

THE STRUCTURE OF THEME AND RHEME IN CHILDREN'S STORY: A CASE STUDY OF JAVANESE TO INDONESIAN TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

In the translation process, maintaining the theme-rheme structure of the original text is essential to ensure that the translated text remains coherent and retains its original impact. This study aims to observe the structure of theme and rheme in Javanese children's stories and its translation into Indonesian. This research applies Systemic Functional Linguistics theory by Halliday as the theoretical framework. Therefore, the research tries to examine how thematic organization is maintained or altered during the translation process. The research was conducted using qualitative research with a case study approach. The data were taken from a bilingual children's story book entitled *Eh, Mecothon* published by Kemendikbudristek and issued by Language Centre, Central Java in 2023. The analysis focuses on the types of themes such as topical, textual, or interpersonal themes. The data were then analysed using four steps: (1) data reduction, (2) data display, (3) data analysis, and (4) conclusion. The result of the analysis showed that themes found in the story are marked and unmarked topical themes, interpersonal themes, and textual themes. The theme is still maintained in its Indonesian translation and only a few which are shifted in the translation result. The shift is found from unmarked topical themes into interpersonal themes. The shift happens due to differences in the language structure and communicative preferences in Javanese and Indonesian languages. The study contributes to the understanding of how translation mediates the theme and rheme in the story, offering insights into the challenges of translating children's literature.

Keywords: *children's story, theme-rheme, translation*

INTRODUCTION

The aim of translation not only transfers words from source language to target language but also reproduces meaning and function of the text. Furthermore, House (2015) describes translation as an activity that recontextualizes the source language into the target language and translation must be subject to various extralinguistic factors and conditions related to the culture of the source language and target language. Therefore, the emergence of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is useful for translation as it emphasizes the functional elements of language use by viewing language as a social semiotic system. SFL also studies how language is used under certain social conditions and how different linguistic constructions are used to create meaning. Therefore, it is very useful for translation because translation is basically concerned with the meaning conveyed through language or discourse (Manfredi, 2011; Yu, 2023).

Functional linguistics introduces the term metafunction that refers to the various ways humans use language to achieve different purposes and communicate meaning. The three main types of metafunctions introduced by Halliday are interpersonal, ideational and textual metafunction. The structure of theme and rheme is the main discussion in textual metafunction. Textual metafunction refers to how language is used to organize messages in a coherent and meaningful way. This function focuses on the internal structure of a sentence or text to ensure that the message flows logically and is easy for the listener or reader to follow. The notion of theme and rheme is essential in translation since it discusses how to maintain the logical progression, emphasis, and cohesion of the original text in the target language (Wang, 2014; Rahnemoon et al., 2017; Ethelb, 2019).

In connection with children's stories, the concept of theme and rheme is vital to understand narrative structures and to maintain narrative coherence. It helps readers track the development of the story and understand its emotional tone (Widhari & Risnawaty, 2023). The structure of theme and rheme aids in delivering messages clearly, capturing young readers' attention by pairing familiar ideas in themes with new information in rhemes to enhance comprehension (Guijarro & Zamorano, 2009;

Riyanto et al., 2024). Moreover, in children's storybooks, authors frequently position characters as the theme to help young readers quickly recognize who the story focuses on. This approach is especially important for children in the sensory-motor and pre-operational stages of cognitive development, where identifying characters is key to understanding the storyline (Guijarro & Zamorano, 2009).

As a consequence, thematic structure becomes more significant in translating children's literature. Maintaining thematic structure is essential not only for preserving narrative coherence but also for supporting the developmental needs of young readers in the target culture. Translating children's literature differs significantly from other forms of literary translation due to the unique cognitive and interpretive abilities of young readers. This type of translation holds particular importance, as it must align with the developmental stage, background knowledge, and comprehension level of its intended audience. When translating texts for children, it is essential for translators to consider the linguistic and conceptual accessibility of the target text. Furthermore, the original intent and meaning conveyed by the source text's author must be carefully preserved in target text. Further, Puurtinen (1998) argues that a translator needs to pay attention to the appropriateness of meaning and also make adaptations to the content that is considered suitable and appropriate for children. Therefore, the translators should consider the theme and rheme organization in source text and ensure that the thematic patterns are preserved and adapted in the target language.

Although numerous studies have discussed the important role of theme and rheme structure in the process of translation such as in news text (Rahnemoon et al., 2017), scientific text (Damayanti, 2012; Ethelb, 2019), political text (Astuti et al., 2018, 2019; Oktaviani, 2013), psychological book (Riani, 2015), tourist promotion text (Bratayadnya et al., 2021), short story translated by machine translation (Jiang & Niu, 2022), children's story book (Ulwiyah, 2021) and subtitle form local language (Purbalingga) into Arabic (Anis, 2022), there is still lack of focused research on theme and rheme construction in children's short story. Moreover, the previous researches have not yet examined the theme and rheme structure in translations from Javanese to Indonesian.

Accordingly, this study offers a novel contribution by examining the structure of theme and rheme in the translation of children's stories from Javanese to Indonesian, a relatively underexplored area. It provides insights into how thematic progression and information flow are maintained or shifted in the translation process between two closely related languages as they are in the same language family. Despite their language family relationship, differences in sociolinguistic roles, textual conventions, and grammatical preferences may lead to notable shifts in information structure during translation. Based on the consideration, this study seeks to answer the questions:

- (1) How is the structure of theme and rheme realized in Javanese children's stories and their Indonesian translations?
- (2) What kinds of thematic shifts occur in the translation from Javanese into Indonesian?

METHODOLOGY

This research employed qualitative research with a case study approach. Case study research in translation involves an in-depth examination of a single unit of investigation, treating it as a coherent whole and paying particular attention to the context in which that unit exists (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014). The case studied in translation may involve translated texts, translators, or even entire translation institutions (Susam-Sarajeva, 2009). Hence, the case that is investigated in this study is the translated text from Javanese to Indonesia. The subject of the research is a bilingual children's story book entitled *Eh, Mecothot* published by Kemendikbudristek and issued by Language Centre, Central Java in 2023. The data in this research comprise linguistic units collected from all clauses in the story. The analysis focuses on the types of themes such as topical, textual, or interpersonal theme. The data then analyzed by using qualitative data analysis by Miles et al. (2014) which consist of four steps: (1) data reduction, (2) data display, (3) data analysis, and (4) conclusion.

ANALYSIS

Thematic structure in Bilingual Children's Story "*Eh Mecothot*"

This section presents the analysis of theme and rheme structures found in the Javanese children's story text and its Indonesian translation. The analysis is grounded in Halliday's Systemic Functional

Linguistics, particularly the textual metafunction, which distinguishes between textual, interpersonal, and topical themes. As the Theme–Rheme distinction is inherently tied to the textual structure, and thematic patterns can reveal how a text is organized, developed, and how it performs its rhetorical functions, theme-rheme construction becomes essential in translation to maintain these patterns where possible (Wang, 2014). If a translator can retain the thematic organization of the source text without compromising the naturalness of the target language, they should strive to do so. Altering the thematic structure could potentially affect the rhetorical characteristics and even the stylistic features of the original text (Jalilifar, 2009; Wang, 2014). The data reveal a variety of theme types in both the Javanese source text and the Indonesian translation as follows.

Topical Themes

In any clauses, topical theme is a mandatory component and is typically represented by the very first linguistic element, which acts as either the participant or the circumstantial adjunct of the verb. In the case of imperative sentences, the main verb itself serves as the topical theme (Alvin, 2015). There are two types of topical themes; unmarked and marked topical themes. Unmarked topical theme is the part of the sentence that comes first and is also the subject of the sentence, while marked topical is the part that comes first in a sentence but is not the subject of the sentence (Bakaa, 2015; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). There is only one marked topical theme found in the story and the rest are unmarked topical themes. Topical theme is the major in the most frequently found in this bilingual story. The data below are examples of topical themes in Javanese and Indonesia.

Data 1/ST

Ing njaba	udane deres
Marked topical theme	Rheme

Data 1/TT

Di luar	hujan deras
Marked topical theme	Rheme

The source text and target text have the structure of theme and rheme with marked topical theme as the first position of the sentence is not the main subject. The writer highlighted the adverb of place to emphasize the location. It can be said that the writer starts the story by explaining the situation outside to set the scene and highlight the importance of the setting.

Data 2/ST

Dio	sedhih ora bisa pit-pitan
Unmarked topical theme	Rheme

Data 2/TT

Dio	sedih tidak bisa bermain sepeda
Unmarked topical theme	Rheme

Data 8/ST

Mas Abi, kangmase,	durung mulih sekolah
Unmarked topical theme	Rheme

Data 8/TT

Mas Abi, kakaknya,	belum pulang sekolah
Unmarked topical theme	Rheme

Data 2 and 8 above showed the unmarked topical theme as the theme of the sentence is the main subject. This unmarked topical theme indicates a regular and neutral sentence structure, with the subject placed at the beginning followed by information about it. There is no particular emphasis on any element other than the subject. In that sentence, the writer introduces the main character of the story and what happened to him. It is important in the story to help readers follow the plot easily and understand what's happening.

The examples of data above describe that there is no shift in translating themes. The thematic structure does not change in the translation. The translator still maintains the form of an unmarked and marked topical theme. Therefore, it can be said that the translation result is equivalent in terms of textual metafunction. This equivalence ensures that the original focus and emphasis intended by the source text are preserved in target text. It allows the readers to receive the same information and it helps in preserving the coherence and flow of the narrative (Savitri & Putri, 2024).

Data 30/ST

Legi	tenan
Unmarked topical theme	Rheme

Data 30/TT

Benar-benar	manis
Interpersonal theme	Rheme

Data 30 above explained the shift in textual metafunction from topical theme to interpersonal theme. The translator changes the theme to align with language structure in Indonesian. In Javanese, intensifiers (like *tenan*) often appear at the end of the clause to express the agreement, emotional or expressive contexts to indicate sincerity, authenticity, or a high degree of something (Hadiati, 2017; Widyaningtyas, 2018).

Interpersonal Themes

An interpersonal theme is an element that appears before the rheme and reflects the relationship between the speaker and listener in a text. It represents the speaker's stance or perspective within the clause and can include elements such as vocatives, modal or comment adjuncts, Wh-Question, and finite verbal operators (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The story contains several interpersonal themes as follows.

Data 16/ST

Kok	emoh?
Interpersonal theme	Rema

Data 16/TT

Kenapa	tidak mau?
Interpersonal theme	Rema

Data 16 above explained interpersonal themes in the form of Wh-question. The word ‘Kok’ in Javanese showed the question word which can be translated into ‘kenapa’. The word ‘kok’ functions both as an exclamatory and interrogative particle, depending on its position in the sentence (Mayasari & Mulyadi, 2020; Woods, Vander Klok & Heim, 2024).

Data 20/ST

Ketoke	enak tenan
Interpersonal theme	Rema

Data 20/TT

Sepertinya	enak sekali
Interpersonal theme	Rema

The interpersonal theme in data above reflected the speaker's attitude or judgment toward the taste of the food in the story. The interpersonal theme in the ST (*Ketoke*) is accurately maintained in the TT (*Sepertinya*), showing that no shift occurred in the thematic structure. The interpersonal metafunction is preserved in the translation. It indicates that the translator has successfully preserved both the thematic structure and the speaker's evaluative perspective from the ST to the TT.

Data 33/ST

Jebul	entho cohot	pancen enak
Interpersonal theme	Unmarked topical theme	Rheme

Data 33/TT

Ternyata	entho cohot	memang enak
Interpersonal theme	Unmarked topical theme	Rheme

Data 33 above described two themes, interpersonal and textual themes, in one sentence. The interpersonal theme showed the speaker's attitude toward the subject and appeared as a topical theme. The topical theme in the data above explained the name of the food from Java named “entho cohot”. Both Javanese and Indonesian have the same thematic structure; interpersonal theme-topical theme-rheme. It means that there is no shift in terms of textual metafunction in the data 33.

Textual Themes

A textual theme is a linguistic element that helps organize discourse and can be made up of any combination of a continuative, a conjunction, and a conjunctive adjunct. A continuative is a small word

like ‘well’ or ‘oh’ that signals a shift, a response, or a continuation in dialogue, often indicating that the speaker is moving to a new point. A conjunction is a word or phrase that connects clauses, either by linking them equally (paratactic) or subordinating one to another (hypotactic). Lastly, a conjunctive adjunct is an adverbial group or prepositional phrase that relates the current clause to the previous part of the text, helping to guide the reader through the logical flow of the discourse. These elements enhance coherence and cohesion in both written and spoken language (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Hilyah et al., 2023). The textual themes found in the bilingual story are elaborated in the following.

Data 4/ST

Nanging	Ibune	ora marengake
Textual theme	Unmarked topical theme	Rheme

Data 4/TT

Tapi	Ibunya	tidak mengizinkan
Textual theme	Unmarked topical theme	Rheme

The conjunction ‘nanging’ and ‘tapi’ are examples of textual themes which introduce a contrast or exception. It signals a shift in the speaker’s argument of the previous sentence. This structure is important for organizing meaning in discourse as the conjunction function to maintain logical flow and link the sentence to previous context by showing contrast or opposition. Another theme in the sentence above is the topical theme (Ibune / Ibunya) which identifies what the sentence is about. The topical theme is unmarked, which means that it follows the typical subject-first clause structure.

Data 10/TT

E...	Mbah putri	rawuh
Textual theme	Unmarked topical theme	Rheme

Data 10/ST

E...	Nenek	datang
Textual theme	Unmarked topical theme	Rheme

The word ‘E...’ is a continuative, which is a type of textual theme. A continuative marks a discourse signal, often used in speech to indicate hesitation, a shift in thought, or to prepare the listener for what’s coming next (Flowerdew & Tauroza, 1995). In data 4 above, continuative ‘E..’ indicates a new move or response. Then, the unmarked topical theme in both sentences refers to the subject (Mbah putri / Nenek) and identifies the topic being talked about. Both Javanese and Indonesian share similar thematic patterns in spoken interaction, hence there is no shift in translation.

The finding showed that the topical theme is the most frequently used in bilingual stories (Javanese- Indonesian), followed by interpersonal theme and textual theme. The topical theme typically refers to the main participant (character, object) or circumstance (time, place) in a clause. In narrative texts, this is crucial because narratives revolve around characters and events. Moreover, the reader needs to know who is doing what, and where or when it is happening (Dashela, 2021; Rahayu et al., 2020). Interpersonal theme in narrative relates to the relationship either between the speaker and the addressee or between the speaker and its message. The interpersonal theme in this bilingual story showed the relationship between characters in the story and their judgment or opinion related to the object told in the story. Then, the textual theme is the least prominent theme in the story because narrative text builds cohesion more often through character references, or chronology, rather than through explicit textual themes (Mustika et al., 2021).

The analyzed data shows that most of the thematic structures in the source text and the translated text are preserved. This preservation reflects that the translator has successfully maintained the textual metafunction in the translation, especially in building the narrative flow and maintaining the focus of

information as intended by the original author. It is in line with the previous research conducted by Najjar, (2024) and Susilowati et al., (2022) about the importance of maintaining thematic organization in translation to preserve the rhetorical function of the text. However, the case of thematic shift also appeared as in data 30, where there is a change from topical theme to interpersonal theme. This shift seems to be done to conform to the natural structure of Indonesian, without changing the overall meaning. This shows that the translator has flexibility in adjusting the structure, as long as the evaluative meaning and the speaker's attitude are maintained. This finding confirms Matthiessen, (2014) statement about the choice in translation. He understands translation as the act of recreating meaning within a specific context by making various decisions. The translator makes choices both when interpreting the original text and when producing the translated version. Therefore, translation is seen as a continuous process of selecting options from the systems of both the source and target languages (Matthiessen, 2014). Moreover, Vasconcellos (2008) in (Wang, 2014) pointed out that languages are different from each other and that translators need to be skilled. Professional translators try to keep the main idea and focus of the original text, even though the grammar of the target language is different. At the same time, translators have to think about many things like missing words, combining several words into one idea, differences in tone, cultural differences, and more.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the theme and rheme structures in the Javanese source text and its Indonesian translation are generally well preserved. Topical theme is the most common type of theme, followed by interpersonal theme and textual theme. Topical themes, usually in the form of subjects or time/place descriptions, are very important in narrative texts to introduce characters and events, making it easier for readers to follow the storyline. Interpersonal themes reflect the attitudes or relationships between characters in the story, while textual themes function as logical links between sentences, although they are used less.

Overall, this study confirms the importance of maintaining thematic organization in translation to preserve rhetorical function and narrative integrity, while showing that translators' flexibility is needed to adapt to the characteristics of the target language without losing the original meaning.

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