

Thematic Progression in Students' Discussion Essays of Undergraduate English Education Program at Universitas Negeri Padang

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to find out how students organize their ideas by seeing the flow of information in the themes and rhemes of clauses in discussion essays. The subject of the study was the sixth semester students of English Department at Universitas Negeri Padang. The total number of sample was 16 students from education program. The sample of the study was collected by using stratified random sampling. The data were collected through students' writing test of discussion essay. They were asked to write discussion essay at least 4 paragraph in 90 minutes. The result of this study showed that students organized their ideas in three ways of thematic progression, including Simple Linear Progression (SLP), Constant Theme Progression (CTP), and Derived Theme Progression (DTP). However, CTP pattern was predominantly used by students in their essays. Furthermore, it was found that the students' ability in writing discussion essay seen from thematic progression was still low that they failed to provide development of information and logical arguments in their writing. They tend to organize ideas in different topics in a paragraph that they put new information in the theme position.

Keywords : *Theme And Rheme, Thematic Progression, Coherent Writing*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a way of communication that enables people to reach others without limitation of time or distance. Through writing, one can communicate with other people within distant areas. Besides, people can express their ideas, opinions, or feelings in

various forms such as in books, novels, papers, short stories, research reports, essays, letters, and poems.

One aspect that has to be paid much attention in producing good writing is coherence. Maintaining coherence is extremely needed when writing something. In this regard, Brown and Yule (1983) reveal that coherence deals with logical organization of the text in order to achieve a smooth flow of idea from the beginning to the middle up to the end of the text.

To achieve a coherent text, students have to be aware of text organization since the most important thing in writing is the organization of ideas or thoughts systematically. The ideas can be categorized as given information in its function called as theme and new information called as rheme. Halliday (2000:37) said that the theme is the starting point of a message which the clause is about. Meanwhile, rheme is the remainder of the message, the part in which the theme is developed.

Moreover, process to define themes in every clause can be seen from thematic progression. The thematic progression can show coherence of a text since the writer should have only one topic in a writing. As Danes (1974) said that the connections between themes and rhemes form patterns of thematic progression which is another SFL concept that makes a significant contribution to the coherence of a text. Thematic progression shows the flow of information in a text where the theme anchors a text or highlights subtopic then rheme is used to comment on theme. It can be said that thematic progression is needed to see how the writer maintains coherence in writing by seeing the progression of themes and rhemes of the clauses in which the organization of ideas and information are developed.

Several researches have been conducted related to theme and thematic progression. Ren, Cao, and Li (2009) conducted study about thematic operational approach and the writing teaching of college English. The result revealed that students' writings were still loose in logical organization of the text content and the coherent layout of the textual structure. In addition, Rosa (2007) in a paper entitled "Thematic Progression as a Means to Keep Cohesion in Exposition Text", states that the ability of the students in writing was still low. It was proved by the students' weaknesses in using

thematic progression in their writing where they fell to provide logical arguments in their writing.

In order to enable students to write a scientific writing, with regard to theme and rheme, the sixth semester students of English Education Program of Universitas Negeri Padang have learned that in Functional Grammar course in the previous semester. For this reason, it was assumed that students are able to write good essay especially discussion essay. Discussion essay is an argumentative essay which needs the writer to propose two contrasting arguments which are arguments for and arguments against on an issue to inform readers about what is being discussed. Furthermore, discussion essay also agrees with one of the patterns of thematic progression.

As a matter of fact, students still had difficulty in writing essay with regard to maintaining coherence related to the thematic progression in their writing. Based on preliminary data, it was proved that students' discussion essay still weren't organized well seen from the organization of text; theme, rheme, as well as thematic progression used. After reading some of the tasks, it was found that the students overused Constant Progression, where the same theme is chosen over several clauses. It was seen from this paragraph, " *Fast food isn't a good choice for our healthy. **Fast food** is considered to be dangerous because **it** is made of a little nutrition ingredients and instant process.*" The text looked like a list because there was a lack of further development of rheme. She tended not to expand on information introduced in the rheme. Essentially, in discussion text, the zig zag pattern or Simple Linear Progression is more preferable as it shows dynamic progression of the ideas. The last problem is that the students tend to put new information in the theme position.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that there were some problems found in students' discussion essay. They were not only about the the organization of theme and rheme, but also the thematic progression model used. Indeed, to have a coherent discussion essay, student should pay much attention to the linearization of the text in which the connected ideas can be seen from the flow of the theme and rheme. Furthermore, discussion essay should have much information development in the rheme.

Thus, the present study was to seek and analyze further phenomena of students' discussion essay especially how theme chosen and the patterns of thematic progression used at the sixth semester students of English Education Program of Universitas Negeri Padang.

METHOD

This was descriptive study. The population in this study was English Department students who registered in sixth semester at academic writing class. Stratified random sampling was used in this research and 16 students taken as the sample. The writing test was used to find out thematic progression in students' discussion essays. The students were asked to write a text of topic given. The students had to write discussion essay at least 4 paragraph in 90 minutes. Then, it was analyzed to find out thematic progression patterns they used in their essays as well how they organized ideas seen from the flow of information in themes and rhemes. It was analyzed into each category based on theory proposed by Eggins (1994).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

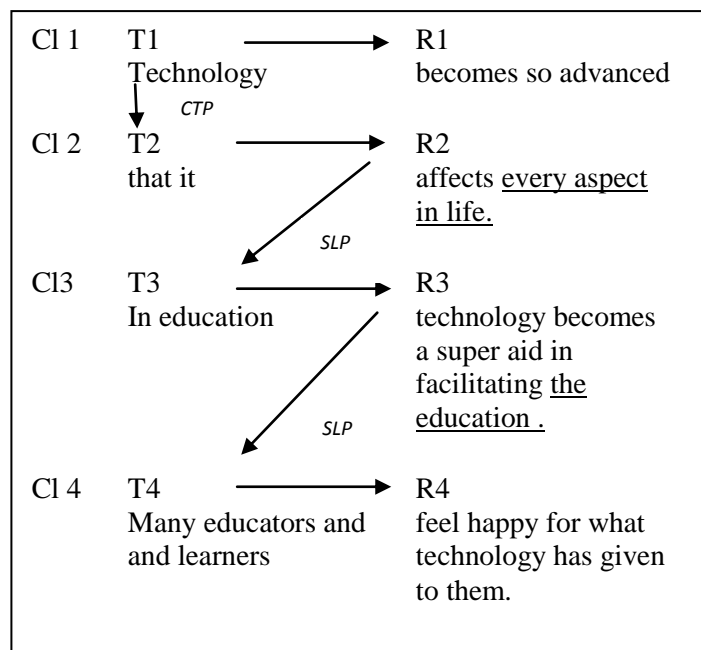
The data collected consists of 16 discussion essays written by students that are related to the topics given. Some students choose the same topics but develop it in different ways. Based on the data, there are three patterns of thematic progression found in the study namely Simple Linear Progression, Constant Thematic Progression, and Derived Theme Progression that are used by students in order to organize their ideas. Moreover, the result reveals that there are various kinds of thematic progression patterns used in each text.

The occurrence of thematic progression patterns in students' discussion essays can be seen in the table below:

Table 2. The Occurrence of Thematic Progression Patterns in Students' Discussion Essays

Sample	Thematic Progression Pattern		
	SLP	CTP	DTP
1	17	18	1
2	14	12	-
3	10	13	1
4	19	23	1
5	11	12	2
6	16	24	1
7	10	17	1
8	5	10	-
9	6	13	-
10	9	8	-
11	12	14	1
12	8	9	2
13	7	24	7
14	6	3	2
15	7	8	2
16	11	14	-
Total	168	222	21

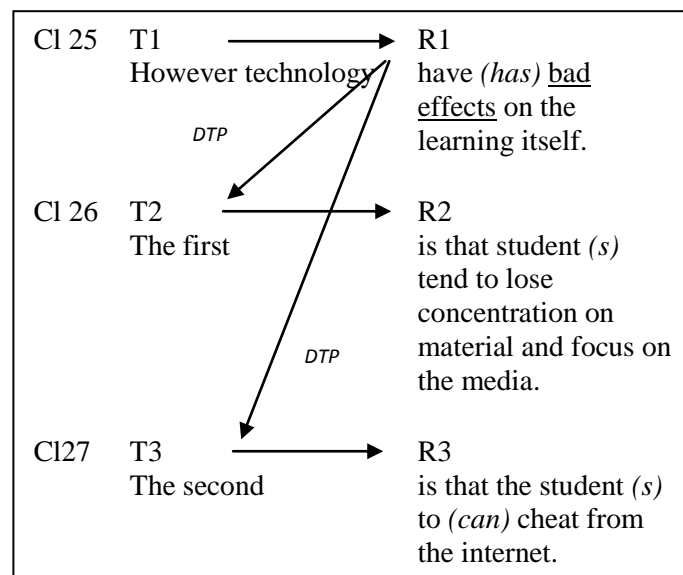
From the table above, it is seen that those three patterns of thematic progression are applied in the students' writing. In the first essay, it is analyzed that CTP and SLP are employed by students in organizing their ideas, as in:



(e.g. 1)

As seen in the sample above, “*technology*” is the first clause of thesis element that is considered as unmarked topical theme that serves to identify the field of under discussion (Emilia,2005), which focuses on “*technology*”. The reference *it* in the second clause refers to “*Technology*” in the preceding clause that constructs CTP “where the same element occurs regularly as Theme” (Eggins, 2004:324). In the third clause, a marked topical theme is applied in the word “*In education*” from rheme “*every aspect in life*” in the second clause that constructs SLP. Then in the next clause, SLP is also employed that the words “*Many educators and learners*” is as unmarked topical theme developed from the rheme “*the education*”. This pattern indicates that the students have been able to make a logical relation and elaboration in their texts.

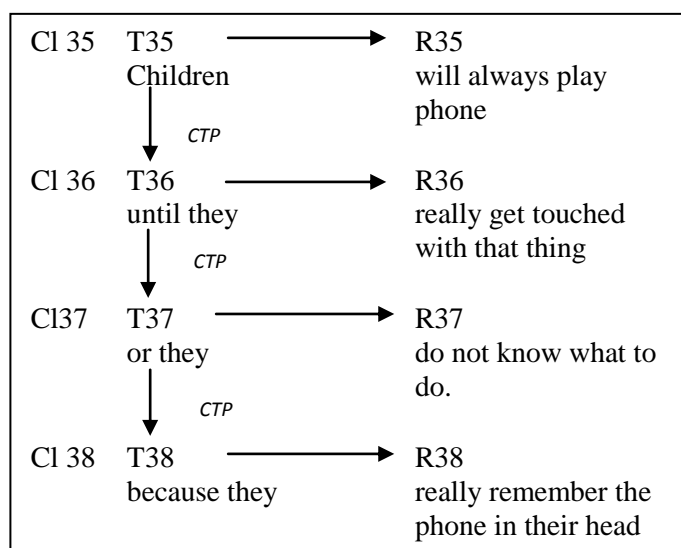
In the next essay, it is analyzed that students not only use CTP and SLP but also DTP in their essays. The occurrence of DTP can be seen as the following example:



(e.g. 2)

Based on the example, it is seen that students use DTP pattern which indicates that the student has clearly “planned” their method of development in their texts (Eggins, 2004:305). This kind of thematic progression is found when some elements exist in a theme or as Hyper-theme of paragraph (Danes, 1974). In the example, the words ‘*technology*’ has a function as unmarked topical Theme of the clause since it is in the initial position of the clause. This clause has a Rheme ‘*have (has) bad effects on the*

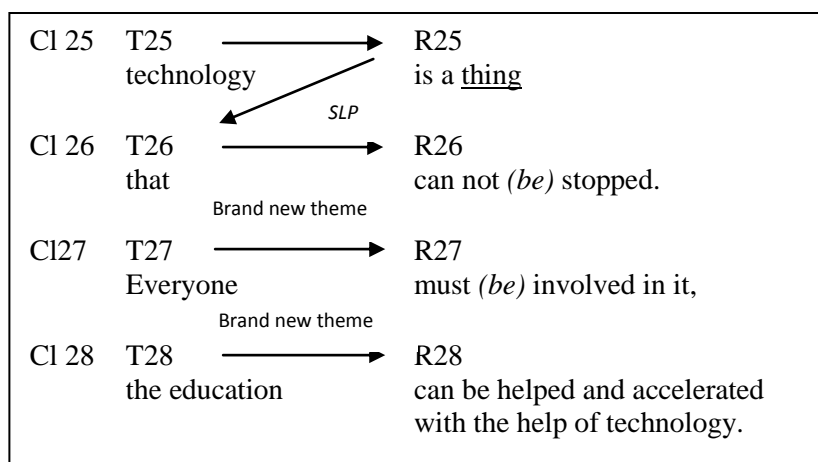
learning itself” which becomes the general notion that introduces a number of different pieces of information, that is, two different arguments in relation to the bad effects of technology. Those examples above show that students apply three thematic progression patterns in their essays, but they still have problems in developing logical arguments. These problems include the problem of overuse Constant Progression and the problem of brand new theme as in examples below:



(e.g.3)

In the example above, the students got the problem of overused Constant Progression in which the same Theme is picked up over several clauses. In this case, the writers tended to provide greater depth in their explanation towards the ideas introduced in the text without further development of Rhemes. The text above is an example of this kind of problem by using the personal pronoun ‘they’ in the Theme selection. The topic is not developed at all through the Rhemes, as a lack of progress in text.

The next problem found in the students essay is brand new theme, as in example below:



(e.g.4)

In the example, it is seen that student applied SLP for the first clause in which the word “technology” is as theme. But in the next clauses, student failed to develop information from the rheme. As Bloor & Bloor (1995) mentioned, the problem of a brand new Theme occurs in the work of inexperienced writers who put new information in the Theme position. In this case, the new Theme is introduced in the text causing a lack of organizational skill in the writing.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings thematic progression analysis, several conclusions could be drawn from this study. It was found that there were three types of thematic progression patterns used in students’ discussion essays namely SLP, CTP and DTP. It was seen that the students were able to apply those three patterns to make their text coherent, but they still had weaknesses in developing their ideas. It was proven that they got the problem of overuse of Constant Thematic Progression in which the same theme is picked up over several clauses. Also, they still were not able to develop their ideas with logical arguments in their discussion essays. They tend to put new information in the theme position that is called as the problem with brand new theme.

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