

An Investigation of Taiwan's College Students' Awareness of Information Packaging in Linguistic Structures

臺灣大學生對句型中訊息包裝之功能語法調查

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摘要

本研究藉由主述位關係與訊息結構來探討臺灣大學生對於句型中訊息包裝之功能語法的理解。作為訊息包裝中重要的一環，此兩結構常以分裂句，被動態，倒裝句，及 *there* 表示存在的句型出現。研究者首先針對以上句型的語法功能設計了一份以情境為導向的題目，請 38 位大一學生填答。在每一題中，他們必須在相同命題且語法皆正確的兩句話中，選擇一句符合上下文的句子，並提供作答理由。接著，研究者統計答案，並以質性方式分析填答理由。研究結果顯示大約三分之一的同學因為對句型的錯誤理解或是對功能語法的知識不足，而選擇了在上下文中無法展現句型功能的答案。在學生的填答理由中，將近百分四十五是與句型訊息包裝無關。本研究也討論了其他影響學生選擇句型的因素並提供對此議題的教學建議。

關鍵詞：功能語法、訊息包裝、閱讀理解、主述位關係、訊息結構

ABSTRACT

The present study explores Taiwan's college students' awareness of information packaging in readings from the perspective of Theme/Rheme structure and Information system. As crucial elements in information packaging (Erteschik-Shir, 1986; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Hockett, 1958; Kuno, 1972; Prince, 1986; Rochemont, 1986; Ward, 1988), the two systems are typically realized by such linguistic structures as cleft sentences, passive voice, inversion sentences, and there insertion (Huddleston & Pullum, 2003; Givón, 1993). A test regarding the discourse functions of the structures was taken by 38 college students. In each test item, they had to choose between two grammatical correct sentences with the identical proposition, and only one of them is context appropriate. They were also required to write down the reasons for their

choices. Their answers were firstly calculated and their explanations were qualitatively analyzed. The result shows that about one-third of the answers are context-inappropriate due to the subjects' misconceptions and insufficient knowledge about the structures. As for the subjects' reasons, almost 45 percent of the subjects' choices are not relevant to information packaging, no matter these choices are context appropriate or inappropriate. Other factors contributing their choices are discussed. Pedagogical implications and suggestions for future research are also provided.

Keywords: functional grammar, information packaging, reading comprehension, Theme/Rheme structure, Information system

1. Introduction

The rise of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) in the 1970s has transformed the focus of grammar instruction. As opposed to the Chomsky's notion (1965) that grammar has its very own existence independent of communicative uses, grammar in communicative competence is seen as a resource for language users to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings with interlocutors. Grammar, as a consequence, not only manifests its use in daily communications in natural settings, that is, discourse. Grammar also develops or "emerges" (Hopper, 1988) from discourse. In other words, the functions of linguistic structures stem from recurrent patterns in discourse, and these patterns constantly shape these functions to cater to communicative purposes (Cumming & Ono, 1997).

Nonetheless, despite the advocate of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Taiwan, the functional approach to grammar seems insufficient or even absent in high school English textbooks. The phenomenon seems especially pronounced when it comes to "information packaging" (Chafe, 1976), namely, how information should be ordered to promote communication. According to Chang and Li (2007), although linguistic structures provided in the textbooks or teachers' manuals are abundant, a great number of them focus on the practices that aim to express the same proposition with different structures. The two researchers point out that such practices cause the following two shortcomings. Firstly, the type of drills ignores the differences in terms of their discourse functions to present information. For example, the commonly seen structure "...be said to..." as exemplified in the sentence "The president was said to have visited the scientist three times last month" (Chang & Li, 2007, p. 6) functions as a way to provide necessary information in a news event. However, the drills in textbooks indicate the structure equals to "It be said that..." which, in fact, aims to present new information at the later part of the sentence. Secondly, the ways structures are presented do not reflect their discourse functions. Such a highly marked structure as "Hard as he tried,..." "Carefully as he drives..." and "Child as he was..." (p. 8) even appear in a single passage or conversation. The repeated use may familiarize students with the structure, but fails to show its real function in presenting information. Furthermore, the incorrect indication of "equalness" and "repetition" of structures also have a negative impact on reading comprehension. The random change of information order and the recurrent use of a single structure without the consideration of the context in a passage not only

endanger its coherence, but also directly serve as a harmful input that impedes the development of students' reading ability (Chang & Li, 2007, p. 7).

The purpose of reading in college makes the knowledge of information packaging more crucial. College students read English articles no longer for the mastery of linguistic structures only. They are required and expected to gain professional knowledge or even explore related fields in textbooks or journal articles to manifest their understanding in their majors. In response to the significance of the issue to college students in Taiwan, the present study is thus proposed so as to further investigate college students' awareness of information packaging in linguistic structures. Theme/Rheme structure and Information system, in particular, are employed, since previous research (Erteschik-Shir, 1986; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Hockett, 1958; Kuno, 1972; Prince, 1986; Rochemont, 1986; Ward, 1988) has indicated that they play a central role in information packaging. The research questions of the present study are as follows:

1.1 Research Questions

1. How are Taiwan's college students' perceptions of Theme/Rheme structure and Information system in readings?
2. What are the factors informing their choices of different structures with identical propositions in a passage?

2. Literature Review

Information packaging (Chafe, 1976) is the linguistic element that enables speakers/writers to select the most appropriate linguistic structures based on their assumptions regarding their hearers/readers communicative state, and helps hearers/readers to decode explicit and implicit meanings embedded in those structures. As indicated in the preceding part, literature has found that information packaging is closely related to Theme/Rheme structure and Information system. The section, then, starts with the introductions of the two systems. Later, syntactic structures that can realize thematic progression and information flow are discussed.

2.1 Theme/Rheme Structure

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), the subject of a clause bears psychological, grammatical, and logical functions. Though in some cases, all these three functions can all fall on one element, they are distinct and separate notions. They give the following definitions: (1) psychological function relates it to "the concern of the message"; (2) grammatical subject refers to "that of which something is predicated"; (3) logical subject means "doer of the action" (p. 56). The two researchers use the following two sentences (p.66) to illustrate them:

- [1a]. The duke has given my aunt that teapot
[1b]. That teapot my aunt has given by the duke.

In [1a], "the duke" has psychological, grammatical, and logical functions. However, in [1b], the three functions are realized by three different entities: "this teapot" serves as a psychological subject, a thing that the speaker has in mind and intends the sentence is to be about when s/he utters the sentence, functioning as "Theme." And "my aunt", from the perspective of traditional grammar, takes the position of subject

without connoting any particular meaning, serving as the “subject.” “The duke,” in terms of thematic roles, acts as the agent. In this paper, the focus will be on the first one, Theme.

The term “Theme” in practice is from the Prague school of linguistics, functioning “in the structure of the clause as a message” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.58), and in the place “from which the speaker proceeds” (Fries, 1995, p. 1). Halliday and Matthiessen give Theme the following definitions:

(1) [The theme] is as it were the peg on which the message is hung (Halliday, 1970, p. 161).

(2) The Theme is the point of departure of the message; it is the element the speaker selects for ‘grounding’ what he is going on to say (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004, p. 58).

As for the rest of the clause, it is called “Rheme.” Thus, Theme can also be interpreted as the element to present the scope of discourse in order to predicate the following constituent (Dik, 1981, p.130).

Theme/Rheme structure is divided into unmarked and marked patterns. Since the typical location of Theme is at the initial position, grammatical subject and Theme often coincide. Thus, when an element functions as both grammatical subject and Theme, the clause is said to have an unmarked Theme. By contrast, any clause with a Theme not in the initial position is said to have a marked one. Following this idea, we can know that example [1a] is presented with unmarked Theme, [1b] marked Theme.

2.2 Information System

The system of information is “a form of discourse organization” (Halliday, 1976, p.175). An information unit is not exactly correspondent to any unit in syntax, but a unit of the same status as a clause. It can be operated within less than a clause or extended to more than one. Thus, one clause may comprise more than one information unit and a single information unit can stretch to more than one clause. It is proposed that a default form of an information unit consists of a given and a new constituent and it is the interaction between what has been known and unknown or what has been predictable and unpredictable (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.89). The known/predictable are often called “given” while the unknown/unpredictable are termed “new.” Given information is “recoverable to the hearer” and new information, “non-recoverable” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p.27). Bloor and Bloor (1995) note that given information is an element to enhance the effectiveness of communication since it represents the shared and mutual knowledge as the background in a particular context. In fact, given information is not only what a hearer/reader can refer to in the previous text, but also “something that is not around at all but that the speaker wants to present as the given for rhetorical purpose” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.91). On the other hand, new information can be either based on which to be introduced or something not expected by audience. In addition, new information represents a speaker’s choice of information focus. The element with this feature of prominence, no matter in spoken or written language, is the one that the whole sentence intends to introduce or even center. In most cases, new information is recognized as the last element in an information unit. In this sense, the usual sequence of an information unit is one in which the given precedes the new (Bock & Irwin, 1980; Chafe, 1979; Daiker, Kerek, & Morenberg, 1986; Kuno, 1980; Prince, 1978; Quirk et al., 1972). This given-new pattern forms a standard order, like Theme system, also known as an

unmarked form in Information system. The following two examples illustrate unmarked and marked Information systems respectively:

[2a] Unmarked Information system:

My mom bought a blue sweater yesterday. The sweater is very beautiful.
Given New

[2b] Marked Information system:

My mom bought a blue sweater yesterday. Beautiful the sweater is.
New Given

Kopple (1986) proposes that sentences conforming to the given-new pattern can contribute to text readability, because it does not require readers to hold the new information when they wait for the given one. Daiker, Kerek and Morenberg (1986) also indicate that the given-new pattern can contribute to the continuity of thought and “carry the thought further” (p.197). This pattern, therefore, governs the word order of a sentence in context and, in turn, usually determines the subject of the sentence. For example,

[3] Michelangelo was another outstanding man of the Renaissance. He was one of the last great Renaissance artists, for by the time of his death in 1564 Italy was falling into decline. Initially he concentrated on sculpture. At Florence in 1501 he began to carve a figure of David from a huge block of marble. This was finished in 1504 when he was 29. David was shown with a sling on his shoulder, going to fight Goliath. The statue was fourteen feet high.

(Barcan, Blunden & Stories, 1972, p.163)

In [3], “a figure of David from a huge block of marble” is new information in the sentence but becomes old information in the following one, where more information is given and explained.

2.3 Syntactic Structures That Influence Thematic and Information Ordering

In the section, to unravel how Theme/Rheme and Information systems are realized by syntactic structures, the functions of it-cleft, passive voice, negative inversion, there insertion, and wh-cleft are presented. These structures are particularly discussed since they are the linguistic devices that can manifest information packaging (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005; Givón, 1993).

2.3.1 It-Cleft

It-cleft refers to the pattern initiated by “it” with a linking verb followed by a relative clause. As a marked structure, it-cleft highlights the new information by putting it before the given one, that is, after “It be...” On the other hand, the given information is presented in the relative clause in it-cleft. For instance,

[4] It was Daniel who fell in love with Mary.

[5] It is tomorrow that the winner will be announced.

In sentences [4] and [5], “Daniel” and “tomorrow” receive prominence respectively, functioning as new information. By contrast, relative clauses, “who fell in love with Mary,” and “that the winner will be announced,” are given information. In this vein,

to accentuate the new, given information is put in an embedded clause as the background.

2.3.2 *Passive Voice*

The most significant feature about passive voice is that it has the same propositional content with its active counterpart but information or Theme/Rheme is arranged differently for the post-position or omission of the agent of a clause. The idea is demonstrated in example [3], in which “the writers wish to shift to talking about the statue of David...by introducing a figure of David as new information in the Rheme and then picking it up as the Theme of subsequent clauses” (Lock, p. 234). Furthermore, the thematized “this” in the second sentence can avoid making a highly marked structure: “This he finished in 1504.”

Likewise, if the agent of a sentence is the new information, passive voice allows the agent to be put at the end of clause, for it’s the unmarked position in Information system. For example,

[6] The new law was proposed, surprisingly, by the governor himself.

[7] The monument was erected by President Roosevelt.

New information in [6] and [7] lies in the agent and it is expected that in the following sentences, writers may explain the idea why the governor wanted to propose the law and why President Roosevelt erected the monument.

2.3.3 *Inversion*

According to Dorgeloh (1997), inversion in English is a device of “emotivity and subjectivity” (p.118) and its occurrence directly comes from discourse such as the change of the topic or the focus that requires listeners’/readers’ attentions (p.116). The notion can be illustrated by the following passage:

[8] Nim’s smiling and shrieking continued for what seemed to be at least three minutes. During that time he sat down across from Stephanie. While looking back and forth at Stephanie, Wer, Joshua, and Jennie, he continued to shriek, smile, and pound the ground with joy. Only after he stopped smiling and shrieking did he go to Stephanie and hug her. That hug was also interrupted by additional shrieks. Quite a lot of noise from a normally silent chimpanzee.

(Terrace, 1979)

According to Thompson (1987), the use of negative inversion is because the author intends to show Nim’s intensive emotion to Stephanie and her family. In addition, the negative inversion also frames the sequential action of “hugging,” which is only possible “after he had calmed down enough to stop smiling and shrieking” (p. 446). As a result, because of the feature that inversion brings a constituent to the front position of a sentence, it shows how speakers/writers are affected emotionally.

2.3.4 *There Insertion*

According to Jacobs (1995), there insertion can function as given information when sentences contain new information only. For instance,

[9] A girl is in the garden.

[10] There is a girl in the garden.

In [9], the subject “a girl” is new information, which results in a marked structure. However, when there insertion is added to the very beginning of the sentence as demonstrated in [10], it allows the new information to restore to its typical position, that is, the end of a sentence. Jacobs (1995) indicates that there insertion is like the function of the phrase “once upon a time” serves in a fairy tale: it acts like given information so as to create the default pattern of given-to-new.

2.3.5 *Wh-Cleft*

The following are wh-clefts:

[11] What Jenny is thinking about is birthday presents.

[12] Where John lives is a question.

[13] Term papers are what Ken is concerned about.

[14] February is when Mandy will leave for America.

Identical with it-cleft, wh-cleft also contains two information units: old information is expressed in wh-clause while the remaining is new. Thus, we can say that examples [11] and [12] are composed in unmarked pattern, for the information is ordered from given to new. On the contrary, [13] and [14] are marked, because new information is presented in the initial position. Moreover, though it-cleft and wh-cleft are similar in their semantic function, Huddleston (1984) proposes that wh-cleft is “much lower in communicative significance” (p. 466) because it is not given “in the sense of having been mentioned or established” (p. 466), despite the fact that it is old information. Nonetheless, listeners/readers have no difficulties in locating old information in the thematic organization of the message, since it is easy to associate wh-clause with the constituents after the linking verb.

3. Methodology

In this section, a test to detect Taiwan’s college students’ perception of Theme/Rheme and Information structures is described. Firstly, the reading materials used are introduced. The sources, the syntactic structures employed, and the reasons for their inclusions are manifested. Next, the subjects’ background information and the procedure of the test administration are delineated. Finally, the approaches to quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data are detailed.

3.1 Data Collection

3.1.1 *Test Materials*

Since the research aims to explore the subjects’ awareness of Theme/Rheme and Information systems, four passages (see Appendix) that include it-cleft, passive voice, negative inversion, there insertion, and wh-cleft were selected according to the subjects’ proficiency level. These grammatical patterns were chosen because of their familiarity to the subjects and their discourse functions. That is, all of the structures have been taught in high school and can either frame the scope of discourse or influence the organization of texts with the assignment of Theme-Rheme and given-new information, as suggested by Huddleston and Pullum (2005) and Givón (1993). Except for the first passage, where two sentences were taken out, one sentence was removed in each text. The subjects were required to fill in the gap by choosing

between two grammatically correct sentences. The two sentences in each item were identical in proposition, but composed with different syntactic structures. Furthermore, the subjects were also expected to provide explanations for their selections in either Chinese or English. The explanations aimed to exam if the subjects comprehended the discourse functions of these linguistic structures and what factors informed their choices.

Question 1 and 2 were extracted from *Before Yesterday: Aspects of European History to 1789* (Barcan, Blunden & Stories, 1991), introducing Michelangelo and his work, the statue of David. Question 1 aimed to test the subjects' knowledge about the function of it-cleft while question 2 focused on their ability to choose the appropriate voice according to the context. Question 3 was an excerpt from a narrative called *Nim* (Terrace, 1979), which documented the writer's experience of teaching the chimpanzee Nim to use America Sign Language. The question required the subjects' awareness of the discourse functions of negative inversion. Question 4 was extracted from BBC Learning English, a passage about a Harvard Business School Professor, Michael Porter, proposing strategies regarding how a nation can gain competitive advantage. The item intended to draw on the subjects' understanding about the discourse role there insertion played in a text. The last question was an article by a blogger Kiemainc, suggesting ways to select a Valentine's Day present for his wife. The item was meant to examine the subjects' apprehension of wh-cleft.

3.1.2 Subjects

There were 8 male and 30 female subjects participating in the test. All of them were freshmen in a college, with the English proficiency of B1 on the CEFR scale at the time of the test.

3.1.3 Test Administration

The test was conducted in a course called Freshman English. Before the test, the researcher read the instructions on the test sheet to the subjects and explained what the subjects were required to do. The researcher also informed the subjects that the sentences in each item were grammatically correct, and they had to choose the most appropriate one according to the context. They were also notified that the test was not aimed to test their proficiency and the results would not influence their grades of the course. The subjects were given 20 minutes to finish the test.

3.2 Data Analysis

Subjects' answers were first recorded and then the inappropriate and appropriate uses of each question were calculated. Next, the reasons for their choices were further categorized. The analysis of their explanations was conducted from two distinct aspects so as to thoroughly evaluate the subjects' awareness of Theme/Rheme and Information systems. Firstly, the subjects' explanations of inappropriate items were calculated to explore the subjects' ideas with respect to the misconceptions of these syntactic structures. Secondly, the elucidations of context-appropriate items were also collected and investigated qualitatively. Their accounts were seen as a measure to inspect if the choices were made based on the subjects' knowledge of the discourse function of each linguistic structure and if there are other factors informing their choices.

4. Results and Discussion

Of all the 190 choices (38 subjects answering 5 questions) made by the subjects, there are 127 of them identical to the original sentences, which is considered more appropriate to the texts. The rate of the appropriate selections is 66.8 percent, while that of the inappropriate ones is 33.2 percent. Table 1 shows the result:

Table 1 The frequencies and percentages of appropriate and inappropriate choices

Identical/ alternative to the original	Identical to the original passage	Alternative to the original passages	Total
Frequency & percentage			
Frequency & percentage	127 (66.8%)	63 (33.2%)	190 (100%)

Among these five test items, the inappropriate use of question 5 is the highest, up to almost 35 percent. By contrast, question 1 seems to be relatively easy with the inappropriate use of 6.5 percent only. Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of each item:

Table 2 The frequencies and percentages of inappropriate choices of 5 items

Item	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Frequency & percentage						
Frequency & percentage	4 (6.3%)	13 (20.6%)	6 (9.5%)	18 (28.6%)	22 (34.9%)	63 (100%)

As shown in Table 2, the discourse function of the structure wh-cleft seems most difficult in the test, accounting for nearly 35 percent of the inappropriate choices. There are three possible reasons for the result. Firstly, the ability to choose the more appropriate sentence in the item requires the knowledge of both Theme/Rheme and Information structures. The writer changes the Theme to “a personal gift solely for her” in the last sentence by introducing “a personal one to her” as the Rheme in the preceding sentence. The step in fact enables the writer to present the Theme, “a personal gift solely for her,” as a frame to direct the scope of the rest of the sentence toward his conclusion, that is, “what she wants.” Furthermore, Information system also plays a significant part in the text. “What she wants,” as the new information in the first five sentences, was still put at the end in the last sentence of the passage. The arrangement implies the writer’s intention to highlight “what she wants” as the only thing matters to him when he chooses a Valentine’s Day present. It is the approach that the writer resorted to in order to achieve the rhetorical purpose of foregrounding “what she wants,” since, according to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), new information is where the focus falls in the sentence.

The second possible reason that contributes to the inappropriate selection in item 5 may be the lack of knowledge with respect to wh-cleft. Although the structure is taught in high school, the focus is normally on accuracy, such as the word order of

the subject and verb in wh-cleft. The functional aspects like why and when the structure should be used are seldom explained in instruction, which, in turn, can impair the subjects' ability to comprehend the text.

Thirdly, the item in the test is the only one that is put at the end of a passage, serving as the conclusion. Hence, in the phase of test development, it is expected that the subjects may find it more difficult, because of the limited clues. Nonetheless, the passage is still included in the test, since we hope that all the passages can reflect the textual functions in authentic materials. In addition, the content is related to the subjects' daily lives and appropriate to their proficiency.

The second highest error rate falls on item 4, the one with there insertion. The result is quite surprising because the structure is taught at the initial stage of English learning scenario in Taiwan and often seen as a basic syntactic structure. The error rate once again demonstrates the deficiency of the functional aspects in the learning and instructional process of the structure. In contrast, passive voice in item 2, compared with there insertion, is commonly regard as a complex structure during the acquisition process. The structure requires the subjects' knowledge of the nature of verbs, that is, transitivity, and their inflections. The item in the test particularly examines the subjects' comprehension regarding its relation to the text organization. Its complexity also reflects its rate of improper use: over one-fifth of the subjects inappropriately opt for active voice instead of its passive counterpart.

The negative inversion in item 3 accounts for nearly 10 percent of the inappropriate use in the test. As a marked structure, the rate of the item was expected to be higher. The assumption is based on the researcher's knowledge that the descriptions of the grammar in high school textbooks normally center on accuracy. Nonetheless, the circumstances where it should be employed and the rhetorical effect it may have are rarely explicitly indicated. The potential reasons for the relatively low rate of inappropriate use will be discussed later when the subjects' explanations are further explored.

It-cleft in item 1 forms the lowest group of inappropriate use, making up only 6.3 percent. The result can be attributed to the subjects' knowledge of the structure. It is the only structure in the test whose discourse function of emphasis is explicitly taught in high school textbooks. The investigation into the subjects' reasons for their choices in the next part can be a clear manifestation in this regard.

In the following section, the in-depth analysis of the subjects' inappropriate selections in each item is presented to find out factors contributing to their inappropriate choices.

4.1 Subjects' Reasons for Inappropriate Choices

4.1.1 Item 1

There are only four subjects inappropriately choosing it-cleft structure. Two of them think it-cleft should be employed for its function of emphasis. However, they do not notice that Italy is not the focus in the context, which manifests that they failed to comprehend the text. As for the remaining two subjects, one of them consider it-cleft structure clearer, while the other only indicates that it is the structure that s/he has ever learned.

Table 3 The frequencies and percentages of the reasons for inappropriate use in item 1

Reasons	Clarity	Emphasis	Others	Total
Frequency				

Frequency & percentage	1 (25%)	2 (50%)	1 (25%)	4 (100%)
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4.1.2 Item 2

Item 2 inspects subjects' perception about voice choice. As illustrated in Table 4, over 38 percent consider the use of active voice more appropriate because the subject used in this sentence should be identical to those in the previous sentences. It suggests that the subjects are aware of the concept of Theme, but fail to realize that the Theme is switched from "Michelangelo" to "David, the statute" in the later part of the passage. It may be also because they do not finish reading the passage to recognize the change of Theme. In addition, 23 percent still have the misconception that animate subjects can make the passage "vivid" and "better." It is a clear indication that these subjects do not acknowledge subject positions are contingent on text organization through the operation of Theme/Rheme and Information systems. About 15 percent view the use of active structure as the device to emphasize the person who finished the statue. Lastly, the remaining three subjects have different explanations regarding their inappropriate choices. One thinks active voice makes the text more readable, while another reasons that passive voice should be avoided, since it is rarely used in Chinese passages. The other even mistakenly indicates the use of "this" as the subject in passive voice may lead to confusion—readers may think "this" refers to "a huge block of marble" in the preceding sentence, rather than "David." It suggests L1 interference and misunderstanding of the cohesive device can inform their choices.

Table 4 The frequencies and percentages of the reasons for inappropriate use in item 2

Reasons	Human as subject	Identical to the previous subjects	Emphasis	Others	Total
Frequency					
Frequency & percentage	3 (23.1%)	5 (38.5%)	2 (15.4%)	3 (23.1%)	13 (100%)

4.1.3 Item 3

Item 3 intends to explore subjects' knowledge of the function of negative inversion. As suggested in the previous part, negative inversion here intends to show Nim's intensive emotion and the hug occurred only after he showed his excitement. In the test, as shown in Table 5, there are two reasons for subjects' improper selections: two-thirds view the main clause should be put in front of the subordinate one, for the former is the focus. The result manifests that students have the basic idea of the relationship between the main and the subordinate clauses. However, they do not realize that the order of main and subordinate clauses can be a communicative strategy that helps writers organize the text and highlight their focus. As for the other

two subjects, one mentions the inversion sentence can lead to readers' difficulty in comprehending the whole sentence and the other does not provide any explanation.

Table 5 The frequencies and percentages of the reasons for inappropriate use in item 3

Reasons \ Frequency	Main vs. subordinate clauses	Others	Total
Frequency & percentage	4 (66.7%)	2 (33.3%)	6 (100%)

4.1.4 Item 4

In the item of there insertion, as illustrated in Table 6, the overwhelming majority (77.8 %) think the choice of there insertion impairs the clarity of the sentence, making it less precise. In addition, about one-tenth are interfered by the insertion of "Porter suggested": one of the subjects considers it odd to use "Porter suggested" after there insertion. The other indicates that when "Porter suggested" follows, there insertion sounds more objective, which can threaten Porter's authority. Nevertheless, with "four factors" taking the subject position, Porter's suggestion, according to the same subject, becomes more powerful. Lastly, the rest of the 11 percent associate the direct description "Four factors, Porter suggested, help to make a nation competitive" with emphasis. The subjects' explanations clearly show that though there insertion is one of the structures learned as a novice English learner in Taiwan, its discourse function is not explicitly or implicitly taught and completely or accurately acquired.

Table 6 The frequencies and percentages of the reasons for inappropriate use in item 4

Reasons \ Frequency	Precision/Clarity	Interference of "Porter suggested"	Emphasis	Total
Frequency & percentage	14 (77.8%)	2 (11.1%)	2 (11.1%)	18 (100%)

4.1.5 Item 5

The last item focuses on wh-cleft, which, as mentioned above, has the highest rate of inappropriacy. As indicated in Table 7, almost half (47.6%) regard wh-cleft as the emphasis when it is put in the subject position. Around 15 percent have the basic idea that context is the paramount when it comes to choosing between these two structures, which results in their choice of "What she wants is a personal gift solely for her." Moreover, another 14.3 percent think that with "what she wants" taking the subject position, the writer can arouse readers' interest to find out what the present is. As for the category of others, answers like clarity and intuition are included. In fact, all these explanations show that the subjects' insufficient knowledge of the discourse functions of the structure affect their comprehension of the text. Neither do they

detect the writer’s change of Theme, nor do they realize the writer’s intention to highlight “what she wants” as the conclusion.

Table 7 The frequencies and percentages of the reasons for inappropriate use in item 5

Reasons Frequency	Emphasis	Discourse	Readers’ interest	Others	Total
Frequency & percentage	10 (47.6%)	3 (14.3%)	3 (14.3%)	5 (23.8%)	21 (100%)

The detailed analysis of the subjects’ reasons for their improper use reveals the following two findings. Firstly, some subjects acknowledge the discourse functions of some linguistic structures, such as the idea of emphasis in it-cleft and different information weighting in subordinate and main clauses. Nonetheless, some have incorrect conceptions regarding these structures. The phenomenon is especially true when certain subjects think passive voice makes the text less vivid while there insertion reduce the clarity and persuasion of a sentence. Wh-cleft is even mistakenly considered a means to emphasize. Secondly, except for those in the item of it-cleft, a large number of the subjects’ explanations suggest the function of “emphasis.” In fact, it is also the reasons extensively used in those for appropriate choices. The phenomenon is discussed in detail again in the next part when the reasons of the appropriate choices are provided.

4.2 The Subjects’ Reasons for Appropriate Choices

The subjects’ explanations for their choices of the appropriate items are varied. In addition, some of them mention more than one reason in a single item, whereas the others used only one or two words or even leave it blank. The complexity and the heterogeneity of their explanations make classifying them difficult. As a consequence, the explanations are roughly divided into two groups in terms of their relativity to the two systems. As shown in Table 8, almost 83 percent directly or indirectly refers to the two systems, while the rest do not. In the sub-section, reasons unrelated to Theme/Rheme and information status are firstly presented. Next, the explanations that are explicitly or implicitly related to the two systems are listed in order to examine their awareness of information packaging. It is believed that the discussion can shed light on if these appropriate choices are made based on the functions of the structures.

Table 8 The frequencies and percentages of reasons related/unrelated to two systems

Related/unrelated reasons Frequency	Reasons related to the two systems	Reasons unrelated to the systems	Total
Frequency & percentage	105 (82.7%)	22 (17.3%)	127 (100%)

4.2.1 *Reasons unrelated to the two systems*

The subjects' explanations in the group are some misconceptions with respect to the use of the structures. For instance,

[S23]/[S24] Long sentences should be avoided. (item 1)

[S29]/[S12] Writers should avoid using the same subject "he" in a row. (item 2 and 3)

[S34] Negative inversion can show one's advanced proficiency in English. (item 3)

[S21] "There are..." is similar to the structure in Mandarin, which makes the text easy to understand. (item 4)

The reasons clearly demonstrate that their choices are not based on the organizations of the passage. It also shows that, firstly, such misconceptions concerning the choice of structures still persist. Some subjects are convinced that complex grammatical patterns are better. Others consider the use of the same subject in consecutive sentences unacceptable. Secondly, L1 interference is still one factor that informs the subjects' choices of linguistic structures. As one of the reasons prevalent in both context-appropriate and inappropriate explanations, L1 interference is in fact both beneficial and detrimental to the acquisition. The explicit presentation of the similar or contrasting use between L1 and English may help students to acquire the discourse functions of these structures. Moreover, if we add reasons for inappropriate choices (63 of them) demonstrated in the previous section and the reasons unrelated to the two systems up, almost 45 percent of the explanations are not relevant to information packaging. It is a staggering number and a clear manifestation that more illustrations regarding discourse functions in grammar instruction are needed.

4.2.2 *Reasons related to the two systems*

As suggested in Table 8, over 80 percent of the reasons show the subjects' knowledge regarding the two systems. The following are some examples:

[S7] The previous sentence is about "Michelangelo. So the next sentence should continue talking about him first and then Italy. (item 1)

[S38] The previous sentence talks about "his time." So the following sentence should begin with the time he died. (item 1)

[S7] The preceding sentence indicates he started to carve the statue, so the following sentence should tell readers his work was finished. The arrangement seems to make the text more readable. (item 2)

[S26] The sentence with passive voice picks up what is left in the previous sentence. (item 2)

[S17] The inversion emphasizes Nim's excitement, and the following sentence also suggests Nim's continuous act of shrieking. It shows that the excitement continues. (item 3)

[S2] The previous sentences talk about Nim's smiling and shrieking. Thus, the sentence should initiate with "only after... shrieking...", which creates a sense of continuity. (item 3)

[S3] "There are" at the beginning of the sentence prepares readers for the following four suggestions. I'm also more familiar with it. (item 4)

[S33] "There are" helps unfold "four factors." Otherwise, readers may feel puzzled with "four factors" at the very beginning of the sentence. (item 4)

[S32] "There are..." creates the sense of the sentence beginning. "Four factors" to initiate it is too abrupt. (item 4)

[S21] The latter part of the preceding sentence is "a personal one." So the sentence should pick up the idea, beginning with "A personal gift," which creates a sense of continuity. (item 5)

[S36] "What she wants" as the beginning of the sentence is too abrupt, when it is put after the preceding sentence. (item 5)

These subjects' explanations explicitly point out that the flow of information should be given to new. Some of them even mention the arrangement can promote text readability and create a sense of continuity. Similarly, they also detect the syntactic structures used in a sentence are contingent on the Theme of a passage. In fact, some even directly indicate the change of Theme influences voice choice in item 2 and the choice of the subject in item 3, although they use the word "focus," rather than "Theme":

[S16] The following sentences are describing David. The focus of the sentence, as a result, should be changed to David, so "this" has to take the subject position. (item 2)

[S23] The focus has been changed to David, the statue in the next sentence. (item 2)

[S11] The hug should be put at the end of the sentence, because the focus of the next sentence changes to "the hug." (item 3)

Moreover, similar to the phenomenon observed in the reasons of the subjects' improper choices in the previous part, an overwhelming number of explanations suggest the function of "emphasis." For instance,

[S35] "This" should be the subject, because it is the emphasis. (item 2)

[S6] The preceding sentences repeatedly mention "continue," so "only after he stopped..." should be emphasized and thus put at the front. (item 3)

[S31] To emphasize the "four factors." (item 4)

[S24] "A personal gift" should be the subject, because it is emphasized. (item 5)

As manifested, some subjects' ideas of emphasis refer to the Theme, while others denote old information. It makes the researcher wonder their definition of "emphasis." Is it possible that the subjects are actually equipped with the concept of Theme/Rheme or Information systems, but simply use the same word, "emphasis," to convey their idea only because they do not know the correct term? Since the doubt cannot be clarified in the present study, the possibility cannot be excluded. Thus, explanations including the idea of "emphasis" are still classified into the group related to the two systems.

In addition, there are also a huge number of the subjects mentioning "readability." The idea sometimes is the only reason for their choices, while other times juxtaposes with reasons such as emphasis or continuity. It reveals that the subjects may have the implicit awareness that the flow of given-to-new information and the order of Theme/Rheme make texts easier to read. The subjects, in this sense, may "feel" their existence, but may not have been explicitly taught and acquired the knowledge.

The last idea that is prevalent in their explanations is "style." Several subjects suggest that, compared with spoken language, written discourse employs more passive voice and inversion. The type of reasons are also considered to be related to the awareness of the two systems, since written language, indeed, puts more emphasis on discourse organization than spoken one. It in turn requires the operation of Theme/Rheme and Information structures more often.

5. Conclusion

The present study investigates Taiwan's college students' awareness of information packaging by exploring the subjects' choices of different structures with identical propositions. The results show that (1) about one-third of the subjects' answers are inappropriate to the context of each passage and (2) almost 45 percent of the total choices are not relevant to the functions of information packaging realized by these structures. Aside from the subjects' unawareness of the two systems, it can be due to the subjects insufficient knowledge, like the manipulation of main and subordinate clauses according to speakers'/writers' intention to achieve communicative aims. It can also be attributed to such misconceptions as complex structures are better, active voice makes texts more readable and vivid, and the same subject in consecutive sentences is unacceptable. The deficient knowledge of the functions and misunderstanding of the structures also impair their comprehension of the texts. By contrast, some subjects can explicitly point out the discourse functions the structures have and the significant roles they play in the arrangement of Theme/Rheme and given/new information, whereas others show their implicit knowledge in this regard. The findings, again, manifest that both explicit and implicit knowledge about the two structures can facilitate their reading process, helping them to grasp the main ideas of the passages.

As for the other factors informing the subjects' choices of structures, there are two interesting phenomena worth discussing. Firstly, even after learning English over ten years, reaching the proficiency level of B1, students are still interfered by their L1. The situation occurs in both their appropriate and inappropriate choices. As a factor that can either facilitate or impede students' acquisition of linguistic structures, L1 interference requires more teachers' attention in grammar instruction. The explicit indication about their similarity to and difference in the use seems necessary. The second issue is the subjects' use of the word "emphasis." In both the reasons that explain their context-appropriate and inappropriate choices, the subjects extensively

use the concept to refer to the Theme/Rheme and information status. Its definition, as a result, arouses the researcher's curiosity. The question that the subjects consciously use it to denote the sense of "emphasis" or simply as a general term to connote some discourse functions remains unraveled. The two issues can be delved into in future studies so as to further provide valuable implication into students' perception regarding information packaging.

As a preliminary study examining college students' awareness of information packaging, there are two limitations. Firstly, although the inclusion of five distinct linguistic structures in the test enables the research to discuss the subjects' awareness of information packaging in a broader sense, one test item for each of the structures may not precisely reflect the students' comprehension of them. To unveil the subjects' understanding of each structure to a greater extent, future studies should employ not only more questions for every syntactic pattern but also materials extracted from diverse disciplines. Secondly, in spite of the indication of L1 interference in the study, it is still unclear the degree to which L1 can impact the subjects' syntactic choices. A control group of native speakers of English is suggested to add in the future research. The answers from the group are expected to function as the baseline to provide richer and more detailed data to help evaluate the role of L1 in information packaging. It can also help find out if certain structures are subject to L1 interference. Based on the study results, language teachers can implement instructions or tasks that can particularly address the issue.

The present research shows that grammar instruction in Taiwan still prioritizes the idea of accuracy over the appropriate use of linguistic structures. English teachers in Taiwan are suggested to be sensitive to students' knowledge of the functions of syntactic patterns. Instructors responsible for novice and intermediate level classes should incorporate necessary tasks into the course to raise students' awareness regarding the influence different structures have on discourse, despite their identical proposition. Once equipped with the concept, students can be further provided with writing practices to learn how to use appropriate patterns to compose essays that can promote effective communication. In other words, regardless of students' proficiency, the discourse functions of syntactic structures should be the first step in grammar instruction, not the other way around. After all, the encoding and decoding of messages in texts take the operation of both appropriacy and accuracy. It is the only way that makes passages truly "communicative."

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7. References

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8. Appendix

同學你好：

我們是 OOO 目前正從事英語閱讀研究。以下四個段落，是從不同的文章中所節錄出來。其中五句話，我們以不同的方式寫出來，而這兩種寫法在文法上都是正確的。請思考一下，選出你認為是最適合的答案。之後，請寫出你選擇的理由 (中英文闡述皆可，但請盡量用確切的字彙，避免籠統描述)。感謝你的配合。

A.

Michelangelo was another outstanding man of the Renaissance. He was one of the last great Renaissance artists, _____ 1 _____. Initially he concentrated on sculpture. At Florence in 1501 he began to carve a figure of David from a huge block of marble. _____ 2 _____. David was shown with a sling on his shoulder, going to fight Goliath. The statue was fourteen feet high.

_____ 1.

- (A) for by the time of his death in 1564 Italy was falling into decline.
- (B) for it was Italy that by the time of his death in 1564 was falling into decline.

理由

_____ 2.

- (A) He finished this in 1504 when he was 29.
- (B) This was finished in 1504 when he was 29.

理由

B.

Nim's smiling and shrieking continued for what seemed to be at least three minutes. During that time he sat down across from Stephanie. While looking back and forth at Stephanie, Wer, Joshua, and Jennie, he continued to shriek, smile, and pound the ground with joy. _____ 3 _____. That hug was also interrupted by additional shrieks. Quite a lot of noise from a normally silent chimpanzee.

_____ 3.

- (A) Only after he stopped smiling and shrieking did he go to Stephanie and hug her.
- (B) He went to Stephanie and hugged her only after he stopped smiling and shrieking.

理由

C.

In 'The Competitive Advantage of Nations', published in 1990, Porter moved his attention from the problems of competition in business to the issues of competing

nations. Globalisation, it seems, does not mean that everything is the same everywhere. National differences still matter. ____4____: tough domestic rivalry, country resources, country infrastructure (including the educational quality of its workforce) and the cluster phenomenon. (from BBC Learning English)

____ 4.

- (A) There are four factors, Porter suggested, that help to make a nation competitive
 - (B) Four factors, Porter suggested, help to make a nation competitive
- 理由

D.

It is important that throughout the whole year, I pay attention to what her needs are and what she wants. I find it quite easy to read between the lines, for those indicators that tell me of her wants and needs as the year rolls on. I mostly go with what she needs as opposed to what she wants. When we go out shopping I pay special attention to what she likes, looks at and wishes for. Items like furniture for the home or communal gifts will not work I learned that the hard way. I want the Valentines Day gift to be a personal one to her and definitely not an item that we both can use. (by Kiemainc)

____ 5

- (A) What she wants is a personal gift solely for her.
 - (B) A personal gift solely for her is what she wants.
- 理由