

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

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LangSciTech
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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.
- 6 To understand and be able to identify predicated Themes and thematic equatives.

- **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).
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- But this definition is ambiguous (!!!)

Theme: the Systemic Functional approach

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- 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 (and
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- 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**”)

Given?	Focus
	New
the dinosaurs were killed by an	ASTeroid

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

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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

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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,
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- 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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- “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							Rheme

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
	Complement	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)