



AN ANALYSIS OF TEXTUAL METAFUNCTION IN THAI EFL STUDENTS' WRITING

Sudrutai ARUNSIROT¹

Abstract: As teaching English as a foreign language, it has become obvious that an average Thai is considered to have very low English proficiency. As a result, Thailand may find herself at a disadvantage because of inferior English skills towards globalization and forming of ASEAN community. Thus, the study is devoted to the exploration of English writing skill which sets out to obtain some concrete information on the students' problems in writing English supported by Systemic Functional Grammar. The result reveals that five problems of the Theme in terms of Theme selections and Thematic progression patterns were found: the problem of empty Theme, the problem of the brand new Theme, the problem of overuse of constant progression, the problem of empty Rheme, and the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme. It is hoped that the current study would be a contribution to the development of linguistic studies. This study will provide not only Thai EFL learners with a better understanding of problems in order to help them improve their writing performance, but will also provide Thai teachers with information that will help to develop English teaching materials and practical tools for Thai EFL learners, especially for teaching writing in EFL classroom.

Keywords: Expository writing, Theme and Rheme analysis, Systemic Functional Grammar

Özet: İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğretirken, ortalama bir Taylandlının çok düşük bir İngilizce seviyesine sahip olduğu açıkça görülmektedir. Düşük İngilizce becerilerinden ve Güneydoğu Asya Milletler Birliği'nin bir parçası olduğundan dolayı Tayland dezavantajlı olmaktadır. Bu yüzden, bu çalışma öğrencilerin Sistemik İşlevsel Dil Bilgisi tarafından desteklenen İngilizce yazmadaki problemleri üzerine bazı bilgiler elde etmeyi amaçlayarak İngilizce yazmanın keşfine yönelmektedir. Özne seçimleri ve özne devamlılık öğeleri açısından sonuçlar öznelle alakalı beş problemin bulunduğunu ortaya koymaktadır: öznenin olmaması problemi, daha önce kullanılmamış yeni bir öznenin kullanılması problemi, özne devamlılığının aşırı kullanılması problemi, yüklem olmaması problemi ve metinsel öznenin karmaşık seçimi problemi. Bu çalışmanın dilbilimsel çalışmaların gelişimine katkı sağlaması umulmaktadır. Bu araştırma, sadece İngilizce'yi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Taylandlı öğrencilere kendilerinin yazma performanslarını geliştirmelerine yardımcı olmak için karşılaşılan problemlerin daha geniş kapsamlı bilgisini sunmakla kalmayacak, aynı zamanda Taylandlı öğretmenlere, özellikle de İngilizce'nin yabancı dil olarak öğretildiği sınıflarda yazma becerilerini öğrenenlere, Taylandlı öğrenciler için İngilizce öğretme materyalleri ve pratik araçlar geliştirmeye yardımcı olacak bilgileri de sunmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Açıklayıcı yazma, özne-yüklem analizi, Sistemik İşlevsel Dil Bilgisi

1. Introduction

As a developing country, English was first introduced into Thailand through contact with foreign native speakers of English. Since that time, English has had widespread influence on Thai society. As a result, it was taught as one of the school's compulsory subjects in Thai schools. With globalization and modernization, English has become a key language in schools and universities and has a significant influence on education and society today. The role of English has gradually expanded in parallel with the economic growth of Thailand and the launch of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015. Hence, keeping up with globalization and preparing to be part of the ASEAN community, it is important to encourage Thai people to be familiar with English.

¹ Dr., The School of Western Languages, Chiangmai Rajabhat University, Thailand, a_sudrutai@hotmail.com

In Thailand where Thai students are identified as English foreign language (hereafter EFL) learners, the most serious problem in English language learning is writing skills (Pawapatcharaudom, 2007). Previous studies on the written work of Thai EFL learners both at university level and at lower levels such as Lukanavanich (1988), Abdulsata (1999), Boon-Long (1998), Srinon (1999), Lush (2002) have shown that their writing is full of errors. Therefore, Thai students need to be exposed to a deeper awareness of what types of errors frequently occur and why they make those errors. Regarding the subject of teaching English as a foreign language, many studies have been done to ascertain errors which occur below the clause level, however there has been little previous work focusing on errors at the discourse level. Consequently, I was motivated to undertake a study of Thai EFL learners' writing at the level beyond the clause to investigate Thai EFL learners' writing difficulties.

To examine Thai EFL learners' writing difficulties, the analytical framework of Theme-Rheme of Systemic Functional Linguistics was used as a tool to characterize writing in terms of coherence. As Halliday (1985) stated, 'the textual function of the clause is that of constructing a message' and the Theme/Rheme structure is the 'basic form of the organization of the clause as message.'

The present study should be a contribution to the development of linguistic studies. This will provide not only Thai EFL learners with a better understanding of problems in order to help them improve their writing performance, but will also provide Thai teachers with information that will help to develop English teaching materials and practical tools for Thai EFL learners, especially for teaching writing in EFL classroom.

2. Research Methodology

This study uses documentation methods. 114 student compositions written by 57 second-year undergraduate students majoring in English were obtained as the raw data. These students were enrolled in the writing course named ENG 2213: Writing 2 in Academic Year 2012 at Chiang Mai Rajabhat University. Within this course, they were assigned to write their opinions in one paragraph entitled '*the best book I have ever read*' and '*the impact from the factories*' for developing writing skills.

Since this study aimed to investigate the students' problems in writing English, two aspects of Theme in the textual metafunction will be examined: Thematic selections and Thematic progression patterns. These components are further explored to investigate Theme types and Thematic progression manifested in students' writings. This analysis of the choice of Theme and Rheme allows us to reveal the writing difficulties with topic development and text flow that Thai EFL learners experience. Thus, the errors which occur below the clause level will not be involved in this analysis.

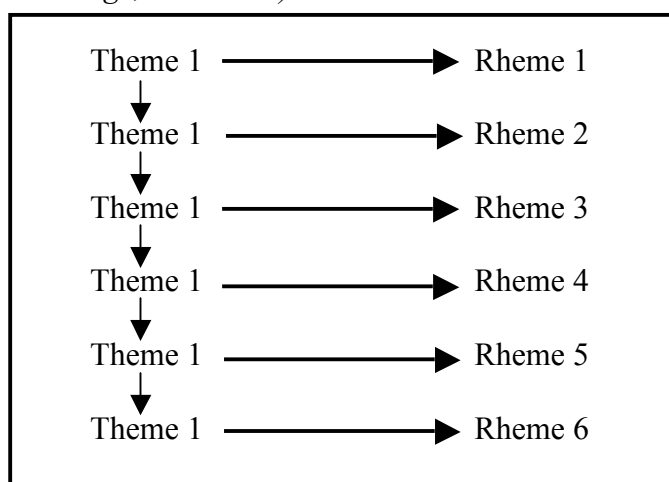
All these texts were, firstly, analyzed by using the Theme-Rheme framework to examine the Thematic structures and the Thematic progressions. The procedure applied in textual analysis was identifying the clause boundaries and number of clause simplexes and clause complexes by using boundary marker. By segmenting clauses, the 114 texts include 409 clause complexes and 1515 clause simplexes.

Secondly, analyzing the Thematic structures was adopted from Halliday (1985). There are three kinds of Themes: ideational, textual or interpersonal. The ideational Themes are further categorized as unmarked and marked. Unmarked Themes are grammatical sentence subjects in declarative clauses, and can be realized as simple and complex nominal groups. The

marked Themes are further subcategorized into three types: circumstantial adjunct, subordinating clause and attributive clause. After all occurrences of Theme types were scrutinized, percentages were calculated by dividing each Theme type by the total number of sentences.

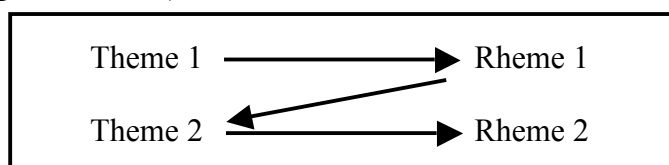
Thirdly, analyzing the Thematic progression of student texts was based on the Paltridge’s classification of Thematic progression. According to Paltridge (2000), Thematic progression is the way in which the Theme of the clause may pick up or repeat a meaning from a preceding Theme or Rheme. In other words, Thematic progression helps give cohesion and thus coherence to a text, guiding the reader through the text in a logical and rational course. There are three kinds of Thematic development pattern: Theme reiteration/ constant Theme pattern, a zig-zag/ linear Theme pattern and a multiple Theme/ split Rheme pattern. In a Theme reiteration or constant Theme pattern, a Theme is picked up and repeated at the beginning of each clause as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Thematic progression: Theme reiteration or constant Theme pattern (Martin & Rothery, 1986 as cited in Paltridge, 2000: 140)



In a zig-zag or linear Theme pattern, the subject matter in the Rheme of the previous clause is taken up in the Theme of a following clause as illustrated in Figure 2.

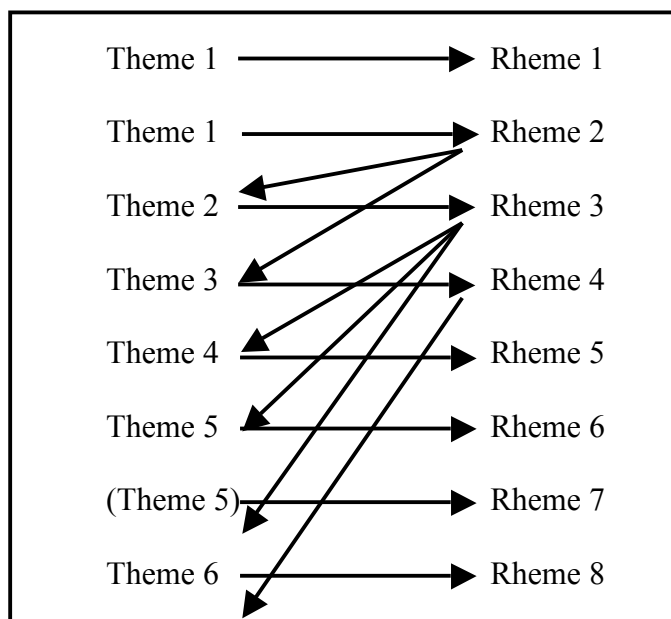
Figure 2
Thematic progression: A zig-zag or linear Theme pattern (Clegg & Wheeler, 1991: 83 as cited in Paltridge, 2000: 140)



In a multiple Theme or split Rheme progression, a Rheme may include a number of different pieces of information, each of which may be taken up as the Theme in a number of subsequent clauses as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Thematic progression: A multiple Theme/ split Rheme pattern (based on Nesbitt et al., 1990: 21)



Then, the kinds of Thematic progression used will be analyzed and presented in terms of the quantitative and qualitative results.

3. Results and Findings

3. 1. Theme and Rheme

According to Halliday, textual metafunction is realized through Thematic structure, information structure and cohesion. Thematic structure includes Theme and Thematic progression patterns, information structure includes given and new units of information and cohesion includes reference, conjunction, ellipsis and lexical cohesion. This study will focus exclusively on the Thematic structure to examine the problems resulting from the misuse of Theme and its effect on Thematic Progression in paragraph writing.

3. 2. Theme and Rheme boundary

According to Patpong (2002), Theme and Rheme boundary is a sequential ordering and range of possible groups or phrases that use for setting Theme and Rheme structure. In the present study, the sequential orders and possible Themes found in the data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

The sequential order and possible Themes found in the data

Theme			Rheme
Textual (optional)	Interpersonal (optional)	Topical/Ideational (obligatory)	
conjunction group: and, if, when, because, first, second, finally, then, as, so, in addition, moreover, weather, for example, most importantly, in	mood adjunct: I think Most importantly In my opinion Most of all	non-ellipsed: the best thing I have ever read, I, Power of life, the book ellipsed: ‘.	

particularly, since			
relative nominal group: which, who, that, why		relative nominal group: which, who, that, why	
▲		▲	

From Table 1, the Theme can be identified in terms of three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal and textual. It consists of the textual element which is optional followed by the interpersonal element which is optional and followed by a topical/ideational element which is obligatory. According to the frequency analysis, the topical/ideational elements occurred at the most frequent rates followed by textual elements and interpersonal elements. Regarding three different types of constituents, the Theme typically introduces some information which can either be in the form of a representation (Ideational), an opinion of the writer (Interpersonal) or the actual organization of the text by linking (textual).

In clause complexes, the previous clause and the following clause are linked together by a textual Theme, for example the conjunction group as ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘then’, ‘so’ and the relative nominal group ‘which’, ‘who’, ‘that’, ‘why’. Moreover, the relative nominal group performs a function not only as textual element, but also topical element.

3. 3. Theme and Rheme Structure

Based on the data, the Theme can be further broken down into sub-components: textual Theme, interpersonal Theme and topical/ideational Theme.

3. 3. 1. Textual Theme

Based on an analysis of Thematic structure, a continuative adjunct and conjunctive adjunct are found in these data as well as the relative elements.

3. 3. 1. 1. Conjunctive Adjunct as Theme

The account of the types of conjunctive relations will be based on Martin & Rose’s (2003) classification. They set further divided conjunctions into two categories for their roles: external and internal conjunctions. According to Martin & Rose (2003), external conjunctions are used to link objective events. Table 2 is a summary of the external conjunctions in terms of their roles of constructing logical relations found in the data.

Table 2
The external conjunctions found in the present study

Logical relation		Examples
Addition	Additive	and, both...and
	Alternative	Or
Comparison	Similar	Like
Time	Successive	after, since, before, after that, then, until
	Simultaneous	as, while, when
Consequence	Cause	because, so, therefore, even though, however, anyway
	Means	But
	Condition	if, whether, then
	Purpose	so that

Based on the data, 60.74% of all the conjunctions are external conjunctions. They are divided into four logical relations: addition, comparison, time and consequence. With respect to these kinds of external conjunctions, logical consequence relation is used most frequently (34.79%) followed by time (33.46%), addition (30.23) and comparison (1.52%).

Regarding the internal conjunctions, 39.26% of all conjunctions are internal conjunctions. They are also divided into four logical relations: addition, comparison, time and consequence. With respect to these kinds of internal conjunctions, logical time relation is used most frequently (80.59%) followed by addition (10%) and comparison (9.41%). In addition, there is no consequence found in the data. Table 3 is a summary of the internal conjunctions in terms of their roles of constructing logical relations found in the data.

Table 3

The internal conjunctions found in the present study

Logical relation		Examples
Addition	Developing	furthermore, moreover, in addition
Comparison	Rework	such as, for instance, for example, in particularly
Time	Successive	first of all, first, second, third, finally, next, the last

3.3.1.2. Continuative

According to Halliday & Matthysen (2004), continuatives are a small set of words which link or signal move in discourse. There are three kinds of logical relations: addition, comparison and time. Within addition, there is only sub-type of continuative: neutral. Within comparison, there are three sub-types: neutral, less than and more than. Finally, within time, there are four sub-types: sooner, longer, persistent, repetitive. Table 4 is a summary of the continuatives in terms of their roles of constructing logical relations found in the data.

Table 4

The continuatives found in the present study

Logical relation		Examples
Addition	Neutral	too, also
Comparison	Neutral	so (does the daughter)
	less than	only, just
Time	Persistent	still

3.3.2. Interpersonal Theme

According to Paltridge (2006), interpersonal Theme refers to an item that comes before the Rheme which indicates the relation between participants in the text, or the position or point of view that is being taken in the clause. Based on the data, an adjunct, and a finite are the subtypes found. There are no wh-elements and vocative subtypes. A set of lexical items such as mood adjunct ('I think/thought'), comment adjunct ('most importantly, most of all'), and finite ('does') are used to indicate the writer's comment on the ideational content of the clause.

3.3.3. Topical (Ideational) Theme

Topical (ideational) Theme is the element which refers to a participant, a circumstance or the process of the clause. Regarding Halliday (1985), topical Themes are divided into two subtypes: simple and multiple Theme. Simple Themes always have a topical element while multiple Themes may have the interpersonal and textual Themes in addition to topical Theme. The present study reveals that the number of multiple Themes outweighs the number

of simple Themes. 58.98% of all Themes are multiple Theme while 41.02% are simple Themes. This indicates that multiple Themes are dominant in the texts. As a result, the use of multiple Themes is one of the characteristic features of writing exposition, helping the writers in their attempts to persuade the readers.

3.3.3.1. Simple Theme

Within the simple Theme, the topical Theme is divided into two subtypes: unmarked and marked Theme. Simple marked Theme refers to when a topical element is chosen for foregrounding while simple unmarked Theme refers to that which is most usual. Overall, the number of unmarked Themes by far outweighs the number of marked Themes. 96.61 percent are unmarked Themes whereas 3.39 percent are marked Themes. In the present study, unmarked topical Themes are the subjects of the clause which could be either non-ellipsed topical Themes, ellipsed topical Themes (zero morpheme), or relative nominal groups. Moreover, there are two types of marked topical Theme: marked topical Themes as Theme Matter and marked topical Theme as transitivity role. In this study, the marked topical Theme as Theme matter is realized by ‘as to/for + nominal group’ such as *for one thing, for women*. It is presented explicitly as an explicit announcement of the Theme which plays a purely textual role.

In addition, the marked topical Themes as transitivity role are conflated with a participant or circumstance role in the clause. It is classified into three types: process Theme, participant Theme or non-subject complement Theme, and circumstance Theme. The circumstance Theme in terms of the location as Theme is the only subtype found in the present study. It can be either a place-direction, source or time. A place-direction is expressed through prepositional phrase serving as circumstantial adjunct *in the world*. Also, source is expressed through prepositional phrases serving as circumstantial adjuncts *in a novel, in this book, in this story, in the bible, by the story of some people in Thailand*. Moreover, the subtype of marked circumstance Theme used the most was time which is realized by either adverbial groups or prepositional phrases e.g. *yesterday, everyday, in the morning, mostly, in summer season*. The examples of simple Themes found in the present study are given in Table 5.

Table 5

The examples of simple Themes found in the present study

No	Theme				Rheme
	textual Theme	interpersonal Theme	topical Theme		
			marked Theme	unmarked Theme	
(1)				She	is kind and friendly.
(2)				There	are many advantages of a health book.
(3)			For women,		this magazine gives much information about their beauty.
(4)			In summer season,		we should choose our clothes to follow fashion trends.
(5)			Sometimes,		I just need a break for my life.

3.3.3.2. Multiple Theme

The multiple Theme refers to a clause structure which has more than one element of Theme. There are three types of multiple Theme found in this study: textual Theme and topical

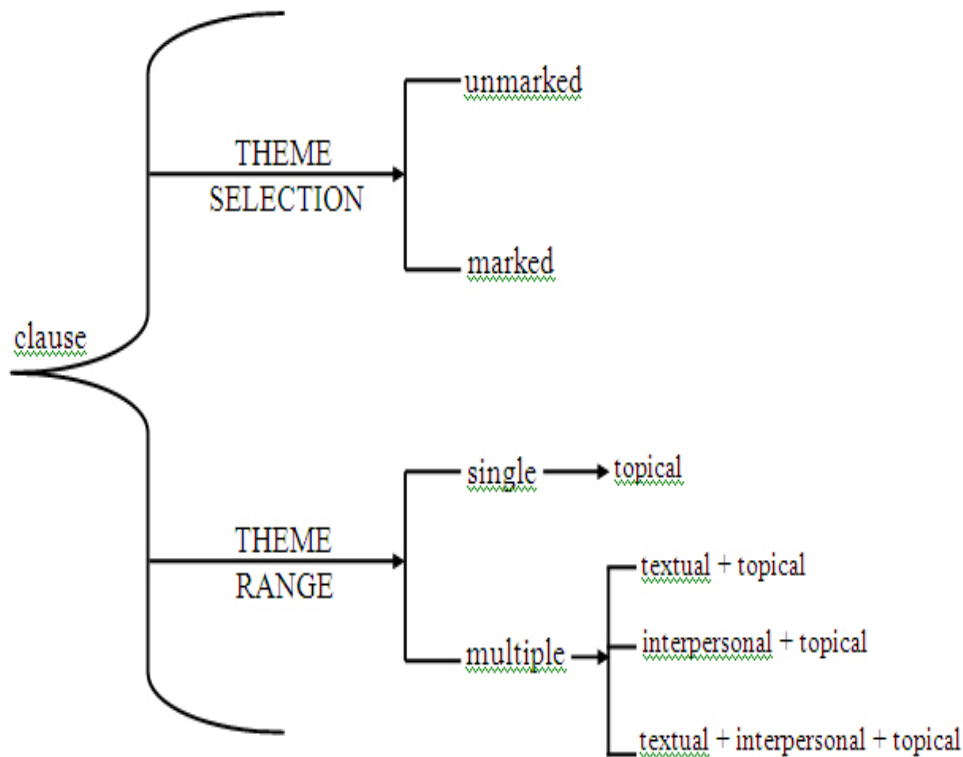
Theme, interpersonal Theme and topical Theme, textual Theme, interpersonal Theme and topical Theme, as in Table 6.

Table 6
The examples of multiple Themes found in this study

No	Theme				Rheme
	textual Theme	interpersonal Theme	topical Theme		
			marked Theme	unmarked Theme	
(6)		In my opinion,		there	are several positive effects of opening a large factory.
(7)	As a result,			it	causes water pollution.
(8)	Next,	I thought		this news	was important
(9)	Therefore,	I think		it	is not fair.
(10)	And so	Does		the daughter	

To sum up, the structure of clauses comprises Theme selection and Theme range. Theme selection can be either an unmarked Theme or a marked Theme. Regarding Theme range, it can be either a single Theme which consists of a topical (ideational) Theme or a multiple Theme. As for multiple Theme, there are three types: textual Theme and topical Theme, interpersonal Theme and topical Theme, and textual Theme, interpersonal Theme and topical Theme. Figure 4 is the system network of Theme selection and Theme range found in this study.

Figure 4
The system network of Theme selection and Theme range

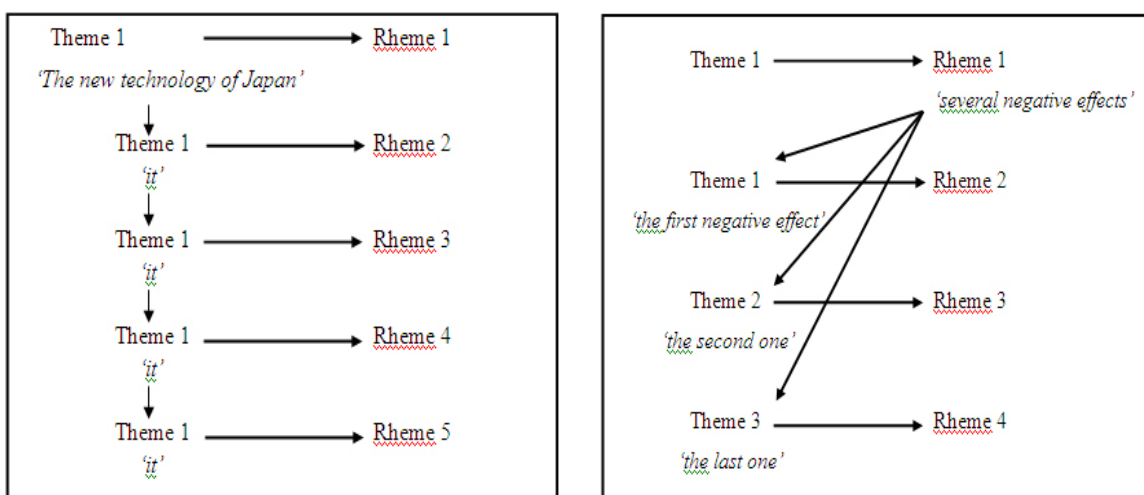


3. 4. Thematic Progression

As Eggins (1994) defines, the Thematic progression is the exchange of information between successive Theme and Rheme pairings in a text. There are several main types of Thematic progression, which depends on different text types. This study divides Thematic progression based on Paltridge’s classification.

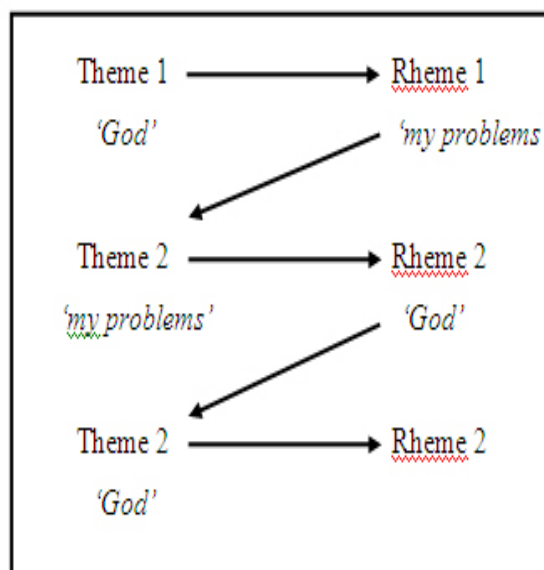
Based on the data, there are three Thematic progression patterns found in the present study. They are a Theme reiteration, or constant Theme pattern, a zig-zag Theme pattern, and a multiple Theme or split Rheme. The multiple Theme or split Rheme is used most frequently (51.35%) followed by the Theme reiteration, or constant Theme pattern (34.23%) and the zig-zag Theme pattern (14.42%). Moreover, the result reveals that there are various kinds of Thematic progression patterns used in each text. Based on an analysis of the Thematic progression, most of the texts start by presenting their points of view followed by a series of arguments which extends from the parts of the Rheme in the preceding clause and then it becomes the Theme in subsequent clauses by using logical time relations to indicate that these are additional steps. This result shows that the multiple Theme or split Rheme pattern plays a significant role as the basic pattern of Themes in writing exposition texts. However, this study found that there are two other kinds of Thematic progression patterns, a Theme reiteration, or constant Theme pattern and a zig-zag Theme pattern, occur at a medium rate and a low rate respectively in the data. In order to make the exposition texts more accessible for their readers, different writing styles will be used in writing exposition texts. Hence, it is necessary to expand two kinds of Thematic progression patterns in providing arguments in greater depth to support the writers’ points of view in the body paragraph. Based on Danes (1974, cited in Nwogu & Blor, 1991), a Theme reiteration, or constant Theme pattern is the basic pattern of Themes in general. Thus, this pattern occurs more often than a zig-zag Theme pattern in the texts. Figure 2 is the examples of Thematic progressions found in the data.

Figure 2
The examples of Thematic progressions found in the data



A Theme reiteration, or constant Theme pattern

A zig-zag Theme pattern



A multiple Theme or split Rheme

3. 4. 1. The problems of the Theme

As Halliday mentioned, Thematic structure plays an important role in organizing the message and enhances connectivity between ideas in the text. It is used as a tool to analyse cohesion and coherence and to explain how the texts are constructed and to diagnose language weaknesses in the student's writing. In students' writing, lack of text coherence is identified as a major problem which contributes substantially to lower scores in students' examinations. As inexperienced writers, the students encounter failure to control the flow of information from Theme to Rheme causing difficulties for the readers to follow the progression of ideas or arguments in the texts. According to Bloor & Bloor (1992), there are three common problems resulting from the misuse of Theme and Rheme: the problem of the brand new Theme, the problem of the double Rheme, and the problem of the empty Rheme.

This study reveals that there are five problems found in the data in terms of the Thematic selections and the Thematic progression patterns. They will be discussed in the following section.

3. 4. 2. The problem of the empty Theme

The problem of the empty Theme occurs frequently in students' writing. Due to mother tongue interference, the text in English is created in the same manner as the text in Thai is. In Thai sentence structure, the subject can be omitted. When Thai students write in English, they tend to transfer this Thai rule into their English sentence structure causing the problem of the empty Theme in their English texts. To solve this problem, the teachers should be aware of the fossilized learning of their students. According to Selinker (1972), the term 'fossilization' is the phenomenon which results in the learners' failure to reach the level of first language competence.

In Thailand, English teachers pay much attention to provide a large amount of information about the similarities and differences of sentence structure between the Thai language and English ensuring that students know where certain words have their proper slots in the sentence structure. But the students continue making the same mistakes in their written and spoken English all the time.

Even though Selinker & Lamendella (1978) redefined that fossilization is a permanent cessation of interlanguage learning, the researcher as an English teacher believes that it can be controlled. Firstly, the causal factor of fossilization needs to be clarified. According to this kind of Theme, fossilization occurs in the syntactic level due to the difference between English and Thai syntactic rules. In the situation that Thai students have difficulty in differentiating between these rules, they have to turn to their mother tongue for help from time to time. Thus, fossilization occurs. In order to overcome fossilization, the adoption of proper learning strategies needs to be provided. The teachers should raise students' meta-awareness of English sentence structure in both forms and usages. The teachers need to treat language as a system by making effective cross-lingual comparisons, analyzing the target language, and using a great deal of exercises to focus on the subject being omitted with their students. By providing a direct learning strategy, the form would be repeated over and over again in different ways. The students will become familiar with this form and be able to distinguish how it is used within a sentence. The examples of this kind of problem are given in Table 6.

Table 6
The examples of the empty Theme

No	Theme				Rheme
	textual Theme	interpersonal Theme	topical Theme		
			marked Theme	unmarked Theme	
(11)	when			I (<i>empty Theme</i>)	feel good and relax read the healthy poem every time.
(12)	Second,			(<i>empty Theme</i>)	is her language style in writing

3. 3. 3. The problem of the brand new Theme

As Bloor & Bloor (1995) mentioned, the problem of a brand new Theme occurs in the work of inexperienced writers who put new information in the Theme position. In this case, the new Theme is introduced in the text causing a lack of organizational skill in the writing. For example, the writer talks about why the bible is the best book for reading in Text 9. The Themes of all the arguments in the body paragraph refers to the bible by using the pronoun 'it' except the second argument. In the second argument, the sentence '*amazing Jesus performed miracles*' was introduced in the text. Here, the Theme '*amazing Jesus*' is in the Theme position, however this is the first mention of this information. It indicates that the writer lacks the ability to develop adequately any of the ideas introduced.

3. 3. 4. The problem of overuse of constant progression

Regarding the Thematic progression, the present study found the problem of overuse of constant progression in which the same Theme is picked up over several clauses. In this case, the writers tended to provide greater depth in their explanation towards the ideas introduced in the text without further development of Rhemes. Text 42 below is an example of this kind of problem by using the personal pronoun '*she*' in the Theme selection. The topic is not developed at all through the Rhemes, as a lack of progress in text. The examples of the problem of overuse of constant progression are given in Table 7.

Table 7

The examples of the problem of overuse of constant progression

No	Theme				Rheme
	textual Theme	interpersonal Theme	topical Theme		
			marked Theme	unmarked Theme	
(13)	First of all			the Reader's Digest	was written by Nudée Vanessa Race.
(14)				She	is an expert at mind and brain.
(15)				she	graduated neuroscience from Harvard University.
(16)				She	is smart, cheerful and intelligent.
(17)	And			She	is considered as a genius.

3. 4. 5. The problem of the empty Rheme

According to Bloor & Bloor (1992), the empty Rheme refers to the clause which fails to present new information in the Rheme position. For example, 'it causes a global warming'. Here, Rheme is 'causes a global warming'. This Rheme is empty of any content. There are two strategies used to overcome this problem. The first one is to add new information in Rheme position making it complete. This clause can be changed to '*it causes global warming regarding human-caused pollution from factories*'. The other strategy is to build up the Theme to provide additional information. Adapting the above method, the sentence can be changed to '*Generating more Carbon Dioxide produced by factories contributes to global warming*'.

3. 4. 6. The problem of confusing selection of textual Theme

From having little experience in writing, some students have difficulties in finding the appropriate conjunctive to make text connectedness. For example, '*It also give me good advise and the best way to be happy in our life. The story is full of beautiful and interesting words. However, it can teach us about how to live and survive with the truth.*' These three sentences open in the same way. As for the connecting words for adding on to a viewpoint, the connectives such as furthermore, moreover, in addition were selected to lead the readers easily from one point to the next.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The writing skill seems to be a difficult academic skill for Thai EFL learners (Pawapatcharandom, 2007). Most students find difficulties in writing a text. Therefore, the researcher is interested in analyzing textual metafunction in order to figure out how students organize their message through their texts. In this particular research, there were three objectives that this study aims to fulfill. Firstly, this study aims to investigate the Thematic selections used by Thai EFL learners in their writing. Secondly, it examines the Thematic progression patterns of Thai EFL learners in their writing. Thirdly, it investigates the problems in terms of the flow of Theme-Rheme in the texts written by Thai EFL learners.

The data analysis indicated that three different types of Thematic organization patterns were used in the texts. Regarding frequency analysis, the textual elements were used more than interpersonal elements. Concerning a large number of continuatives, conjunctives and relative elements, the high proportion of the use of textual Theme is not surprising. Since this Theme

not only acts as a connection which links the relationship of the clause within the text but also provides more explicit guidance to the reader on how to obtain a coherent interpretation of the text, this may result in finding it more frequently than the interpersonal element. This finding appears to support the study of Martin & Rose (2003). He explains that conjunctions are important to connect steps in arguments. Also they are mostly used in the exposition genre because they link logical steps of arguments in the whole text.

In the case of the simple and multiple Themes, the multiple Themes outweigh the simple Themes. This finding is inconsistent with Coffin & Hewings's (2005) study. This could be due to the fact that, an exposition needs to make a point and to persuade the readers to agree with it. The writers must engage the readers and their emotions to enhance the readers' solidarity with their points of view. One interesting way to grab readers' attentions is to ensure continuity in the texts by using internal conjunctions and external conjunctions. Within this study, internal conjunctions are used to join ideas within the same sentence while external conjunctions are used to link ideas between different sentences. Therefore, the writers used multiple Theme by adding textual Theme and interpersonal Theme to topical Theme to create connectedness in the text. As a result, it provides the writers with an effective way to convey information circulated in the written text.

Analyzing the data in light of marked and unmarked Themes, the result reveals that the number of unmarked Themes by far outweighs the number of marked Themes. This is in line with Halliday (1994). He partially explained that the unmarked Theme is used in text if there is no prior context leading up to it, and no positive reasons for choosing anything else. As novice writers, students have difficulty in composing their texts. The simplest way of constructing English sentences is to put either nominal group or pronoun in subject position to make sure that the sentence is grammatically correct.

Regarding Thematic progression pattern, three patterns proposed by Paltridge (2000) were found in the texts. The multiple Theme or split Rheme pattern was used at the most frequently. This indicates that the multiple Theme or split Rheme patterns are dominant in the texts. Consequently, the use of the multiple Theme or split Rheme patterns is one of the characteristic features of writing exposition that tries to convince the readers to align with the writers' points of view. This parallels the study of Danes (1974, cited in Nwogu & Blor, 1991). Split Rheme is the basic pattern of Themes in exposition.

Additionally, the analysis showed that the texts which lack Thematic progression encounter many kinds of problems. The problems were the problem of empty Theme, the problem of the brand new Theme, the problem of overuse of constant progression, the problem of empty Rheme, and the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme. This finding appears to support the study of Wang (2007). He concluded that students' weaknesses in their arguments are due to problems with either Thematic progression or Thematic selection, or both.

There are limitations to this study. The raw material for this analysis was small as there were only 114 texts. It was limited in size and scope. Besides, grammatical errors contributed to the problems of understanding the whole texts thoroughly due to the students' lack of knowledge of English.

In terms of the implications of the study, perhaps the real strength lies in the way these findings indicate two further areas for exploration. The first area for further exploration is the teaching English as a foreign language. As the current study attempts to reveal, Theme

selections and Theme progression patterns have the potential to develop the flow of information in the texts and improve writing skills more efficiently. Regarding the previous studies, the notions of Theme and Rheme is a powerful tool to use improving writing skills. Besides, Wang (2007) noted that the insights gained from Theme and Rheme pattern are valuable in not only creating a cohesive text but also in teaching writing in teaching literacy. He further mentioned that this notion of Theme can show students how to read effectively by paying attention to the first paragraph, the topic sentence of each paragraph, and Theme of a clause. As a result, the Theme of a clause orients the readers to the message within the clauses. Likewise, the problems of Theme and Rheme patterning gained from the present study can be effectively applied in classrooms to help the students while writing. Being aware of the notions of Theme and Rheme, the students will pay much attention to focusing on cohesive tools and Thematic structure due to problems with either Thematic selection or Thematic progression, or both creating their texts in effective ways.

The second area of further exploration focusing on the use of Theme and Rheme resources would also be valuable. Such a study would explore how the students organize their message in written texts. It allows us to identify discourse level errors in order to make conscious Theme and Rheme choices that improve the coherence and cohesion of the texts. As Halliday & Hasan (1976) mentioned, one way of achieving cohesion in text is through Thematic organization, which involve the relationship between clauses based on the information contained in their Themes and Rhemes. Thus, such a study would contribute to the overall body of knowledge in the area of SFG, including the resources of Theme and Rheme.

Acknowledgements: I would like to express my gratitude to the Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University for granting me a scholarship.

References

- Abdulsata, P. (1999). *An Error Analysis of Srinakharinwirot University Second-Year English Major Students Compositions*. M.A. Thesis: Srinakharinwirot University.
- Bloor T. & Bloor M. (1995). *The functional analysis of English: a Hallidayan approach*. London: Arnold.
- Boon-Long, V. (1998). *Error Analysis in Writing of the English Major Students of Chiang Mai University for English 221 and English 222*. A research report: Department of English, Chiang Mai University.
- Coffin, C. & Hewings, A. (2005). Engaging electronically: using CMC to develop students' argumentation skills in Higher Education. *Language and Education*, 19(1), 32-49.
- Eggs, S. (1994). *An introduction to systemic functional linguistics*. New York: Pinter Publishers.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- _____. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar*. Hodder, London.
- Halliday, M. A. K. & Matthiessen, C. (2004). *An Introduction to functional grammar*. Third edition. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K. & Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.
- Lukanavanich, S. (1988). *An Analysis of Written Errors of First-Year English Students at Bangkok University*. M.Ed. Thesis: Silpakorn University.
- Lush, B. (2002). Writing Errors: A Study of Thai Students' Writing Errors. *Thai TESOL Bulletin*. 15(1), 75-82.
- Martin, J. R. (1984). Language, register and genre. In F. Christie (Ed.), *Children Writing*, (pp. 21-29). Geelong: Deakin University Press.

- _____. (1997). 'Analysing genre: Functional parameters'. In F. Christie & J. R. Martin (Eds.), *Genre and institutions: Social processes in the workplace and school*, (pp.3-39). London and New York: Continuum.
- _____. (1998). 'Linguistics and the Consumer: The Practice of Theory'. *Linguistics and Education*, 9(4): 411-448.
- Martin, J. R. & Rose, D. (2003). *Working with Discourse: Meaning Beyond the Clause*. London: Continuum.
- Nwogu, K. & Bloor, T. (1991). Thematic progression in professional and popular medical texts. E. Ventola (Ed.), *Functional and systemic linguistics: approaches and uses*, (pp. 369-384). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Paltridge, B. (2000). *Making Sense of Discourse analysis*. Gold Coast, Queensland: Antipodean Educational Enterprises.
- _____. (2006). *Discourse analysis*. London: Continuum.
- Patpong, P. (2002). *On Themes as a Textual Resource in Thai*. Paper presented at The 14th Euro-International Systemic Functional Linguistics Workshop: Issues in Language Description: Rethinking Systemic Functional Theory at the University of Lisbon, 24-27 July 2002.
- Pawapatcharaudom, R. (2007). *An Investigation of Thai Students' English Language Problems and Their Learning Strategies in the International Program at Mahidol University*. M.A. Thesis: King Mongkut's Institute of Technology North Bangkok.
- Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 10, 209-241.
- Selinker, L. & Lamendella, J. T. (1978). Two perspectives on fossilization in interlanguage learning. *Interlanguage Studies Bulletin*, 3(2), 143-190.
- Srinon, U. (1999). *An Error Analysis of Free Compositions Written by the First Year Students of Mahamakut Buddhist University*. M.Ed. Thesis: Silpakorn University.
- Wang, L. (2007). Theme and rheme in the thematic organization of text: Implication for teaching academic writing. *Asian EFL Journal*, 9(1), 1-11.