

# Peripheral Themes in Applied Linguistics Articles

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## Abstract

There is considerable agreement among linguists that thematic analysis offers writers insights into manuscripts that may be rejected by international journals due to thematic organization problems. Whereas many comparative studies have provided valuable information about thematic progression (TP), the role of peripheral themes (PTs) has almost been neglected. Using the revised model of the TP proposed by McCabe (1999), this study incorporated a corpus of 32 experimental RAs, aiming to find out the possible similarities/differences in exploiting the PTs between the ELT RAs of local and international journals. Analysis revealed that different types of PTs were exploited in both samples, and their frequencies were fairly similar. These similarities were justified by the fact that the sample papers represented the shared genre. Results also suggested that PTs should not be considered as marginal themes, but as crucial ones that introduce, organize, and summarize topics.

**Keywords:** Thematic Progression (TP); Peripheral Theme (PT); ELT Journals

## 1. Introduction

*Theme*, as one of the important concepts of systemic functional grammar, plays a central role in our everyday communication. According to Halliday (1985), theme is an element which serves as the point of departure of the message and what the speaker/writer has in mind to start with. It is an element in a particular structural configuration that organizes the clause as a message (Halliday, 1985). The remainder of the message is called *rheme*. Therefore, a clause consists of a theme combined with a rheme, and the structure is expressed by order.

Theme/rheme organization is generally regarded as an indicator of coherence. Hutchins (1977) maintains that one of the important characteristics of all texts is that their sentences are linked by some kind of thematic progression (TP), by which he refers to the choice and ordering of information, their hierarchical structure, and their relationship to the hypertheme in discourse beyond the level of sentence. In other words, TP indicates how theme and rheme are linked to the material which comes next in the text (McCabe, 1999). But not all of the themes fit into the TP patterns. In fact, there are some kinds of themes which do not form progression. Dubois (1987) categorized them as uncoverable themes. Calling them

unmotivated, Ventola and Mauranen (1991) considered these themes as signs of bad writing. However, McCabe (1999) pointed out that although these themes do not form progressions, they are crucial to the organization of discourse. She labeled these themes as peripheral themes (PTs) and emphasized that “they are only labeled as peripheral here in that they are peripheral to the thematic progression patterns” (p. 180)

In EFL contexts (e.g., in Iran), the English research articles (RAs) written by many non-English-speaking Iranian researchers might be rejected when submitted to well-reputed international journals, hence not published. As Martinez (2003) argues, remarks like “The subject of the paper is interesting and up-to-date; however, the English used is poor and should be significantly improved along the text” are very common in the editors’ replies to papers submitted by these writers (p. 104). Martinez (2003) claims that the main reason for rejecting the research article (RA) may be that their writers do not have a deep knowledge of the language used in international journals. The writers need to know not only about the culture of the English language, but also how to use its grammar and lexis to construct texts appropriate for professional journals.

Theme is one of the textual choices that language producers make at clause level. It has a crucial role in the readability and satisfactory appearance of a text. As Belmonte and McCabe (1998) argue, writers may lose effectiveness in their arguments due to problems with thematic selections, TP, or both. So, as Borsinger (2003) argues, awareness of the way these organizations influence the readers can become powerful means for communicating results more effectively.

## **2. Literature Review**

The initial place has an enormous importance in clause and discourse. Theme influences the hearers’/readers’ interpretation and constitutes the initial textual context of everything that follows in the discourse (Brown & Yule, 1983). A number of studies have been carried out to investigate the theme/rheme structure in different languages and the relationship of rheme organization in the writings of the (non)native English writers and to find out the similarities/differences of thematic structures employed by (non)native writers of English.

Mauranen (1996) compared the texts written in English by English and Finnish authors as well as the texts written in Finnish by Finnish authors. She found that peripheral TPs were rare in the RAs of the native speakers/writers in either English or Finnish, but common in the RAs by the nonnative English-speaking Finns’ writings in English. She concluded that such TPs are characteristic of deviant, lower proficiency English. McCabe and Belmonte (2001) selected the texts written in both Spanish and English to explore TPs. The results showed that the same global

spatial strategy of thematization was chosen by the writers both in English and Spanish when dealing with place relations in the descriptive texts. Regarding the PTs, they concluded that these themes can be problematic for text processing. Martinez (2003) compared the thematic realization in the Method and Discussion sections of biology RAs, expecting that the difference between the Method and Discussion sections would manifest itself in different thematic structures. She argued that, in a specific genre, the linguistic choices will differ across the schematic stages of that genre. The results showed that those differences found in the two sections can be attributed to the different rhetorical purposes of the sections.

North (2005) used a systemic functional approach to analyze the essays written by students from different backgrounds. She concluded that the thematic choices in the students' essays reflected different conceptions of knowledge of academic writing which themselves contributed to success in course assessment. Considering that Hallidayan notion of theme associates with the English language, Zhou (2006) applied the theme construction to the Chinese language which shows grammatical dissimilarity with English. The results suggested that the modal themes, as one of the main features for the realization of interpersonal theme, were not prevalent across both corpora. Wang (2007) explored the relationship between theme/rheme organization and the cohesion of academic texts. She concluded that if teachers shows their students how to properly arrange the old and new information, they can manage the meaning in their writings and construct cohesive texts. Jalilifar (2009) investigated thematic development in English and translated Persian academic texts. The results showed, however, that the Persian texts contained significantly more linear patterns. Overall, linear links help orient the reader and make the text more cohesive, which explains why they are frequent in academic texts. Khalili (2011) explored the constituent rhetorical moves of article Introductions in 12 academic RAs with respect to thematic organization and TPs. The findings indicated that each move had characteristic patterns of thematic selection and the progression attributed to the global discourse topic and the communicative intention of these moves.

In recent years, theme/rheme organization has been studied and proved to be a very important cohesive element at discourse level. As North (2003) argues, theme is a device to organize meaning which operates at the local level, indicating how a writer has chosen to order information within the clause. It also structures the flow of information by shaping interpretation of the text. Whereas extensive research has been done on theme organization and TP, the role of PTs (i.e., themes that are peripheral to the TP patterns) has almost been neglected, as several of the studies cited above have analyzed (non)academic texts for thematic configurations, disregarding the role of PTs. The paucity of comparative studies in this area calls for

further research in scholarly texts, including journal RAs, from this perspective. The current research was an attempt to illustrate the possible thematic configurations in the writing of local and international writers regarding the employment of PTs, with the hope that awareness of the Iranian nonnative writers of English of thematic patterns would, indeed, lead to RAs that are more cohesive and so increase chances of publication in international journals. Accordingly, the research questions addressed in this study were as follows:

1. Which types of peripheral themes are used by RA writers of local and international ELT journals?
2. Is there any difference between the peripheral themes utilized in ELT RAs published in local and international journals?
3. What are the roles of peripheral themes in the two groups of ELT RAs?

### **3. Method**

#### ***3.1 Description of Journals***

The materials consisted of a corpus of 32 RAs: 16 from *ELT Journal* and 16 from *Roshd Journal*. A description of each group follows in turn. *ELT Journal* is an international, peer-reviewed journal published quarterly by Cambridge University Press for those involved in ESL/EFL. The journal provides a medium for discussion of principles and practices of teaching/learning the English language and is a forum for exchanging information among the community members in the field of teaching English. It generally accepts RAs that draw on experience with new methods, techniques, and materials to the teacher training.

*Roshd* is a local, peer-reviewed journal published quarterly by the Ministry of Education in Iran. It targets the English language teachers, students who major in teaching English, and all of those interested in teaching foreign languages. Its aim is to help local teachers share and benefit from each other's experiences. This journal usually accepts RAs in German, English, and Persian. It predominantly publishes the M.A. thesis-driven RAs by novice Iranian researchers. The RAs are expected to be up-to-date in content, helpful to teachers of English, and bridge the gap between research findings and classroom activities. Besides article publication, the journal publishes interviews with famous local applied linguists, education/higher education authorities, as well as language teachers.

The rationale for the selection of these two journals was their availability and easy access to the researcher. A further motivation for their selection was that *Roshd* and *ELT Journals* are already established scholarly journals which are widely accepted by EFL/ESL experts at local and international levels.

### ***3.2 Framework of the Study***

This research considered the revised model of Danes's (1974, as cited in McCabe, 1999) TP patterns proposed by McCabe (1999) as the selection of point of reference. Danes (1974, as cited in McCabe, 1999) identified four main patterns of TP:

1. Constant TP: The theme of one clause is derived from the theme of the previous clause.
2. Linear TP: The theme of one clause is derived from the rheme of the previous clause.
3. Derived hyper-TP: Particular themes in subsequent clauses are derived from a hypertheme or from the same overriding theme.
4. Split rhematic progression: The rheme of the first clause is split into two items, each in turn being taken as a theme element in subsequent clauses.

McCabe (1999) added a fifth classification to that of Danes as:

5. Split TP: The theme of the first clause is split into two or more ideas and these ideas are developed in the themes of subsequent clauses.

Adopting Danes's TP patterns, McCabe (1999) grouped these patterns into two overall types: (1) theme progression including constant theme and split theme, and (2) rheme progression including simple linear and split rheme. To increase the reliability of the analysis, tokens of the above patterns were identified and tallied in the datasets, but they were discarded as they fell outside the scope of the study. In the course of analysis, there were themes in the corpus which did not fit into the abovementioned patterns. Following McCabe (1999), these themes were labeled as PTs. This study drew particularly on the frequency, type, and function of the PTs as an aspect of a less charted territory in thematic study of texts. In this study, a number of such themes were identified, as explained below:

- Key themes: Sometimes, in a given context, it was difficult to decide whether a theme proceeded from a preceding theme or from a preceding rheme because it had been mentioned many times quite regularly. These repeated themes were called key themes.
- Summary theme: Summary themes were those which summarized a stretch of preceding text, that is, they did not proceed from just one previous theme or rheme.
- Previous theme: If a theme referred to an entire previous clause rather than only to previous theme or rheme, it was called previous clause theme.

- Back theme: Because TP links were only established over a maximum of three clauses, so back themes referred to links that went farther back than three clauses; in other words, there was a gap of more than two clauses between a theme and its predecessor.
- Related theme: The themes related to the topics that recurred in the text and their frame of reference fell clearly in the scope of the subject matter were called related themes. In this study, the related themes were mainly found in cases that the writer discussed something related to the subject matter and then mentioned the name of one or more specialists or researchers to prove the accuracy of their claims.
- New theme: Themes really new to the discourse were called new themes, for example, the first theme of the text analyzed. Sample analyses illustrating different patterns of TP and PTs are shown in Appendix A.

The other types of themes which lay outside the TP patterns were metatextual themes (i.e., referring to the text itself; e.g., *this study*), extralinguistic themes (e.g., *you, we*), existential themes (*there*), extraposition (*it*), adverbial themes (temporal, etc.), process, *wh*-elements in interrogatives clauses, thematic equatives, general words (e.g., *the problem, one*), and examples. The rationale for the selection of the above classifications was that they are more plausible, attestable, and complete than the other categorizations used for analyzing TP patterns and PTs in texts (Martinez, 2003).

### 3.3 Procedure

First, all the available volumes of *ELT* and *Roshd Journals* published between the years 2001 and 2007 were collected (a number of these volumes were e-versions). Every issue of *Roshd Journal* included, at least, two RAs in English (about 40 RAs within this time period). In *ELT Journal*, about seven RAs were included in each issue. In order to narrow down the research, only the experimental RAs were considered (20 in *Roshd* and about 40 in *ELT*). Then, 16 RAs from *ELT Journal* and 16 RAs from *Roshd* were randomly selected, taking care that the RAs represented a variety of authors to control author's style/preference

To ensure that the two groups were quantitatively equal, the RAs, either obtained directly from the e-versions of the relevant journals or manually scanned and converted into Rich Text format, were saved on the computer and word count was run on them, excluding Abstracts, Footnotes, Endnotes, References, Appendixes, and texts associated with tables and graphics. The obtained corpus contained 100,960 words (50,644 representing *Roshd* and 50,316 representing *ELT*). Afterwards, the texts were carefully read and analyzed to calculate the frequency of the TP patterns in the different rhetorical sections of the RAs. One problem with

textual analysis is that there is always the danger of making mistakes in interpretation. To preclude the threat of jeopardizing reliability in the analysis, six RAs from the corpus were also analyzed by an experienced researcher in applied linguistics, and agreement was made on the method of analysis after detailed discussion of the differences of analysis.

### 3.4 Rhetorical Specification

The point to be mentioned here is that, initially, the present study was an attempt to determine the PTs in the four rhetorical sections of the RAs (i.e., Introduction, Methodology, Results, and Discussion). However, it was observed that a number of the RAs in both journals did not follow this standard format and, in fact, their structures varied. Therefore, in order to avoid any possible wrong classification and to remain consistent throughout the analysis, the study considered the Results and Discussion sections as one macropart. In other words, the frequency of the PTs was counted and calculated in three rhetorical sections, including Introduction, Methodology, and Results/Discussion.

### 3.5 Unit of Analysis

One of the primary considerations in the analysis of thematicity in texts is the unit of analysis in which themes are identified. In the present study, T-unit was taken as the unit of analysis. McCabe (1999) defines T-unit as an “independent conjoinable clause complex” comprising “an independent clause plus all of its hypotactically related clauses” (p. 73). The independent clauses can exist on their own as simple sentences or can string together using coordinating conjunctions. One of the major problems related to the coordinated independent clauses is *ellipsis* (North, 2003). Following North (2003), the coordinated clauses with ellipsed subjects were considered as separate units, provided that the clauses still contained a finite element.

#### ➤ Example 1:

- ✓ *ELT* 15: T-unit 22: The students were allowed to work at their own pace,
- ✓ T-unit 23: *but were requested* to keep in regular contact.

If neither the subject nor the finite operator was present, the clause had no mood element, and it was regarded as an example of the coordinating at the level of group rather than clause.

#### ➤ Example 2:

- *Roshd* 9: T-unit 212: Feedback will keep the dedicated teacher aware of the learners errors *and give* her ideas for tackling their learning problems.

Another problem occurred where an initial reporting verb might be followed by one or more clauses. As McCabe (1999) states, the projected clauses following a reporting verb and introduced by *that* or having an ellipited subject are hypotactic clauses. So, these clauses were analyzed as one T-unit in this study:

➤ Example 3:

- ✓ *ELT* 3: T-unit10: Schmitt states that the use of performed lexical chunks facilitates greater fluency in speech production and aids the listeners.

#### 4. Data Analysis

The number of the words and T-units was calculated in the three rhetorical sections of *ELT* and *Roshd* RAs. The average number of words per clause in *ELT* and *Roshd* RAs was 20.41 and 21.11, respectively (see Tables 1 and 2):

Table 1. *Word Counts and T-Units in Different Rhetorical Sections of ELT RAs*

<i>ELT</i> RAs	Word Count				T-Units			
	I	M	R&D	Total	I	M	R&D	Total
<i>ELT</i> 1	441	776	2,424	3,641	17	29	106	152
<i>ELT</i> 2	645	890	1,422	2,957	24	41	68	133
<i>ELT</i> 3	1,094	536	1,272	2,902	44	26	60	130
<i>ELT</i> 4	184	726	2,316	3,226	7	32	122	161
<i>ELT</i> 5	292	324	2,574	3,190	13	15	130	158
<i>ELT</i> 6	1,256	464	1,609	3,329	56	25	106	188
<i>ELT</i> 7	179	708	2,112	2,999	6	41	110	157
<i>ELT</i> 8	1,471	536	1,369	6,676	69	20	66	155
<i>ELT</i> 9	1,313	806	695	2,814	46	30	32	108
<i>ELT</i> 10	949	779	1,660	3,388	40	48	85	173
<i>ELT</i> 11	131	1043	1,461	2,635	5	52	76	133
<i>ELT</i> 12	258	238	2,807	3,303	13	12	170	195
<i>ELT</i> 13	1,018	646	1,346	3,010	54	22	75	151
<i>ELT</i> 14	583	503	1,343	2,429	26	26	53	105
<i>ELT</i> 15	260	571	2,689	3,520	13	25	142	180
<i>ELT</i> 16	808	444	2,345	3,597	36	24	127	187
Total	10,882	9,990	29,444	50,316	469	468	1,528	2,465

Note. Columns: Numbers of words and T-units in the three rhetorical sections of *ELT* RAs (Introduction [I], Methodology [M], and Results and Discussion [R&D])



Table 2. *Word Counts and T-Units in Different Rhetorical Sections of Roshd RAs*

Roshd RAs	Word Count			Total	T-Units			Total
	I	M	R& D		I	M	R&D	
<i>Roshd 1</i>	861	531	753	2,145	39	30	32	101
<i>Roshd 2</i>	1,827	879	657	3,363	91	53	30	174
<i>Roshd 3</i>	743	1,118	1,283	3,144	36	52	55	143
<i>Roshd 4</i>	1,264	658	977	2,899	46	33	42	121
<i>Roshd 5</i>	908	547	2,295	3,751	39	35	132	206
<i>Roshd 6</i>	755	1,459	477	2,691	31	80	22	133
<i>Roshd 7</i>	1,078	507	1,675	3,260	48	25	76	149
<i>Roshd 8</i>	776	891	760	2,427	38	44	31	113
<i>Roshd 9</i>	1,146	1,047	1,914	4,107	56	67	87	210
<i>Roshd 10</i>	1,454	234	543	2,231	80	12	23	115
<i>Roshd 11</i>	820	313	1,218	2,351	30	16	51	97
<i>Roshd 12</i>	819	600	956	2,375	45	44	54	143
<i>Roshd 13</i>	1,118	644	3,661	5,423	47	31	145	223
<i>Roshd 14</i>	2,104	451	1,327	3,882	87	19	61	167
<i>Roshd 15</i>	924	549	1,775	3,293	38	30	88	156
<i>Roshd16</i>	1,838	836	628	33,02	78	45	25	148
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,435</b>	<b>11,311</b>	<b>20,899</b>	<b>50,644</b>	<b>829</b>	<b>616</b>	<b>954</b>	<b>2399</b>

Note. Columns: Number of words and T-units in the three rhetorical sections of Roshd RAs (Introduction [I], Methodology [M], and Results and Discussion [R&D])

#### 4.1 Thematic Progression Patterns and Peripheral Themes

All the T-units in the corpus were analyzed in order to determine the TP patterns and the different types of PTs. According to McCabe (1999), the relationships are determined on the basis of the presence of different cohesive devices such as repetition, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, pronouns, substitutions, ellipsis, and paraphrasing.

In this study, the researcher followed North's (2005) procedure for identifying links by looking for the first most constituent that had a topical link with the preceding main clause. If the left most item identified as a link was a modifier, then the whole constituent was examined for a link to the preceding text. Verb-initial constructions with ellipsis were analyzed as forming a part in a progression chain. According to North (2005), these constructions have come from the previous rhemes, so they have linear progression provided that the subject for the verb is the same and the verbs have the same reflection for the tense.

➤ For example:

- ✓ *ELT* T-unit 37: The groups were coded as control and experimental groups

- ✓ T-U 38: and *were supposed* to received routine method and treatment, respectively.

Following McCabe (1999), the themes for which the reader has to go back more than two clauses to find a previously mentioned concept were not considered as part of TP patterns. In other words, if the links were established over a maximum of three clauses, these links were not considered as part of the TP patterns. In light of the above points, the corpus was first analyzed to determine the total frequency of the TP patterns and the PTs (see Table 3):

Table 3. *TP Patterns and PTs in ELT and Roshd*

Journals	TP Types	PTs
<i>ELT</i>	1,613 (66)	852 (34.56)
<i>Roshd</i>	1,667 (69.48)	732 (30.51)

As Table 3 indicates, both groups preferred TP patterns over PTs. As illustrated above, the PTs (or themes outside the TP patterns) constituted 34.56% and 30.51% of all the T-units of *ELT* and *Roshd* RAs, respectively. This seemed to be somewhat in line with the study by Hawes and Thomas (1997). In the analysis of ESL learner texts, they found PTs accounting for around a quarter of all progressions. McCabe (1999) also found that a large percentage of clauses in her research (36% in English and 43% in Spanish texts) did not fit into thematic patterns, suggesting that these themes are pragmatically necessary in allowing for theme/rheme configuration of the clause.

In the next step, the frequency and percentage of the TP patterns and the PTs were calculated in the three rhetorical sections of the corpus (see Tables 4 and 5):

Table 4. *TP Patterns and PTs in Three Rhetorical Sections of ELT*

R S	Total TPs	PTs	Total
I	273 (11.07)	196 (7.95)	469 (19.02)
M	321 (13.02)	147 (5.96)	468 (18.98)
R&D	1,019 (41.36)	509 (20.64)	1528 (62)

Table 5. *TP Patterns and PTs in Three Rhetorical Sections of Roshd*

R S	Total TPs	PTs	Total
I	595 (24.8)	234 (9.75)	829 (34.55)
M	446 (18.59)	170 (7.08)	616 (25.67)
R&D	626 (26.09)	328 (13.67)	954 (39.76)

In the Introduction sections, the total percentage of the PTs was 7.95% and 9.75% in *ELT* and *Roshd* RAs, respectively. This difference in the percentages can be attributed to the greater number of the T-units in the Introduction sections of *Roshd* RAs due to longer review of the literature associated with them. In the Methodology sections, the PTs in *Roshd* RAs outran those in the RAs in *ELT Journal*. In the Results and Discussion sections, the PTs constituted a greater share of *ELT* and *Roshd* RAs. In other words, unlike the findings for the previous sections, here the PTs were more frequent in *ELT*. These results are in sharp contrast to Rafiei's (2012) findings. In analyzing the different rhetorical sections of thesis-driven RAs, she found that there was a remarkable difference between the Results and Method sections regarding the PTs: The PTs were more frequent in the Method sections. It appears that PTs are more pivotal to text processing than being considered problematic.

In the next phase of the study, the frequency and percentage of the different types of the PTs were calculated in the three rhetorical sections of the corpus (see Table 6 & 7):

Table 6. *Frequency/Percentage of Different Types of PTs in ELT*

RS	met	extral	extrap	exis	back	new	adv	summ	proc	fron	Pre	wh	key	equit	ex	rel	gen	total
I	19 4.05	3 0.6	16 3.4	6 1.3	34 7.25	17 3.7	13 2.8	12 2.56	3 0.6	0 0	18 3.8	11 2.3	2 0.4	1 0.2	12 2.5	26 5.5	3 0.6	196 7.95
M	20 4.3	11 2.3	9 1.9	4 0.8	50 10.6	3 0.64	5 1.06	4 0.85	1 0.2	1 0.2	11 2.3	12 2.6	6 1.3	0 0	0 0	10 2.13	0 0	147 5.96
R&D	48 3.1	29 1.9	36 2.36	12 0.8	143 9.36	5 0.3	18 1.8	38 2.47	10 0.6	7 0.5	75 5	8 0.5	24 1.6	12 0.8	10 0.6	32 2.09	2 0.1	509 20.6
All	87 3.5	43 1.6	61 2.5	22 0.9	227 9.3	25 1.01	36 1.5	54 2.19	14 0.5	8 0.3	104 4.2	31 1.25	32 1.01	13 0.5	22 0.9	68 2.75	5 0.2	852 34.6

Note. Columns: Different types of PTs: metacognitive, extralinguistic, extraposition, extralinguistic, back, new, adverbial, summative, process, fronted, previous clause, *wh*-elements, key, equative, example, related, and general words

Table 7. *Frequency/Percentage of Different Types of PTs in Roshd*

RS	met	extral	extrap	exist	back	new	adv	summ	proc	fron	pre	wh	key	equit	ex	rel	gen	total
I	23 2.8	3 0.3	11 1.3	22 2.66	55 6.5	19 2.3	16 1.9	16 1.9	1 0.2	8 1	14 1.7	9 1.08	3 0.4	0 0	0 0	31 3.7	3 0.3	234 9.75
M	35 5.6	9 1.47	5 0.81	7 1.13	64 10.4	4 0.65	2 0.32	7 1.37	0 0	0 0	12 1.9	3 0.5	9 1.5	0 0	0 0	12 1.95	0 0	169 5.96
R&D	62 6.5	14 1.14	43 4.5	13 1.37	89 9.34	5 0.53	7 0.74	12 1.26	1 0.2	1 0.2	41 4.3	4 0.4	12 1.3	7 0.7	0 0	14 1.47	2 0.2	328 13.67
All	120 5	26 1.08	59 2.45	42 1.75	208 8.6	28 1.06	25 1.07	35 1.45	2 0.08	9 0.4	67 2.8	16 0.67	24 1.06	7 0.3	0 0	57 2.4	60 7	732 30.5

Note. Columns: Different types of PTs: metacognitive, extralinguistic, extraposition, extralinguistic, back, new, adverbial, summative, process, fronted, previous clause, *wh*-elements, key, equative, example, related, and general words

The most frequent type of PT was “back” in the Introduction sections of both journals. The other more frequent types were “metatextual” in *ELT* RAs and “related” in *Roshd* RAs. In the Methodology sections, the most frequent type of PT was “back” followed by “metatextual.” Like the other sections, in the Results and Discussion sections, the “back” theme was the most frequent type of PTs. The other more frequent types were “metatextual” in *Roshd* RAs and the “previous” theme in *ELT* RAs. According to Herriman (2011), “back” themes are used after intervening explanations to remind the reader of the text topic. They also allow for organization of text over several paragraphs, in that they are used to chain paragraphs. McCabe (1999) related the higher proportions of “metatextual,” “previous,” and “related” themes to the fact that these themes work for the reader in terms of discourse and, as their referents may be available in the cognitive framework of the text, the readers do not have any problem with these themes; for example, the frame of reference of “related” themes falls clearly within the scope of the subject matter. In order to compare the total frequency of the PTs in both groups, chi-square analysis was used (see Table 8):

Table 8. *Results of Chi-Square Test in ELT and Roshd*

Corpus	Total Words	Total PTs	%	$X^2$
<i>ELT</i>	2,465	852	34.56	0.25
<i>Roshd</i>	2,399	732	30.51	

The critical value of  $X^2$  with 1 *df* was 3.84 for the .05 level of significance. Because the value of the chi-square obtained for the total frequency of the PTs in *ELT* and *Roshd* RAs was less than 3.84, it was concluded that the difference was not meaningful. In other words, no significant differences were found between the RAs of *ELT* and *Roshd* in terms of the PTs. In addition to this comparison, chi-square was carried out to compare the frequency of the PTs in the different rhetorical sections of the RAs (see Table 9):

Table 9. *Results of Chi-Square Across Different Rhetorical Sections*

Corpus	Total Words	Total Words in RS	Total PTs	%	$X^2$
<i>ELT</i> I	2,465	469	196	7.95	0.0901
<i>Roshd</i> I	2,399	829	234	9.75	
<i>ELT</i> M	2,465	468	147	5.96	0.089
<i>Roshd</i> M	2,399	616	170	7.08	
<i>ELT</i> R&D	2,465	1,528	509	20.64	1.40
<i>Roshd</i> R&D	2,399	954	328	13.67	

The critical value of  $X^2$  with 1 *df* was 3.84 for the .05 level of significance. Because the values of the chi-square obtained for the different types of themes were less than 3.84, the differences were not statistically meaningful.

### 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of the data revealed a number of points about the TP and different types of PTs in the corpus. The results indicated that the TP patterns and the PTs were similarly exploited in both samples. These similarities can be explained in terms of genre.

It is believed that the texts belonging to the same genre present a similar contextual configuration, that is, they show common characteristics in linguistic elements related to the field, mode, and tenor of discourse. According to Halliday and Hasan (1985), the field of discourse recognized in the culture can predict the experiential meaning. Tenor of discourse, or the actors involved in the creation of text can predict interpersonal meaning. And, mode of discourse, or particular functions assigned to language and rhetorical channels, can predict textual meanings (p. 46).

It was observed that similarities in the field, tenor, and mode engender similarities in textual choices and are reflected in the thematic choices preferred. Theme, as one of the textual choices, provides insights into establishing similarities within and between genres. It is worth noting that this finding, in line with other studies like North (2005) and Khalili (2011), indicate that the analysis of different types of theme can reveal crucial characteristics of texts regarding genre.

The findings did not fully endorse other studies. For instance, contrary to Mauranan's (1996) study, the sample RAs in *ELT* and *Roshd* were not markedly different in the employment of the PTs in the Introduction and Methodology sections. Moreover, the PTs were more frequent in the Results and Discussion sections of *ELT*. The variable use of the PTs might hardly imply difficulty in processing or analyzing with regards to the preceding discourse or signs of bad writings. As McCabe (1999) states, they only do not fit into the TP patterns suggested by Danes (1974)—an important aspect of textuality which calls for further considerations. In fact, psycholinguistically, with their references in the reader's forefront of consciousness, they are important to the organization of discourse and can provide thematic continuity in the text. However, their analysis needs great mental efforts on the part of the reader.

According to McCabe (1999), although "key," "back," "related, and "previous clause" themes divert the reader's attention and, sometimes, cause pausing in order to figure out the connection between theme and the rest of discourse, they play very important functions. These themes allow for the organization of text over

several paragraphs. These themes are all available to the reader, “though somewhat more difficult than other types of theme; however, for reader their referents may still be available” (McCabe, 1999, p. 183). According to Virtanen (1992), adverbials which appear in the initial position of the clause are liable to function in the service of the text, for example, as markers of text type or text strategy as well as text segmentations.

The greater proportion of “summative” themes in the RAs in *ELT*, especially in the Results and Discussion sections, may be due to the fact that such themes often involve nominalization that can increase the level of abstraction (Herriman, 2011). Martinez (2003) argues that the Discussion section is the most abstract and argumentative section of academic RAs, where the results obtained must be evaluated and interpreted in relation to the problems and the writer should try to persuade the reader to accept the relevance of the findings to other findings. As Herriman (2011) states, this kind of progression tends to be acquired later in L2 learning, and it is not surprising that L2 learners use it less frequently because they cannot condense information and have difficulty in creating both local and global anaphoric and cataphoric connections. McCabe (1999) believes that “summary” themes serve to wrap up the section with an overall comment or they serve to pave the way for the next themes. They are often used as a means of organizing the content, and advanced learners tend to use them to scaffold the content of longer stretches of texts (Harriman, 2011). Further research is required to find out the extent of nominalization use and the presence of “summative” themes in local and international journals.

Among intriguing themes, *there* and *it* have been widely discussed. *It* has often been associated with focusing role, whereas *there* is connected with existential clauses. It has an important role in organizing information and introducing new items/points (Mauranen, 1999). Although “existential” theme is more frequent in speech, it is not uncommon in writing. It is used in writing to emphasize or underline important or new information and to show the existence or nonexistence of an object or phenomenon (Lirola, 2002).

Finally, PTs should not be considered as unimportant and marginal themes, but as clear and typical ones, organizing the flow of information, summarizing, introducing new topic, or making topic shift. In sum, there is widespread evidence that TP patterns are insufficient to cover all kinds of theme/rheme progressions that are observable in different texts because writers can provide specific links for their readers through other means than TP patterns. Experts and analysts should look outside these patterns both linguistically and extralinguistically to discover the patterns by which discourse is developed (Crompton, 2004).

The aim of the present study was to investigate and comparatively analyze the different types of the PTs used in ELT RAs of local and international journals to find out the possible similarities/differences between them. The analysis of the corpora revealed that the different types of PTs were used in both journals (*Roshd* and *ELT*), and their frequencies were rather similar across the two groups. The results confirmed that PTs have crucial roles in organizing text over several paragraphs and creating both local and global anaphoric and cataphoric connections. The results will be helpful to the local writers of English, in general, and the local writers of ELT RAs, in particular. As Ghadessy (1995) states, the understanding of how texts are created would be much poorer without the concept of theme and TP patterns. In addition to writers, this study can be helpful to the readers because they also need to be aware of the way different PTs are realized in academic RAs. This awareness can guide them through the logical path constructed by writers to comprehend the subsequent segment and help them to understand RAs better.

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### Appendix A

#### Sample Analysis of Results and Discussion Section of ELT Articles

No T-Unit	Theme	Rheme	TP
1	Skehan	has investigated the possibility that 'tasks may be chosen and implemented so that particular pedagogic outcomes are achieved' (my emphasis)	new
2	He	distinguishes between the three goals of accuracy, fluency, and complexity,	1-2 constant
3	and argues	that the learner cannot give full attention to each of these three goals simultaneously.	2-3 linear
4	He	suggests that a trade is operating whereby a focus on one of these goals is at the expense of the others.	2-4 constant
5	The task designer's role	is therefore to select tasks, which channel attention towards the desired pedagogic outcome.	1-5 back
6	Surprisingly there	have only been a relatively small number of studies of participants in task	existential
7	and this article	therefore seeks to investigate two main areas	metatextual
54	The participants	were students studying General English for three hours each morning in a large College of Further Education.	metatextual
55	Their ages	ranged from 17 to 30	54-55 constant
56	and they	had come to England to study English for a variety of reasons, the most common of which was the hope that it would improve their future employment prospects.	55-56 constant
57	Enrolment on the courses	is for a minimum of three weeks, which means that there can be a fairly high turnover of students.	54-57 back
58	some	stay at the college for a month, whereas others may be in England for a year before progressing to vocational course.	57-58 linear
59	The eight students (four female, four male) who took part in the study	came from the following countries: Hong Kong, Iran, Italy, Korea (2), Spain, Turkey, and Venezuela.	58-59 linear
92	for example, B9 (Table 4)	felt more at ease when he'd had more practice talking in English with another student	91-92 linear
93	a4	compared his level of proficiency to his classmates'	92-93 constant
94	and thought	he was not competent enough to converse with them was a motivating factor for this student,	93-94 linear
95	yet this	decided to work harder to 'try to improve'	Previous

96	and he	having no one to use the language with caused much disappointment	clause
97	to another student (B15),	he felt that he 'have improvement.'	95-96 linear
98	but when his friends provided the opportunity for him to use the language	show how other learners, be they an individual or a group, can motivate learning in the classroom	95-97 linear
99	all these entries		97-98 linear summative

### Appendix B List of RAs in *Roshd* and *ELT*

#### ***Roshd* RAs**

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