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Coherence between the Discursive Functions of the Rheme-Thematic Structure and its Parts

Z. Z. Gafarova
Associate Professor, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Philology, Asia International University

A B S T R A C T
The distribution of the rheme-thematic structure is not limited to the level of a single utterance or speech structure, but covers the entire text and its individual parts, forming a rhematic chain. The relationships between the links of the chain change depending on the communicative situation and purpose, but the invariant part of the content must be preserved.

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Introduction. The concept of "topic" plays an important role in the analysis of the thematic structure of a discourse and the coherence of its parts. This concept was first introduced by the American linguist Wallace Chaffee, and it corresponds to the term "theme" used by M. Halliday. For example, the first place of the part of the play in the sentence: The play John saw yesterday was interesting is a product of the phenomenon of topicalization.

Main body. The phenomenon of topicalization can be described in terms of the expression of information in discourse in the context of the theme-rheme relationship. Even at the time of Y. Firbas, it was proposed to call the information that occurs in a speech structure and is clarified depending on the context a "theme". (The elements that transmit new information, on the contrary, form the communicative center of the speech structure and form the rheme. Thus, the rheme is the information at the initial stage of the message being conveyed - emphasizing the theme, and serves to complete the thought being expressed. The rheme contains the main, new part of the information. However, the information can be fully expressed only within the framework of the theme-rheme relationship.

Briefly, "old" and "new" information are not interrupted in terms of speech structure and ensure the dynamics and mobility of communication.

The terms that indicate whether information is "new" or "old" include such pairs as "core-core" (W. Matesius), "theme-rheme" (Y. Firbas, F. Danesh, M. Halliday, K. Boost, A. Boguslavsky), "topic-explanation" (J. Lyons, O. Dahl, T. Venneman), and "topic-focus" (A. Vezhbitskaya, P. Sgall). These terms are often used interchangeably without any distinction. In addition, these terms reflect specific features in the division of "old" and "new" parts of information.

Traditionally, the "new and old" parts of information have been considered primarily at the level of sentence structure or the combination of two sentences, without paying sufficient attention to the fact that the distribution of information actually depends on the communication strategy.

It is well known that changes in the strategy of information distribution perform a discursive function. When the strategy moves from pre-existing information to new, the perception of the text becomes "easier", while when this direction moves "from new to old", the communicative value of information increases, and the importance of new information is emphasized. The importance of new information ensures the effectiveness of the exchange of ideas in a dialogue. Therefore, the temporal and spatial topicalization of the reported event affects the semantic structure of the speech and causes changes in its content: But that weekend he sent this letter (Lawrence, Short stories, p.259).

When the tense is not topicalized (not highlighted), the general meaning of this sentence looks different: He sent this letter that weekend.

The effect of the emphatic movement can also be observed when other time markers are used. For example, in the following case, the next word is topicalized: When she left to go to Sheila, she had been wearing a new suit, caramel-coloured linen (Rendell, Blood lines, p.167).

Observe the shifts in content when the above structure is given without emphasis: She had been wearing a new suit, caramel-colored linen when she left to Sheila.

It seems that when the subordinate clause is thematically separated, the moment of the action is emphasized, while when such a rhematic separation is absent, the event expressed in the main clause is highlighted.

From the point of view of the referent of meaning, the movement of topicalization indicates the passage of events over a certain period of time. Such a referent connection, in turn, has priority in terms of information transmission. As L.G. Luzina (1996:87) noted, two principles are activated in this type of speech structures:

"old" information retains its formal priority;

the priority of active, new information becomes a communicative-pragmatic principle.

However, a fragment that is removed from the topic can be perceived as both "new" and "old" information at the same time:

When we got through that I volunteered to wash dishes (Lawrence, Sons and Lovers, p.261).

In the given example, the time-related verb that expresses "old", previously known information through the pronoun that, and also conveys information about the completion of the action indicated by this pronoun.

Therefore, describing the expression of information distribution as one of the principles of discourse formation under the theme-rhema structure allows to include the performance of the discursive task among the factors that ensure the selection of pragmatic tools in the process of text creation.

When analyzing the functions of temporal means of expression in discourse, it is also necessary to note the features of the subordinate clauses that appear in the text. Many researchers show that in addition to temporal relations, subordinate clauses also express other relations, such as condition, cause-effect, purpose (Jacobs 1993:66-69). However, the fulfillment of the indicated functions of subordinate clauses can be proven only by referring to the text, since additional meanings and functions arise only in the content of the information that is communicated in the context of the discourse. For example, when formed by the conjunction when, the causal relationship is expressed in the adverb: Of course, we couldn't entirely ignore the fact that vocations were declining students dropping out more and more frequently and ordained priests leaving the priesthood or the church in ever increasing numbers. When it was someone you knew personally, someone you had been trained with or taught by, it was always a shock (Lodge, Paradise News, p.183).

In this passage, the element when refers to the cause of the situation expressed in the main clause it was always a shock. This meaning can be understood in connection with the event described in the previous part of the text: "The increasing number of students and teachers leaving the church has shocked many."

Also, the agreement of the when conjunction with the conditional conjunction formed by the if conjunction of the subordinate clause is observed: when there were no visitors, Paul now took his meals with visitors, as he was beyond the nursery control (Lawrens, Short Stories, p.359).

Although the given example is analyzed out of context, the correspondence between the comparative sentences is based on lexical knowledge. (That is, young children do not usually participate in the circle of adults) and therefore the present sentence can be transformed into a conditional sentence: If there were no visitors, Paul now took his meals with his parents.

As experimental practice shows, the structure formed by the when conjunction has the ability to express additional meaning, and the speaker uses this ability to connect parts of the text and express complex semantic relationships between events.

In general, the theme-rheme relationship plays an important role in the formation of a text. It is known that external connections are important for a text, but internal connections also play a separate role. One of the main methods of expressing such connections is, of course, to transmit information from the known or "old" part and then move on to the new (unknown) part. In this way, a content chain is formed that makes it possible to recognize, to transform unknown information into known.

According to the analysis of the temporal features of the course of events considered above, the main discursive function of the means participating in the composition of predicative speech structures is manifested in their ensuring the content coherence of the text. As a result, such means, which are included in the list of discursive factors, are intended to perform a certain pragmatic function.

As is known, in the process of communication, the text appears as a product of speech activity. The text is a multi-stage, multi-layered structure, its various aspects are associated with the performance of various tasks. The structural structure of the text reflects the relationship between form and content. If its structural structure is the arrangement of constituent linguistic forms within various relationships, then within the framework of the content it implies the semantic relationship of parts and individual units.

In the communication environment, the formal and substantive aspects of the text appear as a whole structure, in which the units of different levels and systems interact (Papina 2002). The factors that ensure such integrity have different sources, and among them, the ones that determine the communicative-pragmatic purpose of the text are distinguished. It was noted above that the theme-rhema relationship plays an important role in the realization of this goal. The role of the topic in text formation and information transmission is manifested in two directions. This is, firstly, to ensure a connection with the previous context, and secondly, to serve as a reference point for introducing the rheme. Perhaps the essence of the theme-rheme structure lies in the ability to create conditions that ensure the communicative development of the topic.

In conclusion. In our opinion, in order to trace the development of the theme of a whole text, it is necessary to compare the relationship of individual theme-rheme groups within it. To achieve this goal, we considered it appropriate to refer to the criteria for determining the communicative status of speech elements proposed by Y. Firbas (Firbas 1979). Preliminary observations show that the activation of the theme-rheme structure in texts of different genres has its own characteristics. Therefore, it was necessary to include in the analysis conditions and factors related to the non-linguistic context.

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