

1. Introduction

The ultimate goal of writing in English or translating from Chinese to English is to produce a native-like English text. This native-like text lies not in that all the parts of speech sit in the right place, but rather in that the text shows its textuality, i.e. a sense of continuity. For many EFL students, translation is an exercise they have constantly been doing in learning English. Many translation exercises, especially those for EFL students, ask students to translate individual sentences rather than a coherent text. Since these individual sentences are not linked together in a textual way, this kind of exercises does not offer enough practice for advanced EFL students in translating longer passages either from Chinese to English or vice versa. This study maintains that teaching M. A. K. Halliday's systemic functional grammar provides students the tool for analyzing and writing a coherent text.

According to Halliday, information structure and thematic structure are patterns to form clauses, while cohesive devices can establish relationships between clauses to give a sense of continuity to discourse. In the process of translation, translators need to achieve two major tasks—understand the message of a text and then transfer the idea into written language. Both tasks require thorough linguistic knowledge of the source and target languages. For EFL students, reading and writing in a foreign language is definitely more difficult than reading and writing in their mother tongue because of not having enough linguistic knowledge of the foreign language. Hence, text analysis tools should be offered to help students to improve their reading and writing skills.

In this study, I will first discuss some of the studies done by ESL, EFL, and translation scholars, in which the information structure, thematic structures, and cohesive devices are effective tools for analyzing and producing English texts. Next, I will explain the relationships between M. A. K. Halliday's systemic

functional grammar and discourse analysis. Utilizing systemic functional grammar as a tool for text analysis could help EFL students understand the authentic English text, and eventually to produce more native-like English translation. Finally, students' translation assignment is discussed to provide evidence concerning the effectiveness of teaching functional grammar in translation course.

2. Why Teaching Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar?

Reading and writing are the two skills in translation. If a translator does not read the text right, i.e. getting the right message from the source text. The rest of the work would be a failure. Studies in ESL and EFL reading comprehension indicate that extensive reading enhances the reading comprehension (Robb & Susser, 1989; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Mason and Krashen, 1997; Rodrigo, Krashen & Gribbons, 2004). In other words, students need to have broad contact with texts of a foreign language in order to improve their language skills. In addition, researches also suggest that reading elaborated texts, not artificially simplified ones, improve students reading skills because elaborated texts retains more native-like qualities of the language (Oh, 2001; Yano, et al., 1994).

In addition to extensive reading, translation studies suggest that text analysis tools such as information structures, thematic structures, and cohesion should be offered in teaching translation (Baker, 1992; Bell, 1991; House, 2001; Shei, 2005). Halliday's systemic functional grammar has been applied in these researches and many others. M. W. V. Kopple (1982, 1991) has done several studies on Halliday's thematic structures and maintains that Halliday's system might be useful for understanding aspects of discourse production, structure, or reception. Weissberg also utilizes information structure as a model to describe paragraph structures in his ESL writing class.

Studies on EFL writing and translation (劉, 1994; 藍 & 崔, 2004-2005; Liu,

1997) also indicate that when Taiwanese EFL learners write in English, majority of them use translation during the process of composing. Different levels of EFL learners might have distinct extent to which they utilize translation to transfer their concepts or ideas into written English. This then leads to the problem of the grammatical interference from the source language to the target language. Many studies have been conducted by ESL and EFL researchers such as U. Connors, P. K. Matsuda, T. Silva, Kobayashi & Rinnert, to name just a few, showing the problem of teaching and learning English as a foreign language.

Unlike general EFL courses, in translation class, two languages are studied equally. However, many studies on Chinese-English contrastive linguistics (Li & Thompson, 2005; Yeh, 2004; 何, 1996; 陳, 2005) focus mainly on contrasting or comparing smaller units such as vocabulary, phrases, and clause structures, hardly the comparison or contrast of discourse styles. As for the teaching of translation, 藍 & 崔 (2004-2005) provide a more comprehensive pedagogical strategy. They incorporate Noam Chomsky's transformational generative grammar, M. S. Liu's (劉宓慶) translational cognitive process, and Daniel Gile's Sequential Model of Translation to form a "Step Model of Translation Pedagogy." However, their approach still limited to individual sentences. This method does not seem to help students learn the various styles or genres in English texts. Of course, the discourse style of Chinese texts is another huge issue. Because of limited space, in the following section, I will explain the Halliday's analysis system of thematic structures, information structure, and cohesive devices.

3. Functional Grammar: Thematic Structures, information Structure, and Cohesion

All full clauses have thematic structures and information structures. Thematic structure involves components of Theme and Rheme, and information structure

involves constituents of information units. According to Halliday, thematic structure, i.e. the Theme-Rheme structure, is a message structure of a clause. The purpose of this structure is to draw attention to the most important parts of its message, its themes. In other words, The Theme in English is “*the idea represented by the constituent at the starting point of the clause*” (Bloor and Bloor, p. 71). As Halliday says, the Theme is “the element which serves as the point of departure of the message” (p. 37). Theme and Rheme together constitute a message. “Theme is a system of the clause; and it is realized by the sequence in which the elements of the clause are ordered—Theme comes first” (Halliday, 308). In other words, the writer must make choices how to start the message in order to grab the attention of the reader.

Information structure often overlaps with thematic structure. Information structure involves constituents that are labeled *Given* and *New*. Given information are references to things that are known to the reader or listener as common knowledge or experience. In order for a person to understand a text, either spoken or written, Given information is usually placed at the beginning of a clause so that the reader or listener would know what to expect with the shared or mutual knowledge. That is, Given information is often the Theme of the clause. Furthermore, the first sentence, or clause complex, is all New information since its purpose is to tell the reader the main idea of the text.

Halliday also indicates that the information structure is only a generalization about tendencies in English, not an absolute rule. Information structure is not a systematic structure, i.e. the sequence of information units in a clause depends on factors such as the relationships between the writer/speaker, the text, and the reader/listener, the relationships between clauses, or the context within which the text is constructed. Clause complex which has more than one dependent clause may have Given and New information mixed together.

Beyond the structures of clauses is the coherence of a text—the state that the clauses are put together to form a text. Cohesion, or cohesive devices, is the method with which the clauses and other linguistic elements are combined “to give a sense of continuity to discourse” (Bloor and Bloor, 84). An essay, a novel, a poem, or a speech, requires cohesive devices so that the reader or listener can continue reading or listening without stopping and asking what the content is about.

Since linguistic meaning is not created by individual words, or lexical items, but rather, by the networking between words, cohesion is a common ground for all languages in the world because it is a way to express a chunk or a stretch of ideas. All texts need certain kinds of cohesive system to connect the subject matter together. According to Halliday, cohesion is a non-structural function of discourse, which includes *reference*, *substitution* and *ellipsis*, *conjunction* and *lexical cohesion*. *Reference* can be cohesive when two or more expressions in a text refer to the same person or thing. It is usually indicated by means of “pronoun, demonstrative (*this*, *these*, etc.) or a comparative” (Bloor and Bloor, p. 93). In addition, the repetition of nominals also has cohesive function.

Substitution is used to avoid the repetition of a lexical item. In English, many words have a set of synonym to replace the item. *Substitution* includes nominal, verbal, and clausal substitution. *Ellipsis*, or the omission of words, phrases, or clauses, is also used to avoid lengthy clauses. Similar to substitution, ellipsis also has nominal, verbal and clausal ellipsis.

Conjunction is a more common concept on cohesion for English learners. Conjunctions tie clauses or sections of text in order to show meaningful relationships. In addition to many conjunctions, such as *and*, *but*, *or*, there are *conjunctive Adjuncts*, also known as *cohesive conjunctives* (e.g. *then*, *for this reason*, *on the other hand*) that not only link clauses or lexical items, but also

indicate the relationship between the linguistic elements. For example, the cohesive conjunctive *for this reason* indicate causal relationship between clauses.

Lexical cohesion is the most difficult concept in cohesion. Basically, lexical cohesion functions in semantic field. It refers to the situation that the choice of a lexical item relates to the choices that have done previously in terms of their semantic relationships. As Halliday states, “Lexical cohesion comes about through the selection of items that are related in some way to those that have gone before” (p. 330). Basil Hatim also defines lexical cohesion as “the role played by the selection of vocabulary in organizing relations within a text” (p. 202). This includes the choice of using repetition, synonyms, near synonyms, antonyms, or registers.

The Theme-Rheme structure can also be a cohesion device. Theme can be repeated when a passage is aimed at explaining the same topic; this kind of structure is called “constant Theme pattern.” Sometimes, the Rheme of a clause becomes the Theme of the next clause, and so on, which is called “linear Theme pattern.” Other times, a Theme can have more than one Rheme, and each Rheme becomes the Theme of the following clauses. This is called “split Rheme pattern.” Or, more than one Theme is indicated. For example, the discussion of two opposite ideas or the comparison of two countries. This is called “multiple Theme pattern.” These different patterns of Theme-Rheme structure can appear in one text at the same time. Even though these structures and functions may seem complicated, they indicate the way how a writer focuses on a particular subject. I will use an example to explain how the previously mentioned structures work together in text analysis.

Following is a short passage marked for analyzing the thematic and information structures. The Theme-Rheme structure (a) is marked by a vertical line as the group boundary, and two vertical lines between clause complexes, or between sentences. For information structure (b), the first clause complex is usually

considered all New information which is italicized for easy reading.

(a) Theme-Rheme structure:

Religion | is much more important to Americans than to people living in other wealthy nations. || Six-in-ten (59%) people in the U.S. | say || religion | plays a very important role in their lives. (Pew Global Attitudes)

(b) Information structure:

Religion is much more important to Americans than to people living in other wealthy nations. Six-in-ten (59%) people in the U.S. say religion plays a very important role in their lives. (Pew Global Attitudes)

The Theme in the first clause is *Religion*, and the Rheme is the rest of the clause in which the Americans' attitudes towards religion are compared with people of other wealthy countries. In the second clause complex, the Theme of the independent clause is *Six-in-ten (59%) people in the U.S.*, and the Theme of the dependent clause is *religion*. One of the Rheme of the first clause—Americans—becomes part of the Theme of the independent clause of the second clause complex. The Theme of the dependent clause is the same as the first clause complex—*religion*. These Themes demonstrate the topic of the article indicated in the title “Among Wealthy Nations ..., U.S. Stands Alone in Its Embrace of Religion.”

In analyzing the information structure, we can see that the first clause complex consists of four information units: (1) religion, (2) important, (3) Americans, and (4) people of other wealthy nations. When the New information is mentioned, it becomes Given information in the following clauses. Hence, in the second clause, the subject of the independent clause involves Given (*people in the*

U.S., i.e. *Americans*) and New (*six -in- Ten*). The subject, also the Theme, of the dependent clause remains the same as the Theme of the first clause complex. While the first clause complex compares American's attitude towards religion with people of other nations. The second clause complex still focus on the same subject matter, but adds New information with statistics and the detail description of the importance of religion to Americans. As mentioned earlier, Given information, which often precedes the New information, gives readers references and knowledge to interpret the New information that follows.

For analyzing the Cohesion of the text, let us read a little further of the same text. The clause complexes have been separated and numbered for easy reading. Keep in mind that the four functions of cohesion are *reference*, *substitution* and *ellipsis*, *conjunction*, and *lexical cohesion*.

- (1) Religion is much more important to Americans than to people living in other wealthy nations.
- (2) Six-in-ten (59%) people in the U. S. say religion plays a very important role in their lives.
- (3) This is roughly twice the percentage of self-avowed religious people in Canada (30%), and an even higher proportion when compared with Japan and Western Europe.
- (4) Americans' views are closer to people in developing nations than to the publics of developed nations.

For limited space, I marked a few elements in this passage as the focus of the discussion. In the box, the word *religion* is repeated twice; in (3), though a different form—*religious*, the semantic meaning is still the same, i.e. a synonym. In (4), the

word *views* is actually the *ellipsis* of *views on religion*. *Religious views* is also omitted in (3) *when compared with Japan and Western Europe* in which the comparison is the religious view not the nations. Therefore, in these four clause complexes, the first Theme *religion* appears in the following three clause complexes using repetition, synonym, and ellipsis.

The *Americans* in (1) is substituted by *people in the U.S.* in (2), and repeated in (4). We can also argue that the demonstrative *this* is a substitution of *Americans* since the percentage *this* represents is about the *Americans*. The general term *people* is repeated four times, appearing in each clause complex, and is substituted by *the publics* in (4). Though the term signifies different groups through different modifiers, they represent the connection between people and attitudes towards religion.

The analysis in the previous paragraphs demonstrates that the thematic and information structures and cohesion can be very complicated and difficult. The interpretation of the lexical cohesion in particular relies greatly on the cultural knowledge of the target language, here English. The next section further discusses the students' work to examine the problems of translation from Chinese into English in terms of Theme-Rheme and information structures and cohesion.

4. Research Material

The research material is the student translation assignments in a translation course opened in the spring semester 2007. These students are junior students, English majors, in National Chiayi University. The total class members are 47.

The assignment for discussion (Appendix A) is one of the ten in-class assignments. This assignment is an excerpt from an article in a Taiwanese local magazine, 遠見 (Global Views Monthly), in which economic and social issues are

the main subject matter. The reason for choosing this magazine is that it discusses general issue known to most people. The language and writing style is above average. In my class, I want my students to deal with not only the linguistic problem but also ideas about current issues. After all, language use is a social activity.

The assignment was done in the second half of the semester. By then, the students had learned about the thematic and information structures and cohesion for some time. Functional grammar was a new idea to these students. Only about half of the students who had previously taken my “Intro to Translation” course had a little idea about what functional grammar was. The thematic and information structures and cohesion was still strange to them. The introduction of these structures lasted for the whole semester through classroom lecture and translation exercises.

In Appendix B, copies of fifteen pair of students’ works are included. Each student had done the assignment before they came to the class for pair work discussion. The Appendix B shows the first draft and the second revision of their pair work. Odd number indicates the first draft and even number the second revision. The students’ works only show the first paragraph of the assignment for limited space.

Students were also asked to mark the Theme-Rheme structure while revising in the classroom. Because a few students did not come to class or came unprepared, only the works of thirty students, i.e. fifteen groups, were selected for discussion.

4. Analysis and Discussion

I have explained how thematic and information structures and cohesion work in English text. Though Chinese has very different clause structure and text

structure, modern Chinese has been influenced greatly by English language, especially in the last few decades when translation works on literature, sciences, and academic studies become popular. In the following section, I will first discuss the assignment utilizing the previously mentioned functions, then, the discussion of students' works.

The passage is the first paragraph of the translation assignment (Appendix A). Following the Chinese text is the literal translation for the reference of readers who do not understand Chinese. The translation is done word by word and follows the word order of the Chinese text. The two prepositions in the brackets are added for easy understanding. This is to give a sense of how the discourse of this particular Chinese text is structured.

杜拜讓我印象非常深刻。我的感覺是，杜拜政府對觀光的發展，就像台灣對高科技的發展一樣，所有的資源和策略都是支持杜拜變成一個區域性、甚至是全世界的觀光勝地。

Dubai makes me impressed very much. My feeling is, Dubai government to tourist development is like Taiwan to high-tech development the same. The resources and strategies all are [for] supporting Dubai [to] become a regional, moreover [an] international tourist wonderful location.

From the literal translation, the thematic pattern is **linear**, i.e. the Rheme in the first clause becomes the Theme (underlined part) of the second clause. The Rheme of the first clause is about *me* being impressive; this message then turns into *My feeling* in the independent clause of the second clause complex. The message in the Rheme of the second clause complex is Dubai's *development*. We can argue that semantically *resources and strategies* are closely related to *development* because any development requires resources and strategies. The linear Theme pattern acts

as a kind of cohesion to connect the clauses.

For analyzing information structure, the first clause complex is all New information which provides information units of *Dubai* and *my impression*. These information then becomes Given information as shown at the beginning of the second clause complex, *My feeling*. Then, New information follows to add explanations to the impression by comparing Dubai's development with that of Taiwan since the reader of the magazine is mostly local Taiwanese. The New information *development* then again becomes the Given in the third clause complex through lexical cohesion by phrasing it differently. Evidently, this kind of writing maintains the focus of the content. The reader would not be confused by unexpected information. Furthermore, for most readers who have a sense of world issue would know the nation Dubai. Hence, starting the article with *Dubai* would not surprise the reader.

Other cohesive devices are also indicated in the text; *Dubai* is repeated three times and *development* twice in this short passage. *Development* and *resources and strategies* can be treated as *collocation*, which means they are often mentioned together. *Regional* and *international* can also be considered as a response to the comparison between Dubai and Taiwan. Both are one of the many regional locations in the world, but both have the attempt to become international.

4.1 Discussion of students' works

The following discussion focuses on students' awareness of the functional grammar they had learned in the class. From the students' first draft (Appendix B, indicated by the odd number) and the revision (indicated by the even number), and other assignments which are not shown and discussed here, students were making choices and encountering difficulties when dealing with the text. Using the short excerpt, the following two issues are prominent in the organization of clauses.

1. The selection of Theme patterns:

Basically there are three thematic patterns: constant, linear, and multiple. In the first clause complex, the first draft indicates that 12 groups utilize *Dubai* as the Theme, and 3 utilize *I* as the Theme. However, in their second revision, only 5 groups remained unchanged, and 10 groups changed the Theme from *Dubai* to *I*.

In the first draft of the following clause complex in which 13-in-15 groups utilize words or phrases that signify similar meaning to *I*, such as *In my opinion*, *In my view*, *What I feel*, or *My thought* as the Theme. Their second revision of the second clause complex stays pretty much the same, with 11 groups using *In my opinion* or similar phrases as the Theme. The transition of the first Theme in the revision turns the linear Theme pattern into the constant Theme pattern, i.e. the same Theme in the continuous clause complexes.

As for the third clause complex, 11 groups out of 15 groups utilize *All the resources and strategies* as the Theme which makes the sequence of clauses complexes turns into linear pattern, i.e. the previous Rheme becomes the Theme of the following clause complex.

The reason for using constant Theme, I believe, is that constant Theme pattern is the basic and simple pattern. It is easy to focus. Constant Theme pattern often appears in the beginning writing with the same subject and its pronoun repeatedly appears in continuous clauses. Most articles involves the use of these three Theme patterns—constant, linear, and multiple. The difficulty lies in how to use them properly so that the reader would not be confused.

However, we can also argue that since the Chinese text starts the clause with *All the resources and strategies* (所有的資源和策略), the students simply literal translated the clause without thinking of the Theme patterns. However, during the exercise of marking the Theme, the students could examine their writing through the patterns they had learned. If they can practice more on this kind of exercise, they would become more aware of the organization when writing in or translating into English.

2. The organization of the clause sequence

In this very short excerpt, students did not show too much difficulty in cohesive devices—reference, substitution and ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. The term *impression* (印象) in the first clause complex connects to *In my opinion, In my view, My thought, What I feel*, or simply *I* in the second clause complex. Even though the Chinese text is feeling (感覺), this word can be interpreted as *views, thoughts, opinions* as well.

The last phrase in the Chinese text, 觀光勝地 (tourist wonderful place or wonderful place for tourism), also has various translations among which *attraction* and *scenic spots* are the most common. None literally translated 勝地 as wonderful place. Perhaps too many words would remove some of the power of seizing attention.

In addition to lexical cohesion, Chinese sentences, or clauses, are divided in a different way from English. That is, the boundary of a clause is not as clear as English. The Chinese punctuation can be a way of cohesion. For example, comma (,) is used to divide a long message for easy reading and the period (。), at the end of a message. In a way, the comma functions as the division of information units.

The passage under discussion shows only two periods—after the first clause and at the end of the passage. However, most students divided the passage into three clause complexes in their English translation. This is because English clause structure is limited by strict grammar rules while Chinese language is more flexible in construction clauses.

The above discussion indicates that students demonstrated some knowledge of functional grammar, but also confusions on how to apply the knowledge to their translation and text analysis. Perhaps due to limited time, grammar discussion can only take up less time in a translation class. Nevertheless, the revisions do indicate that they are aware of the sense of continuity in a text so that the combination of clauses can create a discourse. Of course, there are other problems in assessing translation works, such as faithfulness or readership which are not the purpose of this paper.

5. Conclusion

Toward the end of the semester, an informal survey to the students taking the translation course was conducted to understand their acceptance of the teaching of functional grammar. Majority of them admitted that thematic and information structures help them understand the structure of individual clauses and the organization of passage. However, many also stated that marking the Theme is very difficult since the beginning of a clause complex is not always the subject. It is also difficult to divide information units which do not have systemic rules to follow. Information units can be a single word, phrases, or even a clause. These units can be nominal or verbal groups. Nevertheless, through constant practices, most of the students can mark the structure right in the test.

In the part of cohesion, *lexical cohesion* was the most difficult. However, they indicated that after learning the cohesion function, they became more sensitive in

the usage of vocabulary, and most important of all, making connection between words appear in distinct clauses.

The difficult of teaching functional grammar in translation class is time limitation. Since it is a translation class, not a grammar class, focus must be selected. Thematic and information structures and cohesion are only a small part of the functional grammar. Consciously aware of these functions does not guarantee the effective result of translation works. However, this functions offer EFL student translators or writers alternative ways of reading and writing English text. In addition to the accumulation of knowledge on English vocabulary and sentence structures, college EFL students should go beyond the writing and translation exercises done in the high school. Practices of reading and writing longer passages would advance their English competence.

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