

CrossRef DOI of original article:

Construction of the THEME System of Myanmar

Lai Yee Win¹¹ Department of English, Sittwe University, Rakhine State, Myanmar*Received: 1 January 1970 Accepted: 1 January 1970 Published: 1 January 1970*

Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to construct the THEME system of Myanmar following the system network for Theme in English proposed by Halliday (1985, 1994; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 2014) within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. It is found that the THEME system of Myanmar consists of two sub-systems: Theme status and Theme composition. For the former, there are two major types: unmarked and enhanced Themes, while for the latter, Theme can be presented in two ways: simple and multiple Themes. Unmarked Themes in Myanmar clauses are Subject, Complement, Adjunct, hypotactic clause, Predicator (only in imperative), and Ba-element (only in interrogative). The enhanced Theme in Myanmar contains two major types: equative or preposed attribute. Multiple Theme includes textual, interpersonal and topical Themes which can be chosen as a point of departure of the clause. The findings may shed light on the realization of the textual metafunction of Myanmar language.

Index terms— Theme, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Myanmar.

1 Introduction

According to Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL, hereafter), language serves three metafunctions: experiential, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday 1985 (Halliday, 1994; Matthiessen 2004, 2014; Fawcett 2000; Fawcett, 2008, forthcoming), forthcoming). Based on the textual metafunction of language, the concept of the THEME system is considered. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 64), the THEME system construes organizing messages relevantly to the other notes around them and to the broader context in speaking or writing. The textual meaning of the clause is realized by a thematic structure consisting of two parts: Theme and Rheme. The Theme is the element that serves as the starting point of the message, while the remaining part is the Rheme that gives further information about the Theme. From a Systemic Functional approach, the studies of Theme 1 are based on Halliday's thematic structure (see Caffarel et al. 2004).

Research on Theme in Myanmar from a Systemic Functional approach is surprisingly scant (e.g., Hopple 2002; Rattanapitak 2009; Ozerov 2014). Rattanapitak (2009) studies the THEME system and its realizations in Myanmar from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics. However, Rattanapitak's (2009) study of Theme in Myanmar does not cover interrogative and exclamative clauses. Moreover, bias in the data collection also exists because it relies on only five Burmese religious tales extracted from Min Yu Wai's (1999) book entitled "38 Welfare Tales," containing 38 stories about Buddhist teachings. To meet this literature gap, this paper aims to develop the THEME system of Myanmar by supplementing it with the enhanced Theme based on the thematic analysis of different genres of Myanmar text from a Systemic Functional perspective.

In the THEME system of Myanmar proposed in this study, two sub-systems: THEME STATUS and THEME COMPOSITION are presented in order to show the flow of information in Myanmar text. For the former, unmarked and enhanced Themes are presented, while for the latter, simple and multiple Themes are presented. Theme in Myanmar typically functions as a Subject, Complement, Adjunct, or hypotactic clause. It can also function as a Baelement in interrogative, and a Predicator in imperative. Two major types of special thematic structures, such as thematic equatives and preposed attributes are found in Myanmar. Thompson

6 SEE EXAMPLES (1)-(3).

45 (2004 Thompson (2008: 164) : 164) characterizes them as enhanced Theme in his THEMATIC systems of
46 English. The typical organization of a multiple Theme in Myanmar is textual^interpersonal^experiential. This
47 study contributes to the understanding of how Myanmar people organize their messages relevantly to the context.
48 The result makes an important contribution to a contrastive study of THEME systems between Myanmar and
49 foreign languages.

2 A

51 Author: Professor and Head of Department of English, Sittwe University, Rakhine State, Myanmar. e-mail:
52 laiyeewin18@gmail.com a) Theme and Mood

53 The choice of Theme in Myanmar clause depends on Mood choice. MOOD, the primary interpersonal system
54 of the clause, provides interactants with the resources for giving or demanding a commodity such as information
55 and goods-&-services -in other words, with the resources for enacting speech functions (speech acts) through the
56 grammar of the clause: statements (giving information), questions (demanding information), offers (giving goods-
57 &-services), and commands (demanding goods-&-services). This study focuses on major clauses of Myanmar.
58 Minor clauses like /kaunnbye/ "ok", /hokekè/ "yes" have no Mood choice and thematic structure, and so they
59 are left out of account in this study. A major clause in Myanmar can be either indicative or imperative. Indicative
60 has two options: declarative and interrogative. Exclamative is a subtype of declarative. The following will present
61 thematic structures in each Mood type of Myanmar from the perspective of a textual metafunction. To meet this
62 need, this study aims to develop the THEME system of Myanmar based on the network presented by Halliday
63 (1985Halliday (, 1994; Matthiessen 2004, 2014). It is of great significance that findings are based on the thematic
64 analysis of different genres of Myanmar text. In this study, the elaborations of unmarked Themes in different
65 clauses and special thematic structures of Myanmar are supported with data from authentic materials, such as
66 literature, news articles, and databases such as SEAlang Library Burmese corpus 2 . The thematic compositions
67 of simple and multiple Themes in Myanmar are also presented in this study. The results of this study will form
68 part of a more extensive study of the Systemic Functional Grammar of Myanmar. This study will also make a
69 significant contribution to a contrastive analysis of THEME systems between Myanmar and foreign languages.

3 III.

4 Construction of the THEME System of Myanmar

72 The THEME system is a grammatical resource for the organization of the clause as a message. It realizes the
73 textual mode of meaning concerning the creation of text relevantly to the preceding text and context, which is
74 intrinsic to language. The clause in any language has the character of a message, or quantum of information
75 in the flow of discourse; therefore, every language has some form of organization contributing to the flow of
76 discourse (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 88). Like other world languages, Myanmar clause is also organized
77 as a message by having a special thematic status assigned to one part of it. This element is enunciated as the
78 theme, and then it combines with the remainder to constitute a message. In spoken and written Myanmar,
79 textual prominence (i.e., the thematic status) is given to an item by putting it first in the clause. The Theme is
80 the first element functioning as the point of departure of the message, which locates and orients the clause within
81 its context. In contrast, the remainder of the message (i.e., the part in which the Theme is developed) is known
82 as the Rheme (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 89). Following Halliday's (1985Halliday's (, 1994Halliday's (,
83 2014)) Theme-Rheme structure, this study explores thematic choices in different clause types in Myanmar,
84 including simple clauses, clause complexes, and reported clauses. It also explores enhanced Themes or special
85 thematic structures of Myanmar, such as thematic equatives and preposed attributes.

5 i. Theme in indicative clauses

87 The Theme in Myanmar declarative functions as Subject, Complement, and Adjunct. The Theme functioning
88 as a Subject or Complement is generally realized by a nominal group, nominal group complex, and clause. The
89 Theme functioning as an Adjunct is typically realized by a prepositional phrase or an adverbial group.

6 See Examples (1)-(3).

91 In Myanmar, the unmarked Theme in WH-interrogative is Ba-element, analogous to the WH-element
92 ? ? ? seelon=hma inarr phytmye-sothehmar ahman phyt-par-the.unite=COND strength COP-SBJMARK
93 truth COP-POLMARK-PRS.DECL.SENTSUF

94 Theme Rheme "It is true that unity is strength." Yes/no interrogatives function to ask for the polarity of
95 the clause between "yes" and "no". The unmarked Themes in Myanmar yes/no interrogatives are the Subject,
96 Complement, Adjunct, and hypotactic clause. The clause-final interrogator, such as /-larr/ and /-lè/) marks the
97 end of the Myanmar yes/no interrogative. See Examples (7a)-(7c). (SEAlang Library Burmese Corpus)(SEAlang
98 Library Burmese Corpus)(3) ? ? ? ? myit-

99 The communicative purpose of the imperative is to ask the other person to perform the action. In Myanmar,
100 the unmarked Theme in the positive imperative is the Predicator realized by the verbal group expressing the
101 action to be performed by the addressee, while the one in the negative imperative is the Predicator along with

102 the preverbal negator /ma-/ and the post-verbal particle /-nèt/ (cf. Examples 8 and 9). As Examples (??) and
103 (??) show, there is no Rheme in thematic structures of Myanmar imperatives whose unmarked Theme is the
104 Predicator. According to Halliday (1994: 52-54), every major clause has an experiential Theme (i.e., the first
105 element with the experiential meaning of the clause). The thematic experiential constituent is labeled as the
106 "topical Theme," which is closely associated with the topic of the clause in topic-comment analysis. It is also
107 possible to have a purely interpersonal Theme (e.g., vocative, modal Adjuncts, and mood-marking) or textual
108 Theme (e.g., continuative, structural, and conjunctive Adjuncts) before the experiential Theme. In this case,
109 everything up to the experiential Theme is included in the Theme of the clause. The typical ordering of elements
110 in a multiple Theme is textual[^]interpersonal[^]experiential, as shown in Example (13).

111 7 c) Theme in clause complexes and reported clauses

112 Thematic choices in Myanmar clause complexes and reported clauses are investigated in this study following
113 Halliday (1985Halliday (, 1994Halliday (, 2014)). In a Myanmar clause complex, the dependent clause always
114 precedes the clause on which it depends. In such case, the dependent clause is analyzed as the Theme for the
115 whole clause complex. As every clause has a Theme, the dependent clause and the dominant clause are further
116 analyzed into Theme-Rheme structure as in Example (14).

117 According to ??Thompson (2004 ??Thompson (/2008: 161): 161), "Reporting or projection has a different kind
118 of relationship between clauses than other types of clause complex; this is reflected in the uncertain status of
119 projected Themes in the text; and in the case of quotes, the analysis is usually straightforward in such a way that
120 the reporter makes a thematic choice in the projecting or reporting clause and also recycles the original speaker's
121 thematic choice in the quote." Both Themes typically play an essential role in the development of the text, and
122 they are analyzed separately in the reporting clause and quote, as shown in Examples (??5) and (??6). ""Who
123 attacked?" asked Juan Tomas quickly."

124 (Htin Lin 1999: 126)

125 In both direct speech and indirect speech in Myanmar, the reported clause comes after the Subject of the
126 reporting clause. Each of them has its Theme. The Theme of the reported clause links in with the topic of
127 the text, while the Theme of the reporting clause primarily develops the information by identifying the source
128 ??Thompson 2004 ??Thompson /2008: 161): 161). Both Themes, therefore, serve different functions in the
129 development of the text, and they are identified separately, as illustrated in Example (17). ""It is a pearl of great
130 value," Kino said."

131 (Htin Lin 1999: 97)

132 The second type of special thematic structure is the preposed attribute. It is a part of the Theme that
133 introduces the quality of the following nominal group functioning as the starting point of the clause ??Thompson
134 2004 ??Thompson /2008: 163): 163). The preposed attribute plus the following nominal group as Theme in
135 Myanmar is shown in Example (19).

136 8 d) Special thematic structures of Myanmar

137 Special thematic structures of Myanmar (i.e., enhanced Theme) cover thematic equatives and preposed attributes
138 (see Figure 3). In a thematic equative, Theme and Rheme are in the same status, which is pointed out by the
139 verb to be, as shown in Example (18). IV. Based on the findings of thematic analyses on Myanmar's declarative,
140 exclamative, interrogative, and imperative clauses, the THEME system of Myanmar is demonstrated in Figure
141 3. This paper presents the THEME system of Myanmar from the Systemic Functional perspective. In section
142 2, the previous studies on Theme in Myanmar have been reviewed. There are very few studies of Theme in
143 Myanmar from the Systemic Functional perspective. Their analysis is based on the restricted data collection;
144 consequently, they do not offer satisfactory answers to the organization of messages in different genres of Myanmar
145 text. To meet this need, the present study has developed a system network for THEME in Myanmar based on the
146 findings from the thematic analysis of different clauses: declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamative
147 in Myanmar by using Halliday's (1985Halliday's (, 1994)) Theme-Rheme structure in section 3.

148 In conclusion, this study is of great significance in investigating how Myanmar speakers organize their messages
149 coherently to the other messages around them and in the broader context of spoken and written discourse.
150 The findings of this study characterize the textual metafunction of the Myanmar language and contribute to
151 the Systemic Functional Grammar of Myanmar. This study has clear implications for further research on a
152 contrastive analysis of Theme in Myanmar and foreign languages.

153 Findings show that the THEME system of Myanmar consists of two sub-systems: THEME STATUS and
154 THEME COMPOSITION. The former contains two major types: unmarked and enhanced Themes, while the
155 latter contains simple and multiple Themes. Unmarked Theme in Myanmar clauses can be Subject, Complement,
156 Adjunct, hypotactic clause, Predicator (only in imperative), and Ba-element (only in interrogative). Enhanced
157 Theme contains two major types: thematic equatives and preposed attributes. A multiple Theme includes
158 textual (e.g., continuative, structural, and conjunctive Adjuncts), interpersonal (e.g., vocative, modal Adjuncts,
159 and moodmarking), and experiential/topical Themes.

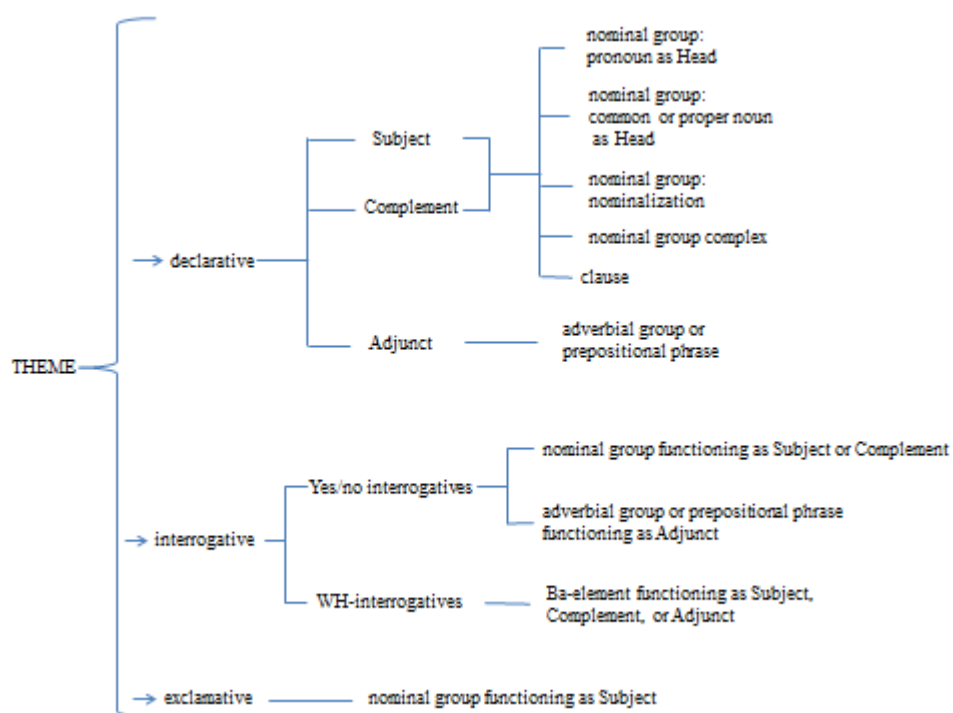
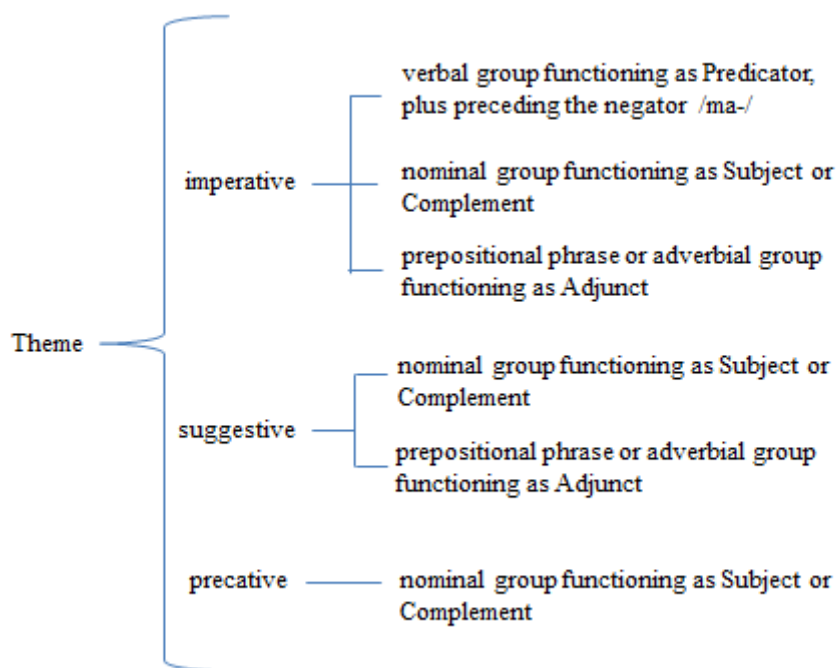
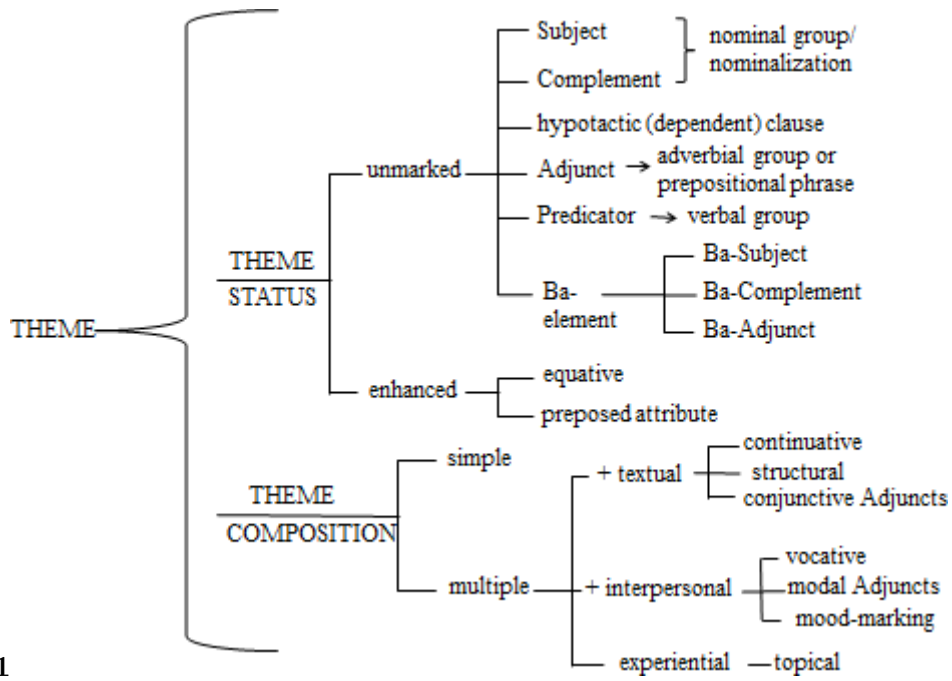


Figure 1:



1

Figure 2: Figure 1



1

Figure 3: Figure 1 :

Year 2022

)

G

(

-Global Journal of Human Social Science

????? ???? ?? ?? ?? ?

Figure 4:

	(5) a. Themmatization of Ba-element functioning as Subject	b. Complement as Theme	
	? ?		?
	béthue de-pannoe-go		mimpyaw-khèt-darlè. bényayarl
			go
	who this.DEM-vase-OBJMARK	2SG-OBJMARK tell-PST-INT.SENTSUF	where
	Theme	Theme	Rheme
	"Who told you?"	"Where will you put this vase?"	
	(SEAlang Library Burmese Corpus)	(SEAlang Library Burmese Corpus)	
54	b. Themmatization of Ba-element functioning as Complement	? béthu-go	c. Adjunct as Theme ? ? tw
Year			
2022			
Volume	upstairs Theme	"How many bedrooms are there upstairs?"	bedroom how.many Rheme (Journal Kyaw
XXII			
Is-			
sue			
IX			
Ver-			
sion			
I			
) G	which-time (7) a. Subject as Theme		come.back-IRR-INT.SENT
(
-	(4) ? ? ? ein-gyee-ga house-AUG-SBJMARK	splendid-EXCL ? ? ?	kyetthayayshi-laiktar. Theme Rh
Global			
Jour-			
nal			
of			
Hu-			
man			
So-			
cial			
Sci-			
ence			
	"How splendid the house is!"	Theme Rheme	3PL-OBJMARK invite-PFV-INT.SENTSUF
	"What does she come here for?"	Theme Rheme	
	(SEAlang Library Burmese Corpus)		

[Note: taphetkannsethot kyanor hlannkyi-laik-the. river-ALL 1SG.M.NOM glance-PFV-DECL.SENTSUF Theme Rheme "I glanced towards the river." (Lae Twin Thar Saw Chit 2004: 11) (Journal Kyaw Ma Ma Lay 1957: 120) representing the missing information that the speaker wants to know from other person. Themmatization of Baelement can function as Subject, Complement, or Adjunct, as shown in Examples (5a)-(5c). Exclamative, a subtype of declarative, is a small group of clauses. It functions to express the speaker's intense emotions. who-OBJMARK meet-OPT-PRS.INT.SENTSUF Theme Rheme "Whom do you want to meet?" (SEAlang Library Burmese Corpus) c. Themmatization of Ba-element functioning as Adjunct ? bé-achein pyanlar-hmar-lè. "Have they been invited?" (SEAlang Library Burmese Corpus)]

Figure 5:

(9)	ma-thwarr-nèt. (11) a. Subject as Theme		
	NEG-go-NEGIMP.SENTSUF		?
	Theme		
	"Don't go!" ngardot yokeshin	thwarr kyi-yaaun.	
	(SEAlang Library Burmese Corpus) 1PL.NOM film go	see-	SUGMAR.
	Theme Rheme		
Year 2022	(10) a. Subject as Theme "We let's go and see the film!" (SEAlang Library Burmese Corpus)	b. Complement	
		?	?
	béthuehma yokeshin	ma-hloke-kya-nèt. thwarr kyi-	yaaun.
	anyone film	NEG-move-PLMARK-NEGIMP.SENT	
	Theme Theme	Rheme Rheme	
	"Anyone, don't move!" "Let's go and see the film!"		
	(SEAlang Library Burmese Corpus) (SEAlang Library Burmese Corpus)		
	b. Complement as Theme c. Adjunct as Theme		
	?	? ?	?
G	thu-go denayt	phann-laikkyasann. yokeshin thwarr kyi-	
	3SG-OBJMARK arrest-IMP.SENTSUF today film go	see-	SUGMAR.
	Theme Theme	Rheme	
		Rheme	
	"Arrest him!" "Let's go and see the film today!"		
	(SEAlang Library Burmese Corpus) (SEAlang Library Burmese Corpus)		
	c. Adjunct as Theme		
	?	?	?
			?
	(12) a. Subject as Theme		
	chetchinn immediately 3SG-OBJMARK arrest-IMP.SENTSUF	thu-go phann-laik-kya-sann. ? ?	
	thetthet	thwarr-bayazay.	
	Theme Thet.Thet go-REQMARK Rheme		
	"Arrest him immediately!" Theme Rheme		
	(SEAlang Library Burmese Corpus) "Let me go!"		
	(Journal Kyaw Ma Ma Lay 1957: 205)		

Figure 6:

Theme- Rheme-2
2
Year 2022
63
Volume XXII Issue IX Version I
)
(
© 2022 Global Journals

[Note: Conclusion4 https://www.burmalibrary.org/sites/burmalibrary.org/files/obl/mal_18.12.21.pdf G "in-
spected the learning of the students in peace." (Myanma Alinn Daily Newspaper 2021: 7)4]

Figure 7:

160 **9 Abbreviations found in the**
161 1 2 3

¹Theme (with capitalized initial) refers to the function; THEME (all letters in capitals) is used as the system's name.

²<http://sealang.net/burmese/corpus.htm>

³Construction of the THEME System of Myanmar© 2022 Global Journals

- 162 [Journal Kyaw Ma Ma Lay ()] , *Journal Kyaw Ma Ma Lay* 1957. Shwe Lin Yone.
- 163 [Wai ()] , Min Yu Wai . 1999. Yangon: Mingala Yaungche. (38 Welfare Tales. 3rd edn)
- 164 [Fawcett ()] *A theory of syntax for Systemic Functional Linguistics*, R P Fawcett . 2000. Amsterdam &
165 Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- 166 [Rattanaipitak ()] ‘An analysis of textual meaning in some selected Burmese religious tales’. A Rattanaipitak .
167 *Journal of Language and Culture* 2009. 28 (2) p. .
- 168 [Halliday ()] *An introduction to functional grammar*, M A K Halliday . 1985. London: Arnold.
- 169 [Halliday ()] *An introduction to functional grammar*, M A K Halliday . 1994. London: Arnold. (2nd edn)
- 170 [Halliday and Matthiessen ()] *An introduction to functional grammar*, M A K Halliday , C M I M Matthiessen .
171 2004. London: Arnold. (3rd edn)
- 172 [Fawcett] *Forthcoming*). *The functional semantics handbook: Analyzing English at the level of meaning*, R P
173 Fawcett . London: Equinox.
- 174 [Halliday and Matthiessen ()] *Halliday’s introduction to functional grammar*, M A K Halliday , C M I M
175 Matthiessen . 2014. (4th edn. London: Routledge)
- 176 [Jacobs ()] ‘Informational autonomy’. J Jacobs . *Focus: linguistic, cognitive, and computational perspectives*,
177 Peter Bosch, & Rob Van Der, Sandt (ed.) (Cambridge) 1999. Cambridge University Press. p. .
- 178 [Fawcett ()] *Invitation to Systemic Functional Linguistics through the Cardiff Grammar: Analyzing An extension
179 and simplification of Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar*, R P Fawcett . 2008. London: Equinox.
- 180 [Kyanoramonnzonnkyanor [The person I hate most is me Lae Twin Thar Saw Chit ()]
181 ‘Kyanoramonnzonnkyanor [The person I hate most is me’. *Lae Twin Thar Saw Chit* 2004.
- 182 [Caffarel et al. (ed.) ()] *Language typology: A functional perspective*, A Caffarel , J R Martin , C M Matthiessen
183 . I. M. (ed.) 2004. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- 184 [Matthiessen ()] ‘Lexicogrammatical cartography: English systems’. C M I M Matthiessen . *Tokyo: International
185 Language Sciences Publishers* 1995.
- 186 [Thompson ()] *London: Hodder Arnold/Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. book-
187 shop.com/MyanmarBooks/BookDetails/19951*, G Thompson . 2004/2008. April 2020. p. 17. (Introducing
188 functional grammar)
- 189 [Halliday and McDonald ()] ‘Metafunctional profile of the grammar of Chinese’. M A K Halliday , E McDonald
190 . *Language typology: A functional perspective*, Alice Caffarel, James Robert Martin & Christian Matthias
191 Ingemar Martin Matthiessen (ed.) (Amsterdam & Philadelphia) 2004. John Benjamins. p. .
- 192 [Caffarel ()] ‘Metafunctional profile of the grammar of French’. A Caffarel . *Language typology: A functional
193 perspective*, Alice Caffarel, James Robert Martin & Christian Matthias Ingemar Martin Matthiessen (ed.)
194 (Amsterdam & Philadelphia) 2004. John Benjamins. p. .
- 195 [Steiner and Teich ()] ‘Metafunctional profile of the grammar of German’. E Steiner , E Teich . *Language
196 typology: A functional perspective*, Alice Caffarel, James Robert Martin & Christian Matthias Ingemar Martin
197 Matthiessen (ed.) (Amsterdam & Philadelphia) 2004. John Benjamins. p. .
- 198 [Teruya ()] ‘Metafunctional profile of the grammar of Japanese’. K Teruya . *Language typology: A functional
199 perspective*, Alice Caffarel, James Robert Martin & Christian Matthias Ingemar Martin Matthiessen (ed.)
200 (Amsterdam & Philadelphia) 2004. John Benjamins. p. .
- 201 [Lin ()] *Paletaye: than [The Pearl*, Htin Lin . 1999. Yangon: Pan Shwe Pyi Press.
- 202 [Ozerov ()] *The system of information packaging in colloquial Burmese*, P Ozerov . 2014. Bundoora. La Trobe
203 University (MA Thesis)
- 204 [Hopple ()] ‘Topicalization in Burmese expository discourse’. P Hopple . *Studies in Burmese linguistics*, Justin
205 Watkins (ed.) (Canberra) 2005. Pacific Linguistics. p. .