AN ANALYSIS OF MARKED AND UNMARKED THEMES IN ONLINE NEWSPAPER A STUDY CASE: RAY DALIO'S PERSPECTIVE ON AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

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Abstract: This study analyzes the use of marked and unmarked themes in two online news articles from BBC and CNBC, focusing on Ray Dalio's perspectives regarding the U.S. presidential election. Drawing on Halliday's theory of textual functions, the research investigates how theme selection influences the presentation of information and engages readers. The findings reveal a distinct difference in the thematic composition of the two articles. The first article predominantly employs unmarked themes, ensuring clarity and directness in reporting, while the second article demonstrates a more dynamic balance between marked and unmarked themes to highlight critical contexts and enhance narrative engagement. These results underscore the importance of theme construction in digital journalism, where linguistic choices shape both the narrative structure and audience interpretation. This study contributes to the understanding of media language strategies and their role in shaping public perception of political discourse.
Keywords: Digital Journalism, Textual Function, Political Discourse, U.S. Presidential Election, Media Language Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has profoundly transformed the media industry, bringing about changes that extend far beyond the surface. Historically, the media sector operated in a traditional, physical manner—news and information were primarily disseminated through printed materials such as newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets. However, with the onset of digital technology, the industry has shifted to virtual platforms, creating a new era of information sharing. Today, news is no longer confined to the tangible formats of the past; it is now instantly accessible online, transcending geographical boundaries and time constraints. This transition is exemplified by the rise of online news platforms such as CNBC, which have become leading sources of information, offering real-time updates and broad accessibility.

The significance of this shift is reflected in the habits of internet users. According to a study by Hootsuite (2024), 61.1% of internet users in Indonesia obtain news and current information from the internet. This dramatic change has not only revolutionized the way news is consumed but also transformed how it is organized, presented, and interpreted. Language, as the medium through which information is communicated, plays a pivotal role in shaping how readers engage with and perceive the material. According to Bonvillain (2019), language functions as a tool for communicating the sender's message intentions to others, guaranteeing that the intended meaning is clearly grasped.

According to Saedi (1991), the texture of a text can be characterized by textual features such as thematization strategies, schematic structure, paralanguage, and

cohesion. These elements are integral to the textual function of language in media, particularly in the context of digital journalism. The use of language in newspapers is closely linked to its textual function (Rosa, 2007).

Halliday (1994) in his theory states that theme/rheme plays a major role in organizing the message and enabling it to be communicated and understood clearly. The theme serves as the starting point of a message, establishing the framework for what follows According to Emilia (2014), the theme in English refers to the element in a clause or a larger text unit that appears first. The rheme, on the other hand, elaborates on the theme, encompassing all the information that lies outside the initial thematic element.

If the theme aligns with the subject, it is known as an unmarked theme, whereas a theme that differs from the subject is referred to as a marked theme (Halliday, 2004). An unmarked theme typically aligns with the grammatical subject of the sentence, adhering to conventional sentence structures. Marked themes, by contrast, deviate from standard patterns, placing emphasis on specific elements to draw attention or convey importance. This distinction is crucial for analyzing the nuances of how information is presented, particularly in media, where the arrangement of themes can subtly influence public perception.

The application of these linguistic principles is especially relevant in analyzing political news, a category that often garners widespread public interest. One example of such coverage is the debate surrounding the American presidential candidates, a topic that has sparked extensive discussion and controversy among experts, including notable figures like Ray Dalio. Understanding how marked and unmarked themes are employed in these discussions is essential for uncovering the media's role in framing narratives and shaping opinions.

This research focuses on the marked and unmarked themes in articles from the online news platform CNBC, specifically those addressing Ray Dalio's views on the American presidential candidates. By applying Halliday's theory of textual function, this study aims to explore how these linguistic strategies contribute to the construction of meaning and the influence of media narratives on public discourse.

METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative-descriptive approach, as it is well-suited for an in-depth examination of thematic structures within textual analysis. This methodology enables a comprehensive exploration of how themes are constructed and utilized to convey meaning in written discourse. The data for this study comprises two articles from CNBC, chosen purposely due to their relevance to political discourse and their demonstration of specific linguistic strategies.

The first article, titled "Ray Dalio Concerned About America Post-Election: 'Both Candidates Worry Me'," and the second article, "Ray Dalio Calls Upcoming U.S. Election the Most Consequential of His Lifetime," were selected as the primary sources for analysis. These articles provide a rich context for investigating the interplay between language and meaning, particularly in politically charged narratives.

The analysis is grounded in Halliday's framework of marked and unmarked themes, a linguistic theory that highlights the role of thematic structures in shaping communication. Each clause within the articles was meticulously examined to identify the theme, which was then categorized as either marked or unmarked based on its position and alignment with the grammatical subject. The frequency of each type of

theme was recorded, and its narrative function was analyzed to understand how the articles convey emphasis and guide reader interpretation.

This methodological approach allows for a detailed comparison of thematic strategies employed in the two articles. By examining how marked and unmarked themes are distributed and utilized, the study provides valuable insights into how linguistic choices influence audience perceptions and the overall framing of political discourse.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table news 1 'Ray Dalio concerned about America postelection: 'Both candidates worry me'

The analysis of Table 1, titled "Ray Dalio Concerned About America Post-Election: 'Both Candidates Worry Me'," reveals a notable dominance of unmarked themes within the article's structure. This pattern provides significant insights into the author's linguistic choices and their implications for communication effectiveness. Of the 14 clauses analyzed, 12 feature unmarked themes, demonstrating a strong preference for standard grammatical structures where the subject of the clause functions as the theme. This approach aligns with the conventions of journalistic writing, prioritizing clarity and accessibility to ensure that readers can quickly grasp the essential information.

Unmarked themes are employed to deliver straightforward and unambiguous messages. For example, in the clause, "A post-election America worries U.S. billionaire Ray Dalio," the subject "A post-election America" is positioned as the theme, presenting the core concern of the narrative in a clear and direct manner. Similarly, in the clause, "Dalio noted that Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump is 'a lot more capitalist,'" the use of an unmarked theme places the focus on Dalio's observation, maintaining a factual tone that reinforces the article's objective reporting style. These instances exemplify how unmarked themes contribute to the article's overall readability and its ability to communicate key points efficiently.

In contrast, the analysis identified only two marked themes, which are used selectively to serve specific rhetorical purposes. Marked themes deviate from conventional sentence patterns by placing emphasis on particular elements, often to foreground contextual or background details. For instance, the clause "Speaking at the Future Investment Initiative conference in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday..." begins with a marked theme, highlighting the temporal and locational context of Dalio's remarks before introducing the main subject. This strategic placement not only provides necessary background information but also draws attention to the significance of the setting, underscoring the international platform from which Dalio shared his concerns.

The deliberate use of marked themes in this manner adds depth and variation to the narrative, breaking the monotony of unmarked structures while ensuring that critical contextual elements are not overlooked. This balance between marked and unmarked themes reflects a careful editorial choice, aiming to enhance the narrative's engagement and flow without compromising its primary objective of factual reporting.

Overall, the findings suggest that the article's reliance on unmarked themes aligns with the conventions of objective journalism, focusing on delivering clear and concise information. The inclusion of a limited number of marked themes, however, demonstrates the author's intent to strategically highlight specific aspects of the narrative, adding layers of meaning and variety to the textual structure. This balanced approach not only supports the article's aim of providing impactful and accessible information to its digital audience but also enhances its narrative effectiveness by subtly guiding reader focus toward key

details.

The data from Table 1 clearly illustrates this thematic distribution, with 12 unmarked themes and 2 marked themes identified. This distribution underscores the predominant reliance on unmarked themes for clarity and factual emphasis while showcasing the purposeful deployment of marked themes to enrich the article's contextual and narrative quality. Such an analysis highlights the interplay between linguistic choices and journalistic objectives, offering insights into how language structures shape the delivery and reception of media content.

Paragraph	Clause	Theme	Rheme	Explanation
1.	A post election America worries U.S billionaire Ray Dalio	A post election America (unmarked)	Rheme : worries U.S billionaire Ray Dalio	The subject "A postelection America" is the natural starting point, so it is unmarked. The rheme explains Dalio's concern about America after the election.
1	Dalio called for reforms numerous times amid a political landscape rife with what he views as irreconcilable differences	Dalio (unmarked)	Rheme: Dalio called for reforms numerous times amid a political landscape rife with what he views as irreconcilable differences	Dalio is the unmarked theme as the focus naturally starts with him
2	Speaking at the future investment initiative conference in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday, the founder of Bridgewater Associates spoke about major geopolitical and election-related concerns	Speaking at the future investment initiative conference in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday(marked)	Rheme: the founder of Bridgewater Associates spoke about major geopolitical and election-related concerns	Marked theme speaking at the conference provides context before introducing Dalio's statement
2	"Both of the candidates worry me" Dalio told cnbc	Both of the candidates (marked)	Worry me" told CNBC	The quote "Both of the candidates" is placed for emphasis, making it a marked theme. The rheme describes Dalio's

				concern about both candidates.
2	"This left, right and fighting each other is a problem"	"This left, right and fighting (unmarked)	Rheme: each other is a problem	Unmarked theme emphasizes the division dalio is concerned about
2	I think that there needs to be a bringing of Americans together...	I (unmarked)	Rheme: Think that there needs to be a bringing of Americans together...	The sentence follows a natural order, with dalio's personal belief as the theme
3	Dalio noted that republican presidential candidate donald trump is "a lot more capitalist"	Dalio (unmarked)	Rheme: noted that republican presidential candidate donald trump is "a lot more capitalist"	Dalio as unmarked theme makes it clear that he is expressing an opinion
3	Both candidates have major differences, including in tax policies	Both candidates (unmarked)	Rheme: "have major differences... tax policies"	An unmarked theme that brings focus to the candidates' differences
3	Trump's plan to collect greater tariff revenue could lead to a spike in prices	Trump's plan (unmarked)	Rheme: "could lead to a spike in prices"	The theme remains unmarked and straightforward, focusing on Trump's plan
4	Consequences of the election are "really more a left-right question"	Consequences of the election (unmarked)	Rheme: "are more of a left-right question	An unmarked theme that directly introduces Dalio's viewpoint on election consequences
4	Dalio said he continues to be concerned about the increase in U.S. Treasury supply	Dalio (unmarked)	Rheme: "continues to be concerned... Treasury supply"	Again, the unmarked theme is "Dalio," making the statement's focus clear
5	"We have a real debt problem," Dalio said	We (unmarked)	Rheme: "we have a real debt problem"	Simple, unmarked theme with "We" emphasizing shared concerns
5	The treasury market is basis	The Treasury market (unmarked)	Rheme: "is basis of all capital formation"	An unmarked theme, indicating

	of all capital formation			a general economic fact
5	Dalio said gold should be a part of a diversified strategy that reduces risk	Dalio (unmarked)	Rheme: "said gold should be part of..."	The focus is straightforward, with Dalio as the theme and his recommendation

Table news 2 Ray Dalio calls upcoming U.S. election the most consequential of his lifetime

The analysis of Table 2, titled "Ray Dalio Calls Upcoming U.S. Election the Most Consequential of His Lifetime," offers a deeper insight into the thematic structuring of the article, revealing a calculated use of both marked and unmarked themes. Among the 24 clauses analyzed, 13 unmarked themes and 11 marked themes were identified, indicating a slight predominance of unmarked themes. This balance reflects the article's dual purpose: to present clear, straightforward information while also drawing attention to specific contextual details that enhance the narrative's depth and engagement.

Unmarked themes emerged as slightly more frequent, underscoring the article's emphasis on delivering direct and accessible information to its readers. These themes focus on the main subject or actor of the clause, allowing for a seamless flow of ideas and prioritizing the reader's understanding of key points. For instance, sentences such as, "Ray Dalio said the 2024 U.S. election will likely be the most important of his life," and "He explained that broad-based prosperity creates a society where there is both order and opportunity," exemplify this approach. By employing unmarked themes, the article ensures that its central ideas are conveyed clearly and concisely, minimizing distractions and keeping the reader's focus on the most critical aspects of Dalio's statements. This use of unmarked themes reflects a communicative strategy aimed at clarity, especially in a context where the subject matter—Dalio's views on the implications of the election—is inherently weighty and complex.

On the other hand, the article makes deliberate and frequent use of marked themes to introduce contextual or emphatic nuances that enrich the narrative. Marked themes often serve to foreground temporal or situational elements, setting the stage for the information that follows. For example, the clause "Speaking to CNBC's 'Squawk Box Asia' on Thursday..." places immediate emphasis on the situational context of Dalio's statement, preparing the reader to consider the relevance and timeliness of his remarks. Similarly, "On Wednesday, Dalio had named the elections as a major force shaping the global economy..." highlights the chronological sequence of events, drawing attention to the broader implications of his observations. The inclusion of these marked themes adds a layer of narrative variety, enabling the article to emphasize specific details that might otherwise be overlooked. This approach enhances the reader's engagement by creating a more dynamic and textured reading experience.

Overall, the findings suggest that the article employs a balanced and strategic combination of marked and unmarked themes to achieve its communicative objectives. The predominance of unmarked themes ensures that the article remains clear and accessible, allowing readers to easily grasp the primary messages. Meanwhile, the frequent use of marked themes demonstrates an effort to provide contextual richness and emphasize critical details, particularly in a narrative centered on a complex and impactful subject like the U.S. presidential election. This combination of thematic strategies highlights the article's adaptability in addressing a topic that demands both precision and

engagement, showcasing its ability to inform and captivate its audience simultaneously. By effectively balancing these elements, the article not only delivers Dalio's insights but also situates them within a broader narrative framework, enhancing their resonance and relevance for the reader.

Paragraph   Clause   Theme Rheme Explanation

Paragraph	Clause	Theme	Rheme	Explanation
1	Ray Dalio said the 2024 U.S. election will likely be the most important of his life	Ray Dalio (unmarked)	said the 2024 U.S. election will likely be the most important of his life	Here, "Ray Dalio" is the unmarked theme as the main subject, with the rheme offering news details about his view.
1	adding that he thinks the country needs a "strong leader of the middle.	adding that (marked)	He thinks the country needs a "strong leader of the middle.	"Adding that" serves as a marked theme, placing emphasis on Dalio's additional opinion in the theme.
2	Speaking to CNBC's "Squawk Box Asia" on Thursday, the founder of Bridgewater Associates explained that what the U.S. should aim to reach "broad-based prosperity"	Speaking to CNBC's "Squawk Box Asia (marked theme)	The founder of Bridgewater Associates explained that the U.S. should aim to reach "broad-based prosperity" and highlights societal challenges	The marked theme emphasizes the context of the statement before introducing Dalio's explanation about the elections.
2	and that the upcoming elections highlight challenges to society's ability to function smoothly	and that (unmarked theme)	the upcoming elections highlight challenges to society's ability to function smoothly	"and that" is the theme connecting his further opinion, with the rheme detailing the election's potential impact.
3	Asked about who he supported in the presidential race	Asked about (marked)	who he supported in the presidential race	"Asked about" serves as the marked theme, with the rheme

				revealing the focus on Dalio's support.
3	Dalio said: " Neither is what the country needs."	Dalio (unmarked)	said: " Neither is what the country needs."	"Dalio" is the unmarked theme, and the rheme states his neutral stance on presidential candidates.
4	Ray Dalio said the 2024 U.S. elections will likely be the most important of his love	Ray Dalio (Unmarked)	Said the 2024 U.S. elections will likely be the most important of his love	The theme is "Ray Dalio," which is the subject of the sentence. It is an unmarked theme because it starts the sentence directly. The rheme provides information about what Ray Dalio said about the 2024 elections.
5	Speaking to CNBC's "Squawk Box Asia" on Thursday the founder of Bridgewater Associates explained that the U.S. should aim to reach "broad-based prosperity" and the presidential election highlights challenges to society's ability to function smoothly	Speaking to CNBC's "Squawk Box Asia" on Thursday (Marked Theme)	The founder of Bridgewater Associates explained that the U.S. should aim to reach "broad-based prosperity" and the presidential election highlights challenges to society's ability to function smoothly.	The theme "Speaking to CNBC's 'Squawk Box Asia' on Thursday" is a marked theme because it provides additional context about when and where the statement was made. The rheme explains Dalio's thoughts on the U.S. presidential election and its challenges.

6	As far as the election goes it's going to be the most consequential election of my lifetime because we now have irreconcilable differences between the two sides, he said.	As far as the election goes (marked theme)	it's going to be the most consequential election of my lifetime because we now have irreconcilable differences between the two sides, he said.	The marked theme places importance on the election before addressing Dalio's specific viewpoint on its significance
6	The first question we'll ask is will we have an orderly transition of power?	The first question we'll ask is (unmarked theme)	will we have an orderly transition of power?	This paragraph begins with a straightforward unmarked theme introducing a key question regarding the transition of power
6	We have the question the fact that it is possible — that election results may not be accepted — that's quite something.	We have the question (marked theme)	the fact that it is possible — that election results may not be accepted — that's quite something.	Unmarked theme "we have the question" sets up the problem, while the rheme elaborates on the potential outcome and its importance.
7	On Wednesday Dalio had named the elections as a major force shaping the global economy, calling it an "issue of internal order and disorder."	On Wednesday (marked theme)	Dalio had named the elections as a major force shaping the global economy, calling it an "issue of internal order and disorder."	The marked theme "On Wednesday" gives context, specifying when the statement was made. The rheme describes Dalio's opinion on the elections' influence on the global economy.
8	He told CNBC on Thursday that there's a larger problem with a	He (unmarked)	told CNBC on Thursday that there's a larger problem with a	"He" is the subject, making it the theme. The rest of the clause

	"win-at-all-cost mentality," as it presents "challenges to being able to compromise and make decisions in a way that is conducive to our democracy working effectively."		"win-at-all-cost mentality," as it presents "challenges to being able to compromise and make decisions in a way that is conducive to our democracy working effectively."	provides more details about his statement, showing his view on a problematic mentality.
9	Republicans and Democrats are sharply divided on a number of issues, such as abortion access, immigration, and climate change.	Republicans and Democrats (unmarked)	are sharply divided on a number of issues, such as abortion access, immigration, and climate change.	The theme is the subject (the political parties). The rheme gives new information about their division on specific issues
10	Top concerns for voters across the spectrum	Top concerns for voters across the spectrum (marked)	include inflation and the high cost of living, according to nationwide polls.	The theme emphasizes what is most important to all voters, not specific issues of division. The rheme provides details on these shared concerns, inflation and high cost of living
11	When asked about who he supported in the presidential race	When asked about who he supported in the presidential race (marked theme)	Dalio said "neither is what the country needs	The clause starts with a marked theme, "When asked about who he supported...," as it emphasizes the condition under which Dalio made his statement
11	Dalio said, "neither is what the country needs."	Dalio (unmarked)	"Neither is what the country needs."	Here, "Dalio" is the unmarked theme as he is the subject of the clause, with "neither is what the country

				needs" as the rheme giving his opinion.
12	"What the country needs is the moderates coming together to be able to work together and make great reform."	"What the country needs" (unmarked theme)	"is the moderates coming together to be able to work together and make great reform"	The unmarked theme starts with the topic of the country's needs, and the rheme elaborates on what those needs are.
12	"What the country needs is broad-based prosperity."	"What the country needs" (marked)	"is broad-based prosperity."	Similarly, this clause begins with a marked theme, "What the country needs," reinforcing his vision, while the rheme provides further detail about his specific recommendation.

13	While Dalio expressed optimism about certain parts of American society	While Dalio expressed optimism (unmarked theme)	about certain parts of American society he said that those exceptional elements benefit only a small percentage of the population.	The unmarked theme introduces Dalio's optimism, followed by a rheme that limits its scope, maintaining coherence and flow
13	he said that those exceptional elements benefit only a small percentage of the population	he (unmarked theme)	"said that those exceptional elements benefit only a small percentage of the population."	"He" is an unmarked theme here, placing Dalio as the speaker, with the rheme focusing on his criticism about limited benefits.
14	He explained that broad-based prosperity creates a society where there is both order and opportunity	he (unmarked theme)	"explained that broad-based prosperity creates a society where there is both order and opportunity."	"He" as an unmarked theme introduces Dalio again as the speaker, while the rheme provides his views on the value of broad-based prosperity.

14	pointing to Singapore as an example	"pointing to Singapore as an example" (marked)	-	This phrase acts as a marked theme, providing specific support for his argument, with no additional rheme since this is a supporting point for the previous clause.
15	The Southeast Asian nation is frequently lauded for its high level of education and availability of public housing	"The Southeast Asian nation" (unmarked)	"is frequently lauded for its high level of education and availability of public housing."	"The Southeast Asian nation" (Singapore) is an unmarked theme that introduces the country, with the rheme describing the aspects for which it is praised.

The analysis of two online news articles from CNBC reveals significant insights into the linguistic strategies employed in reporting Ray Dalio's perspectives on the 2024 U.S. presidential election. This research, utilizing Halliday's textual function theory, provides a deep understanding of theme construction in digital media reporting and highlights how linguistic choices shape the reader's perception of political discourse. The primary findings of this study illustrate a significant difference in theme usage between the two articles, reflecting distinct approaches to reporting and audience engagement.

The first article demonstrated a clear preference for unmarked themes, with 12 out of 14 clauses following standard grammatical patterns. This approach prioritizes clarity and simplicity, ensuring that readers can easily grasp the main message without unnecessary complexity. By employing unmarked themes, the article maintained a straightforward and direct narrative that effectively communicated Dalio's views. The limited use of marked themes—only two instances—was strategically used to emphasize key contextual elements, such as the timing and location of Dalio's statements. This subtle use of marked themes provided additional context while maintaining the overall clarity of the report.

In contrast, the second article exhibited a more dynamic approach, with a composition of 13 unmarked themes and 11 marked themes out of 24 total clauses. This thematic variation reflects a more sophisticated narrative strategy that balances the need for informative reporting with techniques designed to engage the reader more deeply. The higher frequency of marked themes in this article suggested a deliberate attempt to foreground contextual and situational information, adding depth and variety to the structure. This approach captured the reader's attention and placed Dalio's commentary within a broader framework, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the issues discussed. The marked themes emphasized elements such as specific dates and the nature of the interview, ensuring readers could contextualize the statements and grasp their significance.

The linguistic choices in these articles demonstrate the powerful role of theme construction in shaping perceptions of political discourse. Both articles strategically used themes to highlight essential information, emphasize specific elements of Dalio's statements, and maintain clarity while adding analytical depth. The themes employed in

these articles conveyed Dalio's concerns about political polarization, the need for national unity, critiques of the current political system, and calls for moderate leadership. Through careful thematic selection, the articles were able to engage readers while conveying key aspects of Dalio's perspectives on the upcoming election.

Theoretically, this research extends the understanding of Halliday's textual function by demonstrating its practical application in digital journalism. It shows that theme selection is not just a grammatical decision but a powerful tool for conveying information, shaping context, and presenting different perspectives in online reporting. This study highlights that while both articles aimed to inform readers, their use of themes varied in a way that affected the overall narrative. The limitations of the study, including its focus on two articles from the same source, suggest avenues for future research. Expanding the scope to include articles from different media outlets could provide a broader understanding of how theme construction is used across various journalistic styles and platforms.

CONCLUTION

In the analysis of the two online news articles, various thematic elements demonstrate the stylistic features of linguistic strategies used in online journalism. The first article could be described as straightforward with its dominant use of unmarked themes, which the author's goal was to achieve effective reporting communication and proper understanding of the message. Use of marked themes was minimal to pinpoint certain crucial aspects such as when and where certain events occurred, but did not interfere with the flow of the story.

On the other hand, the second article is differentiated by the use of both marked and unmarked themes in the same manner giving balance to everything. This approach did help in focusing on important aspects of the topics as well as the background, that many readers would find easier to relate the topic to the current situation during the unfolding of the 2024 Presidential elections in the US.

These conclusions demonstrate the significance of ideas about the construction of a theme in the context of information presentation and understanding in the digital world. Although unmarked themes serve the demise of vagueness, marked themes serve the sense of focus and boosts reader effect. This research encourages the consideration of language choices in online journalism and their implications towards public impressions and greatly expands our comprehension of language as a working tool in politics in the context of online reporting.

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