Application of Thematic Structure in English Writing

Yumei Huang[1], Jin Xiao[2], Shenghu Ma[3]

1.School of Foreign Studies of Gansu University of Political Science and Law, Lanzhou, Gansu, 730070, China

2.Dunhuang Middle School, Dunhuang, Gansu,736200,China

3.School of Foreign Studies of Gansu University of Political Science and Law, Lanzhou, Gansu, 730070, China

Abstract: English writing becomes more and more important for college students. And we know that the composition consists of sentences and sentences consist of words. Besides, sentences can also be made of theme, rheme and transition.We should arrange them in the appropriate place of a passage, which makes the writing more perfect. Therefore, the application of the thematic structure in a writing plays an important role. We should realize its importance and know the use of it in order to make our English writing easier to read and understand.

Keywords: theme; thematic structure; thematic progression; discourse coherence

1. Introduction

As we all know, writing is one of the five essential means in English learning, and it is a significant way for authors to express their thoughts and perfect their foreign language skills. Therefore, writing a perfect and attractive English composition is a hot topic that many scholars have been discussing for many years. In a composition, it has many constituent elements, such as words selection, sentences constitution, paragraphs formation, discourse coherence, etc. Every step is very essential and important, especially the sentence structure. The sentence constituents are complex, and it has theme (T for short), rheme (R for short) and transition. Themes and rhemes are important parts of discourse function in functional grammar. Meanwhile, they have close relations and they play vital portions in sentences and English writing.

2.Thematic structure

2.1 Definition

Thematic structure is effective and useful in a sentence, because it sends vital and necessary messages to readers. Every sentence is with peculiar thematic structure. Thematic structure has mainly two elements, which are theme structure and rheme structure. When there exists an ordinary sentence, the primary message and the posterior are fixed and do not change because without language environment, the theme and rheme are not together, and substantially all developed texts are composed of two or more sentences. So the rhemes and rhemes, themes and rhemes, and themes and themes of the former sentence and the latter sentence will have relationships and changes, and these relationships and changes are called thematic progression. With the advance of each sentences theme, all the discourse progresses constantly until it forms a whole that can express a certain complete meaning.

2.2 Classification

An English writing is with many types of themes, playing necessary roles in a passage. They can help writers to build a correct relationships among the elements, and they can also help readers to master the meaning of the writing.

The theme can be divided into some types according to some conditions. We can stipulate themes into simple themes, multiple themes and clausal theme depending on the complicacy of its structure. Themes can also be seen as topic theme, interpersonal theme and textual theme according to its function and meaning, and it can also be parted into multiple themes in a way.

2.3 Simple theme

Simple theme means those thematic elements that contain only conceptual elements but not interpersonal elements and textual elements, which are expressed in the form of noun phrases, adverb phrases or prepositional phrases. There are some examples, a. The man in black (T) laughed at me.(R) b. That lady in pink (T) is my relative (R). c. In the playground (T) there are many students (R).

2.4 Multiple theme

Multiple themes are composed of multiple semantic components, which respectively express ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. The multiple theme has an immanent structure, and can be more profoundly split into textual theme, interpersonal theme, and topical theme. Halliday's concept of complex theme further enriches the theory of theme-rheme structure theoretically. For example, ''And maybe you are wrong''. ''and'' is textual function, ''maybe'' is interpersonal function, and ''you'' is ideational function.

2.5 Clausal theme

The clausal theme is made up of the whole clause -the main clause or clause in a compound sentence. Simply speaking, clausal theme means the whole sentence acting as the theme, that is, the subordinate clause in the conventional grammar. For example, ''If it rains tomorrow(T) //we will not go to see that movie(R)''. Besides, phrases that are not predicate forms of verbs, such as -ed or -ing phrases, can seen as clausal theme. For example, ''That they do not know how to learn English by listening and reading (T)// is a big issue(R)''. All in all, if a sentence contains two or more than two clauses, the former one is called the clausal theme. Like this one ''If winter(T) comes(R1) [T] //can spring be far behind[R]?''

3.Application

3.1 Thematic progression

Most texts are made of two sentences or more , in which case they will have some connection and change between themes, rhemes and rhemes, and between themes. Professor Zhu Yongsheng calls this connection and change progression. With the advance of the primary structure of each sentence, the whole article progresses constantly till it forms a whole which can express a certain complete meaning, and from there, the thematic progression comes into being.

The thematic progression is a way of blossom of a writing depending on the author's decision of theme. And it decides the constitution of a passage and the sentence, so we should cultivate our consciousness of thoughts and ability, which is benefit for us to grasp the structure of text and meaning. The organic relation between the main idea and secondary one in a text determines the progression of sematic aspect, and the most significant view is that the thematic progression can inflex the information chain of the content.

3.2 Parallel development

Parallel development has the settled theme and diverse rhemes. Through selecting the identical theme as the equal starting point, the writer uses different rhemes to describe what the text about from different aspects. Here is an example, ''My friend(T1) is in Netherlands now (R1). He (T2=T1) has been there for three years (R2). He (T3=T1) is a doctor (R3). He (T4=T1) is studying in a famous university(R4)''. And we can use a regular shape to describe this parallel relationship:

T1—-R1

|

T2(=T1)—-R2

|

.

.

.

Tn(=T1)—-Rn

We can also analyze this relationship in detailed sentences, '' Last year I travelled to the Dalian. I had a very wonderful and low flight. I didn't have fun, though''. Every sentence is dominated by ''I '', that is to say, they have the same theme, but each takes a fresh piece of information as its rheme, which makes several parallel sentences. If letter A stands for the main standpoint of the starting sentence and different letters stand for each rheme, this development can be demonstrated as follows,

A ← B

A ← C

A ← D

A ←...

3.3 Continuous development

Continuous development has its own feature: the rheme of the preceding sentence is the primary message of the following. Under this type, the preceding sentence rheme or a portion of secondary message becomes the main one for the following. Here is also an example, ''We visited the Palace Museum (R1). The Palace Museum (T2=R1) is in the Beijing (R2). The Palace Museum (T3=R1) shows us many interesting and attractive cultures of Chinese history(R3)''. And we can use a regular shape to describe this continuous relationship:

T1—-R1

  |

  T2(=R1)—-R2

  .

    .

      .

  Tn(=Rn-1)

We can also analyze this relationship in detailed sentences, ''Lily gave her mother most of the money she earned from selling handmade cake. The remaining she spent on woolen yarn for her manual creations. Among the things she created, Lily had a sweater. Sweater warms her easily.'' The rheme or the others of the previous sentence is used as the theme of the following sentence, and a new message is used as the rheme to clarify this theme, and so on, bringing new information and promoting the expression of the thought content. We can deduce that the main message and secondary of each sentence in every sentence conbination are continuous development, and we can make a simple expression to show :

  A ← B

    B ← C

      C ← D

        D ← ...

3.4 Concentrated development

Concentrated development has the uniform rheme and different themes. Under this pattern, the main message in individual caluse are diverse, but all of them have the same rheme. Here is an example, ''John (T1) likes basketball (R1). Jim (T2) likes basketball (R2=R1). Each boy member (T3) of my club likes basketball (R3=R1)''. And we can make a regular shape to describe this relationship:

T1—-R1

T2—-R2(=R1)

  .

    .

      .

Tn—-Rn(=R1)

We can also analyze this relationship in detailed sentences, ''Father sent Bella a souvenir. Mother sent Bella a souvenir. Uncle Shaw sent Bella a souvenir. We all sent Bella presents for her good score.'' After the essential depict of the theme and rheme in the starting sentence, the second, the third... sentences, each start with a new theme, but they all use the rheme of the first sentence, that is, the different starting points of each sentence all boil down to the same situation or state. We can take a simple expression to show this concentrated relation:

A →Z

B → Z

... →Z

3.5 Cross development

The cross development defines that the theme of the preceding sentence is the rheme of the following sentence. Under this type, the theme in the first sentence will become the rheme in the posterior, and the theme in the posterior will become the rheme in the next one, and so on. Next is an instance, ''That movie (T1) is exciting and attractive (R1), but I (T2) didn't have favor in watching it (R2=T1). A dog (T3) hit me (R3=T2). I (T4) lower my head and glared at it (R4=T3), but it ignored me(R5=T4)''. And we can draw a regular shape to describe this relationship:

T1—-R1

|

T2—-R2

.

.

.

Tn—-Rn(=Tn-1)
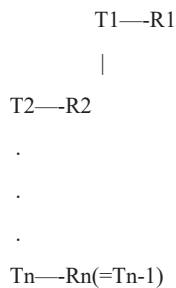
We can also analyze this relationship in detailed sentences,''looking different animals at the zoo is my favourite habit. I often look them for hours even without many kinds. But this doesn't disturb me. Some people who have the same habit are unlucky. Instead of watching animals, they get the history of the zoo. I am a bit fortunate indeed.''The primary message of the preceding one becomes the subordinate information of the secondary, the primary message of the secondary becomes the posterior of the following, and the main message of the next becomes the minor of the next, and so on. We can use a simple expression to show this crossed relation:

A ← B

C ← A

D ← C

4.Conclusion

In a conclusion, we can realize the importance of the thematic structure in an English writing, and we also learn about the classification of the thematic structure, which helps us a lot in our future learning. In English writing, we need to construct the thematic structure correctly and arrange the role of thematic advancement and discourse coherence for enhancing the readability and fluency of English writing.

References

[1] Halliday, Explorations in the Functions of Language[M]. London: Edward Arnold,1973.

[2] Halliday, M.A.K. An Introduction to Functional Grammar [M]. London:Edward

[3] Lyons, Semantics[M]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1997.

[4] Thompson, Geoff. Introduction Functional Grammar [M]. Beijing: Foreign Language

[5] Liu Hongmei. Writing and Language Arts [M]. Peking University Press, 2015 (1) 46-54.

[6] Luo Qingsong. Research on Teaching Chinese Writing as a Foreign Language [M]. China Social Science Press, 2002(1) 87-146.

Acknowledgements