The role of background knowledge in language comprehension has been formalized as schema theory…, any text, either spoken or written, does not by itself carry meaning. Rather, according to schema theory, a text only provides directions for listeners or readers as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning from their own, previously acquired knowledge. This previously acquired knowledge is called the reader's background knowledge, and the previously acquired knowledge structures are called schemata. (Carrel and Eisterhold, 1987, p. 220).

In recent years interest in schema has again become prominent in cognitive psychology and its role in comprehension of the text has been explored and employed in the teaching of reading. Carrell (1983) divides schemata into formal schemata and content schemata. Formal schemata refers to the formal, rhetorical organizational structures of reading texts, such as the text genres, rhetorical structures; while content schemata means the content-related knowledge, which is beyond the linguistic knowledge and even involves culture-specific background knowledge. Further, Carrell's (1984 & 1987) studies show if EFL/ESL readers possess the appropriate formal schema against which to possess the discourse type of the text, and if they utilize that formal schema to organize their recall protocols, more information is retrieved from familiar content, and thus yield good comprehension.

Carrell (1985) also provides an empirical evidence that the rhetorical organization of a text interacts with the ESL reader's formal schemata (i.e. his/her background knowledge of and experience with textual organization) to affect reading comprehension. Her study manifests that teaching various aspects of text structure such as the patterns of comparison, causation, problem/solution, and collection of description does indeed enhance ESL reading comprehension.

However, since reading and writing are just like the two sides of one coin, Weissberg (1984) in his research argues "…there is evidence that the kinds of traditional rhetorical categories (such as definition, cause/effect, and comparison/

contrast) commonly presented in ESL composition textbooks do not in fact accurately describe the majority of paragraphs actually written and published in English" (p.485). Instead, Weissberg (1984) proposes an alternative set of models for teaching paragraph structure, one which is based on the given/new contract, namely, the theme-rheme patterning.

To sum up, schema theory is a theory that helps explain how texts take on meaning and significance for a reader. It has become an essential part of the overall theory of discourse because it provides a powerful insight into the problem of the "coherence" of a text. The "coherence" of a text deals with the problem "how a text takes on unity and meaning for the receivers" (Cook, 1994, p. 9). "Coherence" is reached with reference to a fixed number of shared or known schemata. Theme and Rheme and the recognition of cohesive devices are asserted here in this present study to help students build up "shared or known" formal schemata, thus facilitating their comprehension in reading texts.

1.2 Background

In tests, because there are several types of reading passages, students tend to use different strategies to deal with the problems they encounter, especially with those having gapped passages, in which some words, phrases, or even sentences are deleted. In the research conducted by Kuo (2002), the subjects express their perception of the barriers of performing cloze tests by marking the level of difficulty on the five-point scales. The results show that because there are too many local items in the cloze tests, lower-level reading abilities, including vocabulary, grammatical patterns and syntactic structures, are the major reading barriers in taking cloze tests, and most of the subjects perceive structures as their major reading difficulties.

Klietzien (1991) confirms that poor and good comprehenders tend to adopt different reading strategies as the material difficulty level increases. However, most

students go through more bottom-up process as mentioned above than top-down process such as inferencing, predicting, visualizing, using prior knowledge, and the consequences are often as the findings made by Lu (2002) concerning difficulties in reading comprehension. In her research, she has found that the examinee fails to acquire the mastery of textual features, including text organizers and coherent and cohesive devices. The mastery of textual features is a key factor in reading comprehension. In other words, they have no ideas of what textual markings are and of how the rhetorical markers are utilized effectively. The weakness results in the fact that the examinee fails to gather information across sentences and paragraphs and to follow the author's way of arranging the material to accomplish his/her purpose.

Furthermore, Lu's (2002) research has also found that the less proficient examinee demonstrates imperfect control of linguistic knowledge. This sort of deficiency almost guarantees difficulties in the reading process and test taking. Besides, the low group shows low proficiency in identifying details even if the corresponding information is clearly stated. Roughly speaking, the examinee is not proficient in utilizing rhetorical organizers effectively and thus fails to build up global comprehension beyond the sentence-level knowledge. Hence, they miss linguistic clues to facilitate reading comprehension and choosing correct answers.

This global comprehension is one of the key factors to good reading comprehension. The present study concerns how the students can be instructed through the local-level linguistic knowledge to have a command of rhetorical markings across the text. As Robinett puts it, "students must learn to follow the general rhetorical principles typical of English composition, which include the logical organization of sentences within a paragraph, the linking of sentences within paragraphs, and the organization of whole composition" (Robinett, 1978, p. 233).

A large body of literature has argued that prior knowledge of text-related

information strongly affects reading comprehension. Researchers such as Carrell (1988) support the observation that some students are short of sufficient background knowledge and that accumulating background knowledge helps to improve comprehension and learning from text; as a result, the lack of background knowledge might give rise to their reading problems. Therefore, students should be taught what the elements of a reading text are and how they are organized. And one essential element of being a text is coherence, which can be realized through the use of cohesive devices. Researchers such as Geva (1992), Wang (1998), Kuo (2002), Lu (2002) and Chen (2003) emphasize the instruction of cohesive devices. Nuttall (1996) suggests explicit teaching of the five types of cohesive devices identified by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Besides, many researchers suggest that the appropriate discourse structure should be taught to L2 learners so as to develop their organizational ability (Chen, 1992; Mohan & Lo, 1985). Some research has been conducted on instructing topical structure analysis as a revising strategy and the effects have been proved positive (Witt, 1983; Connor & Farmer, 1990).

As for teaching the text organization to Chinese EFL learners, Mo (1991) recommends that the teaching of the extended topic chain facilitates comprehending the text development for Chinese students. Besides, after exploring the concept of discourse competence in the light of academic journal articles written by native and non-native writers of English and native-language writers of Finnish, Mauranen (1996) advocates the instruction of one of the text-organizing language devices — theme-rheme progression, and it is convinced that that foreign-language teaching might generally profit from taking text level more seriously into account. Shen (2004) in her research confirms that through instruction of topical development, coherence in high school students' English compositions can be improved.

Nevertheless, so far in high schools in Taiwan, little attention has been paid to

the explicit teaching of text structure, the training on text organization, in which the selection and ordering of themes (topics) have much to do with local and global coherence. As observed by Mauranen (1996), the specific place allocated to textual competence is small and limited in that the teaching of textual competence is depicted as showing students how to order information in a paragraph in terms of topic sentences, supporting sentences, and conclusions, while conventions for organizing discourse are not taught formally at all.

1.3 Motivation and Purpose

As mentioned above, there are several test types of reading passages, and the reconstruction of textual organization for incomplete reading passages, such as Integrative Test (綜合測驗), Semantic Choice (文意選填), and Discourse Structure (篇章結構) seems to pose great difficulty for the students taking College Entrance Exam. Although these test items are under different item subtitles and aimed at testing different linguistic abilities (such as vocabulary, grammar, semantics or sentence structure), these reading passages do share the same characteristic: they all have gaps. Since these "gapped" problems are attributed to students' deficient knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, discourse, or sentence structure, these different types of test problems actually can be reduced as reading comprehension problem. Hence, how to bridge these gaps to comprehend the reading passage involves understanding the text structure. Reading is exactly the reconstruction of the text, as Coady mentions, "…orthographic, syntactic, and semantic clues in the material are used in the reconstruction of the text" (Coady, 1979, p. 6). Students should be enlightened in order to familiarize themselves with these "clues" in their reading process.

Since readers try to get information through their reading process, a text may be viewed as a flow of information, and a written text is constructed so as to proceed from given to new information. Thus, from the perspective of information

communication, a sentence can be divided into two elements, theme and rheme (topic and comment). In the systemic-linguistic tradition, theme and rheme together organize the sentence and are associated with the given/new contract. Daneš, one of Prague School linguists, is convinced that the choice and distribution of theme for every utterance are not random but patterned. As he notices that the inquiry into the thematic organization of the text is closely connected with the investigation of the so-called "text coherence" or "text connexity", his basic assumption is that "text connexity is represented, *inter alia*, by thematic progression (TP)" (Daneš, 1974, pp. 113-114). As explained in the following:

> By this term (TP) we mean the choice and ordering of utterance themes, their mutual concatenation and hierarchy, as well as their relationship to the hyperthemes of the superior text units (such as the paragraph, chapter,…), to the whole text, and to the situation. Thematic progression might be viewed as the skeleton of the plot. (Daneš, 1974, p.114).

Through thematic progression, information may be gathered across sentences. Thematic progression is actually the application of this present study as a formal schema to analyze data. This present study analyzes the reading texts to explore how English language is used in the text development. By analyzing the reading texts, following research questions will be answered:

(1) To what extent thematic progression is displayed in EFL textbooks?

(2) How are the explicit cohesive devices used in EFL textbooks?

(3) To what extent can this approach be applied in test-taking?

1.4 Significance of the Study

Meyer's (1985) research indicates that the reader's knowledge of understanding how a passage is structured contributes to their reading comprehension. The readers who are able to identify top-level structure as well as paragraph-level relationships of a passage have been found to be better able to understand the passage

than are those readers who remember only a collection of details. It has been pointed out that text structure refers to the author's progression from given to new information, and included in the structure is the use of certain linguistic cues that provide the reader with information about what the author expects the reader to decode, but concerning this aspect of structure comprehension, it has remained relatively unexplored (Demel, 1990). Thus, this study assumes that through the analysis of texts, students will have a better understanding of how sentences are structured into paragraphs and then into a text by using rhetorical organizers, or textual markers. If students are aware of the way the reading text is organized, they may transfer the knowledge while taking tests in the same way, as Cohen (1988) suggests that the exploration and analysis of thematic progression will help track the semantic development, and thus help activate efficient reading.