

# Theme and Thematic Progression in Narrative Texts of Indonesian EFL Learners

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**Abstract**— This study aims to analyze and describe the Thematic progression patterns and types of Theme in students' narrative texts of Indonesian EFL Learners. This study employs a descriptive-qualitative research design. The data were obtained from a collection of students' texts. This study uses the theory of Thematic progression: Bloor and Bloor (2004), and the theory of types of Theme developed by Halliday (1994), Gerot & Wignell (1994), Halliday et al. (2004). The finding shows a dominant use of Constant pattern in narrative texts indicates that the students are able to create a focus on specific participants as this is one of the linguistics features of narrative texts. The use of Linear pattern indicates that the students have achieved the ability to create cohesion of the texts by introducing the new information by taking a Rheme to become Theme of the upcoming clause. In terms of types of Theme, the high number of Topical Themes in students' text may indicate that the students are able to lead the reader to focus on participants (characters) of the story. The use of Interpersonal Themes, which dominantly used by middle and low achievers, indicate that high achievers tend to be complex lexically (written language), while middle and low achievers tend to use complex grammatically (spoken language). The dominant use of Textual Theme indicates that the students are able to create complex clause and to connect the clause which helps them to create a cohesive and coherent text.

**Keywords**— systemic functional linguistic, textual metafunction, theme, thematic progression, narrative texts.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Study in Theme and Thematic progression in students' texts is important to evaluate coherence in a writing. Coherence is a kind of relationship between ideas in a text which helps the text to hang together. It also deals with ideas that arrange clearly and logically. Halliday et al. (2004) stated that a text is said to have global coherence if the text hangs together as a whole which is referred to as "discourse flow". Therefore, if a text is coherent, the reader can understand easily the main points of the text. According to Halliday & Hasan (2014) a text is coherent if two conditions are fulfilled, first, a text must be consistent with a context in which it is created, second, a text must be connected by cohesive devices. In other words, it suggests that coherence can be built if it is relevant to context, and if there is a connection between ideas in a text.

To create a coherent text some common problems in writing may arise, especially when students are asked to write a good composition, their writing may be good in grammar, but poor in text structure and disorganize in logic, that makes the whole texts lack unity. As grammar

(as well as other systems in language) contributes to the coherent flow of information in a text (Jones & Lock, 2010), it might lead teachers to pay more attention to grammatical mistakes. This might make the students to think correct grammar is the essential factor in writing, thus the students are paying too much attention to grammar rather than the order of organization, and fail to create more coherent writing.

Some studies have been conducted to examine coherence in students' writing by analyzing the use of Theme and Rheme. Study in Theme and Thematic Progression in learner English focus on how appropriate use of Theme and Thematic progression to improve coherence in learners output, mainly learners of English writing, by analyzing their problem in the use of Theme and Thematic progression. This is in line with Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) state that one way to evaluate the students' writing skills in creating the text is analyzing Thematic progression based on the Theme system of Systemic Functional Linguistic. Some studies stated that one of the major problems for the students' writing is in the logical order of

the text content and the coherent layout of textual structure. This is supported by Wei (2010) argued that students' English writing was lack of coherence due to the inappropriate thematic choice and thematic progression. Furthermore, Zhang (2004) found that Theme in students' writing was confusing because they were not connected to preceding Theme, and as a result, Themes did not help develop the writing.

This study aims to analyze and describe the realization of Thematic progression and the use of Theme types in students' Narrative texts. Therefore, findings of this study can be useful to examine problems in students' text and it also applies to improve students' writing skills.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistic

Bloor et al., (2004) state that for Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), a language as a 'system of meanings', it follows semantic (concerned with meaning) and functional (concerned with how the language is used). That is to say that when people use language, precisely they construct meaning. Besides, Thompson, (2013) also states that SFL is essentially equated with function, and that describing language from this view appears to seem to be a much less workable task than describing the structures. According to Halliday, SFL is a theory that examines language as a system in terms of functions. This theory introduces the three metafunctions of meaning, they are experiential or ideational meaning, interpersonal, and textual meaning.

### 2.2 Textual Metafunction

Textual metafunction concerns Theme and Rheme. The Theme highlights a certain piece of information within a clause as being more important than others, which provides the "point of departure" for the message (Halliday, 1994). Besides, Deterding & Poedjosoedarmo (2001) mention that "textual meaning is expressed by thematic structure (the identity of theme, what we are talking about, and Rheme, what we are saying about it)."

The following is the table shows about Theme and Rheme

Theme	Rheme
1. The duke	has given my aunt that teapot.
2. My aunt	has been given that teapot by the duke.
3. That teapot	the duke has given to me.

(Halliday et al., 2004)

### 2.2.1 Types of Theme

According to Halliday (1994); Halliday et al., (2004) types of Theme can be categorized into three categories, they are Ideational theme, Textual theme and Interpersonal theme.

There are two types of Ideational theme; unmarked theme and marked theme. The unmarked theme in the English clause is usually started with the subject. The marked theme is a non-typical theme that is characterized by other than subjects such as complement, adjunct, or predicator. The following is an example:

My sister	talked to me yesterday.
<b>Theme (unmarked theme)</b>	<b>Rheme</b>
<b>Ideational Theme</b>	

Last month	my sister talked to me.
<b>Theme (Marked theme)</b>	<b>Rheme</b>
<b>Ideational Theme</b>	

The Interpersonal theme relate to the relationship either between the speaker and his addressees or between the speaker and its message. In addition, Gerot & Wignell (1994) state that the Interpersonal theme occurs before the topical theme. The Interpersonal theme can be Modal Adjunct, Vocative, Finite, or WH-elements.

Perhaps	we	can wait until next week
Modal Adjunct	Topical	<b>Rheme</b>
Interpersonal	Ideational	
Theme		

(Gerot & Wignell, 1994)

The Textual theme helps to structure the text and develops connection to other clauses (Halliday, 1994), it realized by conjunctive adjunct, e.g and, however; conjunction, e.g before, after, how, which, and continuative". Textual theme is categorized into continuative, conjunction, and conjunctive adjunct.

Anyway,	Then	They	could not finish their job
Continuative	Conjunctive Adjunct	Topical	<b>Rheme</b>
Theme			

## 2.2 Thematic Progression

Thematic progression is the way the themes are linked together to form a text. According to Eggins (2004), Thematic progression is the flow of information between sequential themes and rhemes. Analyzing the flow of information is considered important because an analysis of how these themes progress and collaborate with rheme is essential to see the organization of a text. In this case, Bloor et al. (2004) have proposed several Thematic patterns that are commonly found in texts. They are Constant theme pattern, Linear theme pattern, Split Rheme pattern and Derived themes

### 2.2.1 Constant theme Pattern

The Constant theme pattern shows that the topic of the first clause is introduced in the first theme, and then becomes the second, the third and the fourth theme of each clause as represented below.

Clause 1. Theme A + Rheme A  
 ↓  
 Clause 2. Theme A + Rheme B  
 ↓  
 Clause 3. Theme A + Rheme C

**Noam Chomsky**, an author of *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, revolutionized linguistics. **He** also happens to be well known for his political views. In fact, **he** is better-known to laymen for his political view. (Sujatna, 2013)

### 2.2.2 Linear theme pattern

The Linear theme pattern shows that the rheme of each clause becomes the theme of the next clause as represented below.

Clause 1. Theme A + Rheme B  
 ↙  
 Clause 2. Theme B + Rheme C  
 ↙  
 Clause 3. Theme C + Rheme C

The museum is located in the center of town near **the square**. **This square** is a common destination for **tourist buses**. **The buses**, all belonging to the Island Tour Bus. (Sujatna, 2013)

### 2.2.3 Split Rheme pattern

This type occurs when the rheme of a clause has two or more components, each rheme is taken as the theme of the next clause as represented below.

Clause 1. Theme A + [Rheme B + Rheme C]  
 ↙ ↘  
 Clause 2. Theme B + Rheme  
 ↙ ↘  
 Clause 3. Theme C + Rheme

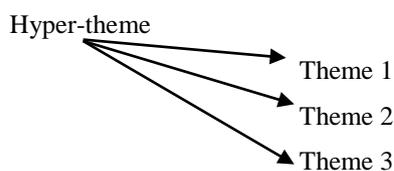
The only other considerable region of dense population in the world lies in Japan. This country shows a remarkable fusion of **both densely populated rural and**

**urban communities**. Japanese **peasant farmers**, who constitute 45 percent of the total population, practice a typical monsoon Asian subsistence economy, whereas the **millions of people living in vast industrial cities** such as Tokyo and Osaka have much in common with counterparts in Europe and North America.”

(Bloor et al., 2004)

### 2.2.4 Derived Theme

The Derived theme occurs when the theme of a clause is not stated explicitly in the theme – rheme of the previous clauses by the form, but it relates in meaning to the theme or rheme of the previous clause as represented below.



**The rat-like rodents** include hamsters, lemmings, voles and gerbils, as well as rats and mice. **The black rat** is found in buildings, sewers and rubbish yards, but has been largely replaced by the bigger, more aggressive, brown rat. **Voles** are mouse-like rodents that live in the grassland of Europe and Asia; **water voles**, or water rats, build complex tunnels along river banks. **The house mouse** often lives inside buildings and is a serious pest because it eats stored food. **The field mouse**, on the other hand, very rarely comes near human dwellings. (Bloor et al., 2004)

## III. METHODOLOGY

This study is designed as a qualitative and descriptive research method since the primary purpose of this study is to analyze and describe the types of Theme and Thematic progression in students’ narrative texts, a descriptive qualitative method was considered appropriate (Creswell, 2009). The descriptive method is method research that attempts to describe and interpret the objects under reality. Moreover, Keizer (2015) argues that all linguistics research is first and foremost based on observation and description.

The data of the study were taken from the sixth grade of International Elementary School in Bandung. The data is nine students’ narrative texts which were intentionally selected based on teacher’s suggestion, these data represent low, middle, and high achievement category based on school’s writing rubric score.

The steps in analyzing the data: first the identification of Thematic progression, followed by the

identification of types of Theme. In analyzing the Thematic progression, the researcher focused on the trends of Thematic progression to see how the low, middle and high achievers elaborate and relate each clause in Theme Rheme structure to develop a narrative text

Next, the identification of types of Theme is conducted, the text also divided into some stages of narrative, by breaking down the texts into numbered clauses, text orientation, complication, and resolution. Then the types of Theme were identified based on the theory of Halliday (1994), Gerot & Wignell (1994), and Halliday et al., (2004) in terms of Topical, Interpersonal, or Textual theme. The identification of types of Theme would describe how the students organize the idea textually.

in students' narrative texts. The findings concerning the types of Thematic progression are presented in Table 1.

The table above describes that only two types of Thematic progression (Constant and Linear) are used in Students' narrative texts. Based on the table above, the Constant patterns is the most frequent Thematic progression used. It occurs 80 times or equal to 63% of the total. The high number of Constant pattern in students' narrative texts indicates that the students tend to represent the continuing information by focusing on the Theme of the text in the preceding clause. This trend shows us how elementary students are able to maintain the focus of the story by repeating the Theme in the next clause. In terms of students' text category, Constant theme pattern is mostly found both in the middle achiever for 25 times and low achiever for 25 times, then followed by high achievers' for 30 times.

Besides the Constant Theme, another Thematic progression which occurs in students' narrative writing is the Linear pattern. The Linear pattern is mostly found in the low achievers' texts for 18 times, then followed by high achievers' for 17, and the middle achievers' 11. The high frequency of Linear pattern implicitly indicates that the students have achieved the ability to create cohesion of the texts by introducing the new information by taking a Rheme to become Theme of the upcoming clause. In terms of students' text category, the Linear pattern is mostly found in the low achievers' texts for 18 times, then followed by high achievers' for 17, and the middle a

#### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There are nine texts which were purposively analyzed in this study. These texts were categorized into three levels of achievement: low, middle, and high achievement. Each category consists of three texts. This

section is to answer a part of research questions about type of Thematic progression and the type of Theme applied in students' narrative texts. The findings concerning the types of Thematic progression are presented in Table 1.

Table.1: The Thematic progression realization

Types of Thematic Progression	Students' Text Category							
	Low		Middle		High		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Constant	25	58	25	69	30	64	80	63
Linear	18	42	11	31	17	36	46	37
Split Rheme	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Derived	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	43	100	36	100	47	100	126	100

then followed by high achievers' for 17, and the middle achievers' 11.

The absence of the Split rheme pattern and Derived theme pattern in students' narrative texts show that the students of elementary school rarely tend to compose a complex text, however they are able to create a well-organized and understandable texts through Constant and Linear patterns. The dominant use of Constant pattern in narrative texts also means that the students are able to create focus on specific participants as this is one of the linguistics features of narrative text.

This section is to answer a part of research question about types of Theme realized in students' narrative texts, which is represented in Table 2.

The three types of Theme (Topical, Interpersonal, and Textual Themes) are used in students' narrative texts. Based on Table 2, the Topical Theme is the most frequent Theme used. It occurs 412 times or 69% of the total. This Topical Theme is divided into two parts, they are the marked Themes which occur 30 times or 5%, and the unmarked Theme which occur 392 times or 64%. The finding of the high number of Topical Themes in students' texts may indicate that the students are able to lead the reader to focus to participants (characters) of the story. As one of linguistic features of narrative text is to focus on specific and usually individualized participants, thus it may be the cause of the dominant number of Topical Theme occurrences in students' narrative texts.

Table.2: The use of Theme in the students' texts

Types of Theme		Students' Text Category							
		Low		Middle		High		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Topical	Marked	8	4	16	6	6	3,75	30	5
	Unmarked	141	72	137	53	114	71	392	64
Interpersonal		13	7	14	5	3	2	30	5
Textual		34	17	90	35	37	23	161	26
Total		196	100	257	100	160	100	613	100

Meanwhile, the Interpersonal theme is the least type of Theme found in students' text. The number of Interpersonal Themes in the total of students' texts are 30 or equal to 5%. This theme mostly found in spoken text, which is in the dialogue of the story, as Interpersonal Theme commonly happens in the conversation (Eggin, 2004). The use of Interpersonal Theme is highly occurred in middle achievers for 14 times, followed by low achievers for 13 times, and high achievers for 3 times. These numbers show that high achievers tend to use dialogue less than middle and low achievers, these also indicate that high achievers, tend to be complex lexically (written language), while middle and low achievers tend to be complex grammatically (spoken language).

On the other hand, the Textual Theme occurs 161 times or equal to 26% of the total. The use of Textual Theme is highly occurred in middle achievers for 90 times or 35%, followed by high achievers for 37 times or 23%, and low achievers for 34 times or 17%. The dominant use of Textual Theme indicates that the students are able to create complex clause and to connect the clause which helps them to create a cohesive and coherent text

To conclude, the Topical Themes are the most frequent that occur in students' narrative texts of all levels (69%), followed by Textual Themes (26%). Meanwhile, the Interpersonal Themes are the least used in the narrative text (5%). This result supports the research that conducted by Safitri (2013), about Theme system in the narrative text whose finding showed that there were three types of Theme used by the students, they are Topical, Textual and Interpersonal, and it stated that Topical Theme was the most frequently used.

## V. CONCLUSION

The finding showed that Thematic progression and types of Theme support one of the linguistic features of narrative text. In terms of Thematic progression, the dominant use of Constant pattern in narrative text indicates that the students are able to create focus on specific participants as this is one of the linguistics features of the narrative texts. The use of Linear patterns indicates that the students have achieved the ability to create cohesion of the texts by introducing the new information by taking a Rheme to become Theme of the upcoming clause. In terms of types of Theme, the high number of Topical Themes in students' texts may indicate that the students are able to lead the reader to focus on participant (characters) of the story. The use of Interpersonal, which dominantly used by middle and low indicate that high achievers tend to be complex lexically (written language), while middle and low achievers tend to be complex grammatically (spoken language). The dominant use of Textual Theme indicates that the students are able to create complex clause and to connect the clause which helps them to create a cohesive and coherent text. Further research in Theme and Thematic progression for elementary school students can be applied in other genres such as in recount text, procedural text, or expository text.

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