



## Topical Theme Analysis in Recount Texts from an English for Nusantara Textbook: an SFL-Based Study

Ghania Balqis Rahmadiani<sup>1</sup>, Evi Karlina Ambarwati<sup>2</sup>, Wawan Setiawan<sup>3</sup>, Salsabila<sup>4</sup>  
<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang

Jl. H.S. Ronggowaluyo, Kel. Puseurjaya, Kec. Telukjambe Timur, Kab. Karawang, Jawa Barat

E-mail: [2210631060079@student.unsika.ac.id](mailto:2210631060079@student.unsika.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>, [evi.karlina@fkip.unsika.ac.id](mailto:evi.karlina@fkip.unsika.ac.id)<sup>2</sup>,

[wawan.setiawan@fkip.unsika.ac.id](mailto:wawan.setiawan@fkip.unsika.ac.id)<sup>3</sup>, [2110631060106@student.unsika.ac.id](mailto:2110631060106@student.unsika.ac.id)<sup>4</sup>

**Abstract :** *The analysis of themes in a recount text shows how the text is organized. One of the essential themes to analyze is the topical theme, as it represents the clause and reflects the writer's ability to convey the content of the text. This study aims to identify the forms and types of topical themes that are dominantly used in recount texts in English textbooks for junior high school grade 9 based on the concept of Systemic Functional Linguistics. The research data were four recount texts taken from chapter two. The data is organized into clauses through a qualitative approach with a content analysis research design. All clauses were analyzed based on the types of themes and rheme. The analysis results show that there are 97 topical themes. Most topical themes were participants (78.4%) and circumstances (21.6%). In addition, the recount texts did not have process as the central theme. The dominant type of topical theme found is the unmarked theme, followed by the marked theme. This study's findings reinforce the importance of explicitly teaching the elements and types of topical themes found in the self-contained curriculum teaching materials to support language learning in junior high schools.*

**Keywords:** *English for Nusantara Textbook; Recount Text; Topical Theme*

**Abstrak :** Analisis tema dalam teks recount menunjukkan bagaimana teks tersebut disusun. Salah satu tema penting yang perlu dianalisis adalah tema topical karena tema tersebut mewakili klausa dan mencerminkan kemampuan penulis dalam menyampaikan isi teks. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi unsur-unsur dan jenis tema topikal yang dominan digunakan dalam teks recount pada buku pelajaran bahasa Inggris untuk siswa kelas 9 SMP berdasarkan konsep Linguistik Sistemik Fungsional. Data penelitian terdiri dari empat teks recount yang diambil dari bab dua. Data tersebut disusun ke dalam klausa melalui pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain penelitian analisis isi. Semua klausa dianalisis berdasarkan jenis tema dan rema. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa terdapat 97 tema topikal. Sebagian besar tema topikal adalah partisipan (78,4%) dan keadaan (21,6%). Selain itu, teks-teks recount tersebut tidak memiliki proses sebagai tema sentral. Jenis tema topikal yang dominan adalah tema tak bertanda, diikuti oleh tema bertanda. Temuan penelitian ini memperkuat pentingnya pengajaran eksplisit mengenai unsur-unsur dan jenis-jenis tema topikal yang terdapat dalam bahan ajar kurikulum mandiri untuk mendukung pembelajaran bahasa di sekolah menengah pertama.

**Kata kunci:** Buku Teks English for Nusantara; Teks Recount; Tema Topikal

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Textbooks are the primary and supplementary resources in the teaching and learning process, through which students can gain understanding and enhance their critical thinking skills (Wale & Bogale, 2021). In addition, Rahim et al. (2021) stated that textbooks are written materials that serve as sources of informative content used by students in learning activities to

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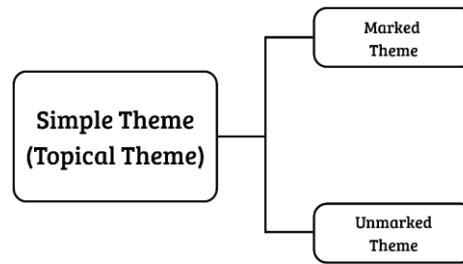
deepen their understanding and improve their learning experiences. Furthermore, textbooks serve as a tool for introducing texts while expanding vocabulary and grammar knowledge applicable to classroom teaching and learning activities (Cunningsworth, 1995). Therefore, to present informative content, the materials in textbooks must also be well-structured (Valverde et al., 2002).

English textbooks contain texts from various genres with the aim of enhancing students' genre awareness and literacy (Dost, 2025). In the context of education in Indonesia, one type of text that students must study is the recount text (Hidayati, 2024). A recount text is a text that retells events that have already taken place in the past, such as a vacation or a personal experience from the past (Qomariah, 2021). This genre aims to retell past events in a sequential manner, similar to a diary, thereby providing information or entertaining the reader (Sartika et al., 2022). Dost (2025) states that recount texts in English textbooks are divided into four subcategories: personal, historical, biographical, and autobiographical. One of the most frequently encountered categories in English textbooks is the personal recount text. As material in English textbooks, the text must meet language appropriateness standards according to students' developmental stages, as evidenced by spelling, phrasing, and the sentences structured within each paragraph (Octora et al., 2023). Therefore, text analysis plays a crucial role in identifying subtle patterns to explore the meaning of the text (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Text structure plays a vital role in successful language learning. Mahfud et al. (2024) emphasize that it can improve students' learning objectives. One approach that can be used to examine this structure is theme structure analysis, which positively impacts teaching and learning language in the classroom Yan (2015). In the framework of systemic functional linguistics, the theme is the starting point of the message. Eggins (2004) and Halliday (1994) mention that one element that is always present in every clause is the topical theme. This element functions as a marker of the main idea and as a basis for readers to understand the content of the text. Thus, analysis of the topical theme helps determine how the author organizes the information in the text.

The topical theme is the first constituent in a clause that carries the meaning of experience (Emilia, 2014; Martin et al., 2020). This theme can be realized through three transitivity forms: participant, circumstance, and process (Emilia, (2014); Halliday & Matthiessen (2004). Participant is realized through a nominal group or pronoun, process through a verb indicating an action, while circumstance is present as an adverb. Furthermore, Gerot & Wignell (1994) stated that topical themes are divided into marked and unmarked theme, as illustrated in "Figure 1". An unmarked theme is characterised by the fact that the unit at the beginning of the clause

functions as the subject. Meanwhile, marked themes are realized as modifiers to give specific emphasis (Eggins, 2004).



**Figure 1. Types of Topical Theme**

Several previous studies have explored themes in various types of texts. In their study, Meiarista & Widhiyanto (2020) stated that the emergence of topical themes in recount texts written by students reached the highest percentage, namely 53.6%. Furthermore, Mustofa and Kurniawan (2023) found that unmarked topical themes dominated 51.2% of student recount texts, indicating a tendency for writers to directly highlight the main character or topic. Mahfud et al. (2024) conducted research about the Merdeka Curriculum textbooks for junior high school also showed similar results, where topical themes dominated 55% of clauses. These findings emphasize the importance of topical themes in maintaining text coherence, even though the focus of the research was not exclusively on this element. These findings underscore the significance of topical themes in preserving text coherence, even though the primary focus of the research did not pertain exclusively to this aspect.

However, to date, no research has examined topical themes in a single type of text and in a particular textbook. Most studies still analyze themes and rhemes comprehensively, and few have focused on examining recount texts in textbooks. This discrepancy underscores the necessity for research exclusively focused on topical themes in recount texts, a genre currently incorporated within the school curriculum.

To fill this research gap, this study focuses on recount texts in the English for Nusantara textbook for Grade IX. This study has two objectives: first, to identify the most dominant form of topical theme used; and second, to identify the variations in the types of topical themes that appear. This analysis is expected to enrich functional linguistic studies and provide practical contributions for teachers and students in English language learning.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a quantitative approach. Through quantitative methods, numerical data is collected and analyzed to gain an understanding of a phenomenon (Rana et al.,

2021). This study also used content analysis as a research design, as suggested by previous research (Zein et al., 2023). Quantitative content analysis is a classification approach to identify textual information, ranging from text structure, word patterns, frequency, context, and relationships (Grbich, 2013). There are eight stages in conducting quantitative content analysis (Rose et al., 2014). It begins with formulating two research questions, followed by establishing systemic functional linguistics as the theoretical framework. The third stage involves determining the units for which frequency will be calculated. In this study, the research data consists of manifest content, or material that is easily observable (Saldanna & Omasta, 2021). The focus of manifest content is clause-level analysis, which is defined as the largest grammatical unit (Gerot & Wignell, 1994). Next, the fourth stage is to create a coding scheme following the theoretical frameworks of Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) and Eggins (2004). The subsequent stages are data collection, the coding process, data analysis, and finally, reporting the findings of the data analysis. To calculate the frequency of occurrence of elements and types of topical themes, calculations were performed using the percentage formula developed by Cameron (2001), as shown in “Figure 2”.

$$P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100\%$$

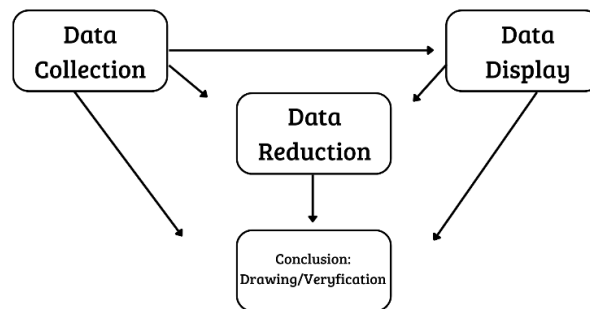
P = Percentage  
f = Frequency  
n = Number of Segments  
100% = Constant Values

**Figure 2. Percentage Formula**

The research data is in the form of four recount texts sourced from chapter two of the English textbook for junior high school grade IX, authored by Damayanti et al. (2022). The textbook was published in 2022 by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This study focuses on the second chapter, which uses language to recount past experiences. Therefore, several recount texts were identified in the second chapter of the book. Meanwhile, the four recount texts were chosen because they fall under the category of personal recount texts. Personal recount texts are a type of text that retell the author’s personal experiences (Sitorus & Sipayung, 2018). Personal recount texts are also a genre frequently found in junior high school-level English textbooks (Dost, 2025). This research focuses on the topical themes in the four recount texts. The four selected personal recount texts are characterised by a shared thematic focus, namely the description of vacation experiences. The research focused on the topical themes in the four recount texts. In addition, these four personal recount texts also share the same

structure, beginning with orientation, events, and reorientation (Hasanah, 2022). The initial personal recount text consists of five paragraphs and is located on page 105; it retells the author's vacation to Karimunjawa Island. Second, there is a personal recount text about the author's vacation to Sumbawa, consisting of four paragraphs and located on page 116. Next is a personal recount text titled "My First Snorkeling Experience," which consists of five paragraphs and is located on page 124. Finally, there is a personal recount text describing the author's experience spending a vacation in Bogor. This text consists of three paragraphs and is located on page.

In analysing the data, the researcher employed the research framework developed by Milles et al. (2014), as illustrated in "Figure 3". The process consists of three primary stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In data reduction, several stages start with recounting the text broken down into clauses, then identifying the topical theme elements, and classifying the topical theme according to the types. Next, the data is presented in tables. The last step is to draw conclusions from the findings.



**Figure 3. Stages in Data Analysis**

### 3. FINDING AND DISSCUSSION

This study examines the dominant topical theme forms and topical theme types found in four recount texts. The data were analyzed using Halliday & Matthiessen's (2004) textual analysis model related to topical theme rheme analysis. Before determining the form and type of topical theme, the four recount texts were fragmented into clauses and then analyzed based on theme rheme. Thus, the analysis of this study is at the clause level.

The research findings are summarized in two key points. First, the dominant forms of topical theme in recount texts are the participant as a topical theme, followed by circumstances. Second, the study identifies two types of topical themes: unmarked and marked.

**1. Dominant Forms Used in Recount Texts**

**Table 1. Dominant Forms Used in Recount Texts**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Part</b>	<b>Circ</b>	<b>Pro</b>
1	26	5	0
2	18	2	0
3	21	7	0
4	11	7	0
Total	76	21	0
%	78.4%	21.6	0

Notes:

Part = Participant

Circ = Circumstance

Pro = Process

The result of the analysis indicated the presence of 97 topical themes. As illustrated in “Table 1”, the most prevalent form of topical theme is identified as 'Participant', with a frequency of 78.4%. This is followed by 'Circumstance', which occurs in 21.6% of cases. Meanwhile, no process as a topical theme was found in the recount text. The use of topical themes in the text indicates that the writer focuses information on 'who or what (participant)' and 'where, when, why, which, and how (circumstance)' (Zein et al., 2023).

- **Participant as Topical Theme**

**Table 2. Participant as Topical Theme**

We	really enjoyed the sunset
Participant	Rheme
Topical Theme	

Participant as a topical theme is the most frequent form of topical theme in the text. As illustrated in “Table 2”, it supports the results of research conducted by Larasati et al. (2022) that the percentage of participants is greater than in other forms. In the table, 'we' functions as the subject, while the rest becomes the theme. "We", "I", and "it" are the elements that appear

most often in recount texts. Maryam et al. (2020) mentioned that using references is one of the language features of recount texts.

- **Circumstance as Topical Theme**

**Table 3. Circumstance as Topical Theme**

Last week,	my parents and I went to Bogor to spend our weekend
Circumstance	Rheme
Topical Theme	

In “Table 3”, the first sentence is "Last week," which is the topical theme of the second sentence. The sentence in the table above is identified and summarised as a circumstantial adjunct as a topical theme, because the topical theme in the table used the adverb of time. In the context of recount texts, temporal circumstantial adjuncts have been observed to frequently function as the topical theme (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). It is commonplace to encounter phrases such as "Last semester," "On the second day," and "Last week.”

The findings show that the dominant form of topical theme is represented by the participant as a pronoun, which always appears at the beginning of the clause. After that, it is followed by a circumstance represented as an adverb. Meanwhile, the process as a topic theme was not found in the recount text. Process as a topic theme was not found in the recount text. This is due to one of the characteristics of a recount text, namely the use of the simple past tense and action verbs that do not occur at the beginning of the clause (Hasanah, 2022). This also aligns with research conducted by Mustofa and Kurniawan (2023), which shows that only nominal and adverbial groups appear as topic themes, while verbal groups are not found in recount texts. Similar findings were also revealed by Meiarista and Widhiyanto, (2020), who stated that verbal groups do not function as topic themes because recount texts only focus on telling the sequence of events in the past, not on persuading or influencing readers.

## 2. The Types of Topical Theme

- Unmarked Theme

**Table 4. Unmarked Theme**

<b>Unmarked Theme</b>	<b>Rheme</b>
I	could observe a variety of corals and fishes
We	departed from Jepara in the morning
It	was a lovely day
The garden	was very big

Unmarked themes are the dominant type used in recount texts. It appears as many as 76 times. As illustrated in “Table 4”, the word "I" as the theme of the clause is most frequently found in recount texts. Clauses beginning with the words "I," "We," and "It" fall into the category of unmarked themes that use pronouns as the head of the clause. These pronouns belong to the noun category according to grammatical theory. Furthermore, based on the analysis results shown in “Table 4”, there are unmarked themes consisting of common nouns. The word "The garden" uses a noun as the head of the clause. In this study, unmarked themes are realized through pronouns and nouns.

These findings align with the research conducted by Mustofa and Kurniawan (2023), who state that the unmarked theme, as the topical theme, dominates the beginning of the clause. The unmarked theme appears when the subject is in the initial position within the sentence structure, consistent with the theoretical framework of systemic functional linguistics (Hanafiah et al., 2018). A subject located at the beginning of a clause has a conventional meaning that serves to indicate the topic of the text (Amartya et al., 2022). Furthermore, clauses that begin with a noun or pronoun to identify the main participant (the core of the text) indicate that the writer has achieved the text’s purpose (Emilia, 2014).

- **Marked Theme**

**Table 5. Marked Theme**

<b>Marked Theme</b>	<b>Rheme</b>
The next day,	we did other activities
As soon as	the sky got darker, we went back to the hotel
Last semester,	I was sent to Manado North Sulawesi to represent my school at a national storytelling competition

The number of marked themes that appear in the recount text is 21. As illustrated in "Table 5", it can be seen that the words "The next day" and "Last Semester" serve as the head of the theme. These are adverbs functioning as modifiers in the clause. Meanwhile, the word "As soon as" serves as the head of the theme. It is a linking word functioning as a conjunction to connect the clause to the independent clause. In a declarative clause, a theme that is not the subject is called a marked theme (Halliday (1994). This indicates that a marked theme consists of an adverb and a conjunction.

The results of this marked theme analysis align with the research conducted by Mustofa and Kurniawan (2023), which showed that marked themes are less common than unmarked ones. (Mahfud et al., 2024) stated that the most common form of marked theme is the adverb. It serves to provide additional meaning to the subject. Furthermore, marked themes with adverbial elements are used by writers to ensure coherence and to emphasize time or reason (Eggins, 2004). Placing something other than the subject at the beginning of a clause can alter the typical mood structure (Bell, 1991). Consequently, such themes are rarely found (Anggraeni & Mahdi, 2020). Nevertheless, the use of marked themes can capture readers' attention by providing information about the story's time (Ningyi, 2020).

Based on the results above, it is evident that the presence of a topical theme in a text plays a crucial role in maintaining coherence and cohesion in the organization of the message (Nugraha, 2023). Butt et al. (2000) explained that the use of themes helps students to effectively build meaning across clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and the whole text. Using the right theme reflects the writer's ability to convey the main topic clearly. The topical theme in the text also illustrates an aid to students in understanding the content of the text. That way, the information

can help. Readers understand the main idea and follow the flow of text development. In addition, the use of topical themes indicated by the subject can foster students' awareness and direct their focus on the content of the text.

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This study shows that only participant and circumstance elements are used as topical themes in recount texts. In addition, the variation in the use of marked and unmarked themes illustrates that textbook writers utilize topical themes strategically to build the recount structure. This finding confirms that topical themes are essential in helping students understand the content and flow of recount texts. Therefore, teaching about the elements and types of topical themes must be explicitly done at the junior high school level. The result provides benefits for teachers and curriculum designers in developing and implementing the curriculum at school.

This research is limited to analyzing the form and type of topical theme in a recount text in one government-issued textbook, so the findings cannot be generalized to all teaching materials. Therefore, future researchers are advised to conduct a more comprehensive study of topical themes in other text types, such as descriptive text, narrative text, argumentative text, and others. Future researchers are also encouraged to analyze types of English textbooks published by private entities. In addition, research on multiple English textbooks with different levels will increase the understanding of the effectiveness of studying such linguistic features in language teaching and learning.

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