

A Systemic Functional Analysis on Texts Written by ESL Learners, and A Text on Daily English Canada Newspaper, and Its Implication for English Teaching and Learning Improvement

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to reveal characteristics of English language produced by English as Second Language (ESL) Learners in the form of written text. By using a theme and rheme analysis. Within the Systemic Functional Analysis Framework, the writer compared the features of English language utilized by ESL learners and those by native proficient writer of an English Newspaper called English Daily Canada for their textual meaning. The Analysis comprises analysis of different aspects of language use in a written text which include the analysis of thematic structure, thematic development, and textual cohesion. The result of the analysis shows the distinctive characteristics amongst the three texts from which teachers of English as Second language classes can draw a conclusion in order to design a lesson plan which is more suitable for the students. It is expected that this analysis can provide a way of understanding the limitation of the resources available in students' mind, and whether or not the students successfully utilize these resources for social purpose, thus gives contribution and implication towards the future direction of the English as Second Language teaching and learning.

Keywords: *Systemic Functional Analysis, Theme and Rheme Analysis, ESL Learner, Newspaper Text, Implication, ESL Teaching*

1. INTRODUCTION

The view of language has arrived at an understanding that language is a system of meaning which accommodates a large number of resources for people in order to make meaning in the social context (Haliday and Hasan, 1985, as cited in Eggins, 2004). In order to convey their meaning, or to produce a language outcome, speakers or writers usually draw on these resources in such a way that they assume can deliver the meaning successfully. This view of language has implications and contributions in the area of ESL teaching and learning in a way that it allows the teacher to improve their students' language by identifying and understanding of the limitation of the resources available in students' mind and whether or not the

students successfully utilize these resources for social purpose. From students' written texts, teachers can understand the level of students' ability in choosing the language appropriately by using rheme and theme analysis. This analysis describes the structure of the text from which the linguistic features chosen by the students in delivering their meaning can be clearly recognized, hence reveals the language features the student is lacking. This then gives the information about what language knowledge the students should be provided with.

A number of attempts (i.e Azzouz, 2009) in describing the structure of language used by people, particularly, in written text, have departed from the work by Halliday and Hasan (1985) who introduce a systemic functional

linguistic, an approach to language grammar which view the language as a semiotic system, the system of meaning rather than merely the system of the words isolated from meaning and context. This systemic functional linguistic approaches the language from the point of view where a clause or a language chunk is seen as a structure of meaning instead of a structure of vocabulary. ‘Language users do not interacts in order to exchange sounds, nor even exchanges words or sentences. People interact to make meanings: to make sense of the world and of each other.’ (Egins, 2004. p. 11). Thus, this approach analyzes a text by breaking down the structure of language based on the meanings the writer or the speaker conveys.

According to this approach, language users deliver a number of meanings while they use language. This involves ideational meaning (the perceptions of the world), interpersonal meaning (the expression and understanding about feeling, attitudes, and judgments), and textual meaning (text organization) (Bloor and Bloor, 2004).

Moreover, Egins (2004, p.3) asserts that the semiotic interpretation of the system of language enables us ‘to consider the appropriacy and inappropriacy of different linguistic choices in relation to their contexts of use, and to view language as a resource which we use by choosing to make meanings in contexts.’ This can be seen as relevant and beneficial for ESL teachers as they work under the increasingly use of communicative approach in language teaching which emphasizes on language use in context.

The goal of functional grammatical analysis, according to Fontaine (2013, p.12) is “to gain a deeper understanding of language in use and an insight into language use that would not be possible without this kind of in-depth analysis.”

On the basis of the systemic functional grammar framework, this paper provides a description and analysis of written text of ESL learners and text published in English Daily Canada for their textual meaning. It focuses on examining the structure of language in the texts including the flow of information and thematic structure, and the characteristic of cohesive devices employed by the writer in the texts. The texts are contrasted and compared for these language features to find how the different language users organize their texts. It also aims to draw some implication and future direction of this analysis towards second language teaching and learning.

This paper is organized into several sections; thematic Analysis, thematic development, Textual cohesion

analysis, including grammatical and lexical cohesion, and the conclusion.

2. THE ANALYSIS OF THEMATIC STRUCTURE

In the analysis of the thematic structure, theme and rheme of each text are analyzed for its characteristic, including what kind of theme most appear in the text. The distribution of themes in the three texts is described in the following table.

Theme		Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
	Total	75	84	40
Topical theme	Total	43 (57%)	47 (55,9%)	28 (72%)
	Marked	7 (16,3%)	3 (6,4%)	6 (21%)
	Unmarked	36 (83,7%)	44 (93,6%)	22 (86,2%)
Textual		28 (65%)	28 (59,5%)	8 (20%)
Interpersonal		4 (9,3%)	9 (19,1%)	5 (17,2%)

Table 1. Theme and Rheme Distribution in the texts

The distribution of topical theme in text 1 and 2 appear to be slightly different in term of their frequency which is about 55% of all the themes identified in the texts. The significant difference of the topical theme utilization realized in the text 3, in which 72% of all themes are characterized as topical theme.

A significant number of the use of marked topical themes appears in the third text. About 6 out of 28 topical themes are considered marked. Meanwhile, text 1 and 2 have less marked topical theme in the text where only about 16,3% and 6,4% of the total topical theme in both texts constitutes marked. According to Bloor and Bloor (2004), topical theme is regarded as marked when the starting point of the clause is the elements other than subjects, including process and circumstance. Thus, it can be implied that in text 3, the characteristic of text in which meaning accommodated in the clauses introduced by circumstance or process occurs much more frequent

compared to the other two texts. This means that the proficient writer has higher capability in delivering the meaning in different ways to prevent monotonous in the text organization. Moreover, in some cases, the decision to put the circumstantial adjunct in the beginning of the sentences might be based on the consideration of the priority of the messages the writer wants the reader to pay attention to. As in the following sentence:

(1). However, in the case of David Sharp in May 2006, we need to look a bit closer.

Marked Topical theme

In this sentence, the writer wants to make the reader to have in mind the case of David Sharp before receiving the next information.

Moreover, this language feature also found considerably frequent in text 1, where the percentage of its emergence is represented by the figure of 16%. This means that the student has begun to understand that the clause can also be start not only with the subject, but the circumstantial adjunct and process. He begins to employ a more varieties of language structure in presenting his/her ideas. As in the following sentences:

(1). Just now, a group of climbers walked closed to me (from text 1)

Theme

(2). At that time, I thought they must come to save me.

Theme

The students has already employed circumstantial adjunct, just now and At that time to introduce the main information he wants to convey. This student could have put these elements at the end of the clause or the sentence. However, his wider access of language enables him to choose the make it the other way round.

Unlike text 1 and text 3, text 2 utilizes the least marked topical theme. This means that almost all the clauses in this text begin with the subject or participant. This suggests that the student still required an understanding that circumstantial adjuncts can be positioned at the beginning of the sentence in order to avoid monotonous. It is also important to raise the awareness of the student on the flexibility of the circumstantial adjuncts in the sentence.

In term of textual theme distribution, both text 1 and text 2, which is represented by percentage of 65% and 59,5% successively, whereas, text 3 accommodates the least textual theme. According to Halliday (2004), textual theme is realized by the features of continuative, conjunction, and conjunctive adjuncts. Thus, the using of textual theme by the writer is related to the attempts of maintaining the cohesiveness of the text which will be discussed in the next section in this paper.

Interpersonal theme is most frequently found in text 2. About 19% of the total theme constitutes interpersonal theme, followed by text 3 which is 17% of the total. Text 1 accommodate 9% interpersonal theme. This figure suggests that text 1 employed the least interpersonal theme among the others. Interpersonal theme is the constituent in which the writer attaches his personal attitude or mood toward the information appear in the beginning of the clause such as modal adjuncts; Mood, vocative, polarity, and comment (Eggins, 2004). The bigger number of the frequency of interpersonal adjuncts found in text 2 indicates that the writer has already capable in giving an attachment of their own attitude toward the information they want to provide, in other word, the writer tries to hedging. This suggest that the writer has been knowledgeable on the important of the feature of hedging in essay writing, most importantly in writing an argumentative text, which allows him to avoid over-precise commitment. As in the following sentences, the writer writes:

(1) Actually, they tried to saved him by all their effort

(2) Therefore, I think, their responsibility is to save themselves, not anyone else.

(3) And, I believe those 40 climbers did nothing wrong

The words underlined in the sentences above are interpersonal theme found in text 2. This sentences show that the writer has begun to organize the structure of his information by using hedging at the beginning allowing the reader to understand that the next information is the writer's attitude toward that piece of information.

While for the ESL student who writes text 1, the teacher can assist them by providing more phrases which constitute these the hedging features, such as it seems, look like, appear to be, in my opinion, may be, might be, probably, and perhaps to the students whenever the students want to make an argument in their essay writing text.

3. THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT

As theme constitutes a 'starting-point for the message: it is what the clause is going to be about' (Halliday and Matthiesen, 2004, p. 64), the development of theme in the text has something to do with textual cohesion. Eggins (2004) asserts that the development of theme between clauses in text has a very significant contribution to the cohesion and coherence of the text. Eggins (2004) categorize three kinds of theme pattern in a text; the theme reiteration, where the same participant or element of the text serves as theme repeatedly in the succeeding clauses, zig zag pattern, where the element

of rheme is taken up to become a theme in the following clause, and multiple rheme pattern, where 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.



Figure 1. Theme reiteration pattern

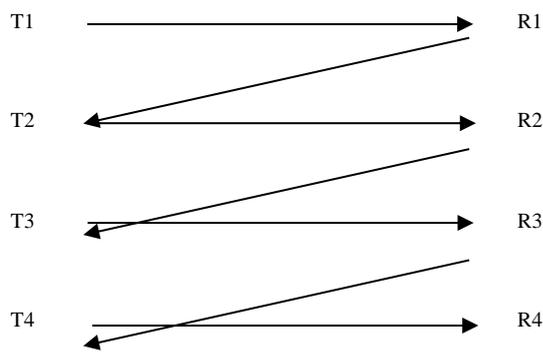


Figure 2. Zig zag pattern

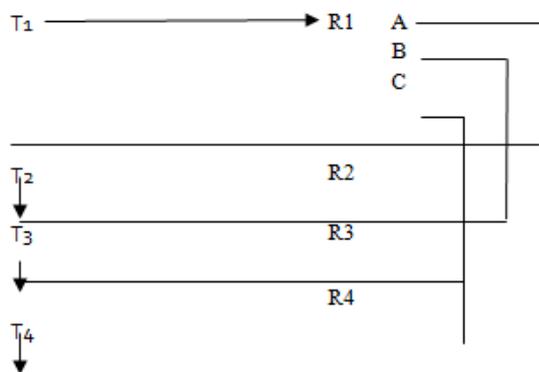


Figure 3. Multiple Rheme Pattern

In text 1, there are five realization of the second type of theme development where the elements of the rheme in the first clause become the theme in the succeeded clauses (T2=R1, T14=R23, T18=R35). The dominant pattern of theme development is the constant pattern or reiteration in which themes in several successive clauses are identical (T1, T11, T20). Text 2 and text 3 share the

same number of the instances of zig zag pattern (Text 2: T2=R1, T4=R7, T12=R29, Text 3: T4=R3, T15=R15, T16=R17), . However, text 3 differ to text 2 in a way that in text 2, there are a large number of repetition of similar theme in the clause, while the repetition of theme occurs less frequent in text 3.

The large number of repetition of theme, where theme is developed constantly, indicates that the text is lacking development of ideas (Er, 1993). Moreover, Eggins (2004, p. 324) argues that ‘A text in which theme never varied would not only be boring to read or listen to, but would indicate a text which is going nowhere. If a theme is our point of departure, constancy of theme would mean we are always leaving from the same spot an that the new information introduced in the rhemes would not be being followed up.’ The description of provided by Eggins can be found in text 1 and 3 where the dominant pattern of theme development is theme reiteration. As in the following clauses in text 2:

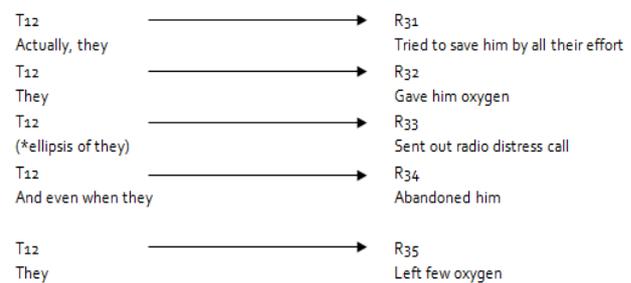


Figure 4. Theme Reiteration

The above clauses exemplify how one participant repeatedly serves as theme in text 2. This ESL learner can be assisted through the explicit teaching of how to utilize more variation of in developing theme simultaneously achieve the cohesion. Teacher, for instance, could introduce the zig zag pattern in which they can develop theme to introduce the new information.

Instead of departing from the same participant in every clause, the information in the above sentence can be structured as follow;

Actually, they tried to save him by all their effort. Some of the efforts include giving him oxygen and sending out the radio distress call. The oxygen is also left to help David Sharp in order to help him breathing.

According to Eggins (2004, p. 325) ‘the zig zag pattern achieves cohesion in the text by building on newly introduced information. This gives a sense of cumulative development which may be absent in the repeated theme pattern.

4. ANALYSIS OF TEXTUAL COHESION IN DISCOURSE

Cohesion is a term which describes the cohesiveness of two or more information or ideas in a text as being cohesively and coherently tied. Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 4) propose that ‘the concept of cohesion is a semantic one: it refers to relations of meaning that exist within a text, and that define it as a text.’ More specifically, they say ‘cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another.’ (Ibid). Azzouz (2009) define cohesion as ‘the surface relations between sentences that create a text. Thus, cohesion is central in building up the information and ideas in a text to be comprehensively delivered. In systemic functional linguistic, cohesion is seen as the system of language in which the actualization depends on the presence of other elements (Ibid). Language provides a number of devices which enable language to be cohesively related to each other such as conjunction.

Moreover, cohesion, according to Halliday and Hasan (1976) ‘is expressed through partly through grammar and partly through vocabulary’. The first termed as grammatical cohesion which includes reference, conjunction, ellipsis and substitution, while the lexical cohesion realized by repetition, synonym, hyponym, and meronym. The characteristic of textual cohesion, including the using of grammatical cohesive devices, (reference, conjunction, ellipsis and substitution) and the lexical cohesive devices in the text are described in the following few sections:

4.1 Grammatical Cohesion

4.1.1. Reference

One aspect that creates cohesiveness of a text is the using of reference. Here, we observe text in term of the writer’s tendency of whether he is looking backward or forward (endophoric) and looking outward (exophoric).

The writers’ use of reference will be analyzed from the data obtained in the texts. It is described in the following table.

Type of Reference	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
Total Reference	62	79	52
Anaphora	21	45	18
Cataphora	8	10	14
Exophora	39	24	20
Personal (R.P)	45	58	32
Demonstrative (R.D)	20	17	21
Comparative (R.C)	-	2	1

Table 2. The distribution of the types of reference in the three texts.

The significant number of the using of reference in total is shown in the text 2, which is mostly compounded by the domination of 58 personal references and 45 anaphoric references. While in all text, the prominent references use constitutes the personal references. This kind of reference is dominant in all three texts. It is obvious that in argumentative essay, the personal pronoun emerges much more frequently. Text 1 and text 3 dominantly use the reference item exophorically, while more than a half of the total number of reference used anaphorically in text 2. Comparative reference is found rare in the three texts. Text 1 employs zero comparative text, while text 2 and 3 utilize slightly different of comparative reference (2 in text 2, and 1 in text 3).

Although the reference employed in text 1 and text 2 is large in number, there remains the problem in appropriateness of its usage. These sentences exemplify the inappropriateness of the referencing in text 1 and text 2.

- (1) Including while somebody are in trouble, whatever they are lost their ways or lost their money, you should give a hand to them (from text 1)
- (2) At such an altitude, all of them were weak, exhausted, having breathing difficulties and cold..... (from text 2)

In the first sentence, it is not really clear what the world ‘they’ refers to. It is probably refers cataphorically to the word ‘somebody’ in the preceding clause, however, the pronoun ‘they’ does not go with the word ‘somebody’. The word ‘somebody’ refers to a singular pronoun reference, thus, it agrees with the third pronoun singular such as ‘he’ or ‘she’ rather than the third pronoun plural. This implies that the student is still lacking the knowledge and the understanding on the referencing the indefinite pronouns such as ‘somebody’, ‘anybody’, ‘anyone’ or ‘everyone’. It is in this area that the teacher should assist the students. However, as the language changes over the time, in term of norms, there may be possibility that, one day; this kind referencing

can be widely acceptable. There is nowadays issue on sociolinguistic in term of abolishing the gender attachment in language, such as referring the indefinite pronoun with third singular pronoun. This is also something that language teachers have to keep in mind in teaching language grammar to the students.

Sentence (2) also indicates that the writer has a problem with referencing, particularly the cataphoric referencing. The word 'such' in the typical phrase such as 'at such an altitude', 'such opinion, 'in such problematic situation,' normally refers to the information which has been already described and elaborated in the preceding clause or sentence which describes or defines the following word.. For example, in 'at such a confusing explanation' the word such refers to an information or elaboration given before the clause which characterizes the following word or phrases (in this case, the 'confusing explanation'). However, in 'such an altitude' in the above sentence is not really clear what the word 'such' refers to as there is no explanation about the characteristic of altitude before, there is no information about what height the altitude is. Thus, this student needs to have a wider understanding on the sense of the word 'such' in diverse co-text and context.

4.1.2. Conjunction

Conjunction is cohesive device that people use in linking two ideas together. Gerot and Wignell (1994) define conjunction as 'the semantic system whereby speakers relate clauses in terms of temporal sequence, consequence, comparison, and addition'. Language user most of the times make meaning which is related to each other such as the causal relationship, temporal relationship, and additional relationship which is concretely described by the assistance of cohesive devices. Halliday and Hasan (1976) categorize the types of conjunction into four groups of relation; additive, adversative, causal, and temporal. The frequency of these types of conjunction in the three texts is described as follows:

Conjunction	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
Total conjunction	30	28	17
Additive	14	8	11
Adversative	4	5	1
Causal	6	11	2
Temporal	6	4	3

Table 4. The Distribution of Types of Conjunction in the three texts.

Additive relation appears to be the most dominant relation among others relation accommodated in the three texts as the figures for additive conjunction in the

table suggest. However, adversative conjunction appear significantly less than other conjunction particularly in text 3 whereby only 1 out of 17 conjunction constitute causal. The higher total number of the conjunction in text 1 and text 2 suggest that the writer have employed adequate conjunction to link their ideas. This also indicates that the learners have been already taught the features of conjunction before.

This shows that the learners at this stage have already got the input on the features of cohesive devices in the classroom. However, the problem of the two learners is that they still have limited understanding of the using some cohesive devices in connecting their ideas. The appropriateness of the using of conjunctions remains a problem for the ESL learners. For instances, in text 1 and text 2, the learner write:

(1) But at this time, I can't move, even can't rise my arm.
(from text 2)

(2) If I'm a people who is one of the 40 climbers that pass
(form text 1) (unfinished sentences, due to the inappropriate use of 'if' conditional)

Sentence (1) shows the learner's inappropriacy use of the adversative conjunction 'but' as he uses it in the beginning of the sentence. According to English norm, the conjunction 'but' ineffectively used at the beginning of the sentence. In order to make the meaning of adversative relation of the learner's idea successfully conveyed, the learner could be directed to the using of a more flexible cohesive device that show this relation, such as however. Therefore, instead of using 'but', the learner might begin to use 'however' which accommodate the same meaning and can be placed in the initial position.

Sentence (2) indicates the lack of understanding about conveying ideas in the conditional form. The use of 'if' conditional seems inappropriate and unfinished in the sentence no (2) that leads the message the writer wants to address is delivered incompletely. Thus, more attention to this aspect of language is required to increase the student's understanding and skill in conveying conditional sentences.

4.1.3. Elipsis and Substitution

Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 142) refer ellipsis as 'something left unsaid'. Ellipsis occurs where certain part of the clause such as verbal phrases and nominal phrases, or the clause itself is omitted. Kennedy (2003, p. 324) defines ellipsis as 'the process by which noun phrase, verb phrase, and clauses are deleted or 'understood' when they are absent.' While, in ellipsis some aspect of language is deleted, in substitution, as the name implies, the aspect is substituted with another referring words. 'Substitution is a relation between linguistic items, such as words or phrases.' (Halliday

and Hasan, 1976, p. 142). Thus, we can see that there is these two language features are almost identical. Azzouz (2009) asserts that ‘the relationship between substitution and ellipsis is very close because it is merely that ellipsis is ‘substitution’ by zero (0).’ Both ellipsis and substitution are categorized into three types; nominal ellipsis/substitution, verbal ellipsis/substitution, and clause ellipsis/substitution.

	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
Ellipsis			
Total	13	4	5
Nominal	1	3	3
Verbal	3	-	-
Clausal	9	1	2
Substitution			
Total	0	1	1
Nominal	-	-	-
Verbal	-	-	-
Clausal	-	1	1

Table 5. Elipsis and Substitution

According to the data above, there is a frequent use of ellipsis in text 1 compared to the other two texts, which is represented by the number of 13, whereas text 2 and text 3 have slightly different amount of ellipsis which is realized by 4 and 5 ellipsis. The table shows that the distribution of ellipsis in text 2 and text 3 are similar. In term of type of ellipsis, text 1 employs dominantly the clausal ellipsis among other types while, text 2 and 3 employs significantly different amount of clausal ellipsis which is only 1 and 2 in both text respectively. Moreover, nominal ellipsis occurs in the same frequency in both text 2 and 3, each of which employs 3 this kind of ellipsis, whereas text 1 only has 1 nominal ellipsis. This data suggest that text 1 is more aware of this language features. However, substitution is found rare in the three texts. This might be because this kind of features more often occurs in the spoken language. For example, we tend to say ‘I don’t want to have this kind of shoes, I want the other one.’ we tend to substitute the words with other lexical item which is still understandable.

4.1.2. Lexical Cohesion

According to Halliday in De Oliveria (2013, p.222), “Lexical cohesion refers to the continuity established in a text by the choice of lexical items and involves relations between these items”. In this paper, the writer analyzes the three texts for their lexical cohesion.

Lexical Cohesion	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
Total			
Repetition	David Sharp 3	David Sharp 9	climbers 7
	To die 2	Life 4	rescue 3
	Climbing 1	Frost bite 2	Everest 3
	summit 2	die 5	Life 4
	The world’s highest mountain 1	save 6	David Sharp 5
	Basic 1	death 2	Help 6
	People 4	Human life 3	summit 6
	trouble 2	climbers 3	Stop 1
	At the gate of the death 1	important 1	Put at risk 1
	Human sense 1	oxygen 2	decision 2
	Save 2		expedition 2
	society 2		Save 1
	help 2		regret
	climber 2		My teammates and I 1
	Leave/left 3		article 1
			aborted 1
Synonym	8	11	7
Hyponym	1	3	1
Meronym	1	2	1

Observing the data above, we can see that the most higher number of repetition occurs in the text 3, in which the word ‘climbers’ is repeatedly seven times. While the word ‘save’ become the word which is most repeated in text 2. Text 3 employs considerably lower number of word repetition. The highest repetition is the word ‘people’ in which its occurrence is represented by the number of 4.

It can be implied that the high frequency of the occurrence of repetition suggests the limited access of language in term of vocabulary. The following sentence exemplifies the typical repetition occur in text 2.

- (1) It is nearly impossible to save a man who dying slowly and unable to move.
- (2) Some studies proved that David could have been saved if they have enough oxygen.

There are repetition of the word ‘save’ in the above two sentences. The word ‘rescue’ can be used interchangeably with the word ‘save’. However, the student selects the word ‘save’ again to express the same meaning. It is perhaps because he does not have any other vocabulary in his mind to say the same thing. However, teacher could help the students to teach them synonym of the English words to enrich his vocabulary and language when writing an essay.

In term of synonym, the three texts employ slightly different amount of this features. However, among the others, text 2 is considered as the text with most

synonym utilization, for example, the word ‘climbers’ and ‘mountaineer’ are used interchangeably.

Hyponym and meronym are the language features that are rarely found in the three texts. However, there are 3 hyponym in text 2 and 1 hyponym in text 1 and 3. Meronym occur two times in text 2, but it is only occur once in text 1 and 3. For example, in text 2, we can find the words elbow and knee which are related meronymically as they constitute part of body. As Halliday and Mathiessen (2004, p. 575) assert define meronymy as ‘be a part of’. While in text 1, the hyponymy relation can be found. This is realized by the appearance of the words ‘human’ and ‘animal’ which can be put under the category of creatures. ‘Hyponym is “be a kind of”, as in fruit is a kind of food’ (Ibid). Thus, human or animal is a kind of creatures.

4. CONCLUSION

This analysis has revealed some features of text written by ESL learners and the proficient writer. Some of the results of this analysis includes the development of theme serves as the starting point in a clause, from which the writer depart to introduce the new information in the clause, and the use of cohesive devices identified in the texts. The theme development in the three texts is not significantly different. There is the domination of the constant or reiteration pattern shared by text 1 and text 2. While theme in text 3 is developed by the same number of zig zag pattern with the other two texts, and less number of constant pattern than in text 1 and 2. Thus, the theme in text 3 is more varied and well developed compared to the other two texts. This suggests that the writer is more skillful in developing theme.

In term of cohesion, writer 1 uses less repetition compared to text 2 and text 3. Ellipsis and substitution are also found more in text 1 than in the other two texts. These also suggest the language features that the ESL learners are lacking in order to create cohesiveness in their writing are the use of synonym and more appropriate use of references and conjunctions. Teachers and language educator are benefited from this analysis in a sense that they are informed what target language features the students need to be provided with in order to help them acquire and produce the language.

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