

Exploring Predicated Themes from a Systemic Functional Point of View in Alan Paton's Novels

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Summary

This paper intends to prove that the recurrent use of predicated themes in the novels written by the South African writer Alan Paton has certain communicative implications, since they are appropriate to express feelings, and to highlight information in situations of climax in the novels under analysis. The analysis of this syntactic structure in context will point out that predicated themes allow the writer to be conscious that he is asserting or denying something in a firm way; the predicated theme is also an important structure for the textual organisation of discourse. The linguistic framework for this paper is systemic functional linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004), a linguistic school that establishes a clear link between lexicogrammatical choices in the text, and the relevant contextual factors surrounding it. Systemic linguistics explores how linguistic choices are related to the meanings that are being expressed.

Opsomming

Met hierdie artikel word daar gepoog om te bewys dat die herhaalde gebruik van bevestigde temas in die romans van die Suid-Afrikaanse skrywer Alan Paton bepaalde kommunikatiewe implikasies het: in die romans wat ontleed is, word hierdie temas aangewend om uitdrukking aan gevoelens te gee en om inligting in klimakssituasies uit te lig. Deur die ontleding van hierdie sintaktiese struktuur binne die konteks word daar getoon dat bevestigde temas die skrywer in staat stel om daarvan bewus te wees dat hy iets nadruklik te kenne gee of ontken. Die bevestigde tema voorsien ook 'n belangrike struktuur vir die tekstuele organisasie van diskoers. Die linguistiese raamwerk vir hierdie artikel is sistematiese funksionele linguistiek (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004) – 'n skool van linguistiek wat toon dat daar 'n duidelike skakel tussen leksikogrammatiese keuses in die teks en die relevante kontekstuele faktore daaromheen is. Sistematiese linguistiek verken hoe linguistiese keuses verband hou met die betekenis waaraan uitdrukking gegee word.

1 Introduction

This article emphasises a very important use of predicated themes:¹ the fact that this syntactic structure is used by the protagonists and the narrator of the novels written by the South African writer Alan Paton in some of the most important moments of his novels makes clear that predicated themes can be used to emphasise, to highlight a certain part of the information, or to point out feelings or emotions. The hypothesis in this article is that the recurrent use of predicated themes has certain communicative implications that will be the object of this study. The corpus of examples is drawn from the three novels written by Alan Paton: *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), *Too Late the Phalarope* (1955) and *Ah, but Your Land Is Beautiful* (1981).

Predicated themes are structures in which the elements at the beginning of the sentence are introduced with the predicative formula “it +be”. After that, there is a nominal or adverbial group that receives emphasis. The analysis of this syntactic structure in context will point out that predicated themes allow the writer to be conscious that he is asserting or denying something in a firm way; it is also an important structure for the textual organisation of discourse because the predicated theme contrasts with something previously said or highlights a certain fact that is important for the narrative. The recurrent use of a certain grammatical pattern such as the predicated theme is always significant from the semantic and the grammatical point of view because there is no doubt that grammar is the means by which we make meanings. In this sense I agree with Butt in the following statement:

But grammar is significant because (and only because) we know it is the organisation of meaning-of semantics. And crucially, it is this tie-up between the semantics and the grammar that we are always focusing on when we are talking about grammar – we are talking about it in relation to the higher levels in the linguist’s model, the **semantics**² and the **context**: how do the grammatical selections construct a particular kind of meaning, and how does that particular kind of meaning have a place in, contribute to, shape, direct, provide the basis for, the unfolding of a social event? These are questions that put grammar to work.

(Butt 2003: 11)

In this article, the role of predicated themes, and their function in building meaning in the novels will be considered. In this sense, we will concentrate on meaning beyond the clause or, paraphrasing Martin and Rose (2003: 1), the focus of this article will be on the social aspect of language as it is constructed through texts, on the constitutive role of meanings in social life.

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1. “Predicated themes” are known in traditional grammar as cleft sentences.
 2. Bold type in the original text.

2 The Use of Predicated Themes in Verbal Art

The study of grammatical patterns such as predicated themes in verbal art is essential to understanding. I intend to prove that the use of predicated themes in the novels is a resource used by the author to highlight certain climactic moments, and to build the context in which the novels are placed, namely the apartheid period in South Africa. Consequently, the grammatical description presented in this article will allow us to “make statements about the appropriacy of certain linguistic choices given the context of their use” (Egins 2004: 139).

The linguistic framework of this paper is Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereafter SFL) because within this theoretical framework it is claimed that the way texts are constructed is determined by the functions that those texts have in society, and because for this linguistic school there is no dissociation between grammar and semantics.

The purpose of this analysis on predicated themes is to better understand the meanings expressed in the novels. As Halliday declares in his *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, one of the purposes for which linguistics is useful is “to understand literary and poetic texts, and the nature of verbal art” (Halliday 1994: xxx). As readers it is important to be aware of the fact that the novels, like any other text, can be a complex phenomenon: “To a grammarian, text is a rich, many-faceted phenomenon that ‘means’ in many different ways” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 3).

In terms of the SFL framework, any variation in language, or the instantiation of marked structures such as the predicated theme, may be seen from the perspective of its role in the construction of meanings. As Hasan (1989: 12) puts it: “In a way, the working of the patterns and the text are one and the same thing, for without the work that the patterns of language are doing there would be no text, or at least there would only be a different text”. On account of this, there is a clear relationship between what the author says and how he says it. In other words, every word chosen by Paton and every grammatical structure is clearly connected with his intention, and the purpose of his writing.

Following Halliday (1978: 27), we understand language as “meaning potential” – what the speaker can do or mean, which implies that out of the different choices that are possible in language, the speaker selects the most appropriate ones according to the communicative situation or to the functions that language has in context. The notion of meaning potential is essential for SFL since out of all the possible things we can mean, we choose from the range of potential meanings according to our communicative purpose. SFL studies the potential, that is, all the possibilities that are available in language and the instance that is chosen to fulfil a particular communicative end.

We cannot separate language and society. Language is realised through text; this implies that texts do not have intrinsic meanings since meaning emerges according to the way texts are used in social contexts. The language chosen to express a particular meaning determines the way in which that meaning is perceived. As Johnstone states:

Each instance of discourse is another instance of the laying out of a grammatical pattern or the expression of a belief, so each instance of discourse reinforces the patterns of language and the beliefs associated with culture. Furthermore, people do things in discourse in new ways, which suggest new patterns, new ways of thinking about the world.

(Johnstone 2002: 42)

Paton, and other authors who were against apartheid, responded to the attacks that freedom and dignity were suffering. They were concerned with political and moral protest in their writings. These authors defended the interests of the black population; they also tried on behalf of the white population to restate the meaning of freedom, justice, truth and love. Apartheid politics included the application of total segregation in such a way that cities were divided into group areas, selecting the population by their racial category according to their identity documents.

The fact that the author describes and centres his work in South Africa during apartheid highlights a historical, political and social reality with very specific characteristics that the author tries to highlight and denounce through his writings, as we can see in these novels. The author has chosen the English language as the instrument through which he lets us know, both the readers of his time and any reader of another historical period, the real social situation that enveloped South African society in the apartheid period, which was clearly characterised by racial segregation and social problems. He decided to show his commitment through his writings, which have political and ethical significance.

I have decided to use examples from Paton's novels as a corpus because they have a clear social purpose, and because I am interested in the context described in them. In this way, the literary text becomes a source of meanings because it shows the relationship between text and social reality.

The analysis of predicated themes in the three novels will show that this syntactic structure is quite common in writing to help the reader to be conscious of asserting or denying something in a categorical way, and that it is also an important structure in the textual organisation of discourse, since it lets us emphasise fundamental information in a determined text: predicated themes lead the reader to place emphasis on a predetermined sentence element. The initial position of the sentence is relevant from a cognitive point of view, which is why the predicated theme is adequate to express something urgent. The use of predicated themes in the novels is justified by the novelist's intention of showing the social situation of his time.

Literature is a practice that is socially conditioned. As a result, the author shows certain ideological convictions and certain interests because he is permeated by the community's characteristics. In addition, literature is a link between the situation that the community is living, the history that surrounds it, and the rest of the world because it tries to transmit a message, and to let us know what the sociopolitical situation was like. The exploration of predicated themes in context will show how this structure functions in a literary text because in literature the exploration of any grammatical aspect has a purpose that is different to other forms of writing. Since the corpus of examples is literary, the next section will refer to the different aspects related to the social function of language: ideology, situation type, context of culture, context of situation, and the variables of field, tenor and mode.

3 Aspects Related to the Social Function of Language in the Novels

As regards Alan Paton's ideology, it should be pointed out that his ethical and moral principles made him very sensitive to the racial conflicts in South Africa. He interprets the racial fight as a revolt against the domination of man, against dominating or being dominated. Paton believed in a common society in which differences among individuals are respected, as he made clear in an article published in *Contact* in 1958:

That is the long view, not to waste our time in dreaming fantastic dreams of separate and independent societies, but to bend our energies to the building of a common society, with no nationalism except a common South African nationalism, with no discrimination except against all policies that make any person suffer because of his colour and race.

(Paton 1958: 9)

For several years Paton wrote and travelled constantly, hesitating between contemplation and action but, being aware of the socio-political situation of his country, he decided to participate actively in politics against apartheid through the Liberal Association, which he founded in 1953 and presided over until 1968 when the government disbanded it (cf. Callan 1968).

The poles of his political visions and his literary topics are the same, because he concentrates on the negative by condemning institutionalised power, which he distrusts; Paton also concentrates on the positive since he believes in the power of love expressed through brotherhood between human beings. A central idea in Alan Paton's ideology is his denunciation of what is inhuman in racial separation and, consequently, his defence of individual freedom and of racial equality.

With respect to the situation type, it is evident that the three novels describe the social context of South Africa, whose population is divided into several groups: whites, Asians, coloureds and Africans. Each group has its own cultural identity, a language, a social organisation and a territory to which it is attached by historical links.

Regarding the context of culture, in the sense that it is used by Malinowski (1923, 1935), it must be considered the second stage of the colonisation of Africa, which took place from the nineteenth century on with the creation of colonial empires. In the twentieth century, movements in favour of autonomous governments in the French and British colonies were started at the same time that African nationalism increased (Ross 1999).

From 1948, life in South Africa was controlled by apartheid legislation. The African National Congress and the National Party, founded almost at the same time (1912 and 1914 respectively), were in opposition for a long time, and since 1920, various governments had progressively deprived black South Africans of land and political rights. For this reason, black people started the Defiance Campaign in 1952, which is mentioned in *Ah, but Your Land Is Beautiful* (Paton 1981), and the tragic 1960 campaign which ended in many people dying in Sharpeville.

Finally, it is essential to refer to the context of situation. The novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) is the story of a white and a black family, of black and white social groups, and the discriminatory society in which they coexisted. The book could be described as a documentary about South Africa at that time, with fictional events blended with socio-political, economic, and even ecological realities. It is also a cry of pain, an exhortation, a prophecy, almost a prayer. In addition to everything previously said, *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), the story of Stephen Kumalo and the search for his son in Johannesburg, could be considered a product of its time, since it shows social tensions and, beyond them, a search for brotherhood (Martínez Lirola 2002b).

One of the main objectives of the novel is to show the white population behaving in the typical way of Christian charity, so that the white population commits to change society when it becomes aware of the social problems of the country. In Alexander's words (1994: 435) "[h]e [Paton] glorified God in loving his fellows. He hated the power-hungry, exercised intelligence and independence, and had faith in the decency, tolerance, and humanity of the common man". The novel was written in the hope that South Africa could become a more open society, which would imply a change of heart. Charity is presented as an essential condition to bring an end to the suffering of a great part of the population.

In the novel *Too Late the Phalarope* (1955), set in an Afrikaner community, the main topic is not so much a racial problem as the incapacity of human beings to be understood in intimate relations. Paton presents the

protagonist's aunt, Sophia, as narrator of the story. In contrast with the capacity to love and to forgive perceived in the narrator, the author presents the story of Jakob van Vlaanderen and his son, which is a tragedy due to the unhealthy relationship between them. Alan Paton deals with the obscure relationship between a father who does not show his feelings and a son who keeps his emotions secret for that reason. The title refers to the son's incapacity to answer to his sexuality, which makes him ruin his life by loving a black woman.

Pieter, Jakob van Vlaanderen's son, is the protagonist of the novel. He cannot resolve the tension between his public personality, which has the characteristic virtues of the Afrikaner population, and his emotional nature, by having an affair with a black woman. Jakob van Vlaanderen is of the opinion that Pieter has gone not only against marriage vows or Christianity's rules but also against the destiny of the Afrikaner race, and that being so, the father condemns the son to stay out of the family, out of the community.

In this novel, Paton describes a difficult situation in apartheid South Africa, a problem of human nature. He shows his vision of the collective Afrikaner conscience and its attitudes; he also shows some characteristics of Greek tragedy, for example, the narrator constantly comments on the action and foresees what is going to happen.

Ah, but Your Land Is Beautiful (1981) describes the main events that took place during the first years of the Liberal Party together with some of the hopes and fears of the moment. This novel shows how the National Party implemented its apartheid ideology, which plunged South African politics into a dark period. As Sparks (1990: 163) declares: "Apartheid and National Socialism both arose from the same witches' cauldron of national grievance and economic depression".

A few prominent leaders were convinced that they had found a formula to guarantee the future of the white minority until the twenty-first century. The plan, as it is described in the novel, was to create a permanent political majority of white people, taking away the right to vote from the black population, and creating "autonomous territories" for the blacks, where they were offered a political alternative to self-government and a certain form of independence.

The National Party's success can be partially explained because many of its activities and political actions did not break with the past. This party did not invent segregation, which was created after the Anglo Boer War (1899-1902), and which featured in legislation governing urban residence and land rights from 1910 until 1946. Neither did the National Party invent racial classification, which originated before the creation of the Union of South Africa, and which had been regularised by Prime Minister Hertzog as far back as 1926. The decade of the 1950s, in which Alan Paton sets his novel, was when the main body of apartheid legislation was passed and, equally,

when the black movements showed their rejection of it by whatever means were available to them (Ross 1999).

4 Analysis of the Variables of the Context of Situation in the Novels: Field, Tenor and Mode

Since the corpus of examples belongs to three novels, there is a very clear context of situation created by the author, which can be described as paying attention to the characteristics of its three components: when analysing the notion of field, the place and the moment in which Alan Paton places the action of his novels must be considered. In the three cases the action is centred in South Africa, specifically in the apartheid era. The topic is different in each novel: *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) shows how the terrible conditions in which black people live lead Absalom Kumalo to an extreme situation – killing a white man. In the case of *Ah, but Your Land Is Beautiful* (1981), he describes how the National Party supports racial segregation, and how the Liberal Party is established and tries to defend the interest of the disadvantaged racial groups. In *Too Late the Phalarope* (1955) the main topic is the great interest the author has in the white man's psychology, apparently strong but clearly marked by his desire for a black woman, which will destroy him. The heroic figure of Pieter is destroyed by the system to which he belongs.

When analysing the notion of tenor, the social relations between the participants in the linguistic interchange have been taken into consideration since the kind of social relation affects the use made of language: the sender is Alan Paton, and the addressees can be considered to be the society of his time as well as any reader that approaches the novels in any other historical moment.

Poynton (1985) points out that we find three dimensions inside the notion of tenor, to which I shall refer briefly: The power dimension observes if the relations between the participants are equal or not. In the case of the novels under analysis, it is evident that Alan Paton has power over the readers, and tries to make them aware of the facts that he is narrating. The contact dimension makes reference to the existence or otherwise of a contact relationship between the participants. In this case, it is evident that there is no contact. When we read the novels, we establish a relationship with the author, and we are conscious of his thoughts and his ideology, but we are not in contact with him. The author establishes a relationship with the reader through the characters, their psychology or thoughts, and the context in which they are framed. The affective involvement dimension refers to the extent to which the participants are emotionally involved in or committed to a situation. It is evident that the author is committed, and the way to express

his commitment is by writing these novels. Alan Paton tries to make readers commit to the social situation in such a way that they are involved affectively.

The concept of mode makes reference to the role that language plays in the text. In Paton's novels, language is not limited to presenting a series of actions but it offers us a detailed description of the facts that took place; it teaches us. The channel through which the author transmits his linguistic message is the novel, a written text as opposed to a spoken one, which implies that the author lacks both visual contact and the possibility of obtaining information from the reader, because there is both spatial and temporal distance between them.

The author transmits the concrete cultural situation of his time at the same time that he describes the characteristics and social values of that situation through the main topics of the novels, and through the use of language. He tries to show the negative side of that society at the same time as he suggests ways to improve it. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o declares:

“Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world.”

(Thiong'o 1995: 290)

Language is the instrument Alan Paton uses to narrate a historical situation. Language creates and builds the social situation, in other words, the author transmits his experience through language, and the fact that he chooses so many examples of predicated themes to highlight climactic moments, to talk about feelings, to emphasise and to contrast, becomes an important characteristic of his written language. As a writer, the author becomes an authority, and transmits through his expressive use of language the political, social and cultural facts that really took place in the society of his time. Paton uses language to reflect the social situation he lived in.

5 Analysis of Predicated Themes in a Literary Corpus

5.1 Definition and Analysis of the Structure

In formal linguistics, the predicated theme is known as a cleft sentence since it comes from the division of a simple sentence into two different parts (that constitute different sentences). It normally starts with the pronoun “it” without any anaphoric reference, followed by the verb “to be”.

In SFL, cleft sentences fall under the scope of what Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 95) call “predicated theme”. Considering that predicated

themes consist of two clauses, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 97) propose a double thematic analysis of this type of structure, one in which we have two themes and two rhemes, and one in which we have one theme and one rheme. An example from *Too Late the Phalarope* illustrates both analyses:

[I]t is *the yellow trousers* that anger me most of all.
(Paton 1955: 55; my italics)

- a) Theme Rheme Theme Rheme
- b) Theme Rheme

Version (a) shows the local congruent thematic structure of the two sentences in the construction; both themes are non-marked (*it* and *that* are both subjects). Version (b), on the contrary, shows the thematic structure of the whole sentence as a predicated theme. No matter what analysis is chosen, it seems that in both (a) and (b) the theme is the part of the message with less communicative dynamism, because *it* and *that* hardly add any information to the message. On the contrary, the rheme is the expression that shows a higher level of communicative dynamism because that part of the message is essential to understand the message, as we can see in the highlighted element *the yellow trousers*, and in the relative clause *that anger me most of all*.

Collins (1991: 170) refers to version (b) as “metaphorical analysis in which the superordinate clause is all thematic”.³

5.2 Functional Aspects

Cleft sentences have been analysed from the logical, formal, functional and psycholinguistic points of view (Halvorsen 1978: 23-36; Erdmann 1990: 156-171).

The function of the predicated theme can be understood by concentrating for example on the function of the subject as theme. It is well known that the subject normally coincides with the theme. That is the reason why it should be unnecessary to use a special structure to place it in the thematic position. Consider the following example from the corpus. After each example, I cite the year in which the novel was published, and the page on which it can be found:

[B]ut it was not Johannes who had killed the white man, it was I myself.
(Paton 1948: 143)

3. In my opinion, the predicated theme is always a grammatical metaphor whether we apply analysis (a) or (b).

If the use of the predicated theme is avoided, the example will be: Johannes did not kill the white man, I killed him.

In this way the contrast between both subjects is almost completely lost. In spoken language, it would be possible to mark that contrast with intonation, emphasising “Johannes” and “I”. The predicated theme makes the reader put emphasis on a specific element of the sentence.

In these sentences, the foregrounded element is very important because *it* and the copulative verb have a low degree of communicative dynamism. The foregrounded element is followed by the relative clause, which is introduced by *that* with the function of subject in the majority of the examples of the corpus. As Huddleston (1984: 460) points out, there is preference for the use of *that*, although *who* is also very common when its reference is personal.

As stressed by Halliday (1985: 59-61), the predicated theme functions as an “identifying clause”, as can be observed when rewriting the following examples from the corpus:

That is partly because it's your authority that she is flouting. [= The thing that she is flouting is your authority.]

(Paton 1981: 20)

It is not often that such a custom is broken. [= The moments when such a custom is broken are not often.]

(Paton 1948: 174)

The predicated theme allows the speaker or hearer to state something in a categorical way, generally in contrast with something already said. This structure is also appropriately used to emphasise information that is considered essential in a text because it is important for the textual organisation of the discourse. Predicated themes are very useful in written language since they help the reader to identify where the focus of the sentence is, without the necessity of graphic help such as underlining, italics or capital letters.

After what has been said in the previous paragraphs, it is evident that the predicated theme places the elements which have more semantic load, and which are more important for the transmission of the message, after the introductory formula *it is* or *it was*; in this way, what is more important for the reader appears in the first place, following Jespersen's principle of topicality ([1909]1949: 54).

This structure is used as a thematiser since in a chapter or a section, the predicated theme introduces at its beginning, summarises in the middle, or just mentions at the end, which is illustrated with these two paragraphs from the beginning of the novel *Too Late the Phalarope* (1955). These examples give us information about Pieter van Vlaanderen's life at the beginning of the novel:

But after a certain age it stopped, not by law but by custom, and the growing white boy became the master.

It was not only this reading and writing, but the riding and the shooting, and his grave self-confidence, that gave him his command over them.

(Paton 1955: 21)

It was not long after this first event which I have written down, of the boy Dick, that my nephew went down to the location; ...

(Paton 1955: 22)

The same effect can be observed in the following example of *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), which seems to summarise by appearing in the middle of a section:

I say we shall always have native crime to fear until the native people of this country have worthy purposes to inspire them and worthy goals to work for. For it is only because they see neither purpose nor goal that they turn to drink and crime and prostitution.

(Paton 1948: 68)

In some instances, the predicated theme is used to contrast, as in this example, and in the ones that will be analysed in section 5.2.3:

It is not often that such a custom is broken. It is only when there is a deep experience that such a custom is broken.

(Paton 1948: 174)

Finally, it also adds information to discourse, in such a way that communication continues:

They will find a “formula” to embody all the points of agreement and to leave out all the points of disagreement, and it is the points of disagreement that are the most fundamental.

(Paton 1981: 126)

The predicated themes analysed indicate that these clauses are doing something significantly different from immediately preceding clauses because they are emphasising or contrasting, pointing out climactic moments or talking about feelings, as will be observed in the following sections.

Predicated themes are one of the linguistic resources used by Alan Paton to make his writing an instance of verbal art, because the use of this structure always has a semantic consequence that establishes a clear link between the generic structure of the novel and the precise moment in which the predicated theme appears. As Hasan (1989: 91) states: “If there is art, it is because of how language functions in the text”.

I found 127 examples of predicated themes distributed in the following way: 56 in *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), 43 in *Too Late the Phalarope* (1955) and 28 in *Ah, but Your Land Is Beautiful* (1981).

5.2.1 Use of Predicated Themes in Climactic Moments

Paton's novels, like any other piece of verbal art, possess a style by means of which the author exploits different resources, and the use of predicated themes is part of the style of this novel. Since we believe its use is not arbitrary but motivated by the story's textual situation, we will consider any instance of predicated theme a "stylistic shift" because it shows a "variation in the mode of expression" (Hasan 1989: 57).

Following systemic functional linguistics, any variation in language, or the recurrence of patterns such as predicated themes, makes some difference in the construction of meanings, i.e. patterns of language are not used freely since they always have an effect in semantics. In Hasan's words (1989: 96): "We pay attention to the patterning of patterns when it is significant; and in order to be significant the foregrounding must have a semantic consequence". For this reason, the following paragraphs will explore the examples of predicated themes used in climactic moments in the three novels.

An important moment in *Too Late the Phalarope* (1955) is when Stephanie, the black woman who is having a love affair with Pieter, discovers when she is out of prison that somebody has taken her son, and that is the reason why she goes to see Pieter: so that he will speak to the people in charge of this, and she can be with her son soon:

It is not the magistrate, she said. It is the white women who have taken the child.

(Paton 1955: 169)

In one of the attempted murders that Robert Mansfield suffers in *Ah, but Your Land Is Beautiful* (1981) because of his being against apartheid, Prem is injured, and in the hospital Professor Eddie makes the following statement to point out that Prem has the love and support of many people at such a hard time:

It's not only my love that I'm bringing to you.

(Paton 1981: 213)

In another dramatic moment in the novel, when the fanatics place a bomb in Mansfield's Street, the predicated theme highlights that it is surprising to know that a man died, and that it was his daughter who discovered the corpse:

It was her daughter Felicity who made the horrifying discovery of a man's body lying by the demolished wall.

(Paton 1981: 220)

In *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), one of the most representative examples is when the person in charge of the reformatory tells Kumalo by using a predicated theme that it was his son who had fired the fatal shot. Declaring that Absalom Kumalo fired the shot implied that he was accused of murder, and would be sentenced to death:

It was he who fired the shot.

(Paton 1948: 84)

Absalom Kumalo uses this construction when he confesses to his father that he was the one who fired, and when he declares it in front of the judge. By using this structure, Absalom assumes all the responsibility for what he has done with honesty and strength, which implies that the other people who were with him are not responsible for the death of Arthur Jarvis:

They came with me, but it was I who shot the white man.

(Paton 1948: 88)

I said no, I did not know, but it was not Johannes who had killed the white man, it was I myself. But it was Johannes who had struck down the servant of the house.

(Paton 1948: 143)

When Stephen Kumalo insists to his son that he speak the truth in front of the judge, he uses a predicated theme. This statement points out the importance of truth for Kumalo's ideology and religious ideas: for him, telling the truth is essential, although he is aware that the consequences of it might be the end of his son's life:

Be of courage, my son. Do not forget there is a lawyer. It is only the truth you must tell him.

(Paton 1948: 109)

This is the structure used by Stephen Kumalo to tell Arthur Jarvis's father that it was his son who had killed Jarvis's son. In this way, there is no doubt about who performed such a terrible action, the truth is told, and both Arthur Jarvis's and Absalom Kumalo's fathers have to accept what took place and the consequences of it because there is nothing that can be done to change the real facts:

It was my son that killed your son.

(Paton 1948: 155)

The following example appears in John Kumalo's speech: he emotionally states that the mines, one of the main sources of riches in the country, are kept going thanks to the poverty of people working there, which shows the socioeconomic difficulties suffered by black people during the apartheid period:

They say that higher wages will cause the mines to close down. Then what is it worth, this mining industry? And why should it be kept alive, if it is only our poverty that keeps it alive?

(Paton 1948: 159)

In the same way, this is the structure chosen by the narrator to express the hope that Stephen Kumalo had placed in James Jarvis. With the following predicated theme, Kumalo shows that he believes that a white man can help black people, in other words, Kumalo's statement points out that another society is possible in which blacks and whites are not separated, but are able to live together in peace:

[H]e found himself thinking that it was Jarvis and Jarvis alone that could perform the great miracle.

(Paton 1948: 211)

Finally, the narrator chooses this structure to express the moment in which Absalom Kumalo will be executed at the end of the novel. The predicated theme highlights the precise time of the death of Kumalo's son, which is without any doubt one of the climactic moments of the novel:

The sun would rise soon after five, and it was then it was done, they said.

(Paton 1948: 234)

5.2.2 Use of Predicated Themes To Talk about Feelings

The predicated theme clearly breaks the typical word order of English: subject, verb, object (SVO), which creates a contrast with the word order expected. In this way, the predicated theme contributes to the vividness of the novels since this syntactic structure is used to express feelings, to emphasise situations of climax and to create a social reality. The following examples will show that the predicated theme is a structure very much used in the three novels to talk about feelings such as sadness, hatred or love. In this way, Paton highlights some of the basic feelings of human beings, which shows that in his novels he creates characters that show their human side:

[I]t is you I love, your body and mind and soul.

(Paton 1955: 69)

It is not a campaign of protest, it is a war, and therefore everything white must be destroyed, even the sisters and their hospitals and their clinics and their schools. It is this hatred that fills lovers of peace with despair.

(Paton 1981: 35)

It is not only my love that I'm bringing to you.

(Paton 1981: 213)

The feeling expressed in most examples of the corpus is fear, since Paton wished to describe the difficult situations that created fear in black people's hearts during the apartheid period:

It was only when the sickness had passed that I saw how terrible was my danger, and how terrible was my sickness ...

(Paton 1955: 46)

It is not only the Europeans who are afraid. We are also afraid, right here in Sophiatown.

(Paton 1948: 22)

In the following examples, it is clear that what predominates in the place where the action of the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) takes place, is the fear that its inhabitants feel:

But they are not enough, he said. They are afraid, that is the truth. It is fear that rules this land.

(Paton 1948: 25)

It was the suspense, the not-knowing, that made him fear this one thing, ...

(Paton 1948: 79)

It was at Alexandra that I first grew afraid, but it was in your House, when we heard the murder, that my fear grew into something too great to be borne.

(Paton 1948: 94)

It was only the fear of the chief that made anything come out of these meetings.

(Paton 1948: 226)

By using this structure the characters and narrator also show people's widespread concern about the bad social situation at that moment and in that place. The fact that there are no jobs, no opportunities of promotion and no hope for the black population implies that people are desperate, and are forced to turn to crime, prostitution, etc.:

You will learn much here in Johannesburg, said the priest. It is not only in your place that there is destruction.

(Paton 1948: 22)

For it is only because they see neither purpose nor goal that they turn to drink and crime and prostitution.

(Paton 1948: 68)

The narrator shows great emotion when the rain comes, showing in this way that people expected it after a terrible drought; in this example, the demonstrative's reference is cataphoric:

But it was this for which all men were waiting, the rain at last.

(Paton 1948: 207)

These feelings reflect what black people felt during the apartheid period in which Alan Paton sets his novels: the fear that the black population had of exploitation, of marginalisation and of racial segregation; their hatred of white men for being responsible for such a precarious situation, and their love of the country above all.

On several occasions, predicated themes are used to point out feelings of loyalty to God and to the country. These two feelings are very important in people's lives because although the social situation was terrible, their faith in God helped black people to cope with it:

Yet it comes to me that it is not the judgement of God but that of men which is a stranger to compassion ...

(Paton 1955: 9)

It is only this intense feeling of loyalty to God and nation that helps me to avoid bitterness and jealousy.

(Paton 1981: 78)

[B]ut it was South Africa that nurtured him.

(Paton 1981: 139)

The previous examples are representative of the author's ideology and personality, since Alan Paton was a very religious person, and he always defended the interests of poor people and of his country throughout his writings, his work, and his political position.

5.2.3 Use of the Predicated Theme To Contrast

The predicated theme is a structure very much used in written language, since the combination theme/new information is marked, and normally of the contrastive type (Martinez Lirola 2002a). The use of predicated themes in written language allows the reader to be conscious that he is asserting or denying something in a firm way; it is also an important structure for the textual organisation of discourse. The previous statement points out that

predicated themes are mainly used for emphasis in the majority of the examples:

And why did I not speak? For I was old and he was young, he was always a boy to me; but it was he that had the power.

(Paton 1955: 7)

In the previous example, the personality of Pieter van Vlaanderen is highlighted from the beginning of the novel. It is made clear that he is the protagonist, and he is going to be the centre of attention in the climactic moments of this novel.

In the following statement pronounced by Dick, he emphasises that he is happy because the person who has discovered him is Pieter, his friend: otherwise, the consequences of him having an affair with a black woman would be terrible because at that time sexual relationships between black and white were forbidden:

Then when the lieutenant made no answer, he said, still in the whisper, I mean both things, I mean I'm glad I was caught, and glad it was you that caught me.

(Paton 1955: 18)

In the example on page 40, the importance of Pieter in Dick's life is also emphasised. It is evident that this example and the previous ones intend to emphasise that Pieter was considered a very good person, he was very popular and respected, which contrasts with the actions that will condemn him at the end of the novel:

His face and voice were eager, so the lieutenant had to overcome his constraint, seeing it was he himself who had made the young man eager.

(Paton 1955: 40)

When we consider the predicated theme in the previous examples, we observe that the emphasis on the highlighted element points out that this is very important for the development of the action. There are also examples in which the predicated theme contrasts with something previously said. The predicated theme is normally associated with the following contrastive formula: *it was not ...*, *it was ...*, *who/which ...*, (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 96), as in this example:

He knows it is not he, it is these people who have done it.

(Paton 1948: 191)

However, there are also examples in which the contrastive formula does not appear as such, but a very clear contrast is nevertheless expressed by paying attention to the meanings activated in several examples of the corpus:

Yet it comes to me that it is not the judgement of God but that of men which is a stranger to compassion; for the Lord said, go thou and sin no more.

(Paton 1955: 9)

It's not only my love that I'm bringing to you. I bring love from Laura and Hendrik and ...

(Paton 1981: 213)

[I]t is not we who will get more for our labour. It's the white man's shares that will rise ...

(Paton 1948: 34-35)

The previous example, from pages 34-35 of the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), is especially relevant because it is related to one of the main topics of the novel: in this example, a clear contrast is established between the two main racial groups in South Africa: the whites, in privileged positions, enriching themselves by taking advantage of the other racial group, the black population, those suffering unjust situations and condemned to work under inhuman conditions so that the whites could enrich themselves even more.

Other examples of predicated themes with a clear contrastive meaning in the novels are the following:

Right at the beginning of *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), Stephen Kumalo discusses with his wife the possibility of going to Johannesburg to look for his son and sister. Stephen's wife declares that she is not responsible for proposing that he go to Johannesburg since that is something that was always a possibility, but Stephen did not consider it until today:

He is in Johannesburg, she said wearily. When people go to Johannesburg, they do not come back.

You have said it, he said. It is said now. This money which was saved for that purpose will never be used for it. You have opened a door, and because you have opened it, we must go through. And Tixo alone knows where we shall go.

It was not I who opened it, she said, hurt by his accusation. It has a long time been open, but you would not see.

(Paton 1948: 11)

On the same page, Kumalo emphasises his feelings by contrasting what his wife thinks with what he thinks: he feels that the fact that his family has gone to Johannesburg, and decided to live a different life hurts him:

You are hurting yourself, she said.

Hurting myself? Hurting myself? I do not hurt myself, it is they who are hurting me. My own son, my own sister, my own brother. They go away and they do not write any more. Perhaps it does not seem to them that we suffer. Perhaps they do not care for it (Paton 1948: 11).

When Stephen goes to Johannesburg, he shares with Msimangu, another pastor, the terrible situation of his place. Both use the contrastive formula *it was not ..., it was ..., who/which ...* in their speech to point out that fear is not only felt by Europeans, or only in a specific place, but on the contrary, it is a problem that is found everywhere, and it concerns everyone:

That happens nearly every day, he said. And it is not only the Europeans who are afraid. We are also afraid, right here in Sophiatown. It was not long ago that a gang of these youths attacked one of our own African girls; they took her bag, and her money, and would have raped her too but that people came running out of their houses.

You will learn much here in Johannesburg, said the rosy-cheeked priest. It is not only in your place that there is destruction. But we must talk again about your country, but I must go now.

(Paton 1948: 22)

On page 84 a clear contrast is established between Absalom Kumalo and the other two young men accused of having killed Arthur Jarvis. The fact that Absalom had been to a reformatory seems to point to Absalom being guilty of Arthur Jarvis's murder, in other words, the following predicated theme pronounced by the narrator points out what people assume about the kind of boys who go to a reformatory:

The other two were not reformatory boys. It was he who fired the shot.

(Paton 1948: 84)

In one of the climactic moments of *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) it is highlighted that it was Absalom himself who had killed the white man. This statement establishes a contrast between him and the other two boys because, although both were with him, Absalom declares in the trial that he was the only one who fired. The contrast in this structure activates a crucial meaning: Absalom assumes the responsibility for having killed a man with the following predicated theme:

They came with me, but it was I who shot the white man.

(Paton 1948: 88)

In the example below, a clear contrast is observed between Stephen Kumalo's feelings: he first experienced fear, which then became terror. The contrast in feelings appears with the contrast of two different places: *at Alexandra* and *in your House*:

It was at Alexandra that I first grew afraid, but it was in your House, when we heard of the murder, that my fear grew into something too great to be borne.

(Paton 1948: 94)

In the next example there is a contrast between the mission that pertains to the judge, and the mission that pertains to people. Since these examples are pronounced by the narrator, his voice becomes the voice of what the society of the time expected from a judge and from people. It is assumed that they have different roles, which is also emphasised by the fact that both words, “Judge” and “People”, are written in capital letters, as if they were two institutions:

The Judge does not make the Law. It is the People that made the Law.
(Paton 1948: 136)

It is the duty of the Judge to do justice, but it is only the People that can be just.
(Paton 1948: 136)

With the following statement, Absalom Kumalo establishes a contrast between what he did and what Johannes did, which is very clear in the second predicated theme of the paragraph. This example is pronounced in a very important moment in *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), when Absalom speaks out in the trial. As in the example (1948: 88) already mentioned in the previous paragraphs, Absalom accuses himself again of being the only person responsible for the death of an innocent man, which fulfils the expectations of society:

[B]ut it was not Johannes who had killed the white man, it was I myself. But it was Johannes who had struck down the servant of the house.
(Paton 1948: 143)

The following paragraph highlights the fact that black and white people used to be separated in court. It is interesting that such a custom can be broken, as in *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), which establishes a contrast between what normally happened in South Africa at that time and in that place:

They come out of the Court, the white on one side, the black on the other, according to the custom. But the young white man breaks the custom, and he and Msimangu help the old and broken man, one on each side of him. It is not often that such a custom is broken. It is only when there is a deep experience that such a custom is broken. That young man’s brow is set, and he looks fiercely before him. That is partly because it is deep experience, and partly because of the custom that is being broken. For such a thing is not lightly done.
(Paton 1948: 174)

In the example below, a woman establishes a contrast between the priest (“umfundisi”) who substituted Stephen Kumalo when he was outside the place, and Stephen himself. By using this predicated theme, the woman

praises and emphasises his good traits because he was well known for being an excellent teacher, priest, husband, and friend:

We do not understand him, she says. It is only our umfundisi that we understand.

(Paton 1948: 188)

Stephen decides to share with a friend what is going to happen to his son; he does not want to hide it from certain people, which might be surprising because sharing the fact that Absalom Kumalo has been condemned is painful for Stephen Kumalo:

And my son, he is condemned to be hanged. He may be given mercy. They will let me know as soon as they hear.

Au! Umfundisi.

You may tell your friends. And they will tell their friends. It is not a thing that can be hidden. Therefore you may tell them.

(Paton 1948: 192)

In the following example pronounced by the narrator in *Too Late the Phalarope* (1955), a contrast is established between Pieter's talents and everyone else's in order to point out that he was popular, and a person with power over other people:

It was not only this reading and writing, but the riding and the shooting, and his grave self-confidence, that gave him his command over them. And his great height too, for at sixteen he was as tall as his father, who was six foot three.

(Paton 1955: 21)

The following paragraph refers to the courtship between Pieter and his wife, which was quite pure due to their personalities and the time when they were dating:

Our courtship was like that, long and shy and protracted; some people said it was the times, but it was not only the times, it was also our natures. I had put my hands on her shoulders, shy and my heart beating, almost as though I had made some mistake and had meant to put them somewhere else, and might take them away at any moment.

(Paton 1955: 66)

When the narrator uses this structure, a contrast is established between the two women who wanted to talk to Pieter when he got home: Esther and Stephanie. The fact is that it is Stephanie who makes him feel fear because there is a secret between them: their secret love.

Not long after that the lieutenant was in the location, and one of the klonkies told him that the old woman Esther wished to speak to him. So he went to her

house, but it was not the old woman Esther that wished to speak to him, it was the girl Stephanie.

(Paton 1955: 169)

Dr Hendrik's personality is also highlighted by contrasting him with the political leader that has power in the historical moment in which *Ah, but Your Land Is Beautiful* (1981) takes place:

I feel that the hand at the helm is not strong enough for these dangerous waters. I feel that it is only Dr Hendrik that can lead us to safety.

(Paton 1981: 211)

In many of the predicated themes in the corpus, there are references to the white man, in such a way that his role in the novels is emphasised, and presented as crucial for the development of the story. The following ones have positive connotations; in this way there is a balance with all the negative socioeconomic facts taking place in South Africa during the apartheid period for which the white man is responsible:

[I]t was the lieutenant that gave the praise.

(Paton 1955: 173)

It was a white man who brought my father out of darkness.

(Paton 1948: 25)

It was white men who did this work of mercy ...

(Paton 1948: 80)

It was a white man who taught me.

(Paton 1948: 228)

It was he also who taught me that we do not work for men, that we work for the land and the people.

(Paton 1948: 229)

With these sentences the author wants to reinforce the idea that in South Africa there are good white men who are gentle, and try to contribute to improving the situation of the place, as Arthur Jarvis did, a white man known for being very active in the church, and for working in favour of African people. The lawyer that will defend Absalom Kumalo in the trial is also a white man, Mr Carmichael, whose commitment consists in defending Absalom free of charge, which indicates that he is very generous.

Another important white man in the development of the novel is Mr James Jarvis, Arthur Jarvis's father. Instead of showing hatred or a desire to take revenge after the murder of his son, he decides to help the population of Ndotsheni. Stephen trusts him to contribute to the development of the place:

[I]t was Jarvis and Jarvis alone that could perform the great miracle.
(Paton 1948: 211)

Pieter van Vlaanderen, the protagonist of *Too Late the Phalarope* (1955) has a very good relationship with the black population of the place. He is considered superior to them, which was the normal belief of the time due to the fact that white men were the ones with power, the ones who were respected, and the ones in control of the social situations:

[I]t was he who had the power.
(Paton 1955: 7)

It was not only this reading and writing, but the riding and the shooting, and his grave self-confidence, that gave him his command over them.
(Paton 1955: 21)

With these examples, the author reminds us that not everybody in South Africa is against the black population. Apart from these references, there are also examples referring to white men in terms that have negative connotations, clearly describing purposeful things done by the white population that had a negative effect on black people:

Blackspots became offensive. It was the British who allowed them to happen ...
(Paton 1981: 88)

It is the white man's shares that will rise ...
(Paton 1948: 34-35)

Umfundisi, it is the white man who gave us so little land, it was the white man who took us away from the land to go to work.
(Paton 1948: 228)

These examples point out that the white man is responsible for the unfair situation in South Africa. But personal references in predicated themes do not refer just to the white man. Apart from this, there are other examples in which the highlighted element is a proper noun, referring to a politician who was important in his time. The first example shows the name of the protagonist of *Too Late the Phalarope* (1955):

[F]or it was Pieter van Vlaanderen and the dominee that beat the giants of the North.
(Paton 1955: 144)

[A]nd it was Moshweshwe who made the remnants into a new nation, the Basuto.
(Paton 1981: 32)

It was JR Hofmeyr who every year while he was Minister increased the amount of African education.

(Paton 1981: 50)

It was John Parker who challenged the conservative and the timid at the Cape Town conference.

(Paton 1981: 103)

[I]t was Lutuli who mounted a chair and ordered them all to return to their seats ...

(Paton 1981: 208)

I feel that it is only Dr Hendrik that can lead us to safety.

(Paton 1981: 211)

I could not say to him that it is only Dr Hendrik who can convince me that there is only one side to a question.

(Paton 1981: 217)

The previous examples point out personalities that were crucial for the historical moment in which the action of the novels takes place. At the same time, these examples provided by the narrator emphasise the politicians that he considers important and powerful enough for the change that needs to take place in the apartheid period, in other words, the narrator lets us know who can be responsible for the changes that need to take place in South Africa at that time.

Since most of the examples analysed are provided by the narrator, it is very important to comment on the role he/she has in the novels: the narrator lets us know the author's ideology through his statements. The author creates the narrator, a figure that establishes a relationship with the facts and the characters in the way that the author decides: the narrator might know everything about the characters, he/she can be outside the action, or he/she can be one of the characters, as in the novel *Too Late the Phalarope* (1955). It is also the author who decides the narrator's role in the verbal art: it can be to moralise, to simply communicate how the facts took place or to transmit an ideology, as Bobes Naves (1993: 30) declares: "El narrador puede no limitarse a narrar, puede ser comentarista, aclarar, censar, ser moralista, tener misión valorativa".⁴

After the analysis of the novels, it is obvious that the narrator knows the reality being narrated very well, and he/she evaluates it in a negative way: by reporting an unjust social situation in South Africa during the apartheid period. In the examples provided by the narrator, he/she does not limit himself/herself just to narrating the facts; he/she also expresses his/her

4. My own translation: "The narrator cannot just confine himself/herself to narrating; he can also comment, make clear, forbid, be a moralist, evaluate."

opinion about them in a categorical way. In other words, the narrator is responsible for what is said, as Fowler declares:

[A] certain relevant culture is created (romantic, artistic, fashionable, privileged, socialising) to be shared by the narrator and his appropriate reader The narrative instance created by the invocation of cultural codes joins narrator and reader in a compact of knowing superiority. From this base the narrator can claim general acceptance of the judgements he makes on the world within the story.

(Fowler 1981: 101)

6 Conclusion

In this article, the analysis of predicated themes in context allows us to identify the reasons why Alan Paton used this structure in the novels. As Butt (2003: 35) states, grammar “allows you to get closer to the cultural phenomenon, first of all by being able to get closer to the textural and textual organisation”.

According to the data, from the formal point of view the predicated theme is a marked syntactic structure because it creates a local thematised structure throughout the predication (*it is/it was*), in such a way that the predicative element becomes the marked focus of the information as in “[B]ut *it was* not Johannes [which belongs to the predicated theme] who had killed the white man, *it was* I myself ...” (Paton 1948: 143).

When analysing the form and function of the highlighted element, I noted that it is varied and has a flexible structure. In a high percentage of the examples, the highlighted element is a nominal phrase with the function of subject, although prepositional and adverbial groups are also found. This structure marks the division between theme and rheme, since there is a change in the intonation of the highlighted element. The focus of the sentence appears to be on the highlighted element. In predicated themes, the sequence theme-rheme is not reversible.

Predicated themes are used in discourse as one of the ways in which new information precedes known information. From the semantic point of view, predicated themes are considered to be identifying because they establish a relationship of identification between two entities: the identified and the identifier.

There is always a relationship between texts and society/culture: texts are sociologically shaped, and they also constitute society and culture. In this sense, the novels under analysis do not have intrinsic meanings since meaning emerges according to the way the novels are used in social contexts. As Fairclough (1995: 55) puts it: “Language use – any text – is always simultaneously constitutive of (1) social identities, (2) social relations and (3) systems of knowledge and belief”.

While reading the novels, the following question was kept in mind: why did the author use predicated themes and under what circumstances? The fact that the predicated theme is used by the protagonists in some of the most important moments of the novels makes clear that this structure is used to emphasise a certain part of the information, or to point out feelings or emotions. The predicated theme contrasts with something previously said, or highlights a certain fact considered important for the narrative.

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