

Textual Metafunction in Korean English Learners' Writings

Woo, Sujung

Konyang University

ABSTRACT

The Journal of Studies in Language 37.4, 525-541. The current study explores the textual metafunction in Korean English learners' writings by examining the Theme choices and the patterns of the Thematic progression in the writings in two different proficiency levels. The analysis of the Theme and Thematic progression can be a useful tool to analyze the writings in that they characterize English learners' writings based on the linguistic choices they have made. Moreover, it is useful because the writings are examined not just on a structure of a sentence level but on the linguistic resources that writers use to communicate in a larger discourse level. As a result, the present study has found that the high and low level learners have difficulties employing nominalization and existential *there* in the Theme position of a clause. The utilization of the multiple Theme in both groups does not indicate a meaningful difference between the two groups. However, the employment of markedness of Theme demonstrates a slight difference between the two levels. In terms of Thematic progression, the three typical types of Thematic progression have been found in the study: linear Thematic progression, Thematic progression with constant Theme, and multiple-Rheme. Besides these patterns, some problematic patterns are found in the writings that coincide with the previous research. (Konyang University)

Keywords: Systemic Functional Linguistics, textual metafunction, Thematic structure, Thematic progression, L2 writings, English learners



<https://doi.org/10.18627/jslg.37.4.202202.525>

pISSN : 1225-4770

eISSN : 2671-6151

Received: January 10, 2022

Revised: February 02, 2022

Accepted: February 12, 2022

This is an Open-Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial License which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Copyright©2022 the Modern Linguistic Society of Korea

본인이 투고한 논문은 다른 학술지에 게재될 적이 없으며 타인의 논문을 표절하지 않았음을 서약합니다. 추후 중복게재 혹은 표절된 것으로 밝혀질 시에는 논문게재 취소와 일정 기간 논문게출의 제한 조치를 받게 됨을 인지하고 있습니다.

1. Introduction

According to the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), language is functional and the language functions can be realized through linguistic resources such as vocabulary and grammar (Eggs, 2004). Moreover, language is a system of choices in that people make meanings by choosing proper linguistic resources according to the social and cultural contexts in which they communicate. When we speak, for instance, we have to choose whether we want to use the form of a statement, a question, a command, etc. If we choose the form of a question, another choice has to be made, that is, whether to use a WH-question, a Yes/No question,

etc. These language choices that language users make manifest characteristics that they have. The characteristics may not only include their language proficiency level but also represent how they develop the story as it unfolds.

Writers construct the messages through the texts, and the meanings or messages are realized in a set of clauses. According to Halliday, “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” (Halliday, 1985: 53). The Theme is the starting point of a message and “the element that orients the clause within its context” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 64). Moreover, Theme selection is very important in that it contributes to the communicative effects of the message (Egins, 2004). Therefore, when teaching English learners writing, it is important that they are taught how to write in English not only with appropriate words and correct grammar but also with cohesive and coherent structures.

Certain characteristic features in English learners’ writings indicate non-native like features such as a high frequency of overuse of certain words or fragmented clauses. In many cases, these non-native like features require too much time and effort of the learners as well as teachers to correct or modify them. There is, however, another aspect which should be more emphasized when analyzing the learners’ writings, which is cohesion and coherence. Creating cohesion and coherence in writing is difficult not only for the English learners in a novice level but also for the advanced learners who have reached a level where they mastered most of the language skills.

Studies have illustrated the usefulness of Theme and Thematic progression as a tool to characterize whether English learners’ writings are cohesively and coherently developed (Bloor and Bloor, 1992; Christie and Dreyfus, 2007; Schleppegrell, 2004, 2009; Wang, 2007). In a similar vein, this paper investigates Theme and Thematic progression of the English learners’ writings to find out how the Theme choices and Thematic progression that they have chosen contribute to the cohesion and coherence of the text and show that the system of Theme and Rheme can be a useful tool to analyze the English learners’ texts in a discourse level.

2. Theoretical Background

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) focuses on how language is structured and utilized in order to produce meaning in social contexts (Halliday, 1985). In SFL, language is considered as a “system of choices” (Thompson, 2014: 8) in that linguistic elements are regarded as resources and communicators choose the appropriate resources to convey the meaning in social context. In other words, creating meanings can be realized through choices of words and a set of rules in a language system. There are three important theoretical aspects of SFL when making choices to create meanings: genre, register, and mode. Genre is a staged, goal-oriented social process (Martin et al., 1987). When people create a text, they make choices with respect to the genre which involves the context of culture. Moreover, the concept of genre is useful in teaching English learners in that it offers the capacity for the learners to make meanings that are valued in English-speaking cultures (Christie, 1999). Another important theoretical aspect is register which is represented by choices of field, tenor, and mode. The field is concerned about “what is going on in context” (Matthiessen et al., 2010: 95), which represents the ideational meaning. The tenor, on the other hand, refers to the social relationships played by interactants and realized in interpersonal grammatical choices such as modal verbs (e.g., *can*, *could*, *may*, *should*, *probably*, etc.) and mood (*declaratives*, *questions*, or *demands*) (Schleppegrell, 2004). Finally, the mode represents “the role of language plays in the interaction” (Egins, 2004: 90) whether it is spoken or written.

These three theoretical aspects are realized through three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational or experiential metafunction has to do with the experiences a writer or speaker expresses. Therefore, the ideational strand of meaning are represented by nouns and nominal groups, verbs, and verb groups, and in prepositional and adverbial phrases. In SFL terms, the ideational meaning concerns participants, processes, and circumstances in the system of transitivity. The interpersonal metafunction relates to exchange meanings between communicators. It focuses on the roles of addressers and audience, the structure of mood, and modality. Lastly, the textual metafunction which is the main concern of this study determines how clauses are expressed as a message. The textual metafunction deals with the Thematic structure that are related with the construction of Theme and Rheme and the information structure that concerns with the architecture of old and new information.

Looking at Theme-Rheme structure and Thematic progression in text can be very useful in exploring the textual functions of a text. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 64) defines Theme as 'the starting point for the message' which usually contains familiar information. The Theme can be identified by the position that takes in a clause. The first element in a clause is Theme, and the everything else that is not Theme is Rheme. The following figure shows the system of Theme selection:

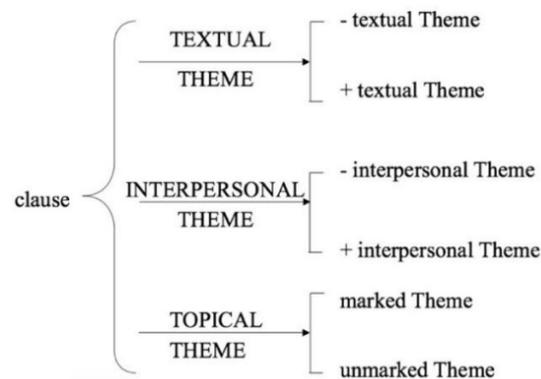


Fig. 1. The System of Thematic Choice (Adapted from Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014: 106)

As shown in Figure 1, the Theme choices which orient reader/listener to the messages involve choice of Theme, that is, textual, interpersonal, and topical Theme. The topical Theme is the most essential of the three types of Theme in that it comprises an experiential element and ends the theme of the clause. These experiential elements are clause-initial circumstantial adjuncts, processes represented by main verbs, and participants realized as subjects, objects, or complements. The following table demonstrates each element as topical Theme respectively:

Table 1. Nominal group, verb, and circumstantial adjunct as Topical Theme (Butt et. al., 2012: 170-175)

Little brown Betty	lived at the golden can.
Put	the kettle on.
On Sunday morning	my love will come in.
Topical	
Theme	Rheme

The textual Theme serves a linking function that contributes to the internal cohesion of texts. The two main categories of the textual Theme are continuity adjuncts (e.g. *oh, well, yeah, no*, etc.) and conjunctive adjuncts (e.g. *and, but, so, however, therefore*, etc.) as shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Textual Theme (Eggins, 2004: 306)

Oh	they	give you a cup of tea.
No	you	wouldn't.
But	in Switzerland	they give you a cognac.
and	he	proposes marriage.
Textual	Topical	
Theme		Rheme

Finally, the interpersonal Theme serves to set up the reader's/speaker's point of view on the clause as part of its local context or to express his/her subjective opinions. The interpersonal Theme always precedes the topical Theme and typically follows the textual Theme as in Table 3:

Table 3. Multiple Theme (Thompson, 2014: 177)

	My God, Harriet	we	've been dealt a bad hand!
Well,	certainly	sanity	is a precarious state.
But	surely	the course	doesn't start till next week.
And,	oddly,	he	was right.
Textual	Interpersonal	Topical	
Theme			Rheme

Another important aspect of the system of Theme choices is markedness of Theme. As shown in Figure 1, for the choice of topical Theme, either marked or unmarked Theme is selected as a topical Theme. The notion of marked and unmarked can be distinguished whether it is typical or atypical. Markedness of Theme is closely related to the Mood and Theme structures of the clause. In other words, unmarked Theme in each Mood structure, that is declarative, polar interrogative, WH-interrogative, and imperative, serves a role as subject, finite, WH-element, and predicator respectively:

Table 4. Examples of Unmarked Theme (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014: 100-104)

I	had a little nut-tree.
Can you	keep secret?
Where	did you get that from?
Turn	it up.
Unmarked Theme	Rheme

For marked Theme, it conflates with other constituents from the Mood structure such as circumstantial adjuncts:

Table 5. Examples of Marked Theme

On Sunday morning	my love will come in.
Marked Theme	Rheme

By employing a marked Theme in a clause, a certain aspect of the message becomes salient. The salience is made by the speaker/reader intentionally so that it can steer the development of the message in specific ways.

The Theme which contains familiar or old information from the previous clauses in the text connects to the Theme and Rheme of the following clause as the text unfolds. Daneš (1974) introduced the three basic thematic progression patterns: linear Thematic progression, Thematic progression with constant Theme, and Thematic progression with derived Themes. In the linear Thematic progression which is also known as “the zig-zag pattern” (Eggins, 2004: 324), the element which occurred in the Rheme of the previous clause appears in the Theme position of the subsequent clause. The linear Thematic progression is diagrammed in Figure 2:

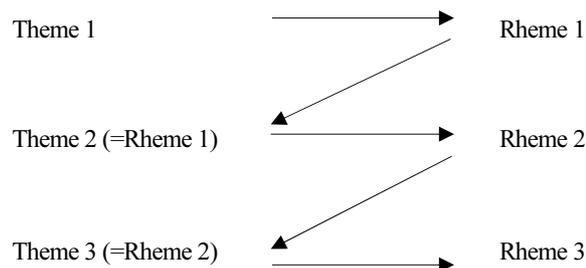


Fig. 2. The Linear Thematic Progression

Another pattern of Thematic progression is the constant Theme pattern in which the same Theme is reiterated in the set of clauses in the following text. Using this type of Thematic development can have listener/reader be focused on the same topic. Starting at the same point of departure, however, indicates that the new information introduced in the preceding clause is not being elaborated any further (Eggins, 2004). The Thematic progression with constant Theme is diagrammed in Figure 3:

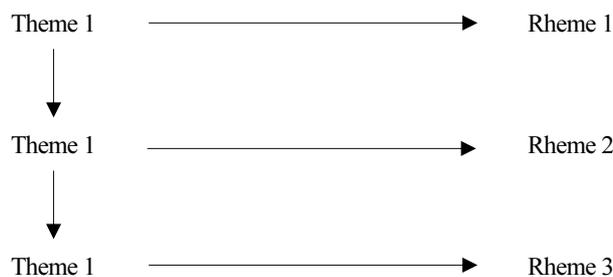


Fig. 3. Thematic Progression with Constant Theme

The final Thematic progression with derived Themes Daneš (1974) demonstrated has not been found in the writings of the present study but the last pattern, the multiple Rheme pattern, that Eggins (2004) illustrated appeared in the English learners' writings though the pattern is not exactly the same as the one in Eggins. In this pattern, the Rheme in a clause contains several different pieces of new information, each of which occurs as a Theme in the subsequent clauses as shown in Figure 4:

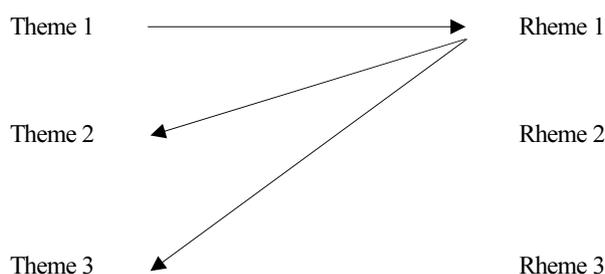


Fig. 4. Multiple-Rheme Pattern

Based on the Theme choices and the pattern of Thematic progression, the writings of the English learners in two different level groups are examined in the present study.

3. Data and Method

The study is based on component of The International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE) which is one of the largest Asian learners of English corpus. The corpus consists of written as well as spoken discourse of Asian English learners from ten different countries including Korea, Japan, China, Hongkong, Indonesia, etc. Moreover, the corpus also contains the written and spoken discourse of native speakers of English from the United States, Australia, England, and Canada for the reference data.

All the participants in the ICNALE were required to take a standard L2 vocabulary size test (Nation and Beglar, 2007), and also to present their TOEFL or TOEIC scores. Then, all the learners have been classified into four kinds of CEFR-linked proficiency bands: A2, B1_1 (B1 low), B1_2 (B1 high), and B2+, based on their scores in the proficiency tests or in the vocabulary size test (VST). For the present study, 30 writings of the Korean learners of English in the two levels are examined: 15 writings from A2 and 15 writings from B2+. Table 6 and 7 show the details of the participants of the corpus:

Table 6. Participants in the Low-proficiency Level (A2) of the ICNALE

No.	Code	Words	Sex	Age	Major	TOEIC	VST
1	W_KOR_006	202	F	21	Military	400	43
2	W_KOR_021	200	M	20	Military	420	32
3	W_KOR_026	218	M	24	Military	520	45
4	W_KOR_031	236	F	21	English	480	38
5	W_KOR_046	214	F	27	English	450	41
6	W_KOR_064	205	F	22	English	500	37
7	W_KOR_074	204	F	22	Education	540	35
8	W_KOR_082	209	M	25	Trade	480	36
9	W_KOR_088	228	F	20	Trade	450	26
10	W_KOR_111	211	F	21	Education	470	36
11	W_KOR_113	220	M	25	Education	400	42
12	W_KOR_120	210	F	20	English	475	34
13	W_KOR_145	239	F	22	Business	500	30
14	W_KOR_148	216	F	23	Policy	480	48
15	W_KOR_156	205	F	23	Education	500	43

Table 7. Participants in the High-proficiency Level (B2+) of the ICNALE

No.	Code	Words	Sex	Age	Major	TOEIC	VST
1	W_KOR_013	232	M	25	Business	785	36
2	W_KOR_020	228	M	23	Military	805	32
3	W_KOR_056	216	F	23	English	865	37
4	W_KOR_057	218	M	26	Business	790	42
5	W_KOR_075	205	M	20	English	710	38
6	W_KOR_095	219	M	26	Business	830	47
7	W_KOR_128	284	M	22	Policy	105 TOEFL (iBT)	43
8	W_KOR_138	254	M	26	Education	815	45
9	W_KOR_151	204	F	23	Education	840	40
10	W_KOR_160	276	F	24	Policy	810	38
11	W_KOR_177	207	F	22	English	800	46
12	W_KOR_204	229	F	22	Military	96 TOEFL (iBT)	37
13	W_KOR_207	186	F	24	English	900	46
14	W_KOR_208	218	F	19	Chemistry	800	41
15	W_KOR_212	236	F	24	French	910	38

For the present study, the written essays of the two different groups (A2 and B+) of the Korean English learners from the corpus have been chosen. All the participants for the written essay corpus were asked to write an essay on a given topic: It is important for college students to have a part-time job.

For the analysis of the study, all these texts in the written essays were first divided into T-units, that is, “slightly larger than the clause, but smaller than the sentence” (Fries, 1995: 49). Fries also claims that the T-units are the most useful unit for analyzing Theme in a text. The Themes in each T-unit are examined and categorized into three types of Theme: topical, interpersonal, and textual. The topical Themes are then further identified whether it is marked or unmarked. Finally analyzing the Thematic progression of the texts was based on Daneš (1974) and Eggins (2004)’s classification of Thematic progression: the linear Thematic progression, Thematic progression with constant Theme, and multiple-Rheme-pattern.

4. Choice of Theme and Thematic Progression

What gets to be Theme of a clause is important in several aspects. It indicates the starting point of the message and invites the readers into the texts. More importantly, the Thematic choices contribute to the internal cohesion of the text. In this section, the choice of Theme in the learners’ writings will be analyzed to find out how each text hang closely together to create the cohesion of the text.

4.1 Choice of Theme

It is important to note that every clause has a topical Theme. It can be alone as a single Theme, or the other Themes such as textual or interpersonal Theme is combined to make it multiple Theme. Table 8 indicates the frequencies and percentages of single and multiple Themes in the writings of both groups followed by the examples from the corpus:

Table 8. Frequencies and Percentages of Single and Multiple Themes

Group	Single Theme	Multiple Theme	
	Topical Theme	Textual+Topical Theme	Interpersonal+Topical Theme
A2	269	110 (40.9%)	30 (11.2%)
B2	261	90 (34.5%)	42 (15.3%)

(1) Multiple Theme in both groups¹⁾

- a. *So* **students** are working part-time to earn their pocket money. (W_KOR_PTJ0_046_A2_02)
- b. I THINK **these** are much more important than the money we earn from doing part time job. (W_KOR_PTJ0_095_B2_0)
- c. *However*, I BELIEVE **it** is critical for us as college students to have a part time job since it helps us to be more responsible in our actions. (W_KOR_PTJ0_113_A2_0)

In (1a), a conjunctive adjunct *so* is deployed before the topical theme, **students**. The theme choice for (1b) is

1) Following Eggins (2004), the textual Themes are in italics, the interpersonal Themes are in Capitals, the Topical Themes are in bold, and marked Themes are double-underlined.

2) Every example from the ICNALE is denoted by its file name.

interpersonal Theme, I THINK followed by the topical Theme **these**. Unlike (1a) and (1b), all three types of theme-textual, interpersonal, topical- are employed in the Theme position in (1c).

As shown in Table 8, the number of topical Theme of both levels are similar. The number of the multiple Theme, however, indicates that the lower level group uses more contextual Theme than the higher level group. This results conflicts with some of the previous studies (Hawes and Thomas, 1997; Seo, 2019; Yunita, 2018) that show the less proficient writers are, the more textual Theme is used. The reason for the higher proportion of textual Theme in the A2 group in this study results from the overuse of conjunctive adjuncts such as *and*, *so*, *but*, etc.

As for interpersonal Theme, it is infrequently utilized across all the writings in both groups. Moreover, there is an insignificant difference in terms of the proportion of interpersonal Theme between the two groups. Much less frequent use of interpersonal Theme in both groups confirms that they share the characteristics of the mode value which is written mode.

Since there is a Topical Theme in all the clauses, it is useful to examine what types of the topical Theme is realized in the text. The following table describes what get to be chosen as topical Theme:

Table 9. Number of each topical Theme

Level	Noun or Noun Phrase	Nominalization	Dependent Clause	Existential <i>There</i>
A2	101 (37.5%)	14 (5.2%)	29 (10.8%)	4 (1.5%)
B2	53 (20.3%)	14 (5.4%)	35 (13.4%)	8 (3.1%)

Very small number of the nominalization and existential *there* in both groups proves that these language expressions are difficult for the English learners to utilize. In this sense, exposing and teaching how to employ those expressions can help the English learners in writings and speaking. Another interesting to be noted is that there is a significant difference in the number of noun or noun phrase as topical Theme. While the learners in B2 group used a noun or noun phrases as topical Theme 53 times, the lower level learners employed them 101 times. In other words, the lower learners heavily rely on brief nominal groups as a topical Theme. This result suggests that the more proficient learners employ more various types of topical Theme.

One of the choices to make is whether a grammatical subject is selected as a starting point of the message or not, which makes Theme unmarked or marked. The choice of marked Theme can be made to signal that the writer wants the reader to pay attention to that particular message. In other words, the use of marked Theme can be a useful tool to find out the purpose of the writer.

Table 10. Markedness of Theme in Writings

Group	Single Theme		Multiple Theme	Total Theme
	Unmarked	Marked		
A2	225 (83.6%)	44 (16.4%)	140 (52.0%)	269
B2	195 (74.7%)	66 (25.3%)	132 (50.6%)	261

As shown in Table 10, the proportion of marked Theme in the writings of group A2 (15%) is smaller than the one in the writings of group B2 (25%). This quantitative analysis result is consistent with the previous research that claims the higher the student levels are, the more they utilize marked Theme (Hawes and Thomas, 1997; Lee, 2007; Park and Nam, 2015; Ping, 2007; Seo, 2019). The following examples illustrate unmarked and marked Theme of the Two groups:

(2) Unmarked Theme in the two groups

- a. College is one of the small society. (W_KOR_PTJ0_031_A2_0)
- b. I'm too tired physically and emotionally. (W_KOR_PTJ0_046_A2_0)
- c. I have done part time jon in Korea. (W_KOR_PTJ0_020_B2_0)
- d. Many students are having part time jobs these days. (W_KOR_PTJ0_177_B2_0)

The unmarked Theme in each clause (2) is the same as the subject of its clause. In (3), however, the subject of the clause is not the same as the Theme of the clause.

(3) Marked Theme in the two groups

- a. Nowadays, many students have a part-time job for their college tuition. (W_KOR_PTJ0_001_A2_0)
- b. While they work part time job, they meet many people. (W_KOR_PTJ0_006_A2_0)
- c. For these reasons, part time job is very useful. (W_KOR_PTJ0_151_B2_0)
- d. If you have various careers, you can give more good impression to your boss or interviewer. (W_KOR_PTJ0_151_B2_0)

Many of the marked Themes found in the writings of the two groups are either Adjunct (3a, c) or a dependent clause (3b, d). When we look at (2d) and (3a), the difference between unmarked and marked Theme can be salient. Those two clauses convey almost the same meaning. (2d) starts the message with *Many students* which is the subject of the clause whereas (3a) begins with *Nowadays* as a point of departure, which is not the subject of the clause.

As Eggins (2004) points out, the important contribution of Thematic choices is to create internal cohesion of the text. Furthermore, skillful use of appropriate Theme 'results in a text which appears to hang together and make sense' (Eggins, 2004: 321). In this section, the choice of Theme in the writings of both groups have been explored. There is a slight difference in the choice of markedness of Theme between the two groups. The utilization of the multiple Theme in both groups does not indicate meaningful difference between the two groups. The internal cohesion and coherence of the text become more salient when we look at how the Theme that has been chosen progress in the whole text.

4.2 Thematic Progression in Students' Writings

In the previous section, what gets to be Theme in the writings have been explored. In this section, following Daneš (1974) and Eggins (2004), the Thematic progression of the writings are examined. It was found that only two types of Thematic progression that Daneš (1974) introduced have been found and the other progression type that was presented by Eggins (2004) has been utilized in the writings. Other than those types of Thematic progression, problematic

Thematic progressions have been found in the writings.

4.2.1 Linear Thematic Progression

The first main type of the Thematic progression is the linear Thematic progression in which the Theme is derived from the Rheme in the preceding clause. The following example demonstrates the linear Thematic progression:

- (4) **Many students (T1)** are having part time jobs these day. **It (T2)** became one of the cultures among young people. **They (T3)** work at cafe, fast food store, and so on. (W_KOR_PTJ0_177_B2_0)

Theme		Rheme
Many students (T1)	→	are having part time jobs these day. (R1)
It (T2)	←	became one of the cultures among young people. (R2)
They (T3)	←	work at cafe, fast food store, and so on. (R3)

Fig. 5. Thematic progression of (4)

As shown in (4), the Theme (**It**) of the second clause is derived from the Rheme (*having part time job*) of the first clause. This same pattern occurs in the following two consecutive clauses as well. The clauses that are built upon what has been introduced as new information help achieve the whole text cohesion. In other words, The utilization of the linear Thematic progression indicates how the clauses are closely interwoven to create the cohesion. However, very few linear Thematic progression have been found in the writings of both groups, which implies that the utilization of the linear Thematic progression calls for higher level of English proficiency.

4.2.2 The Thematic Progression with Constant Theme

Another typical type of the Thematic progression is the Thematic progression with constant Theme where the same Theme appears in the Theme position of the following clauses. This kind of Thematic progression can help the reader focus on what the text is trying to say. On the other hand, the utilization of the same Theme can make the text too simple or boring. The following example demonstrates the Thematic progression with constant Theme:

- (5) Thematic progression with constant Theme

I AGREE that **college students (T1)** have a part time job. **Because if college students have part time job (T2)**, they improve sociality. **College students (T3)** experience social life early. **They (T4)** improve sociality than students don't have a part time job. *As a result*, **the students (T5)** will get a job they can adapt more easily. *Also*, **college students (T6)** earn money themselves without their parents help. *Therefore* **they (T7)** will know that money earning is very hard. (W_KOR_PTJ0_006_A2_0)

Theme	Rheme
I AGREE that college students (T1)	have a part time job. (R1)
↓	
Because if college students have part time job (T2)	they improve sociality. (R2)
↓	
College students (T3)	experience social life early. (R3)
↓	
They (T4)	improve sociality than students don't have a part time job. (R4)
↓	
<i>As a result, the students</i> (T5)	will get a job they can adapt more easily. (R5)
↓	
<i>Also, college students</i> (T6)	earn money themselves without their parents help. (R6)
↓	
<i>Therefore they</i> (T7)	will know that money earning is very hard. (R7)

Fig. 6. Thematic progression of (5)

As shown in (5), the same participant occurs in the topical Theme in the all eleven clauses. Using the same participant in the Theme in the fifth clause helps the readers know what each text is about and be focused on the topic. Even though using the constant Theme repeatedly can make clear what the text is about, it also shows lack of elaboration of the writers' own ideas. In the second, third, and fourth clauses, for instance, the writer claims that college students can improve social skills by working part-time job. While he is reiterating his idea, the writer does not provide any more specific examples or explanation for his reasons why having part-time job can improve social skills.

4.2.3 Multiple – Rheme

According to Eggins (2004), several number of pieces of new information can be introduced in the Rheme position, each of which then appears in the Theme positions in subsequent clauses. The following example illustrates the point:

- (6) Today, **many college students (T1)** have part-time job for several reasons. I THINK **it (T2)** is very important for their college lives to have part-time job for the following reasons. *Firstly, they (T3)* can have experience on society before they graduate their college. **Through the part-time job (T4)**, they can learn business manner and communication skill with others as the society requests. *Secondly, they (T5)* can live independently by having part-time job. **They (T6)** can earn some money for their college tuition and their own leisure life without their parents' help, *and also, they (T7)* can buy something they have wanted. *Lastly, it (T8)* is a very good opportunity for college students to think about their parents' efforts for them. **From birth to high school (T9)**, most of them

have been given their parents' money and efforts. **Through the part-time job (T10)**, they finally know the fact that they parents earn money in a different way. **For these reasons (T11)**, I totally agree that it is very important for college students to have part-time job. **They (T12)** can get valuable things through part-time job.
(W_KOR_PTJ0_207_B2_0)

Clause	Theme	Rheme
C2	I THINK it (T2)	is very important for their college lives to have part-time job for the following reasons. (R1)
C3	Firstly, they (T3)	can have experience on society before they graduate their college. (R2)
C4	Through the part-time job, (T4)	they can learn business manner and communication skill with others as the society requests. (R3)
C5	Secondly, they (T5)	can live independently by having part-time job. (R4)
C6	They (T6)	can earn some money for their college tuition and their own leisure life without their parents' help. (R5)
C7	And also, they (T7)	can buy something they have wanted. (R6)
C8	Lastly, it (T8)	is a very good opportunity for college students to think about their parents' efforts for them. (R7)

The writing in (6) starts with the two Themes: one is interpersonal Theme, I THINK, and the other is topical Theme, **it (T2)**. The messages in the subsequent clauses are built upon the *reasons* in the Rheme position of the first clause. Employing the textual Theme (*Firstly, Secondly, And also, Lastly*) in each clause, the *reasons* that have been in the Rheme position of the first clause are elaborated in the subsequent clauses, C3, C5, C7, and C8. This example is different to some degree from the Multiple-Rheme pattern that Eggins (2004) introduced. In the pattern, the information introduced in the Rheme position is 'picked up' as the Theme of the following clauses. The element of the Rheme position of the above example, however, does not appear as Theme in the next few clauses but elaborated in the whole clauses.

4.2.4 Problematic Thematic Progression

Not all the clauses in the writings consistent with the patterns of the Thematic progression presented above. Actually, there are more problematic patterns of Thematic progression that need to be modified in order for the writings to be cohesive and coherent. The most frequent problematic pattern of the Thematic progression found in the writings is the Thematic progression with brand new Theme (Bloor and Bloor, 1992), that is, the text started with one particular Theme, and a new Theme that is not derived from either the Theme or the Rheme in the previous clause suddenly occurs in the Theme. Intervening with a brand new Theme can hamper the readers to understand the text due to the lack of cohesiveness. The following example demonstrates the point:

(7) **Many college students (T1)** have part time jobs because they can earn money. **The tuition (T2)** is very expensive. **Students (T3)** need much money for that. **Students (T4)** need also much money for enjoying their life with friends. **Some part time jobs (T5)** are very hard and difficult like physical labor. **Pay (T6)** is also very low. *So, students (T7)* don't like these jobs.(W_KOR_PTJ0_074_A2_0)

The first clause of the text in (7) begins with **Many college students (T1)** which also appears in the Theme position for the third, fourth, and seventh clauses. The Themes in the other second, fifth, and sixth clauses, however, are the Themes that are derived from neither the Theme nor the Rheme of the previous clauses. Due to these brand new themes, the clauses in the text do not seem to adhere to each other as well as to be coherent. **Some part time jobs (T5)**, for instance, is not from either Theme or the Rheme of the previous clause but from the very first clause, which have the readers make the conceptual connections (Belmonte and McCabe-Hidalgo, 1998) and what this particular message in this clause has to do with what has just been said.

The same pattern can be found in the writings of the higher level group:

(8) **It (T1)** is very important to experience other jobs because we don't know that what we are interested in and want to be. *So* I THINK **it (T2)** is very good ways. **I (T3)** had part time jobs several times. **It (T4)** was very hard experiences *but* **it (T5)** is great time for me. **When I needed money (T6)** I sold clothes last year. **I (T7)** worked on the department store. **It (T8)** was very hard *and* **I (T9)** really wanted quit so fast. (W_KOR_PTJ0_056_B2_0)

The most problematic Theme in the above text is **it (T2)** and **When I needed money (T6)**. **It (T2)** in the second clause is uncertain because it is not clear what *it* refers to. The Theme, **When I needed money (T6)** is also problematic because it is not related to any part of the previous clause which can lead the reader confusion or force the reader to make the conceptual connections.

Another problem found in the writings is a heavy use of textual Theme. The typical type of textual Theme is cohesive devices such as *and*, *but*, *so*, etc. These cohesive devices are often overused in English learners' both speaking and writing (Kim, 2004). Moreover, too many or inappropriate use of textual Theme can hamper the cohesion and coherence of the text. The following example is a part of a less proficient English learner's text which includes 15 textual Theme within the text which contains 19 clauses:

(9) I can't agree to this statement. Of course, it is important for college students to have a part-time job. ***But*** it is necessary that they study for their life. ***Actually***, some college students always are working a part-time job. ***By the way***, it is dangerous for college students to concentrate on working a part-time job because they are busy working for part-time and they can't studying. ***At the moment***, student must remain learn and study hard. As college students, ***but***, If they don't study hard, they will always regret and glooming. ***Finally***, they will stop studying and leave college. ***At the same time***, work and study is very difficult and college students will know it very tired to reach a decision. ***However***, college student's duty is learning and studying and having a part-time job is only one in many options. ***Actually***, most of college students don't know what they want. Dream is precious and has the future even if you fail. Perhaps, studying is very important for their dreams ***and*** Someday their dreams will come true. ***In the end***, having a part-time job is important and good experience, but not as expensive as schoolwork. ***So***, I think that college students had better study. (W_KOR_PTJ0_082_A2_0)³⁾

3) For the clear distinction, all the textual Themes in the text (9) are italicized in bold.

This text which is written by the English learner in the low proficiency group has problems not only with grammar and lexical items but also with cohesiveness and coherence. As shown in (9), 15 clauses out of 19 clauses are starting with a textual Theme in the text. Overuse and inappropriateness of the textual Themes result in misunderstanding and incoherence of the text. *Finally*, for example, in the ninth clause, is not a suitable textual Theme. Although the clause is starting with the textual Theme that signals 'it is the last point of the text', the text continues to develop with more clauses. Two problematic patterns found in the writings occurred in both groups and have in common in that these make the reader difficult to understand the text because of lack of cohesiveness and coherence.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the Thematic choice and Thematic progression in the writings of the Korean English learners in the two proficiency levels have been examined. It has been found that there was no significant difference between the learners in the higher level and the ones in the low level. As regards the Thematic choice, types of the topical Theme, single and multiple Theme, and markedness of Theme have been explored. As for the types of topical Theme, a noun or a noun phrase was the most frequently used as a topical Theme in both groups. Nominalization and existential *there*, however, were infrequently used in both groups. This implies that the English learners have difficulties in utilizing those two lexical items. This also suggests what the teacher should focus when teaching writing. Another facet of Thematic choice explored in the study was using single or multiple Theme in both groups. Although there is not a notable difference in using single or multiple Theme in both groups, the learners in the low level group use more multiple Themes than the higher level learners. The reason for the slightly high frequency of the multiple Theme in the lower group is that the learners in the low level group use more conjunctive adjuncts as the textual Themes along with the topical Themes. As regards the markedness of the Theme, the low level group tends to use more unmarked Theme than the higher level group whereas the higher level group is likely to use more marked Themes than the low level group.

The Thematic progression patterns that have been found in the present study are linear Thematic progression, Thematic progression with constant Theme, multiple-Rheme, and some problematic patterns. The problematic Thematic progression patterns are brand new Theme and overuse and inappropriateness of the textual Theme, which appear in speakers of other languages (Arunsirot, 2013; Belmonte and McCabe-Hidalgo, 1998).

In many cases, the concept of Thematic structure and Thematic progression is neglected when English learners' writings are analyzed as well as when writings are taught. The framework of Theme and Thematic progression, however, can be a very useful tool to analyze texts and teach English learners how to construct the meaning through the texts that they intend to convey. Moreover, the framework of thematic progression in SFL can provide English learners become aware of different patterns of textual organization and facilitates the creation of cohesive and coherent text when writing in English. It raises awareness about the fact that inadequate or inconsistent application of Thematic progression may lead to instances of incoherence in written discourse. The SFL does not focus on a structure of a sentence level but on the linguistic resources that writers use to communicate in a larger discourse level. Furthermore, it puts importance on the linguistic resources as meaning-making resources that produce messages in sociocultural contexts. Therefore, English learners should be aware that they need to draw on a range of possible linguistic resources to make meaning and develop messages cohesively and coherently when writing.

References

- Arunsirot, S. 2013. An Analysis of Textual Metafunction in Thai EFL Students' Writing. *Novitas-Royal Research on Youth and Language* 7, 160-174.
- Belmonte, I. A. and A. McCabe-Hidalgo. 1998. Theme-Rheme Patterns in L2 Writing. *Didáctica* 10, 13-31.
- Bloor, M. and T. Bloor. 1992. Given and New Information in the Thematic Organization of Text: an Application to the Teaching of Academic Writing. *Occasional Papers in Systemic Linguistics* 6, 33-44.
- Butt, D., R. Fahey, S. Feez, and S. Spinks. 2012. *Using Functional Grammar: An Explorer's Guide*. 3rd edition. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Christie, F. 1999. Genre Theory and ESL Teaching: A Systemic Functional Perspective. *TESOL Quarterly* 33, 759-763.
- Christie, F. and S. Dreyfus. 2007. Letting the Secret Out: Successful Writing in Secondary English. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* 30, 235-247.
- Daneš, F. 1974. Functional Sentence Perspective and the Organization of the Text. In F. Daneš (Ed.), *Papers on Functional Sentence Perspective*. The Hague: Mouton, 106-128.
- Eggs, S. 2004. *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*. 2nd edition. New York: Continuum.
- Fries, P. H. 1995. Themes, Methods of Development, and Texts. In Hasan, R and Fries, P. H. (eds), *On Subject and Theme: from the Perspective of Functions in Discourse*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 317-359.
- Halliday, M. A. K. 1985. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 1st edition. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M.A.K. and C.M.I.M. Matthiessen. 2004. *An introduction to functional grammar*. 3rd edition. London: Hodder Arnold.
- Halliday, M.A.K. and C.M.I.M. Matthiessen. 2014. *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar*. 4th edition. London: Routledge.
- Hawes, T. and S. Thomas. 1997. Problems of Thematisation in Student Writing. *RELC Journal* 28, 35-55.
- Ishikawa, S. 2013. The ICNALE and Sophisticated Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis of Asian Learners of English. *Learner Corpus Studies in Asia and the World* 1, 91-118.
- Kim, M. 2004. Coherence and Cohesion in the Narratives of Korean EFL Learners. *Discourse and Cognition* 10, 31-56.
- Lee, S. 2007. Connectors as Textual Orienting Themes in Korean and Australian Student Essay Writing. *English Teaching* 62, 121-147.
- Martin, J. R., F. Christie, and J. Rothery. 1987. Social Processes in Education: A Reply to Sawyer and Watson (and others). In I. Reid (Ed.), *The Place of Genre in Learning: Current Debates*. Geelong, Australia: Deakin University, Centre for Studies in Literary Education, 35-45.
- Matthiessen, C. M. I. M., K. Teruya, and M. Lam. 2010. *Key Terms in Systemic Functional Linguistics*. London and New York: Continuum.
- Nation, I. S. P. and D. Beglar. 2007. A vocabulary size test. *The Language Teacher* 31, 9-13.
- Park, K. and D. Nam. 2015. Analysis of Thematic Structure in L2 Writing: A Systemic Functional Perspective. *SNU Journal of Education Research* 24, 65-88.
- Ping, A. L. 2007. Developing the Message: Thematic Progression and Student Writing. *The Journal of Asia TEFL* 4, 93-127.
- Schleppegrell, M. J. 2004. *The language of schooling: A functional linguistic perspective*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Schleppegrell, M. J. 2009. Grammar for Generation 1.5.: A focus on meaning. In M. Roberage, M. Siegal and L. Harklau (Eds.), *Generation 1.5 in College Composition: Teaching Academic Writing to U.S.-educated Learners of ESL*. New York: Routledge, 221-234.
- Seo, E. 2019. Lexicogrammar as a Meaning-Making Resource: A Systemic Functional Approach to Second Language (L2) Writing in Cross-Border Education. *Korean Journal of Applied Linguistics* 35, 153-191.

- Thompson, G. 2014. *Introducing Functional Grammar*. 3rd edition. New York: Routledge.
- Wang, B. and Y. Ma. 2017. Textual Choices in Rabindranath Tagore's Stray Birds and Feng Tang's Chinese Translation. *Proceedings of the Sixth Northeast Asia International Symposium on Language, Literature and Translation*, 31-37.
- Wang, L. 2007. Theme and Rheme in the Thematic Organization of Text: Implications for Teaching Academic Writing. *Asian EFL Journal* 9, 164-176.
- Yunita, S. 2018. Theme and Thematic Progression in Students' Recount Texts. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 7, 524-530.

Woo, Sujung, Professor
121 Daehak-ro Nonsan, Choongnam
Dept. of General Education, Konyang University
E-mail: suewoo@konyang.ac.kr