Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

2.0 Introduction

Chapter 2 gives an overview of related literature that has moulded the theoretical and conceptual background of the study.

2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistics

Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) theory originates from the work of the linguist MAK Halliday (1985, 1994). This theory has its influence from the work of earlier schools of grammar (Bloor & Bloor 1995). In SFL, ideas on language have been influenced by the Prague School of thought. The Prague School of thought is the catalyst for the Systemic Functional discussion on Theme and Information (Fries 1981). These terms will be discussed in the next section.

In SFL, Halliday views language as a resource for making meanings and exchanging services. Language has a functional purpose in our everyday life. In order to understand language in use, Halliday stresses that language is contextually related. At this point, Longacre (1981) concedes with Halliday that language use must be related to the context.
The starting point for doing text analysis, however, is the clause. Halliday (1968, 1969, 1970, 1985a, 1985b & 1994) identifies the clause as the most basic lexico-grammatical unit. However, he further proposes that Theme can be seen from other rank levels such as group, phrase or clause complex level. Halliday (1978, 1994) identifies three components of meaning or semantic metafunctions that represent the functions of language in the language system. These three kinds of meaning are ideational (experiential) meanings, interpersonal meanings and textual meanings and are realized simultaneously in the structure of a clause. In this study, the first letter in each metafunction will begin with uppercase letters. For example the ideational function will be written as Ideational, interpersonal function will be written as Interpersonal and textual function will be written as Textual. The following text example will be used to explain how a clause realises Ideational, Interpersonal and Textual meanings simultaneously.

1) Ideational meaning – Language has a representational function. It represents things, concepts, relations, and events and their circumstances. It is used to represent our experience of the world and it conveys a picture of reality. Ideational meanings can be divided into experiential and logical meanings. For example if you say:

(T6, s1)

*The bodies of tennis players, gymnasts, track and field stars, and weight-lifters differ dramatically from one another.*
you are simultaneously representing or describing something, interacting with someone by telling them something and organising the linear flow of your message. You could also say it in another way, for instance:

*Tennis players, gymnasts, track and field stars, and weight-lifters’ bodies differ dramatically from one another.*

or

*As for tennis players, gymnasts, track and field stars, and weight-lifters, their bodies differ dramatically from one another.*

In each of the utterance, you would have been saying something slightly different in meaning. Each of these aspects of the utterance is possible through all the linguistic or grammatical options available.

2) **Interpersonal meaning** – Interpersonal meanings allow speakers/writers to encode meanings of attitudes, interactions and relationships. Again, Interpersonal meanings can be seen from the illustrations below.

(T6, s1)

*The bodies of tennis players, gymnasts, track and field stars, and weight-lifters differ dramatically from one another.*

Alternatively,

(a) *The bodies of tennis players, gymnasts, track and field stars, and weight-lifters differ dramatically from one another, don’t they?*

or

(b) *Do the bodies of tennis players, gymnasts, track and field stars, and weight-lifters differ dramatically from one another?*
In this case, interpersonal meanings are slightly different in sentences (a) and (b) although both sentences have the same experiential meanings. Sentence (a) would be seeking for confirmation whereas sentence (b) would be asking for information.

3) Textual meaning – Language also has a textual function. It allows us to organise our experiential and interpersonal meanings into a linear and coherent text. It also allows us to encode meanings of text development. For example,

(a) They differ dramatically from one another.

or

(b) It was the bodies of tennis players, gymnasts, track and field stars, and weight-lifters that differ dramatically from one another.

In this case, different textual meanings were conveyed by organising the message differently. In the first instance (a), the bodies of tennis players, gymnasts, track and field stars, and weight-lifters have been replaced by the pronoun They. The listener/reader would need to refer to the previous sentence in context to find out who They refers to.

In the second instance (b), the experiential meaning has been re-organised so that the emphasis is now on the bodies of tennis players, gymnasts, track and field stars, and weight-lifters. In other words, the textual function has to do particularly with the flow of information and the take-off point for the message. Therefore, we can conclude that textual meanings are
important in the creation of coherence in spoken and written texts. Furthermore, Halliday concludes that thematic structure is what 'gives the clause its character as a message. Theme is the element which serves as the point of departure of the message' (Halliday 1985:38).

Thus, one of the reasons for studying Theme and Rheme in this paper is the potential of the theme structure to reveal the textual organisation of the text which is how a piece of text means what it says.

2.2 History of Theme

A lot of the Systemic work on discourse and the textual dimension of language have been influenced by the work of Prague School scholars like Vilem Mathesius, Josef Vachek, Jan Firbas and Frantisek Danes. They name the textual dimension of language as Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP) (Fries 1983).

The Prague School work on FSP which focuses on the dynamics of the sentence as a communicative event, finds it useful to distinguish between the Theme and the Rheme of the sentence. Mathesius' (1939) initial formulation of Theme is applied by most of the Prague School scholars. Mathesius describes Theme in two distinct functions, that is (i) that which is known or obvious in the given situation and (ii) that from which the speaker proceeds. In other words, Mathesius' initial formulation on Theme can be summarised in these two concepts:
a. information which is known or obvious in the situation, and

b. information from which the speaker proceeds.

Halliday’s definition on Theme is different from Mathesius. In the Systemic Functional framework, Halliday separates these two notions – *information which is known or obvious in the situation* and *information from which the speaker proceeds*, into two distinct terms, Given/ New and Theme/ Rheme. The term **Given** is used to refer to what is being presented as known, that is point (a) above, and the term **Theme** to refer to the ‘point of departure of the message’ that is point (b) above.

Most Systemic Functional linguists adopt Halliday’s view on Theme which is primarily focused on the grammar of the clause rather than on the rhythm of the discourse. They justify their view by saying that a constituent with the function of Theme does not necessarily have the function Given as well. Instead, under certain conditions, Theme might be conflated with New. Thus, Theme in this case, no longer functions as that which is known or obvious.

In **Given and New information structure**, texts are divided into information units. The Given structure is differentiated by a change of pitch, or loudness, signalling what is viewed as the point of the message or given and the other information as New.
2.3 Theme and Rheme

There are two parallel and interrelated expressions of textual meaning in a clause which are the *Information Structure* and the *Thematic Structure* (Bloor and Bloor 1995). The Information Structure involves constituents that are labelled *Given* and *New*. On the other hand, Thematic Structure involves constituents that are labelled *Theme* and *Rheme*. However, some linguists conflate these two concepts under a single heading which is 'topic and comment' (Halliday 1970).

Theme, according to Halliday (1985:278), is 'encoder-oriented'; it is 'what I, the speaker, choose to take as my point of departure'. Similarly, in his revised version, Halliday (1994:38) again characterises Theme as 'the point of departure for what the speaker is going to say - what the message is concerned with or what the message is about'.

His definition of Theme, 'what the message is about', however has raised a number of controversies (Gonzalez 2001). The expression 'what the clause is about' has regularly been assumed to be equated with Topic. In the systemic framework, Halliday differentiates Theme with the term 'topic' because the term 'topic' has been associated with 'only one particular type of Theme' (1985:39) whilst in a text, there is more than one Theme as the text develops.

Furthermore, a number of research articles have demonstrated that what occurs first in clauses is often not the topic. (Fries 1995) (See Gundel 1977; Downing 1991; Huddleston 1988 for examples.) Fries too refutes the
view that Theme is not topic or given. He explains that Theme functions as an orienenter to the message. It orients the reader to the message that is about to be perceived and provides a framework for the interpretation of that message.

In this study, the meaning of Theme which means 'the point of departure for what the writer is going to say', as posited by MAK Halliday is applied (1985:36). The elements functioning as theme are those that have transitivity status.

Theme in English is recognised by the initial position in a clause. It means Theme equals clause initial constituent(s). The recognition criteria for the English Theme appears very simple and straightforward. Nevertheless, problems arise when distinct sub-categories of Theme co-occur within the same clause and when the system of Theme occurs at different ranks. Thus Theme recognition criteria might be complex.

Halliday says that Theme is everything up to and including the first constituent which have transitivity status. However, Berry (1989) finds that the Subject of a clause has a special status. Therefore, Theme must include everything that precedes the verb. Hence, in a 'marked Theme' clause such as On Saturday, John bought a car, Halliday says that the 'marked Theme' is On Saturday. Berry, however includes John as Theme in addition to On Saturday.

Different languages are said to have different ways of realizing Theme (Lock 1996). Theme, in English is realized by a word order whereas Theme in Japanese is realized by particles or affixes wa and Theme in Tagalog is
realized by particles or affixes *ang* (Martin 1992). Indeed, problems may also arise when these tools are used to analyze different languages which do not have the same Theme-Rheme structure as in English. The first position in an English clause is used to signal to the audience what the message is about. In other words, we can conclude that Theme in English 'contains textual meanings because it signposts the development of a text' (Butt et al. 1995:92). Textual meanings enable writers to inform readers about where the text is heading.

Another source of complexity is in the recognition criteria for Theme pertaining to what type of unit acts as the entry point to the system of Theme (Fries 1995). According to Halliday, at least three different unit types have this privilege. They are the clause complex, the clause and the group or phrase. The complexity arises when choices in the system for one unit is applied to a different unit and the same result is expected. For example, Theme may not show the same consistency throughout the analyses at clause complex rank and at clause rank. This issue will be taken up in Chapter 5 in direction for further research (page 124).

Halliday (1967) has drawn attention to the importance of first position in clause or sentence for thematising or foregrounding certain types of information.

Brown and Yule (1983) also point out the importance of initial position in clause structure. They point out that different varieties of English make use of this important first position in different ways. For example, interactional
conversation tends to place items such as *I* and *you* in first position, hence marking 'the interactional aspect' and giving 'a clear indication of the speaker's view of what he is using language to do' (1983: 141). They also identify that certain types of written English make use of first position to identify 'the writer's topic area' and 'the organisation of the paragraph' (1983:141). Fries, in his later research, confirms the potential of first position to indicate the pattern or organisation of a text (1983).

In the typical form of an English declarative clause, the unmarked form, Theme, Subject and Actor are conflated into a single element. For example, in the following sentence:

\[ Mei \text{ Lin is beautiful.} \]

\[ \text{Theme} \quad \text{Subject} \quad \text{Actor} \]

*Mei Lin*, here is both Theme, Subject and Actor as well.

Halliday (1985) states that this is the form that we tend to use if there is no other significant reason for choosing anything else. In the unmarked form Theme-Rheme and Given-New are mapped onto one another (Halliday 1985). Here, the distinctions between Theme and Topic become less significant. In sentence (a) the unmarked form of a declarative, *Aggasi* is the point of departure of the message, the Theme and the Topic. The distinctions between Theme and Topic become less significant in this sentence. Conversely, in sentence (b) the marked form of a declarative, *In Australia* is
the Theme whereas the Topic of the clause is *all the college boys*. In sentence (b) the Theme element differs from the Topic element.

a) **Agassi**, who was the best tennis player, was adored by all the school boys.

b) **In Australia, all the college boys** adored Agassi, who was the best tennis player.

Halliday defines and describes marked Themes as when any element other than the Subject functions as Theme. The most frequently used marked Theme is an adverbial group or prepositional phrase which functions as Adjunct in the clause. This type of Theme is frequently used in genres which use place or time as a point of departure. An example of an adverbial group as Theme is shown below.

**Strangely**, he did not cry.

The most marked type of Theme in English is the Complement (Ideational Theme), a nominal group which has the potential to be subject. They are not common in English, especially in written English. Under normal circumstances, we do not place an object at the initial position of a clause, for example:

**This exercise** I created.

However, it may be common in the spoken form with a shared context or in a face to face interaction.

Themes may be either ‘simple’ or ‘multiple’ (Halliday 1985:41, 1994:40). A simple Theme may consist of two or more elements forming a
single complex element (a group complex or a phrase complex). This is shown in the example below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the gym or outside the house</th>
<th>he can exercise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rheme</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multiple Themes, on the other hand are constituted when part of the clause functioning as Theme has a further internal structure of its own. The Theme may incorporate elements from all three metafunctions – Ideational, Interpersonal and Textual. Although Interpersonal and Textual Themes are not always present, there is always an Ideational element in the Theme, which represents a process, a participant in a process (person, thing, institution) or a circumstance attendant on that process (time, place, manner), (Halliday 1985). The example below illustrates the use of multiple Themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Now</th>
<th>Mei Lin</th>
<th>you</th>
<th>must come for the meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>textual</td>
<td>interpersonal</td>
<td>topical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Rheme</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The theme in the example above consists of three metafunctions which are the Topical, Interpersonal and Textual.

Halliday terms this Ideational element as the ‘topical Theme’, which corresponds fairly well to the ‘Topic’ of Mathesius’ initial formulation. A simple Theme consists only of the topical Theme, while a multiple Theme consists of an unmarked form of Textual^Interpersonal^Ideational (Halliday 1985).
Since Information Structure is realized through intonation choices, it will not be investigated in this study. This study will examine only the system of Theme through the grammar of the clause.

2.4 Text Analysis

In recent years, various researchers have contributed to the study of textuality of texts by analysing their Theme and Rheme structures and their thematic patterns and developments in texts (Halliday 1968, 1985; Danes 1974; Firbas 1974, 1992; Berry 1989; Fries 1981; Fries and Francis 1992 and Martin 1992). There is no doubt about the usefulness of the functional thematic structure framework as an analytical tool for applied linguistics.

However, Fries (1995) states that even though much progress has been made in the field of text linguistics, the framework for text analysis and the analysis of clauses is not perfect. This is clearly seen in Halliday's words that 'our understanding of the meaning system is itself very deficient; so the face of a grammar turned towards semantics is still hardly illuminated' (1994:xxxv).

Fries (1981) questions the relation between Theme choice and method of development in a text and the role Theme plays in identifying elements of text structure. This research also hopes to find the relation between Theme choice and method of development and the role Theme plays in identifying elements of text structure in sports texts.
In order to find a solution to his questions, Fries (1981) explores the relationship in Thematic content within short texts. In his research, he makes two hypotheses and two additional hypotheses were added since 1981 (1995). His hypotheses were: "i) that different patterns of Thematic progression correlate with different genres, ii) that the experiential content of Themes correlates with what is perceived to be the method of development of a text or text segment, iii) that the experiential content of Themes correlates with different genres, and iv) the experiential content of the Themes of a text correlates with different generic elements of structure within a text" (Fries 1995:319).

Since Fries's research in 1981, several studies have explored the third hypothesis in greater detail. Fries finds the experiential content of the Themes vary with genre types and the number of times that certain meanings are expressed thematically also vary with genre types. Xiao's (1991) research on thematic selection in fables and recipes concurs with Fries' findings that the experiential content of the clause Themes correlates with genre type.

In contrast to Fries and Xiao' results, Francis' (1989, 1990) results support hypothesis 3 only partially. Francis's comparison of Themes in news reports, editorials and letters of complaint finds that the Themes used in the news reports differ clearly from the Themes used in the other two genres. However, when the Themes of the Letters were compared with those of the Editorials, the results did not differ significantly. This finding conflicts with the results in Martin's (1989) report. Martin finds significant differences between
the experiential content of the Themes of hortatory and analytical exposition. The results varied appear to be according to which genres are explored and the size of the data examined.

Berry (1989) studies children’s writing from the perspective of two genres which seems to be closely related to more general types of writing which are important in the workplace: the guidebook (informational writing) and the travel brochure (promotional writing). In her study, she reports that not all children are able to use all thematic options in a manner appropriate to one of these genres.

Ghadessy (1995) examines thematic development and its relationship to registers and genres. He deals with the grammatical and lexico-semantic properties of clause Themes in a number of written sports commentaries. The results of his study are compared and contrasted with studies on thematic development in other registers and genres. The findings indicate that Themes in written sports commentaries are more like Themes in narratives and obituaries and different from Themes in programmes and expository prose. The findings too confirm that there is a definite relationship between Theme selection and elements of structure in a genre. This study hopes to find out whether the sports texts analysed exhibit a similar relationship between Theme selection and elements of structure in a genre.

Rashidi (1991) investigates the Theme/Rheme structures of a Dari (Afghan Persian) narrative and how they contribute to the flow of the discourse. He finds that the theme pattern tends to have a linear development
of the message and Theme does not coincide with first position, nor does it necessarily coincide with Subject or Given. Rashidi’s results prove that other languages do not function in the same way as the English Theme-Rheme structure.

Ventola (1995) analyses thematic development in academic texts and their translations. She finds a close relationship between context and text. Her result concurs with Halliday’s (1978:114) findings that a "sociological semantics implies not so much a general description of the semantic system of a language but rather a set of context-specific semantic descriptions, each one characterizing the meaning potential that is typically associated with a given situation type”.

Whittaker (1995) analyses the textual and the ideational Themes in eight academic articles on economics and linguistics. She finds similarities in different disciplines in terms of the number and the realizations of textual and interpersonal Themes. There are over twice the number of textual Themes to interpersonal Themes and both types frequently show metaphorical realizations. Interpersonal Themes are not realized as adverbs but instead are expressed by means of a clause or metaphorical realizations, for example, *It is, however, clear that …… can be replaced with an adverb clearly. In both disciplines, about thirty per cent of Ideational Themes are realized by Circumstantials. The same percentage involves relational processes. Relational processes are usually realized by a linking verb such as be, have, seem, appear or become. An example of a relational process clause is
created here to illustrate the point mentioned. *John is a tennis player.* The disciplines differed as to number and types of material processes. Material processes express an action or an activity carried out by a doer or an agent, as shown in *John played well.* It also points to differences involving genre. However, in this study the texts used are non-academic texts and from a different discipline – sports.

Drury (1991) examines students' summary writing at university level. She compares summaries written by native speakers and those of second language users of English in terms of theme, transitivity and grammatical metaphor as part of her analysis. In her study, she finds that native speakers' summaries contain more strategic use of conjunctions, better selection of non-projecting reporting structures and show skillful manipulation of grammatical metaphor compared to second language users. Examples of grammatical metaphor can be found in Whittaker (1995).

Christie (1989), analyses students' literature essays written by secondary school students. She highlights the weaknesses of the text by examining the types of processes, the conjunctions and the range of topical Themes selected by the students. She finds that students do not use the topical Themes effectively in their essays.

In quite a similar study, Kim Luan (1993) also analyses students' literature test essays written by secondary school students from a top-ranking school and a low-ranking school in Singapore. He compares their essays in the use of Theme, Transitivity, Interpersonal Elements and Grammatical
Metaphors. In his study, he finds that most students from both top-ranking and low-ranking schools have problems in creating successful literature essay texts. This proves Systemic Functional Linguistics to be a useful tool in describing, interpreting and evaluating a piece of text.

Nwogu – Bloor (1991) investigate variations of thematic organization of information in three related types of medical texts. They find that there are differences between professional and popular texts in the distribution of thematic progression patterns and in the lexico-syntactic realization of theme. According to them these differences can be due to factors such as purpose and audience.

Azirah (1996) in her study on Syntactic Choices and Text Organisation also discovers that texts are influenced by the culture and audience. Her study concurs with Nwogu – Bloor (1991) that text organisation is closely related to culture and context.

2.5 Conclusion

Chapter Two has given an overview of the related literature and related studies carried out using thematic structure framework discussed in Systemic Functional Linguistics. The framework will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter three and Chapter four.