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교육학석사학위논문

Thematic Organization in the English Writing of
Korean College Students:
A Systemic-Functional Approach

한국인 대학생 영어 학습자의 영어 글쓰기에서의
주제 구조 연구: 체계기능적 접근

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Korean College Students:
A Systemic-Functional Approach

By

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Abstract

In academic writing, conventional wisdom holds that the logical development of ideas is an essential factor for organizing a text. Drawing on Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional framework, theme, an analytical unit which is defined as the starting point of a message, has been regarded as a vital method of development by systemic functional linguists.

Given the crucial role of the thematic organization in constructing logical connection in the text, considerable research efforts have been made to examine the thematic structures in academic writing (Bloor & Bloor, 1992; Ghadessy & Gao, 2000; Gosden, 1992; Green et al., 2000; Hewings, 2004; Jalilifar, 2010; Martinez, 2003; North, 2005). Despite the growing interest in the thematic selection, however, the systemic functional approach is at an early stage of L2 research area. There is a clear need for examining differential impact of L2 learners' proficiency levels on thematic choice as it remains elusive. In addition, the literature needs statistical generalization as previous research has been based mostly on the relatively small amount of data.

Employing Halliday's Systemic functional approach, the present study focuses on the Korean EFL college students' way of distributing information in written English texts, with special focus on how learners' proficiency contributes to how they organize thematic structure. The current research takes materials of

argumentative essays written by Korean EFL college students and English native speakers with inquiry focused on the thematic selection and usages of theme features including theme length, theme function, theme markedness, thematising structure, theme role, and lexico-semantic properties of the theme. In particular, the current study aims to identify if Korean EFL writers' usage of the thematic organization gets closer to that of native writers as learners' proficiency improves. Further, by identifying the thematic structure of many thousands of instances, the current research purports to examine a key characteristic of high-performing writers in terms of constructing the thematic structures. The detailed qualitative analysis gives a better understanding of how individual learners employ theme in actual contexts.

The quantitative result uncovers disparity between non-native and native writers' texts in pivotal aspects of the thematic structure. The tendency to overuse certain theme features such as textual theme, multiple theme, thematic equative, the first and the second person pronouns and abstract concepts is observed in all levels of learners. It is also worth noting that learners' proficiency is a crucial factor that affects theme length, marked theme, predicated theme, and theme role in that learners show improvement as their proficiency increases.

The qualitative analysis reveals pronounced differences in the thematic organization of non-native and native writers. One stark difference is the tendency to overuse the textual theme; the variety of textual elements and the

number of textual theme increase as proficiency develops. Also noteworthy is that the present study provides a clearer picture of differences in the aspects of the interpersonal theme. The results indicate that Korean EFL learners stick to certain familiar interpersonal features, thus their arguments become less convincing. Regarding learners' dependence on the first and second person pronouns in the topical theme, the results of the current study indicate that the overuse problem improves as learners' proficiency increases. Indeed, the results show that the level of proficiency significantly influences learners' choices of thematic structures.

These findings provide meaningful implications for Korean EFL writing pedagogy. The present study statistically verifies significant differences due to proficiency and reveals that advanced learners also make inexperienced choice in constructing thematic structure. In this regard, the results suggest current education should concentrate more on drawing out the proper use of thematic structure, thus enabling learners to raise awareness and achieve knowledge of the thematic development of texts.

Key Words: Theme, thematic structure, systemic functional grammar, second language writing, argumentative writing, corpus

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of Halliday's (1994) systemic functional approach, the present study explored thematic choices in English writings of Korean EFL learners compared to English native speakers and examined differences in selections of theme regarding learners' levels of English proficiency. This chapter presents the study's purpose and research questions.

1.1 The Purpose of the Study

The concept of 'theme' and 'thematic structure' are effective notions for better understanding the interaction between distribution of information in a clause and logical development of a text. However, despite the growing interest of theme and thematic structure in writing, few studies have focused on theme selection in the EFL context. Considering that L2 writers have difficulty in choosing appropriate thematic structure (Fontaine & Kodratoff, 2011; Hawes & Thomas, 1997; Lee, 2008; Mauranen, 1996; Ping, 2007), more investigation is needed to examine Korean EFL written texts with regard to theme analysis.

Pioneered by M.A.K. Halliday's (1994) work on Functional Grammar, a number of systemic functional linguists (Fries, 1995; Ghadessy & Gao, 2000; Gosden, 1992; Green et al., 2000; Hewings, 2004; Jalilifar, 2010; Martinez, 2003; North, 2005) have devoted substantial research effort to the role of the initial position of a clause in the distribution of ideas or development of the texts. From the Systemic Functional point of view, a sentence can be divided into 'theme' and 'rheme', which are fundamental concepts to analyze a text. Following the terminology of the Prague school of linguists (e.g. Firbas, 1992; Garvin, 1994), Halliday began using the term 'theme' to refer the first element in the sentence that represents "the starting point for the message" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013, p. 38). According to Halliday's (1994) framework, 'rheme' is the component that comes after the theme and constitutes the remainder of the message. The semantic organization that the theme and rheme construct together is called a 'thematic structure'. For instance, the status of theme indexes to 'From Raffles Place MRT' of the clause 'From Raffles Place MRT, walk through the office blocks of Chulia Street'. The theme constructs a thematic structure with 'walk through the office blocks of Chulia Street', which is in the rhematic position of the sentence (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013, p. 88).

As Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) put it, in the thematic structure, the theme plays a prominent role in a clause. The theme functions as making a connection between the previous message and the following sentence by

continuing the information provided by the preceding sentence. In this respect, Fries (1983) and Halliday's (1985) research underscore that the pattern of information within the theme of a text indicates "the method of development of the text" (Fries, 1995, p. 323). The theme provides an environment for the rheme to inherit the message conveyed by theme. The rheme, the remainder of the clause following the theme, develops and elaborates the information or idea initiated in the theme.

By analyzing the thematic structure of a text, it is possible to understand how the writer realizes the nature of his/her underlying concern (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013, p. 133). The thematic structure is in close relationship with the distribution of ideas in the text. In other words, a writer's selection of theme pertains to the rhetorical purposes that the writer has in mind. It can thus be said that diverse theme types and their contents could be regarded as a linguistic option for logical/coherent writing. In order to create a cohesive text, a writer needs to know how to organize the theme and rheme in each clause. Skillful writers are able to develop the elements of the clause toward constructing the coherent message.

In this light, Halliday's system of theme analysis provided a basic method for analyzing clauses into elements that play communicative roles in discourse. Given the pivotal role of thematic information structures in constructing information structure and maintaining textual coherence, a number

of systemic functional researchers focused on writers' choice of thematic structure. Numerous studies focused on distinct groups of writers (Ghadessy, 1999; North, 2005; Wang, 2007) or specific types of writing (Gomez, 1994; Hewings, 2004) and commonalities and differences between types of writers or genres of writing (Gosden, 1992; Jalilifar, 2009, 2010; Lee, 2007, 2008; Lu, 2002; Martinez, 2003; Nam & Park, 2015; Park & Nam, 2015; Kim, 2012). Previous literature also addressed consequential findings with respect to the gap between competent/native writers and underperforming/non-native writers. The literature reveals that more competent writers tended to employ a greater proportion of marked theme (Hawes & Thomas, 1997; Jalilifar, 2010; Lee, 2008; Martinez, 2003; Park & Lu, 2015, Ping, 2007). Also, the proportion of single theme was higher in expert writings, showing that the skillful writers are able to organize separate pieces of information into single thematic content (Lee, 2008; Park & Lu, 2015). On the other hand, less proficient writers employ more textual devices (Green et al, 2000; Hu, 2008; Jalilifar, 2010; Park & Nam, 2015) and depend on a few selected ideational contents as the topical theme (Lee, 2008, Park & Lu, 2015).

However, despite the growing interest in thematic selection to date, few attempts have been made to examine the differential impact of learner variables such as proficiency levels of thematic choice (Lee, 2007, 2008; Wei, 2013a). Considering that proficiency diversity is necessary to understand how L2 writers'

ability to construct coherent progression of ideas improves, more research is needed to examine if their use of theme varies according to their competence development. In addition, there is a clear need for statistical generalization as previous literature has been based mostly on dozens of example essays (Hewings, 2004; Lee, 2008; Kim, 2012). Although considerable research efforts have been made to ascertain diverse writers' ways of organizing thematic structure, research of thematic structure in large-scale text corpora with statistical verification is the initial step.

As a way of supplementing limitations of the previous literature, the current study is designed to investigate the thematic structure in more detail. This study first sets out to discover the differences in the thematic choice between Korean EFL writers and English natives. The second purpose is to investigate proficiency levels as an influencing factor of learners' use of the theme. In addition, the present study elaborates on individual instances in detail for clearer understanding on the underlying differences. Employing Halliday's systemic functional approach, the present research focuses on the Korean EFL college students' organizing information in English writing, with special focus on how learners' proficiency contributes to how they distribute information to construct the thematic structure. The present study uses corpora consisting of argumentative essays written by Korean EFL college students and English native speakers, with questions focused on the thematic selection and usages of

distinctive theme features that have been broadly adopted by a number of systemic functional research studies (Gosden, 1992; Hewings, 2004; Jalilifar, 2009; Lee, 2007, 2008; Martinez, 2003; North, 2005; Park & Lu 2015; Park & Nam 2015). The theme features analyzed in the present study include theme length, theme function such as textual, interpersonal, topical theme and markedness of theme. In addition, thematising structures and theme role are also analyzed in the present research though these specific aspects of theme have been relatively neglected in previous studies. It is worth examining the particular structures in that Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) emphasize that the use of unusual types of theme and specific thematising structures in theme position might guide the reader towards a particular pattern of emphasis.

Further, for a detailed analysis on the experiential content of theme, the current research adapts Francis's (1990) semantic category. Francis (1990) investigated the distributions of four basic semantic categories of topical theme: people/groups/institutions, concrete things, abstractions and time expressions. Following former researchers who accepted Francis's (1990) framework in their semantic analyses (Kim, 2012; Lee, 2008), the present study investigates the semantic role of the topical theme in accordance with their semantic categories. By carefully analyzing the thematic structure of many thousands of instances, the current research purports to qualify previous literature to a great extent and gain a better understanding of how individual learners employ theme and rheme in

actual contexts.

1.2 Research Questions

The purpose of the present study is threefold. The first is to investigate the difference in thematic choice among Korean EFL students' writings and English natives' texts with regard to basic theme features. The second goal is to examine the difference in the use of specific theme features among Korean student writers' with different proficiency levels and English native writers. Further, the Korean EFL writers and English natives' use of semantic properties of theme is analyzed. The present study seeks to answer the following research questions.

1) What are the differences in the use of basic theme features among Korean EFL writers of different proficiency levels and English native writers?

2) What are the differences in the use of specific aspects of theme among Korean EFL writers of different proficiency levels and English native writers?

3) What are the differences in the semantic distribution of theme among Korean EFL writers of different proficiency levels and English native writers?

CHAPTER 2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

First, this chapter introduces the theoretical background for the present study. Section 2.1 addresses conceptual framework of the present study and illustrates theme features adopted as bases of the current analysis. Section 2.1.1 gives a brief sketch of systemic functional grammar. 2.1.2 describes, in detail, the basic types of themes. Section 2.2 summarizes the previous literature on thematic structure, in particular, those focused on the similarities and differences in thematic selection between non-native/novice writers and native/professional writers.

2.1. Theoretical Background

Since Mathesuis articulated the concept of a theme in the early 1930s, scholars of Prague School (Fries, 1995) have constantly elaborated the notion of the theme and thematic structure. Influenced by the Prague school's work, M.A.K Halliday adopted the concept of the theme into the systemic functional framework. From that point of view of the systemic functional grammar, the

initial position in a clause, which realizes the function of ‘theme’, is a consequential element in the development of the text. Systemic Functional linguists hold that theme analysis has a potential for gaining insight into its texture and understanding how the writer delivers his underlying messages (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013, p. 133).

This section demonstrates the basic ideas of systemic functional grammar and its fundamental concepts, thereby providing a rudimentary understanding of the conceptual framework for analysis and discussion of the present study.

2.1.1 Theme in Systemic Functional Linguistics

The theoretical framework for the present study draws on Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar which focuses on theme and rheme as fundamental elements for constructing a clause. In this framework, an element that functions as a starting point of a message is called theme. The theme continues the information provided in previous sentences by “orienting the clause within its context” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013, p. 66). The rheme, on the other hand, comes after the theme by inheriting the message conveyed by theme. Table 1, quoted from Halliday and Matthiessen (2013, p. 90) displays the

way a clause is segmented into theme and rheme.

Table 1

Theme in Declarative Clauses

Theme	Rheme
The duke	has given my aunt that teapot
My aunt	has been given that teapot by the duke
The teapot	the duke has given to my aunt

The three sentences in Table 1 consist of the same components; however, the elements could be developed differently as described in the examples. What makes the three sentences different is having different starting points, in other words, selecting a different theme for the message. The difference between the first and the second sentence is whether the doer ('The duke') of the act or the receiver ('My aunt') of the action is functioning as a theme. When 'by the duke' is introduced in the rheme of the sentence as in the second instance, 'the duke' then becomes available as a natural starting point for the following sentence. In the third sentence, the theme 'The teapot' could be read as indicating that the teapot may be the main topic of the clause. In this way, a certain choice of theme reflects a writer's intention to maintain coherence in the text.

The comparison among the variations suggests that, though each clause

refers to the same state of affairs, the different choice of theme contributes to a different meaning (Thompson, 2004, p. 119). English proposes a great variety of semantically similar propositions with different sentence structures, therefore a writer can change the starting point by moving the components of the clause, considering which order is more appropriate in a given context.

In sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.3, the description of theme markedness according to mood class of each clause as well as classification of theme types - 'topical', 'interpersonal' and 'textual' - are examined.

2.1.2 Unmarked and Marked Theme

A theme can belong to either 'unmarked' or 'marked' status, depending on whether the choice of theme is typical or unusual to occur in the thematic position of that mood class (Eggins, 2004, p. 318). Theme markedness deals with the relationship between the mood and theme structure of the clause. In other words, an unmarked theme is when theme conflates with the mood structure constituent that typically occurs in the first position in clauses of that mood system. Marked theme, on the other hand, is when theme conflates with any other constituent from the mood class (Eggins, 2004). For example, in a declarative sentence where subject as a theme is regarded as a natural choice, thematic choices such as adjunct or complement are classified as the 'marked

theme.’ The same principle can be applied to imperatives and interrogatives. A finite in an interrogative, a predicator in an imperative, and a wh-element in a wh-interrogative play marked roles. Table 2 summarizes unmarked and marked examples depending on the mood classes. The following examples illustrated in Table 2 are adapted from Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) and Thompson (2004). Thematic contents of the example clauses are italicized.

Table 2

Mood Type and Theme Markedness

Mood class	Unmarked Theme	Marked Theme
Declarative	Subject (e.g. <i>The duke</i> has given my aunt the teapot.)	Adjunct, Complement (e.g. <i>From house to house</i> I wend my way.)
Imperative	Predicator (e.g. <i>Turn</i> it down.)	(e.g. <i>On arrival in Liverpool</i> take a taxi to the University.)
Polar interrogative	Finite (e.g. <i>Did</i> you give her the book?)	(e.g. <i>On the right</i> is it?)
WH-interrogative	WH element (e.g. <i>Why</i> was he opposed to coming in?)	(e.g. <i>After the party</i> , where did you go?)

If there is any proper reason for choosing a theme other than the unmarked theme, a marked theme is used in the text (Halliday, 1994). It can be said that marked choices inevitably function as writer-selected signals, as Gosden (1992) put it. Literature has supported the significance of marked theme in the way that marked theme has been employed more frequently in advanced

writing (Hawes & Thomas, 1997; Jalilifar, 2010; Lee, 2008; Martinez, 2003; Park & Lu, 2015; Ping, 2007).

So far, theme markedness has been illustrated in a single clause of a constituent. There are also ‘multi-element constituents’ as theme, which have been named as ‘thematising structures’ by systemic functional linguists. (Eggins, 2004; Halliday, 1994; Thompson, 2004). The thematising structures including ‘thematic equatives’, ‘predicated theme’, ‘thematised comment’, and ‘proposed theme’ also contain unmarked and marked form. Table 3 provides the marked and unmarked forms of the four thematising structures. Examples of unmarked and marked theme in Table 3 are extracted from Thompson (2004).

Table 3

Theme Markedness in Thematising Structures

Structure	Unmarked Theme	Marked Theme
Thematic Equatives	<i>What the duke gave to my aunt</i> was that teapot.	<i>That</i> is the one I like.
Predicated Theme	(All predicated theme are marked.)	<i>It was in the city</i> that Diana donated bood.
Thematised comment	<i>It is true</i> that it took five years to do so.	To remark of Brooksmith that ‘the scaffolding of this tale rests upon the existence of a class-stratified society’ is silly.
Preposed Theme	<i>Happiness</i> , that’s what life is about.	

Halliday’s naming of ‘thematic equatives’ is expressed in the structure of

‘Theme = Rheme’ form. In thematic equatives, the theme is separated from the rheme, which helps listener/readers to easily understand the information. These interactive functions of thematic equatives reflect a writer’s consideration of the audience. Similar to thematic equatives, ‘predicated theme’ also allows the speaker to distinguish a single constituent and give it emphatic thematic status. Predicated theme guides the audience to pay attention to a particular constituent by selecting a specific element and emphasizing it. Another structure that resembles predicated theme is what Thompson (2004) labeled as ‘thematized comment’; the speaker’s own attitude or comment is selected as the starting-point of the message. Last, in ‘preposed theme’, a speaker separates a constituent as a theme and inserts a pronoun in the following clauses. As described in Table 3, these thematising structures also have unmarked and marked status.

In sum, thematising structures show the speaker’s thematic selections related to the structures’ communicative functions. A theme has unmarked or marked status depending on whether a thematic choice “conflates with the mood structure constituent that typically occurs in the thematic position in clauses of that mood class” (Eggins, 2004, p. 318). The term ‘unmarked theme’ indicates usual choice, whereas marked theme represents an atypical or unusual choice of theme. It can be said that when a marked choice is made, “something in the context requires an atypical meaning to be made” (Eggins, 2004, p. 318).

2.1.3 Multiple Theme

Another point is need to describe the system that distinguishes between a simple and a multiple theme. A theme belongs to one of the two categories, simple or multiple, depending on whether a theme contains either of textual or interpersonal constituent or not. The thematic experiential constituent that plays the role of participant, process, or circumstance is labeled as a ‘topical theme’. ‘Simple theme’ refers to a theme that is comprised of topical theme only. While clauses frequently begin with a topical theme, it is also possible to have a textual or interpersonal theme preceding the topical theme; this is called a ‘multiple theme’.

Halliday (1994) labels the ideational thematic content the ‘topical theme’, arguing that the topical theme closely corresponds to what is generally called ‘topic’. The topical theme is a vital element in the thematic structure, as every theme contains one and only one topical theme. Also, a topical theme is referred to as an experiential theme because it plays a part in the experience within the clause.

Any element that precedes the topical theme can also be part of the theme. The preceding constituents have either textual or interpersonal functions. ‘Textual themes’ include conjunctions, conjunctive adjuncts, continuatives, and ‘discourse markers’ (‘well’, ‘now’, ‘yes’, ‘no’, etc.) as these elements signal the

beginning of a message (Thompson, 2004). An ‘interpersonal theme’ expresses a speaker’s mood or attitude toward the message through modal adjuncts, vocatives, and finite verbal operators. Table 4 describes the subcategories and examples of textual and interpersonal theme with reference to Halliday and Matthiessen (2013).

Table 4

Textual and Interpersonal Theme

	Subcategories	Example
Textual Theme	Continuative	<i>Yes, no, well, oh, now</i>
	Conjunction	<i>And, nor, either, but, yet</i>
	Conjunctive Adjunct	<i>In other words, for instance</i>
Interpersonal Theme	Modal/comment Adjunct	<i>Probably, of course, clearly</i>
	Vocative	<i>Personal name</i>
	Finite verbal operator	<i>Finite auxiliary verbs</i>

If a textual theme and an interpersonal theme appear together in a theme, the typical ordering of elements is textual theme preceding interpersonal theme. However, it is also possible that the interpersonal theme precedes the textual theme. Table 5 shows instances of multiple themes with example combinations of the textual or interpersonal theme followed by the topical theme.

Table 5

Examples of Multiple Theme

Textual	Interpersonal	Topical	
Theme			Rheme
But	surely	the course	doesn't start till next week.
Well,	certainly	sanity	is a precarious state.

From: Thompson, 2004

2.2. Systemic Functional Research

Given the significance of theme analysis considering the role of theme structure in organizing a coherent message, systemic functional linguists have examined the thematic structure of diverse writings of various writers. This chapter summarizes the previous literature on the thematic choice to date. First, section 2.2.1 introduces the studies on the thematic structure in general. Section 2.2.2 focuses on systemic functional research of non-native writers' thematic selection in detail.

2.2.1. Studies on Thematic Structure

The conceptual background for the current research exploits Systemic Functional Grammar suggested by Halliday (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthysen, 2013). Accepting the Prague school's concept of theme and rheme, a substantial research effort has been developed in the systemic functional framework. Given the significant role of thematic structure in developing texts, early studies explored how writers employ thematic structure in their texts. These studies focused on specific groups of writers or particular types of writing (Fries, 1983, 1995; Ghadessy, 1999; Ghadessy & Gao, 2000; Gomez, 1994; North, 2005; Vande Kopple, 1991; Wang, 2007) or the comparison between various types of writers or genres of writing. (Gosden, 1992; Jalilifar, 2009, 2010; Kim, 2012; Lee, 2007, 2008; Lu, 2002; Martinez, 2003; Nam & Park, 2015; North, 2005; Park & Nam, 2015). Multiple studies have found that novice/non-native and expert/native writers differ vastly in their choices of thematic structure. It was mostly agreed in the existing literature that immature writers are prone to employ ineffective thematic strategy: using a too simple theme or too many themes at a time, and overusing a specific thematic structure like existential *there* (Bloor & Bloor, 1992; North, 2005). Moreover, writers in the

lower level of proficiency produce incomplete thematic structures or unclear references. These prominent features are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The first noticeable difference has been reported in the use of theme function, textual theme in particular. Textual theme is one of the prominent features that shows differences according to the level of competence (Bolton et al., 2002; Green et al, 2000; Lee, 2007). Textual theme functions as making explicit the structure of an argument. However, it has been also generally found that less proficient writers have the propensity to overuse textual theme which results in disturbing continuity (Granger & Tyson, 1996; Green et al., 2000; Jalilifar, 2009). Lee (2007) shows that unskilled writers significantly depend on the textual theme, particularly compared to native writers who employ minimal amounts of the textual device in academic writing. This result can be partially explained by Hawes and Thomas's (1997) argument that textual theme functions as the "obvious player" in connecting the texts. In addition, a recent study by Park and Nam (2015) supports previous studies by showing that non-native student writers tend to overuse thematic position for textual connectors.

The issue of multiple theme is an essential element for discussing textual theme, as a textual theme is the major contributor of multiple theme. While a number of studies found that multiple theme is preferred by less proficient writers (Kim, 2012; Nam & Park, 2015; Park & Nam, 2015; Park & Lu, 2015),

North (2005) found that students majoring in humanities employ more frequently than science students.

The third salient feature that showed a clear distinction is the marked theme. As discussed above, marked choice of theme occurs under a contextual reason to abandon the normal choice. For that reason, Hewings (2004) stated the importance of marked theme in that a simple listing of unmarked theme makes a text monotonous. This argument is supported by most studies; they report that experienced writers are prone to use more marked themes. (Hawes & Thomas, 1997; Jallifar, 2010; Lee, 2008; Park & Lu, 2015; Park & Nam, 2015; Ping, 2007). However, advanced learners' preference for the marked option needs further investigation as previous literature provides mixed evidence as to the relationship between learner proficiency and frequency of the marked theme.. Kim (2012) found that Korean EFL students largely preferred marked theme compared to native counterparts, contrary to the previous literature. However, this contrasting result is rather inconclusive as his categorization of theme markedness did not fully reflect Halliday's (1994) theoretical model. For instance, Kim (2012) simply classified all instances of interrogative, exclamatory, and imperative forms into the marked category. This classification is indeed untenable considering that theme markedness, in their schema, is related to the mood class of the clause: each mood class contains marked and unmarked form. In this regard, the controversial results demand further clarification with accurate

classification and more precise analysis.

The topical theme, an essential ingredient of thematic structure, has also been at the core of research interests. For the analysis, Francis's (1990) semantic categories have been widely adopted by systemic functional researchers for analyzing semantic properties of topical theme by systemic functional researchers (Fries, 1995; Ghadessay & Gao, 2000; Lee, 2008). Based on her clarification, the literature on the topical theme of argumentative essays revealed that immature writers' increasing employment of personal contents in topical position could make it difficult for the formal written texts to accomplish the intended goal of writing (Brown & Yule, 1983; Fries, 1995; Lee, 2008; Thompson, 2004).

Overall, the existing literature revealed various contributing factors to thematically well-organized texts. However, although the literature has placed major emphasis on the thematic structure, studies focusing on the effects of learners' levels of proficiency on theme selection are few in number. Also, theme analysis in the EFL context is still in its early stage, although the EFL learners often face difficulty in thematic organization. In this respect, functional linguists have suggested a need for further studies respecting international contexts. Thus, the present study aims to examine the Korean EFL learners' thematic selection in writing English argumentative essays and exclusively centers on the impact of

proficiency levels in thematic structures. In addition, the present study aims at identifying key ingredients for successful academic writing by analyzing the thematic distribution of advanced writings. In this way, the present study purports to serve as a profound understanding for EFL writing based on the systemic functional approach. The following section describes the theme analyses performed in EFL contexts.

2.2.2. Theme Analysis in EFL Contexts

Although considerable research efforts have been made to assess the effects of thematic choice on the quality of academic writings, it is an emerging area in L2 writing research. A few attempts focused on the problems that writers in English as a foreign language (EFL) context face in managing the structure of their texts (Fontaine & Kodratoff, 2011; Mauranen, 1996; Ping, 2007). In terms of proficiency comparison, Hawes and Thomas (1997) analyzed essays written by Malaysian students attending tertiary education from lower-intermediate to advanced level, and the result reported the advanced learners' distinguishing characteristics in their thematic choice. For instance, advanced writers used marked theme more frequently and were reluctant to employ concrete nouns as

topical theme. Ping's (2007) study of Singaporean students' texts supports Hawes and Thomas (1997) in that it reveals the weak writers' tendency of using fewer marked themes. Examples of this type of research also include a couple of analyses undertaken in the Korean EFL context (Lee, 2007, 2008). His research on the corpus of Korean college students' argumentative essays has focused on the aspect of the textual theme (Lee, 2007) and semantic properties of the topical theme (Lee, 2008).

Lee's (2007) research on the corpus of Korean college students' argumentative essays focused on the aspect of the textual theme. His study reveals that the EFL essays are prone to depend on the textual theme as well as confusing register appropriateness of connectors. Non-native participants in his study frequently employ characteristic connectors of spoken register, which results in making their writings appear rather informal. This finding implies that non-native writers are underprepared in employing the appropriate amount of textual theme, in particular using formal connectors for academic writing. This result is, in general, consistent with the findings of most comparative studies (Kim, 2012; Nam & Park, 2015; Park & Lu, 2015; Park & Nam, 2015).

With regard to semantic properties of topical theme, researchers have highlighted less skillful writers' strong preference for personalized features in formal writing (Fries, 1995; Kim, 2012; Lee, 2008; Thompson, 2004). Building

on the previous research, for example, Lee (2008) found that Korean EFL university students tend to personalize their essay writing, frequently employing discourse features of narratives in topical positions. This result can be partially explained by the general tendency that EFL learners are not instructed enough to learn how to conceptualize ideas properly in the formal written genre.

The most recent effort on the qualitative theme analysis is possibly Park and Nam's (2015) approach adopting a software program for automatically analyzing the thematic structure. Sample sentences extracted from Korean students' essays and essays collected from an American university are analyzed based on four key features of the theme analysis: theme length, theme function, theme plurality and theme role. The result notes that EFL learners are in general limited in thematic choice. The research calls for subsequent studies to include comprehensive consideration of learner variables and qualitative analysis to thoroughly understand the relationship between the quality of writing and choice of thematic structure.

As discussed so far, compared to a variety of literature about native English speakers, relatively less interest has been given to EFL learners. Considering that writing is one of the biggest impediments for non-native learners, more research is indeed required to gain a considerable understanding of how foreign writers employ thematic structure to organize texts. In this

respect, the present study aims to provide a cogent analysis particularly focused on Korean EFL learners' performance.

It is also worth noting that the differential impact of learners' proficiency on thematic outcomes remains elusive. There is little information on the effect of proficiency level, which must be understood in order to improve writing strategy. In addition, statistical analysis has been beyond the scope of most of the previous research. This methodological challenge is common in the general literature on systemic functional approach. Currently, several attempts are being made to develop automatic computer tools for analyzing the large amount of data (Park & Lu, 2015; Schwarz et al., 2008). However, such automatic analysis is unable to examine individual instances, thus detailed qualitative research is indispensable to examine the profound reasons for individual differences. As a way of bridging this gap, the present study attempts to examine Korean EFL essays with different proficiency levels in reference to those of native writers' texts, analyzing enough texts for performing statistical analysis.

CHAPTER 3.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter introduces the materials used in the current study and data analysis procedures are introduced. Section 3.1 outlines the data analyzed in the present study, and Section 3.2 explains the process of data analysis.

3.1. The Texts

The data used in the present study are drawn from the Korean Learner Corpus of English Argumentative Essays (KLCEAE) (Oh & Kang, 2013) and the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCENSS). The KLCEAE is comprised of English argumentative essays written by college students from several universities in Korea. The LOCENSS, a representative learner corpora compiled in the 1990s by Sylviane Granger, includes mainly argumentative essays written by English native speakers.

A total of 709 EFL essays in the KLCEAF, divided into three proficiency levels, were holistically graded by three experienced raters, two of

whom are native English speakers. The assessment was based on 60 point scale, guided by the independent writing rubric for the TOEFL iBT test. The essays were graded into six proficiency levels, and the texts earning the rank of 1 or 2 were classified into Advanced Level (AL), those having the rank of 3 or 4 into Intermediate Level (IL), and the 5 or 6 levels into Beginner Level (BL). The size of the three sub-corpora of the KLCEAE is as follows: the AL consists of 95 essays with 49,400 words in total, the IL contains 492 essays with 169,441 words, and the BL is comprised of 122 essays with 27,944 words.

The present study extracted 50 essays each for three proficiency levels from the KLCEAE, thus a total of 150 essays were chosen for analysis. Along with the non-native essay selection, 50 essays were extracted from the LOCNESS as a reference corpus. The essay selection was based on the essay topic of the texts. Based on the previous studies that considered essay topics as a critical factor in theme analysis (Aijmer, 2002; Herriman, 2011; Hewings, 2004; Hinkel, 1995), the selection was mainly established on topics the essays dealt with. In order to ensure topic similarity with the native corpus, essays dealing with cultural specific issues such as Korean political issues or US government are excluded. Next, the essays covering topics such as euthanasia, alcohol problem, abortion and environmental issues were primarily selected, as these topics were commonly found in the KLCEAE and LOCNESS. Since the topics of the two corpora were not entirely identical, the remainder of the corpora were

comprised of the essays dealing with various controversial issues such as capital punishment, teacher assessment, terrorism, and gun control, to mention but a few. As Biber (1993) argued, the difference in the text length can have a negative effect on the corpus analysis; therefore, the native essays over 1000 words were also eliminated. Table 6 displays the number of essays and words contained in the three levels of learner corpora and native corpus.

TABLE 6

The Four Corpora of the Study

	BL	IL	AL	NS
Number of essays	50	50	50	50
Number of words	11291	16405	22577	22581
Number of words/essays	225.8	328.1	451.54	451.62
Number of T-units	1052	1141	1397	1290

3.2. Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis procedure involves the following phases. The first step was to manually segment texts into T-units. The t-unit, defined by Hunt as “an independent clause plus any subordinate clause(s) attached to it” (1965, p. 141), has been adopted by researchers of a number of systemic functional studies. Then, each of the t-units was divided into theme and rheme by the researcher. Next, each theme was manually categorized according to the classification of theme features. The present study adopted four main features of theme based on former systemic functional research (Eggins, 2004; Halliday, 1994; Thompson, 2004). Table 7 describes the theme features examined in the present study, adapting Park and Nam’s (2015) descriptions including examples taken from Halliday and Matthiessen (2013). The specific thematising structures, adopted from Thompson (2004), are analyzed in this study and briefly described in Table 8 (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 for the full version).

In order to analyze lexical and semantic features of a topical theme, the present study followed Francis’s (1990) semantic category of topical theme, as it is the typical classification system adopted by numerous systemic functional researchers (Fries, 1995; Lee, 2008). Table 9 describes Francis’s (1990) semantic category with brief examples taken from Halliday and Matthiessen (2013). In the

examples below, the theme is underlined, with textual theme italicized and interpersonal theme shown in boldface.

TABLE 7

Theme Features

Feature name	Category	Definition and example
Theme length		The number of words in the theme
Theme function	Textual	The theme links to the previous sentences (e.g. <i>that is, also, meanwhile</i>)
	Interpersonal	The theme expresses the speaker's attitude (e.g. probably, usually, fortunately)
	Topical (ideational)	The theme expresses the contents (e.g. the best idea)
Theme plurality	Single	Topical function only (e.g. <u>A slight feeling of fear of his father, mixed with awe,</u> comes through many of his letters.)
	Multiple	Textual or interpersonal theme precedes the topical theme (<u>Therefore I</u> may as well be cheerful.)
Theme Selection	Unmarked	Normal choice of theme (e.g. <u>This teapot</u> was what the duke gave to my aunt.)
	Marked	The theme break the unmarked norm (e.g. <u>Until the arrival of the remittance</u> I am cut off from my home.)

TABLE 8

Thematising Structures

Structure	Description and example
Thematic equatives	<p>The form ‘Theme = Rheme’ with the ‘=’ expressed by the predicator ‘be’.</p> <p>(e.g. <u>What you need to do</u> is to write me an official letter asking for an extension.)</p>
Predicated theme	<p>The ‘it’ acts as a place-holder for the subject of the predicator ‘be’ in the first clause and the real subject is the second clause. It is possible to re- write the two clauses in the form of a single clause.</p> <p>(e.g. <u>It wasn’t until 1986</u> that we finally came back to work in the UK.)</p>
Thematised comment	<p>The ‘it’ acts as a place-holder for the subject of the predicator ‘be’ in the first clause and the real subject is the second clause. The comment in the ‘it’-clause is not a meaning component of the second clause, therefore, it is impossible to re-write them in the form of a single clause.</p> <p>(e.g. <u>It is true</u> that it took five years to do so.)</p>
Preposed theme	<p>The theme as a separate constituent, and then substituting a pronoun in the appropriate place in the following clause.</p> <p>(e.g. <u>Happiness</u>, that’s what life is about.)</p>

TABLE 9

Francis's (1990) Semantic Categories of Topical Theme

Semantic Category	Example
People/groups/institutions	e.g., <i>All human individually and collectively</i>
Concrete things	e.g., <i>aeroplane</i>
Abstractions	e.g., <i>concepts</i>
Time expressions	e.g., <i>In 1980</i>
Others	

Based on the theme features and semantic categories listed above, the theme and rheme of each t-unit were carefully interpreted. The thematic interpretation followed the notational conventions of Halliday and Matthiessen (2013). Based on the thematic interpretation convention, the analysis is presented in tabular data using Microsoft Excel (See Figure 1 for the example and Appendix 3 for the full version of instances.). All interpreted data were carefully coded and double-checked.

Figure 1

Example of Data Analysis

	A	B	C	D	E	F
		Textual Theme	Interpersonal Theme	Theme Selection	Theme length	Theme role
1						
2	We can find a lot of women in advertisements.	X	X	unmarked	1	subject
3	<u>But sometimes</u> , we wonder what they are doing in the ads.	O	O	unmarked	3	subject
4	<u>Because they</u> seem not to be quite relevant to the ads.	O	X	unmarked	2	subject
5	They don't do anything about advertising products, but just showing their nice body line or dancing very sexily.	X	X	unmarked	1	subject
6	<u>Why</u> do women do these kinds of jobs in ads?	X	X	unmarked	1	wh-interrogative

Notational conventions:

- Single underlining Theme
- plain Topical theme
- **bold** Interpersonal theme
- *italic* Textual theme

For the quantitative analysis, the present study decided to analyze normalized frequency per 1,000 t-units rather than adopting a normalized frequency. The normalized frequencies of theme features in each subclass and each semantic category were calculated and chi-square tests were carried out to assess the difference between the non-native and native group. Then, the chi-square tests were conducted again to determine whether there are significant differences among the different levels of learner groups.

In the last phase, the qualitative analysis was conducted to closely examine the specific uses of the theme. The research particularly paid attention to the use of textual theme, interpersonal theme, and semantic categories of the topical theme to provide a more detailed account for the quantitative differences among the learner groups and the native writers. At this stage, the Wordsmith Tool package (Version 5.0, Scott, 2007) was employed in searching interpersonal items found in Korean EFL and native data.

CHAPTER 4.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of the study. The results of the quantitative and the qualitative analysis are displayed respectively in Section 4.1 and Section 4.2.

4.1. Quantitative Results

This section reports the results of the quantitative analysis. Section 4.1.1 first takes account of the overall and relative frequencies of basic theme features. Section 4.1.2 then compares overall and relative frequencies of certain aspects of theme in more detail. Section 4.1.3 demonstrates the overall and relative frequencies for semantic properties of the topical theme.

4.1.1 Density of Basic Theme Features

The result of quantitative analysis revealed some notable differences in the use of theme features between the learner and native writers. The basic theme

features examined in this subsection include theme length, theme function, theme plurality and theme markedness.

4.1.1.1 Theme Length

As can be seen from the data shown in Table 10, the comparison on theme length among three levels of Korean EFL learners and native counterparts show noticeable differences.

Table 10

Results of Theme Length

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
BL	1052	2.99	2.69
IL	1141	3.61	3.04
AL	1397	4.33	3.83
NS	1290	4.04	3.98

It can be seen that the mean length of theme gradually increases with the growth of proficiency. Beginner learners have a tendency to employ the shortest theme (2.99), and the mean value of theme length grows consistently in intermediate (3.61) and advanced group (4.33). One interesting finding was that the mean length of advanced corpora is even longer than that of the native corpus.

The mean value of theme length in the advanced learner writing is 4.33, which is slightly longer than 4.04 in native writing. However, in terms of standard deviation, native corpus marks the highest value among the four corpora. The result implies that the native writers show the greatest variation in the length of theme, which suggests that native group have a wider choice in theme selection. With regard to the standard deviation of theme length, the value of standard deviation increases steadily as learner's level of proficiency increases. The beginner group has the smallest value of standard deviation (2.69), and the intermediate and advanced learners have higher value with the standard deviation of 3.04 and 3.83, respectively. It can be said that considering learner proficiency, the advanced learners are not just better at producing longer theme, but also making thematic structures more diverse from short to long structures. This result is supported by research literature reporting that the length of theme and value of standard deviation in learner data is smaller compared to those of native corpus (Nam & Park 2015; Park & Nam, 2015; Park & Lu, 2015). Overall, the EFL learners are relatively limited in the aspect of theme length whereas native writers show more flexibility. In the native writing, the longer theme mainly includes the long noun phrases with condensed information. For example, 'the opportunity to learn about the vast world around us' (NS #08) or 'people who inherit money or live off the interest of investors' (NS #21) acted as a theme of a clause, serving dense and specific information about the subject. The shorter

theme in the native texts shows the use of demonstrative pronouns such as ‘this’ or ‘that,’ which function as connecting the previous argument with the following clause. The Korean EFL data, on the other hand, rarely have such long noun phrases or demonstrative pronouns in the thematic position. Instead, non-native writers tend to employ person pronouns (e.g. ‘I’, ‘they’) or personal agents (e.g. ‘many people’, ‘some feminists’) as short theme. Such disparities found in the theme length between the learner and native data concur with the finding of Nam and Park (2015).

4.1.1.2 Theme Function

In this subsection, the proportions of topical theme, textual theme, and interpersonal theme are analyzed and compared among the four corpora. Table 11 presents the raw and the normalized frequency of occurrence of theme functions, and Table 12 displays the results of the chi-square tests between native and the non-native writers.

The normalized frequencies demonstrated in Table 11 show a clear difference in topical and textual theme between the Korean EFL learners and native speakers. The three Korean learner groups show a more frequent use of textual theme, while their use of topical theme is considerably infrequent compared to that of native texts. The overall differences in density of topical and

textual theme are typical of learners at all levels of proficiency. The results of the chi-square tests confirm a statistically significant difference in terms of the proportion of topical ($\chi^2=121.04$, $p<.001$) and textual theme ($\chi^2=40.41$, $p<.001$) between learner groups and native. The overuse of textual theme is consistent with general findings reported by previous literature (Green et al., 2000; Jalilifar, 2009; Kim, 2012; Lee, 2007; Nam & Park, 2015; Park & Nam, 2015) that pointed out that non-native writers are prone to employ textual theme in thematic position.

Table 11

Density of Theme Function

	Topical	Textual	Interpersonal
BL	1030 (711.3)	392 (270.7)	26 (17.9)
IL	1137 (715.9)	423 (271.5)	28 (17.9)
AL	1389 (702.2)	538 (271.9)	51 (25.7)
NS	1281 (811.7)	256 (162.2)	41 (25.9)

(frequencies per 1,000 T-units)

Table 12

Results of Chi-square Test between Non-native and Native Corpora (χ^2):

Theme Function

	Topical	Textual	Interpersonal
NNS/NS	121.04***	40.41***	1.42

*** ($p<.001$), ** ($p<.005$), * ($p<.05$)

Next, the result shows that the learner and native groups are not significantly different in the use of the interpersonal theme ($\chi^2=1.42$). This result conflicts with some previous studies reporting that the frequency of interpersonal theme is relatively low in non-native texts compared to native texts (Jalilifar, 2010; Kim, 2012). However, recently Nam and Park (2015) reported the contradictory result, that is, no statistically significant difference was indicated between native and non-native participants in the aspect of the interpersonal theme. The present study supports Nam and Park (2015) in that the result of the present study did not expose a stark difference between native and learners.

In order to examine whether the non-native writers' proficiency affects their preference on theme functions, the chi-square tests evaluating the significance of differences among learner groups were performed.

Table 13

Results of Chi-square Test Comparing Four Corpora (χ^2): Theme Function

	Topical	Textual	Interpersonal
BL/NS	46.92***	50.71***	2.36
IL/NS	37.74***	51.56***	2.55
AL/NS	54.26***	61.29***	0.00

*** (p<.001), ** (p<.005), * (p<.05)

Table 13 contains the results of the chi-square tests: no significant

difference among levels of learner groups, which implies that the overuse of textual theme remains common irrespective of non-native learners' level of language proficiency. This finding contradicts the finding of Lee (2007), according to which less proficient learners tend to employ more textual theme. In the present study, however, though the normalized frequency of textual theme is gradually growing as learners' proficiency improves to the higher level, no statistically significant difference was confirmed due to proficiency in the comparison among Korean EFL learners.

The noticeable preference of textual theme shown in non-native texts may be explained by the function of the textual theme as cohesive devices, functioning as an "obvious player" in the sentence's initial position (Haws and Thomas, 1997, p.38). McCabe (1999) argues that textual theme contributes to greater continuity and cohesion in texts. However, the overuse of textual theme disrupts the flow of information. Native writers may know how to logically organize texts without textual theme, for example, by using topical theme to give coherence to the texts (Jalilifar, 2009, p. 102).

4.1.1.3 Theme Plurality

The current section deals with Halliday's (1994) distinction between simple and multiple themes in accordance with their internal structures. Table 14

illustrates the raw data and the normalized frequency of the occurrences of theme plurality. Table 15 shows the results of the chi-square tests of each variable between native and non-native data.

Table 14

Density of Theme Plurality

	Single	Multiple	N/A
BL	618 (587.4)	412 (391.6)	22 (20.9)
IL	692 (606.4)	445 (390.0)	4 (3.5)
AL	820 (586.9)	569 (407.3)	8 (5.7)
NS	994 (770.5)	287 (222.4)	9 (6.9)

(frequencies per 1,000 T-units)

Table 15

Results of Chi-square Test between Non-native and Native Corpora (χ^2):

Theme Plurality

	Single	Multiple
NNS/NS	129.40***	127.19***

*** (p<.001), ** (p<.005), * (p<.05)

As shown in Table 15, Korean EFL student writers are much more dependent on multiple theme while native speakers rather prefer single theme. The chi-square test revealed statistically significant difference in the frequencies

of single ($\chi^2=129.40$, $p<.001$) and multiple themes ($\chi^2=127.19$, $p<.001$) between the non-native and native groups.

Structurally, a multiple theme must have at least one or the other of textual or interpersonal theme in addition to the topical theme. In this sense, the frequency of single and multiple theme seems to be connected with theme function discussed above. The previous subsection revealed that the learner groups highly overused textual theme than the native writers, whereas the native writers preferred the topical theme. The result described in Table 15 seems natural considering that Korean EFL participants prefer the multiple functions to a great extent, especially the textual function.

What is noteworthy is that no statistically significant difference was found after a chi-square analysis among the three learner groups. Table 16 shows the results of chi-square test assessing the significance of differences among learner groups.

Table 16

Results of Chi-square Test Comparing Four Corpora (χ^2): Theme Plurality

	Single	Multiple
BL/NS	90.54***	79.19***
IL/NS	76.67***	80.75***
AL/NS	103.04***	105.53***

*** ($p<.001$), ** ($p<.005$), * ($p<.05$)

It can be seen that the overuse of multiple theme does not improve as proficiency level increases. Multiple theme is preferred to a great extent by all groups of learners. The results concur with evidence from previous research that compared the thematic choice of non-native writers with that of native (Kim, 2012; Nam & Park, 2015). It has been reported that learners are generally more depend on multiple theme. However, regarding the proficiency level, the existing literature has provided mixed evidence on the relationship between frequencies of multiple theme and learner proficiency. Most studies suggested that learners with lower proficiency overuse multiple theme in comparison to those with higher proficiency (Kim, 2012; Nam & Park, 2015). In contrast, North's (2005) comparison between UK students majoring in arts and science concluded that students studying arts who used significantly higher numbers of multiple theme received a higher grade in writing assessment. In her study, the art majoring students' frequent use of multiple theme has been interpreted as an index that reflects their ability to produce semantically more condensed text. The present study supports Kim (2012) and Nam and Park (2015) as the overuse of multiple theme did not show a significant change related to the proficiency development.

While the present study reveals the general pattern of theme usage by non-native and native writers, it does not suggest enough explanation about how their use of theme function and plurality is related to the learners' proficiency development. As a number of previous studies reported that the tendency to

overuse and misuse textual theme is one of the major characteristics found in the non-native writings (Bolton et al., 2002; Green et al., 2000; Lee, 2007), further analysis is needed to investigate if there are qualitative differences between learners in the usage of the textual and multiple theme. The qualitative analysis will deal with the use of textual theme by the different levels of learners.

4.1.1.4 Theme Markedness

The current subsection reports the results of analysis on the frequency of unmarked and marked theme. Table 17 describes the raw and the normalized frequencies of theme markedness. Table 18 contains the results of the chi-square tests between native and non-native.

Table 17

Density of Theme Markedness

	Unmarked	Marked	N/A
BL	826 (785.1)	204 (193.9)	22 (20.9)
IL	837 (733.5)	300 (262.9)	4 (3.5)
AL	1023 (732.2)	366 (261.9)	8 (5.7)
NS	979 (758.9)	302 (234.1)	9 (6.9)

(frequencies per 1,000 T-units)

Table 18

Results of Chi-square Test between Non-native and Native Corpora (χ^2):

Theme Markedness

	Unmarked	Marked
NNS/NS	0.58	0.35

*** (p<.001), ** (p<.005), * (p<.05)

Regarding theme markedness, there is no salient difference between learner and native groups' selection. In other words, Korean EFL learners in the present study are not different from native counterparts in the aspect of theme markedness. Given that the frequent use of marked theme has been regarded as an index of experienced writing, such a similarity between learner and native seems interesting in that it can be interpreted as learners utilizing marked function as well as native writers.

This overall correspondence contradicts earlier studies arguing that non-native or novice writers tend to underuse marked theme (Hawes & Thomas, 1997; Jalilifar, 2010; Lee, 2008; Park & Lu, 2015; Park & Nam, 2015; Ping, 2007). The chi-square test further examined the statistical difference among the learner groups. Table 19 describes the results of the chi-square test and demonstrates that the beginner group's underuse of marked theme proved to be statistically significant when compared to native group and the other two learner groups.

Table 19

Results of Chi-square Test Comparing Four Corpora (χ^2): Theme Markedness

	Unmarked	Marked
BL/NS	2.27	5.53*
IL/NS	2.06	2.70
AL/NS	2.50	2.79

*** (p<.001), ** (p<.005), * (p<.05)

That is, the beginners produced significantly less marked theme than the advanced and the intermediate learners. In this respect, the outcomes of the present study support the conventional wisdom in that the beginner group of learners employs remarkably lower proportion of marked theme. What is interesting is the increase in using of marked theme by the intermediate and the advanced groups. The beginners seem to struggle with producing unusual or marked structures, and the learners are gradually accustomed to employing diverse unusual types of theme as their proficiency improves to intermediate and advanced levels.

The previous discussion reveals major differences between Korean EFL learners and the native writers: shorter theme length in the learner data, the learners' overuse of textual theme, and learners' underuse of topical theme. No statistical difference was confirmed with regard to the use of interpersonal theme and marked theme. However, when considering learner proficiency, it was found

that the beginner group significantly underuse marked theme while the underuse of marked choice improves as proficiency increases. The following section will primarily focus on how learners adopt specific thematising structures.

4.1.2 Density of Specific Aspects of Theme

The current chapter first attempts to examine the density of the three specific thematising structures: proposed theme, predicated theme, and thematic equative. Also, the density of theme role is analyzed.

4.1.2.1 Thematising Structures

The comparisons of the frequency of the three thematising structures in native and students' writing are described in Table 20 and Table 21. Table 20 shows the raw and the normalized frequency of the occurrence of each thematising structures. Table 21 represents the statistic results comparing native and non-native texts.

As Table 21 describes, the result of the chi-square tests confirms that L1 and L2 writers are markedly different in their usage of thematic equative

($\chi^2=16.11$, $p<.001$) and preposed theme ($\chi^2=3.99$, $p<.05$), whereas there is no significance in terms of predicated theme. In particular, a salient difference is observed in the outcomes with regard to thematic equative ($p<.001$).

Table 20

Density of Thematising Structure

	Preposed Theme	Predicated Theme	Thematic Equative
BL	9 (8.5)	14 (13.3)	17 (16.1)
IL	4 (3.5)	34 (29.7)	11 (9.6)
AL	1 (0.7)	49 (35.0)	19 (13.6)
NS	11 (8.5)	32 (24.8)	39 (30.2)

(frequencies per 1,000 T-units)

Table 21

*Results of Chi-square Test between Non-native and Native Corpora (χ^2):
Thematising Structure*

	Preposed Theme	Predicated Theme	Thematic Equative
NNS/NS	3.99*	0.18	16.11***

*** ($p<.001$), **($p<.005$), *($p<.05$)

To verify the proficiency variable with regard to the frequency of the thematising structures, chi-square tests were used to evaluate the significance of differences among learner groups.

Table 22

Results of Chi-square Test Comparing Four Corpora (χ^2):

Thematising Structure

	Preposed Theme	Predicated Theme	Thematic Equative
BL/NS	0.00	3.98*	8.76**
IL/NS	2.49	0.57	12.75***
AL/NS	9.20**	2.42	4.92*

*** (p<.001), ** (p<.005), * (p<.05)

Results of the chi-square tests described in Table 22 indicate that a higher number of thematic equative in the native writings sharply contrasts with Korean learner groups' relatively low usage irrespective of proficiency variables. The somewhat underuse of those specialized structures in the EFL corpus thus needs to be considered in relation to the functions they perform. As described before, the thematic equative is shown in the form of 'Theme = Rheme', with the '=' articulated by the predicator 'be' (Thompson, 2004, p. 126). In a thematic equative, the starting point is usually a question that the writer or speaker assumes the audience may want to ask at that stage of the text. By completing his or her own message by answer the question, thematic equative "makes explicit the interactive consideration of the audience." (Thompson, 2004, p. 127) In this vein, it can be said that native writers are much more able to interact with the readers by using thematising structures.

4.1.2.2. Theme Role

Next, the frequencies of syntactic structures of theme role are analyzed in the subsection. Table 23 illustrates the raw and the normalized frequency of occurrence of each syntactic structure. Table 24 shows the chi-square results of the variables between native and non-native texts.

Table 23

Density of Theme Role

	Subject	Adjunct	Dependent Clause	Existential There	To-infinitive/ Gerund	Predicator
BL	752 (714.8)	93 (88.4)	89 (84.6)	28 (26.6)	21 (19.9)	15 (14.2)
IL	728 (638.0)	136 (119.1)	127 (111.3)	38 (33.3)	29 (25.4)	34 (29.7)
AL	915 (654.9)	171 (122.4)	128 (916.2)	47 (33.6)	39 (27.9)	61 (43.6)
NS	872 (675.9)	142 (110.0)	115 (89.1)	42 (32.5)	10 (7.7)	31 (24.0)

(frequencies per 1,000 T-units)

Table 24

Results of Chi-square Test between Non-native and Native Corpora (χ^2):

Theme Role

	Subject	Adjunct	Dependent Clause	Existential There	To-infinitive/ Gerund	Predicator
NNS/NS	0.34	0.02	0.50	0.04	13.86***	1.48

*** (p<.001), ** (p<.005), * (p<.05)

As Table 24 describes, the results reveal that non-native student writers have a similar tendency in the use of subject, adjunct, dependent clause, existential there and predicator. Yet, non-native student writers are significantly more dependent on to-infinitive/gerund role when compared to native writers ($\chi^2=13.86$, $p<.001$).

Table 25

Results of Chi-square Test Comparing Four Corpora (χ^2): Theme Role

	Subject	Adjunct	Dependent Clause	Existential There	To-infinitive/ Gerund	Predicator
BL/NS	4.12*	3.02	0.15	0.70	6.61*	2.87
IL/NS	3.87*	0.50	3.32	0.01	11.97**	0.77
AL/NS	1.33	1.09	0.50	0.03	15.23***	7.82*

*** ($p<.001$), **($p<.005$), *($p<.05$)

Considering learners' proficiency, notable differences are found among learners with various levels of proficiency in their use of subject role and to-infinitive and gerund as theme. Table 25 shows that the beginner group is statistically significant in the case of subject role when compared to native group ($\chi^2=4.12$, $p<.05$). In addition, group differences were found between beginner group and other two learner groups. While beginners were heavily dependent on the subject role as a theme, intermediate and advanced learners employed diverse

types of theme role more actively. The wider variety of theme role and sentence patterns for higher-level learners might be attributed to the effect of improved linguistic competence.

In sum, the description of theme role has double implications. That is, beginners are not prepared enough to employ various syntactic roles in thematic position, and the learners' common preference for to-infinitive/gerund may be attributed to Korean EFL educational environment as to-infinitive and gerund are one of the grammatical structures mainly taught in the Korean EFL textbooks.

4.1.3 Density of Semantic Properties of Topical Theme

Based on Francis's (1990) semantic categories that have been widely adopted by systemic functional research, this section analyzes lexico-semantic properties of a topical theme. Table 26 describes the raw and the normalized frequencies of semantic properties of a thematic position. Table 27 shows the results of the chi-square tests making a comparison between native and non-native speakers.

Table 26***Density of Lexico-Semantic Properties of Theme***

	BL	IL	AL	NS
1 st person	226 (214.8)	142 (124.4)	95 (68.0)	105 (81.4)
2 nd person	52 (49.4)	49 (42.9)	60 (42.9)	31 (24.0)
Animate Participants	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	9 (6.4)	5 (3.8)
Global Theme	50 (47.5)	62 (54.3)	68 (48.6)	56 (43.4)
Abstract Concept	176 (167.3)	161 (141.1)	298 (213.3)	299 (231.8)
Anaphoric Nominalization	3 (2.9)	4 (3.5)	11 (7.9)	10 (7.8)
Text Reference	127 (120.7)	170 (148.9)	173 (123.8)	157 (121.7)
Spatio-Temporal	33 (31.4)	32 (28.0)	31 (22.1)	33 (25.5)

(frequencies per 1,000 T-units)

Table 27***Results of Chi-square Test between Non-native and Native Corpora (χ^2):******Lexico-Semantic Properties of Theme***

	1 st person	2 nd person	Animate Participants	Global Theme	Abstract concept	Anaphoric Nominali- zation	Text Reference	Spatio- Temporal
NNS/ NS	198.49 ***	10.88 **	2.87	0.46	18.48 ***	1.25	0.72	0.05

***statistically significant (p<.001), ** (p<.005), * (p<.05)

The chi-square distribution reveals that in the Korean EFL texts, the first ($\chi^2=198.49$, p<.001) and the second person pronouns ($\chi^2=10.88$, p<.005) are

significantly overused compared to native texts. On the other hand, the statistics confirmed that ‘abstract concepts’ are significantly underused in the non-native texts. ($\chi^2=18.48$, $p<.001$) The result supports the existing literature showing that non-native writers tend to frequently use the first and the second person pronouns as a theme (Lee, 2008). It has been also reported that the English native speakers preferred abstract concepts in the thematic position whereas they are relatively uncommon in the Korean EFL data.

Table 28

Results of Chi-square Test Comparing Four Corpora (χ^2):

Lexico-Semantic Properties of Theme

	1 st person	2 nd person	Animate Participants	Global Theme	Abstract concept	Anaphoric Nominali- zation	Text Reference	Spatio- Temporal
BL/ NS	85.01 ***	10.94 **	4.09*	0.23	14.90 ***	2.52	0.00	0.71
IL/ NS	12.30 ***	6.81*	4.43*	1.57	32.45 ***	1.91	3.87*	0.14
AL/ NS	1.75	7.34*	0.85	0.42	1.32	0.00	0.03	0.33

***statistically significant ($p<.001$), **($p<.005$), *($p<.05$)

Table 28 describes the chi-square results that use learner proficiency as a variable. The comparison between lexico-semantic properties of theme by four groups uncovers the student writers’ preference for the first and second person pronouns as well as underuse of abstract theme measured against native data. The results generally imply that the observed patterns of advanced learners are

similar to those of native writers. In contrast, learners with lower proficiency tend to have limited choice of semantic features. For example, beginner and intermediate learners are more likely to employ personal pronouns in topical position than advanced learners and native writers. Also, abstract concepts are relatively uncommon in EFL writings as compared to native speakers' preferred choice of it. The associated chi-square tests indicate the statistical difference between the EFL and native texts. The literature suggested that the frequent use of the first and second person in theme position represents a typical characteristic of spoken register (Thompson, 2004, p. 372). According to Lee (2008), the employment of abstract concepts including anaphoric nominalization in formal essay writing is in general considered characteristic of written discourse. In this respect, the current result could be a sign of the EFL learners' immaturity on the register and genre.

4.2. Qualitative Results

This section presents a detailed qualitative analysis of thematic choice by writers' native language and EFL learners' different levels of English proficiency. The qualitative analysis found remarkable differences in comparing Korean EFL student writers to English natives. In a detailed analysis that follows, some notable characteristics of thematic selection among the corpora are described and discussed.

4.2.1 Textual Theme

One important finding of the present study is that non-native learners' excessively depended on the textual theme as an orienting device. Earlier literature also observed learners' overuse of textual theme (Granger & Tyson, 1996; Green et al., 2000; Jalilifar, 2009; Lee, 2007; Park & Nam, 2015). Overuse of textual theme can detract from the smooth development of the texts because it hinders establishing a cohesive link. In this respect, further exploration is needed to give a clearer understanding of the non-native learners' preference of the textual theme. This section develop a special focus on the following two aspects: Disparity in actual usage between EFL learners and natives in general, and the

different aspects of textual theme use in relation to the levels of English proficiency. The following example (1) is extracted from an EFL text at the advanced level. (The theme of each T-unit is underlined, with the textual theme italicized.)

(1) (extracted from AL#03)

Korea has a low rate of reported for sex crime. The reported rate is only 6%, and the indictment rate is lower than 45%. Furthermore, imprisonment rate is lower than the indictment rate. In other words, only 1% of the entire offenders are sentenced to jail, and even fewer people's information is released on the internet. In other words, there are many hidden criminal that we don't know. For that reason, it is a big mistake to think that the notify law enforcement can preclude crime.

In (1), six out of eight t-units engage textual theme in front of ideational thematic position, which seems excessively high frequency. In the extracted text, six successive textual themes are employed in the thematic position, which can make readers have difficulty understanding the text. This obvious preference of textual theme found in non-native texts could be partly explained by Hawes and Thomas's (1997, p. 38) statement that textual theme is regarded as an 'obvious

player' in the initial position. Non-native learners may depend on the dominant role of the textual theme as a cohesive device. However, even though the appropriate use of textual theme makes texts sound coherent, the overuse of textual theme has a negative effect on building coherence of a text.

The frequency difference in textual theme between non-native and native texts also needs further discussion in strategic aspect. On the other hand, native writers show other strategies to maintain textual coherence without explicitly using the textual theme, for instance, the extracted paragraph (2) shows how to use interrogative instead of the textual theme to change the subject.

(2) (extracted from NS#03)

Abortion would still be rampant but now it would have a much higher mortality rate and it would be more expensive. Without abortions where would all the unwanted children go? The basic plan would be to put them in abortion homes, but this would cost tax payers huge sums of money to support.

In (2), the second sentence switches the topic by throwing a question, instead of employing adversative textual theme such as 'but' or 'however'. This strategy to utilize interrogative mood effectively functions as changing the plot without using the textual theme. The topical theme itself is also enough to link

the relationship of the clause to the surrounding text and contexts.

(3) (extracted from NS#31)

Susan B. Anthony originally led the cause because she felt that women should be given equal treatment in society. The ideas behind "feminism" were rooted in the ideal that all men, and women, were created equal and therefore should be treated so in the society in which they chose to live. Men had the exclusive rights to the vote, employment opportunities and other societal features that empower a human being to be innately whole. By this I do not mean that by receiving the right to vote and having a chance to get a good job you have found the meaning of life.

None of the textual theme is employed in (3), however, the text still maintains the logical connection between clauses. Diverse topic-related topical theme can also control the flow of information. According to Halliday (1994), unmarked theme also gives continuity to the texts and maintains coherence between sentences. The theme or rheme of the previous clause can be placed in the thematic position of the following clause and this relation connects the clauses.

One plausible explanation for learner's overuse of textual theme may be

their awareness of the obvious function of textual connectors. There is general agreement among researchers that frequent use of textual theme in academic texts might be based on the argumentative nature of the texts, which contributes to greater coherence and cohesion (Halliday, 1994; Lee, 2007; McCabe, 1999). It should be noted that the role of the textual theme is by no means uncontroversial. However, this marked overuse has been considered as one of the major barriers that deter non-native writers from constructing well-organized texts (Lee, 2007).

The qualitative examination also finds substantial differences in the use of textual theme according to learners' varying levels of proficiency. The result reveals that the beginner group uses the most limited types of connectors such as 'and', 'so' or 'but', as displayed in (4): (The textual theme is underlined with italicized.)

(4) (extracted from BL#01)

Society make light of lives about to kill their own baby. So I object the abortion. There is exception as I referred. But most of the abortion is just done by their parent's carelessness.

In (4) above, two of the most frequent connectors, 'and' and 'so' function as part of the textual theme. The result is not unexpected considering that these coordinators have often been considered by previous literature as an

index of low-level learners' 'syntactic immaturity' (Crowhurst, 1987; Reid, 1992; Rutherford, 1987. Scarcella, 1984) and of spoken discourse rather than written register (Biber, 1986; Chafe, 1984; Granger & Tyson, 1996)

It should be also noted that the non-native writers have the propensity to adopt ordinal numbers (e.g. first, second, third) in the textual theme position. Notably, the phenomenon is the most frequent at the intermediate level, as described in (5).

(5) (extracted from IL#09)

There are four reasons why I am against. First, suicide is not allowed. Euthanasia is a kind of suicide. Human rights do not include the right to take one's own life. Second, an end cannot justify a means. Even if euthanasia is right, doctor's crime must be punished. Who shall be responsible for it? Euthanasia raises such a problem. Third, there is some possibility of killing treatable patients, because the discernment, whether the disease can be treated or not, is especially difficult. Finally there are worries about a trend to make light of one's life.

In (5), four reasons of the writer's arguments are listed in a continuous stream with sentence-initial ordinal numbers. Noteworthy is that the non-native learners' preference of ordinal numbers is in clear contrast to native texts where

almost none of ordinal numbers is found in thematic position. Thus, frequent use of sentence-initial ordinal numbers in textual position can be considered an indicator of learner writing. Also, worth noting is the extreme preference of textual theme at the advanced texts. In the EFL corpus, interestingly, the overall instances of textual theme are most frequent in the advanced texts, with the normalized frequency even over two times higher than native texts.

To sum up, the Korean student writers overuse some elements. For example, a textual theme with informal connectors (and, so, but, etc.) is widely found in the Korean EFL data. The phenomenon seems to be related to what Hasselgren (1994) referred to as “lexical teddy bears”, which describes the infelicitous usage resulted from overdependence on the familiar, that is, the expressions learned at the early stage. EFL writers’ frequent use of a limited number of elements reflects their narrow interests with only some familiar features.

Another consequential finding is that the advanced learners more highly overused textual theme than the intermediate learners and beginners. Hence, not only is there increment in the variety of textual theme with a growth in proficiency, but also increase in an overuse tendency. In other words, this result shows that textual theme is demanding even for advanced learners. The present study thus suggests that in order to provide insights into building coherence and raise learners’ awareness, the varied functions of the textual theme as well as the

unmarked theme should be explicitly taught.

4.2.2 Interpersonal Theme

Also, despite the rich literature on thematic structure, academia has almost no studies covering all areas of theme features. Most existing literature on thematic structure focused on some specific aspects of theme features, for example, marked theme (Green et al., 2000), textual theme (Lee, 2007), or semantic properties of the topical theme (Lee, 2008). Some research efforts have investigated diverse thematic features (Hewings, 2004; Park & Lu, 2015; Park & Nam, 2015); however, most of them provide quantitative outcomes only and do not suggest qualitative results. The thematic structure has been investigated in a minimal way, thus the present study is expected to reveal underlying aspects of thematic choice by Korean EFL student writers, and to enable Korean EFL students to understand some essential features in English essay writing and be more adept at producing written texts.

Interpersonal theme has been relatively neglected in systemic functional research compared to the sustained interest on textual theme. Jalilifar (2010) suggests that less proficient writers' insufficient use of interpersonal theme may result in less reader-friendly texts. As previously examined, the chi-square

analysis indicated no significant difference in number of interpersonal theme between Korean EFL students and native speakers. However, the frequency of interpersonal theme gradually increases as learners become more proficient; thus the gap between non-native and native is decreasing. That is, though the overall comparison of interpersonal theme between Korean students and native speakers is not significant, further examination of interpersonal theme usage by individual learner groups may be meaningful.

Halliday's (1994) account contains three categories of interpersonal theme: vocative, modal/comment adjunct, and finite verbal operator in yes/no interrogative. Vocative generally refers to personal name used to address the person. Modal/comment adjuncts are expressions projecting the speaker or writer's attitude or judgment on the content of the message. Finite verbal operator, such as 'am', 'do' and 'can' in yes/no interrogative sentences, includes a set of finite auxiliary verbs defining tense or modality.

The occurrence of the interpersonal theme feature needs to be analyzed in the aspects of the genre and register of the writings. The texts evaluated in this research are argumentative essays, of which characteristics are far different from those of spoken or informal genres. According to Halliday (1994), vocatives are typical of dialogue or spoken register rather than written register. Indeed, of the three categories, vocatives and finite verbal operators rarely occurred in either Korean or native writing. Thus, we focus on the aspects of modal and comment

adjuncts, which “express the speaker or writer’s judgment on or attitude toward content of the message” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013, p. 108).

Table 29

Frequencies of Individual Interpersonal Theme in Rank Order

Rank	Interpersonal Theme (Raw Frequency)	
	NNS	NS
1	sometimes (21)	of course (6)
2	especially, of course (12)	even (5)
3	in my opinion (8)	maybe (4)
4	actually, especially, maybe (6)	apparently, basically, clearly, sure, perhaps, personally, usually, well (2)
5	generally (5)	always, especially, generally, in my opinion, no doubt, relatively speaking, simply, sometimes, unfortunately (1)

As Table 29 illustrates, the comparison shows clear difference in the usage of interpersonal features by Korean EFL and native writers. *Sometime* with a total of 105 occurrences in the three non-native groups proved to be the preferred interpersonal feature as it accounts for 20 percent of the whole. *Especially* and *of course* come in second with 12 instances each, followed by *in my opinion* with eight instances. The top three rankers comprise of about a half of total instances in the EFL corpus, which implies EFL learners’ tend to rely excessively on a few interpersonal themes.

In contrast to the EFL texts, the native data show a more balanced result. What comes first among the 41 instances of interpersonal theme is, of course, the proportion of which is less than 15 percent of the total. Even with five occurrences is placed in second in the native corpus, followed by maybe which occurs four times. A variety of interpersonal items fall in fourth and fifth places, which reflects that the native writers employ substantially rich and variable interpersonal theme in their essays.

It is interesting to observe that most top-ranked items did not overlap two different language groups. In the native corpus, even is the second most frequent interpersonal theme; however, it was relatively uncommon in the EFL texts. The EFL student writers excessively preferred sometimes, while native speakers were reluctant to use it as the interpersonal theme.

The relatively frequent use of *sometimes* may be attributable to their intensive learning of English frequency adverbs in Korea. In Korean EFL educational context, frequency adverbs such as *always*, *usually*, and *sometimes* are repetitively emphasized from the early stage of public education. This excessive dependence on sometimes, meanwhile, is in contrast to the less frequent use of other frequency adverbs such as *always* and *usually* in the EFL texts. It should be noted that, as pointed out by Hewings (2004), appropriate use of frequency adverbs makes the argument sound more objective. In particular, through using adverbs denoting a higher frequency (e.g., always, often, usually),

the author can “mediate the amount of commitment they show to the statement.” (Hewings, 2004) It can be, therefore, suggested that in the EFL context, balanced application of diverse frequency adverbs should be taught.

Further, a number of items are only found in native data. No occurrence of *always, sure, clearly, relatively speaking, apparently, well, simply, and no doubt* is found in the interpersonal thematic position in EFL texts. Although these words are used once or twice in the native data, it can be seen that the non-native writers have relatively fewer numbers of interpersonal items than the native writers. Also, on the basis of Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2013) categorization of modal adjuncts, native writers have a reported tendency to use the interpersonal theme which expresses obviousness (e.g., *sure, clearly*) or presumption (e.g., *apparently, no doubt*) much more frequently than Korean EFL counterparts. The examples taken from the native data are presented below.

(6) (extracted from #NS34)

There are however organised leisure fox hunts for fun and I am sure that the participants enjoy themselves immensely. **No doubt most of the fun** is had in the chase and not the kill.

(7) (extracted from #NS21)

A rather hard view would be that if someone who works on a menial or

physically taxing job does not make a fair or moderate salary then it is his or her own fault (or bad luck). These opinions are based on a rather faulty American premise that all people are given an equal chance in life and what they make of it is their own responsibly. Apparently, most people believe that they are underpaid and that others are overpaid.

In example (6), an interpersonal theme *no doubt* expresses the writer's strong convictions about the argument. Similarly, in example (7) the writer selected *apparently* to provide a reliable rationale for his argument. The examples show that the native writers effectively engage interpersonal theme in assuring certainty of their argument. Hewings (2004) emphasized the role of the interpersonal theme as "signaling the writer's evaluation of the significance of the evidence just presented." Hinkel (2002) also highlighted the importance of interpersonal components in that they function as effective and appropriate means of persuasion. Considering the evaluative and persuasive nature of the genre of argumentative essays, production of a complex rhetorical structure by interpersonal theme that delivers a persuasive and evaluative angle is a substantial feature of high-rated essays (Hewings, 2004).

Korean EFL writers are less skillful at expressing the writer's angle by taking advantage of interpersonal meta-function. Given the significance of interpersonal theme in developing arguments, these results provide the reason for

teaching Korean EFL students how to make better use of interpersonal theme in clarifying the writer's position completely.

The detailed comparison of the use of interpersonal thematic elements implies that what is more substantial than the similarity in overall frequency is how these items actually perform in each separate context. Though the two corpora indicate no significant statistical difference in the frequencies of interpersonal theme; however, their actual uses proved to differ in quality. Non-native writers seem to fail to recognize the function of interpersonal theme in delivering their argument. Korean EFL writers show a tendency to relying excessively on a few interpersonal theme, while the native writers do not have such dependence on a few items. It has also been demonstrated that Korean EFL writers, compared to their native counterparts, are inexperienced in employing interpersonal theme elements to supports the significance of the arguments. It seems difficult for non-native student writers to employ appropriate interpersonal theme in argumentative writing.

4.2.3 Semantic Categories of Topical Theme

The final point of this research comes from semantic categories of the topical theme. As shown in Table 27 above, the noticeable difference between

the two corpora is observed in the uses of first/second person pronouns between the EFL and the native corpus. Although the previous literature underscores the employment of personal pronouns with regard to genre and registers, more research is required to gain a better understanding of how learners' proficiency affects the use of the first and second person pronouns in the thematic position. The within-group variations across the proficiency groups within EFL writers should be further studied to ascertain how they are familiarized into the academic writing convention of the use of the personal pronouns.

In the EFL corpus, at the beginner and the intermediate in particular, the first person pronouns tend to be widely used across the whole text as shown in (8). (The first person pronouns placed in thematic position are in boldface.)

(8) (extracted from BL#50)

Now **I** will say which I prefer to live big city or small town. **I** prefer to live big city, because big city has many entertaining facilities. If **I** live small town, I often will not go to cinema. Whenever **I** want to see the movie, I need to go to downtown.

In (8), three t-units out of four include the first person pronoun in thematic position, which might give the reader the impression that the text is rather personal. The extreme use of the first person in the learner text results in

personalizing their argument, which is inappropriate for argumentative writing. Instances of the first person pronoun in the intermediate texts are described in (9) and (10). (The first person pronouns placed in thematic position are in boldface.)

(9) (extracted from IL#15)

Are students able to assess their teachers objectively? From my experience of adolescent, I think the answer is no. Although every student doesn't behave as I feel, but there is a tendency that students dislike the teacher more strict to them.

(10) (extracted from IL#23)

I think writing assessment is not necessary for college admission. **I** think it cannot measure student's all ability that college requires. It is true writing assessment can distinguish students.

In the extracted IL texts, the first person pronouns were employed to express the writers' arguments or attitudes about the topic. The student writers' use of the first person pronouns often involves 'I think', which makes the arguments subjective and personal. In (9), the theme 'From my experience of adolescent' even enhances the personalizing effect. Likewise, the EFL writers tend to state their personal experiences as well as involve themselves in the

arguments as participants. This direct involvement of the writer as a text participant seems to reflect their insufficient knowledge about formal writing conventions.

Learners' over-dependence on the first and the second person supports was demonstrated in the previous literature (Brown & Yule, 1983; Kim, 2012; Lee, 2008; Thompson, 2004). It has been argued that frequent use of first and second person can be seen as an indicative of immature writing. Lee (2008), for example, reveals that in Korean EFL learner essays, the first and the second person pronouns constitute over 10 percent of the total topical theme, which is substantially higher than the native opposite's texts. The comparison conducted by previous research clearly suggests that the vast majority of the EFL writers tend to extensively use the first and the second person pronouns in their essay writings.

Research has argued that selecting the first and the second person in the thematic position is not appropriate for the genre of argumentative essays in that it is more typical of speech rather than writing (Thompson, 2004, p. 372). Fries (1995) revealed that the first and the second person pronouns in the thematic position were rather uncommon in written genres. In this respect, the habitual employment of the first and the second person pronouns has been regarded as a typical characteristic of low-performing student writers. The non-native group's

propensity to overuse the personal pronouns thus contributes to personalize their argument. This is one feature that underperforming students need to acquire in order to reach beyond the current level of proficiency.

In the advanced texts, on the other hand, the first person is relatively infrequently used. In (11) below, extracted from the advanced corpus, the writer fortified his argument without employing the first person as a theme.

(11) (extracted from AL#41)

Many people are recently disapproving the educational system in that it is not well performing its role to educate students. One of the reasons suggested by those critics is that teachers today are not doing their best to teach their students. They are insisting that teachers should be evaluated by how their students perform. Although that might facilitate teachers to pay more attention to their students' academic performance, it cannot be recommended.

In (11), most of the themes are related to people in general or abstract concept, such as 'many people' and 'one of the reasons'. The extracted example shows

how advanced writers make their claims sound rather objective by engaging the majority and abstractions in the thematic position of the arguments.

However, this is not to say that academic writing restricts the use of the first and the second person pronouns. Previous studies (e.g. Chang & Swales, 1999; Hyland, 2004) have also pointed out the necessity to expose the writer's explicit presence in the formal essay. For example, a corpus-based study by Chang and Swales (1999) observed a trend to employ first person pronouns in disciplines of academic writing. The explicit presence of writers in the texts can add to the 'interactional aspects' of the discourse as Brown and Yule (1983) puts it. It can thus be said that using the first and the second person pronouns is not to be avoided in writing; their presence in formal essay writing still has its advantages though the writer's direct involvement in the discourse is generally uncommon in academic writing. What is more consequential than the overall frequency is how these factors actually reflect the functions of the genre.

In this respect, the result that notable frequency variations are found across the three levels of learner groups is worth mentioning. The result reveals that the frequency of first personal pronouns decreases as learner's proficiency develops. It can be thus said that dependence on person pronoun changes over time as a result of improved English proficiency. The relatively uncommon use

of the first person pronoun in the high-performing group can further raise persuasiveness of the argument.

Chapter 5.

CONCLUSION

This chapter comprises two sections. Section 5.1 summarizes major findings as well as concluding remarks and implications of the present study. Section 5.2 notes the limitations of the study and suggests further analyses.

5.1. Major Findings and Implications

The present study explored the thematic structure in Korean EFL learners writing compared to native texts, with particular focus on learners' proficiency as a variable. The research begins with curiosity about whether EFL learners' improving overall proficiency to produce linguistic outcomes is accompanied by more diverse and appropriate use of the thematic structure. In order to answer three research questions of central concern to the present study, the study first compared the overall and relative frequencies of theme features of learner data and with data from native speaker's writing. Particular distinctions found in the quantitative research were then put into the qualitative analysis to verify their profound meanings in detail.

The findings of the present study clearly show that textual theme, multiple theme, and the first and the second person pronoun are the features are highly overused in the Korean EFL texts compared to those of English natives. Given that the overuse tendency of textual theme and personal pronouns are characteristics of non-native writers' thematic choice, this result concurs with the previous literature that explored the thematic structures of written English texts of non-native writers in comparison to those of native writers (Granger & Tyson, 1996; Green et al., 2000; Jalilifar, 2009; Lee, 2007; Lee, 2008; Park & Nam, 2015). Korean EFL student writers also show reliance on to-infinitive/gerund in the thematic position, irrespective of their levels of English proficiency. These aspects of Korean EFL learners are apparently distinguished from the natives' outcomes.

The more crucial dispute is differences according to learner proficiency, which is found in various respects within the performances of learners. First of all, the analysis revealed that learner proficiency is a marginal factor that affects theme length; learners become more flexible in theme length as their proficiency develops. Secondly, the learners become better able to employ marked theme with development of proficiency. Specifically, while beginner groups of learners are reluctant to use marked theme, intermediate and advanced learners become more balanced in using unmarked and marked theme as their proficiency level increases. The third interesting outcome is a consequential growth in the

occurrence of textual theme and multiple theme in the learner data. It is observed that the intermediate and the advanced learners employ even more textual and multiple theme than the beginners.

In sum, the quantitative comparison generally reveals that the non-native learners' thematic choice becomes more closely approximate the native writers as their proficiency develops. Nevertheless, the proficiency development does not involve the learners' proper use of textual and multiple theme; as result shows that as higher the learner proficiency is, the more textual theme are found in the texts.

Further qualitative analysis of the three distinct features (textual theme, interpersonal theme, and first and second person pronouns) indicated that proficiency has been found to be a substantially influential factor that notably affects all three aspects. First, learners at beginner level were the most limited in their choice of textual connectors, while advanced learners fairly overused personal pronouns. In addition, although no meaningful difference in the number of the interpersonal theme is found between learner and native corpus, most of the top ranked items of interpersonal theme rarely overlapped Korean EFL learners and native speakers. Korean texts especially overuse some familiar interpersonal themes such as *sometimes*, *especially* and *of course*. As a result, the arguments produced by the Korean EFL learners are less effective at delivering

the persuasive and evaluative stance of the writer. In terms of the semantic properties of topical theme, the analysis revealed that the overuse tendency of personal pronouns improves as proficiency grows.

From a pedagogical point of view, the present study provides certain valuable implications for the Korean EFL writing context. The investigation on theme production of advanced learners reveals that they also make inexperienced choices. The result implies several aspects of thematic structures are problematic even for advanced learners. A number of studies suggested that in order to raise learners' awareness of the importance of the theme selection, explicit teaching efforts concentrating on eliciting the appropriate use of thematic structures could be useful (Lee, 2008; Park & Nam, 2015). Gosden (1992) recommended that a focus on the ability to manipulate thematic contents based on awareness of conventional patterns would be a cogent means of assisting non-native writers to gain greater control of the writing process, thereby enabling students to gain confidence. In particular, considering the findings that the learners' proficiency interacts with their thematic selections, the educational efforts should consider the learners' level of proficiency to provide proper education. The instruction can first aim at helping beginners to raise awareness of the importance of the initial position of a clause, and then help them become familiar with a wide variety of themes they can choose. It seems also necessary to provide advanced learners with explicit instruction specifically focusing on particular theme features that

the advanced learners find difficult. Such teaching efforts could be a useful method to enable students to conceptualize and suitably develop their ideas by adopting appropriate thematic structures.

5.2. Limitations and Suggestions

The findings of the current study suggest meaningful starting points for further analyses. Some limitations could be improved and developed in the further studies.

However, the results seem to indicate that they are not entirely related to the proficiency variable. There could be interaction of those variables in their theme selection. Given this limitation, further research on diverse individual variables could help in generalizing the findings.

Despite a relatively large amount of data used in this study, it is still somewhat insufficient for drawing explicit conclusions. More extensive analysis would expand the current issue, provide teachers a clearer picture of the challenges that Korean students must overcome, and serve as a practical linguistic strategy to enhance their textual coherence. The findings of the present

study can be discussed in depth by further research considering and overcoming these limitations.

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Appendix 1. Identifying Theme

1. Declarative clause (Theme is underlined)

	Function	Class	Examples
Unmarked Theme	Subject	Nominal group: pronoun as Head	<u>I</u> had a little nut-tree <u>She</u> went to the baker's <u>There</u> were three jovial Welshmen
		Nominal group: common or proper noun as Head	<u>A wise old owl</u> lived in an oak <u>Mary</u> had a little lamb <u>London Bridge</u> is fallen down
		Nominal group: nominalization (nominalized clause) as Head	<u>What I want</u> is a proper cup of coffee
Marked Theme	Adjunct	Adverbial group	<u>Merrily</u> we roll along
		Prepositional phrase	<u>On Saturday night</u> I lost my wife
	Complement	Nominal group: common or proper noun as Head	<u>A bag pudding</u> the King did make <u>Eliot</u> you're particularly fond of
		Nominal group: pronoun as Head	<u>All this</u> we owe both to ourselves and to the peoples of the world who are so well presented here today
		Nominal group: nominalization (nominalized clause) as Head	<u>What they could not eat that night</u> the Queen next morning fried

From: Halliday & Matthiessen , 2013

2. Imperative clause (Theme is underlined)

	Examples
Unmarked Theme	<u>Turn</u> it down. <u>Just place</u> a blank CD in the drive. <u>Don't do</u> that. <u>Let's do</u> lunch at the Ivy. <u>Don't let's</u> quarrel about it.
Marked Theme	<u>On arrival in Liverpool</u> take a taxi to the University.

From: Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013

3. Polar interrogative (Theme is underlined)

	Examples
Unmarked Theme	<u>Could you</u> eat a whole packet of tim tams? <u>Didn't it</u> smell terrible? <u>Are they</u> still together?
Marked Theme	<u>On the right</u> is it? <u>At lower latitudes where there are no stratospheric ice crystals,</u> is the role of ice mimicked by other aerosols such as volcanic dust?.

From: Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013

4. Wh- interrogative (Theme is underlined)

	Examples
Unmarked Theme	<u>Who</u> wants a glass of white wine? <u>How many hours</u> did you want? <u>And how long</u> is she there for?
Marked Theme	<u>Aesthetically, in terms of the vision in your head,</u> what is the relationship between the fiction and the non-fiction? <u>After all, except for music,</u> what did they have in common?

From: Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013

5. Thematic equatives (Theme is underlined)

	Examples
Unmarked Theme	<u>What you need to do</u> is to write me an official letter asking for an extension.
Marked Theme	<u>That</u> is not what I meant. <u>Making the Party feel good about itself</u> is, after all, what he does best. <u>And nothing</u> is precisely what we got.

From: Thompson, 2004

6. Predicated Theme (Theme is underlined)

	Examples
Unmarked Theme	(All predicated theme are marked.)
Marked Theme	<u>It is we</u> who have not learned how to use it. <u>It wasn't until 1986</u> that we finally came back to work in the UK.

From: Thompson, 2004

7. Thematised comment (Theme is underlined)

	Examples
Unmarked Theme	<u>It is true</u> that it took five years to do so. <u>It may</u> be that the news reporters are manipulating the truth for reasons of strikingness.
Marked Theme	<u>To remark of Brooksmith that 'the scaffolding of this tale rests upon the existence of a class-stratified society'</u> is silly.

From: Thompson, 2004

8. Preposed Theme (Theme is underlined)

	Examples
Unmarked Theme	<u>People like us, in the middle</u> , we have to be careful about the children we have. <u>Happiness</u> , that's what life is about. <u>That bloke who rang last night</u> , what was he on about?
Marked Theme	(None of the examples is presented.)

From: Thompson, 2004

Appendix 2. Textual and Interpersonal Theme

1. Textual theme

	Type	Meaning	Examples
1	appositive	i.e., e.g.	that is, in other words, for instance
	corrective	rather	or rather, at least, to be precise
	dismissive	in any case	in any case, anyway, leaving that aside
	summative	in short	briefly, to sum up, in conclusion
	verificative	actually	actually, in fact, as a matter of fact
2	additive	and	also, moreover, in addition, besides
	adversative	But	on the other hand, however, conversely
	variative	instead	instead, alternatively
3	temporal	then	meanwhile, before that, later on, next, soon, finally
	comparative	likewise	likewise, in the same way
	causal	so	therefore, for this reason, as a result, with this in mind
	conditional	(if ...) then	in that case, under the circumstances, otherwise
	concessive	yet	nevertheless, despite that
	respective	as to that	in this respect, as far as that's concerned

From: Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013

2. Interpersonal theme

	Type	Meaning	Examples
1	probability	How likely?	probably, possibly, certainly, perhaps, maybe
	usuality	How often?	usually, sometimes, always, (n)ever, often, seldom
	typicality	How typical?	occasionally, generally, regularly, for the most part
	obviousness	How obvious?	of course, surely, obviously, clearly
2	opinion	I think	in my opinion, personally, to my mind
	admission	I admit	frankly, to be honest, to tell you the truth
	persuasion	I assure you	honestly, really, believe me, seriously
	entreaty	I request you	please, kindly
	presumption	I presume	evidently, apparently, no doubt, presumably
	desirability	How desirable?	(un)fortunately, to my delight/distress, regrettably, hopefully
	reservation	How reliable?	at first, tentatively, provisionally, looking back on it
	validation	How valid?	broadly speaking, in general, on the whole, strictly speaking, in principle
	evaluation	How sensible?	(un)wisely, understandably, mistakenly, foolishly
prediction	How expected?	to my surprise, surprisingly, as expected, by chance	

From: Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013

Appendix 3. Thematic Interpretation of Texts

1. Example of a BL text (#BL14)

	Textual Theme	Interpersonal Theme	Theme Selection	Theme length	Theme role
<u>Maybe</u> they don't assess teacher objectively.	X	O	unmarked	2	subject
<u>Real object of teacher-assessment</u> is to dismiss teachers who are incompetent and to improve student's ability.	X	X	unmarked	4	subject
<u>But</u> <u>In student's position</u> , students like teachers who treat students good, and don't like teachers who treat bad, not objectively.	O	X	marked	4	adjunct
<u>When this phenomenon occurs</u> , each students have different criterion.	X	X	marked	4	dependent clause
<u>That</u> may give rise to side effects.	X	X	unmarked	1	subject
<u>For example</u> , <u>If some students who study hard and get a good score</u> may respect teachers who make students study hard.	O	X	marked	13	dependent clause
<u>But</u> other students who don't study much time may like teachers who make students free.	O	X	unmarked	8	subject
<u>This</u> doesn't improve student's ability in actually.	X	X	unmarked	1	subject
<u>So</u> <u>from this point of view</u> , teacher-assessment should not conduct.	O	X	marked	6	adjunct
<u>But</u> <u>when I was highschool student</u> , I want to conduct teacher-assessment.	O	X	marked	6	dependent clause
<u>Because</u> , <u>In my school</u> , Some teachers taught student loosely.	O	X	marked	4	adjunct
<u>In addition</u> , <u>they</u> don't consider students' grade.	O	X	unmarked	3	subject
<u>I</u> think these teachers don't have qualification to teach student.	X	X	unmarked	1	subject
<u>In a conclusion</u> , <u>in my opinion</u> , <u>only 50% of students who got a good grade in school</u> are qualified to assess teachers	O	O	unmarked	17	subject

2. Example of an IL text (#IL17)

	Textual Theme	Interpersonal Theme	Theme Selection	Theme length	Theme role
I think that the university have no right to ban drinking alcohol on campus.	X	X	unmarked	1	subject
<u>At first</u> , <u>almost of university students</u> are already over tewnty.	O	X	unmarked	6	subject
<u>It</u> mean they are adults by the civil law.	X	X	unmarked	1	subject
<u>They</u> can participate an election, do smoking and drink alcohol without any restriction.	X	X	unmarked	1	subject
<u>Campus</u> is not so holy or sacred like Church.	X	X	unmarked	1	subject
<u>Of course</u> in the Middle Ages in Europe, Universities had autonomous rights and they ruled their place by their own law like a religious place.	O	X	marked	8	dependent clause
<u>However</u> , it was very long times ago	O	X	unmarked	2	subject
<u>and</u> we are living in 21th century.	O	X	unmarked	2	subject
<u>Second</u> , <u>Drinking alcohol</u> is very helpful to get rid of stress.	O	X	unmarked	3	gerund
<u>And</u> alcohol is one of the most important part of relation in Korea.	O	X	unmarked	2	subject
<u>So</u> <u>prohibiting alcohol strongly</u> will be action which ignore their student.	O	X	unmarked	4	gerund
<u>At last</u> , it's against social equity.	O	X	unmarked	3	subject
<u>There can be</u> some students who over druken and do unproper action.	X	X	unmarked	3	existential there
<u>But</u> they are only few.	O	X	unmarked	2	subject
<u>A large pertantage of student</u> are not so harmful in campus society.	X	X	unmarked	5	subject
<u>If the university stop selling beer or soju on campus</u> , it treat every student a potential criminal.	X	X	marked	10	dependent clause
<u>Whether we like its anti social character or not</u> people talk more when they are drinking and thus spread more ideas than they otherwise would.	X	X	marked	9	dependent clause
<u>Seeing universities as institutions</u> have always stood for the communication and facilitation of new ideas.	X	X	unmarked	4	gerund
<u>We</u> should encourage behavior that leads to the development of those new ideas.	X	X	unmarked	1	subject

3. Example of an AL text (#AL02)

	Textual Theme	Interpersonal Theme	Theme Selection	Theme length	Theme role
<u>It is debatable</u> whether quick decisions are always false or can trigger worse results than careful thought.	X	X	marked	3	predicator
<u>Some people think</u> that it is right that the decisions that people make quickly are always wrong.	X	X	unmarked	2	subject
<u>However</u> , I disagree with the idea	O	X	unmarked	2	subject
<u>because</u> decisions may depend on certain situations	O	X	unmarked	2	subject
<u>and</u> quick decisions can bring about better results than careful thought.	O	X	unmarked	3	subject
<u>The first reason</u> is that decisions may depend on certain situations	X	X	unmarked	3	subject
<u>because</u> sometimes we have to choose something at a specific moment.	O	O	unmarked	3	subject
<u>For example</u> , if you are a doctor and emergency situations occur, you have to make decisions quickly to cure your patients.	O	X	marked	11	dependent clause
<u>In this case</u> , if you cannot make decisions quickly, patients will have a hard time with pain and badly may die.	X	X	marked	3	adjunct
<u>According to situations</u> , quick decisions are essential and important.	X	X	marked	3	adjunct
<u>Especially in an emergency</u> , doctor's decisions can help their patient to recover from fatal cases.	X	O	marked	4	adjunct
The second reason is that quick decisions can bring about better results than careful thought	X	X	unmarked	3	subject
It is <u>bias</u> that the decisions that people make fast are always wrong.	X	X	marked	3	predicator
<u>If you are a businessman and your partner wants to contract with you for profits</u> , you have to make a decision fast to attract your partner or increase your profits for business.	X	X	marked	15	dependent clause
<u>If you delay the contract and say "please, give me more time."</u> , it will be useless and you may not have a chance to develop your business and profits.	X	X	marked	12	dependent clause
<u>All things considered</u> , I strongly believe the decisions that people make quickly can help someone to choose better	O	X	unmarked	4	subject
<u>because</u> decisions can depend on certain situations	O	X	unmarked	2	subject
<u>and</u> quick decisions can bring about better results than careful thought.	O	X	unmarked	3	subject

4. Example of a NS text (#NS21)

	Textual Theme	Interpersonal Theme	Theme Selection	Theme length	Theme role
<u>The question of compensation for services rendered</u> is never so simple as remitting a predetermined salary based on qualifications and a person's dedication to the task at hand.	X	X	unmarked	7	subject
<u>If one has preconceived notions concerning one's salary</u> , one will certainly be disappointed since some employers are sure to value their skills and abilities less than others.	X	X	marked	8	dependent clause
<u>Contribution to society</u> is subjective and therefore impossible to compensate 'equally'.	X	X	unmarked	3	subject
<u>In the 1920s in American</u> , it became very popular to disdain people who did not actually work for a living, but merely lived off the interest of their investments.	X	X	marked	5	adjunct
<u>The stock market</u> was experiencing a boom,	X	X	unmarked	3	adjunct
<u>and several formerly working-class citizens</u> became wealthy and relished the idea of retiring early.	O	X	unmarked	5	subject
<u>But several great authors of that period</u> questioned the right of these investors to effectively live as parasites;	O	X	unmarked	7	subject
<u>they</u> received money,	X	X	unmarked	1	subject
<u>but they</u> contributed nearly nothing to society.	O	X	unmarked	2	subject
<u>People who inherit money or live off the interest of investors</u> often seem to spend their time in search of a new thrill, some sort of excitement that money cannot buy.	X	X	unmarked	11	subject
<u>Having almost unlimited wealth</u> changes people, both those who are born into wealth and those who earn their own money early	X	X	unmarked	4	gerund
<u>But do they</u> have the right to live this way?	O	X	unmarked	3	interrogative
<u>What about</u> people who work very hard yet they seem to be paid miserably.	X	X	unmarked	2	wh-interrogative
<u>A migrant work</u> may slave away in a field all day long and make less money in a day than a wealthy person spends on a tip at	X	X	unmarked	3	subject
<u>The answer this question</u> lies in one's feelings about Democracy.	X	X	unmarked	4	subject
<u>Some</u> would argue that if a person is smart enough or lucky enough to earn money for an early retirement (or for their children's inheritance) he or she is entitled to it.	X	X	unmarked	1	subject
<u>A rather hard view</u> would be that if someone who works on a menial or physically taxing job does not make a fair or moderate salary then it is his or her own fault (or bad luck).	X	X	unmarked	4	subject
<u>These opinions</u> are based on a rather faulty American premise that all people are given an equal chance in life and what they make of it is their own responsibly.	X	X	unmarked	2	subject
<u>Apparently, most people</u> believe that they are underpaid and that others are overpaid.	X	O	unmarked	3	subject
<u>For instance, everyone</u> seems to think that doctors make much too money for the work they do, yet none of the doctors are lowering their fees	O	X	unmarked	3	subject
<u>(they must think that it's a fair price)</u>	X	X	unmarked	1	adjunct
<u>So, unless we wish to impose on the personal lives of wealthy people by making them work harder</u> , or give people who are not wealthy money that society does not believe they deserve, we cannot give pay equal to contribution to society.	X	X	marked	18	dependent clause

국문초록

본 연구는 Halliday 가 1994 년에 제안한 체계구조적 언어학의 관점에서 한국인 영어 학습자들이 영어 글쓰기에서 주제 구조를 구축하는 양상을 분석하고자 한다. 지금까지 다양한 장르의 글에서 화자의 주제 구조 사용을 분석하는 연구가 상당수 수행되어 왔지만, 대부분의 연구가 주제 구조의 일부 요소만 분석하거나 통계적인 검증을 수행하지 않았다. 특히 주제 구조의 형성이 글의 논리적인 연결에 중요한 요소임에도 불구하고, 이에 대한 비 원어민 영어 학습자의 사용 양상 연구는 그 수가 제한적이었다. 이러한 필요성에 의거하여 본 연구는 능숙도가 다른 한국인 대학생 영어 학습자들이 쓴 영어 에세이와 원어민의 영어 에세이를 자료로 하여, 영어 글쓰기에 있어 한국의 학습자들이 원어민과 비교하여 주제 구조를 어떻게 구현하고 있는지를 분석하고자 하였다.

본 연구는 각기 다른 영어 능숙도별로 각 50 개씩 총 150 개의 한국인 영어 학습자 에세이와 50 개의 영어 원어민 에세이를 자료로 하여, 먼저 주제 구조 요소의 전반적인 빈도 및 상대적인 비율을 통계적으로 분석하였다. 다음으로는 심층적인 연구가 필요한 항목을 중심으로 질적인 분석을 시행하였다. 본 연구의 주요 결과는 다음과 같이 요약된다.

양적 분석의 결과를 살펴본 바, 주제 구조 활용의 전반에 있어서 한국인 영어 학습자의 사용 양상이 원어민과 비교하여 확연한 차이를 보임을 확인하였다. 하위요소의 빈도에 관하여는 한국인 학습자들이 전반적으로 텍스트 주제(textual theme)와 다중 주제(multiple theme)를 유의미하게 많이 사용하였다. 한편, 유포

주제(marked them)와 대인 주제(interpersonal theme)의 밀도와 관련해서는 원어민과 한국인 영어 학습자의 사용 양상에서 유의미한 차이가 발견되지 않았다.

양적 연구를 통하여 발견한 결과는 학습자의 능숙도와 관련하여 유의미한 시사점을 제시한다. 요컨대 상당수의 하위 요소에서 학습자의 능숙도에 따라 뚜렷한 차이가 발견되었다. 먼저, 학습자의 능숙도가 향상됨에 따라 주제(theme)의 길이가 길어졌으며 유표 주제(marked theme)의 사용이 활발해지고 일인칭 화자에 대한 의존이 줄어드는 양상을 보였다. 반면, 특정 요소의 사용에 있어서는 학습자의 능숙도 향상이 보다 발전된 주제 구조 활용을 보장하지 않음이 발견되었다. 한국인 영어 학습자들은 능숙도 수준과 관계 없이 텍스트 주제(textual theme)와 다중 주제(multiple them)를 과다 사용하는 경향을 보였다. 특히 능숙도가 낮은 학습자일수록 화자의 의도를 효과적으로 전달할 수 있는 다양한 주제 구조의 사용에 있어 한정적인 구조 활용에 그쳤다. 이와 같은 한계로 인하여 한국인 대학생들이 작성한 에세이는 논쟁적 에세이의 목적을 효과적으로 구현하지 못하고 있음을 발견하였다.

질적 분석에서는 텍스트 주제(textual theme), 대인 주제(interpersonal theme), 주제의 의미적인 자질이 구현되는 양상에 주목하였다. 먼저 텍스트 주제(textual theme)에 관하여는 한국인 영어 학습자들이 텍스트 주제(textual theme)에 과도하게 의존함에 비하여, 영어 원어민은 단일 주제(single theme)만을 사용하여 문단을 유기적으로 구성해 나가는 경향을 확인하였다. 대인 주제(interpersonal theme)의 사용에 있어서는 한국인 영어 학습자와 영어 원어민이 자주 사용하는 요소가 서로 다름이 확인되었다. 마지막으로 능숙도가 낮은 한국인 영어 학습자들은 1 인칭

화자를 주제 (theme)로 과다 사용하여 논증의 객관성을 약화시키는 결과를 낳았으나, 학습자의 능숙도가 향상됨에 따라 1 인칭 화자의 사용이 줄어들었으며 논증의 객관성을 강화시키는 방향으로 주제 구조를 활용하는 모습을 보였다.

이와 같은 결과는 학습자들이 글을 유기적으로 구성해 나가도록 지도함에 있어 개인이 속한 수준에 따라 적합한 지도가 필요함을 시사한다. 이상의 결과에 근거하여, 본 연구는 한국인 영어 학습자의 글쓰기에 있어서의 주제 구조 구성에 대한 시사점과 이후 연구에 대한 제언을 결론부에 제시한다.

주요어: 주제 구조, 체계기능적 접근, 영어 글쓰기, 능숙도

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