

A Textual Analysis of Selected Text Messages of Male and Female

Otemuyiwa Adebola

Department of English, College of Humanities,
Joseph Ayo Babalola University
Ikeji Arakeji, Osun State, Nigeria

Abstract

This work undertakes the Theme-Rheme model of textual organization in the structural patterns of information in selected text messages of male and female undergraduate students of some tertiary institutions in Nigeria because SMS text is one of the cheapest mailing services students can afford. Forty (40) SMS text messages were collected from cellular phones of twenty (20) males and twenty (20) females between the ages of 18-30. The analyses of data were guided by general linguistic principles. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) framework was used. The results showed that out of the 80 clauses analyzed, 51 clauses were marked (66%) and 29 clauses were unmarked (34%), 36 clauses had Simple Themes (45%) and 44 clauses had Multiple Themes (55%). This was significant for the fact that Marked Themes occurred more than Unmarked Themes because there was no rigid form to be followed as the liberty to prioritize whatever the texters want was there. It was noted that Unmarked Themes elements were realized by nouns and pronouns. This study has been able to reveal the significance and realization of organizational structure of text messages using functional linguistic approach. It has also been able to explore Marked and Unmarked Themes in the structuring of information in text messages. It has further shown the interplay of Simple and Multiple themes. It, moreover, revealed that Theme – Rheme relationships were often realized by the same structural elements in the text messages, and the elements that were often given thematic status were mainly realized by nouns and pronouns. It is clear from the study that the analysis of components of textual organization is a tool in enhancing proper understanding of texts and pinning down the intended message of writers through what they front and give thematic status.

Keywords: texting, marked theme, unmarked theme, simple theme, multiple theme

INTRODUCTION

Short Message Service (SMS) is a service available on most digital mobile phones (and other mobile devices, e.g. a pocket PC, or even desktop computers) that permit the sending of short messages (also known as text messages or colloquially SMSes, or even texts) between mobile phones, other handheld devices and even landline telephones. The term *text messaging* and its variants are more commonly used in North America, UK, and the Philippines, while most other countries prefer the term SMS.

The principal distinctions between Modern English and the New Englishes are vocabulary, style, register, spelling, pronunciation and grammar. They are almost the same but nowadays English Language has more new words. These words are as a result of some factors like the industrial revolution and the advancement of technology, which includes development in information and telecommunication in which the Global System of Mobile Communication (GSM) belongs. This development has necessitated the need for neologisms to describe new words for things and ideas that had not previously existed. Language use involves making choices from complexes of linguistic options, thus, the reason for choosing a set of linguistic options rather than another. This lies in the textual function of

language. How does textual organization reflect these options in SMS Text Messages?

A common interpretation of 'Theme' is that, it is the idea represented by the constituent at the starting point of the clause' (Bloor & Bloor, 2004). Halliday (1994) viewed Theme as 'the point of departure of the message', where each clause is said to carry a message. The identification of the Theme is based on word order. The element which comes first in the clause is the 'Theme', and what comes after it is the 'Rheme'. According to Halliday (1970), the Theme analysis involves two layers of analysis; a Multiple Theme analysis and a Simple Theme analysis. Multiple Themes refer to themes with more than one thematic constituent. Simple theme refers to theme with only one thematic constituent. Each clause in a text has a theme which relates to the ideational function of language and is labeled the Topical Theme of the clause (Bloor & Bloor, 2004). In clauses with only one Theme identified, the Theme is typically topical. However, some clauses can also be assigned a Textual and interpersonal Theme. The Textual Theme almost always is the first part of the Theme and fulfils a linking function. It is, therefore, usually realized by structural conjunctions, relatives, conjunctives or continuatives. The interpersonal Theme usually follows the Textual Theme and

typically includes one or more of the following elements: a finite verb, a Wh-element, a vocative, or an adjunct (typically an adverb). The interpersonal Theme mainly conveys the writer's attitude towards, comment on or assessment of the message of the clause. The ideational or Topical Theme is the element of the clause that expresses some kind of representational meaning. Technically, it is a function from the transitivity structure of a clause which implies that it can be a participant, a circumstance (i.e. giving information about time, place, manner, cause, etc, or a process. It is important to remember that every clause must contain one and only one topical Theme. Once the Topical Theme has been identified, all the clause constituents to the right can be consigned to the Rheme role (Eggsin, 1993).

Another point we need to make about Theme is to explain the system in the Theme network that distinguishes between Marked and Unmarked Theme. According to Eggsin (1993) the term "Unmarked" simply means 'most typical/usual', while "Marked" means 'atypical'/'unusual'. Eggsin further notes that Theme predication is another strategy to producing Marked Themes. To Eggsin, all predicated Themes are in some sense Marked, since the subject of the original clause is made Rheme in the predicated version. She notes that skillful writers choose Marked Themes to add emphasis to their texts. As a way of concluding, we can distinguish between clauses marked or unmarked for theme through the element in the first position, which results from choice the individual makes- whether it is marked or unmarked. We chose SMS text messages as the data for this study because SMS text message service is one of the cheapest mailing services students can afford. It is personal and direct from one person to another. SMS is asynchronous, that is it does not require the immediate attention of the receiver. It is neither unobtrusive nor disturbing as cell-phones could be put in vibration during lectures.

The objectives of this study are; (i) to identify the Themes and Rhemes of the selected texts messages; (ii) to find out the relationship between Simple and Multiple Themes, and (iii) to find out the relationship between Marked and Unmarked Themes.

Systemic Functional Linguistics and the Study of SMS in English

The approach to the study is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). SFL is suited to different analyses in linguistic stylistics because of its usefulness for describing actual instances of language use. Apart from seeing language as a medium of expression or as a means of communication or interaction between individuals or group of individuals, SFL also views language as a means of organizing other people, and directing their behavior (Halliday 1970). This perception of language has been closely related to the

demands that we make on it and the functions it serves. However, the usefulness of a synthesis of structural and functional approaches has also been apparent in the works of some linguists, especially the Hallidayan and Prague Schools. To them, the particular form taken by the grammatical system of a language is closely related to the needs that language is required to serve. This framework deals with the ideational functions of language which is concerned with grammatical resources for constructing our experience of the world around and inside us. It deals with interpersonal function of language which creates social subjects or identities or the relationship between them, and lastly, it deals with textual function of language which gives room for content and form analysis. This textual function is the target of this study.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The data for this study were forty (40) SMS text messages collected from cellular phones of twenty (20) males and twenty (20) females between the ages of 18-30. The respondents were undergraduate students of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and the University of Ibadan, Ibadan. The two universities are located in the south western part of Nigeria. The analysis is based on the thematic structure of the clauses, that is, the theme-rheme forms. The theme, which is the most important part of a clause, could be Marked or Unmarked; it could be Simple or Multiple. The themes were identified and analyzed. The percentage total of occurrences of Marked, Unmarked, Simple and Multiple themes were calculated using the formula below;

$$\text{Marked Theme (\% occurrence)} = \frac{\text{Total number of Marked Themes}}{\text{Total number of Themes}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Unmarked Theme (\% occurrence)} = \frac{\text{Total number of Unmarked Themes}}{\text{Total number of Themes}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Multiple Themes (\% occurrence)} = \frac{\text{Total number of Multiple Themes}}{\text{Total number of Themes}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Simple Theme (\% occurrence)} = \frac{\text{Total number of Simple Themes}}{\text{Total number of Themes}} \times 100$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of themes of female and male SMS text messages are presented in Tables 1 and 2 below. The results show that 51 clauses were marked for theme, this makes the percentage usage of the marked theme of both male and female to be 66%. 29 clauses were unmarked for theme, and this makes the percentage of occurrences of unmarked theme to be 36%. It is found out that the percentage of occurrences of the Marked Theme is higher than that of the Unmarked

Theme. This might be due to the fact that the Predicator, the Complement and the Adjunct elements that make up the Marked Themes are more than those of the 'Subject' element in the data collected.

TABLE 1. Analysis of Theme and Rheme of Female SMS

Clause	Theme	Rheme	Theme			
			marked	unmarked	simple	multiple
1	I	can hear drums of uncommon success and record breaking excellence		X	X	
2	Alas, the chorus	Is chantn ur name	X			X
3	Are u	ready to dance?	X			X
4	It	is ur turn to excel.		X	X	
5	O Allah	touch the people	X			X
6	I	care for with your mercy	X			X
7	Keep them	safe and happy	X			X
8	Remind them	of your love	X			X
9	Guide and bless them	greatly, especially the one reading this message	X			X
10	Adam and Eve	ate luv		X		X
11	Romeo & Juliet	made love		X		X
12	Julius Ceaser	fought 4 lov		X	X	
13	While Samson	die 4 luv	X		X	
14	Valentine	also did		X	X	
15	what can u	do to recipocate my lov.	X			X
16	After a yr	of havg to live without u,,,	X			X
17	I	've realized		X	X	
18	I	lost me when I lost u		X	X	
19	I	miss u		X	X	
20	I	don't miss u & u alone,		X	X	
21	'I	miss u & m together		X	X	
22	Remember	dat young Jewis lad with 2 fish & 5 loaves,	X		X	
23	Love	is blind bcos it can not see the imperfection of its partners		X	X	
24	And love	can see bcos it only love one person perfectly at a particular time	X			X
25	The sun	has no foundation, yet hanging in the space	X			X
26	Do I	hear u say Amen?	X			X
27	Once in ur	beautiful life & yet another new & expectant year has just began.	X			X
28	May God	perfect your life.	X			X
29	May all opportunity lost in the previous years	be abundantly regained in this new year of your life.	X			X
30	May all the things u	lay hands on prosper	X			X
31	Omniscience God	be at ur sides	X			X
32	U	will never encounter memory failure and ur cyber will never be down in Jesus name		X	X	
33	As kings	don't beg to rule,	X			X
34	princes	don't beg for honour		X	X	
35	A lion	doesn't beg its prey for food		X		X
36	U	will never beg to succeed in life		X	X	
37	D higher u	go	X			X
38	Geography	claims d cooler it becomes,		X	X	
39	May u	find ur academic work easier	X			X
40	And, at d end	excel in flying colour Amen.	X			X

TABLE 2. Analysis of Theme and Rheme of Male SMS

Clause	Theme	Rheme	Theme			
			marked	unmarked	simple	Multiple
1	May all the promises of God for u	be fulfilled		X		X
2	May his mercies	be upon u in all ur endeavours dis yr	X			X
3	As u	've entered into ur breakthrough & abundant blessing	X			X
4	Anytime I	remember u ar a caring, handsome, charming, nd lovin hobby, u mn df wl world 2 me	X			X
5	I	fl so hapi		X	X	
6	Ma ndls lv	no1 cn take away from u	X			X
7	U	r d bst		X	X	
8	Ma luv 4 u	is real	X			X
9	The sun	rises in the sky with the warmest smile,	X			X
10	He	wishes u a good morning,		X	X	
11	Hoping dt u	have d perfect day.	X			X
12	Take care	and miss u	X			X
13	Goodnite	Rhemeless	X		X	
14	Thousands of pages of SMS	cn nva be enf 2 express ma lv 4 u	X			X
15	Out of a thousand girls	u choose me nd made me proud		X		X
16	For eva	wil I lv nd aprrect u ma prince	X			X
17	As the dew	falls / upon all weeds without apologies	X			X
18	So	shall the Lord honour u without seeking ur permission?	X		X	
19	Merry xmas	Rhemeless	X			X
20	Wishing u	the merriest xmas 'n' the happiest new year	X			X
21	No 1	deserves it anymore than a wonderful person like u		X	X	
22	Our business	In life isn't to get ahead of oders	X			X
23	But	to get ahead of ourselves	X		X	
24	To	break our records	X		X	
25	To	outstrip our yesterday by our today	X		X	
26	So	change from yesterday	X		X	
27	Who	do u think u r		X	X	
28	U	Think u re so important dat I can't do without u?		X	X	
29	Now	Listen and listen good	X			X
30	If u	tnk I miss u or kia about u	X		X	
31	U	're absolutely rite		X		X
32	Each day	carries a gift .	X			X
33	Wat	u do daily is a future story	X			X
34	Learn	from yesterday	X		X	
35	Liv	4 2day & drm of 2moro	X		X	
36					X	
36	bliv u	'l get d best of 2day	X			X
37	Jesus	cares for u.		X	X	
38	When I	Ist saw ur eyes, the shape of ur lips, the way u smile ... the colour of ur teeth & the figure of ur body,	X			X
39	I	found out that a famous saying is realiy true!		X	X	
40	Nobody	Is perfect !	X		X	

Examples from the data are:

Unmarked Theme

- (i) I can hear drums of uncommon success and record-breaking excellence
- (ii) Romeo and Juliet made love

Rheme

Marked Theme

- (i) Remind them of your love
- (ii) Keep them safe and happy

From the analysis, the total occurrence of Simple Themes was 36(about 45%), while the total

occurrence of Multiple Themes was 44 (55%).
Examples from the data are;

Simple Theme	Rheme
U	think u're so important dat I can't do without u?
I	care for with mercy.
It	is ur turn to excel

In case of Multiple Themes, we have those with Textual Theme + Topical Themes as in the following examples from the data;

(a) Theme Rheme
Anytime I remember u ar a caring, handsome charming and lovin hobby

In the above text, we have (anytime + I), time adjunct +nominal item as the Multiple Theme.

(b) Theme Rheme
The sun has no foundation, yet hanging in the space....

In the above text, a definite article / determiner+ nominal item is revealed as the Multiple Theme. This shows the particularity of the determiner.

(c) Theme Rheme
Omniscience God be at our sides

In the sample above, we have adjectival phrase + nominal item constituting the Multiple Theme. (Omniscience + God). Thematic status is giving to an element signaling special force.

(d) Theme Rheme
After a yr of havin to live with u, I av realized die for love
While Samson

In the two text messages above, the first element provides cohesive link with the information that follows- conjunctive adjunct. Giving that thematic status prioritized the time of the event.

(e) Theme Rheme
May all the promises of God for u be fulfilled
Thousands of pages of SMS cn nva be enuf
2 expres ma
luv 4 u

Examples above reveal clauses that have a whole clause functioning as theme. The comparison between male and female occurrences of themes are presented in Table 3 and shown in figures 1 and 2 for marked and unmarked themes and simple and multiple themes respectively.

Table 3: Comparison between Male and Female occurrence of Themes

THEME	MALE	FEMALE	% Total
Marked	30	21	66
Unmarked	11	18	34
Simple	20	16	45
Multiple	20	24	55

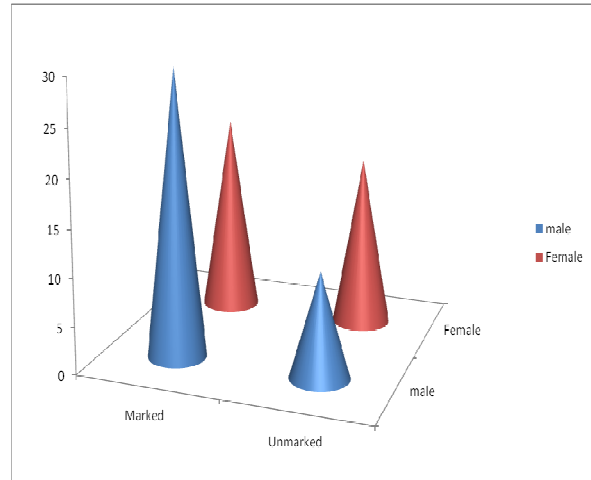


Figure 1: Comparison between Male and Female usage of Marked and Unmarked Themes

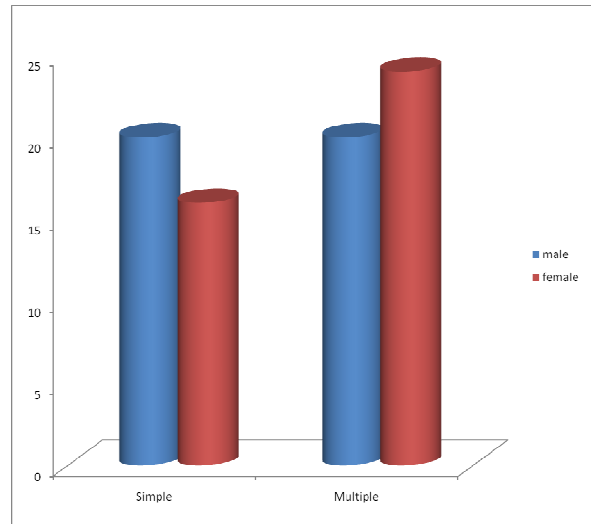


Figure 2: Comparison between Male and Female usage of Simple and Multiple Themes

The relationship between Marked and Unmarked themes revealed that in the Unmarked themes, the females' percentage of occurrence is higher than that of males' which shows that in texting, there is no rigid form to be followed as the liberty to prioritize whatever the writers of texts want is there. It is worthy to note that the unmarked theme elements were realized by nouns and pronouns in all cases. We noted that most of the clauses were imperatives and declaratives while there were only few exclamatory and interrogatives.

The relationship between Simple and Multiple themes of male and female revealed that the percentage of occurrences in female is higher in Multiple themes usage while the percentage of occurrences in male is higher in Simple themes usage. The difference is not significant but it might

be because female are more careful in their choice of words in order to be coherent than male. There is significant difference in the male and female usage of Marked and Unmarked themes. In the case of the Marked themes, male has higher number of occurrences, this might be because most males do not waste time in making their point in discussions. They go straight to the point and thereby prioritize what they actually want their audience or reader to understand. In the case of the Unmarked themes, female has the higher number of occurrences, this might be because females by their nature want to say everything and this makes them to be more detailed in their expressions.

CONCLUSION

This study has been able to reveal the significance and realization of organizational structure of text messages using functional linguistic approach. It has also been able to explore Marked and Unmarked Themes in structuring of information in text messages. It has further showed the interplay of Simple and Multiple themes. It moreover revealed that Theme – Rheme were often realized by the same structural elements in the text messages and the elements that were often given thematic status were mainly realized by nouns and pronouns. It is clear from the study that the analysis of components textual organization is a tool in enhancing a proper understanding of texts and pinning down the intended message of writers through what they fronted and given thematic status.

REFERENCES

- Bloor, A. & Bloor M. (2004): *The Functional Analysis of English: A Hallidayan Approach* (2nd edition). London: Arnold.
- Egins, S. (1993): *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*: London. Pinter Publishers. Pp 45-47.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1970): "Language Structure and Language Function", in
- Lyons, J. (ed) *New Horizons in Linguistics*. England: Penguin Books
- Halliday, M.A.K (1994): *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (Second Edition). London: Edward Arnold