



Textual Metafunction in Taylor Swift's Graduation Speech 2022

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Abstract

Graduation speech is one of the particular speeches that graduates or teachers in the graduating field are required to give (Assidiqi & Cahyono, 2023). In this case, Taylor Swift is trusted to give the commencement speech because she is the recipient of the Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts degree awarded by NYU (New York University) in appreciation of her outstanding achievements in the music industry and her lasting influence on popular culture. Therefore, this study aims to analyze textual metafunction realization in the speech, also examining the thematic progression that make clauses coherent and cohesive. This research employs descriptive qualitative method within Systemic Functional Linguistics framework. From the analysis that has been done, 341 clauses were found in Taylor Swift's Graduation Speech 2022. The most dominant theme type is topical theme, which is found in every clause in the speech. Following by textual theme, which is found in 115 clauses. The least theme type found is interpersonal theme, which is only found in 15 clauses. This research also found the use of Thematic progression pattern in Taylor Swift's graduation speech. Three main patterns of thematic progression namely constant theme pattern, linear/zig-zag pattern, multiple rheme pattern are used in the speech.

Article History

Received: 04-02-2025

Revised: 06-02-2025

Accepted: 10-03-2025

Keywords:

*Graduation speech,
Textual metafunction,
Thematic Progression,
Theme-rheme,
SFL*



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INTRODUCTION

Speech is a one-way speaking activity in front of an audience that aims to convey thoughts, ideas or information using effective word selection and language that can influence and benefit the audience (Arsjad, 1988; Wisanggeni, 2011). In speech the use of language tends to be formal because speeches are often used in official events like conferences, seminars, commemorations, upgrading, and other events. Graduation is also a formal event that uses speeches in it. The graduation speech is one of the particular speeches that graduates or teachers in the graduating field are required to give (Assidiqi & Cahyono, 2023). In this case, Taylor Swift is trusted to give the commencement speech because she is the recipient of the Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts degree awarded by NYU (New York University) in appreciation of her outstanding achievements in the music industry and her lasting influence on popular culture.

Therefore, this research will focus on analyzing the graduation speech delivered by Taylor Swift.

Taylor Swift is a well-known singer-songwriter from the United States. According to Billboard.com, on November 11, 2006, she made her debut on the Billboard 200 chart. Her first Hot 100-charting single, "Tim McGraw," from the album's first single, was released on September 23, 2006. In 2007, she became the youngest recipient of the BMI Songwriter of the Year award. She accepted nominations for Best New Artist at the 50th Grammy accolades and won accolades at the CMAs, ACMs, and AMAs (Taylor Swift Museum, 2021). Grammy.com reported that Taylor Swift created history in 2024 when she became the first and only artist to win the Grammy for Album of the Year four times. Swift's activism and charitable endeavors are also part of her private life. She has used her platform such as award acceptance speeches, social media posts, and song lyrics to increase understanding of political and social issues (James, 2023). Often, Taylor Swift has continuously conveyed motivating and inspirational messages, particularly to young people.

On May 18, 2022, New York University (NYU) awarded Taylor Swift an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts in appreciation of her exceptional accomplishments to the music industry and her enduring influence on popular culture. According to the institution, Swift received the degree because she is "one of the most prolific and celebrated artists of her generation". Honorary Doctorate itself are honorary degrees awarded by a university or another institution to recognize an individual's accomplishments to a specific industry or subject. With the awarding of the degree, Taylor Swift is also trusted to give commencement speech at 2022 New York University graduation ceremony. Therefore, to analyze Taylor Swift's speech in this research, it would be more appropriate to use textual metafunction, which is one of the metafunction of Systemic Functional Linguistics.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a theory of language that was first established by Michael Halliday. The SFL approach views language's grammar as interconnected sets of meaning-making possibilities (Halliday, 2014), SFL studies not sentences but clauses. There are three metafunction in SFL, the first metafunction is textual metafunction, in which words are arranged to suit the context. The second is interpersonal metafunction; people communicate with each other through language. Last but not least is the experiential metafunction, which discusses how people experience the world through language (Thompson, 2014). Of the three metafunctions, this research will only focus on textual metafunction.

Textual metafunction according to Eggins (2004), the language used depends on signals that indicate cohesive relations between the clause, its context, and its purpose, so all language will somehow encode textual meaning. In textual metafunction, the system called Theme and it is realized in structure which is include two main constituents known as theme and rheme. The term "theme" is put in the first part of the clause, and "rheme" is the part of the clause that developed the theme (Halliday, 2014). It can be identifying three different types of elements of clause structure that can get to be Theme: topical (experiential) elements, interpersonal elements and textual element (Eggins, 2004).

Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) stated that when a clause concludes with the first constituent which are process, circumstance, or participant, then the theme is topical. Topical theme could be unmarked and unmarked. Unmarked theme is when the Theme as Subject, (Thompson, 2014). It is also started with nominal group, nominal group complex, and

embedded clause. Marked theme is when an Adjunct is used as Theme (Halliday, 2014) in (Thompson, 2014) books. It is also a theme that is something other than the Subject. It happens if the clause started with adverbial groups and prepositional phrases. Interpersonal Theme is used when a constituent that would classify as Mood (but not as Transitivity) appears at the start of a clause (Eggins, 2004). The interpersonal theme is the theme that occurred before the Topical Theme, it can be modal/comment adjunct, vocative, and finite verbal operator (yes/no interrogative). When the writer or speaker makes clear how a clause relates to the surrounding discourse, it is known as the textual theme. It can be continuative, conjunction, and conjunctive adjunct that occur before interpersonal theme and topical theme.

The distribution of theme to both the cohesion and the coherence of the text can be uncovered, one of the ways is by examining the method of development (Eggins, 2004). Three primary thematic development patterns are as follows: multiple rheme pattern, zigzag, or linear, and reiteration or constant theme. Constant theme pattern entails the development of themes by means of a particular theme's repetition. The first clause's theme is selected to serve as the theme for the following clauses (Eggins, 2004; Paltridge, 2012). Linear theme, known as a zigzag pattern. It is a pattern in which the theme of the subsequent clause develops from a subject matter in the preceding clause's rheme (Eggins, 2004; Paltridge, 2012). Multiple rheme pattern, the theme of one clause introduces a number of different pieces of information from rheme of the preceding clause, each of which is then picked up and made Theme in subsequent clauses (Eggins, 2004).

In conducting this research, the researcher used previous research related to textual metafunction entitled *Textual Meaning Analysis on the Queen's Coronavirus Broadcast: "We Will Meet Again"* written by Larasati Ayu Damayanti, Th. Cicik Shopia B., dan Ririn Ambarini (Damayanti, 2021). The research identifies the types of theme and the most dominant type of theme of the speech in the message of the Queen Elizabeth II's Broadcast about the Coronavirus pandemic in United Kingdom.

Most of the previous research related to textual metafunction is lack in examines speeches from entertainment industry figures especially singer, most previous research examined speeches from political figures, educational figures, and so on. Therefore, this research intends to choose Taylor Swift's speech to study. This research not only tries to analyze how textual metafunction realized in the speech, but also examines the thematic progression that makes the clauses coherent and cohesive.

METHODS

This research employs descriptive qualitative method within Systemic Functional Linguistics framework. Aspers & Corte (2021) stated that a cyclical process, looks closely at the phenomena being examined to make significant distinctions in order to improve understanding within the scientific community known as qualitative research. Descriptive qualitative method was employed because it offers a detailed description and study of a single entity. The ideal design is a descriptive-qualitative one as it is essentially interpretative (Creswell, 2009). Since main purpose of this study is to analyze, and interpret the data to examine how textual metafunction realized, dominant type of theme and thematic progression were used in speech, a descriptive qualitative study was considered appropriate.

The source of the data that used in this on-going research is Taylor Swift's graduation speech at the 2022 New York University Graduation Ceremony. The source of data comes in two forms. The first form is a Youtube video of Taylor Swift's graduation speech at the 2022 New York university graduation ceremony, the video entitled "NYU's 2022 Commencement Speaker Taylor Swift. The second form is a transcript of the speech that taken from Rolling Stone, the article entitled "Read Taylor Swift's Inspiring Speech for NYU's Class of 22".

This research used document analysis as a technique to collect data. Document analysis is a subset of qualitative research in which the researcher interprets documents to give an evaluation topic context and voice (Bowen 2009). Therefore, the primary data in this research were collected from Taylor Swift's graduation speech 2022. After the data has been collected, the researcher analyze the data in Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. The researcher analyzes the data based on Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), Thompson (2014), and Eggins (2004) books to find out how textual metafunction realization and the most dominant type of theme. After that, the researcher try to identify the thematic progression or theme pattern using Eggins (2004) and Paltridge (2012) books. In the end, the researcher will make a conclusion by explaining findings and the results of the analysis, the realization of textual metafunction, the most dominant type of theme, theme patterns that occur in Taylor Swift's graduation speech.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Textual Metafunction Realization in Taylor Swift's Graduation Speech 2022

Table 1. The use of theme types in Taylor Swift's Graduation Speech 2022

No	Types of theme	Frequency
1.	Topical	341
2.	Interpersonal	15
3.	Textual	115

In Taylor Swift's Graduation Speech 2022, this research found 341 clauses, where topical theme is found in every clause making it the most dominant theme type in the speech, followed by textual theme found in 115 clauses, then the least theme type found is interpersonal theme which is only found in 15 clauses.

As mentioned before in the previous section, in textual metafunction, the system called Theme and it is realized in structure which is include two main constituents known as theme and rheme. The term "theme" is put in the first part of the clause, and "rheme" is the part of the clause that developed the theme (Halliday, 2014). However, this research will only present some data of textual metafunction realization in Taylor Swift's graduation speech 2022 which includes 3 types of theme; topical (marked and unmarked), interpersonal, and textual theme, it can be seen as follows;

Data 1

I never got to have the normal college experience, per se.

The realization of textual metafunction showed in data (1), the theme *I* is unmarked topical theme, because *I* is nominal group and after topical theme is rheme. Thus, the rheme is *never got to have the normal college experience, per se*.

Data 2

I went to public high school until tenth grade

From the data above, it can be seen *I* is the subject in the clause and it is unmarked topical theme, *went to public high school until tenth grade* is the rheme.

Data 3

life can be heavy

The realization of textual metafunction showed in data (3), the theme *life* is unmarked topical theme, because *life* is nominal group and after topical theme is rheme. Thus, the rheme is *can be heavy*.

Data 4

especially if you try to carry it all at once

The data above starts with *especially* which is a modal adjunct, as mentioned in the previous section modal adjunct shows speaker's judgement and it is include in interpersonal theme. *If* is conjunction which can be identified as textual theme. *You* is unmarked topical theme because it is a nominal group. The rest of the clause is rheme.

Data 5

But I really can't complain about not having a normal college experience to you

From the data (5) shows that *but* is textual theme because *but* is a conjunction. *I* is topical theme (unmarked) because *I* is a nominal group and, in this clause, acts as a subject. The rheme of the clause is *really can't complain about not having a normal college experience to you*.

Data 6

because you went to NYU during a global pandemic

Based on data 6, there are two types of theme, in the clause *because* is conjunction which include in textual theme, and *you* is nominal group also the subject of the clause. Therefore, it can be identified as unmarked topical theme. After the topical theme is rheme. The rheme is *went to NYU during a global pandemic*.

Data 7

What I mean by that is knowing what things to keep,

What I mean by that is an embedded clause which include in topical theme (unmarked), and the rest of the clause is the rheme.

Data 8

For the entirety of 2012 I dressed like a 1950s housewife.

The data above shows that the theme is topical theme (marked) *because For the entirety of 2012* is a prepositional phrase, and *I dressed like a 1950s housewife* is the rheme of the clause.

Data 9

you're probably doing or wearing something right now

Data 9 shows that the theme is *you* (unmarked topical theme) because *you* acts as a subject in the clause and also nominal group, the rest of the clause is the rheme.

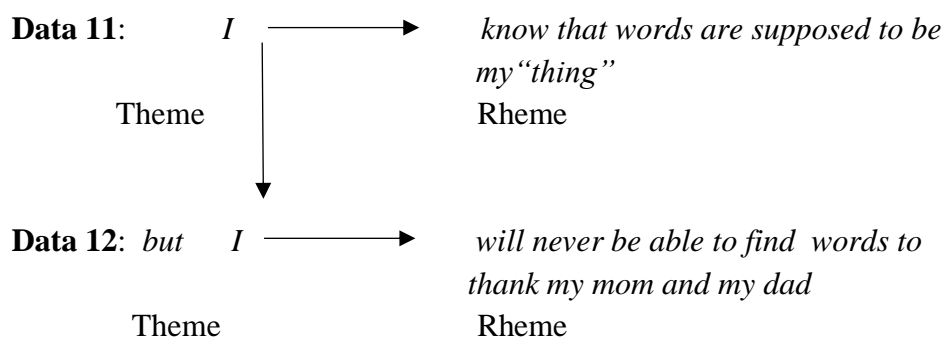
Data 10

that you will look back on later

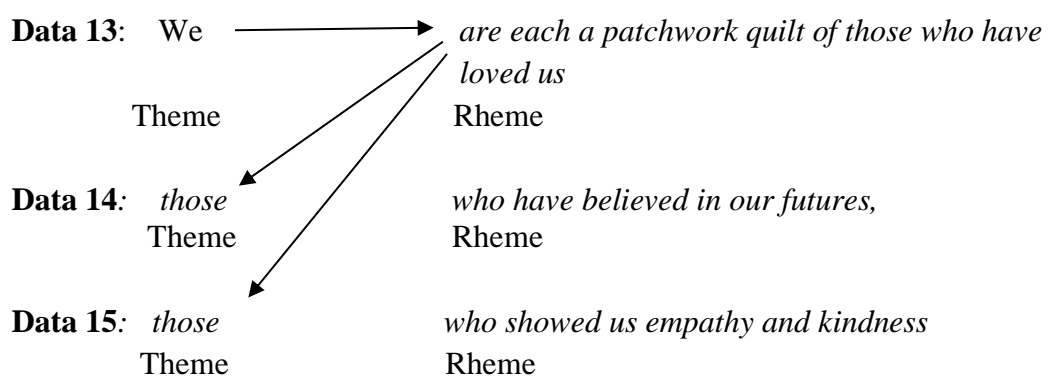
Based on data 10, there are two types of theme, in the clause *that* acts as conjunction which include in textual theme, and *you* is nominal group also the subject of the clause. Therefore, it can be identified as unmarked topical theme. After the topical theme is rheme. The rheme is *will look back on later*.

Thematic Progression Used in Taylor Swift Graduation Speech 2022

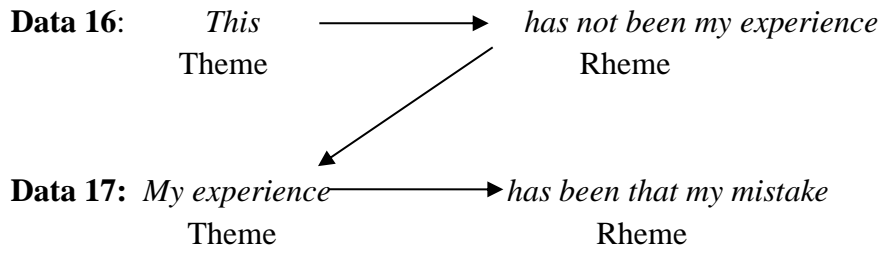
According to Paltridge (2012), the term "thematic progression" describes how theme develops and how theme in a clause might borrow or reiterate the meaning of a previous theme or rheme. Three primary thematic development patterns are as follows: multiple rheme pattern, zigzag, or linear, and reiteration or constant theme. In this study, the use of the three primary patterns of thematic progression was found, the following data presentation can be seen which represents the use of the three primary patterns;



Based on the analysis above, the pattern from both of the clauses is constant theme pattern. It shows the theme *I* from data 11 is repeated in the next clause as a theme. It indicates that by using *I* as the theme repeatedly, the addresser aimed to create cohesion. A repeated theme created by the same participant gives the text a clear focus (Eggins, 2004), it also indicates *I* is the primary topic of the clause.



Multiple rheme pattern used in the clauses above. The pattern occurred when the theme of one clause introduces a number of different pieces of information from rheme of the preceding clause, each of which is then picked up and made Theme in subsequent clauses, it is combines both linear and constant patterns. (Eggins, 2004). From the clauses above the rheme *those* in data 13 is repeated in the data 14 and data 15 as theme. It indicates the theme *those* is develop and become the primary topic of the text.



Based on data 16 and 17, the pattern identified from both of the data above is a zig-zag/linear pattern. According to Eggins (2004), in the text, the zig-zag pattern achieves cohesion by introducing new information. It gives the text a cumulative progression. The new information is that the theme is taken from the rheme in the previous clause. The analysis above shows that the theme *My experience* in data 17 is taken from the rheme in data 16, it shows that in data 17 the main topic is different from the previous clause and provides new information about the main topic in the clause.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis that has been done, 341 clauses were found in Taylor Swift's Graduation Speech 2022. The most dominant theme type is topical theme, which is found in every clause in the speech. The topical theme itself is often a nominal group or subject indicating that the text concentrates on explaining, and conveying factual information related to the main topic. In this case, Taylor Swift in her graduation speech gives a lot of informative and inspirational messages to the graduates about her experiences in pursuing her dreams, the life lessons she learnt during her career, etc. The next theme type is textual theme, which is found in 115 clauses. textual theme itself is a link between clauses that makes one clause and another cohesive. This shows that Taylor Swift is a speaker who cares about the logical flow and cohesiveness in her speech. Then, the least theme type found is interpersonal theme, which is only found in 15 clauses. This shows a lack of direct interaction with the audience or the speaker's opinions, as it is more orientated towards narratives about life journeys, lessons from personal experiences, and inspirational advice for graduates. Swift discusses the importance of embracing change, facing mistakes, and persevering in the face of life's challenges. She shares reflections on her career journey, difficult decisions, and how these experiences have shaped her.

This research also found the use of Thematic progression pattern in Taylor Swift's graduation speech. Three main patterns of thematic progression namely constant theme pattern, linear/zig-zag pattern, multiple rheme pattern are used in the speech. The use of constant theme shows that Taylor Swift can maintain focus on the main theme, creating continuity in her speech. Linear/zig-zag theme pattern shows Taylor Swift can develop a logical idea, where the rheme of the previous clause becomes the theme of the next clause, reflecting the speech is progressive. The multiple rheme pattern also used in this speech shows that Swift is able to manage and develop several ideas at once, reflecting her ability to distribute attention on various related topics. The combination of these three patterns reflects that the speech is well organized, rich in information, and able to direct the audience through the narrative. In this research, there is limitation experienced by researcher, it happens in separating speech text into clauses, because there are some words that are not included in the 3 theme types, researchers hope that future research will be more thorough in classifying a text into clauses.

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