Textual Metafunction in Students' IELTS Writing Task 2

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Abstract

This research is aimed to analyze the textual metafunction in students' IELTS Writing Task 2 and the factors underlying the way the subjects used themee and rheme in the descriptive text. This study was conducted using a descriptive-qualitative method. The subjects of the research are 10 high school students who pursue Academic IELTS at Batari School. The technique for collecting data was document analysis and interview. The result of this research showed that the students used three types of thematic progression patterns in combination. The analysis of thematic progression and the interview results showed that the reasons underlying the use of theme and rheme in IELTS task 2 writing were a lack of linguistic skill and lack of argumentative knowledge

Keywords: Metafunction, Theme, Rheme, IELTS Argumentative

Introduction

At the high school level, especially for students who pursue learning with the national plus curriculum, as well as those who wish to study abroad, must hone their English proficiency. The requirement for admission of new students who master English proficiency makes mastery of English a very important thing. One of the proficiency tests that is being widely used for university entrance requirements is IELTS and one of the skills that must be mastered is writing skills, although it can be seen that many students still have difficulties when they want to achieve a certain score for the IELTS proficiency test.

In addition to speaking, reading, and listening, the IELTS test requires language users to prove their writing skills which are graded with Task 1 and Task 2. In Task 1, students are required to be able to describe a graph, map or diagram. As for Task 2, the ability to write opinion texts is what is tested. Writing opinion texts can be challenging because students are not only required to be logical but also to master the basic skills of writing opinion texts. This is not an easy task for students who have a mother tongue background (Alsahli and Meccawy, 2022).

Systemic Functional Grammar is an unusual method in the field of linguistics. This approach is different from traditional and formal grammar. Functional grammar not only considers the structure of linguistic features but also emphasizes on the meaning

conveyed through those features. This is in accordance with the objectives of IELTS task 2 opinion text which requires students to provide logical and organized meaning in their writing. On this basis, the author is interested in conducting research on functional grammar because it allows for the exploration of language structure and meaning through linguistic features.

Halliday (1985, 1994, and 2004) pioneered the textual metafunction. Textual metafunction refers to how language relates to its environment, which includes the verbal environment (what has been said or written before) and the non-verbal, situational environment. These meanings are conveyed through patterns of structure and thematic development. So based on the above background, the author wants to find out the problems of this study which are to see how subjects use theme and rheme in their Task 2 IELTS writing and the reasons subjects use theme and rheme as they do.

Metafunctions

A language is a system for creating meaning, and its meaning potential has evolved around three motifs: what we refer to as the "metafunctions" of ideational, interpersonal, and textual, with the ideational in turn comprising an experiential component and a logical component (Van, 2021). Grammar is a theory of human experience and grammar is our interpretation of all that happens around us and within ourselves. Interpersonally, it is a way of doing things; grammar is our construction of social relationships. Textually, grammar is the creation of information; it produces discourse, patterned word forms that form meaningful semiotic contexts (Trinh et al., 2017).

The respective metafunctions are: the first (using language to talk about the world) is experiential; the second (using language to interact with others) is interpersonal; and the third (organizing language to fit the context) is textual. Textual metafunction is the strand of meaning most attached to the concept of text. Thompson (2014) stated that textual meaning regards the clause as a message, and its primary function is to create text.

Textual metafunction is about the verbal world, especially the flow of information in the text, and deals with clauses as messages. Textual metafunctions relate to thematic structures, which contain information, management, resources and genres. According to Halliday, grammar also indicates a third component, which is another mode of meaning related to text construction. In a sense, it can be regarded as an enabling or facilitating function because the other two functions - interpreting experience and enacting interpersonal relations - depend on the ability to establish discourse order, organize discursive flow, and continuity as the discourse moves along. This also emerges as a clearly delineated motif in grammar. Language as a system organizes messages in an integrated way so that the pieces of the message fit logically with others around it and with the broader context in which the talking or writing takes place. In textual metafunction, a clause is analyzed into theme and rheme (Thompson, 2014).

According to (Halliday, 1994), topical themes can be realized through experiential elements such as participants, processes, and circumstances. Interpersonal theme contains elements such as modal adverbs or comments that express the author's judgment or attitude towards the content of the message. Its function is to project the author's personal view or judgment about what the clause says. The function of textual theme is to show how the writer makes explicit how the clause relates to the surrounding discourse or context. This includes continuatives, which signal new movement in the discourse; conjunctives, which consist of groups of adverbs or prepositional phrases to link the clause to the preceding text; and conjunctions, which connect or bind clauses that

appear in the same structure with other clauses. Theme is the point of departure, while rhyme is the goal of the discourse (Thompson, 2014).

Features of Textual Metafunction
According to Banks (2002), Textual metafunction is that part of the meaning potential that makes a text a text, and not just a series of words or clauses. As such, it involves phenomena such as thematic structure and thematic progression.
a. Thematic Structure
The theme joins the rest (rheme) so that the two parts form a message (Banks, 2002). Thematic structure characterizes a clause as a message. In other words, thematic structure identifies a clause as a message. Of the two elements that make up a clause, one is the element that functions as the theme.
1) Theme
The first component of the clause transitivity system functionally occupies the theme. One element in the clause is pronounced as the theme; this is then combined with the other part so that the two parts form a message (Thompson, 2014).
2) Rheme
A rheme is a constituent of a sentence that adds mostly new information in addition to what has already been said in the discourse. Rheme usually, but not always, relates to the subject.
b. Thematic Development
Thematic progression is a strategy used by the writer to connect the themes and schema in a clause with the clauses around it. It is a decisive factor that determines the structuring of information as it acts as a bridge between the sentence level and the discourse level. The two parts are referred to as theme and rhyme respectively. While theme usually anchors a text or highlights a (sub)topic, rheme is usually used to comment on theme.
Thematic progression, as defined by Eggins (1994), is the transmission of information between subsequent Theme and Rheme pairings in a work. There are three primary types of thematic development, depending on the text type: constant, zig-zag, and multiple thematic patterns.
1) Constant Progression
In this type of progression, the theme of the second clause is the same thing as the rheme of the first clause. Constant progression can be seen as follows :
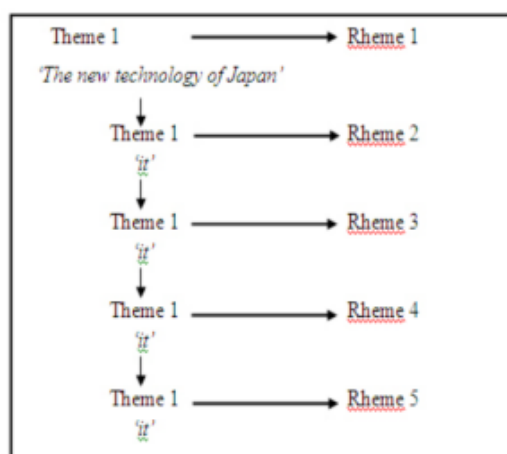

Figure 1: Constant Thematic Pattern

2) Linear Progression
In this type of progression, part of the rheme of the first clause becomes the theme of the next clause. This type is also called as zig zag thematic progression.
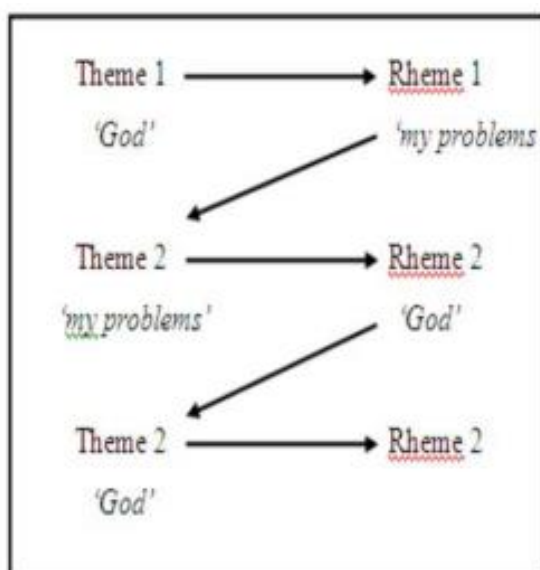

Figure 2: Linear Thematic Pattern

3) Multiple Progression
In the third type of thematic progression, the theme of the first clause is divided into two parts, each of which is treated as a theme element in the second clause.
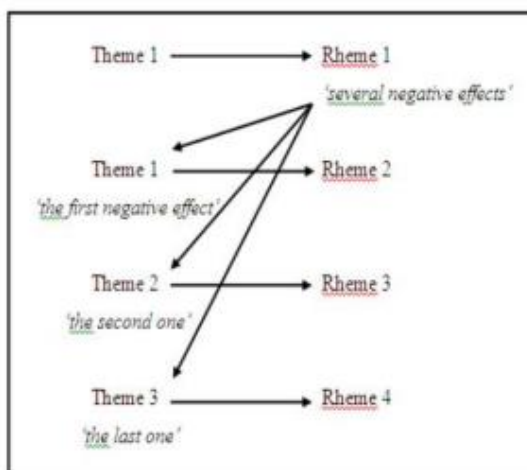

Figure 3: multiple thematic progression

IELTS Task 2 Academic Writing
According to the IELTS Academic 17 (2022) book, the writing section consists of two tasks, the first task on describing a given diagram in at least 150 words (approximately 20 minutes) and the second task on creating an essay (advantages-disadvantages, opinion, cause-effect, cause-solution, and discussion of views) in at least 250 words (approximately 40 minutes). While task 1 aims to evaluate test takers' ability to compare, contrast, organize, and present data, task 2 focuses on their ability to respond to given problems from various academic topics (IELTS Academic 17, 2022).

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IELTS Task 2 Writing, Academic Module Task 2 Writing in IELTS tasks test takers to write an academic essay of at least 250 words on a given topic within 40 minutes (IELTS Academic 17,2022). Usually, the texts written are opinion texts, causes and effects, causes and solutions, advantages and disadvantages, opinions, and discussions about both views. Essays are assessed on four main criteria: Task Response (TR - ideas), Lexical Resources (LR - vocabulary), Grammar Range and Accuracy (GR - grammar), and Cohesion-Coherence (CC - organization).

Previous Researches

A research showed that the right choice of theme types enables IELTS test-takers to produce a well written text which exhibits two important features: cohesion and coherence. Moreover, more multiple themes than simple themes should be applied in the writing. Establishing multiple themes can provide a useful guide to the rhetorical path that the writer is following and make the writing more academic, thereby improving the chances of scoring high on the IETLS examination. (Trung : 2019)

Another research was conducted to explore students' ability in writing which influenced through the perspective of SFL in 2023 (Herman,Muhammad Rafiek,Titik Agustina,Kundharu Saddhono,Malabar ,Saputra and Purba : 2023), The results showed that metafunctions analysis was very important because there were ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions. The ideational metafunction presented the use of some processes in the writings (material, mental, relational and verbal), interpersonal showed the importance of mood and residue elements in students' writing and textual metafunction showed the importance of thematic progression pattern. This study found that to minimize students' challenges and strengthen their academic writing and critical thinking skills, teachers should have a better understanding of Systemic Functional Linguistics theory.

Research Method

This study is a descriptive qualitative research. Non-numerical data such as words and images are gathered and then analyzed. In this research, the texts will be taken from EFL students' descriptive writing. The descriptive writing will be analyzed in a descriptive form in order to observe the textual metafunction.

The designation "research subject" pertains to an individual who actively engages in a study and fulfills the role of a provider from whom data is gathered as stated by Creswell (2014). Hence, the subjects of this investigation are Senior high school students who pursue Academic IELTS at Batari School, they are grade 11 and 12 students. There are 3 selected texts chosen from each grade. The primary research instrument employed in this study is the writer herself, as she will be responsible for the collection, analysis, identification, and categorization of the research data.

Therefore, the data analysis involves multiple sequential steps, including:
1. Finding the textual metafunction in EFL students' IELTS task 2 Writing.
2. Analyzing the textual metafunction written in students' IELTS task 2 Writing.

Result and Discussion

Textual metafunction is realized through Thematic structure, information structure and cohesion. As thematic structure covers Theme and Thematic progression patterns, information structure includes given and new units of information. Cohesion covers reference, conjunction, ellipsis and lexical cohesion. To be clear, this study will focus on the Thematic Progression in IELTS TASK 2 writing

The way of analysis will be described in this section in which the writer read every sentence of the texts, broke up the sentences into clauses, and then analyzed the theme and rhyme that would be the textual meaning realized in a clause and how they developed it into paragraphs. According to Halliday (1994), the most important information is commonly placed first in the initial position while the remainder is followed, which are called theme and rheme. Theme and rheme are two constituents of the thematic structure, which realizes the clause's textual meaning and develops the text by using thematic progression. Thematic progression is the way for the writer to make a paragraph hang together by picking up the theme or rhyme in the previous sentence to be the theme in the following sentences, with some kinds of progression styles (Halliday, 1994). In this research, there are 10 texts of IELTS Task 2 under a topic " Some people say that traveling alone is better than travelling with a group of people." are selected to be the data. In their essay, students have to discuss both views and give their opinion. The analysis of the data is discussed in detail below.

1. The thematic progression of IELTS Task 2

The result of the data analysis shows that the subjects used the the combination of constant, linear and multiple thematic pattern in their IELTS task 2 writing (opinion text). The combination can be seen in the table below :

Table 1. Thematic patterns in students' IELTS Task 2 Writinng

| Thematic patterns	Students' IELTS task 2 writing										Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	
Constant	7	7	8	8	6	8	10	9	8	6	82
Linear	2	3	2	5	11	5	4	4	5	8	49
multiple	3	5	1	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	42
Total clause	14	16	12	17	25	17	19	18	17	18	

As shown in the table above, it can be seen that the most dominant thematic progression pattern found in the students' IELTS task 2 writings is reiteration/constant theme patterns. This is to show that the students tend to use personal pronouns such I, they and the writer in their writings. This may be because students think that it is easier and defines more clear focus in describing or explaining reasonings. The below is given as an example :

Table 2. Data 1 : IELTS Task 2 Writing

Theme	Rheme
Some people	prefer to travel with a companion.
Other people	prefer to travel alone.
Personally, I think	these two options have their advantages and disadvantages.

From one side, travelling with a companion	can bring many benefits
First of all, travelling with a companion	is safer for several reasons.
If travellers got lost in a strange city,	it is easier to find a way back.
Also They	can support and help each other.if something happened .
He or she,	will be there with you and protect you no matter what.
Other reason to have a companion	is that travelling with a companion is more exciting and interesting.
You	can share all beautiful moments and new experiences.
you	can also help each other to take pictures
And, you	can also do the things they like together and having fun together
On the other hand,	travelling alone can bring many benefits too.
For example	one does not have to do things that the other person does not want to.
Moreover, people	want to be alone and enjoy all beauty around them.
As a conclusion, whether with a company or alone, travelling	Depends on how we decide to enjoy it.

Table 3. Thematic progression of data 1
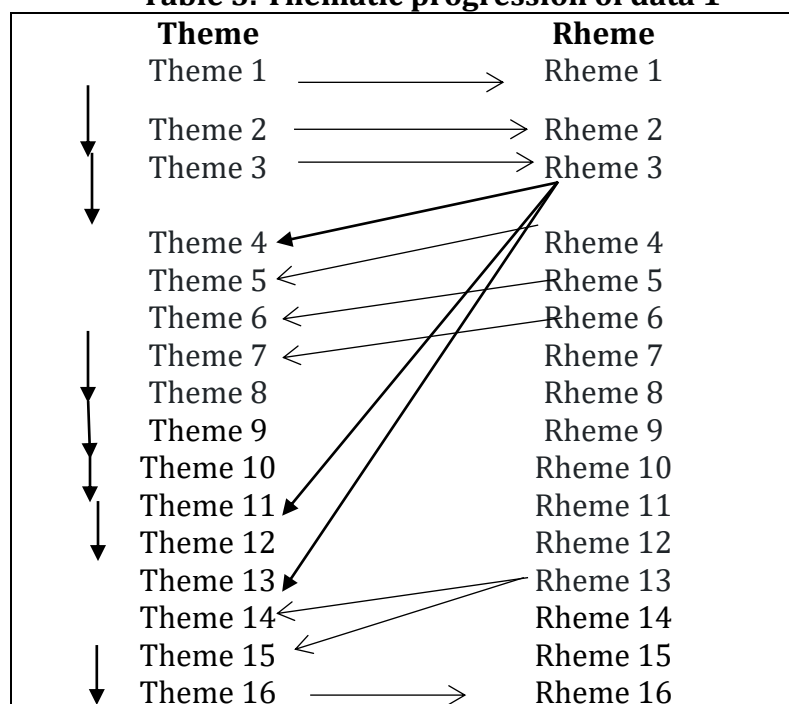
It is found in the example above that the student can produce three types of thematic pattern: constant, linear and multiple theme patterns. The student is able to

show coherence in the text and the relationship within sentences is logical. Additionally marked topical thematics are used to connect the ideas.
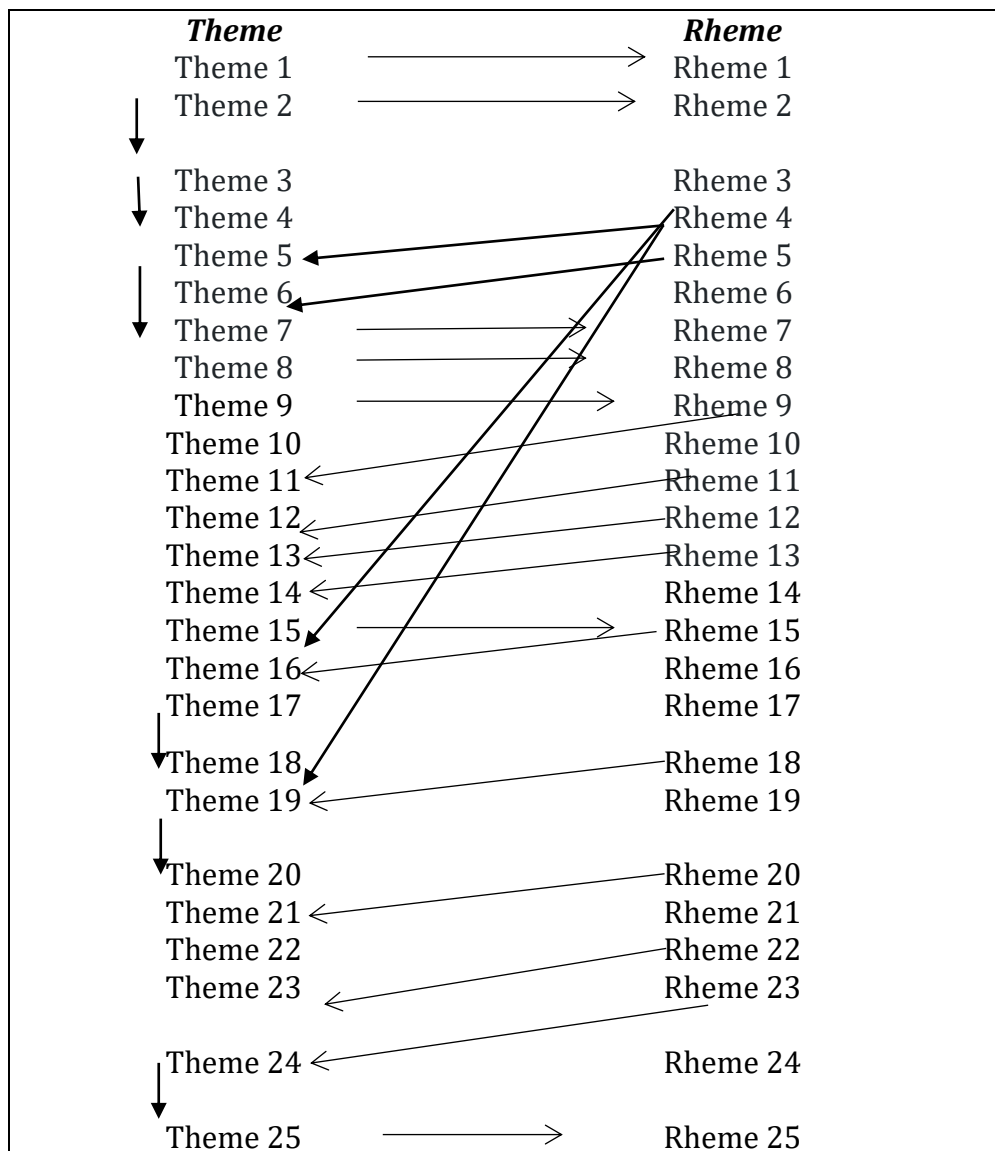
In the other example, it can be seen that linear theme pattern is as well used, in which the rheme of some clauses are taken up as the theme in the next clause. This linear thematic progression becomes a way for the writers to connect the ideas with one another. Beside the use of conjunctions to create cohesion,a theme is usually found as a modified form of a rheme in the previous sentence. For example, the rheme in clause 5 'a good trip' is changed to 'planning a trip' in clause 6; thus is used as the theme in that clause. This shows that the students have enough lexical resource to elaborate their ideas. This strategy is recommended to be applied in IELTS writing as a range and accuracy of vocabulary is also marked. To continue, student 5 below shows the most use of linear thematic with the number of constant and multiple thematics follow after. More clear description can be seen in the tables below:

Table 4. Data 5 : IELTS Task 2 Writing

Theme	Rheme
People	like to travel alone by contending that their trip will be more comfortable.
As they	can do whatever that they want to.
In this essay, the writer	still believes that traveling with a group is better.
I will	discuss reasons and examples to support my viewpoint.
To begin with,	people in a group can help each other to plan a good trip
Planning a trip	is not a simple task.
It	may consume some hours or a day long.
because, even before the departure day,	traveler will have to make a lot of decisions and reservations such as booking a hotel, selecting a flight, and scheduling a trip.
If we have a group of people	then the tasks can be distributed among people
Tasks distribution	Makes the planning easier.
Second, the expense per person for a trip	will be reduced when more people join the trip.
More people	Means more money is collected to pay.
The same rate of charge	will be shared among the group.
For example, when renting a vehicle, a person in a group of four people	will have to pay only a quarter of the renting cost instead of a full of charge when driving the car alone.
Other expenses such as hotel rental, food cost, and even some ticket cost	are also be lower when purchased by a group of people.
Third, a group	will make the trip more convenient and enjoyable.
In contrast, travelling alone	can be more efficient too.
Going somewhere alone	Gives us time to know ourselves better.
The moment of knowing yourself better	is rarely to have if you go with others

This moment	is usually seek by adults or office workers when travelling
They	have 1001 problems in their lives.
Moreover, solo travelling	helps many individuals find their pursue of happiness.
Those people who are having problems	Certainly find clearer minds after being secluded from the crowded environment.
However, problems	many times are solved after talking to someone else.

Table 5. The Pattern of Thematic Progression in Data 5

Theme	*Rheme*
Theme 1	Rheme 1
Theme 2	Rheme 2
Theme 3	Rheme 3
Theme 4	Rheme 4
Theme 5	Rheme 5
Theme 6	Rheme 6
Theme 7	Rheme 7
Theme 8	Rheme 8
Theme 9	Rheme 9
Theme 10	Rheme 10
Theme 11	Rheme 11
Theme 12	Rheme 12
Theme 13	Rheme 13
Theme 14	Rheme 14
Theme 15	Rheme 15
Theme 16	Rheme 16
Theme 17	Rheme 17
Theme 18	Rheme 18
Theme 19	Rheme 19
Theme 20	Rheme 20
Theme 21	Rheme 21
Theme 22	Rheme 22
Theme 23	Rheme 23
Theme 24	Rheme 24
Theme 25	Rheme 25

Meanwhile, the last pattern is multiple theme pattern. The students try to develop their paragraph by taking the subject matter in the rheme of one clause is taken up in the theme of a following clause for twice or thrice. Usually, the use of multiple theme is to show reasoning, sequence of examples and supporting ideas of the writer's claim. This attitude is based on the generic structure of argumentative or opinion text in which

a writer must support their arguments with supporting evidence, data or reasoning. As can be seen in most of the data, multiple thematic is used at least five times.

2. Factors Underlying How Subjects Use Theme and Rheme

Theoretically, there are two reasons underlying the use of theme and rheme in opinion (argumentative) texts. The two reasons are (1) lack of linguistic ability and (2) ability to construct opinions/ideas. Empirically, based on the data, the reason they use constant is because they lack of linguistic knowledge, they are not used to building argument sentences that require proper cohesive devices. The consequence of this lack of linguistic knowledge is that the subjects only express their opinions without thinking about the cohesion between sentences. Thus, the text often lacks continuity of ideas.

Conclusion

From the results above, it can be concluded that :

1. There are three thematic progression patterns in combination used in students' IELTS writing task 2: the combinations of constant,linear and multiple patterns. The constant pattern is widely used, more commonly in arguments and conclusion parts. Linear thematic is also commonly used to connect the ideas or to show continuity. This shows that students are naturally able to connect ideas in a text, despite the lack of linguistic ability.
2. The reasons underlying the use of theme and rheme in argumentative text are a lack of linguistic skill and lack of argumentative knowledge. Moreover, it is suggested for a student to improve their skills of argumentative. Therefore the findings are useful to enhance students' ability in attaining coherence and cohesion in IELTS writing task 2.

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