

# The Application of Thematic Theory in Translation

Fang Wang

School of Foreign Languages, Changchun University of Science and Technology, Changchun, China

**Abstract**—The paper focuses on the application of Theme/Rheme theory in the process of translation. First the author reviews the concept of equivalence in translation and then analyzes the significance of Theme/Rheme division in representing the writer's intention and the rhetorical activity of the text, thus pointing out the importance of preserving thematic equivalence during translation. Then the author analyzes some examples of authentic translation.

**Index Terms**—theme, rheme, translation, equivalence

## I. INTRODUCTION

Equivalence has been a kernel concept in translation theory, but it is also a controversial one. Wilss (2001, 134) states that “the concept of TE (translation equivalence) has been an essential issue not only in translation theory over the last 20 years, but also in modern translation studies” and “there is hardly any other concept in translation theory which has produced as many contradictory statements and has set off as many attempts at an adequate, comprehensive definition as the concept of TE between SLT and TLT”. Since 1950s, many theorists have made considerable exposition on translation equivalence. J.C. Catford defines translation as “the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)”. He holds that “the central problem of translation practice is that of finding TL translation equivalents”. (Catford, 1965). He distinguishes textual equivalence from formal correspondence. The former is “any TL text or portion of text which is observed on a particular occasion to be the equivalent of a given SL text or portion of text” and the latter is “any TL category (unit, class, structure, element of structure, etc.) which can be said to occupy, as nearly as possible, the same place in the economy of the TL as the given SL category occupies in the SL” (ibid: 27)

The concept of equivalence has been discussed in various dichotomous ways such as ‘formal vs. dynamic equivalence’ (Nida), ‘semantic vs. communicative translation’ (Newmark), ‘semantic vs. functional equivalence’ (Bell), and so on. According to Nida and Taber, “translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style”. He emphasizes that “the translator must strive for equivalence rather than identity.” (Nida, 1969) Translation under this type of definition contains three essential terms: (1) equivalent, which points toward the source-language message, (2) natural, which points toward the receptor language and (3) closest, which binds the two orientations together on the basis of the highest degree of approximation” (Nida, 1964). He argues that in contrast with formal equivalence which focuses on the message itself, a translation of dynamic equivalence is not so concerned with matching the receptor language message with the source-language message, but with the dynamic relationship, that is, the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message.

## II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THEME/RHEME IN TEXT

### A. Text and Texture

According to Halliday (Halliday, 1976), the word TEXT is used in linguistics to refer to any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole. He defines that a text as a unit of language in use. It is not a grammatical unit, like a clause or sentence; and it is not defined by its size. It does not consist of sentences; it is realized by, or encoded in, sentences. However, Halliday (Halliday, 1976) points out that if every text consisted of only one sentence, there is no need to go beyond the category of structure to explain the internal cohesiveness of a text. But texts are usually not limited to one sentence; on the contrary, texts consisting of only one sentence are fairly rare. They do exist; there are public notices, proverbs, advertising slogans and the like, where one sentence by itself comprises a complete text, for example:

No smoking.

Wonders never cease!

Read the herald every day.

But most texts extend well beyond the confines of single sentence. So in this paper I will concentrate on those texts with several sentences to make clear its thematic progression and thematic patterns in the creation of texture. Texture, according to Halliday & Hasan (Halliday, 1976), is what distinguishes the text from something that is not a text and

therefore it is simply the quality of being a text, rather than a set of unconnected bits of language such as one might find in a collection of independent sentences used as exercises in a language text book. Halliday (Halliday, 1994) identifies the textual component of the grammar of English (and hence texture) as consisting of the features associated with two groups of resources: the structural and the cohesive, as can be seen in the following diagram (Halliday, 1994):

1. Structural Component
  - thematic structure: Theme and Rheme
  - information structure and focus: Given and New
2. Cohesive Component
  - reference
  - ellipsis and substitution
  - conjunction
  - lexical cohesion

From this diagram it is clear that in Halliday's point of view, the Theme systems and the information systems form the main components of texture within the sentence in English. But he also points out that the overall choice of Theme/Rheme is an important part in the creation of the texture of a text and he (Bloor, 2001) investigates the textual organization of a piece of writing by Charles Darwin and demonstrates how the interaction of Given and New information with Thematic progression underpins the rhetorical value of the discourse. Therefore, apart from cohesive ties, thematic progression is also an important means to create texture for it inherently involves the concept of cohesion (Cloran, 1995) and Halliday (Halliday, 1994) also realizes that "the choice of Theme, clause by clause, is what carries forward the development of the text as a whole."

#### *B. Theme/Rheme and Development of Text*

The functions of Theme/Rheme demonstrate that they are of significance on text level. Always put in the initial position of a clause, Theme has two functions (a) it acts as a point of orientation by connecting back to previous stretches of discourse and thereby maintaining a coherent point of view and, (b) it acts as a point of departure by connecting forward and contributing to the development to later stretches. Then its significance can only be understood by seeing how it contributes to the progress of the message in texts (Yan, 1995). And in the analysis of the usefulness of the Theme/Rheme distinction in explaining methods of organization and development in different types of text, a great deal of emphasis has traditionally been placed on Theme rather than Rheme (Baker, 2000). However, the function of Rheme shows that it is also of importance in text.

The Rheme is what the speaker says about the Theme. The content of N-Rheme regularly concerned information that related to the purposes of the text, of the text segment, and of the sentence and clause of which it was a part. On the other hand, the content of the Themes, even when they were separated from their main clauses by commas, regularly did not relate to the purposes of the text and text segments. Rather the content of the various Themes serve as orienters to the information contained in the clauses. (Fries, 1994) Therefore Rheme is the goal of discourse. As such, it is the most important element in the structure of the clause as a message because it represents the very information that the speaker wants to convey to the hearer. It is the Rheme that fulfils the communicative purpose of the utterance.

Therefore we can see that Theme and Rheme are not grammatical notions. They have little to do with whether a given sequence is or is not grammatical. Grammatical sequences are part of the abstract system of language. In context, grammaticality does not necessarily ensure acceptability or coherence. In a text that is well formed grammatically but is ill-formed in terms of its thematics, it is difficult to see a link between the Themes of the above clauses, or even between a Rheme and a following Theme. Hence not surprisingly the text feels disjointed and lacks orientation. The individual clauses are perfectly grammatical but taken together; they are not acceptable as a stretch of discourse. So it is necessary to take account of thematic structure and thematic progression to maintain a coherent point of view in any act of communication. And in the area of Theme/Rheme analysis, it is the thematic progressions that deserve full attention. As is shown in the second chapter, patterns of thematic progression, based on the identification of the Theme and Rheme of each clause, is of great help to the development of text for it concerns where Themes come from and how they relate other Themes and Rhemes of the text and the analysis of the patterns is one way to work through the text sentence by sentence, following the unfolding of the text. As Hatim (Hatim, 2001) points out, the notion of thematic progression is a potentially useful analytical tool for unlocking texts and revealing their texture.

Apart from contributing to the development of text, thematic patterns also indicate whether a rhetorical activity is embedded within, related to or unrelated to a preceding activity, and determine the existence and type of relationship between rhetorical activities.

#### *C. Theme/Rheme and Rhetorical Feature of Text*

If Theme is a meaningful element on the level of clause or clause complex, then we should find that the kinds of meanings that are made thematic would vary depending on the purposes of the writers. And Fries (Fries, 1995) has found that thematic progression and the experiential content of the Themes do not occur randomly and the frequencies of the various thematic progressions vary with genre type, the experiential content of the Themes varies with genre type, and the proportions of times that certain meanings are expressed thematically also varies with genre type. From his findings we can conclude that the selection of an individual Theme of a given clause in a given text is not in itself

particularly significant. But the overall choice and ordering of Themes, particularly those of independent clauses, plays an important part in organizing a text, providing a point of orientation for a given stretch of language and showing a writer's rhetorical purpose. For instance, Perfetti and Goldman (Hatim, 2001) suggest that placing the main referent in subject position (that is Theme 1 becoming Theme 2, and so on) is a method favored by those who prepare encyclopedia entries, obituaries and children's book. In a similar vein, Brown point out that a detective novel constantly thematizes time adverbials, while a travel brochure systematically uses place adverbials as Themes.

Therefore, we can conclude that Theme/Rheme distinction related to translation is text-based rather than restricted to the structure of individual clause for the overall choice of Themes/Rhemes can reflect an author's intention, the methods of organization and development of the text and the author's rhetorical purpose.

### III. THEME/RHEME IN TRANSLATION PRACTICE

Having noted the thematic theory in Chinese and English and the significance of thematic theory in text analysis, this part will be focused on the application of thematic theory in translation practice between English and Chinese. We will first shed light on individual clauses for the purpose of investigating how the Theme is realized in the ST and TT because it is clear that a text does not come out of nothing, but is realized by sentences, which are interwoven together to form an integrated text. The Theme-Rheme distribution and the interrelationships among the individual sentences always cast an influence on the overall organization of the text, and the thematic progressions of the whole text cannot be dealt with without taking the Theme/Rheme division of the sentences into account. It is not reasonable or feasible to ignore the application of thematic theory on clause level, from which my discussion will start.

#### A. Application on Clause Level

From the previous analysis it has been clear that both English and Chinese clauses can be analyzed from the perspective of Theme/Rheme and there are marked/unmarked Themes. In both languages the markedness of Themes depends on the mood of the clauses. Therefore in translation thematic choices of unmarked or marked elements in the clause should be treated carefully because it is a meaningful choice made by writers to orient or guide readers properly. Baker says, "Thematic choice is always meaningful because it indicates the speaker's/writer's point of departure. But some choices are more meaningful than others, because they are more marked than others" (Baker, 2000). Hence in the process of translating, Themes, especially marked Themes, are to be kept when the writer's intention is taken into consideration.

For example:

1. 在你们身上(MT), 寄托着中国和人类的希望(R)。 (鲁迅致中共中央电) 比较“中国和人类的希望(UT)寄托在你们身上(R)。” (Chen, 1986)

Version 1: On you (MT) is placed the hope of China and mankind(R).

Version 2: The hope of China and mankind (UT) is placed on you(R).

In the original sentence, the prepositional phrase at the first position of the clause functions as marked Theme and the writer's emphasis, while in the sentence of normal order, the subject is Theme and unmarked and no special emphasis can be seen. As a result, a translator should pay attention to the Theme/Rheme division in the original sentence to make clear the writer's intention and try to keep it in the process of translation. In the first version of translation the Theme in Chinese is still the same as that in English, and the thematic structure of the source language remains unchanged in the target language. The second version is also acceptable, which, however, when compared to the first version, appears not as ideal as the first one. In this sentence, the approximated thematic equivalence adds to the more desired effect of translated sentence.

From the following examples we can have a better understanding of the slight differences between the translated sentences.

2. Travel twelve and a half miles for so simple an affair I would not.(Arnold Bennett) (Chen, 1986)

Version 1: 我不愿意为了一件这么普普通通的事而跋涉十二英里半之远。

Version 2: 为了这么一件普普通通的事而跋涉十二英里半之远, 我是不干的。

From the source sentence we can perceive that Arnold Bennett implies his dislike by the adjusted sentence order. As readers, we can think of the regular order of this sentence: "I would not travel twelve and a half miles for so simple an affair", which manifests a lack of strength and impressiveness in indicating Bennett's intended feeling for the matter of "travel". Thus the form of the original English sentence serves as an important element of meaning as a whole. Bennett succeeds in showing his attitude by the very use of Theme-Rheme which deviates from the average reader's expectation of the pronoun as the Theme. Consequently, a translator should be competent in discerning all these subtle differences in his process of translation, and be keen on the way that aims at producing a version which can express Bennett's attitudinal meaning to an extent as great as possible. The above given two Chinese translation versions are understandable and acceptable, but when we take author's intended meaning into consideration, the second version outweighs the first one in that it corresponds to the original sentence's thematic structure, which is the main device adopted by Bennet. Thus thematic equivalence is an important aspect, the ignorance of which will reduce the expressive effect and thus cannot give a full account of the original text.

This point will be illuminated in the following two examples:

3. 这个问题(T)要搞清楚(R)。《邓小平文选》(Feng, 1995)

Version 1: We (T) must be clear about this question(R). 外文出版社

Version 2: The issue (T) should be made clear(R). 北京周报

4. The mantle of your high office (T) has placed on your shoulder at a time when the world at large and this Organization are going through an exceptionally critical phase(R).(Chen, 1986)

Translated version 1: 正当全世界和本组织处于一个非常危急的时期中(T), 这个崇高职务的重担落到了你的肩上(R)。

Translated Version 2: 这个崇高职务的重担(T), 是正当全世界和本组织都处于一个非常危急的时期之际, 落到你的肩上的(R)。

However, we should not follow the thematic structure too rigidly, as the comparative study of English and Chinese shows that there are differences in the realization of thematic structure in each language.

As Chafe (Baker, 2000) suggests that is incorrect to translate a Chinese-style topic with an English expression such as "As for". This is because the English expression suggests contrastiveness.

5. 对于那些恃势凌人的地区霸权主义行为(T), 我们是坚决反对的(R)。(赵总理在六届人大二次会议上报告)(Chen, 1986)

Translated Version 1: We (T) firmly oppose any practice of regional hegemonism in which the strong bullies the weak (R).

Translated Version 2: As to the practice of regional hegemonism in which the strong bullies the weak (T), we firmly oppose (R).

From the above discussion of the first several examples, we might judge at the first sight that the first translation version of this sentence is better than the second one, since the former, from the point of view of thematic structure, resembles the original English sentence more than the second version. However, we know that the phrase "as to" denotes a comparative meaning, and it will probably suggest that "we only firmly oppose the practice of regional hegemonism in which the strong bullies the weak and our concern will not reach and influence other kind of behavior, or at least our concern to other matter weakens in degree to the practice of regional hegemonism", while in Chinese "对于" is a generalized term which might indicate "comparativeness" or not, and it depends on the very context and the speaker's intention. Therefore the first translation is favored, although it is not very similar to the source sentence in terms of thematic structure.

### B. Application on Text Level

Since the Theme/Rheme distinction related to translation is text-based and the thematic patterns can reflect the methods of organization and development of the text and the rhetorical activity of the text, then in the process of translating, if a translator can preserve the thematic patterning of original without distorting the target text, s/he should make an effort to present the target text from a perspective similar to that of the source text, for changing thematic patterns may change the rhetoric feature and even style of the source language text. Baker (Baker, 2000) also points out that if the elements placed in Theme position in the source text can easily and naturally be placed in Theme position in the target text, the method of development of the two texts will be the same or similar. In the following section I will discuss the situations in which similar forms in the TLT can successfully convey the meanings in the original text, while the changed form is unnecessarily used in the TLT.

e.g.

6. To the eyes of a man viewing it from behind (T1), the nut-brown hair was a wonder and a mystery(R1). Under the black beaver hat (T2), surmounted by its tuft of black feathers (T2), the long locks, braided and twisted and coiled like the rushes of a basket, composed a rare, if somewhat barbaric, example of ingenious art (R2). One (T3) could understand such weavings and coilings being wrought to last intact for a year, or even a calendar month (R3); but that they should be all demolished regularly at bedtime, after a single day of permanence (T4)(MT), seemed a reckless waste of successful fabrication (Xiao, 2001)

The following chart can illustrate the thematic patterning of the SLT:

T1(to the eyes of man...)->R1(the ..hair...)

T2(under the...hat...feathers)->R2(...long locks...)(=R1)

T3(one)(=T1) ->R3(understand...such weavings...a month)(=R2)

T4(but that they...performance)(=R3) ->R4(...waste of successful fabrication)

Version 1: 一个人(T1)要从后面看这栗色头发, 会觉得那是一桩奇迹, 也是一种神秘(R1)。这头发上(T2)罩着一顶黑色獭皮高帽子, 帽子上还差这一束黑色羽毛, 使帽子显得更高(R2)。帽子下面(T3)露出一股一股的长头发, 它们是先编成一根一根的小辫子, 随后又绞成几根大辫子, 再盘绕起来, 就像编好在一个篓子上的灯心草(R3)。把头发弄成这般模样(T4), 可算是很少见的, 一个精巧的艺术的例子, 虽然带点原始的风味(R4)。谁都明白(T5), 这样编好和盘好的一股股头发, 可以经得起一年, 少说也经得起一整月都不会散开来(R5); 但

是每天到睡觉的时候(T6), 这个仅仅保持了一整天的编盘好的头发, 又照例得统统拆散, 就好像让一件成功的艺术制作毫不在意地给糟蹋了(R6)。

Thematic patterning of this translated version is:

T1(一个人)→R1(从后面看这栗色头发, 会觉得.....也是一种神秘)

T2(这头发上)(=R1)→R2(...一顶黑色獭皮高帽子...帽子上...帽子显得更高)

T3(帽子下面)(=R2)→R3(...长头发...一个篓子上的灯心草)

T4(把头发...这般模样)(=R3)→R4(可算是很少见的...艺术的例子...原始的风味)

T5(谁都明白)→R5(这样...的一股股头发...不会散开来)(=T4)

T6(...到睡觉的时候)→R6(...头发...统统拆散...好像...艺术制作..给糟蹋了)(=R5)

Version 2: 从后面去看(T1), 这栗色的头发简直就是一桩奇迹, 一件秘密(R1)。黑色羽饰獭皮高帽下面(T2), 露出一络络长发, 看上去是小辫子绞成大辫在盘绕而成的云髻, 就像用灯心草编织的花篮; 虽带一点原始的风味, 却算得上是精巧罕见的艺术品(R2)。谁(T3)一看就会明白, 梳妆成这样的发式是要让它的风采经一年至久而不衰, 或至少一月而不散(R3); 但是, 每天到睡觉的时候(T4), 这仅仅施展了一天魅力的云髻, 又照例统统拆散, 就好像是不在意地让一件艺术品给糟蹋掉了(R4)。

Thematic patterning in this translated version looks like:

T1(从后面去看)→R1(这栗色的头发...一桩奇迹, 一件秘密)

T2(黑色...高帽下面)→R2(一络络长发...编织的花篮...艺术品)(=R1)

T3(谁)→R3(一看就会明白...这样的发式...不衰, 或...一月而不散)(=R2)

T4(但是...到睡觉的时候)→R4(...的云髻...拆散..艺术品给糟蹋掉了)(=R3)

Here in the original text complicated patterns of thematic progression can be found, i.e., constant Rheme, alternating thematic pattern and linear progression. As the chart illustrates, Rheme 1, Rheme 2 and Rheme 3 form constant Rheme pattern, Theme1 and Theme3 form alternating thematic pattern while Rheme3 and Theme4 form linear progression. Aside from thematic progression, the experiential contents of the constant three Rhemes all refer to “hair” which becomes the Theme in the last clause. From the analysis of thematic patterning it is clear that this paragraph is developed around the word “hair”. This makes the reader aware that first the writer mainly describes the hair because it all appears at the Rheme position. Therefore when the original text and the first translated version are compared, it is clear that it is not faithful to the original text in that it changes the core of the message from the hair to the hat, which is not the writer’s focus of message. And from the charts of thematic patterning of the two translated texts, it is clear that in the second one the Theme/Rheme position is not changed and the translator makes the target text also focused on what happens to the “hair”. Therefore it is more faithful to the original text not only in message conveyed, but also in form and style. So in this case it is unnecessary to change the thematic patterning of the original text. This is also true in Chinese-English translation. For example:

#### 7. 《天静沙·秋思》(元)马致远

枯藤老树昏鸦(R1), 小桥流水人家(R2), 古道西风瘦马(R3)。夕阳(T4)西下(R4), 断肠人(T5)在天涯(R5)。

(Huang, 2003)

The thematic progression in the poem is as follows:

T1 (=zero Theme) → R1(枯藤老树昏鸦)

T2 (=zero Theme) → R2(小桥流水人家)

T3 (=zero Theme) → R3(古道西风瘦马)

T4(夕阳) → R4(西下)

T5(断肠人) → R5(在天涯)

Version 1: Autumn

(翁显良译)

Crows (T1) hovering over rugged trees wreathed with rotten vine—the day is about done (R1). Yonder (T2) is a tiny bridge over a sparkling stream, and on the far bank, a pretty little village (R2). But the traveler (T3) has to go on down this ancient road, the west wind moaning, his bony horse groaning, trudging towards the sinking sun, father and father away from home (R3).

The thematic progression of the translated version looks as follows:

T1 (Crows) → R1 (hovering over rugged trees... about done)

T2 (Yonder)(---R1) → R2 (is a tiny bridge ...pretty little village)

T3 (...the traveler) → R3 (has to go on ...father away from home).

Here the original text is a poem containing five lines. And the pattern of thematic progressions is free. The most important feature is that the first three lines are Themeless and only with Rhemes made up of paralleled noun phrases. And in the last two lines, the Themes are “夕阳”and “断肠人”. By analyzing patterns of thematic progression of the poem, we can see that the first three lines function as a static picture in which the author’s focus is on the sun and the traveler. And the poem is very short and concise. However, translated version is a prose composed of three long

sentences in which the Themes are “Crows” “Yonder” and “Traveler”. Hence not only the focus of the author’s description has changed, but also the rhetoric feature and the style has changed.

What’s more, in the original Chinese source poem, the objects of “crows”, “rugged trees” and “rotten vine” are parallel in description, while in the translated version, they are arranged in a subordinate order to modify the “crows”, and “the crows” is exalted to be the subject, which is the Theme, and the “rugged tress” and “rotten vine” proceed on to describe the “crows”, namely, they are the Rhemes. Then readers will probably get such an impression that the poet focuses his attention on the “crows”, which will go against the descriptive effect of the original Theme. In addition, this very first sentence presents a dynamic picture in the readers’ mind, and it adds animate power to the poem, but we know that the original poem is a quite static one, and it is just like a beautiful and sorrowful picture unfolded little by little in front of readers, and the unique effect of its vividness and touchingness lies heavily in the associative thinking by the readers themselves. In my opinion, the appealing of this poem hides in its implications of static state. The large space it leaves for readers to imagine, the more can readers connect their own life experience with it. The rest sentences more or less have the same problem. Therefore this version, which is in the form of prose, is not equivalent to the original text and the changed thematic text succeeds in making it easy for readers to understand, but fails to keep up with the key spirit of the original poem. Therefore the following translated version is much better when judged from the perspective of Theme/Rheme.

Version 2: Tune to “Sand and Sky”

Autumn Thoughts

by Ma Zhiyuan

Dry vine, old tree, crows at dusk, (R1)

Low bridge, stream running, cottages, (R2)

Ancient road, west wind, lean nag, (R3)

The sun (T4) westering, (R4)

And one with breaking heart (T5) at the sky’s edge.(R5)

(Translated by Schlepp)

The pattern used in the poem is:

T1(=zero Theme) → R1(Dry vine, old tree, crows at dusk)

T2(=zero Theme) → R2 (Low bridge... cottages)

T3(=zero Theme) → R3(Ancient road... lean nag)

T4(The sun) → R4 (westering)

T5 (...one with breaking heart) → R5( at the sky’s edge)

In this version, the Themes and Rhemes match the position of the Themes and Rhemes of the original poem. This thematic equivalence also creates a static picture in the translated version. So the two texts are equivalent not only in the image conveyed but also in the presentation of rhetoric feature and style. Therefore judged from the Theme/Rheme analysis, this translated version is better than the previous one in that the translator preserves the pattern of original text.

Though the above examples show that equivalence can be achieved by similar thematic patterns, this does not mean that no adjustment can be made. Since no two languages are totally identical to each other, it is natural that thematic equivalence cannot be kept in every case. Hence Nida’s concept of ‘the closest natural equivalence’ (1964) must be also taken into consideration in order to achieve thematic equivalence. In fact, even when similar thematic patterns can be employed in the target text, certain adjustment has to be made. And the following example can illustrate this point.

For example:

8. My old friend Harrison (T1), had lived in the Mediterranean for years before he returned to England (R1). He (T2) had often dreamed of retiring in England and had planned to settle down in the country (R2). He (T3) had no sooner returned than he bought a fire house and went to live there (R3). Almost immediately he (T4)began to complain about the weather(R4), for even though it was still summer (T5) it rained continuously and it was often bitterly cold (R5).

(New Concept English , Vol 3, in Xiao Liming, 2001)

The thematic patterns are as follows:

T1 (My old friend Harrison)→R1(had lived... returned to England)

||

T2 (He) →R2 (had often dreamed ...in the country)

||

T3 (He) →R3 (had no sooner returned than ...live there)

||

T4 (he) →R4 (began to complain about the weather)

T5 (for even ... summer) →R5 (it rained... bitterly cold)(=R4)

Translated Version: 哈利逊(T1)是我的旧交, 侨居地中海多年, 近返英国(R1)。哈(利逊)(T2) 早已梦想归本土退休, 迁往乡间定居(R2)。(T3)归国伊始, 便买下一栋清雅的别墅(R3)。可是(T4)刚一住下, 就抱怨起英国的天气来(R4); 原来当时虽炎暑未尽(T5),但阴雨连绵,寒冷彻骨(R5)。

T1(哈利逊)→R1(是我的旧交...近返英国)

||

T2(哈(利逊)) → R2(早已梦想...定居)

⋮

T3(=zero Theme) → R3(归国伊始...一栋清雅的别墅)

⋮

T4(可是(structural Theme)) → R4(刚一住下, 就抱怨起英国的天气来)

⋮

T5(原来当时虽炎暑未尽) → R5(但阴雨连绵, 寒冷彻骨)(=R4)

From the analysis, it is obvious that in the SLT constant Theme progression is used to indicate that the writer's description is focused on the person but his activities are what the writer really wants to deliver to the reader. But in the translated version, similar pattern is used only with adjustment. Personal pronoun "he" is omitted from the third sentence and thus the third and fourth clause are Themeless. This happens because Chinese is a topic-prominent language as opposed to English which is "subject-prominent". And in Chinese the topic of a text does not need to appear in every clause for fear of repetition, hence the omission of personal pronoun "he" in the following sentences of this paragraph.

However, things are not always so optimal in translation, as is shown in the following example in which even marked Theme is put at the Rheme position in the target text.

For instance:

9. I (T1) strove with none (R1); for none (T2) was my strife (R2);

Nature (T3 (MT)) I loved (R3), and next to nature (T4), Art (R4);

I (T5) warmed both hands before the fire of life (R5);

It (T6) sinks (R6), and I (T7) am ready to depart(R7).

(Landor, 1775-1864, in Yang Jiang, 1994)

T1 (I) → R1 (strove with none)

T2 (none) (=R1) → R2(was my strife)

T3 (Nature) → R3(I loved)

T4 (next to nature)(=T3) → R4(Art)

T5 (I) (=T1) → R5 (warmed ... fire of life);

T6 (It) (=R5) → R6 (sinks)

T7 (and I) (=T1) → R7(am ready to depart).

Translated Version:

我(T1)和谁都不争(R1), 和谁争(T2)我都不屑(R2);

我(T3)爱大自然(R3), 其次(T4)就是艺术(R4);

我(T5)双手烤着生命之火 取暖(R5);

火(T6)萎了(R6), 我(T7)也准备走了(R7)。

(杨绛译)

The thematic progression of the translated version is:

T1(我)→ R1(和谁都不争)

T2(和谁争)(=R1) → R2(我都不屑)

T3(我)(=T1) → R3(爱大自然)

T4(其次) (=R3)→ R4(就是艺术)

T5(我)(=T1) → R5(双手烤着生命之火 取暖)

T6(火)(=R5) → R6(萎了)

T7(我)(=T1) → R7(也准备走了)

The chart of the patterns of thematic progressions reveals that the combination of constant Theme progression and linear thematic progression contribute to the development of the original poem. In the second line "Nature" is the object of the clause and therefore it is a marked Theme. However, in the translated version, it is put in the Rheme position. If it is put at the beginning of the clause in the target text, it will affect the aesthetic effect of the poem. So the author changes it into "I loved nature" and thus makes the target poem focusing on "I" to foreground it. From this example it is clear that change may occur on local level, while on global level the two texts are similar in the overall patterning of Theme/Rheme.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, whatever thematic structure a translator employs in translation, he must make sure that the thematic patterns contribute to the cohesion and coherence of the target language text and does not distort the meaning of the original text.

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**Fang Wang**, MA in linguistics, earned in Jilin University, Jilin Province, China, in 2007. The major field is critical discourse analysis.

She is now a lecturer in CUST and is studying for her Ph.D. degree in Jilin University. His main published articles include Resolving Ambiguity in Familiar and Unfamiliar Casual Speech, Exploring Teaching Beliefs in Teaching EAP at Low Proficiency Levels.