A Systemic Functional approach to literature: a preliminary study of two postcolonial texts

Norma L. Alfonso & Miriam P. Germani

Abstract
The Systemic Functional approach to language, mainly developed by Michael Halliday, “is increasingly being recognized as providing a very useful descriptive and interpretative framework for viewing language as a strategic meaning-making resource” (Eggins 1994: 1). It focuses on the analysis of authentic texts in relation to the cultural social context in which they occur to discover how meanings are produced in interaction. By applying this approach to the analysis of literary texts, it is possible to isolate patterns which will allow to “provide an objective linguistic basis for interpreting a work” (Kennedy 1991: 96). The study of the three language metafunctions described by Halliday constitutes a valuable tool which can be combined with postcolonial literary theories to achieve a deeper understanding of the authors’ ideas as expressed in their works. The purpose of this paper is to compare excerpts from two postcolonial literary texts: “Integration”, by Native American author Sherman Alexie, and A Small Place, by Caribbean author Jamaica Kinkaid. The selected excerpts deal with discrimination viewed from a postcolonial perspective, since the authors belong to oppressed minorities within a hegemonic Anglo Saxon society.

Key words: Systemic Functional Linguistics, socio-cultural context, postcolonial literature, literary analysis, resistance.

Estudio preliminar de dos textos literarios poscoloniales desde la perspectiva de la Lingüística Sistémica Funcional

Resumen
La Lingüística Sistémica Funcional, desarrollada principalmente por Michael Halliday, provee un marco teórico útil para la descripción e interpretación del lenguaje como medio de creación de significados (Eggins 1994: 1). Desde esta perspectiva se analizan textos auténticos en relación al contexto sociocultural en el que ocurren para descubrir cómo se producen esos significados en la interacción. Al emplear este enfoque al análisis de textos literarios, se pueden aislar estructuras que permitirán obtener una base lingüística objetiva para interpretar una obra literaria (Kennedy 1991: 96). El estudio de las tres metafunciones del lenguaje descriptas por Halliday constituye una herramienta valiosa que combinada con teorías literarias poscoloniales posibilita una mayor comprensión de las ideas expresadas por los autores en sus producciones. El objetivo de este trabajo es comparar extractos de dos textos literarios poscoloniales: “Integration” del autor indígena estadounidense Sherman Alexie, y A Small Place de la autora caribeña Jamaica Kinkaid. Las partes seleccionadas desarrollan el tema de la discriminación visto desde una perspectiva poscolonial, ya que ambos autores pertenecen a minorías oprimidas por la sociedad hegemónica anglosajona.

Palabras clave: Lingüística Sistémica Funcional, contexto socio-cultural, literatura poscolonial, análisis literario, resistencia.
Estudo preliminar de dois textos literários pós-colonias sob a perspectiva da Lingüística Sistêmica Funcional

Resumo


Palavras chave: Lingüística Sistêmica Funcional, contexto sócio-cultural, literatura pós-colonial, análise literária, resistência.
The Systemic Functional Approach to language, mainly developed by Michael Halliday, “is increasingly being recognized as providing a very useful descriptive and interpretive framework for viewing language as a strategic meaning-making resource” (Eggins 1994: 1). It focuses on the analysis of authentic texts in relation to the socio-cultural context in which they occur to discover how meanings are produced in interaction (Eggins 1994: 3).

By applying the systemic functional approach to the analysis of literary texts, it is possible to isolate patterns in order to “provide an objective linguistic basis for interpreting a work” (Kennedy 1991: 96). The purpose of this paper is to compare excerpts from two literary texts: “Integration” and A Small Place (see appendix). Both texts have been written from a postcolonial perspective since the authors belong to oppressed minorities within a hegemonic Anglo Saxon society. The sections selected for analysis deal with the topic of discrimination.

“Integration” (text 1), by Native American author Sherman Alexie, is a short story about a Native American boy, John, who is taken away from the reservation as soon as he is born without his mother’s knowledge, to be given in adoption to a white couple. The story reflects the failure of the attempt to integrate the boy to the wealthy Anglo Saxon society to which his adoptive parents belong. These particular extracts describe the discrimination he suffers due to his ethnic origin and his feelings in response to this situation.

A Small Place (text 2) is a nonfiction narrative about the Caribbean island of Antigua. Jamaica Kincaid, the author, examines in this essay the brutal effects of colonial oppression. She writes accusatorily addressing her white readers. The parts of the story selected for this work show the writer’s anger at the discrimination suffered by her people and herself in colonial times and the way in which this course of action has negatively affected their lives.

Context of culture: genre
One of the aspects used by Systemic Functional Linguistics in order to analyze language in use is the context of culture. Having a certain text, it is possible to analyze how people use language to achieve culturally appropriate goals by referring to the concept of ‘genre’. In Eggins’ words, “genre can be thought of as the general framework that gives purpose to interactions of particular types, adaptable to the many specific contexts of situation that they get used in” (Eggins 1994: 32). Since genre is realized through language, it is through the patterns of meanings, words, structures and sounds that this contextual dimension is expressed.
Genre analysis

The texts under analysis have been written by postcolonial authors who aim at making their readers aware of the discrimination suffered by oppressed minorities under the hegemony of the white society. Moreover, both texts seek to stir readers—whites and non-whites—to modify the situation in which discrimination arises.

In text 1 the protagonist's story unfolds as the narrator describes the Native American boy's situation at school, which creates a framework for the two dialogues that show white people's attitude towards him. Text 2 is an autobiographical account containing factual information about the consequences of imperialism, achieved through the description of the white people's behaviour towards the black inhabitants of Antigua as seen in three social institutions: the school, the hospital and the club.

Context of situation: register

One dimension which allows the exploration of how context gets into text is through the analysis of genre. Another dimension is that of the situational context which provides details as regards the interactants involved in producing a text, what the text is about and the role of language in the event. Halliday says that “there are three aspects in any situation that have linguistic consequences: field, mode and tenor” (Halliday in Eggins 1994: 52), which are the three register variables.

Field makes reference to the ‘topic’ of the activity in which the interactants are engaged and it is realized through the patterns of processes, participants and circumstances—the Transitivity patterns in language. Mode is related to the role of language in an interaction, that is to say, the way speakers construct their messages according to the unfolding situation, whether written or oral. The mode variable is realized through the system of Theme, which refers to the linguistic organization of the clause. Tenor has to do with the effect the social role of interactants has on language use. Role relationships can be seen in variables such as power—equal or unequal; contact—frequent or infrequent; and affective involvement—high or low. The tenor variable can be related to Mood and Modality; that is, the use of certain words in order to smooth language use in interaction, and it is realized through patterns of Mood.

Register analysis

As regards the field variable, even though texts 1 and 2 share the topic of discrimination, this word is never used by the writers. Instead, the topic is reflected in the attitudes the participants representing the white society show towards the discriminated participants. For the purpose of the analysis the clauses have been numbered.
Despite the fact that the protagonist in text 1 and the narrator in text 2 suffer the effects of discrimination, their reactions are totally different. The former withdraws from the encounters with white people by stepping “outside himself” (clause 2), saying “the right things” (clause 13) and laughing “appropriately” (clause 18), all of which is “painful” and “uncomfortable”. On the other hand, the latter accuses the white society openly by saying that they had “such bad manners, like pigs” (clause 5), behaved “in a bad way” (clause 6) and were “strangers in someone else’s home” (clause 8).

In reference to mode, texts 1 and 2 partake of both written and spoken mode. In text 1 this combination is made evident by the insertion of dialogue within the third person narrative, which explains the wide presence of projected clauses. Being a first person narrative, text 2 reads as an oral retelling of a personal anecdote. This is achieved by the use of repetition of structures, elliptical clauses and by addressing the reader in a direct way (for example, clause 18: “Let me tell you about…”).

The analysis of tenor shows that both text producers, themselves members of oppressed communities, express high affective involvement with the situations portrayed in their works. This is manifested in the presence of attitudinal and evaluative choices. In text 1 the white participants refer to John as “the dark one” (clause 48), “Indian” (clause 62), “a foreigner” (clause 64) and “adopted” (clause 72), and suggest that white girls “should find somebody more appropriate” (clause 79). In text 2 the narrator takes up the role of a social critic who expresses her judgement about the colonizers through the use of attitudinally loaded lexical items: “pigs living in that sty” (clause 15), “not acting like a human being” (clause 17), “un-Christian-like” (clause 38) and “small-minded” (clause 39).

The three register variables of field, mode and tenor are linked to the three types of meaning language is structured to make: the experiential, the textual and the interpersonal.

**The experiential metafunction**

The experiential perspective –related to field- accounts for the ‘content’ meaning of the clause considering processes which involve participants in certain circumstances. “Language reflects our view of the world as consisting of ‘goings-on’ (verbs) involving things (nouns) which may have attributes (adjectives) and which go on against background details of place, time, manner, etc. (adverbials)” (Thompson 1996: 76).

In order to deal with the role of different participants, we analyze clauses in terms of ‘Transitivity’; that is, the different kinds of processes determine the types of participants related to them. Any process type can have circumstantial elements expressed through adverbial groups or prepositional phrases. Processes have been classified into six categories: material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioral and existential.
Transitivity analysis

Text 1: The analysis of the processes and participants in these excerpts helps to reveal that John is the main character of the story, since forty of the eighty-four clauses that make up the extract have him as participant. Almost half of the clauses (thirty nine) have relational processes in which John is the carrier (nineteen attributive clauses), the identified (three identifying ones) and the possessor (one possessive clause). Three other relational processes have his hair, shoes and parents as participants. This reflects the aim of the author to focus on the description of the protagonist.

John is also the actor in nine of the thirteen material processes; the senser in three out of eighteen mental processes; the sayer in four out of nine verbal processes and the behaver in all four behavioural processes. Only in the case of the mental processes the father/s and daughter/s are predominantly the sensers (fifteen out of eighteen clauses). This may be explained by the nature of the conversation in which father and daughter—who stand as representatives of the white society—exchange their views on the relationship the girl has with the Indian boy. John also performs the role of identifier, receiver and phenomenon in other clauses, a fact which reinforces his role as protagonist.

There is only one existential process (clause 80), which performs the function of expressing the plausibility of the conversation John imagines, since the narrator presents as existents the white girls who wanted to upset their fathers by dating an Indian boy.

As regards the Circumstances, they are mainly extent (duration: clauses 1, 12, 32), location (place: clauses 4, 26, 27, 28, 61, 66, 81; time: clauses 13, 33, 37, 73, 81), manner (clauses 15, 18, 25, 40, 68, 69, 80), cause (clause 38) and reason (clause 75). All of these help to provide information about the setting of the story, the behaviour of the characters and explanations for their actions.

A distinctive feature of verbal and mental processes is that they project a second clause by either quoting or reporting speech or ideas, respectively. A relationship of interdependence between the two clauses (Paratactic relationship) gives quoting or direct speech, whereas a relationship of dependency (Hypotactic relationship) between projected and projecting clauses results in indirect or reported speech (Eggins 1994: 252).

In reference to projection, there is a majority of projected clauses (forty two) related paratactically to the projecting ones. They are quotes of the conversations that take place between John and his ex-classmates and between father and daughter. The importance of the projected quotes in the last interaction lies in the fact that the reader seems to overhear this conversation, which is particularly revealing of the ideas the white society has about the relationships between whites and non-whites. The father’s prejudices are manifested in the long questioning to find out about John’s racial origin and in his final advice to his daughter to stop dating him. Moreover, his racism is disguised by his apparent concern about adopted children.
Text 2: This text presents a variety of process types, though it is possible to observe the predominance of mental, relational and verbal processes, which confirms Kincaid’s intention to show the main participants’ feelings and thoughts.

Out of forty-one clauses, fifteen include verbs describing a mental process, in particular, that of cognition. The writer has highlighted certain linguistic patterns to reveal particular facts –phenomena– about the participants –sensers– who in all but two clauses constitute the discriminated group: “we” (clauses 5, 34, 36, 38, 40, 41), “I” (clauses 11, 12, 24) and “my mother” (clauses 25, 26).

A very interesting pattern that emerges is the number of relational processes –ten out of the remaining twenty-six– used to identify the participants which are characterized through attributive clauses (clauses 7, 10, 14, 15, 29, 30, 31, 37).

Eight clauses contain verbal processes, 75% of which express what the sayers –people from Antigua– have to ‘say’ about the ‘strangers’. One clause (clause 19) presents a distinctive structure where “an attribute of the subject, rather than following it […] , is placed in front” (Thompson 1996: 140). This preposed attributive has the function of providing more information about the participant before getting to the real message.

Only three clauses (2, 16, 22) describe material processes, and in all of them the actors are the same –“some people from North America”. By the use of passive transformation in clause 2, the goal becomes the grammatical subject. Clause 16 is a rhetorical question. What comes into view is that there is absolute lack of physical involvement in action on the part of the narrative voice, which can just express what goes on in the internal world of her mind.

Considering behavioural processes, two of the three clauses have ‘they’ as behaver (clauses 6, 13) accompanied by manner circumstantials that describe their ‘wrong’ behaviour. The phenomenon in clause 33 helps reinforce the topic of the narration –“the word for any of this was racism”–.

Finally, as regards existential processes, the text opens with a declarative clause (clause 1) which performs the function of introducing an enumeration of the institutions –existent– created by the “white invaders”. The writer repeats the same structure to go on mentioning such institutions in clause 27.

As regards circumstances, they “essentially encode the background against which the process takes place” (Thompson, 1996:104). In the text under analysis there is a high frequency of circumstantial elements: location (place: clauses 2, 7, 14, 16, 22, 28, 30, 31; time: clauses 5, 9, 24, 30), manner (clauses 6, 13, 22, 25, 26, 32), matter (clause 18), degree (clause 23), means (clause 35) and reason (clauses 17, 35, 37).

The predominance of relational processes in text 1 (39 out of 84) shows the author’s intention to create a clear description of the situation the participants are involved in. By piling up a series of attributive and identifying clauses, the writer lets the reader ‘see’ the
scene. In contrast, mental processes prevail in text 2 (15 out of 41) since the author’s aim is to express the participants’ opinions, thoughts and feelings.

**The Interpersonal Metafunction**

Since one of the main purposes of communicating is to interact with other people, the interpersonal metafunction explains how language is used in an interaction to establish and maintain social relations, to influence people’s behaviour, to express one’s viewpoint and to elicit or change others’ opinions. Thus, interpersonal meanings—related to tenor—are used to achieve different purposes in a communicative exchange (Thompson 1996: 38-39).

Halliday identifies four basic speech functions: giving or demanding information (through propositions), and giving or demanding goods & services (through proposals). These functions are labeled respectively: statements, questions, offers and commands (Eggins 1994: 150-154; Thompson 1996: 40).

A clause consists of two functional constituents: the ‘mood’, which carries the argument and the ‘residue’, which can be ellipsed (Eggins 1994: 155). The mood is made up by the subject and the finite. The residue may contain three kinds of functional elements: predicator, complements and adjuncts. The speaker expresses attitudes and judgements of different kinds through ‘modality’ which may be expressed by a modal verbal operator or by a mood adjunct (Eggins 1994: 179; Thompson 1996: 57-59).

**Interpersonal Analysis**

Text 1: The most interesting aspects of interpersonal analysis in this text are present in the two dialogues included in the excerpt. Being a fictional narrative, “Integration” allows for the inclusion of dialogue to help develop the theme of the story and to create the characters. The two conversations under analysis are a short phatic interaction between John and his ex-classmates (clauses 7 to 11 and 14 to 17) and a longer one between father and daughter (clauses 45 to 79). The first conversation revolves around the topic of what has happened in John’s life after graduation, and it develops in a very casual, conventional way. The ex-classmates (referred collectively as “the white boys”) and John seem to say what is expected of them in such situations. Thompson (1996) speaks about “wordings choosing the speaker” and “meanings choosing the speaker” because “a crucial part of our language ability is knowing how things are typically—or even obligatorily—said in certain contexts” (p. 36). The words chosen for the interaction illustrate this, since the description of how John feels during these encounters reflects the lack of real involvement between the interactants.

During this first interaction some of the clauses (7 to 11, 14 to 17) are projected...
quotes in a paratactic relation to the projecting ones. A few others (clauses 18 to 21) contain projected reports and descriptions of John’s behaviour. However, the reader may feel that he/she is still listening to John’s direct speech. This impression is created by the writer’s choice to elide the subjects in clauses 19, 20 and 21, which being grammatically dependent on the subject of clause 18, are nevertheless separated by the use of full stop, a strategy which mimics speech (Thompson 1996: 71).

The author’s use of the modal ‘would’ to express past habit in “he would never speak to them,” “she would say to John,” “Mary, Margaret or Stephany would come to school” and “the girls would never mention their fathers” suggests that these were frequent situations. Thus, this modalisation helps to construct John’s identity as a lonely, isolated young man who has not built true friendship bonds with his ex-classmates, and who has been ‘used’ by the few white girls who have dated him with the aim of upsetting their fathers, and have later discarded him.

In interpersonal terms, the mood is said to be “the core of the exchange” because it is through the mood that a speaker enacts a role and creates one for his/her listener (Thompson 1996: 46). This is what happens in the second conversation, in which the father enacts the role of questioner simultaneously assigning the role of respondent to the daughter. This conversation also shows the unbalance of power in the roles of father and daughter. It is the father who asks the questions, since he has the right to demand information. The daughter complies by providing the information requested. In some cases (clauses 53, 64) a declarative mood question –what Thompson calls ‘queclaratives’ (68)– is used with the intention to be interpreted as a question to check the speaker’s assumptions.

Along the conversation the father is careful not to sound authoritarian and he achieves his purpose through the use of modalisation (“I just think”) and by using a vocative adjunct (“hon”) that helps create solidarity with the daughter since “the way the speaker names the other person indicates how s/he thinks of that other person” (Thompson 1996: 69). Moreover, in clause 79 the father says “I just think, I mean, don’t you think you should find somebody more appropriate?” in which he combines an interpersonal mood adjunct followed by a textual conjunctive adjunct and including a subordinate clause with the finite ‘should,’ an element marking secondary modality. As Thompson says “interpersonal meanings are not inherently tied to specific constituents but spread over the whole clause; and they may well be cumulative, reinforced by being expressed at several points in the clause” (56). When applied to commands, modality –“the space between ‘yes’ and ‘no’”– can be related to “the degree of obligation on the other person to carry out the command” (57). The father’s use of a heavily modalised command suggests his intention to present the command as a suggested course of action, so that compliance can be achieved more safely.
One interesting aspect in the analysis of a text is the source of modality. According to Thompson (1996), “the question of whose views we are being given may be crucial in understanding the text [...]”. Writers of novels or short stories often use modality very subtly to indicate that we are seeing events not from the point of view of an omniscient narrator but from that of a character within the story. Since the character is not omniscient, we are given a restricted view of events, which opens up the possibility that as readers we may in fact be meant to see things differently” (p. 63). This can be perceived in the analysis of the second conversation, presented as part of John's imagination through the use of modalisation. The modal ‘could’ in “he could almost hear the conversations” (indicating ability) combined with the mood adjunct ‘almost’ (indicating intensification) suggest a hypothetical overhearing of the dialogue. Moreover, in “a father would say to his daughter” and “the door would click shut,” the modalised finite ‘would’ reiterates the unreality of the conversation. However, right after the reader is told about the end of the relationship, John's view of the situation is proved to be right. The existential process in clause 84 tells us that there were in fact “a few white girls who dated John precisely because they wanted to bring home a dark boy to their uptight parents.”

Text 2: In order to understand the interpersonal relationship between interactants, it is necessary to analyze the systems of ‘mood’ and ‘modality’. As regards the mood aspect of the interpersonal function, all the clauses have the form of positive statements describing the events and the thoughts of the participants. There are three instances of negation (clauses 20, 21, 33) and all of them express the idea that the colonized people are unable to react against the white colonizers.

Adjuncts are typically realized by an adverbial group or a prepositional phrase and their function is to give information about how, when, where or why something happened (Thompson 1996: 53). There are two circumstantial adjuncts –a prepositional phrase (clause 5) and two adverbial groups (clauses 7, 17)— and two modal adjuncts (clauses 21, 33). Modal adjuncts serve the purpose of commenting on the whole clause in the first case and of expressing tense in the second example. Conjunctive adjuncts (clauses 1, 9, 16, 26, 27, 32, 35, 36) do not have any role in the interpersonal meanings of the clause and do not belong either to mood or residue.

As far as modality is concerned, the writer signals a higher or lower degree of certainty about what she is narrating through modal verbal operators. This text presents four cases of modality when referring to what the ‘people’ or the narrator herself ‘can do’, expressing certain degree of ability (clauses 3, 4, 24). The use of ‘must’ in “These things must have made them seem to themselves very big and good” (clause 13) shows the narrator's certainty about the effect that settling in Antigua has had on the colonizers themselves.

Evaluation is also related to modality and it is “a central part of the meaning of any text” (Thompson 1996: 65). It is related to the author’s attitude of leaving the text open
to negotiation or presenting it as unquestionable. An interesting issue that emerges when analyzing this text is whether the narrator is interested in negotiating with her readers or just imposing her own viewpoint. Here, Kinkaid qualifies the colonizers using highly emotional language to compel the readers to agree with her views and act accordingly. For example, clause 17: “For they so enjoyed behaving badly, as if there was pleasure immeasurable to be had from not acting like a human being”, clause 40: “We thought they were like animals, a bit below human standards as we understood those standards to be” and clause 41: “We felt superior to all these people”.

A comparison between the two texts taking into account ‘evaluation’ shows that the author of text 2 explicitly charges the colonizers with the responsibility of oppressing the black population of Antigua. On the other hand, the author of text 1 denounces the effect of discrimination in a veiled, implicit manner. The main difference between the two texts from the interpersonal point of view lies in the wider presence of paratactic projected clauses in text 1 in comparison with text 2.

The Textual Metafunction

In English textual meaning is mainly expressed through the ordering of constituents, which indicates to listeners or readers “how the present part of the message fits with other parts” (Thompson 1996: 117). To analyse textual meaning it is necessary to refer to the system of ‘Theme’, which is related to the organization of the clause as message. This system has two components: Theme and Rheme. The theme is the point of departure for the message, that is, the first element in the clause, and it typically contains familiar or ‘given’ information. The rheme is the part of the clause that develops the theme and it normally contains unfamiliar or ‘new’ information (Eggins 1994: 271-275).

In the thematic structure of the clause there are textual, interpersonal and ideational or topical elements. When the element that occurs in first position has a function in the transitivity system, it is called topical theme. There can be only one topical theme in each clause. When the first element is part of the mood, it is called interpersonal theme. The textual theme is realized by those textual elements –conjunctive and continuative adjuncts– which play a cohesive role in relating the clause to its context. Clauses may also have multiple themes when they contain a sequence of textual and/or interpersonal themes before the topical one, which is the obligatory element (Eggins 1994: 276-282).

Theme choices serve to orient the listener or reader. Themes are unmarked when they are ‘the most typical/usual’ element in the clause; they are marked when they are ‘atypical or unusual.’ The speaker or writer’s choice of a marked theme implies that the context requires a special meaning to be made. Thus, thematic choices contribute to the internal cohesion and coherence of the text (Eggins 1996: 296-299).
Thematic structure Analysis

Text 1: Considering in the first place ideational themes, more than half of the clauses (41) have John as their theme. In most of them he is referred to by the use of his first name or the third person singular pronoun ‘he’. This happens within the third person narrative in which the omniscient narrator tells the story or within the hypothetical conversation between father and daughter. In the other clauses, John is the theme in the form of first or second person pronouns during the interaction that takes place between John and his ex-classmates. In addition, in three more clauses, though John is not himself the theme, this slot is occupied by “his shoes” (clause 2), “his hair” (clause 3) and “his parents” (clause 70). Furthermore, in another clause (clause 78) John is included as a member of a class in the nominal group “adopted kids”. The overall theme of the story is built up on the author’s choice of making its central character the theme of most of the clauses in these sections.

Of the remaining clauses, “the white boys” is the theme in one clause (7); “the father/s” –sometimes “I” or “you” in the conversation– are the theme in eight clauses (37, 38, 45, 48, 49, 59, 71, 77). The “white girls” –who are introduced as the theme of clause 27, named “Mary, Margaret, Stephany” in a minor clause and later referred to as “the daughter/s” and “I” or “you” during the conversation– become the theme of twelve clauses (42, 43, 53, 55, 56, 73, 74, 76, 79, 81 82, 83). The girls’ “smell”, “breasts” and “voices and faces” become metonyms for the girls themselves and therefore three more clauses can be added to complete their description.

All these characters, who are never developed as individuals, share the fact that they are white and that they behave in a similar manner towards John. Thus, they can be considered to constitute a unity which stands in thematic position in twenty one clauses in a binary opposition to the forty one clauses in which ‘John’ is the theme. This polarization which is often present in discourse through the opposition ‘I’ vs. ‘you’ or ‘we’ vs. ‘them’ is realized in this story through the pronouns ‘he’ –the Indian boy– vs. ‘them’ –the white people, thus contributing to the development of the theme of discrimination and racism that permeates the whole of the short story.

It is also worth mentioning that, in a great majority of the cases, the above themes also coincide with the subject and with the actor, identifier, senser, sayer or behaver, depending on the process expressed by the verb. This is, according to Thompson, the most neutral version of language expression since “there are tendencies for certain functions to be performed by the same constituent, e.g. actor tends to be subject, and subject tends to be theme”(32).

As regards marked themes, there are only three in these extracts: a circumstantial adjunct –“At first” (clause 13)– typically used to organize narrative texts, and two ‘queclaratives’ (clauses 53 and 64) frequently used in spoken interactions.
A case of evaluation is present in clause 11, in which the thematized comment “It’s good” functions as an introductory clause which evaluates the information in the following non-finite clause “to see you” which constitutes the rheme (Thompson 1996: 66).

The excerpts also contain cases of multiple themes in which interpersonal and/or textual themes precede the ideational one. As regards interpersonal themes, the text presents a few Mood adjuncts expressing usuality: “occasionally” (clause 22) and “more and more” (clause 23) which contribute to the development of the story. The mood adjuncts “I just don’t think” (clause 42) and “I just think” (clause 79), which express opinion/attitude, are used by the father to mitigate his ideas about John, since he does not want to confront his daughter directly. In the interactive sections of the extract we find finites in polar interrogatives —“is” (clauses 54, 63) “isn’t” (clause 50), “does” (clause 57), “are” (clause 73)— and polarity adjuncts in the answering moves —“yes” (clause 51), “no” (clause 65), which again reflect the interactive kind of this piece.

Finally, the textual themes are realized by conjunctive adjuncts: “but” (clause 5), “and” (clauses 23, 26, 33, 36, 38, 40, 82) and “except” (clause 69); and continuative adjuncts: “oh” (clause 49) “well” (clauses 58, 76, 78), “I mean” (clauses 61, 79) and “you know” (clause 67), all of which are typical in conversations. There is also one case of a distractive conjunction: “by the way” (clause 60). The continuative and distractive textual adjuncts are used to fulfill two functions. First, they allow the speakers, in this case father and daughter, to keep the floor while they organize their ideas. Secondly, by contributing to soften the impact of the words, they help to ‘disguise’ the father’s real feelings about his daughter’s relationship with an Indian boy.

Text 2: “The textual strand of meaning [...] is concerned with the potential the clause offers for its constituents to be organized differently to achieve different purposes” (Eggins 1994: 272). From the point of view of thematic structure, the text is made up of thirty-nine declarative clauses, an interrogative clause (16) and an imperative one (18). Different types of themes can be identified —ideational, interpersonal and textual— and each of them contributes to the communicative effect of the message.

Turning the attention to ideational themes, polarization becomes evident; fifteen clauses have “we”, “I”, “people” or “no one” as topical elements representing the discriminated people while eleven present “they”, “this man/he” or “this woman/she” in first position to make reference to the colonizers. All the topical elements are constituents to which a transitivity role can be attached, such as sayer, behaver, identifier, carrier, senser or actor. Clause 2 is an example of the writer’s intention to establish a specific starting point by using a passive construction —“It” meaning “the Mill Reef Club”, which she has introduced in the rheme of the previous sentence. The agent is explicitly mentioned in a prepositional phrase introduced by the particle “by”. Clauses 25/26 show a similar ‘chaining’ process.
If there is anything that precedes the ideational element, that constitutes a multiple theme, of which eleven clauses can be found in this text. In all the clauses except one, textual elements precede ideational ones. There are nine conjunctive adjuncts—“and” (clauses 9, 16, 26, 32, 34, 35), “but” (clause 14), “and then” (clause 1) and “then” (clause 27)— and one circumstantial adjunct—“for” (clause 17).

The presence of only one interpersonal theme—a mood adjunct in clause 21—is due to the fact that the writer is categorical as regards the ideas proposed and little arguibility is possible.

Considering theme markedness, eight clauses have cases of marked theme; this helps add coherence and emphasis to the text. Seven of them provide circumstantial information (clauses 5, 7, 9, 14, 19, 26, 28), but clause 25 shows another way of creating marked theme—moving a complement to subject position—to make a sentence seem more powerful. The rest of the clauses contain unmarked themes.

As a final point, it is worth mentioning the elliptical clauses (8, 10, 15, 21, 30, 31) where the theme and part of the rheme—the processes—have been omitted from the clause. However, the part of the message that is missing may be inferred either from the previous clause or from the general context.

At the textual level, the most noticeable similarity between the texts is the use of polarization to contrast the roles performed by the different ethnic groups portrayed in these texts. This is frequently manifested through thematic choices. A striking difference becomes evident when considering interpersonal themes. The high occurrence of interpersonal themes in text 1 is explained by the fact that it contains two conversations. This dialogic nature is not present in text 2.

Finally, it can be concluded that by analyzing a literary text from the perspective of the functional approach to language, it is possible to identify textual patterns which will provide an objective linguistic basis for the interpretation of literature. Thus, readers can achieve a deeper understanding of the role the characters play in a text, the reasons for their actions and, what is more, the purpose of the authors in creating their works. What the analysis has shown is that the study of the three language metafunctions—ideational, interpersonal and textual—constitutes a valuable tool to construct a clearer picture of the situations portrayed by the writers in the analyzed texts.

**Appendix**

Text 1: “Integration”

{1} John attended St Francis Catholic School from the very beginning. {2} His shoes always black topsiders polished clean. {3} His black hair very short, nearly a crew-cut, just like every other boy in school. {4} He was the only Indian in the school {5} but he had friends, handsome white boys who were headed off to college. {6} John would never speak to any of them after graduation, besides the one or two he came across
in a supermarket, movie theater, restaurant. ‘John, buddy,’ the white boys always said. ‘How are you doing?’ God, what has it been? Five, six years? It’s good to see you.’ John could step outside himself during those encounters. At first he listened to himself say the right things, respond in the right way. ‘I’m good. Working hard? Nah. Hardly working!’ He laughed appropriately. Promised to keep in touch. Shared a nostalgic moment. Commented on the eternal beauty of the Catholic girls from way back then. Occasionally he could not stand to see his friends from high school, and more and more their voices and faces were painful to him. He began to ignore their greetings, act like he had never seen them before and walk past them. John had danced with a few white girls in high school. Mary, Margaret, Stephanie. He had fumbled with their underwear in the back seats of cars. John knew their smell, a combination of perfume, baby powder, sweat and sex. A clean smell on one level, a darker odor beneath. Their breasts were small and perfect. John was always uncomfortable during his time with the girls and he was never sorry when it was over. He was impatient with them, unsure of their motives and vaguely insulting.

The girl’s fathers were always uncomfortable when they first met John and grew more irritated as he continued to date Mary, Margaret or Stephanie. The relationships began and ended quickly. A dance or two, a movie, a hamburger, a few hours in a friend’s basement with generic rock music playing softly on the radio, cold fingers on warm skin. ‘I just don’t think it’s working out,’ she would say to John, who understood. ‘Hon,’ a father would say to his daughter. ‘What was that boy’s name?’ ‘Which boy, Daddy?’ ‘That dark one.’ ‘Oh, you mean John. Isn’t he cute?’ ‘Yes, he seems like a very nice young man.’ ‘You say he’s at St Francis?’ ‘Is he a scholarship student?’ ‘I don’t know. I don’t think so. Does it matter?’ ‘Well, no. I’m just curious, hon.’ ‘By the way, what is he? I mean, where does he come from?’ ‘He’s Indian, Daddy.’ ‘From India?’ ‘No, Daddy. He’s Indian from here. Like bows and arrows and stuff.’ ‘Except he’s not like that.’ ‘His parents are white.’ ‘I don’t understand.’ ‘Daddy, he’s adopted.’ ‘Oh. Are you going to see him again?’ ‘I hope so. Why?’ ‘Well, you know. I just think. Well, adopted kids have so many problems.’ I just think, I mean, don’t you think you should find somebody more appropriate?’ The door would click shut audibly. Mary, Margaret or Stephanie would come to school the next day and give John the news. The daughters would never mention their fathers. There were a few white girls who dated John precisely because they wanted to bring home a dark boy to their uptight parents.

Text 2: A small place (extracts from the essay by Jamaica Kincaid)

And then there was another place, called the Mill Reef Club. It was built by some people from North America who wanted to live in Antigua and spend their holidays in Antigua but who seemed not to like Antiguans (black people) at all, for the Mill Reef Club declared itself completely private, and the only Antiguans (black people) allowed to go there were servants. People can recite the name of the first Antiguan (black person) to eat a sandwich at the club house and the day on which it happened; people can recite the name of the first Antiguan (black person) to play golf on the golf course and the day on which the event took place. In those days, we Antiguans thought that the people at the Mill Reef Club had such bad manners, like pigs; they were behaving in a bad way, like pigs. There they were, strangers in someone else’s home, and then they refused to talk to their hosts or have anything human, anything intimate, to do with them. I believe they gave scholarships to one or two bright people each year so they could go overseas and study; I believe they gave money to children’s charities; these things must have made them seem to themselves very big and good, But to us there they...
were, {15} pigs living in that sty (the Mill Reef Club). {16} And what were these people from North America, these people from England, these people from Europe, with their bad behavior, doing on this little island? {17} For they so enjoyed behaving badly, as if there was pleasure immeasurable to be had from not acting like a human being. {18} Let me tell you about a man; {19} trained as a dentist, he took it on himself to say he was a doctor, specializing in treating children’s illnesses. {20} No one objected— {21} certainly not us. {22} He came to Antigua as a refugee (running away from Hitler) from Czechoslovakia. {23} This man hated us so much that he would send his wife to inspect us before we were admitted into his presence, and she would make sure that we didn’t smell, that we didn’t have dirt under our fingernails, and that nothing else about us—not apart from the colour of our skin—would offend the doctor. {24} (I can remember once, when I had whooping cough and I took a turn for the worse, that my mother, before bundling me up and taking me off to see this man, examined me carefully to see that I had no bad smells or dirt in the crease of my neck, behind my ears, or anywhere else. {25} Every horrible thing that a housefly could do was known by heart to my mother, {26} and in her innocence she thought that she and the doctor shared the same crazy obsession—germs.) {27} Then there was a headmistress of a girls’ school, hired through the colonial office in England and sent to Antigua to run this school which only in my lifetime began to accept girls who were born outside a marriage; {28} in Antigua it had never dawned on anyone that this was a way of keeping black children out of this school. {29} This woman was twenty-six years old, {30} not too long out of university, {31} from Northern Ireland, {32} and she told these girls over and over again to stop behaving as if they were monkeys just out of trees. {33} No one ever dreamed that the word for any of this was racism. {34} We thought these people were so ill-mannered {35} and we were so surprised by this, for they were far away from their home, {36} and we believed that the farther away you were from your home the better you should behave. {37} (This is because if your bad behaviour gets you in trouble you have your family not too far off to help defend you.) {38} We thought they were un-Christian-like; {39} we thought they were small-minded; {40} we thought they were like animals, a bit below human standards as we understood those standards to be. {41} We felt superior to all these people.

Notes
(1) We have considered this clause to be synonymous with “How are you?,” so we have analysed the process as relational.
(2) We consider this to be a verbal group complex in which the second verb expresses the Event and the first one modifies it by expressing how the Event has unfolded (Thompson 1996: 190-191)
(3) We have decided “have to do” as Relational Process because we have considered it to be synonymous with “have a relationship”.

Works cited

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