Thematic Organization in MA TEFL Students' Argumentative, Cause and Effect, and Process Types of Writing

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Abstract

It is generally recognized that many second language learners have difficulties with cohesion in academic texts. Writing seems to be the most difficult subject for many students. To produce good writing, it is necessary to know how to organize Theme and Rheme in a text. Thematic structure as an important feature in textual metafunction plays a significant role in promoting the textual coherence. This research is concerned with the insights presenting the relationship between theme and rheme derived from Systemic Functional Linguistics. Halliday (1994) claimed that the structuring of language as a message is realized in the thematic structures of the constituent clauses of a text. To Halliday, the basic unit for thematic analysis is the clause. Thereby, this study was an attempt to compare different thematic types and thematic progression patterns in EFL students' academic writing texts. For this purpose, the researcher selected 30 MA students of English language teaching as the participants of the study after administering a TOEFL test and excluding the outliers. Each participant was required to write three different types of argumentative, process and cause & affect compositions. The collected data were analyzed according to the Thematization process from the textual metafunction aspects. The results showed some differences in the thematic structure of the different types of compositions. The findings of this study have some implications to the EFL students. They can learn to perform the same analysis in their own writings; thus improving cohesion in their own texts. Theme/rheme plays a major role in organizing the message and in enabling it to be communicated and understood clearly.

Keywords: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Thematic structure, Theme, Rheme, Argumentative, process, and cause and effect writing

Introduction

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by Michael Halliday and his colleagues, has had a great impact on language teaching. It analyzes a text, spoken or written, from a functional point of view. It is one of the linguistic theories that paid much attention to the theory of context which provides a very useful theoretical and analytical framework for exploring and explaining how texts mean (Eggins, 1994).

Nunan (2001) has argued that, being able to produce a piece of writing which is coherent, fluent and extended is the most difficult thing to do in language. Writing is a special skill that even native speakers may not master it. In recent years, great achievements have been made in both the theoretical research and the practice of college English writing teaching and learning. However, many of the students' writings are still far from satisfactory. Most of the teachers believe that many of the students do not know how to make a coherent discourse, failing to present their statements or argumentation closely around the topics of the passages in a coherent way. According to Halliday and Hassan (1976), coherence refers to those linguistic features that combine to make a text meaningful to the readers.

To produce good writing, it is necessary to know how to organize Theme and Rheme in a text. Thematic structure as an important factor for textual metafunction plays a significant role in promoting the textual coherence. In fact, the thematic organization of the text is closely connected with discourse coherence. Coherence, on the whole, is regarded as the links in a text that connects ideas and makes the flow of thoughts meaningful and clear for readers (Castro, 2004).

Halliday (1994) has claimed that the structuring of language as a message is realized in the thematic structures of the constituent clauses of a text. Theme/rheme plays a major role in organizing the message and in enabling it to be communicated and understood clearly. He viewed Theme as 'the point of departure of the message', where each clause is said to carry a message. The element which comes first in the clause is the 'Theme', and what comes after it is the 'Rheme'. " Themes and Rhemes of clauses and clause complexes are used for different purposes" (Fries, 2002). The

interaction of Theme and Rheme governs how the information in a text develops.

 According to the Eggins (1994), in describing the structural configurations by which the clause is organized as message, the clause has two functional components of a Theme (point of departure for the message) and Rheme (new information about the theme). According to Halliday(1994), Theme is the element which serves as the point of departure of the message and the remainder of the message, the part in which the theme is developed is called the Rheme. Thompson (1996) defines Theme as the first constituent of the clause. All the rest of the clause is simply labeled as the Rheme. He further mentions that the different choice of Theme has contributed to a different meaning.

Theoretical Background to the Study

Types of theme

Halliday (1994) has differentiated among different kinds of themes and categorized them into *Topical, Interpersonal and Textual types.*

Topical Theme

The ideational stage of the Theme, known as Topical Theme, which is a function from the transitivity structure of the clause, can be recognized as the first element in the clause that expresses some kind of 'representational' meaning (Martin, Matthiessen, & Painter, 1997).

Eggins (2004) states that when an element of the clause, especially at the first position of it, takes a transitivity function we describe it as a topical theme. The first constituent in the clause which takes a transitivity role such as Actor, Behaver, Senser or Circumstance represents a topical theme. An important principle which determines the Theme/Rheme boundary is that *every clause must contain one and only one topical theme.* Once a topical theme is identified in a clause, all the remaining clause constituents are consigned to the Rheme role.

According to Halliday (1994), the clause in its role as a representation sets up a model of human experience which considers the processes that take place around us and inside us. He asserts that these processes are

construed by the grammar in terms of *three* components; the process itself; the participants in that process; and any circumstantial factors such as time or place. As cited above, the principle relevant to the thematic structure is that the Theme always contains one, and only one, of experiential elements of *participant, circumstance*, or *process*. This means that the theme of a clause extends from the beginning of the clause up to the first element that has a function in transitivity. Since a participant in thematic function is called the 'Topic' in a *topic-comment analysis*, the experiential element in the Theme is referred as the *'Topical theme'*. So it can be said that the Theme of the clause consists of the topical theme together with anything else that comes before it.

Interpersonal Theme

The interpersonal Theme is any combination of (i) vocative: typically a personal name used to address which may come more or less anywhere in the clause and is thematic if preceding the topical theme, (ii) modal: any of the modal adjuncts (modal adjuncts are those which express the speaker's judgement towards the relevance of the message) such as probability, usuality, typicality, opinion, admission, and etc. whenever precedes the topical theme, and (iii) mood-marking Theme, a finite verbal operator- temporal and modal- if it proceeds the topical theme or a WH-interrogative or imperative which is not preceded by another experiential element (Halliday, 1994).

According to Eggins (2004), the constituents which can function as interpersonal Themes are the unfused Finite (usually realized by an auxiliary verb in interrogative structures) and all four categories of Modal Adjuncts: *Mood, Vocative, Polarity* (*Yes* and *No* items thatfunction as a sub-category of Modal Adjuncts and stand in for an ellipsed MOOD constituent), and *Comment* (adverbial expressions of attitude which occurs before the first topical theme).

Textual theme

The category of textual elements that can occur in thematic position is the third clause constitute. Textual themes almost always constitute the first part of the Theme coming before any interpersonal theme. They give thematic prominence to textual elements with a *linking* function. They relate

the clause to its context, so they contribute to the cohesion of the text. The two main types of textual elements as theme of a clause are *Continuity adjuncts* and *Conjunctive Adjuncts*. Continuity adjuncts are used in spoken dialogue to indicate that the present speaker's contribution is somehow related to what a previous speaker has said in an earlier turn. The commonest continuity items are: *oh, well,yes* and *no* , when they are not used as stand-ins for clause ellipsis, but as the first item in the clause. In sum, this kind of adjunct indicates a relationship between present and previous discourse (Eggins, 2004).

The second type of textual elements as Theme are cohesive conjunctions which serve to link sentences together and are described as conjunctive adjuncts in Mood analysis of the clause. These kinds of conjunctions are described as textual Themes when they occur before the first topical theme in a clause (Eggins, 2004). According to Halliday (1994), there are some certain elements that have a special status in the thematic structure of the clause. These are either typically or obligatorily thematic elements. Those that are *typically thematic* consist of two sets of items, almost all of them adverbs or propositional phrases, functioning as adjunct in the clause: *Conjunctive adjuncts*(those which relate the clause to the preceding text) are related to the textual theme and *Modal adjuncts* (those which express the speaker's judgement regarding the relevance of the message) are related to the interpersonal theme.

Halliday (1994) also introduces *obligatory thematic elements* that are *Conjunctions,* relating the clause to the preceding clause in the same sentence and *Relatives,* relating the clause in which they occur to another clause. They do not form a single word class; they are *nouns* or *adverbs* such as *nominal group, adverbial group,* and *prepositional phrase*. He specifies the textual components of the theme as (i) Continuative: one of a small set of discourse signalers, *yes, no, well, oh, now*, which signal that a new move is beginning, (ii) Structural: any of the obligatory thematic elements, *conjunctions* and *WH- relative* (but note that the group or phrase containing the relative *is simultaneously the topical theme*), (iii) Conjunctive: one of the *conjunctive adjuncts* preceding the topical theme.

The following example shows the position of the three types of themes in a sentence.

Although	Sometimes	restaurant foods	may be delicious
Textual	interpersonal Theme	Topical	Rheme

Writing

In the second half of the twentieth century, writing, or written discourse, and teaching of writing began to receive a significant attention as a legitimate area of inquiry involving many related fields, such as applied linguistics and composition studies. Although applied linguists have come to recognize the importance of writing in its own right as well as its complexity, writing remains one of the least well- understood subjects in applied linguistics in general (Schmitt, 2002). Writing as a productive skill is more complicated than it seems at first and often seems to be the most demanding skill to obtain in languages learning. It is something most native speakers never master (Pakdel&Khodareza, 2012), since " nowadays we view writing not solely as the product of an individual, but as a cognitive, social and cultural act" (Ahangari, 2008, p.2).

Halliday (1985) considers writing as an activity by which people learn to express and convey their meanings. Writing is a complex process (Richards &Renandya, 2002) through which writers explore thoughts and ideas, and change them into a visible and concrete form (Pakdel&Khodareza, 2012). Hoi- yee and Falvey (1993) with a process-oriented view see writing as the process of utilizing language through which people try to discover meaning and communicate it.

Zamel (1983) describe writing as a process of discovering and creating meaning where ESL skilled writers show the ability to explore and clarify ideas and are capable of attending to language–related concerns primarily after their ideas have been delineated.

Different types of writing

Effective writing is an essential communication skill that is necessary in personal relationships and in almost every profession. There are different types of writing methods or modes of discourse used to develop a good paragraph. Methods of support relate to the purposes, goals, or aims for which the paragraph is being written. There are two main purposes for writing: exposition; to explain and argumentation: to prove or persuade. The most frequently used types of writing include: Definition, Classification, Comparison and Contrast, Process Description, Cause and Effect and Argumentation (Birjandi, Alavi, Salmani-Nodoushan, 2004). This kind of classification also can be referred to as some ways of organizing material into different kinds of structure (i.e., the way a piece of writing is organized and doing or its function in the assignment in how the structure constructs the relationships between different ideas (Creme& Lea, 2008).

Process writing

The Process type of writing is used in describing a series of connected actions in chronological manner. It might be in the form of natural, mechanical or historical processes. This method is used to explain a process or how to do something. It uses transitions of enumeration (e.g., *first, second, third*) and/or time (e.g., *then, next, finally*) and is the right pattern of development when your purpose is to help your readers understand the steps in a process or procedure or to give instructions. Like the other methods, it can also be used to expand the idea in the paragraph (Birjandi& et al, 2004).

Argumentation writing

Argument is frequently concerned with developing a central idea or making a case for a particular point of view that you want your reader to accept and the way in which all the different parts of your assignment will be related in some way to this particular point of view. In such writing, the writer will be concerned with developing a number of themes which support the central idea and thereby provide evidence for the argument which is made (Creme& Lea, 2008). Argumentation is a three-step process: a) present a personal viewpoint, b) explain, clarify, and illustrate that

viewpoint, c) convince the reader that the viewpoint is valid. The first two steps are also used in exposition. The third step is, however, specific to argumentation. The reader will not accept your opinion if you fail to prove it; opinion is almost worthless alone. However, if you can prove the validity of your claim, readers will probably be *persuaded* or even *convinced* to accept your opinion. To be held valid, an opinion needs to be supported by facts, examples, statistics, personal experience, or authoritative sources (Birjandi& et al, 2004).

Cause and effect writing

In a cause and effect type of writing the writer tries to answer questions such as, why did something happen? What were the consequences? ; in other words, 'what caused something' and/or 'what followed' can still be an important way of representing a relationship (Creme& Lea, 2008). The cause and effect type can be used to expand the idea in the paragraph by establishing or explaining what happened as a result of something, it also analyzes the causes or the effects of something or the relationship between both. In this pattern, transitions of logic (e.g., thus, therefore, consequently, as a result) and words and phrases of cause and effect (e.g., because, for the reason that, given that, ineffect) feature prominently (Birjandi& et al., 2004).

Empirical Background to the Study

A number of studies have explored the concept of Theme and Rheme development in the writing projects of learners. Some research projects such as Wang (2007) have tried to examine and explore the insights concerning the relationship between Theme and Rheme derived from SFG, with the aim to improve cohesion in academic texts. The results of the paper showed that by analyzing Theme and Rheme in a text, the students can learn to perform the same analysis in their own writings, and thus improve cohesion in their own work.

Adebola (2011) explored the Theme-Rheme model of textual organization in the structural patterns of information in selected text messages of male and female guided by general linguistic principles of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) framework. He found

some differences in the frequency of the different types of Themes used by male and female writers. He concluded that the analysis of components of textual organization is a tool in enhancing proper understanding of texts and pinning down the intended message of writers through what they front and give thematic status.

Fries (2002) tried to analyze the thematic organization of a fund-raising letter sent out by the political action group to its readers. In this letter the writer tried to persuade the readers to contribute money to this particular project. Fries in his analysis of the Theme and Rheme of this letter, showned that the selection of the Theme and Rheme is purposeful. He concluded that Themes, Rhemes are being used as a position of emphasis, and they relate directly to the general goals of the text.

Denardi, Greggio, DellAagnello, Gil (2007) in their article, discuss the thematic structure of academic abstracts in the light of Systemic Functional Linguistics to verify how this structure contributes, either positively or negatively, to the construction of cohesion. The results indicate that (a) in the analyzed abstracts there is a predominance of declarative and topical unmarked Themes, (b) the thematic organization found is typical from the zigzag pattern, thus introducing new information in every new clause and as such contributing to the achievement of the text information development, and (c) the thematic elements, i.e.Theme and Rheme, succeed each other in the clauses, hence promoting cohesion and coherence to the abstracts and contributing positively to their texture.

Wang (2006) has argued that helping students improve their English writing skills is the responsibility of an English teacher. Language teacher is responsible for helping students develop the linguistic tools that will enable them to learn and share what they have learned. He stressed that the four theoretical concepts of *Theme and Rheme, lexical density, grammatical metaphor, nominalization* are significant grammatical concepts with an effective role in enhancing language and literacy development of EFL or ESL learners but more exercises are needed during the processes of learning and teaching or it's very hard for students to master the features of the languages. He concluded that these elements can be implemented in enhancing language and literacy development. The results of his study

showed that teaching these four concepts enhances students' awareness of English grammatical complexity and their writing development.

Paiva and Freitas (2010) report part of a case study research that examines and proposes the effectiveness of Halliday's textual metafunction as a pedagogical tool for evaluating cohesion and coherence in L2 writing. The results indicate that emphasizing the application of the principles of textual analysis will help teachers visualize students' text organization, avoid a nonproductive focus on students' sentence-level errors, and encourage them to assess students' writing from a discourse-level perspective. They also claim that the textual analysis conducted in this study may offer relevant insights to language educators in terms of writing instruction and evaluation. The results show that emphasizing the application of the principles of textual analysis may serve three purposes. First, it can help teachers provide more productive and effective feedback on students' written production. Second, it allows teachers to visualize students' text organization. Last but not least, it may encourage teachers to evaluate student's writing from a discourse-level perspective rather than from a sentence-level perspective alone.

In sum, regarding all the studies reviewed above, this study has made an attempt to examine the application of different theme types in the three writings types of Iranian MA TEFL students. So the researcher raised the following research questions to answer in this research project.

1. Is there any significant difference among the three types of themes (topical, interpersonal and textual) in terms of the frequency of use in the argumentative type of writing?
2. Is there any significant difference among the three types of themes (topical, interpersonal and textual) in terms of the frequency of use in the cause and effect type of writing?
3. Is there any significant difference among the three types of themes (topical, interpersonal and textual) in terms of the frequency of use in the process type of writing?

Method

This research was inspired by the insights from the theme and rheme concept derived from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), with the aim

of investigating thematic organization in the academic writing of TEFL MA students. It brings to light SFL as one of the linguistic theories which play a significant part in the analysis of texts at grammatical level.

This study was designed within the framework of the quantitative and qualitative research methodology. It adopted clauses as the unit of analysis. The academic writing essays of 30 EFL students were analysed in terms of clause system (theme and rheme) and types of themes included in each clause were identified.

Participants

The participants of the present study were 30 Iranian MA students of TEFL who were doing their post graduate studies at Islamic Azad University of Tabriz. They were at the age range of 25- 35 and their native languages were Azari Turkish and Farsi. They had just passed their academic writing course. They had been selected from among 50 MA students based on their scores on Proficiency test of TOEFL. Those students whose score fell one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected as the participants of the study. Then these participants were required to write three different essays in the argumentative, process, and cause and effect type in three different sessions in the writing class.

Instrumentation

Three different types of academic writing essays of 30 EFL students were used as the data for analysis, and the framework which was used to analyze them was adapted from the Halliday's SFL (1994) and Eggin's (2004) textual metafunction categorization. For the purpose of the study, only the thematic parts of the writings were considered and analyzed.

Procedure

This study was designed within the framework of the quantitative research methodology. It adopted clauses as the unit of analysis. The academic writing essays of EFL students were analyzed in terms of the 'clause system' (theme and rheme) and types of theme included in each clause. To this end, several steps were taken into account. First, for checking the homogeneity of the participants, the researcher administered a TOEFL

test for 50 MA TEFL students. The 30 students whose proficiency scores were one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean were selected as the participants of the study. Then during the three successive sessions the participants were required to write three pieces of writings in the argumentative, process and cause and effect types. The allocated time for each one of the writings was 60 minutes for writing and revising. They wrote their essays in the writing class individually without the use of dictionary and without receiving any help or feedback. They had to write between 200 up to 250 words. After collecting of the data, each essay was closely read by two experts. Each essay was broken into its constituent clauses and boundary of the theme and rheme parts. Then, the theme part was analyzed based on the type of the theme which had been used. Finally, the frequency of occurrences of each theme type in each writing category was counted and was divided by the total number of the t-units of that piece of writing and the obtained numbers were tabulated for further analysis.

Results

Tabulation of the research data

The research data were obtained by analysing the EFL learners' writing samples based on the Halliday's (1994) systemic functional model and Eggin's Textual metafunction (2004). The number of Topical, Textual and Interpersonal Themes in three types of writings was identified, calculated, and analysed.

To answer the research questions one, two and three, the researcher ran three one-way repeated measures ANOVAs.

Comparison of three theme types in the argumentative writing

In the first research question, the researcher compared the frequency occurance of the three Theme types of topical, interpersonal and textual in the argumentative writing of the participants. To answer this question, the researcher conducted a one-way repeated measure ANOVA. For running the repeated measures ANOVA, an assumption should be met through the Mauchly's test of sphericity. Mauchly's Test of Sphericity tests the assumption that each of the within subjects' effect is approximately equally

correlated with every other score. The results of Mauchly's test of sphericity are shown in the following table 4.1.

Table 1
Mauchly's Test of Sphericity on the argumentative writing

Measure:MEASURE_1

Within Subjects Effect	Mauchly's W	Approx. Chi-Square	Df	Sig.	Epsilon[a]		
					Greenhouse-Geisser	Huynh-Feldt	Lower-bound
Argumentative	.838	4.962	2	.084	.860	.909	.500

As shown in Table 4.1, the value of .08, which is larger than .05, indicates that the needed assumptions are met and we can continue for further analysis. So, first, some descriptive analyses were run, the results of which are indicated in the table 4.2 below.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for the mean scores of three theme types in the argumentative writing

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Argumentative topical (1)	.78	.08	30
Argumentative textual (2)	.40	.13	30
Argumentative interpersonal (3)	.05	.05	30

As it is clear from Table, there are some differences among the means of the three theme types (i.e., in the topical theme the mean is .78, in the textual type it is .40, and in the interpersonal type the mean is .05). However, in order to see whether this difference is statistically meaningful or not, the researcher ran a one-way repeated measure ANOVA. The results of this analysis are shown in table 4.3.

Table 3
Multivariate Tests for the comparison of three theme types in the argumentative writing

	Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Argumentative	Pillai's Trace	.983	804.739^a	2.000	28.000	.000	.983
	Wilks' Lambda	.017	804.739^a	2.000	28.000	.000	.983
	Hotelling's Trace	57.481	804.739^a	2.000	28.000	.000	.983
	Roy's Largest Root	57.481	804.739^a	2.000	28.000	.000	.983

The results of the one-way repeated measures ANOVA through the test of Wilks' Lambada, as shown in Table 4.3, indicate that there are significant differences among the three theme types regarding the frequency of use (F (2,28) = 804.73, p= .000). The Wilk'slambada is .017 and partial eta squared is .98, and as p value is less than .05 , implying that there are significant differences in the three types of theme (topical, textual , interpersonal) distribution in the argumentative writings. In order to identify the location of this difference, the researcher conducted the post hoc pairwise comparison, the results of which are shown in table 4.4.

Table 4
Pairwise comparisons of three theme types in the argumentative writing

(I) Argumentative	(J) Argumentative	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^{a}	95% Confidence Interval for Difference^a Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	.386*	.026	.000	.319	.453
	3	.733*	.018	.000	.687	.780
2	1	-.386*	.026	.000	-.453	-.319
	3	.348*	.023	.000	.290	.406
3	1	-.733*	.018	.000	-.780	-.687
	2	-.348*	.023	.000	-.406	-.290

As indicated in table4.4 the difference is between topical and textual, topical and interpersonal as well as between textual and interpersonal types of themes in the argumentative writings. But considering the mean of the three types, the most frequently occurring type is topical, followed by textual and the least frequently occurring theme type in the argumentative is the interpersonal one.

Comparison of the three theme types in the cause and effect writing

The concern of the second research question was to investigate if there was any difference among the use of the three types of themes in the cause and effect type of composition. In other words, the researcher wanted to find out the most frequently used type of the theme in that compositions. In order to answer this question, first the researcher ran a Mauchly's test of Sphericity,which is a prerequisite for the follow up calculations. The results of this analysis are shown in table 4.5 below.

Table 5
Mauchly's Test of Sphericity on the cause and effect writing

Within Subjects Effect	Mauchly's W	Approx.Chi Square	Df	Sig.	Epsilon[a]		
					Greenhouse-Geisser	Huynh-Feldt	Lower-bound
Cause and effect	.972	.803	2	.669	.973	1.000	.500

As shown in table 4.5, the value of .66 indicated that the needed assumption was met, paving the way for so the follow up analyses. The researcher, first, ran some descriptive statistics; the results are which are shown in table 4.6.

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics for the three theme types in the cause and effect writing

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Cause and effect topical	.8533	.11096	30
Cause and effect textual	.4463	.14915	30
Cause and effect interpersonal	.0187	.03702	30

As it is clear from table 4.6, the highest frequency belongs to the topical theme .85, the next highest one belongs to the textual theme .44, and the lowest frequency relates to the interpersonal theme .018. But in order to check whether this difference reached a significant level or not, the researcher ran a one-way repeated measure ANOVA, the results of which are depicted in Table 4.7.

Table 7
Multivariate Tests for the comparison of three theme types in the cause and effect writing

	Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Cause	Pillai's Trace	.982	776.145[a]	2.000	28.000	.000	.982
	Wilks' Lambda	.018	776.145[a]	2.000	28.000	.000	.982
	Hotelling's Trace	55.439	776.145[a]	2.000	28.000	.000	.982
	Roy's Largest Root	55.439	776.145[a]	2.000	28.000	.000	.982

Wilks' lambda test results in table 4.7 indicates that there are significant differences among the three types of themes regarding the frequency of use, because the p value equals .000, which is less than .05, the set value. In order to locate the source of this difference, the researcher ran a post hoc test of pairwise comparison, the results of which are shown in table 4.8.

Table 8
Pairewise comparison of theme types in the cause and effect writing

(I) cause	(J) cause	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.[a]	95% Confidence Interval for Difference[a]	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	.407[*]	.034	.000	.321	.493
	3	.835[*]	.022	.000	.778	.891
2	1	-.407[*]	.034	.000	-.493	-.321
	3	.428[*]	.027	.000	.359	.496
3	1	-.835[*]	.022	.000	-.891	-.778
	2	-.428[*]	.027	.000	-.496	-.359

The results of table 4.8 indicate that the difference between the topical and textual theme and also between the topical and interpersonal is significantly meaningful; likewise, the difference between the textual and interpersonal themes is significant. By looking at the mean differences, it becomes clear that the topical theme had the highest amount of frequency; the textual theme was in the second place, and the interpersonal theme was the least frequently occurring theme.

Comparison of the three theme types in the process writing
In the research question three, the researcher intended to find out any significant difference among the three types of theme types regarding the

frequency of use in the process type of composition. Thus, like the previous analyses, first, the researcher considered the assumption needed to be met in order to employ the one-way repeated measures ANOVA. Table 4.9 shows the results of Mauchly's test of sphericity.

Table 9
Mauchly's Test of Sphericity on the process writing

Within Subjects Effect	Mauchly's W	Approx. Chi-Square	Df	Sig.	Epsilon[a]		
					Greenhouse-Geisser	Huynh-Feldt	Lower-bound
Process	.750	8.067	2	.288	.800	.839	.500

As table 4.9 shows, the p value is .28, which is higher than .05, implying that the condition of running the repeated measures ANOVA was satisfied. Table 4.10 depicts the descriptive statistics for the comparison of theme types in the process writing.

Table 10
Descriptive Statistics for the comparison of theme types in the process writing

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Process topical	.5130	.12049	30
Process textual	.8243	.15952	30
Process interpersonal	.0227	.04168	30

As the descriptive statistics in table 4.10 indicates, among the three types of themes in the process writing, the textual theme had the highest frequency (.82). It was followed by the topical theme (.51), and the least frequently occurring one was the interpersonal theme .02. But in order to see whether this difference had reached a significant level or not, the researcher ran the one-way repeated measures ANOVA, the results of which are shown in table 4.11.

Table 11
Multivariate Tests for the comparison of theme types in the process writing

	Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Process	Pillai's Trace	.981	707.099[a]	2.000	28.000	.000	.981
	Wilks' Lambda	.019	707.099[a]	2.000	28.000	.000	.981
	Hotelling's Trace	50.507	707.099[a]	2.000	28.000	.000	.981
	Roy's Largest Root	50.507	707.099[a]	2.000	28.000	.000	.981

The results of this analysis indicates that there were significant differences among the three types of themes regarding the frequency of use (F(2,28)=707.09, Wilks' Lambda.=019, p =.000). Then in order to identify the location of this difference, the researcher ran a pairwise comparison, the results of which are shown in table 4.12.

Table 12
Pairwise comparison of theme types in the process writing

(I) process	(J) process	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.[a]	95% Confidence Interval for Difference[a]	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	.309[*]	.035	.000	.220	.398
	3	.800[*]	.022	.000	.745	.855
2	1	-.309[*]	.035	.000	-.398	-.220
	3	.492[*]	.031	.000	.412	.571
3	1	-.800[*]	.022	.000	-.855	-.745
	2	-.492[*]	.031	.000	-.571	-.412

The results of the pairwise comparison indicated that the difference between the topical and textual themes, as well as the difference between the topical and interpersonal themes was statistically significant. In the same way, the difference between the textual and interpersonal themes had reached the significant level. By a close look at the mean scores, it becomes clear that the highest frequency belonged to the textual theme, followed by the topical theme and interpersonal theme, respectively.

Discussion

The descriptive statistics of the use of topical theme in three writing types of process, argumentative, and cause- effect essays revealed that the

use of topical theme in the argumentative and cause-effect type of writings was more than the other two (textual and interpersonal) theme types, but in the process type of writing, the textual theme had the highest frequency of occurrence.

With regard to interpersonal theme, the analyses unfolded that the frequency of the use of this kind of theme was equally low in all three types of writing. As for the textual theme, the statistical tables showed similar results for the argumentative and cause-effect types, while the use of the theme was highest in the process type of writing.

Regarding the topical theme, which was the most frequent one in each type of the writings, the findings of this study are in line with those of McCabe and Hillman (2007), who examined topical, textual and interpersonal differences between a news report and an editorial. They focused on the textual metafunction through theme choice, the use of textual adjuncts, and interpersonal metafunction. They claimed that authors tend to choose topical themes as the point of departure in news article. This conclusion is consistent with the results of the present study, which shows that the topical theme, compared to other types of theme, has the highest frequency and is similarly used in three types of writings. These similarities might be attributed to the same genre, i.e. academic writing to which these pieces of writings belonged. It is supported by the idea put forward by Jallilfar (2010), who asserted that texts of the same genre have similar contextual configurations. Another reason for the frequent use of the topical theme can be related to the choice of nominal group realizing the topical theme of the main clause (subject/theme) which is used to encode the writers' view point.

According to Halliday (1994), the most usual form of marked theme is an adverbial group, prepositional phrase, functioning as adjunct in the clause. With regard to marked topical theme, the results of this study revealed that this type of theme was almost equal in each of the three types of writing, but the unmarked topical theme, which had the greatest frequency among other types, had similar percentages in the process and cause-effect types and the lowest measure in the argumentative type.

As suggested by Halliday (1994), theme is an obligatory part of a clause. Topical theme can take every element including the subject, which can be either marked or unmarked. Halliday (1994) mentions that unmarked topical theme is a noun or nominal group which function as a subject and that subject is the normal theme choice. According to the findings of this study, it can be supposed that the extensive choice of unmarked topical theme serves as the purpose of introducing the topics of the essays and provides the frames for interpretation of the rest of the message. Moreover, it can be assumed that the choice of unmarked topical themes helps the writer develop the text and produces logical connections of information between clauses. It can be concluded that the frequent use of theme indicates the writer's stance on the issue and specifies the reader's interpretation of the following clauses. Also, the findings of this research are in line with the analysis of textual metafunction of human rights discourse of KhabazAzar (2012), in which unmarked topical theme had the highest frequency among other types.

In terms of the textual themes, the analysis revealed that textual theme has the most frequency in process type writing. It enhances connectivity between ideas in the text. The degree of an academic text can be seen through the total number of clauses found in the sentences. If in a text the total number of the clauses are more than the total number of the sentences, the text will have much more complete information, in other words the more clauses found in the text, the more complete the information contained (Dalimunte, 2013). It can be concluded that in the process type writings with the textual metafunction clauses as the most frequent one, the texts are more informative, and thereby use more cohesive devices to relate information to the other one.

Interpersonal metafunction is concerned with the interaction between speaker and listener. This type of theme is underestimated in students' writings suggesting the actual tone of students' writings. The interpersonal theme is less used because it concerns with personal judgment or opinion which is subjective (Dalimunte, 2013).This finding is in line with Coffin and Hewings (2005) finding. They found 4.25% interpersonal themes in the students' writings. The reason could be that where the interpersonal stances are signaled by pronouns such as *I* and *we*in theme position, they are often

categorized as topical not interpersonal themes. This finding was in contrast to North's (2005). In the analysis of students' essays, she found 9.75% interpersonal themes in the students' essays (p.7). The difference between the present study's results and those of North's could suggest a low degree of personality in the students' writings of this study, and can also be explained in terms of generic differences, that is, students' writings are not reader friendly.

One of the important implications that can be drawn from the findings of this study relates to the insights that this research can provide into the way students view writing.

Lores (2004) brings about justification in claiming that thematic analysis is a useful tool for investigating genres and stresses its significance as part of a writer's available linguistic resources that can contribute to the writers' production of effective local and global discourse.

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Biodata

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