Theme and Rheme : Types and Problems in EFL University Students' Written Texts

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الخلاصة

بنيت هذه الدراسة على التكرار والتحليل الوظيفي للعنونة المؤكدة(thematization) في النصوص الكتابية لطلاب قسم اللغة الانكليزية ،كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية ،جامعة البصرة. وتستكشف الأفكار بشأن العلاقة بين المسند اليه والمسند (theme and rheme)) والمشتقة من نظرية النحو الوظيفي– التعددي الانظمة (Systemic-Functional Grammar Theory) . وقد استخدم الباحث ثمانين نصاً مقالياً وإنشائياً للتحليل. وكان التحليل التجريبي هو الوسيلة الرئيسية للكشف عن العديد من المشاكل المشتركة للتلاحم والتماسك النصي عند الكتابة بلغة أجنبية. أظهرت النتائج بان نوع المسند اليه غير المؤكد (the unmarked Themes) قد هيمن بوجوده على أنواع المسند اليه (theme) في نصوص الطلاب بينما سجلت المجاميع الاسمية (nominal group) أعلى نسبة من نوع المسند اليه المؤكد (topical theme type). فيما يخص الجزء الثاني من البحث ، فقد عينت أنواع عديدة من مشاكل المسند اليه مثل : مشكلة الموضوع الجديد(brand new theme) ، ومشكلة الاستخدام المتزايد لكلمة "There" ، ومشكلة خلو المسند إليه (عدم وجوده) وعدم تطوره ، وأخيرا مشكلة إيجاد المسند اليه مع عدم وضوح المشار إليه .

Abstract

This study is built on frequency and functional analysis of thematization in English students' written texts in Basra University, College of Education for Humanities, Department of English. It explores the insights concerning the relationship between Theme and Rheme derived from theory of Systemic-Functional Grammar. Eighty written texts-essays and compositions- were deployed for analysis. Then, the empirical analysis will be the main code to uncover several common problems for textual cohesion and coherence in FL writing. The results showed that the unmarked Themes dominated the existence of theme in the students' texts, while the nominal group recorded the highest percentage of the topical theme type .Within the second part of the study , different types of theme problems were identified like: the problem of the brand new theme, the over-use of "*There*" in the theme selection , empty rheme and non-constant progression ,and themes with unclear reference.

Theme and Rheme ……………………….…………………………………...……

1. Introduction

Writing is a demanding activity especially for learners of a second or a foreign language and yet it is a skill that they have to master in order to do well in content courses especially at the tertiary level of education. The ability to write in-depth academic essays is widely regarded as one of the hallmarks of a higher education. So, when our students are asked to write, they find that the most difficult part of the writing task is starting the writing task itself. Students suffer from 'writers' block', awed by the fact that they have to write out their thoughts on a blank piece of paper. It is essential that most of university students are unable to write clearly about topics related to their study fields. Thus, choosing proper and appropriate words would help learners to convey their intended meaning. If, on the other hand, words are inappropriately and inaccurately selected, they lead to the confusion and segmentation of meaning.

In the EFL writing setting, we find that learners often write compositions or essays that consist of sentences which are not connected together into a cohesive text. Yes, it is true that writing is difficult as it requires intense, active thinking throughout a continuous productive process in which thoughts and ideas are transferred into written communication, but not just words and letters on paper. However, in most cases, students "believe that writing is a natural gift rather than a learned skill" (Langan, 2000:12). They add that they do not have the talent of writing. As a result, these students do not write and do not try their best to do so. Nevertheless, it is claimed that writing can be mastered through practice, and all what it needs is special attention from both instructors and students. While ELT writing materials provide some focus on cohesive devices, little attention is paid to the progression of information in texts.

2. The Definition of Theme and Rheme

Before starting the definition of these two terms, it is necessary to mention their origin. Jianghong and et al (2005: 18) report that the term pair was made widely known by the work of Vilém Mathesius and others in the Prague School, in the first systematic attempt of studying information structure (known as functional sentence perspective in the Prague School). Mathesius describes Theme as:

> *that which is known or at least obvious in a given situation*
> *and from which the speaker proceeds.*

(Daneš, 1974: 106)

According to Glottopedia *"it was not coined by Mathesius, but by Hermann Ammann. The term pair theme and rheme first appeared in Ammann (1928:3), where the author points out that this terminology was foreshadowed in Ammann (1911/1912)."*

Theme and Rheme ....

The terms *theme* and *rheme* have been defined according to various criteria: In the Systemic Functional Grammar, *Theme_* is viewed as "the starting point of the message" (Halliday 1994: 38) and as "an orienter to the text" (Fries 1995:318), providing a framework for the interpretation of the message. These two characteristics of *Theme* have led to the formulation of hypotheses concerning its usefulness as a guide to the understanding of the text. As a device for organizing meanings, *theme* does not only operate at the local level, indicating how the writer has chosen to order information within the clause, but also helps to structure the flow of information in ways that shape interpretation of the text as a whole (Martin 1992; 1995); whilst *rheme* is simply defined as the remaining part that develops the theme (Jianghong and et al ,2005: 18 ; Wang, 2007:166; Alonso and Mccabe (2003:2). In other words, the *rheme* is what you are saying about the *theme* - it typically contains unfamiliar or new information, what you want to tell your reader. The following table summarizes the terminology used:*\

The boy	is riding the horse	Used by
Topic	Comment	Sgall et al(1973)
Theme	Rheme	Halliday(1967)
Old	New	Chafe (1970)
Given	New	Haviland and Clark (1974), Clark and Haviland (1977),and Allerton (1978)
Logical subject	Logical object	Chomsky (1965)
Focus	-----	Sidner (1978a,1978b)
Psychological subject	Psychological predicate	Hornby(1972)

Figure (1): (Adapted from Hirst, 1981: 51)

In English, the *theme* usually initiates the sentence and the *rheme* appears at the end. The decision about which part of the sentence to make the *theme* and which part that makes the *rheme* depending on the information that needs to be communicated.The following two sentences are good examples:

1. The M1 goes from London to Leeds.
2. The motorway from London to Leeds is called the M1.

 *While the words in each column describe closely related concepts, it should not be inferred that they   are precisely synonymous

The *theme* in sentence 1 is "the M1". The reader has been introduced to the M1 but does not know where it goes and therefore he needs to be told. Such information is called   the *rheme*. In sentence 2, the *theme* is "the motorway from London to Leeds". The reader knows there is a motorway from London to Leeds but does not know what it is called, thus "the M1" is the *rheme* of the second sentence.

Theme and Rheme …………………..………………………….…..………

The term "Thematisation" is not only manifested at the sentence level, but in paragraphs and the whole text. Halliday (1994:54) in his book *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* , argues that "the topic sentence of a paragraph is nothing other than its theme". Thus the main idea of a paragraph is simply its theme.

3.Theme Types

Nikmah (2010: 8), following Halliday's categorization of theme , maintains that the theme can be classified into three categories; topical theme which consists of marked and unmarked theme, interpersonal theme and textual theme which consists of structural conjunction, relative, conjunctive adjunct and continuative.

It is evident from the above context that there are three possible themes are found in English .They are: **Topical theme** (SVOA elements) which is functioning as the point of orientation for the experiential meanings of the clause**.** It occupies the first position of a clause as in the following declarative clauses:

The cigarettes	contain very harmful materials.
Smoking	causes many diseases .
Examination	is a way to test the ability of the examinees.
Topical Theme	**Rheme**

(Taken from students' texts)

Topical theme is not always realized by nominal groups, but it can also be realized by adverbial groups , prepositional phrases or nominalization of a clause as in the following examples (the first two ones are prepositional phrases ,the third and fourth ones are adverbial clauses while the last ones are nominal groups):

In the holiday,	I decided to visit……
At morning,	my mother came……
Now,	it is clear for anyone who is smoking…..
Nowadays,	Higher education is a huge question…
My friend who is very close to me	is my mother.
How a teacher can evaluate his students	is throughout testing their ability…..
Topical Theme	**Rheme**

(Taken from students' texts)

Topical theme may also co-exist with the other two themes, i.e textual and interpersonal themes. Therefore, they are termed as Multiple Theme as it is presented in the following example:

Nor	Do	I	know…..
Textual	**Interpersonal**	**Topical**	
		Theme	**Rheme**

Theme and Rheme …………………………………………………………………..………

<div align="center">(Multiple Theme taken from students' texts)</div>

Interpersonal theme (vocatives, modal, or mood marking) functions to code the speaker's or writer's personal judgment on meaning as in the following examples:

I hope that		would be of use ….
Please,		show me the way ….
Interpersonal theme		**Rheme**

<div align="center">(Taken from students' texts)</div>

and **Textual theme** (discourse markers and conjunctions) relates the meaning of the particular clause to the other parts of the text . It does not express interpersonal or experiential meaning , but it performs cohesive work by connecting one clause to its context (Eggins : 2004) .

Finally,		one of them	told me…
But	unfortunately	I	couldn't utter a word
Textual	**Interpersonal**	**Topical**	
Theme			**Rheme**

<div align="center">(Taken from students' texts)</div>

The following table (which is proposed by Halliday,1994:54 and modified in Wang , 2006:5-6) is the most proper one which gives equivalent information about themes and their components.

Table (1):Components of a multiple Theme (M. A. K. Halliday , 1994: 54)

Metafunction	Component of Theme
Textual	_ **Continuative** (discourse signallers/ Markers: yes, no, well, oh, now, which signal that a new move is beginning) _ **Structural** (conjunction: and , or, nor, either, neither, but, yet, so, then, when, while, before, after, until, because, even, in case… or WH-relative: which, who, whos**e,** when, where, that…**)** _ **Conjunctive**: relate the clause to the preceding text such as that is, for instance; rather; in any case; in fact; in short; actually; and, also, moreover; but, on the other hand; instead; meanwhile, then; likewise; so; if; yet; as to that;
Interpersonal	_ **vocative:** any item used to address such as a personal name. _ **modal:** any of the model Adjunct

	which expresses the speaker's judgment regarding to relevance of the message such as probably, possibly, certainly, perhaps, maybe; usually, sometimes, always; occasionally, generally regularly; of course…; I think, in my opinion, personally; frankly, to be honest; honestly; please, kindly; evidently; hopefully; in general; strictly speaking; wisely; to my surprise… _ **mood-marking: a finite verbal operator** _**WH (interrogative or relative)**
Experiential	**Topical (participant, circumstance, process)**

In addition to the former classification, Theme can also be categorized into unmarked and marked. It is based on theme markedness . This category becomes important because thematic progression analysis is based on the unmarked Topical Theme in clauses (Sugijarto, 2010:17).The following table shows examples of unmarked and marked themes in clauses:

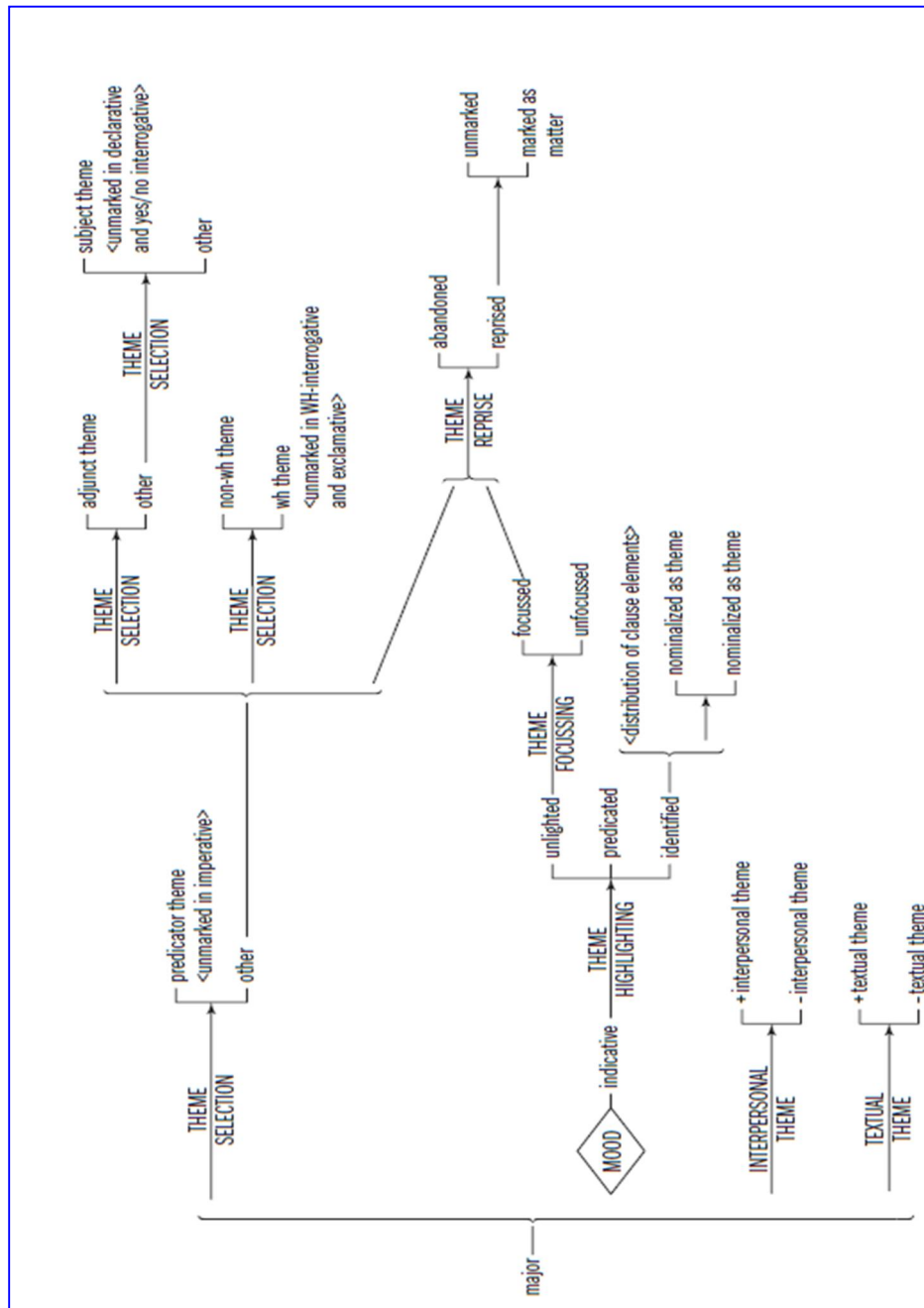Table (2): Marked and Unmarked Themes (Adopted from Halliday, 2004 with modification*)

	Clause	Class	Clause example
Unmarked theme	Declarative clause	Nominal group pronoun, common or proper noun as Head	I /had a little nut-tree
			there /were three jovial Welshmen
			a wise old man (john) /lived in a house in the wood
		Nominalization	what I want / is a proper cup of coffee
	Exclamative as the sub -category of declarative clause	Adverbial phrase	How carefully/ he seems to greet.
	Interrogative clauses	WH-element	where / did you get that from?
		Finite operator	Could/ you/ eat a whole packet of tim tams?
			Has/ he/ got the car back by the way? Are/ they/ still together?
	Imperative clauses	Verbal group	Answer /all five questions!
			Let's/ not quarrel about it!
Marked theme	Declarative	adverbial group	merrily / we roll along
		prepositional phrase	on Saturday night / I lost my wife
		nominal group: pronoun as Head	Eliot / you're particularly fond of All this /we owe both to ourselves and to the peoples of the world [[who are so well represented here today]]
		nominalization	what they could not eat that night # the Queen next morning fried

Interrogative clauses	Non-finite element	After tea/ will you tell me a story?
	Non-wh-element	In your house/ who does the cooking?
Imperative clauses	Non-finite element	Your kids/ keep out of the way! First/ catch the fish.

*Instead of having different tables for the marked and unmarked themes as they are
shown in Halliday (2004) , the researcher puts them in one table.*

4- Thematic progression

One of the writers' tasks is to know how to hook the sentences together in a way that enables them to create a text with both unity of texture and unity of structure. Eggins (1994) believes that "***the flow of information in a sentence from Theme to Rheme is important to convey the message effectively. The exchange of information between Theme and Rheme pairings in a text is called Thematic Progression***" (in Wang, 2007: 168)

Thematic progression, as understood by Daneš (1974), is the study of how Theme in a text is developed from clause to clause to build larger stretches. Eggins (1994) prefers to use Thematic development instead of Thematic progression. She states that the choice of Theme for any individual clause is generally related to the way information is being developed over the course of the whole text. Daneš (1974) presents three models of Thematic Progression. These are re-iteration, zigzag, and multiple patterns. (in Nikmah, 2010:18)

McCabe (1999) modified the thematic progression scheme proposed by Daneš (ibid) and identified four main patterns of thematic progression: 'constant TP', 'linear TP' , 'split theme TP', and 'split rheme progression' that might manifest differently in different genres. These thematic progression are:

1) Constant thematic progression: The theme of one clause is derived from the theme of the previous clause;

    T ----- R1
    T ----- R2
    T ----- R3

Theme	Rheme
Salim Mohammed	was born in UAE.
He	was very interested in learning English.
And (he)	always tried to find opportunities to speak English with his friends.
When he	was twelve,
he	could communicate with his foreign friends freely.

Figure (3): Constant Thematic Progression

2) Linear thematic progression: The theme of one clause is derived from the rheme of the previous clause;

```
T1------R1
      T2 (R1) ------ R2
            T3 (R2) ------ R3
```

Theme	Rheme
Outside my window	is a big lawn.
In the middle of the lawn	is a flower bed.
The flower bed	is full of roses.
The roses	are my favourite flowers.

Figure (4): The Linear or 'zig-zag' Progression

3) Derived hyperthematic progression: Particular themes in subsequent clauses are derived from a hypertheme or from the same overriding theme;

```
T1 -------- R1
    T2 --------R2
T3 --------R3
```

Theme	Rheme
The play (T1)	was interesting,(R1)
But I(T2)	didn't enjoy it.(R2/T1)
A young man and a young woman(T3)	troubled me.(R3/T2)
I (T4)	turned round and looked at them,(R4/T3)
But they(T5)	didn't pay any attention to me.(R5/T4)

Figure (5): Derived Hyperthematic Progression

4) Split rhematic progression: The rheme of the first clause is split into two items, each in turn being taken as a theme element in subsequent clauses.

Theme	Rheme
There (T1)	are four basic types of clowns.(R1)
Whiteface clowns(T2/R1.1)	cover their face with white make-up(R2)
and (they)(T2/R1.1)	do a lot of physical stunts like leaping and tumbling.(R3)
Auguste clowns(T3/R1.2)	wear colourful, ill fitting clothing and oversized

	shoes.(R4)
They (T3/R1.2)	also have bulbous noses and brightly coloured wigs.(R4)
Character clowns(T4/R1.3)	make fun of the human condition(R5)
and (they)(T4/R1.3)	may impersonate characters such as a cowboy, fireman, tramp or policeman.(R6)
The more recent "New Vaudeville" clowns(T5/R1.4)	involve the audience in the performance.(R7)

Figure (6) : The Split Rheme Pattern

He later proposed a fifth category to Danes's, split theme progression, where the theme of the first clause is split into two or more ideas, and these ideas are developed in the themes of subsequent clauses (Jalilifar, 2010 a: 34 and Jalilifar, 2010 b: 13).

Theme	Rheme
1-Many of the changes to Earth that concerns scientists	has the potential to rob the planet of its biological richness.
The destruction of Earth' s ozone layer for example,	could contribute to the general process of impoverishment by allowing ultraviolet ray to harm plants and animals.
And global warming	could wipe out species unable to quickly adapt to changing climates.
Clearly, protecting	will come only through coordinated international efforts to control human population, stabilize the composition of the atmosphere, and preserve intact Earth's complex web of life.
2-Bill and Mary	had opposite ideas about the weather:
He	was a pessimist
and she	was an optimist.

Figure (7): The Split Theme Progression

5.The Problems of Misusing Theme and Rheme

The problems of inappropriately handling the flow of Theme and Rheme are quite common among inexperienced writers. Bloor & Bloor (1992) identify three common problems resulting from the misuse of theme and rheme: *The problem of the brand new Theme* , *The problem of the double Rheme* , and *The problem of the*

empty Rheme. Other related problems were identified by Belmonte and Mccabe-Hidalgo (1998): *Over-use of constant progression, Confusing selection of Discoursal and Topical Themes, Intervening material between mention in Rheme and subsequent thematization , Over-use of* 'There', *Themes with unclear reference.*

All the problems that are elicited in students' writings are going to be defined, identified and discussed in the second part of the practical side of this study.

6.Previous Studies

Many previous studies carried out tackling and focusing on the concept of Theme and Rheme as a strategy for observing coherence and most of them came out with the importance of teaching Theme and Rheme for EFL learners .For example, Jalilifar (2010a: 44) suggests that " thematic organization is a highly effective *and valuable technique in writing as it enhances connectivity between ideas in the text".*

Also, Wang (2007: 173-174) says that *"the notion of Theme can show students how to read effectively by paying attention to the first paragraph, the topic sentence of each paragraph, and Theme of a clause. Generally, the first paragraph orients a reader to what the text will be about and predicts the topic sentences of each paragraph of the text. A topic sentence orients a reader to what a paragraph will be about, and it tends to predict the Themes of the sentences in the paragraph. Theme of a clause orients a reader to the message in clause."* and Dvorak (2008) support this idea to improve students' writing.

Morover , there is a study done by Jianghong and etal (2005) in which they maintain in their conclusion (p.21) that ***"the application of theme –rheme theory provides teachers with a good approach to teaching reading. By analyzing thematic structure in the text, readers can not only identify the important information and track the writer strain of thought, but also accelerate their reading speed. Due to limited short-term memory, following the Themes of sentences and paragraphs enables readers to remember the most important information, and therefore it conduces to comprehension improvement."***

7. The Data

7.1 Participants

Four groups of 80 male and female undergraduate EFL students took part in the study. Each group consists of (20) students .The four groups are from first, second, third and fourth stages, Department of English, College of Education , Basra University. The participants of this study range in ages from (18 to 23) years old. All of them were taught the features of a good paragraph and how to write correctly.

7.2 Procedure

Theme and Rheme …………………………………………………..……

The research described in this paper centers on texts produced by students as part of their course assessment. At the beginning, the participants were informed about the two terms "theme and rheme" and their meanings. Then, the participants were asked to write a paragraph (written by first year students), a composition(written by second and third year students), and an essay (written by fourth year students).The topics were Smoking and Friendship(for first and second year students), and Examination as an Evaluation System(for third and fourth year students).

The written texts- paragraphs, compositions and essays- are analyzed to find out the thematic progression of each clause and to identify the theme- rheme problems in students' writing. In analyzing the data, the writer uses distributional method by dividing the data into some lingual units. Moreover, the writer uses deletion technique in order to know the element which is crucial in conveying the message of the clause. The following steps summarize the procedure which was applied in designing the research:

1- dividing all sentences into clauses.
2- numbering all the clauses.
3- rewriting and labeling the parts of the clause based on thematic structure.
4- identifying theme types in the written texts.
5- identifying theme-rheme problems.
6- drawing conclusion

7.3 Research Questions

The focus of this research is two-pronged. The first part is to identify and analyze the theme types in students' writings. The second part is to identify the theme-rheme problems. The progression of information in English texts is going to be explored and to show how it can serve to providing greater cohesion in our students' writings.

7.4 The Analysis

7.4.1 Theme Types

The overall methodology of this study is quantitative, in that things are counted. However, it is not a statistical analysis; the quantitative data is used as a basis for inter- pretation, to link the textual elements with the context and situation of the text. The texts were analyzed according to the Theme of the independent clause and everything up to and including the Subject of the independent clause was categorized as theme. The *Theme* of the main clause was analyzed through reference to the roles which the *Theme* performed, i.e. textual, interpersonal, marked and or Subject/Theme. Anything not considered *Theme* was considered *Rheme.* The total number of the clauses were (648) clauses which were analyzed for Theme types.

Theme and Rheme ……………………………………………………………..……

Topical Themes were subdivided into Subject/Theme and marked Theme. As Halliday (1994) states , the Subject is typically the unmarked Theme of the clause where the two functions Subject and Theme are mapped onto each other. With the exception of textual and interpersonal Themes, anything other than Subject in initial position is referred to by Halliday (ibid) as a marked Theme. In the present study, the Subject of the independent clause is labelled Subject/Theme. Ideational elements in thematic position that are not mapped onto the Subject have been termed marked Theme.

As would be expected, the highest frequency of occurrence of Theme choices in the present corpus were unmarked Themes and it dominates the existence of theme in the students' texts. It occurs (493) times (%76.080).This finding is supported by Sugijarto (2010:59) and Forey's (2002: 131) where the majority of these were simple Themes. Every clause has a Subject/Theme even if it is an ellipsed Subject/Theme. The different types of Subject/Themes were counted, and shown as in the following table:

Table (2) : The Number and Percentage of Topical Theme Type

Topical Theme type	No. of occurrence	Percentage
Nominal group	215	%46.336
Personal pronouns	188	% 40.517
Referential items	50	% 10.775
Ellipsed Subjects	0	% 0
Wh-questions	11	% 2.370
total	464	%100

Although personal pronouns form a nominal group, they will be treated as a separate category as it is shown in the table above. It is obvious that the nominal group occupies dominantly the highest percentage of the topical theme type (%46.336). The use of personal pronouns indicates the notion of showing the writers' view point, as in the following examples:

Table (3): (Topical Theme, nominal group and personal pronouns, taken from students' texts)

Theme	Rheme
My favouirte friend	has three main features.
The second feature	is being ready to help….
Smoking	is one of the worst habits in our world.
She	can sing and….
I	admire my friend for three….
He	is talented.
He	is the best student in the….

Theme and Rheme …………………………………………………………..………

Referential items did not occur as frequently in the texts, which shows that the students preferred to re-write the subject again rather than using the referential items .

No imperative topical themes were found in students writing. The dominant use of topical theme may indicate that the students write effectively to orient the readers to understand the texts.

While a textual Theme is any combination of Conjunctive Adjunct, Conjunction and/or relative, Conjunctive Adjuncts and conjunctions are particularly significant as Theme since they are an important means for expressing logical links between the ideational content of the messages in a text and thereby helping the reader understand the text (Forey, 2002: 122 and Sugijarto, 2010: 62-63). When Textual Themes such as *however*, *but*, *in addition* and *and* occur at the beginning of clauses they either tell the reader (or listener) that this message is contrary to the previous message, or that its meaning is additional. Thus they would help the readers to interpret the meaning of the message.

The rating of Textual Themes reads (215) (%33.179) of the total (648) clauses in the corpus. Textual Theme in the students' texts can be found in the following examples:

Table (4): (Textual Theme, taken from students' texts)

Theme		Rheme
Textual Theme	Topical Theme	
After that,	I	sat in my stage and watched the teacher.
Then,	the teacher	started to give us some constructions.
And in all my exams,	I	took full marks.
Also,	I	like to read horror stories like….
Now,	any person	can be aware of the effect of smoking on his life.
However,	the people who smoke	will lose their money and health.

It was found that additive and causal conjunctions (**and, although ,so, thus,…ect**) were more frequent than adversative conjunctions (**but,however,yet, nevertheless,..ect**).In such case, it is evident that the students are trying to

elaborate why and how a phenomenon happens in obvious connected sentences.

The frequency of interpersonal themes was very low 20 (3.086%) of the total (648) clauses in the corpus. Most of them were containing the words (I believe, I think, ect). Such result suggests a low degree of personality in the students' writings of this study. This is due to the fact that the students were taught to be formal in their writing , thus they produce less reader friendly texts.

Interpersonal Theme		Rheme
So,	I hope that	a new way of examining is going to be applied.
unfortunately	I	couldn't utter a word.

7.4.2 Theme Problems:

The second part represents the analysis of the students' writings. Through this analysis, a number of problems are identified, they either relate to Thematic selection, Thematic progression, or both. Finding problems of inappropriately handling the flow of Theme and Rheme is quite common among inexperienced writers. Bloor and Bloor (1992), for example, identify three common problems resulting from misuse Theme and Rheme. Moreover, Belmonte and Mccabe-Hidalgo (1998) add more problems to those which have been mentioned by Bloor and Bloor .Titles problems, which were elicited in students' writing, are explained and illustrated below:

7.4.2.1 The Problem of the Brand New Theme

It is common in the work of inexperienced writers, who put new information in Theme position as in the following examples:

 - **The most important way of evaluating learners is examination.**
 - **Three main features should be found in my close friend.**
 - **The students' level can be judged through exam.**
 - **Every year, a lot of people died because of smoking.**
 -**How much students understand the material can be easily shown through examination**

All these sentences are the first (mostly topic) sentences in the first paragraph of students' writings.The Themes **'The most important way of evaluating '**, **'Three main features'**, **'The students' level'**, **'Every year, a lot of people'** and **'How much students understand the material'**, are brand new themes.

7.4.2.2 The Over-Use of "There" in the Theme Selection

Out of (80) written texts, there are (70) clauses starting with "There" word. The students regard beginning a sentence with 'there ' an easy way to start a new idea or to begin a paragraph. So, it occurs very frequently in their writing. The following examples illustrate this fact :

Theme and Rheme …………………………………………………………………………...……

-There are different opinions about this matter. Some would say that exams are the best way to evaluate students. There are others who would prefer different techniques in evaluating their students except exams.

   The third sentence in this text could be changed to be a part of the second sentence as in "and others would prefer…..   rather than exams."

-*There* are three main features in my close friend.

- There are different levels in evaluation.

- Since , there is an exam at the end of each course,……

-There are two reasons to consider smoking as a bad habit.

- There are a lot of features …..

- There are three reasons why people should not smoke.

7.4.2.3 Empty Rheme and Non-Constant Progression

   It is common in students' writings, who fail to represent 'new' information in Rheme position .Examples:

- **Lack of qualified teachers is a serious problem.**

- **My close friend' Selma' is the closest one.**

- **Friendship relation is a relation between two friends.**

   The Rhemes **'is a serious problem','is a relation between two friends'** and **' is the closest one'** fail to offer any information, which should be mentioned previously.

   Moreover, it is possible to find paragraphs with no theme progression at all. The students wrote many clauses of the text which share the same Theme. In these cases, the text often reads like a list. In the examples below, the topic sentence is not developed at all through the Rhemes, as there is a lack of further development of Rhemes:

  - **I think the examination is not all the time a way to evaluate the information that is found in any book, because some books in college are not useful. Some books are not useful in college or we cannot use in the future. The examination is not always useful in college.**

 -**Every year, a lot of people died because of smoking. Smoking may cause death to many persons. You can see people smoking everywhere. So smoking can be considered one of the main reasons behind peoples' death.**

- **Examination is a very important system since it evaluates students' ability and enables teachers to discover what their students have understood and learned. So, it is a good mean to test students' ability.**

   In all the examples mentioned so far, the same idea is repeated over and over. In each paragraph, the Rheme is empty of any conceptual content. The reader starts with an idea and ends with the same idea.

7.4.2.4 Themes with Unclear Reference

Theme and Rheme ………………………………………………………………......……

This one can be divided into two categories according to Belmonte and Mccabe- Hidalgo (1998:25): an over-use of pronouns, mainly personal pronouns and indefinite pronouns ,and the over-use of the indefinite **"it".** For the first one, most of the students (subjects) switch from the pronoun *" I "* to *"we"* to *"you"* without any logical connection and they use the pronoun *"your"* instead of *"my"* in their writings as it is shown in the following examples:

- **The smoking is very dangerous thing in the life. Smoking may be called ill that kills everyone if he continues smoking all <u>your</u> life.**

-**This evaluation is regarded valid because all the world use this system with <u>their</u>   students.**

- **<u>I</u> think examination does not evaluate <u>us</u>, not develop <u>us</u> in any way or another. I don't intent to use the same style to teach my students. <u>We</u> should use different techniques rather than exams in evaluating <u>our</u> students.**

- **I admire my friend for three reasons: talent, intelligent , and kind…………He is kind because anyone needs a help, he would help him quickly. <u>Your</u> friend who has all these features certainly is beloved by all.**

-**The expert proofs say that smoking hurt <u>us</u> from the first time <u>we</u> smoke. It affects <u>your</u> lungs…..**

- **<u>We</u> can know the degree of progress that the examinee gets through examination. <u>You</u>**

can specify the levels of the examinees. Also , through examination, <u>he</u> can diagnosis the weak and strong points of the students. <u>They</u> can also know the level <u>they</u> achieved through their teaching.

As the data clearly shows, there is no example on the use of unclear reference of the indefinite **"it"** found in students' writing.

8. Conclusion

Writing is one of the four language skills in EFL teaching and learning. It is not only very important for students' academic discipline, but also for their future professions .Helping students' improve their English writing skills is therefore 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. One of these tools is the recognition of theme and rheme for the learner as an addresser and as an addressee. The learner must be familiar with

fronting as a powerful resource to highlight adverbials or objects. The learner must also be able to choose the themes of their sentences, as the organization of information in the sentence depends on that.

Teaching composition in our universities depends on producing correct grammatical sentences containing an idea. The teachers insist on an idea that the sentences in a paragraph ,a composition ,or an essay should be linked together to one main idea without teaching them that in each sentence there should be a theme and a rheme and the types of possible themes in writing or the different ways of thematic progression. Thus, it is suggested that teachers need to look beyond the traditional grammar of the clause when teaching writing and should be aware of all the facets of composition writing .

The paper shows that Theme and Rheme patterning can be effectively applied in classrooms to diagnosis students' weaknesses. Students' weaknesses in their arguments are due to problems with either Thematic progression or Thematic selection, or both.

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