



THEME ANALYSIS AS A TOOL TO TEACH COHESIVE ENGLISH TEXTS

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Abstract: *The fact shows that teaching writing English as a foreign language in Indonesia is not easy. The students' problems seem to be related to grammar, vocabulary, genre and mostly cohesion. We should always find appropriate better ways to solve this problem. One of the ways to solve this problem may be the application of Systemic Functional Linguistics, especially the use of Theme in shaping a cohesive text. It is shaped by making the Theme of the clause be related with the Theme or the Rheme of the previous clauses.*

Keywords: *Theme, Rheme, Clause, Cohesion*

Abstrak: *Fakta menunjukkan bahwa mengajar siswa untuk menulis dalam bahasa Inggris di Indonesia merupakan sebuah tantangan. Masalah yang masih dimiliki oleh siswa menyangkut grammar, vocabulary dan terutama kohesi. Kita harus selalu berikhtiar untuk menemukan cara yang sesuai untuk memecahkan masalah ini. Salah satu yang mungkin bisa dilakukan adalah mengaplikasikan pendekatan Systemic Functional Linguistics, yaitu penggunaan Theme dalam menulis teks yang kohesif. Hal ini dapat dilakukan dengan melatih siswa untuk memahami bahwa sebuah Theme dapat dihubungkan dengan Theme atau Rheme klausa sebelumnya.*

Kata Kunci: *Theme, Rheme, Klausa, Kohesi.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia, especially teaching writing, is very challenging (e.g: Pratiwi, 2016). The challenges come from either the lack of students' experience, the very limited time allocated to study English at schools, the limited resource materials, and the teaching methods, amongst others. These limitations have caused Indonesian EFL students to have difficulties in producing English text, especially in composing a cohesive text (eg: Albana, Marzuki, Alek, Hidayat, 2020) For example, one of my students wrote *I want to go to college because I can get more knowledge. Being fluent in English will greatly facilitate us when travelling far.* From this example, we can see that the two sentences seem not to be directly connected. This example suggests that the students lack of understanding in wiring a cohesive text in English. Therefore, we need to find ways to help our students to be able to write cohesively. The question is how can we help students to write a cohesive text? One of possible ways which deals with cohesive text is making use of Theme analysis. By doing Theme analysis, students can become aware of their text cohesion. So the purpose of this article is to describe how Theme analysis can be used as a tool to compose cohesive texts.

B. THEME

A clause always consist of a Theme and a Rheme. Halliday (1994) states: “Themes is the element which serves as the point of departure of the message”. It is the realisation of textual dimension of metafunction. Textual metafunction gives the writer choice in organizing the text. While rheme is the part in which the themed is developed. The following examples can give the illustration:

- The dog ate the hamburger
Theme Rheme

- The hamburger was eaten by the dog
Theme Rheme

These two clauses have the same experiential meaning, because what happens in the real world is already represented by both clauses. However, they have different textual meaning, because the choice of the first word to start the clause is different. The point that becomes the matter in the first clause is *the dog*, while the matter of the second clause is with *the hamburger*. In other word, the theme in the first clause is “the dog”, and the theme of the second clause is “the hamburger”. More examples are the following:

- The teacher has given my friend
Theme Rheme

- A book the teacher has given to my friend
Theme Rheme

- To my friend the teacher has given
Theme Rheme

The detail of the theme can be seen in the following explanation.

1. Textual Theme

Textual themes consist of three them, the are:

1). Continuative, 2). Structural and 3). Conjunctive.

1). Continuative theme is the discourse signallers such as *yes, no, well, oh, no*, which signal that a new move is beginning. The example taken from Halliday (1994) can be seen in figure (1).

Figure 1: Examples:

Oh	soldier	won't	you	marry me
Continuative	vocative	finite	topical	Rheme
textual	interpersonal		Experiential	
Theme				

- 2). Structural Theme is element that consist of conjunction such as *and, or, so,* and WH-relative such as *which, who, where, However.* The complete elements can be seen in figure (2) and figure (3).

Figure 2: Conjunctions

Type	Examples
Co-ordinator	And, or, nor, either, but, yet, so, then
Subordinator	When, while, before, after, until, because, if, although, unless, since, that, whether, (in order) to Even if, in case, supposing (that), assuming (that), seeing (that), given that, provided (that) in spite of the fact that, in the event that, so that

Figure 3: Relatives

Type	Examples
Definite	Which, who, that, whose, where (why, how)
Indefinite	Whatever, whichever, whoever, whomever, whenever, wherever, however

- 3). Conjunctive Theme is the adjuncts listed in figure (4).

Figure 4: Conjunctive Adjuncts

	Type	Meaning	Examples
I	Appositive	'i.e.,e.g'	That is, in other words
	Corrective	'rather'	At least, to be precise
	Dismissive	'in any case'	In any case, anyway
	Summative	'in short'	Briefly, tp sum up
	Verifactive	'actually'	Actually, in fact
II	Additive	'and'	Also, moreover, beside
	Adversative	'but'	However, conversely
	Variative	'instead'	Instead, alternatively
III	Temporal	'then'	Before that, later on
	Comparative	'likewise'	In the same way
	Casual	'so'	Therefore, as a result
	Conditional	'(if...) then'	In that case, otherwise
	Concessive	'yet'	Nevertheless
	Respective	'as to that'	In this respect, as far as that's concerned.

2. Interpersonal Theme

Interpersonal theme consists of 3 themes, they are:

- 1). Vocative, 2). Modal, 3). Mood-marking
- 1). Vocative Theme is any item, typically a person name.
- 2). Modal Theme is any of the modal adjuncts listed in figure (5).

Figure 5: Modal Adjuncts

	Type	Meaning	Examples
I	Probability Usuality Typicality Obviousness	How likely? How often? How typical? How obvious?	Probably, maybe Usually, always, never Generally, occasionally Of course, surely
II	Opinion Admission Persuasion Entreaty Presumption Desirability Reservation Validation Evaluation Prediction	I think I admit I assure you I request you I presume How desirable? How reliable? How valid? How sensible? How expected?	In my opinion Frankly, to be honest Believe me, seriously Please, kindly Evidently, no doubt Fortunately, hopefully At first, tentatively In general, on the whole Wisely, mistakenly Surprisingly, as expected

- 3). Mood-marking Theme is a finite verbal operator, if preceding the topical theme or a WH-interrogative (or let's) when not preceded by another element.

3. Experiential Theme

Experiential Theme can be a participant, Circumstance, or process. It is also called topical theme, because a theme consists of at least a topical theme. In a clause, there is only one topica; theme.

C. THEME ANALYSIS

In order to be clear, a text taken from a brochure pf medicine “Voltaren Rapid 50” is analyzed. The text is:

“Aspirin was original anti-inflammatory drug and is still used to treat some forms of pain. However, to control inflammation, as well as pain, very large doses of aspirin are required, which can be, inconvenient to take and, more importantly, may cause stomach irritation or dyspepsia and sometimes ulcers and bleeding. Another medication which is frequently used by for mild pain is paracetamol. This is an analgesic (pain reliever) which many people find effective. However, it has no effect on inflammation or stiffness.”

The first clause in the paragraph is “Aspirin was original anti-inflammatory drug”. The analysis is:

Aspirin	Was original anti-inflammatory drug
THEME	RHEME

The theme of this first clause is aspirin, and the new information is in the rheme, that is “was the original anti-inflammatory drug”. The reason for aspirin to be put as the first theme in the paragraph might be because the function of this paragraph is telling the treatment using medicine. It is known that aspirin is one type of medicine used in the treatment of illness.

The new information in the clause is rheme, that is “was the original anti-inflammatory drug”. This rheme suggests that it was, not it is, original anti-inflammatory drug. In other word, the rheme of the clause tell the reader that in the past, people used to use an anti-inflammatory drug, which was used at the first time. By contrast, this rheme might tell any anti-inflammatory drug at present, which is not original any more. The non-original drug might be written later after this clause.

In whole, this first clause tell the reader that aspirin, as one type of medicine, used to be taken by people in the past as anti-inflammatory drug. But at present, it is not taken anymore, because there might be new anti-inflammatory drug, another type of medicine having the same effect as aspirin. This new medicine might be found later anywhere after this clause.

The second clause is still in the ssame sentence, that is “and is still used to treats some forms of pain”. The analysis is:

And	(aspirin)	Is still used to treat some forms of pain
Textual	Topical (ellipsis)	R H E M E
T H E M E		

This second clause begins with conjunction “and” which can be called textual theme, which is an element that doesn’t express interpersonal or experiential meaning, but plays important role in cohesive work, relating the clause to its context (Eggin, 1994). Eggin continues, that ‘and’ is a conjunctive adjunct as theme, that is a conjunction which is used to link clauses together within a sentence. The topical theme in this clause is not written, but it is already understood from the previous clause, that is ‘aspirin’. Such situation might what Halliday (1994) calls anaphoric ellipsis, where some part of the clause is presupposed from what has come before.

The new message, rheme, is ‘is still used to treat some form of pain’. This rheme tell the reader that aspirin, is at present still used by people. The mood adjunct ‘still’ indicates that aspirin has been used since the past time.

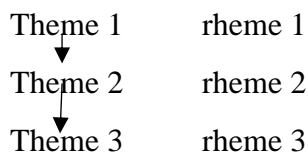
The relation of this clause with the message in the first clause seems to be contradictory. It is contradictory, because in the first clause, aspirin was (simple past< meaning not a present). However, in the second clause, it is written that it is used at present. This contradiction then dissapeared after being related by a textual theme ‘and’. This proves that textual theme has an important role in shaping the text, that is functioning as cohesion device.

The third clause is “However, to control inflammation, as well as pain, very large doses of aspirin are required”. The analysis is:

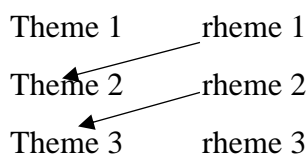
However	To control inflammation as well as pain	Very large doses of aspirin are required
Textual	Topical (marked)	R H E M E
T H E M E		

This clause start with textual theme ‘however’, followed by topical theme, which is a marked theme ‘to control inflammation as well as pain’. This theme is marked, because ‘to control inflammation as well as pain’ cannot function as subject in declarative clause (Halliday, 1994). Halliday says that marked theme can be adverbial group or preposition phrase, functioning as adjunct. In fact, ‘to control inflammation as well as pain’ seems to be adjunct, specifically circumstantial adjunct of cause, purpose (Halliday, 1994). The reason for this theme to be marked might be caused by the intention of the writer to raise this message to be very important to know. This might also be caused by the conjunctive, textual theme ‘however’. This textual theme function to lower the importance of previous message, ‘aspirin’. The marked theme ‘to control inflammation as well as pain’ also functions as signal that this theme is very important message. As Eggins suggest that marked theme is chosen because the writer/speaker is signaling that all the this are not equal.

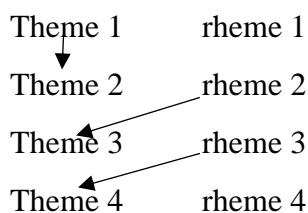
The relation between this clause and the previous clause is that the theme if this clause, ‘to control inflammation as well as pain’, is taken from the previous rheme, ‘some of the pain’. In other word, inflammation is still related to the form of the pain. This is relevant to what Ferguson, et. al (1995) suggests, that thematic development can be done by three ways: firstly, the theme of a clause refers to the theme of the previous clause. The diagram is:



The second thematic development is, that the theme of the clause refers to the rheme in the previous clause. the diagram is:



The third method is to use both methods in a text. The diagram is:



Those thematic development methods help to organize the text to become cohesive and make sense.

The fourth clause is still in the same sentence with the third clause, that is ‘which can be inconvenient to take’. The analysis is:

Which	Can be inconvenient to take
T H E M E	R H E M E

The clause starts with a relative ‘which’. The function of ‘which’ is to relate the clause. However, it is not conjunction, it is either noun or adverb (Halliday, 1994). According to Halliday, relatives are obligatory thematic. This topical theme ‘which’ refers to the previous topical theme, that is ‘large doses of aspirin’. This follows Ferguson, et.al’s second pattern of thematic development method, that is the theme refers to the theme in the previous clause. Therefore, the message of the theme and rheme in this clause is ‘large doses of aspirin can be inconvenient to take’.

The fifth clause is ‘and more importantly, may cause stomach irritation or dyspepsia and sometimes ulcers and bleeding’. The analysis is:

And	More importantly	May cause stomach irritation or dyspepsia and sometimes ulcers and bleeding
Textual	Topical (marked)	R H E M E
T H E M E		

In this clause, there are two themes, textual theme ‘and’, and topical theme, marked theme ‘more importantly’. The textual theme ‘and’ functions as the conjunction that organize the textual meaning, that is relating this clause to the message of the previous clause, having additive relation (Halliday, 1994). The other theme, ‘more importantly’, is a marked theme because it is not the subject of the clause. As mentioned before, a marked theme is a declarative clause is when the topical theme is not the subject of the clause. In fact, it is not a subject, but what Halliday (1994) calls circumstantial adjunct of manner, quality. The function of this marked theme is like what Eggins says, to signal that the message is not equal. It means that this needs more attention than the previous message. Therefore, the message of this clause seems like this: ‘The first thing to know before knowing other things is that large doses of aspirin may cause stomach irritation or dyspepsia and sometimes ulcers and bleeding’.

The sixth clause is ‘another medication which is frequently used for mild pain is paracetamol’. The analysis is:

Another medication which is frequently used for mild pain	Is paracetamol
T H E M E	R H E M E

The theme of this clause is ‘another medication which is frequently used for mild pain’. This type of pain might be what Halliday (1994) calls simple theme or more than one group of phrase. This theme is called simple, because it contains only one unit, that is nominal group. This unit, therefore, functions as one constituency, thus one theme. This theme still has relation with the previous theme, that is about medicine.

The new message, the rheme of this clause is ‘is paracetamol’. It has equal position with the theme. Halliday (1994) calls this type of clause as thematic equative, because it forms two elements (theme + rheme) and the two elements are linked by a relationship or identify of ‘equal signs’, express by the verb ‘be’.

The message of this clause in the text seems to be like this: ‘Another medicine (other than aspirin), is paracetamol.’. Therefore, aspirin and paracetamol are two types of medicine which have equal degree of importance/unimportance.

The seventh clause is ‘This is an analgesic (pain reliever)’. The analysis is:

This	Is an analgesic (pain reliever)
T H E M E	R H E M E

Theme of this clause is the topical theme ‘this’. It refers to the rheme in the previous clause, that is ‘paracetamol’. Again, this follows second thematic development method proposed by Ferguson, et.al. The rheme is ‘an analgesic (pain reliever)’. This might also be an equative thematic, that is the message in the theme equals to that in the rheme.

The eight clause, which is still in the same sentence with the seventh clause is ‘which many people find effective’. The analysis is:

Which	Many people find effective
T H E M E	R H E M E

The theme of this clause is relative ‘which’. As Halliday mentioned before, that relative of this kind is obligatory thematic. It refers to the rheme of the previous clause ‘an analgesic (pain reliever). It might also refers to the theme of the previous clause, ‘this’ (paracetamol). This is possible because the previous clause is an equative thematic, where the theme and the rheme have the same message. Therefore, whether the theme ‘which’ refers to the theme or the rheme of the previous clause, the textual meaning doesn’t make any difference.

The message represented by the theme and rheme in this clause is ‘paracetamol, an analgesic (pain reliever), is effective for many people’.

The last clause of this paragraph is ‘however’, it has no effect on inflammation or stiffness’. The analysis is:

However	It	Has no effect on inflammation or stiffness
Textual	Topical	R H E M E
T H E M E		

There are two themes in this clause. the first is textual theme ‘however’ and the other is topical theme ‘it’. The textual theme functions as the conjunction, relating previous message with that of the preceding. It relates the two clauses in what Halliday (1994) calls adversative type, contrasting the message it relates. The topical theme ‘it’ refers to the theme of the previous clause ‘which’, which refers to ‘paracetamol’. Therefore, the message represented by the theme and rheme of this clause is ‘But paracetamol has no effect on inflammation or stiffness’.

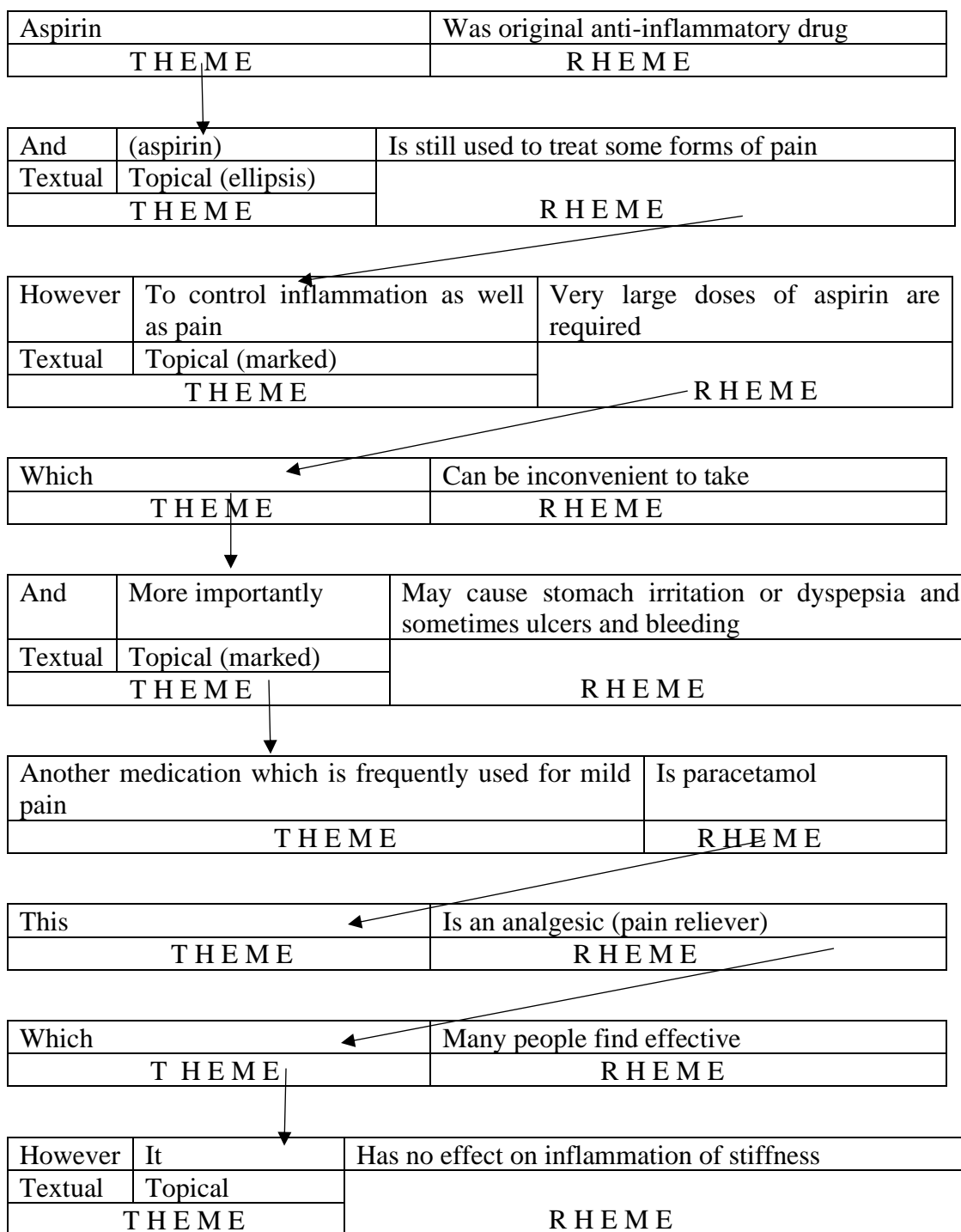
The paragraph following it, which is still about medicine, is not presented here, but it is about a better medicine than the medicine written in the paragraph having been analyzed. The better medicine is Non-Steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS), in which the medicine being introduced in this brochure, Voltaren Rapid, is one of them.

The message written in the first paragraph, therefore, seems to be an introduction. It gives illustration about the weaknesses of the medicine that has been used so far. Then in the next paragraph, the good medicine, which is medicine being introduced, is offered.

D. THE RESULT OF THE ANALYSIS

From the analysis of the paragraph, it can be seen that there are several types of theme found in the paragraph. They are:

- Textual theme: and, however
- Elliptical theme: it/aspirin
- Marked theme: to control inflammation as well as pain, more importantly.
- Topical theme: aspirin, which, this, it.
- Simple theme of more than one group or phrase: another medication which is frequently used for mild pain.
- The thematic development methods used are various:



E. APPLICATION IN TEACHING WRITING

Making use of Theme analysis to teach writing cohesive texts in English may be done in several ways. One of them can be a filling gap practice. Filling gap means there is a part in a sentence which is left blank for the students to fill in. To fill it in, students should consult with the words either with the previous or the preceding clauses or sentences. By understanding the context in those clauses or sentences, students can have idea of what word or words to fill in the blank space. The following is a simple example of filling gap exercise, taken from the same text used in previous part of this article.

“Aspirin was original anti-inflammatory drug and is still used to treat some forms of pain. However, to control _____(1) , as well as pain, very large doses of _____(2) are required, _____(3) can be, inconvenient to take and, more importantly, may cause stomach irritation or dyspepsia and sometimes ulcers and bleeding. Another medication which is frequently used by for mild pain is paracetamol. _____(4) is an analgesic (pain reliever) which many people find effective. However, _____(5) has no effect on inflammation or stiffness.”

Clue: 1). Inflammation 2). Aspirin 3). Which 4). This 5). It

The above example shows that students should fill in Themes in the blank space. By doing this, students are given a model of a cohesive text and trained to think or to identify the connection between ideas. We may also sometimes need to ask students to think of Rhemes as well, as in number 2) in the exercise.

The next step after students are given the “awareness” exercise of Theme analysis, may be giving a writing exercise. Students are given tasks to compose a text or texts which need them to use Themes to connect between ideas. By doing these exercises repeatedly, students are expected to be aware of a cohesive text.

F. CONCLUSION

To conclude, a Theme is a significant tool to shape a cohesive text. As in the example given, the thematic (theme) development used by the ‘Voltaren Rapid 50’ makes the message flows well. It can be seen that all topical themes refer to medicine. Additionally, the theme of the last clause of the paragraph still refers to or at least has relation with the first theme in the first clause of the paragraph. It follows Ferguson, et.al’s (1995) method of thematic development, specifically type one and two. This thematic development proves that Theme has important role in representing textual meaning, specifically to keep the text cohesive.

The model of the Theme analysis can be applied in teaching English as a second or foreign language, especially for teaching writing. The teaching process can start with making the students aware of the position of Themes, then give students writing tasks which need them to practice using Theme in the appropriate way to produce a cohesive text.

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