

مرکز اطلاعات مدرک علمی ایران  
تمهیت مدرک

۱۳۷۷ / ۷ / ۱۹

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH

THE COMPASSIONATE

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**ALLAMEH TABATABAIE UNIVERSITY**

**THE ROLE OF THEMATIC STRUCTURE IN  
COMPREHENDING SPOKEN  
LANGUAGE**

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE ENGLISH  
DEPARTMENT OF THE COLLEGE OF FOREIGN  
LANGUAGES.

TEHRAN, IRAN, 1374/1995

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*00468/2*

« *TO MY :*

*PARENTS,*

*TEACHERS,*

*AND PROFESSORS*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	I
Abstract	II
<b>I. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Statement of the problem	1
The hypotheses	2
Significance of the study	2
<b>II. Review of the Related literature</b>	<b>4</b>
Introduction	4
Analytical survey of language definitions	5
Communication and Discourse	7
Functional Sentence Perspective	11
Theme, Rheme, and Grammar	14
Information Structure vs Thematic structure	17
Thematic structure	20
Functions and Elements of Clause	21
Theme vs Rheme	23
Simple Themes	27

Multiple Themes	28
Clausal and Predicated Themes	29
Different Approaches to Theme and Rheme	30
Theme - Rheme within the realm of CD	30
Context - dependence / independence	31
Pragmatic and syntactic perspective	32
Information structure	33
Given versus New	34
Devices indicating information structure	39
Syntactic forms	39
Word order	40
Intonation	43
Pitch prominence	44
Listening Comprehension	45
What is listening?	47
Listening Processes	47
Factors Involved in Listening	48
<b>III. Method</b>	<b>52</b>
subjects	52

Design	53
Instrumentation	54
Selecting Passages	55
Pretesting and Items Analysis	57
Tests	58
Proficiency Test	58
TOFEL Listening Test	59
Main Tests	60
Statistical Procedures	60
One way ANOVA	60
Two way ANOVA	61
Scheffe Test	62
IV. Results	63
Homogeneity	63
Characteristics of the Study Measures	64
Reliability	64
Validity	65
Analysis of Variance	66

<b>V. Discussion, Conclusion, and Pedagogical Implications</b>	<b>71</b>
Discussion and Conclusion	71
Pedagogical Implications	75
Implications for EFL Testing	75
Implications for EFL Teaching	75
Implications for Syllabus Designers and EFL Textbook Writers	76
Implications for Translation	77
Implications for Further Research	78
Bibliography	79
Appendices	83



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to all those who have helped me to make this study possible. My deepest gratitude is to professor Dabir-Moghaddam who provided me with valuable comments, materials, useful suggestions, and corrections all throughout this study. I am also indebted to professor Sadeghian whose helpful insights and readings guided me while writing this thesis. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Nowruzi, Mrs Akbari, and Mrs Shamsavary whose help and assistance in experimental procedures of this work made its completion possible for me.

I am most appreciative to my parents for their kind, compassionate assistance all through my life. And also I should thank my BA Professors, specially Dr. Farhady who provided me with excellent comments and recommendations during this study. I feel obliged to thank Dr. N. Dorry who read the passages as a native speaker.

## **ABSTRACT**

### **The Role of Thematic Structure in Comprehending Spoken Language**

Human language is a system of communication unique to human beings. Other communication systems do not have the characteristics, features, flexibilities, and capabilities of human language. Mainly human communication has got two manifestations: spoken and written. Every piece of language produced, either spoken or written is referred to as text.

The way a text is presented and staged has been the center of attention by discourse analysts, for research findings indicate that text structure can make a text either easier or more difficult to comprehend.

Information is transferred through the process of communication. Therefore, the investigation of how information is transferred in text and/or in discourse, has a crucial impact on the process of staging and representation of discourse structure. For discourse analysis is the analysis of how and why a piece of language/discourse is produced and understood in a given context. Also there is a mutual relationship between context and a

piece of language/discourse produced, i.e., context determines what we say and what we say determines the context (Halliday, 1978).

A text is made up of Information structure and Thematic structure. The former deals with the distribution of "Given - New" in an utterance and refers to something new and is primarily a matter of stress and intonation. The latter is a matter of arrangement and organization. However, the two are concerned with how information is transferred, or discourse structure is staged. Also the two structures provide appropriate context and respond to both speaker and Listener (Vasconcellos, 1992: 157).

Linguists have expressed different views regarding the arrangement of information in a text. For instance, De Beaugrand and Dressler (1981) express disapproval to marked information organization and believe that it makes text comprehension difficult. On the contrary, Firbas (1992) and Givón (1988) hold that the unusual order of sentence elements fulfils an additional communicative purpose not served by unmarked ordering.

In an attempt by the investigator to verify the truth of the above positions, a test was devised to tap the subjects' comprehension of three spoken texts with three different Thematic Structures. In fact this study is concerned with the relationship between the variation in Thematic Structure and the

comprehension of spoken language. So the study focused on the following questions:

1. Is there any relationship between thematic structure and the comprehension of spoken language?

2. Which of the themes would have greater thematic force and be easier for the subjects to comprehend?

Accordingly, the following null hypotheses were set forth:

1. There would be no relationship between the variation in thematic structure and comprehending spoken language.

2. There would be no difference between the kind of theme and the comprehension of spoken language.

In this study, the independent variable had more than two levels, so in order to determine and discover whether the levels of the independent variable differ in how they influence the subjects' performance on the dependent variable, two way ANOVA and Scheffé Test were used. The study was done on the basis of a counterbalanced design.

The homogeneity of subjects was determined through the administration of a Michigan test and running a one - way ANOVA over subjects score on listening tests. Three groups of sophomore students majoring in English

Literature and Translation at Allameh Tabatabaie' University *were selected.*

The information presented in Table IV.1 reveals that the values observed for F (in two - way ANOVA) exceed the F - critical value. Therefore, the first null hypothesis is rejected at .01 level. Also the information presented in Tables IV.2, IV.3, and IV.4 reveals that t-observed values exceed the t-critical values at .05 and .01 level of significancy. So the second null hypothesis is rejected.

# **CHAPTER I.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 - Statement of the Problem**

This study is concerned with the relationship between the variation in thematic structure (Theme + Rheme) and comprehending spoken language.

It also aims at investigating whether it is necessary to give priority to pragmatic (functional) perspective or to syntactic perspective in developing material for courses dealing with listening comprehension in EFL situation.

The questions in this study are as follows:

- Is there any relationship between the variation in thematic structure and the comprehension of spoken language?
- Which of the themes would have greater force and be easier for the subjects to comprehend?

## 1.2 - The Hypotheses

To be on the safe side, the present researcher's hypotheses are null hypotheses. They are as follows:

- There is no relationship between thematic structure and comprehending spoken language.
- There would be no difference between the kind of theme and subjects' comprehension of spoken texts.

## 1.3 - Significance of the Study

As for its significance, the study will firstly answer the introductory questions. The findings will be also beneficial to the course designers to determine what the pre-requisites of an EFL listening comprehension course should be. Moreover, the results will show whether or not it is necessary in preparing materials for listening comprehension to use the language for which it is commonly used in daily communication, i. e. , the natural grammar in Halliday's account. For instance, if different variations are found in every day use of language, they should be included in EFL listening comprehension