A Contrastive Analysis of Thematic Progression Patterns of English and Chinese Consecutive Interpretation Texts

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Abstract—As a grammatical device, Theme-Rheme structure plays an important role in organizing and analyzing discourse. Theme Progression patterns (hereinafter called TP patterns) are significant method of the analysis of textual cohesion and organization. Based on linguist Danes' theory about TP patterns, this paper tries to present a contrastive analysis of the texts of consecutive interpretation in English and Chinese from the perspective of TP patterns, then the TP patterns in it will be analyzed and concluded.

Index Terms—consecutive interpretation, discourse, Theme-Rheme structure, TP patterns

I. INTRODUCTION

It is linguist Frantisek Danes who puts forward the concepts of TP patterns for the first time. He states that the organization of information in texts is determined by the progression in the sequence of utterance of themes and their corresponding rhemes, and this progression between the successive themes and rhemes can be defined as TP (Danes, 1974). He focuses on the "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 paragraph, chapter), to the whole of text, and to the situation." (Danes, 1974, p.114) He defines this kind of complicated thematic relationship as TP patterns.

Some famous linguists, such as Mathesius and Halliday, etc. hold the view that the Theme-Rheme structure is an important method of discourse organization. According to communicative function, a complete sentence can be divided into Theme and Rheme. Halliday defines the Theme as the beginning or starting point of the sentence, first element of sentence. Rheme is defined as the remainder, main content of the sentence, statement and description of Theme. This division not only helps in exploration and demonstration of the formation characteristics of discourse but also helps to get a good knowledge of how author establishes topic framework and develops text. Halliday (1985) points out that functional grammar aims at serving as a tool of discourse analysis. In practice of translation, texts are often regarded as basic units of translating by translator (Si, 2001). In the course of consecutive interpretation, source language is naturally divided into short discourses, and textual meaning is naturally displayed in utterances of source language and version of target language. Therefore, it is feasible to apply functional grammar to analyze the texts of consecutive interpretation. Even though experts and scholars from home and abroad have been doing extensive and intensive research in TP patterns, yet applied research is hardly done in the translation of consecutive interpretation texts and interpretation. As a result, it is meaningful to do research in this. Relying on systemic-functional grammar, this paper presents a contrastive analysis of the texts of consecutive interpretation in English and Chinese from the perspective of TP patterns. Then the similarities and differences of TP patterns in it are analyzed, thereby it can be taken as the guidelines for practice.

II. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF TP PATTERNS

In 1969, Frantisek Danes proposes the concept of Theme Progression for the first time. On the basis of a wide and deep research in massive languages data, he formulates three major patterns of TP: simple linear progression, constant progression, derived hyperthematic progression. As an effective way of organizing texts, since the theories of TP patterns are brought forward, some domestic and overseas linguists have deep discussions about the theory of TP patterns, others put forth their own TP patterns. Van Dijk comes up with two TP patterns: Parallel structure and Chain structure (Huang, 1988). Xu (1982) puts forward four models of TP patterns: the Parallel pattern, the Continuous pattern, the Concentrated pattern and the Crossing pattern. Zhu (1995) also offers four patterns: the same Theme, the same Rheme, Continuous model and Alternative model. Then, Huang (1985), based on Danes' and Xu's TP patterns, provides seven patterns, which is the most comprehensive up to date: the Parallel, the Continuous, the Concentrated, the Alternative, the Coordinate, the Derivative and the Irregular. Hu (1994), after the analysis of discourse characteristics in English and Chinese, draws the conclusion that there should be three basic models. The first model is to repeat the previous Theme. That is, the Theme in the first sentence continues to be the Theme of the second sentence. The second model is to develop a new Theme from some content of the previous Rheme. The third is to develop a new Theme from

the combination of the previous Theme and Rheme. Referring to various viewpoints of TP patterns, which is considered as theoretic framework, author presents a contrastive analysis of TP patterns of the texts of consecutive interpretation in English and Chinese.

III.   CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF TP PATTERNS OF TEXTS OF CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETATION IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE

To discuss characteristics of English and Chinese consecutive interpretation texts, author chooses some texts of consecutive interpretation (in English and Chinese) from wen premier press conference from 2008 to 2010. After analysis of related language data, three main basic TP patterns are found. They are the same Theme model, the same Rheme model, Continuous model.

A.   The Same Theme Model

This (also called Parallel TP pattern) is a pattern in which all sentences have the same Theme but different Rhemes. Those different Rhemes elucidate the Theme from various perspectives. That is to say, the theme of the first clause is taken as the themes of other ensuing clauses. Specifically, all clauses describe the theme from various perspectives.

Its expression, as follows:

T1 → R1

T2 (=T1) → R2

…

Tn (=Tn-1)→ Rn (n>1) (T refers to Theme, R refers to Rheme, Number "n" refers to number of layers. The same below)

Example One

Source Language:

The previous government (T1) encountered two sudden disasters about which the Chinese all over the world were deeply concerned (R1). Five years ago, you (T2), as the newly elected premier, led the fight against the SARS epidemic (R2). People (T3) still want to know what was on your mind at the time (R3). Five years later, when the disaster of sleet and snowstorms hit Southern China, people (T4 = T3) once again saw you at the forefront of the fight against the disaster (R4). What (T5) was on your mind this time (R5)? What kind of challenges (T6) do you expect in the next five years (R6)?

Target Language:

Shang jie zheng fu (T1) ceng jing yu dao liang ci ling quan qiu hua ren wei zhi qian gua de tu f axing zai hai (R1). 5 nian qian, xin ren zong li de nin (T2) jing li le fei dian (R2), ren men (T3) hai bu zhi dao nin dang shi de xin lu li cheng (R3). 5 nian zhi hou, tu ru qi lai de nan fang bing xue zai hai, ren men (T4=T3) you kan dao nin ben zou zai kang ji xue zai de qian xian (R4), zhe chang zai hai (T5) rang nin gan shou dao le shen me (R5)? wei lai 5 nian nin (T6) jiang hai hui mian lin shen me yang de tiao zhan (R6)?
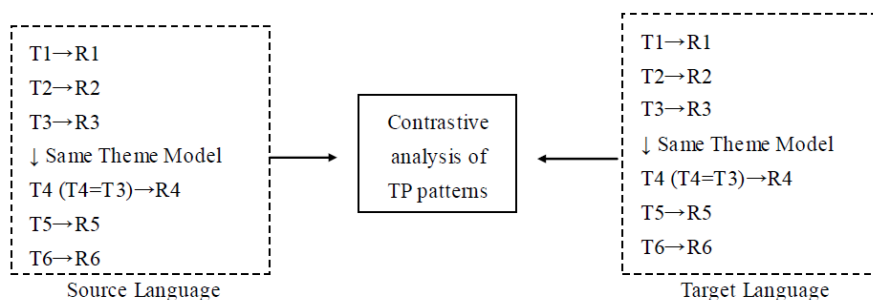

Figure 1.   Note contrastive analysis of the same theme model

B.   The Same Rheme Model

This (also called Concentrated TP pattern) is a pattern which has always the same Rheme but different Themes for all sentences. In this model, all sentences have the identical Rheme. Different starting of sentences concentrated on the same situation or condition.

Its illustration, as follows:

T1 → R1

T2 → R2 (=R1)

…

Tn → Rn (=Rn-1) (n>1)

Example Two

Source Language:

We (T1) have noted (R1) that in your Report on the Work of the Government you (T2) indicated (R2 = R1) that the central government (T3) will go all out to support and consolidate HK's status as international financial centre (R3). The

central government (T4 = T3) will also go all out to support the diversified development at a proper level by Macao (R4). At the end of last year, the central government (T5 = T3) also approved the reform and development plan (R5) for the peal river delta area. HK and Macao (T6) have a lot of expectations of this plan (R6 = R5). As you just said that the international financial crisis (T7) is still spreading (R7) and it (T8 = T7) has yet to hit the bottom (R8).

Target Language:

wo men (T1) zhu yi dao (R1), zai nin de zheng fu gong zuo bao gao li ti dao zhong yang hui quan li (T2) zhi chi gong gu xiang gang guo ji jin rong zhong xin de di wei (R2=R1), tong shi ye hui (T3) cu jin ao men jing ji shi du duo yuan fa zhan (R3). wo men (T4) ye zhu yi dao (R4), zai qu nian nian di de shi hou, zhong yang zheng fu (T5=T3) ye tui chu le zhu san jiao gai ge fa zhan gui hua gang yao (R5), gang ao ge jie (T6) dui zhong yang de zhe xie ju cuo dou you hen da de qi dai (R6). tong shi wo men (T7) ye kan dao (R7), zheng ru nin suo shuo de, zhe chang jin rong wei ji (T8) hai zai man yan (R8), hai (T9) mei you jian dao di (R9).
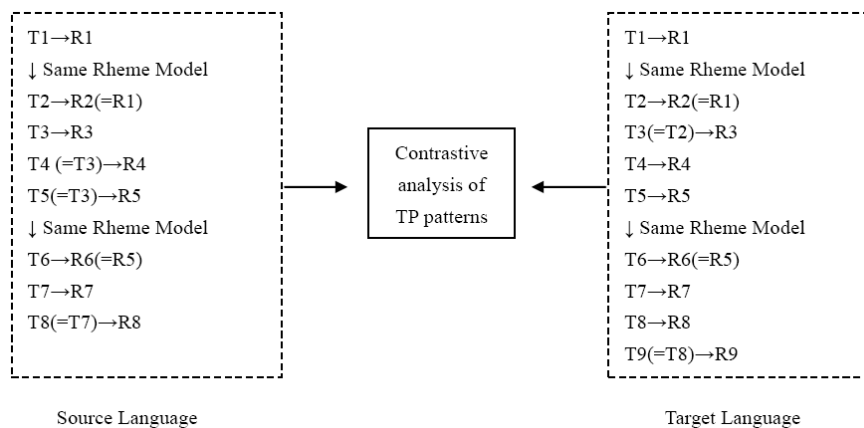

Figure 2.   Note contrastive analysis of the same rheme model

C.   Continuous Model

This is a pattern in which the Rheme of the previous sentence becomes the Theme of the next sentence which works with a new Rheme. The new Rheme serves as the Theme of the next new sentence. The model continues on and on and is expounded in the following example.

It is expressed as follows:

$$T1 \rightarrow R1$$
$$\downarrow$$
$$T2 \ (= R1) \rightarrow R2$$
$$\dots$$
$$Tn \ (Rn - 1) = Rn$$

Example Three

Source Language:

According to media reports, some American officials and analysts (T1) say (R1) that the Chinese delegation (T2), the representatives at Copenhagen, the Climate Change Summit in December, were perceived as arrogant (R2=R1), and that you, Mr. Premier (T3), your decision not to attend the key meeting there even though other heads of state, including President Barack Obama, were in attendance at the meeting was a reason for disappointment and surprise by some of the other participants (R3). What (T4) is your response to this (R4) and how (T5) did the proceedings in Copenhagen look from your perspective (R5)?

Target Language:

you mei guo de guan yuan, hai you fen xi jia yi ji mei ti (T1) ren wei (R1), zai qu nian 12 yue ju xing de ge ben ha gen qi hou da hui shang, zhong guo dai biao tuan (T2) biao xian ao man (R2=R1), wen jia bao zong li nin ben ren (T3=R2) shen zhi ju jue can jia yi ge bao kuo mei guo zong tong ao ba ma zai nei de ruo gan guo jia yuan shou huo shou nao can jia de zhong yao hui yi (R3), zhe (T4) ling yu hui ge fang gan dao shi wang he chi jing (R4). nin (T5) dui ci zuo he hui ying (R5)? nin (T6) ru he kan dai ge ben ha gen jin cheng (R6)?
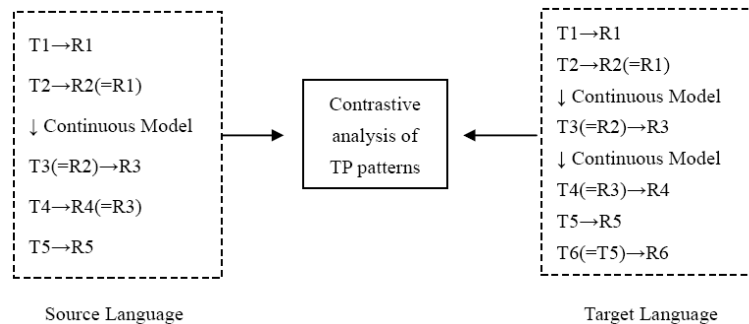
Figure 3.   Note contrastive analysis of continuous model

IV.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on previous contrastive analysis, we draw the conclusion: First, discourse of source language for the most part coincides with that of target language in TP patterns. TP patterns of most source language texts are kept by translator during consecutive interpretation. Although in rare cases some changes are made, generally translators organize information and short sentences according to TP patterns of source language texts. Second, discourse of source language differs from that of target language because of many reasons. As follows: a. Target language texts are more than source language texts in TP patterns. The reason is that long sentences and grammatical structure in English are dealt by way of breaking up the whole into parts in practice of interpretation. b. source language texts from government press conference. Under formal context, source language texts habitually use long sentences and complex short sentences. Therefore, this adds occurrence of particular long sentences and structure, which results in the difference of TP patterns between source language texts and target language texts. c. English is far from Chinese in language feature. Chinese is often referred as topic-prominent language, whereas English is subject-prominent language. Therefore, theme may be different from rheme in description of same information in English and Chinese. d. Influence from particular translation form of consecutive interpretation and personal abilities of translators. During consecutive interpretation, translators often use short sentences to reduce pressure of information memory because they have no enough time to analyze and organize language and seldom make changes on texts-translated. In addition, personal style and performance of translators also may lead to the difference between discourse of source language and that of target language in TP patterns.

V.   CONCLUSION

Some main TP patterns are concluded in this paper by analysis of the texts of consecutive interpretation in English and Chinese from government press conference. At the same time, author points out two viewpoints: For one thing, discourse of source language for the most part coincides with that of target language in TP patterns. For another, discourse of source language may differ from that of target language with the occurrence of complex structures, such as long adverbial clauses, attributive clauses, appositive clauses, etc. Based on above analysis and discussions, some helpful inspirations perhaps come to us. That is to say, in most cases, translators may interpret according to TP patterns of source language texts. With the occurrence of complex structures, such as long adverbial clauses, attributive clauses, appositive clauses, etc. translators should try to abandon previous information form, and make proper changes. Raising awareness of TP patterns may help translators complete interpreting jobs more effectively. Besides, it is instructive for English teaching practice in interpretation.

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