

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter introduces the theme system as the basis for analyzing students' writing projects in the English education department of UIN Sunan Gunung Djati. This section discusses the background of the study, research questions, research purposes, research significance, theoretical framework, and previous research.

#### **A. Background of the Study**

English is not the most widely spoken language globally, it holds the status of being the official language in numerous countries. English has been used as a common language in several nations for daily communication purposes. English is designated as the primary language in several other nations, underscoring its significance as a language of study. English has emerged as the prevailing language in the realm of business. Numerous studies conducted globally indicate that English is the predominant language utilized for cross-border commercial communication. According to an article published in *The Economist* in 2014, there has been a growing trend among multinational corporations to choose English as their primary language. In the context of our increasingly interconnected global society, it is indisputable that the English language has assumed a significant role across various domains.

Indonesia, being a developing nation, continues to employ English as a non-native language. It continues to be a language that is taught and promoted within educational institutions. According to Lauder (2008), the utilization of the English language in Indonesia has evolved within the framework of post-colonial educational capacity enhancement and, more recently, in response to the imperative of facilitating growth, particularly in the realm of state education. Every language possesses a unique system that distinguishes it from other languages, and English is no exception. English, being a foreign language, has distinct differences from the Indonesian language system. Hence, English is widely regarded as a challenging

language to acquire. However, it is vital to recognize the significance of the English language and the necessity of acquiring and achieving proficiency in it.

Mastery of the English language necessitates proficiency in four essential skills: speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Writing is considered a crucial language ability that plays a pivotal role in achieving academic achievement and is an essential prerequisite for engaging in civic life and the global economy (Graham & Perin, 2007). Within the realm of education, academic writing projects necessitate students to acquire proficiency in the art of effective writing. The assessment of various domains of knowledge primarily relies on written forms of evaluation (Muslim, 2014). There exists a positive correlation between writing proficiency and academic achievement, whereby students who possess strong writing skills tend to attain higher grades compared to their counterparts who lack such proficiency. In most cases, colleges and universities mandate that students obtain foreign language certifications as a prerequisite for graduation. Proficiency in writing is a crucial component of these examinations (Huy, 2015). Furthermore, in the context of employment, those who possess exceptional writing skills are highly sought after in numerous professional sectors. Hence, possessing expertise in playwriting plays a crucial role in attaining success (Marzban & Sarjami, 2014).

Paragraph writing has become an unavoidable type of skill that students at universities in Indonesia must be competent in. As EFL students, they are expected to be proficient in writing, because writing is an essential language skill (Harmer, 2004). By writing, people can share their ideas, feelings, and thoughts. According to Oshima and Hogue (2006), a paragraph is a collection of related sentences that focus on a single central theme. Paragraph writing is a form of writing intended to develop basic skills. It necessitates comprehension of sentence structures, vocabulary, and grammar. This means that students must be able to construct a paragraph to describe objects abstractly or concretely. It is the process of transforming concepts into coherent and cohesive written text. However, not all students are aware of the necessity of text coherence and cohesiveness. Through this research, the system of theme and rheme is revealed through the outcomes of

the student's writing projects. Both of these analyses are crucial to maintain the coherence and cohesiveness of their writing project.

Nevertheless, students encounter numerous challenges when it comes to the task of writing. According to Seyabi and Tuzlukova's (2014) research, there are five main categories of writing difficulties. These include challenges related to initiating an essay or paragraph, uncertainty regarding the construction of grammatically accurate English sentences, difficulties in organizing ideas coherently, struggles in selecting appropriate vocabulary to convey thoughts effectively, and a lack of sufficient ideas pertaining to the topics assigned by teachers. One of the primary challenges encountered by students when given a task is the issue of preserving coherence, which stands out among the five concerns identified. To engage in the act of composing written content. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), coherence refers to the internal mechanism utilized in organizing the clause as a message, encompassing the concepts of theme and information.

In contrast, the absence of consistency in writing might impede a reader's comprehension of the concepts and essential arguments presented in the text. The concept of coherence facilitates the reader's smooth transition between ideas, sentences, and paragraphs within a written piece (Sherman, Slawson, Whitton, & Wiemelt, 2011). Students often prioritize word and sentence levels over the overall coherence of their language, specifically textual coherence (Lee, 1998). The theme order of the text is intricately linked to discourse coherence or text cohesion (Ren, Cao, Gao, & Li, 2009). The issue at hand has resulted in a noticeable decline in students' inclination towards writing, a skill that holds significant importance in meeting educational standards (Muslim, 2014). The issue of writing is a significant challenge for students who are seeking to obtain their university degree. The individuals encountered difficulty in the process of composing their thesis. The absence of publication of students' theses or written work commonly occurs inside specific academic institutions.

The composition of academic writing is considered a fundamental component of educational prerequisites. Furthermore, this particular task is frequently assigned to students within the academic setting. Moreover, it is necessary for students to compose an essay in other significant domains, such as during the process of employment or scholarship applications. Academic writing can be challenging for students due to the requirement of showcasing a comprehensive understanding of a subject matter through extensive study and reading (Learning Services, 2009). The process of composing academic writing entails developing critical thinking skills, which involve the ability to identify relevant topics for exploration (analysis), examine the question from various viewpoints (critique), and construct a persuasive argument that meets academic standards (evaluation) (Australian National University, 2013). The essay is composed of distinct paragraphs and adheres to a conventional structure that encompasses an introductory section, a body section, and a concluding section.

Despite its significance, writing is a difficult skill to learn, especially when it must be done in a language other than the author's mother tongue. English is not the first language in this country; it is not even a second language; it is a foreign language. Therefore, writing in English can be challenging for students, especially for EFL learners. According to Qomariah and Wahyuni (2016), topic sentences, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences were all areas where students most frequently erred in terms of paragraph arrangement. The language structure of the students' writings also had inaccuracies. Additionally, it was shown that the most common faults made by students were syntactic and stylistic. This indicates that selecting and structuring words into coherent sentences is the most challenging part of writing for students. They struggle with writing, starting with the concept and ending with the execution. This means that organizing and developing ideas seems to present greater challenges.

Students with an understanding of grammar, structure, and coherence in writing may indicate how well they can write a paragraph. According to Wirantaka (2016), students encountered challenges at several stages of the writing process,

including brainstorming, drafting, rewriting, and editing paragraphs. These difficulties were attributed to issues with English vocabulary, grammar, the development of primary ideas, coherence, the construction of effective sentences, and the incorporation of quotations. Furthermore, themes and rhemes work together to keep the narrative consistent and structured. Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) state that sentence rationalities can be identified through topical movement. Moreover, theme system can be used to evaluate or measure students' writing coherence.

One effective approach for evaluating students' writing proficiency and complexity is to examine their organization of Theme-Rheme and the interplay between Theme and Rheme within their writing. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the theme serves as the initial point from which the clause revolves. The idea of rheme, which is a component of the textual content that presents novel information, follows the concept of theme, according to Cummings (2003). The correlation between theme and rheme facilitates comprehension of the proficiency level at which students are able to articulate their thoughts in written form. Through an examination of this correlation, valuable insights can be obtained into the writing proficiencies and difficulties of individuals, facilitating the development of more effective pedagogical approaches and enhanced language education.

Theme systems can be used to determine the coherence and unity of a sentence. It makes use of patterns to help readers recognize related topics and rhemes in a single sentence (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2013). This study attempts to explore the three types of themes - textual, interpersonal, and topical - in students' writing (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). In addition, this study also discusses the components contained in the students' writing projects.

This study allows researchers to see how theme-rheme systems typically appear in written text. First, Mustofa and Kurniawan's (2023) found that a recount text complied with textual structure and linguistic requirements. The text featured

unmarked topical, topical, marked, and interpersonal themes, with theme reiteration being the most common. The study examined a recount text by an advanced English student, analyzing its organization, language features, theme progression, and theme system through qualitative case study. Second, Nurlela, Marwani, and Yusuf (2023) reveals Reiteration, Zig-Zag, and Multiple-Rheme patterns as the three thematic development patterns used in student report writing. Reiteration is the most common, occurring 50 times, aiming to aid readers' concentration and progression. The study included 15 tertiary students.

However, this research is similar to previous research. The previous researchers examined texts with a thematic progression system. This study also focuses on the constructions and types of theme system in students' writing projects. Thereafter, this research is also conducted at the university level. Although this research is similar to previous studies, this research introduces a fresh perspective by specifically examining the constituent elements of theme in student writing. This study focuses on the components that constitute each group of themes in the students' paragraph writing project. In addition, the site is different from previous studies. Previous studies focused on the effects and most common types of thematic progression in students' writing, including expository paragraphs, discussion texts, short stories, recount texts, and report writing. In addition, previous studies were conducted at several universities in Sumatra, while this research is conducted at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung.

## **B. Research Questions**

This study examines the theme-rheme system in students' paragraph writing. The researcher develops two main research questions according to the theme-rheme structure in the students' paragraph writing. The two research questions are arranged as follows:

- a. What types of theme system are used in students' paragraph writing projects?
- b. What components are constituted in each theme group in students' paragraph writing projects?

These research questions require documents to collect data. To answer the first and second questions, the researcher requires documents for further analysis. Documents will be used to analyze the theme-rheme system in students' paragraph writing projects.

### **C. Research Purposes**

This study aims to analyze theme system in students' paragraph writing projects. First, the researcher identifies the types of themes in the students' paragraph writing projects. Second, the researcher describes the components that constitute each group of themes in students' paragraph writing projects. These two issues are examined by the researcher through qualitative descriptive methods in order to accurately and systematically describe theme system. Based on the results of the analysis, it can be seen that each theme has its own components. Therefore, the components contained in the student's paragraph projects show what type of theme is used in the student's paragraph writing projects and also its components.

### **D. Research Significance**

Students at the university are expected to be proficient writers in academic contexts. It is the process of turning ideas into clear and concise writing. Yet, not all students are aware of how important cohesion and coherence are in texts. Through this research, the system of theme and rheme is revealed through the students' writing project outcomes. Both analyses are crucial to maintaining the coherence and cohesiveness of their writing project. This study has two implications, which include theoretical and practical implications.

At the theoretical level, the research promotes the theme-rheme system to produce high-quality writing. The study believes that the theme-rheme system enhances students' writing abilities. This SFL theory instructs students on how to produce more cohesive written products.

At the practical level, this study provides information on how to arrange coherent writing. Students can better control the text organization and have more control over their writing by utilizing the theme pattern during the writing process.

In addition, the findings of this study are expected to provide teachers with the understanding that coherent writing is of high quality. Teachers use the theme-rheme system to construct coherent writing. Teachers can use SFL's theory of theme-rheme system to observe coherence. As a result of this study, it is useful for teachers to provide their knowledge of coherence in a single text by using the theme-rheme system. Coherence in a single text and the theme-rheme system can be useful for teaching students.

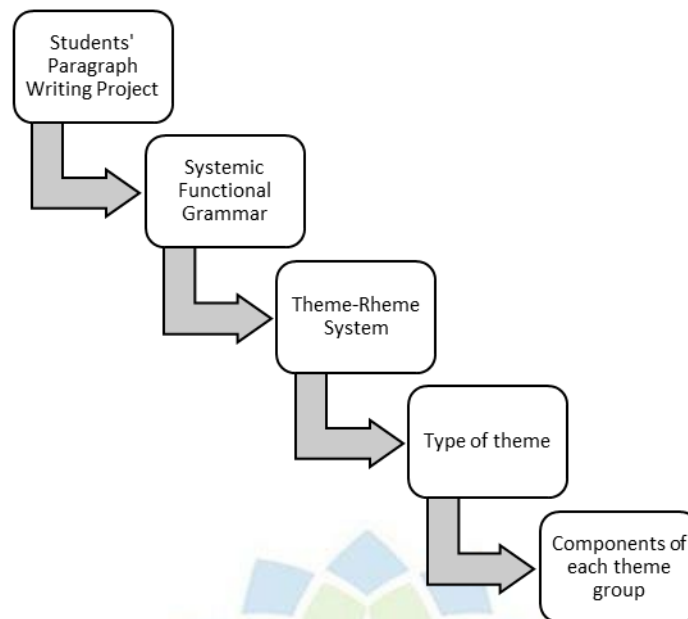
### **E. Theoretical Framework**

This study analyzes the theme-rheme system employed by students' writing projects. It can be useful for students to improve their writing. In addition, every student has a different style of writing based on their knowledge, which can result in various types of themes. The following graphic shows the theoretical framework for this research.

The theoretical framework for this study is illustrated in Figure 1.1. It demonstrates how the concepts in this study are related to one another. The types of themes and the components contained in each type of theme are utilized in students' writing projects. It can be determined by evaluating the theme-rheme system in student writing projects.

The traditional grammar approach is different from the conventional method. It focuses on creating grammar structures. Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) were the first to introduce systemic functional grammar. It is especially beneficial in showing how texts function beyond the sentence level, how various texts are constructed, and how language changes to fit the aims of the users. It employs a descriptive approach and concentrates on word groups that generate meanings.





**Figure 1.1** Theoretical Framework

The theme, as defined by Halliday and Matthiessen (2013), is the component that places the clause in its context. The theme also serves as the message's starting point. Martin, Matthiessen, and Painter (1997) claim that each clause is arranged like a message related to an unfolding text. It means that the language's textual metafunctions include the theme system. It is concerned with how information is organized within specific clauses, which in turn affects how the overall text is organized. Also, each clause is structured as a message connected to the development of the text. The theme system organizes the phrase to highlight how its particular context relates to the overall context of the text that it serves.

Clauses are structured using a theme system in such a way that they not only show the local context but also the broader context of the text. The system searches for previous events based on the current starting point. The clause's function and place in the text are both clear. The theme is the initial clause or local context. The next part of the clause message gives the objects clear descriptions. This is referred to as a rheme. Therefore, a clause consists of a theme followed by rheme. The clause's structure contains a lot of information, and the theme serves as a message with meaning.

To help readers understand the concept of theme and rheme in the clause, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) provide three types of theme in the clause: topical, interpersonal, and textual. Topical theme can be realized through participants, circumstances, or processes, while interpersonal theme can be connected to letters in the text or the viewpoint or location of the phrase. Textual theme can derive from any combination of continuative, conjunction, and conjunctive.

The text used in this research is students' paragraph writing project of the academic text. A paragraph is a group of phrases that logically develop one idea (Rooks, 1988). In academic writing, a good paragraph is important. A good paragraph is essential as it helps readers comprehend the writing's topic. Readers will be able to identify the main idea and supporting elements of the paragraph if the paragraph is coherent and the main idea is sufficiently developed and supported by the right supporting sentences. Also, for paragraphs to bind properly, they must be coherent. It demonstrates to readers the paragraph's coherence.

In writing a paragraph, students frequently aren't aware of the application of the theme system. They only focus on technical topics like grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, etc. Therefore, the identification of the theme system is important to explain how the students organize the text.

## **F. Previous Research**

In the last five years, document analysis has developed into a useful tool for study; one of these uses is the analysis of themes in writing. The topic of theme patterns in writing has been covered in a number of studies. The majority of them examine the various themes found in English texts. This allows the researcher to see how themes typically appear in paragraph writing.

First, the study conducted by Le and Wijitsopon (2015) indicated thematic progression is advisable for English learners to possess a comprehensive understanding of the underlying principles and engage in extensive practice of employing the Theme-Rheme structure for the purpose of analyzing texts, as well as effectively organizing and enhancing their own written compositions. When considering the challenges faced by learners in achieving complete proficiency in

the English language, it is important to analyze the many obstacles they encounter. Thematic progression involves the presentation of assumptions that may lead to potential answers. The objective of this study is to examine the efficacy of the theme-rheme framework in assessing the writing of ESL/EFL learners. The study is structured into three primary sections. The initial section provides a comprehensive examination of the theoretical framework of Theme-Rheme and thematic progression. The subsequent section examines a scholarly composition authored by a Vietnamese English as a Second Language (ESL) student, and afterwards proposes methods for implementing Thematic Progression to improve the coherence of the student's writing.

Second, the study investigated by Putri and Rosa (2020) indicated that the most common theme types in the students' discussion text are simple unmarked theme (44.61%) and multiple unmarked theme (42.35%), whereas simple marked theme (10.14%) and multiple marked theme (2.90%) are the least common. A descriptive research methodology was used for this study. The second-year students in Universitas Negeri Padang's English Department represented the research participants. They were chosen as candidates, because they had completed an essay writing course. Cluster random sampling was used to select the sample of 30 pupils. According to the result, students are motivated to use unmarked themes frequently, because they concentrate on how they come up with ideas for the discussion text.

Third, the study discussed by Sulastri (2022) indicated that various types of thematic progression were used in the short story. The multiple-rheme pattern, which is the short story's most prevalent organizational structure, is utilized 16 times (66.67%); theme reiteration appears five times (20.83%); and the zigzag pattern appears three times (12.50%). This study used descriptive-qualitative methodology. The researcher employed coding, analysis of each paragraph's theme progression type, classification, and calculation of the percentage of each form of thematic progression. The researcher chose specific passages from the brief narrative to highlight various developmental techniques. Theme progression

analysis was then used to examine the short story and determine how the theme developed across the text.

Fourth, the study conducted by Mustofa and Kurniawan (2023) found that the text complied with the textual structure and linguistic requirements of a recount text. Unmarked topical themes (51.2%), topical textual themes (40%) and marked topical themes (8%), and interpersonal themes (0.8%), were the themes that appeared the most frequently. Theme reiteration was the most common (88.20%) according to the theme system, while Zigzag Themes only made up (11.80%) of the total. The author's ability to keep readers' attention on the main topic of the text is shown by the predominant use of unmarked themes, while the student's implication in maintaining the text's cohesion and coherence is shown by the high number of textual themes. Based on the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics, the researcher examined a recount text written by an advanced (C1 level of English) student. The information on the text's organization, language features, theme progression, and theme system was collected through a qualitative case study through methodical identification, calculation, and analysis.

Fifth, the study investigated by Nurlela, Marwani, and Yusuf (2023) indicated that Reiteration, Zig-Zag, and Multiple-Rheme patterns were found to be the three forms of thematic development patterns used in student report writing. Reiteration is the most common pattern, occurring 50 times (67.5%), followed by Zig-Zag (18 times, 24.3%), and Multiple-Rheme (6 times, 8.1%). The main purpose of Reiteration in their texts is to make it easier for readers to concentrate on a particular aspect and follow the text's progression. The information was comprised of all the clauses from the report texts of fifteen tertiary students, who were classified into three achievement levels: high, middle, and low.

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