



# The Theme – Rheme Model

**L/O/G/O**

Alina Biletska IM-52

# Theme – rheme theory: a brief introduction

- The term “**Theme**” is first put forward by **Mathesius**, a linguist of the Prague school and developed by **Halliday** and many other linguists.
- According to Mathesius, any sentence can be semantically divided into parts: Theme and Rheme.
- Halliday argues that the **Theme** is the starting point of the message chosen by the speaker/writer. **Rheme** is the remaining part that develops theme.

# Definitions Of Theme And Rheme

## Theme

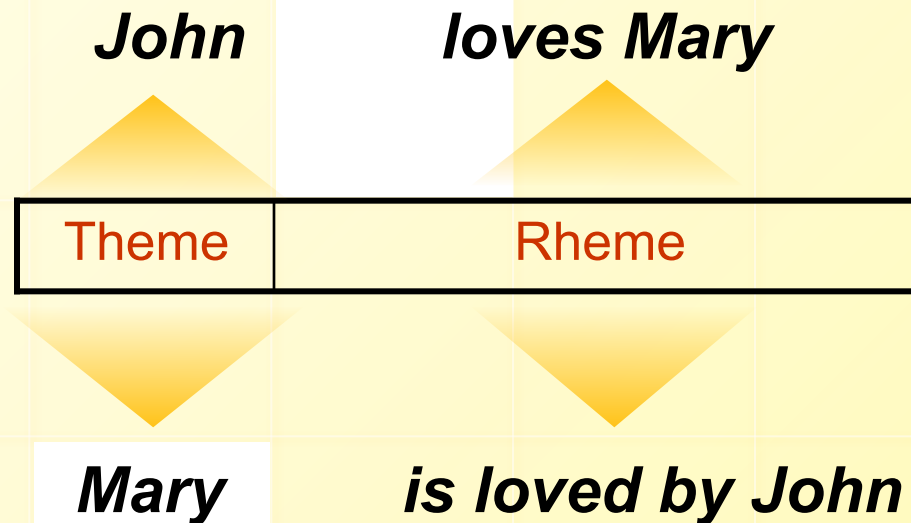
The main idea that you  
are talking about and lets  
the reader or listener  
know what the clause  
is going to be about.

## Rheme

What you say  
about  
the main idea.

- **Theme in the clause: Hallidayan Model**

- Theme: “what the clause is about”
- In English, the first constituent of the clause:



- The rest of the clause is called the Rheme

# Theme in the clause: Berry's Model

- Main difference in Berry's model: Distinguishes between:
  - “Basic Theme” (the Subject)
  - “Additional Theme” (any fronted Adjuncts)

**On a clear day, you can see forever.**

**Halliday:**

Theme	Rheme
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**On a clear day, you can see forever.**

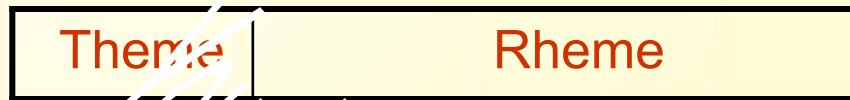
**Berry:**

Add. Theme	Basic Theme	Rheme
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# Types of Theme

- Subject Theme (**Unmarked theme**)

*I am writing a poem.*



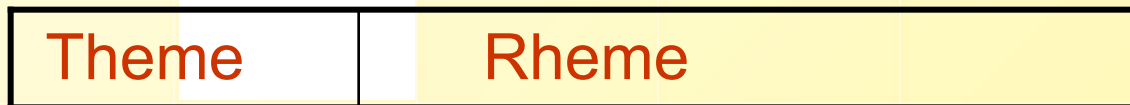
- Adjunct Theme (**Partially marked**)

*On a clear day, you can see forever.*



- Fronted Objects and Complements (**Marked Themes**)

*Fish I like.*



*Letters I am writing to my friends.*

# Theme in different mood of a clause

**Theme in  
declarative  
sentences**

**Theme in  
interrogative  
sentences**

**Theme in  
exclamative  
clauses**

**Theme in  
imperative  
sentences**

# Theme in declarative sentences

- Unmarked (Theme = Subject)

**a. *The two Indians*** stood waiting.

**b. *The Indian who was rowing them*** was working very hard.

**c. *Of course it's*** an accident.

- Marked (Theme ≠ Subject): A Theme that is something other than the subject, in a declarative clause, we shall refer to as a marked theme.

**a. *Across the bay*** they found the other boat.

**b. *What she had felt*** he never knew.

The most usual form of marked Theme is an adverbial group, such as ***today, suddenly...***, or prepositional phrase, such as ***at night, in the corner, without much hope***, functioning as **adjunct** in the clause.



# Theme in exclamative clauses

Theme in exclamative clauses:  
WH-element as Theme, normally  
nominal group or adverbial group  
functions as exclamative (WH-) element.



***How cheerfully***  
he seems to grin!



***What***  
***tremendously easy***  
***questions***  
you ask!

# Theme in interrogative sentences

The natural theme of a question is 'what I want to know'.

Polarity (yes/no) questions: unmarked Theme = finite + Subject (What the speaker wants to know is the polarity 'yes or no?'). Normally, the first word (finite operator) of verbal group together with nominal group functions as Subject.

- a. **Are you** interested in Syntax?
- b. **Would you** like a cup of tea?

Wh-questions: unmarked Theme = Wh-word (What the speaker wants to know is the identity of some element in the content.) Nominal group, adverbial group or prepositional phrase functions as interrogative (WH-) element

- a. **What** are you doing here?
- b. **Then, in the name of goodness,** why does she bother?
- c. **Which platform** does it leave from?

Marked Theme choices are relatively rare with questions, please see the following sentence.

**After the party,** where did you go?

# Theme in imperative sentences

The imperative is the only type of clause in which the Predicator (the verb) is regularly found as Theme. Verbal group functions as Predicator, plus preceding don't if negative.

- a. **Wake** me up before the coffee break.
- b. **Don't disturb** me while I'm taking a nap.
- c. **Let's have** a look at this recipe.
- d. **Please stop** it.

# Theme in clause complexes

***As the universe expended, the temperature of the radiation decreased.***

There are two different ways of analysing of the dependent clause and each captures different aspect of what is going on.

<i>As the universe</i>	<i>expended,</i>	<i>the temperature of the radiation</i>	<i>decreased.</i>
Theme		Rheme	
Theme	Rheme	Theme	Rheme

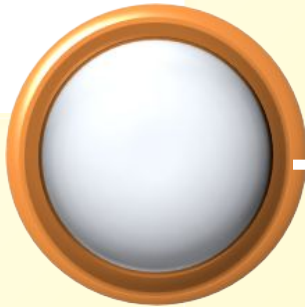
# Multiple Themes



Textual theme, functioning to relate the meaning of the particular clause to other parts of the text.



Interpersonal theme, often functioning to code the speaker's or writer's personal judgement on meaning.



Topical theme, functioning as the point of orientation for the experiential meanings of the clause.

metafunction	Component of Theme
<p><b>Textual</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Continuative</b> (discourse signallers/ Markers: yes, no, well, oh, now, which signal that a new move is beginning)</li> <li>● <b>Structural</b> (conjunction: and, or, nor, either, neither, but, yet, so, then, when, while, before, after, until, because, even, in case... or WH-relative: which, who, whose, when, where, that...)</li> <li>● <b>Conjunctive</b>: relate the clause to the preceding text such as that is, for instance; rather; in any case; in fact; in short; actually; and, also, moreover; but, on the other hand; instead; meanwhile, then; likewise; so; if; yet; as to that;</li> </ul>

<p><b>Interpersonal</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>vocative:</b> any item used to address such as a personal name.</li> <li>● <b>modal:</b> any of the modal Adjunct which expresses the speaker's judgment regarding to relevance of the message such as probably, possibly, certainly, perhaps, maybe; usually, sometimes, always; occasionally, generally regularly; of course...; I think, in my opinion, personally; frankly, to be honest; honestly; please, kindly; evidently; hopefully; in general; strictly speaking; wisely; to my surprise...</li> <li>● <b>mood-marking: a finite verbal operator</b></li> <li>● <b>WH (interrogative or relative)</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>experiential</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Topical (participant, circumstance, process)</b></li> </ul>

The background features a yellow grid pattern on the left side. In the center, there are several realistic water droplets. On the right side, there are large, colorful abstract shapes in red, yellow, green, and blue, separated by white borders.

**Thank You!**

**L/O/G/O**