

Thematic progression and rhetoric in Sun and Times editorials: 1991-2008

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Abstract

Key in the rhetorical strategy of any text is the way information and comment are organised through thematisation - the structuring of a clause into two parts, theme and rheme, or 'given' and 'new' information, respectively. What moves a text forward is *thematic progression*, by which the theme and/or rheme of a clause link up to those of other clauses. Prague linguist Daneš (1974) posits three types: *constant*, *simple linear*, and *derived*. Thematic progression can contribute to the generation of a systematised viewpoint and is potentially a powerful aid in ideological dissemination.

Newspapers are probably still the most read text types today, in hard copy or online. In Britain two stand out particularly in terms of their presumed influence. The Sun, a tabloid, is the country's best-selling daily, while The Times, a 'quality' ex-broadsheet, is favoured by the social elite. This article examines the development of thematic progression in The Sun and The Times from 1991 to 2008. It offers tentative conclusions as to the rhetorical strategies behind the changing progression choices.

Since by 2008 a good proportion of the data cannot be accounted for by Daneš' types, new progression categories are proposed: C Type underlines the fact that lexical repetition can function through empty 'grammar' words and can repeat several elements at once. C Gap provides a dynamism that is less obviously demagogic than constant and allows for alternation between referents. C Rheme progression achieves a foregrounding effect by placing 'given' material where the reader expects to find 'new'.

Keywords: thematic progression, media discourse, rhetoric

1 Introduction

Two British newspapers stand out particularly in terms of their presumed impact on the nation's thinking. The tabloid Sun is the country's best selling, with daily sales of around three million. The Times, a quality ex-broadsheet, is favoured by the social elite. Big claims have been made about the influence they wield over public opinion. After the Conservative victory in the 1992 general election, for instance, a headline proclaimed: "It's The Sun wot won it" (the Sun, 11.4.1992), while Abraham Lincoln once called the Times "the most powerful thing in the world, except, perhaps, the Mississippi" (quoted in Leapman, 1984:182).

Key in the rhetorical strategy of any text, including that of newspaper articles, is the way information and comment are organised through thematization - the

structuring of a clause into two parts, theme (the first part of a clause) and rheme (the remainder), or given and new information, respectively. What then moves a text forward as a whole is thematic progression, by which the theme and/or rheme of a clause link up with those of other clauses. This article examines the development of thematic progression in the Sun and the Times from 1991 to 2008. It offers tentative conclusions as to the rhetorical strategies behind the changing progression choices, proposes new categories for analysis and suggests that there is common ground between grammarians and lexicologists.

1.1 Thematization and persuasion

“The theme is the text producer’s point of departure in a clause, and generally corresponds to what is taken to be (which does not mean it actually is) ‘given’ information, that is information already known or established for text producers and interpreters... A sequence of themes... shows the agenda... and indicates [the producer’s] commonsense assumptions about [an issue]” (Fairclough, 1994:183).

Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis definition links thematization to persuasion and implies that, while the reader assumes theme will present known or given information, the writer may in fact include within it material that does not comply with this expectation, possibly as a conscious strategy. A compatible psycholinguistic explanation is to be found in a corpus-based study by Hoey (2005): thanks to repeated exposure to language, readers are unconsciously primed to associate given elements with specific sentence positions, hence the connection with theme and rheme. Lexical items may also nest with specific grammatical functions or display negative colligation such that they have, for example, “*an aversion to Theme*” (2005:90).

A reader’s individual exposure to language is unique but Hoey stresses that, given the phenomenon of cultural reproduction, “*there must be harmonising principles at work to ensure that each individual’s primings do not differ too greatly from those of others*” (ibid:11). He claims that the most important of these are education and the mass media (ibid:182). Just as teachers may prime students’ language to conform to socially accepted norms, newspapers may also prime readers’ language, presumably to inculcate their own preferred associations.

1.2 Thematic Progression

Thematic progression refers in effect to the conversion of new into given material through the repetition or transformation of elements in other themes and rhemes. The notion originated with Czech linguist Daneš (1974), who posits three progression types: *constant* progression, by which successive clauses retain the same theme; *simple linear*, which links a theme to the rheme of the preceding clause; and *derived*, which links themes not to preceding elements but to co-hyponyms under a single hypertheme, which may be explicit or implicit in the text. Thematic progression can contribute to the generation of a systematized viewpoint and is potentially a powerful device for ideological dissemination because it can function across text of any length.

Whereas fellow Prague school linguists had described given and new in terms of whether they were recoverable from the preceding discourse, Daneš argues it is the speaker’s intention that counts above all. New is therefore not objective but whatever the speaker presents as non-recoverable from the context, whether or not it is actually known or recoverable. He distinguishes between theme and given on the grounds that the speaker is not obliged to make the given his/her starting point. Daneš (1995)

follows Firbas in equating theme with the lowest communicative dynamism, but insists that the latter need not necessarily come at the beginning of a sentence. This leaves open the possibility that comment may occur where a reader expects to find given information, conceivably leading the reader to mistake the one for the other.

It and *there* predicates may be employed as empty elements in theme position, allowing the reversal of given and new. Alternatively, *there* predicates may be used to obscure aspects of transitivity relations, especially the actor's identity. In the following example, with a slash separating theme (in italics) from rheme, *there* helps obscure the fact that it is the Government that is responsible for scrapping the planned rail link:

There / is to be no high-speed rail link from France to London in the foreseeable future (The Times: 10.10.1991).

As for *it* predicates, these can present a proposition as an objective given, rather than as the opinion it really is, e.g.:

It / is harder to sell cars today than anyone can remember (The Sun: 15.10.1991).

In sum, thematic progression is the joint development of theme and rheme to create coherent text and to persuade. This paper refers to individual Daneš-style progressions from one clause/sentence to the next as *links* to a) reflect this cohesive role, b) to employ the same term for repetitions used in Hoey (1991) and c) to distinguish them from *breaks* in progression. Breaks, for which non-participant themes (including *it* and *there* predicates) provide a vehicle, are examined separately in a forthcoming paper entitled "Breaks in thematic progression".

2 Data and Methodology

2.1 Data

This paper is based on analysis of the same ten days' editorial columns from the Sun and the Times of October 1991 followed by another ten days' editorials from September 2008. The data comprise 121 articles in all, approximately half (60) being from 1991 and half (61) from 2008. Although the number of Sun articles (63) and Times articles (58) is similar, the volume of text in the Times is almost tenfold that in the Sun because articles in the Times are so much longer. However, the priority being to compare how the two papers say what they do, text for text, preserving the structural integrity of the whole text, this was perhaps unavoidable.

2.2 Model

The theme model underlying this research is Halliday's (1985), which can be glossed as 1. the start of the clause, 2. everything up to and including the first ideational element, and 3. what the message will be about. However, where this definition would produce a theme that fails to show 'where the passage is going', I extend it to include the grammatical subject, following Thomas' (1991) claim that: "in unmarked sentences, [aboutness] is generally conveyed through the grammatical subject" (p.253). Where Halliday accepts as theme, for example, adjunct-only structures such as "once / I was a real turtle" or "very carefully / she put him back on his feet" (1985:39), I would include *I* in the first and *she* in the second, rather than merely *once* and *very carefully*, as does Halliday.

2.3 Methodology

1. Locate and number each independent clause;
2. Identify a theme/rheme boundary for each clause or clause complex;
3. Identify a Daneš progression type for each – excepting those that are text-initial;
4. Determine the numerical importance of each progression type under consideration;
5. Analyse similarities and differences among progressions in Times and Sun;
6. Compare the pragmatic uses made of these in 1991 as against 2008 and formulate hypotheses as to their changing rhetorical motivation.

3 Analysis of Daneš' Progression Types

3.1 Occurrence of individual progression types in 1991

Counting individual instances of constant, simple linear and derived reveals the relative usage made of these progression types in different (sub)genres. Alternatively, the progression type used more often than any other in a given text could be said to be the main development method of that text and this will be examined in sections 3.6 and 3.7. Table 1, to begin with, shows the general frequency of occurrence of Daneš' types in 1991. Note that numbers do not add up to 100% for two reasons. Firstly, some clauses do not form any progression links with others. Such cases are more numerous in the Sun than the Times as the Sun makes relatively greater use of breaks (Hawes, 2010, forthcoming). Secondly, the newspapers are employing progression types not specifically accounted for by Daneš. These will be investigated in section 4.

	THE SUN	THE TIMES
Derived progression:	29% (56)	58% (547)
Constant progression:	25% (48)	14% (128)
Simple linear progr:	15% (30)	13% (118)

Table 1. Occurrence of Daneš' progression types in 1991

3.2 Derived

Daneš' derived progression can be represented as **Th(D1)**, **Th(D2)**, **Th(D3)**, where *Th* denotes theme. The various themes are generally co-hyponyms or co-meronyms, all relating to a superordinate, which may be found in the title or may simply be the implicit subject of the article. The following themes (in italics) provide an example. They come from a Sun text whose implicit superordinate is *the economy and the coming general elections*:

Economic recovery / is firmly under way. *Inflation* / is expected to tumble further today. *Industry* / is virtually strike-free and *wage settlements* / are the lowest in years. *Yet sterling* hangs on the ropes like a battered boxer because opinion polls suggest Labour might win the next election (The Sun: 11.10.1991).

In 1991 derived was the most used progression type in each newspaper, though used only half as often in the Sun as it was in the Times, where a clear majority of all progression links were derived. However, derived progression holds relatively little interest in terms of rhetoric. It has traditionally been the norm in European intellectual writing, whereas constant progression has been considered an overly obvious method of development. Moreover, one could argue that every theme of a text in some way derives from its hypertheme – otherwise it would not be there.

3.3 Simple linear

Simple linear progression can be reduced to the formula **Rh1-Th2, Rh2-Th3, Rh3-Th4**, etc, where dashes indicate links. In this progression type, the rheme of the first clause (Rh1) links up with the theme of the second (Th2), the rheme of the second (Rh2) to the theme of the third, and so on. In the example below, *a US company* in the rheme links up with the following theme, which specifies the company as *American Airlines*:

England's footballers / will be sponsored by a *US company* for the next World Cup. *American Airlines* / have done a £100,000 deal with the F.A. (The Sun: 11.10.1991).

In 1991, simple linear as a proportion of all progression types was similar in both newspapers: 13% in the Times and 15% in the Sun.

3.4 Constant

Constant progression repeats the same theme (including its pronominalizations and synonyms) in successive sentences, while varying the rhemes. The relevant formula in this case would be: **Th1-Th2, Th2-Th3, Th3-Th4**, etc. An instance from 1991 is reproduced below, employing constant progression across four clauses:

First, Western Samoa / whack the Welsh at Rugby. Now *they* / run the mighty Australians close in the World Cup. *This faraway country* / has fewer people than Newcastle. *It* used to be known only for coconuts and bananas (The Sun: 17.10.1991).

In 1991, the Sun's constant progressions out-proportioned those of the Times by nearly 2 to 1. Its discourse might therefore have appeared rather demagogic compared with that of the Times, which would have seemed relatively academic or low-key.

3.5 Occurrence of individual progression types in 2008

Table 2, below, provides the figures for 2008. The change in frequency of occurrence is dramatic. The Times, having employed twice as many derived progressions in 1991, now uses fewer than the Sun. In fact, the occurrence of derived in the Times has collapsed to just over a quarter of its 1991 level. It now makes greater use of simple linear and, especially, constant, suggesting that it perceives a greater need to guide readers through the text than it once did. Alternatively, the Times might be accused of going down market. Adding together the Times' scores for all three Daneš types in 2008 surprisingly yields only 51%. One implication of this is that it is employing other sorts of progression in large numbers (see below).

	THE SUN	THE TIMES
Derived progression:	18% (50)	15% (133)
Constant progression:	17% (48)	20% (186)
Simple linear progr:	22% (63)	16% (147)

Table 2. Occurrence of Daneš' progression types in 2008

Whereas in 1991 derived was the leading progression method in both Sun and Times, each paper now uses a different Daneš type as its most common. For the Sun this is simple linear, the occurrence of which increased by almost 50% to 2008. An example below is taken from a very typical Sun editorial which uses a member of the Royal Family as a vehicle for praising British soldiers:

PRINCE Harry / was so moved by *shattered marine Ben McBean's* fight for life that he publicly hailed him as a "true hero". *Brave Ben* / was barely conscious after losing an arm and a leg as the two comrades flew home from Afghanistan (The Sun: 17.9.2008).

On the other hand, the Times' most common progression type in 2008 is constant, which has similarly increased by almost 50% from 1991. In an article on the financial crisis, the Times features Dick Fuld, CEO of Lehman Brothers, in no less than six adjacent themes:

Mr Fuld / has been the imperious chief executive of Lehmans, the fourth largest investment bank in the United States, since 1994. *A curious cross between Gordon Gekko and Tony Soprano, Mr Fuld* / was an unapologetic mogul of Wall Street: *he* / put down his colleagues in public; *he* / was good at straight-talking, but not so practised at straight-listening; *and ultimately he* / deluded himself and those around him that, having seen off a brush with bankruptcy in the late 1990s, he and his bank had taken the precautions necessary to weather any financial storm. *At Lehmans' annual general meeting last April, he* / said: "The worst of the impact on the financial services is behind us" (The Times: 16.9.2008).

3.6 Main progression method of a text in 1991

Turning to the question of which Daneš progression types were employed as the main development method (i.e most frequently occurring) in individual editorial articles, the following table provides the figures for 1991. Percentages denote the proportion of all articles in which a particular progression was the main method used, while figures in brackets express the actual number of articles in which this was the case.

	THE SUN	THE TIMES
Derived progression:	55% (17)	100% (29)
Constant progression:	39% (12)	3% (1)
Simple linear progression:	19% (6)	0% (0)

Table 3. Daneš types as main progression method in 1991

What is immediately clear from Table 3 is the importance of derived in 1991 for both newspapers. In all but one of the Times' editorial articles it was the dominant

development method. What is less clear is that in the single remaining editorial it tied for first place with constant and that one editorial is therefore counted twice. Arguably, the relative dominance of derived in the Times was greater than appears from the table because no other progression type achieved sole dominance in any article. In the Sun, derived also played a leading role in 1991 but its dominance was not what it was in the Times – a little over half the Sun’s articles used derived as their main progression method. At any rate, in concluding that derived was the most common type of progression we reveal little more than what common sense might predict: that at certain points in a text the writer refers indirectly to the hypertheme.

Whereas the Times never employed simple linear as the main progression method of its 1991 editorials, the Sun did so in six (19%) of its texts. This could be because it is easier to sustain a simple linear development in the much shorter texts of the Sun than in those of the Times. Arguably, the Sun went to greater lengths than the Times to clarify the development of its arguments for its readers. This is perhaps unsurprising if the social background of the readership is taken into consideration, if we can assume that literacy rises with social class. Worcester (1998) showed that 79% of Sun readers were semi-skilled, lower working class, or unemployed, 82% of Times readers middle class or skilled manual workers (cited in Richardson, 2007:79). With regard to constant, almost 40% of the Sun’s 1991 editorials made it their main progression type, while only one did so in the Times - and this was only a tie.

In summary we could say that in 1991 both newspapers used the three Daneš progression types similarly for typical editorials. While their default development strategy was to use derived progression, their secondary strategy was to use constant progression, which points out more directly the relationships between propositions. The third strategy was to use simple linear, which produces local cohesion between adjacent clauses. It therefore appears that derived themes were employed to construct a coherent background texture against which the less numerous but more cohesive constant and simple linear progressions might appear relatively prominent.

3.7 Main progression method of a text in 2008

Table 4, below, shows that the situation with regard to the main progression type has changed in 2008. The Sun in particular has shown radical alteration, with a third of its editorials now employing simple linear as the main development method, while almost as many still employ constant progression in that capacity. Derived progression, previously used as the main type in a majority of Sun texts, now plays this role in only one in every six texts. The increasing use of simple linear and constant progression is mirrored in the Times, as is the reduced role for derived, now the main progression type in less than half of the Times’ editorials. Alongside these changes, a third of 2008 articles now employ non-Daneš types (discussed in section 4) as their main progression method. Note that the figures add up to more than 100% due to ties for first place.

	THE SUN	THE TIMES
Derived progression	16% (5)	45% (13)
Constant progression:	31% (10)	24% (7)
Simple linear progr:	34% (11)	10% (3)
Breaks:	31% (10)	28% (8)
C Gap:	3% (1)	3% (1)

Table 4. Daneš and other types as main progression method in 2008

3.8 Summary of Daneš progression types

These data concur with Daneš (1974) in so far as the patterns he hypothesizes are abundantly evidenced in both newspapers. Changes from 1991 to 2008 suggest that both papers, particularly the Times, are moving down market and simplifying the underlying information structure of their texts. It is beyond the scope of this research to say whether this is due to declining literacy in the readership, changes in the way people read, or perhaps an attempt to draw a broader audience. However, with all the new media competing for attention, as well as the increasing number and size of pictures in newspapers, it seems likely that readers no longer focus on the text with the concentration they once did, perhaps more often skimming and scanning text than before, or reading only the early parts of it. This may be leading editors to spell out more clearly the information structure of their articles through an increasing use of constant and simple linear progression.

What can be stated with some confidence is that the Times' dwindling occurrence of derived progression and increasing occurrence of constant progression confirms the ongoing tabloidization of the paper. As for the Sun, while overall it appears to be moving in the same direction, its reduced occurrence of constant progression in 2008 compared with 1991 suggests a toning down in style and, possibly, a quest for more conventional respectability. The provocative stance of "*It's The Sun not won it*" has given way to a more discreet dissemination of ideology.

One thing is clear: if a significant proportion of the data can no longer be accounted for by Daneš' constant, simple linear and derived progression, it is necessary to go beyond these types to obtain a satisfactory picture of current newspaper rhetoric. To this end, the following section proposes and discusses various alternative thematic progression methods.

4 Variants of Constant Progression

The Sun has long stood out for its tub-thumping style, which relies in no small part on constant progression and the repetition this entails. Although in 1991 such demagogic repetition was not a significant feature of the Times, things have changed by 2008 and it too has begun to repeat elements more liberally. All progression types involve some form of repetition, whether of a hypertheme (the general idea and, therefore, a more abstract kind of repetition) or a specific participant (a repeated lexical item and, therefore, more concrete sort of repetition). This makes thematic progression a close relative of Hoey's (1991) lexical patterning and suggests that it is the repetition itself, rather than the repeated element, which is primary. For, although grammar and lexis closely overlap in this respect, they do not have to. The next extract, from a text on the

financial crisis, illustrates this fact. It employs a sort of constant progression, not in the form of a repeated participant referent, but in four successive *it* predicate themes, traditionally seen as lexically empty or purely grammatical elements:

It / would be easy to blame it all on the bankers... But it / would be wrong. It / may seem an inopportune moment to say... Yet it / needs to be said... (The Times: 17.9.2008).

Nor is it necessary that constant progression entail word-for-word repetition. In the context of lexical patterning, Hoey (1991) points the way, referring to a whole range of repetition types that include paraphrase. By analogy there are many possible variants for constant progression. Thomas (1991) and Daneš (1995) examine common ground between thematic progression and work on clause relations (eg Winter, 1977; Hoey, 1983). Thomas cites similarities between derived progression and the general-particular relation, where sentences are frequently related “*such that the theme of the second sentence derives from the theme of the first sentence*” (Thomas, 1991: 276), with the first theme as the general element and the second as the particular.

4.1 Constant type progression

Thomas’ work on the interrelatedness of thematization and other aspects of the lexico-grammar and text organisation led me to search for phenomena parallel to Daneš-style progression. First to come to light was a strategy of repeating not the same referent but the same theme types, as did the example using *it* predicates above. I refer to this as *C Type Progression*. The extract below provides another example. Coming from an article about a plot to oust the Prime Minister, it uses three times in succession four distinct theme categories: 1. named participant; 2. female participant; 3. government participant; and 4. a rhemeless, or ellided, clause. In other words, all three are simultaneously instances of a name, a female and a member of the government (at that time), as well as lacking an intact theme-rheme structure. The technique lends an exceptional degree of focus to these themes, grouping them together yet emphasising their distinctness. (The fourth clause is included merely as context for the citation).

Siobhan McDonagh. Joan Ryan. Fiona Mactaggart. These are not the names of towering political figures... (The Times: 15.9.2008).

Again, whereas named participants, female participants and government participants are longstanding staples in the Times, the paper used very few such rhemeless clauses back in 1991 (Hawes, 2001) and rarely repeated so many thematic elements in this way. Both these uses of progression were however already ordinary in the Sun in 1991 and continue in 2008. A more up-to-date example from the Sun on the subject of interest rate cuts repeats the WH- element in successive exclamative clauses:

What / a Christmas present it would be. And how / [Gordon Brown]’d love to play Santa! (The Sun: 15.9.2008).

Therefore, although it is only a minor category, accounting for little over 2% of all progressions in each newspaper, C Type could merit greater attention in future.

4.2 Constant gap progression

What I refer to as *C Gap Progression* (C standing for constant) is the repetition of a theme that occurs two or more clauses previously in the text, i.e not the immediately

preceding one. This may be represented by the equation $Th1+n-Th2$, $Th2+n-Th3$, $Th3+n-Th4$, etc. While C Gap does not form a chain of cohesive links the way constant progression can, the themes repeated at intervals do contribute appreciably to coherence. Of course, the longer the gaps become, the weaker the effect is likely to be. But, whereas the grammatical aspect of repetition present in constant progression may be lost, Hoey's (2005) lexical priming effect will no doubt be present.

Because this progression category requires that there be gaps between the repeated themes, the relatively shorter Sun articles and longer Times articles have unequal potential for employing C Gap as a strategy. While in 1991 it did occur frequently in both papers, instances in Sun articles did not exceed three repetitions. Times texts, however, frequently employed it more than ten times in the same article and in one editorial of 12 October 1991 entitled *John Major*, the Conservative Prime Minister figured as participant theme no less than 16 times. To save space, the example below shows a typical C Gap strategy in the Sun, where just two themes are linked by a pronominalization across a gap of a single clause ("*It did him no good*"):

ENGLAND manager Graham Taylor / was interviewed on TV for just 15 minutes after the match with Turkey. It / did him no good. He / could not explain why his team were so outshone by players from a country best known for its carpets and eunuchs (The Sun, 18.10.1991).

Just as the longer Times texts hold greater potential for C Gap because they allow more repetitions, so too the gaps these involve can be far longer than the Sun's, often stretching across more than 20 clauses and, in one case, across 31. In editorials from 2008 C Gap has become a major category statistically, accounting for 11% (31) of all progressions in the Sun and no less than 15% (135) in the Times. An example from the latter occurs in an article on the nationalization of the mortgage agencies in the USA, as compared to those in the UK, and it employs a relatively close-knit sequence of C Gap progressions. Interestingly, this is a multi-C Gap sequence. On the one hand, it repeatedly thematizes the US financial authorities under various names, with their UK counterparts in the intervening gaps. On the other hand, it also does precisely the opposite. Moreover, this distinctive alternation pattern involves both themes and rhemes:

Little over a year ago, *New York /* worried that *London* was set to leave it behind. These days, *it / is the City* that eyes *Wall Street* with creeping envy. For *America's* handling of the credit crunch / has been in stark contrast to *Britain's* approach. When the inter-bank markets froze last summer, / *the US Federal Reserve* made cash much more freely available to the banks; *the Bank of England, /* both in word and deed, was more measured. When the economy started to slow, / *the Fed* slashed interest rates despite worldwide concerns about inflation; *the Bank /* has held steady. When Bear Stearns faltered, / *the Fed* orchestrated a weekend firesale; *the Bank, the Treasury and the Financial Services Authority /* spent nearly five months reversing into the nationalisation of Northern Rock. And when the housing market and the financial system were in danger, / *Washington* stepped in to take control of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac; *Downing Street /* announced a stamp duty holiday. On each occasion, *America /* has chosen pragmatism over principle, decisiveness over dither (The Times: 9.9.2008).

This example brings us to a final progression category, which focuses on rheme.

4.3 Constant rheme progression

What I refer to as *C Rheme progression* is again based on the principle of repetition but repeats the rheme of a previous clause instead of its theme. The idea that a rheme per se could be utilized in progression possibly originated with Lau (1992). It could be

represented by the equation **Rh1-Rh2, Rh2-Rh3, Rh3-Rh4**, etc, while its variant, *C Gap Rheme progression*, would be **Rh1+n-Rh2, Rh2+n-Rh3, Rh3+n-Rh4**, etc. It is perhaps because the reader expects the rheme to introduce something new, to be the comment and message proper, that repetition of this element produces a particularly marked effect and a constant rheme probably signals unusually emphatic rhetoric.

An important question is how closely two rhemes should mirror each other to qualify as C Rheme progression. Imposing too strict conditions would render the category negligible. However, this would be to miss a real rhetorical tendency. In 1991 Sun rhemes often repeated the pattern used in a previous rheme, if not necessarily the same words. This is very noticeable in such short texts, even where the repetition is limited to the same **modal + base form** or **be + adjunct** structures. An instance of this, attacking a Labour leader predicted to win the approaching general election, was:

Neil Kinnock / *can gabble* and he / *can run*. But he / *cannot hide* the truth (The Sun, 21.10.1991).

Sometimes more elements are involved. In the following example, on new guidelines for the BBC, the sequence **is the + (virtue) nominal + in + -ing** is repeated:

Where / *is the integrity in interviewing* three people... Where / *is the impartiality in broadcasting* disparaging remarks... (The Sun, 21.10.1991).

Unlike the Times, the Sun occasionally exploited C Rheme in its truest sense of repeating whole identical rhemes, smacking of an appeal to Pavlovian reflexes. By way of illustration, one extraordinary oratorical outburst in the Sun of 1991 relied for its flavour on constant theme, reinforced by constant rheme. It is perhaps revealing of the paper's priorities that, in a world of life and death issues, it was the loss of TV AM's franchise that excited the most passion of all:

[TV AM] / *is TWICE* as popular with viewers as any of its rivals. *So it / had to go*. *It / has set* standards of entertainment that the pompous BBC would recognise only in a dream. *So it / had to go*. The management had saved the company from going bust. *So it / had to go*. *It / broke* the monopolistic unions and won an historic strike. *So, naturally, it / had to go* (The Sun, 17.10.1991).

As for the Times, the nearest it came in 1991 to full-blooded C Rheme progression was in an editorial on the Guinness Book of Records, politically a relatively benign topic. Nevertheless, it did employ significant ellipsis (rare in the Times in 1991):

The local champion / yearns to go regional; the regional, / national; the national champion / international (The Times, 15.10.1991).

However, the Times has now become more adventurous in its use of colourful progression. An example from 2008, below, demonstrates how far it appears to have moved in the direction of Sun-style repetition. Five successive clauses thematize the same institution participant, the Labour Party, and three in a row also opt for a degree of constant rheme (“*may decide that...*”):

...intriguing begins against the leader, matters always come to a head at some point. *And until they do the party / cannot* make any progress or see its future clearly. *The Labour Party / should* determine that, for it, that moment has come now. *The party / may decide* that the Prime Minister should go, *it / may decide* that he should stay. *It / may decide* that there must

be a contest, or that a contest is unnecessary. But whatever it decides, / now is the time to decide it (The Times: 15.9.2008).

Perhaps even more interesting than tabloidization in the Times is what could be called broadsheetization in the Sun. In view of the Sun's several instances of C Rheme in 1991, cited above, it is quite a surprise to find that this progression strategy has by 2008 all but disappeared from that paper. The apparent conclusion from this is that the Sun has been toning down its rhetoric in pursuit of a different role for itself.

5 Conclusions

This paper has examined developments in the use of thematic progression in the Sun and the Times between 1991 and 2008. Changes in reading habits may be leading editors to spell out more clearly the information structure of their articles so that they remain digestible despite receiving less concentrated attention than before. A move away from grand scale, academic-sounding text, to a more emphatic style of rhetoric is manifested in the fact that use of Daneš' derived (which accounted for a majority of all progression in 1991) is giving way to an increasing use of simple linear and constant in the Sun and the Times, respectively.

While progression in the Times still produces an effect at once more formal and possibly more authoritative than the Sun's, an ongoing tabloidization in the former is to an extent mirrored by broadsheetization in the latter. If the Times is increasingly embracing constant progression and related types, the Sun's less frequent occurrence of constant suggests a toning down in style, possibly reflecting an attempt to be taken more seriously. The major finding of this research is therefore that the newspapers are converging, each moving away from the polarized styles of 1991, when the Sun posed as disarmingly frank, the Times as impartial. They may be moving towards a mixed style more akin to that of the American Time magazine, which combines certain informal features with other more formal ones (see Redd, 1991).

Since by 2008 a good proportion of the data cannot be accounted for by Daneš' types, it also seems necessary to go beyond these when analyzing newspaper rhetoric through progression. Proposed new categories include C Type, C Gap and C Rheme. C Type underlines the fact that lexical repetition can function through empty grammar words and can repeat several elements at once. C Gap provides a method of moving text forward that is less obviously demagogic than constant and is also a way of progressing by alternating between referents. C Rheme achieves a foregrounding effect because it places given material where the reader expects to find new.

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