

Exploring Coherence In Efl Students' Writing: A Theme–Rheme And Semantic Discourse Analysis Of Senior High School Texts

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ABSTRACT

SMA PGRI I Denpasar Bali has deep focus on English application in the school which English becomes special concern given to the students. This research would like to explore the students' competence in English semantic discourse by investigating the students' competence in applying Theme-Rheme to connect one clause to other clauses. This research uses qualitative method, Grounded Theory, namely to develop theory of linguistic to reveal the students' competence in writing skill. The data were taken from twenty tenth grade of SMA PGRI I Denpasar Students in April 2025. Five of the twenty students were chosen as the data randomly. The five students' work are labelled as Quote, namely; Quote I, Quote II, Quote III, Quote IV, and Quote V. The clauses in each quote were observed and identified to find out the semantic relation by identifying Theme-Rheme Functions. The theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics, Theme-Rheme is used to examine the students' competence in English writing which involves Topical Theme and Textual Theme. The result of this research indicates that incompetence of understanding Theme-Rheme in clauses makes the clauses not have semantic relation. Therefore, the students' work is not categorized as a text. The phenomenon brings positive contribution in English teaching and Semiology which the English teacher must improve the students' motivation to learn English. In addition, the teacher is expected to teach English reading in different genres. The result of this research adds applied linguistic references which can be used for the following applied linguistics researches.

Keywords: Student, Semantic Relation, Topical Theme, Conjunction

INTRODUCTION

The dynamic of social and economic aspects in communities cannot be avoided happening in the world. Those phenomena influence communities' view toward the world. The communities' readiness is very significant function to cope with the social and technology development. The readiness must be encouraged by advance of education since it does not only develop one's skill and knowledge, but it also develops one's mental regarding to social phenomena

happening in the world (Mardatillah et al., 2025).

SMA PGRI I Denpasar is a senior high school existing in Denpasar which has deep concern to social and technology dynamic happening in the world. It provides subjects realized in the curriculum which have positive impacts for social and technology development happening in the communities. Therefore, the students have relevant skill and knowledge which can be applied in industries which can bring positive

impacts for communities' productivity (Tobbi, 2025).

SMA PGRI I Denpasar knows that Bali is very famous in tourism industries which involve many employees to support the existence of tourism industries. Therefore, English is viewed very important to create skilled students in the industries. The school establishes English environment in the school where the students interact each other with English (Meng et al., 2026).

The students are given English from tenth grade to twelve grade intensively twice in a week. The subject of English given to the students emphasizes on applied linguistics such as; reading, speaking, writing, and listening. Those basic skills are given to improve the students' English competence in daily communication (Culcover, 2013). Those skills are viewed to be very important since those skills should be comprehended very well. Learning those skills enables the students to have critical thinking of social phenomena happening in communities.

In speaking skill, the teacher provides the topics related to daily conversation for examples; topics in restaurant, hotel, shopping, tourism object, and many others. The students are given chance to speak in English monolog or dialog. In listening, the students practice to listen English song, English Film and others. In reading, the students are guided to understand the clauses based on the current context. In writing skill, the students are given chance to tell stories then the students are required to rewrite based on their cognition in comprehending text

(Tabatabaee-Yazdi & Samir, 2023). The process of studying English must be supported with media to increase students' motivation (Tekel & Erus, 2023). Speaking English requires linguistic and social context which they coincide to work together produce certain message or reference (Kunjana Rahardi et al., 2025).

Learning English is not only about how to understand the material, but it is also complexity which involve social context such as *field*, *tenor*, and *mode* (Dijk, 2009). *Field* is associated with the participants, namely who studies, what for the students, who teach, the time and how the process of teaching and learning is done. *Tenor* is associated with the relation between the teacher and the students such as vertical or horizontal relation. *Mode* is associated with social aspects such as: media, kinds of language, social norm, the aim of learning, social signs, and others (Suardana, 2021). Those social contexts cannot be part from learning since learning needs conducive environment (Arfah et al., 2023 ; Juwana & Sukendra, 2026).

Language is associated with the structure of clause and how to connect one clause to other clauses. The language users must have deep cognition about language features used to link each clause within a text. The clauses linked must have certain function so the text must be integrated in the meaning. Social context is associated with the time, participant, method, norm, and other social aspects (Stojnic, 2021). The competence in English can be found in four skills, one of which is writing skill. The users of English can elaborate their imagination,

planning, opinion, information, and command in their own ways (Suardana & Fitri, 2024).

Evaluation is an obligation which must be managed to evaluate the success of learning and teaching. Therefore, the teacher measures the achievement of the target by doing assessment from linguistic point of view. The assessment is viewed to be very important because the assessment reveals the students' English competence degree. The assessment in English skill is integrated since the competence supports each other. In addition, the evaluation brings positive impacts for the teacher teaching English to evaluate the teacher's competence in teaching English (Walker et al., 2024).

Arif & Suardana (2025) evaluated the grammatical cohesion in written text done by the students of The Sailing Bali College. The result of that research indicated that the students were still confused in using the appropriate English cohesion in the written texts done by the students. That research is similar to the research by Delfia et al. (2023). Lexical cohesion is one of cohesive devices used to emphasize the message of language. Lexical cohesion is used to repeat the previous theme of the clause. The evaluation of lexical cohesion was done by (Rasis et al., 2025). That research observed the repetition, synonym, antonym, hyponymy, meronymy, and collocation in spoken text. The result of that research indicated that the function of lexical cohesion function to maintain the meaning (Chuenchaichon, 2022).

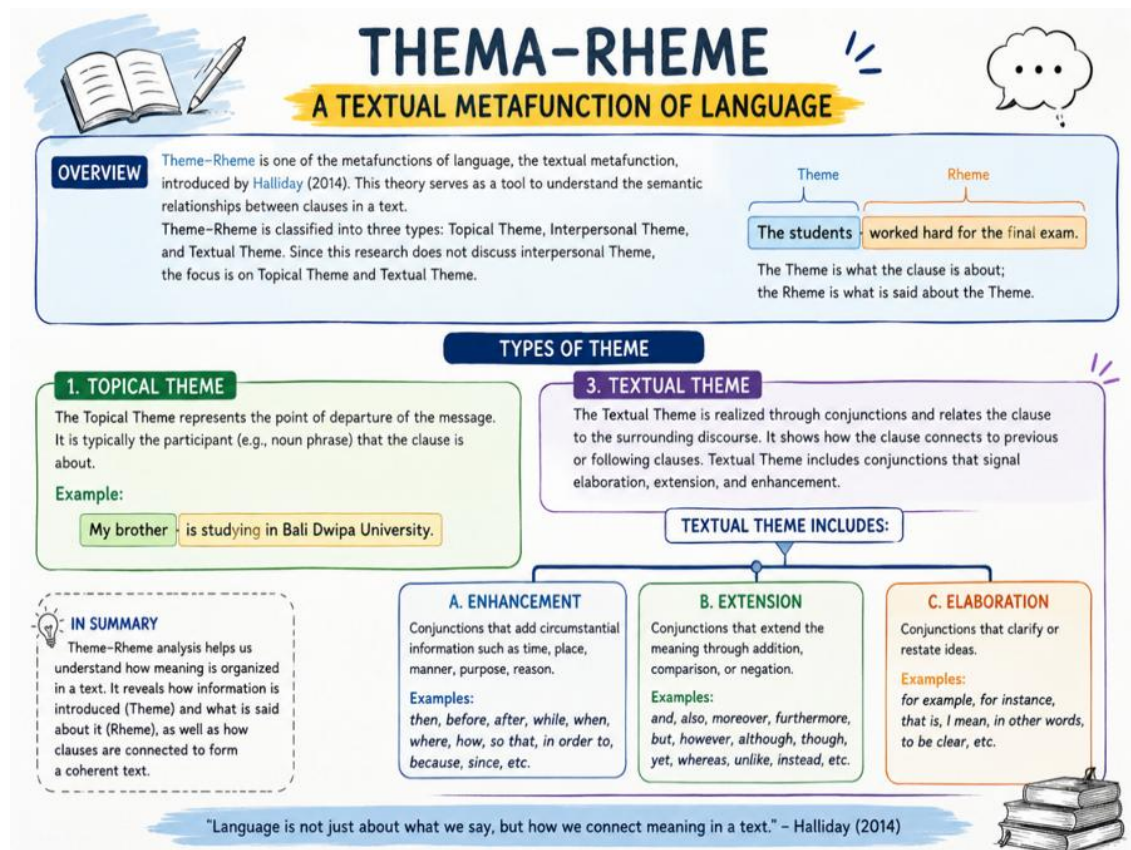
Those previous researches stimulate the researcher to evaluate the tenth-grade students of SMA PGRI I Denpasar in

English competence from semantic discourse. This research focuses on the students' competence in English from the Theme-Rheme in the students' work. The research has more complex than the previous researches mentioned above since this research involves Topical Theme and Textual Theme which Topical Theme is not analyzed yet by the previous researches.

The result of this research has close relationship with psycholinguistics, namely to develop the students' competence in English use. This result gives description about how far the students' competence to correlate one clause to the other clauses into a text. Therefore, the result of this research can be used as a reference for the following psycholinguistics researches. In addition, the result of this research is expected to be able to trigger other linguistic researchers to develop theory of linguistics to measure students' English competence.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of Theme-Rheme is one of language functions called metafunction proposed by Halliday (2014). The theory emphasizes how one clause and other clauses have semantic relation within a text. If one clause does not have semantic relation with others, the collection of the clauses does not establish a text. One of linguistic features used to measure the relation is Theme-Rheme. The concept of Theme-Rheme for this research is described as below in which ChatGPT is used as assistance for the description



Linguistically, Theme is an element which places initial position which is realized with adverbial or nominal group, while the rests of the elements within the clause is called as Rheme. A text containing more than one clause must have semantic relation. The relation is realized with Theme and Rheme in the second or the sequence clause. Theme-Rheme can be classified into three Themes, namely; Topical Theme, Interpersonal Theme, and Textual Theme. Interpersonal Theme is applied in social interaction which involves participants in it realized in dialog, while this research does not describe language as ideational and

textual functions. Because of that reason, this research focuses on writing competence so this research analyses two Themes, namely Topical and Textual Themes (Suharsono et al., 2024).

Topical Theme is adverbs realized with adverbs or nominal group function as Subject of clause. The nominal group used in a clause can be animate or inanimate. Topical Theme can be realized with linguistics elements such as: pronoun, the name of entity including of the synonym, antonym, and repetition. The appropriate realizations in the following or in the sequence clauses can establish certain meaning in the text.

Textual Theme is associated with conjunction functioning as clause connector so the clauses establish a text. Conjunction can function as intra or inter conjunction. Conjunction can be divided into; elaboration, extension, enhancement.

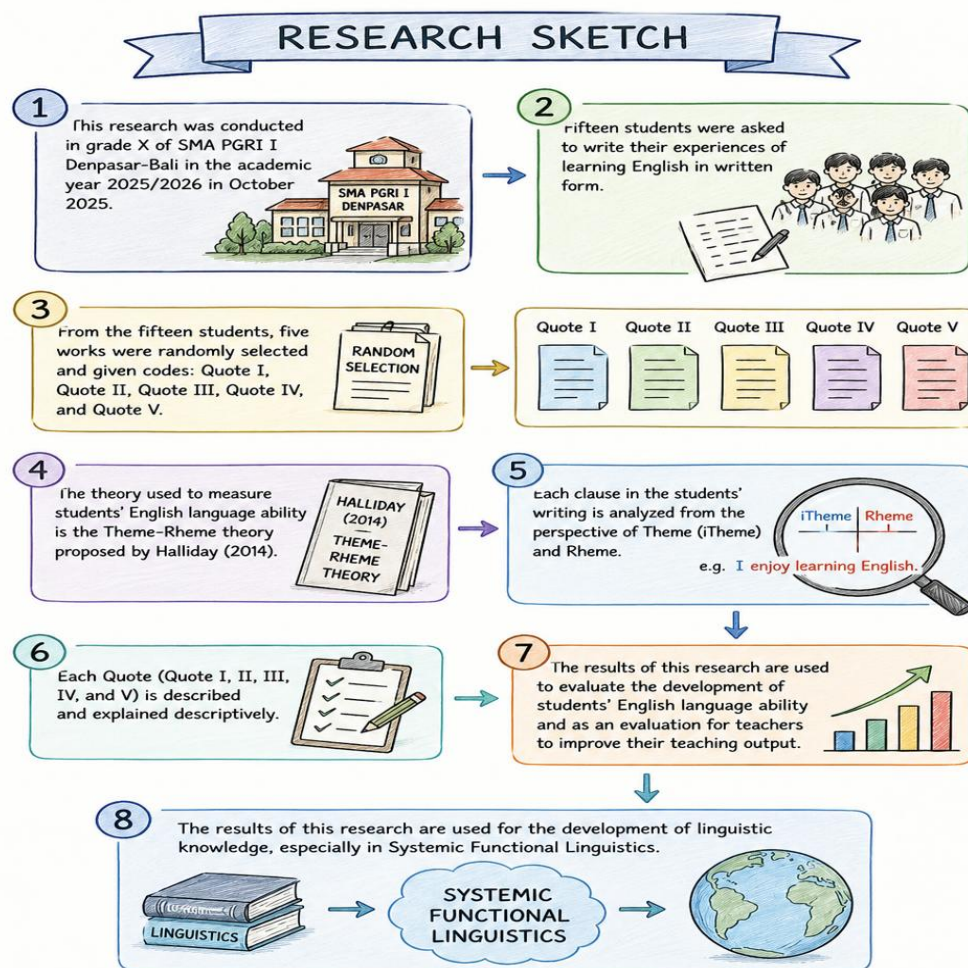
Elaboration conjunction serves to elaborate the main clause or to emphasize the previous topic. The elaboration has function in the text such as: (i) Clarification, it clarifies the topic embed in the previous clause such as; *I mean, It means, it refers to, in other word, in conclusion, I resume, the conclusion,* and others. (ii) Simplification, it simplifies the meaning in the clause by simplifying such as; *for example,* and *for instance* (Halliday, 2014).

Extension conjunction serves to add information conveyed in the previous information. The existence of the following clause gives more additional information. The conjunctions used in the clauses are; *and, in addition, besides, not only... but also.* Extension conjunctions are also used to state contradiction and choices such as; *or, instead of, but, however, either or, neither nor* (Suardana, 2020).

Enhancement conjunctions are conjunctions which function to connect clauses functioning as adjunction clauses (Arif & Suardana, 2025). The conjunctions used in the clauses serves as: (i) Time is realized with *when, after, before, while, then.* (ii) Location is realized with *in the place, from which, in which, as long as, the time.* (iii) Manner is realized with *as, the same way as, by.* (iv) Point of view is realized with *according to, according to, I think).* (v) Purpose is realized with *in order to, to, by aim to.* (vi) Cause or reason is realized with *because* and *since.*

METHOD

This research is qualitative, Grounded theory, namely this research would like to develop theory through evaluation the students' competence in using conjunction in written text (Madriana & Suardana, 2025). The researcher did practice in teaching writing skill at SMA PGRI I Denpasar-Bali. The method used for teaching is contextual approach, based on the students' competence or knowledge about world (Nuriah et al., 2025). <https://chatgpt.com/c/6a940342-e7b8-83ec-9863-6fb671f2308e>.



The data were taken from twenty tenth grade of SMA PGRI I Denpasar-Bali. The research is assessment of the students' competence in English conjunction. The students were required to write their daily activity in English. The written quotes were identified and selected for the data based on the requirements. The texts can be used the data if the text is more than five clauses, the works are written in good English Structure, and with the writer' name. If the text is similar activities with another, the text which used the best English structure was selected as the data. The selection of finding the data resulted in Five of twenty quotes based on those categories. The five works are given code as Quote I, Quote II, Quote III, Quote IV, and Quote V.

As mentioned above, each quote must be established with more than five

clauses. Each clause used in the works were read very carefully by observing in semantic relation, namely Topical Theme and Textual Theme. Topical Themes are used to examine the semantic relation among the clauses within the works. In addition, conjunctions are used to identify the text genre. The Theory used to analyze the data is Theme and Rheme Theory as part of SFL proposed by Halliday (2014). The theory can identify the depth of semantic relation between one clause to other clauses. The relation can be realized with Theme with Theme, Theme with Rheme, Rheme with Rheme, and Rheme with Theme.

Textual Theme is realized with conjunctions grouped into three functions, namely; elaboration, extension, and enhancement. The elaboration

conjunctions are seen how the main clause is elaborated with the second clause such as: similarity, simplification, and repetition. The extension conjunction used in the clauses can be seen from how the conjunctions are functioned to connect one clause to another clause by giving additional information or omitting some information. Textual conjunctions used in the text are seen from how the second clause gives some information about time, place, frequency, and manner.

The analysis of this research is presented descriptively by presenting five quotes which the Theme and Rheme in the second or the following clauses are coded with italic type. The result of this research gives positive contribution for English teaching and learning output.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section elaborates the conjunctions applied in the students' work. The analysis is presented in each quote as below.

Quote I

I get up at 6 every day and I take a bath about ten minutes. At 06:30. I have breakfast only a piece of bread and a glass of water. Before I go to school, I prepare my stationaries for the studies at the school. I go to school at 07:10. When I arrive at the school and I go into the class. At 07:30, the lesson starts for the first study. My favorite subject is English so I study very seriously. My father works as English speaking guide. He always invites me to escort guests when I do not go to school. I always pay attention to my father when he speaks English. I get a lot of things after I

join tour. I think it is good for me to improve my English.

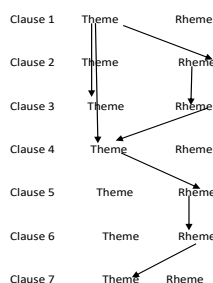
Quote I is not coherent since there are two topics presented in the quote (Todd, 2023). The first topic is about daily activity. However, the second topic is about the writer's activities beyond school. The two topics do not have semantic relation. The first topic emphasizes the writer's activities done after getting up. Whereas, the second topic is about the writer's activity when doing tour. The first topic is realized with *I* which states the student or the writer of the quote. However, the clause *At 07:30, the lesson starts for the first study* is still considered as having semantic relation with the previous clause because the Rheme of that clause has semantic relation with *the class* in used in the previous clause. The clauses *My father works as English speaking guide. He always invites me to escort guests* do not have semantic relation with the previous clauses. Quote I can be divided into two topics as below.

Topic I is realized as below.

(1) *I get up at 6 every day and I take a bath about ten minutes.* (2) *At 06:30. I have breakfast only a piece of bread and a glass of water.* (3) *Before I go to school, I prepare my stationaries for the studies at the school.* (4) *I go to school at 07:10.* (5) *When I arrive at the school and I go into the class.* (6) *At 07:30, the lesson starts for the first study.* (7) *My favorite subject is English so I study very seriously.*

In topic I, the conjunction *and* in the clauses *I get up at 6 every day and I take a bath about ten minutes at 06:30* are

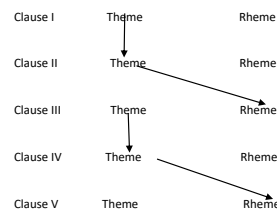
not appropriate. Semantically, the function of *and* is to add one activity so the information is more complete. However, the conjunction should be *then* which serves to connect information. The appropriate conjunction in that clause should be enhancement, namely to state the sequence event. The same case happens in the clause *When I arrive at the school and I go into the class*. The Theme and Rheme is elaborated as below.



The second topic is realized as below.

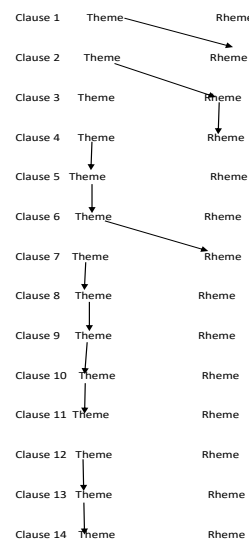
(1) *My father works as English speaking guide.* (2) *He always invites me to escort guests when I do not go to school.* (3) *I always pay attention to my father when he speaks English.* (4) *I get a lot of things after I join tour.* (5) *I think it is good for me to improve my English.*

The second topic of Quote I uses conjunction *when* which indicates time. The function of that conjunction serves the time the student learns English beyond the class. The clause *I think* in *I think it is good for me to improve my English* serves as “point of view”. The student has prediction or opinion about the class. That conjunction is realized with Mental Process related to cognition about the significance of English for future.



Quote II

(1) I study at the school to improve my knowledge. (2) In my opinion, English has very important thing for me (3) because most jobs in Bali need English. (4) My sister cannot speak English (5) so she does want to work in a hotel. (6) She does not have good English. (7) I do not want as my sister experience. (8) I study English hard. (9) I get English at the school. (10) I also study English at home (11) in order I have English competence. (12) My father is a hotel staff. (13) He works at cook (14) because he like cooking very much. I like cooking.



Four clauses *My father is a hotel staff. He works at cook because he like cooking very much. I like cooking* make the Quote II not as a text because the four clauses do not support the previous topics. The four clauses talk about the student' father

activity. The clause I like cooking do not support the clauses describing the student's father. The father activity is "working", while the clause I like cooking states the student's hobby.

Preposition phrase in my opinion in the clause In my opinion, English has very important thing for me because most jobs in Bali need English indicates that the student has cognition about the significance of English for future time. The preposition phrase is associated with opinion which is similar to "I think" (Halliday, 2014).

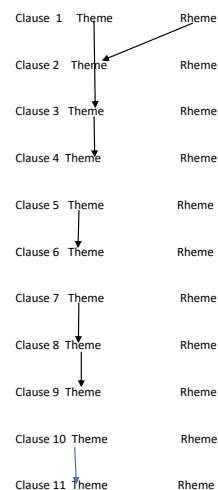
Quote II omits conjunction as the clause She does not have good English. I do not want as my sister experience. I study English hard. The clauses will be much clearer if the clauses are marked with conjunction like 'Therefore' which is appropriate for the clause She does not have good English. Therefore, I do not want as my sister experience. The similar thing also happens in the clause I do not want as my sister experience. In order word, I must study hard.

The clause *My father is a hotel staff* uses Topical Theme realized with my father which does support the Theme-Rheme in the previous clauses. The irrelevant Topical Themes causes the text not become as text.

Quote III

(1) I go to school at 06:45. (2) The school starts at 07:30 then finish at 14:45. (3) I arrive home at 15:00. (3) I take a nap for thirty minutes. At 16:00. (4) I help my mother to clean and cook for our family dinner. (5) My father arrives home at 18:00. (6) He works as officer in one of private offices in Denpasar. (7) My sister is studying

Civil Engineer at Udayana University. (8) She is very busy every day. (9) She takes job training in a big project. (10) I want to be English Guide (11) after I finish this school while I continue my higher study.



The clauses *At 16:00, I help my mother to clean and cook for our family dinner. My father arrives home at 18:00* do not have similar Topical Theme. The first clause uses *At 16:00*, I as Topical Theme, while the second clause uses *my father* as Topical Theme. The difference Theme in the clauses is not categorized as a text.

Quote III is similar to previous tests which not all clauses have semantic relation so the text is not constructed by the clauses with irrelevant topic. The first topic talks about the student's activity realized with *I go to school at 06:45. The school starts at 07:30 then finish at 14:45. I arrive home at 15:00. I take a nap for thirty minutes. At 16:00, I help my mother to clean and cook for our family dinner.*

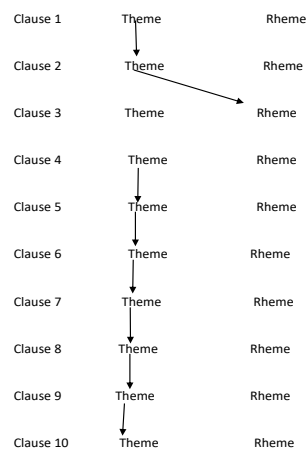
The clauses are made very simple since the clauses do not get expansion in nominal group or verbal group. The clauses can be added with conjunction

stating sequence of event “after that”. Therefore, the clause can be *I take a nap for thirty minutes. At 16:00 “after that” help my mother to clean and cook for our family dinner.*

Clauses realized with *he works as officer in one of private offices in Denpasar. My sister is studying Civil Engineer at Udayana University* do not have any semantic relation. The irrelevant of those clauses can be seen from the message of the clauses (Suharsono et al., 2024). The clause *She takes job training in a big project* does not have semantic relation with the clause *I want to be English Guide after I finish this school while I continue my higher study.*

Quote IV

(1) I study English very Monday and Thursday in the class. (2) I like English very much. (3) My parent and sister support me to study English since they need me to work in a five star hotel. (4) My sister works as clerk in a national bank. (5) She likes working there. (6) I and she take English course every Tuesday and Friday nights. (7) I also play Balinese Gamelan in a Banjar. (8) I do it every Sunday afternoon. (9) My activities are full in each week. (10) I enjoy them very much. Those will be very useful for my life in my future.



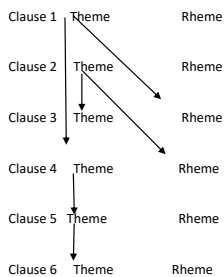
Quote IV is different from Quote I, II, and III. Quote IV is categorized as text (Fairrooz, 2023). Each clause supports each other. The linguistic features used as the indicator that the text is integrated are Theme-and Rheme of the clauses (Suharsono et al., 2024). The Topical Theme of the text is the student realized with *I* and *she*.

The conjunctions used in the quote are very limited such as *since* and *also*. The conjunction *since* is used to state the reason, while the conjunction *also* is used to state addition (Riadi, 2023). Those conjunctions used in the quote indicate the student makes descriptive text (Said et al., 2022). The text emphasizes activity realized with Material Process such as *study*.

Quote V

(1) I am a hard student because I have dream to be an English teacher. (2) My mother is a Math teacher. (3) My mother always motivates me to be a teacher. (4) I do not want to make my mother disappointed so I must help her to do her job at home such as; cleaning, cooking, washing, and ironing. (5) I study every night at 19:00 and I watch TV or play game. (6) I go to bed at 20:00.

Before I sleep then I pray for my better life.



Quote V is similar to Quote IV since both Quote IV and Quote V have clauses which one clause to other clauses are integrated. All of the clauses used in the quote use *I* as Topical Theme so the quote can be called as a text (Rosliana et al., 2026).

However, Quote V is categorized as narrative text because the clauses emphasize Relational process realized with *have*. The conjunctions used in Quote V are such as *because*, *so*, and *before*. Those conjunctions in the quote indicate that the quote talks about the reason and the sequence of event.

FINDINGS

As mentioned above, there are five quotes analyzed in this research. There are several findings founds this analysis, namely:

The clauses made by the students are simple clauses since the clauses do not expansion through nominalization. The nominal group used in the quotes are filled with the head, lack of pre and post modifiers in the nominal groups. In addition, verbal groups used in the quotes are very limited. It means that the students have ability in speaking instead of writing skill. The students must be trigger to write English text (Aeni et al., 2024).

The students used very limited conjunction. Elaboration conjunction is not found in the quotes. The absence of elaboration conjunction represents the students cannot develop nominal group. It indicates the clauses are very simple. The conjunctions used in the quotes are such as; enhancement and extension. Enhancement conjunctions are found such as *since*, *because*, *before* and *so*, while additional conjunction such as *also*. The limitation of the conjunction indicates that the students are not familiar how to connect one clause to other clauses. The competence of connecting clauses is one of writing skill (Cushing Weigle, 2009).

The students are more familiar in writing narrative instead of descriptive. It may be caused by the familiarity in reading story texts. It establishes metacognitive aspect in writing English (Aziz & Nasir, 2019). Therefore, the students are programed what they should do in writing.

The students' creativity must be developed by giving practice in reading skill because reading skill has very close relationship with writing. In addition, the students must be guided how to develop clause by establish environment (Triyono et al., 2023).

Quote I uses two topics in the text so the information realized is not consistent so it is not called text (Suardana & Fitri, 2026). The first topic is realized with *I* function as Topical Theme. Whereas, the second topic is realized with *my father* as Topical Theme.

CONCLUSION

Theme and Rheme is very important to create the coherence of text. Topical Theme used in the quotes are dominated by Subject *I*. it represents the students describe themselves as the actors. The Textual theme realized with indicates narrative genre text which describe the sequence of events. The quotes made by the students indicate the students must be given guidance how to develop the main topic by developing clause so the clauses constructing the text have semantic relation. The limitation of conjunctions used in the quotes represents that the students are familiar to use simple clauses. The language used by the students is one of the characteristics of spoken text.

This research is expected to bring some positive impacts for applied linguistics, namely; Semantics, English Teaching and Learning, Psycholinguistics, and Semiotics. The result of this research is expected to add linguistic references which can be used as reference for the following linguistics research. In addition, the result of this research is used as assessment for the school to improve the output.

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