

Discourse Grammar

Information Structure

Information structure is all about how speakers arrange the information in their message. It is natural for the shared message to come before the one not known to the hearer. The shared message is usually found at the beginning of the clause and it is called the **Given** information. The other information is the focus of the speaker's message and it is referred to as the **New** information. The Given and the New information make up the information structure of the clause.

The Given

The Given information is the information that is known to both the speaker and the hearer. It is normally taken for granted that the listener(s) or reader(s) know the information. So the speaker takes off from that point to supply the new information. For example: **My younger son** *travelled to the USA yesterday*

The New

The new information is the rest of the clause. It is called New because it is actually what is new to the hearer or reader. For instance in the sentence above, *travelled to the USA yesterday* is the new information. It is what the speaker actually wants the hearer to know.

Thematic Structure

Thematic structure refers to the organization of the message in the clause. A special status is given to one part of the clause that is called the **Theme** and the other part is called the **Rheme**. This simply has to do with what the writer or speaker chose as the starting point of the clause.

Theme

The theme is defined as Halliday (1985: 39) as: *the element which serves as the starting point for the message*. He went further to say that the Theme is what the clause is all about. In most cases, the Theme assumes the first position in the clause. For example: **The president of Nigeria** *is from the northern part of the country*

Rheme

The Rheme is defined by Eggins (1993: 275) as: *that part of the clause in which the Theme is developed*. It is every other part of the clause apart from the Theme. The Rheme is the part of the clause that contains the real message of the clause. The speaker/writer departs at the point of the Theme to supply the message to the hearer/reader.

Thematic Progression

Thematic Progression (TP) refers to how one theme progresses into another from clause to clause. Danes (1974) identified four types of Thematic Progression.

The Constant Theme Pattern

The first kind of TP is called the **Constant Theme Pattern**. The constant theme pattern occurs when a common theme is shared by clauses that follow one another in a text. The theme of each clause either refers wholly to the first theme or partly to it. This TP pattern is common in biographical information and other narratives.

Example of Constant TP is **1. Mr Sawyer** *is my friend.* **2. He** *attended Kings College Lagos.* **3. After his secondary education,** **4. he** *travelled to England,* **5. where** *he was trained as a lawyer.* **6. He** *was one of the foremost lawyers in Nigeria.*

The Linear Theme Pattern

The Linear Theme Pattern is a pattern in which a rheme is taken up as a theme in a subsequent clause. In other words, the rheme of the last clause becomes the theme of the following clause. An example of this is produced below.

1. The president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria *is Umaru Yar'Adua.* **2. Umaru Yar'Adua** *was the last Civilian governor of Katsina State.* **3. Katsina State** *is one of the states in the North Central Nigeria.* **4. The North Central Nigeria** *is regarded as the power base of most politicians in the Northern Nigeria.*

The Split Rheme Pattern

The third type of TP is called the Split Rheme Pattern. The split Rheme TP is the type in which the Rheme of the clause has two component and each of the component is taken in turn as the them of subsequent clause.

Nigeria *can be conveniently divided into three major regions: the Northern, Western and the Eastern regions.* **2. The Northern Region** *is mainly populated by Hausa speakers and they are mostly Moslems.* **3. The Western Region** *has mainly Yoruba people who are well- exposed to Western education and it has a mixture of Islam and Christianity.* **4. The Eastern Region** *is inhabited mainly by the Igbo speakers, who can be described as the economic livewire of the nation.*

The Derived Theme Pattern

This kind of TP is a feature of longer text with a variety of topics for discussion. The author may pick any of the topics earlier mentioned and use it as the theme for a clause. An example is given below.

1. Lion *is one of the most dreaded animals.* **2. The large cat** *is fierce-looking and always looking ferocious.* **3. Its cubs** *are just like domestic cats.* **4. The mane of male lions** *makes them look dreadful.* **5 Its powerful claws** *can tear even the hardest skin* **6. and its canines** *are equally very strong.*