenious way of dealing with the question, in fact it does not seem to provide a clear-cut separation between two different aspects of the definition of Theme, particularly if we consider that the definition of Theme is a matter of theory, as a result of observation and analysis of a specific function present in all natural languages, and the identification of Theme is a matter of analysis of the behaviour of that function in a particular natural language. As stressed by Halliday (1994, p. 38), but often forgotten, that means that in English:

> **As a general guide**, the Theme can be identified as that element which comes in first position in the clause. We have already indicated that **this is not how** the category of Theme is **defined**. The definition is functional, as it is with all the elements in this interpretation of grammatical structure. The Theme is one element in a particular structural configuration

which, taken as a whole, organizes the clause as a message (our emphasis in the first two cases).

We feel it is important to stress Halliday's point that the identification of the element Theme is a result of a functional definition and not the result of a particular position in a grammatical structure. It happens that in English both things coincide, but that should not be sufficient to bring structural aspects into the definition of Theme, which is supposed to be a function present in all natural languages, independently of its structural configuration and positioning. Different languages behave differently both in functional and structural terms and the application of the notion of Theme to languages other than English may result problematic, if one considers not only function but also structure. Portuguese is one such a language, not only because of its specificity, but also because, depending on the definition of Theme, its two main varieties **may not go** entirely together when it comes to what is a marked or unmarked Theme.

The purpose of this paper is to raise arguments for a definition of Theme that may also be useful for languages such as Portuguese, where in declarative clauses the Subject is often elided leaving the Predicator as clause initial.[2] The structure shown by this type of clause, and the way it casts doubts on the organisation of the clause as message, seem to be related to the core of the controversy over the definition of Theme.

We will start with a characterization of the problem we are dealing with, the contents of section 1, moving then, in section 2, to the presentation of possible ways of addressing it. In section 3, we will try to validate a proper solution by raising arguments in favour of it and against the other possible solutions. Finally, in section 4, some tentative conclusions will be drawn, including a consequent redefinition of the notion of Theme.

2. The problem

Both English and Portuguese are considered to be SVO languages, according to their structural pattern of syntactic organization. They share

this characteristic with languages such as Spanish, Italian or French, for instance. The fact that all these languages belong to the same group in terms of their general pattern of syntactic organization would lead us to believe that they all behave the same way when it comes to the definition of Theme. Consequently, what has been written about English could apply to all the other languages. But that cannot be the case. As a matter of fact, unlike English and French, but together with Spanish and Italian, Portuguese has another characteristic that raises some difficulties to a direct transfer of what has been put forward about Theme in English.

In terms of Chomskyan linguistics, this characteristic has been referred to as a positive marking of the Dummy Subject Parameter (DSP), while in English (and French) this marking is considered to be negative. Portuguese is thus a pro-drop language. What this means is that in Portuguese one has the possibility of eliding the Subject in ordinary constructions such as (1), leaving the Predicator as clause initial, as in (2):

> (1)   / Eu fui ao cinema ontem /
>   'I went to the cinema yesterday'
>
> (2)   / Fui ao cinema ontem /
>   '[I] Went to the cinema yesterday'

How should one define marked or unmarked Theme in Portuguese, then? Should we consider that in clauses like (2) the Theme is a marked one, since it overrules the natural choice of Subject as Theme? Or on the contrary, is it unmarked because it is a natural thing in Portuguese to have the verb as the first element of the clause due to the natural omission of the Subject, which being present would constitute a marked Theme? These questions are not easily answered and the problems they raise are worth looking at.

For languages such as Portuguese, the consequences or correlations of being a pro-drop language are several: on the one hand, there are no expletive Subjects in standard Portuguese as there are in English or in French—compare, for instance, such meteorological processes (Halliday, 1994, p. 143) as in (3); on the other hand, there is the possibility of having post-verbal Subjects as shown in examples (4) and (5):

> (3)   * / Ele chove /
>   'It is raining'
>   ' Il pleuve'

> (4)   / Apareceu um rato no meu escritório /
>   '[It] Appeared a mouse in my office'

> (5)   / Escrevi eu este livro /
>   * 'Wrote I this book'

Lastly, the pro-drop characteristic seems to be connected with a rich verbal morphology in terms of person and number, although the opposite of this may not be true. In fact, the explicit occurrence of pronominal Subject in Portuguese may be looked at as redundant, if one considers that, along tense, person information or participant identity is grammatically encoded in the Finite.

3. Hypotheses

What is important here is the fact that in Portuguese the Subject may be elided, which leaves us with three possibilities or solutions to deal with the problem, when considering declarative clauses:

> **1)** the explicit presence of Subject in clause initial position stands for unmarked Theme, and its dropping leaves the verb in clause initial position as marked Theme;

2) the explicit presence of Subject in clause initial stands for marked Theme, and the pro-drop together with verb in clause initial stands for unmarked Theme;

3) both the explicit presence of Subject in clause initial and its dropping with verb in clause initial are unmarked Themes, and a marked Theme would be something else, such as circumstantiation or Subject post-verbal positioning.

Although we are dealing here with parameters such as marked and unmarked Theme, the question is much more general than it may look. In fact, as we stressed in the title of this paper, marked or unmarked, that is NOT the question, the question is: Where's the Theme? One can only decide on markedness and unmarkedness if one knows what and where the Theme is. That is why **solution one** analyses pro-drop as a phenomenon that occurs sporadically according to the speaker's intention. In this case, the Subject is the Theme, and the absence of Subject, due to the possibility of pro-drop, is meaningful, thus resulting in unmarked and marked Theme respectively. **Solution two**, on the other hand, chooses the reverse possibility, thus looking at the pro-drop phenomenon as the natural thing in Portuguese, *i. e.* the verb is the Theme. In this case, each time the speaker explicitly introduces the Subject in co-texts where it could be dropped, the speaker is marking Theme. Finally, **solution three** looks at the different contexts where one uses the Subject and where one drops it, to see the pattern (if any) behind the phenomenon and how it relates to markedness and unmarkedness.

4. Solution

The data analysed[3] lead us to claim that neither solution one nor two correspond to what actually happens in Portuguese. In fact, solution one might be considered a direct transfer of the rule stated for the English language. But as we have already said, Portuguese does not

behave exactly like English. In fact, the regularity of subjectless sentences in Portuguese (in terms of absence of an explicit noun or pronoun) calls for a different way of looking at the language. For a complete understanding of what we are saying, let us consider the following text of European Portuguese (EP), an oral one, from an interview from *Português Fundamental*, Entrevista 0886 (Nascimento *et al.*, 1987, p. 219)[4].

The text is numbered clause by clause, followed at the end by an English translation; on the right-hand column of both versions one may find the classification of sentences according to whether they have an explicit Subject (SUBJ), an undetermined Subject (UN), a post-verbal Subject (POST), or an elided Subject (Ø):

Portuguese text:

1.	vi a casa toda.	Ø
2.	mostrou-me a casa toda.	Ø
3.	nós entramos,	SUBJ
4.	é um corredor assim alaranjado,	Ø
5.	ela tem tudo assim, mais ou menos,	SUBJ
6.	predomina o amarelo, alaranjado,	POST
7.	tem duas credências, mui[to], muito bonitas;	Ø
8.	numa (...) tem o telefone	Ø
9.	e outra onde tem umas, uma, até uma prenda que lhe ofereci	Ø
10.	e... depois en(...), vai-se para o lado direito	UN
11.	tem a sala comum,	Ø
12.	é toda forrada, toda pintada,	Ø

13.	mandou pintar, um amarelo alaranjado.	Ø
14.	a entrada, façamos de conta,	Ø
15.	nós estamos aqui, não é,	SUBJ
16.	e faz a sala de estar	Ø
17.	e depois a outra metade é a sala de jantar;	SUBJ
18.	faz um cotovelo	Ø
19.	eu quero explicar	SUBJ
20.	era o que eu estava a dizer há bocado à NP	Ø
21.	Tem três móveis	Ø
22.	e então era uma c(...),	Ø
23.	tem uma cantoneira	Ø
24.	(...) foi o que ela disse	Ø
25.	que também gosta muito de uma cantoneira,	Ø
26.	de facto fica muito engraçado.	Ø
27.	esta parte daqui ela pôs um sofá cor azul-turquesa com umas borlinhas assim, género daquelas senhorinhas,	SUBJ
28.	mas não é senhorinha,	Ø
29.	é um sofá muito bonito;	Ø
30.	depois tem duas cadeirei(...), cadeirões,	Ø
31.	como eu tenho uma mobilia também assim, luís dezasseis	SUBJ
32.	e são muito engraçadas	Ø
33.	porque são,	Ø
34.	fazem as costas em redondo	Ø

35.	e, e as perninhas são todas em talha, todas em volta com uma talha muito miudinha	SUBJ
36.	e são viradas, forradas a, a damasco dourado, voltadas para nós, não é, para o sofá	Ø
37.	porque no meio tem uma mesa.	Ø
38.	depois tem uma mesa de vidro grosso onde serve ali... baixinha, onde serve qualquer coisa.	Ø
39.	ao lado tem uma mesa redonda...	Ø

English translation:

1.	[I] saw the whole house.	Ø
2.	[she] showed me the whole house.	Ø
3.	we enter,	SUBJ
4.	[it] is a sort of orangy corridor,	Ø
5.	she has it all like that, sort of,	SUBJ
6.	[it] predominates the yellow, orangy,	POST
7.	[she] has two console tables, ve[ry], very pretty;	Ø
8.	on one (...) [she] has the telephone	Ø
9.	and another where [she] has some, one, even a present [I] offered her	Ø
10.	and... then (...) one goes to the left hand side	UN
11.	[she] has the common room,	Ø
12.	[it] is all covered, all painted,	Ø
13.	[she] had [it] painted, an orangy yellow.'	Ø

14.	the entrance, let [us] pretend,	Ø
15.	we are here, isn´t it,	SUBJ
16.	and [it] is the living room	Ø
17.	and then the other half is the dinning room,	SUBJ
18.	[it] makes an L shape	Ø
19.	I want to explain	SUBJ
20.	[it] was what I was saying right now to NP	Ø
21.	[she] has three pieces of furniture	Ø
22.	and then [it] was a (....),	Ø
23.	[she] has a corner shelf	Ø
24.	(...) [it] was what she said	Ø
25.	that [she] also likes a corner shelf a lot,	Ø
26.	in fact [it] looks quite nice.	Ø
27.	this part here she has put a turquoise-blue sofa with a sort of frills, like those of those little round armchairs,	SUBJ
28.	but [it] is not a little round armchairs,	Ø
29.	[it] is a very pretty sofa;	Ø
30.	further up [she] has two chair(...), high chairs,	Ø
31.	as I also have one like that, sort of, Louis sixteen	SUBJ
32.	and [they] are very cute	Ø
33.	because [they] are,	Ø
34.	[they] have round backs	Ø
35.	and, and the legs are all carved, all around with a very tiny carving	SUBJ

36.	and [they] are turned, upholstered with a, a golden damask, turned towards us, isn't it, to the sofa	Ø
37.	because in the centre [she] has a table.	Ø
38.	further up [she] has a thick glass table where [she]serves there… a low table, where [she] serves something	Ø
39.	on the side [she] has a round table...	Ø

A quick look at the text and its Subject realisation shows that pro-drop is something quite regular in everyday discourse in Portuguese. And if we look at written language we will see that pro-drop is even more frequent because the repetition of the same Subject is somehow seen as redundant. We might then say that the appropriate answer would be solution two. But again, that is not in fact the case. Portuguese is not, as Japanese is said to be, "a language where typically Subject is absent to begin with" (Hori, 1995, p. 162).

Furthermore, against solution one there is the fact that both the main varieties of Portuguese behave differently when it comes to Subject realisation. BP (Brazilian Portuguese), in contrast to EP, makes less use of what may be called pro-drop Subjects (Negrão, 1990). In fact, one of the most important syntactic changes that Chomskyan linguistics found in BP is an evolution "from a positive marking to a negative marking of the pro-drop parameter, together with a significant reduction or simplification in inflectional paradigms" (Duarte, 1993, p. 107; our translation).

Therefore, choosing either of the two solutions discussed so far would mean, according to this difference between EP and BP, that marked and unmarked Theme, as far as pro-drop is concerned, would be different things in each of the main varieties of Portuguese with the two having different networks of choices in relation to Theme. In fact, if we accept that the frequency of pro-drop in both varieties goes in

opposite ways, the same would happen with the definition of markedness and unmarkedness, as far as Theme is concerned.

Further evidence against solution two is the fact that speakers of Portuguese**,** whether EP or BP, do not seem to see a semantic or functional difference between sentences such as (6) and (7):

(6)   / **Eu** tenho acompanhado todos os seus relatórios /
'I have followed all his reports'

(7)   / Tenho acompanhado todos os relatórios internos do Marco Antônio /
'[I] Have followed all Marco Antônio's internal reports'

Furthermore, notice that both clauses were produced one after the other by the same speaker in a business meeting. The second, being a reformulation of the first, is intended to dispel the ambiguity associated with the possessive *seus* (of Marco Antônio), and not to clarify the Subject in the clause. So, the difference between the presence or the omission of the Subject in initial position does not seem to carry a semantic or functional difference with it. And even if it did, that difference would not be enough for the phenomenon to be considered a case of either markedness or unmarkedness. The fact is that, in Portuguese, in purely structural terms, the presence of the pronoun realising the Subject is redundant, as that function is also encoded in the Finite. That means that either one introduces the notion of degree into markedness so that one may say that there are sentences where the Theme is more marked than in others, which does not seem reasonable, or one has to accept that**,** in terms of markedness, either the presence or absence of the pronoun is immaterial. What we mean is that one cannot say, in relation to example (7) above, the unmarked case according to solution two, that example (6) is marked but less marked than example (8) below, which has a circumstance as Theme:

(8)   / Ultimamente eu tenho acompanhado todos os
       seus relatórios /
                'Lately I have followed all his reports'

Another argument is that, although not seeing a difference in meaning and function in cases such as (6) and (7), speakers of Portuguese do see a difference between sentences such as (9) and (10), where the cases of marked and unmarked themes would vary according to the solution adopted. According to solution one, the examples would be unmarked and marked, respectively, and according to solution two, they would be the other way around.

(9a)   / **Um rato** apareceu no meu escritório /
        '**A mouse** appeared in my office'

(9b)   / **Estes livros** são difíceis de ler /
        '**These books** are difficult to read'

(10a)   / Apareceu **um rato** no meu escritório /
        '[It] Appeared **a mouse** in my office'

(10b)   / É difícil ler **estes livros** /
        '[It] Is difficult to read **these books**'

Furthermore, considering the text presented above, we might also say that the Subject could also be inserted in the clauses whenever it is not there. The overall meaning of the text, in thematic terms, would not change. The result might be seen as odd in some cases, but the text would nevertheless be correct and convey the same meanings. One could ask what proportion of explicit and non-explicit Subjects we should have for that feeling of oddness not to exist. We are sure no one has an answer to that and certainly speakers of different varieties of Portuguese would not easily come to an agreement on it. And so we come to solution three, the one that seems to us to correspond to a correct account of the problem.

The analysis of the data shows that, in fact, pro-drop Subjects turn out to be used mainly, but by no means only, in contextualized sentences (not isolated ones) or in texts where the Subject has been made clear in previous sentences. Furthermore, whenever the explicit Subject is absent, it is encoded in the morphology of the verb, which carries with it the features of its subject, for person and number.

We could then say that, being an SVO language, Portuguese places the Subject in first position in the clause, and this is an indisputable fact. What may happen is that the Subject may not be explicitly present, in which case it is recoverable by the co-text, either by an ellipsis of reference (which endophorically points to previous or continuing text), or through verb inflection, which ultimately points, by ellipsis of reference again, to an explicit occurrence of the Subject. What we have here, then, are cases of co-referentiality. The difference from other languages is that the devices used to establish co-referentiality are not necessarily a pronoun or a demonstrative but they may also be referential ellipsis. The fact that we have an ellipsis of reference, recoverable by the co-text, is enough not to consider these as cases of marked Themes. In the examples below, from an Annual Report of the Metro Co., in São Paulo, the Subject is elided, but nevertheless it is the Theme since its ellipsis (anaphorically recoverable) is "the starting point for the message; it is the ground from which the clause is taking off" (Halliday, 1994, p. 38):

(11)   / **Entendemos** que há que ampliá-la rapidamente /
'[We] Feel that it must be amplified quickly'

(12)   / **Compreende** e **integra** os controles centralizados "em tempo real" /
'[It] Comprises and [it] includes the centralized controls in "real time"'

As Boxwell (1995, p. 124) has pointed out: "scholars describing the cohesive resources of English… have pointed out to the contribution

ellipsis can make to the texture of text. However, in most cases, ellipsis has not been associated with co-referentiality, and rightly so in the majority of cases for English, where its overwhelming function is that of co-classification […]." Inverting Boxwell's words, we would rather say that there are languages where co-referentiality may be established by an ellipsis of reference. Portuguese is such a language. In fact, the possibility of using ellipsis of reference to establish co-referentiality in texts in Portuguese has been stressed in Mateus *et al.* (1989), the reference grammar, in terms of modern Linguistics, for European Portuguese. In their chapter on "Devices of textual Organization", Mateus *et al.* say, "anaphoric terms may have a lexical realization […], being for that matter anaphoric pronouns, personal pronouns or demonstrative pronouns, or they may be void, *i. e.* they may be, syntactically, empty categories" (p. 145; our translation).

What we are stressing here is that according to this solution, the difference between English and Portuguese should be one between different cases of establishing cohesive ties of reference, not one between different ways of marking or not marking Themes. As for the differences between EP and BP in terms of frequency in pro-drop, this solution would account for them as, say, varietal or dialectal differences, with no consequences for the delimitation of what Theme is in Portuguese.

In short, both the Subject and the verb can be instances of unmarked Themes in Portuguese. It seems important to make clear, though, that this assertion should not be misinterpreted. In fact, we are not saying that the natural choice for Theme in Portuguese is both the Subject and the verb, or sometimes the Subject, sometimes the verb. The natural choice for Theme in Portuguese is the Subject, and there is no question about it. But there is also no question about the fact that certain occurrences of verbs in thematic position are cases whereby the verb encodes in itself a Subject that either has been previously expressed, *i. e.* that is already known, or that is present or made obvious in the context of situation, and therefore equals the choice of Subject as Theme, not the choice of the verb.

This would also account for clauses with the so called impersonal verbs, such as the meteorological ones, the verb *haver*, with the sense of existing ('there + be'), and certain forms of BP *fazer* ('There + has been') and *ser* ('be'), that have no Subject expressed, as in the following examples[5]:

(13)   / Chove muito em São Paulo /
        '[It] Rains a lot in São Paulo'

(14)   / Houve um engano /
        '[There] Was a mistake'

(15)   / É tarde /
        '[It] Is late'

(16)   / Faz meses que não fumo /
        '[There] has been months that [I] don't smoke'

In the light of our proposal, these would also be cases of unmarked themes; themes that behave contrary to the cases adduced. In fact, if what is natural is for these verbs not to have a Subject, it also happens that, in EP, for discursive reasons, with no implication in semantic terms, these verbs may have an expletive Subject morphologically realized, as in:

(17a)   / Ele chove, ele faz sol, ele é um vê se te avias /
        (?) 'It rains, it makes sun, it is a hurry up'
(17b)   / Ele há coisas inexplicáveis /
        * 'It there are unexplainable things'

This does not mean, of course, that all occurrences of verbs in thematic position are cases of unmarked Theme since there are cases in Portuguese where the verb is in thematic position but the Subject is present, *i. e.* it is present in a post-verbal position. These are clear cases of marked Theme, such as in the following example of our data:

(18)   / **É sensível** seu efeito na racionalização do
        transporte e na ampliação da acessibilidade /
                '[It] Is noticeable its effect on transport
                rationalization and in the expansion of
accessibility'

Other cases of marked Themes using verbs include passives where the Actor is deleted and left undetermined, or where the special use of *se* marks the verb with the 3rd person, leaving the Subject undetermined, as in the following groups of examples, respectively:

(19a)   / **Foram assinados**, em abril de 1991, os contratos
         para a execução /
         * 'Were signed, in April 1991, the contracts for the
         execution'

(19b)   / **Foram ainda assinados** convênios com as
         Prefeituras envolvidas /
         * 'Were also signed protocols with the participating
         city councils'

(20)   / **Comparando-se** dez/91 e dez/90, **observa-se**
         uma melhora na imagem geral do serviço /
         * '[one] Comparing Dec/91 and Dec/90, [one]
         observes an improvementin the general image of
         the service'

Of course, there are other ways of marking the Theme, but those are the same as in English, where one can use a circumstance in a thematic position, as in the examples in (21):

(21a)   / **Na Linha Leste-Oeste**, implantou-se uma nova
         estratégia de circulação de trens /
         'In the East-West line, one implanted a new strategy
         in train circulation'

(21b) **/ A nível dos equipamentos,** escolheu-se o que
havia de mais atual /
'In terms of equipment, it was chosen whatever
there was of most recent'

(21c) **/Para o suprimento de energia**, optou-se por
sub-estações digitalizadas/
'For energy supply, digitalised sub-stations
were   chosen'

(21d) **/ No período,** houve sensível melhora no
desempenho da quilometragem média /
'During the period, there was a substantial
improvement in the average mileage
performance'

There are, however, in Portuguese some special verbs, like
acontecer ('happen') or *aparecer* ('appear'), for instance, that allow the
construction of declarative sentences with a post-verbal Subject more
often than its counterpart with a pre-verbal Subject. Those constructions
are different from cases such as the one presented above in (18), which
is a predicated Theme:

(18)   / **É sensível** seu efeito na racionalização do
transporte e na ampliação da acessibilidade /
'[It] Is noticeable its effect on transport
rationalization and on the expansion of accessibility'

The special cases we are referring to are the ones like those in examples
(9) and (10), presented above and repeated here for the sake of clarity:

(9a)   / **Um rato** apareceu no meu escritório /
'**A mouse** appeared in my office'

(9b)   / **Estes livros** são difíceis de ler /

'**These books** are difficult to read'

(10a) / Apareceu **um rato** no meu escritório /
        '[It] Appeared **a mouse** in my office'
(10b) / É difícil ler **estes livros** /
        '[It] Is difficult to read **these books**'

The choice of which is the marked and which is the unmarked theme in these cases may be a controversial question for which we do not have an answer yet. There are two different ways of looking at the problem; they have to do with the relationship between the system and its subsystems. On the one hand, the fact that these verbs behave differently from most verbs in Portuguese is not important because they are part of the general system of verbs and must be looked at exactly as the other verbs in the system. According to this perspective, and following our proposal on what theme is in Portuguese, sentences (9) above are unmarked for theme whereas sentences (10) are marked. Since the Subject (the natural choice for theme) is there, but in a post-verbal position, that means that the theme is the verb, and therefore a marked one.

On the other hand, these verbs may be seen as forming a subset or subsystem under the overall system. In terms of their use in the language, they seem to occur more often with a post-verbal Subject than with a pre-verbal one. Therefore, if the natural thing in Portuguese is to classify these verbs as having Theme, followed by the Subject, that ultimately means that, whenever we reverse this order, we are marking something else for Theme, i. e. the Subject.

This is a question that, in fact, needs further research, both at a theoretical level and at data analysis level, again with the instruments of corpus linguistics. However, that research is out of the scope of the

present paper, which aimed not at clarifying the exceptions, but at systematising the regularities.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, we would like to come back to the beginning of this paper and to the controversy over the definition of Theme. As Hasan and Fries (1995) have put it:

> 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, e.g. Matthiessen (1995), who talks of Theme as 'the resources 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 […], 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, [*sic*] Subject. This seems to be a reasonable demand, whose satisfaction is however beset with serious problems. (p. xxvii)

To make matters worse, we have shown, or at least tried to show, that Theme may be something that has no realization in the clause; in that case, it is only inferred from the adjoined co-text, *i. e.* from an adjoined clause or from the inflection of person and number in the verb. This brings us to our call for a redefinition of the notion of Theme, so that such cases as the ones brought up here may be fully incorporated in the new definition—these are cases of languages that, depending on the co-text, may or may not have the Subject morphologically present, *i. e.* cases where a meaning rather than a structure fills in the role of Theme.

For that, we think we should go back to basic definitions—to simple ways of looking at reality. One such way is the one Halliday quotes when, in *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1994, p. 31), he establishes the difference between Subject, Actor and Theme, using for that purpose the traditional notions of Subject: logical Subject, which Halliday calls Actor, grammatical Subject, which he calls Subject, and psychological Subject, which he calls Theme. Here is what Halliday writes, in a not so often quoted passage, about the traditional notion of psychological Subject: "Psychological Subject meant 'that which is the concern of the message'. It was called 'psychological' because it was what the speaker had in his mind to start with, when embarking on the production of the clause".

Picking up on this definition of psychological Subject, the ancestor of the concept of Theme, we would then say, drawing also on our conclusions, that Theme is **that which is the concern of the message, that which the speaker has in mind to start with, when embarking on the production of the clause, even if it doesn't correspond to any morphological realization**.

Notes

1. This paper was written within the bi-national Project "Discourse and Social Practice in Lusitanian and Brazilian Companies", involving the University of Lisbon and the Catholic Universities of Rio de Janeiro and of São Paulo, with the financial support of the Brazilian Agency Capes and the Portuguese ICCT, and within grant n 521571/97-9 of the Brazilian Agency CNPq.

2. Although we are talking about declaratives, whatever we will say about this type of clause seems valid for interrogatives as well. For a more precise account of this and of the differences between Brazilian Portuguese (BP) and European Portuguese (EP) in the construction of both types of clauses, further research using the methodology of corpus linguistics is needed.

3. We used data from both the Brazilian and the European varieties of Portuguese, drawn mainly from the database of the, already referred to, bi-national Project "Discourse and Social Practice in Lusitanian and Brazilian Companies", involving the University of Lisbon, the Catholic Universities of São Paulo and of Rio de Janeiro and the database of the "DIRECT Project — Towards the Language of Business Communication" (Catholic University of São Paulo). We also used data

from the project "Português Fundamental", developed by the Linguistics Research Centre of the University of Lisbon.

4. Although there may be a difference between EP and BP in terms of frequency, that difference is irrelevant for the point under discussion; that is why only an EP text has been used.

5. For the sake of clarity, a note is needed here. Both varieties of Portuguese use the verb *haver* with the sense of existing ('there + be') and both varieties use the verb *fazer* with its ordinary meaning ('make'). With this general sense of the verb *fazer*, example (16) would literally be translated into English as *'It makes several months that [I] don´t smoke'. Contrary to EP, though, BP also uses the verb *fazer* with the sense of existing as in example (16), in cases where EP would normally use the verb *haver*. Therefore, in EP, example (16) would read as *Há meses que não fumo*. The correct translation of both the EP and the BP version into English would be 'I haven't smoked for several months now'.

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