

On the Content Aspect of Textual Themes

1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the Textual Theme, an entity referred to elsewhere also by other labels, such as Discourse (Level) Theme, Textual Topic, Discourse Topic, Hypertheme, Macrotheme, etc. Moreover, sometimes a hierarchy of Textual Themes is posited, differing in their scopes, including the Global Theme, Paragraph Group Theme, Paragraph Theme, etc.

The Textual Theme, however, should be distinguished from its utterance (local) homonym. With Hausenblas (1971) we shall assume that the Textual Theme is superposed to the theme delimited within the frame of reference of the so-called FSP (or else topic focus articulation/information structure).¹ In other words, as utterance themes or local topics the author selects elements which are at least to some degree relevant to the Textual Theme. Hence the Textual Theme is seen as an entity which motivates various (utterance) themes (U-themes) directly or at least indirectly.²

It should be noted, however, that Textual Themes have not been studied *per se*; rather, interest in them developed during recent larger-scale research into cohesion and coherence in paragraphs and paragraph groups (see, Pipalova forthcoming).

The Textual Theme represents a textual (discourse) function, accorded to entities by the author and interpreted by the recipient. However, the encoded Theme need not be decoded the way it was intended.

Naturally, in monological texts, the selection of the Theme is the ultimate responsibility of the author. In dialogical and multilogical texts, however, it tends

1 To distinguish between the two homonymous terms of >THEME<, in what follows (outside citations), we shall reserve the capital-preceded >Themes< - i.e., (Textual) Theme and its varieties (e.g., Paragraph Theme, Global Theme) as interpreted on a textual, hierarchically superior level. The non-capitalized >theme<, on the other hand, will label its counterpart delimited on the hierarchically inferior FSP level (local topic) and contrasted with the rheme.

2 It should be noted that in this chapter the unit of analysis is the main clause.

to be negotiated between two or more interlocutors (see, e.g. Downing 2003, Povolná 2005).

The Theme is inherent in the text (or text-driven), representing the text's organizing principle. This, however, does not preclude comparisons of texts on the basis of their Themes. In fact the Theme may be secondarily abstracted from texts and, as a result, texts may be correlated on the basis of similarities in their Themes.

The selection of the Textual Theme tends to be conditioned or even constrained by the context. Certain situations, periods, registers, genres, fields, communities, speakers, etc., are all associated with particular groups of Themes. Downing (2003, 114) further observes that cultures and subcultures may have possible sets of topics, some of which are open-ended, while others are conventionally limited by the institutional settings (e.g., law courts, classrooms, etc.). Indeed, in a particular situation, the eligibility of Themes varies from relatively common or prototypical Themes all the way to Themes which would be unusual, or even striking in such circumstances. Frequent Themes allow us even to categorize texts (e.g., publishing houses may catalogue books by their regular Themes, the books are then >themed<). Also, inventories of common fiction Themes have been published. For instance, in Daemmrich and Daemmrich (1986) most Themes and Motifs are labelled by nominal units, e. g., >brother conflict, >ancient ruins<, >aggression<, >quest<, >adventure<, >clown<, >colour<, etc., to name at least a few.

Since the Theme is deliberately selected by the author given the particular context (situation), the very choice may lend itself to an evaluation. That is why we may assess the Themes as suitable, unsuitable, prestigious, inferior, relevant, irrelevant, etc., (see Peterka 2001, 138).

Many authors further maintain that the Theme plays a central role in ensuring coherence in texts. Indeed, the Theme stabilizes and >grounds< the discourse and is relevant to the perception of its coherence (see e.g., Mathesius 1942 [1982], Giora 1985). That is presumably why it is shown to decay from memory more slowly than other processing levels (see e.g., Kintsch et al. 1990, cited in Brown 2006). Furthermore, unnegotiated changes in Theme tend to be identified as disturbance in coherence (see Bublitz, Lenk 1999, 166-172).

Although there seems to be general agreement as to the significance of the notion in question, there is, however, much disagreement as to what to understand by the concept. To our knowledge, in secondary literature, the Theme has been defined as pragmatic/textual/discourse aboutness, as a single referent, as an FSP function, as a proposition, as a topic sentence, as a cognitive structure, as a summary, as the main idea, as a macro-speech act, as the stock of shared knowledge, etc.

2. Hausenblas's Approach to Textual Theme

One of the most comprehensive accounts of Theme is provided by Hausenblas (1969; and with some minor modifications, 1971). In his definition, the Theme is what is laid down to the fore, to the centre of the >visual< area of reasoning and communicating, but simultaneously, is subjected to further processing in discourse (Hausenblas 1971, 60).

Thus, in Hausenblas, the Theme is marked by its duality. On the one hand, it is something foregrounded, since the author delimits what is, as well as what is not, the centre of attention. Simultaneously, however, the Theme is naturally backgrounded, since it serves only as a foundation for communicating the ultimate sense of the text.

Hausenblas accords the Theme two distinct functions, namely a perspective and a prospective one. In the delimitation of the former, he was inspired by Mukarovsky (1932 [2000]). The function consists in >perspectivizing< (hierarchizing) elements of the content structure. This means that some Thematic entities are assigned greater prominence at the expense of others. As a result, we may perceive the main Theme, various subsidiary Themes, Thematic shifts, all the way to individual motifs.

In the second function, the prospective one, the Theme operates as a kind of a starting point for subsequent elaboration of the semantic flow. In other words, in this function the Theme embodies a kind of a prospect, plan, which may be fulfilled, specified, modified, abandoned, etc. The laying down of a Theme predisposes a certain range of issues to be selected and raised by the author. Whereas the former perspective function has a hierarchizing effect, the latter, prospective function, represents a kind of disposition to a particular treatment. In other words, it creates certain expectations.

Apart from this dual function of Theme, Hausenblas further maintains that there are two aspects of (Textual) THEME - (1) the specific cognitive content of a text, depicting a portion of (fictitious) extralinguistic reality, and (2) a principle of the content build-up of texts. In the latter sense the (Textual) THEME is seen as a means of text structuring. We may assume that the Theme's content aspect is primarily extralinguistically oriented and only secondarily textual (forming an indispensable unit of texture). Conversely, its constructional/structural aspect appears to be primarily textual and only secondarily reflecting the extralinguistic arrangements (e.g., causal conditioning, changes with time, etc.).

Nearly fifty years later, we can only endorse both these dualities, functions and aspects. Despite their being closely interrelated (i. e., one presupposing and conditioning the other), in what follows, we will have space to outline only the content aspect. In this context it appears worthwhile to recall Hausenblas's words describing the ease with which we tend to posit the Theme as a theoretical

category, and the difficulties we face when identifying its specific content in individual texts.

3. Present Treatment

3.0. Introduction

It should be pointed out that in the present approach we shall put aside such treatments where the Theme is regarded as the main idea, macro-proposition, gist or summary. In a similar vein, we shall disregard such approaches where the Theme is confounded with the potential or intended interpretation. In our view, many of these treatments bring the Theme close to the Global Rheme and appear feasible only in retrospect. In our understanding, the Theme only promises what the text as such should ultimately deliver.

Taking Brown and Yule (1983) in particular, Hausenblas (1969; 1971), Danes (1994; 1995); and Danes in Cmejrková et al. (1999) as our starting points, we suggest a three-layered approach to the Textual Theme. More specifically, we assume that the Theme may be delimited on at least three distinct hierarchized levels which are arranged into a kind of a pyramid. For ease of reference, the whole pyramid, i.e., the three layers put together, will constitute a >Thematic area<. In what follows, we shall ascend the pyramid from the bottom.

3.1. The Broadest Layer of the Theme

In the broadest sense, the Textual Theme involves all the elements inherently taken for granted in the particular speech event. In the framework created by Korenský et al. (1987), the comprehensive structure of the communicative event involves a number of substructures, namely the *socio-psychological (sub)-structure* (i.e., the social, psycho-physiological and communicative features of the participants, their mutual relationships, their shared knowledge and experience, etc.), the *communicative competence structure* (the participants' knowledge of the social and communicative norms, their shared experiential and cognitive pool, and their use of verbal and non-verbal codes), the *pragmatic structure* (communicative intentions, strategies, goals, etc.), the *object structure* (participants, present personal and non-personal objects, the communicative medium and channel, records of previous communications, etc.), and, the arguably most decisive *Theme-and-content structure* (i. e., the discussed personal and non-personal objects, and other content items, including the meta-communicative ones). Moreover, it appears that the content aspect of the Theme

influences (and, at the same time, is influenced by) the text type and text pattern (these falling in the constructional/structural aspect of the Theme). Hence, the broadest and lowest layer of the Theme, which is simultaneously the most diffuse of all, may be conceived of as corresponding to a whole array of gradually established constituents derived from, and reflecting, the comprehensive structure of the communicative event.

However, the aforementioned (sub)structures and constituents of the general communicative framework do not always enjoy equal standing. First and foremost, not all of them need be linguistically manifested in the text. Particularly in some registers, many of them tend to be backgrounded. Frequently, it is not only the elements which are explicitly featured that are significant for the interpretation of the Theme. Just as telling may be the range of elements which are solely presupposed. What is important, however, is that given the openness of texts (van Peer 1989, 277), the recipient can reconstruct the missing links on the basis of his/her activated world knowledge, including the knowledge of the general communicative frame(work). As is pointed out by Downing (2003, 113-4), »global topics are not built up exclusively on the basis of textual information. Knowledge on various levels is also involved, including general knowledge in the form of schemata, frames and scripts; sociocultural knowledge and assumptions of the sociocultural context of situation, and finally of the immediate communicative situation, including the goals and needs of the participants, their character, relative status, and the kinds of speech acts they may engage in given the current discourse situation.«

In example (1), a number of elements of the broadest layer are encoded as utterance themes (e.g., *readers - 1, now - 5, us - 6, 7, 8*, etc.).

- (1) *1* Readers will not be surprised to learn that the purpose of this chapter is to consider the environmental issues outlined in Chapter 1 in the light of the social problems perspective, and to analyse the green movement as a collection of agencies making »social problem claims<. *2* This is not done for the sake of bolstering a sociological theory but because this perspective allows us to appreciate how the green movement has come to assume the shape it had at the beginning of the 1990s. *3* A book written even a few years ago (for example the excellent Pye-Smith and Rose 1984) would have presented pressure groups struggling to create public concern about a social problem. *4* Straightforwardly campaigning books would have exhorted their readers to take the issues seriously (Porritt 1984). *5* Now, with green issues high on the political and public agendas, it might be tempting to argue simply that the objective problem has finally forced itself into the public consciousness. *6* The social problems perspective prevent us from falling into that way of rewriting history; it leads us to ask how it is that envi-

ronmental issues have come to be seen as an objective social problem. 7 It also encourages us to examine processes internal to the green movement. 8 This perspective leads us to inquire how certain problems have come to the fore within the overall green case, how others have suffered relative neglect and why some organizations have prospered. 9 It also indicates some of the things which can be anticipated from the green movement. (Yearley 1992, 52)

Occasionally, to encode some of the elements of the broadest layer of the Theme as (U-)themes and simultaneously not to lose track of the prominent thematic Discourse Subject (DS),³ the authors may decide to employ also what we call submerged thematic progressions. In example (2), taken from a monograph, the author initially foregrounds⁴ the main DS, namely *Jung*. This is achieved, among other things, by establishing an identity chain interlacing mostly personal pronouns. In order to attain a greater interactiveness of this text, to disrupt a stylistic stereotype, etc., and simultaneously not to lose sight of the hitherto foregrounded DS, the author encodes as a theme an element of the broadest layer of the Textual Theme (namely *we*). What is more, by employing the same ele-

3 »As discourse subject (DS) I treat anything - be it an object, a group or class of them, a quality, state, process, action, circumstance, event, episode, and the like - that the speaker has in mind when applying a nominating (or deictic) unit in the process of text production in order to introduce/present/mention/re-introduce/recall something.« (Danes 1989, 24)

4 >Foregrounding< will be understood here essentially in line with the Prague linguistic tradition, particularly with Mukarovský (1932 [2000]). Mukarovský (1932 [2000], 226-227) argues that the purpose of foregrounding is »to attract the reader's (listener's) attention more closely to the subject matter expressed by the foregrounded means of expression.« In his view, »foregrounding is the opposite of automatization, that is, the deautomatization of an act; the more an act is automatized, the less it is consciously executed; the more it is foregrounded, the more conscious does it become«. (In the present study, however, rather than with >auto-matization<, we have contrasted the term with backgroundings)

Apart from its intentionality and its contrast with the background, Mukarovský stresses »the consistency and systematic character of foregrounding« (1932 [2000], 227). Moreover, foregrounding also implies choice, as »a complete foregrounding of all the components is impossible« (227). Furthermore, foregrounding is related to hierarchy. »The component highest in the hierarchy becomes the dominant. All other components, foregrounded or not, as well as their interrelationships, are evaluated from the standpoint of the dominant. The dominant is that component of the work which sets in motion, and gives direction to, the relationships of all other components« (227).

The opposition foregrounding / backgrounding (automatization) has gained wide currency in linguistics and has been employed with varying interpretations in diverse contexts. It seems worthwhile to recall also Leech and Short (1981,48) who distinguish between qualitative and quantitative foregrounding. Among others they maintain that »the quantitative foregrounding [...] (adapted by R.P.) of a prominent pattern of choices within the code itself shades into the qualitative foregrounding [...] (adapted by R.P) which changes the code itself« (ibid., 139).

ment in several succeeding utterances (3-5), the author establishes an additional identity chain. Interestingly, this decision is matched by syntactic parallelism in utterances 3-5. However, the original identity chain pursued initially is not discontinued this way, but rather temporarily submerged (only to resurface again in U-thematic functions later in the text).

- (2) 1 He took precisely the same approach to the belief systems of the East. 2 Here, too, he attempted to set on one side all metaphysical claims, treating them with agnostic indifference, and concentrating his attention on their psychological nature and significance. 3 We saw earlier that in dealing with the concept of karma, for example, he was careful to avoid any presumption concerning the doctrine of rebirth, treating it instead as an expression of the collective unconscious, a notion for which he claimed nothing but empiricist credentials. 4 We saw too how, in his Commentary on The Tibetan Book of the Dead, he transformed the experiences of the dead soul in its passage from death to rebirth into psychological terms, and prefaced his introduction to The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation with the disclaimer that »Psychology [...] . treats all metaphysical claims and assertions as mental phenomena and regards them as statements about the mind and its structure« (Cwll.760). 5 And we saw in his discussion of the I Ching that he took a strictly agnostic attitude to its pronouncements, describing his approach as psychological phenomenology<, and insisting that »nothing >occult<« is to be inferred. 6 »My position in these matters is pragmatic.« (Cwll.1000) [...].(Clarke 1994, 150)

3.2. The Central Layer of the Theme

So far we have been discussing the lowest layer of the Theme. The central layer of the visualized pyramid is foregrounded against the background of the broader communicative framework. Simultaneously, since it is constituted within the communicative framework, it is also conditioned and constrained by the latter.

In this study we shall conceive of the central layer of the Textual Theme as a complex and hierarchized semantic (cognitive) structure, in monological texts selected by the author. Naturally, like the broadest layer, it may, but need not, be expressed explicitly. In the latter case it stays in the background, being only inferred.

Moreover, even when it is encoded explicitly, it is never expressed in its entirety. Rather, from the cognitive structure the author deliberately selects elements to be thematized (encoded as utterance themes). It is usually some of its most conspicuous, prototypical elements that suggest it.

Conversely, many entities are not manifested by explicit exponents. Nevertheless, since more gets communicated than is virtually worded, even elements which are solely implied are by no means devoid of significance.

Since the Theme appears to be the semantic starting point of the communication, it is crucial for its coherence. However, since it may not be expressed entirely, its perception tends to be imperfect. As shown for instance by Tárnyiková (2002, 56), coherence is always graded and never complete. Similarly, Bublitz and Lenk (1999, 155) argue that coherence is always only partial, although »participants operate on a generally shared default assumption of coherence« (Bublitz, Lenk 1999, 154), and to achieve a coherent reception of texts, they tend to supply the missing links on the basis of their activation of the relevant portion of world knowledge. That is exactly why the authors' strategies as to which elements to choose, how and when to encode them as themes are so essential and may induce greater or lower degrees of coherence. It should be noted that the types of the author's choices may follow from a number of factors, such as the disposition of the Thematic area, the author's intention, the length of the text, the text-type and genre, the intended recipient, etc., only to name at least some of them.

However, the author's selection of elements from the complex semantic (cognitive) structure (and their thematization) represents simultaneously his/her strategic decision, which >perspectives< the content in a particular way (perspective function). It betrays his/her particular >angle of vision< in its own right, or the strategic starting point, among others, with regard to the recipient, which may lead to the foregrounding of certain elements at the expense of others (prospective function).

Such a strategic decision may be detected both globally, as well as at any moment of dynamically conceived discourse. In this connection, we may recall the well-known »Why that now to me?« by Sacks (cited in Coulthard 1977, 76).

Through these choices, the hearer is as if guided throughout the text in a particular way (see also Bublitz, Lenk 1999, 158). Furthermore, the choices (and their sequential arrangement) may be viewed as signals of the author's cooperativeness. Indeed, if they are felicitous, the reader will be able to recall the relevant cognitive structure. As Bublitz and Lenk (1997, 171) argue, »frames are normally activated by keywords«.

It should be noted that the assumption of cooperativeness holds even for monological texts. In this connection we may also recall Linell (1998, 267) who argues that given the collaborative framework, the author of monological texts »produces her topics and arguments with some sensitivity as to how a potential responder, a >virtual addressee^ may react«.

Despite these choices, the central layer of the Theme is nevertheless rather comprehensive. However, unambiguous delineation of this comprehensive se-

mantic (cognitive) structure is virtually impossible. Rather, we may conceive of it as a somewhat diffuse and complicated structure, involving a whole range of DSs.

From this it also follows that though more specific, and comparably more clearly delineated, this layer of the Theme is not homogeneous at all. Rather, we may assume that there are more essential (prototypical) and less essential (marginal) elements or discourse subjects composing it.

The degree of centrality, however, is a property ascribed to various DSs ultimately by the author. In other words, some items of the layer are brought intentionally into greater prominence than others.

In examples (3) and (4), numerous elements of the central layer are encoded as U-themes. These, however, are occasionally interspersed with elements of the broadest layer.

- (3) 1 First The Independent goes tabloid, now the Times follows suit, though both papers are still available in broadsheet form. 2 The Daily Telegraph and the Guardian may not far be behind. 3 What is behind this revolution? 4 There has been a decline in quality newspaper sales over the past couple of years, and publishers have increasingly felt that some sort of shake-up was necessary to revive the market. 5 The Independent was in a particular trough, with sales at less than half the level of the early Nineties, and _____ needed to do something dramatic. 6 It has certainly succeeded. 7 Overall sales have gone up, and in some areas the paper's tabloid version is out-selling the broadsheet one. 8 The Times evidently felt it was in danger of missing out. 9 On Wednesday a tabloid edition was introduced in the Greater London area. (Spectator, 29/11/2003)
- (4) 1 The supervision of the court and matters arising before and after trial rests with the Clerk to the Justices, who must normally be a solicitor or barrister of at least five years' standing. 2 The Clerk, or a court clerk, is also available in court to give advice to the justices on a point of law, but he must not influence their decision. 3 The justices decide questions of fact without the assistance of a jury and also decide upon the appropriate sentence. 4 The accused person may be represented in court by either a barrister or a solicitor. (Marsh and Soulsby 1987, 30)

Further, an affinity should be pointed out between certain text-types or genres on the one hand, and typical configurations of the elements in the thematic (cognitive) structure on the other. For example, in narrative fiction the traditional major and very complex thematic constituents include the characters, the

plot and the setting. (It is perhaps needless to add that in verbal art, given its second-order semiosis, each thematic constituent becomes a special, second-order sign; for further, see, e.g., Cervenka 1992, Hasan 1985.)

Conversely, from the reader's point of view, these affinities presumably explain the expectation-creating role of Themes. As Calfree and Curley (1984,174) explain, a skillful reader employs schemata - »mental frameworks acquired through experience and instruction«.

Furthermore, of the conventionalized configurations of constituents in the thematic organization, in certain text types/genres some such constituents tend to be prototypically foregrounded, whereas others usually stay in the background. Moreover, foregrounding is a dynamic property, and therefore some constituents may be temporarily foregrounded only to yield to others.

3.3. The Narrowest Layer of the Theme

We have seen above that the author always selects to encode as U-themes various elements both from the broadest layer of Theme (communicative framework) and from the central layer (cognitive structure). However, there are cases when s/he remains rather focussed in his/her choices, and as a result, this consistency in choices assigns the item selected (and enacted as the main Thematic DS) extra prominence. Therefore, in the narrowest sense the content aspect of the Theme may be identified with some of the most salient elements of the Theme-and-content structure, or with its dominant entity, e. g., the subject of scrutiny in a scientific monograph or a protagonist in an autobiographical novel (though itself a second-order sign, see above). Such a foregrounded DS, constituting the top layer in the visualized pyramid, is referred to in Brown and Yule (1983,137) as >topic entity<, in van Dijk (1981,187) as >major discourse referent< or in Tomlin et al. (1997, 89) as >central referent<.

However, Brown and Yule (1983,138) argue that when delimiting the topic of an obituary, »one would hardly want to say that >the topic< of an obituary was >the man< referred to by the name at the top of the entry, except in speaking in some kind of shorthand. There are many aspects of >the man, physical characteristics for instance, which would hardly be considered to be appropriate aspects for inclusion in an obituary. The >topic< of an obituary might be more adequately characterized in some such terms as >an appreciation of the noteworthy events and deeds in the life of X<.« Still, it appears that the depiction of noteworthy events and deeds in the life of people constitutes some of the defining features of obituaries. Indeed, these do form part of the stock of shared knowledge, may be activated, among other things by the graphical layout and presumably also by the space they are regularly assigned in newspapers, etc. In other words, these

features are presupposed, expected, as they form part of our culture. In our understanding, then, they do form an integral part of the Theme, though by no means part of its narrowest layer. Against the background of the broader layers, however, there arises as a singular, unique feature, the foregrounded or dominant DS.

Therefore, it seems that the above economical depiction of Theme is, after all, possible when numerous parameters of the context of situation are activated to such an extent that the writer may afford such >shorthand<. For example, a writer of an obituary discusses the Theme with another specialist in the field. Similarly, when a hot scandal is the subject of discussion, the mere mention of the politician's name presumably drags behind it a whole network of connotations and activates such a huge amount of world knowledge that the shorthand is not only feasible, but, presumably, also natural.

It should be noted, however, that even if a particular discourse subject remains the centre of attention throughout the discourse (especially through rather principled choices), it is always foregrounded against the respective background (i.e., the broadest and the central layers), the dominant entity of which it is taken to represent, whatever the degree of such foregrounding. Even if the background remains only implied, cooperative participants in the communication act will activate the portions of world knowledge structures (frames, schemata, scenarios, etc.), pertaining to the dominant DS and relevant to it.

Examples (5) and (6) illustrate paragraphs in which the utterance themes foreground a single DS. Although the narrowest layer is not the only one featured, it is the most dominant one.

- (5) / The mink (bold in the original, R.P.) was widely introduced for fur in 1929 and ___ immediately escaped to colonize >wetlands< extensively but irregularly throughout Britain and north-eastern Ireland. 2 It is a serious predator of poultry, game-birds and fisheries and may locally exterminate ducks and waders. 3 Despite all counter-measures it is probably by now permanently established. (Norwich 1991, 32)
- (6) / The building's fantastical interiors were born of a marriage between art and commerce; ___ crafted to excite the imagination, to invoke the muse and to help spin a few bucks. 2 They surround audiences with sweeping vistas, half-naked gods, goddesses, fauns and satyrs - a pantheon to charm theatregoers into forgiving the old patch of damp or peeling paintwork. (The Times, 5/1/2002)

4. Conclusion

Having reached the top layer, we may now recapitulate. To conclude, in the present treatment the content aspect of the Theme involves at least three hierarchized layers arranged to resemble a kind of a pyramid. The lowest and broadest layer, which is simultaneously the most diffuse of all, follows from the overall communicative framework. It corresponds to all the given elements of the speech event. The central layer embraces a number of hierarchized, closely interrelated and regularly co-occurring elements arranged as a cognitive structure, or a content frame. The third, the most restricted one of all, though also potentially available (at least) in (some) texts, embodies some of its most conspicuous or foregrounded elements, or else, its dominant DSs.

It seems that all texts apart from athematic ones exhibit at least the first two layers of Theme. Athematic ones appear to display only the broadest layer. The centrality of the narrower (content frame) layer, presumably leads Downing and Locke (1992, 224) to the delimitation of what they call >Superordinate Topics< as cognitive schemata. Martin and Rose (2003, 181) identify them as >frames of references. The representation of this layer, however, may be backgrounded, whenever the choices from among its constituents are principled to such an extent that they lead to the unequivocal foregrounding of some of the conspicuous or dominant Thematic DS(s).

Presumably, the aforementioned tiers, among other things, suggest which elements constituting the complex Theme are typically foregrounded and which are not. It seems that each tier as such is incorporated in the immediately succeeding broader counterpart as its somewhat foregrounded constituent.

These layers in the delimitation of the Theme notwithstanding, we tend to think of the Theme as a complex cognitive entity which unites rather than separates, has an integrative force, lends sense to the selection and arrangement of hierarchically lower Themes, or even subsidiary Themes, motivating them. Thus, in this study, the Theme is seen as the most static, unifying element embodying the subject matter treated, or as what has been subjected to some description, analysis, scrutiny, narrations etc.

It should be remarked at this point that some Themes are more predisposed to somewhat narrow rendering (foregrounding the central motif, etc.), whereas others are more prone to connote broader treatments.

Despite that, even if largely the same Thematic area is selected on different occasions, texts/discourses still tend to differ, among other things, in what they feature at all, what they choose to presuppose, what they foreground, and on what they establish their continuity. In other words, the same Thematic area may be instantiated and >perspectived< in radically differing ways.

At this point it is vital to recall again the concept of openness of texts (van

Peer). It is impossible and indeed undesirable to identify explicitly all the elements of the Thematic area. In authentic texts, it is usually only some conspicuous features that are foregrounded. In our understanding the outcome of the choices constitute presumably what Firbas (1995) calls the >thematic layer< of the paragraph (text).

These considerations have a bearing on build-up patterns in texts, as paragraphs and various higher text units differ considerably among other things in the type of layers of the Theme they feature in their utterance themes. When dealing with paragraphs, paragraph groups or even larger units of texts, it appears significant to explore whether solely elements of a single layer of the Theme are thematized or not, and which layer(s) they come from. If entities of more layers are encoded as utterance themes, it is interesting to investigate which layer is dominant and which is featured only marginally. Just as important is to discover what the mutual proportions of elements drawn from different layers are like, and conversely, which layers are only implied and why. Indeed, paragraphs foregrounding different layers appear to follow different build-up patterns.

Abbreviations and Symbols:

DS - Discourse Subject
FSP - Functional Sentence Perspective
R.P. - Renata Pipalova
Theme - Textual Theme
theme - theme in the theory of FSP
U-theme - utterance theme

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