



Theme-types and Thematic (Progression)... (Allagbe, et. al., 2023) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10431599>

Theme-types and Thematic (Progression) Patterns in the Argumentative Essays by Second-Year English Major Students from the Université André Salifou

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Abstract

This paper aims at analyzing the Theme-types and Thematic (progression) patterns in the argumentative essays written by second-year English major students from the Université André Salifou (henceforth, UAS), Niger Republic. Drawing its theoretical underpinnings from Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth, SFL) and the descriptive mixed research method, the study randomly selected and examined 10 out of the 80 argumentative essays (i.e., 12.50%) written by the English as Foreign Language (henceforth, EFL) students enrolled in the second year (2020-2021). The findings revealed that 8 out of the 10 texts contain two Theme-types: Topical Themes and Textual Themes. They also showed that most of the Topical Themes are unmarked, suggesting that the subjects in the clauses occur in their usual slots. The marked Themes, though they exist in low proportions in the texts, proved that the texts are rhetorically well-organized. The use of Textual Themes in the texts exuded too that the texts are rhetorically well-organized. Again, the findings indicated that all the texts comprise two major Theme classes (a and b), the dominant type being Theme class (a), confirming once more that Topical Themes are placed in their usual slots. Finally, the findings unveiled that only two types of Thematic progression pattern were selected in the texts: Theme reiteration and the zig-zag pattern. In other words, the multiple-Rheme pattern is absent from the texts, indicating that the students still find it difficult to organize their texts. Hence, more efforts should be devoted to text creation and organization in the EFL writing class.

Keywords: Argumentative essays, Theme-types, textual meaning, thematic pattern, thematic progression pattern

Introduction

There is an increasing number of lexico-grammatical studies on student writing drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics, (henceforth, SFL) which use the T-unit or the clause complex rather than the clause as the unit of analysis (see Ebrahimi and Ebrahimi, 2012 and Nguyen and Nguyen 2018, for instance). It must be made clear from the onset that such studies create confusion in the mind of student researchers in this field. To dispel this confusion, proponents of SFL have recently established that the central unit of any lexico-grammatical analysis is the clause (Eggins, 2004; Fontaine, 2013; Halliday and Mathiessen, 2014, etc.). In fact, these scholars posit that the clause encodes three strands of simultaneous meaning, namely: ideational meaning, the interpersonal meaning and the textual meaning. Ideationally, the clause is seen as representation; i.e., it encodes the speaker's or writer's representation of reality, involving particular processes, participants and circumstances. Interpersonally, the clause is seen as exchange; i.e., it encodes the speaker's or writer's action and interaction with the addressee, including Mood, Modality and Adjunct choices. Textually, the clause is seen as message; i.e., it encodes how the speaker or writer organizes language, the means s/he draws on to produce a meaningful message or text. To



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organize language and realize textual meaning, the speaker or writer, as systemic linguists cogently hold, needs to develop or deploy such text-forming resources as cohesion or cohesive devices, logical relations (taxis and logico-semantics), Theme and Theme progression (see Allagbé, Tankari and Maignero, 2021 and Allagbé, Tankari and Tchada, 2022, on the study of the first two in student writing). The current study is concerned with (the analysis of) textual meaning in student writing.

Fontaine (2013, p. 139) claims that “There is no more basic role for the clause than that of creating text. Every clause is either constitutive of a text or part of a larger text.” Further, she adds that “Within the clause, the main resource for creating text is referred to as Theme [...]” (Ibid.). Theme actually comprises two functional components: Theme and Rheme. Eggins (2004, p. 299) points out that “Theme is the element which comes first in the clause.” According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 89), “The Theme is the element that serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that which locates and orients the clause within its context.” Concurring with the foregoing, Fontaine (2013, p. 140) observes that “Within the clause, Theme indicates the clausal element that the speaker [or writer] has selected as the starting point; a metaphoric peg on which to hang the message.” For Halliday and Matthiessen (Ibid.), “The speaker [or writer] chooses the Theme as his or her point of departure to guide the addressee in developing an interpretation of the message; by making part of the message prominent as Theme, the speaker [or writer] enables the addressee to process the message.” Acknowledging the foregoing, Fontaine (2013, p. 140) highlights the importance of the initial position of the clause in English. In that regard, she writes:

In English, the initial position of the clause is significant for a variety of reasons. For example, it often introduces the topic about which something is being said, it may indicate the relevance of the clause to the surrounding text, it may orient the message in a particular way, or it may mark a transition in the text. This is not to say that the thematic elements of the clause are more important than the rest of the clause but rather that they contribute directly and in a pivotal sense to the creation of text.

On the contrary, the Rheme is the part of the clause in which the Theme is developed (Eggins, 2004, p. 300, Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 89). Eggins (2004, p. 299) posits that Theme involves three major systems: choice of type of Theme, choice of *marked* or *unmarked* Theme, and choice of predicated or unpredicated Theme. There are three types of Theme: viz. Topical (or Experiential), Interpersonal and Textual. A Topical or Experiential Theme is the starting point of the clause to which a Transitivity function (participant, process or circumstance) is assigned. An Interpersonal Theme is the point of departure of the clause to which a Mood label (subject, finite, vocative, etc.) is given. A Textual Theme is a clause element occurring in Thematic position which can neither be assigned a Mood label nor a Transitivity label. A Textual Theme plays an important role of cohesive work by relating the clause to its context. There are two types of Textual elements, namely: continuity adjuncts (e.g. oh, yes/yea/yep, no/nope, well, etc.) and conjunctive adjuncts (e.g. and, then, but, yet, however, etc.). It must be noted that the aforementioned three Theme-types correspond to the three-metafunctional structure of the clause. It must be noted too that Topical Theme is obligatory in a clause, while Interpersonal and Textual Themes are optional (Nguyen and Nguyen, 2018, p. 87). A Theme which conflates with any other constituent from the Mood system is called a *marked* Theme. However, when a Theme conflates with the Mood structure constituent that typically occurs in first position in clauses of that Mood class, it is referred to as *unmarked*. In other words, a Theme is said to be *unmarked* when it is used in its usual/normal/expected Subject position/slot (Amoussou, 2016; Allagbé, Amoussou and Tchada, 2020). As for Theme Predication, it is defined as “a process used when the speaker/writer wishes to give emphasis to a constituent that would otherwise be emphasized, while maintaining the ‘real’ news, which is in the Rheme of the original clause” (Eggins, 2004, p. 316). There is also what is called a ‘multiple Theme’. This notion presupposes that we have a ‘simple Theme’. A simple Theme is formed when the Theme of a clause consists of only one single structural element (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 92). The structural element is the obligatory topical Theme. But a multiple Theme indicates that there are several textual and/or interpersonal Themes occurring before the obligatory topical Theme (Eggins, 2004, p. 307).

The analysis of Theme in student writing is very important for two main reasons. First, this can help us gain an insight into how students select Theme to create cohesion and coherence within the clause and across the clause level. In this perspective, Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 133) cogently argue that “In the Theme-Rheme structure, it is the Theme that is the prominent element. [...] by analysing the thematic structure of a text clause by clause, we can gain an insight into its texture and understand how the writer made clear to us the nature of his [or her] underlying concerns.” Second, the analysis of Theme in student writing can help us unveil how student writers introduce the topic at hand, develop and orient it by means of successive Thematic patterns indicating what systemic linguists’ term ‘Thematic progression’ or ‘method of development’ (Eggins, 2004). Eggins identifies three types of Theme (progression) pattern, namely: Theme reiteration, the zig-zag pattern and the multiple-Rheme pattern. According to this scholar, Theme reiteration is one basic way to keep a text focused (i.e.,



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cohesive) by simply reiterating an element. The zig-zag pattern, on the other hand, denotes a pattern in which an element which is introduced in the Rheme in use in clause 1 gets promoted to become the Theme of clause 2. In the multiple-Rheme pattern, she further explains, the Theme of one clause introduces a number of different pieces of information, each of which is then picked up and made Theme in subsequent clauses (Eggins, 2004, pp. 324-325).

Empirical research on the development, deployment and use of Theme-types and Thematic (progression) patterns in student writing has been carried out by linguists and language educators in a recent past. Ebrahimi and Ebrahimi (2012), for instance, explored Theme markedness in a corpus of 180 compositions written by 60 EFL students: 20 sophomores, 20 juniors, and 20 seniors majoring in Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL). To gather data from the three categories of participants, the researchers asked them to write three pictorial stories. Using Halliday's (1994) model of thematic organization and clause complexity as a unit of analysis, the written texts were examined to control the students' use of marked Themes, and find out whether there were any statistically significant differences among the three groups with regard to their use of marked Themes. The findings revealed that the three categories used a small number of marked Themes in their texts, suggesting that most of the Topical Themes occupy both Thematic and Subject positions. According to these scholars, Theme/Subject compliance is indicative of structural simplicity of students' writings with different academic experience. On the other hand, the low portion of the marked Themes identified in the students' written texts, they added, indicated that their writing is less argumentative in nature. Again, it was reported that the similarity of the number of marked Themes used in the three groups can be explained in terms of genre. However, the slight increase in the use of marked Themes moving from sophomore to senior group can be accounted for in terms of academic experience.

Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) also investigated the Thematic progression patterns employed in 20 academic IELTS sample essays from books published by Cambridge University Press and IELTS official websites with the band score of 9 written by highly successful test-takers. Using the descriptive method combined with qualitative and quantitative approaches, the researchers segmented the essays into T-units. A T-unit, according to Fries (1994) (cited in Nguyen and Nguyen, 2018, p. 89) is a clause complex which consists of an independent clause together with all hypotactically related clauses and words which are dependent on it. The aim of this investigation was to find out which elements were selected as Themes in the sample essays. From the findings, the scholars reported that a total number of 491 Themes was used in the essays. Topical Themes ranked first with a figure of 311 (i.e., 63.4%) followed by Textual Themes representing 144 (i.e., 29.3%) and Interpersonal Themes with a rate of 36 (i.e., 7.3%). They further noted that a large proportion of Topical Themes found in the essays are often heavily modified nominal groups and dependent clauses. They also indicated that the great number of Textual Themes employed in the essays revealed that the clauses therein are joined together logico-semantically. Likewise, they reported that the deployment of Interpersonal Themes allowed the writers to convey their personal judgment in the texts with a view to establishing an interaction between them and their readers. Again, they added that the writers' use of the few interpersonal themes gave their texts an impersonalized tone because academic writing is always formal in tone (Oshima and Hogue, 1991, p. 3); i.e., the academic writing style is objective rather than subjective, formal rather than colloquial in nature. Moreover, they quantified the rate of simple and multiple Themes in the essays. They deduced from the analysis that, out of the 311 Themes the writers employed, 149 (i.e., 47.9%) are simple and 162 (i.e., 52.1%) were multiple. The multiple-Theme structure identified in the essays is Textual[^] Interpersonal[^] Topical. They explained that multiple themes prove to play an important role in construing the writer's point of view and in helping the writer to organize the message and connect the ideas in the text. Therefore, multiple themes are more appropriate for IELTS essay writing in order to indicate a high level of English proficiency (Nguyen and Nguyen, 2018, p. 90).

In the same token, Anwar and Amri, (2020) analysed the types of Theme and the Thematic patterns used in the discussion texts written by the third year students of English Department of Universitas Negeri Padang. These researchers selected 20 students enrolled in the aforementioned institution in the 2018/2019 academic year, and asked them to write a discussion text based on one of the three topics suggested. Drawing on a descriptive qualitative method (a content analysis method), the texts discussion written by the selected students were examined. From the findings, the scholars reported that the texts are composed of clauses constituted by four Theme types: simple unmarked Topical Theme (SUT), simple marked Theme (SMT), multiple unmarked Theme (MUT), and multiple marked Theme (MMT). They further noted that the most frequently used type in the students' texts is SUT with a figure of 338/638 (i.e., 52.98%). It is followed by MUT with a number of 206/638 (i.e., 32.29%), SMT representing 71/638 (i.e., 11.13%) and MMT with a total of 23/638 (i.e., 3.60%). They also found out that the identified SUTs in the texts were deployed in the clauses located not only in the introduction and conclusion but also in the arguments, suggesting that both the pros and cons in the students' discussion texts are mostly presented in SUT clauses. The foregoing finding, they explained, is in contrast with the finding of a previous study (Rosa, 2007a) which argued that con



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arguments are more frequently presented in marked Themes. They also explained this contrast in terms of difference in writing: students or novice writers are less creative and pay less attention to the organization of ideas. In addition, these scholars reported that the students' texts are made up clauses including the following Thematic patterns: Topical, Textual^Topical, and Interpersonal-Textual-Topical. The most frequently used pattern in the texts is Topical with a figure of 409/638 (i.e., 64.11%). The foregoing pattern, they explained, is due to the dominance of simple Themes in the students' texts. It is followed by Textual-Topical representing 225/638 (i.e., 35.26%). This pattern, they indicated, is motivated by the absence of interpersonal Theme from the multiple Themes composed of two types of Themes. Next comes the Interpersonal-Textual-Topical pattern with a number of 4/638 (i.e., 0.63%). The preceding pattern, they noted, is motivated by the very small occurrence of interpersonal theme in the students' discussion texts.

Mustika, Nurdin and Sakina (2020) investigated Theme and Thematic Progression in students' Recount texts too. The study was conducted in a private senior high school in Bandung and comprised nine tenth grade students' recount texts classified into three different levels of achievement: low, middle, and high achievers. Employing a qualitative design, the researchers examined the texts with a view to unveiling how the students organize their ideas in their recount texts, from the perspective of Theme and Thematic Progression, and finding out the implication of the Theme and Thematic Progression used by the students for the flow of their texts. From the analysis, the researchers inferred that that Topical Themes are the most dominant type of Theme used by the students from all achievement levels with the total percentage 73.5%. They further indicated that that most of the Topical Themes were unmarked (57.69%). They also noted that the unmarked Topical Themes frequently used by the students in their descriptive texts are pronouns and nominal group complexes. Again, they observed that the unmarked Themes occur in form of referential items (i.e., it, this, that, etc.) and ellipsis. In addition, the scholars reported that marked Themes are quite frequently found in the students' texts. In fact, the marked Themes identified in all the texts represented 15.81%. As the analysis further exuded, marked Themes are the third frequent Theme used across the three levels of achievement with 10.81% in the high achievement, 23.38% in the middle achievement, and 15.22% in the low achievement. The analysis also indicated that the marked Themes occurring in the students' descriptive texts are mostly in form of adverbial groups and prepositional phrases which function as Adjuncts of the clauses. The researchers further reported that the second frequent Theme employed in the students' recount texts is Textual Theme with 26.07%, suggesting the students' ability to establish the cohesion of text. They also reported that interpersonal Themes are the least type of Theme found in the text with 00.43%, indicating that the students rarely employed modulation and modularization in their texts. The rare use of interpersonal Themes in students' recount text, they explained, is acceptable since it commonly occurs in the conversation form (such as in interrogative clauses, polarity answers, and vocative adjuncts) while conversation is rarely used in a recount text. In addition to the identification of Theme, they analysed the Thematic Progression patterns in the students' recount texts. The analysis revealed that the students used three of the four Theme Progression patterns, namely: Theme reiteration Pattern, Zig-zag Pattern and Multiple-Theme Pattern. The analysis also indicated that Theme reiteration patterns are the most frequent patterns realized by the students from all achievement levels with 57.06%, suggesting that the students succeeded in keeping the focus of their texts by repeating their thematic element(s). Theme reiteration patterns are followed by zig-zag patterns with 36.16%, implying that the students have been able to make a logical relation and elaboration in their texts. The least Thematic Progression patterns identified in the students' texts are the multiple-theme progression patterns with 6.78% from the total patterns, suggesting that the students have not been able to manage the organization of their texts.

Similarly, Na-on and Jaturapitakkul (2017) studied the research project abstracts written by Thai EFL engineering undergraduates with a view to unveiling how they construct their ideas therein. In fact, 39 abstracts (13 from each of the 3 departments: Computer Engineering, Civil Engineering, and Chemical Engineering) written by Thai students were collected for the analysis, and the thematic (progression) and rhetorical patterns therein were identified. The abstracts were extracted both from the university's online library system and directly from the respective departments. The abstracts were actually based on three criteria: 1) the year of publication was from the academic years 2010-2015, 2) the length of the abstracts was between 200-300 words, for the ability to see the TP patterns clearly when analyzed and 3) all the abstracts were written by students who enrolled in the International Program. From the analysis, the researchers deduced that the abstracts contained the three patterns: Constant TP, Linear TP and Split Rheme. Further, they noted that Constant TP (50.92%) ranked first, Linear TP (48.35%) second and Split Rheme (00.73%) third in the abstracts. They also compared the use of the TP patterns across the three departments. They observed that the Computer and Civil Engineering departments employed Constant TP the most frequently whereas the Chemical Engineering department used the pattern the least often. Among the three, only the Civil Engineering department did not employ any Split Rheme pattern in their writing. Following these findings, the researchers recommended that teachers should familiarize their learners gradually with the concept of cohesion, Theme, and Rheme and



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eventually the Thematic Progression theory as this will help them better understand their own writing along with its generic processes.

As the studies reviewed above clearly exude, the use of Theme and Thematic progression in student writing plays a very important role as it encodes cohesion and coherence therein. The aforementioned studies reviewed also indicate that no prior analysis of student writing in an EFL context has thus far been conducted. This is the research gap that this paper sets out to fill. The next section is concerned with the analysis of the Theme-types and Thematic (progression) patterns deployed in the selected written essays under study, and the discussion of the findings arrived at.

Objectives of the Study

The current paper is set against the background of the above-mentioned theoretical claims. It aims at analysing the Theme-types and Thematic (progressive) patterns in the argumentative essays written by second-year English major students from the Université André Salifou (henceforth, UAS), Niger Republic. In the academic year 2020-2021, eighty students enrolled for the second year and followed a 10-week writing course. At the end of the course, they wrote an argumentative essay on one of the two topics below:

1. Should students be allowed to use their smart phone in class?
2. Modern technology has made the world a better place to live in today.

Research Questions

In consonance with the above-stated research objectives, this study formulates the questions below which it intends to answer:

1. What kind(s) of Theme do second-year English major students choose or use in their argumentative essays?
2. What kind(s) of Thematic (progression) pattern do second-year English major students deploy in their argumentative essays?

Methodology

To reach the set goal of this investigation, ten (i.e., 12.5%) out of the eighty student essays were randomly selected: 5 on the first topic and 5 on the second one. These essays are numbered (Texts 1-5 are on the first topic whereas Texts 6-10 on the second one). This paper employs the descriptive mixed method research design which consists in describing, identifying and classifying the Theme-types and Thematic (progression) patterns in the students' essays. The identified Theme-types and Thematic patterns are first quantified and tabulated before the findings thereof are discussed.

Results

Research Question 1

What kind(s) of Theme do second-year English major students choose or use in their argumentative essays?

We begin this section with the analysis of Theme in the students' argumentative essays. Recall that these essays are ten in total and they are numbered Text 1 to Text 10. This analysis follows Eggins (2004) and Fontaine (2013). In Eggins (2004) and Fontaine (2013), the clause rather than the T-unit or clause complex is considered as the unit of any lexicogrammatical analysis. In line with this criterion, the 10 texts are first of all segmented into clauses, and then the clause constituents therein are rigorously described or identified in consonance with the theoretical framework outlined in the first section. Due to space limitations, the analysis proper is not displayed here. Only the statistics drawn from the study are reported instead. The Theme-types identified in the texts under study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Theme-types in the Texts

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF THEME-TYPES IN THE TEXTS											
Theme-types		Text1	Text2	Text3	Text4	Text5	Text6	Text7	Text8	Text9	Text10
Topical	Marked	08	02	03	04	06	11	02	04	05	08
	Unmarked	33	24	30	40	48	44	26	35	36	16
Interpersonal		01	00	00	00	00	01	00	00	00	00
Textual		19	09	19	15	20	24	05	13	16	09
Total		61	35	52	59	74	80	33	52	57	33



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As the table above clearly shows, Text 1 contains a total number of 61 Themes. In this text, Topical Themes rank first with a figure of 41/61 (i.e., 67.21%), Textual Themes second with a count of 19/61 (i.e., 31.14%) and Interpersonal Theme third with a number of 01/61 (i.e., 01.63%). Thirty-three (1; 2; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14; 16; 17; 18; 19; 20; 21; 22; 23; 24; 25; 26; 27; 28; (29); (33); 34; 36; 38; 40 and 41) out of the 41 Topical Themes are actually *unmarked*, suggesting that the subjects in the clauses constitutive of the text are predominantly used in their usual/normal/expected positions/slots. The *unmarked* Themes found in Text 1 can be grouped into three categories: common nouns ('Cell phones' in clauses [1; 11; 13 and 41] and 'students' in clauses [5 and 32]), a relative pronoun ('where' in clause [19]) and verbal nouns or/and predicators ('to use' in clause [4]; 'to research' in clause [7]; 'to forget' in clause [8]; 'to look at' in clause [18], etc.). The aforementioned common nouns are anaphorically referred to in the text with the pronouns 'it' in clauses (2; 6; 9; 12; 14 and 38) and 'they' and its variant 'their' in clauses (15; 16; 17; 26; 28; (29); (33); 34; 36 and 40). The bracketed clauses in the foregoing denote ellipsis. This is to say, the *unmarked* Topical Theme in each of these clauses is not overtly given but implied. The *marked* Topical Themes identified in the text are of two types: single words ('anything' [31]; 'Physically' [32] and 'Moroly' (Morally) [35]) and groups of words ('In education' [3]; 'In sum' [30]; 'In sum up' [37]; 'for any work' (39) and 'For example, if their teachers give them a work' [15]). In clause (31), the writer has placed a Goal in Thematic position, suggesting that the Goal has been emphasized or given prominence in the clause. In contrast, in clauses (3; 30; 32; 35; 37 and 39), circumstances are placed in Thematic position, and by so doing they become foregrounded. According to Thompson (2004, p. 109 cited in Fontaine, 2013, p. 79), circumstances "encode the background against which the process takes place". In this perspective, Eggins (2004, p. 339) argues that the use of foregrounded Themes in a text is "[...] one realization of a careful written mode, in which the writer has planned the rhetorical development of the text to allow the foregrounding of Circumstantial information". It must be noted that what is foregrounded in clause (15) is a hypotactic structure or a dependent clause. By placing a dependent clause in Thematic position, the writer wants to make the text "[...] appear more spoken, as the frequent use of dependent clauses in Thematic position contributes to neutralizing the distinction between spoken and written language." (Ibid.). In other words, as Eggins (2004, p. 323) further explains,

Hypotactic structures such as these allow the writer to maintain a very congruent style: rather than building up the lexical density of the text, the writer exploits the strategy of grammatical complexity. However, the Thematic position of the dependent clause indicates an amount of pre-planning that is less common in spoken than written language. Thus the text is able to 'sound' like written language, while remaining accessible by maintaining its closeness to the spoken language.

Like *marked* Themes, the 11 Textual Themes (5; 6; 9; 11; 12; 14; 15; 20; 25; 26; 28; 29; 33; 34; 36; 38; 39 and 40) found in Text 1 somehow suggest that the text is rhetorically well-written. In fact, all the Textual Themes identified in the text are Conjunctive items, indicating thus that the text is more characterized by feats of written language. Some of the Conjunctive elements in the text are *because* in (5); *Thus* in (6); *and* in (9), etc. The only Interpersonal Theme 'MAYBE' (24) used in the text is a mood adjunct and expresses probability, adding an interpersonal meaning to the clause in which it belongs.

Unlike Text 1, Text 2 comprises 35 Themes, and these Themes are of two types: 26 (i.e., 74.29%) Topical Themes and 09 (i.e., 25.71%) Textual Themes. Twenty-four out of the 26 Topical Themes are *unmarked* (1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 20; (21); 23; 24; 25 and 26), indicating that the subjects in the clauses are chiefly employed in their usual/normal/expected positions/slots. The *unmarked* Topical Themes in Text 2 fall into four groups: common nouns ('Cell phone' in clauses [1; 10 and 12] 'people' in clause [2] and 'students' in clauses [5; 8; 11; 15 and 17]), a relative pronoun ('which' in clause [16]); a nominal group ('the use of cell phone for the students in class' in clause [24]) and verbal nouns or/and predicators ('to facilitate' in clause [3]; 'to use' in clauses [6 and 9]; 'to by (buy)' in clause [18] and 'to forget about' in clause [26]). Three of the foregoing tokens ('Cell phone'; 'students' and 'the use of cell phone for the students in class' are referentially referred to in the text with 'it' (7 and 25) and 'they' (19 and [21]). While the pronoun 'it' is used in clause (7) to point back to 'Cell phone', it is employed in clause (25) to refer to the nominal group 'the use of cell phone for the students in class'. The pronoun 'they', on the other hand, is anaphorically used to point back to 'students'. The two *marked* Topical Themes in Text 2 are of only one type: prepositional phrases ('In this case' [13] and 'From what' [22]). As stated earlier on, the use of marked Themes in a text serves to foreground Circumstantial information in it, exuding thus that it is rhetorically well-planned. The use of Textual Themes in a text also shows that the text is well-planned. In fact, in Text 2, there are 09 Textual Themes, all of which are Conjunctive elements (*that* [2 and 24]; *In spite of* [4]; *because* [7]; *in order to* [14]; *So* [15 and 19]; *and* [21] and *but* [25]).

Text 3 encompasses 52 Themes. Like Text 2, this text contains only two Theme-types: 33 (i.e., 63.46%) Topical Themes and 19 (i.e., 36.54%) Textual Themes. Thirty out of the 33 Topical Themes are *unmarked* (1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 10;



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11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 20; 21; 22; 23; 24; 25; 26; 27; 28; 29; 30; 32 and 33). This reveals that the subjects in the clauses are mainly placed in their usual/normal/expected positions/slots. The *unmarked* Topical Themes found in the text can be classified into six groups: a common noun ('Cell phones' in clauses [1 and 32]); nominal groups ('the cell phone(s)' in clauses [7 and 25]; 'some/most of the people' in clauses [3 and 14] and 'The more concern' in clause [22]); nominalizations ('using a cell phone in class' in clauses [3 and 11]); an indefinite pronoun ('anything' in clause [23]), relative pronouns ('where' in clause [16]; 'who' in clause [21] and 'which' in clause [33]) and verbal nouns or/and predicators ('to allowed (allow)' in clause [5]; 'to use' in clause [6]; 'to do' in clauses [12; 18 and 29]; 'to make' in clauses [13 and 30]; 'to work' in clause [26] and 'to sue (use)' in clause [27]. The token 'Cell phone' is referred to in the text with the pronoun 'it' in clauses (8; [10]; 17 and 18). The three *marked* Themes identified in this text can be classified into two: single words (Generally [9] and 'whatever' [19]) and a group of words (or a transitional expression) ('To conclude' [31]). The use of these marked Themes in the text serves to encode Circumstantial information in it, showing that it is rhetorically well-organized. Likewise, the use of the 19 Textual Themes (all of them are Conjunctive items) in the text indicates that the text is well-organized. Some of the Textual Themes in Text 3 are *Even though* (2); *that* (3); *but* (4); *Thus* (7); *because* (8), etc.

In the same token, Text 4 counts 59 Themes distributed across two types of Themes: 44 (i.e., 74.58%) Topical Themes and 15 (i.e., 25.42%) Textual Themes. Forty out of the 44 Topical Themes are *unmarked* (1; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 21; 22; 23; 25; 26; 27; 28; 29; 30; 31; 32; 33; 34; 35; 37; 38; 39; 40; 41; 42; 43 and 44), specifying that the subjects in the clauses are predominantly employed in their usual/normal/expected positions/slots. The *unmarked* Topical Themes in Text 4 can be grouped into four categories: common nouns ('Cell phone' in clauses [1; 7; 19; 22; 31; 38 and 43] and 'student' in clauses [9; 16 and 39]); a nominal group ('A simple question during the course' in clause [26]); relative pronouns ('which' in clauses [8; (12); 20; 29 and 34]; 'that' in clause [28] and 'who' in clauses [32 and 35]) and verbal nouns or/and predicators ('to use' in clauses [6 and 44]; 'to cheat' in clause [10]; 'to answer' in clause [14]; 'to be' in clause [30] and 'to commit' in clause [40]). The common noun 'cell phone' is referred to with the lexical item 'This element' in clause (3). It is also pointed back to referentially with the reference item 'it' in clause (33). Likewise, the common noun 'student' is anaphorically referred to with the pronoun 'He' in clauses (11; 13; 15; 17; 18; 21; 23; 25 and 27). The four *marked* Themes in the text are 'by which' in clause (2); 'which' in clause (20); 'everytime (every time)' in clause (24) and 'From all what' in clause (36). While the first two are structural elements, suggesting the packaging of clause simplexes into clause complexes in the text, the other two are groups of words, unveiling time or frequency and transition respectively therein. The use of the 15 Textual Themes (all of which are Conjunctive items) proves that the text is well-planned too. Here are some examples of the Textual Themes identified in Text 4: *because* (4); *However* (15); *Since* (7); *if* (13); *Again* (16), etc.

Text 5 encloses 74 Themes. These Themes are shared by two Theme-types: 54 (i.e., 72.97%) Topical Themes and 20 (i.e., 27.03%) Textual Themes. Forty-eight out of the 54 Topical Themes are *unmarked* (1; 2; 3; 4; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; (19); 20; 22; 23; 24; 25; 26; 27; 28; 30; 31; 32; 33; 34; 35; 36; 37; 38; 39; 40; 41; 43; 44; 45; 46; 48; 49; 50; 51; 52 and 54), displaying that the subjects in the clauses are mainly deployed in their usual/normal/expected positions/slots. The *unmarked* Topical Themes in Text 5 can be classified into six groups: common nouns ('Cell phone' in clauses [1; 14 and 40] and 'students in clauses [6; 10; 12; 23 and 37]); nominal groups ('some students' in clause [3] and 'Certain people' in clause [7]); nominalizations ('using cell phone by students in class in clause [8] and 'Researching' in clause [11]); relative pronouns ('who' in clause [4]; 'which' in clauses [(19) and 32] and 'that' in clause [43]); indefinite pronouns ('Some' in clause [48] and 'others' in clause [50]) and verbal nouns or/and predicators ('to communicate/find in clause [2]; 'to use' in clauses [13; 24 and 49]; 'to complete' in clause [18]; 'to do' in clause [27], etc.). It must be noted that the common noun 'Cell phone' is referred to in the text with the pronoun 'it' in clauses (17; 25; 26 and 54). Likewise, the indefinite pronoun 'others' is pointed back to with the pronoun 'they'. The foregoing denotes that the text embodies inter-clausal relations. The six *marked* Themes identified in Text 5 are 'Nowadays (Nowadays)' in clause (5); 'Nowadays' in clause (21); 'If the lecturer have (has) something...' in clause (29); 'In your cell phone' in clause (42); 'In condition' in clause (47) and 'To sum up' in clause (53). The use of these Themes indicates that the clauses in the text are rhetorically well-planned. The use of the 18 Textual Themes (all of which are Conjunctive items) also shows that the text is well-planned. The following are some of the Textual Themes identified in the text: *that* (6; 8; 12); *but* (9); *in that* (10); *by* (16); *Also* (17), etc.

Text 6 counts 80 Themes distributed as follows: 55 (i.e., 68.75%) Topical Themes, 24 (i.e., 30%) Textual Themes and 01 (i.e., 01.25%) Interpersonal Theme. Forty-four out of the 55 Topical Themes are *unmarked* (1; 2; 4; 5; 6; 7; 9; 10; 12; 13; 14; 16; 17; 18; 19; 21; 22; 23; 24; 26; 27; 28; 29; 30; 31; 32; 33; 34; 35; 37; 38; 39; 41; 42; 43; 44; (45); 46; 48; 49; 51; (52); 54 and 55), suggesting that the subjects in the clauses occupy their usual/normal/expected positions/slots. The *unmarked* Topical Themes in Text 6 fall into five groups: nominal groups ('(the) modern technology' in clauses [1; 5; 32; 51 and (52)];



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‘This question’ in clause [8] and ‘the time’ in clause [11]); an indefinite pronoun (‘everybody (everybody)’ in clause [4]); personal pronouns (‘we’ in clauses [10; (12); 14 and 16]; ‘I’ in clauses [17 and 18] and ‘you’ in clauses [22; 23; 29; 38 and 41]); relative pronouns (‘how’ in clause [7]; ‘who’ in clauses [19; 44 and 45]; ‘why’ in clause [30] and ‘which’ in clauses [35 and 48]) and verbal nouns or/and predicators (‘to live’ in clauses [2; 6; 33; 49 and 55]; ‘to go’ in clause [26] and ‘to inform’ in clause [37]). The eleven *marked* Themes found in this text are ‘Today’ in clause (3); ‘This question’ in clause (8); ‘the time’ in clause (11); ‘at that time’ in clause (15); ‘in our time’ in clause (20); ‘now’ in clauses (25 and 40); ‘in ancient time’ in clause (36); ‘all’ in clause (47); ‘In summary’ in clause (50) and ‘in this (these) cases’ in clause (53). The use of the foregoing Themes proves that the text is internally well-organized. Again, the use of the 24 Textual Themes (all of which are Conjunctive items) identified in the text exudes that it is internally well-organized. Some examples of the Textual Themes in Text 6 include *that* (4); *but* (7); *In order to* (9); *and* (11); *For example, when* (12); *before* (13), etc.

Unlike Text 6, Text 7 includes 33 Themes distributed as follows: 28 (i.e., 84.85%) Topical Themes and 05 (i.e., 15.15%) Textual Themes. Twenty-six out of the 28 Topic Themes are *unmarked* (1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 20; (21); 22; 23; 24; 25; 27 and 28), indicating that the subjects in the clauses occur in their usual/normal/expected positions/slots. The *unmarked* Themes identified in the text can be grouped into four categories: nominal groups (‘Modern technology’ in clause [1 and 7] and ‘many people’ in clauses [20 and (21)]); common nouns (‘Technology’ in clause [15] and ‘People’ in clause [17]); relative pronouns (‘which’ in clause [3] and ‘what’ in clauses [12 and 22]) and verbal nouns or/and predicators (‘to live’ in clauses [5 and 28]); ‘to express’ in clause [9]; ‘(to) send’ in clause [11]; ‘to stand’ in clause [18]; ‘to be’ in clause [19] and ‘to paid (pay)’ in clause [25]). The nominal group ‘Modern technology’ is referred to anaphorically with the pronoun ‘it’ in clauses (2; 4; 6; 8; 10; 13; 16; 24 and 27). The two *marked* Themes identified in Text 7 are ‘With the advance (advancement) of new technology’ in clause (14) and ‘To conclude’ in clause in (26), exuding that the text is internally well-organized. In addition, the presence of the 5 Textual Themes (all of which are Conjunctive items) found in the text shows that it is internally well-organized. The Textual Themes found in Text 7 are *Even though* (6); *Then* (20); *or* (21) and *without* (23 and 29). The only Interpersonal Theme ‘OF COURSE’ (1) used in the text is a mood adjunct and expresses certainty.

Like Text 7, Text 8 contains a total number of 52 Themes. These are shared by two Theme-types: 39 (i.e., 75%) Topical Themes and 13 (i.e., 25%) Textual Themes. Thirty-five out of the 39 Topical Themes are *unmarked* (1; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; (20); 21; 22; 23; 24; 26; 27; 28; 29; 30; 31; 32; 33; 34; 36; 37; 38 and 39), indicating that the subjects in the clauses occupy their usual/normal/expected positions/slots. The *unmarked* Themes found in the text can be classified into five groups: nominal groups (‘Modern technology(ies)’ in clauses [1 and 6]; ‘some documents’ in clause [15]; ‘many people’ in clauses [18; 29 and 38]; ‘the world’ in clause [32] and ‘many companies and some working places (and) their workers’ in clause [33]); demonstrative pronouns (‘This’ in clauses [8 and 13] and ‘These’ in clause [22]); an indefinite pronoun (‘whatever (whatever)’ in clause [12]); personal pronouns (‘it’ in clauses [4; 5 and 9]; ‘they’ in clauses [7; 19 and 20]; ‘I’ in clause [36] and ‘you’ in clause [37]) and verbal nouns or/and predicators (‘to live’ in clauses [3 and 39]; ‘to browse’ in clause [10]; ‘(to) download’ in clause [11]; ‘to find’ in clause [16]; ‘to manage’ in clause [23]; ‘(to) use’ in clause [24] and ‘to stand’ in clause [26]). The four *marked* Themes found in this text are ‘Now adays (Nowadays) and at this age’ in clause (2); ‘what ever (whatever)’ in clause (12); ‘at (the) bank’ in clause (25) and ‘To sum up’ in clause (35). The deployment of the preceding Themes points out that the text is internally well-organized. Also, the deployment of the 13 Textual Themes (all of which are Conjunctive elements) shows that the text is rhetorically well-written. The Textual Themes found in the text are *First* (6); *and* (11; 15; 20 and 24); *Second* (17); *without* (21; 30 and 34); *Moreover* (25); *while* (27); *Last (by)* (28) and *when* (32).

Text 9 is similar to Texts 7 and 8 in that the 57 Themes it encompasses are distributed across two Theme-types: 41 (i.e., 71.93%) Topical Themes and 16 (i.e., 28.07%) Textual Themes. Thirty-six out of the 41 Topical Themes are *unmarked* (1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17; 19; 20; 21; 22; 23; 24; 25; 26; 27; 28; 29; 30; 31; 33; 34; 35; 36; 38; 40 and 41), exuding that the subjects in the clauses occur in their usual/normal/expected positions/slots. The *unmarked* Themes in the text are of six types: nominal groups (‘people’s life’ in clause [8]; ‘The using of cell phones in order to listen to radio to get information even on your bed’ in clause [10]; ‘the using of technology’ in clause [11]; ‘The using of dictionary and others (other) grammatic (grammar) documents’ in clause [29] and ‘modern technology’ in clause [41]); common nouns (‘Technology’ in clause [1]; ‘computer’ in clause [12]; ‘Radio’ in clause [15] and ‘people’ [30]); a relative pronoun (‘which’ in clause [14]); an indefinite pronoun (‘someone’ in clause [25]); personal pronouns (‘It’ in clauses [3; 7 and 19]; ‘we’ in clauses [20; 21; 22; 26; 36 and 40] and ‘you’ in clauses [13; 16; 17 and 34]) and verbal nouns or/and predicators (‘to live’ in clause [4]; ‘(to) facilitate’ in clause [5]; ‘to enter’ in clause [23]; ‘to download’ in clause [24]; ‘to go’ in clause [33] and ‘to attend’ in clause [38]). The five *marked* Themes identified in Text 9 are ‘For these reasons’ in clause (6); ‘on the way of study’



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in clause (18); ‘Anywhere’ in clause (32); ‘For the kind of travel which need (needs) to pass a huge water’ in clause (37) and ‘To sum up’ in clause (39). The use of these Themes proves that the text is rhetorically well-planned. The use of the 16 Textual Themes (all of which are Conjunctive items) in the essay suggests that the essay is rhetorically well-planned too. Some of the Textual Themes found in the text include *and* (5); *that* (7 and 11, etc.); *First* (8); *by* (9); *Moreover* (12); *because* (13), etc.

Text 10 like the preceding texts (7; 8 and 9) comprises 33 Themes shared by two Theme-types: 24 (i.e., 72.73%) Topical Themes and 09 (i.e., 27.27%) Textual Themes. Sixteen out of the 24 Topical Themes are *unmarked* (2; 3; 4; 7; 9; 12; 13; 14; 15; 16; 18; (19); 20; 21; 22 and 23). This exudes that the subjects in the clauses occur in their usual/normal/expected positions/slots. The *unmarked* Themes in Text 10 can be categorized into six groups: nominal groups (‘Modern technology’ in clauses [1; 16; (19); 22 and 23]); a nominal clause (‘the knowledge he had accumulated’ in clause [6]); personal pronouns (‘it’ in clauses [3 and 20]); a common noun (‘Technology’ in clause [12]); relative pronouns (‘that’ in clause [9] and ‘which’ in clause [21]) and verbal nouns or/and predicators (‘to begin’ in clause [4]; (‘to introduced (introduce)’ in clause [7] and (‘to bring’ in clause [18]). The eight *marked* Themes found in the text are ‘With the dawn of 21th (21st) century’ in clause (1); ‘through all the periods’ in clause (5); ‘the knowledge’ in clause (6); ‘With the dawn of modern technology’ in clause (8); ‘with the age machinery’ in clause (10); ‘by which’ in clause (11); “by what” in (17) and ‘with evolutive perspective’ in clause (24). The use of these Themes implies that the text is rhetorically well-written. The text also counts 09 Textual Themes, all of which are Conjunctive elements, indicating that the text is rhetorically well-written. The Textual Themes identified in Text 10 are *Even though* (2); *but* (3); *and* (6); *however* (10); *by* (13; [14] and [15]); *Second* (18) and *Finally* (22). After displaying the types of Themes, the second-year English major students choose in their argumentative essays, let us now look at the Thematic (progression) patterns that they deploy in their texts.

Research Question 2

What kind(s) of Thematic (progression) pattern do second-year English major students deploy in their argumentative essays?

The analysis of Thematic patterns follows the Theme classification proposed by Amoussou (2016). The Theme classification contains six classes (a, b, c, d, e and f). This classification has been chosen because of its attempts to categorize the grammatical intricacies of the composition of Theme in a more or less precise way useful for a practical linguistic analysis. In fact, because of the preceding reason, this classification has been adopted and used recently to study the stylistic dimension of the Thematic structure and Thematic features in literary texts (see Allagbé, Amoussou and Tchada, 2020 and Amoussou, Allagbé and Tchada, 2020b). It is hoped too that this classification will help unveil the Thematic patterns in student writing. This classification has been reworked recently by Amoussou (2021). The main change this scholar highlights in his recent study concerns Theme classes (e) and (f), which he failed to distinguish in his earlier work (2016) because of lack of insight then, as he puts it himself (p. 4). In his recent work (2021), he considers the two classes as classes of rankshifted clauses: defining and reporting ones (see p. 4 of the study for more details). The Theme classification is provided in the table below.

Table 2: Theme Classification

Theme classes	Structure/Composition of the Theme
(a)	‘Only a transitivity-label item or Topical Theme’
(b)	‘Textual element+ Topical Theme’
(c)	‘Interpersonal element+ Topical theme’
(d)	‘Textual element +Interpersonal element+ topical Theme’/‘Interpersonal element+ Textual element + Topical theme’
(e)	‘Structural element’
(f)	‘Textual element+ structural element’/‘structural element+ Topical Theme’

The Thematic patterns found in the texts are provided in the table below.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Thematic Patterns in the Texts

Theme class	Frequency Distribution of Thematic Patterns in the Texts									
	Text1	Text2	Text3	Text4	Text5	Text6	Text7	Text8	Text9	Text10
a	20	15	11	20	30	26	21	26	24	11
b	19	10	19	15	20	22	05	13	16	09



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c	01	00	00	00	00	01	00	00	00	00
d	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
e	01	01	03	08	04	04	03	00	01	02
f	00	00	00	01	00	02	00	00	00	02

Table 3 indicates that Text 1 comprises four Thematic patterns: Theme class (a) (20/51 [i.e., 39.21%]); Theme class (b) (19/51 [i.e., 37.25%]); Theme class (c) (01/51 [i.e., 01.96%]) and Theme class (e) (01/51 [i.e., 01.96%]). As the analysis clearly exudes, Theme class (a) predominates over other Theme classes, suggesting once again the dominance of Topical Themes placed in their usual/normal/expected positions/slots. This indicates a written mode. Like Theme class (a), the three other Theme classes (b; c and e) contain clauses in which Topical Themes occur in their initial slots. While in Theme class (b) these Topical Themes are preceded by a Conjunctive element, exuding cohesive development, in Theme class (c), the Topical Theme is placed after an Interpersonal element or a Mood adjunct, encoding interpersonal meaning. The use of Theme class (b) shows clause complexing. Spoken language tends to use the dynamic pattern of clause complexing (Eggins, 2004, p. 293). In contrast, in Theme class (e), the Topical Theme is a structural element, implying also the packaging of clause simplexes into clause complexes. Unlike Text 1, Text 2 only consists of three Thematic patterns: Theme class (a) (15/26 [i.e., 57.69%]); Theme class (b) (10/26 [i.e., 38.46%]) and Theme class (e) (01/26 [i.e., 03.85%]). Like Text 2, Text 3 encompasses three Thematic patterns: Theme class (a) (11/33 [i.e., 33.33%]); Theme class (b) (19/33 [i.e., 57.58%]) and Theme class (e) (03/33 [i.e., 09.09%]). Text 3 differs from Texts 1 and 2 with regard to the rate of Theme classes (b and e). Simply put, this text seems to include more Conjunctive and structural elements than the other two. Like Text 1, Text 4 incorporates four Thematic patterns: Theme class (a) (20/44 [i.e., 45.45%]); Theme class (b) (15/44 [i.e., 34.09%]); Theme class (e) (08/44 [i.e., 18.18%]) and Theme class (f) (01/44 [i.e., 02.27%]). This text differs from Text 1 in that it does not contain Theme class (c). It is also different from Text 1 because it includes Theme class (f). The only Theme class (f) found in the text is ‘by which’ in clause (2). Like Texts 2 and 3, Text 5 comprises Three Thematic patterns: Theme class (a) (30/54 [i.e., 55.55%]); Theme class (b) (20/54 [i.e., 37.04%]) and Theme class (e) (04/54 [i.e., 07.41%]).

Unlike the preceding texts, Text 6 encompasses five Thematic patterns: Theme class (a) (26/55 [i.e., 47.27%]); Theme class (b) (22/55 [i.e., 40%]); Theme class (c) (01/55 [i.e., 01.82%]); Theme class (e) (04/55 [i.e., 07.27%]) and Theme class (f) (02/55 [i.e., 03.64%]). Text 7 differs from Text 6 in that it has only three Thematic patterns: Theme class (a) (21/29 [i.e., 72.42%]); Theme class (b) (05/29 [i.e., 17.24%]) and Theme class (e) (03/29 [i.e., 10.34%]). This text differs from all the other texts because of the rate of Theme class (b) it includes. Unlike all the texts, Text 8 contains only two Thematic patterns: Theme class (a) (26/39 [i.e., 66.67%]) and Theme class (b) (13/55 [i.e., 33.33%]). Text 9, like Texts 2; 3; 5 and 7, comprises three Thematic patterns: Theme class (a) (24/41 [i.e., 58.54%]); Theme class (b) (16/41 [i.e., 39.02%]) and Theme class (e) (01/41 [i.e., 02.44%]). Like Texts 1 and 4, Text 10 incorporates four Thematic patterns: Theme class (a) (11/24 [i.e., 45.83%]); Theme class (b) (09/24 [i.e., 37.50%]); Theme class (e) (02/24 [i.e., 08.33%]) and Theme class (f) (02/24 [i.e., 08.33%]). It must be noted that all the texts look alike because none of them consists of Theme class (d). By the same token, the ten texts are similar in that they all contain the same types of Thematic progression pattern: Theme reiteration and the zig-zag pattern. The Thematic progression patterns discovered in the texts are indicated in Table 4.

Table 4: Frequency Distribution of Thematic Progression Patterns in the Texts

		Frequency Distribution of Thematic Progression Patterns in the Texts									
Types of Thematic Progression Pattern		Text1	Text2	Text3	Text4	Text5	Text6	Text7	Text8	Text9	Text10
Theme reiteration Pattern		16	10	08	19	10	11	13	07	13	07
Zig-zag Pattern		03	01	04	09	09	05	01	04	03	04
Multiple-Rheme Pattern		00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
Total		19	11	12	28	19	16	14	11	16	11

The table above clearly shows that the dominant Thematic progression pattern employed in all the texts is Theme reiteration pattern. This pattern rates 16/19 (i.e., 84.21%) in Text 1, 10/11 (i.e., 90.90%) in Text 2, 08/12 (i.e., 66.67%) in Text 3, 19/28 (i.e., 67.85%) in Text 4, 10/19 (i.e., 52.63%) in Text 5, 11/16 (i.e., 68.75%) in Text 6, 13/14 (i.e., 92.86%) in Text 7, 07/11 (i.e., 63.64%) in Text 8, 13/16 (i.e., 81.25%) in Text 9 and 07/11 (i.e., 63.64%) in Text 10. The dominance of this pattern indicates that the students have kept their texts focused (i.e., cohesive) by simply re-iterating the Thematic element in most of



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the clauses therein. As the table further indicates, the next dominant Thematic progression pattern in the texts is the zig-zag pattern. It represents 03/19 (i.e., 15.79%) in Text 1, 01/11 (i.e., 09.10%) in Text 2, 04/12 (i.e., 33.33%) in Text 3, 09/28 (i.e., 32.14%) in Text 4, 09/19 (i.e., 47.37%) in Text 5, 05/16 (i.e., 31.25%) in Text 6, 01/14 (i.e., 07.14%) in Text 7, 04/11 (i.e., 36.36%) in Text 8, 03/16 (i.e., 18.75%) in Text 9 and 04/11 (i.e., 36.36%) in Text 10. The presence of the zig-zag pattern here exudes that the student writers have been able to encode logical relations and elaborations in their texts. On the contrary, the table shows that the multiple-Rheme pattern is absent from the texts. This clearly indicates that the students still find it difficult to organize their texts. As Eggins (2004, p. 326) notes, “[...] the multiple-Rheme pattern often provides the underlying organizing principle for a text, with both the zig-zag and theme reiteration strategies being used for elaborating on each of the main thematic points.”

Conclusion

This paper has analysed the Theme-types and Thematic (progressive) patterns in ten (i.e., 12.5%) out of eighty argumentative essays written by second-year English major students from the UAS, Niger Republic, in the academic year 2020-2021. The study has employed the descriptive mixed method research design which consists in describing, identifying and classifying the Theme-types and Thematic (progression) patterns in the students’ essays. The identified Theme-types and Thematic patterns were first quantified and tabulated before the findings thereof were discussed. In point of fact, the analysis has yielded some salient findings.

The findings reveal, for instance, that eight of the students’ texts (2; 3; 4; 5; 7; 8; 9 and 10) contain two types of Theme, namely: Topical Themes and Textual Themes. On the other hand, only Texts 1 and 6 include the three Theme-types. As the analysis further indicates, a great number of Topical Themes are unmarked, suggesting that the subjects in the clauses occur in their usual/normal/expected positions/slots. The *unmarked* Themes in the texts range from three to six types. The *marked* Themes, though they exist in low proportions in the texts, prove that the texts are rhetorically well-organized. The use of Textual Themes in the texts also shows that the texts are rhetorically well-organized. In addition, the analysis of Thematic patterns points out that the texts encompass mainly two Theme classes (a and b). The dominance of Theme class (a) confirms once more the dominance of Topical Themes placed in their usual/normal/expected positions/slots, which is indicative of a written mode. Theme class (b) clauses are the next dominant Thematic pattern in all the texts, and since the Topical Themes in them are preceded by a Conjunctive element, their use contributes to the cohesive development of the texts.

Again, the analysis of Thematic progression patterns in the texts unveils the choice of two patterns: Theme reiteration and the zig-zag pattern. Theme reiteration is the most dominant type in all the texts, and its use proves that the students have kept their texts focused (i.e., cohesive) by simply re-iterating the Thematic element in most of the clauses therein. The use of the zig-zag pattern also unveils that the student writers have been able to encode logical relations and elaborations in their texts. However, the multiple-Rheme pattern is absent from the texts, indicating that the students still find it difficult to organize their texts. Hence, more efforts should be devoted to text creation and organization in the EFL writing class. To reach this goal, Jing (2015) suggests an instructional package meant to build students’ meta-knowledge of cohesion and coherence and Theme/Theme progression (T/TP). This package can be tried out both in an ESL (English as Second Language) setting and an EFL setting. Future research could measure the impact of this package on students’ writing skills.

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