

Thematic Structure: A Study on English and Persian

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Abstract

Thematization is the process of arranging theme, rheme patterns in a text. The present study aims to investigate marked thematization strategies in English and Persian scientific texts. The data for this study were supplied through different text types of scientific genre, such as biology, geology, chemistry, physics and mathematics. Out of the existing scientific textbooks in English and Persian, 20 books were randomly selected. The materials were originally written in English or Persian. In order to have ample instances of texts, 2 paragraphs of about 150 words were selected from each book. Marked themes were classified based on Grzegorek's (1984) classification on Topicalization, Left -Dislocation, Cleft sentences, and Pseudo-cleft sentences. Furthermore, Chi-Square test was employed to compare and contrast the obtained frequencies to see the statistically significant differences. The results revealed that there were no significant differences between marked thematic structures of English and Persian scientific texts. Based on the findings of marked themes, the research hypothesis was maintained. In addition, the results of the Chi-Square test revealed that marked thematic sentences similarly were realized in English and Persian scientific texts. Generally, topicalization was the most frequent types of marked thematic structure used in both kinds of texts. As a result thematic structure is a greatly useful and important tool in writing. Writers should have enough knowledge about marked thematic structures in the creation and interpretation of texts.

Keywords: Thematization Patterns; Marked Theme; Theme and Rheme; Systemic Functional Grammar, Scientific Texts.

1. Introduction

Theme/rheme plays a major role in organizing the message and in enabling it to be communicated and understood clearly (Halliday, 1994). Whatever is chosen to be the first place, will influence the hearer/reader's interpretation of everything that comes next in the discourse since it will

constitute the initial textual context for everything that follows (Alonso, Belmonte & McCabe, 1998).

Theme and rheme analysis is an area that has attracted the attention of some translation scholars. The basic premise is that sentences consist of themes, which present known, context-dependent information, and rhemes, which present new, context-independent information. Because they represent new information, it is rhemes rather than themes which push text development forward.

Thematization is one of the subcategories of textual analysis. Textual analysis is the analysis of the text in terms of its textual features or its texture. Thematization strategies are what the writer chooses as the theme of the clause.

The results of Jallilifar's (2010) research on theme indicated overall similarities in both journals regarding different types of theme and patterns of thematic progression. But there were significant differences in the number and the context of the usage of different patterns of thematic progression in the introduction.

This study aimed at finding out whether marked thematic sentences in the English and Persian scientific texts were similar or different with Halliday's (1960) systemic functional grammar (SFG) as the theoretical foundation. To put it simply, the researcher was going to discover whether Marked thematic sentences similarly realized in the Persian and English scientific texts or not. Furthermore, on detecting the most frequent marked thematic structure used in the two kinds of texts. For achieving this purpose, 20 scientific texts which were originally written in Persian and English were compared and contrasted to see whether marked thematic sentences are similar or not. This study drew on the classification of Grzegorek's (1984), who has classified Marked themes into Topicalization (TOP), Left-Dislocation (LD), Cleft sentences (CL), and Pseudo-cleft sentences (PCL). This study is devoted to characterize marked thematization patterns in a sample of English and Persian scientific texts.

2. Thematization Patterns

According to Lotfipour-Saedi (1991), the texture of a text can be characterized by textual features of 1) thematization strategies, 2) schematic structure, 3) paralanguage and 4) cohesion (cited in Yarmohammadi, 1995).

Halliday writes: "the 'textual' component in language is the set of options by means of which a speaker or writer is enabled to create texts" (Halliday 1994, p. 161). One key choice in the textual configuration of discourse is that of what will appear in Theme position; indeed, for Halliday (1985, p. 53), "the textual function of the clause is that of constructing a message" and the Theme/Rheme structure is the "basic form of the organization of the clause as message". In the organization of discourse, then, an important concern is which participant, process or circumstance will be chosen as the ideational point of departure for the message. According to

Bell (1991), thematization patterns organize the initiation of the clause and acts to direct the attention of the receiver of the message to the parts the sender wishes to emphasize.

While explaining something to another person, whether in speech or writing, we try to organize what we say in a way that makes it easier for the reader to understand (Bloor and Bloor, 1995). The structuring of language as a message is realized in the thematic structure of the constituent clauses of a text.

Not (1996) asserts that thematic development is necessary for the construction of an optimally coherent and grammatically cohesive structured text. The investigation of thematization patterns in scientific texts were carried out by Dubois (1987) and by Nwogu and Bloor (1991). Both studies were based on naturally occurring data and found that the simple pattern and the constant pattern are frequent. Thematization is the process of arranging theme, rheme patterns in a text. Angela Downing (2001) points that the essential nature of a text lies largely in terms of its semantic coherence and the reason for less than optimal coherence may be that the writer is simply not good at controlling the mass of new information that is successively accumulated as the text unfolds. This mass of information is mostly so extensive that the writer should make a choice, and this choice, is determined directly or indirectly by the selection of utterance Theme.

Grzegorek (1984) introduces four main types of thematization in English: (1) passivization, (2) clefts and pseudo-clefts, (3) topicalization, left-dislocation, focus movement, and (4) presentation sentences with proposed expressions. She compares these thematization types with those existing in Polish. She says that thematization is governed by a variety of factors, most of which are of pragmatic rather than purely syntactic nature.

Halliday (1994) who is the main representative of the positional approach to the definition of theme characterizes thematization in English as the process of shifting various sentence elements to the initial position plus any grammatical changes within a sentence, which are caused by such a movement. According to Fries (1983) different discourse genres (i.e., narratives, descriptives, argumentatives, and so on) have different patterns of thematic progression. For example, an argumentative text can be characterized by high proportion of cross-reference from the rheme of one sentence to the theme of the text.

According to Halliday and Hassan (1976), coherence refers to the way a group of clauses or sentences relate to the context. A text is cohered when one part of a text follows another part of the text. The outcome of coherence is that each part of the text creates a context within which the next bit of the text is interpreted. Then, there is a relationship between what is said or written and what was said or written a moment ago. Reid (2000, p. 116) says that coherence means "to stick together". One way writers make a text cohesive is through 'thematic' organization (Halliday and Hassan, 1976). Halliday (1976) defined coherence as the probability of connecting what has

been mentioned above. To ensure the successful development of a topic, the application of various techniques for cohesion is vital. Some forms of cohesion are realized through the grammar and others through vocabulary (Halliday, 1976). Cohesion contributes to coherence. Thematic progression is a kind of cohesion (Halliday, 1976). According to Danes, thematic progression means "the choice and ordering of utterance themes, their mutual concatenation and hierarchy, as well as their relationship to the hyperthemes of the superior text units (such as paragraph, chapter...) to the whole of the text and to the situation" (Danes, 1974, p. 114).

Halliday (1985, p. 67) explained that thematic progression is of crucial importance to the internal relation between sentences in the text. Thematic progression contributes to text coherence in that it lets us know what the text is about and where the text is going. By analyzing the thematic structure of a text, "we can gain an insight into its texture and understand how the writer made clear to us the nature of his underlying concerns".

3. Theme and Rheme

Theme and rheme analysis is an area that has been the center of some translation scholars' attention (see Grzegorek 1984, Newmark 1988, Bell 1991, Baker 1992, Halliday 1994, among others).

Topic is a non-structural discourse category which describes what the text is about (Brown & Yule, 1983). Given information is the information that can be predicted or which belongs to that knowledge shared by both listener and speaker, whereas new information is that information which is contextually non-retrievable and says something about the given (Prince, 1981). According to Halliday (1994), the grammatical subject is the one that of which something is predicated. Also, Halliday (1994) distinguishes three different kinds of subject. Grammatical subject which is defined above, psychological subject which is the concern of the message and the logical subject which is the doer of an action. But Halliday (1994) used three equivalent terms for these expressions. He used theme for psychological subject, subject for grammatical subject and actor for logical subject.

Halliday believes that each clause conveys a message that has two parts, i.e., what comes first or the theme, and what comes last or the rheme. The theme usually constrains given information and the rheme, new information (1994).

In the English language, the theme includes the lexical items (up to and including the first participant, process or circumstance) taking first position in the clause. These lexical items signal what the message will be about (White, 2000). According to Bloor and Bloor (1995), theme in English is the idea represented by the constituent at the starting of the clause.

Fries (1983, p. 118) makes the point that "there are good and sufficient internal grammatical reasons to say that the beginning is special for some reason" and goes on to argue that "initial position in the sentence, or sentence level Theme, means 'point of departure of the sentence as

message" (ibid, p. 119). Martin (1992) provides evidence which indicates that "point of departure does indeed mean something more than coming first" (p. 151).

The Theme is the first constituent of a clause (Thompson, 2004). White (2000, p. 153) describes it as the "angle or departure of a clause...[it] is what each utterance is 'about'..." The Theme is the starting point of a clause and includes the first Participant, Process or Circumstance (White, 2000, p. 154). Additionally, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004 cited in Thompson, 2004, p. 143) explain the Theme as "that which locates and orients the clause within its context."

According to Fairclough (1994), the Theme is the text producer's point of departure in a clause, and generally corresponds to what is taken to be 'given' information, that is information already known or established for text producers and interpreters.

For Brown and Yule (1983), Theme is not only the starting point of the message, but it also has a role of connecting to what has been said. They assume that it is the left-most constituent of the sentence which has two important functions:

- 1) It maintains a coherent point of view by connecting back and linking into the previous discourse.
- 2) It serves as a point of departure for the further development of the discourse (p. 133).

Halliday (1994) provides different definitions for theme which will be listed as follows:

1. The theme is what is being talked about, the point of departure for the clause as a message.
2. The English clause consists of a theme and a rheme. The theme of the clause is the element which, in English, is put in the first position.
3. The theme is the statement which serves as the point of departure of the message.
4. Within that configuration, the theme is the starting point for the message; it is what the clause is going to be about" (Cited in Fries, 1995, p. 3).

For Strauss and Corbin (1990), the links between expressions and themes are "conceptual labels placed on discrete happenings, events, and other instances of phenomena". Themes, or categories, are the classification of more discrete concepts. "This classification is discovered when concepts are compared one against another and appear to pertain to a similar phenomenon. Thus, the concepts are grouped together under a higher order; more abstract concepts are called a category" (p. 61). Halliday (1970) refers to theme as a line of nails on the wall. The contents of the texts are carried along the nail line. He suggests that theme is "what the clause is about", and no matter what the author wants to talk about, he must

arrange the relative information around this topic in a logic order, with the thematic structure arranged distinguishingly according to the specific genres and aims. In a word, thematic structure is one of the necessary conditions for creating discourse coherence.

4. Markedness

In linguistics, *markedness* refers to the way words are changed or added to give a special meaning. The *unmarked choice* is just the normal meaning. Gosden (1996) asserts that the manipulation of Unmarked and Marked thematic choices is a means of achieving textual cohesion and coherence.

Marked theme is considered as a cover term consisting of different classifications like Topicalization, Left-dislocation, Cleft and Pseudo-cleft sentences. According to Grzegorek (1984), a thematic structure is communicatively marked when it does not follow the sequence from the old to the new information. It is obvious that an unmarked theme shows a grammatical subject that forms the point of departure while the marked theme employs a technique that fronts other information. The marked theme uses three main context frames for this purpose: Conjunctive/Modal adjunct and Conjunctions, Prepositional and Adverbial Phrases and Subordinate Clauses and Nonfinite Clause (Gosden, 1992). According to Eggins (1993) the term "Unmarked" simply means 'most typical/usual', while "Marked" means 'atypical'/'unusual'. Eggins further notes that Theme predication is another strategy to producing Marked Themes. To Eggins, all predicated Themes are in some sense Marked, since the subject of the original clause is made Rheme in the predicated version. She notes that skillful writers choose Marked Themes to add emphasis to their texts.

According to Halliday (1985), theme plays an essential role in the way discourse is organized. Theme is known and context-dependent information while rheme is new and context independent information. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 65) believe that "As a message structure, therefore, a clause consists of theme accompanied by a rheme; and the structure is expressed by the order- whatever is chosen as the theme is put first". Alice Davidson (1980) suggests the more marked the construction, the more likely that an implicated meaning will be that which the utterance is intended to convey (Cited in Brown & Yule, 1983).

Simply put, the unmarked member of any pair is the most natural, the most frequent, the simplest, the more basic, the logically prior, the more universal, the first learned, the one implied by the marked member; the one understood, unstated, taken for granted, ordinary, usual., etc.

Baker (1992) believes that the degree of markedness will depend on the frequency with which the element in question generally occurs in theme position and the extent to which it is normally mobile within the clause.

Based on Bell (1991) view, marked theme in English is signaled by predicting, proposing, clefting, or fronting of the theme and combinations of these options. It is the theme where the writer consciously or

unconsciously affects the organization of the text by choosing something other than the subject for the starting point of their message. Fries (1983) claim that marked themes are more truly thematic than non-marked themes. If 'theme' is everything located at the beginning of the sentence, as a result of choice, then markedness of theme or use of special resource to put complements, objects and verbs in initial position betrays a deliberate choice.

5. Systemic Functional Linguistics

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory, founded by Halliday views languages as a social semiotic resource people use to accomplish their purposes by expressing meaning in context.

Systemic Functional Linguistics or SFL concerns language as a system of meaning. This argumentation is in line with Halliday in Bloor and Bloor (2004, p. 2). "For SFL, a language is 'a system of meanings'. That is to say that when people use language, their language acts, produce or, or more technically, construct meaning." According to Weil (1844 as cited in Wang, 2007), the theoretical principles underlying the study of theme and rheme are derived mainly from the Systemic-Functional Linguistics. "In the systemic functional approach to language study, each sentence encodes not just one, but three meanings simultaneously, and these meanings are related to the three different and very basic functions of language" (Butt et al., 2003 p. 6). Derewianka (2001, p. 256) says, "Halliday's approach has been to develop a model of grammar which provides a clear relationship between functions and grammatical systems". Such an approach reflects Halliday's belief that, "language is as it is because of its function in social structures" (Halliday, 1973, cited in Fairclough, 1992, p. 26). Butt (2000, p. 29) says that SFG redefines traditional grammar to recognize that, "words have functions as well as class, and that how a word functions can tell us more than any description of words in terms of class can about the piece of language, where it occurs, the person who chose to use it in that function, and the culture that surrounds the person and the message".

Halliday (1985, p. xiv) defines systemic theory as "a theory of meaning as choice, by which a language, or any other semiotic system, is interpreted as networks of interlocking options" (cf., Allan & Salmani Nodoushan 2015; Capone & Salmani Nodoushan 2014; Salmani Nodoushan 2006, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016a,b). According to Martin, Matthiessen, and Painter (1997, p. 1) "Functional grammar is a way of looking at grammar in terms of how grammar is used".

Within SFL the *clause* is the main constituent by which language is communicated. "The clause is the fundamental meaning structure in our linguistic communication with each other" (Butt et al. 2003, p. 33). A clause can be described as "any stretch of language centered on a verbal group "(Thompson, 2004, p. 17). In systemic functional grammar (SFG) (Halliday, 1994, 2000; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), texts are viewed as social processes and the context of a text is manifested through language, especially on the level of lexicogrammar. In the view of SFG, clause is the

basic linguistic unit which can be divided into three constituent parts: (i) the process itself; (ii) participants in the process; (iii) circumstances associated with the process. These parts construct the frame of reference for interpreting our experience of happening, doing, sensing, meaning, being and becoming. To Martin and Rose (2007), Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a big multi-perspectival theory with more dimensions in its theory banks that might be required for any one job. SFL is called systemic because compared with other theories it foregrounds the organization of language as options for meaning and is also functional because it interprets the design of language with respect to ways people use it to live. A key concept in Halliday's approach is the "context of situation" which obtains "through a systematic relationship between the social environment on the one hand, and the functional organization of language on the other" (Halliday, 1985, p. 11). According to Gerot and Wignell (1994), functional grammar tries to explain language in actual use and focus on text and their context. Systemic functional grammar concerns not only with structure but also how those structures construct meaning. The most prominent unit in functional grammar is clause rather than sentences. The principle unit of analysis in SFG is text, which is defined as any kind of passage, whether spoken or written that makes a unified whole. The term "unified whole" is described as texture which is claimed to be the distinguishing feature of texts (Eggins, 2004). According to Halliday (1999), systemic functional linguistics can be efficiently employed to help us analyze different types of texts and relate them to the original context in which they were produced as well as their general background-for whom it is written, what its angle is on the subject matter, and so on.

6. Previous research on thematization

Various scholars have in recent years contributed to the study of textuality of texts by analyzing their theme, thematic structure, and thematic progression in text across different languages to find out how academic texts unfold thematically. Hasselgard (2004) worked on thematic structures in 1200 sentences in English and their translation in Norwegian. She found that there were significant differences between these two languages regarding the grammatical structure of sentence openings. Zhou (2006) worked on the theme construction of Chinese language showing some grammatical dissimilarity with English. Working on interpersonal metafunction, she tried to show whether advertisement texts in Chinese and English journals engender similarities in interpersonal metafunction. Results indicated that the modal themes were not prevalent across both corpora, and so the advertisement texts did not engender similarities in interpersonal metafunction across two languages. Jallilifar and Khedri (2011) scrutinized thematic development and progression in English academic texts and their translations in Persian. Applying Halliday's (1994) thematic organization and McCabe's (1999) thematic progression, they analyzed sample academic texts selected from the first three pages of the first chapters of nine English applied linguistics books and their translation versions that were representatives of applied linguistics books taught in the

Iranian universities at undergraduate and graduate levels. Analyses of original texts and their Persian counterparts indicated that there were significant differences between the two text types regarding thematic development and progression especially in terms of unmarked and multiple themes.

7. Methodology

7.1. Materials

Different text types of scientific genres such as biology, geology, chemistry, physics and mathematics comprise the data pool. 20 books are randomly selected, among many books in scientific texts in English and Persian. The selected books are originally written in Persian and English. In order to have ample instances of texts, 5 paragraphs are selected from each book.

7.2. Procedure

The texts were analyzed for identification of marked thematization patterns in English and Persian scientific texts. Marked themes were analyzed to see the degree of homogeneity of scientific texts in English and Persian languages. In general, both qualitative and quantitative data analysis were employed in this study. Qualitative analysis was carried out in order to identify and categorize marked thematization patterns. Quantitative analysis, on the other hand, was conducted to determine the occurrences of marked themes in the selected English and Persian scientific texts. In order to carry out this study the following steps were taken: The first step was to choose 20 scientific books from different genres such as biology, geology, chemistry, physics and mathematics. The books were chosen randomly. Then, in order to have ample instances of the texts, 5 paragraphs were selected from each book. The next step was to read the Persian and English scientific texts and identify the sentences containing Marked thematic sentences. Halliday's (1960) SFG was used as the framework of the study. It is one of the most powerful models of grammatical theory that has been constructed for the purpose of text analysis. SFG refers to how messages are organized in relation to other messages to create coherence and cohesion. He classified themes into textual, interpersonal, and topical. Textual theme is concerned with theme and rheme and was the focus of the present study. The element of the clause which is in first position is known as the theme, and everything that follows is the rheme. The analysis of the selected texts was closely based on Grzegorek (1984) taxonomy of marked themes which are Topicalization, Left-Dislocation, Cleft and Pseudo cleft sentences. After identifying and categorizing marked thematic structures, a quantitative analysis was conducted to determine the frequency of marked thematic structures to find the differences between the four groups in this regard. Then, Chi-Square test was employed to compare and contrast the obtained frequencies to see the statistically significant differences. In sum, the data were analyzed using the SPSS (Statistics Package for Social Sciences). The data calculated with computational analysis. In fact, the Chi-Square test

was employed to see whether the differences between the two sets of data with regard to the occurrences of Marked themes were significant.

8. Results

This section elaborates the total frequency of classification of Marked thematic structures in English and Persian scientific texts.

Table 1: Total frequency of classification of marked thematic structures in the English and Persian scientific texts

Marked thematic sentences	Persian scientific texts		English scientific texts		Chi-Square Test Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
	No.	%	No.	%	
Topicalization	73	66.97	70	67.96	.948
Left-Dislocation	15	13.76	16	15.53	
Cleft sentences	7	6.42	6	5.82	
Pseudo-cleft sentences	14	12.84	11	10.67	
Total number of marked thematic sentences	109		103		

Based on Table 1, there are 109 cases of marked thematic structures in Persian scientific texts while there are 103 cases of marked thematic structures in English scientific texts. The Persian writers have applied TOP (66.97%) more than other classifications. they then have used LD (13.76%) and PCL (12.84%) more. Also, they have employed low frequency of the CL (6.42%). According to Table (4.1), the English writers have applied Top (67.96%) more than other classifications. They, then, have used LD (15.53%) more. Furthermore, they have employed a low frequency of the PCL (10.67%). The least frequency of classification of marked themes refers to the CL (5.82%). TOP was at the highest level in both kinds of texts, 73 cases in Persian scientific texts and 70 cases in English scientific texts. Chi-Square test was employed to compare and contrast the obtained frequencies to see the statistically significant differences between the English and Persian scientific texts. As the Chi-Square test for independence (with Yates Continuity Correction) indicated, the value of .864 was larger than the alpha value of .05, so the researcher concluded that the result is not significant. This means that there were no significant differences between Persian and English scientific texts. There was no association between them.

9. Discussion and Conclusion

As the Chi-Square test indicated, there were no significant differences between marked thematic structures of English and Persian scientific texts.

In other words, there was no association between Persian and English scientific texts. Therefore, Marked thematic structures similarly realized in Persian and English scientific texts. Based on the results obtained from the analysis of data, the research hypothesis maintained.

The findings of this research were in line with Forey's (2002) study. He concluded that, theme plays an important role in organizing the text. The present research also emphasized identification of theme by scientific texts' writers in organizing the text and conveying the message to readers. Wang's (2007) research was in line with the present study.

This paper was an attempt to examine marked thematic structures in the English and Persian scientific texts. The results revealed that marked thematic structures were present in both English and Persian texts. These findings contribute evidence to support the view that thematic structure is a greatly useful and important tool in writing. It increases the relationship and connection between ideas in the text.

Writers should get mastery over the grammar and structure of the language they are writing in, particularly in terms of thematic structure. They should try to convert information effectively, clearly and creating cohesive text. The cohesion in texts can be improved by concentration on thematic organization in texts.

Writers can apply the results of this study in writing texts. The obtained results can help them in writing process in terms of appropriate theme selection, conveying the message more clearly, developing cohesion in discourse, creating a cohesive text, helping them to avoid the use of odd thematic structures that are not typical of the language in use and make the text fuzzy, and helping readers to comprehend the text effectively. It can be assumed that implications of this study will be helpful for writers as well as those who teach English grammar to Persian language. The findings of this study hopefully help the writers with a wider and more comprehensible viewpoint about the process of writing to get familiar with the possible challenges in the writing process, preserve marked thematic structures, and convey the correct message.

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