

THEME AND RHEME ANALYSIS AND POLITENESS STRATEGY IN DIPLOMATIC WORKPLACE WRITING: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Rahardjo¹, Didin Nuruddin Hidayat*², and Alek
^{1,2,3}UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta

Abstract

This study explores thematic progression patterns within the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and the selection of words identified in writing within the diplomatic workplace. Politeness strategy employed between government to government communication through written diplomatic texts and its relationship with theme and rheme progression is the focus of this study. It is also aimed at raising host country EFL diplomat as well as university students' awareness of progression patterns and the importance of persuasive writing to mitigate confrontational notions. Many researches have been conducted on public diplomacy and international relations on speeches or verbal texts but no studies on written text communication between a diplomatic office in a foreign country with the host country office announcing the arrival or departure of a diplomat from a foreign nation. To fill that gap is the reason of this study is aiming. A descriptive qualitative study was employed to analyze the theme-rheme progression patterns on a third-party-type diplomatic text of the Embassy of the United States of America addressed to the host country diplomatic consular section of the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia in Jakarta. SFL theory was applied particularly in analyzing the textual meta-function of the text to find the theme-rheme progression patterns. The result showed that the distribution of themes and rhemes in the text being analyzed follows the simple progression category.

Keywords: Theme, Rheme, Progression, Diplomatic Text

INTRODUCTION

In order for communication to be successful, speakers or writers have to choose the beginning point for their word. In writing, the word at the beginning point of the sentence or clause will become the center or main topic the writer wants to point out and to grammatically organize and develop text elements to hold together and give the text meaning and for the reader to guide him to interpret and successfully understand the message being communicated. Anything that is selected to begin in the text be it adverbial, prepositional or verbal phrases will influence the hearer/reader's interpretation of everything that will come after it in the discourse. The beginning point of the text can only make sense to the addressee if followed by other units expanding the point to make a unity. In English texts whether it is a single clause or a sentence, discourse units can be separated

*correspondence Address
E-mail:

into two parts, namely Theme and Rheme. Halliday (2004) states text is any occurrence of language, in any form of communication that makes sense to someone who knows the language. A text covers two perspectives complimenting one another, i.e., why it means what it does and what it reveals about the system of the language in which it is spoken or written. To comprehend the organization of texts and their intended meanings at the discourse level, within the systemic functional linguistics theory, Theme and Thematic Progression Patterns (T/TP) are used to analyze the structure and meaning of texts (Jing, 2015). This theory hypothesizes that a sentence or a clause is made up by Theme and Rheme where Theme functions as the initial point of a clause telling readers what information to follow while Rheme is the ensuing or other part of a clause that forms a wholeness of a sentence following the Theme (Liu & Zhang, 2018). Theme is also called “old” or “given” and Rheme is the “new” information expanding the topic. Theme and Rheme are the two choices that form a major system in the textual metafunction. By Theme, as Halliday (2004) points out as what the message is concerned with and the starting point for what the speaker or writer wants to say which can be illustrated in the following sentence (*italic*): ‘*The house is not for sale*’. ‘The house’ is the starting point and is the topic of the sentence which in communicative terms is what the speaker or writer wants to talk about. All others that follow and are associated to the starting point are referred to as Rheme (Jing, 2015). Thus Rheme in the example sentence is ‘*is not for sale*’ and to function as expansion of the topic. To analyze the thematic progression of a text, scholars have different ways in categorizing and naming the text development. McCabe-Hidalgo and Belmonte (1998) proposes four progressions, i.e. simple linear progression, constant progression, derived hyperthematic progression, and split progression while Paltridge (2012) and Linda et al. (2017), state there are three kinds of thematic development patterns, i.e. theme reiteration / constant theme pattern, zigzag linear theme pattern, and multiple theme / split rheme pattern. However, a thorough understanding of Thematic progression is beneficial in order for EFL/ESL writers to be successful in communicating their ideas. In testing the above-stated hypothesis, this paper attempts to analyze a sample of written text from within a diplomatic workplace, The Embassy of the United States of America in Jakarta, hereinafter USA in its interaction with the host country foreign affairs office, The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, hereinafter the Department of Foreign Affairs that will also touch the issue of the choice of words in the writing of third-party types of diplomatic notes announcing the arrival of a diplomat accompanied with his family members. While studies on thematic progressions are in abundance, no study has been conducted specifically regarding the

organization of texts and on the use of selected words constructed in the diplomatic writing being studied. Two research questions in this study are posed: (1) how themes and rhemes are distributed in the text and (2) why specific, selected words are used in the text. It hopefully serves as a bridge to increase host country EFL diplomat students attending the Indonesian Foreign Affairs Academy and university students' awareness of the importance of English writing as is used in foreign affairs relations. The Indonesian Foreign Affairs Academy is a state-run academy that produces would-be diplomats to be stationed overseas representing Indonesia. For the purposes of this study, the data being analyzed is a written diplomatic text (USA) sent to the addressee, host country foreign office (The Department of Foreign Affairs) announcing the arrival of a US diplomat and his spouse to Indonesia. This is in conformance to Article 5, Appendix I of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961 on establishment and conduct of diplomatic relations in which the sending state should notify the receiving state to accredit a head of mission or any member of staff.

“The sending State may, after it has given due notification to the receiving States concerned, accredit a head of mission or assign any member of the diplomatic staff, as the case may be, to more than one State, unless there is express objection by any of the receiving States”.

The term ‘diplomacy’ in this paper is according to Omenogor (2019), defined as a way to phrase statements in a polite, tactical, non-committal and nonconfrontational manner to gain a strategic advantage or to find mutually acceptable solutions to a common challenge. Related to the selection of words structure, the use of friendly words is central to maintain or cultivate hospitable relationships, trust, and openness in foreign relations (Ishihara, 2016). According to Friedrich (2016) the use of nonviolent language for diplomatic purposes must appear to bear a fine balance between being direct and indirect, assertive and empathetic, and persuasive and compromising. In the context of this study diplomacy can be defined as the art to deal with or the ability to control difficult situations tactfully verbally or in writing without upsetting others. The ability to write diplomatic texts cohesively becomes central for a diplomat. In this paper, the selection of words structure to provide meanings related to theme and rheme progression will be analyzed.

In the systemic functional grammar (SFG), the terms Theme and Rheme have various definitions. Halliday (2004) says Theme is the starting point of the message and Herriman (2011) as a heading in the text that provides a framework for the interpretation of the message. Rheme on the other hand is defined as the remaining part that develops the theme.

Thus Rheme is what the speaker is going to talk and develop about the Theme that contains a piece of information unfamiliar or new to the reader. These two characteristics have become a significant and useful guide to the full understanding of and in the interpretation of the text (Ridha, 2014). Theme as “the point of departure of the clause” (Halliday, 2004) has been extended to signal the relationship between the thought in the speaker’ mind and its expression in discourse (McCabe-Hidalgo & Belmonte, 1998; Vasconcellos, 1992) in which the speaker chooses one element or other for thematic position based on the thought (s)he wants to express and on how (s)he wants to connect that thought to the surrounding text. Thus Theme is the idea represented by the constituent at the beginning of the clause and the surrounding text is the Rheme that completes the thought expressed by the writer/speaker (McCabe-Hidalgo & Belmonte, 1998). To sum up the initial position in the clause can be defined as the Theme while the non-initial position is described as the Rheme (Shame, 2020). Theme and thematic progression is central in how speakers construct their messages in such a way to make them fit smoothly and to unfold the language event (Thompson et al., 2014; Wei, 2014). Choices of theme and rheme are functional dependent upon the text content (Shieh & Lin, 2011). Eggins (2004) says a text is the realization of three kinds of metafunction, i.e. ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. According to Danes (1974) and Firbas (1992), it is the selection and sequences of utterances and their interconnection of the units such as paragraphs or chapters in the whole text and situation. Danes classifies the thematic progression into some patterns namely, simple linear, constant, derived hyperthematic progression, and split progression. Halliday (2004) categorizes Theme into three namely, topical theme which consists of marked and unmarked theme, interpersonal theme and textual theme which consists of structural conjunction, relative, conjunctive adjunct and continuative (Ridha, 2014). To complete the interpretation and understanding of a text from the readers’ standpoint, a constituent should follow the theme to make a wholeness of the intended message. This constituent that can complete the given information or theme is called Rheme. Rheme develops the information uttered at the initial point of departure to make connect and build a unity. As stated in the earlier section, Rheme expands the information the speaker/writer wants to state or is concerned with. As an example, the following sentence (*italic*) will highlight the concept of part and parcel of Theme (T) and Rheme (R), ‘(T)Perth weather (R)is quite balmy in December’, the Rheme (R) *is quite balmy in December* is the added information.

Messages between countries are communicated through diplomatic notes or DipNote as cited in the U.S. State Department’s official blog. Such messages are style-written

differently in accordance to types of notes, and ranks of the interlocutors of the respective countries. Diplomatic correspondence is drafted in two ways, i.e. first person and third person notes following certain established formula (US Department of State, Third-Person Notes 5 FAH-1 H-612.2. The diplomatic text under study announces the arrival of a diplomatic staff attached to the US embassy in Jakarta whose assignment is mandated under Article 5, Appendix I of the Vienna Convention 1961. It is a third-party-type note (Note Diplomatique) or one of seven in the list stipulated in the Foreign Affairs Handbook (FAH). The handbook is quoted below:

5 FAH-1 H-612.2-5 Note Diplomatique (CT:CH-4; 07-31-2002)

“A note diplomatique is a formal note between governments which speaks for and under the direction of the government presenting it. A diplomatic courtesy phrase or complimentary close is not used. A note diplomatique may be signed or initialed by a government representative from the Department or an officer authorized by the chief of mission at post (see 5 FAH-1 EXHIBIT H-612.2-5(A) and (5 FAH-1 EXHIBIT H-612.2-5(B)).”

The text is drafted as such using the opening following courtesy formulas (*italic*) as:

“The Embassy of... presents its compliments to the Foreign Affairs Ministry and has the honour to inform...” and ending with: *“The Embassy of... avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Foreign Affairs Ministry the assurances of its highest consideration”*.

It is beyond the scope of this present paper to explore the history of the selection of words that sound to be high-sounding in all diplomatic notes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative study of textural data identified in the corpus of third party type of diplomatic written texts from an embassy, i.e. The Embassy of the United States of America – hereinafter USA to a host country foreign affairs office, The Department Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia – hereinafter Deplu. One data in the form of diplomatic note was extracted from the embassy’s archives and analyzed applying the SFL progression theory proposed by Danes (2004) in particular within one of the three metafunctions, i.e. textual metafunction. In this study, the writer analyzes the theme and rheme in each clause and how it connects with the following part of the clause to make the intended meaning as well as the choice of words which sound to be very peculiar in term of politeness. Theme and Rheme are the two terms that part and parcel which describe the way in which information is distributed within a sentence. In summary, Rheme (R) is added to the information the writer is concerned with the topic in Theme (T).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following data (*italic*) is an excerpt of a third-party-type of diplomatic note sent to the host country foreign office. Third-party-type diplomatic notes refer to the use of a third person pronoun placed at the initial text to communicate to an interlocutor of a similar power distance. Such notes also differ in a way in the use of selected words depicting politeness and maintaining respects and salutation. The name of the person in the note is imaginary for the purpose of this study and the analysis will begin from the first sentence of the first of three paragraphs in the text.

(1) *The Embassy of the United States of America (1) presents its compliment to the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and (2) has the honor to inform that (3) Mr. Anthony Blanke (3) has arrived in Jakarta, Indonesia on June 25, 2010 to assume duties as Attaché of Administration in the Embassy. Mr. Anthony Blanke, holder of diplomatic passport number, BF1 XXXXXX is accompanied by his spouse, Mrs. Getrude Blanke, passport number, BF 2 XXXXXX valid for three years.*

Theme	Rheme
(T1) The Embassy of the United States of America	(R1) presents its compliment to the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia <i>and</i>
(T2) The Embassy of the United States of America	(R2) has the honor to inform <i>that</i>
(T3) Mr. Anthony Blanke	(R3) has arrived in Jakarta, Indonesia on June 25, 2010 to assume duties as Attaché of Administration in the Embassy.

In this compound sentence, the Theme (1) is followed by Rheme (1) that expands the topic and the conjunction “and” connects Theme (2) with Rheme (2). Theme (3) preceded by *that* connects to Rheme (3). The flow can be represented as follows:

Theme 1	—————→	Rheme 1
Theme 2	—————→	Rheme 2
Theme 3	—————→	Rheme 3

In this example, the item in the Theme of the first clause is used as the Theme in the following clause. Danes (1974) calls this constant progression.

The second sentence in the first paragraph is represented in Table 2 as follows:

Theme	Rheme
(T1) Mr. Anthony Blanke, holder of diplomatic passport number, BF1 XXXXXX	(R1) is accompanied by his spouse, Mrs. Getrude Blanke, passport number BF 2 XXXXXX valid for three years.

As can be seen above, the flow of the theme and rheme is again linear. The rheme completes the ideational thought represented by Mr. Anthony Blanke.

The second paragraph of the text consists of two sentences as follows:

The Embassy requests that Mr. Anthony Blanke and Mrs. Getrude Blanke be granted a diplomatic visa and exit reentry permit during their tenure in Indonesia. Their passports are attached for the Department's perusal.

Again, the progression pattern of the above sentences can be depicted in the following table:

(T1) The Embassy	(R1) requests that Mr. Anthony Blanke and Mrs. Getrude Blanke be granted a diplomatic visa and exit reentry permit during their tenure in Indonesia.
(T2) Their passports	(R2) are attached for the Department's perusal.

The last paragraph is the concluding sentence signaling the end of the text. It represents an appreciation to the addressee and it is organized in one sentence giving the final comment or decision that leaves the reader with the most important ideas to think about.

The Embassy of the United States of America avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia the assurances of its highest cooperation and consideration.

(T1) The Embassy of the United States of America	(R1) avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia the assurances of its highest cooperation and consideration.
--	--

Based on the above analysis of the text in three paragraphs, there is linearity between themes and rhemes in all the sentences keeping cohesion and coherence of continuous, sequence information (Hoek, 2018; Trevisan & García, 2019; Fatmawati et al., 2019).

From the diplomatic perspective, sincerity and respect as written in the text by way of choosing the words away from informality can be shown in the following table:

Selected words/phrases	Verb meanings and/or expression of politeness in the context of diplomacy	Location in text
(1) *presents its compliments...	<i>* give (v) one's respects or greeting; to display one's diplomatic credentials</i>	<i>Compound sentence in paragraph 1</i>
(2) *has the honor to inform...	<i>* regard (v) or treat (someone) with admiration and respect</i>	<i>Compound sentence in paragraph 1</i>

(3) <i>*request that ...</i>	<i>*ask for (v); The act of asking persuasively in a tactful manner without upsetting anyone (n)</i>	First sentence in paragraph 2
(4) <i>*avails itself of this opportunity to renew to...</i>	<i>* make use (v); thanking and showing of graciousness (n)</i>	Sole sentence in paragraph 3

(*) Quoted from Webster's II New Riverside University (1984)

Theme and Rheme progression patterns differ dependent upon the organization of the structure and development in discourse and between the interlocutors. The fluid process of interconnectedness takes place where the interlocutors engage and share the negotiated process. Evidence shows that interconnectedness between theme and rheme in all the sentences in the analyzed data follows a linear, constant progression where the theme in the first clause is used and reiterated in the next clause (Bloor, 2004; Hoek, 2018; McCabe-Hidalgo & Belmonte, 1998). The choice of words applied in five sentences clustered in three paragraphs also differs which is away from informality as the interlocutors involve a diplomatic entity and the host country. It shows sincere politeness avoiding the use of first person and second person pronoun. Instead, it uses a "third" person pronoun which is a common text genre within diplomatic entities. According to Ishihara (2016), such language use is applicable to shape collaborative relations and the value of mutual respect. Direct language use may not apply to more formal occasions involving higher-stakes outcomes in diplomacy. Meanwhile, the use a third person pronoun reflects a politeness strategy between two parties enjoying similar power distance as stated by Ishihara (2016) and Omenogor (2019) above. Sincerity, politeness and indirectness are evidenced in the construct of the sentences that form a constant thematic progression.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In the writing of diplomatic texts requesting the services of the host country offices, writers apply a different text genre in constructing the message which in this context is hortatory in nature. A singular third-person note in the form of active voice is used in the request of services from the interlocutor. The interconnectedness between theme and rheme is found to be constant and flows smoothly. There is a level of power distance similarity between the sender and the recipient. It is believed that there is a relationship between the constant theme-rheme constant progression and the use of a third-person pronoun in the diplomatic text as well as the selection polite words. Thematic progression model appears to be fully applicable in helping to reveal the internal organization of the text. Within the EFL teaching and learning perspective, the introduction of Theme-rheme theory to young

EFL diplomat and university students and the like will help improve their writing coherence especially as it also relates to the writing of diplomatic texts. It can also be very helpful as a tool of instruction at the level of discourse for the writing teachers. Suggestion for future research would be that a wider array of diplomatic texts could be investigated.

REFERENCES

- 5 FAH-1 EXHIBIT H-612.2-5(A). (n.d.). Retrieved March 8, 2021, from <https://fam.state.gov/fam/05fah01/05fah010610.html>
- 5 FAH-1 EXHIBIT H-612.2-5(B). (n.d.). Retrieved March 8, 2021, from <https://fam.state.gov/fam/05fah01/05fah010610.html>
- 5 FAH-1 H-612.2-5 *Note Diplomatique* (CT:CH-4; 07-31-2002). (n.d.). Retrieved March 8, 2021, from <https://fam.state.gov/fam/05fah01/05fah010610.html>
- 5 FAH-1 H-612.2 *Third-Person Notes* (CT:CH-4; 07-31-2002). (n.d.). Retrieved March 8, 2021, from <https://fam.state.gov/fam/05fah01/05fah010610.html>
- Bloor, T. (2004). *The functional analysis of English*. Hodder Education. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203774854>
- Danes, F. (1974). Functional sentence perspective and the organization of the text. *Papers on Functional Sentence Perspective*, 23, 106–128. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111676524.106>
- Danes, F. (2004). Universality vs. culture-specificity of emotion. In E. Weigand (Ed.), *Emotion in Dialogic Interaction Advances in the Complex*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Eggins, S. (2004). *An introduction to systemic functional linguistics* (2nd ed.). Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Fatmawati, D., Sinar, T. S., Ganie, R., & Yusuf, M. (2019). Thematic progression patterns of short story the black cat. *Language Literacy: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Teaching*, 3(1), 64–73. <https://doi.org/10.30743/ll.v3i1.1082>
- Firbas, J. (1992). *Functional sentence perspective in written and spoken communication*. Cambridge University Press.
- Friedrich, P. (2016). World Englishes and peace linguistics: Their contribution to English for diplomatic purposes. In P. Friedrich (Ed.), *English for Diplomatic Purposes*. Short Run Press Ltd.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (2004). *An introduction to functional grammar* (C. M. I. M. Matthiessen (Ed.); 3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Herriman, J. (2011). Themes and theme progression in Swedish advanced learners' writing in English. *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 10(1), 1–28.
- Hoek, J. (2018). *Making sense of discourse*. Gerd Stabler.
- Ishihara, N. (2016). Softening or intensifying your language in oppositional talk: Disagreeing agreeably or defiantly. In P. Friedrich (Ed.), *English for Diplomatic Purposes*. Short Run Press Ltd.
- Jing, W. (2015). Theme and thematic progression in English writing teaching. *Journal of Getsempena English Education Journal (GEEJ)* Vol.8 No.1 May 2021

Education and Practice, 6(21), 178–187.

- Linda, L., Maisa, M., & Mulatsih, D. (2017). The use of thematic progression in writing hortatory exposition text. *Academic Journal Perspective: Education, Language, and Literature*, 5(2), 125–136. <https://doi.org/10.33603/perspective.v5i2.679>
- Liu, X., & Zhang, H. (2018). Discourse Analysis of the Victory Speech of President Trump from the Perspective of Theme and Thematic Progression Patterns. *Education and Humanities Research*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/emim-18.2018.56>
- McCabe-Hidalgo, A., & Belmonte, I. A. (1998). Theme-rheme patterns in L2 writing. *Didáctica*, 10, 13–31. <https://doi.org/10.5209/DIDA.20673>
- Vienna convention on diplomatic relations, (1961). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781843143055-31>
- Omenogor, H. D. (2019). The use of the passive voice for diplomatic and polite formal communications. *Agbor Campus ANSU Journal of Language and Literary (AJILLS)*, 1(5), 73–84
- Paltridge, B. (2012). *Discourse analysis: An introduction*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Ridha, N. S. A. (2014). Theme and rheme: types and problems in EFL university students' written texts. *Journal of Basrah Researches (Humanities)*, 39(1), 92–114.
- Shame, E. (2020). Choice of theme-rheme in political news reports in the Malawian English-language printed media. *Journal of Humanity*, 28(1), 49–71.
- Shieh, C., & Lin, K. S. (2011). *Thematic progression patterns and the texts of the department required english test*. 15–34.
- Soukhanov, A. H., & Ellis, K. (Eds.). (1984). *Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Thompson, S. A., Loveland, J. M., & Fombelle, P. W. (2014). Thematic discrepancy analysis: A method to gain insights into lurkers and test for non-response bias. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28(1), 55–67. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.06.001>
- Trevisan, P., & García, A. M. (2019). Systemic functional grammar as a tool for experimental stimulus design: New applicable horizons in psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics. *Language Sciences*, 75, 35–46. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2019.101237>
- Vasconcellos, M. (1992). The theme as message onset: Its structure and characteristics. *Linguistics*, 30(1), 147–164. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ling.1992.30.1.147>
- Wei, J. (2014). Theme and thematic progression in learner English: A literature review. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, 16(1), 67. <https://doi.org/10.14483/udistrital.jour.calj.2014.1.a06>