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A Comparative Analysis of Theme and Thematic Progression in Descriptive Texts

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Abstract – This study aims to analyze the theme and thematic progression and compare both student's and standardized descriptive texts. Additionally, the research would delve into the pedagogical implication in teaching a descriptive text. A text from a student of a senior high school in Semarang, Indonesia and a TOEFL Practice text were collected in the document analysis. Thematic analysis was done by applying SFL principles. The result showed that both texts employed textual and topical theme system mostly with model's text using an interpersonal theme once. the student's descriptive text had few missing themes which also indicated that it had grammatical mistakes that need to be given attention when teaching language to learners. Both texts served the thematic progression of zig-zag and reiteration as descriptive text aims to describe and identify an object. Although, the student had chosen few multiple patterns and seldom had no pattern in the text. Furthermore, the integration of thematic system studies and thematic development towards a descriptive text through modeling and construction activities can contribute greatly to providing substantial learning benefits to promote language proficiency and efficient communication skills.

Keywords - Theme progression; SFL; Descriptive text; ELT.

INTRODUCTION

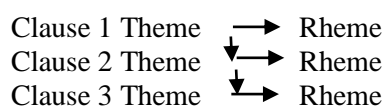
Descriptive text which is present in the latest curricula designed by the government. Both 2013 curriculum and emancipated curriculum mentioned that descriptive text should be learnt by tenth graders of senior high school. Based on Gerot & Wignel (1994); Knapp & Watkins (2005), descriptive text is a kind of text that is used by the writer or speaker to describe particular thing, person, animal, place and or event to the readers or hearers. In descriptive writing, a writer relies on adjectives, adverbs and other linguistic techniques to describe something in the mind of the reader. Furthermore, Gerot & Wignel (1995) mentioned that descriptive text shall contain two elements in particular: identification and description. It is identification that describes the object to be described, while description involves describing parts, qualities and characteristics of its components. In conclusion, descriptive text is text that has an aim to describe everything in detail.

Considering that the text should be composed and constructed well by the students, teacher has the responsibility to master the knowledge and deliver it to the students as the text not only has rigid rules for the form of the sentences, but also has purpose and meaning for each structure. Teachers should necessarily have enough knowledge of how the clauses make meaning to the goal of the descriptive text which become the focus of systemic functional linguistic (SFL).

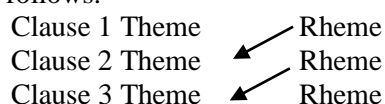
According to Gerot & Wignel (1994), SFL tends to see language as a means of making meaning and tries to describe language in the real world, focusing on texts and their contexts. It is critical to make sure whether the students understand and apply the rule of writing descriptive text they have learnt. One of the ways to ensure this is by analyzing it in SFL perspectives. Cohesion and coherence are two aspects that shows whether it is a good text or not as mentioned by (Halliday & Hasan, 1976) that the relation, which includes elements inside and outside of the clause, must be used to ensure that written text

flows smoothly. Therefore, Eggins (2005) stated that the best way to create a text's message is by using thematic progression patterns. Theme and thematic progression of clauses will help students to identify the whole clause in which they can understand how to organize text and improve their writing.

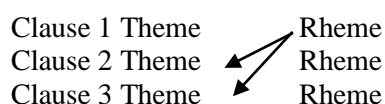
Based on Rahmawati (2016) students' texts should have a good connection in terms of thematic progression to reach the purpose of communication. According to Martin and Rother in Paltridge (2000:140) quoted by Mulatsih (2006), there are three types of thematic development patterns. Firstly, theme reiteration or constant pattern which shows that the first theme is taken up and repeated at the beginning of the next clause. The pattern helps to maintain a strong topical focus. It can be seen as follows.



The second is zig-zag or linear pattern. The use of this pattern is to achieve cohesion and give a sense of cumulative development in a text by building on newly introduced information. (Eggins, 1994). It is where the subject matter in the rheme of one clause becomes the theme of the next clause which can be seen as follows:



The last is split rheme or multiple theme pattern where a rheme can include a number of different pieces of information, each of which can be used as a theme in a number of subsequent clauses. This type is usually used in longer expository texts. The pattern is shown as follows:



Research have been done in the aspect of theme and thematic progression in writing. McCabe (1999) compared two languages which are Spanish and English history text. The study found a higher use of constant thematic progression than the linear thematic progression of the text. Meanwhile, another study conducted by Yunita (2018) about students' recount texts in a vocational school in Indonesia revealed that the theme and thematic patterns supports the character of texts composed by students

to a certain extent and the use of multiple theme progression which states that text development is done by the students according to previous plans before writing the ideas. Moreover, Jalilifar (2009) looked at the development and evolution of topics in English academic texts, as well as their translation into Persian. He wanted to know how translators dealt with thematic developments as tools when translating a text into another language. Additionally, Wang (2010) investigated the writing of university students in China in the context of thematic choice and progression. The study found that students could learn to read the same analysis in their own work as by analyzing themes and rheme into a text, leading to an improvement of rapport of their work. Finally, a study done by Rahmawati (2016) investigating the thematic progression type that mostly used in the descriptive and recount texts written by the nursing students. The result showed that most of the clauses in their texts use reiteration theme. Their texts become easy to be understood but become the monotonous text. In descriptive text, most of the clauses use reiteration theme.

Based on the research mentioned, it is important to conduct the investigation because of the reason that the text is a must taught lesson for first graders of senior high school in Indonesia. The writers would be able to know students' ability in writing descriptive text from the perspective of theme and thematic progression. This study aims to analyze the theme and thematic progression and compare both student's and standardized descriptive text as there are few publications to the analysis. Additionally, the research would like to delve more into the pedagogical implication that can be conducted in teaching a descriptive text.

METHOD

This research is a descriptive quantitative study involving textual analysis to explore the thematic structures and progression in descriptive texts. A purposive sampling was chosen to select the participant in the study. One 10th grader student of senior high school in Semarang, Indonesia who was given a task to write a descriptive text was selected as the participant. A descriptive text from the student and a descriptive text from a standardized book by Longman: preparation course for the TOEFL test were collected in the document analysis. Thematic analysis was done by applying SFL principles to analyze the thematic structures and progression in both student and standardized texts, identifying

similarities and differences between the two text types.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the analysis of the text, it is shown in figure 1 that both texts mostly employed textual and topical theme system and served the thematic progression of zig-zag and reiteration as descriptive text aims to describe and identify an object (Rahmawati, 2016).

Thematic System

The result showed that model’s text has 14 clauses describing about ‘Niagara Falls’ and student’s text has 22 clauses identifying ‘Lawang Sewu’.

Table 1. Thematic system applied in the two texts

	Topical (%)	Interpersonal (%)	Textual (%)	Missing theme (%)
Model’s Text	100	7	14	0
Students Text	91	0	36	9

Firstly, the model text of Longman: preparation course for the TOEFL test used 100% of topic-based themes which refers to ‘Niagara Falls’ as the thematic focus for the whole text that acts consistently as the thematic position. There was also the use of ‘it’ that further refers to ‘tourists’ which became the thematic position of several clauses. Based on figure 1, all clauses in the text used topical themes as the examples are presented in Table 1.

Table 2. Thematic use in clause 1, 2, and 3

Niagara Falls, of the most famous North American natural wonders,	has long been a popular tourist destination
Topical Theme	Rheme
That	actually constitute Niagara Falls the 173-foot-high Horseshoe Falls on the Canadian side of the Niagara River in the Canadian province of Ontario and the 182-foot-high American Falls on the U.S. side of the river in the state of New York
Topical Theme	Rheme
Tourist	today flock to see the two falls
Topical Theme	Rheme

Table 3. Interpersonal theme in clause 4

Approximately	85 percent of the water goes over the falls actually	goes over Horseshoe Falls with the rest going over American Falls.
Interpersonal Theme	Topical	Rheme

Furthermore, interpersonal theme was also used once in the text for about 7% as revealed in table 3. It shows that the writer placed a comment adjunct (approximately) to foreground his or her attitude towards the topic. This signal is the type of clause which has been chosen to exchange meaning. In the clause, the writer mentioned that the calculation made in the text is not the exact percentage of the water. The text, additionally, also used some textual themes in the form of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. These themes give texture to the text for around 14%. The examples are shown in table 4.

Table 4. Textual themes in Clause 6 and 11

and	it	Is quite a popular activity to take a steamer out onto the river and right up to the base of the falls for a close-up view
Textual Theme	Topical	Rheme
Because of concern	That all these tourists	would inadvertently destroy the natural beauty of this scenic wonder
Textual Theme	Topical	Rheme

The student’s descriptive text about the description of ‘Lawang Sewu’ also used a lot of topical themes for 91% that refers to ‘Lawang Sewu’ as the thematic position of the text. However, 9% of clauses had missing theme in which the subject was needed for the clause that also acted as the topical theme in certain clauses. The examples of the topical themes used in text are revealed in the following table (table 5).

Table 5. Topical themes used in student’s descriptive text in clause 1, 10, and 22

Lawang Sewu	Is a Dutch heritage located in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia
Topical Theme	Rheme

At first,	the building was used as the headquarters of a private railway company in the Netherlands		
Topical Theme	Rheme		
and	(this film)	(also)	feature(s) the ghosts of a Dutch woman, a man with a ball and chains wrapped around his legs, and a kuntilanak
Textual Theme	Topical	Rheme	
Missing Theme			

Then, the text also used textual themes for 36% as the connect some clauses with the use of conjunctions such as *and*, *but*, *because*, and *who*. These conjunctions are used to give connection and texture to the text. Some examples are shown in the following table (table 6).

Table 6. Textual themes used in student’s descriptive text in clause 1, 10, and 22

because	Lawang Sewu	has a lot of doors
Textual Theme	Topical	Rheme
who committed suicide inside		
Textual/Topical Theme	Rheme	

According to the model’s text which mostly employs topical and textual themes, student’s text indicates that the writer uses a good attempt to promote the cohesion of the text by using topical themes and to enhance the relevance of each clause used in the text by applying textual themes. The use of themes indicates that the text is “highly written English” according to Ravelli (2000). Conjunction that are consequential such as *because*, *that*, *who* inform a feature of a critically literate person. There are only 9% of the clauses did not make a good use of themes although it did not influence much of the whole text to be understood well by the readers.

Thematic Progression

In order to maintain the connectedness among clauses, both texts seemed to choose themes of the clauses by using both reiteration and zig-zag patterns. In general, the trend of thematic progression in students' literature is consistent with most English language texts which feature themes Reiteration and Zig Zag patterns as major thematic

shifts. (Bloor & Nwogu, 1991). The use of reiteration in descriptive text helps the writer to describe something and the use of zig-zag pattern helps to develop the idea from the previous rheme to be the theme in the current clause to explore more about the topic. The result of the patterns used are shown in the following figure (figure 1).

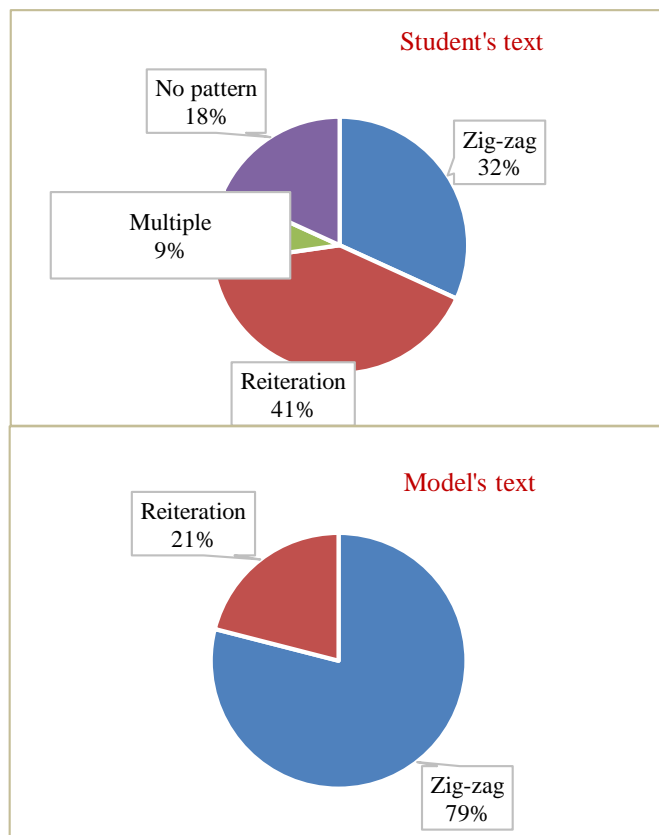


Figure 1. Theme progressions in descriptive texts

Figure 1 reveals that model’s text employed 79% of zig-zag pattern and 21% of reiteration pattern. The text written by the student also occupied the theme of reiteration for 41%, followed by the zig-zag pattern for 32% as well. The examples are shown in figure 2.

Student’s text, furthermore, presented 18% of the clauses that had no pattern to start a new theme for providing the idea exploration of the clauses in the text. These are in clause 4 to 5, 14 to 15, 18 to 19, and 21-22. This showed that the student might lose coherence at some point in the text which are shown in the following examples (figure 3).

Additionally, the student also had employed multiple theme pattern for about 9% of the clauses that helped to develop the text smoothly. The examples are displayed below (figure 4).

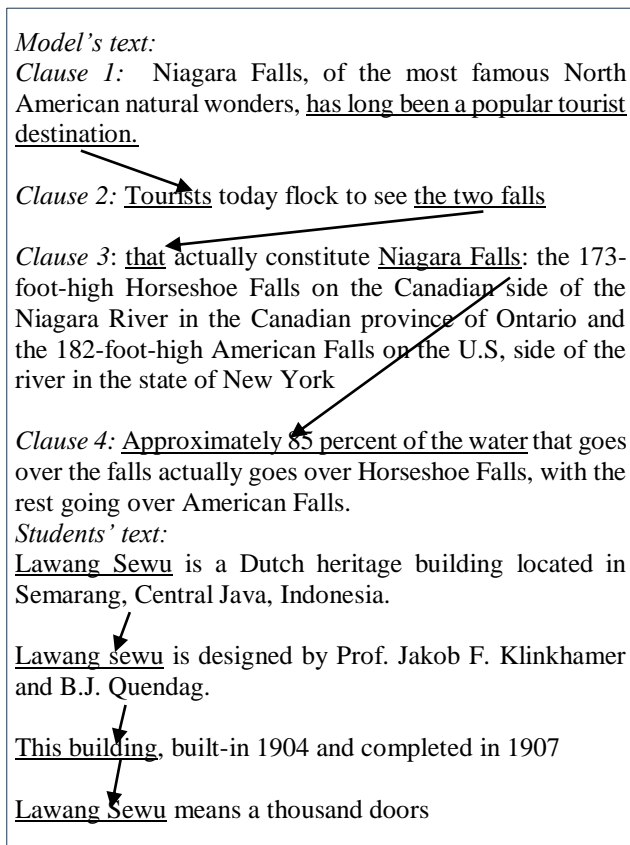


Figure 2. Theme progressions in model's and student's texts

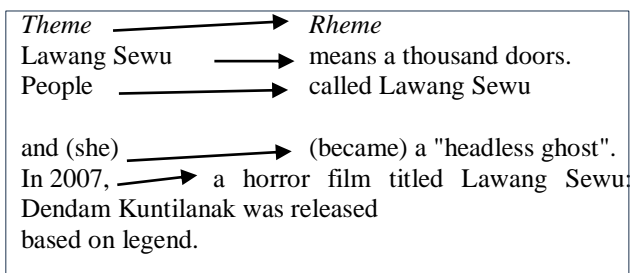


Figure 3. Theme with no pattern in clause 4 to 5 and 18 to 19

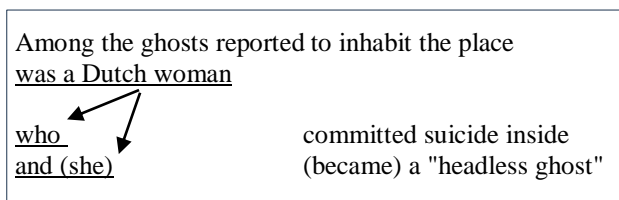


Figure 4. Theme with no pattern in clause 16 to 17 and 17 to 18

Based on the analysis, it is shown that the use of reiteration and zig-zag pattern are mostly used in the model's text and the student was also successful enough to perform the similar patterns of theme development of the text since descriptive text

focuses more on the object (Rahmawati, 2016) which is described by the writer. Although there were few sentences with no pattern which might cause inefficiency, the text still managed to be understood as a whole.

From the findings, it showed that both texts employed textual and topical theme system mostly with model's text using an interpersonal theme once. the student's descriptive text had few missing themes which also indicated that it had grammatical mistakes that need to be given attention when teaching language to learners. Both texts served the thematic progression of zig-zag and reiteration as descriptive text aims to describe and identify an object. Although, the student had chosen few multiple patterns and seldom had no pattern in the text. The result supports the study by Yunita (2018) who stated that topical theme indicates the students' skill to deliver what the text is about and the textual theme showed the students' ability to develop the logical relationship between clauses and make their texts more cohesive and coherent. Furthermore, the use of themes indicates that the text is "highly written English" according to Ravelli (2000). The result of the study also supports the finding by Rahmawati (2016) which revealed that students used reiteration patterns mostly in their descriptive text which were monotonous. The difference in this study and the previous study is that the model's and student's texts involved not only reiteration pattern, but also zig-zag pattern of theme progression resulting to a more variative and enthralling information in the text. This pattern is considered more difficult than theme reiteration because the writer needs to pick up the rheme from the previous clause to be put as the theme in the new clause.

Pedagogical Implication

Pedagogical implications are numerous in the context of language teaching and learning, particularly when using thematic systems and thematic progressions in descriptive texts. Based on the analysis, knowledge of theme system is important for language learners as it as it has been investigated by Eggins (1994), Butt et al (2000), Droga & Humphrey (2003), Fang & Schleppegrell (2008), and Derewianka (2011) in Emilia (2014). The aspects considering the significance of thematic system and progression in language learning are diverse. Firstly, it can improve reading comprehension. Teaching students how to recognize thematic changes in descriptive text may improve their knowledge of the texts. It will enable them to better describe main ideas and underlying details,

which are important for understanding and interpreting written material. Descriptive text has identification and description as its linguistic feature, students can be given a model's text and are asked to underline topic sentence of each paragraph and themes of the clauses in the text. For example, the frequent use of topical theme and reiteration or zig-zag theme progression in descriptive indicates the focus of the text describing an object. They can also be given an understanding of how thematic system contributes to the overall clarity and coherence of the text. Secondly, it can develop writing skills. Having knowledge of thematic systems will allow students to take into account the complete composition of their work. In order to develop a deeper understanding of composition and improve their writing skills, it helps them to move beyond simple correction of sentence errors. They can learn to organize meanings into clauses, clause complexes, paragraphs, and texts effectively by given a model's text for students to analyze before they construct their own writing. There is also a need to advance clearly on the thematic basis of effective communication in many academic and professional writing tasks. Teachers can prepare students for the demands of more advanced writing tasks in their academic and professional lives by teaching thematic systems for descriptive writing.

Thirdly, it improves the coherence and cohesion. A progression of theme helps organize information in such a way as to make it comprehensible. When learning the thematic systems, students will have improved ability to form sentences and paragraphs more coherently, making it easier for them to communicate. Next, it can support vocabulary expansion and reinforce critical thinking. Descriptive texts often require a high level of vocabulary to convey the detailed and vivid images. In order to help students select words more effectively, the teaching of theme system encourages teachers to focus their efforts on vocabulary linked to specific topics. it also requires students to consider critically the way they present and organize information when analyzing thematic developments in descriptive texts. In this way, it can lead to discussion about the effectiveness and impact of various organizing strategies on readers' understanding. Finally, it improves the understanding between cultures. Descriptive texts are often used for describing cultural objects, places or events. As students learn to organize information in ways that are meaningful and culturally appropriate, teaching thematic systems in this

context can enhance their intercultural understanding.

Pedagogical implications from the analysis of both texts indicates that thematic system can help language learners in learning writing as Butt et al (2000) mentioned that the quality of writing in workplace, business and academic English can be enhanced significantly if attention is given to the thematic progression of ideas in a text. Furthermore, De Silva Joyce and Feez (2012) stated that studying patterns of themes will help students in planning and developing their own text by mapping themes. Students will be able to use this knowledge in order to organize their thoughts more effectively and encourage creativity within a clear structure. The study of thematic system and progression also can improve the coherence and cohesion of text made by learners, Support vocabulary expansion and reinforce critical thinking, and improve the understanding between cultures. Finally, the promotion of language proficiency, reflective thinking and efficient communication skills can contribute greatly to providing substantial learning benefits through integration of thematic system studies and thematic development towards a descriptive text.

CONCLUSION

This research analyzes the theme and thematic progression and compares both student's and standardized descriptive text, the research would like to delve more into the pedagogical implication that can be conducted in teaching a descriptive text. The comparative nature of the research has provided valuable insight into the development of linguistic competence and the influence of standardized norms on the choice of thematic content in descriptive texts. It is clear that theme system and theme progression play an important role in shaping the structure and coherence of descriptive text. The findings indicate that, in order to help students achieve a better alignment with the standardized text when describing their ideas in descriptive text, it is important to consider the linguistic aspects within academic contexts. It is suggested that theme management be exposed to students through modeling and construction activities. Additional linguistic elements could be explored in this area by deepening the pedagogical implications, with a view to enhancing language instruction and learning outcomes.

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