■ BREAKS IN THEMATIC PROGRESSION

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Tematizacija, organizacija informacione strukture po klauzama oko ose dato/novine jesu pojmovi koji pripadaju teoriji funkcionalne gramatike. Tematski progres se ostvaruje tako što se individualne klauze povezuju sa susednim klauzama, stvarajući teksturu. Model tematskog progresa koji se i danas koristi kao standard dao je Daneš (1974), a on obuhvata tri modela progresa: *konstantni, prosti linearni i izvedeni* progres. Međutim, Danešova teorija je primenjiva samo na *nemarkirane* teme. Stoga mi u ovom radu želimo da predložimo novu kategoriju „podela", ne bi li se videlo šta se dešava sa *markiranim* temama. Za analizu smo uzeli poznate britanske novine „Tajms" i „San". U radu se primeri analiziraju u kontekstu retorike i predlažu se izvesni zaključci.

KLJUČNE REČI: tematski progres, funkcionalna gramatika, jezik i mediji.

1. INTRODUCTION

Thematisation is central to the information structure of English. It relates to the way clauses are organised by speakers or writers and the way hearers or readers process that information in their turn. Those engaged in structuring clauses and those engaged in their decoding may be equally unaware of any rules of thematisation. Nevertheless, these rules do exist, albeit unwritten. They were first systematically researched by Mathesius (1929) and subsequent linguists of the Prague School, such as Firbas (1966), and they have since become integral to the theory of functional grammar as propounded by M.A.K. Halliday and others.

Thematic progression is the linking up of individual clauses with their neighbouring clauses to move a text forward and create discourse. Daneš (1974), also of the Prague School, outlined three types of thematic progression, involving differing methods of

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linking, which he labelled *constant*, *simple linear*, and *derived* progression, respectively. These remain standard even for the most recent publications in the field (eg Li 2009; Dubois 2009; Guijarro & Zamorano 2009), though extra subcategories such as *gapped* or *split rheme* progression have been proposed.

However, the central problem with Daneš' progression theory, with or without the extra subcategories, is arguably that it is only applicable to clauses thematising the subject, ie *unmarked* themes. This present paper will propose a new category of 'breaks' to cover what happens when a theme is *marked*, has no referent and comprises an element grammatically incapable of functioning as subject of a clause. Examples are provided, along with discussion of their rhetorical implications, and suggestions are made for further research. The data employed for the analysis are taken from The Times and The Sun, two of the best known British newspapers.

2. THEMATISATION AND THEMATIC PROGRESSION

Thematisation is the structuring of a clause into two parts: the theme, or leftmost part, which usually situates the various elements in the context as 'given' information, and the rheme, or rightmost part, which typically contains comment, or 'new' information. A speaker/writer must make appropriate decisions about how to present information, correctly discerning what is given or new for a particular hearer/reader so that they are neither bored nor confused. At the same time, the speaker/writer may choose to present propositions in theme (as taken-for-granted) or in rheme (as something to be analysed and perhaps questioned) whether or not they actually believe their hearer/reader is familiar or unfamiliar with the propositions.

The chosen themes and rhemes then link up with each other across clauses by the repetition or transformation of some or all of their elements, through thematic progression. Daneš (1974) provides the classic typology: in his first type, *constant progression*, successive clauses retain their theme/referent, which may be represented as Th1-Th2, Th2-Th3, Th3-Th4, etc (where Th denotes theme). In other words the theme of clause 1 links up with the theme of clause 2, the theme of clause 2 with the theme of clause 3, and so on. In the example below, *This faraway country* in clause 1 links up to *It* in clause 2, a slash denoting the boundary between theme and rheme.

> This faraway country / has fewer people than Newcastle. It / used to be known only for coconuts and bananas (The Sun, 17.10.1991).

In Daneš' second progression type, *simple linear*, a clause's theme repeats or transforms the rheme of its preceding clause, which may be depicted as Rh1-Th2, Rh2-Th3, Rh3-TH4, etc (Rh denoting rheme). In other words, the rheme of one clause links to the theme of the following one and that clause's rheme then links to the theme of the next. This is exemplified by the progression from *a US company* in the rheme of the first clause below to *American Airlines*, the theme of the second:

England's footballers / will be sponsored by <u>a US company</u> for the next World Cup. <u>American Airlines</u> / have done a £100,000 deal with the F.A. (The Sun, 11.10.1991).

Daneš' final progression type, *derived*, operates through the linking of themes not to other clauses but to an implicit umbrella superordinate functioning as 'hypertheme' of the whole text. This could be shown as Th(D1), Th(D2), Th(D3), etc, where there is no cohesive local link, only an implied link to the hypertheme, hence the 'D' for derived is in brackets. *Inflation, industry, wage settlements* and *sterling* are, in context, all derived from the hypertheme 'the economy and the coming general elections':

<u>Inflation</u> / is expected to tumble further today. <u>Industry</u> / is virtually strike-free <u>and wage settlements</u> / are the lowest in years. <u>Yet sterling</u> / hangs on the ropes like a battered boxer because opinion polls suggest Labour might win the next election (The Sun, 11.10.1991).

Variations on – or additions to – Daneš' types have been proposed. Hawes (2001), for instance, suggested three: *constant gap* (like Daneš' constant but missing out one or more clauses in between those carrying the progression), *constant type* (progression not through similar referents in successive clauses but through elements of similar grammatical types, eg both themes being WH-question words) and *constant rheme* progression (where material is repeated in the rhemes of successive clauses, as in Shakespeare's 'Brutus / is an honourable man').

Another type frequently mentioned as an addition to Daneš' categories is *split rheme* progression. Li refers to this by the alternative name of *multiple-theme pattern*, explaining that "the rheme of one clause introduces a number of different pieces of information, each of which is then picked up and made theme in subsequent clauses" (2009: 26). It has however been argued that split rheme progression is in fact a combination of constant and simple linear progression (eg Maruthai 2009: 50). On the other hand, certain linguists have subtracted from Daneš' categories instead of adding to them. By way of example, Dubois and others discount Daneš' 'derived' as a progression type on the grounds that it involves no local cohesive devices (eg Dubois 2009).

Finally, in preparation for a discussion of marked thematisation, below, Leech & Short (1981) build on the work of the Prague School, particularly in the treatment of foregrounding and prominence. They claim that the dominant style of a text forms the backdrop, or norm, against which a secondary style may be created by deviating from that norm. Having established a pattern, when a writer breaks that pattern it is likely to be noticeable to the reader. Such deviation has prominence, or psychological salience, precisely by virtue of its standing out when compared with the norm.

In thematisation, the norm is to select subject participants as theme and there must be a "good reason for choosing something else" (Halliday 1985: 45). Within the theory on thematic progression, however, the choice of a non-subject incapable of playing the role of participant in the text appears to have been passed over as if it were of no importance. Therefore it is appropriate that we look more closely at the rhetorical effect of such a choice rather than simply ignoring it because it does not fit

any of Daneš' or others' progression types. This paper argues that such marked choices not only progress the text in a different manner to the unmarked norm, but also tend to co-occur with, or even be vehicles for, evaluative rhetorical moves.

3. DATA

The choice of editorial articles as the data for this study should be uncontroversial as newspapers are probably still the most read of all text types (either in hard copy or online) if we judge on the basis of volume as opposed to frequency of encounter, though in terms of the latter the most read text type might now be emails. As for the specific papers from which the editorials are taken, The Sun is Britain's best-selling daily, while The Times continues to be the most respected 'quality' paper, its law reports, for instance, cited as the most authoritative after the courts' own reports.

The data comprise 121 editorial articles from two distinct historical moments when, one political party having been in government for an extended period but visibly weakening in popularity, ideology could be assumed to be paramount. These are: 60 articles – 31 from The Sun and 29 from The Times – all taken from ten consecutive days' editorial columns in October 1991 (when the Conservatives had been in power for 12 years), and a further 61 articles – 32 from The Sun and 29 from The Times – from ten consecutive days' editorial columns in September 2008 (when Labour had been in power for 11 years). Although the number of Sun and Times articles is similar, the volume of text in The Times is almost tenfold that in The Sun. This disproportion in favour of The Times is actually helpful in so far as rhetorical uses are less readily identifiable in The Times than they are in The Sun.

4. DEFINITIONS & METHODOLOGY

Halliday's seminal definition of theme may be glossed as: 1. the start of the clause, 2. everything up to and including the first ideational element, and 3. what the message will be about (Halliday 1985: 39-54). In Halliday & Matthiessen, an updated version, the theoretical link between theme and aboutness is loosened and theme is redefined as: "that which locates and orients the clause within its context" (2004: 64). Taking this into consideration, the present study employs the original definition but, where this would produce a theme that fails to show 'where the passage is going', I extend it to include the grammatical subject, following Thomas' (1991: 253), claim that "in unmarked sentences, [aboutness] is generally conveyed through the grammatical subject." Therefore, for instance, where Halliday accepts as theme simple adjuncts (italicised) such as "*once* I was a real turtle" or "*very carefully* she put him back on his feet" (1985: 39), I would include 'I' in the first and 'she' in the second.

The analytical procedure was as follows:

1. locate and number each independent clause;
2. identify a theme for each;

3. determine the category of Daneš progression, and any others that may be present, for each inter-clause boundary, which I refer to as a 'link' (following Hoey 1991);
4. analyse similarities and differences in the Times and Sun subcorpora of 1991 and 2008 regarding the use of thematic progression;
5. formulate hypotheses as to the rhetorical motivation behind the use of these progression types.

5. MARKEDNESS AND BREAKS

"Marked choices of theme are often interesting in what they show, not only about commonsense assumptions but also about rhetorical strategies" (Fairclough 1994: 183).

'Marked' in linguistics refers to an option that is not the first choice or 'norm', as opposed to 'unmarked', which is the typical choice in the given situation. In the interest of clarity the definition of marked employed for this study is: *one which thematises something incapable of being the subject referent of a clause.* This is different from *one which thematises something other than the subject*, proposed in Halliday (1985: 45), which could conceivably render all passives 'marked', even in text types where they are commonplace, such as scientific research articles. Having already discounted adjunct-only structures above, my own definition therefore equates marked themes specifically with *non-participant themes.*

The great majority of themes in the data of both newspapers are either human participants (individuals and groups) or non-human participants (animals, things and ideas). Relatively more themes in The Sun involve humans; relatively more in The Times involve abstract concepts, though from 1991 to 2008 the gap between them has narrowed. At any rate, most themes include participants and it is the repetition of these in some form that permits Daneš' progression. Those themes that do not include participants are likely to create a *break* – instead of a link – between clauses because there is no referent susceptible to be repeated. An exception occurs where two or more successive clauses thematise the same grammatical item, eg an *it* or *there* predicate, thereby providing a potential, if semantically hollow, repetition element.

Despite occurring less frequently than human participants or non-human participants, breaks lend themselves readily to exploitation in evaluative rhetoric and present a particularly interesting category. They are often used to change the direction of the discourse and typically occur at the beginning or end of a rhetorical segment, breaking the flow of thematic progression and thereby revealing the seams of a writer's ideological message. This is why I refer to them as 'breaks' (Hawes 2001). In his more recent work (eg Daneš 1995) Daneš himself begins to see progression not exclusively in terms of linking, but also of boundaries. When he refers to progression as "the skeleton of the plot" (1995: 32) this implies not only continuity but also delimitation. He echoes Hoey (1991) on paragraph boundaries, stating that "...there cannot be right and wrong places to break but only more appropriate or less so, depending on the rhetorical needs

of the writer" (Daneš 1995: 30), and comes close to connecting thematic progression, discourse boundaries and rhetorical purpose. It was the analysis of these three that first led me to switch focus from linking progression to its boundaries. A finding that the final clauses of editorial articles are exceptionally dense in non-participant themes further suggested a boundary-creating function. Hypothesising a marked variety of progression, the data then produced evidence of extra-progression elements operating in ways other than Daneš' types.

6. PROMINENT BREAKS AND EXAMPLES

While breaks are functionally the opposite of links, this does not mean that they are merely stretches of text without any links. They occur at the points where sequences of links begin, end or change and they even seem to cause these changes. Breaks are dynamic agents in their own right. In fact, because they act both forwards and backwards, they have double pull. Whereas Daneš' links combine to form progression sequences, breaks are themes used by a writer to end a sequence, begin a new one, or otherwise divert the course of the rhetoric. The real situation is more complex than this because breaks may also accumulate to form their own sequences if repeated in successive clauses. The following exemplifies a break (underlined) in action:

> THE BBC / will not be bullied by any political party. That / is the arrogant reply from deputy Director General, John Birt, to complaints of bias in its news coverage of the Tory conference debate on the Health Service. He / says 'any reasonable observer' can see the BBC presents the news with integrity and impartiality. <u>Does Mr Birt</u> / own a different dictionary to the rest of us? (The Sun, 21.10.1991).

This passage initially progresses by means of simple linear links. *Will not be bullied by any political party*, in the rheme of the first clause, is summarised by *That* in the theme of the second. *He*, the theme of clause three, then refers back to *John Birt* in the rheme of clause 2. It is the theme of the final clause, *Does Mr Birt*, which breaks the progression. From Mr Birt's opinion, the focus is diverted to The Sun's attack upon the BBC. For, although this final theme contains a repetition of Mr Birt and therefore involves constant progression, the sense of a continuing progression sequence is not as strong as the contrary effect produced by the polar interrogative and the mood switch. In other words the rhetorical force of the grammatical change in mood overrides the effect of the lexical repetition and the reader need go no further for it to be immediately clear that the rhetorical emphasis is changing.

Although there is some overlap between the concepts of links and breaks, the basic difference is clear: while links involve repetition and, thus, given information, breaks ring in the new by virtue of challenging or at least diverting away from, the given. This distinction may go further than Daneš has explicitly in explaining why theme and given are not the same thing. Whilst grammatically speaking breaks are themes, semantically they straddle both given and new. A writer could divert the flow of the discourse either

by a) introducing new data or b) a different – perhaps contradictory – perspective on given data. This may already be implicit in Daneš' point that it is the speaker's intention, not the data per se, that counts when distinguishing given from new. For whereas Mathesius (1929) and Firbas (1966) had described given and new in terms of whether these were recoverable from the preceding discourse, Daneš argues that the new is what the speaker *presents* as non-recoverable (whether or not it is actually known or retrievable from the context), newness being primarily a matter of communicative relevance.

Relatively more of The Times' themes than The Sun's act as links in these data. Therefore the reverse is true of breaks. More than a quarter of all Sun themes function as breaks, as against less than a sixth in The Times. Halliday's (1985: 45) statement, mentioned above, that 'the Subject is the element that is chosen as Theme unless there is good reason for choosing something else', suggests at the very least that a writer is more conscious of what s/he is doing when employing a marked theme. Therefore I propose as one measure of evaluative ideology the equation *breaks divided by links*: the more breaks a text has relative to its links, the more likely it is to be overtly evaluative. Applying this equation, it emerges that The Sun's rating (0.5) is two and a half times as high as that of The Times (0.2). In the following I analyse the use of breaks in the two newspapers. The two tables below depict some of their preferences in this respect.

Table 1. Breaks in The Sun (% of all themes)		
	1991	2008
Annexes:	10%	8%
Interrogatives:	7%	6%
It & there predicates:	4%	3%
Exclamatives:	3%	2%
Bound clauses:	3%	3%
Verb themes:	0%	5%

Table 2. Breaks in The Times (% of all themes)		
	1991	2008
Bound clauses:	5%	5%
There predicates:	3%	3%
Interrogatives:	2%	3%
It predicates:	1%	5%
Annexes:	1%	5%
Verb themes:	1%	4%

6.1 BOUND CLAUSE BREAKS

Bound clause themes, to begin with, take the whole of an initial relative (or 'bound') clause as theme to a succeeding main clause, as rheme. They are transitional between unmarked and marked themes as figures for their co-occurrence with verbs in both papers show no real departure from those of participant themes and a majority of bound clause themes employ actional verbs. In The Times' editorials of 1991 they represent the largest and least marked category of breaks, accounting for at least one in twenty of all themes. An instance (underlined) from the pre-election campaign of late-1991 is:

<u>Were Labour to be in power today</u>, / its leaders would be wrestling with identical problems of allocating roughly similar resources (The Times, 11.10.91).

In The Sun, bound clause breaks occur only half as frequently, but they are more marked and function as typical breaks. An example comes from an article in which it advises the singer Tom Jones he should not complain about an infatuated fan:

<u>If you don't like it Tom</u>, / go back to the valleys and stop moaning (The Sun, 19.10.91).

6.2 INTERROGATIVE BREAKS

Before examining interrogative breaks it is necessary to consider briefly the notion of rhetorical questions. I define these as questions that do not require an answer. They can be of two kinds: RQ1 (rhetorical question 1), signals 'this is what I'm going to tell you about', often occurring at the start of an article. This initiates an overt question-answer sequence, with the preferred answer soon following the question, as in:

<u>WHY</u> / has the pound sunk on world money markets? ... because opinion polls suggest Labour might win the next election (The Sun, 11.10.91).

RQ2, the second kind, is less transparent. Bearing the 'answer' within itself, it is unanswerable and presumes that the reader agrees or, if s/he does not, that any objections are not worth hearing. RQ2 is unanswerable both because it is presented as irrefutable and because its typical text-final position ends all discussion. This places the writer in a position of strength, even of authority, vis-a-vis the reader. An example comes from an article in The Sun attacking teachers' 1991 pay demands:

<u>Where</u> / is the lolly to come from if they take the largest slice of the cake? (The Sun, 18.10.91).

For WH-interrogative breaks I count solely the WH-element, eg 'what', 'where', 'how long', following Halliday (1985), but for polar interrogatives I include both the auxiliary AND the subject to its right. This is because I consider that the WH-element tells a reader far more about where the discourse is going than could a finite (auxiliary)

by itself. In The Sun, WH-interrogatives alone represent one in twenty of all themes and reveal a surprising divergence between form and function. Instead of expressing uncertainty or seeking missing information as traditionally expected, The Sun's WH-interrogatives are exclusively rhetorical questions. They are also common enough to sometimes accumulate in a sequence of successive clauses in the manner of links, joined not by a common referent but by repetition of the grammatical category. An example of this can be found by extending the excerpt on Mr Birt and the BBC cited above (capital letters were present in the original):

> ...[Mr Birt] / says 'any reasonable observer' can see the BBC presents the news with integrity and impartiality. Does Mr Birt / own a different dictionary to the rest of us? WHERE / is the integrity in interviewing three people in the bar of a hospital social club? WHERE / is the impartiality in broadcasting disparaging remarks in the middle of a report on the Health Secretary's speech at Blackpool? (The Sun, 21.10.1991).

Having dwelt on Mr Birt and the BBC through several simple linear progressions, the polar interrogative *Does Mr Birt* signals a break in progression and a new rhetorical direction, with The Sun going onto the offensive. The two WH-interrogative breaks then reinforce and broaden the attack into a hard-hitting triple rhetorical sequence. In 1991 The Times rarely employed such strategies. However by 2008 it had doubled its proportion of these themes and even used sequences of up to four WH-interrogatives in a row. An instance from an article on Iraqi interpreters shows that The Times now uses such themes offensively and in ways reminiscent of The Sun's:

> Where / are compassion, decency and humanity? (The Times, 11.9.08).

In 1991 Polar interrogatives were far less common in The Times than The Sun. As with WH-interrogatives, this choice is now becoming scarcer in The Sun but more common in The Times, again suggesting a gradual convergence of the two papers. If used at the start of an article, The Times' polar interrogatives may be 'dummy' questions to which the rest of the text provides an answer, or 'loaded' questions implying a clear 'yes' or 'no' answer. In the following, the word 'really' makes it plain that the answer in this case is no:

> Is Germany / really willing for decisions on Yugoslavia to be taken by majority vote? (The Times, 17.10.91).

Another strategy in The Times is the text-initial or text-final polar interrogative as a vehicle for a call to act in a particular way. The next example is text-final and exhorts British institutions to follow the USA's lead in intervening in the finance market to alleviate the 2008 credit crisis:

> The Bank of England, the FSA and the Government / will now have questions to answer. Are they / similarly prepared to rescue finance from the financiers? (The Times, 9.9.08).

6.3 EXCLAMATIVE AND ANNEX BREAKS

Exclamatives and annexes are two breaks closely related in function. Both are overtly evaluative. Both typically elide the theme of a clause and are therefore exceptionally marked choices. Neither is used to bring up new points, though they may encapsulate the argument and strengthen it in different ways. While exclamatives make a writer's attitude explicit, annexes provide additional back-up to complete a statement or give some final reasons for it. The important difference between the two is that, whereas exclamatives are grammatically independent, annexes are only appendages to other clauses without which they would make no sense. Both exclamatives and annexes occurred far more frequently in The Sun than in The Times in 1991.

Exclamative breaks occur in the body of a Sun text or as its final theme, where they typically introduce a forceful summing-up of the main argument. A minor category, they were used less often in both papers in 2008 than they had been in 1991, perhaps because they signal the writer's rhetorical moves too obviously and therefore provoke resistance in the reader. Classic exclamatives thematise a WH-element, as in the excerpt below from an article discussing the nomination of Judge Clarence Thomas to the US Supreme Court:

> <u>How ironic</u> / that America's equally hypersensitive sexual politics should now have put his choice at risk (The Times, 12.10.91).

Exclamative breaks are often reinforced in The Sun by slang, colloquialism or discourse participation, in The Times by modal verbs and evaluative adjectives. An example from The Sun, employing slang (*twits*) and discourse participation (*us*), is:

> ...<u>GOD help</u> / Britain while twits are allowed to tell us what to do (The Sun, 17.10.91).

Annex breaks are the most common breaks of all in The Sun and possibly the fastest growing category in The Times. They present a special category because they perform anaphorically as links but cataphorically as breaks. Often consisting of a single word, at least some part of their clause being elided, they are unable to stand alone and must be 'annexed' to their lead-clause. They are therefore dependent on that previous clause but have the effect of strengthening it by adding extra comment. One could deny annexes the status of theme by virtue of their having no rheme. Or one might argue that they are themeless rhemes, being both additions to and adjacent to their foregoing rhemes. Alternatively, one could categorise them as altogether outside theme-rheme structure. However, since annex breaks occur after the end of the preceding clause, they occur in clause-initial (ie theme) position for a reader who is processing text from left to right. Thus I count them as theme/breaks with the proviso that they are dependent on their lead-clause, hence mere 'annexes'.

Annexes are amongst the most evaluative of breaks and have long been an important rhetorical device in The Sun, accounting for fully 10% of all its themes in 1991. The following excerpt is typical of The Sun's stance on business. The annex is to be found in the final two words, which are also the very last words of the article:

...All Britain needs / is a single law to allow businesses to open when they want. This / is not revolution. <u>Just freedom</u> (The Sun, 16.10.91).

By 2008 The Sun had muted its annex themes and also employed them slightly less often (8%). The Times, on the contrary, used fivefold the number of annexes that it had done in 1991 (5% of all Times themes in 2008) and appeared to be cultivating a style until recently reserved for tabloids. An example of an annex in The Times, reacting to a particular view of grammar, consists of just a single word:

"Spelling / is a triviality, and grammar / is of no importance so long as we make our meaning plain." <u>Heresy!</u> (The Times, 15.9.08).

In The Sun, meanwhile, annexes may be found in conjunction with other overtly rhetorical elements, such as interrogative breaks, forming a composite strategy, as in:

Were [British Rail, who had destroyed uniforms] / really afraid that anyone would dress up as a bogus BR porter? <u>And risk the anger of commuters!</u> (The Sun, 19.10.91).

6.4 VERB BREAKS

Thematising a verb in or near clause-initial position, these breaks were rare in 1991 and exclusively subject-verb inversions suggestive of quaintly poetic language or emphatic rhetoric. An instance from a 1991 article on assorted Japanese robots, is:

<u>Next came</u> / dancing beer cans and crisp packets (The Times, 10.10.91).

By 2008 these had developed into one of the leading break types in both papers. They took various forms, including that of imperatives, as in a Times article arguing against the teaching of creationism in science lessons:

Children / should be taught about faith... But in science classes? <u>Please teach</u> / science (The Times, 12.9.08).

Verb breaks, unsurprisingly for a choice so marked as to place verb before subject, tend to be overtly evaluative, even in The Times. The following is an example:

The failure to secure convictions on the main charge [of plotting terrorist attacks] / is disappointing. <u>But in no way should</u> / this be taken as a reflection of the dedication of the police (The Times, 10.09.08).

6.5 *IT* AND *THERE* PREDICATE BREAKS

Halliday (1985: 60) sets out two ways of analysing *it* and *there* themes. I adopt the simpler alternative of counting solely the actual words 'it' or 'there' as theme. Both

breaks enjoy a special status in terms of their potential for changing the rhetorical direction of a text because material normally found in the rheme may be included in theme or, alternatively, the whole clause may become a vehicle for new information, following *there* in the role of dummy subject. Both breaks share an exclusivity of focus in common with thematic equatives (eg 'what this means is...'), but *it* breaks especially can be used to stress one thing instead of – or to the detriment of – another.

Daneš (1995) follows Firbas in equating theme with the lowest communicative dynamism, but he insists this need not necessarily come at the beginning of a sentence, leaving open the possibility that comment may occur where a reader expects to find 'given', conceivably leading the reader to mistake the one for the other. *It* and *there* breaks exemplify this eventuality. By thematising 'dummy' elements, they permit the reversal of given and new, potentially mystifying the reader. *There* predicates may be used to obscure aspects of transitivity relations, especially the actor's identity. In the following, for example, a *there* break helps to obscure the fact that it is the Government that is responsible for scrapping a planned rail link:

> There / is to be no high-speed rail link from France to London in the foreseeable future (The Times, 10.10.1991).

An example of a *there* break in The Sun provides a particularly jingoistic instance of that paper's peculiarly outdated rhetorical strategy on Europe:

> GERMANY and France / are planning their own private army... For the sake of world peace, there / is only one thing worse than having the Herrenvolk and the Messieurs at each others' throats. That / is having them on the same side (The Sun, 19.10.91).

An example of existential *there* used less as a typical rhetorical break than as a means to build a triple sequence on the future of pubs is to be found in The Times,

> Now we / are in the middle of a third and more diffuse revolution. There / is the pub as entertainment centre, with live music, alternative comedy or televised sport. There / is the pub as mid-market restaurant, with an international menu of microwaved dishes. There / are the new village pubs... (The Times, 11.10.91).

From 1991 to 2008 the use of *it* and *there* breaks generally diminished and the rhetorically more powerful interrogative and annex breaks were chosen increasingly in their place. However, there is a surprising exception: a fivefold increase in The Times' *it* predicates over the same period. In the following example *it* combines with a polar interrogative in an assessment of whether the new Pakistani president is capable of dealing with the threats facing his country. The judgement initiated by the *it* break is all the weightier as it comes in the article's final clause:

> Can President Zardari / deliver? ... It / is, alas, a very tall order (The Times, 9.9.08).

7. CONCLUSION

This paper has looked at thematic progression in newspaper editorials and suggested that its manipulation may be an important vehicle for affecting changes in readers' attitudes. This applies most especially to 'breaks', which I have posited as a necessary addition to Daneš' original progression types, functioning as a marked or anti-progression device. Breaks are functionally the opposite of links, dynamic agents in their own right used by a writer to end a sequence, begin a new one, or otherwise divert the course of the rhetoric. Occasionally they may accumulate to form their own sequences if repeated in successive clauses, creating powerful rhetorical devices. One measure of evaluative ideology, it was proposed, is: *breaks divided by links.*

One linguistic sub-branch for which a study of breaks may hold significance is genre. This paper has exemplified the most frequently occurring breaks in the editorials of two newspapers. But what is the consistent relationship, more generally, between different types of breaks and different genres? Interestingly, Guijarro & Zamorano's claim that the appropriateness of constant and simple linear thematic progression decreases with the rising level of readers' literacy (2009: 771) appears to be in conflict with the finding that The Times has recently been using more, rather than less, of the most marked breaks. Future research might therefore examine whether this is explicable in terms of genre development or whether it lends credence to the popular notion of falling literacy rates among even relatively literate sections of the British population, such as Times readers.

Another intriguing area for further research might be a comparative investigation of specific thematic progression and break types in spoken versus written language. What, if any, are the major differences in usage? Do breaks, as demonstrated here, feature as commonly in spoken discourse as they do in written or is their function performed in other ways?

Perhaps the most important area for which the theories of progression and breaks hold relevance is the teaching of academic writing to non-native students. Which aspects of thematic progression – and of breaks in particular – are worth teaching? What level of English and/or literacy in students would be necessary for this to be viable? Should such teaching be theoretically explicit or merely practical? In other words, ought it to deal with the theory or, rather, to raise consciousness of it indirectly, for instance through exercises in which students are asked to pick the best of several possible endings to a sentence or paragraph, each with differing thematic structures? Since coherence in academic writing is probably the greatest challenge facing overseas students, and since this is primarily a matter of information structuring, thematic progression and breaks surely have an important role to play.

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SUMMARY

BREAKS IN THEMATIC PROGRESSION

This article examines Daneš' (1974) thematic progression in editorial articles from the British newspapers The Sun and The Times. It outlines the need for a different type of progression category in cases where the choice of theme precludes the functioning of any of Daneš' types. Whilst his threefold model (sometimes expanded to a four or five-fold model) is recognised as the normal or 'unmarked' means of progressing a written text, there appears to be a major theoretical lacuna, namely what happens when theme is not only something other than the subject, but something grammatically incapable of functioning as subject of a clause or sentence.

To remedy this situation a category of 'breaks' (in thematic progression) is proposed. Breaks are thematised elements that cannot be subjects or participants in a text and may include elements functioning as exclamatives, WH- and polar interrogatives, verb groups, *it* and *there* predicates and bound clauses, as well as elliptical 'annex' themes. Breaks appear to lend themselves well to changes in the rhetorical direction of a text and are typically employed for evaluative purposes. Examples from The Sun and The Times are discussed and tentative conclusions regarding the rhetorical strategies behind them are offered.

KEYWORDS: thematic progression, functional grammar, language and the media.