

## THEMATIC PROGRESSION IN ACADEMIC WRITING CLASS: A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR STUDY

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### Abstract

The objectives of this study are to elaborate the cohesion and coherence of students' academic writing from the perspective of thematic progression. It aims to find out the thematic progression patterns (simple and multiple with the combination of two patterns) and to examine the problems in thematic progression in academic writing class. Then, descriptive qualitative method is used to analyze the data. The results of this study show that there are four simple thematic progression patterns and seven multiple with two thematic progression patterns found in the students' academic writing. The implication of this study is that the teachers and the lecturers of academic writing will have guidelines to teach the students to produce good, cohesive, and coherent academic writing in term of thematic progression pattern. Besides, they will also have platform in identifying the problems occurring in the thematic progression of students' academic writing.

**Key words:** Misuse of Theme and Rheme, Pattern, Thematic Progression.

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### INTRODUCTION

A piece of writing must be organized in a good way. It should be organized in a way that all parts of the writing unite each other. It should also be organized in a way that the ideas of the writing hang together and flow smoothly so that the messages can be received by the reader. In other words, a piece of writing must fulfill the principle of cohesion (Septiyana & Aminatun, 2021) and coherence. cohesion refers to the relations of meaning within a text that occurs where the interpretation of some elements in the discourse is dependent on that of another (Kuswoyo, Sujatna, Indrayani, et al., 2020). Two elements exist in the cohesive relations (Oktavia & Suprayogi, 2021), (Afrianto, 2017), the presupposing and the presupposed, and they are integrated into a text. In other words, it can be said that cohesion is the tied connection between two elements in a text. Meanwhile, coherence refers to the ideas that hang together in a text.

The study of how forms and meaning are related each other is known as Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). Based on Lock, SFG is the study that sees language first and foremost as a system of communication and analyzes grammar to discover how it is organized to allow speakers and researchers to make and exchange meanings. It can be

seen that SFG views the organization of the form (grammar) (Mandasari & Wahyudin, 2021), (Ayu et al., 2021), (Kuswoyo & Susardi, 2016) in meaning (semantic) perspective (Pranoto, 2021), (Oktaviani & Desiarti, 2019), (Amelia, 2021), (Pustika, 2020), (Wahyudin, 2018). Specifically, in terms of cohesion and coherence, SFG deals with the analysis of textual metafunction (the function of language to organize a text) that sees clause as message and focuses on the theme and rheme structure (thematic progression) in a text.

Thematic progression, which contributes to the cohesion and coherence of a text, is very important especially in the kind of writing that has wide range of purpose. It is because in this kind of writing, the messages that will be delivered should be really assured to be gotten by the readers. It is also because in this kind of writing, the messages that will be delivered have more effects than those of other kinds of writing (Sari & Putri, 2019), (Handayani & Aminatun, 2020), (Meliasari et al., 2018), (Putri & Aminatun, 2021), (Wahyudin & Sari, 2018). It is also because in this kind of writing, the messages that will be delivered will get more attention than those of other kinds of writing. One of the examples of the writing that has wide range of purpose is academic writing (Wahyudin, 2018), (Puspita, n.d.), (Ayu & Zuraida, 2020), (Muliyah et al., 2020) . Academic writing is the style of advanced writing that is used by students at university or college and academics, such as PhD students, lecturers and researchers that is based on analysis – the process of breaking down ideas – to increase one's understanding.

In this research, the researchers got interested in analyzing the thematic progression of fifth semester students' academic writing in literary criticism class (Kardiansyah & Salam, 2021), (Kardiansyah & Salam, 2020), (Kuswoyo, n.d.), (Suprayogi & Novanti, 2021). The reason is because this writing is written by high level students who are just introduced to academic writing and expected to produce good and structured academic writing. Further, the researchers chooses the students' writing in literary criticism class because in this class the high level students in English literature are expected to apply all knowledge they have learnt in other previous literary subjects (Amelia, 2016), (Rido et al., 2021), (Rido, Kuswoyo, & Nuansa, 2020), (Al Falaq et al., 2021), (Rido, Kuswoyo, & Ayu, 2020). Based on these reasons, the researchers thinks that it is very needed to analyze the thematic progression pattern in the writing of this class in order to know how the students organize their academic writing and help them producing good academic writing. Besides, the researchers also want to identify what problems occurring in the thematic progression of

the writing are, regarding the misuse of theme and rheme so that later, the problems can be minimized or avoided.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Thematic Progression**

Thematic progression is the method of development of theme and rheme (Kuswoyo & Susardi, 2017). It can also be said that thematic progression is the system of how theme and rheme are developed in a clause “Indeed, as the text unfolds, the themes connect to the themes and rhemes of preceding clauses various ways (KUSWOYO et al., 2013), picking up or repeating the important concepts and developing them further, whose connections form patterns of thematic progression.” Further, thematic progression contributes to the cohesion and coherence because it shows how messages are tied, hanged, and developed each other in a text.

### **Theme and Rheme**

Theme is the element that serves as the point of departure of the message (Gulö, n.d.), (Kuswoyo, Sujatna, Rido, et al., 2020), (KUSWOYO et al., 2013). It is that which the clause is concerned or it is what the clause is about. The remainder of the message, the part in which the theme is developed, is called as rheme (Gulö, n.d.). This definition is added by Bloor and Bloor that defines theme as the idea represented by the constituent at the starting point of the clause and rheme as the rest of the message.

### **Thematic Progression Patterns**

Thematic progression pattern can be defined as the pattern of arrangement of theme and rheme. It deals with how the theme and rheme are organized to produce cohesive and coherent text. Further, Bloor and Bloor classify the patterns of thematic progression into four. They are *constant theme pattern*, *linear theme pattern*, *split rheme pattern*, and *derived theme pattern*.

### **The Problems in Thematic Progression**

There are 3 common problems resulting from the misuse of theme and rheme, which are the problem of brand new theme, the problem of double rheme, and the problem of empty rheme. Arunsirot adds that there are 3 more problems, which are the problem of empty

theme, the problem of overuse of constant progression, and the problem of confusing selection of textual themes.

### **The Problem of Brand New Theme**

The problem of brand new theme is extremely common in the work of inexperienced researchers, who put new information in theme position. It means that there will be new theme(s) that is(are) not connected to the previous theme or rheme. The example of paragraph that has brand new theme:

**Exams** are the results of cramming. **Most of them** are tests of memories, working under pressure, not ability. **Teachers** would teach students exam techniques...

From the example, it can be seen that the first and second clause share the same themes, which are about *exam*. However, in the third clause, there is a brand new theme *teacher* that is not related to the previous themes or rhemes.

## **METHOD**

In this research, the researchers applied descriptive qualitative research method. It means that the researchers described the results of the analysis in the form of words (Pranoto & Afrilita, 2019), not numbers. These descriptions are in line with the objectives of this study which aim to find out the thematic progression patterns and to identify the problems occurring in the thematic progression of students' writing in which the results were described in words. Further, the researchers also applied library research to find information from books and internet sites for the need of the analysis. The data sources of this research were 20 academic writing of 20 students which were chosen purposively (fifth semester students' writing). Further, the data in this research were taken from the clauses of the paragraphs in the papers. The data analyzed were focused on the background of the study section of the paper since this section consisted of more data needed.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Thematic Progression Pattern**

Based on the findings, it is found that all thematic progression patterns occur in students' writing. It is also found that in each paragraph analyzed, the pattern(s) can be simple (one) thematic progression pattern or multiple (two or more) thematic progression patterns.

However, as explained earlier, the analysis only focuses on the analysis of simple thematic progression pattern and multiple progression patterns with the combination of two patterns found in the writing.

### **Constant Theme Pattern**

As explained earlier, constant theme pattern refers to the type of pattern in which the theme of the clause is introduced in the first clause and then it occurs in the subsequent clauses as the themes as well. In the analysis, it is found that there are five paragraphs organized by this kind of pattern. The example of the paragraph having this pattern can be seen below:

#### **Datum 1/21**

**The Second Coming** expresses his fear about a world apparently descending into chaos and also meditates on historical, political and personal transitions (C26). **It** focuses on the increasingly turbulent events in Ireland in the context of historical cycles, but also reaches over to resonate with personal concerns (C27). (Paper 16, Paragraph 10, Clause 26-27)

In the paragraph above, it can be seen that the theme of clause 26 is *The Second Coming*. It is the poem written by W.B. Yeats (stated in the earlier paragraph). This theme then is shared in clause 27 by using the pronoun *it*. So, it can be summarized that the clauses of the paragraph have the same shared themes.

### **Combination of Constant Theme and Constant Rheme Pattern**

The paragraph organized by using the combination of constant theme and constant rheme pattern will have the ideas that go through both the theme and the rheme. In the analysis, it is found that there is only one paragraph organized by using this kind of combination. The paragraph having the combination of these patterns can be seen below:

#### **Datum 5/21**

**Then, the short story of “Take Pity”** was published in 1956 by a Jewish-American researchers, Bernard Malamud (C26). **The story** reveals some surprising secrets of human nature (C27). **Take Pity as a fiction** does not merely give the fantasy for the readers (C28). **It** gives us a better understanding of human psychology and emotions (C29). Thus, the researchers analyzed the human

psychology side of the main character using the theory from Carl G. Jung, that is Animus archetype (C30). (Paper 12, Paragraph 5, Clause 26-30)

In the paragraph above, it can be seen that the theme of clause 26 is *Then, the story of "Take Pity"* (*then* = textual theme, *the story of "Take Pity"* = topical theme). This theme is repeated as the theme in clause 27 by *the story*, in clause 28 by *Take Pity as fiction*, and in clause 29 by pronoun *it*. However, in clause 29, the flow of the idea shifts to the rheme. It can be seen that the rheme of clause 29 is *gives us a better understanding of human psychology and emotions*. The part of the idea in this rheme, which is the underlined expression *human psychology*, then flows to the rheme in clause 30, *analyzed the human psychology side of the main character ...*, whose main point is about *human psychology side*. So, it can be concluded that this paragraph has clauses whose themes are taken from previous themes and whose rheme is taken from previous rheme.

### **The Problem of Brand New Theme**

The problem of brand new theme refers to the new information that is put in theme position. It also means that the theme is not connected to the previous theme or rheme. In the analysis, it is found that there are four paragraphs having this problem. The example of the paragraph can be seen below:

#### **Datum 12/21**

**Poems** can be written to sound beautiful, to tell a story or to share a message (C8).

**They** can have alternative meaning (C9), **they** can share a feeling or experience (C10), **they** can express just about anything (C11). But the main difference between poetry and other forms of writing is the attention the poet pays to structure, form, tone, word choice and all of those things that create the effect the poet is trying to achieve (C12). (Paper 16, Paragraph 4, Clause 8-12)

In the paragraph above, it can be seen that the theme of clause 8 is *poems* and it is repeated as the themes in clause 9, 10, and 11 by using the pronoun *they*. Besides, it can also be seen that the rhemes of clause 8, 9, 10, and 11 describe the functions of poems. However, it can be seen the appearance of brand new theme *but the main difference between poetry and other forms of writing* which is not related to the themes or rhemes of previous clauses.

This theme is not correlated to the themes or rhemes of previous clauses as it describes the idea of the main difference between poetry and other forms of writing.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be seen that both simple and multiple (with two) thematic progression patterns found in the students' academic writing. There are four types of simple thematic progression patterns and seven types of multiple thematic progression patterns found in students' academic writing. Furthermore, it is also found that all problems in thematic progression proposed in the theoretical framework and other four new problems occur in the students' academic writing. Therefore, it can be concluded that in students' academic writing, there are more problems in the thematic progression.

Based on thematic progression problems found, it can be seen that the academic writing of the students are still not cohesive and coherent. Therefore, this research has two suggestions. First, the teachers and the lecturers of academic writing can pay more attention to the cohesion and coherence of students' writing, especially in term of thematic progression. Second, the students can be more careful and detail in writing so that the problems in thematic progression can be avoided or minimized. If these can be achieved, students will be able to produce cohesive and coherent writing. Moreover, this study also found that the students faced grammatical problems in writing. Even, many simple mistakes are also found. This is also the indication that the students are not well equipped with grammar skills. The writer hopes that other researchers can do researches on this matter so that this problem can be avoided or minimized in the future.

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