

Comparative Analysis of Thematic Progression Patterns in Narration and Exposition

Hongping Chen, Yameng Zheng*

School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Baoding, 071000, China

DOI:10.21276/sijll.2019.2.4.2

| Received: 12.06.2019 | Accepted: 25.06.2019 | Published: 30.06.2019

*Corresponding author: Yameng Zheng

Abstract

It is assumed that thematic progression (TP) patterns are correlated with genres including narration, exposition, description and argumentation. In order to figure out the distributions of TP patterns in narration and exposition, the present study conducts a comparative study. It adopts four TP patterns: continuous pattern, TP with continuous Theme, TP with continuous Rheme and alternative pattern. Two texts are chosen randomly from New Horizon English Course (Reading and Writing) [1], a textbook for non-English majors in China, as representatives of narrative and expository writings. This paper can be divided into five parts. First, this paper presents the background of this study. Then it introduces the theoretical framework involving thematic structure and different thematic progression patterns. As the main body, the third part focuses on the quantitative comparative analysis of distributions of TP patterns in the two genres. The fourth part is results and discussion and the final part is conclusion. The result shows that though both genres incline to utilize TP with continuous Theme and continuous pattern, narration prefers TP with continuous Rheme while exposition tends to utilize more alternative pattern. This paper testifies the statement that there exist differences between distributions of TP pattern in narrative and expository writing. It also attempts to provide enlightenments for guiding the teachers to help improve students' reading and writing abilities.

Keywords: Theme, Rheme, TP Patterns, comparative analysis, narration, exposition.

Copyright @ 2019: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution license which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use (NonCommercial, or CC-BY-NC) provided the original author and source are credited.

INTRODUCTION

Originally, it was the Mathesius [2], an renowned linguist of Prague school, that put forward thematic and information theories, which constitute the main content of textual metafunction. According to Halliday, textual metafunction is "realized" by thematic system, information system and cohesion [3]. Researches on TP patterns are of high practical value as they help readers to understand how texts are organized and improve their ability of reading and writing. Currently, not a few studies have analyzed thematic system.

Xu Shenghuan [4] and Zhu Yongsheng [2] are among the earliest scholars who introduced Theme choice and TP patterns into China. From then on, Theme choice and TP patterns have been utilized by many scholars to the analysis of different texts. Fries [5] supposed that there may be some specific relations

between TP patterns and different discourses. However, previous studies concentrate merely on pure theoretical analysis or the Theme choice and TP patterns in a single text. Few researches have made comparative analysis of TP patterns in different genres. Although Li Guoqing has analyzed the patterns of TP in narrative and descriptive segments in *The Old Man and the Sea* and found out that there existed differences [6], his analysis is based on the fragments of the fiction and thus TP patterns may not equal to that of complete discourses. Besides, the TP patterns that Li choose are based on the three patterns of TP put forward by Danes [7], which has been developed by other scholars. Moreover, most of previous researches only utilize qualitative approach. In this regard, this paper will utilize both quantitative and qualitative methods to make a comparative analysis of different distributions of TP patterns in narration and exposition.

Thematic Structure

According to Halliday and Matthiessen thematic structure, mainly carrying message, normally consists of Theme and Rheme [8]. Broadly speaking,

Theoretical Framework

This part will present thematic structure, display different TP patterns raised by many scholars and clarify the TP patterns adopted in this essay.

Theme can be identified as an element which takes up the first position in a clause. There are different definitions. The most popular one is made by Halliday that “Theme is the point of departure/starting point for the message, it is that with which the clause is concerned” [9]. At present, it has been recognized that Theme begins from the first word of a clause and ends with the first experiential element including process, participants, circumstantial factors. Except for Theme, the rest part of a clause is called Rheme, which usually gives more information about Theme.

Theme can be divided into unmarked Theme and marked Theme according to its frequency [10]. As regards to composition of Theme, it is recognized that Theme can be divided into simple Theme and complex Theme [10]. A simple Theme contains only one structural unit, that is experiential element. Complex Theme, however, refers to the Theme in which textual or interpersonal elements precedes the experiential

element [11]. In that case, the typical order should be textual ^ interpersonal ^ experiential [11].

Thematic Progression

As we know, there exist some connections and changes between Themes and Rhemes of surrounding clauses within a complete cohesive discourse, and these relations and changes can be called thematic progression [2].

There are mainly three kinds of TP patterns raised by Danes [7], Xu Shenghuan and Zhu Yongsheng. Danes put forward tree kinds of TP patterns: simple-linear, constant and derived hyper thematic pattern [7]. Following the three TP patterns proposed by Danes, Chinese scholars like Xu Shenghuan [4] and Zhu Yongsheng [2] developed the TP patterns that which is still be used now. To make it more clearly, these patterns raised by these three above scholars can be demonstrated by table of Figure-1:

Table of Figure-1: Danes/Xu/Zhu TP patterns (“--”means there is no counterpart)

Scholars	Thematic Progression Patterns				
Danes	simple linear TP	Constant pattern	hyper-thematic pattern	--	--
Xu	Continuous pattern	Parallel pattern	--	Concentrated pattern	Alternative pattern
Zhu	Continuous pattern	TP with continuous Theme	--	TP with continuous Rheme	Alternative pattern

The present paper prefers the TP patterns raised by Zhu Yonsheng as they are more specific and inclusive. Thus the TP patterns adopted by this study is: ① Continuous pattern; ② TP with continuous Theme; ③ TP with continuous Theme; ④ alternative pattern. For better understanding, the four patterns are as follows:

- Continuous pattern: $T_1 \rightarrow R_1 \dots T_2 (=R_1) \rightarrow R_2 \dots T_3 (=R_2) \rightarrow R_3 \dots$
- TP with continuous Theme: $T_1 \rightarrow R_1 \dots T_2 (=T_1) \rightarrow R_2 \dots T_3 (=T_2) \rightarrow R_3 \dots$
- TP with continuous Theme: $T_1 \rightarrow R_1 \dots T_2 \rightarrow R_2 (=R_1) \dots T_3 \rightarrow R_3 (=R_2) \dots$
- Alternative pattern: $T_1 \rightarrow R_1 \dots T_2 \rightarrow R_2 (=T_1) \dots T_3 \rightarrow R_3 (=T_2) \dots$

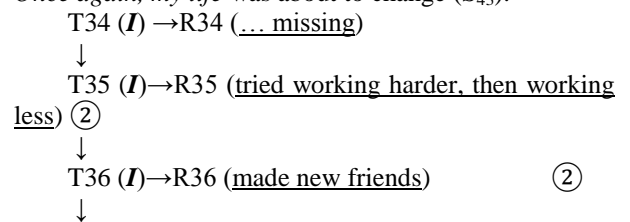
Analysis of Thematic Progression Patterns in I Am Home and Advertising

In this part, this essay will analyze the thematic progression patterns in *I Am Home* and *Advertising* and the analysis unit is paragraph. The two above essays are included in *New Horizon English Course (Reading and Writing)* (second edition).

Because of limited space, original texts (attached as appendix) will not be showed here.

Among the four TP patterns, *I Am Home*, as a narrative writing, utilizes the second pattern—TP with continuous Theme a lot, which can be proved by the eighth paragraph (“S” is the abbreviated form of Sentence).

I tried to figure out what was missing (S₃₄). I tried working harder, then working less (S₃₅). I made new friends (S₃₆) and lost touch with old ones (S₃₇). Nothing I did seemed to fill the void (S₃₈). I tried to remember when I was happiest (S₃₉). I asked myself what was important to me (S₄₀). Finally, I had the answer (S₄₁). I knew what I had to do to be happy (S₄₂). Once again, my life was about to change (S₄₃).



- T37 (*and I*)→R37 (lost touch with old ones)
- ② T38(*Nothing I did*)→R38 (..the void) ②
- T39 (*I*) →R39 (tried to remember when I was happiest) ②
- ↓
- T40 (*I*)→R40 (...important to me) ②
- ↓
- T41 (*Finally, I*) →R41 (...had the answer)
- ② ↓
- T42 (*I*)→R42 (...to be happy) ②
- ↓
- T43 (*Once again,*) →R43 (My life..) ④

As shown in the above example, it is not difficult to find out that TP with continuous Theme occurs 8 times as “I” is frequently used to tell the readers what happened to the narrator as well as the narrator’s psychological activities. By frequent use of “I” in such texts, the narrator can shorten the distance with readers so as to convince the readers and inspire their empathy.

Likewise, this thesis makes a comprehensive quantitative analysis of distribution of TP patterns in *I Am Home*. The data can be shown in Table of figure-2.

Table of Figure-2: Patterns of TP in *I Am Home*

TP patterns	①	②	③	④
frequency	13/43	19/43	7/43	4/43
ratio	30.2%	44.2%	16.3%	9.3%

As demonstrated in the table, there are altogether 43 times of thematic progression, with 13 times of continuous pattern, 19 times of TP with continuous Theme, 7 times of TP with continuous Rheme and 4 times of alternative pattern. That is to say, TP with continuous Theme, makes up for 44.2% of the total, occurs most frequently and alternative pattern least frequently in *I Am Home*. Such distribution makes sense as a narrator usually utilizes more first person “I” and other continuous Theme in the essay to narrate his

or her story in a natural way. Continuous pattern is also preferred by the narrator as it helps to make the story more fluent and easier to follow. Accordingly, alternative pattern is least used in narration.

In the similar way, the author makes a comprehensive quantitative analysis of distribution of TP patterns in *Advertising*, an expository writing. The data is demonstrated in table of figure-3:

Table of Figure-3: Patterns of TP in *Advertising*

Patterns of TP	①	②	③	④
Frequency	5/21	10/21	2/21	4/21
ratio	23.8%	47.6%	9.5%	19.1%

The table tells us TP with continuous Theme makes up nearly a half of all TP patterns in *Advertising*. there are 5 times of continuous pattern, 10 times of TP with continuous Theme, 2 times of TP with continuous Rheme and 4 times of alternative pattern among 21 TP patterns. The least used pattern is TP with continuous Rheme. At this point, this author will cite the eighth part as an example of alternative pattern in *Advertising*.

This same sort of simple, informational advertising is still used (S22). Examples include the roadside signs that tell travelers that they can buy fresh corn just down the road or that there is a restaurant in the next town (S23).

T22(*...advertising*)→R22 (is still used)

- ↓
- T23(**Examples**)→R23 (include roadside signs...)
- ④

There are altogether two sentences in the paragraph: the Theme in the former sentence is “This same sort of simple, informational advertising”; and the Rheme of the latter sentence is “include the roadside signs that...”. It is easy to recognize that the roadside signs is a specific form of the “simple, informational advertising” in the former sentence. By applying alternative pattern, the author presents more information and impress the readers will details.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The two above tables present similarities and differences of TP patterns in narrative and expository writings. As regards the similarities, it is not difficult to find out that both the two texts incline to utilize TP with continuous Theme most frequently, followed by continuous pattern. More specifically, TP with continuous Theme accounts for 44.2% in the Theme choice in the narrative writing and makes up for 47.6% in the expository writing; the continuous pattern ratio in the two texts are 30.2% and 23.8% respectively.

Apposed to the above similarities, there also exist differences in the two texts. The above data reveals that the narration uses more TP with continuous Rheme while the exposition tends to have a greater incidence of alternative pattern. This is understandable as a narrative writing usually narrates a story and the story content may remain similar or follow a logical order, and thereby more TP with continuous Rheme is used. As for expository writing, alternative pattern may be used more frequently in order to illustrate one object more comprehensively.

However, there are also some limitations in this paper. This thesis attempts to clarify the differences of Theme choice and distributions of TP patterns in narration and exposition, but due to lack of energy and ability, it only choose two texts, which might not represent all the texts of the same genre. Thus the following researches are expected to conduct a more comprehensive study by analyzing more texts.

CONCLUSION

Different from previous studies, this paper deals with the correlation between TP patterns in two complete texts of different genres. This paper testifies that there exist differences between distributions of TP pattern in narrative and expository writing. Judging from table of Figure 2 & 3, both genres utilize TP with continuous Theme most frequently among the four TP patterns. The purpose of a narration is to narrate things that happened to certain individuals and an exposition aims to illustrate some objects in detail. That is to say, both genres center on a certain fixed topic, which may explain why the both use much more TP with continuous Theme. As we can see, *I Am Home*, the narrative writing, tends to use TP with continuous Rheme, which can elaborate some circumstances or events so as to provide more information for the readers and engage them into reading. *Advertising*, the expository writing on the other side, inclines to use more alternative pattern, which may be explained by the fact that such TP pattern will make the object more noticeable and impressing.

This paper aims to offer some enlightenments for how to improve students' reading and writing abilities. Teachers are expected to make students have a general picture of thematic progression so that they can have a better understandings of how texts are unfolded. Besides, the correlation between different patterns of TP and different genres are also supposed to be applied in teaching reading and writing.

Appendix

Text 1 *I Am Home*

I grew up on a farm with a huge family. There was lots of love, lots of space and lots to do. From gardening in the greenhouse to chasing our old goose, feeding the goats to gathering the cattle, the world "bored" never found its way into my vocabulary. The work for us was a labor of love.

My family and I were very close, spending most nights playing games or telling stories until it was time to go to bed. Falling asleep was never a problem for me. I just listened to the sounds of singing birds and dreamed of another day on the farm. This was my life, and I knew I was lucky.

When I was 12, though, something terrible happened that would change my life forever. My father suffered a serious heart attack and was diagnosed with heart disease. The doctors informed my dad that he would need to change his lifestyle completely, which meant no more farming life. We were forced to sell our home and move west.

The dry Arizona air was good for my father, and I was adjusting to a new school, new friends and a new way of living. While my surroundings were different and strange, they were also exciting and fun. As fate would have it, my life would soon change again, and in a very big way.

One day, a personal manager from Los Angeles came up to me and asked if I had ever thought about being an actress. The idea had never crossed my mind. After talking it over with my parents, we decided that my mother and I would move to Los Angeles for a while and give it a shot.

Thank goodness my mother was right by my side from the very start. Together, we approached it like an adventure. When my first film was a success, my mother and I both decided that it was time for her to depart and resume her life in Arizona. The little girl from the farm was disappearing and being replaced by a woman in the big city.

I truly loved my job and was treated like a queen. And yet, something was missing. Slowly, a dark void found its way into my heart and began to eat away at my happiness.

I tried to figure out what was missing. I tried working harder, then working less. I made new friends and lost touch with old ones. Nothing I did seemed to fill the void. I tried to remember when I was happiest. I asked myself what was important to me. Finally, I had the answer. I knew what I had to do to be happy. Once again, my life was about to change.

I called my mother and father and said, "I miss you so much. I need my parents back. I am buying a place out here and I want you to move to California." My father was not too keen on the idea of being back in the rat race, but I assured him that this time it would be nothing like that. So we began looking for a place just like I remember growing up in.

Then one day we found it: the perfect home, nestled in a warm and sunny valley with pear trees in the yard. The move renewed my family's happiness; the dark void in me began to disappear; and a sense of balance returned to my soul. I was home, again.

Text 2 Advertising

Advertising is part of our daily lives. To find proof, you have only to leaf through a magazine or newspaper or count the radio or television commercials that you hear in one evening. Most people see and hear a mass of advertising messages every day. And people respond to the many devices that advertisers use to gain their attention.

Advertising is a big business—and, to many people, a fascinating one, filled with attraction and excitement. It is part literature, part art, and part show business.

Advertising is the difficult business of bringing information to great numbers of people. The purpose of an advertisement is to make people respond—to make them react to an idea, such as helping to prevent forest fires, or to make them want to buy a certain product or service.

At the beginning of the 20th century, advertising was described as "salesmanship in print". If this definition were expanded to include radio and television, it would still stand today.

The most effective way to sell something is through person-to-person contact. But the cost of person-to-person selling is high. Because it takes a great deal of time, it increases the cost of the product or service. Advertising, then, distributes the selling message to many people at one time.

Advertising is very old. It can be found as far back as the public criers of ancient Greece—who, for a fee, shouted out messages about a company's products to one and all. But it first became important in the late 15th century, when the trader of the rapidly growing

cities and rural towns needed a way to tell people where their goods could be bought.

The first printed advertisement in the English language appeared in 1478 more than a century before Shakespeare's first play was produced. This early ad was the work of William Caxton, English's first printer, who used it to advertise religious books from his own studio. Caxton posted small printed notices along London's main streets. Besides advertising his product, he identified his shop with a certain trademark so that customers could find it easily.

This same sort of simple, informational advertising is still used. Examples include the roadside signs that tell travelers that they can buy fresh corn just down the road or that there is a restaurant in the next town.

The Industrial Revolution, in the 18th and 19th centuries, brought a new kind of advertising. Large factories took the place of small workshops, and goods were produced in large quantities. Manufacturers used the newly built railroads to distribute their products over wide areas. They had to find many thousands of customers in order to stay in business. They could not simply tell people where shoes or cloth or tea could be bought—they had to learn how to make people want to buy a specific product. Thus modern advertising was born. Advertising helped to create new markets and to raise standards of living as people came to feel that they had a right to new and better products.

Advertising agencies began to develop in the United States just after the Civil war. At first, the chief objective if these agencies was to sell space in the various media, mainly newspapers and magazines. But they soon added the service of writing and producing advertisements.

From these modest beginnings, advertising has developed into a highly specialized and profitable business.

REFERENCE

1. Shutang, Z., & Quansheng, H. (2009). *New Horizon English Courses (Reading and Writing 3)* (2nd ed.). Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Researches Press.
2. Yongsheng, Z (1995). Patterns of Thematic Progression and Text Analysis. *Foreign Language Teaching and Researches*, 3, 6-12.
3. Yongsheng, Z., & Shiqing, Y. (2011). *New Reflections on Systematic Functional Linguistics*. Shanghai: Fudan University Press.
4. Shenghuan, X. (1982). Theme and Rheme. *Foreign Language Teaching and Researches*, 01, 1-9.
5. Fries, P. H. (1983). On the status of Theme in English: arguments from discourse. In J.S. Petofi

- & E. Sozer (eds.). *Micro and Macro Connexity of Texts*. Hamburg: Buske Verlag.
6. Guoqing, L. (2003). Thematic Progression and Genres. *Foreign Language and Their Teaching*, 7, 53-56.
 7. Dane, F. (1974). Functional Sentence Perspective and the Organization of the Text. In F. Dane (ed.): *Papers in Functional Sentence Perspective*. Prague: Academia.
 8. Halliday, M. A. K., & Christian, M. (2004). An Introduction to Functional Grammar (third edition) [M]. London: Arnold.
 9. Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). An Introduction to Functional Grammar (second edition). London: Arnold, 34-38.
 10. Huang, G. (2001). On Conflated Theme in Systemic Function Grammar. *Modern Foreign Languages*, 2, 111-120.
 11. Thomson. (2004). *Introducing Functional Grammar (second edition)* [M]. London: Arnold.