THEMATIC PROGRESSION IN THESIS ABSTACTS
WRITTEN BY ENGLISH STUDENTS OF FBIB UNISBANK SEMARANG

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Abstract

This study examines the pattern of thematic progression (TP) in the abstracts written by English students of FBIB Unisbank Semarang. Twenty five abstracts are randomly taken from which the sentences are analyzed to show their thematic patterning. The theory proposed by Danes (1974) was used as the framework to analyze the pattern employed in the abstracts and the result of which indicates that the split rheme TP pattern (77%) is realized in the abstracts and theme-derived TP pattern (23%) is also noticed. The study also describes that the link between linguistic thematic progression and the messages is characterized by the use of speech functions (SF) as declarations (33%), representatives (50%) and directives (17%). It is sufficient to say that students display good experience in writing their abstracts but to further justify that the abstracts are standard ones future researchers may conduct similar studies by employing more data and schematic structure analysis on abstracts.

Key words: thematic progression, abstract, speech function

A.   BACKGROUND

Thematic progression (TP) is part of systemic functional linguistics and technically support to the written knowledge of discourse. Not (1996: 4) says that TP is necessary for the construction of an optimally coherent and grammatically cohesive structured text. In systemic functional linguistics it is the elaboration of mode of the discourse which functions to accommodate the ideational meaning and interpersonal meaning. This may mean that the construal of the outer or inner world of experience, and the way it may be negotiated are accommodated in either spoken or written discourse which begins with a theme (topic), from which point a speaker or writer starts to convey his or her message and ends in a rheme (comment). Hallidayan grammarians also consider theme as a fundamental device that the speaker uses to establish a perspective from which to present his message. Within the syntactic constraints, the speaker is free to indicate which part of the information is the theme and to mark the degree to which that theme is being emphasized.

The applications of TP types to scientific texts have been carried out (Dubois 1987, Nwogu and Bloor 1991). Both studies were based on naturally occurring data and found the simple linier TP pattern and the constant (continuous) TP pattern to be frequent.

As the work of scholars in linguistics the abstracts of the theses they write must have certain thematic patterns. Which TP pattern is to apply, no one knows for sure. It is for this reason that the

study was conducted. The study was also intended to display the link between the TP realized in the abstracts and the messages in terms of speech functions.

Research questions

The main research question in this study is: "How are the thesis abstracts written by English students of FBIB Unisbank Semarang developed?"

However, the above research question is further developed into the following sub-research questions in order to facilitate the process of analysis.

1. What TP is realized in the thesis abstracts?
2. How is the TP in the thesis abstracts linked to the messages in terms of SFs?

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This sub title discusses the theoretical framework on which the analysis was based in an effort to find the answers to the research questions.

1. Abstract

Summaries are common in writing and usually appears at the end of a chapter or article, highlighting the major point of the piece and outlining the significant detail. Academic writing such as essays, articles, and reviews often begin with a summary—an abstract. It is a concise form of all key points of an original source. It must be clear, balanced and comprehensive. An abstract or summary is written last, but it is inserted at the beginning of the research paper, coming after the title and before the introduction. Kies (2008) states that abstracts have a fairly standard form and inform the reader of six bits of information about the piece of writing being summarized. They are as follows:

1) purpose (the author's reason for writing and main idea)
2) scope (the author's focus and attention)
3) method (the evidence to provide and the way to convince the reader of the validity of the author's main idea)
4) results (the consequences of the problem or issue that the author is discussing)
5) conclusions (the description of a 'cause and effect' relationship or explanation of the origins of issue or problem and the conclusions drawn)
6) recommendations (the solutions to resolve the problem of issue and the recommended action or change)

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Abstracts are not long — only about a paragraph. If each point of the six bits of information got its own sentence, then the abstract would be six sentences long. Many writers, however, find that they can combine several of the sentences of the abstract when the ideas are closely related.

Kies (2008) also says that there are two types of abstract, namely descriptive abstract and informative abstract. According to him descriptive abstracts include information about (1) the purpose, (2) scope, and (3) methods used to arrive at the findings contained in the original document. A descriptive abstract need not be longer than several sentences if it adequately summarizes the information.

Informative abstract, on the other hand is an expanded version of the descriptive abstract. In addition to information about (1) the purpose, (2) scope, and (3) methods used, the informative abstract includes (4) the results, (5) conclusions, and (6) recommendations.

2. Organizing messages

Language has a textual function. This may mean people can use language to organize their experiential and interpersonal meanings into a linear and coherent whole. The product of speaking and writing is an example of the organization of experiential meaning and interpersonal meaning, respectively in terms of sound system and orthographic system. Writing a short paragraph or text such as an abstract is just like organizing messages or meanings (experiential and interpersonal) with the system of orthography of a language.

To organize a text into a coherent whole we need to keep our readers and listeners being well informed about where they are and where they are going. There are grammatical resources to signpost the way through clauses from the beginning to the end of a text. The first signpost tells the readers and listeners what the speaker or writer has in mind as a starting point—the theme. Firbas (1976) defines theme under two concepts: (1) as the starting-point of the utterance—which is known or at least obvious in the given situation and from which the speaker proceeds, and (2) as the foundation of the utterance—something being spoken about in the sentence. Rheme, on the other hand, will be what the speaker says about and expresses something new or something unknown from the previous context.

In each one of the four clauses below the speaker has made different choices about how the first position in the clause should be filled.

1. The boy chased the pretty girl anywhere.
2. Anywhere the boy chased the pretty girl.

3. By the boy the pretty girl was chased anywhere.

4. The pretty girl was chased by boy anywhere.

We know that all choices are meaningful so we need to ask what has motivated the change. At least it is understood that the change in the order changes our perspective about the concerns of the clause. We interpret that clause 1 as a message about the boy, clause 4 as a message about the pretty girl. On the other hand, clause 2 is more likely to be part of a conversation about where various actions took place, and clause 3 is about the agency of the action.

3. THEME-RHEME Structure

What comes first in a clause expresses an important and separate kind of meaning. This is to signal to the audience what the meaning is about. In English the first position in a clause contains textual meanings because it signposts the development of the text. To describe textual meanings we need a simple and distinct metalanguage: we call the first element THEME and the rest of the clause RHEME. Halliday (1985: 38) characterizes Theme as what the message is concerned with. It is the point of departure for what the speaker is going to say. In other words, it functions as a starting point or signpost, that is, the frame the speaker has chosen for the message.

The theme of a clause can be realized as a nominal group, adverbial group or prepositional phrase and nominalization. The examples are as follows:

The man has given the money.

Very carefully she put him back on his feet again.

With sobs and tears he sorted out those of the largest size.

What the girl did was running.

Butt, et al (2001) divide theme into:

(1) TOPICAL (EXPERIENTIAL) THEME is the first element of the experiential meanings, be Participant, Process or Circumstance.

The man in the moon	came down too soon.
The man who came to dinner	stayed for breakfast.
Topical Theme	Rheme

(2) TEXTUAL THEME is the text-creating meanings and is any combination of Continuative (yes, no, well, oh, now), Conjunctions (and, because, who) and Conjunctive Adjunct (for instance, in addition, likewise).

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But		the pig	was not.
When		the prince	saw Cinderella
Textual Theme		Topical Theme	Rheme

(3) INTERPERSONAL THEME is the first element of the clause which indicates an interaction between speakers. This may include the Finite in Interrogative clauses where it precedes the Subject, Vocatives (personal name used to address) and Mood Adjuncts (surprisingly, in my opinion, fortunately).

May	we	have some butter for the royal slice of bread?
Jessica,	come	here
Could	the team	have beaten the grant finalists?
Probably	they	could.
Interpersonal Theme	Topical Theme	Rheme

4. Theme in Declaratives

Theme in declarative could be congruent (conflated with the Subject) or incongruent. This is known as Markedness of the Theme. Marked theme is an incongruent theme, thus something other than the subject. The purpose is to draw the addressee's attention to a particular group or phrase

Merrily	we	roll along
On Saturday night	I	lost my wife
Marked Circ Top Theme	Top Theme	Rheme

Unmarked theme (congruent) is a theme that is conflated with the subject.

Mary	had a little lamb
She	went to the Baker's
Unmarked Top Theme	Rheme

Theme in Exclamatives

How cheerfully	he behaved
What tremendously easy questions	you asked
Interpersonal Theme	Rheme

Theme in Interrogatives

There are two main types of questions: POLARITY and WH-QUESTION.

Is	he	at home?
Can	you	forget it?
Interpersonal Theme	Topical Theme	Rheme

Where	has my little dog gone?
Who	will send you the message?
Interpersonal Top ThemeRheme	

Theme in Imperatives

Put	the kettle on!
You kids	keep out of the way
Don't leave	any belonging on board
Let's	not quarrel about it

Thematic progression

Thematic progression (TP) is a feature of rhetorical coherence—the interrelatedness of features in a text. Downing (2001) says that TP is closely connected with discourse coherence (or text connexity). She posits further that a text is defined largely in terms of its semantic coherence. Rhetorical coherence can be further explained by the concept of topical development. Danes (1974) identifies two basic types of topical development—thematic and rhematic progression. Davies (1984) opines that when the theme of an utterance corresponds with the theme of the previous utterance, the topical development is said to be thematic; and when the theme of an utterance corresponds with the rheme of the previous utterance, the topical development is said to be rhematic. He further explains that if a text exhibits excessive TP, it is likely to bring about rhetorical coherence in the text. However, if a text exhibits excessive rhematic progression (RP), it is likely to bring about rhetorical incoherence in the text.

Danes (1974) postulates four types of TP. His suggestions which serve as the bedrock of the thematic analysis for this study are illustrated below:

1. The Simple Linier TP Pattern. Each rheme in this pattern becomes the theme of the utterance. It is graphically represented as follows:
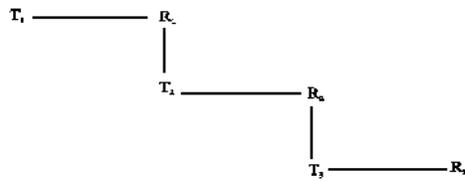
The following text illustrates the simple linier TP pattern and its explanation:

The stomach produces gastric juice (1), which contains dilute hydrochloric acid (2). The acid kills most of the bacteria in the food (3). The partly digested food passes next into the duodenum (4).

Clause 1 establishes a Theme The stomach with the rest as Rheme.

Clause 1 to 2: the simple linier TP, since the rheme element gastric juice of clause 1 provides the theme of clause 2 which

Clause 2 to 3: the simple linier TP, since the rheme element hydrochloric acid of clause 2 provides the theme of clause 3 The acid

Clause 3 to 4: the simple linier TP, since the rheme element the food of clause 3 provides the theme of clause 4 The partly digested food

2. The Constant (continuous) TP Pattern. In this pattern the same theme appears in sequence in series of utterances with possibly no identical wording. Fries (2001) describes this as a topically linked TP pattern. It is graphically represented as follows:
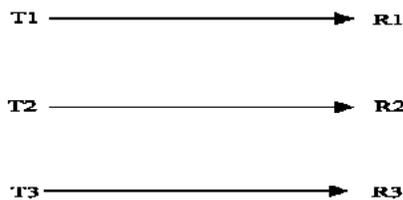
The following text illustrates the constant TP pattern and its explanation:

The brain contains 10 billion nerve cells, making thousands of millions of connections with each other (1). It is the most powerful data processor we know (2). And it is under intensive investigations by scientists nowadays (3).

Clause 1 establishes a Theme The brain with the rest as Rheme.

Clause 2: the constant TP, since the theme The brain of clause 1 remains the theme of clause 2 it as the reference of 'The brain'

Clause 3: the constant TP, since the theme The brain of clause 1 remains the theme of clause 3 it as the reference of 'The brain'

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3. The Theme-Derived TP. This pattern need a hypertheme to which all the themes relate. It is diagramed as follows:
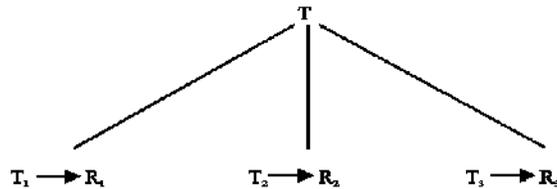
The following text illustrates the theme-derived TP pattern and its explanation:

New Jersey is that along the coast and southern portion (1), the north-western region is mountainous (2). The coastal climate is mildly (3) but there is considerable cold in the mountainous areas during the winter months (4). Summers are fairly hot (5). The leading industrial production includes chemicals... .(6)

Clause 1 establishes a Theme New Jersey with the rest as Rheme.

Clause 1 to 2: the theme-derived TP, since the theme the north-western region of clause 2 means that of the hypertheme New Jersey of clause 1

Clause 1 to 3: the theme-derived TP, since the theme The coastal climate of clause 3 means that of the hypertheme New Jersey of clause 1

Clause 1 to 4: the theme-derived TP, since the theme there of clause 4 refers to the hypertheme New Jersey of clause 1

Clause 1 to 5: the theme-derived TP, since the theme Summers of clause 5 refers to that of the hypertheme New Jersey of clause 1

Clause 1 to 6: the theme-derived TP, since the theme the leading industrial production of clause 6 means that of the hypertheme New Jersey of clause 1

4. The Split Rheme TP Pattern. This is the combination of pattern one to three. It is illustrated as follows:
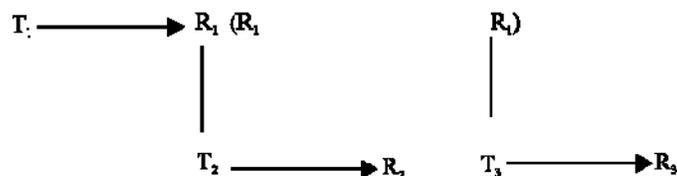
The following text illustrates the split rheme TP pattern and its explanation:

The only other considerable region in the world lies in Japan (1). This country shows a remarkable fusion of both densely populated rural and urban communities (2). Japanese peasant farmers, who constitute 45 percent of the population, practice a typical monsoon

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Asian subsistence economy (3), whereas <u>the millions of people living in vast industrial cities</u> have much in common with counterparts in Europe and North American (4).

Clause 1 establishes a Theme <u>The only other considerable region in the world</u> with the rest as Rheme.

Clause 1 to 2: the split rheme TP, since the theme <u>This country</u> of clause 2 is the split of the rheme element Japan of clause 1

Clause 1 to 3: the split rheme TP, since the theme <u>Japanese peasant farmers</u> of clause 3 is the split of the rheme element referring to the rheme element Japan of clause 1

Clause 1 to 4: the split rheme TP, since the theme <u>the millions of people living in vast industrial cities</u> of clause 4 is the split of the rheme element referring to the rheme element Japan of clause 1

Speech Function in Text

Reinterpretation of messages in terms of speech functions (SF) is also considered here in order to relate TP pattern to the messages. This may serve as a complement to TP analysis.

Searle (1969) discusses five main types of SF. They are as follows:

1. Representative, which are used in making assertions, conclusions and claims.

2. Directive, which are used in commanding, begging, requesting and asking the hearer to do something.

3. Commissives, which require commitment from the speaker, such as promising, vowing, offering and threatening.

4. Expressive, which concern the psychological states of the speaker such as thanking and welcoming.

5. Declarations, which have something to do with aspects of declaring, marrying and firing.

C. METHOD

The research is qualitative and descriptive in nature that it only explains the phenomena pertaining to TP and SF realized in the thesis abstracts written by English students of FBIB Unisbank Semarang. The data were collected through documentation, thus twenty five thesis abstracts were randomly chosen from the library. These twenty five abstracts were then segmented into clauses so as to determine the themes and rhemes. Afterwards the categorized clauses of each abstract were analyzed on the bases of their TP and SF. Finally the writer tried to give an account or interpretation on the phenomena pertaining to the TP and SF realized in the thesis abstracts.

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D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The progression of theme in the abstracts written by English students of FBIB Unisbank Semarang turns out to be in the split rheme TP pattern (77%). The theme-derived TP pattern is also noticed in the abstracts (23%) but the simple linier TP pattern and the constant (continuous) TP pattern do not appear in their abstracts.

The sample analysis is presented as follows:

Abstract

This thesis has two objectives[1]: first, identifying the temporal dimension and hesitation phenomena emerging in an English exchange created by some English students of the English Study Program of Stikubank University[2]. Second, explaining why temporal dimension and hesitation phenomena emerged in the exchange[3].

In order to get the data, students randomly selected were asked to make an exchange about reason issue – thesis writing[4]. This conversation was recorded, transcribed and analyzed qualitatively[5].

The results of the analysis showed that the students could not avoid displaying temporal dimension and hesitation phenomena when they had to execute a task in an exchange[6]. The temporal dimension of the exchange that the students performed were short pauses (21.1%), long pauses (5.1%), lengthening or drawls (1.9%) and unfinished speech (3.2%)[7]; the hesitation phenomena were indicated with filler (15.2%), cajoler (0.5%), gambit (1.9%), repeat oneself (19.3%) and other (10.4%), repair oneself (5.9%) and other (0.5%)[8].

The findings indicate that the speakers encountered difficulties and experienced hesitation in executing their task in the exchange[9]. The phenomena indicate that the students' speaking readiness is low[10]. In other words, when communicating their ideas or feeling the students encountered a lot of problems that the communicative goal is difficult to achieve[11].

These may be triggered by such factors as: (1) the need of time to collect information to participate in the exchange. (2) the cognitive difficulty in executing the task (3) the need of a time gaining device to select the intended lexical items (4) the want to facilitate the insufficient communication skill (5) the want to eliminate the hesitation and (6) the want to correct the unintended expression[12].

The writer finally suggests that any reader interested in similar topic may conduct a study with a larger data that he or she could provide list of problems and suggest the method of teaching and the teaching materials[13].

Clause 1 establishes a theme This thesis with the rest as rheme.

Clause 1 to 2: split rheme TP pattern because the theme identifying the temporal dimension and hesitation phenomena of clause 2 refers to the split of the rheme element two objectives of clause 1.

Clause 1 to 3: split rheme TP pattern because <u>explaining why temporal dimension and hesitation phenomena</u> of clause 3 refers to the split of the rheme element <u>two objectives</u> of clause 1.

Clause 2 to 4: split rheme TP pattern because the theme <u>students randomly selected</u> of clause 4 refers to the split of the rheme element <u>some English students</u> of clause 2.

Clause 4 to 5: split rheme TP pattern because the theme <u>this conversation</u> of clause 5 refers to the split of the rheme element <u>an exchange</u> of clause 4.

Clause 1 to 6: theme-derived TP pattern because the theme <u>the result of the analysis</u> of clause 6 is derived from the hypertheme <u>this thesis</u> of clause 1.

Clause 6 to 7: split rheme TP pattern because the theme <u>the temporal dimension of the exchange</u> of clause 7 refers to the split of the rheme element <u>temporal dimension and hesitation phenomena</u> of clause 6.

Clause 6 to 8: split rheme TP pattern because the theme <u>the hesitation phenomena</u> of clause 8 refers to the split of the rheme element <u>temporal dimension and hesitation phenomena</u> of clause 6.

Clause 1 to 9: theme-derived TP pattern because the theme <u>the findings</u> of clause 9 is derived from the hypertheme <u>this thesis</u> of clause 1.

Clause 9 to 10: split rheme TP pattern because the theme <u>the phenomena</u> of clause 10 refers to the split of the rheme element <u>the speakers encountered difficulties and experienced hesitation</u> of clause 9.

Clause 2 to 11: split rheme TP pattern because the theme <u>the students</u> of clause 11 refers to the split of the rheme element <u>some English students</u> of clause 2.

Clause 9 to 12: split rheme TP pattern because the theme these of clause 12 refers to the split of the rheme element <u>the speakers encountered difficulties and experienced hesitation</u> of clause 9.

Clause 1 to 13: theme-derived TP pattern because the theme <u>the writer</u> of clause 9 is derived from a word referring to the hypertheme <u>this thesis</u> of clause 1.

The relation between the TP and the messages of the abstract is characterized by declarations (33%) as in This thesis has two objectives, representatives (50%) as in The findings indicate that the speakers encountered difficulties and experienced hesitation in executing their task in the exchange and directives (17%) as in The writer finally suggests that any reader interested in similar topic may conduct a study with a larger data.... Commissives and expressives do not appear in the abstracts.

The findings may indicate that writing is not an easy thing to do, let alone writing an abstract. In an effort to develop a writing ability a student needs to begin with combining words to form a nominal group, combining words and phrases to form a sentence, and combining sentences to form a paragraph. In developing a paragraph a student needs to master the knowledge of TP and apply it in his writing habit. He also needs to know whether he would apply the simple linier TP pattern, constant (continuous) TP pattern, split rheme TP pattern, theme-derived TP pattern in order to develop a paragraph of different text.

The most related element in the study of TP is the concept of theme (topic) and rheme (comment). Some linguists also relate theme and rheme as given and new respectively. The concept of new may relate to (1) something not mentioned before in the preceding context and (2) something related as rheme to a theme to which it has not yet been related.

In this study English students of FBIB could prove their experience in writing abstracts with respect to the employment of TP pattern. None of the students applied the constant (continuous) TP pattern or the constant rheme pattern which are characterized as the most tedious patterns in developing a paragraph. The application of representatives, declarations and directives in their abstracts also provides evidence that students have partly displayed their ability in the schematic structure of an abstract. However, they need to apply the standard way of writing an abstract, be a descriptive abstract or an informative one.

E. CONCLUSION

In conclusion the writer could say that English students of FBIB could display their ability in developing their abstracts using the split rheme TP pattern and theme-derived TP pattern. In order to link the linguistic TP with the messages they try to convey in their abstracts they tend to employ intended SFs, such as representative, declaration, and directive. They seem to know that the other two SFs, the commissive and expressive are not needed in writing an accepted abstract.

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