THEMATIC PROGRESSION PATTERNS IN ELT JOURNAL ABSTRACTS

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ABSTRACT

Developing an English cohesive and coherent writing requires an effort of connecting ideas grammatically and semantically. To explore this, we carried out a research study by analyzing fifteen journal abstracts from international journals in ELT whose impact factors are within the top 10 in the field. The data showed that the abstracts make use of integrated pattern, not relying simply upon a single pattern. The findings also suggest ambiguous relationship between some clauses, many of which rather represent inductive relationship; therefore coding them into the three thematic progression patterns in Eggins (1994) seemed to be less accommodating. Further research on this subject would then require more sophisticated research theoretical framework.

Keywords: *Thematic progression pattern, journal abstract, academic writing*

INTRODUCTION

Disseminating articles whether in a scientific journal or conference requires submission of an abstract as sine qua non prior to the submission of the whole article. These abstracts, before formally published, are screened therefore they should appeal to the journal editors or conference committee for further acceptance process. Thus, an abstract should be structured the way it is comprehensible, cohesive and coherent apart from some general aspects of writing such as grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and generic structure. In the meantime, writing coherent and cohesive abstract is a daunting task hence research on the way an it is structured becomes indeed important. It may help novice writers decide which features of abstract writing they need to use. Nonetheless, addressing the way an abstract is structured to reach coherence and cohesion is a challenging task. Here functional linguists offer a ubiquitous and robust approach to analyzing the coherence and cohesion of the abstracts through thematic progression pattern analysis. This approach enables us to track how a theme is developed through particular pattern that may depicts the writers' personal and cultural preference in structuring their texts.

In this research we aim to uncover the types of thematic progression

patterns writers in ELT journals use in their abstracts and how they are realized in depth. Practically, we believe by doing so, this offers potential to present epitomes of highly acceptable models of journal abstracts that can stimulate novice writers in particular and offers better understanding on how a text is organized.

Research Questions

In this study we aim to address the following research questions:

1. What thematic progression patterns are used in ELT journal abstracts?
2. How those patterns are realized in the respective journal abstracts?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Journal Article Abstracts

An article abstract is the short version or summary of the entire article in a journal. By inserting abstract, the writers help the readers decide whether to read the article or not and prepare themselves for reading the rest of the articles (Yakhontova, 2003). An abstract might comprise some elements involving situating the research, the research objectives, methodology, summarized results and conclusion as well. Yet, these components might differ from one journal to another.

Text Coherence and Cohesion

The term coherence is relatively equivalent to the logical connection between ideas in a text. That being said, it focuses on the semantic dimension of how the propositions in a discourse are interconnected rather than connection in terms of grammatical relation or cohesion. Unlike its counterpart, cohesion rather represents grammatical relation frequently signaled by the presence of cohesive devices whether in the form of conjunction or transition. These two aspects of discourse are truly important since they play important roles in tiding any bites of words or clauses in a text.

Theme and Rheme

In text analysis, the term theme and rheme is not particularly strange as both represents how message in a clause is structured. Theme basically means what is a clause or sentence about, whereas rheme mostly refers to what is said about the theme or the rest of clause or sentence which does not belong to theme. The way theme and rheme of a clause organized lead to a pattern called thematic progression pattern. Nonetheless, determining the theme and rheme requires an extra effort.

Theme, for instance covers ideational, interpersonal and, textual kinds if seen from the language metafunction. In addition, a theme might be unmarked (typical) and marked (atypical) where discourse analyst is really in situation where deep understanding particularly in distinguishing these types of theme in the most appropriate way is of demand. An instance of analysis will best illustrate the concepts of theme and rheme:

This article	Reports an investigation on the use of negotiated

	language learning.
Theme	*Rheme*

As seen on the above illustration, the subject matter or what the sentence is about is the article. Nonetheless, the theme requires explanation, therefore the rest of the sentence 'reports an investigation on the use of negotiated language learning' plays its role as a rheme to describe the theme. More complex models can be seen below:

Last month,	We attended a seminar.
Theme (topical)	*Rheme*

Unlike the previous one, the above model illustrates that the theme is not the subject. Rather, it is the complement or circumstantial adjunct 'last month' which plays a role as the topical theme since it is the subject matter and not what 'we' did.

Therefore, a framework of analysis consisting of theme components by would be a great aid to identify the theme and rheme as presented below:

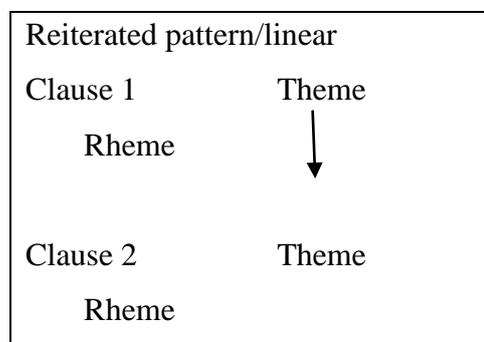| Metafunction	Theme components
Textual	Continuative (well, OK,…) Structural (conjunction or WH-relative) Conjunctive (adjunct)
Interpersonal	Modal (adjunct) Finite Wh-interrogative
Ideational	Topical (subject, complement or circumstancial adjunct.

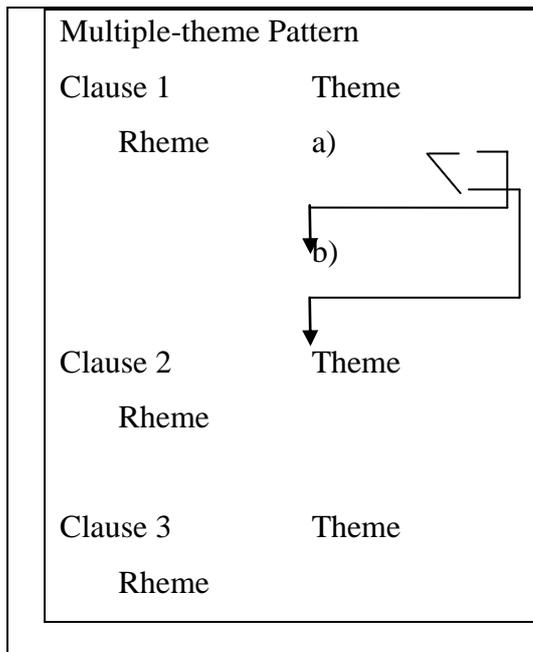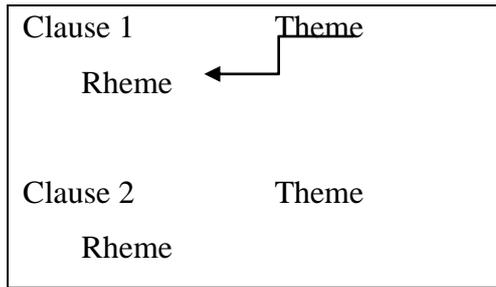(Gerot and Wignel, 1994)

Thematic Progression Patterns

Every piece of discourse has both arranged the way it transfers information or messages clearly. Patterned thematic development in a text helps the readers digest the information in the way that is comprehensible. If not arranged in good pattern the piece of discourse may attract too much attention since it is not well organized. Typically, thematic progression patterns might be in the form of the-reiteration, zigzag, and multiple-theme pattern (Eggins, 1994).

Nevertheless, other researcher like Danes as cited in Belmonte and McCabe-Hidalgo (1998) categorize the patterns into simple linear, constant, derived hyperthematic, and split progression pattern. These patterns signal the connection between one clauses or sentences to another. If there is missing link in the pattern, then the text is regarded less coherence and cohesive. The patterns might be examined in the following figures:

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Reiterated pattern/linear

Clause 1              Theme

    Rheme               │
                        │
                        ▼

Clause 2              Theme

    Rheme
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Zigzag Pattern
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Clause 1   Theme

    Rheme

Clause 2   Theme

    Rheme

Multiple-theme Pattern

Clause 1   Theme

    Rheme   a)

b)

Clause 2   Theme

    Rheme

Clause 3   Theme

    Rheme

METHOD

Research Approach

This research is basically qualitative with a discourse analysis approach. Yet, unlike other discourse analysis, we specify our method based on systemic functional linguistic approach founded by M.A.K Halliday. By using this approach, the analysis uses clause as unit of analysis as suggested by Martin and Rose (2004).

The Corpus

The objects of this study involve a corpus of fifteen journal articles abstracts from five ELT journals with highest impact factors. The choice of these journals is ultimately based on feasibility of determining good journal articles. Although we believe that impact factor is reasonably not the only criterion in judging quality of a scientific journal at least it has its own strengths where first, it overcomes the possibility of bias if the choice of good journals is selected based on experts' preferences and second, impact factor represents the highest frequency of citation articles in a journal have. Procedure of Data Analysis

As the present research is truly qualitative, common procedure of data analysis to be applied is based on Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) steps in analyzing qualitative data with slight modification to fit the types of data.

1. Prepare and organize the data
2. Review and explore the data
3. Code data into categories
4. Construct thick descriptions.
5. Build themes and hypotheses
6. Report and interpret the data.

FINDING AND CONCLUSION

The variations of thematic progression patterns can be seen in the following table:

RA	Thematic Progression Pattern
RA1	Reiterated, Zigzag, Multiple Theme
RA2	Zigzag, Reiterated
RA3	Reiterated
RA4	Zigzag, Reiterated
RA5	Reiterated
RA6	Reiterated
RA7	Zigzag, Reiterated,
RA 8	Reiterated, Multiple Theme
RA9	Zigzag, Reiterated
RA10	Zigzag, Multiple Theme
RA11	Reiterated, Multiple Theme
RA12	Reiterated, Zigzag, Multiple Theme
RA13	Reiterated, Zigzag
RA14	Reiterated
RA15	Zigzag

The 15 research article abstracts obtained from several sources revealed variably difference tendency in thematic progression pattern yet most of which make use of reiterated pattern with some having the integrated pattern. The reiterated

patterns show reiteration of either the theme or rheme. RA 1,2 7, and 8 have quite apparent thematic patterns in which the clauses making use of a combination between two or three of the thematic patterns whether the zigzag vs reiterated or zigzag with multiple theme pattern and further. Nonetheless a number of clauses in some articles abstracts seem to have implicit relationship.

Take for example, when an author presents their research objective then continue with a clause describing the research participants doing tasks to gather the data. Therefore, it is quite hard to identify the relationships between clauses since the authors observe the generic structure to save space and observe the abstract generic structure so strictly. Although an article abstract is so dense to summarize the whole research, some authors, particularly the seemingly non native English writer attempt to make a well-organized abstract such as RA 11 and 12 which are mostly arranged in multiple patterns.

This phenomenon might shed on light on a cultural tendency where Asian non-native speakers of English are quite careful in writing research abstracts while the NNS seem to do so in a relatively opposite way. This phenomenon also reflects two poles of academic writing style, the pragmatic and critical pragmatic style. This is perhaps influenced by the fact that many authors are acquiring English during graduate studies. Another important writing phenomenon in the sample abstracts is the slight ambiguity of theme-rheme patterns where clauses do not show clear theme-rheme relationship.

See excerpts taken from the sample below. It can be said that the complexities of the data lead to actual data analysis confusion since in many cases, the relationship between clauses are not quite apparent. Rather, the articles seem to strictly observe the generic structure of abstract genre in a rigid way therefore less likely to interrelate each clause explicitly. It should be admitted, though, that these articles abstracts are already published under prestigious scientific journals in ELT.

And there is a great deal of strict rule of cohesion. The author's grealty managed to manage the flow of their ideas systematically without losing the unity, coherence, and cohesion of their abstract.

Discourse **connectives**	are important indicators of textual coherence
Theme	**rheme**
And mastering **them**	is an essential part of acquiring a language.
Theme	**rheme**
In this article, we	compare advanced learners' sensibility to the meaning conveyed by **the connectives** in an offline grammmaticality judgement task
Theme	**rheme**

(RA1)

This study	Examines the effect of the timing of explicit instruction (EI) on grammatical accuracy
Theme	**rheme**
A total of 123 learners	were divided into two groups: those with some productive knowledge of past counterfactual conditionals (+Prior Knowledge) and those without such knowledge (-Prior Knowledge)
Theme	**rheme**
Each group	was divided into four conditions
Theme	**rheme**
Two (Pre-EI and Pre+during-EI)	studied an EI handout prior to a

	composition task
Theme	**rheme**
but only the Pre+during-EI learners	were allowed to refer to it during the task.
Theme	**rheme**
The post-EI learners	Received the handout after completing the texts to use to revise their texts.
Theme	**rheme**

(RA 11)

Therefore, it can be concluded that due to syntactic complexities of the texts, analysis using Eggins (1994)'s account seems to be quite shallow in comparison toDanes as cited in Belmonte and McCabe-Hidalgo (1998). This study might be further advanced into dual analysis of thematic progression patterns as well as syntactic complexity of the texts.

CONCLUSION

The analysis revealed a great deal of complexities of thematic development in the texts. Few of which indicates less clear relationship among clauses especially when the authors state their research objectives, then continue to research participants and research procedure without hints to the objectives. Therefore, it is suggested that further research is needed for deeper understanding due to the syntactic complexities of the texts.

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