



Chinese Indirection and Thematic Progression in Chinese ESL Writing

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Abstract

This study investigates how problems of thematic progression in Chinese ESL writing are attributable to differences in thematic development in Chinese and English. Articles written by thirty English expert writers and thirty Chinese expert writers as well as essays written by thirty advanced ESL learners were closely analyzed. Textual evidence shows that thematic development is quite often differently executed in Chinese and English. Comparative textual analysis and editing according to English conventions also indicate that Chinese ESL learners have their own ways of thematizing discourse, putting emphasis and using connectives in ways unexpected by English native speakers. These features, often found disrupting the flow of Chinese ESL texts, can be traced to conventions of topicalization in Chinese, which may in turn be accounted for by cognitive and cultural reasons, rather than just developmental factors. Peculiarities in Chinese ESL thematization may well contribute to the impression of indirection and opacity of their writing.

Keywords: thematic progression, ESL writing, problems of fluency, LI influence, differences in thematic development in English and Chinese

INTRODUCTION

In the literature of contrastive language studies, there has been a long debate since Kaplan (1966) on whether texts constructed by Orientals, particularly Chinese, are characteristically indirect and if so, what may account for the indirection. This study investigates the question of indirection in Chinese ESL and Chinese and English expert writing by looking at how thematic progression may differ in Chinese and English. It will argue how such differences may affect the text construction of Chinese ESL learners in their acquisition of the target language and how the resultant texts may cause problems in the text-processing of readers not familiar with such patterns.

Let us begin by looking at the importance of thematic progression before reviewing literature concerning the theoretical difference between Chinese and English thematic construction.

Hinds (1987) notes that the intelligibility of text is affected by lack of smooth transition from given to new information. He believes that in order for the reader to extract the writer-intended message in the processing of text, there must be enough signals in the

text to guide the reader from one information unit to another. To Kaplan, who first suggested that there are cultural differences in rhetorical styles, coherence and unity is what an English reader expects from the text, which must be presented “in a sequence which is intelligible to its reader. Kaplan’s famous doodles diagram (Kaplan, 1966: 4) of different cultural rhetorical styles are in fact sketches of how different cultural styles deviate from the expected sequence of information presentation familiar to the English reader. But most cross-cultural studies of rhetorical styles inspired by Kaplan have focused their research on rhetorical moves above the sentence level—at the levels of the paragraph or the text as a whole. Few studies have been undertaken at the level of thematic progression both within and between sentences. This study will examine how problems in thematic progression in Chinese ESL learners’ writing may contribute to breakdowns in the smooth decoding of messages from one sentence to another. The question of whether such ESL inept thematic constructions may be due to language transfer will be looked into as well.

LITERATURE REVIEW

L1 Influence on Thematic Progression in ESL

Green (1991) was among the first to notice that there is a strong L1 influence on the way Chinese ESL learners construct the theme and rheme of their sentences. He also suspects in passing that the rhetorical difference Kaplan attributes to Chinese writing may be a result of the way themes are typically constructed in the Chinese language. In this section, how theme and rheme in Chinese may be different from English will be expounded first before a discussion of how such differences may contribute to thematic construction problems in Chinese ESL learners’ writing.

How Theme in Chinese may be Different from its English Counterpart

In English, theme is “the peg on which the message is hung” (Halliday, cited in Fries 1994: 232), only marking “the point of departure for the message”. The theme tends to have low information value. It mainly serves a textualization function by referring back to the ongoing discourse. In Chinese, theme tends to be more important in information value (Ren, 1994), being “the basis on which the message is built” (p.164). Being part of a topic-comment structure, Chinese theme is often topical and therefore grammatically nominal. In Chinese syntax, multiple nominal themes are common. Even clauses expressing condition, cause, concession etc. can be analyzed as topics in Chinese sentences (Tsao, 1988:700). The resulting syntax therefore tends to be left-branching and is also more top-heavy both in structure and information value than English. In terms of given and new information, topicalized themes are the norm in Chinese and they are frequently used to introduce new information rather than relate back to what is given in the discourse.

Apart from theme, rheme also appears to differ somewhat in the two languages. In English, the bulk of the message is carried by the rheme; English rhematic structure tends to be more complicated when compared with the theme. The structural ‘compensation’ (Ren, 1994:163) of greater information load in the rheme may account for the greater complexity and length of the rhematic part of the sentence in English.

The rheme in an English sentence frequently starts with the main verb in the main clause, which often coincides with the beginning of the contour of tonic prominence in the information unit. The rest of the rheme completes the information unit started by the finite verb of the main clause, which may be followed by an object, complement or adverb, all of which may be a single word, but expandable into a phrase, or a clause etc. In Chinese syntax, on the other hand, the rheme is relatively less complex, but because of the topic-comment structure, the rheme is nevertheless information heavy. Because finiteness of the verb is not a requirement in Chinese syntax, the unit of new information is not oriented primarily around finiteness but gravitates towards the end of the sentence to give the most significant information on the topic.

Thematic Progression in Chinese ESL Writing

Thematic progression refers to the way the text moves forward from theme to rheme, both within a clause or between clauses. Green (1996) is one of the few researchers who has drawn close attention to likely L1 influence on thematic progression within a sentence although he has never elaborated on how thematic construction may shape the overall pattern of connected discourse. He only demonstrated how L1 interference in thematic construction may lead to grammatical markedness and even difficulty in comprehension of the text. He describes the problem as follows:

“Chinese discourse frames seem to be intruding into English information structure and the effect is both powerful and puzzling, since the TL produced is ordered in a marked way and as such, lends an inappropriately strong tone to the discourse, as well as a sense of disjointed and fragmented development of messages in the text.” (p.129)

He argues persuasively that such a disruptive effect in the reader’s comprehension of text is a direct consequence of the way Chinese ESL learners construct their themes, which is very often just topicalization, without the typical textual and/or interpersonal thematic elements in the English sentence:

“The staccato quality deriving from inadequate thematic development which pervades a good deal of the written English discourse produced by Chinese learners, is a consequence of topicalisation, the co-occurring lack of embedded thematic elements, and the concomitant nonappearance of adequate cohesive ties.” (p.129)

Unfortunately, Green did not give any examples of how the ESL learners’ lack of skill in thematization not only within but also above the sentence level in English has led to a problem in the effective processing of a continuous text. His examples remain isolated sentences. Recent studies (e.g. Xu, 2000; Wang 2007), however, have shown that the development of theme and rheme at the textual level of Chinese ESL writing differ from that of the writing of peer native speakers, presenting problems that affect both the quality and comprehension of the ESL writing. But regrettably, these studies have not investigated how L1 and L2 differences may have contributed to thematic progression problems in Chinese ESL writing, thus leaving a gap in the deeper understanding of thematic development problems in Chinese ESL learners’ construction of text.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the thematic structural differences in English and Chinese as expounded in the literature and investigate how they affect the construction of texts in the expert writing of Chinese and English;
- To unravel whether problems in thematic construction in Chinese ESL writing are attributable to differences in thematic progression in the native language and the target language of the learners;
- To demonstrate how text processing problems experienced by readers more used to English thematic progression can be improved by removing problems in thematic construction according to systematic differences in the thematic progression of English and Chinese.

METHODOLOGY

Corpus

The data reported in this study came from a corpus of thirty expert English and thirty expert Chinese articles taken from academic journals on the controversial subject of whether human cell cloning research should be allowed. The thematic constructions of the expert writers of English and Chinese were contrasted with those in the thirty essays written by advanced Chinese ESL learners at university level in Hong Kong. To match the genre of the expert writing, the learners' argumentative essays were written on the same controversial topic as the expert writers as well.

Analytical Methods

T-units, defined as "independent clause(s) together with all hypotactically related clauses and words which are dependent on that independent clause" (Fries, 1995: 49) contiguous to each other were used to examine how each unit unfolds and progresses into another. Following the structures of T-units, the flow within and between sentences of the text can be traced and the pattern of thematic development delineated. The analysis of thematic progression was focused on the development of theme and rheme in the T-units adjacent to each other.

This is essentially a qualitative study. Theme and rheme developments were analyzed basically according to, but not confined to Danes' model (1974) of linear, constant, derived themes and split rhemes. The analysis was not limited to these four types as it was felt that more flexibility can be maintained when thematic development is found to serve various communicative purposes using patterns other than those postulated in Danes' model (Fries, 1995). Faulty or problematic thematic developments in the learners' texts were noted and compared with the expert English and Chinese writing in order to identify systematic differences and similarities so as to account for possible L1 transfers. Thematic progression is regarded as "faulty" or "problematic" when there is a hiatus in the smooth progression of thoughts from the theme to the rheme in a series of sentences in the text, which may lead to poor comprehension, rereading of the text, or unscrambling the thematic construction in order to salvage the continuity of the thoughts expressed in the text.

FINDINGS

Many problems can be detected in the present corpus that can arguably be attributed to the learners' lack of mastery of skills required to execute smooth development of themes and rhemes in English prose. The typical ESL patterns of thematic progression will be discussed one by one with the help of examples.

Topic-Comment Structure

In the present corpus, many a sentence displays a preponderance for organizing the sentence elements using a topic-comment structure which disrupts the flow of the sentence, giving it an unnecessary spiraling effect.

In the following example, the topic of the first sentence and the whole paragraph is "cloning". It is unproblematic when this topic is chosen as the theme of the sentence to begin the paragraph. However, the topic of the second sentence is 'those sick people', which, although inferable from the context, is nevertheless never mentioned in the preceding sentence. According to the principles of thematic progression (Danes, 1974, cited in Mauraen, 1996: 204-205) the theme of a succeeding sentence should either be a repetition of the previous theme, which is "cloning", or should be related to the rheme of the previous sentence, which in this case is "the understanding of the new technology". The topical theme of the second sentence, however, is "those sick people and 'they'", thus making a jump in thematic development. Obviously sensing the gap, the writer uses a transitional marker 'Besides' as a textual theme to bridge over to the topic 'those sick people'. Unfortunately, 'besides' is a transitional marker normally used for the continuation of an argument, giving additional but unrelated support to the claim (Yeung, 2009). The ensuing proposition of incurable sick people having hope for a cure through cloning is clearly just a continuation of the same argument in the immediately preceding text and so the use of 'besides' does not help at all in pushing the argument forward. Instead, the rhetorical connective acts a distracter, setting the reader to look for another kind of argument which is not forthcoming in the text. In keeping with the typical L1 Chinese thematic structure expostulated above (e.g. Ren, 1994), the second sentence falls into a 'topic-comment' structure. Similarly, 'People' in the last sentence, marked off by a comma, falls into the same 'topic-comment' structure as well.

In the example, the problematic thematic elements are underlined for easy reference. A revised version (in square brackets) is also given to show how the sentences can be rewritten to improve thematic progression. The revised sentences are also underlined to show what could have been a more normal pattern of thematic development in English without the untoward twists and turns caused by the unskillful choice of themes. Note that in the revised version, the idea that there is hope for the terminally ill is treated as new information and is shunted to a rhematic position, which is a point to be further developed in the upcoming section on learners' problems involving the given-new structure of theme and rheme.

Example 1

Cloning is a medical breakthrough; many researches revealed that cloning can cure many illnesses, such as heart attack, cancer, if we have a more comprehensive understanding of this technology. Besides, for those sick people, they were sentenced to death because no existing measure could cure them in the past. Since cloning was invented, there is still a hope for them. People, who have incurable diseases need this technology to help them.

[Cloning is a medical breakthrough. Many research studies have revealed that cloning can cure many illnesses such as heart attack and cancer if we have a more comprehensive understanding of this technology. With the development of cloning, there is still some hope for those sick people who would otherwise be sentenced to death because no existing measure could cure them in the past. People who have incurable diseases need this technology to help them.]

In the following examples (2 & 3), the unusually strong topical themes can equally be revised by replacing them with textual themes to get rid of the hiatus and confusion created by the topic-comment structure which, as we shall see in greater detail in Section 6 below, may well be natural and common in the learners' native language. As can be seen, the topic-heavy structure, probably patterned after the Chinese model, is quite evident. In Example 2, there is even a double topic, with the pronoun 'they' repeating the preceding nominal phrase. To show how the ESL texts may differ from L2 expected patterns, the original learners' sentences have been revised. The problematic topical themes and the revised textual themes are underlined for attention:

Example 2

(Paragraph following a discussion of the differences in values between Chinese and Western cultures.)

The different viewpoints of Chinese and Western cultures though, they stand on the same side on the issues of cloning.

[In spite of the different viewpoints of Chinese and Western cultures, they stand on the same side on the issue of cloning.]

Example 3

(After recounting the merits of cloning, the writer continues as follows:)

Cloning, in general, despite all the merits we get, I think it should be banned.

[In general, despite all the merits we get, I think cloning should be banned.]

Given-New Structure in Theme and Rheme

It is generally recognized in applied linguistics (e.g. Halliday, 1994; Fries, 1994) that in English, there is a correspondence between the sequence of given and new information and the structure of theme and rheme. As mentioned above, theme is the point of departure for the message conveyed in the sentence and therefore occupies initial position in the sentence. For the sake of our discussion, it is worth noting again that as a

vehicle for the continuation of text in a new sentence, theme often carries recoverable information and thus normally refers back to the preceding sentence. Rheme, on the other hand, is the part of the sentence which carries new information. Its introduction into the text is facilitated by the theme. In English, except for simple themes which are topical but are rare, textual and interpersonal themes are far more common. This is understandable as textual and interpersonal themes usually prepare the way for the presentation of new information which is significant for the further development of the ongoing text. It is also a characteristic of English to be 'end-focused' (Ren, 1994: 163) as the rheme is where the new information is found. The pronoun 'it' acting as theme in a sentence is often cited in the literature as evidence that 'it' is used as a grammatical subject which is empty in meaning in order to reserve the rhematic position of the sentence for information which is regarded as important for the speaker. For example:

It is going to rain soon.

Theme Rheme

We shall see in the examples provided below that Chinese learners are apparently ignorant of this principle of textual development and thus found reversing the positions of new and old information as theme and rheme, thereby putting emphasis in the wrong place in the sentence:

Reversal of Given and New in Thematic and Rhematic Positions

In example 4 below, it can be seen that old information carried over from the preceding text—'religious viewpoint' against cloning is put in rhematic position. The main point of the text, which recommends a ban, should have taken up prime position in the rheme. However, this point only follows the topical theme 'cloning' in an earlier part of the sentence, thus missing imparting a sense of finality to the recommendation. A revised version is also given alongside the original for comparison:

Example 4

Therefore, human cloning should be banned in the viewpoint of religion.

[Therefore, from the religious point of view, human cloning should be banned.]

In Example 5, the topicalized theme is actually a nominalization of the proposition which should be put into a rhematic position in the sentence after the attribute 'possible'. By reversing the topicalized theme and rheme, the top-heavy topicalization atypical of English is removed and a much clearer sense of the meaning emerges, as shown in the revisions. The topicalized theme and the rewritten part are underlined for easy reference:

Example 5

He (a cloned human) should be given a new identity or treated as an associate of his mother would be controversial.

[It would be controversial whether he should be given a new identity or treated as an associate of his mother.]

Misplaced Emphasis

Another way of identifying the frequent thematic problem in the ESL writing is to find the misplaced emphasis in the thematic position of the sentence. The problem can be attributed to the learners' lack of understanding of the fact that the rheme is where the significant information should be placed. In Example 6 below, the adverb in marked sentence-initial positions can be shifted to rhematic position for new information after the nominal or pronominal subject. Or, if the writer wishes to draw attention to the attribute, the 'it' structure can be used to put the attribute in rhematic position for added emphasis, as shown in the second revision below. The same underlining conventions above are used for the following examples:

Example 6

Probably, we would not want to have a child with three heads and five legs...

[We would probably not want to have a child with three heads...]

[It is unlikely that we want to have a child with three heads...]

Lack of Metadiscoursal Signals for the Change of Topic/Perspective/Stance

Whenever there is a break in the development of discourse such as a change of topic, a shift of the writer's perspective, or a change in the writer's stance towards the topic, the English reader would expect the change to be properly signaled in order to transition smoothly to the next part of the discourse. Such expectations can be said to be within the conventions of what has been called the 'writer-responsible' rhetorical tradition of English, which may not be shared by other languages such as Japanese and Chinese (Hinds, 1987). Whether this is due to cultural differences or simply lack of awareness of the English conventions, the present learners' corpus shows many instances where metadiscoursal signals of change are not forthcoming where they may be expected. The following (Examples 7-13) are some examples.

Change of Topic

In Example 7, there is a change of topic from human cloning to animal cloning. Since the thematic transition is rather abrupt, so only after getting to the rhematic part of the sentence can one infer that the sentence is trying to provide evidence for the lack of safety in cloning in general. But strictly speaking, what is true about animal cloning may or may not apply to human cloning. The intended relevance, however, can be provided by a textually-realized thematic transition, as shown in the revised versions. The rewritten parts are underlined for easy reference below:

Example 7

According to Dr. Arthur Caplan... 'cloning might be able to help infertile individuals and couples to have children. However, cloning is not safe.' Animal cloning has produced many dead, deformed and diseased animals.

[...cloning is not safe.' This can be seen in animal cloning experiments, which have produced many dead, deformed, and diseased animals.]

[...cloning is not safe. As seen in animal experimentation, cloning has produced many dead, deformed, and diseased animals.]

Change in Level of Generality

In Example 8, there is also an abrupt change in the discourse from the controversial opinions out there in the world to a statement of the writer's own attitude. The introduction of an interpersonal theme can help smooth the sudden jump from objective reporting of general opinions to a declaration of personal viewpoint.

Example 8

Since the success of the cloning of the sheep Dolly, cloning has become a controversial issue all over the world. The arguments of both for and against the issue have been mainly divided into a few parts: medical, human rights, morality and identity. I am strongly against the issue of cloning.

[.....Personally, I am against cloning.]

Change of Stance

In Example 9, the first paragraph is obviously a critique against pro-cloning reasoning. The first sentence in the second paragraph, however, reads like an argument in support of cloning, which seems to contradict the stance taken up by the writer in the previous paragraph. The transition marker 'Secondly', listing yet another point, only serves to confuse the reader more. As the text unfolds, the sentence is only an acknowledgement of an opposing argument to be debunked later. To avoid the apparently unintended change of stance, the writer's attitude has to be signaled using an interpersonal theme to refer to the argument as one being reported only, instead of one of his or her own.

Example 9

{Ending a paragraph giving arguments against cloning}

...It is not reasonable to say that cloned people are inferior to others. They should not be labeled as curing machines and be killed when others need their organs or any part of their bodies.

Secondly, cloning can help those couples who suffer from sterility.

[It has often been argued that cloning can help couples who suffer from sterility. But...]

The following is an example of the same kind. A sentence can be provided here to bridge the gap of transition.

Example 10

What is the opposition to cloning? There are three basic arguments: cloning is not natural; it has potential for misuse; and it's immoral.

{The above introductory paragraph is immediately followed by a debunking of the three arguments}

[What is the opposition to cloning? There are three basic arguments: cloning is not natural; it has potential for misuse; and it's immoral. But none of these arguments can withstand scrutiny.]

Signaling Rebuttals

Signaling change of stance is obviously related to the presentation of rebuttals, which is a common feature in arguments. Rebuttals normally consist of two parts—acknowledgement of the opposing stance as a concession, to be followed by a refutation of the opposing argument in spite of the concession (Barton, 1995). Needless to say, an effective rebuttal has to be carefully engineered. Apart from the weight and precision of the content in the attack, the acknowledgement or concession to the opposing viewpoint has to be skillfully staged, not as a full-blown endorsement but only as a concession or gambit leading to its final refutation. Learners who haven't mastered the delicate art of fine-tuning the reader's expectations in a concession-rebuttal sequence make the blunder of appearing to speak for two different positions, bewildering the reader with an apparently sudden, unexplained change of mind.

In the following example, the first sentence states the possible benefit of cloning talented people. The writer uses the subjunctive modal 'could', which weakens the strength of the projection. But since this supposed benefit may also have the undesirable side-effect of having artificially designed people, the two sentences actually fall into the sequence of acknowledgement and rebuttal. As such, the rhetorical function should be more clearly indicated with appropriate signals, to further weaken the supposed benefit by pointing out that it is theoretical in nature only and the change of perspective should be underlined with an adversative conjunct 'but' to turn an apparent benefit into its opposite—a dreaded outcome.

Example 11

The technology could also help us to create more talented people by cloning the genes of talented people. If this is the case, then our next generation will be designed.

[In theory, the technology could also help us to create more talented people by cloning the genes of talented people. But if this happens, our next generation will be designed.]

In Example 12 below, merely adding an adversative connective throws light onto an otherwise ambiguous concession-rebuttal rhetorical sequence:

Example 12

First, cloning is inhuman. Just we have mentioned about making some clones for organ transplant so that everyone can be saved. Clones are also human.

[...We have just mentioned making some clones for organ transplants But clones are also human.]

In Example 13 below, the ambivalent viewpoint introduced by the coordinative connective 'Meanwhile' can be sharpened by a contrastive marker such as 'However', which turns the two conjoined propositions into a predominant view expressed in the second, overtaking the first proposition. Naturally, such a change may belie the

essentially bifocal viewpoint of the writer, which may also be due to cultural influence (see Section 6.3 below on subordination and coordination):

Example 13

I admit that scientific technology has our living standard improved and bring us great surprises. It is important for scientific development to enjoy its freedom, so that it can conduct different experiments to improve or upgrade our living standard and quality. *Meanwhile*, morality should also have the higher priority than science.

[I admit that..... different experiments can be conducted to improve or upgrade out living standard and quality. However, morality should have higher priority than science.]

Ellipsis of Context-Dependent Information

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, Chinese discourse is reputed to be 'reader-responsible' instead of 'writer-responsible' like English (Hinds, 1987). Instead of making everything explicit, the Chinese writer can count on the reader to work harder to infer meanings from the text and the context of situation, so certain things can be left unsaid. In the learners' writing samples, we quite often find cases where gaps of meaning are found in the text, which would have been filled with so many words in English. To the English reader, such gaps may have the effect of making the text go off at a tangent.

In Example 14 below, the writer announces that a comparison will be drawn between the Chinese and Western viewpoints about cloning. But in the ensuing paragraph, only the Chinese cultural point of view is explicitly discussed without any direct reference to their Western counterpart. And yet, it is obvious that the writer has the Western viewpoint in mind, especially in the second half of the paragraph. The comparative connective 'In contrast' certainly indicates this comparison. The whole text echoes Kaplan's observation (1972: 46) that in oriental writing, 'the subject is never looked at directly. Things are developed in terms of what they are not rather than in terms of what they are'. The missing gaps have been filled in the revised version below the original version:

Example 14

... In the following, I am going to explain why cloning should not be encouraged from the Chinese and Western culture perspectives.

First of all, concerning the Chinese culture, cloning definitely goes against it. For the Chinese, it is always important to maintain the harmony between humans and nature. Human is only one of the members in the whole nature system and life and death should be determined and ruled by the nature. Thus, human manipulating their own life is considered as violating the law of nature. So it will break the harmony with the nature. In contrast, Chinese believe that we should 'live with nature, grow with nature.' Being a ruler of the whole nature is not what humans pursue. As a result from the Chinese culture, cloning is not encouraged.

[First of all, cloning is definitely against Chinese culture. For the Chinese, it is always important to maintain harmony between humans and nature. Mankind is only one of the members in the whole natural system and life and death should be determined and ruled by nature. The Western way of manipulating one's own life is considered by Chinese as violating the law of nature, thus breaking man's harmony with nature. Unlike Westerners, Chinese believe that we should 'live with nature, grow with nature.' Being a ruler of the whole of nature is not what humans should pursue. Thus, according to Chinese culture, cloning is not encouraged.]

In Example 15 below, a gap appears between the first and second sentences, turning them into what to an English reader would consider two independent propositions—one about cloning, the other about increasing life span in general. The revised version has tried to fill in the gap:

Example 15

Moreover, hypothetically, if a brain is moved from an old body to a clone, it would continue to degenerate. Therefore increasing lifespan or immortality would never be feasible.

[Moreover, hypothetically, if a brain is transplanted from an old body to a clone, it would continue to degenerate. Therefore, using cloning to increase lifespan or attain immortality would never be feasible.]

Under-Specifying the Relationship between Propositions

A common feature which may affect the readability of the ESL texts is the learners' failure to show exactly how propositions are related to each other in the sentences. The result again is a loosely-constructed text, leaving the reader the chore of finding the logical connection between the elements either within or between the sentences. Below are some typical ways of how idea relationships are underspecified:

Repeated Mentions of Topic instead of Proper Referencing

In Example 16 below, the topic 'some people' (italicized for easy reference) is used as the theme consecutively in two sentences. In a properly constructed text, the second mention of the topic would be pronominalized. The repeated mention of the same topic is not only thematically awkward but also confusing as it makes one wonder whether the second mention of 'some people' refers to the same or another group of people altogether. Use of the pronoun 'they' would improve readability and remove the ambiguity, at the same time tightening up the text by showing the hierarchy of main (sentence 1) and supporting idea (sentence 2).

Example 16

Some people would suggest that cloning is unnatural and not ethically correct. *Some people* suggest that cloning of human beings would affect in different ways a normal human being. However, this is also wrong as cloning will behave like any other human being would behave as it will have all the characteristics of a normal human being...

[Some people would suggest that cloning is unnatural and ethically incorrect. They suggest that cloning of human beings would affect a normal human being in different ways...]

In Example 17, a similar repeated mention of the same topic 'many of them' also creates ambiguity, which can be clarified by specifying further exactly what is being referred to.

Example 17

...there were hundreds of sheep which were not successful in the experiments. And many of them died before they were born *and many of them* were deformed or had serious illnesses and then they would die or killed by the scientists.

[...there were hundreds of sheep which were not successful in the experiments. Many of them died before they were born and of those that survived, many of them were deformed or had serious illnesses and they would die...]

Under-Integrated Propositions with Weak Links

Sometimes, clauses are under-integrated because vague links are used to connect the propositions. The favorite connectives used happen to be the coordinating conjunction 'and', the relative connective 'that', and the time marker 'when'. It is as if the learners just wish to string the ideas together without bothering to point out specifically what the underlying relationship is between these ideas. As we shall see later in Section 6.3, this may have to do with the coordinating mindset of the Chinese or simply the preponderance of the Chinese rhetorician to set the reader on a trail to establish the logic embedded implicitly in the discourse.

In Examples 18, 19, 20, and 21 below, the vague links in the original have been italicized for attention. In the revised versions, they are replaced by connectives which specify the relationship between propositions more clearly. The texts have also been tightened up by replacing the paratactic structures with more subordination.

Example 18

For those reasons I mentioned above, I believe cloning should not be legalized *and especially* human cloning will bring huge chaos to humanity as well as all the merits.

[For those reasons I mentioned above, I believe cloning, especially human cloning, should not be legalized, as it will bring huge chaos to humanity despite all its merits.]

Example 19

Should it be allowed *and* encouraged?

[Should it be allowed or even encouraged]

Example 20

...society will be very complicated *that* people cannot identify themselves clearly.

[...society will be very complicated as people cannot identify themselves clearly.]

Example 21

Furthermore, *when* we are talking about human cloning, it is even more unacceptable.

[Furthermore, if we are talking about human cloning, it is even more unacceptable.]

[Furthermore, when it comes to human cloning, it is even more unacceptable.]

Misuse, Overuse, and Underuse of Transitional Markers

Both teachers and researchers alike have noted the use of transitional markers as an area of grave concern for Chinese ESL learners (e.g. Milton & Tsang, 1993; Field, 1993; Johns, 1984). As evident in the earlier examples, the present corpus is by no means an exception. The same problems of overuse, underuse, and misuse can be found. They are likely to be the result of the learners' lack of thematization skills in English, as demonstrated by examples shown earlier involving the use of thematic links and transitional marker.

DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the question of to what extent the thematization problems cited above can be attributed to L1 influence will be investigated more closely, first by looking at patterns of textualization in the Chinese language. For this purpose, relevant comments from previous scholars about Chinese grammar and thematization will be discussed. Textual examples will be drawn from the present Chinese expert corpus to examine whether these theories apply. We will also look further into whether the supposedly Chinese patterns match the problems in the learners' corpus in any specific way. To account for the phenomenon of cultural influence, the question of how deep-seated Chinese cultural patterns may shape the linguistic elements will be discussed as well.

Topic-Comment Structure and Theme-Rheme Structure in Chinese

As a factor possibly contributing to the problems of thematic progression in Chinese ESL writing, the topic-comment structure most typical of the Chinese language deserves closer attention than just mentioned earlier. It is commonly agreed among scholars (e.g. Chao, 1965; Tsao, 1988; Shen, 1997; Ren, 1994) that unlike English, which is subject-prominent, Chinese is a topic-prominent language. Being a subject-prominent language, English seldom has pure simple topics as the theme of the sentence. When simple topical themes do appear, they are a marked form intended for added emphasis. For example (Halliday, 1994):

Topical Theme	Subject and Predicate
Mathematics	I hate it.

In Chinese, on the other hand, topicalized themes are very common. Furthermore, topics in Chinese are often nominalized phrases heavily packed with information. What would be embedded as modifiers to the topic in a right-branching manner in English often appears as part and parcel of the topic placed to the left of the head noun in Chinese. For example (Ren, 1994, p.163):

家里 人人 身体 健康

Family everyone body healthy

Everyone in the family is in good health.

In English, however, when topics are structurally and informationally heavy, they make for heavy prodding in the processing of the text, as evidenced in the examples given earlier under the learners' problems in thematic progression. Such formulation of the topic is often regarded as awkward, as shown in Example 2 above.

Sometimes, more accomplished students make use of cleft structures to the right of the topic in an English sentence to build up the topical theme, as shown in Example 3 above. The readability of this kind of sentence is, however, still dubious, compared with the rewritten version in square brackets using the normal English thematization conventions. Such cleft constructions, though not frequently used in English, occur quite a lot in the Chinese corpus. For instance:

Example 22

由于 克隆人 的成功率 不可能 达到 100%;

Because human cloning's success rate cannot reach 100%,

[*Because the success rate of human cloning cannot reach 100%,*]

生殖克隆 技术 首次 应用于 人 后,

reproductive cloning technology first time apply to man then,

[*reproductive cloning, (when it is) first applied to men,*] [CLEFT CONSTRUCTION]

无论何时 都 有 实验 性质,

any time also have experimental nature;

[*always has an experimental nature.*]

In one of his articles on how the topic-comment structure in Chinese interferes with Chinese ESL learner's thematization in English, Green (1996) states that topic in Chinese is 'a relatively free-standing element, which requires few or no cohesive devices to relate it to the discourse which surrounds it.' An examination of the Chinese expert corpus shows that there are cases where topics are thematically independent from the preceding discourse. As we have seen earlier in Example 1, the Chinese ESL learner's lack of skill in English thematization easily results in the abrupt introduction of new topics, which arguably could have been influenced by the relatively independent nature of topical themes in Chinese. In English, thematization of topics follows a salient word

order of given and new, whereas in Chinese, a different word order is at play which makes thematic topics more independent than English.

Chinese is a language which basically follows the natural temporal sequence of perception in ordering words in a sentence (Tai, 1985). Green (1996) argues that it is largely due to the negative transfer of this 'pragmatic word order' (p.125) that Chinese ESL learners have difficulty in making use of the 'salient word order' of English in thematic development. Perhaps this can be better explained by analyzing how a Chinese sentence can be different from its close English equivalent in both word order and thematic development. The following is a typical series of sentences taken from the Chinese cloning corpus. The excerpt occurs immediately after a discussion on how human cloning can upset the traditional kinship system and cause a serious ethical problem. A close translation is given in cursive brackets and a more liberal translation following the English thematic pattern is given in square brackets:

Example 23a

但是, 人们的 伦理观念 是会 变化 的, [CLAUSE 1]

But, people's ethical concept is may change PART,

可以 根据 变化了的 客观 存在 再 给 人们,

can base on changed objective existence again give people

以 伦理 定位. [CLAUSE 2]

PREP ethical definition.

{But people's ethical concepts are subject to change; based on changed circumstances, (we) can give people (another) ethical definition again.}

[But people's ethical concepts are subject to change; they can be redefined based on changed objective circumstances.]

Example 23b

在 试管婴儿 那里 也 遇到 这个 问题. [CLAUSE 3]

PREP test-tube baby there also encounter this problem.

{With test-tube babies, (we) have also encountered this problem.}

[This has also happened to test-tube babies.]

The close translations in cursive brackets illustrate how thematic progression becomes disjointed following the same natural word order of the Chinese sentences. Although both rhematic and thematic elements are about 'change', the former refers to the change

of ethical concepts whereas the latter points to the changes in the surrounding situation, which are to be used as the basis for redefining ethical concepts. The latter is obviously new information just introduced into the discourse but is presented as a given in thematic position, thus violating the convention of thematic progression in English discourse. A reformulation of the two clauses more in keeping with an English reader's expectation would be something as given in the square brackets: The new information of 'redefinition of ethical concepts according to changes in circumstances' is repackaged as the rheme of the second clause

Viewed in the same light, the third clause also has the same problem of reversal of given and new in the thematic and rhematic positions of the sentence. '这个问题' ('this problem') is given information, repeating what is in the rheme of the preceding clause, but is presented here in rhematic position, which is normally reserved for new information in an English sentence. But of course, what would be problematic in English is perfectly normal in Chinese as the syntactic construction follows the Principle of Time Sequence (Tai, 1985).

Following the Principle of Time Sequence (Tai, 1985) or Pragmatic Word Order (Green, 1996), Chinese has a typology which diverges from English in a number of ways. For example, the thematic position of the sentence in English is often used to perform an interpersonal function, telling the reader how to interpret the rest of the sentence. To be sure, the same applies to Chinese too, but the temporal sequence tends to take over salient word order, resulting in the lack of a clear signal marking the rhetorical function of the sentence. The Chinese sentence below follows the natural sequence of events but masks the rhetorical intention of the writer to debunk a claim:

Example 24a

有 人 提 议 克 隆 人 能 提 供 可 移 植 的 器 官 或 避 免 遗 传 病

EXIST people suggest clone man can supply transplantable organ or avoid hereditary illness

{Some people suggest cloning man can supply transplantable organs or avoid hereditary illness}

实 现 ... 优 生,

realize eugenics,

{(in order to) realize eugenics,}

试 图 为 克 隆 人 的 可 行 性 提 供 证 据. [SENTENCE 1]}

attempt for cloning man POSS desirability supply evidence.

{in an attempt to provide evidence (for) the desirability of human cloning.}

In following the Principle of Time Sequence, the above Chinese sentence uses an almost narrative mode. The writer's subdued critical stance is not clear until we come to the second sentence:

Example 24b

这 存在 严重的 伦理 道德 问题。 [SENTENCE 2]

This exist serious relations morality problem.

{Herein lies (a) serious morality problem of human relationships.}

Rendered in the salient word order of English, the writer's stance would have been clearer from the start of the first sentence. The reordered part is put in italics and new additions underlined for easy reference:

[In an attempt to provide evidence for the desirability of human cloning, it has been claimed that human cloning can provide transplantable organs or even avoid hereditary illnesses in the realization of eugenics.]

It can be noted that in the English version of the sentence, what is in the rheme of the Chinese sentence has become the theme. The claimed benefits of human cloning cited in the sentence are to be viewed as an attempt to provide an argument in a debate only. One does not have to go on reading to the end of the sentence to grasp the writer's critical intent.

Abandoning the temporal word order in Chinese for salient word order in an English translation would also improve the thematic flow and continuity of the text, as shown in Example 25:

Example 25

康德曾 在 他的人类 尊严 原论 中 提 到: [SENTENCE 2]

Kant has PREP his human dignity thesis PREP mention ASP (Completion)

{Kant has, in his thesis on human dignity, mentioned:}[CLOSE TRANSLATION]

[In his thesis on human dignity, Kant has mentioned:] [LIBERAL TRANSLATION]

By placing 'in his thesis on human dignity' in thematic position, a better link is forged with the previous sentence about human rights. Instead, putting 'Kant', a hitherto unmentioned topic as theme makes the transition from the previous sentence more abrupt; also, using a cleft structure in Sentence 2 to link up with the previous sentence further disrupts the smooth flow of the English version. However, in Chinese, it is perfectly acceptable to have a thematic topic which on first reading is apparently unrelated to the foregoing text, only to have its relevance revealed in a later part of the sentence following a temporal sequence. It is also to be noted that cleft structures are

very common in more sophisticated Chinese learners' writing and could possibly be due to transfer of the Chinese temporal word order.

Ellipsis of Context-Dependent Elements

Chinese is a discourse-oriented rather than a grammar-oriented language like English. It should not come as a surprise that grammatically functional elements like those in English are often missing in Chinese sentences. Even content words can be omitted if the information they convey can be inferred from the context.

Example 26 below illustrates how grammatical elements can be omitted and Example 27 how content words are not necessary when their meanings are obvious from the context. The original Chinese sentence is first translated word for word into English before two more liberal translations are given using the English syntactic conventions. Grammatical words missing in the original Chinese sentence are inserted within cursive brackets in the two liberal translations:

Example 26

应该 承认 克隆人 也是人,

Should admit clone human also is human,

[{We} should admit {a} cloned human is also human.] [Version 1-part 1]

他们 同样 享有 一般 人所 应 享有的 权利.

They same enjoy possess ordinary people POSS should enjoy possess right.

[They {should} enjoy having the same rights {as} ordinary people should possess.][Version 1-Part 2]

[{We} should admit {that} a cloned human is also human {and that} he/she has the same right {as} an ordinary person should have.][Version 2 merging Parts 1 and 2 with a slightly different modality in Part 2]

In the above example, the grammatical subject 'We' is omitted from the sentence. In Chinese, finite verbs are not an essential requirement as in English and modality can be implied rather than conveyed more explicitly by verbs and auxiliaries. As a result, the original Chinese sentence can be translated into English in two ways, using finite and auxiliary verbs differently (bolded in the examples) to convey slightly different modalities. In the Chinese sentence, such refined differences in modality are left up to the reader to interpret. But by manipulating the modality system, the English writer can exhort the reader to endow the human clone with the same human rights as in the first translated version, or simply assert that the human clone has the same right as any other human being, as translated in the second version.

In the following Chinese excerpt, the example of varying standards of beauty is just inserted with a dash instead of a verbal signpost such as 'for example'. The point that historically renowned beauties reflect the changing standards of society is quite clear from the context and so the key word 'reflects' is omitted. In English, it would appear that such an omission is impossible without creating a staccato effect, as shown in the three different translated versions, with a transliteration followed by two more liberal translations:

Example 27

而且 随着 社会 发展,

Also follow society development,

{Also{,} follow{ing} social development,} [Version 1]

[{We can see that} following social development,] [Version 2—to be continued]

价值 观 正 在 变 化, 今 天 的 优 明 天 很 可 能 就 是 劣.

value concept now PROGR change, today POSS good tomorrow very probable ADV is bad.

[{the} sense of value is now changing, today's good will most probably be tomorrow's bad] [Version 1]

[{our}values are changing, {what 's} good today may well be {what's} bad tomorrow.][Version 2]

肥 环 燕 瘦 — 中 国 传 统 审 美 观 的

Fat Wan Yin Slim — Chinese tradition standard of beauty REL

{The historically renowned beauties of varying shapes and sizes—{reflecting} [Version 1..to be continued]

变 化 很 好 地 说 明 了 这 一 点.

change very well explain ASP this one point.

(Version 1 continued

the changes in traditional Chinese standards of beauty, illustrate this point very well.}[Version 1]

[{This point} is well illustrated by the changes in the traditional standards of beauty, {as reflected in} the various shapes and sizes of the renowned beauties in Chinese history.][Version 2]

The fact that Chinese text is heavily dependent on contextual understanding can be seen in the deletion of the grammatical subject if it can be inferred from the context. In English, the elliptical subject has to be the same as its antecedent, but in Chinese, the subject can be omitted even when there is a change of perspective in the discourse and the antecedent is not grammatically traceable. The following excerpt illustrates this:

Example 28

英国 科学家 从 一只 六年岁 母羊的 乳腺 中

British scientists from one CL 6-year-old mother sheep's milk gland PREP

取下 一个 体细胞,

take down one CL somatic cell,[CLAUSE 1]

将 它的细胞核 移植 到 另外一 头 母羊的

TRAN its cell nuclear transplant to another CL mother sheep's

去了细胞核 卵子 中,[CLAUSE 2]

enucleated egg cell inside,

待 培养 成 胚胎 后,

wait develop become embryo after,[CLAUSE 3]

再 植 入 到 第三 头 母羊的 宫 内 发育 成长,

again plant into ASP third CL mother sheep's womb PREP develop grow,[CLAUSE 4]

产下 了 小羊 多莉'.

give birth ASP lamb 'Dolly'. [CLAUSE 5]

In this excerpt, the three clauses following the main clause have elliptical subjects sharing the same antecedent grammatical subject 'British scientists' in the first clause. The grammatical subject of Clause 5 is also omitted, but the antecedent has changed from the grammatical subject of the main clause to the third mother sheep mentioned in Clause 4. Strictly speaking, there is in fact no grammatical antecedent, nor is there a relative pronoun linking the clause to its subject. The phrase 'third mother sheep's womb' buried in the middle of the preceding clause is grammatically not identical with 'the third mother sheep' that can be said to have given birth to the lamb 'Dolly'. The sheep that gave birth to Dolly can be inferred from the discourse, but is not grammatically realized in this Chinese sentence.

As ellipsis of grammatical subjects is common in Chinese sentences, it can be argued that weakness in the use of referencing in Chinese ESL writing is attributable to different orientations in syntactic constructions in Chinese and English. As references do not have to be exact when inferable from the context and there is no requirement for a grammatical subject in finite clauses in their L1, it is hardly surprising that Chinese learners are prone to use vague pronouns such as 'it' or omit relative pronouns altogether in the thematic progression of sentences. The repeated use of nouns where pronouns are more appropriate may well be an overcompensation of learners trying to follow syntactic rules regarding the necessity of having a grammatical subject.

Coordination versus Subordination

It is generally recognized that English academic prose has a hierarchical structure in terms of syntax, paragraph, and overall organization of text (e.g. Jacobs, 1990). Chinese, on the other hand, is generally more paratactic than hypotactic in syntactic structure (Zuo, 2001; Shen, 1997). The composite structure of Chinese sentences has been described as 'loose and plastic' (Zuo, 2001: 8) whereas English prose is more tightly spun. Because of this textual preference, plus the greater dependence on the context for meaning, Chinese is inevitably different from English in the organization of clauses within and across sentences. Such a difference may have a significant impact on the Chinese ESL's construction of English prose. The following excerpt shows how the paratactic structure of Chinese is basically different from the hypotactic structure of English and that the English translation has to take on a more hierarchical and integrated structure in order to sound more natural and become more transparent in meaning in English. While Version I translations are close parallels of the original, Version II transforms the loose structures into a more hierarchically-structured syntax that is conventional of English academic prose.

Example 29

Clause 1

治疗性 克隆 是 现代 医学 发展 的 一个 重要 方向,

Therapeutic cloning is modern medicine development POSS one CL important direction.

[Therapeutic cloning is modern medicine's important direction of development.][Version 1]

[Therapeutic cloning marks an important direction of development for modern medicine.] [Version 2]

Clause 2

它 打开 了 再生医疗 的 大门,

It open ASP regenerative medicine POSS big door,

[It has opened regenerative medicine's big door [Version 1—to be continued]

[It has opened a significant gateway for regenerative medicine, [Version 1a—to be continued]

Clause 3

具有 无限 的 潜力. [PARATACTIC]

possess unlimited POSS potential.]

[{which} possesses unlimited potential][Version 1& 1a][HYPOTACTIC]

[It has opened a gateway of unlimited potential development for regenerative medicine.]

[Version 2] [HYPOTACTIC]

Clause 4

如今,

Now,

治疗性 克隆 技术 的 兴起 和 发展,

Therapeutic cloning technology POSS rise and development,

[Now, therapeutic cloning technology's rise and development [Version 1-Part 1]

使 再生医疗 不再 是 一个 遥远的梦想.[SIMPLE STRUCTURE]

make regenerative medicine no longer to be one CL faraway POSS dream.

makes regenerative medicine no longer a faraway dream.} [Version 1-Part II]

[Now, with the rise and development of therapeutic cloning technology, regenerative medicine is no longer a faraway dream] [Version II-Parts I and II][HYPOTACTIC STRUCTURE]

Clause 5

这 一 天 正 一 步 一 步 向 我 们 走 来。

This one day now one step one step towards us walk ADV. [SIMPLE STRUCTURE]

[This day is coming to us step by step]. [Version 1]

[Now, with the rise and development of therapeutic cloning, regenerative medicine is no longer a faraway dream, but is coming step by step towards us.] [Version 2 of Clauses 4 & 5] [HYPOTACTIC & ELLIPTICAL PARATACTIC, MORE INTEGRATED STRUCTURE]

Unlike the complex sentence in English, Clauses 2 and 3 in Chinese can be said to be in a paratactic relationship, as Clause 3, beginning with a verb (‘具有’ ‘possess’), is syntactically the predicate of the grammatical subject, or alternatively the comment of the thematic topic (‘它’ ‘It’) in Clause 2. In English, the two clauses have to be combined into a main-subordinate relative clause complex with ‘which’ (‘which possesses unlimited...’) as a link to specify their inter-relationship; alternatively, a prepositional phrase (‘of unlimited...’) can be constructed to show how the propositions are related hierarchically to one another. Clauses 4 and 5 in Chinese are syntactically simple sentences with their flat structures yoked together with a semantic link (‘这一天’ ‘this day’). It is to be noted that this link does not point to any textual elements in the previous clause, but its meaning is inferable from the discourse as ‘the day when the dream comes true’. This kind of linkage appears much looser when compared to the highly integrated Version 2 with a prepositional phrase (‘with the rise and development of...’) and an elliptical structure (‘but regenerative medicine is coming..’) articulating the logic of the relationship behind the elements in the proposition as a whole. Thus, we can see that in the English versions, there is a linearity achieved through subordination of sentence elements whereas in Chinese, coordinating structures are used in a way that is very much characteristic of Chinese discourse.

Use of Connectives in Chinese Texts

The Chinese texts in the corpora show that connectives are very much an integral part of the prose. For example, the following excerpt shows how connectives are used in Chinese text. The connectives are bolded for easy reference:

Example 30

由于 克隆人 的成 功 率 不 可 能 达 到 100%;

Because human cloning’s success rate cannot reach 100%,

生 殖 克 隆 技 术 首 次 应 用 于 人 后,

reproductive cloning technology first time apply to man after,

无论何时 都 有 实验 性质,
any time all have experimental nature;

即便 克隆 出 长寿 “健康”的人,
even if clone out long life ‘healthy’ man

也 不能 保证 该 技术的 安全性,
still cannot guarantee the technology’s safety,

因为 技术 造成的 基因 缺陷 不能 确定 会 在何时,
because technologically induced genetic deficiency cannot be certain will when

在 何种 程度 上 表达?
{and} to what kind degree PREP express?

又 有 谁 知道 克隆 多少 个人 之后 才 能
And [So] EXIST who know clone how many men after then can

暴露出 所有 的 问题?
expose all problem?

因此, 克隆技术 不能 达到 绝对的 “安全” 或 “成熟”.
Therefore, cloning technology cannot attain absolute ‘safety’ or ‘maturity’.

但 我们 认为, 技术上 可以接受的 成功率,
But we believe, technically acceptable success rate.

接近于 自然生殖的 克隆体健康 指标 应当 被考虑 在 安全 标准 体系
中.

near natural birth's cloning health indicator should be considered in safety standard system PRP.

As we can see from the above example, most of the connectives are readily translatable into English and would correspond to the use of those connectives in a similar English text. One of the two exceptions is the absence of 'and', which otherwise would have been used in English to link up the two phrases '不能 确定会在何时, 在何种程度上表达?':

'[We] cannot be certain when [**and**] to what degree [technologically-induced deficiencies] will be expressed?'

The other is the use of a parallel conjunctive '又' ('And') instead of a logical connective 'So' linking the two sentences together. Thus we can see from this short example that connectives are used although not always in exactly the same way due to grammar and the requirement of explicit logic in English academic prose. It is not surprising that Chinese ESL learners cannot simply rely on positive transfer to acquire the skills of how to use connectives properly in English.

Although no statistical comparisons have been made between English and Chinese texts, some scholars (e.g. Zuo, 2001, Shen, 1997) have observed that connectives are more sparingly used in Chinese texts:

"Chinese is comparatively paratactic. It has far fewer connectives than English and lacks inflections in the strict sense. Implicit coherence plays a much more important role than explicit cohesion in semantic conveyance and comprehension." (Zuo, 2001:8)

If this observation is correct, then the overuse of connectives by Chinese learners of English cannot be due to direct interference from Chinese. Rather, it is the lack of thematization skills that accounts for the learners' overuse of connectives as a compensation device to tie over the lack of smoothness of flow in between sentences (Bruce & Lewkowicz, 1991).

CONCLUSION

With the picture described above, how should we assess the Chinese learners' thematization problems?

First of all, thematization problems are widespread among Chinese learners of English, not only at developmental stages of acquisition (Green, 1991), but also at more advanced levels of sophistication (Bruce & Lewkowicz, 1991). These problems are also widely reported by scholars in both quantitative (e.g. Milton & Tsang, 1993) and qualitative (e.g. Johns, 1984) studies. The rampant overuse of connectives has often been accounted for (Milton & Tsang, 1993; Johns, 1984; Field, 1993) by the teaching of

connectives in word lists out of context and also as an exam technique for linking separate points in writing summaries. However, the more complex patterns of thematization in Chinese ESL writing which are at variance with those of English texts must have deeper roots in the textualization patterns as shown above and their cultural cognitive underpinnings of the Chinese language, as will be further explained below.

As seen above, a number of Chinese textual and grammatical features make likely candidates for negative language transfer in ESL writing: the general dependence on contextual understanding rather than exact wordings in the text, the lack of requirement for grammatical subjects, and the relative preponderance of coordinating structures rather than subordinations as compared with English, are basic features of the L1 language that may easily get transferred to the target language. The vagueness in the use of reference such as 'it', and what to the English reader appears to be confusing repetition of the same subjects instead of pronouns, may plausibly be attributed to differences in the construction of thematic progression in Chinese. The under-integrated text structures of Chinese ESL writing can arguably be due to the more plastic nature of Chinese rhetoric, more given to coordination than subordination when compared with English. The greater Chinese dependence on wholistic understanding rather than specific grammar and wordings for precise comprehension as in English may also give rise to ambiguity or even obfuscation often observed in Chinese ESL learners' texts.

As the Chinese apparent preference for coordination rather than subordination has a profound effect on text construction, the more far-reaching cultural factors underpinning the phenomenon deserves some further discussion. It has often been pointed out in the literature (e.g. Zuo, 2001; Ren, 1994; Shen, 1997) that Chinese has a dynamic point of view, which is reflected in their syntax and text organization, as well as other cultural artifacts like paintings. Just as a Chinese painting can have multiple foci so that the eye can take in one part of the painting at a time, instead of the whole picture (as in Western painting as a result of the foreshortening effect of a single focus), Chinese syntax is best viewed (Shen, 1997; Zuo, 2001) as a flow of phrases and units, but not grammatically bound together in a tree-structure like English. Unlike Chinese, English adopts an essentially focal viewpoint in syntax and text development, and so thematization has to follow a linear pattern with surface features guiding the reader. In an English sentence, this linearity is evident in the subordination of clauses and phrases to the main clause. In the case of a continuous text, thematic progression is engineered through the use of themes and rhemes, signposting development and changes by theme selection in contiguous sentences. In Chinese, as the viewpoint has a more dynamic mode of operation relying on contextual understanding as a whole, there is less of a requirement for motivated themes foreshadowed by information already given in the rheme of the preceding sentence. This possibly accounts for the relatively free-standing nature of topical themes in Chinese as well as the abrupt introduction of the new in thematic position. The new element may include an unannounced change of perspective or stance we sometimes see in Chinese prose. This dynamism in viewpoint in Chinese text is also evident in the lesser degree of subordination and greater use of

coordinating structures, leading to a looser pattern of textualization than English both at the intra- and inter-sentence levels. L1 transfer may also increase the difficulties in mastering complex subordinating structures both at sentence and text levels in English. This last point is obviously backed up by research studies of L2 problems in text-processing among Chinese learners in Hong Kong.

In an extensive study of three Band One (good) schools in Hong Kong, Sharp (2003) found that 14-year old Chinese ESL learners scored significantly higher in recalling information from a loosely- organized text than texts which are more tightly structured. The Chinese learners appear to have little problem remembering the ideas listed numerically in the text but seem to have more difficulty in grasping the propositions which are tied together with logical connectives in a hierarchical structure. At the university level, Allison and Ip (1991) reported that advanced Chinese learners had problems recognizing the critical stance of a writer, who presented one claim as superseding another presented in the passage. Instead, they read as neutral both positions put forward. It would appear from these findings that the Chinese mind has a strong propensity for coordination rather than subordination. This probably explains why Chinese learners are less sensitive to subordinating arrangements of ideas. The following Chinese sentence in a news bulletin is telling when compared with how differently the propositions would have been coded in English syntax to make the main idea come through:

Chinese Version

澳洲 称 捞 到 马 航 残骸 才 停止 搜索.

Australia say salvage (asp-completion) Malaysian airline wreckage then stop search.

English Version 1

Australia says until they find the wreckage of the Malaysian airline, they will not stop the search

English Version 2

Australia says they will stop searching only after they've found the Malaysian airline.

Note that the Chinese sentence follows the Principle of Time Sequence in its presentation of the two propositions: (1) Australia's search for the missing Malaysian Airline is ongoing; (2) they will stop when they find the missing airline. The two ideas are in a coordinating structure with the adverb of time 'then'--a marker of sequence, as a link. Processing of the sentence to get the gist of the information extends throughout the sentence, following the natural order of events. On the other hand, either of the two sentences in English translation presents the main idea as when Australia will stop the search. Both constructions leave no doubt in the mind of the reader very early on in the processing of the sentence by means of the subordinating connectives 'not until' and 'only after'. But reading the first clause of the Chinese sentence can easily lead to the misunderstanding that the missing airplane has been found. The two clauses are in a coordinative relationship with one another as neither of them has a grammatical

subject. There is nothing to indicate syntactically that the main idea is in the second clause. Compared with the Chinese, the load of processing of the English sentences is certainly a lot lighter for the reader.

To sum up, the results of this study show that some features of the Chinese language may contribute to thematization problems in Chinese ESL writing: the topic-comment structure, the natural temporal sequence (Tai, 1985), the non-linear dynamic viewpoint (Zuo, 2001), the preference for coordination over subordination, and the concomitant orientation towards discourse rather than grammar. Possible transfers of these features have been discussed above under each of the thematization problems commonly encountered by Chinese L2 learners. It is not difficult to see that learners' texts can become more opaque and difficult to follow when they are beset with some or all of the above thematization differences. Such differences may well contribute to the feelings of indirection and confusion (as first noted by Kaplan, 1966) in an English reader who has a different set of expectations of how texts should unfold at the intra- and inter-sentential levels in the creation of meanings.

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