Thematic Progression in English Business Case Reports written by Chinese and French Students

Thi Cam Ha Nguyen

January 2018

Dissertation Submitted for the Award of MA in ELT and Applied Linguistics

School of Humanities
Faculty of Arts and Humanities

The work contained within this document has been submitted by the student in partial fulfilment of the requirement of their course and award.
Acknowledgement

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Emma Moreton, who has given me valuable guidance and suggestions throughout the completion of this study. I also would like to thank Dr. Michael Ribb and Prof. Hilary Nesi for giving me the access to the data used in this study. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their constant encouragement and support.
Abbreviations

TP – Thematic Progression
NS – Native Speaker
EFL – English as a Foreign Language
ESL – English as a Second Language
L1 – First Language
CT – Constant Theme
SL – Simple Linear
ST – Split Theme
SR – Split Rheme
Sum – Summative Theme
Ba – Back Theme
BH – Back Heading Theme
BT – Back Table Theme
Tem – Temporal Theme
Grm – Grammatical Theme
Ext – Extralinguistic Theme
Gen – Generic Theme
Met – Metatextual Theme
New – New Theme
Abstract

This study investigates thematic progression in business case reports written by Chinese and French students as compared to those written by native students. To be more specific, it examines the frequencies of thematic progression patterns in those reports. It is revealed that generally speaking there are more similarities than differences regarding these students’ use of thematic progression patterns. More noticeable differences are found when it comes to thematic progression in different rhetorical moves and minor patterns. This could imply that in general students’ academic experience and language proficiency could have more influence on their use of thematic progression patterns. However, L1 interference cannot be ruled out.

In general there are some similarities which can be observed not only in both Chinese and French students group but also in the NS group. These similarities could be considered as features of business case reports in terms of thematic progression. Firstly, there are four main types of thematic progression patterns used by students in their reports including Simple Linear, Constant Theme, Back Theme and New Theme in which Back Theme is the most frequently-used and Simple Linear is more popular than Constant Theme. Orientation move is characterized with high proportions of New and Metetextual Themes. Analysis move is characterized with high proportions of Simple Linear and Recommendation is characterized with high proportions of Back Theme.

Compared with Chinese students, French students seem to prefer to put I, we, and Wh-interrogatives in Theme position. They also use more Generic Theme and Temporal Themes. While Chinese students seems to use Split Rheme more frequently, French students seems to use Summative Theme more often, and both of Chinese and French students use Split Rheme less frequently than native students. Native students also use more Grammatical, Back Heading and Back Table Themes. In Orientation move, while native students use approximately the same amount of Simple Linear and Constant Theme, Chinese students shows a strong preference for Constant Theme while French students seem to prefer Simple Linear. French students also use more New Themes in Analysis move and Chinese students use more New Themes in Recommendation move.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgement ................................................................................................................................. 1  
Abbreviations .......................................................................................................................................... 2  
Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. 3  
Table of Contents ................................................................................................................................... 4  
List of Tables and Figures ...................................................................................................................... 6  
1. Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 7  
   1.1. Background .......................................................................................................................... 7  
   1.2. Aims ...................................................................................................................................... 7  
   1.3. Objectives ............................................................................................................................ 8  
   1.4. Organization ........................................................................................................................... 8  
2. Literature Review ............................................................................................................................... 9  
   2.1. Theme-Rheme ....................................................................................................................... 9  
   2.2. Thematic progression ............................................................................................................. 12  
   2.3. Previous Studies on TP in EFL ......................................................................................... 18  
   2.4. The Gap .............................................................................................................................. 19  
3. Methods ............................................................................................................................................ 21  
   3.1. Research Questions .............................................................................................................. 21  
   3.2. Data ....................................................................................................................................... 21  
   3.3. Data Analysis ....................................................................................................................... 22  
      3.3.1. Move division ............................................................................................................... 22  
      3.3.2. Unit of Analysis .......................................................................................................... 25  
      3.3.3. Theme-Rheme Identification ...................................................................................... 26  
      3.3.4. Thematic Progression Identification ........................................................................... 27  
   3.4. Ethics ...................................................................................................................................... 30  
4. Results .............................................................................................................................................. 31  
   4.1. Overview of TP across NS, Chinese and French data ......................................................... 31  
   4.2. TP across three groups of students in each move ............................................................... 33  
      4.2.1. TP in Orientation Move ............................................................................................ 33  
      4.2.2. TP in Analysis Move ................................................................................................ 35  
      4.2.3. TP in Recommendation Move .................................................................................. 36  
5. Discussion ......................................................................................................................................... 39  
   5.1. General use of TP Patterns ................................................................................................. 39  
      5.1.1. Similarities ................................................................................................................... 39  
      5.1.2. Differences .................................................................................................................. 44
List of Tables and Figures

Table 2.1. Overview of Topical Themes in Different Moods ........................................ 10
Table 2.2. Overview of TP Patterns ........................................................................ 14
Table 2.3. Peripheral Themes - McCabe 1999 ............................................................ 15
Table 2.4. Unmotivated Themes – Herriman 2011 ................................................... 15
Table 2.5. Overview of Rhematic Progression Patterns ............................................. 16
Table 3.1. Nathan’s (2013) Analysis of Business Case Report’s Structure ............. 23
Table 3.2. TP Patterns in the current study ............................................................... 29

Figure 4.1. TP Patterns Distribution in NS, Chinese and French data .................. 31
Figure 4.2. TP Patterns in Orientation Move ............................................................ 33
Figure 4.3. TP Patterns in Analysis Move ............................................................... 35
Figure 4.4. TP Patterns in Recommendation ........................................................ 37