

Thematicity in Published vs. Unpublished Iranian TEFL Theses

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Abstract—Writing up their theses, postgraduate/MA students investigate patterns that can guide them in efficiently preparing their theses. Analyzing theme/rheme patterning, proven as a signaler of coherence and cohesion in written discourse, may provide the patterns postgraduate students search for. There is, therefore, an urgent necessity to scrutinize the issue from different perspectives, and propose recommendations to improve the written discourse quality especially among non-native writers. Accordingly, this study addressed thematicity in two rhetorical sections, that is, method and results sections of three categories of MA students' theses: (1) those with theses-driven articles published in scholarly journals, (2) those with theses-driven articles presented in conferences, and (3) those with no such presentations in any academic fields. Following Halliday's (1994) and McCabe's (1999) models of thematic organization and progression, 45 theses, 15 from each category, were compared in terms of thematicity. Although frequency data indicated that the tendency in using different thematic patterns was higher in published theses, but Chi-square test did not reveal any significant differences among the three categories in terms of theme selection and progression. These similarities in terms of thematicity can be attributed to the same genre to which different theses belonged. The results of the study are discussed to provide fruitful insights about thematic conventions applied in written discourse.

Index Terms—MA theses, theme progression, theme selection, T-unit

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the concerns of writers is to organize information in a way that it transfers their intended feeling or meaning to the readers. In the realm of foreign language (FL) learning and teaching, writing takes the greatest attention, but we encounter a good number of authors who fail to organize their ideas efficiently in the writing. So, these writers are marginalized from academic fields in spite of the merit of their ideas. Several reasons may account for such failure. It is now generally accepted that lack of coherence is one of the major problems in students' writing (Guo & Wang, 2005; Mao, 2002; Wang & Sui, 2006). Lack of cohesion has also been recognized as one of the main difficulties in second language (L2) learners' writings (Bamberg, 1983). It is, therefore, urgent to scrutinize the problem from different perspectives, and propose recommendations to improve the written discourse quality especially among non-native writers. One such consideration is to probe thematicity that has been proved to be a very important framework for analyzing and teaching coherence and cohesion at discourse level (Belmonte & McCabe, 1997; Fries, 1994, 1995; Martin, 1995; Mellos, 2011; Wang, 2007). Theme and rheme can be a useful tool for writers to sort and develop their ideas more consistently and coherently in their essays. As Wang (2007) states, theme of a clause guides reader to the clause's message.

Writers must pay attention to what they write and how they develop their information in the clauses and in the texts as well. It is, thus, necessary to analyze different thematic options used by writers who have succeeded in presenting their theses in academic fields. Doing so would allow the students to enhance their writing awareness and produce semantic coherence in their writing and accordingly in their theses.

Despite the fact that the role of theme patterns in making cohesion and coherence in writing has been proved by different studies, a limited number of research has been dedicated to examine thematicity in the highly valuable writing pieces (e.g., theses) which are aimed to be kept as academically referred records in the libraries. Accordingly, the aim of this study was to examine theme selection and progression among three categories of Iranian MA students' theses, that is, those that articles based on them have been presented in academic fields like scholarly journals and conferences and those that have not had appearance of their articles in such fields.

This study was hoped to act as a block for building the body of research which apparently has not been much wide in this area. For the researchers in the field of applied linguistics, the results of this study will cater for several overarching incentives as regards the types of thematicity applied by Iranian MA TEFL students in writing their theses which, in

turn, shed light on the extent to which TEFL students are and should be aware about the conventions of thematic patterns in writing.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In what follows, a snapshot of studies in relation to the scope of the present study is dealt with.

Over the last few years, theme and rheme have been studied and proved to be highly useful in the comprehension and production of texts because, as already mentioned, they are important elements for producing cohesion and coherence in the discourse. Great deals of effort have been made to investigate theme patterning in academic texts from different perspectives.

Some research has focused on the theme pattern and organization in different rhetorical sections of academic articles. In one of his research, Ghadessy (1999), for example, studied thematic organization of 150 academic article abstracts coming from 30 different academic disciplines. Research showed that although there were grammatical and lexicosemantic differences in the themes of the clauses of the abstracts, a common method of development or point of departure could be developed by theme selections. Ghadessy concluded that thematic framework was a powerful method of text analysis to build a more complete profile of the academic article abstracts and other registers.

In the same vein, Lores (2004) analyzed research article (RA) abstracts from linguistics journal in terms of rhetorical organization and thematic structure. Two types of rhetorical organization were recognized in the abstracts, IMRD (introduction-methods-results-discussion) and CARS (Create a Research Space). Thematic distribution and choice were investigated in these two types of structures and the result was different thematizations in IMRD and CARS abstracts. The research showed the contribution of thematization studies towards the understanding and explicit description of RA abstracts.

In a more recent study, Jalilifar (2010a) explored thematic types and progression in different rhetorical sections of articles published in international journal of ELT and those that had been published in a local journal, that is, Roshd. Roshd authors were all Persian non-native writers of English while ELT represented authors with different linguistic backgrounds. The results showed significant differences in the context of the usage of different patterns of thematic progression (TP) in the introduction and results and discussion sections of international compared with local journals. Similar theme types and progression were the results of examining both journals without discriminating their rhetorical sections.

Some of the studies have dedicated the scope of their research on thematicity to contribute to genre analysis. One such investigation is McCabe's (1999) study of theme/rheme analysis of English and Spanish history textbooks. She reported overall similarities in the theme types and patterns of TP that attested to the theory of similar genres resulting in similar linguistic choices related to textual, interpersonal, and ideational themes. At the same time, a slight difference was found in participants involved in material processes in both groups of texts. The other case of difference in her study was related to differences in results amongst texts within each of the corpora that were attributed to possible effects of subject matter and individual author style.

All studies reviewed in this section are valuable and have shed light on thematicity from different perspectives, however, an in-depth consideration of such studies reveals that investigation on theme patterning has been limited in some ways. One such limitation, for example, relates to the choice of the type of rhetorical section(s) to analyze thematicity. Considering abstracts, for instance, written with a word restriction in mind, cannot be matched with McCabe's (1999) characterization of theme as the representative of authors thoughts. As Ghadessy (1999, p. 143) posits, in academic article abstracts, "Information is packed especially in the nominal group of clauses" and this may result in occupying abstracts with special kinds of themes that may not be the evidence of the writers' choice for delivering their thoughts. Another concern rising about previous research is related to the authors of the academic pieces selected for scrutiny. Some researchers have considered native vs. non-native writers in the same line of language proficiency, whereas, as Mauranen (1996) stresses, published or edited texts with native writers are used as a criterion for evaluating other written pieces in terms of thematic selection and progression. A similar limitation emerges when theme patterning is probed through comparing local and international journals where two different articles are published in journals of absolutely different academic status. It also seems that the majority of research focusing on thematicity in discourse has selected a limited number of genres for analysis such as research papers. Drawing upon the drawbacks of the previously addressed studies, it is felt essential to expand the horizons of the previous studies by carrying investigations such as the present one that focused on written pieces of a different genre; because not enough is yet known about the organization of the thematic patterns across theses.

In support of paving the way towards such existing drawbacks, the current study aimed to scratch upon analyzing theme patterns in MA TEFL theses to reveal the general pattern of thematicity and probable similarities or differences in terms of thematicity. Thus, a major aspect of the current research involved informing non-native writers of the crucial effect of theme/rheme on textual organization and will contribute to the growing body of research in the field.

III. METHOD

A. Corpus

The corpus was selected from three universities offering TEFL courses in Iran. It consisted of 45 theses with semi-experimental designs defended between the years 2009 and 2011. The theses were divided into three categories: 15 of them belonged to (TPAJ) with theses-driven articles published in academic journals, the second category ($N=15$) represented theses with articles presented in conferences (TPC), and the remaining 15 (i.e., TNP) had appeared in none of the academic fields mentioned above. As regards the specific sections of the whole theses, the frequencies of theme types and progression patterns were counted and calculated in two rhetorical sections, namely, method and results sections.

B. Instruments/ Models of Analysis

To practically set the ground for the sake of putting into practice the already mentioned theoretical aspects of the current study, Halliday's (1994) categorization of theme and the revised model of Daneš's (1974) thematic progression (TP) patterns proposed by McCabe (1999) were used for comparing and analyzing the dataset. Halliday (1994) classifies themes into textual, interpersonal, marked, unmarked, simple, and multiple themes. McCabe's (1999) proposed TP patterns include two groups of theme progression and rheme progression. Theme progression consists of constant theme and split theme; and rheme progression includes simple linear and split rheme.

McCabe (1999) also identified a large number of themes termed peripheral themes. These include: thematic equatives, *Wh* element in interrogative clauses, the pronoun *we*, the imperative word *imagine*, circumstances of manner, attributive apposition, time and place adverbials, back, related, new, key, sum, previous clause, inversion, extraposed, existential, and metatextual theme. McCabe posits that these themes cannot be analyzed in terms of TP patterns; in other words, they do not fit into any of the above configurations of TP patterns proposed by McCabe. Following Jalilifar (2010a) in this study, only frequencies of peripheral themes were tabulated without being submitted to statistical tests and their results are reported merely by their frequencies (For more information regarding the models applied in this paper see Rafiei, 2012). The unit or segment of text based on which themes were specified in this research was T-unit, which in McCabe's (1999) terms refers to an independent clause plus all of the clauses that are hypotactically related to it.

To minimize the danger of unreliability in the texts interpretation, two copies were prepared from 6 out of 45 total number of the theses. The selected 6 texts included 2 theses from each category of TPAJ, TNP, and TPC. One of the above-mentioned copies was analyzed by the researcher and the second copy was analyzed by a TEFL practitioner well aware about thematicity. Examining the two analyzed copies, there appeared just one case of disagreement between the researcher's and the second coder's analysis, however a final agreement was reached at on the categories of analysis.

IV. RESULTS

A. Analysis of Quantitative Data

The corpus was analyzed in terms of the frequency of different types of themes. Before reporting the findings, the number of words, T-units, and the average number of words per clause were calculated for each thesis group. The number of words was 60731, 60485, and 60621 and the number of T-units was 3349, 3285, and 3296 in TPAJ, TNP, and TPC, respectively. In the three categories, the results section contained more T-units that present the greater length of this section in the theses. TPAJ compared to the other two categories owned the highest frequency of T-units (i.e., 2022) in the results section. The average number of words per T-units in TPAJ, TNP, and TPC was 18.1%, 18.4%, and 18.3%, respectively. Table 4.1 that will be used for further reference is indicative of the distribution of T-units in the rhetorical sections of the theses.

N.B. In all the tables, M and R represent the method and results sections, respectively.

TABLE 1
FREQUENCY OF T-UNITS IN THE RHETORICAL SECTIONS OF TPAJ, TNP, AND TPC

Theses	M	R	Total
TPAJ	1327	2022	3349
TNP	1581	1704	3285
TPC	1565	1731	3296

In the following section, the findings related to each type of theme are explained.

1. Textual themes

Frequency of textual themes is elaborately presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
FREQUENCY OF TEXTUAL THEMES IN THE RHETORICAL SECTIONS OF TPAJ, TNP, AND TPC

Theses	M	R	Total
TPAJ	308	611	919
TNP	359	463	822
TPC	321	500	821

As Table 2 shows, the highest proportion of textual themes belonged to TPAJ (919 cases). Further analysis of the data revealed that the total number of textual themes was higher in the results section compared to method section in the

three corpora. Furthermore, the total frequency of textual themes in the results section of TPAJ was greater than TNP and TPC.

Looking at the frequencies, however, did not give us a comprehensive picture of the significant differences among three categories in terms of using textual themes. So, a Chi-square test was run to take the clear picture. Results of Chi-square test ($X^2 = 4.170$, 1 df, $P > .05$) indicated that there was not a significant difference among the three groups of TPAJ, TNP, and TPC in terms of applying textual themes. Otherwise stated, textual themes selection appeared to be of the same status among the corpora.

2. Interpersonal themes

Interpersonal themes were investigated through the T-units of TPAJ, TNC, and TPC. The data presented in Table 3 shows frequency of interpersonal themes in the three categories.

TABLE 3
FREQUENCY OF INTERPERSONAL THEMES IN THE RHETORICAL SECTIONS OF TPAJ, TNP, AND TPC

Theses	M	R	Total
TPAJ	15	32	47
TNP	5	28	33
TPC	5	36	41

The results of analysis (Table 3) revealed that the tendency of students in TPAJ was higher (47 cases), compared to those in the other two categories in terms of using interpersonal themes. Investigating the rhetorical sections of the theses revealed that while the method section of TPAJ was dedicated to the greatest number of interpersonal themes (15), it was the results section of TPC that used the highest frequency of interpersonal themes (36).

The total number of interpersonal themes in each category of thesis was analyzed by Chi-square test to establish significant results. With a similar pattern to the previous results, findings of Chi-square test ($X^2 = 2.166$, 1 df, $p > .05$) revealed no significant differences among corpora regarding selection of interpersonal themes.

3. Marked themes

The results related to the third type of theme, that is, marked themes are depicted in Table 4.

TABLE 4
MARKED THEMES IN THE RHETORICAL SECTIONS OF TPAJ, TNP, AND TPC

Theses	M	R	Total
TPAJ	335	695	1030
TNP	401	580	981
TPC	391	607	998

As Table 4 shows, marked themes were more frequent in TPAJ compared to TNP and TPC. Though more frequent in TPAJ, the high profile of marked themes appeared in the results section.

One marked difference appeared in considering the distribution of marked themes between method and results chapters. While the relationship between the two rhetorical sections was diverse in TPAJ, the difference was very small in TNP and TPC. To gain a statistical evidence for the pattern of distribution of marked themes, overall frequencies of marked themes were further explored by the Chi-square test and the results ($X^2 = .335$, 1 df, $p > .05$) indicated no significant difference among the three categories in terms of selecting marked themes.

4. Unmarked themes

Summary statistics related to the proportion of marked themes is presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5
FREQUENCY OF UNMARKED THEMES IN THE RHETORICAL SECTIONS OF TPAJ, TNP, AND TPC

Theses	M	R	Total
TPAJ	992	1327	2319
TNP	1180	1124	2304
TPC	1174	1124	2298

As Table 5 indicates, the total frequency of unmarked themes was somewhat greater in TPAJ. One outstanding difference was the way in which unmarked themes were distributed in the introduction and results sections. In TPAJ, the difference between the method and results section was very noteworthy. That is, while 992 cases of unmarked themes were employed in the method section, the number of unmarked themes in the results section was 1327. In TNP and TPC, on the other hand, the difference was very minimal. Results established through the Chi-square test ($X^2 = .112$, 1 df, $p > .05$) indicated that the three categories of theses did not reveal any significant differences in terms of selecting unmarked themes.

5. Simple themes

Table 6 illustrates the use of simple themes across the three categories of corpora.

TABLE 6
FREQUENCY OF SIMPLE THEMES IN THE RHETORICAL SECTIONS OF TPAJ, TNP, AND TPC

Theses	M	R	Total
TPAJ	1012	1396	2408
TNP	1219	1221	2440
TPC	1240	1203	2443

Unlike the other types of themes in which TPAJ had the greatest frequency, TPC and TNP used simple themes with the highest proportion, 2443 and 2440 cases, respectively. Distribution of simple themes across the rhetorical sections of the theses also revealed some areas of variations. TPAJ used 1396 cases of its simple themes in the results section while TNP and TPC applied 1221 and 1203 cases of their total simple themes in this section, respectively. This means that in the case of TPAJ, similar to the other types of themes, results section was more elaborate in terms of using simple themes. A similar pattern of results were observed among the three categories as far as simple themes selection was concerned. Otherwise stated, the result of Chi-square test ($X^2 = .926$, 1 df, $p > .05$) expressed the existence of no significant difference among TPAJ, TNP, and TPC in terms of applying simple themes.

6. Multiple themes

The last category of theme types belongs to multiple themes that were investigated across the corpus. Total distributions of multiple themes as well as their concentrations in the rhetorical sections of the theses appear in Table 7.

TABLE 7
FREQUENCY OF MULTIPLE THEMES IN THE RHETORICAL SECTIONS OF TPAJ, TNP, AND TPC

Theses	M	R	Total
TPAJ	315	626	941
TNP	362	483	845
TPC	325	528	853

Like other types of themes, TPAJ showed the highest tendency in using multiple themes. Reviewing multiple themes across the rhetorical sections of the theses revealed higher concentration of multiple themes in the results section of TPAJ compared to TNP, and TPC. Chi-square test was run on the last type of theme, accordingly, no significant difference ($X^2 = 3.472$, 1 df, $p > .05$) were observed among the three categories.

In the next section, the results of analysis related to TP patterns in the three categories of corpora is covered.

Before moving on to the next section, it seems necessary to note that, in this study, each of the six types of theme was analyzed separately by the Chi-square test, but in the case of TP patterns, it was the total number of TP patterns that was submitted to the Chi-square test to investigate the presence of probable significant differences among the three categories of theses. The reason for this method of analysis roots back to some statistical issues. As it was mentioned previously, T-unit acts as a basis on which themes are analyzed. Therefore, the total number of T-units as well as the total number of themes forms the data for the Chi-square test to analyze the thematic differences among or between groups under study. As regards TP, the total number of TP patterns, due to the presence of peripheral themes, is normally less than the total number of T-units. So, the results of analysis gained by the Chi-square test applied to the findings related to the whole would give a comprehensive picture of any significant differences among the categories under investigation. However, this is not the case about theme types in which a single element can have the characteristics of four theme sorts at the same time. For example, a single element can appear in the category of multiple, marked, textual, and interpersonal themes at the same time. This nature of theme types leads to the total theme types to outnumber the total T-units. Thus, the statistical analysis in which the total number of themes outnumbers or equals the total number of T-units would seem not to completely portray the existence of significant differences in the groups under study. To avoid this problem, following Jalilifar (2009, 2010a), each theme type in terms of selection was analyzed separately, whereas the results showing TP patterns were treated in total with no specific attention to the elements.

B. TP Pattern in TPAJ, TNP, and TPC

This study also attempted to investigate the presence of any significant differences among the three categories in terms of TP pattern. Tables 8 and 9 indicate the different patterns of TP across the two rhetorical sections of theses.

N.B. In the tables related to TP patterns, Lin= Simple linear, Con= Constant theme, Sp rh= Split rheme, Sp th= Split theme, and Per= Peripheral themes.

TABLE 8
FREQUENCY OF TP PATTERNS IN THE M SECTION OF TPAJ, TNP, AND TPC

Theses	Lin	Con	Sp rh	Sp th	Total	Per
TPAJ	506	449	14	0	969	358
TNP	531	517	9	1	1058	523
TPC	534	517	13	1	1065	500

TABLE 9
FREQUENCY OF TP PATTERNS IN THE R SECTION OF TPAJ, TNP, AND TPC

Theses	Lin	Con	Sp rh	Sp th	Total	Per
TPAJ	656	613	16	4	1289	733
TNP	581	576	18	2	1177	527
TPC	604	601	15	2	1222	509

Reviewing the data provided by Tables 8 and 9 indicates the highest tendency in TPC in terms of applying the total number of TP patterns. Regarding the rhetorical sections, the total number of TP in the results section compared to the method section was greater across all dataset. However, total frequencies of TP in the results section were somehow greater in the case of TPAJ.

In the method section, the most frequent simple linear chains belonged to TPC and TNP (i.e., 534 and 531 cases), respectively. Constant and peripheral themes also appeared more frequently in the method section of TNP and TPC.

In the results section, the frequency of constant themes and simple linear TP in TPAJ was greater than TNP and TPC that may indicate that this section was more elaborate than the method section in TPAJ category. In TPAJ, there was a remarkable difference between results and method sections in terms of using peripheral themes. The frequency of these themes was greater in the results section of TPAJ. As regards applying peripheral themes, the difference between results and method sections in TNP and TPC was small.

The total number of TP patterns was further investigated through the Chi-square test to examine the existence of significant differences among three categories of corpora. Chi-square test output ($X^2 = .581$, 1 df, $p > .05$) did not reveal any significant differences among the three categories in terms of total pattern of TP.

C. Qualitative Findings

The researcher was also interested in qualitatively finding out the tendency among MA students towards using thematic subcategories in their written discourse. The content of both sections of the theses was analyzed qualitatively. Although this involved a quantitative process of tabulating, coding, and categorizing the data, content analysis that dealt with the most outstanding patterns appearing in the TEFL theses was preferably applied for further clarify.

Regarding the three main subcategories of textual themes, namely structural, conjunctive adjunct, and continuative, results of content analysis revealed that conjunctive adjunct had the highest frequency across the three categories. Moreover, continuative as the other subcategory of textual themes was not utilized by any of the categories of corpora. This may be due to the fact that, as McCabe (1999) surmises, continuatives are generally tokens of spoken discourse rather than written discourse.

Different sorts of interpersonal themes were also explored in the corpus under study. The most frequent type of interpersonal themes was finite operators in TPAJ and modal adjuncts in TNP and TPC. Finite operators and modal adjuncts were mainly nested in the results section of three corpora. *Let's* the other type of interpersonal themes, not surprisingly, was not observed in any of the corpora. This lack can be attributed to the academic nature of the written pieces examined in this investigation.

In terms of unmarked themes, it was *participant* that gained the greatest profile in three categories especially in TPAJ and it was mainly concentrated in the results section in TPAJ, but in the case of TNP and TPC, it mostly occupied the method section. Other types of unmarked themes were used with a low frequency in the three corpora.

Concerning three subcategories of multiple themes, textual+ topical themes appeared with the most proportion in the three categories, though more frequent in TPAJ, and it was mostly concentrated in the results section. Again, TPAJ showed the greatest tendency in using this type of multiple themes in the results section. The frequency of interpersonal+topical and textual+interpersonal+topical themes was low among the three corpora.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Statistical analysis of six types of themes, namely, textual, interpersonal, marked, unmarked, simple, and multiple themes, and TP pattern explored in the three categories of theses indicated that there was not any significant differences among the corpora in terms of selection of different types of themes and pattern of TP. These similarities can be attributed to the same genre to which different theses belonged.

The overall results of this study add another block to the building made by previous researchers such as Jalilifar (2010a) and McCabe (1999) in which they present evidence confirming the fact that texts of the same genre have similar contextual configurations. This means that texts belonging to the same genre appear with similar linguistic choices related to the field, mode, and tenor of the text (Halliday, 1985, 1994; McCabe, 1999). The findings may be an indication of Jalilifar's (2010a) view that "similarities in the discourse characteristics engender similarities in textual choices, which are reflected in the thematic choices preferred, since the field, tenor, and mode can be realized in topical, interpersonal, and textual themes respectively" (p. 32). Concerning the generic nature of MA theses, it is suggested that TPAJ, TNP, and TPC share some common features that as Swales (cited in Jalilifar, 2010a) purports include common goals, mechanisms of interaction, specific vocabulary, and community members. In addition to the same form and rhetorical sections, they also share similarities in terms of their audience, content, and purpose which lead to similar frequencies of theme types and patterns of TP.

Another possible justification for the findings may be rooted back to the level of proficiency writers possess while writing academic pieces. Theme/rheme as the significant signaler of coherence and cohesion is considered as one of the elements of language proficiency in discourse. In a fairly obvious sense, Jalilifar (2010b) makes it evident that “the greater the language proficiency, the more thematically organized the text, and the closer to native speaker texting” (p. 44). Some of the studies focusing on thematicity in discourse and reaching to a significant difference among thematic patterns of the participants were usually of the kind in that there were marked differences between language proficiency of the participants. For example, some of these studies made their comparison between native and nonnative made discourses (Jalilifar, 2010b; Montemayor-Borsinger, 2003) or discourses chosen for the investigations were made by students from different levels of university studies, being sophomore, junior, and senior (Jalilifar, 2010b).

In its pursuit of investigating thematic patterning, this study is thought to function as a significant contributor of new insights and implications especially with regard to thematic organization in written discourse. However, one should bear in mind that these implications are hypothetical and need to be examined in real situations carefully before they are implemented.

Lores (2004) brings about justification in claiming that thematic analysis is a useful tool for investigating genres and stresses its significance as part of a writer’s available linguistic resources that can contribute to the writers’ production of effective local and global discourse. One of the important implications of the findings may, thus, relate to the insights they can provide the students regarding the most common thematic conventions applied in academic written discourse. Otherwise stated, this research served to add to the literature on genre analysis especially to the literature regarding the most common thematic choices in MA TEFL theses to which little attention has been paid so far.

Findings of this research, based on the definition of Harmer (2007) of successful writing, may be helpful in the process of writing practices. As Harmer states, students should receive instruction on genre and they need to be exposed to examples of texts within a genre so that they develop a feel for the conventions of that genre. Another implication of the present study, consequently, may be directed towards material designers, in general, and EFL practitioners, in specific, who are recommended to utilize the results of this research and similar investigations as a criterion of advanced students writing conventions, in part of thematicity, in their writing programs. Focusing on theme/rheme structure of a clause, as Wang (2007) recommends, can lead to immediate and startling results in writing instruction. So, it seems essential to devote part of the EFL curriculum to writing practices with reference to thematic frameworks. This can include some advanced writing courses orienting on thematic patterning specifically developed for postgraduate candidates.

Though this study has temporarily come to an end, the work is not finished. The researcher strongly suggests other interested researchers to approach thematicity from a variety of qualitative and quantitative angles through which they can discover EFL writers’ thematic tendency in written production with emphasis on all rhetorical sections. A profitable next step in this line of research will be, therefore, to examine all chapters of theses comprehensively.

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