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AN SFG STUDY ON MARKED THEMES IN ENGLISH JOURNAL ARTICLES ON FINANCE

Nguyễn Thị Thanh Hoà¹

Abstract: *The systemic functional grammar perspective defines a theme as the message's beginning point that helps to create a cohesive discourse with the goal of expressing a communicative event. The two types of themes: marked and unmarked are analyzed and categorized. A theme is labeled marked when it begins with adverbs, conjunctions, conjunctive adjuncts, and modal adjuncts, and unmarked when it coincides with the subject. This paper aims to analyze linguistic features of marked themes used in English journal articles on finance to convey communicative functions between writers and readers. A comprehensively descriptive analysis is conducted on a total of 50 English articles randomly selected from 10 Scopus-indexed journals on finance with ISSN index in order to answer the following specific questions: (1) What types of marked themes used in English journal articles on finance?, (2) What are they used for? The findings can provide practical suggestions to Vietnamese authors for enhancing the linguistic quality of their papers.*

Keywords: *SFG, cohesive discourse, theme types, journal articles on finance, academic writing*

Tóm tắt: *Theo quan điểm của Ngữ pháp chức năng hệ thống đề ngữ được định nghĩa là điểm bắt đầu của thông điệp, giúp tạo ra một diễn ngôn có tính chất gắn kết nhằm mục đích thể hiện một sự kiện giao tiếp. Đề ngữ bao gồm có hai loại đó là đề đánh dấu và đề không đánh dấu. Đề ngữ được gọi là đánh dấu khi đề ngữ bắt đầu bằng các trạng ngữ, từ nối, phụ ngữ liên hợp và phụ ngữ tình thái; đề ngữ được gọi là không đánh dấu khi đề ngữ trùng với chủ ngữ. Nghiên cứu này được tiến hành nhằm phân tích các đặc điểm ngôn ngữ của đề đánh dấu trong các bài báo tạp chí chuyên ngành tài chính tiếng Anh trong việc thực hiện các chức năng giao tiếp giữa người viết và người đọc. Tổng số 50 bài báo chuyên ngành tài chính tiếng Anh đăng trên các tạp chí uy tín có chỉ số ISSN và nằm trong danh mục Scopus được chọn lọc ngẫu nhiên. Bài viết này trả lời cho các câu hỏi sau đây: (1) Các loại đề đánh dấu được sử dụng trong bài báo tạp chí tài chính là gì?, (2) Các loại đề đánh dấu này được sử dụng với mục đích gì? Kết quả nghiên cứu phần nào đưa ra các đề xuất mang tính thực tiễn dành cho các tác giả Việt Nam nhằm cải thiện chất lượng về mặt ngôn ngữ trong các bài viết của mình.*

Từ khoá: *Ngữ pháp chức năng hệ thống, diễn ngôn gắn kết, các loại đề ngữ, tạp chí tài chính, viết học thuật*

1. INTRODUCTION

Scholars observed a few scientific studies on the definition of themes. The element that acts as “the starting point for the message: it is what the clause is going to be about,” according to Halliday (1985) [10], is known as the theme. It is acknowledged that the research of text development methods benefits from this kind of approach. According to Fries, the information included in the topics of a passage's different sentences corresponds with the passage's development strategy

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(Fries, 1983) [7]. The ongoing selection of themes during the discourse generation process is not arbitrary; rather, it demonstrates how the main ideas of the discourse are organized to create a cohesive discourse.

The identification of the theme is typically dependent on order; the theme is developed in the rheme, which occurs after the element that appears first in the phrase. The term "Thematic Progression," first proposed by Czechoslovakian linguist Frantisek Danes (1974), refers to the way that themes and rheme development drive the text ahead and maintain discourse continuity [4]. Since then, studies on the state of themes, their evolution, etc., in various discourses have been conducted. Francis (1990) primarily examined the selection of participants and procedures as the theme of clauses and contrasted the transitivity of news items, editorials, and letters from newspapers [6]. In order to identify the characteristics of theme progression patterns, Nwogu (1989) examined medical texts [22]. Yu Yu-guo and Zhao Jian-cheng (1993) [26] investigated the features of theme progression patterns in English auto ads. Martinez (2003) examined the theme selection in the method and discussion portions of scholarly journal articles on biology [20].

Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen (2015) stated that the construction of text—the presentation of ideational and interpersonal meanings as information that may be communicated by speaker and listener in context, which is the focus of the textual metafunction. In this way, theme, a resource for choosing a point of departure and establishing a context for a clause, is one of the main textual systems [3].

Hallidaian (2004) model of thematic organization figured out that themes are classified into two types naming marked and unmarked themes. In this study, the unmarked themes are analysed at the level of clause rather than at the sentence level because the study aimed to identify thematic structures in English journal articles on finance [13].

2. THEORETICAL BASE

2.1. Systemic Functional Grammar

Systemic functional grammar, according to Halliday (1987) [11], organizes structures around text and describes language as a system of relationships, with the emergence of structures to realize these ties, using semantics as the basis. Functional systemic grammar was founded with the intention of facilitating human communication by delivering a certain meaning. According to the author, in order for language to convey specific meanings, it must be appropriately constructed and perform the following three meta-functions:

2.1.1. *Experiential meta-function*

- Experiential meta-function is aimed at conveying information and exchanging contents and messages between speakers and listeners. Furthermore, events, situations, and relevant entities are described by this meta-function. The transitivity system, which is composed of processes, circumstances (optional), and participants (obligatory), is used to form the structure of experiential meaning that varies according to variations in language use. In this way, the ideational meaning reflects the field of discourse and is realized through process types, participant types, and circumstance types.

Furthermore, Halliday (1971) contended that the goal of transitivity systems is to communicate ideas in a way that represents experiential meta-function. More precisely, speakers and writers use language to express a range of experiences about the world through the transitivity system, a grammatical system that explains the world of experience through six different types of processes: material, mental, relational, verbal, existential, and behavioral. In particular, certain process types use one or more verbs and one or more adjectives that correspond to the people or situations that took place during the event or incident. Action processes that show an entity's capacity for action are known as material processes [9].

2.1.2. Interpersonal meta-function

This function plays a key role in establishing relationship among members in the communication community in order to build relationships among members of the communication community. The speaker must convey personal characteristics, the social groupings they belong to, and their register in order to influence the opinions and attitudes of others in order to achieve communicative goals in a particular communication scenario. This function affects the modality system and mood. To fulfil this function, language is intended to connect members of a specific social community, it is feasible to argue that interpersonal meta fully reflects social traits.

2.1.3. Textual meta-function

Sentences and words must be combined in this grammatical function to produce a coherent spoken or written paragraph. This metafunction executes a message using the Theme-Rheme structural paradigm. In his perspective, the rheme from which the topic emerges is the surviving element, and the element to which the clause is attached and which forms the beginning of the message is the theme.

2.2. Themes

Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen (2015) stated that the construction of text—the presentation of ideational and interpersonal meanings as information that may be communicated by speaker and listener in context, which is the focus of the textual metafunction. In this way, theme, a resource for choosing a point of departure and establishing a context for a clause, is one of the main textual systems [3].

Halliday (1994, p. 44) stated that *Unmarked theme* is “an element that occupies the point of departure position of the clause and conflates with the grammatical subject” [13]. For example, In this light, identity is not fixed or static rather that it is changeable.

In other studies, Halliday, M.A.K (2014) believed that themes are so-called unmarked themes when they coincide with the subject and the themes are so-called marked themes when they start with adverbs, conjunctive devices, conjunctive adjuncts and modal adjuncts [16]. In addition, Halliday (1989) argued that there are two categories of themes in English: marked themes and unmarked themes. An unmarked theme is named when the subject of a clause is the theme, but a marked theme is named when the theme is not the subject of a phrase. Conjunctive and modal adjuncts are used in this instance to identify the marked theme, which gives the text coherence and cohesiveness and expresses the authors' opinions. Furthermore, in “*Language, Context, and Text: Aspects of Language*

in a *Social-Semiotic Perspective*”, Halliday (1989) believed in textual meta-function acts on systems of cohesion and reference in which reference is a participant or a circumstance in a particular location which refers to the elements that follow it while cohesion in a text is aimed at creating links in a text at any units from the smallest like words to the largest like clause [12].

Halliday (1985) defines thematic structure primarily for clause which is composed of Theme and Rheme and is one of the means to achieve the cohesion of text [10]. As a key component of clause, Theme is defined as what is being talked about, the point of departure for the clause as a message, the remainder of the message that develops Theme is called Rhyme. “The major function Theme serves is to locate and orient the clause within its context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.64); it is the ground from which the clause is taking off and coincidentally creating textual meaning, establishing interaction between readers and writers, and fulfilling the social purpose of a discourse [13].

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Regarding the summaries of theoretical foundation, it is concluded that the definition of theme is studied in numerous aspects so that textual meta-function is seen to take an effect in a communication community.

2.3. Scientific Discourses

Economic scientific discourse, according to Warren, J. Samuels (1989) is any text that describes, interprets, and explains economic topics using language [26]. The goal of scientific discourse is to introduce concepts, prove hypotheses, and explain laws of existence, development, and interactions among other phenomena. As a result, the language utilized to make broad arguments is impersonal, impartial, and emotionless, Galperin (1997) [8]. Meanwhile, economic scientific discourses are studies that employ scientific procedures to anticipate, control, experiment, and produce, and language communicates the objectivity and specificity of mathematics, Dudley-Evans & Henderson (1990) [5]. McCloskey (1987) is another academic who argued that economics should be acknowledged and applied when creating mathematical models, evaluating statistics, and arguing about markets [22]. To strengthen their arguments, they employ rhetorical strategies including analogy, comparison, and metaphor. Therefore, we can observe that scientifically, economic discourses in general and journal articles on finance in particular are experimental examinations of production and reproduction processes that seek to establish economic hypotheses and make economic forecasts.

As being a scientific subject, economic discourses employ mathematical terminology and technical jargon in a precise, objective, and concrete manner. It can be seen that scientific discourses on economics, in general, and journal articles on finance in particular, involve the experimental investigation of production and reproduction processes with the goal of establishing economic hypotheses and making economic forecasts. Economists and linguists are interested in the type of economic discourse seen in journal papers about finance. In reality, economists like McCloskey, D. (1987) [22], Dudley-Evans, Tony & Henderson, Willie (1990) [5] have conducted numerous studies on scientific books on economics. Specifically, McCloskey (1987) examined

economic publications from the viewpoints of linguists and economists. According to his research, the author recommended a shift in economic texts and stated that the communication community needs guidance to comprehend economic discourses. Therefore, economists were interested in his study of rhetorical techniques in economic texts which focused on the use of economic metaphors to convey specific information. In order to enhance clarity in scholarly language, McCloskey also brought up dependability and persuasiveness in economic discourses. It might be claimed that McCloskey's study findings have greatly benefited applied linguistics and education professionals in addition to economics. Likewise, McCloskey, Dudley Evan, and Henderson proposed that carefully considered economic journal papers start at the phrase level.

2.4. Characteristics of economic journal articles

According to Bhatia (1993), journal articles in economics have a universal structure that includes an introduction, body development, conclusion, style, content, specific readers, communication purpose, and typical linguistic traits [2]. Scholars and economic experts employed by a particular organization write these articles (Swales, 1987,2005). The purpose of these journal articles is to share research discoveries in economic fields with specific economists, economists, and economics students [24], [25]. Economics seeks to share research findings on economics-related topics with readers who are economics researchers, instructors, and students. According to Halliday (1987), language in economics has an abstract quality when written, and the "expert grammar" method is usually used to clarify significant issues in economics or the use of abstract language such as metaphor, metonymy, personification, nominalization, and the terminology or system of symbols in mathematical models.

3. METHODOLOGY

Statistical methods are employed to collect the occurrence of adverbs, conjunctions, conjunctive adjuncts, and modal adjuncts which signal marked themes in English journal articles on finance. Accordingly, discussions are presented to state the basic linguistic properties and characteristics used in English journal articles on finance.

Data for this study are collected from English journals on finance in numerous financial sectors such as corporate finance, tax, import and export, etc. These journals were selected because of their index in prestigious journals, e.g. Journal of Corporate Finance, Journal of Banking Finance, International Review of Financial Analysis, Review of Finance. The 50 journal articles selected as data for this study were connected to the latest issues up to the time when this study began. From these journal articles, 1,324 clauses are examined to identify marked themes and their functions.

4. FINDINGS

The table below indicates the number and frequency of occurrence of marked themes in English journal articles on finance.

Table 1. Distribution of Marked Themes and Unmarked Themes in English Journal Articles on Finance

No.	Theme Types	Frequency	Percentage
1	Marked	530/1.324	40%
2	Unmarked	794/1.324	60%

The research results indicate that marked themes occurred 530 times in the total of 1.324 clauses, accounting 40% of themes used in English journal articles on finance.

According to Halliday's theory of systematic functional grammar, marked themes are illustrated by the Theme-Rheme model with the following formula:

Marked Theme: Marked Theme-Rheme

Marked themes in English journal articles on finance

In this paper, marked themes in English journal articles on finance are discussed and analyzed. Marked themes are identified with the following linguistic components

**Adverbs in English journal articles on finance*

In his study, Halliday defined marked themes as those which are signalled with adverbs of location and time such as *in the corner, today, suddenly, at night...* in the following examples

Example 1:

Marked Theme	Rheme
Over the last two decades or so,	the volume of empirical research has grown significantly relative to that of theoretical research.

Example 2:

Marked Theme	Rheme
For about twenty years	the empirical literatures on finance-growth nexus and on financial crises developed in parallel and without much intention

Example 3:

Marked Theme	Rheme
Today	it has clearly taken on a much more systemic role as debt is taken out for everyday consumption, not just in moments of desperation

The analysis of these examples indicates that adverbs of time such as *Over the last two decades or so, For about 20 years, Today* are marked themes of the clause in order to emphasize essential information in the clause such as time and location which draw readers and listeners' attention toward the point of time in financial issues.

**Conjunctive adjuncts and Modal adjuncts in English journal articles on finance*

In order to facilitate communication between writers and speakers and readers, conjunctive and modal adjuncts are surveyed and analyzed in English journal articles on finance to convey readers or listeners' communication in assessment, forecast, and justification. A statistical table of the different types of modal conjunctive and modal adjuncts in English journal articles on finance.

Table 1. Conjunctive adjuncts and Modal adjuncts in English journal articles on finance

Types	Conjunctive adjuncts	Modal adjuncts
1	Summative	Probability
2	Additive	Usuality

3	Adversative	Typicality
4	Comparative	Obviousness
5	Time	Opinion
6	Causal	Evaluation
7	Concessive	Persuasion

- *Conjunctive adjuncts*

Table 1' statistical findings demonstrate that all kinds of conjunctive adjuncts can be found in English journal articles on finance in order to connecting the messages of the forward and backward texts, conducting interpersonal function and networking readers and listeners in communication community.

The highlighted terms in the following examples are conjunctive adjuncts that are used as marked themes in English journal articles on finance.

Type 1: Summative

Example 4:

Overall (*Conjunctive adjunct*), their analysis provides a convincing theoretical argument for the intuition that contingent capital may be effective in reducing bank failure rates and bankbail outs.

Example 5:

In summary (*Conjunctive adjunct*), our results have provided two important insights into the financing of firms in Africa.

The analysis of these examples illustrate that conjunctive adjuncts are employed to summarize research process and analyze statements in English journal articles on finance.

Type 2: Additive

Example 6:

Furthermore (*Conjunctive adjunct*), expected returns are high, prices are low, and risk premium are high in a coordinated way across many asset classes.

Example 7:

The financial services offered by the Slow Money Alliance concern companies' full balance sheets. Local Slow Money Alliance groups can consequently provide short-term liquidity to entrepreneurs, by buying their goods and services in advance. They **also** (*Conjunctive adjunct*), grant them short-term and medium-term loans, by means of online crowdfunding platforms.

The analysis of these instances demonstrates how conjunctive adjuncts are employed in the English journal articles to support the author's claims and viewpoints when discussing financial-related issues. These conjunctive adjuncts are exemplified by terms such as *additionally*, *furthermore*

Type 3: Adversative

Example 8:

For most sentiment analysis algorithms, the sentiment lexicon is the most important resource and has yielded improved results and analysis. **However** (*Conjunctive adjunct*), past works usually used general sentiment lexicons for analysis.

Example 9:

On the other hand (*Conjunctive adjunct*), high performing firms might be better able to access financing from banks.

The analysis of the examples shows that conjunctive adjuncts are used in English journal articles on finance to present inconsistencies in the application of financial principles and terms in practical financial issues. These conjunctive adjuncts are illustrated by words such as *however*, *on the other hand*...

Type 4: Comparative

Example 10:

Similarly (*Conjunctive adjunct*), Lambert and Pohlen (2001) state that most of the performance measures called supply and chain metrics are just logistics measures with an internal focus, unable to capture how the firm drives value and profitability in the supply chain.

Example 11:

The Glass Act Steagall Act of 1933 was followed by a sharp decline in the share of the top 0.1%. **Inversely** (*Conjunctive adjunct*), the financial liberalization reforms of 1980-1984 were followed by an increase in the share of the top 0.1%.

The analysis of these instances demonstrate how conjunctive adjuncts are employed in English journal articles on finance to highlight similarities or differences while conveying the author's thoughts and evaluations on financial issues. Words like *similarly*, *inversely*, etc., serve as examples of these conjunctive adjuncts.

Type 5: Time

Example 12:

Finally (*Conjunctive adjunct*), a common view is that there are already many theories out there and it will take a long time for empiricists to test them all, and so it is justified to have a large volume of empirical research relative to theoretical research for empiricists to catch up with the existing theories.

Example 13:

The market is **then** (*Conjunctive adjunct*) dominated by agents who extrapolate the bubble into the future. This raises the question of why fundamentalists do not take an opposite position thereby preventing the bubble from developing.

The analysis of the cases reveals that time sequences of the financial sectors are expressed in English journal articles on finance through the use of conjunctive adjuncts. Words like *finally*, *then* and so on serve as examples of these conjunctive adjuncts.

Type 6: Causative

Example 14:

Their tuition is that when the stock is more liquid, speculators will find it more profitable to acquire costly information and profit from trading the stock. This leads to more information revealed from trades. *As a result* (Conjunctive adjuncts), existing shareholders do not need to spend an extra cost to verify the project's quality, and the firm will be more likely to finance a good project.

Example 15:

Supply chain decisions affect the firm's capital structure, risk level, cost structure, profitability, and ultimately, market value. *Thus* (Conjunctive adjunct), supply chain management (SCM) is shifting from a tactical, back-office to a driver of shareholder value.

The analysis of these example demonstrate that conjunctive adjuncts are used to state causative relationship in defining, evaluating financial terms. These conjunctive adjuncts are exemplified with such words as *as a result, thus*....

Type 7: Concessive

Example 16:

Although (Conjunctive adjuncts) forecasts of return volatility have more success, even the most sophisticated models cannot predict more than 30-40 percent of variation in the next day's volatility; predictive ability drops off rapidly, and explains less than 20 percent of variation beyond about ten days.

Example 17:

However (Conjunctive adjuncts), financial theory places the burden of deleveraging uniquely on the debtors' side, and does not acknowledge the responsibility of creditors.

The analysis of these example demonstrate that conjunctive adjuncts are used to present contrasting or estimated points of view in evaluating financial matters. These conjunctive adjuncts are illustrated with words such as *although, though, however*...

-Modal adjuncts

Six categories of modal adjuncts, including *probability, usuality, typicality, obviousness, opinion, admission, desirability, and evaluation*, are used in English journal articles on finance. The use of these modal adjuncts is aimed to present authors' assessments of the level of certainty, frequency, or opinions to bring readers/listeners in the communication community specific understanding regarding financial matters. The modal adjuncts are identified with the highlighted words in the following examples.

Type 1: Probability

Example 18:

Here recessions are measured by an increase in idiosyncratic risk, rather than by a fall of average consumption relative to its recent past or a rise in the conditional variance of long-run aggregate consumption. But those events are *likely* (Modal adjunct) to be highly correlated.

Example 19:

That **surely** (*Modal adjunct*) snacks of time- varying risk aversion, included by recent losses, not a segmented market in which every investor, fundamental and intermediary alike, wants to buy but leverage and agency problems cause the only active agents –leveraged interemediaries-to sell.

The analysis of these examples indicates that modal adjuncts are used to make predictions about the likelihood phenomena occurring in financial issues. This linguistic feature is identified with modal adjuncts such as *likely, surely...*

Type 2: Usuality

Example 20:

Economic historians have **always** (*Modal adjunct*) had an interest in financial crisis. The financial panics of the nineteenth century as well as the Great Depression have been examined many times.

Example 21:

Early macroeconomic analysis, particularly that of Keynes, is **sometimes** (*Modal adjunct*) interepreted as claiming that mathematical representations of the process driving outcomes are attainable, because economic behavior, especially decision-making by financial market participants, stems only from mercurial " animal sprittits".

Modal adjuncts are used in English journal articles on finance in order to reflect the level of usuality in observing, evaluating statements in financial matter.

Type 3: Typicality

Example 22:

Typically (*Modal adjunct*), adaptation and resilience are the dominant framings, as reducing climate vulnerability is used less as stand-alone concept.

Example 23:

This would seem **particularly** (*Modal adjunct*) relevant in the present era, which has underlined the enduring relevance of formal public authority: the state, far from having been dissolved into the soft power and subtle techniques of governance, often intervenes directly and decisively in the economic process.

The analysis of these instances indicates that modal adjuncts are used in English journal articles on finance to present universal statements in financial matters. This linguistic feature is identified with modal adjuncts such as typically, particularly...

Type 4: Obviousness

Example 24:

This is **clearly** (*Modal adjunct*) visible from a comparison of the bottom panel with the top panel of figure 4. We observe that the upward movement in the exchange rate coincides with an increase in the weight of chartists in the market.

Example 25:

The answer is, **of course** (*Modal adjunct*), that stocks are risky. But people accept many risks in life. In lotteries and at casinos they even seek out risks. The answer must be that stocks have

a special kind of risk, that stock values fall at particularly inconvenient times or in particularly inconvenient states or nature.

The analysis of these instances show that modal adjuncts are used in English journal articles on finance in order to present conclusions or statements by verifying accuracy, reliability of research results in financial matters. These modal adjuncts are recognised with words or phrases such as *clearly, of course...*

Type 5: Opinion

Example 26:

According to (Modal adjunct), Kuntchev et al. (2013), the firms in the FCC group applied for a loan and were rejected and do not have any type of external finance.

Example 27:

Accordingly (Modal adjunct), the offtake agreement may reduce the effect of the holdup problem on the price of the project output.

The analysis of these instances demonstrates that modal adjuncts are used in English journal articles on finance to present authors' points of view on financial aspects. The particular modal adjuncts are *according to, accordingly...*

Type 6: Evaluation

Example 28:

Interestingly (Modal adjunct), the GFC seems to have resonated the pre-GFC results further, in the sense that stakeholder groups that were reasonably important pre-GFC have become even more important post-GFC.

Example 29:

Specifically (Modal adjunct), respondents rank "access to finance" along with 15 other variables) on a scale of 1-5 (1 being no obstacle and 5 being a severe obstacle).

The analysis of these examples indicate that modal adjuncts are used in English journal articles on finance to show objective evaluation on aspects in financial issues.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings clearly show that marked themes reflect textual meaning in English journal articles on finance. Regarding adverbs in English journal articles on finance, authors focus on descriptions and analyses of clauses with time expressions as marked themes to draw readers' attention toward to the point of time in financial matters. With regard to conjunctions, authors tend to use conjunctions as marked themes to illustrate cause and effect relationship in the clause. In terms of modal adjuncts, these connectives can be found in English journal articles on finance in order to link the forward and backward texts' messages, perform interpersonal functions, and connect readers and listeners in a communication community.

6. CONCLUSION

This study identifies several types of marked themes and how they are employed to express different functions after conducting a research on a significant number of clauses from 50 journal articles on finance. These help to meet some of the language standards that authors of scholarly

journal articles, particularly those in the financial sector must comply with. Therefore, both Vietnamese scholars and researchers in this field will greatly benefit from the study by having a better understanding of these linguistic requirements and choosing the appropriate language for their articles in order to meet international standards and have more of their valuable works published internationally.

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