FACOLTÀ DI STUDI UMANISTICI
Lingue e Comunicazione
Lingua Inglese 2

LESSON 6

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Thematisation

- Arranging the text, attracting the reader's attention on certain parts (the most important ones for the writer's intentions & for intelligibility).

- The information contained is arranged as to carry the writer's message forward and to focus the reader's attention of some elements rather than others.

- New information is associated to known/ shared information (in the co-text or situational context).

- Known v new information – according to the writer

- The initial part of the clause, what it will be about: THEME

Thematisation

"*A one-cent is the smallest Euro coin*"

(I will tell you about a one-cent- one-cent is the THEME)

"*The smallest Euro coin is a one-cent*"

(I will tell you about the smallest Euro coin:

The smallest Euro coin is the THEME)

The THEME is context-dependent, as the reader has already access to the information offered.

The remainder of the clause, called the RHEME, acts as the new context-independent element, holding the NEW information that is going to be given about the THEME, therefore carrying most of the sentence's communicative importance

- The theme is context-dependent
- The remainder of the clause is the RHEME, that functions as the new context-independent element – it holds the new info about the theme & carries most of the sentence's communicative relevance (Ulrich 152)
- Theme/rheme – subject/predicate
- The theme *announces* the starting point of the message

- When the theme appears at the beginning of the sentences (when it *announces* the starting point of the message) it is considered <u>unmarked</u> *

    (English declarative sentences: subject)

- SVO(A) – Theme-Subject, Rheme-Object, Verb a transition between the two.

    IN ENGLISH DECLARATIVE SENTENCE NO OTHER ORDER IS POSSIBLE

 Yes/No interrogative sentences – the theme is the *subject* (operator); wh- Questions, the theme is *the wh- interrogative pronoun*

Ex: the grandma gave a bunch of flowers to her niece; did you get a gift?; what did you get?

*In Linguistics and social sciences, **markedness** is the state of standing out as non-typical or divergent in comparison to a regular or more common form.

- Yes/No interrogative sentences –

The theme is the subject (operator):

Does Tiffany like football?

In wh- Questions, the theme is the

wh- interrogative pronoun

What does she like?

ENGLISH RELIES ON WORD ORDER AND PHRASE STRUCTURE TO INDICATE GRAMMATICAL FUNCTION

MUCH MORE FLEXIBILITY IN ITALIAN!!

Deviation from normal word order

Such deviations are possible one a writer wants to foreground some information.

These changes or foregrounding are considered MARKED and whatever is brought to the front of the clause gets promoted to THEME position.

✓ <u>Fronting</u> – an element different from the subject is moved to the opening of the sentence + an element or the subject is moved to the end of the sentence:

"<u>Half-way across the bridge stands </u>David Tripp, aged 43, tunelessly playing a mouth organ"

"<u>Mary</u> he had not seen for years, but <u>Claudia</u> he saw again yesterday"

Deviation from normal word order

✓ <u>Inversion</u> – subject-verb inversion (mainly w/ place adverbials moved to the front), subject/operator inversion (w/ restrictive or negative adverbial)

> *"There, sitting at the entrance, was the guard"*

> *"Never have I understood less about women"*

✓ <u>Clefting</u> – division of the sentences into 2 clauses, each w/ its own verb (anticipatory subject *it* + verb *to be ... that*). It becomes an empty THEME, but used to give focus to a part of the clause that would otherwise not be marked:

> *"It was Mr Smith that I met"*

> *"It is you that I trapped into this marriage*

✓ <u>Pseudo-clefting</u> – *wh-* pronoun becomes the subject to foreground another clause element

Sally bought a teapot

<u>What Sally bought</u> was a teapot

✓ <u>Left</u> & <u>right</u> <u>dislocation</u> – used to foreground elements.

-*Left disl*. to anticipate identification (marked themes):

*"**Mark** she saw the following afternoon, as she was coming out of the supermarket".*

- *Right disloc*. to postpone identification (cataphoric substitute theme related to the postponed theme) – mainly in informal spoken discourse:

*"They were painted by me, **these pictures".***

BOTH LEFT AND RIGHT DISLOCATION MAINLY OCCUR IN INFORMAL SPOKEN DISCOURSE

✓ <u>End-focus</u> – anything that comes at the end of a clause will be interpreted as the focal element (written discourse):

"The single most important skill and most undervalued capacity for exercising adaptive leadership is <u>diagnosis</u>."

✓ <u>Active/passive</u> <u>voice</u> – the person who does the action is the subject/theme in the former, in the later what matters is not the agent but the person or thing influenced by the verb (scientific and technical writing where *the focus is on the find-ings and not on the find-ers*)

Penicillin was discovered in 1929

The focus moves from what or who causes the happening to the happening itself

- Know v new:

    Julia lost her doll v the doll was lost by Julia

Double object verbs – text dynamism

- Impersonal style

Double object verbs – text dynamism:

1a- We gave the participants in group 1 the quiz

2a- We gave the quiz to **to the participants in group 1** (end focus given)

1b- The participants in group 1 were given the quiz

2b- The quiz was given **to the participants in group 1** (end focus given).

The difference in meaning conveyed by the two passive forms is closely related to the communicative dynamism of the text.

Of course, the choice of which form depends on the overall text and how the information is arranged.

- Impersonal style. Another effect of using the passive, in contrast with a more personalized form of the passive construction

- Focus on the verb: the emphatic operators do/did -> a contrast, the rejection of a previous remark in the co-text or context

EMPHATIC OPERATORS

He <u>does</u> eat meat, doesn't he?

- Also emotive emphasis: personal worry, blame or grumpiness

You said you would phone me!

- I <u>did</u> phone you! But you didn't answer.

- OK, I didn't phone you, but I <u>did</u> send you a text.

Thematic progression

- Communication evolves through the theme/rheme division, alternation, of clauses
- Known -> new = known -> new
- Theme + rheme: communicative dynamism of successive sentences in the text, where the theme carries the lowest degree of communicative dynamism & the rheme drives the communication forward (Ulrich 162)
- Functional organization of the clause in terms of theme & rheme is known as FSP approach (Functional Sentence Perspective, Firbas 1964, Danes 1974)

Recognizable patterns

- Overall thematic structure and rhetorical purpose of the text

- Thematic progression: the choice & ordering of the theme & rheme in relation to superior text units (paragraphs, chapters) and the whole text (Ulrich 163)

1- Linear thematisation of rhemes

T1 -> R1
     |
    T2 -> R2
       |
      T3 -> R3

The new house was built by Mr. Jones. He was ...

2- Thematic progression with a constant theme

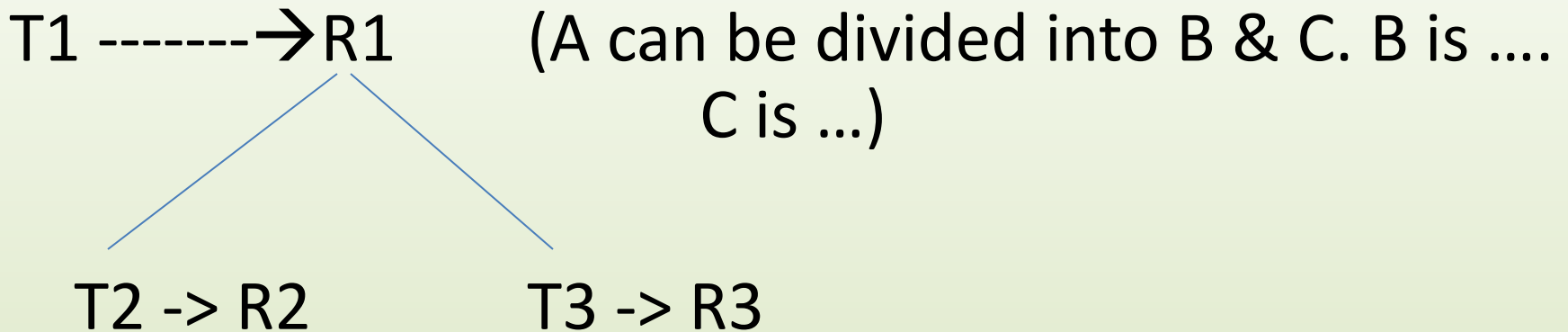(subsequent themes are related to the first)

T1 -> R1

I

T1 -> R2

I

T1 -> R3

The child was a good boy. He used to play fairly. He went to school .... He ...
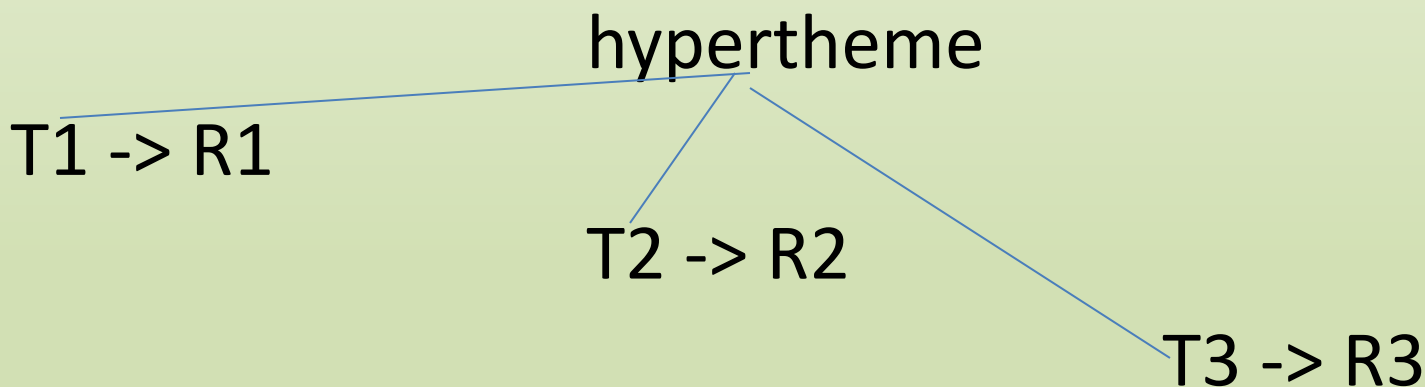
Typical of advertising (theme = brand)

3- Thematic progression by means of a split rheme

T1 -------→R1   (A can be divided into B & C. B is ….
C is …)

    T2 -> R2   T3 -> R3

4- Thematic progression w/ subsequent themes derived from a *hypertheme* or *metatheme*

hypertheme

T1 -> R1

        T2 -> R2

                T3 -> R3

(Sardinia is … Its sea … the mountains … The southern region…)

5- Thematic progression w/ subsequent constant themes related to the first rheme

T1 -> R1

     |

     T2 -> R2

     |

     T2 -> R3

     |

     T2 -> R4

Ex. Kids drink milk. Milk is white. Milk comes from cows. ...

6- Thematic progression w/ subsequent new themes related to a constant rheme

T1 -> R1

T2 -> R1

T3 -> R1

Ex. Kids drink milk. Poppies drink milk. Adults drink milk

Thus, authors decide systematically to foreground certain elements in the text.

Each syntactic variation of theme and rheme is a strategic device on the part of the author to focus the reader's attention on some piece of information rather than on another in consideration of the whole text.

Thematic sequencing depends on DISCOURSE GENRE and RHETORICAL PURPOSES and plays a fundamental roe in text construction