Theme and Thematic Progression in English Writing Teaching

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Abstract

Theme and thematic progression (T/TP) is a major aspect of the way that speakers construct their messages in a way which makes them fit smoothly into the unfolding language event. While studies have illustrated the usefulness of observing T/TP to identify English learners' writing difficulties and suggested that T/TP should be included in English writing lessons to help students write more coherently, there has been little more than theoretical advice as to how teachers could apply the theory of T/TP, and very few studies have developed and studied teaching materials informed by T/TP. The present study provides an instructional package in T/TP for Chinese EFL students by examining theories in Systemic Functional Grammar and reviewing relevant literature. The activities in this instructional package are designed to build students' meta-knowledge of coherence and T/TP in order to give students more grammatical resources to improve the coherence of their writing, help them become aware of how information and ideas should flow in a text so that it could be easily understood by the reader. In addition, students would apprehend which T/TP patterns are valued in English writing and have the opportunities to apply this knowledge to improve their writing.

Keywords: Theme, thematic progression, English writing

1. Introduction

Theme and thematic progression (T/TP) is a major aspect of "how speakers construct their messages in a way which makes them fit smoothly into the unfolding language event" (Thompson, 2014, p. 117). The Theme is the starting point of a message, "that which the clause is about" (Halliday, 2014, p. 89). It is followed by the Rheme, which is "part of the assembly of the new information that the text offers" (Cummings, 2003, p. 133). What comes first (i.e., in Theme position) in an English clause is vital for how readers view the text as message because they are culturally primed to have certain expectations about Theme and Rheme (Hoey, 2005). As the text unfolds, the Themes connect to the Themes and Rhemes of preceding clauses in various ways, picking up or repeating the important concepts and developing them further. These connections form patterns of thematic progression (Daneš, 1974).

Studies have illustrated the usefulness of T/TP as a tool to characterize EFL/ESL writing as successful or less successful in terms of coherence (Bloor & Bloor, 1992; Christie & Dreyfus, 2007; Rørvik, 2012; Schleppegrell, 2004, 2009; Vande Kopple, 1991; Wang, 2007; Wei, 2013a, 2013b; Wei, 2014). However, as Hawe and Thomas (2012) pointed out, while native speakers of English may have acquired how to use T/TP to produce coherent discourse when they grow up learning the language, EFL/ESL students are yet to learn what kind of information to place in the Theme position and how to continually pick up the information which is already in the text and repeat it in some way so that the reader is always aware of what the key concepts are and how the key concepts are being developed (Hyland, 2004).

While studies have illustrated the usefulness of observing T/TP to identify English learners' writing difficulties (Bloor & Bloor, 1992; Christie & Dreyfus, 2007; North, 2005; Schleppegrell, 2004, 2009; Vande Kopple, 1991; Wang, 2007; Wei, 2013a) and suggested that T/TP should be included in English writing lessons to help students write more coherently (Bloor & Bloor, 1992; Christie & Dreyfus, 2007; Rørvik, 2012; Schleppegrell, 2004, 2009; Vande Kopple, 1991; Wang, 2007; Wei, 2014), there has been little more than theoretical advice as to how teachers could apply the theory of T/TP (Wang, 2007), and very few studies have developed and studied teaching materials informed by T/TP (Bonhnacker, 2010).

2. Literature review

There has been a consensus that instruction in T/TP should be included in teaching of English (Alonso & McCabe, 2003; Bohnacker, 2010; Cheng, 2002; Christie & Dreyfus, 2007; Hawe & Thomas, 2012; Ventola, 1994; Wang, 2007). For example, Ventola (1994) advocated that courses for academic writing in a foreign language should develop learners' consciousness and linguistic skills in organizing information in texts in a way which was referentially and thematically cohesive. Cheng (2002) proposed that the theory of T/TP should be included in English teaching to Chinese students in his study discussing how the problems with thematic

progression would compromise coherence in Chinese college students' writing. It was pointed out in Alonso and McCabe (2003) that English learners often wrote essays that consisted of sentences which did not seem to connect into a cohesive text and more attention should be paid to the progression of information in texts in addition to focus on cohesive devices. Wang (2007) claimed that the theory of T/TP was a valuable tool for teachers to diagnose writing difficulties and students should be taught how to arrange old and new information to help improve cohesion and coherence in their writing. Christie and Dreyfus (2007) advocated a genre-based approach to teaching deconstructing genre models for T/TP. Bohnacker (2010) pointed out that "discourse-driven word order patterns are … largely ignored in descriptive grammars, teacher training and language teaching materials"(p. 133) while the learners were not likely to monitor for differences concerning the interaction of information structure and word order, as they were probably not even aware that Swedish differed from German in this regard. Hawe and Thomas (2012) proposed that "there is a need for coaching in thematisation ... teaching at least rudimentary thematisation theory and giving students practice with an assortment of thematic options...based on our students' apparent inadequate familiarity with English information structure" (p.182).

In contrast, however, there have not been a lot of investigations regarding how teachers could apply the theory of T/TP (Wang, 2007), or studies that have developed and studied teaching materials informed by T/TP (Bohnnacker, 2010).

Cheng (2008) provided a genre-based pedagogy on EFL students' writing development by incorporating "analyzing thematic choices" as part of the three-stage EFL composition course in Taiwan for college freshmen's narrative writing course, where stage three focused students on analyzing lexical-grammatical features associated with English narrative writing, intending to help the students understand how the situational context was constructed through linguistic features, which included type of verbs, use of appraisal terms, syntactic features, thematic choices and cohesive ties.

Ho (2009) tried helping students analyze the macro and micro elements following analysis of T/TP in a text. The research subject is a second-year student pursuing an English medium science degree at the university. She was first asked to read a science article of her choice from the different sources (for e.g., journals and books), and then asked to write a review of the article. The completed written text was collected by the instructor. Over the next two weeks, the student was presented with a number of model review texts under the review genre. Using the whole text SFG-based approach, instruction consisted of joint instructor-student analysis of the obligatory and optional sequence of stages found in a review text, the types of clauses and their patterns of thematic progression. The instruction is aimed at raising the student's awareness of the generic identity of the review text, its clause structure and thematic development.

Mellos (2011) presented classroom activities that introduced students to the grammar of T/TP in order to improve the coherence of their writing, with a model of Theme-Rheme analytical framework in academic writing curriculum. Comprised of five sessions, i.e., Introduction to Theme/Rheme, Analysis of authentic and model texts, Introduction to thematic patterns, Analysis of T/TP in student texts, and Application to the students' writing, the lessons were intended for an undergraduate ESL academic reading and writing course and with adaptation, could be used for other levels and contexts.

Cheng (2008)'s genre-based pedagogy included "analyzing thematic choice" as part of a three-stage EFL composition course, Ho (2009) implemented his instruction in T/TP with one participant, Mellos developed a comparatively complete but brief Theme-Rheme analytical framework in academic writing curriculum comprising of five sessions for ESL students. The present research, however, intends to develop a more complete and detailed instructional package in T/TP for Chinese EFL students by examining theories in Systemic Functional Grammar and reviewing relevant literature.

3. Theoretical background

In speech and writing, a variety of resources could be used to organize the message and construct the angle of intended meaning, one of which being the Theme (Forey, 2002), as illustrated in Table 1. The Theme highlights a certain piece of information within a clause as being more prominent than others, which provides the "point of departure" for the message (Halliday, 2014, p.99).

Table 1. Theme as a device to construct intended meaning

Theme	Rheme
The German field marshal Fedor von Bock	foolishly repeated Napoleon's ill-fated attack on Russia in 1812.
Napoleon's ill-fated attack on Russia in 1812	was foolishly repeated by the German field marshal Fedor von Bock
It	was the German field marshal Fedor von Bock who foolishly repeated Napoleon's ill-fated attack on Russia in 1812.

As a device for organizing meanings, the Theme not only operates at the local level, indicating how the

writer has chosen to order information within the clause, but also helps to structure the flow of information in ways that shape interpretation of the text (Martin 1992, 1995) on the global level. This flow of information between successive Themes and Rhemes in a text is called thematic progression (Eggins, 2004, p. 45). Thematic progression contributes to the cohesive development of a text, that is to say, in a cohesive text the distribution of given and new information needs to follow certain patterns.

3.1 Theme and Rheme

The Theme is defined by Halliday as "the point of departure for the message ... the element the speaker selects for 'grounding'" (2014, p. 83). It is "the peg on which the message is hung" and can be recognized by the fact that it "is put in the first position" (Halliday, 1970, p. 161). The Theme orients the listener/reader to the message that is about to be perceived and provides a framework for the interpretation of the message. The Theme typically contains familiar, old or given information, which has already been mentioned somewhere in the text, or it is shared or mutual knowledge from the immediate context. The Theme is followed by the Rheme, "the remainder of the message, the part in which the Theme is developed" (Halliday, 2004, p. 64). The Rheme is the remainder of the message in a clause in which the Theme is developed, which means the Rheme typically contains unfamiliar or new information. As a message structure, a clause consists of a Theme accompanied by a Rheme and the structure is expressed by the order –whatever is chosen as the Theme is put first (Halliday, 2004, p. 65).

The Theme extends from the beginning of a clause up to (and including) the first element that has a function in transitivity. This means that the Theme of a clause ends with the first constituent that is participant, circumstance, or process, which is referred to as the topical Theme. The topical Theme may be preceded by elements which are textual and/or interpersonal in function, and they are called textual Theme and interpersonal Theme respectively in SFG. This typology of Themes into topical, textual and interpersonal Themes is made in terms of textual metafunction.

3.1.1 Topical, textual and interpersonal Themes

The element that is typically chosen as topical Theme in an English clause depends on the choice of mood (Halliday, 2014, p. 97). All free major clauses are either indicative or imperative in mood; if indicative, it is either declarative or interrogative; if interrogative, it is either "yes/no" interrogative or "WH-" interrogative.

Topical Themes may be preceded by elements which are textual and/or interpersonal in function; if so, these are also part of the Theme. The textual Theme is any combination of continuative, structural and conjunctive (Halliday, 2014). A continuative is one of a small set of discourse signalers such as "yes", "no", "well", "oh", "now", which signal that a new move is beginning; it can also be a response, in dialogue, or a move to the next point if the same speaker is continuing. A structural Theme is any of the obligatorily thematic elements, namely conjunctions and WH-relatives (the group of phrase containing the relative is simultaneously the topical Theme).

The interpersonal Theme is any combination of vocative, modal, and mood-marking (Halliday, 2014). A vocative is any item, typically (but not necessarily) a personal name, used to address; it may come more or less anywhere in the clause, and is thematic if preceding the topical Theme. A modal Theme is any of the modal adjuncts listed in Table 3.5 that have the meaning of probability, usuality, typicality, obviousness, opinion, admission, persuasion, entreaty, presumption, desirability, reservation, validation, evaluation or prediction, whenever it occurs preceding the topical Theme. A mood-marking Theme is a finite verbal operator, if preceding the topical Theme; or a WH-interrogative (or imperative "let's") when not preceded by another experiential element (i.e., when functioning simultaneously as topical Theme).

3.1.2 Marked Themes

The mapping of Theme on to subject is considered as the unmarked Theme of a declarative clause, which is normally the element chosen as Theme unless there is good reason for choosing something else (Halliday, 2014). In accordance with thematic markedness, the topical Themes can be categorized into marked and unmarked Themes.

Halliday (2014) posits a cline of markedness, capturing the likelihood of any of these elements occurring in initial position in the clause. The most common form of marked Theme is an adverbial group or prepositional phrase functioning as circumstantial adjunct. The least likely, and thus the most marked, is a complement, which is a nominal group that could have been chosen as subject but was not.

The identification of marked or unmarked Theme is determined by the mood of the clause, whether the clause is declarative, interrogative or imperative. The unmarked Theme is realized by the subject in a declarative clause, the operator in a polar interrogative clause, WH-element in a content interrogative clause, overt subject or the verb if starting with one in an imperative clause. Other elements in the Theme position would be identified as marked Themes.

3.2 Thematic progression

Halliday (1994) proposes that thematic principle lies behind the organization of paragraphs in written discourse (p. 55) in that the topic sentence of a paragraph is nothing other than its Theme. He also elaborates

how Themes and Rhemes could be chained into thematic progression to produce coherent texts (1994, p. 388). Indeed, as the text unfolds, the Themes connect to the Themes and Rhemes of preceding clauses in various ways, picking up or repeating the important concepts and developing them further, whose connections form patterns of thematic progression (Daneš, 1974). Daneš extends the concept of Theme as point of departure of a single utterance (clause) to that of explaining the inner connectivity of texts, which is represented by thematic progression (Herriman, 2011). Thematic progression refers to the way Themes interact with each other and with Rhemes in order to provide continuity in discourse and to organize the text. Daneš (1974) defines thematic progression as follows:

> …the choice and ordering of utterance Themes, their mutual concatenation and hierarchy, as well as their relationship to the hyperThemes of the superior text units (such as the paragraph, chapter…), to the whole text and to the situation. Thematic progression might be viewed as the skeleton of the plot (p.114).

Thus, thematic progression concerns the way that the texts develop the ideas they present. More specifically, thematic progression concerns where Themes come from—how they relate to other Themes and Rhemes of the text. Patterns of thematic progression are formed by a systematic relation between the Theme-Rheme selections and experiential selections in a text (Ghadessy, 1995; Yang, 2008).

3.2.1 Thematic progression patterns

Daneš (1974) postulates three basic thematic progression patterns from analysis of scientific and other professional texts: linear progression, constant progression[4] and TP with derived Theme (p. 119).

Linear progression is where the Theme relates to the Rheme of the preceding utterance, in other words, the Rheme portion of each sentence becomes the Theme of the following clause. According to Daneš (1974), this is the most elementary, or basic, thematic progression. This is illustrated here with example 1 (the division of Theme and Rheme is indicated by "/" and the division of T-units is indicated by "//"). The Rheme of the previous clause appears as the Theme of the next clause. Linear progression involves the following relevant relations: $R_1 = T_2, T_1 \neq T_2, R_1 \neq R_2$.

Example 1

Human history / teems with stories of momentous blunders in a wide range of disciplines. // Some of these consequential errors / go all the way back to the Scriptures, or the Greek mythology.

In example 1, the subsequent Theme picks up on information provided for in the previous Rheme; this can be mapped as:
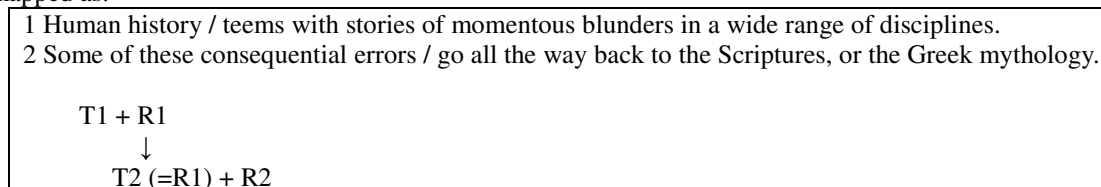
> 1 Human history / teems with stories of momentous blunders in a wide range of disciplines.
> 2 Some of these consequential errors / go all the way back to the Scriptures, or the Greek mythology.
>
>   T1 + R1
>   ↓
>   T2 (=R1) + R2

Figure 1. Mapping of linear progression

Constant progression is where the same Theme appears in a series of utterances, as "The purpose of this book" and "my goal" in example 2. Constant progression involves the following relevant relations: $T_1 = T_2, R_1 \neq T_2, R_1 \neq R_2$.

Example 2

The purpose of this book / is to present in detail some of the surprising blunders of a few genuinely towering scientists, and to follow the unexpected consequences of those blunders. // At the same time, my goal / is also to attempt to analyze the possible causes for these blunders and, to the extent possible, to uncover the fascinating relations between those blulnders and features or limitations of the human mind.

The thematic progression of example 2 can be mapped as in Figure 2 below:
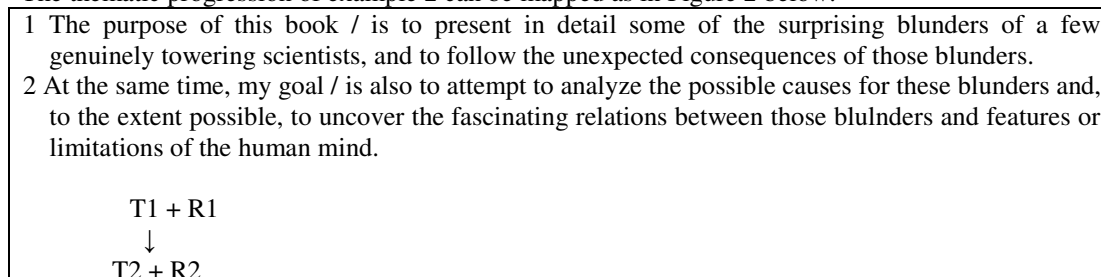
> 1 The purpose of this book / is to present in detail some of the surprising blunders of a few genuinely towering scientists, and to follow the unexpected consequences of those blunders.
> 2 At the same time, my goal / is also to attempt to analyze the possible causes for these blunders and, to the extent possible, to uncover the fascinating relations between those blulnders and features or limitations of the human mind.
>
>   T1 + R1
>   ↓
>   T2 + R2

Figure 2. Mapping of constant progression

These two types of TP pattern were characterized by Dubois (1987, p. 93) as "canonical". According to Enkvist (1974), linear progressions create a "dynamic" style of writing and constant progressions a "static" style

of writing. Certain correlations have also been found between these progressions and text type. Linear progressions occur frequently in expository and argumentative texts, for example in editorials (Francis, 1989; Hawes & Thomas, 1996) and popular medical texts (Nwogu & Bloor, 1991). Constant progressions occur frequently in narratives (Fries, 1995a; Wang, 2007) and in news stories (Francis, 1989, 1990; Gómez, 1994).

The third type that Daneš proposed is TP with derived Themes where particular Themes are derived from a "hyper-Theme" (of a paragraph, or other text section). In TP with derived Theme, the topics of each sentence are individually different, but are all derived from the same overriding Theme, or hyper-Theme or overall Theme of a paragraph or text, as illustrated in example 3. TP with derived Themes involves the following relevant relations: $T_1 \neq T_2, R_1 \neq T_2$.

Example 3

No scientific theory / has an absolute and permanent value. // As experimental and observational methods and tools improve, / theories can be refuted, or they many metamorphose into new forms that incorporate some of the earlier ideas. // Einstein / himself stressed this evolutionary nature of theories in physics: "The most beautiful fate of a physical theory is to point the way to the establishment of a more inclusive theory, in which it lives as a limiting case."

This TP pattern with derived Themes has led to some considerations. One of them is concerned with the extent of semantic implication or inference. Dubois (1987), for example, raised objections basing her objections on Daneš' point indicating that givenness could be indirect as well as direct, through semantic inference or semantic implication, including relations obtained through hyponymy and hyperonymy, and through associative relations. McCabe (1999) held that the problem of the derived Theme analysis was that the analyst was making the decision as to whether the Theme in question was included in the text through semantic inference, thus placing it in the categories of simple linear or constant Theme.

Another consideration is with the fact that examples of the derived Theme pattern were only found in the most specialized of the genres, as Nwogu (1989) did in his analysis of three medical genres. This is perhaps because the notion of derived Theme can be thought of as less "given" and more indirect to a "lay" reader; thus one would not expect to find it in texts where the readers do not share the same degree of knowledge shared by writers and readers of very specialized texts. This type of progression, derived from hyper-Theme progression, deals with sets of interrelated ideas and therefore relies largely on shared knowledge. This kind of progression has been found to be usual in legal texts (Kurzon, 1984) and professional medical texts (Nwogu & Bloor, 1991). A third concern is about the overlapping of TP derived from hyper-Theme with constant or linear progression (Leong, 2005; Herriman, 2011) because it is problematic to distinguish relations of collocation or other associative relations.

Daneš(1974) further proposed that these basic types of TP may be employed in various combinations, some of which could reveal a certain regular pattern and may be considered as TP patterns of a higher order, which is also further developed by other scholars (McCabe, 1999). Among these is the exposition of a split Rheme progression where a Rheme is expanded by a series of subordinate Themes, as illustrated by example 4. This type of TP is characterized by the fact that a certain Rheme is explicitly or implicitly double or multiple, so that it gives rise to a pair of or multiple thematic progressions.

Example 4

...gradualism, mainly from the work of two geologists. // One / was the eighteenth century geologist James Hutton, // and the other / was Darwin's contemporary and later close friend Charles Lyell.

1 gradualism, mainly from the work of two geologists.
2 One / was the eighteenth century geologist James Hutton,
3 and the other / was Darwin's contemporary and later close friend Charles Lyell.

$$T1 + R1 \ (= Ri \quad + \quad Rii)$$
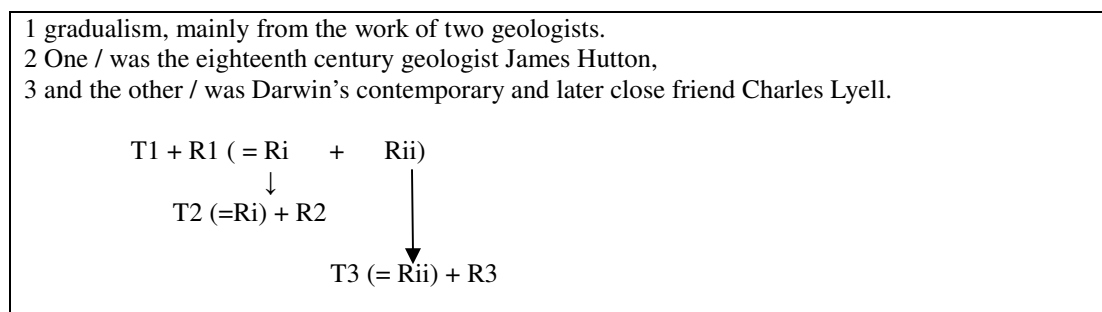$$\downarrow$$
$$T2 \ (=Ri) + R2$$
$$T3 \ (= Rii) + R3$$

Figure 3. Mapping of split Rheme progression

Similarly McCabe (1999, p.175) observed a split Theme pattern where a Theme is expanded by a series of subordinate Themes, as shown in example 5. Split Theme progression means that a Theme may contain more than one idea, and these ideas are developed in different subsequent clauses.

Example 5

... and the blunders of the five scientists on my list / are rather different in nature. // Darwin's blunder / was in not

realizing the full implications of a particular hypothesis. // Kelvin / blundered by ignoring unforeseen possibilities. // Pauling's blunder / was the result of overconfidence bred by previous success. // Hoyle / erred in his obstinate advocacy of dissent from mainstream science. // Einstein / failed because of a misguided sense of what constitutes aesthetic simplicity.

1 ... and the blunders of the five scientists on my list / are rather different in nature.
2. Darwin's blunder / was in not realizing the full implications of a particular hypothesis.
3. Kelvin / blundered by ignoring unforeseen possibilities.
4. Pauling's blunder / was the result of overconfidence bred by previous success.
5. Hoyle / erred in his obstinate advocacy of dissent from mainstream science.
5. Einstein / failed because of a misguided sense of what constitutes aesthetic simplicity.

$$T1 \ (= Ti \quad + \quad Tii \ +...) + R1$$
$$\downarrow$$
$$T2 \ (=Ti) + R2$$
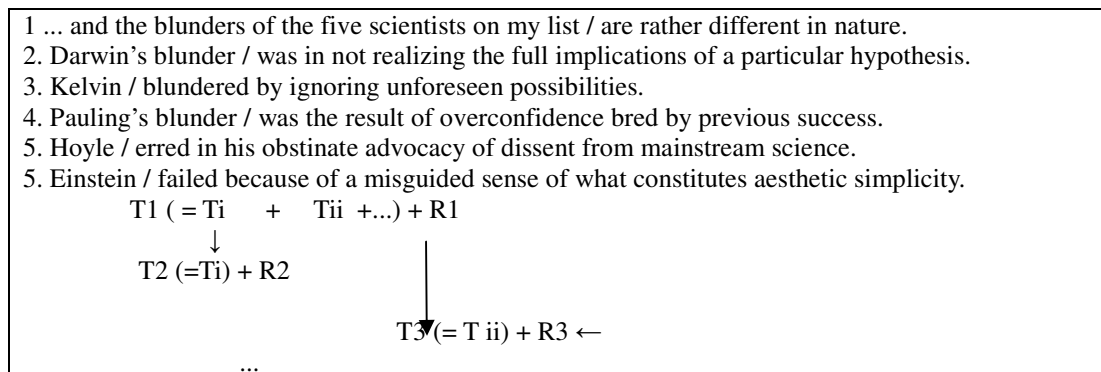$$T3 \ (= T \ ii) + R3 \leftarrow$$
$$...$$

Figure 4. Mapping of split Theme progression

Split Theme and Rheme progressions (split progressions) such as these are expository in character as they provide a list of related information to illustrate a main point.

McCabe (1999, p.181) observed a summative progression which summarizes a stretch of the preceding text, as in example 6, where "Implicit in the design argument" is a summary of the preceding content.

Example 6

This was precisely the line of reasoning adopted by William Paley almost two millennia later: a contrivance implies a contriver, just as a design implies a designer. An intricate watch, Paley contended, attests to the existence of a watchmaker. Therefore, shouldn't we conclude the same about something as exquisite as life? After all, "Every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation." This fervent pleading for the imperative need for a "designer" (since the only possible but unacceptable alternative was considered to be fortuitousness or chance" convinced many natural philosophers until roughly the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Implicit in the design argument / was yet another dogma: Species were believed to be absolutely immutable.

Summative progressions are not repetitions or synonyms of any preceding element. Instead, they encapsulate a stretch of preceding text (anywhere from two previous clauses to 26), as illustrated in example 6, hence they do not proceed from just one previous Theme or Rheme. The summative progression does just what its name implies: it summarizes a part of the text in the Theme, and then the Rheme serves either to wrap up the section with an overall comment, as shown in example 6, or it serves to pave the way for a subsequent Theme.

3.2.2 Themes that do not form progression

Not all Themes form progressions and those which do not form progressions have been regarded as peripheral Themes (McCabe, 1999, p. 180) or referred to as "unmotivated Themes" (Herriman, 2011). They are sometimes thought of as signs of bad writing (Mauranen, 1993a, 1993b), even though it is pointed out by McCabe (1999, pp.180-189) that some of these Themes could contribute to the development of the text in different ways.

McCabe (1999) divided the Themes into four main categories: pragmatic Themes, grammatical Themes, extralinguistic Themes and metatextual Themes. Pragmatic Themes were key concepts frequently referred to in the text; grammatical Themes were usually dummy subjects "it" and "there"; extralinguistic Themes were situationally evoked, e.g., "we" referring to the writer and reader, or imperatives addressing the reader; metatextual Themes were Themes referring to the text itself, e.g., chapter and figure, etc.

Herriman (2011) divided the Themes which do not connect immediately to the preceding text into new Themes, contextual Themes and back Themes. New Themes represent complete new information in the text and the information in contextual Themes can be derived from the context. The Themes which do not connect to their immediately preceding T-unit but reintroduce meanings mentioned earlier in the essays were back Themes, with the exception of Themes in split and summative progressions which formed hierarchical relations of subordination and super-ordination over longer stretches of text. Herriman (2011)'s categorization of back, new and contextual Themes is adopted in the present research.

4. The instructional package

This section presents classroom activities that introduce students to T/TP in order to improve the coherence

of their writing. The following lessons draw on previously mentioned research and provide an example of how the theory of T/TP can be incorporated into an academic writing curriculum.

While coherence has been considered fundamental to the success of an academic paper, EFL/ESL writing training appears to lack a systematic way of teaching coherence (Lee, 2002 a; Witte & Faigely, 1981). Training tends to focus on "local" coherence problems related to mechanical and grammatical errors or cohesive devices despite the fact that "global coherence" which looks at the coherence of a text as a whole, needs to be addressed in the EFL/ESL classroom in a systematic way (Bamberg, 1983, 1984; Ferris & Hedgecock, 1998; Lee, 2002b; Schleppegrell, 2009; Witte & Faigely, 1981). Previous studies suggest that SFG, with its emphasis on meaning and function, and Theme-Rheme structure, the grammar which identifies the lexico-grammatical elements of the textual metafunction, provide an effective framework for identifying coherence in student texts (Bloor & Bloor, 1992; Christie & Dreyfus, 2007; Eggins, 2004; Schleppegrell, 2004, 2009; Vande Kopple, 1991; Wang, 2007). As a result, it has been suggested that the grammar of T/TP can be and should be incorporated into writing training (Bloor & Bloor, 1992; Christie & Dreyfus, 2007; Schleppegrell, 2004, 2009; Vande Kopple, 1991; Wang, 2007). Teaching coherence using SFG approach in a EFL/ESL classroom should be enhanced and, ideally, integrated with writing assignments (Medve & Takac, 2013), which could be achieved by introducing various types of activities in which learners explore the features of a coherent text, the types of cohesive devices and their functions in a text.

The training provided in this section includes lectures on T/TP as well as activities to practice T/TP in writing. The following lessons have a sequence of activities which first develop students' meta-awareness of T/TP, and then allow them to apply it to their writing to improve its coherence. These activities include identifying and noticing T/TP patterns, explaining their reference, gap-filling tasks that require learners to write down appropriate T/TP patterns, writing short paragraphs using T/TP patterns and revising the writing in line with T/TP patterns. Furthermore, Schleppegrell (2009) suggested that writing instructors help students analyze their texts in terms of thematic structure and progression after students have written their first drafts and before sentence-level editing. In this way, students can improve the way how information flows and meaning is developed in their texts before focusing on grammatical errors. The activities in this lesson also offer students opportunities to analyze student texts and authentic texts in addition to their own writing.

The training is divided into ten sessions and each session is designed to last 60 minutes. There are generally four parts in each lesson: (1) analyzing student writing (starts from the second session); (2) presentation of authentic texts; (3) introduction to key concepts; (4) activities for practice. The lesson starts with an analysis of student writing from the assignment of last lesson. Then, the students are presented with authentic texts and introduced to key concepts. This is followed by activities which allow students to analyze thematic choice and thematic progression in examples, and apply T/TP in their own writing. The sessions are described below and the complete training materials are attached together with "Teachers' guide to the training" in Appendix 1. The training material is intended for college students learning English as a foreign language and with adaptation, could be used for other levels and contexts. "Teachers' guide to the training" provides additional information concerning the aim of each session, the important concepts and supplementary material related to the activities in each session to whoever uses the training material.

Session 1 starts with two short passages and guided questions that require the students to compare the texts to decide which text was more cohesive. Then the concept of coherence and its importance in writing is introduced and two other examples are also provided for further practice. This activity preceded the introduction to Theme/Rheme in order to activate their schemata by drawing their attention to how sentences began and how connections between sentences could affect the coherence of a text. After this, the students are asked to write five sentences on the topic: Advantages of Internet.

Session 2 gives a general introduction to T/TP and focuses on the basic concepts: clause, Theme/Rheme and different types of Themes (textual, topical, and interpersonal). Lee (2000, 2002a) found that developing students' meta-awareness of coherence could help students revise the discourse level of their texts and improve the overall coherence of their writing. Studies have also suggested that teaching students the notions of Theme and Rheme can expand students' range of grammatical options for meaning-making that lead to more effective writing (Connor & Farmer, 1990; Chen, 2005; Fang, 2004; Schleppegrell, 2004, 2009; Vande Kopple, 1991; Wang, 2007; Wei, 2013b). In the end, the students are asked to revise the five sentences written from session 1, using what they learned in session 2. Session 3 connects Theme-Rheme structure to given informatin and new information and it also provided students with the opportunity to practice identifying the Theme, Rheme, and various Theme types in single sentences. The purpose of the activity is for students to consolidate the knowledge they acquire in session 2 before attempting to analyze longer texts. The students are asked to develop the first advantage of internet in 5 sentences. They are also required to incorporate into their writing what they learned in session 3.

Session 4 presents the concept of thematic progression, together with two activities, including a scramble activity in which the Themes have been cut up into strips. The Rhemes are provided in the order they appear in

the original text and the students are asked to decide where the Themes belong. An authentic text is chosen for this activity in order to increase the students' knowledge of how coherence is created in writing. Vande Kopple (1991) recommended that an activity with scrambled topical Themes may help those students who struggled with consistency in this aspect. In the activity, the students should be reminded how coherence is achieved in the text. At the end of the lesson, the students are asked to revise the paragraph in which they develop the first advantage of internet. Session 5 presents constant, linear and split Rheme progression, and focuses on constant progression. The explanations of the patterns are provided with examples. Along with the description of the patterns, information is provided on how they could detract from or contribute to text coherence. After that, the students are asked to write a short paragraph on the second advantage of internet, and they are also encouraged to try to use constant progression. In session 6, the students learn how to develop new information, using linear progression, in which the connections between ideas are explicit and dense nominal structures recapitulate old information in the Theme (Christie & Dreyfus, 2007; Eggins, 2004; Schleppegrell, 2004; Wang, 2007). The students practice this TP pattern when they revise the paragraph on the second advantage of internet. Session 7 focuses on developing more than one Theme from the previous Rheme with split Rheme progression and developing more than one Theme from the previous Theme with split Theme progression. These two pattern could also provide a text with coherence with the organizational pattern which indicate to the reader what would follow in a text (Christie & Dreyfus, 2007; Eggins, 2004; Wang, 2007). The students are then required to write on the third advantage of internet, and are asked to try using any of the four types of TP patterns for organizing information.

Sessions 8 and 9 provide the students with examples using a mixture of different TP patterns as revision. Control of information structure, with old information preceding new information, as pointed out by Bloor and Bloor (1992) and Wang (2007), was also an important element in text coherence. And this activity gives students the opportunity to apply the knowledge of T/TP they acquired in previous sessions and practice identifying T/TP patterns in short texts before they attempted to analyze longer texts. The identification of the thematic structure of the text is accompanied by a discussion on how the information flows to make the text coherent which could help students understand how the meaning and purpose of a text unfolded when these elements were effectively arranged (Christie & Dreyfus, 2007).The students are required at this stage to write a conclusion to the composition on "Three advantages of Internet". Session 10 presents to the students the Themes that did not form progression, i.e., back Themes, new Themes and contextual Themes. Wang (2007) found that when students did not properly control how information moved from Theme to Rheme, "there is no clear signpost directing the reader, who therefore cannot easily follow the progression of an idea or argument" (p. 167). It is not enough just analyzing how coherence is created through the progression of Themes and Rhemes in a successful text to provide a model for students to improve the coherence of their own writing. The students also need to know the bad examples of information organization. They are asked to revise the whole piece of writing at the end of session 10. This session also concludes the training by going through the key concepts briefly and the students peer reviewing each other's writing for T/TP and then analyzing their own texts.

5. Conclusion

The present study provides an instructional package in T/TP for Chinese EFL students by examining theories in Systemic Functional Grammar and reviewing relevant literature. All of the activities in this instructional package are designed to build students' meta-knowledge of coherence and T/TP in order to give students more grammatical resources to improve the coherence of their writing. Furthermore, these activities help students become aware of how information and ideas should flow in a text so that it could be easily understood by the reader. In addition, students would apprehend which T/TP patterns are valued in English writing. Finally, these activities provide students with the opportunities to apply this knowledge to improve their own writing.

Coherence is both text-based and reader-based, which could be promoted by appropriate thematic choices and TP patterns, therefore, applying this instructional package in English writing teaching and investigate the effect of instruction on English learners' use of T/TP would be a good direction in future research in this area.

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