Themes and theme progression in Swedish advanced learners' writing in English

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Abstract
This study investigates how the Themes and Theme progressions in a sample of Swedish advanced learners' writing contribute to the method of development in their texts. A comparison is made to a sample of similar writing by British university students. It was found that the advanced learners' sample contains more interactional Themes, which create a dialogic method of development similar to that found in conversational language. Themes and Theme progressions which are typical of expository writing, on the other hand, are used less frequently. These include discourse label Themes, summative progressions, which manage the build-up of information as it accumulates in the text, and split progressions, which signal hierarchical relations between parts of the informational content.

Key Words: Theme, method of development, thematic progression, information structure, learner corpora

1. Introduction

Advanced learners have reached a level where they have mastered most of the formal features of the language and make few grammatical mistakes. Nevertheless, it has been found that there are certain characteristic features in their writing that tend to distinguish it from writing by native-speaker students and give it a "non-native" sound, for instance an overuse of high frequency vocabulary, an overly spoken style and a high degree of involvement (Granger 2004:135). Another area which appears to be difficult for advanced learners is the organisation of information in the discourse (Mauranen 1993:141, Bülow-Møller 1996, Lorenz 1998, Caroll *et al* 2000:443, Callies 2009:2). This concerns, among other things, selecting what information to place in Themes (Boström Aronsson 2005). The Theme is the starting point of an utterance, "the element which serves the point of departure of the message; it is the element which locates and orients the clause within its context." (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004:64). This is followed by the Rheme, which is "part of the assembly of the new information that the text offers" (Cummings 2003:133). The choice of what to place in the

Themes of a text is not, as Halliday & Matthiessen (2004:99) point out, a "haphazard matter". It reflects the "way in which a text develops its ideas", thereby constituting what has been called the "method of development" of the text.' (Fries 1995:323). Furthermore, as the text progresses, the Themes connect to the Themes and Rhemes of preceding clauses in various ways, picking up or repeating their meanings and developing them further. These connections form patterns of thematic progression (Daneš 1974). To create a well-formed text, then, learners must select Themes which contribute successfully to its development and connect to other Themes and Rhemes in a way that controls the flow of information and creates coherence in the text.

Earlier studies of Swedish advanced learners' writing have found that it displays some of the typical characteristics of advanced learners' interlanguage. Among other things, there is a tendency to use a rather emphatic style with features typical of spoken language, in particular expressions of subjective involvement (Boström Aronsson 2005:197). This is evident, for instance, in a frequent usage of first person references, *it*-clefts (e.g. *It was Pete that told her*), which typically have a contrastive, emphasizing function, and Themes containing interpersonal items, such as *perhaps, of course* (Boström Aronsson 2005). This study investigates the Themes in Swedish advanced learners' writing with regard to how they contribute to the method of development in their texts and what patterns of thematic progression they form.

2. Material and Method

Investigating how Themes contribute to the thematic progression of a text requires in-depth manual analysis, which restricts the size of the material that can be investigated. The material examined here is a small sample of 16 essays (comprising a total of approx. 8000 words) from the Swedish component of the *International Corpus of Learner English* (ICLE) (Granger 2002), which I will refer to as the SWICLE sample. The essays have been written by Swedish students in their second year of university studies of English and they are all written on the same topic: *Man and Nature*. *How do we develop a borrower's rather than consumer's mindset*? These essays will be compared with a sample of similar size (16 essays, approx. 8000 words) from the *Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays*, which were written by British university students.

These essays were also all written on an environmental topic: *Road and Rail Transport Problems in the UK*. Although the essays in both samples are problem-solution texts, the problems addressed in these texts are slightly different. The SWICLE problem (the need to change people's attitude to their environment) is somewhat more abstract than the LOCNESS problem (the shortcomings of British road and rail transport), which is of a more practical and concrete nature. The assignments are also worded slightly differently, which may also affect how the writers construct their texts. In the SWICLE sample, the essay topic is formulated as a question appealing to a shared responsibility, represented by *we*, whereas in the LOCNESS sample the essay topic is an impersonal, informational noun phrase.

Each essay was divided into "T-units", i.e. units "slightly larger than the clause, but smaller than the sentence" consisting of "an independent clause together with all hypotactically related clauses and words that are dependent on that independent clause" (Fries 1995: 49).[1] Theme and Rheme structure can, of course be found in all types of clauses that express mood and transitivity (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004:98), and there has, therefore, been some variation in what has been treated as the unit of analysis in earlier studies of Themes and Rhemes. Some have analysed the Themes and Rhemes of all types of clauses (Francis 1989, 1990). Others have used the orthographic sentence as their unit of analysis (e.g. Hawes & Thomas 1997) or the macrosyntagm, which is a coordinate, complete main clause capable of standing as a well-formed sentence, including sentence fragments (e.g. Enkvist 1974:131, Crompton 2004:227). What is used as the unit of analysis will, of course, affect the empirical results of the investigation and the comparisons that can be made between them. One advantage of using the T-unit as the unit for the analysis is that it allows analysts to take into account whether a dependent adverbial clause has been placed in initial position in the Theme or later in the Rheme. This would be missed if analysis was carried out on the clause level only. Dependent clauses in initial position provide meaningful frames within which the rest of the sentence develops (Downing & Locke 2006:236), and if they are taken as the point of departure for the whole clause complex, the way in which

[1] Coordinated clauses with an ellipted subject in the second clause have been counted as two T-units.

Themes work to signal the 'method of development' of the text emerges more clearly (Thompson 2004:155). For this reason, those studying the thematic development of texts usually use the T-unit as their unit of analysis (Thompson & Thompson 2009:46).

In each of the T-units, the Themes were identified as the items placed in initial position. As thematic and focal prominence forms a cline which has a wave-like effect (Halliday 1994:337), the boundary between where the Theme ends and the Rheme begins is inherently indeterminate (Fries 2009:13). In this study, I will follow Halliday & Matthiessen (2004:81) and draw the boundary after the first experiential constituent, i.e. the constituent which represents a participant, circumstance or process, which Halliday & Matthiessen label the topical Theme, e.g. the adverbial, *On Friday,* in *On Friday the storm will hit Sweden.* This analysis equates the Theme with a spatial metaphor i.e. the Theme as the point of departure in the message. In some studies, (e.g. Dubois 1987, Hawes & Thomas 1997, Mauranen 1993, 1996, Martin & Rose 2007) the Theme is equated with a matter metaphor i.e. what the clause is 'about' (Gómez-González 2001:115) Here, the boundary between the Theme and the Rheme would be drawn after both the adverbial and the subject, i.e. *On Friday the storm,* as this includes what the clause is about, *the storm*.[2]

The topical theme may be preceded by items which have textual meaning, i.e. they are concerned with the text as a message, such as conjunctions and conjuncts which link the clause to the surrounding text, e.g. *but, nevertheless, therefore,* and/or interpersonal meanings, which provide an attitudinal orientation to the message, such as modal adjuncts e.g. *surely, indeed, etc.* As these items are inherently or, in the case of interpersonal items, characteristically thematic, they do not exhaust the full thematic potential of the clause, and it is only after the topical Theme

[2] Thompson & Thompson (2009:58) argue, that "if Subject is taken as Theme because it is Subject, this means that the distinction between the metafunctions in terms of their different contributions to meaning is blurred. Whereas Theme is the 'starting point of the message', Subject is the "'resting point' of the argument'; Subject 'specifies the entity in respect of which the assertion is claimed to have validity' (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004:117,118). Therefore "it would seem theoretically more secure to consider the possibility that the two threads of meaning, while both contributing to texture, operate independently, and that, in order to gain a full picture of the logogenetic growth of the text, both need to be traced separately."

appears that the thematic grounding of the message is completed (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004:85). This study focuses on the topical Theme, as it is this part of the Theme that contributes most to the method of development of a text. Interpersonal and textual components in the Swedish advanced learners' Themes will not be considered here.[3] I will first investigate the topical Themes in the two samples and then examine what kinds of Theme progressions they form.

3. Topical themes

3.1 Identifying types

A text may be seen as consisting of different levels of meaning, i.e. a propositional information content level, and a writer-reader level, where the writers interact with their readers (vande Kopple 1985, 1988, Crismore 1989 and Crismore *et al.* 1993). The Themes of a text may therefore be selected from these two levels. On the propositional information content level, the Themes refer to actions, events, states of affairs or objects in the real world outside the text.[4] On the writer-reader level, the Themes refer to the world of the text itself, by, for instance, signalling the presence of the writer and/or reader, commenting on the writing process itself or features of its structure and organisation.

In this study I have investigated to what extent the topical Themes in the two samples develop their texts on these different levels. Those which develop the propositional informational content level have been labelled informational Themes. These represent, for instance, animate or inanimate participants, as in (1) and (2), respectively, or circumstances such as spatial or temporal location, as in (3), or contingency relations (concession, reason, condition, purpose etc), as in (4).

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[3] See Boström Aronsson (2005) for a comparison of the interpersonal and textual components of Themes in samples of the SWICLE and LOCNESS corpora.

[4] In dictionaries and encyclopedias, for instance, the Themes are usually centred round the object which is being defined or described (Matthiessen 1995:578); in guide books they are often centred round spatial locations (Matthiessen 1995:570, Fries 1995:325); in obituaries, they are typically centred on the main person and times in his or her life (Fries 1995:320), and in academic research papers, they are often abstractions, in particular nominalisations (Corbett 2008).

(1) Children should also be taught that there will be people coming after them, who will have to take care of everything we leave behind. (SWICLE)

(2) Public transport is the obvious solution to the increase in population (LOCNESS)

(3)
a. In the west we are obsessed with things. (SWICLE)
b. Today environmental issues are considered to be much more important than a couple of decades ago. (SWICLE)

(4)
a. Although catalytic converters are now compulsory on new cars, fumes in cities have become so bad that scientists have linked them to a marked increase in the number of asthma sufferers. (LOCNESS)
b. Because of dangerous UV-B rays from the sun we may have to stay in-doors. (SWICLE)
c. and if Nature is not going to fight back, we will have to change. (SWICLE)
d. To get from A to B, they stop at, and sometimes divert several miles to reach C, D and E. (LOCNESS)

On the writer-reader level, topical Themes are fusions of experiential meaning with interpersonal or textual meanings, respectively. These have therefore been divided into two categories, which I have labelled interactional and discoursal Themes, respectively.

The label interactional Theme is from Berry (1995:64), who makes a distinction between informational Themes which foreground aspects of the topic and interactional Themes which foreground the interactiveness of the discourse by referring to the writer or reader. Interactional Themes occur thus when the writers use first and second person pronouns, as in (5a) and (5b) and when the writer addresses the reader directly in e.g. rhetorical *wh*-questions, as in (5c), in imperatives, as in (5d), or in conditional clauses with *you*, as in (5e). Interactional Themes create a dialogic method of development in a way similar to the collaborative

development across turns found in interactional conversational speech (Matthiessen 1995:575).

(5)

a. I believed that I was the only one thinking about the environment and that my actions taken to improve the world were small and insignificant. (SWICLE)
b. We want to give our children the same experiences of nature as we have had ourselves; as a place for recreation and inspiration. (SWICLE)
c. What can we do with rapid economic growth if we do not have fresh air to breathe? (SWICLE)
d. Just look at the case of the planned Newbury bypass. (LOCNESS)
e. If you look around the world you will notice that countries with a clean "image", meant to attract tourists for example have a more environmental-oriented view in common. (SWICLE)

The label discoursal Theme is from Gibson (1993:324), who proposed this category for Themes which combine textual meaning with experiential meaning. Discoursal Themes are concerned with the current discourse as a text. They include instances of reflexive metadiscourse, i.e. they are used by writers to "comment on language itself, the communicative situation, or their own roles in it." (Ädel 2009:70). In (6a & b), for instance, the Themes comment explicitly on the writing process itself, and in (6c & d), they clarify the writers' purpose.[5]

(6)

a. However, writing this essay will allow me to indulge in some wishful thinking (SWICLE)
b. And as I said initially, I think we are on the right track. (SWICLE)

[5] There may, of course, be a certain degree of overlap between interactional and discoursal Themes, as in (6b) and (6d), for instance, where the writers refer to themselves in the writing process.

c. In concluding I wish to propose clean, efficient comfortable and cheap public transport for the near future. ((LOCNESS)
d. To illistrate my point, if every time you took a train, it stops for 2 hours on the track, everyone would stop taking it.[6] (LOCNESS)

Some discoursal Themes are discourse labels, or what Matthiessen (1995:569) refers to as "lexicalizations of aspects of the discourse organisation". These are abstractions such as *cause, reason*, *question, example, way, factor,* etc. (also referred to as "shell" nouns by Schmid, 2000:37*),* which encapsulate a chunk of information by conceptualising and characterising its function in the discourse (Schmid 2000:14). Some of these labels are genre-sensitive, for instance *problem,* and *solution,* which refer to parts of problem-solution texts. Mauranen (1993:79) notes that discourse labels such as these "both change perspective and provide information. The referent now consists not only of the content of the text stretch picked out by its reference, but also its status in the text. Such references make the reader aware of the text as a text (as a textual phenomenon which has parts with functions, like conclusions, examples, questions, etc.) along with the meaning that is referred to." This is illustrated by (7), where the Theme *This question* labels its immediately preceding content.

(7) What can we do with rapid economic growth if we do not have fresh air to breathe?
This question has made many people start thinking about what they can do to be more friendly to the environment. (SWICLE)

Thematic discourse labels may in some cases, as Matthiessen (1995:569) points out, be regarded as metaphorical interpretations of conjunction, i.e. they are nominalisations of conjunctive relations between stretches of text. In (8a) the Theme, *the problem,* expresses a relation of contrast similar to that expressed by the conjunctions, *but*, and in (8b) the Theme

[6] Spelling mistakes have not been corrected.

the result expresses a relation similar to that expressed by the conjunct *therefore.*

(8)

a. I do not think that people really want their children to grow up in a world where you can not drink the water from a stream in the mountains, or breath the air in the cities without a gas-mask. The problem is that we are in a period where people have not yet experienced what pollution can do to the world. (SWICLE)
b. But he sells it to smart businessmen at losing prizes and the result is that he remains the exploitation victim, unable to get out of the circle. (SWICLE)

As Schmid (2000:37) points out, discourse labels are "remarkable from the point of view of information distribution". When they occur in identifying clauses they have a strong focalising affect similar to that created by *wh*-clefts. In (9), for instance, which are both topic sentences, they are a powerful text-structuring device which marks a transition from one phase of the text to another by linking to the preceding text and predicting how the text will unfold. In (9a) the Theme *A way around these problems* signals a move in the text from the description of the problem to a discussion of a possible solution, and in (9b), the Theme *The reasons for this* links the description of the problem to a discussion of its causes.

(9)

a. A way around these problems is, however, in sight. Road transport will … (LOCNESS)
b. The reasons for this are many and varied. People of today want … (LOCNESS)

In the category of discourse Themes, I have also included existential *there*[7]and pronouns which have extended text reference, such as the demonstratives *this* and *that* (Halliday & Hasan 1976:52) as these items

[7] Berry (1995:66) regards existential *there* as a "pass option, an option not to make use of the thematic slot to foreground any particular type of meaning."

are also used to signal the organisation of information.[8] Existential *there*, as in (10), performs a presentative function for newsworthy information. When writers select *there* as the Theme of their utterances, they indicate to their readers that new information is about to be presented in the Rheme. Thus, by flagging the existence the new information at the end of the clause, *there* plays an important role in the development of a text (Martin 1995: 232).

(10) There must also be a cooperation on international level where governments draw up regulations together. (SWICLE)

Demonstrative pronouns with extended text reference "point to" a stretch of text in the surrounding discourse, as in (11), and "[i]f such an item serves as Theme, it "distils" meaning referentially and contributes a "summary" of a segment of text meaning" (Matthiessen 1995:568).

(11)

a. It is a great danger to ourselves if we continue to consider indigenous peoples and their environment as a museum. We must stop being sentimental when it comes to ecology. This is the major problem in the question of how to save our world. (SWICLE)
b. Our need and dependance on road and rail transport has created supply. The car industry is now one of the world's largest. In the last 30 years we have seen the construction of a vast motorway network throughout the U.K. All of this has come at a price though. (LOCNESS)

The distribution of these three types of topical Themes will be discussed in the next section.

3.2 Topical Themes in the SWICLE and LOCNESS samples

Table 1 compares the proportions of Informational, Interactional and Discoursal Themes in the two samples.

[8] Three instances of the pronoun *it* in *it*-clefts in the SWICLE sample have been included in this category.

Table 1. Informational, Interactional and Discoursal Themes in the SWICLE and LOCNESS samples

	SWICLE		LOCNESS	
Informational	358	65%	366	69%
Interactional	96	17%	31	6%
Discoursal	99	18%	134	25%
Total T-units	553		531	

The proportion of informational Themes in the SWICLE sample is slightly smaller than in the LOCNESS essays (65% vs 69%). There is also a difference in the type of content these informational Themes represent. In the SWICLE sample, there are more animate informational Themes (107 vs. 41) (See Table 2). There are also more Themes representing temporal (44 vs. 17) and spatial location (17 vs. 7). The method of development on the informational level of the SWICLE sample tends thus to be more often centred on humans in a temporal or spatial context in contrast to the LOCNESS sample which is predominantly centred on inanimate concepts. To a certain extent this reflects the different essay topics. The SWICLE essays are concerned with how a change is to be brought about in people's attitudes, and a change implies a temporal perspective. The LOCNESS essays deal with concrete problems concerning infrastructure.

Table 2. Informational Themes in the SWICLE and LOCNESS samples (raw frequencies)

	SWICLE	LOCNESS
Animate	107	41
Temporal Location	44	17
Spatial Location	17	7
Contingency	51	56
Other Inanimates	139	245

The proportion of interactional Themes is more than three times as high in the SWICLE sample as in the LOCNESS sample (17% vs. 6%). This

is mostly due to more *wh*-interrogatives (23 vs. 6) and 1st and 2nd personal pronouns (63 vs 16), especially inclusive *we* with generic reference (See Table 3)[9]. Using questions is a strategy often used by learners (Virtanen 1998:97), in particular to highlight a piece of information for emphasis (Callies 2009:209). The frequent usage of inclusive *we* as a personal generic is characteristic both of the high degree of involvement found in advanced learners' writing in general (Petch-Tyson 1998: 117) and of their tendency to use features of spoken lang. It also reflects a tendency for learners to write on a somewhat vague and general level, often making sweeping statements.

Table 3. Interactional Themes in the SWICLE and LOCNESS samples (raw frequencies)

	SWICLE	LOCNESS
1st and 2nd person pronouns	63	16
Imperatives	10	9
Wh-interrogatives	23	6

The proportion of discoursal Themes is lower in the SWICLE sample than in the LOCNESS sample (18% vs. 25%). This is mainly due to fewer discourse labels (54 vs. 70) and summative demonstrative pronouns (17 vs. 35), whereas there is no great difference in the numbers of the other types (i.e. writers' comments on the writing process and existential *there*, See Table 4).

[9] In a comparison of the usage of *we* in the SWICLE and LOCNESS corpora (Herriman 2009), it was found that generic *we* was used four times more frequently by the Swedish students.

Table 4. Discoursal Themes in the SWICLE and LOCNESS samples (raw frequencies)

	SWICLE	LOCNESS
Discourse Labels	54	70
Summative demonstratives	17	35
Existential *there*	18	19
Writing process	7	10
It in *it*-clefts	3	

In sum, the Swedish advanced learners tend to use more interactional and fewer informational Themes than the native writers. This reflects the tendency for advanced learners to use a subjective style of writing. It may also be partly due to the wording of the essay topics. In the LOCNESS sample, the essay topic clearly elicits a problem and solution text, whereas in the SWICLE sample, it is formulated as a question and therefore invites a dialogic perspective with interactional Themes. The advanced learners also use fewer discoursal Themes of the type which condense and label chunks of information in the text. In contrast to the SWICLE essays, then, the method of development in the LOCNESS essays tends to be more informational and discoursal.

These findings suggest, then, that, in contrast to the native speakers, the Swedish advanced learners are less aware of how to use Themes which create a monologic method of development of the type normally found in expository writing. I will now go on to examine how the Themes in the SWICLE and LOCNESS samples form Theme progressions.

4 Thematic progression in the SWICLE and LOCNESS samples

4.1 Background

Thematic progression is concerned with connectivity between information in Themes and other parts of the text. Three main types of thematic progressions may be formed, as the following examples from

Daneš (1974:119) illustrate,[10] a linear progression where the Theme relates to the Rheme of the preceding utterance, as in (12), a constant progression where the same Theme appears in a series of utterances, as in (13), and a derived pattern, where successive Themes are derived from a common topic, a hypertheme (of a paragraph, or other text section), as in (14), where the hypertheme is *New Jersey*.

(12) Linear
The first of the antibiotics was discovered by Sir Alexander Fleming in 1928. He was busy at the time investigating a certain species of germ which was responsible for boils and other troubles.

(13) Constant
The Rousseauist especially feels an inner kinship with Prometheus and other Titans. He is fascinated by any form of insurgency…

(14) Derived from hypertheme
New Jersey is flat along the coast and southern portion; the northwestern region is mountainous. The coastal climate is mild, but …..

According to Enkvist (1974), linear progressions create a "dynamic" style of writing and constant progressions a "static" style of writing. Certain correlations have also been found between these progressions and text type. Linear progressions occur frequently in expository and argumentative texts, for example in editorials (Francis 1989, Hawes & Thomas 1996) and popular medical texts (Nwogu & Bloor 1991). Constant progressions occur frequently in narratives (Fries 1995, Wang 2007) and in news stories (Francis 1989 & 1990, Gómez (1994). The third type of progression, the derived from hypertheme progression, deals with sets of interrelated ideas and therefore relies largely on shared knowledge. This kind of progression has been found to be usual in legal

[10] Daneš, as Crompton (2004:200) points out, had a combining approach to Theme, i.e. Theme was identified contextually as given information, not syntactically by its position.

texts (Kurzon 1984) and professional medical texts (Nwogu & Bloor 1989). Identifying derived from hypertheme progressions is, however, somewhat problematic as there are no criteria for an unambiguous distinction between this and constant or linear progressions which are indirectly connected to each other by relations of collocation or other associative relations. Leong Ping (2005:713) points out, for example, that the Themes, *the corner kick* and *the curling ball,* in (15) are, on the one hand, connected to a common topic, in this case the football game and may therefore be regarded as a derived from hypertheme progression. On the other hand, both of the Themes are also collocationally associated to each and may therefore also be regarded as a constant progression.

(15) The corner kick was taken skilfully, and the curling ball soon found the back of the net.

As both views are equally possible, it is not clear how these two patterns are to be distinguished from each other. Some studies (e.g. Dubois 1987, Mauranen 1996, McCabe 2004, Leong Ping 2005) have therefore subsumed Daneš' derived from hypertheme progression under linear and constant progressions. In this study, I will do the same.

Some Themes form progressions which connect in hierarchical relations of superordination or subordination to other Themes and Rhemes. McCabe (1999:181) observed a summative Theme progression which summarises a stretch of the preceding text, as in (16), where *the social effects* is a summary of the preceding content.

(16) Even more significant than the social effects were the psychological consequences.

Daneš (1974:121) and McCabe (2004) identified a split Rheme progression where a Rheme is expanded by a series of subordinate Themes, as in (17).

(17) All substances can be divided into two classes: elementary substances and compounds. An elementary substance is a substance which consists of atoms of only one kind … A compound is a substance which consists of atoms of two or more different kinds … (Daneš 1974:121).

Similarly McCabe (1999:175) observed a split Theme pattern where a Theme is expanded by a series of subordinate Themes, as in (18).

(18) The upward movement of wages and the downward price of cereals led….
Better wages in both town and countryside enabled the population to …
While the price of wheat fell, wine, beer, oil, butter, cheese, meat, fruit, …

Split Theme and Rheme progressions such as these are expository in character as they list related points of information which illustrate a main point.

Some studies have included gapped progressions. They differ in how far these gaps extend. McCabe (1999) for instance, delimits progressions to connections with a maximum gap of three clauses, whereas Dubois (1987:94) counts all connections as progressions, even those 80 clauses apart. In this study I will, however, only consider connections between contiguous T-units as linear or constant progressions. The Themes which connect to earlier parts of the text will be labelled "Back". Themes, with the exception of Themes in split and summative progressions, as these form hierarchical relations of subordination and superordination over longer stretches of text.

Themes which do not form progressions at all have been regarded as "unmotivated Themes" and consequently signs of bad writing (Mauranen 1993). It has been pointed out by McCabe (1999:180-189), however, that even though these Themes do not form progressions, some of them do, nevertheless, contribute to the development of the text in various ways. These fall into four main categories: pragmatic Themes, which are key concepts frequently referred to in the text, grammatical Themes, i.e. dummy subjects *it* and *there*, extralinguistic Themes, which are situationally evoked, e.g. *we* referring to the writer and reader, or imperatives addressing the reader, and metatextual Themes, which are Themes which refer to text itself, e.g. *chapter, figure,* etc. In this study, I will divide the Themes which do not connect to the preceding text into two categories depending on whether they represent new information or may be derived from the context (labelled New and Contextual Themes, respectively).

The distribution of these different types of theme progressions in the SWICLE and LOCNESS samples will be discussed in the following section.

4.2 Thematic progressions in the SWICLE and LOCNESS samples

Table 5 compares the Themes which form progressions in the two samples.

Table 5. Theme Progressions in the SWICLE and LOCNESS samples

	SWICLE		LOCNESS	
Constant	109	20%	90	17%
Linear	180	32%	156	29%
Summative	14	3%	38	7%
Split Theme	0	-	24	4%
Split Rheme	15	3%	38	7%
Total	318	58%	346	65%

In both samples, nearly two thirds of the Themes (58% in SWICLE and 65% in LOCNESS) form progressions. Linear progressions are most usual. These are formed by about a third of the total number of Themes (with slightly more, 32%, in SWICLE than in LOCNESS, 29%). Linear progressions tend to predominate in the passages of the essays which describe causes of problems and their effects, as in (19).

(19) The basic dilemma facing the UK's rail and road transport system is the general rise in population. This (LINEAR) leads to an increase in the number of commuters and transport users every year, consequently putting pressure on the UKs transports network. The biggest worry to the system (LINEAR) is the rapid rise of car users outside the major cities. Most large cities (LINEAR) have managed to incourage commuters to use public transport thus decreasing major conjestion in Rush hour periods. (LOCNESS)

Constant progressions were formed by about a fifth of the Themes in both samples (with slightly more in SWICLE, 20%, than in LOCNESS, 17%). These progressions develop the text from the same angle by adding new information in each sentence. Others form pairs of contrastive Themes, juxtaposing two members of a set of possible candidates, as in (20).

(20) People living in big cities do not see any change in their lives, whether the nature around the city is damaged or not, because they will got their everyday goods transported to them anyway. Those on the other hand who live in close contact with Nature and depend on it for their survival (CONSTANT) have another approach to the environment. (SWICLE)

Series of successive constant progressions were found in the SWICLE sample only. These formed narrative or descriptive passages, or lists of proposed solutions, such as (21).

(21) So what we have to do ti change our mindset to a "borrower's", is first of all to put pressure on all polluting companys and make them either re-cycle or find non-polluting alternatives. Secondly we (CONSTANT) have to fight poverty in order to save the land from deforestation and desertification. We (CONSTANT) need to educate the poor people how to use their land without destroying it. And then we (CONSTANT) have the most difficult task: the one of changing peoples view of money. We (CONSTANT) have to make everyone see that you can not eat, breath or drink money. (SWICLE)

Summative progressions were formed by 3% and 7% of the Themes in SWICLE and LOCNESS samples, respectively. This is illustrated by (22) where the Theme, *the way of consuming and hurrying through our lives,* encapsulates the content of the preceding chunk of text

(22) In the west we are obsessed with things and the ironic saying: 'The one who has got the most things when he dies, wins' tells us a lot about what we believe in. It is also an alarm bell trying to make us realize how crazy we act. Our way of consuming and

> hurrying through our lives (SUMMATIVE) must come to an end and we have to understand the consequences of our actions. (SWICLE)

Summative progressions allow a cumulative "compacting" of the text by nominalising chunks of information. The lower proportion of summative progressions in the advanced learners' sample may be due to the fact that this kind of progression often involves nominalisation of the propositional information content. As nominalisation increases the level of abstraction in the text (Martin 1992:407), it tends to be acquired later in language development and therefore it is perhaps not surprising that it is used less by learners writing in a second language. A similar tendency has been observed in the English used by Danish speakers. In a study of the language used in negotiations, (Bülow-Møller 1996) found that the Danish speakers lacked a ready ability to condense information in abstract superordinate terms, and therefore had difficulties "in creating both local and global anaphoric and cataphoric connections and in contrasting old and new information by reduction or focus to forge links in their discourse." (1996:38). A further reason why the Swedish learners use fewer nominalisations may, be transfer from Swedish. Nordrum (2007) found that nominalisations are frequently translated into clauses with the generic subjects (*man* "one" or *vi* "we") in Swedish. If nominalisations are less usual in Swedish, this would also explain why the Swedish learners prefer to select personal generics as their Themes rather than nominal Themes which encapsulate information and label its discourse function.

Split Rheme progressions were formed by 3% and 7% of the Themes in the SWICLE and LOCNESS samples, respectively. Split Theme progressions, on the other hand, were found in the LOCNESS sample only (4%). Split progressions organise information into subordinate parts. In (23), for instance, the discoursal Themes, *one* and *another reason,* form a split Rheme progression which expands on the Rheme *many reasons for this,* and in (24) the informational Themes *the carrot* and *the stick* form a split Theme progression which expand on the Theme, *A 'carrot and stick' approach*.

(23) The forests, especially in eastern Europe, are dying. There are many reasons for this: one (SPLIT RHEME) is the extensive use

of the car, another reason (SPLIT RHEME) is that many of the power-plants are run on coal or oil. (SWICLE)

(24) A 'carrot and stick' approach should probably be used. The carrot (SPLIT THEME) would be cheaper fares on buses, trams and trains and improved services, together with an advertising campaign to try to persuade people of the benefits of public transport. The stick (SPLIT THEME) would be making cars more expensive to run, either by increasing road tax or increasing the duty on petrol. Neither measure would be popular, but in the end they would help to create a better transport system in Britain. (LOCNESS)

In contrast to the advanced learners, the LOCNESS writers tend thus to use summative and split progressions more frequently as a means of organising the content of their essays. They are often used to scaffold the content of longer stretches of text, as in (24) where a split Rheme progression, and a summative progression organise the discussion of a number of proposed solutions presented in the Rheme of the topic sentence at the beginning of this stretch of text (*three main ways of doing this: sharing cars, using public transport and walking or cycling*).

(25) So, the only way around the problem is to have less cars. There are three main ways of doing this: sharing cars, using public transport and walking or cycling.
Sharing cars (SPLIT RHEME) seems feasible, but is ….
Buses (SPLIT RHEME) are almost without exception, old. This makes them … Trains have similar problems. They don't ...
People walking or using a bike (SPLIT RHEME) are not protected from the elements and, …
These methods of transport (SUMMATIVE) are slow, and allow you to carry much less. (LOCNESS)

Similarly, in (25) the themes, *Solutions for these problems in Britain* and *The problem with these schemes*, are summative progressions in topic sentences at the beginning of each paragraph. These label the content of the preceding paragraphs (*problems* and *schemes*) and predict the content of the paragraph which follows (*solutions* and *problem*), thereby

providing a transition between the different parts of these problem-solution texts.

(26)

a. Solutions for these problems in Britain (SUMMATIVE) have been fairly unimaginative and unsuccessful. Park and ride schemes are … (LOCNESS)
b. The problem with these schemes (SUMMATIVE) is that they are unpopular …(LOCNESS)

The remaining Themes (42% in SWICLE and 35% in LOCNESS) are "Back", Contextual and New (see Table 6).

Table 6. Back, Contextual and New Themes in the SWICLE and LOCNESS samples

	SWICLE		LOCNESS	
Back	74	13%	53	10%
Contextual	103	19%	82	15%
New	58	10%	50	9%
Total	235	42%	185	35%

"Back" Themes do not connect to their immediately preceding T-unit but reintroduce meanings mentioned earlier in the essays. Back Themes are found, for instance, at the beginning of the concluding paragraphs to remind the reader of the essay topic, as in (26) and after intervening explanations or evaluations, as in (27).

(27) In order to develop people's minds towards "borrowers" (BACK) society must be permeated with ecological awareness. (SWICLE)

(28) These are the common opinions and arguments when green consumers describe their difficult situation and they explain why well-meaning people sometimes fail to fulfil their obligations as green consumers. Unfortunately this is the stage where most of us stagnate in our efforts to become environmentally conscious

> and responsible people. Being a green consumer (BACK) is a step in the right direction, but it is not enough to solve the problem of our planet's fate. (SWICLE)

Back Themes are somewhat more usual in the SWICLE sample than the LOCNESS sample (13% vs. 10%). This is partly due to a tendency for the SWICLE writers to intersperse their argumentation with interactional rhetorical questions, generalisations with *we, you* and evaluative comments, as in (27) above.

Contextual Themes represent information which is situationally evoked (Prince 1981:236) and therefore does not interrupt the flow of information. These include deictic references to time and place, e.g. *now, here, today,* references to the writer, reader(s) or to the writing process itself. In this category I have also included the nonrepresentational subjects *there* and *it* and personal generics, e.g. *people*, *we, man, nobody*. There is a slightly greater proportion of contextual Themes in the SWICLE sample (18% vs. 15%). This is mainly due to the frequent usage of the personal generic *we.*

New Themes, finally, are either brand-new and have to be created by the reader, as in (29) or "Unused", i.e. assumed to be part of the readers background knowledge but introduced into the discourse for the first time, as in (30) (Prince 1981:235). New Themes may also be unknown information represented by the *wh*-words in *wh*-interrogatives, as in (5c) above.

(29) A recent survey in the Observer calculated that these measures, and many more, could be paid for out of the government's road budget, and enough would be left to maintain all existing roads. (LOCNESS)

(30) Bangkok, the capital of Thailand is today the most polluted capital in the world. (SWICLE)

When new information is placed in the Theme, it is backgrounded, and, as a result, more difficult to challenge. In this way, the writer is able to "smuggle" more information into the message and to present it as shared knowledge, as in (31)

(31) But with petrol companies unwilling to investigate water and alcohol powered cars for fear of losing petrol sales these still seem a long way off as our everyday form of transport. (LOCNESS)

New Themes are more or less equally usual in both samples (10% vs. 9%). There is however a qualitative difference. In the SWICLE sample, a large number of these (22 instances) are *wh*-words in rhetorical questions, whereas in the LOCNESS samples most new or "Unused" Themes are informational, as in (29) and (31).

In sum, linear progressions predominate in both samples, which is to be expected in argumentative texts such as these (Crompton 2004:237). Both linear and constant progressions are slightly more usual in the SWICLE sample as well as Themes which do not form progressions (Back, Contextual Themes). They also contain fewer summative and split Theme/Rheme progressions. The advanced learners' differ thus from the LOCNESS writers in that tend to use fewer progressions of the kind typically found in expository texts, i.e. progressions which form hierarchical relations between parts of its informational content.

5. Conclusion

As Thompson points out (2004:165), in order to build up the framework of a text, Themes need to 1) signal what the speaker thinks is a suitable starting point; 2) signal the maintenance or progression of 'what the text is about'; 3) specify or change the framework for the interpretation of the following clause (or clauses) and 4) signal boundaries between sections of the text. It has been found here that, when it comes to signalling a suitable starting point and 'what the text is about', the Swedish advanced learners, in contrast to the native speakers, tend to frequently select an interactional starting point, thereby creating a dialogic method of development similar to that found in conversational language. As a dialogic method of development foregrounds interpersonal meaning (Martin 1992:437 & 448), it follows, then, that their essays contain fewer informational Themes which signal the content of the text. It has also been found that the Swedish advanced learners select fewer Themes and Theme progressions which specify the framework of their texts and signal boundaries between its sections, i.e. they use fewer discoursal

Themes, and fewer summative and split Theme progressions. It has been pointed out earlier that one of the reasons for the non-native soundedness of Swedish advanced learners' writing is their lack of awareness of register differences, which results in a tendency to use an overly informal and colloquial style of writing (Altenberg and Tapper 1998:92, Boström Aronsson 2005: 188-190). One remedy for this is, as Altenberg and Tapper have pointed out, more extensive training in writing expository texts. The results of this study have shown that this should aim at increasing the advanced learners' understanding of how Themes and Theme progressions contribute the method of development in texts. They would, in particular, benefit from an increased awareness of how Themes and Theme progressions may be used to manage the logogenetic build-up of information as it accumulates in their texts.

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