5 Textual colligation and thematic progression in English

In the previous chapters, attention has been paid particularly to lexis and to how meaning arises from word combinations. In this chapter, lexical choice will be considered from the perspective of thematic choice in the English language. According to Hoey (2003:171), "lexical choice has a major effect on features such as cohesion, Theme choice and paragraph division" and corpus analysis may also help the linguist to identify the nature of lexical choices.

As repeatedly described in the previous chapters, items should not be considered in isolation and should not be used as a slot and filler model or open choice principle would suggest (see chapter 3). Items are not arbitrarily combined but attract each other. As already seen, these attractions may be of different nature: lexical, grammatical, semantic or pragmatic. All these attractions considered together help identify units of meaning which should be interpreted as the basic units of language. Hoey (2003:174) identifies a fifth type of attraction which he defines *textual colligation*. What he firmly believes in is that lexical items are *primed* for use in textual organization, that is to say every lexical item is expected to be used in a certain way in the organization of the structure of texts. This attraction constrains us, as writers or speakers, to use words just as the other types of attractions identified by Sinclair do (see chapter 3).

According to Hoey (1985) whenever we encounter a word we note subconsciously the words it occurs with (its collocations), the meanings with which it is associated (its semantic associations), the pragmatics it is associated with (its pragmatic associations), the grammatical patterns it is associated with (its colligations), whether it is typically cohesive (its textual collocations), whether the

word is associated with a particular textual relation (its textual semantic associations), if it likes to begin sentences or paragraphs (its textual colligations), the genre, style, or social situation it is used in.

Most of the associations Hoey talks about have already been discussed and explained in the preceding chapters. In this chapter, the relation between lexical items, their function and their position in a clause will be analysed.

However, first some terminology should be made clear. The terms *lexical chains* and *cohesive chains* will be frequently encountered. A lexical chain is a sequence of related words in a text. Lexical chains are used to create cohesion in a text, that is to say to create a text which is well-organized, semantically meaningful and works as a coherent unit. Cohesive devices will be described in the following sections. However, we will provide here a couple of examples in order to make the definition of lexical chain clear. A cohesive device may be the repetition of the same item, of one of its synonyms, the use of pronouns or of co-referential items. A text dealing with Barack Obama is likely to use as cohesive devices the pronoun *he*, and the co-referential items *The President* and *The White House*. All these items form a lexical chain which gives cohesion to the text.

Texts are (or should be) cohesive and all the parts of the text have to be organized in order to have a meaningful unit as a result. Text should also be linearly developed (see Hoey 2003:172). This means that each sentence of a text should be meaningfully linked both to the sentences that follow and precede. This aspect of textual organization is represented by the Theme-Rheme structure. In order to describe this structure, the following sections will heavily draw on Halliday's works (1985a and b) who represents the Systemic-Functional tradition.

5.1 Theme and Rheme in the Systemic-Functional tradition

The clause has to be interpreted as a message. The structure which gives the clause its character as a message is defined by Halliday (1985b:38) **Thematic structure**. This type of structure is composed by two parts: the Theme and the Rheme. These two parts combined together constitute the message. Let us consider the following clause:

The hurricane Sandy strengthens into a strong category two hurricane.

It is concerned with *the hurricane Sandy*, which is the Theme of the clause. In the second part of the clause, details are added on hurricane Sandy: *strengthens into a strong category two hurricane*. This part in which the Theme is developed is called Rheme. According to Halliday (1985b:39) the Theme can be identified as that element which comes in first position in the clause. It is the starting point for the message and describes what the clause is going to be about. For this reason, part of the meaning of the clause depends on which element is chosen as its Theme.

The elements that can be selected as Theme in English are: subject, predicator, object, complement, and adjunct. The subject is the person, place, or thing that does what the verb describes. The predicator is the verbal element of the clause or of the sentence. The object is a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase representing 1) the person or thing (direct object) that something is done to, such as *book* in *We bought a book*, or 2) the person (the indirect object) who is concerned with the result of an action, such as *her* in *I gave her a book* or *I gave a book to her*, or 3) the person or thing that is joined by a preposition to another word or phrase, such as *bed* in *She was lying on the bed*. The complement is a word or phrase (esp. a noun or adjective) that follows a verb and describes the subject of a verb. The adjunct is an adverbial word or phrase that adds information to a sentence[19].

Further examples of Theme-Rheme structure are reported below (Halliday 1985b:40):

THEME	**RHEME**
The Queen of Hearts	she made some tarts
the man in the wilderness	said to me
for want of a nail	the shoe was lost

[19] Definitions adapted from Macmillan English Dictionary for advanced learners, 2002 and from the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 1990.

with sobs and tears	he sorted out those of the largest size
from house to house	I wend my way
Language – human speech -	is an inexhaustible abundance of manifold treasures
One hundred and fifty years ago, on 15 September 1830,	the world's first passenger railway … was opened …

5.1.1 Marked and unmarked themes

In declarative clauses, the Theme is usually represented by the subject. For example, in the clause *Material scientists are now actively borrowing nature's capacity for regeneration*, the theme is *material scientists* and corresponds to the subject of the clause. Putting a subject in thematic position means making an **unmarked** choice, that is to say a choice which is very likely to be made in declarative clauses. Conversely, a **marked Theme** in declarative clauses is a Theme which is not combined with the subject but with any other elements constituting the clause. Halliday (1985b:45) indicates the adjuncts as the most usual form of marked Theme in declarative clauses, such as for example *today, suddenly, at night, without much hope* whereas the most marked type of Theme in declarative clauses is a complement. He (*ibidem*) provides the example of *nature* in *nature I loved* and *this responsibility* in *this responsibility we accept wholly.*
The table reported below summarizes possible unmarked and marked choices in declarative clauses (Themes are reported in bold):

	Function	**Clause example**
UNMARKED THEME	Subject	**- engineers** have tackled the problem using a variety of strategies; - **A trans-Atlantic journey of just sixty minutes** has been promised since the dawn of supersonic flight; - **she** was given the prize.

MARKED THEME	Adjunct	- **In late September**, a secretive experimental vehicle roared into the clear blue skies; - **In the pages of popular books, magazines and newspaper comics**, the hyperfast world of airline travel was predicted to be just over the horizon;
	Complement	- **Precious** were his comments.

In interrogative clauses, verbs, auxiliaries, and Wh- elements are unmarked thematic choices. Their occurrence in first position are the regular pattern by which the interrogative is expressed. Marked themes are not usually used in interrogative clauses. However, examples of marked theme in this type of clauses are (Halliday 1985b: 48): *after tea will you tell me a story?* where the Theme is *after tea* and *in your house who does the cooking* where *in your house* represents the Theme.

Examples of unmarked and marked thematic choices in interrogative clauses are reported below (Themes are reported in bold):

	Function	**Clause example**
UNMARKED THEME	Finite verb	- **Is** this your bag? - **Can** you answer the phone, please? - **Do** you know him? - **Will** you be there? - **Should** I go?
	Wh- questions	- **Who** wrote this book? - **How** long has he been sleeping? - **How** far is the station? - **Which** house do you live in?

MARKED THEME	Adjunct	- **After dinner** will you call me? - **In the US** who will be elected?

In imperative clauses, the unmarked Theme is represented by *you, let's* and the verb. In negative imperatives, typical Theme is *don't*. Some examples are reported below (Themes are in bold):

	Function	**Clause example**
UNMARKED THEME	Finite verb (*do/don't; let's;* …)	- **Close** the door, please; - **Do** keep quiet; - **Let's** go out; - **Don't** look at me like that.
	Subject (you)	- **you** keep quiet.

As explained by Halliday (1985b: 49-52; see also Baker 1992:123), conjunctions and modal adjuncts (such as *and, or, when, even if, …;* and *probably, perhaps, usually, broadly speaking,* …) usually occur at the beginning of a clause in English. This means that these items can be considered inherently thematic and it is natural for the speaker to put them in initial position. These elements are, therefore, not considered part of the thematic structure.

5.1.2 Other types of marked Theme

The difference between marked and unmarked Themes in declarative, interrogative and imperative clauses has already been described above. In the examples provided, marked Themes were characterized by the presence of items in initial position which do not usually occupy that place by default. For this reason, the Themes combined with predicators, complements, and adjuncts are defined Fronted Themes, referring to the action of fronting, of placing in initial position. Furthermore, it has been noticed that there exist different degrees of markedness. For example, in declarative clauses the presence of an adjunct in

thematic position is marked because in the English language the initial position is occupied by the subject by default. However, thematizing place adjuncts is very common in tourist and narrative texts (see Enkvist 1987 a nd Baker 1992). Conversely, fronting a predicator is a very unusual choice in the English language. Apart from 1) Fronted Themes, there are other two types of marked structures in English: 2) Predicated Themes, and 3) Identifying Themes.

2) Predicated Themes: *it* + be + nominal/adverbial group

As already mentioned above, another type of marked Theme is the Predicated Theme (Halliday 1985b:59). This structural patterns is characterized by the pronoun *it* + the verb *be* followed by a nominal or adverbial group. Let us consider the following example:

It was John who called her yesterday night

The predicated Theme is often associated with contrast. The function of *it was* in the example above is, therefore, creating contrast. The meaning is "it was John and not someone else who called her yesterday night". However, it should be noticed that the Theme of such structures is not *it* but the element which occurs after the verb *be*. In the example above, the Theme is, therefore, represented by *John*. The personal pronoun *it* has the function of an empty subject and is used to allow a cer tain element to be placed near the beginning of a cl ause and be interpreted as a Theme (Baker 1992:135).

Another function associated with predicated Themes is linked to the interpretation of the clause as an information unit. The information unit is structured into two components: one part is the news and the other part is what is already known to the listener, the given (Halliday 1985b:59). The new usually comes at the end of the information unit and corresponds to the Rheme. Conversely, the already known, the given comes at the beginning and corresponds to the Theme. In the example above, the predicated Theme allows the speaker to present *John* as the new item even though it is in thematic position.

3) Identifying Theme

Identifying Themes differ from predicated Themes because instead of the pronoun *it* + be, a *wh*- structure is placed in initial position in the clause (Halliday 1985b: 41-43; Baker 1992:136). According to Halliday (*ibidem*), in this special thematic structure all the elements are organized into two constituents which are linked by a relationship of identity expressed by the verb *be*. Let us consider the following example (*ibidem*):

What the duke gave to my aunt was that teapot

In the clause above, what comes before the verb *be*, that is to say *what the duke gave to my aunt*, is an instance of nominalization, "whereby any element or group of elements takes on the functions of a nominal group in the clause" (*ibidem*). In this type of thematic structure, what comes before the verb *be* functions as Theme. Another example is the following:

What happened was that John called her yesterday night

The Theme of the clause reported above is *what happened* and the rest of the clause functions as Rheme.

Predicated and identifying Themes allow the speakers to structure the message in whatever way they want, that is to say overcoming restrictions on word order (see Baker 1992:136). Furthermore, they imply contrast and contribute to the meaning of exclusiveness. In the first example reported above, the meaning of exclusiveness refers to the teapot: the duke gave my aunt that teapot and nothing else.

We will briefly summarize the three types of marked Themes by considering the structure *Hurricane Sandy has killed dozens of people in the Caribbean* and by changing the position of its components. In some cases the order of the elements in the clause needs to be rearranged.

Let us start with fronted Theme. As said above, in declarative clauses a marked Theme is a T heme which is not combined with the subject but with any other

elements constituting the clause. The other elements are: subject, predicator, object, complement, and adjunct.
The clause *Hurricane Sandy has killed dozens of people in the Caribbean* is unmarked because the subject is in initial position and functions as Theme.
If the place adjunct is fronted, the structure would become marked, however not highly marked as explained above (see section 5.1.1):

Fronted place adjunct: *In the Caribbean hurricane Sandy has killed dozens of people*

The Theme is *in the Caribbean* and, as visible, the resulting structure sounds quite common.
When objects or complements are fronted the resulting structure is marked and less used. The two examples are reported below:

Fronted object: *Dozens of people hurricane Sandy has killed in the Caribbean*;
Fronted adjunct: *Killed dozens of people were*.

Dozens of people and *killed* are, respectively, the fronted object and the fronted adjunct and are placed in Theme position.
As already said, fronting a predicator is a highly marked and very unusual choice. Let us consider the following example:

Fronted predicator: *Hurricane Sandy threatened to kill dozens of people in the Caribbean, and kill them it did.*

In the above example, *kill* functions as Theme. Examples of fronted predicator in English are very rare.

Predicated Themes involve the use of the pronoun *it* + the verb *to be*. Here follow the examples:
1) *It was hurricane Sandy which killed dozens of people in the Caribbean*;

2) *It was in the Caribbean that hurricane Sandy killed dozens of people*.

As already explained above, the Themes are what comes after the *it*-structure. *Hurricane Sandy* and *in the Caribbean* are, therefore, selected as marked thematic choices.

Identifying Themes imply the use of *what* combined with the verb *to be*. Here follows the example:

What hurricane Sandy killed in the Caribbean were dozens of people

The Theme is *what hurricane Sandy killed in the Caribbean* and the Rheme, the core of the message is *dozens of people*.

The following section will describe the interpretation of the clause as an information unit, that is to say as a unit composed of what is already known to the listener or the reader and what is new.

5.2 The clause as information unit: Given and New

The clause is the nearest grammatical unit which corresponds to the information unit. According to Halliday (1985b:274):

> The information unit is what its name implies: a unit of information. Information, as this term is being used here, is a process of interaction between what is already known or predictable and what is new or unpredictable. (…) It is the interplay of new and not new that generates information in the linguistic sense.

As anticipated, in section 5.1.2 the information unit is made up of two constituents, the Given and the New. The Given is that part of the information unit

which is already known to the hearer or to the reader; the New is the remaining part of the unit which presents the new message.

Given and Theme and New and Rheme are semantically related but not equal. The Theme is the point of departure of a speaker or of a writer while the Given represents the common ground between the speaker/writer and the listener/reader. Similarly, the Rheme is what the speaker/writer says about the Theme and New is what is not already known to the listener/reader. This explains why Theme and Rheme are speaker oriented while Given and New are listener oriented. What is new and what is given, therefore, depends on the common ground, on the shared knowledge existing between the interlocutors.

The following message can be segmented in three different ways depending on the amount of shared knowledge existing between the participants to the linguistic event. In other words, the interpretation of the message depends on the context of situation:

We are meeting John and Mary tomorrow afternoon

If we are talking about what we are doing the following day, the Given is only the pronoun *we* and the rest of the sentence *are meeting John and Mary tomorrow afternoon* is New. Conversely, if the focus of our message is on who we are meeting, the Given is *We are meeting* and the Rheme is *John and Mary tomorrow afternoon.* There is also a further possibility: we may want to inform our interlocutors only about when we are meeting John and Mary. In this case, the Given is *We are meeting John and Mary* and the New is *tomorrow afternoon.*

In the English language given information is usually placed before new information in order to make the text easier to be understood.

As exemplified above, Theme and Rheme and Given and New are semantically related. The information unit typically corresponds to a clause, even though for Halliday (1985b:285) the interpretation of the Given as something occurring in initial position (in Theme position) and of the New as the element placed at the end of the clause (in Rheme position) may limit the potential of these two

systems. However, the above mentioned organization of the clause represents a valid guideline for the organization of a text.

5.3 External relationships between clauses: the concept of cohesion

Both Theme and Rheme and Given and New represent internal resources for structuring the clause as a message. However, a proper organization of a text also needs non-structural resources which are referred to by the term cohesion. Cohesion can be created in English by four different ways: reference, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical organization (Halliday 1985b:288 and ff).

5.3.1 Reference

The term **reference** broadly refers to the relationship between a word and the object it refers to. In Hallidayan terms, reference is an element introduced at one place in the text which acts as a reference point for other elements following in the text. Pronouns are the most common referential elements used in English and in many other languages. Apart from personal pronouns, demonstratives are also used in texts to refer back to something that has already been said. Let us consider the examples below:

*The White House says that **the president** was updated through the night as Hurricane Sandy carved its way up the coast - signing two declarations of disaster.*
***He** really would be in trouble if people thought **he** was ignoring a major disaster to save his political career, travelling to swing states to campaign instead of staying in the White House*[20].

[20] From BBC News bbc.co.uk *Sandy steals spotlight from Romney* by Mark Mardell, 31 October 2012.

A relationship of identity is created between the elements *the president, He,* and *he*. Both *He* and *he* refer back to *the president* and form a chain of reference which contributes to the cohesion of the text.
The following example contains a demonstrative used to refer back to something previously mentioned:

The sun shines and this delights me

Here, *this* refers to the first stretch of the message and the relationship of reference is created between *the sun shines* and *this*. In writing, demonstratives typically refer back to the preceding text (anaphoric reference). However, in some cases they may also refer to something that follows (cataphoric reference). Examples of cataphoric *that* and *those* are provided below (Biber Conrad and Leech 2002:75):

The unit of heat was defined as ***that*** *quantity [which would raise the temperature of unit mass of water …];*
We apologise to ***those*** *readers [who did not receive the Guardian on Saturday].*

5.3.2 Ellipsis and substitution

Other forms of cohesion are ellipsis and substitution. They both set up a lexicogrammatical relationship which, as Halliday (1985b:296) explains is a relationship in the wording rather than directly in the meaning.
Ellipsis refers to the omission of elements which are recoverable from the linguistic context or the situation. The examples reported below are adapted from Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002:230; 348):

- *He squeezed her hand but* (omitted element: *he*) *met with no response*;
- *He and his mate both jumped out, he* (omitted element: *jumped put*) *to go to the women, his mate* (omitted element: *jumped put*) *to stop other traffic on the bridge*;
- *He fell asleep up there – I don't know how* (omitted element: *he fell asleep up there*).

Substitution occurs when an element is replaced by another element. Some examples provided by Halliday (1985b:297ff) are reported below:

- *I've lost my voice*.
- *Get a new one*.
(*One* replaces and acts as a substitute of *voice*)

- *If you've seen them so often, of course you know what they're like.*
- *I believe so*.
(*So* is a substitute of *I believe I know what they are like*)

- *Does it hurt?*
- *Not any more. It was doing last night.*
(*Doing* replaces the verb *hurt*)

5.3.3 Conjunctions

Conjunctions are type of function words that connect clauses and sometimes, phrases or words. Baker (1992:191) summarizes the main relations expressed by conjunctions in the table reported below:

additive	*and, or, also, in addition, furthermore, besides, similarly, likewise, by contrast, for instance;*
adversative	*but, yet, however, instead, on the other hand, nevertheless, at any rate, as a matter of fact;*
casual	*so, consequently, it follows, for, because, under the circumstances, for this reason;*
temporal	*then, next, after that, on another occasion, in conclusion, an hour later, finally, at last;*
continuatives (miscellaneous)	*now, of course, well, anyway, surely, after all.*

Baker (1992:192) notices that languages vary in the type of conjunctions they prefer and in the frequency of usage of conjunctions. What students should bear in mind is that the English language has a tendency to present information in small chunks and to signal the relations between chunks in unambiguous ways. Furthermore, the frequency of use of conjunctions varies according to text types.

5.3.4 Lexical cohesion

According to Halliday (1985b:310), **lexical cohesion** occurs when items that are related in some way to those which have been previously mentioned are selected. These relationships between items may be created through repetition, synonymy, and collocation.

Repetition refers to the repetition of a lexical item. For example:

John tried to open the door. The door was locked.

The repetition of the word *door* is a form of lexical cohesion.

Repetition also refers to words which do not have the same morphological shape but are forms of the same item. Halliday (*ibidem*) provides the examples of *dine, dining, diner, dinner* and of *rational* and *rationalize.*

Synonymy is another form of lexical cohesion and involves the choice of a lexical item which is synonymous to the item previously mentioned. Examples may be *noise* and *crash* or *lightning* and *flash*.

Superordinates (general words referring to a class) and **hyponyms** (specific words referring to a class) are also included in this form of lexical cohesion. Examples are *bird* and *robin*, *car* and *sedan*, *child* and *girl*, *snake* and *phyton*, and so on.

A special case of synonymy is represented by **antonymy** which refers to lexical items which are opposite in meaning. Examples are: *warm* and *cold*, *war* and *peace*, *love* and *hate*, and so on.

We have already talked about collocation in chapter 3. Halliday (1985b:312) considers **collocation** as a form of lexical cohesion where the relationship between items is represented by their tendency to co-occur. He provides the following example (*ibidem*):

A little fat man of Bombay
Was smoking one very hot day.
But a bird called a snipe
Flew away with his pipe,
Which vexed the fat man of Bombay.

The items *smoke* and *pipe* are very strong collocates and this relation makes the occurrence of *pipe* cohesive.

5.4 Thematic progression in English

A message is textured when it has certain kinds of meaning relations. These meaning relations form the basis of cohesion between the messages of a text (Halliday and Hasan 1985:73).
In the creation of texts, the following features should be considered (Halliday 1985b:315ff):
1) Theme and focus; 2) lexical cohesion and reference; 3) ellipsis and substitution; 4) conjunctions.
We will discuss here only the first of these features, the choice of Theme.
The choice of Theme clause by clause is of utmost importance because the alternation of Theme and Rheme contributes to the development of the text. The organization of the clause in terms of Theme and Rheme is defined 'Functional sentence perspective' or FSP approach (Firbas 1964; Danes 1974). Thematic progression differs from language to language and from one text type to another.
In English there are three main thematic progressions:

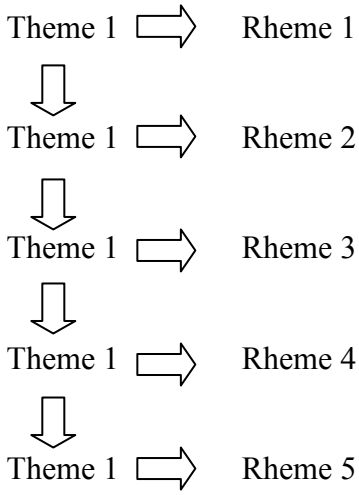
a) the main topical Theme may be repeatedly used for a certain stretch of discourse;

Let us consider the following example taken from *In Pursuit of the Proper Sinner* by E. George (1999):

David *thanked her.* ***He*** *stood in the dining room where the windows stretched from floor to ceiling and reflected all three of them in the glass.* ***He*** *admired the epergne that spilled white roses onto plaits of ivy.* ***He*** *fingered one of the thin silver forks.* ***He*** *used his thumbnail against a drip of candle wax. And* ***he*** *knew* ***he*** *wouldn't be able to force a morsel of food past the constriction in his throat.*

In *David thanked her, David* is the Theme and *thanked her* is the Rheme. The following clauses have all the same Theme and cohesion is created by the relationship of reference between *David* and the personal pronoun *he*.

The structure of the text follows the progression reported below:



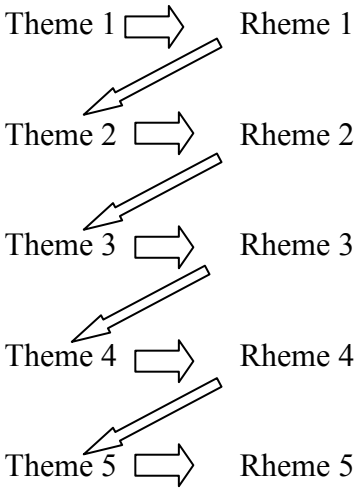
b) the Theme of one clause is selected from within the Rheme of the preceding clause;

The following example is adapted from Alexander Bain's biography[21]:

[21] available at http://inventors.about.com/od/bstartinventors/a/fax_machine.htm.

*The first fax machine was invented by Scottish mechanic and inventor **Alexander Bain** in 1843. **He** received a British patent for "improvements in producing and regulating electric currents and improvements in timepieces and in electric printing and signal telegraphs", in laymen's terms a fax machine.*

The Rheme of the first sentence contains the element Alexander Bain which is used as Theme of the following sentence.
The structure of this thematic progression is reported below:



c) a series of Themes can be developed from within a single Rheme (split Rheme).
An example of progression by means of a split Rheme is reported below[22]:

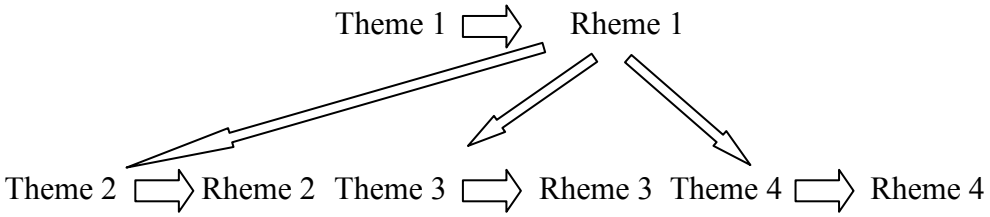
*Sedimentary rocks can be divided into **clastic rocks, chemical rocks, and organic rocks**.*
***Clastic sedimentary rocks** are accumulations of clasts: little pieces of broken up rock which have piled up and been "lithified" by compaction and cementation.*

[22] adapted from *Ask GeoMan What are the 3 basic types of rock?* available at http://jersey.uoregon.edu/~mstrick/AskGeoMan/geoQuerry13.html

Chemical rocks *form when standing water evaporates, leaving dissolved minerals behind ….*

Organic rocks *are any accumulation of sedimentary debris caused by organic processes ….*

In the above example the Rheme of the first sentence is split into three Themes. The typical structure of the split Rheme is the following:



d) Themes may derive from a hypertheme. Let us consider the example below[23]:

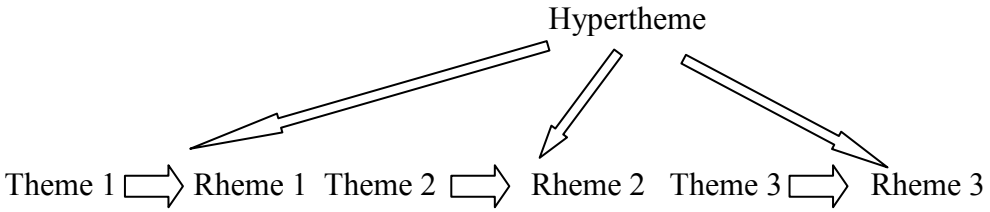
Italy is located in southern Europe and comprises the Italian Peninsula and some islands such as Sicily and Sardinia. Almost 40% of the territory is mountainous, with the Alps as the northern boundary and the Apennine Mountains forming the backbone of the peninsula.

Italian is the official language spoken by the majority of the population. The climate of Italy is highly diverse, and could be far from the stereotypical Mediterranean climate. Winters are cold and damp in the North, and milder in the South. Conditions on peninsular coastal areas can be very different from the interior's higher ground and valleys, particularly during the winter months when the higher altitudes tend to be cold, wet, and often snowy. The Alps have a mountain climate, with cool summers and very cold winters.

In the above text, *Italy* is the hypertheme and subsequent themes (*Almost 40% of the territory, Italian, The climate,* …) are derived from it.

The structure of this thematic progression is exemplified below:

[23] adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Italy and http://wikitravel.org/en/Italy



At this point, the analysis of a whole text will be carried out. The text presented below has been chosen for analysis because it contains many of the thematic progressions discussed above[24]:

At the scene *by Damian Grammaticas*

We headed towards where the tsunami hit land, close to the little village of Higashiro.
We had to pick our way through a sea of mud. What should have been a road was covered in broken branches, a squashed tractor and lots of electricity cables that had been brought down.
The destruction goes on and on.
The seashore was in the distance behind a row of trees. Here the waves toppled houses; they lie at crazy angles. Trees have been smashed into the buildings. A motorcycle lies twisted and bent.
Inside the houses, the furniture has been turned to matchsticks, possessions tossed everywhere, and on a few walls are portraits with the faces of those who once lived here, now stained by the waters which filled everything.

Analysis of thematic progression (Themes are reported in **bold** and Rhemes in *italics*) :

[24] from BBC News bbc.co.uk *At the scene* by Damian Grammaticas, 14th March 2011.

We *headed towards where the tsunami hit land, close to the little village of Higashiro.*

Theme 1 (**We**) ⟶ Rheme 1 (*headed towards where ….*)

↓

We *had to pick our way through a sea of mud.*

Theme 1 (**We**) ⟶ Rheme 2 (*had to pick our way through a sea of mud*)

In the first two sentences the Theme *we* is repeated and Rheme 1 and Rheme 2 are combined with the same Theme 1.

From within Rheme 2 (*had to pick our way through a sea of mud*), the author chooses the Theme of the following sentences:

What should have been a road *was covered in broken branches, a squashed tractor and lots of electricity cables that had been brought down.*

The destruction *goes on and on.*

Theme 2 (**what should have been a road**) ⟶ Rheme 3 (*was covered in broken …*)

Theme 3 (**that**) ⟶ Rheme 4 (*had been brought down*)

Theme 4 (**The destruction**) ⟶ Rheme 5 (*goes on and on*)

The description in Rheme 3 (*was covered in broken branches, a squashed tractor and lots of electricity cables*) is semantically similar to Theme 4 (*the destruction)* and, for this reason, they are cohesive.

Most of the Themes in the remaining part of the text are chosen from within Theme 4 which acts as a hypertheme. Theme 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10 are all descriptions of *the destruction*.

The seashore *was in the distance behind a row of trees*.

Theme 5 (**The seashore**) ⟶ R heme 6 (*was in the distance behind a row of trees*)

Here *the waves toppled houses*; **they** *lie at crazy angles*.

Theme 6 (**Here**) ⟶ Rheme 7 (*the waves toppled houses*)

Theme 7 (**they**) ⟶ Rheme 8 (*lie at crazy angles*)

Trees *have been smashed into the buildings*.

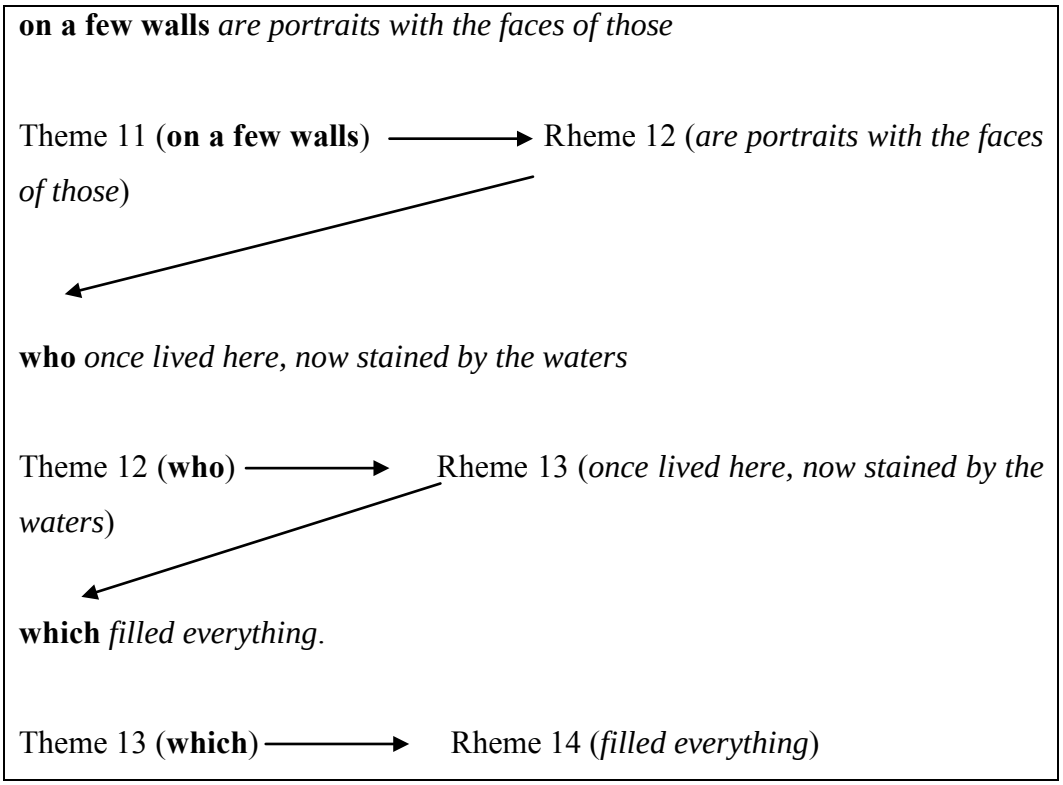
Theme 8 (**Trees**) ⟶ Rheme 9 (*have been smashed into the buildings*)

A motorcycle *lies twisted and bent*.

Theme 9 (**A motorcycle**) ⟶ Rheme 10 (*lies twisted and bent*)

Inside the houses, *the furniture has been turned to matchsticks, possessions tossed everywhere, and*

Theme 10 (**Inside the houses**) ⟶ Rheme 11 *(the furniture has been …)*



The text is highly cohesive because it has all the meaning relations which are at the basis of a well-structured text.

This chapter has briefly summarized the features of cohesion and has shown the importance of Theme-Rheme progression in the creation of texts.
It needs to be said that these theories are valid for the English language but many of them do not prove to be as valid for the Italian language, particularly because Italian is not characterized by the same rigid word order as English.
For example, fronted predicators are not a marked choice in Italian. Sentences such as *Rispondo io al telefono* or *Vado al cinema con Francesca* sound quite common in the Italian language even though they have predicators in Theme position.
Furthermore, the use of conjunctions is different in the two languages; as mentioned above, texts in English are characterized by small chunks of language. Conversely, the Italian language uses longer chunks which need to be connected by means of more conjunctions and subordination.

These differences are fundamental in the process of translation. Students trained to become translators should be acquainted with the features of the two languages which should be studied contrastively.

Meaning arises from the combination of words. These combinations constrain the way clauses are formed. However, in order for a text to be meaningful and work as a unit, structural and cohesive devices should be used and clauses should be organized according to the meaningful relations occurring between them.