

**Why Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)
Isn't Just for Those Working in SFL (and Vice Versa),
Plus Arguments for Seeing Theme-Rheme and Topic-Comment
as Separate Functional Structures***

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0. Introduction

In this chapter I would like to talk about aspects of Prof. Michael Halliday's approach to language and communication that I think are important to all linguists, but have been overlooked or obscured in some other approaches. These include the recognition of the linguistic functional structures as being the relations between the elements of the structure and the idea that the structure as a totality influences the interpretation; the recognition of interpersonal, textual, and ideational meaning structures; the recognition of different constructions for manifesting transitivity; the recognition of the difference between Token and Value in the use of reference phrases; the recognition of the importance of functional explanation in description; and the recognition of the importance of Theme-Rheme and the separation of Theme-Rheme and Given-New. In the process I will also point out aspects of Prof. Halliday's approach that have influenced other approaches, and aspects that relate to concepts in other approaches, such as the role of the construction to understanding. I would also like to present a new idea that grew out of my understanding of Prof. Halliday's approach, in interaction with what is called "projection" in Interactional Linguistics. On the basis of Tagalog data, I propose separating the Theme-Rheme functional structure from the Topic-Comment (generally Comment-Topic in Tagalog) functional structure, as well as the Given-New (New-Given in Tagalog) functional structure.

1. Brief mention of certain useful insights from SFL

1.1 Separation of ideational, textual and interpersonal meaning

Traditional grammarians saw the entire utterance or sentence as a single functional structure, as if all parts of the utterance were doing only one thing, and so argued that it was ungrammatical to use an adverbial form like *hopefully* in *He will hopefully come today*, as semantically it is not modifying *come*. By separating out the interpersonal meaning and the ideational meaning, Prof. Halliday was able to explain in a functional way what was going on

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Prof. Halliday passed away on 15 April, 2018, and so I would like to dedicate this paper to him to show my respect, admiration, and affection for him.

here, that *hopefully* isn't meant to modify *come*, but functions as an interpersonal comment on the ideational proposition *he will come today*. This was of course because Prof. Halliday saw language as a social semiotic, and so took the interactional and situational aspects of the utterance as being as important to the utterance as the expression of who did what to whom.

And by separating out the logical structure of modification from the ideational structure, Prof. Halliday was able to explain such things as why within the structure of the nominal group in English the Epithet can often appear either before the Measure (which is the grammatical Head of the construction) or before the Thing (the semantic core of the nominal group, which in (1) appears within a Post-modifier of the Head; Halliday 1994: 195), even though, as in example (1), it is the Thing (the tea) that is strong, not the Measure (the cup):

- (1) a. *a strong cup of tea*
b. *a cup of strong tea*

He insightfully recognizes that this is partially due to analogical transference from cases where the Epithet could apply to either the Head or Thing in such a structure, such as in example (2) (ibid):

- (2) a. *a thick cloud of smoke*
b. *a cloud of thick smoke*

This is very much how usage-based approaches to grammar see the influence of exemplars in understanding changes in grammatical structure (see for example Bybee 2006).

By separating out the textual metafunctions of the clause and explaining mood choice by reference to what appears in the Theme, Prof. Halliday was able to give a very plausible explanation for the structure of the English clause, and why English is not a so-called “pro-drop” language (Halliday 1967b; 1994, Ch. 3):¹ English marks the grammatical mood of the clause by what appears in the Theme, and in what order the Subject and Finite are in, so the Subject must appear in the clause in order to mark the grammatical mood in most indicative clauses:

Indicative: declarative: The unmarked Theme (the most usual Theme) in English declarative clauses is the Subject, as in (3)-(4) below:

- | | Theme | Rheme |
|-----|--------------|------------------------|
| (3) | The boy | lost his notebook. |
| (4) | The cup | was smashed to pieces. |

¹ Given the fact that it is a grammaticalized aspect of English, and English is the odd-man out in this regard typologically, it would actually make more sense to call English a “pronoun-retaining” language.

Indicative: interrogative: yes/no question: The Theme in English yes/no interrogatives generally includes the Finite Verbal Operator (*is, isn't, does, doesn't, etc.*—that which embodies the expression of polarity) and the Subject, in that order:

	Theme	Rheme	
(5)	Did you	eat yet?	(Yes/no interrogative)
(6)	Does he	like ice cream?	
(7)	Can I	do it?	

Indicative: interrogative: WH-word question: The Theme in English question-word type interrogatives is the question word, i.e. that which requests the missing piece of information:

	Theme	Rheme	
(8)	Who	left the cat out?	(WH- interrogative)
(9)	What	are we having for dinner?	
(10)	Where	did he say we are going?	

Imperative: The unmarked Theme in non-negative second person imperatives in English is the Predicator (the function of *be* in (11)), though it is possible to have a pronoun or *Do* + Predicator as marked Theme. The Theme in negative second person imperatives (prohibitives) is *Don't* plus the following Subject (marked form) or *Don't* plus the Predicator (unmarked form, as in (12)). The unmarked Theme in first person imperatives is *Let's*, as in (13). Imperative is the only type of clause in which the Predicator is the unmarked Theme.

	Theme	Rheme	
(11)	Be	quiet!	(2nd person Imperative)
(12)	Don't be	so talkative!	(2nd person Prohibitive)
(13)	Let's	have lunch together!	(1st person Imperative)

This system is important and functionally useful because it allows the hearer to know right at the beginning of the clause what sort of interaction is being carried out (assuming congruency between mood and speech act), and if it is an interrogative, what sort of information is being asked for. Signaling to the hearer what is about to come in the interaction on the part of the speaker and inferring what is about to come in the interaction on the part of the hearer is what is talked about in Interactional Linguistics as “projection” (e.g. Auer 2005, Thompson & Couper-Kuhlen 2005, Hopper & Thompson 2008, Hopper 2012, 2013).² This use of the word “projection” is quite different from the use of the word in SFL (for projecting quotes and ideas) and in generative syntax (for consistency in categorization between the lexical item and the larger structures based on it). Projection in Interactional Linguistics includes both the ability to

² There is also considerable psycholinguistic evidence for projection, sometimes called “anticipation” or “prediction” in the literature, see e.g. Altmann & Kamide 1999, DeLong et al. 2005, Bubic et al. 2010, Cohn & Paczynski 2013, Holler et al. 2015, Huettig 2015, Levinson & Torreira 2015, Barthel et al. 2016, Barthel et al. 2017, Sauppe 2016.

guess what is coming up in the interaction (what we might call “anticipating” the speaker’s intentions), and also the grammatical mechanisms for helping the hearer to make such guesses (what we might call “telegraphing” one’s intentions, to use the boxing metaphor). Typologically different languages allow for different types of projections (e.g. Tanaka 2000, Ono & Thompson 2017).³ The clause is seen in Interactional Linguistics as the locus of interaction, as “. . . the clause is precisely that unit which permits significant projectability” (Thompson & Couper-Kuhlen 2005: 485). The same authors (p. 487) point out that “Schegloff (1987, 1996) has proposed that the *beginning of the turn* in English is the key locus for projectability”, and Heritage (2013: 333) states that elements put in initial position “can offer initial clues as to the broad turn-shape and turn-type that is about to be implemented (Schegloff, 1987:71-72)”. Hopper (2012: 308) argues that “[p]rojection is what makes verbal communication an open and collaborative affair; as participants develop a sense of where the discourse is going, they tacitly mold it, allow it to continue, harmonize with the speaker’s goals, interrupt it with their own contribution, offer supportive tokens of various kinds, or predict when their turn will come”.⁴ Compare this with Prof. Halliday’s view of the clause as something to interact with. I will return to this below.

Another example of the influence of the three-way distinction in metafunctions outside SFL is the work of Elizabeth Traugott on subjectification in grammaticalization (Traugott 1982, 1988, 1989, 1990; Traugott & König 1991). Traugott has shown that there is a type of secondary grammaticalization where a construction that has grammaticalized at first with only an objective meaning often later further grammaticalizes in the direction of subjective (speaker-oriented) meaning, with a stage in between of marking textual cohesion (that is, the path of development is ‘propositional (> textual) > (expressive)’; Traugott 1990:497). In Traugott 1989, three semantic-pragmatic principles of grammaticalization are given:

Semantic-pragmatic Tendency I:

Meanings based in the external described situation > meanings based in the internal (evaluative/perceptual/cognitive) situation. (p. 34)

[e.g. *behind* (body part) > (space) > (time), where it operated twice]

³ Although in Thompson 1985 the term projection is not used, it is said that “the initial purpose clause helps to guide the attention of the reader. by signalling, within the portion of the text in which it occurs, how the reader is expected to associate the material following the purpose clause with the material preceding it. The final purpose clause does not play this role. In Hallidayan terms, the difference could be stated by referring to the three functions of language: ideational (content), textual (text-organizing), and interpersonal (pragmatic). While final purpose clauses serve at the ideational level, initial purpose clauses operate simultaneously at the ideational and at the textual levels (Halliday, 1973)”.

⁴ See Obana & Haugh 2015 and Blöndal 2015 for examples of collaborative production of the structures used in communication.

Semantic-pragmatic Tendency II:

Meanings based in the described external or internal situation > meanings based in the textual situation. (p. 35)

[cohesive, e.g. *æfter* ‘following behind’ first became a temporal connective (Tendency 1), then became a marker of textual cohesion as a subordinator]

Semantic-pragmatic Tendency III:

Meanings tend to become increasingly situated in the speaker’s subjective belief state/attitude toward the situation. (p. 35)

[e.g. English *sippan* ‘after, from the time that’, through conversational inference from the temporal sequence came to have a causative meaning (*since: Since you’ve got a cold, we’ll cancel the trip*); also *while*: OE *þa hwile þe* ‘at the time that’ > ME *while (that)* ‘during’ > PDE *while* ‘although’; situation viewed as existing in the world > signal of cohesive time relation between two clauses > expression of speaker’s attitude (Traugott 1990:497)]

Traugott’s concepts of ‘propositional’, ‘textual’ and ‘expressive’ are based to a large extent on SFL’s ‘experiential’, ‘textual’ and ‘interpersonal’ metafunctions of language, respectively (Elizabeth Traugott, personal communication), and some of the grammaticalizations mentioned are interpersonal metaphors mentioned by Prof. Halliday, such as a projecting clause developing a modal sense, as in *I think it’s going to rain*.

1.2 Recognition of the influence of the totality of the structure on interpretation

SFL sees the metafunctions as structures in which the functional relationships between the elements (functions) is what constitutes the structure:

. . . clause as a message, clause as an exchange, clause as a representation. Each of these three strands of meaning is construed by configurations of certain particular functions. Theme, Subject, and Actor do not occur as isolates; each occurs in association with other functions from the same strand of meaning . . . A configuration of this kind is what is referred to in functional grammars as a STRUCTURE.

The significance of any structural label lies in its relationship to the other functions with which it is structurally associated. **It is the structure as a whole, the total configuration of functions, that construes, or realizes, the meaning.** (Halliday 1994: 34, highlight mine)

Although the functional structures can have different grammatical manifestations, it is the totality of the structure that determines the meaning. Halliday (1994:114) shows how the structure itself influences the interpretation. For example, in discussing the example *The empty house was longing for the children to return*, he says “Simply by putting *the empty house* in this grammatical environment, as something that felt a longing, we cause it to be understood as endowed with consciousness.” This is why Prof. Halliday doesn’t talk so much about verbs, but about processes, as the same verb can represent different processes in different structures, e.g. English *feel* can be used to represent a material, mental, or relational process, depending on its relationship to the other elements in the structure: *I used my hand to feel the table*

(material; \approx *touch*); *I feel that he should be more polite* (mental; \approx *think*); *I feel miserable* (relational; \approx *to be*).

The understanding of how the totality of the structure is involved in the understanding of the meaning of an utterance is mirrored in what has come to be known as the constructionist approach to language. This view was adopted in Role and Reference Grammar in terms of the understanding of grammatical relations as early as the 1970's, but it is only with the advent of Construction Grammar (e.g. Fillmore, Kay & O'Connor 1988; Kay & Fillmore 1999; Goldberg 1995, 2006; Goldberg & Suttle 2010; Croft 2001, 2013) that the rest of linguistics is catching up with the idea that we need to look at the structures/constructions as a whole, and understand that the nature of an element in a construction depends on its function in the construction, not on abstract classifications (see, e.g. LaPolla 2013). This also makes sense historically and functionally, as we now understand that all structure is the result of grammaticalization (the conventionalization of repeated discourse patterns) and this occurs not in terms of individual words, but in terms of constructions used in particular communicative situations (e.g. English *go* is only involved in the expression of prospective aspect in a particular type of construction that arose out of repeated use in certain sorts of contexts; in other constructions it is simply a movement verb).

1.3 Transitive/ergative distinction in the transitivity system

Related to the insight that meanings are expressed in structures is the insight that the type of structures found in a language may not be uniform throughout the language. And so, for example, in discussing the ideational structure of the clause, Prof. Halliday recognizes two types of structure within the system of transitivity, the traditional Western view of transitive structure, where the action may or may not be 'carried across' to another participant, and the ergative structure, where the action may or may not be caused by an external agency (Halliday 1967a, 1968, 1994, Ch. 5). In 2011 František Kratochvíl, Alec Coupe and I edited a special issue of *Studies in Language* on transitivity. In the introductory paper for the volume (LaPolla, Kratochvíl & Coupe 2011) we introduced the SFL notion of distinguishing transitive and ergative structures (constructions) within the system of transitivity. We also showed the similarity of the ergative structure to the native Tibetan grammatical tradition's view of transitivity as involving or not an external agent rather than the action carrying over or not to another participant.⁵ We argued for recognizing transitivity as a constructional phenomenon, rather than assuming that one system and one construction type holds for the whole language, and for seeing the ergative construction, as defined in SFL, as a possibility for construction types when talking about transitivity both across languages and within a single language. Other papers in the special issue supported that view with empirical evidence from different languages.

⁵ I asked Prof. Halliday if he had been influenced by the native Tibetan grammarians, and he said he hadn't been; it was just a case of parallel viewpoints.

1.4 Text as a process and interaction

An important difference between Prof. Halliday's approach and many other approaches is that language use is seen as a process of interaction. Schleppegrell (2012: 22) writes:

SFL describes linguistic systems and the functions they enable, revealing the ways social actors construe their experience and enact relationships. From the systemic perspective, language is seen as a network of dynamic open systems from which speakers and writers are constantly selecting as they use language, thereby maintaining or changing the systems over time through their choices.

This is similar to the current recognition of language as an emergent and usage-based phenomenon, which arises and changes the way it does due to the choices speakers make when they speak in response to the actions of their interlocutors. SFL then manifests similarities with Interactional Linguistics, Conversation Analysis, and usage-based approaches (see Ochs, Schegloff & Thompson 1996; Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2001; Thompson & Couper-Kuhlen 2005; Barlow & Kemmer 2000; Bybee 2006; Lieven 2016; Hopper 2011, 2012, 2013). In fact Kemmer & Barlow (2000: vii) mention the Firthian tradition (of which SFL is a part) as one of the two major traditions "that are usage-based in the sense of focusing on acts of language use". As Halliday says in his earliest work outlining the theory (1961: 250), "Language is patterned activity", and, following Firth (1961: 243), "The data to be accounted for are observed language events, observed as spoken or as codified in writing, any corpus of which, when used as material for linguistic description, is a 'text'." And he cites Firth (1957a: 143), who said that language systems "are maintained in activity, and in activity they are to be studied". In a later article (1970: 361), Prof. Halliday says, ". . . aside from questions of language and society, or language and culture, the internal organization of the linguistic system has itself a functional basis, so that in order to understand the nature of language it is necessary to start from considerations of its use."

Although Hopper (2013), in discussing some of the achievements of Interactional Linguistics, mentions things that had already been worked out in SFL without mentioning work in SFL, Sandra Thompson, a key person in Interactional Linguistics since its inception, in an early paper in the development of the field (1985) explicitly builds on work in SFL by Prof. Halliday (e.g. 1967a-b) and Fries (1983) on the importance of initial position in the clause and the function of Theme, and explains the difference between the uses of initial and final purpose clauses in terms of the three metafunctions recognized by SFL practitioners (see footnote 3).

1.5 Seeing explanation as crucial to description

The Bloomfieldian Structuralists, in doing language description, traditionally did not concern themselves with explanation or historical development or comparative issues. Chomskyan Structuralists even more so did not concern themselves with such issues. Modern (non-Chomskyan) Structuralists, for whom the framework is now often called "basic linguistic theory", have added typological and historical comparison to the original Structuralist approach, though some, such as Matthew Dryer (2006), have argued that explanation is not necessary in describing a language using basic linguistic theory, and Dryer and Martin

Haspelmath have argued that it isn't necessary to look at why the structures are the way they are when doing typological comparison.⁶ Yet many of us working in language documentation feel that we should, as much as possible, explain the patterns we find from a historical or communicative interaction point of view (or both), and that this is also relevant in doing cross-linguistic typological comparisons (e.g. LaPolla 2016b, 2017). It has always been core to Prof. Halliday's approach to explain the patterns found in languages in terms of communicative and interactive goals and functions, a truly functionalist approach. In teaching a course on the structure of English in my university, I use Prof. Halliday's *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1994) as the textbook, because it not only tells us what the patterns of English are, but **why** they are the way they are, from a communicative interaction point of view, and also includes many comments on the history of the patterns. The students find this much more interesting, useful, and applicable than a simple description of abstract rules. It is also the only major grammatical theory that allows you to evaluate texts and translations, using the evaluation of choices made in the creation of the text.

1.6 Identification of Token and Value

Prof. Halliday's insight into the uses of reference phrases as Token vs. Value (e.g. 1994, §5.4.4) allows us to understand how an identifying phrase such as *Boys will be boys*, or *War is war* are not simple tautologies, but are actually saying something, that is, make sense as utterances. He distinguished attributive clauses (e.g. *John is a lawyer*), where the predicate is saying that the subject is a member of a class, from identifying clauses (e.g. *John is the lawyer*), where the predicate identifies the subject as a particular individual, but showed that within the identifying type there is a relationship of Token, a more specific reference, and Value, a more general characteristic reference. This is what allows us to see the first mention of *war* in *War is war* as Token, the reality of war, and the second mention as Value, the characteristics war has. We find this distinction helpful in understanding some non-identifying clauses as well, such as the following two natural examples from my own experience: *Sometimes when you get a ten dollar haircut you get a ten dollar haircut!* and *Don't blame me if I pulled a you on you!* From this insight Prof. Halliday also showed how the difference between identifying and attributive clauses is just a matter of the former being a case where the class is reduced in membership to one.

2. Separation of Theme-Rheme and Given-New

In the Prague School of linguistics, the concepts of Theme-Rheme, Functional Sentence Perspective, and Communicative Dynamism (CD) have loomed large. In discussing Theme, Firbas (1964[2009: 260]), citing Mathesius 1939, says, "Mathesius defines the theme as 'that which is known or at least obvious in the given situation, and from which the speaker proceeds' in his discourse (234)". This sounds like Given, but Firbas 1987 argues that the Theme is not necessarily "known" ("Given"), and it is not necessarily the initial element of a clause, but it is the item with the lowest degree of communicative dynamism in the clause. That is, "the

⁶ See the extensive debate on comparative categories on the LingTyp listserve, January 2016, available at <http://listserv.linguistlist.org/pipermail/lingtyp/2016-January/thread.html> under the heading "Structural congruence as a dimension of language complexity/simplicity".

information conveyed by the theme contributes least to the further development of the communication within the sentence” (Firbas 1987: 138). But it provides the foundation (using Mathesius’s *základ* ‘foundation’) for the information provided in the rest of the clause.⁷ He mentions that Daneš (1964) pointed out that Mathesius used three different terms, *východiště* ‘point of departure’, *téma* ‘theme’ and *základ* ‘basis, foundation’, and that

“... in 1939 Mathesius explicitly stated that the point of departure was not necessarily always identical with the theme (cf. Mathesius 1939: 171; 1947: 235; 1982: 174). Mathesius, however, did not explain the difference between the two. Later he dropped the term *východiště* [‘point of departure’] altogether and used the terms *téma* [‘theme’] and *základ* [‘foundation’] synonymously, in fact returning to a practice he already chose in 1929 (cf. Mathesius 1929; 1982: 29-38; 1983: 121-42).” (Firbas 1987: 140)

Firbas goes on say that the feature ‘aboutness’ is always a part of the Theme, but the Theme is not necessarily “context-dependent”, so the two are separate features. He quotes Mathesius at length, but the important part for us is that Mathesius felt the two parts of the semantic structuring of the sentence were “what is being spoken about” (the basis, foundation) and “what is being said about it” (the ‘core’; Mathesius 1982: 120, cited in Firbas 1987: 144). That sounds to me like topic and comment, and Mathesius for some time saw this as separate from the point of departure.

Firbas (1964[2009:265]) argues against another Prague School linguist, František Trávníček, who had argued (1962) that the theme was the initial element of the clause. Firbas says, “Identifying the theme with the beginning of the sentence, Trávníček disregards both the criterion of the degree of CD and the criterion of known or unknown information.” Firbas also mentions that the linguist K. Boost had a similar understanding of “Thema”, and that a third linguist, Eduard Beneš (1959), suggested a distinction between “basis” and “theme”:

“By ‘basis’ he understands the phenomenon that “as the opening element of the sentence links up the utterance with the context and the situation, selecting from several possible connections one that becomes the starting point, from which the entire further utterance unfolds and in regard to which it is orientated” (216). The term ‘theme’ would be applied by him to the phenomenon defined by us here as the element(s) carrying the lowest degree of CD within the sentence. We believe this differentiation to be sound. It prevents the student of language structure from mixing up aspects that should be kept separate.” (Firbas 1964[2009: 267]).

⁷ The earliest mention of the beginning of the utterance as the ground on which the interaction depends is probably Weil 1844[1887: 29]: “. . . it was necessary to lean on something present and known, in order to reach out to something less present, nearer, or unknown. There is then a point of departure, an initial notion which is equally present to him who speaks and to him who hears, which forms, as it were, the ground upon which the two intelligences meet; and another part of discourse which forms the statement (*l’énnonciation*), properly so called. This division is found in almost all we say.”

So here we see at least some Prague School linguists accepting a three-way distinction between what is “known” or not; what is the starting point of the utterance; and what the clause is about and has the lowest degree of communicative dynamism in the clause.

Prof. Halliday was one of the first outside the Prague School to talk about information structure (e.g. 1967b, 1970), and the typology that he outlined was very similar to the typology worked out by Knud Lambrecht (1986, 1994, 2000) almost 20 years later, which has become very influential and adopted in, for example, Role and Reference Theory (e.g. Van Valin & LaPolla 1997, Ch. 5).

Prof. Halliday distinguishes, as Lambrecht does, between the status of referents as identifiable or not in the mind of the addressee and the structure of focus and pragmatic presupposition, but uses “New” and “Given” for the latter concepts, respectively. He states (1967b: 204), “What is focal is 'new' information; not in the sense that it cannot have been previously mentioned, although it is often the case that it has not been, but in the sense that the speaker presents it as not being recoverable from the preceding discourse . . . If we use the - admittedly rather inappropriate - term 'given' to label what is not 'new', we can say that the system of information focus assigns to the information unit a structure in terms of the two functions 'given' and 'new'.” This is quite similar to Lambrecht’s definitions of focus, pragmatic presupposition, and focus structure (1994, Ch. 5; where he cites Halliday 1967b at length).

Prof. Halliday identified “unmarked focus”, where either the entire predicate or the entire clause is in focus, and “marked focus”, where the domain of focus is limited to a single constituent. Lambrecht develops this typology more fully, not only distinguishing broad focus (unmarked focus) from narrow focus (marked focus), but within broad focus distinguishing between “predicate focus”, the most common type of focus, where the entire predicate is in focus in a structure with a topic as a comment about that topic, and “sentence focus”, where the whole clause is in focus and there is no topic. In narrow focus, although all but the single focused element is within the pragmatic presupposition (Given), there is also no topic that the clause is about. Prof. Halliday explicitly recognized that there are utterances where there is no Given, as it is all New, yet there seems to be the assumption that there is a topical Theme in all clauses (see footnote 21), and this I think has given rise to problems in the analysis of texts. I’ll return to this below.

Prof. Halliday’s SFL is possibly the only major theory outside the Prague School that distinguishes Theme-Rheme and doesn’t conflate it with Topic-Comment or Given-New. Many other theorists do not understand the difference between Theme and Topic, and often Given, and just assume they are the same. Prof. Halliday argues that Topic is just one type of Theme (1994: 38). He identifies the Theme as the initial element of the clause in English, but states clearly that is not how it is defined; it is defined functionally, in construction with the Rheme, as a message is made up of a Theme and a Rheme, and within that “the Theme is the starting-point for the message; it is the ground from which the clause is taking off” (Halliday 1994: 38). He goes on to say

First position is not what defines the Theme; it is the means whereby the function of Theme is realized, in the grammar of English. There is no automatic reason why the Theme should be realized in this way; . . . there are languages which have a category of Theme functionally similar to that of English but which nevertheless express it in quite a different way. But if in any language the message is organized as a Theme – Rheme structure, and if this structure is expressed by the sequence in which the elements occur in the clause, then it seems natural that the position for the Theme should be at the beginning, rather than at the end or at some other point. (Halliday 1994: 38)

Matthiessen and Halliday (2009: 65) state that

The system of THEME sets up a local environment, providing a point of departure by reference to which the listener interprets the message. With this system the speaker specifies the place in the listener’s network of meanings where the message is to be incorporated as relevant. The local environment, serving as point of departure, is the Theme; what is presented in this local environment is the Rheme.

Distinct from this is the “degree of newsworthiness” (Matthiessen & Halliday 2009: 66), “represented as a configuration of Given + New”, the system of information focus (ibid).

So what we see here are three separable concepts, Topic-(Comment),⁸ Given-(New), and Theme-(Rheme), though Topic and Theme seem to be collapsed in Mathesius’ later view. What I would like to argue is that there are very good reasons for the Theme being the initial element of the utterance, and that the collapsing of Topic and Theme into one concept is problematic, and so we should separate out three functional structures: Theme-Rheme (which always has Theme before Rheme), Given-New (which can be New-Given in some languages as a marked pattern or in some languages as the unmarked pattern), and Topic-Comment (which can be Comment-Topic in some languages as the unmarked pattern).

Before I can make my point, though, I need to digress a bit and talk about how communication happens, and why the initial position in an utterance is important independent of being the Topic or not.

⁸ In Halliday 1967b: 200, Prof. Halliday states that he does not use the terms “topic” and “comment” “because they have tended to be used in a way which conflates what are here regarded as distinct functions, with ‘topic’ meaning both ‘given’ and ‘theme’”. I am not using “topic” in that way, but as what the clause is about, which I argue is independent of, though often overlaps with, “given” and “theme”, even though Prof. Halliday states, “The theme is what is being talked about, the point of departure for the clause as a message” (1967b: 212).

Downing (1991) also argues that “what is being talked about” and “the point of departure for the clause as a message” should not be conflated, as “[t]he point of departure of the message is not necessarily what the message is about” (p. 122), in particular that non-participant ideational elements that are thematic are not what the clause is about, and so argues for seeing only participant roles as possible topical Themes, and for not seeing other thematic elements such as Circumstances and Attributes as topical Themes.

McGregor (1992) argues for a similar position to Downing’s, but from the point of view that circumstantials are not experiential elements of the clause, and so should not be topical Themes, as the topical Theme of an English clause should be “the first element that has an experiential role in the clause” (p. 147).

3. The creation of meaning

Meaning doesn't exist externally in the world; it is created subjectively in our minds.⁹ That is, even in linguistic communication, there is no meaning in words or sounds; we create meaning from the actions of other people by putting together certain assumptions in which the actions "make sense". This includes linguistic actions (speech/writing), as language is not a thing, but a behavior, and many of the principles and cognitive abilities are the same as for other aspects of human behavior.¹⁰ The inference used to "make sense" of some phenomenon is called abductive inference (Peirce 1940; and called "inference to the best explanation" in the philosophy of science), and it is how we understand the natural world and how we understand the motivations of other people when they do something. We have a natural instinct to "make sense" of things, as it is crucial to our survival, and that means trying to hypothesize a reason for some phenomenon, whatever it is. When we observe a natural phenomenon, we take whatever information is available to us and create a context of interpretation in which that phenomenon makes sense to us. When we see another person doing something, we instinctively hypothesize why they are doing it, using abductive inference. In communication we apply this ability to inferring someone's intentions when they want us to infer their intention in performing some action (see LaPolla 2015 for details).

So communication is not coding and decoding, it is ostension¹¹ and inference, that is, the communicator doing an action ostensively to show the desire to communicate, and then the addressee using abductive inference to infer the reason for the person's action, whether it was linguistic, non-linguistic, or both.¹²

⁹ In Wendy Bowcher's plenary talk at the conference where this paper was presented, she used the example of a fist, and all the meanings one could ascribe to it; in his plenary talk Geoff Thompson showed a picture which could be understood in different ways. These examples highlight the subjective nature of meaning.

¹⁰ As David Butt said about the system networks in his talk at the conference, they are a representation of "the flow of behavior". I also want to stress, as Ruquaiya Hasan pointed out after my presentation, the assumptions related to language and other cultural aspects that we bring to the context of interpretation are socially constructed, that is, they are social conventions (as well as personal habits), and I do not intend to downplay the social aspect of language use, but the idea is that our understanding of language is simply memories of how we have seen or heard language being used, and how we have used it ourselves.

¹¹ The use of the term "ostension" for a communicative act and some other insights that led to this view of communication and cognition are due to Sperber & Wilson 1986, though the theory presented here diverges in many important ways from Relevance Theory. See LaPolla 1997 for discussion.

¹² Prof. Halliday (2002: 8) states: ". . . it should be possible in the next decade or two to crack the semiotic code, in the sense of coming fully to understand the relationship between observed instances of language behaviour and the underlying system of language – something that has eluded us up till now, so that we have even turned the two into different disciplines, calling only one of them 'linguistics' and labelling the other 'pragmatics'." My view is that this occurred because the Structuralists divorced language from communication, and made linguistics solely the study of linguistic structure, but this is based on a problematic notion of how language works (see Harris 1981—even Reddy 1979 did not go far enough in refuting what he called the "conduit metaphor"), and so the way to "crack the code" is to realise that there is no code; communication isn't based on coding and decoding, but on inferring the communicator's intention in performing a communicative act (see LaPolla 2015, 2016a).

Communication can happen with or without language, but language serves to constrain the creation of the context of interpretation in particular ways relevant to the culture and cognition of the speakers. Each language is unique, as it emerges out of the communicative behavior of a unique society of speakers, and so each language will differ in terms of what semantic domains the speakers have constrained often enough for the particular pattern to become conventionalized on the societal level and habitualized on the individual level, and they will differ in terms of how much they constrain the interpretation of a semantic domain if they do so, and they will differ in the particular linguistic mechanisms used to constrain it if they do so.

As perception of a speech act is linear, interpretation is also linear, and this is why the initial segment of the utterance is so important, as mentioned in the discussion of “projection” above (§1.1). We don’t wait for the whole utterance to be completed before we start creating the context of interpretation; we start building the context of interpretation with the very first word, and then that context of interpretation influences the creation of the context for interpreting the rest of the utterance.¹³ We project what is to come, and languages can give us clues as to what to expect.¹⁴ We saw in English that the initial segment influences the creation of the context of interpretation in terms of constraining the interpretation of the mood such that the addressee can project what sort of interaction the speaker intends to accomplish with the hearer. Other languages put different elements in initial position to help the hearer project aspects of the interaction that that culture deems salient. Languages also differ typologically as to what is obligatorily thematic and what isn’t. For example, in English, conjunctions such as *if* must be thematic, i.e. precede the Topical Theme, but this is not the case in Chinese.

I will use Tagalog as an example of a language that, like English, also makes good use of the clause initial position to aid the hearer’s projection of the speaker’s intention, but uses it for somewhat different purposes than English does, and does not generally put the Topic in initial position.

4. Theme in Tagalog

Tagalog, a Malayo-Polynesian language spoken in the Philippines, is a consistently focus-initial language and so in general the predicate appears in initial position and the information structure is Comment-Topic (New-Given) rather than Topic-Comment (Given-New). The

¹³ Cf. MacWhinney’s (1977: 152) view of “starting points”: “The speaker uses the first element in the English sentence as a starting point for the organization of the sentence as a whole. Similarly, the listener uses the first element in a sentence as a starting point in comprehension.” Gernsbacher & Hargreaves (1988, 1992) also argue for the importance of initial position, discussing many of the experimental results showing what they call “the privilege of primacy”, how what appears in initial position influences the interpretation of the whole utterance. Kim & Kuroshima (2013: 269) cite a large number of studies on interaction in different languages, and argue that they “demonstrate how turn beginnings serve as a prime location in interaction regardless of the language’s typology.”

¹⁴ Cf. Schegloff (1987: 71): “Turn-beginnings project a “shape” for the turn, and they’re in that respect potentially critical elements for a speaker’s recipients, who, in having to analyze the turn as it develops, may need the turn beginning resources as part of the materials for their analysis.”

predicate in most cases marks aspect, realis/irrealis, and often the semantic role of the Topic of the clause. Topic here is actually a grammatical status, as well as a pragmatic status, as it is an argument singled out for special morphological treatment, and is what the clause is about.¹⁵ Generally any argument, whether participant or circumstance, can be the Topic of the clause, though usually (but not always) it is one that is identifiable to the hearer, and in many cases the predicate takes a form to reflect the semantic role of that argument.¹⁶ The representation of the argument (if it appears in the clause and is not a pronoun) generally takes either a marker of specificity (*ang*, or *si* with proper names) or a topic form of demonstrative pronoun to mark it as the Topic. The set of pronouns also distinguishes topical from non-topical referents, with the latter appearing as possessive forms or dative forms. Let's look at some examples (natural examples from my own fieldwork, the conversation "Making Salsa"; see also Schachter 2008, 337-8, for sets of constructed parallel examples with the same arguments but with different choices of topic).

14) 1. Jirehel: *Madali lang kasi 'ng gumawa ng salsa eh.*

ma-dali lang kasi ang g<um>awa ng salsa eh
 STAT-easy just because SPEC <AT>make POSS sauce EMPHATIC
 'Making sauce is easy.'

2. Wendy: *Oo, madali lang.*

oo ma-dali lang
 yes STAT-easy just
 'Yes, it's easy.'

3. *Gawin mo lang ketchup,*

gawa-in mo lang ketchup
 do-UT 2sgPOSS just catsup
 Just make it with ketchup,

4. *tapos lagyan mo ng tomatoes,*

tapos lagay-an mo ng tomatoes
 finish add-LT 2sgPOSS REL tomatoes
 then you add tomatoes,

¹⁵ The notion "what the clause is about" is not as straightforward as it might seem, as this can differ between languages. Tagalog has a much richer set of morphosyntactic possibilities for maintaining the reference to particular referents as Topic than English does, and so very often what is the Topic in Tagalog, what the clause clearly is about, will not be the topical Theme or even notional topic in the English translation (e.g. (14.3-5), where the salsa is the Topic in the Tagalog clauses, but cannot be in the English translations in any natural way). English can achieve some of the same results in some contexts using marked constructions like clefts, but does not do so to the extent or as naturally as Tagalog does. That the grammatical Topic in Tagalog is what the clause is about can be seen from the fact that "[a]ny predication minus its topic can function as a nominalization understood to denote what would be the topic of that predication" (Adams & Manaster-Ramer 1988: 81). I will use "Topic" for this Tagalog-specific category and "topic" for the more general comparative category.

¹⁶ This is similar to the choice of A construction vs. O construction in Jawarawa, discussed by Dixon 2000, 2004, depending on what is considered to be the topic of the clause, but with more choices for topic than just A and O.

5. *lagayan mo ng salt and pepper to taste, tapos na.*

lagay-an mo ng salt and pepper to taste tapos na
 add-LT 2sgPOSS POSS salt and pepper to taste finish CS
 add salt and pepper to taste; then, it's done.'

In this example, the first speaker, Jirehel, refers to the making of salsa using an actor-topic form (*gumawa*) where the infix *-um-* marks it as Actor-Topic,¹⁷ but then the second speaker, Wendy, uses the same root in line 3 of the example, but with Irrealis Undergoer-Topic suffix *-in*, to profile the event from the point of view with the salsa as the Topic. She then follows this in lines 4 and 5 with two tokens of the root *lagay* 'add' with the Location-Topic suffix *-an*, to keep the salsa as the Topic, but with it now having the semantic role of the location where the tomatoes and salt and pepper are to be added. Notice how there is no overt reference to the topic in any of Wendy's utterances (e.g. '*yung salsa* 'the salsa' could have been added to the end of each of Wendy's utterances in lines 3-5, but it wasn't), yet we can tell what is being talked about (what is the pragmatic and grammatical Topic) because of the marking on the predicate.

In a series of insightful papers, James Martin (1981, 1988, 1990, 1995b, 1996, 2004, Martin & Cruz 2018) discusses several aspects of Tagalog grammar from an SFL point of view. He points out that Tagalog has a "predisposition for loading interpersonal meaning onto the front of the clause" (1990: 36). Interrogative elements, for example, obligatorily appear in initial position (as in (15); with some interrogative words this is achieved by the use of clefting to isolate the interrogative word in the utterance-initial predicate), the "attention-directing" deictic pronouns and interpersonal comments such as *mabuti pa* 'it would be best if . . . ' always appear in initial position, and the marking of negation and modality is also generally utterance-initial, as in (16) and (17). Aside from immediately initial position, there is a large number of clitics that mark textual or interpersonal meaning that occur in second position in the clause (those in bold type in (15)-(17)), and the personal pronouns (e.g. *mo* in Wendy's utterances in (14) and in (17), and *siya*, which is the topic in (15)) are also second position clitics. Following are some examples adapted from Martin (1990: 19, 22, 12):

15) *Kailan kaya siya tatakbo.*

kailan kaya siya ta-takbo
 when SPECULATION 3sgT REDUP-run
 'When do you suppose she'll run?'

16) *Hindi pa rin ho ba lumabas si Cory.*

hindi pa rin ho ba l<um>abas si Cory
 NEG NCS also RESPECT Q <AT>outside SPEC PN
 'Didn't Cory leave anyway, sir/ma'am?'

¹⁷ It happens that in this line the speaker has made the relevant clause the Topic of a higher clause, but the phenomenon is the same.

17) *Baka naman gusto mong magkape.*

baka	naman	gusto	mo=ng	mag-kape
maybe	CONTRAST	want	2sgPOSS=LNK	IAT-coffee

‘But maybe you’d like to have coffee.’

Prof. Martin calls these elements thematic, but also considers Topic phrases at the end of the clause, such as *si Cory* in (16), thematic. This view is also followed in Matthiessen & Halliday 2009.

It is also possible for the Topic or circumstantial phrases and clauses to appear in focus position preceding the predicate, generally linked to the predicate with the particle *ay*, as in (18), which Martin (1990: 20) classifies as having a marked Theme.¹⁸

18) *Si Aquino pala ay pinatay ni Marcos.*

si	Aquino	pala	ay	p<in>atay	ni	Marcos
SPEC	PN	SURPRISE	PPT	<RUT>dead	POSS	PN

‘Surprisingly Aquino was killed by Marcos’

This construction is usually used for scene-setting or contrastive topics (cf. Fox 1985). Notice that the second-position clitic (*pala*, which shows surprise) does not follow the Predicator (*pinatay*), but follows the first phrase of the utterance. This is not necessarily true of the clitic pronouns.

In most of the major discussions of theme, from Mathesius 1929 up through to the present, the languages under discussion have been topic-comment languages where the topic appears in initial position, and so there has been the problem of distinguishing the function of initial part of the utterance or clause (the speaker’s starting point) from the topic. A language like Tagalog allows us to separate the two, and to see that the starting point of the utterance does not have to include the topic, yet is still important for understanding how the speaker facilitates the interaction by structuring the clause in a way that makes it easier for the hearer to infer certain aspects of the speaker’s intention.

What I’d like to argue is for associating theme with those elements at the beginning of the utterance that help with the hearer’s projection of the communicator’s intent, and so a topic that comes at the end of the clause would not be considered to be part of the theme, as it is not contributing to the projection. The clause-initial topics, though, could be considered part of the theme.

¹⁸ It is also possibly to only have a pause before the predicate instead of using *ay*. Tagalog is rigidly focus-initial, and there are many constructions for allowing different elements to appear in initial focus position, e.g. circumstantial elements (which usually occur after the predicate), without using the *ay* construction, e.g. *Sa Martes pa tayo bibili ng mesa* [LOC Tuesday NCS 1plinclT REDUP-buy POSS table] ‘We won’t buy a table until *Tuesday*’, where the date is the key focal information of the clause. See also Naylor 1975: 54ff. on the predicate as the unmarked Theme and anything other than the predicate appearing in initial position as marked Theme.

There has been much discussion of the complementarity of the theme-rheme and given-new functional structures in English, giving the clause peaks of speaker (theme) vs. hearer (new) prominence and troughs of non-prominence in a sort of periodic wave-like structure (e.g. Halliday 1979, 1994; Matthiessen 1988, 1992; Martin 1992), and in fact Matthiessen (1992: 42) states that “the textual metafunction is concerned with creating contrasts between prominence and non-prominence in meaning as an aid in the processing of text”. As Tagalog consistently has the new utterance-initially, conflating theme and topic would mean that there is no such wave-like structure in Tagalog, but if we separate theme and topic we can say that there is still such a complementary periodicity, but it is topic vs. new rather than theme vs. new, which is actually what is meant in talking about theme vs. new, as it is the topical theme that is the most important in this regard.

Now, this chapter is not really about Tagalog; I am just using Tagalog as an example. I am arguing for a methodological principle. I want to argue that we should distinguish between the Theme, defined as the speaker’s starting point, and the topic. The theme forms a structure with the rheme, and the topic forms a structure with the comment. By topic here I am referring to what the clause is about, which is in a functional structure with the comment, what is said about the topic. In Tagalog this is explicitly marked, and does not depend on position within the clause.¹⁹ In other languages, such as Chinese, topic is defined by its position in the clause, and only reference phrases that are clause-initial (in the case of primary topics) or at least preverbal (in the case of secondary topics) will be seen as a topics, and so word order is used to distinguish referents that are topics (and distinguish primary and secondary topics) from referents that are not topics. This means that in Chinese it is being made thematic that allows the reference to a referent to be understood as referring to the topic of the clause. See the following example (from LaPolla & Poa 2006: 278):

19. (a) *Yuán cháo mò nián, yě céng*
 PN dynasty end year also EXP
chū-le yī-ge qiānshilǐluò de rén.
 emerge-PFV one-CL honest.and.upright ASSOC person
 ‘At the end of the Yuan dynasty, there appeared an honest and upright person.’

- (b.1) *Rén xìng Wáng,* (b.2) *míng Miǎn,*
 person surnamed PN given.named PN
 ‘(This) person was surnamed Wang, and had the given name Mian,’

¹⁹ The rare exceptions to this being where *ang* or demonstrative-marked arguments occur in the predicate and so are not topics, and when unmarked topics occur in initial position in the construction with *ay*. In these cases position in the construction helps identify the element as the Topic. There is also the exclamative construction, a referential use in which the pragmatic topic, if it appears, is not treated as a grammatical Topic but as a possessive modifier, e.g. *Ang ganda ng buhok mo!* [SPEC beauty POSS hair 2sgPOSS] ‘The beauty of your hair!—cf. *Maganda ang buhok mo* [beautiful SPEC hair 2sgPOSS] ‘Your hair is beautiful’. This is also true when the predicate is a property concept modified by the intensifier *napaka-*, e.g. *Napakaganda ng buhok mo* ‘Your hair is very beautiful’.

- (b.3) *zài Zhūjì-xiàn xiāngcūn jūzhù;*
 LOC PN-county countryside live
 ‘(he) lived in in the countryside of Zhuji county,’
- (b.4) *qī suì shí sǐ-le fùqīn,*
 seven years.old time die-PFV father
 ‘when he was seven his father died,’
- (c.1) *tā mǔqīn zuò xiē zhēnzhǐ,*
 3sg mother do some sewing
 ‘his mother did some sewing,’
- (c.2) *gōngjǐ tā dào cūn xuétáng-lǐ qù dúshū.*
 supply 3sg ALL village school-inside go study
 ‘to give him money to go to the village school to study.’

This is a very typical stretch of Chinese narrative text. The first clause introduces a new referent in post-verbal (non-topic) position, then this referent becomes the topic of the following four clauses.²⁰ A related referent is then the topic of the next two clauses. The structure of all the clauses except the first is topic-comment. The first clause is presentative, a “sentence focus” construction (Lambrecht 1994, LaPolla 1995), and so does not have a topic (the temporal expression locates the event in time, but is not the topic of the predication—see LaPolla 1995 for discussion). The clause in (19b.4) involves two parts, a topic and a comment, but the topic is not mentioned and the comment (the entire line) has the reference to the person who died in post-verbal position, just as in the presentative construction in the first line of this text. In this case the reference to the father appears in post-verbal position not because the father is being introduced for further development as a topic, but simply to mark it as not a topic, and so his dying is seen as an event that happened to the topic of the clause (Wang Mian) when he was seven years old. This allows for consistency in the choice of topic, what is called a “topic chain” in Chinese linguistics.²¹ What is important is that the father not be interpreted as the topic of a categorical statement. Had reference to the father been before the verb, then the father would have been understood as the topic, and the statement would have been about him, not about Wang Mian. That would be saying something very different from what the author intends in this stretch of text.

Even in English this view can help us resolve some problems that come up when we try to apply the view that necessarily conflates initial position and what the clause is about. For example, Matthiessen & Martin (1991: 45) discuss the thematic nature of English initial *there* in existential clauses, arguing that “The Theme is one of the elements that realises the feature ‘existential’; it sets up as the point of departure that an Existent will be presented. The new

²⁰ This is true of Tagalog as well: existential clauses do not have topics, and can be used to introduce referents that will go on to become topics in later clauses (see Adams & Manister-Ramer 1988).

²¹ Here we see that distinguishing theme from topic allows us to still talk about theme in these clauses, even though the topic is not overtly mentioned.

information comes within the Rheme as the Existent . . .”. Martin (1992: 165), says “As unmarked Theme, *there* is anticipatory; it signals that something is coming - namely the new participant at the end of the clause.” Martin (1995: 306) also discusses this construction in similar terms:

“. . . for Halliday the fact that placing *there* first is a systemic choice precisely parallel to beginning a clause with its Subject in any other process type means that *there* is a perfectly ordinary candidate for Theme. The fact that it is not assigned a participant function by Halliday . . . is beside the point; *there* does realise ideational meaning, helping distinguish existential from other relational clauses (cf. existential *there was a record player in the corner* , attributive *the record player was in the corner, wasn't it?* and identifying *that's the record player in the corner*”.

The function of clause-initial *there* in this construction then is the function of projection that I have been talking about, which I see as different from topic. The controversy here is about whether clause-initial *there* can be considered “what the clause is about”, i.e. can be considered the topic of the clause. If instead of insisting that theme and topic must coincide, and also recognize that not all clauses have topics (see Lambrecht’s notion of “sentence focus” clauses, where there is no topic, a prime example being existential clauses), then we can just say clause-initial *there* is theme, that it is helping the addressee project the mood of the clause and the nature of the clause as existential. The clause is not “about” *there*, which is non-referential, though, so *there* is not a topic, even if it is Subject, and in fact there is no topic in the clause.²²

In discussing the fact that WH-elements are obligatorily clause-initial in English, Prof. Halliday says (1970: 358): “There is no intrinsic reason why the WH-element should be in first position. In many languages, it occupies whatever position in the clause is appropriate to its status in transitivity. Where the WH-element is assigned first position this must be because first position has some independent structural significance as the expression of another function with which the WH-function is typically associated, a function that will automatically be carried by the WH-element if the clause is of the WH-type.” This seems to be recognition that initial position in the clause has a function independent from what the clause is about.

Martin (1995a: 304-5) says, “In defining Theme as ‘the point of departure for the message . . . that with which the clause is concerned’, Halliday is attempting to gloss the rationale for placing information first (Theme) rather than last (as unmarked New).” This makes perfect sense, for English, as English generally has New at the end of the clause, and so the information about the Topic relative to which the New is to be understood should ideally come before it. But in a language where New is at the beginning of the clause, this motivation does not hold. There is still motivation for helping the addressee infer (project) the speaker’s goals and

²² Prof. Halliday himself, in earlier work (e.g. 1970: 357) argued that all independent indicative clauses had a theme, “with the possible exception of those beginning with dummy *it* and *there*, which may be best regarded as having no thematic element in their structure”. In this he seems to have been influenced more by the sense of what the clause is about rather than the starting point of the utterance.

direction in which the interaction is most likely to proceed, but that is not the same as Topic, what the clause is about.

As Prof. Halliday (1967b) and Knud Lambrecht (1994) have argued, the pragmatic status of referents in the minds of the speaker and hearer (what Lambrecht calls identifiable vs. unidentifiable) is a different type of information from that involved in what Prof. Halliday calls information focus, and Lambrecht calls focus structure (e.g. Topic-Comment is “predicate focus structure”), and so these two concepts also need to be distinguished, giving us three different semantic domains: the identification of referents,²³ the identification of what the clause is about and what is being said about it, and the identification of the intention of the speaker in the interaction. Of course the use of topics as themes is highly motivated, as it allows projection also of the speaker’s intention in terms of the development of the content of what is to follow (see Fries 1983; Martin 1992), including Martin’s (1992) macro-Theme, hyper-Theme, and Theme (i.e. macro-Topic, hyper-Topic, Topic), but I am arguing that we need to expand the typology to allow for languages that do not conflate theme and topic. The fact that distinguishing between given and new also helps the hearer correctly project the speaker’s intention (the reason for marked focus constructions like clefts), and the fact that topics are generally identifiable referents, and the fact that speakers often use the topic as the starting point to allow the hearer to better project what the speaker’s intention in the interaction will be, has led to the concepts being collapsed in many theories, but the example where this correlation doesn’t happen show that we need to distinguish different functional structures.

This then leaves us with the question of where to draw the line between Theme and Rheme in Tagalog. In Halliday 1994 everything up to the topical Theme, defined as the first participant, process or circumstance in the clause, is considered part of the Theme in English, but if in a language like Tagalog the Topic is not part of the Theme, how do we draw the line between Theme and Rheme? In an example like (16), repeated below, if we follow the rule given for English, then the entire predicate (including *lumabas*) is in the Theme, leaving only the Topic (*si Cory*) outside the Theme.

16) *Hindi pa rin ho ba lumabas si Cory.*

hindi pa rin ho ba l<um>abas si Cory

NEG NCS also RESPECT Q <RPAT>outside SPEC PN

‘Didn’t Cory leave anyway, sir/ma’am?’

Evidence for this sort of analysis is the fact that in some cases the initial element and the predicate have to be linked into an overt phrase using the *na/-ng* linker. In such cases, if there are second position clitics, they occur after the first word of the phrase and before the linker,

²³ This is only talking about the status of referents in the minds of the speaker and hearer, and not the tracking of referents in discourse. The latter is known as “referent tracking” or “reference tracking” (see Heath 1975, Foley & Van Valin 1984: 321-74, Van Valin 1987, Comrie 1989). Although Tagalog does manifest a referent tracking system in its marking of the semantic role of the argument that is the Topic, I am not specifically talking about referent tracking here except as one aspect of the use of Theme in Tagalog for helping with projection.

as in (20), where the phrase *pwedeng kunin* ‘can take’ is interrupted by the 1sg non-topic pronoun and the question marker, and so the linker appears at the end of the question marker. So if we take the first phrase as the Theme, then we should include the other elements as well, again leaving only the Topic (*yun leaves*) as the Rheme.

20) *Pwede ko bang kunin yun leaves . . . ?*

[pwede ko ba=ng kunin] ‘yung leaves
can 1sgPOSS Q=LNK take:UT that+LNK leaves

‘Can I take the leaves . . . ?’

<https://delishably.com/beverages/How-to-Make-Malunggay-Tea-Home-Made-Moringa-Tea>

In a case like line 4 of (14), repeated here, we could consider the first word, *tapos*, as a textual Theme and the predicate, *lagyan*, as the end of the Theme. But as the other two elements actually form a phrase together with the predicate (*mo* and *ng tomatoes* are both possessive modifiers)²⁴ set off from the Topic (which is left unexpressed by Wendy), we could consider the entire utterance to be thematic, with only the Topic again not part of the Theme.

14) 4. *tapos lagyan mo ng tomatoes,*

tapos lagyan-an mo ng tomatoes
finish add-LFS 2sgPOSS POSS tomatoes
then you add tomatoes,

In a clause like (18), repeated here, where the Topic is in initial position, the Theme would just be the initial Topic alone:

18) *Si Aquino pala ay pinatay ni Marcos.*

si Aquino pala ay pinatay ni Marcos
SPEC PN SURPRISE PPT kill:RUT POSS PN

‘Surprisingly Aquino was killed by Marcos’

It then would not include the particle of surprise *pala*, which might seem counterintuitive given that *si Aquino pala* is one information unit in Prof. Halliday’s view (e.g. 1967b). But it might be seen as similar to *unfortunately* in *John unfortunately left before Melanie came*,²⁵ where the Comment Adjunct would not be seen as part of the Theme.

²⁴ Compare for example, *Kaibigan lang siya ng aking tatay* [friend only 3sgT POSS 1sgDAT+LNK father] ‘He is only my father’s friend’, with *Tinanong lang siya ng aking tatay* ‘My father only asked him’, where *kaibigan ng aking tatay* ‘my father’s brother’ and *tinanong ng aking tatay* ‘asked by my father’ are phrases of the same type in Tagalog, though in English we translate them very differently. The fact that they form phrases with the predicate linked by *ng* is why such arguments cannot appear in initial position the way *ang*-marked or *sa*-marked arguments can. See LaPolla 2014 for more on the different types of phrases in Tagalog.

²⁵ Assuming this is said without intonation breaks before and after *unfortunately*, which would mark it as a separate information unit.

On rereading the Prague School writings, it seems we may not need to draw a clear line in all cases. Their view was that there was a continuous progression, and not a clear break between the two. As Geoff Thompson pointed out in his plenary talk at the conference, Theme “tails off” (see also Matthiessen 1992: 50-51). If we take Theme as those elements which aid projection, then we also do not need to draw a clear line, as throughout the utterance the hearer is using what has been said already to project what is to come.

One final comment on Prof. Halliday’s approach: unlike some of the theories that it is often compared to, it isn’t a fixed metalanguage that is applied to different languages in the same way. It is a very flexible approach, which assumes the communicative and interactional aspects of language and the contexts of situation and culture, but does not assume the actual details of how the speakers of a language organize their interactions is the same, and Prof. Halliday has expressed his disappointment to me upon seeing people mechanistically assume that his analysis of English structures can be applied directly to other languages. His is an empirical approach, not only in terms of using natural discourse as his data, but also in his recognition that languages can differ in terms of how they express meaning (and what meanings they express), and so must each be studied inductively.

Abbreviations used:

1plinclT	1 st person inclusive topic pronoun	LT	Locative Topic suffix
1sgPOSS	1 st person singular possessive pronoun	NCS	No Change of State marker
2sgPOSS	2 nd person singular possessive pronoun	NEG	negative
3sg	3 rd person singular pronoun	PFV	Perfective aspect marker
3sgT	3 rd person singular Topic pronoun	PN	Proper Name
ALL	Allative verb	POSS	Possessive linker
ASSOC	Associative marker	PPT	Pre-Predicate Topic marker (creates a construction with the Topic preceding the predicate)
AT	Actor Topic infix	Q	Question particle
CL	Classifier	REDUP	Reduplication of initial syllable for marking imperfective and planned actions
CS	Change of State marker	RUT	Realis Undergoer Topic infix
EXP	Experiential aspect marker	SPEC	Specific referent
IAT	Irrealis Actor Topic prefix	STAT	Stative predicate
LNK	Linker	UT	Undergoer Topic suffix
LOC	Locative marker (Tagalog); Locative verb (Chinese)		

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