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THEMATIC CHOICES AND THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAMESE STUDENTS' RESEARCH ARTICLE ABSTRACTS: A COMPARISON WITH PROFESSIONAL ABSTRACTS

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ABSTRACT

Academic writing, especially research article abstract writing, is still unfamiliar to many Vietnamese students. This study examines thematic choices and thematic development in 10 research article abstracts written by Vietnamese business administration students and compares them with 10 abstracts written by professional authors and published in accredited journals. The study focuses on topical, textual and interpersonal Themes and three patterns of thematic development, namely constant, linear and split Rheme patterns. The results show that the two groups share some similarities in their use of Themes and thematic development. However, some differences can be seen in clause structure and Theme choices. Vietnamese students tend to use simple clauses, unmarked Themes and nominal groups more frequently, while professional writers use a wider range of clause and Theme structures. This might be because students have limited English competence and are less familiar with the abstract genre. Based on these findings, some implications for teaching academic writing in the Vietnamese tertiary context are discussed.

Keywords: Academic Writing, Research Article Abstracts, Theme, Thematic Development, Systemic Functional Linguistics.

1. INTRODUCTION

For many Vietnamese students, learning English is closely related to passing examinations and fulfilling English requirements for academic study. Grammar is therefore sometimes viewed as an object to study rather than as a resource for creating meaning in a particular context. Fixed grammatical patterns may help students generalize language forms at the initial stage of learning, but they do not show how language is used in context. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) could therefore provide a useful approach for understanding the connection between grammar and meaning and how grammatical choices contribute to the creation of coherent texts.

Research at tertiary level has also received attention in Vietnam. Since 2012, the Ministry of Education and Training has organized an annual research contest for undergraduate students in different fields. The contest encourages students to apply theoretical knowledge to practice, and the research articles follow the format of journal articles. Along with a Vietnamese abstract, contestants are required to write an English abstract for their research. Understanding academic registers and genres is therefore important for students who need to construct research papers and communicate their research results to an international academic community.

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It is recognized that academic writing in professional settings in general and abstract writing in particular are still unfamiliar to Vietnamese students. There is a need to investigate research article abstracts to help students understand conventions used by professional writers. It seems that non-English major students may need more time to develop these skills because of their limited English competence.

Research article abstracts are important because they provide readers with a concise representation of a research article. They can help readers decide whether to read the full article, provide a preview of the research, and support indexing. Previous studies have examined abstracts from different perspectives, including rhetorical moves, linguistic realization, authorial stance, thematic organization and thematic progression. However, little attention has been paid to thematic choice in research article abstracts written by students, particularly Vietnamese students. In the Vietnamese context, previous research has examined thematic choice in students' academic writing, but there has been limited research on research article abstracts written by Vietnamese students. Therefore, this study investigates the thematic choices and thematic development of research article abstracts written by Vietnamese business administration students in comparison with professional abstracts. The purpose is to identify similarities and differences between the two groups and to suggest some pedagogical implications for teaching academic writing in Vietnam.

The study addresses four research questions:

1. What choices of Theme do students make in their abstracts?
2. How do they develop Theme in their texts?
3. What are the similarities and differences between Vietnamese students' abstracts and professional abstracts?
4. What teaching implications could be drawn from answering the three questions above?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Review of previous studies

2.1.1. Thematic choice

Thematic choice has been examined in different types of written texts, including business writing (Coffin, 2003; Forey, 2004) and academic writing in science (Martin, 1993; Halliday, 1994b), history and management (Ravelli, 2004), and geography (Hewings, 2004). Some studies have also examined the relationship between Theme–Rheme and Given–New structures (Bloor & Bloor, 1992; Halliday, 1994b). Although this relationship can help explain how information is organized and how textual coherence is achieved, it is not the main focus of the present study.

In the Vietnamese context, Tran (2005) investigated thematic choice in nine argumentative essays written by secondary school students from three subject groups: English, history, and computer science. The findings showed differences in the use of Themes across the groups. Computer science students tended to use consistent Theme patterns, including structural conjunctions and discourse adjuncts as Textual Themes. History students showed features more closely associated with narrative writing, particularly the use of first-person pronouns as topical Themes, whereas the English group was less consistent in its choice of topical Theme. These findings suggest that thematic choice may be related to how successfully students organize argumentative writing. However, the study was based on a relatively small number of essays, and further research is needed to examine thematic choice in other types of student writing.

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2.1.2. Research article abstracts

Research article abstracts have an important role in academic communication because they provide a concise account of a longer text and help readers decide whether the full article is relevant to their interests. The American National Standards Institute defines an abstract as an accurate, abbreviated representation of a document, preferably prepared by its author (ANSI, 1979). Similarly, Bhatia (1993) describes an abstract as a factual summary that gives readers concise information about the full report. Abstracts can also help readers preview an article and support the indexing of research in large databases (Hartley & Benjamin, 1998; Huckin, 2006). Their importance is also reflected in the fact that abstracts are commonly required for journal submissions and conference papers (Martin, 2003). As English is widely used in international academic communication, the ability to produce an effective abstract is particularly relevant to researchers who write in English as an additional language.

Previous studies have examined research article abstracts from different perspectives. At the level of genre structure, Swales (1990), Bhatia (1994), and Hyland (2000) contributed to the analysis of rhetorical organization. Hyland (2000), for example, proposed a five-move model consisting of Introduction, Purpose, Method, Product, and Conclusion. Santos (1996), based on 94 abstracts from three leading applied linguistics journals, also proposed a five-move framework. Other studies have examined particular features of abstracts, including the moves and verb tenses used in applied linguistics journals (Tseng, 2011), hedges and boosters in English- and Chinese-medium applied linguistics journals (Hu & Cao, 2011), and rhetorical differences between abstracts written by Iranian and native English-speaking electrical engineering researchers (Abarghooeinezhad & Simin, 2015). Huckin (2006), in his study of medical abstracts, further argued that stating the purpose does not necessarily constitute a separate move. Taken together, these studies indicate that the rhetorical organization and linguistic features of abstracts may vary across disciplines and research contexts.

Other researchers have considered how rhetorical organization is realized through linguistic choices. Pho (2008), drawing on Santos' (1996) framework, investigated authorial stance in abstracts in applied linguistics and educational technology and found that different moves could be distinguished through their linguistic features. Lores (2004) also examined thematic and rhetorical organization in applied linguistics research article abstracts using the CARS and IMRD models. Her findings suggested a close relationship between thematic organization and rhetorical structure. In a comparison of applied linguistics and economics abstracts, Ebrahimi and Chan (2015) identified disciplinary differences in the grammatical subjects used in the texts.

From a Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective, Ebrahimi (2016) examined Theme types and thematic progression in 120 research article abstracts from economics, agriculture, applied linguistics, and applied physics. The findings showed that unmarked Themes were more frequent than marked Themes, although the extent of this preference differed across disciplines. The study also found that marked topical Themes appeared more often in the humanities and social sciences than in the hard sciences. Interpersonal Themes were uncommon, while simple Themes were used more frequently than multiple Themes. These findings suggest that thematic choices in abstracts may be associated with disciplinary conventions and the communicative purpose of the genre.

Although previous studies have provided useful insights into the rhetorical and linguistic features of research article abstracts, much of this work has focused on genre organization and the linguistic realization of rhetorical moves. Less attention has been paid to thematic choice at the clause level in abstracts written by students. Research on thematic choice in Vietnamese student writing also remains limited. Therefore, examining research article abstracts written by

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Vietnamese students may help extend existing research by showing how Theme is selected in this specific academic context.

2.1.3. Thematic development

While thematic choice concerns the selection of Theme within a clause, thematic development focuses on how Themes and Rhemes are connected across clauses to organize information throughout a text. Halliday's view of Theme as the point of departure of a message provides a basis for examining this relationship. However, as McCarthy and Carter (1994, p. 54) note, less attention has been paid to how Theme develops across clauses to create the macro-structural organization of a text.

Following Danes (1974) and Fries (1995), Bloor and Bloor (1995, 2004) discuss three main patterns of thematic development: Theme iteration, or constant Theme; linear thematic progression, also known as the zig-zag pattern; and split Rheme, in which elements of a preceding Rheme become Themes in subsequent clauses. Fries (1995) further suggests that thematic progression may be related to genre. These patterns provide a way to examine how information is maintained, extended, and connected as a text develops.

Ebrahimi's analysis of research article abstracts across four disciplines provides further evidence that thematic progression may vary according to disciplinary context. Applied linguistics abstracts showed a preference for the zig-zag pattern, which links the Rheme of one clause to the Theme of the next. This pattern can support the development of an argument by connecting information already introduced with new information. In contrast, agriculture abstracts more frequently used Theme reiteration, which Ebrahimi suggested could make the texts read more like a list. The study also identified frequent use of miscellaneous patterns across disciplines, indicating that thematic development does not always follow the regular patterns described in earlier accounts (Bloor & Bloor, 1995; Eggins, 2004). Ebrahimi further suggested that cohesive links can help readers retrieve information introduced earlier in a text. These findings indicate that thematic development is not simply a matter of repeating or changing Themes. The way information moves from one clause to the next may also contribute to the organization and coherence of a text. However, the available studies provide limited evidence about how these patterns operate in research article abstracts written by Vietnamese students. Further examination of thematic choice and thematic progression in this context may therefore help clarify how students organize information and develop textual coherence in academic writing.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data

The study analysed two groups of research article abstracts. The first group consisted of 10 abstracts written by undergraduate business administration students who participated in the national research contest in Vietnam in 2016. The students' abstracts were anonymised and coded from VA1 to VA10. Business administration was selected because it was a popular field in the contest and had the highest number of submissions in 2016, with ten articles.

The second group consisted of 10 professional abstracts selected from accredited journals. The authors were both native and non-native English speakers, but the abstracts were considered professional because they had been published in accredited journals. Each abstract was assigned a code from PA1 to PA10.

The professional abstracts were selected according to several criteria, including topic, content, journal reputation, word count, publication time and accessibility. Topic and field were given the highest priority because the keywords used by student writers did not always accurately

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reflect the content of their articles. The selected professional articles were published between 2002 and 2017.

The researchers attempted to match the student abstracts with professional abstracts according to topic and content. For example, VA1 and PA1 were related to supply chain management and multi-criteria decision making for green supply chains, while VA10 and PA10 concerned tourists' satisfaction with shopping. However, the matching was not always exact because student articles tended to focus on particular case studies whereas professional journal articles could discuss theoretical issues at a broader level.

Journal reputation was also considered when selecting the professional abstracts. The journals were selected based on information from Scimago, using the field of Business, Management and Accounting. The original study reported that nine of the ten selected journals ranked above 60 in the relevant ranking, while the Journal of Cleaner Production was ranked 116 among 1,139 journals considered.

3.2. Framework of analysis

The study focused on the textual metafunction of SFL. Two aspects were examined: thematic choice and thematic development between clauses. Theme and Rheme were used as the main concepts for analysing how information was organized within clauses and across clauses. Following Halliday and Matthiessen, Theme was identified as everything up to the first experiential element, which could be a process, participant or circumstance. Three types of Theme were examined: topical Theme, textual Theme and interpersonal Theme. A topical Theme is compulsory, while textual and interpersonal Themes are optional. When textual or interpersonal elements occur before the topical Theme, the clause contains a multiple Theme.

Topical Themes were also classified as marked or unmarked. In declarative clauses, the topical Theme is unmarked when it is conflated with the Subject. It is marked when another element, such as a Complement or Circumstantial Adjunct, occupies the initial position.

Textual Themes were classified into continuatives, structural conjunctions and conjunctive Adjuncts. Their main function is to connect the experiential meaning of one clause with surrounding discourse. Interpersonal Themes include vocatives, modal Adjuncts and mood-marking elements.

For thematic development, the study followed Fries (1995), Bloor and Bloor (1995, 2004) and McCarthy (1991), identifying three main patterns: constant Theme, linear thematic pattern and split Rheme pattern. In the constant pattern, the same Theme is maintained across clauses. In the linear pattern, the Rheme of one clause becomes the Theme of the following clause. In the split Rheme pattern, different elements in the Rheme become Themes in subsequent clauses.

3.3. Units of analysis

The study focused on independent clauses and clause complexes as the central units of analysis. Independent clauses were selected because previous researchers have argued that they play an important role in the thematic organization of texts. Dependent clauses were also considered in the analysis, particularly when they occurred in initial position and functioned as marked Themes in clause complexes.

4. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

4.1. Clause and clause-complex choices

The first finding concerns the distribution of simple clauses and clause complexes. Vietnamese students tended to use simple clauses much more frequently than clause complexes. Across the ten student abstracts, 59 independent clauses were identified. Only a small number of clause

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complexes occurred, and these were hypotactic rather than paratactic. Three of the hypotactic instances were used to show reasons through expressions such as due to and because.

For example, in VAS1, the dependent clause "due to the challenge of rising public awareness of environmental issues and governmental regulations" was used to provide background information for the study. In this case, the student appeared to use the dependent clause to establish the context before presenting the main message.

Another noticeable finding is that no paratactic clause was found in the student abstracts. This might result from the students' limited English competence. As the student writers were non-English majors and might not have been familiar with the abstract genre, there is a possibility that they tried to make their abstracts simple in order to communicate more effectively.

Professional writers, in contrast, used a wider range of clause structures. This difference suggests that the two groups may have different levels of flexibility in organizing information within the limited space of an abstract. However, the present data do not allow the difference to be attributed to English proficiency alone.

Table 4.1. Distribution of clause and clause complex in Vietnamese students' abstracts and professional abstracts

Abstracts	No of independent clauses	Simple Clauses	Clause complexes	
			Paratactic	Hypotactic
VA1	8	7	0	1
VA2	6	6	0	0
VA3	5	4	0	2
VA4	6	6	0	0
VA5	5	4	0	1
VA6	4	4	0	0
VA7	6	6	0	0
VA8	7	6	0	1
VA9	9	7	0	1
VA10	3	3	0	0
	59	**53**	**0**	**6**
PA1	14	8	2	2
PA2	9	4	0	4
PA3	9	4	2	1
PA4	7	3	2	0
PA5	12	8	1	1
PA6	7	4	0	2
PA7	7	5	1	0
PA8	7	3	1	2
PA9	11	10	0	1
PA10	7	6	0	1
	94	**71**	**9**	**14**

4.2. Topical Themes

Topical Theme is the compulsory part of the Theme structure. The findings show that Vietnamese students had a strong tendency to use unmarked Themes. Unmarked Themes

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accounted for 91.53%, whereas marked Themes accounted for 8.47% of the student data. Marked Themes appeared in VA3 and VA6 in particular.

One example in VA6 is the non-finite clause "using data collected from 500 citizens in 19 inner-city districts in HCMC and applying binary…", which occurred before the main clause "the study explores the determinants [of] bus choice behaviour in HCMC". Another example is the prepositional phrase "Through Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and binary logit model", which indicates how the study was carried out.

Professional abstracts also showed a strong preference for unmarked Themes, but markedness was somewhat more frequent than in the student group. The original analysis also identified a marked Theme in VA10, where "on that basis" was interpreted as a possible way of signalling a conclusion.

Another important finding concerns the lexical realization of topical Themes. Nominal groups were the dominant realization in both groups. In the student abstracts, nominal groups accounted for 88.14% of topical Themes. Personal pronouns were not found in the student data, and ellipsis was also absent.

The strong use of nominal groups is understandable because nominal groups can frequently function as Subjects and therefore as unmarked topical Themes. However, the original study suggests that the absence of personal pronouns and ellipsis may also be related to the students' preference for simple clause structures. The exact reason for this pattern is not established by the data and therefore should be interpreted cautiously.

Table 4.2.1 Summary of frequency of Themes used in students' abstracts

	Abstracts	Clauses	Textual		Interpersonal	Topical		Multiple Themes
			Str.	Conj		Unmarked	Marked	
Vietnamese students' abstracts	VA1	8	2	3	0	8	0	5
			25%	**37.5%**		**100%**		**62.5%**
	VA2	6	0	2	0	6	0	2
			0	**33,33 %**		**100%**		**33.33%**
	VA3	5	2	2	0	3	2	2
			40%	**40%**		**60%**	**40%**	**40%**
	VA4	6	0	0	0	6	0	0
			0	**0**	**0**	**100%**	**0**	**0**
	VA5	5	2	2	0	5	0	4
			40%	**40%**	**0**	**100%**	**0**	**80%**
	VA6	4	0	2	0	2	2	2
			0	**50%**	**0**	**50%**	**50%**	**50%**
	VA7	6	0	0	0	6	0	0
			0	**0**	**0**	**100%**	**0**	**0%**
	VA8	7	2	0	0	7	0	2
			28.57 %	**0**	**0**	**100%**	**0**	**28.57%**
	VA9	9	0	1	0	9	0	1
			0	**11.11 %**	**0**	**100%**	**0**	**11.11%**

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	VA10	3	0	0	0	2	1	0
			0	**0**	**0**	**66.66%**	**33.33 %**	**0%**
		59	**(7) 11.86 %**	**(12) 20.34 %**	**0**	**(54) 91.53%**	**(5) 8.47%**	**(18) 30.51%**
Journal abstracts	PA1	14	5	0	0	12	2	5
			35.17 %	**0**	**0**	**85.71%**	**14.23 %**	**35.71%**
	PA2	9	5	0	0	5	4	3
			55.55 %	**0**	**0**	**55.55%**	**44.44 %**	**33.33%**
	PA3	9	3	1	0	6	3	3
			33.33 %	**11.11 %**	**0**	**66.67%**	**33.33 %**	**33.33%**
	PA4	7	2	1	0	7	0	3
			28.57 %	**14.29 %**	**0**	**100%**	**0%**	**42.86%**
	PA5	12	3	2	0	10	2	4
			25%	**16.67 %**	**0**	**83.33%**	**16.67 %**	**33.33%**
	PA6	7	1	0	0	5	2	0
			14.29 %	**0**	**0**	**80%**	**20%**	**10%**
	PA7	7	1	0	0	6	1	1
			14.29 %	**0**	**0**	**85.71%**	**14.29 %**	**14.29%**
	PA8	7	3	3	0	6	1	3
			12.5%	**12.5%**	**0**	**87.5%**	**12.5%**	**37.5%**
	PA9	11	1	1	0	9	2	2
			9.09%	**9.09%**	**0**	**81.82%**	**18.18 %**	**18.18%**
	PA10	7	0	0	0	6	1	0
			0	**0**	**0**	**85.71%**	**14.29 %**	**0%**
		94	**20.21 %**	**6.38%**	**0**	**77.66.%**	**19.15 %**	**25.53%**

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Table 4.2.2. Distribution of topical lexis of topical Themes

Abstracts	Personal Pronouns	Nominal groups	Verbal groups	Prep. Groups	Ellipsis	Others	No of clauses
VA1	0	6	1	1	0	0	8
VA2	0	6	0	0	0	0	6
VA3	0	3	0	1	0	1	5
VA4	0	6	0	0	0	0	6
VA5	0	5	0	0	0	0	5
VA6	0	2	1	1	0	0	4
VA7	0	4	0	2	0	0	6
VA8	0	7	0	0	0	0	8
VA9	0	9	0	0	0	0	9
VA10	0	2	0	1	0	0	3
	0	**(52) 88.14%**	**(2) 3.39%**	**(4) 6.78%**	**0**	**(2) 3.39%**	**59**
PA1	0	9	1	2	1	1	14
PA2	0	5	1	1	0	2	9
PA3	5	1	0	3	0	0	9
PA4	4	1	0	0	1	1	7
PA5	0	8	0	2	2	0	12
PA6	0	5	1	0	0	1	7
PA7	0	6	0	1	0	0	7
PA8	0	6	1	0	1	1	8
PA9	2	7	1	1	0	0	11
PA10	0	6	1	0	0	0	7
	(11) 11.7%	**(57) 60.64%**	**(6) 6.38%**	**(10) 10.64%**	**(5) 5.32%**	**(6) 6.38%**	**94**

4.3. Textual and interpersonal Themes

The analysis of multiple Themes shows a difference between the two groups. Vietnamese students used conjunctive Themes (20.34%) more frequently than structural conjunctions (11.86%). Professional writers showed the opposite tendency, using structural conjunctions at 20.21%, compared with 6.38% for conjunctive Themes.

This difference may indicate that the two groups used different ways of establishing relationships between clauses. Students appeared to rely more on conjunctive elements to make connections between ideas explicit, whereas professional writers used structural conjunctions more frequently. However, the study does not establish a direct causal explanation for this difference.

Interpersonal Themes did not appear in the data. This result is consistent with the impersonal nature of research article abstracts discussed in the original study. Since abstracts present condensed information about research, interpersonal elements that express personal attitudes or interaction between writer and reader were not prominent in either group.

4.4. Thematic development

The second major aspect of the analysis concerns thematic development between clauses. The study examined three patterns: constant Theme, linear pattern and split Rheme pattern. The

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findings show that no split Rheme pattern occurred in either group. Instead, constant and linear patterns were dominant.

In the Vietnamese student abstracts, the analysis identified 11 linear patterns and 11 constant patterns. In the professional abstracts, there were 18 linear patterns and 17 constant patterns.

The linear pattern allows the Rheme of one clause to become the Theme of the following clause. In this way, information introduced in one clause can be developed further in the next clause. The constant pattern, on the other hand, maintains the same Theme across clauses. Both patterns therefore contribute to the organization of information in a text.

The similar use of linear and constant patterns in the two groups suggests that Vietnamese students were able to employ some patterns of thematic development that were also found in professional abstracts. This finding is important because it shows that the differences between the two groups were not found in every aspect of thematic organization.

The absence of the split Rheme pattern in both groups is also noteworthy. The original study reports that previous research has found differences in thematic progression across disciplines, with linear and constant patterns playing different roles depending on the type of text. In the present data, however, neither group used the split Rheme pattern.

Table 4.4. Summary of instances of thematic development between clauses

Abstracts	Linear patterns	Constant patterns	Split patterns	No of clauses
VA1	2	2	0	8
VA2	1	0	0	6
VA3	0	1	0	5
VA4	0	4	0	6
VA5	1	0	0	5
VA6	1	0	0	4
VA7	2	0	0	6
VA8	2	0	0	8
VA9	0	4	0	9
VA10	2	0	0	3
Total	**11**	**11**	**0**	**60**
PA1	0	1	0	14
PA2	1	0	0	9
PA3	0	1	0	9
PA4	2	2	0	7
PA5	4	4	0	12
PA6	2	0	0	7
PA7	3	3	0	7
PA8	3	2	0	9
PA9	2	3	0	11
PA10	1	1	0	7
Total	**18**	**17**	**0**	**95**

4.5. Overall comparison

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Overall, the findings show both similarities and differences between Vietnamese students' abstracts and professional abstracts. The two groups were similar in their limited use of interpersonal Themes and their use of constant and linear thematic development. These similarities suggest that students' abstracts shared some important characteristics with professional research article abstracts.

At the same time, differences were found in clause structure, markedness and the realization of Themes. Vietnamese students relied heavily on simple clauses and unmarked Themes. They also used nominal groups as topical Themes at a higher proportion than professional writers. In terms of multiple Themes, students used conjunctive elements more frequently, whereas professional writers used structural conjunctions more frequently.

It could be argued that these differences are related to students' limited English competence and unfamiliarity with the abstract genre. However, these factors should be regarded as possible explanations rather than direct causes because the study did not independently measure English proficiency or familiarity with the genre.

5. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings suggest several pedagogical implications for teaching academic writing to Vietnamese students. First, teachers could give students opportunities to compare their own writing with professional academic genres. Through comparison, students may identify differences in clause structures, Theme choices and thematic development. This could help students become more aware of the conventions of research article abstracts.

Second, writing instruction could pay more attention to the relationship between grammar and meaning. Fixed grammatical patterns may help students produce individual sentences, but they do not necessarily show how grammatical choices contribute to the organization of a complete text. SFL could provide a useful framework for helping students understand this relationship.

Third, teachers could design activities that allow students to identify Theme and Rheme in model abstracts and examine how information moves from one clause to another. Such activities may help students understand the role of constant and linear thematic patterns in creating textual coherence.

Finally, students could be given opportunities to practise different clause structures. The findings show that student writers relied more heavily on simple clauses than professional writers. Therefore, tasks could be designed to help students connect ideas through clause complexes rather than relying only on isolated simple clauses. Based on the results, teaching academic writing should not focus only on vocabulary and sentence-level grammatical accuracy. Attention should also be paid to how linguistic patterns organize information and contribute to meaning in a text.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has analysed 10 research article abstracts written by Vietnamese business administration students in comparison with 10 professional abstracts from accredited journals. The purpose was to investigate thematic choices and thematic development, identify similarities and differences between the two groups, and suggest some pedagogical implications for teaching academic writing in the Vietnamese tertiary context.

Regarding thematic choices, both groups maintained some common characteristics of research article abstracts. Interpersonal Themes did not appear in the data, and both groups employed

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constant and linear patterns of thematic development. These findings indicate that Vietnamese students were able to use some thematic patterns that were also found in professional abstracts. However, differences were identified in clause structures and Theme choices. Vietnamese students used simple clauses more frequently and showed a strong preference for unmarked Themes. Nominal groups were also the dominant realization of topical Themes in the student abstracts. In addition, students used conjunctive Themes more frequently, whereas professional writers used structural conjunctions more frequently. These differences may be related to students' English competence and unfamiliarity with the abstract genre, although the present study does not establish a direct causal relationship.

For teaching implications, teachers could provide students with opportunities to compare their writing with professional academic genres. Based on the findings, teachers could design tasks to help students practise Theme and Rheme, thematic development and different clause structures in research article abstracts. Such activities may help students understand how grammar contributes to the organization of a text rather than treating grammar as a set of isolated rules.

The study was conducted on a small scale and focused on research article abstracts written by Vietnamese students in business administration. Therefore, further research could investigate a larger number of abstracts from different academic disciplines and sources. Other types of academic writing, such as personal statements or job applications, could also be examined from the perspective of thematic choices and thematic development.

Despite these limitations, the study shows the links between grammar, text organization and meaning. The findings may be useful in assisting teachers to shape students' academic writing in accordance with conventions of academic English. It is hoped that greater attention to linguistic patterns carrying meanings could help students express their ideas and develop their academic writing in English.

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