

## **SFL-BASED ANALYSIS OF THEMATIC PROGRESSION OF ENGLISH GRADUATE PERSONAL STATEMENTS**

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### **Abstract**

The main problem faced by graduate and undergraduate students in writing their university application letters includes the difficulties of producing a coherent and cohesive text that can convince the evaluators of their suitability to the target program. The present study was conducted principally to investigate the thematic progression patterns realized in students' statements (henceforth PSs), for their considerable role in shaping the overall structure of the text and unfolding the writer's identity. The corpus consists of 20 PSs written by graduate English students applying for a Master's in Sociology in Western institutions. Eggin's (2004) framework of Theme and Rheme was applied to analyze the thematic progression patterns (TPP) observed and find out the dominant pattern revealed from the students' texts. The findings of the analysis indicated the presence of two main thematic progression patterns, namely the Reiteration pattern and Zigzag pattern, with the total absence of the Multiple theme pattern. The obtained results of this work may offer valuable insights for academic writing instructions and material developers.

**Keywords:** coherence, personal statements, SFL, thematic progression pattern

### **Introduction**

The importance of writing as a main productive skill in language has gained increasing research interest in recent years (Soleymanzadeh & Gholmani, 2014) and several studies have proved its significant value as a field of research in teaching as well as in academic assessment. Although it would be easy to produce grammatically accurate sentences, it might be fairly challenging for students to structure a text in a coherent, clear, and understandable manner (Schmitt, 2002; Ostrom & Cook, 1993). University application essays are thus no different from other genre types in this particular aspect. As such, they may be deemed as an intriguing source for exploration since they are considered crucial documents in the student's academic life. Indeed, they serve as one of the most significant pieces of writing in the application process as it is the only space where students may fully express their motivations, relevant academic and professional credentials, and goals which make them eligible for the target program (Brown & Barton, 2004, p.2). Further, the PS is worth research consideration as it may reveal how students may be introduced to an academic community through their narratives. Accordingly, as

stated by Brown and Barton (2004), “researchers and teachers of writing need to learn more about the painstaking self-inventory and complex self-representation that our students perform at this momentous threshold of professional development” (p.4).

Although the genre of PSs has been explored by scholars for about two decades, relevant research from a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective is still scarce, and this type of academic writing still has various aspects to be investigated. While the vast majority of PS research papers focused mainly on rhetorical analysis and linguistic features, few studies have attended to the issue of the thematic progression pattern of this genre of writing. The applicants’ attempts to demonstrate their ability to convey relevant ideas in a kind of ‘intellectual style’ points to a significant research area that focuses on the patterns of thematic development that students bring to their texts. In other words, the style in which information and ideas are communicated in the writer’s text is deemed as significant as the information considered to be relevant in their writings. As such, the investigation of the thematic pattern in the applicants’ PSs may highlight certain aspects related to TP’s use which can affect and be incorporated in students’ writings generally and in university PSs particularly.

Thematic progression is seen as one of the main pillars of the text’s cohesion and coherence which determine the text’s writing’s quality (Pitler et al., 2008). The theory of thematic progression was first put forward by Frantisek Danes from the perspective of textual analysis. According to Danes (1974), the selection and arrangement of themes and rhemes, as well as the interrelation between themes and rhemes in the preceding paragraph, are all examples of thematic development. Several linguists and academics are beginning to investigate the structuring techniques and progression patterns of texts following previous research studies, particularly the thematic progression hypothesis put forward by Danes (1974). They have presented their views on thematic progression patterns. Danes expanded the research on theme and thematic progression into the textual level and he ended up by proposing five canonical Thematic Progression patterns. Various studies have proved the significance of theme and thematic progression as a tool to assess the success of students’ writings in terms of coherence and diagnose their writing difficulty in different genres (Christie & Dreyfus, 2007; Wang, 2007; Wei, 2013a, 2013b; Wei, 2014). It plays a key role in textual coherence and cohesion as it “enhances connectivity between ideas” on the one hand and “guides the readers through the logical paths constructed by the writers” on the other (Ebrahimi & Ebrahimi, 2014). In other words, TP is a key factor in the overall organization of ideas and information as it functions as a link or a bridge between sentence level and discourse level, coordinating coherence and cohesion and thus helping writers to communicate their ideas successfully (Wang, 2010).

According to Eggins (2004), TP can be embodied in three major forms namely the Reiteration pattern, the Zig-zag pattern, and the Multiple rheme pattern. Theme reiteration pattern is a writing technique that consists mainly of repeating the theme of the previous clauses. Although this strategy seems to be efficient in conferring a coherent and cohesive effect to the text by repeating previous information, this pattern may lead the reader or listener to boredom by keeping the same content in the subsequent clauses. In contrast, in the zig-zag linear pattern, the theme is retrieved from the preceding clause’s rheme. It shapes a rhythmic coherent

pattern whereby the information follows one after the other. The multiple rheme pattern is a thematic progression strategy where the information of a rheme is found to be the themes of the subsequent clauses or the following paragraphs. Different analysts maintained that this pattern offers an effect of unity to the whole paragraph since all the details and information belong to the same rheme of the first clause. Eggins' three different forms of the thematic progression patterns can be illustrated in the figures below:

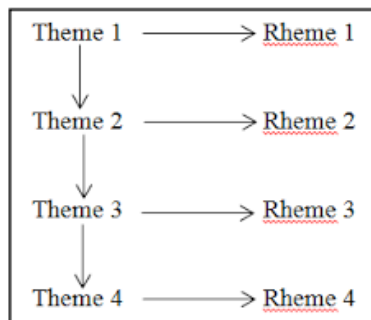


Figure 1. The reiteration pattern

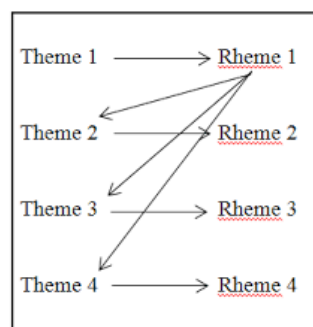


Figure 2. The zig-zag pattern

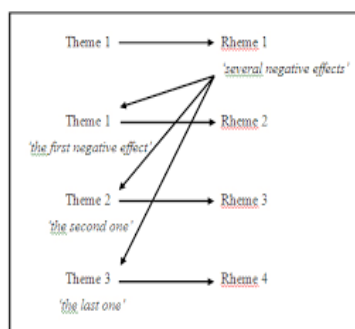


Figure 3. The multiple-rheme pattern

The importance of investigating the thematic progression patterns in a written text helps to reveal the flow and the representation of information and ideas in the larger text. In this concern, Thompson (2014) argued that TP reveals how “speakers construct their messages in a way which makes them fit smoothly into the unfolding language event” (p.117). In the same vein, Arancon (2013) maintained that the analysis of thematic progression techniques may assist the learners in identifying the text’s structure by determining the beginning and the end of the text’s main points introduced by the semantic organization of clauses, paragraphs, and discourse. As such, it can be concluded that the choice of thematic patterns affects the way the information is semantically presented and structurally organized, which in turn influences the writing coherence and the text composition.

Various studies on the thematic organization of academic genres have been conducted by different researchers in linguistic and literary works. Indeed, thematic progression patterns have been the focus of several studies in different contexts, each applying a particular model to specific types of genres. Jobar et al. (2020) conducted research that investigated the use of TP in the introductory sections of essay writing of non-native students. It focused mainly on the information “flow mapping” employed by the students which consisted essentially of the Mixed, Separate, Incarnate, and Linear thematic patterns. The significance of this study lies

in its prominent role in helping teachers in applying new teaching methods and strategies in different academic settings which may help to recognize the students' strengths and weaknesses in their writings. Nonetheless, the generalizability of the obtained findings remains questionable, to some extent, as the study is based on a limited number of data.

In the same vein, Gunawan et al. (2020) analyzed the textual pattern of recount texts produced by hearing-impaired students to instantiate the way they structure language in communication. This research aimed to identify the writer's choice of thematic progression patterns based on Eggins's (2004) model as an analytical framework. The corpus consisted mainly of 36 recount texts written by low and high achievers from three different educational levels: elementary, Junior high, and senior high schools. The textual analysis proved that the theme reiteration pattern was the most frequently used pattern by the hearing-impaired participants in their recount texts, followed by the zig-zag pattern. Such an investigation could offer valuable linguistic and pedagogical insights regarding the teaching methods that can be implemented in the writing courses oriented to hearing-impaired learners as a minority group of students with special needs. Besides, Lestari et al. (2019) presented a study on the use of thematic progression patterns in Journal articles produced by undergraduate students. The data used consisted of 10 samples of recently published research articles. The textual investigation showed that the zig-zag pattern was the most dominant in all the articles, followed by the reiteration pattern. Further, the TP analysis revealed the students' writings lack of coherence and inconsistency. The study ends by shedding light on the importance of students' need to learn and understand the TP used to improve their writings' cohesion and coherence. Indeed, as it is mentioned by Wang (2010), paying attention to the students' use of TTP in their writings would be considerably helpful in enhancing their texts' unity and development.

Along the same line with these empirical studies and in an attempt to address the aforementioned research gaps, this study intends to answer the following research questions:

1. What kinds of Thematic Progression Patterns are used in the English graduate application essays?
2. To what extent did they contribute to the essays' coherence and cohesion?

## **Method**

### ***Data description***

This study adopts the qualitative (Creswell, 2003) research approach within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Snape and Spencer (2003) argued that the qualitative approach is "a research method that aims to provide an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the data which may produce detail description and classification, identify patterns of association or develop typologies and explanation" (p. 69). The qualitative design was selected as this study intends to describe, analyze, interpret, and implicate the major aspects concerned with the Thematic Progression Patterns most commonly found in the English PSs composed by graduate students applying for a master's in Sociology. This approach is also coupled with a descriptive statistic technique which aims at providing the sums of the most frequent theme patterns and progressions in the applicants' essays to

understand how a text is organized and in what manner the ideas are developed throughout.

The data source was 20 PSs produced by English graduate students applying for a master's in Sociology at Western universities. The corpus was collected through direct contact with students due to the confidential nature of the documents (see Haji, 2023).

Table 1. Data description

<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Sociology</b>
<b>Total n- of PSs</b>	20
<b>Total n- of words</b>	13.146
<b>Average of length</b>	657
<b>Range</b>	494-1.117

### *Data analysis*

This study investigated naturally occurring written data as the applicants, in this case, were not informed that their essays would be employed as a corpus for a research study. Indeed, to avoid the influence of any exterior factor such as time constraints, uneasiness, etc. the researcher found it more appropriate to contact students who had already written their application letters, and submitted them to the target university, hence the corpus was a “naturally occurring data” (Bryman, 2011, as cited in Haji, 2023). The current research analyzes the types of thematic patterns most commonly observed in English PSs in the Sociology Discipline relying on Eggin’s (2004) Systemic Functional taxonomy of thematic progression patterns as an analytical framework.

Following the qualitative design, the data were investigated manually undertaking several steps. First, all the application essays were collected through personal contact with the students. Second, all the PSs were read in detail. Third, the essays were broken into paragraphs. Fourth, the paragraphs were broken into separate units consisting of “an independent clause, together with all hypotactically related clauses and words that are dependent on that independent clause” (Fries, 1995, p. 49). This is to ease the researcher to determine Themes and Rhemes. Fifth, the clauses were scrutinized in terms of theme-rheme pattern distribution to track how the applicants organized the ideas and the flow of information in their texts. Theme and Rheme identification was based on Halliday and Matthiessen, ’s (2014) approach which considers that “Theme extends from the beginning of the clause and up to (and including) the first element that has a function in transitivity” (p. 89). Sixth, the researcher identified and classified the thematic progression patterns found relying on Eggins's (2004) model to identify to what extent the writers succeeded in elaborating and relating the main point (theme) to the supporting details and evidence provided in each clause. Then, the thematic progression schema was drawn in the whole PSs. After that, the TPP occurrences and frequency were calculated, compared, and tabulated, and the internal coherence viewed from the TPP was evaluated. Finally, all the findings were interpreted and discussed based on the applied framework and previous research results. Based on Eggins’ (2004) theory of thematic progression, the identification of themes was based on synonyms, paraphrasing, identical wordings, personal pronouns, etc.

Independent clauses served as the optimal unit of analysis in this study, Theme and Rheme were not examined concerning dependent clauses, including embedded clauses. In this concern, Fries and Francis (1992) argued that considering the independent clause only allows the analyst to “discern the method of development and thematic progression of a text” (p.47) more easily, as the structure of beta [dependent] clauses, including their thematic structure, tends to be constrained by the alpha [independent] clauses”. This is also the common approach applied in various text-based research (e.g., McCabe, 1999; Williams, 2009).

### Findings and Discussion

The relative weight a writer gives to each form of the thematic progression pattern shapes the general structure of their writings. The textual analysis of the data under investigation, as illustrated in Table 2, indicated that the reiteration pattern is the most dominant in the English PSs (90%) followed by the zig-zag pattern (9.5%) with the total absence of multiple rheme pattern.

Table 2. The use of thematic progressions in the PSs

PSs	Number of clauses	Reiteration Theme pattern	Zig-zag Theme pattern	Multiple Rheme pattern
PS1	15	10	5	-
PS2	22	17	5	-
PS3	23	23	-	-
PS4	27	23	4	-
PS5	30	28	2	-
PS6	27	22	5	-
PS7	28	24	4	-
PS8	19	19	-	-
PS9	15	15	-	-
PS10	21	19	2	-
PS11	19	14	5	-
PS12	17	13	4	-
PS13	35	33	2	-
PS14	24	24	-	-
PS15	22	21	1	-
PS16	29	27	2	-
PS17	17	17	-	-
PS18	21	19	2	-
PS19	17	17	-	-
PS20	21	21	-	-
<b>Total</b>	449	406	43	0
<b>Percentage</b>	100%	90.57%	9.43%	0%

#### *Reiteration pattern*

The reiteration pattern is the most frequent pattern applied by English graduate students applying for Sociology in their university application letters. It comprised 406 units over 449 TP clauses, which is 90.57% of all the patterns used. This pattern occurs when the theme of the first clause is repeated, not necessarily with identical wording, as the same theme of the subsequent clause (Paltridge, 2006) to elaborate different ideas and information of one participant in a range of clauses. Indeed, in the reiteration theme pattern, “the same theme enters into

relation with several different Rhemes. The result of this type of TP is that the Themes in the text constitute a chain of (typically) co-referential items which extends through a sequence of clauses” (Fries, 1995, p.7). The high frequency of the reiteration theme may be explained by the applicants’ ability to keep the focus of their essays by reiterating the same theme of the clause in the following clauses. In the data under investigation, this pattern consists mainly in retaining the same theme “I” which is employed by the graduate students over several clauses and sentences to try to self-position themselves as perfect candidates for the target program. The thematic investigation of the graduate PSs revealed a heavy reliance on the first personal pronoun “I”, which is appropriate in the genre of PSs, as the most recurrent theme since this genre is meant to provide information that naturally centers around the applicants themselves. This thematic phenomenon contributes to the informativeness, argumentativeness, and unambiguity of the students’ writings, such characteristics are highly recommended by the admission committee members. This pattern can be illustrated in the following extract:

**Extract 1:**

*I am seeking admission to the MA program in Sociology at NYU to pursue my interest in economic sociology. I really want to prepare myself personally, intellectually, and professionally for an academic career in sociology. I was drawn to sociology towards the end of my undergraduate career at Colorado College, after becoming frustrated with the limits of the theoretical perspectives... [PS 3 Sociology]*

Additionally, the preponderance of the reiteration pattern over the other forms of thematic structure in this study signposts that the writers considered the major participants, are given the leading role to strengthen their position in the texts. This can be expected in such kind of genres which are intended to be purely informative about the candidates’ academic credentials and relevant experiences to gain admission to the desired program or university. Further, the genre of PSs is a self-promotional genre that is based essentially on self-glorification and self-appraisal, that is emphasizing the “I”. In this concern, Halliday & Mathiessen (2004) argued that “it tends to be the overall organization of the text that determines the choice of theme in any particular clause, or that determines at least the general pattern of thematic choices” (p.162). Accordingly, there is a strong relation between the choice of the thematic progression pattern and the genre the text belongs to, taking into consideration the ultimate rhetorical purpose of the text. In other words, the choice of thematic pattern is never arbitrary but dependent on the context and content of the text, “the overall organization of the text and the type of register it belongs to, i.e. the variety [...] of which a particular text is an instance, determines the choice of Theme in any particular clause or the general pattern of thematic choices” (Gomez-Gonzalez, 2001, p. 99).

Further, the significant frequency of the first personal pronoun in the English application essays might be explained by the language’s typological features. Indeed, English is considered to be a prominent language in which the subject is an essential item that determines the English sentence structure. In this respect, Li and Thompson (1976) assumed that the various semantic communicative structures constrain the pattern of the sentence and affect the word order as well. Thus, in the

English PSs, the intensive use of the same subject in each sentence can build the thematic progression between two subsequent clauses, forming the Reiteration pattern.

Similar results were found in Brett's (2018) research on thematic progression in British and Japanese university application essays. The findings proved that Japanese students preferred the use of the constant pattern which, in most cases, was the first person pronoun "I", and which tends to be the subject of any unit in all the PSs. The British students, on the contrary, favored the use of the zig-zag pattern (referred to as the linear pattern) which suggests a more complex narrative structure and less use of the first-person singular pronoun. Besides, the obtained findings correlate with Tafakkori and Moghani's (2018) results of their research on thematic progression patterns in English-written biography texts. Indeed, the reiteration pattern, referred to as the constant pattern, appeared to have the highest weight in the TP chains in the English autobiographical texts. This signifies that biographies, and similar genres of narrative and descriptive nature, generally opt to present knowledge simply about the subject, being the main 'theme' or participant, whom the narrative is about. In such cases, the reiteration theme achieves cohesion through the continuous use of the same Theme which develops a static style and stagnant sensation (Enkvist, 1974; Eggins, 1994). In addition, Abed (2010) argued that constant pattern is a "technique of simple explanation and description". As these essays were produced as part of an application process for a master's in a Western university, most probably, the reiteration pattern is found to be the most appropriate thematic form deployed by graduate students to organize their ideas in a simple, clear, and brief way, knowing that the candidates are generally restricted by a limited number of words in their application essays.

Though the extensive use of the reiteration thematic progression pattern has played a crucial role in maintaining the focus of the argument, as well as elaborating different ideas of one participant which is the "I" in a range of clauses, it has been widely criticized by various scholars for its repetitive and redundant aspect. Indeed, the overuse of the reiteration pattern over the other patterns may make the text stuck just in one idea only and get the reader bored. In this concern, Jalilifar (2009) argued that the predominance of the Constant pattern over the other progression patterns may result in "simplistic, repetitive, and redundant paragraphs which may result from continuous application of the same topic" (p.105). This claim is also supported by Wang (2007) in his study of thematic progression in academic texts produced by university students. He maintained that the writers' overuse of the constant pattern, where the same theme is chosen for different clauses, leads the text to appear to be more narrative, lacking argumentation and thematic development. In the same vein, Ashadi et al (2023) discovered that the constant pattern was widely frequent in the students' low-scoring essays, while the Linear Theme pattern was frequently present in the high-scoring essays. They argued that the high achievers succeeded in providing more expounded ideas through their ability to use the linear pattern, while their counterparts tended to maintain the focus on the same subject through the use of the reiteration theme pattern to meet the readers' expectations.

### ***Zig-zag pattern***

Surprisingly, this pattern was not as dominant as the preceding one in the Sociology PSs. Indeed, it comprised only 9.57% of the TP patterns in the application essays. In this thematic pattern, the element that is presented as the Rheme of the first clause gets promoted to be the Theme of the subsequent clause (Bloor & Bloor, 2004) to develop what was mentioned in the Rheme of the previous clause. The use of the zig-zag pattern in the Sociology graduate PSs by some candidates carries certain significance. This thematic progression structure assists the students in smoothly composing their application essays by introducing new information to be elaborated, a fact that will enrich and strengthen the development of their texts' fluency and coherence (Alyousef, 2015). More importantly, the zig-zag thematic pattern might be employed in the data under investigation as a persuasive strategy to prove the student's suitability to the target discipline. More proficient writers opted to use a highly argumentative and engaged writing style, where arguments are built in a persuasive structure, to achieve its communicative purpose on the one hand and as a means to retain the text's cohesion on the other. This could be attributed to the candidates' awareness in choosing the appropriate way to portray and "sell" their image to the evaluation committee members and effectively impress their audience. Indeed, by applying the zig-zag pattern, English students attempted to produce a more complex and fluid narrative pattern meanwhile avoiding the redundancy of the first-person pronoun as the focal Theme in their application essays. The zig-zag progression pattern can be illustrated in the extract below:

#### **Extract 2:**

*I am volunteering on a project this summer involving the rehabilitation of young offenders through sport. **This** is another part of my life... [Ps 11 Sociology]*

#### **Extract 3:**

*I have taken part in many annual performances during the last two years of choreography, set design, and fund raising. **This** all had an unexpected impact on my thinking about my sociology A-level work... [Ps 11 Sociology]*

Several linguists rallied to the idea that the scarcity of the zig-zag pattern in some students' writings and its absence in others may cause difficulties in developing a well-structured argumentative style as well as sustaining a strong logical relationship between the successive clauses. Indeed, according to Thompson (2014), this particular pattern ensures a smooth flow of information development in the texts, hence it contributes to the text's overall coherence and cohesion. This creates a sense of continuous thematic development in the writing by extending and building on the newly preceding information. As such, the use of the zig-zag pattern in students' texts commits to realizing the text's coherence by switching a Rheme of a previous clause to be the Theme of the following clause while maintaining the semantic correctness and thematic connectedness of the sentence. Such a writing pattern proves to be beyond the majority of the student's writing skills and abilities at this level.

Nevertheless, the zig-zag pattern is commonly revealed in several studies on thematic progression patterns. Based on a thematic progression investigation of students' final reports, Hendrawan et al. (2021) discovered that this pattern was more frequently used compared with the reiteration pattern and the Multiple-rheme pattern. They argued that the intensive use of this pattern, at the expense of others, created a thematic cumulative development on the one hand and contributed significantly to the texts' internal cohesion and coherence on the other. Besides, based on the obtained findings, the authors concluded that the writers of the final reports have succeeded, to some extent, in applying the writing techniques and thematic features suitable to the genre's characteristics.

### ***Multiple-rheme pattern***

According to Eggins (2004), the Multiple-rheme pattern refers to the Rheme in the previous clause that includes several constituents that are taken up as themes in the subsequent clauses. The thematic progression analysis of the data under investigation revealed that this pattern was absent, that is it was not used by any of the applicants in the Sociology PSs, which seems quite expected. Indeed, though this pattern offers a well-structured thematic development of the text which may convince the readers to align with the writers' opinions, in such a genre, Sociology Master students shared the same tendency to adopt a plain, direct style based on the reiteration and zig-zag progression patterns to make their essays therefore understandable. This reveals the students' awareness of the genre's academic conventions and requirements, knowing that the selected participants got admitted and were already enrolled in the target program. More to the point, the absence of the third type of thematic progression pattern did not affect negatively or underscore the quality of the analyzed graduate PSs in any aspect. Conversely, it was validly replaced by the intensive use of reiteration and zig-zag patterns to operate the same goal, which is to create a well-organized thematic pattern in their essays, to convince their readers of their suitability to the desired university.

Some scholars attributed the scarcity or even absence of the Multiple-Rheme pattern in students' texts to its complexity as "creating this kind of construction is very difficult for students" (Hendrawan et al., 2021, p. 200). Indeed, in this particular genre, it can be concluded that candidates were more confident to incorporate simple writing patterns that can ensure an easy flow of information instead of more complex patterns which may lead the readers to a kind of misunderstanding or ambiguity. Within the same perspective, Emilia et al. (2018) explained in their study of analysis of cohesion in exposition texts that this pattern was used only by high-achiever students who proved their ability to provide more additional in-depth details and succeeded in expanding information shared in the Rhemes. This indicates that these students have carefully organized their texts in such a way that the ideas are structured into a clear sequence in the sense that the text smoothly moves on to guide the reader to a line of information as a whole. Such a writing technique could not be easily applied by low and middle-achievers to produce a well-organized and successfully planned piece of writing with a better sense of unity, connectedness, and fluency of information within both the text and clause levels.

It is worth mentioning also that the multiple-rheme pattern is generally present in sophisticated expository and argumentative texts (Zhang & Li, 2009),

and it “tends to occur in paragraphs involving classification” (Nwogu & Bloor, 1991, p. 379”, which is not the case of self-promotional writings. In argumentative writings, the incorporation of this thematic progression emphasizes the focus of the text and reveals a strong connection and continuity among ideas which may result in a deeper discussion of the proposed topic. Hence, it may be inferred that the thematic progression use is genre-specific. In other words, the applicants’ tendency to employ one pattern over the others can be accounted for by the text’s purpose and the intended audience’s expectations.

### **Conclusion**

This study has investigated thematic progressions in 20 graduate PSs, written by English students applying for a master's in Sociology, from a Systemic Functional perspective. Indeed, the paper aims to investigate the different types of thematic progression patterns, proposed by Eggins (2004), embedded in the selected application essays and how they have been technically employed by the candidates not only to prove their proficiency in developing their ideas logically and coherently but also to convince their audience of their suitability to the target discipline or university. The obtained findings revealed also that the reiteration progression pattern was the most prominent pattern adopted by the applicants to maintain the focus of the same Theme or subject and enhance the logical flow of information. The second pattern present in some of the students’ essays was the zig-zag pattern which was used by some of the applicants in an attempt to link the cohesive and coherent ties in the analyzed essays. However, the total absence of the third type of thematic progression pattern proposed by Eggins (2004) signposts that due to the selected genre’s requirement, the graduate applicants favored a plain and straightforward writing style to ensure the essays’ accessibility, readership, and more importantly admission.

From a linguistic perspective, the present study offers valuable implications for corpus-assisted thematic progression analysis. It has contributed to revealing the dominant thematic patterns incorporated in a less studied genre, which is the genre of PSs. Indeed, it offered a better understanding of the various thematic structures that may shape a successful application essay. Hence, this paper could be useful for all prospective students by providing them with clearer ideas concerning the thematic and structural pattern to be included in such kinds of documents. From a pedagogic perspective, this study provides instructors with valuable insights on how they can include SFL-based studies of such academic and self-promotional genres as a potential pedagogical tool in classroom activities, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts. Indeed, based on several successful PSs, this research suggests that thematic progression patterns are to be considered one of the most significant and effective writing techniques in teaching academic writing at different levels to diagnose the students’ weaknesses and enhance their writing abilities, thus improving their chances for admission.

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