

**A Thematic Structure Analysis of the Washing Ton
Post Newspaper Article "The Most Shocking Political
Assassination of the Past Decade Remains an Utter
Mystery"**

أ.م. أحمد محمد مهدي الباحث عبد الزهرة فاهم

جامعة القادسية / كلية التربية

ahmed.alzubaidv@cu.edu.iq

Abstract

This paper investigates the thematic structure analysis of the Washing Ton Post Newspaper Article "The Most Shocking Political Assassination of the Past Decade Remains an Utter Mystery". It is mainly concerned about Benazir Bhutto's Assassination. There have been several assassinations of well-known political figures, many of them lost their lives, whereas many more narrowly escaped. Understanding whether or not assassinations truly affect the development of events is crucial to comprehending assassination as a historical effect, a policy, or even a social issue. The aim of this paper is to examine theme and rheme organizations and to identify the patterns of thematic progression that are utilised in this article. The researcher has utilised an eclectic model for analyzing the research data based on Halliday's 2004 functional approach and Danes' 1974 thematic progression patterns. The thematic structure analysis of this study reveals that sentence elements that convey given information are consistently referred to as Themes, while elements that convey new information are referred to as Rhemes. The

thematic elements of many lexical items utilized to describe assassinated figures are carried out in the marked and unmarked thematic structure in the research data.

Key Words : Thematic structure, Thematic progression, Theme, Rheme, Bhutto's assassination.

الخلاصة

تكشف الورقة البحثية تحليل البنية الموضوعية لمقالة مجلة واشنطن بوست المعنونة "بقايا الغموض التام للاغتيال السياسي الاكثر صدمة في العقد الماضي". تتناول المقالة بصورة رئيسية اغتيال بوتو. كان هنالك العديد من الاغتيالات للرموز السياسية البارزة. خسر العديد من هذه الرموز حياتهم، بينما نجا العديد منهم بأعجوبة. إن فهم ما إذا كانت الاغتيالات تؤثر حقاً على تطور الأحداث أم لا، أمر بالغ الأهمية لفهم الاغتيال باعتباره تأثيراً تاريخياً، أو سياسة، أو حتى قضية اجتماعية. تهدف الورقة البحثية الى فحص تنظيمات المُسند اليه والمُسند وكذلك التعرف على انماط التقدم الموضوعي في المقالة اعلاه. أستخدم الباحث نموذج انتقائي لتحليل بيانات البحث معتمداً على منهج هاليداي الوظيفي لعام (٢٠٠٤) وأنماط التقدم الموضوعي دينيس عام (١٩٧٤). يكشف تحليل البنية الموضوعية للدراسة أن عناصر الجملة التي تزودنا بالمعلومات المعطاة يشار لها بالمُسند اليه، بينما عناصر الجملة التي تزودنا بالمعلومات الجديدة يشار لها بالمُسند. استخدم تحليل المعلومات والمواضيع لمختلف المصطلحات المعجمية لوصف الرموز المختالة، حيث ان توظيف مضامين تلك المصطلحات نُفذ في بنية موضوعية موسومة وغير موسومة في بيانات البحث.

الكلمات المفتاحية : البنية الموضوعية، التقدم الموضوعي، المُسند اليه، المُسند، اغتيال بوتو.

1- Introduction

The notion of theme and rheme was presented by Mathesius, a representative of Prague School, and it is considered to be one of the most significant elements of Systemic Functional Grammar. The results of Mathesius were subsequently recognised by Halliday (2000), who pointed out that themes could be classified into marked and unmarked based on the degree of markedness. A Czech linguist named Danes and Chinese scholars started conducting relevant investigations in

the 1980s, which led to the development of the thematic progression. Theme and rheme theories, as well as thematic progression patterns, have been extensively used in the analysis of many forms of discourse such as translation, news reports, and academic writing during the past three decades (Hu, 2013; Liu, 2016; Zhu, 2016). However, there have been very few research that have specifically investigated the thematic structure and patterns of thematic progression in the political assassinations.

Therefore, based on the theory of thematic structure and thematic progression patterns, this paper attempts to analyse the Washing Ton Post newspaper article "The Most Shocking Political Assassination of the Past Decade Remains an Utter Mystery" that concerned with the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the prime minister of Pakistan, that happened during the decade preceding and is still a mystery. Investigators and the general public are perplexed since the circumstances and specifics of the assassination remain unknown.

2- Literature Review

The expansion of the theme and rheme ideas has been largely attributed to the Danes, Firbas, and Mathesius, among others Prague School linguists. Much long before then, these two concepts had already been applied (Adjémian 1978). Henri Weil (a French scholar of German descent) first introduced the concepts that known as theme and rheme in the 19th century. It is stated in Weil's book (1879) that the order of words corresponds to the organisation of theme and rheme in the context. In other words, the evolution of ideas is what determines the order of words in a sentence or phrase that are conveyed by individuals in order to perform a communicative act (Adjémian, 1978, p.253). Weil(1879) divided the sentence into two components, the theme and the rheme to demonstrate his theory of word order. Theme is defined as "le point de depart", or "the departure point that

serve as the discourse's objectives" and the rheme as "the goal of discourse" (Weil,1879, pp. 20-21).

Among other Prague School linguists, Vilém Mathesius (1939–1974) developed the theory of Functional Sentence Perspective. Mathesius, the Prague School creator, proposed theme and rheme first. The rheme, which derives from the Functional Sentence, denotes the maximum level of Communicative Dynamism, which is more significant than the theme that refers to the lowest degree of Communicative Dynamism. The two terms were adopted and modified by several Functional Grammar School linguists such as Halliday. The initial part of a phrase, which is the known information, and what the writer and reader are aware of is referred to as the theme, while rheme is the description of the theme that the speaker wants to convey. Comparatively, the main function of theme in functional grammar is to set the topic and provide the framework (Thompson,2000).

According to Adjémian (1978, p.265), FSP is as well described as a level of analyses, which shows how sentence components are distributed based on their function as discourse units. The communicative function of a sentence determines the word order and structure of its constituent parts, allowing the writer or speaker to convey what they intend to say in a particular context. The theme-rheme structure of a phrase, according to FSP, expresses the writer's or speaker's intended meaning. It has been pointed out in the works dealing with FSP, that there are two different aspects of theme and rheme:

- Theme refers to the subject of the speech or the point of departure, •
- whereas Rheme refers to the comment or the goal of the discourse.
- Theme as a given information that is known, and Rheme as information •
- that is unknown, which is a new.

Mathesius (1939) defines the theme as "the starting point of the speech" and "that which is known or at least obvious in the Given situation, and from which the speaker proceeds in his discourse". Conversely, rheme is defined as "the core of the utterance", and "what the speaker states about, or in regard to the starting point of the utterance"(Mathesius, 1939,p.234). In contrast, Firbas (1987) argues that the theme does not always have to be 'known' and it does not have to be the first element in a phrase. Instead, it is the element with the lowest degree of communicative dynamism in the clause, that is to say, The theme's information contributes the least to the development of the communication within the phrase (Firbas,1987,p.138).

Taking into consideration the definitions provided by Mathesius, the Czech system considers the sequence Theme-Transition-Rheme to be indicative of 'objective' word order. This refers to the normal and unmarked development of information within a sentence, beginning with Given and moving towards New information. On the other hand, the sequence Rheme-Transition-Theme is considered to be of 'subjective' word order, which is marked and begins with New and moves on towards Given information (Mathesius,1939).

In fact, the most important contributions that Mathesius made were his investigation of the function that FSP plays a role in defining the order of words and his inquiry to the theme and rheme in modern language (Firbas,1974, p.13). Thus, Mathesius does not differentiate between given and new, which is the transmission of unknown information by rheme and known information by theme, and the thematic structure, which states that the theme as the first element while the rheme is last element. Moreover, Firbas (1974) demonstrates the example, "A girl came into the room", Mathesius's method in theme-rheme analysis in (FSP) falls short in accounting for the generality unmarked and natural language use.

According to Firbas (1974, p.18), if Mathesius's method is to be followed, then

the sequence Theme-Transition-Rheme should be represented by unmarked structures like "A girl came into the room". In a sentence like this, while the Subject, "A girl," conveys the unknown, the adjunct "into the room," which stands for the text's contextually or an element recoverably dependent, conveys known information. The verb or the transition stays the same. The structure of the unmarked sentence like "A girl came into the room" indicates the order of "rheme transition theme rather than theme transition rheme" when determining theme and rheme, in accordance with Mathesius's recoverability criterion

3- Theoretical Framework

3.1 Thematic Structure

The thematic structure, a crucial concept in textual function, is described as the structure that conveys the line of meaning. This concept was first proposed by Mathesius, who categorised sentences into three distinct components: theme, narrative, and transition (Han,2010). In contrast with Mathesius categories, the thematic structure in Halliday's framework of systemic functional linguistics has been modified and expanded based. Halliday (2000) pointed out that each phrase or utterance could be separated into two semantic components from the standpoint of communicative function, and these components are theme and rheme. Moreover, the theme exhibits the characteristic of markedness and unmarkedness according to the grammatical perspective (Halliday, 2000). Therefore, it may be categorised as a marked theme and an unmarked theme, with the difference being in their association with the topic. An unmarked theme refers to a situation when the theme is the same as the position of the subject. This is the most common form of theme observed in discourse. When a subject does not function as a theme, it is called a marked theme (Halliday, 2000).(as cited in Ningyi,2020,p.147).

3.2 Thematic Progression Patterns

The thematic structure of each phrase is specific to itself. Both the theme and the rheme of a sentence are obvious when the phrase is considered in isolation; nevertheless, when the sentences are combined to form a text, there will be relationship and change between the theme and the rheme. Connection and change are referred to as progression, and the basic pattern of theme change that can be summarised from sentences that seem to be disordered is the pattern of thematic progression (Zhu and Yan, 2005). As far as thematic progression patterns are concerned, linguists have proposed a variety of classification methods. Within the context of continuous speech, for example, Danes identified three different forms of thematic progression patterns.

The concept of thematic progression, which was developed from the work of Danes in 1974, refers to the way in which texts develop the ideas that they connect with one another. More specifically, thematic progression is concerned with the origins of themes and the ways in which they are connected to other themes and rhemes in the text. A systematic relation between the theme-rheme choices and experience selections in a text, which results in the development of patterns of thematic progression, forms the basis that contributes to these patterns. An investigation of thematic development may be carried out by examining the cohesive ties that exist between the different themes that are present in a text as well as the positions of the things that are considered to be connected by the cohesive ties. Therefore, given a theme, what are the elements that are cohesive within that theme, and where are those items that are cohesive resolved. (Ghadessy, 1995, p.7).

4- Model of Analysis

4.1 Halliday' 2004 Functional Grammar

This approach involves the analysis of the thematic structure of sentences, typically separating them into theme and rheme. Conventionally, the theme is what the sentence is about, often the subject or the part of the sentence that appears first. The rheme constitutes the remainder of the sentence, contributing information about the theme. Utilization of the model in this study aims at analyzing the structure of the newspaper articles to identify the kinds of theme and rheme, marked and unmarked theme, as well as new and given information. The objective of this model is to establish an analytical framework for theme-rheme components in selected newspaper articles. It permits the dissection of the clauses in terms of theme and rheme.

Halliday(2014,p.89) states that the theme includes facts or information that is already known, while rheme is the rest of the message and includes new information. Theme serves as the message's introduction, while rheme serves as its development. According to Halliday (1985, 2004), there are two types of themes: unmarked themes that are the subject of the sentence and marked themes that do not coincide with the subject of the sentence.

Unmarked Themes -١

The only unmarked theme element is the subject, which appears in a declarative clause. Nominal groups are responsible for the realisation of the subject, which includes the pronoun as head, the common or proper noun as head, and the nominalized clause as head. (Halliday& Matthiessen,2014,p.100).

'I had a little nut-tree' (pronoun as a head) **-a**

'Mary had a little lamb' (proper noun as a head) **-b**

'What I want is a proper cup of coffee' (nominalized clause as head) **-c**

Marked themes -٢

They are aspects that come initially in the phrase (circumstance, participant, and process). An adverbial group or prepositional phrase acting as adjunct is the most typical form of marked theme(Halliday,2014,p.100).

Merrily we roll along (adverbial group) -a
 on Saturday night # I lost my wife (prepositional phrase) -b

4.2 Danes' 1974 Thematic progression patterns

despite the fact that there are several models for the patterns of thematic progression, Danes is still more useful than the others, he claims that the interactional patterns convey the text's thematic progression (Danes,1974,p.113) (as cited in Hussein, Y.A.,& Ahmed, M.F.2021,p.81).

The notion of three major categories of thematic patterns proposed by Danes (1974) provides an explanation of the putting of information in speech contexts. It would seem that his definition of the connection between themes and their rhemes provides a more adequate description of the way by which texts are developed. Danes (1974) suggested three main thematic progression patterns that are as follows:

Simple Linear Thematic Progression -١

In this pattern, the rheme of the initial phrase will be transformed into the theme of the clause that comes after it as in the following example:

The little narrow, crooked town of Dover hid itself away from the beach and ran its head into the chalk chiffs, like a marine ostrich. The beach was a desert of heaps of sea and stones tumbling wildly about, and the sea did what it liked, and what it liked was destruction.

It is evident that the main rheme of the preceding phrase, "hide itself away from the beach", is the source of the theme of the second clause, "The beach". The same successive supplying is repeated in the space between the second and third sentences.

Continuous Thematic Progression -٢

The following example demonstrates how the theme of the subsequent sentence is also derived from the previous clause:

Monseigneur ,one of the great lords in power at the court, held his fortnightly reception in his grand hotel in Paris .Monseigneur was in his inner room, his sanctuary of sanctuaries, the Holiest of Holiests to the crowd of worshipping in the suite of rooms without .Monseigneur was about to take his chocolate.

In the given example, the successive sentences have the same Theme which is (Monseigneur).

Derived Hyper thematic Progression -٣

The specific themes in following clauses have been derived from a hyper-theme or the same overarching theme, as in the following example:

In England, there was scarcely an amount of order and protection to justify much national boasting. Daring burglaries by armed men, and highway robberies, took place in the capital itself every night; families were publicly cautioned not to go out of town removing their furniture to upholsterers 'warehouses for security; the highwayman in the dark was a City tradesman in the light, and being recognized and challenged by his fellow-tradesman whom he stopped in his character of "the

Captain," gallantly shot him through the head and rode away; the mail was waylaid by seven robbers, and the guard shot three dead, and then got shot dead himself by the other four (Book First, Ch.1, p.4f) as cited in (Hussein, Y. A., & Ahmed, M. F. 2021).

The hyper-theme in the given extract 'an amount of order and protection' (which has been split up into several phrases) . The following themes are taken from this hyper-theme.

5- Methodology

The current paper utilise one article from Washing Ton Post Newspaper that concerns with the assassination of Pakistan' prime minister Benazir Bhutto as a data to be studied and analysed using an eclectic model. This paper adopted a qualitative research method to analyse the data by using an eclectic model based on Halliday's (2004) functional approach and Danes' (1974) thematic progression patterns.

6- Data Analysis

The data analysis will be done according to what was mentioned earlier in the theoretical framework.

"The most shocking political assassination of the past decade remains an utter mystery"

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/08/30/belarus-lukashenko-switzerland-harauski-tsikhanouskaya/df5d6228-471f-11ee-b76b0b6e5e92090d_story.html?itid=sr2

September 1, 2017 at 10:56 a.m. EDT

No.	Theme	Rheme
1	Bhutto's assassination	one of the most shocking political assassinations of our time
2	Bhutto's assassination details	charismatic Pakistani leader and two-time prime minister, died during an attack as she waved to an adoring outdoor crowd
3	Background information on Bhutto	returned from exile to her homeland, led by a military dictator, to attempt a political comeback
4	The unsolved nature of the assassination	appears destined to remain a mystery
5	Verdict of the anti-terrorism court	two police officials found guilty of failing to provide security for Bhutto and improperly handling the crime scene; sentenced to lengthy prison terms
6	Controversy surrounding the verdict	expressed disappointment, suggesting political deal making and a reflection on the independence of Pakistan's judicial system
7	Acquittal of suspects	arrested five men as suspects in the murder were acquitted
8	Opinion on the acquittal	expressed disappointment in the verdict, calling it a disgrace to Bhutto's memory
9	Bhutto's controversial background	Bhutto's family history of violent tragedy, political plotting, internal feuds, and military repression
10	on Bhutto's life, Previous attempts	Bhutto's previous survival of a massive bombing in Karachi and subsequent house arrest

11	Details of the assassination	shots rang out , fell and hit her head on the vehicle, and later died of head injuries on the way to a hospital
12	Lack of interest in discovering the truth	showed no interest in uncovering the truth and refused an autopsy
13	U.N. report on the investigation of Bhutto's family, including her widower	criticized Pakistani authorities for lack of effort in solving the crime and interference from intelligence agencies
14	Lack of comment from Bhutto's widower	no immediate comment from Asif Ali Zardari after the verdict was announced

In the given sentences, the themes provide the given information, while the rhemes introduce new information or provide details about the given information. The marked themes are identified in (T10), in which the most usual form of marked theme is a prepositional phrase functioning as adjunct in the clause. Another marked themes (T12),(T14) function as complement , these are nominal elements that have not been chosen to be the subject, but rather, have the potential to function as subjects. The marked themes in the clauses (T4,T5,T6,T7,T11) function as nominalized clauses as head. The unmarked themes are identified in (T1, T2, T9, T13) which function as proper nouns. In declarative clause the subject is the only element that is chosen as a theme. (T3) is another nominal group with common noun as a head.

Theme and rheme organisation shows that the first theme 'Bhutto's assassination' which follows a pattern of continuous theme in the second, the tenth and the eleventh main phrases, T2, 'Bhutto's assassination details', T10, 'Previous attempts on Bhutto's life' and T11, 'Details of the assassination'. The main clause of (T2) 'Bhutto's assassination details' also follows a continuous theme with the

theme of the eleventh clause 'Details of the assassination'. Another example of continuous theme is found in the main clause of (T3) 'Background information on Bhutto' in which it becomes (T9) 'Bhutto's controversial background'. These are the constant themes that found in The Washington Post's first article on Bhutto's assassination.

Derived hyper thematic progression, the above table presents many hyper themes that derived from the preceding themes, the main theme of the first clause, 'Bhutto's assassination' forms as a hyper theme from which the themes of the third and fourth clauses are derived, T3, 'Background information on Bhutto' and T4, 'The unsolved nature of the assassination'. The main theme of the third clause, 'Background information on Bhutto' follows a pattern of hyper theme from which the main clauses of (T9) and (T10) are derived, T9, 'Bhutto's controversial background' and T10, 'Previous attempts on Bhutto's life'. 'Verdict of the anti-terrorism court' is the main clause of the fifth theme which considers a hyper theme from which the main clause of (T6) 'Controversy surrounding the verdict' is derived. Another instance , the seventh theme 'Acquittal of suspects' forms as a hyper from which the eighth theme 'Opinion on the acquittal' is derived.

Four instances of simple linear patterns are identified in this article, the first SLP is explained in the rhematic element of the first clause, 'One of the most shocking political assassinations of our time', becomes the theme of the next main clause, T2, 'Bhutto's assassination details'. The second example is in the second Rheme 'Charismatic Pakistani leader and two-time prime minister, died during an attack as she waved to an adoring outdoor crowd' which becomes the theme of the tenth clause 'Previous attempts on Bhutto's life'. 'Five men arrested as suspects in the murder were acquitted' the main clause of (R7) is an example of 'SLP', which becomes the main clause if (T8), 'Opinion on the acquittal'. The last instance of SLP, is identified in the rhematic element of the twelfth main clause, 'Bhutto's

family, including her widower, showed no interest in uncovering the truth and refused an autopsy ' becomes the theme of the fourteenth clause 'Lack of comment from Bhutto's widower'.

To sum up, the patterns of thematic progression that are identified in Washington Post article consist of six **CT**, six **DT** and four **SLP**. The continuous of the first main clause can be considered as the most significant thematic pattern in Bhutto's murder article. As mentioned above, priority is given for derived themes.

7- Conclusion

The present paper examined the use of thematic structure using the Functional Linguistic framework of the Washing Ton Post Newspaper Article "The Most Shocking Political Assassination of the Past Decade Remains an Utter Mystery". A variety of themes were adopted in the article analysed, Marked and Unmarked themes, each with its own basic characteristic, are the two categories into which the number of structural components within a theme is split for the purpose of analysis. On the other hand, the three main types of Thematic Progression provides a useful justification for the arrangement of contents in the texts.

In terms of the use of thematic structure, the current paper has indicated that the two kinds of themes are utilized, marked and unmarked themes. They are used in the article in a variety of occurrences. The unmarked themes are the most dominant themes that are used in the article analysed. A subject in theme position refers to the unmarked thematic structure or the typical pattern. A pronoun, nominal group with a proper noun or common noun as head, and nominalization phrase as head may all represent a subject functioning as a theme. It is obvious that the marked theme is the rarest type of theme found. The analysis indicates that the reporter doesn't frequently employ the marked theme such as an adverbial clause and prepositional phrase, but an unmarked theme presents a grammatical subject that

serves as the point of departure, in which the news journalists have the tendency towards using common, proper nouns and pronouns as a result of the article contents which are concerned with the assassination of persons.

In terms of use the patterns of thematic progression, the results show that the three patterns of TP continuous theme, hyper derived theme and simple linear theme are utilized in the given article. The Washington Post newspaper article has **eight continuous themes, six derived themes, and four simple linear themes.** The continuous theme is the most common pattern of this article.

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