

Thematic Structure in Jesus Christ's Sermon on the Mount: A Systemic Functional Approach

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ABSTRACT

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a useful tool for analyzing the message of a clause since it is centered around a clause by determining the themes and the thematic progression/theme-rheme patterns associated with clauses. Analyzing the Sermon on the Mount from a linguistic perspective offers a new insight beyond theological issues on how Christ structured His sermon to convince the rebellious Jews in His generation. That being said, this study aimed to determine the themes present in the Sermon on the Mount and the theme-rheme patterns formed by the themes of the clauses. The study employed a descriptive-qualitative method to meet the objectives of the study. The study utilized the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) as one of the free Bible translations that Bible Gateway Online offers to analyze the text of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5 to 7. In addition, the study employed purposive sampling to collect the needed data for the study. Consequently, results show that the Topical theme dominates the sermon, while the dominant thematic progression is the Constant pattern. The former implies that the sermon is Topic-oriented, which means that Christ utilized various subjects to convey the message of His sermon effectively. Meanwhile, the Constant pattern indicates that Christ created a sense of repetition and emphasis on a particular subject by repeating it; thus, it is a way to keep the reader's attention firmly on a single subject. Overall, the thematic patterns in the sermon augment our understanding of how they are being structured to create a cohesive and memorable message that edifies the audience and may provide a generic template on how a sermon should be structured in a particular context so that listeners may gain deeper insights.

Keywords: Introduction section, cohesion, SFL, thematic progression, themes

INTRODUCTION

The study of language would benefit far more from investigating the Bible's underlying linguistic practices than from merely considering it as a work of sacred art. This makes it a historical document where the language used by its characters is documented, and one language activity that is less studied in this book is sermon/speech. A speech is an act of conveying intentions to the people listening to you, and this is what speakers do. Through the words they utter to the audiences, they convey certain messages. One can benefit more by studying the Sermon on the Mount made by Jesus Christ from the perspective of the Functional approach, particularly thematic analysis. According to Dawson (2018), in his book entitled 'The Teaching of Jesus from Mount Sinai to Gehenna: A Faithful Rabbi Urgently Warns Rebellious Israel,' the Sermon of the Mount is "generally considered the heart of Jesus' moral teaching" which makes it one of the greatest discourses of Jesus Christ in Matthew's gospel account because it calls out to rebellious Israel to understand the essence of morality in social and political issues and the law and the prophets. Likewise, Stott (1978) writes in the author's preface that the Sermon on the Mount captures the substance of Jesus' teaching. That being said, for the past years, exegetes and biblical scholars have utilized the historico-critical methodologies in understanding the content of the holy scriptures; however, they have been starting to see the downsides, for they can only answer questions put by the same methodologies; they do not address or attempt to address questions regarding meaning, communication, function of language and so on (Botha, 1991).

Accordingly, scholarly interest in religious discourse has been considerable. To understand the structure and purpose of language employed in the religious sphere, a variety of religious leaders' speeches, sermons, and writings have been analyzed. Discourse analysis, stylistics, and the forms and substance of the sermonic text

have all been examined in the majority of the literature on sermonic language and delivery (Taiwo, 2007; Pieterse, 2010; Park, 2010; Adedun & Mekiliuwa, 2010). Studies by Taiwo (2005) and Bankole & Ayoola (2014) have also examined the textual analysis of sermonic texts concerning the language's mood system and how preachers construe meaning in relation to their grammatical choices. These studies have all used sermons from pastors or preachers who discuss Jesus, and some conclusions have been drawn about the decisions they make.

Similarly, previous research papers have extensively studied the Holy Scriptures utilizing the ideational metafunction of Halliday's Systemic Function approach (Awuku, 2018; Djimet, 2022; Iredele, 2022). For instance, Awuku (2018) studied the Sermon on the Mount made by Christ and utilized the Transitivity System under the heading of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) by MAK Halliday to understand its language in light of the experiential function of language. He found that the world of text that was revealed in the form of a sermon was a world characterized by social issues such as trusting, giving, and prayer, a world of knowledge and practice of the old law, and a world of suffering and social vices like persecution, violence, and murdering. The study concluded that the Messiah exhibited knowledge about these issues in life, as reflected in his sermon, by making some promises to persuade his followers to change their bad ways for the betterment. Similarly, other studies have investigated the Sermon on the Mount, but they looked at it in portions and not in its entirety, and/or they solely concentrated on theological aspects of the sermon (Adjei et al., 2016; Kodjak, 2014; Pelikan, 2001).

To address the gaps, this study aimed to analyze the full Sermon on the Mount rather than just selected passages. Beyond the theological side of the coin, this paper took a linguistic investigation by exploring the Sermon on the Mount made by Jesus Christ on how He structured the sermon based on the principles of the Textual Metafunction as reflected in the types of themes He utilized and the thematic progression that the sermon is structured of.

Statement of the Problem

Generally, this study sought to go beyond a theological examination by taking up the linguistic investigation of the Sermon on the Mount using the Textual Metafunction of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) by MAK Halliday. Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the types of themes in the Sermon on the Mount?
2. What are the theme-rheme patterns in the Sermon on the Mount?

Objective of the Study

Generally, through a detailed linguistic analysis and coding, this study sought to explore the language of the Sermon on the Mount from the perspective of functional grammar by considering how the message of the sermon is linguistically and meaningfully realized through its themes and theme-rheme patterns dictated by the grammatical choices of Jesus Christ.

Theoretical Framework

Textual Metafunction

It appears that recent researchers have opted to study the theological side of the Sermon on the Mount; however, one must consider the fact that religious discourse is shaped by language itself. Having said that, analyzing religious texts like the Sermon made by Christ will allow us to explore the meaning-making mechanisms within religious texts by looking at the textual function of language within a religious setting. Taking into account that the sentences of a language always contain a representation of textual meaning to some extent, Theme and rheme are the terms for the systemic functional linguistic perspective's fulfillment of this meaning. (Eggins, 2004; Halliday, 1994). That said, recent studies below have mentioned key terms relevant to the Textual Metafunction of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). First, the theme is the message

that is written at the beginning of the sentence, and this message communicates the clause's overall meaning (Halliday, 1994; Bloor & Bloor, 1995; Gerot & Wignell, 1995). Meanwhile, rheme, on the other hand, is a message that is contained in a clause other than the theme or in the conception of Halliday, it is understood as “the rest of the message in which the theme exists” (Halliday, 1994).

Types of Themes

In addition, there are three types of themes: namely, topical, textual, and interpersonal. Topical themes are those that illustrate ideational meanings, and they typically serve as a subject in the setting of unmarked themes (Bloor & Bloor, 1995; Halliday, 1994; Martin et al., 1997). It implies that this theme simultaneously plays the roles of the subject and the theme. The last is understood as the focus of the information transferred (Bloor & Bloor, 1995) in a clause. This theme can be divided into two parts, namely, marked and unmarked themes. A marked theme is chosen to attract the attention of readers; it is to some extent also used to signify the changing of settings from spatial to temporal, and it can be identified by analyzing elements written before the subject (Gerot & Wignell, 1995; North, 2005; Wei, 2016; Halliday, 1994; Thompson, 1996; Eggins, 2004). Hence, in order for this theme to be analyzed, place it before the subject. With that, the elements involved in this marked theme are adjuncts, preposition groups, and complements (Halliday, 1994). The usage of marked themes demonstrates the authors' intent to transform material that is typically thought of as a rheme into essential information in a succession of clause structures (Bloor & Bloor, 1995). In contrast to the marked theme, unmarked topical themes used to occupy the position of the subject (Gerot & Wignell, 1995; Eggins, 2004; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). These can be assumed by noun groups, embedded clauses (Gerot & Wignell, 1995), or nominalization of subject and pronouns (Halliday, 1994).

On the other hand, a clause's significance in light of its context is represented by a textual theme. (Gerot & Wignell, 1995; Eggins, 2004). Because of this, when combined with other sentences in a context, a textual theme is considered a unifying element (Eggins, 2004). The text's textual theme is introduced at the start of each clause and is made up of conjunction-included parts, conjunctive adjuncts, and modal adjuncts (Thompson, 1996).

Lastly, a clause's position or point of view, or an item that occurs before the rheme that describes the relationship between participants in the text, is referred to as an interpersonal theme (Paltridge, 2021). An interpersonal theme might convey likelihood (e.g., perhaps), usuality (e.g., sometimes), typicality (e.g., generally), or obviousness (e.g., undoubtedly). It can also convey opinion (e.g., to my mind), admission (e.g., frankly), persuasion (e.g., believe me), entreaty (e.g., kindly), presumption (e.g., no doubt), desirability (e.g., hopefully), or prediction (e.g. as expected) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Theme-rheme Patterns

On the other hand, as for the theme-rheme patterns of the sermon of Christ, there are **constant** theme-rheme patterns, **linear** theme-rheme patterns, **multiple** themes or **split** rheme patterns, and **derive** themes (Bloor and Bloor, 2004; Deterding & Poedjosoedarmo; 2001; Paltridge, 2021).

First, in the constant one, the first clause's theme introduces the topic of the paragraph. The theme of one clause is also the theme of the ones that come after it. This type also gives the reader the information that serves as the themes throughout the clauses, unlike rheme, which introduces new material that isn't further discussed in the subsequent sentences (Kuswoyo, 2016).

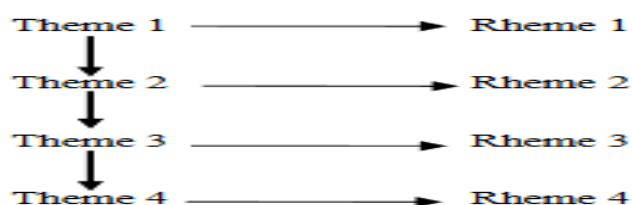


Figure 1. Constant theme-rheme pattern

An example of a text which has such a structure is found below:

“Blessed are **the poor in spirit**, for the kingdom of heaven is **theirs**. Blessed are **those who mourn**, for **they** will be comforted. Blessed are **the humble**, for **they** will inherit the earth. Blessed are **those who hunger and thirst for righteousness**, for **they** will be filled.”

Second, another typical example of thematic development is when the theme of one phrase picks up the subject matter from the rheme of the next (Paltridge, 2021), and this refers to the linear theme-rheme patterns or the zig-zag pattern (Eggins, 2004).



Figure 2. Linear theme-rheme pattern

An example of a text which has such a structure is found below:

“But I tell you, don’t take an oath at all: either by **heaven**, because **it** is God’s throne; or by the **earth**, because **it** is his footstool; or by **Jerusalem**, because **it** is the city of the great King.”

Third, a rheme in 'multiple-theme' or 'split rheme' development may contain a variety of information, each of which could be used as the theme in different subsequent clauses (Paltridge, 2021).

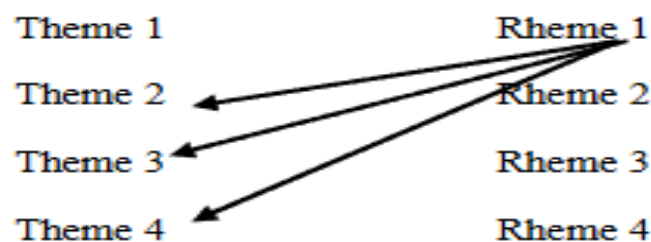


Figure 3. Multiple theme pattern

As shown above, when a clause's rheme consists of two or more parts, each of which serves as the theme of subsequent clauses in turn, this scenario happens (Kuswoyo, 2016). However, this type of theme-rheme pattern is not present in the Sermon on the Mount.

Lastly, the pattern 'derive theme-rheme' happens to characterize expressions in the position of theme that are coherently linked to a topic that has been addressed previously in the text in terms of meaning but not necessarily in form (Bloor & Bloor, 2004).

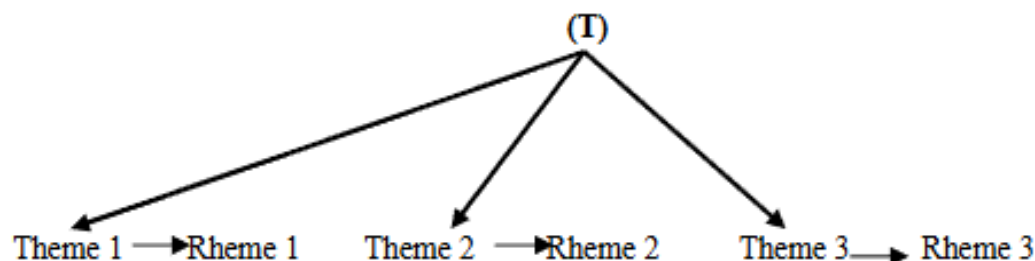


Figure 4. Derive theme pattern

An example of a text which has such a structure is found below:

“You are the light of the world. A **city** situated on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a **lamp** and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and **it** gives light for all who are in the house. In the same way, let **your light** shine before others...”

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

The Sermon on the Mount

That said, it would be very helpful to consider first the background of the Sermon of the Mount in order to gain some insights into the meanings being communicated by the thematic structure of the sermon. Awuku (2018) observed in his thesis entitled ‘Agency and Processes in Religious Discourse: A Transitivity Analysis of the Sermon on the Mount’ that Christ’s sermon contains social issues like marriage, cohabitation peacefully, divorce, and adultery; religious issues like prayer, giving, and trusting; a world of old law knowledge and practice; a world of suffering; and a world of social vices like violence, murder, and persecution. She utilized the ideational metafunction of the Systemic Functional linguistics of MAK Halliday to describe the natural world of Jesus Christ in the broadest sense, and to do that, her study is concerned with clauses as representations.

Moreover, Dawson (2017), in his book entitled ‘The Teaching of Jesus From Sinai to Gehenna: A Faithful Rabbi Urgently Warns Rebellious Israel’ noted that Chapter 5 of the sermon reflects Jesus’ positive teachings in relation to the Old Covenant while Chapter 6 to 7 deal with his negative teachings in condemnation to the disobedience exhibited by the Israelites to the Old Covenant at his time. In contrast to the customs of the Jews of his day, the Messiah’s sermon accurately explains the morals of the Old Covenant. Also, this notion is in contrast with the conventional interpretation of the sermon, which argues that Christ was only comparing the Mosaic Law to his new law. Thus, this sermon is entirely based on the teachings from the Old Testament. The majority of its lessons are also found in the New Covenant initiated at his death on the Roman cross, as the author of the said book observes.

Related Studies

In accordance, humans always communicate. One way we share messages is through language. Sermons, along with written documents, are verbally delivered to share a meaningful thought with the audience. According to Halliday (1994), language can be seen as a system of meaning. This implies that when people speak, their language creates or constructs meaning. There have been researches based on the Textual Metafunction that are related in some aspects to this present study, as presented in the following discussion.

Accordingly, recent studies in the field of the Textual Function of SFL have explored the holy scriptures. First, Siahaan (2023) conducted a study on Luke chapter 17 entitled “A Theme Analysis of Paratactic and Hypotactic Clause Complexes on Luke Chapter 17 of the English Standard Version Bible in the ESV.org.” It explored the language of Luke 17 from the perspective of grammar. The technical model used for the data analysis was by Eggins (2004) concerning (1) four types of themes; (2) theme analysis in declarative sentences; (3) theme analysis in declarative ellipses; (4) theme analysis in the WH interrogative; (5) analysis of themes in imperatives; (6) the theme in the paratactic clause complex; (7) the theme in the hypotactic clause complex; and (8) three types of additions. The researcher ascertained the types of themes found in the said passage in the scriptures. The results of this study found: 1) four types of themes with their corresponding occurrences: (1) topical themes with as many as 46 items (62%), (2) interpersonal themes with as many as six items (8%), (3) textual themes with 19 items (26%) and (4) dual themes with three items (4%); 2) topical themes (62%) are the dominant types of themes. That said, the study implies that Jesus Christ was topic-oriented toward His audience in the way the apostle Luke portrays Him in the passage of Luke chapter 17.

The current study is basically related to Siahaan’s (2023) study, for it utilized Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and the Holy Scriptures as its source of the data; they differ in terms of the technical model approach and the subject of the said study. For this current study, the researcher himself utilized passages in

the Sermon on the Mount found in the book of Matthew, and the technical model approach used for the analysis is the SFL of Halliday, while Siahaan's (2023) study focused on Luke chapter 17 and utilized the technical model approach for data analysis by Eggins (2004, as cited in, Siahaan, 2023). Both models are not technically rivals but rather complementary. The complementing aspect lies in the fact that it was Halliday himself who extensively developed the core principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), including the idea that language functions through the three metafunctions: representing experience (ideational), interacting with others (interpersonal), and organizing text (textual) (Almurashi, 2016). Eggins explained and elaborated Halliday's model, providing practical applications and detailed analysis methods for researchers studying language through the framework of SFL (Eggins, 2004). Meanwhile, both the previous study and this present one differ in their objectives, for Siahaan's (2023) study focused on types of themes only, while this proposed study explored the thematic progression or the theme-rheme patterns determined by the position of a theme in a clause in the subsequent clauses. When it comes to findings, Siahaan's (2023) study found that the dominant theme in Luke chapter 17 is Topical, and this current study concurs. This is predictable since both Matthew 24 and Luke 17 are spoken by Christ, and it could create the pattern that Himself usually utilizes this type of theme in His spoken discourse.

Second, Lau (2014) explored the book of Romans, particularly chapter 8, verses 1 to 17, entitled "A Text Linguistic Study of Romans 8:1-17: Comparing English and Chinese Translations." This study dealt with the importance of the Holy Spirit of God in the life of Christians, comparing two Bible translations, the New International Version and the Worldwide Chinese New Version. The researcher aimed to determine the central themes in the said passage and ascertain if the two translations give different meanings to the readers and how these meanings are communicated in the text the way they have been structured by the experiential process. The findings revealed that the relational and material processes dominate the passage while the participants of these processes are God and man; thus, the experiential aspect reveals that it is relevant to the God-human relationship along with the works of God in the life of the believer. Meanwhile, in the textual metafunction, the findings indicate that both textual and topical themes dominate the passage. This means that the former contributes to the cohesiveness of the passage, and the latter is connected to the two groups of participants in the passage, namely, God and humans, of which the Holy Spirit is especially emphasized. Overall, the author observed that "the flesh and the Spirit are two main ideas...both translations highlight the significance of the works of the Spirit in believers' lives, by the contrast of some semantically-opposite motifs such as life and death, and the mind governed by the flesh and mind governed by the Spirit... most of the occurrences of the plural pronoun "we," which suggests the group who live according to the Spirit, are in the last few verses."

Lau's (2014) study is related to the current study because both studies sought to determine the types of themes and the thematic progressions present in the underlying passage of their respective corpus through the use of the Textual Metafunction of SFL. However, they differ since Lau's (2014) study focused on other passages in the Holy Scriptures while the current study focused on a sermon of Jesus Christ. Also, they differ in terms of the aims of their studies. Lau (2014) studied the experiential and textual metafunction of Romans 8:1-17 while this current study focuses only on the textual metafunction. Moreover, Lau (2014) compared two translations of the Bible to meet the objectives of the study, while this present study only utilized one translation. When it comes to the findings of themes, both studies demonstrate the dominance of the Topical theme. This could also create a pattern between Apostle Paul's thematic choice and Christ's. The former is communicated through his written discourse, while the latter is communicated through spoken discourse.

Third, Putri & Rosita's (2023) study entitled "Textual Metafunction Analysis in Surah Maryam and the Gospel of Luke: A Comparative Analysis" explored the themes and thematic progression present in the texts of Surah Maryam (the 19th chapter of the Quran) and Luke chapter 1 verses 26 to 38 in the Holy Bible. Their paper focused on the discussion of the said literature. In their analysis, they employed the principles of the Textual Metafunction of Halliday and Matthiesen to determine the themes. Also, Dane's thematic progression theory was used to determine the theme-rheme patterns as found in the texts. After finding the respective types of themes and the thematic progressions for each literature, the authors compared the respective results. Specifically, the findings indicate that both of the texts mostly utilize a simple unmarked theme that aims to make the conveyed information in the text clearer and easier to understand by the reader due to its focus on the participant of the clause. Meanwhile, both of the texts also mainly use derived hyper-theme progression, which

focuses on a single theme. This means that both literature have only one subject in their texts for each clause.

Putri and Rosita's (2023) study is relevant to this current research because both surveyed and analyzed biblical literature in terms of the texts' textual metafunction. They utilized the Textual Metafunction as proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen to identify themes, but the previous study differs in that it employed Danes' thematic progression theory to ascertain thematic development. Additionally, they differ in their data sources and analytical approaches. The earlier study centered on the book of Luke in the Bible, specifically in Luke chapter 1, verses 26 to 38, whereas this current study focuses on the book of Matthew, which contains the Sermon on the Mount. Moreover, the related study utilized a comparative approach, comparing the occurrences of themes and thematic progressions in two literary texts, while this current study focuses solely on one text, eliminating the need for comparison. In terms of findings, the present study indicates that the Topical theme dominates the Sermon on the Mount, consistent with the previous study's results for both examined texts. However, the present study did not specify whether the theme is marked or unmarked, a detail included in the earlier study. Regarding thematic progression, the present study found that a constant theme prevails in the clauses of the Sermon on the Mount, while the previous study revealed that it is the Derived-Hyper theme that dominates Surah Maryam (the 19th chapter of the Quran), and both the Simple Linear and the Derived-Hyper themes dominate Luke chapter 1 verses 26 to 38 in the Bible. Thus, the findings may imply that chapter 19 of the Quran employed only a single subject or topic while Luke chapter 1, verses 26 to 38 used the method of building information from the previous idea, which is connected to the overarching main idea that all the individual themes within the text are related to.

On the other hand, previous research about systemic functional linguistics has focused on the speeches of public figures such as politicians. Djimet's (2022) study entitled "Language Use as a Means to Construct Realities: Theme Patterns in Joe Biden's Speech on the Anniversary of the Capitol Attack" examined President Joe Biden's speech about the Capitol attack anniversary from the textual metafunction under the heading of systemic functional linguistics perspective (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) in order to uncover the choices of thematic structure as utilized by the president to construct some realities through language use as a message to the public. The researcher found that topical themes are dominant, followed by textual and interpersonal themes. In line with that, the Topical themes in the speech (i.e., I, they, we, he, it, you stand for the attack, rioters, Joe Biden himself, American people, and Donald Trump in clauses) are essentially concerned with carriers, actors, sensors, sayers, agents, behavers, etc. These are the main foci of the message. As for the textual Themes, they have served not only to realize cohesion but also to give the text its written character, that is, language is being used to reflect on experience rather than to enact it (Eggins, 1994). They express cohesive dimensions such as extension (i.e., and, but, or, both) and enhancement (so, as, if, because). The former has been used in the speech to construct coherent facts aimed at convincing the Americans to recognize lies elaborated by former president Trump, while the latter organizes "the arguments logically in terms of time, cause, and condition." The speech also has an attitudinal connotation expressed through interpersonal Themes (i.e., well, can, maybe, finally, my fellow Americans, to me, just, in fact, frankly, somehow), which take the form of warnings against undemocratic practices and behaviors. Moreover, marked Themes underline the gravity of the attack as regards the place and the time at which it took place. Hence, this study focuses on the position of the theme.

Djimet's (2022) study is related to this present study since both examined a speech/sermon, and they utilize the Textual Metafunction of SFL to describe the said speeches' structure. In contrast, they differ in terms of the main foci of the study, for the related study only focused on the types of themes, thus describing how they were being used in the speech by the speaker, while this present study focuses on both the types of themes and the thematic progression determined by the position of the themes in the subsequent clauses. When it comes to the findings, both studies indicate the dominance of the Topical theme. This implies that both sermons are topic-oriented, aiming to directly communicate the message of the sermon to the intended audience. On the other hand, it is also interesting to note that the previous study found that the rest of the themes, namely, textual and interpersonal types of theme, follow the Topical theme in the number of occurrences, respectively. This means that both sermons made by Christ and Biden have similarities in terms of thematic formation.

Meanwhile, other studies focus on theme-rheme patterns. Kuswoyo's (2016) study entitled "Thematic

Structure in Barack Obama's Press Conference: A Systemic Functional Grammar Study" surveys the theme-rheme pattern of Barack Obama's press conference. The researcher found out that there are two kinds of theme-rheme patterns in Barack Obama's press conference, and each pattern is composed of different respective embedded patterns, namely, simple theme-rheme patterns and multiple theme-rheme patterns. The former is composed of a constant theme pattern, linear theme or zigzag pattern, and derived theme-rheme pattern, and the latter is composed of a combination of constant theme and constant rheme, a combination of constant and linear theme, a combination of split and constant themes and another pattern is proposed by the researcher himself, namely, the derived rheme. Also, the findings revealed that the combination of constant and linear theme patterns is distributed mostly in both press conferences. In contrast, the combination of constant and split themes is only found once.

Kuswoyo's (2016) study is related to the current study because both employed the Textual Metafunction of SFL, explored the thematic progression of the texts, and studied a verbal transcribed speech/sermon. However, they differ in that the previous study did not focus on ascertaining the types of themes and their contribution to the meaning found in the texts. This present study focuses on both ascertaining the themes and the thematic progression. When it comes to the findings, the previous study did not count the number of occurrences of each type of thematic progression but only identified them, while this present study counted each occurrence and described the significance of the dominance of one occurrence over others. For this study, the Constant theme pattern dominates the clauses of the Sermon on the Mount, and this pattern can also be found in the sermon of President Obama, analyzed by the previous study. This may imply that both Obama and Christ created a sense of repetition and emphasis on a particular subject by repeating it; thus, it is a way to keep the reader's attention firmly on a single subject.

In contrast, a previous study focused on analyzing the other metafunctions of SFL in addition to the textual function. Ngongo et al. (2018) conducted a study entitled "Metafunction Meaning Realization in Lexicogrammar of Sermon Texts on 'Language and Cultural Month,' Kupang Town: A Systemic Functional Linguistic Approach" whereby they utilized the three metafunctions of SFL in their study of sermon texts on 'Language and Cultural Month,' Kupang Town to analyze and describe how the metafunction meaning (i.e. experiential, interpersonal, and textual) of the sermon texts was realized in the lexicogrammar level. In terms of textual function, they discovered that the priests were more focused on their seriousness in expressing experience through messages in sermons by using topical themes, as evidenced by the fact that the topical theme was used more frequently than other themes (1,641 occurrences). The limited use of mark theme to emphasize a subject suggested that the speakers did not need to reiterate the topic as a subject because the issue was sufficiently communicated.

Ngongo et al.'s (2018) study is related to the present study since both sought the types of themes present in the texts through the use of the Textual Metafunction of SFL. Also, they shared relatedness because they both employed a sermon as their source of data. Nevertheless, they differ in their approach, for the previous study was focused on the three metafunctions of SFL, including the textual one, while this current study focuses only on the latter. Moreover, the recent study did not include the thematic progression found in the texts of the sermon, while this present paper included the thematic progression found in the Sermon on the Mount made by Jesus Christ. Concerning the results, the previous study noted that priests took sharing their experiences through spoken words very seriously. The discourse was intended to increase congregational attention. The presence of topical themes in sermons, therefore, demonstrated the seriousness of expressing experience through communication. Meanwhile, the findings of the present study concur with the findings of Ngongo et al. (2018). In this limited scenario, this may imply that Topical themes are indeed a common part of a religious sermon, though future studies are needed to prove this claim.

Overall, the uniqueness of studying the Sermon on the Mount through the lens of linguistic analysis of SFL is that the researcher could go beyond a theological analysis to a linguistic one similar to the previous studies mentioned above (Awuku, 2018; Lau, 2014; Putri and Rosita, 2023; Siahaan, 2023). In this regard, Botha (1991) noted that exegetes and biblical scholars have been starting to see the downsides of employing the historico-critical methodologies in understanding the content of the holy scriptures since they can only answer questions from the same methodologies. They do not address or attempt to address questions regarding

meaning, communication, function of language, and so on. In accordance, those who focused on the Sermon on the Mount looked at it in portions and not in its entirety, and/or they solely concentrated on theological aspects of the sermon, not on the linguistics side of the coin (Adjei, Ewusi-Mensah, & Logogy, 2016; Kodjak, 2014; Pelikan, 2001).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is designed with a descriptive-qualitative research method. Utilizing a qualitative research approach enables the researcher to remain grounded in reality. The qualitative researcher gains uncensored first-hand knowledge of social life by seeing people as they go about their daily lives, listening to them talk about what is on their minds, or looking at the written materials they make (Taylor, 2016, as cited in Ayunon, 2018). Hence, the qualitative approach allows the researcher to analyze the text of the Sermon on the Mount with flexibility since it does not define the variables in advance but is left open as long as it is possible to account for potential nuances of meaning unveiled during the process of examination which the quantitative method does not allow (Dornyei, 2007). Moreover, the qualitative approach also enables the researcher to focus on the individual meaning of the text rather than on the meaning in general, which quantitative studies do (Dornyei, 2007). In this case, the qualitative method serves the major goal of the researcher, which is to identify the themes and thematic patterns of the sermon that necessarily need individual descriptions for better insights.

Corpus, Sampling Design, and Data Collection

Using the Christian Standard Bible as found in Bible Gateway online, an examination of the text of the Sermon on the Mount made by Jesus Christ is conducted. The text of the sermon is taken from the book of Matthew, chapters 5 to 7. That being said, the researcher employed a purposive sample strategy to gather the pertinent data required for this study in order to address the study's objectives. Specifically, the necessary data were gathered manually using the online digital version of the Bible. That being said, the researcher manually read and identified each clause present in the sermon. After that, the researcher transcribed each of them into a table where each type of theme was identified respectively (i.e. Textual, Interpersonal and Topical) to analyze the themes of each clause. This was done so that the researcher could sort out the theme from its rheme. Meanwhile, the researcher conducted a separate gathering of data to analyze the thematic progression. This was done by transcribing the entire passage from Matthew 5:3 to Matthew 7:27. Thus, the data that were gathered were in the form of a sermon text. Depending on the Bible publisher, the section of Jesus Christ's Sermon on the Mount (specifically Matthew chapters 5 to 7) is highlighted in color Red.

Method of Analysis

The researcher used MAK Halliday's Textual Metafunction to determine the types of themes (i.e., Textual, Interpersonal, and Topical) employed by Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount by manually placing and examining each clause in a table to sort out the themes from their rhemes, hence, classifying what type of theme can be found for each clause. Furthermore, to determine the theme-rheme patterns in the sermon (i.e., Constant, Linear, Multiple, and Derived), the researcher manually identified each clause through coding in order to ascertain the particular thematic progression involved in the clauses. This is done by identifying the theme's position inside a clause and its position in the subsequent clauses. Having said that, the researcher focused only on specific clauses where the types of themes and thematic progressions can be found. Overall, one can claim that Jesus was observing the principle of Textual Metafunction of language, and it is the researcher's responsibility to uncover the choices that underlie the structure of His sermon, as Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) note that "[w]e have referred to language... as resource - choices among alternatives."

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section showcases the findings and a detailed discussion of the study's results to obtain an accurate understanding and perspective of the Themes and Theme-rheme patterns in the Sermon on the Mount made by Jesus Christ. In this section, a clause refers to a single proposition or unit of meaning, and the rheme refers to

the rest of the information in a clause after the theme (Halliday, 1994; Bloor & Bloor, 1995; Gerot & Wignell, 1995).

Q1. What are the types of themes found in the Sermon on the Mount?

Table 1 showcases the distribution of Themes in the Sermon on the Mount. Based on the results, all types of Themes are involved in the Sermon.

Table 1. The Distribution of Themes as found in the Sermon on the Mount.

Themes	Occurrence (%)
Topical	227 (54.31%)
Textual	152 (36.36%)
Interpersonal	39 (9.33%)

As shown in Table 1, the Topical theme had the highest number of occurrences in the Sermon on the Mount: 227, or 54.31%. The Textual theme followed with 152 instances, or 36.36%. This was followed by the Interpersonal theme, which garnered only 39 occurrences, or 9.33%.

To illustrate the results, below are examples taken from the analysis of the Sermon on the Mount.

<c 1a>Blessed are **the poor in spirit**,

<c 1b> for the **kingdom of heaven** is theirs.

<c 2a>Blessed are **those who mourn**,

<c 2b>for **they** will be comforted

<c 4a>Blessed are **those who hunger and thirst for righteousness**,

The Topical theme is the most dominant because most of the subjects used in the analyzed clauses are topics. According to Siahaan (2023), a topical theme is a clause element with a transitivity function in the first position. It is the theme of a clause that culminates with the first element, which is either participants, circumstances, or processes (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). There is only one topical theme in each clause, while the remainder is called Rheme. According to the example above, the subject for each clause above is the following: the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven, those who mourn, they, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness indicate that the participants belong to the Topical themes because they assume the function of a topic in each clause. Moreover, the domination of the Topical theme indicates also that the sermon is Topic-oriented, which means that Christ utilized various subjects to convey effectively the message of His sermon.

<c 3a>Blessed are the humble,

<c 3b>**for** they will inherit the earth.

<c 5a>Blessed are the merciful,

<c 5b>**for** they will be shown mercy.

<c 13a>No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, <c 13b>**and** it gives light for all who are in the house.

<c 15a>Don't think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. <c 15b> I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. <c 16a>**For** truly I tell you, <c 16b>until heaven and earth pass away, <c 16c>not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law <c 16d> until all things are accomplished. <c 17a>**Therefore**,

whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. <c 17b>But whoever does and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

The Textual theme follows the Topical themes in the analyzed clauses. It is a theme of cohesiveness. According to Djimet (2022), "[a] Textual Theme is a component of the clause which has a cohesive function such as Continuity Adjuncts and Conjunctive Adjuncts." That said, it "can appear in thematic positions, does not express interpersonal or experiential meaning, but does an important cohesive task in connecting the clause with its context" (Siahaan, 2023). The presence of the cohesive devices above, like and, for, and therefore, make possible the cohesion of the texts. Additionally, the presence of the Textual themes indicates the fact that Christ explicitly signals how the information of one clause is linked to the previous one, creating a cohesive text. Also, it demonstrates Christ's understanding of the surrounding context and His intention to build upon or create a shift from the previously given information.

<c 9a>You are blessed <c 9b>when they...<c 9d>...**falsely** say every kind of evil against you because of me.

<c 13a>No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, <c 13b>**and** it gives light for all who are in the house. <c 14a>**In the same way**, let your light shine before others, <c 14b>**so** that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

<c 15a>Don't think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. <c 15b> I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. <c 16a>**For truly** I tell you, <c 16b>until heaven and earth pass away, <c 16c>not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law <c 16d> until all things are accomplished.

<c 26a>But I tell you, <c 26b>everyone who looks at a woman **lustfully** has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

<c 33a>You have heard <c 33b>that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. <c 33c>But I tell you, don't resist an evildoer. <c 33d>**On the contrary**, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

Lastly, the Interpersonal theme appeared least in the clauses. In these clauses exists the element of the message to which a Mood function can be assigned (Djimet, 2022). It is a clause's position or point of view or an item that occurs before the Rheme that describes the relationship between participants in the text (Paltridge, 2021). In the case above, the principles of this type of theme are indicated in the usages of **Falsely**, **In the same way**, **Truly**, **Lustfully**, and **On the contrary**. The presence of the Interpersonal theme in the sermon implies that Christ was essentially showing His personal stance within the message of the sermon; hence, He was indicating how He positions Himself or how He conveys His personal judgment on the meaning (Himphinit and Astia, 2023) in relation to His audience or the information being communicated through the sermon.

The results of this study are similar to the study of Djimet (2022) because the dominant theme in the previous study was topical themes. This means that most of the clauses in the previous study contain topical ones. The rest of the processes were also present in the previous study, namely, Textual and Interpersonal. However, it differs from this study because it surveyed a non-biblical text. Also, the results of this study share similarities with the study of Siahaan (2023) because the previous study showcases that the dominant theme is also Topical. This means that the clauses in Luke chapter 17 of the said study contain topics that represent the entire message. Also, the presence of the rest of the themes in the previous study, namely, textual and interpersonal,

and their same ranking in terms of number of occurrences made this present study and the previous one share some commonalities. However, they only differ since the previous one included multiple themes in its analysis as a type of theme. Additionally, the present study also mirrors the study of Larasati et al. (2022), which found that Topical themes in the clauses function as participants in the speech of Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the United Kingdom. Also, this previous study found Textual themes that promoted cohesiveness to the speech and one Interpersonal theme that enabled the prime minister to acknowledge the truth of his speech (i.e., And the truth is,...).

That said, the fact that this present study shares similarities with the studies of Djimet (2022), Siahaan (2023), and Larasati et al. (2022) implies that the Topical theme is linguistically common in political sermons and biblical texts like the Bible, though further research can prove this point.

Generally, focusing on the overall dominant theme identified, which is the Topical one, the results imply that Jesus Christ was serious in conveying the topics or message of His Sermon in front of many people. The message of the Sermon aimed to make the audience pay more attention by utilizing more Topical themes. Most of these themes refer to the audience and Jesus Himself. These are indicated in the utilization of the pronouns **I, you, us, we, they, whoever, anyone, the one, others, he, and everyone**. These pronouns enabled Jesus Christ to create a connection between Himself and His audience.

Furthermore, other nouns are mentioned in the sermon, namely, the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven, those who mourn, the humble, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted, your reward, the salt, a city, heaven and earth, the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter, your righteousness, your gift, your adversary, the judge, your right eye, your right hand, the gentiles, heavenly Father, your left hand, your giving, your Father, our Father, your Kingdom, their fasting, your heart, the eye, your whole body, your eye, the light, the darkness, the wildflowers, Solomon, tomorrow, each day, the door, his son, the gate, the road, false prophets, grapes, good tree, bad tree, every tree, the rain, the rivers, the winds, and the foundation. These nouns/topics mirror the message that the sermon communicates to its original audience.

Meanwhile, the Textual theme reflects the cohesiveness of the Sermon. Jesus tends to connect thoughts that would create meanings in connection to the context of the issue. According to Thompson (2013), “Textual metafunction uncovers how writers or speakers build their messages in a way that makes them flow naturally into the unfolding language event.” Lastly, the Interpersonal theme is less than topical and textual ones in the said Sermon. The elements of this type of theme were less used by Jesus Christ in His sermon. The repetition of the expression “Truly I say to you...” mirrors this along with others.

Q2. What are the theme-rheme patterns in the Sermon on the Mount?

Table 2 showcases the distribution of theme-rheme patterns in the Sermon on the Mount. According to the results, all patterns are involved except with the multiple theme/Split rheme pattern.

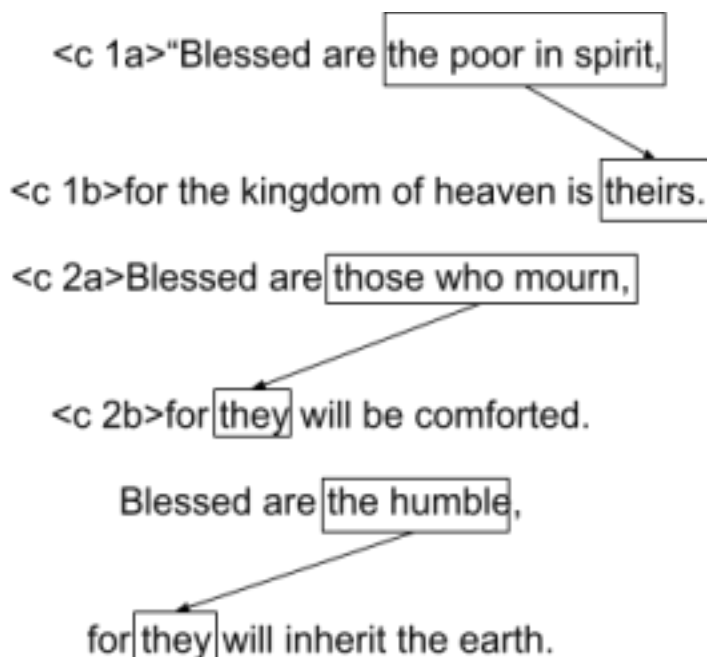
Table 2. The Distribution of Theme-rheme patterns as found in the Sermon on the Mount.

Theme-rheme patterns	Occurrences (%)
Constant	110 (61.11%)
Linear	58 (32.22%)
Derive	12 (6.67%)
Multiple theme/Split rheme	0 (0%)

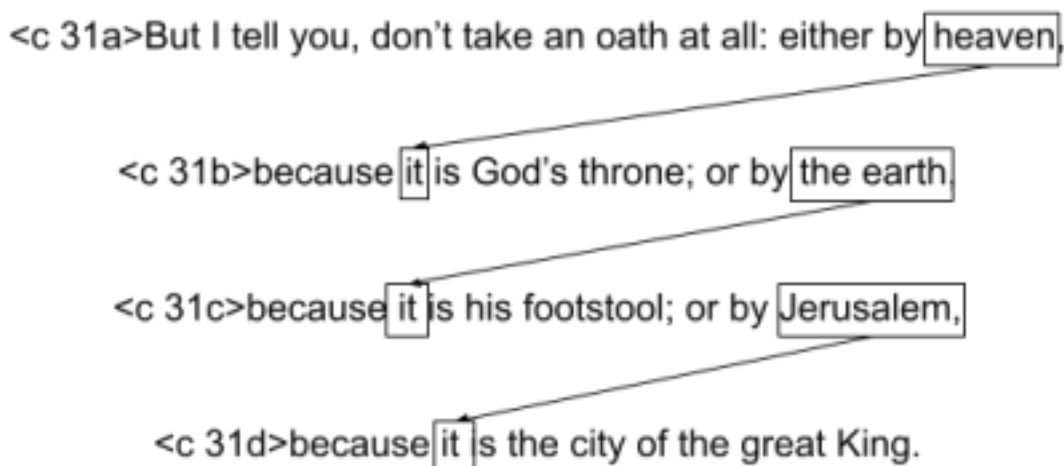
From the results presented in Table 2, the Constant theme-rheme pattern had the highest frequency count, with a total of 110 occurrences or 61.11% in the entire

sermon. This is followed by the Linear/Zigzag theme-rheme pattern with 58 occurrences or 32.22%. Lastly, the derived theme pattern got the least number of occurrences in the clauses, with 12 or 6.67%.

To demonstrate the results, below are some examples taken from the analysis.

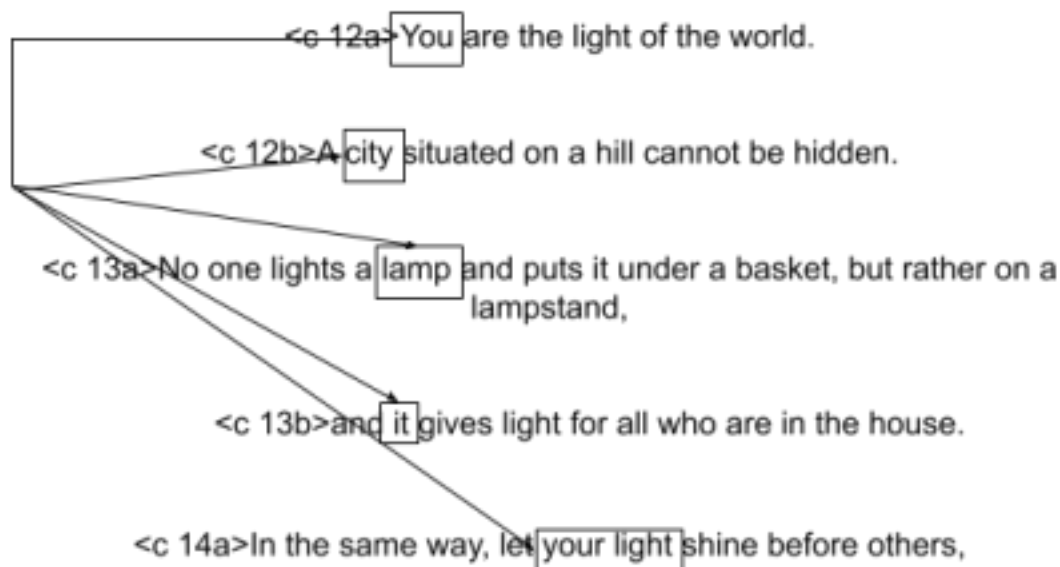


The constant theme-rheme pattern is the most dominant because most of the analyzed clauses exhibit a consistent pattern of a theme; that is, the subject of a clause always assumes the position of the theme of the next clause, as demonstrated above. Hence, according to Kuswoyo (2016), this pattern “presents the reader with the given information acts as the themes throughout the clauses while rheme presents new information which is not further discussed in the following clauses.” In the samples above, we can see that there exists parallelism due to the retainment of the position of the same subject of the first clause to the second using a plural pronoun (i.e., they). The presence of this type of pattern indicates that Christ created a sense of repetition and emphasis on a particular subject by repeating it; thus, it is a way to keep the reader's attention firmly on a single subject.



In contrast, the Linear/zigzag theme-rheme pattern follows the Constant above in the analyzed clauses. It is a pattern that enables the speaker to expound more on the message or the rheme of the first clause into the second by making it a theme or a topic of the next clause. That is, in this pattern, an element that is introduced

in the rheme in clause one gets promoted to become the theme of clause two (Eggins, 2004, as cited in Kuswoyo, 2016). In the example above, heaven, earth, and Jerusalem are expounded in the next clauses. This pattern enabled Christ to effectively explain or expound the message (rheme) of the previous clause to create an expanded version of the description for each topic He communicated to His audience. This implies that Christ cares so much about His audience to the point that He wants them to understand His sermon seamlessly.



Lastly, the Derived theme pattern garnered the least occurrences in the analyzed clauses. Its principle is that “the theme of a clause is not stated explicitly in the theme–rheme of the previous clause by the form, but it relates in meaning to the theme or rheme of the previous clause” (Kuswoyo, 2016). Through this type of pattern, Jesus was able to expound more on the sub-messages of His sermon by utilizing, as the examples above indicate, metaphors such as city, lamp, and light to relate to His audiences. Such terms (city, lamp, light) were directly related in meaning to the subject of the previous clause (i.e., c 12a).

Generally, the results are similar to the study of Larasati et al. (2022) because the previous study discovered a constant theme, a linear/Zig-zag theme, and multiple/split-rheme patterns in the speech of Boris Johnson. However, it differs from this present study because it has no derived theme in the analyzed clauses. Also, the results of this study share similarities with the study of Kuswoyo (2016) because it found constant theme and Linear theme-rheme in the analyzed clauses of the speech of former president Barack Obama. Meanwhile, it differs because it found a combination of the split theme and constant theme patterns in the clauses.

Focusing first on the overall dominant pattern in the analyzed clauses, namely, the Constant pattern, the results imply that Jesus Christ is applying “the same theme to strengthen power or stress some kind of special feelings... it is very common and effective way in political speech” (Feifei, 2019). This is in consideration of the fact that Jesus is invoking special feelings from His audience through the way He speaks and structures His speech. Hence, the Sermon on the Mount is a political speech aimed at the conversion of obedient Jews while, at the same time, it functions as an act of condemnation towards the rebellious House of Israel in the time of Jesus Christ. Political in the sense of having an authoritarian or societal impact of Jesus’ words toward His contemporary audience of the sermon.

According to Dawson (2018), the Sermon of the Mount is “generally considered the heart of Jesus’ moral teaching,” which makes it one of the greatest discourses of Jesus Christ in Matthew’s gospel account because it calls out to rebellious Israel to understand the essence of morality in social and political issues and the law and the prophets else judgment will befall them. Speaking of judgment, Chilton (1987) emphasized that the Sermon on the Mount indicates the persecution, oppression, and slaughtering of Christians “by the wealthy and powerful of apostate Israel,” and Matthew 23-24, along with the book of Revelation details the destruction of the rebellious House of Israel and the vindication of the persecuted saints.

Having said that, Matthew 23 sets the main aim of Jesus Christ's first advent, which was to introduce reforms for the House of Israel during His time, conveyed in His Sermon on the Mount (Dawson, 2017). This means that chapter 23 of Matthew cannot be divorced from the preceding chapters, specifically chapters 5-7, 21, and 22, in which Christ preached in front of His crowd through parables and was being challenged by the same Jewish authorities whom His Great Denunciation in chapter 23 was directed to. According to DeMar (1999), the "woes" of Matthew 23 and Jerusalem's destruction were a result of warnings from John the Baptist and Jesus about their judgment if they didn't repent (cf. Matthew 3:7-12; Matthew 21:33-46; 22:1-14). Moreover, Chilton (1987) demonstrates that the context for Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24 is established by His words in Matthew 23. Jesus made it abundantly clear that Israel would soon face judgment for their denial of God's Word and their ultimate betrayal of God's only Son. When the disciples found themselves alone with Jesus, they were so troubled by His forecast of destruction for the current generation and the "desolation" of the Jewish "house" (the Temple) that they had to ask Him why (cf. Matthew 24:1-3).

On the other hand, the presence of a Linear/Zig-zag theme-rheme pattern implies that Jesus is further explaining the message of a clause by making it the theme of the next one. This creates an impression to the audience of Christ that He values His message above all towards the rebellious Israel. Lastly, the presence of the derived themes in the clauses signified that Jesus is further expounding a Topical theme by making it appear in various forms but with meaning to communicate its content in metaphors, as indicated in the example above.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The study entitled "THEMATIC STRUCTURE IN JESUS CHRIST'S SERMON ON THE MOUNT: A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL APPROACH" aimed to ascertain the types of themes and the respective thematic progression in the Sermon on the Mount made by Jesus Christ in the Book of Matthew using the Textual Metafunction under the heading of Systemic Functional Linguistics.

Specifically, the study aimed to achieve the following objectives: (1) Determine the types of themes in the Sermon on the Mount. (2) Determine the theme-rheme patterns in the Sermon on the Mount.

The study utilized a descriptive-qualitative research design. The corpus of the study is the Sermon on the Mount made by Jesus Christ, particularly found in Matthew chapters 5 to 7. The study used MAK Halliday's Textual Metafunction to determine the themes and their thematic structure in the said sermon.

The results showed that all Themes identified in the clauses of the Sermon on the Mount were found. Notably, because Jesus Christ tends to create a connection between Himself and His audience while at the same time focusing on topics that relate to issues that the sermon was dealing with, the Topical themes dominate the clauses. Jesus is enabled by this type of theme to emphasize His message constructed by different topics in the sermon and to place Himself and His audience as the participants in the text. That said, Topical themes tell that the discourse is a topic-oriented type of sermon—it conveys the message.

Also, it is worth noting that the Textual themes help the context and the background of the sermon become cohesive to understand the message by the recipients—it establishes cohesion. Lastly, the interpersonal themes enabled Jesus to create a relationship between the participants and the text of the sermon—it establishes relationships between participants and in this case, between Christ and His contemporary audience at that time.

Lastly, the Constant theme is the most dominant pattern found in the clauses, which signals that the sermon is a political one in the sense of having an authoritarian or societal impact of Jesus' words toward His contemporary audience of the sermon. This is followed by the Linear/Zig-zag and Derived theme-rheme patterns, respectively. Notably, because Jesus Christ strengthens the power or effect of His sermon or stresses some kind of special feelings towards His audience, the Constant theme-rheme pattern dominates the analyzed clauses in the Sermon on the Mount.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The dominant theme is Topical, which implies that the sermon is topic-oriented—it conveys the message.
2. Other themes help to further understand the context and background of the participants in the text of the sermon as a whole.
3. The dominant theme-rheme pattern is the Constant pattern, which indicates that the Sermon on the Mount made by Jesus Christ is kind having a political tone in the sense of having an authoritarian or societal impact of Jesus' words toward His contemporary audience.
4. While both linear/zigzag and derived patterns helped Jesus Christ to convey the message of the text constructively.

Limitations and Recommendations

With this limited study, it is not known whether the findings can be applied to all religious sermons and passages in the Bible concerning Christ's discourse. Notwithstanding, the analysis found that Christ has utilized the three types of themes, with the Topical type as dominant in the clauses of the sermon. Moreover, the analysis also unveiled that the Sermon on the Mount mostly employed the Constant theme-rheme pattern. In short, this study has proven that Christ's Sermon on the Mount can be analyzed linguistically. Based on the conclusions above and limitations of the study, the following recommendations are drawn:

1. Future researchers in this field may opt to choose to study the thematic structure of the Great Denunciation in Matthew 23 and the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, considering the connection this study established with them.
2. Future researchers may do an investigation to determine how the role of the thematic structure of a sermon improves modern preaching techniques or public speaking.
3. Future researchers may also do a focus examination of the functions of each theme and theme-rheme pattern in a specific sermon.
4. Future researchers may further also investigate the differences between a religious sermon and a political sermon using the lens of Halliday's Textual Metafunction.
5. Future researchers may also conduct a comparative study on the Textual Metafunction of two passages in the Bible.

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