A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO MARK HALLIDAY'S SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR AND THE ANALYSIS OF A FAIRY TALE IN TERMS OF THEME AND RHEME

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to apply the systemic functional grammar to discover a fairy tale in terms of Theme- Rheme system. Based on Mark Halliday's theory of systemic functional grammar, the study focuses on the analysis of a fairy tale called "the princess and the pea" as a text in terms of the textual metafunction in the realization of Theme-Rheme pattern. The two principal methods employed in this study are descriptive and analytical methods. The findings showed that in terms of Theme-Rheme pattern, unmarked topical theme is the most noticeable feature of the text and the analysis also revealed how the author develops the text. This study proves that systemic functional grammar is truly a useful analytical tool for those whose concern is for the structure and meaning of a particular text.

Key word*: Systemic Functional Grammar, Theme and Rheme, fairy tales*

1. INTRODUCTION

The last four decades have witnessed a major shift in linguistics research from focusing on forms to focusing on both forms and function. These fundamental changes reflect an emerging view in which language is treated as a communicative activity rather than an isolated set of grammatical rules. Following these developments, the field of linguistic research has welcomed the arrival of the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). According to Halliday [1994], SFG which is based on functional framework is different from formal models of grammar. In terms of analysis, this is not a one way process, from context to use. The exploration can go both ways: we can learn about the general grammatical resources of the language by looking at how they are in text; and we can understand how texts work by applying what we know about the meaning of grammatical resources. Identifying these advantages, the authors were determined to conduct an analysis on a fairy tale based on functional framework.

The reason for choosing to investigate a fairy tale lies not only in people's familiarity with this specific type of text but also lies in our personal interests in fairy tales. Besides providing entertainment, these tales "hide a wealth of insights just below the surface" [Young, 1997] and provide children with a good sense of imagination as well as rich context for language that is important in later reading. The fairy tales by Andersen adapt a humorous and colloquial style, reminiscent of oral story telling techniques rather than the sophisticated literary devices of the fairy tales written by other precursors. Therefore, "the stories are for children, but adults too should be able to listen in ". [Andersen, 1871]

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study does not attempt to discover all the aspects of functional grammar but limits itself to one area related to textual metafunction of language. In other words, only the system of Theme and Rheme is taken into consideration in the analysis of the chosen text.

With a view to analyzing Theme-Rheme pattern of a fairy tale as a text, two principal methods are used, namely descriptive and analytical methods. The former is concerned with the description of the text in terms of Theme-Rheme system in the light of Systemic Functional Grammar and the latter deals with the analysis of the text for discussion.

The following are the aspects based on which the analysis was carried out.

2.1. Features of Systemic Functional Grammar

According to Halliday [1994], the fundamental difference between systemic functional grammar and formal models of grammar is that the former is based on a functional framework. It is functional in three closely related senses: in its interpretation (1) of text, (2) of system, and (3) of the elements of linguistic structures.

(1) It is functional in the sense that it is designed to account for how the language is **used.** A functional grammar is essentially a 'natural' grammar, in the sense that everything in it can be explained, ultimately, by reference to how language is used.

(2) The fundamental components of **meaning** in language are functional components. Systemic functional grammar distinguishes three functional components of meaning in language: the ideational metafunction, the interpersonal metafunction, and the textual metafunction.

(3) Each **element** in a language is explained by reference to its function in the total linguistic system. A functional grammar is one that construes all the units of a language – its clauses, phrases and so on – as organic configurations of functions.

[M. K. Halliday, 1994: xiv]

2.2 Three Metafunctions of Language

According to Halliday [1994], language has three functions. The first function is called the **ideational function**. This function serves for the expression of 'content': that is, of the speaker's experience of the real world, including the inner of his consciousness. The ideational function has two subtypes: **experiential function** and **logical function**. In serving this function, language also gives structures to experience, and helps to determine our way of looking at things and combining things in a logical way.

The second function of language is the **interpersonal function**. This function serves to establish and maintain social relation: for the expression of social roles created by language itself – for example, the roles of questioner or respondent, which we take on by asking or answering a question; and also for getting things done, by means of interaction between one person and another.

The third function of language is the **textual function**. This function is concerned with providing links with language itself and with the features of the situation in which it is used. This function of language enables speaker or writer to construct texts, or connected passages of discourse that is situationally relevant; and enables the listener or reader to distinguish a text from a random set of sentences. [Van, Hoang Van, 2006: 28-29].

While ideational metafunction is concerned with clause as representation through the system of Transitivity, the interpersonal function is concerned with clause as exchange through the system of Mood, the textual metafunction is concerned with clause as message through the theme system.

2.3. Theme - Rheme System

Systems of Theme are two elements: the **Theme (Th)** and the **Rheme (Rh)**. The theme serves as the departure of the message, which in English coincides with the initial element(s) of the clause; and the Rheme is the remainder of the message. By analyzing the thematic structure of the clauses in a text, we can find out the text's mode of development.

The theme may be realized by a nominal group, a prepositional phrase, an adverbial group, or even a clause in the case of predicated theme.

Regarding their meanings, themes can be subdivided into three types, namely: topical Theme, textual Theme and interpersonal Theme [Halliday, 1994:38; Butt et al, 1995:90-94; Thompson, 2004:142]. Topical Theme refers to the first group or phrase which is relevant to the experiential meaning (E.g. Participant, Process, or Circumstance) in a clause. Interpersonal Theme concerns with the interpersonal meaning (e.g. vocative), whereas textual Theme deals with the textual meaning. Since Theme is a departure part of a clause, it can be identified by looking at the function of the first group part of a clause, whether it functions as experiential meaning (topical theme), interpersonal meaning (interpersonal theme), or textual meaning (textual theme) [Butt et al, 1995:90-92].

Theme may be single or multiple, marked or unmarked. A theme is single when the thematic element itself is represented by just one constituent. In contrast, a theme is multiple when it has a further internal structure of its own. An unmarked theme is one that is usual or typical, whereas a marked theme is one that is unusual.

Demonstrated below is an example of Them-Rheme.

She	*loved dancing*
Theme **(Topical/ unmarked)**	**Rheme**

On the table	*there is a book*
Theme **(Topical/ marked)**	**Rheme**

2.4. Fairy tales
2.4.1. What is a fairy tales?

According to Cambridge Dictionary, a fairy tale is a traditional story written for children that usually involves imaginary creatures and magic.

2.4.2. Features of English fairy tales

Fairy tales have a common set of language features which are seen to some extent in all fairy tales. They also have a common structure.

Firstly, it is generally accepted that the phrases like "once upon a time", "long time ago", "Once there was…" are common expressions that usually appear at the beginning of an English fairy tale. Furthermore, fairy tale endings where everything turns out for the best are common.

Secondly, the setting is nearly always vague. Structure is most typically a recount in chronological order, where events retell what happened to a main character that came into contact with the 'fairy world'. Time and place are undefined.

Thirdly, there are usually two groups of characters in a fairy tale which is opposite to each other: good and bad. Moreover, there is always a magical element in fairy tales, without which they cannot be made up as fairy tales. It is the magic which helps to fulfill the good's and poor's dreams.

Lastly, there is often transformation in fairy tales. We can take phenomena of Cinderella and frog as examples. Cinderella is transformed into a princess and the frog is transformed into a prince.

In short, fairy tales attract people of different generations as well as at different stages of one's life circle by the language used and interesting plot as well as its "wealth of insights" [Young, 1997]

3. THE ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT IN TERMS OF THEME AND RHEME

The fairy tale "*The Princes and the Pea*" to analyse was written by Hans Christian Andersen in 1835 and it is taken from the book ***Hans Andersen Fairy Tales a Selection*** published by Oxford University Press in 1998.

The text consists of 47 clauses which make up 20 clause complexes. Most of the clauses in the clause complexes are in paratactic relation showing their interdependence. Their semantic relations are mainly of elaboration and extension. The analysis of the tale in terms of theme and rheme can be seen in the tables below.

(1)   (2)

There	*was*	*once*	*a prince …princess.*	*But*	*she*	*has to be*	*a real princess*
Theme **(unmarked)**	**Rheme**			**Theme** **(unmarked)**	**Rheme**		

(3)

So	*he*	*traveled*		*all…world*	(4) *to find*	*one*
Theme (unmarked)		**Rheme**			**Theme (marked)**	

(5)

but	*there*	*was*	*always*	*something wrong*	(6) *- there*	*were*	*plenty of princesses*
Theme (unmarked)		**Rheme**			**Theme (unmarked)**	**Rheme**	

(7)

though	*whether*	*they*	*we re*	*real princesses*	(8) *he*	*could*	*never*	*quite*	*find out*
Theme (unmarked)			**Rheme**		**Theme (unmarked)**	**Rheme**			

(9)

there	*was*	*always*	*something …right*
Theme (unmarked)	**Rheme**		

(10)

So	*he*	*came*	*home*	*again*	(11) *and*	*was*	*very*	*unhappy*
Theme (unmarked)		**Rheme**			**ellipsis**	**Rheme**		

(12)

because	*he*	*wanted*		*so much*	(13) *to have*	*a real princess*
Theme (unmarked)		**Rheme**			**Theme (marked)**	

(14)

One evening	*there*	*was*	*a dreadful storm:*	(15) *it*	*thundered*
Theme (marked)	**Rheme**			**Theme (unmarked)**	**Rheme**

(16)   (17)

and	*lightened*	*and*	*the rain*	*poured down*	*in torrents*
(ellipsis)	**Rheme**	**Theme** **(unmarked)**		**Rheme**	

(18)

it	*was*	*really*	*quite*	*frightening!*
Theme **(unmarked)**	**Rheme**			

(19)

Then	*there*	*came*	*a knock*	*at the town-gate*
Theme **(unmarked)**		**Rheme**		

(20)   (21)

and	*the old king*	*went out*	*and*	*opened*	*it*
Theme **(unmarked)**		**Rheme**	**ellipsis**	**Rheme**	

(22)   (23)

It	*was*	*a princess...outside.*	*But my*	*what a sight*	*a*	*she*	*was*	*with ...storm*
Theme **(unmarked)**	**Rheme**		**Theme** **(marked)**			**Rheme**		

(24)   (25)

Her ... clothes	*were running*	*with water:*	*water*	*was running in*	*through... shoes*	*and out ...heels*
Theme **(unmarked)**	**Rheme**		**Theme** **(unmarked)**	**Rheme**		

(26)   (27)

But	*she*	*said*	*she*	*was*	*a real princess*
Theme **(unmarked)**		**Rheme**	**Theme** **(unmarked)**	**Rheme**	

(28)   (29)

'Well	we	shall	soon	find out'	thought	the old queen	to herself
Theme (unmarked)		**Rheme**		**(ellipsis)**	**Rheme**		

(30)   (31)

She	went	into the bedroom,	took	all the bed-clothes	off
Theme (unmarked)	**Rheme**		**(ellipsis)**	**Rheme**	

(32)

and	put	a pea	on ...bed
(ellipsis)	**Rheme**		

(33)   (34)

Then	she	took	twenty mattresses	and	laid	them	on...pea
Theme (unmarked)		**Rheme**		**(ellipsis)**	**Rheme**		

(35)

And	there	the princess	had to spend	the night
Theme (marked)		**Rheme**		

(36)   (37)

In the morning	they	asked	her	how	she	had slept
Theme (marked)	**Rheme**			**Theme (marked)**	**Rheme**	

(38)   (39)

'Oh, ...badly!'	said	the princess	'I	have	hardly	shut	my eyes	the ...night
Theme (marked)	**Rheme**		**Theme (unmarked)**	**Rheme**				

(40)   (41)

Heaven	knows	what	there	was	in my bed
Theme (unmarked)	**Rheme**	**Theme (marked)**	**Rheme**		

(42)   (43)

I	have been lying	on something hard	- I	am	black and blue	all over
Theme (unmarked)	**Rheme**		**Theme (unmarked)**	**Rheme**		

(44)

It	's	really	dreadful!
Theme (unmarked)	**Rheme**		

(45)   (46)

And	so	they	could see	she	was	a real princess.
Theme (unmarked)			**Rheme**	**Theme (unmarked)**	**Rheme**	

(47)

because	She	had felt	the pea	through… eiderdowns
Theme (unmarked)		**Rheme**		

(48)

No one…princess	could	possibly	be	so	sensitive
Theme (unmarked)	**Rheme**				

(49)   (50)

Then	the prince	married	her,	for	he	was	now	sure… princess
Theme (unmarked)		**Rheme**		**Theme (unmarked)**	**Rheme**			

(51)   (52)

and	the pea	was placed	in …museum,	where	it	can	still	be seen
Theme (unmarked)		**Rheme**		**Theme (marked)**	**Rheme**			

(53)				(54)			
if	*no one*	*has taken*	*it.*	*And*	*that*	*'s*	*a true story!*
Theme **(marked)**		**Rheme**		**Theme** **(unmarked)**		**Rheme**	

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our analysis shows that most of the themes in the text belong to ideational component (that is, topical one). Of 47 clauses and clause complexes analyzed for theme, 37 have unmarked theme and 10 have marked theme. At the beginning of the text, inanimate nouns as theme predominate (*there* in 1, 5, 6, *it* in 15, 18), then they are shifted to animate nouns (*she, I, they, he*) revealing the development of the story. 15 clause complexes contain textual theme and of 11 marked themes, 4 are in dialogic portion expressing the logical relations of addition and enhancement. There are only 3 interpersonal theme (*my* in 23, *well* in 28, *oh* in 38) reflecting the interactive feature in the text.

From the analysis above, a conclusion may be drawn that systemic functional grammar is a paradigm for those whose concern is with the structures and meaning of a particular text. This approach brings us with a useful analytical tool to look at the whole text and its characteristic features.

Some implications should be figured out for teachers and learners in language teaching and learning. Firstly, for the learners of English, with the knowledge of Theme-Rheme structures, they can have a better understanding of how the text is developed, which will help them develop their writing skill, especially in terms of written discourse. Secondly, for teachers of English, they are encouraged to introduce to their learners the thematic organization before developing their productive skills. Once their learners are well-equipped with this powerful analytical tool, they will have confidence in managing the meanings of their own spoken and written discourse.

This study is confined to only the Theme-Rheme structure of a fairy tale using analytical instruments of functional framework. Therefore, further research should be extended to the analysis of the text via the system of transitivity, mood and cohesive ties. It is also advisable to investigate other types of texts such as fables, short stories, novels, academic writing …with different genres, which have in fact been adapted for practical use in the classroom.

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APPENDIX

THE PRINCESS AND THE PEA

THERE was once a prince who wanted to marry a princess. But she had to be a real princess. So he travelled all round the world to find one, but there was always something wrong—there were plenty of princesses, though whether they were real princesses he could never quite find out: there was always something that was not just right. So he came home again and was very unhappy because he wanted so much to have a real princess.

One evening there was a dreadful storm: it thundered and lightened and the rain poured down in torrents—it was really quite frightening! Then there came a knock at the town-gate, and the old king went out and opened it.

It was a princess who stood outside. But my, what a sight she was with the rain and the storm! Her hair and her clothes were running with water: water was running in through the toes of her shoes

THE PRINCESS AND THE PEA

and out at the heels. But she said she was a real princess.

'Well, we shall soon find out!' thought the old queen to herself. She went into the bedroom, took all the bed-clothes off and put a pea on the bottom of the bed. Then she took twenty mattresses and laid them on top of the pea, and then twenty eiderdowns on top of the mattresses.

And there the princess had to spend the night.

In the morning they asked her how she had slept.

'Oh, terribly badly!' said the princess. 'I have hardly shut my eyes the whole night! Heaven knows what there was in the bed! I have been lying on something hard—I am black and blue all over! It's really dreadful!'

And so they could see she was a real princess, because she had felt the pea through twenty mattresses and twenty eiderdowns. No one but a real princess could possibly be so sensitive.

Then the prince married her, for he was now sure that he had found a real princess, and the pea was placed in the art museum, where it can still be seen if no one has taken it.

And that's a true story!