Unit 3

Theme–Rheme (and Given–New)

Clause-as-message, and information unit

Slides for the session of
Exploring English Grammar — the world of clauses
held on
05.xi.2019

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LangSciTech
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The learning goals for today's session are:

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Theme–Rheme (and Given–New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

A sacrament as a semiotic act

THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

Grammatically 'marked' Themes

The learning goals for today's session are:

1. To understand the difference between Theme–Rheme and Given–New structures.

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2. To learn to analyse clauses into Theme and Rheme.

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3. To learn to identify the most typical Themes for each grammatical mood.

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4. To learn to identify textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes.
5. To understand the difference between grammatically 'unmarked' and grammatically 'marked' Themes.

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2. To learn to analyse clauses into Theme and Rheme.
3. To learn to identify the most typical Themes for each grammatical mood.
4. To learn to identify textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes.
5. To understand the difference between grammatically 'unmarked' and grammatically 'marked' Themes.
6. To understand and be able to identify predicated Themes and thematic equatives.

Theme: an ambiguous definition

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- **Thema** *[topic]* In der Thema-Rhema-Gliederung der Mitteilung bzw. der Äußerung der (kommunikative) Ausgangspunkt, die Basis zur Entfaltung des Mitteilungsgehalts des Satzes: das Bekannte oder das durch Situation oder Kontext Gegebene; der Teil der Äußerung, der weniger Information enthält als das *Rhema*. T. ist das, worüber etwas mitgeteilt wird, und auch das, was aus Kontext und Situation ableitbar ist; Rhema is das, was über das Thema mitgeteilt wird, was aus Kontext und Situation nicht ableitbar ist – die neue Information (Daneš 1970, 1976).
Th. Lewandowski: Linguistisches Wörterbuch 3. Heidelberg/Wiesbaden: Quelle & Meyer [UTB 1518]: 1990 (5., überarbeitete Auflage).

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- But this definition is ambiguous (!!!)

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach

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- The two concepts **Theme** (='what the message is about') and **Given** (='derivable from situation / context') are kept distinct:

| Theme | Rheme | ⟵ clause-as-message |

| Given | New | ⟵ information unit |

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Theme: the Systemic Functional approach

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- 'Theme' is treated as a function in the structure of the clause-as-message ('Theme–Rheme structure').
- 'Given' is treated as a function in the structure of the information unit.
- Normally (but not always), one information unit coincides with one clause.

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Theme	Rheme	← clause-as-message

Given	New	← information unit

- 'Theme' is treated as a function in the structure of the clause-as-message ('Theme–Rheme structure').
- 'Given' is treated as a function in the structure of the information unit.
- Normally (but not always), one information unit coincides with one clause.
- Sometimes an information unit can be shorter or longer than one clause.

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (2)

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- Theme–Rheme is realized by sequence.

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- Theme–Rheme is realized by sequence.
- To signal that something is Theme in English, you put it in **first position** in the clause, to create a **'local context'** for the message.

Theme	Rheme	
the dinosaurs	were killed	by an asteroid

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- The information unit is realized by intonation: one information unit is expressed as one 'melody' or **tone group**.

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Theme	Rheme
the dinosaurs	were killed by an asteroid

- The information unit is realized by intonation: one information unit is expressed as one 'melody' or **tone group**.
- The climax of the 'New' information is signaled by the Focus (which you can hear as the Nucleus of the tone group: the syllable **"AST"**)

			Focus
Given?			New
the	dinosaurs were	killed by an	**ASteroid**

//.1. ∧ the / dinosaurs were / killed by an */ **ASTeroid** //

3.5

Learning Resources

- 'Helmut Kohl went to Halle': shows all four possible ways Theme–Rheme and Given–New can map onto each other:
  http://spence.saar.de/courses/grammar/unit03/halle.pdf

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- one-page summary in German of the differences between Theme–Rheme and Given–New structure (slightly dogmatic):
  http://spence.saar.de/courses/grammar/unit03/themrhem2.pdf

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- Annabelle Lukin: Clause as message part 1 / Clause as message part 2 (scroll down the page)
  https://vimeo.com/album/2028694

A sacrament as a semiotic act

- *"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, (…)"*

A sacrament as a semiotic act

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- Anyone who was raised in the Church of England knows that this is the beginning of a wedding ceremony, or to give it its official title: The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony. Matrimony, a.k.a. marriage, is one of the "sacraments" of the Church of England. But what is a sacrament?

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- The groom says the following words:
  "With this Ring I thee wed,
  with my body I thee worship,
  and with all my wordly goods I thee endow"

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- The groom says the following words:
  "With this Ring I thee wed,
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  and with all my wordly goods I thee endow"

- What comments would you make on the order of the parts of each clause? And what intonation would you use if you said this aloud?

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Typical Themes for each grammatical mood

- The Theme–Rheme boundary is shown by #

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- [imperative]   Predicator

Typical Themes for each grammatical mood

- The Theme–Rheme boundary is shown by #
- [imperative]   Predicator
-     "Open # the window!"

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Typical Themes for each grammatical mood

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- [imperative]   Predicator
-    "Open # the window!"
- [indicative: interrogative: WH-]   Wh-

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- The Theme–Rheme boundary is shown by #
- [imperative]   Predicator
-     "Open # the window!"
- [indicative: interrogative: WH-]   Wh-
-     "What # does he want?"

Typical Themes for each grammatical mood

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- [indicative: interrogative: WH-]   Wh-
-   "What # does he want?"
- [indicative: interrogative: yes/no]   Finite

Typical Themes for each grammatical mood

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-    "Did he # mean me?"

Typical Themes for each grammatical mood

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- [indicative: declarative: exclamative]   Wh-

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- [indicative: declarative: exclamative]   Wh-
- "What a rude person # he is!"

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- [indicative: interrogative: yes/no]   Finite
-    "Did he # mean me?"
- [indicative: declarative: exclamative]   Wh-
-    "What a rude person # he is!"
- [indicative: declarative: non-exclamative]   Subject

Typical Themes for each grammatical mood

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- [imperative]   Predicator
-    "Open # the window!"
- [indicative: interrogative: WH-]   Wh-
-    "What # does he want?"
- [indicative: interrogative: yes/no]   Finite
-    "Did he # mean me?"
- [indicative: declarative: exclamative]   Wh-
-    "What a rude person # he is!"
- [indicative: declarative: non-exclamative]   Subject
-    "He # 's crazy — he # 's a grammarian."

Internal structure of a multiple Theme

well	but	then	surely	Jean	wouldn't	the best idea	be to join in?
con-tinu-ative	struc-tur-al	con-junc-tive	mo-dal-	voc-at-ive	finite	topical	
textual			interpersonal				
Theme							Rhme

Unmarked vs. marked Themes

	Function	Class	Clause example
unmarked Theme	Subject	nominal group: pronoun as Head	I # have a dream
		nominal group: noun as Head	my sister # has a new boyfriend
		nominalization	what I want # is a proper cup of tea
marked Theme	Adjunct	adverbial group	merrily # we roll along
		prepositional phrase	on Saturday night # I lost my wife
	Comp-lement	nominal group: noun as Head	Eliot # you're particularly fond of
		nominal group: pronoun as Head	this # they should refuse
		nominalization	what chance gave # chance took away

(Based on Halliday and Matthiessen)