

THEME AND THEMATIC PROGRESSION IN STUDENTS' RECOUNT TEXTS

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the Theme and Thematic progression patterns in students' recount text in a state vocational school in Bandung. This study employs a descriptive-qualitative research design. The data were obtained from a collection of students' texts. This study uses the theory of Theme system developed by Halliday (1994) and the theory of Thematic progression proposed by Eggins (2004) as the framework to analyze the data. The findings showed that the Theme and Thematic progression supports the character of Recount text written by the students to some extents: the Topical Theme represents the students' ability to deliver what the text is about, the Interpersonal Theme helps students declare their personal comments, while the Textual Theme showed the students' ability to develop the logical relationship between clauses and make their texts more cohesive and coherent. In terms of thematic progression patterns, the Theme Reiteration pattern signposts that the students tend to make the text focus by repeating the same element as Themes; the Zig Zag pattern showed that the students introduce newly information by promoting the Rheme in a clause to the Theme in the subsequent clause, and the Multiple Theme pattern specifies that the students develop the texts well according to the prior plan before writing those ideas in the text.

Keywords: theme; thematic progression; recount texts

Students need to pay attention to several aspects to write a good composition. One of them is the Theme of clauses. Starting a sentence with a Theme is useful in helping students to communicate their ideas successfully (Wang, 2010). The theme is the element of clause structures which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is the clause concerned (Halliday, 1994). The Theme then becomes the prominent element for standing as the grammatical system that organizes the clause in such a way that it helps construct the environment (Emilia, 2014) because it provides the environment for the remainder of the message, which is known as the Rheme, in the Theme and Rheme organization (Halliday, 1994).

However, as a skill, writing is regarded as a difficult skill to be mastered by the students. It is in line with Emilia's study (2005) which discovers that most students considered writing as a difficult subject. Most of the students' skills are far from their learning targets, and teaching writing so far has not been satisfying. It is supported by Alwasilah (2008) who stated that communication in written language is difficult for students and even for teachers. And the difficulty in written language communication makes students tend to be not productive in writing (Alwasilah & Alwasilah, 2005).

Theme-Rheme organisation or Thematic organisation of clause is the most significant factor in the development of texts (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Focusing the students' writing

on the Thematic progression will be very useful in helping students communicate their ideas successfully (Wang, 2010). For pedagogical contexts of writing, Downing (2001) stated that Thematic progression analysis can be applied within educational settings. Downing (2001) also suggested that one of the benefits of Theme and Thematic progression is that it can be used as a resource for analysing texts in educational setting, particularly for students' texts.

In this study, the Theme progression of Systemic Functional Linguistics is used as the instrument to analyze the text written by vocational students. There are four reasons why Thematic progression becomes reasonable to analyse. First, thematic progression is used to organise the principles where new information is conveyed in the context (Hutchin, 1987). Second, it is used to represent the text development (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Third, it is used to organize the texts in a linear and coherent way (Butt, Feez, Spinks, & Yallop, 2000). Fourth, it is utilized to enhance students' ability to read and construct longer texts (Emilia, 2014).

Although the Theme and Thematic progression has been widely studied in the Indonesian vocational school contexts, the awareness of writing organisation based on Thematic progression seems to attract less attention from both teachers and students. Huda (2008) supported that the awareness of writing organisation based on Thematic progression remains unexplored from both teacher

and students for probable insufficient information, although it is essential for enhancing language skill development, particularly writing.

Many studies concerning Theme and Thematic progression have been conducted by several researchers in literary works. The study conducted by McCabe (1999) reported a greater use of the constant thematic progression pattern compared to the linear thematic progression pattern in comparing two different languages: Spanish and English history texts.

Green, Christopher, and Lam (2000) investigated sentence-initial position, certain topic-fronting devices (beginning for and concerning), and logical connectors (besides, furthermore, and moreover) in a non-native speaker (NNS) corpus produced by Chinese subjects, with an English native-speakers corpus as a research baseline. The findings demonstrated that Chinese subjects did have a greater tendency than native speakers to place the connectors under consideration in Theme position. This empirical study was followed by an exercise in which texts containing marked Themes were analyzed to determine the effects of markedness on information structure. It was found that inappropriate occupation of Theme position by the items under consideration here had a deleterious effect on information structure and that this, in turn, had negative effects on both local and global text coherence.

The somewhat similar study has also been conducted by Wang (2010) in China. She investigated university students' writing in terms of thematic choices and progression. This study found that by analyzing Theme and Rheme in a text, the students can learn to perform the same analysis in their own writings, and thus improve cohesion in their own work.

Moreover, Jalilifar (2010) who investigated rhetorical structure of ELT articles on local and international journals reported that overall both local and international journals shared similar rhetorical features since they were attributed to the same genre. Meanwhile, the differences of both categories relied on the number and context of usage of different patterns of thematic progressions in the introduction, result, and discussion of those journals. He further suggested that the authors of the local journal of English need to be informed about the important role of thematic organization in writing ELT articles in order to make their text more communicative.

Meanwhile, Sugijarto (2010) conducted a study on Thematic Progression in students' explanatory texts. In his study, it was found that students commonly apply Constant and Simple Linear Thematic Progression indicating students' texts consistency.

Furthermore, other researchers have investigated their effects on the text development.

Rakhman (2012), who investigated thematic progression of high school students' exposition text, found out that the thematic progression is consistent with the linguistics features of argumentative essays including Simple Linear Theme Progression (SLP), Constant Theme Progression (CTP), and Derived Theme Progression (DTP) (Eggins, 2004).

In addition, Bowen (2013) who investigated the 1st and 3rd year graduate students' text found the system of Theme shows that writers rhetorically frame the information. It is shown that some Theme choices link co-textually to the surrounding discourse, whilst others are chosen to look outward from the text to a wider context.

The study conducted by Triyani (2013) examined English Learning Materials for Senior High School Grade X written by MGMP Team of Kudus Regency is one of English handbook which is used as a main learning source for students. The result of this study shows that the reading texts in English Learning Materials for Senior High School Grade X written by MGMP Team of Kudus Regency consist of 270 topical theme, 101 textual theme and 7 interpersonal theme. At last, it can be seen that the highest number types of theme is topical theme. The writer also found that the texts use various types of thematic progression which comprise 158 constant/reiteration theme, 62 zigzag theme and 14 multiple theme. So, it can be seen that the highest number types of thematic progression is constant/reiteration theme.

Another study investigating Theme system of SFG in students' narrative text was conducted by Safitra (2013). Her study explored the realization of the Theme system in students' narrative texts in terms of types of Theme, choices of topical Theme and Thematic progression, resulting in three kinds of pattern used by the students, namely topical, textual, and interpersonal Theme, in which the topical Theme was the most frequently used.

In addition, as a fifth areas, some studies used Theme-rheme structure and Thematic progression patterns as an analytical tool to examine the students' texts to diagnose problems that EFL students might face when writing in English (Rustipa, 2010; Qing-Feng, 2009; Alonso & McCabe, 2003; Belmonte & Hidalgo, 1998; Lovejoy, 1998, Wong, 2007). These studies did not involve any intervention. They only showed the areas where students suffer from a lack of writing coherently and cohesively at the sentence, paragraph, and essay levels. Based on their analysis, pedagogical recommendations were suggested to implement the teaching of Theme-rheme structure and the different thematic progression patterns to improve the writing quality of EFL learners

The study conducted by Wong (2007) examined and identified the weaknesses of theme/rheme structure as message in a case study. His subject was a non-native speaker of English

who had spent many years studying English as a foreign language. His subject had completed 48 essays in 6 months on different issues: social, business, and scientific matters. Examining the first 20 essays, Wong discovered a number of weaknesses such as: absence of theme, disguised/vague/non-explicit theme, and incoherent tie between theme and rheme. She then carried out an action research to solve such problems in the student's written work. In her writing programme, she taught the subject the three parts of the clause: the notion of theme and rheme in a clause, examining academic texts with focus on theme and rheme (reading), writing short essays, and finally correcting essays with special focus on theme and rheme structure. Wong then examined the student's work and concluded that some improvements were made with clearer themes. She presented some sentences to show how the student applied clearer themes. Thus, she recommended the teaching of theme/rheme structure to overcome weaknesses that are apparent in students' writing. This study was small as it involved only one student, and it lacked a detailed analysis of the student's essays.

Additionally, in terms of students writing task, according to Ebrahimi and Ebrahimi (2012), the choice of interpersonal Theme among students' proficiency level indicated the relationship between language proficiency and writing skill. The result showed that small decrease of the use of this Theme type moving from elementary to advance students, it is indicate the more factual nature of advance students' composition. They further argued that the findings were applicable in improving writing skill.

Based on the studies above, there are two important point which are indicates First, Theme and Thematic progression useful as analytical tool to examine the problems in students texts, such as the areas where students suffer from a lack of writing coherently, and cohesively at the sentence, paragraph, and essay levels. Second, it is also applicable in improving writing skill.

The study on the Theme and Thematic progression in Recount texts written by tenth grade students of a senior high school (Listyani, 2013) has been conducted as well. However, studies dealing with the analysis of the Theme and thematic progression in Recount texts written by vocational students are hardly discovered. Concerning the importance of the Thematic progression in students' texts and the insufficient awareness of this issue by the teachers and the students in Indonesia, further research about Thematic progression is needed. Thus, the current study focuses on analysing vocational students' Recount texts in terms of schematic structure and textual organization using Theme-Rheme and Thematic progression of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in Indonesian context.

Concerning the text type being investigated, students' Recount text becomes the main concern of this study because of several reasons. First, there are few studies concerning the analysis of senior students' Recount text using Theme progression analysis. Recent publications are mainly concerned with the analysis of vocational school students' text. Second, this study is concerned with the analysis of Recount text because recent publications are mainly concerned with the analysis of narrative text and explanatory text. The final reason is because the Recount text will be taught in the second semester in the vocational school context. Therefore, it is considered crucial to conduct an investigation to the Recount text.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive-qualitative design, embracing the characteristics of a case study approach. This approach was used since it provides an intensive, holistic description and analysis of single entity (the bounded system, the case). A descriptive-qualitative design was carried out in a natural setting (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990; McMillan, 1992; Creswell, 2003; Silverman, 2005; Alwasilah, 2008). Since the primary purpose of this study is to analyse, describe, categorize, and interpret data to recognize how the schematic structure and textual organization of Vocational students' Recount text in a small scale/case, a descriptive qualitative study was considered appropriate (Creswell, 2003; 2009; 2012; Sandelowski, 2000).

In addition, the use of SFL, specifically in analysing Recount text, as a text analysis, played a significant role in this study. The use of Theme-Rheme and Theme progression analysis will help researchers reveal textual organization of students' recount text (Halliday, 1994; Eggins, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Besides, this analysis was also chosen since it was one of many linguistics approaches that have been well developed in education areas (Freebody, 2003, in Emilia, 2005).

The data of the study were taken from the eleventh grade students of vocational school in Bandung. The participants were purposively selected by the researcher based on suggested on the teacher's suggestion.

The data in this study were analysed inductively. Inductive analysis involves the process of identification, classification, and interpreting (McMillan, 1992). The data analysis in this study will be divided into two steps: documentation of the students' text analysis and interview analysis.

After the students' texts were collected by the teacher, they were analysed after being read. Then, the researcher conducted the steps in analysing the data, involving the identification of Theme choice and the identification of the theme progression

pattern, and deciding the thematic progression trends.

The identification of Theme is intended to separate clearly between the Theme and Rheme. Each of the students' Recount texts was broken down into numbered clauses. Besides breaking down into numbered clauses, the texts were also divided into some stages of Recount text: orientation, events, and reorientation. Then, the Theme choices were identified based on the works of Halliday (1994), Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), and Eggins (2004) in terms of topical, interpersonal, or textual theme. Topical Theme will be further analysed to find whether it is marked or unmarked. The identification of Theme choice aims to investigate how the students organize the idea textually in those texts.

After identifying all of the clauses in terms of

thematic choice, the researcher then identified the thematic progression pattern of those texts. In analysing this aspect, the researcher focused on each stage of Recount text to see how the students elaborate and relate the point made to the supporting information or evidences provided in each stage.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are six texts which were purposively selected to be analysed in this study. These texts were divided into three levels of achievement: high achiever, middle achiever, and low achiever. Each group consists of two texts. This section is to answer a part of the research question about the Themes realized in students' Recount texts. The findings concerning the types of Theme are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. The use of themes in students' texts

Types of Theme		Students' Text Category						Total	
		High Achiever		Middle Achiever		Low Achiever			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Topical	Marked	17	15.45	15	16.85	7	12.96	39	15.40
	Unmarked	55	50.00	44	49.44	32	59.26	131	51.80
Interpersonal		1	0.91	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.40
Textual		37	33.64	30	33.70	15	27.78	82	32.40
Total		110	100.00	89	100.00	54	100.00	253	100.00

The three types of Themes (Topical, Interpersonal, and Textual Themes) are applied in students' Recount texts. As illustrated in Table 1, the Topical Theme is the most frequent Theme used. It occurs 170 times or 67.2% of the total. This Topical Theme is broken-down into two parts, i.e. the marked Theme which occurs 39 times or 15.4% and the unmarked Theme which occurs 131 times or 51.8%. The finding of the high number of Topical Themes in students' texts may indicate that student writers effectively orient the reader to what their texts are about. As one of the linguistic features of Recount text is to focus on what the text is telling, this may be the background of the dominant number of occurrences of the Topical Theme in students' Recount texts.

Different from the Topical Theme, the Interpersonal Theme is the rarest type of Theme found in students' texts. The occurrences of Interpersonal Theme in the entire students' text is only 1 time or equal to 0.4% in the high achieving students' texts. This finding signals that the student writers rarely use modulation and modalisation in their texts (Emilia, 2005). The rare use of the Interpersonal Theme in students' Recount text is acceptable since it commonly occurs in the conversation (Eggins, 2004). This confirms Butt et al.'s (2000) statement that the Interpersonal Theme is more often found in spoken texts for students to join and sustain their interaction. Meanwhile, the conversation or spoken interaction is rarely used in the Recount texts, so this may be background of

infrequent number of occurrences of the Interpersonal Theme in students' Recount texts.

On the other hand, the Textual Theme occurs 82 times or equal to 32.4% of the total. The total occurrences of Textual Theme evidences that the students are aware of the important role that the Textual Theme plays in creating a cohesive and coherent text.

The table shows that there is correlation between the implementation of Themes with the level of achievement. From the three groups of this study (high achiever, middle achiever, and low achiever), the high achieving students frequently produced more Topical Theme, Interpersonal Theme, and Textual Theme compared to the other two groups. This may be caused by the number of clauses made by high achieving students who tend to write longer texts than those of the other groups. Meanwhile, the middle achieving students produced more Topical Theme and Interpersonal Theme compared to the low achieving students. It is probably due to the same reason, namely the number of clauses of middle achievers was greater than that of the low achievers.

To conclude, The Topical Themes are the most dominant Themes occurring in students' Recount texts of all levels (67.2%), followed by Textual themes (31.4%). Meanwhile, the Interpersonal Themes are rarely used in students' Recount text (0.4%). This result supports the study of Safitri (2013), whose findings show that there were three types of Theme used by the students, namely

Topical, Textual, and Interpersonal, in which the Topical Theme was the most frequently used.

This section is to answer a part of the research

question about the Thematic progression realized in students' Recount texts, which is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The thematic progression realization

Types of Theme	Students' Text Category						Total	
	High Achiever		Middle Achiever		Low Achiever		F	%
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Theme Reiteration	34	68.00	35	83.33	23	79.31	92	76.03
Zig Zag	14	28.00	5	11.91	5	17.24	24	19.84
Multiple Theme	2	4.00	2	4.76	1	3.45	5	4.13
Total	50	100.00	42	100.00	29	100.00	121	100.00

The table above described that all the three Thematic progressions (Theme Reiteration, Zig Zag pattern, Multiple Theme pattern) are applied in students' Recount texts. As illustrated in the table, the Theme Reiteration is the most frequent Theme used. It occurs 92 times or equal to 76.03% of the total. The high number of Theme Reiteration in students' texts may indicate students' ability in maintaining the focus of the texts by reiterating the thematic element of the clause in the subsequent clauses. In terms of students' levels, Theme Reiteration pattern is mostly found in the middle achievers' texts, i.e. 35 times, then followed by the high achievers' for 34 times, and the low achievers' 23 times.

Besides the Theme Reiteration pattern, another Theme which occurs in students' Recount text is the Zig Zag pattern. Zig zag pattern happens 24 times or equal to 19.84% of the total. The high frequency implies the students have succeeded in developing the cohesion of the texts through the introduction of new information by shifting a Rheme to become a Theme of the subsequent clause. In terms of students' levels, Theme Reiteration pattern is mostly found in the high achievers' texts, i.e. 14 times, then followed by the middle achievers' for 5 times, and the low achievers' 5 times.

The third pattern in students' Recount text is the Multiple Theme pattern. This pattern occurs merely 5 times or equals to 4.13% of all Thematic progression patterns. By applying this pattern, students express their focus at the Rheme of one clause, and then describe it consecutively as Themes in the subsequent clauses. In terms of students' levels, Theme Reiteration pattern is mostly found in the high achievers' texts, i.e. 2 times, then followed by the middle achievers' for 2 times, and the low achievers' 1 time. This signals that the middle and high achieving students have been able to develop both the macro and hyper-themes in their texts, while the low achievers have only been able to develop the hyper-theme in their writings (Emilia, 2014). However, the findings that each student's level employs this patterns show that the students have understood how to create a good thematic pattern in order to make an efficient Recount text.

The trend of thematic progression in the students' texts is in line with most English texts in

general, which present Theme Reiteration and Zig Zag patterns as the most dominant thematic shifts (Nwogu & Bloor, 1991). This means that the students' texts have characterized themselves as factual texts written in English in terms of thematic progression pattern. This also means that the students seem to have attempted to make their texts well-organized to be therefore understandable.

CONCLUSION

In terms of Theme system, the finding showed that the Theme choice and Thematic progression support the character of the Recount texts written by the students. The Topical Theme represents the students' ability to deliver what the text is about, the Interpersonal Theme helps students to present their personal attitude, and the Textual Theme promotes the logical relationship between clauses in order to build text cohesion and coherence. In terms of thematic progression patterns, the finding showed that the use of Theme Reiteration pattern indicates that the students could build the focus by repeating the same element as Themes, the use of Zig Zag pattern shows that the students were able to manage the given-new information in building relations between clauses, and the use of Multiple Theme pattern suggests that the students were able to develop texts according to prior plan. With regard to the importance of Theme management in order to raise the teacher's awareness in the teaching and learning process, it is found that theme management was understood by the teacher to benefit the process of writing, as evidenced in the quality of students' texts which, as the teacher claimed, was better than those written prior to the teaching-learning processes. Furthermore, this study explores some pedagogical implications of theme management for writing processes. It is suggested that theme management be exposed to students through modeling and construction activities.

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