Thematic Structure in Reading Comprehension Texts in English Textbooks

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Abstract—**Theme choice in academic texts plays an important role to the reader's comprehension as it facilitates the coherence and cohesiveness of the text. However, research on thematic structure in academic settings in developing world has still received less attention. This paper reports findings on the use of thematic structure in four English textbooks in a book series used in tertiary education in the Vietnamese context. It employed functional grammar as the main theoretical framework to the analysis of different types of themes including simple themes, multiple themes and clausal themes in the 24 reading comprehension texts across four levels, specifically elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate. The analysis revealed three main findings. First, simple themes, which include topical/unmarked and marked themes, were used most across levels, while multiple themes took the second position, and clausal themes were used the least. Second, the number of multiple and clausal themes increased in accordance with the textbook levels from low to high, though that of simple themes demonstrated a decreasing pattern. Third, among components of multiple themes, the frequency of experiential and textual themes was significantly high in all four books, compared with that of interpersonal themes. It is concluded that a variety of theme types were employed in reading texts across levels, contributing to the coherent organisation of the texts.**

Index Terms—**Theme, rheme, english textbooks, reading texts.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Linguistic complexity has increasingly become appealing to educational linguistics researchers because of its importance in language and literacy education. Even though the notion of complexity has been extensively explored (see [5], [13], [18], [34], [37], [43], [51]); there is, in fact, no standard linguistic measure towards it as different linguistic approaches lead to different ways of assessing complexity [57]. Therefore, it is argued that linguistic complexity should be examined from a specific linguistic theory [11].

Functional grammar (also known as Systemic Functional Grammar) is a theory of language developed by Michael Halliday, a key pioneer of SFL which has been very influential linguistic approach in Australia and worldwide for the past three decades. Halliday's linguistic theory was officially introduced in his series of books entitled *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* ([26], [28], [30]) and *Halliday's*

Introduction to Functional Grammar [31]. According to Halliday [26], functional grammar can be understood in three ways. Firstly, it is functional in the sense that it provides an explanation of how language is used. It means that every piece of text can be justified in the context of use. Moreover, it is designed to gratify human needs. Hence, a functional grammar is basically a natural grammar in the sense that everything in it can be clarified with regard to how language is used. The second meaning of functional grammar is that the central components of meaning in language are functional components. Language is structured with two types of meaning, "the ideational or reflective", and "the interpersonal or active". They are, in the terminology of the current theory, "metafunctions". The ideational meaning refers to language used to construe meaning or human experience about the world while the interpersonal meaning refers to the relationship between the speaker/writer and the listener/reader. The combination of these two meanings is a third metafunction known as the textual meaning. Finally, Halliday [26] states that functional grammar can be recognised in the sense that each element in a language is explained concerning its function in the total linguistic system. That is to say, each single unit of language such as clause or phrase, is interpreted as functional with reference to the whole. In a word, functional grammar is "the interpretation of texts, of the system and of the elements of linguistic structures" ([26], p.xiii). Due to the richness of this theory, it provides powerful principles to understand and manage complexity [41].

Since its appearance in the 1970s, functional grammar has been widely applied in a variety of academic fields including language and literacy education, child language development, science education, speech pathology and artificial intelligence ([28], [32]). Regarding language and literacy education in specific, the theory underpins the Australian Curriculum: English and it is now adopted in curriculum design in the field of Teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) in many parts of the world. Despite this strong influence, research on English textbooks adopted in language education at the university level in Vietnam is still under investigated. This research looks at how the use of thematic structure differs across levels including the elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate levels in an English book series to provide more insights into the complexity of written textbook language and to suggest implications for textbook writing and curriculum design. This is part of a larger research project that examines different measures of linguistic complexity [57]. The following section will describe the

theoretical background of the investigated language concept.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A. Theme-Rheme

When speakers/writers produce a message, they produce only one word at a time, and they have to choose a starting point for their message [39]. Halliday ([26], [28]) defines the point of departure of the message as Theme, and the remainder of the message as Rheme. In other words, Theme is the element which comes first in the message, while Rheme is the one which provides additional information to the starting point and is available for subsequent development in the text. The clause as message is therefore organised into Theme + Rheme. The system of Theme relates to the textual metafunction of the language. It organises "the clause to show what its local context is in relation to the general context of the text it serves" ([42], p.21). As Theme is the first constituent of the clause, and Rheme is the rest of the clause; the different choice of Theme contributes to a different meaning and different organisation of the text as can be seen in the examples in Table I.

TABLE I: EXAMPLES OF THEME CHOICE ([55], PP.118-119)

Theme	Rheme
For centuries,	yellow canaries have been used to 'test' the air in mining.
Yellow canaries	have been used to 'test' the air in mining for centuries
Miners	have used yellow canaries to 'test' the air for centuries
In mining	yellow canaries have been used to 'test' the air for centuries
To 'test' the air in mining	yellow canaries have been used for centuries
The air	has been 'tested' in mining for centuries by using yellow canaries

B. Types of Theme

1) Simple themes (topical theme or experiential theme)

Simple Themes are also recognised as experiential (topical) theme [28] or ideational Theme [42]. Simple Themes are divided into unmarked topical Theme and marked topical Theme. If the first topical element of a declarative clause is also the Subject, it is an unmarked Theme which may be a noun or pronoun realised as a nominal group or a nominalisation. Vice versa, non-subject Themes are marked [42]. Marked Theme functions as adjunct or complement of the clause. Adjunct consists of adverbial group or prepositional phrase. Complement can be a nominal group or a nominalisation. Simple Theme is the first element in the clause that conveys the 'representational' meaning. It contains only one structural element which is constituted by just one unit: one nominal group, adverbial group or prepositional phrase [28]. Therefore, it might be a 'participant' (a), a 'circumstance' (b), giving information about time, place, manner, cause, etc. or the process (c) [42].

In Examples 1, 2 and 3, Themes are recognised in italic face.

Example 1: ***Many people in North America*** *begin college at the age of eighteen.* ([1], p. 32)

(Unmarked Theme as a participant)

Example 2: ***In the United States***, *the cost of a college education can be quite expensive.* ([1], p.32)

(Marked Theme as a circumstance)

Example 3: ***Says Mr Smith:*** *"It's too early to draw any conclusions yet".* ([42], p. 24)

(Marked Theme as the process)

2) Multiple themes (textual and interpersonal themes)

We have discussed simple or topical Theme which expresses the representational function and construes a quantum of human experience in the clause. There are also other elements preceding the topical Theme which are either textual or interpersonal in function, playing no part in the experiential meaning of the clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). When there is a topical Theme plus textual Themes and/or interpersonal Themes in a clause, the clause has multiple Themes. Multiple Themes are normally ordered like this: textual ^ interpersonal ^ experiential. In all cases, the experiential (the topical Theme) comes last and the one followed is part of the Rheme.

Textual Theme

"Textual Themes almost always constitute the first part of the Theme, coming before any interpersonal Themes. They give thematic prominence to textual elements with a linking function" ([42], p.24). Textual theme can be recognised by conjunctions, relative pronouns, conjunctives, and continuatives which are in bold face in Examples 4-8.

- Structural conjunctions can link two clauses in a coordinating relation as seen in Example 4 and can mark one clause as dependent on another as seen in Example 5.
  Example 4:
  Now, I often eat soup when I am tired or worried, ***and*** *it helps me feel better.* ([1], p.12)
  Example 5:
  As *she approaches, your classmate suddenly raised her eyebrows.* ([1], p.140)
- Relatives
  Example 6:
  We heard Professor Smith's lecturer, ***which was a great disappointment***. ([42], p.26)
- Conjunctives
  Example 7:
  However, *the English language has many variations.* ([1], p.116)
- Continuatives
  Example 8:
  Oh, *what a surprise to see you here*! ([1], p.140)

Interpersonal Theme

The Interpersonal Theme is any combination of vocative, modal and mood-marking ([28], p. 53). Besides, Martin et al ([42], p. 25) describe many ways to define interpersonal Theme based on the factors below.

- Finite which is normally realised as auxiliary verbs
  Example 9
  Did *you use paper money to buy it?* ([1], p.12)
- Wh- element
  Example 10
  What *is this book made of?*   ([1], p.12)
- A vocative
  Example 11
  Mr Wolf, Mr. Wolf, *may we cross your golden waters?*
- An Adjunct which is normally realised as an adverb
  Example 12
  In 1857, *the first soccer team was created in Sheffield, England.* ([1], p. 87)
- Interpersonal Theme in Examples 13-14 are also treated as interpersonal metaphors of modality [28].
  Example 13
  I don't suppose you need Old English and Anglo-Saxon.
  Example 14
  Do you think *I should take an early play like the Prometheus?* ([42], p.25)

An example about a multiple Theme which consists of six types of non-typical element in thematic position is presented in Table II.

TABLE II: ANALYSIS OF MULTIPLE THEMES

Well	but	then	surely	Jean	wouldn't	the best idea	be to join in
Cont	Stru	Conj	Modal	Voc	Finite	Nominal	
Textual			Interpersonal			Topical	
Theme							Rheme

B3. Theme in clause complexes

Our discussions so far are about Themes in single clauses. Themes in clause complexes which contain a dependent clause and a main clause can be analysed in two ways ([26], [28], [30], [31], [55]) as follows.

(i) analysing Theme and Rheme in each clause separately (Example 15a)
(ii) analysing Theme and Rheme of a clause complex as a whole (Example 15b). If the dependent clause comes first, it is the Theme. If the main clause comes first, the Theme of the clause complex is the Theme of the first clause.

Example 15a

As the universe	expanded,	the temperature of the radiation	decreased
$Theme^1$	$Rheme^1$	$Theme^2$	$Rheme^2$

Example 15b

As the universe	expanded,	the temperature of the radiation	decreased
$Theme^1$		$Rheme^1$	
$Theme^2$	$Rheme^2$	$Theme^3$	$Rheme^3$

What if there are more than one dependent clauses or dominant clauses in a clause complex? The answer might lie on the decision of unit of analysis. Fries [21] states that T-Unit is the most effective way for analysing Theme; others might base on simple clause or clause complex as the basic unit of Theme analysis. It is argued by the researcher that irrespective of the approach chosen, consistency in doing the analysis to fulfil the research aims is the first and foremost important factor. The choice of unit of analysis for theme will be discussed in the methodology section. The following section will review previous studies on the topic.

C. Previous Studies on Thematic Structure

A number of studies have focused on thematic structure [17], thematic progression, cohesion and information development in Iranian textbooks ([15], [16], students' compositions [38], interpretation texts [33], annual report [8], and thematic structure of talk [52].

Ref. [15] performed a functional analysis of thematic progression patterns in Iranian English textbooks which are widely used for teaching *Pre-requisite, English for General Purposes* and *English for Specific Purposes* courses at Iranian universities at the bachelor level. Twelve units, from six textbooks were randomly selected for data analysis based on thematic progression model declared by McCabe [39]. The finding shows that different types of patterns of thematic progression (linear, constant, split Rheme, and split Theme) were used in the textbooks. The occurrence of linear and miscellaneous patterns was different across the three textbooks, which attributed to textbooks' different levels. Besides, [38] investigated the impact of thematic structure in the assessment of English compositions written by Chinese students in College English Test (CET)-4 examinations. The study shows that the themes and thematic progression were distributed variously in different scored compositions. Also, higher-score achievers resulted from the success of using a variety of thematic structure.

Furthermore, [8] investigated the readability of annual reports in terms of thematic structure from systemic functional grammar perspective in the UK. Based on analysis of 60 UK chairman's statements, the results indicate that the introductions to the chairman's statements were systematically easier to read than the other parts of the chairman's statements. The thematic structures within the statements were indeed a key driver of the variability of annual report readability. However, no research focusing on Theme choice as a linguistic resource charactering complexity of written language has been found in international EFL textbooks commonly used for teaching English in Vietnam has been occurred.

D. Previous Studies on Functional Grammar in Vietnam

Linguists and researchers in Vietnam have put substantial efforts to keep themselves informed of the advances in linguistics internationally. In Vietnam, functional grammar has been applied in studies of text in two dimensions. Firstly, the functional point of view have been adopted to the study of the Vietnamese language ([10], [35], [36], [53], [54]) and also to the contrastive analysis of English and Vietnamese syntax and semantics (see [5], [13], [18], [34], [37], [43], [51]). With reference to the Vietnamese context, Vietnamese linguists have paid attention to the comprehensive issues of Vietnamese

functional grammar. [37] conducted a doctoral research on transitivity systems in the Vietnamese language with reference to the experiential grammar of the Vietnamese clause from the functional perspective. Following that, [36] examined the meaning and structure of a science fiction story employing a systemic functional perspective. He firstly described the context of the chosen text then analysed the clauses, clause complexes, the transitivity pattern, the Mood pattern, the Theme-Rheme pattern, the grammatical and lexical cohesion before putting an end to a summary of the context of situation of the text in terms of the three contextual parameters: field, tenor and mode [35]. [53] described metafunction profile of Vietnamese grammar from grammar and discourse perspectives. Later on, in [53], a description of Vietnamese grammar with particular reference to metafunctions, namely the system of Theme, the system of Mood, and the system of transitivity was stated. Also, [14] presents a functional analysis of Vietnamese grammar in relation to its representation, exchange and textuality. Secondly, in terms of contrastive analysis of functional grammar in English and Vietnamese, several studies at the doctoral levels in Vietnam have been carried out ([44], [46]). Here and there, some master theses on functional grammar and its aspects have been conducted with samples taken from newspapers, poetry, political speeches, short stories and novels (see [5], [13], [18], [34], [37], [43], [51]). It is evident that the application of SFL theory to the studies of texts in Vietnam still needs further explorations. It is also obvious that no research employing the theoretical framework of SFL has been conducted to investigate the language of textbooks, either government-approved textbooks in school or international EFL textbooks adopted in language education programs in EFL centres or universities in Vietnam. This present research contribute to the study of functional grammar in a series of international textbooks adopted in EFL teaching in one specific EFL context (i.e. Vietnam) by looking at the important language feature of theme.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Text and Textbooks Selection

A series of reading books, namely *Active Skills for Reading* ([1]-[4]) has been chosen because they have been widely used as the main English reading textbooks in the language education programs in universities and language centres in Vietnam for the past decade. The book series includes four books 1, 2, 3, and 4 and are classified into four levels: elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate respectively. Each book level consists of 32 reading passages covering various genres and belongs to both science and non-science domains. For the purpose of the research, only academic genres have been chosen, while conversations or interviews, which are concerned with spoken mode, have not been selected. As a result, twenty four texts in four books were chosen with six texts per book. The chosen texts were classified into four groups: Book 1 - Elementary (n = 6), Book 2 - Pre-intermediate (n = 6), Book 3 - Intermediate

(n = 6) and Book 4 - Upper intermediate (n = 6). Six texts at each level were coded as described in Table III.

TABLE II: CODED TEXTS

Text	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4
1	E1	P1	I1	U1
2	E2	P2	I2	U2
3	E3	P3	I3	U3
4	E4	P4	I4	U4
5	E5	P5	I5	U5
6	E6	P6	I6	U6

B. Unit of Analysis

In thematic structure analysis, choosing a unit of analysis is crucial. Martin [40] suggests that theme can be analysed at the level of clause, clause complex, paragraph, and even at the text level. In literature, researchers have chosen different units for thematic analysis including clause ([9]; [19]; [25]) or T-Unit ([6], [20]-[24]).

Whatever unit of analysis is chosen, "the choice of unit to investigate must be governed by the purpose of the investigator" ([23], p. 47). As one of the purposes of this research was to examine the deployment of various themes across level of textbook texts, the analysis of this study focused on three types of themes discussed by Halliday ([26], [28]) consisting of simple themes, multiple themes and clausal themes. [26] and [23] argue that independent clauses are the most appropriate unit of analysis for thematic analysis concerning the textual metafunction. Therefore, independent clauses or independent conjoinable clause complex were chosen for examining theme in the present study.

To identify independent clauses, understanding clause complex is crucial, as clause complex is "a language structure that consists of one clause working by itself, or a group of clauses that work together through some kind of logical relationship" ([7], p. 30). Thus, a clause complex which contains one, two or more than two independent clauses, theme of each clause is examined separately because each independent clause can work by itself. For a clause complex which consists of one independent clause preceded or followed by one or more than one dependent clause (i.e. an alpha ^ beta, or beta ^ alpha), dependent clause (s) are treated as part of a clause complex. This is because traditionally, dependent or subordinate clauses have been known as adverbial clauses or circumstantial adjuncts. [23] argue that "the structure of beta clause, including their thematic structure, tends to be constrained by the alpha clause" (p.47). Therefore, a clause complex which contains one dependent clause following by one independent clause, dependent clause is treated as an adverbial clause and functions as the Theme of that clause complex which is known as clausal Theme ([26], [28]), and the independent clause is the Rheme. By contrast, a clause complex which contains one dependent clause proceeding by one independent clause, Theme of the main clause is the Theme of the clause complex, and the rest of the clause complex is the Rheme ([26], [28]).

C. Procedure of Theme Analysis

Thematic structure analysis in this study involves the

following steps. Firstly, the researcher divided each selected texts into clause complexes as defined in this study. Theme and Rheme of each clause were then identified and categorised in three groups of themes and sub-groups of each type as described in Fig. 1. The instances of each theme and sub-theme were manually counted and the frequency of theme in the data was obtained by the proportion of each theme per total clause complexes. The results of thematic analysis were statistically evaluated and displayed in tables and graphs.
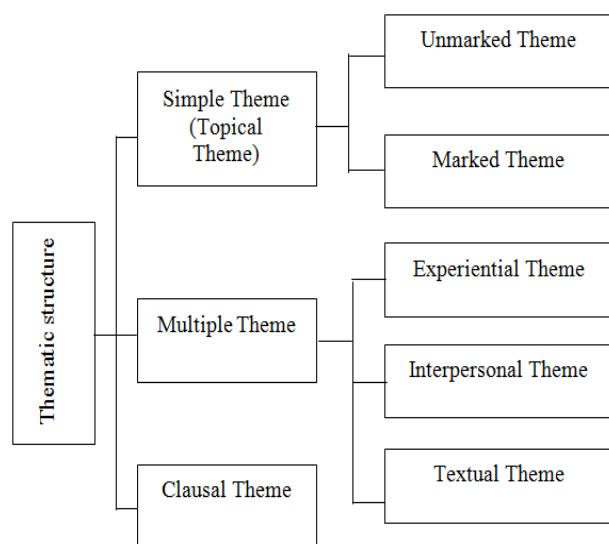

Fig. 1. Thematic structure investigated in this study ([26], [28]).

IV. THEMATIC STRUCTURE ACROSS TEXTBOOK LEVELS

Themes were categorised in three types including simple theme, multiple theme and clausal theme. Multiple theme consists of experiential theme, interpersonal theme and textual theme. Table IV describes mean scores of theme types across four textbook levels.

TABLE IV: PERCENTAGE OF THEME TYPES ACROSS TEXTBOOK LEVELS (N=6 PER BOOK)

Book	Simple Theme (Experiential Theme)	Multiple Theme			Clausal Theme
		Experiential Theme	Interpersonal Theme	Textual Theme	
Book 1	67.50%	14.67%	1.17%	14.67%	2.33%
Book 2	62%	18.17%	0.5%	18.17%	1.67%
Book 3	55.33%	19.33%	1.33%	18.50%	5.33%
Book 4	55.50%	18.50%	0.75%	19.83%	6.17%
Sig.	*.431*	*.586*	*.414*	*.575*	*.282*

As far as thematic analysis is concerned, Table 4 shows that textbooks at different levels employed three types of theme: simple theme, multiple theme and clausal theme. However, the distribution of these themes was slightly different in different levels of books. Specifically, the percentage of simple theme in the first level of book was the highest accounting for 67.5%. The figure was lower in the next three levels, specifically it accounted for 62% in Pre-intermediate level, 55.33% in Intermediate and 55.50% in Upper-intermediate respectively. Multiple theme and clausal theme, in contrast, demonstrates an increasing pattern from low to high level of textbook.

Particularly, 30.17% of multiple theme was used in Elementary texts, 36.33% in Pre-intermediate texts and around 38% in the two highest levels of book. Clausal theme which includes a dependent clause as the beginning of a clause complex was less used in the first two levels of book (around 2%). The number was approximately three times higher in the two latter books, but still small number.

As far as the function of theme is concerned, the experiential theme was used most in the four books as the experiential theme or topical theme is obligatory theme that constitutes the departure of a message contributing to the development of a text. Similarly, interpersonal theme which involves questions was less used across levels of books as this study investigated reading texts which mainly include declarative sentences. It is worth noting that while 14.67% of textual theme was used in the Elementary texts, the numbers were relatively similar in the next three levels, standing at 18.17%, 18.50% and 19.83% for Pre-intermediate, Intermediate and Upper-intermediate respectively. One way ANOVA was conducted to find out if different types of theme were statistically different between textbook levels. However, the result reveals that there were no statistically differences on theme between different levels of textbooks as the p-value was greater than 0.05 for all kinds of theme as observed in Table 4.

Illustration of theme types that contributing to the coherence of the texts across four levels are provided in Boxes 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively. In the following examples, Theme (in italic) and Rheme (in normal case) were distinguished from each other by #, and types of theme were written in the brackets followed immediately after themes. As can be seen, various thematic structures were employed in texts across levels contributing to the textual meaning of the messages.

BOX 1. TYPES OF THEME IN AN ELEMENTARY TEXT

||| *In many Latin cultures* (marked theme) #, a young woman's fifteenth birthday is important.||| *At this age* (marked theme) #, she is considered an adult. |||*To mark this special day* (clausal theme) #, || families with teenage daughters have a celebration called a *Quinceanera.* ||| *The day* (unmarked theme) # begins with young woman and her family going to church. ||| *Later* (textual theme), *there* (unmarked theme) # is a party, || *and* (textual theme) *many guests* (unmarked theme) # are invited.||| *(Extracted from Text E6)*

BOX 2. TYPES OF THEME IN A PRE-INTERMEDIATE TEXT

||| *In many countries* (marked theme) #, sixteen or eighteen is the age at which a person becomes an adult. |||*Young men and women* (unmarked theme) # at this age can get a part-time job, || *and* (textual theme) *begin* (unmarked theme) # to receive an income of their own. ||| *They* (unmarked theme) # no longer have to rely on their parents for money all the time. ||| *In many parts of North Americans* (marked theme) #, sixteen is also the age when one can obtain a driver's license; || *in England* (marked theme) # it is seventeen. ||| *(Extracted*

BOX 3. TYPES OF THEME IN AN INTERMEDIATE TEXT

||| *In many countries* (marked theme) #, sixteen or eighteen is the age at which a person becomes an adult. |||*Young men and women* (unmarked theme) # at this age can get a part-time job, || *and* (textual theme) *begin* (unmarked theme) # to receive an income of their own. ||| *They* (unmarked theme) # no longer have to rely on their parents for money all the time. ||| *In many parts of North Americans* (marked theme) #, sixteen is also the age when one can obtain a driver's license; || *in England* (marked theme) #, it is seventeen.||| *(Extracted from Text P6)*

BOX 4. TYPES OF THEME IN AN UPPER-INTERMEDIATE TEXT

|||*Their food* (unmarked theme) # is tied, literally, to the frozen ocean.||| *Within layers of sea ice* (marked theme) # , microscopic algae bloom in profusion as sunlight floods in from above. ||| *When the sea ice melts with the beginning of summer* (clausal theme) #, || the ice algae escape into the water, where they are grazed on by dense swarms of krill – a type of shrimplike crustacean.||| *The krill* (unmarked theme) #, in turn, are the Adelie penguins primary food source. |||*To eat them* (clausal theme) #, Adelies spend their entire lives on, around, or beneath the Antarctic pack ice. || *(Extracted from Text U6)*

The result shows that various theme types were employed across textbook levels. It is interesting to find out that there were no statistically differences on theme choice between different levels of textbooks, despite there were some general patterns. Specifically, the results show that simple theme was used most across levels which was accounted for the highest percentage in Book 1 (67.5%), and the number decreased gradually to 55% in Book 4. However, there was a slight decrease in the use of simple themes from low to high level. Multiple theme took the second position, but there was a slight increase in the employment of multiple theme across levels. Clausal theme was used the least in the textbook texts, although this kind of theme showed an increase from elementary to upper-intermediate level. These results indicate three things. Firstly, simple theme which includes topical theme and marked theme is the main component to construe the starting point of the message, in which marked theme which includes circumstances help construe the textual meaning and create the coherent texts across levels. Secondly, among components of multiple theme, textual theme was employed relatively the same across levels to build the textual meaning, the instances of interpersonal themes was not considerable. Thirdly, higher levels of textbooks employed a higher percentage of multiple and clausal themes, and slightly lower of simple theme, although these differences were not statically significant.

Moreover, regarding the function of theme, experiential theme displayed the highest frequency in four books, interpersonal theme was less used, and textual theme was relatively similar across textbook levels. It is not surprising that experiential theme was used most in the four books as the experiential theme or topical theme is obligatory theme that constitutes the departure of a message contributing to the development of a text (Halliday, 1985a, 1994). Thus, the result found in this study is quite expected. It is not surprising either when interpersonal theme which involves questions was less used across levels of book as this study investigated academic genres which mainly include declarative sentences. The similarity of textual themes employed across levels indicates that all textbook texts across levels were written coherently due to the adoption of marked theme and textual theme, which indicates time or place a process happens among levels. It can be concluded in this study that the choice of theme types was not significantly different according to the textbook levels.

V. CONCLUSION

Drawing on a functional linguistic framework, this study investigated the use of thematic structure in a selected English textbook series used in TEFL in the tertiary educational Vietnamese context. The results show that a variety of themes were adopted in the selected texts across levels, effectively contributing to the texts' coherence, though the differences in theme choice were not significant among levels. The research provides useful insights into the study of theme in an EFL context, but the findings can be relevant in other EFL contexts which have the similar socio-economic and educational status. Further studies are recommended to explore thematic progression and periodicity in the selected textbooks or in other data sets to help EFL learners to use theme at the clause level and beyond clause more effectively.

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