An Analysis of Thematic Progression in High School Students' Exposition Texts

Asri Nur Rakhman*
asri.nurrakhman@gmail.com

* Asri graduated in December 2012 from English Education Study Program, Indonesia University of Education Bandung

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate how high school students organize their ideas in their Exposition texts, and to what extent their Exposition texts are consistent with argumentative language features in terms of Thematic Progression, based on the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (e.g. Danes, 1974; Eggins, 2004). The data were nine high school students' Exposition texts from low, middle, and high level of achievement. The result shows that the students organize their ideas in three ways of Thematic Progression, including the Zig-zag Pattern or Simple Linear Theme Progression (SLP), the Re-iteration Pattern or Constant Theme Progression (CTP), and the Multiple Theme Pattern or Derived Theme Progression (DTP). In terms of Thematic Progression consistency, some texts from middle and high achievers are consistent with the argumentative language features, since they employed SLP than CTP and used DTP. Some students still need guidance to create good pieces of writing.

Keywords: *Thematic Progression, Exposition text, Senior High School*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is generally recognized as a difficult task by ESL and EFL students (Rosa, 2007). The reason for this is that writing requires the students to encounter some conditions by which they can write well. One aspect that plays an important role in writing is the coherence (Wang, 2007). As Halliday (1994: 309) stated, coherence is "the internal [resource] for structuring the clause as a message", including the notions of Theme and information.

However, maintaining the coherence in students' writing becomes the main problem faced by the students when they are asked to write. Research has found that in ESL/EFL students' writing, the students focus almost entirely on the word and sentence levels rather than the level of the whole discourse, that is, textual coherence (Ferris and Hedgecock 1998 as cited in Lee, 1998). In fact, the thematic organization of the text is closely connected with discourse coherence or text connexity (Ren *et al*, 2009).

Nonetheless, in Indonesian secondary school context, thematic organization is not paid attention to by both teachers and students in the teaching and learning activity, especially in writing skill, though it is important since it can show the ability of students in organizing their ideas and making their sentence coherent (Wang, 2007). Thus, this study aims to reveal how the students organize their ideas in their Exposition texts seen from Thematic Progression, and to explore the extent to which the students' Exposition texts are consistent with the argumentative language features in terms of Thematic Progression.

THEME-RHEME ORGANIZATION, THEMATIC PROGRESSION, AND THEMATIC PROGRESSION CONSISTENCY

Theme and Rheme are two terms which characterise the way in which information is spread or distributed in

a sentence (Wang, 2007). Theme is the element of the clause structure which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is with which the clause is concerned (Halliday, 1985:38). The Theme provides the environment for the remainder of the message; which is known as the Rheme, in Theme-Rheme organization (*ibid*) that becomes the most significant factor of the development of the text (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004).

In relation to Theme type, Theme can be single or multiple Themes. Multiple Themes can consist of topical, interpersonal, or textual Theme. The example of Theme-Rheme analysis is displayed below in table 1:

The exchange of information between Theme and Rheme pairings in a text is called Thematic Progression (TP) (Eggins, 1994, as cited in Wang, 2007). Eggins (2004) states that

Thematic Progression contributes to the cohesive development of a text and it can strengthen the text's coherence and cohesion (Emilia, 2005). Moreover, Eggins (2004) and Danes (1974) name three patterns of TP as follows:

1. *Re-iteration pattern* or *Constant Thematic progression (CTP,* which appears when Topical Theme has relation to the one in the following clause.

2. *Zig-zag pattern* or *Simple Linear thematic Progression (SLP,* which has a Theme that derives from an element in the Rheme of the preceding clause

3. *Multiple-Theme pattern* or *Derived Theme Progression (DTP),* which mostly occurs in the longer text, has one or some elements in a clause which are then distributed in Themes of the following clauses

But,	Mary,	Surely	We	Can wait until next week
Conj.	Vocative	Modal	Topical	
Textual	Interpersonal		Topical	
Theme				**Rheme**

(Multiple Themes, Adopted from Gerot and Wignell, 1994:108)

Table. 1

In addition, Danes mentions the fourth pattern of TP, that is, *Split Rheme Progression (SRP),* which Eggins (2004) characterizes it as Multiple Theme pattern. The example of TP Analysis is displayed below:

1. Now, **in big cities**, teens already know the name of the dangerous drugs. `SLP`

2. **They** don't just know drugs, `CTP`

3. But **they** use it too.

In determining TP Consistency, the occurrence of TP above is calculated to see which pattern that mostly occurs in the text. Since in the longer Exposition text DTP usually occurs,

and SLP is dominant, then those two phenomena becomes the basic parameter to determine whether or not the students' texts are consistent with the argumentative language features, in terms of Thematic Progression. (see Fries, 1995; Nwogu and Bloor, 1991).

THEMATIC PROGRESSION AND THEMATIC PROGRESSION CONSISTENCY IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' EXPOSITION TEXTS

The result of the study found reveals three patterns of Thematic Progression, which are SLP, CTP, and

DTP, are used by students in order to organize their ideas in their texts in almost of every level of achievement.

The first text analyzed is a low achiever's text which employs just CTP and SLP in order to organize her ideas (e.g. 1):

1. _Drugs is (are) a (there should be no "a") dangerous drug(s)_
   ↘ CTP
2. _And it is also harmful [to people [who eat them]]._

3. _When we take drugs,_ SLP

(e.g. 1)

Drugs in the first clause of Thesis element is considered as an unmarked topical Theme that serves to identify the field under discussion (Emilia, 2005), which focuses on drugs. The reference _it_ in the second clause refers to _Drugs_ in the preceding clause constructing CTP "where the same element occur regularly as Theme" (Eggins, 2004: 324). In the third clause, an unmarked topical Theme again is applied in word _we_ derived from Rheme _to people [who eat them]_ in the second clause constructing SLP. This pattern indicates that the students have been able to make a logical relation and elaboration in their texts (Eggins, 2004).
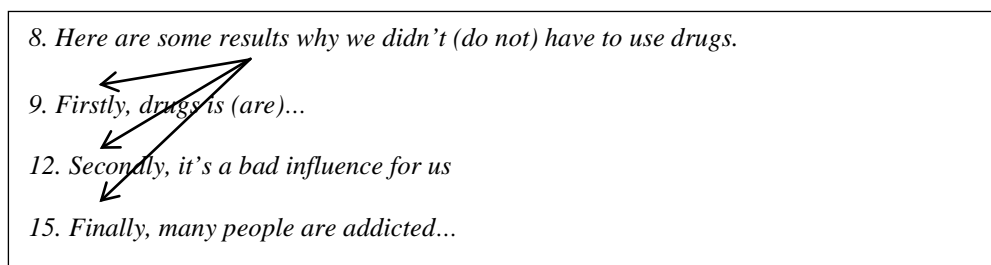
In the analysis of texts by middle and high achievers, several aspects can be designed. First, the number of clauses employed by the students is more than the low achiever. Second, it is found that the student does not only employ CTP and SLP, but also use DTP which indicates that the student has clearly "planned" their method of development in their texts (Eggins, 2004:305; Emilia, 2010:124) (E.g.2):

This kind of thematic pattern is found when some elements exist in a Theme

or as Hyper-Theme of paragraph (Danes, 1974). From the text above, the word '*Here'* has a function as an unmarked topical Theme of the clause since it is in the initial position of the clause. This clause has a Rheme '*are some results why we didn't (do not)*

have to use drugs' which becomes the general notion that introduces a number of different pieces of information, that is, three different arguments in relation to why we do not have to use drugs.

8. Here are some results why we didn't (do not) have to use drugs.

9. Firstly, drugs is (are)...

12. Secondly, it's a bad influence for us

15. Finally, many people are addicted...

(e. g. 2)

In relation to TP Consistency, it is analysed by picturing the trend of TP in students' exposition texts. The trend of TP in students' exposition texts is presented in Table 2 below.

The trend shows that CTP is the most frequent pattern that occurs in the students' texts. The second dominant pattern is SLP, and the third is DTP. As discussed before, in an argumentative text, SLP seems to be dominant than CTP. It is because SLP can give an impact to the development

of information in argumentation where arguments are arranged in a meaningful way to achieve its purpose (Nwogu and Bloor, 1991). In addition, DTP is found frequently in expository texts.

Nonetheless, the result generally shows that the most dominant occurrence in the students' texts is CTP, which occurs mostly in narrative texts (Fries, 1995). However, in detailed analysis, there are two students from middle and high level of

achievement who employ SLP more than CTP in their texts, indicating that the students' texts are consistent with argumentative language features in terms of Thematic Progression.

Table 2. Thematic Progression Trends

No	Thematic Progression Type	Number of Occurrence			
		High Achievers	Middle Achievers	Low Achievers	Total
1	Simple Linear Progression or Zig-zag Pattern	21	11	3	35
2	Constant Theme Progression or Re-iteration Pattern	28	20	19	67
3	Derived Theme Progression or Multiple Theme Pattern	9	5	1	14
	Total	58	36	23	

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this study signify that, seen from Thematic Progression, the students have organized their ideas in three ways of TP patterns. Despite some minor weaknesses such as grammatical errors and the compliance of linguistic features that still need further improvement, the students seemed to be able to apply CTP, SLP, and DTP in their texts to make their texts coherent. It was also found that most students generally applied Constant CTP and SLP. In the specific identification, SLP and DTP seemed frequently to occur in middle and high achievers, which indicate that their texts were consistent with argumentative language features, in terms of Thematic Progression. Moreover, CTP, on the other hand, is dominant in low achievers.

Based on the research findings, discussion, and conclusion, it is suggested that the students and teachers develop the text organization of the text by applying TP pattern in the process of writing, so that it can lead the students to have a good control of writing, especially in managing their information in their texts to achieve the goal effectively. In addition, the teachers need to put more effort in teaching low achievers in elaborating the arguments. In order that the students can elaborate their arguments, the teacher should ask the students to read more about the topic first so that they have better knowledge on the issue. The teacher can also put more emphasis in teaching pronoun, reference, conjunctive and conjunction as a textual resource that can enhance the coherence in students' texts. Moreover, the effectiveness of the teaching strategies can also be evaluated from the result of TP analysis.

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