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Another Look at Thematization of Complement in English from Functional Linguistic Perspective

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Abstract: This paper tries to re-examine the issue of a new topic that is complements in English sentence construction in terms of Theme and Rheme. It presents an overview on the sentential complement as a universal linguistic phenomenon in natural languages across the globe. The paper adapts 'Systemic Functional Linguistics' to discuss two important linguistic concepts of discourse known as 'Theme' and 'Rheme' which other linguists handle them as topic of a sentence in a text (what is new) and the additional part (what is given) respectively. The study which focuses on analysing complements in terms of their Thematice and Rhematice functions discovers that complement in English sentence structure plays an important role in describing or adding new information to the other main parts of a sentence. In its analysis, this paper discovers cases in which the fronting of the complement in a theme position is taken place, highlighting the role of the context in thematizing complements in sentences. It further shoes that all kinds of complement are in Thematice rather in Rhematice position. Having analysed many examples, the paper concludes that thematizing of complement in a sentence has distinct syntactic, pragmatic, and semantic functions.

Keywords: Theme, Rheme, complement, sentence, and context.

1. Introduction

The functions of complement in sentence construction have attracted the attention of many grammarians from both descriptivist, formalist and functionalist stocks, as its roles transcend beyond what other parts of sentences arguments such as subjects, objects or verbs that are the major constituent of a sentence performed in achieving meaningful communication. Traditionally, the term "complement" refers to a major constituent of sentence or clause structure that signals the complete meaning of the verb (Crystal, 2008:92). The basic idea of complement is to complete the meaning of the clause that it belongs (Quirk et al., 1985:65).

Many researches on complementization in English are dominated by the perspectives of the syntactic analysis which the complement from the notion phrase structure rule (Radford, 2009). These forms of analysis in many instances lack descriptive and explanatory adequacy to adequately explain the function of complement as it function goes beyond ideational to interpersonal function from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics since it involves pragmatic functions (Bedu, 2010).

In view of this, the present study sets to approach complements in English to highlights some essential features of complements such as their forms, meanings and functions in English language communication. The data utilized in this paper are driven from different sources such as grammar books and the British National Corpus (BNC) to answer the following two research questions:

- 1- Can the complement take a Theme position instead of its Rheme position?
- 2- What are the purposes behind such transferring?

To facilitate the process of finding the origins of the examples used in this study from the British National Corpus (BNC), the author puts the symbol (BNC) in front of each example and also wrote the link at the references section.

Literature Review

Syntactic function is the most abstract level in syntactic analysis (Bedu 2010). It deals with the assignment of syntactic functions such as Subject, Predicate, and Object in a clause. They are sort of formally-predetermined rooms in the linear syntactic organization of a clause. From descriptive grammarian focus, scholars identify three properties of complements given by Huddleston (1984:263): (a) the occurrence of a complement of a given kind depends on the presence of a verb of an appropriate subclass; (b) complements are obligatory with certain verbs; (c) prototypical complements are realised by NPs or Adj Ps. However, the term "complementation", in transformational grammar slightly differs from the above as it refers to the generation of complements, such as obligatory verb complements that are immediate parts of the verb phrase.

General overview of Complements in the Syntax of English

The term complementation as put forward by Quirk et al. (1985), refers to the function of a part of a phrase or clause which follows a word and completes the specification of the meaning relationship which that word implies. Most of sentences produced consist of five components or "five functional categories of clause constituents" with three of them further subcategorized (Quirk et al., 1985:750). These five constituents are arranged variously to form different shapes of sentences. English sentences are based on the permissible combinations of the following seven functional patterns:

- 1. SV Subject-verb
- 2. SVO Subject-verb-object
- 3. SVC Subject-verb- complement
- 4. SVA Subject-verb- adverb
- 5. SVOO Subject-verb-indirect object-direct object
- 6. SVOC Subject-verb-direct object-complement
- 7. SVOA Subject-verb-direct object-adverb

As shown from the above classification, there are two types of complements; the subject complement (**SVC**) and the direct object complement (**SVOC**). The subject complement, for Kolln (1999), can come either after the verb *Be* or after the Linking Verbs, as in:

```
1. a. She is a student. (S+ Be+ C)b. He became a teacher. (S+ linking verb+ C)
```

Moreover, Bernard (2006) argues that subjective complements, can be either a predicate noun or a predicate adjective, as in the following examples:

```
2. a. Tom is a professor. (a professor is a noun)b. Tom is intelligent. (intelligent is an adjective)
```

The second type of complement mentioned in the diagram is the direct object complement. The direct object complements normally follow verbs listed in dictionaries as transitive such as, *make*, *heard*, *awoke*, *write*, *see*, *paint*, *break* ... etc. as in the following examples:

3. a. She made her mother *happy*.

- b. He had written a letter to explain his idea about the issue.
- c. They saw the boy playing in the garden.

The direct object complements, for Firsten and Killian (2002:278), can be classified into seven distinct types: Noun phrase, Adjective phrase, Base verb phrase, Infinitive verb phrase, -ing verb phrase, Past participle phrases and Prepositional phrases. The most problematic type from these seven types is when the direct object complement comes as a noun phrase because it is difficult to distinguish between the direct object complement and the direct object which comes after indirect object as in the following examples:

- 4. a. They gave John a present. (SVOO)
 - b. They chose John **a leader** of the team. (SVOC)

The above two sentences seem to be similar because they contain transitive verbs followed by two nouns. But actually, they are very different because the first sentence (a.) contains two objects; an indirect object (*John*) and a direct object (*a present*) while the second sentence (b) contains one direct object only (*John*) and a direct object complement (*a leader*).

In addition to the two main complements mentioned above, there are other sub-types of complements such as; the verb complement and the adjective complement. In the case of the verbs that need complements to complete their meaning, Celce-Murcia (1983:629) affirms that it is difficult to find a rule for the kind of complements that comes with specific verbs because the relation of the verb to complement type seems arbitrary. The kind of the complement that a verb triggers can be predicated depending on the meaning of the verb. For this reason, verbs that share similar functions likely require the same kind of complement. Moreover, Celce-Murcia (ibid) divides verb complements into five types; that-clause complementation, infinitive complement, gerund complementation, tenseless subjunctive complements and non-participle constructions.

The other kind of complement is the adjective complement which is used to refer to the clause or phrase that modifies an adjective or adds to the meaning of the adjective, such as;

5. I am happy they got married.

Adjective complement always follows the adjective and it can be a noun clause or a prepositional phrase, such as:

6. We were happy by the news.

After giving a brief about the structure and the types of complements, it is necessary to shift to explain the functions of complements in English.

3. Functions of Complements in English

Complements have a general purpose that is to qualify, describe or provide additional meaning to other words in a sentence. Ralph (1958:128) shows that the function of complement is most widely recognized where complements are nominal, or objects. For example, the subject complement describes the subject of the sentence and similarly the adjective complement describes or adds to the meaning of the adjective. Herbst (1983:113), in his classification of prepositional adjective complementation, argues that

the particles have semantic functions such as; experience, goal, reference, and topic, for example:

- 7. a. He was keen to complete his work in time.
 - b. They were happy that they pass the exam.

\

the *to-clause* in (a) expresses the speakers' attitudes towards the likelihood or desirability of completing his work in time, while in (b), it expresses the speakers' attitudes towards the truth of passing the exam. Thus, as Dixon's third criterion states, complement clauses "will always describe a proposition", which can in turn be "a fact, an activity or a potential state".

Functional Linguistic Approach to English Complement Construction

Every language theory has a certain way to identify the function of an argument or constituent. Often it involves both semantic and syntactic analysis, but it mainly relies on syntactic operation. Pragmatically, every piece of information which is available in a clause is essential, but if it can be dropped off and the clause still represents a logical proposition, that information is considered to be syntactically non-essential and optional. Dropping off an element from a clause is then one of syntactic techniques to identify whether or not a piece of information is essential. When a Predicate has two essential Arguments, every language theory has its own way to identify which Argument syntactically functions as Subject. Because both have different syntactic relation to the Predicate, the other Argument must not function as Subject and must have a different syntactic function in the clause.

From functionalists' point of view, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p.122) define Complement as "an element within the Residue that has the potential of being Subject but is not; in other words, it is an element that has the potential for being given the interpersonally elevated status of modal responsibility — something that can be the nub of the argument".

4. Theme and Rheme in English

In 'Systemic Functional Linguistics', Halliday sees language as a social semiotic that does its function in society. For him, "Theme extends from the beginning of the clause and up to (and including) the first element that has a function in transitivity" (Halliday, 1994:53). The term 'Transitivity', for Halliday, refers to set of options relating to cognitive content, the linguistic representation of extralinguistic experience that are available for the speaker to choose according to factors such as; feelings, thoughts and perceptions (Haliday 1976:199). Halliday describes the Theme-Rheme dichotomy as; first, the 'theme' is marked in intonation as a separate tone unit, frequently followed by a brief pause, second, only the basic elements of the kernel structure can become topic themes: the process (main verb), the participants (subject and object) and the circumstantial factors (adverbials). Thus, according to Halliday (1994), the Theme of a clause "ends with the

first constituent that is either participant, circumstance, or process" (Halliday, 1994:52) and Rheme is "the remainder of the message" (Halliday, 1994:67).

Halliday's model of context consists of three strata: context of culture (genres), the context of situation (register), and text in context. For him, context of situation consists of three variables: field (what is happening), tenor (nature of the participants), and mode (is it spoken or written or both). These three variables (field, tenor, and mode) are closely linked to the metafunctions of language which are: ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions, as the following table shows:

Context Genre	Language Text		
Theory of register	Metafunctions Ideational		
Field			
Tenor	Interpersonal		
Mode	Textual		
Figure (1). Contact in Systemia	hannooch (Cronoto and Darini 2011.		

Figure (1): Context in Systemic Approach (Granato and Parini 2011:71)

Halliday shows that these three metafunctions are linked with the three lines of meaning in a clause: *subject*, *actor*, and *theme*. In other words, analysing a sentence like:

8. The boy rode his bike down the street. can be illustrates the following table:

Metafunctions					
Experiential	Actor	Process (material)		Goal	Circumstance
(Ideational)	(participant)			(participant)	
	The boy	Rode		his bike	down the
					street
Interpersonal	Mood	Predicator		Complement	Adjunct
	Subject	Finite			
	The boy	(did)	rode	his bike	down the
					street
Textual	Theme	Rheme			
	The boy	rode		his bike	down
		the street			

Table (1) Three Metafunctions at Clause Level (Thompson, 2013)

The ideational or experiential function of language is represented in terms of *happenings* (process), the action "*rode*", the entities (the actor and the goal) is represented by the participants in the happenings (*the boy, his bike*), and the *circumstantial features* "down the street". The *interpersonal* function deals with the grammar of sentences and it represented by the subject (the boy), finite verb (did), predicator (rode), complement (his bike), adjunct (down the street). Textual function deals the 'thematic structure' and it divides the text to *theme* and *rheme*, or *old* and *new*.

5. Thematization of Complements

The concept of thematization involves process of shifting various sentence elements to the initial position plus any grammatical changes within a sentence, which are caused by such a movement (Rzayev et al. 2007:247). The aim of such process is to direct the attention of the receiver of the message to the parts the sender wishes to emphasize. According to Grzegorek (1984), there are four main types of thematization in English:

- (1) passivization,
- (2) clefts and pseudo-clefts,
- (3) topicalization, left dislocation, focus movement, and
- (4) presentation sentences with proposed expressions.

Functional grammarians explain that these four types of thematization are used to specify a special linguistic phenomenon related to information-structure. Thematization is mostly seen as the grammatical process which indicates new information or contrast to a presupposition in the clause. Besides pragmatic functions, thematization can be categorized by syntactic properties like fronting that means a certain constituent of the sentence can be moved to the initial position of the sentence to specifically add information value to the preposition of the unmarked structure as explained in Functional Grammar by Dik (1989). This suggests that every sentence and every word can hold a definite message or aim within the same sentence structure. Functionalists further assert that the syntactic arrangement of the components of the sentence structure can reflect different kinds of messages. Thus, it can be said that the word order of every sentence is purposeful, especially the main discourse functions of fronting are: organizing information flow to achieve cohesion and expressing contrast (Biber et al., 1999:900 and Hanny and Mackenzie, 2002).

Halliday (1994) believes that each clause conveys a message that has two parts, i.e., what comes first or the *theme*, and what comes last or the *rheme*, and the theme usually constrains given information and the *rheme*, new information. Speakers within their communication, focus on topics more than others during their speeches. Thus, to focus on a topic is to front it. The topic that is focused on is the *Theme*, while the rest of the speech, related to the topic is the *Rheme*. This idea was supported by Huddleston (1984:454) who explains that the effect of thematic fronting is to assign greater prominence to the element concerned than it would typically have in an unmarked construction, and in many cases, certainly, the fronted element can be thought of as corresponding to the topic.

- 9. Soldiers **kill the protesters in the morning** in Egypt. (Unmarked construction)
 - 10. **The killing of the protesters in the morning** was done by the soldiers in Egypt. (Marked construction)

The process of fronting that contrasts the structures in (9) and (10) above is predicate fronting. Similarly, the process of fronting can also be applied to complements. A complement is a word which completes the meaning of the verb of incomplete predication. Complement can be in form of:

- a. Noun
 - 11. Mary is a teacher.
- b. Adjective
 - 12. Tom looks attractive.

- c. Adverb
 - 13. Water is everywhere.

Apart from examples in 11-13, there are kinds of complements which scholars dub as subject complement and object complement as exemplified in 14 (a &b) below:

- 14. a. Othman is my friend or He looks tired.
 - b. We elected him *our president* or the name of my teacher *Ilker*.

If a speaker wants to give a complement more important within a sentence, s/he will start with it. The search in the British National Corpus (BNC) shows various examples in which the thematization of complements takes place. Fronting of all kinds of complements with its purposes is going to be discussed in the following sections

5.1 Subject complement in theme position

Thematization of complement is related to *relational* process. According to Downing and Locke (1992:112), relational process are those types of verbs in which there is a characterization or identification of a participant, such as *be, seem, stand, lie, become, turn* or *get*. These verbs constitute subject complement. English sentence that includes a subject complement starts with a subject, verb and a subject complement which comes after the subject to describe it in the sentence, such as:

- 15. a. His name is *John*.
 - b. John was a doctor.
 - c. John looks busy.

The structures in (15a-c) above begin with the subject "his name, and John in (15 a and b and c)"; they are logically and normally denoted by the theme or the topic of the sentences. The predicate with the word in italic are the complement that functional grammarians considered as the Rheme of the text as they add more information to the theme. In 15 (a) and (b), the predicate nominative renames the subject while in 15 (c), the predicate is an adjective modifying the subject.

But the phenomenon of fronting allows the rest of the constituents to move their positions within a sentence, and thus, the theme is not always performed by a subject. Sometimes language users may introduce their sentence with a subject complement, such as:

- 16. **Albert** his name was, and **he** greeted her with a kiss when he opened the door to us. (BNC)
- 17. **Inspector** comes up and says, 'What are you doing here?' **McLeod**, his name was. (BNC)

In the above two structures, thematizing of the subject complement has the following purposes:

- 1) To attract the listener to hear the complement before the subject.
- 2) To assure definitely the person's name as Albert in (16) or McLeod in (17) and not other names.
- 3) To assure to the listener that the name has a special importance in the mind of the speaker as something fix and unforgettable.
- 4) Syntactically, to assure that 'Albert' it is the subject of the following sentence 'he' as in

(16) and 'McLeod' is the subject of the former sentence 'Inspector' as in (17).

Another case which demands fronting the subject complement before the subject is the interrogative structure as in (18) and exclamation sentence as in (19).

18- Tom, his name was? How do you know that?

19. Gazing down, Luke thought how **beautiful** she was despite the tear-stains and the swollen eyelids. (BNC)

Another case related with thematizing the **subject complement in the form of adjective** can be shown in the following sentences:

- 20. a. **A silly little bitch** she had been, pleading with him to let her live, and promising that if he did she would say nothing and leave Vienna at once, never to return. (BNC)
 - b. **A dull cool summer** it had been, as different as could be from the year before. (BNC)

The structures in (20) show that the head of the complement *bitch* in (a) is proceeded by a determiner and modifiers (*silly*, *little*), and the head *summer* in (b) is proceeded by a determiner and modifiers (*dull*, *cool*) are typical cases of thematization. The fronting is happened because the head is preceded by one or more adjectives and the speaker wants attract the focus of the hearer on these adjectives as a kind of suspense. Such configuration amplified the assumption that theme is always what is being talked about by the speaker.

Similarly in the next two examples, the speaker starts with the subject complement 'More serious' before the subject as a way of exaggeration for the seriousness of the actions in (a) and the instances in (b) as it is illustrated below:

- 21. a. More serious were Aurangzeb's actions against non-Muslims. (BNC)
 - b. More serious were instances when a group of villagers raided a nearby district for cattle. (BNC)

Within that configuration in the above structures, *theme* is the starting point for the message; it is what the clause is going to be about in which the subject complement 'More serious' serves the same function as given information.

Grammarians posit that subject complement can also take the form of prepositional phrase in a sentence like this:

22. The bird (S) is **on the tree**.

To cross-check whether the subject complement of such a type is fronted or not, one would take Huddleston's (1984:458) hypothesis in which he looks at the non-WH interrogative versions of sentence construction as illustrated in the following examples:

- 23. a. The key he was looking for was **inside the clock**.
 - b. **Inside the** clock was the key he'd been looking for.

The two structures have the same form of the direct question as in (24) below:

24. Was the key he was looking for **inside the clock**?

In this case, from the two corresponding structures in (23), the sentence in (23.b) is derived from (23.a) because it does not have no direct interrogative counterpart. Huddleston (1984:458) shows that it has no direct interrogative counterpart because the kind of thematic reordering it exhibits is restricted to declaratives.

Other examples may have different situation, such as:

- 25. a. The best place for it was **inside the clock.**
 - b. **Inside the clock** was the best place for it.

The sentence (25.b) at first glance appears to be derived from (25.a), but applying the direct question method shows that they have two separated forms of interrogatives:

26. Was **the best place for it** inside the clock?

That is corresponding to (25.a), and the following question:

27. Was inside the clock **the best place for it**?

That is corresponding to (25.b), so, this difference shows that (25.b) does not derive from (25.a) by a reordering of the functions.

5.2. Object complement in theme position

In the case of object complement, Rzayev et al. (2007:185) show that the object prefers a final or a post-verb position in the clauses of all lengths. This is in accordance with its Rhematic function in the communicative structure of a sentence. There are seven kinds of object complement as indicated in the following examples:

- 28. a. They chose John a leader of the team. (Noun phrase as DOC)
- b. We painted the house **peach.** (Adjective phrase as DOC)
- c. I promised John to go. (Infinitive verb phrase as DOC)
- d. I saw the boy **playing with his friends.** (-ing verb phrase DOC)
- e. I heard the president **proclaim the war against terrorist**. (Base verb phrase DOC)
- f. I saw the president **interviewed by CNN**. (Past participle phrase as DOC)
- g. The teacher organised the exams **in the old building**. (Prepositional phrases as DOC)

Language users may deviate from these norms and use the sentences as in the following:

- 29. For one thing, the group did not choose the name, which came from a reviewer's description of a painting by Monet. (BNC)
- 30. Both countries also enjoy the full support of Britain and the US **a point** you chose to ignore. (BNC)

- 31. **Answering two questions**, I would like to hear from you now, why and how did you act like this.
- 32. To say the same thing I will not repeat at all.
- 33. **Playing Monopoly** last time I saw him. (BNC)

Examining the above examples shows that the aim behind complement in theme position is:

- 1) To attract the listener to hear the complement before the subject, as in all the above sentences.
- 2) To assure definitely that the 'one thing' (the theme and the reason) is behind not choosing him as in (29),
- 3) To assure to the listener that the action is what attracts the speaker as in (31).
- 4) semantically, to assure that 'a point' in (30) which is the subject of one sentence has equal meaning with the whole former sentence 'Both countries also enjoy the full support of Britain and the US', and starting with the complement 'a point' comes to themitize it and at the same time to focus on the opinion of the speaker regards the former sentence.

5.3. Verb complement in theme position

The nature of verb complement depends on the nature of the verb in a sentence. Examples of the five types of verb complements suggested by Celce-Murcia's (1983:629) are:

- 34. a. We knew that the news is true.
- b. They insist that this student sign up for a counsellor.
- c. He wanted *to be a minister*.
- d. The thief denied *stealing the car*.
- e. I prefer swimming in the river.

Speakers sometimes change the position of verb complements in a frontal place in the sentence, as the following examples show:

35. **To be a free-dinner** kid was to enjoy a full stomach every single day of the week, puddings and all. (BNC)

In the structure (35), the speaker thematize the complement 'To be a free-dinner' because it is the topic of the whole sentence, and to attract the listener to its importance behind the occurring of the main action that is 'enjoy a full stomach ...etc.' From the above structure, the example shows marked theme of information in the flow of discourse as it has some form of organization whereby it fits in with, and contributes to, the flow of discourse.

5.4. Adjective complement in theme position

Adjective complement can be fronted to the theme position as in the following:

- 36. That he had gone was odd= (from: It was odd that he had gone)
- 37. Whether she can do it is questionable= (from: It is questionable whether she can do it)

Examining the above sentences shows that thematizing process is happened for two reasons: first, the adjective complements (that he had gone) as in (36) and (Whether she

can do it) as in (37), refer to the subject of the original sentence (it), and thus they were replaced by it. This replacement comes from the speaker to assert that the description of the adjective, (he had gone) in (36) and (she can do it) in (37) are more important than the adjective itself. Secondly, this type of sentence is used for the function of exclamation. Another example related to the same case is the following:

38. But, gentlemen, **of this** I am certain, the Conservative Party has been a good thing for this country and it is our business today, and as long as we can, to keep that...etc. (BNC)

The use of the words *this* or *that* in a front position is functional as they refer to something mentioned in previous discourse. These words make the addressee understand the information as something not new, but as the theme of the sentence.

Thus, putting the complement at the beginning of a sentence has a function in communication. As Ralph (1958:134) shows, a complement cannot be described in terms of fixed positions. Moreover, the syntax of a sentence plays an important role in communication because by the syntactic form it will be possible to see the constituents which have more important role than others. This idea was shared by Rzayev et al. (2007:188) who state that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the syntactic and the communicative functions of syntactic elements. Accordingly, each syntactic element can be a carrier of different communicative function. To conclude, according to the syntactic form, a complement can be recognized because it cannot be described in terms of fixed positions. Finally, it can be said that both of "Theme" and "Rheme" are means of connecting ideas, but not in all cases, they overlap with the so-called "topic" and "focus".

6. Conclusion

The results of the analysis show that Thematization of complement occurs in contexts where clauses are related either to one context, that is the previous context or the next context, or with both contexts. Although the normal position of complements is a final position, complements can be put at the beginning of a sentence for a specific function in communication which can develop the ways of improving communication in the light of knowing the potential of these complements which are used in most of sentences. This paper has also shown the ways of how language users can make a distinction between Theme and Rheme and how they can get benefit from this distinction in conducting semantic analysis of single sentences and bigger texts. Moreover, this paper concludes that the syntactic, as well as the semantic analysis of a sentence, plays an important role in the communication because by the syntactic form it will be possible to see the constituents which have more important role than others. Some of the functions of thematizing a complement in a sentence can be summarized as follows:

- 1- To attract the listener to hear the complement before the subject.
- 2- To assure definitely that the information in the complement is fixed and non-changeable in the mind of the speaker.
- 3- To assure the listener that the information in the thematized complement has a special importance in the mind of the speaker as something fixed and unforgettable.
- 4- Syntactically, to assure that the elements of the thematized complement are related to other elements of the following or the former sentence.

- 5- Using the terms 'one thing', two things, something, ...etc in a thematized complement attracts the listener to focus on the theme and the reason that will be mentioned in the next sentence.
- 6- Semantically, using the terms 'point', view, opinion, idea, at the beginning of, a thematized complement summarizes the information in the whole former sentence, and at the same time to reflex the opinion of the speaker regards the former sentence.

All the above mentioned functions enhance including these forms of organization whereby it fits in and can contribute to the flow of discourse **as** a main function in communication.

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