



An Analysis of Themes and Thematic Progression Patterns in Ivanka Trump’s Speech

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Abstract

Ivanka Trump’s speech is inspiring and receives widely concerns. Based on thematic structure and thematic progression patterns, this paper studies and analyzes Ivanka’s speech. This paper combines qualitative and quantitative research methods. The paper lists the frequency of the simple theme, multiple theme, clausal theme, and the frequency of various thematic progression modes. Through the study, this paper finds that: (1) in the study of thematic types, simple theme is in the highest proportion, followed by the clausal theme, and finally multiple theme. It is found that the distribution is closely related to its characteristics of the speech. (2) The distribution of thematic progression patterns is as follows: The constant theme pattern ranks the highest part, followed by linear progression pattern, alternative progression pattern and constant rheme pattern; (3) The use of thematic structure and thematic advancement mode play an important role in the coherence of the speech and also play a convincing role. The significance of this study is to apply the relevant theories of context to the analysis of political speeches, and to provide a theoretical reference for speakers in preparing their political speeches.

Key words: Thematic structure; Thematic progression; English political speeches

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INTRODUCTION

The study is based on theories of textual function. Textual function belongs to Systemic Functional Linguistics, which is put forward by M.A.K. Halliday, who divides textual function into three categories: thematic structure, information structure and cohesion. Thematic progression is put forward by Danes and developed by other scholars. In this thesis, Halliday’s theories on thematic structure, Zhu Yongsheng’s viewpoints on thematic progression will be employed to explore the textual features of political speeches.

Although English public speech has been studied in western countries for thousands of years, the relevant research in China is limited. Most studies of English public speech are based on the theory of stylistics, but only a few of them analyze the textual features of speeches from theories of thematic structure and thematic progression.

This thesis makes an analysis of Ivanka’s speech based on Halliday’s theory of thematic structure and Zhu Yongsheng’s theory of thematic progression, which can only test the practicality of theories of thematic structure and thematic progression, but provide a new angle for analyzing English political speeches. Besides, after understanding the textual features of English political speeches, the audience can better comprehend political speeches and the speaker can better prepare speeches.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many linguists from western countries have done a lot of research into theme and rheme. Influenced by their viewpoints, China scholars develop an interest in thematic structure too. The term “theme” was first appeared in the founder of Prague School—Vitim Mathesius’ Functional Sentence Perspective in 1939, but it did not enter the circle of mainstream linguistics at that time until 1960’s. Just as

mentioned above, Mathesius is the first one who proposed the theory of theme and rheme and expounded the theory from the perspective of known information and unknown information. Then Prague School defines theme as the sentence component bearing smallest communicative dynamism. Later, according to Halliday (1985: 2000), theme is the foundation and grounding for the following information of the sentence. And he defines the theme as the point of departure of information and communication, which carries some known message of the speaker and the listener; while the rheme is the rest of the sentence, which gives more description and explanation to the part of the theme, and takes hold of the core information of utterance. Halliday classifies theme into simple theme, multiple theme and clausal theme based on the complexity of thematic structure. And theme is divided into marked theme and unmarked theme according to whether the grammatical subject of the sentence mapping on the theme or not, which is expounded in theoretical framework in detail.

In China, Zhu Yongsheng (1990) discusses the possibilities between themes and information distribution. What is different from the view of Xu's is that he deprecates the "related information", just "zero information", "known information", "partial known and partial new information" and "new information" left.

Though the thematic theory is originated abroad, the analyses and developments on these principles have flourished in these several decades.

Frantisek Danes (1974:118-119) is the first person who proposes the notion "thematic progression pattern" and three typical models—linear thematic progression pattern, constant thematic progression and derived thematic progression. And based on that, he extends his thematic progression patterns into five types—constant thematic progression pattern, derived thematic progression pattern, linear thematic progression pattern, spring thematic progression pattern and split rheme pattern.

Based on these models, Chinese scholars also come up with various patterns of thematic progression by comparing different genres of discourse. Zhu Yongsheng (1995) gives four thematic progression models, the same theme, the same rheme, continuous model and alternative model. In essence, the organizational structure of four thematic progression patterns proposed by Zhu Yongsheng (1995) concurs with that of Xu Shenghuan's in some sense.

Martin Joos (1961) puts forward that there are five distinctive levels of English public speeches: frozen, formal, consultative, casual and intimate in his book *The Five Clocks*. Chilton and Schaffner (1997) hold that all aspects of language should be remembered when one is delivering a speech and a successful speech should consider the following elements: meaning and structure of lexicon, internal arrangement of sentences and interaction between the speaker and hearer.

In China, many scholars discuss the stylistic features of English public speaking, such as Wang Zuoliang, Xu Zhenzhong, Xu Youzhi and so on.

Wang Zuoliang (1985) holds that public speeches are more formal than everyday conversations. Xu Youzhi (2005) discusses general features and stylistic features of public speeches.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Theme and Its Classification

Mathesius classified the sentence into three parts according to various functions in sentences, which is theme, rheme and the transition.

Halliday revises the Mathesius's view in that he classifies transition into the scope of rheme and makes a more detailed classification from the functional perspective.

2.1.1 Simple Theme

Halliday thinks that theme is a concept more than topic, and he classifies theme into simple theme, multiple theme, and clausal theme.

According to Halliday (1994), the simple component is not necessarily a nominal phrase, adverbial group, pronoun phrase and prepositional phrase are also available. As simple theme is a single structure that has not internal structure, it denies any further structure interpretation. The simple theme in a clause only represents one meta-function among ideational, interpersonal and textual functions.

Example 1:

- (a) The classmates (T) threw food at the dog. (R)
- (b) I (T) feel very sorry on hearing the sad story. (R)
- (c) He himself (T) finished all the work of the team. (R)

In sentence (a), the theme "The classmates" is a nominal phrase that serves as ideational function in the sentence. And it is the ultimate element that cannot be further divided, though it bears two words. In sentence (b), the simple theme "I" cannot be analyzed further, either. Appositive also works as the component of the single theme. Just like in sentence (c), "himself" is the appositive of the pronoun "He", they are supposed to be seen as a single theme.

2.1.2 Multiple Theme

Multiple themes are composed of several semantic components with ideational function, textual function and interpersonal function. These three functions can occur simultaneously with the sequence of textual theme, interpersonal theme, ideational theme or just two of them. Among the three semantic components, the ideational theme is prerequisite. Different from simple themes, multiple themes possess internal structures and they can be further analyzed.

2.1.3 Clausal Theme

When a sentence contains two or more clauses, whether

they are sub-clauses or co-clauses, the first clause appears to be theme and the rest is the rheme. Though each clause in complex sentences can be further divided into themes and rhemes, this kind of inner structure is not taken into account in this thesis. Since there are so many complex sentences, the classification of theme and rheme in such details is meaningless considering the goal to reach.

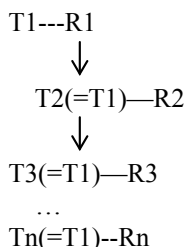
Many scholars state that clausal themes have the ideational function, so they are topical themes indeed. But Halliday does not agree with it. Halliday insisted that the main clause and the subordinate clause can be exchanged in the position to achieve the specific feelings.

2.2 Thematic Progression Pattern

2.2.1 Classification of Thematic Progression Pattern

In this thesis, four thematic patterns are enunciated: parallel pattern, concentrated pattern, continuous pattern and alternative pattern.

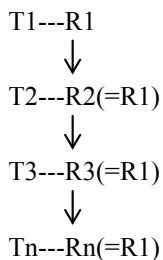
(a) Parallel pattern: All clauses share the same theme of the first clause, but different rhemes in a discourse, thus the theme in the first clause is introduced from various perspectives and is the center of the following clauses, which can be illustrated as the following:



Example: Every single one of you (T1) has an obligation to do the same. You (T1) have an obligation to see each setback as a challenge (R1) and as an opportunity to learn and grow. (R2) You (T3) have an obligation to face whatever life throws your way with confidence and with hope. (R3)

In this example, $T1=T2=T3$, which is correspondent with the features of the parallel thematic progression.

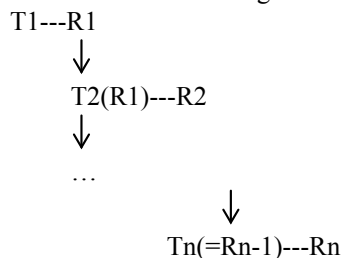
(b) Concentrated pattern: all the rhemes or part of the themes are identical or conform to the logical relations in this pattern, so all the rhemes are concentrated into the same rheme. Almost all sentences share the same rheme, but different themes.



Example:

Jim (T1) likes playing basketball. (R1) And Tom (T2) also likes playing basketball. (R2) All of us (T3) like basketball. (R3)

In this example, all rhemes refer to playing basketball. (c) Continuous pattern: also called continuity pattern. The previous rheme is the next theme, and it is the same situation with the following discourse.

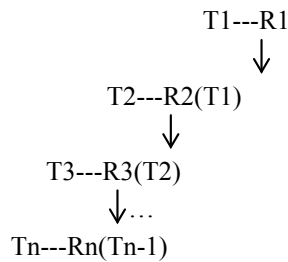


Example:

Once upon a time, (T1) in a mountain there lies a temple. (R1) And in it (T2) lives a priestling. (R2) He (T3) planted an apple tree. (R3)

But the tree (T4) didn't bear fruit for many years. (R4)

(d) Alternative thematic pattern: also called crossing pattern. The theme of the former clause serves as the rheme of the latter one.



Example 12:

China (T1) was a feudal country that didn't bear its independent industry once. (R1) The European countries (T2) just took it as an affiliated country. (R2) But then China as an east giant (T3) despised these blue-eye animals. (R3) In fact nobody (T4) shall look down upon on their power. (R4)

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

This paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the distribution of simple themes, multiple themes and clausal themes?
2. What is the distribution of the four kinds of thematic progression patterns?
3. What is the role of thematic structures and thematic progression patterns in the speech delivered by Ivanka?

4.2 Research Instrument

In order to analyze the thematic progression pattern of Ivanka Trump's speech, we used Microsoft Office Excel (2010) to obtain descriptive statistics on the theme and thematic progression patterns. The instrument makes research more scientific and effective.

3.3 Data Collection and Research Procedures

This research selects the speech delivered by Ivanka Trump as the corpus to be analyzed.

In order to reach a more scientific and convincing conclusion, this study uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are used to identify and categorize theme and thematic progression patterns. Quantitative methods are used to analyze statistics-based presentations.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, based on Halliday's theory on thematic structure and Zhu Yongsheng's research on thematic progression, Ivanka's speech will be explored in order to find the features of English public speeches.

4.1 Thematic Structure

4.1.1 Simple Themes, Multiple Themes and Clausal Themes

According to complexity, themes are divided into simple theme, multiple theme and clausal theme.

4.1.1.1 Simple Themes

As is mentioned in Chapter two, simple themes are presented by one single element, such as a noun, a nominal group, a pronoun, an adverbial group, a prepositional group, a nominalization in the thematic equative or an apposition etc.

The following are some examples selected from the data.

- (1) That (T)// is not the case this time.
- (2) I (T)//have seen him fight for his family.
- (3) Billionaire executives (T)// don't usually ask the people doing the work for their opinion of the work.
- (4) In 2014, (T)//women made 83 cents for every dollar made by a man.
- (5) American families (T)// need relief.
- (6) As President, (T)// my father will take on the bold and worthy fights.
- (7) One year ago, (T)//I introduced my father when he declared his candidacy.
- (8) Real change, the kind we have not seen in decades (T)// is only going to come from outside the system.

In the above nine examples, the themes of Examples (3) and (5) are nouns, the themes of Example (1) and Example (2) are pronouns. In Example (4), the theme is a prepositional group. In Examples (6) and (7), the themes are adverbial groups. In Example (8), the theme is a nominal group complex including an apposition. It is still one structural element.

The number and percentage of simple themes in each sample are listed in Table 1.

Table 1
Distribution of SIMPLE THEMES

Type	Number	Percentage
Simple themes	52	50%

From the table, we can see that the percentage of simple themes is 57.74%, which means among simple themes, multiple themes and clausal themes, simple themes are the most often used in speeches. Simple

themes contain only one element, which is brief enough to understand, because the addressees are ordinary people, some of whom are even poor educated. It is not suitable to use too much complex elements at the beginning of clauses, because it will increase the burden of understanding. Another feature of simple themes is direct.

4.1.1.2 Multiple Themes

The Multiple theme is a combination of textual interpersonal theme and topical theme. Among the topical theme is obligatory, while the textual theme and interpersonal are optimal. Besides, the topical theme is always after the textual theme and interpersonal theme. In addition, the textual theme or interpersonal can both appear before the topical theme. For example:

(9) And (textual theme) he (topical theme) //prevailed against a field of 16 very talented competitors.

(10) Sometimes (textual theme) it (topical theme)//'s a tough choice.

(11) As (textual theme) the proud daughter of your nominee (interpersonal theme), I (topical theme)// am here to tell you that this is the moment and Donald Trump is the person to make America great again.

(12) Fortunately, (interpersonal theme) Donald Trump (topical theme)// is incapable of thinking small.

In the above examples, the first two examples only include textual themes and topical themes. Examples (12) contain interpersonal themes and topical themes. In Examples (11), textual theme, interpersonal theme and topical theme all appear.

The Table 2 gives the specific figure and percentage of multiple themes

Table 2
Distribution of Multiple Themes

Type	Number	Percentage
Multiple themes	14	13.5%

From the table, it is clear that the percentage of multiple themes is 36.80%. That is to say, multiple themes are the least frequently used themes in speeches.

4.1.1.3 Clausal Themes

When the dependent clause comes before the dominant clause, the theme of the whole clause is a clausal theme. For example,

(13)When the primaries got tough and they were tough, (T)//he did what any great leader does.

(14)If it's possible to be famous and yet not really well done, (T)//that describes the father who raised me.

(15) As researchers have noted, (T)//gender is no longer the factor creating the greatest wage discrepancy in this country, motherhood is.

From the above examples, we can see that Example

(13) is an adverbial clause of time introduced by “when”. Example (14) is an adverbial clause of condition introduced by “if”. Example (15) is an adverbial clause of manner introduced by “as”. All themes in the above examples are clausal themes.

The number of clausal themes in the speech is shown in Table 3:

Table 3
Distribution of Clausal Themes

Type	Number	Percentage
Clausal themes	38	36.5%

As the table 3 shows, clausal themes are second frequently used in the speeches. Clausal themes are more complicated than the other two themes. So the addressees need more efforts to remember them. However, the time of speech is limited. If the speaker wants to make addressees remember as much information as possible, he may as well divide compound clauses into simple clauses.

4.2 Thematic Progression

In this thesis, zhu Yongsheng's four patterns of thematic progression which are parallel thematic progression, linear thematic progression,

alternating thematic progression are employed to discuss Obama's speeches.

5.2.1 Constant Theme Pattern

Constant theme pattern means the theme of the first clause is equal to the themes of subsequent clauses, while rhemes of each clause are different. That is to say, the speaker conveys different information around the same topic by using the same theme and different rhemes.

(20) I (T1) have seen him fight for his family. I have seen him fight for his employees. I (T2) have seen him fight for his company. And now, I (T3) am seeing him fight for our country. (T1=T2=T3)

Here, the themes are the pronoun “I”, which is an unmarked theme. The repetition of I emphasize Ivanka's respect for her father. In this way, Ivanka tells hears that her father has the ability to be the president of America.

The number and percentage of Constant theme pattern are listed in Table 4.

Table 4
Constant Theme Pattern

Type	Number	Percentage
Constant theme pattern	21	50%

From the above table 4, we can see that in the twenty samples, parallel thematic progression pattern takes up over 50%. That is to say, parallel thematic progression pattern is often used. Parallel thematic progression means the themes of all clauses are the same, while the rhemes are new descriptions about the same topic. By using this pattern, the speaker can give detailed explanation around one topic and the hearers will know what the speaker is talking about clearly.

5.2.2 Constant Rheme Pattern

Constant rheme pattern means the rheme or part of the rheme in the first clause is used as rhemes in subsequent clauses. Thus, the themes in clauses are different, which are around the same rheme. The function of concentrated thematic progression is the same as parallel thematic progression.

(21) Like many of my Contemporary, (T1)// I do not consider myself categorically Republican or Democrat. More than party affiliation, (T2)// I vote on based on what I believe is right, for my family and for my country.

R1 and R2 are all is related to Ivanka's thoughts about election. It is not linked to the party, but the ability of candidates. In this way, Ivanka can help her father win the hears' support.

This sentence tells the audience Trump's way of doing things. By narrating how her father educated her when Ivanka was young, Ivanka prove her father is suitable to be the president. Her father has the personality to be a good president who can make America big.

The number of constant rheme pattern is listed in Table 5.

Table 5
Rheme Pattern

Type	Number	Percentage
Constant rheme pattern	3	7.1%

From the table 5, we can see that the number of concentrated thematic progression takes up little part, which is fewer than parallel thematic progression. Concentrated thematic progression plays the same function as parallel thematic progression. It is also around the same topic.

4.2.3 Linear Progression Pattern

In linear progression pattern, the rheme or part of the rheme in the first becomes the theme of the next clause. The content of the next clause expands the clause. It is just like a line in which clauses are closely linked with one another. It leads to thus the hearers can follow the speaker's thoughts easily.

(22) Sometimes it (T1)//'s a tough choice. That (T2)// is not the case this time.

In the above example, “That” in T2 means “a tough choice” in R1, which is a linear thematic progression between two clauses.

The number and percentage of linear progression pattern are shown inTable 6.

Table 6
Linear Progression Pattern

Type	Number	Percentage
Linear progression pattern	11	26.2%

According to the above table 6, we can see that the percentage of linear thematic progression is 26.2%, which is more than that of thematic progression and less than that of parallel thematic progression. Just as the name indicates, linear thematic progression is just like a line, which means the topics go smoothly from the beginning

to the end without any interruption. It causes so strong logical power that the hearers can easily follow the speaker without any distraction.

4.2.4 Alternative Progression Pattern

Alternative progression pattern means the rheme of the subsequent clause equals to the theme of the previous clause.

(23) And he (T1)//prevailed against a field of 16 very talented competitors. For more than a year, (T2)//Donald Trump has been the people’s champion, and tonight he’s the people’s nominee.

In this example, “Donald Trump” in R2 refers to the “he” in T1, which is just like a crossing.

Table 7
Distribution of Alternative Progression Pattern

Type	Number	Percentage
Alternative progression pattern	7	16.7%

In summary, the thematic structure adopted by Ivanka and the function of the thematic progression patterns can basically be divided into three categories. Firstly, let the audience logically follow Ivanka’s ideas to make it easier and clearer to understand his speech. Secondly, to help convey Ivanka’s confident attitude to what he says to the audience. Thirdly, to make everyone aware the seriousness and importance of the issues raised at the summit.

CONCLUSION

Based on the theories of Halliday and Zhu Yongsheng, the thesis has discussed the thematic structure and thematic progression of Ivanka’s speech. After the study, the following features are found. First, among simple themes, multiple themes, and clausal themes, simple themes are dominantly used. The reason is that simple theme contains only one element, which is brief and direct. It is easy for the addressees to understand the speech and get the information as soon as possible. With regard to marked themes and unmarked themes, unmarked themes are used much more than marked themes. The reason is that unmarked themes are natural starting point, while marked

themes are used to emphasize something.

Second, in Ivanka’s speech, among the four thematic progressions, parallel progression is dominantly used while the other patterns are seldom used.

For the speaker, after comprehending the features of themes and thematic progression of English political speeches, the ability of writing an effective speech may be enhanced.

However, the thesis only makes an analysis from the perspective of theme and thematic progression, more angles like information structure or cohesion can be discussed as well. The author hopes further study will be improved.

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