

Thematic Progression of Education Passages in CET-4 “Careful Reading”

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Abstract

Education passages are a frequent focus in the “Careful Reading” section of CET-4, posing significant challenges for examinees. As an important aspect of sentence structure and discourse analysis, thematic progression patterns are crucial for understanding passages and solving test questions. This article, using the six thematic progression patterns proposed by Huang Guowen as a framework, explores the distribution characteristics, ways of their realization, and practical assistance of these patterns for examinees in education passages in the CET-4’s “Careful Reading”. This article finds that: (1) centralized pattern and extending pattern appear with higher frequency in education passages of CET-4’s “Careful Reading”, making them the two primary patterns; (2) the realization of thematic progression patterns in these passages are diverse and often used in combination, enhancing the coherence and logic of the passage, enriching expression, highlighting key points, and improving the overall quality and readability of the passage; (3) this study uses examples of detail question and inference question to demonstrate that thematic progression patterns can help examinees efficiently solve questions, aiming to provide targeted reading and answering strategies for examinees, thereby improving their reading comprehension and exam performance.

Keywords: Thematic Progression, CET-4, “Careful Reading”, Reading Strategies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As is well known, the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) is a highly influential and authoritative large-scale standardized examination. However, the pass rates in many universities are less than satisfactory (Zhao, 2008). The reading comprehension, being the part with the highest score and the most time-consuming, has a significant impact on the overall exam performance. Particularly, the “Careful Reading”, which not only account for a large portion of the reading comprehension scores but also encompass a wide variety of themes and numerous questions, pose a considerable challenge for many examinees. In view of this, the author conducted a thematic classification and frequency analysis of all 138 reading passages in the CET-4’s “Careful Reading” over the past decade (2014-2023). According to figure 1.1, the themes of the passages can be categorized into

psychology, economics, health, education, environment, technology, culture, society, and others. Among these, the education passages appeared most frequently, totaling 23 instances, followed by health, economics, and society, and then technology, psychology, culture, environment, and others. Moreover, the author’s annual statistical analysis of different thematic types of “Careful Reading” passages in CET-4 over the past decade shows that only education passages were included every year. This indicates that education passages hold a relatively high and stable position in the “Careful Reading” of CET-4. Currently, most existing research focuses on factors affecting CET-4 performance, language proficiency standards, reliability and validity, as well as listening and writing in CET-4. Few studies, however, concentrate on the education passages in CET-4 “Careful Reading”.

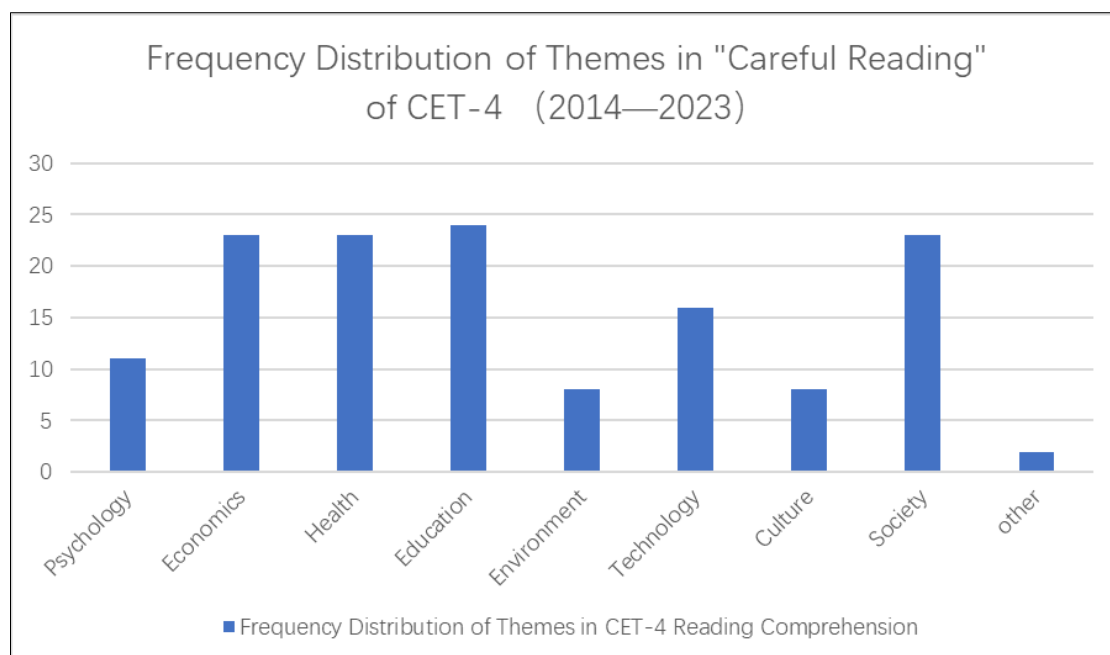


Figure 1.1 Frequency Distribution of Themes in “Careful Reading” of CET-4 (2014—2023)

In view of this, this article employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, using Huang Guowen’s six types of thematic progression patterns as a framework, to address the following three questions: (1) What are the distribution characteristics of thematic progression patterns in education passages of CET-4’s “Careful Reading”? (2) How are the thematic progression patterns realized in these education passages? (3) How should examinees utilize thematic progression patterns to effectively answer questions in the education passages of CET-4’s “Careful Reading”? This study focuses on the education passages in CET-4’s “Careful Reading”, aiming to provide examinees with targeted reading and answering strategies to enhance their reading skills and exam performance. Additionally, this article is the first to explore the education passages in the CET-4’s “Careful Reading” section from the perspective of thematic progression patterns, thereby enriching the relevant research cases in this field. Lastly, the corpus selected for this study consists of six randomly chosen education passages from the “Careful Reading” section of the CET-4 over the past decade (2014-2023). These relatively recent materials provide valuable references for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Thematic Progression Theory

Since the concepts of “theme” and “rheme” were first introduced by Mathesius (1939), scholars have proposed various understanding to them (Firbas, 1964; Halliday, 1994). Danes (1974), through extensive corpus analysis, formally introduced the thematic progression theory and argued that it forms the “skeleton” of a text’s plot. Subsequently, many scholars found diverse thematic progression patterns and classifications, leading

to the theory’s maturation and application (Danes, 1974; Xu, 1982; Huang, 1988; Eggins, 2004).

Most existing research has predominantly applied the thematic progression theory to discourse analysis, teaching practices, and translation studies. In discourse analysis, scholars firstly noted some proof that thematic progression can be used for discourse analysis. For instance, Xu (1982) noted that theme-rheme interaction enhances discourse completeness. Hu (1994) argued that thematic progression patterns can also explain discourse from the perspectives of language’s meta-functions. With further research, scholars expanded beyond the analysis of single text. Fries (1983) found that thematic progression is genre-dependent by comparing expository and narrative texts. Yang (2004) from the perspective of communicative dynamism, proved that proper thematic progression facilitates information flow. Nowadays, the thematic progression is widely recognized as a cohesive device that promotes discourse coherence and an effective method to reveal the discourse coherence.

In the field of teaching practice, scholars have primarily applied the thematic progression pattern to writing and reading instruction. For example, Hawes and Thomas (2012) demonstrated the importance of the thematic progression patterns in essays for East Asian EFL learners but didn’t identify effective methods. Subsequently, Nguyen Thi Thung and Nguyen Thi Quynh Hoa supplemented strategies for thematic progression in IELTS writing (Zhang & Zhang, 2020). Lv (2009) explored how to apply the thematic progression theory to college English writing instruction. Similarly, Liu (2012) through comparing the differences in theme types and thematic progression patterns

between English and Chinese summaries, proposed an English writing teaching method based on thematic structure analysis, which has practical significance.

As related research deepened, the thematic progression theory was also applied in the field of translation. Most scholars focused on how translators should handle theme choice as a textual device. For instance, Li (2002) applied the concepts of theme and rheme from discourse analysis theory to English-Chinese translation studies, discussing the differences in theme structures caused by syntactic differences between the two languages. Jalilifar (2009) investigated the thematic progression patterns in English academic texts and their Persian translations, finding that authors and translators must pay attention to and effectively use thematic progression patterns. Li (2009) suggested maintaining the same thematic progression patterns as the source text in English-Chinese translation to preserve the original style. Khedri and Ebrahimi (2012) through reviewing previous related studies, also proved that theme structure is a very effective and valuable tool for translators. Rosa (2019) explored how student translators used thematic progression patterns in translating from English to Indonesian.

In summary, after decades of development, researchers have explored the thematic progression theory from different perspectives and validated its effectiveness in discourse analysis, teaching practices, and translation studies. However, existing research on reading strategies remains relatively general, mostly providing classroom teaching suggestions for teachers without specifically focusing on reading passages or question types for particular exams. This indicates the necessity for future research to further refine and empirically apply the thematic progression patterns in specific examination contexts to enhance its practical value in teaching practice.

2.2 Research on CET-4 Reading Comprehension

Currently, research related to CET-4 reading comprehension can be broadly divided into three categories. The first category involves an overall evaluation of CET-4 reading comprehension question types, covering aspects such as difficulty, reliability, and validity. For instance, Li and Yang (2013) used the Flesh readability formula to study the difficulty and correlation of difficulty in the traditional reading questions of CET-4 exams held in June and December each year. Their findings revealed a general trend of increasing difficulty in CET-4 traditional reading questions. Zhai (2023), within the framework of pragmatic stylistics, analyzed the pragmatic stylistic features of the December 2021 CET-4 reading comprehension questions from the perspectives of structure, vocabulary, and grammar. Huang (2023), using three parallel reading passages from the June 2021 CET-4 exam as examples, studied the orientation of reading ability, text readability, and their correlation with reading performance, providing insights

for the design and evaluation of CET reading passages. Additionally, some scholars have noted the importance of “Careful Reading” in reading comprehension. For example, Cheng (2017), based on syllabus requirements theory and language testing theory, used six CET-4 exam papers as samples to study the validity of “Careful Reading” passages. These studies provide valuable references for further enhancing the design and evaluation of the CET-4 reading comprehension section.

The second category of research focuses on the teaching practice of CET-4 reading comprehension. For instance, Song (2009), through analyzing the themes and thematic progression patterns in recent CET-4 reading comprehension passages, explored the internal structure of texts, providing guidance and references for college English teachers. Luo (2013) investigated the comprehension levels of students on CET-4 reading passages under skill-based teaching and text-based teaching, finding that text-based teaching was more effective. Xu (2020) found out the structure strategy, delivered through the Intelligent Tutoring of Structure Strategy (ITSS) to adult Chinese ELLs, can improve students’ reading strategies and get positive effect on people’s reading comprehension on CET-4. Yumiao (2022) demonstrated a significant positive correlation between self-efficacy and CET-4 reading scores, suggesting that teaching should focus on cultivating students’ self-efficacy to improve their reading abilities. Jing and Jinghong (2022), from the perspective of English testing theory, explored teaching methods that combine CET-4 reading with English testing theory to help students enhance their English application abilities. These studies provide valuable insights and strategies for the teaching practice of CET-4 reading comprehension.

The third category of research focuses on answering strategies or reading strategies for CET-4 reading comprehension question types. For example, Fu (2020), using the June 2019 CET-4 exam as an example, confirmed the application value of cohesion theory in CET-4 reading comprehension, offering useful insights for test-takers. Liu (2014) had participants answer CET-4 reading comprehension multiple-choice questions without reading the original passage, finding that students’ “de-common-validity” led to higher accuracy rates and proposed methods to improve “de-common-validity,” reminding test-takers to pay attention to the use of common knowledge.

In summary, current research on CET-4 reading comprehension can be roughly divided into three aspects: overall evaluation, teaching practice, and answering or reading strategies. Overall evaluation primarily focuses on the difficulty, reliability, and validity of reading comprehension question types; teaching practice research explores the effectiveness of various teaching methods in improving students’ reading comprehension abilities and offers suggestions for teachers; answering or reading strategy research

provides specific methods for test-takers to handle questions. However, existing research lacks in-depth analysis of specific question types, particularly systematic studies on thematic progression patterns in education passages for “Careful Reading.” Therefore, this study, from the perspective of thematic progression patterns, investigates the distribution, realization, and practical application of thematic progression patterns in education passages for CET-4 “Careful Reading.” Through this research, we aim to effectively help CET-4 test-takers better grasp the structure, logic, and information flow of passages, understand key information, and thereby improve reading efficiency and exam performance.

3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

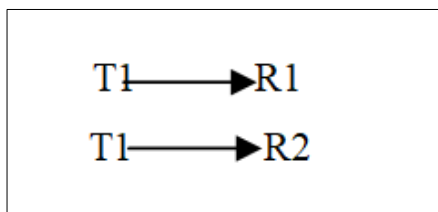
Since Danes (1974) first introduced the thematic progression theory through extensive corpus analysis, many scholars have proposed diverse thematic progression patterns and classifications (Danes, 1974; Xu, 1982; Huang, 1988; Eggins, 2004). Especially Huang (1988), by summarizing previous viewpoints and analyzing actual discourses, proposed a more detailed classification of six thematic progression patterns, namely parallel pattern, extending pattern, centralized pattern, overlapping pattern, coordinate pattern, and derivation pattern.

3.1 Parallel Pattern

In the parallel pattern, the theme of the first sentence serves as the departure point, and the themes of subsequent sentences derive from it, each introducing a different rheme to explain and elaborate on the same theme from various angles. For example:

Online classes (T1) began to be popularized just a few decades ago (R1). They (T2) are advertised as a way for adults to finish their education and students to learn the material at their own pace (R2). (from the June 2022 CET-4 exam)

This pattern can be represented by the following formula:

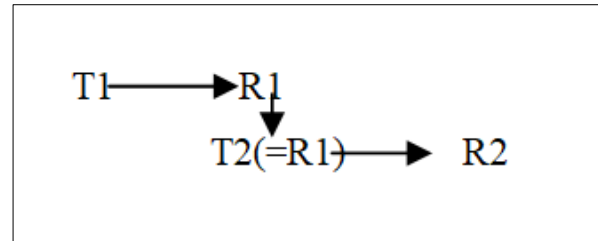


3.2 Extending Pattern

The extending pattern involves using the rheme or a part of the rheme of the first sentence as the theme of the second sentence. The new rheme introduced by this theme then becomes the theme of the next sentence, and so on, continuously introducing new information and advancing the content. For example:

Textbook publishers (T1) connect professors, instructors and students in ways that alternatives, such as open e-textbooks and open education-themed resources, simply do not (R1). This connection (T2) happens not only by means of collaborative development, review and testing, but also at conferences where faculty regularly decide on their textbooks and curricula for the coming year (R2). (from the December 2019 CET-4 exam)

This pattern can be represented by the following formula:

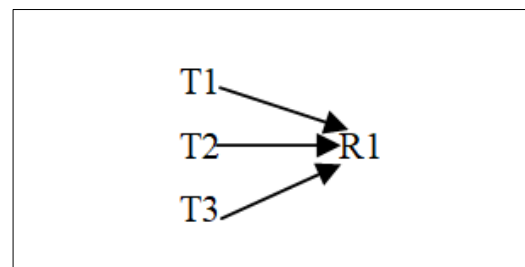


3.3 Centralized Pattern

In the centralized pattern, after the basic statement of the theme and rheme in the first sentence, each subsequent sentence begins with a new theme, but all these themes converge on the same rheme or a part of it. For example:

Schools (T1) must develop anti-cheating policies that include technology and these policies must be updated consistently (R1). Teachers (T2) must stay on guard when it comes to what their students are doing in classrooms and how technology could be playing a negative role in the learning process (R2). Parents (T3) must also talk to their kids about the appropriate ways to find academic answers and alert them to unethical behaviors that may seem innocent in their own eyes (R3). (from the September 2022 CET-4 exam)

This pattern can be represented by the following formula:

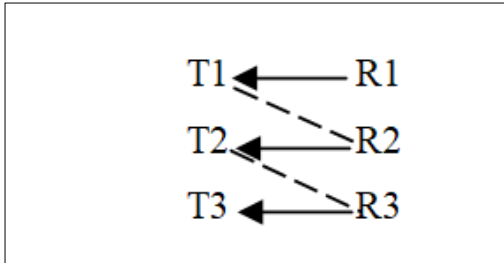


3.4 Overlapping Pattern

In the overlapping pattern, the theme of the first sentence becomes the rheme of the second sentence, the theme of the second sentence becomes the rheme of the third sentence, and so forth, in a crisscross manner. For example:

Academic dishonesty (T1) is nothing new (R1). As long as there have been homework assignments and tests (T2), there have been cheaters (R2). (From the September 2022 CET-4 exam)

This pattern can be represented by the following formula:

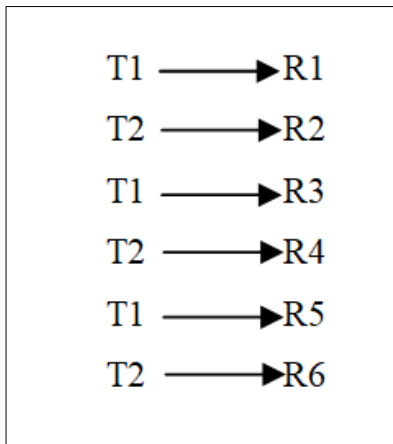


3.5 Coordinate Pattern

In the coordinate pattern, the themes of the first, third, and other odd-numbered sentences are the same, and the themes of the second, fourth, and other even-numbered sentences are the same. This pattern is often used for comparisons. For example:

Americans (T1) eat with knives and forks (R1); Japanese (T2) eat with chopsticks (R2). Americans (T3) say “Hi” when they meet (R3); Japanese (T4) bow (R4). Many American men (T5) open doors for women (R5); Japanese men (T6) do not (R6).

This pattern can be represented by the following formula:



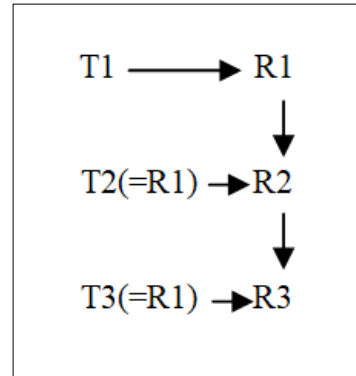
3.6 Derivation Pattern

In the derivation pattern, the themes of the sentences following the first sentence are all derived from a part of the rheme of the first sentence. For example:

If play and building are critical to 21st-century skill development, (T1) that’s really good news for two reasons (R1): Children are born builders, makers, and creators, (T2) so fostering 21st-century skills may be as

simple as giving kids room to play, tinker, and try things out, even as they grow older (R2). Secondly, (T3) it doesn’t take 21st-century technology to foster 21st-century skills (R3) (from the June 2021 CET-4 exam).

This pattern can be represented by the following formula:



In summary, the understanding and application of these thematic progression patterns are crucial for analyzing and constructing coherent passages. By identifying how themes and rhemes interact within a passage, one can gain deeper insights into the structure and flow of information. This theoretical foundation sets the stage for the methodological approach outlined in the next section, where these patterns will be applied to a corpus of education passages from CET-4 “Careful Reading”.

4. METHOD

To address the aforementioned issues, the author first extracted all education passages from CET-4’s “Careful Reading” sections over the past decade (2014-2023), totaling 24 passages, and numbered them according to their themes and topics. To ensure the effectiveness of the selected passages, the author repeatedly cross-checked and discussed with multiple classmates to finalize the judgment criteria. Subsequently, using the random number table method, six passages were randomly selected, forming a self-built “CET-4 education ‘Careful Reading’ Corpus” totaling 2126 words. Then, the themes and rhemes of the selected passages were manually annotated, and the distribution characteristics of various thematic progression patterns were extracted and counted using Huang Guowen’s six thematic progression patterns as the theoretical framework. Next, one passage was randomly selected from the annotated six passages as a case study, and its theme progression patterns were analyzed in combination with relevant literature. Finally, taking detail questions and inference questions as examples, the study explored how CET-4 test-takers could use thematic progression patterns in practical problem-solving.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Distribution of Thematic Progression Patterns

In this study, a total of 67 instances of different thematic progression patterns were identified within education passages in the “Careful Reading” of CET-4, as illustrated in figure 5.1. According to figure 5.2, the centralized pattern and extending pattern were the most

prevalent, each occurring 23 times and accounting for 34.3% of the total instances. The parallel pattern appeared 12 times, representing 17.9% of the total. The overlapping pattern was observed 6 times, making up 9.0% of the total. The derivation pattern was less frequent, with 3 instances, accounting for 4.5% of the total. The coordinate pattern did not appear in the selected corpus, accounting for 0% of the total instances.

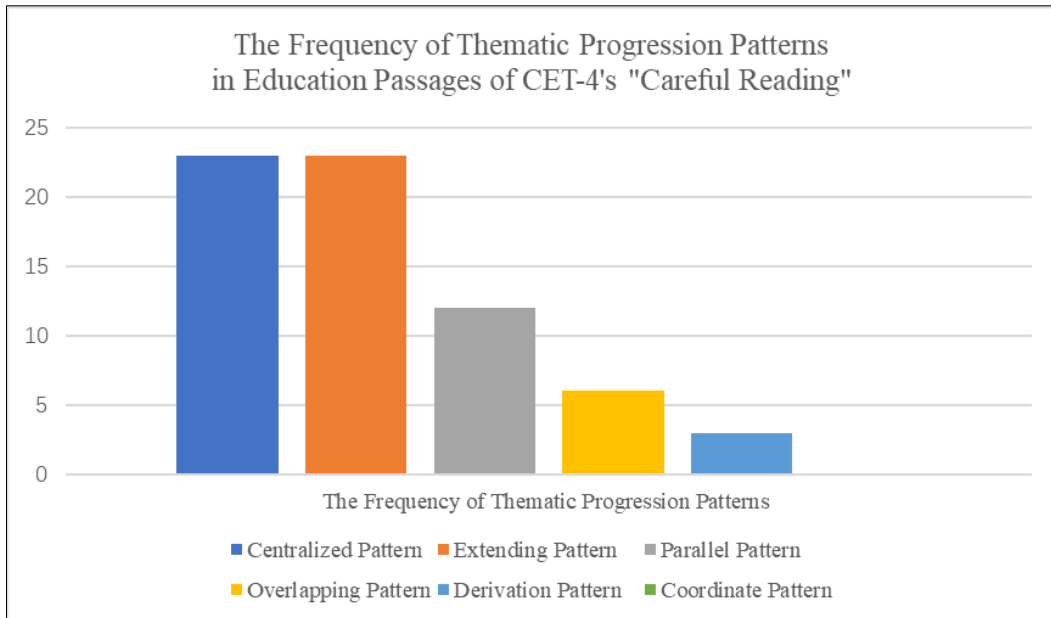


Figure 5.1: The Frequency of Thematic Progression Patterns in Education Passages of CET-4’s “Careful Reading”

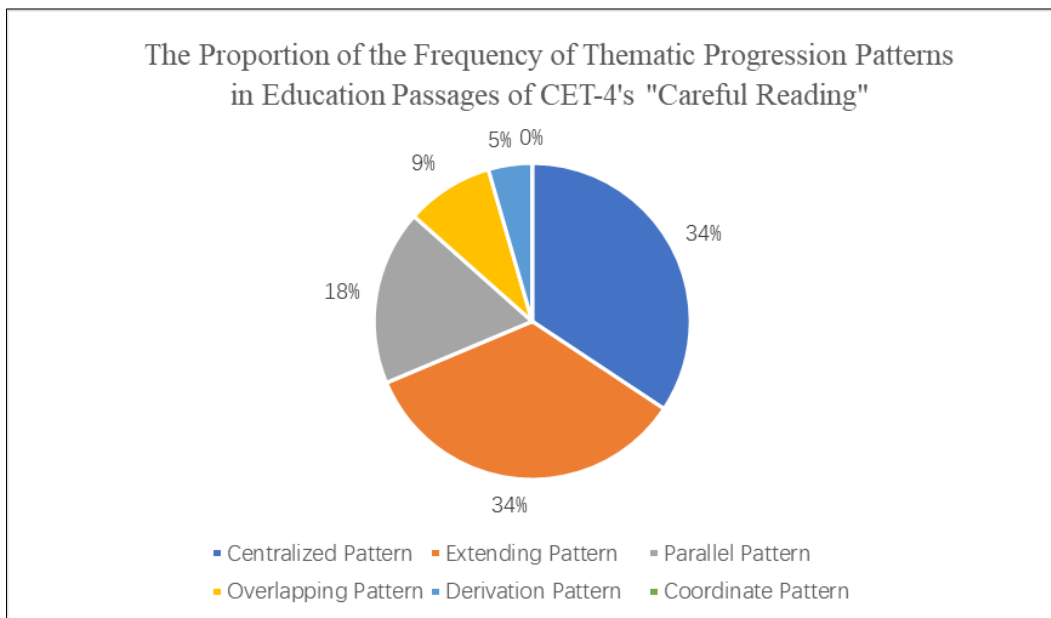


Figure 5.2: The Proportion of the Frequency of Thematic Progression Patterns in Education Passages of CET-4’s “Careful Reading”

From the two figures mentioned above, it can be observed that the centralized pattern and extending pattern together account for 68.6% of the total instances among the six types of thematic progression patterns.

These two patterns are the predominant ones, while the other four patterns appear less frequently. This indicates that the six different thematic progression patterns contribute differently to the development and coherence

of the education passages in “Careful Reading” of CET-4. The centralized pattern and extending pattern play a more significant role in the development and coherence of the education passages in “Careful Reading” of CET-4. The authors of these passages also show a preference for using these two patterns.

5.2 Realization of Thematic Progression Patterns

This study randomly selected an education passage in “Careful Reading” from the September 2022 CET-4 exam to analyze its thematic progression patterns. The research began by segmenting the passage into themes and rhemes, marking the themes as T1, T2, T3...TN and the rhemes as R1, R2, R3...RN:

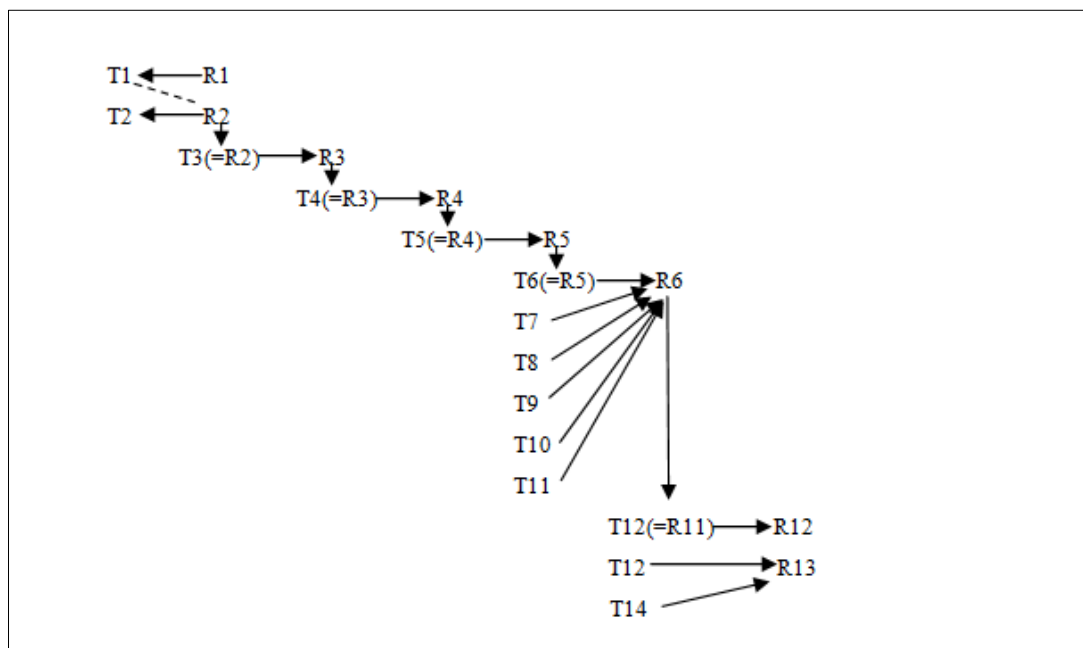
“Academic dishonesty (T1) is nothing new (R1). As long as there have been homework assignments and tests (T2), there have been cheaters (R2). The way that cheating (T3) looks has changed over time, though (R3), particularly now (T4) that technology has made it easier than ever (R4). A study by the Josephson Institute of Ethics (T5) interviewed 23,000 high school students and asked them a variety of questions about academic ethics (R5). Of the teens surveyed (T6), 51 percent said that they had knowingly cheated at some point on an exam but that they did not feel uneasy about the behavior (R6). A Common Sense Media survey (T7) found that 35 percent of students had cheated via smartphone, though the parents surveyed in that particular study did not believe their kids had ever cheated (R7). In many cases (T8), students did not realize that strategies like looking up answers on a smartphone were actually cheating at all (R8).

In today’s classrooms (T9), students who cheat are rarely caught (R9). There (T10) are no formulas written on the insides of hands or students looking across the aisle, or whispering answers to their classmates (R10). Today’s students (T11) use smartphones, tablets or even in-class computers to aid their cheating attempts and leave no trace of their crimes (R11). Since cheating through technology is not listed specifically as being against the rules in many school policies (T12), students do not view the actions unethical (R12).

The technology (T13) is being adopted so quickly that school districts cannot adequately keep up with cheating policies, or even awareness campaigns that alert students to the problem with using technology to find answers in a certain way (R13). From a young age (T14), students learn that answers exist conveniently at their fingertips through search engines and expert websites (R14).

Schools (T15) must develop anti-cheating policies that include technology and these policies must be updated consistently (R15). Teachers (T16) must stay on guard when it comes to what their students are doing in classrooms and how technology could be playing a negative role in the learning process (R16). Parents (T17) must also talk to their kids about the appropriate ways to find academic answers and alert them to unethical behaviors that may seem innocent in their own eyes (R17).”

After analyzing the thematic progression patterns of the selected reading passage, the following structure shown was obtained:



From the structure above, it can be observed that the first two sentences of the passage form an overlapping pattern. The theme of the first sentence (T1)

straightforwardly states the topic of the passage, academic dishonesty and the rheme (R1) explains that academic dishonesty is not a recent phenomenon.

Subsequently, the author compares the inception of homework and exams (T2) with the emergence of academic dishonesty (R2), further substantiating the long-standing nature of academic dishonesty. By making T1 and R2 the same, the expression of ideas and the transmission of information naturally progress. It is worth noting that although “academic dishonesty” (T1) and “cheaters” (R2) do not completely repeat the same term, they overlap or are similar in meaning, thus T1 and R2 can be considered identical or repetitive. According to Huang Guowen’s perspective, the themes and rhemes of different sentences are considered identical in cases where they completely repeat the same term, use pronouns, use synonyms or near-synonymous structures, substitute a part for the whole or partially repeat, only take part of the semantic content or grammatical structure of the theme or rheme, or display some kind of connection through sentence cohesion.

In the third sentence, the author, based on the viewpoint in R2 that “cheaters have existed for a long time”, introduces the methods of cheating (T3), leading to the fact that the methods of cheating have evolved over time (R3), thereby extending the viewpoint of the second sentence. T4 continues with the time frame mentioned in R3, narrowing it down to the present and pointing out that today’s technology has greatly facilitated cheating (R4). In the fifth sentence, the author begins with a study by an ethics institution (T5), describing the specific details of this survey, which investigates the academic ethics of tens of thousands of high school students (R5). Since “it” in R4 refers to “cheating” or “academic dishonesty,” both of which fall under the category of ethics, T5 and R4 are also considered identical. In the sixth sentence, the author continues with the information about the subjects from R5. This leads to the findings of the ethics study regarding high school students’ cheating behaviors (R6), specifically that more than half of the students have cheated in exams and do not feel guilty about it, highlighting issues in the current education system. In summary, sentences two to six form an extending pattern, where each sentence’s theme is based on part of the information from the previous sentence’s rheme. This gradually expands new viewpoints or information, making the passage more coherent and enriching, helping readers follow the logic step by step.

In sentence 7, the author cites another survey (T7) as a background, leading to the finding that many students cheat (R7), overlapping with the findings in sentence 6 that many students engage in cheating behaviors. However, R7 also mentions that the survey found many students cheat with smartphones. In sentence 8, the author uses some survey cases as background information (T8), leading to the same findings as in sentence 6, that many students do not consider looking up answers on their phones as cheating. Overall, sentences 6 to 10 and 11 discuss the issue of student cheating from different perspectives, including

various studies, surveys, cases, or personal viewpoints. More specifically, the rhemes of these sentences focus on the phenomenon and characteristics of student cheating, indicating that many students cheat, many use technological means to cheat, and many do not consider their actions as cheating. The rhemes of these sentences specifically reveal the current phenomenon of student cheating, forming a centralized pattern. The author, from different perspectives, comprehensively reveals the prominent issues in current education, ensuring the coherence and unity of the passage’s theme, and emphasizes the importance and necessity of researching and discussing this phenomenon. This also lays the groundwork for analyzing the causes of this phenomenon and proposing solutions in the following passage. For readers, this arrangement helps capture the key points emphasized in the passage.

In T12, the author, based on the phenomenon of technological cheating mentioned in the previous R11, naturally transitions from explaining the phenomenon to attributing it. That is, the author believes that because many school policies do not explicitly prohibit cheating with technology (T12), students think such behavior is allowed (R12). Since R11 and T12 both revolve around cheating with technology, they belong to an extending pattern. That naturally transitions information and introduces new information that is, from highlighting the existence of the phenomenon to analyzing its causes.

In T13, the author continues with the term “technology” from T12, using partially known information (T13) to further explain and analyze the viewpoint in the previous sentence (R13), that the rapid spread of technology leaves schools unable to incorporate technology-based cheating into policies or inform students. Therefore, sentences 12 and 13 maintain an unchanged theme while continuously introducing new information in the rheme, forming a parallel pattern. This arrangement makes the information presentation more organized, the structure clearer, and the display more intuitive, helping to maintain the logic and coherence of the passage. In sentence 14, the author starts with “from a young age” (T14), leading to the fact that students learn from a young age that they can easily get answers using technology (R14). It is important to note that both R13 and R14 mention the content of students finding answers using technology, so sentences 13 and 14 form a centralized pattern. These two sentences explain the situation of students knowing and using technology to cheat from different angles.

In T15, the author uses “schools” as basic information, leading to measures schools must take against cheating (R15), specifically proposing anti-cheating policies targeting technological cheating. Then, the author continues with “policies” from R15 as T16, emphasizing that these policies must be continuously updated. Thus, sentences 15 and 16 form an extending pattern, naturally introducing new information and

emphasizing the importance of policies, enhancing the coherence of the passage. In the last two sentences of the passage, the author uses teachers (T17) and parents (T18) as themes, respectively, proposing corresponding methods to address students' technological cheating from two different angles. The rhemes of these two sentences have partial semantic consistency, forming a centralized pattern. This arrangement allows the passage to focus on a core issue from different angles, strengthening the argument through multi-angle discussion. This helps deepen the theme, enabling readers to gain more insights on how to address the issue and take action as early as possible. This is the true purpose of the author writing this passage.

Through the above analysis of thematic progression patterns, we can understand the structure and information presentation of the passage more deeply and clearly. The passage begins with the theme "academic dishonesty" and then extends and expands this theme through historical comparisons and specific research data. The first two sentences use an overlapping pattern, clarifying the long history of academic dishonesty. The following sentences, through an extending pattern, describe in detail the evolution of academic dishonesty over time and how technology facilitates cheating, and through specific research data, reveal the reality that students commonly cheat and do not consider it improper behavior. As the discussion deepens, the author uses parallel and centralized patterns to comprehensively reveal the phenomenon of students cheating using technological means, analyze its causes, and propose corresponding countermeasures. Especially through the extending pattern, the author analyzes from different angles the contradiction between outdated school policies and rapid technological development, emphasizing the importance of constantly updating anti-cheating policies. Finally, the passage, through a centralized pattern, proposes measures from the perspectives of teachers and parents, echoing the theme and deepening the discussion. This structural arrangement not only makes the passage logically clear and coherent but also enhances its persuasiveness, helping readers better understand and address the issue of academic dishonesty.

In conclusion, the ways of realization of thematic progression patterns are diverse, and different thematic progression patterns are often used interchangeably in passages. By cross-using these patterns, the passage's coherence and logic can be enhanced, the expression enriched, key points highlighted, readers guided to think deeply, and the overall quality and readability of the passage improved.

5.3 The Application of Thematic Progression Patterns

The application of thematic progression patterns not only enhances the logicity and coherence of a passage but also helps readers better grasp the flow

of information, the presentation of content, underlying implications, and the author's attitude. Mastering the use of thematic progression patterns can effectively solve common problems in the education passages in CET-4 "Careful Reading". Below, we will take detail questions and inference questions from CET-4 as examples to demonstrate how to use thematic progression patterns to address these common questions.

5.3.1 Detail Questions

Detail questions in CET-4 "Careful Reading" section primarily assess the examinee's ability to understand and grasp specific information in the passage. We will illustrate this using an example from CET-4 in September 2022:

What did the Common Sense Media survey reveal ?

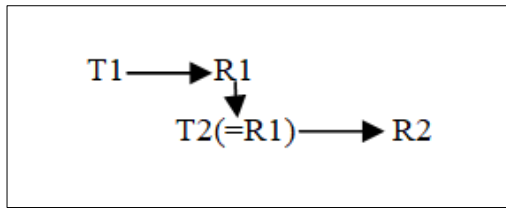
- A. Most parents tended to overprotect their children.
- B. Many students committed cheating unknowingly.
- C. Students were in urgent need of ethical education.
- D. Parents and kids had conflicting ideas over cheating.

First, examinees can quickly locate the part of the passage containing the keyword "Common Sense Media" and divide its theme and rheme:

A Common Sense Media survey (T1) found that 35 percent of students had cheated via smartphone, though the parents surveyed in that particular study did not believe their kids had ever cheated (R1). In many cases (T2), students did not realize that strategies like looking up answers on a smartphone were actually cheating at all (R2).

Next, by reading the question, we know that we need to find the results of the survey in the original passage and match them with the options to select the correct answer. The first sentence introduces the basic background information of the survey (T1) and presents its findings.

R1, which reveal that many students cheated using smartphones, and parents did not believe their children would cheat. In the second sentence, the author further focuses on some cases within the survey as the new theme (T2), leading to a further finding that students did not realize that looking up answers on a smartphone constituted cheating (R2). Thus, the author progressively focuses from "students cheating using smartphones" to "students not considering their actions as cheating," forming a linear pattern as shown below:



Based on this, we compare the content of the original passage with each of the four options. Option A mentions that most parents tended to overprotect their children. According to the theme in this option, we can quickly locate the part in the original passage (R1), which expresses that parents did not believe their children cheated. This is an objective statement of parents' attitudes without implying protection or overprotection, thus excluding option A. Option B mentions that many students committed cheating unknowingly, which aligns with the new information (R2) led out by the author, indicating that students did not consider looking up answers on a smartphone as cheating. Besides matching the content, this option also aligns with the author's intent to convey information using the linear pattern, making option B the correct answer. Option C suggests that students urgently need ethical education, but the original passage only stated the survey results without proposing further solutions or conclusions, hence excluding option C. Option D indicates that parents and children had conflicting ideas about cheating, which is not reflected in the original passage. If the author intended to present such differences, a parallel pattern would likely be used to highlight these differences. However, the original passage uses an extending pattern, maintaining a single line of thought without highlighting differences, thus excluding option D. In conclusion, by using the thematic progression pattern analysis and comparing each option, we can accurately determine that option B is the correct answer.

Therefore, for detail questions, we can fully utilize thematic progression patterns to quickly locate information in the passage, efficiently understand the main idea, structure arrangement, and the author's attitude and intention, thereby helping examinees select the correct answer within the limited time.

5.3.2 Inference Questions

Inference questions require examinees to logically infer and judge information not explicitly mentioned in the passage based on the understanding of the content, author's attitude, overall structure, and details of the passage. Typically, answers cannot be found directly in the passage but must be inferred from the context. We will use a sample question from the CET-4 exam in December 2020 as an example to demonstrate how to make use of thematic progression patterns to solve these questions:

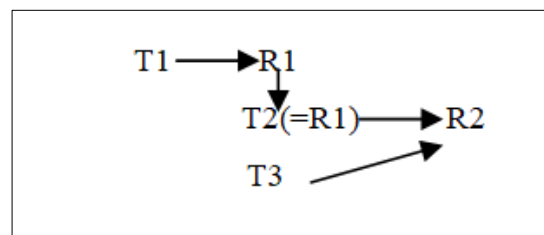
What does the author mean by a cultural shift (Line 2, Para. 6)?

- Simplification of schools' academic curriculums.
- Parents' involvement in schools' policy-making.
- A change in teachers' attitudes to mental health.
- A change in the conception of what schools are.

Based on the information in the question, the keyword is "cultural shift", located in the second line of the sixth paragraph, i.e., "This will, though, require a huge cultural shift." Examinees need to infer the meaning of "cultural shift" from the surrounding context by dividing the themes and rhemes of the sentences:

"There (T1) are already examples of innovative schools which combine mental health and wellbeing provision with a strong academic curriculum (R1). This (T2) will, though, require a huge cultural shift (R2). Politicians, policymakers, commissioners and school leaders (T3) must be brave enough to make the leap towards reimagining schools as providers of health as well as education services (R3)."

From the above analysis, it is clear that "this" in T2 refers to the action mentioned in R1, where some schools have combined mental health and wellbeing services with a strong academic curriculum, leading to the viewpoint that this requires a "huge cultural shift." The first and second sentences form a linear pattern. The content of T3, though not directly appearing in the previous two sentences, contains "make the leap" in R3, which is synonymous with "cultural shift" in R2, sharing overlapping meanings. Therefore, the second and third sentences form a centralized pattern. Overall, we can derive the following thematic progression pattern:



Since the term "cultural shift" appears in R2, we need to find the overlapping part to infer its meaning. Analysis shows that sentences 2 and 3 have the same rheme, and "make the leap" in R3 is synonymous with "cultural shift" in R2, allowing us to infer the meaning of "cultural shift" using R3. R3 further elaborates on "make the leap" as reimagining schools as providers of both health and education services, aligning with the meaning of option D. Therefore, the correct answer is D.

In conclusion, when dealing with detail and inference questions in the CET-4's "Careful Reading" section, examinees can effectively locate and understand

textual information using thematic progression patterns, thus improving problem-solving efficiency. For detail questions, by identifying keywords and structure of theme and rheme, examinees can quickly match options with the original information; and by summarizing thematic progression patterns, they can efficiently understand the main idea, structural arrangement, and the author's attitude and intention. For inference questions, by analyzing the theme-rheme relationship of the context, examinees can grasp the structure and clues of the passage to deduce the deep meaning of keywords. In summary, mastering thematic progression patterns helps examinees better grasp the logic and structure of the passage, enabling them to accurately answer questions within the limited time.

6. CONCLUSION

This study employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to focus, for the first time, on the education passages in CET-4 "Careful Reading" from the perspective of thematic progression patterns. It explores their distribution characteristics, implementation methods, and how examinees can use these patterns to solve common question types in these passages. The results indicate that in the education passages of CET-4's "Careful Reading", centralized pattern and extending pattern appear more frequently and are the two main processes, while parallel pattern, overlapping pattern, derivation pattern and coordinate pattern are less common. Additionally, the implementation of thematic progression patterns in these passages is diverse and often involves the intersection of different patterns. This arrangement enhances coherence and logic, enriches the expression and highlights key points of passages, and guides readers to think deeply, thereby improving the overall quality and readability of passages. Using examples of detail and inference questions from the education passages in CET-4 "Careful Reading", this study demonstrates that thematic progression patterns can help examinees efficiently identify the connections between sentences, understand passages' theme, and improve reading comprehension and exam performance.

However, this study also has certain limitations. The sample size is relatively small, as it includes only six randomly selected education passages from the past decade. Additionally, despite multiple verifications, the manual annotation process of themes and rhemes may still be influenced by subjective factors. Nevertheless, this study still broadens the understanding of education passages of CET-4's "Careful Reading" to some extent and provides practical guidance for CET-4 examinees. By fully utilizing thematic progression patterns, examinees can better grasp the structure, logic, and flow of information in passages, understand key information, and thereby improve reading efficiency and accuracy.

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