

Topicality chains in two discourse genres

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of this paper is to focus on the differences of news items and tourist brochures as regards their topical sequentiality. After defining 'topic' from the aboutness perspective as a semantic pragmatic notion (van Dijk, 1981a and b; Downing, 1997) it will be shown that, due to their specific characteristics of genre and register, the topical progression of the two subgenres under investigation reveals significant differences.

I conclude that while the global topical progression of the tourist brochures is normally characterized by just one topical sequence, the internal organization of the news items is, however, multisequential. The purpose of the journalist is not so much to make reference to just one informative aspect of a social and current event as to transmit the message to the greatest number of readers.

In addition, the writer of the brochure generally activates a sole topical sequence through a new topic (Dik, 1989), with the aim of attracting the attention of the reader on the tourist place that is being advertised and influence directly in his behaviour. However, the journalist tends to introduce most of the topical chains of a news item through known topics, as a way of making all the issues of an informative event more easily understood.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to study the differences in the topical sequentiality of two subgenres, news items and tourist brochures. The general hypothesis proposed for this research is that the news items and tourist brochures should, according to the characteristics of genre and register, show

a significant difference in their topical organization and in the activation of the new topical sequences.

Firstly, the concept of topic will be defined from the aboutness perspective as a semantic-pragmatic notion and, following van Dijk (1981a and b), Reinhart (1982), van Oosten (1985), Downing (1997) and Downing *et al.* (1998), two basic levels of topicality will be presented, distinguishing between discourse topics and sentence topics. Secondly, another of the aspects that has raised more interest in current writings on topicality will be approached: the sequentiality of topic chains in discourse (Keenan and Schieffelin, 1976; Lautamatti, 1987; Siewierska, 1991; Hengeveld, 1997; Goutsos, 1997). Finally, the topical sequentiality and the introduction of topical spans or sequences will be studied in twenty tourist brochures and twenty news items, taken from a selection of tourist magazines, independent brochures and quality newspapers¹.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. The notion of topic

The notion of topic adopted here will not be defined on the basis of the special treatment that, from a structural or prosodic perspective, is given to some clause constituents (Halliday, 1985, 1994; Dik, 1989). A one-to-one correspondence will not be established between the concept of topic and the initial or final position of the sentence. The pragmatic function of topic is not so much a question of position or prominence as a question of relevance and aboutness. The topic is, above all, a textual category that is determined by the context and not by purely formal or structural aspects.

Therefore, the notion of topic adopted in this paper is dissociated from the Hallidayan concept of theme (Halliday, 1967, 1985, 1994). It is not always possible to establish an automatic relationship between the clause constituent that expresses what a sentence is about, the topic, and the point of departure of the clause as message, the theme (Downing, 1991, 1997). On many occasions, as the following fragment taken from our sample of texts shows, the theme is realized by an adverbial component or a thematized element that does not provide topical information:

- (1) Luxury, style, service, quality (theme), **this** beautiful **hotel** (topic) has it all. *The Grecotel Creta Palace* is located, in its own private grounds, on a beautiful sandy beach 3 miles outside the town of Rethymnon. *This* large *complex* offers elegant accommodation in the main building and bungalow village types. It boasts many amenities... (Crete. Rethymnon. Olympic Holidays, 1995).

Following van Dijk (1977, 1981a and b), van Oosten (1985) and Downing (1997), the semantic-pragmatic concept of topic is viewed from the aboutness perspective as the entity, proposition or main idea which a sentence, a stretch of discourse or a discourse in its global sense is about. The communicative purpose of the writer, the knowledge that both the writer and the reader share, and the linguistic and extralinguistic contexts are all taken into account in the delimitation of the notion of topic as aboutness. As a result, I have considered this concept as a pragmatic and cognitive phenomenon, which can only be established in contextual terms.

2.2. Hierarchization of topics: discourse and sentence topics

The notion of topic has been enlarged from Hockett (1959) to be applied not only to the sentence, but also to textual sections and to the text in its global sense. In fact, depending on the unit of application (sentence or discourse), many linguists make a distinction between sentence topics and discourse topics (van Dijk, 1977, 1981a; Reinhart, 1982; van Oosten, 1985; Siewierska, 1991) or between global topics and local topics (Schank, 1977; Downing *et al.*, 1998; Downing, 2000).

Within the pragmatic and discourse perspective that has been adopted, the local topic is defined as the entity about which information is given at the sentence level. The sentence topic is a referential phenomenon, which is maintained through the continuous references that are made to it. In agreement with van Dijk (1977:138), I have considered that a passage is about a topic if this entity about which information is given is referred to persistently throughout the text.

However, the topic does not always coincide with a specific constituent of the clause structure. In many cases it expresses a main idea or a general concept that unifies and gives coherence to the text. While the sentence topic represents the entity or the proposition about which information is given at local level, the discourse topic represents what a whole text or discourse is about and is defined as a cognitive schema which sequentially organizes and unifies all the local topics under the same topical frame (van Dijk, 1977; van Oosten, 1985; Downing *et al.* 1998). I have considered the notion of Discourse Topic useful and necessary to refer either to the global idea which the discourse or an episode within the discourse is about, or to the propositions, hierarchically organized, that constitute its semantic macrostructure² (Brown and Yule, 1983; van Dijk, 1979; van Oosten, 1985).

With regard to the hierarchization of sentence topics and in line with van Oosten (1985) and mainly Dik³ (1989), a further typology is presented in which five different subtypes of local topics are differentiated (Introductory

topic, Known topic, Subtopic, Resumed topic and Superordinate topic), in order to study the cohesive relationships that are established between the local topics of a text and the sequentiality with which they are activated (cf. Moya, 2000).

Although the levels of application of discourse and sentence topics are different, they are closely related to each other, as the sentence topic can encapsulate all the information expressed in a text or in an episode of the whole text in a sole constituent (van Oosten, 1985; van Dijk, 1981a). Therefore, any element of the discourse topic can be focussed on and become a sentence topic without losing the internal coherence of the text. These local topics, which evoke at the sentence level the general idea about which information is given in a text or a stretch of text, have been called Superordinate Topics (van Oosten, 1985).

In the following extract, taken from the news item “Car bomb kills Punjab minister” the journalist introduces a superordinate topic which encapsulates in a sole constituent, all the information expressed in the previous text. The discourse topic of this news item is “the killing of the Prime Minister of The Punjab”. Many of its sentences give information about two topical entities: Beant Singh, the chief minister, and the car bomb. The activation of the superordinate topic, ‘the assassination’, helps to maintain the topic continuity of the text, as it encapsulates all the information that has been introduced previously in a nominalization and creates links between a specific sentence and whole text of which it is a part:

- (2) A car bomb (Introductory topic) yesterday killed the chief minister of The Punjab (Introductory topic) and 12 bodyguards.

Beant Singh (Known topic) was leaving his office in the region’s capital, Chandigarh, when the powerful bomb exploded...

...The assassination (Superordinate sentence topic) is a set back to Prime Minister Narasimha Rao’s government, which claimed to have eliminated Sikh militancy nearly three years ago.

It is also a setback to Mr Rao’s ruling Congress party, of which Mr Singh was a member a close ally... (Car bomb kills Punjab minister. The Daily Telegraph, 01.09.1995).

We will use the term ‘introductory topic’, in accordance with Dik (1989) and Hannay (1985a), to make reference to those topical entities that are introduced for the first time in the discourse. As can be seen in example n° 2, the function of introductory topics is to activate an entity which will later become a potential topic (Hannay, 1985a). Therefore, two characteristics should be attributed to this notion: on the one hand, its presentative and new character and, on the other, its level of persistence in the following text (Givón, 1983a; Hengeveld, 1997)⁴.

Once a topical element has been introduced or activated it will be called ‘known topic’. A topical entity should be analysed as known, not only in those cases when it has been previously activated directly or indirectly through an introductory topic or a subtopic component (Dik, 1989), but also in those when it is presented by other informative elements of the clause. As can be seen in the following fragment, these can be either verbal processes, circumstances or nominal entities which, usually placed in rhematic position, introduce future potential topics ⁵:

- (3) A lone fisherman whose leg was severed in an accident at sea summoned help by calling *his wife* on his mobile telephone. Tom Willacy, 55, was fishing from his 38ft shrimper in the Solway firth when the boat’s winch cable cut through his right leg... *Patricia Willacy* kept him on the line while she ran to a neighbour’s house to call for help... (Fisherman phones home for help after leg is severed. The Times. August 29, 1995).

In opposition to Hajicová and Sgall (1975) and Mackenzie and Keizer (1990) who assume that a topical entity should be analysed as given if it is recoverable from the general or situational knowledge that both speaker and hearer share, I have restricted, along with Dik (1989) and Lambrecht (1994), the referential identity of the known topic to the linguistic context. The fact that a topic is retrievable as much through the general context as through the situational context does not mean that it should be analysed as known if it has not been linguistically activated before.

Following Hannay (1985a) and Dik (1989), the term subtopic will be used to define those entities associated or related to a previously activated topic: “If an entity X has been activated in the given setting, then the speaker may present an entity Y as a sub-Topic entity, if Y R X, where R is a relationship of inference” (Hannay, 1985b: 53). Finally, we will use the term resumed topic to describe a topical entity that has been re-established through anaphoric reference after some time without mention in the text. The resumed topic functions both as a mechanism of continuity and discontinuity, since it produces a break in the current topical chain and at the same time establishes the continuity of a known topical entity that had already been the focus of attention in the previous text. In extract n° 4 both subtopics and resumed topics can be identified. The constituent “the west coast”, of the last sentence is a resumed topic by means of which the writer of the brochure makes reference to a subtopic previously activated in the linguistic context, ‘its west coast’:

- (4) ...But Barbados (known topic) also has two intriguingly different faces. On its fashionable west coast (subtopic), the placid Caribbean waters gently lap dazzlingly bleached sands. Take a trip to the south east (subtopic), on the other hand, where the Caribbean meets the Atlantic,... Barbados (known

topic) is not as scenic and lush as some of its more mountainous neighbours... Don't expect deserted stretches of beach- the south coast (subtopic) in particular is quite built up... The west coast (recurrent topic), although also busy, offers delightful golden sandy beaches... (Barbados. Time Off. City Selection, 1995).

This topical hierarchy allows us to approach the study of the topical progression of a text from two different perspectives: from a local level, through the identification of the sentence topics, and from a general or global perspective, on the basis of the discourse topic. However, this does not imply that it is assumed that all sentences in a text contain a topical constituent or that, as Hockett (1959) suggested, they can be segmented in a binary structure made of topic and comment. There are introductory sentences in a stretch of discourse which cannot be assigned a topical status or sometimes even sentences which only contain focal information (Siewierska, 1991). The local topic is not always realized by a specific clause constituent; it sometimes remains implicit, either for purely rhetorical reasons, for questions of linguistic economy or for its possible inference from the previous linguistic context. In tourist brochures, for instance, it is not infrequent to find sentences which lack a local topic. In the sentences of the following paragraph all the information is **focal** and makes reference to the main topical entity about which information is given, Castleton:

- (5) ...It would be hard to imagine anywhere with such an array of natural and historical features both above and below ground... (Castleton)

2.3. The topical sequence

As it is not possible to introduce all the information at once and in a sole sequence, there are continuity and discontinuity chains within a stretch of text and they are realized, as Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) point out, by linguistic strategies of continuity and topical transition.

Once an introductory topic is activated for the first time in the linguistic context, it can maintain its persistence or continuity through the references that are made to it in the following discourse by means of known topics, subtopics or resumed topics. The activation of a new topical entity will obviously open a new topical sequence and will break the continuity of the previous topical chain.

There are topics that stay alive throughout several sentences or even the whole text. However, others have a low level of persistence. The discourse is in this way organized hierarchically in topical sequences, formed by groups

of clauses that are about the same topic and that keep, in turn, a narrow relationship with the discourse topic. These topical chains of continuity and discontinuity follow each other and allow the writer to introduce the information s/he wants to transmit to his/her readers progressively. As Siewierska affirms: “The common situation is for a discourse to consist of several chains of clauses each united by a common topic of discourse which in turn somehow bears on an overall topic of discourse” (1991: 154).

I have assumed that the continuity of a topical sequence is kept through both collaborating and incorporating discourse strategies (Keenan and Schieffelin, 1976: 342). The first are used when two or more utterances give information on the same entity. The second, when a subtopic associated with another topic previously introduced in the discourse is activated. These two mechanisms are at the writer’s disposal to keep the persistence of a topical participant during a passage. In fact, when the writer activates an entity previously introduced in the linguistic context, s/he facilitates the identification of the topic for the reader.

However, it is considered that a change of topic will take place when a topic does not keep a close relationship with the previous topical chains (introductory topic). When the information that is expressed in the rhematic span of the sentence generates another potential topic and when a resumed topic is reintroduced, this also produces a variation of topic. Therefore, each different topical constituent that is not related to other previously activated topical entities opens a new topical sequence and interrupts, albeit for a brief lapse of time, the continuity of the current topical chain:

DISCOURSE TOPIC

<i>Introductory topic – Known topic -- Subtopic -----Resumed topic</i>
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- (6) A teenage girl (Introductory topic) whose ambition was to become an actress died after collapsing during a school play. Katie Moulton (known topic), 14, had suffered flu-like symptoms when she took to the stage at Hardenhuish School, Chippenham, Wilts...

Becky Redfern (Introductory topic), 15, a fellow pupil, used mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to revive her but Katie (Resumed topic) suffered a relapse in an ambulance and was found to be dead on arrival at hospital... (Girl, 14, dies after collapse on stage. The Daily Telegraph. February, 17, 1995).

It is generally an introductory topic that activates a new topical sequence in discourse. However, a topical chain is not always introduced by means of

novel constituents. As will be demonstrated later, in many cases, it is a known topic that generates a different topical sequence. In news items, for instance, it is not infrequent to find cases where the information introduced in the rheme about a local topic becomes topical in the following discourse:

DISCOURSE TOPIC

<i>Known topic -- Subtopic -- -- -- Resumed topic</i>

Resumed topics⁶, however, do not activate new topical chains, as their main pragmatic function is to re-establish an old informative sequence. Although their activation breaks up with the progression of the current topical sequence, they have been considered as mechanisms of continuity since they reintroduce entities that had already fulfilled a topical function. Subtopics cannot introduce new topical chains in the text either, due to their dependence on the introductory or known topics that activate them. For this reason when the writer moves from an introductory or known topic to its corresponding subtopic or from a subtopic to the main topic again, I have considered that a proper change of topic does not take place. In these cases, a different topic is not being introduced, we are just moving within the same topical frame (Crete and its resorts, in example n° 7):

- (7) ...Crete (Introductory topic) has a fascinating history... Being the largest of the Greek islands, its landscape (subtopic) changes at every road bend. The northern coast (subtopic) is by far the most visited and Heraklion (subtopic)- the capital- separates the west and the east in an almost uncanny way... With so much to enjoy, no wonder you find such a mixture of people visiting Crete (Known topic) for, whatever your idea of a good time, Crete's (Known topic) got something just for you! (Crete. An island so varied you'll be spoilt for choice. Olympic Holidays, 1995).

Like the sentences that constitute a text, the different topical chains that define the content of a stretch of discourse are closely related to each other and succeed each other progressively. Each topical sequence is associated directly or indirectly with the previous sequence and with the discourse topic, so that the message that is transmitted is informatively relevant, linguistically cohesive and contextually coherent. As Lautamatti affirms:

We expect sequences making up a piece of discourse to be related, however, indirectly, to the main idea discussed, here referred to as discourse topic. This relation may be direct, especially in short text, or indirect, based on the

development of subordinate ideas, subtopics, which in their turn relate to the discourse topic (1987: 87).

Therefore, discourse is organized in continuous and discontinuous topical sequences, made of a series of sentences which give information on the same topic. A topic, in turn, will maintain its continuity while it is still relevant for the communication and until the activation of a new informative entity opens a different topical chain in the text: “.human discourse is multi-propositional, with clauses making up chains, which in turn make up paragraphs, etc.” (Givón, 1995: 91). While the writer has to add more information about a topic, this will be kept alive by means of the continuous references that are made to it. Once the chain is over, the current topic is left out and a new referent with a topical status is introduced.

The cohesive and coherent relations⁷ that are established between the local topics of a text and the discourse topic, along with the different topical chains that define its content, are the essential factors that should be borne in mind when analysing its internal coherence and its topical progression. Although the concept of topic has been typically related with the notions of aboutness and information, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) already considered it in their studies on oral discourse as a structural mechanism that carried out a decisive function in the general organization of discourse.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA AND EXEMPLIFICATION

Once the theoretical framework has been outlined, the typology of topic proposed can now be applied to the forty news items (7.009 words) and tourist brochures (6.619 words) in order to establish the differences in their topical organization. As the main aim of this study is to carry out a comparative analysis of the topical sequentiality displayed by the two subgenres researched, it has been considered appropriate to go through the general characteristics of genre and register of the sample of texts contained in the data.

3.1. Genre selection

The twenty news items analysed belong to the informative subgenre⁸ and, following van Dijk (1988a), can be classified as ‘hard news’, as they are current events that should be published the same day on which they occur. The selected news has a sensationalistic character and makes reference to events of human interest which usually imply suspense, conflict, antagonism

and violence. Their style is impersonal and concise. Thus, they can be considered, together with brief news, as the prototype of pure news par excellence.

The 'field'⁹ of the news of events is determined by the specific activity that defines them. Although the rhetorical purpose of the journalist when writing news for a newspaper can be influenced by political, economic, social or ideological motivations (Fowler, 1991), his/her main aim is to inform about current issues in a hypothetically objective¹⁰ and impersonal way (van Dijk, 1988b; Martínez Albertos, 1993; Grijelmo, 1997). The transmission of this type of information imposes a narrative style and a formal language.

The 'tenor' of the news items selected for research is determined by the sociological characteristics of the newspapers from which they have been taken. The sample of texts have been chosen at random from newspapers such as 'The Times', 'The Daily Telegraph' and 'The Guardian', typically directed to an upper-middle class with a medium or high cultural level.

Finally, the 'mode' of the news is, evidently, the written language. The written product tends to be independent of the immediate context in which the event that is narrated takes place. Therefore, there is no possibility of feedback between the journalist and his/her reader. The lexis is elaborate, presenting a high degree of lexical density, and the syntax is normally characterized by its low grammatical intricacy. These variations in field, tenor and mode will be shown in the use of a particular language, a concise and impersonal language which rejects personal comments and evaluative expressions.

In opposition to the informative and narrative character of the news items, the main aim of the tourist brochures is not so much to inform the reader about a particular 'product' as to influence directly in his behaviour (van Dijk, 1988a and b); Cook, 1992). The promotion of a geographical area, a city, a museum,... is what defines the 'field' of the tourist brochures. Their main rhetorical purpose is to attract the attention of the readers in a subliminal way so that they take an interest in the place that is being advertised. With the help of iconic elements, of psychological and social mechanisms and with the use of persuasive and descriptive techniques, the professional tries to annul the defense mechanisms of the reader so that s/he fully accepts the information that is shown in the brochure.

The variable of 'tenor' is characterized by the interpersonal relationship that is established between the sender and the reader of a tourist brochure. An expert in a geographical area persuasively addresses a possible visitor, usually less familiar with the place that is being described. Although there is no possibility of feedback between them, the advertiser applies to the potential tourist in an appealing and personalized tone in order to have an influence on his behaviour.

As a written text, the tourist brochure shares some properties of the ‘mode’ of the news items; both subgenres are written to be published. However, in contrast to the discourse of journalism, the discourse of advertising is more interpretative and evaluative. As a text type, the tourist brochure is a descriptive text in which there is a predominance of subjective language. In fact, although there is no possibility of a direct interaction, the writer of the brochure looks for a certain involvement with the tourist. This is achieved by the utilization of personal and commentary expressions, stative verbs and descriptive adjectives (Lázaro Carreter, 1979).

Therefore, the communicative purposes of these two subgenres are clearly different and, as had been predicted, this would play a key role in their internal macrostructure and topical sequentiality.

3.2. Method of analysis

In order to demonstrate the hypothesis outlined before, the 20 news items and 20 tourist brochures will be submitted to an empirical analysis. On the basis of the aboutness criterion and the topical typology presented in the previous pages, the local topics of the sentences of the sample of texts will be classified, in an attempt to determine the macrostructure or the general topical sequentiality of the two subgenres researched. Discourse topics are identified in terms of the macropropositions expressed either in the headlines of the news of events or in the titles and subtitles of the tourist brochures. Sentence or local topics, however, are identified by their being embodied within the discourse topic and by their referential continuity in the text. The local topics of the 40 news items and tourist brochures usually make reference either to the main participants of the news items or to the different tourist areas of interest described in the brochures.

Once the topical sequentiality of the 40 texts selected at random is established, it will be established whether the entities that generate new topical chains are linguistically introduced by new elements or, on the contrary, whether they are realized by given constituents, previously introduced in the co-text.

3.3. Typology of topics and Topical Sequentiality in news items and tourist brochures

In this section the typology of topics which are most frequently predominant in the 40 news items and tourist brochures will be studied. As far as the tourist brochure is concerned, the topical typology that most

frequently predominates is the subtopic which, as can be appreciated in the following chart, reaches the value of 48% of the total tokens analysed in the data. Through the subtopic the writer highlights the main areas of interest that are a must for the tourist and attracts the reader's attention to the 'product' that is being advertised:

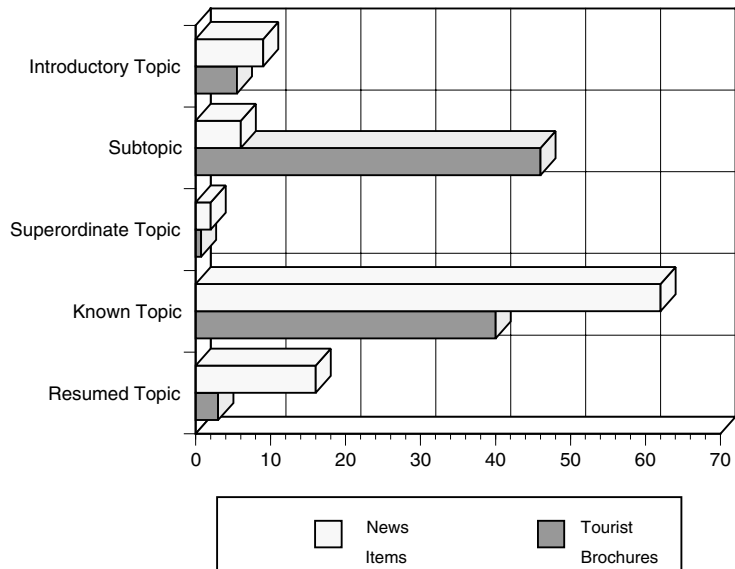


Chart 1. Typology of topics in news items and tourist brochures (%). A comparison.

The brochure “Cayman Islands” sets a good example. Once the local topic is introduced in the initial paragraph, its continuity is kept alive in the text through the activation of known topics (Here, The Island of Grand Cayman, It) and especially subtopics (Grand Cayman’s bustling capital George Town, Cayman Brac). By means of these topical constituents the writer of the brochure makes reference to the tourist areas of most historic interest on the islands:

- (8) With some of the clearest water and best protected reefs in the Caribbean, **the Cayman Islands** (Introductory topic) are a Mecca for divers and lovers of velvet smooth, white sand beaches. **Grand Cayman’s bustling capital**

George Town (Subtopic) -named after George V - has plenty of fine shops and restaurants, with beautiful Seven Mile Beach and West Bay the focus for many visitors. Quieter **Cayman Brac** (Subtopic) (known as the ‘Brac’ to Caymanians) is middle sister of the three Cayman Islands just 12 miles long and 1 mile wide. **Here** (Given topic) you’ll find first class hiking and bird-watching, outstanding diving and snorkelling - not to mention legends of pirate Backbeard who ‘holed up’ in its labyrinth of caves.

The flat coral island of Grand Cayman (Given topic) has a secure, Americanised atmosphere, excellent shopping but is generally more expensive than elsewhere in the Caribbean. **It** (Given topic) offers a wide selection of restaurants, ranging from fast-food to fine dining -where male guests are expected to wear trousers rather than shorts in the evening... (Cayman Islands. British Airways Holidays, 1996).

Quantitatively speaking, the topical typology that follows is the known topic, which reaches the rate of 41%. On some occasions they are referential to the main topical entity of the sentence. On others, however, their main function is to keep the continuity of subtopic components which are already activated in the previous linguistic context. In the following paragraph, taken from the brochure “The Candlelight Inn”, a subtopic is introduced in thematic position “Our Lantern Dining Room”, whose continuity is maintained through two known topics, “this area” and “the Lantern Dining Room”:

- (9) *Our Lantern Dining Room* enjoys a very high reputation for its food, especially its seafood bought fresh at the local fish auction. A feature of *this area* is a collection of fine paintings by such well known Irish artists as Deating, Lamb, L.M. Hamilton and Father Jack Hanlon. *The Lantern Dining Room* is also an ideal venue for weddings, catering for up to 96 people (The Candlelight Inn).

The presence of introductory topics is much less significant, only 6%. We must bear in mind that, although all the tourist brochures have an introductory topic, the high rate of known topics and, mainly, of subtopics, minimizes the frequency of these local entities in the global percentage. Finally, neither the frequency of resumed topics, which barely reach the rate of 4% of the total tokens analysed, nor the frequency of superordinate topic is quantitatively relevant.

With regard to the topical typology of the news items, the most predominant entities are the known topics, which reach the rate of 63% of the total tokens identified. This increase in known topics with regard to the previous subgenre brings with it other significant differences between the two text types that are being researched. Thus, while in the tourist brochures the subtopic was the category most frequently used, in the news of events it only

represents 7% of the total. The utilization of introductory topics (10%) and superordinate topics (3%) is not significant in the news items either.

Finally, in the news items resumed topics, which reach the rate of 17% of the entirety of local topics, are the most predominant category after the known topic. In fact, the presence of this topical typology in the news items causes an increase of 13% with regard to the same category in the advertising text. A clear example is found in the second paragraph of the following extract. Once the journalist has introduced information about “Balkash”, the Siberian tiger that attacked and killed its keeper, the main topical chain is re-established in the text through the reactivation of the resumed topic, “the keeper”, which assigns again a topical status to the victim of the attack:

- (10) A zoo keeper killed by one of his tigers had planned to give up his job because it was too dangerous and poorly paid, an inquest into his death heard yesterday. **Mr Trevor Smith** (Known topic), 33, of Goodnestone, Kent, had been married less than a year and planned to start a family, his widow Debbie, 22, told Canterbury coroner’s court...

...Mr Roger Brown, from Gillingham, Kent, a visitor to the zoo, said that without warning Balkash (Known topic) rose on to his rear legs and placed his front paws on Mr Smith’s shoulders. **The keeper** (Resumed topic) fell to the ground and the tiger ran across the enclosure with him in his mouth (Tiger keeper killed in cage planned to quit over danger; The Daily Telegraph, 17.02.1995).

After identifying the topical typology of the two text types under investigation, we shall centre our attention upon the topical organization or topical macrostructure of the tourist brochures. The high rate of subtopics is a decisive factor of their global topical progression. In the brochures the discourse topic tends to coincide with an entity, generally a geographical area, a place of interest..., that becomes the main local topic of the sentences of the brochure. This basic entity is closely associated with a series of subtopics, which expand the information the writer wants to transmit to the reader and makes reference to the most interesting places of a touristic area.

The close relationship that is established between the discourse topic and the various subtopics defines and delimits the macrostructure of the tourist brochures, typically characterized by only one topical sequence. In fact, once the advertising texts have been analysed, it can be stated that 15 out of 20 brochures are centred on a sole topical chain, defined on the basis of the association that is made between the main topic and its subtopics.

Only 5 out of the 20 tourist texts¹¹ give information about more than one topical entity. The following extract sets a good example. Most of its sentences are about ‘Castleton’, the discourse topic, and its subtopics (The imposing ruins of Peveril Castle, The Winnats Pass, Mann Tor, etc). Only one sentence

generates a different topical sequence, activated by means of a known topic, 'this stone', which has been linguistically introduced before (the mineral Blue John):

- (11) Nestling in the heart of the Peak National Park, Castleton is one of Britain's most fascinating villages... *No wonder we call it the 'Gem of the Peaks'* without which a journey to the Peak National Park would be incomplete - and in fact it has a gem of its own: the surrounding area is the only place in the world where the mineral Blue John is found. **This translucent semi precious stone** banded in blue, red, purple and yellow has been prized for ornaments and jewellery since Roman Times...

High above the town are the imposing ruins of Peeveril Castle, from which the village gets its name. The castle was begun shortly after 1066 by William the Conqueror.

The spectacular Winnats Pass climbs 1300 feet out of the village, banked by near vertical cliffs. Overlooking the pass is Mam Tor, the name means "mother mountain" but it is known locally as "The Shivering Mountain" as its layers of gritstone and shale gradually crumble to cause landslips... (Castleton).

The empirical analysis carried out reveals that the topical macrostructure of the tourist brochure tends to be monosequential. In fact, if the topic is not identified with the theme or the first ideational element of the clause as message, their global organization shows a certain relation with one of Danes' (1974) patterns of thematic progression, specifically, the one that Danes denominates 'Thematic Progression with derived Themes'. In it, the themes or subthemes of the text's clauses are derived from a hypertheme. The relation that is established between the global hypertheme and the rest of the clausal themes determines the schematic structure and the internal coherence of the text.

As for the organization of the news items, distinctive features have been found in the data. Unlike the tourist brochures, the macrostructure of the news items is characterized by more than one topical sequence. Therefore, it can be stated that their structural organization is multisequential and is defined on the basis of the different topical chains about which information is given in the text.

In the case of the news items, a close relationship does not exist between the introductory topic and the rest of the constituents with topical properties. Most of their sentences are about the topical participants generated in the lead. However, the journalist introduces other informative elements that also activate their own topical chains in the text. As an example, the first paragraph of the news items "Schoolboy finds mother beaten to death on sofa" is about a teenager and his mother, victim of a frustrated attack and robbery. The

entities ‘Evelyn Howells’ and ‘Glen Howells’ open the two main topical sequences of the current event that is narrated. Nevertheless, the journalist also assigns a topical status to other clause constituents such as ‘the staff’ and ‘three men and a woman’ which, in turn, generate new topical chains throughout the text:

- (12) A teenager (Introductory topic) returned from taking the family dog for its evening walk to find his mother battered to death on the sofa, the apparent victim of a robbery that went wrong.

Detectives believe that Evelyn Howells (Known topic), a history and religious education teacher, was attacked after confronting opportunist thieves who had slipped in after a door was left on the latch.

Glen Howells (Resumed topic), 15, and his brother John, 14, had taken out Jessie, the family’s Yorkshire terrier, soon after 9 p.m. on Thursday...

Mrs Howells (Resumed topic) had worked at Newsome High School for four years. Gerry Hull, the headmaster, said yesterday: “The staff (Known topic) are in a state of shock over her tragic death. Eve (Resumed topic) was extremely conscientious and dedicated.

Three men and a woman (Introductory topic) who live locally were arrested by detectives early yesterday and questioned in connection with the murder. They (known topic) were released on police bail last night. (Schoolboy finds mother beaten to death on sofa. The Times, 02.08.1995).

As can be seen in n° 12, the news items tend to give information about more than one topical sequence. It is for this reason that, unlike in the tourist brochures in which there is a high predominance of derived thematic progression (Danes, 1974), in the news items, patterns of simple lineal thematic progression are, on some occasions, created. As Danes (1974) postulates, in this pattern of progression each rheme becomes theme of the next sentence, establishing in this way the internal coherence of the text.

Only one of the twenty news items of the sample of text, “Former teacher jailed for sex abuse of boys”, has an atypical macrostructure, as it does not transmit information about several topical chains. This news item is essentially centred on a sole topical entity, “Charles Napier”, that maintains its continuity throughout the text by means of the activation of known topics, in their majority located in thematic position:

- (13) **A former British Council worker who** sexually abused boys at his home was sent to prison for nine months yesterday.

...**Napier** found a job with the British Council in Cairo after being banned from teaching jobs in British schools after a conviction for indecent assault. **He** was sacked when British council officials discovered the offenses... **He** admitted in a presentence report that **he** was still sexually attracted to boys, and had also expressed continuing sexual

feelings for children in a recent letter... **Napier, who** has been living abroad, was also ordered to pay (1,000 costs (Former teacher jailed for sex abuse of boys. *The Times*, 02.09.1995).

3.1. Introduction of the topical sequences in the sample of text

Once the topical sequentiality of the sample of 40 texts has been analysed, we shall study the informative character of the local entities that activate the topical chains of the two subgenres under investigation.

The notions of topic and information have been approached from different perspectives and have been subject to great terminological controversy during the last thirty years. Mathesius' (1939) definition of Theme has been the direct cause of the polemic that is being referred to. In this definition the maestro of the Prague School assigns to the Theme the property of aboutness (topicality) and, at the same time, another two fundamental characteristics: on the one hand, he defines theme as the part of the sentence that expresses known information and, on the other, as the point of departure of the clause as message.

However, even though linguists such as Firbas (1982) or van Dijk (1977) have followed this 'combined' approach, others such as Fries (1981), Halliday (1985), Quirk *et al.* (1985) or Downing (1991) have adopted different postures and keep a separate line between the thematic and the informative structure of the clause: "Thematic choice is independent of the choice of what is given or new information" (Fries, 1981: 30). In agreement with them, we assume that, although on some occasions the theme or the first clause element is realized by a known constituent, there is not always a one-to-one correlation between these two dimensions.

It is not, however, the purpose of this section to go into the conceptual dimensions of the concepts of topic and information in any depth. Following the topical typology presented in the previous pages, my fundamental aim is to determine whether the topical sequences of the two subgenres under investigation are introduced by new elements or whether the local topics that activate a different topical chain in the text are realized by linguistically known entities.

In the twenty tourist brochures researched the main topical sequence is activated by means of introductory topics. As can be appreciated in the following extract, the local topic "The Square Towncentre Tallaght", is realized by a new constituent, recently introduced in the linguistic context. The brochure, structured in letter form and directed to a possible visitor, offers information about a sole topical chain, The Square Towncentre Tallaght and its running team:

(14) Dear Visitor,

Welcome to **The Square Towncentre, Tallaght**, Ireland's award winning and largest Shopping Centre. Since its launch in October 1990, The Square has proved a favourite destination for people of all ages - people have come to expect much more than just the finest choice of shops.

The Square boasts 135 shops, 9 restaurants, 5 major stores, as well as a 12 screen UCI multiplex cinema, creche facilities, children and adult adventure and entertainment centres, feeding rooms, and of course, free car parking for over 2,200 cars, with our own 2FM studios, who broadcast live from the Centre 7 hours per week.

Here at The Square, the Management Team are determined to make your shopping trip a satisfying, memorable and pleasurable experience... (The Square Towncentre Tallaght).

Not all the advertising texts follow this general tendency. Five exceptions¹² have been found in which the global progression of the tourist brochure is defined on the basis of more than one topical sequence. Even in these five, the main topical chain is introduced by means of new or unknown topics. However, in four out of the five cases the second topical sequence is activated through known topics. Only in the brochure 'Stanford Hall' is the second topical chain generated through an introductory topic (Percy Pilcher), formally realized by a proper name:

(15) Stanford Hall (new topic) built in 1697 for Sir Roger Cave is still home to his descendants and is one of the most exquisite examples of architecture of the period.

The lofty ballroom grandly resplendent in pink and gold with its painted ceiling and renowned Stuart collection of portraits is surrounded by more intimate family rooms.

The cosy panelled library is lined with over five thousand books. The peaceful drawing rooms with their lovely portraits and elegant furniture overlook the park.

The grand staircase winds past portraits of the family to the bedrooms with four poster beds and tapestries.

All engenders the atmosphere of one's ideal of an English country house. But there is much more... **Percy Pilcher (Introductory topic), the first man to fly in England, was killed at Stanford in 1899** (Stanford Hall).

In general terms, the analysis carried out with the sample of texts confirms that the basic topical sequence about which information is transmitted in the brochures tends to be activated by introductory topics. In fact, 81% of the tokens analysed reach this conclusion. On the contrary, secondary topical chains, informatively less significant and relevant, are usually introduced by known topics, already activated in the previous linguistic context.

The macrostructure of the news items is different from the monosequential organization of the tourist brochures. In the former, there are several topical chains about which information is given and there is not always a one-to-one correspondence between the main topical sequence and the rest of the informative chains that define them from a content perspective.

As in the tourist brochures, the first topical sequence of the news items tends to be activated by an introductory topic. However, this does not imply that all the informative chains that determine their global macrostructure are introduced by new topical entities. On many occasions, they are generated through known topics or superordinate topics.

Next, in representation of the sample of journalistic texts chosen at random for research, a news item will be analysed in order to identify its different topical sequences and find out whether they are activated by means of introductory topics or known topics. The headline of the news is “Diver was dragged down by conger eel”:

- (16) (1) **A DIVING instructor** who was found unconscious on the shore of a loch had been dragged down to its depths by a 6ft-long conger eel which he disturbed.
- (2) Gordon Bell, who was taken to a decompression chamber at Faslane Naval Base suffering from the bends, told police that he was surprised by the eel while on a midnight dive in Loch Long, Argyllshire.
- (3) While instructing two other divers in a part of the loch known as Conger Alley, he had banged his torch on some rocks and was surprised by a large eel which darted out.
- (4) **The eel** had become entangled in a fishing line and
- (5) **The line** caught Mr Bell on the head, dragging him down at speed.
- (6) Mr Bell, who was transferred to Vale of Leven Hospital in Alexandria, Strathclyde, told police yesterday that he became separated from his companions as he descended into the loch.
- (7) He dropped his torch but managed to cut himself free with his diving knife.
- (8) He then surfaced quickly and staggered to the shore.
- (9) He has told police that he remembers nothing of surfacing or his subsequent discovery by a passing cyclist on Thursday at about 11.30 a.m.
- (10) Mr Bell was discharged from hospital yesterday and will return for a check-up in a month, but is believed to be suffering no ill-effects from his ordeal (Diver was dragged down by conger eel. The Times, 02.08.1995).

The main topical sequence of this text is introduced by the indefinite constituent ‘A diving instructor’. This local topic, located in thematic position,

is the most relevant entity informatively speaking. In fact, the journalist makes reference to it in most of the sentences of the news item (Gordon Bell, Who, He...), in order to expand the information that s/he wants to transmit to the reader. Its basic topical chain is, therefore, activated by an introductory or new topic.

This is not, however, the only topical sequence of the news item under analysis. The journalist also refers to other local topics that, although less relevant, generate new topical chains in the text. The sentences n° 4 and 5, for instance, grant a topical status to the constituents “the eel” and “the line” which, in turn, activate two different topical sequences: “**The eel** had become entangled in a fishing line and **the line** caught Mr Bell on the head, dragging him down at speed...”. These entities are introduced by the journalist through two known topics, already mentioned in the previous linguistic context, specifically in sentences n° 1, 2, 3 and 4, where reference is already made in rhematic position to the informative elements that later on will be activated as the local topics of the text.

As a result, it can be stated that the informative sequences that determine the global macrostructure of the news items are not always generated by introductory topics. On some occasions, especially when the journalist introduces secondary or informatively less relevant topical chains, these are usually introduced by means of known topics, linguistically activated in the rheme of the previous clauses.

4. CONCLUSIONS

After carrying out the empirical analysis of the forty texts under investigation and applying the topic typology proposed in the previous pages, I can affirm that, due to their specific communicative purposes and their characteristics of genre and register, the structural organization and the types of topics that can be most frequently found in the two subgenres researched show relevant differences. The presence of subtopic components in the tourist brochures is important, 48% of the total tokens analysed. The known topic, however, is the constituent that most frequently prevails in the news items, as it reaches the value of 63% of the total tokens identified in the sample of texts. Unlike in the brochures, in the news of events the rate of frequency of subtopics (7%) is not significant at all.

The close relationship that is established between introductory topics and subtopics in the brochures determines their global topical progression, typically characterized by a sole topical sequence which makes reference to the most interesting places of a touristic area.

The structural organization of the news items is, on the other hand, multi-sequential. There are different topical referents, most of them known or resumed, about which information is introduced at clause level and there is not a relationship of dependency between the introductory topic and the rest of the topical entities. The aim of the journalist is not so much to highlight only one informative aspect as to inform the greatest number of readers about all the issues of a current and social event. The journalist usually introduces several topical sequences; the most relevant are activated from the beginning in the lead¹³; others, informatively less relevant, are generated either through new topics, introduced in the following paragraphs of the news item or through known topics, previously referred to in the rheme of the previous sentences and taken as real topics in the following text.

The multisequential organization of the news items also requires the utilization of resumed topics. These make reference again, after the activation of a different informative chain, to topical entities already introduced in the linguistic context. In fact, the presence of resumed topics is more relevant in the journalistic subgenre (17%) than in the advertising one (4%).

Although all the tourist brochures have an introductory topic, the presence of this topical category is more significant in the news items (10%) than in the brochures (6%). This is due to the fact that in the latter only one introductory topic is usually activated, in order to focus the readers' attention on the main tourist area which is being promoted. In the news items, however, several introductory topics are activated to inform the reader about the most relevant aspects of a current event, generally of tragic and criminal character. These local entities generate, in turn, part of the topical chains that determine the semantic content of the news item. Nevertheless, as has been shown, introductory topics are not the only constituents that create new topical sequences in journalistic texts.

Both in the tourist brochures (41%) and in the news items (63%) the rate of frequency of known topics is relevant. In the tourist texts the function of these topical entities is to keep the continuity of a subtopic, closely associated with the main topic or with the discourse topic. However, in the news items known topics are typically used either to maintain the persistence of an introductory topic or to grant a topical status to a rhematic constituent, previously introduced in the text.

Regarding the informative value of the clause constituents which introduce the topical sequences in both subgenres, the empirical analysis carried out also shows important differences between them. Thus, while the main topical sequence in the tourist brochures is activated by means of introductory topics in 81% of the tokens examined, in the news items only 44% of the topical sequences identified in the sample of texts are introduced by new topics. Most of the informative sequences, 56%, are generated by means

of known topics or superordinate topics, linguistically established before. Known topics, therefore, carry out a double function in the news items: on the one hand, they maintain the continuity of the topical entities which have been previously introduced and, on the other, assimilating functions typical of novel topics, they activate new informative sequences in the text.

The writer of the brochure generally introduces a sole topical sequence through a new topic, with the purpose of focalizing the attention of the reader on the 'product' or tourist area that is being promoted. The journalist also tends to introduce the main topical sequence of the news items through a new topic. However, most of their topical chains are generated by known topics, already referred to in the text. This way, the understanding of the message is made easier for the reader, as the sentence topics of the text are created from entities which have already been linguistically introduced or which have been activated in the rheme of the previous sentences.

The communicative intentions of the journalist and the advertiser play a decisive role in the internal organization and the topical progression of the two subgenres selected for investigation. Therefore, after obtaining the results, it can be stated that the initial hypothesis is confirmed.

NOTES

¹ The context of this study is my doctoral thesis on topic introduction and topic continuity on news items and tourist brochures (1999), directed by professor Angela Downing. I am indebted to her for her accessibility and valuable comments on this research.

² Van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) define the concept of macrostructure as the hierarchical representation of the different macropropositions that determine the content of a text. The highest proposition represents the global discourse topic, while other propositions of lower level represent what a stretch of text or a part of the whole text is about. As Downing points out "in cognitive approaches as in van Dijk and Kintsch (1983), this global meaning of a stretch of text is held not to be intrinsically present in the text itself, but rather, assigned to the text or discourse by readers or listeners" (1998: 26). The global discourse topic is determined by contextual, cognitive and pragmatic factors such as the extralinguistic situation in which the communicative interaction takes place, the general knowledge that both the writer and the reader share or the rhetoric purpose of the text.

³ Although I have adopted part of Dik's terminology, I am not always, as will be stated afterwards, in agreement with the definitions of the categories that he presents in *The Theory of Functional Grammar* (1989), especially when he refers to the notions of given topic and restopic.

⁴ In fact, the new referents introduced by indefinite or existential constructions will not be assigned a topical function unless they are kept alive in the linguistic context. A boundary has been drawn between those referential entities whose persistence is maintained after their introduction and those whose rate of persistence is zero or whose continuity is not kept alive after their first activation in the discourse. Only the first will be analysed as topics.

⁵ In this way I assume that Danes' thematic progression can play a key role in the widening and modification of the concept of given topic that Dik presents in his functional grammar. Danes distinguishes three different types of thematic progression and tries to show the relationship

between theme and rheme and the overall text. One of them is called 'TP with linear thematization of rhemes' and in this the rheme of the first clause becomes the thematic constituent of the next utterance, establishing by means of this progressive mechanism the internal cohesion of the text (Danes, 1974: 118). Therefore, the notion of known topic will be defined as that entity previously introduced in the text by means of another topic, a subtopic or other informative elements already activated in the linguistic context.

⁶ They have also been called 'reintroductory topics' (Keenan and Schieffelin, 1976).

⁷ I agree with Finch (2000: 211-121) when he states that while 'cohesion' refers to text-internal links, 'coherence' is concerned with text-external relevance. As Trask (1993: 39) affirms, the concept of coherence is determined by the degree to which a discourse makes sense in terms of our knowledge of the world.

⁸ As a great macrogenre current Anglo-Saxon journalism can be classified into two general subgenres: stories and comments (van Dijk, 1988a). In this sense, Martínez Albertos affirms that the first and immediate objective of journalistic information is to give news; in second place it is the subjective comment of the facts that have become news (1993: 44). Fairclough (1995: 72) expands the classification offered by Dijk and also distinguishes a third journalistic subgenre, 'background features', in order to make reference to the so called 'interpretive articles' that are located in an intermediate line between the purely informative style and the comment or evaluative style. Although the basic distinction between stories and comments is widely accepted, the classification of journalistic genres is a question which can neither be considered as solved nor exhausted. As van Dijk (1988a: 125) suggests there is a gradual transition between the various journalistic genres. Subgenres are not rigid frames with clear boundaries between them.

⁹ The variables of field, tenor and mode determine the register of a particular genre, that is, the variations the language suffers in a specific social situation of communication (Halliday and Hasan, 1985/1989: 12). A genre is, in turn, defined by a schematic macrostructure, considered as a cognitive model that facilitates its identification, understanding and interpretation. Whereas the genre is typically associated with the context of culture, the register is related to the situational context in which the communicative interaction is developed.

¹⁰ Although many Spanish scholars agree that journalism must be essentially objective (Martínez Albertos, 1993), news items are products which are logically mediated by ideological interests. In fact, with the term 'objectivity', Martínez Albertos (1993: 43) makes reference to the journalist's duty to truthfulness and intellectual honesty.

¹¹ Tunisia, Castleton, Stanford Hall, The Canterbury Tales and Our little farm.

¹² Tunisia. A living history lesson, Stanford Hall, Castleton, The Canterbury Tales and Our Little Farm.

¹³ In this sense, as Martínez Albertos (1993) and, partly, also Grijelmo (1997) state, the organization of the news item is usually distributed, fundamentally for reasons of space and time, in the form of a 'reversed pyramid', laid out in such a way that the initial paragraph tends to be the most relevant, from an informative perspective.

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