THEME AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN SCHOLARLY E-MAIL MESSAGES

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ANNOTATION: *This article investigates the role of theme and intertextuality in scholarly e-mail communication. Academic e-mails have become an essential means of interaction among researchers, professors, and students in the digital age. The study focuses on how thematic organization helps writers structure information clearly and how intertextuality connects e-mails with previous messages, academic sources, and shared knowledge. The research is based on a qualitative analysis of fifty scholarly e-mails collected from university professors and graduate students representing different academic disciplines. The findings demonstrate that clear thematic progression and intertextual references contribute significantly to coherence, clarity, and continuity in academic communication. The article also highlights that scholarly e-mails combine both formal and informal discourse features, reflecting the changing nature of academic interaction in online environments.*

Key words: *theme, intertextuality, scholarly e-mails, academic discourse, thematic progression, communication, systemic functional linguistics, academic writing, discourse analysis, digital communication.*

ANNOTATSIYA: *Mazkur maqolada ilmiy elektron xatlarda tema va intertekstuallikning o‘rni tadqiq qilinadi. Raqamli davrda akademik elektron xatlar tadqiqotchilar, professorlar va talabalar o‘rtasidagi muhim aloqa vositasiga aylangan. Tadqiqotda tematik tashkil etishning axborotni aniq yetkazishdagi ahamiyati hamda intertekstuallikning oldingi xabarlar, ilmiy manbalar va umumiy bilimlar bilan bog‘liqligi o‘rganiladi. Tadqiqot universitet professorlari va magistratura talabalari tomonidan yozilgan ellikta ilmiy elektron xatning sifat tahliliga asoslangan. Natijalar shuni ko‘rsatadiki, tematik progressiya va intertekstual havolalar akademik muloqotning izchilligi, aniqligi va uzluksizligini ta’minlashda muhim rol o‘ynaydi. Shuningdek, maqolada ilmiy elektron xatlar rasmiy va norasmiy uslub xususiyatlarini birlashtirishi hamda bu holat zamonaviy akademik kommunikatsiyaning rivojlanayotgan tabiatini aks ettirishi ta’kidlangan.*

Kalit so‘zlar: *tema, intertekstuallik, ilmiy elektron xatlar, akademik diskurs, tematik progressiya, kommunikatsiya, funksional lingvistika, akademik yozuv, diskurs tahlili, raqamli kommunikatsiya.*

АННОТАЦИЯ: *Данная статья посвящена исследованию темы и интертекстуальности в научных электронных письмах. В современную цифровую эпоху электронная почта стала важным средством общения между исследователями, преподавателями и студентами. В исследовании рассматривается, каким образом тематическая организация способствует ясному представлению информации, а интертекстуальность связывает электронные письма с предыдущими сообщениями, научными источниками и общими знаниями. Работа основана на качественном анализе пятидесяти научных электронных писем, написанных преподавателями университетов и магистрантами различных специальностей. Результаты показывают, что*

тематическая прогрессия и интертекстуальные ссылки играют важную роль в обеспечении связности, ясности и непрерывности академической коммуникации. Также подчеркивается, что научные электронные письма сочетают признаки как формального, так и неформального стиля, отражая изменения в современном академическом дискурсе.

Ключевые слова: *тема, интертекстуальность, научные электронные письма, академический дискурс, тематическая прогрессия, коммуникация, функциональная лингвистика, академическое письмо, анализ дискурса, цифровая коммуникация.*

INTRODUCTION

In the modern digital era, electronic communication has become an inseparable part of academic life. Among different forms of online communication, e-mail remains one of the most widely used tools for interaction among scholars, researchers, professors, and students. Academic e-mails are used for exchanging ideas, discussing research projects, submitting assignments, providing feedback, arranging meetings, and maintaining professional collaboration. Although e-mails are generally considered less formal than journal articles or conference papers, they still represent an important form of academic discourse that requires organization, clarity, and coherence.

One of the essential linguistic concepts that helps explain how academic messages are structured is the concept of *theme*. According to systemic functional linguistics developed by M. A. K. Halliday, the theme is the element that appears at the beginning of a clause and serves as the point of departure for the message. Thematic organization plays a significant role in guiding the reader through the text and helping maintain logical progression. In scholarly

e-mails, writers frequently use thematic structures to make their communication concise, direct, and understandable.

Another important concept is *intertextuality*, a term originally associated with Julia Kristeva and influenced by the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin. Intertextuality refers to the relationship between one text and other texts. In academic communication, no text exists independently because every message is connected to previous discussions, references, research papers, and shared disciplinary knowledge. In scholarly e-mails, intertextuality may appear through quotations from earlier messages, references to academic articles, attached documents, or implicit use of specialized terminology understood within a professional community.

Academic discourse has been extensively studied by scholars such as Halliday, Swales, Hyland, and Bhatia, who emphasize that communication within academic communities follows specific discourse conventions and rhetorical patterns. Scholarly e-mails represent a unique combination of formal and informal communication styles, reflecting the transformation of academic interaction in the digital age. Despite the growing importance of e-mail communication, linguistic studies focusing specifically on thematic organization and intertextuality in scholarly e-mails remain relatively limited.

Therefore, the present study aims to investigate how theme and intertextuality function in scholarly e-mail messages. The research seeks to identify common thematic patterns, examine the role of intertextual references, and explain how these linguistic features contribute to effective academic communication. By analyzing authentic examples of academic e-mails, this article provides insights into the evolving nature of digital academic discourse and the ways scholars organize meaning in online interaction.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research methodology in order to analyze the use of theme and intertextuality in scholarly e-mail communication. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth examination of linguistic structures, communicative strategies, and contextual meanings within authentic academic interaction.

The data for the research consists of fifty scholarly e-mails collected from university professors and graduate students representing different academic disciplines, including linguistics, sociology, education, and engineering. The selected e-mails include various communicative purposes such as requests, replies, academic feedback, collaborative discussions, and administrative communication. The diversity of disciplines and communicative functions made it possible to observe a broad range of thematic and intertextual patterns.

Ethical considerations were carefully maintained throughout the research process. All personal information, including names, institutional details, and contact information, was removed from the data in order to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality. In addition, all participants provided consent for their e-mails to be analyzed for academic purposes.

The analysis of thematic structure was based on the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen. Each e-mail was divided into clauses, and the initial element of every clause was identified as the theme. Themes were then categorized into three major types:

1. **Topical themes** – representing the main subject or topic of the clause;
2. **Interpersonal themes** – expressing attitudes, opinions, or interactional meanings;

3. **Textual themes** – including connectors and discourse markers such as “however,” “therefore,” and “meanwhile.”

This classification allowed the researcher to identify how writers organize information and guide readers through the message.

For the analysis of intertextuality, both explicit and implicit forms were examined. Explicit intertextuality included direct references to previous e-mails, quotations, attached documents, academic articles, and research findings. Implicit intertextuality involved the use of shared disciplinary terminology, assumed background knowledge, and indirect references understood within academic communities.

The data analysis was conducted manually through close reading and comparative examination of the e-mails. Special attention was given to thematic progression across clauses and paragraphs, as well as the frequency and function of intertextual references. Different types of scholarly e-mails were also compared to determine whether communicative purpose influenced thematic organization and intertextual practices.

RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal several significant patterns regarding the use of theme and intertextuality in scholarly e-mail communication. One of the major observations is that academic writers strongly prefer clear and direct thematic structures. In most cases, the opening element of a sentence explicitly introduces the central topic of the message. Such organization enables readers to understand the purpose of the communication immediately and contributes to the efficiency of academic interaction.

The analysis also demonstrates that thematic progression varies according to the length and communicative purpose of the e-mail. In shorter messages, writers commonly employ a constant theme pattern in which the

same topic is repeated across several clauses. This strategy helps maintain focus and clarity, especially in requests, confirmations, and brief updates. For instance, when discussing a research project or assignment, writers frequently continue referring to the same subject throughout the message in order to avoid ambiguity.

In contrast, longer scholarly e-mails often display more complex thematic progression. Writers gradually introduce new information while maintaining connections to previously mentioned ideas. This type of progression is particularly common in detailed academic feedback, explanations, and collaborative discussions. The gradual development of information supports coherence and allows writers to explain complicated concepts more effectively.

The results also indicate that intertextuality is highly prevalent in scholarly e-mails. Many messages contain references to previous conversations, attached documents, conference materials, or academic publications. Writers frequently quote or summarize earlier messages to maintain continuity within the discussion and to ensure that both participants share the same context.

Furthermore, explicit references to attachments such as article drafts, research proposals, and reports were observed regularly. These attached materials extend the meaning of the e-mail and become an integral part of the communication process. Implicit intertextuality was also evident in the use of discipline-specific terminology and shared academic assumptions that were understood without detailed explanation.

Overall, the findings suggest that both thematic organization and intertextuality contribute significantly to coherence, efficiency, and mutual understanding in scholarly e-mail communication.

ANALYSIS

The findings demonstrate that theme and intertextuality function together as essential mechanisms for organizing and maintaining effective academic communication. The preference for direct and clearly identifiable themes reflects the communicative priorities of academic writers, who often seek to deliver information efficiently within limited time and professional contexts. By placing the main topic at the beginning of a clause, writers reduce ambiguity and facilitate rapid comprehension for readers.

The use of constant thematic progression in shorter e-mails appears to be a practical communicative strategy. Repetition of the same theme helps maintain focus and minimizes the possibility of misunderstanding. This is especially important in professional academic settings where concise communication is highly valued. Such thematic consistency allows writers to emphasize key information without overcomplicating the structure of the message.

At the same time, the presence of more complex thematic progression in longer messages reflects the intellectual and analytical nature of academic discourse. When writers introduce new themes gradually while linking them to previous information, they create logical coherence and support the development of sophisticated arguments or explanations. This demonstrates that scholarly e-mails share certain discourse characteristics with more traditional forms of academic writing.

The analysis of intertextuality reveals that scholarly e-mails are deeply embedded within broader academic conversations. References to earlier messages, research papers, drafts, and shared documents indicate that academic communication is cumulative and collaborative rather than isolated. Through intertextual references, writers establish continuity, reinforce shared

understanding, and position their messages within ongoing professional interactions.

Implicit intertextuality further reflects the existence of specialized academic communities. The use of discipline-specific vocabulary and assumed knowledge suggests that writers and readers share common intellectual backgrounds. However, this may also create barriers for newcomers or less experienced researchers who may struggle to interpret implicit references and specialized terminology.

The findings support the theoretical perspectives of Halliday, Swales, and Hyland, who argue that academic discourse is shaped by communicative conventions, thematic organization, and interactional practices. Scholarly e-mails, despite their relatively informal appearance, demonstrate sophisticated linguistic organization and serve as an important medium of professional academic interaction.

DISCUSSION

The present study highlights the growing importance of scholarly e-mails as a distinct form of academic discourse in contemporary digital communication. Although e-mails are often perceived as less formal than traditional academic genres, the findings demonstrate that they require careful linguistic organization and strategic communication practices.

Thematic organization plays a fundamental role in ensuring clarity and coherence. The frequent use of direct themes indicates that academic writers prioritize efficiency and accessibility in communication. In fast-paced academic environments, where researchers and professors may receive large numbers of e-mails daily, concise thematic structures enable readers to process information quickly and respond effectively.

Intertextuality also emerges as a central feature of scholarly e-mails. Academic communication rarely occurs in isolation; instead, it develops through continuous interaction with previous messages, research materials, and institutional contexts. Through explicit and implicit intertextual references, writers maintain continuity, support collaboration, and construct shared academic understanding.

At the same time, the study identifies certain communicative challenges. Excessive reliance on implicit intertextuality may reduce accessibility for individuals who are unfamiliar with specific academic traditions or terminology. Graduate students, novice researchers, and interdisciplinary collaborators may encounter difficulties interpreting highly specialized references or assumed background knowledge. Therefore, academic writers should balance conciseness with clarity in order to ensure effective communication across diverse audiences.

Another important observation is that scholarly e-mails represent a hybrid discourse form combining characteristics of both formal and informal language. While academic conventions such as politeness, precision, and professional terminology remain important, e-mails also allow for greater flexibility and conversational interaction. This reflects broader changes in academic discourse influenced by digital technologies and online communication practices.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that theme and intertextuality are essential linguistic features in scholarly e-mail communication. Theme contributes to the organization and progression of information, while intertextuality connects messages to wider academic contexts and collaborative discussions. Together, these elements support coherence, continuity, and effectiveness in digital academic interaction. Future research may further

explore cross-cultural differences, disciplinary variation, and the impact of technological changes on academic e-mail communication.

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