

Discoursal feedback on essays based on thematic progression

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Abstract

Establishing coherence is a vital feature of a good essay. Many learners, despite a good command of grammatical knowledge, still lack the ability to compose fluent and well-organized essays. In most textbooks on writing, coherence is mainly introduced or represented as a list of transitional devices or logical connectors. However, an important issue in achieving textual cohesion and coherence is the thematic selection and progression throughout an essay. It has been demonstrated that thematic patterning, namely 'simple linear', 'constant', 'derived hyperthematic', and 'split' progression, has a great impact on the general structure of an essay and contributes significantly to its local and global (in)coherence. This study investigates scoring essays based on thematic progression in argumentative essays written by 21 EFL students at an undergraduate program in Iran. The findings revealed that by analyzing theme and rheme patterns in essays scored by different raters, those who had received high scores had mostly used linear and split types of thematic progression as well as constant theme-rheme patterns. On the other hand, students with low scores had mostly applied constant progression the overuse of which had lowered their scores. Interestingly, there was a positive correlation in essay ratings based on thematic progression and holistic scoring already carried out by course instructor. This study emphasizes the need for expanding the criteria in providing corrective feedback on students' essays or scoring them by considering their thematic organization at the discourse level along with its grammatical and lexical features at the clause level.