Theme Markedness in EFL Students' Recount Texts: A Systemic Functional Analysis

Ridwan Hanafiah[1], Muhammad Yusuf[1, 2], Aprilza Aswani[2]

[1]English Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, University of Sumatera Utara

[2]English Education Study Program, STKIP Pelita Bangsa Binjai

Article Info	ABSTRACT
	This study is aimed to discover the types and the dominant type of theme markedness in EFL students' recount texts based on the theory of systemic functional linguistics. Qualitative content analysis approach was utilized in this study. Writing sheets were utilized as the instruments of collecting the data. The data were in the form of clauses taken from 33 recount texts written by second-year students of English literature department of University of Sumatera Utara. Based on the analysis, it was discovered that there were 1144 clauses in the data. Then, in terms of theme markedness, marked theme (MT) had 213 occurrences (18.62%) and unmarked theme (UMT) had 931 occurrences (81.38%). The conclusion can be drawn that there were 2 types of markedness namely marked theme (MT) and unmarked theme (UMT), and the dominant type of theme markedness was unmarked theme (UMT). It means that the students dominantly used unmarked theme in their recount texts.

Corresponding Author: Ridwan Hanafiah, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, University of Sumatera Utara, Jalan Universitas No.19 Kampus USU, Kota Medan, Sumatera Utara 20155 E-mail: ridwances@yahoo.com

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Background of the Study

Writing is related to the text. Text refers to any instanceof language, in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows thelanguage. Text can also be characterized as language functioning in context (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Halliday, 2010; in Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). Moreover Martin and White (2005:8) assert that writing is concerned with graphology and has to deal with the organization of letters into sentences, alongside punctuation, layout, and formatting.

There are some academic genres that should be acquired by English department students such as narrative, recount, news item, exposition, and so on. Gerot and Wignell (1994) argue that recount text is used to retell events for the purpose of informing and entertaining. The schematic structure of this text comprises of orientation ^ events ^ re-orientation. The significant linguistic features of recount text are focus on specific participant, using material process, using circumstances of time and place, use of past tense, and focus on temporal sequences. In short, this genre is beneficial to amuse and to inform reader about past event.

Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) is a multi-perspective model, designed to prove analysts with complementary lenses for interpreting language in use (Martin and White, 2005:7). Systemic functional linguists make four main theoretical claims about language: (a) That language use is functional; (b) That its function is to make meaning; (c) That meaning is influenced by social and cultural contexts; and (d) That the process of using language is a semiotic process in which people make meanings by making linguistic choices (Eggins, 2004). The focus of analysis in SFL is a clause rather than a sentence because a clause is a composite entity.

There are three kinds of meaning run throughout the whole of language, and in a fundamental respect they determine the way that language has evolved. They are referred to in systemic accounts of grammar as metafunctions (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014:84). Then, Sinar (2007:56) asserts that metafunction of language are inherent in every language use in social context. Metafunctions of language are divided into ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function which are simultaneously relevant at any level of the linguistic system.

Textual function is also comprehended as clause as message realized through theme and rheme. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014:83) point out that a clause has meaning as a message, a quantum of information; the theme is the point ofdeparture for the message. It is the element the speaker selects for 'grounding'what he is going on to say. There are three kinds of theme namely topical, interpersonal, and textual. In a sentence, once the theme is identified, rheme is easy to be identified since it is everything else in a sentence which does not form part of the theme (Martin and Rose, 2008).

SFL can be utilized as a tool to evaluate students' writing. Theme offers choices of what meaning to prioritise in a text, what to package as familiar and as new. This has reason since once the thematic structure of the text is scrambled it becomes difficult to follow and textual choices are essential to the text's making sense (Tshotsho, 2014). Additionally, the initial point is important in the clause and discourse since due to its impact to the hearers or readers' interpretation of everything that follows in the discourse. Then, it constitutes the initial textual context for everything that follows (Ebrahimi and Ebrahimi, 2012). What is placed in this initial position is called theme. In this study, the writer is interested in analyzing textual function precisely topical theme comprising of two types namely marked theme (MT) and unmarked theme (UMT). The examples of clause analyzed by using MT and UMT are presented in the following:

Table 1. Example of unmarked theme (UMT)

My family and I	went to Yogyakarta last month
Theme: Topical	**Rheme**
UMT	

Table 2. Example of marked theme (MT)

Last month,	my family and I went to Yogyakarta
Theme: Topical	**Rheme**
MT	

1.2. The Problems of the Study

In line to the background of the study, the problems of the study are stated as the followings;

1) What are the types of theme markedness discovered in EFL students' recount texts?
2) What is the dominant type of theme markedness discovered in EFL students' recount texts?

1.3 The Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are formulated as the followings

1) To discover the types of theme markedness discovered in EFL students' recount texts.
2) To discover the dominant type of theme markedness discovered in EFL students' recount texts.

1.4. The Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to be and relevant as references for further studies, and to enrich the field of discourse analysis.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Previous Related Studies

There are some previous researchers conducting the similar research such as Ebrahimi and Ebrahimi (2012), and Tshotsho (2014). But, this study is different from the previous studies in terms of genre used, and the points to be analyzed. For example, Ebrahimi and Ebrahimi (2012) conducted a research "Markedness in Writing: A Case of EFL Students". The results show that there are significantdifferences between the three groups of students regarding the utilization of marked theme in their writing. Then, Tshotsho (2014) conducted a research entitled "Assessing Students' Academic Writing Using Systemic Functional Linguistics at a University in South Africa" dealing with assessing academic writing of first year students at tertiary level which essentially determines students' success in their studies. Their essays were analysed by using systemic functional linguistics (SFL) as an analytical tool, looking at how they develop themes when writing texts in the second language.

2.2. Systemic Functional Linguistics

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a linguistic theory introduced by M.A.K. Halliday which stresses its study on the language as source of meaningthat focuses the study on the discourse analysis. Saragih, (2016:1) adds that SFL deals with the function of language. So, SFL is viewed as the system of meaning and can be used to interpret language in multi-perspective area.

2.3. Metafunctions

Language has three main kinds of meanings simultaneously: ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings (Halliday,1985). Language covers three main kinds of meanings simultaneously: ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. These three kinds of meaning are referred to in systemic accounts of grammar as metafunctions (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014:84). Furthermore, Teich (1999:15) asserts that all three metafunctions are of equal status; none is moreimportant than any other. They are simultaneously relevant at anystratum of the linguistic system. It is also in line with Sinar (2007:56) stating that metafunction of language are inherent in every language use in social contexts. In conclusion, there are three metafunctions of language i.e. ideational, interpersonal, and textual function which have the same status and used in social context.

2.4. Textual Metafunction: Theme and Rheme

Textual function is well-known as clause as message which is realized by theme and rheme. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014:83) point out that a clause has meaning as a message, a quantum of information; the Theme is the point of departure for the message. It is the element the speaker selects for 'grounding' what he is going on to say.Theme contains well-known information which has already been mentioned before in the text. It also comes first in the clause. Theme also functions as the subject of the clause (Eggins, 2004; Martin and Rose, 2003). In a clause there is a rheme which is part of the clause in which the theme is developed.

There are three kinds of theme namely textual, interpersonal, and topical theme. Textual Theme makes explicit the way the clause related to the surrounding discourse. It covers four elements of Theme, they are: conjunction, relative, conjunctives and continuatives. Interpersonal Theme is used when the speaker or writer wants to projects his or her angle on the value of what the clause is saying. It covers one or more of the element of finite, WH-element, vocative and modal adjunct. Then, topical theme is coded by the first element of the transitivity system. It can be participant, process or circumstances. When the Topical Theme places at the first part in a clause; it means that the Theme is simple Theme. But the if the Theme is doing not place at the first element of a clause, it means that the clause combine with the other kind of Theme and it's mean that this kind of Theme is the complex Theme.

Markedness in topical themehas two types i.e. marked theme (MT) and unmarked theme (UMT). Eggins (2004:318) clarifies that "Theme markedness has to do with the relationship between the Mood and Theme Structures of the clause: how the functional roles assigned to constituents in a Theme analysis conflate with the functional roles assigned to those same constituents in the Mood structure.

2.4.1. Unmarked Theme (UMT)

Eggins (2004:318) defines that unmarked theme (UMT) has the constituent that is Theme which is also playing one of the following roles:

1) Subject (in a declarative clause)

2) Finite (in an interogative clause)

3) Predictator (in an imperative clause)

4) WH element (in a WH-interogative clause)

In other words, UMT appears when Theme conflates with the Mood Structure constituent that typically occurs in first position in clauses of that Mood class. The examples of UMT are presented in the following tables.

Table 3. The examples of unmarked theme (UMT)

Example	Role Conflation	Mood Class
I'm reading a book.	Theme/Subject	Declarative
Do you love me?	Theme/Finite	polar interogative
When will Andi visit his mom?	Theme/WH element	WH- interrogative
Stay away from that stuff!	Theme/Predicator	Imperative

2.4.2. Marked Theme (MT)

Marked Theme (MT) is the Theme in a clause which the function in a clause is not as the subject. It can be as verb, adverb, etc. The commonest type of marked theme is theme conflating with an adjunct: circumstantial (which is not conflated with a WH element).The term unmarked simply means 'most typical/usual', while marked means 'atypical/unsual'. All things being equal, an unmarked choice will be made. When marked choice is made, the speaker or writer is signaling that all things are not equal, that something in the context requires an atypical meaning to be made (Eggins 2004:318). The example of MT is presented as the following:

Table 4. The examples of marked theme (MT)

At the zoo,	I found some interesting thing
Theme: Topical	Rheme
Marked Theme (MT)	

2.5. Writing

Oshima and Hogue (1999) strongly argue that writing specifically academic writing is not easy. The process of writing should be scrutinized by the writer. Writing is not as simple as constructing and arranging sentences. Martin and White (2005:8) assert that writing is concerned with graphology and has to deal with the organization of letters into sentences, alongside punctuation, layout, and formatting. It is not only a process of linking words into sentences or paragraphs, but also it is a sequence or steps of ideas, organized thoughts and feeling in the form of words and combined into sentence into form of paragraphs in which every sentence is closely related one another.

2.6. Recount Text

Dirgeyasa (2014:25) defines that recount text is to retell personal stories which can be either factual or imaginative with the objective of informing and amusing readers (or both). The generic structure of recount text is orientation ^ sequence of events ^ re-orientation. And the significant lexicogrammatical features of recount text are focus on specific participant, using material process, using circumstances of time and place, use of past tense, and focus on temporal sequences.

Table 5. The example of recount text (National Exam for Nautical Deck Department, 1997 in Dirgeyasa, 2014:32)

Title	To the Passage of the Ship
Orientation	I was sailing with and on board vessel M.V. Gunsa from Osaka, Japan, via Hong Kong to Jakarta. It was really big vessel containing a large amount of Liquid natural Gas (LNG)
Sequence of events	The vessel departed Osaka on September 1st, morning, and arrived in Hong Kong at 22.00 o'clock, September 6th in 2000, then left that port on 8 straight to Jakarta where I arrived on the 15th at 06.00 o'clock.
	The vessel was fully loaded with Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) and in Hong Kong she discharged and loaded part of the cargo, so that he burden of the vessel when leaving Hong Kong for Jakarta was only 7000 tons.
	During the voyage, the vessel experienced bad weather a couple of days, and she had to reduce speed and alter course several times just to ease her and to avoid serious rolling.
	On arrival, in order to protect the company from any claim which might be brought forward by the shippers, I thought the master of the ship has to make a good note of Protest covering the fact, meanwhile the ship lying alongside goes down 202 Tanjung Priuk. While discharging, an accident again happened on board M.V. Gunsa that is the portside derrick of hatch 2 forward fell down the respective bulwark that caused serious damage to the bulwark and injured three longshoremen who were working on deck.
	In this case, I thought that the Master had to make a statement of fact regarding the above accident.
Re-orientation	As for me, it was a good experience to create any knowledge and ability in handling the ship at sea, as well as handling human beings on board the ships.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative content analysis approach was utilized in this study.Ezzy (2002:85) states that content analysis can be useful as a stage of data analysis asit allows the relevance of preexisting theory to be tested, and itcan be used as a way of assessing the applicability of a theorythat emerges during thematic or content analysis. Writing sheets were utilized as the instrument of the research. The data were in the form of clauses taken from 33 recount texts written by second-year students of English literature department of University of Sumatera Utara. The students were instructed to write a recount text comprising about 250-350 words in 60 minutes.

The procedures of content analysis used in this study are:

1) Data making: It consists of unitizing, sampling, and documenting

2) Data reduction: statistically and simply omission of irrelevant data

3) The analysis: concerning with the more conventional process of identification and representation of patterns that are statistically significant namely writing down the frequency of each type of theme markedness: unmarked theme (UMT) and marked theme (MT).

4) Inferences making: The direct evidence about the inferred phenomena is characterized by the results of analysis and validation efforts.

4. Data Analysis, Findings and Discussion

4.1. Data Analysis

Based on the analysis from 33 recount texts written by second-year students of English literature department of University of Sumatera Utara, it was discovered that there are 1144 clauses in the data. The clauses then were analyzed by using textual function (theme and rheme) to find out the types and the dominant frequency of theme markedness in the data. Both of the types of theme markedness (UMT, and MT) are discovered in the text.

4.1.1. Unmarked Theme (UMT)

Having been analyzed, the data illustrates that unmarked theme (UMT) has 931 occurrences or 81.38% from the total number of occurrences. The examples of the clauses containing UMT are presented in the following:

Table 6. Marked Theme (Taken from Text 11)

I	had a trip to the zoo about a few months ago
Theme: Topical	**Rheme**
UMT	

The previous example illustrates that subject is functioned as topical theme. In the data, the occurrences of UMT are very dominant. It has 44 occurrences as the highest occurrence in text 33 and only 9 occurrences as the lowest in text 3. Then, the data also presents that UMT dominantly appears in the form of subject functioned as theme.

4.1.2. Marked Theme (MT)

In terms of marked theme (UMT), it is found that there are 213 occurrences or 18.62% from the total number of occurrences.

Table 7. Marked Theme (Taken from Text 10)

In Banda Aceh,	I visited UleeIhem
Theme: Topical	**Rheme**
MT	

In the example above, the clause contains marked theme because subject is not functioned as the topical theme, but circumstantial adjunct. MT appears in every text and has the highest occurrence in text 30 totaling to 14 times and in text 21, it occurs only once.

4.2. Findings

After the data have been analyzed, the findings obtained can be seen in the following points.

1) There are two types of markedness theme discovered in the data namely unmarked theme (UMT) and marked theme (MT).

2) The dominant type of theme markedness is unmarked theme which has 93l occurrences 81.38% from the total number of occurrences.

4.3. Discussion

From the findings, it was found that there are only 213 occurrences or 18.62% of MT. It means that MT utilized in small number. It also supports the previous research that the portion of occurrences of MT is not more than 20% such as Coffin and Hewings (2005) found (18.82%) marked themes in the students' writings (p.158), North (2005), in her study of thematicity in essay writing, found that (17.08%) of the topical themes was marked. Ebrahimi and Ebrahimi (2012) in their study also explain that the reason of the utilization of small number of marked theme is that these students prefer to place theme in the subject position of the clause.So, it finally affects to the occurrences of unmarked theme. From the data, it is also found that students in this study tend to write a clause by using UMT. It is proven that there are 931 occurrences or 81.38% from the total number of occurrences of the topical theme. The findings also underpin the research conducted by Nurlela (2010). She discovers that the use of MT is dominantly used in spoken text while in the written text, UMT is more dominant. Additionally, the dominant use of UMT in the data reveals that simple theme is also used dominantly and subject typically occurs in first position in clauses.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The conclusion is drawn that there are 2 types of markedness namely marked theme (MT) and unmarked theme (UMT), and the dominant type of theme markedness is unmarked theme (UMT) totaling to 931 occurrences or 81.38%. It means that the students dominantly used unmarked theme in their recount texts. It is also suggested that students should pay attention to the use of theme as the starting point of the message in their writing since it affects the readers' interpretation while reading their writing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

[1] Coffin, C. &Hewings, A. (2005). IELTS as Preparation for Tertiary Writing: Distinctive Interpersonal and Textual Strategies. In L. J. Ravelli, & R. A Ellis, (Eds.). *Analysing Academic Writing (153 – 171).* London: Continuum.

[2] Dirgeyasa, I. W. (2014). *College Academic Writing; a Genre Based Perspective.* Medan:Unimed Press.

[3] Ebrahimi, S.F., and Ebrahimi S.J. (2012).Markedness in Writing: A Case of EFL Students; *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 2 (4), 773-777.*

[4] Eggins, S. (2004). *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics.*New York: Continuum.

[5] Ezzy, D. (2012). *Qualitative Analysis: Practice and Innovation.* New South Wales: National Library of Australia.

[6] Gerot, L. AndWignel, P. (1994). *Making Sense of Functional Grammar.* New South Wales: Antipodean Educational Enterprises.

[7] Halliday, M.A.K. (1985). *Spoken and Written Language.* Victoria: Deakin University Press.

[8] Halliday, M.A.K and Matthiessen C.M.I.M. (2014). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar (4rded.).* London: Routledge.

[9] Martin, J.R. & White, P.R.R. (2005). *The language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English.* London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

[10] Martin, J.R. and Rose, D.(2008). *Working with Discourse.* London: Continuum.

[11] North, S (2005). Disciplinary Variation in the Use of Theme in Undergraduate Essays.*Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *26 (3), 431-452.*

[12] Oshima and Hogue. (1999). *Writing Academic English(3rded).* New York: Pearson Education.

[13] Nurlela.(2010). *Representasi Leksikogramatika Teks Pidato Kenegaraan Presiden Soeharto dan Presiden Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono*. [Dissertasi]. Medan: Universitas Sumatera Utara, Sekolah Pasca Sarjana.

[14] Saragih, A. (2016). Empowering Students through Learning English in the Present Context of Indonesia.in Sinar (et al.). *Proceedings: National Conference on Language and Culture*; Medan: USU Press. Page 1-11.

[15] Sinar, T.S. (2007). *Phasal and Experiential Realizations in Lecture Discourse: A Systemic-Functional Analysis*. Medan: Koordinasi Perguruan Tinggi Swasta Wilayah- I NAD-Sumut.

[16] Teich, E. (1999).*Systemic Functional Grammar in Language Generation: Linguistic Description and Computational Representation*. Cambridge: Bookcraft (Bath) Ltd

[17] Tshotsho, B. (2014).Assessing Students' Academic Writing Using Systemic FunctionalLinguistics at a University in South Africa.*Int J EduSci*, 6(3): 425-433.

BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHORS

Ridwan Hanafiah is a senior lecturer at English Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, University of Sumatera Utara, Indonesia. He got his doctoral degree in Linguistics from University of Sumatera Utara. He also ever joined a short course for his dissertation at Utah State University in 2010. He is interested in psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and Discourse analysis. He can be reached at ridwances@yahoo.com

Scopus Author ID: 57193544253

Muhammad Yusuf is a lecturer at English Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, University of Sumatera Utara and English Education Study Program at STKIP Pelita Bangsa Binjai. He got his bachelor degree in English education (S.Pd.) from Universitas Negeri Medan and master degree (M.A.) in English from University of Sumatera Utara. His research interests are TEFL, discourse analysis, and sociolinguistics. He can be contacted at yusufelmahbub@gmail.com.

Aprilza Aswani is a lecturer at English Education Study Program at STKIP Pelita Bangsa Binjai. She got her bachelor degree in English education (S.Pd.) from UniversitasNegeri Medan and master degree (M.A.) in English from University of Sumatera Utara. Her research interests are TEFL, conversational analysis, and classroom discourse analysis. She can be contacted at aprilzaaswani27@gmail.com.