



Thematic Development in Students' Argumentative Essay

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Abstract

In writing argumentative essay, the writer should mind complete parts of the essay and other linguistic elements. The two important linguistic elements are theme and rheme. Since theme and rheme are crucial in clause structure, thematic development is regarded important in the development of text. There are three patterns of thematic development proposed by Eggins, i.e., theme reiteration, zig-zag pattern, and multiple-theme pattern. This research states its objective as to analyze the thematic development occurred in students' argumentative essay. The occurrence of thematic development is analyzed and elaborated into the finding and discussion. This research is a qualitative research. There are 13 essays written by students. The essays are chosen randomly to maintain the objectiveness of the analysis. Those essays consist of 323 clauses. They are analyzed based on the concept of thematic development proposed by Eggins. The analysis of thematic development of the clauses shows that theme reiteration emerges as the most preferable thematic development pattern. It can be seen that 217 clauses (67,2%) in students' essay are in forms of theme reiteration. 84 clauses (26,0%) of the essay apply zig-zag pattern in thematic development. Multiple-theme pattern comes as the least preferred thematic development pattern. It only comes up in 22 clauses (6,8%) out of 323 clauses. It can be concluded that students understand the way to develop their essays by implementing combination of thematic development. It marks a successful phase of students' writing skill. Nevertheless, students need writing practice intensively to make their writing skill grow better.

Keywords: academic essay, argumentative essay, rheme, thematic development, theme

Introduction

There are three types of academic essay. They are descriptive essay, expository essay, and argumentative essay. Argumentative essay as one of essay types functions to show argument of the writer using evidence and logical reasoning (The Basics of Essay Writing | UNSW Current Students, n.d.). In writing argumentative essay, the writer should mind complete parts of the essay and other linguistic elements. The two important linguistic elements are theme and rheme. Theme is the element of clause structures which serves as the point of departure of the message (in the beginning or starting point); it is the clause concerned (Halliday et al., 2014), and rheme as the rest or remainder of the clause (aboutness). Theme and rheme was first introduced by Halliday in Systemic Functional Linguistics which analyzes language from its main functions. The three main functions of language are (1) to talk about the experience (experiential function) and to show the logical relationship between them (logical function), (2) to interact and/or to express a point of view (interpersonal function), and (3) to organize our experiential, logical, and interpersonal meanings into a coherent whole (textual function) (Butt, D., Fahey, R., Spinks, S., & Yallop, 2012). From the functions of language stated, it can be seen that theme and rheme show textual function, in which it is used to organize the meaning in a coherent whole.

Minding the importance of theme and rheme in clause structure, thematic development is regarded crucial in the development of text. Thematic development is the exchange of information between successive theme and rheme pairing in a text. There are three patterns of thematic development, i.e., theme reiteration, zig-zag pattern, and multiple-theme pattern (Paltridge & Burton, 2000). Theme reiteration (also known as constant theme pattern) uses pattern in which the element of the preceding clause is the same as the subsequent clause. Zig-zag pattern applies the pattern in which the rheme of the preceding clause contains an element which becomes the theme of subsequent clause. Multiple-theme pattern uses the theme of one clause to introduce a number of different pieces of information, each of which is then picked up and made in subsequent clause. The use of thematic development can be applied in analyzing text in educational setting, particularly for students' texts (Downing, 2001). Regarding this, the researchers apply thematic development in analyzing students' academic essay. It is done to analyze the development of students' essay to make it coherent and cohesive to read.

The focus of thematic development has been emerged in some other works in educational settings. The first work puts its focus on theme and thematic progression in students' recount texts. It investigates the theme and thematic progression patterns in students' recount text in state vocational school. The result of it shows that the theme and thematic progression supports the character of recount text written by the students to some extents (Yunita, 2018). Another work also focuses on this topic. Theme-rheme theory and the textual coherence of college students' English writing puts its focus on the patterns and principles among clauses. The work results in helping students' in the process of English writing. Students

need to develop the coherence in writing and considers inter-textual cohesion as well as logical relations in text (Guan, 2015). The third work focused on thematic development is in the analysis of thematic progression on third grade students' writing in www.thewritesource.com. It aims at describing thematic progression in the 3rd grade students. The result shows that multiple-theme pattern dominates the thematic progression development (Sukawatie, 2018).

There are some other works focused on thematic development. The next work puts its focus on types of theme and the most dominant theme used in students' writing. Topical theme emerges as the most dominant theme in the work, and nominal group emerges as the most dominant element of the topical theme in the writing. Students identify topical theme by stating a word or phrase functioned as a subject and adjunct (Qomariah, 2021). Another work focuses on describing the pattern of thematic progression in a student writing. It aims to know which thematic pattern of progression is widely used in the student's writing. The theme reiteration or constant theme pattern is preferred by the students in writing text. It also highlights the importance of theme and rheme in writing (Syharizal et al., 2018). The sixth work that puts its focus on thematic development emphasizes on writing exposition text. The analysis reveals that the exposition text written by high proficiency level learner successfully implements the thematic progressions and achieves the micro-level of coherence. The ones written by average proficiency level learner overuses one of the patterns, and those written by low proficiency level learner unsuccessfully implements the thematic progressions and does not achieve the micro-level of coherence. The highlight of the work is that the implementation of thematic progressions helps the texts hang together and make sense (Williyan & Sutopo, 2019).

All those previous works focused on theme and thematic progression emphasize on a story genre of text, such as recount and exposition texts. None of it puts its focus on academic text, in which the teaching learning practice happens in academic field. Regarding the gap, the researchers take it into deeper analysis in this research. This research puts its focus on academic text in form of academic essay in university level students as the subject. The academic essay is chosen because students are expected to produce academic work as their output.

This research states its objective as to analyze the thematic development occurred in students' argumentative essay. The thematic development uses the one proposed by Eggins, which puts three patterns, namely theme reiteration, zig-zag pattern, and multiple-theme pattern. The occurrence of those patterns is analyzed and elaborated into the finding and discussion of this research.

Method

The objective of the research was to analyze the thematic development occurred in students' argumentative essay. Students' essay was analyzed in its three main patterns of thematic development, i.e. theme reiteration, the zig-zag pattern,

and the multiple-theme pattern (Eggins, 2005). This research was a qualitative research, in which it used qualitative method in data analysis. Qualitative research was regarded the most suitable type of research for this data since it exposes data in natural setting and the submission of the data was in forms of words, not numbers. Qualitative research is a process of naturalistic inquiry that seeks an in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural setting (*What Is Qualitative Research? - Quantitative and Qualitative Research - Subject and Course Guides at University of Texas at Arlington*, n.d.).

In taking samples, purposive sampling was chosen in this research to get data. Purposive sampling is a sample collected from information rich cases for in-depth study (Dian Ramadani, 2006). The students chosen as the sample were those who already got Academic Writing class. There were 13 essays written by students. The essays were chosen randomly to maintain the objectiveness of the analysis. Those essays consisted of 323 clauses.

In collecting the data, researchers asked students to write argumentative essay as the initial step. The instrument used in this phase was writing test, in which it included as the mid-term test for Academic Writing class. Then, the data were analyzed based on the concept of thematic development proposed by Eggins. In analyzing the data, researchers read and analyzed each clause in essay thoroughly. Classifying theme and rheme into three main patterns was the next step in analyzing the data. Finally, researchers concluded the result of the analysis.

Results

This section covered the result of analysis of thematic development on students' argumentative essay. The essay written by students put its focus on Covid-19 condition. It was divided into three sub-topics. They are condition after Covid-19 pandemic, students' regret when pandemic was over, and students' hope in online class during Covid-19 pandemic condition. Each essay was then analyzed using three main patterns of thematic development, i.e. theme reiteration, the zig-zag pattern, and the multiple-theme pattern (Eggins, 2005). Details on students' mistake on grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, etc. did not come into researchers' ultimate consideration.

Table 1. Analysis of Thematic Development

Essay	Theme reiteration	Zig-zag pattern	Multiple-theme pattern
1	15	10	2
2	12	3	4
3	23	10	2
4	9	7	2
5	8	4	1
6	6	2	1

7	18	19	9
8	24	6	5
9	23	7	2
10	7	2	0
11	28	6	0
12	13	5	1
13	31	12	2
Total	217	84	22

The total clause used as the data was 323 clauses. The analysis of thematic development of the clauses showed that 217 clauses (67,2%) in students' essay were in forms of theme reiteration. Theme reiteration made use of the theme in the first clause to be the theme of the following clause (McCabe & Alonso Belmonte, 1998). This way regarded to make the essay focused and hung together. The analysis showed that most of students' essays seemed cohesive because they applied focus on one theme only which gave readers clear path on the content, but it somehow made readers bored at the same time with some repetition in the essay. Some clauses in the essay were repeated after one another. Although theme reiteration provided clear focus for the readers, it also appeared to be boring to read because the essay showed repetition (Eggins, 2005). Some examples of theme reiteration in the essay were presented in the figure below.

Table 2. Analysis of Theme Reiteration

Clause No	Theme	Rheme
1	We	are currently dealing with a Covid-19 pandemic that has lasted more than a year.
3	Vaccines	minimize the risk of contracting a disease by enhancing your body's natural defenses.
18	The government	makes many attempts to protect their country.
30	The human spirit	is important for one's identity.
47	Parents	often feel worried about diseases such as high blood pressure, anemia, and so on.

84 clauses (26,0%) of the essay showed zig-zag pattern in thematic development. Zig-zag pattern achieved cohesion in the text by building on newly introduced information. This gave the text a sense of cumulative development which may be absent in the repeated theme pattern (Eggins, 2005). This pattern developed

and promoted rheme in the previous clause into theme in the next clause. Some clauses in students' essay had implemented this pattern. It could be seen from some clauses that came as the rheme and then promoted into theme for the next or couple next clauses. Some students applied the zig-zag pattern by using conjunctions and relative pronouns, such as but, that, so, if, etc. The combination of clauses with conjunction or relative pronoun came into students' preference when writing essay and showing zig-zag pattern. Some examples of zig-zag pattern in the essay were presented in the figure below.

Table 3. Analysis of Zig-zag Pattern

Clause No	Theme	Rheme
24	The current phase of this epidemic but it	is unmistakably a pandemic of the uninsured, is not limited to them.
77	There are these cells	two types of white blood cells that are activated, are important in fighting viruses.
92	His words that they	makes some people realize have to keep vaccinated.
133	If a student it	has an inadequate internet network, can interfere the online learning process in the classroom.
180	Slowly, humans so it	will be able to adapt to Covid-19, is no longer a fear.

The last thematic development was multiple-theme pattern. In this pattern, a rheme might include a number of different pieces of information, each of which might be taken up as the theme in a number of subsequent clauses (Rustipa, 2010). This pattern showed the least preference pattern chosen by students in writing essay because it only came up in 22 clauses (6,8%) out of 323 clauses. Since it introduced rheme into some themes, some students found it difficult and did not put this pattern in their essays. It might happen because students needed to think more on the use of the rheme. It was indeed beneficial for students to apply this pattern

when they write because multiple-theme pattern allowed students to hang their essays together and make them cohesive to read. Some examples of multiple-theme pattern in the essay were presented in the figure below.

Table 3. Analysis of multiple-theme pattern

Clause No	Theme	Rheme
9	We	are at risk of serious illness and diseases,
9	in which the diseases	are measles, meningitis,
10	Many of the diseases	are potentially fatal.
32	Government	implemented some new policies.
33	One of them	is lockdown.
34	The policy	has profoundly affected human's life.
88	There	are two things we should
89	The thing	is to increase our immunity ...
93	The next thing	is to end the pandemic and ...
103	I	felt two effects.
104	The first effect	is that until this semester
106	The positive impact	is that I have free time
166	Individuals	have immunity to SARS-CoV-2.

167 If SARS-CoV-2 —————> enters human body

168 If SARS-CoV-2 —————> is not severe, it is quite mild.
infection

Discussion

It could be seen from the finding that students used thematic development of their essays well. The elaboration and development of their essays were good in practice with the implementation of three thematic developments, namely theme reiteration, zig-zag pattern, and multiple-theme pattern. It showed good result of students' writing skill. One explanation for good practice of students' writing skill was writing practice frequency. By practicing writing intensively, students gained their ability to write and develop their writing better. It was also supported with the knowledge of thematic developments to make the essay cohesive and coherence to read. But, this research was only limited to the analysis of students' academic essay. Using these thematic developments for other kinds of writing would be beneficial in improving students' writing skill better. The lecturers' help in guiding students to write was also crucial. An impressive quality writing would be achieved with good skill and wise advice from experts, in this case lecturers.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this research is that students' implementation of thematic development in academic essay is good. Students understand the way to develop their essays by implementing combination of thematic development. It marks a successful phase of students' writing skill since the essay produced by the students shows good output of writing practice.

Mastering writing is not an easy task to do. Indeed, it takes supports from many elements to make it work. Lecturers and students need to have good relationship to make an essay better, because students' writing skill supported with lecturers' advice is going to create an impressive writing.

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