Abstract
In a functional grammar, the interpretation of language is understood as a system of meanings together with the forms that express those meanings (Halliday, 19942: xiii-xiv). In this sense we can state that is functional grammar is connected with semantics.

We have chosen Systemic Functional Grammar as the linguistic framework because we are interested in studying how language is used in its context.

Instead of having chosen independent examples coming from a computational corpus, we have decided to analyse some of the main processes of thematization (cleft sentence and reversed pseudo-cleft sentence) and postponement (existential sentence, pseudo-cleft sentence and extraposition) in English in the book Wouldn't Take Nothing for my Journey Now written by the American writer Maya Angelou in 1993.

Since to a large extent, word order in English is fixed, we have to say that the use of certain grammatical constructions is functionally relevant, since we can perceive the feelings and thoughts of the author. For example, by using extraposition, we are postponing an important part of the message as a way of giving prominence to it. By the use of existential sentences, we introduce new elements into discourse.

1. Existential Sentence
1.1 Formal Aspects

The term existential sentence is due to Jespersen. The author (1909-1949: Vol. VII: 110) declares the following statement regarding the main use of existential sentence:

"The chief use of there-sentences is to denote the more or less vague existence or coming into existence of something indefinite; thus very frequently with the verb be [...]."

Breivik (1983: 5-6) reserves the term existential sentence to design "all and only clauses containing existential/locative be or an intransitive verb which has included in it the meaning 'be in existence' or 'come into existence'."

The structure of the sentence is: There + verb + nominal group.

Normally, we find the noun preceded by an adjective, the indeterminate article or expressions of quantity such as a few, a great deal of, but we find one example with the definite article, which means that the "definite restriction" is not respected:

In many African religions there is the belief that all things are inhabited by spirits which must be appeased and to which one can appeal. (33)

The existential sentence can be followed by a relative clause:
There are a few misguided wits who think they are being complimentary when they declare a woman is "too much". (39)

1.2 Functional aspects

With regard to the analysis of the structure in terms of theme and rheme, the theme is there and the rheme the rest of the structure. New information is in the rheme, i.e., in the notional subject.

We agree with Grzegorek (1984) in that the most common use of the structure is to point out the existence or non existence of an object or phenomenon, as we can see in the following examples:

There was a day maid who cleaned, and a gardener who daily tended the lush gardens. (1993: 62)
There are many incidents which can eviscerate the stalwart and bring the mighty down. (1993: 79)
There would be a distinct whine in the voice. (1993: 85)
The existential sentence can also emphasize or underline important information for the author. In the first example the author underlines women's discrimination, in the second the existence of God and in the third death as part of life:

In fact, there were so few public acknowledgments of the female presence that I felt personally honoured whenever nature and large ships were referred to as feminine (1993: 5).

After about the seventh repetition I began to sense that there might be truth in the statement, that there was a possibility that God really did love me (1993: 75).

"Sister, there are people who went to sleep all over the world last night, poor and rich and white and black, but they will never wake again." (1993: 86)

2. Pseudo-Cleft Sentence

2.1 Formal Aspects

In Systemic Functional Grammar, Halliday (1994: 40-41) calls these structures "thematic equatives, because it sets up the Theme + Rheme structure in the form of an equation, where 'Theme = Rheme'." In the example What the duke gave to my aunt was the teapot we find a nominalization as theme since a group of elements is functioning as a nominal group in the sentence. Apart from the theme's nominalization, in this structure we find the verb be and other element in the rheme. This analysis lets Halliday call this structure "thematic equatives" or "theme identification" (Halliday, 1994: 40).

Huddleston (1984: 462) defines this structure in the following way: "The pseudo-cleft is a special case of the identifying be construction - the case where the identified role is associated with a fused relative construction."

2.2 Functional Aspects

In these structures, one sentence is identified with another. The identifier is normally more prominent and it is there that we find the focus of the information.

Traditionally the first part of the pseudo-cleft sentence has known information; on the other hand, the sentence after the verb be has the focus.

We just find one example of pseudo cleft in the book under analysis in which a
thought of the author is expressed in a very determined way to point out that it is true: Human beings are more alike than unalike, and what is true anywhere is true everywhere, [...] (1993: 11)

Following the analysis proposed by Halliday (19942: 41), with regard to theme and rheme the structure would be analysed in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Rheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>what is true anywhere is true everywhere, [...]</td>
<td>(1993: 11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Extraposition

3.1 Formal Aspects

When we place a long subject at the end of the superordinate clause and we replace it by the pronoun it in subject initial position, we find an example of extraposition. Huddleston (1984: 451) offers the following definition:

"Extraposition shifts a unit to the end of the clause (except that certain peripheral adjuncts may still follow it) and inserts it into the vacated position."

The definition offered by Poutsma (1904-1916: 100) is the following:

"When the subject follows the predicate in the shape of a subordinate statement or an undeveloped clause, it is mostly announced by the personal pronoun it by way of anticipatory or provisional subject."

Extraposition is compulsory with verbs such as appear, seem, chance, happen, remain and the passive of hope, intend, etc. (Huddleston, 1984: 452). In the majority of the examples we find the verb be but there are two examples in which we find a different verb:

- It seems to me a lifelong endeavor to try to live the life of a Christian. (1993: 73)
- It seems easier to lie prone than to press against the law of gravity and raise the body onto its feet and persist in remaining vertical. (1993: 79)

In the second part of the structure we can find a that clause or a to infinitive clause:
3.2 Functional Aspects

As regards the analysis of the structure in terms of theme and rheme, we have to say that the theme is it and the rheme the rest of the structure.

In some of the examples extraposition is used to emphasize something that is really important to keep in mind. By using this structure we are postponing the heavy subject to the end of the clause, that is, we are postponing an important part of the message as a way of giving prominence to it:

- It is imperative that a woman keep her sense of humor intact and at the ready. (1993: 7)
- It is necessary, especially for Americans, to see other lands and experience other cultures. (1993: 11)
- It is wise to take the time to develop one's own way of being, increasing those things one does well and eliminating the elements in one's character which can hinder and diminish the good personality. (1993: 28)
- [...] if it was difficult to sustain a love affair between people who had grown up next door and who looked alike and whose parents had attended church together, how much more so between people from different races who had so few things in common. (1993: 113)

The author uses extraposition to express some of her thoughts in a very determinant way as we can see in the following examples:

- The New Testament informs the reader that it is more blessed to give than to receive. (1993: 15)
- In a world where many desperately seek to know all the answers, it is not very popular to believe, and then state, I do not need to know all things. I remind myself that it is sufficient that I know what I know and know that without believing that I will always know what I know or that what I know will always be true. (1993: 48)
- It seems to me a lifelong endeavor to try to live the life of a Christian. (1993: 73)
[...] it wasn't difficult for me to have faith. (1993: 74)

Young girls were called Sister, Sis, or Tutta. Boys became brother, Bubba, and Bro and Buddy. It is true that those terms used throughout the slave communities had had their roots in the African worlds from which the slaves had been torn, [...] (102)

4. Passive

4.1 Formal Aspects

Passive can be used in two different ways: as a thematization process, passive has no agent; in this way the result of an action or the person affected by the action is emphasized, i.e., the subject. As a postposition process, passive emphasizes the agent when this is present; if there is no agent, it can also emphasize the predicate.

When in a sentence we find a transitive verb, the passive voice lets us postpone the subject and change it into the passive sentence's agent. At the same time, passive construction has the property of moving another nominal group, the active sentence's direct object at the beginning of the sentence.

Stein (1979: 26) defines passive in the following way:

"Passive verb phrases are verbal combinations consisting of a verb + an obligatory past participle which function as verbs in a sentence and cannot be replaced by a one-word form in the present and past tense nor by a corresponding coordinated active verb phrase."

Most of the examples we find in the book have a by agent as we can see in:

The man, his family and friends were lessened by not getting to know me and my family and friends. And it also meant that I, my family and friends were lessened by not getting to know him (1993: 123).

There are also examples in which the agent is not present:

[...] save when I cry out earnestly I am answered immediately and am returned to faithfulness (1993: 35).

4.2 Functional aspects
In relation to the analysis of the structure in terms of theme and rheme, we have to say that the theme is the part of the structure before the passive verb and the rheme the rest of the sentence.

Halliday (1970: 161) declares the following statement in which we can see that the use of passive is justified:

" [...] theme, actor and modal subject are identical unless there is a good reason for them not to be. Where they are not, the tendency in Modern English is to associate theme and modal subject; and this is the main reason for using the passive. The passive has precisely the function of dissociating the actor from this complex, so that it can either be put in focal position at the end, or more frequently, omitted, as in (29):

(29i) This gazebo was built by Sir Christopher Wren.
(29ii) This gazebo is being restored."

Most of the examples of passive are used to emphasize different facts such as the sense of being a woman in the first example:
A rose by any other name may smell as sweet, but a woman called by a devaluing name will only be weakened by the misnomer (1993: 7).

In the next example it is highlighted the importance of being open to other languages:
I do know, however, that being exposed to the existence of other languages increases the perception that the world is populated by people who not only speak differently from oneself but whose cultures and philosophies are other than one's own (1993: 12).

The next example points out how some people care a lot about appearance and other people's influence:

Dress is important to mention because many people are imprisoned by powerful dictates on what is right and proper to wear. Those decisions made by others and sometimes at their convenience are not truly meant to make life better or finer or more graceful or more gracious (1993: 56).

In the next three examples, the passive sentences point out some feelings of the author:
I am besieged with painful awe at the vacuum left by the dead
Some people who exist sparingly on the mean side of the hill are threatened by those who also live in the shadows but who celebrate the light. [...] I was fired from a job when I was sixteen old and was devastated (1993: 79).

The incident saddened and burdened me. The man, his family and friends were lessened by not getting to know me and my family and friends. And it also meant that I, my family and friends were lessened by not getting to know him (1993: 123).

Nash presents passive as a characteristic of formal discourse: "A further stylistic property of the passive is that it noticeably cools the manner of address - i.e. it is an index of the formal tone" (1980: 140). We agree with him since this example gives solemnity to the narration:

I recognize the timid sadist who would like to throw a stone and hide her hand or, better, who would like not only to wound but to be forgiven by the soon-to-be injured even before the injury (1993: 117).

5. Cleft sentence

5.1 Formal aspects

Jespersen (1909-1949: Vol. VII: 147-148) defines cleft sentences in the following way:

"A cleaving of a sentence by means of it is (often followed by a relative pronoun or connective) serves to single out one particular element of the sentence and very often, by directing attention to it and bringing it, as it were, into focus, to mark a contrast."

Delin (1992: 71-72) declares regarding cleft sentences:

"Clefts are focusing constructions. Clefts serve to indicate syntactically the position of GIVEN or NEW information. [...] Many accounts of clefts have in common the view that the use of a cleft construction, either of itself or in conjunction with a particular accent pattern, indicates that the speaker or writer considers or intends certain elements within the construction to be interpreted as FOCAL."

The emphasized element in the examples of our corpus is either a prepositional phrase or a noun phrase. The relative pronoun introducing the second part of the structure can be who, that, which or 'zero pronoun'. In the
examples of this book we find that and which.

5.2 Functional aspects

Halliday (19942: 60) proposes a double thematic analysis for cleft sentences. The first one represents the local thematic structure of the two sentences that we find in the construction. The second level shows the thematic structure of the whole sentence. The following structure illustrates these two analysis:

It is in the search itself that one finds the ecstasy (1993: 73).

a) Theme Rheme Theme Rheme

b) Theme Rheme

By using this structure, we single out one particular element of the sentence, and by directing attention to it, it is emphasized. Maya Angelou highlights certain circumstances that have surrounded women and have been determinant for women's lives: In a time and world where males hold sway and control, the pressure upon women to yield their rights-of-way is tremendous. It is under those very circumstances that the woman's toughness must be in evidence (1993: 6).

In the next example, Angelou underlines the importance that believing in the spirit has in her life:

It is this belief in a power larger than myself and other than myself which allows me to venture into the unknown and even the unknowable (1993: 34).

The author also wants to emphasize that life is a continuous search:

The idyllic condition cannot be arrived at and held on eternally. It is in the search itself that one finds the ecstasy (1993: 73).

6. Reversed pseudo-cleft sentence

6.1 Formal aspects

We find a reversed pseudo-cleft when the nominal relative clause is at the end of the complex sentence as subject complement and the emphasis is on the subject.

With regard to the analysis of reversed-pseudo-clefts, we have to say that it is a
sentence with the structure SVC with a nominal relative clause as subject complement.

In this version of the reversed pseudo-cleft we can find the following wh-forms: what, why, where, how and when. The most common are what and why.

6.2 Functional aspects

Reversed pseudo-cleft sentences are thematically non-marked from the thematic point of view, since the theme is the subject of the clause, which is normal in declarative sentences. In these sentences the thematic element is the identifier instead of the identified and receives emphatic. The identified is rhematic.

This structure is mainly used to emphasize a certain fact as we can see in this example:

The flatterer, for that is what the speaker means to be, exposes himself as a manipulator who expects to ingratiate himself into "Earth Mother's" [...] (1993: 39).

The demonstrative that introducing the reversed pseudo-cleft sentence has a very clear anaphoric reference.

7. Conclusion

This article is within the framework of Systemic Functional Grammar for two main reasons: the importance of the context for the analysis of the main syntactical processes of thematization and postponement in English and because it studies language in relation to society and analyses the main reasons for choosing between some linguistic forms or others, fact that is always determined for the function that those linguistic forms have in society.

The syntactical processes of thematization (cleft sentence, reversed pseudo-cleft sentence and passive) and the syntactical processes of postponement (existential sentence, pseudo-cleft sentence and extraposition) we have analysed are used by the Maya Angelou as a way of controlling the sentences and transmitting the message.

We can also conclude that profound feelings and emotions of the author are attempted throughout the whole book.

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References


