Ahm, ehm, you call it theme? ...  
A thematic approach to spoken English*  

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Abstract  
This paper focuses on the adequacy of Multiple Themes, as described in Halliday (1985), to spoken English. Halliday’s theory is contrasted with the results of some experiments in the psycholinguistic domain which prove the importance of hesitations in the organisation of the message. Based upon real data, the article argues the need to improve and expand the original description of these elements in order to account satisfactorily for the problems that spoken data pose for this kind of analysis.

1. Introduction  
In recent years we have witnessed a great number of works trying to establish the limits of the notion of theme within the Systemic Functional framework (Fries, 1990; Ventola, 1991; Berry, 1992, 1993), together with its value in the description of the structural organization of a text. The concept of theme was first used by Matthessius (1939; in Firbas, 1964: 268) with the following statement:

“The theme is that which is known or at least obvious in the given situation, and from which the speaker proceeds.”

This seminal definition was the origin of much of the work done in the field by the Prague School Linguists, especially Firbas (1964), and Daneš (1974), who introduced the notion of ‘Thematic Progression’ in a text.

Halliday, within the Systemic Functional tradition, defines theme in the following way:

* I would like to thank Profs. A. Downing and R. Whittaker for their helpful comments on the final revision.
"[Theme is the] . . . element which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that with which the clause is concerned." (Halliday, 1985: 38)

It is important to mention in passing that this definition, as well as Mathesius', is somewhat ambivalent, since there is a coincidence of structural and notional values: theme is defined as the point of departure, i.e. first position (structural value), and "that with which the clause is concerned" (notional value). In the present article, the structural approach is adopted (for further discussion on this problem see Fries, 1983).

Halliday (1985) explains how the theme of a clause, i.e., the first element in the clause, may be realized by more than one word in what he defines as 'Multiple Themes'. This article investigates Halliday’s description of Multiple Themes and their adequacy in dealing with spoken data. Specifically, it will be concerned with the analysis of Pauses and the role of these elements in the thematic analysis of spoken discourse, not only as floor-taking devices, but also as content-bearing elements. Thus, the present study will try to account for the interpretation of this phenomenon from the systemic functional perspective by expanding the definition of Multiple Themes given in Halliday (1985).

2. Multiple Themes, the state of art

Halliday’s notion of Multiple Themes is grounded in the profusion of elements which may appear in the first position of a clause. The taxonomy of these elements follows the underlying assumption that the clause is the simultaneous result of three different processes in human communication: the transmission of experience (Ideational Function), the interactive exchange (Interpersonal Function), and the transmission of the message itself (Textual Function).

The Ideational Function realizes the processes and participants in a speech event, the Interpersonal Function realizes the transmission of information and the attitude of the speaker towards the addressee as it is encoded in the language, and the Textual Function permits the efficient structural distribution of the words that serve as content-bearing elements of the message. The category of theme pertains to the Textual Function and is supplemented by that of Rheme, i.e., the remaining part of the clause.

Halliday (1985), in a fundamental observation, explains how it is possible to identify the functions that govern linguistic communication, i.e. textual, ideational and interpersonal, within the thematic structure, e.g.

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c}
\text{Textual} & \text{Interpersonal} & \text{Topical} & \text{Rheme} \\
\text{Theme} & & & \\
\end{array}
\]

(Halliday, 1985: 55)

This category of Multiple Themes can be realized, according to Halliday (1985), by the following elements:
The Textual element, which can be divided into the following subcategories:
1. Continuative Themes: they signal that a new move is beginning, e.g. yes, no, oh, now, well ...
2. Structural Themes: realized by the following categories:
   2.1. Conjunctions: – coordinating and, or, either, but ...
   – subordinating when, while
   2.2. Relatives: – definite: which, who, whose, that
   – indefinite: whatever, whichever
3. Conjunctive Themes: realized by Conjunctive Adjuncts, such as: that is, in other words, for instance ...

The Interpersonal element. In this category the following elements may appear:
1. Modal Theme: realized by adjuncts such as: probably, possibly, perhaps ...
2. The Finite Verb in polar questions.
3. A Vocative element.

The Ideational element, or Topical Theme, can be realized by a process (a verb), a participant in a process (subject, object, complement), or a circumstance in a process (time, place, manner, etc. ...).

The first two thematic functions, textual and interpersonal, may be reversed. In contrast, the Topical Theme marks the end of the thematic structure and is always obligatory, since it carries the ideational component which according to Halliday (1985: 54) “... corresponds fairly well to the element identified as ‘topic’ in topic–comment analysis”.

The notion of ‘topic’ poses many problems, because it can be understood in two ways: as a notion belonging to the field of discourse, i.e. a description of what a text is about (thus, e.g., Brown and Yule, 1983); and, following Hockett (1958), it can also be understood as the ‘initial constituent of a clause’, i.e. what the speaker announces about something which will be immediately referred to, in what is known as the topic–comment structure. This conflation of Topical Theme as the starting point, and as the carrier of the topic of the message from the Hallidayan perspective, has been rejected by Downing (1990, 1991). This author has shown that both functions may coincide in some cases, but not always, specifically with initial (thematic) Adjuncts. This dissociation is especially interesting in spoken language, where several topic formulations can be ascribed to the same coherent piece of discourse (Brown and Yule, 1983).

Thus, there is a distinction within the clause frame between the following categories: Theme–Rheme (structural domain), Given–New (information distribution domain), Topic–Comment (discoursal domain).
3. A new approach to the study of theme in spoken English

3.1. Introduction

Halliday’s theory of theme is useful when applied to written texts, because this kind of language is usually highly controlled by the addressee and, therefore, tends to conform to norms of grammar and style. However, the analysis of spoken data presents many problems for the analyst, both from the interactional point of view, since we find continuous interruptions and negotiations to keep the floor, and from the syntactic point of view, because it is common to find phenomena such as repetition, repair, pauses etc., which may blur the syntactic organization of the clause.

From the theoretical perspective, the first difficulty lies in the fact that Halliday presents the clause as the basic unit of analysis for all kinds of discourse in the unmarked situation. In my opinion, this is correct for written English, since there are well-established conventions to mark clause boundaries in written texts. However, this analysis is more difficult in the spoken language because the boundaries separating different units are not very clear.

This problem led Goldman-Eisler (1972) to research the basic syntactic unit that helped speakers to transfer their thoughts into connected speech, both in spontaneous discourse as well as in reading aloud prepared texts. In her experiments, she found out that the only syntactic unit which showed a distinct pattern of strong cohesion in spontaneous unprepared speech was the sentence (the clause complex in the Hallidayan terminology). Her results prove that speakers organize their messages in cohesive sentence units with a hierarchical structure which fits into the sentence frame.

With regard to the Clause, Goldman-Eisler discovered that, in opposition to written language, this element was not such a clear entity in the analysis of connected speech. The reason for this difference was that there is always more fluency in the spoken transition between clauses than in the transition between sentences. Her statistics showed that 77.9% of the sentences in spontaneous speech were divided by pauses of longer than 0.50 seconds, whereas 66.3% of the clauses were divided by pauses of less than 0.50 seconds. These figures were validated statistically by a $t$-test which showed a significance of $p$ beyond 0.0001.

In view of these problems, Boomer (1965) suggested a new encoding and decoding entity for spoken discourse called the ‘Phonemic Clause’. This unit is defined by Trager and Smith (1951, in Boomer, 1965: 149) as a “phonologically marked macrosegment which contains one and only one primary stress and ends in a terminal juncture”. This theory is expanded in Dittmann and Llewellyn (1967, 1969), where it is shown how Phonemic Clauses relate with body movement, in other words, it is proved how the internal organization of language is closely related to kinesics.

Halliday (1967) makes a similar suggestion in his attempt to reconcile the concepts of the independent clause and the Tone Group, stating that both categories are coextensive in the unmarked case. Other scholars, like Brown and Yule (1983), disagree with this position and suggest that the Tone Group is basically coextensive with the Phrase. A middle-way approach is that held by Quirk et al. (1962), who sup-
port the idea that the Tone Group is coextensive with what they call 'clause-sequence', which can be realized by any grammatical category as long as it is syntactically and semantically relevant.

With regard to the notion of Thematic Structure and spoken discourse, the only reference with regard to the possible analysis of oral texts is the following, due to Halliday:

"... if a clause is structured as two information units (realised as two tone groups), the boundary between the two 'nearly always' coincides with that between Theme and Rheme. This is an important feature of discourse in English and constitutes one of the strong pieces of evidence for construing the Theme in this particular way." (Halliday, 1985: 5b; inverted commas mine, JRT)

3.2. Problems in the analysis of spoken data

One of the immediate features that can be noticed in the analysis of spoken texts is the great number of Pauses, especially in spontaneous speech. Pauses, or Hesitations as they are also referred to, can be described as periods of time in a conversation in which the average participant might feel that someone should be speaking (Mishler and Waxler, 1970). In order to achieve a classification of this phenomenon, I will make a division between Filled Pauses (FP), i.e., those in which the speech flow is interrupted by some vocal articulation (Cook, 1971); and Unfilled Pauses (UP), i.e., those which are realized by silence.

Many studies have shown the psychological importance of Pauses both in the elaboration of speech, for example Boomer (1965), Goldman-Eisler (1958-1961), Henderson (1974), Maclay and Oswood (1959), and Natale et al. (1979), as well as in the organization of the turn-taking system. These are what I respectively call the 'psycho-physiological' and the 'discourse-grammatical' function of Pauses (Romero Trillo, 1992b).

My hypothesis is that both Filled and Unfilled Pauses play a part in the thematic structure of the message and should be included in the inventory of elements realizing the textual function of the theme-rheme structure, since they are functionally parallel to other elements which appear in the flow of speech such as: "yes, no, well, oh, now", etc. Furthermore, I suggest that Pauses do not only realize the Continuative function in the structure of Multiple Themes, but, due to their psycholinguistic relevance in the production of speech, and due to their role in the exchange of turns in a conversation, these elements may fulfill the three above mentioned functions: textual function, as structural elements; interpersonal function, as devices to give and take the floor; and ideational function, as content-bearing elements.

If the Theme is defined as "the element which serves as the point of departure of the message" (Halliday, 1985: 38) and proves to be the psychological 'crutch' on which the speaker relies in order to continue his or her discourse (see for example Whittaker, 1991), then Pauses do fulfill this role, since their appearance always coincides with the entropy for syntactic and semantic accuracy of the forthcoming discourse in relationship with the preceding one (Boomer, 1965; Henderson, 1974).

This new interpretation of the phenomenon implies the choice of a new unit of analysis in the study of spoken discourse. Systemic Functional Grammar considers
the Clause the basic unit, but I suggest that the Phonemic Clause be selected for the study of spoken language. The choice of this unit, as has been described above, respects the systemic tradition with regard to the role of the Tonic as the element that carries the most relevant load of information in any particular linguistic chunk, and of the Tone Group, as the basic semantic unit in speech (Halliday, 1967; 1970).

An essential feature of Pauses is that even though they may appear anywhere in the syntactic clause, they often occur in the beginning of Phonemic Clauses, especially in slot number 2, i.e. after the first word of the utterance (Boomer, 1965). This frequent initial position indicates that they certainly have a definite role in the organization of the forthcoming message.

4. Background theory to the analysis of the text

Since the phenomenon of Pausing is very complex, this article will concentrate on the appearance of Filled Pauses in thematic position, in other words, taking the Phonemic Clause as the unit of analysis, I will try to account for the thematic relevance that Filled Pauses may have in the analysis of a spoken text.

The data of my analysis is the transcription of the text S.1.1 belonging to Svartvik and Quirk’s (1980) corpus of English conversation, with a total of 1211 phonemic clauses. This transcription chooses the Tone Unit (the Phonemic Clause in the present terminology) as the basic division of the text, therefore each number represents one independent Phonemic Clause.

The elements under analysis are the following: [ə], [əː], [əːm], [əh], [əm], and [aː]. (In the transcriptions below the Tonic of the Phonemic Clause is marked by capitals, and the element under study will appear in bold.)

In the categorization of the elements that may function as Multiple Themes, Halliday makes no reference whatsoever to the phenomenon of Pausing. It seems to me that Continuatives, a category within the Textual Theme, are the elements that bear most similarity with Pauses:

"Textual meaning is relevance to the context: both the preceding (and following) text, and the context of situation. The textual function of the clause is that of constructing a message ... CONTINUATIVES are a small set of items such as yes, no, well, oh, now, which signal that a new move is beginning." (Halliday, 1985: 53–54)

In the classification I have adopted, Pauses can have the following functions in thematic position.

Interpersonal function: the Filled Pause indicates that a new move in the conversation is taking place, either of the present or of a new speaker.

A. (21) AH (22) [əː] you mean that [dhi dhi] the PAPERS ARE (23) more or less set ad
   HOMINEM (24) ARE they
B. (25) [əh] — they SHOULDN’T BE

In this example, the Filled Pause shows that speaker B has taken up the turn. It is interesting to notice that in the Phonemic Clause ‘25’, the FP is followed by silence,
in which the speaker is probably searching for the appropriate response to A’s conflictive statement.

The Interpersonal function of FP’s can also be seen when we find exchange of turns between different speakers who only utter Filled Pauses to indicate that they are receptive to new information (Romero Trillo, in progress).

**Textual function:** when the Filled Pause is used as the starting point of the following message. In other words, the FP continues a previously started turn and therefore does not have an interpersonal effect, but is merely a signal of the beginning of a new Phonemic Clause.

A. (215) YEAH - (216) [ə:] I MUST say (218) this this is AWFULLY KIND (219) because ...
B. (220) well I’ll I’ll get them through ... QUICKLY

I want to emphasize that the Interpersonal and the Textual functions of FP’s in thematic position are closely related. Furthermore, I would say that all FP’s in the Interpersonal Function also realize the Textual function because apart from indicating the beginning of a new turn, they also help to organize the message from the structural point of view. However, the opposite does not seem to be true, because we may find Filled Pauses which do not help to obtain the floor, and just realize the Textual Function, as for example in a series of Multiple themes, or inside a turn, for example:

B. (828) well NOW you SEE (829) these people for YEARS (830) [a:] as a matter of fact [ə] I rather burst OUT

**Ideational function:** in this function, the Filled Pause signals by means of a phoric relation, typically anaphora, an element which is mentioned somewhere else. In these situations, the speaker makes use of the FP to resume his/her previous words so as to continue with the same syntactic and semantic organization:

A. (791) [ə] the other the other the other MAN (792) [ə:m] who [rou?] 3 to 4 syllables I THOUGHT.

This analysis of FP’s as Ideational elements which refer anaphorically to other elements of the previous discourse seems to me very important because it explains why many FP’s appear in the middle of syntactic clauses, but nearly always at the beginning of Phonemic Clauses. The reason, as was explained above, is that the Phonemic Clause carries the load of information relevant to that particular prosodic and syntactic unit, and therefore, the Ideational (Topical) theme of that particular piece of talk is the element on which the speaker supports his/her following words.

When the Ideational theme of a Phonemic Clause is not a Continuative element, the organization is parallel to that of written texts. The following example shows how the themes of the phonemic clauses which do not belong to the class of Continuatives, serve as starting points of the following words, and contribute to perfect cohesion with the preceding elements.
A. (74) \( [\sigma:] \) he should have had his dissertation \( \text{IN} \) (75) \textbf{at} the beginning of \textbf{MAY} (76) \textbf{but} the damn thing hasn’t \textit{COME}.

However, when a Filled Pause realizes the theme, it has to be considered as a meaning-carrying particle which conveys semantic information in terms of structure and content. Further examples of this phenomenon are the following:

(39) ... some of our \textbf{PEOPLE} (40) who are \textbf{DOING} \textbf{LEs} — (41) \( [\sigma:m] \) have to consider which \textbf{PAPER} to \textbf{DO}.

(143) I’ve got a I’ve got about a \textbf{WEEK} (144) of fairly hard \textbf{WORK} (145) \( [\sigma] \) after the fourth of \textbf{JULY}.

In these examples, we see how the FP’s substitute for elements which have been mentioned earlier; therefore, they serve as starting points to continue the message, while maintaining the same syntactic and semantic structure.

Another important fact with regard to Halliday’s statements about spoken discourse and thematic structure is the following: “if a clause is organized into two information units, the boundary between the two is overwhelmingly likely to coincide with the junction of Theme and Rheme” (Halliday, 1985: 40). However, in the present analysis we can see how the Tone Group boundaries do not appear between the theme and rhyme of the written clause; it seems, rather, that their appearance has to do with the psycholinguistic, and social difficulty of finding the appropriate words in a given situation. This is why the Phonemic Clause is taken as the unit of analysis for spoken texts.

5. Analysis of the text

In this part of the article, I will illustrate my hypothesis with some examples taken from the above mentioned corpus. I have decided to treat Textual and Interpersonal Themes jointly, because trying to differentiate both functions from a written transcription is a difficult task, since there is no record of the gestural cues that the speakers may have used and which could stand for the interpersonal function of the thematic structure.

5.1. Examples of filled pauses as textual and interpersonal themes

In this section, some examples of realizations of Filled Pauses as Textual-Interpersonal Themes are presented. The transcription conventions are as in the original work by Svartvik and Quirk (1980), although some of the symbols have been simplified if irrelevant for the analysis. The numbers indicate the beginning of the Phonemic Clause, the symbols in bold indicate FP realizations under study, the strokes and equal signs represent the pitch movement of the tonic element. When there is a combination of these intonation symbols in a single Phonemic Clause, we have a Compound Tone Group (Halliday, 1967) with a primary and a secondary tonic.

[ə]

30 A *"y/eah#* / 31 B *("give him one on))*/ 33 B [[[ə] ^y/eah# 34 I actually ^got it for y/ou#))

61 A *"y/ears !I see* . 62 ^y-es# . 63 ^y-es# - 64 [ə:m] . ^one \other thing S/am# - 65 [ə:m] - ^DE!\aney# - 66 a Ca^n/adian# 67 *(who) ^graduated* 68 B "*[[[ə] ^wh/ere did you put those things# 69 ^just one)). ^let me put this in my b\ag# 70 ((or)) I'll ((^walk a:w\ay with_out

132 B *[m]^h\yn]?* / 131 A ar:\ive# 133 [ə] I ^think that we :mustn't worry too :much 133 a:b\out th/is# 134 ^we we ^make it !perfectly clear that :papers must /134 be in on the :first of :M/vay# *- 135 [ə:m]

136 B *[m]^h\yn]?* / 135 A . [?ə ?a:] ^and [ə] I !don't want to [ə:] ^you kn/ow#

[ə:]

21 A ^\ah# - 22 [ə:] you ^mean that [dhi dhi] {the !p\apers} ^"are# 23 ^more or less :set ad !\hominem# 24 ^are _they# -

73 B ^[mh/m]?* / 74 A [ə:] he ^should have had his . dissertation ^\in# 75 A ((at the)) be\ginning of M/vay# . 76((but)) the ^damn thing ((hasn't)) c\ome# - 77 [ə:] I ^id get a !\p\ostcard fr/om him#

84 A ^if he !puts it into the :diplomatic b\ag# 85 ^as [ə:m] - !\hat's his _name# . 86 Mickey ^\y\ohn _did# . 87 then ((it's)) not so b\ad# - 88 ^but [ə:] !how are y\ou going to be pl/aced# 89 ^for "(((!h\aving#))")

[ə:h]

21 A ^\ah# - 22 [ə:] you ^mean that [dhi dhi] {the !p\apers} ^"are#/23 ^more or less :set ad !\hominem# 24 ^are _they# -

25 B [ə:h] - - they ^sh/ouldn't b/e# - 26 ^but [ə:h] - I ^mean ^/one # 27 ^sets - - ^one _ques-tion# 28 ^now I ^mean !this fellow's doing ((the)) language / of:\advertising# "*" 29((so ^very)) w\ell#

318 A ^\m]?# - 319 is the ^readership going thr = ough# 320 ^m/eanwhile#

321 [ə:h] ^w\ell# 322 at the ^moment [ə] it's ^gone through :c\ouncil# 323 I don't know ^how it's going through ((at)) the 323 resid\entary l/evel# 324 ^Joe has [go] .g/ot it of _course# 325 and *.^ and ^D\ell# 326 ((and)) pre\sumably those are [dhi] two people

[a:m]

61 A *"yes !I see* . 62 ^y-es# - 64 [ə:m] . ^one \other thing S/am# 65 [ə:m] - ^De!\aney# - 66 a Ca^n/adian# 67 *(who) ^graduated*

71 [ə:m] - - De\laney's the Ca:n/adian . st/udent {re\m/ember#)}# 72 last YEAR
In all these examples, it can be seen how the speaker chooses to start the turn by making use of an FP, either as a signal for taking the floor, or as a means to look for words and structures which may be more appropriate in the exchange, especially in controversial cases.

5.2. Examples of Filled Pauses as Topical Themes

In this section, all the instances of Filled Pauses as Topical Themes are presented. Transcription conventions remain as above. It is important to highlight, as was mentioned above, that when a syntactic clause is uttered in two or more phonemic clauses, the division seldom coincides with the theme–rheme structure in the strict Hallidayan perspective. Furthermore, as was mentioned above, these Phonemic Clauses may consist of either a simple or a compound Tone Group (Halliday, 1967, 1970), here represented by strokes and equal signs marking the pitch direction. For this reason, it is possible to find combinations of several phonemic clauses having compound Tone Groups, all of them within a syntactic clause range, and having an independent theme–rheme organisation.

For example, in the following extract there is a sentence starting in the middle of the phonemic clause 109, after an FP, and ending in the phonemic clause 112:
In the present section, I will bracket the elements being substituted by the FP, in order to show how these elements make it possible to continue the structural and semantic organisation of the previous Phonemic Clause. Another important point to take into account is that, in most cases, the elements which are substituted by the FP's receive the Tonic stress of their Tone Group, represented by the symbols: '/', '\', '=' ', and their combinations. This means that the FP's verbalize the elements that have carried the highest degree of information in the preceding Phonemic Clause.

[\[a\]]

135 ['a] [a] I don't want to [\[a\] you know# 137 ^run ourselves out of an external examiner# 138 by [\[your saying# 139 [\[a\] oh to [\[hell with !th=isl (^[\[your saying#

143 I've got a. I've got about a week# 144 of ^fairly hard work# 145 [\[a\] after the fourth of July#.

(^[\[fairly hard work#)

509 you take out one of these tablets# 510 and you place the tablet# 511 [\[a\] be\ between your knees# (the tablet#)

748 ^this is^ ^this is one of the things that - [\[a\] one of the ^ many_things# 749 [\[a\] in English structure# (^"many_things#)

[\[a\]]

52 ((and)) ^make sure that there's something# [\[a\] fairly closely related# (something#)

209 [\[a\] I shall get# [\[a\] scripts from ten assistant examiners# (get#)

228 ((was [s] that)) [\[a\] our external exam=aminaer# 229 ^as well as our:s/elves of course# ^/ 230 [\[a\] would be free during term=ime# ++

(external exam=aminer#)

1084 and ^Marsh told {^h=im#}# 1085 [\[a\] that so ^far as the school ((I ^mean you / s=ce#)) (told {^h=im#})
I think largely because it's difficult to get a fairly long say: three or four lines. ([to ^g\et#])

I have to consider which paper. (p\eople#)

We have to consider which paper. ([to ^g\et#])

I'm thinking of some of our people. (clears throat) ([who]) are doing LEs. - - 39 because you see ((I)) - some of our people arc doing LEs. - - /41 I have to consider which paper. to "do" (p\eople#)

One other thing I'm doing is. - 65 De! Nacey - - (S/am#)

Until the end of [dhi] summer. vacation 171 because the last meeting of ((the)) Council Commission is about the middle of July. - (be^c=ause#)

That Nightingale goes. - -

No next year - -

Sixty-six sixty-five - (goes++)

This is the only case in the data in which the FP does not substitute a tonic element, but it is interesting to point out that there is a Phonemic Clause, uttered by a different speaker, between the FP and the substituted word)

It seems to me that you've got two. - two things - -

Anybody who is looking for a niche to fit it a ready-made niche. (Dooking {Af=or#})

This analysis shows how FP's in thematic position of the phonemic clause refer anaphorically to an element which has been mentioned before. This circumstance contrasts with FP's inside Phonemic Clauses; these merely mark a hesitation in the speech flow without any reference to what has been said before. Therefore, FP's as topical themes tend to substitute for elements which were uttered immediately before and serve as starting points structurally and semantically, for continuing the message at the point where it was stopped. The reason for the frequent adjacency of FP's and the substituted elements is due to the fact that tonic elements tend to appear at the end of Phonemic Clauses (Tone Groups) in the unmarked case (Halliday, 1967, and 1970). However, the speaker is free to choose an alternative option (Romero Trillo, 1992a). For example in the following text we find a post-tonic element, "of course",
between the tonic and the FP, each of the latter belonging to separate Phonemic Clauses:

228 ((was [s] that)) [ə:m] our ex^ternal ex=aminer# 229 ^as well as our:s/elves of course# * * / 230 [ə:] ^would be !free during t^erm_time# +++
(ex^ternal ex=aminer#)

With regard to the frequency of the syntactic or grammatical categories that FP’s may substitute for when they function as Topical Themes, I could not find any significant pattern in my data. I would also like to point out that in my analysis, I did consider all the occurrences of FP’s which appeared in the text at the beginning of Phonemic Clauses, without, however, finding any counterexamples that might contradict the results that I have shown.

6. Conclusions

In the present article, I have tried to show that Filled Pauses are important elements in the organization of the message that should be included in the category of Continuative elements within the structure of Multiple Themes (Halliday, 1985).

Furthermore, this study has shown that Filled Pauses are not restricted to the textual function of the thematic structure, but they also realize the Ideational and Interpersonal functions in the structure of Multiple Themes. The fact that the theme is speaker-oriented, whereas information is hearer-oriented (Halliday, 1985) confirms that, according to the psycholinguistic research quoted above which described pauses as elements serving the speaker’s linguistic introspection, the role of FP’s in thematic position is important in the speaker’s elaboration of the message, from the textual, interpersonal, and ideational point of view.

Finally, taking the Phonemic Clause as the basic unit of analysis for spoken discourse is important, as it widens the scope of the description of spoken discourse, and reflects more accurately the reality of speech. It could be said that Pauses, which are elements that have been traditionally discarded in systemic linguistics, do have an important role in the creation of discoursal relevance and texture (Halliday, 1977), because they contribute to the internal cohesion of the message and also help to relate messages to the situational environment, for example in the turn-taking system, or by reflecting the indetermination of the speaker (interpersonal function). Furthermore, Pauses also relate the message to the co-textual environment, since they are intimately dependent on the surrounding discourse when they function as textual and ideational elements in the thematic structure. Paraphrasing Halliday, theme in spoken discourse might be defined as the “point of departure of the ‘Phonemic Clause’ as a message”.
Appendix

In this section the total figures of the results found in the present text are presented: the Filled Pause category, its thematic function, the number of instances found in the text, and finally, the Phonemic Clauses where these elements appear. The source of the text is Svartvik and Quirk (1980), section S.1.1.:

– Ideational 4: 139, 145, 511, 749.


\[a: h\] – Textual-Interpersonal 2: 25, 321.
– Ideational 0


– Ideational 0

\[a:m\] – Textual-Interpersonal 1: 273
– Ideational 0

\[a:\] – Textual-Interpersonal 1: 1086
– Ideational 0

Total figures: Textual-Interpersonal: 98
Ideational: 16

References


