

## A Study on Thematic Structures of News Report Scripts

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**Abstract:** The paper is devoted to listening comprehension of news reports from 2016 to 2019 College English Test based on Halliday's theories on the theme structures, in which the application characteristics of thematic structures in scripts of news reports are analyzed, thereby, helping testees recognize the production and interpretation of the discourse and then enlighten teacher's as well as improve accuracy in the tests.

### 1. Introduction

News reports, a kind of speech reporting and a public discourse, record what is happening, accurately and based on facts, which are characterized by timeliness and authenticity. News at home and abroad broaden people's horizons and make people familiar with the world. There are three types of listening comprehension in College English Test, a national examination for students in college or university, among which listening of news reports is a new test from 2016.

Due to lack of access to news in daily life, quite a few students find it difficult for them to keep up with the pace of news report in CET-4. While news report, as the first section of listening part, covering seven questions in terms of three news reports, the efficiency of answers to the questions based on the news reports has positive or negative impacts on testees.

Theme, as the starting point of the utterance or the discourse topic entity plays a key role in identifying the information units and encode the reporters' contents of the clauses. This essay intends to explore the application of thematic structures of news reports in CET-4, mainly signifying the distribution and features of various thematisation.

### 2. Definition of Theme

Mathesius in 1942 defined the term theme as a formal category, the left-most constituent of the sentence. Everything else that follows in the sentence which consists of 'what the speaker' states about or in regard to. [1] Halliday (1994) believes that the theme, generally, can be identified as element which comes in first position in the clause, and theme is the starting point for the message and the ground which the clause is taking off. [2]

### 3. Simple Theme and Multiple Theme

According to Halliday's, theme can be divided into the simple theme and the multiple theme. Simple theme is a simply label that are used to suggest that meaning is attached to in the clause, where the utterance comes from. While sometimes there might be more than a single structure in this position, then there are multiple themes in the clause. Typical ordering of a multiple theme is textual, interpersonal and experiential. [3]

### 4. Analysis Results of Theme Structures

Scripts of news reports from 2014 to 2019 CET-4 are abstract as the examined target, among which six reports are included in each year. After classifying the discourse into several clauses and

separating theme from rheme in each clause, the author studies the application of thematic structures in detail.

#### 4.1. Simple Theme

When the theme of a clause consists of only one structural element, and that element is represented by only one unit shown by one nominal group, adverbial group or prepositional phrase, it is called a simple theme. [4] The application of simple themes in reporting are listed as follow.

Nominal group and prepositional phrase are both distributed in reporting. First, it is typical that a nominal group especially the person and the person with a regional qualifier is commonly adopted in the reports. For example, (1) *The two workers were flown to the southernmost Chilean city of Punta Arenas.* In the clause, *the two workers* is the departure of the utterance, and there is usually a pause between sentences in order that the testees are capable of realizing that the thematic organization appears to be exploited by the speaker to provide a structural framework for this clause. (2) *A pilot from Virginia removed his son's loose tooth with a helicopter.* The nominal theme *a pilot* with a determiner *from Virginia* in the clause reminds listeners of the place may be a key point in the examination. Besides, the group complex or phrase complex as theme are frequently applied. A case in this point is (3) *The terror attacks in Paris last November were called Europe's worst in the past decade.* *The terror attacks* modified by the place *in Paris* and time *last November* and they constitutes the theme. Here are some examples from 2019 scripts.

**Table 1.** Application of nominal group as simple theme

Theme	Sample
a 9-year-old Central California boy	2019-6-1
his father	2019-6-1
James	2019-6-1
a young couple	2019-6-1
the head of Paris Tourism Board	2019-6-2
the two workers	2019-6-2
a pilot	2019-6-2
the father of four	2019-6-2
Mr. Rahim	2019-6-2
New York City police	2019-12-1
officers	2019-12-1
bird lovers	2019-12-1
visitors	2019-12-1
the resident	2019-12-1
Mr. Villers	2019-12-1

some parents	2019-12-1
the UK Health Secretary	2012-12-2
a man from Libya	2012-12-2
Keith Porter	2019-12-2
online office workers	2019-12-2
one online post	2019-12-2

In reporting, long clauses consist of the discourse and the clauses are ranging from 6 to 9 in the chosen scripts, in which 21 nominal phrase with person or persons are the simple themes with the high frequency. Additionally, pronouns representing persons or person such as *they, he, it*, etc are also used as simple themes.

As for the prepositional phrases as the simple theme are rarely distributed. The cases are as follow (5) *Among the reasons for the slower service today there are more choices on the menu.* and (6) *From the bottom of our heart we would like to thank each and every person that stopped by.* The groups led by the prepositions *among* and *from* are employed to give a clear identification of the two clauses. While prepositional phrases are often applied to indicate time, like *on Tuesday, at other times, after it fell asleep, etc.* As a matter of fact, some questions are often related to time. Taking a specific question as an example in 2019, question 2 based on news report one is (7) *What is on display this week in the museum's resident exhibition hall?* and it enables the testees to attach importance to the time.

Finally, in some cases a simple theme contains two or more groups or phrase complex and functions as a single structural element. (9) *The fossil hall, which displays some of the world's oldest and largest fossil specimens, receives more than 2 million visitors each year.* In this comparatively complex clause, *the fossil hall* is followed by the modification *which displays some of the world's oldest and largest fossil specimens* and the two components form a single structure to constitute the simple theme of this clause. Of the three simple themes, adverbial groups are less distributed. The case in such kind is (10) *Thankfully the emergency services have again worked well together.*

#### 4.2 Multiple Theme

Sometimes there might be more than a single structure and they can be the topical theme with anything else comes before it. In this case, we have a multiple theme. Conjunctions like *and, but* and *as* before the topical subject and they have a special status in the thematic structure of the clause, which tend to be thematic[5-10].

Adversative conjunction *but* is occupied frequently as a part of theme in the scripts of CET-4 reporting. The examples are as follow.

**Table 2.** Application of conjunctions as a part of theme

But as a part of Theme	Sample
But one lawyer tells the paper that...	2019-6-1
But with that policy now being abolished...	2019-6-1
But noted that the company is...	2018-6-2
But the woman says...	2018-6-2

In addition, the conjunctions *as* in (11) *as it went by*, *and* in (12) *and we wish the gentleman a speedy recovery* are applied infrequently.

## Conclusion

Theme seems to have come to be used as a general term in discourse analysis for sentential subject as well as the left-most constituent. The research on thematic structures of listening comprehension of news reports in CET-4 which are designed for the examination-oriented scripts illustrates that the specific language characteristics of reports lay the foundation for the testees to answer questions in examinations as well as mastery of information on the daily basis. While there are also some limitations in this paper, for instance, the analysis on thematic progression is not mentioned, which leaves the room for further study.

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