

Saudi Students' Argumentative Essays from the Perspective of Theme-Rheme: An Analysis of the Misuse of Theme and Rheme

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Abstract

In this paper, I intended to analyze 14 Saudi students' argumentative essays using the Theme-Rheme system. The system of Theme-Rheme is considered useful and has been utilized in analyzing students' problems in L2 writing in many studies (Krisnawati, 2013; Wang, 2007; Setiawati, Hapsari, and Priyatmojo, 2017). This paper using the system of Theme-Rheme unravelled many problems Saudi students committed in their writing due to their misuse of the Theme and Rheme. Those problems were as follow: the problem of brand-new Theme, the problem of empty Theme, the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme and the problem of empty Rheme. However, not only are those problems, but also the researcher claims that the analysis revealed problems that were not found in other studies, to the best knowledge of the researcher; these problems were termed as follow: the problem of incomplete Theme due to either thematic equative or the misuse of nominalization, the problem of empty exemplificative device, the problem of double Theme and the problem of arranging Rheme. The analysis did not locate any problems in terms of constant thematic pattern and in terms of the problem of double Rheme. All the problems were found in the students' essays have been illustrated along with discussions.

Keywords: Analysis, Argumentative essays, Problems of Theme and Rheme

INTRODUCTION

The problem of L2 writing for EFL Saudi students has been discussed in many studies (e.g.; Ibnian, 2017; Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016). However, even though there have been many studies examined the problem of students' writings from the perspective of Theme-Rheme (e.g., Yan, 2015; Fang & Li, 2015; Jingxiz & Li, 2015; Linda & Andhika, 2014), there were few studies in which Saudi students' problems were investigated (e.g.; Alyousef, 2019; Alyousef, 2015). The current study aims to add to the previous literature in terms of the application of Theme-Rheme in the Saudi context.

Since students are still being taught writing skill using the traditional methods, which looks at only the level of sentence structure in terms of word and grammar other than the level of discourse (Jingxiz & Li, 2015), they still, at least in the KSA, struggle in writing and face many difficulties to write even a paragraph.

In this research paper, I aim to analyze 14 Saudi engineering students' argumentative writings for looking at whether the students could develop their writing cohesively or failed at their writing development. Applying the system of Theme-Rheme will enable the researcher in terms of tracking closely the way the students developed their essays. In other words, looking closely at the problems of the misuse of Theme and Rheme, which the students committed in their essays, may result in a proposal for the English curriculum designers in Saudi Arabia, when it comes to teaching writing skills for students at the level of the university.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of Theme-Rheme in L2 writing

Theme-Rheme has been investigated in many studies (Krisnawati, 2013; Wang, 2007; Setiawati, Hapsari, & Priyatmojo, 2017; Fang & Li, 2015; Jingxiz & Li, 2015; Linda & Andhika, 2014; Yan, 2015; Ren, Cao, Gao & Li, 2009). Krisnawati (2013) analyzed texts produced by two groups of Indonesian university students; each group consists of 10 students. The notion of Theme and Rheme was introduced to the students and then they were asked to write an essay. The researcher came up with that 14 out of 20 of the students could produce more coherent introductions cohesively. Also, Wang (2007) conducted a study in which she analyzed a text written by a student in the field of politics. The analysis focused on three problems resulted from three types of misuse of Theme and Rheme; these were: the problem of the brand new Theme, the problem of the double Rheme, and the problem of empty Rheme. The analysis also includes thematic progression; the researcher found that Theme and Rheme can be of benefits to the students so that they can learn it and perform it in their writings.

Setiawati, Hapsari, and Priyatmojo (2017) examined analytical exposition texts and found that the students excessively used reiteration pattern to develop their texts since this pattern of thematic progression is the easiest type. They did not employ different methods of thematic progression. This might be because they were not familiar with the notion of thematic development. Moreover, Fang and Li (2015) looked closely at the significance of thematic structure in terms of its role in organizing both structures and cohesion and coherence in writing. They stated that "the Theme-Rheme theory" and "thematic progression" play an essential role in building a coherent and cohesive passage. Furthermore, Ren, Cao, Gao, and Li (2009) explored the possibility of applying thematic progression and construction methods in teaching writing at the level of the university. The researchers applied that method in their teaching. They suggest that teaching writing based Theme-Rheme might be of help in terms of developing their ideas logically and coherently. Moreover, Yan (2015) carried out a study to testify about the role of Theme-Rheme in developing non-English majors' writing competence. The researcher divided the participants in the study into two groups; controlled group and experimental one. The controlled group consists of 49 students, whereas the experimental group consists of 51 students. The controlled group was taught writing using the traditional method, while the experimental group was taught using the notion of thematic development. The researcher came up with that students in the

experimental group accomplished much more progress than students in the controlled group. This result proves that teaching writing based on the system of Theme-Rheme has a positive impact on the development of learners' writing.

Another study in which the researcher collected their data using different tool is a paper which was carried out by Linda and Andhika in (2014); the researchers reviewed 20 compositions written by 20 EFL learners along with interviews and class observation, and found that students encountered problems represented in an overuse of constant pattern because of which the development of their ideas was affected, for they did not go deeply in developing the given information, which is in the Rheme position. However, this result, according to the researchers, shows that Theme-Rheme plays an essential role in helping students to develop their writings.

It can be put in this way, creating a coherent and cohesive writing without exposing students to the notion of Theme and Rheme is unachievable. Jingxiz and Li (2015) tested the validity of Theme theory application in teaching writing and found that teaching writing based on Theme theory is of help in terms of looking at composition from the perspective of text organization rather than "the narrow scope of syntax" (ibid, 126). This emphasizes that students need to be taught writing by paying more attention to both the Micro and Macro- level of text.

Problems of Theme-Rheme in L2 students' writing

The problem of Theme-Rheme has been investigated in many studies (e.g.; Jalilifar and Alipour, 2017; Al-Bazzaz and Alshajlawi, 2018; Belmonte and McCabe-Hidalgo, 1998; Ahmad, Abdalla and Hamdan, 2015). Jalilifar, Alipour and Rabiee (2017) examined the organization of Theme and its development in 67 of argumentative writings along with 60 introduction sections that were taken from three journals, and found that there was an important difference in both the introduction sections and the compositions written by the students in terms of the structure of Theme; this, in its turn, refers back to the lack not only in the unity and cohesiveness in the MA students' essays but also the lack of explicit exposure to the thematic patterns.

Belmonte and McCabe-Hidalgo (1998) carried out a study to prove the importance of Theme-Rheme in L2 writing instruction. The researcher examined 25 compositions written by Spanish students learning English as a second language and uncovered many problems related to cohesion and coherence in the participants' written compositions. By this, the researcher states:

"Teachers of writing need to look beyond the traditional grammar of the clause when evaluating student writing, and to make room for looking at patterns at the level of discourse"(ibid, p. 26).

Errors of the misuse of Theme and Rheme in L2 students' writing

Risdaneva and Dahliana (2019) examined thematic development in 40 texts produced by EFL learners in Aceh, in Indonesia, and their study resulted in that the students were not able to develop their ideas thematically. Students committed the problem of brand new themes, and on some occasions they committed mistakes because of the problem of

the empty rhemes. Moreover, Kuswoyo and Susardi (2017) investigated the problems of thematic development in 20 compositions. The research revealed six problems of thematic development: the problem of brand new Theme, the problem of double Rheme, the problem of empty Rheme, the problem of empty Theme, the problem of overuse of reiteration pattern and the problem of mystifying selection of textual Theme. Along with what has been previously stated, Arunsirot (2013) examined Thai EFL learners' problems in writing and found that there are five problems students committed. These were: the problem of empty Theme, the problem of brand new Theme, the problem of overuse of constant progression, the problem of empty Rheme and the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme.

The system of Theme-Rheme in SFL

According to Halliday "thematic structure gives the clause its character as a message" (2004, p. 64). Theme is the component that functions as the departing point of the message; whereas Rheme is where the Theme is developed (ibid).

According to Bloor and Bloor (as cited in Wang, 2007), there are three issues that resulted from the misuse of Theme and Rheme. These are: the problem of brand new Theme, the problem of double Rheme and the problem of empty Rheme. In addition to these problems, Arunsirot in Kuswoyo and Susardi (2017) added three issues. These are: the problem of empty Theme, the problem of overuse of constant progression, and the problem of confusing selection of textual Themes. All the issues of the misuse of Theme and Rheme are defined and exemplified in the section of results and discussion. As this study focuses on the problems of Theme and Rheme in terms of the misuse of them, the researcher will limit its analysis of the students' essays to those problems.

STUDY DESIGN

Research questions

This research paper in which the researcher intends to investigate 14 Saudi students' argumentative essays is based on the following main question:

- What are the problems of the misuse of Theme and Rheme in the Saudi students' essays?

This question is divided into 6 mini-questions. They are as follow:

- Did students commit the problem of brand new Theme?
- Did students commit the problem of double Rheme?
- Did students commit the problem of empty Rheme?
- Did students commit the problem of empty Theme?
- Did students commit the problem of overuse of constant thematic pattern?
- Did students commit the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme?

Data collection

Data for this study was taken from 14 Saudi engineering students. The students produced essays which were a requirement for a course entitled "Writing Skills". They were required to write an argumentative essay no less than 200-250 words. The

obtained data was analyzed qualitatively to delve into the issues of the misuse of Theme and Rheme.

Method of analysis

This current study is limited to six misuses of the Theme and Rheme. Three of these problems were identified by Bloor & Bloor (1992 cited in Wang, 2007). These were: the problem of the brand new Theme, the problem of the double Rheme, and the problem of empty Rheme; also, Arunsirot in Kuswoyo and Susardi (2017) added three issues. These were: the problem of empty Theme, the problem of overuse of constant thematic progression, and the problem of confusing selection of textual Themes. Not only were these problems but also the researcher claims that there were problems that were not found in other studies. This is to the best knowledge of the researcher. These problems were termed as follows: the problem of incomplete Theme due to either thematic equative or the misuse of nominalization, the problem of empty exemplificative device, the problem of double Theme, and the problem of arranging Rheme.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analyzing student A's essay revealed that student committed three errors. These were: the problem of brand new Theme, the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme and the third problem, even though it was not within the research questions, the problem of double Theme was found in the student's essay; this occurs when there are two Themes in the same clause with one is not further developed. All these problems respectively are exemplified below along with discussion.

1. *Education No one differs in its importance, but the way it is. Some students believe that learning in the classroom is more effective than online learning*

Extract from student's introduction

As the instance shows, the student committed the problem of brand new Theme because of putting new information in the Theme position with no link to the previously mentioned Theme or Rheme. In other words, the second underlined clause is not related to either the Theme or Rheme in the previous clause. This refers to the fact that Saudi students face difficulty in writing an introduction in which they start by general statement and then narrow their topic towards the thesis statement. This problem can be overcome by exposing students to the notion of Theme-Rheme to keep in mind when writing.

2. *The difficulty of solving these problems is that they are not expected as traffic accidents or complicated in the solution such as the place of residence of the student. And also the problem of repetition the student goes to the same place daily, which brings a sense of boredom, and this affects the student's ability to understand.*

Extract from student's 1st body paragraph

Second above example shows that the student had a problem, the researcher suggests that this problem is the problem of double Theme. The underlined clause shows that the student began his second clause with two additive conjunctions followed by two

Themes *the problem of repetition* [and] *the student*. This should have been written, for example, like this: *the problem of repetition that the student goes to* . However, committing such a mistake refers to the fact that Saudi students have no exposure to the function of the relative pronoun *that* as a modifier to the phrase *the problem of repetition*. Also, the Saudi students were not exposed to the notion of Theme-Rheme yet. Furthermore, the underlined additive conjunctions *and also* exemplify the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme; they should have been replaced by a paired conjunction *not only ... but also* to avoid falling into another problem, which is here is the problem of brand new Theme.

Analyzing student B's essay uncovered four problems. These were: the problem of brand new Theme, the problem of empty Theme, the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme, and the problem of empty exemplificative device, although the fourth problem is not included in the research questions, the researcher found it in student B's essay. It is noticed that the student committed the problem of brand new Theme on five occasions. Below are two examples illustrating that the problem of brand new Theme.

1. *Online courses are becoming more and more popular. The ability to relax at home and use our own personal computers is taking more and more students out of classrooms and putting them online.*

Extract from the student's introduction

2. *They will have to work in groups with all kinds of people with many differing viewpoints. Online courses require none of that. Businesses often tell university faculty that they wish graduating students had more interpersonal skills.*

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

The above two examples indicate that the second clause of each example is not related to the previous Theme or Rheme. This resulted in the problem of brand new Theme, which causes difficulty in reading some parts of the student's essay. Not only is this problem but also the analysis revealed the problem of empty Theme, for example:

3. *When in a classroom, students may be required to speak their mind.*

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

The space after the word *when* shows where the problem of empty Theme occurred. The clause should have been written, for example, in this way *when students are in a classroom, they may be required to speak their mind.*

Also, the student B's text includes the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme; an example is given below:

4. *Online courses usually require no face to face interaction with classmates and lecturers. However, this takes away from the interpersonal skills that students need to acquire along with their education.*

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

The underlined word *however* is the cause of confusing selection of textual Theme. It is supposed to use the textual Theme, for example, *consequently* since the second clause expresses a result, not a contrast.

It has been found in the student's essay the problem of an empty exemplificative device, which occurs due to the missing conjunctive adjunct *for example/ for instance*. This problem led to information that may seem as an irrelevant one. An example is provided to illustrate this problem:

5. *Students may not realize it while enrolled in a difficult course, but they will better appreciate the education they receive in college if they are required to put in more effort in obtaining it. A child does not learn how to spell by looking up words in a dictionary, he memorizes the words using flashcards or something similar.*

Extract from the student's 2nd body paragraph

In the space above, it should have been used an exemplificative device such as *for example/ for instance* to avoid putting information seem to be irrelevant to the previous clause.

Analysis of student C's essay located four problems: the problem of brand new Theme, the problem of empty Rheme, the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme, and the problem of thematic equative, although the fourth problem was not stated in the research questions, the analysis revealed it. An example for each problem is provided followed by discussions.

1. *Overall, online education lowers the quality of instruction to students. Secondly, online education eliminates personal interaction. Due to lack of personal interaction students find it difficult to ask questions. We must also find a solution to students cheating in Internet tests before we talk about the number of students engaged in distance learning.*

Extract from the student's conclusion

As the instance shows, in the first clause that is underlined, there is a problem of empty Rheme; the Rheme [*online education*] *lowers the quality of instruction to students* is not further clarified. In other words, how online education does lower the quality of instruction to students? Not only is this but also in the second clause that is underlined too, there is another empty Rheme. The Rheme [*online education*] *eliminates personal interaction* is also not developed in terms of how online education eliminates personal interaction. Moreover, in clause 3, there is a problem with brand new Theme because the Theme is not related to the previous Theme or Rheme.

2. *Online learning is where courses are taken online, but the teacher and students interact or communicate online.*

Extract from the student's introduction

3. *According to the National Center for Education the number of students engaged in distance learning annually.....*

Extract from the student's 2nd body paragraph

The aforementioned instances clarify two problems were committed by the student. These are discussed respectively. The first example shows the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme, which is *but*; this causes a mystification in understanding the clause due to the use of adversative conjunction. The second example illustrates the problem of thematic equative, which is *the number of students engaged in distance learning annually ...* This problem led to an incomplete Theme/Rheme since the student has not been exposed to thematic equative, which is according to Halliday (1967/8) as cited in Halliday and Martin (2004 /69) “thematic equative sets up the Theme + Rheme structure in the form of an equation, where Theme = Rheme”.

Analyzing student D's essay uncovered the following problems: the problem of brand new Theme, the problem of empty Rheme and the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme. Examples of these problems are given respectively and followed by clarifications for each problem.

1. *Technology makes a great improvement on education, now the online classroom has similar benefits as the normal classroom.*

Extract from the student's introduction

2. *Since we have been having online learning instead of classroom learning due to the corona virus, students have been expressing their opinions.*

Extract from the student's introduction

3. *Having to choose between online learning or classroom learning and decide which is better is difficult, because of the differences between students' preferences.*

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

The three taken examples from student D's essay illustrate that in the first example, there was a problem called brand new Theme due to the unrelated relationship between the clauses. In the first one starting with the Theme *technology* and ending the clause with the Rheme *makes a great improvement on education* is a must to be elaborated in the second clause through a type of thematic progression to avoid such a problem. Also, the second example indicates a problem called empty Rheme due to leaving the Rheme with no elaboration. *[students] have been expressing their opinions*; what opinions the students express were not stated or further developed. This problem can be avoided, for example, by stating that “since we have been having online learning instead of classroom learning due to the corona virus, students have different opinions about the online learning”. The third example shows the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme, which occurred on two occasions at one clause; the employment of the coordinating conjunction *or* should have been replaced by the additive conjunction *and*. Moreover, the use of the cause signal word *because of* should not have been preceded by a comma. However, the student might not be able to distinguish between the cause signal words *because of* and *for* in terms of the use of a comma; *for* must be preceded by a comma when used as a cause signal word.

An analysis of student E's essay revealed that the student's essay included one problem; the problem of brand new Theme. It is observed that the student committed the problem of brand new Theme on five occasions. Two examples below illustrate the problem.

1. *Nowadays you can learn from any place from school, university, or at home. Many students believe that classroom learning is more effective than online learning.*

Extract from the student's introduction

2. *Most students prefer classroom learning because they love the interactions in the classroom. Those students prefer classroom learning because they can directly share their views and clarify their own queries with the teacher, thus getting their questions answered right away. In online learning, you can ask your teacher any time you want,*

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

Looking at the second clause of the first example reveals that there is no relation between the two clauses. In the first example, the second clause does not refer to either the Theme or the Rheme of the previous clause. Also, in the second example, the first three clauses share the same Theme/ Rheme; whereas the last clause is an ill one; it resulted in an unlinked clause to the previous Theme/ Rheme. This problem led to a problem that led to a contradiction in the student's body paragraph.

After analyzing student F's essay, it was found that the student had two problems; the problem of brand new Theme that was occurred on three occasions, and the problem of empty Rheme that was occurred on two occasions. Two examples of each problem are given along with discussion respectively.

1. *With no internet connection you will not be able to access the online materials. In addition, online learning supporters emphasis on how instead of going to school or university to attend the classes in person, they can take the classes at the comfort of their homes. This is a big disadvantage on the long run, with no social interactions this will take the opportunity of forming social networks from them away.*

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

The above example illustrates the problem of brand new Theme, which can be avoided in the first clause by a thematic progression and in the last clause by using a contrast signal word or phrase such as *however/ on the other hand*. The problem occurred in one paragraph twice. Not only is this problem, but also the analysis revealed the problem of empty Rheme which took place on two occasions in the same paragraph. For examples:

2. *Students and teachers who prefer online classes say it gives them flexible schedules, ability to study at home and **less pressure to students**.*

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

In this example, it can be seen that there are three Rhemes; the only one was developed in the end of the student's paragraph is underlined and in bold; whereas the two underlined ones were not further developed. Instead of developing them, the student as

it was previously aforementioned fell in the problem of empty Rheme. In other words, for instance, do online classes give flexible schedules in terms of time or course requirements? Also, the phrase *ability to study at home* is a kind of superfluous Rheme.

Analyzing student G's essay unravelled that the student committed four problems: the problem of brand new Theme occurred on four occasions, the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme took place on one occasion, the problem of double Theme was located on three occasions and the problem of arranging Rheme was found on one occasion, even though the two last problems were not within the research questions, they were found in the student's essay. All the problems are exemplified and discussed below.

1. *Learning is an important and essential thing in our life. A person must not be wasting time and underestimated the learning because it is the only way to succeed in life. Nowadays there are two ways to learn in our community, online learning classes and classroom learning. **classroom in schools and universities is considered by some to be a waste of time if you can attend the lecture while you are at home.***

Extract from the student's introduction

From the above-mentioned example, it can be seen that the student fell into the problem of brand new Theme on two occasions in his introduction. Not only was this, but the student committed a problem, I labelled it, the problem of arranging Rheme. The problem of arranging Rheme occurs, as it is highlighted in bold, when there are two Rhemes in a sentence and instead of starting with the first one to develop it further, the student writer started with the second one; this made reading his introduction unreadable easily.

2. *Advantage of saving time in online classes when you can attend the class while you are in home any time it has the same results. However, the research is inconclusive. In spite of the fact that research shows the students that attend the classes they understand the lesson faster and better than the online classes Because when you are in class there is nothing distracting you.*

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

3. *The classroom learning (it) is smoother and easier to communicate with the teacher and students.*

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

The second instance above shows that the student committed the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme; while the third example indicates that the student fell in the problem of double Theme that is the use of two Themes at the same time.

This example is full of errors in structures; however, the current paper focuses on the problems of the misuse of Theme and Rheme. The problem of confusing selection of textual Theme, which is *in spite of the fact that*, should have been followed by a contrasting clause. The third example shows that the student committed the problem of

double Theme, which is due to the use of two Themes in the same clause; it is underlined.

Student H's essay analysis unravelled that the student had five problems of Theme-Rheme. These were: the problem of brand Theme that occurred on three occasions, the problem of empty Rheme was on one occasion, the problem of empty Theme was on one occasion, the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme was on one occasion and the problem of double Theme was one occasion. Instances are provided and explained.

1. *For example, in classrooms teachers have responsibilities to education and train students in certain skill. And for that they do work and use their creativity according to student's responsibilities. But in online classes the hard work and the educational product in which teachers are unable to find out the mindset of students.*

Extract from the student's 2nd body paragraph

This example indicates that two problems of brand new Themes were committed; they are underlined; and also a problem of empty Rheme was committed as it is highlighted in bold; in this problem, the student did not further clarify what the student's responsibilities are so that the Rheme is left with no development. Also, the student started his body paragraph using the phrase *for example*, and as it is known that this phrase is used to introduce something within the paragraph to initiate a supportive sentence for what has been previously mentioned. However, the student started his second body paragraph by that phrase. Clause cannot be initiated with a textual Theme unless the textual Theme is used for introducing an exemplificative sentence within the body paragraph.

2. *First, classrooms learning by following a routine. help to build a strong learning foundation (passion for excellence) in the mind of a students that stay along their live. Classrooms learning keep continue no matter you are in the mood of learning and not.*

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

The instance above shows many problems, yet the focus is on the problem of Theme-Rheme. It is evident that the student-writer committed the problem of empty Theme. The given space indicates where the problem took place. Furthermore, the examples illustrates the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme; it is in the use of *and* where it should have been used the conjunctive adjunct *or* since the sentence clarifies a kind of contrast not an addition. In addition to the previous problems, the student had the problem of double Theme, for example:

3. *The teachers in traditional classes they are work hard to make students understand but in online classes they cannot understand what the students want.*

Extract from the student's conclusion

Here in the above instance, the student used the noun *the teachers* and used the pronoun *they* because of which the problem took place; nevertheless, this may be

because the noun that is followed by the prepositional phrase *in traditional classes* led to such problematic.

Student I's essay analysis located five problems of brand new Theme. There were no problems of other misuses of the Theme and Rheme. Instances and discussions are given below.

1. *In this world that has become rich in technology, we have become able to dispense with classrooms by offering Internet services and anyone can learn via the Internet. The effectiveness of learning on physical classes is a point of contention.*

Extract from the student's introduction

2. *The main reason why e-learning competitors are so effective is because of their ease of access and convenience. The number of courses and certificates is only one click away from the reach of students, thus helping them study in their own place and at a comfortable pace.*

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

Both examples above show the problem of brand new Theme; looking at the second clause of each example, which are underlined, clarifies that the clauses are not related to the Theme or Rheme of the previous ones. This problem can be handled if the student used a textual Theme such as *however* to connect the second clause to the first one; whereas in the second example, the problem can be avoided by a means of a textual Theme such as *in other words*. However, since the student is not yet exposed to the Theme-Rheme system, such problems were expected to be found.

Analyzing student J's essay revealed that the student committed the problem of brand new Theme on seven occasions, the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme was unravelled on three occasions, the problem of empty Rheme was found on one occasion and the problem of an incomplete Theme was found on two occasions. Examples are provided below followed by discussions.

1. *For several years, learning in the classroom was the accreditation for education After students experimented with online learning, there were some advantages and disadvantages.*

Extract from the student's introduction

2. *As I mentioned the advantages, I have to mention some disadvantages. The first thing is the need for an infrastructure, in terms of availability of computers, high speed internet connection, and the cost of its application is very high. In addition to weakening the students' motivation to learn, due to spending a lot of time in front of the computer screen and websites.*

Extract from the student's 2nd body paragraph

3. *E-learning as well as flexibility, especially **since** there are no links to the subject of time, so people can learn at any time they want according to the time appropriate for them.*

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

4. So, it is friendly to the environment, because it does not need to use papers, pens, and other materials that may be made to the environment when disposed of.

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

5. Also, enhancing students 'sense of responsibility. And improving students' independent intellectual skills.

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

6. In conclusion, classroom learning and online learning can have many advantages and disadvantages. For me, I agree that online learning is more effective than classroom learning.

Extract from the student's conclusion

It can be seen in the above-mentioned examples that the student committed many mistakes due to the misuse of the Theme and the Rheme. The first two examples indicate the problem brand new Theme; both underlined examples unravel that the student's writing as if it were an arrangement of clauses with no connection to the previous clause (s). Also, examples (3 and 4) show the problem of using a textual Theme where it should not have been used because the writer student starting his clause using the signal reason word *since* which should have been followed by an independent clause with no signal word; however, the student utilized the word *so* which signals an effect in where was supposed not to use. This use led to difficulty and ambiguity in his intended message, and an example (4) the problem is due to the use of the reason signal word *because* preceded by a comma. Furthermore, example (5) unravels the problem of incomplete Theme that results from the misuse of nominalization. However, the student was not exposed to the system of Theme-Rheme and the use of nominalization. Moreover, example (6) shows the problem empty Rheme, which is due to leaving a Rheme with no further explanation/ development. This also refers to the fact that Saudi students struggle in writing a conclusion for their essays, but overcoming that problem can be by a means of Theme-Rheme exposure.

Student K's essay analysis located that the student fell in the problem of brand new Theme on four occasions and the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme on one occasion. Examples are below:

1. For many years, traditional classroom learning was playing the key role of education. After students have tried online learning, there was some different opinions about the more effective way of learning. Some students including me agree that traditional classroom learning is more effective than online learning.

Extract from the student's introduction

2. Students are less likely to get distracted by their friends in the classroom. Therefore, they would be more concentrated and focused during the lecture in online courses.

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

As the first example unravels, the second clause is not related to either the Theme or Rheme of the first clause. Also, the third underlined clause is not related to the previous one in any way; hence the introduction looks like an arrangement of sentences with no link within them. The second example exemplifies the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme because of which the second clause was unconnected properly to the previous because of the use of the effect signal word *therefore* instead using an adversative conjunction such as *however*.

Analyzing student L's essay unravelled two problems: the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme that was on two occasions and the problem of empty Theme that was on one occasion. Examples are given:

1. *In first place, the online learning can enable students with disabilities to learn while they are comfortable. In another hand, some students have jobs to earn money and in the same time, they can attend classes across devices at their workplace.*

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

2. *In conclusion, in this essay, I just mentioned the positive things without touching on negative things, so that do not mean the online learning does not had any negative thing, but it is more useful than classroom learning.*

Extract from the student's conclusion

The employment, as it is shown in the above instance, of the phrase *in another hand* was not appropriate since the second clause should have been linked to the previous one using an additive word or phrase such as *also/ in addition* to create cohesion. Not only is this problem, but also as the second example unravels, the problem of empty Theme. This problem occurred because the clause has no topical Theme.

Student M' essay analysis came up with three problems. These were: the problem of brand new Theme, the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme and the problem of double Theme. The problem of brand new Theme took place on eleven occasions; five of those problems were found along with the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme. Examples along with discussions are given below:

1. *Science is what build countries **and** ignorance do the opposite. Every country try to level up their education system. Nowadays, there are more than one way to teach students. Classroom and online method is a common ways to teach at parents. Some people think it is better to going with the old way, face to face method. **Also**, classroom learning is the official in many countries. **But**, there are some people go through online because they think it is more effective.*

Extract from the student's introduction

2. ***Low costs** it is a reasonable cause too. Since not everyone can hold high debts of education, online is a good choice.*

Extract from the student's 1st body paragraph

The above examples show many misuses of the Theme/ Rheme. Student's essay was considered the worst essay since many problems as stated above. Looking at the first example shows that the six underlined clauses indicate that all the six clauses were not related to each other in terms of Theme-Rheme. It looks like arranging sentences together with no cohesion and coherence. In addition to that, the textual Themes as highlighted in bold unravel the problems that resulted in an unlinked paragraph. This problem because of the use of the additive conjunction *and* which should have been replaced by a contrast signal word such as *whereas*, for science is not like ignorance; the use of textual Themes *also* and *but* led to ambiguous structures; this problem can be handled if the student utilized a concessive conjunction such as *although/ even though* to create a well-read sentence structure. Also, in the second example, the problem of double Theme is shown. The student utilized in the Theme position two topical Themes because of which the intended meaning was lost.

Analyzing student N's essay revealed that the student committed the problem of brand new Theme on one occasion. This student's essay was the best one compared to all his classmates' essays. Below is an example:

1. *In these days, all students try the second type of learning witch is the online learning. Yesterday I saw a conversation between the students.*

Extract from the student's introduction

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, all the 14 Saudi students misused the Theme and the Rheme with differences in the number of committing the abuses. Through the analysis, it has been revealed that the students failed in writing a coherent essay. All they had problems in developing their essays resulted from the problem of brand new Theme, the problem of empty Theme, the problem of confusing selection of textual Theme, and the problem of empty Rheme. Not only were these problems, but also the researcher unravelled four types of the misuses of the Theme and the Rheme, which were not mentioned in other studies, to the best knowledge of the researcher. These problems were termed as follows: the problem of incomplete Theme due to either thematic equative or the misuse of nominalization, the problem of empty exemplificative device, the problem of double Theme, and the problem of arranging Rheme. The analysis had not located any problems in terms of constant thematic pattern and double Rheme. All the previous committed problems were because Saudi students think that arranging sentences together is a good style of writing; they do not know when they should have started a new paragraph.

However, in the light of this research results, students will be exposed to those illustrated problems and also will be exposed to authentic texts to analyze and to practice analysis of thematic progression and analysis of the use of Theme and Rheme to identify the problems, themselves, to enhance their writing skills. Moreover, the

system of Theme-Rheme through which the current results have been unravelled might be a beginning step that the English curriculum designers in the KSA could benefit from.

The results revealed by the analysis found many problems in students' essays. Those problems were due to their lack of knowledge of the Theme-Rheme. In the Saudi context, writing is still being taught following the traditional method. However, this study attempts to direct the writing instructors to the notion of Theme-Rheme and its application in the L2 writing teaching.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In the light of the current study results, it can be safely ascertained that Saudi students need to be taught the system of Theme-Rheme explicitly using examples such as the ones in this study to raise their awareness to the importance of Theme-Rheme movement at the level of paragraph and the whole essay. In other words, creating a coherent text requires paying attention to the thematic patterns since they affect the organization of text (Alyousef, 2019). Also, the notion of Theme-Rheme can be of benefit and help in terms of shifting students' concentration from the level of sentence structure to the level of discourse/ text structure; thus, writing becomes a continuous tracking for the movement of Theme-Rheme within the Macro and Micro level of the discourse/ text.

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