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CONTEXTUAL FUNCTIONS OF PREDICATED THEMES IN WRITTEN TEXT: ALAN PATON'S *CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY* (1948) AS DIALOGUE WITH APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

Abstract

In this article we pay attention to the relations between a text and its social context: our text is the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), written by the South African writer Alan Paton. Our contention is it was only in a novel that one could offer the sort of meanings that Paton was offering in that particular historical period, that context of culture.

We make use of the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory of language for our purpose, a theory that makes explicit the relations between language systems and structures, and their use as resources for social interaction. Our study involves consideration of the SFL theoretical framework as a way into the examination of the use of predicated Themes and in terms of the relations of their use to aspects of the social context of the novel. We conclude that Paton's use of predicated Themes allows him to not only make the text a more coherent unit – a text – and to make a more authentic representation of character dialogue, but more importantly allows him to make a more interactive textual engagement with the reader.

Key words

Predicated themes; Systemic Functional Linguistics; context; culture; text; Alan Paton

1. Introduction

In this article we attempt to relate the use of predicated Themes in Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) to the contexts of situation and culture of his time. The

language used by the South African writer Alan Paton in this novel has a clear social purpose: to describe a social reality. However, it is clear that in writing this novel Paton was also attempting not only to describe but also to act upon his society and its culture, that of Apartheid South Africa. His story was not merely a passive reflection of the times in which he lived and worked: it was an active participant in that era, and was, we contend, intended to be so – the language reveals this.

The choice of the written fictive mode of discourse, we contend, is significant to a consideration of the novel, in terms of its language, its value as a work of art and commentary on the issues of his day, and to a consideration of the cultural profile of that society. In choosing the written mode Paton was both enabled to create a textual complexity and force, and also to negotiate meanings that would have been difficult or impossible through other modes of communication such as spoken dialogue. Nevertheless, employing the written mode meant being constrained by the limitations of its semiotic potential. Besides the inability in a novel for immediate dialogic responses, and the absence of resources such as gesture, body language etc, there is in the graphology of the English written language system no realisation plane for the intonational systems which play such an important role in realising the semantics of interaction and negotiation (Halliday 1967; Halliday and Greaves 2008).

It is within the context of these considerations – of the different meaning potentials and functions of different forms of communication within a culture¹ – that we discuss in this article the use of predicated Themes in *Cry, the Beloved Country*. We study the use of this structure in the written form of language in terms of the social functions of the novel. If “language is as it is because of what it has to do” (Halliday 1973: 34), one would expect the character of each form of language – written and spoken – to be related to the social uses to which it is put (Halliday 1985; Martin and Rose 2007; Alexander 2008); while the differences in semiotic potential between the two forms would in turn help shape the socio-semiotic demarcation of roles each plays in a culture. We show how the use of predicated Themes within written language allows Paton not only to contribute to making the text a more coherent unit – a text – and to make a more authentic representation of character dialogue, but more importantly allows him to create the sense of a more interactive textual engagement with the reader, thereby drawing the reader into a more dialogic, spoken-like negotiation of the cultural issues the text addresses.

The theoretical framework we employ is that of Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereafter, ‘SFL’), as pioneered by Michael Halliday (1961, 1978), and subsequently developed by Halliday together with other scholars such as Ruqaiya Hasan (Halliday and Hasan 1989; Hasan 1999), James Martin (1992), Christian Matthiessen (1995; Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) and David Butt (2003a). SFL is here seen as a social theory based upon the concept that our perceptions of our experiential world and the enactment of our social relations, as well as the engendering of these into discourse are created through language (and other semiotic resources); and

that the social functions of language have therefore served to evolve the language itself, its formal system networks and structures, such that analyses of the structures and systemic choices made by a language user in a text may serve as an indicator of the social context of that text. As Martin and Rose (2007: 1) state: "... we want to focus on the social as it is constructed through texts, on the constitutive role of meanings in social life"; or, looked at from the other direction, as Firth (1957: 180) stated, "we study language as part of the social process".

The recurrent use of a particular grammatical pattern such as the predicated Theme – which is a marked grammatical construction (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 2004; Collins 1991a; Delin 1991, 1992) – is thus significant from the semantic and contextual point of view, as grammar is the means by which we make semantic and contextual choices as part of semiotic social interaction. In this sense we agree with the following statement by Butt (2003b: 11):

Grammar is significant because (and only because) we know it is the organization of meaning – of semantics. And crucially, it is this tie-up between the semantics and the grammar that we are always focusing on when we are talking about grammar – we are talking about it in relation to the higher levels in the linguist's model, the **semantics**² and the **context**: how do the grammatical selections construct a particular kind of meaning, and how does that particular kind of meaning have a place in, contribute to, shape, direct, provide the basis for, the unfolding of a social event? These are questions that put grammar to work.

Following Johnstone's elaboration of this point, (2002: 9), we are interested in how:

- Discourse is shaped by the world, and discourse shapes the world
- Discourse is shaped by language, and discourse shapes language
- Discourse is shaped by participants, and discourse shapes participants
- Discourse is shaped by prior discourse, and discourse shapes the possibilities for future discourse
- Discourse is shaped by its medium, and discourse shapes the possibilities of its medium
- Discourse is shaped by purpose, and discourse shapes possible purposes.

In the SFL framework 'context' itself is seen as a semiotic construct (Firth 1968: 13; Halliday and Hasan 1989: 8; Martin 1985; Hasan 1996: 37; Hasan 1999; Butt 2003a): a theoretical tool for handling the events, social relations and circumstances of the situation within which language occurs in terms of their abstract relations to the language choices being made. Language choices function to realise socio-contextual meanings: for example a polar interrogative mood in the grammar can be used metaphorically to encode not a question but interpersonal deference or politeness, in the command 'can you pass the salt please'; which

politeness in turn functions to realise a hierarchic social relation (Butt 2003a). Context is thus treated systemically, in terms of choice also: social beings have at their disposal a range of options within the systems of context that together constitute the 'culture' of a community, the total potential for communicating meaningfully with one another. Thus while 'hierarchic relations' encoded in 'deference' may be a typical contextual option in one type of situational environment (e.g. job interview), in another (e.g. amongst close friends) this choice may not be as appropriate.

Our approach in the present work is via the multidimensional framework that has evolved as a set of explicit principles of design underpinning the SFL theoretical model (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). These dimensions are as follows. Stratification is concerned with the relations of the different levels of analysis – context, semantics, lexicogrammar, phonology/graphology, and phonetics/graphetics. Each 'stratum' realises choices at the stratum 'above'; while being realised in those at the stratum 'below'; while the interstratal relations of choices are not fixed: for example, a question (semantics) may be realised by an interrogative or declarative (e.g. 'you want the salt?'), although such metaphoric mappings often involve intonation (e.g. rising tone). Metafunction is the theoretical dimension by which we are enabled to analyse the various language systems in terms of their social functions. Systems of the ideational metafunction are a means for reflecting upon our experience of our world; interpersonal systems enable us to interact with others in our social world; while systems of the textual metafunction are a means of weaving together ideational and interpersonal meanings into text that is coherent and relevant to its context. The instantiation dimension theorises the relation of the systemic potential of language to actual choices from that potential in text; as well the intermediate region of choice pattern and systemic subpotential, which concern us with the concepts of text-type and register.

The axis dimension is concerned with the relations of the paradigmatic aspect of the theory of language – language as systems of choice – to the syntagmatic aspect – language as structural output of systemic choices. Delicacy, however, is concerned with the relation of systems, with more delicate options being made available within the context of a particular choice from options at a less delicate level in a system network: for example, 'polar interrogative' is an option within the system of MOOD³, with its entry condition being the selections of the less delicate 'indicative: interrogative' options. Rank concerns the compositional aspect of language: for example, a clause is composed of groups or phrases, which themselves are composed of words, and those of morphemes.

Within the theoretical framework formed by these concepts, the idea of choice is central: language is viewed primarily as a systemic potential, a network of interrelated systems of options from which speakers and writers select according to their communicative, i.e. functional/contextual, needs. These dimensions allow us to not only follow Firth's imperative of being clear about the 'levels of abstraction' at which we 'make our statements of meaning' (Firth 1968: 19) but to also be precise about our analytical position with respect to all the dimensions

of our theoretical apparatus. The multidimensional framework thus gives the users of SFL theory language a way to explore in an explicit, systemic way the relations between social context, language, and its use in communication. The central concepts of the model also make the negotiation of any particular investigation manageable in terms of aim, scope and structure, being the ‘co-ordinates’ by which we may ‘navigate’ our way through the ‘map’ of the semiotic potential of language in context (Butt et al. 2000: 18).

In the present work we are concerned with the use of a particular grammatical structure in terms of its use in a text, within the particular contexts of situation and culture in which it was written, and conduct a variety of qualitative analyses to study this relation. This marked structure is primarily considered from the paradigmatic perspective on the textual metafunction (that is, as a grammatical choice), specifically in terms of the lexicogrammatical systems of THEME, INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION, INFORMATION FOCUS, and COHESION: how choices from these systems relate to their semantic and contextual functions. We will also consider certain interpersonal aspects of their use.

INFORMATION systems are realised in speech through intonation; but in writing have no (conventionalised) realisation plane (graphology stratum), punctuation being used inconsistently in this respect. Despite this, choices from the systems that are represented in writing (primarily THEME and COHESION) interact to imply choices in INFORMATION systems (cf. Davies 1986, 1994): specifically, in many cases, an assignment of marked New⁴ is suggested by this structure (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 91).

Within SFL theory, the deployment of predicated Themes as a textual resource thus implicates a relation to choices from within one of the major parameters of context of situation: the role that language is playing in the situation, called the ‘mode’ parameter of discourse context (cf. Halliday and Hasan 1989; Butt 2003a). It is the relations of the mode aspect of context to the use of predicated Themes with Paton’s *Cry, the Beloved Country* that will form the main focus of this paper. We will now look at how the predicated Theme works, and to some problems of the construction in terms of its analysis in the written mode. We will then look at Paton’s use of this structure within this novel in terms of the socio-cultural context operative for the text, and consequences of his use of the written mode of discourse with respect to this context.

2. Predicated Themes in written text: structure and system

The construction under focus in our present work is known in formal linguistic theory as a cleft sentence, since it comes from the division of a simple sentence into two different parts. It normally starts with the semantically empty pronoun *it*, followed by the verb *be*; after that we find the highlighted/focal element itself, with a relative clause coming at the end of the structure. The so-called ‘it-cleft’ structure thus follows the following formula: “It +be” + “highlighted ele-

ment” + “relative clause” (Martínez Lirola, 2009: 39 ff). As Gómez González and González García (2005: 156) point out:

Broadly, clefting identifies a discourse strategy whereby information is packaged or “cleft” into two units in order to fulfil a two-fold discourse effect, despite the differences entailed in variations of this pattern across languages: (1) to set up a relationship of identity of the “X is Y” specifying type between two units (e.g. a character defect=*that makes them go into politics*; mi hijo ‘my son’=*el que se viene a la yema de los dedos* ‘that pops up my head’) and (2) to give discourse prominence to generally (part of) one of the two units, the EIF (e.g. *a character defect* and mi hijo ‘my son’).

In Systemic Functional Linguistics, the term used by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 95) is ‘Predicated Theme’ because the Identified of the identifying relational type of clause – the ‘highlighted element’ – which is predicated by the ‘it + be’ formula is treated as Theme, according to a double thematic analysis proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 97). Here is an example from our novel (Paton 1948: 155), with the congruent THEME analysis:

- | | | | | | |
|-----|-----------|------------|---------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| (1) | <i>It</i> | <i>was</i> | <i>my son</i> | <i>that</i> | <i>killed your son.</i> |
| | Theme | | Rheme | Theme | Rheme |

If we think in functional, meaning-based terms, there are strong indications that the thematic structure of the clause complex is being manipulated such that congruent Theme of the first clause – the semantically ‘empty’ element ‘it’ – by making no substantial contribution to the clause, ceases to be considered as Theme (and likewise for ‘is’). The first item in the clause bearing experiential function is thus ‘my son’, making it Theme. This then strongly suggests that the following clause is in fact not functioning as a separate clause, but as Rheme for the Theme ‘my son’: Collins (1991a: 170) refers to version (b), shown below, as a “metaphorical analysis in which the superordinate clause is all thematic”:

- | | | | | |
|-----|---------------|---------------|-------------|------------------------|
| (2) | <i>It was</i> | <i>my son</i> | <i>that</i> | <i>killed your son</i> |
| | | Theme | Rheme | |

The significance of the Predicated Theme structure to text discourse and context may be appreciated more fully when we consider such choices of THEME and clause division in their interaction with (actual and implied) choices in the systems of COHESION (Halliday and Hasan 1976; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 524–85) and INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION and INFORMATION FOCUS (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 89–92, 129–30; Halliday and Greaves 2008).

In the spoken mode, the phonological resources of intonation allow for the division of information into ‘information units’ – the ‘chunking’ of continuous

speech into a succession of units of information (Halliday and Greaves 2008). This division is called the system of INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION. In the unmarked instance, one information unit is co-extensive with one clause: that is, the two major units of the grammar of English – the clause, and the information unit – will be mapped onto one another, unless there is a good reason, functionally, for it to be otherwise.

In the spoken mode, the option of assigning marked tonality is thus available, and may be utilised to its utmost, depending upon the semantic and context needs of the speaker.

The other system relevant to our discussion, INFORMATION FOCUS, is concerned with the assignment of New information in the information unit, generating the Given–New structure by which speakers alert listeners to the information to which they are to attend as ‘news’. In the unmarked case, the last content item in an information unit carries the focus of (culmination of) New (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 89–90).

In concert with the division into clauses and the clausal system of THEME, the systems of INFORMATION FOCUS and INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION “vary the density with which new information is introduced, show how it relates to what has gone before [...] and direct the listener exactly to what he wants him to attend to” (Halliday 1985: 59). The two ‘waves’ of textual status in the clause – of theme, and information – in the unmarked case complement each other, the former falling from the beginning of the clause, the latter rising towards the end of the clause. However, in the spoken mode there is, again, the option of assigning marked choice: “Whereas in written language there is a tendency to proceed linearly from the known to the informative (since there is no resource in the writing system for expressing this kind of meaning), in spoken language there is a great deal of variation, as the speakers exploit the potential of tonicity to its full rhetorical effect” (Halliday 1985: 56).

In the written mode, as Halliday points out here, there are of course no such phonological resources and thus no such options for markedness, and so the unmarked option is assumed unless there is some other indication otherwise (Halliday 1978, 1985; Davies 1986, 1994). In the graphological system of the English culture there have evolved a set of resources, called punctuation, for realising some of the meanings realised in speech through intonation; but these are inconsistently used (Halliday 1985: 32–39), and even where carefully employed realise a mix of textual and interpersonal grammatical and semantic choices.

Predicated Themes thus do not show by themselves which is the right information structure: as a general rule, the interpretation of (the author’s intended) choices in INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION and INFORMATION FOCUS depends on a reading of the context of the text. In written text this is (primarily) the ‘local’ context of the preceding text. Martin Davies (1994) has shown how, primarily through the careful deployment of resources of COHESION (anaphoric reference, lexical cohesion etc), writers are able to suggest quite clearly the correct interpretation of their text in terms of the assignment of Given and New.

Collins (1991a: 154–70, 212; 1991b) also has investigated possible variant interpretations of predicated Themes in writing in terms of INFORMATION systems, and provided strong bases from an empirical standpoint for particular interpretations within certain textual conditions.

To return to our example above, if one considers this piece of text without reference to the co-text, there are numerous possibilities of interpretation of the choice of New, a few of which are shown in Table 1 (by italics):

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| INFORMATION FOCUS | (a) It was <i>my</i> son that killed your son |
| | (b) It was <i>my</i> son that killed <i>your</i> son |
| | (c) It was my son that <i>killed</i> your son |
| | (d) It was my <i>son</i> that killed your son |
| | (e) It <i>was</i> my son that killed your son |

Table 1. Possible interpretations of New in a Predicated Theme structure

The first thing to consider is that this is character dialogue: the analysis of the co-text in this instance must take account of what is being treated as (recoverable) Given information not by the author, but by the characters themselves. In the example in question, the speaker – Stephen Kumalo – is identifying for the father of a murdered boy that the killer was in fact Kumalo’s own son. In interpretation (a) it is the relationship of possession – encoded in ‘my’ – only that is at issue, with everything afterwards treated as cohesively recoverable information. This may be contrasted with (d), where ‘son’ is treated as focus of New information.

In (b), there is a contrastive relation set between the possessive relations of both the fathers to their sons, thus also implicating an unmarked choice of INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION of one information unit for each clause. In interpretation (c) ‘my son’ could be New or Given information: one could, for example, imagine this as a reply to the question ‘what have you to tell me about your son and my son?’, in which case it would be Given. One could imagine (e) as confirmation of a report, such as in reply to the question ‘I can’t believe these rumours about your son killing my son’.

There is not the space here to go into a detailed cohesion analysis of the text: it is sufficient to say that each interpretation, taken out of the local context of the text, implies a different textual relation to the preceding discourse, and a different construal of the context of situation of the text. If there were no access to the preceding text, we would have no way of making this interpretation; even with the co-text, the interpretation can be problematic.

Let’s now look at two instances of a Predicated Theme where there is less ambiguity as to the interpretation of textual choices (the Predicated Themes are in italics):

- (3) They come out of the Court, the white on one side, the black on the other, according to the custom. But the young white man breaks the custom, and he and Msimangu help the old and broken man, one on each side of him. It is not often that such a custom is broken. *It is only when there is a deep experience that such a custom is broken.* (Paton 1948: 174)
- (4) The Judge does not make the Law. *It is the People that made the Law* (Paton 1948: 136)

Here, the cohesive properties of the lexicogrammar, together with the structural resources available in the written mode, allow this ideational meaning – when a custom is/isn't broken – to be a point of textual prominence through the implication of marked New, as strongly suggested by the cohesive properties of the preceding text. In this case it is the author's voice alone – or at least the narrator's voice – to whom we can attribute the use of this marked emphasis, implicating therefore some textual importance to this element within the novel as a whole (cf. Martínez Lirola and Smith 2009). The implication of a marked choice as New also gives the reader a sense of 'hearing' the author/narrator 'speak' to us directly, because such choices, common in everyday speech, are encoded in intonation.

In addition to its textual role, a Predicated Theme may play an interpersonal role in a text as an indicator of choices in the interpersonal system of KEY (cf. Halliday and Greaves 2008). This is because, as Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 96) declare: "the predicated Theme structure is frequently associated with an explicit formulation of contrast; it was not..., it was..., who/which...". In spoken language, such a contrast is typically realised with the choice of the 'strong' declarative key, realised by a high falling pitch contour. Thus the predicated Theme can, where such a sense of contrast is present, imply an additional sense of interpersonal force, in the choice of the 'strong' declarative key; and in the process, the reader is given the sense of 'hearing' the written text 'speak', because of the typical association of this choice with a distinctive intonational contour.

These implied intonational choices in the written text are characteristic of spoken language, associated with face-to-face, real-time dialogic interaction, and thus bring some of the immediacy of dialogue to the author-reader relationship: we 'hear' the choices in the written text as though the characters are actually speaking, because we associate the meanings with their customary realisation in speech through intonation. We will now consider the range of semantic and contextual roles predicated Themes play in the novel.

3. The use of the Predicated Theme structure in *Cry, the Beloved Country*

Predicated Themes are used in *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) for various semantic purposes (cf. Martínez Lirola and Smith 2009; also Martínez Lirola 2002a, 2002b, and 2007b). The examples spoken by the characters are used to emphasize

and contrast important information in the negotiation of their conversations, thus giving to the written discourse not only the sense of real spoken language but also some of its semogenic power. The examples below of predicated Themes, spoken by Stephen Kumalo, have a great expressive and communicative value:

- (5) At first it was a search. I was anxious at first, but as the search went on, step by step, so did the anxiety turn to fear, and this fear grew deeper step by step. *It was at Alexandra that I first grew afraid, but it was in your House, when we heard of the murder, that my fear grew into something too great to be borne.* (Paton 1948: 94)

The representation of character speech also includes both the ‘internal voice’ of the characters’ inner thoughts and other voices such as excerpts from the speeches prepared by the murdered son, Jarvis Junior. Paton often does not make the speaker identity clear in these parts of the text, leaving the interpretation as to whose voice it is speaking – which character, or whether the author’s/narrator’s voice – to the reader. In some cases, it is the style of the prose alone that indicate ‘inner thoughts’, or ‘speech’, in others the author makes it explicit:

- (6) Yes, Msimangu was right. *It was the suspense, the not-knowing, that made him fear this one thing, in a great city where there were thousands upon thousands of people.* (Paton 1948: 79)
- (7) There was no point in imagining that if one had been there, one could have prevented a thing that had happened only because it had not been prevented. *It was the pain that did that, that compelled one to these unprofitable thoughts.* (Paton 1948: 133)
- (8) *I say we shall always have native crime for fear until the native people of this country have worthy purposes to inspire them and worthy goals to work for. For it is only because they see neither purpose nor goal that they turn to drink and crime and prostitution.* (Applause) (Paton 1948: 68)

In the examples where it is clearly the narrator’s voice which uses the marked New information structure, the author does not limit himself just to representing the speech of characters but expresses his authorial perspective on the story’s development and the characters’ predicament, their (text-internal) ‘context of situation’. This intrusion of the narrator’s voice, together with the implication of textual prominence afforded by the Predicated Theme, implicates critical points in the novel’s development, and thus gives us an insight into the author’s ideology and intent in constructing the text (Martínez Lirola 2007c). The narrator knows the reality he is narrating very well, and he evaluates it in a negative way, i.e., he reports an unjust social situation, thus engaging with that social context via

the author-reader relation. The additional interpersonal force of the 'strong' key discussed earlier, implied by the contrastive meanings in the predicated Theme structure in the examples below, also adds a sense of authorial persuasiveness to certain parts of the text:

- (9) *It is the duty of a Judge to do justice, but it is only the People that can be just.* Therefore if justice be not just, that is not to be laid at the door of the Judge, but at the door of the People, which means at the door of the White People, *for it is the White People that make the Law.* (Paton 1948: 136)
- (10) *For it is the dawn that has come, as it has come for a thousand centuries, never failing.* But when that dawn will come, of our emancipation, from the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear, why, that is a secret. (Paton 1948: 236)

This of course also applies to some extent to their use for character speech: although the interpretation of such uses is complicated by their practical function for the author as a means of representing 'authentic' dialogue between characters, we may assume the implication of a narratorial emphasis also, as the author addresses the various issues of apartheid South Africa via the medium of his characters' voices. The semantic potential afforded by the use of Predicated Themes offers a powerful tool for doing so. Often it is hard to tell if one is hearing a character's voice, or the narrator's; but with the above examples, the narrator voice seems clearly to be expressing the author's ideology in a definitive way.

Predicated Themes are used to build the textual structure of the novel, often indicating a point of climax, either in a 'scene', or in the text as a novel, and point to overarching themes and messages in the novel. All the examples presented appear in crucial moments for the development of the action, i.e., in climatic moments (see Martínez Lirola 2008 and 2009: 62–64, and Martínez Lirola and Smith 2009 for further discussion of this aspect). As an identifying type, the superordinate clause of the predicated Theme structure is often used to make textually clear, through marked New, the identity of some critical aspect of the story, the characters' lives and ideologies, and thus contributes to the development of the development of the novel's global narrative structure:

- (11) Yes, I told them. They came with me, *but it was I who shot the white man.* (Paton 1948: 88)
- (12) - Why did you choose this time?
- *It was Johannes who chose this time.* He said it was told to him by a voice. (Paton 1948: 138)
- (13) *It is only as one grows up that one learns that there are other things here than sun and gold and oranges. It is only then that one learns of the hates*

and fears of our country. It is only then that one's love grows deep and passionate, as a man may love a woman who is true, false, cold, loving, cruel, and afraid. (Paton 1948: 150)

We have shown elsewhere (Martínez Lirola and Smith 2009) how the use of this resource within *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), in its implication of the instantiation of a marked New, involves consideration of Martin's concepts of hyper- and macro-New as part of the semantic system of 'point' (Martin 1992: 434-92). Having set up the macro-Theme of the novel as a whole in the first chapter, Paton 'makes his points' of informational prominence via the use of Predicated Themes. Their use thus not only serves to cohere the various events and issues addressed in the novel into a unity of textual structure, but they also make clear what it is in the text, as a unity, that is to be 'attended to' (macro-New), via the implication of a marked textual construction.

We have considered Predicated Themes from the perspective of the lexicogrammatical stratum, showing how they may imply a variety of textual and interpersonal grammatical choices; and from the semantic stratum, showing some of their discourse semantic functions. We will now go on to address the issues of their use within a written text within the context of situation and culture operative for the novel, showing how the choice of written mode is itself significant to an understanding of the novel and the author's purpose in writing it.

4. Context of culture as a social meaning potential: Paton's use of the written mode

For Paton the social context of South Africa became a long-standing concern throughout his writings and life. The South Africa of his time was divided into several groups: whites, Asians, half-breed and Africans. From 1948, social life in South Africa was dominated by a system of apartheid of the black and white populations. Each group owned its own cultural identity, a language, a social organization and a territory to which it was attached by historical links. The major division into black and white was reflected politically in the foundation, at almost the same time (1912 and 1914 respectively), of two major political parties, the African National Congress and the National Party, who fought from the 1920s onwards over dominant Nationalist policies which deprived black South Africans of land and political rights.

The domains of Paton's political visions and his literary topics were the same: a central idea in Alan Paton's ideology was to denounce what is inhuman in racial separation and, consequently, the defence of individual freedom and of racial equality. Although he concentrated on the negative aspects of his society, condemning the corruption of the institutionalised power – and thus making his novel an interpersonal challenge to that power – Paton also concentrated on the positive aspects, since he clearly believed in the power of love as expressed through

brotherhood between human beings. This more religious ideology is an integral part of the statement he seeks to make to his readers through his text, making it more than simply an act of political polemic.

The relationship between black and white peoples in South Africa was textualised in Paton's novel within the context of a wider relationship, that of human beings and the land. It is this relationship, and the cultural issues it implies – the differences between European and African ways of relating to the land – that Paton suggests as a root cause of the suffering of both black and white. From the first chapters Paton makes clear that individual blame is not a solution to the social and political problems of South Africans: what is required is a larger perspective, the sort of perspective not normally associated with the discourse of everyday dialogic interaction. It is the culture of humankind – the ways of thinking and communicating which determine the relations of human and human and human and the land – that is implicated in the causes of the suffering depicted in the story.⁶

However, he faced the dilemma of how to negotiate such abstract and perhaps difficult meanings with a society intellectually barricaded behind the walls of its apartheid divisions? Clearly the written, novel form was required as a means of enacting such meanings; but how then to negotiate the author-reader relationship in such a way as to engage in the dialogic debate upon these issues that was, to Paton, so clearly necessary?

The evolution of writing was not originally designed for such uses: "writing evolves when language has to take on new functions in society. These tend to be the prestigious functions, those associated with learning, religion, government, and trade" (Halliday 1985: vii): that is, functions associated with monologic declaration (and hierarchic social relations), rather than dialogic interaction (between equals). As a result, the written language system lacks certain aspects of the spoken mode of the language, particularly the resources of INFORMATION and KEY systems realised in speech through intonation, by which speakers interact. Halliday (1985: 32) characterises these as "[t]he on-the spot features of language, the things that tie it to the particular moment and context of speaking [...] because of its core functions, writing is not anchored in the here and now [...] the omission of prosodic features from written language is, in some respects and under certain circumstances a genuine deficiency".

Over time, writing has come to take on functions in a society more traditionally associated with the spoken mode: most significantly for the creation of verbal art (literature), and particularly for the creation of fictive dialogue, as well as non-fictive dialogue (e.g. transcripts of court-room debate); as well as for, in Paton's time, dialogic interaction in letter writing, and in recent times with the advent of e-communication and real-time interaction in the written mode, such communication as internet chatrooms, SMS messaging, etc. Members of Paton's culture had at their disposal a choice of forms in which to communicate with their society; thus the choice of a particular form for a particular social function is significant. We can therefore ask: what were the advantages and disadvantages

of Paton's choice of the written mode? Table 2 sets out some of the aspects of the spoken and written modes critical to a consideration of our novel.

| Mode: | Spoken | Written |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Characteristics | real-time; unrecorded; face-to-face, immediate presence of receiver and context, interactive; context available text-independently; high speed of delivery/reception | delayed; recorded; distanced from receiver, non-interactive; detached from immediate situational context; context must be construed through text; slow speed of delivery/reception |
| Advantages | able to respond (and react! And comfort and agree and disagree) immediately; can use the resources of rhythm and intonation; can utilise other semiotic resources such as gesture, bodily attitude/pose, etc. | Avoid immediate interruption, reaction (possibly violent!); is received with more openness and concentration, reading being a private activity; more able to pursue difficult, abstract or sensitive field/topics over a long uninterrupted stretch of a single text (is essentially a single 'turn'), organise and reorganise; is culturally privileged (cf. Halliday, 1985: vii) |

Table 2. Main characteristics and advantages of spoken and written mode

Table 2 shows that in Paton's time there were both significant advantages and disadvantages to either mode. However, it is clear upon consideration of the themes and ideas addressed in *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) that the advantages of using the written mode far outweigh those of the spoken mode. In this respect, two major considerations stand out: the difficulty of enacting meanings within the highly sensitive field of discourse related to the issues of apartheid South Africa; and the difficulty of developing in the spoken mode the sort of large-scale textual detail and coherence necessary to bring deeper understanding to these issues. In the spoken face-to-face mode, in negotiating such meanings one would always be running the risk of being interrupted at best, and at worst attacked or imprisoned.

Having selected the spoken fictive mode from the cultural potential available to him, however, Paton then had the task of interacting with his audience. To choose the written mode, with its inherent limitations, meant challenges in terms of both representing with 'immediacy' and authenticity the scenes and characters of his story as well as in engaging with the reader in a 'dialogue' upon the issues he raises and addresses. It seems obvious that in this novel the author, although distancing himself through the written mode from the other potential interactants

of his society, had nevertheless the aim of engaging with them: the novel clearly seems intended not merely as an expression of abstract concepts, detached from the issues of the immediate social context, but as a vehicle for the negotiation of issues deeply and immediately relevant to the society of his day – Paton wanted it to be ‘anchored in the here and now’. It is with respect to this communicative dilemma that we can see the significance of Paton’s versatile use of the Predicated Theme structure, as outlined earlier, in its several functions.

Written language resources such as the Predicated Theme structure, as also the almost song-like (and very African) lyricism and other poetic qualities of the work, were clearly answers to that dilemma. It is clear that, as a marked textual and interpersonal resource, the Predicated Theme gave Paton the potential to bring some of the immediacy and semiotic power of the spoken face-to-face dialogic mode to bear in the written fictive mode, creating the sense of a more intimate and immediate dialogue between author and reader.

Collins (1991a: 84) suggests attributing their popularity in writing to two main reasons: firstly, “since stress is not marked in writing the construction serves to direct the reader into the intended interpretation of the information structure”; secondly, in terms of their thematic flexibility (Collins 1991a: 174), which “provides an attractive resource for writing, which arguably depends for its texture more on thematic than informational patterns” (Collins 1991a: 215). Importantly, he further considers that “[i]t is precisely in ‘opinionative’ texts, where clefts occur with the greatest frequency, that one would expect writers to find a need for linguistic means whereby intonation might be indicated, and in these that the contrastive implication generated by the theme/new combination would prove an attractive resource” (Collins 1991a: 214–215).

Halliday (2002: 37) has observed that “in reading a written text we assume unmarked choices ... unless there is a good reason in the environment for the choice of another one”. This concept of ‘good reason’ is critical to our discussion here of Paton’s use of the written mode to negotiate the difficult and complex issues of apartheid South Africa in the 1940s.

Paton was committed with the socio-political situation of his country and his intention with this novel was to create a new social consciousness, to oppose the dominant ideology in South Africa in that historical moment. His recurrent use of a marked grammatical structure therefore appears clearly connected with a marked social reality, and his desire to challenge it. The way in which he used language in the novel is a direct consequence of his social purpose in writing it (Blommaert 2010; Hasan 2009; Martin 2009; Teubert 2010). As Hasan (1989: 52) points out “text and context are so intimately related that neither concept can be enunciated without the other”.

Therefore we propose that Paton set out in this novel to contribute to the negotiation of the cultural landscape of his day; and that his attempt may be crucially assessed through an investigation of the type of text he created and the textual resources he deployed to do this. As Thiong’o (1995: 290) declares: “Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and

culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world”.

The use of predicated Themes was a way for Paton to transform the written monologic fictive mode into a real dialogue with the reader and the social context of his time, to give the sense of direct authorial (and character) address to the reader, while at the same time allowing the construction of a more carefully elaborated monologic text within the context of that dialogue. Paton’s novel thus forms part of that move, greatly expanded in contemporary times with interactive digital media, towards a more complex inter-mixing of the functions of different modes of communication within contemporary cultures (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001), and in particular to the expanded role that writing plays in the socio-cultural life of modern communities.

5. Conclusions

The combination of thematic flexibility and textual and interpersonal markedness is what gives Predicated Themes in Paton’s novel not only textual and interpersonal power in the written medium but also a very strong sense of the immediacy of the author’s voice and authenticity of the characters’ dialogue. This analytical interpretation accords well with literary reviews of *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), such as the following: “... its writing is so fresh, its projection of character so immediate and full, its events so compelling and its understanding so compassionate, that to read the book is to share intimately, even to the point of catharsis, in the grave human experience it treats” (New York Times 2002: 1).

As mentioned above, we consider that the Predicated Themes, as a special case of an identifying clause, serve in the written mode to identify the issues Paton feels are critical to the novel and to a discussion of apartheid South Africa. In addition, because choices in the textual metafunction function to engender relations between a text and its context, the choice of a Predicated Theme structure, as an instance of implied textual markedness, thus not only indicates critical points in the semantic development of the text but also the points at which Paton wishes most to engage the reader’s attention and thus to interact with the reader: where there is textual markedness, the text-context relation (including the shared context of author and reader) is foregrounded, and the ‘distance’ between writer and reader lessened.

We contend that Paton’s use of this grammatical structure, with its implications in the written mode of marked textual and interpersonal meaning, may be related to the social contexts of situation and culture of his time. It was only through the written mode that he could have woven such complex, controversial and abstract meanings into a coherent commentary on the issues of his time; but it was also through such textual resources that he was able to give such meanings the force and immediacy of face-to-face dialogic debate. We conclude that the novel we have analysed and its social context are inseparable; and that Paton wrote his novel in full awareness of this relation.

Notes

- ¹ Discussions of the use of different communication forms (called, variously, ‘modes’, ‘semiotic resources’, ‘media’), theoretical issues involving the semiotic ‘division of labour’ between these forms in a culture, and studies of their interactions in multimodal texts can be found in, for example, Kress and van Leeuwen (2001); O’Halloran (2004); Baldry and Thibault (2006).
- ² Bold type in this word and the following one appear in the original text.
- ³ All upper caps for system names, as per SFL convention (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 2004).
- ⁴ Initial letter upper cap for structural function labels, as per SFL convention (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 2004).
- ⁵ For a full elaboration of the SFL description of the (grammatical) intonational systems and their realisation in (phonological) intonation systems, please refer to Halliday and Greaves (2008).
- ⁶ It is interesting in this regard to consider the origins of the term ‘culture’ (AD 1440), meaning ‘the tilling of land,’ from L. *cultura*, from pp. stem of *colere* ‘tend, guard, cultivate, till’. “The figurative sense of ‘cultivation through education’ is first attested 1510”. Sourced from *Online Etymology Dictionary*. <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=culture>

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