





Information Structure

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**(adapted from Discourse analysis for
language teachers (P.51-60) and
Functional Grammar (P. 72-))**


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- **Most learners, when learning the grammar of a foreign language, spend time assimilating the structure of clauses in that language, i.e. Where subjects, objects and adverbials are placed in relation to the verb, and what options are available for rearranging the most typical sequences.**
 - **Discourse analysts are interested in the implications of these different structural options for the creation of text, and, as always, it is from the examination of natural data that patterns of use are seen to emerge**


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- **English is what is often called an 'SVO' language, in that the declarative clause requires a verb at its centre, a subject before it and any object after it.**
 - **There are in English a variety of ways in which the basic clause elements of subject, verbs, compl-object, adverbial can be rearranged by putting different elements at the beginning of the clause.**



These ways of bringing different elements to the front are called fronting *devices*.


1. *The Guardian, Joyce reads.* Object-fronted
2. Sometimes Joyce reads *The Guardian.* Adverbial-fronted
3. It's *The Gurdian Joyce reads.* (It-them, or cleft)
4. What Joyce reads is *The Guardian.* (Wh-pseudo-cleft)
5. She reads *The Guardian, Joyce.*
Right-displaced subject
6. Joyce, she reads *The Guardian.*
(Left-displaced subject)

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- **(1) seems to be saying something 'about' The Guardian rather than 'about' Joyce; (5) and (6) seem to be telling us something 'about' Joyce.**
 - **This 'aboutness' is the sort of notion discourse analysts are concerned with, for it is a speaker/writer choice made independently of the propositional content of the message; the speaker/writer decides how to 'stage' the information, where to start, so to speak, in presenting the message.**

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- **In English, what we decide to bring to the front of the clause (by whatever means) is a signal of what is to be understood as the framework within which what we want to say is to be understood.**
 - **The rest of the clause can then be seen as transmitting 'what we want to say within this framework'.**

Theme and rheme


- **Items brought to front-place we shall call the themes (or topics) of their clauses.**
- **Alternatively, the theme can be seen as the 'point of departure' of the message (Halliday 1985: 38).**
- **For the moment, we shall take as the theme of a clause the subject noun-phrase, or, if this is not initial, then we shall include whatever comes before it.**
- **It seems that position in the clause is important in many of the world's languages, and that creating a theme in the clause is a universal feature, though its realizations may vary from language to language.**

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- **Concentrating on the themes (or topics) of clausa does not tell us much about the rest of the clause, which may be called the *rheme or comment of the clause*.**

postcard

I'm sitting here at my desk writing to you.

Outside my window is a big lawn surrounded by trees, and in the middle of the lawn is a flower bed. It was full of daffodils and dips in the spring. You'd love it here. You must come and stay sometime; we've got plenty of room.



no	Theme (topic)	Rheme (comment)
1	I	'm sitting here ..
2	Outside my window	Is a big lawan ...
3	In the middle of the	Is a flower bed.
4	lawn	Was full of daffodils ...
5	This bed	'd love it here.
6	You	Must come and stay
7	You	've got plenty of room.



Two different options can be seen to be realized here:

- a) **the *rheme of sentence 3* contains an element (the flower bed) which becomes the *theme of sentence 4*;**
- b) ***the theme of sentence 5 is the same as the theme of sentence 6***

Option (a)

theme1

rheme 1



theme2

rheme 2



theme 3 - etc.



Option (b):

theme1 - rheme'



theme 2 – rheme



theme3 - etc.

Types of theme

- **Within the school of linguistics known as functional linguistics, three types of theme are identified:**
 - 1. topical**
 - 2. interpersonal**
 - 3. textual (Halliday, p. 72)**

Types of theme

- **Textual theme: The first fronted element (finally) organizes the text sequentially a--that the section is coming to a close.**
- **Interpersonal theme signals people' attitude towards what they have to say**
- **Topical theme is part of the content or ideational meaning of the message.**

Example

Textual	Interpersonal	Topical
Moreover . . . Likewise For instance	Frankly Obviously Personally	<i>Joe Smith Burglars I</i>