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Textual Metafunctions of Generation Z Students' Questions in the Context of Indonesian Language Education Courses: A Systemic Functional Linguistics Approach

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Abstract

Objectives: This study investigates the textual metafunctions of Generation Z students' questions in Indonesian Language Education courses using a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach. It examines the theme-rheme structure and theme categories to understand how students construct meaning and engage in academic discourse.

Methods: A qualitative descriptive method was employed, with data collected from 100 students at a public university in Indonesia over one semester. Thematic analysis, based on SFL, categorized questions into topical, textual, and interpersonal themes.

Results: Findings reveal that 'What' questions primarily define concepts, while 'Why' questions demonstrate causal reasoning and critical thinking. 'How' questions emphasize processes, solutions, and implications, showcasing students' evaluative and procedural thinking. Temporal and quantitative questions indicate precision, while confirmatory questions with the clitic '-kah' reflect an evaluative stance. These patterns highlight students' cognitive engagement and communicative strategies in constructing coherent discourse.

Conclusions: The study's significance lies in its implications for inquiry-based pedagogy, providing insights into students' questioning strategies that enhance literacy, discourse coherence, and higher-order thinking. Educators can leverage these findings to design instructional methods that foster critical inquiry and active learning, aligning with students' academic needs and communication styles.

Keywords: textual metaphors, Generation Z students' questions, Indonesian language education course, systemic functional linguistics

الوظائف الوصفيَّة النصيَّة لأسئلة طلبة الجيل Z في سياق مقرَّرات تعليم اللغة الإندونيسيَّة: مقاربة اللغويات الوظيفيَّة المنهجيَّة

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ملخّص

الأهداف: تبحث هذه الدراسة في الوظائف الفوقيَّة النصيَّة لأسئلة طلبة الجيل Z في مقرَّرات تعليم اللغة الإندونيسيَّة باستخدام منهج اللغويات الوظيفيَّة المنهجيَّة (SFL)، وتبحث الدراسة في بنية الموضوع وفئات الموضوعات لفهم كيفيَّة بناء الطلبة للمعنى والانخراط في الخطاب الأكاديمي.

الأساليب: استخدمت الدراسةُ المنهج الوصفي الكيفي؛ حيث جُمِعَت البياناتُ من 100 طالب وطالبة في إحدى الجامعات الحكوميَّة في إندونيسيا على مدار فصل دراسي واحد. وَصُنِّفَ التحليلُ الموضوعيُّ، استنادًا إلى اللغة الإنجليزيَّة السفليَّة (SFL)، والأسئلة إلى موضوعيَّة ونصيَّة وشخصيَّة.

النتائج: كشفت النتائجُ عن أنَّ أسئلة "ماذا" تحدِّدُ المفاهيم في المقام الأول، بينما تُظهر أسئلة "لماذا"\" التفكير السببي والتفكير النقدي، وتؤكد أسئلة "كيف" على العمليات والحلول والآثار المترتِّبة عليها؛ مما يُظهرُ تفكيرَ الطلبة التقييمي والإجرائي. تشيرُ الأسئلةُ الزمنيَّةُ والكميَّةُ إلى الدِّقَّة، في حين تعكسُ الأسئلةُ التأكيديَّةُ التي تحتوي على حرف "كه" موقفًا تقييميًّا. تبرزُ هذه الأنماطُ المشاركةَ المعرفيَّةَ والاستراتيجياتِ التواصليَّةَ للطلبة في بناء خطاب متماسك.

الاستنتاجات: تكمنُ أهميَّةُ هذه الدراسة في آثارها في علم أُصول التدريس القائم على الاستفسار؛ حيث توفِّرُ رؤًى حول استراتيجيات الطلبة في طرح الأسئلة التي تعزِّزُ القراءةَ والكتابةَ وتماسكَ الخطاب والتفكيرَ عاليَ المستوى. يمكن للمعلِّمين الاستفادة من هذه النتائج لتصميم أساليب تعليميَّة تعزِّزُ الاستفسارَ النقديَّ والتعلُّمَ النشط، بما يتماشى مع الحاجات الأكاديميَّة وأساليب التواصل لدى الطلبة.

الكلمات المفتاحيَّة: الاستعارات النصيَّة، أسئلة طلبة الجيل Z، مقرَّر تعليم اللغة الإندونيسيَّة، اللسانيات الوظيفيَّة المنهجيَّة.

INTRODUCTION

Questioning is one of the fundamental skills in the cognitive domain in the learning process. The questions that students ask reflect their mindset, including how they understand and connect information. In this context, Generation Z, as a generation born in the digital era, has unique communication characteristics. This generation is known to be critical, skeptical, and explorative, with a tendency to utilize technology to seek and organize information (Twenge, 2018). Research indicates that Generation Z students demonstrate a higher tendency to ask open-ended questions compared to previous generations, often integrating multiple sources and multimodal information (Prensky, 2010). This aligns with the cognitive constructivist perspective, which posits that learning is an active process of constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving information (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

Language plays a central role in the communication process, including in question formulation. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), introduced by Halliday (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), provides a theoretical framework for analyzing language structures, including questions, through three main metafunctions: ideational, textual, and interpersonal. This approach is relevant for understanding how Generation Z students use language to articulate ideas, establish relationships between concepts, and convey their critical attitudes. Recent studies have shown that students from this generation tend to use more complex syntactic structures in their questioning patterns, often embedding multiple clauses to express nuanced inquiries (Martin & Rose, 2007). Furthermore, technological advancements have influenced their questioning strategies, as digital interactions allow them to refine and modify their questions based on instant feedback from online sources (Lee, 2020).

In a study conducted by Mercer (2002), classroom discourse analysis revealed that students who engaged in dialogic questioning—questions that encourage extended discussions—exhibited deeper conceptual understanding and critical thinking skills. This finding supports the idea that the structure and function of questions are not merely linguistic choices but are also shaped by cognitive and social processes. Understanding these structures provides valuable insights for educators in designing instructional methods that foster critical inquiry, enhance discourse coherence, and support the development of higher-order thinking skills (Wells & Ball, 2008).

In Indonesian language courses, questioning skills play a crucial role in fostering students' understanding and developing their critical thinking abilities, as the questions they pose can reflect their analytical skills and comprehension of various issues (Bloom & VanSlyke-Briggs, 2019; Anderson et al., 2018). Vygotsky & Cole (1978) emphasize that social interaction, including discussion-based questioning, contributes to cognitive development, while Mercer (2002) explains that language is not merely a tool for communication but also a medium for thinking and problem-solving. In this context, a question such as "How can Indonesia reduce the negative effects of chemical fertilizer use?" not only reflects students' awareness of environmental issues but also demonstrates how they use language to connect local concerns with global challenges, aligning with the concept of language for thinking (Gee, 2014). Thus, questioning in academic discussions not only strengthens students' critical thinking skills but also enables them to explore real-world problems through reflective and argumentative language use (Alexander, 2006).

Although there have been many studies on the communication patterns of Generation Z (Prensky, 2001; Twenge, 2017), there is still a lack of studies that discuss their question sentences with LSF theory, especially in the context of Indonesian language education. In addition to these two studies, studies that focus on interrogative sentences or questions are presented as follows. First, a study entitled "The Coherence of Teachers' Questions in Learning". This study describes the rhetoric of teachers' questions in learning in terms of (1) the coherence of teachers' questions in learning, (2) the use of coherence markers of teachers' questions in learning, and (3) students' responses to teachers' questions in learning (Eriyanti, 2016). Second, a study entitled "Active Learning Model with Questioning Strategy to Improve the Quality of Civics Learning Process." The purpose of this model is for students to be able to think and argue critically (Kariadi & Suprapto, 2018). Third, a study entitled "Problem-Based Learning Models and Socratics Questions to Improve Students' Critical Thinking Skills." This study aims to test the effectiveness of problem-based learning models and Socratic questions to improve students' critical thinking skills in science subjects in junior high school (Redhana, 2012).

Based on the description of previous research that has been presented above, it is necessary to conduct research that focuses on the questions of Generation Z students. Therefore, this study aims to explore the textual metafunction of Generation Z students' questions in the context of Indonesian Language Education courses. To review this problem, this study uses a SFL approach. The study focuses on reviewing the theme-rheme structure in Generation Z students' questions and the theme categories in Generation Z students' questions. This study is significant because it provides in-depth insights into effective learning strategies for improving students' literacy and comprehension skills, especially in the context of language education. In addition, the results of this study can be the basis for developing more innovative teaching methods that are under the needs of students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Systemic Functional Linguistics

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is an approach viewing language as a semiotic system that functions in a social context (Halliday, 2014). Language is not just a grammatical structure but also a system of meaning choices that develop in social interactions. Halliday (1978) emphasized that language functions to express experiences, build social relationships, and organize messages in a text. From an ontological perspective, SFL recognizes language as dynamic, contextual, and layered. Language is understood as a system of choices (systemic) that offers various possibilities for expressing meaning in certain situations (Eggins, 2004). This approach shows that the relationship between linguistic form and its communicative function reflects language users' social and cultural needs.

SFL has the following main principles as the basis for its analysis.

a. Language as a System of Choice

Language is not just a collection of structural rules but a system that offers users a variety of choices to convey different meanings according to context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). This system allows language users to choose the most appropriate linguistic elements to adapt their communication to a particular situation (Martin & Rose, 2007).

b. Language Metafunction

(1) Ideational metafunction relates to how language is used to express experiences, both external and internal world experiences. For example, in academic discourse, clause structures are often used to represent causal and logical relationships (Eggins, 2004).

(2) Interpersonal metafunction relates to how language is used to build social relationships, express attitudes, and shape interactions between speakers and listeners. For example, in conversation, the use of modality words indicates the level of certainty or obligation in speech (Thompson, 2014).

(3) Textual metafunction relates to how language is used to build cohesive and coherent texts according to their communicative context. According to Halliday & Hasan (2014), cohesion in the text can be realized through the use of references, substitutions, ellipsis, conjunctions, and lexical.

c. Strata in Language

Halliday (2014) proposed that language has several interrelated levels (strata), namely (1) semantics, layers of meaning constructed in communication, (2) lexicogrammatical: grammatical structures, and vocabulary choices that support meaning (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), and (3) phonology/graphology: sound or written representations that realize grammatical structures.

d. Context in Language Use

SFL emphasizes the importance of context in language analysis, which includes (1) Situational context (field, tenor, mode): what is being talked about, the relationship between participants, and the medium of communication; (2) cultural context: norms, values, and social conventions that shape language use. In systemic functional linguistic analysis, the method used is based on a qualitative approach that examines language in its context (Eggins, 2004).

Some methodological steps that are commonly applied are as follows.

a) Functional discourse analysis: This approach analyzes texts or conversations with a focus on the metafunction of

language and the relationship between linguistic forms and their meanings in a particular context (Martin & Rose, 2007).

b) Analysis of structure and lexicogrammatical choice: This analysis aims to identify grammatical and vocabulary patterns used to construct meaning in texts or verbal interactions (Thompson, 2014).
c) Situational and cultural context mapping: This analysis understands how situational and cultural factors influence the language choices used by individuals or groups in communication (Eggins, 2004).
d) Multimodal analysis: In recent studies, LFS has also been applied in the analysis of multimodal communication, which includes text, images, and other visual elements that contribute to meaning in social interactions (O'Halloran, 2004)

Systemic Functional Linguistics provides a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding how language works as a dynamic semiotic system. With a context-based and function-based approach, SFL allows for a more in-depth and applicable study of language in various fields, such as education, media, and social discourse analysis (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Textual Metafunction

Textual metafunction is one of three language metafunctions proposed by Halliday in the Systemic Functional Linguistics approach (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). This metafunction focuses on how text is structured to have cohesion and coherence that allows messages to be conveyed clearly in a communication context. Halliday (2014) explains that textual metafunction is related to organizing information in a text so that it can form a logical and easy-to-understand structure. This metafunction works by connecting linguistic elements in discourse and ensuring integration between parts of the text. In the communication process, textual metafunction plays a role in organizing the sequence of information, adjusting to the situational context, and forming a harmonious relationship between parts of the text (Eggins, 2004).

Textual metafunction has several main principles that support the structure and integration of the text.

a. Theme and Rheme

Theme and rhyme are the main concepts in textual metafunction. The theme is the initial part of a clause that functions as the starting point of a message, while the rheme is the part that develops or provides further information about the theme. Themes can be participants (noun phrases), processes (verb phrases), or descriptions (adverbial phrases). In discourse analysis, the theme-rheme pattern helps in seeing how a text is developed and how the relationships between parts of the text are established (Martin & Rose, 2007).

b. Cohesion and Coherence

According to Halliday & Hasan (2014a), cohesion is the relationship between parts of a text marked by grammatical and lexical elements that connect one part to another. Cohesion in a text can be realized through (1) reference (use of pronouns or repetition), (2) substitution (replacement of elements with other words), (3) ellipsis (removal of parts that can be understood from the context), (4) conjunctions (connectors between clauses), and (5) lexical cohesion (use of synonyms, antonyms, or word repetition). Meanwhile, coherence is concerned with the logical relationship between parts of a text that allows the text to be understood meaningfully (Eggins, 2004). Coherence ensures that the text is structurally related and has a meaning coherence.

c. Discourse Structure: Textual metafunction regulates the discourse structure to suit its communicative purpose. Discourse structure includes the sequence of information, the opening and closing of the text, and transitions between parts of the text (Thompson, 2014). A good discourse structure helps the audience understand the contents of the text more easily.

Textual metafunction works in three main stages, namely:

a. Identification of Theme and Rheme: In forming a text process, the writer or speaker chooses a theme that will be the starting point of the message. This theme is then developed with rheme, which provides additional information or clarifies the main message.

b. Application of Cohesion and Coherence: For the text to be cohesive and coherent, cohesive elements such as conjunctions, references, and repetitions are used to connect clauses and paragraphs. Adjustment of inter-sentence relationships is also done to ensure that the meaning of the text remains clear and structured.
c. Organization of Discourse Structure: The text is then structured based on its genre and communicative context. For example, in academic discourse, texts tend to have an argumentative structure consisting of an introduction, development, and conclusion (Martin & Rose, 2007). In everyday conversation, discourse structures can be more flexible depending on the interaction dynamics.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative approach is suitable for analyzing this problem because it enables an in-depth exploration of language as a social phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Given that language use is shaped by social interactions, cultural norms, and educational influences, qualitative methods allow for a nuanced understanding of these factors (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). Furthermore, the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework provides a comprehensive lens through which to analyze language structure in its metafunctional dimensions—ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

By employing a descriptive analysis method, the study can capture the complexities of language as it naturally occurs rather than reducing it to quantifiable metrics. Additionally, using the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework further justifies this approach, as SFL focuses on how language functions in different contexts through its metafunctions—ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). This enables the study to explore the structural aspects of language and its meanings, purposes, and variations across different social settings, making qualitative research the most appropriate methodological choice.

Data Collection

The data in this study consists of question sentences formulated by Generation Z students during Indonesian language lectures. These questions were sourced from 100 students aged 18-22 years old enrolled in a public university in Indonesia. The data collection took place over one semester, from August to December 2024, and included written questions submitted through assignments and online discussion forums. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research emphasizes exploring and understanding how individuals construct meaning in social contexts. Therefore, analyzing student-generated questions allows for a deeper understanding of their critical thinking patterns and engagement in academic discourse.

The data was selected based on specific criteria to ensure relevance and representativeness. First, the questions had to be submitted in writing during lecture discussions. Second, they needed to focus on academic topics, particularly education, social issues, and sustainability. Third, the study considered explorative, evaluative, and rhetorical questions, as these types indicate different levels of critical thinking (Chin & Osborne, 2008). The data were collected through document analysis, where student-generated questions were recorded and categorized based on linguistic and functional characteristics. The primary instruments included a question documentation form, a coding scheme, and an analytical framework based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), which allows for examining how language functions within specific contexts. This approach aligns with the view that language is a means of communication and a tool for shaping thought and knowledge (Mercer, 2002).

Data Analysis

- Identification and Categorization
  a) Categorizing Questions: each question is classified based on the type of interrogative word (e.g., *what, how, why, when*) to understand the linguistic patterns used in questioning.
  b) Textual Metafunction Analysis: questions are analyzed based on thematic structure, focusing on (1) Main elements (Themes) → The starting point of a clause (e.g., "How do Gen Z students communicate?") and (2) Theme Categories consist of (a) Topical Theme (main idea of the clause), (b) Textual Theme (connectors like

however, therefore, in contrast), and (c) Interpersonal Theme (expressing opinion, stance, or interaction, e.g., *Do you think...?*).

- Thematic Interpretation

The findings are interpreted to identify (1) Gen Z's Communication Patterns (What types of questions do they use more frequently? The role of questioning in their discourse), (2) Relevance to Local and Global Issues (How their communication reflects social, cultural, or digital trends), and (3) Implications for Inquiry-Based Pedagogy (How their questioning strategies can enhance classroom discussions. The pedagogical value of encouraging diverse questioning styles) (Twenge, 2018).

FINDINGS

Main Elements (Themes-Rhemes)

The main elements in this study consist of themes-rhemes. A more detailed presentation is as follows.

Category of Questions with the Word "*Apa* (What)"

(1) *Apa alasan kancil dianggap nakal*? (What is the reason why deer are considered naughty?)
(2) *Apa definisi "menyembuhkan" dalam konteks pengobatan*? (What is the definition of "cure" in the context of medicine?)
(3) *Apa beras merupakan kebutuhan pangan utama di Indonesia*? (Is rice the main food in Indonesia?)
(4) *Apa yang dimaksud dengan pendidikan*? (What is meant by education?)
(5) *Apa saja alternatif pupuk kimia*? (What are the alternatives to chemical fertilizers?)

In data (1), the theme "*Apa alasan kancil* (What is the reason why deer)" and rheme "*dianggap nakal?* (are considered naughty?)" was found. In data (2), the theme "*Apa definisi 'menyembuhkan'* (What is the definition of 'cure')" and rheme "*dalam konteks pengobatan?* (in the context of medicine?)" were found. In data (3), the theme "*Apa beras* (What is rice)" and rheme "*merupakan kebutuhan pangan utama di Indonesia?* (is the main food need in Indonesia?)" were found. In data (4), the theme "*Apa yang dimaksud* (What is meant)" and rheme "*dengan Pendidikan?* (by education?)" were found. In data (5), the theme "*Apa saja alternatif pupuk kimia* (What are the alternatives to chemical fertilizers?)" and rheme: there is no explicit addition because the theme already covers the entire information.

In this category, the theme always begins with the word "*apa* (what)" which serves as an introduction or marker of the type of information expected. The rheme is often an in-depth explanation or definition of the topic in question. In addition, themes tend to be explicit and go straight to the heart of the question. Some data shows that the theme already covers the whole information, such as in "*Apa saja alternatif pupuk kimia?* (What are the alternatives to chemical fertilizers?)". Thus, this question shows students' focus on definition, explanation of concepts, and exploration of issues.

Category of Questions with the Word "*Mengapa* (Why)"

(1) *Mengapa Indonesia masih bergantung pada pupuk kimia dalam sektor pertanian?* (Why does Indonesia still rely on chemical fertilizers in the agricultural sector?)

(2) *Mengapa pendidikan dianggap penting dalam kehidupan seseorang?* (Why is education considered important in a person's life?)

(3) *Mengapa masyarakat Indonesia membutuhkan beras?* (Why do Indonesians need rice?)

In data (1), the theme "*Mengapa Indonesia* (Why Indonesia)" and the rheme "*masih bergantung pada pupuk kimia dalam sektor pertanian?* (is still dependent on chemical fertilizers in the agricultural sector?)" were found. In data (2) the theme "*Mengapa pendidikan* (Why is education)" and rheme "*dianggap penting dalam kehidupan seseorang?* (considered important in one's life?)" are found. In data (3) the theme "*Mengapa masyarakat Indonesia* (Why do Indonesians)" and rheme "*membutuhkan beras?* (need rice?)" was found.

Themes begin with "*mengapa* (why)" to focus the question on a particular cause or reason. The rema expands the discourse with an emphasis on logical reasons or underlying factors. The theme contains the main subject or topic (such as Indonesia, education, or Indonesian society), while the rheme directs the discussion to the reasons or motivations behind the phenomenon. This question highlights students' critical thinking skills by exploring the underlying reasons for important issues.

Categories of Questions with the Word "*Bagaimana* (How)"

(1) *Bagaimana cara mengurangi dampak negatif penggunaan pupuk kimia?* (How can we reduce the negative impact of using chemical fertilizers?)
(2) *Bagaimana akses ke pendidikan di Indonesia?* (What is the access to education in Indonesia?)
(3) *Bagaimana cara Indonesia untuk meningkatkan produktivitas pertanian?* (How can Indonesia increase agricultural productivity?)
(4) *Bagaimana bila terkadang yang menyembuhkan kita itu bukan obat kimia, tetapi pikiran positif serta sugesti dari diri kita sendiri?* (What if sometimes it's not chemical medicine that cures us, but our own positive thoughts and suggestions?)
(5) *Bagaimana cerita ini membentuk pandangan tentang moralitas, mengingat Kancil sering berhasil mengakali pihak lain tanpa konsekuensi jangka panjang yang signifikan?* (How does this story shape views on morality, given that Kancil often manages to outsmart others without significant long-term consequences?)

Data (1) found the theme "*Bagaimana cara mengurangi* (How to reduce)" and rheme "*dampak negatif penggunaan pupuk kimia?* (The negative impact of using chemical fertilizers?)". Data (2) found the theme "*Bagaimana akses ke pendidikan* (How is access to education)" and rheme "*di Indonesia?* (in Indonesia?)". Data (3) found the theme "*Bagaimana cara Indonesia* (How can Indonesia)" and rheme "*untuk meningkatkan produktivitas pertanian?* (increase agricultural productivity?)". Data (4) found the theme "*Bagaimana bila terkadang yang menyembuhkan kita* (What if sometimes what heals us)" and rheme "*itu bukan obat kimia, tetapi pikiran positif serta sugesti dari diri kita sendiri?* (is not chemical drugs, but positive thoughts and suggestions from ourselves?)". Data (5) found the theme "*Bagaimana cerita ini* (How does this story)" and rheme "*membentuk pandangan tentang moralitas, mengingat Kancil sering berhasil mengakali pihak lain tanpa konsekuensi jangka panjang yang signifikan?* (Shape views on morality, given that Kancil often manages to outsmart others without significant long-term consequences?)".

Themes start with "*bagaimana* (how)", indicating a focus on the process, solution, or implications of an issue. Remains are often detailed steps or scenarios that enrich the discourse. Themes illustrate the subject matter while remaining present in more complex developments, often with evaluative or narrative elements. For example, "*Bagaimana bila terkadang yang menyembuhkan kita itu bukan obat kimia, tetapi pikiran positif serta sugesti dari diri kita sendiri?* (What if sometimes what cures us is not chemical drugs, but positive thoughts and suggestions from ourselves?)". Thus, Generation Z students tend to be exploratory and reflective, reflecting an openness to different perspectives.

Categories of Questions with the Word "*Kenapa* (Why)"

(1) *Jika karena alasan itu, kenapa Indonesia tidak mencoba menanamkan budaya untuk memakan jenis karbohidrat selain beras?* (If for that reason, why doesn't Indonesia try to instill a culture of eating other types of carbohydrates besides rice?)
(2) *Kenapa kancil yang cerdik disebut nakal?* (Why is the clever deer called naughty?)

Data (1) found the theme "*Jika karena alasan itu, kenapa Indonesia tidak mencoba menanamkan budaya* (If for that reason, why doesn't Indonesia try to instill a culture)" and rheme "*untuk memakan jenis karbohidrat selain beras?* (to eat other types of carbohydrates besides rice?)". Data (2) found the theme "*Kenapa kancil yang cerdik* (Why is the clever

deer)" and rema "*disebut nakal?* (called naughty?)". The word "*kenapa* (why)" is used for cause-and-effect questions that are more connected to opinions or assumptions. The theme indicates an initial assumption or idea, while the rema expands on additional explanations. The rheme often leaves room for further interpretation or development. For example, "*Kenapa kancil yang cerdik disebut nakal?* (Why is the clever deer called naughty?)". This question shows a desire to question the general narrative or existing assumptions.

Category of Questions with the Word "*Kapan* (When)"
Kapan Indonesia tidak perlu mengimpor beras? (When will Indonesia not need to import rice?)

In the data above, we find the theme "*Kapan Indonesia* (When will Indonesia)" and the rheme "*tidak perlu mengimpor beras?* (not need to import rice?)". Usually, this category is limited to questions about time. However, with the rema, this question refers to criteria. Students show concern not only for the sustainability aspect that is bound to the time dimension but also for the criteria that indicate a country no longer needs to import rice.

Categories of Questions with the Word "Berapa (How Much)"
(1) *Berapa jumlah persentase masyarakat Indonesia yang mengkonsumsi beras sebagai makanan utama?* (What percentage of Indonesian people consume rice as their main food?)
(2) *Berapa tingkat persentase kesembuhan dengan mengonsumsi obat kimia?* (What is the percentage rate of recovery by taking chemical drugs?)

In data (1), the theme "*Berapa jumlah persentase masyarakat Indonesia yang mengkonsumsi beras* (What the percentage of Indonesian people who consume rice)" and rheme "*sebagai makanan utama?* (as the main food?)" were found. In data (2), the theme "*Berapa tingkat persentase kesembuhan* (What is the percentage rate of recovery)" and rheme "*dengan mengonsumsi obat kimia?* (by consuming chemical drugs?)" were found. These questions emphasize a focus on quantity or specific numbers. The theme is a quantitative entity, while the rema provides a particular boundary or context. The theme goes straight to the focus of quantification, such as a percentage number or cure rate. The rema adds an application context. Thus, students showed attention to the collection of concrete data and proof through numbers.

Categories of Questions with the Clitic "*-kah* (-is)"
(1) *Benarkah produksi beras di Indonesia tidak memadai?* (Is it true that rice production in Indonesia is inadequate?)
(2) *Bukankah sektor pertanian cukup besar?* (Isn't the agricultural sector big enough?)

In data (1), the theme "*Benarkah produksi beras di Indonesia* (Is it true that rice production in Indonesia)" and the rheme "*tidak memadai?* (is inadequate?)" are found. In data (2), the theme "*Bukankah sektor pertanian* (Isn't the agricultural sector)" and rheme "*cukup besar?* (quite large?)" are found. Questions with the clitic "*-kah* (-is)" contain evaluative or rhetorical elements, often aimed at validating assumptions or statements. Themes contain claims, while remarks leave room for discussion. A direct theme lists the topic of evaluation, such as rice production in Indonesia or the agricultural sector. The rema leads to the confirmation of assumptions. Thus, students tend to be evaluative and question the feasibility or veracity of existing claims.

An analysis of the themes-rhemes from Generation Z students' questions shows the following. First, students tend to raise issues that are locally and globally relevant, such as sustainability, education, and agrarian matters. Second, the questions show an analytical mindset, with the ability to identify, explore, and evaluate issues in depth.

Theme Categories (Topical, Textual, and Interpersonal)

The following data is presented, which is suspected to show the theme category of the question sentences of Generation

Z students, which are categorized based on the question words used.

Question Category with the Word "*Apa* (What)"

(1) *Apa alasan kancil dianggap nakal*? (What is the reason why deer are considered naughty?)
(2) *Apa definisi "menyembuhkan" dalam konteks pengobatan*? (What is the definition of "cure" in the context of medicine?)
(3) *Apa beras merupakan kebutuhan pangan utama di Indonesia*? (Is rice the main food in Indonesia?)
(4) *Apa yang dimaksud dengan pendidikan*? (What is meant by education?)
(5) *Apa saja alternatif pupuk kimia*? (What are the alternatives to chemical fertilizers?)

In data (1), there is a topical theme, "Apa alasan kancil (What is the reason why deer)," and interpersonal, using the word "*apa* (what)" as a question indicator. In data (2), there is a topical theme "*Apa definisi 'menyembuhkan'* (What is the definition of 'cure')" and interpersonal using the question word "*apa* (what)" shows explorative interaction. In data (3), there is a topical theme, "*Apa beras* (What is rice)" and interpersonal uses the question word "*apa* (what)" as an opening question. In data (4), there is a topical theme, "*Apa yang dimaksud* (What is meant)" and interpersonal uses the question word "*apa* (what)" as a conceptual exploration tool. In data (5), there is a topical theme, "*Apa saja alternatif pupuk kimia* (What are the alternatives to chemical fertilizers?" and the interpersonal use of the question word "*apa* (what)" indicates a broad scope exploration question.

Questions with the word "*apa* (what)" are used to explore the definition, meaning, and scope of a concept. Topical themes in this category are often simple but get straight to the heart of the information sought. The interpersonal function of "*apa* (what)"-words show the student's desire to get basic information as a foundation for further discussion.

Categories of Questions with the Word "*Mengapa* (Why)"

(1) *Mengapa Indonesia masih bergantung pada pupuk kimia dalam sektor pertanian?* (Why does Indonesia still rely on chemical fertilizers in the agricultural sector?)

(2) *Mengapa pendidikan dianggap penting dalam kehidupan seseorang?* (Why is education considered important in a person's life?)

(3) *Mengapa masyarakat Indonesia membutuhkan beras?* (Why do Indonesians need rice?)

In data (1), there is a topical theme, "*Mengapa Indonesia* (Why Indonesia)" and interpersonal using the question word "*mengapa* (why)" signifies critical explorative questions. In data (2), there is a topical theme, "*Mengapa pendidikan* (Why is education)" and interpersonal uses the question word "*mengapa* (why)" which contains aspects of exploring important values. In data (3), there is a topical theme, "*Mengapa masyarakat Indonesia* (Why do Indonesians)" and interpersonal using the question word "*mengapa* (why)" indicates the exploration of reasons.

Questions with the word "*mengapa* (why)" focus on cause-and-effect analysis. Topical themes direct discussion to relevant subjects, while interpersonal themes facilitate in-depth exploration of the reasons behind a particular phenomenon. This usage reflects students' ability to think critically and question the underlying factors.

Categories of Questions with the Word "*Bagaimana* (How)"

(1) *Bagaimana cara mengurangi dampak negatif penggunaan pupuk kimia?* (How can we reduce the negative impact of using chemical fertilizers?)
(2) *Bagaimana akses ke pendidikan di Indonesia?* (What is the access to education in Indonesia?)
(3) *Bagaimana cara Indonesia untuk meningkatkan produktivitas pertanian?* (How can Indonesia increase agricultural productivity?)
(4) *Bagaimana bila terkadang yang menyembuhkan kita itu bukan obat kimia, tetapi pikiran positif serta sugesti dari*

diri kita sendiri? (What if sometimes it's not chemical medicine that cures us, but our own positive thoughts and suggestions?)

(5) *Bagaimana cerita ini membentuk pandangan tentang moralitas, mengingat Kancil sering berhasil mengakali pihak lain tanpa konsekuensi jangka panjang yang signifikan?* (How does this story shape views on morality, given that Kancil often manages to outsmart others without significant long-term consequences?)

In data (1), there is a topical theme "*Bagaimana cara mengurangi* (How to reduce)" and interpersonal using the question word "*bagaimana* (how)" indicates a solution question. In data (2), there is a topical theme, "*Bagaimana akses ke pendidikan* (How is access to education)" and interpersonal using the question word "*bagaimana* (how)" indicates an exploration of the situation. In data (3), there is a topical theme, "*Bagaimana cara Indonesia* (How can Indonesia)" and interpersonal use of the question word "*bagaimana* (how)" indicates the focus of the solution. In data (4), there is a topical theme "*Bagaimana bila terkadang yang menyembuhkan kita* (What if sometimes what heals us)" and interpersonal use of the question word "*bagaimana* (how)" indicates exploration of alternative ideas. In data (5), there is a topical theme "*Bagaimana cerita ini* (How does this story)" and interpersonal use of the question word "*bagaimana* (how)" indicates moral exploration.

The word "*bagaimana* (how)" is used to ask about the method, steps, or implications of an issue. Topical themes in this category are often related to processes or solutions, while interpersonal themes show an exploration of situations, alternatives, or moral views. For example, *Bagaimana bila terkadang yang menyembuhkan kita itu bukan obat kimia, tetapi pikiran positif serta sugesti dari diri kita sendiri*? shows students' openness to non-conventional perspectives.

Categories of Questions with the Word "*Kenapa* (Why)"

(1) *Jika karena alasan itu, kenapa Indonesia tidak mencoba menanamkan budaya untuk memakan jenis karbohidrat selain beras?* (If for that reason, why doesn't Indonesia try to instill a culture of eating other types of carbohydrates besides rice?)

(2) *Kenapa kancil yang cerdik disebut nakal?* (Why is the clever deer called naughty?)

In data (1), there is a textual theme "*Jika karena alasan itu* (If for that reason)" which connects to the previous context and topical "*kenapa Indonesia tidak mencoba menanamkan budaya* (why Indonesia does not try to instill culture)". In data (2) there is a topical theme "*Kenapa kancil yang cerdik* (Why is the clever deer)" and the interpersonal use of the question word "*kenapa* (why)" shows a critical exploration of perception. The word why is often used in the context of critical or evaluative questions. The textual theme in this category shows a connection with the previous context, while the topical and interpersonal themes reflect students' desire to reassess established assumptions or narratives.

Categories of Questions with the Word "*Kapan* (When)"

Kapan Indonesia tidak perlu mengimpor beras? (When will Indonesia not need to import rice?)

In the data above, there is a topical theme "*Kapan Indonesia* (When will Indonesia)" and interpersonal using the question word "*kapan* (when)" which in this question does not indicate a temporal question, but rather the criteria or standards of a country that no longer needs to import rice. Although traditionally, when is used to ask about time, in this data, when is used to explore criteria or standards. This can be seen in "When will Indonesia not need to import rice?", which focuses more on conditions rather than chronological time.

Categories of Questions with the Word "*Berapa* (How Much)"

(1) *Berapa jumlah persentase masyarakat Indonesia yang mengkonsumsi beras sebagai makanan utama?* (What percentage of Indonesian people consume rice as their main food?)

(2) *Berapa tingkat persentase kesembuhan dengan mengonsumsi obat kimia?* (What is the percentage rate of cure by taking chemical drugs?)

In data (1), there is a topical theme "*Berapa jumlah persentase masyarakat Indonesia yang mengkonsumsi beras* (What the percentage of Indonesian people who consume rice)" and interpersonal using the question word "*berapa* (how much)" shows quantitative exploration. In data (2), there is a topical theme "*Berapa tingkat persentase kesembuhan* (What is the percentage rate of recovery)" and interpersonal using the question word "*berapa* (how much)" shows the focus of numbers and statistics. Questions with the word how much show students' orientation to the quantification of information. Topical themes focus on specific numbers or statistics, while interpersonal themes facilitate data-driven exploration to support arguments.

Categories of Questions with the Clitic "*-kah* (-is)"

(1) *Benarkah produksi beras di Indonesia tidak memadai?* (Is it true that rice production in Indonesia is inadequate?)
(2) *Bukankah sektor pertanian cukup besar?* (Isn't the agricultural sector big enough?)

In data (1), there is a topical theme, "*Benarkah produksi beras di Indonesia* (Is it true that rice production in Indonesia)" and the interpersonal use of the question clitic "*-kah* (-is)" shows critical exploration with modality. In data (2), there is a topical theme "*Bukankah sektor pertanian* (Isn't the agricultural sector)" and interpersonal using the question clitic "*-kah* (-is)" indicates a rhetorical question with modality. Questions with the clitic "*-kah* (-is)" are used to evaluate certain claims or assumptions. The topical theme includes the main claim that is the focus of the discussion, while the interpersonal theme indicates an exploratory or rhetorical modality, as in "*Benarkah produksi beras di Indonesia tidak memadai*?".

DISCUSSION

Theme-Rheme Structure in Students' Questions Based on Systemic Functional Linguistics

The findings in this study indicate that questions asked by students have a distinctive theme-rheme pattern based on the question words used. In the category of questions with the word "*Apa* (What)" the theme always begins with this word and focuses on the definition, concept, or exploration of an issue, while the rheme provides further explanation. In the categories of "*mengapa/kenapa* (Why)" and "*bagaimana* (How)," the theme contains the main subject, while the rheme explains the reasons or factors causing a phenomenon, reflecting students' critical thinking. Questions with the word "*bagaimana* (How)" are more oriented towards the process, solution, or implications of an issue, with rhemes that are often evaluative or narrative. Based on the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach, the theme-rheme structure in students' questions reflects how they construct meaning in learning interactions. The theme, as the initial part of a clause, functions as the starting point for the message, while the theme develops further information (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

In the category of questions with the question word "*apa* (What)", this word always precedes the theme and serves to open the exploration of a concept, definition, or phenomenon. This is in line with the ideational metafunction in SFL, which shows that language is used to express real-world experiences and academic concepts (Eggins, 2004). This structure also shows the use of textual metafunction, where questions begin with an explicit theme and are developed through rhemes to provide additional information (Thompson, 2014).

Meanwhile, questions with the question words " *mengapa/kenapa* (Why)" have a more complex theme-rheme pattern, where the theme is often the main subject, which is then further explained in the rheme regarding the reasons or causes of a phenomenon. This reflects students' tendency to develop critical thinking because they are not only looking for basic information but also understanding causal relationships. From the perspective of interpersonal metafunction, this type of question shows students' position as active questioners in building social relationships with teachers or sources of information (Halliday & Hasan, 2014a).

In addition, questions with the question "*bagaimana* (How)" are more process or solution-oriented, where the theme

directs attention to a procedure, while the rheme explains the steps or consequences of an action. This pattern shows the use of cohesion and coherence in textual metafunction, where questions are structured to allow for a systematic understanding of a concept (Eggins, 2004). Thus, the theme-rheme pattern in these various question categories illustrates how students utilize language as a choice system to build understanding progressively and contextually.

Theme-Rheme Pattern Variations in Quantitative and Confirmative Questions

The findings indicate that the "*kapan* (When)" category is limited to the time aspect but also reflects attention to the continuity criterion. "How much" questions emphasize quantification and concrete data, with the theme directly referring to numbers or amounts, while the rheme adds the application context. Finally, questions with the clitic "*-kah*" indicate a form of confirmation or negation questions that are often used to test the truth of an assumption. Overall, the theme-rheme patterns in these various question categories illustrate how students construct questions to explore information, understand concepts, and develop critical and reflective thinking.

Based on these findings, it can be explained that the "*kapan* (When)" and "*berapa* (How much)" question categories show more specific theme-rheme patterns, reflecting students' focus on quantitative and temporal information. In the questions with " *kapan* (When)", the theme usually includes a particular reference of time, while the rheme provides the context or condition of the continuity of an event. From the perspective of situational context in SFL, this indicates that students tend to construct meaning by considering the time factor as part of their understanding of a phenomenon (Eggins, 2004). Meanwhile, the question "*berapa* (How much)" is oriented towards quantification, where the theme directly refers to the amount or number, while the rheme serves to provide the context of the application or relevance of the data. This structure is closely related to lexicogrammatical choice, where the choice of words and sentence structure in this type of question is more direct and prescriptive (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

In the form of confirmative questions, the use of the clitic "*-kah*" indicates the use of linguistic strategies that students utilize to test the truth of an idea or idea. In terms of interpersonal metafunction, this form indicates the way or strategy of students to establish interactions with interlocutors and adjust the level of confidence in the information received (Thompson, 2014). In the various categories of questions above, the theme-rheme structure reflects students' patterns of seeking information and shows the linguistic strategies used to create cohesion in academic communication. This shows that students' questions have explorative and evaluative functions that are in line with the Systemic Functional Linguistics approach that sees language as a choice system used based on the demands of social and academic contexts (Martin & Rose, 2007).

Generation Z Question Construction in Textual Metafunction Perspective

The questions asked by Generation Z students reflect various categories of themes, including topical, textual, and interpersonal. The use of question words such as "*apa* (What)", "*mengapa/kenapa* (Why)", and "*bagaimana* (How)" show a different focus in exploring information. Questions with "*apa* (What)" tend to be used to analyze the definition, concept, and scope of something, while "*mengapa/kenapa* (Why)" is more oriented toward cause-and-effect analysis and critical thinking. Meanwhile, questions with "*bagaimana* (How)" function to examine the process, solution, and implications of a problem. In addition, the use of the question word "*mengapa/kenapa* (Why)" often shows a critical exploration of perception and narrative, while "*kapan* (when)" is not always used in a temporal context but also the analysis of certain standards and conditions.

The questions asked by Generation Z students reflect various categories of themes, including topical, textual, and interpersonal. From the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), this pattern can be analyzed through textual metafunction, which focuses on how text or discourse is organized to have integration and cohesion. The use of question words such as "*apa* (What)", "*mengapa/kenapa* (Why)", and "*bagaimana* (How)" show that Generation Z students actively choose linguistic strategies that suit their communication goals. In particular, the question word "*apa* (What)" is more often used to ask for definitions or concepts, which is related to the thematic function in textual metafunctions. In this case, the

structure of students' questions can be analyzed based on themes and rhemes—where what tends to function as a theme that directs attention to the identification of a phenomenon, while the rheme part develops further information related to the theme.

In addition, the use of the question word "*mengapa/kenapa* (Why)" shows a tendency to think analytically and critically, which is closely related to cohesion and coherence in the text. According to (Halliday & Hasan, 2014a), cohesion in a text or discourse can be built through logical relationships such as cause and effect, which are often found in why-based questions. Generation z seems to not only seek facts but also try to understand the causal relations underlying a phenomenon, which in SFL can be associated with the use of causal conjunctions and argumentative strategies in discourse structures.

Meanwhile, questions about how to indicate the exploration of processes or solutions reflect genre-based discourse structures. In discourse structure, process-oriented questions often demand more complex responses, including descriptions of specific steps or solutions. From an SFL perspective, this is related to the organization of information in texts, where instructional or explanatory texts tend to have more explicit thematic patterns and the use of cohesive strategies such as references and repetitions to maintain continuity of meaning. Furthermore, the use of question words such as "*mengapa/kenapa* (Why)" and "*kapan* (When)" also shows flexibility in the use of language. The word "*mengapa/kenapa* (Why)" is often used in critical explorations of perception and narrative, which are related to interpersonal functions in social interactions.

Meanwhile, it is not only used in temporal contexts but also the analysis of certain standards and conditions. From a textual metafunction perspective, this shows how Generation Z constructs text structures that are adaptive to their communication needs, both in academic and social interactions. Thus, Generation Z's question patterns are not just a set of syntactic structures but rather a representation of linguistic choices influenced by situational contexts and their communication needs in an increasingly complex digital world.

Question Structure and Thinking Patterns of Generation Z Students in Learning

Questions with the question word "*berapa* (How much)" emphasize quantitative and statistical exploration, while the use of the clitic "*-kah*" indicates evaluative or rhetorical questions with a certain modality. Overall, this question pattern indicates that Generation Z students are not only looking for factual information but also exploring concepts, reasons, solutions, and critical evaluations of various phenomena. This finding confirms that understanding question structures can provide insight into students' thinking patterns in their learning process and academic interactions.

The findings of this study indicate that questions with the question word "*berapa* (how much)" emphasize quantitative and statistical exploration, while the use of the clitic "-kah" indicates evaluative or rhetorical questions related to a certain modality. This pattern reflects that Generation Z students are not only looking for factual information but also exploring concepts, reasons, and solutions and conducting critical evaluations of various phenomena. From the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), this phenomenon can be explained through three language metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

From the ideational metafunction aspect, the use of the question word "*berapa* (how much)" shows that students tend to express their experiences in the form of data and fact exploration. In the learning process, this question indicates an orientation towards quantification and measurement as a thinking strategy. In contrast, the use of the clitic "*-kah*" reflects the evaluative aspect, which is closely related to modality in academic communication. This is in line with Halliday's (2014) view that language is used to organize human experiences in text systematically.

Interpersonal metafunction in this context is seen in how students use questions as a tool to build academic interactions and negotiate meaning in discussions. Evaluative questions with the clitic "-kah" show students' emotional involvement and critical attitude towards a statement or phenomenon. This strengthens the role of language as a means to express attitudes and build social relationships in the learning environment (Thompson, 2014)

From the textual metafunction perspective, the pattern of questions asked by students shows how language structures play a role in building coherence and cohesion in academic discussions. Quantitative and evaluative questions used

alternately in learning interactions reflect systematic and structured thinking strategies. The theme-rheme structure in a discourse determines the way information is developed and understood (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In this context, Generation Z's questioning pattern shows their ability to organize and manage information coherently and logically.

Thus, the findings of this study reinforce the view that understanding structure is to know how students seek information and reveal thinking patterns in lecture activities. Through the Systemic Functional Linguistics approach, this pattern can be analyzed as part of the sociolinguistic dynamics in the academic environment, where language becomes the main means in the formation of knowledge and understanding.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that the theme-rheme structure in students' questions is systematically shaped by the type of question word used, reflecting their cognitive processes and linguistic strategies in academic discourse. Questions beginning with "*apa* (What)" predominantly focus on defining concepts or exploring phenomena, with rhemes providing elaborative details, while "*mengapa/kenapa* (Why)" questions exhibit a more complex theme-rheme pattern that encourages causal reasoning and critical thinking. Meanwhile, "*bagaimana* (How)" questions emphasize processes, solutions, or implications, demonstrating students' ability to construct procedural and evaluative inquiries. Additionally, questions categorized under "*kapan* (When)" and "*berapa* (How much)" indicate a focus on temporal and quantitative precision, respectively, while confirmatory questions using the clitic "*-kah*" reveal students' evaluative stance in verifying assumptions. These diverse patterns align with the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) framework, illustrating how students strategically use language to construct meaning, engage in knowledge exploration, and maintain coherence in discourse. The interplay between ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions further highlights the depth of students' engagement in learning interactions.

Significantly, these findings suggest that students' question patterns are not merely syntactic choices but reflections of their cognitive and communicative strategies, shaping their ability to navigate academic discussions. Understanding these structures provides valuable insights for educators in designing instructional methods that foster critical inquiry, enhance discourse coherence, and support the development of higher-order thinking skills.

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