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**Theme markedness in English  
and Spanish:  
A Systemic-Functional  
Approach**

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**No. of credits: 4**

**May 1995**

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# 1 Introduction

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The aim of this study is to provide an account of unmarked theme options in Spanish, as compared to those established for English (Halliday, 1985; Matthiessen, 1992). A secondary aim has been to present a preliminary classification of theme options in Spanish following the computational treatment for English done by Matthiessen (1992). The paper is structured as follows.

In section 2 we make a short review of the literature on some relevant concepts, such as theme, given, and topic, with special emphasis on the concept of theme as studied by different schools of linguistics.

Section 3 focuses on providing a functional definition of theme, i.e., to account for the function or functions the notion of theme has within the language, and how this function is realised in the grammar of Spanish, namely by first position in the sentence.

Section 4 concentrates on some word order questions for Spanish. Spanish, at first sight, seems to admit many different elements in first position and many different word orders in the sentence. Therefore, there seemed to exist the need for a classification of ‘natural’, or ‘unmarked’ word order, and for the definition of the contexts for that unmarked order.

Section 5 presents the problems posed by Spanish word order in relation to theme options, and the classification of unmarked thematic options in relation to mood.

In section 6, and before moving on to classifying and establishing the theme systems in Spanish, other languages were considered. English and German provide a full account of theme and theme markedness (Matthiessen, 1992; Steiner & Ramm, 1993). For Italian, Renzi (1988) presents an interesting study on word order options in that language, although no systematic account of theme has been carried out yet<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For a preliminary treatment of theme in Italian within a computational framework see Lavid (1995).

The last part, section 7, provides a pre-computational classification in terms of systems for certain phenomena related to theme, such as theme and mood; the interpersonal, textual and ideational theme systems, etc.

After this brief summary of the present study, a few things must be pointed out. First of all, there is no consideration of intonation in the study. Although it is acknowledged that intonation plays a very important part in the description of theme markedness, the study concentrated on the written language, and no attempt was made at considering how it interacts with theme phenomena. Thus, we only considered the sequence of elements, the grammatical classifications, and the intuitions of a native speaker of Spanish as the basis for the classifications provided.

Besides, subordinate clauses were not taken into account. The systems and classifications refer just to main or independent clauses or sentences within the context of mood.

## 2 Review of literature

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If we leave aside the evolution in the definitions of the concepts of subject and predicate, as it has been studied since its formulation by Plato and Aristotle (see Gundel (1977) for an explanation of these concepts), we can start with the thematic organisation of the clause as first defined by the Prague School of Linguists. The theories developed by this group of linguists consider that the clause has a communicative dynamism achieved through the progression of information from older to new information. This is what they called the functional sentence perspective (FSP) point of view. Danes (1974, 1989) claims there is a division of the sentence, or utterance, into:

- (i) theme (topic) - rheme (comment), in the sense 'what the speaker is talking about' and 'what he says about his theme'. This aspect receives the name of 'communicative articulation'.
- (ii) known/given/old/contextually bound information - new/unknown/contextually non-bound information; in a different terminology this would be: starting point/basis/presupposition - core/nucleus/focus of utterance. The second aspect is called 'informational bipartition'.
- (iii) different degrees of 'communicative dynamism' of utterance constituents.

The first definition of theme within the Prague School was that of Mathesius. He stated that theme is 'what the sentence is about', and rheme, or enunciation, is 'what is said about it'. The theme, "what is known or at least obvious in a given situation and from which the speaker proceeds in his discourse," usually precedes the enunciation or rheme (in Gundel, 1977). Mathesius notes that in English it is common to associate theme with grammatical subject, because of the rigidity of its word order. Therefore, in sentences where all the information is new there is no theme.

Firbas restated the theory and introduced the notion mentioned above of communicative dynamism, to avoid saying that a sentence has no theme, and to account for the relationship between given and new information and what the sentence is about. New information has

more communicative dynamism than old information, but there is a degree in the progression from one to the other, so that themes are optionally followed by a transitional element, as in the following examples, where 1, 2 and 3 indicate the theme, transitional element and rheme, respectively (Gundel, 1977):

(2.1) Long ago there lived a beautiful queen.  
          1                          2                          3

(2.2) A girl broke the vase.  
          1          2                          3

(2.3) The party was over at three.  
          1          2          3

Theme is defined, in Halliday's words, as (Halliday, 1985:38) "the element which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that with which the clause is concerned." The thematic structure gives the clause its character as message, some form of organisation giving it the status of a communicative event. This structure may be realised in different ways. In English, the clause is organised as message by having a special status assigned to one part of it. One element in the clause is enunciated as the theme; this then combines with the remainder so that the two parts together constitute a message.

He then goes on to explain that Theme is a label for this function, and this theme, combined with the remainder of the clause makes the two parts constitute a message. This definition is well known, and has been used, criticised and praised many times before. But what it is most important to point out here is that Halliday defined Theme as realised by position in the clause *in English*. Different languages use different devices to provide this function with a realisation in the language. Moreover, he explains that only in English is Theme realised by first position in the clause (Halliday, 1985:39): "First position in the clause is not what defines the Theme; it is the means whereby the function of Theme is realised, in the grammar of English."

Therefore, Theme is a function realised by position in some languages —of which English is one—, and by first position in English. Whatever is left in the clause is the Rheme.

Theme is not the same as Given. Halliday defines Given and New as part of the information structure of the clause, and having to do with intonation units. The information unit —defined as the process of interaction between what is known or predictable and what is new or

unpredictable— consists of an obligatory New element plus an optional Given. The boundaries between the two, when present, are established by intonation and context. The difference Given + New and Theme + Rheme is explained as follows (Halliday, 1985:278): “The Theme is what I, the speaker, choose to take as my point of departure. The Given is what you, the listener, already know about or have accessible to you. Theme + Rheme is speaker-oriented, while Given + New is listener-oriented.”

There exists, however, a semantic correlation between information structure and thematic structure, so that the speaker will usually choose theme from the given information, placing the new information in the rheme of the sentence/utterance.

A problem, however —as discussed by Downing (1991)— is posed by Halliday’s definition of theme as both ‘what the sentence is about’ and ‘the point of departure of the message’. As Downing points out, the problem is not solved by the idea of multiple themes —ideational, interpersonal and textual— or the need to ‘wait for’ the ideational/topical theme to complete the theme of a sentence, because topical themes include fronted adjuncts, and it would be very difficult to say that a sentence is ‘about’ an adjunct, as in example (2.4), where the sentence is not about ‘at eight o’clock this morning’:

(2.4) At eight o’clock this morning the President left from Barajas to attend the international conference to be held in Rome.

Circumstantial adjuncts are easily moved to first position in the sentence because they are not semantically or syntactically integrated into the clause structure, they are not topics (Downing, 1992). Therefore, the only points of departure that are really ‘what the clause is about’ are participants and processes. Downing (1991:128) makes a new classification of the function of initial elements, according to the type of framework they set up:

- 1) participant Themes, which set up individual frameworks.
- 2) spatial, temporal and situational Themes, which set up circumstantial frameworks.
- 3) discourse Themes, which set up subjective and logical frameworks.

We will try to solve this problem with a new definition of theme which does not include necessarily ‘what the sentence is about’, so that we can consider circumstantials as themes (cf. section 3).

Topic is our next element of concern. Here we will have to face yet another definition for all the concepts under consideration. Givón (1983) agrees that the tradition has always divided the sentence, or clause, into two components. One of them is the **focus** (also called ‘rheme’, ‘comment’, ‘new information’), and the other one the **topic** (‘theme’, ‘old information’). However, these notions have also been the subject of general confusion. Focus has been used as a synonym for ‘comment’, as that part of the sentence that predicates something about the topic of the sentence. Focus is the irrecoverable information as opposed to the recoverable, contextually bound part. It is considered to be the most important part of the information from the speaker’s point of view. Topic has been defined as the participant being referred to within the sentence, and it is considered to be in close relationship with subject —a ‘grammaticalised topic’—, but there is no one-to-one relationship between subject and topic, as it happens in the following sentences, all about John, which is then the topic, but not the subject:

- (2.5) a. John, we saw him yesterday.  
b. We saw him yesterday, John.  
c. We saw John yesterday. (Givón, 1983)

Given, thus, the difficulty to trace topic to any specific grammatical realisation, we will have to disregard this concept in favour of the idea of theme, as will be further refined below.

Theme has not been studied within the transformational-generative school as outlined above, but the notions of topic/comment and focus/presupposition are related to what is under discussion here. Topic-comment is a relation of surface structure which corresponds, more or less, to the notion of subject-predicate in deep structure. Focus and presupposition are elements of the semantic representation of a sentence, the focus being the intonation centre —roughly, the element which is absolutely new— and the presupposition being the rest of the sentence but the focus, which is then replaced by a variable, as in example (2.6a), where *rejected the proposal* is focus, corresponding to the presupposition in (2.6b):

- (2.6) a. Archie rejected the proposal.  
b. Archie did something. (Gundel, 1977)

On the light of this example, it seems that focus is the same as rheme. However, in example (2.7) below, we have a focus at the beginning of the sentence, which would contradict our

idea that rheme —when equivalent to focus— does not occupy the first position in the sentence.

(2.7) a. Archie rejected the proposal.

b. Someone rejected the proposal. (Gundel, 1977)

Therefore, we cannot identify theme-rheme as the same as focus-presupposition for all cases. Besides, as it happens with Givón's definition, the concepts are not so clearly related to syntax as to help us provide a grammatical classification of theme, which is what we attempt to provide.

Ideally, subject (=agent), topic (=what the sentence/piece of discourse is about) and theme (=point of departure of the clause as message) all coincide in one element of the clause. Or, as Chafe (1976) puts it, "the noun 'Betty' in the sentence 'Betty peeled the onions' might be said to function simultaneously as the grammatical (or superficial) subject, as the logical subject, and as the psychological subject." However, this is not always the case, and it is, therefore, very important to keep all these concepts apart from each other.

As a summary for these concepts, we will use Downing's (1992:224): "Theme [...] is an element of the thematic structure, of which the other element is Rheme. Subject is a syntactic element of clause structure, of which the other elements are Predicator, Complements, Objects and Adjunct. Topic, as we see it, is a discourse category representing the notion 'what the text, or part of the text, is about'." Topics are then classified into superordinate, basic-level and subordinate.

Taking all these studies as a point of departure, in the next section we will try to forward another working definition of theme, which will be the one used in our description of theme markedness in Spanish.

### **3 Towards a functional approach to Theme**

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Considering the remarks made in the previous section, it seems that we need one concrete definition of theme —the main concern of the present study— which is distinctive enough and which provides an approach to study the phenomenon within the Spanish language. For a start, we will consider Brown and Yule’s approach. It seems the most appropriate one for such phenomena as interpersonal and textual themes, and adjuncts in the left-most position of the sentence:

We shall assume in the rest of our discussion that *theme* is a formal category in the analysis of sentences (or clauses in a complex or compound sentence) and, following Danes (1974), we shall assume that it has two main functions:

- (i) connecting back and linking in to the previous discourse, maintaining a coherent point of view
- (ii) serving as a point of departure for the further development of the discourse. (Brown & Yule, 1983:133)

This twofold function of theme will account for all the instances of thematic realisation in Spanish, as will be discussed in section 5.

We have defined what functions theme fulfils, but we still need to provide a definition, especially when we take into account that the word ‘discourse’ is mentioned twice. It is true that the analysis of language should not consider sentences in isolation, but discourse and text. However, this first approach to the notion of theme cannot hold such a wide study, because we are trying to concentrate on the idea of theme markedness within the sentence, although we are aware that sentences do not occur in isolation, and to this we will refer in many of the explanations.

Lavid (1994) points at the difficulty of defining theme if we consider Halliday’s definition of both point of departure and ‘what the sentence is about’. The second interpretation can only be accepted if sentences are considered as parts of a text, because ‘what the sentence is about’ implies the identification of theme with topic, and with a sentence constituent. Schank (1977) says that sentences in isolation do not have a topic, which is created only by the interaction of sentences.

To bridge this gap between theme in the sentence and theme/topic in discourse, Lavid suggests two different levels of analysis: the grammatical and the discourse level. At the grammatical

level of analysis, Halliday's multiple themes —textual, interpersonal, ideational— are considered useful, but holding ideational as the essential one. The solution to the problem of circumstances as the first ideational element of the clause would be to preserve the idea of 'topical theme' —a sentential element which refers to participants or entities— as one of the possible ideational themes of the clause.

At the discourse level of analysis, Lavid says it is possible to integrate both the grammatical and the discourse notion by treating sentential elements as a realisation of discourse themes.

The discourse definition, first mentioned in Lavid & Hovy (1993) is as follows:

Theme is that element that informs the listener as discourse unfolds how to relate the incoming information to what is already known, providing the attachment point to new information pieces from the discourse. More specifically, theme acts as a signpost for the reader of a specific text structuring strategy or orientation.

This explains the usual identification of theme and given, and of theme and point of departure.

Thus, theme is a guide for the reader in the unfolding of the discourse and the information.

Lavid's double level of analysis helps us understand the function of theme at the discourse level, but we are still facing the problem of what theme is at the sentence level, because the aim of this study is to provide a characterisation of markedness at the sentence level —although the occurrence of the sentence within the text will be mentioned very often.

Therefore, we will say that theme is that element that connects back to the previous discourse and serves as point of departure for the following information, as Brown & Yule, and Lavid & Hovy have already done. And, if we consider theme only within the sentence, we will say that the function of theme is *realised* by first position in the sentence (as Halliday says for English).

Our definition will therefore be as follows:

Theme has the function of both connecting back to the previous discourse and of serving as point of departure for the ensuing information. The function of theme is realised by first position in the sentence, especially by those elements that imply a shared knowledge between speaker and hearer.

The definition does not contain a great amount of new information, what is most important is what it does not include: it makes no reference to theme as 'what the clause is about', because we consider theme more of a grammatical and pragmatic element than a semantically charged element. That is to say, theme is not necessarily represented by a full lexical element or group

(e.g., a nominal group working as subject), but by elements such as clitic pronouns, verb endings, etc., as will be explained in section 5.

To summarise: theme in our study will be considered at the sentence level, as occupying first position, but bearing in mind that it always has a discourse function.

## 4 Word Order in Spanish: some remarks

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Word order plays a relevant part in the definition of theme as a grammatical notion, because, as we saw in the previous section, theme is realised by first position in Spanish —and in other languages, of which English is one (Halliday, 1967). As a consequence, we cannot follow the classifications done for English, because word order is different in Spanish and English. Therefore, in this section we will focus on the order of words in the Spanish sentence, with especial reference to the kind of language Spanish is. It has been argued that Spanish is a SVO language (Tomlin, 1986), but many studies (Bolinger, 1954-55; Hatcher, 1956a; Hatcher, 1956b; Contreras, 1978; Givón, 1983; Bentivoglio, 1983) prove that there is a strong alternance between SV and VS, especially in certain structures determined by syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic factors.

Givón (1983), in his study on topic continuity in discourse, compares different languages, among them Spanish, and states that Spanish has a pragmatically-controlled flexible word order, but gravitating towards rigidification of SVO. He says that the alternance SV/VS is due to two main factors: topic-continuity pragmatics and ‘presentative’ VS word order (Givón, 1983:28). As a consequence, we will argue that Spanish presents a relatively free word order, focusing especially on the positioning of the subject.

But first of all, although it is not our main focus of concern, we will start with word order in non-sentence construction, to be able to understand where the so-called free word order in Spanish lies.

### 4.1 Word order in non-sentence construction

Halliday (1970) talks about first position as very important for the progression of information in English. Although Spanish does not hold the same linear ordering of elements, it is also significant that deictics and possessives, those elements that contribute to signal the point of

view, come in the first place, and the newer information is relegated to the last place. The same is true of the ordering of adjective and noun in the noun phrase. In example (4.1), the deictic precedes the information that is required in the question, the newest piece of information. In example (4.2), the adjective comes after the verb because it is the element that provides the newest information, necessary to distinguish the wanted apple (the green one) from the rest.

- (4.1) ¿Qué chaqueta quieres? Esta roja.<sup>2</sup>  
what jacket want? this red  
'Which jacket do you want? This red one.'
- (4.2) Dame esa manzana verde.  
give-me that apple green  
'Give me that green apple.'

It is traditionally said, when studying Spanish grammar, that the adjective (which shows a relatively free positioning with respect to the noun) usually follows the noun, but precedes it in the cases where it has a poetic function that does not provide real information. In *Esbozo* (RAE, 1989:410-411), the explanation is that the postponed adjective answers a restrictive function, determining the meaning of the noun, especially when noun and adjective hold a genus-species relation between each other: *arquitectura civil, militar, religiosa* ('civil, military, religious architecture'). From a logical point of view, the postponed adjective restricts the extension of the noun. Likewise, it would be odd to postpone an adjective that contains qualities associated to those of the noun: *las ovejas mansas, miel dulce* ('the meek sheep, sweet honey'), because we cannot imagine any sheep which are not meek, or any honey which is not sweet. The function of the preposed adjective is, therefore, not a defining, but an explaining one. The preposed adjective denotes an affective attitude. Another instance of preposed adjective is the epithet, in this case used merely with an artistic intention and almost restricted to literary language.

Many scholars have studied word order in non-sentence construction. Stiehm (1975) refers back to previous studies —among them Bolinger's (1954-55)— to point out that Spanish has

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<sup>2</sup> Most of the examples are provided by the author, except for those with a reference at the end. Whenever it was considered relevant to understand the word order, both a word-by-word gloss and an English translation are provided. When this was unnecessary or redundant, only the English translation is present.

both a fixed and a free word order in non-sentence construction, determined by paradigmatic relations of complexity and contrast, what Bolinger calls contrastiveness. Although Stiehm extends his study to all the components of the noun phrase, and to other groups, we will limit the description to adjective and noun combinations, which show a free word-order pattern.

According to Stiehm, beginning elements carry greater possibilities of future combination. Thus, in *muchachas bellas* ('girls beautiful'), the contrastive element of the modifier is intensified: of all the girls we are talking about the beautiful ones, whereas in *bellas muchachas* ('beautiful girls'), we are talking about the class of beautiful things which are girls. He says that the modifier is paradigmatically contrastive —not a great range of paradigmatic opposition between *bellas* and other modifiers— and the noun shows paradigmatic complexity —there is a wide range of possibilities of contrasting *muchachas* with other nouns. Stiehm explains thus the relationship of preceding known elements and following new elements. The known element becomes such because it is understood in reference to a scheme of paradigmatic definition, and the new element is then understood in reference to a scheme of syntagmatic definition, conditioned by the preceding element. Then, the known quality of beginning elements depends not only on contextual reference or information previously known, but also on a manner of referencing knowledge and concepts through distinctive oppositions within the semantic group.

Although stated in different words, this means that linear positioning in the sentence plays an important role in the development of information from old to new, from general to specific. As a consequence of this, we can say that position in the sentence is also relevant for Spanish, as it is for English, and that 'old', 'given', or 'thematic' information comes before new information. We will keep this assumption and try to prove it in section 5, where the thematic realisation for Spanish is explained.

The other relevant conclusion we can draw is that the freer word order in non-sentence construction enables the speaker to choose the order he/she prefers for communicative purposes. This implies a wider range of elements available for first position, both in non-sentence constructions and in the sentence.

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The examples are numbered within each major section.

## 4.2 Word order within the sentence

Now we will turn to word order in the sentence, which will be the central structure to be analysed. One of the first points to consider is subject status. According to Alarcos Llorach (1994), subject is an adjacent term, the verb being the only compulsory element in order to build a sentence. The verb in Spanish contains two different signs, or markers, the lexical part (the meaning) and the morphological part which works as the real subject, carrying the tense, aspect and person information. This is the grammatical or personal subject, recoverable from context (within the text or real-world context). Given the case that the situation is not sufficient to identify what entity corresponds to the person included in the verb, an additional noun or pronoun is added, constituting an explicit or lexical subject. Therefore, Alarcos Llorach does not only state the optionality of the subject, he goes beyond and defines it as explicit —thus marked— when present.

Grammars of Spanish for foreign speakers (Butt & Benjamin, 1988) try to simplify the question of subject-verb order, stating that, in sentences consisting only of subject and verb, the unfocused element comes first. In the following examples, the verb comes first if the focused element (new information) is the subject, as in example (4.3). However, when the focused or new element is the verb, this occupies second position, as in example (4.4):

(4.3) ¿Quién viene? Viene Antonio.  
who comes? Comes Antonio  
'Who's coming? Antonio's coming.' (Butt & Benjamin, 1988)

(4.4) ¿Qué está haciendo Antonio? Antonio está durmiendo.  
what is doing Antonio? Antonio is sleeping  
'What's Antonio doing? Antonio's sleeping.' (Butt & Benjamin, 1988)

When the subject is an indefinite noun, not preceded by definite article or a demonstrative, it almost always follows the verb in such sentences. Example (4.5) is much more common and it sounds more 'unmarked' to Spanish ears than example (4.6). Butt and Benjamin (1988) also account for this fact:

(4.5) Llega un tren.  
arrives a train  
'A train is arriving.'

(4.6) Un tren llega.

a train arrives  
'A train is arriving.'

(4.7) Sonó un tiro.

a shot rang out (Butt and Benjamin, 1988)

When the sentence consists of a subject, verb and object (direct or indirect) the possibilities are as follows (Butt and Benjamin, 1988:395):

(4.8) Inés leyó el libro.	SVO
El libro lo leyó Inés.	O (redundant pronoun) VS
El libro Inés lo leyó.	OS (redundant pronoun) V
Inés el libro leyó.	SOV
Leyó Inés el libro.	VSO
Leyó el libro Inés.	VOS
'Inés read the book.'	

Of course, not all the forms have the same probability of occurrence in normal discourse, being only the first two, even the first three options the most usual ones.

In the rest of this section, we will try to provide an overview of what other scholars have observed in Spanish word order, in order to arrive at a classification of unmarked word order (section 4.3), which will eventually help us analyse unmarked theme options (section 5). Considering that our ultimate goal is to speak about theme, we will focus just on those studies on the position of the subject and on the first position in the sentence, leaving aside the placement of objects and adjuncts when they are not in first position.

As we mentioned at the beginning of this section, many studies have been produced on the relative free word order of the Spanish sentence. We will start with the SV/VS inversion, explained according to different reasons. The basic reasonings given for the case of SV inversion are related to a few factors. We will concentrate on the two most important ones, plus a few explanations which apply to very specific cases. The first reasoning refers to given-new constraints, i.e., presentation of new information in the last place. Secondly, end-weight explains why there is SV inversion when the subject is very long. Finally, topicality and the presence of a non-subject participant with 'psychological' verbs.

#### 4.2.1 *Given-new constraints*

Given-new constraints explain why new information is presented last because the focus of the message is located towards the end. Several studies have mentioned this factor to account for some Spanish constructions, among them: Bolinger (1954-55), Hatcher (1956a; 1956b), Fernández Ramírez (1986), Silva-Corvalán (1983), Givón (1983), and Bentivoglio (1983).

Bolinger (1954-55) says that a presupposed element is either not uttered because it can be clearly understood, or it is uttered in the first place, preceding the non-presupposed element or 'point'. So, in example (4.9), the subject in the second sentence is not uttered because it can be clearly understood, and in example (4.10) the presupposed element, the finite verb, is uttered in the first place:

(4.9) Juan ha llamado. Ha dicho que vendría a las ocho.  
Juan has called. Has said that would-come at the eight  
'Juan called. He said he'd come at eight.'

(4.10) ¿Quién ha llamado? Ha llamado Juan.  
who has called? Has called Juan  
'Who called? Juan (did).'

In both examples we used another previous sentence to illustrate the factors pointed out by Bolinger. For this purpose, Hatcher puts forward the idea of Underlying Question. Hatcher, in two very insightful articles (Hatcher, 1956a; 1956b), explains that any utterance can be considered as the answer to an underlying question, from which certain elements will be known when elaborating the answer utterance. In the following two examples, the first one shows a zero given, whereas the second one shows two elements as given. The question is to be understood as a generic question for all sentences of their type, the square brackets indicate its underlying character:

(4.11) [What is done?] They made coffee.  
(4.12) [What does S do to O?] I had it restored.

Hatcher says that the underlying question is what determines the continuum of meaning, determined in turn by givenness. We could assume the underlying question to be the presupposition, the context speaker and hearer have in mind and share. This would explain the alternance of these two possible and 'natural' options in Spanish:

- (4.13) [¿Qué pasó esta mañana?] Esta mañana habló Juan.  
 [what happened this morning?] this morning spoke Juan.  
 '[What happened this morning?] This morning Juan spoke.'
- (4.14) [¿Cuándo habló Juan?] Juan habló esta mañana.  
 [when spoke Juan?] Juan spoke this morning.  
 '[When did Juan speak?] Juan spoke this morning.'

Example (4.13) above shows a case of SV inversion because the subject is the new element. This same phenomenon was described by Hatcher in another article (Hatcher, 1956b). She takes up the issue of the existence of the subject as the theme of many Spanish utterances, with subject-verb inversion. This is what we called 'presentational' verbs, which introduce or denote the coming into existence of a subject. She found that the existential sentence is very widely represented in Spanish, being the question Existence of the Subject the most frequent with intransitive (intransitive-reflexive) verbs, and very frequent in the combination of intransitive verb and Thing-Subject. Nearly three hundred verbs were found to represent, in their context, only or mainly that the subject is present or exists, is absent, begins, continues, is produced, occurs, appears, arrives. In a vast majority of these constructions, the word order is verb-subject. For the other possible instances of subject-verb, she offers no study, but poses the hypothesis of a question of point of view, as in the alternance *entra la luz* and *la luz entra* ('the light comes in'), and in examples (4.13) and (4.14) above.

Therefore, we have established that all the verbs which denote the coming of existence of the subject may have SV inversion, due to the fact that the subject is the newest piece of information, it is what is 'created' with the utterance. Fernández Ramírez (1986) explains this as a descriptive inversion, when the author is representing sounds, smells and typical perceptions:

- (4.15) Sonó la campanilla que anuncia el prefacio.  
 sounded the bell that announces the preface  
 'The bell announcing the preface sounded.' (Fernández Ramírez, 1986)

Note that this example is very similar to (4.7), where inversion was explained in terms of indefiniteness of the subject. Both concepts, of newness and indefiniteness may conflate and produce the inversion.

Silva-Corvalán (1983) also studies the subject-verb inversion from the point of view of the contrast between old and new information, newer subjects being introduced after the verb, which constitutes in fact a confirmation of all the above explanations:

- (4.16) Y cuando llegamos a Santa Mónica acá vivían muchos japoneses.  
and when came to Santa Mónica here lived many Japanese  
'And when we came to Santa Mónica there lived many Japanese here.' (Spanish example and English translation from Silva-Corvalán, 1983)

Givón (1983) and Bentivoglio (1983) define this structure in terms of definiteness, as a 'presentational' structure: "Spanish, which is gravitating toward rigidification of SVO, already employs the so-called *existential-presentative* VS word order to introduce indefinite *subjects* into the register for the first time." This structure is unmarked both for existentials and presentatives (Bentivoglio, 1983:279).

#### 4.2.2 End-weight

Our second reason for SV inversion was that of end-weight. Long and complicated elements tend to move to the end of the sentence, in order to avoid burdening the hearer/reader with too much information from the beginning of the sentence. Bolinger (1955-56) also uses the notion of longest-element last, but linking it up with the idea of new datum, i.e., the long element does not come last because it is long; on the contrary, it tends to be long for the same reason that it comes last, because it is a new datum:

- (4.17) ¿Qué hace en la tienda a estas horas aquel señor de la barba larga, los zapatos negros y el traje gris?  
what does in the shop at this time that gentleman of the beard long, the shoes black and the suit grey?  
'What is that gentleman with the long beard, black shoes and grey suit doing in the shop?' (Spanish example from Bolinger (1954-55))

As seen in the example, the subject is long because it is absolutely new, the hearer needs a long description to be able to know who the speaker is referring to. The English translation

sounds odd, due to the fact that the long subject occurs in between ‘is’ and ‘doing’, the two words that constitute the verb phrase in itself. In Spanish, it comes last not only because it is long, but because it is contrastive. Note that this is also applicable to presentative verbs, where we introduce a new subject, which needs to be defined:

- (4.18) Ha venido el chico ese con el que estuvimos hablando ayer.  
has come the boy that with the who were talking yesterday  
‘That boy, with whom we talked yesterday, has just come.’

The fact that the subject is long is not, however, sufficient to explain why there is inversion in presentative structures, because the inversion takes places with short subjects, then making us refer back to the known-new opposition:

- (4.19) Dirige Luis Herrero. (typical introduction in radio and television programmes, with a pause between verb and subject)  
directs Luis Herrero  
‘(With) Luis Herrero as director.’

This is not to be taken as an alternance of rules according to our needs. Rather, it is the conflation of two different tendencies — ‘new information last’ and ‘long+new last’— which enable the application of the inversion for many different cases, consequently showing a tendency in Spanish.

### 4.2.3 *Other factors*

Here we will include basically two factors mentioned above, such as topicality and the case of psychological verbs.

Topicality is considered as a factor that determines inversion by Bentivoglio (1983). In her study of spoken Latin-American Spanish, Bentivoglio repeats Givón words with respect to Ute, and states they apply to Spanish: “preverbal position is [...] a signal of *discontinuity/surprise*, while post-verbal position signals *continuity* and *predictability*.” (Bentivoglio, 1983:300). Therefore, the attempt to preserve topic continuity in discourse would account for many instances of inversion in discourse. Unfortunately, a complete study of discourse is not possible here, so we will keep the idea of topicality just as a reference, but without influence on our sentence-level examples.

As regards the so-called ‘psychological’ verbs, Bentivoglio (1983) makes reference to the presence of dative nominal groups with verbs such as *gustar* ‘like’, where there is no alternative construction:

(4.20) A Pilar le gustan las cerezas.  
to Pilar her like the cherries  
‘Pilar likes cherries.’

In this case the indirect object is semantically very much like a subject, and a better candidate for subject status than the grammatical subject (*las cerezas*) in terms of animacy. This takes place with certain mental, affective and cognitive processes, where the experiencer is grammatically an adjunct, but is placed before the verb. Examples of these processes are *gustar* (‘like’), *encantar* (‘love’), *interesar* (‘interest’), *adorar* (‘adore’), also listed by Martínez Caro (1989).

After reviewing some studies on Spanish word order, in the rest of this section, and in order to conclude this study on word order, we will outline the unmarked word orders in relation to mood.

### **4.3 Unmarked word order structures**

The definition of unmarked structures is seen in relation to mood, and therefore, the classification is divided into declarative, interrogative and imperative sentences.

#### **4.3.1 Declarative sentences**

Declarative sentences present four unmarked word order structures:

(i) **SVO**

(ii) **VS**

**(iii) Non-subject participant + V + (S)**

**(iv) Circumstantial + V + (S)**

In this section, we will try to explain the contexts for each one of these cases and its variants.

**(i) SVO**

	<b>(Subject)</b>	<b>(no)</b>	<b>(clitic/s)</b>	<b>Finite<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>(Object/s / Adjunct/s)</b>
(4.21)	Ricardo	no	te lo	sacó	del cajón.
	Ricardo	not	you it	got-out	from-the drawer.
	'Ricardo didn't take it from your drawer.'				

This first structure is unmarked for all its occurrences. It represents the SVO structure. The subject can be elliptical whenever it is recoverable, because it is also present in the verb ending (cf. section 4.2). The negative particle is always placed before the verb, and only separated from it due to the presence of a clitic pronoun. A clitic pronoun must be placed before the verb.

Let us provide a clearer explanation of the presence and absence of the elements above. First of all, we have already said that the subject occupies first position when it is a proper noun or short phrase not recoverable from context (4.22). When it is recoverable it is implicit in the verb ending (4.23), and when it is long it tends to be postponed to the verb —which will constitute a different word order structure. This structure would also include impersonal verbs (4.24). As a consequence, the finite is the only obligatory element:

	<b>(Subject)</b>	<b>(no)</b>	<b>(clitic/s)</b>	<b>Finite</b>	<b>(Object/s / Adjunct/s)</b>
(4.22)	Marta	-	-	trajo	una caja de bombones.

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<sup>3</sup> We have used the term 'verb', because it is present in word order descriptions. However, we shall keep henceforth the term 'finite' as carrier of person, number and tense information, but usually as a synonym for 'verb group' or 'verb phrase', because the finite is rarely separated from the predicator, and therefore it can be considered as a whole in terms of positioning in the sentence.

	'Marta	-	-	brought	a box of chocolates.'
(4.23)	-	-	-	He hecho	muchas cosas estas vacaciones.
	-	-	-	have done	a lot of things these holidays
	'I did a lot of things over the holidays.'				
(4.24)	-	-	-	Llovió	-
	'It rained.'				

The negative particle precedes the verb or the clitics and, when there is no subject, occupies first position:

- (4.25) No creo que venga Juan.  
not think that comes Juan  
'I don't think Juan will come.'
- (4.26) No hay nada que hacer.  
not there-is nothing to do  
'There isn't anything to be done.'

It is also in the first position when there are clitic pronouns. The only element that can precede the negative particle is the subject, as in the examples below, where only a subject before the negative would preserve the unmarked structure:

- (4.27) No lo sabía hasta que Roberto me lo dijo.  
not it knew until that Roberto me it told  
'I didn't know until Roberto told me.'
- (4.28) No se lo dijo a su novio.  
not him it told to her/his boyfriend  
'She/he didn't tell his/her boyfriend.'
- (4.29) No se ha mirado al espejo hoy.  
not himself has looked at-the mirror today  
'He hasn't looked at himself in the mirror today.'
- (4.30) No se arrepintió de nada de lo que había hecho.  
not "se" repented from anything of it that had done  
'He/she didn't repent from anything he/she had done.'

Apart from the negative particle and the subject, the next elements are clitic pronouns. Here we have to establish different categories. First of all, clitic pronouns must be classified into:

- reflexives (*me, te, se, nos, os, se*), which can be direct or indirect objects

- pseudo-reflexives, or ‘romance’ reflexives (same form as reflexives)
- direct / indirect objects (indirect: *le, les, se*; direct: *lo, la, los, las*)

To what seems to be an incredible amount of occurrences of *se* in the different cases, we have to add yet two more cases: the passive *se*, which belongs in another structure and consequently is not included here. The impersonal *se* is included in this structure (see below for an explanation), but it is not considered a proper clitic.

Reflexives, when indirect, may be accompanied by a direct clitic, and direct and indirect may also be placed together. The ‘romance’ reflexive always occurs alone. Except for the ‘romance’, the rest have a function in the transitivity and represent a participant already mentioned, or to be mentioned (co-referential clitics). Let us consider some examples:

- **reflexive**

(4.31) El se lava.

he himself washes  
‘He washes himself.’

(4.32) Se lavó con agua fría.

himself/herself washed with water cold  
‘He/she washed himself/herself with cold water.’

(4.33) Se lavó la herida con agua fría.

himself/herself washed the wound with water cold  
‘He/she washed his/her wound with cold water.’

The first two examples represent a direct object (he washed something, and that something was himself). The third one is indirect, because the direct is *la herida*.

- **pseudo-reflexive or ‘romance’ reflexive**

García (1975) calls these ‘romance’ reflexives. It is not reflexive in the usual sense, because it does not correspond to a direct object, it shows identical reference between subject and object, and it can be used with both animate and inanimate subjects:

(4.34) Pedro se durmió.

Pedro “se” slept  
‘Pedro fell asleep.’ (García)

(4.35) La puerta se abrió.  
the door "se" opened  
'The door opened.' (García)

(4.36) Me fui a las ocho.  
me went at the eight  
'I left at eight.'

Sometimes this romance reflexive is the only possibility, the option without the pronoun being ungrammatical:

(4.37) Me arrepentí / \*Arrepentí.  
me repented / repented  
'I repented.'

● **direct/indirect object**

(4.38) Le ruego que me lo envíe lo antes posible.  
you pray that me it send as soon as possible  
'I pray you to send it as soon as possible.'

(4.39) Lo compré en una tienda de Toledo.  
it bought in a shop of Toledo  
'I bought it at a shop in Toledo.'

(4.40) Se lo dijo a todos mis amigos.  
them it said to all my friends  
'He/she told all my friends.'

Impersonal *se* has a special status within the clitics. It corresponds, more or less, to an impersonal subject, such as 'one', 'someone', so we would be tempted to include it within the subject category:

(4.41) Se vive bien aquí.  
"se" lives well here  
'One lives well here.'

However, we have said that the negative particle comes always after the subject if there is one, but:

(4.42) No se vive bien aquí.  
not "se" lives well here  
'One doesn't live well here.'

The fact that the negative precedes the *se* should lead us to include it with the rest of the clitics, and that is also impossible because, unlike the rest of the clitics, it never co-occurs with

another subject. We will just consider it is a special case, but still within this (i) structure, as far as word order is concerned.

In summary, the structure SVO may contain all the elements above (cf. the general structure), with one, or all —except for the finite verb— absent.

**(ii) VS**

	<b>(no)</b>	<b>(se)</b>	<b>Finite</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>(Object/s / Adjunct/s)</b>
(4.43)	-	-	Ha venido	Juan.	
	-	-	has come	Juan	
	'Juan has just come.'				
(4.44)	No	-	ha venido	Elena	a clase
	not	-	has come	Elena	to class
	'Elena hasn't come to class.'				
(4.45)	-	-	Aprobaron	sólo los estudiantes que habían asistido a clase.	
	-	-	passed	only the students who had attended to class	
	'Only the students who had attended the classes passed.'				
(4.46)	-	-	Ha venido	la carta que estabas esperando.	
	-	-	has come	the letter that were waiting	
	'The letter that you were waiting for has arrived.'				
(4.47)	-	Se	produjo	un accidente.	
	-	"se"	produced	an accident	
	'There was an accident.'				
(4.48)	-	Se	abrió	el plazo para presentar los trabajos.	
	-	"se"	opened	the period to present the papers	
	'The period to present the papers started.'				
(4.49)	No	se	admiten	propinas.	
	not	"se"	admit	tips	
	'No tipping.'				

This, as we argued above, is the case when there is a 'presentational' verb, or when the subject is very long.

A variant of this structure is the case with the passive *se*. These examples correspond to a passive —*pasiva refleja* in *Esbozo* (RAE, 1989:379)— with the particularity that when the object is plural, the verb agrees with the object, and it could be paraphrased into a passive sentence (García, 1975). This happens with transitive verbs, and it is half way between impersonal and passive:

(4.50) Se quemó el dulce.

“se” burnt the jam

‘Somebody burnt the jam.’ / ‘The jam was burnt.’ (García, 1975)

(4.51) Se cumplieron las promesas.

“se” fulfilled the promises

‘Somebody fulfilled the promises.’ / ‘The promises were fulfilled.’ (García, 1975)

This case of *se* —and some instances of the ‘romance reflexive’— could be thought of as a marked order, because the reverse order, which seems to be SVO, is also possible:

(4.52) El dulce se quemó.

the jam “se” burnt

‘The jam burnt.’

(4.53) Las promesas se cumplieron.

the promises “se” fulfilled

‘The promises were fulfilled.’

(4.54) Un accidente se produjo.

an accident “se” produced

‘An accident took place.’

We will establish that both orderings are unmarked, because there are no reasons to consider one more marked than the other. If that were the case, the option with the *se* at the beginning would be the most likely candidate, for two reasons: first of all, the *se* acts as marker of the impersonal/passive character of the sentence; secondly, many of these examples could fit into our two reasons for inversion, presentative verb or long subject.

(4.55) Se han divulgado estas noticias.

“se” have spread these news

‘This news has spread / has been spread.’ (Spanish example from *Esbozo*, 1989)

(4.56) No se cumplió el objetivo del Gobierno.

not “se” fulfilled the objective of the Government

‘The objective of the Government was not fulfilled.’

**(iii) Non-subject participant + V + (S)**

	<b>Non-subj. part.</b>	<b>(no)</b>	<b>clitic</b>	<b>Finite</b>	<b>(Subject)</b>
(4.57)	A Juan	-	le	gusta	María.
	to Juan	-	him	likes	María
	'Juan likes María.'				
(4.58)	Al jefe	no	le	gusto	-
	to-the boss	not	him	like	-
	'The boss doesn't like me.'				
(4.59)	-	-	Me	encantan	los días como hoy.
	-	-	me	charm	the days like
	today				
	'I love days like today's.'				
(4.60)	A mi padre	no	le	interesa	la política.
	to my father	not	him	interests	the politics
	'My father is not interested in politics.'				
(4.61)	A la amiga de Juan	no	le	gusta	ir al cine.
	to the friend of Juan	not	her	like	go to-the cinema
	'Juan's friend doesn't like going to the cinema.'				

Non-subject participant refers to the experiencer adjunct with 'psychological' verbs, those that express a mental, affective or cognitive process. The adjunct or indirect object can be a full nominal phrase —then followed by a co-referential clitic— or just the clitic pronoun. The negation is always placed after the full nominal group and before the co-referential clitic.

Example (4.59) is different from structure (i), as in example (4.62) because if the subject is present, it is placed before the verb:

- (4.62) (yo) Me senté al lado de David.  
(I) "me" sat to-the side of David  
'I sat next to David.'

**(iv) Circumstantial + V + (S)**

	<b>Circumstantial</b>	<b>(no)</b>	<b>(clitic/s)</b>	<b>Finite</b>	<b>(Subject)</b>
(4.63)	Esta semana	-	-	vendrá	mi amigo Juan.
	this week	-	-	will-come	my friend Juan
	'My friend Juan is coming this week.'				
(4.64)	En Valencia	no	-	hay	mucha gente este año.

	in Valencia	not	-	there-is	much people this year
	'There aren't many people this year in Valencia.' / 'In Valencia there aren't many people this year.'				
(4.65)	En 1815	-	lo	trasladaron	a Santa Elena.
	in 1815	-	him	transferred	to Santa Elena
	'In 1815 he was transferred to Santa Elena.'				

These circumstantials include spatio-temporal adjuncts which serve as a location to the rest of the sentence, and which cause SV inversion.

This was a summary of what we considered to be the four basic word order types for Spanish independent declarative sentences.

#### 4.3.2 Interrogative sentences

Interrogative sentences can be open or closed (yes/no interrogatives). If open, the unmarked word order always implies a question word (*qué, quién, cuándo, cómo, dónde, porqué*) in first position. If closed, the verb, or finite, is the first element in unmarked order. As in declarative sentences, negative particles and clitics may precede the finite—but not the *qu*-word in open interrogatives. In yes/no interrogatives we have included the negative particle, although such questions with a negative polarity carry some special connotations (surprise, seeking agreement, etc.) which may override its status of yes/no questions, i.e., they may not seek a simple answer, 'yes' or 'no'. As with the other mood types, they can express different illocutionary forces, but this is not relevant for markedness.

	<b>Qu-word</b>	<b>(no)</b>	<b>(clitic/s)</b>	<b>Finite</b>	<b>(Subject)</b>
(4.66)	¿Qué	-	-	ha dicho	el jefe de tu aumento de sueldo?
	what	-	-	has said	the boss about your rise of salary?
	'What did the boss say about your salary rise?'				
(4.67)	¿Cuánto	-	-	has pagado	- por esa chaqueta?
	how much	-	-	have paid	- for that jacket?
	'How much did you pay for that jacket?'				
(4.68)	¿Quién	-	se lo	ha contado?	
	who	-	him/her it	has told?	
	'Who told him/her?'				

(4.69) ¿Quién no - quiere helado?  
 who not - wants ice-cream?  
 'Who doesn't want ice-cream?'

	<b>(no)</b>	<b>(clitic/s)</b>	<b>Finite</b>	<b>(Subject)</b>
(4.70)	-	-	¿Aparecieron	tus gafas?
	-	-	appeared	your glasses?
	'Did you find your glasses?'			

(4.71)	-	-	¿Has pensado	-	bien lo que te dije?
	-	-	have thought	-	well it what you told?
	'Have you thought over what I told you?'				

(4.72)	-	¿Lo	has visto	-	en alguna parte?
	-	it	have seen	-	in some place?
	'Have you seen it somewhere?'				

(4.73)	¿No	-	quieres	-	venir con nosotros?
	not	-	want	-	come with us?
	'¿Don't you want to come with us?'				

### 4.3.3 Imperative sentences

Imperative sentences usually lack a subject. If present, it occupies the place after the verb in unmarked order. The finite is the first element.

	<b>Finite</b>	<b>(Subject)</b>
(4.74)	Siéntese	usted, por favor.
	sit-down	you, please
	'Sit down, please.'	

(4.75)	Cierra	-	la puerta, por favor.
	close	-	the door, please
	'Close the door, please.'		

(4.76)	Traémelo	-	lo antes posible.
	Bring-me-it	-	as soon as possible.
	'Bring it (to me) as soon as possible.'		

Negative imperative sentences are slightly different. First of all, the verb is in the subjunctive, and they admit a clitic, as opposed to the positive imperative, which incorporates the clitic to the verb (see (4.76) above).

<b>(no)</b>	<b>(clitic/s)</b>	<b>Finite</b>	<b>(Subject)</b>
-------------	-------------------	---------------	------------------

- |        |                            |       |            |   |            |
|--------|----------------------------|-------|------------|---|------------|
| (4.77) | No                         | te    | sientes    | - | ahí.       |
|        | not                        | you   | sit        | - | there.     |
|        | 'Don't sit there.'         |       |            |   |            |
| (4.78) | No                         | me lo | estropees, | - | por favor. |
|        | not                        | me it | damage,    | - | please     |
|        | 'Don't damage it, please.' |       |            |   |            |

In this section we have provided an account of the unmarked word order structures in independent declarative, interrogative and imperative sentences. In the following sections, we will concentrate on unmarked theme options in Spanish.

## 5 Theme and mood in Spanish

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The studies of word order seem to show that the unmarked structures in relation to word order are much more numerous in Spanish than in English. This would yield a wider range of unmarked thematic options in relation to mood. In English theme selection always occurs in specific mood contexts, and the unmarked options are those that the grammar allows for the particular mood —subject for declaratives, *wh*-element for open interrogatives, and so on.

In Spanish, the unmarked thematic options are not only controlled by grammar, but there are also a lot of pragmatic factors that come into play and which conflate with grammar to produce a wider range of unmarked thematic options. In Spanish, as in Italian (Renzi, 1988), theme markedness is controlled by three factors: grammar, pragmatics and intonation. Intonation is out of the scope of the present study, since we concentrate on the written mode. The next sections study theme markedness in relation to grammar and pragmatics.

### 5.1 Thematic options in Spanish

In section 3 we explained the function of theme as both link to previous discourse and point of departure for what is coming next. That function is realised by the first element in the simple clause. In our discussion of Spanish, however, we shall have to modify this assumption made for English. Consider the following example:

(5.1) El jueves nos reunimos Juan, Angela, Pedro y yo. Fuimos a casa de Angela y nos lo pasamos muy bien.

the thursday us met Juan, Angela and Pedro. Went to house of Angela and us it spent very well  
'On Thursday Juan, Angela, Pedro and I met. We went to Angela's and had a very good time.'

If we consider that the theme in the first sentence is *el jueves*, we are still following the definition given above, because *el jueves* is an adjunct of time, thus the point of departure of the discourse: I am going to tell you about Thursday, and about something that happened on Thursday. But for the second sentence, there is no such exact correlation. *Fuimos* is

completely new, it represents another action that happened on Thursday. The only solution to the problem is to divide the verb *fuimos* into its two morphological components: *fui-*, the lexical part of the verb ‘to go’ in the past and *-mos*, the part that includes the person and number information.

This refers back Alarcos Llorach, as it was already explained in section 4.2: “*El signo léxico del verbo (o sea, el significado de la raíz) es el verdadero predicado de la oración, y el signo gramatical o morfológico funciona como el auténtico sujeto (esto es, la persona designada por la terminación verbal), y que debe llamarse sujeto gramatical o, si se prefiere, sujeto personal*” (1994:257). (‘The lexical sign of the verb (i.e., the meaning of the root) is the real *predicate* of the sentence, and the grammatical or morphological sign works as the real subject (i.e., the person referred to by the verbal ending), and which must be called *grammatical subject* or, if preferred, *personal subject*.’ Emphasis is from the original).

Therefore, it is the ending of the verb what links up to the preceding part of the discourse, referring back to *Juan, Angela, Pedro y yo*, whereas the rest of the verb— in fact, the part that linearly comes first— is the new information, then part of the rheme. In this sense, the verb conveys both retrievable and irretrievable information in the way that Firbas (1992) explains it, in the sense that it does not complete the communication (retrievable) and contributes towards its development (irretrievable). The verb has, thus, two degrees of communicative dynamism contained in it. Firbas says that, although linearity is undoubtedly involved in this development—the progression towards the actual communicative goal of the sentence—, “it cannot be claimed that the actual linear arrangement of sentence elements is always in perfect agreement with a gradual rise in communicative dynamism” (1992:8).

As explained in footnote 3 (section 4.3.1), we use both terms ‘verb’ and ‘finite’. ‘Verb’ is the traditional term used in Spanish grammars, whereas ‘finite’ refers to the part of the verb which indicates tense, person and number (Halliday, 1985). That ‘finite’, as defined for English, corresponds to the morphological part explained above. Then, ‘finite’ has the same function in both languages of carrying tense, person and number information. The contextual occurrences of that element in Spanish and in English are, however, different. In English, the finite has a certain speech function of addressing the hearer, because it is the first element in a yes/no

interrogative (considered as interpersonal theme). In Spanish, on the other hand, the finite conflates the syntactic function of subject with the morphological marking when the subject is implicit in the verb ending.

That would provide the reason why in Spanish that ‘finite’ element —the morphological component, together with the lexical component of the verb— constitute the theme when they appear in first position due to absence of the subject. In English the finite alone is never the theme, it is necessarily accompanied by a subject (in polar interrogative clauses). Compare the following description of unmarked theme in mood structure (Downing and Locke, 1992:227):

Subject in a declarative clause:	<i>Alice went home.</i>
Finite + Subject in a polar interrogative clause:	<i>Did Alice go home?</i>
<i>WH</i> -element in a <i>WH</i> -interrogative:	<i>Where did Alice go?</i>
Predicator or <i>let</i> + Subject in an imperative clause:	<i>Go home!</i>
	<i>Let's go home!</i>

Therefore, our ‘morphological component’ and the English ‘finite’ are not exactly the same, because in Spanish it is ideational —it contains information about the subject—, whereas in English, when in first position, it is interpersonal —it specifies the speech function of the sentence. In the theme systems we keep the notation finite, but it is important to bear in mind that this refers to the morphological part of the verb which refers to person, tense and number and, by means of that, to the subject.

This view will have consequences on the thematic progression of the discourse, because then the only recoverable piece of information for subjectless sentences will be the verb ending. Otherwise, the thematic progression pattern would be very difficult to explain.

Let us consider another example where the verb carries no explicit subject, but it is preceded by a clitic pronoun:

- (5.2) *Ayer estaba muy cansada cuando llegué casa. Me dormí en el sofá y ni siquiera cené.*  
yesterday arrived very tired at home. Me slept on the sofa and not even had-dinner  
'Yesterday I was very tired when I got home. I fell asleep on the sofa and didn't even have dinner.'

In this case, we should consider both the pronoun and the verb ending as the theme linking up to the previous discourse, being both of them the elements that refer back to the previous sentence. We could, as with true clitic objects, consider that ‘me’ is the real link, referring to the previous and the next verb, in which case the ending would be redundant, but still

necessary to distinguish this structure from simple transitive verbs (with a clitic direct or indirect object) and from reflexive verbs:

- (5.3) Me dijo todo lo que pensaba de mí.  
me told all it that thought of me  
'He/she told me everything he thought about me.'
- (5.4) Me dije que era hora de ponerme a trabajar.  
me told that was time to put-me to work  
'I told myself it was about time to start working.'

Silva-Corvalán (1983) proposes the consideration of old-new as a continuum, not a dichotomy. This we will have to combine with theme-rheme, allowing then to consider all the elements defined as theme (clitics, negative particles, verb endings) as in a scale of 'oldness' and of theme categorisation. In order to be able to establish a system and a clear-cut categorisation, we will just take the first element appearing in the sentence to be the theme, but bearing in mind that, in an example like (5.5) below, the fact that we consider *se* as the theme does not exclude *lo*, because the second clitic also has a certain thematic function, for it represents the link to the previous discourse together with the verb ending. However, as already stated, we will strictly consider the first element to be the theme.

- (5.5) Se lo dejé en la cocina.  
him/her it left in the kitchen  
'I left it in the kitchen (for her/him).'

## 5.2 Unmarked theme in declarative sentences

We have seen that the unmarked structures of declarative sentences are the four ones presented below. We will assign an index to each element that can be selected as unmarked theme, depending on different contextual factors which will be explained for each selection. The indices will be used to refer to different theme options in the theme systems specified in section 7. The ordering of the numbers does not make reference to any special order of appearance or frequency of appearance:

**(i) SVO**

(Subject)<sub>1</sub> (no)<sub>7</sub> (clitic/s)<sub>2</sub> Finite<sub>3</sub> (Object/s / Adjunct/s)

**(ii) VS**

(no)<sub>7</sub> (se)<sub>4</sub> Finite<sub>3</sub> (Subject)

**(iii) Non-subject participant + V + (S)**

Non-subject part<sub>5</sub> (no)<sub>7</sub> (clitic/s)<sub>2</sub> Finite<sub>3</sub> (Subject)

**(iv) Circumstantial + V + (S)**

Circumstantial<sub>6</sub> (no)<sub>7</sub> (clitic/s)<sub>2</sub> Finite<sub>3</sub> (Subject)

**1. Subject**

The contextual factors for subject as theme are basically two: the subject is a proper name, or a short phrase. Subject as theme is only possible in structure (i). When the subject is present, then that is the theme of the clause or sentence, the point of departure for what is coming next. The absence of subject implies that it is recoverable from the context, and then not necessarily explicit in a noun or noun phrase, but present in the verb ending (cf. section 4.2: Alarcos, 1994). Theme is underlined.

(5.6) Marta contempla, como cada día, el apacible retrato del Caballero de Tres Forcas, cuya comprensiva mirada no le da ninguna respuesta.

'Marta looks, as every day, at the peaceful portrait of the Knight of Tres Forcas, whose sympathetic look does not provide any answer.' (Sampedro)

(5.7) Los chicos me miraron y uno de ellos era Emilio.

'The boys looked at me and one of them was Emilio.' (Martín Gaité)

**2. Clitic pronouns**

Leaving out the subject, our first point of attention is clitic pronouns. They come before the verb when they refer to an object that is 'given' in the context of speaking, because it has been mentioned before, or because the speaker assumes it is in the mind of the hearer. They substitute a direct or indirect object, and we will assume that they are the theme of the sentence, the point of departure:

(5.8) El domingo de resurrección, el centenario padre Antonio Isabel afirmó en el púlpito que la muerte de los pájaros obedecía a la mala influencia del Judío Errante, que él mismo había

visto la noche anterior. Lo describió como un híbrido de macho cabrío cruzado con hembra hereje, una bestia infernal cuyo aliento calcinaba el aire y cuya visita determinaría la concepción de engendros por la recién casadas.

'On Easter Sunday, centenarian Father Antonio Isabel affirmed on the pulpit that the death of the birds was due to the bad influence of the Wandering Jew, whom he himself had seen the night before. He described him as a hybrid between a he-goat crossbred with a heretic female, a devilish beast whose breath burnt the air and whose visit would determine the conception of monstrosities by the newly-married women.' (García Márquez)

In this example, *lo* refers back to *el Judío Errante*, which has been mentioned before in the discourse. But also part of the information contained in the verb has been mentioned in the previous sentence: *describió* does not have any explicit subject, but we know that the subject is *el centenario padre Antonio Isabel*. The verb fulfils in just one word a twofold function: its ending, as part of the theme, links up to the previous sentence; its lexical part helps develop the discourse to the next part of the sentence, which constitutes all the new information. The finite is, thus, partly thematic, although it will not be included as such in our system (section 7)

This same situation applies to those sentences with two clitic pronouns, direct and indirect object. When the two pronouns are together, the indirect *le* is transformed into *se*, to avoid the cacophony produced by *\*le lo* or *\*le la*. This *se* is not to be mistaken for the other instances that will be dealt with later on. Sometimes the indirect clitic is a repetition of the indirect object mentioned after the verb, but for some verbs this sounds less unmarked than the option without the indirect clitic:

- (5.9) Se lo contó a todo el que quiso escucharle.  
him/her it told to everybody the who wanted listen-him  
'He/she told to anyone that wanted to listen to him.'
- (5.10) Lo contó a todo el que quiso escucharle.  
it told to everybody the who wanted listen-him  
'He/she told to anyone that wanted to listen to him.'

In any case, the truly and first thematic option will be the clitic that appears first in the sentence. A question regarding clitics is that of its relative freedom of occurrence, the much debated question of *lo puedo hacer* versus *puedo hacerlo* ('I can do it'). Clitic pronouns can sometimes move in the sentence, especially with an auxiliary verb. Fish (1961) says that the choice depends on a series of situations, mainly context, so that the pronoun would come first if it is already given, as in the first example below, where *lo* refers back to *me*. In the second

example, there is no reference to the object of the action, so the pronoun, which is new information, comes last:

(5.11) ¿Qué me van a hacer si no encuentro esa papeleta? ¡**Lo** vamos a fusilar!

‘¿What are you going to do to me if I don’t find that paper? We’re going to execute you!’ (Fish, 1961)

(5.12) ¿Qué van a hacer? ¡Vamos a fusilar**lo**!

‘What are you going to do? We’re going to execute you!’ (Fish, 1961)

Another article in answer to Fisch’s (Davis, 1961), treats the question from the point of view of intonation, which could be a relevant factor for many of the unmarked or marked structures we are studying. But, as it was stated at the beginning, intonation does not fall within the scope of this study.

Clitics can also be co-referential, i.e., referring *forward* to an object within the clause. Those are still considered theme, fulfilling then the function of helping the development of discourse, as in the following example, where *le* refers forwards to *a María*:

(5.13) Le dijo a María que quería verla.

‘He/she told María that he/she wanted to see her.’

We have already made reference to the other types of clitic pronouns that can occur in a sentence, i.e., reflexives and ‘romance’ reflexives (cf. section 4.3). Whichever of these comes first will be the thematic option.

### 3. Finite

The contexts for finite as unmarked theme are three different ones: first, the subject is implicit and there is no other element (negative particle, clitics) between subject and verb. Second, meteorological verbs are impersonal and subjectless and therefore never take a subject. Thirdly, the subject may be postponed due to any of the factors explained in section 4.2. This is detailed and exemplified below.

At the beginning of this section we talked about the status of the finite as theme. We consider the finite to be the unmarked theme when it appears in the first place due to absence of the

subject. But, as stated above, it is just the information about the subject which constitutes the theme, the lexical part being part of the rheme.

(5.14) Agua Fría entró corriendo en el recinto de los Grandes [...]. Tiritó un poco y añoró el cálido exterior del edificio.

'Cold Water ran into the precincts of the Great Ones [...]. She shivered a little and missed the warm exterior of the building.' (Montero)

In impersonal sentences, the finite is always selected as unmarked theme. As above, we consider just the information about the subject to be the theme. This prevents impersonal sentences from being all thematic:

(5.15) Nevó.

'It snowed.'

Finite is selected when the subject is postponed, because of the 'presentative' structures, end-weight reasons, or any other as already explained.

(5.16) Ha llegado Marta.

'Marta has arrived.'

#### 4. *Se*

In the section on word order we provided an outline of the different types of *se*. This can be an indirect object, a reflexive particle, part of a pronominal verb or a marker of the impersonal/passive character of the verb. The first two, indirect object and reflexive, are to be included together with clitics (index 3), because they have a function in the transitivity, and behave as any other clitic.

The 'pronominal' *se* (RAE, 1989:380-81) has also been referred to as 'romance' reflexive. It does not have any function, and it should be considered as a preposed part of the verb:

(5.17) Se presentó de repente.

'He/she came all of a sudden.'

Here the verb is *presentarse*, and the *se* is part of the verb, because the option without the *se* is ungrammatical. Therefore, both clitic and finite form a whole in the thematic option.

There is another type of *se*, which —as explained in section 4.2— causes SV inversion. It is the *se* which implies a certain passive character (*pasiva refleja*). Because, as the one above,

it does not have any function in the transitivity, we will consider both clitic and finite as a whole.

- (5.18) Se han hecho demasiados comentarios al respecto.  
'Too many comments have been made as regards that.'

## 5. Non-subject participant

This has been fully explained before. It refers to an indirect object which acts as experiencer in certain mental or psychological processes.

- (5.19) A nadie en mi clase le gusta el profesor nuevo.  
'Nobody in my class likes the new teacher.'

## 6. Circumstance

This includes time and space adjuncts which serve as location for the action presented in the sentence. The first consideration to take into account within this structure is time and space adjuncts. Many scholars (Downing, 1991; Firbas, 1992; Matthiessen, 1992) have pointed to the fact that time and space adjuncts in first position serve as the setting of the action, providing a framework from which to understand the rest of the sentence. Consequently, we will consider these as unmarked themes, even though a different positioning is possible, as in examples (5.20) and (5.21), already presented elsewhere. Note that these examples were explained in terms of point of view and underlying question (Hatcher, 1956a), i.e., they must be contextualised to be unmarked. Because context is involved here, topicality is also part of the factor explaining the unmarkedness of this structure:

- (5.20) [*¿Qué pasó esta mañana?*] Esta mañana habló Juan.  
'[What happened this morning?] This morning Juan spoke.'  
(5.21) [*¿Cuándo habló Juan?*] Juan habló esta mañana.  
'[When did Juan speak?] Juan spoke this morning.'

## 7. Negative particle *no*

The contexts of appearance of the negative particle are the opposite to those of the subject. This particle always comes before its verb, except for the presence of clitic pronouns, in which

case it precedes the clitic(s), including reflexive, ‘romance’ reflexive and impersonal uses of *se*. Therefore, it will only appear in first position due to an absence of the subject.

We have considered the negative particle as part of the interpersonal theme of the sentence, because it conveys the polarity of the clause, and it very often occupies the first position. Firbas (1992) says that the negative particle is very dynamic, because it focuses the attention on the negative character of the sentence. However, the subject may appear before it, thus overriding Halliday’s ordering of themes: textual - interpersonal - ideational. But it seems quite logical to consider the negative particle as the interpersonal theme.

(5.22) No ha venido nadie a la fiesta.  
int. ideational

‘Nobody came to the party.’

(5.23) No falta ninguna.  
int. ideational

‘None is missing.’ (Hatcher, 1956)

### 5.3 Unmarked theme in interrogative sentences

#### 5.3.1 Open interrogative sentences

The only element from the unmarked open interrogative word order which can be selected as unmarked theme is the question word (*wh*-word in English, we will call them *qu*-words), so we can say that the question word or phrase is the theme in unmarked structures:

Qu-word<sub>1</sub> (no) (clitic/s) Finite (Subject)

#### 1. Question word

This is the only possible option in this structure, because it is obligatory and therefore does not allow for the following elements to come in the first place.

(5.24) ¿Cuántos tuberculosos habrá ahora en este café?

‘How many tuberculous people will there be in this café now?’ (Cela)

(5.25) ¿En qué somos las últimas?

‘In what aspect are we the last ones?’ (Montero)

(5.26) ¿Qué sucede?

'What is going on?' (Torrente Ballester)

We can always find, of course, marked instances of this type of interrogative sentences, but these will not be dealt with here, because the possibilities are almost infinite. We may have a participant or an adjunct as the left-most constituent of the sentence in a number of different combinations.

(5.27) ¿A mí por qué se me detiene?

'Why am I arrested?' (Cela)

In all the cases, a textual or interpersonal theme may come first. These cases will be considered as separate instances, different from the rest only in the presence of the non-ideational element.

(5.28) ¿Y cómo los habéis sacado de mi casa, si está sellada?

tex. ideational

'And how did you get them out of my house, being it sealed?' (Torrente Ballester)

(5.29) Pero, hija, ¿por qué hablas así?

tex. int. ideational

'But, darling, why do you talk like that?' (Cela)

### 5.3.2 Yes/No Interrogative sentences

Yes/no interrogative sentences always start with the finite verb in the unmarked cases. Of course, the first positioning of the finite may be reinforced by any of the other factors that cause the inversion for declarative sentences. But, in any case, finite-subject is always the unmarked, plus the negative particle or clitic pronouns, because it is conditioned by grammar:

(no)<sub>3</sub>            (clitic/s)<sub>2</sub>            Finite<sub>1</sub> (Subject)

(5.30) ¿Sabe Juan lo de tu coche?

'Does Juan know about your car?'

(5.31) ¿Ha venido ya el recibo del teléfono?

'Has the telephone bill arrived?'

(5.32) ¿Está su esposo?

'Is your husband in?' (Cela)

(5.33) ¿Han salido las notas del primer examen de Historia?

'Have the grades for the first History exam come out?'

(5.34) ¿Veis esa fuente con cuentas?

'Can you see that fountain with the marbles?' (Montero)

(5.35) ¿Sabes que a la niña le ha salido novio?

'Do you know that the girl has found a boyfriend?' (Cela)

The finite can be preceded, as in declarative sentences, by clitic pronouns. The position of the clitic is not arbitrary, and if it is required by the verb or because it refers to a 'given' object, there is no other place where it can be located. As a consequence, we will have to postulate that the clitic constitutes the theme of the sentence

(5.36) ¿Me quieres mucho?

'Do you love me very much?' (Cela)

(5.37) ¿Se lo has dicho ya a tu padre?

'Have you already told your father?'

The presence of the negative particle would entail multiple themes:

(5.38) ¿No crees que es una película buenísima?  
int. ideational

'Don't you think it's a great film?'

(5.39) ¿No tenéis sacerdotes en Lulabay?  
int. ideational

'Don't you have priests in Lulabay?' (Montero)

(5.40) ¿No te enorgullece el saberte tan valiosa?  
int. ideational

'Doesn't it fill you with pride to know that you are that valuable?' (Montero)

The subject can be present in any of the cases cited above, with or without clitics:

(5.41) ¿Le dio usted las gotas que le dijo don Francisco?

'Did you give him the drops Mr. Francisco told you?' (Cela)

(5.42) ¿Se refiere Vuestra Excelencia a la fe del padre Villaescusa?

'Does Your Excellency refer to Father Villaescusa's faith?' (Torrente Ballester)

(5.43) ¿Está usted seguro de lo que dice?

'Are you sure of what you are saying?'

The subject appears in first position only when we want to put an emphasis on the addressee, for that reason commonly only the second person (singular or plural) is made explicit before an interrogative verb, fulfilling thus the function of a vocative. In such cases, it is a marked theme.

In the following examples, some of them are preceded by interpersonal or textual themes.

(5.44) ¿Usted está seguro que tiene ganas de trabajar?

'Are you sure you want to work?' (Cela)

(5.45) Oye, ¿tú conoces a mi amiga Toñuca, una que es un poco pelirroja?

'Listen, do you know my friend Toñuca, the one with the red hair?' (Martín Gaité)

(5.46) Entonces, padre, ¿usted no cree que Dios castiga a los pueblos por los pecados de los Reyes?

'Then, father, don't you think God punishes the people for the sins of their kings?' (Torrente Ballester)

## 5.4 Unmarked theme in imperative sentences

Imperative sentences are most frequently subjectless, therefore the finite will be the theme in this mood structure. However, in negative imperatives the structure is slightly different (cf. 4.4.3 above):

Finite <sub>1</sub>	(Subject)	
(no) <sub>3</sub>	(clitic/s) <sub>2</sub>	Finite <sub>1</sub> (Subject)

### 1. Finite

The finite has two different contexts in imperative sentences. First of all, it is the only possible option in unmarked affirmative imperative sentences:

(5.47) Escriban su nombre y sus apellidos en la parte superior de la página.  
'Write your name and surname on the upper part of the page.'

Secondly, this finite may be a different mood (in the traditional sense of distinction indicative/subjunctive). The subjunctive only appears after a negative particle or a clitic. It is different from the finite above, and it is thematic because it is the ideational theme, the negative particle being the interpersonal:

(5.48) ¡No hagas eso!  
'Don't do that!'

### 2. Clitics

When present, they are the ideational theme, after the interpersonal negative particle. They are only possible in the negative. In the affirmative, they come after the finite:

(5.49) ¡No lo abras todavía!  
'Don't open it yet.'

(5.50) ¡Ábrelo enseguida!  
'Open it at once!'

### 3. Negative particle

As stated for declarative sentences, the negative particle is part of the interpersonal theme. For the imperative, it changes the verb slightly, making it a subjunctive, and with the clitics in front of the verb (see above):

(5.51) No digas nada, por favor.  
'Please, don't say a word.'

(5.52) No se lo cuentes a nadie.  
'Don't tell anybody.'

In the next section, we will briefly present the system networks built for English and German as part of the computational specifications carried out for theme markedness in those languages. We will include Italian because of its similarity with Spanish in certain aspects.

## 6 Studies for other languages

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In this section, we will outline the pre-computational classifications done for theme systems in English (Matthiessen, 1992) and in German (Steiner & Ramm, 1993). English served as the point of departure for the building of other systems, and for that reason it is interesting to analyse how the English systems were applied in German. We have also included Italian in this section, although there is not a complete system as of present for this language. However, some of the points made by Renzi (1988) as regards the Italian language were considered quite relevant for the study of Spanish.

### 6.1 English

We briefly summarise here Matthiessen's (1992) classification of theme options in English, with a special attention to marked and unmarked contrast. Matthiessen (1992) is mainly Halliday's classification oriented to the building of theme systems, and it has been implemented in NIGEL, the systemic functional grammar component in the PENMAN system. Still, it does not account for some of the problems of Halliday's description, such as including circumstances within topical themes.

There is, however, a very interesting approach in the English computational system: in interrogative clauses, both the finite and the *wh*- serve as interpersonal themes. In yes/no interrogative questions, the subject becomes the topical theme. But in *wh*-interrogatives, it is the interrogative word the one which fulfils that function (see table 1 below). That is to say, the *wh*- serves two functions within the thematic realisation at the same time: it is both interpersonal and topical theme. This comes to confirm our previous assumption that the same word may have two different functions in the theme system (as it happens with the verb in

Spanish). Table 1 is an account of unmarked theme in mood context, considering textual, interpersonal and ideational themes.

		Theme			Rheme
		textual	interpersonal	topical (experiential)	
indic.	declarative			Subject they	cook curry
	interrog.	yes-no	Finite do	Subject they	cook curry?
		wh-	Wh what	(/Subject, Complement, Adjunct)	do they cook?
imp.	implicit Subject			Process or --- Cook --- ['you']	the curry! cook the curry!
	explicit Subject			Subject You	cook the curry!

Table 1. Unmarked theme selection in mood context (fragment, from Matthiessen, 1992).

Apart from these considerations, the rest of the theme systems follow Halliday's definitions and explanations. Matthiessen describes theme as the "resource for setting up the local context", for the contextualisation of the clause. This contextualisation can be ideational, interpersonal, or textual. Interpersonal and textual themes are selected through the ATTITUDE and CONJUNCTION systems. The interpersonal theme includes one or more of the following (the examples are taken from Matthiessen, 1992):

- Finite
- (6.1) Has he really resigned?
- Interpersonal adjunct, reflecting the attitude:

(6.2) Sadly, it doesn't look like the old places will be around much longer.

- Vocative:

(6.3) But surely, my dear Mrs. Warren, you know the reason.

Textual theme can be:

- Conjunctive element, indicating elaboration, extension or enhancement with relation to the previous discourse:

(6.4) In other words you can answer some questions. (elaborating)

(6.5) Furthermore this alternative would be far too costly. (extending)

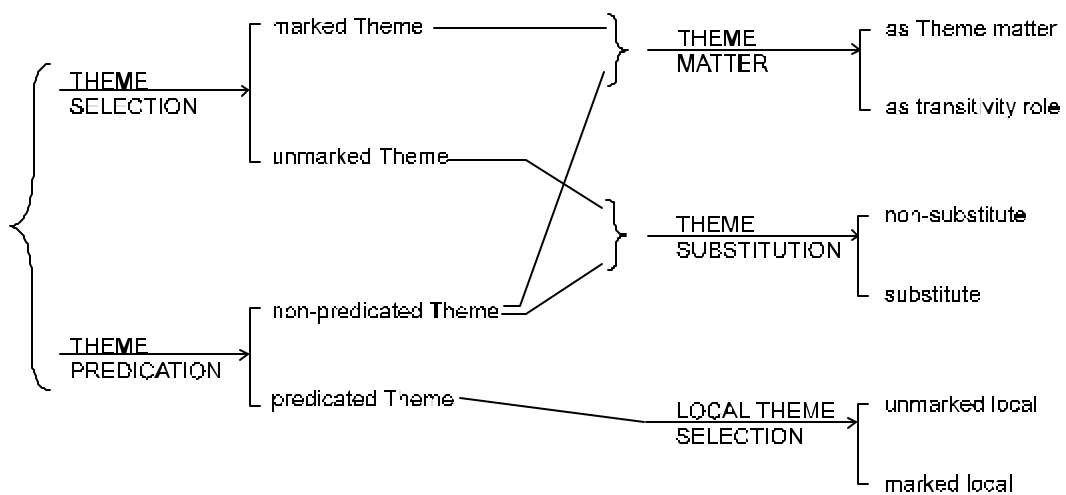
(6.6) And at this point it became like something out of an Ingmar Bergman film. (enhancing)

- Continuative:

(6.7) Well, my own dear, sweet, loving little darling, I really can't see why you should object to the name of Algernon.

Yes you do.

The ideational theme system is much more complicated. The general outline is represented in figure 1:



We will not go into the realisations of these options, because they will be explained as we outline the Spanish counterparts.

## 5.2 German

The study for German (Steiner and Ramm, 1993) is based on Halliday's approach, and the results were very much similar to those found in English, although it is acknowledged that to produce a context-independent specification of unmarkedness is much more difficult than in English.

Some other differences were found. First of all, it is possible to have multiple experiential themes:

- (6.8) Das Buch nach Hause bringen möchte ich nicht.  
the book to home bring want I not.  
'I don't want to bring the book home.' (German example from Steiner & Ramm, 1993)
- (6.9) a. Mir scheint, daß Du recht hast.  
b. Me parece que tienes razón.  
'I think that you are right.' (German example from Steiner & Ramm, 1993)

Note that, in example (6.9a), Steiner and Ramm give both constituents, *mir scheint*, as theme.

Further on in the article, however, they relate theme and transitivity and affirm that when the process is phenomenon-oriented, associative-belong, and we have experiencer-type roles, that role is the unmarked theme:

- (6.10) Mir schwant Böses.  
me seems evil  
'I sense something evil.' (Steiner & Ramm, 1993)
- (6.11) Mir gehören alle Häuser in dieser Gegend.  
me belong all houses in this area  
'All the houses in this area belong to me.' (German example and English gloss from Steiner & Ramm, 1993)

There is no specification whether this also happens with full noun groups, or only with pronouns. Our approach, in section 5, was slightly different, because we only considered the clitic and *part* of the verb within the theme.

Apart from the possibility of multiple experiential themes, it is difficult to have an experiential theme within multiple theme, i.e., together with interpersonal and textual:

- (6.12) a. \*Daher, ehrlich gesagt, ich werde nicht gehen.  
b. Daher, ehrlich gesagt, werde ich nicht gehen.  
c. Daher werde ich, ehrlich gesagt, nicht gehen. (Steiner & Ramm, 1993)

In example (6.12a), two textual and one interpersonal themes are signalled as ungrammatical, yielding thus examples (6.12b) and (6.12c), which sound better, without the experiential element within the theme. As a consequence, it is possible in German to have a theme without any experiential element.

But the most important remark done for German is that, in yes/no interrogatives and in simple tenses, the process gets conflated with the finite, because no operator such as the English ‘do’ is needed:

- (6.13) a. Spielst du fußball?  
b. Do you play football?  
c. ¿Juegas al fútbol?

This is true for all simple verbs: the process is conflated with the finite, and this is the theme, making it then unnecessary to include the subject within the theme in such sentences, as in Spanish. In compound tenses, nonetheless, the realisation for German is more similar to the one for English:

- (6.14) a. Hat er die Aufgabe gemacht?  
b. Has he done his homework?  
c. ¿Ha hecho los deberes?

In the examples (6.14a) and (6.14b), the auxiliary is the interpersonal theme, and the subject the ideational one. Example (6.13) will resemble the realisations for Spanish and, although compound tenses do not behave the same as in Spanish —where the finite and non-finite

forms move together to the front of the sentence, whether there is a subject or not—, we can see how German behaves in the same way as Spanish, as will be seen in the next section.

The last important remark to be done for German is that theme may be conflated with a spatio-temporal Circumstance:

(6.15) In diesem Projekt haben wir eine große Aufgabe.  
 in this project have we a big task  
 'We have a big task in this project.' (German example from Steiner & Ramm, 1993)

To summarise, let us see the system of markedness in relation to declarative mood, and how it is different from the English one. Note that '1st participant role' means not only subject, but also any 'experiencer-type role', as it happens with psychological verbs (see example 6.9).

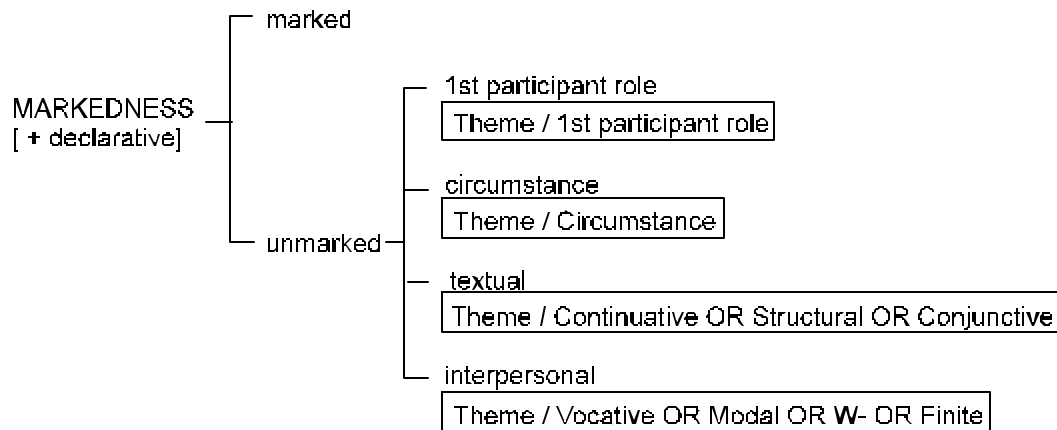


Fig. 2. Markedness in declarative sentences (German).

### 5.3 Italian

There is no study as of present of thematic realisation patterns for Italian, or theme systems, although work on this area is progressing towards the building of such a system (Lavid, 1995). We will take, then, the study done by Renzi (1988) on unmarked word order, which provides a very meaningful research into what is unmarked in terms of thematic selection.

The Italian study contains two relevant approaches to the question of word order that we are going to point out here. The first one is the fact that, for Italian, there is no mention of ‘unmarked theme’, but of ‘natural order of elements within the sentence’. This approach implies that we should not consider just the first element (the theme) as the one that imprints an unmarked structure to the sentence. It is the whole sequence of elements what provides the unmarked character to the sentence, together with the degree of definiteness and givenness of those elements. For example, in Italian, as in Spanish, it is possible to have inverted verb-subject in presentative structures (6.16)<sup>4</sup>:

(6.16) È arrivato Piero.  
‘Piero has arrived.’

However, this order is considered unmarked for pragmatic reasons (see below), but if we add another element, which may compete with the subject because it is newer, then the structure is marked:

(6.17) ?? È arrivato Piero a Roma.  
‘Piero has arrived in Rome.’

The same sentence would be unmarked if the subject is indefinite, because then the progression towards the newer element is fulfilled:

(6.18) È arrivato un marziano a Roma  
‘A Martian has arrived in Rome.’

This interpretation links up with the idea of communicative dynamism explained in section 2: the sentence progresses from old or known towards new. If we place the subject after the verb, then the subject is considered new, but if we place another element after the subject, both the subject and the other element compete in the degree of communicative dynamism and of new information. In summary, what we have tried to prove is that all elements within the sentence play a role within the thematic structure, and to consider just the first one is to limit

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<sup>4</sup> In this section, all the Italian examples are from Renzi (1988).

the study of theme. Unfortunately, we do not have the space here to provide a full account on the unmarked order of elements in Spanish.

The second idea is the interpretation of marked/unmarked from three different points of view. A sentence can be marked or unmarked from a syntactic, intonational or pragmatic point of view. Thus, the absence of subject produces a pragmatically marked order, in the sense that it needs a well-defined context to be adequate, but unmarked syntactically or grammatically, because a finite verb can exist without a subject, as in the following example:

(6.19) Arriveranno alle sette.  
'They'll arrive at seven.'

There are in Italian, besides, many other instances of the same phenomena studied for Spanish, namely three important ones: firstly, long elements tend to occupy the last position in the sentence (6.20); secondly the first position with psychological verbs is the senser, but not the subject (6.21). In both examples, (a) is syntactically unmarked — subject+verb+complement—, but (b) is pragmatically unmarked:

(6.20) a. È certo che hanno parlato.  
b. Che hanno parlato è certo.  
'It is true that they have spoken.'

(6.21) a. Gli spaghetti piacciono a Giorgio.  
b. A Giorgio piacciono gli spaghetti.  
'Giorgio likes spaghetti.'

Thirdly, in Italian, time adjuncts can occupy the first position in an unmarked sentence, performing then the function of temporal framing for the sentence:

(6.22) Nel 1265 è nato Dante.  
'Dante was born in 1265.' / 'In 1265 Dante was born.'

For a more graphical presentation of all these phenomena in Italian, we will use Lavid's (1995) proposed network for Italian:

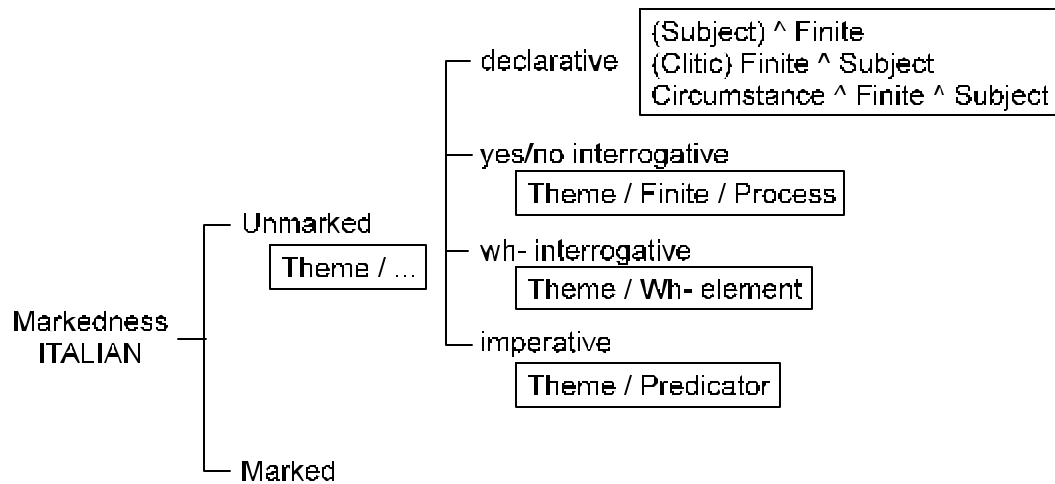


Fig. 3. Theme markedness in Italian (adapted from Lavid, 1995).

This section has provided an outline of the most relevant points in the study of thematic options in three languages, being the studies for English the most complete ones. Having English classifications as a reference, we will provide the classifications and systems for Spanish in the next section.

## 7 Theme systems for Spanish

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### 7.1 Textual, interpersonal, and ideational theme

Textual and interpersonal themes have not been dealt with very deeply in previous sections. The realisations are the same as in English, that is, attitudinal (interpersonal) and conjunctive (textual), plus vocatives (interpersonal). However, there are slight differences, as stated in previous sections, because we considered the negative particle to be the interpersonal theme when it occurs in the first place.

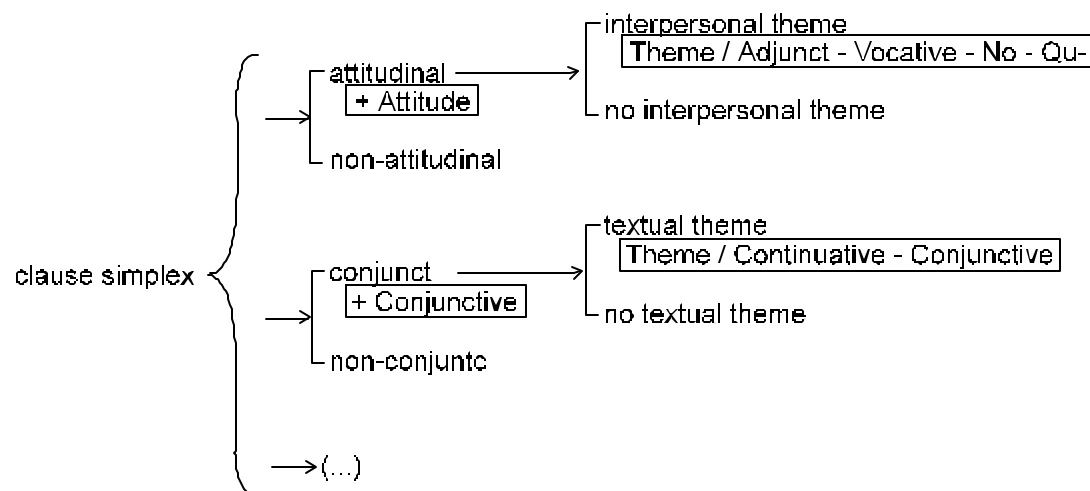


Fig. 4. Interpersonal and textual theme selection in Spanish.

Attitudinal themes show the speaker's point of view on what he/she is saying, or from the point of view of something related to it. Those would comprise attitudinal adjuncts, realised by adverbs and prepositional groups such as *honestamente*, *en mi opinión*, *francamente*, *simplemente*, *al fin y al cabo*, *técnicamente*, *desde el punto de vista legal* ('honestly', 'in

my opinion', 'frankly', 'simply', 'all in all', 'technically', 'from a legal point of view'), and so on. Vocatives also serve as interpersonal themes.

We cannot say, however, that the finite in interrogative sentences is an interpersonal theme, because it is not necessarily the marker of the interrogative, addressing character of the sentence, as declaratives may have a finite at the beginning. The only difference between an interrogative (7.1a) and a declarative (7.1b) is the intonation:

- (7.1) a. ¿Ha venido Juan?  
Has Juan arrived?  
b. Ha venido Juan.  
Juan has arrived.

These two examples contain a subject, but the same would apply if they did not have a subject. The subject, then, loses its function of expressing mood, as Halliday (1967, 1974) points out for English: "It has often been noted, for example, that the subject in English is essential to the expression of mood." (Halliday, 1974:47). He says that it is the subject that makes the distinction between different instances of mood: "It is the role which specifies speech function, first as between indicative and imperative and then, in its interaction with the finite verbal element, between declarative and polar interrogative; non-polar interrogative being specified by the WH-role, which may however be mapped on to that of subject." (Halliday, 1967:215). All these distinctions would not hold in Spanish: it is basically the intonation what helps us realise the speech function and the mood of the sentence.

But *wh*-words, or *qu*-words in Spanish (*qué, quién, cuándo, cómo, dónde, porqué*) do have a function in the interpersonal theme, because they are real markers of interrogation, as *no* is the marker of negative polarity.

The textual theme may indicate relation to the previous discourse (conjunctive) or continuity (continuative). Conjunctive themes connect the clause to the preceding discourse, through conjunctions, co-ordinators and subordinators, and through other types of links or continuative elements: *sin embargo, y aún así, y, pero, porque, mientras, bueno, además, en primer lugar, en segundo lugar* ('however', 'even so', 'and', 'but', 'because', 'while', 'well', 'besides', 'first of all', 'secondly'), etc.

According to Halliday (1985), we can find more than one theme in the sentence, having then multiple themes, which include everything up to the first ideational element. We can also find more than one textual or interpersonal theme. In the examples below we have instances of simple and multiple themes, both textual and interpersonal:

- (7.2) Sí, verdaderamente: yo estoy todo el día pensando en esta hora.  
 textual interpersonal ideational  
 continuative  
 'Yes, frankly: I spend the day thinking of this hour.' (Cela)
- (7.3) Pero, padre, yo no he buscado el placer fuera del matrimonio.  
 textual interp. ideat.  
 conj. voc.  
 'But, father, I haven't sought pleasure outside wedlock.' (Torrente Ballester)
- (7.4) Pero, Emilio, ya lo sabes que te quiero mucho.  
 textual interp. ideational  
 conj. vocative  
 'But, Emilio, you know that I love you very much.' (Martín Gaité)
- (7.5) Pues vente con nosotras, anda.  
 textual ideational  
 continuative  
 'Then come with us, come on.' (Martín Gaité)
- (7.6) Oye, chata, ¿hemos venido para ser felices o para que me coloques el rollo de tu mamá  
 int. int. ideational  
 voc. voc.  
 querida?  
 'Listen, honey, did we come to be happy or to have you tell me the story of your dear Mum?' (Cela)
- (7.7) Y, a propósito de rumores, Diego, ¿qué se dice hoy por la corte?  
 tex. text. int. ideational  
 continuative conjunctive voc.  
 And, speaking about rumours, Diego, what is said today in the court? (Torrente Ballester)
- (7.8) No me creo nada de lo que estás diciendo.  
 int. ideational  
 voc.  
 'I don't believe a word of what you are saying.'

The ideational theme system is much more complex. It embodies two primary systems: theme selection and predication. Theme selection refers to the unmarked or marked character of the theme selected. As we studied in section 5, the selection for Spanish is very wide and includes many different elements. Theme predication implies the creation of an internal predication to identify the theme (cleft construction), with a choice between predicated and non-predicated. We will keep the same system as the one for English (fig. 1, section 6.1)

## 7.2 Theme selection: unmarked and marked theme

Leaving aside textual and interpersonal themes, the next element to be selected for theme is the ideational/experiential theme, which has also been called topical theme. We will keep the notation ideational/experiential, in order to avoid the mistake that could lead to interpret the ideational (or topical) theme as the ‘topic’ of the sentence or discourse, a concept not necessarily identifiable with that of ideational theme.

As already explained in section 5, theme markedness is related to mood type, thus yielding a different classification for declarative, interrogative and imperative sentences. The theme markedness systems for Spanish presented below were built on the basis of the unmarked thematic selections specified in section 5. The indices for each theme selection refer back to the selection there explained, and which are presented here again for convenience:

- **Unmarked theme in declarative sentences**

- (i) **SVO**

(Subject)<sub>1</sub> (no)<sub>7</sub> (clitic/s)<sub>2</sub> Finite<sub>3</sub> (Object/s / Adjunct/s)

- (ii) **VS**

(no)<sub>7</sub> (se)<sub>4</sub> Finite<sub>3</sub> (Subject)

- (iii) **Non-subject participant + V + (S)**

Non-subject part.<sub>5</sub> (no)<sub>7</sub> (clitic/s)<sub>2</sub> Finite<sub>3</sub> (Subject)

- (iv) **Circumstantial + V + (S)**

Circumstantial<sub>6</sub> (no)<sub>7</sub> (clitic/s)<sub>2</sub> Finite<sub>3</sub> (Subject)

- **Unmarked theme in interrogative sentences**

- Open interrogatives**

Qu-word<sub>1</sub> (no) (clitic/s) Finite (Subject)

- Yes/no interrogatives**

(no)<sub>3</sub> (clitic/s)<sub>2</sub> Finite<sub>1</sub> (Subject)

- **Unmarked theme in imperative sentences**

Finite<sub>1</sub> (Subject)

(no)<sub>3</sub>      (clitic/s)<sub>2</sub>      Finite<sub>1</sub> (Subject)

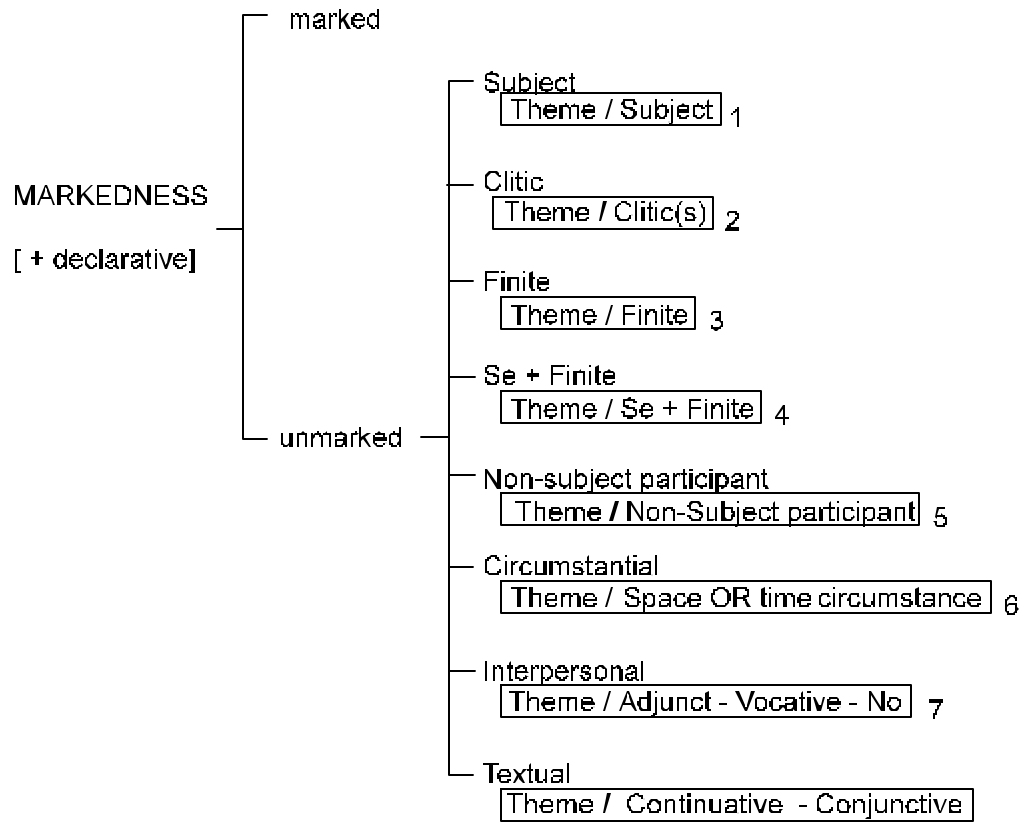


Fig. 5. Unmarked theme selection in relation to mood (declarative) in Spanish.

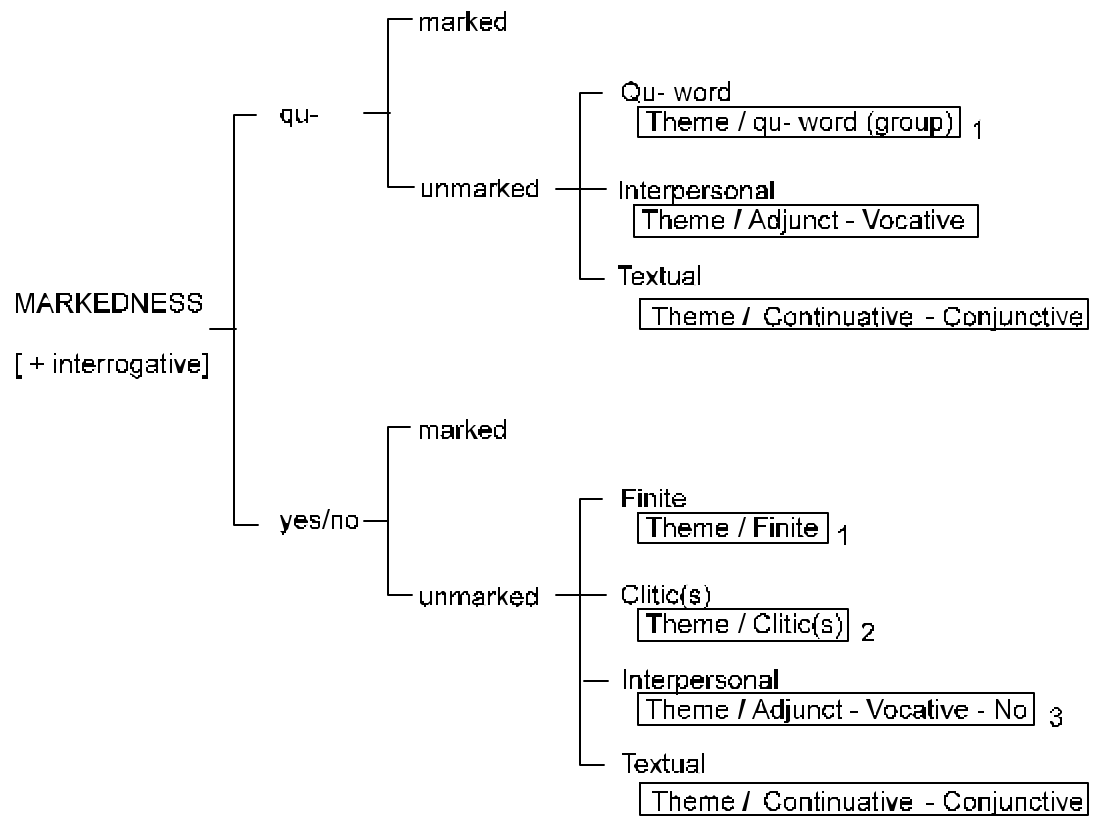


Fig. 6. Theme selection in relation to mood (interrogative) in Spanish.

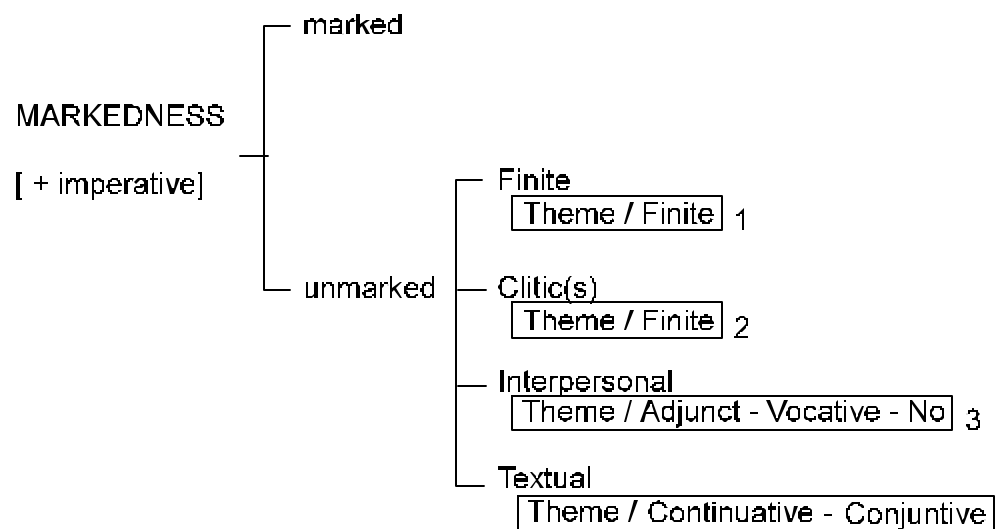


Fig. 7. Theme selection in relation to mood (imperative) in Spanish.

The marked theme is any other not mentioned here, and any of the above under different circumstances from those outlined in section 5.

### 7.3 Theme matter

Theme matter is defined in terms of the conflation of the theme with the rest of the structural elements in the clause. If the theme is structurally integrated in the clause, then it is 'no theme matter'. If the theme is not integrated, then 'theme matter' has been selected. The theme is a textual subject matter, related cohesively to the rest of the discourse through reference or lexical cohesion. Certain expressions make the theme matter explicit, such as *por lo que se refiere a, en cuanto a* ('as regards', 'as for').

- (7.9) Los que han terminado pueden marcharse ya. En cuanto a los que no han terminado, tienen cinco minutos más.  
'The ones who have finish may leave. As for the ones who have not finished, you have five more minutes.'

Theme matter in relation to the transitivity role refers to the case when the marked theme is conflated with a structural unit within the clause —a participant or a circumstance other than the unmarked cases outlined above.

- (7.10) De María ni me hables.  
'Don't even talk to me about María.'

### 7.4 Theme predication

Theme predication offers the two choices non-predicated and predicated theme. A predicated theme is selected through the use of a cleft construction, where there is an identifying process with the theme as the identifier, and as the focus of the information. The predicated option is the marked one in the theme system. There are some restrictions as regards theme predication:

textual and interpersonal elements, and clauses within the clause complex system cannot be predicated, as a general rule.

In Spanish, the structure is impersonal, and therefore with a subjectless *ser* plus the identifier (the identified, 'it' in English, is implicit).

(7.11) Es María quien debe hacerlo.

'It's María who must do it.'

Note that the clause may begin with any of the relative pronouns: *que, quien, cual, como, cuando, donde, el/la/los/las cual(es)/que, etc.*

(7.12) Fue allí donde tuvimos el accidente.

'It was there that we had the accident.'

(7.13) ¿Es este chico el que te pegó?

'Is it this boy who hit you?'

Theme predication is also related to mood. Predicated theme is only possible in indicative mood (including declarative and interrogative sentences), but it is not possible with imperative sentences, unless we use the particle *que*, used sometimes to express a wish, followed by the subjunctive, as can be seen in the following table. The table is adapted from Matthiessen (1992), and the variations are done on the sentence 'María attended the lecture on Monday.'

		non-predicated theme	predicated theme
MOOD TYPE: indicative	INDICATIVE TYPE: declarative	María asistió a la conferencia el lunes	<u>Fue</u> el lunes cuando María asistió a la conferencia
	INDICATIVE TYPE: interrogative	qu- ¿Cuándo asistió María a la conferencia?	¿Cuándo <u>fue</u> que María asistió a la conferencia?
		yes/no ¿A qué asistió María el lunes?	¿A qué <u>fue</u> a lo que María asistió el lunes?
MOOD TYPE: imperative		¿Asistió María a la conferencia el lunes?	¿ <u>Fue</u> el lunes cuando María asistió a la conferencia? ¿ <u>Fue</u> a la conferencia a lo que María asistió?
		¡Asiste a la conferencia el lunes, María!	— ¡Que <u>sea</u> el lunes cuando asistas a la conferencia, María!

Table 2. Theme predication and mood in Spanish.

## 7.5 Theme substitution

Theme substitution takes place when the unmarked, non-predicated theme moves to the end of the sentence and is therefore substituted by a pronoun. This seems to be less common in Spanish, as there is no need to use a pronoun before a verb. Compare the English and the Spanish examples:

- (7.14) a. They don't seem to match these colours.  
b. \_\_\_\_ No parecen casar estos colores. (Matthiessen, 1992)

In (7.14a), the subject is a pronoun and the substitute theme is a nominal group. In (7.14b), there is no corresponding theme, the substitute is the nominal group, but the theme is the negative particle (cf. section 5).

The substitution is much more evident when there is an explicit full element involved in the substitution:

- (7.15) Es un libro muy bueno, ése de la izquierda.  
'It's a very good book, that one on the left.'

## 7.6 Theme identification

Theme identification is called, in grammars of English, pseudo-cleft construction. This involves a nominalisation with a *wh*-word, which transforms a non-identifying process ('thematic equative') into an identifying one. In Spanish, this is done through the indefinite *lo que*.

- (7.16) Lo que dices es absurdo.  
'What you say is absurd.'

The motivation for this realisation of theme is to provide a textual alternative to the non-identified clause.



## 8 Concluding remarks

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This paper has attempted to provide a study on theme markedness in a multilingual context, with special attention to the contrast between English and Spanish.

Theme was approached from a functional point of view, as the function (pragmatics, discourse) that is mapped into form (grammar). As a consequence, there were two levels of analysis: the grammatical and the pragmatic one. Grammar was first considered, and when an unmarked structure could not be classified as so because of grammatical reasons, then we looked for pragmatic ones. Due to both type of phenomena, grammatical and pragmatic, the range of options available in the Spanish language is much wider than those for English. Besides, we pointed out that the thematic option cannot usually be considered as the first element appearing in the sentence in isolation. Very often, it is the first two or three elements that realise the function of theme, as defined in section 3, although in our systems we classified just the element in first position.

The work here developed constitutes a systemic approach to the study of theme, because we presented the phenomena observed in different systems, which might contribute to a future computational specification of theme options in Spanish.

## 9 Acknowledgements

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Thanks are due to all those who helped in the preparation of this paper, from family and friends to professors, partners, some librarians, and —why not— even computers. But, above all, I want to thank my tutor, Dr. Julia Lavid, for contributing in almost every stage of this study, from the refinement of the initial idea to the carefully reading and commenting of all the drafts, and for her continuous support and help during the last few years.

This paper was written while I was working for the GIST project —Generating InStructural Text, LRE Research Project 062-09—, which personally meant the opportunity of both offering my humble contribution and approaching the fascinating field of multilingual generation. It is my wish to thank all the people involved in the project for allowing me to participate, especially the Universidad Complutense and, again, Dr. Julia Lavid, scientific director of the Madrid site, for trusting me to be part of this project.

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