

THEMATIC PROGRESSION IN STUDENTS' RECOUNT TEXTS

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate Thematic progression patterns in students' Recount text in a state Vocational School in Bandung. To meet the purpose, this study employs a descriptive-qualitative research design. The data are obtained from collection of students' text. This study uses the theory of Thematic progression proposed by Halliday (1994) and Eggins (1994; 2004) as the framework to analyze the data. Furthermore, the findings show that the Thematic progression support the character of Recount text written by the students to some extents: the Theme Reiteration pattern signpost that the students tend to make the text focus by repeating the same element as Themes, the Zig Zag pattern shows 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: Thematic Progression, Students' Text, Recount Texts

INTRODUCTION

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, 2007). The theme is the element of clause structures which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is the clause one 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 to 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 of students considered writing as a difficult subject. Most of students' skills are far from their learning target and teaching writing so far has not been satisfying. It is supported by Alwasilah (2007) who states that communication in written language is difficult for students and even for teachers. And the difficulty in written language communication makes them 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 to communicate their ideas successfully (Wang, 2007). For pedagogical contexts of writing, Downing (2001) states that Thematic progression

analysis can be applied within educational settings. Downing (2001) also suggests that one of the benefits of Theme and Thematic progression is 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, et. al, 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 context, the awareness of writing organisation based on Thematic progression seems to attract less attention from both teachers and students. Huda (2008) supports that the awareness towards writing organisation based on Thematic progression seems to attract less attention 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 different fields of knowledge. The study conducted by McCabe (1999) reported greater use of the constant thematic progression pattern compared to the linear thematic progression pattern in comparing two different languages. McCabe (1999) conducted a comparative study on Spanish and English history texts.

Green et al (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 (2007) in China. She investigated university students' writing in terms of thematic choices and progression. This study found out 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.

Hu (2008) conducted a comparison study between American college students' English writing and Chinese college students' English writing in terms of simple Themes, multiple Themes, and clausal Themes. She found that Chinese college students used less simple Themes but more multiple Themes and clausal Themes than American college students. In multiple Themes, Chinese college

students sometimes overused textual Themes such as "and," "but," "however," etc., which was explained by an overgeneralization of English grammar rules. They also put a lot of temporal adjuncts and spatial adjuncts at the beginning of a clause, especially spatial terms such as "at the school" or temporal terms such as "last year," which was explained by the interference of Chinese, their native language.

Moreover, Jalilifar (2010) who investigated rhetorical structure of ELT articles on local and international journal reported that overall both local and international journal shared similar rhetoric 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 local writers of English need to be informed to the important role of thematic organization in writing ELT article in order to make their text more communicative.

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

Herriman (2011) investigated how Themes and thematic progressions in a sample of Swedish advanced learners' writing contributed to the method of development in their texts. With a comparison to a sample of similar writings by British university students, the author found that advanced learners' samples contained more interactional Themes, which created a dialogic method of development similar to that found in conversational language. Themes and thematic progressions which were typical of expository writing, on the other hand, were used less frequently. These included discourses label Themes and summative progressions which managed the build-up of information as it accumulated in the text, and split progressions which signaled hierarchical relations between parts of the informational content.

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.

Furthermore, other researchers also 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 (SLP, CTP, and DTP) (Bloor & Bloor, 2004; Eggins, 2004).

In addition, Bowen (2013) who investigated the 1st and 3rd year graduate students' text found the system of Theme shows that writer's rhetorically frames 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 wider contextually.

Lu (2013) compared Theme choices in English writings of Singaporean students from an English speaking background (SE), Singaporean students from a Chinese-speaking background (SC), and students from the People's Republic of China (PRC) at the university level. It was found that SC and PRC students used less topical Themes than SE students, that PRC students used less textual Themes than both SC and SE students, and that PRC students used less interpersonal Themes than both SE and SC students. The author found that the writing of Singaporean and Chinese students did produce various interesting similarities and differences and attributed these similarities and differences to their sociolinguistic and educational backgrounds. The findings of this study suggested that English learners of different background (in this case, English learners of Chinese-speaking background in mainland China and those from Singapore) exhibited closer performance to each other as compared to native English speakers.

Another study investigating Theme system of SFG in students' narrative text 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 that there were three kinds of pattern used by the students namely topical, textual, and interpersonal Theme, in which the topical Theme was the most frequently used.

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 to the analysis of vocational school students' text. Second, this study concerned to the analysis of Recount text because recent publication are mainly concerned to the analysis of narrative text and explanatory text. Final reason is because the Recount text will be taught in the second semester in the vocational school context (KTSP, 2006; Hyland, 2009). Therefore, it is considered crucial to conduct an investigation to the recount text.

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 analyzing 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.

The following discussion synthesizes the realization of Theme system in students' Recount texts. This section elaborates the implementation of Theme system in terms of types of Theme and thematic progression applied in students' texts. This elaboration is intended to answer the first research problem, i.e. the Theme and thematic progression pattern which are realized in students' Recount texts.

In terms of types of Theme applied by the students in their texts, all the three types of Theme are used by the students in composing their texts, i.e. the Topical, Interpersonal, and Textual Themes. From the three types of Theme, the Topical Theme (68%) appears to be the predominating Theme in students' Recount texts, then followed by the Textual Theme (31.6%) and the Interpersonal Theme (0.4%). From the findings it is deductible that the dominating occurrence of Topical Theme in students' texts signals the students' ability to deliver what the text is about. It also indicates the students' ability to demonstrate where the information has come and where it is going (Butt et al., 2000: 152). The Topical Theme is the most dominant in the texts because in each clause there is always an ideational (topical) Theme which gives thematic status to an element structure of the clause (Matthiessen, 2005). In addition, the rarity of Interpersonal Theme employed in students' texts shows the small amount of the use of modality and modalization. The students tend to be "concerned with facts and have single modality of certainty" (Emilia, 2005: 178). Besides, the quite frequent appearance of Textual Themes signifies the students' ability to develop the logical relationship between clauses and even stages in the texts. It presents students' successfulness in shaping and structuring the texts (Butt et al., 2000: 152). This is in line with Forey's statement which argues that "Textual Theme is an important means for expressing logical links between the ideational content of the messages in a text and thereby helping understand the text" (2002: 122). Concerning the thematic progression, there are three types of thematic progression. They are the Theme Reiteration (76.03%), Zig Zag (19.84%), and Multiple Theme (4.13%) patterns. The Theme Reiteration is the most frequent Themes used. They occur 92 times or equals 76.03% of the total. The finding that the high number of Theme Reiteration in students' texts may indicate that students' ability in maintaining the focus of the texts by reiterating the thematic element of the clause in the subsequent clauses. This pattern appears 92 times in students' texts. The use of Theme Reiteration pattern indicates that the students tend to make the text focus by repeating the same element as Themes. The significance of the use of this thematic progression, when we have the same participants made Theme on regular basis, as (Eggins, 1994: 303) argues, is that it provides the text with a clear focus. The Theme reiteration helps maintain a strong topical focus.

After the Theme reiteration pattern, The Zig Zag pattern has the second place of the mostly occurring thematic progression pattern in students' Recount texts. Zig zag pattern happens 24 times or equals 19.84% of the total. The application of this pattern indicated that the students indeed create or introduced newly information by promoting the Rheme in a clause to the Theme in the subsequent clause. The use of Zig Zag pattern in students' texts indicates that the students tend to give the text a "sense of cumulative development" (Eggins, 2004: 325). Additionally, The use of this pattern is important when the students elaborate the evidence and information in their texts (Schleppegrell, 2004). Furthermore, the Multiple Theme pattern, each student applies at least one of this patterns in their texts. Meanwhile, only one student (writers of text 6, which is included in low achiever level) who was not able to manage their text by using Multiple Theme pattern. It may be the student cannot plan and elaborate their ideas. This pattern occurs merely 5 times or equals 4.13% of all Thematic progression. The application of this pattern indicates that the students develop the texts well according to the

prior plan before writing those ideas in the text. It is in line with Fries who argues that the use of this pattern signals that the method of development of the text is well-planned and therefore “shows the writer’s investigation strategy applied prior to the writing process” (1995: 321). Also, it shows that the students have the capacity to create a “more coherent and more writerly text” (Emilia, 2010: 155). In addition, the significance of the Multiple Theme pattern that the students have been able to write good Recount texts (in terms of thematic progression pattern) as Multiple Theme pattern is one of the criteria of highly academic, well-written, and well-planned texts (see Emilia, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative design, embracing the characteristics of a case study approach. This approach is used since it provides an intensive, holistic description and analysis of single entity (the bounded system, the case) (Merriam 1988 in Duff, 2008). A descriptive-qualitative design was carried out in a natural setting (Fraenkel & Wallen , 1990; McMillan, 1992; Creswell, 2003; Silverman, 2005; Alwasilah A. C., 2008). Since this primary purpose of this study is to analyze, 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 analyzing Recount text, as a text analysis, played a significant role in this study. The use of Theme progression analysis will help researcher to 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 had been well developed in education areas (Freebody, 2003, in Emilia, 2005).

The data of the study were taken from students’ text of Vocational school at the eleventh grade in Bandung. The participants who became the sample of this research consists of six students.

Students’s Recount texts were collected in several steps. Firstly, the eleventh grade students of a Vocational school were purposively chosen as the participants of the study because they have learnt Recount text. Secondly, the six students were categorized into three groups: high achievers, middle achievers, and low achievers as suggested by the teacher. The classification of the students into three categories were derived from their writing scores as provided by the English teacher. Finally, six student texts were identified and classified using Theme and Thematic progression.

The data in this study was analyzed inductively. Inductive analysis involves the process of identification, classification, and interpreting (McMillan, 1992). The data analysis in this study is documentation of the students’ text analysis.

After the students’ texts were collected by the teacher, they were analyzed after being read. Then, the researcher conducted the steps in analyzing the data involving the identification of the theme progression pattern, and deciding the thematic progression trends.

After identifying all of the clauses in terms of thematic choice, the researcher then identified the thematic progression pattern of those texts. The thematic progression analysis aims to find out how the students maintain the logical relation of the texts (Schleppegrell, 2004; Knapp & Watkins, 2005). The analysis of Thematic progression was based on the works of Fries (1994; 1995a; 1995b), Eggins (2004), and Bloor & Bloor (2004). It can be classified into three: the zig-zag pattern, the reiteration pattern, and the multiple Theme pattern. In analyzing this aspect, the researcher focused on each stages of Recount text to see how the students elaborate and relate the point made to the supporting information or evidences provided in each stage.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

There are six texts which were purposively selected to be analyzed 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 the research question about the Thematic progression realized in students' Recount texts is presented below.

Table 4.2 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	35	83.33	23	79.31	92	76.03
Zig Zag	14	28	5	11.91	5	17.24	24	19.84
Multiple Theme	2	4	2	4.76	1	3.45	5	4.13
Total	50	100	42	100	29	100	121	100

The table above describe that all the three Thematic progression (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 Themes used. They are occurs 92 times or equals 76.03% of the total. The finding that the high number of Theme Reiteration in students' texts may indicate that 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 mostly found in the middle achievers' texts, i.e. 35 times, then followed by the high achievers' i.e. 34 times, and the low achievers' i.e. 23 times.

Beside the Theme Reiteration pattern, another Theme which occurs in students' Recount text is the Zig Zag pattern. Zig zag pattern happens 24 times or equals 19.84% of the total. The finding that 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 clauses. In terms of students' levels, Theme Reiteration pattern mostly found in the high achievers' texts, i.e. 14 times, then followed by the middle achievers' i.e. 5 times, and the low achievers' i.e. 5 times.

The third pattern in students' Recount text is the Multiple Theme pattern. This pattern occurs merely 5 time or equals 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 mostly found in the high achievers' texts, i.e. 2 times, then followed by the middle achievers' i.e. 2 times, and the low achievers' i.e. 1 times. This signals that the students in the level of high and middle achievers have been able to develop the both the macro and hyper-themes in their texts, while the students in the levels of 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 presents Theme Reiteration and Zig Zag patterns as the most dominant thematic shifts (Nwogu & Bloor, 1991: 373). 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

Concerning the thematic progression, there are three types of thematic progression. They are the Theme Reiteration (76.03%), Zig Zag (19.84%), and Multiple Theme (4.13%) patterns. The Theme Reiteration is the most frequent Themes used. They are occurs 92 times or equals 76.03% of the total. The finding that the high number of Theme Reiteration in students' texts may indicates that students' ability in maintaining the focus of the texts by reiterating the thematic element of the clause in the subsequent clauses. The use of Theme Reiteration pattern indicates that the students tend to make the text focus by repeating the same element as Themes. After the Theme reiteration pattern, The Zig Zag pattern has the second place of the mostly occurring thematic progression pattern in students' Recount texts. Zig zag pattern happens 24 times or equals 19.84% of the total. The application of this pattern indicated that the students indeed create or introduced newly information by promoting the Rheme in a clause to the Theme in the subsequent clause. Furthermore, the Multiple Theme pattern, each student applies at least one of this pattern in their texts. Meanwhile, only one student (writers of text 6, which is

included in low achiever level) who was not able to manage their text by using Multiple Theme pattern. It may be the student cannot plan and elaborate their ideas. This pattern occurs merely 5 times or equals 4.13% of all Thematic progression. The application of this pattern indicates that the students develop the texts well according to the prior plan before writing those ideas in the text.

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