Systemic Functional Linguistics: Analyzing the Theme System and Thematic Progression in Indonesian University Students' English Writing

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Abstract. This study aims to investigate the English writing assignment of Indonesian college students. This study focuses on the use of theme system and thematic progression in the text which was produced by the learners in Universitas Muhammadiyah Surabaya. This study used the systemic functional linguistics as approach in teaching and learning in writing class. This study used the qualitative approach with descriptive qualitative as the method. It was conducted because this study observed about the writing assignment which would be elaborated descriptively. The data were taken by using the purposive sampling. The participants were 3rd year students which consisted of twenty students. The observation and interview were conducted as instrument in data collection. There were several steps conducted in analyzing the data. They were first, the students' pre-writing assignment were read carefully by the researcher. Then, those writing assignment were classified in to three classifications, they were low, middle and high achiever. Those pre-writing assignments were analyzed based on the SFL's theory about theme system and thematic progression. Then, the students' post-writing assignment were read intensively by the researcher. Then, those post-writing assignments were classified based on the previous classification. Then, those were analyzed based on SFL's theory in theme system and thematic progression. Finally, it is inferred that there is the significant process between writing assignment and systemic functional linguistics approach. The students can construct the message or information in the clause by using the theme system which will be turned to be the larger text. The student (high and middle learners) can produce the text cohesively and coherently by applying the thematic progression. In the other hand, there is several texts which produced by the low learners is not understandable to be read.

Keywords: College students · English writing · theme system · thematic progression

1 Introduction

English is well-known language which used in around the globe. It can be the first, second and even foreign language. For the learners who learn it as a foreign language,

they will learn skills, those are listening, reading, speaking and writing. The skill which difficult to be gained by the learned is writing [1, 2]. EFL learners need to learn writing after they learn others skill due to the fact that it is quite complicated. EFL learners find that academic writing is kind of challenging [3]. They are not only developing the grammar or choosing the diction but also constructing the idea in order to create the meaningful text. In creating successful writing, they need to construct the ideas which is written in the paragraph and it must be connected between or among other paragraphs. It is conducted not only to create the text readable but also meaningful in order not to cause the ambiguity or confusion. Writing requires the good knowledge in grammar, diction and sub-skills such as coherency, cohesiveness and unity [4].

Regarding to cohesive and coherence in teaching writing, it can be applied by using the Systemic Functional Linguistics or SFL. It is introduced by [5]. It is the theory in which language is used to interpret the meaning in social setting. It means that SFL relates to the language as resource in which the people establish the meaning to interact with others in given situational and cultural context. SFL theory is in which the people literally set up the building knowledge, experience and culture [6]. SFL highlight in which language has three function [7]. The three functions in language which is mentioned in SFL theory is interpersonal function, ideational function and textual function. Interpersonal function or tenor is about social relation, ideational function or field is about language which construct the language, then textual function or mode is about the context which constructed by the language [7]. In the textual function, it investigates how the language construct the cohesive and coherence in a text.

1.1   Theme System

Theme has the important role in which the clause gives the significant contribution to construct the message [8]. Theme is "the points of the departure of the message" in which it leads to construct the interpretation of message while rheme is "the reminder of the message" which is developed after the theme [5]. The example of the theme and rheme can be known [9].

Theme	Rheme
Lion	Beats the unicorn all around the town.

The theme is classified into three, they are topical theme, interpersonal theme and textual theme. The topical theme is the first element in the clause that expresses some kind of representational meaning which realized in transitivity structure as a participant, a circumstance or a process [6]. In topical theme, if the theme is subject, it is called unmarked theme while if the theme is non-subject, it is called marked theme (Table 1).

Then, the interpersonal theme is the interpersonal part of the theme and it is often used to indicate the author's personal judgment of the meaning (Table 2).

The last is textual theme. It does not express any interpersonal or experiential meaning but it relates to the important cohesive work. The textual theme is also indicated in linking function. The function of textual theme is to give the access the readers to explore the information and build the information in order to figure out what the writer wants to express (Table 3).

Table 1. Example of topical theme [6]

Participant as a theme	Unmarked (subject as a theme)	Smoking It (smoking) It	is dangerous for our health. Causes many diseases … is said …
Circumstance as a theme	Marked	Yesterday	I went to the zoo with my family.
Process as a theme	Marked	Come	To the class on time!
		Topical theme	Rheme

Table 2. Example of Interpersonal Theme [6]

Unfused Finite as a Theme	Can Have	We You	Have lunch now? Read Laskar Pelangi?
Mood Adjunct	I think (I believe)	English	Is important for our success in education.
Comment Adjunct	Obviously	Family planning	Is useful for the prosperity of a country
Vocative Adjunct	Sinta	You	Should read Laskar Pelangi?
Polarity Adjunct	Yes No		
	Interpersonal Theme	Topical Theme	Rheme

Table 3. Example of Textual Theme [6]

Coordination	Rina works very hard, *but* her classmates seem to waste too much time chatting
Subordination	Many students did not pass the final test of Functional grammar *because* they were not prepared for it
Relative	Some lecturers do not seem to welcome the newest policy of the department, *which* is [[classroom observation]].
Conjunctive	*Besides*, the argument [[which is launched by the U.S. government of attacking Iraq]] is not making any sense.

1.2 Thematic Progression

Furthermore, due to the fact that cohesive and coherence is the important function in writing, it can be obtained through thematic progression. Thematic progression gives the contribution to cohesive development of the text [4, 10]. Thematic progression regards
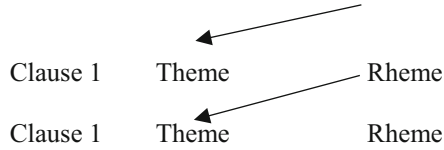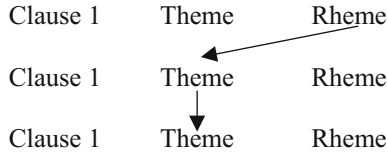
Clause 1   Theme   Rheme

Clause 1   Theme   Rheme

Fig. 1. The zig zag pattern [8]

Clause 1   Theme   Rheme

Clause 1   Theme   Rheme

Clause 1   Theme   Rheme

Fig. 2. The reiteration pattern

Clause 1   Theme   Rheme   a
                               b
                               c

Clause 2   Theme   Rheme

Clause 3   Theme   Rheme
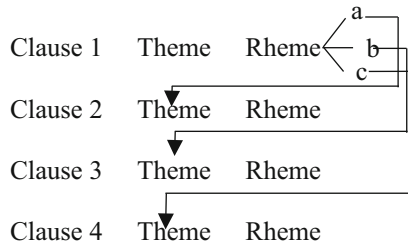
Clause 4   Theme   Rheme

Fig. 3. The multiple pattern

to the combination between theme and rheme. Theme is the starting point in which the message is developed while rheme is developed after theme which called as theme's reminder [5]. In thematic progression, theme creates the connection between previous message and following sentence which continue the information provided by the preceding sentence while the rheme develops and elaborates the information or idea initiated in the theme [11]. Additionally, in the beginning theme and rheme need to collaborate each other in developing the text in order to create the next theme and rheme coherence and cohesive. It is due to the fact that theme and rheme as indicator of cohesive [2] and coherence [12].

In thematic progression is classified into three, there are zig zag pattern, reiteration pattern, multiple theme pattern. First, it is zig zag pattern in which the function is to achieve the cohesion in a text by establishing on newly introduced information [8]. It can be known in the pattern (Fig. 1).

Second, it is reiteration pattern which has the function to provide the text with a clear focus [8]. The reiteration theme in which theme has the relation with a number of different rheme. The example of reiteration theme can be seen in a text (Figs. 2 and 3).

Recently, there are multitude studies about the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) which has the significant in English Language Teaching. Mostly, the EFL learners around the globe feel challenged in writing due to the fact that creating cohesive and coherence

in a text is not easy. It can be investigated through the thematic progression in a text in which the theme and rheme in a text is constructed. The study about SFL especially about the thematic progression is conducted in some countries in which English become second or foreign language, such as in China [2, 10], Korea [11], Swedish [13], Iraq [14], Thailand [15] and Singapore [16]. Those studies mentioned that the college students' English writing has the lack of theme and rheme so that the text cannot be cohesive and coherence. Furthermore, the multitude studies are also conducted in Indonesia in which English is the foreign language. The studies investigated the thematic progression on each genre text, such as recount text which is produced by the vocational students [1, 17], analytical exposition [18], hortatory [4]. The function of thematic progression is able to be applied to identify the five starts hotel website [19] and articles on journal [12]. The cohesive and coherence in essay of college students [3] also can be figured out through theme and rheme. Those studies agreed that systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is able to figure out the cohesive and coherence in a text through theme and rheme.

Furthermore, construct the theme and rheme in order to obtain the cohesive and coherence in text is challenging for the Indonesian learners due to the fact that English is not the first or second language. Indonesian is as EFL learners start to get English subject since they are in primary school as a foreign language until tertiary level, it does not mean they are able to use English fluently. As the EFL learners and the lack of constructing the idea or information, they always feel difficult to write the text coherence and cohesively. It is experienced by the students in tertiary level due to the fact that they must create the academic writing. It is the obligation that tertiary students must create academic writing. Writing is the demanding skill in tertiary level in order to produce the academic writing [14]. Due to the fact that the previous studies do not investigate the function of SFL in English teaching and learning especially in writing. Moreover, this study aims to investigate the use of theme system in the college students' writing assignment and the thematic progression.

2   Methodology

This study concerned about the writing of college students in theme system and thematic progression. The data which would be investigated was the writing assignment. The qualitative approach was conducted in this study because the elaboration was in words form not in number which the data was obtained in the form of fieldnote or interview. The data or information collected and analyzed is in the textual material, such as documentation, interview, fieldnote or in visual material, such as photograph and video recordings in which is called as qualitative approach [20]. Therefore, in the qualitative approach, the method which conducted was qualitative descriptive. It was conducted because the way in analyzing the data was to elaborate the text descriptively.

2.1   Respondents

The participant of this study was college students in 3rd year in one of the University in Surabaya, Indonesia. It was conducted in one class which consisted twenty students. All the name of the students was written in pseudonyms. That level was chosen because

the participant needed to prepare their writing to face the academic writing for final result. The observation chooses the writing class C because the lecturer teaches the writing material by using the systemic functional linguistic or SFL. Then, the purposive sampling was conducted in this study because the research subject was chosen based on the criterion. Purposive sampling is the providing the important information by choosing the participants which can be set up by other choices [21].

2.2 Instruments

There were several instruments to collect the data in this study, they were observation and interview. In the observation, the researcher used note taking to notice the activity done by the teacher and students in the online class. The class observation was conducted at least 3 times. Moreover, recording was also conducted in the observation process. It was recorded through zoom recording because the teaching process was conducted by zoom meeting. While, in the interview, it was conducted in this study as secondary data source. The interview was addressed to the teacher. It was conducted by telephone through WhatsApp call by using open-ended question. The questions were regarding to the students' ability in writing, teaching SFL in writing, etc.

2.3 Procedures

In this study, the data collection was conducted through several steps. First, the lecturer asked the students to write a text by giving the topic. In the first meeting, the lecturer did not teach them the function of SFL in writing which was called pre-writing task. Then, the researcher collected the documentation data, they were students' writing assignment. Next, the lecturer gave the function of SFL in writing in couple of meeting. After that, the lecturer asked the students to write the text. Finally, the researcher collected the students' writing which was called post-writing assignment.

2.4 Data Analysis

In this study, there were several steps conducted in analyzing the data. First, the students' pre-writing assignment were read carefully by the researcher. Then, those writing assignment were classified in to three classifications, they were low, middle and high achiever. Those pre-writing assignments were analyzed based on the SFL's theory about theme system and thematic progression. Then, the students' post-writing assignment were read intensively by the researcher. Then, those post-writing assignments were classified based on the previous classification. Next, those were analyzed based on SFL's theory in theme system and thematic progression. Finally, between the students' pre-writing assignment and post-writing assignment were compared to figure out the significant SFL theory in writing teaching and learning.

3 Finding and Discussion

In this section, this researcher would investigate the theme and rheme and thematic progression in the English writing of college students that has already been gathered during the data collection.

3.1   Theme System on English Writing of Students' College

The theme system had the significant in writing the text, in which, it helped to construct the environment. The theme system has been found on the text which wrote by the college students. The theme system found was topical theme, textual theme and interpersonal theme. The result was found on the text that there was the difference between learners. The difference of the learners was classified into three levels. Those levels were the high, middle and low learners. The text which wrote by those levels had the topical, textual and interpersonal theme but the way for delivering the theme system on the text were totally different.

The theme system is realized through the structure in the form of clause, in which, it consisted the theme and rheme. The texts consisted of the theme and rheme in which it delivered the message clearly. The departure point of the message which delivered in the theme did not create the ambiguity. It made the readers did not feel the confused to catch the message or information which were delivered by the writer. The topical, textual and interpersonal theme were on the text described clearly.

Covid-19	is make a bad impact for various sector
Topical theme	Rheme

That sentence was the example of topical theme on the text which produced by the high learners. The topical theme is the first element in the clause that expresses some kind of representational meaning which realized in transitivity structure as a participant, a circumstance or a process [6]. Mostly, the transitivity structure in the topical theme was as participant in which "Covid 19" was applied as a subject. "Covid 19" on the topical theme was as unmarked theme because it was as the subject. Besides the topical theme, the interpersonal theme was applied on the text. The example of the interpersonal theme,

Actually	This virus	Can be spread out by animal to human
Interpersonal theme	Topical theme	Rheme

The interpersonal was applied to indicate the author's personal judgment of the meaning. Interpersonal theme is very important to foreground the position of writer. The interpersonal theme above, the word "actually" was including the comment adjuncts, in which typically realized by an adverb. It provided the writer's comment or attitude toward the message. Then, the last theme was textual theme. The example of textual theme,

Third,	The timing of study	Is disorder because of insomnia, many assignments and etc.
Textual theme	Topical theme	Rheme

The word "third" is the textual theme which help to give the information on how the text will unfold. Then, the textual theme in the form of "third" was applied to assist the

reader to access the information or to build the new information that the writer wanted to express. The word "third" was as the linking function in textual theme, in which it was crucial in the light of the significance given to argument, or discussion in the text. Moreover, those examples above were conducted in the text by high, middle and low learners. They could be applied the use of theme system in the text. In the text, they could organize the information in the individual clause which would be the larger text. Theme has the important role in which the clause gives the significant contribution to construct the message [8].

Then, the learners also combined all the theme, such as topical, textual and inter-personal theme in one clause which was called the multiple themes. They wanted to show the message that there was the ideational content by using the topical theme, the text building by using the textual theme and the conveying the social relation by using the interpersonal theme. Majority, the learners applied the multiple themes because they produced the text in which they elaborated what happens and expressed the opinion about the issue discussed. The learners wanted to elaborate the issue of Covid-19 pandemic and also express their opinion about it. The example below was the use of multiple themes in the text which was produced by the learners.

… which	Basically	We	Do not know that our self-carried the virus.
Textual theme	Interpersonal theme	Topical theme	Rheme

Before the students given the knowledge about SFL, they could not know how to organize the information or construct the message in the text. It could be seen in their pre-writing assignment. After the teacher taught the students about the use of SFL in writing about the use of theme system and thematic progression, the students could organize or construct the message in individual clause to be the larger text. It could be known from the post-writing assignment in which those examples above were from the post-writing assignment of the students. Moreover, there was the difference of each learners' level on their text. In high and middle learners, the way to construct the message in individual level were good. The texts which written had the complexity in delivering the theme system. The text was understandable which stated in the clause. They also applied the clause complex. The theme in the clause complex was dependent and also independent, in which they were analyzed too based on the theme. In the other hand, several low learners could not produce the use of theme system (theme and rheme) in the text. They produced in one clause by theme or rheme only. Although they applied the clause complex by using coordination, they wrote rheme without theme. The sentence which they wrote was not understandable because the clause was too long. There was coordination, subordination and relative in one clause so that it caused there was the rheme without theme.

3.2 Thematic Progression on English Writing of Students' College

In the data collection, it found that there were only fifteen texts collected from the twenty students. The text which produced by the learners was about the impact of COVID-19
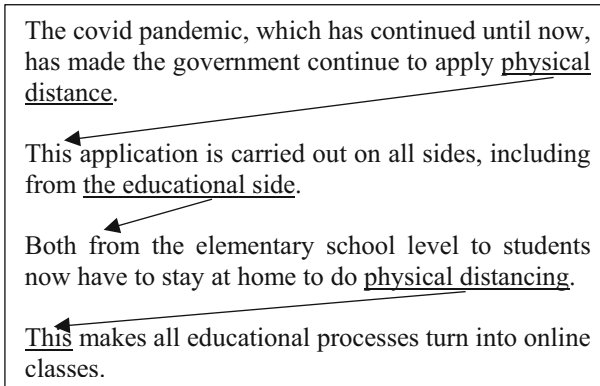
The covid pandemic, which has continued until now, has made the government continue to apply <u>physical distance</u>.

This application is carried out on all sides, including from <u>the educational side</u>.

Both from the elementary school level to students now have to stay at home to do <u>physical distancing</u>.

<u>This</u> makes all educational processes turn into online classes.

Fig. 4. The zig zag pattern [8]

pandemic. It was known that the learners applied three various of thematic progression, they were zig zag pattern, re-iteration pattern and multiple patterns. Several students applied the zig zag pattern in the text in which it was written in the first paragraph. The example below was the text which produced by Purwarini (pseudonym). The use of zig zag pattern was to achieve the cohesion in a text by developing on newly introduced information. It used the rheme in the clause which was applied for developing the new theme for the next clause. According to the explanation which was stated by Eggins in [6] that the zig zag pattern gave the text a sense of cumulative development which may be absent in the repeated themes (Fig. 4).

Then, several students applied the reiteration theme in the first paragraph of writing assignment. The text below was the example of reiteration theme. It was written by Fiani (pseudonym) (Fig. 5).

The reiteration theme was applied to achieve the cohesion in the text by developing the same theme. According to the explanation which was stated by Eggins in [6] the use of reiteration theme was to provide the text with a clear focus. The focus which wanted to be clear was about the corona virus in which it was always to be the theme in the next clause in the text. The reiteration theme was applied when the writers had the same participants which made theme on a regular basis. The reiteration theme could provide the topical theme.

The last was the multiple theme which applied by the learners in the post-writing assignment. The use of multiple themes was to produce the text by elaborating, analyzing or informing the issues which include cause and effect in writing. In multiple patterns, the theme in one clause introduced a number of different pieces of information, each of which is then picked up and made theme in subsequent clause. The text below was the example in the use of multiple theme which produced by Warakota (pseudonym). Majority, all the leaners from high, middle and low applied the multiple themes to inform the issue of Covid-19 pandemic about advantages or disadvantages (Fig. 6).

Moreover, the use of zig zag pattern and reiteration pattern were applied by high or middle learners as introductory sentence in informing the issue. In the other hand, low learners did not zig zag pattern or reiteration pattern in the introductory sentence so that
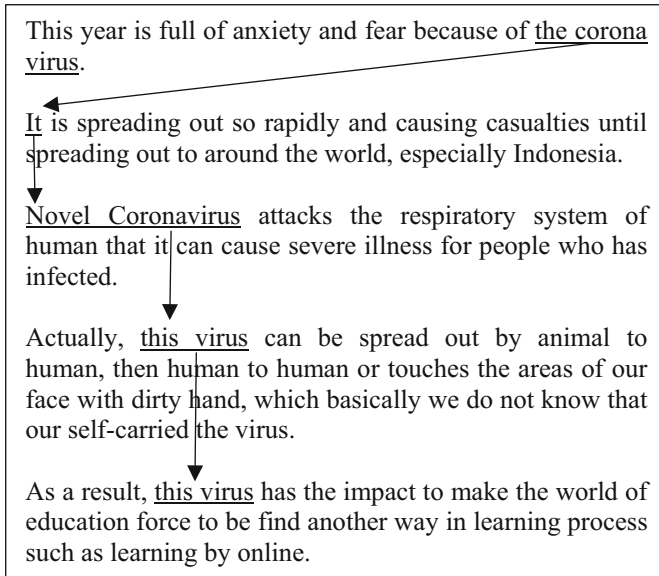
This year is full of anxiety and fear because of the corona virus.

It is spreading out so rapidly and causing casualties until spreading out to around the world, especially Indonesia.

Novel Coronavirus attacks the respiratory system of human that it can cause severe illness for people who has infected.

Actually, this virus can be spread out by animal to human, then human to human or touches the areas of our face with dirty hand, which basically we do not know that our self-carried the virus.

As a result, this virus has the impact to make the world of education force to be find another way in learning process such as learning by online.

Fig. 5. The reiteration pattern

The coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic is the defining global health crisis of our time and the greatest challenge we have faced since World War Two. COVID 19 causing a great harm to humanity but COVID 19 also have many advantages.

First, COVID 19 resulting in people taking care of their health even more. …

Second, COVID 19 resulting in a cleaner world more than before. …

Third, COVID 19 resulting technology is becoming more and more demanded and developed. …

The last, everything that has its advantages has its downsides. Even though COVID 19 has its advantages, COVID 19 is still a serious ventricular disease the whole world still faces...
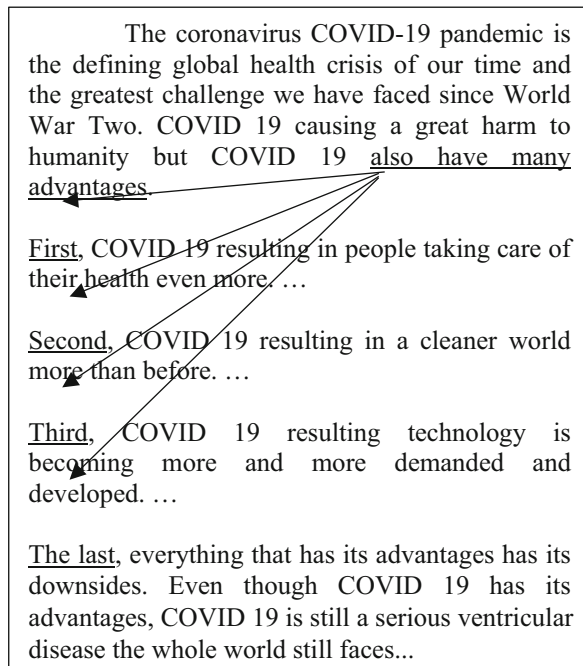
Fig. 6. The multiple pattern

there was no the cohesion in each clause. The low learners applied the multiple themes in elaborating the advantages or disadvantages of the issue.

Additionally, in interview process, the teacher explained that in teaching writing skill by using the systemic functional language (SFL), there was several obstacles in the process teaching and learning. SFL was new thing for students because there was no SFL subject in their study in English department. Adding SFL subject in English department was impossible because their subjects in English department were full. Consequently, SFL subject was added in discourse analysis subject but it was only explained generally. To overcome the students who were not understand, the teacher asked them to make a group to discuss assignment. Additionally, the teacher also said that when the students knew and understood about the SFL, it would bring many benefits, such as the students could produce the text coherently and cohesively. It was the important in developing the text coherently and cohesively because it would be understandable to be read.

4   Conclusion

This study concludes that the use of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) in writing teaching class gives the significance process for the English writing assignment of Indonesian college students. It can be proven from the difference of writing assignment between pre-writing and post-writing. Students can construct the information in the individual clause to be the larger text by applying the theme system. The students (high, middle and low learners) can deliver the message which is stated in the use of theme and rheme. Those students (high and middle learners) apply the topical, textual and interpersonal theme in their text. They also apply the multiple theme which contains the three themes in their complex clause. In the other hand, the several low learners still cannot apply the theme system so that there is the rheme without theme in the clause. It makes the text is not understandable. Moreover, the students can apply the thematic progression in their text. The use of zig zag pattern and reiteration pattern are applied by the high and middle learners as introductory in their text but for the low learners, the introductory paragraph cannot be classified because it is unstructured. For the multiple patterns, all the students (high, middle and low learners) apply it in informing the issue. They can produce the text cohesive and coherence through the use of thematic progression.

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