THEME AND RHEME ANALYSIS IN INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING: A CASE STUDY

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Sarjana Pendidikan in English Education

By:

ADNAN YAKUB
SN. 2519099

ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND TEACHER TRAINING
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI
K.H. ABDURRAHMAN WAHID PEKALONGAN

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2024

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Analysis in Indonesian EFL Students' Academic Writing: A Case Study"

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Dengan ini mohon agar skripsi tersebut segera dimunaqosahkan.

Demikian nota pembimbing ini dibuat untuk digunakan sebagaimana mestinya. Atas perhatian bapak/Ibu, saya sampaikan terima kasih.

Wassalamu'alaikum Wr.Wb.

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MOTTO

"Let me Talk!"

-Kevin de Bruyne

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menyelidiki penggunaan tema dan rema dalam penulisan akademik siswa EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Indonesia. Penelitian dilakukan terhadap mahasiswa Jurusan Tadris Bahasa Inggris di salah satu universitas di Pekalongan, dengan fokus pada bagaimana mereka menerapkan struktur tema dan rema untuk menghasilkan teks yang kohesif dan koheren. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berdasarkan Miles, Huberman, dan Saldana (2014), data dikumpulkan dari delapan sampel esai yang ditulis oleh siswa semester enam. Kerangka analisisnya berakar pada teori tema dan rema karya Halliday dan Matthiessen (2014), yang menekankan pentingnya elemen-elemen tersebut dalam penataan dan pengorganisasian informasi dalam sebuah teks. Temuan ini mengungkapkan preferensi yang signifikan terhadap tema topikal unmarked theme, khususnya kata benda (noun), yang berjumlah 183 dari 326 klausa. Tema tekstual adalah tema kedua yang paling banyak digunakan, sedangkan marked theme dan interpersonal theme lebih jarang digunakan. Studi ini juga menemukan bahwa kurangnya interpersonal theme menunjukkan perlunya instruksi untuk mengintegrasikan perspektif penulis ke dalam teks mereka. Berdasarkan temuan ini, penulis merekomendasikan pentingnya tema dan rema dalam pengajaran menulis, mendorong penggunaan marked theme, dan menggabungkan latihan pada perangkat kohesif. Mempromosikan penggunaan tema tekstual dan interpersonal theme juga penting untuk mencapai transisi yang lancar dan hubungan yang jelas antar ide, sehingga meningkatkan koherensi dan keterlibatan teks akademis secara keseluruhan. Penelitian ini menjawab dua pertanyaan utama: bagaimana tema dan rima diterapkan dalam tulisan akademik siswa dan tema mana yang paling dominan digunakan, memberikan wawasan tentang praktik penulisan akademik yang efektif bagi siswa EFL.

Kata Kunci: Tema dan Rema, Kohesi dan koheren, Penulisan Akademik.

ABSTRACT

This research investigated the use of theme and rheme in the academic writing of Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. The study was conducted with English Language Teaching Department students at one of the universities in Pekalongan, focused on how they apply theme and rheme structures to produce cohesive and coherent texts. This study used a qualitative approach based on Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), data were collected from eight essay samples written by sixth-semester students. The analysis framework is rooted in Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) theory of theme and rheme, which emphasizes the importance of these elements in structuring and organizing information within a text. The findings revealed a significant preference for unmarked topical themes, particularly nouns, which accounted for 183 out of 326 clauses. Textual themes were the second most used, while marked themes and interpersonal themes were less frequently employed. The study also found that the lack of interpersonal themes indicates a need for instruction on integrating the writer's perspective into their texts. Based on these findings, recommendations include emphasizing the importance of theme and rheme in writing instruction, encouraging the use of marked themes, and incorporating exercises on cohesive devices. Promoting the use of textual and interpersonal themes is also essential for achieving smooth transitions and clear relationships between ideas, thus enhancing the overall coherence and engagement of academic texts. This research addressed two primary questions: how theme and rheme were applied in students' academic writing and which themes were most dominantly used, providing insights into effective academic writing practices for EFL students.

***Keywords**: Theme and Rheme, Cohesion and Coherence, Academic Writing.*

PREFACE

We give Allah SWT praise and gratitude for his generosity in providing me with direction, health, and patience so that I could finish writing my thesis, " **Theme and Rheme Analysis in Indonesian EFL Students' Academic Writing: A Case Study.**" In order to meet one of the criteria for the Sarjana Pendidikan Degree at the English Education Department of the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, this essay has been submitted. Because of several contributions from numerous people, the suggested study may be completed. Consequently, I would want to use this opportunity to offer my profound thanks to:

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Pekalongan, 4th July 2024

The Writer

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Writing skills not only help students to express their ideas in a clear and structured way, but also help students to gain a better understanding of English grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure (Budjalemba & Listyani, 2020). In addition, writing can also help students to develop critical, analytical, and reflective thinking skills. Christiansen (2022) also stated that in writing, students are required to consider and organize information well, and choose the right words to convey their ideas.

To structure the writing so that the information it conveys is clear and easy to understand, it must be cohesive and coherent. According to Xhepa (2016) cohesion and coherence are very important elements in spoken or written language, therefore with cohesion we will understand the actual relationship between different parts in a sentence. Cohesion, also known as coherence, is the invisible glue that links them together. Strong coherence in writing suggests that your ideas make sense and flow naturally from one phrase to the next, making it easy for readers to follow your direction (Aryadoust, 2016). Without cohesion, writing will appear disjointed and ineffective (Cheung, 2023). Inconsistencies will challenge readers and hinder understanding, rendering your communication efforts ineffective.

In order to write cohesively or coherently requires gradual practice. Practicing writing skills certainly requires a long learning process and

providing material because it is very difficult (Mariana et al., 2018). Therefore, writing courses will be offered in stages from 1st semester to 6th semester. According to Ghufron et al. (2016) teaching academic writing courses requires gradual practice. Similar to the English Language Teaching Department Students at one of the universities in Pekalongan.

Beginning in the first semester, students embark on the course "English Paragraph Writing". In this course students are trained to express their thoughts in a paragraph according to the writing style taught. Subsequently, in the second semester, they progress to “English Essay Writing”. Wherein they refine their skills in developing coherent and well-structured essays while mastering appropriate language and stylistic conventions. Furthermore, in the third semester they study “Grammar in written text” in which they learn about the ability to recognize common grammatical errors in writing, and to be able to compose text using correct English grammar. Moreover, in the fourth semester they take courses “Genre-based Writing: Creative Writing”. This course focuses more on writing skills as a process of conveying messages that are creative, unique and attract the reader's attention. Next to the fifth semester discussing “Multimodal Reading and Writing: Theory and Practice”. Discusses the use of text presented through a combination of modes between visual text (static images), modes between visual text (static images), verbal (aural), linguistic, gestural, and spatial.

Lastly, in the sixth semester, students delve into "Academic Reading and Writing", dealing into advanced topics such as academic writing conventions,

citation methodologies, reference explanation, and plagiarism avoidance techniques. The objective of the academic writing course is to equip students with the ability to produce academic writing in diverse formats, including abstracts, papers, articles, and essays, while being able to write appropriate writing (Ghufron et al., 2016)

Since in academic writing students must write appropriately, academic writing has more urgency to write with cohesion and coherence. According to Poudel (2018), efficient academic writing requires an equal amount of cohesiveness and coherence. Paragraphs attempt to establish cohesiveness and coherence, as well as their function in conveying the text's meaning. Moreover, in academic writing, students must write abstracts, papers, articles and essays clearly, neatly and orderly. According to Roberts (2017) students must be taught the writing process, writing aspects, writing correctness, and writing models, which include discussion subjects such as planning, structuring paragraphs, composing an introduction, main body, and conclusion. Aside from grammar, sentence kinds, cohesiveness, academic writing types, how to quote, paraphrase theory, editing, revising, plagiarism prevention, and publication.

Although cohesive techniques such as coordinating conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs are addressed in general textbooks, the association between theme and rheme has received great attention in the field of academic writing instruction (He, 2020). It is suggested that themes be incorporated into English writing instruction to enable students to produce more coherent and

efficient writing. Students who are more competent in utilizing theme and rheme seem to be more successful in generating academic papers (Leza, 2012). In addition, researchers discovered a strong correlation between cohesiveness and the quality of academic text, because cohesion is considered a predictor of academic text quality (Chanyoo, 2018).

The analysis of theme and rheme is considered an essential aspect of discourse analysis in academic writing. Theme introduces the main topic or focus of a sentence, while rheme provides additional information to further develop the topic (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). An effective use of theme and rheme in academic writing can help improve coherence and readability of the text (Duha & Gultom, 2022). Furthermore, Kartini & Farikah (2015) stated that studying theme and rheme are necessary for students to create a well-organized paragraph, which will result in a cohesive paragraph.

In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) developed by Halliday & Mathiessen (2014), the concepts of "theme" and "rheme" are the two main elements in the meta-text function that form sentence structures. This concept helps to understand how language is used to convey meaning in a text. The first element of the clause is called theme. Gnoli (2018) defines the theme as an aspect of a sentence that serves as "the message's starting point: it is what the clause is going to be about". The rheme is the remainder of the sentence, and it indicates the topic of what it says. Furthermore, according to Halliday & Mathiessen (2014) Themes can be classified into various categories: ideational, textual, and interpersonal.

Based on knowledge above, the use of theme and rheme are key for creating a well-organized sentence, theme and rheme is also useful to make a coherent and cohesive paragraph for students to construct a writing. Using Fauziyanti's (2016) research as an example, entitled “Exploring Theme-Rheme System in Efl Learners’ Argumentative Essay: A Portrait on The Mode of Discourse”. Based on the result the students often convey the material in a variety of ways. In order to address the difficulties that students have when enhancing their writing, Rafidah Rahman's (2018) study was conducted entitled “Using Theme and Rheme to Increase Students’ Achievement in Writing News Item at the Tenth Grade Students of SMAN 2 Selayar”. The researcher discovered that after learning about theme and rheme theory, the students at SMAN 2 Selayar were able to write news articles with greater writing achievement. This research demonstrates how using the theme & rheme theory to writing instruction improves text writing efficacy. But in those studies there was no calculation of the presentation of the number of uses of the type of theme. Additionally, studies have been conducted to determine the ratio of the type of theme that has been used, such as Apsari's (2019) research entitled "Theme and Rheme Analysis of Opinions and Ideas in Analytical Exposition Texts Written by Class XI Students of SMA N 4 Magelang 2018/2019 Academic Year". The results showed that the unmarked topical subject was the most used type of theme in text. Another study also examines the percentage of types of themes that have been used. A similar study by Meiarista and Widhiyanto (2020) entitled "Theme-Rheme Configuration in Recount Texts

Produced by the Fourth Semester Students of the English Department 'Semarang State University' in the Academic Year 2018/2019". The result of the unmarked topical theme was frequently used in their study. Another research conducted by Duha and Gultom (2022) entitled "Theme and Rheme Analysis in The Students' Writing Descriptive Text at A Junior High School". The result of the study describes the theme and thematic development patterns discovered in students' descriptive texts at SMP 1 Delituna. This research found that unmarked topical themes had the highest frequency of appearance, namely 78% in the text.

However, there has been no further research that concentrates on theme and rheme that focuses only on student's academic writing. Even though students academic writing has more urgency to write with cohesion and coherence. Also Poudel (2018) stated that good academic writing requires a good combination of cohesion and coherence between texts. Based on the knowledge above that theme and rheme are vital to create a well organized sentence and several studies have demonstrated that the use of theme and rheme can contribute to a text's cohesion and cohesiveness. This study was conducted to know how the use of theme and rheme can produce cohesion and coherence in writing and this study conducted to know what are most dominant themes used in producing clear and well-structured academic writing. This study looked at what sorts of themes are most commonly used by Academic Writing Students. Knowing what types of themes are utilized by Academic Writing

Students it represents the proper usage of theme and rheme and indicates that their writing is cohesive and coherent.

During his time as a member of an organization at one of the universities in Pekalongan in 2021, the researcher analyzed several writings by students who took part in a competition held by the organization. The competition was attended by 6th semester students of the English Language Education Study Program. The researcher found that the students' writing was very cohesive and coherent, with each sentence connecting effectively. From the background explanation above, it is known that effective use of theme and rheme can create cohesion and coherent writing. The researcher concluded that effective use of theme and rheme can increase cohesion and coherence in writing. However, because the sample was written by students who had graduated this year and for the context of recent research, the researchers then decided to deepen this analysis by focusing on 6th semester students majoring in English Education for the 2024 academic year at one of the universities in Pekalongan by taking several samples of their academic text. The selection of students for the 6th semester of the 2024 academic year is based on their urgency to write scientific papers and in order to motivate them to produce better writing that is more cohesive and coherent. Because the correct use of theme and rheme can improve the quality of writing, it is important to know the extent of the influence of the use of theme and rheme on the quality of academic writing. Therefore, this research aims to analyze how theme and rheme are applied in

EFL students' academic writing, in order to create cohesive and coherent writing.

The researcher hopes that this study offers valuable feedback to participants who submit their writing samples, particularly for students who need to write scientific essays and must do so proficiently. The researcher also hopes that this study can provide insight into how Indonesian students use theme and rheme in academic writing, helping lecturers and instructors understand students' difficulties and strengths in organizing information effectively. The results of the research can be used to develop more effective learning materials and curricula and design better teaching strategies, targeting common weaknesses in the use of theme and rheme. This research could also serve as a basis for further research in the fields of applied linguistics and language education, as well as providing insight into the influence of cultural background and mother tongue on English writing.

1.2 Formulation of The Problem

Addressing the knowledge above, the aims of this study that the writer wants to reveal:

1. How are the theme and rheme applied in producing writing by students' Academic Writing?
2. What are the most dominant themes used in producing writing by students' Academic Writing?

1.3 Operational Definition

Operational definition refers to the precise definition of the key terms used in the research study. For this study on "Theme and Rheme Analysis in Indonesian EFL Students' Academic Writing: A Case Study" the following operational definitions are provided:

1. Textual Metafunction:

   Textual Metafunction refers to the language function used in creating a text (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In this study, textual metafunction will specifically refer to the identification of themes and rhemes in academic writing.

2. Theme

   The element that acts as the message's starting point is known as the theme. (Halliday, 2004)

3. Rheme

   Rheme is the part of a sentence that provides additional information about the theme (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

4. Academic writing

   Academic writing is a formal style of writing used in academic settings that follows certain conventions and guidelines (Taylor, 2009).

5. Indonesian EFL Students

   Non-native English speakers studying academic writing at an Indonesian institution are known as Indonesian EFL students (Ratnawati et al. 2018).

6. Coherence

Coherence is the logical and clear organization of ideas and information in a text that enables the reader to understand the intended message (Zabrucky & Commander, 1993).

1.4 Aims of the study

The aim of this research is to analyze the use of theme and rheme in the academic writing of Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. Specifically, this research seeks to know how themes and rhemes are applied and identify the most frequently used themes in their academic writing and examines how themes and rhemes are structured in students' essays to understand common patterns and variations. The researcher hopes that the findings of this study will demonstrate that use of appropriate themes and rhemes is crucial in demonstrating better English language proficiency in a student's academic writing.

1.5 Significance of the study

The significance of this study is explained as follows:

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

The researcher hopes that this study can help the teacher to lead the students to understand the meaning of sentences through themes and rhymes. It is hoped that knowledge of theme and rhyme can maximize the experience of analyzing weaknesses in students' writing skills.

1.5.2 Practical Significance

This research can help prospective teachers in teaching writing skills that pay attention to themes and rhemes in the classroom whenever they become

teachers in formal or informal education. This helps them to be more motivated in mastering English to teach to prospective students.

1.5.3 Empirical Significance

This research can help upcoming researchers who are conducting analyses on the same issue. This can assist them in making some of their analytical ideas crucial for determining the following stages in carrying out the same subject of analysis.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of the Findings

There are two findings based on the formulation of the problem in this study. The first finding addresses the question, "How are the theme and rheme applied in producing writing by students' Academic Writing?" which indicates that the students properly use these structures to enhance clarity, readability, and coherence in their texts. The proper use of theme and rheme not only makes the writing more comprehensible and engaging but also fosters cohesion and coherence. The analysis results show that the correct application of theme and rheme can ensure smooth transitions between sentences, creating a seamless flow of ideas throughout the text. This seamless flow is crucial as it helps to maintain the reader's interest and understanding, making the overall writing more effective. Furthermore, it indicates that the students have a good grasp of the structural elements of academic writing, allowing them to present their arguments and information in a logically organized manner. This not only enhances the quality of their work but also demonstrates their ability to apply advanced writing techniques effectively.

The second finding pertains to the question, "What are the most dominant themes used in producing writing by students' Academic Writing?" which reveals a significant preference for unmarked topical themes. Specifically, 183 out of 326 clauses utilized unmarked topical

themes, indicating a tendency towards straightforward and direct sentence constructions typical in academic writing for clarity and precision. This preference for unmarked topical themes is likely because they provide a clear and direct way to present the main topic of a sentence, making it easier for readers to follow the writer's argument and maintain coherence throughout the text. Additionally, unmarked topical themes help to establish a consistent focus, which is essential for the logical flow and structure expected in academic writing. Textual themes were the second most used with total 112 of clauses. Textual theme significantly contributing to text cohesion and logical flow. Textual theme is used to help link ideas and sentences, ensuring a smooth and coherent progression of arguments. Conversely, marked topical themes were less frequently used, with only 27 out of 326 clauses featuring them, indicating potential areas for further development in students' writing skills. Marked topical themes are rarely used in academic writing by students primarily because of the preference for clarity and directness. Interpersonal themes were the least used, showing limited employment of expressing judgement and viewpoint in their writing. Interpersonal themes are rarely used in academic writing by students primarily due to the emphasis on objectivity and formality.

5.2 Recommendation

Based on the findings of this research on the use of theme and rheme in the academic writing of Indonesian EFL students, several recommendations can be made to enhance students' writing skills and improve the overall

quality of their academic texts. Students should be encouraged to understand and apply the concepts of theme and rheme, as these elements significantly enhance the clarity and readability of their texts. Experimenting with marked themes, such as adverbials and prepositional phrases, and using cohesive devices like reference, substitution, conjunction, and ellipsis can improve text cohesion. Writing instructors should incorporate lessons on the significance of theme and rheme, promoting exercises that focus on cohesive devices and marked themes to help students develop sophisticated writing styles. Additionally, further research should investigate the impact of various instructional strategies on students' use of theme and rheme and how these elements influence the quality and coherence of academic texts across different contexts

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