

Thematic Structure and Thematic Progression in Reading Texts in Vietnamese High School English Textbooks

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Abstract

Thematic choices and thematic development are crucial for constructing a meaningful and coherent text, facilitating readers' comprehension. Although extensive studies on textbook analysis have explored either thematic structure or thematic progression patterns, these two aspects seem to have been collectively under-investigated. This study attempts to investigate the differences in thematic organizations that characterize 20 reading texts in English 10 and English 12 textbooks for high school students in Vietnam, to investigate how thematic features in different textbook levels aligns with learners' proficiency levels. Two analytical models, including Halliday's (1994) theme categorization and McCabe's (1999) thematic progression patterns, were adopted. The findings reveal a predominant use of simple, mainly unmarked topical themes in both books, with an increased presence of multiple and clausal themes in English 12. The results also indicate a dominant use of constant, simple linear, and miscellaneous progression patterns, while more complex structures such as derived hyper-themes and split rhemes are rare, and split themes are entirely absent. Hence, these research results suggest a strategic approach to textbook design aimed at enhancing linguistic proficiency and reading comprehension through increased thematic complexity across different language levels, which can offer valuable pedagogical implications and inform future research.

Keywords: theme, thematic structure, thematic progression, English textbooks, reading texts

1. Introduction

Improving the quality of teaching and studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Vietnamese schools has been achieved through many methods and one of the most significant ones is renovating textbook design. Recognising the significance of producing new English textbooks for the national 2020 Project, which aims to enhance the communicative proficiency of Vietnamese EFL graduates, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has partnered with MacMillan Education and Pearson Education to develop a ten-year English textbook series. This textbook series ranges from Grade 3 to 12 across three levels: primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary, with each level aiming to have students achieve Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels A1, A2, and B1, respectively (Hoang, 2015). This series focuses on developing four macro-skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), and incorporating linguistic elements (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar) and intercultural aspects. Each textbook study unit consists of eight 45-minute lessons: Getting Started, Language (Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Grammar), Reading, Speaking, Listening, Writing, Communication & Culture, Looking Back & Project.

Reading is the initial skill taught in a unit to enhance students' reading ability and introduce them to language and concepts related to the topic. This knowledge may be subsequently applied in Speaking or Writing classes. The objective of reading skills differs in each level of the textbook series. At the lower secondary level, students are expected to understand sentences and structures commonly used for basic communication needs (such as information about family, oneself, shopping, asking for directions, and jobs). Meanwhile, the goal of reading skills in textbooks for upper secondary level students is to enable them to comprehend the key ideas of a paragraph or speech on familiar subjects related to jobs, school, and entertainment. Generally, teachers' attempts to improve EFL learners' reading comprehension have focused on familiarizing students with several reading skills to answer questions quickly and correctly after reading a text, with less attention given to imparting language knowledge and analysing language complexity of the text. This underutilization of reading texts can limit students' opportunities to develop vocabulary and writing skills because reading materials can provide EFL students with valuable input for ideas, organization, language structures, and vocabulary, which are essential for improving their writing proficiency and lexical knowledge.

Research on the appropriateness of language use in reading texts in English textbooks has still received less attention. This scarcity of research has highlighted the importance of future studies. To and Mahboob (2018) explained that linguistic complexity plays a vital role in language teaching, making this research area valuable for offering recommendations for EFL textbook designers, curriculum developers, and teachers. Hence, this article presented part of our research project on the linguistic features of reading texts in the ten-year English textbook series of MOET. Specifically, using systemic functional linguistics (SFL) as the primary theoretical framework, we

analysed different types of thematic structure (TS) based on Halliday's (1994) theme (T) classifications and thematic progression (TP) patterns following McCabe's (1999) model in the reading texts in English 10 and English 12, two textbooks at the upper secondary level of the English textbook series in Vietnam. To achieve this aim, the current research attempted to address the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1. What thematic structures characterize reading texts in English 10 and English 12?

RQ2. What patterns of thematic progression characterize reading texts in English 10 and English 12?

The analysis of how TS and TP differ between lower- and higher-level textbooks will shed light on how linguistic complexity is scaffolded for Vietnamese EFL learners at Grade 10 and Grade 12. Put simply, this study helps to identify whether thematic features in textbooks are appropriately graded to support learners' gradual development in reading comprehension and language skills. Effective TS structures and TP patterns in reading texts have been proven to bring positive EFL reading learning outcomes in terms of enhancing students' global and detailed understanding (Chen et al., 2011). Hence, how TS and TP are structured in reading texts is worth investigating. Particularly, the current research results serve as a valuable reference for teachers to tailor their instructions to suit learners' proficiency levels by focusing on specific thematic features. By comparing TS and TP across proficiency levels, we can also provide feedback to textbook developers to ensure reading materials gradually increase in complexity to align with learners' linguistic and cognitive development. Moreover, EFL teachers will help students improve their writing by promoting thematic continuity to enhance the text's clarity and flow, as suggested by Humaizi and Yusuf (2024). Understanding thematic patterns enables students to create well-structured texts and develop writing skills because the genres of reading texts align with writing tasks in English textbooks. Hence, this knowledge can provide ideas, organization, vocabulary, and grammar to facilitate students' writing. This argument is well supported by Yan's (2015) study, which found that successful writings use various T types, and thematic choices and TP patterns can enhance cohesion, coherence, and logical structures in writing.

2. Literature Review

The Theme (T) refers to the "point of departure of the message; it is that which locates and orients the clause within its context" (Halliday, 1994, p. 37; Halliday & Matthiessen 2014, p. 89). The rheme (R), therefore, is the remainder of the clause or message, in other words, the parts of a sentence which are not Ts (Eggin, 2004; Fries, 1995; Halliday, 1994).

2.1 Thematic structure (TS) in Textbooks

Halliday's (1994) TS system presents a notable advantage when examining the T-R structure of a text by considering word order's role in conveying textual meaning through the arrangement of constituents (Eggin, 2004). This model has also been preferred by most recent studies (Thompson, 2013), which would enable cross-study comparisons. Particularly, it has been used for textbook analysis in extensive research (e.g., Arab Zouzani & Pahlevan-Nezkad, 2015; Jalilifar & Abbasi Montazeri, 2017; Mujahidi, 2017; To, 2018; Rosi & Ningrum, 2019; Wengrum, 2020; and Mahfud et al., 2024). A summary of their publications in terms of the type of textbook, country, and major findings, is presented in Table 1 as below.

Table 1. Summary of publications on TS in textbooks

Author(s) & Year	Textbook-type	Country	Major findings (related to TS)
Arab and Pahlevan-Nezkad (2015)	Reading texts of 4 high school English textbooks across 4 grades	Iran	There is not a specific pattern in organizing the texts. The frequency of marked Ts, which can contribute to a text's difficulty level, did not increase from lower to higher levels. Marked Ts are even more frequent in the lowest grade textbook.
Jalilifar and Abbasi Montazeri (2017)	Introductory sections of 60 academic textbooks	Iran	Textual Ts surpassed interpersonal Ts in all groups. Over half of the topical Ts were unmarked. Simple Ts were used more frequently than multiple Ts. The majority of multiple Ts were unmarked, lacking overt textual or interpersonal elements.
Mujahidi (2017)	Senior high school English textbook at x grade	Indonesia	There are three types of T-R structures used: topical T, interpersonal T, and textual T. Topical T was the most often utilised among them.
To (2018)	Reading texts in a series of four English reading textbooks used in higher education.	Vietnam	Simple T, consisting of topical/unmarked and marked T, was the most frequently used across levels. Multiple T was the second most used, while clausal Ts were the least used. The frequency of multiple and clausal Ts grew as the textbook levels rose, but the occurrence of simple T decreased. The frequency of experiential and textual T in multiple Ts was significantly higher than interpersonal T in all four books.
Rosi and Ningrum (2019)	Textbook instructions of an English textbook in state schools	Indonesia	Unmarked topical T is the most frequently used, followed by textual T and marked topical T, and interpersonal T is the least commonly used.
Wengrum (2020)	Reading texts from two different English textbook	Indonesia	Texts from both textbooks were shown to use topical and textual T.

	publishers for first-grade Junior High School students			
Mahfud et al. (2024)	Dialogues in a junior high school English textbook	Indonesia	Data included three T types: topical, interpersonal, and textual Ts. Topical T, interpersonal T, and textual T accounted for 55%, 34%, and 10%, respectively. It was very rare for one clause to have only one T.	

As shown in Table 1, all studies analysed textbooks from English as a foreign language (EFL) countries. From the table, it can be seen that topical Ts were the most frequently used across different textbooks (e.g., Mujahid, 2017; Mahfud et al., 2024). Some studies identified the occurrence of marked and unmarked Ts, finding that a majority of topical Ts are unmarked (Jalilifar & Montazeri, 2017; To, 2018). Textual Ts often appear more frequently than interpersonal Ts (e.g., Jalilifar & Montazeri, 2017), and their presence was prominent in Indonesian textbooks (e.g., Rosi & Ningrum, 2019; Wensuum, 2020). Interpersonal Ts were the least commonly used (e.g., Rosi & Ningrum, 2019), or even absent (Wengrum, 2020). Regarding studies examining other T types beyond textual/interpersonal/topical Ts, simple Ts were used more frequently than multiple Ts (Jalilifar & Abbasi Montazeri, 2017; To, 2018). While most studies explored typical TS characterizing textbooks analysed, Arab & Pakzadian’s (2015) study revealed no systematic pattern in organizing Ts across four high school English textbooks. It can be concluded that despite using the same Halliday’s (1994) TS model, research findings vary according to the context and textbook type, hence they are limited to a single subject matter only.

2.2 Thematic Progression (TP) in Textbooks

With TS, language users can closely follow the text progression in which the elements or meanings from the R in one clause are placed or reiterated in the T of the next clause. This process is what Butt (2012) described as generating TP patterns. Simply put, TP represents how the T of a clause can pick up or repeat a meaning from a preceding T or R and expand upon it (Thompson, 2013). TP plays a crucial role in enhancing the information flow and clarity of the text as “the organization of information in texts is determined by the progression in the sequence of utterance Ts and their Rs.” (Daneš, 1969, p. 132). Hence, smooth TP enhances text coherence and facilitates faster processing (Hawes & Thomas, 2012) by linking broader ideas and connecting information throughout a text (Donohue, 2012; Fitriati & Gayatri, 2021). In other words, when effective TP patterns occur, written texts may flow well and increase in readability. Several models have proposed different TP patterns, and one of the most popular TP classifications is devised by Daneš (1974) with three basic TP patterns: linear progression, constant progression, and derived hyper-T. However, McCabe (1999) found that a significant number of clauses do not align with the patterns suggested by Danes. Thus, McCabe’s (1999) TP model, an updated version of Daneš’s (1974), was preferred in this study as it was considered more plausible, attestable, practical, dependable, up-to-date, and complete compared to previous categorizations used for analysing T and TP patterns in texts (Martínez, 2003). In addition to Daneš’s (1994) three TP patterns, McCabe’s (1999) model includes two more: split R progression and split T progression.

An increasing number of studies have utilized TP analysis on textbooks, as demonstrated by Ebrahimi and Khedri (2012), Jalilifar and Abbasi Montazeri (2017), Mujahidi (2017), and Kasmita and Sujarwati (2022), and Mahfud et al. (2024), each employing distinct TP models. A summary of their publications in terms of the type of textbook, country, TP frameworks, and major findings, is presented in Table 2 as below.

Table 2. Summary of publications on TP in textbooks

Author(s) & Year	Textbook-type	Country	TP models	Major findings (related to TP)
Ebrahimi and Khedri (2012)	Three English textbooks	Iran	McCabe’s (1999) 5 TP models: linear, constant, derived hyper-T, split R and split T	There are significant differences in linear and miscellaneous patterns among three textbooks. Constant patterns were prevalent across all textbooks, surpassing linear patterns. The split R pattern was entirely neglected while the miscellaneous one, which is outside McCabe’s (1999) TP pattern, was used in all textbooks.
Jalilifar and Abbasi Montazeri (2017)	Introductory sections of 60 academic textbooks	Iran	McCabe’s (1999) 5 TP models: linear, constant, derived hyper-T, split R, and split T	Linear progression surpassed constant progression. Split T chains were not found in the samples, while split R chains were quite rare. Peripheral patterns were widely utilized.
Mujahidi (2017)	Senior high school English textbook at x grade	Indonesia	Emilia’s (2014) 3 TP models: zig-zag, reiteration, and multiple T	The textbook author employed zig-zag patterns instead of reiteration and multiple R patterns.
Kasmita and Sujarwati (2022)	Book of Physics for grade VII of Junior High School written in English and Indonesian	Indonesia	Daneš’s (1974) 3 TP models: linear, constant, and derived hyper-T	TP patterns of the source text and target text are linear and constant, suggesting a similarity in the position of T and R in source text and target one.
Mahfud et al. (2024)	Dialogues in a junior high school English textbook	Indonesia	Eggin’s (2004) 3 TP models: zig-zag, reiteration and multiple R	Multiple R and zigzag thematic progressions were found in the data.

As illustrated in Table 2, studies examined TP in textbooks from Iran and Indonesia, showing an increased researchers' interest in that topic in non-native English learning materials. Different TP models were employed, with some overlaps in certain TP patterns (e.g., Daneš, 1974; Eggins, 2004; Emilia, 2014; McCabe, 1999). Iranian textbooks focus more on linear and constant progressions, while split R patterns were rare, while split T was absent (e.g., Ebrahimi & Khedri, 2012; Jalilifar & Montazeri, 2017). Peripheral patterns appeared in academic textbooks, showing flexibility in information structuring (e.g., Jalilifar & Abbasi Montazeri, 2017). Regarding Indonesian Textbooks, there is a frequent presence of zig-zag and multiple R patterns, suggesting a focus on developing complex ideas in senior high school textbooks (e.g., Mahfud et al., 2024; Mujahid, 2017). Hence, it can be inferred that textbooks from different regions emphasize different TP strategies, which may be influenced by curriculum goals and pedagogical approaches. For these reasons, research results in one research context cannot be transferable to another despite using the same TP framework.

2.3 Research Gap and Study Justification

Even though over the last few decades, many studies on textbook analysis have been devoted to exploring either TS (Arab Zouzani & Pahlevan-Nezkad, 2015; To, 2018; Wengrum, 2020) or TP patterns (Ebrahimi & Khedri, 2012; Kasmita & Sujarwati, 2022), few studies have analyzed both these two aspects of thematicity in textbooks. A search of the literature reveals a scarcity of research on the textbook analysis of TS and TP, including Jalilifar and Abbasi Montazeri (2017) from Iran, Mujahidi (2017) and Mahfud et al. (2024) from Indonesia. This scarcity of studies on that topic implies that to support the findings of different TS and TP patterns, further studies need to be conducted on various textbook types in different countries. To contribute to the existing body of research in the area of thematization, the present study aimed to analyse TS and TP in reading texts in Vietnamese High School English Textbooks, with a focus on English10 and English12 to identify any differences in thematic features in these two books. In light of these findings, we can discover whether linguistic complexity from two levels of English textbooks is suitable for supporting EFL learners' gradual development in reading comprehension.

3. Method

3.1 Data Collection

This study's corpus comprised 20 reading texts sourced from English Textbooks published by Vietnamese MOET. It included 10 texts from English 10 and the other 10 from English 12, with lengths ranging from 165-282 words for the former and 207-377 words for the latter. Each textbook comprises two volumes: English 10 is divided into English 10 Volume 1 and English 10 Volume 2, and English 12 also has English 12 Volume 1 and English 12 Volume 2. English 10 is the initial book in a series of three English language textbooks designed for Vietnamese high school students, while English 12 is the last book. Given that the upper level of the English textbook series includes three books, English 11 was not chosen for document analysis in this study because the researchers expected to see noticeable differences in linguistic complexity and reading skills required between the lowest and highest-level textbooks at the upper secondary level of the textbook series. English 10 is used for students who have just finished learning English textbooks at lower secondary where students are supposed to understand sentences and structures commonly used in basic communication needs to reach A2 level of CEFR. Meanwhile, English 12 is used for those who have learned EFL for 10 years according to the general education curriculum, where students are hoped to comprehend the key ideas of a paragraph or speech on familiar subjects to reach B1 CEFR level. The period of learning, the objectives of reading skills and the expectation of English proficiency level in English 10 and English 12 differ significantly, making the comparative analysis of linguistic complexity worth investigating.

Besides the differences in wordcount of reading texts, the objectives for reading skills in each textbook under study are completely distinct. In English 10, students should be able to read and understand important information in newspapers and advertisements, and understand simple messages and media information about popular topics. In English 12, students need to comprehend detailed content in news and articles about current topics, understand the full meaning of the text, and skim through short texts to find specific information. The topics of reading texts in these textbooks are also different. Texts in English 10 cover five topics like household chores and duties, acupuncture, TV shows, volunteer work, inventions based on nature in Volume 1, and the other five topics including gender equality in employment, superstition in Viet Nam, new ways to learn English, threats to the natural environment, benefits and principles of ecotourism in Volume 2. On the other hand, English 12 includes texts about people's life stories, urbanization and its causes, soot pollution, forms of mass media and cultural identity in modern society in Volume 1. And the English 12 Volume 2 comprises topics on protecting endangered species, artificial intelligence applications, job advertisements, career advice on websites for secondary school leavers, and lifelong learning. Comparing two sets of reading texts is expected to reveal insightful findings on the differences in TS and TP in the two textbooks.

3.2 Data Analysis

This study utilised mixed methods with various data collection instruments to achieve more thorough results, as opposed to solely relying on a quantitative or qualitative method (Creswell & Clark, 2018). The percentage of various TS and TP patterns was determined by a quantitative approach. A detailed textual analysis was then carried out to identify the variations in the use of Ts between the two textbooks.

3.2.1 Analytical Frameworks

The study adopted Halliday's (1994) T classification and McCabe's (1999) TP pattern to analyse the TS and TP patterns, respectively, in

reading texts in English 10 and 12 textbooks.

In the first analytical framework, Halliday (1994) classifies T as topical (ideational/experiential), textual, and interpersonal, in line with Eggins's (2004) and Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) categorization. Topical T is an element that contributes to the experience meaning of the phrase, representing "either a participant, circumstance, or process" (Halliday, 1994, p.53). According to Halliday (1994), there are two types of topical T: marked and unmarked T, defined by the mood of the phrase, whether declarative, interrogative, or imperative. Unmarked T occurs when T is associated with a subject in declarative clauses, while marked T occurs when a non-subject element, such as an adverbial group or prepositional phrase, is chosen as the T. The topical T may come before the textual T and interpersonal T. A textual T is a blend of continuative, structural, and conjunctive features (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). A continuative T is a discourse signaler that indicates the start of a new move in the conversation. A structural T is an obligatory thematic element, such as conjunctions or relative pronouns. An interpersonal T contains vocative, modal, and mood-marking elements (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). A vocative is a term, usually a personal name, used for addressing someone directly. A modal is a type of adjunct that conveys meanings related to probability, opinion, admission, persuasion, desirability, evaluation, or prediction. A mood marking is a finite verbal operator, a WH-interrogative, or imperative.

Halliday (1994) also distinguished between a simple T and multiple Ts. The former refers to circumstances with a single thematic element - a topical T in the sentence, which can be categorised as unmarked topical T or marked topical T. However, the latter happens when several additional parts fulfil a textual or interpersonal function and come before the topical T. Likewise, Butt (2012) and Thompson (2013) identified three separate subcategories of T within a clause: textual T, interpersonal T, and topical T, and various combinations of these subcategories form a sequence of multiple Ts. However, these above cases are all about Ts in a single clause.

Halliday (1994) pointed out another T type called clausal T to refer to T in clause complexes, including a dependent clause followed by an independent clause. In this case, the dependent clause is regarded as an adverbial clause and serves as the T of that clause complex. Clausal T can be identified by analysing either the T and R in each clause separately or the T and R of a complex clause.

Regarding the second analytical framework, McCabe (1999) divides TP patterns into five types: Simple linear, constant, derived hyper-T, split R and split T, in which the first three types were previously devised by Daneš (1974). Among these, the first type is the most elementary, where the R of each sentence becomes the T of the subsequent clause, similar to a zig-zag pattern in Eggins's (2004) classification. Constant progression is created by repeating the same T in a series of utterances (can be named a reiteration pattern, according to Eggins, 2004). The third type is TP with derived T where Ts of each sentence are individually different, but are all derived from the same hyper-T of a paragraph or text. Split R TP occurs when a R includes several different pieces of information, and each piece of information may be taken up as a T in the subsequent clauses, thus being Eggins (2004) referred to as a multiple R pattern. Similarly, McCabe (1999) identified a split T pattern where a T is expanded by a series of subordinate Ts, that is a T may contain many ideas, which are then developed in separate subsequent clauses.

3.2.2 Unit of Analysis

In this study, T-unit, an independent clause with other dependent clauses (Fries, 1995; McCabe, 1999), was adopted as the unit of analysis, following extensive research on thematic analysis (e.g., Jalilifar & Abbasi Montazeri, 2017; Kasmita & Sujarwati, 2022; Mujahidi, 2017; and Wengrum, 2020). The selection of the T-unit was driven by its suitability as an optimal unit for identifying TP patterns. Identifying T-units was generally a straightforward task. When an independent clause comes before a dependent one, the dependent is interpreted as the R and the independent as the T. In the meantime, the T of the independent clause functions as the T for the entire clause complex when it appears first. A sentence with several independent clauses will have several T-units, each with T and R.

3.2.3 Data Analysis Procedure

The study conducted TS and TP analysis by following these steps. Initially, T-units were identified in each reading text. The T and R of each T-unit were then categorised into three categories of Ts (simple T, multiple Ts and clausal T) and sub-groups of simple T (marked T and unmarked T) and multiple Ts (topical T, interpersonal T and textual T). The number of each T and sub-T was manually tallied to determine the frequency of T in the dataset by calculating the proportion of each T out of the total number of all T. Finally, particular instances from the reading texts were retrieved to qualitatively analyse the use of TS in two textbooks. The TP analysis was the same as the TS process, which involved finding and categorising TP patterns (simple linear, constant, derived hyper-T, split R and split T) and miscellaneous progressions. Subsequently, the total counts of all TP occurrences for each pattern were computed and transformed into percentages for display in tables. Finally, specific excerpts from reading materials were qualitatively analysed to gain insight into the use of TP in the two textbooks. Data analysis was conducted by each researcher independently coding data (TS and TP). To ensure the research findings' reliability, the coded data underwent inter-coding and cross-checking processes between two researchers, where they compared the results of data coding and discussed resolving any inconsistencies that occurred. To minimize researcher bias, an expert in applied linguistics verified the accuracy of the identified TS and TP categories and patterns. When discrepancies arose between the two researchers and the third analyst, discussions were held before finalizing the results. This inter-rater process was implemented carefully, as errors in data interpretation are a common issue in textual analysis (Jalilifar, 2010).

The overview of data in terms of the total number of words and T-units in reading texts in two English textbooks, the average number of words per reading text, T-units per reading text and words per T-unit, is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Overview of data

Textbook	Total no. of words	Total no. of T-units	Average no. of words per reading text	Average no. of T-units per reading text	Average no. of words per T-unit
English 10	2369	154	236.9	15.4	15.38
English 12	3129	180	312.9	18	17.38

It is obvious that reading texts in English 12 has a higher number of words, T-units, words per reading text, T-units per reading text, and words per T-unit, compared to English 10. More words may indicate a higher lexical density and more T-units are associated with more independent clauses in the texts. Longer texts and more T-units per reading text may imply more syntactic complexity, and longer T-units may indicate more complex sentence structures. It can be inferred that reading texts in English 12 exhibits greater linguistic complexity in terms of word count, sentence structures, and syntactic density compared to English 10.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 The Use of TS in Reading Texts in Two Textbooks (RQ1)

TS in reading texts was compared across two books: English 10 and English 12. The distribution of different T types according to Halliday’s (1994) categories within each book is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of T types in reading texts in English 10 and English 12

Textbook	Frequency and Percentage	Simple T (Topical T)		Multiple Ts			Clausal T
		Marked T	Unmarked T	Textual T	Interpersonal T	Topical T	
English 10	Frequency	13	79	11	0	11	28
	Percentage	9.92	60.30	8.39	0	8.39	21.37
English 12	Frequency	20	70	24	0	24	36
	Percentage	13.33	46.66	16	0	16	24

Table 4 shows that reading texts in both textbooks employed three types of T: simple T, multiple Ts and clausal T, and among three sub-types of multiple Ts, interpersonal T was completely unused. When comparing across the two books, the instances of simple T and clausal T showed almost no significant difference between English 10 and English 12, with simple T being most commonly used, followed by clausal T in these textbooks. It is not surprising because simple Ts or topical Ts are obligatory to constitute the departure of a message and contribute to the development of a text (Halliday, 1994). The preference towards using simple T is consistent with research findings indicated by Jalilifar and Abbasi Montazeri (2017) and To (2018); nevertheless, these authors discovered that multiple T was the second most used. Despite this similarity between the two books, a considerably higher frequency of multiple Ts was recorded in English 12. This is in line with To’s (2018) results, which reveal the higher the level of textbooks was, the more multiple Ts were used. Likewise, in Jalilifar and Abbasi Montazeris’s (2017) study, multiple Ts were also utilised most in the most detailed and longest part of the introductory sections of textbooks, instead of the other parts like foreword and preface.

Further examination of each T type has revealed interesting similarities and differences in the examined reading texts in English 10 and English 12 . Regarding simple T, English 10 used a significantly higher frequency and percentage of simple Ts compared to English 12. This might suggest that English 10 was more focused on simple Ts established by one nominal group, or one adverbial group, or one prepositional phrase, which are deemed appropriate for the level and objectives of this book. However, both books recorded the prevalence of unmarked topical Ts, with a considerably higher percentage of unmarked Ts compared to marked Ts. More specifically, in English 10, 79 cases (60.30%) of all Ts are unmarked topical Ts as opposed to 13 cases (9.92%) being marked. Showing a similar trend, in English 12, there were 20 marked Ts (13.33%) compared to 70 unmarked ones (46.66%). This indicates that in most of the samples, there was a merging of clause T and the grammatical subject, and this T compliance is Halliday (1994) regarded as the typical message structure of English declarative clauses (Halliday, 1994). Thanks to this feature, the predominant use of simple, unmarked topical Ts could help students easily identify the main ideas in reading texts. This straightforward structure, hence, can support students’ reading comprehension and reduce their cognitive load, especially for those at a lower level using English 10. This predominance of unmarked Ts is in line with Ebrahimi’s (2017) research findings on marked and unmarked T types in 15 general English texts for university students in Iran. Ebrahimi (2017) attributed this finding to textbooks writers’ preference for using simple structures to facilitate readers’ better comprehension. In another study on textual meanings in English textbook instructions for Tenth Graders in Indonesia, unmarked topical Ts were also found to be the most dominant (Rosi & Ningrum, 2019), making the instructions clear and concise to support the learning objectives. The prevalence of topical marked Ts has also been documented in Mahfud et al.’s (2024) research on the TS analysis of dialogues in a junior high school English textbook in Indonesia. As the primary goal of this textbook was to impart knowledge and comprehension of various subjects, incorporating more topical Ts could strengthen its focus on specific topics, helping students to internalize and understand key concepts better (Mahfud et al., 2024).

Some examples of simple Ts used in English 10 and English 12 are italicized in the following extracts (1)-(7):

- (1) “*The mother* is usually the homemaker, who has to do most of the household chores.” (Hoang et al., 2013a, p.9)

- (2) “*They* learn good skills, are more responsible, and tend to be overall good people.” (Hoang et al., 2013a, p.9)
- (3) “*These* are considered ‘push’ factors.” (Hoang et al., 2013c, p.23)
- (4) “*Controlling black carbon* can help to slow down global warming.” (Hoang et al., 2013c, p.34)
- (5) “*Installation of filters to remove black carbon from diesel vehicles* can also reduce soot.” (Hoang et al., 2013c, p.35)
- (6) “*Before the 1950s*, urbanization mainly occurred in more economically developed countries.” (Hoang et al., 2013c, p.23)
- (7) “*By observing animals and plants*, they design new products to serve humans.” (Hoang et al., 2013a, p.51)

(8) “*According to psychologists*, most people do not realize the enormous benefits that come to a family when husbands and children share the housework.” (Hoang et al., 2013a, p.9)

In (1)-(4), simple Ts are unmarked, while (5)-(7) are examples of marked simple Ts. The subject/T is a participant in the form of a nominal group “The mother” in (1), or a personal pronoun “They” in (2), or a demonstrative “These” in (3). Meanwhile, the T is a process of doing an action “Controlling black carbon” in (4), and a circumstance “Installation of filters to remove black carbon from diesel vehicles” in (5). Regarding instances on marked Ts, “Before the 1950s” in (6) is to indicate a location (when?), “By observing animals and plants” in (7) is to describe a manner (With what/ By what means?), and “According to psychologists” in (8) is to express an angle (from what point of view?). These marked Ts are circumstantial adjuncts in the form of adverbial groups or prepositional phrases. In each sentence from (6)-(8), there is a combination of a marked T and an unmarked T (e.g. “Before the 1950s” + “urbanization”), which refers to the term extended T as named by Halliday (1994).

Nevertheless, the case seems to be opposite within the multiple Ts category, in which English 12 had significantly higher occurrences and proportions of both textual T and topical T, with each having 24 instances and accounting for 16%, compared to English 10 (11 instances, 8.39%). This means that English 12 used more Ts that include several additional parts to provide textual information preceding a topical T, and this feature helps to create relevance to context (Halliday, 1994). The increased presence of multiple Ts in reading texts in English 12 allows students at this level to process more embedded information within sentences, thus fostering their reading skills.

It is also noticeable that multiple Ts in both books were created by the combination of textual T and topical T in the complete absence of interpersonal T. Textual Ts indicate the way clauses link inherently, while interpersonal ones demonstrate the writer’s point of view on the value of what the clause of saying (Halliday, 2014). Instead of containing interpersonal Ts involving questions, reading texts in two textbooks have declarative sentences, suggesting that book authors do not focus on establish social interactions in the texts. No instances of impersonal Ts in reading texts in both English textbooks are consistent with research findings in academic genres indicated by Jalilifar and Abbasi Montazeri (2017), Martínez (2003) and McCabe (1999) to reveal the writing style of these books is impersonal and objective. However, this finding is in contrast with Mahfud et al.’s (2024) study, where interpersonal Ts appeared as the second most frequent Ts, which can be attributed to the target of textbook analysis in that study was dialogues involving a back-and-forth exchange between two or more speakers.

The following extracts (9)-(13) are to illustrate the use of multiple Ts in English 10 and Tieng 12, with textual T being italicized and topical T being underlined.

- (9) “*As a result*, breathing in the tiny particles can cause asthma attacks, heart disease, bronchitis and many other respiratory illnesses.” (Hoang et al., 2013c, p.34)
- (10) “*However*, people often do not confine themselves to one culture.” (Hoang et al., 2013c, p.62)
- (11) “*For example*, books have helped people to educate themselves while newspapers have recorded daily events.” (Hoang et al., 2013c, p.50)
- (12) “*and he* doesn’t want to put all of the housework on me.” (Hoang et al., 2013a, p.9)
- (13) “*but they* also lay food on the altar.” (Hoang et al., 2013b, p.19)

In these extracts, textual Ts are realised by conjunctive adjuncts such as “As a result” (causal conjunctive adjunct) in (9), “However” (adversative conjunctive adjunct) in (10) and “For example” (appositive conjunctive adjunct) in (11) or conjunctions like “and” in (12) and “but” in (13). While conjunctions and conjunctive adjuncts both create semantic connections between meanings, they differ in that the former can combine two components into a unified structural unit (Halliday, 1994). The combination of a textual T and a topical T in each extract helps to develop links to other clauses, contributing to the coherence of the text.

In the same trend with multiple Ts, there was also an increase in clausal T from English 10 to English 12 both in terms of frequency and percentage (28 vs. 36 instances and 21.37% vs. 24%). Clausal Ts are likely to involve more complex sentence structures, which were more frequent in English 12, indicating a progression towards more sophisticated Ts and higher language complexity once the book level is higher. This is consistent with the expectation that students’ linguistic capabilities and reading skills would be more developed in a higher grade. This may enhance students’ reading comprehension but could also pose difficulties for weaker ones to process information at sentence and text levels.

Ts in complex clauses in English 10 and English 12 were recognized by the combination of a hypotactic clause and a T, or a paratactic clause and a T, or a marked T and a T. Below are extracts in these English textbooks containing clausal Ts with Ts being underlined and

hypotactic clauses, paratactic clauses and marked Ts being italicized.

(14) “*Although there are unanswered questions, acupuncture appears to work.*” (Hoang et al., 2013a, p.19)

(15) “*If students are about to start a job, career advisers have useful information that may have them make the transition into the working world smoother.*” (Hoang et al., 2013d, p.50)

(16) “*It is suggested that cultural identity develops in three stages.*” (Hoang et al., 2013c, p.62)

(17) “*Many people believe that the first person who visits their home on the first day of the New year will affect their life.*” (Hoang et al., 2013b, p.19)

(18) “*In developing countries, reducing soot emissions can be achieved by replacing traditional stoves with clean, alternative fuel cookers and heaters.*” (Hoang et al., 2013c, p.34)

In (14) and (15), the first clause is dependent on the second clause. For example, in (14), the independent clause “acupuncture appears to work” could stand alone while the dependent clause “Although there are unanswered questions” could not. Similarly, if the second clause “career advisers have useful information that may have them make the transition into the working world smoother” was removed in (15), the first clause “If students are about to start a job” would not make sense on their own. Therefore, examples (14) and (15) demonstrate a relationship between two clauses in which one is dominant and the other dependent. According to Halliday (1994), when the dependent clause is in first position in the clause complex, it is considered hypotactic and constitutes a marked T. Hence, coupled with examples on marked Ts in (6)-(8) mentioned earlier, a marked T may be realized by a hypotactic clause acting as the T of a clause complex in (14)-(15), or a circumstantial adjunct “In developing countries” to indicate a location (place) in (18) in clause-initial position to expand on the unmarked T or the independent clause, creating extended Ts. In addition, extended Ts are also established by using projecting clauses, that is, including a personal viewpoint as the starting point of the clause. Personal viewpoint can be made explicit, e.g. in (17) “Many people believe that” or appear more objective, e.g. in (16) “It is suggested that” with no human participant taking on the thought process. According to Halliday (1994), the projecting clause conveys the ideational aspect of either verbal expression, mental projection, or factual projection, while the projected clause embodies the ideational realization of the projection. For example, in (16), the projecting clause “It is suggested that” expresses the ideational component of mental projection and this ideational element is realised in the projected clause “cultural identity develops in three stages”.

The above research findings on TS in reading texts from two English textbooks can offer educators suggestions to adapt textbooks, modify lesson plans, and develop teaching strategies to enhance students' reading comprehension skills. A reasonable approach for teachers would be to introduce more sentence structures to expose students to diverse TS and TP and improve their ability to process complex texts. To do that, teachers should recommend additional reading materials that suit students' levels and needs (e.g., writing samples, short stories) to enhance students' sentence parsing skills and reading fluency. Teachers can also explicitly teach discourse markers to help students understand text organization, foster their reading rate, and improve coherence and cohesion in writing. Some other teaching activities involve engaging students in sentence rewriting exercises to improve their syntactic awareness and getting them to practice summarising and paraphrasing to break down complex sentences into simpler ones. Given these suggestions, experimental research on the effects of applying TS theory on EFL students' reading skills remains underexplored, highlighting the need for more future studies in this area.

4.2 The Use of TP in Reading Texts in Two Textbooks (RQ2)

Examining different types of TP patterns in reading texts in English 10 English 12 textbooks is another target of investigation in this study. Results of the data analysed based on McCabe (1999) TP classification are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of TP in reading texts in English 10 and English 12

Textbook	Frequency and Percentage	Simple linear TP	Constant TP	Derived hyper-T TP	Split R TP	Split T TP	Total TP
English 10	Frequency	19	23	6	4	0	52
	Percentage	36.53	44.23	11.54	7.69	0	66.67
English 12	Frequency	22	23	9	5	0	59
	Percentage	35.48	37.10	14.52	8.06	0	60.21

As presented in Table 5, in reading texts in both English 10 and English 12, the most frequent type of TP patterns was the constant progression, followed by simple linear progression, similar to Ebrahimi and Khedri's (2012) findings while opposed to Jalilifar and Abbasi Montazeri's (2017) and Mujahidi's (2017) ones. This indicates a preference for structurally straightforward thematic development in the two English textbooks. The least employed was split R and split T progression was completely unused, which is consistent with Jalilifar and Abbasi Montazeri's (2017) research findings, suggesting that these more complex TP patterns were used the least frequently in both books. The percentages could indicate the relative emphasis placed on different types of TP in each book. For instance, English 10 had a notably higher percentage of simple linear and constant progression than English 12, suggesting a possibly more repetitive or simpler TP patterns. Conversely, English 12 used derived hyper-T and split R progressions more frequently than English 10, which may reflect a shift towards more complex reading texts as the level of English textbooks advances.

Looking at each TP pattern in details, it can be seen that simple linear progression was the second common type in reading texts both English textbooks, with 19 instances (36.53%) in English 10 and 22 instances (35.48%) in English 12. It suggests reading texts should have a clear and direct development of ideas, where each sentence builds upon the previous one, as illustrated in extracts (19). This can help students understand the continuity in texts and may simplify the process of tracking the flow of information, which is crucial to facilitating their reading skills. The tendency towards using simple linear TP can be attributed to the argumentative nature of the reading texts analyzed to inform and persuade the readers about topics under discussion.

Constant progression was the most common in reading texts in both books, with 23 instances (44.23%) in English 10 and 23 instances (37.10%) in English 12. By repeatedly focusing on the same T as in (20), students may find it easier to retain information and find information related to that T to support their reading comprehension. The repetition of the same T across sentences in the texts could also indicate the authors' style of writing that prioritizes depth over breadth in topic. While simple linear chains are considered a hallmark of argumentative texts and are thought to create dynamic texts, constant Ts are believed to lead to static texts and are typical of descriptive and narrative texts (Alonso & McCabe, 2003). This is comparable to the fact that both two books primarily comprise descriptive texts, followed by argumentative texts. Although it is generally hypothesized that overuse of constant TP often hinders text development while linear TP enhances cohesion, Chang's (2023) study on how TP patterns influence the readability of research article introductions for graduate students reveals that a text with high constant TP and low linear TP was rated highly readable due to fewer breaks and explicit linguistic cues. Hence, it can be inferred that the high volume of constant TP may increase the readability of reading texts in both highschool English textbooks.

Derived hyper-T progression is more common in English 12 (9 instances, 14.52%), revealing a progression towards more complex structures as students' levels advance. Since each T is different but related to a central hyper-T as presented in (21), it requires students to engage in higher-order thinking to understand how each part relates to the whole. This could be seen as a way to prepare students for more sophisticated texts and discourse where ideas are more abstractly connected.

The presence of split R progression is less frequent in English 12 (5 occurrences, 8.06%) and in English 10 (4 occurrences, 7.69%), in the form of a R with multiple pieces of information leading to subsequent clauses that each take up a piece of this information as their T in (22). This indicates a moderate use of complex sentence structures that provide multiple subsequent Ts. This TP pattern can be named as multiple T, aiming to provide comprehensive information related to the topic discussed in the text, one of the major TPs found in Mahfud et al.'s (2014) research findings.

Split T progressions are totally absent in reading texts in two English textbooks. The absence of split T patterns, and scarcity of derived-hyper T and split R ones suggests that high school students have limited opportunities to engage with highly complex structures in English reading texts. This may suit students' English proficiency level at that stage, however, it may not better prepare them for comprehending more sophisticated texts in higher education.

These following extracts in English 10 and English 12 are to illustrate the above five types of TP patterns with Ts being italicized and Rs being underlined.

(19) "People *volunteer for a number of different reasons.* One of the more obvious reasons why people volunteer *is because they find something they are passionate about and want to do something good for others.*" (Hoang et al., 2013a, p.41)

(20) "Some people *feel a strong urge to keep their cultural identity,* so they continue speaking their language, cooking their food, wearing their traditional clothing, and celebrating their festivals. *They also insist that their children and grandchildren maintain their cultural identity.*" (Hoang et al., 2013c, p.62)

(21) "Soil pollution *is a result of dumping plastic or other inorganic waste in the ground and the overuse of chemical fertilizers in agriculture.* The long-term effects of soil pollution *are contaminated vegetation and the decrease of soil fertility.*" (Hoang et al., 2013c, p.41)

(22) "Online courses *have instead enabled lifelong learning by providing learners, teachers, and course providers with much more flexibility in terms of learning time, place, pace, and style.* Learners, for instance, can now have the course content taught to them by a school located miles away from where they live or work. *In addition, young parents can select their group meeting time late in the evening when their children have gone to bed.*" (Hoang et al., 2013d, p.62)

However, not all Ts link to a previous T or R in close proximity to form progressions, and those have been regarded as peripheral or miscellaneous TP patterns (McCabe, 1999, p. 180). Opposed to Wang's (2007) claim that miscellaneous progression patterns distort the development of ideas, McCabe (1999) contends that these Ts play a crucial role in organizing discourse and they are only referred to as peripheral because they are outside the TP patterns. Table 6 below reveals the results of data analysis on miscellaneous patterns in reading texts from two English textbooks.

Table 6. Distribution of Miscellaneous TPs in reading texts in English 10 and English 12

	English 10		English 12	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Miscellaneous TPs	26	33.33	39	39.79

The table shows that miscellaneous TPs in reading texts occurred with a frequency of 26 times in English 10 and 39 times in English 12, constituting 33.33% and 39.79%, respectively, of the total TP patterns. This might indicate that more than a third of TPs outside

McCabe's (1999) classifications were used in both textbooks, consistent with research results found by Ebrahimi and Khedri (2012), and Jalilifar and Abbasi Montazeri (2017). The high incidence of this progression may stem from the nature and specific purpose of the genre of the reading texts, the variation in the length of texts and linguistic complexity. This result finding is different from Mahfud et al.'s (2024) study, which found no T development that comes out of the three T types (reiteration, zig zag and multiple R). This difference can be attributed to Mahfud et al.'s (2024) target of text analysis being dialogues, thus focusing on interaction and spontaneity, and using simpler TS and TP.

The following extracts are to illustrate miscellaneous TPs in two books.

(23) "You can gain experience in education, social work, health care, marketing, and web design. The opportunities are endless." (Hoang et al., 2013a, p.41)

(24) "Lifelong learning is facilitated by e-learning platforms. Education is now no longer offered only by bricks and mortar institutions." (Hoang et al., 2013d, p.62)

The findings above on all TP patterns can suggest that educators should make informed decisions about adapting reading texts, modifying lesson plans, and implementing teaching strategies to improve students' reading comprehension. A reasonable approach would be to incorporate texts with diverse TP patterns instead of primarily focusing on constant and linear TPs to help students be exposed to more dynamic text structures. Teachers should explicitly teach students how to identify and use different TP patterns in texts and use them effectively in their writing. To enhance critical reading skills, teachers should introduce other reading resources with more varied TP patterns (e.g., more advanced reading exercises and argumentative essays). Other teaching activities may include having students rewrite paragraphs to experiment with different TPs, providing incomplete texts, and asking students to continue them using different TPs.

5. Conclusion

With the data of 20 reading texts, the comparative analysis of TS and TP patterns in reading texts from English 10 and English 12 aimed to provide insightful findings into the complexity and diversity of thematic constructions in two English textbooks at the upper secondary level in the new textbook series published by Vietnamese MOET. Research findings offered information on how language is utilized in texts from these two textbooks to express meaning and organize knowledge to engage students in the reading process by paying attention to T-R patterns. This study suggested how the choice and distribution of TS and TP patterns in reading texts can significantly impact students' reading comprehension skills. Drawn on Halliday's (1994) classification of T types, the findings indicated a predominant use of simple T, especially unmarked topical T, in reading texts from both textbooks, underscoring its fundamental role in establishing the groundwork for message development within texts. The increased frequency of multiple Ts and clausal Ts in English 12 compared to English 10 reveals a deliberate progression towards complexity in thematic organization, presumably to match the advancing linguistic capabilities of higher-grade students. This progression aligns with the educational objective of gradually preparing students for more complex linguistic structures and reading skills. Moreover, the analysis of TP patterns, based on McCabe's (1999) classification, further elaborated on the thematic development within these textbooks. The predominant use of constant and simple linear progressions in reading texts in both textbooks suggested a focus on reinforcing and sequentially developing ideas, making students easier to follow the flow of arguments and aiding in better retention of information. More complex TPs like derived hyper-T and split R TPs were used less frequently, potentially due to their more complex nature not being suitable for learning objectives that aim to have students achieve B1 CEFR level at the end of Grade 12. Interestingly, the significant occurrence of miscellaneous TPs underscored the flexibility and diversity in thematic development beyond the conventional TP patterns. This suggests that the textbooks were designed to accommodate a wide range of thematic constructions, thereby fostering students' deeper understanding of textual coherence and cohesion.

By examining linguistic characteristics, research findings can provide valuable pedagogical insights for enhancing curriculum materials and teaching methods, ultimately improving students' learning outcomes. First, the findings emphasize the importance of gradually increasing the complexity of TS in textbooks as students' levels progress. Hence, this insight can serve as a guide for educators and curriculum designers to adapt teaching strategies to suit students' linguistic development, facilitating a deeper understanding of complex texts. Secondly, this study provides a framework for evaluating the thematic complexity of educational materials. Publishers and authors can benefit from these insights by designing textbooks that appropriately challenge students at different grade levels, ensuring a balanced linguistic complexity in terms of TS and TP. This can lead to the development of more effective educational resources that cater to the evolving needs of learners. Thirdly, this research suggests the use of Ts and TPs significantly affects the readability of English reading texts, which is in line with Chang's (2023) findings; however, Chang (2023) discovered additional linguistic and cognitive factors facilitating readers' comprehension, including a clear rhetorical structure, meta-discursive devices and comprehensible syntactic structures. This can be used as a reference for EFL material developers and teachers to select and adapt reading texts to enhance students' readability. Lastly, by highlighting the role of TS in text comprehension and coherence, the study underscores the need for explicit instruction on thematic analysis in language education. A possible approach for teachers could be explicitly teaching students different types of TS and TP patterns with their examples and then designing some exercises for students to identify TS and TP in some model essays or more advanced reading texts. Teachers can also integrate thematic awareness into their writing lessons, helping students recognize and utilize thematic patterns to improve their writing skills and text interpretation. For example, certain teaching strategies for writing skills can be to address TP patterns, minimize information breaks, emphasize clear rhetorical moves, and instruct students to use marked Ts, cohesive devices, and balanced syntactic structures.

In addition to offering these practical implications, this study acknowledges certain limitations regarding the scope of textbooks analyzed, the generalizability of findings and the focus of the study. The study focuses on only two textbooks at the upper secondary level of Vietnamese MOET English textbook series, which may not fully represent the thematic and linguistic diversity across different textbooks at different grade levels in English language curriculum in Vietnam, highlighting further validation for broader generalization. Future research could expand the analysis of thematic features to a broader range of textbooks from different subjects taught in English (e.g., science, literature), at different educational levels (e.g., primary and secondary education) in various academic contexts (e.g., private or international schools). Additionally, given the specific focus on English textbooks used for public high schools in Vietnam, the findings may not be directly applicable to textbooks used in other educational contexts. Comparative studies involving textbooks from different countries could provide a more comprehensive understanding of thematic progression in global educational materials. Finally, the study focuses exclusively on linguistics features in English textbooks without considering external factors, including how the texts are actually used in classrooms, how students interpret linguistic features, and how teachers perceive the analysis of linguistics features in their lessons. These considerations can open new ideas for future studies on textbook analysis.

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Authors' contributions

Both authors were responsible for data collection and data analysis. Mrs Lan Thi Huong Nguyen drafted manuscript and Ms Hoang Minh Nguyen revised it. Mrs Lan Thi Huong Nguyen was in charge of writing the results, discussion and conclusion sections. Ms Hoang Minh Nguyen wrote abstract, introduction, literature review and method sections. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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