



An analysis on thematic progression patterns of reading comprehension TOEFL prediction texts

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ABSTRACT

The importance of learning English, a global language, is immense. With the rising trend of English-medium preschools, driven by parents' desire for their children to achieve native-like proficiency, English has become a priority for many students. BSC Education outlines several reasons for this: English's global prevalence facilitates cross-border communication, enhances job prospects, and improves social interactions. It is also the dominant language in academia, media, and the internet. To assess proficiency, students often take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), which evaluates speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. TOEFL scores are essential for admission to English-medium educational institutions. Despite its importance, reading comprehension can be challenging, particularly under time constraints, as students must understand texts and answer questions accurately and quickly. Mastering reading skills is thus crucial for TOEFL success. This research focuses on analyzing TOEFL prediction reading texts by examining thematic progression patterns and dominant themes. Understanding these patterns can help students improve their reading comprehension strategies, better preparing them for the TOEFL exam. Additionally, the research offers valuable insights for writing scientific texts, providing a useful reference for students aiming to enhance their academic writing skills.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning English is so important as it is a global language (Ilyosovna, 2020; Putra et al., 2020; Rao, 2019). English is taught to the children at a younger and younger age (Dewi, 2019). Most parents even send their children to the pre school which uses English as the language to teach and talk to their students or it is called "an international or national plus school" in order that their children can speak English like a native (García & Frede, 2019; Sawyer et al., 2019). There are ten good reasons why students need to learn English based on BSC Education (De Wilde et al., 2020; Sari & Aminatun, 2021; Simamora & Oktaviani, 2020): (1) English is a global language, (2) studying English can help to get a job, (3) learning English can help to meet new people, (4) many scientific papers are written in English, (5) English is the language of the media industry, (6) English is the language of internet, (7) travelling is a lot easier with a good knowledge of English, (8) English is one of the most important

languages for business, (9) with English, we can study all over the world, and (10) English gives us access to multiple cultures. However, there are four main aspects needed to notice to learn a language such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing. To measure the English skill, students can take an exam that world recognizes, for example, TOEFL (Akmal et al., 2020; Galikyan et al., 2019; Jaelani et al., 2022). TOEFL stands for Test of English as a Foreign Language. The TOEFL is standardized test that measures a test-taker's mastery of the English language (Azhari & Sahputri, 2022; Hutabarat, 2023). The TOEFL was created as a way to measure the English skills of non-native speakers hoping to attend schools where English was the language of instruction. Looking at a students' TOEFL scores helped admission officers decide if that student had a high enough level of English to succeed at their school. Out of four aspects mentioned before, reading looks easy but hard in the reality as the students must be able to comprehend the text and answers questions related to it with limited time. It would be easy if there was no time limit, but it's not. This research, therefore, is intended to analyze the reading texts from the TOEFL Prediction to see what thematic progression patterns they use and what is the dominant that occurs (Chang & Zhang, 2021; Pavavijarn, 2022). By finding it, this research is hoped to give a new knowledge especially to the students to know how to deal with the texts in reading section of TOEFL and can be a reference how to write a scientific text.

Thematic structure is one of three essential functions proposed by (2020) which he refers to Metafunction; they are ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Additionally, functional grammars consider language as a resource for creating meaning, according to (2021). The statement makes it clear that learning systemic functional linguistics should take into account both the structures and the ways in which they create meaning in texts and contexts. Thematic structure belongs to the textual function which packages the other two functions - ideational and interpersonal, into coherent text. According to the framework, each clause has a two-part message structure, comprising a Theme and Rheme (Dyck, 2020; Leong, 2022).

As was already said, systemic functional linguistics views language as a network of systems, or interrelated sets of alternatives for meaning, rather than as a collection of structures. According to Halliday (1994), "Theme extends from the beginning of the clause and up to (and including) the first element that has a function in transitivity" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013), the most popular method for determining Theme in a clause is based on this statement. The Theme of a clause thus "ends with the first constituent that is either participant, circumstance, or process" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013).

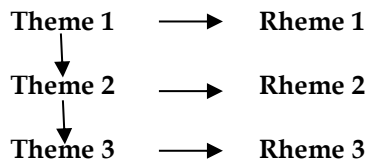
Rheme, which is the section of the phrase where the theme is developed, can be defined as everything that is not the theme (Wang, 2007). An English message structure consists of a theme and a rheme. The structure has a specific order: the theme comes first, then the rheme, and whatever is positioned in the first position is the theme. Rheme frequently refers to new information, whereas theme usually refers to given information. Given denotes the known or predictable, whereas New denotes the unknowable or unpredictable. According to (Wang, 2007), the difference between "Given and New" refers to knowledge that the speaker presents to the listener as either recoverable (Given) or not recoverable (New)..

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Thematic progression is another name proposed by Danes and Paltridge (2002) to refer to how a clause's theme may pick up or repeat a meaning from a preceding theme and rheme. Thematic progression allows us to track how the Theme and Rheme of each clause are semantically related to those of other clauses in the text. It also allows us to see how the message moves from clause to clause (Leong, 2022). According to Paltridge, there are several types of ways to develop theme and rheme in a clause:

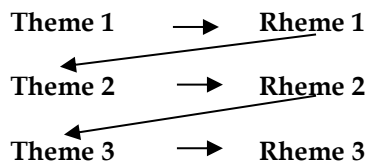
1. A constant theme pattern (theme reiteration)

Constant theme pattern is a clause sentence in which there is the use of pronoun and conjunction in the beginning of the sentence then becomes the theme of the sentence, and the theme of the sentence is reiterated into the next sentence. (Paltridge, 2002:102)



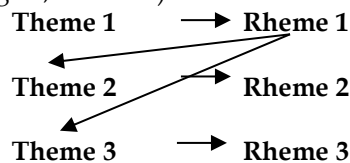
2. The Zig-Zag (Linear Theme Pattern)

Zig-zag pattern is a pattern of the sentence which describes about a sentence where the second theme is found the information of the rheme in the first sentence. (Paltridge, 2002:131)



3. The Multiple / Split-rheme Pattern

The multiple pattern is a combination of pattern between constant and zig-zag patterns. (Eggs, 2004:326)



RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The method used in this research is qualitative research using descriptive method. Descriptive data in qualitative gives a thorough and in-depth account of the social issues being studied. It is in line with Sinaga (2022) that stated "qualitative researcher tends to be inductive which means that they develop a theory or look for a pattern of meaning on the basis of the data that they have collected." The data used are two texts of Reading Comprehension in the TOEFL Prediction Test. They will be analysed clause by clause and will be classified into Theme and Rheme to see their Thematic Progression. To get a fully understanding, the analysis presented as follow:

Text 1

Hotels were among the earliest facilities that bound the United States together. They were both creatures and creators of communities, as well symptoms of the frenetic quest for community. Even in the first part of the nineteenth century, Americans were already forming the habit of gathering from all corners of the nation for both public and private, business and pleasure, purposes. Conventions were the new occasions, and hotels were distinctively American facilities making conventions possible. The first national convention of a major party to choose a candidate for President (that of the National Republican party, which met on December 12, 1831, and nominated Henry Clay for President) was held in Baltimore, at a hotel that was then reputed to be the best in the country. The presence in Baltimore of Barnum's City Hotel, a six-story building with two hundred apartments, helps explain why many other early national political conventions were held there.

In the longer run, American hotels made other national conventions not only possible but pleasant and convivial. The growing custom of regularly assembling from afar the representatives of all kinds of groups - not only for political conventions, but also for commercial, professional, learned, and avocations ones - in turn supported the multiplying hotels. By the mid-twentieth century, conventions accounted for over a third of the yearly room occupancy of all hotels in the nation; about eighteen thousand different conventions were held annually with a total attendance of about ten million persons.

Nineteenth-century American hotelkeepers, who were no longer the genial, deferential "hosts" of the eighteenth-century European inn, became leading citizens. Holding a large stake in the community, they exercised power to make it prosper. As owners or managers of the local "palace of the public," they were makers and shapers of a principal community attraction. Travelers from abroad were mildly shocked by this high social position.

Paragraph 1

Hotels	↓	were among the earliest facilities that bound the United States together.
They	↓	were both creatures and creators of communities, as well symptoms of the frenetic quest for community.
Even in the first part of the nineteenth century, Americans	←	Were already forming the habit of gathering from all corners of the nation for both public and private, business and pleasure, purposes.
Conventions	←	were the new occasions, and hotels were distinctively American facilities making conventions possible.
The first national convention of a major party	↓	to choose a candidate for President (that of the National Republican party, which met on December 12, 1831, and nominated Henry Clay for President) was held in Baltimore, at a hotel that was then reputed to be the best in the country.
The presence in Baltimore of Barnum's City Hotel,	←	a six-story building with two hundred apartments, helps explain why many other early national political conventions were held there.

Paragraph 2

Theme	↓	Rheme
In the longer run, American hotels	↓	made other national conventions not only possible but pleasant and convivial.
The growing custom of regularly assembling from afar the representatives of all kinds of groups - not only for political conventions, but also for commercial, professional, learned, and avocations ones	←	in turn supported the multiplying hotels.
By the mid-twentieth century, conventions	←	accounted for over a third of the yearly room occupancy of all hotels in the nation; about eighteen thousand different conventions were held annually with a total attendance of about ten million persons.

Paragraph 3

Nineteenth-century American hotelkeepers,	↓	who were no longer the genial, deferential "hosts" of the eighteenth-century European inn, became leading citizens.
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Holding a large stake in the community, they	exercised power to make it prosper.
As owners or managers of the local "palace of the public," they	were makers and shapers of a principal community attraction.
Travelers from abroad	were mildly shocked by this high social position.

Based on the analysis above, the three kinds of thematic progression pattern are found in the text which are theme reiteration occurs 4 times, zig-zag pattern occurs 3 times, and multiple pattern occurs 2 times.

Text 2

Beads were probably the first durable ornaments humans possessed, and the intimate relationship they had with their owners is reflected in the fact that beads are among the most common items found in ancient archaeological sites. In the past, as today, men, women, and children adorned themselves with beads. In some cultures still, certain beads are often worn from birth until death, and then are buried with their owners for the afterlife. Abrasion due to daily wear alters the surface features of beads, and if they are buried for long, the effects of corrosion can further change their appearance. Thus, interest is imparted to the bead both by use and the effects of time.

Besides their wearability, either as jewelry or incorporated into articles of attire, beads possess the desirable characteristics of every collectible: they are durable, portable, available in infinite variety, and often valuable in their original cultural context as well as in today's market. Pleasing to look at and touch, beads come in shapes, colors, and materials that almost compel one to handle them and to sort them.

Beads are miniature bundles of secrets waiting to be revealed: their history, manufacture, cultural context, economic role, and ornamental use are all points of information one hopes to unravel. Even the most mundane beads may have traveled great distances and been exposed to many human experiences. The bead researcher must gather information from many diverse fields. In addition to having to be a generalist while specializing in what may seem to be a narrow field, the researcher is faced with the problem of primary materials that have little or no documentation. Many ancient beads that are of ethnographic interest have often been separated from their original cultural context.

The special attractions of beads contribute to the uniqueness of bead research. While often regarded as the "small change of civilizations," beads are a part of every culture, and they can often be used to date archaeological sites and to designate the degree of mercantile, technological, and cultural sophistication.

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Paragraph 2

Theme

Besides their wearability, either as jewelry or incorporated into articles of attire, beads

Rheme

possess the desirable characteristics of every collectible:

They

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Based on the analysis above, two kinds of thematic progression pattern are found in the text which are theme reiteration occurs 6 times and zig-zag pattern occurs 4 times.

From the discussion above, the occurrences of each pattern of thematic progression on reading comprehension text of TOEFL prediction can be seen as follows:

Tabel 1. The Result of the Occurrences on Reading Comprehension of TOEFL Prediction

Text	Theme Reiteration	Zig-Zag Pattern	Multiple Pattern	Total
Text 1	4	3	2	8
Text 2	6	4	-	10
Total of Occurrences	10	7	2	18

The table shows us that the total of 18 patterns occurred on both texts. We found that the theme reiteration pattern occurred the most with 10 occurrences, followed by the zig-zag pattern with 7 occurrences, and the least is the multiple pattern with 2 occurrences. Furthermore, on text 2 there is no multiple pattern found.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research is to find out what thematic progression patterns on reading comprehension of TOEFL Prediction are used to give more knowledge to English learners who think that TOEFL examination is hard to do especially the reading comprehension section. Besides the text sounds scientific, they need to compete with the time given. By knowing what the thematic progression patterns frequently occur on text, hopefully, could help the learners to understand the text. The findings reveal to us that the three kinds of thematic progression patterns proposed by Paltridge (2006) may occur on the text of reading comprehension of TOEFL Prediction and the researchers believe this fact answers what makes TOEFL Reading Comprehension hard enough to do. The changes of the theme on the text are so progressive that makes the readers confused the idea of each paragraph. The test takers are then encouraged to study the thematic progression pattern to help them easily understand the reading text. Future research should delve deeper into the specific impacts of each type of thematic progression pattern identified by Paltridge (2006) on TOEFL reading comprehension performance. Studies could examine how different thematic progression patterns affect comprehension across various proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds to determine if certain patterns pose more difficulties for specific groups of learners. Additionally, researchers could develop and test targeted instructional strategies or interventions to help students recognize and navigate these patterns more effectively. Incorporating technology, such as adaptive learning platforms, to teach thematic progression patterns could also be explored to enhance learner engagement and effectiveness. Finally, longitudinal studies tracking the progress of students who receive training in thematic progression could provide insights into the long-term benefits of this approach on reading comprehension skills and overall TOEFL performance.

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