

Interpersonal and Thematic Analysis of Reading Materials of TEM 4 in China

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ABSTRACT: *EFL students in China have difficulty in identifying different genres and understanding well of texts when they are doing reading comprehension in TEM 4 which is an English proficiency test for English major college students in China. Those students have a common sense that the key of reading comprehension is to develop the quantity of vocabulary and analyse grammatical structure of each sentence. The article provides a functional analysis briefing on interpersonal and thematic analysis on the basis of theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to analyse reading materials from TEM 4 in order to help English major students in China have a good understanding and effective reading strategy when they do the reading comprehension. On the other hand, students learning from these analytical tools and process may have more grammatical awareness on identifying clauses and thematic relations across different reading genres.*

KEYWORDS: EFL reading, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), functional analysis

INTRODUCTION

Students in China who are studying English as a foreign language have difficulty identifying genres and understanding text well when taking TEM 4, which is an English proficiency test for English major college students. The students have an understanding that the key to reading comprehension is the development of a large vocabulary and the analysis of each sentence's grammatical structure. However, they do not have any progression in that way even they know the meaning of every word in the text. Therefore, the purpose of the research is to help students improve their reading skills to different types of texts based on the functional analysis of reading text materials in TEM 4. The rationale of this research is that functional analysis are able to guide students read effectively and answer different questions from the material correctly in reading comprehension. Understanding functional meanings is a way to reach the semantic level of texts for students as well.

The background of the research is TEM 4 which is a national test for English major band 4 in China. Jin and Fan (2011) report that the aim of TEM 4 is to testify the English proficiency and literacy for sophomore of English major, and TEM 4 is also a stage to examine them whether reach to the standard of National College English Teaching Syllabus for English Majors which is authorized by national college English Test Institution. The contents of TEM 4 are listening, grammar and vocabulary, cloze, reading and writing, and the total score is 100 points. Among those section, reading makes up 20 percentage of the test which occupies the biggest ratio, so it indicates the importance of reading comprehension for students. Narration, exposition and argumentation are the main genres of reading material, and the reading comprehensive questions are categorized as gist and details. The topics of the text have covered the field of society, technology, culture, economy, daily life and biography.

The theoretical foundation of the study is systemic functional linguistics which support the text analysis. SFL is first developed by Michael Holliday in 1960s and then this theory is extended by more and more scholars. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004; 2014) classify three metafunctions which are ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunction. Each of them has a strong relation to each other. Bloor and Bloor (2013) explain that ideational metafunction represents the perception of the world by people; interpersonal metafunction shows the feelings and attitudes from different social status of people; textual metafunction displays the organization of text. According to Halliday (1994), one of the aims of the SFL is to serve the purpose of text/discourse analysis. And SFL developed three metafunctions to realize the meaning in the language: interpersonal metafunction, textual metafunction and ideational metafunction. These three functions are not embodied in different stratifications of language discretely but co-exist in all texts. Among those functions, the ideational metafunction reflects the human experience of the external and internal world, including experiential function and logical function. This paper focuses analysis on the interpersonal and textual meanings of different genres of reading materials from TEM 4. SFL is not only the theoretical framework but also an analytical tool of discourse analysis, many scholars have conducted discourse analysis from the perspective of SFL (Yang 2012). Fang and Schleppegrell (2011) state that functional language analysis makes students have a better understanding of purpose and value of texts. In a word, SFL discourse analysis is very helpful and useful of researchers in understanding how people organize language in texts, textual features, and language choices (García Montes, 2014).

The purpose of the study is to explore the interpersonal and textual meaning of narration and exposition reading in TEM 4. It is expected that students may recognize the social status of the author and textual organization in order to answer particular questions of reading comprehension like gist questions in TEM 4.

METHOD

In this study, the design of text analysis is used in a qualitative research study. The reading materials were the first two texts chosen from the reading comprehension part of TEM 4 in labelled as text A and text B. Text A was a narration which was an introduction of a city and text B was an exposition that gave the origination of some English words. The length of each text was about 450 words. As the reading materials of English test, titles were not offered to students, so text analysis was crucial for them to understand materials. Considering the different characteristics of two texts, text A was analysed by interpersonal perspective which conducted an interpersonal metafunctional analysis.

Tables should be titled like the example shows below, the style "Figure title" is used here also for the title.

Table 1. Interpersonal Metafunction Analysis of Text A

Cl #	Subject	Finite/ Predicator	Finite	Predicator	Comple ment	Mod Adj	Cir Adj
1	the sun		is				up in Amsterdam
2	the largest city in the Netherlands	sits					on the Amstel River
3	you		can	rent	a bicycle		
4				visit	the Van Gogh or Anne Frank museum		
5				take	a water taxi		
6	the sun	goes					down
7	the party	begins					
8	Several areas of the city	show			the two worlds that rule	clearly	

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					Amster dam		
9	They (areas of city)		are				within a short cab ride of each other.
10	Dam Square	attract s			daytime sightsee rs		to its festivals
11	Several beautif ul and very popular hotels		can	be found			there
12	there		is		the Royal Palace and the Magna Plaza shoppin g mall		
13	evening	desce nds					on Dam Square
14	Hip pop or funk music	begins		blaring			from Club Paradiso and Club Melkweg
15	These		are		two of the most popular clubs		in Europe
16	you	come					
17	The clubs		don't	shut			down until 4 am
18	you	check			the various inexpen sive ways		
19			Don't	worry			about getting lost

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20	Dutch		is		the official language		
21	most people in Amsterdam	speak			English		
22	you		will	notice	half the people who are on bicycles		
23	They (visitors)	rent			US\$17 to \$20		for a whole day
24	Amsterdam	has			a good canal system		
25	You		can	use	the canal bus or a water taxi		in the “Venice of the North”
26	You		can	take			in the picturesque canal house architecture
27	The rows of neat, narrow four-story dwellings of brownstone						with large windows are well worth seeing
28	Many of them		are		several centuries old		

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29	You		might	jump out of	the canal bus		at the Museum Quarter
30	The city	has			an appreciation of its historic past		
31	One place to visit		is		the Anne Frank House		in Nine Streets
32	Young Jewish girl	wrote			her famous diary		during World War II
33	Visitors		can	view	Anne's original diary		
34				climb			behind the bookcase to the room

The content of text A divided in to 34 clauses, and the criteria about identifying a clause was that each clause only contained one process which regarded as a notional verb. Table 1 had analyzed the Subject, Finite, Predicator and Adjunct of each clause which were labels of interpersonal metafunction in SFL. As for text B, Theme and Rheme analysis more emphasized the characteristic of exposition.

Table 2. Theme and Rheme analysis format of Text B

Cl. #	Theme			Rheme
	Txt	IntP	Topical	
1			In an article	some Chinese scholars are described as being "tantalized by the mysterious dragon bone hieroglyphics
2			Tantalized	is one of many English words that have their origins in myths and legends of the past (in this case, Greek and Roman ones)
3			The meaning of the verb tantalize	is a very particular one: "to promise or show something desirable to a person and then take it away; to tease by arousing hope."

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4			Many (but not all) English dictionaries	give you a brief indication of a word's origins in brackets before or after the explanation of the meaning
5			For tantalize the following explanation	is given: Tantalus
6			This means that you should look up the name Tantalus	to find out the word's origins
7	and if		you	do, you will find out that in Greek mythology
8	Tantalus			was a king who was punished in the lower world with eternal hunger and thirst
9			he (Tantalus)	was put up to his chin in water that always moved away when he tried to drink it and with fruit on branches above him placed just a little bit out of his reach
10		Can you	Can you	see why his name was changed into a verb meaning "to tease or torment by arousing desire"?
11			Another example	is the word siren, familiar to us as the mechanical device that makes such an alarming sound when police cars, ambulances, or fire engines approach
12			This word	also has its origins in Greek mythology
13			The traveler Odysseus (Ulysses to the Romans)	made his men plug their ears so that they wouldn't hear the dangerous voices of the sirens
14	So		the word	came to be associated both with a loud sound and with danger
15	When		someone	speaks of a "jovial mood" or a "herculean effort," he or she is using words with origins in mythology
16			Look	these words up to find their meaning and relationship to myths
17			Many common words, such as the names for the days	also come from mythology

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			of the week and the months of the year	
18			Wednesday	derives from the ancient Norse king of the gods, Woden, and Thursday was originally Thor's day, in honour of Thor, the god of thunder.
19			All the planets except the one we live on	bear names that come from Roman mythology. Several other elements have names that come from mythology, too
20			Several other elements	have names that come from mythology, too.
21			It (English word)	seems that myths and legends live on in the English language

The method of text B was also categorized as numbers of clauses in order to analyse Theme (a sort of given information) and Rheme (a sort of new information) of each clause. The aim of those two methods of analysis is to find out the rules and rationale of purpose of authors and structure of texts which are relied on a deeper analysis in the section of data analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

According to the data, functional analysis has interpreted some features of two genres of texts. The result shows that the main topic of text A is an introduction of Amsterdam to those visitors who have interested in traveling there. Among those 34 clauses, the author has taken the topic of city as Subjects for 10 time which are reflected as different forms such as the city, Amsterdam, and areas of the city, and the Subjects about visitor are paraphrased as you and visitors. Subject in the interpersonal perspective is the most important position that the author put in the clause. Therefore, it can be inferred that the gist of text A is that Amsterdam is a famous tourist city which attracts thousands of visitors. It is worth noting that the two sorts of Subjects follow with two kinds of mood which is the key to interpret the attitude and social status of the author.

Table 3 The time frequency of Subject and Mood in text A

	City	Visitor
Subject	10	9
Polarity	10	0
Modality	0	6

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It is clearly that polarity is only used in the Subject about city, and modality is frequently conducted in the Subject of visitors. Then it can be interpreted that the author may be a tourist magazine editor and write to those readers who are likely to travel the city. Firstly, the author is pretty sure about the traveling information of Amsterdam because that is his field. Secondly, the purpose of the author is to persuade readers visit that place and buy this magazine so that he uses the modal expression such as can and might in order to show his sincerity that put readers as a higher status than himself. The modality also indicates that the author is not sure whether readers like it or not which put him as an advisor to soften the words.

Theme and Rheme analysis demonstrate the main line and gist of text B. Text B is an exposition which takes a lot examples to explain one thing. Thus, only finding Subjects is not enough to this genre of text because there are varieties of them. However, the result of Theme analysis finds the gist of the material. Although text B has a lot different Subjects such as siren and tantalized, they all belong to a same category which is English words as Theme perspective. It is accounted that Theme about English words have occurred 12 times in 19 clauses. There is a question of text B which could be solved based on the analysis:

Which of the following can best serve as the title of the passage?

A. Greek and Roman Mythology in Language. B. Mythological Origins of English Words. C. Historical Changes in Word Meanings. D. Mythology and Common Words.
This question asks for the title of the text. In fact, the title can be interpreted as a bigger Theme of the text compared with the clause. Students have already known that English words is the gist of this text, and the content is how English words are derived from mythology combining with the analysis of Rheme, so B could be the best choice. The Theme and Rheme analysis show that students can effectively identify the gist and theme of the reading material in the exam to enhance their performance in reading.

CONCLUSION

Reading materials of TEM 4 have been analysed and interpreted by a functional language analysis which demonstrates the significance of text analysis and effective reading skills. The paper indicates a whole process of interpersonal and thematic analysis of texts from TEM 4 to explore their interpersonal and textual meaning. Analysis of interpersonal and textual meanings have provided enough evidence and details to understand and interpret narration and exposition in TEM 4. Students may be expected to improve their comprehensive ability after conducting these two approaches. However, due to the limitation of the paper, there should be more ways of functional analysis such as analysis of experiential perspective which could be implied to different genres of reading, and one text may not be only limited on a particular functional analysis. The future study is required to integrate functional analysis into an effective pedagogy that apply into Chinese EFL classroom in order to help more students of reading comprehension.

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