THE ANALYSIS OF THEMATIC CHOICE IN STUDENTS' PARAGRAPH WRITING
(A Study of Systemic Functional Analysis)

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In this research, the writers analyze the documents of students' paragraph writing. The writers intended to find out the types of themes in students' paragraph. Since the research is the study of systemic functional analysis, the theory of SFG in this research was developed by Halliday (2004) that was strengthened by Bloor and Bloor (2004 and some other supporting theories.). This was a qualitative research.. From 311 themes stated in 50 paragraphs, the most themes used by the students are Topical themes. The two types of topical themes are stated in more than a half of the whole themes found. The unmarked themes are 54,98% , while the marked topical themes are shown 12,54%. The Textual themes are created 28,94% of the 311 clauses of the 50 paragraph written by the students. The smallest themes found is interpersonal themes. It is only 3,54% from the whole paragraph.

A. Introduction

Harmer (2007) states that there are four process in writing namely planning what students are going to write, darfting their ideas, reviewing the text, and editing the text before it is published. Although it is a time-consuming activity, but teacher must implement it to encourage students' writing experience then it can be students' writing habit. The problem that is faced by teachers is the time allocation, as time-consuming activity, the writing process is not always be used in classroom, the aim of learning focuses on students product. Writing as a process has some elements that requires a good writing product. Weigle (2002) states that the elements in good writing are content, vocabulary, organization, language use, and mechanic. These elements are not easy to be mastered by students, that is why they must be familiar with writing process although it consumes long time.

One of the important element of writing is content. Content is related with students' vocabulary, mechanic, and organization which reflects students' basic competence. Besides that, a good content consists of cohesive and coherent informations that makes the reader understand the message easily (Bailey, 2003). In developing ideas into a text, students need to be aware that their text must hold together on one topic, it means that their text must consist of cohesion and coherence. The process of writing and the elements of writing can encourage students in writing skill.

According to those statements, the writers investigates students' writing to identify the thematic choice they use in their writing. Bloor and Bloor (2004) states that the use of thematic structure is a best way in which the message of a text is created.

There are three types of Themes discussed in this research that are proposed by Halliday (2004) namely Topical Theme, Textual Theme, and Interpersonal Themes.

B. Language from the Systemic Functional Perspective

Language is a natural part of the living process. It is used to interact with one another, to construct and maintain our interpersonal relations and the social order that lies behind them and also to amass the experience built up in the course of that process, both personal and collective. It is a tool for constructing meaning.

One school of thought in linguistics interprets language as a system of forms, to which meanings are then attached. The direction taken was first the study of the forms of words (morphology); then the forms of sentences (syntax) were explored in order to explain the forms of words.

However, from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics, language is viewed as a systemic resource for expressing meaning in context. This view of language as meaning potential implies that language is not a well defined system and language exists; therefore it must be studied in contexts such as professional settings, classrooms, and language tests. Grammar is a resource for creating meaning in the form of wordings. Language is seen as a means to an end, rather than as end in itself (Halliday, 2004)

Applied linguists study language use in context, for example the contexts associated with specialized registers (e.g., business or academic), contexts for language learning (e.g. classrooms and study abroad programs), and contexts for language assessment (e.g. speaking tests and writing assignments). As a consequence many applied linguists are interested in linguistic theory that takes into account the contextual dimensions of language.

Due to the fact that language use differs from one context to the other, the ways in which human beings use language are classified in SFL into three broad categories known as metafunctions. They are:

1) ideational metafunction:
Language is used to organize, understand and express our perceptions of the world and of our own consciousness. This function is further classified into two sub-functions or modes known as:
i) experiential function: concerned with content meanings or ideas.
ii) logical function: concerned with the relationship between ideas.

2) interpersonal metafunction:
Language is used to enable us to participate in communicative acts with other people, to take on roles and to express and understand feelings, attitude and judgments.

3) textual metafunction:
Language is used to relate what is said (or written) to the rest of the text and to other linguistic events. In other words, language is used to organize the text itself.

C. Text analysis using Systemic Functional Linguistics

The general application of systemic linguistics is to understand the quality of texts. Text analysis was seen as an "interpretive study" in traditional approaches to literary study. Interpreting a text involves stating WHAT a text means. However, text analysis is regarded as an explanatory activity from a systemic point of view. A systemic analysis of a text aims to

uncover and state HOW a text means. Halliday (1985) suggests that there are two levels of analysis, understanding of the text and evaluation of the text. He views understanding as the lower of the two levels and that it is easily attainable. It involves using the linguistic analysis to show how and why, the text means what it does. The higher level which is the evaluation of the text involves using linguistic analysis to say why the text is, or is not an effective text for its own purpose – in what respects it succeeds and in what respects it fails, or is less successful. This level according to Halliday is very much harder to attain because it involves the interpretation of the environment, its context of situation and context of culture, together with how the linguistic features of a text relate systematically to the features of its environment, including the intention of those involved in its production.

In line with Halliday's thinking, this study which is an investigation into thematic progression in upper secondary EST texts is based on the lower level of analysis which is the understanding of the text.

D. Theme-Rheme Structure

In Bloor and Bloor (2004), it is explained that Thematic Structure operates at the level of the clause. In some ways, Thematic Structure is similar to information structure (given and new information). Theme and Rheme are two terms which represent the way in which information is distributed in a sentence.

The definition of Theme given by Halliday (2004) is that Theme is given information serving as "the point of departure" of a message. The given information is the information which has already been mentioned somewhere in the text, or it is shared or mutual knowledge from the immediate context. In other words, Theme typically contains familiar, old or given information. In simple terms, then, a clause begins with a realization of the Theme. This is followed by the realization of the Rheme, which can be explained as being the rest of the message.

While Downing and Locke (1992) said that Theme and Rheme are the two components which together make up the organisational construct that is the thematic structure of the clause. The Theme comes first and is identified as the first constituent in the clause. What follows is the Rheme.

Based on the statements above, Theme functions as the starting point for the message the element which the clause is going to be about has a crucial effect in orienting listeners and readers. Theme is the starting point of the clause, realized by whatever element comes first, and Rheme is the rest of the message, which provides the additional information added to the starting point and which is available for subsequent development in the text. The different choice of Theme has contributed to a different meaning and English uses first clausal position as a signal to orient a different meaning of the sentences.

The explanation also shows that Rheme is the remainder of the message in a clause in which Theme is developed, that is to say, Rheme typically contains unfamiliar or new information. New information is knowledge that a writer assumes the reader does not know, but needs to have in order to follow the progression of the argument. The boundary between Theme and Rheme is simple: Theme is the first element occurring in a clause; the remainder clause is Rheme.

It could be assumed that in all languages the clause has the character of a message. As a message structure, therefore, a clause consists of a Theme accompanied by a Rheme; and the structure is expressed by the order – whatever is chosen as the Theme is put first. The Theme is not necessarily a nominal group. It may also be an adverbial group or prepositional phrase (Halliday, 2004).

Generally, the Theme can be identified as the element that comes in the first position of a clause and this definition is functional. The Theme may be a nominal group, adverbial group or prepositional phrase. Figure 2.1. represents the example of Theme-Rheme, and figure 2.2. illustrates the three different realizations of Theme.

Theme	Rheme
The lion	beat the unicorn all round the town
All round the town	the lion beat the unicorn
However, the unicorn	still did not want to bow to the lion
The lion	decided to beat him to death
Would the unicorn	give in to the lion
When the lion got to the battle field	the unicorn was ready for the battle

Figure 1. *The example of Theme-Rheme System*

Theme	Rheme
The teacher (*Nominal Group*)	has given the students a lot of work
Last week (*Adverbial Group*)	she was absent from school for two days
With confidence (*Prepositional Phrase*)	he embarked on the difficult task

Figure 2. *The three different realizations of Theme*.

E. Types of Themes

Frequently, the Theme is marked off in speech by intonation. It is spoken in a different tone group, especially when the Theme is either:

(i) an adverbial group or prepositional phrase or

(ii) a nominal group not functioning as Subject

(Halliday, 2004)

A typical pattern for Theme in a declarative clause is in which the Theme is conflated with the Subject and this is hailed as the UNMARKED THEME.

e.g. The old man has lost his walking stick

The phrase *'The old man'* is both Subject and Theme. The item most frequently functioning as unmarked Theme in a declarative clause is the first pronoun *'I '*This is followed by the personal pronouns *you, we, he, she, it, they*; and the impersonal pronouns *it* and *there*.

A pattern where the Theme is something other than the Subject, in a declarative clause, is referred to as a MARKED THEME. The most usual form of marked Theme is an adverbial group (e.g. *today, suddenly), or* prepositional phrase (e.g. *in the morning, with confidence),* functioning

as *adjunct* in the clause. A complement, a nominal group, that is not functioning as Subject is also referred to as a marked theme (e.g. *nature* in *nature I loved*, *this responsibility* in *this* *responsibility we accept wholly*). Figure 2.3. described Themes in declarative clause.

	Function	**Class**	**Clause example**
Unmarked Theme	Subject	Nominal group: Pronoun as Head	I # love reading He # drove to work
	Subject	Nominal group: common or proper noun as Head	There # were many people An old man # lived in the house Borobudur Temple # is the pride of the nation. what I need # is a drop of lime
	Subject	nominalization	juice
Marked Theme	Adjunct	Adverbial group; prepositional phrase	Happily # they went to the park With confidence # he attempted the task A pudding # my mother did
	Complement	nominal group; nominalization	What they could not eat # they threw away

Figure.3. Themes in declarative clause
(Theme-Rheme boundary is shown by # symbol)

Furthermore, in Halliday (2004), it is explained that there are three types of theme (topical, interpersonal and textual). The topical theme is a theme that is used to develop the topic of the clause. It is called an *unmarked theme* if it is a subject and a *marked theme* if it is other than a subject, such as an adjunct, complement, or predicator. The interpersonal theme expresses the degree of intimacy or in types of mood.

The textual theme symbolizes the logical reality and the continuity of the clause. The logical relation is expressed through conjunctions, whereas the continuity of a clause is realized in the continuative.

As mentioned in Halliday (2004), every clause must contain one and only one Topical Theme. But it is common for clauses to contain a sequence of Themes. One or several Textual Themes and / or Interpersonal Themes may occur before the obligatory topical Theme. Figure 4. shows the components of **Multiple Themes**.

Metafunction	**Component of Theme**
Textual	Continuative; structural (conjunction or **WH-relative)** ; conjunctive (Adjunct)
interpersonal	Vocative; modal (Adjunct), finite (operator); **WH-(interrogative)**
experiential	Topical (participant, circumstance, process)

Figure 4. The components of Multiple Themes drawn Halliday, 2004

Note: **WH-(relative) or WH-(interrogative)** *is also a topical element.*

The detail explanations about 3 main types of theme will be described below.

1. **Topical Theme**

Topical theme functions as the point of orientation for the experiential meanings of the clause. The components of Topical Theme are participant, circumstance, process.

The Topical Theme is a must in every clause and is the first constituent of a meaningful structure of a clause and always represents a Participant, Circumstance or Process. It is always realized by one of the following elements: *Subject (S), Predicator (P), Complement (C), or Circumstantial Adjunct (A).*

A typical pattern in declarative clauses is one in which the Theme is conflated with the Subject;

e.g. *Water can erode sediment on slopes*

where water is both Subject and Theme. In Sytemic Functional Linguistics, this mapping of Theme on the Subject is classified as Unmarked Theme. The first pronoun *I* is an Unmarked Theme most profoundly found in everyday conversations. Following this are personal pronouns *you, we, he, she, it, they*; and the impersonal pronouns *it* and *there*. Then, comes other nominal groups – those with common nouns or proper nouns as Head – and nominalizations.

Marked Theme is a Theme something other than the Subject in a declarative clause. The most usual form of Marked Theme is an adverbial group, (e.g. *today, suddenly, quickly, surprisingly),* or prepositional phrase, (*e.g. at night, with much anticipation,)* functioning as ADJUNCT in the clause.

e.g. <u>*On a global scale,*</u> *air pollution represents the greatest problem of all.*

2. **Interpersonal Theme**

Interpersonal theme includes elements that reflect the kind of interaction taking place among speakers (e.g. "maybe", "obviously"). Interpersonal theme often functions to code the speaker's or writer's personal judgement on meaning. The components of Interpersonal Theme are:

a. Vocative: any item used to address such as a personal name. It may appear anywhere in a clause and is considered thematic if precedes the topical Theme.

b. Modal: any of the model Adjunct which expresses the speaker's judgment regarding to relevance of the message such as probably, possibly, certainly, perhaps, maybe, usually, sometimes, always, occasionally, generally, regularly, of course…, I think, in my opinion, personally; frankly, to be honest, honestly, please, kindly, evidently, hopefully, in general, strictly speaking, wisely, to my surprise…

Table 5. sets out the principal types of Interpersonal Theme.

	Type	Meaning	Examples
I	Probability	How likely?	probably, possibly, certainly, perhaps, maybe
	Usuality	How often?	usually, sometimes, always, never, often, seldom
	Typicality	How typical?	occasionally, generally, regularly, for the

			most part
	obviousness	How obvious?	of course, surely, obviously, clearly
II	opinion	I think	in my opinion, personally, to my mind
	admission	I admit	Frankly, to be honest, to tell you the truth
			honestly, really, believe me, seriously
	Persuasion	I assure you	please, kindly
	entreaty	I request you	Evidently, apparently, no doubt,
	presumption	I presume	presumably
	desirability		(un)fortunately, to my delight/distress,
	reservation	How	regrettably, hopefully
	validation	desirable?	At first, tentatively, provisionally,
	evaluation		broadly speaking, in general, on the whole,
	prediction	How reliable?	in principle
		How valid?	(un)wisely, understandably, mistakenly,
			foolishly
		How sensible?	To my surprise, surprisingly, as expected,
			by chance
		How expected	

Figure 5. Examples of Interpersonal Theme drawn from Halliday, 2004

c. Mood-marking: a finite verbal operator, if preceding the topical Theme, is the element that embodies the expression of polarity. It is this that expresses positive or negative: *is, isn't; do, don't; can, can't*

d. WH- interrogative (or *imperative let's*) when it is not preceded by another experiential element (i.e. *when functioning simultaneously as topical Theme*)

3. Textual Theme

Textual theme consists of the lexical elements that enable the connection between clauses and these elements are used to structure the text (e.g. "in conclusion", "and", "that"). They almost always constitute the first part of the Theme, coming before any Interpersonal. They provide thematic prominence to textual elements with a linking function. Textual theme functions to relate the meaning of the particular clause to other parts of the text. The components of Textual Theme are:

a. Continuative – a small set of discourse signalers (yes, no, well, oh, now) which signal that a new move is beginning: a response, in dialogue, or a move to the next point if the same speaker is continuing.

b. Structural – any of the obligatory thematic elements listed in the Figure 2.6. and Figure 7. below, conjunctions and WH-relatives (conjunction: and , or, nor, either, neither, but, yet, so, then,when, while, before, after, until, because, even, in case… or WH-relative: which, who, whose, when, where, that…)

Type	Examples
co-ordinator	and, or, nor, either, but, yet, so, then
subordinator	when, while, before, after, until, because, if, although, unless, since, that, whether, (in order) to

Figure 6. Conjunctions drawn from Halliday, 2004

Type	Examples
Definite	Which, who, that, whose, when, where (why, how)
Indefinite	Whatever, whichever, whoever, whenever, wherever , however

Figure 7. Relatives drawn from Halliday, 2004

c. Conjunctive: relate the clause to the preceding text such as that is, for instance; rather; in any case; in fact; in short; actually; moreover; on the other hand; instead; meanwhile; likewise; as to that. Usually such an Adjunct precedes the Topical Theme. Figure 2.8. lists the elements of conjunctive.

	Type	Meaning	Examples
I	Appositive	'i.e., e.g.'	That is, in other words, for instance
	Corrective	'rather'	or rather, at least, to be precise
	Dismissive	'in any case'	in any case, anyway, leaving that aside
	Summative	'in short'	briefly, to sum up, in conclusion
	Verifactive	'actually'	actually, in fact, as a matter of fact
II	Additive	'and'	Also, moreover, in addition, besides
	Adversative	'but'	On the other hand, however, conversely
	Variative	'instead'	Instead, alternatively
III	Temporal	'then'	Meanwhile, before that, later on, next, soon, finally
	Comparative	'likewise'	likewise, in the same way
	Casual	'so'	therefore, for this reason, as a result, with this in mind
	Conditional	'(if…) then'	in that case, under the circumstances, otherwise
	Concessive	' yet '	nevertheless, despite that
	Respective	' as to that '	in this respect, as far as that's concerned

Figure 8. Conjunctive Adjuncts drawn Halliday, 2004.

From the previous explanation, the writer learnt that Halliday (2004) has his own parameters of theme. He views theme as:

1. encoder – oriented
"What I, the speaker choose to take as my point of departure".
2. what *" gives the clause its character as a message"*
3. the element which serves as the point of departure of message.

His further assertions about theme are:

1. Themes take a speakers point of view rather than a hearer's point of view.
2. Theme is a psychological notion, not just a packaging strategy.
3. Theme is essentially a clausal element represented by a single constituent.

These parameters and assertions distinguish theme from other related notions. Both Theme and Given are speaker –selected, that is , it is the speaker "who assigns both structure, mapping one on to the other to give a composite structure to the discourse and thereby relate it to its environment"

Second, theme is not to be equated with subject. Subject is more intimately tied to the surface features of grammaticality while Theme is related to the concept of psychological subject.

Third, theme is not synonymous with topic in the usual grammatical sense in which that term is understood. According to Halliday, Topic cannot be understood in any universal sense as it has been used in many ways to mean many things.

Halliday (2004) implies that a language, if it has Theme – Rheme structures, signals Theme in some consistent overt manner (e.g. in English sentence initial position). If Theme is to be defined as "the point of departure of the message", then Theme will be realized not only in different ways in different languages but also in different ways within a single language.

F. Qualitative Research

In general, qualitative research involves "data collection procedures that result primarily in open-ended, non-numerical data which is then analyzed primarily by non-statistical methods" (Dornyei: 2008, cited in Fauziati, 2009). Fauziati (2009) also says that Qualitative research uses no statitical analysis. It is also often associated with hypothesis generating and developing an understanding. It collects the data through observation and then comes up with a theory to account for the data. Thus, it does not decide in advance what variables will be important. Instead, it attempts to describe as fully as possible what is being observed. In this sense qualitative research is interested more in the process, e.g. what actually goes on in the classroom (Brown: 2000, cited in Fauziati, 2009). It describes a given situation, fact, or event through the information obtained from documentary sources: books, records, magazines, journals, interviews, newspaper articles, etc.

G. Findings and Discussions

The findings here relate to the first stage of the analysis where research question number 1 will be answered. A total of 50 texts were examined. For every text, the clause will be identified one by one. Then the types of theme in each clause will be identified too. The types of Theme namely Textual Theme, Interpersonal Theme and Topical Theme were determined.

From 50 paragraphs written, each paragraph consists of 5-16 clauses. Total clauses of those fifty paragraphs are 311 clauses. It means there are 311 themes stated in the data.

The findings show that all Theme types were found. The most number of Themes were Topical Themes. From that total, 171 were unmarked Topical Theme while the remaining 39 were marked Theme. The least number of Themes were Interpersonal Theme, only 11 Themes. Textual Theme amounted to 90 elements of the overall Themes found in the text.

1. The Analysis of Textual Themes

The *Textual Theme* denotes any combination of continuatives, structural and conjunctives and always precedes the Topical Themes in a Multiple Themes structure. A total of 90 Textual themes (28,94% of the whole themes appear) made up of structural and conjunctive Adjuncts were utilized in students paragraphs to enhance cohesion and coherence of the text.

Below are some data of textual themes from the students paragraphs.
***During my study**, I learnt lots of things.*
Textual Theme

Before examination, I don't go anywhere.
Textual Theme
Lit up by the sun in colors, my dream guides me to study hard.
Textual Theme
When getting bored, I always remember my goal target to get my spirit back.
Textual Theme
I will become a successful person in the next ten years, or i can't make my parents happy.

Textual Theme

Intelligence is an advantage of a learner, but good study habbit is more important.

Textual Theme

For the detail analysis , it can be seen at the table 4.1

Table 9

NO	TYPES OF TEXTUAL THEMES	CLAUSE EXAMPLE
	Conjunctive Adjunct	**During my study**, I learnt lots of things.
	Conjunctive Adjunct	**Before examination**, I don't go anywhere.
	Conjunctive Adjunct	**Lit up by the sun in colors**, my dream guides me to study hard.
	Conjunctive Adjunct	**When getting bored**, I always remember my goal target to get my spirit
	Structural	I will become a successful person in the next ten years , **or** I can't make my parents happy.
	Structural	Intelligence is an advantage of a learner, **but** good study habbit is more important.

Typically, I often do the task near the deadline
Interpersonal Themes

2. The Analysis of Interpersonal Themes

The *Interpersonal Themes*, which is any combination of vocative, modal or mood marking elements, are also found in the data. Of the 311 clauses analyzed, only 11 clauses (3,54%) contained this Theme. Below are the data of interpersonal Themes from students' paragraph..
Unfortunely, I can't directly continue my study.
Interpersonal Themes
Suddenly, We're surprised by the announcement.
Interpersonal Themes

The samples show interpersonal Themes which are modal Adjuncts.

3. The Analysis of Topical Themes

The element most used in the investigated texts is the *Topical Theme*. The Topical Theme contains an experiential element: a participant, a circumstance or a process Topical Themes which are divided into Unmarked Topical Theme and Marked Topical Theme. The Unmarked Topical Theme is identified when the Subject conflates as the Theme. The unmarked option for thematic choice in a declarative clause is a nominal group functioning as the Subject of the clause.

The Marked Topical Theme, on the other hand, is elements other than Subject such as adverbial groups or prepositional phrases functioning as Adjunct.

The selected texts show a total of 210 Topical Themes. Out of this, 39 are marked Themes (12.54 %) whereas 171 are unmarked Themes (54,98%). The Marked

Below are the data of Unmarked and Marked Topical Themes (underlined) from the students paragraph.

Table 10

NO	TYPES OF TOPICAL THEMES	CLAUSE EXAMPLE
	Unmarked	**I** want to be a lecturer.
	Unmarked	**My friends** help me to study.
	Unmarked	**My favourite lecturers** always motivates me after class.
	Unmarked	**She** lent me lots of books.
	Unmarked	**The books** are very thick.
	Unmarked	**Good study habbit** is important.
7.	Marked	**Lots of book** he gave me.
8.	Marked	**I** won't be underestimated anymore.
9.	Marked	**Those achievements** are proposed for my parents.
10.	Marked	**My graduation** must be documented well.

H. Discussions

From the analysis it is found that most students select unmarked topical themes to start their writing. It supports more than a half (54,98%) of the whole themes of the clauses in 50 paragraph made by the students. Meanwhile, this types of themes are tipically simple themes (based on it characteristics) if it is compared with other types of themes (interperpersonal themes and textual themes). The selections of this theme show the short varieties used by the students in their writing.

To overcome this findings , students can be taught more information to vary their dictions and the strategies to develop their writing. So that they are able to create any types of writing as mention in the previous literature such as intensive writing or responsive writing. Teachers are constantly encouraged to modify and adapt these materials to a level suited to the language proficiency of their students so that they are not deterred from the outset. Teachers should ensure modifications do not compromise the structures used in the science register. In order to satisfy that requirement, teachers may well benefit from the knowledge of Theme –Rheme as this directly relates to the structure of the texts.

The principle of integration can help teachers cover a cluster of skills in several lessons. Once a topic is selected, teachers can plan tasks and activities that seek to integrate skills. Language skills, vocabulary, and grammar items must be repeated often to maximize learning and bring about retention. To this end, teachers should set a variety of tasks and activities that will enable learners to use the language items repeatedly so that items are reinforced. Repetition should be carried out using new materials to avoid boredom.

In order to bring about effective learning, learners must be given every opportunity to engage in real or simulated activities that require them to use the language i.e. lessons should be activity-based and learner-centred and revolve around real-life tasks to ensure relevance.

I. Conclusion and Suggestions

The research findings show the four types of themes are found in students' paragraph writing. The most themes used by the students are Topical themes. The two types of topical themes are stated in more than a half of the whole themes found. The unmarked themes are 54,98% , while the marked topical themes are shown 12,54%. The Textual themes are created 28,94% of the 311 clauses of the 50 paragraph written by the students. The smallest themes found is interpersonal themes. It is only 3,54% from the whole paragraph.

This type of analysis can also be carried out in spoken genres such as lectures, conversations, story telling and jokes. It can also be applied to the comparison of professional scientific writings. Other authentic sources like newspaper reports, magazines or science or technology pamphlets could also be analysed for the cohesion of text using this approach. The focus will be to explore whether there is any connection between perceived coherence and thematic structure .

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