

## Thematic Progression Patterns in English Abstracts of Doctoral Dissertations by EFL Students

Zhenzhen Zhang (Wonkwang Univeristy)\*

Borim Lee (Wonkwang Univeristy)\*\*

Zhang, Zhenzhen and Borim Lee. 2019. Thematic progression patterns in English abstracts of doctoral dissertations by EFL students. *Korean Journal of English Language and Linguistics* 19–4, 668–687. This study examines the use of thematic progression (TP) patterns in English abstracts of doctoral dissertations written by Korean and Chinese students in medical science. These EFL students' abstracts are compared with an American university's dissertation abstracts in the same field. The results of the mixed quantitative–qualitative analyses reveal that the three most preferred TP patterns in all three groups are exactly the same: simple linear pattern, constant Theme pattern, and constant Rheme pattern. However, the detailed uses of the three patterns vary slightly according to the groups. The EFL groups, Korean and Chinese writers, exhibit more similarities than differences with each other on their choices of TP patterns. When compared with the American control group, both EFL groups show deviations. Specifically, both EFL groups tend to overuse the alternative model. Additionally, the Chinese group also overuses the constant Theme pattern, which is known to disturb cohesion and coherence of writing. The results of a pilot study conducted to probe the reasons of these deviations suggest the writers' native language influences. The results of this study also provide some pedagogical implications in terms of text organization for EFL academic writing.

**Keywords:** thematic progression (TP) patterns, Theme, Rheme, English abstracts, academic writing, Korean, Chinese, EFL, native language

### 1. Introduction

Halliday (2000) describes Theme as the point of departure in a clause that the speaker chooses for grounding. The remainder of the message which develops the Theme is defined as Rheme.<sup>1</sup> In English, the given information often lies at the beginning of a sentence (the Theme part), while the new information often lies at the

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\* The first author is Zhenzhen Zhang and the corresponding author, Borim Lee.

<sup>1</sup> Since the word *theme* has other meanings, we capitalize *Theme* and *Rheme* in this paper to make them exclusively refer to *Theme* and *Rheme* parts of a clause.

end (the Rheme part). The Theme–Rheme structure is considered a basic form of the composition of sentences to convey messages. Daneš (1974) proposes the principles of thematic progression, which refer to the way sentences are grouped together in Theme–Rheme structure to make a coherent discourse and to effectively decode the text. As the text unfolds, the following Themes combine with the Themes or Rhemes in the preceding clauses in varied ways, selecting or repeating the key information in the text and developing it further. These various combinations form thematic progression (TP) patterns, which represent “the ways that speakers use in constructing their messages to make them fit smoothly into the unfolding language event” (Thompson 2014: 145). Therefore, using proper TP patterns can direct readers’ attention from the given information to the new information so that they may discover the general ideas and main points of a cohesive text. Indeed, the usefulness of the thematic progression has been confirmed by other scholars (Eggins 2004, Ghadessy 1995, Hasan and Fries 1995, Paltridge 2012 among others).

In a given text, the flow of information between successive Themes and Rhemes can be different according to the text genres. Martin (1992) states that genres can be generally distinguished by their own structures in organizing the message. Many linguists have agreed that each distinct genre has its own internal organization or structure. Academic writing, therefore, can be recognized as a kind of an independent genre due to its own features and internal organizations. Fries (2002) points out that thematic developments of an academic text need to show a high occurrence of simple linear thematic progression, because academic texts display complex arguments in which each consecutive idea is the elaboration of an idea in the preceding clause. Alonso and McCabe (2003) also propose a useful way to govern the flow of information through TP patterns in the ESL writing classroom. They adopt it as a helpful tool to revise students’ essays. Cao and Li (2015) analyze the TP patterns in scientific papers appearing in the international journals and show that the most popular TP patterns employed by scholars are simple linear pattern and constant Theme pattern.

However, studies have revealed that EFL learners deviate from English native speakers on their choices of TP patterns in writing, and thus they often fail to promote the smooth development of information in a text. There are many studies focusing on the comparison of thematic structure and progression applied in writings of EFL learners and native speakers. Park and Nam (2015) point out that Korean college students have a tendency to overuse highly formulaic and repetitive themes when

compared to English native speakers. The study conducted by Dou and Zhao (2019) shows that Chinese postgraduates majoring in civil engineering and architecture have a strong tendency to use simple linear pattern and constant Theme pattern in their English abstracts. Kuswoyo and Susardi (2016) argue that various TP patterns are adopted by EFL learners in academic writing in order to maintain the text coherence.

This study explores the TP patterns used in English abstracts of doctoral dissertations in medical science written by Korean and Chinese students and compares them with those from an American university. It aims to answer the following questions: First, what are the most preferred TP patterns in the English abstracts by the three groups? Second, what similarities and differences are there in their choices of TP patterns? Finally, how do EFL students' choices of TP patterns deviate from their American counterpart's, and what may account for these deviations?

## 2. Theoretical Background

With regard to the concepts of Theme and Rheme, different scholars have had different views. Theme and Rheme were first introduced in 1939 by a Prague School linguist Vitem Mathesius in the article titled "*On Functional Sentence Perspective.*" Halliday, a representative in the school of systematic functional linguistics, has developed and elaborated on the Theme–Rheme theory. The different connections between Themes and Rhemes contribute to the development or the thematic progression of texts. In most cases, the connectivity would not be realized by exactly the same wording but some semantic relations, such as a whole–part relation, a set–element relation, and a general–specific relation.

Daneš (1974) is one of the linguists who have made a great contribution to the study of TP patterns. He states that the connectivity of discourses is primarily achieved through thematic progression. Daneš posits three basic patterns of thematic progression: simple linear pattern, constant Theme pattern, and derived Theme pattern. TP patterns have been further developed by many other scholars (Eggins 2004, Fries 2002, Hu, Zhu and Zhang, McCabe 1999, Paltridge 2012, Thompson 2014, Xu 1982, 1989 among others). It is generally agreed that a discourse cannot be well organized through only one TP pattern, but TP patterns can be employed in varied combinations. Dou and Zhang (2019) adopt eight TP patterns commonly employed in English academic papers to examine the usage tendency of TP patterns in English research

abstracts written by EFL learners. Based on the above-mentioned studies, this study summarizes the following six TP patterns as the basis for the text analysis.

### 2.1 Simple Linear Pattern (R→T) or Zig-zag Theme

In this pattern, the Theme correlates with the Rheme of the preceding T-unit, which is explained in detail in section 3.2. The Rheme of the preceding T-unit appears as the Theme of the following T-unit. This pattern is a logical means of constructing a cohesive text but may seem dull if overused. According to Daneš (1974), it is the most basic TP pattern. This pattern can be mapped as in Figure 1, where the numbers refer to the division of T-unit.

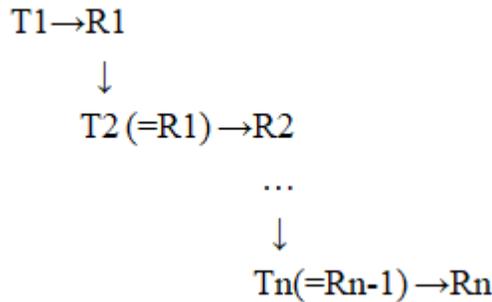


Figure 1. Simple Linear Pattern (or Zig-zag theme)

**Example 1:** The diversity in ipRGC signal generation (T1) / does not appear to divide among ipRGCs that project to different brain regions that control distinct functions (R1); ipRGCs that project to the hypothalamus (T2 = R1) / have diverse physiological properties that are highly overlapping with the ipRGCs that project to the pretectum (R2). (Emanuel 2016)<sup>2</sup>

### 2.2 Constant Theme Pattern (T→T) or Theme Reiteration

This pattern refers to the one, in which the Theme of the first T-unit repeatedly appears as the Theme of the following T-units. The authors regard the skipping thematic progression mentioned in the study of Dou and Zhao (2019) as a variant of

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<sup>2</sup>All examples in this paper are from the dissertation abstracts selected for this study, and their references are provided at the end of this article.

Constant Theme Pattern. In this skipping pattern, the theme in the first T-unit reappears in the Theme position in other T-units that are far away from the first T-unit. Constant Theme Pattern is mapped as the following Figure 2:

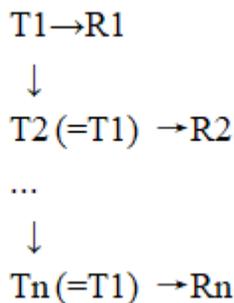


Figure 2. Constant Theme Pattern

**Example 2:** Additionally, a previously undefined subset of T cells (T1) / was identified that express intermediate levels of CX3CR1 (R1). Flow cytometric analysis of the subsets migrating through murine peripheral tissues in the memory phase (T2 = T1) / established CX3CR1<sup>int</sup> cells as the dominant subset. (Loughhead 2016)

### 2.3 Constant Rheme Pattern (R→R) or Centralized Thematic Progression

This pattern shows that the Rheme continuously keeps the same topic while the Theme is different (Xu 1982). Liu (2016) compared Chinese and English abstracts of Academic papers and found that the constant Theme patterns were overused in Chinese academic abstracts and the constant Rheme patterns appeared most frequently in English academic abstracts. This pattern is illustrated in figure 3:

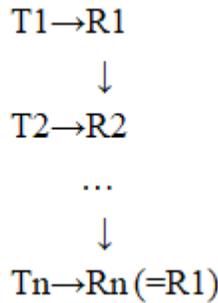


Figure 3. Constant Rheme Pattern

**Example 3:** Recent studies (T1) / have reported that patients with schizophrenia showed impairment in facial emotion processing (R1). However, there (T2) / are only few researches about genetic factors that contribute to neurobiological abnormality for facial emotion recognition processing in schizophrenia (R2 = R1). (Park 2014)

2.4 Derived Theme Pattern (T/ R → T<sub>n+1</sub>)

In this pattern, the Theme of successive T-unit is derived from either the Theme or the Rheme in the preceding T-unit. This kind of TP pattern has been found to be very common in legal texts (Kurzon, 1984) and also in professional medical texts (Bloor, 1991). This pattern is illustrated in Figure 4:

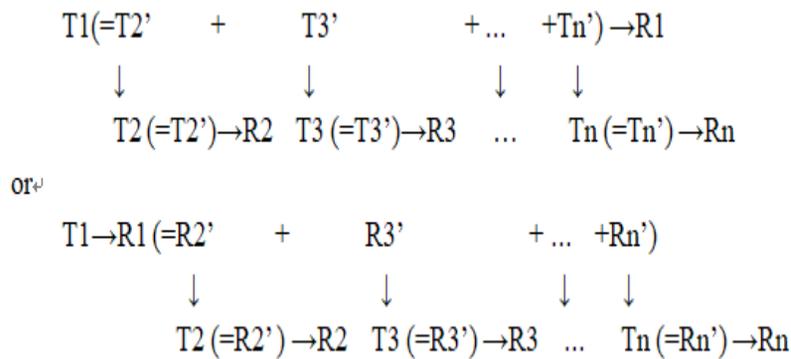


Figure 4. Derived Theme Pattern

**Example 4** ( $R \rightarrow T_{n+1}$ ): As the learning process proceeds ( $T_1$ ), / the response pattern of serotonin neurons becomes clearly different from that of dopamine neurons ( $R_1 = R_2' + R_3'$ ). Serotonin neurons ( $T_2 = R_2'$ ) / gradually develop a slow ramp-up response to the reward-predicting cue, and ultimately remain activated to the sucrose ( $R_2$ ). Dopamine neurons ( $T_3 = R_3'$ ), / in contrast, gradually increase their response to the reward-predicting cue ( $R_3$ ). (Zhong 2017)

## 2.5 Alternative Model ( $T \rightarrow R$ ) or Intersection Thematic Progression

In this pattern, the Theme of the preceding T-unit appears as the Rheme of the following T-unit (Xu 1982). This pattern is illustrated in Figure 5:

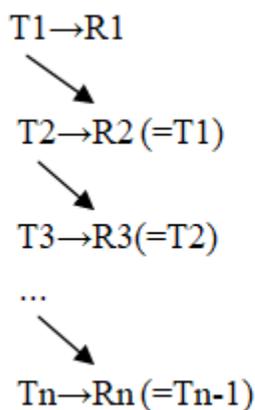


Figure 5. The Alternative Model

**Example 5:** This study ( $T_1$ ) / was performed to identify the important molecular biological changes underlying liver and brain injuries in an animal model of Wilson disease ( $R_1$ ). LEC rats and LEA rats, a non-diseased LEC rats, aged 6, 12 and 24 weeks (3 each per group) ( $T_2$ ) / were used for the study ( $R_2 = T_1$ ). (Lee (2016)

## 2.6 Combined Theme Pattern ( $T+R \rightarrow T$ ) or Inductive Thematic Progression

In this pattern, the combination of the Theme and Rheme of a T-unit develops a

new Theme in the following T-unit (Hu, Zhu and Zhang 1989). This pattern is shown as following Figure 6:

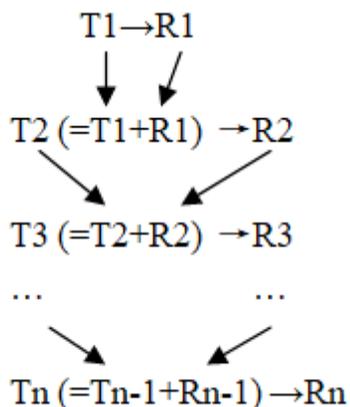


Figure 6. Combined Theme Pattern

**Example 6:** Although high concentration of ambient ozone is believed to be originated from anthropogenic sources (T1), / there have also been natural sources (R1). Based on this factor (T2 = T1 + R1), / it has been speculated that there is no health effect below the background level, suggesting the existence of a threshold (R2). (Bae 2014)

## 2.7 Null Progression

We have so far provided six TP patterns, but not all Themes or Rhemes can contribute to the progression (Herriman 2011, McCabe 1999), especially in EFL students' writing. In some cases, new information is given in the Theme part, which is called a new Theme. Based on McCabe (1999), the Theme or the Rheme of a T-unit for which readers have to go back beyond three T-units to find the previously mentioned notions is not considered a part of TP patterns, and this kind of T-unit is realized as a null Theme. An exception to this case is Themes in the derived Theme pattern, which constitute hierarchical relations over longer stretches in the texts. In the current study, the T-unit that has a new Theme and the Theme or Rheme that does not directly contribute to the information development of a text are defined as Null Progression (NP).

**Example 7:** In order to investigate alterations of HR-pQCT parameters in RA patients (T), / age- and sex-matched healthy controls were included for comparison (R). (Jin 2018)<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Data Collection

This study aims to find out the distribution of TP patterns used in Korean and Chinese EFL learners' academic writing and compare the results against the American corpus. The data were obtained from the online unpublished doctoral dissertations in the major field of medical science. This field was selected because the doctoral degree in this area is offered by the top ranking universities in all three countries included in this study. Fifteen abstracts each were chosen from Seoul National University, Peking Union Medical College, and Harvard University, which belong to the best universities in their respective countries. A total of forty-five abstracts that have been published since the year 2010 were randomly selected. The EFL students' dissertations were written in their own native languages, Korean and Chinese respectively except for their English abstracts. Harvard University was chosen as a control group because it could be assured that the dissertations from that university were produced by highly proficient English writers.

#### 3.2 Data Analysis

All the selected abstracts were carefully analyzed and divided manually into T-units. This study adopts T-units as the basic units of analysis because it is regarded as the most optimal for thematic progression in discourse analysis (McCabe 1999). Each T-unit includes one main independent clause plus all the hypotactic clauses that are dependent on it (Fries 1995). The data obtained for this study were analyzed following these steps.<sup>4</sup> First, the identification of Theme and Rheme was based on the

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<sup>3</sup> The Theme in this sentence is connected with the previously mentioned Theme, which is found beyond the scope of three T-units. This T-unit, therefore, is classified as Null Progression.

<sup>4</sup> To increase the reliability of the data analysis, a Chinese professor who is experienced at

notion put forward by Halliday (2004), which better reflects the coherence of topics (Fries 1995). The Theme consists of one and only one of the experiential elements, i.e., the Theme of a T-unit coincides with the first element that represents a participant, circumstance or process, which is defined by Halliday as the topical Theme. To give a specific example, the circumstantial element in the following sentence, Example 8, *In Chapters 3 and 4* is classified as the Theme of this T-unit, and the subject *I* as a part of Rheme:

**Example 8:** *In Chapters 3 and 4* (T), / *I* describe our efforts to map the CbtA-binding determinants on FtsZ and MreB, respectively (R). (Heller 2016)

In addition, this study investigated the texts both quantitatively and qualitatively on the basis of TP patterns mentioned in the previous section. The frequency occurrence of each type of TP pattern was first calculated. The frequency of each TP pattern from the two EFL groups, the Korean corpus and the Chinese corpus, were first compared, and each EFL group was then compared with American corpus. The results were tested statistically by using the software IBM SPSS Statistics 24 here were significant differences about the statistics. In addition, Independent-Samples T tests were conducted in this study, and a  $p$ -value  $\leq 0.05$  was regarded as being statistically significant.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1 Overall Results and TP Patterns in the Three Corpora

A word count was conducted on the 45 English abstracts, and the collected data contained a total of 21,298 words. Table 1 below provides the general results on the total numbers of the words, the T-units, and the average numbers of words in each T-unit in the Korean (KR), Chinese (CN) and American (US) corpora respectively.

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discourse analysis was consulted to analyze six abstracts from the corpus of this study.

**Table 1. The Overall Results of the Data**

	Words	T-units	Words per T-unit
US	7009	303	23.13
KR	7154	348	20.56
CN	7146	399	17.91

If we look at the number of words used in the abstracts, we can see that EFL writers used a bit more words than their American counterpart, but in terms of the number of words per T-unit, the EFL writers used fewer words. Specifically, the Chinese used only 17.91 words per T-unit, which amounts to only 77.4% of the Americans' use of words per T-unit, 23.13.<sup>5</sup>

Let us first discuss the main topic of this study: What are the most preferred TP patterns by the three language groups investigated? Table 2 provides the overall distribution of the six TP patterns and null progression obtained from the three language groups.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 2. Overall TP Patterns in US, KR, and CN Corpora**

	US Corpus (%)		KR Corpus (%)		CN corpus (%)	
R→T	91	(31.60%)	91	(27.33%)	105	(27.34%)
T→T	56	(19.44%)	81	(24.32%)	110	(28.65%)
R→R	97	(33.68%)	71	(21.32%)	97	(25.52%)
T/R→T <sub>n+1</sub>	10	(3.47%)	27	(8.11%)	14	(3.65%)
T→R	24	(8.33%)	44	(13.21%)	47	(11.98%)
T+R→T	6	(2.08%)	7	(2.10%)	2	(0.52%)
NP	4	(1.39%)	12	(3.60%)	9	(2.34%)
Total	288	(100.00%)	333	(100.00%)	384	(100.00%)

The results in Table 2 are illustrated in Figure 7 below to make the comparisons between the groups easier. It clearly shows that the three most preferred TP patterns in all three groups are exactly the same: simple linear pattern (R → T), constant Theme pattern (T → T), and constant Rheme pattern (R → R). However, the detailed

<sup>5</sup> This may indicate that EFL writers' sentences were relatively shorter than their American counterpart's.

<sup>6</sup> Since the first T-unit of each abstract could not be connected to the previous one, the actual number of T-units in each group had additional 15 T-units as was presented in Table 1.

uses of the three patterns vary slightly according to the groups.

In the American corpus, simple linear pattern, constant Theme pattern, and constant Rheme pattern take up the top three: 31.60%, 19.44%, and 33.68% respectively. An abstract must be very informative because it has to provide condensed information of the whole dissertation in a logical way. In a cohesive and coherent abstract, therefore, the constant Rheme pattern helps to provide more information about the new topic appearing in the Rheme part, and the simple linear pattern facilitates the smooth development in the abstract on different topics. Using constant Theme pattern is also very useful to impress the readers on the same topic than changing Themes.

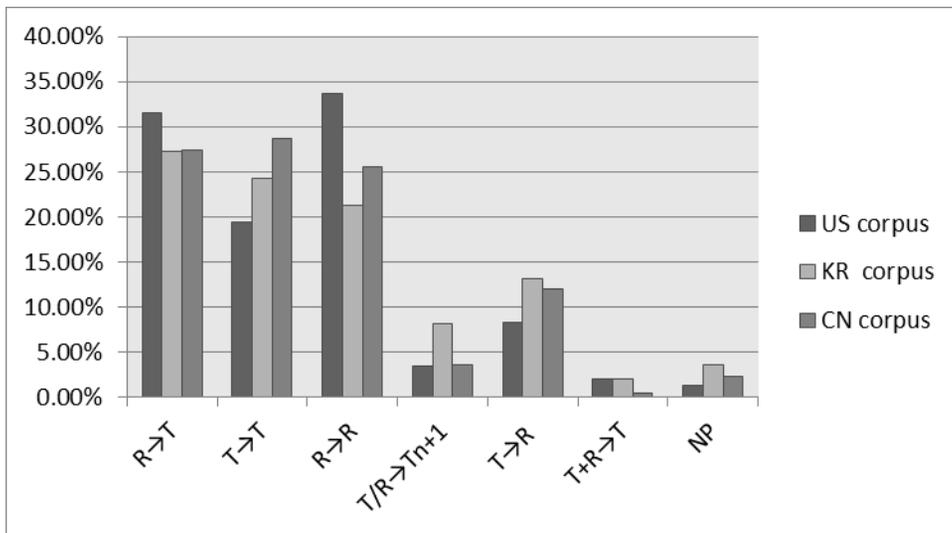


Figure 7. The Frequency of TP Patterns in US, KR, and CN Corpora

In the EFL corpus, both Korean and Chinese groups prefer the same three TP patterns. In the Korean corpus, the simple linear pattern, constant Theme pattern, and constant Rheme pattern occupy 27.33%, 24.32%, and 21.32% respectively. In the Chinese corpus, simple linear pattern, constant Theme pattern, and constant Rheme pattern, account for 27.34%, 28.65%, and 25.52%, respectively. The results show that EFL writers use TP patterns in the similar way to American writers, although there are small differences in the actual rankings among the three TP patterns. This result is consistent with the findings of Zhang and Wang (2001), who claim that the texts of a particular genre tend to select similar TP patterns.

## 4.2 TP Patterns in EFL Corpora

Let us now focus on the TP patterns of the EFL writers to see how the two EFL groups differ. An independent-Samples T Test was carried out to answer this question. The mean scores and standard deviation (SD) for TP patterns in the Korean and Chinese corpora are provided in Table 3.

**Table 3. Mean Scores and SD for TP Patterns in KR and CN Corpora**

		R→T	T→T	R→R	T/R→T <sub>n+1</sub>	T→R	T+R→T	NP
Mean	KR	6.07	5.40	4.73	1.80	2.93	.47	.80
	CN	7.00	7.33	6.53	.93	3.07	.13	.60
SD	KR	2.939	3.269	2.738	2.111	1.387	.743	1.082
	CN	3.546	4.065	1.959	1.486	1.870	.352	.910

From Figure 7, we could see that the choices on TP patterns were nearly the same in the two corpora. But the *t*-test results showed that there was a significant difference between the two corpora in the constant Rheme pattern (R → R) [ $t(28) = -2.071$ ,  $p = .048 < .05$ ]. This means that there were significantly more constant Rheme patterns in Chinese corpus than Korean corpus. This indicates that Korean and Chinese writers tend to adopt similar TP patterns in academic writing, except that Chinese writers use more constant Rheme patterns than Korean counterpart. The constant Rheme pattern makes readers focus on what the writers emphasize in the Rheme part, i.e., the new information.<sup>7</sup>

## 4.3 TP Patterns in EFL and American Corpora

For the purpose of finding out how Korean and Chinese writers deviate from American writers on the choices of TP patterns, T-tests were performed between Korean and American corpora on one hand and between Chinese and American corpora on the other.

<sup>7</sup>One of the authors of this study states that Chinese people often focus on parataxis rather than hypotaxis in the sentence structure, and it may explain why Chinese writers are more inclined to elaborate on the new information appearing in the Rheme part.

## 4.3.1 TP patterns in Korean and American corpora

The mean scores and SD for TP patterns in Korean and American corpora are compared in Table 4. The results of  $T$ -test reveal some significant differences only in the distribution of the alternative model ( $T \rightarrow R$ ) [ $t(28) = -3.197, p = .004 < .05$ ]. These results are different from the findings in Park and Nam (2015), who claimed that Korean students had a tendency to overuse highly formulaic and repetitive themes when compared to English native speakers.

Table 4. Mean Scores and SD for TP Patterns in KR and US

		R→T	T→T	R→R	T/R→T <sub>n+1</sub>	T→R	T+R→T	NP
Mean	KR	6.07	5.40	4.73	1.80	2.93	.47	.80
	US	6.07	3.73	6.47	.67	1.60	.40	.27
SD	KR	2.939	3.269	2.738	2.111	1.387	.743	1.082
	US	3.173	2.658	2.264	1.496	.828	.632	.594

The results of this study show that there were significantly more alternative models found in the Korean corpus than in the American corpus. This may mean that the Korean writers tend to use more new Themes or give further explanations of the given topic in the Rheme part of the following  $T$ -unit. No other statistically significant differences were found in the other TP patterns. The three most preferred TP patterns by the Korean writers were simple linear pattern, constant Theme pattern, and constant Rheme pattern, as was the case with the American writers. We can summarize that Korean writers tend to adopt similar TP patterns and thus perform similarly to the American students in their English writing.

## 4.3.2 TP patterns in Chinese and American corpora

The mean scores and SD of for TP patterns in Chinese and American corpora are compared in Table 5. The results of the  $t$ -test between the two corpora revealed significant differences not only in the alternative model ( $T \rightarrow R$ ) [ $t(28) = 2.778, p = .012 < .05$ ] but also in constant Theme pattern ( $T \rightarrow T$ ) [ $t(28) = 2.871, p = .008 < .05$ ]. Chinese writers tend to employ significantly more constant Theme patterns and alternative models than their American counterpart.

Table 5. Mean Scores and SD for TP Patterns in CN and US

		R→T	T→T	R→R	T/R→T <sub>n+1</sub>	T→R	T+R→T	NP
Mean	CN	7.00	7.33	6.53	.93	3.07	.13	.60
	US	6.07	3.73	6.47	.67	1.60	.40	.27
SD	CN	3.546	4.065	1.959	1.486	1.870	.352	.910
	US	3.173	2.658	2.264	1.496	.828	.632	.594

Overuse of constant Theme pattern by Chinese writers indicates that, in the Rheme part, they fail to expand the information introduced in the Theme part. This finding agrees with Liu's study (2016), which stated that constant Theme patterns were overused in Chinese academic abstracts, while constant Rheme patterns were most frequently used in English academic abstracts. In addition, the results of this study show that Chinese students also overused alternative models in much the same way as Korean students did. This leads us to conclude that overuse of alternative models is one of the noticeable characteristics of EFL academic writing.

#### 4.3.3 A pilot study for EFL writing

Given the above results that EFL writers' use of TP patterns was different from their American counterpart, a pilot study was conducted as an attempt to find possible answers. A logical possibility would be to find connections with the EFL students' writing in their native languages, so a pilot study was conducted to analyze some of the Chinese students' abstracts written in Chinese and compare the results with those obtained for their corresponding English abstracts.

For this purpose, six out of the fifteen Chinese abstracts were randomly selected to analyze the TP patterns used in them. The mean scores and SD between the abstracts written in Chinese and English by the Chinese writers are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. TP Patterns in Chinese and English Abstracts in CN Corpus

		R→T	T→T	R→R	T/R→T <sub>n+1</sub>	T→R	T+R→T	NP
Mean	English	10.50	8.33	7.67	1.00	4.50	.17	1.17
	Chinese	7.17	7.17	6.47	.67	4.67	.33	.33
SD	English	1.871	2.160	2.229	1.673	1.761	.408	1.169
	Chinese	1.941	2.251	.816	1.033	1.506	.816	.516

The *t*-test results reveal that a significant difference was found only in one pattern: simple linear pattern (R → T) [ $t(10) = 3.029, p = .013 < .05$ ].<sup>8</sup> This means that Chinese students tend to adopt almost the same TP patterns in their abstract writing whether the medium language is their native language or English, a foreign language. This result strongly suggests that EFL writers' academic writing reflects the influence of their native language, and this assumption needs to be confirmed through extensive investigations in the future research.

## 5. Conclusion and Implications

This study has examined and compared the TP patterns used in English abstracts of doctoral dissertations written by Korean and Chinese students in medical science. These results were then compared with the TP patterns used in American PhD abstracts in the same field. The results showed that simple linear pattern, constant Theme pattern, and constant Rheme pattern were the three most preferred TP patterns in all three groups. This is in accord with the results of other researchers (Dou and Zhao 2019, Liu 2016).

In addition, the results indicated that Korean and Chinese groups showed more similarities than differences with each other on their choices of TP patterns. When these EFL groups were compared with their American counterpart, however, some differences were noted between the two groups. Compared with the American group, the Korean group showed a tendency to overuse the alternative model, while the Chinese group overused not only the alternative model but also the Theme reiteration pattern. The reasons for this difference between the two EFL groups, however, could not be clearly discovered in this study, and therefore further research on this issue is needed.

As an attempt to figure out the EFL groups' deviations from the American control group, a pilot study was conducted on the six sample cases from the Chinese group to compare the TP patterns in their English abstracts and their corresponding Chinese

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<sup>8</sup>More simple linear patterns were used in the Chinese students' English abstracts than in their corresponding Chinese abstracts. The reason may be that English emphasizes hypotaxis rather than parataxis in the way sentences are constructed. The internal relationships between sentences in English, therefore, are more straightforward because they are realized through simple linear patterns.

versions. The results indicated that there were striking similarities between the English abstracts and their corresponding Chinese abstracts on their choices of TP patterns except in one pattern: the constant Theme pattern. The results of this pilot study suggest that further explorations are necessary on the issue of native language's influence on English writing.

Furthermore, the findings of this study shed some pedagogical implications for EFL academic writing in terms of text organization. For EFL teachers, it will be useful to understand the flow of ideas through Theme and Rheme. They know their students' weaknesses and problems in writing so that they can better help them improve their writing abilities. Also, EFL students need to raise their awareness on the importance of selecting different TP patterns in order to construct more cohesive and coherent texts.

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Examples in: English  
Applicable Languages: English  
Applicable Level: Tertiary

Zhang, Zhenzhen, Graduate Student  
Wonkwang University  
Department of English Language and Literature  
460 Iksan Daero  
Iksan, Jeonbuk 54538  
Korea  
Tel: 063-850-6875  
E-mail: 55485233@qq.com

Borim Lee, Professor  
Wonkwang University  
Department of English Language and Literature  
460 Iksan Daero  
Iksan, Jeonbuk 54538  
Korea  
Tel: XXXXXXXXXX  
E-mail: brlee@wku.ac.kr

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