Thematic Progression in EFL Students' Academic Writings: A Systemic Functional Grammar Study

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Abstract

This research aims to find out (simple and multiple with two) thematic progression pattern in fifth semester students' academic writing. It elaborates how the students organize the ideas in their writing through the organization of the theme and rheme. To find out the pattern, the theory of thematic progression patterns proposed by Bloor and Bloor (2004) was applied. Then, descriptive qualitative and library research methods are applied in this research. The data in this research are 20 pieces of fifth semester students' academic writings. The result of the research shows that there are four types of simple thematic progression pattern and seven types of multiple with two thematic progression pattern found in students' academic writings. Then, it can be concluded that thematic progression pattern in students' academic writings, to some extent, are various.

Key Words*: academic writing, thematic progression, SFL*

Introduction

A good piece of writing must fulfill the principles of cohesion and coherence. According to Halliday and Hasan, 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. Two elements exist in the cohesive relations, the presupposing and the presupposed, and they are integrated into a text (1976: 4). Meanwhile, coherence refers to the ideas that hang together in a text. It means that what has been stated before in a text provides the idea of what will be coming next (Halliday and Hasan, 1989: 48). It can be seen that there are two important points of cohesion and coherence, which are the elements or the forms and the ideas or the meanings.

The study of how forms and meaning are related each other is known as Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). According to 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 writers to make and exchange meanings (1996: 1). It can be seen that SFG views the organization of the form (grammar) in meaning (semantic) perspective. 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 (Bloor and Bloor, 2004: 10-11; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014: 83; Sujatna, 2012: 383).

Thematic progression, which contributes to the cohesion and coherence of a text, is very important especially in a piece of advanced 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. 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.

In this research, the writers were interested in analyzing thematic progression pattern in the fifth semester students' academic writings. The reason is because this is a kind of advanced writing that should be organized in a very cohesive and coherent way. Besides, this is also a type of writing written by advanced level students who are expected to be able to produce well-structured and academic writings. Therefore, the writers want to elaborate how the students organize their academic writings based on the thematic progression pattern.

Theory and Method

In this research, the writers applied descriptive qualitative research method. It means that the writers described the results of the analysis in the form of words, not numbers, as Perry states that qualitative research is characterized by verbal description of its data (2005). These descriptions are in line with the objectives of this study which aim to find out the thematic progression patterns in which the results were described in words.

The data sources of this research were 20 academic writing of 20 students of The Higher School of Foreign Language Teknokrat Bandar Lampung in literary criticism class 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. Moreover, the data analyzed consisted of 85 paragraphs and 589 clauses in total. Then, the analysis is only focused on simple (one) thematic progression pattern and multiple (with two) thematic progression pattern.

In collecting the data, the writers applied documentation method. There were some steps the writers applied. They are: 1) getting the writing from the lecture, 2) sorting out the writing that was not used, which is sixth semester students' writing (since all writing taken consisted of both fifth and sixth semester students' writing), 3) rearranging the background sections of the writing since they were the focus of the analysis, and 4) printed out the background sections of the writing.

In analyzing the data, the writers also applied some steps. They are: 1) reading the writing, 2) coding the clauses ("C" is used, stood for clause), 3) dividing the theme and rheme, 4) diagramming the theme and rheme to find out the thematic progression pattern, and 5) classifying the pattern based on the theory.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the findings, it is found that all thematic progression patterns occur in students' writing. In addition, other patterns are also found in the writing. Besides, 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.

Simple Thematic Progression Pattern

Simple thematic progression pattern refers to the paragraph that has only one type of thematic progression pattern. In the analysis, it is found that there are thirteen paragraphs in students' writing organized by simple thematic progression pattern. Further, the simple thematic progression patterns found in the writing involve:

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 1/36

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.

Constant Rheme Pattern

This pattern is the type of pattern in which the rhemes of the clauses share the same topic/idea. In this analysis, it is found that there is only one paragraph to have this pattern. The paragraph can be seen below:

Datum 2/36

Jung says "Anima and animus tend to operate ..." (p185) (C18). Thus, this paper will discuss what kind of feminine character or anima shown inside Martin and how his anima or feminine reveal (C19). (Paper 4, Paragraph 5, Clause 18-19)

In the paragraph above, it can be seen that the clauses share the same rheme. The rheme of clause 18 is *says "Anima and animus tend to…"* whose main point is the underlined expression *anima and animus.* Then, this idea gets promoted to be the rheme of clause 19, the underlined expression *will discuss what kind of feminine*

character or anima shown inside Martin and how his anima or feminine reveal. This rheme can be said to be from the previous clause because its main point is about *anima,* which is one of the main points (*anima* and *animus*) stated before. Thus, it can be said that the clauses of the paragraph share the same idea in their rhemes.

Linear Theme Pattern

Linear theme pattern refers to the type of pattern in which the rheme of each clause becomes the theme of subsequent clause (the rheme of clause 1 becomes the theme of clause 2, and so on). In the analysis, it is found that there are six paragraphs organized by using this pattern. The example of the paragraph having this pattern can be seen below:

Datum 3/36

In order to help the writers analyzing this case, she uses <u>anima and animus concept by Gustav Carl Jung</u> (C11). **Jung's theory** opens the way for equalizing value between his 'masculine' and 'feminine' ways of being and, barring his stereotypical descriptions of these behaviors in men and women, makes possible a functioning integration of both aspects within one individual of either sex (C12). (Paper 4, Paragraph 3, Clause 11-12)

In the paragraph above, the rheme of clause 11 is *she uses anima and animus concept by Gustav Carl Jung*. Then, it can be seen that the part of this rheme, the underlined expression *anima and animus concept by Gustav Carl Jung,* becomes the rheme in clause 12 by using the words *Jung's theory.* To conclude, this paragraph has two clauses in which the rheme of the first clause is the same as the theme in second clause.

Derived Theme Pattern

This pattern refers to the type of pattern used to describe expressions in theme position which are cohesively linked in meaning, but not necessarily in form, to a topic which has been stated earlier in the text in which this topic serves as a hypertheme. In the analysis, it is found that there is only one paragraph organized by using this pattern. The paragraph can be seen below:

Datum 4/36

Many literary critics are on the opinion that … (C18). **Carl Jung**, **Swiss psychologist**, argued that the root of an archetype is in the "collective unconscious" of mankind (C19). (Paper 16, Paragraph 7, Clause 18-19)

In the paragraph above, it can be seen that the theme of clause 18, *many literary critics,* serves as the hypertheme. It means that this theme becomes the main theme from which other themes can be derived. Further, it can be seen that the theme of clause 19 is *Carl Jung, Swiss psychologist.* This theme is derived from the hypertheme *many literary critics* for *Carl Jung* is *one of the literary critics*. To sum up, this paragraph has two clauses in which the theme of the first clause is the hypertheme of the theme in subsequent clause.

Multiple Thematic Progression Pattern

Multiple thematic progression patterns refer to the paragraph that has more than one type thematic progression patterns. In this analysis, the multiple thematic progression patterns are only limited to two type thematic progression patterns. Further, in the analysis, it is found that there are twenty three paragraphs in students' writing that are found to have two type thematic progression patterns. The patterns found in students' writing involve:

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 5/36

Then, the short story of "Take Pity" was published in 1956 by a Jewish-American writer, 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 <u>human psychology</u> and emotions (C29). Thus, the writer analyzed the <u>human psychology side</u> 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"*. 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.

Combination of Constant Theme and Linear Theme Pattern
The paragraph that is organized by the combination of constant theme and linear theme pattern will have both the theme taken from previous theme and the theme taken from previous rheme. In the analysis, it is found that there are sixteen paragraphs organized by using this combination pattern. The example of the paragraph having this pattern can be seen below:

Datum 6/36

In "The Princess" short story, there are <u>some characters such as the princess, Teddy bear, the king, dragon and other character </u>that have contributed in the short story itself (C16). **The Teddy bear** is a little bear doll (C17). **Although it** is a doll (C18), **he** had a big wish to protect human from the danger of dragon (C19). (Paper 20, Paragraph 5, Clause 16-19)

In the paragraph above, it can be seen that the rheme of clause 16 is *there are some characters such as princess, Teddy bear, the king, dragon and other character…* in which the main idea of this rheme is *about the characters of the story.* The part of the idea of this rheme, which is one of the characters - *Teddy Bear* – then becomes the theme in clause 17, *The Teddy Bear.* This theme is then repeated as theme in clause 18 by using *although it* where the pronoun *it* refers to *The Teddy Bear.* Then the pronoun *it,* which refers to *The Teddy Bear,* is shared again as the theme in clause 19 by using the pronoun *he.* To sum up, this paragraph has clauses whose themes are promoted from both previous rheme and the themes.

Combination of Constant Theme and Derived Theme Pattern
The paragraph organized by using the combination of constant theme and derived theme pattern will have both the theme taken from the previous theme and the theme derived from a hypertheme. In the analysis, it is found that there is only one paragraph organized by using this combination pattern. The paragraph can be seen below:

Datum 7/36

Short story is a kind of literary works (C34). **Short story** has been the part of our society (C35) **since it** was told orally (C36). **According to Ferguson (1982:45), it** is a piece of prose fiction, usually under 10,000 words which can be read at one sitting (C37). **Artistically, a short story** is intended to create an impression via character, conflict, theme, setting, symbols and point of view (C38). **A short story** is personal part of the author and today is more concerned with character than action (C39). **Ferguson (1982:46)** added, "Short stories published in magazines and short story collections today generally do not exceed 10,000 words in length; fifteen to twenty typed, double-spaced pages might be the average. There are, however, publications that accept or even specialize in longer short works, but they are relatively few. If a piece of fiction runs upward of fifty or sixty pages, it might be labeled a "novella", "novelette" or "short novel" rather than a short story" (C40) (Paper 6, Paragraph 3, Clause 34-40)

In the paragraph above, it can be seen that the theme of clause 34 is *short story.* This theme is repeated as the theme in clause 35 by using the same nominal group *short story.* This theme is shared again as the theme in clause 36 by *since it* in which *it* refers to the *short story*. Then, it is subsequently repeated as the themes in clause 37 by *according to Ferguson, it*, in clause 38 by *artistically, a short story*, and in clause 39 by *a short story*. Further, this theme (*short story*) becomes the hypertheme for the next clause. It can be seen that the theme in clause 40 is *Ferguson*. *Ferguson* can be said as derived from the hypertheme *short story* since *Ferguson* is *one of the literary experts explaining the definition of short story*. To summarize, this paragraph has clauses whose themes are taken from the theme of the other clauses and is derived from the theme of previous clause.

Combination of Constant Theme and Linear Rheme Pattern

The paragraph organized by the combination of constant theme and linear rheme pattern will have both the theme taken from the previous theme and the rheme taken from previous theme. In the analysis, it is found that there are three paragraph organized by using this pattern. The example of the paragraph having this pattern can be seen below:

Datum 8/36

As a part of prose, short story is brief fictional <u>prose</u> <u>narrative</u> that is shorter than a <u>novel</u> and that usually deals with only a few characters (C8). **The short story** is usually concerned with a single effect conveyed in only one or a few significant episodes or scenes (C9). There are a lot of examples of the <u>short story</u> such The Princess (C10). (Paper 20, Paragraph 3, Clause 8-10)

In the paragraph above, it can be seen that the theme of clause 8 is *as a part of prose, short story*. This theme is repeated in clause 9 by *the short story*. This theme then flows to the rheme of clause 10, *are a lot of examples of the short story such The Princess.* This rheme is said to be taken from previous theme because one of the main points in this rheme is about *the short story.* So, it can be said that this paragraph has clauses whose theme is taken from previous theme and whose rheme is taken from previous theme.

Combination of Constant Rheme and Linear Theme Pattern

The paragraph organized by the combination of constant rheme and linear theme pattern will have both the rheme taken from previous rheme and the theme taken from the previous rheme. In the analysis, it is found that there is only one paragraph having this pattern. The paragraph can be seen below:

Datum 9/36

In the reality, <u>The Western</u> already colonize the minds of the Eastern to assume that western is the great culture (C13) **and they** are already planting the eastern though to respect and <u>imitate</u> them (C14). Just like that already happen in this era, if many people in our country mostly <u>emulated the style of western such as, lifestyle (fashion, food), literary works, film, song, etc.</u> (C15) Therefore, this paper will discuss about ; (1) What are the <u>factors that describing the colonization between the different culture inside the story?</u> (2) What is the <u>positive impact of postcolonial inside the story?</u> (C16) **Those** are the problem formulations that will explain in this research (C17). (Paper 7, Paragraph 3, Clause 13-17)

In the paragraph above, it can be seen that the rheme of clause 13 is *The Western already colonize…* The part of this rheme, which is the underlined expression *the western* flows to the theme of clause 14 by *and they*. This theme is said to be taken from previous rheme as the pronoun *they* refers to *the western.* Then the rheme of clause 14 is *are already planting the eastern though to respect and imitate them*. The idea of this rheme is about the *aim of western colonization that tried to make the eastern respect and imitate them.* Then, this rheme flows to the rheme of clause 15 as *mostly emulated the style of western such as…* This rheme is said to be taken from previous rheme because its meaning, shown by the word *emulated,* refers to the part of previous rheme, which is about *imitation.* Then, the rheme of clause 15 is shared again to the rheme of clause 16, *will discuss about ; (1) What are the factors that describing the colonization between the different culture inside the story? (2) What is the positive impact of postcolonial inside the story?*. This rheme is the problem formulation of the writers. This rheme is said to be taken from the previous rheme because it is closely related to the meaning of previous clause. It can be seen that the first problem formulation is about *factors describing the colonization seen in the culture inside the story.* It can also be seen that this idea is taken from the part of idea in previous rheme, which is *style of western*. Then, it can be seen that the second problem formulation is about *the positive impact of colonization inside the story*. This idea is also taken from the part of idea in previous rheme, which is *western* or *colonization.* Then, this rheme, which is about the problem formulation of the writers, becomes the theme in clause 17 by using the pronoun *those*. To sum up, it can be said that this paragraph has clauses whose themes are taken from previous rhemes and whose rhemes are taken from previous rhemes.

Combination of Linear Theme and Derived Theme Pattern

The paragraph organized by using linear theme and derived theme pattern will have both the theme taken from the previous rheme and the theme derived from hypertheme. In the analysis, it is found that there are three paragraphs having this pattern. The example of the paragraph can be seen below:

Datum 10/36

Many had been written to analyze literary work using many approaches and theories (C1). **However, this study** is aimed to analyze the feminine side inside the character of Martin in McCullers's <u>A Domestic Dilemma</u> (C2). **A Domestic Dilemma** is a short story written by Carson McCullers which tells us about a family consists of <u>father – Martin Meadows, mother – Emily Meadows, and two children</u> (C3). **They** had <u>moved to New York because of Martin's work</u> (C4). **Since then**, there was something wrong in <u>Emily</u> that makes her couldn't take care of her family anymore (C5). **Thus, Martin** took over his wife's jobs in family role and made feminine side of Martin reveals (C6). (Paper 4, Paragraph 1, Clause 1-6)

In the paragraph above, it can be seen that the theme of clause 1 is *many,* which refers to *many studies* (can be seen from the context in the writing). This theme then becomes the hypertheme for the theme of the next clause. It can be seen that the theme of clause 2 is *however, this study* (actually, the part of the theme *however* is inappropriate). This theme can be said as derived from the theme (hypertheme) of previous clause because *this study* refers to *one of many studies*. Then, it can be seen that the rheme of clause 2 is *is aimed to analyze the feminine side inside the character of Martin in McCullers's A Domestic Dilemma*. The part of this rheme, which is the underlined expression *A Domestic Dilemma,* then becomes the theme in clause 3, *A Domestic Dilemma.* Then, the rheme of clause 3 is about the family member *father – Martin Meadows, mother – Emily Meadows, and two children.* This rheme then is taken as the theme in clause 4 by using the pronoun *they.* Then, the rheme of clause 4 is *had moved to New York because of Martin's work.* This rheme then becomes the theme in clause 5 *since then* in which *then* refers to *the movement of the family to the New York*. Then, the rheme of this clause is *there was something wrong in Emily that makes her couldn't take care of her family anymore*. The idea of this rheme, which is about *Emily,* then shifts to the theme of clause 6, *Thus, Martin*. This theme can be said as taken from the rheme of previous clause as *Martin* is *Emily's wife*. Therefore, it can be concluded that this paragraph has both the clause whose theme is derived from the theme/hypertheme of previous clause and the clauses whose themes are taken from the rhemes of previous clauses.

Combination of Linear Theme and Linear Rheme Pattern

The paragraph organized by using the combination of linear theme and linear rheme pattern will have both the theme taken from the rheme of previous clause and the rheme taken from the theme of previous clause. In the analysis, it is found that there are two paragraphs organized by using this pattern. The example of the paragraph having this pattern can be seen below:

Datum 11/36

Firstly, The Little Mermaid was an innocent little girl (C20). However, after her birthday, <u>she changed from an innocent little girl become the girl who has a courage to take a risk</u> (C21). **That** is why, this paper aims to potray about the character building inside of the story (C22). (Paper 15, Paragraph 5, Clause 20-22)

In the pattern of the paragraph above, it can be seen that the theme of clause 20 is *Firstly, the Little Mermaid*. This theme then flows to the rheme of clause 21, *she changed from an innocent little girl become the girl who has a courage to take a risk*. This rheme can be said to be taken from previous theme since it describes the previous theme *the Little Mermaid*. Then, the rheme of clause 21 shifts to the theme of clause 22 by using the pronoun *that.* The pronoun *that* can be said to be taken from the rheme of previous clause as it substitutes the meaning of the rheme of clause 21 (*that* substitutes the meaning of the rheme *she changed from an innocent little girl become the girl who has a courage to take a risk*). So, it can be summarized that this paragraph has clauses whose rheme is taken from previous theme and whose theme is taken from previous rheme.

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. These findings are in line with those of studies by Rakhman (2013), Sujatna (2013), and Arunsirot (2013) showing that the patterns were various in the texts. However, the results of this analysis, in some extent, are different from those of study by Albogobeish and Sedghi (2014) showing that only two patterns occurred in the text. Then, it can be concluded that thematic progression patterns of students' academic writing are various.

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