FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

THE ANALYSIS OF THEME-RHEME IN IMPROVING COHERENCE AND COHESION OF ESL WRITING: A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims at investigating the effectiveness of Theme- Rheme framework by analyzing ESL/EFL learners writing in order to help them see their writing problems concerning cohesion within texts and textual ideas. Using quasi-experimental design, the research conducted a ten-week interventional course on ULIS first-year students, and then utilized the framework of Theme-Rheme. The results showed a significant enhancement in students' writings, in both numerical and descriptive data, particularly fewer occurrences of incoherent errors, more effective use of themes and thematic progression, and considerably higher coherence & cohesion scores. This study hope to raise the learners' awareness of the essential concepts of Theme and Rheme as well as Thematic Progression and practice using Theme-Rheme structure to analyze texts, and organize and develop their own compositions.

KEY WORDS: Theme; Rheme; Thematic Progression; ESL/EFL learners; writing skill.

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1. Introduction

Writing, especially its coherence and cohesion is generally acknowledged among researchers and linguists to be one of the most difficult aspects of a language to master. Even among native speakers, without any proper guidance and support, producing coherent and precise writings might prove to be a challenging task (Rashtchi & Keyvanfar, 1999, as cited in Hashemnezhad & Hashemnezhad, 2012). Among EFL/ESL students, such difficulties are not only present but are also exponentially more severe. David Nunan (1999, p.217) posits that producing a cohesive and long piece of writing is possibly "the most difficult thing to do in a language". This opinion is also echoed by Richards and Renandya (2002), who assert that no other skill poses more of a challenge to L2 learners than writing (2002, p.303).

Improving writing skill among students requires hard work, time and effort. The two important concepts of coherence and cohesion in writing in general, and in English writing in particular. As one vital factor to determine whether or not a writing text is "good", cohesion is interpreted as tight connection between sentences to create paragraphs, and between paragraphs to create a text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Cohesion can be considered as an element of coherence which is what makes the text understood in a certain context (Witte & Faigley, 1981). In ESL/EFL teaching and learning, failure to create cohesive ties in students' writings may result in their low scores in exams (Bamberg, 1983 as cited in Wang, 2007). Nevertheless, the coherence and cohesion of English writing are exceedingly difficult to attain for most of students even if they have obtained the knowledge of lexical and grammar devices. Therefore, it is decidedly fundamental for applying Theme-Rheme theory into academic English writing. The term "academic writing" in this paper refers to the type of writing accepted among the academia. This includes writings in academic genre, academic papers, and academic paper abstracts.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the influence of teaching theme-rheme and thematic progression patterns on students' writing coherence and cohesion (C & C) and to explore the framework patterns that later help improve ESL students' academic writing skill.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theme and Rheme

Theme and Rheme, as the two fundamental concepts of Systematic Functional linguistics, are

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borrowed by Halliday from Prague School. Actually, Theme and Rheme are not new concepts and have been issues of debate since the eighteenth century when Weil (1844) introduced a clausal structure consisting of a point of departure and enunciation (as cited in Wang, 2007).

Theme and thematic progression (T/TP) is a major aspect of "how speakers construct their messages in a way which makes them fit smoothly into the unfolding language event" (Thompson, 2014, p.117).

Table 1. Theme and Rheme.

Chocolate candy	contains sugar, plus the naturally ocurring stimulants caffeine and theobromine.
Theme	**Rheme**

Theme is defined as "the point of departure" of the message (Halliday, 1985) and "it is the ground from which the clause is taking off", serving as the four characteristics: (1) the leftmost part of the clause; (2) up to, and including, the first ideational element; (3) what the message will be about, and (4) the reminder of the clause. In other words, Theme provides a setting which typically contains familiar or old information. The following part in the clause constitutes Rheme.

Rheme is the second part of the clause in which Theme is developed, and usually contains unfamiliar information, or new knowledge that a writer assumes his/her readers do not know. New information, or *Rheme*, is indispensable in order to follow the progression of the argument. As the text unfolds, the Themes connect to the Themes and Rhemes of preceding clauses in various ways, picking up or repeating the important concepts and developing them further. These connections form patterns of thematic progression (Daneš, 1974).

Theme system organizes the clause showing how it adapts to its surrounding context, thus promoting the cohesive development of the text. According to Halliday (Halliday, 1985), theme consists of unmarked theme and marked theme. The former refers to the subject of the clause mappings with its grammatical subject. Otherwise, it is marked theme. For an instance, the subject of the sentence "Our team won" overlaps with the theme "our team", therefore, it is regarded as the unmarked theme. As an opposite in the following sentence "The rest he spent on chemicals for his experiments", the theme "The rest" does not coincide with the grammatical subject of the clause. For this point, it is a marked theme.

Furthermore, theme can be divided into simple theme, multiple theme and clausal theme. Clauses may contain a multiple theme structure. For example:

If winter comes (T), // can spring be far behind (R)? (*"Ode to the West Wind"*- P. Shelly).

The above sentence can also be split into multiple theme structure as follow:

If winter (T) //comes (T), can spring (T) //be far behind (R)?

Theoretically, in the case of a sequence of themes, textual and interpersonal optional themes should come before the obligatory topic theme, as follow (Martinez, 2003):

Table 2. The Sequence of Themes.

Therefore,	it is possible that	classical MAP kinase isoforms	play a role in
↓	↓	↓	↓
Textual Theme	**interpersonal theme**	**topical theme**	**Rheme**

A proposal could be concluded form the above example that theme might be constructed by a nominal group, adverbial phrase, verbal group, prepositional part or even a dependent clause. The requirement is that theme should come first in a clause and act as the given information. Theme and Rheme are loaded with the role of acting as the bricks of building cohesion intra-clausally in clauses.

Cook has offered a suitably succinct and helpful explanation: “Communication might be defined as the conversion of new information into given information, and a successful communicator as a person who correctly assesses the state of knowledge of his or her interlocutor. If we misjudge, and treat what is given as new, we will be boring; in the reverse case when we assume the new to be given, we will be incomprehensible” (Cook, 1989).

Since the new information is the main purpose of communication, Rheme is surely to be the focus of a clause, usually acting as the argument in the academic text, providing the new knowledge for readers. The interesting point is that the extension of argument in text has to prolong according to a certain kind of regulation, which is given the theoretical item as "Thematic Progression (TP)" or Thematisation. The item was proposed by Danes early in 1974, referring to the way subsequent discourse re-uses previous Themes or Rhemes according to an overall textual plan. Thompson (Thompson, 2004) defined Thematisation as a major aspect of "how speakers construct their messages in a way which makes them fit smoothly into the unfolding language event". Therefore, TP is vital for readers and writers to understand and organize the texts and writings.

Comprehensively understanding, Theme integrates familiar, old or given information which makes it the focus of information in the clause and provides the settings for the remainder or aboutness of the sentence, namely the Rheme. On the contrary, Rheme is hypothesized to be the remainder of the message in a clause that has been proposed by Theme. In the practice context, the definition put forward by Paltridge (2006) is chosen as the working definition in the present study. In accordance with this definition, TP is “the way in which the theme of a clause may pick up, or repeat a meaning from a preceding theme or rheme” (Paltrigde, 2006, p.148).

2.2. Categorization of thematic progression

Thematic progression involves the way Themes and Rhemes concatenate within a text to the hierarchic organization of the text and ultimately to rhetorical communicative purposes. Eggins (Eggins, 1994) explained TP as "the exchange of information between successive Theme and Rheme pairings in a text".

There have been different frameworks proposed to categorise the TP patterns in a text. Danes (1974) listed three major types of TP patterns, namely: Simple Linear Progression, Constant progression, and Theme progression with a Derived Theme. Dubois (as cited in Nguyen Th. and Nguyen T., 2020) deduced Daneš’ scheme to two main ones: themic and rhemic, each of which may be simple or multiple, contiguous or gapped. McCabe’s (1999) categorisation of TP patterns was a revised version of Danes' (1974). The researcher concluded five types of patterns: Simple Linear, Constant Theme, Derived Hypertheme, Split Rheme, and Split Theme. However, the two patterns of derived hypertheme and split theme are commonly found in highly specialized texts such as medical or legal documents (Wei, 2015), whereas for discursive academic essays, they are barely identified (Nguyen Th. and Nguyen T., 2020). Therefore, only three of the patterns proposed by Eggins are adopted in the current study.

The patterns are simply identified as follows (Eggin, 2004):

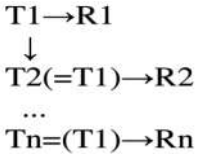
(1) Simple linear theme progression pattern:

The rheme of the first sentence becomes the theme of the succeeding clause, as in the following extract: (T stands for Theme and R for Rheme, N for the numbers of sentences).

$$T1 \rightarrow R1$$
$$\downarrow$$
$$T2(=R1) \rightarrow R2$$
$$Tn=(Rn-1) \rightarrow Rn$$

(3) Constant Progression (CP):

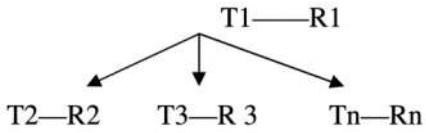
The theme of the first sentence is repeated as the theme of the subsequent clauses as well. This case is also called Derived hyper-thematic progression pattern.



For example: "And *yet we* understand them and don't even notice that they are new. *We* speak, *but usually we* are not aware of the movements of our tongue, lips, or other parts of the mouth or throat involved in the production of sounds".

(4) Split Rheme Progression (SRP):

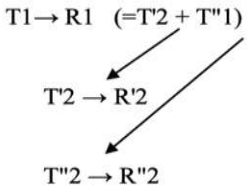
Under this pattern, the rheme in the previous sentence is spilt into several different items which in turn become the theme of the following sentences.



For example: "*I will* use the term 'language teaching method' to mean a coherent set of links between actions and thoughts in language teaching. *The actions* are the techniques *and the thoughts* are the principles in the title of this hook: *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching".*

(5) Split Theme Progression (STP):

The theme of a clause is composed of two or more items, each of which is considered a theme in the following clause.



For example: *"The mother and the child made a plan. She first found the wolf and tore his stomach, and the child brought some stones to fill the wolf's stomach".*

2.3. Cohesion and Coherent

Cohesion and coherence are important aspects of the structure of academic writing as they have an influence on the readability and logical flow of the argument of a text. A good writing should have a good expression of form and a good presentation of content. As is mentioned previously, cohesion concerns the form of a text and coherence concerns the content of a text. Coherence is established through cohesive relations and determines the interpretation of a text. If there is coherence in a piece of writing, the writing can be understood by readers and ideas of its content can be communicated to them.

Coherence is the unity of ideas, and cohesion is the unity of structural elements. Halliday and Hasan (1976: 23) define coherence as "the way a group of clauses or sentences relate to the context". Coherence is not based on surface links. Instead it relies on the links derived from thematic development, organisation of information or communicative purpose of a particular text. Martin (1992a) points out, given that we can recognise two levels of context (context of culture as realised by genre and context of situation as realised by register), we can recognise two types of coherence: situational (registerial) coherence and generic coherence.

Cohesion is defined as the linguistic features which help to make a sequence of sentences a text, i.e. to give it 'texture' (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 7). Cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some

element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one presupposes the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it. When this happens, a relation of cohesion is set up, and the two elements, the presupposing and the presupposed, are thereby at least potentially integrated into a text (1976: 4).

Wei (2015) has listed a collection of coherence and cohesion errors, such as loosely related pieces of information and a lack of focus on the main idea. Soon after realizing this problem, previous studies have unanimously established a clear connection between coherence and the appropriate implementation of theme and thematic progression, which were first termed by Halliday (1994). The theory of theme/rheme basically concerns the arrangement of what comes first in a sentence in order to create a link with the sentence preceding it and with the whole text to which it belongs (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2004). To proceed, the positive influence of introducing theme/rheme theory on identifying students' coherence and cohesion problems in writing has been confirmed in numerous studies, including Bloor and Bloor 1992; Christie and Dreyfus 2007; Schleppegrell 2004, 2009; Vande Kopple 1991; Wang 2007, (as cited in Wei, 2015).

2.4. Coherence problems related to theme/rheme

A comprehensive understanding of how information is organized and developed in texts and different patterns that frame these passages on pages is essential to academic writing in English. Themes and rheme are the considered as building bricks of cohesion and textual coherence. The arrangement in which the theme is combined with the theme is the mode of the theme. Native speakers may be subconsciously aware of the underlying organization of the text without being taught, while non-native learners are less likely to be fully aware of the logical arrangement in the target language. As such, they may have difficulty identifying a method for structuring information into an internal logical discourse.

Recently, there has been a common agreement that teaching academic writing should include the theory of theme/thematic progression so learners would be aware of the aspects of coherence and cohesion (Cheng 2002, McCabe 2003, Bonhnacker 2010). However, most of them did not provide proper guidance on how this could be implemented in a class. Thus, since then, a number of researchers have taken the initial steps to provide teaching materials on the implementation of the theme-rheme model.

More studies were also conducted to investigate specific coherence problems that could be conceptualized using the theme-rheme theory. Bloor and Bloor (as cited in Wang, 2007; Kuswoyo and Susardi, 2017; and Nguyen H., 2020) listed three major problems concerning theme/rheme use that could affect coherence, namely: (1) the problem of a brand new theme; (2) the problem of double rheme; and (3) the problem of an empty rheme. Wang (2007)'s one-case study later on added two more problems, which are: (4) underuse of thematic progression, as Wei (2015) confirmed above with data from sixty Chinese undergraduates, and (5) overuse of simple constant theme (as has been found in low-score writings in Mellos, 2011).

Studying Malaysian students' discursive writings, Kuswoyo and Susardi (2017) identified ten coherence issues with two new problems: problems with textual themes and grammar-related problems. Textual theme errors include incorrect use of textual themes, under/overuse of textual themes, and double textual themes. They concluded that the grammatical errors affect the completeness of a clause and therefore hinder how meanings were conveyed.

In the context of Vietnam, a research on 35 academic writings written by Vietnamese sophomores majoring in English teacher education was conducted by Nguyen H. (2020). The finding in this research was resonated with textual theme problems identified in Wang (2007), Kuswoyo and Susardi (2017). The both figured out that, a sentence that interrupted the continuation of the information between the sentence preceding it and the sentence following it. These findings were a further step in describing in more detail the specific issues associated with thematic progression. In fact, the problem was also identified in another genre of writing, specifically narrative, when Choo (2009) analyzed writings by high school Malaysian students. Despite differences in styles, the findings also suggested similar results as in academic writing, including: inappropriate use of textual

themes; brand new themes; the problem of disorganized arrangements of ideas; and underdevelopment of rhemes.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research question

The objective of the study is to examine to what extent the explicit instruction of theme-rheme model can impact coherence and cohesion of ULIS first year students' academic writings. The research problem is addressed by answering the two following questions:

1.What coherence-related problems persist in students' essays in both pretest and posttest stages?

2.To what extent have students' textual coherence and cohesion improved after the treatment?

3.2. Participants

The participants of the research were 54 freshmen at Faculty of English Language Teacher Education (FELTE), Hanoi University of Languages and International studies (ULIS), Vietnam National University (VNU), academic year 2020-2021. Students were divided into two different groups: Control group (26 students) and Test groups (28 students). In their first semester, students studied 1A - a compulsory courses, which aimed at improving their level of proficiency from A2 to B1 CEFR. The course accounts for four periods (50 minutes per period) per week. The research aims at examining the relationship between theme/thematic progression teaching and students' academic writing C&C; thus 3 written entries from 2 groups in the 1A course were collected. The writing scores and theme/thematic progression analysis were used to test the hypothesis of a correlation between theme/thematic progression instruction and writing quality.

3.3. Research design

This research is the Classroom Action Research type. According to Mettetal (2001), Classroom Action Research is a method of finding out what works best in your own classroom so that you can improve student learning. The model of classroom action research is planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Arikunto, 2007: 09) which is considered too as the CAR cycle based on Kemmis and McTaggart (2007: 278). The reasons of choosing CAR are because this researcher can be set within a specific context or situation, researchers can be participants, action research involves continuous evaluation and modifications, there are opportunities for theory to emerge, the study can lead to open-ended outcomes, and through action research, researcher can bring a story to life (Koshy, 2005: 21). The descriptive quantitative method with a pretest/post-test design was employed in this study to confirm the results of the quantitative study and conclusion was withdrawn due to these results.

Descriptive Statistic (DS) in quantitative data analysis is also used as DS gives numerical and graphic procedures to summarize a collection of data in a clear and understandable way.

3.4. Research procedures

In order to conduct this research, two classes of first year students in the subject of 1A Social English at FELTE, ULIS - VNU were chosen. To begin with, the two groups were given a pre-intervention test which was actually the first writing entry they completed in their compulsory course. Then in the 10 weeks of the course, students of control group learn the content of the course. While participants from experimental group beside taking the content of the compulsory course they received lesson training on writing coherently, utilizing the theory of theme-rheme and thematic progression. The lessons and activities were integrated into writing lesson during the class time at the university.

After the treatment, the final writing entry of the both group were taken to analyzed the improvement of their writing.

Each participant was required to submit two entries, one before the intervention took place, and the other written after receiving the instruction. The entries would be analyzed in terms of coherence and cohesion, and the use of theme-rheme/thematic progression. To minimize grammatical and lexical errors that can affect the clarity of expression, students are allowed to submit the second versions of their writing after the first one had been commented on and corrected through peer feedback. The pre-intervention entries were taken from one of the essays students had completed in their compulsory course, while the post-intervention ones were newly written.

The table below illustrates a general schedule of the procedures:

Table 1. *Schedule of the intervention*

Pretest Writing Submission	Week 1
Instruction lessons and activities	Week 1 to Week 10
Posttest Writing Submission	Week 11

4. Research findings and discussion

The study was conducted at the University of Languages and International Studies, which is located in Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam. The population of interest was the university's first-year students from the faculty of felte Faculty of English language teaching. The participants received a ten weeks instruction course on the implementation of thematic progression in academic writing. The teaching package followed the five-step sequence of introducing and revising Theme-Rheme in Mellos (2011), but it was extensively adapted to suit the students' level. The time allotment was also adjusted according to the teaching context.

The training included 10 lessons (10 hours of training) to ensure that students have enough time to grasp the concept of Theme-Rheme structure and apply it to improve their compositions. In the course, theory was introduced, activities related to spotting and revising common coherence errors in sample texts were added, as the awareness of these errors might be tremendously useful in avoiding them (Wang 2007).

Research question 1

The frequency of each type of errors found in students' essays demonstrated in Table 2 also indicates a number of changes in writing quality after treatment.

Table 2. *Theme-rheme errors found in students' essays*

	Precourse	Postcourse
(TX) Overuse	16	8
(TX) Underuse	6	2
(TX) Incorrect	22	14
(ID) Brand new	26	32
(ID) Repetitive	14	0
Double rheme	10	4
Empty rheme	8	0
Unrelated rheme	12	10
Underdeveloped rheme	10	10
Digressed sentence	14	10
Disorganized progression	2	2
Total	140	94

Notes: For (TX) overuse and (ID) Repetitive, each essay that contains the issue is counted as one occurrence of error

For specific types of errors, one of the most evident changes was seen in the number of errors called Repetition of ID. Although with different level of complexity, there had been an attempt to diversify the presentation of topical themes they had to use often, in order to avoid simple repetition. Prior to the course, the problem was recorded in 50% of the student essays, while it virtually disappeared in the latter compositions. Another considerable decline was seen the number of TX-theme errors. All types of errors including Overuse of TX themes, Underuse of TX themes, and Incorrect use of TX themes were seen much less often in postcourse essays. For example, there were initially 16 out of 28 students whose essays were caught using too much TX themes. This number was halved after their participation in the theme-rheme instruction.

As for the number of rheme-related mistakes, the changes were relatively small. The only exception came from Empty rheme errors, with a total of 8 occurences in the precourse essays and none in postcourse ones. For double rheme errors, five instances were found in precourse writings while this number was two in postcourse group. The last two errors concerning the disruption and disorganization in the text's progression experienced negligible decrease in number.

On the contrary to the overal fall, the mistakes of Brand-new themes were found more often in essays written after the course than those preceding it. Thirteen occurences of brand-new themes were found in precourse essays, while the number found in postcourse compositions were 6 more. Furthermore, the problem was experienced by more students in the posttest essays than in pretest ones, with the tendency to either not improve or even worsen, except for one case of student 8704.

Table 2. *Theme types in total times used and in percentages*

	Precourse		Postcourse		p (2-tailed)
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	
Ideational themes-unmarked(UM)	310	82%	344	78%	
Ideational themes - marked (M)	68	18%	98	22%	0.50
Textual themes (TX)	214	59%	218	49%	0.12
Interpersonal themes (IN)	4	1%	32	7%	
Total No. clauses	378		442		

Two-tailed t-test with paired data was, once again, conducted to check whether such differences were significant. Interpersonal themes were disregarded since they were more related to the writing style, rather than coherence and cohesion. The test came up with p=.05 for marked themes and p=0.12 for TX themes. This showed that there was a 50% chance that the difference in marked-theme use was random; and the chance for TX was 12%. In other words, statistical data showed no significant differences in the proportional use of theme types between the two groups.

Similarly, Table 3 indicates no significant differences between the uses of thematic progression patterns. In both groups, the most popular pattern was Theme Reiteration (T-R) with approximately a third of the total number of clauses. Zig-zag pattern (Z-Z) accounted for 20%-25%, which made it the the second most commonly used type. Multiple-Rheme pattern came in third with less than 10%. Another (less heard of) type of progression which was Rheme-reiteration was also found sparingly in students' essays with roughly 5% of the total number of clauses (See Extract 1).

Table 3. *Types of thematic progression in total times used and in percentages*

	Precourse		Postcourse		p (2-tailed)
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	
Theme Reiteration (T-R)	124	33%	128	29%	0.42
Zig-zag (Z-Z)	74	20%	112	25%	0.27
Multiple Rheme (M-R)	34	9%	31	7%	0.22
Rheme-reiteration (R-R)	22	6%	20	5%	
Total No. clauses	378		442		

Extract 1. 8722-PRE (*Rheme-reiteration example*)

Theme	***Rheme***
Secondly/, it is the illegal downloading platforms, not the	that bear the greatest responsibility for this situation.

users,	
(T-R) (R-R) They	are the ones who directly commit the crime and make a profit from it.
(R-R) As a result,/ fining the users	is pointless as long as the culprit can still get through and gain advantage by these platforms.
Note: the underlined parts are reiterated throughout the sentences.	

From the above results on the percentages of theme types and thematic progression patterns, no significant differences were identified between the precourse and postcourse essays.

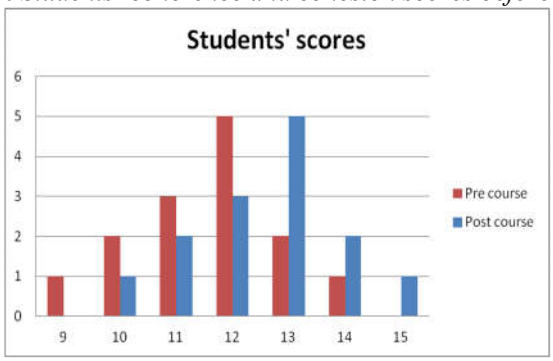
In general, there were a total of 11 types of errors found in the analyzed essays that could be conceptualized using the model of theme and rheme. There were still a number of coherence and cohesion errors that could not be explained by this model, some of which related to grammar and vocabulary. Compared with previous studies by Wang (2007), Kuswoyo and Susardi (2017), and Nguyen H. (2020), the theme-rheme errors found in this study coincided for the most part, yet one more type of mistake of "unrelated rheme" was identified. However, the mistake aligns with the Inference Boundary model, which establishes certain constraints based on context for the rheme (Clark & Clark, 1977).

As for the non-theme-rheme errors, they have proven that, although the theme-rheme model is extremely useful in identifying specific problems that hinder coherent writing, it cannot fully cover all coherence-cohesion-related problems. In other words, theme and rheme theory cannot provide a complete solution to all incoherent issues.Another aspect that is worth mentioning is the role of grammar and vocabulary in C&C. Although the two often stand alone as two distinct criteria from C&C in writing assessment, a high frequency of such issues, with a certain degree of seriousness, in writing can actually hinder the clarity of a text. Similar issues with grammar were also identified in Kuswoyo and Susardi (2017), with sentences lacking either a theme or a rhyme causing difficulties in comprehension.

Regarding the number of errors, several inferences can be made about students' awareness of coherence and cohesion. Prior to the treatment, although students were allowed to submit their final versions of essays, which had received comments from (at least) their peers and had been corrected, a relatively large number of coherence problems were identified in all categories of errors (except for the category "confusing referents"). This strengthens the fact that these freshmen experienced difficulties identifying and adjusting to mistakes in this aspect. Meanwhile, in posttest essays, the number of errors, particularly those related to TX themes and rhemes, has reduced considerably. This proves that, to a certain extent, students' awareness of coherence and cohesion has improved. One error type that has completely disappeared in post-course essays is "empty rheme." It is not surprising since this is an error that can easily be recognized and corrected.

Research question 2:

Figure 1. *Students' coherence and cohesion scores before and after the course*



From the statistic in figure 3 above, students achieved higher scores in terms of coherence and cohesion after the course. Specifically, before the course started, their scores ranged from 9 to 14, with the highest number of 5 students scoring 12. This range increased to (10-15) as students got their second essays marked 6 weeks later. The mode also rose to 13 with over a third of the students.

To ensure that the discrepancy was not random, mean scores and the p value for t-test were calculated. The mean scores for precourse essays and postcourse essays were 11.57 and 12.57 respectively. One-tailed t-test with paired data (two scores from the same student were paired together) came up with a p value of 0.012 (which is smaller than 0.05). This meant that students' second essays' scores were significantly higher than the first ones'.

Table 4. *Mean, mode, median and p value for students' scores*

	N	Mean	Mode	Median	p (1-tailed)
Pre course	26	11.57	12	12	0.012
Post course	26	12.57	13	13	

From the statistic above**,** it is concluded that no significant changes have been found in both the percentages of theme types and thematic progression patterns after the intervention. Although the percentage of the Z-Z pattern in posttest essays was relatively higher than the pretest ones, the percentages of other progression patterns have the tendency to drop slightly. This contradicts the findings in Wei (2015), which indicated a considerable increase in the number of motivated themes (themes which form progressions) and the percentage of linear progression (Z-Z pattern) used in students' writings after the quasi-experiment. There were no certain explanations for this discrepancy, yet it might be due to the difference in emphasis between the two instructional packages derived from two studies. In Wei (2015), students were taught each thematic progression pattern in one 50-minute session, not including revision sessions. Meanwhile, in this study, all progression patterns were introduced in a 2-hour lesson with another topic of "unmotivated theme.".

Despite no noteworthy patterns emerging from quantitative data, descriptive data has indicated otherwise: In this work, ID themes were employed with higher complexity, compared to a large number of simple, repetitive ones in pre-treatment writings. This has led to a number of improvements in TX theme use and the quality of thematic progression.

Regarding TX themes, which used to be the primary tool in connecting ideas, there has been a significant reduction in the reliance on these types of cohesive devices. Instead, posttest essays resorted to thematic progression to create the links wherever possible. At the same time, the quality of different types of thematic progression also shows certain improvements. In pretest essays, many simple ID themes were simply repeated and showed little value in terms of coherence and cohesion, whereas the reiteration of themes in posttest compositions ensured the essay focus was retained.

As for the Z-Z pattern in the latter writings, attempts at rephrasing old information in a subsequent theme were recorded, although with varied complexity (only demonstratives, demonstratives in combination with synonyms, near synonyms, or hypernyms/shell nouns, complex nominal groups, or, less commonly, dependent clauses). Such ways of maintaining a continuous flow of information were also found in ESL students' essays in Mellos (2011), although more advanced ways were a rarity in the current study.

In addition, apart from the three progression patterns documented in previous studies, rheme-reiteration was found to be another pattern that contributes to textual cohesion. This finding, although once documented in newspaper analysis by Hawes (2015), was relatively novel compared with previous studies whose focus was on academic compositions.

Apart from certain improvements, there are areas of theme and thematic progression use that recorded mixed results. First, marked themes, which Eggin (2004) and Mellos (2011) concluded as a tool contributing greatly to coherence, were used with mixed effects both before and after the treatment. Marked themes that were "it"-clauses caused breaks in progression when placed in supporting ideas. The findings resonate with findings from Eggin (2004). When predicated clauses

are used as marked themes, they signal an emphasis on the information that follows "it + be" whereas in cases of problematic use, the clause should have elaborated on what has been said in the preceding clause, rather than signal an overt evaluation such as "obvious" or "undeniable.". The lack of instruction on how to use marked themes could be a possible reason for this problem.

The second problem that has gotten slightly worse after the course is the more frequent occurrences of brand new themes. The result was the opposite to that in Wei (2015), yet qualitative analysis found a notable discrepancy in how these poor choices of themes were made before and after the course. Particularly, in precourse essays, the choices were quite instinctive and did not show a particular pattern, while many of the later writings showed a lot more intentional choices of what came first in a clause, which were oftentimes words in the same collocations. This pattern of errors shows an early awareness of how progression is formed, as well as an attempt to diversify the theme use. Regretably, the pattern also illustrates a lack of opportunity to practice to be able to really apply the learnt theory better. The assumption is confirmed in open-ended questionnaire responses when a number of students express the need for further practice.

Moreover, the T-test results showed a significant increase in students' essay scores for the criteria of coherence and cohesion after the Theme-rheme course. This proves that there has been a certain degree of improvement in students' writing performance. The results resonate with Choo (2009) and Wei (2015), which found that the instruction of theme and rheme had a positive influence on students' coherence and cohesion.

4. Conclusion

Theme and rheme are the two important concepts to organize the information in discourses. At a higher level, they play a vital role in constructing texts to be cohesively and coherently. The study explores to what extent implicit instruction of theme-rheme/thematic progression can have an impact on students' coherence and cohesion, particularly in academic writing. To find the answer to the research problem, the study has employed one-group quasi-experimental design, which involves a 10-week interventional course, and a thorough comparison of participants' compositions before, and after the intervention in terms of existing C&C errors, the use of theme-rheme and thematic progression, and C&C scores.

The study has strengthened the fact that an awareness of theme and rheme and their influence on the textual meaning of a text can be helpful in assisting the teaching and learning of academic writing. Regarding teachers' benefits, the research has provided a relatively complete set of materials for instructing the framework. This package can be either incorporated into the main writing lessons or used in writing correction sessions. By identifying the exact elements that could enhance, or deter, textual coherence and cohesion, the theme-rheme lessons will make this aspect, which has always been a more abstract one compared with grammar and vocabulary, more tangible and workable for learners.

For students, the paper presents a detailed analysis of authentic texts written by ESL students to highlight what has been done well and what has not in terms of managing coherence. Every student would probably find themselves in one of the examples listed in the findings, and this relatability enables them to visualize ways to enhance coherence and to avoid some mistakes. In addition, the analytical rubric specifically designed for coherence and cohesion implemented in the study could be helpful to students as they revise their own writing. The rubric elaborated on different levels of coherence and cohesion management, from a broad perspective such as the overall organization and progression of the text, to a narrower scope such as the use of textual themes or the complexity of reiteration. The explicit categorization of criteria assists learners in assessing their texts' levels of coherence and which criteria need further improvements. They can also look at other peers' writings who have done better to adopt the same techniques.

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Phân tích vai trò Đề - Thuyết trong việc nâng cao tính liên kết và mạch lạc trong bài viết của sinh viên ngành ngôn ngữ

Tóm tắt: Thông qua khảo sát thực nghiệm có can thiệp trong 10 tuần và phân tích bài viết của sinh viên ngành ngôn ngữ Anh tại Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ - Đại học quốc gia Hà Nội, nghiên cứu đã tập trung chỉ ra những lỗi sai sinh viên ngành ngôn ngữ Anh thường mắc phải liên quan đến Đề, Thuyết, diễn tiến đề ngữ đồng thời làm rõ vai trò của Đề - Thuyết trong việc tạo sự liên kết và tính mạch lạc cho văn bản. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy có sự cải thiện đáng kể về chất lượng các bài viết của những sinh viên sau khi được học về Đề - Thuyết. Bước đầu sinh viên đã có thể sử dụng Đề và diễn tiến đề ngữ một cách hiệu quả để tăng tính mạch lạc và gắn kết cho bài viết; đồng thời tránh các lỗi thiếu mạch lạc trong tư duy và phát triển bài viết. Nghiên cứu mong muốn góp phần nâng cao nhận thức của người dạy và người học ngoại ngữ về vai trò của Đề và Thuyết cũng như Diễn tiến đề ngữ trong việc nâng cao chất lượng các văn bản viết.

Từ khoá: đề; thuyết; diễn tiến đề ngữ; sinh viên ngành ngôn ngữ Anh; kĩ năng viết.