



THEME AND THEMATIC PROGRESSION OF UNDERGRADUATE THESES

Hamdan Zainu Mubarak

SMAN 11 Garut, West
Java, Indonesia

Email:
nara.elmubarak@gmail.com

Article History

Submitted 10 February 2021
Revised 1 March 2021
Published 30 March 2021

Abstract.

This research aimed to analyze the theme and the thematic progression in undergraduate students' theses. To achieve these aims, qualitative research embracing case study was chosen. The participants of this research were six undergraduate students from academic year 2016, 2017, and 2018 in one of colleges in Garut. The data, students' theses, were collected by techniques of document study based on these themes (developing writing skill). The theory of theme by Butt et al (2000) and thematic progression by Bloor and Bloor (2004) was used to analyze the data. The result revealed that undergraduate students mostly used unmarked topical theme and reiteration pattern. It meant that the undergraduate students had tried to persuade the readers to accept their point of view and they had tried to make their text focus by repeating the same element as a theme

Keywords: Theme, thematic progression, undergraduate thesis, background of the study.

INTRODUCTION

The background section is very important in the thesis. It becomes the foundation of the thesis because in that section the writers explain their research in broad outline. The background section exposes the reason of the writers do the research and the theories that corroborate his or her research, becomes the fundamental information concerning to the research to broader fields and also signs concisely the expansion of the research problem (McMillan & James. H, 2008). Therefore, the writer should pay more attention to this section which the reader will decide to continue to read the thesis or not.

In spite of its importance, Swales and Feak (1994) state that writing background of the study is a slow and difficult process. The writers are hard to achieve coherence and cohesion in a text. Specifically, they could not state a clear and accurate main idea or topic sentence or their topic sentence was not in the right place, neither in the first paragraph nor in the last

paragraph. Besides, the students were also lack on fulfilling supporting details for their writing. In other word, they are still difficult in establishing coherence and cohesion in a text.

To overcome the problems as mentioned above, understanding the concept of theme system including thematic progression is one of solutions. Halliday (2014) states that theme is the point of departure for the message which the element of the speaker selects for grounding. It means that a theme is a starting point of a sentence that can be the main information of the sentence itself. It is noticed that as a message structure, a sentence is consisting of theme and accompanied by a rheme; which the structure is expressed as the theme is put first. It indicates that theme and thematic progression can make a significant contribution to the coherence and cohesion of the text.

Based on the previous studies above, it is clear to say that there are not many studies which focus on theme and thematic progression in university students' theses. Therefore, it is necessary to do further studies in different context such as undergraduate thesis. Thus, this research is aimed at analysing theme and thematic progression of undergraduate theses, particularly in the background stage.

This research concerned to the analysis of English Education Program students in one of colleges in Garut in terms of its students' theses background and its theme and thematic progression.

According to Fontaine (2013), Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) focuses on language functions. The system part of this relates to the way in which these functions are organized. Fontaine (2013) also says that language is one type of semiotic system, which simply means that language is a system (or systemically arranged) and it represents a resource for speakers so that it can give meaning. The view in the SFL is that the ways in which we can give meaning through language are governed through usage patterns. The idea here is that the language is set as a select system. It is the organization of this system that enables the speaker to give meaning, by choosing relevant and appropriate options.

The textual metafunction is the strand of meaning which is most inherently associated to the concept of text. Textual meaning considers the clause as message, and its main function is that of creating text (Halliday, 1978 as cited by Fontaine, 2013). Halliday also says that textual metafunction refers to how the message is delivered. This can be seen from the organization or composition of the information, and whether the information is conveyed in oral or written media.

But et al. (2000) describes the focus of the textual metafunction which is to "organise our experiential and interpersonal meanings into a linear and coherent whole". Textual metafunction is divided into two constituents: Theme and Rheme. Theme is said to be the important element and is typically realised in the first part of the clause. Hence, an item existing in the first division of the sentence is given "thematic status".

In the theme-rheme relationship, the theme sometimes presents the "given" information and "provides the environment" for rheme. Rheme, on the other hand, is the rest of the message once the theme has been identified, helps develop the theme and usually holds "new" information (Egins, 1994; Halliday, 2004).

Martin et al. (1997) states that there are three common types of theme found in a message: topical theme, textual theme, and interpersonal theme. In general, topical themes are conveyed through the first participant, process or circumstance in a particular clause. As such, there is mainly only one topical theme per clause. Topical themes can be divided into two kinds: marked topical theme and unmarked topical theme. Alternatively, textual theme can exist in the form of structural conjunctions, relatives or conjunctives. Interpersonal

theme, on the other hand, may consist of finite which is usually presented in the form of auxiliary verb, wh-element, vocative or adjuncts which normally exists in the form of adverb.

The quality of text also can be seen from thematic progression. Thematic progression contributes to the cohesive development of a text, and produces a coherent whole text. According to Bloor and Bloor (2004), there are three types of thematic progression: reiteration pattern, zig zag pattern and multiple theme pattern. First is reiteration pattern. In this type of theme, the pattern of thematic progression has the same theme that well organized or regularly. While the rheme of each clause gives further explanation to the same theme. The second type is zig zag pattern. In this pattern, an element that is in the previous clause becomes the theme in the current clause. The theme of a certain sentence can be the summary of most of the content of the previous sentence and it makes a new point that is a new rheme. The last type is multiple theme pattern. In this pattern, the theme of one clause introduces a number of different pieces of information, each of which is then picked up and made theme in subsequent clauses. This pattern highlights the one general theme from which other themes are derived.

Numerous related studies throughout the world concerning theme and thematic progression have been conducted by several researchers in different field of knowledge. Particularly, there are some studies in the field of translation were conducted by Wulandari (2009), Sofyan (2009), Rachmawati (2010), and Wang (2014). They found that several thematic progressions are employed in the texts, giving an indication of the readers' comprehension of the text. These studies set out and described why and how certain thematic progressions occurred in the texts. There are some studies in various genres of texts were done by McCabe (1999), Xu (2000), Thompson (2005), Yang, Ramirez & Harman (2007), Banks (2008), Yang (2008), Ikaningrum (2009), Sugijarto (2010), Herriman (2011), Rakhman (2012), Safitra (2013), Bangsa (2013), and Al Bakaa, 2014). The main result of these research, it was found that the topical theme was the most frequently used and students commonly apply reiteration and zigzag pattern indicating students' texts consistency. The research on theme-rheme analysis is also established in the article that conducted by Jalilifar (2010) who investigated rhetorical structure of ELT articles on local and international journals reported the using of different patterns of thematic progressions in the introduction, result, and discussion of those journals. Those studies are generally related to Systemic Functional Linguistics developed by Halliday (1994).

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a descriptive-qualitative design, embracing the characteristics of a case research approach. This approach had been taken into account since it provided an intensive, holistic description and analysis of single entity (Duff, 2008). A case, in EFL context, can include a person (teacher and student) or an entity such as school or classroom (Chappelle and Duff, 2003 as cited in Hood, 2009) or group of students. In this research, the focal point was on the undergraduate students' theses.

This research was carried out in one of colleges in Garut, Indonesia. The setting was selected by considering that the result of the research gave impact on the students in the college, especially in the process of writing academic texts. The participants were purposively selected by considering that the theses were written in the last three years. Thus, theses chosen based on those who had followed thesis examination from eighth semester students' academic year 2016, 2017, and 2018 with two participants in each year. The theses were also chosen based on the theme of their theses, and the theme chosen is about developing writing

skill.

In this research, documentation method was employed since the data were taken from printed media (Arikunto, 1998). There were six backgrounds of the study were chosen as the instruments, specifically, to be analysed using theme and thematic progression analysis to find out students' textual organization and the dominant type of themes and thematic pattern used in their theses.

Once the theses had been selected, the texts were divided into clauses. This was followed by the identification of the theme and rheme for each clause. Table below was an example of the table which adopted from Butt et al (2000) for the classification of theme and rheme. However, the division between theme and rheme and the theme type for each clause conducted based on Martin et al.'s (1997) model.

For the investigation of thematic progression, the theses were divided into paragraphs. This was to facilitate the analysis of thematic progression as the research applied a large amount of data. The analysis of thematic progression then carried out within these paragraphs.

The findings of the types of themes and thematic progression displayed in tables in order to facilitate comparison between the occurrence of different patterns of theme and thematic progression. This was also to assist the discussion of results which covered how these patterns lead to a persuasive and cohesive text. The presentation included the total occurrences of theme and thematic progression types. At last, the researcher summed up all the theme and the thematic progressions that occurred in those texts. This analysis revealed the theme and the thematic progression trends that mostly used in undergraduate students' theses.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The most common type of theme found in theses background was the unmarked topical theme. This was followed by the textual theme and the marked topical theme. The interpersonal theme was the least common type of theme found in the theses background. Each theme type played a significant role in persuading the readers. However, to examine cohesion in theses background, it was not sufficient to look at theme alone, but also the thematic progression.

	Textual	Interpersonal	Topical	
			Marked	Unmarked
Occurrence	117	2	27	250

The table above showed that all theme types were presented in the theses background. The most common of theme type found was the unmarked topical theme with 250 occurrences. Next was the textual theme with 117 occurrences. The marked topical theme made up 27 occurrences. Lastly, the lowest occurrence of theme type found in the theses background was the interpersonal theme with only 2 occurrences. With the unmarked topical theme as the most dominant type, it showed

that the writers tried to persuade the readers to accept their point of view or perhaps a new truth. In term of thematic progression, there was one pattern of thematic progression that mostly presented in theses background, this was reiteration pattern. The writers mostly used reiteration pattern to keep the text focus by using the same element as a theme. Then, some of them applied zigzag pattern to make a sense of cumulative development of their texts. The types of thematic progression that occurred in the texts can be seen in the table

below:

Table above revealed that the most common thematic progression found in the theses background was the reiteration pattern with 86 occurrences. This was ensued by the zigzag pattern with 55 occurrences. Conversely, the thematic progression which the least applied in the theses background was the multiple theme pattern with only 3 occurrences. With the reiteration as the most dominant pattern, it showed that the writers tried to make the text focus in presenting their point of view.

According to Martin et al. (1997), the unmarked topical theme can be realised by a pronoun, noun phrase, grammatical item “it”, nominal group which extends beyond the main noun, and embedded wh-clause. The findings revealed that (1) pronouns were generally applied in the theses background to refer to an element that has been mentioned earlier (2) the noun phrases applied in the theses background generally consist of proper and common nouns and were at times preceded by a determiner or a numeral (3) the anticipatory “it” was the most common type of grammatical item “it” which was applied in the theses background (4) nominal group which extends beyond the main noun applied in the theses background allowed them to be both compact and concise which may persuade the readers (5) the embedded –wh clause was applied in the theses background to make the readers anticipate the subsequent clause, and thus more focus was given to that clause.

In declarative clauses, marked topical themes were realised through non-subject themes such as adverbial group or prepositional phrase. Findings also revealed that the marked topical themes also comprised non-finite clauses.

As mentioned before, the textual theme is made up of structural conjunctions, relatives and conjunctives (Martin et al, 1997). Findings revealed that all three types of textual themes were found in the theses background. According to the findings, the type of interpersonal theme found in the theses background was the adjunct.

In term of thematic progression, all of the types (i.e. reiteration, zigzag, and multiple theme) were found in theses background.

The result showed that the most common type of theme found in theses background was the unmarked topical theme, which were mainly constituted by the noun phrase. This was followed by the textual theme and the marked topical theme. The interpersonal theme was the least common type of theme found in the theses background. Each theme type played a significant role in persuading the readers. However, to examine cohesion in theses background, it was not sufficient to look at theme alone, but also the thematic progression.

There was one pattern of thematic progression that mostly presented on

	Reiteration Pattern	Zig-zag Pattern	Multiple Theme Pattern
Occurrence	86	55	3

undergraduate students’ theses background, this was reiteration pattern. The students mostly used reiteration pattern to keep the text focus by using the same element as a theme. They tried to make their texts coherence and cohesion; it can be showed by how they used the same pattern to make each clause related. This pattern made the reader easily to find the information. Some of the texts used zig zag pattern, it gave the reader the new information by using the rheme as the theme on the next clause.

The result of this research was similar in term of theme with the research of Astuti et.al (2010) but not similar in term of thematic progression which the texts have no coherence

and cohesion because of less occurrences of thematic progression.

In this research, in parts of coherence and cohesion of the text, the students were able to make coherent and cohesive text in regard to thematic progressions employed in the text. The significance of the use of thematic progression helped to enhance the text coherence and cohesion.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result, the researcher formulated the conclusion into three types of oral corrective feedback used by non-native English teachers in Classroom activity. First, explicit correction used by teacher A and teacher C. Second, repetition used by teacher A. Third, clarification request used by teacher B and teacher C. It could be concluded that oral corrective feedback strategies used by the teachers at three different school were explicit correction, repetition, and clarification request. However, oral corrective feedback strategies that mostly used by the English teachers were clarification request. It can be said that the English teachers considered these strategies are effective and appropriate to be applied for correcting students' erroneous utterances during speaking class. However, it is possible to the teachers to apply the other oral corrective feedback strategies in classroom activity.

REFERENCES

- Amri, W (2016). Teacher's Oral Corrective Feedback Strategy in English Language Classroom. UIN Aceh Thesis
- Brookhart, Susan M. How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students. New York: ASCB. (2008).
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison K. (2000). Research Methods in Education (5th Edition). London: Routledge Falmer. In: Sharma (2010).
- Cullen, R. 2002. Supportive Teacher Talk: The Importance of the F- Move. *ELT Journal*, 56(2), 117-127.
- Ellis, R. Corrective Feedback and Teacher Development. *L2 Journal*, 1, (2009): 3-13.
- Creswell, Jhon W. Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches. New York: Cambridge University. (2009).
- Fraenkel, Jack R. And Norman E. Wallen. (2009). How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education. New York. McGrawHill Companies.
- Gay, L. R and Airasian p. Educational Research Competences for Analysis and Application. New Jersey: Prentice hall Inc. (2000).
- Gebhard, J. G. 2000. Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language: A Teacher Self Development and Methodology Guide. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Harmer, J. (2007). The practice of English language teaching (4th ed.). Essex: Pearson Education.
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The Power of Feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 81–112. doi:10.3102/003465430298487
- Irawan, E. & Salija, K. (2017). Teachers' Oral Feedback in EFL Classroom Interaction (A Descriptive Study of Senior High School in Indonesia). State University of Makassar, Indonesia. doi: 10.26858/eltww.v4i2.4496

- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2014). Afterword: Rethinking global perspectives and local initiatives in language teaching. In S. Ben Said (Ed.), *Language teachers and teaching: Global perspectives, local initiatives* (pp. 317-323). New York, NY: Routledge
- Lyster, R.; Ranta, L. Corrective feedback and learner uptake: negotiation of form in communicative classrooms. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, Cambridge, v. 19, n. 1, p. 37-66, 1997.
- Lyster, R., Saito, K., & Sato, M. (2012). Oral corrective feedback in second language classrooms. *Language Teaching*, 46(01), 1–40. doi: 10.1017/s0261444812000365
- Mackiewicz, J. & Thompson, I. 2013. Motivational Scaffolding, Politeness, and Writing Center Tutoring. *The Writing Center Journal*, 33(1), 38-73.
- Maizola (2016). Teachers' Oral Corrective Feedback on Students' Dialogue Performance at Senior High School. STKIP PGRI Sumatera Barat Thesis
- Ningkrum (2018). Analysis of Oral Corrective Feedback on Students' Speaking Performance in EFL Classes. UNNES paper
- Norris, J. M. and L. Ortega (2000) Effectiveness of L2 instruction: A research synthesis and quantitative meta-analysis. *Language Learning* 50(3), 417-528.
- Brookhart, Susan M. *How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students*. New York: ASCB. (2008). Brookhart, Susan M. *How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students*. New York: ASCB. (2008). Education, 2009.
- Rahimi, M. & Sobhani, A. Teachers' Different Types of Feedback on Iranian EFL learners' Speaking Errors and Their Impact on the Students' Uptake of The Correct Forms. *Research Papers in Language Teaching and Learning*. Holonic Open University: ISSN. (2015).
- Russel, J.; Spada, N. The effectiveness of corrective feedback for the acquisition of L2 grammar: a meta-analysis research.
- Rydahl, S. (2005). *Oral Feedback in the English Classroom: Teachers' Thoughts and Awareness*. Karlstad: Karlstads Universitet. Retrieved February 3, 2016 from <www.divaportal.org/smash/get/diva2:6576/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.
- Sa'adah, Nurkamto, and Suparno (2018). Oral Corrective Feedback: Exploring the Relationship between Teacher's Strategy and Students' Willingness to Communicate. 5(2), 240-252. doi: 10.24815/siele.v5i2.11532
- Sephehrinia, S., & Mehdizadeh, M. (2016). Oral corrective feedback: teachers' concerns and researchers' orientation. *The Language Learning Journal*, 46(4), 483–500. doi:10.1080/09571736.2016.1172328
- Shaofeng Li (2014). Oral Corrective Feedback. *ELT Journal* Volume 68/2; doi:10.1093/elt/cct076
- Sheen, Y. & R. Ellis. *Corrective Feedback in Language Teaching*. In E. Hinkel (ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*, Vol.2. New York: Routledge, (2011): 593-610.
- Siska, Mukhaiyar, and Ratmanida (2018). English Teachers' Strategies in Giving Oral Corrective Feedback on Students' Speaking Performance. *Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on English Language and Teaching (ICOELT-6)*
- Sprouls, K. Teachers' Use of Positive and Negative Feedback with the Students Who Are High-Risk for Emotional Behavioral Disorders. A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy. Arizona State University. (2011): 33.

- Taipale, P. (2012). Oral errors, corrective feedback, and learners' uptake in an EFL setting (Master Thesis, University of Jyväskylä).
Retrieved from: https://jyx.jyu.fi/space/bitstream/handle/123456789/37544/URN_NBN_fi_jyu-201203121409.pdf; sequence=4.
- Tunstall, P. & Gipps, C. 1996. Teacher Feedback to Young Children in Formative Assessment: A Typology. *British Educational Research Journal*, 22(4), 389-404.
- Wannemacker, Stefan De et al. *Interdisciplinary Approach to Adapting Learning*. London: Springer. Verlag Berlin
- Postlewaite (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education* (2nd ed., pp.5738-5745). Oxford, UK: Pergamon.