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 30 xi 2020



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

Robert Spence LangSciTech Saarland University



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

Given-New structures.

To understand the difference between Theme-Rheme and

γρα

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

γρα

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

- 1 To understand the difference between Theme-Rheme and Given-New structures.
- 2 To learn to analyse clauses into Theme and Rheme.

γρα

Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

A sacrament as a semiotic

THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal,

and topical Themes

Grammatically 'marked'

Themes

- 1 To understand the difference between Theme-Rheme and Given-New structures.
- 2 To learn to analyse clauses into Theme and Rheme.
- To learn to identify the most typical Themes for each grammatical mood.



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

- To understand the difference between Theme-Rheme and Given-New structures.
- To learn to analyse clauses into Theme and Rheme.
- To learn to identify the most typical Themes for each grammatical mood.
- 4 To learn to identify textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes.



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

- 1 To understand the difference between Theme-Rheme and Given-New structures.
- To learn to analyse clauses into Theme and Rheme.
- To learn to identify the most typical Themes for each grammatical mood.
- 4 To learn to identify textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes.
- To understand the difference between grammatically 'unmarked' and grammatically 'marked' Themes.



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

- 1 To understand the difference between Theme-Rheme and Given-New structures.
- 2 To learn to analyse clauses into Theme and Rheme.
- 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.
- To understand and be able to identify predicated Themes and thematic equatives.

Theme: an ambiguous definition



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

A sacrament as a semiotic

THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

Grammatically 'marked' Themes

• 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).

Theme: an ambiguous definition



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

A sacrament as a semiotic

THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

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But this definition is ambiguous (!!!)



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

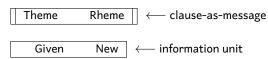
Learning Resources

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THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

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





Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

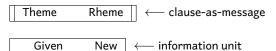
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act

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Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

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Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

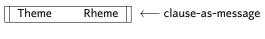
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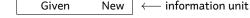
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THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

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Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

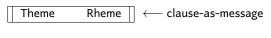
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act

THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

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





- '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.



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

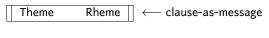
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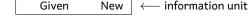
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THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

The two concepts Theme (='what the message is about') and
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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.
- Sometimes an information unit can be shorter or longer than one clause.



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

A sacrament as a semiotic

ct

THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes



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

• Theme-Rheme is realized by sequence.



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

- 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.

ſ	Theme		Rheme
Γ	the dinosaurs	were killed	by an asteroid



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

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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**.



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

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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





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

 '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



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

A sacrament as a semiotic

act

THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

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Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

A sacrament as a semiotic

act

THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

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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

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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

- '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



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

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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



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

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



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

A sacrament as a act

THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

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



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

act

THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

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Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

act

THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

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- ACHTUNG! PROTESTANTENALARM!
- A sacrament is defined in the Catechism of the Church of England as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace".
 (The word "sign" here really means 'signifiant'; the "grace" (= gift from God) is the 'signifié'.)



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

acc

THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

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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"



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

A sacrament as a se

THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

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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"
- 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?



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

act

THEME and MOOD

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

The Theme-Rheme boundary is shown by #



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

A sacrament as a semiotic act

THEME and MOOI

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

- The Theme-Rheme boundary is shown by #
- [imperative] Predicator



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

A sacrament as a semiotic act

THEME and MOOI

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

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



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

A sacrament as a semiotic act

THEME and MOOI

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

- The Theme-Rheme boundary is shown by #
- [imperative] Predicator
- "Open # the window!"
- [indicative: interrogative: WH-] Wh-



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

A sacrament as a semiotic act

THEME and MOOI

Textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes

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



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

A sacrament as a semiotic act

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



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

A sacrament as a semiotic act

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



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

A sacrament as a semiotic act

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- "Did he # mean me?"
- [indicative: declarative: exclamative] Wh



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

A sacrament as a semiotic act

THEME and MOOD

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



Theme-Rheme (and Given-New)

Goals

Introduction

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach (1)

Learning Resources

A sacrament as a semiotic act

THEME and MOOD

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- "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



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

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- [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."



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

Internal structure of a multiple Theme

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



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

Unmarked vs. marked Themes

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

(Based on Halliday and Matthiessen)