

# THEMATIC PROGRESSION IN THE STUDENTS' WRITING RECOUNT TEXT

**Johannes Jefria Gultom; Terade M.T. Barus**  
Universitas Negeri Medan  
johannes@unimed.ac.id; teradebarus@gmail.com

## *Abstract*

*This study was aimed at investigating the types of theme and the pattern of thematic progression in students' recount texts. The research was a descriptive qualitative research. It was conducted at SMP Maria Goretti Kabanjahe in North Sumatera. The subjects of the study were 35 students at ninth grade. The data were collected using documentation technique. The procedures of the analysis were: separating a text into clauses, identifying and classifying the types of theme of every clauses, and identifying and classifying the pattern of thematic progression of the texts. There were 310 clauses found in the students' writing. The findings showed that there are four types of theme in the students' recount texts, namely: Unmarked Simple Theme (177/57%), Marked Simple Theme (6/2%), Unmarked Multiple Theme (97/31.4%), and Marked Multiple Theme (30/9.6%). In addition, the patterns of thematic progression found were Constant Theme Pattern (47/88%) and Simple Linear Pattern (5/12%).*

**Keyword:** *Theme and Rheme, Thematic Progression, Recount Text*

## **1. Introduction**

Writing is usually known as a difficult task for many students who learn language, especially foreign language. Language learners like students find difficulties to translate their native language to target language. Many subjects are taught in school and one of them is English Subject. Students' skill in English at Junior High School need more attentions to face global competition in the future. Especially in writing

skill though it is important since it can show the ability of students in organizing their idea and making their sentence coherent and also it can enhance language skill development. This can be proved by students task about writing students' experiences which are some of them lack of coherence.

In syllabus for ninth grade, students have to master some kinds of text, there are recount text, narrative text, descriptive text, etc.

Recount text is one of the texts that has to be mastered by students. Recount text is the text retells past events, it can be like personal experience. The purpose of recount text in which giving the audiences a description of what happened and when it happened. The different between recount and narrative text is in terms of the problems in the sequence of events. Telling experiences is one of examples of recount text. Writing recount text is not only about error in grammatical but also how sentence of every paragraph relates each other.

The Theme provides the environment for the remainder of the message which is known as the Rheme, in Theme-Rheme organization that becomes the most significant factor of the development of the text. The study analyzed the Thematic Progression in the recount text which becomes the main data of this study. Theme and Rheme in a text is called Thematic Progression. Thematic progression contributes to the cohesive development of a text, that is to say, in a cohesive text the distribution of given and new

information needs to follow certain patterns.

### **1.1 The Problems of the Study**

The problems of study were formulated as follows:

1. What types of theme that are found in students' writing recount text?
2. What types of Thematic Progression patterns are found in students' Recount text?

### **2.2 Theme and Rheme**

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) generally which is also called as systemic functional grammar or systemic grammar, is a grammar that developed by Halliday with his introduction to functional Grammar based on the model of language as social semiotics. According to Eggins systemic functional linguistics is an language approaches in which centered on how using language in accomplishing everyday social life. SFL discusses language based on three metafunctions, namely: ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction, and textual metafunction.

This study was focused on textual metafunction. In the textual

metafunction, SFL discusses the theme and rheme of a clause. Theme can be identified as the first element in the clause. Halliday (2014:39) says that theme is starting point for the message that informs what clause is going to be about. This represents the main topic in an utterance or clause. This represents the point of departure this message from the previous one. On the other hand, the rheme is developed from theme. New information is typically contained in the Rheme. Theme is broadly speaking, what the clause is going to be about. Or in term of Theme or Rheme, Theme represent, “this is what I am talking about” and Rheme is “this is what I am saying about it”.

In term of looking at a clause as a message, the Theme looks backwards, relating the current message to what has gone before. The rheme points both backwards and forwards by picking up an information which is already available and adding to it and by presenting information which has not been there before.

### 2.3 Types of Theme

The theme can be divided into a number of categories; ideational, textual and interpersonal.

#### a. Ideational/Topical Themes

The ideational or topical Themes is usually but not always the first nominal group in the clause. Topical themes may also be nominal group complexes, adverbial groups, and prepositional phrases or embedded clause. In this unmark case the topical Theme is also the subject. A topical Theme which is not the subject is called a Marked Topical Theme. The term marked is used because it stands out. It attracts attention because it is not what we normally expect to find.

#### 1. Unmarked Topical Theme

##### a) Nominal group as Theme

Theme	Rheme
Santus	visited the village

##### b) Nominal group complex as

Theme

Theme	Rheme
We	Visited village

##### c) Embedded clause

Theme	Rheme
((we did))	was go to the village

#### 2. Marked Topical Theme

a) Adverbial as Theme:

Theme	Rheme
Down	Roni fell

b) Prepositional phrases as Theme

Theme	Rheme
To the village	Joko and Tony went

c) Complement as Theme

Theme	Rheme
His	bicycle he repair

b. Textual themes

They can be continuatives and /or Conjunctive adjuncts and the conjunctions. The line between Conjunctions and conjunctive Adjuncts is often a fine one.

e.g.

1	The procedure was difficult
	However, nevertheless was very useful

2	The procedure was difficult.
	However, was, nevertheless, very useful.

3	The procedure was simple.
	However was very useful nevertheless

Conjunctions tend to provide Textual Theme within a clause

complex and are called structural Theme. Conjunctive adjuncts, on the other hand, tend to (but don't always) join text outside of clause complexes. They tend to have more of a text-organizing function.

Continuatives are a small items which, if they are these, are always at the first of the clause and signal that a new move is beginning. For example:

Well, right, ok, now, always, of course.

Continuatives	Topical	Rheme
right,	what we need to did 2 days ago	was take some rest

c. Interpersonal Themes

Interpersonal elements occurring before the Topical Theme are also thematic. They may be modal adjuncts, vocatives, finite or Wh-elements.

1) Modal Adjunct

Modal	Topical	Rheme
Interper	Theme	
May	we	could
wait until next week		

2) Vocatives

Vocative (a name or nickname used to address someone) are only the matic, if they occur before the topical theme, a finite verb or a modal adjunct.

Vocative	Topical	Rheme
Theme		
Dearly beloved, we were gathered here yesterday		

In the clause below the person's name is not used as a vocative; therefore topical and not interpersonal.

Topical	Rheme
Theme	
Ridwan decided to wait until next week	

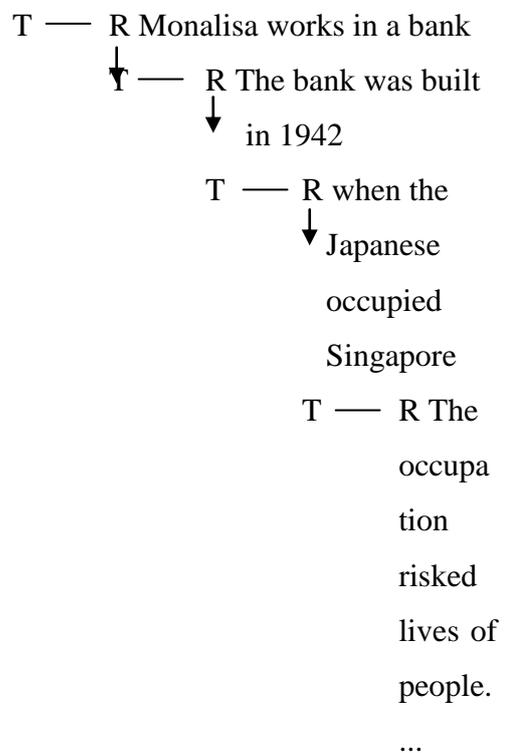
Cont	Vocat	Tropical	Rheme
Text	Int	Tropical	
Theme			
Anyway, Rani, we decided to wait until next week			

2.4 Thematic Progression Pattern

There are eight patterns of clause development by Halliday (2004). The first pattern shows that as the first step, there is a clause with its theme and rheme. The clause is developed into another clause, which is the second clause where the theme of the second clause is derived from

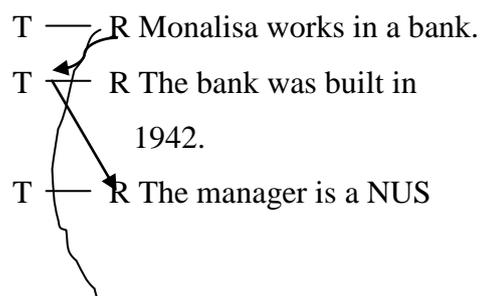
the rheme of the first clause. Then, the theme of the third clause is derived from the rheme of the second. Further, the theme of the fourth clause is again derived from the rheme of the third clause and so forth. In this way it is shown that chunk of the message in one clause is chained to or interwoven with another chunk.

a. Simple Linear Progression Pattern



(Figure a.1)

b. Derived Hyperthematic Progression Pattern



graduate  
 T — R Most of the costumers are  
 middle class ociety....

(Figure a.2)

c. Constant Progression Pattern

T — R Monalisa works in a bank.  
 T — R Her father is a police  
 T — R Her mother is a doctor  
 T — R The family live prosperous  
 life.....

(Figure a.3)

The first development pattern is summarized in Figure a.1. The second pattern (presented in Figure a.2.) shows that themes of the second, third, fourth clauses and so forth are derived from the rheme of the first clause. The third pattern (shown in Figure a.3.) shows that in contrast to the second pattern, the themes of the second, third, and forth are derived from theme of the first clause.

d. Spliting Progresson Pattern

T — R Monalisa works in a bank.  
 T — R Last year she took a one-  
 month leave  
 T — R because work load  
 depressed her

T — R The holiday ha indeed  
 refreshed her

(figure a.4)

e. Derived Hyperthematic Progression

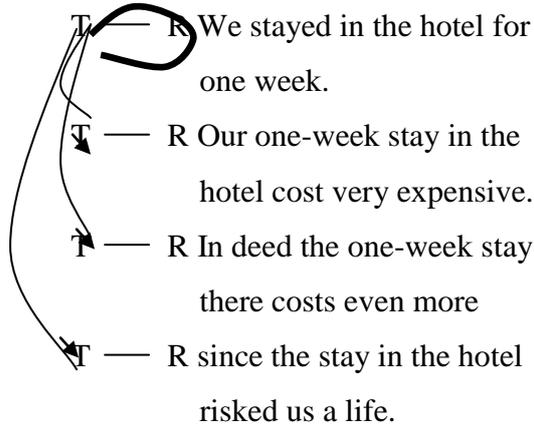
T — R Monalisa works in a bank.  
 T — R Last year the bank gained  
 signifcant profit  
 T — R Therefore, the goverment  
 awarded the bank the  
 Fringe Benefit.  
 T — R The benefit of \$5000 was  
 given to Monalisa, the  
 Executive

Manager. (Figure a.5)

The sixth pattern of clause development indicates that the message or information in the first clause is condensed into a phrase. In other words, the message in the first clause is rankshifted and realized into a phrase. This known as nominalization. A clause is potentially nominalized. The clause we stayed in the hotel for one week is potentially rankshifted and nominalized as a phrase as *our one-week stay in the hotel*. Then the themes of the second, third, and fourth clauses are derived or based on the nominalization as shown in Figure a.6.

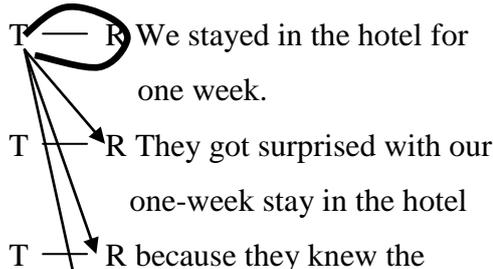
The seventh pattern (see figure a.7.) indicates that the nominalization is used as the basis for the Rheme of the second, third, fourth and so forth clauses. This pattern is an opposition to the pattern the sixth.

f. Elliptic Progression Pattern



(Figure a.6)

g. Crossing Progression Pattern



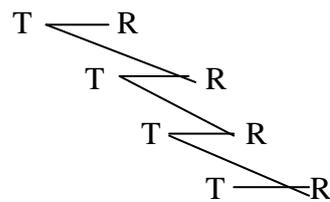
expensive cost of one-week stay in the hotel

T — R No one will try another stay in the hotel.

(Figure a.7)

The eighth pattern of clause development is opposite of the first pattern. Here the rhemes of the second clause is derived or developed from the theme of the first clause. Then, the rheme of the third clause is derived from that of the second. Further the rheme of the fourth clause is derived from that of the third clause theme and so fourth. In other words, the pattern of development is that the Rhemes of the clauses are developed from the themes of the previous clauses.

h. Zig-zag Progression Pattern



(Figure a.8)

Monalisa works in a bank

Her husband loves the pretty bank manager very much

Next year the man with dark hair and dense beard will hold a special party to celebrate the anniversary of their five year long marriage....

(Figure a. The Development of Clause into Larger Unit)

### 3. Research Methodology

This study is a descriptive qualitative research. Descriptive research will be looked at individual, groups, institutions, method, and materials in order to describe, compare, contrast, classify, analyze and interpret the entities and the events that constitute their various field or inquiry (Cohen, et. al., 2007). Descriptive research is thus a type of research that is primarily concern with describing the nature or conditions and degree in detail of present situation. Meanwhile qualitative method means that all data that are analyzed are in the form of sentences and words, not in the form of number .

The subjects of this research were 35 students at ninth grade at SMP Maria Goretti Kabanjahe. The source of the data was their writing recount text. The texts were collected using documentation technique.

In the procedures of collecting data, the researcher will do several steps as follows:

1. Separating the texts into clauses.

2. Identifying and labeling the Theme and Rheme of the clauses
3. Classifying the Theme and Rheme of the clauses.
4. Identifying and classifying the pattern of thematic progression of each text

### 4. Findings and Discussion

The research findings are revealed, after the data analysing above, as following:

#### 4.1 Types of Theme

In textual metafunction, theme is classified into 4 types, namely: Unmarked Simple Theme (UST), Marked Simple Theme (MST), Unmarked Multiple Theme (UMT) and Marked Multiple Theme (MMT). Below are the analyses of the theme in the clauses identified in the students' recount text.

1. Unmarked Simple Theme (UST)

Data 1.

I	am very sad
Topical Theme	rheme
Unmarked Simple Theme	

An Unmarked Simple Theme must be a topical theme. In the clause above, the theme of the clause is "I". There is only one theme in the clause. It means that the clause has an Unmarked Simple Theme.

Data 2.

At the afternoon we	take a bath
Topical Theme	Rheme
Marked Simple Theme	

In the clause above, “At the afternoon” is used as the starting point of the clause. It is not a congruent subject of a clause. Therefore, the clause has a Marked Simple Theme.

Data 3.

Then we	went home in Kobanjah.
Textual Theme	Rheme
Unmarked Multiple Theme	

In the clause above, there are two types of theme namely a textual theme (then) and a topical theme (we). So the clause contains multiple theme.

Data 4.

Yesterday my family	went to Berastagi
Textual Theme	Rheme
Marked Multiple Theme	

Based on the types of theme identified and classified in the data analysis, the number of the types of theme can be summarized in the table 1 below.

No	Types of Theme	Number	Percentage (%)
1	Unmarked Simple Theme	177	57%
2	Marked Simple Theme	6	2 %
3	Unmarked Multiple Theme	97	31.4%
4	Marked Multiple Theme	30	9.6 %

Total	310	100%
-------	-----	------

Table 1. The Types of Theme of Clauses in the Students’ Writing Recount Texts

Table 1 above shows the description of Theme which was found in the clause. from the table, it can be seen that Unmarked Simple Theme (UST) dominated the most clauses by number 177 clauses with the percentage 57% in students’ recount texts which consist of 310 clauses.

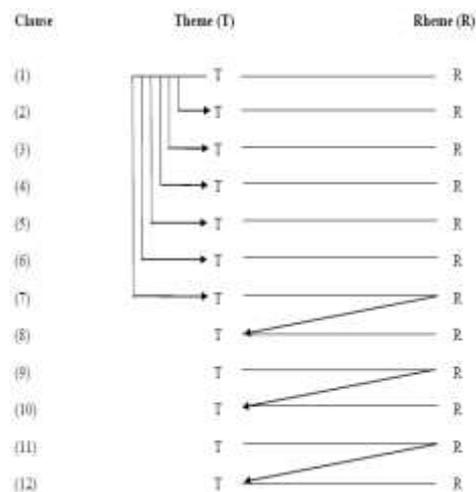
Unmarked Multiple Theme (UMT) becomes second one by number 97 clauses with the percentages 31.4%. Marked Multiple Theme (MMT) is the third by number 30 clauses with the percentages 9.6 % and Marked Simple Theme (MST) is the lowest number 6 clause with the percentages 2% which found in students’ recount text.

## 1.2 Types Thematic Progression Pattern

The way of waving the ideas in form of a paragraph may be different among the students. It is called as thematic progression in textual metafunction. The following is the analyses of thematic

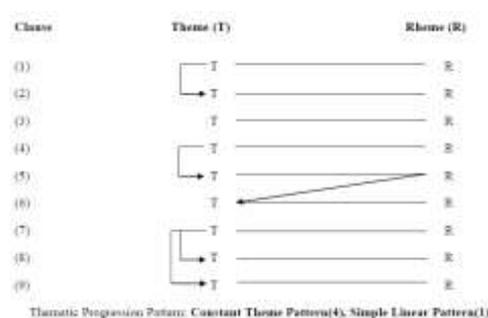
progression in the students recount texts.

Data 5.



In data 5 above, it can be seen that the text which was written by student 3 consist of two patterns namely Constant Theme Pattern (CTP) and Simple Linear Pattern (SLP). In CTP, the theme of the first clause became the theme in the second clause, and so on. On the other hand, in SLP, the rheme of the first clause became the theme in the second clause, and so on.

Data 6.



In the data 6 above, student no. 11 also wrote his recount text

containing Constant Theme Pattern and Simple Linear Pattern. In CTP, the theme of the first clause became the theme in the second clause, and so on. On the other hand, in SLP, the rheme of the first clause became the theme in the second clause, and so on.

Based on the analyses of the thematic progression pattern of the students' writing recount text, the patterns can be summarize in the table 2 below.

N o	Thematic Progression Pattern	Numbe r	Percentage( %)
1	Constant Theme Pattern	47	88%
2	Derived Hyperthemat ic Progression Pattern	-	-
3	Simple Linear Pattern	5	12%
4	Derived thematic Progression Pattern	-	-
5	Splitting Progression Pattern	-	-
6	Elliptic Progression Pattern	-	-
7	Crossing Progression Pattern	-	-

8	Zig-zag Progression Pattern	-	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>52</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 2. The Patterns of Thematic Progression in the Students' Writing Recount Texts

Table 2 above shows that there are eight patterns of thematic progression. They are Constant Theme Patterns with total 47 times or 88 %. Simple Linear Pattern with total number 5 times or 12 %. Derived Thematic Pattern, Splitting Progression Pattern, Elliptic Progression Pattern, Crossing Progression Pattern, and Zig-zag Progression Pattern are not found in students' writing recount text. The researcher only found 2 patterns of thematic progression in students' writing recount texts which are Constant Theme Pattern, Simple Linear Pattern.

## 2. Conclusion

This research has uncovered the reality students are encountering in writing recount text. The finding of the study shows that Unmarked Simple Theme is the most dominant type of students' writing recount text. In addition, it shows that the students' recount texts were mostly

developed in Constant Theme Pattern. This indicates that the students have difficulties in developing theme based on the types of thematic progression. This leads to the incomprehensive understanding the story contents.

## References

- Charles F Meyer. (2009). *Introducing English Linguistics*, (New York: Cambridge University Press), p. 102.
- Cohen. (2007). *Research Methods in Education* (6th.ed). London, New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Danes, F. (2004). Functional sentence perspective and the organization of the text. In F. Danes, ed. *Papers on Functional Sentence Perspective* (106-128). Prague: Academia/The Hague: Mouton.
- Dewi, Hernawan & Apsari. (2019) Thematic Progression in Students' Descriptive Text. *Profesional Journal of English Education*, 2(2), 126-132.
- Dirgeyasa, W. (2016). *College Academic Writing: A Genre-Based Perspective*. Jakarta: Kencana.
- Dirven, Rene & Marjolijn Verspoor. (2004). *Cognitive Exploration of Language and Linguistics (Cognitive Linguistics in Practice)*.

- Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co.
- Dorothy E Zemach & Lisa A Rumisek. (2005). *Academic Writing: From Paragraph to Essay*, (Oxford: Macmillan Publisher Limited,). P. 82.
- E. Bruce Goldenstein, (2008). *Cognitive Psychology: Connecting Mind, Research, and Everyday Experience*, 2nd ed. Thomson.
- Eggins, S. (2006). *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*. London New York, NY, USA, Pinter Publisher ; Distributed in the United States and Canada by St. Martin's Press.
- Gerot, L. and Wignell, P. (2007). *Making Sense of Fuctional Grammar*. Gerb Stabler. Australia.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (2004). *An introduction to Functional Grammar*. Second Edition London: Edward.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (2014). *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Revised by C.M.I.M. Mattiessen. New York: Routldge.
- Knapp, P., Watkins, M. (2005). *Genre, Text, Grammar: Technologies for teaching and assessing writing*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.
- Martin, J and Rose, D. (2008). *Genre relations: mapping culture in Australian Journal of Linguistics*. Journal of Australian Journal, 2(3) 234-297.
- Mega, W. D., Khauriena, F. H., Yanuarti, A. (2019). Thematic Progression in Students' Descriptive Texts. *Indonesian Journal*, 2(2). 126-132.
- Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M. and Saldana, J. (2014) *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. Sage, London.
- D. L. McCabe. (1999). Academic Integrity in honor code an non-honor code environment: A Qualitative Investigation," *Journal of Higher Education*.(page 211-234.
- Nation, I.S.P. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing*. New York: Routledge.
- Nguyen, T. T., & Nguyen, T. Q. H. (2018). An Analysis of Thematic Progression Strategies in Academic IELTS Sample Essays. *International Journal of Humanities, Philosophy and Language*, 1(4), 85-93.
- Nurdianingsih, F. (2017). Thematic Progression Pattern : A Technique To Improve Students' writing Skill Viewed From Writing Apprehension. *Journal of*

- Linguistic and English Teaching*, 2(2), 238-247
- Paltridge, B. (2006). *Discourse analysis*. London, England: Continuum.
- Rahmawati, R. V. & Kurniawan, E. (2015). Thematic Progression Analysis in Students' Thesis Abstracts. *Indonesian EFL Journal*, 1(1). 81-87.
- Rene D., Marjolijn V. (2006). Cognitive Exploration of Language and Linguistics (Cognitive Linguistics in Practice), (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co, 2p. 184.
- Rika, V. R., Eri, K. (2015). Thematic Progression Analysis in Indonesian EFL Students' Thesis Abstract. *Indonesian EFL Journal*, 1(1), 81-87.
- Sugiyono. (2010). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Wang, L, (2007). Theme and rheme in the thematic organization of text: Implications for teaching writing, *Asian EFL Journal*, 9(1), 164-167.
- Wei, J. (2015). Theme and thematic progression in English Writing Teaching English: *Journal of Education & Practice*, 6(21), 178-187.
- Yang, X. (2008). *Thematic progression analysis in teaching exploration writing*. English Language Teaching, 1(1), 29-33.
- Zemach, D.E and Rumisek, L.A. (2005). *Academic Writing from Paragraph to Essay*. Oxford: Macmillan.