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A Contrastive Study of Thematic Progression in Academic Essays Written by English Majors and IELTS Candidates

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Thematic progression represents the way themes relate with each other and with rhemes in organizing a text. The present study explores what kinds of thematic patterns were deployed in IELTS essays in the light of Functional Grammar. 30 IELTS essays written by English-majored students at Quang Nam university and 30 sample essays with band scores of 7.0-7.5 were selected as data for text analysis. The descriptive and comparative methods as well as qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to give a detailed description of thematic progression based on McCarthy (1991)'s model with a view to identifying similarities and differences between two group essays. The findings reveal that three types of thematic patterns: constant, linear, and derived were realized in the essays, of which the writers displayed a greater tendency towards employing constant patterns. However, it is noticeable that there were significant differences regarding the use of linear patterns and derived patterns traceable to the level of language proficiency of the writers. It is hoped that the findings of the study will provide insights into the nature of thematic progression, whereby IELTS test-takers can make good use of thematic patterns for completing their IELTS essays successfully.

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