CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a description of the the background of the study, research questions, significance of the study, scope of the study, clarification of key terms, and organization of the paper.

1.1 Background of the Study

Writing is one of the language skills that should be learned by students in secondary to tertiary levels of education. Harmer (2004:31) argues that it always has been formed as part of the curriculum in the teaching of English. According to the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology number 08 of 2024 concerning National Higher Education Standards, the secondary levels of education require graduates to have adequate English competency to fulfill the needs of academics and work globally. For academic purposes, students with English competency can access academic resources in a significant amount of literature or educational materials available in English. Besides, they are equipped with English skills to meet the demands of global work face and expand their career network.

Writing is seen as a meaning-making activity where language choices are made to fulfill specific social purposes (Halliday, 1985). The language choices are influenced by the context of culture and the context of the situation which are called genre and register in terms of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Martin & Rose, 2008). Studies have shown that students who receive instruction based on SFL principles develop a better understanding of how to construct texts that are coherent, cohesive, and appropriate for intended purposes (Christie & Derewianka, 2008). Furthermore, they need to be able to manipulate the flow of information in various ways by utilizing the beginning of clauses (Christie & Derewianka, 2008).

Based on the 2013 Curriculum, descriptive text is one of the genres of text that should be learned by students since they are in the secondary level of education. Descriptive text is one of the text types used to describe particular things, persons, animals, places, or events (Gerot & Wignell, 1994; Knapp & Watkins, 2005). It provides details about the characteristics of people, places, and things. According to Swales and Feak (2012), it lays a foundation for more complex writing tasks such as narrative, persuasive writing, reports, and

research. Students need to describe information vividly and properly (Emilia & Christie, 2013). Furthermore, it improves students' ability to communicate clearly and precisely for academic success and professional communication (Zinsser, 2006). Therefore, writing descriptive texts has a significant role in students' language skills.

However, most students consider writing to be a difficult subject in school (Emilia, 2005). According to Christie and Derewianka (2008), organizing the text is one of the challenges faced by students to make it accessible to the remote reader. Besides, they have difficulties in creating well-organized text (Mayekti et al., 2022). Students lack proficiency in text production skills (Ismayanti and Kholiq, 2020). They are also poor in grammar use (Nurfidoh and Kareviati, 2021). Therefore, writing coherence and cohesive text is challenging for students.

Students have difficulties in writing descriptive text as well. Noprianto (2017) reveals that there are three high school students' major problems in writing descriptive texts: the inability to adjust the social function of the text, the difficulty in writing with a chronological schematic structure, and the difficulty in filling the text with appropriate language features. Senior high school students representing the middle and high achievers have a good schematic structure of the descriptive text while low achievers are still confused in identifying the schematic structure (Siahaan, 2013). In addition, one of the difficulties found in junior high school students' writing is the inability to develop their ideas (Purnamasari et al., 2021).

Coherence and cohesion play a fundamental role in the quality of writing. There are two dimensions of a text, with cohesion being internal properties (internal organization) and coherence contextual properties (Eggins, 1994). Coherence is the way of group of clauses or sentences relate to the context (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, cited in Eggins, 2004). A coherent text occurs if semantic and pragmatic meanings make sense in its real-world context to readers or listeners. Coherence depends on the readers or listeners being able to interpret the message about its context (Emilia, 2014). Eggins (2004) reveals that there are two types of coherence: registerial or situational coherence and generic coherence. Situational coherence occurs when we can identify one situation in which all the clauses of the text could occur, for example identifying the topic of the discourse (field), what roles the writer is playing (tenor), and how closely language is tied to the experience it's commenting on (mode). Besides, a text has generic coherence when writers can recognize the text as an example of a particular genre

(type text) such as descriptive, narrative, exposition, discussion, procedure, recount, report, etc. (Eggins, 1994).

Meanwhile, cohesion refers to the devices available to assist link information in writing and help the text flow and hold together (Knaap & Watkins, 2005). A cohesive text occurs when the sentences and spoken utterances are semantically linked and consistent. The text is not probably cohesive if a random set of unconnected sentences or spoken utterances just thrown together and readers or listeners will not be able to see links between each sentence/utterance (Carter & McCarthy 2006, cited in Emilia, 2014). Eggins (1994) emphasizes that the key notion behind cohesion is that there is a semantic tie between an item at one point in a text and an item at another point.

To make good text in writing, coherence and cohesion should be employed by identifying the Theme of the clause (Eggins, 2004; Safitra, 2013). Good writing can be seen from the relationship between the Theme and Rheme in each clause and how the thematic choices are made by the writer (Bloor et al., 2004:84). Besides, the Theme assists students to communicate their ideas successfully (Wang, 2007). The selection and development of Themes are crucially prominent to avoid chaotic text production that sometimes occurs during the development of text (Butt et al., 2000).

Moreover, the idea of Theme and Rheme leads to the analysis of Thematic progression (Fries, 2002, cited in Paltridge, 2006). Thematic Progression analysis can be employed in teaching writing to improve students' writing skills (Yang, 2008). It helps the writers to organize and develop their ideas or information smoothly (Butt et al., 2000; Emilia, 2014). Additionally, Bloor & Bloor (2004) reveal that it is essential for maintaining coherence in texts, as it helps to manage the flow of information effectively. Thus, the Theme and Thematic Progression should be employed by students to develop an effective text through an effective selection of theme and theme progression (Hawes and Thomas, 2012). Writing becomes a secondary need to convey messages to others. The use of the Theme and Thematic Progression pattern in writing assists students in communicating the message clearly by producing cohesive and coherent texts.

Several researchers have conducted studies on theme and thematic progression. For example, studies on theme and thematic progression in research thesis abstracts (Arono, 2018), theses (Gunawan & Aziza, 2017; Mubarak, 2021), and scientific writing (Leong, 2022). Moreover, many studies on the Theme and Thematic progression have also explored in various genres of texts, such as argumentative texts (Al Bakaa, 2014), narrative texts

(Pasaribu, Pasaribu, & Panggabean, 2019; Rahayu, Krisnawati, & Soemantri, 2020), exposition texts (Bangga, 2013), and recount texts (Mustika & Kurniawan, 2023; Latifa & Kurniawan, 2023).

Further, studies on theme and thematic progression in descriptive texts have been explored as follows, Purba and Pasaribu (2021) conducted a study focused on the Thematic progression of junior high school students' descriptive texts. Zahra, Emilia, and Nurlaelawati (2021) analyzed the cohesion and coherence of junior high school students' descriptive texts using the Theme and Thematic progression. In addition, Siahaan, Amalia, and Krisnawati (2023) explored the Theme and Thematic progression of elementary students' descriptive texts especially in low achievers. However, the analysis of the Theme and Thematic Progression of senior high school students' descriptive texts has less attention. Besides, few studies have discussed high school students' awareness of the Theme and Thematic Progression patterns.

Therefore, the present study attempts to analyze the Theme and Thematic Progression constructed in descriptive texts written by students in one of senior high schools in Malang, East Java, in order to explore how their ideas are constructed. Additionally, the study aimed to investigate students' awareness of the Theme and Thematic Progression Pattern.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background of the study, this research is guided by the following research questions.

1. What Themes and Thematic Progressions are constructed in students' descriptive texts at a senior high school in Malang?
2. How is the students' awareness of the Theme and Thematic progression?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The result of this study will contribute to teaching writing in both theory and practice. For a theoretical purpose, the study filled the gap among previous studies. The result gives valuable insight in the Theme and Thematic progression of descriptive text.

For practical purposes, the result assists teachers in teaching writing to enhance students' writing skills, especially in producing coherent and cohesive texts. Besides, this study will be used as a reference for future researchers to conduct similar studies.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study is intended to analyze senior high school students' descriptive text of one of senior high schools in Malang, East Java, in terms of its theme and thematic progression. Besides, students' awareness of the Theme and Thematic Progression pattern are investigated.

1.5 Clarification of Key Terms

a) Systemic Functional Linguistics views language as a social semiotic to accomplish particular purposes by expressing meaning in context developed by Michael Halliday (Halliday, 1985, cited in Fauziati, 2016; Eggins, 2004). Social semiotics mean how people use language with each other to accomplish everyday social life (Halliday, 1978, cited in Eggins, 2004). In the current study, SFL refers to the text analysis framework used in the study to explore theme and thematic progression.

b) The Theme is the element that comes first in the clause and what the clause is going to be about (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Eggins, 2004). It contains given information that is familiar from the context. The Theme in this study refers to the given information that emerged in the clause of descriptive texts.

c) Thematic progression is the Theme and Rheme development applied in the text to organize the ideas (Butt et al., 2000). In addition, it concerns where themes come from and how they relate to other themes and rhemes (Jing, 2015). Thematic progression in this study refers to the same element of clause that occurs regularly as a Theme in descriptive texts.

d) Descriptive text is one of the text types that is used to describe particular things, persons, animals, places, or events (Gerot & Wignell, 1994; Knapp & Watkins, 2005). In this study, descriptive text is a piece of writing to describe person, place, or thing written by senior high school students in one of senior high schools in Malang.

e) Awareness refers to language awareness which is the conscious knowledge of how language works (Bolitho et al., 2003). In this case, the awareness refers to students' awareness of the Theme and Thematic Progression pattern in their descriptive texts.

1.6 Organization of the Paper

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter I provides the background of the study, research questions, significance of the study, scope of the study, clarification of key

terms, and organization of the paper. Chapter II discusses Systemic Functional Linguistics, Theme System, Descriptive Text, Levels of Students' Achievement, and Students' Awareness. Chapter III describes the research methodology applied in the study. It covers research design, research site and participants, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter IV presents the findings and discussion of this study. Chapter V provides conclusions and recommendations for the readers and English teachers.