CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the general issues related to the current research. It includes background of the study, research question, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms and thesis organization.

1.1 Research background

Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (hence SFL) influence on language learning has been of great interest to researchers. This is believed to owe to its particular specialization on the concept of metafunctions, i.e. interpersonal, ideational and textual, as opposed to the traditional grammar (see Eggins, 2004). Within SFL theory, language users are able to express these three kinds of meaning simultaneously by utilizing a set of grammatical choices available in the lexico-grammar system. As the theory posits, the interpersonal, ideational and textual metafunction are the semantic meanings for which people make when interacting (Eggins, 2004). Interpersonal metafunction expresses the writer's role relationship with the reader as well as the writer's attitude towards the subject matter. Ideational metafunction shows the way the writers make sense of the world. Textual metafunction suggests the way the text is organized.

It is particularly this latter strand of metafunction that is of important for its role that partly contributes to realizing textual meanings. According to Halliday (1974: 95, 97, in Eggins, 2004), textual metafunction is described as the 'relevance' or the 'enabling' metafunction. This suggests the organization of the text in such a way that is relevant to its given context and communicative purpose.

Research into thematic structure in texts has been revealing. Several research compared the thematic structure in different genres (see, for example, Ghadessy, 1999; Ebrahimi and Heng, 2012), whereas several others compared the thematic structure and aspects of students' writing of different level of score (e.g., Ping, 2007; Kawaguchi, Haenouchi, & Ichinose, 2009). Research into thematic structure of interlanguage texts has also been prevalent. For example, Green, Christopher, & Mei (2000) reported a comparison of corpus academic writings produced by non-native speakers of Chinese student and native speakers of English in relation to the occurences of the two fronting devices (i.e., beginning *For* and *Concerning*) and the three thematized connectors (i.e., *Besides, Furthermore* and *Moreover*). Mirahayuni (2002) investigated the textual structure of research articles written by English speakers, Indonesian writers writing in English, and Indonesian writers writing in Indonesian. Some attention has also been given to thematic progression in academic research articles (e.g., Soepriatmadji, 2009; Herriman, 2011; Nuraeningsih, 2012; Sharndama & Panamah, 2013; Shi, 2013). These studies described the way the thematic structure and progression contribute to cohesion and coherence of texts.

Thematic structure and its utilization in the field of language teaching has been an especially popular area of research. Several action research reported the effectiveness of incorporating thematic structure in teaching writing (e.g., Ren, Cao, Gao, & Li, 2009; Priyatmojo, 2012 ; Farikah, Nurkamto, & Sofwan, 2013). The results showed a considerable improvement of students' competence in developing paragraph of certain genres.

In translation studies thematic organization has been of an issue. Khedri and Ebrahimi (2012) reported the efficacy of thematic structure to keep the rhetoric and argumentation well-structured. Several studies have mostly dealt with the way the translator tackled the issues of textual devices (i.e. thematic organization and progression) when a text was translated into another language (e.g., Jalilifar, 2009; Rorvik, 2003; Kim, 2007). In coping with translation

problems as regards the thematic issue, Dejica-Cartis and Cozma (2013) proposed a process-based translation by putting a methodological approach for integrating information-structure theories in translation process.

Although considerable research has been devoted to thematic structure, these research have tended to focus on a single mode of discourse, i.e. written (e.g. Ghadessy, 1999; Ebrahimi and Heng, 2012; Ping, 2007; Kawaguchi, Haenouchi, & Ichinose, 2009). It would seem, therefore, that further investigations are needed in order to find out the thematic realizations in two different modes of discourse, i.e. spoken and written. The aim of the present research is to compare the realizations of thematic structures in students' research papers and oral presentations. To be specific, it will reveal the types of Theme and linguistic realizations of topical Theme in research papers and oral presentations. Selections of type of Theme and realizations of topical Theme to become the focus of investigation because they will reveal variations between two types of text, considering there is a choice between using textual and interpersonal thematic elements. In addition, topical Theme is expected to occur in each clause for its vital role in giving the content to the clause (see Thompson, 2004; Martin, Matthiessen and Pinter, 1997), and thus is crucial to look at what it is (see Eggins, 1994, 2004). Topical Theme can be realized in various elements such as nominal group, dependent clause, embedded clause, etc.

The selection of research papers and oral presentations being the focus of investigation is motivated by a consideration that these two have become an important part in academic tradition particularly postgraduate level. Research papers constitute students' mastery of a subject matter, and as it turns out, they are often followed up by oral presentations. The analysis of Theme will provide evidence that the two types of text are alike to several respects, but different to the other: the texts may be ideationally and interpersonally similar but textually different. It is hoped that the information presented will be useful to students of non-native English speakers particularly in Indonesian context as to differences of

spoken and written language in terms of the way they are structured, which realizes the textual meaning of the text.

1.2 Research questions

The questions that this research seeks to answer are formulated as follows:

1. What types of Theme are used in students' research papers and oral presentations?
2. What is selected to be Topical Theme in students' research papers and oral presentations?

1.3 Aims of the research

The research is aimed to:

1. find out the types of Theme get used in students' research papers and oral presentations. The type of Theme is expected to vary according to the mode variations of the texts.
2. reveal the elements selected to be the topical Theme in students' research papers and oral presentations. The language use in different mode will somehow affect the lexical choices as well as their structure in clauses. This in turn will reveal the characteristics of spoken and written language in terms of its thematic structure.

1.4 Significance of the research

The following significant points are expected from this case study:

1. It imparts a contribution to the theory of functional linguistics. The study of functional linguistics has mostly dealt with the way the metafunctions are realized in either written or spoken mode. The current research, however, extends the analysis to uncover how the Theme is structured in written mode as compared to that of spoken mode. This will indicate that the texts are alike to some extents but different to the other.

2. It contributes to raising students' awareness of the way the message is structured in both written and spoken mode. As for non-native language users particularly in Indonesian context, it is helpful to provide accounts towards how the language is used according to its context and purpose.

1.5 Definition of terms

The technical terms prominently used in this research are defined as follows:

1. Academic language refers to language typically used in the school context that gives access to students to acquire knowledge and that serves as a tool of thinking (Schleppegrell, 2004).

2. Metafunction is defined as "the highly generalized functions language has evolved to serve and which are evidenced in its organization" (Matthiessen, Teruya, & Lam, 2010: 138).

3. Mode refers to "the role language is playing in an interaction" (Martin, 1984, in Eggins, 2004: 90).

4. Register is "A variety of language determined by a particular set of values of the context; it is determined by what the speaker is doing socially" (Matthiessen, Teruya, & Lam, 2010: 176).

5. Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) refers to "a functional approach to language which explores both how people use language in different contexts, and how language is structured for use a semiotic system" (Eggins, 2004: 20).

6. Theme is defined as "Textual system for organizing the clause as a message, more specifically for assigning an element or set of elements of the clause the textual status of prominence as orientation or local context for the interpretation of the rest of the clause—the point of departure in the process of interpreting the clause" (Matthiessen, Teruya, & Lam, 2010: 223).

7. Topical Theme refers to "an element of the clause in which a Transitivity function can be assigned occurs in first position in a clause" (Eggins, 2004: 301).

1.6 Thesis organization

This research is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 consists of the background of the study which elaborates a general description of the research focus under discussion. The following sub-chapter includes research questions, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms and thesis organization.

Chapter 2 elaborates theoretical bases underlying the present research. It mainly discusses the language approach of Halliday's SFL to analyze the thematic structure in students' research papers and oral presentations. It subsequently provides a description on the concept of register, mode and language features typical in academic setting.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology employed in this research. It includes research design, research setting and participants, data collection and data analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the data presentation and data analysis. The data presentation describes the choice of types of Theme including textual, interpersonal, and topical Theme in students' research papers and oral presentations. They also present the elements used to be the topical Theme in both types of text. They are discussed by referring to relevant theories and previous studies.

Chapter 5 provides conclusion and suggestions drawn from this research. The conclusion is made based on the research findings and the discussion regarding the two research problems formulated above.