
RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Comparative study of Thematic Model from the Perspective of Textual Meta-Function: A Case Study of Top Chinese and Foreign Universities' English Promotional Videos

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ABSTRACT

English promotional videos are crucial tools for image dissemination in universities, playing a key role in shaping institutional branding, attracting potential students, and enhancing social awareness. While numerous studies have explored the linguistic characteristics of university promotional videos from a semiotic perspective, systematic analyses from the perspective of textual meta-function remain relatively scarce. This study, utilizing the UAM Corpus Tool, investigates the thematic structure of English promotional videos from 89 universities in China and abroad through the lens of textual meta-function. By analyzing the thematic model of these videos, the research reveals both similarities and differences in how universities construct their images. Both Chinese and foreign promotional videos emphasize clarity and organization of information, thereby establishing a core role in the discourse meaning construction process: educational and academic disseminators. Additionally, the mode roles in the discourse meaning construction process for Chinese universities' English promotional videos (UEPVs) are characterized as Contributors and Narrators, whereas foreign UEPVs tend to emphasize the roles of inspirators and guides.

KEYWORDS

textual meta-function; universities' English promotional videos; thematic model; mode

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1. Introduction

Promotional videos are important means of publicity in modern society, utilizing multimedia elements such as visuals, sound, and text to present information about a university's image, products, and services. They serve the purposes of promotion, marketing, and publicity across various fields, including business, culture, and politics.

A high-quality university promotional video serves as a distinctive calling card for the institution, which can showcase the cultural history and learning atmosphere of the school, and gather the strength and hearts of the entire school. What attracts me most is that the promotional video is also a unique historical memory of the school, with significant commemorative value. Consequently, many scholars, both domestic and international, have studied this from various perspectives, such as the semiotic analysis of universities' English promotional videos (UEPVs).

Halliday's theory frequently mentions the Theme-Rheme system, which consists of two functional components: the Theme and the Rheme serves as the core element, including simple Theme and multiple Theme. The Prague School proposed the theory of thematic structure, which plays a crucial role in discourse interpretation, leading many prominent domestic scholars to increasingly focus on the study of thematic structures. Most research is based on Theme progression patterns, examining the relationship between Theme progression and discourse coherence, often involving comparative analyses of selected texts and

their Chinese translations. However, there is limited research on the thematic model of UEPVs from the perspective of textual meta-function. Therefore, this article attempts to analyze the similarities and differences between English promotional videos of

top 100 universities in QS rankings abroad and those of well-known "Double First-Class" universities in China (City University of Hong Kong and The Chinese University of Hong Kong are included due to their QS rankings being within the scope) from the perspective of textual meta-function, in order to provide a new perspective for the study of UEPVs. However, for one hand, this article only selects a total of 89 UEPVs (41 foreign universities and 48 domestic universities). As a result, the thematic resources in these videos are limited. For the other hand, the analysis is only conducted from the perspective of textual meta-function, without considering interpersonal and conceptual meta-functions. Therefore, there may be shortcomings in the study of UEPVs from Chinese and foreign universities.

2. Literature Review of Universities' English Promotional Videos

Through online resource search, research on UEPVs is mainly reflected in the following aspects:

(1) In terms of symbolic analysis of UEPVs (Wang Lemeng, 2019), most of the research on UEPVs in China begins with semiotic analysis, focusing on the constituent elements. This type of article often discusses one or several symbols in the visual image, such as the architecture, background music, and commentary in the image. He Jian, Mo Haining, and Li Jun (2013) from Guangxi University of Science and Technology analyzed the promotional video of their university from the perspective of architectural symbols.

(2) In terms of video production in UEPVs, some scholars have discussed the content and process of creating UEPVs from the standpoint of video production techniques. This type of article often appearing in the form of journals, explores how to shoot promotional videos from some aspects such as planning, visual language, narrative content, and post production, with a greater emphasis on one aspect of creative techniques (Wang Lemeng, 2019). For example, The article "An Analysis of the Application of Digital Special Effects in Universities' Promotional Videos" mainly discusses the technical aspects of digital effects in producing intros, outros, subtitles, transitions, and color grading in such videos.

(3) In terms of the nature of UEPVs, this type of article does not delve into specific films. Instead, it provides a preliminary classification of UEPVs from a theoretical standpoint: school anniversary and history, enrollment promotion, inspection promotion, and promotional videos for institutions under universities. However, this classification lacks a definitive basis.

(4) In terms of the creative concept of UEPVs, this type of article focuses on the actual creative purposes and intentions behind the creation of UEPVs. For example, Zhi Linglin's article, "Starting from the Debate Over Promotional Videos of Peking University and Yale University—What Kind of Image Promotional Video Do We Anticipate?" explores the desired characteristics of UEPVs through an interview with Professor Shi Chuan from the School of Film and Television at Shanghai University (Gao lei, 2015).

There are some studies on university image building, but the theoretical research is relatively limited and lacks in-depth exploration. Currently, no books on the comparative study of English promotional videos of Chinese and foreign universities have emerged. Through searching academic journal databases such as CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), there are very few papers on this topic, with "A Comparative Study on Attitudinal Resources in English Promotional Videos of Chinese and British Universities" (Wang xia, 2023) being the only one. This study selects the texts of UEPVs from six Chinese and British universities as its corpus, comparing the distribution of attitudinal resources in the three subsystems of affect, judgment, and appreciation. Ding Yongxun's "What the Promotional Videos Compare: Reflections on Universities" contrasts the promotional videos of Peking University and Yale University, analyzing their construction against the backdrop of different cultural contexts.

The literature review reveals that studies on UEPVs predominantly adopt a semiotic approach, with scant attention given to textual meta-function. Moreover, comparative analyses between Chinese and foreign UEPVs are limited, often relying on the corpora from only two countries and lacking comprehensive horizontal and vertical comparisons which are necessary for generalizing thematic models. Additionally, quantitative analyses of these videos are scarce. Unlike former research, this article distinguishes itself by examining UEPVs from 48 Chinese "Double First-Class" universities and 41 top 100 QS-ranked international universities. Utilizing the thematic system framework, it aims to identify comparative differences in the thematic model from the textual meta-function perspective, providing a novel viewpoint for investigating English promotional videos of both Chinese and foreign universities.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Textual Meta-function Theory

Halliday (1978:47) elucidates the concept of meta-functions as “areas of meaning potential which are inherently involved in all uses of language”, referring to as ideational, interpersonal and textual. The textual meta-function of language has to “provide for making links with itself and with features of the situation in which it is used” (Halliday 1970:175). Ideational and interpersonal meta-functions having equal status, textual meta-function distinguishes itself from these two in that it is an “enabling function” (Halliday 1978:50), “enabling the ideational and interpersonal currents of meaning to flow together- and, by the same token, constraining them from flowing apart” (Halliday 2001:277). In a sense, textual meta-function embodies Halliday’s distinctive view of discourse construction, thus, playing a critical role in the theoretical system in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Guo hangqi, 2022).

The evolution of textual meta-functional theory is synchronous with the construction and development of the entire theoretical system of SFL. The growth of Halliday’s textual meta-function theory can be divided into three stages: the initial stage, the developmental stage and the sublimation stage. Halliday agrees that textual function is made up of three primary components: thematic system, information structure and cohesion system. However, the analysis will be mainly focused on the thematic system in this thesis.

3.2 Thematic System

The concepts of Theme and Rheme were first proposed by Vilem Mathesius (1939), the founder of the Prague School, in his *Functional Sentence View* (Zhang bojiang, Fang mei, 1994). He believes that a sentence consists of three parts: Theme, Rheme, and transition. Theme is the starting part of a sentence, which can be more simply defined as the known or predetermined part used by the speaker to start a topic in a specific context. It is not difficult to see from this explanation that the Theme involves two aspects: known information is the starting point of the speaker’s communication (Han kaihua, 2010). The Rheme unfolds around the Theme and is the core part of a sentence, while the transition links the Theme and Rheme of the sentence (Hu zhuanglin, Zhu yongsheng & Zhang delu, 1989). Although the transition is between the Theme and Rheme, it is located on the periphery of the Rheme, still belongs to the Rheme. This means that Mathesius’s “Sentence Functionalism” includes the arrangement of sentence internal structures and their relationship with discourse (Beneš, 1968). This distinction between Theme and Rheme is of great significance for sentence structure comparison, analysis of sentence function, and stylistic features.

Mathesius pioneered the theory of Theme, transition, and Rheme, but successors cannot fully agree with his viewpoint. Firbas (1964) redefined the concepts of Theme and Rheme. He proposed Communicative Dynamism. Communicative Dynamism refers to the degree to which each element of a sentence contributes to the development of communication (Firbas, 1972). He believes that the Theme is the component with the lowest Communicative Dynamism in a sentence, while the Rheme is the component with the highest Communicative Dynamism, and the transition is in a central position.

Danes (1974) largely agrees with Mathesius’s viewpoint. Danes believes that a sentence should be divided into two parts based on the information it carries. The transitional position is actually the Rheme. Although Rheme carries new information, the role of Theme is more important than that of Rheme, as Theme has an important function of connecting context.

In the 1960s, Halliday, a representative figure of the Systemic Functional Linguistics School, accepted the concepts of Theme and Rheme, but proposed different views on its definition. In his book *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, Halliday (1985: 38-39) defines the Theme as “the component that serves as the starting point in a message and is the object of the relevant clause”, while the Rheme is “the remaining part of the message, which is the part that develops the Theme”

Halliday’s contribution to the thematic system mainly lies in the following two aspects:

First, he divides Theme into simple Theme, multiple Theme and clause Theme. Among them, the simple Theme lacks internal structure and cannot be further analyzed, while the multiple Theme can be further divided into textual, interpersonal, and topical Themes.

An example can be used to illustrate these kinds of Themes.

Tab. 1 Example of Multiple Theme (Halliday, 2008:81)

well	but	then	surely	Jean	wouldn't	the best idea	be to join in
continuative	structural Theme	conjunctive Adjunct	modal Theme	Vocative	finite verbal operator	topical Theme	Rheme
textual Theme			interpersonal Theme				
Theme							

Thompson (2014) mentioned in his *Introduction Functional Grammar* that, when a dependent clause in a clause complex precedes the independent clause on which it depends, there appear to be good practical reasons for analyzing the dependent clause as the Theme for the whole clause complex. This is what Halliday referred to as the "clause Theme".

Tab. 2 Dependent Clause as Theme (Halliday, 1994)

if	winter	comes,	can	spring	be far behind?
Theme1			Rheme1		
structural Theme	topical Theme	Rheme2	finite verbal operator	topical Theme	Rheme3
Theme2			Theme3		

Meanwhile, in terms of whether the initial element conflates with the subject of the sentence, Theme can also be classified into marked and unmarked Theme. In declarative clauses, the mapping of Theme on to Subject is unmarked Theme while a Theme that is something other than the Subject is marked Theme (Halliday, 2008:73). In declarative clauses, marked Theme is usually adverbial group like *suddenly*, *quickly*, or prepositional phrase like *in the corner*, *in the afternoon*, *without thinking*. Sometimes, complement also acts as marked Theme. In yes/no interrogative clause, the element that expresses polarity, namely the Finite verbal operator, functions as Theme. In WH-interrogative, the WH-element which functions to request for the missing information is Theme of the clause. Those two kinds of Theme are unmarked Themes. In positive imperative clauses, the predicator is the unmarked Theme (Du xueping, 2016).

Tab. 3 Examples of Unmarked Theme

unmarked Theme	Rheme
What I want	is a new computer.
Who	did it?
He	will come back tomorrow.

Tab. 4 Examples of Marked Theme

marked Theme	Rheme
After the party,	Where did you go?

In a word, Unmarked Theme is often adopted as the starting point and usually tends to arouse our attention to what the speaker says. While the marked Theme is mainly employed to stress some special elements in order to make messages coherent.

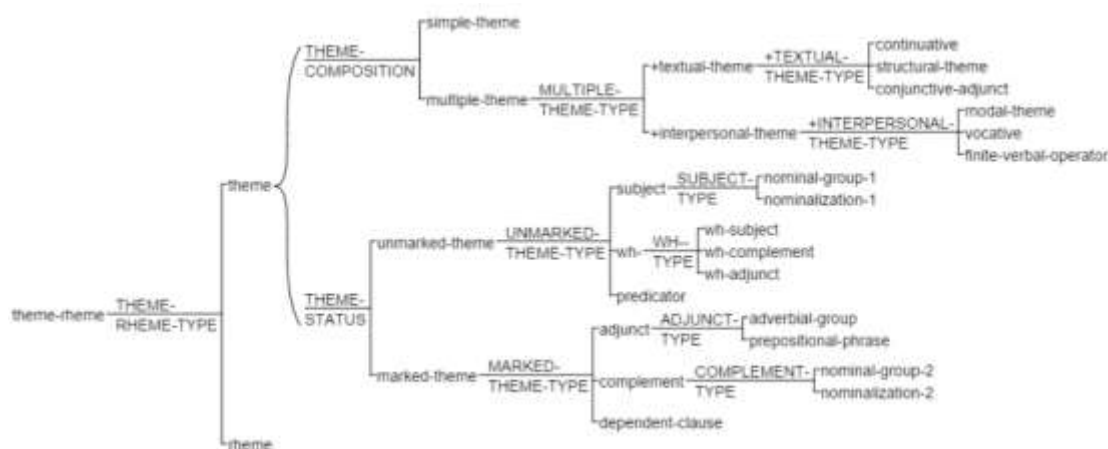


Fig. 1 Thematic

System

In order to comprehensively demonstrate the functional labels of these Themes, this thesis constructs a comprehensive thematic system by combining the Theme system diagrams of Halliday (2008, 80) and Thompson (2014, 142).

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Data

The corpus of this article is selected from audio texts of English promotional videos from 48 “Double First-Class” universities in China and 41 top 100 universities in QS rankings abroad. These schools have a good reputation both domestically and internationally, and their coverage area is relatively broad. All promotional videos are sourced from the official website of the school.

In order to make the results more reliable and universal, this study selected UEPVs in different countries and levels, totaling 41688 words. Among them, the texts of Chinese UEPVs have a totally 30794 words, while foreign UEPVs have a totally 10894 words.

4.2 Research Instrument

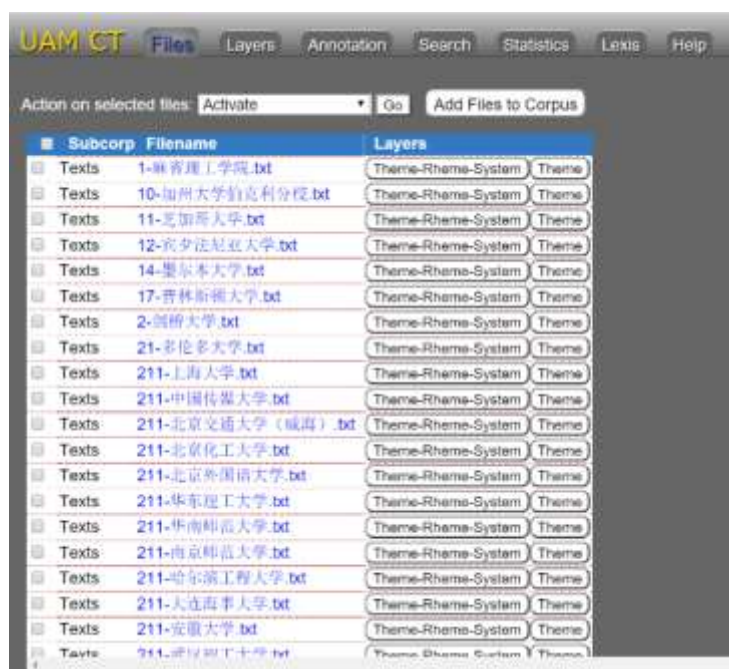


Fig. 2 Corpus of Promotional Videos in UAM

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In this research, UAM Corpus Tool 6.2 is used. It is a widely used annotation software in Systemic Functional Linguistics. By creating a project, importing the corpus to be annotated, and defining the annotation system and systemic networks, manual or automatic annotation of the imported data can be performed. This research primarily utilizes Thematic system for the manual annotation of Theme resources. Then, the results of the annotation could be counted, retrieved, and contrasted in UAM. Besides, the results can also be exported by UAM. We can see some texts of the promotional video in UAM from Figure 2.

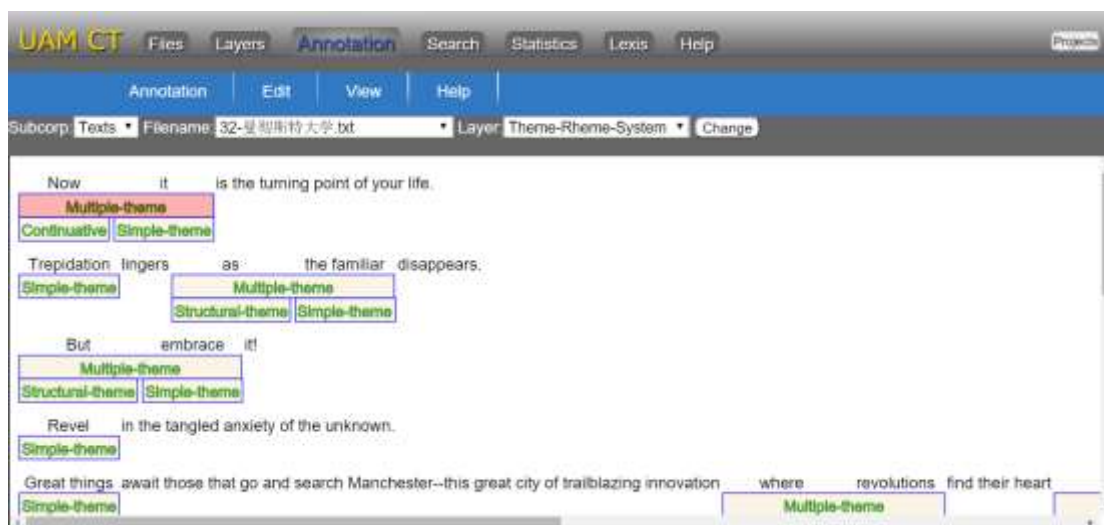


Fig. 3 UAM Annotation

This study's mode of annotation utilizes manual approach rather than automatic approach. And the annotation process in UAM is illustrated in Figure 3.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Thematic model of Chinese and Foreign UEPVs

According to Table 5, The table distinguishes Theme types into two main categories: simple Theme and multiple Themes. Simple Themes are further divided into marked and unmarked Themes, while multiple Themes encompass textual and interpersonal Themes. This classification offers a clear framework for understanding the diversity of Theme structures.

Tab. 5 Thematic model of UEPVs

Chinese and Foreign UEPVs							
Theme Types				Number (Percent)			Total (Percent)
simple Theme	marked-Theme	adjunct	adverbial-group	88 (2.4%)	479 (13.1%)	631 (17.3%)	3039 (83.5%)
			prepositional-phrase	391 (10.7%)			
		complement	nominal-group-2	68 (1.9%)	68 (1.9%)		
			nominalization-2	0 (0.0%)			
		dependent-clause		84 (2.3%)			
	unmarked-Theme	subject	nominal-group-1	2218 (61.0%)	2227 (61.2%)	2408 (66.2%)	
			nominalization-1	9 (0.2%)			
		wh-	wh-subject	16 (0.5%)	42 (1.2%)		
			wh-complement	7 (0.2%)			
			wh-adjunct	19 (0.5%)			
		predicator		139 (3.8%)			
multiple Theme	textual-Theme	continulative		25 (0.7%)		579 (15.9%)	
		structural-theme		508 (14%)			
		conjunctive-adjunct		46 (1.2%)			
	interpersonal-Theme	modal-theme		12 (0.4%)		20 (0.6%)	
		vocative		0 (0.0%)			
		finite-verbal-operator		8 (0.2%)			
Total (Percent)							3638 (100%)

Data show that simple Themes constitute the majority of the overall Theme types (83.5%). Marked Themes are relatively few, primarily consisting of adverbial phrases and prepositional phrases. Multiple Themes represent a smaller proportion of the overall Theme types (16.5%), with textual Themes occurring more frequently than interpersonal Themes.

Overall, Table 5 reflects the dominance of the simple Theme in language use, providing significant empirical data for linguistic research. Understanding the distribution of this thematic structure deepens our comprehension of language expression and aids in optimizing expression strategies in language teaching and applications to enhance communication effectiveness.

Tab. 6 Thematic model of Chinese UEPVs

Chinese UEPVs							
Theme Types				Number (Percent)			Total (Percent)
simple Theme	marked-Theme	adjunct	adverbial-group	78 (3.6%)	408 (18.7%)	488 (22.4%)	1911(87.8%)
			prepositional-phrase	330 (15.1%)			
		complement	nominal-group-2	25 (1.2%)	25 (1.2%)		
			nominalization-2	0 (0.0%)			
		dependent-clause		55 (2.5%)			
	unmarked-Theme	subject	nominal-group-1	1333 (61.3%)	1338 (61.5%)		
			nominalization-1	5 (0.2%)			
		wh-	wh-subject	4 (0.2%)	14 (0.6%)		
			wh-complement	4 (0.2%)			
			wh-adjunct	6 (0.2%)			
		predicator		71 (3.3%)			
multiple Theme	textual-Theme	continuative		18 (0.8%)		258 (11.9%)	
		structural-theme		208 (9.6%)			
		conjunctive-adjunct		32 (1.5%)			
	interpersonal-Theme	modal-theme		5 (0.2%)		8 (0.3%)	
		vocative		0 (0.0%)			
		finite-verbal-operator		3 (0.1%)			
Total (Percent)							2177 (100%)

The chart illustrates the distribution of Theme types in Chinese UEPVs. In the simple Theme category, there are a total of 1,911 instances, accounting for 87.8% of the overall total. Notably, the number of unmarked Themes significantly exceeds that of marked Themes. Unmarked Themes, particularly subjects, dominate with 1,338 occurrences, accounting for 61.5%, highlighting the central role of direct subjects in expression. Marked Themes total 488 instances, comprising 22.4%. However, the frequency of complements is lower compared to other types of marked Themes, such as adjuncts.

The number of multiple Theme is 266, accounting for 12.2% of the total. Among these, textual Theme dominate with 258 occurrences, while interpersonal Theme appears only 8 times. This indicates that in complex contexts, textual structure is prioritized over interpersonal interaction. This trend may reflect the greater importance of information organization over interactivity in communication.

Tab. 7 Thematic model of Foreign UEPVs

Foreign UEPVs							
Theme Types				Number (Percent)			Total (Percent)
simple Theme	marked-Theme	adjunct	adverbial-group	10 (0.7%)	71 (4.9%)	143 (9.8%)	1128(77.2%)
			prepositional-phrase	61 (4.2%)			
		complement	nominal-group-2	43 (2.9%)	43 (2.9%)		
			nominalization-2	0 (0.0%)			
		dependent-clause		29 (2.0%)			
	unmarked-Theme	subject	nominal-group-1	885 (60.5%)	889 (60.8%)	985 (67.4%)	
			nominalization-1	4 (0.3%)			
		wh-	wh-subject	12 (0.8%)	28 (1.9%)		
			wh-complement	3 (0.2%)			
			wh-adjunct	13 (0.9%)			
predicator		68 (4.7%)					
multiple Theme	textual-Theme	continuative		7 (0.5%)		321 (22.0%)	333 (22.8%)
		structural-theme		300 (20.5%)			
		conjunctive-adjunct		14 (1.0%)			
	interpersonal-Theme	modal-theme		7 (0.5%)		12 (0.8%)	
		vocative		0 (0.0%)			
		finite-verbal-operator		5 (0.3%)			
Total (Percent)							1461 (100%)

The chart clearly illustrates the usage of Theme types in foreign UEPVs. The frequency of simple Theme (67.4%) significantly exceeds that of multiple Themes (22.8%). Specifically, unmarked Theme accounts for the vast majority (67.4%), which indicates that foreign language learners prefer direct and easily comprehensible structures in their expressions. This phenomenon not only reflects learners' pursuit of clarity but also underscores the importance of simplifying expressions in language use. Furthermore, the findings offer crucial insights for the production of UEPVs, suggesting that concise and clear expressions should be prioritized to enhance audience understanding and engagement.

5.2 Comparison of the Thematic Models

5.2.1 Simple Theme and Multiple Theme

Tab. 8 Distribution of Theme Types of the two UEPVs

The Distribution of Theme Types of Chinese and Foreign UEPVs		
Theme Types	Chinese UEPVs	Foreign UEPVs
	Total (Percent)	
simple Theme	1911 (87.8%)	1128 (77.2%)
multiple Theme	266 (12.2%)	333 (22.8%)

Tab. 8 is the distribution chart of simple Theme and multiple Theme in Chinese and foreign UEPVs. Overall, whether in China or abroad, there is always more simple Theme than multiple Theme, and this similarity can be explained by the following key points.

In the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), mode, as one of the contextual variables, includes both channel and rhetorical mode (Halliday, 1978), which encompass the channels of language use (spoken or written), communicative functions (interactive or informative), and discourse organization. Through the theory of mode, it is possible to explain why the number of simple themes is generally higher than that of multiple themes. The following is an analysis based on mode.

Firstly, in accordance with the requirements of clarity and efficiency in written language, the primary medium of English promotional videos is an extension of written language (such as voiceover scripts or subtitles). The rhetorical goal is to convey information as clearly as possible while maintaining a simple structure. A simple theme contains a core subject, with clear meaning and avoids complex syntax. Whether for Chinese or foreign universities, promotional videos aim to convey information

to a global audience in an intuitive and easily understandable way. Overly complex multiple themes may reduce the logical coherence and continuity of the information.

Secondly, In line with the characteristics of informational discourse, university promotional videos primarily focus on conveying core information about the institution (such as academic achievements, cultural atmosphere, and facilities). Simple themes help highlight this information, providing the audience with a quick cognitive pathway. For example, a sentence like “*We build, design and explore. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)*” uses a simple theme, allowing for a more direct transmission of information. In contrast, adding too many supplementary or descriptive elements in a multiple theme increases the informational burden.

In addition, Universal linguistic features in cross-cultural communication. In the context of globalization, the language used in English promotional videos needs to cater to an international audience and adhere to the general principles of global discourse. A high proportion of simple themes is employed to ensure the information's accessibility and ease of understanding.

At the same time, we can see that the proportion of multiple themes in foreign UEPVs (22.8%) is twice that of Chinese UEPVs. This can be explained by the following reasons:

The rhetorical modes differ between foreign and Chinese university promotional videos. Foreign UEPVs tend to focus more on expressing logical relationships or discourse coherence, with compound subjects often including logical connectors, background information, or evaluative content. For example, “*We apply science, and we engineer the future because it is exploring and solving that moves us forward. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)*”—this compound subject not only conveys information but also emphasizes cause-and-effect relationships. In contrast, Chinese UEPVs are more likely to directly state facts, with less complexity in the subject part of the sentence.

Combining the above analysis, it is evident that the use of simple clauses not only effectively conveys information but also balances the potential power dynamics and social distances. Through simple and direct expressions, the audience can grasp the information while also feeling respect and care from the information provider. In promotional videos of Chinese universities, the prevalence of simple clauses reflects the demand for direct and clear communication. In contrast, while compound clauses are relatively more common in international universities, there are still numerous instances of simple clauses to cater to diverse audience needs.

5.2.2 Marked Theme and Unmarked Theme

Tab. 9 Distribution of Simple Theme

The Distribution of Simple Theme of Chinese and Foreign UEPVs			
Theme Types		Number (Percent)	
		Chinese UEPVs	Foreign UEPVs
marked-Theme	adjunct	408 (18.7%)	71 (4.9%)
	complement	25 (1.2%)	43 (2.9%)
	dependent-clause	55 (2.5%)	29 (2.0%)
Total (Percent)		488 (22.4%)	143 (9.8%)
unmarked-Theme	subject	1338 (61.5%)	889 (60.8%)
	wh-	14 (0.6%)	28 (1.9%)
	predicator	71 (3.3%)	68 (4.7%)
Total (Percent)		1434 (65.4%)	985 (67.4%)

From Tab. 9, it is shown that unmarked Theme captures a high rate than marked Theme does. This is a common phenomenon in many discourses.

The advantages of unmarked Theme in information transmission primarily lie in their clarity and comprehensibility. Due to their direct structure, this type of Theme can rapidly convey core messages, reducing cognitive load for the audience and facilitating easier absorption and recall of relevant content. Additionally, the unmarked Theme aligns with the audience's linguistic habits, maintaining consistency with their cognitive patterns and enhancing message receptivity. In cross-cultural communication, the intuitiveness of unmarked Theme also helps to mitigate language and cultural barriers, promoting more effective communication.

In contrast, the limitations of marked Theme lie in their complexity and cognitive challenges. The marked Theme often involves more intricate sentence structures, which can lead to ambiguity and increase the cognitive load on the audience. This complexity not only hampers comprehension but also negatively affects memory and recall efficiency. In promotional videos where quick information acquisition is essential, the use of the marked Theme may lead to misunderstandings or distortion of information, thereby reducing communicative effectiveness. Thus, prioritizing the unmarked Theme in information structure design can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of message delivery.

The comparison of the chart clearly illustrates the significant differences in the use of marked and unmarked Themes in Chinese and foreign UEPVs. Specifically, the usage rate of the marked Theme in Chinese UEPVs is 22.4% (488 instances), while in foreign UEPVs, it is only 9.8% (143 instances). This indicates a greater inclination towards complex sentence structures in Chinese educational videos, with a markedly higher frequency of marked Themes. Regarding unmarked Themes, the situation is not very different: Chinese UEPVs show a proportion of 65.4% (1434 instances), compared to 67.4% (985 instances) in foreign UEPVs. This demonstrates that both contexts exhibit a strong reliance on unmarked Themes.

The higher frequency of marked Themes in China can be analyzed from multiple dimensions, including cultural communication styles, language structure, and educational practices.

The higher frequency of marked subjects in Chinese promotional videos can be analyzed from multiple dimensions.

Firstly, cultural differences impact language expression. The higher proportion of "marked subjects" in Chinese UEPVs (22.4%) may reflect China's tendency to emphasize abstract subjects with "symbolic meaning," such as the nation, ideology, history, or culture. This tendency could be aimed at conveying a particular national image or collective ideology. In contrast, the lower proportion of "marked subjects" in Foreign UEPVs (9.8%) may reflect a greater focus on individuals or specific actions, as well as a preference for narrative fluidity and linguistic directness. Western cultures generally use fewer abstract concepts as subjects, instead favoring specific people or events to convey messages.

Secondly, linguistic conciseness and rhetorical intent play a role. Chinese UEPVs may prioritize "image building" and "emotional appeal" in their language expression, which could explain the greater use of marked subjects to enhance the power and emotional impact of the language. The use of marked subjects not only emphasizes the "special nature" of a concept or theme but also provides the audience with more space for reflection. In contrast, Foreign UEPVs tend to focus more on the rapid transmission of information and linguistic simplicity.

In addition, educational practices also play a crucial role in this phenomenon. The Chinese education system, particularly in academic and formal settings, typically emphasizes the use of complex sentence structures and grammar. As a result, students naturally tend to use more marked Themes in their expressions. Additionally, Chinese UEPVs often feature more detailed and rich narratives in order to capture the audience's attention. This keen insight into audience needs motivates creators to incorporate more marked Themes in their content, enhancing the layered delivery and engagement of the information.

Finally, Chinese is classified as a theme-prominent language, where speakers emphasize the unity of subjective and objective perspectives and tend to highlight the theme rather than the subject. In Chinese, the topic and the given information generally overlap. In contrast, English is a subject-prominent language, where, in most cases, the theme and the subject coincide.

5.2.3 Textual Theme and Interpersonal Theme

Tab. 10 Distribution of Multiple Theme

The Distribution of Multiple Theme of Chinese and Foreign UEPVs			
Theme Types		Number (Percent)	
		Chinese UEPVs	Foreign UEPVs
textual-Theme	continuative	18 (0.8%)	7 (0.5%)
	structural-theme	208 (9.6%)	300 (20.5%)
	conjunctive-adjunct	32 (1.5%)	14 (1.0%)
Total (Percent)		258 (11.9%)	321 (22.0%)
interpersonal-Theme	modal-theme	5 (0.2%)	7 (0.5%)
	vocative	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
	finite-verbal-operator	3 (0.1%)	5 (0.3%)
Total (Percent)		8 (0.3%)	12 (0.8%)

The tab.10 reveals clear differences in the distribution of Theme types in UEPVs from Chinese and foreign universities. The total number of textual Themes is 579, accounting for 15.9%. Among these, the structural-Theme dominates with 508 instances, representing 14%, indicating that the organization of information and logical relationships play a central role in the videos. In contrast, the interpersonal-Theme constitutes only 20 instances (0.6%), with their subcategories (such as vocative and finite-verb-operator) almost absent, highlighting the limited use of the interpersonal Theme.

The significant predominance of the textual Theme over the interpersonal Theme is primarily attributed to the functions and objectives of university promotional videos.

Firstly, these videos aim to convey information objectively, including the institution's academic achievements, cultural activities, and campus environment. In this context, speakers often rely on facts and data for their statements, leading to a more frequent use of the structural Theme compared to the interpersonal Theme, which express subjective feelings. Secondly, promotional videos must maintain a level of professionalism and authority, necessitating clear and concise information delivery while avoiding interference from personal emotions.

Moreover, educational institutions typically aim to showcase their academic achievements and educational philosophies through promotional videos, which often rely on logically structured narratives rather than subjective expressions. This phenomenon not only reflects the specific needs of educational promotion but also underscores the high emphasis on objectivity and accuracy in communication. Therefore, the dominance of the textual Theme in UEPVs from Chinese and foreign universities results from language usage and embodies the objectives of promotion and educational values.

A comparison of the distribution of multiple Theme types in UEPVs from Chinese and foreign universities reveals significant differences. Chinese universities exhibit a total of 258 textual Themes, accounting for 11.9%, while foreign universities have 321 textual Themes, representing 22.0%. In terms of the structural Theme, Chinese universities report 208 (9.6%), compared to 300 (20.5%) for foreign institutions, which indicates a stronger emphasis on structural expression in foreign universities. Additionally, both groups show a limited use of the interpersonal Theme. From this, it can be concluded that the sentence structure of foreign UEPVs has more logical semantic words, such as "but", "and", or more complex sentences formed by more attributive clauses.

For example :

- (1) *So that was a major consideration for me when I was applying.* (University of Cambridge)
- (2) *So how far will you go?* (Northwestern University)
- (3) *We know that recent events have caused some of you to wonder if you will be welcome in the United States.* (Boston University)

From the perspective of “mode” in Systemic Functional Linguistics, the phenomenon of significantly more thematic elements in foreign promotional videos compared to domestic ones can be analyzed from multiple angles.

Firstly, foreign promotional videos often emphasize diverse forms of expression, employing a rich array of thematic elements to enhance the depth and appeal of the narrative. This diversity not only improves the efficiency of information transmission but also effectively captures the audience's attention. By introducing various thematic elements, foreign promotional videos can increase viewer engagement and interest.

Secondly, the discourse structure of foreign promotional videos is typically more flexible, allowing for the incorporation of various thematic elements, such as textual themes, structural themes, and cohesive adjuncts. This flexibility makes information delivery more dynamic and appealing, better accommodating the needs and expectations of different audiences. Additionally, the use of diverse thematic elements helps to clearly differentiate various levels of information, enabling the audience to more easily understand complex content. Particularly, the use of structural themes and cohesive adjuncts aids the audience in identifying logical relationships within the flow of information, thereby enhancing the coherence and comprehensibility of the discourse.

Finally, foreign promotional videos generally place greater emphasis on interactivity with the audience, and the use of multiple thematic elements can enhance viewer engagement. This approach not only fosters an emotional connection with the audience but also allows them to experience a sense of interactivity in information exchange, rather than merely passively receiving information.

6. Conclusion

This study conducts a systematic comparison of Theme types in Chinese and foreign UEPVs, focusing on the distribution differences of the simple and multiple Theme, the marked and unmarked Theme, as well as the textual and interpersonal Theme across diverse linguistic contexts.

First of all, through the analysis of the meta-functions in Systemic Functional Linguistics, the phenomenon of a greater number of simple clauses than compound clauses can be attributed to the status relationships and levels of solidarity among participants. Simple clauses play a crucial role in the effectiveness of information transmission and the construction of social relationships, making them a mainstream mode of expression in promotional videos.

Furthermore, the significantly higher usage frequency of the marked Theme in Chinese UEPVs may be attributed to the cultural emphasis on indirect expression and the structural flexibility of the Chinese language, aligning with the educational emphasis on complex sentence structures.

At last, the textual Theme demonstrates significant importance in both Chinese and foreign UEPVs, underscoring the central role of logical coherence and information organization in educational promotion. This phenomenon not only reflects the specific demands of educational promotion but also underscores the high prioritization of objectivity and accuracy in communication. Through the analysis of the “mode” dimension, it becomes evident that the diversity and flexibility of thematic elements in foreign promotional videos are key characteristics that set them apart from domestic ones. These features not only enhance the effectiveness of information transmission but also increase audience engagement and comprehension, resulting in a richer and more vibrant discourse structure in foreign promotional videos.

Based on these analyses, the mode roles of Chinese EUPVs in the process of discourse meaning construction are Contributors and Narrators, while the roles of foreign UPV focus more on constructing the roles of Inspirators and Guides.. Together, they construct the discursive role of educational and academic Disseminators.

The study provides essential theoretical support for the production of UEPVs and offers new insights and implications for language teaching and cross-cultural communication, emphasizing the importance of optimizing expression strategies to enhance communication effectiveness across different cultural contexts.

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