

## Understanding Types of Theme in Various Business Reading Text Exercises Using Functional Approach

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### Abstract

An important point to understand a text is knowing what information or message that the writer wants to convey to the reader. In additions, it is very important to know the point of the departure of the message called as Theme appearing in the beginning of the clause.

This research is aimed to measure the understanding of the English Students of 4<sup>th</sup> semester consisting of 23 students as respondents in classifying and identifying types of Theme in various business reading text exercises using functional approach proposed first by Halliday. The theory claims that the *theme* can be divided into some categories: *ideational*, *textual* and *interpersonal*. Then, the writer would like to know what types of Theme tend to appear in business reading text materials. The method used in this research is quasi-experimental studies. There are three phases applied in this research. First, the students were given and explained theories about types of theme; second, they were given some exercises; and the last, they were evaluated by doing a test.

Three classifications were resulted. They consist of *understanding* (if the test score is more or with 80 point), *enough* (if the test score is 60-79 point), and *Less Understanding* (if the test score is less than 60 point). The result shows that 60% students are classified *Understanding*, 35% students are classified *Enough* and 15% students are classified *Less Understanding*. *Ideational theme* tends to appear more dominant than two other Themes in the business reading text exercises because those texts use many declarative clauses in conveying the information to the readers.

**Key words:** *Theme, Ideational Theme, Textual Theme and Interpersonal Theme*

### Introduction

It is generally recognized that many foreign language learners have difficulties in choosing or identifying the topic or subject being discussed in a text. It is very important because by knowing the topic we will know the important point being discussed in a text. Topic is known as organized hierarchically according to their level of operation. If the text is written, the topic of the text is usually indicated by its title. Each paragraph of a written text also has a topic. The topic of paragraph can usually be identified by what we call the topic sentence (Deterding, 2001). Therefore, topic is what a text, section or clause is about and topic is always conceptualized as an entity or a nominalization (Downing and Locke, 2006)

The information above, however, is not necessarily associated with *Theme*. *Theme* and *Topic* are quite different types of category. We introduced the concept of Theme when we are talking about textual meaning in Functional Grammar. *Theme* also is what the speaker or writer chooses as the point of departure for the message in any one clause or sentence. What we are saying about the *Theme* is called *Rheme* (Halliday, 1985). They are sometimes realized by the same words or phrases as subject and predicate respectively.

Identifying *theme* can appear in any kinds of clauses, such as interrogative, imperative, exclamative or declarative clauses. Every clause describes its own characteristic in understanding the concept of *theme* and *rheme*. Guided by this information, the writer begins to think of a research which focuses on how the students of English Department in 4<sup>th</sup> semester understand types of *theme* using *functional approach*. The introduction of Functional Grammar has not included in our curriculum. Therefore, it is not an easy thing to share something new to the students. The sources of materials used to measure their understanding about types of Theme are various reading text exercises.

## I. Purposes

This research is aimed to measure the understanding of the English Students of 4<sup>th</sup> semester consisting 23 students as respondents in classifying and identifying types of Theme in various business reading text exercises using functional approach proposed first by Halliday. Then, the writer would like to know what types of Theme tend to appear in business reading text materials.

## II. Method

The method used in this research is quasi-experimental study. A quasi-experimental study is a type of evaluation which aims to determine whether a program or intervention has the intended effect on a study's participants. Quasi-experimental studies take on many forms, but may best be defined as lacking key components of a true experiment. While a true experiment includes (1) *pre-post test design*, (2) a *treatment group* and a *control group*, and (3) *random assignment* of study participants, quasi-experimental studies lack one or more of these design elements.

In this research there are three phases applied. First, the students were given and explained theories about types of theme; second, they were given some exercises; and the last, they were evaluated by doing a test.

## III. Respondents

The respondents are the 4<sup>th</sup> semester students of English Department who took Communicative Grammar I subject in Widyatama University. Some reasons have been considered in choosing those students as the respondents. First, those students have passed three basic grammar subjects such as Grammar I-III in their previous three semesters. Second, they have understood some basic traditional grammar, for instance: *Sentence Patterns, Subject-Verb Agreement, Tenses, Types of Clauses, and Types of Sentences*. Therefore, those materials can be their prior English knowledge before they are introduced with Functional Grammar. Functional Grammar is something new for them to learn formally in the class because Functional Grammar is not included as one subject to learn in our curriculum. That is one of the reasons for the writer to introduce Functional Grammar as supplementary subject to develop their grammar capability. By giving this material, the writer expects her students get richer knowledge of grammar especially how to learn grammar using another approach; that is Functional Grammar.

## IV. Theories

### 4.1. Theme and Rheme

The system of Theme belongs to the textual metafunction of the language. It is concerned with the organization of information within individual clauses and, through this, with the organization of the larger text. Martin et al (1997) claim that every clause is organized as a message related to an unfolding text. They said that the system of Theme organizes the clause to show what its local context is in relation to the general context of the text it serves in; the system is concerned with the current point of departure in relation to what has come before, so that it is clear where the clause is located in the text-how its contribution fits in. This local context or point of departure is called *Theme*. The rest of the message of the clause is what is presented against the background of the local context – it is where the clause moves after the point of departure. This called *Rheme*.

In English, according to Gerot and Wignell (1994) the *Theme* can be identified as that or those element(s) which come(s) first in the clause. This represents the point of departure of this message from the previous one. The rest of the clause is called the *Rheme*. New information is typically contained in the Rheme. Theme is broadly speaking, what the clause is going to be about. Or in terms of Theme and Rheme. Theme represents 'This is what I'm talking about' and Rheme is 'This is what I'm saying about it'.

Examples:

(1) **I** usually play tennis on Wednesdays. (Theme is in bold)

It is also possible to highlight different parts of the message by placing them in the position of Theme:

(2) **Usually**, I play tennis on Wednesdays.

(3) **On Wednesdays**, I usually play tennis.

One point for EFL classes, however, is that the Theme that is chosen is one part of a network system. This means that the Theme simultaneously highlights what the clause is about and also delimits the scope of the clause. By saying 'On Wednesdays, I usually play tennis' the speaker is implicitly excluding the other days of the week (this could be grammatically explicit through it-clefting – 'It is on Wednesdays that I usually play tennis'). Similarly, by saying 'Usually, I play tennis on Wednesdays' the speaker is opposing that habituality with some *unusual* event. The message thus feels, in a sense, incomplete and we would expect some additional information, such as 'but today it's raining'. Also often overlooked for EFL is that by saying 'I usually play tennis' the speaker is implicitly excluding the other participants in the exchange.

**Table 1: Theme and Rheme**

point of departure of clause as message; local context of clause as piece of text.	Non-Theme – where the presentation moves after the point of departure; what is presented in the local context set up by Theme.
initial position in the clause	position following initial position

(table from Martin et al)

## 5.2 Types of Theme

Garot and Wignell also claim that the Theme can be divided into a number categories: **Ideational, Textual** and **Interpersonal**. A clause can have only, all or none of these categories present.

### 5.2.1 Ideational Theme

The Ideational or Topical Theme is usually but not always the first nominal group in the clause. Topical Themes may also be nominal group complexes, adverbial groups, and prepositional phrases or embedded clauses. In the *Unmarked* cases the Topical Theme is also the Subject. A Topical Theme which is not the Subject is called a *Marked* Topical Theme.

#### a. Unmarked Topical Theme

- (1) **John** went up the hill. (Nominal Group as Theme)
- (2) **John and Jill** went up the hill. (Nominal Group Complex as Theme)
- (3) **(What John and Jill did)** was go up the hill. (Embedded clause)
- (4) **Marked Topical Theme**
- (5) **Someday**, you will understand that. (Adverbial as Theme)
- (6) **At Hotel**, Marry and John will stay. (Prepositional Phrase as Theme)
- (7) **Jasmine** I love the smell of. (Complement as Theme)

### 5.2.2 Textual Theme

Textual Theme can be Continuatives and/or Conjunctive Adjuncts and Conjunctions. The line between Conjunctions and Conjunctive Adjuncts is often a fine way. Conjunctions tend to provide *Textual Theme* within a clause complex and are called *Structural Themes*. Conjunctive Adjuncts, on the other hand, tend to (but don't always) join text outside of clause complexes. They tend to have more of a text-organizing function.

Continuatives are a small set of items which, if they are there are at the beginning of the clause and signal that a new move is beginning. For examples: well, right, OK, now, anyway, of course.

- (1) **Right, what we need to do today** is revise for our test.

Cont.	Topical	Rheme
Theme		

These relate to the context of speaking in that they signal to the listeners that someone is about to start, resume or continue speaking

- (2) **Well, on the other hand**, we could wait.

Cont.	Conjunctive	Topical	Rheme
Theme			

Conjunctives relate the clause to the preceding text providing a logical link between messages.

### 5.2.3 Interpersonal Theme

Interpersonal elements occurring before the Topical Theme are also thematic. They may be Modal Adjuncts, Vocatives, Finite or Wh-elements.

- (1) **Perhaps** we can wait until next week. (Modal Adjunct as Theme)

Modal	Topical	Rheme
interper		
Theme		

- (2) **Dearly beloved** we are gathered here today.

Vocative	Topical	Rheme
Theme		

- (3) **Mary**, we decided to wait until next week.

Vocative	Topical	Rheme
Theme		

Vocatives (a name or nickname used to address someone) are only thematic if they occur before the Topical Theme, a Finite Verb or a Modal Adjunct.

- (4) **Anyway** **Marry** we decided to wait until next week.

Continu.	Vocative	Topical	Rheme
Textual	Interper.	Topical	
Theme			

- (5) **But**, **Marry**, surely we can wait until next week.

Conj.	Voc.	Modal	Topical	Rheme
Textual	Interpersonal.		Topical	
Theme				

## V. Discussion

### 6.1 Delivering Materials

The material of Introduction to Functional Grammar was given in the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting in the class after discussing the material about types of sentence, such as *Simple Sentence*, *Compound Sentence*, *Complex Sentence* and *Compound-Complex Sentence*. Two models in delivering and learning material processes were applied, such as lecturing in the class and discussing via email. These two models were applied because the availability of the time for delivering the material was very limited. Besides, the writer gave some supplementary materials via email to be read and opened a discussion in a class or via e-mail.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> until 6<sup>th</sup> meeting, the writer inserted some additional materials about Introduction to Functional Grammar. The materials consist of some topics: *Definition of Functional Grammar*, *the Difference between Traditional Grammar and Functional Grammar*, *Clauses as a Message*, *Theme and Rheme* and *Types of Themes*. When delivering the material, the writer explained about the definition and theories related to the topic discussed. The writer realized that all those materials were not completely delivered in only 3 meetings. Therefore, students were allowed to continue the discussion by asking some questions out of the class or sending questions via email.

### 6.2 Giving exercises

The main focus of delivering the materials was about how to understand types of Theme using Functional Approach. To check their understandings about types of Theme, some exercises, such as identifying and classifying types of Theme were given to the students. The sources of exercises were taken from various business reading texts and taken from internet websites. The design of exercises was adapted from "*Working with Functional Grammar*" by Martin et al (1997).

Sample exercises:

a. Identifying topical Theme (declarative)

Follow the models provided and underline the Topical Theme in each clause!

Example: He was fat and bunched.

1. Ada Lovelace was the daughter of the poet Lord Byron.
2. She was taught by Mary Somerville.
3. Babbage was an English mathematician.
4. ....

(Source was taken from a business reading text exercise entitled *The First Computer Programmer*)

b. Identifying marked topical Theme (declaratives)

Identify the Topical Theme and classify as unmarked or marked!

Example: By the time they were getting near Eeyore's Gloomy Place... (M)

1. In 1842 and 1843, Ada translated the work of an Italian mathematician, Luigi Menabrea, on Babbage's Analytical Engine.
2. Though mechanical, this machine was an important step in the history of computers.
3. Babbage worked on it for many years until his death in 1871.
4. ....

(Source was taken from a business reading text exercise entitled *The First Computer Programmer*)

c. Identifying textual Theme (declarative)

Follow the model to identify textual and topical parts to Theme!

Example: So he sang it again.

1. However, Boeing also announced a deal with General Electric (GE) on the show's first day.
2. However, a spokesman for Delta later said that...
3. ...and that "no final decision" had been made on future fleet purchases.
4. ....

(Source was taken from a business reading text exercise entitled *Airbus Crisis Over*)

d. Identifying interpersonal Theme (declarative)

Those exercises were given to the students via email and must be completed within a week after the writer explained to them in the class. For those who have already completed the exercises, they will get feedback and point from the lecturer.

### 6.3 Giving Test

Test was given to the students after completing 3 classroom meetings consisting explaining the materials and doing exercises. Students were tested in the class once with the duration of 1 hour. The test material consisted of 20 numbers with 3 different focuses. First, fill in the table to identify and classify textual and topical Themes. Second, fill out the chart to identify and classify interpersonal and topical Themes, and the last, fill out the table to identify and classify textual, interpersonal and topical stages to the Theme (all metafunctions).

### 6.4 Results

For knowing the result of the test, three classifications were resulted. They consist of *Understanding* (if the test score is more or with 80 point), *Enough* (if the test score is 60-79 point), and *Less Understanding* (if the test score is less than 60 point). The result of the test shows that there are 13 students got the test score of more or with 80 point (60%) and they were classified *Understanding* about types of Theme, 8 students got the test score of 60-79 point (35%) and they were classified *Enough* about type of Theme, and 2 students got the test score less than 60 point (15%) and they were classified as *Less Understanding* about types of Theme.

Tabel2 :Result of The Test

Range	Classifications	Number of Students	Percentages
≥ 80	Understanding	13	60%
60 – 79	Enough	8	35%
< 60	Less Understanding	2	15%

## VII. Conclusion and Suggestions

### 7.1 Conclusion

From the result of analysis, it can be concluded that introducing the types of Theme in various business reading text exercises using functional approach gives a positive effect to the English students of English department, specifically to the 4<sup>th</sup> semester. It is proven from the result of the final score which says that 13 students got the test score of more or with 80 point (60%) and they were classified *Understanding* about types of Theme, 8 students got the test score of 60-79 point (35%) and they were classified *Enough* about type of Theme, and 2 students got the test score less than 60 point (15%) and they were classified as *Less Understanding* about types of Theme. In additions, *Ideational Theme* tends to appear more dominant than two other Themes (Textual and Interpersonal Themes) in the business reading text exercises because 4 texts used as sources of reading text use many declarative clauses in conveying the information to the readers and most of them using ideational or topical Theme as point of the departure.

### 7.2 Suggestions

Learning grammar using functional approach is expected to be included into syllabus in the near future. The subject discussing types of Theme can be taught to the English Department Students in semester IV as long as they have sufficient knowledge about types of clauses based on traditional grammar. Sources of reading materials can be developed not only discussing about business issue but also discussing other more interesting issues from many sciences such as history, arts, health, and so forth.

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