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Theme in spoken language: when a tone group is not a clause

Abstract: While there is a clear tendency for a Theme not to occur within its own tone group, it is equally clear that clauses are frequently formed out of more than a single tone group. Hence it is precipitous to assume an a priori relationship between clause and tone group/information unit. Speakers in pursuit of their individual communicative choices manage their interactional and informational needs by producing prosodic and thematic choices appropriate to their goals. Such choices as we have seen are frequently mutually re-enforcing, but speakers may employ prosodic choices which foreground their interactional needs. Specifically, this entails that there is no direct relationship between lexico-grammatical and prosodic meanings; both redound with semantic meanings. Yet, these meanings may be constrained by the interactional demands of the communicative situation in which a speaker operates. In this paper, I examine the spoken realisation of Interpersonal Theme and find that Interpersonal Themes realized by Mood adjuncts and metaphors of modality tended to be realized with different key. Similarly, the expectation that marked Theme was likely to attract high key was found to be subject to the speaker's need to manage the interaction.

Keywords: focus; information; interaction; interpersonal theme; key; stratification; tonality

1 Introduction

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is unique among functional approaches to language in that it separates Theme and Information (Halliday 1967a).[1] This

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separation has led to much fruitful work on the study of Theme (e.g. the chapters in Hasan and Fries 1995 and Forey and Thompson 2008). However, almost all work on Theme has concentrated on written texts with little attention given to spoken language (but see Arús-Hita 2022; Bäcklund 1992; Ping 2005; Taboada and Lavid 2003). Except for O'Grady (2017a, 2024), there has been limited discussion of the inter-relationship between prosody and Theme. Here I will argue that neglect of the prosodic articulation of Theme results in analyses that do not fully capture the fact that speech happens as an unfolding continuous flow, and hence the interactional component of unscripted speech is discounted.

Halliday (1967b) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) have described both the clause and the tone group as encoding a quantum of information. The tone group corresponds to a unit containing a single piece of information dubbed the information unit. Within SFL there has been an assumption that clauses and tone groups are coterminous, and that Given information typically precedes New information. This has led to the further assumption that Theme normally coincides with Given while New information is contained in the Rheme. The expected pattern is seen in Example (1) but not in Examples (2) or (3). All examples in the paper unless indicated by the asterisk (*) are taken from the data set described in Section 3. The transcription symbols used in the examples can be found in the Appendix.

(1) I read an article in the *Guardian*.

I	read an article in the /***Guar***dian |
Theme	Rheme

	Focus
Given	◄————————————New

(2) the video is quite focused on uh the sea

| *the video*	is quite **fo**cused on |	\\uh |	the /**sea** |
	Focus	N/A	Focus
	◄————————New		
Theme	Rheme		

In Example (1) the subject pronoun is Theme and also Given. The Focus falls on the final lexical item *the Guardian* which is presented as the main burden of the message. However, in Example (2) there are two Foci though both are Rhematic. The Thematic element *the video* is salient. It is unclear without examining the wider context whether it is Given or New, as this ultimately depends on whether the salient element is recoverable, either by being physically present or previously mentioned. In Example (3) though we find an unambiguous example of a Focal element being Thematic.

(3) the train line between here and home had closed

	the \/ _**train**_ **line** |	_between_	/_**here**_ _and home_ |	had \/**closed**
	Focus		Focus	Focus
	Given	◄——————— New		
	Theme			Rheme

The speaker has articulated the clause as three information units; each of which must contain an information focus, with the first two coterminous with the Theme. These examples illustrate that in spoken discourse it is not correct to assume an a priori relationship between clause and tone group/information unit, and hence between Theme and Given.

  In Section 2, I will briefly review (i) the literature on Theme focussing on its relationship with the interpersonal metafunction, and (ii) the literature on the prosodic encoding of information. I will discuss key choices in order to illustrate how tone groups are presented to hearers within the temporal flow of interactive speech (Brazil 1997; O'Grady 2010).[2] Section 3 will describe the data set and illustrate how it was coded. In Section 4, I will discuss the relationship between Theme and prosody by focussing on their coupling and decoupling in the creation of interpersonal meaning in interactive situated discourse. Finally, in Section 5, I will summarise the main findings.

2 State of the art

Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 89) define Theme as "the element which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that which locates and orients the clause within its context". It is identified as extending from the beginning of the clause up to and including the first element in transitivity. This element is called the topical Theme (Halliday 1994: 43). The topical Theme may be preceded by optional initial textual and interpersonal elements. Examples (1)–(3) are examples of Themes consisting of topical Themes only. Examples (4)–(6) illustrate Themes with multiple elements. Thematicity is only exhausted through the realisation of an experiential

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2 This is not to be confused with the slightly different use of Key in Halliday (1967b) and Halliday and Greaves (2008). In these works Key refers to the systems of meanings generated by tone choices occurring on tone groups with identical Mood choices. For instance assuming declarative Mood a choice of tone 5 (rise-falling) rather than the neutral tone 1 (falling) signals a strong commitment. A fall-rise (tone 4) signals a reservation. Key choices signal a speaker's attitude towards the content of their proposition and express their attitude towards their hearer. This is very similar to the function ascribed to key in this chapter but the prosodic means of realising key choices are quite different.

element; a clause can only be located within its context when it orients towards *what is going on in the context*.[3]

(4)   So we were quite affected by the floods.

So	*we*	were quite affected by the floods
Textual	Topical	
Theme		Rheme

(5)   I think it was last year.

I think[3]	*it*	was last year
Interpersonal	Topical	
Theme		Rheme

(6)   because obviously seventeen minutes is quite a long time to sit there

because	*obviously*	*seventeen minutes*	is quite a long time to sit there
Textual	Interpersonal	topical	
Theme			Rheme

Unlike Examples (1)–(3) which only orient and locate the clause in terms of representational meaning, Examples (4)–(6) do more. The inherently Thematic conjunction *so* in Example (4) locates the clause as linked to the preceding one and functions logically to signal that the forthcoming clause will elaborate the proposition expressed in the previous clause. In Example (5), the Interpersonal orientation includes the speaker's assessment of the truth of her proposition as likely but not certain. In Example (6), the orientation includes the inherently thematic structural Theme *because* which extends the proposition in the previous clause by providing a reason for the speaker's action. The realisation of the modal Theme *obviously* presents the starting point as one where her hearers will not dispute the common sense of the proposition that is to come in the Rheme.

   All the Theme examples so far consist of unmarked Theme which is defined as "the element which the speech function would determine for the point of departure of the clause" (Halliday 1967a: 213). To illustrate Declarative Mood comprises Subject ˆ Finite order and hence Subject represents the unmarked Theme choice in that Mood. The options are presented in Table 1.

   Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 97) provides a semantic gloss that unmarked Theme represents the expected choice and is chosen as Theme in the absence of a good communicative reason. In a similar manner, I glossed marked Theme as

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3 I have coded *I think* as a "metaphorical expression of modality, akin to a modal adjunct, in that the Mood tag is interpreted as *wasn't it*"; see Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 687) and Section 3 below for further details.

Table 1: Topical Theme and Mood.

Mood	Theme	
	Unmarked	**Marked**
Declarative	Subject, e.g. pronoun, nominal group, non-finite clause.	Complement, Adjunct, e.g. preposition phrase, adverbial group.
Interrogative Y/N	Finite plus Subject,[a] e.g. finite operator ^ subject.	As above.
Interrogative *Wh-*	Wh element, e.g. nominal group, preposition phrase, or adverbial group functioning as interrogative element.	As above.
Imperative	(Let's) plus predicator, e.g. verbal group.	As above.

[a]Note in Halliday (1967b) the Theme was finite only. A different approach is taken in Martin et al. (1997: 25) who class the finite as the interpersonal Theme on the grounds that it is the element which signals that a response is required. They would similarly class the *Wh-* interrogative as a fusion of interpersonal and topical Theme.

signalling that the perspective being developed is approached from an unusual angle (O'Grady 2017a: 276). In Example (7), the clause is not orientated around the subject *a lot of houses* but rather around the temporality encoded in the Theme *during like during the floods during that time.* The angle being developed concerned what occurred at a time and not in a particular location. This is unexpected as the speaker's prior cotext had encoded information about the city *Hull* where her family lives.

(7)   during like during the floods during that time a lot of houses got flooded

during like during the floods during that time	a lot of houses got flooded
abandoned	
Marked Theme	Rheme

The following paragraphs briefly describe the tone group/information unit. For further information see (Halliday 1967b; Halliday and Greaves 2008; Tench 1996). Speech is parcelled out in tone groups each of which contains a tonic element. A tonic element is signalled by the presence of a tonic accent on the tonic syllable which is the site of the major pitch movement in the tone group. Minimally the information unit must contain a tonic syllable. It may contain additional syllables before and after the tonic. Phonetically the tonic focus is realized within a tonic syllable but informationally it is the grammatical item which contains the tonic focus that the speaker draws attention to. The elements found in the tail after the tonic syllable are non-salient and project Given information. Elements prior to the tonic syllable may be salient or non-salient. Informationally they may be Given or New. Table 2 schematises the options with examples from the corpus. Given elements are shaded in grey. Salient syllables are underlined and tonic syllables are underlined and in bold.

Table 2: The possible realisations of tone groups with examples.

	Minimum tone group	Maximum tone group
Tonic only	/**flooded** Focus	N/A
Tonic ^ Tail	my /**house** was Focus Given	N/A
Prehead ^ Tonic	and \\s**tuff** Given Focus	N/A
Prehead ^ tonic ^ tail	it was really/**bad** as well Given Focus Given	N/A

Head ^ Tonic ^ Tail	N/A	so the **sea**side town isn't
		          Focus Given
		          ◄-------- New

Head ^ Tonic	N/A	a lot of people started to **blame**
		                                    Focus
		                    ◄---------------- New

Prehead ^ head ^ Tonic	N/A	it's hard to **show** Given Focus ◄---------- New
Prehead ^ head ^ tonic ^ tail	N/A	but her garden is at**tached** to it Given Focus Given ◄--------- New

I have followed Brazil (1997) and classed tone groups as maximum or minimum depending on whether the tone group contained more than a single salience. The significance of this categorisation will become clear in the discussion of key below. Table 2 illustrates that tonic syllables present the lexical item they occur in as non-recoverable. While posttonic items are Given, the status of pretonic ones is somewhat ambiguous. In minimum tone groups, the lack of a pretonic salience means that the pretonic is presented as recoverable. However, in maximum tone groups, the position is not so clear. Halliday and Greaves (2008: 57) state that the Focal element may either represent the New or be the culmination of the New. The status of items between the head and the tonic depends on the context and whether the material in the pretonic is available. The same phonetic realisation may have a different information distribution depending on the context.

(*9a)   What's new?

(*9b)   What did you get?

		I bought	a new **car**		but I haven't had	time	to **drive**	it	
9a			Focus				Focus		
			◄————New		Given————►◄		—New	Given	
9b			Focus				Focus		
		Given———►◄— New			Given————►◄————— New			Given	

In Example (9b) the salient item *bought* is Given while in Example (9a) it is presented as not having been previously introduced to the context. The accenting of pretonic syllables does not necessarily entail Newness. If we turn back to Table 2 we can see that an explanation based on recoverability is unable to account for the speaker's decision to accent the structural Theme *so*. There can be no question of the conjunction being recoverable from the cotext.

(10) | so the **sea**side town isn't |

However, the accenting of *so* has a functional motivation in relation to how the speaker projects that her hearers will receive her message. The initial pretonic salience (the onset) realizes the key of the tone group.[4] A high key signals to the hearer that the speaker will articulate a proposition which contrasts with the expectations created by the previous discourse. This may be because the high key signals the introduction of a new topic, or because the speaker intends to develop the discourse in an unexpected way. A low key signals that the speaker projects that the following discourse is equivalent to the previously created expectations. Selection of mid key carries no such implications. The key choice realized by the articulation of *so* is mid; the speaker signals that the starting point of her clause is neither unexpected nor equivalent to previous expectations.

The speaker has the additional choice of choosing to pitch the tonic syllable as higher or lower than the preceding onset. Following Brazil (1997) we describe such choices as high, mid, and low termination. A high termination signals that the speaker anticipates the hearer will adjudicate the proposition. A mid termination anticipates hearer concurrence with the proposition, while a low termination projects no expectations, signals closure, and resets the pitch. Returning to Example (10) the presence of the onset followed by the tonic allowed the speaker to realize independent key and termination choices.

As stated earlier, Halliday (1967b) and Halliday and Greaves (2008) argue that the unmarked realization for a single clause is to be articulated as a single tone group. However, this claim remains in need of empirical confirmation. Halliday and Greaves (2008)[5] do not base their argument for an unmarked relationship between clause and tone group solely on frequency. Rather, an unmarked choice is the choice made in the absence of any good reason for choosing anything else. Marked choices are therefore motivated by a good reason. However, the unmarked/marked choice

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4 High, mid, and low are relative terms and refer to audible step ups/step downs in pitch compared to the previous onset. Thus, without a pitch reset, a mid onset can be followed by a high, mid or low one, a high onset by a high or mid one and a low onset by low or mid one.

5 I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

contrasts in terms of "skew" (Halliday 1991: 35); allowing us to expect that a marked relationship would manifest frequency effects. Indeed without relying on frequency, our claims would amount to armchair linguistics! Hence, if there is an unmarked relationship we can expect that at least 70 % of tone groups will be conterminous with clauses. The sole study I know which examined the relationship between clause and tone group in English is Croft (1995) which despite being a rather small scale study offers some support for Halliday's claims. Croft showed that the relation between tone groups and grammatical units, though not necessarily clauses, was strong and occurred 91 % of the time. He further identified a number of tendencies, where the one-to-one relationship between clause and tone group did not hold: (i) parallelism, (ii) syntactic complexity in general, and (iii) distance.[6]

Givón (2017: 182) disagrees and argues that the equation of clause with tone group privileges a grammatical analysis over a *pre-grammatical* one where speech is produced as a sequence of subclausal units identified as "constituents falling under their own separate intonation contour" i.e. tone groups (Givón 2017: 157). He, like me (O'Grady 2010), argues that the sequencing of tone groups into larger communicative sequences is tightly governed by the conventions of the language. I further argue though, that irrespective of the relation between an individual tone group and an individual clause, tone groups form into sequences which equate with clause units.

To sum up this section, we can see that if Halliday is correct most Themes will co-occur with Rhemes in single tone groups. Where the Theme is longer or contains more syntactically distant material it may form into its own tone group. This leads us to expect that marked Themes and modal adjuncts will frequently occur within their own tone groups. We might also expect that as marked Theme signals an unusual angle in the development of the message, and as high key signals that the following proposition will be contrary to the previously created expectations that speakers may re-enforce marked Theme by simultaneously selecting high key. But we note that Taboada and Lavid (2003: 166) found in their study of elicited task-orientated conversation that while marked Theme was often used to signal the introduction of a new proposal, it was usually located turn medially. In our investigation of the relationship between Theme and interpersonal meaning, we predict: (1) Modal adjuncts and metaphorical expressions of modality may occur in independent tone groups. (2) Marked Themes are likely to contain a high key re-enforcing that something unexpected is about to occur in the conversation.

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6 By distance Croft (1995) refers to the concept of syntactic closeness, e.g. a direct object is closer to the verb than an oblique one, or a complement is closer than an adverbial clause.

3 The data set

Nine volunteers, all undergraduate students, were provided with a video link which showed images of flooding in the UK and asked to watch the video at home. Eight of the volunteers were female. The video was silent so that there could be no possibility of language from the video priming responses.[7] The volunteers were randomly assigned into four groups of three and asked to attend a meeting with their group members on the following day.[8] The volunteers were not known to each other and hence given a few minutes to introduce themselves and break the ice. Then the video was played again with the participants encouraged to comment on it as it was playing. Once the video had finished playing, and the sound recorder had been turned on each volunteer was invited to speak in turn about what they had watched and any personal experiences they had of flooding. Each session concluded with a short conversation framed by the participants' reactions to what they had heard from their peers.

I used PRAAT software (Boersma and Weenick 2013) to transcribe the recordings into tone groups. Boundary cues such as pauses, changes in rhythm, and the presence of a major tone movement indicated a tone group boundary. Within each tone group, I transcribed the salient syllables with the final one being the tonic, and the initial one being the onset. In order to support my auditory analysis of high, mid, and low key and termination, I measured the F0 value for all onset and tonic syllables. Finally, I used the visual representation of the F0 (pitch) curve to establish the tone choice. The written transcripts of the recordings were coded as Theme ˆ Rheme following the principles set out in Section 2. Table 3 summarises the contributions by number of tone groups and Themes produced.[9]

Across the whole corpus, there were 2.6 times more tone groups than Themes. Within the individual texts, this ranged from 2.2 times to 4.2 times more tone groups. It is clear there is no one-to-one relation between clauses and tone groups with tone groups mostly being formed out of sub-clausal elements. Examples (11)–(15) illustrate the possibilities.[10]

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7 The choice of methodology was greatly influenced by the success of the silent Pear Stories film in generating speech. See Chafe (1980) for a full description.

8 One female volunteer was unable to attend and hence one group comprised two people.

9 As I consider the text to be the unit of analysis, I treat the dialogues and monologues as identical. My aim is to examine how the interaction between Theme and prosody realizes interpersonal meanings. I am not concerned with the choices of individual speakers and any possible variation between speakers.

10 There were no examples of predicated Theme in the data set. The sole possible equative theme is | Yeah I guess what you were **say**ing about like | \\/**Port**land and stuff |. However, as the speaker produces no following material I discounted it as an abandoned Theme.

Table 3: The relation between tone groups and themes.[a]

Speaker	Number of tone groups	Number of Themes	Ratio Theme to TG
A1	77	34	1:2.2
A2	78	29	1:2.7
A1/2	74	22	1:3.4
B1	76	31	1:2.5
B2	132	49	1:2.7
B3	101	43	1:2.3
B1/2/3	206	98	1:2.1
C1	109	38	1:2.9
C2	108	26	1:4.2
C3	134	55	1:2.4
C1/2/3	97	34	1:2.9
All	1,192	459	1:2.6

[a]As I have transcribed Theme in relation to T units and not clauses the figures are close but not identical to the ratio between tone group and clause.

(11)   I live near Hull.

Topical Theme

	I	**live** near |**Hull** |
Theme	Rheme

The Theme is realized by a pronoun and is nonsalient.

(12)   so um him and his family had to cook their Chris … like Christmas dinner and turkey at the local church and like

Textual ^ Topical Theme

|so **um** |	him and his family	had \/**to** | | **cook** their |Chris … like Christmas dinner and /**turk**ey | at the local /**church** and like |
Textual	Topical	
Theme		Rheme

The Textual and Topical Themes are in different tone groups. The Topical Theme is realized by an NG and is salient.

(13)   I think it was erm yesterday.

Interpersonal ^ Topical Theme

| I think	it	was erm /**yes**terday |
Interpersonal	Topical	
Theme		Rheme

The interpersonal Theme is realized by a metaphor of modality and, unlike the Topical Theme, is salient. The clause is produced as a single tone group.

(14) because obviously the big light zoomed out

Textual ^ Interpersonal ^ Topical Theme

| because	obviously	the big light	**\\zoomed** out |
Textual	Interpersonal	Topical	
Theme			Rheme

The salient topical Theme is preceded by the salient adjunct *obviously* and the non-salient conjunction *because.* The Theme and the Rheme occur within a single tone group.

(15) so where my friend was in Godlaming um her house is like by the river bank like off of it

Marked Theme

| so where my \\/**friend** was | in **God**laming |	| um her **house** is like by the /**ri**ver bank | like \\/**off** of it|
Textual Topical	
Theme	Rheme

In Example (15) as the Subject *her house* is not found within the Theme, the hypotactic clause *where my friend was in Godlaming* is the marked Theme of the clause complex.[11] It is articulated in two tone groups and preceded by a non-salient textual Theme.

The five examples above illustrate that speakers articulate Themes in as many tone groups as appropriate to their message. Table 4 details the articulation of Theme in relation to tone group across the data set.

It is immediately obvious that a large majority (72 %) of Themes are not realized as one or more Tone groups. Excluding marked Themes the percentage rises to 79.7 % of Themes. It is also obvious that while only a small minority of unmarked Themes include an interpersonal component, the inclusion of an interpersonal element does not affect tonality with 88.2 % of interpersonal ˆ topical Themes being articulated within the same tone group as Rhematic elements. The number of interpersonal Themes in my data is much lower than recorded by previous studies

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11 There was one ambiguous case where it was not immediately clear if the elements *the following day* was Thematic.

\| −and \| the н kind of scenes like my \\/dad would make \| (0.63) \| We were н lucky that they /\\opened up \| (0.29) one of the \\roads \| (0.31) \|the \\sun \| cause it was really a hot sunny \\day \| **the ʟ/following day** \| (0.93) they opened up the −roads \| (0.18) \|and erm … (0.35) н\\one of the roads \| and we were able with a \\minor detour \| [we] were able to … make it \\/out to Cardiff \|

Because of the presence of the extended pause, I classed it as an afterthought and as a NG which elaborates the previous tone group. However, in theory it could be a Marked Theme orienting the following clause.

Table 4: Number of tone groups contained within a Theme.

# of TGs	0	1	2	3	4	5
Topical	134	7	1	1	0	0
Textual ˆ topical	136	12	28	7	1	0
Interpersonal ˆ topical	15	0	1	1	0	0
Textual ˆ interpersonal ˆ topical	18	4	12	2	0	0
Marked	7	23	13	4	2	1
All	310	47	54	15	3	1[a]

[a]I have excluded 28 Themes from consideration as they were abandoned, i.e. no Rheme was produced.

e.g. Bäcklund (1992) and Taboada and Lavid (2003) who found that around 30 % of Themes contained an interpersonal element. In my data set, only 14 % of unmarked Themes contained an interpersonal component.

Conversely, speakers' tonality decisions seem affected by the presence of a textual Theme with 22.1 % of textual ˆ topical Themes being realized as one or more tone groups. Examination of these cases revealed three patterns. The first and by far the most common was where the textual Theme was placed in its own tone group. This occurred on 70.6 % of the instances where textual ˆ topical Themes were articulated as one or more tone groups. The topical Theme was always realized by a non-salient pronominal element. This compares with the overall data set where a non-salient pronoun functioned as topical Theme 63.8 % of the time. In the second pattern, the tonic syllable co-occurred with the topical Theme and the textual Theme was nonsalient. In the third, there was a tonic on both the textual and topical Themes. In both these patterns the topical Theme was realized by a nominal group or an indefinite pronoun. These patterns occurred 13.8 % and 15.6 % of the time. Examples (16)–(20) illustrate.

(16)   and then they turned the light on

and –**then** | (.59) they	ʜturned the \/**light** on |
Textual | Topical	
Theme	Rheme

(17)   erm and yeah and obviously it didn't get all that bad here in Cardiff

| \/**erm** | (1.31) ʜ–**and** | (.69) <u>yeah</u> and	<u>ob</u>viously	it	**didn't** | (.36)| <u>get</u> all that <u>bad here</u> in /**Car**diff |
Textual	Interpersonal	Topical	
Theme			Rheme

(18)   oh yeah that's in Surrey

oh	(.19) **yeah**	(.19) that	's in **Sur**rey	
Textual	Topical	
Theme		Rheme

(19)   so everything has been slightly damaged

|so	ʟ**ev**erything	has been | (.38) <u>slightly</u> \/**da**maged |
Textual	Topical	
Theme		Rheme

(20)   and his house or his like street was completely flooded

| ʟ–**and** | (.35) **his** | (.51) **house** | ʟor his like **street** |		was comple<u>te</u>ly **floo**ded |
Textual	Topical	
Theme		Rheme

Examples (16)–(18) illustrate that there are three sub-patterns, where textual Theme is found within an independent tone group. In 7.3 % of the cases, e.g. Example (16) the textual Theme was realized by a conjunctive adjunct. In the remainder of the cases, it was realized by either a conjunction (63.8 %), e.g. Example (17), or a continuative (28.9 %), e.g. Example (18). In Example (19), the textual element is not salient while the Topical Theme is tonic. In Example (20), both Textual and Topical elements are focal. What seems noteworthy is that all examples contain silent and filled pauses within or near the Theme. The speakers seem unsure as to the actual wording required to develop their message. They know how the proposition encoded within the unfolding message relates to the cotext and can signal the conjunctive relations. But in order to gain time to compose the most relevant and appropriate message, Themes especially textual Themes are made tonic.[12] Hence these textual Themes seem to be as related to the management of the interaction as to the organisation of the message. In their work on the chunking of discourse, Sinclair and Mauranen (2006) propose that a message unfolds as series of M (message-oriented) elements and O (organisational-oriented) elements.[13] The former increment experience while the latter are the

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12 Unlike Example (10), there is no functional motivation for making the textual Themes tonic. For instance, in Example (17) the speaker signals an initial high key signalling that the hearers will find it contrary to the previous expectations that the speaker made it untroubled to Cardiff. But the speaker could have projected this expectation by pitching the first prominent syllable in the clause as high regardless of the tonality division.

13 They do not explicitly equate their chunks with tone groups as they primarily work with written texts, but it would seem a logical thing to do in the study of the unfolding of speech. This is especially so when one considers that a tone group is an information unit, and Sinclair and Mauranen do, at least implicitly, claim a psychological reality for their chunking decisions. Though note that a tone group can contain a mixture of O and M elements.

remaining elements. O elements themselves are divided into those which are related to the text (OT) and those which manage the interaction (OI). The Textual Theme in Example (18) is an OI element while those in Examples (16) and (19) are OT elements. By making the textual Theme elements tonic the speakers have signalled that the conjunctive adjunct in Example (15) and the conjunction in Example (16) function simultaneously as OT and OI elements. Placement of a tonic textual Theme into its own tone group is related to the speaker's interactional needs, and not exclusively focused on signalling the development of the message.

Modal metaphors such as *I think* and *I guess* are difficult to disambiguate from projecting mental process clauses. For instance the string of words *I think she is cool* could be interpreted as either a projected clause with *she is cool* realising the projected phenomenon or as a monoclausal structure with *I think* coded as a modal element signalling probability. Four, not entirely convincing probes are found in the literature which claim to disambiguate the constructions: (i) the presence or absence of a complementizer, (ii) the subject mood tag probe, (iii) transparency to negation, and (iv) transparency to factive sentence adverbials[14] (Kearns 2007; Thompson and Mulac 1991; Van Bogaert 2010). Table 5 illustrates.

I (O'Grady 2017b) pointed out that without considering context it is impossible to make definitive disambiguating claims. For instance, the negation and comment adjuncts examples could be read as equating to either:

Negation	*I don't think she is cool* or *It is not that I think she is cool, it is that I know she is.*
Factive	*I think unfortunately she is cool* or *it is unfortunate that I think she is cool.*

Similarly, the complementizer and mood tag probes may contradict, e.g. *I think that she is cool isn't she?* Boye and Harder (2007) argue that this construction has evolved a range of uses and that the actual value of a use can only be determined in context. With this in mind, I examined all potential instances of the modal metaphor

Table 5: Projection or subjective explicit modal.

Test	Modal	Projection
Complementizer	I think she is cool	I think that she is cool
Mood tag	I think she is cool isn't she?	I think that she is cool don't I?
Negation		I don't think <that> she is cool
Comment adjunct		Unfortunately I think she is cool

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14 In SFL, these are labelled comment adjuncts. See Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 191) for examples.

construction in context: removed all negations, and used the Mood tag probe to test what the most natural subject was. There were no instances of complementizing *that* or comment adjuncts next to potential modal metaphors in the data. Dehé and Wichmann (2010) illustrate that in speech a prosodic prominence on the pronoun *I* rather than on the verbal element indicates a mental projecting process, e.g.

(21)   But I think we're almost our own worst enemy

But	/\I	think	| (.74) we	're almost our own worst \enemy |
Textual	Topical		Topical	
Theme		Rheme	Theme	Rheme
	Focus				Focus
Given		Given	Given	New

Hence this example was coded as a projecting ˆ projected complex with two Theme components, but no interpersonal Theme. Turning our attention back to Themes with interpersonal elements we find that fully 50 % of the textual ˆ interpersonal ˆ topical Themes were realized as one or more tone groups. In other words, (at least) part of the Theme was presented as Focal, i.e. newly introduced to the discourse, e.g. Example (17). Overall, only 63 Themes[15] were identified which contained an interpersonal component. Of those 26 contained a key choice. Table 6 details the Key choices found in the Themes.

The majority of key choices for all types of Theme was mid. As noted earlier mid key carries the value of neither being contrastive nor equative. As such it signals that the speaker is continuing to talk. Thus, it seems likely that a mid key salience serves another function; either to enable an independent termination choice, or to signal that the salient item is part of the New. The high and low key choices explicitly signal an expectation that the hearer will find the Theme contrary to expectations or equivalent to the previous expectations. In Section 2, I argued that the existing

Table 6: Key and Theme.

Key	High	Mid	Low	Total
Topical	6	16	4	26
Textual ˆ topical	12	39	5	56
Interpersonal ˆ topical	1	3	0	4
Textual ˆ interpersonal ˆ topical	8	13	1	22
Marked	10	23	9	42
Total	37	93	20	152

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15 Ten of these were found prior to Marked Themes.

literature predicted a correlation between marked Theme and high key but that is not what Table 6 shows. Less than a quarter of the marked Themes contain a high key. The conflation of low key and marked Theme is surprising as it is hard to see how an unexpected angle of development can be equivalent to previously created expectations.

This brief survey of the data has thrown up a number of interesting issues in relation to Theme and interpersonal meaning which I will examine in the next section. First, I will look at the articulation of the interpersonal Themes in order to examine the communicative value realized by the accompanying prosodic choices. Secondly, I will examine the key choices that co-occur with interpersonal Themes in order to see whether such choices re-enforce or add to the interpersonal Themes. Finally, I will examine the realisations of high key, and especially the unexpected realisations of low key within marked Themes.

4 Discussion

In O'Grady (2020), I proposed a revision to the standard SFL architecture by arguing that prosodic systems belonged to the content and not the expression plane. The import of this suggestion is that there is no direct relationship between lexico-grammatical and prosodic meanings, though as they both redound with semantic meaning the coupling between the lexico-grammar and the prosody will be tight and predictable. Within the data set as noted above sixty-three Themes were identified which contained an interpersonal element.[16] Structurally the interpersonal Themes comprised thirty adjuncts, and thirty three metaphors of modality. In addition, there were three finites all of which were non-salient. There were 10 interpersonal Theme elements which were followed by marked Themes which will be discussed below. Of the adjunct and metaphor of modality interpersonal Theme components, twenty-nine were nonsalient and thirty-three were produced with a tonic or non-tonic prominence. The following paragraphs will examine the interplay of the prosodic choices and the lexico-grammar in realising interpersonal meaning. Seventeen out of the thirty modal adjuncts received a prosodic prominence with four being tonic. Twelve of the salient modal adjuncts realized a mid key with the other being a high key. The four tonics were all pitched as mid key/termination. The examples below illustrate:

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16 As it is possible to have more than one Interpersonal Theme element in a clause, there were 66 interpersonal Theme elements found within the 63 Themes which contained an interpersonal Theme component.

(22)   and maybe [he] put online

and	maybe	[he]	**put**	(.86) L\/**on**line |
Textual	Interpersonal	Topical		
Theme			Rheme	
Given ——————————————————————→			▶ Focal	Focal

(23)   but obviously I was at uni

| but	obviously	I	was	at L\/**u**ni |
Textual	Interpersonal	Topical		
Theme			Rheme	
Given —————————————————————————————→				▶ Focal

In Examples (22) and (23), the adjuncts that realize the interpersonal Themes are presented as Given information. But the communicative value is not the same. In Example (22), the speaker's assessment of her father's hypothetical behaviour is tentative. The lack of salience re-enforces her uncertainty as to her dad's potential actions. Had she made the adjunct salient, her claim would have been simply that her father was the type of person who might have made and posted such a video. She would not have signalled her doubt as to whether he was the type who might have posted such a video. In Example (23), the lack of salience signals that the "obviousness" of the speaker's location at the time of the flooding is to be taken for granted. A salience on the adjunct would suggest that the speaker felt the need to assert the obviousness of her location; her hearers either did not know it or for some reason disputed it.

(24)   and usually people have time off

| and	usually	people	have	L/**time** off |
Textual	Interpersonal	Topical		
Theme			Rheme	
				Focal
Given —————————→		←—————		New

(25)   and luckily my dad was with me to sort of talk me through you know

| and	luckily	my \/**dad**	was with me |to sort of talk me \/**through** |	\/**you** know |
Textual	Interpersonal	Topical		
Theme			Rheme	
		Focus	Focus	Focus
Given ←—————		New	Given —————→ ←—————	New

In Examples (24) and (25), the adjunct is salient and hence potentially presented as part of the non-recoverable information. Yet, it is clear that the saliences realize different values. In Example (24), the speaker produces a message which conveys her estimation of the usuality of people not working over the Christmas period. This is

clearly not news. The message itself sets the scene for the following clause which states that as a result people had some time to clean up/repair the flood damage. In Example (25), the salience on *luckily* presents her state of mind as not recoverable. The hearers are presented as not being able to know that she is an inexperienced driver. The communicative effect is to highlight the danger she, as a novice driver, experienced. All three tone groups are articulated by fall-rising tone signalling that the speaker is presenting her information, not as a simple statement, but as a series of information units which convey implications. The hearers are invited to imagine themselves as occupying the driver's seat: a more dangerous and difficult experience than they might have imagined.

(26)   but obviously it's an island that has been battered by storms for many years

|but \ob̲viously |	it	's an \i̲s̲land |that has been **bat**tered | by \/**storms** for many years |
Txt	Inter	Top	
Theme			Rheme
Focus			Focus	Focus	Focus
Given	New	Given ——▶	New ◀—— —— New —— ——▶ Given

(27)   and really it's only been over the past couple of years

and	**real**ly |	(.67) it	's o̲n̲ly been over the p̲a̲s̲t couple of /**years** |
Textual	Inter	Topical	
Theme			Rheme
Focus			Focus
Given		Given—	▶◀—————— New

In Examples (26) and (27), the adjunct is tonic. In both examples, the fall presents the interpersonal Theme as major information. In Example (26), when discussing the isle of Portland the speaker presents the obviousness of her answer as information that one of her hearers needs to know. This hearer has previously admitted to not knowing where Portland is. The rest of the message consists of three tone groups. The first is a paratactic clause; presented as a piece of major information. The second and third form an elaborating hypotactic clause with the third tone group presented as information that does not tell. By making *obviously* tonic, the speaker is pointing out her reaction to the hearer's lack of knowledge.[17] In Example (27), the adjunct *really* is tonic. While overly presenting an assurance that her message is truthful may seem like overkill in a description of damage caused by a previous flood in Hull, in fact, the interpersonal Theme heightens the effect of the flood disruption. She presents the actuality of the duration of suffering as not accessible to her hearers. They need to be explicitly told of the long term damage caused by flooding.

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17 Unsurprisingly, the speaker is from a town close to Portland.

(28)　　obviously it has been on the news and stuff

‖ нob̲viously	it	has b̲een on the **news** and stuff ‖
Interpersonal	Topical	
Theme		Rheme

	Focus
Given ◀—————————————	——————————— New

In Example (28), the adjunct is pitched with high key. The presence of the pronominal *it* referring to the storms is clearly recoverable. The salience on the adjunct does not present the element as part of the New. Instead, the functional motivation for the salience arises from the speaker's need to signal a high key choice – see also Example (10). She is transitioning from describing the video to a new topic namely television coverage of the floods. The introduction of the television coverage is not predictable. The choice of the site of the high key is constrained by the fact that, had the speaker placed it either on the non-salient pronoun or salient predicator, she would have introduced an unwarranted contrast either between *the flood* and *something else* or between *the past* and *non-past*. Such potential contrasts would realize a complaint that the *flooding* and *not some other natural disaster* has been on the news or that the coverage has been prematurely stopped. This was not her intention.

As noted above, I located 33 modal metaphors which Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) describe as explicit (incongruent) subjective adjuncts. Of these three were the construction *I guess* with the remainder being *I think*. Examples (29)–(33) illustrate the prosodic patterns found in the data.

(29)　　but I think it is quite an interesting idea

‖ but	I think	it	is quite an in̲teresting /i̲d̲ea ‖
Textual	Interpersonal	Topical	
Theme			Rheme

		Focus
Given —————————————————	——————▶ ◀———————	New

In Example (29), the speaker presents his assessment that new technology can prevent or alleviate flood damage as recoverable. The copresence of the boosting lexis *interesting* is mediated by the preceding modifier *quite* which re-enforces his message that it is only probable and not certain. In other cases as Example (30) illustrates:

(30)　　‖ I think like … (.29) you know you've got the **Brit**ish obsession ‖

The non-salient interpersonal Theme is detached from the message and functions as an OI element akin to the textual Themes Examples (16)–(20). Examples (31) and (32) illustrate the functioning of salient interpersonal Theme.

(31)   so I guess it's quite a contrast

	so	I <u>guess</u>	it	's <u>quite</u> a **con**trast |
	Textual	Interpersonal	Textual	
	Theme			Rheme
				Focus
	Given ——————▶ ◀——————			New

(32)   I think it was uuhh like at night

	I ʜ<u>think</u>	it	**was** | (.96) uuhh like at /**night** |
	Theme		Rheme
			Focus Focus
	◀—————		New Given —————▶

In both examples, the salient interpersonal Theme is presented as integrated with the message. The speaker presents Example (31) as having a lowered probability. Recognising that her argument is based on a single experienced example, she modulates her claim of a contrast between the attention paid to flood and river defences. In Example (32), the speaker's narrative cannot be challenged. She alone has privileged information as to how the flood affected her friends. Yet, she presents her claim as only probable. The marked tonality coupled with the presence of the filled pause and the filler *uuh* signal some difficulty in assembling the words needed to complete her message. The choice of high key signals the transition in her narrative from telling the location of her friend's house to relating a particularly serious and traumatic flooding instance which probably occurred at night. The high key is located on the interpersonal Theme but does foreground her assessment of likelihood; it signals a change in the direction of her unfolding and unformed message.

(33)   but yeah erm I think we found like it was just it was quite hard to just you
               know like waiting for him to carry on

| but yeah /**erm** | (.61) I **think** | (.29) we			**found** like it was just | it was quite **hard** to just | (.52)| you know like <u>wait</u>ing for him to /**car**ry on |
Textual	Interpersonal	Topical	
Theme			Rheme
	Focus		Focus
		Given	————▶ Given

(34)   I guess uh … like … it did come out a bad time like Christmas like

I ʜ/**guess** | (.51) uh … like …		it	did come out a /**bad** time like | /**Christ**mas like |
Interpersonal		Topical	
Theme			Rheme
Focus			Focus Focus
		Given —	————▶ Given Given

Examples (33) and (34) illustrate that the speaker's assessment is Focal, i.e. presented as non-recoverable. However, it is noticeable, within the data set, that tonic modals of metaphor are always followed by a noticeable pause and frequently by filler material. This implies that this construction functions not only to signal the speaker's assessment, but also to help the speaker manage the interaction. The speaker in the pursuit of her message knows what she wishes to impart but has not sorted the words required to articulate her communicative intention. For instance, in Example (35), the speaker, who has previously related how the flooding negatively impacted upon her friend's Christmas holidays, signals through her selection of high key a change in the direction of her narrative. The message she develops is that perhaps if there has to be flooding, then flooding during a holiday period is more manageable than at other times. The interpersonal Theme signals her uncertainty that what she says is actually the case. She presents her claim as tentative; one that her hearers are free to disagree with.

(35) | I ʜ/**guess** | (.51) uh … like … it did come out a /**bad** time like | /**Christ**mas like | (.69) | It was like **pro**bably | (.51) <u>ruined</u> a <u>lot</u> of **people's** | (.39) Christmas **spi**rit but | <u>then</u> at the **same** time | it's –**kind** of | (.75) | <u>if</u> it's going to ʜ**hap**pen | (.29) it's (.35) a ʜ<u>good</u> time in a –**sense** | that <u>everyone's</u> –**there** like | (.81) **ra**ther than | (.31)| cause they don't have ʟ/**work** | and **stuff** |

It is noticeable that high key was more commonly found with metaphors of modality than with adjuncts. While the data set is too small to extrapolate definite conclusions as to why this might be or indeed to know if this is anything other than an artefact, we can see that adjuncts tend to be more integrated into tone groups. This may imply that the speakers were less focused on managing the interactions and more focused on incrementing their messages. It is also possible that because modal metaphors are structurally identical to projecting clauses that their articulation signals the redundant expectation of a projection which signifies a possible transition in the narrative and attracts a key selection.

      Turning to the final issue of marked Theme, I noted in Section 3 that the literature predicted a correspondence between marked Theme and high key. However, Table 6 indicated that this was not the case. Only 23.8 % of marked Themes had an initial high key. Surprisingly there was almost an equal number of low keys. Mid key was the most frequent choice for marked Theme. In Example (36), I will examine the communicative value of the various key choices.

(36) | **so** | **(1.04) <u>where</u>** \/**we were** | (.74) \ ʟ<u>um</u> | the whole – ʟ<u>town</u> | got \<u>flooded</u> | (.44) | but my <u>house</u> somehow /<u>didn't</u> | (.5) | so \<u>like</u> | (.42) \<u>we</u> | like /\<u>my</u> house was | kind of … on a /<u>hill</u> | (.34)| ʟ<u>out</u> of the /<u>way</u> | (.52) ʟ\<u>um</u> | (.45) and we ʜ/<u>weren't</u> affected | by like ʜ–<u>um</u> | (.28) the ʜ<u>power</u> cuts ʜ /<u>either</u> | (.65) | *but my* ʜ|*friend* | *who* \|*lived* |(.56) \oh | (.19) \<u>yeah</u> | (.19) that's in \<u>Surr</u>ey| **but** … **(.49) where I** **am** | it's /<u>Guild</u>ford |

There are two marked Themes notated in bold. Both of them contain a mid key choice. It is clear that a high key choice, which while re-enforcing the speaker's decision to commence her message from an unexpected angle: notably specifying where she lives and its relevance to inland flooding, would have signalled a contrast between sea and river flooding. The prior cotext focused only on sea flooding and the transition to inland flooding was unexpected. But the speaker's point was that the damage caused by inland flooding was as severe as that caused by the sea. Hence a high key would have introduced an unwarranted contrast whereas the speaker wanted to signal equivalence. The marked Theme is repeated to specify the name of the town where the speaker lives. Once again it is pitched as a mid key; to do otherwise would be to introduce the unwelcome notion that somehow it is surprising that the town she lives in is Guilford. Without the marked Theme a hearer would have surmised incorrectly that it was her friend and not the speaker who lived there. It is noticeable that the abandoned Theme notated by italics was pitched with a high key. It is clearly the speaker's intention to explicitly contrast her experience of the flood with that of her friend.

(37) | –erm | (.82) but I ʜthink it just <u>kind</u> of \/<u>strikes</u> me how | (.37) | \<u>how</u> erm | /<u>bad</u> | (.93)| ʜ<u>flood</u> defences –<u>are</u> | (.23) <u>tend</u> to be in \<u>Bri</u>tain | | and <u>how</u> Britain don't \<u>seem</u> to be | (.29)| \pre<u>pared</u> for any kind of | (.25) \/ex<u>treme</u> | like (.26) ʟ ex<u>tre</u>mities with ʟ /<u>weather</u> | (.47)| ʟ–<u>erm</u> | (.51) **because ʟ obviously when it** ʟ \<u>snows</u> | ʟevery<u>thing</u> <u>goes</u> into ʟ/<u>melt</u>down | (.61) | ʟ \<u>and</u> | (.57) it <u>seemed</u> like (.25) that <u>way</u> with the \<u>floods</u> |(.30) | because obviously ʜ\<u>roads</u> were completely | (.70)| trans<u>formed</u> into \/<u>rivers</u> | (.24) | ʟ\/<u>erm</u> | (.85) and <u>people</u> weren't <u>ab</u>le to get ʟ/<u>through</u> | (.78)

In Example (37), the speaker produces a marked Theme illustrating an example of extreme weather. It is the setting for her point that everything goes into meltdown when the weather exceeds the norm. While the marked Theme signals an unexpected angle of development it does not signal a development that is contrary to the discourse expectations; the UK's lack of resilience to weather is widely commented on. The low key signals that the proposition is available to the hearers should they wish to search their memories for instances of Britain failing to deal with extreme weather. The modal adjunct *obviously* is salient. It is not only the condition of the snow falling but also the obviousness of the condition that is presented as being equivalent to the discourse expectations.

Example (38) is another example of marked Theme coinciding with low key. The marked Theme signals a boundary between her description of the scenes shown and not shown in the clip. Her point that the video likely exaggerated the impact of the storm is inferable from what she has previously said. The low key signals that her

following message elaborates by providing an illustration of what she claims is a predictable example of hyperbole. The Marked theme adds to the message by expressly linking the verbal projection with the cotext.

(38) | \but | (.72) it \/probably wasn't as (.93)| ʟ\bad | as ʟ/other places | | which – they | (.26) probably didn't they didn't really ʟ\/show in the clip | (.21) | **whereas** ʟ /**where** they were like | this is this ʟ\inn | that's been like at\tacked | and it's ʟstill ʟ\standing | (.45)

Example (39) provides an example which is more in line with what literature had led us to expect. The marked Theme signals that the message is being developed by the introduction of an unexpected angle and the high key re-enforces the change of direction by signalling the transition to a new unexpected topic. As there has been no mention of any particular year prior to the articulation of the high key, no unwarranted contrast between years is made. The speaker is free to use both high key and marked Theme to signal a transition in the angle of the development of the narrative.

(39) | ʜ**every** **year** | people are \saying| oh it's getting worse and \worse | (.36)| you /know

The above discussion brings to mind Marx's oft-quoted claim: "Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen, but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted" (Marx 2019 [1852]: 480). In a similar manner, we can say that speakers make meanings but they do not make them as they please: they do not make them under self-selected circumstances, but within given social situations co-negotiated with their interlocutors and subject to the contingent conventions of the language. Hence, while we have seen that high key and marked Theme both signal transitions; speakers are not free in all situations to couple them. It is precisely the uncoupling of lexico-grammar and prosody that allows (or constrains) speakers to produce unfolding meanings which simultaneously manage the interaction and advance their message.

5 Conclusions

To conclude, the data suggests that there is no direct relation between lexico-grammatical resources and prosodic ones. While speakers are at times constrained in coupling prosodic and lexico-grammatical choices, noticeable tendencies were found in the data. Despite there being more tone groups than clauses, the Theme is not usually found within its own tone group. This is the case irrespective of whether

the Theme contains Interpersonal elements. However, textual Themes have a higher tendency to appear within their own tone groups. The expectation that adjuncts and mood metaphors as more syntactically distant elements would tend to occur in their own tone groups was not met. However, as with textual Themes, mood metaphors frequently co-occurred with filled and unfilled pauses indicating that the speakers were focussing on the management of the interaction, and not on the presentation of information. It was noticeable that adjuncts were more integrated into tone groups than mood metaphors and less likely to be the site of a high key. I interpreted this as indicating that the speakers choose high key to signal transitions in the discourse prior to finalising their wording. The expected convergence between high key and marked Theme was not found, as at times high key signalled unwarranted contrasts that did not accord with the speakers' message.

Speakers in pursuit of their individual communicative choices manage their interactional and informational needs by producing prosodic and thematic choices. Such choices as we have seen are frequently mutually re-enforcing, but speakers may employ prosodic choices which foreground their interactional needs. As Halliday (1989: 97) said, "spoken language encodes them [phenomena] as things that happen in an outward continuous flow". But it is a flow with a co-constructed target. While speakers have their target firmly in mind, they are rather hazy as to how they and their hearers will get there. Thus, in ensuring their hearers navigate to the intended target, speakers co-deploy lexico-grammatical and prosodic resources in simultaneously managing perceived informational needs and interactional expectations.

Appendix: Transcription symbols

			Tone group
word	Salient syllable
\word	Tonic syllable with fall tone
/word	Tonic syllable with rise tone
–word	Tonic syllable with level tone
\/word	Tonic syllable with fall-rise tone
/\word	Tonic syllable with rise-fall tone
H\word	High termination (with fall)
L\word	Low termination (with fall)
Hword	High key
Lword	Low key
…	Short silence
(.25)	Duration of silence in seconds and tenths of seconds

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