Research Article

Analyzing Thematic Structures in Queen Elizabeth II's Christmas Speeches

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Political speech plays an important role in connecting various segments of society and fostering a sense of unity. This study aimed to investigate thematic structures of Christmas speeches delivered by Queen Elizabeth II.

Methodology: To meet the aim of the study, a corpus of 711 T-units was analyzed using Halliday's (2014) thematic structure approach and Daneš' (1974) thematic progression model.

Results: The research findings indicated that the topical theme was the most frequently utilized type, followed by a moderate usage of textual theme, while interpersonal theme was the least applied. Moreover, a predilection was shown towards unmarked themes over marked ones to enhance simplicity. The findings revealed that the predominant employed thematic pattern was the constant pattern, followed by the linear pattern to a slightly lesser degree, whereas the split pattern was scarcely utilized. The integration of these patterns yielded a harmonious flow of information and a cohesive arrangement for the textual composition.

Conclusion: The analysis of theme structure and thematic progression patterns from 2001 to 2021 revealed that the Queen exhibited a consistent pattern of theme structure usage, while the usage of thematic progression varied depending on the topics addressed in each speech. These results along with other further investigations may be beneficial in training political sciences students, future politicians and public speakers.

1. Introduction

Political speeches play an essential part in connecting various segments of society and fostering a sense of unity. The fundamental aspect of political discourse lies in the capacity of the politician to employ linguistic and symbolic tools that activate dormant inclinations within the populace (Gamson, 1992). Language is a crucial component in political activities as it is involved in the preparation, execution, influence, and enactment of such actions. Therefore, language and politics are intricately intertwined. Annually, on the 25th of December at 3:00 p.m. Greenwich Mean Time, Queen Elisabeth II of The United Kingdom of Great Britain used to present her Christmas speech (message), from the Music Hall of Buckingham Palace. It is a unique opportunity for the monarch to address her subjects directly, expressing her thoughts and reflections on the year

gone by and offering her hopes for the future. The inception of this custom dates back to 1932 when George V, the grandfather of The Queen, initiated it, and it has been upheld ever since (The Royal Family, 2023). The Queen's Christmas Speech holds immense historical, political, and cultural significance, serving as a window into the British monarchy and the wider British society over time (Catsiapis, 2005). The Christmas message, whether celebrated or satirized, has become an established tradition in British culture and for millions of people worldwide, comparable in significance to customary festive dishes such as roast turkey and Christmas pudding. The Queen's speech on television is watched by a vast number of individuals throughout the United Kingdom. The message is broadcasted through various media channels such as televisions, radio stations,

and the Internet, reaching a global audience (Kredátusová, 2009).

The Christmas speech is an important way for the Queen to connect with the public on a personal level, by sharing her thoughts and feelings without the interference of the government (Catsiapis, 2005). The Christmas message is a live example of how language is used to serve functional meaning in a specific social, cultural and political context, therefore using the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework was considered as a distinct appropriate analysis approach since it presents a theory about language as a social process and a methodology to analyze language patterns.

The development of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is largely attributed to Michael Halliday, who suggested that language should be analyzed through a functional-semantic perspective (Halliday, 2014). The central objective of this theoretical framework is to comprehend the nature of texts by scrutinizing them within their cultural and social milieu. The SFL framework makes four primary theoretical claims. It posits that language is functional and its primary function is to create meaning (semantic). Additionally, social and cultural contexts influence these meanings, and language usage is inherently semiotic (Eggins, 2004). According to Halliday (2014), the SFL perspective regards the grammar of language as system networks or interrelated sets of options for making meaning. He proposed three metafunctions at a lexico-grammatical level to account for the potential of language to create meaning: the Ideational "construing a model of experience," the Interpersonal "enacting social relationships," and the Textual "creating relevance to context."

These metafunctions are utilized simultaneously whenever language is used. The writer/speaker's lexico-grammatical decisions can be observed as a means of depicting the world, whether it be imaginary or factual, conceptual, or tangible (ideational metafunction), to express their connection with the audience (interpersonal metafunction), and to structure the delivery of their communication (textual metafunction). The metafunctions, which serve as fundamental organizing principles of language, can be viewed as tools that facilitate linguistic analysis, comprehension, and discussion regarding the linguistic choices present in a particular text. The analyst can utilize these tools as a means of "deconstructing" any message that is contained within a given text, with respect to the linguistic realizations that are present within each metafunction (Eggins, 2004).

Although the Queen's Christmas speech and its content receive considerable attention each year, its textual analysis is less common (Kredátusová, 2009). One may find acoustic analysis of the speech (Harrington et al., 2000), analysis of metaphors (Hlubuček, 2017; Mehmeti, 2020), speech act analysis (Sari & Pranoto, 2022), and rhetorical analysis (Kassabova, 2020) but a text analysis using SFL seems to be very exceptional. To our best knowledge, only Puspani et al. (2024) investigated language functions in the Queen's 1975 Christmas speech, employing the literary approach method

to explore language functions. No prior studies have examined a collection of The Queen's Christmas speeches using the Halliday's Theme/Rheme system. This study is pertinent since it may be helpful for speakers in the political sciences domain.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate theme structure and thematic patterns (hereafter, TP) in The Queen's 2001-2021 Christmas speeches collection. The study attempted to answer the following two research questions:

1. What theme structures and TP patterns were used in the Queen's 2001-2021 speeches?

2. Has the Queen's choice of theme structures and TP patterns changed throughout those 20 years?

2. Literature Review

Thematic patterns have been a widely used as an analytical tool among researchers for a considerable time, with applications of the analysis on various forms of written communication such as journalistic texts, advertising materials, and academic papers. Nevertheless, a limited number of scholars have analyzed political speeches through the lens of Theme structure and TP (Damayanti et al., 2021; Feifei, 2019; Hanh, 2012; Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2020; Sinurat, 2018).

Damayanti, Ambarini and Shopia (2021) investigated textual meaning manifestations in the Queen's Corona Virus Broadcast "We Will Meet Again" aired in March 2020. The researchers reported that topical theme represented 67% of theme types in this speech, with 54% being marked and 46% unmarked. Textual theme accounted for 26% while interpersonal theme represented only 6% (Damayanti et al., 2021). Similarly, Octaberlina and Muslimin (2020) examined the textual meanings in the speech of the Indonesian President Joko Widodo, concerning the endeavors to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The results revealed that topical Theme represented 67% of theme types, followed by textual Theme (33%), whereas interpersonal Theme was not employed. The most frequent TP pattern used in the speech was derived theme type (44%). Simple linear TP accounted for 31% of TP types in the speech. Constant and split TP patterns were equally employed, accounting for approximately 15% each.

Analysis of the 2017 inauguration speech of Donald Trump by Sinurat (2018) revealed a significant 80.45% utilization of topical theme, a moderate 17.40% use of textual theme and a low use of interpersonal theme. The prevalent TP identified in Trump's speech was the constant TP, which represented 42.5% of the TP. This was followed by the linear TP with a frequency of 16.30%. In contrast, it was noted that the employment of both derived theme and split rheme patterns was minimal, constituting a mere 1.5% each. Along similar lines, Feifei (2019) reported that Barak Obama's election success speech had a predominant utilization of simple thematic structure, accounting for 80% of the speech, while the remaining 20 % of the speech employed a multiple thematic structure. The Marked theme was utilized with greater frequency, comprising 60% of the

total usage. Overall, Obama employed numerous uncomplicated and unmarked themes to articulate his distinct viewpoints and concepts. Through the utilization of a straightforward and clear thematic approach, Obama exhibited his confidence in the forthcoming progress of his nation. These various themes were integrated into a cohesive approach utilizing solely linear and consistent TP patterns. Finally, the analysis of a corpus of political speeches in Vietnam by Hanh (2012) revealed that a significant proportion of the speeches (77.54%) were found to contain a high frequency of the topical theme. A total of 76.23% of those topical themes were categorized as unmarked. The study also reported a low utilization of textual and interpersonal themes, with percentages of 14% and 7% respectively. Puspani et al. (2024) explored language functions in the Queen's 1975 Christmas speech, employing the literary approach method and found that the most used language function in her speech was Personal Function, followed by the Interactional Function, Regulatory Function, Imaginative and Representational Function.

To sum up, textual meaning investigations of political discourse are limited to a few studies, and no published study has explored and analyzed a collection of The Queen's Christmas broadcasts using Halliday's Theme/Rheme system. What follows is an overview of the major systems that realize the textual metafunction, namely theme structure and TP systems.

3. Theoretical Framework

The primary objective of this study was to exclusively examine the textual meaning in The Queen's Christmas speeches. Eggins (2004) asserts that textual meaning plays a crucial role in language organization. It enables the effective and contextually appropriate arrangement of text clauses, while also achieving the intended purpose (Eggins, 2004). According to Halliday (2014), the textual Metafunction serves as the facilitating mechanism through which language is structured as a message, based on the selection of meaning within a particular framework (Halliday, 2014).

In the realm of textual analysis, the clause is regarded as the primary origin of meaning that is utilized to structure and convey information or messages. The exchange of information between two individuals occurs through the use of clauses during communication. The disseminated information is systematically arranged and prioritized based on its significance. Typically, the primary information is situated at the beginning position, with subsequent details following thereafter. The elements that appear at the beginning and subsequently in a sentence are referred to as the Theme and Rheme, respectively.

The identification of theme in a clause is commonly approached through Halliday's (2014) framework, who states that Theme extends from the beginning of the clause and up to (and including) the first element that has a function in transitivity. The theme of a clause ends with the first constituent that is either participant, circumstance, or process and rheme is the rest of the clause i.e. everything which is not theme. This first constituent is called topical Theme and it can be preceded by interpersonal and/or textual elements, as presented next.

3.1. Theme structure

What follows is a brief description of theme structure.

3.1.1. Topical theme

Topical theme pertains to the experiential meaning of language which denotes what the clause is about or the topic of the clause, as per Bloor and Bloor (2004) explanation. The identification process is relatively straightforward, according to Eggins (2004), any constituent that appears at the beginning of a clause and can be assigned a Transitivity function is classified as a topical Theme. The constituent in question encompasses the elements of participants, process, and circumstance, as noted by various scholars (Butt et al., 2009; Halliday, 2014; Linda & Peter, 1995). The fundamental principle in the identification of the thematic structure of a clause is that a clause comprises a solitary TP either participant, process, or circumstance. For example:

1. I have given blood 36 times.
2. In most infants there are frequent episodes of crying with no apparent cause.
3. Read that book!

In (1) the subject I is the actor of the process have given. It functions as Topical Theme as it acts as the participant of the action of giving blood. In (2) in most infants is a circumstance occurring in the beginning of the clause and considered as Topical Theme instead of there are. In terms of process, the verb read in (3) is Topical Theme as it functions as a process.

Furthermore, Halliday (2014) indicated that there are two types of topical Theme: Marked and Unmarked. In a clause, the subject realizes the unmarked topical Theme, while the marked topical Theme is realized by components other than the subject like circumstances, adverbial groups and predicators (Halliday, 2014).

3.1.2. Interpersonal theme

According to Eggins (2004) the term interpersonal theme is used to describe a constituent that appears at the beginning of a clause and is labeled with a Mood label rather than a Transitivity label. Typically, it is positioned before the topical Theme. The elements comprising the interpersonal Theme consist of Vocative, Modal Comment Adjuncts, Finite Verbal Operators, and mental clauses, which serve to convey the speaker or writer's perspective or conviction (Eggins, 2004).

According to Bloor and Bloor (2004) a vocative is any element utilized to address. This includes personal names such as Jack or Sara, familiar addresses such as father, mother, or boy, and terms of endearment or disparagement like Honey, Darling, or Baby (Bloor & Bloor, 2004). Modal comment adjunct refers to the speaker or writer's evaluation or stance toward the message's content. The

utilization of interpersonal themes, such as honesty or possibly, may indicate the level of dedication of a speaker or writer to veracity or accuracy (Halliday, 2014). Another element that falls under the category of interpersonal Theme is the finite verbal operator. These are a limited group of auxiliary verbs that express the primary tense of modality e.g., did, was not, will, do, used to.

The constituents of interpersonal Theme in Mood Adjuncts comprise elements such as: maybe and just among others. As in: Maybe Tom could help. Martin et al. (1997) explain that the initial and secondary mental clauses that convey the speaker's viewpoint can be classified as interpersonal themes. As an illustration, within the clause "I think there would probably be some of them that you will never see ", I think retains its interpersonal significance, which Halliday classifies as an interpersonal metaphor of modality (James R Martin et al., 1997).

3.1.3. Textual theme

The term encompasses all types of textual elements. These are linguistic components that lack interpersonal or experiential connotations yet, serve a crucial cohesive function in connecting the clause to its broader context (Eggins, 2004). The textual Theme encompasses three distinct categories of constituents, continuative conjunctions (yes, oh, well, yea…), structural conjunctions (and, or, nor, either, then, when, while, before, after…) and conjunctive adjuncts in academic discourse (first, second, then, furthermore, in addition; Halliday, 2014).

As previously indicated, there must be a topical Theme (marked or unmarked) in each clause. Interpersonal and textual themes, nevertheless, are optional. The utilization of the two themes to modify the topical theme is at the discretion of the speaker or writer. According to Bloor and Bloor (2004), a clause that solely contains a single Theme, which is typically topical, is referred to as a simple Theme. This particular structure is commonly observed in
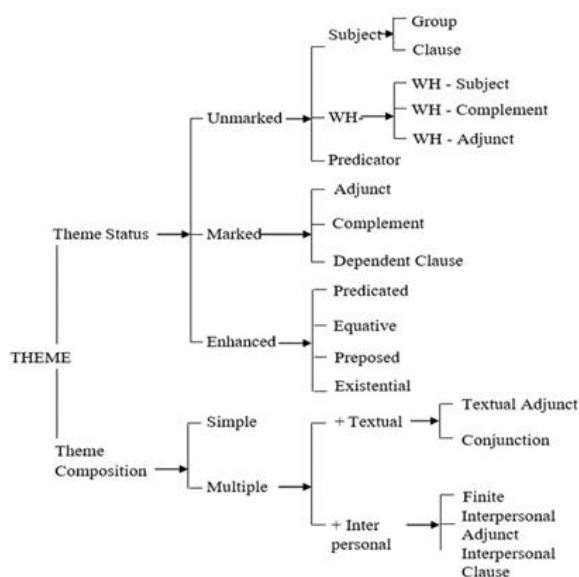

Figure 1.
Theme System (Thompson, 2014)

straightforward statements that are either declarative or imperative (Bloor & Bloor, 2004). Conversely, a clause that contains multiple Themes is characterized as having a multiple Theme structure. This linguistic phenomenon is frequently encountered in both spoken discourse and lengthier syntactic structures. The Theme system outlined by Thompson (2014) provides a comprehensive understanding of the Theme structure (Thompson, 2014).

Over time, Theme analysis has persistently evaluated the role of Theme beyond the clausal structure, which has a noteworthy impact on the overall organization of the text. At the paragraph level, the derivation and influence of Theme and Rheme in a clause are contingent upon the Theme and Rheme present in preceding texts. In essence, the chosen Theme within a specific clause may originate from either the Theme or Rheme of the preceding clause. This structure is commonly referred to as TP which was first introduced by Daneš (1974). He conducted an examination of the sequence of thematic structures within clauses and subsequently highlighted the significance of this pattern in establishing coherence and cohesion.

3.2. Thematic patterns

Building on Daneš' (1974) work, Eggins (2004) introduced three types of TP patterns: the constant pattern, the linear (zigzag) pattern and the split (fan) pattern.

3.2.1. The constant theme patterns

This pattern involves the progression of themes through the repetition of a specific theme. The theme of the initial clause is chosen as the theme for the subsequent clauses. Theme Reiteration is an alternative term used to describe this pattern. The progression of this pattern goes as follows:
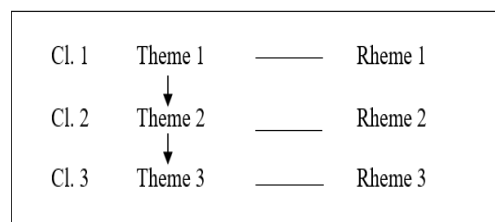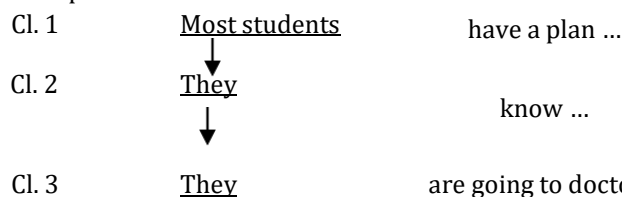

Figure 2.
Constant Theme Pattern

Example:

Cl. 1   <u>Most students</u>   have a plan …

Cl. 2   <u>They</u>   know …

Cl. 3   <u>They</u>   are going to doctors.

Through the utilization of this particular pattern, the writer or speaker has the ability to allocate specific emphasis towards a particular subject or participant. Thus, this progression pattern is frequently observed in descriptive or narrative literature (Bloor & Bloor, 2004).

3.2.2. The linear (zigzag) theme pattern

The linear or the zig-zag is the second kind of TP. According to Bloor and Bloor (2004) the pattern involves the elevation of the element that is introduced in the Rheme of the first clause to the position of Theme in the second clause. It is frequently observed in argumentative or expository texts. The TP of this pattern is represented in Figure 3.
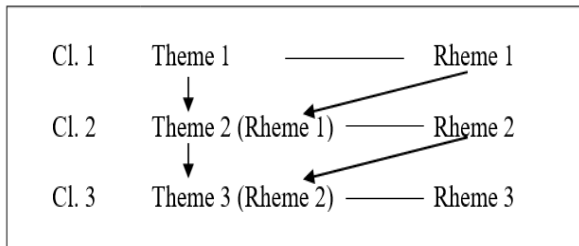

Figure 3.
Linear Theme Pattern

Example:

Cl. 1 The stomach   produces gastric juice,

Cl. 2 which *(gastric juice)* contains dilute hydrochloric acid.

Cl. 3   The acid kills most of bacteria in the food.

3.2.3. The split (fan) theme pattern

Also called the multiple-rheme pattern (Eggins, 2004) and it appears when a rheme of a clause comprises two parts, each of which is used as the theme of the next clause in turn.
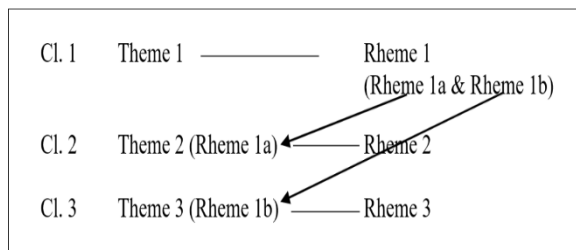

Figure 4.
Split Theme Pattern

Example:

Cl. 1 this country   shows a remarkable fusion of both densely populated rural and urban communities.

Cl. 2 Japanese peasant farmers   practice …

Cl. 3 whereas the millions of people   have much in common living in vast industrial cities such as Tokyo and Osaka

5. Methodology

5.1. Research design

To answer the research questions stated earlier, a mixed-methods research approach was employed. Martin and Rose (2008) noted that while generalizations derived from quantitative statistical studies are important, it is equally essential to give a qualitative analysis of particular, unique cases that contribute to a deeper comprehension of the text (Martin & Rose, 2008). From this perspective, the study utilized quantitative analysis to obtain theme structure and TP frequencies and percentages. furthermore, a qualitative analysis was undertaken on selected dataset extracts (Aljuraywi & Alyousef, 2022).

To investigate the thematic structure, the data was examined using thematic structure framework suggested by Halliday (2014). The result of this examination was then further analyzed using TP model proposed by Daneš (1974) to discover the most frequent pattern of thematic development used in the Queen's Christmas speeches.

5.2. Data collection

Twenty Christmas speeches (2001- 2021) were collected from the official royal family website (www.royal.uk/royal-family), comprising a total of 13100 words. The length of the speeches ranged between 734 words (2011 broadcast) and 521 words (2009 broadcast).

Table 1.
Number of Words in the Queen's Christmas Speeches (2001-2021)

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Word count	699	580	578	585	553	594
Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Word count	591	679	521	622	734	640
Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Word count	648	662	680	603	717	564
Year	2019	2020	2021			
Word count	609	603	699			

5.3. Data analysis

Before analyzing the thematic structure, it was necessary to decompose each text into separate T-units. A T-unit consists of an independent clause, together with all hypotactically related clauses and words that are dependent on that independent clause (Rezayi & Moghani, 2018). T-units are widely acknowledged among scholars as the most suitable units for conducting textual analysis in studies related to thematic structure and TP (McCabe, 1999). The decomposition of the Queen's twenty Christmas speeches resulted in 711 T-units. The units were subsequently numbered and put in an Excel sheet to facilitate the quantification of T-units within each respective text. Then, the thematic structures were analyzed by dividing each unit into its constituent theme and rheme. Each unit could

contain multiple themes. However, each unit must only include one topical theme. Upon identification of the topical theme, the remaining portion of the clause would constitute the Rheme. The themes were classified and color tagged into topical (marked or unmarked) in blue, interpersonal in purple, and textual themes in red, and subsequently quantified and expressed as a percentage using the following formula: n= Fx/N x100% (Fatmawati et al., 2019). Where: n= Percentage of types, Fx= total types of frequency of the sub-category and N= Total of all categories. The T-units in different paragraphs were then examined and marked for Constant, Linear (zig-zag) or Split (fan) themes patterns. Percentages were later counted using the same aforementioned formula. Expressions lacking a predicate, such as "A Happy Christmas to you all", were excluded from T-unit calculations since their analysis in terms of theme structure and TP was not possible. Finally, trends of theme structure and TP in the Queen's Christmas speeches were examined to identify any discernible pattern change or consistency throughout this period of 20 years.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1. Thematic structure

As previously stated, Theme refers to the initial constituents of a clause that serve as the starting point for the message. Table 2 illustrates the proportions and percentages of the three Theme types used in the Queen's last 20 Christmas speeches.

Table 2.
Distribution of Theme Structure in the Queen's Christmas (2001-2021) Speeches

	Topical	Interpersonal	Textual
Frequency	711	59	153
Percentage	77%	6%	17%

All the three types of themes were used in this data set, but with significantly different frequencies. The topical theme represented 77% of the theme types employed in the Queen's Christmas speeches, while textual theme accounted for 16%. Meanwhile, the interpersonal theme had the least occurrence frequency representing only 6% of theme types.

The dominance of topical theme among the other theme categories was quite expected since a topical theme is an obligatory part of Theme. Furthermore, topical theme is the element which is closely related to a participant, a circumstance or the process of a clause; therefore, it is used as a foregrounding component to direct the attention of the audience to the central subject that is being discussed. Moreover, the utilization of a topical theme is an effective speech approach as it is easily comprehensible (Rezayi & Moghani, 2018). This is why the Queen frequently employed this type of theme, as she was aware that her audience are comprised of a diverse range of individuals, including immigrants with basic English skills and citizens with limited education. Queen Elizabeth II used topical themes to highlight reoccurring topics throughout the past twenty years, such as expressing grief, community responsibility,

endorsing hope, building confidence and reassurance (Sari & Pranoto, 2022). This is a characteristic of informational content and intentionality in political speeches (Kenzhekanova, 2015). Following are some examples of topical themes used by the Queen in this corpus:

1. During the following days we struggled to find ways of expressing our horror at what had happened (2001 speech).
2. They have learnt to take responsibility and to exercise judgement and restraint in situations of acute stress and danger (2003 speech)
3. In the United Kingdom and around the world, people have risen magnificently to the challenges of the year (2020 speech).
4. Today we celebrate Christmas (2017 speech).

As can be seen from the examples, the prevalence of topical theme in the data demonstrates that the Queen aimed to enhance the clarity of the speeches for the intended audience. This result aligns with the findings of Chen and Shuo's (2018) analysis of Ivanka Trump's speech, where they found that topical theme was also the most used theme type by Ivanka with an 86.5% frequency (Chen & Shuo, 2018). The studies previously referenced Damayanti et al. (2021), Octaberlina and Muslimin (2020) and Sinurat (2018) have collectively reported analogous findings regarding the pervasive utilization of textual theme by political figures when engaging in public discourse across various contexts. The Queen employed euphemism in Example 3 by using the phrase "challenges of the year" instead of "coronavirus," "Covid-19," or "pandemic." In this case, the evident textual theme topic is one of resilience, triumph, and overcoming adversity. The Queen was likely aiming to strike an optimistic and inspiring tone, acknowledging the hardships people faced during the pandemic without dwelling on the painful realities. This allowed her to deliver a unifying and uplifting note in her Christmas message.

Table 2 also illustrates that textual themes constituted 17% of theme types in the Queen's Christmas speeches collection. These findings show the commonality of moderate use of textual theme in political speeches, which aims at avoiding overly structured and detached delivery and maintaining audience engagement using a more conversational style. For example, Hanh (2012) in his Vietnamese political speeches corpus analyses reported that the use of textual themes was moderately prevalent, accounting for 14% of theme types. Damayanti, Ambarini and Shopia (2021) found that textual theme accounted for 26% of themes in the Queen's 2020 COVID-19 broadcast. Similarly, the analysis of both the Indonesian and English translated COVID-19 speech of the Indonesian President Joko Widodo by Octaberlina and Muslimin (2020) revealed a 26% and 33% of textual theme employment and Sinurat (2018) Donald Trump's inauguration speech analysis reported that 17.40% of themes were textual. This average use of textual theme by the Queen is due to the wide-ranging nature of her Christmas speeches, in which she addresses many topics and events in the same speech, therefore, each

topic was separately addressed lowering the need to use textual themes to connect different units. However, the used textual themes were appropriately employed and served the purpose of providing a sense of cohesiveness and suitable structure to the speeches as shown in these examples:

1. **But** life, of course, consists of final partings as well as first meetings. (2021 speech).
2. The Tomb of the Unknown Warrior isn't a large memorial, **but** everyone entering Westminster Abbey has to walk around his resting place, honoring this unnamed combatant of the First World War a symbol of selfless duty and ultimate sacrifice. (2018 speech).
3. My family and I are also inspired by the men and women of our emergency services and Armed Forces **and** at Christmas we remember all those on duty at home and abroad, who are helping those in need and keeping us and our families safe and secure. (2019 speech).

Albeit limited in number, interpersonal themes were present in the Queen's Christmas speeches. The use of interpersonal themes scored the lowest percentage among the other types of themes in this data set with only a 6% frequency as demonstrated in Table 2. Butt et al. (2009) posited that interpersonal themes are more frequently present in spoken texts due to the sustained interaction between speakers (Butt et al., 2009). However, this is not applicable on the Queen's Christmas Speeches since these speeches are pre-prepared and recorded before being broadcasted on Christmas Eve. Hence, this low use implication of interpersonal themes could be attributed to the objectivity and impersonal traits (Halliday, 2004) of political speeches delivered in special occasions. The speeches are intended for public consumption and are focused on the interests of the populace. Thus, the Queen has exercised discretion in not overly disclosing her personal views as not to overwhelm the listeners with personal opinions, except in matters where a definitive stance was deemed necessary such as religion, wars or commonly agreed-upon matters as in:

1. Perhaps it's truer to say that Christmas can speak to the child within us all. (2021 speech)
2. Of course, family does not necessarily mean blood relatives but often a description of a community, organization or nation.
3. Certainly, the need for selflessness and generosity in the face of hardship is nothing new. (2005 speech)
4. Sometimes it seems that reconciliation stands little chance in the face of war and discord. (2014 speech)

Table 3 shows the results of Theme 'markedness' in this data set. It can be noticed that the frequency of the unmarked theme in the corpus was more than four times as much as that of the marked theme. This is a typical result since Halliday (2014) notes that the unmarked theme "is the form we tend to use if there is no prior context leading up to it, and no positive reason for choosing anything else" (p. 82).

Table 3.
Distribution of Marked and Unmarked Themes in the Queen's Christmas (2001-2021) Speeches

	Unmarked	Marked
Frequency	585	126
Percentage	82%	18%

The unmarked themes constituted about 82% of the topical theme, in contrast with the marked theme types which consequently made up a much smaller portion of 18% of the overall topical themes. Below are some examples of marked and unmarked topical themes used by Queen Elizabeth II in this collection of Christmas speeches:

1. At the time, it felt like a landmark (2017 speech).
2. After all the tribulations of this year, this is surely more relevant than ever. (2001 speech).
3. Mary and Joseph found no room at the inn (2007 speech)
4. Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith (2011 speech).
5. New communication technologies allow them to reach out to the wider world and share their experiences and viewpoints. (2009 speech).

The examples reveal that the Queen's selection of the unmarked theme is a consequence of the amalgamation of the theme with the subject. It serves as an illustration of the uncomplicated nature of the speeches. A greater occurrence of the unmarked theme is associated with a reduced level of argumentation in political discourse (Ebrahimi & Ebrahimi, 2012). Additionally, it facilitates the comprehension of the structure of the text by the audience and enhances their engagement in the communication process (Whittaker, 1995). Furthermore, the utilization of unmarked themes promotes the maintenance of coherence between clauses and ensures continuity throughout the text (Jalilifar, 2009).

6.2 Thematic progression

Thematic patterns hold significant importance in establishing consistency and interconnectedness within texts, because the correlation between consecutive themes and their rhemes offers a more comprehensive explanation of the method of development of texts. This corpus of the Queen's Christmas speeches yielded a total of 88 thematic chains. Figure 5 shows the results of the frequencies and percentages of the different TP patterns found within these 88 thematic chains as applied in the data.

Figure 5 reveals that the most common TP pattern found in the Queen's Christmas speeches is constant pattern with 46 instances (52% frequency), ensued by a high use of linear or zigzag pattern (40 instances) representing 46% of TP patterns. The least frequent pattern utilized in the data was the split (fan) pattern accounting only for 2% (2 instances). These findings are consistent with the results of a prior study conducted on the 2017 inauguration speech of Donald Trump by Sinurat (2018).

The heavy reliance on constant TP, combined with the strategic use of linear and zigzag patterns, demonstrates how political speakers leverage thematic organization to create coherent, compelling
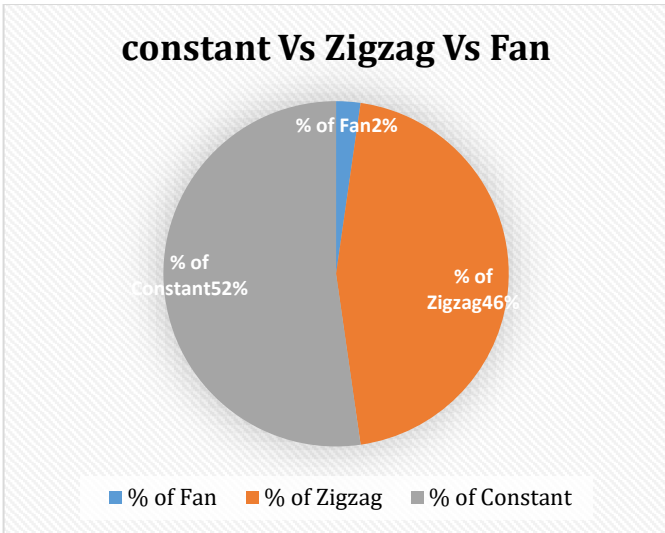
Figure 5.
Distribution of TP Patterns in the Queen's Christmas (2001-2021) Speeches

narratives that resonate with their audiences. The relative rarity of split (fan) patterns further underscores the preference for maintaining a dominant, unifying theme in political speech.

Utilizing a consistent participant as the Theme in a recurring manner imbues the text with a distinct sense of direction. Nevertheless, a written or spoken discourse that lacks variation in its theme would not only be uninteresting to hear, but would also suggest a lack of direction in the text (Eggins, 2004). For this reason, the speeches delivered by the Queen exhibited a balanced application of both constant and linear TP techniques, providing a comprehensive and elaborating account of a singular subject, yet smoothly transitioning between different topics. This management of information flow resulted in the creation of well-structured and coherent discourse. What follows are examples of TP patterns from this data.

6.2.1 Constant theme pattern

Figure 6 begins with the topical theme "Forgiveness." This theme is reiterated in the succeeding clauses through the use of the personal pronoun "it."
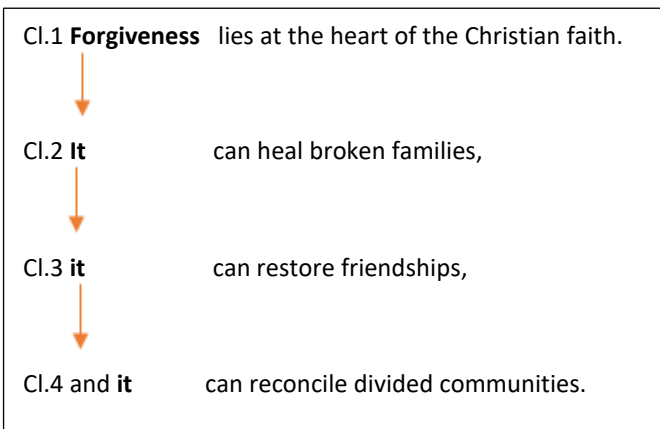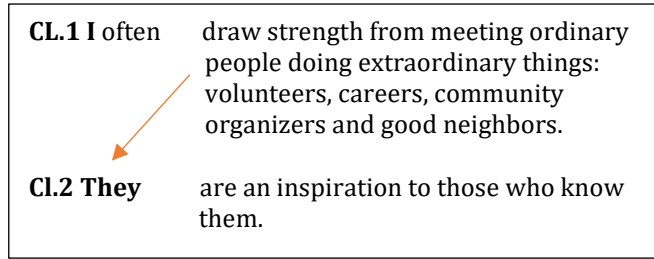

Figure 6.
Constant Thematic Pattern from the Data

Figure 7.
Linear Thematic Pattern from the Data

6.2.2. Linear (zigzag) pattern

According to Figure 7, the first clause introduces the element "ordinary people doing extraordinary things" as part of the Rheme. This element is then promoted to the theme position in the next clause through the use of the pronoun "They."

Therefore, the utilization of the linear TP by the Queen allowed for seamlessly logical dissemination of information (Sinuart, 2018). This mechanism generated a cohesive text and offered the audience a comprehensible cumulative text development, as stated by Eggins (2004).

6.2.3. Split (fan) pattern

Figure 8 shows how the rheme of the first clause possesses two elements: "moments of happiness" and "times of sadness." These elements are then made the theme in the succeeding clauses. The first element is promoted as the theme the second clause through the use of the noun phrase "the happiness." Similarly, the second element is taken up as theme of the third clause by using "the sadness."
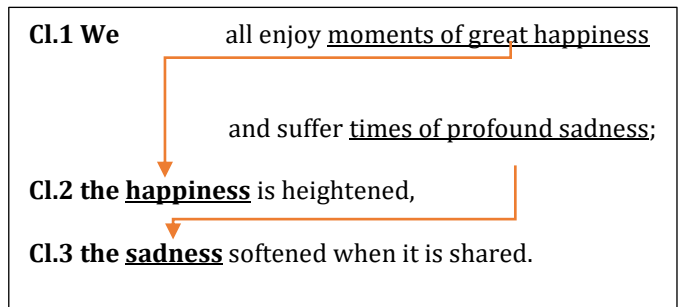

Figure 8.
Example of Split Theme Pattern from the Data

Despite the benefits of this thematic progression pattern, its application was not commonly observed in the speeches delivered by the Queen, as it necessitated a more comprehensive textual expansion and it can to be challenging to comprehend, particularly in light of the speech's oral delivery.

6.3. The Queen's choice of theme pattern throughout the past 20 Years

Figure 9 shows trends of theme structure in the Queen's Christmas speech from 2001 to 2021. As demonstrated there has been no major increase or drop in the use of the three types of themes throughout the 20 years.
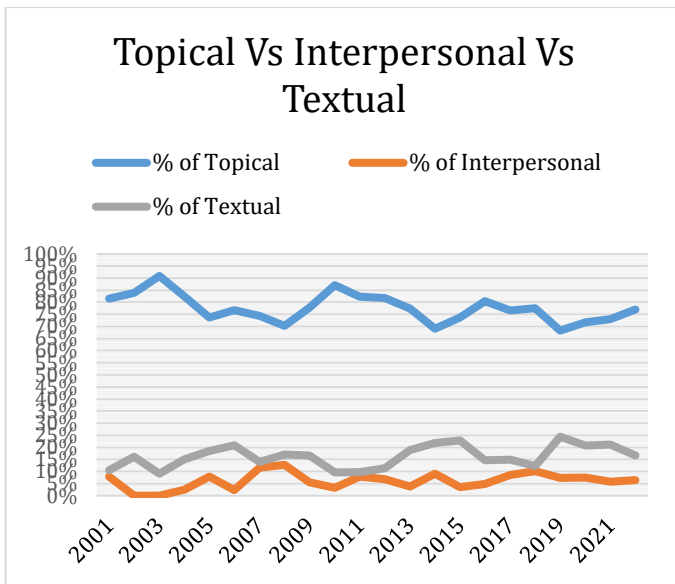
Figure 9.
The Queen's CHOICE of Theme Structure from 2001 to 2021

The pattern somehow remained stable, suggesting that the Queen's inclination was predominantly towards disseminating information about particular subjects, leading to the production of texts that were easily understandable to potential audiences. Therefore, the Queen successfully established a cohesive structure for her speeches, characterized by a consistent distribution of topics, a consistent mode of expressing her perspective, and a uniform approach to dividing and connecting her ideas as appropriate, over several years.

Figure 10 illustrates trends in TP patterns utilized by the Queen in her Christmas speeches from 2001 to 2021. Unlike the theme structure, TP patterns in this data displayed significant fluctuations throughout the years.

The constant pattern was constantly employed by the Queen, however it dramatically dropped to zero in 2008, 2014 and 2015 speeches. There was also a regular use of the zigzag pattern; yet, it experienced major decreases in 2002,
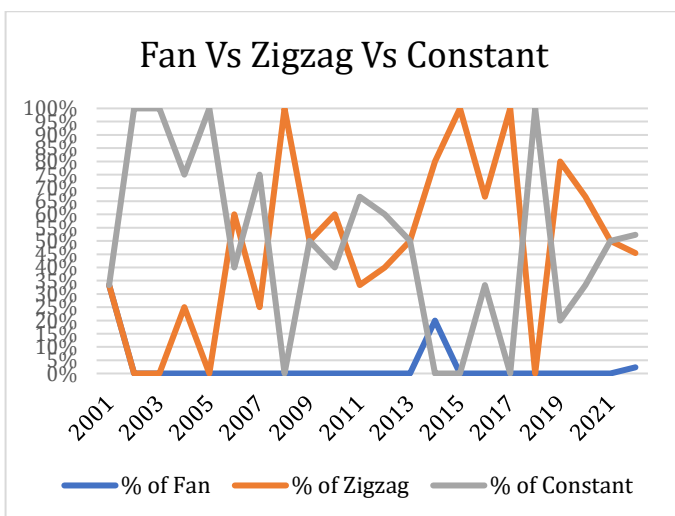

Figure 10.
The Queen's Theme Patterns Choice from 2001 to 2021

2003, and 2018 Christmas speeches. The split pattern was only used twice by the Queen in 2001 and 2014.

The choice of TP correlated with the topics discussed by the Queen in each Christmas speech. The constant pattern was frequently employed to underscore the significance and impact of particular occurrences, such as the commemoration of the Golden Jubilee (marking 50 years of the Queen's reign), the passing of her mother and sister in 2002, and the deployment of British military personnel to Iraq in 2003. Contrastively, the linear pattern was used when a smoother extensive discussion and a more comprehensive and coherent discourse were needed. Such as the celebration and contemplation of the achievements of The Prince of Wales on the occasion of his 60th birthday in 2008. Similar interpretations were provided by Feifei (2019) that Obama's election success speech contained linear patterns of expression, which conveyed a clear and logical thought process. Additionally, the speech incorporated consistent thematic elements, which served to reinforce Obama's power and authority, as well as to emphasize certain emotional sentiments.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the thematic structure and thematic progression patterns in a collection of Christmas speeches delivered by Queen Elizabeth II over a period of 20 years. The analysis revealed that the Queen primarily utilized topical themes to convey information, with minimal use of interpersonal themes. This suggests a focus on imparting clear, comprehensible content to her audience. The study also found a preference for unmarked themes and a predominance of constant and linear thematic progression patterns, which contributed to a coherent and balanced flow of information in the speeches. In conclusion, the Queen maintained a relatively consistent usage of thematic structure over the years, while her thematic progression patterns varied depending on the specific topics addressed in each speech.

The results of this study can be helpful in the political sciences pedagogical domain. By comprehending the Theme structure and TP utilized in the Queen's speeches, political students and future politicians can acquire enhanced insights into crafting a coherent and rational speech, and subsequently employ sophisticated linguistic elements to produce successful presentations. The analysis of these speeches can also provide a model for other politicians on the appropriate structure of speeches that should be delivered in special occasions, and help them develop an understanding of how to organize their own ideas and present them clearly and compellingly.

The findings may offer valuable perceptions into the overall structure of the Queen's discourse in various contexts beyond the Christmas season. Furthermore, applying this Theme structure and TP modal can help different types of speakers like teachers, lecturers, broadcasters, and leaders in different domains to deliver their messages consistently and coherently.

Temporal constraints have led to two significant

limitations which could be addressed in future research. Initially, it is advisable to expand the data size to encompass all of the Queen's Christmas speeches. Additionally, the corpus type should be broadened to incorporate various categories of the Queen's speeches, and also other speeches delivered by diverse important political figures.

Declarations

Competing interest

The authors have declared no competing interests.

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Authors' contribution

Asma collected and analyzed the data. She also reviewed the literature and presented and interpreted the findings. Hesham revised the abstract, introduction, methodology, and the conclusion sections. He also updated the literature review, including the theoretical background, and the results and discussion sections.

Availability of data and materials

All data presented in the current study are available upon the request of editors.

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