CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers the rationale of the study which motivated the researcher to conduct this study. This chapter also presents the objectives of the study, significances, an operational definition of terms and the organization of the paper.

1.1. Rationale

Teaching English commonly focuses on enhancing the four language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. As one of the language skills, writing plays a significant role in students' education period and it can be a great asset during their lives (Collerson, 1989: 1). Since writing plays a very crucial role in students' education, "writing has always been formed as part of the syllabus (curriculum) in the teaching of English" (Harmer, 2004: 31), a fact which is also found in the language curriculum and syllabus in Indonesia (Ministry of National Education Regulation No. 23 Year 2006 on Graduate Competence Standard).

Hence, writing is one of the important skills to be acquired by students. Nevertheless, Emilia (2005) found that most students considered writing a difficult subject. It might be because they find difficulties in communicating their ideas using the written language. To write a good composition, students should pay attention to several aspects. One of them is the Theme of the clause. Focusing

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on the Theme will be very useful in helping students to communicate their ideas successfully (Wang, 2007: 171). Theme helps the speaker/writer "to specify the place in the listener/reader network of meaning where the meaning is to be incorporated as relevant" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 19). Moreover, Theme is the element of clause structure which serves as "the point of departure of the message; it is with which the clause is concerned" (Halliday, 1994: 37). The Theme then becomes important because it provides the environment for the remainder of the message, which is known as the Rheme, in the Theme-Rheme organization (Halliday, 1994).

Recent research into Theme system analysis has been conducted by several researchers. It is shown in studies conducted by McCabe (1999) Forey (2002), Thompson (2005), Yang, Ramirez, & Harman (2007), Mustaffa (2007), Wang (2007), Wulandari (2009), Sofyan (2009)Li (2009), Jalilifar (2010), Rachmawati (2010) and Sugijarto (2011). Those studies are generally related to Systemic Functional Linguistics developed by Halliday (1994). They mostly investigated various texts seen from their thematic progressions. The study conducted by Sugijarto (2011), for instance, investigated the thematic progression in students' explanatory texts. In his study, Sugijarto found that students commonly apply Constant and Simple Linear Thematic Progression indicating students' texts consistency. Another study investigating thematic progression is the study conducted by Mustaffa (2007) which investigated texts written by undergraduate LEP (Limited English Proficiency) students. In her study, she found that the LEP students display average ability in their use of thematic progression. Wang (2007)

also conducted the study on Theme and Rheme organization. This study was concerned with its implication for teaching academic writing in tertiary education.

The study on Theme-Rheme analysis is also established in the field of Translation as performed by Wulandari (2009) and Rachmawati (2010). They investigated thematic progression in translations of popular texts, and found that several thematic progressions are employed in the texts, giving an indication of the readers' comprehension of the text. These studies set out and described why and how certain thematic progressions occurred in the texts.

Research into Theme system was not only focused on the thematic progression, as described earlier, but several researchers also investigated the function of Theme in comparing two different languages as conducted by McCabe (1999) and Sofyan (2009). McCabe (1999) conducted a comparative study on Spanish and English history texts. This study explored whether or not thematic and rhematic choices can be linked to the context of situation and culture within which the texts were written, and thus give a clear reflection of the field, mode and tenor of the texts. In this study, she used historical texts as the source of the research. Sofyan (2009) also investigated comparison between two languages, using the Theme system of Systemic Functional Grammar. The topical Theme shift in factual English – Indonesian translation was explored, where the author found a topical Theme dominates the entire text being investigated.

It is found that the study of Theme analysis on students' narrative texts, particularly the texts written by senior high school students, has not been conducted, especially in Indonesia. Thus, this study intends to fill the gap with a

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Theme system analysis on students' narrative texts. In this study, the Theme system of Systemic Functional Grammar is used as the instrument to analyze the texts written by senior high school students. This study investigates thematic elements of the texts written by the students through examining several aspects as suggested by Eggins (1994, 2004), namely choices of types of Themes, choices of topical Themes, and choices of thematic patterns.

There are several reasons why the Theme system is investigated in this study. First, the Theme system focuses on the first element of the clause describing what the text is about (Gerot and Wignell, 1994; Eggins, 2004; Thompson, 2004). This means that when students' texts are difficult to understand, "the problem often originates in the choice of Themes and the expression of Rhemes" (Butt et al., 2000: 151). Second, the Theme system has a crucial role in the readability and in the appearance of a text and, in general, plays a central role in our every day communication. It sets up an environment in which the message can be interpreted and understood clearly (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997: 19 as cited in Jallilifar, 2010: 8). A discussion of textual meaning always includes a consideration of how text is organized and how the information is developed.

Since text has a significant position in educational contexts, it is therefore very interesting to study one of the genres of the texts. Concerning the genre of the texts, a narrative is examined in this study because of several reasons. Firstly, narrative is often considered as "the macro genre" (Knapp and Watkins, 2005: 221). It means that this genre can easily accommodate other genres and still remain dominant. Secondly, the narrative is the most commonly produced type of

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story in an English program (Christie and Derewianka, 2008, 31-32). Thirdly, because of its social purpose –that a narrative is to entertain and amuse the readers- (Anderson and Anderson, 1997: 3; Gerot and Wignell, 1997: 204), high school students are particularly fond of this. The final reason is because the narrative text has been taught in the secondary high school since the implementation of KTSP (*Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan*, or School-based Curriculum) in 2006 (Susanti, et al., 2011: 1), therefore, it is a very interesting topic for investiagtion.

1.2. Objectives

Based on the rationale above, by analyzing the Theme system in students' narrative texts, this study aims to:

1. explore the application of the Theme system in students' narrative texts in terms of types of Theme, choices of topical Theme and thematic progressions.

2. find out the implication of the Theme system on the flow of texts.

1.3. Significances

Theoretically, this study is expected to provide a reference to understand the thematic analysis of students' narrative texts, and it will also provide input for other researchers to conduct research in the same field with a different focus.

In practice, this study is expected to provide insight into teaching the narrative genre, especially in applying choices of Theme types, choices of topical Theme and thematic progressions in the development of paragraphs. The results of this study will also demonstrate the consistency of students' writing in terms of choice of topical Theme and the thematic progression.

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Professionally, this study will contribute to the teaching and learning practices involved in writing a narrative text. It is expected that this study will be beneficial for English teachers to evaluate their strategies in teaching narrative texts. Therefore, it might offer a new insight into teaching narrative texts in secondary school.

1.4.   Operational Definition

1. Systemic functional grammar is one of the linguistics approaches that considers language as a social semiotic system (Halliday, 1994).

2. Theme is the element which serves as the starting point for the message: it is what the clause is going to be about (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004).

3. Rheme is the part of the clause in which the theme is developed (Eggins, 2004).

4. Topical Theme is the first element in the clause that expresses some kind of 'representational' meaning (Butt et al., 2006; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004).

5. Interpersonal Theme is identified when a constituent to which it is assigned a Mood label and occurs at the beginning of a clause (Eggins, 2004).

6. Textual Themes almost always constitute the first part of the Theme (Martin, Matthiessen and Painter, 1997).

7. Thematic progression is the way in which the Theme of a clause may pick up, or repeat, a meaning from a preceding Theme or Rheme (Paltridge, 2000).

8. Narrative is a text that tells a story and, in doing so, entertains the audience (Anderson and Anderson, 2003).

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1.5.   Organization of the Paper

This paper consists of five chapters. The first chapter presents the rationale of the study i.e. the reasons motivating the researcher to conduct the study. This chapter also discusses the objectives of the study, significances, operational definitions and the organization of the paper. The second chapter presents the theoretical foundation of the study. It discusses theories relating to the study. The third chapter explores the methodology used in the study: research questions, the design, data collection and data analysis. The fourth chapter presents the findings of the study and its discussion. The fifth chapter provides conclusions and recommendations. The conclusions section concludes the study and provides the answers for research questions. The recommendations section provides some recommendations for the readers of the paper and for English teachers in secondary education.