

Thematic Progression of Thai Song Dam Folktales¹

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Abstract

This paper is a work-in-progress reporting on an on-going research on *Textual data management of Thai Song Dam Ethnic Group* which is a sub-project under the research project entitled *Ethnicity: New paradigm in language and cultural transmission*. It draws on Systemic Functional Linguistics to investigate the discourse structure of some Thai Song Dam folktales. The paper explores thematic progression patterns in Thai Song Dam folktales spoken in Thailand. The thematic progression is associated with the method of text development which is based on the typical thematic selection realized by unmarked and marked topical Themes (cf. Fries, 1981/1983, 1995a, 1995b). In this current study, patterns of thematic progression are explored as a way of revealing the textual organization of the folktales and the local progression achieved by the thematic selection of successive clauses (cf. Daneš (1974)). The data for this study were drawn from ten Thai Song Dam folktales. They were taken from secondary sources (e.g., folklore researches' appendices, Thai Song Dan folktale collections). Based on Daneš's notion of thematic progression, patterns of Theme selection were explored. The study revealed that the most frequent pattern of thematic progression selected in the ten folktales was the continuous or constant Theme expressed by unmarked topical Themes. Both ellipsed and non-ellipsed unmarked topical Themes were selected and repeated as the point of departure of each clause. The second most frequent pattern is linear Theme pattern. The study also revealed that the primary methods of folktale development are those of temporal and spatial organizations.

Key words: Thai Song Dam (Tai Dam/Lao Song Dam) ethnic group, Folktales, Thematic progression, Thematic development, Method of text development, Theme selection