The Application of Thematic Progression Mode in English Discourse Teaching

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Abstract: The thematic progression mode is a framework for the content of a text and is also constrained by the genre of the text. English reading is an important part of high school English teaching. Traditional English reading teaching focuses on the language knowledge, mostly using the text translation method as the teaching means, and the whole teaching process mostly sticks to the stereotypes of staying in the analysis of individual words and sentences, which leads to the students neglecting the importance of the text as a whole in the process of reading. To address this problem, this paper tries to discuss the guiding significance of the thematic progression mode in text interpretation and reading teaching practice based on the theme-rheme theory.

Keywords: Thematic Progression Model; English Reading; Theme; Rheme

1. Introduction

Mathesius, the founder of the Prague School, suggested early on from a functional syntactic perspective that most sentences can be cut into two basic components: Theme and Rheme. The theme generally indicates known information, and the rheme indicates new information. From the point of view of the narrative value of sentence components, rheme plays a more important role because it conveys new information. However, from the point of view of discourse structure, the theme is more important, because in a coherent discourse, the theme contains information that expresses the organisation and logical structure of the discourse. English reading in high school requires students to understand the main gist of the discourse, to comprehend specific information in the text, to infer the lexical meaning of vocabulary words according to the context, to make simple judgements and inferences, to understand the basic structure of the text, as well as to comprehend the author's intentions and attitudes, and Theme-Rheme Theory is just the right way to help high school students to achieve these goals.

2. The Relationship Between the TP Mode and the Discourse

The discourse is not made up of many small sentences arranged in an unordered way, the discourse is a reflection of the author's thoughts, how to propose the topic, develop the topic, propose new topics, end the topic, all of these have a systematic nature. Dannesch (1974) proposed a system of thematic progression, and also divided thematic progression mode into three kinds: Later, the theory of thematic progression mode was introduced into China, and many scholars put forward their own views on the classification of thematic progression mode based on different criteria. Taken together, the most common thematic progression modes in English discourse are the following four:

(1)Continuous Theme TP: The same theme and different rhemes in the preceding and following sentences. (Fries 1983; Danes 1974; Zhu Yongsheng 1995)

(2)Simple Liner TP: The rheme or part of the rheme of the previous sentence is the theme of the subsequent sentence. (Fries 1983; Danes 1974; Zhu Yongsheng 1995)

(3)Continuous Rheme TP: This pattern indicates that the front and back clauses have different themes and the same rheme. (Zhu Yongsheng 1995)

(4)Derived Theme TP: The theme of the preceding sentence derives the theme of the following sentence. (Fries 1983; Danes 1974; Su 2008)

3. The analysis of the theme of 'Come And Eat Here 1'

In reading teaching, teachers can help students master the content and structure of reading discourse faster and more accurately by introducing the knowledge of theme progression mode appropriately. The application of the theme progression mode in reading is briefly described as an example of a narrative text in the compulsory three of the PEP edition.

Wang Peng (T1) sat in his empty restaurant feeling very frustrated (R1). It(T2) has been a very strange morning (R2) . Usually , he (T3)got up early and prepared his menu of barbecued mutton kebabs, roast pork, stir-fried vegetables and fried rice (R3). Then by lunchtime , they(T4) would all be sold (R4) . By now , his restaurant (T5) ought to be full of people (R5) . But not today. Why (T6) was that (R6)? What (T7) could have happened (R7) ? He (T8) thought of his mutton, beef and bacon cooked in hottest, finest oil (R8). His cola (T9) was sugary and cold (R9), and his ice cream (T10) was made of milk, cream and delicious fruit (R10). "Nothing (T11) could be better (R11)," he thought . Suddenly, he(T12)saw his friend Li Chang hurrying by (R12). "Hello, Lao Li," he called. "Your usual?" But Li Chang (T13) seemed not to hear (R13). What (T14) was the matter (R14)? Something terrible (T15) must have happened if Li Chang was not coming to eat in his restaurant, as he always did (R15).

Wang Peng (T16)followed Li Chang into a new small restaurant (R16). He (T17) saw a sign at the door(R17).

Curiosity (T18) drove Wang Peng inside (R18). It (T19) was full of people (R19) .The hostess (T20), a very thin lady,came forward (R20) ."Welcome ," she said . "My name (T21) is Yong Hui (R21). I (T22)'ll help you lose weight and be fit in two weeks if you eat here every day (R22)." Then she (T23) gave a menu to Wang Peng (R23). There (T24)were few choices of food and drink on it: just rice, raw vegetables served in vinegar, fruit and water (R24). Wang Peng (T25) was amazed at this and especially at the prices (R25) . It (T26) cost more than a good meal in his restaurant (R26)! He (T27) could not believe his eyes (R27) . He (T28) threw down the menu and hurried outside (R28) .On his way home , he (T29) thought about his own menu (R29) . Did it (T30) make people fat (R30) ? Perhaps she (T31) should go to the library and find out (R31) . He (T32) could not have Yong Hui getting away with telling people lies (R32) ! He (T33) had better do some research (R33)!

At the library, Wang Peng (T34) was surprised to find that his restaurant served far too much fat and Yong Hui's far too little (R34). Even though her customers (T35) might get thin after eating Yong Hui's food (R35), they (T36) were not eating enough energy-giving food to keep them fit (R36). They (T37) would become tired very quickly (R37). Wang Peng (T38) felt more hopeful as he drove back home (R38) .Perhaps with a discount and a new sign he (T39) could win his customers back(R39).

It can be seen that the main part of the article has a total of 39 themes, in order:

Para1: Wang Peng (T1)→It(T2)→Usually, he (T3)→Then by lunchtime, they (T4)→By now,his restaurant (T5) →Why (T6)→What (T7)→He (T8)→His cola (T9)→and his ice cream (T10)→Nothing (T11)→Suddenly,he (T12)→ But Li Chang (T13)→What (T14)→Something terrible (T15);

Para2: Wang Peng(T16)→He (T17);

Para3: Curiosity (T18) →It (T19)→The hostess (T20)→My name (T21)→I (T22)→Then she (T23)→There (T24)→Wang Peng (T25)→ It (T26)→He (T27)→He (T28)→On his way home,he (T29)→Did it (T30)→Perhaps she (T31)→He (T32)→He (T33);

Para4: At the library,Wang Peng (T34)→Even though her customers (T35)→they (T36)→They (T37)→Wang Peng (T38)→Perhaps, he(T39).

The first part is the first paragraph, which is composed of 15 clauses and is centred on the person, the restaurant and the mood of the characters. If we divide the themes and rhemes of the sentences in the first paragraph, we can see that the first, third, eighth and twelfth themes are the main character "Wang Peng", the second and fifth themes become "Wang Peng's restaurant", and the fourth, ninth, tenth and eleventh subjects are "the food in Wang Peng's restaurant". The two interpersonal themes in the first paragraph, usually and suddenly, indicate the writer's attitude and show the writer's doubt that the status of today's restaurant is different from that of the past days. The marked themes "Then by lunchtime" and"By now" emphasise the time, meaning that lunchtime has passed, but there are still no customers in Wang Peng's restaurant today. The theme and theme in the question sentences guided by special interrogative words as unmarked themes are mostly used in narrative texts to express the speaker's special tone and emotion, for example, the special interrogative sentence guided by "Why, What" in this paragraph expresses the author's doubt about the arrival of no customers in the restaurant today. So students can have a general idea about the first paragraph of the article: the first paragraph mainly deals with Wang Peng's restaurant and the food in the restaurant, as well as Wang Peng's mood about the status of the restaurant that day.

By analogy, the second part is paragraph 2 and 3, and it is clear that a new theme (new information), appears in this part. The new theme"She (the hostess)" makes it clear that a new character, the owner of a new restaurant in the neighbourhood, appears in the

second part. The marked theme "Then, On his way home" also emphasises the time of day. The interpersonal theme "Perhaps" express the author's attitude towards the speculation about the reason for the new restaurant's booming business. It can be learnt that this part is mainly about Wang Peng's search for the reason why Yong Hui's restaurant is so popular.

The fourth paragraph is the last part of the text. The theme "At the library" emphasises the location and shows that the writer wants to find out why the food served in her restaurant is not healthy enough. "Even though" is a theme that suggests the development of the article, it is a turning point in the paragraph, as the food in the restaurant is too fatty, but the food in the new restaurant is too low in calories, and the customers who eat at the new restaurant often become thinner, but not healthy. From this, we can see that the paragraph is about Wang Peng thinking about how he can make his restaurant more competitive.

The theme arrangement shows that the author uses compound themes in many cases in order to express ideas and connect the discourse, while marked themes are also constantly employed in order to emphasise the context. Themes of the 39 clauses in the discourse clearly show the author's thoughts. From "the depression of Wang Peng's restaurant" to "the discovery of a new restaurant" to "the discovery of what made the new restaurant attractive" to "Wang Peng's new thinking about restaurant food", readers can understand the author's thinking.

4. Conclusion

Therefore, from the analysis of the above article's thematic progression mode, it can be seen that, as an English teacher, in the process of English reading teaching, if students are popularised with the theories and models related to thematic progression, it will help them to quickly analyse the article and understand the overall structure of the article, which will lead to the improvement of their reading comprehension. The aim of the study of thematic progression mode is to make the reading process simple. It starts with understanding the overall content of the discourse, looking at the semantic relationships between sentences and the way the theme unfolds. In this way, they can focus on the overall meaning of what the author is trying to say rather than on individual words and sentences, thus changing the passive, negative reading process into an active, positive participatory one and achieving reading in the true sense of the word.

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