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THE FUNCTIONS OF PLACE-NAMES

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1. *Introduction: the issues to be discussed*

The purpose of this article is to honour Kenneth Cameron. It is therefore fitting that it should be about place-names. The author of the article, however, is not a place-name specialist, but a systemic linguist and discourse analyst. The article will therefore not be about the etymologies of place-names, but about their functions: their grammatical functions, their discourse functions and the relation between the two.

The relation between grammatical function and discourse function is a matter of considerable debate. At one time particular attention was paid to the relation between the grammatical subject of a clause and the discourse notion of "topic".¹ More recently the focus of attention has been on the discourse functions of *theme* (i.e. the initial constituent of a clause).² Thus Brown and Yule briefly mention a possible connection between grammatical subject and discourse topic, but apparently only to dismiss it as irrelevant to their real concerns, these being theme and its related concepts.³ Glatt⁴ and Eiler⁵ also seem to assume that it is theme that is likely to be of interest from a discourse perspective. Fries explicitly refers to "the irrelevance of the function of grammatical subject" for his discussion of "method of development".⁶ He also appears to regard the grammatical subject as irrelevant to topic, preferring to discuss the latter in terms of frequency of mention.⁷

The arguments for the discourse functions of theme are convincing. Nevertheless it seems a little premature to dismiss the grammatical subject as irrelevant. I shall discuss the issues fully elsewhere. I expect to argue there that *both* grammatical subject and theme are important for *both* topic and method of development, a multi-functional approach such as that advocated by Halliday being more illuminating than approaches which seek a one-to-one relation.⁸ However, that is to look rather far ahead. Before I can make claims of that kind, a good deal of evidence must be assembled and discussed in some detail. For the moment, my aims must be rather less ambitious. It will be possible to report here only on the first steps in the search for relevant evidence.

I shall begin by making a detailed study of the place-names in four texts. The questions in which I shall be mainly interested are: (1) Do the grammatical functions of the place-names differ from

one text to another? (2) If so, can the differences in grammatical function be explained in terms of differences in discourse function? In particular I shall be interested in whether the frequency with which place-names are assigned to grammatical subject can be related to the "topic" of the discourse.

In the later stages of the article I shall make brief reference to other material in addition to the original four texts. Even so, it will still be the case that a very small amount of evidence is being reviewed. No conclusive answers to the questions will be attempted, therefore. The aim, rather, will be to identify worthwhile hypotheses for future work.

A final note to conclude this introductory section: the issues are not only interesting from a theoretical point of view; they also have educational implications. Both Glatt and Eiler are writing in the context of volumes intended to be useful to, among other people, teachers of English composition. In my view, both make interesting points, but they tell teachers only part of the truth.

2. *The data*

In a survey of the literature on "topic", Brown and Yule criticise much of the work on the grounds that "it has been restricted to such unrepresentative discourse data that the findings are unlikely to have much wider application".⁹ Studies have been confined to single texts or to single types of text. In many cases, the texts have not been naturally occurring texts, but have been specially constructed by the analyst for the purposes of the study. All too often, attention within the texts has been focused on single sentences, or pairs of adjacent sentences, rather than on patterns across large stretches of text. As Brown and Yule point out, "the use of single constructed sentences as the basis for making claims about notions such as 'the topic of a discourse' is extremely misleading".¹⁰ Givon, too, makes a plea for "a serious distributional study of texts - of both formal and informal registers".¹¹

I shall follow the views of these writers in three ways. Firstly I shall assume that the texts which constitute appropriate data for this type of study are real texts, not specially constructed texts. By "real text", again following Brown and Yule, I shall mean "the verbal record of a communicative act", whether written or spoken.¹² Secondly I shall study distributional patterns across the texts, not just isolated examples from the texts. Thirdly I shall bear in mind the possibility that the relation between grammatical function and discourse function may well differ from one register to another. I shall therefore use texts from different registers.

Two further considerations influenced my choice of texts: the need, for the present article, to work with texts likely to include a reasonable number of place-names; the availability of a suitable informant to assist in interpreting the texts. The latter point is particularly important in connection with the present study, if one

accepts Brown and Yule's insistence "on the principle that it is speakers and writers who have topics, not texts".¹³ My informant has participant status in relation to three of the texts that I shall be using. It was unfortunately not possible to find an example of the fourth type of text for which this was the case.¹⁴

The four texts chosen for detailed study were: a recording of a committee meeting; a recording of a coffee-party conversation; a guide-book; a travel brochure. The committee meeting was that of the Mothers' Union, an organisation associated with the Church of England. My informant was a member of the committee. The three participants in the coffee-party conversation are all members of the branch of the Mothers' Union whose committee meeting was recorded. The three, sometimes with the addition of other members of the branch, meet frequently in each other's houses for coffee-parties, tea-parties, etc.. On the occasion of the recording, my informant was the hostess.¹⁵ The guide-book, a guide-book to the East Midlands, is one which my informant has used on her travels.¹⁶ She is therefore a genuine reader of the book, not just an analyst viewing the text as a static object suitable for dissection. An attempt to unearth a travel brochure which my informant was known to have used in the past, a travel brochure furthermore that covered the same geographical area as the guide-book, unfortunately proved unsuccessful. The travel brochure eventually used in the study was collected for me from a local travel agent by one of the other members of the coffee-party.¹⁷ I have to admit that this connection with the other texts is tenuous in the extreme.

The additional material to be referred to later in the article will include written texts more closely associated with the original conversational texts: holiday postcards and letters exchanged between members of the coffee-party and their friends and families; minutes of the Mothers' Union branch committee meetings. I also have available to me a collection of children's writing, the entries in a Schools Writing Competition organised in connection with the Grantham October Festival a few years ago. The children were asked to write a passage about Grantham suitable for inclusion in a guide-book. This will be relevant to discussions of whether relations between grammatical function and discourse function are automatic - whether, for instance, assignment of place-names to grammatical subject automatically follows from a particular type of subject matter - or whether such relations are a matter of convention, associated perhaps more with written language than spoken language. If the latter, they would of course be something that children have to learn. Full consideration of this additional material, however, must await future publications.

3. Identifying place-names in the texts

An attempt to discover how place-name specialists set about extracting place-names from texts revealed that they do not regard the identification of place-names as problematic. I was offered the definition "A place-name is a name which refers to a place", together with the additional information that capitalisation can be

taken as an indicator of a place-name. This may not pose problems for place-name specialists, but it did, at least initially, for me. As a linguist, I have learnt to beware of "notional" definitions of the type just given.¹⁸ And it is obviously not true that every item in a text which has a capital letter can be regarded as a place-name. Furthermore, spoken texts do not have capital letters, at least not until they are transcribed (see below).

In any case, as a discourse analyst, am I really interested in analysts' views of what constitutes a place-name? Ought I not rather to be investigating what participants perceive as place-names? (Schegloff and Sacks, two of the pioneers of conversation analysis, emphasise that they are concerned not with "analysts' constructs", but with "descriptions of the orientations of conversationalists".¹⁹)

I examined the texts to see if there was any evidence as to the participants' views. No consistent criterion for identifying place-names emerged, but interesting points were observable in relation to one or two items. For instance, in the following extract from the committee meeting, *Central Council* appears to be being treated as equivalent to the place-name *Wells* in that it is substitutable for it in such a way as to contradict the information conveyed:

- (1) Mrs F. If we had somebody from Wells [we could throw it open
Mrs S. [Oh it's not from Wells
Mrs F. Oh I thought you meant somebody from Wells
Mrs S. Oh no somebody from Central Council

In view of the advice I had been given about capitalisation, I looked at my transcriber's uses of capitals. This again did not provide a reliable guide. The transcriber was inconsistent in her use of capitals. *The Hall* is sometimes capitalised, sometimes not, similarly *The Parish Rooms*. (It is worth noting here that such inconsistency would be interesting data in its own right, if there were time and space to investigate it systematically. Labov has drawn attention to the implications of synchronic variation for studies of language change.²⁰ Inconsistency in capitalisation is presumably relevant to the processes by which common nouns turn into proper nouns. It is probably significant that my transcriber is not inconsistent in her capitalisation of names such as *Wells*.)

I therefore tried a more direct way of discovering the transcriber's views. I asked her to pick out the place-names from 3000 words of each text.²¹ The first 3000 words of the coffee-party conversation were used for this purpose; the first 3000 words of the committee meeting proper - i.e. after the opening prayers and the reading aloud of the previous meeting's minutes; and the first 3000 words of the travel brochure proper - i.e. after the introductory pages, which seemed to be about the holiday firm itself rather than the holidays it offered. In the case of the guide-book, since I am not attempting strict control of variables for this initial survey, and remembering the purpose for which this article is being written, I chose for detailed study the section of

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the book beginning with the entry for *Lincoln*.

The number of place-names found by my informant in each text is shown in Table 1. The figures represent occurrences of place-names, i.e. in linguistic terms, tokens not types. Thus for extract (1) above, *Wells* was counted three times since it occurs three times.

It is interesting to note that my informant did pick out *Central Council* as a place-name, thus confirming that at least one of the participants perceived this in the way that evidence from the text itself suggested. It is also interesting that, although she was working from her own transcriptions of the conversations, she was not influenced by her own use of capitals. She picked out *hospital* as a place-name, but did not pick out *Middlecombe*. I queried both these points with her, in case the latter was simply an oversight. She continued to insist that *hospital* was a place-name, but that *Middlecombe* was not. *Middlecombe*, she explained, was a private house. For her, evidently, the names of public buildings count as place-names, but the names of private residences do not.

Table 1: Number of place-names in 3000 words of each text

Guide-book	119
Travel brochure	73
Coffee-party	25
Committee meeting	17

I also carried out my own independent search for place-names in the texts. I have neither participant status nor place-name specialist status, but I was interested to see to what extent two native speakers of a language would agree as to what were place-names in that language.

There were, in fact, very few disagreements; not more than two in any one text. (In spite of my initial doubts, it looks as if place-name specialists may be right to claim that the identification of place-names is unproblematic!) I have already implied some of the types of disagreement that did arise. For instance, I would not have regarded *hospital* as a place-name; it occurs in the phrase *the local hospital* and the modifier *local* for me makes it a common noun rather than a proper noun. On the other hand, I did pick out *Middlecombe*. I did not at the time know that it referred to a private residence, since this was not obvious from the text, but I would probably still have included it even if I had known. I do not draw a line between public buildings and private residences. (Such disagreements would again be interesting data in their own right if there were time and space to pursue them.)

To return briefly to the views of place-name specialists: I suspect that both my informant and I are interpreting *place*, in "A

place-name is a name which refers to a place", more broadly than would the specialists themselves. The place-name specialist I consulted emphasised that street-names and field-names are not place-names. However, I notice that the recent book by K. Cameron (Nottingham, 1985), which has the title *The Place-names of Lincolnshire*, includes sections on street-names, field-names and houses. It looks as if the term place-name can be used by specialists in both a broad and a narrow sense. My informant and I are both obviously taking it in the broad sense.

4. *The grammatical functions of the place-names*

This section of the article will be devoted to answering the first main question raised in the introduction: Do the grammatical functions of the place-names differ from one text to another? Although I am principally concerned with possible variation in the frequency with which place-names are assigned to the grammatical subject, it will be necessary also to consider the frequency with which they are assigned to other grammatical functions. If one wishes to argue that there is a connection between grammatical subject and topic of discourse and that this connection is *special* to the grammatical subject, one also has to show that this particular connection does *not* exist between topic and other grammatical functions. The figures for other grammatical functions are therefore necessary for comparative purposes.

One does not wish, however, to look at *too many* other grammatical functions. In the early stages of an investigation it is desirable to keep things as simple as possible. Lakatos reminds us that when Newton was working out his programme for a planetary system he began with a simple model and then progressed through "a chain of ever more complicated models".²² It seems similarly sensible when investigating the relations between grammatical function and discourse function to begin with simple models of each type of function and then gradually to increase the complexity.

The initial step in the grammatical analysis for this study was accordingly very simple indeed. The clauses containing the first 25 place-names from each text²³ were analysed in terms of what Quirk et al. describe as "the most familiar and important illustration of functional classification" - subject, verb, object, complement and adverbial - with a view to seeing to which of these functions the place-names had been assigned.²⁴

The second step was to analyse these clauses in terms of theme and rheme.²⁵ Grammatical subjects frequently occur in first position in their clauses and can consequently also be said to be the themes of those clauses. Any study which treats grammatical subject and theme as rivals for the attention of discourse analysts must therefore consider whether the apparent importance of grammatical subjects is really due to the fact that they are also themes, and whether the apparent importance of themes is really due to the fact that they are also grammatical subjects. For this reason, careful note was kept of: the occasions on which place-names were assigned to phrases which were functioning both as grammatical subject and

theme; occasions on which place-names were assigned to grammatical subjects which were not themes; occasions on which place-names were assigned to themes which were not grammatical subjects.

A third step was also included in the analysis: each of the previous types of classification was cross-classified in terms of head of phrase and modification of phrase.²⁶ In each of the first two steps of the analysis, examples such as *Lincoln* in (2) and *Dulverton* in (3) were grouped together:

- (2) *Lincoln* was originally inhabited by the Celtic tribes
- (3) and the *Dulverton* ones have got a bus

This seemed unsatisfactory. It is at least arguable that place-names assigned to the heads of grammatical subjects might be expected to be more closely connected with the topic of the discourse than those which merely form part of the modification.²⁷

A fourth step was considered, but for reasons of time and space rejected: the classification of the functions of the clauses in which the place-names themselves are functioning. It is again at least arguable that the grammatical subjects of main clauses might be expected to bear a closer relation to the discourse topic than the grammatical subjects of subordinate clauses. This fourth step must obviously be given a high priority in future developments of the work.

Table 2 shows the results of the analysis in terms of subject, object, complement, adverbial. (There were no instances of place-names functioning as verbs.) It can be seen from these results that the four texts *do* differ in the grammatical functions of their place-names, the relative frequency with which place-names are assigned to the subject being greater in the travel brochure and guide-book than in the committee meeting or coffee-party conversation, the relative frequency with which place-names are assigned to the adverbial being greater in the committee meeting and coffee-party than in the travel brochure or guide-book.

Table 3 shows the results of the analysis in terms of theme and rheme. (It is unnecessary to give the figures for rheme since, by definition, anything which is not part of the theme is part of the rheme. The figures for grammatical subject are repeated for comparison, and indications are given of the extent to which subject and theme co-incide.) Again we find that the texts *do* differ, the relative frequency with which place-names are assigned to theme being greater in the travel brochure and guide-book than in the coffee-party conversation or committee meeting. However, in the case of the guide-book, the figures for theme are not independent of the figures for subject, there being only two occasions on which subject and theme do not co-incide. The travel brochure would appear to be more interesting from this point of view, there being 10 instances of lack of co-incidence. It would obviously be useful to look at these examples in some detail, which is something I hope to do in a future study.

Table 2: Occurrences of place-names in subject, object, complement, adverbial. (Figures based on the first 25 place-names from each text.)

	Coffee-party	Committee meeting	Travel brochure	Guide-book
Subject	0	3	12	16
Object	3	5	1	4
Complement	1	2	1	0
Adverbial	21	15	11	5

Table 3: Occurrences of place-names in theme, with comparative figures for subject. (Figures again based on the first 25 place-names from each text.)

	Coffee-party	Committee meeting	Travel brochure	Guide-book
Theme	2	3	10	14
Subject	0	3	12	16
Themes which are not subjects	2	0	4	0
Subjects which are not themes	0	0	6	2

Tables 4 and 5 show the results of cross-classifying the earlier analyses in terms of head and modification. There will again be no room for full discussion of these tables, but brief reference will be made to one or two points of interest as these become relevant in later sections of the article.

In concluding this account of the grammatical analysis of the place-names, it should be re-emphasised that the amount of material examined has been very small indeed. It is perfectly possible that the differences which have emerged are purely fortuitous. However, it seems at least reasonable to say that the results are not discouraging for someone who believes, as I do, that different types of information will be mapped onto different grammatical functions in different types of text and that such differences are relatable to discourse function.

5. *The place-names and "topic" of discourse*

The hypothesis that I shall be considering in the following section will be: that the relative frequency with which place-names are assigned to grammatical subject will increase in proportion to the centrality to the "topic" of the discourse of the information conveyed by the place-names.²⁸ Before this hypothesis can be discussed, however, we need an independent way of arriving at a statement of what constitutes the topic of a particular discourse and an independent way of measuring the centrality of the information conveyed by the place-names.

This is well known to be a far from easy task. Brown and Yule devote a whole chapter to discussion of the problems involved.²⁹ If one attempts to derive the information from the texts themselves, one has to be careful not to be deriving the information from the *grammar* of the texts. This would be assuming that one already knew what in fact one was trying to discover, and it would lead to circular reasoning.³⁰ We need, then, either a source of information which is derivable from aspects of the texts other than their grammar, or a source of information which is independent of close examination of the texts altogether; or, since any one source is likely to be unreliable unless corroborated by other sources, a combination of these. Both types of source will be used in this study.

First, let us consider the density in the texts of the place-names themselves. One of the advantages of working with place-names is that they can reasonably reliably be associated with a particular type of meaning or information: information about place or location. It is necessary to be a little cautious here. Schegloff reminds us (a) that place-names can convey information other than information about location, (b) that information about location can be conveyed by expressions other than place-names.³¹

On the first of these points it can be said that, in all Schegloff's examples, information about location is conveyed as well as some other type of information. The other type of information is *additional* to the locational information, not instead of it. Similarly in extract (4), from my coffee-party text,

Table 4: Cross-classification of figures in Table 2 in terms of head and modification.

	Coffee-party		Committee meeting		Travel brochure		Guide-book	
	Head	Modification	Head	Modification	Head	Modification	Head	Modification
Subject	0	0	0	3	8	4	6	10
Object	1	2	0	5	1	0	0	4
Complement	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	0
Adverbial	18	3	11	4	8	3	5	0
Total	20	5	11	14	17	8	11	14

Table 5: Cross-classification of figures for theme in terms of head and modification.

	Coffee-party		Committee meeting		Travel brochure		Guide-book	
	Head	Modification	Head	Modification	Head	Modification	Head	Modification
Theme	1	1	0	3	4	6	5	9

(4) so you put off Tiverton then for Tuesday

it could be said that what is really being referred to is an event rather than a place. But the event consists of "going to Tiverton", so there is still locational information involved.

The second point really needs more discussion than there is room for here. For the moment I will simply note that the alternatives to place-names - expressions such as *there*, *back* - are more likely to be used when the information conveyed is part of shared knowledge. When the information is part of the main content to be communicated, it is likely that place-names themselves will be used. I am aware, however, that this begs a large number of questions.

Hopefully, it will be conceded that the density of place-names in a text can be regarded as at least a *rough* measure of the amount of locational information in that text and of the relative importance of such information to the main content.

Certainly, the overall density of place-names is in principle independent of the relative frequency with which place-names are assigned to the grammatical subject. The expected result of an increase in overall density, if there were no special connection between any particular grammatical function and any particular discourse function, would be an *even* rise in distribution; there would be just as great a rise in the number of place-names assigned to the adverbial, for example, as to the subject. If, therefore, the rise is uneven, this can presumably be claimed as evidence in favour of the existence of some special connection.

As a second source of information about centrality to topic - mindful of Brown and Yule's insistence that it is in any case the participants in communicative acts that have topics, not the texts per se - I look to my informant's views.³² I tried two methods of discovering my informant's views: I asked her to say in a few words what she thought each text was about; I asked her to rank-order the texts in terms of the extent to which she would expect information about places or locations to be central to the main subject matter. The two informant tests were separated by about six months. It is unlikely, therefore, that her replies to one were influenced by her replies to the other.

The results of the informant tests are given in Table 6, the texts being listed here in the order in which they were listed for the informant in the rank-ordering test. Figures from Table 1 have also been included here as an indication of the overall density of the place-names in the texts.

It will be seen that the figures in column 1 and the figures in column 3 point to exactly the same rank order for the texts: guide-book highest, then travel brochure, then coffee-party conversation, then committee meeting.³³ The results of the other informant test are more difficult to quantify, but it could perhaps be argued that there are slight indications of a similar rank order. The reply for the guide-book actually includes the lexical item *place*; places would appear to be regarded by the informant as

Table 6: Measures of the centrality of the information conveyed by the place-names to the "topic" of the discourse

	Informant's ranking of texts to show expectations of centrality. (1 = high expectations 4 = low expectations)	Informant's statements as to what each text is about	No. of place-names found in 3000 words of text
Travel brochure	2	"travelling information"	73
Committee meeting	4	"the next year's programme"	17
Guide-book	1	"description of places to visit"	119
Coffee-party	3	"things that had happened since last we met"	25

what Brown and Yule call "topic entities" for the text.³⁴ And could one argue that the lexical item *travelling* implies places? If so, this might again be grounds for placing the travel brochure second to the guide-book. There would be nothing in the results of this test to separate the committee meeting and the coffee-party, however, and these would have to be regarded as equal third.

6. Grammatical subject and "topic" of discourse

Let us now consider the evidence available so far for the hypothesis that the relative frequency with which place-names are assigned to the grammatical subject will increase in proportion to the centrality to the "topic" of the discourse of the information conveyed by the place-names.

A comparison of Table 2 with Table 6 shows most of the figures to be encouraging for this hypothesis. The guide-book is the highest ranked text in Table 6 and has the largest number of occurrences of place-names assigned to the grammatical subject. The travel brochure is ranked second and has the second largest number of occurrences. The two lowest ranked texts have none or very few occurrences of place-names assigned to grammatical subject.

The one feature of Table 2 which cannot be accounted for by this hypothesis is that the text ranked lowest of all, the committee meeting, has more instances of place-names assigned to grammatical subject than the coffee-party - only three more, it is true, but more. A look at Table 4 reveals a further point which cannot be accounted for by this hypothesis: the travel brochure has a higher proportion of place-names functioning as the heads of grammatical subjects than the guide-book.

The first of these points will be discussed further in the following section under the heading of possible alternative hypotheses. Discussion of the second point must await future publications, as must detailed comparison of the figures for grammatical subject with those for other grammatical functions.

For the moment, it would appear that the hypothesis under consideration could account for some of the figures, but not all.

7. Possible alternative hypotheses

The differences in centrality to topic are by no means the only differences between the texts which could account for the variation in the frequency with which place-names are assigned to grammatical subject. Two of the texts are written, while the others are spoken. Some of the texts are more formal than others. The conversations took place among small groups of which all the members were well known to each other; the written texts are addressed to large numbers of readers most of whom will be unknown to the writers. The speakers can rely on shared knowledge; the writers cannot. Indeed, it is perfectly possible that the variation in frequency can only be accounted for in terms of a combination of these factors. Stubbs, for instance, draws attention to the interrelations between a scale of writtenness/spokenness and a scale of formality/informality.³⁵

It will be possible in this article only to consider very briefly just two further hypotheses: that the relative frequency with which place-names are assigned to grammatical subject will be greater in written texts than in spoken texts; that the relative frequency with which place-names are assigned to grammatical subject

will increase in proportion to the formality of the occasion. There would seem to be some slight evidence in favour of each of these hypotheses.

There is some evidence that in the coffee-party text, speakers have actually avoided assigning place-names to grammatical subject even where this would have been topically appropriate. For instance

(5) they had a nice antique shop at Wells

could equally well in the context of the discourse have been *Wells had a nice antique shop*. To avoid this, the speaker has introduced a "they" which is (a) vague, (b) totally irrelevant to the rest of the conversation. Yet, when writing postcards to each other, the speakers in the coffee-party conversation *do* assign place-names to grammatical subjects. Similarly, in the minutes of the previous committee meeting, whose reading aloud is recorded on my tape, there are only five place-names, but one of these is assigned to grammatical subject. Furthermore, it is the *head* of the grammatical subject.

It is also worth noting in this connection that examples such as (5) occur in the children's writing, particularly in the writing of those children who, in my judgement, have not yet mastered the conventions of written English. The writtenness/spokenness hypothesis would at least appear to be worth investigating further.

Slight evidence for the formality hypothesis can perhaps be found in the first of the anomalies reported in the previous section. One might expect a committee meeting to be more formal than a coffee-party, even though the participants in both are well known to each other. This could account for the occurrence of place-names in the grammatical subjects of the committee meeting, where there are none in the coffee-party conversation.

The formality hypothesis would also be an alternative explanation for the differences between the travel brochure and the guide-book. A travel brochure is, after all a kind of advertisement. One would expect the travel brochure to be less formal than the guide-book.

Conclusion

As already indicated, it would be foolish to draw too firm conclusions from so small a study. It would appear, however, that all three of the hypotheses discussed in this article are worth further investigation. It would also appear that the inter-relatedness of these hypotheses should be considered.

It will also be interesting to consider in future work to what extent the behaviour of place-names is simply a special case of some larger phenomenon. To what extent do the hypotheses apply to assignment to grammatical subject of instances of references to any non-human entities?

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As it happens, the next article I write will also be intended for inclusion in a festschrift volume. This time, however, it will not be in honour of the Director of the English Place-Name Society. I shall be able to include in the study grammatical subjects other than those containing place-names.

NOTES

- 1 See, for example, the collection of articles in *Subject and Topic*, ed. C.N. Li (New York, 1976).
- 2 This definition of *theme* is usually ascribed to Halliday. However, for Halliday's own views, see M.A.K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (London, 1985) p.39.
- 3 G. Brown and G. Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (Cambridge, 1983) p.135.
- 4 B.S. Glatt, "Defining Thematic Progressions and Their Relationship to Reader Comprehension", in *What Writers Know*, ed. M. Nystrand (New York, 1982) pp.87-103.
- 5 M.A. Eiler, "Thematic Distribution as a Heuristic for Written Discourse Function", in *Functional Approaches to Writing*, ed. B. Couture (London, 1986) pp.49-68.
- 6 P.H. Fries, "On the Status of Theme in English: Arguments from Discourse", in *Micro and Macro Connexity of Texts*, ed. J.S. Petöfi and E. Sözer (Hamburg, 1983) p.133.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p.135.
- 8 M.A.K. Halliday, "Language Structure and Language Function", in *New Horizons in Linguistics*, ed. J. Lyons (Harmondsworth, 1970) pp.140-65.
- 9 Brown and Yule, p.124.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p.83.
- 11 T. Givon, *On Understanding Grammar* (New York, 1979) p.209.
- 12 Brown and Yule, p.6. For other uses of the term *text* see Brown and Yule, p.190; and M. Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis* (Oxford, 1983) pp.9-10.
- 13 Brown and Yule, p.68. (Brown and Yule later imply that hearers and readers also have topics, e.g. p.82.)
- 14 Finding a suitable informant is no easy matter. W. Labov, in *What is a Linguistic Fact* (Lisse, 1975) p.31, warns that "the judgments of those who are familiar with the theoretical issues may not be counted as evidence". On the other hand, informants who have no knowledge at all of the type of work one does simply do not understand one's questions. Stubbs (*op.cit.*, p.91) draws attention to the "considerable effort" which is necessary "to mould the intuitions of beginning linguistics students" until they can make the distinctions required of them. One has to tread a very fine line between informants who know too much and informants who know too little. The informant for the present study is in fact my mother. Hopefully, Labov's strictures do not apply to mothers! My mother is not familiar with the theoretical issues which underlie my work. On the other hand, she is very used to being asked strange questions by me about linguistic matters and is usually able to understand the questions well enough to give relevant replies.

Functions of Place-Names

- 15 It was also my mother who made the two recordings and transcribed them for me. She worked with the transcription conventions recommended in M. Stubbs, B. Robinson and S. Twite, *Observing Classroom Language* (Milton Keynes, 1979) pp.32-3.
- 16 H. Westacott, *RAC Going Places: East Midlands* (London, 1982).
- 17 Select Holidays travel brochure for Winter Sunbelt, Oct. 85-May 86, advertising holidays in the Canary Islands, Madeira, Southern Morocco, Gambia, Eliat, the Seychelles and Kenya.
- 18 See e.g. F. Palmer, *Grammar* (Harmondsworth, 1984) p.55.
- 19 E.A. Schegloff and H. Sacks, "Opening up Closings", *Semiotica* 7 (1973) p.293.
- 20 W. Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (Philadelphia, 1972).
- 21 I did not offer my informant any definition of a place-name but left her to decide for herself what she understood by the term - cf. Stubbs' investigation into what his informants understood by the term *plot*. M. Stubbs, "Stir until the Plot Thickens", in *Literary Text and Language Study*, ed. R. Carter and D. Burton (London, 1982) pp.56-85; revised version in Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis*, pp.194-217.
- 22 I. Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Research Programmes", in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (London, 1970) pp.135-6.
- 23 On points of disagreement, I followed my informant's identification rather than my own.
- 24 R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, J. Svartvik, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London, 1985) p.49.
- 25 All grammatical terms in this article are used as in Quirk et al. except where otherwise indicated.
- 26 As Quirk et al. point out (p.60), strictly speaking prepositional phrases are "nonheaded". However, it still seems useful to distinguish between e.g. to Taunton and on the train to Taunton. I have therefore treated examples of the former type as instances of place-names assigned to head of adverbial, the latter as instances of place-names assigned to modification of adverbial.
- 27 The analysis is still at present a rather blunt tool. Modification includes not only both pre-modification and post-modification of fairly normal types, but also, in the case of the guide-book, addresses of places named earlier. Thus in *The Usher Art Gallery*, *Lindum Hill*, *The Usher Art Gallery* has been treated as place-name assigned to head, *Lindum Hill* as place-name assigned to modification.
- 28 It is of course just as important to consider comparative figures for other discourse functions as to consider comparative figures for other grammatical functions. In future work I shall discuss possible models of discourse function. One of the first models to be considered will be that of Fries (op.cit.) since he explicitly opposes "method of development" to "topic" (p.135).

- ²⁹ Brown and Yule, pp.68-124.
- ³⁰ Brown and Yule themselves appear in places to come quite close to this type of circular reasoning, e.g. pp.140-4.
- ³¹ E.A. Schegloff, "Notes on a Conversational Practice: Formulating Place", in *Studies in Social Interaction*, ed. D. Sudnow (New York, 1972) pp.75-119.
- ³² Brown and Yule, p.68.
- ³³ The rank-ordering test took place *before* the informant was asked to search for place-names in the texts. Her replies to the test question could therefore not have been influenced by the actual count of place-names.
- ³⁴ Brown and Yule, p.137.
- ³⁵ M. Stubbs, "Written Language and Society: some Particular Cases and General Observations", in Nystrand, *op.cit.*, p.41.

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