

## **Thematic Progression in the Rhetorical Sections of an Online Iraqi English Newspaper**

Nadia Abed Shakeh, Assistant Lecturer, Iraq Ministry of Education, Educational Directorate  
Rusafa/2

*nadia\_a72@yahoo.com*

### **Abstract**

Thematic development refers to the way theme and rheme in the clause are developed. The theory of rhetorical structure can be defined as the strategies that follow specific ways to make writing more persuasive. The present study aimed to examine how Iraqi writers maintain cohesion in the text by analyzing the patterns of thematic progression in various rhetorical sections in an online Iraqi newspaper, Azzaman (Zaman). To carry out the study, the news articles were collected from January 2013 to June 2013. Actually, 2 opinion articles which focused on the most important political issues were taken each month, collected and analyzed. The analysis focused on the thematic progression and rhetorical structures. The results revealed that thematic progression patterns were used in every rhetorical section of the newspaper. The findings of the study showed the occurrence of thematic progression with different rhetorical patterns in writing English opinion articles and the influence of culture on the rhetorical structure.

**Keywords:** Opinion articles, rhetorical structure, theme, rheme, thematic progression

### **Preliminaries**

The organization of theme-rheme in a clause can be useful for cohesion development (Dumanig F. 2012). The progression in the text can be seen through the organization of theme and rheme information or what is called as thematic progression (Sopyan, 2011). According to Leckie (1991) thematic structure involves the message of the clause, that is, the theme and rheme division of the clause while thematic development or thematic progression, involves the way theme is developed over larger sections of text. In addition, Leckie (1991) states that the thematic structure within the clause, and an extension of thematic structure (thematic development throughout the text) are both constituents of an area where degrees of explicitness are evident over a range of texts. This means that thematic development stems from the way the themes and rhemes develop the idea in a clause. The thematic structure of the clause mirrors the semantic structure of language. Therefore, theme occupies an important role in the discourse and its position determines the thematic progression pattern in the entire text. The thematic progression should be connected to the ideas already presented by theme and rheme in the text.

Mann and Thompson (1988) define rhetorical structure as “the art of effective expression (speaking & writing) and the persuasive use of language”. Katajamaki (2007) argues that opinion articles are structured differently in English compared to the Swedish and Finnish newspapers. Katajamaki and Kosketa (2006) presented their model of analyzing the rhetorical structure in newspapers. The model consists of three main sections and subdivided into four stages: the introduction section, the intermediate section (this section is subdivided into two stages: intermediate stage and the solution stage). The last part is the coda section (which is also subdivided into two stages: conclusion stage and the moral stage).

Based on what was stated above, thematic progression and rhetorical sections in this sense are considered as macrostructure and micro-structure, respectively. In other words, thematic structures refer to the overall construct of clauses, while rhetorical moves in the text refer to larger segments which help in making writing clear and simple. The present study focuses on the

thematic progression within rhetorical sections that play an important role in maintaining the cohesion of a text.

## Methodology

### Materials and design

This study used a qualitative design to come up with a more complete understanding of how Iraqi writers achieve coherence and cohesion in the opinion articles of an online Iraqi newspaper published daily in Iraq. This newspaper is published in both Arabic and English. The data for the study were taken from twelve opinion articles from the English edition of Azzaman (<http://www.azzaman.com>). The articles were collected from January 2013 to June 2013. Actually, 2 opinion articles which focused on the most important political issues were taken each month.

### Data analysis procedure

The data analysis for this study comprised three stages, 1) the first stage focused on the rhetorical structure of the news as well as classifying the texts into three sections: introduction section, intermediate section and the coda section. The intermediate section was further subdivided into two stages: intermediate stage and solution stage. The coda section was also classified into two stages: conclusion stage and moral, 2) the second stage of analysis focused on the theme and rheme in each clause. To analyze theme and rheme, the clauses in each opinion article were identified first. Then all themes and rhemes in each clause were also identified, and 3) the third stage of the analysis focused on the thematic progression patterns in different rhetorical sections. The data analysis procedure is shown in brief in the following diagram:

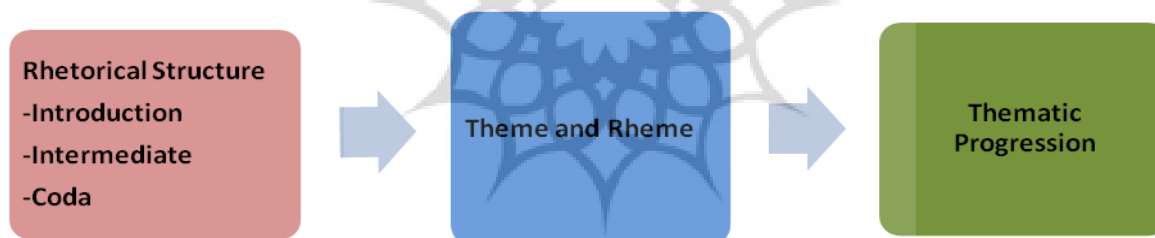


Figure 1. Data analysis procedure

### Analysis and results

For the analysis of rhetorical structure of the selected texts in the present study, Katajamäki and Koskela's (2006) model was employed. This model divides news texts into three sections: introduction, intermediate and coda section. The intermediate section is subdivided into two stages of rhetorical structure, i.e. intermediate stage and solution stage. The last section is the coda section which is subdivided into two stages: conclusion stage and moral stage.

The results of the analysis revealed that rhetorical structure sections are used in all the articles, but they differ in the usage of other stages, especially solution and moral stages. Actually, most articles used the three main sections but did not supply the readers with solution and moral stages. More specifically, only 3 articles out of 12 used solution stage and 5 articles out of 12 used the moral stage. This simply means that the writers did not provide the readers with suitable solution and moral for the events.

The results referred also to thematic progression in each rhetorical structure. Thematic progression analysis was done for every clause in each rhetorical section of Azzaman newspaper's opinion articles. It is to be noted that thematization within the rhetorical moves plays an important role in maintaining the cohesion of a text. Moreover, the results showed a similarity of occurrence of thematic progression in each rhetorical section. For instance, most occurrences of the four patterns in the intermediate section were seen at the intermediate stage where the article tries to provide justification, arguments or examples for the events, issues, or situation. Generally, the analysis of thematic patterns showed that Azzaman newspaper opinion articles use three out of four thematic progression patterns, but the most frequently-used patterns are simple linear progression and constant theme progression in different rhetorical structure sections in the selected data. It was also noticed that writers avoided using split-rheme progression because of its complexity. The occurrence of different types of thematic progression in each rhetorical section is presented in the following tables:

**Table 1.** Simple Linear Thematic Progression in introduction rhetorical section

<b>Introduction section</b>	“More than 16,000 Iraqis have been kidnapped and kidnapped persons still without a trace since the 2003-U.S. invasion, according to statistics after U.S. invasion gathered by the Ministry of Human Rights. It is the first time the ministry reveals official figures about Iraqis ..... ”
-----------------------------	--

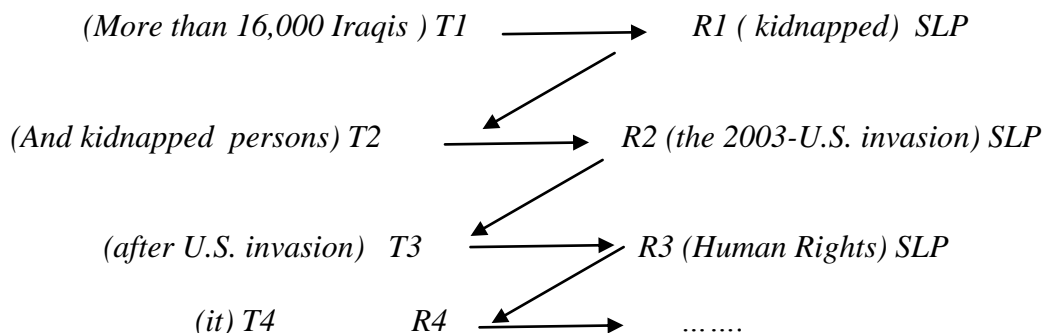
Table 1 above shows the occurrences of thematic progression in the introduction section in which the article describes an event, as a means of starting the article. The introduction section in the opinion articles usually provides a general overview about the issue in which specific issues are foregrounded. In order to explore the occurrences of thematic progression in the introduction section, it was essential to analyze first each clause into theme and rheme as illustrated in the table below:

**Table 2.** Examples of theme and rheme in introduction section  
(**T** refers to theme and **R** refer to rheme)

	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Rheme</b>
<b>1.Introduction section</b>	<p>“ More than 16,000 Iraqis <b>T1</b></p> <p><b>And kidnapped personsT2</b></p> <p>according to statistics after <b>U.S. invasion T3</b></p> <p><b>It T4</b></p>	<p>have been <b>kidnapped R1</b> still without a trace since the 2003-U.S. <b>invasion, R2</b></p> <p>gathered by the Ministry of <b>Human Rights.R3</b></p> <p>is the first time the ministry reveals official figures about Iraqis”<b>R4</b></p>

Table 2 shows an example of theme and rheme in introduction section. The theme and rheme in a clause contribute to the communicative efficacy of a message. As previously mentioned, the theme is realized in the first part of the clause while rheme is the remaining part of the clause. Through the organization of these clauses, the coherence of the text can be achieved. The main part of this study is the thematic progression in the text, with thematic

development referring to the way theme and rheme in the clause are developed as illustrated in figure 2 below:



**Figure 2** Example of Simple Linear Progression in introduction section

Figure 2 shows the simple linear thematic progression in introduction section. In the first clause, the rheme R1(kidnapped) becomes the theme for T2 (And kidnapped persons), then the article continues presenting this type of progression from R2 (U.S. invasion) to become the theme of the next sentence T3( after U.S. invasion), as well as in R3 ( Human Rights ); while maintaining the same theme for T4 (it).The article in the example above develops the idea for the rheme into a theme for the succeeding sentence, so the article needs not develop a new idea, carrying with it the same idea as in the rheme.

**Table 3.** Example of simple linear thematic progression in intermediate stage

<b>Intermediate section</b> Intermediate stage	“In the restive Province of Diyala, specifically targeting Muslim Shiites during their Friday prayers. The bombings in Friday prayers have terrorized Shiites in the Province of which Baaquba is the capital and in Baaqubahave shown the vulnerability of the measures the government has take to protect Iraqis. ”
---	---

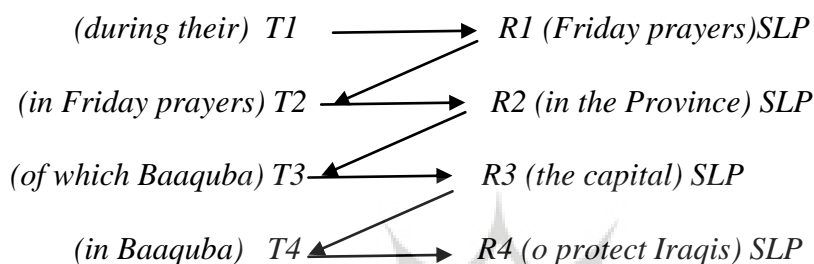
Table 3 shows the occurrences of thematic progression in the intermediate stage in which the article describes an event and gives reasons, justifications and examples about the issue at hand. In order to explore the occurrences of thematic progression in the intermediate stage, the clauses were analyzed into theme and rheme as illustrated in table 4 below:

**Table 4.** Theme and Rheme of simple linear thematic progression in intermediate stage

	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Rheme</b>
<b>Intermediate Stage</b>	“specifically targeting Muslim Shiites during their <b>T1</b>	<b>Friday prayers.R1</b>
	The bombings in <b>Friday prayers T2</b>	have terrorized Shiites <b>in the Province R2</b>
	<b>of which Baaquba T3</b>	is <b>the capital R3</b>

	and in Baaquba T4	have shown the vulnerability of the measures the government has take to protect Iraqis.”R4
--	-------------------	--

Table 4 shows theme and rheme of simple linear thematic progression in intermediate stage. The theme and rheme in a clause affect the message of the text and provide overall coherence. The theme here is realized in the main part of the clause while the rheme is at remaining part of the clause. Thematic progression pertains to how themes and rhemes are ordered in clauses, their hierarchy and connection between each other. This is shown in figure 3 below:



**Figure 3.** Example of simple linear thematic progression in intermediate stage

Figure 3 shows rheme 1 (Friday prayers) becoming the theme in the succeeding parts by focusing on theme 2, Friday prayers (The bombings in Friday prayers). Rheme 2 (Shiites in the Province), then, moves to become theme 3 by naming the province (of which Baaquba). Rheme 3 (about Baaquba) continues on to become theme 4 (and in Baaquba). Such occurrence indicates the emergence of simple linear thematic progression in intermediate stage. This pattern is also preferred because theme is derived from rheme, which aids in the presentation of arguments. As illustrated in Mathesius (1939), information in a sentence start from *given* towards *new information*, while the sequence, rheme-transition-theme to indicate “subjective” word order, i.e. marked, starts from *new* towards *given information*.

**Table 5.** An example of Constant Theme Progression in solution stage

<b>Intermediate section</b> solution stage	“Shammari urged the government to impose tariffs on imported products. He add the products which are produced locally to safeguard domestic industry. He said low-quality and cheap products were flooding the country, making it almost impossible for local industry to compete as it struggles with power shortages and violence. ”
---	---

Table 5 shows an example of constant theme progression in solution stage. In this example, the article gives more details about the issue “Violence destroyed industry” and provides readers with the suitable solution. Theme represents the main idea in the clause of the article, while rheme presents the rest of the departure point for the message in the clause. Table 6 below shows theme and rheme in solution stage.

**Table 6.** Theme and Rheme in solution stage

<b>solution stage</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Rheme</b>
	<i>“Shammari urged the government <b>T1</b></i>	<i>to impose tariffs on imported products <b>R1</b></i>
	<i>He add the products which <b>T2</b></i>	<i>are produced locally to safeguard domestic <b>R2</b></i>
	<i>He said low-quality and cheap products <b>T3</b></i>	<i>were flooding the country,.....”<b>R3</b></i>

Table 6 shows the analysis of theme and rheme in each clause. Thematic progression patterns are considered essential as to how themes and rhemes are ordered in clauses. This is shown below in figure 4:

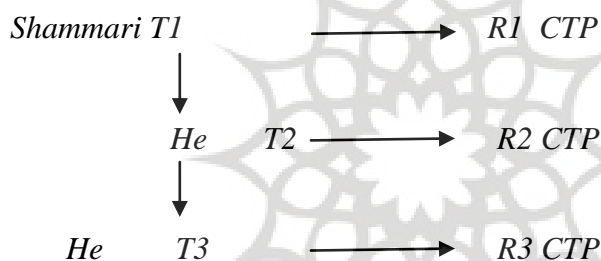
**Figure 4:** Example of constant Theme Progression in solution stage

Figure 4 shows that constant theme progression dominantly plays out in solution stage. This pattern is considered as a simple one among the thematic progression patterns. Here the article keeps the same theme in the rest of the clauses, but different information is presented in the rheme. In the example above, the article starts with T1 “*Shammari urged the government*”, and then moves on to the second clause keeping the same theme. To compensate for the use of the *Shammari’s* name, the writer uses the pronoun “he” as in T2 “*He add the products which*”. Then, the third theme uses the same theme in clause 1 “*He said low-quality and cheap products*”.

Cohesive development refers to the thematic progression of text which means the new information of text is distributed logically and follows a certain pattern. The above example shows there is a tendency towards using constant theme progression in solution stage, and it is distributed logically in order to gain readers attention about the solution that the article provides.

**Table 7.** Example of Constant Theme Progression in conclusion stage

<b>Coda section</b> Conclusion	“Violence hitting the provinces of Nineveh, Anbar and Diyala were massive car bombs with scores of casualties and large damage.
-----------------------------------	---



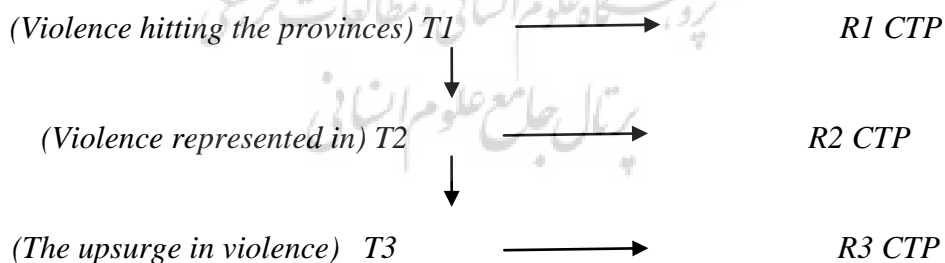
stage	Violence represented in deadly car bombings is making a comeback in Iraq following nearly four years of relative quiet. The upsurge in violence comes as Iraqi political factions grapple fiercely about almost everything, blaming each other for the worsening conditions in the country. ”
-------	--

Table 7 above shows an example of constant theme progression in conclusion stage. This stage supplies the readers with the conclusion of the article. In order to explore the occurrences of thematic progression in the conclusion stage, the clauses are analysed into theme and rheme as illustrated in table 8 below:

**Table 8.** Theme and Rheme in conclusion stage

	Theme	Rheme
<b>Coda section</b>		
Conclusion stage	“Violence hitting the provinces of Nineveh, Anbar and Diyala <b>T1</b> Violence represented in deadly car bombings <b>T2</b> The upsurge in violence <b>T3</b>	were massive car bombs with scores of casualties and large damage. <b>R1</b> is making a comeback in Iraq following nearly four years of relative quiet. <b>R2</b> comes as Iraqi political factions grapple fiercely about almost everything, blaming each other for the worsening conditions in the country.” <b>R3</b>

Table 8 shows the categories based on the example above in order to identify thematic progression. The clauses are categorized into theme and rheme. Thematic progression pertains to how the article achieves coherence through the relation between theme and rheme as shown in the figure 5 below:



**Figure 5** Example of Constant Theme Progression in conclusion stage

Figure 5 shows that the constant theme progression in conclusion stage is the most preferred pattern. Theme 1 presents the violence which destroyed the industry in restive province, i.e. “Violence hitting the provinces of Nineveh, Anbar and Diyala”, followed by the second theme 2, always being the same theme, but this time dealing with the representation of the violence in the province, i.e. “Violence represented in deadly car bombings”. The same theme is embodied in theme 3 by presenting the reasons for the upsurge in violence: “The upsurge in violence”. In constant theme progression, the writer maintained the same theme while, at the

same time, added the new information presented in rheme. Danes (1974) states that theme and rheme in a clause contribute to the message, specifically to the direct communicative effect through thematization.

**Table 9.** An example of derived theme progression in moral stage

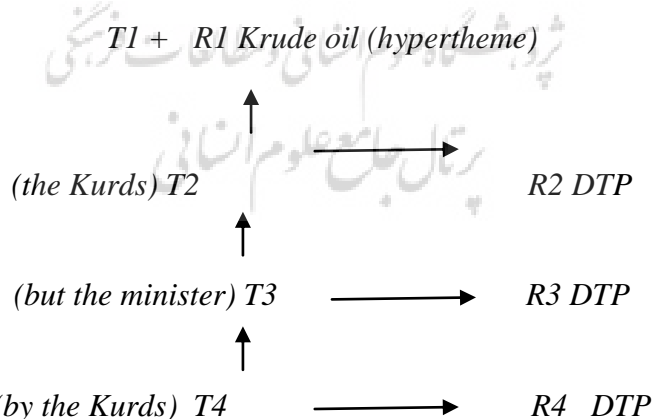
<b>Coda section</b> Moral stage	“There are no confirmed reports of the volume of crude oil the Kurds are shipping to Turkey, but the minister said the government would not tolerate any action by the Kurds to export their oil to neighboring states.”
------------------------------------	--

As indicated above, table 10 shows an example of derived themes progression in the moral stage. In order to explore the occurrences of thematic progression in the moral stage, it is essential to analyze first each clause into theme and rheme as illustrated in table 10 below:

**Table 10.** Theme and rheme in derived theme progression in moral stage

<b>Moral stage</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Rheme</b>
	“There <b>T1</b>	are no confirmed reports of the volume of Krude oil <b>R1</b>
	the Kurds <b>T2</b>	are shipping to Turkey, <b>R2</b>
	but the minister said the government <b>T3</b>	would not tolerate any action <b>R3</b>
	by the Kurds <b>T4</b>	to export their oil to neighboring states” <b>R4</b>

Table 10 categorizes the example above into theme and rheme in order to identify thematic progression. The theme is the main part of the clause, while the rheme is at remaining part of the clause. Figure 6 below shows the derived themes progression in themoral stage:



**Figure 6.** Derived themes progression in moral stage

Figure 6 shows the derived themes Progression in the moral stage. The article in this stage starts with the hypertheme in T1 “*Krude oil*”, then with all the subsequent clauses related to hypertheme of ‘*Krude oil*’, but in T2 “*the Kurds*” relates to hypertheme in the T1. T3 (“*but the*



*minister said the government*”) also relates to the general theme about Krude oil, and T4 (“*by the Kurds*”) relates to the same hypertheme.

The Arabic news written in English focus thematically on different elements and different aspects of presenting their opinions. The organization and selection of themes and rhemes, the focus on information at the local and global levels of opinion articles, are indications of the media’s exercise of power and the use of persuasive techniques to influence the readers’ opinion.

Lastly, the analysis of thematic patterns shows that in Azzaman opinion articles’ thematic progression, the simple linear theme progression and constant theme progression are the two types of thematic progression that are frequently used by writers. This means that the opinion articles have something in common as far as the thematic structure is concerned. Moreover, the 12 articles analyzed follow almost similar patterns. Also, there are similarities in the least occurring patterns in intermediate section solution stage where the article tries to provide suitable solution for the events, issues or situations.

### Conclusion

Thematic progression within rhetorical structure is an effective way and valuable technique in writing opinion articles. The results of this study suggest that theme and rheme patterning can be effectively applied in writing opinion articles. Theme and rheme enhance the link between ideas in the text. Moreover, they are important in guiding the reader through the logical paths constructed by the article, improving text coherence. Also, writers will know where they are losing their effectiveness in their arguments due to problems with either thematic progression or rhetorical structure move, or both.

The study concludes that simple linear progression and constant theme progression are extensively used in different rhetorical structure sections in the selected data because these two patterns are easiest to use by writers working on second or foreign language. Within the clauses in every text, these themes relate to one another mainly through thematic progression: simple linear progression and constant theme progression, so these two patterns are preferred more by Iraqi opinion writers of Azzaman. Although derived theme progression is also seen in the texts, it is not as prominent as the former two patterns, probably due to difficulties for using this pattern. Finally, the consistent and notable non-split rheme progression can be identified in some texts. Previous studies, as well as this study, have shown that second and foreign language writers avoid the use of this pattern because of its complexity for both writers and readers. A last point is that three patterns out of four patterns of thematic progression are distributed in the analyzed texts, in combinations of two and three in one text, but their frequencies differ. In fact, simple linear progression and constant theme progression ranked at higher frequencies in opinion articles, as observed in the current study.

### References

- Bloor, T. & Bloor M. (2004). *The Functional Analysis of English*. London: Hodder Arnold.
- Bloor, T. B. (2013). *The Functional Analysis Of English*. London: Hodder Arnold.
- Daneš, F. (1974) “Functional Sentence Perspective And The Organisation Of The Text”. In F. Daneš (Ed.) *Papers On Functional Sentence Perspective*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Dumanig, F. et al. 2009. *Topical Structure Analysis of American and Filipino Editorials*.
- Dumanig F.P. (2012). *Thematic Progrssion Of Malaysian And Phlippine English Editorials:Acontrastive Analysis*. *Quarterly Journal* 3 (3) .

Halliday, M. A. K. (2004). *An Introduction To Functional Grammar*. Third Edition. London: Arnold.

Hatim, B. (1989) .Text Linguistics In The Didactics Of Translation: The Case Of The Verbal And Nominal Clause Types In Arabic. *Iral*, 27 (2), 137-144.

Hatim, B. And Mason, I. (1997) *The Translator As Communicator*. London: Routledge.

Hyland, K. and Tse, P. (2004) 'Metadiscourse in Academic Writing: A Reappraisal', *AppliedLinguistics* 25(2): 156–77.

Kaplan, R. 1987. *Cultural Thought Patterns Revisited*. In Ulla Connor And Robert Kaplan (Eds.). *Writing Across Languages: Analysis Of L2 Text*. Reading, Masachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co.

Katajamaki, H. & Koskela, M. 2006. *The Rhetorical Structure Of Editorials In English, Swedish And Finnish Business Newspapers*. *Teoksessa Proceedings Of The 5th International Aelfe Conference. Actas Del V Congreso International Aelfe.Prensas Universitarias De Zaragoza*.215–219.

Katajamaki, K. A. (2007). *The Rhetorical Structure Of Editorials In English, Swedish and Finnish Business*. *Teoksessa Proceedings Of The 5th International Aelfe Conference,University Of Vaasa*.

Krisnawati, E. (2013). *Applying Theme And Rheme In Indonesian Efl Students' Writing: An Attempt To Improve Cohesion And Coherence*. *The International Journal Of Language Learning And Applied Linguistics World (Ijllalw)*.

Lecki, I., 1991. *Twenty-five years of contrastive rhetoric: Text analysis and writing pedagogies*. *Tesol Quarterly*, 25(1): 123-143.

Mann & Thompson (1988) Mann, William C. and Thompson. Sandra A. *Rhetorical Structure Theory: Toward a Functional Theory of Text Organization*.Text 8. (3).1988. 213-281.

Mann, W.C., Matthiessen, C.M.I.M. and Thompson, S.A. (2006) *Rhetorical StructureTheory and Text Analysis'*, in W.C. Mann and S.A. Thompson (eds) *Discourse Description: Diverse Linguistic Analyses of a Fund-Raising Text*.

Martin, J. R. (1992). *English text system and structure*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Moore, R. (1971). *Effective writing* (4th ed). New York: Holt,Rinehart& Winston, Inc.

Rusdi, N. (2009). *Thematic Progression As A Means To Keep Cohesion In Exposition Text*. <http://rusdinoor.wordpress.com/2009/12/12/thematic-progression-as-a-means-to-keep-cohesion-in-exposition-text/>

Rustipa, K. (2010). *Theme-Rheme Organization Of Learners' Texts*. *Dinamika Bahasa Dan Ilmu Budaya*, Vo 2 L.4 .

Sopyan, T. (2011). *Thematic Progression In Indonesia Travel*. *Jurnal Ilmu Sastra* Vol. 6 No.1 Mei 2011 Hal 100 - 129 .

Thompson, J. B. (2006) *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*.Cambridge: Polity Press.

Valero-Garcés, C. (1996). *Contrastive Esp Rhetoric: Metatext In Spanish-English Economics Texts*. *English For Specific Purposes*.

Van Dijk, T. A. (1988b). *News Analysis: Case Studies of International and National News in the Press*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Wang, L. (2007). *Theme And Rheme In The Thematic Organization Of Text: Implications For Teaching Academic Writing*. *Asian Efl Journal*, Volume 9, Number 1.