

# THEMATIC PROGRESSION SHIFTS IN THE TRANSLATION OF STUDENT TRANSLATORS

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## Abstract

Thematic progression is one of the tools that can be used to confirm the unity of a text, including a translated text. However, some translated texts do not pay attention to how their clauses related one another as a coherent text. This paper aims at finding out how thematic progression is used in the translation done by student translators. This study used a content analysis as the method. The data were the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) produced by 10 student translators who were asked to translate the text from English into bahasa Indonesia. The data were collected using Translog for more accurate data. Based on the data analysis, it was found that the thematic progression shifts done by the student translators in their TTs are mainly due to their efforts to produce the TT reflecting its independent characteristics. It is concluded that, in terms of thematic progression, the student translators' TTs are dominated by the use of hypertheme and constant continuous theme progressions. This is due to the social function of history text that tells the past historical events involving people and places. The choice of certain types of thematic progression is particularly helpful in building the unity of the text.

**Keywords:** Thematic Progression, Translation Shift, Student Translators

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## Introduction

Coherence or a text unity is the ultimate goal of any practices of writing, including translation practices, and it also becomes the reference of successful writing practices. A coherent text facilitates readers' understanding of the messages conveyed in the text. From the point of view of systemic functional linguistics, coherence is evaluated from how the clauses as messages are organized in the text to accomplish the textual function of language, realized in theme and rheme (Egins 1994; Martin, Matthiessen, & Painter, 1997; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Theme as the point of departure of clause as message which possesses the initial position in the clause (Martin et al., 1997, p. 21-22) has the most influential factor to the rest of the message in a clause (rheme), as Rosa (2013, p. 220) argues that putting the same word in different position of a clause influences the way the readers comprehend the message in the clause.

The interaction of theme and rheme shows the progression of information in a clause which can be either given or new. A theme, according to Egins (1994), contains given information, i.e. the information which is relatively familiar or which has already been mentioned somewhere else in the text. On the other hand, a rheme contains new information. The pattern or interaction of given and new information can be used to guide the readers effectively through the texts (Rosa, 2007, p. 97). Therefore, the writer's failure in controlling the theme and rheme interaction will lead to readers' difficulty in the text comprehension.

The elaborated interaction or progression of theme and rheme is called thematic progression (Egins, 1994, p. 303-305). The important role of thematic progression – simple linear progression, constant continuous theme progression, theme progression with derived themes (hypertheme), and new theme progression (Bloor & Bloor, 1992; Egins, 1994) – in achieving a coherent text has attracted a large number of scholars to do a research on it (cf. Crompton, 2004; Rosa, 2007; Wang, 2007; Hawes, 2015; Sofyan & Tarigan, 2017). However, most of the studies on thematic progression focus on the given language, and academic or scientific writing is the favorite text type. This paper, in particular, studies thematic progression in the translated text whose analysis, undoubtedly, involves the texts both in the source language (SL) and in the target language (TL).

The need of thematic progression is undeniable in translation since it produces a written text that must be coherent. Translation is a process of reproducing or rewriting an original text in another language (House 2001; Munday, 2008) by keeping its original meaning (Larson, 1984). Hence, meaning equivalence is the ultimate goal of any translation practices since translation is a meaning making activity (Halliday, 1992, p. 15). He further emphasizes that no activity is considered to be translation without the results of meaning

creation. Furthermore, the meaning created should represent coherent ideas, and it would not be achieved without specified linguistic theory that concerns with meaning, i.e. systemic functional linguistics or SFL for its valid contribution to a textual practice like that of translation (Halliday, 1992; Hatim, 2001).

Nevertheless, the importance of SFL theories in translation, particularly the theory related to thematic progression, is not fully realized by translators, especially student translators, resulting in less coherent target text (TT). Undeniably, the focus of translation is meaning equivalence; however, such equivalence will not result in a good TT if it is not derived from specified theory of meaning, like the one found in SFL. In addition, the process of rewriting the meaning in the TL will result in a coherent TT by paying attention to the SFL theories, particularly the theory of thematic progression of the clauses in a text. Translation studies involving student translators and the use of SFL approach have been significantly increasing both in product-oriented translation (Braga, Martins, & Pagano, 2006; de Oliveira & Pagano, 2006; Choi, 2013; Marais, 2013; Sofyan & Tarigan, 2017, 2018) and process-oriented translation (Jakobsen, 2002; Rosa, 2017; Rosa, Sinar, Ibrahim-Bell, & Setia, 2017, 2018) since the invention of keylogging tools –e.g. Translog (Jakobsen, 1999, 2011)– and screen recording (Camtasia Studio) and the increasing demand of translation services. Based on the above rationale, this paper aims at finding out how thematic progression is used in the text translated by student translators from English into bahasa Indonesia.

### Methodology

This is a qualitative study using a content analysis as the method. The data were the ST, the English history text entitled ‘Early History of Yellowstone National Park’ downloaded from <http://www.nezperce.com/yelpark9.html> and the TT translated by 10 student translators. They were the third year students of English Department of Universitas Negeri Padang enrolled in the 2017/2018 academic year who had taken three courses on translation and interpreting studies. For more accurate data, Translog was used as the instrument for data collection. In addition, by using Translog, any keyboard activities performed by the student translators, as the process of data collection, would not be missing. The data were then analyzed using a content analysis.

### Results and Discussion

The results of data analysis show that the student translators (hereinafter called translators) shifted the ST thematic progression in their TTs. The indicator of such shifts can be seen in the different thematic progression between the ST and TTs both in terms of types and frequency as displayed in Figure 1.

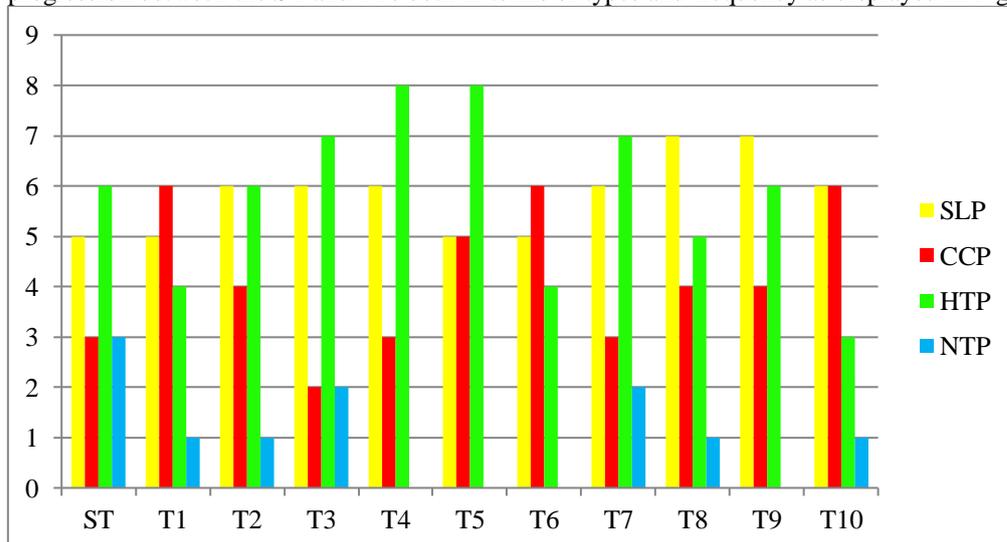


Figure 1. Thematic progression in the ST and TTs produced by student translators

The results of data analysis presented in Figure 1 indicate that hypertheme progression (HTP) is the dominant type of thematic progression used in the translators’ TTs, while simple linear progression (SLP) dominates the ST. Such dominant use of HTP in the TT is caused by the frequent shifts involving constant continuous theme progression (CCP). Study the example in (1).

- (1) ST : The Yellowstone River Valley offered little protection, for several hundred miles, for travelers traveling down the Yellowstone Valley including Indians, as they were subject to attack from warring Indian Tribes like the Blackfeet.

TT : *Lembah Yellowstone River hanya sedikit melindungi, hanya beberapa ratus mil saja, bagi pengelana yang menyusuri sungai Yellowstone termasuk suku Indian, karena pada jalur tersebut mereka dapat diserang oleh suku Indian lain seperti suku Blackfeet.*

The ST in (1) is composed of two topical themes ‘The Yellowstone River Valley’ and ‘they’. The former is the theme derived from the previous clause theme (see Figure 2) which, therefore, shows the progression of theme derived from hypertheme (HTP); and the latter is the theme referring to the previous clause theme (Native Americans) which shows CCP.



Figure 2. The example of dominant use of HTP in the TT

Figure 2 shows that the ST theme ‘The Yellowstone River Valley’ is derived from the clause theme ‘The mountain ranges’; likewise, the TT theme ‘*Lembah Yellowstone River*’ is also derived from the theme ‘*Pegunungan*’. However, the TT topical theme ‘they’ is resulted from the HTP; instead, it is the pronoun of ‘Native Americans’ used in the first clause of the ST (see the ST in the appendix) indicating the use of CCP. Meanwhile, the TT topical theme ‘*pada jalur tersebut*’ is derived from the previous theme ‘*Lembah Yellowstone River*’; in other words, it is part of the Yellowstone River Valley.

In addition, the shift from CCP to HTP shown in Figure 2 is also the result of theme shift, i.e. the shift from unmarked to marked theme (Rosa et al., 2017). The ST topical theme ‘they’ is participant, so it belongs to unmarked theme. This unmarked theme is shifted into a marked theme in the TT because the TT theme ‘*pada jalur tersebut*’ is a circumstance as can be seen in (2).

(2)	ST :		
	as	they	were subject to attack from warring Indian Tribes like the Blackfeet.
	Textual	Topical	Rheme
	Multiple Unmarked Theme		
	TT :		
	karena	pada jalur tersebut	mereka dapat diserang oleh suku Indian lain seperti suku Blackfeet.
	Textual	Topical	Rheme
	Multiple Marked Theme		

The TT theme ‘*pada jalur tersebut*’ (equivalent in meaning with ‘on that track’ in the TL) is not found in the ST, meaning that the translator adds the linguistic element, i.e. circumstance, to the TT. Such addition is intended to clarify the place where the Indians are usually attacked.

The dominant use of HTP in the TT is in line with the findings of Sofyan and Tarigan (2017). They report that the dominant use of HTP in a news item text is characterized by its richer lexical items. Meanwhile, the dominant use of HTP in this text (history text) is caused by the topic of the text that talks about the history of a particular place in Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, USA, i.e. Yellowstone National Park. The use of HTP is particularly useful in describing parts of Yellowstone in order to show the unity of the text. However, the dominant use of HTP progression in Indonesian history text is different from the research report by McCabe (1999) who finds the greater use of CCP in Spanish history texts. In addition, this finding is different from Rosa (2007) reporting that SLP is the type of thematic progression most frequently used in an exposition

text. He also mentions that an exposition text should highlight a dynamic progression of the ideas because it needs a large number of arguments, and to keep the arguments coherent is by the use of SLP (Rosa 2007, p. 7).

Furthermore, it is also found that the number of SLP in the TTs is smaller than in the ST. The smaller number of SLP in the TTs is caused by clause reduction through theme merge which prevents generating the theme from the rheme of the previous clause. One of the examples can be seen in (3).

- (3) ST : The mountain ranges surrounded Yellowstone and its pristine valleys provided shelter, protection, and food.  
 TT : *Pegunungan di Yellowstone dan lembah alam sekitarnya memberikan naungan, perlindungan, dan makanan bagi mereka.*

The ST in (3) is composed of two clauses with two topical themes ‘The mountain ranges’ and ‘its primitive valleys’. Meanwhile, in the TT, the two themes are merged into a theme ‘*Pegunungan di Yellowstone dan lembah alam sekitarnya*’. The theme analysis of the ST and TT in (3) can be seen in (4).

(4) ST :

The mountain ranges	surrounded Yellowstone
Topical	Rheme
Simple Unmarked Theme	

and its pristine valleys provided shelter, protection, and food.

Textual	Topical	Rheme
Multiple Unmarked Theme		

TT :

<i>Pegunungan di Yellowstone dan lembah alam sekitarnya</i>	<i>memberikan naungan, perlindungan, dan makanan bagi mereka.</i>
Topical	Rheme
Simple Unmarked Theme	

The thematic progression shift shown in (4) is the result of translator’s decision to merge two ST clauses into a TT clause. The decision is based on the translator’s understanding that the ST clause second rheme ‘provided shelter, protection, and food’ can be used to explain both of the ST clause themes. In order not to reduce the meaning contained in the ST, the translator adds the word ‘*sekitarnya*’ (equivalent in meaning with ‘surrounding’ in the SL), used as the rheme of the ST first clause, in the TT theme.

Moreover, the results of data analysis presented in Figure 1 also indicate that new theme progression (NTP) is the least frequent type of thematic progressions in the TT produced by the translator. NTP means that the theme contains new information, the information which is never mentioned or used in the previous clauses. NTP reduces the unity of the text which should be, then, avoided. The reason to avoid using new information in theme position is because it fails to show its relation in meaning with the previous clauses in the text. It is just like a sudden coming of a foreign element in the theme position. The shifts done by the translator in relation to new theme progression can be seen in Figure 3.

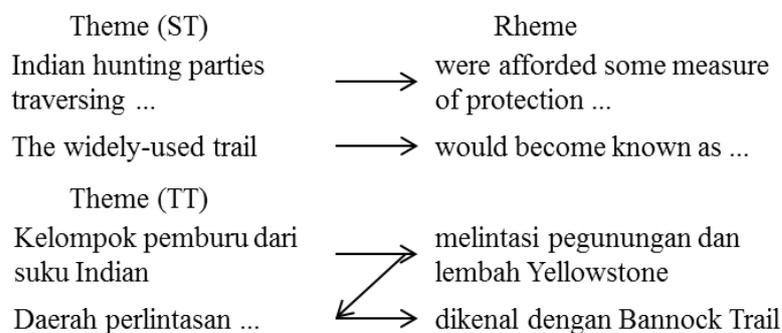


Figure 3. A shift from a NTP to a SLP

The shift displayed in Figure 3 is a shift from NTP to SLP. The ST theme ‘trail’ is a new information because it is never mentioned in the previous clauses, either as a theme or as a rheme. In the TT, the

translator shifts the ST thematic progression by taking one of the information provided in the rheme ‘*melintasi*’ as the theme of the TT ‘*Daerah perlintasan*’. The shift in this thematic progression is a good decision because the TT becomes more coherent as the TT theme contains the given information, a kind of information that should fill the theme position. In addition, the TT theme clearly shows its relation with the previous clause. This is in line with Rosa (2007) and Wang (2007) who consider NTP as one of the problems in a text unity.

In addition to the shift from NTP to SLP, the translators also did a shift from HTP to CCP as shown in Figure 4.

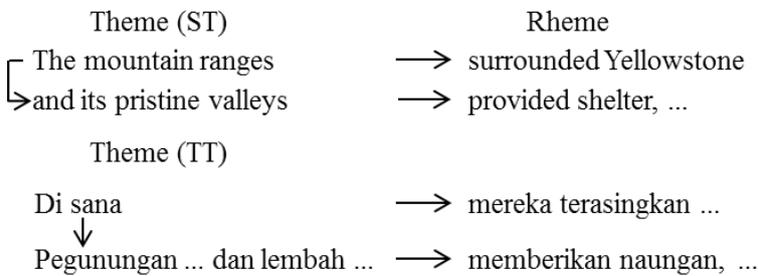


Figure 4. A shift from HTP to CCP

The shift displayed in Figure 4 is motivated by the translator’s decision to combine two ST clauses into one TT clause. The ST theme ‘its pristine valleys’ is a smaller part of the hypertheme in the ST theme ‘mountain’. In other words, the word ‘valley’ mentioned in the ST theme is a part of the ‘mountain’. Meanwhile, in the TT, the translator combines the ST themes as a TT theme ‘*Pegunungan yang mengelilingi Yellowstone dan lembah-lembah alaminya*’. The type of the theme progression in this TT is CCP because the TT theme is similar with the previous TT theme ‘*Di sana*’.

The other thematic progression shift in the translators’ TTs is a shift from SLP to HTP as displayed in Figure 5.

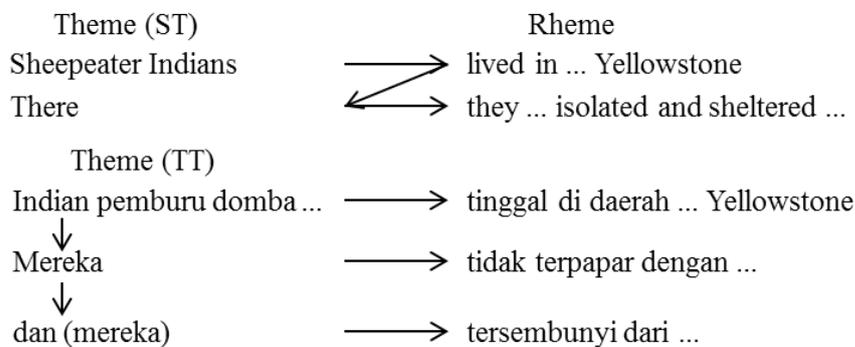


Figure 5. A shift from SLP to CCP

The ST theme ‘There’ is developed using SLP because it is taken from the previous rheme elements ‘in the area of what is now Yellowstone Park’. However, in the TT, the translator uses CCP by writing ‘*mereka*’ (equivalent in meaning with ‘they’ in the TL) as the TT theme, which is the pronoun of the previous TT theme ‘*Indian pemburu domba*’. Not only once, the translator also uses CCP when writing the TT theme ‘*mereka*’ in the next clause, although the theme is not explicitly mentioned.

Although HTP is the dominant type of thematic progression used in the translators’ TTs, there are two unique findings that need to be highlighted in this paper. First, the dominant use of HTP in this text is caused by the many places described in the text. Second, CCP dominates HTP when the text describes the participants involved in the text. These findings eventually suggest two dominant types of thematic progression used in a history text, i.e. HTP and CCP, because such text does not only talk about the history of people but also the history about places. The thematic progression shifts done by the translators are mainly motivated by their efforts to make their TT away from the ST style, and the TT eventually reveals its typical characteristics which are independent from the influence of the ST.

## Conclusions

Based on the research findings, it is concluded that, in terms of thematic progression, the student translators' TTs are dominated by the use of HTP and CCP. This is due to the social function of history text that tells the past historical events involving people and places. The choice of certain types of thematic progression is particularly helpful in building the unity of the text.

## Appendix

Source Text (ST)

Early History of Yellowstone National Park

Native Americans have first claim on the Yellowstone Plateau and lived in the area in peaceful tranquility until the early 1800s--undisturbed by the presence of white men. The Sheepeater Indians, a band of Shoshone, also known as Snake Indians, lived in the area of what is now Yellowstone Park.

There they remained isolated and sheltered from the world around them. The mountain ranges surrounded Yellowstone and its pristine valleys provided shelter, protection, and food as Shoshones, Bannocks, and Nez Perce traversed the protective natural highway en route to the "Buffalo Country" of Wyoming and Montana. To the north of what is now Yellowstone Park flows one of its great rivers, the Yellowstone. The Yellowstone River Valley offered little protection, for several hundred miles, for travelers traveling down the Yellowstone Valley including Indians, as they were subject to attack from warring Indian Tribes like the Blackfeet. Yet, traveling down this valley would have been much preferred. Thus, Indian hunting parties traversing over the mountains and valleys of Yellowstone were afforded some measure of protection from attack. The widely-used trail would become known as the Bannock Trail.

Yellowstone had been discovered and interest in preserving its majestic beauty was growing. Congressional delegate William H. Clagett along with the leadership of Senator Pomery worked to create legislation to create Yellowstone Park. It was created upon a roll call vote with 115 ayes, 65 nays and 60 abstaining on March 1, 1872, and signed by President Ulysses S. Grant.

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