

Thematic Construction in the News Coverage of the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Pattern and Its Implication in Teaching English News-Item Text

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Abstract

This present study attempts to see the pattern of thematic construction in the selected newspaper on the topic of COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia and how it is used in teaching news item text in tertiary level. This study was conducted by using a qualitative approach through the content analysis method. The source of the data was 20 news item text from 2 popular newspapers in Indonesia. From the analysis, it was found that there are some variations in the thematic construction found in the selected newspaper on COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia. From its simplicity, simple and multiple Themes construction were found. Simple Theme is represented by the use of one single Topical Theme in the clauses, Meanwhile, Multiple Theme was constructed by the variation of Textual, Interpersonal, and Topical Theme. In addition, in teaching news item text, lecturers can suggest students to maintain thematic continuity within paragraphs and across the entire article since it can enhance the flow and clarity of their own writing. Then, understanding thematic patterns can guide students in producing well-structured news item text.

Keywords: simple, multiple, theme, newspaper, COVID-19, news item

1. Introduction

1.1 The Background of the Study

Newspaper is one of medias to share information. The author of the news emphasizes the topic in a certain news (Yulianti, 2022). In 2020, COVID-19 pandemic hits Indonesia and all around the world. Specifically in Indonesia, this makes this issue is worth-discussing and worth-informing (Yusuf et al., 2023). One of ways to share the information related to Pandemic is from newspaper (both printed and electronic). The information provided in news articles can help the public to understand the situation, the measures being taken to control the spread of the virus, and what they can do to protect themselves and others. News helps to provide a platform for public discourse about the COVID-19 situation in Indonesia. It can provide a space for different perspectives and opinions to be expressed, and this can help to promote public understanding and debate about the situation. This is important because it helps to ensure that all voices are heard and that the public is well-informed about the different aspects of the situation. The discourse of COVID-19 can be explored through meta-function of language.

In systemic functional linguistics (SFL), clause is the highest rank. A clause is a unit of grammar that typically consists of a subject and a predicate, and it is a basic building block of text. This means that clause cannot stand alone (Ding, 2021). It is organized and combined in a text determines the overall purpose or intent of the text (Nurdianingsih & Purnama, 2017). For example, a text that has a strong focus on providing information to the reader would be realized through clauses that present information in a clear and concise manner. On the other hand, a text that has a persuasive function would be realized through clauses that present arguments and evidence to support a particular viewpoint.

Textual function is one of language meta-function. It refers to the overall purpose or intent of a text, and it is one of the three main functions of language in SFL, along with interpersonal and ideational functions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Clause in textual function is seen as sources of meaning used to organize information or messages (Eggs, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), and it is realized through *Theme* and *Rheme* (Eggs, 2004; Fatmawati et al., 2019; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Meiarista & Widhiyanto, 2020; Yusuf et al., 2021; Zein et al., 2019). The arrangement this builds a clause for a text to convey the clause as a message (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The relationship between textual function and clause is therefore an important one, as it helps to ensure that a text is organized and structured in a way that effectively realizes its overall purpose or intent (Babaii et al., 2016). This relationship is an important aspect of the way that SFL views language and text, and it highlights the role of grammar and clause structure in shaping the overall meaning and purpose of a text (Woo, 2022).

Theme and Rheme in textual function complete each other. Theme is the element that serves as the point of departure of the message (Al-Bazzaz & Al-Shajlawi, 2018; Al-Otaibe, 2021; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) and regarded as given information (Dewi, 2017; Njobvu & Simwinga, 2022). Theme is the element which serves as the starting point for the message: it is what the clause is going to be about. Meanwhile, Rheme is the aboutness of the clause or the rest of the message (Dejica-Cartis & Cozma, 2013; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Rheme also functions to complete the Theme and it fulfils the communicative purpose of the utterance or clause, or new information (Dewi, 2017; Njobvu & Simwinga, 2022; Nurdianingsih & Purnama, 2017; Umiyati, 2011).

In this thematic structure, Theme will be shown more specifically, namely through Theme based on composition and type of Themes. Different types of text will have different style (Ritonga & Yusuf, 2020), and the variation or choice of Theme affects the meaning (To, 2018). In composition, there are simple Theme and multiple Themes (Ding, 2021; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Meanwhile, in type of Theme, there are topical Theme, interpersonal Theme, and textual Theme. Theme is classified based on two criteria, namely composition and markedness (Babai et al., 2016; Hanafiah et al., 2018). Based on composition, the realization of Theme occur from one or more elements, including simple Theme, thematic equation, predicated Theme, multiple Theme, Theme in clause complex, and Theme in relative clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Thematic construction is a crucial aspect of language in the news, as it serves to provide structure, clarity, and emphasis to the information being conveyed. In systemic functional linguistic theory, thematic construction refers to the organization of information in a text, specifically the way in which the topic or Theme of the text is established and developed.

In news reporting, thematic construction is essential in helping to guide the reader or viewer through the content of the story. By clearly establishing the Theme and topic, the journalist or news writer is able to provide a clear and concise overview of the most important information (Yulianti, 2022). This is particularly important in news reporting, where the aim is to present information in an impartial and objective manner. By using thematic construction, the journalist can ensure that the most significant details are highlighted, while other less important information is downplayed.

Another important aspect of thematic construction in news reporting is that it allows for the creation of a clear narrative. Thematic construction helps to provide a logical flow to the information being presented, making it easier for the reader or viewer to understand and follow the story. By providing a clear structure, the journalist is able to help the reader understand the events and context surrounding the story. In addition, thematic construction also helps to provide emphasis to key points within the story. By establishing a clear Theme and structure, the journalist is able to create a narrative that builds towards a climax, highlighting the most important details. This allows the reader or viewer to understand the significance of the events being reported, making it easier to retain the information and draw conclusions.

News item text is one of genres taught in writing. This genre is commonly target to English department's students. Every genre is unique due to their communicative purpose of the text, linguistic features, and its generic structure (Aswani et al., 2023). In English department of Universitas Sumatera Utara, this genre is a compulsory to be mastered by students to pass genre writing subject. Thematic construction has close relationship with text cohesion and coherence. In news item text writing, it helps to create a sense of unity and coherence in the text (Alyousef, 2021; Triyana et al., 2018). Thematic construction provides a framework that ties all the information together, ensuring that the text is not only logically organized but also aesthetically pleasing to the reader. This helps to keep the reader engaged and interested and reinforces the importance of the information being conveyed. Thematic construction is a vital aspect of language in news reporting, as it serves to provide structure, clarity, emphasis, and coherence to the information being conveyed.

By using thematic construction, journalists or news writer can ensure that the most important details are highlighted and that the story is presented in a clear and easy-to-follow manner, helping the reader to understand and retain the information being reported. This makes the study dealing with thematic construction in newspaper be done by many researchers including (Akindele & Lawal, 2017; Asidiky & Puspa, 2020; Ding, 2021; Drid, 2019; Linda, 2013; Marfuaty & Wahyudi, 2015; Siahaan, 2017). This study is different from the previous ones due to the focus of the study is the news text of COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia and its implication in teaching news item text in tertiary level.

1.2 The Research Questions

Referring to the background, the problems of the study are formulated as the followings:

1. How is the representation of Theme in the selected newspaper on COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia?
2. How is the correlation of the findings to be used in teaching news item text in tertiary level?

2. Method

The research design applied was the method of content analysis through a qualitative approach. The newspapers chosen were Kompas and Media Indonesia where these two newspapers were the best newspapers selected by the Indonesia Print Media Awards (IPMA) in 2020. Primary data were in the form of clauses and obtained in the form of 20 news screenshots from online newspapers namely *Media Indonesia* (mediaindonesia.com) and Kompas (kompas.com) related to Covid-19 which were obtained online. The news taken is news with categories related to the economy, education, and health. The news taken is from March 2020-April 2020. The time was chosen according to the beginning of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia as evidenced by the discovery of positive confirmed cases of Covid-19. The data were analyzed by using thematic analysis. This method of analysis is a used to identify and analyze patterns in qualitative data. Then, a coding scheme was prepared to capture these themes and apply it to the data. The next steps were identifying

relationships between Themes and examining how they change over time. Then, the results were interpreted, and conclusion was drawn based on the findings.

3. Result

The Theme is part of the textual function. There are three kinds of Themes, namely textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes. The textual Theme includes four elements of the Theme, namely conjunctions, relative, conjunctive and continuous. Interpersonal Themes are used when the speaker or writer wants to project his point of view on the value of what the clause says. It includes one or more finite adjunct elements, WH-elements, vocative and modal. Then, the topical Theme is coded by the first element of the transitivity system.

3.1 Simple Theme

A simple Theme consists of only one structural element, and it is represented by only one unit – a nominal group, an adverbial group, or a prepositional phrase, or two such groups combined by several coordinators (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). It is one of the clause elements as a Theme, this Theme is also called a topical Theme (Ding, 2021).

<i>Produk yang menjadi fokus utama dari mandat tersebut</i> [Products as the main focus of the mandate]	Adalah [are]	<i>pembuatan Rapid Diagnostic Test (RDT Kit) yang khusus dirancang untuk warga Indonesia</i> [manufacture of a Rapid Diagnostic Test (RDT Kit) specifically designed for Indonesian citizens]
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Subject	Finite	Predicator
MOOD		Residue
Topical Theme	Rheme	

In the example above, it can be seen that the phrase “*Produk yang menjadi fokus utama dari mandat tersebut*” (*The product that is the main focus of the mandate*) is the Theme of the clause which is categorized as a Topical Theme. So, the focus on the clause is the phrase above while the rest of the sentence is called Rheme or the aboutness (Dejica-Cartis & Cozma, 2013).

Simple Theme, also known as "participant Theme," is important in newspaper writing because it helps to establish the topic and focus of the text. In systemic functional linguistics, the Theme of a text refers to the participant or entity that the text is about. In newspaper writing, the simple Theme serves as the starting point for the writer to develop the story and provide information about the topic at hand. It helps to create a clear and coherent structure for the reader to follow, and it sets the tone for the rest of the text.

Moreover, the simple Theme also helps to establish the perspective and voice of the writer, which is crucial in newspaper writing as it affects the credibility and objectivity of the story. The choice of simple Theme can also emphasize certain aspects of the story and provide a different perspective, thus making it an important tool for the writer to convey their message effectively. Simple Theme is a crucial aspect of thematic construction in newspaper writing, as it helps to establish the topic, structure, voice, and perspective of the text. It is a fundamental tool for the writer to communicate their message clearly and effectively, and to provide a clear and coherent reading experience for the reader.

3.2. Multiple Theme

Some Themes consist of two or more elements, including textual Themes, interpersonal Themes, and topical Themes. The order of occurrence of compound Themes is textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes. Topical Themes are required to be present in multiple Themes, while textual and interpersonal Themes are arbitrary. Halliday and Mathiessen (2014) reveal compound Themes as opposed to simple Themes, meaning that a compound Theme consists of more than one element as a Theme in a clause as illustrated below.

<i>Selain itu</i> [besides that]	<i>belum semua distrik di AS</i> [not all districts in US]	<i>telah menyediakan</i> [has provided]	<i>sarana pembejaran OnLine yang dapat digunakan siswa</i> [OnLine learning tools that students can use]
Adjunct: comment	Subject	Finite/Predicator	
RESI--		MOOD	--DUE
Textual	Topical		
THEME		RHEME	

In the sentence above, the data shows that there are variations in the form of compound Themes, namely a combination of Topical Themes and Textual Themes. Topical Themes are represented by the subject, namely the phrase not all districts in the US, while the Textual Theme is represented through the use of conjunctive adjuncts, namely phrases other than that. the textual Theme plays a crucial role in shaping the meaning and structure of the news story and helps to ensure that it is easily accessible and understandable for the reader. By paying attention to the textual Theme, journalists can produce high-quality articles that effectively communicate the information and engage the reader.

The conjunctive adjunct function in the sentence above provides additional explanations regarding the facts presented in the data source, namely the sentence.

“Keterbatasan sarana penunjang pembelajaran OnLine di dunia pendidikan saat ini tidak perlu dipersoalkan karena kondisi dan situasi yang tidak dapat diprediksi terjadi sangat cepat. Bahkan di Amerika Serikat, menurut Mark Lieberman ketika menulis dalam ‘Education Week’, sekalipun e-learning disebut-sebut sebagai alat yang potensial untuk menjaga stabilitas pembelajaran, tetapi tidak semua sekolah siap menawarkan pembelajaran secara virtual, karena tidak semua siswa dibekali untuk belajar OnLine”.

[There is no need to question the limitations of OnLine learning support facilities in the world of education today because unpredictable conditions and situations occur very quickly. Even in the United States, according to Mark Lieberman when writing in ‘Education Week’, even though e-learning is touted as a potential tool to maintain the stability of learning, not all schools are ready to offer virtual learning, because not all students are equipped to learn online].

Conjunctive adjuncts, which are also known as linking adverbials, are important in newspaper writing because they help to connect different parts of a text and establish the relationships between them. In news writing, conjunctive adjuncts can be used to indicate the sequence of events, express causality, or provide additional information to support the main idea. The use of conjunctive adjuncts helps to create a clear and coherent text that is easy for the reader to follow. By linking different parts of the text together, conjunctive adjuncts help to create a clear flow of ideas and prevent the text from becoming disjointed or difficult to understand. Additionally, conjunctive adjuncts can help to provide context and background information that is relevant to the story.

<i>Namun,</i>	<i>Mungkin</i>	<i>banyak juga di antara</i>	<i>yang</i>	<i>belum</i>	<i>seperti apa sesungguhnya virus</i>
[However,]	[maybe]	<i>kita</i>	<i>sepenuhnya</i>		<i>yang pertama kali terdeteksi di</i>
		[many of us]	<i>memahami</i>		<i>Kota Wuhan, Hubei, China ini</i>
			[do not fully understand]		[what exactly is the virus that was first detected in Wuhan City, Hubei, China]
Tekstual	Interpersonal	Topikal			
THEME				RHEME	

The data above represents the use of textual Themes through the use of conjunctions ‘but’. Conjunctions help to connect different parts of a news article and create a coherent and understandable text. They help to establish the relationships between different ideas and events, making the news story more coherent and easier to follow. Conjunctions can be used to express causality and help to explain the relationships between different events. This is especially important in news reporting where the goal is to provide a clear and accurate picture of what has happened. Conjunctions help to clarify the relationships between different ideas and events and make the news story more comprehensible to the reader. By using appropriate conjunctions, journalists can ensure that the information is presented in a clear and accessible way.

The data above also shows the use of Interpersonal Themes, namely the modal adjunct, namely the word ‘maybe’. The word ‘maybe’ expresses certainty or uncertainty: It is used to express the degree of certainty or uncertainty about a fact or event. This is important in news reporting where the goal is to provide accurate and trustworthy information to the reader. Modal adjuncts can be used to convey the writer’s attitude or stance towards a particular issue. For example, the use of words such as “must,” “should,” or “might” can indicate the writer’s opinion or perspective on a matter.

3.3 Thematic Patterns and its Implication to Teaching News Item Text

Topical Themes are represented through the use of the subject through the phrase ‘many of us are also’. Through the sentence above, variations in the use of Textual, Interpersonal, and Topical Themes indicate that the author wants to add additional information to the sentence. Thematic construction also has close relationship with text cohesion and coherence. In news item text writing, Thematic construction helps to create a sense of unity and coherence in the text (Alyousef, 2021; Triyana et al., 2018). Lecturer can emphasize students to pay attention to the use of Theme in their writing since it is relevant to the information that is going to be delivered. This makes sense since Thematic realization is discussed under textual function which is also described as clause as message (Fatmawati et al.,

2019; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Hanafiah et al., 2018).

4. Discussion

Simple Theme was found in the data. It was represented by the use of Topical Theme. In systemic functional linguistics, topical Theme refers to the topic or subject that the text is addressing (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Wei, 2015). In newspaper writing, the topical Theme helps to establish the main focus of the text and provides a clear and concise way for the writer to organize their ideas and information.

By using topical Theme, the writer can ensure that the reader has a clear understanding of what the story is about, and it also helps to guide the reader through the text by providing a clear and coherent structure. The topical Theme helps to create a roadmap for the writer to follow, and it helps to ensure that all of the information and ideas in the text are related to the main topic. Moreover, the choice of topical Theme can also affect the tone and style of the text. By selecting the right topical Theme, the writer can create a clear and engaging tone that is suited to the subject matter. This helps to make the story more appealing to the reader and helps to ensure that the reader remains interested and engaged throughout the text. Topical Theme is an important aspect of thematic construction in newspaper writing. It helps to establish the focus and organization of the text, and it provides a clear and concise way for the writer to organize their ideas and information. By selecting the right topical Theme, the writer can create a clear and engaging tone that is suited to the subject matter, making it a fundamental tool for the writer to communicate their message effectively.

Multiple Theme, also known as "circumstantial Theme," is important in newspaper writing because it helps to provide context and additional information about the topic at hand (Khedri & Ebrahimi, 2012). In systemic functional linguistics, the multiple Theme refers to the circumstances or background information related to the topic being discussed. This information is crucial in newspaper writing as it provides the reader with a more comprehensive understanding of the topic and helps to create a more engaging and informative reading experience.

Multiple Theme helps to establish the context and background information for the story, and it also provides a deeper understanding of the relationships between the participants and events in the story (Khedri & Ebrahimi, 2012). For example, in a news article about a political event, the multiple Theme could provide information about the political background, the history of the issue, and the opinions of various stakeholders. This information helps to give the reader a more nuanced and well-rounded understanding of the topic, and it makes the story more engaging and informative.

Multiple Theme as part of Theme helps provide a sense of coherence and unity to the text (Fitriati & Gayatri, 2021; Khedri & Ebrahimi, 2012; Triyana et al., 2018). By providing background information and context, multiple Theme helps to connect different parts of the story and to create a more coherent reading experience. This coherence is important in newspaper writing as it helps to ensure that the reader can follow the story and understand the different aspects of the topic. In addition, multiple Theme helps to create a more engaging and informative reading experience for the reader. It helps to establish the background information and context for the story, and it provides a sense of coherence and unity to the text, making it a fundamental tool for the writer to communicate their message effectively.

The realization of the Thematic structure by the media indirectly builds context through the linkage of clauses organized by the author as a message. The message affects the reader's perception of the truth of the events reported in the discourse. The interpersonal Theme allows writers to include their comments or opinions. This serves as a means of supporting their argument. In the news text, of course the news writer strengthens the argument by adding the opinion of the source. This also supports the validity of the news presented.

Textual Themes are complex sub-themes (Kusumawardani & Putra, 2021), but it also help build new information that the author wants to reveal (Yulianti, 2022). In line with the concept of textual Themes, this function aims to connect arguments and maintain text cohesion (Devira et al., 2020). It is supported by Babaii et al. (2016) stating that one of the ways to achieve cohesion is through thematicity. The representation of textual Theme connects the ideas in clauses and it provides the cohesion in the text.

The findings can be used in teaching news item text. In news item text writing, Thematic construction helps to create a sense of unity and coherence in the text (Alyousef, 2021; Triyana et al., 2018). By incorporating the study of thematic patterns in SFL into the teaching of news item texts, it is believed to enhance students' ability to comprehend, analyze, and produce news articles effectively. It provides them with a framework for organizing information, improving their writing skills, and developing critical thinking in relation to news discourse.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the data that have been analyzed, it can be concluded that from its simplicity, simple and multiple Themes were found. Simple Theme is represented by the use of one single Topical Theme in the clauses, Meanwhile, Multiple Theme was constructed by the variation of Textual, Interpersonal, and Topical Theme.

In relation to the implication to teaching news item text in university level, students can be suggested to maintain thematic continuity within paragraphs and across the entire article since it can enhance the flow and clarity of their own writing. Then, understanding thematic patterns can guide students in producing well-structured news articles.

Further researches are expected to explore how thematic construction affects the reader's experience and understanding of the news. In addition, research could also explore the relationship between thematic construction and the credibility and objectivity of news. This could

help to understand the role that thematic construction plays in shaping the reader's perception of the news, and how it affects the credibility of the news source. Then, another area of interest could be the examination of thematic construction in different cultural and linguistic contexts. This could help to understand how cultural and linguistic differences affect the way that news is written and the way that Themes are constructed.

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Authors contributions

Humaizi was responsible for drafting the manuscript. Muhammad Yusuf was responsible for collecting the data, and revising the manuscript. The authors have checked and agreed the final manuscript.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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