

AN ANALYSIS OF ALAN PATON'S *CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY* AS A DISCOURSE OF HOPE THROUGH CLEFT SENTENCES

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ABSTRACT

This paper is intended to demonstrate that the recurrent use of the marked syntactic structure called a cleft sentence in the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) has certain communicative implications because it is a structure appropriate to express feelings and to highlight information in climactic situations within this novel.

The analysis of cleft sentences in context will point out that they allow the writer to be conscious that he is assuring or denying something in a firm way and that they are also important structures for the textual organization of discourse.

The linguistic framework of this paper is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), 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.

Key words: predicated themes, cleft sentences, discourse analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Alan Paton, context.

1. INTRODUCTION

The intention of this paper is to demonstrate that the use of cleft sentences in the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) written by the South African writer Alan Paton (founder of the anti-apartheid Liberal Party) is a resource used by the author to highlight certain climactic moments and to represent the context in which the novel is placed: the apartheid period in South Africa. Systemic Functional Grammar will be the theoretical framework used to understand the main reasons for choosing between certain linguistic forms or

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others, depending on the function that those linguistic forms carry out in society.

This paper will analyse the different ways in which cleft sentences contribute to the analysis of the novel as a discourse of hope since this structure conveys certain communicative implications that allow the author to use it to talk about feelings such as love, fear, loyalty to God and to the country and to establish a contrast between the two main racial groups in South Africa: the white and black populations (Martínez Lirola, 2009).

The analysis will prove that the use of cleft sentences in the novel is a resource used by the author to highlight climatic moments and to build the context in which the novel is placed: the apartheid period in South Africa (Martínez Lirola and Smith, 2009). The study of grammatical patterns such as cleft sentences in the verbal art is essential to understand the meanings expressed in the novel under analysis. 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.”

This research will emphasize a very important use of cleft sentences: the fact that the cleft sentence is used by the protagonists in some of the most central moments of the novels makes clear that we are confronted by a structure very often used to emphasize, to highlight a certain part of the information or to point out feelings or emotions (Martínez Lirola, 2002a, 2007a). The cleft sentence contrasts with something previously said or highlights a certain fact that is important for the narrative.

The main hypothesis of this paper is that the recurrent use of cleft sentences has certain communicative implications that will be the object of this study. Our corpus of examples from *Cry, The Beloved Country* (1948), contains 56 examples of this marked syntactic structure.

I intend to consider the role of cleft sentences in the novel under analysis taking into consideration their function in creating meaning in the novel. In this sense, attention will be concentrated on meaning beyond the clause, as Martin and Rose (2007: 1) state: “[...] we want to focus on the social as it is constructed through texts, on the constitutive role of meanings in social life.”

The following study will point out how lexico-grammar gives language the potential to create different meanings. I concur with Eggins (2004: 139) in that 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.”

Paton was committed to resolving the socio-political situation of his country and his intention in this novel was to create a social consciousness, to oppose the dominant ideology in South Africa in his historical situation. His use of language appears clearly connected with a marked social reality (Martínez Lirola, 2002b, 2007b, 2008a). As Fairclough (1995: 55) states: “Language use-any text- is always simultaneously constitutive of (1) social identities, (2) social relations and (3) systems of knowledge and belief.”

This study will focus on the analysis of cleft sentences, in order to understand better the meanings expressed in the novel. As Halliday declares in his *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).

The recurrent use of a certain grammatical pattern such as the cleft sentence 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 (Carter et al., 2008; van Leeuwen, 2008; Blackledge, 2009). In this sense, I agree with Butt (2003: 11) in the following statement:

“But grammar is significant because (and only because) we know it is the organization 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**¹ 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.”

The theoretical 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 (Butt, 2008; Kress, 2010).

Paton, together with other authors who were opposed to apartheid, reinforced the charge that the freedom and dignity of the black populace were suffering. These authors defended the interests of the latter and through their novels attempted to persuade the white population to reconsider the meaning of freedom, justice, truth and love.

The exploration of cleft sentences 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.

Literature is a practice that is socially conditioned. Consequently the author evidences certain ideological convictions and certain interests since he is affected by the community’s characteristics (Teubert, 2010: 8). Therefore, literature is a link between the situation that the community is living, the history that surrounds it and the rest of the world since it attempts to transmit a message, to let the reader know what the socio-political situation was like.

¹ Bold type in this word and the following one appears in the original text.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE VARIABLES OF THE CONTEXT OF SITUATION IN THE NOVELS: FIELD, TENOR AND MODE

As regards the context of situation, when approaching *Cry, The Beloved Country* (1948), we read the narrative of a white and a black family, of black and white social groups and the discriminatory society in which they coexist. This novel, the story of Stephen Kumalo and the search for his son in Johannesburg, can be considered a product of his time because it illustrates the resulting social tensions and thereafter the search for brotherhood.

Due to the fact that the corpus of examples belongs to a novel, there is a very clear context in the 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 novel are essential: in South Africa, concretely during the early apartheid era. The plot in *Cry, The Beloved Country* (1948) indicates how the terrible conditions in which black people live take Absalom Kumalo into an extreme situation, in which he kills a white man.

Poynton (1985) points out that there are three dimensions inside the notion of tenor, to which I shall refer briefly:

The power dimension observes whether the relations between the participants are equal or not. In the case of this novel, the author, Alan Paton, exercises some power over the readers and attempts to make them aware of the facts that he is narrating.

The contact dimension makes reference to the existence, or not, of a contact relation between the participants. In this case, there is no contact. When readers read the novel, they establish a relationship with the author and are conscious of his thoughts and his ideology but they are not in contact with him. The author establishes a relationship with the reader throughout the characters, their psychology and thoughts and the context in which they are framed.

The affective involvement dimension refers to the extent to which the participants are emotionally involved or committed in a situation. It is evident that the author is committed and that the means to express his commitment is by writing this novel or any others of his books. Alan Paton attempts to have his readers share this commitment by affectively involving them.

The concept of mode makes reference to the role that language plays in the text. In the novel under analysis, language is not limited to presenting a series of actions but offers a detailed description of the facts that took place.

The author transmits the concrete cultural situation of his time together with the characteristics and social values of that situation through the main topics of the novel and through the use of language. He wishes to draw attention to the negative side of that society and suggests ways to improve it. As Thiong'o (1995: 290) 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”.

3. DEFINITION AND ANALYSIS OF THE STRUCTURE

This construction is known as a cleft sentence since it stems from the division of a simple sentence into two different parts (that constitute different sentences). It normally starts with the pronoun *it* which does not convey meaning, followed by the verb *be*. As Gómez González and González García (2005: 156) point out:

“Broadly, clefting identifies a discourse strategy whereby information is packaged or “cleft” into two units in order to fulfill a two-fold discourse effect, despite the differences entailed in variations of this pattern across languages: (1) to set up a relationship of identity of the “X is Y” specifying type between two units (e.g. a character defect=*that makes them go into politics*; *mi hijo* ‘my son’=*el que se viene a la yema de los dedos* ‘that pops up my head’) and (2) to give discourse prominence to generally (part of) one of the two units, the EIF (e.g. *a character defect* and *mi hijo* ‘my son’).

In Systemic Functional Grammar, the term used by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 95) is “predicated theme”, because the elements found 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.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 97) propose a double thematic analysis of cleft sentences. An example that illustrates both analyses is the following:

-It *was he* *who* *fired the shot.* (Paton, 1948: 84).

a) Theme	Rheme	Theme	Rheme
b) Theme			Rheme

Version (a) exemplifies 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, indicates the thematic structure of the whole sentence as predicative theme.

No matter what analysis is chosen, in analysis (a) and (b), the theme is the part of the message exhibiting less communicative dynamism because it hardly adds any information, as may be observed in *it* and *who*, whereas the

rheme is the expression that contains a higher level of communicative dynamism because that part of the message is essential to understand the message, as is evident in the highlighted element *he* and in the relative clause *who fired the shot*. Collins (1991: 170) refers to version (b) as “metaphorical analysis in which the superordinate clause is all thematic.”²

4. USE OF THE STRUCTURE IN CLIMATIC MOMENTS

It is very important to remind oneself that this structure is used to express feelings in climactic moments of the novel.

When the person in charge of the reformatory informs Kumalo that it was his son who had fired, he uses a cleft sentence:

- *It was he who fired the shot.* (Paton, 1948: 84).

Absalom Kumalo employs this construction when he confesses to his father that it was he who fired and declares this in front of the judge:

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 advises his son that he say the truth in front of the judge, he uses the cleft sentence:

- *It is only the truth you must tell him.* (Paton, 1948: 109).

This is also the structure employed by Stephen Kumalo to notify Arthur Jarvis’s father that it was Kumalo’s son who had killed Jarvis’ son:

It was my son that killed your son. (Paton, 1948: 155).

The following sentence appears in the speech pronounced by John Kumalo; he emotionally exclaims that the mines, one of the main sources of the wealth of the country, are profitable thanks to the poverty of people working there:

² In my opinion, the cleft sentence is grammatical metaphor no matter if we apply analysis (a) or (b).

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:

[...] he 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 sun would rise soon after five, and it was then it was done, they said. (Paton, 1948: 234).

5. CLEFT SENTENCES AS A MEANS TO TALK ABOUT FEELINGS

Cleft sentences clearly break the typical word order of English: Subject Verb Object (SVO). This contrast strongly emphasizes that this structure is an effective method to express feelings. In this sense, cleft sentences contribute to the vividness of the novels. As the following examples point out, the cleft sentence is a structure often used in the novel to talk about feelings such as sadness, hatred or love:

The feeling that we find in most examples of our corpus is fear:

It is not only the Europeans who are afraid. (Paton, 1948: 22).

This example states that predominant 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, [...] (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).

These feelings reflect what black people felt during the apartheid period: the fear of exploitation, of marginalization and of racial segregation; their hatred of the white person for being responsible for creating such a precarious situation and their love for the country above all.

This structure also conveys their anxiety about the negative social situation in that moment and in that place:

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 expresses strong emotion when the rain arrives, showing in this way that people hoped for this; in this example the demonstrative reference is cataphoric:

But it was this for which all men were waiting, the rain at last. (Paton, 1948: 207).

6. USE OF THE STRUCTURE TO EMPHASIZE AND TO CONTRAST

Cleft sentences allow the speaker or hearer to state something in a categorical way, generally in contrast with something already said. This structure is also appropriate to highlight information that we consider essential in a text because it is important for the textual organization of discourse. Moreover, cleft sentences are very useful in the written language because they help the reader to identify where the focus of the sentence falls, without the necessity of graphic help such as underlining, italics or capital letters (Martínez Lirola, 2008b).

After what has been said in the previous paragraphs, it is evident that the cleft sentence places a greater semantic burden on the elements which are more important for the transmission of the message after the introductory formula *it is* or *it was*; in this way, there is what is more important for the hearer in the first place, following in this way Jespersen's principle of topicality (1909-1949: Vol. VII: 54).

From the previous statements, the cleft sentence is a structure very much used in the written language since the combination theme/new information is marked, and normally of the contrastive type. The use of cleft sentences in the written language allows the reader to be conscious that he is assuring or denying something in a firm way and it is also an important structure for the

textual organization of discourse. The previous statement shows that cleft sentences are mainly used to emphasize in the majority of our examples:

In the following example, when Stephen Kumalo uses the cleft sentence, what he does is to insist to his son to say the truth in the trial:

Be of courage, my son. Do not forget there is a lawyer. But it is only the truth you must tell him. (Paton, 1948: 109).

When using the cleft sentence in the previous examples, the emphasis on the highlighted element is observed to point out that this is very important in the development of the action.

There are also examples in which the cleft sentence contrasts with something previously said. The cleft sentence is normally associated with the following contrastive formula: *it was not...*, *it was...*, *who/which...*, as Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 96) point out and is evident in several examples of our corpus:

[...] it is not we who will get more for our labour. It's the white man's shares that will rise [...] (Paton, 1948: 34-35).

He knows it is not he, it is these people who have done it. (Paton, 1948: 191).

The first example just cited is especially relevant because it is related to one of the main topics of this novel: it establishes a clear contrast between the two main racial groups in South Africa: the whites, enjoying privileged positions and becoming rich by taking advantage of the other racial group, and the black population, suffering unjust situations and condemned to work in subhuman conditions so that the whites profit even more.

In the following examples, a clear contrast is established between Absalom Kumalo and the other two young men who were accused. The fact that Absalom had been to a reformatory seems to favour the argument that he is guilty of Arthur Jarvis's murder:

The other two were not reformatory boys. It was he who fired the shot. (Paton, 1948: 84).

The next example highlights that Absalom himself established a contrast between him and his colleagues, because, although both were accompanying him, in the trial Absalom declares that he was the only one who fired:

They came with me, but it was I who shot the white man. (Paton, 1948: 88).

In a further example (Paton, 1948: 94) there is a clear contrast between Stephen Kumalo's feelings: first, he felt fear that became terror. The contrast of feelings is linked with the contrast between 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 following two examples there is a contrast between the role that corresponds to the judge and the mission that corresponds to people:

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).

In the next example, Absalom Kumalo establishes a contrast between what he has done and what Johannes did, which is very clear in the second cleft sentence of the paragraph. This example is pronounced in a very important moment in the novel under analysis when Absalom declares in the trial:

[...] 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).

In the example (Paton, 1948: 188), a woman establishes a contrast between the teacher ("umfundisi"), who has substituted for Stephen Kumalo when he has been absent, and Stephen himself:

We do not understand him, she says. It is only our umfundisi that we understand. (Paton, 1948: 188).

In many of the cleft sentences in the corpus, there are references to the white man, in such a way that he is emphasized. The following ones have positive connotations:

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).

In employing the previous examples the author wishes to reinforce the idea that in South Africa there are good white people who try to be gentle and contribute to improving the country, as Arthur Jarvis did, a white man known for being very active at church and for working in favour of African people. The lawyer who will defend Absalom Kumalo in the trial is also another white man, Mr. Carmichael, whose commitment consists on defending Absalom for free, which emphasizes that he is very generous.

Another white man who is important for the development of the novel is Mr. James Jarvis, Arthur Jarvis's father, because instead of desiring to take revenge after the murder of his son, he chooses to help the population of Ndotsheni. Stephen trusts him to contribute to the development of the place, as is evident in the following example:

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

Apart from these positive references, there are also negative comments about the white man:

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 reinforce the white man's responsibility for the unjust situation that grips South Africa.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of this paper points out that semantics accompanies the grammatical structure under analysis; hence our theoretical framework has been SFL, because for this linguistic school grammar is connected with meaning since all the different choices in language are meaning determined.

This paper has concentrated on the analysis of cleft sentences in context so as to observe the reasons why Alan Paton used this structure in the novel. In this sense, this paper offers a grammatical perspective because grammar is considered a tool that allows the study of the organization of any text.

According to the different examples analysed, from the formal point of view, the cleft sentence is a marked syntactical structure because it creates a local thematized structure throughout the predication (*it is/it was*), in such a way that the predicative element becomes the marked focus of the information, as we can see in: - [...], *but it was not Johannes* [...], which belongs to the cleft sentence- [...], *but it was not Johannes who had killed the white man, it was I myself* (Paton, 1948: 143).

As regards the form and function of the highlighted element, the analysis shows that it is varied and exhibits a flexible structure, although in a high percentage of our examples, the highlighted element is a nominal phrase with the function of subject, while there are also prepositional and adverbial groups and sentences. 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 falls on the highlighted element. The sequence theme-rheme is not reversible in cleft sentences.

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

The function of the cleft sentence can be understood if we concentrate for example on the function of the subject as theme. It is well known that the subject normally coincides with the theme. Therefore it should be unnecessary to use a special structure to place it in thematic position. An example from the novel will be offered and it will be rewritten so that there a cleft sentence occurs:

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

If we avoid the use of the cleft sentence, the example would be as follows:

Johannes had not killed the white man, I myself had killed him.

In this way almost all the contrast between both subjects is lost. In the oral language, it would be possible to mark that contrast with intonation, highlighting “Johannes” and “I”. The cleft sentence causes the reader to place emphasis on a specific element of the sentence.

The highlighted element is very important in these sentences because it and the copulative verb contain a low degree of communicative dynamism. The highlighted element is followed by the relative clause, which is introduced by *that*, functioning as the subject, in the majority of the examples in our corpus. With Huddleston (1984: 460), we reach the conclusion that there is a preference for the use of *that*, although *who* is also very common when its reference is personal.

Up to this point, the analysis has demonstrated that there is always a relationship between texts and society/culture, i.e., texts are sociologically shaped and also constitute society and culture. In this sense, the novel under analysis does not have an intrinsic meaning since meaning emerges according to the way the novels are used in social contexts. While reading the novel that have been analysed, the following question was kept in mind: why did the author use cleft sentences and under what circumstances? The fact that the cleft sentence is used by the protagonists in some of the most important moments of the novel makes clear that this structure is employed to emphasize, to highlight a certain part of the information or to point out feelings or emotions. The cleft sentence contrasts with something previously said or highlights a certain fact considered important for the narrative.

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