Theme and Prosody: Redundancy or Meaning Making?

Abstract

In a series of extremely influential articles published in the 1960s, Halliday illustrated that what the Prague School labelled as Theme was formed out of two separate but related systems which he labelled Theme and Information (1967 a & b). However, as Information is a system grounded in spoken language, this separation has had the unfortunate consequence of prioritising the study of Theme in written language. The Thematic structure of spoken language and especially the interplay of Theme and intonation has been consequently neglected. The prosodic system of Key (Brazil 1997) functions like Theme to ground a message in its local context and signal how it is to be developed. This study, by uniquely examining the interplay between Theme and Key, is able to identify a number of novel meanings, the most significant of which is a focus on the enabling of Interpersonal meanings. By so doing, it illustrates that the full semogenetic meaning making potential of Theme, as an unfolding orientating device in spoken discourse, can only be revealed by examining the prosodic realisation of the Theme choices.

Key words: Theme, Prosody, Key, Interpersonal meaning, Spoken Discourse.

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1   Introduction: What does Theme do?

Michael Halliday's incorporation of an adapted version of the Prague School concept of Theme into his grammatical description has resulted in numerous advances in the description of English grammar and texts. Yet, Theme, both its form and function, as described by Halliday is not entirely uncontroversial. Nor is it identical to Theme as described by Mathesius, whose original conception contained three elements: *východiště* (point of departure), *téma* (theme/topic) and *základ* (basis or foundation) (Firbas 1987: 140). In his later work, Mathesius conflated *základ* with *téma* (Daneš 1972: 217fn2). Such a view of Theme has been labelled from a Hallidayan perspective as 'combining' (Fries 1981, Davidse 1987) in that it combines the point of departure, i.e. the leftmost element, with that which is presupposed or known. Halliday's Theme is a separating one in that it has been separated out from the system of Information and is solely identified by its linear position within the clause.

In this paper, while I neither argue for the necessity nor advantage of re-introducing combined Theme, I do argue that Halliday's separation of Theme into 2 components has resulted in some unnecessary confusion as to the definition of Theme in Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL) and an unwarranted narrowed focus on text as a written mode. Naturally none of this denies the significance of the numerous studies which have explored how Theme choices weave texts into meaningful webs.

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Ghadessy (1995), Forey & Thompson (2008) and Forey & Sampson (2017) provide useful surveys of the volume of theoretical and applied work on Theme in SFL.

Yet, the sheer volume of (especially applied) studies may have created the impression that while the extent of what is to be included within the Theme remains unsettled, the function of Theme as a textual device is known. However, as the following paragraphs indicate, Halliday has somewhat altered his gloss of the meaning of Theme and I will investigate whether the dissociation of Theme from prosody sits uncomfortably with the current notion of Theme as an orienting device.

Hallidayan linguistics views language as having evolved to serve three generalised metafunctions: the ideational which itself is subdivided into the experiential and logical, the interpersonal and the textual. The ideational metafunction is the resource people use to construe the world around them. The interpersonal metafunction is the resource people use to enact social relations while the textual metafunction is the resource that enables the presentation of ideational and interpersonal meaning as a flow of information within a contextually bound text. Roughly speaking the ideational metafunction covers the areas dealt with under the heading of semantics while pragmatics covers the interpersonal and textual metafunctions (Matthiessen, Teruya & Lam 2009:174). Theme and Information are the major subsystems within the textual metafunction.

Halliday (1994: 37) glossed Theme as "the element which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that with which the clause is concerned." Yet, such a gloss is not entirely helpful in that clauses may start with elements other than experiential ones. Halliday, himself, in his discussion of the interpersonal metafunction states that the subject is the nub of the clause which rather suggests that it should be conflated somehow with his definition of Theme (see Berry 1996). However, this is not in fact the case for Halliday who specifies that "the Theme of a clause ends with the first constituent that is either participant, circumstance or process" (1994: 52) or "The Theme extends from the beginning of the clause (up to and including) the first element in transitivity. This element is called the 'topical' Theme; so we can say that the Theme of the clause consists of the topical Theme together with anything else that comes before it" (Halliday 1994: 43). In other words, there may be cases where the subject occurs not within the Theme but within the Rheme. These cases are known as marked Theme and signal either transitions within a narrative or that the Thematic element requires extra prominence in order to show that the perspective being developed within the clause is approached from an unusual angle.

Gómez-González (2001: 94) described Halliday's Theme as set out in 1994 as a direct extension of Mathesius' *základ/téma*, which she described as comprising both a 'place' and a 'matter' metaphor. Perhaps recognising that the place – point of departure – and the matter – what the clause as message is about – are not necessarily one and the same, the definition of Theme in Halliday's later work has been changed to "The Theme is the element which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that which locates and orients the clause within its context"

(2004: 65 & 2014: 89). Some earlier glosses of Theme had focused on Theme as "enabling the text's angle on the field" (e.g. Halliday & Martin 1993: 244). Matthiessen (1995) similarly described Theme in terms of being an enabling resource for the logogenetic growth of ideational meaning within texts and phylogenetically for the evolution of ideational meaning open to interpersonal negotiation. This is welcome recognition that Theme choices are sensitive to context and not just a unit of clause structure which structures the clause in a manner independent of the co-text. Halliday (1967a: 212) had written that "The Information systems, in other words, specify a structural unit and structure it in such a way as to relate it to the preceding discourse; whereas thematization takes a unit of sentence structure, the clause, and structures it in a way that is independent of what has gone before." Yet, his point was simply that while the Theme/Rheme structure of a clause can be identified through word order, the choices which fill the Theme/Rheme structure are motivated and sensitive to context. In other words, Theme, while a feature of clause grammar, simultaneously operates as a choice motivated by discoursal demands (see for instance Fries [1995] on Theme as method of development across texts). Martin (1992) indeed recognizes clauses and clause complexes as Themes for entire texts (MacroThemes) and paragraphs (HyperThemes). The issue of how Theme is identified will be detailed in the next section.

The gloss of Theme as a discoursal orienting device while both logical and empirically rewarding is, however, not the complete story. Gómez-González (2001: 96) provides three quotations from Halliday (1994) in order to illustrate her contention "that in SFG [Systemic-Functional Grammar] the place and matter metaphors represent two *different*, but *equivalent*, glosses" (2001: 95; italics original). One quotation from 1994 remains unchanged in Halliday (2014).[1] Thompson (2007: 658) concluded that while the 'matter' metaphor remains in use, it has now been very much backgrounded. Yet, Halliday's continued use of the term *topical Theme* ensures its survival. One obvious reason for the controversial use of the topic/matter metaphor is that the most common understanding of topic combines that which is being spoken about with that which is known or presupposed: or in other words a system of combined Theme. A consequence of glossing Theme in terms of grounding is the increased attention that has been given to the Theme/Rheme structure of larger

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[1] The quotation with page numbers taken from the second and fourth editions of Halliday's seminal work *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (IFG) is:

> In *this teapot my aunt was given by the Duke,* the psychological subject is *this teapot.* That is to say, it is 'this teapot' that is the concern of the message – that the speaker has taken as point of embarkation for the clause. (1994: 32) and (2014: 80)

The remaining two quotations have been altered with words referring to "what the message is concerned with" replaced by those referring to "the element the speaker selects for 'grounding' what he is going to say". Yet in Halliday (2014: 97) the following quotation occurs: "Here the Theme … is strongly foregrounded; it summarizes the whole burden of the preface … and enunciates this as their point of departure, as what the undertaking is all about."

textual units such as the paragraph or text; see Martin (1992) on HyperThemes and MacroThemes.[2]

A further, no doubt unintended, consequence of the separating of Prague School Theme into SFG's Theme/Rheme and Given/New is the limited attention which has been paid to spoken discourse. Work such as Bäcklund (1992), which examined Theme in telephone conversations, did not examine their prosodic realisations. O'Grady (2016: 23) examined spoken information structure in a small corpus of simulated monologues and dialogues and found that first mentions of referents[3] were 4.8 times more likely to occur in Rhemes than Themes. This is unsurprising and entirely in accord with the predictions of separating Theme, which notes that Theme frequently conflates with Given, and semi-combining approaches such as Daneš (1972) who claims that in non-emotive sentences the degree of communicative dynamism increases throughout the sentence. To conclude this section, it is clear that the gloss of the grammatical function of Theme has shifted away from topicality to the interlinked function of grounding and orientating the clause within its immediate context. At the same time the separating nature of Theme has resulted in limited attention to spoken texts and especially to their intonational realisation. Prior to a brief overview of relevant prosodic systems in Section 3, I will first illustrate how Theme was identified in the present paper.

2   What is Theme?

Theme is identified as culminating with the first experiential element in the clause. (Halliday 2014). In declarative mood this will usually be the subject, in *yes/no* interrogative mood the finite and subject,[4] in *wh* interrogative mood the 'wh' element and in imperative mood the predicator. Examples (1) to (4), from the corpus studied (on which see Section 4) with Themes italicised, illustrate these typical cases.

(1) *Labour* have put up tax.
(2) *Can I* say one other thing?
(3) *Who in public services, who in their personal life, who in their family life* hasn't had to try to get more for less?
(4) *Remember* this crazy thing I told you about.

Yet, as examples (5) to (8) illustrate, not all clauses commence with experiential elements. Such examples are known as multiple Themes and may contain textual and/or interpersonal elements prior to the topical Theme – see Halliday (2014) for a complete description.

(5) *But we* can do only this <*But* = adversative conjunctive adjunct and is the textual Theme. *We* is the topical Theme>

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[2] Yet, the fact that HyperThemes are frequently glossed as corresponding to the traditional notion of a topic sentence (Matthiessen, Teruya and Lam 2009:144) indicates that there is at the very least slippage between Theme as topic and as grounding.

[3] O'Grady 2016 only examined the recoverability and identifiability of lexical referents and consequently has nothing to say about non-experiential elements found in the Theme.

[4] The finite, as a non-experiential element, does not on its own exhaust the Thematic potential of the clause.

(6) *Well Jacqueline the system* isn't working < *Well* = textual continuative and is the textual Theme, *Jacqueline* = vocative and is the interpersonal Theme. *The system* is the topical Theme>

(7) *Apparently they* don't somehow sort of fit onto the vehicles that our soldiers use <*Apparently* = Modal Adjunct and is interpersonal Theme. *They* is the topical Theme>

(8) *Well maybe I* should explain <*well* = textual continuative and is the textual Theme, *maybe* is a Modal Adjunct and is the interpersonal Theme. *I* is the topical Theme>

Since his earliest work Halliday has identified two further Thematic choices. The first of which, known as a Thematic Equative (also known more widely as a pseudo-cleft), is a clause which contains a nominalized Theme which either specifies what the Theme is or equates it with the Rheme, e.g. (9) and (10).

(9) *What's happened over the last several years* is almost precisely the reverse <The Theme is equated with the Rheme>

(10) *So firstly what we need to do* is make sure we restore those exit controls <The nominalized topical Theme specifies the exclusivity of the action of restoring the exit controls>[5]

The second Thematic choice is Predicated Theme (known more widely as a cleft) (Halliday 1967a) where the nominal element in the Theme is marked off as being New and exclusive, illustrated in example 11:

(11) *It was actually this government* that gave this man a knighthood for services to banking.

The spoken realisation of example 11 is presented in 12 below.[6]

(12) | *It was actually this* **H***government*[7] | that **H**gave this **L**/man | a **H**\knighthood | for services to /\banking |

Thompson & Thompson (2007) note that expressions such as *I think, I believe* and *I mean* are instances of interpersonal grammatical metaphor and should be coded as interpersonal Themes which, by definition, cannot exhaust the clause's Thematic potential, as exemplified in (13):

(13) *Well John I think everyone* will recognize what you are talking about <*Well* = textual continuative and is the textual Theme. *John* is vocative and is an interpersonal Theme. *I think* is an interpersonal metaphor of modality and is an interpersonal Theme. *Everyone* is the topical Theme and exhausts the Thematic potential of the clause>

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[5] *So firstly* is the textual Theme.

[6] In the examples with transcribed intonation: tone units are enclosed by |, underlining signals a prominent syllable with the final underlined syllable in the tone unit being the tonic. The letters **H** and **L** if prior to the onset or onset/tonic signal High and Low Key. If at the end of the tone unit, they signal the final pitch in the tone unit as high or low. The absence of a letter signals a mid pitch. The symbols \ , / , – \/ and /\ signal the tone movements respectively: fall, rise, level fall-rise and rise-fall.

[7] The high fall on *government* foregrounds the newness of *this government* and contrasts it will all the other possible agents (Halliday & Greaves 2008: 165).

All of the Themes, presented above, are classed by Halliday as unmarked in that the first experiential element which exhausts the Thematic potential of the clause is the subject.[8] A marked Theme is one where the first experiential element is not the subject. In declarative Mood this means that the first experiential element is either a Circumstance (14) or a Complement (15):

(14)　　*Under our government* they have never been less than one hundred and forty thousand a year <The first experiential element is a Circumstance of Quality>

(15)　　*Trident* I don't think we can afford it <The first experiential element is a Complement with a less marked realisation being 'I don't think we can afford Trident'>

All of the examples above have illustrated Theme as operating within clauses. Yet, as Halliday (2014: 549) states, there are sequences of clauses operating as clause complexes which may form into a single textual domain. One of these complexes consists of a paratactic or independent clause (α) and a hypotactic or dependent clause (β). The sequence is not fixed and may occur, in Halliday's words, as progressive (α ^ β) or regressive (β ^ α). If the sequencing is regressive (Halliday 2014: 552), it is possible to treat the hypotactic clause as the Theme for the clause complex. As this article (see Section 4) will analyse Theme as a feature of T-Units, this is the solution adopted here. Examples (16) to (18) illustrate that the subject of the clause complex, underlined in (16) – (18), must be the subject of the α clause and therefore the hypotactic β clause is a marked Theme. Theme in regressive sequences is marked.

(16)　　*If we don't trade with Europe* <u>we</u> lose jobs

(17)　　*If I was your Prime Minister* <u>I</u> would want to think very carefully

(18)　　*When we look at the needs of pensioners* <u>it</u> is absolutely true to say that we need help with urgent social needs in the home

This section has provided a brief sketch of the elements that realise Theme. The next section will consider the relationship between Theme and prosody focusing on the prosodic system of Key (Brazil 1997, O'Grady 2010 and 2013).

3　　Prosody, Theme and Key

Halliday in a series of writings has theorized the possible intonational realizations of Theme. As in the unmarked case Theme conflates with Given, it will not contain a tonic focus and will be articulated without tonic prominence or contain a pre-tonic prominence. Pre-tonic prominences, according to Halliday (1967b), frequently project the lexical item containing the prominence as non-recoverable but not if the referent of the lexical item has been previously mentioned or is available in the

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[8] While Halliday recognises that more than one textual and interpersonal element may be found in the Theme he does not allow for the presence of two experiential elements. See Berry (1996) and Downing (1992) for arguments that Theme can include more than one experiential element and Thompson & Thompson (2007) for arguments supportive of Halliday's position.

context. Yet, this does not seem entirely convincing as Halliday has made it crystal clear that speakers project the informational status of lexical items. Given and New refer to the speaker's assessment and not to the discourse status of the item. The speaker has the freedom to background or foreground pre-tonic items and as such it is puzzling why the previous mention or physical availability of a lexical item should play a determining role in a speakers' assessment of its informational status. An intonational prominence in other words adds weight to the Theme. Marked Themes are widely believed to be found within separate tone groups, which entails that they contain informational foci and hence non-recoverable information (Tench 1996).

O'Grady (2017:159) has pointed out that Halliday and mainstream SFL has not yet incorporated the semogenetic potential of Key in the texturing of spoken discourse, though see Tench (1996) and O'Grady (2013). Brazil's and O'Grady's system of Key refers back to the work of Henry Sweet. As Henderson (1971: 178) has shown, for Sweet every 'sentence group' or tone unit has a general pitch of its own which can be classed as high, mid or low. Halliday uses the term Key in a wider but complementary manner to refer to interpersonal systems grounded in the information unit/tone group which express the attitude of the speaker towards both the listener and the content of their message (Halliday & Greaves 2008: 50).

Brazil (1997) proposed that the first prominent syllable,[9] the onset, may be pitched higher, lower or around the same as the onset syllable of the previous tone group. This choice is known as Key. High Key projects that the proposition contained within the tone group is projected by the speaker to be contrary to the hearer's expectations. Mid Key projects that the proposition contained within the tone group is projected by the speaker as not being contrary to the hearer's expectations, i.e. the discourse is developed in an expected and unsurprising manner. Low Key projects that the proposition contained within the tone group is equivalent to the expectations created by the previous discourse (Brazil 1997). Key creates expectations which may not be satisfied by the articulation of a single tone group (O'Grady 2010). High Key, especially if preceded by a fall to low in the speaker's pitch register and an extended pause, functions to project a paragraph-like structure (paratone) on a spoken text (Wichmann 2000: 105). Nakajima and Allen (1993) illustrate that where wording is kept constant but sentence order changed hearers interpret high onset choices as signalling a contrastive or fresh start while mid key is interpreted as the addition of information within a pre-established frame with low key interpreted as an elaboration on what has gone before. However, Tench (1996) notes that clear evidence of a developed paratone structure is absent in conversational speech and concludes that it is a feature of pre-scripted and planned talk where High Key represents a disruption to the flow of the discourse by either signalling the introduction of a fresh topic or signals that the discourse is being extended in a manner contrary to previously created expectations. As such Key functions like Theme as an orientating device which helps hearers interpret the upcoming utterance within its local context. Furthermore, marked Theme and high

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[9] If the tone group only contains a single prominence the onset and the tonic syllables necessarily conflate.

Key both signal unexpected discourse transitions. Yet, the issue of how key and Theme function together in signalling discourse expectancies is, prior to this paper, unexplored.

4   The corpus

In this paper, I use the three pre-electoral televised debates held in the UK before the 2010 general election. The debates were tightly policed and the three politicians were prohibited from directly engaging amongst themselves. Instead they responded to a series of themed questions produced by the audience and then were allowed to respond to their peers' talk. This procedure ensured that the politicians were able to produce extended, cohesive and partly prepared turns. Tench (1990) has noted that speakers engaged in pre- or semi-planned discourse use Key choices to structure their talk and manage their hearers' expectations. As such the political talk transcribed here was expected to, and did, provide sufficient data to allow for a comparison of Key and Theme.

Written transcripts of the three debates were available and I used these to segment the discourse into T-units. Fries (1995: 318) identifies T-units as clause complexes containing one main paratactic clause together with any hypotactic clauses which depend on it. Themes were identified using the criteria stated above (Section 2). Table 1 shows that the politicians' speech consisted of 3,560 T-units.[10]

Table 1. Thematic choice in the politicians' talk across the three debates.[11]

	GB	DC	NC	All
Unmarked Theme	1050	1129	1017	3196
Marked Theme	106	129	129	364
				3560

The entire debates were transcribed by ear with the assistance of Praat (Boersma & Weenink 2010). As I am interested in Key choices, I identified all the prominent syllables and notated the hertz value realised on the syllable. Key, as stated above, is notated in relation to the pitch height of the prior onset syllable. Knowing the hertz value for the prior onset allowed for a relatively easy analysis of the Key choices as high, mid or low. The entire corpus consisted of 10,075 tone groups. Of the tone groups 3,173 contained only a single prominence, the tonic, which functioned as the site for the key choice. The remaining 6,902 tone groups contained an independent onset choice (Table 2).

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[10] The number of T-units, articulated by the politicians, in the debates was actually 3,645. However, owing to a problem with the time setting of the recorder the final few minutes of all three debates were not recorded and so I had to discount 35 T-units with 30 unmarked Themes and 5 marked Themes. Furthermore, owing to problems caused by background noise or interruption from the moderator I also discounted 45 T-units of which 41 contained unmarked Theme and 4 marked Theme.

[11] The initials GB, DC and NC refer to the three political debaters, namely Gordon Brown, the then Labour Prime Minister, David Cameron, the then leader of the Conservative party and Nick Clegg, the then leader of the Liberal Democrats.

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Table 2. The number of Independent Onsets Vs. Conflated Onsets/Tonic

	GB	DC	NC	All
Independent Onset	2268	2284	2350	6902
Conflated Onset and Tonic	888	1053	1232	3173
				10075

Table 3. The politicians' Key choices.

	GB	DC	NC	All
High Independent	623	532	490	1645
High Conflated	196	250	297	743
Mid Independent	1513	1695	1792	5000
Mid Conflated	603	777	906	2286
Low Independent	132	57	68	257
Low Conflated	89	26	29	144
				10075

Tables 1 to 3 illustrate that the most frequent Theme option was unmarked and the most frequent Key option was mid. By comparison, marked Theme accounted for 10.5% of the Theme choices and high Key for 23.7% of the Key selections. This suggests that in speech high Key is a more frequent means of signalling forthcoming departures from previously created expectations. However, it does not say anything about either the prosodic realisation of marked Theme or the linear position of the high Key within the clause. Figure 1 details the percentages of Key choices of the Themes found in the corpus.
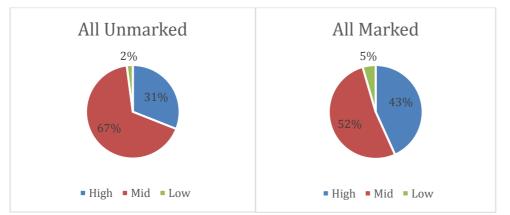

Figure 1. High mid and low Key in the debates in marked and unmarked Theme

Figure 1 makes clear that speakers are free to associate any Key choice with an unmarked or marked Theme. However, it also shows that certain choices are more likely. 31% of unmarked Themes are found within a tone group containing high Key while 43% of marked Themes are similarly found. The position is reversed for unmarked Theme, which shows a preference to be found in tone groups with mid Key. 67% of unmarked Themes are found in tone groups with mid Key. This contrasts with 52% of marked Themes. In order to check whether these tendencies were significant, I used a chi-square test to compare the speaker's Key selections within and across the debates in the tone groups that contained marked and unmarked Themes (Table 4).

Table 4. χ^2 values of Key and Theme choices.

Name	Debate 1	Debate 2	Debate 3	All debates
GB	6.0772*	8.6046*	15.788***	26.7004***
DC	6.0785*	0.8105	1.2795	2.2815
NC	5.885	2.5327	3.7288	7.7486*
ALL	14.7711***	10.7992**	9.8066*	29.3796***

The significance values are indicated as follows: * is significant at 0.05, ** is significant at 0.01 and *** is significant at 0.001.

The results in Table 4 present a mixed picture. It is clear that for one speaker, Gordon Brown, there was a significant difference between the Key choices found within the tone groups containing his marked and unmarked Theme choices in all three of the debates. But for Nick Clegg, while there was a significant difference across the three debates, such differences were not significant in any of the individual debates. David Cameron does not, with the exception of the first debate, appear to have produced significantly differing Key choices in the tone groups containing marked and unmarked Themes. However, consideration of all the Key selections shows that there was a significant difference in the Key choices of the tone units containing marked and unmarked Themes in all three debates. Thus, there does seem to be at the very least a tendency for marked Themes to be disproportionately found more frequently in tone groups with high Keys.[12] Yet, at the same time, the speakers had the option (which they frequently exercised) of producing unmarked Theme in tone groups with high Key.

Table 5. The prosodic realisation of Themes found within the corpus

	High	Mid	Low	Non-Prominent	Total
Topical Theme (unmarked)	186	195	12	1322	1715
Textual ^ Topical	100	228	12	654	994
Interpersonal ^ Topical Theme (unmarked)	57	110	2	93	262
Textual ^ Interpersonal ^ Topical (unmarked)	41	81	1	25	148
Thematic Equative	28	41	3	5	77
Predicated Theme	0	1	0	0	1
Marked Theme (Circumstance)	82	101	6	1	188
Marked Theme (Complement)	13	19	0	0	32
Theme above clause	69	70	2	0	141
Total	576	846	38	2100	3560

Table 5 provides some support for the view that elements in the Theme are usually articulated in the pre-tonic: around 60% of all Themes were non-prominent. However, it can also be seen that marked Themes with one exception contain an intonational prominence. Furthermore, high Key is a more frequent choice when the

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[12] Further supporting evidence for the tendency of marked Theme to attract a disproportionate number of high Key is that only 24% of Tone groups in the corpus contained a high Key. A χ^2 test comparing the goodness of fit between the Key selections within the whole corpus and those found within marked Themes resulted in a value of 80.0386***.

Theme is made prominent: 39% of tone groups with a prosodically prominent Theme contained high Key compared with 27% of tone groups without a prosodically prominent Theme. The situation was reversed for mid Key with 58% of tone groups with prominent Theme containing a mid Key compared with 70% of tone groups with a non-prominent Theme. Thus, it seems that the more a speaker adds informational weight to the Theme, the more likely a speaker is to articulate it with high Key. As a result, the next section will examine the meanings created by the interaction of high Key with prominent unmarked and marked Theme.

5   Discussion: The relation between high Key and marked/unmarked Theme
In order to examine the meanings created by the interaction between high Key and Theme, I examined each occurrence in context and sorted each occurrence into the following (somewhat ad hoc) categories (see Glaser and Strauss [1967] for how to build up a data-driven categorical framework and for the justification in so doing).[13]

A. Opening of Turn – the speaker projects that they are about to produce a contribution to the discourse;
B. A new Paratone – the speaker projects that they are about to change topic within an extended turn: signalled by high Key immediately preceded by a low pitch;
C. Unexpected direction with Theme given in the context – the speaker projects a shift in the topic of discourse in an unexpected direction;
D. To project contrast or specify an individual or action – the speaker projects that their upcoming discourse will contrast their own actions with someone else's or specifies that a named individual's actions were contrary to what would have been expected;
E. Direct attention towards the consequences of a future action – the speaker projects that the consequences of an action will be contrary to expectations;
F. Focus on consequence of earlier action – the speaker projects that a previous action had unexpected and perhaps hidden consequences;
G. Reference to a previous remark – the speaker signals that a previous remark is contrary to what would be expected;
H. Assessment of desirability – the speaker signals that their assessment of the likelihood or desirability of a situation is not predictable.

Table 6 maps the form of the spoken high Key Themes with the proposed meanings which are referred to by the letters given above.

Table 6: Theme type/High Key and meaning category

Theme Types	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Total
Simple Theme	20	77	26	32	31	3	0	0	189
Textual ^ Topical Theme	8	44	36	2	5	0	3	0	98
Interpersonal ^ Topical	17	17	14	3	4	0	1	37	93
Textual ^ Interpersonal ^ Topical	12	18	11	2	2	0	1	29	75

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[13] By ad hoc I mean that were more data examined, it is likely that the categories would be somewhat altered and refined. Though it is worth noting that all of the identified meaning categories were found in each debate.

Thematic Equative	6	13	9	0	0	0	0	0	28
Marked Theme (Circumstance)	2	47	23	0	0	2	2	3	79
Marked Theme (Complement)	2	5	5	0	0	0	0	1	13
Theme above the Clause	2	36	28	0	0	0	0	2	67
Total	69	257	152	39	42	5	7	72	643[14]

Table 6 illustrates a number of interesting points. The first, and expected one, is that there is no single one-to-one mapping of a high Key Theme with any single meaning. That said, however, certain meanings did more frequently coincide with certain high Key Theme types. The presence of an Interpersonal element led to the foregrounding of category H meaning, while categories D and E were associated with unmarked and, primarily, simple Theme. All Theme types realised categories A to C which realised almost three quarters of all meanings. Thus, the most common meanings realised by a high Key Theme are concerned with projecting that the upcoming discourse is being developed from an unexpected angle or in an unexpected manner. Second, meaning categories F and G are either infrequent or possibly non-prototypical examples of the other categories. For instance, category F, illustrated by 2 examples in (19), may itself be best classed as realising a more delicate selection within category G, which itself may represent a more delicate suggestion within category D.

(19i) | ʜ*those* are the <u>kind</u> of \<u>big</u> de<u>cisions</u> | you need to \<u>take</u> |

(19ii) | ʜ*that's* the <u>way</u> for\<u>ward</u> | *if we* ʜ*wait for the <u>rest</u> of the <u>world</u> to catch* \<u>up</u> | we will <u>never</u> <u>ever</u> get <u>round</u> to \<u>do</u>ing this at <u>all</u> |

The Theme is realised as an anaphoric pronominal element which is both prominent and the site of a high Key. The pronominal grounds the utterance in the prior context, while the high Key signals that the utterance will breach the expectations created by the prior discourse. For instance, in (19i) the speaker, Gordon Brown, refers back to his previous decision to cancel an expensive weapons contract, and signals that contrary to expectations such tough decisions are the norm. In (19ii) Nick Clegg refers to his own prior suggestion of a levy on bank profits and signals that, contrary to expectations, Britain should unilaterally impose the levy.

Example (20) illustrates 2 out of the 7 examples from category G.

(20i) | *on the* ʜ*<u>point</u> that <u>gordon</u>* *<u>brown</u> keeps* | *<u>keeps</u>* *<u>saying</u>* | *that of anti-a**<u>mericanism</u>ʟ* | i have a ʜ<u>very</u> <u>simple</u> ʜat\<u>titude</u> | to<u>wards</u> um … our re<u>lation</u>ship with a\<u>merica</u>| *it is an* ʜ*im<u>mensely</u> im<u>mensely</u> im*\/*<u>portant</u>*| <u>special</u> ʜre\<u>lation</u>ship | *but we… it* <u>shouldn't</u> be a \<u>one</u>-way | ʜ\<u>street</u> |

(20ii) | *i* ʜ*<u>think</u> that's what* \<u>jacqueline</u> *is* ʜ*<u>tal</u>king about* | *this* ʜ*desperate* *<u>feeling</u>* | *this* ʜ*<u>hope</u>less* *<u>feeling</u>* | *It* keeps ʜ\<u>happ</u>ening | <u>over</u> and \<u>over</u> a<u>gain</u> |

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[14] The figure of meanings realised by the High Key Themes is more than the number of high Key Themes because on 65 occasions a high Key Theme was coded as realising more than a single meaning.

In (20i) Nick Clegg grounds his utterance in a previous critical remark directed against him and his selection of high Key signals that he intends to rebut it in an unexpected way, namely a critical partnership. In (20ii) his thematic choice grounds his utterance in a previous utterance which highlights the problem of crime. His selection of high Key, however, indicates that he will develop the idea in an unexpected manner, namely towards the hopelessness and despair engendered by the constant repetition of criminal acts. Yet, at a less delicate level, meanings from category G could be considered instances of Category D. In (20i) Clegg explicitly contrasts his beliefs with those of his political rivals while in (20ii) he specifies that he is responding to the words of a named audience member. More will be said later about the interpersonal meanings realised by (20ii) but before doing so I will turn to look at the meanings classed in categories A to E and H.

Category A: Opening of Turn
Within the debates the opening of a turn could occur when the speaker has been explicitly nominated to give an opening statement (i) or a final statement (ii), or to respond to an initial question (iii), their peers' prior response (iv) or as part of the 'free debate' section (v). As noted above, speakers in pre-planned discourse frequently start their contribution with a high pitch (Wichmann 2000: 24–30) and as such the high Key simply marks a beginning and carries no unexpected or contrastive meaning. Yet, the use of high Key at turn openings in the debates does not simply seem to announce the beginning of the speaker's contribution, but rather signals a more nuanced orientating of the speakers' signalling of their expectations. To illustrate, David Cameron's use of high Key in (21) below does not merely announce the beginning of his turn, it signals that contrary to expectations he views UK old age state-pensions as being too low and therefore implicitly criticizes the actions of the then government. Furthermore, no simple Theme high Key or textual ^ topical high Key Theme was found as a response to an audience member's question[15] and only 3 were found at the beginning of an opening or final statement. (22) is the sole example of a simple High Key Theme found at the beginning of an opening statement. (23) illustrates a topical ^ textual High Key Theme found in the opening of a final statement.

(21) | ʜfifty nine pounds is \not enough |
(22) | our ʜeconomy is stuck in a \rutʟ|
(23) | well the ʜbuck \stops hereʟ |

David Cameron opens the third debate with a bold and sweeping statement (22) by signalling that, contrary to expectations and the stated views of his rivals, the UK economy is stalled. His projected view simultaneously implies criticism of the then Labour government's economic policy and boosts his own views. Gordon Brown wraps up debate 3 by projecting that contrary to expectations, he is ready to assume responsibility, and by implication, defend his government's record (23). He signals an

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[15] Across the 3 debates there were 54 occasions where speakers were nominated to respond to an audience member's question. As will be seen later, 4 unmarked Themes containing an Interpersonal element were found in this position.

unexpected orientation towards a robust defence of the past rather than towards a novel future plan.

Unmarked high Key themes which contained an interpersonal element were on 4 occasions found as responses to an audience member's question. Two representative examples are illustrated in 24:

24(i)   (In response to the question, should parties work together in a coalition?)
        | i ʜ*think we* ʜ\\/should try | and work to\\gether | where we ʟ/can |

24(ii) (In response to the question, do you support the pope's visit to Britain?)
        | i ʜ*do* | *think it*'s welcome that the pope is \\coming to | to ʜ\\britain |

In (24i), David Cameron responds by signalling that his assessment of the desirability of parties working together is contrary to the expectations created by the debate and the heated election campaign. Cameron's selection of high Key on the Interpersonal modal metaphor *I do think* in (24ii) signals that it is not his assessment that is contrary to expectations, but rather his stance. He is firmly in favour of the pope's visit. Together, the Theme and high Key function to orientate the hearers to expect that he will provide reasons for his determined support which he does in the following text. To sum up, (24i and ii) illustrate that the high Key choices were neither unmotivated nor a redundant signalling of a response but rather a choice that helped to orientate the hearers to the speakers' meaning.

The conflation of high Key with a Thematic Equative does, however, seem in some instances to be a redundant signal that the speakers are beginning their talk. Consider (25):

(25)   (The beginning of the opening statement)
        | i *be*ʜ*lieve the way* *things are* | is not the way things have to ʜ\\be |

Had Nick Clegg articulated this utterance with mid key, the communicative value would seem unaltered. The fact that an opposition candidate, in an election campaign, believes that change is both possible and desirable cannot be a surprise to his hearers. Thus, the fact that Theme = Rheme, which as a whole grounds the speaker's message and perspectivizes it towards a series of arguments to be presented throughout the entire debate in favour of change, is completely expected. Yet not all Thematic Equatives contain a redundant high Key, as illustrated by (26):

(26)   (In response to a question enquiring if politicians have become too distant from their electorate)
        | *the* ʜ*only reason i* *came into po**litics*ʟ | was because i \\saw | what was happening in my local \\communityʟ|

Gordon Brown's selection of high Key is by no means redundant. It signals that his answer will not be what was expected, i.e. a yes or no. Instead he signals that he will shape his answer in a manner not predictable from the discourse context but rather

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one shaped by his individual life history.

A marked Theme signals that the speaker will develop their idea from an unexpected or unpredictable angle. As a result, in certain cases a high Key marked Theme does not appear to realise an independent communicative value while in others it does. Consider (27i to iii):

(27i) | *from* ʜ*two thousand and e\leven*ʟ| there will be <u>cuts</u> in \<u>spen</u>ding| in de<u>part</u>ments <u>oth</u>er than the \<u>nhs</u>ʟ | other than \<u>school</u> | and <u>oth</u>er than ʟpo\<u>lic</u>ing |

(27ii) |*to* ʜ*boost manu\facturing*ʟ| we have ʜ<u>trebled</u> the <u>number</u> of ap\<u>prent</u>iceshipsʟ | from <u>sev</u>enty thousand in <u>nine</u>teen ninety /<u>sev</u>en | to over <u>two</u> hundred <u>thous</u>and \<u>now</u> |

(27iii) | *and* ʜ*whoever wins the next election* | we can <u>put</u> that in \<u>place</u> | <u>straigh</u>taway |

It is hard to see how the presence of the high Key adds communicative value to (27i). The marked Thematic circumstance simply informs when the projected cuts are predicted to take place. However, in (27ii) the combination of high Key and marked Theme signals to the hearer that, contrary to previous claims and resultant expectations, the Brown government has in fact taken positive action to boost manufacturing. Similarly, in (27iii) the combination of marked Theme and high Key orientates the hearer towards a very unexpected conclusion: namely that irrespective of the election result electoral reform can easily be implemented. In the two examples of Theme above the clause, the high Key appears to be redundant and no more than a verbal signal of the beginning of the speaker's talk, as in (28):

(28) | if … ʜ *If we are going to make a* <u>*real*</u> *difference* | we've got to change the energy balance in our ʟ\<u>country</u>ʟ|

To sum up this section, the combination of high Key and Theme at the opening of a turn may be a redundant signal that the speaker is commencing their talk, but in the majority of instances it realises an independent communicative function.

<u>Category B: a new paratone</u>
Despite this category being by far the most numerous, it is also the least interesting in terms of analysis. Excluding instances where the signalling of the paratone was coded as explicitly realising another meaning (chiefly those classed here as Categories E, F and G), the high Key serves little function other than announcing the beginning of a new topic within the same speaker turn. Consider:

(29i) | they're sus\<u>pended</u> ʟ | \<u>out</u> ʟ | they ʜ <u>shouldn't</u> be in <u>pol</u>itics at \<u>all</u> ʟ| **<end of paratone><start of paratone>** | ʜ *public service* is about serving the public |

29ii) | i don't think we can af\ford it **L** | **<end of paratone><start of paratone>** | da … *a* **H** *tax on* *banks* | i think is now un\avoidable **L** |

29iii) | is that the taliban changed its tactics | **<end of paratone><start of paratone>** | *be* **H** *fore they* –were in a | one-to-one confron\tation with us **L**| face to \face **L**|

In (29i to iii) the high Key Theme serves as the starting point for the paratone. In (i) what is said about public service is in accord with the discourse expectations. In (ii) the speaker has previously argued for the necessity of a bank tax and discussion of its necessity is entirely within the expectations created by the prior cotext. In (iii) similarly, the perspective is developed from what, according to Berry (2013), is a GivTop Theme: one where the topical Theme is informationally predictable or Given. To sum up, excluding cases of double coding, the high Key Theme in paratone opening position serves the textual function of announcing the beginning of a new topic.

Category C: Unexpected direction
This category refers to meanings created where a high Key is conflated with a GivTop Theme within a single paratone. The high Key is not immediately preceded by a low pitch and the meaning created is that the speaker signals that the existing topic is to be developed in an unusual or unpredictable manner. Once again, except in cases which were double coded, e.g. (30iv), high Key Theme functioned to orientate the hearer to the transition and the fact that the existing topic is to be developed in an unexpected manner.

(30i)   In the context of discussion of the UK's economic recovery
         | *but* **H***as we* **H***meet to/night* | **H**economies in \europe | are in\ peril**L** |

(30ii)   In the context of discussion of the credit freeze
         | **H***small businesses* come to my\ surgery**L** | and \say | i've never gone over my \overdraft limit**L** | i've never broken my \covenants | but i cannot get a **H**\loan |

(30iii)   In the context of discussion of existing VAT regulations
         | *on the* **H***issue of* | *vat* | i just think there's a \funny | you \know | \glitch | in the \vat system | at the \/moment | that you pay no \vat on | new-\build | on green-field sites and \/so on |

(30iv)   In the context of discussion of future prospects
         | i **H***think we* can be really \hopeful | about the \future **L**|

In (30 i to iii) the Theme is either physically present or available from the co-text. In (30i) the referent of *we* is readily identifiable as is the content of the previous discussion. But Gordon Brown signals that contrary to expectations the recovery is still in peril and thus implies that the policies that have served to bring Britain out of recession are still required. In (30ii) the Theme *small business* has been referred to in

the immediate cotext as had the wider topic of credit. The unexpected development signalled by the high Key is the difficulty that solvent small businesses have in getting credit. In (30iii) the Theme *VAT* is the topic under discussion and Nick Clegg's selection of high Key signals that he will develop his discussion of VAT in an entirely unpredictable manner: namely towards what he perceives to be a glitch in the system. As in category B, a marked Theme signals that a message is being developed from an unusual angle and, thus, there is a degree of redundancy in the orientation signalled by the high Key. The meaning signalled by (30iv) is both textual and interpersonal. Despite the gloom, Cameron grounds his Theme textually in the referent *we* and signals that contrary to expectations we can hope for a better future. Simultaneously the intonational prominence on *think* signals that this unexpected meaning is his assessment or prediction.

<u>Category D: To project contrast or specify an individual or action</u>
Category D differs from categories B and C in that the presence of the high Key does not only project textual meaning. Examples (31i and ii) illustrate this.

(31i) | ʜ*david cameron* <u>says</u> you can't af\<u>ford</u> tax \/<u>give</u>aways | *no you* ʜ\<u>can't</u> |
what you ʜ\<u>can do</u> | is ʜ<u>switch</u> the \<u>tax</u> system | *make* it \<u>fair</u> |

(31ii) | ʜ*all the experts* a\<u>gree</u> | that it <u>would</u> <u>take</u> … well into the <u>next</u> \<u>decade</u> |
to <u>create</u> ʟ/<u>new</u> nuclear energy | which would be ʜ<u>too</u> –<u>late</u> | to \<u>deal</u> with
the | <u>ene</u>rgy <u>prob</u>lems we have \<u>now</u> |

(31i) is an example where the individual being specified is an active participant in the debate. Nick Clegg grounds his message in *David Cameron* and signals that he will develop it in a manner contrary to the discourse expectations. He agrees with Cameron's claim but then argues that Cameron's view overlooks an alternative course of action. In (31ii) the Theme *All the experts* is explicitly specified and the message developed in a manner which allows Clegg to explicitly contrast expert views on the desirability of the expansion of nuclear power with the views expressed by his political rivals. In short, the high Key Theme does not signal transitions in the discourse but rather seeks to manage hearers' expectations by signalling that the actions or words of specified individuals do not align with the previously created discourse expectations shared by politicians and audience.

<u>Category E: Direct attention towards the consequences of a future action</u>
Category E meaning is realised by the combination of high Key Theme and imperative mood. In the data studied these Themes were also unmarked and did not contain an interpersonal component, as shown in (32):

(32i) | ʜ*take* ʜ<u>six</u> <u>bil</u>lion \/<u>out</u> | *and it* is the e\<u>quiv</u>alent of taking out | <u>thous</u>ands
of \<u>jobs</u> ʟ| in this e\<u>con</u>omy today ʟ |

(32ii) | ʜ*cut* the \<u>waste</u> | *get* the <u>mo</u>ney into the \<u>class</u>room ʟ |

In neither example does the speaker instruct the hearer to undertake a physical act.

Rather the hearer is invited to consider the effect of an action proposed by another. In (32i) Gordon Brown signals that implementing the savings proposed earlier in the debate by David Cameron will have unexpected serious and deleterious consequences. In the following clause he specifies one of the negative consequences. Similarly, in (32ii) Nick Clegg signals the positive and unexpected consequences of reducing unnecessary expenditure and then in the following tone unit with a mid Key Theme presents a further proposed action as entirely commensurate with prevailing discourse expectations.

Example (33) is slightly different in that Cameron instructs his hearers to perform a mental action:

(33) | *and* ʜ*think* about our <u>nat</u>ional … se\<u>cu</u>rity |

He signals that the audience will find the answer to the question contrary to their expectations and by so doing implicitly criticises existing government policy on matters relating to security.

<u>Category H: Assessment of desirability</u>
Category H is identified through the presence of an intonationally prominent interpersonal element within the Theme. As Table 6 illustrated, it is more commonly associated with unmarked rather than marked Theme. Examples include 34 (i to ii) as well as (30iv) and (20ii) above.

(34i) | *and i* ʜ*think ac\tually* | *our <u>high</u>-speed \/<u>rail</u> network* | will al<u>low</u> <u>pe</u>ople to
        get <u>off</u> uh … the \/<u>roads</u>

(34ii) | \/ʜ***i* think** | *we* ʜ<u>let</u> down ʜ\<u>everyone</u> |if we don't ʜ<u>do</u> this \<u>prop</u>erly |

In 34(i) the clause is grounded both interpersonally in the speaker's median modal assessment and experientially in the nominal group *our high speed rail network.* The high Key, however, foregrounds that it is Cameron's assessment which is signalled as being contrary to the discourse expectations and not the proposition itself. Similar meanings are realised in (34ii), in which Cameron's assessment of changes to immigration policy are presented as contrary to expectations. In short the orientating meanings realised by the combination of Theme and high Key are interactive and function to manage hearers' expectations and align their views with that of the speaker.

6   Conclusion
In this article, we have seen that the definition of Theme has shifted within SFL from being "that with which the clause is concerned" to "that which orientates and locates the clause within its context." We have further seen that Theme and Information have been separated. Indeed, this article, by identifying a significant number of Themes which are prosodically prominent and thus likely New, provides further support (were any required!) for the wisdom of separating Theme and Information. Yet, the absence of the consideration of how Theme is articulated in

spoken language has resulted in the overlooking of potential meanings created by the interplay of Key and Theme. In this article a number of novel meanings as well as redundancies have been identified and described. The most significant of these appear to focus on the enabling of Interpersonal meaning. For instance, while both Key and Theme serve to orientate hearers towards the speaker's message, they have the potential to foreground separate strands of meaning. A high Key Theme with an Interpersonal element may ground the message through the lens of speakers' projections of whether their modal assessments are in accord with their hearers' expectations. As such the grounding of the message has shifted from the representation of an action or state towards a negotiation of the likelihood, necessity or desirability of the state or action. To conclude consideration of the meaning potential generated by prosodic choices enables a richer and more granular explication of the meaningful potential realised by grammatical features such as Theme in spoken discourse.

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