

The Influence of the Different Thinking Pattern between Chinese and English on English Writing

Liangguang Huang

English Department, Zhenjiang Watercraft College of PLA, Zhenjiang 212000, China

Email: Blackhawk1975@126.com

Xueqing Wang

English Department, Zhenjiang Watercraft College of PLA, Zhenjiang 212000, China

Email: richerwang1980@yahoo.com.cn

Abstract—Nowadays, people in the world communicate with each other more frequently. Whatever the oral or written form, the culture, especially the thinking pattern, has an obvious effect on the communication. The discourse just reflects this affection. Its form represents the social context of communication. On one hand, people with different cultural background use different discourse. On the other hand, different discourses construe different experience and communication. When we learn a new language, our native language always influences us. Our thinking patterns are conventional. Thus it proposes a new problem to our language teaching – how to write a perfect English composition? According to the study, the differences of the discourse organization between Chinese and American students are obvious. The compositions of American students are smooth and consistent while the ones of Chinese students are a little loose and dull. It is important to improve the ability of cross-cultural communication and the awareness. The students should know clearly that the negative-transfer of our mother tongue. Meanwhile, the discourse analytic approach is a good method applied in the English teaching. It can improve the students' ability to analyze the discourse, arrange the sentences and understand the discourse from the entirety.

Index Terms—thinking patterns, theme and rheme, thematic progression, English writing

I. INTRODUCTION

With the development of the society, China communicates with the whole world more frequently. English has become a very important tool to communicate with other peoples. From kindergarten to college, each student is demanded to study English very well. Among the five basic skills of English – listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation, writing seems a little easy compared with others in most people's opinion. Actually, a number of compositions written in English by our students seem to be far from English, though many of the students can write flawless English sentences and write a beautiful Chinese composition. Thus how to improve the writing ability of English learners has become a problem that plagues English teacher in China.

The reason why our students cannot write an accurate "English" composition is that our mother language, especially the thinking patterns, influences us. The features of a discourse have close relation with those of culture. What is reflected on the writing discourse is the text organization form. There are different ways of expression with different thinking patterns. When a Chinese student writes an English composition, he is used to use our Chinese thinking patterns to construct the discourse and organize the sentences. Well we may consider it a good writing, but an English-speaker may dislike it. So we should know about these differences between Chinese and English and be able to converse our thinking patterns to English.

Writing is just like building a house. To finish the house is far away from our aim. And there are buildings with different styles in different countries. Every sentence and every paragraph has a close relation with its neighbors. Only spelled out some sentences could not make a good writing. So it is necessary to analyze discourse from the point view of coherence, cohesion, construction and so on. All these elements are influenced greatly by culture and thinking patterns. What we are lack of is the teaching of cultural differences in our class. We need not only to develop the students' English skill, but also their culture awareness.

II. CHINESE AND ENGLISH THINKING PATTERNS

A. Language and Thinking Patterns

There are different ideas about the relationship of language and thinking pattern for many years. The most famous and influential theory which caused a great controversy is the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis or Whorfian Hypothesis. The theory claims that the people using different languages have different ways to thinking. It is called "Linguistic Relativity". It also claims that the language determines the way of thinking: Thinking cannot exist in the world without language. And it is the "Linguistic Determination". Sapir acknowledged the close relation between language and culture.

He maintained it necessary that you should understand or appreciate the one with a good knowledge of the other one. After the hypothesis, many scholars proposed different opinions against this theory. Some of them hold the opinion that the thinking patterns determined the use of language, that is, the language is restricted by the cognition of human beings. Some thought that there is little or no relationship between language and culture.

Nevertheless, it is inevitable that language and thinking pattern are influenced by each other. We should know that the language, thinking and culture are interactive about the differences in the language phenomena. Language is influenced by the thinking patterns and cultures as well as construes the reality of thinking and culture. The differences are reflected on the form not the essence of the thinking. So it shows that when we understand another language, we should acknowledge its culture and thinking patterns together.

B. Chinese and English Thinking Patterns

Each kind of culture has its own special system. Due to its differences, its value system and worldview also have different characters. The oriental and western cultures are the two typical cultures in the world. In the communication of modern society, the two cultures always collide with each other. From the ancient time, with the process of history, they formed their own philosophy opinions and universe views. The traditional Chinese hold the view of oneness between Man and Nature while the westerners believed the dividedness between Man and Nature. The two different worldviews have an important function in the foundation of the thinking patterns of the oriental and western people.

Under the influence of the worldview, the Chinese people gradually form the tendency of Entirety and Synthesis in the thinking patterns. They attach importance to the intuition in consciousness. Oppositely, the westerners used to the thinking pattern of analysis and logic. Some scholars had used the concepts of “field-dependence and field-independence” to summarize the difference between the oriental and western thinking patterns.

Jia Yuxin (1997) had summarized several differences. One is the Entity, Synthesis way and Analytic logic way. The Chinese have the thinking habit from the whole to the part, from the big to the small, and reach a balance at last, while the westerners consider the thing from the part to the whole. This is a liner-thinking pattern. The other is the Specific and Abstract thinking pattern. The Chinese Specific way has the form of metaphor, symbol analogy and so on. The process of Abstract way are logic, analytic, inference and systemic in the form of concepts, inference and judgment.

Generally speaking, the analytic and liner way is the feature of western thinking pattern as well as the English. They write a discourse according to this pattern and they used to put the topic to the beginning. The process of drawing the conclusion is important. The Chinese stresses the “Parataxis” in discourse construction. The connection in the discourse isn’t so closely as in the English. All these differences are caused due to the different thinking patterns. Just for this reason, many scholars began the research of discourse pattern of different languages among which the famous one is Kaplan.

III. THEME AND RHEME

Discourse analysis is a new subject of linguistics emerged these years. It analyzes the discourse from a new point of view. Although there isn’t determined theory as its theoretical foundation so far, many linguists have introduced some theory into this subject to study the discourse from different views. The most influential one is M.A.K. Halliday who is the founder of Systematic Functional Grammar theory (SFG). He pointed out that this theory could be a good theoretical framework for the discourse analysis. Its aim has been to construct such a grammar for the purpose of text analysis: one that would make it possible to say sensible and useful things about any text, spoken or written in modern English (Halliday, 1994). In traditional grammar, different linguistic units have different labels. Halliday renamed some units according to their linguistic function in a text. Theme and Rheme are very important technical terms in Systematic Functional Grammar.

A. Definition

The notion of Theme and Rheme are oriented from Czechoslovak linguist V. Mathesius who was the co-founder of the Prague School. Early in 1939 in his articles “the so Called Actual Division of the Sentences”, he had thought that most sentences should be divided into two parts. According to the actual context, a sentence was consisted of the departure of the utterance (the basic part) that was the known information and the core of the utterance. Thus the traditional logical method had transformed into an informative-centered approach. Then German scholar K. Boost proposed two terms of “Theme” and “Rheme” to identify Mathesius’ concepts. Later another respective of Prague School Jan Firbas developed the FSP and the notion of Communicative Dynamism (CD). On this theoretical basis, the Czechoslovak linguists believe that a sentence contains a point of departure and a goal of discourse. The point of departure is equally present to the speaker and to the hearer – it is their rallying point, the ground on which they meet. This is called the Theme. The goal of discourse presents the very information that is to be imparted to the hearer. This is called the Rheme. (Hu Zhuanglin, 2006)

Based on the theory of Prague School, M.A.K. Halliday developed Theme and Rheme in his SFG. About the definition of theme, Halliday argued that in traditional grammar, subject seems to be a unity of three different kinds ‘subject’. It was still implied that there was some sort of a superordinate concept covering all three, a general notion of Subject of which they were the specific varieties, The terms that came to be used in the second half of the 19th century,

when there was a renewal of interest in grammatical theory, were ‘psychological Subject’, ‘grammatical Subject’, and ‘logical subject’. But in actual language, they have to be interpreted as what they really are – three separate and distinct functions. There is no such thing as a general concept of Subject of which these are different varieties. So Halliday replaced the earlier labels with new ones: psychological Subject – Theme grammatical Subject – Subject logical Subject – Actor. Following the terminology of the Prague School, he used the term Theme as the label for its function. There is the element which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that with which the clause is concerned. The remainder of the message, the Part in which the Theme is developed, is called the Rheme. As a message structure, therefore, a clause consists of a Theme accompanied by a Rheme– whatever the Theme is put first. (Halliday, 1994)

Halliday’s notions of Theme and Rheme are a little different from Prague School. He distinct them with Information theory – the former belonged to the syntax category and the latter belonged to phonetic category. Second, he thought that the Theme – Rheme structure was different from the Topic – Comment structure. The label ‘Topic’ usually refers to only one Particular kind of Theme; and it tends to be used as a cover term for two concepts that are functionally distinct, one being that of Theme and the other being that of Given. For these reasons the terms Theme – Rheme are Considered more appropriate in the present framework.

Some other linguists also gave the definition of Theme and Rheme according to their own research. However, these definitions are all similar with each other. For example, Downing and Locke thought, “Theme is a semantic choice, that is to say, which element will be chosen to be the departure of the sentence.”

B. Classification

The Theme is a functional element in sentences. The speaker sometimes will have different implication and a theme can play different roles in the message. So there must be different types of themes. According to Halliday, Theme can be classified into: simple theme, multiple theme and clausal theme.

1. Simple theme of a clause consists of just one structural element. E.g. *The duke* has given my aunt that teapot. The italicized words are the simple theme. The theme is not necessarily a nominal group. It may also be an adverbial group or prepositional phrase. E.g. *once upon a time* there were three bears. For want of a nail the shoe was lost. One common variant of this elementary pattern is that in which the theme consists of two or more groups or phrases forming a single structural element. E.g. *Jack and the others* paid no attention. Trees, forced by the damp heat, found too little soil for full growth. Such themes still fall within the category of simple themes. Any group complex or phrase complex constitutes a single element in the clause. Another variation is “Thematic Equative”, like what the duke gave to my aunt in “what the duke gave to my aunt was that teapot”. This is still a simple theme, because it was turned into a single constituent.

2. Multiple theme is consists of two or more functional components in a clause. These different components represent different metafunctions. The theme extends from the beginning of the clause up to the first element that has a function in transitivity. This element is called the ‘topical theme’. So the multiple themes can be specified as the textural theme, the interpersonal theme and the experiential theme (the topical theme). E.g. *And sooner or later* a ship will put in here. The theme always includes one, and only one, experiential element. The components in simple theme just have one function of the three metafunctions, no matter it is one phrase or more.

3. In a clause complex, the theme is the first while sentence in the beginning. It is called clausal theme. E.g. *If winter comes can spring be far behind?* The italicized part is the theme of the clause complex. There is still a thematic structure in each of the two constituent clauses.

Besides, Halliday also specified the marked theme and unmarked theme. A marked theme is something other than the subject in a declarative clause. The most usual form of marked theme is an adverbial group or Prepositional Phrase. This is a nominal element which, being nominal, has the potentiality of being subject; which has not been selected as subject could be the unmarked theme.

Based on this classification, we can analyze most sentences’ structure. From the type of theme used in a text, we can find that the way to express the implication of the writer so as to find the writer’s idea to develop the discourse.

C. Thematic Progression

If the Theme – Rheme structure just plays a role of a departure in a clause, it couldn’t become the research subject in discourse analysis. From the previous theories, we can see that this departure comes from the whole context. With the meaningful choice of themes, the whole text can develop eventually. This cohesion of Theme and Rheme doesn’t only exist among the sentences but also in a wider scope. It is necessary to investigate how the Theme – Rheme structure develops in a discourse. This is the Thematic Progression.

The Thematic Progression theory is first proposed by Frantisek Danes. In his book “Functional Sentence Perspective and the Organization of the Text (1974)”, he put the idea of Thematic Progression as the choice and arrangement of the themes. It concerned with the relationship between one theme and its hypertheme of the superior text unit or the whole text, as well as their hierarchy system in the discourse. The Thematic Progression can be considered as the framework of the content. In an isolated sentence, the Theme – Rheme structure is regular, while in a discourse, the theme and rheme in one sentence will connect with those of another sentence in the text. There will be some change of the relationship between sentences, themes and rhemes. This kind of connection and change we call it progression. The theme in the beginning of the sentence expresses little information than others, so this pattern of Thematic Progression

in certain degree reflects the basic framework of this discourse. (Xu Lisheng, 2006)

IV. CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

A. *Effect of Chinese Thinking Patterns*

As many scholars have studied for a long time, the language and culture are interacted with each other. When people communicate with others no matter speaking or writing, they must obey some rules in discourse organization for a certain aim. However, due to the different worldview and thinking patterns, the discourse pattern is different in different cultures. From the previous analysis, we can see that there are indeed distinctions in our students' English writing with the American students.

The construction of English discourse pay attention to the integration. There is usually a topic sentence in each paragraph and one main idea. The content must be straight relevant to the topic. The semantics and every sentence and paragraph must connect with each other logically, while the Chinese doesn't stress the cohesion techniques.

The first difference is the use of constant pattern and simple liner pattern in the compositions written by Chinese and American students separately. American students use liner pattern and Chinese students use constant one. The feature of simple liner pattern is developing like a line. The rheme of first sentence becomes the theme of next sentence. The rheme is the new information and with the clause development, it becomes the known information, which is the theme. The reason why American students prefer to this type is decided by their thinking pattern.

According to the western worldview, everything can be divided into parts and they are independent. The westerners stress the contrast. Oppositely, the oriental people especially the Chinese people believe that everything is a unity of opposites. The thinking pattern in western is characterized by the logic, analytic and liner. Stewart (1972) had described the character of American thinking pattern, "for the American, the world is made up by the facts. Their thinking is inductive." Generally speaking the expression of English is liner pattern which is decided by the western thinking pattern. Because of the liner pattern of English discourse, the American students prefer the simple liner pattern to develop the discourse.

As for Chinese, the arrangement of a Chinese discourse stresses the entirety. It takes the semantics as the core. As long as the sentences are connected semantically, the discourse will be smooth. The marrow of Chinese culture is the entirety and harmonious awareness. It pays attention to the harmoniousness between the whole system and hypo-systems. So the individual character of the hypo-system is limited under the whole. The Chinese student is usually influenced by our traditional thinking way of entirety. Each theme is constant with the "superordinate theme". Generally speaking, Chinese is a kind of language of parataxis and its structure is screwed and cyclical. So in Chinese students' compositions, there are often sentences without association to the topic. Compared to the English, the Chinese attach the importance to the outcome and the enumeration of the phenomena. Therefore, in our Chinese students' compositions we often find that the use of constant theme pattern. The theme which is the known information isn't changed and the rheme which is the new information is changed. Influenced by the parataxis of Chinese, the connection of each sentence isn't closely as the English. And the harmoniousness of Chinese affects their choice of thematic progression pattern.

Another important feature of Chinese is the topic-prominent constructions. The thinking pattern of Chinese is used to a holistic way from the whole to the part. This Chinese philosophic cognition is embodied in the topic-prominent constructions. The Chinese prefer a topic-prominent way to the subject-prominent because the traditional thought of harmoniousness of the subjective and objective; While English is the language of subject-prominent with the subjects as the first one. The westerners prefer the individualistic and have the value of self-prominent. So they attach importance to the subjects or themes more accurately. The topic-comment structure is different from the theme-rheme structure. The topic is just one part of the theme.

Generally speaking, the discourse pattern is indeed influenced by the different thinking patterns. This study reveals the distinction between our Chinese students and American students in English writing. Their compositions show that our Chinese students also try to write a good paper closely to the English. However, the negative-transfer of our mother tongue cannot be avoided. There are still many distinctions in our writing.

B. *Cross-cultural Awareness in English Writing Teaching*

With the fast development of modern society, it is become a new life way to communicate with other cultural communities. Nowadays, the English education in China has developed very fast. The Chinese EFL learners and English teachers are aware that only the ability acquisition of language is not enough for the acquirement of the society. How to improve the ability of intercultural communication becomes the final aim.

In our early English teaching, many teachers stress the grammar and vocabulary. Certainly, it is caused by our examination system. However, the English learning today shouldn't still stay in knowledge acquisition. The application of English is more important in modern society. Many times we speak or write English in a Chinese way. The English we speak or write even confuses the English-speakers. So the cross-cultural awareness must be formed in our mind. Here, the cultural awareness refers to the language differences between English and Chinese not other cultures. In English writing, many aspects could be affected by the cultural differences, for example, the choice of words, construction of the discourse, the relations of the sentences and so on. The Chinese reader will think that the beginning

is very clear and short, but the foreign teachers won't think so. This is the influence of the different thinking patterns, English is our second language and we must try to switch our mother tongue to a different thinking way.

First, the teachers should be aware of the cross-cultural importance and improve the abilities of cross-cultural communication of their own. In English class, the teacher should not teach the language itself, but also its background and cultural connotation. The pick-up of the cross-cultural awareness is as simple thing done in one day. We should know the differences between Chinese and English, and then we need practice in our learning process.

C. Discourse Analytic Approach to English

One of the efficient approaches is the Discourse Analytic Approach. Early in the 60's And 70's, there were some people began the research of Discourse Analysis. From a functional view, the discourse is the language in use. Its meaning is decided by the context. The Discourse Analysis involves the relationship between the language and its context. It contains the discourse structure, the discourse pattern, sentence pattern, the cohesion, coherence and so on. Discourse Analysis is very helpful for language teaching. It is a method to describe and understand the language. It can be used to design the Syllabus. And it can also be applied in the identification of the discourse construction.

When the teacher begins the teaching of a discourse, he should describe the cultural background, for example, the place, history, life, custom, etc. to the students. Then the context of the discourse also should be paid attention. Most important is that the construction coherence which refers to the theme and rheme structure, the information structure, the mood, and the process. From the analysis, the students can have an entire impression about this discourse. And they also know the way of English Construction.

As for the English writing, first the construction and pattern of English discourse should be analyzed and observed. Maybe the theory of Discourse Analysis is a little difficult for the students. The teacher could introduce some easy information about it to them, for example, the concept of theme and rheme. And the teacher could also teach them how to identify the theme and rheme in a sentence. Moreover, the teacher could illustrate a writing written by a foreign student to see the thematic progressive pattern and interpret the reason why he chooses so. Our Chinese students should develop our cross-culture awareness in the English learning. By doing this can we know how to write a good English discourse.

Discourse Analytic Approach has many advantages applied in English teaching. Nowadays, people more and more attach its importance. With the development of this subject, it will play a more important role in English teaching.

V. CONCLUSION

The results of comparison show that there are differences in English wiring between the Chinese and American students. These differences are caused by the influence of thinking patterns. The western culture stresses the analytic and logic thinking pattern. It emphasizes the individualist and dividedness between man and nature. Their way of thinking is liner. They focus on the analytic process. The English structure is also developed in a liner way. So the American students prefer the simple liner pattern which reflects the interference and analysis to describe or illustrate one thing. The traditional Chinese culture stresses the entirety. It is a parataxis of thinking pattern. It pursues the harmoniousness between Subjective and Objective so that the Chinese is a topic-prominent construction language. In Chinese students' compositions, multiple themes are used more often than that of American students because of this reason.

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Liangguang Huang was born in Danyang, China in 1975. He received his B.A. degree in Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics from Jiangsu University, China in 1997.

He is currently a lecturer in English Department, Zhenjiang Watercraft College of PLA, Zhenjiang, China. His research interests include Second Language Acquisition and Foreign Language Teaching.

Xueqing Wang was born in Zhenjiang, China in 1980. She received her M.A. degree in Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics from Guangxi Normal University, China in 2009.

She is currently a lecturer in English Department, Zhenjiang Watercraft College of PLA, Zhenjiang, China. Her research interests include Second Language Acquisition and Foreign Language Teaching.