The language of educational linguistics in Hispanic Latin America
Choices of Theme in an emerging field

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This study aims to identify patterns of the system of THEME in Spanish in 28 educational linguistics' articles, an emerging field in Latin America. Results show a high number of textual and elaborated interpersonal Themes (especially in Conclusions), alongside a frequent choice of marked Themes (especially in Introductions) which adjust thematic strings, while the Subject is usually explicit and previous to the verb. Educationally-oriented articles tend to use more interpersonal Themes and preposed explicit Subjects, in what seems to be a disciplinary validation struggle. This research can help understand the construction of a new disciplinary discourse, connecting semantic and lexicogrammatical patterns to epistemological frameworks, while providing evidence to the realization of Theme and Subject across stages, disciplines and languages.

Keywords: subject, educational linguistics, reading and writing, disciplinary discourse, schematic structure, Latin America, Spanish, method of development, epistemology

1. Introduction

Disciplinary discourses have attracted the attention of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) for at least four decades. Researchers have focused on accounting for semantic and lexicogrammatical features, but also on situational and cultural configurations which may help to interpret linguistic findings. In particular, the study of emerging discourses' features, such as grammatical metaphor in scientific English, can provide linguistically-based evidence for discourse change and disputed scientific knowledge production spaces. For example, Halliday advocates the following perspective:

> I shall concentrate on what seems to me to be the prototypical syndrome of features that characterizes scientific English; and what I hope to suggest is that we can explain how this configuration evolved – provided, first, that we consider the features together rather than each in isolation; and secondly, that we are prepared to interpret them at every level, in lexicogrammatical, semantic, and socio-semiotic (situational and cultural) terms. (Halliday 2004:141)

This interest in the discourse of emerging disciplines (including register and genre features) and the epistemological and cultural practices which go with them can also be found in other fields of study, such as historical discourse analysis (Atkinson 1999; Valle 1999; Vallejos Llobet 2005), composition studies (Bazerman 1988, 1999), or languages for specific purposes (Hyland 2004). According to Hyland, there are disciplinary constraints on language, which move around the continuum of homogeneity and diversity, helping to single out disciplinary cultures, and which allow a writer "to create successful texts which display one's disciplinarity, or tacit knowledge expectations, for the practical purposes of communicating with peers" (Hyland 2004:10). Agreed upon disciplinary ways of constructing, communicating and negotiating knowledge also go through processes of hybridization and "cross-fertilization", which are enabled by both the influence and borrowing of theories and methods (Klein 1996). These processes are relevant to pinpoint the development of new, emerging disciplinary discourses.

Educational linguistics in Latin America, particularly related to language and literacy in higher education, is an emerging, still not totally institutionalized field. It has undergone a sharp development in the region during the last decades (Navarro et al. 2016). In 1980, the International Literacy Association released a Spanish-language journal, *Lectura y Vida* (*Reading and life*), which published scholarly articles until 2010. In the mid-1990s, the *UNESCO chair/regional network for the improvement of education quality and equity in Latin America (Reading and writing)*, an international network of scholars and practitioners interested in language and literacy education, was founded. Since then, this network has expanded to 11 countries and around 45 branches and has held national and international conventions. With the start of the new millennium, a dramatic growth in higher education enrolment and language and literacy teaching and writing initiatives attracted the attention of local scholars. During the last decade, four scientific journals' special issues were published in the main countries contributing to the field in Hispanic America (Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Mexico), gathering evidence-based perspectives from funded research projects and groups. This rising intellectual contribution went along with the institutionalization of other international networks, such as the *Latin American Network of Writing Centers and Programs* (2014) and the *Latin American Association of Writing Studies in Higher Education and Professional Contexts* (2016).

These milestones exemplify the development of educational linguistics as an emerging interdisciplinary field in Latin America, especially interested in literacy practices in higher education. This field draws from two well-established mother disciplines in the region: linguistics and education. As an interdisciplinary space, educational linguistics has yet to define how to be labelled (*educational linguistics? language pedagogy? academic literacy? writing studies?*), its objects of research (*writing practices? textual patterns?*), its methods for collecting data and demonstrating hypothesis (*ethnography? discourse analysis?*), its preferred theoretical frameworks and traditions and its main venues for institutional communication and collaboration, among other variables. These conversations and negotiations between cultural and epistemological perspectives must have textual implications. How is the language of this emerging discipline configured? Are there distinctive lexicogrammatical patterns which may be linked to disciplinary discussions? Is it possible to track different textual strategies to negotiate with others?

Scholars have recently started trying to answer these and other related questions, initially fostered by the international research project Initiatives of Reading and Writing in Higher Education in Latin America (ILEES), based on the University of California at Santa Barbara (cf. Bazerman et al. 2017). Research has focused on the development and configuration of the field (conflicting and conflating mother disciplines, topics, methods, frameworks, institutional contexts, among others) from the perspective of scholars (Tapia et al. 2016), as well as from content analysis of their publications (Navarro et al. 2016). Furthermore, research has also studied typical discursive and linguistic features of the discipline's language (Ávila Reyes 2017; Navarro & Ávila Reyes 2014), trying to understand how it realizes the discipline's epistemological and cultural configuration.

Findings show that there is a jurisdictional dispute, frequent in emerging disciplines, over who should be in charge of researching and teaching writing (Ávila Reyes 2017). This dispute ultimately constitutes three distinctive scholarly and textual personas: a writer associated with education and psychology as well-established mother disciplines; a writer associated with linguistics also as a well-established mother discipline; and a writer associated with educational linguistics as a new, interdisciplinary field which borrows from both education and linguistics. On the other hand, preliminary discursive semantic and lexicogrammatical analysis shows that writers relate to previous research, traditions and disciplines using different options of the system of APPRAISAL (Navarro & Ávila Reyes 2014). Some writers prefer to aggregate previous literature without further discussion (a more dialogically expansive, non-conflictive option), whereas others leave room for fewer, more specialized voices (a more dialogically restricted, isolating position). Another study has found that there are anecdotal introductions, which make use of writing crisis narratives to establish a niche, as opposed to epistemic

introductions, which draw from recognized authors, frameworks and traditions (Ávila Reyes in press).

This article aims to deepen these previous studies in terms of SFL through the analysis of lexicogrammatical patterns in a corpus of influential educational linguistics research articles published in Spanish in scientific journals' special issues on academic writing in Latin America during the last decade. In particular, it will account for the way textual meanings are realized in clauses through the system of THEME (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014), including textual, interpersonal and topical (experiential) Themes, and their relation to the realization of the Subject in the clause.[1] These lexicogrammatical patterns will be linked to textual (articles' phases) and contextual (articles' disciplinary orientation) variables, that is to say, to socio-semiotic variables. Thus, the article aims to shed some light on the following research questions:

1. What are some of the lexicogrammatical patterns (of the systems of THEME and MOOD) in the language of an emerging discipline, educational linguistics, in Hispanic Latin America?
2. Can these patterns be linked to socio-semiotic variables (schematic structure and disciplinary orientation)?

This article can help to understand an emerging disciplinary discourse, connecting semantic and lexicogrammatical patterns with epistemological frameworks, thus aggregating evidence to the systemic functional tradition of study of language in context. This understanding of educational linguistic ways of engaging discussions and constructing disciplinarity might even foster better-informed interdisciplinary knowledge-making projects and actions, not only in Latin America, but also in other regions, languages and disciplinary traditions. At the same time, this research can provide some textual evidence on the realization of Subject and Theme in Spanish which can enrich ongoing typological conversations on the systems of THEME and MOOD across discourses and languages. Finally, the contrastive study of writers' choices across the schematic structure of research articles may provide evidence for genre-oriented semantic and lexicogrammatical patterns.

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1. The initial capital means that it refers to the name of a structural function, whereas small capitals are used to refer to the name of a system (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: ix).

2.   Theoretical framework

2.1   The system of THEME in SFL

SFL understands language as a socio-semiotic system used by speakers and writers to construe situated meanings through choices in different strata and subsystems. According to Halliday, meaning choices relate to three main simultaneous communicative metafunctions which arrange the architecture of language: (1) the ideational metafunction, which organizes and categorizes the surrounding and inner world; (2) the interpersonal metafunction, which addresses positions, roles and relations among interacting participants; and (3) the textual metafunction, which enables ideational and interpersonal meanings as a flow of information in unfolding texts, distinguishing prominent and non-prominent information (Matthiessen et al. 2010). These metafunctions are systematically related to the configuration of the context of situation in terms of field, tenor, and mode, respectively. Therefore, speakers/writers use language to convey three types of meanings which are simultaneously embodied in the structure of the clause, a composite entity, to produce a single wording.

Among such systems, the system of THEME realizes the textual metafunction, providing a thematic structure to the clause and construing progression in the text. There are other systems to assign textual statuses to ideational and interpersonal meanings and to establish textual transitions, such as INFORMATION, CONJUNCTION, SUBSTITUTION-ELLIPSIS, REFERENCE and LEXICAL COHESION (cf. Matthiessen et al. 2010). Drawing from original terminology of the Prague School of Linguistics, Halliday and Matthiessen state that:

> The Theme is the element that serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that which locates and orients the clause within its context. The speaker chooses the Theme as his or her point of departure to guide the addressee in developing an interpretation of the message; by making part of the message prominent as Theme, the speaker enables the addressee to process the message.
>
> (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 89)

The Theme then points to "a kind of epicentre from which a message swells and expands to form [a] textual wave" (Teruya 2004: 230). In English and other languages, the Theme is only indicated by position in the clause: "In speaking or writing English we signal that an item has thematic status by putting it first" (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014; cf. Montemayor-Borsinger 2005). This definition is in contrast with the Prague functional perspective, which considers the informational nature of the element: the Theme carries the lowest communicative dynamic (Firbas 1992). Deepening Halliday's original definition, Matthiessen (1995) and Ravelli

(1995) argue that there must be a realization of an ideational element to identify the Theme and for the message to actually take off (Montemayor-Borsinger 2009: 95). In sum, the basic criterion to identify the Theme in the clause is to consider "the first group or phrase that has some function in the experiential structure of the clause, i.e. that functions as a participant, a circumstance or the process" (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 91).

This positional or sequential definition of Theme in English has been expanded by later studies in different languages, such as French (Caffarel 2006), Portuguese (Gouveia & Barbara 2004), Spanish (Arús Hita 2010) and Tagalog (Martin 2004), among others. For example, Martin (2004) shows that, in Tagalog, Theme is realized segmentally: theme is signaled by the particle *ang* at the end of the clause (unmarked) or at the beginning (marked) of the clause. In Japanese, both positional and segmental realization strategies coincide: theme markers (such as -*wa*) enunciate the textual status of the immediately preceding element, whereas the first element in the clause is prominent; both positional and segmental realization strategies usually coincide (Teruya 2004).

Finally, the Theme must be clearly differentiated from the (grammatical) Subject or "that of which something is predicated". The Subject is part of the system of MOOD, which realizes the interpersonal metafunction. However, the typical or unmarked English declarative clause maps them on to one another, together with the Actor or "doer of the action":

> We shall refer to the mapping of Theme on to Subject as the *unmarked Theme* of a declarative clause. The Subject is the element that is chosen as Theme unless there is good reason for choosing something else.
>
> (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 97)

2.2   Theme and discourse

The system of THEME helps to realize ideational and interpersonal meanings in the clause as a quantum of information in the flow of discourse; that is to say, it helps to orient the listener on how to interpret the information developed in the clause (Moyano 2016). This position has been explored by Peter Fries, who proposes that the selection of Theme is motivated by discourse. Fries introduces the concept "method of development" (hereafter MoD) to refer to the information carried by all the Themes in all the clauses of a paragraph or text, which constitute lexical strings. Therefore:

> Theme functions as an orienter to the message. It orients the listener/reader to the message that is about to be perceived and provides the framework for the interpretation of that message.   (Fries 1995: 318)

This perspective expands the scope of the Theme beyond the clause, helps to understand how the system of THEME contributes to the development of the structure of a text as a semantic unit, and allows building bridges between lexicogrammatical options and socio-semiotic interpretations. Fries distinguishes between three types of thematic progression and claims that they are related to different genres and languages (e.g. linear and Theme iteration are more frequent in English):

1. *Linear thematic progression:* The content of the Theme of a second sentence derives from the content of the previous Rheme, i.e. there is a progressive development of the text.
2. *Theme iteration progression*: the same Theme enters into relation with a number of different Rhemes, i.e. there is a co-referential chain of Rhemes beyond the clause.
3. *Derived Theme progression:* All Themes, although not co-referential, derive from a general notion or topic.

In addition, Fries proposes that the experiential meaning of the Theme is linked to the way the reader/listener understands the MoD of a text or text fragment. This means that changes in the experiential meaning would change the way the text is understood, which accounts for an active construction of textual meanings.

Thirdly, Fries establishes connections between the experiential meaning of Themes and genres and genre structures. Again, this position takes the textual metafunction beyond the clause:

> Thematic progressions and the experiential content of the Themes do not occur randomly in these texts. In my data, the frequencies of the various thematic progressions vary with genre type, the experiential content of Themes varies with genre type, and the proportions of times that certain meanings are expressed thematically also varies with genre type.   (Fries 1995: 355)

Further studies of genres have provided more evidence for this hypothesis. Espindola (2016), for example, finds a contrast between stories written for children and for adults: whereas the former show a tendency for the use of Theme iteration, the latter prefer linear thematic progression.

2.3   Types of Theme

Themes can be classified according to different criteria, as Taboada and Lavid (2003) point out. First, Themes can be classified according to the semantic meaning they convey (cf. Halliday & Matthiessen 2014):

a. The *topical Theme* is, in English, the first constituent which is participant, circumstance or process, i.e. the first element realizing an ideational meaning. When there is a textual or interpersonal Theme, the topical Theme tends to be unmarked.

b. The *textual Theme* precedes the topical Theme, plays no part in the experiential meaning of the clause, and is textual in function: it sets up a semantic relation with what precedes it. It is realized through continuatives (*well*), typical in dialogues; conjunctions, which link or bind the clause to another clause (*and, but, so, when, despite, if* and so on); and conjunctive or discourse Adjuncts (*for example, meanwhile*), which relate the clause to the preceding text.[2]

For this study, further and more complex realizations will also be considered. In Table 1 below, *this means that* is considered a textual Theme, roughly equivalent to *therefore*, which links the following statement to the previous one.

Table 1. Thematic analysis of Example (1)

III *Ello implica que*	II *una comprensión exitosa de textos multisemióticos disciplinares*	*exige a los lectores especializados estrategias de lectura de sistemas tales como el verbal pero también, por ejemplo, del gráfico, del matemático, del tipográfico y del color.* II III (19CH)[3]
This means that	a successful understanding of disciplinary multisemiotic texts	requires specialized readers to use reading strategies of systems such as the verbal one but also, for example, the graphic, the mathematical, the typographical and the color one.
Textual	Unmarked, topical, preposed	Rheme
	Theme	

c. The *interpersonal Theme* precedes the topical Theme, plays no part in the experiential meaning of the clause, and is interpersonal in function: it expresses the speaker/writer's angle or intended listener. It includes modal and Comment Adjuncts (*surely*), which express the speaker/writer's judgment or attitude to the content of the message; vocatives (*Jean*), used to address; and

2. As Halliday points out (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:110), discourse adjuncts can either be thematic (*therefore* in *therefore the scheme was abandoned*) or not (*therefore* in *the scheme was therefore abandoned*). The latter is a very frequent choice in the corpus of this study.

3. All the examples are taken from the corpus for this study. The number between brackets shows the article number, whereas the capital letters refer to the country (AR: Argentina; CH: Chile; CO: Colombia; ME: Mexico). For text annotation, III shows clause complexes and II clauses (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014). Subject is underlined. English translations try to resemble the structure of the Spanish clause, even when they might not sound natural or grammatical.

finite verbal operators (*wouldn't, must*), a small set of auxiliary verbs constructing primary tense or modality.

As for textual Theme, however, a more flexible, discursive and strategic perspective on interpersonal meanings is adopted in this study: interpersonal meanings can be realized in different structures, as well as being explicit or invoked. Tables 2 to 5 show examples, from different articles of the corpus, which provide evidence of a recurring ranking clause which is used to convey certainty and, therefore, is considered an interpersonal Theme:

Table 2. Thematic analysis of Example (2)

III *Como es sabido,*	II *las tareas de lectura en la universidad*	*se caracterizan como intertextuales, generalmente a partir de la construcción de argumentos o explicaciones acerca de un determinado tema.* II III (09ME).
As it is known,	reading tasks at university	are typically intertextual, generally based on the construction of arguments or explanations about certain topic.
Interpersonal	Unmarked, topical, preposed	Rheme
	Theme	

Table 3. Thematic analysis of Example (3)

III *Como es sabido,*	II *las formas de manifestación que tomará un texto*	*están ligadas al tipo de género y modo discursivo en él privilegiado, así como la situación de enunciación específica que se crea en el mismo.* II III (10ME)
As it is known,	the expressive features a text would show	are related to the preferred kind of genre and discursive mode, as well as to the specific enunciation situation created in the text.
Interpersonal	Unmarked, topical, preposed	Rheme
	Theme	

In addition, a group of resources conveying interpersonal meaning as options of the system of ENGAGEMENT (Martin & White 2005) are considered interpersonal Themes in this study when they are realized before the topical Theme. They cover positive or negative polarity (Taboada 1995) and textual Themes which simultaneously play an interpersonal role as they establish a dialogic position towards a presupposed reader: concessive (*despite that*), adversative (*but, however*), dismissive (*in any case*), verificative (*actually*) and variative (*alternatively*) (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014).

Themes (in particular, topical Themes) can also be classified according to their ideational role in the clause: participants, processes or circumstances. Finally,

Table 4. Thematic analysis of Example (4)

III *Como es sabido,*	II *en todo el sistema de educación formal e, incluso en el informal,*	*el texto escrito*	*se constituye en el medio fundamental a través del cual los estudiantes construyen y adquieren conocimientos especializados (Parodi 2008, 2014; Parodi & Burdiles 2015).* II III (19CH)
As it is known,	in the whole formal education system, and even in the informal one,	the written text	represents the main mean through which students construct and acquire specialized knowledge (Parodi, 2008; Parodi & Burdiles, 2015).
Interpersonal	Marked, topical, circumstance	Unmarked, topical, preposed	Rheme
	Theme		

Table 5. Thematic analysis of Example (5)

III *Es bien sabido que*	II *la dependencia de los estudiantes*	*no es un aspecto positivo*	*porque*	II *no*	*fomenta la responsabilidad frente a su proceso de aprendizaje.* II II III (28CO)	*[la dependencia de los estudiantes]*
It is well known that	students' dependence	is not a positive aspect	as	[it] does not	promote responsibility over their learning process	[students' dependence]
Interpersonal	Unmarked, topical, preposed	Rheme	Textual	Interpersonal	Rheme	Unmarked, topical, elided
	Theme			Theme		Theme

Themes (especially, topical Themes) can be also classified according to the probability of appearance within the structure of the clause (Taboada & Lavid 2003): marked or unmarked. As explained above, when the Theme is mapped on to the Subject in a declarative clause in English, it is considered an unmarked Theme. However, this is not exactly the case for Spanish, an SVO language with a relatively free order of elements in the clause. The Spanish Subject, realized in a nominal group which agrees in number and person with the verbal affixation, can move around the verb in different positions. Furthermore, and contrary to other Romance languages like French, the Subject in Spanish can be implicit through

ellipsis, retrievable from the context or cotext, and, at the same time, manifested in the verbal affix.[4]

Because of this flexibility, there is an ongoing controversy on what the means of realization of Theme in Spanish are (Ghio & Fernández 2005; Montemayor-Borsinger 2009; Arús Hita 2010; Cegarra 2015; Lavid et al. 2010). Until recently, most research adopted a sequential criterion to understand Theme in Spanish. Contrastively, and based on extensive research, Moyano identifies Theme as the participant which agrees with the verbal affix, whether it is implicit or explicit, and, if explicit, prior or postponed to the verb:

> In Spanish, it [the unmarked Theme] is realized by agreement, by means of the verbal affix as a thematic marker located within the domain of the verbal group indicating the participant which realizes this clause textual function; this is the case regardless of whether the agreeing participant is explicit as first experiential element of the clause, implicit by ellipsis or postponed to the Process.
>
> (Moyano 2016:196)

From this point of view, Spanish shows a thematic marker, namely the verbal affix, which singles out the agreeing participant as the unmarked Theme, and therefore the verb can never be Theme (cf. Taboada 1995; Montemayor-Borsinger 2005, 2009; Moss 2009). In contrast, the marked Theme is indeed sequential and depends on which element realizes the first experiential component in the clause, so that, as in Japanese, marked Theme in Spanish has one means of realization, while unmarked Theme has another:

> Marked Theme in both languages [Spanish and English] is realized sequentially, by locating an element other than the agreeing participant as the first experiential constituent of the clause.   (Moyano 2016:196)

This means that in Spanish the unmarked topical Theme is based *on agreement* (the agreeing participant), but there also can be a *sequential* marked topical Theme if something other than the agreeing participant is realized as the first experiential element of the clause.[5] In other words, the topical unmarked Theme in Spanish is the nominal group (explicit or implicit; if explicit, preposed or postponed) which agrees with the verbal affix. However, when an experiential element other than this participant is placed as the first element of the clause, there is also a

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4. See Quiroz (2018) for recent responses to this classic understanding of MOOD in Spanish.

5. In Spanish, clitics are often preposed to the verb and realize participants conveying ideational meaning. However, they are usually considered part of the scope of the verb or verbal group. For this reason, in this study they will never be considered topical marked Themes. cf. Quiroz (2017).

marked Theme. Moyano provides discursive evidence for this claim. In her corpus of scientific articles, a purely sequential criterion would not construct a consistent MoD: that is, the resulting string of Themes would include elements which are inconsistently related to field. Notice that marked Theme does not imply that there is no unmarked Theme: both Themes are realized together in the clause, the former, which is less frequent, sequentially; the latter, which is highly frequent, by agreement.[6] There are two layers of thematic structure, so to speak: unmarked Theme in Spanish constructs the MoD, whereas marked Theme adds parameters and adjustments of understanding (typically circumstances, but also non-agreeing participants) modifying that MoD.

This study draws from this conceptualization of Theme in Spanish to code the corpus. Therefore, a clause might include a topical marked Theme followed by an unmarked preposed topical Theme (as in Example (4) above) or just an unmarked topical Theme, either preposed (Examples (2) and (3)), elided (as in the second clause of Example (5)) or postponed. These marked and unmarked topical Themes can also be preceded by textual (Example (1)) or interpersonal (Examples (2–5)) Themes. These particularities of the system of THEME in Spanish can explain, for instance, that unmarked Theme tends to be explicit and preposed when it first appears in a string of Themes, then elided in subsequent clauses and clause complexes (contributing to create cohesive co-referential ties within the text as a whole), but it becomes explicit again when the participant is changed (Moyano 2016).

3.   Corpus and methodology

The corpus for this study comprises 28 research articles written in Spanish and published during 2006–2016 in special issues on writing from the main contributing countries in Hispanic America: Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico. These four special issues include some of the most influential authors in the region and therefore account for the current debates and conversations in the field. Table 6 shows more information on the corpus.

The corpus was coded with the assistance of QSR NVivo 11 qualitative data analysis software in relation to the following variables:

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6.   It is worth mentioning that in Spanish there are clauses with no Theme, such as those which include existential processes.

1.   *Context*

The corpus was classified according to the articles' main disciplinary affiliation (education, linguistics, educational linguistics). To establish this variable, three aspects were considered: (a) 1st author's current institutional affiliation, (b) 1st author's university degrees, and (c) title and abstract of the article, especially concerning topic and framework of the article. It is worth noting that, within an emerging field, authors' main disciplinary affiliation is not always something static, as some scholars adopt a different research persona depending on the research they do; the same person can follow a different framework and methodology when they write an article about the administration of a writing initiative or the analysis of mitigation patterns in dissertations. This is why aspect (c) is crucial to decide on the author's affiliation in the particular article under consideration.

To guarantee that this classification is consistent and valid, a survey was conducted among experienced researchers from Spanish-speaking Latin American countries (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay) who were not first authors in the corpus; 34 researchers answered the survey. In the survey, the three possible variables were defined as follows:

Table 6. Corpus of 28 articles from educational linguistics included in special issues on writing published in Hispanic America (2006–2016)

Country	Journal	Year	Special issue title	n. of articles
Argentina	*Signo y Seña*	2006	*Procesos y prácticas de escritura en la educación superior* 'Writing processes and practices in higher education'	4
Chile	*Signos*	2016	*Procesos de lectura y escritura en el mundo contemporáneo de lengua española* 'Reading and writing processes in Spanish language contemporary world'	11
Colombia	*Grafía*	2016	*Desarrollos investigativos en lectura y escritura, en y para Latinoamérica* 'Reading and writing research developments in and for Latin America'	5
Mexico	*Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa*	2013	*Lectura y escritura académica en la educación media superior y superior* 'Academic reading and writing in high school and higher education'	8
Total				**28**

a. *Education, educational psychology*
   Articles related to the study of the teaching and learning process and initiatives through reading and writing, but without explicit references to linguistic variables or a clear theory of language or writing. The author usually (but not always) is a graduate from educational fields and belongs to an education department.

b. *Educational linguistics, literacy, writing teaching*
   Articles related to the study or administration of writing and reading teaching and learning initiatives, with explicit references to linguistic variables or a clear theory of language or writing: alternatively, articles related to the study of linguistic or discursive features, but aiming to address pedagogical goals or writing teaching initiatives. The author usually (but not always) is a graduate from educational or linguistics fields and belongs to an education or linguistics department.

c. *Linguistics, psycholinguistics, discourse studies*
   Articles related to the study of linguistic, grammatical or discursive features. Most research is interested in genres, metadiscourse, intertextuality, and rhetorical structure, with a textual focus and without references to writers, readers and students: alternatively, articles related to language production and reception from an experimental point of view, without attention to ecological teaching and learning situations. There is a clear theory of language or writing, but there is no clear theory of learning or teaching. The author usually (but not always) is a graduate from linguistic fields and belongs to a linguistics department.

Final classification of articles' disciplinary approach displays a balance among disciplinary clusters: articles offer either an interdisciplinary approach (39%, $n=11$), a linguistically-oriented approach (32%, $n=9$) or an educational approach (29%, $n=8$).[7] It is worth mentioning that most answers agreed on whether an article from the corpus is on the linguistic (linguistics or educational linguistics) or the educational (education or educational linguistics) scope of the continuum, except for 3.6% of the answers. In addition, the analysis shows that there seem to be less coincidences on articles classified as educationally-oriented (average agreement: 54%; lowest: 47%; highest: 65%), compared to interdisciplinary (average agreement: 72%; lowest: 59%; highest: 97%) and linguistically-oriented (average agreement: 74%; lowest: 56%; highest: 94%) articles. This could mean that education as a discipline is not easily recognizable as a field interested in reading and writing by the community in terms of its methods and theoretical framework, and therefore there is a need to use more marked options of the systems of MOOD and THEME (see below).

2. *Schematic structure*

   The articles' schematic structure (Eggins 2004) was coded, considering sub-titles and metadiscourse frame markers (those resources which "refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages"; Hyland 2005:49) from the texts as hints for structure organization. This study focuses on the introduction and conclusion sections, as they usually create a niche, sum up findings and point out future developments in relation to the field and previous traditions and research (Swales 2004): that is, as specifically rhetoric phases of the research article genre, they are particularly rich to try to understand the discourse of the discipline.

3. *Clauses*

   Each ranking declarative clause in the introduction and conclusion sections was coded. Non-declarative (imperative, interrogative) and shift-ranked or embedded clauses were not considered, as neither were considered titles, subtitles nor footnotes.

4. *Subject*

   Subject was coded as either explicit or implicit (verbal agreement) and as either preposed or postponed to the verb (when explicit).

5. *Theme*

   Theme was coded according to its type (topical, textual and/or interpersonal) and its probability of appearances (marked or unmarked).

Additionally, different strategies were implemented to guarantee the consistency and accuracy of the qualitative analysis. The main researcher and an assistant independently explored articles from the corpus, identified difficulties, wrote down typical realizations of different phenomena, compared the analyses and agreed on coding criteria, using relevant literature to decide on difficult fragments. After this calibration process, the corpus was coded. To determine inter-rater reliability (kappa) and offer analysis consistency, 2 articles per country (n: 8; 29% of the corpus) were separately coded by both analysts; the coincidence was 0.82 (more than 0.75 is considered an excellent agreement beyond chance; cf. Fleiss et al. 2003:604). After consistency was tested, the resulting realizations of each node, provided by NVivo as a separate list, were carefully studied to look for

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7. If these figures are classified according to each journal's country, Chile's journal turns out to have an overrepresentation of linguistics research (64%; n: 7), with no pure educational research, opposite to Colombia's journal, where there are no purely linguistics texts. Argentina's journal includes mostly interdisciplinary articles (75%, n. 3), whereas Mexico's journal is the only one including the three different approaches. These results, although not representative, add some evidence that confirms previous studies on dominant mother disciplines in each country's main journals devoted to writing in higher education (Navarro et al. 2016).

inconsistencies and recoded if necessary. The text search tool from NVivo was also used to identify recurrent realizations of certain phenomena that could have been omitted by the analysis.

4.   Results and discussion

4.1 Theme

Table 7 shows the general patterns of appearance of Theme across the corpus:[8]

Table 7. Distribution of Theme across the corpus

	Total		Schematic structure				Disciplinary affiliation					
			Introduction		Conclusions		Education		Edu ling		Linguistics	
	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.
Probability of appearance												
Marked	15	206	18	125	12	81	15	51	14	77	15	78
Unmarked	85	1193	82	571	88	622	85	292	86	469	85	432
Total	100	1399	100	696	100	703	100	343	100	546	100	510
Type												
Topical	66	1399	70	700	62	699	64	346	66	544	67	509
Interpersonal	12	254	10	95	14	159	15	81	10	84	12	89
Textual	22	473	21	205	24	268	21	116	23	192	22	165
Total	100	2126	100	1000	100	1126	100	543	100	820	100	763

(Left margin vertical label: *Theme*)

Unmarked (topical) Theme is predominant in the corpus (85% of total occurrences). Most Themes are topical (66%), again an expected finding taking into account that Theme must include an element with an ideational function. On the contrary, results are surprising when marked and non-topical realizations are considered: 15% of occurrences of Theme are marked, while around 1 out of 10 (12%) Themes convey interpersonal meaning and around 2 out of 10 (22%) Themes convey textual meaning. Thus, there is a high frequency of thematic elements which are meant to adjust the interpretation of the clause in ideational, interpersonal and textual terms. Interpersonal Themes include *queremos señalar* 'we would like to point out that', *es bien sabido que* 'it is well known that', *es posible que* 'it is possible that', *en apariencia* 'apparently', *podríamos afirmar que* 'we could state that', among

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8.   % does not express percentage of ranking clauses, but relative participation in the total number of instantiations. Probability of appearance applies only to topical Themes.

others. These frequent realizations of the interpersonal Theme convey levels of certainty and probability, show the writers' intentions, aim to control the readers' possible interpretations, and express evaluations. This frequent realization of textual and interpersonal Themes could be attributed to scientific writing in general, as expert writers tend to convey interpersonal and textual meanings more often (Hyland 2005), or rather to an emerging disciplinary space which needs to set the boundaries of the field. Further contrastive studies should confirm or dismiss these hypotheses.

Introductions (18%) show more marked Themes than Conclusions (12%). In general, marked Themes are circumstances as the first experiential element of the clause, particularly related to time and place (geographically or disciplinary speaking): *hoy* 'today', *en nuestro país* 'in our country', *en las últimas décadas* 'during the last decades', *particularmente en las humanidades* 'particularly in the Humanities', among others. Describing the temporal, geographical and disciplinary specificities of the research and of the common knowledge of a certain topic seems necessary for an emerging discipline which is still to agree on which its common grounds are. Moreover, Conclusions add more textual (24%) and interpersonal meanings (14%) than Introductions (21% and 10%, respectively), thus reinforcing cohesive ties and writers' perspectives at the final stage of texts.

When subdisciplines are considered, education tends to use more interpersonal Themes (15%) than the other disciplinary orientations: linguistics (12%) and educational linguistics (10%). Interestingly, this result can be linked to contextual findings: the disciplinary cluster which is more difficult to agree on is also the one which needs to orient readers more. This suggestive contrast, which is consistent with contrasts in the use of Subject (see below), does not extend to textual and marked Themes, which show little difference across subdisciplines.

A more qualitative approach shows that declarative ranking clauses in the corpus tend to be long, with several rank-shifted clauses and nominalizations: they usually include a single process and have textual and complex interpersonal and textual Themes. Example (6) on Table 8 illustrates this typical configuration.

In Example (6), there is an existential process ('appears'), an element realizing the existent role ('one [argument]') and two rank-shifted clauses modifying it ('that insist on including writing as a teaching subject across the curriculum' and 'that conceptualizes it as a means of social participation and citizenship empowerment'). The system of THEME is very rich: 'It is suggestive to verify' includes an element of modality conveying a positive appraisal ('suggestive') and assigning a high probability of truth ('verify') to what comes next, so it realizes a complex interpersonal Theme; whereas 'too' is a textual Theme which, through the system of CONJUNCTION, links this clause to previous clauses, collaborating to textual cohesion. The first element to express experiential meaning is 'among the arguments that

Table 8. Thematic analysis of Example (6)

III *Resulta sugerente comprobar,*	*también, que*	II *entre los argumentos que insisten en incluir la escritura como objeto de enseñanza a través del currículum*	*aparece*	*uno que la reconoce en tanto instrumento de participación social y poder ciudadano (Bazerman et al. 2006)* . II III (02AR)
It is suggestive to verify,	too, that	among the arguments that insist on including writing as a teaching subject across the curriculum	appears	one that conceptualizes it as a means of social participation and citizenship empowerment (Bazerman et al. 2006).
Interpersonal	Textual	Marked, topical, circumstance	Rheme	Unmarked, topical, postponed
		Theme		Theme

insist on including writing as a teaching subject across the curriculum', so it is the topical Theme but, as Circumstance in first position, it is marked Theme: it helps to identify what the main claim is and what the postponed argument contributes to: the need to include writing across the curriculum. The postponed existential role, here the agreeing nominal group, is the unmarked Theme.

As shown by the literature on Theme, marked Theme adds hints to interpret or slightly changes the MoD. Example (7) in Table 9 provides textual evidence for this mechanism.

Table 9. Thematic analysis of Example (7)

III II *Los buenos lectores en primer año*	*buscan – mayoritariamente – las informaciones del texto*	*y*	II *en segundo año*	*apelan a los conocimientos previos. III* (04AR)	*[Los buenos lectores]*
Good readers in first year	look for – mostly – information included in the text	and	in second year	invoke previous knowledge.	[Good readers]
Unmarked, topical, preposed	Rheme	Textual	Marked, topical, circumstance	Rheme	Unmarked, topical, eliede
Theme			Theme		Theme

In Example (7), the second clause in the clause complex includes a textual Theme which links it to the previous clause and a marked Theme slightly modifying some aspect (the year of study) of the unmarked Theme, which continues to be the same and becomes elided to add cohesive ties.

4.2   Subject

Table 10 presents the general patterns of appearance of Subject across the corpus.

Table 10. Distribution of subject across the corpus

		Total		Schematic structure				Disciplinary affiliation					
				Introduction		Conclusions		Education		Edu ling		Linguistics	
		%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.
Subject	Postponed (explicit)	9	107	10	55	8	52	9	25	8	39	10	43
	Preposed (explicit)	56	670	54	303	58	367	62	182	54	256	54	232
	Verbal affix only (implicit)	35	416	37	206	33	210	29	85	38	178	36	153
	Total	100	1193	100	564	100	629	100	292	100	473	100	428

The distribution of Subject shows its flexibility: preposed to the verb, postponed to the verb or elided. However, it is usually realized in its unmarked, canonical position: explicit and previous to the verb (56%).

When exploring the distribution of Subject within the schematic structure, it becomes clear that it is more canonical in the Conclusions than in the Introductions: preposed explicit Subject accounts for 58% of the occurrences in the final stage of texts, but it drops to 54% in the initial stage. Therefore, Subject, just like Theme, tends to be more marked in the introductory areas of articles.

Similarly to the distribution of Themes across subdisciplines, disciplinary affiliation seems to suggest that education needs to be more explicit: preposed explicit Subject accounts for 62% of occurrences, but this figure drops to 54% in the other two subdisciplines. Conversely, verbal affix only is low in education (29%), but it goes up to 36% in linguistics and 38% in educational linguistics. Thus, authors and articles belonging to education as a disciplinary space tend to use more explicit resources to adjust interpretations or to change expected linguistic patterns than other subdisciplines.

From a qualitative point of view, a typical introduction might well construe a string of preposed explicit Subjects, which are also unmarked Themes, which draw a picture of approaches to the topic. The following examples, analyzed on Tables 11 to 15, comprise the first paragraph of an article.

In Example (8), the first Subject/Theme realizes the main topic of the paragraph (*la lectura y la escritura de textos académicos* 'reading and writing academic texts'), whereas the following Subject/Themes of Examples (9–12), all of them preposed and explicit, list a variety of approaches and frameworks to study that topic.

Table 11. Thematic analysis of Example (8)

III II _La lectura y la escritura de textos académicos_	_se ha estudiado desde diferentes acercamientos teórico-metodológicos: la comprensión textual (van Dijk 1988); los procesos cognitivos (Goodman 1994) o la relación entre discurso, comprensión y aprendizaje (García et al. 2005)._ II
Reading and writing academic texts	has been approached from different theoretical and methodological perspectives: textual understanding (van Dijk 1988); cognitive processes (Goodman 1994) or the relationship between discourse, understanding and learning (García et al. 2005).
Unmarked, topical, preposed Theme	Rheme

Table 12. Thematic analysis of Example (9)

II _Otro enfoque, el sociocultural_	_analiza la lectura y la escritura como prácticas letradas insertas en las prácticas sociales situadas (Cassany, s/f)._ II
Another perspective, the sociocultural approach,	studies reading and writing as literacy practices inscribed within situated social practices (Cassany, s/f).
Unmarked, topical, preposed Theme	Rheme

Table 13. Thematic analysis of Example (10)

II _Algunas investigaciones sobre la enseñanza de la lectura_	_se han realizado desde las teorías de la enunciación y sociocognitiva._ II
Some research on teaching reading	has been carried out drawing from enunciation and sociocognitive theories.
Unmarked, topical, preposed Theme	Rheme

In addition, in 1 out of 3 occurrences the Subject is elided (35%). Elided Subject is very often in impersonal structures such as the passive voice with _se_ or in the first-person plural (the typical authorial persona, very often coinciding with the authors' number). In fact, the pronoun _nosotros_ 'we' is consistently elided in the corpus. A query using the text search tool for the pronoun _nosotros_ (and also the singular equivalent, _yo_ 'I') shows only one instance of a pronoun referring to the authors (in 16CH) in the whole corpus. Strings of elided Subjects, mapped on to unmarked Themes, are common to refer to lists of procedures, as in the following examples on Tables 16 to 21, which belong to the same paragraph.

Table 14. Thematic analysis of Example (11)

II *Independientemente del enfoque,*	*las perspectivas actuales*	*coinciden en que las competencias lectora y escrita atienden a una estructura más compleja que sólo una clasificación basada en la tipología textual o bien como una estructura lineal integrada por introducción, desarrollo y conclusión.* II
Regardless of the approach,	current perspectives	agree that reading and writing skills involve a more complex structure than just a classification based on textual typology or rather related to a linear structure comprising introduction, development and conclusion.
Marked, topical	Unmarked, topical, preposed	Rheme
	Theme	

Table 15. Thematic analysis of Example (12)

II *Los acercamientos teóricos y empíricos actuales*	*estudian las estructuras textuales basadas en la enunciación, en el discurso y en el papel del receptor como constructor de significaciones a partir de sus propios referentes, experiencias, ideología y representaciones de su mundo.* II III (07ME)
Current theoretical and empirical approaches	study text structures based on enunciation, discourse and the receiver's role as a meaning – maker that appeals to their own referents, experiences, ideology and world representations.
Unmarked, topical, preposed	Rheme
Theme	

Table 16. Thematic analysis of Example (13)

III II *El artículo*	*se organiza del siguiente modo:* II
The article	is organized in the following way:
Unmarked, topical, preposed	Rheme
Theme	

In Example (13), the first Subject is canonical (preposed to the verb) and it also realizes the main Theme of the paragraph: *el artículo* 'the article'. Then, the elided Subject *nosotros* 'we' appears 7 times in this paragraph as unmarked Theme, construing a string of actions and procedures carried out by the authors. Marked topical Themes adjust the interpretation of the string of Themes through circumstances referring to places in the article (*en la primera parte* 'in the first part', *en*

Table 17. Thematic analysis of Example (14)

II *en la primera parte*	*presentamos el marco de referencia* II	*y*	II *abordamos el uso del ET [eye tracking] en investigaciones de lectura.* II	*[nosotros]*
in the first part,	present the framework	and	address the use of ET [eye tracking] in reading research.	[we]
Marked, topical, circumstance	Rheme	Textual	Rheme	Unmarked, topical, elided
Theme		Theme		Theme

Table 18. Thematic analysis of Example (15)

II *Brevemente*	*comentamos las teorías y modelos de comprensión de gráficos.* II	*[nosotros]*
Briefly	elaborate on graphics theories and understanding models.	[we]
Marked, topical, circumstance	Rheme	Unmarked, topical, elided
Theme		Theme

Table 19. Thematic analysis of Example (16)

II *En la segunda parte,*	*nos enfocamos en el marco metodológico* II	*[nosotros]*	*y*	II *se incluyen*	*las preguntas de investigación, detalles del tipo de diseño experimental, los materiales y los sujetos de la muestra* . II
In the second part,	focus on methodology	[we]	and	are included	the research questions, details on experimental design type, materials and the subjects of the sample.
Marked, topical, circumstance	Rheme	Unmarked, topical, elided	Textual	Rheme	Unmarked, topical, postponed
Theme		Theme	Theme		Theme

la segunda parte 'in the second part') or their extent (*brevemente* 'briefly'). Impersonal structures include variable passive voice with postponed explicit Subject (*se incluyen* 'are included', *se describe[n]* 'is[are] described'). Textual Themes (*y* 'and', *junto a ello* 'together with that', *por último* 'lastly') help to construe texture among clauses.

Table 20. Thematic analysis of Example (17)

Junto a ello,	II *se describe[n]* 9	*la encuesta y las preguntas a que se enfrentaron los participantes una vez finalizado el experimento con ET* . II
Together with that,	is[are] described	the survey and the questions that participants faced once the experiment with ET was over.
Textual Theme	Rheme	Unmarked, topical, postponed Theme

Table 21. Thematic analysis of Example (18)

Por último,	II *entregamos los resultados,* II	II *los discutimos* II	*y*	II *esbozamos conclusiones y proyecciones.* II III (19CH)	*[nosotros]*
Lastly,	present the results	discuss them,	and	outline conclusions and projections	[we]
Textual	Rheme	Rheme	Textual		Unmarked, topical, elided
Theme			Theme		Theme

5.   Conclusions

Educational linguistics is an emerging discipline in Hispanic America and as such is looking for its own agreed-upon language and epistemological beliefs. The systems of THEME and MOOD can help to understand this evolving disciplinary discourse by providing lexicogrammatical evidence which allows discursive and contextual interpretations. In addition, the analysis contributes some evidence on how these systems are organized in Spanish.

The corpus exhibits a high number of textual and elaborated interpersonal Themes, which create textual ties and orient readers' interpretation of ideational meanings, as well as a frequent choice of marked Themes, which adjust thematic strings and whose distribution is stable across subdisciplines. The Subject is usually realized in its unmarked, canonical position: explicit and prior to the verb.

Introductions to articles show more marked Themes than Conclusions, setting the geographical and temporal boundaries and pointing out common knowledge of this emerging field, whereas Conclusions show more interpersonal and

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9. Within the corpus, it is common to find passive voice with singular agreement when the first nominal agreeing element is singular, as in Example (17). Alternatively, this example could be interpreted as invariable impersonal passive voice without unmarked Theme.

textual meanings in thematic position, focusing on creating textual ties and orienting the reader's understanding of findings. Writers in educationally-oriented articles, especially common in the Colombian journal, tend to use more interpersonal Themes and preposed explicit Subjects, which further adjust how the thematic strings should be understood. This could be interpreted as a validation struggle to explicitly join the disciplinary conversation by a subdiscipline which is not easily identified by peers, although it covers around one third of the corpus.

In summary, educational linguistics as an emerging field shows disciplinary orientations which are easily recognized by members of the community, confirming findings of previous studies. These socio-semiotic features correspond to common choices of the systems of THEME and MOOD, used differently across articles' stages, which aim to set topics and boundaries of the field and adjust readers interpretations, especially for educationally-oriented articles.

Finally, the results have provided more evidence on the enriching interaction of Theme by agreement and positional Theme in Spanish. In particular, it was suggested that the array of potential realizations of unmarked Theme (preposed to the verb, elided but recoverable from cotext or context, or rather postponed to the verb) convey different meanings in terms of waves of information: a preposed, explicit Theme usually changes the topic, whereas elided Themes describe methodological actions and writing organization.

From a more general view, findings have contributed to the understanding of interrelated linguistic, situational and cultural phenomena, particularly the interdisciplinary perspective of an emerging field across schematic stages of a key genre for knowledge construction and negotiation. Moreover, results have aggregated evidence for the typological description of the systems of THEME and MOOD across disciplinary discourses and languages.

Acknowledgements

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