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Theme Structure and Thematic Progression Patterns in “Opinion” Articles from the Saudi Daily Newspaper “Arab News”

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Abstract

This study examined the organizational structure and the construction and communication of meaning in the political “Opinion” articles of the Saudi daily newspaper, Arab News. Employing Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as the theoretical framework, it examined theme structures and thematic progression patterns in 10 opinion articles published between February 1 and February 3, 2024. The analysis identified three primary types of themes: topical, textual, and interpersonal. The findings revealed that Arab News predominantly employs topical themes, reflecting its focus on current socio-political issues. This is expected since opinion pieces are typically concerned with newsworthy topical issues. Thematic progression analysis indicated that the articles primarily employed constant Theme structure, followed by the linear pattern, ensuring textual coherence by maintaining a central argument, reinforcing key points, and sustaining logical development throughout the discourse. These findings underscore the strategic structuring of political opinion discourse and highlight the intricate interplay of ideas and perspectives in journalistic writing. Ultimately, this study provides valuable insights into media discourse, shedding light on how journalistic practices shape public opinion and influence political narratives.

Keywords: *Thematic progression patterns, political opinion articles, Arab news, systemic functional linguistics, public opinion.*

Introduction

Opinion articles serve as a crucial component of modern journalism, providing platforms for the expression and dissemination of diverse viewpoints on socio-political issues. Understanding the thematic structures and patterns of progression in opinion articles is essential for analyzing the dynamics of political discourse and journalistic practices. In this regard, discourse analysis, a field within linguistics, offers valuable insights into the structure and meaning-making processes of communication. As Fairclough (2013) explains, discourse analysis is the study of how language is used in specific social contexts to construct meaning and achieve particular objectives. By examining text organization and underlying thematic structures, discourse analysis enables a deeper understanding of how writers develop arguments and shape readers' interpretations (Van Dijk, 2009).

Similarly, thematic analysis, provides a systematic approach to examining how ideas are organized and developed within texts (Flick, 2022). Originating in linguistics and discourse studies, thematic analysis has been widely applied in media and communication research to investigate patterns in different forms of media discourse, including news reports, editorials, and opinion articles (Cohen et al., 2002). In the context of opinion writing, the thematic structures of opinion articles play a vital role in determining their argumentation framework and persuasive appeal. According to Halliday's (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), themes establish the foundation for structuring and transmitting information in a text. Political opinion articles, in particular, exhibit theme frameworks that reflect authors' priorities regarding specific topics, issues, or arguments, significantly influencing the coherence and persuasiveness of the discourse.

SFL theory posits that the thematic structure of a clause consists of two primary components: Theme and Rheme. The Theme represents the starting point of the message, setting the foundation for what follows, while the Rheme contains the remaining information (Halliday, 2014). For instance, in the sentence "Laila is submitting her manuscript," the Theme is "Laila," while the Rheme is "is submitting her manuscript." A Theme can be topical, textual, or interpersonal. Topical themes function as the primary element, often taking the form of a participant, process, or circumstance. A Theme is considered marked if it does not serve as the grammatical subject, as in "In my city, people love to visit the Taj Mahal." Here, the prepositional phrase "In my city" is a marked Theme. Halliday (2014) and Wei (2016) classify marked themes into five categories: spatial, temporal, manner, cause, and contingency. Textual themes enhance textual cohesion by linking clauses through conjunctions such as "and," "but," and "or," as well as conjunctive adjuncts like "however," "therefore," and "as a result." Interpersonal themes indicate the speaker's stance through expressions like "it seems that," "perhaps," and "certainly."

Beyond individual clauses, thematic progression patterns play a crucial role in ensuring coherence and logical development across sentences and paragraphs. Thematic progression refers to the structured organization and evolution of themes throughout a text (Daneš, 1974), providing insights into how authors introduce, elaborate on, and conclude their arguments while addressing counterarguments. By maintaining a logical flow of information, thematic progression enhances textual

cohesion and readability (Halliday, 2014). According to Paltridge (2006), thematic progression occurs when a clause's Theme either continues or expands on a preceding Theme or Rheme, facilitating smooth information transmission. Eggins (2004) further discusses thematic shifting, in which new themes are introduced either cohesively or unexpectedly, influencing how ideas unfold. Additionally, Rosa (2007) identified derived themes, where multiple themes originate from a shared conceptual source, contributing to a well-structured and interconnected discourse. Danes (1974) identifies three primary types of thematic progression: (i) simple linear (or zigzag), where the Rheme of one clause becomes the Theme of the next, ensuring a systematic development of ideas; (ii) constant continuous, where the same Theme is maintained across multiple clauses, reinforcing a central topic; and (iii) multiple (split-Rheme), where the Rheme is divided into multiple themes, each developing separately.

Understanding these patterns is particularly valuable when analyzing written discourse, such as political opinion articles, where coherence and argumentation structure play a crucial role in shaping readers' interpretations. Political opinion articles significantly contribute to shaping public discourse by presenting arguments, critiques, and perspectives on current socio-political matters. Arab News, a prominent Middle Eastern news outlet, offers a valuable corpus for examining thematic structures and thematic progression patterns in political opinion articles. Given its extensive readership and influence, Arab News plays a critical role in framing regional and global discussions. By analyzing the thematic structures within Arab News opinion pieces, this study aims to enhance our understanding of political discourse in the Middle East and the media's role in influencing public opinion. Examining the distribution and prevalence of thematic elements in Arab News opinion articles enables researchers to uncover the underlying agendas, perspectives, and rhetorical strategies employed to shape readers' viewpoints. Identifying dominant thematic progression patterns provides insight into the persuasive strategies authors use to engage their audience and develop their arguments effectively.

Thematic progression has been a focal point of numerous studies in academic contexts, particularly in examining the coherence and cohesiveness of texts (e.g., Babaii et al., 2016; Hawes, 2015; Nhung & Hiep, 2023; Rass & Portman, 2024; Wan Jusoh et al., 2022a; Zein et al., 2023). While much of this research has centered on academic writing, thematic progression has also been widely applied as a framework for discourse analysis in media texts. However, despite extensive research on discourse analysis and thematic organization in media texts (Drid, 2019; Herzog & Kelly, 2023; Hussein & Ahmed, 2021; Shuya, 2021), studies specifically focusing on the thematic structures and progression patterns of political opinion articles in Middle Eastern media remain scarce. Most existing research on thematic progression has predominantly examined Western media outlets, creating a gap in understanding how these linguistic features function in Arab journalism. In addition, while previous studies have analyzed news reports and editorials, there has been less focus on the thematic organization of opinion articles, which are inherently more argumentative and persuasive than other journalistic genres. In opinion articles, thematic organization has a significant role in framing viewpoints

and guiding reader interpretation. Given the influence of opinion articles in shaping public discourse and the role of thematic organization in constructing coherent texts, a closer examination of their thematic structures is essential for uncovering how ideological perspectives and persuasive strategies are embedded within political commentary.

This study sought to address this gap by systematically analyzing the thematic structures and thematic progression patterns used in Arab News political opinion articles. Utilizing an SFL-based approach, the present study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how political discourse is structured in Arab News opinion articles. Moreover, it explored how thematic progression contributes to textual coherence, persuasive effectiveness, and ideological framing within the political opinion articles. By doing so, this study not only expands the existing body of discourse analysis literature but also offers a linguistic perspective on the role of media in shaping socio-political debates. Specifically, the problem of this study is formulated into the following research questions:

- (1) What are the dominant types of themes used in the political opinion articles published in Arab News?
- (2) What are the most common thematic progression patterns employed in the political opinion articles published in Arab News?

Literature Review

Many studies have contributed to a deeper understanding of discourse organization and thematic development in business texts such as finance, accounting, management accounting, and marketing (Alyousef, 2013, 2015, 2016a, 2016b; Alyousef & Alsharif, 2017). These studies have demonstrated that thematic analysis enhances communication strategies and comprehension, particularly by interpreting thematic patterns and progressions.

Expanding upon this foundation, Alyousef (2013) conducted an extensive inquiry into multiple modes of communication in finance, including both written and spoken formats. Similarly, Herriman (2011) analyzed thematic progression patterns employed by advanced-level learners in Sweden, assessing their impact on textual evolution and the frequency of interaction themes. Findings showed that the texts of advanced learners included more interactional themes than those written by British university students, creating a dialogic method of development similar to that found in conversational language. Kizil and Kushch (2019) and Babaii et al. (2016) highlighted how thematic progression patterns facilitate a smooth flow of ideas and arguments in texts. As opinion articles have a great role in shaping public discourse and influencing socio-political perspectives, it is pertinent to understand patterns of thematic progression in these contexts.

Further research has explored coherence issues in student writing. Tshotsho (2014) identified challenges in paragraph organization among first-year students in South Africa, while Sujatna (2013) examined the evolution of subjects in Sundanese literature, with a particular focus on the dominant Theme trends in works by female authors. In a similar study, Ebrahimi and Ebrahimi (2012) explored thematic progression in writings of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students and found notable variations in how different cohorts utilized thematic progression. Given the

complex interplay of themes in political discourse, particularly in media outlets such as Arab News, further analysis is necessary to uncover underlying agendas, perspectives, and rhetorical strategies employed by authors.

Studies on thematic progression in various cultural and literary contexts provide further insights. Patpong (2013) explored thematic evolution in Thai Song Dam folktales and found that the most frequent pattern of thematic progression was the constant Theme expressed by unmarked topical themes. Jalilifar (2009) examined the development of themes in English academic papers and their corresponding translations in Persian, revealing notable disparities in topic structures across languages. Taye and Mengesha (2024) further highlighted the challenges faced by non-native speakers in effectively organizing thematic progression and concept texture when building their arguments in scientific texts.

Linguistic variations in thematic development have also been examined across different languages. Rosa (2019) investigated how student translators used thematic progression when translating a history text from English into Indonesian language and found that, despite shifts in the thematic progression patterns, the theory of theme and rheme development was applicable in both languages. This study provides valuable insights into Theme development across linguistic and cultural contexts, forming a strong foundation for future research. Earlier, Lorés (2004) explored the rhetorical structure and Theme development of linguistic research article abstracts, finding a correlation between topic progression and rhetorical structure. She observed that linear progression patterns were prominent in the findings and discussion sections of IMRD-structured abstracts, whereas CARS-model abstracts exhibited distinct thematic trends in their various moves.

Ebrahimi (2016) further analyzed thematic patterns in 120 research article abstracts across applied linguistics, economics, agriculture, and applied physics. The study identified commonalities and differences, noting that unmarked topical themes were prevalent across disciplines, while marked topical themes were more frequently used in soft sciences than hard sciences. Across all fields, textual themes were predominant over interpersonal themes. Complementing this, Marfuaty and Wahyudi (2015) examined the opinion section of The Jakarta Post, discovering that topical themes were most common and that simple linear progression pattern was the prevailing thematic pattern. Similarly, Drid (2019) analyzed thematic progression patterns in online English versions of Algerian news articles originally published in Arabic, revealing a strong preference for simple linear and constant thematic progression patterns among Algerian journalists.

Despite the wealth of research on thematic progression in academic, literary, and journalistic texts, there remains a gap in studies specifically examining Theme structure and thematic progression patterns in political opinion articles, particularly within Saudi daily English newspapers. While previous studies have investigated Theme in finance, education, and linguistic research papers, little attention has been given to its application in political discourse. Given the critical role of opinion articles in shaping public perception and influencing political discussions, a systematic analysis of Theme structure and thematic progression in this genre is essential.

The present study aimed to bridge this gap by providing significant insights into the organization, content, and persuasive strategies employed in political opinion articles published in the Saudi daily English newspaper, Arab News. By conducting a qualitative analysis of Theme structure and thematic progression patterns, this research sought to enhance our understanding of political discourse in the Middle East and the broader influence of media on public opinion regarding socio-political issues.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach to analyzing Theme structure and thematic progression patterns in political opinion articles to provide insights into how writers construct coherent and persuasive political discourse. However, frequencies and percentages were used to validate claims when comparing the occurrence of Theme structure types and thematic progression patterns.

To build a representative dataset, a purposive sampling technique was used to select political opinion articles authored by Arab News writers. The study analyzed a corpus of ten opinion articles, comprising approximately 10,000 words, published in English on the Arab News website between February 1 and February 3, 2024. Each article was downloaded in its original form to preserve the integrity of the published text. To ensure substantive discourse for a robust analysis, articles with fewer than 500 words were excluded. In addition, only texts explicitly classified as opinion articles were included, while news reports and editorials were excluded. To maintain analytical focus on discourse structure, non-linguistic elements such as publication dates, author names, and images were omitted.

The Halliday (2014) Theme scheme, rooted in SFL, served as the primary methodological framework. SFL is particularly suitable for this study as it facilitates a detailed examination of discourse structure by analyzing Theme-Rheme organization and tracking thematic development throughout the text. This study applied Halliday's (2014) analytical approach to Theme analysis and thematic development, integrating an extended Hallidayan definition of Theme along with a modified version of Danes' (1974) Thematic Progression patterns.

The corpus analysis followed a systematic multi-stage process. First, each article was segmented into individual sentences and arranged into a tabular format to display Theme and Rheme components. Additionally, the tables categorized themes into three distinct types: Topical, Textual, and Interpersonal. Next, the thematic progression patterns present in the opinion articles were identified and classified. Furthermore, statistical analysis was conducted to determine the frequency of themes and thematic progression patterns. Graphical representations and textual examples, as illustrated by Danes (1974) were incorporated to enhance the clarity of findings.

Results and Discussion

Types of themes

The results revealed the dominance of topical themes in the political opinion articles published in Arab News. The findings displayed in **Table 1** show the distribution of different types of Theme types in the texts.

Table 1

The distribution of Theme types in the opinion articles

Text Type	Occurrences	Topical Theme	Textual Theme	Interpersonal Theme	Total number of themes
Opinion Article	Frequency	363	198	95	656
Text	Percentage	55.34%	30.18%	14.48%	100.00%

Topical themes constitute 55.34% of the total thematic occurrences, indicating that a significant portion of these opinion pieces is dedicated to discussing current events, socio-political issues, and global trends. This reflects the newspaper's commitment to engaging with contemporary discourse on critical matters such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, human rights reforms, and the genocide of the Palestinian people. The prominence of topical themes suggests that the primary focus of these articles is on delivering substantive content rather than on stylistic or structural considerations. This finding aligns with the nature of opinion writing which typically concerns with newsworthy topical issues. An example of the use of a topical Theme in the text is shown in (1).

(1)

In his new political role, David Cameron is ready to lead a new and much bolder effort to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Circumstance	Rheme
Topical	
Marked Simple Theme	

The clause in (1) begins with a marked topical Theme, realized by the circumstance "In his new political role." This element provides important background information, setting the scene for the action that follows. By placing this circumstance at the beginning, the speaker emphasizes the relevance of Cameron's current position to the forthcoming action, thus guiding the reader to interpret the message within this specific context. The remainder of the clause constitutes the Rheme, which carries the main message or new information. This includes Cameron's readiness, the boldness of the proposed effort, and its intended goal. The thematic structure of the clause effectively foregrounds the situational context before delivering the key message, allowing for a more nuanced and purposeful interpretation of David Cameron's political intentions.

Although less dominant than topical themes, textual themes play a significant role in structuring discourse. With 198 occurrences—representing 30.18% of the total themes—textual themes serve as cohesive devices that contribute to the logical flow and overall coherence of the articles. These themes typically include

conjunctions, conjunctive adjuncts, WH-relatives, and continuatives. The comparatively lower frequency of textual themes, as opposed to topical themes, suggests that while discourse organization is valued, the primary focus remains on the content and the message being communicated, rather than on extensive rhetorical structuring. An example of a textual theme from the text is illustrated in (2).

(2)

But the economic angle is only one facet of the importance of the Middle East to the UK.

Conjunction	Participant	Rheme
Textual	Topical	
Unmarked Multiple Theme		

The clause in (2) exemplifies an instance of an unmarked multiple Theme composed of both textual and topical themes. The initial Theme, “But,” serves as a textual theme functioning as a conjunction, indicating a contrast with previously mentioned information. This helps in organizing the text and guiding the listener or reader through the flow of ideas. Following the conjunction is “the economic angle,” which is the topical Theme and also the participant in the clause. This is unmarked because the subject naturally occupies the thematic position without being preceded by a marked element such as a circumstantial adjunct. The Rheme presents the new and significant message. It elaborates on the topical Theme, showing that the economic dimension is just one part of a broader significance. The structure, therefore, combines a textual Theme with an unmarked topical Theme, smoothly introducing a contrast while emphasizing the economic aspect as part of a larger, multifaceted importance.

Interpersonal themes, which account for only 14.48% of the total themes, are the least frequent among the three categories. With just 95 occurrences, these themes indicate a relatively restrained use of explicit authorial stance, persuasive language, or direct engagement with the reader. Interpersonal themes often include modal verbs, adjectives, and adverbs that express the writer’s viewpoint, such as naturally, sadly, and probably. The relatively low occurrence of interpersonal themes suggests that Arab News opinion articles tend to prioritize factual presentation and argumentation over personal involvement or overt subjectivity. An example of an interpersonal Theme from the text is illustrated in (3).

(3)

Could the UK lead the way in breaking the peace process impasse?

Finite	Participant	Rheme
Interpersonal	Topical	
Unmarked Multiple Theme		

The clause in (3) exemplifies an unmarked multiple Theme composed of both interpersonal and topical elements. The Theme begins with the finite “Could,” which functions as an interpersonal Theme, expressing modality and framing the clause as a yes/no interrogative. This element reflects the speaker’s stance and engages the reader by inviting speculation. Following this is “the UK,” which serves as the topical Theme and also the participant of the clause. It is considered unmarked because the participant naturally occupies the initial position without being introduced by a marked element, such as a circumstantial adjunct. Together, “Could the UK” forms a multiple Theme that combines interpersonal and topical functions. The Rheme typically carries the new and significant information, presenting the core proposition of the clause. Overall, this structure effectively foregrounds the actor (the UK) while conveying the speaker’s uncertainty or invitation to consider the UK’s potential role in resolving the political stalemate.

These findings are consistent with the study by Zein et al. (2023), which identified topical themes as the dominant Theme in scientific texts. This similarity suggests that both scientific and journalistic writing prioritize a structured and content-driven approach to presenting information. Likewise, Anwar and Amri (2020) highlight the essential role of topical themes in shaping argumentative discourse, reinforcing the notion that opinion articles in Arab News are designed primarily to inform and persuade through well-structured arguments rather than through personal narratives or anecdotal storytelling. The marked predominance of topical themes over interpersonal ones further indicates a strong emphasis on societal and political issues rather than on personal interactions or emotive engagement. This tendency aligns with Halliday’s (2004) argument that professional writing, particularly in journalistic and academic contexts, often exhibits characteristics of objectivity and impersonality. By prioritizing topical themes, Arab News opinion articles maintain a formal and authoritative tone, ensuring that discussions remain focused on critical socio-political matters rather than subjective viewpoints.

Overall, the analysis indicates that Arab News strategically utilizes thematic structures to construct opinionated yet objective discourse, balancing argumentation with clarity and coherence. The strong reliance on topical themes ensures that the content remains relevant and engaging, while the measured use of textual and interpersonal themes contributes to maintaining a formal and structured presentation.

Thematic progression patterns

The analysis of thematic progression patterns in opinion articles revealed the presence of four distinct types, each occurring in varying distributions (**Table 2**). Among these, the constant pattern emerged as the most dominant, followed by the linear pattern.

Table 2

Occurrence of thematic progression patterns in the texts

Thematic Progression Patterns	Frequency	
	Number	Percentage
Constant Continuous Theme	100	39.22%
Simple Linear Theme	92	36.08%
Derived Theme	38	14.90%
Split Theme	25	9.80%
Total	255	100%

As displayed in **Table 2**, the constant continuous thematic progression was the most frequent thematic progression pattern used in the opinion articles, with a frequency of 100 occurrences (39.22%). This pattern indicates that the same subject or topic is frequently revisited across multiple clauses. An excerpt from the dataset is provided in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. Example of constant continuous Theme pattern in the opinion articles

Cameron	→	has become a frequent visitor to the region, including trips to Israel and Palestine, which has made Britain's presence there more visible.
↓		
he	→	has now also grabbed the headlines with a groundbreaking speech in which he departed from the usual formula of generic and abstract support for a two-state solution.
↓		
He	→	went further by stating that the Palestinian people would need to be shown “irreversible progress” toward actually achieving this.

The news section in **Figure 1** focuses on Cameron’s growing engagement in the region, particularly his visits to Israel and Palestine, which have significantly amplified Britain’s diplomatic presence in the area. The text further develops this central Theme by highlighting Cameron’s recent address, which marks a notable departure from the conventional rhetoric typically employed in discussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Unlike a generic and abstract endorsement of a two-state solution, Cameron’s speech presents a bold and innovative perspective, signaling a shift in diplomatic discourse. This expansion underscores the significance of Cameron’s divergence from traditional diplomatic language, effectively setting the stage for a deeper exploration of a key component of his speech. The consistent thematic focus enhances textual coherence by maintaining a central argument, reinforcing key points, and ensuring continuity throughout the

discourse. By continually referencing a core theme, the text becomes more structured and accessible, allowing readers to follow the argument seamlessly.

This finding aligns with Marfuaty and Wahyudi (2015), who identified the use of the constant Theme pattern as a crucial textual strategy in which maintaining the same theme across multiple clauses strengthens coherence and reinforces the primary focus of a paragraph or section. The recurrence of the central theme serves to unify the discussion and facilitate reader comprehension. However, while this strategy contributes to textual clarity and cohesion, excessive reliance on repetition may lead to redundancy, potentially diminishing reader engagement and limiting the exploration of alternative perspectives (Zein et al., 2023). This confirms Halliday's (2014) assertion that thematic progression plays a crucial role in shaping the coherence of a text. Therefore, balancing thematic consistency with varied structures can help sustain reader interest while preserving coherence.

Simple linear progression pattern was the second most frequently occurring thematic progression pattern in the opinion articles, occurring 92 times (36.08%). This suggests that the text frequently develops ideas sequentially by expanding on the Rheme of the preceding sentence. This pattern promotes a logical and continuous flow of information, making it easier for readers to follow complex arguments or narratives. By allowing for the gradual elaboration of intricate concepts, simple linear progression enhances comprehension and textual cohesion. An excerpt from the dataset is presented in **Figure 2**.

In a simple linear thematic progression, each concept follows logically from the preceding one, resulting in a coherent and sequential flow of information. The given example in **Figure 2** begins by highlighting an observation made on a map, which identifies a narrow passage approximately 190 kilometers in width.

Figure 2. Example of simple linear Theme pattern in the opinion articles

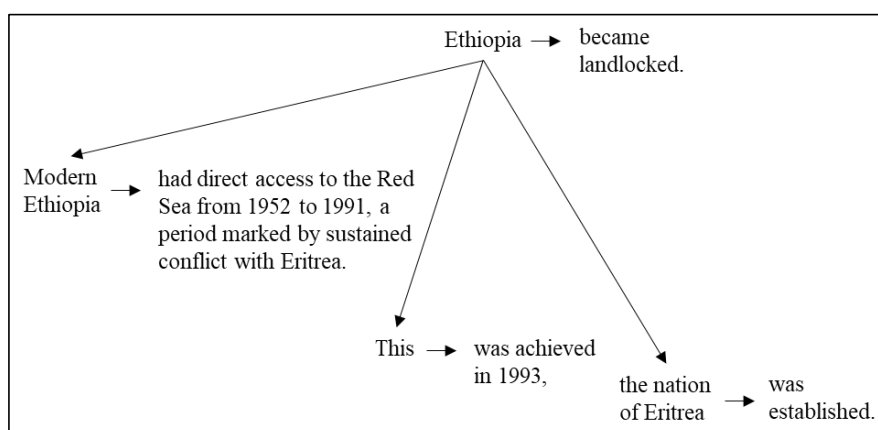
A glance at a map shows	→	that of the 5,000-kilometer span from the Barents Sea to the Arabian Sea, there is an opening of only about 190 kilometers for transport that bypasses Russia and Iran.
	↙	
This	→	is called the Ganja Gap, named after the historic Silk Road city of Ganja in what is now Azerbaijan.
Three major oil and gas pipelines that bypass Russia and Iran	→	pass through the Ganja Gap, along with a motorway, an important rail connection, and fiber optic cables.
	↙	
The Ganja Gap	→	is one of the most important trade choke points in the world.

This corridor stretches over a vast distance of 5,000 kilometers, extending from the Barents Sea to the Arabian Sea while strategically bypassing the territories of

Russia and Iran. This crucial passage, known as the Ganja Gap, derives its name from the ancient Silk Road city of Ganja in Azerbaijan. Building upon this foundation, the development proceeds to enumerate the presence of three significant oil and gas pipelines, as well as vital infrastructure elements such as a motorway, a critical rail connection, and fiber optic cables, all of which traverse this constrained route. The concluding statement emphasizes the Ganja Gap's geopolitical and economic importance, positioning it as a globally significant trade bottleneck. The linear progression of this text effectively enhances reader comprehension by presenting a sequence of interconnected facts, where each new piece of information directly corresponds to and expands upon the preceding one. This structured approach ensures clarity and logical continuity, making complex geopolitical and infrastructural relationships more accessible. This finding is consistent with Fries (1995), who emphasized that simple linear progression fosters logical sequencing and facilitates the introduction of new ideas while maintaining coherence. Furthermore, this finding confirms Marfuaty and Wahyudi (2015) who found that simple linear progression, in which each Rheme becomes the Theme of the subsequent sentence, was the most frequently occurring pattern in textual structures. This finding underscores the effectiveness of this progression style in maintaining a clear and cohesive flow of information, as demonstrated in the discussion of the Ganja Gap.

Next, the derived Theme pattern, observed 38 times (14.90%), signifies that several themes originate from a single overarching concept, leading to a well-structured and interconnected discourse. This approach is particularly beneficial in contexts such as historical or sequential storytelling, where themes evolve naturally from a foundational idea. The derived theme pattern contributes to textual cohesion by ensuring that themes remain contextually anchored while allowing for a dynamic exploration of related topics. One of the examples can be seen in **Figure 3**.

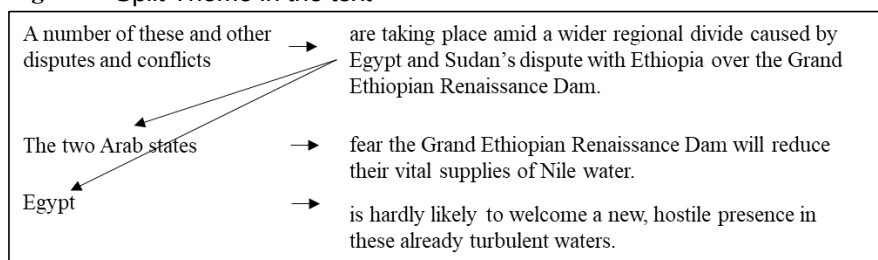
Figure 3. Derived Theme in the text



As shown in **Figure 3**, the sequence of clauses demonstrates a coherent & logical progression, ensuring a seamless flow of information. Each new Theme is intricately linked to the preceding content, fostering continuity and maintaining a strong sense of logical consistency throughout the narrative. This strategy is particularly effective in historical contexts, where events and their consequences are deeply interconnected. By structuring information in a sequential manner, this approach allows readers to follow the development of events effortlessly, as each sentence builds upon the previous one, reinforcing comprehension and enhancing engagement. This pattern aligns with the findings of Nwogu (1993), who argued that derived themes are instrumental in structuring research articles and technical writing, ensuring a clear and logical progression of ideas.

Finally, the split theme pattern, appearing 25 times (9.80%), is less frequent, indicating that the text occasionally dissects a single concept into multiple subthemes. This approach facilitates a more nuanced exploration of complex topics by branching out into different but interconnected ideas. By breaking down a central theme into multiple related strands, this pattern enriches the discussion, enabling a broader and more inclusive discourse. One of the examples is presented in **Figure 4**.

Figure 4. Split Theme in the text



The Rheme highlights two critical components: the geographical division and the ongoing conflict involving Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia. The subsequent sentence narrows the focus to one specific aspect previously mentioned—Egypt and Sudan—by elaborating on their particular concerns regarding the dam. This transition introduces a subordinate topic that specifically addresses the apprehensions of the Arab states, further contextualizing the geopolitical stakes involved. Finally, the discussion shifts its focus entirely to Egypt, examining its strategic position and potential responses within the broader conflict. This structured progression allows the author to systematically dissect multiple facets of a complex issue, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of interrelated themes. By methodically addressing each element introduced in the Rheme, this approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the overarching subject while maintaining coherence and logical continuity throughout the discourse. This finding confirms Danes (1974), who highlighted that the split theme pattern allows for a deeper exploration of multifaceted topics.

Overall, these findings align with previous research on thematic progression patterns. Herdiawan (2017) reported a similar trend, where the constant theme pattern was the most prevalent, followed by the linear pattern and split rheme. Likewise, Drid (2019) found that online English-language Algerian news articles frequently employ linear and constant thematic progression patterns, reinforcing the argument that these structures are essential for maintaining coherence in journalistic writing. Additionally, Abed Shakeh (2016) noted that these two patterns were commonly utilized across various rhetorical structures, further supporting the significance of these patterns in structuring argumentative and informative texts.

The dominance of constant and linear thematic progression patterns in Arab News opinion articles highlights a strong focus on reinforcing central ideas and ensuring logical argumentation. The strategic use of these patterns contributes to the clarity, coherence, and persuasiveness of the text, ultimately shaping how readers interpret and engage with the presented arguments.

Conclusion

The results of this study confirm Halliday's (2014) three primary types of themes: topical, textual, and interpersonal. Through a detailed analysis, it was determined that opinion articles predominantly employ Topical themes discussing current and relevant socio-political issues, accounting for 55.34% of the total themes identified. This emphasis underscores the newspaper's commitment to addressing contemporary subjects of public significance. The strong presence of timely topics suggests that the articles are designed to engage readers by discussing pressing and up-to-date matters (Anwar & Amri, 2020; Zein et al., 2023). This finding is expected, as opinion pieces are typically concerned with newsworthy topical issues. Additionally, textual themes were employed to ensure cohesion across different sections (Nhung & Hiep, 2023; Rass & Portman, 2024; Wan Jusoh et al., 2022b), while interpersonal themes, though less frequent, played a vital role in expressing the authors' viewpoints and directly engaging with the audience (Geng et al., 2024). These interpersonal elements contribute to fostering a connection with readers, thereby enhancing the articles' impact and comprehensibility. The findings revealed that the most dominant thematic progression pattern was the constant, followed by the simple linear pattern. The constant progression pattern, which accounted for 39.21% of all instances, involves the repetition of the same Theme across clauses to maintain a central focus throughout the text. This finding is consistent with Herdiawan's (2017) study and reinforces the idea that opinion articles often revolve around a core argument. The simple linear progression, observed in 36.07% of cases, ensured a logical and systematic flow of ideas by allowing each clause to build on the Rheme of the preceding one, thereby enhancing the persuasiveness and coherence of the argument.

Additionally, the derived Themes accounted for 14.90%, while Split Theme was the least common, comprising only 9.80%. This distribution highlights a strategic use of thematic structures to ensure clarity, coherence, and depth in political discourse.

The findings of this study hold significant implications for understanding political communication in the Middle East and the role of media in shaping public opinion. This research provides a comprehensive analysis of Theme structure and thematic progression patterns in Arab News, enhancing our understanding of how political viewpoints are constructed and conveyed. These insights are valuable for both media professionals and audiences, as they reveal the persuasive techniques employed to influence public perception. The knowledge gained from this study can serve as a guideline for journalistic practices, particularly in crafting opinion articles. Journalists can apply these findings to enhance the clarity and persuasiveness of their writing, ensuring that their arguments are effectively communicated and resonate with their audience. Furthermore, this study underscores the crucial role of thematic organization in shaping public discourse, shedding light on how media influences socio-political perspectives and debates. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for readers to critically evaluate media content and for journalists to exercise ethical responsibility in their reporting.

This study was conducted using a limited corpus of ten opinion articles published over a short timeframe. As a result, the findings may not fully capture the diversity and variability of Theme structures and thematic progression patterns across a broader range of articles and time periods. Additionally, the exclusive focus on Arab News means that the results may not be generalizable to other media outlets or regional contexts. Future studies should consider expanding the dataset to include a more diverse range of sources, thereby enabling a more comprehensive analysis. Furthermore, as a qualitative study, this research relies on subjective interpretation of Theme structures and thematic progression patterns, which may introduce a degree of interpretive bias.

Future research could explore various avenues to build upon the findings of this study. Expanding the corpus to include a broader and more diverse collection of opinion articles from different news sources and time periods would provide a more exhaustive understanding of Theme structures and thematic progression patterns. Comparative studies across different media organizations and regions could uncover variations in thematic development and its impact on political discourse. Additionally, examining the influence of cultural and contextual factors on thematic structures would offer deeper insights into how themes evolve in different socio-political settings. Integrating quantitative methodologies alongside qualitative analysis could provide a more objective and measurable understanding of thematic progression patterns. Employing a mixed-methods approach would enhance the reliability and validity of future findings, contributing to a more robust analysis of political discourse in the media.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data availability statement

The data are available from the referenced resources in the public domain.

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