

Appendix 3
from Peter Fries (1981).

1. A. The English Constitution – that indescribable entity – is a living thing, growing with the growth of men, and assuming ever-varying forms in accordance with the subtle and complex laws of human character.
2. B. It is the child of wisdom and chance.
3. C. The wise men of 1688 moulded it into the shape we know.
4. C. but the chance that George I could not speak English gave it one of its essential peculiarities – the system of a cabinet independent of the Crown and subordinate to the Prime Minister.
5. C. The wisdom of Lord Grey saved it from petrification and set it upon the path of democracy.
6. C. Then chance intervened once more.
7. D. A female sovereign happened to marry an able and pertinacious man,
8. D. and it seemed likely that an element which had been quiescent within it for years – the element of irresponsible administrative power – was about to become its predominant characteristic and change completely the direction of its growth.
9. C. But what chance gave chance took away.
10. D. The Consort perished in his prime,
11. D. and the English Constitution, dropping the dead limb with hardly a tremor, continued its mysteric life as if he had never been.

Queen Victoria, Lytton Strachey (p. 192)

[The above] is a well constructed paragraph which contains within it three lexical systems; the first concerns living, growing, changing, the second system concerns wisdom versus chance and the third system concerns concepts having to do with government. From reading the paragraph it is clear that the main point of the paragraph is that the English constitution is living, growing and changing, that the paragraph is developed via the opposition between wisdom and chance and that the lexical system having to do with government plays no particular role within the structure of the paragraph. On examining the paragraph one finds that the terms having to do with living, growing and

changing typically occur within the rhemes of the component sentences of the paragraph. The terms having to do with wisdom and chance, with certain exceptions which can be explained, occur within the themes of the component sentences. The terms having to do with the form of government occur more or less equally within the themes and rhemes of the component sentences of the paragraph. Thus the consistent placement of the terms of a lexical system inside or outside the themes of the component sentences of the paragraph affect the perceived role of that lexical system within the paragraph as a whole.

[Hence] a) the lexical material placed initially within each sentence of a paragraph (i.e. the themes of each sentence of a paragraph) indicates the point of departure of the message expressed by that sentence, and b) the information contained within the themes of all the sentences of a paragraph creates the method of development of that paragraph. Thus if the themes of most of the sentences of a paragraph refer to one semantic field (say location, parts of some object, wisdom vs chance, etc.) then that semantic field will be perceived as the method of development of the paragraph. If no common semantic element runs through the themes of the sentences of a paragraph, then no simple method of development will be perceived.

M.A.K. Halliday: Appendix 3 (from Peter FRIES 1981) to
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* FRIES, P.H. 1981: 'On the status of Theme in English? arguments for discourse?'
Forum Linguisticum 6.1.