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## **Intercultural variation in academic discourse: Theme zones and the build-up of coherence in research articles**

Irena Hůlková\*

Masaryk University, Czech Republic

Olga Dontcheva-Navratilova

Masaryk University, Czech Republic

Renata Jančaříková

Masaryk University, Czech Republic

Josef Schmied

Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the form and function of the initial part of a sentence, the “Theme zone” (Hannay, 1994; Fetzer, 2008), in the genre of research articles, with a threefold purpose. First, it deals with a comparative analysis of Theme zone patterns (i.e. employment of simple and multiple Themes – the latter being several different configurations of topical, interpersonal and textual Themes) in a corpus of research articles written by English authors and Czech EAL writers. The aim is to determine to what extent these writers differ in thematization and trace possible reasons for the differences. Second, the study offers an intercultural comparison of the realizations of topical, interpersonal and textual Themes, and finally, it looks into thematic progression in two excerpts from the corpus and how the Theme zone contributes to the construal of textual, interpersonal and topical coherence. In all three parts, intercultural variation can be observed, be it Czech authors’ preference for the [textual Theme] [topical Theme] configuration, their more frequent use of exclusive *we* and abstract rhetors in topical Themes and higher employment of textual Themes in the Theme zone, or their inclination to build coherence on a local rather than a more global level.

### **Key words**

Theme zone, thematization, thematic progression, topical/textual/interpersonal Theme, intercultural variation, research article, coherence

### **1. Introduction**

Scientific knowledge, if it is to be the driving force of development and innovation as well as a means of understanding the world around us, has to be disseminated and further communicated efficiently with respect to intended audiences, or more specifically, with regards to the conventions of a particular academic discourse community. For academics, communication of scientific knowledge including its

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\* Address for correspondence: Irena Hůlková, Faculty of Education, Masaryk University, Poříčí 9, 603 00 Brno, Czech Republic. E-mail: hulkova@ped.muni.cz

publication in renowned academic journals is crucial on both a professional and personal level. In order to achieve recognition within their community (i.e. academia), to contribute to the development of debate in their field and consequently increase the impact of their scientific work, researchers have to share their findings on as large a scale as possible. Publishing in English, the lingua franca of academia, has therefore become a necessity for researchers across the sciences in the last few decades regardless of their mother tongue, with English a second language for many, if not a majority of them.

In accordance with the view that language is a social practice and is primarily used for communication, any language production is to be seen as purposeful and occurring in a particular social and cultural context. With regards to the domain of academic discourse, factors such as genre and the discourse community which the speaker is part of and which he or she addresses play a key role in determining the character of discourse, the strategies employed by the speaker and the overall success of communication (Swales, 1990). Within academia both spoken and written genres are represented, although the written ones, mainly research articles published in academic journals, remain the principal and crucial form of sharing one's research results and claiming credit within the academic community. It is worth remembering that a researcher's background, expertise and experience are all assumed to play a role in his or her academic (here written) production. For non-native speakers, writing a research article in English may involve a larger amount of rewriting and editing than for native speakers; also, a lack of experience (or confidence, or both) may result, for example, in minimal or almost invisible authorial presence manifested in the text and preference for other linguistic means. This raises a number of questions concerning possible influence of L1 and transfer from L1 to L2 (i.e. English) within areas such as information processing, text organization, expression and interpretation of meaning, and the range of (preferred) rhetorical strategies. These issues necessarily result in the crucial question of what is to be considered the "norm" and who is to determine the "norm" being posed – a question easy to formulate but much more difficult, if not impossible, to answer. Since written production heavily relies on and is rooted in the standard variety of a language, one might assume that it is native-speaker usage that non-native authors should aim for. Also, the gatekeeping role of journal editors, traditionally native speakers, needs to be taken into account. On the other hand, language is not a rigid or static system – it is a living organism prone to change, and its users inevitably shape and change it by using it more "creatively" than previously, both in written and spoken form. As Mauranen (2012) points out, even written language is not immune to change, although it is considered more stable than spoken language, and with the arrival and rapid development of new forms of sharing and publishing research results, mainly online ones, academic written production is gradually becoming more flexible than traditionally expected (*ibid.*).

The above-mentioned factors and the increasing importance of English as a lingua franca have led in the last two decades to an increasing amount of research into written academic production in English, mainly research articles as the most prominent academic genre, the focus ranging from general ELF issues to very specific areas of language use explored both in native speaker and non-native speaker corpora. Corpus linguistics, allowing exploration of real language use, has been on the increase in the last two decades, but it is essential to point out that the aim of corpora studies should not be to determine what is "right" and what is "wrong" but rather to explore real language use, reveal mutual influences (within comparative studies) and demonstrate the diversity of English as a language used internationally on a highly global scale. Some scholars even admit the possible influence on language change by non-native speakers of English, while others will strongly disapprove of this contention (Mauranen, 2012).

The range of features explored within academic discourse is almost endless, and it should be noted that in the last two decades an increasing number of scholars and researchers have been turning their interest to how content is communicated, i.e. employment of various communication strategies, information processing and information structuring in academic texts. Among the highly explored phenomena there are, for example, various rhetorical and dialogic devices, interaction in academic writing (e.g. Thompson, 2001; Hyland, 2004;), manifestation of authorial presence (Hyland, 2002), citation practices (e.g. Hyland, 1999; Thompson and Tribble, 2001; Harwood, 2009) or cross-cultural differences traced in non-native speaker language compared to the Anglophone tradition (e.g. Zapletalová, 2009; Mur-Dueñas, 2011; Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2015; Povolná, 2015; Schmied, 2015).

In written discourse, where negotiation of meaning between the writer and the audience does not take place synchronously, text organization, clear expression of mutual relations and a wide range of rhetorical strategies largely contribute to efficient and successful communication, as these, among

others, assist the reader in understanding and interpreting the text, i.e. they help the reader to derive coherence from the text. The construal of discourse coherence, defined as the interpretative perception of continuity and purposefulness in discourse created in the mind of the reader (Bublitz, 1999; Dontcheva-Navratilova and Povolná, 2009; Schmied, 2009), is an essential aspect of professional academic writing, which may influence the editors' decision to accept or reject a research article for publication.

It follows from the above-mentioned that meaning interpretation in written texts as well as written production itself are both largely aided by understanding how discourse is organized and how cohesion and coherence are achieved in text. In this regard, the initial position of a clause, the "Theme" (a term used in systemic functional grammar, also labelled as "Theme zone", Hannay, 1994; Fetzer, 2008) plays a crucial role as it allows a range of realizations to express experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings. In correspondence with the Hallidayan metafunctions (experiential, textual and interpersonal, Halliday, 1994) the three types of Theme are labelled accordingly as "topical", "textual" and "interpersonal" (Eggins, 2004). Research into Theme choices, their range as well as mutual combinations of different types of Theme (i.e. "multiple Themes") may thus provide a valuable insight into what communication strategies are employed or even preferred by experienced writers, by native vs non-native users, or by learners and novice writers. The present study explores thematic choices and thematic variation in research articles written by experienced native English speakers and Czech scholars writing in English. Adopting the systemic functional approach, the analysis focuses primarily on 1) the topical, interpersonal and textual Themes and their realizations, and 2) Theme patterning (i.e. simple and multiple Themes) in both corpora in order to establish preferred patterns and identify similarities and differences, the latter possibly (but not necessarily) being determined culturally.

## **2. The register of academic prose and the genre of research articles**

In general, it can be stated that registers are usually associated with particular situations of use, whereas genres are primarily connected with various communicative and social purposes (Martin, 1985; Couture, 1986; Bhatia, 1993; Johns, 1997; Swales, 1990; 2004). This concept is also adhered to by Matthiessen, et al., who state that "register analysis is metafunctionally organised into field, tenor and mode perspectives whereas genre analysis is not" (2010, p. 22). Hyland points out that one of the key dimensions of genre analysis is that "it can help show how language choices reflect the different purposes of writers, the different assumptions they make about their audiences, and the different kinds of interactions they create with their readers" (2005, pp. 88-89), which means that genres are looked upon as a set of communicative events that are used by particular discourse communities the members of which have broad communicative purposes in common (Hyland and Salager-Meyer, 2008, p. 307).

With reference to the register of academic prose, Duszak (1994) points out that "academic writing is not a homogeneous phenomenon, and more insights are needed into what makes a given style appropriate and functional in a given discoursal environment" (p. 292). Despite the fact that quite a few years have passed since this proposition was put forward and in-depth research has been carried out into this area, there are still many linguists who agree that academic prose remains a very general or rather diverse register. Hence, it is not always feasible to delimit and specify all situational characteristics associated with it. Its diversity is caused by the substantial number of genres which the general register of academic prose comprises, and it is more than obvious that not all can be in agreement when it comes to their situational characteristics. Yet, they all share one primary communicative purpose, and that is to provide information regarding a particular scientific subject matter in a cogent and exact manner, and in a standard way (Knittlová, 1990; Grundy, 2013; Biber and Conrad, 2019).

In terms of the genre of research articles, which can be regarded to be "the central genre of knowledge production" (Ruiying and Allison, 2003, p. 365) and "the lifeblood of the academy" (Hyland, 2004, p. 1), its major goal is to convey information and to contribute new knowledge and original research results to a particular academic discipline and hence gain the author recognition among the wider research community. It is therefore crucial that a research article be published in one of the high-index international journals and hence made available to other specialists in the field, as success in academia involves the acceptance of new claims as ratified knowledge by the disciplinary discourse community (Hyland, 1998, p. 25) and the integration of published research into the particular field's reference literature (Fløttum, et al., 2006).

Since register and genre conventions vary not only across disciplines but also across linguistic

backgrounds (cf. Vassileva, 1998; 2001; Fløttum, et al., 2006; Yakhontova, 2006; Mur-Dueñas, 2007; Povolná, 2012; Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2015), it is essential to explore whether non-Anglophone writers adopt the dominant Anglophone norms and conventions in academic discourse and to what extent they preserve some rhetorical and stylistic features of their original academic discourse traditions. This paper undertakes to contribute to this strand of intercultural research by examining the patterning of Themes and their realizations in English-medium research articles by Anglophone and Czech scholars.

### 3. Theme zones: Definitions and boundaries

When looking into the structural configurations by means of which a clause is organized as a meaningful message, we can see that one key concept is used, that of Theme, with an arrangement of the clause into the bipolar configuration of Theme and Rheme. In systemic functional grammar, every clause is based on a Theme-Rheme structure, in which Theme is defined as the initial position of a clause or “point of departure for the message” (Eggins, 2004, p. 296), whereas the rest of the clause is called Rheme and is described as “new information about the point of departure” (ibid.) (cf. the dichotomy of Theme-Rheme as described by Firbas (1992) in the theory of FSP; Firbas does not confine the term Theme to clause/sentence initial elements but associates it with a relatively small contribution to the development of communication – the lowest degree of communicative dynamism – regardless of its position in the clause/sentence). Theme (Halliday, 1994) is of crucial significance to the construction of discourse coherence and is often perceived as a contextualization cue (Gumperz, 1977).

In recent years, “multiple Themes” as “a complex framework for the interpretation of what follows in the rest of the sentence” (Hannay, 2007, p. 258) have attracted the interest of some linguists; however, not much research has been conducted into the occurrence of Theme zones (Hannay, 1994; Fetzer, 2008) in the field of academic discourse and the genre of research articles, which would at the same time offer an intercultural perspective (i.e. our comparison of English and Czech EAL scholars).

As Fetzer (2008) puts it, “Theme is distinguished and delimited from rheme by the necessary and sufficient condition of being the first element in the clause expressing ideational meaning” (p. 1544), and its discursive function lies in its ability to realize anaphoric reference by expressing “connectedness between what has just been said or written” and at the same time cataphoric reference by expressing relation to what is going to be said or written (ibid.). However, very often a Theme zone does not include a single ideational – also called experiential (Halliday, 1994) or topical (Eggins, 2004; Fetzer, 2008) – Theme, but also other metafunctions such as textual and interpersonal Themes (ibid.; Hannay, 2007). An area of research emerging from discourse studies into multiple Themes attempts to cover not only the original Hallidayan sequence-based definition of pre-topical textual and interpersonal Themes, but also their possible occurrence in the post-topical configuration (e.g. [*However*] [*this*][*I believe*] *is quite obvious.*, where we can observe the following arrangement: [textual Theme] [topical Theme] [interpersonal Theme]) (Fetzer, 2008).

The goal of the present study is therefore to investigate intercultural variation in research articles written by English native speakers and Czech scholars using English as an Additional Language (EAL) with respect to (1) Theme patterning, that is, what types of Themes are packed into the initial position (Theme zone), (2) the realizations of topical, interpersonal and textual Themes, and (3) how the Theme zone contributes to the construal of textual, interpersonal and topical coherence.

#### 3.1 Topical, textual and interpersonal Themes

Thompson’s comparison of the three Themes to the beginning of the stories told in an old radio programme entitled “Listen with Mother” can be used as an apt lead-in to this section (2014, p. 163). He quotes the sequence of the three sentences “*Are you sitting comfortably? Then I’ll begin. Once upon a time...*” and points out that “on a small scale, Themes with more than one element can be seen as performing the same function” (ibid.). He also adds that Theme represents a kind of “structural slot” where “fitting-in work” is done, and further explains that whereas textual and interpersonal Themes indicate *how* the fitting-in is going to work, the experiential (topical) Theme signals *what* is going to be fitted in (ibid.).

The aforementioned suggests that Theme always comprises an element that plays a role in transitivity: a participant, process or circumstance (Thompson, 2014, p. 163). Whereas Halliday and Matthiessen (2004; 2014), Eggins (2004) and Fetzer (2008) all adhere to the term “topical Theme” and

some authors (e.g. Givón, 1995 and Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2011) talk about “topical coherence” in this respect, Hannay (2007) and Thompson (2014) keep to the label “experiential Theme”. Leech (1983), Halliday (1971; 1978; 1989; 1994) and Hyland (2004; 2005) talk about the “ideational” language function. Dontcheva-Navratilova aptly sums up various headings used to deal with coherence on the ideational plane of discourse, such as “semantic”, “propositional”, “topical”, “conceptual”, “referential” and “logical” (2011, p. 20). In the present study, we have decided to employ the label “topical Theme”, abbreviated to “TT”.

In terms of “textual Themes”, the label suggests that these are “textual” in function, which means that elements of this kind are brought in when the text itself needs to be organized and coherently related to the world and its readers (Vande Kopple, 1985; Hyland, 2005). Lyons, for instance, calls this function “text reflexivity”, because he views it as “the capacity of natural language to refer to or describe itself” (1977, p. 5), while pointing out that parts of a text can help organize the discourse in a lucid way, thus making the message clear to understand (ibid.). Eggins fittingly adds that textual elements are the ones that do not have any interpersonal or experiential/topical function; however, they fulfil a crucial cohesive role by showing a relation between a clause and its context (2004, p. 305).

“Interpersonal Theme” is then attached to the interpersonal metafunction, with the label suggesting that it is both interactive and personal; it is “language as action” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 30). It is a language means that the author uses to encode interaction and engage with his/her readers, to convey his/her attitudes to the text, feelings as well as evaluations (Hyland, 2005, p. 26). As Fetzer simply states, interpersonal Theme expresses modal meaning (2008, p. 1546).

The realizations of the three Themes introduced above along with the examples representing an intercultural comparison of their use will be expanded upon in the analytical part of this paper (i.e. Section 6 below).

#### 4. Data and method

The contrastive analysis into Theme patterning and Theme realizations was carried out on a specialized corpus of English-medium research articles written by native speakers of English and by Czech EAL authors in the period 2010-2018. The corpus used in this study is rather small, which imposes some limitations on the generalizability of the results; nevertheless, small specialized corpora are regarded as very useful for comparative studies of academic discourse as they “allow for more top-down, qualitative, contextually-informed analyses than those carried out using general corpora” (Flowerdew, 2004, p. 18). The corpus comprises 24 research articles in the fields of linguistics, literature and ELT methodology: 12 articles by Anglophone authors (four for each discipline) and 12 articles by Czech authors (also four for each discipline). The Anglophone scholars’ articles were published in highly influential academic journals, namely *Discourse & Communication* and *Journal of Pragmatics* in the field of linguistics, *European Journal of American Studies* and *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* in the field of literature, and *Language Teaching Research* and *Language and Education* in the field of ELT methodology. The research articles of the Czech EAL scholars were published in local journals, namely *Discourse and Interaction* and *Linguistica Pragmensia* in the field of linguistics, *Prague Journal of English Studies* and *Ostrava Journal of English Philology* in the field of literature, and *Orbis Scholae* and *E-Pedagogium* in the field of ELT methodology. Since only the linguistic journals mentioned above are indexed by SCOPUS, it is likely that apart from the linguacultural background of the authors, the context of publication and different audiences are other factors potentially affecting variation in Theme patterning and Theme realizations.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since ELT methodology research in the Czech Republic is concerned primarily with the situation in Czech schools, a large amount of relevant research is published in Czech. The range of Czech journals in this field publishing the work of Czech scholars in English is therefore rather scarce (e.g. some journals are published in Czech with one regular or special volume in English). Also, scholars writing in English are naturally encouraged to publish preferably in foreign journals. Still, although not indexed by Scopus, the ELT Methodology journals used in the present study are published by renowned Czech universities with a long tradition and as such reflect the range and quality of research carried out by Czech academics in the field. The same applies to the journals representing four literary research articles (i.e. *Prague Journal of English studies* and *Ostrava Journal of English Philology*), which follow a strict selection policy, are double blind peer-reviewed and open to scholars not only from the Czech Republic but also from abroad.

Table 1 summarizes the corpus composition and size in terms of word-count. In agreement with the common procedure in contrastive corpus-based research, the difference in word-count between the Anglophone and Czech sub-corpora was neutralized by normalization to occurrences per 10,000 words.

Table 1. Corpus composition and size

Corpus component	Linguistics		Literature		ELT methodology		Total	
	RAs	word-count	RAs	word-count	RAs	word-count	RAs	word-count
<b>ENG</b>	4	21,000	4	28,000	4	26,000	12	75,000
<b>CZENG</b>	4	14,000	4	19,000	4	17,000	12	50,000
<b>Total</b>	8	35,000	8	47,000	8	43,000	24	125,000

The corpus was built and compiled using the software *SketchEngine* (Kilgarriff, et al., 2004), which automatically tags and lemmatizes the texts in the corpus. The *SketchEngine* corpus tool was also used for searching for the Theme realizations in the corpus, while the analyses of Theme patterning and the contextualized analysis of coherence were carried out manually. Prior to the analysis, the corpora were cleaned to eliminate quotes, examples, tables and reference lists, in order to restrict the analysis to the mainstream text produced by the authors of the research articles.

The analysis of Theme patterns was carried out on four selected passages from each article; these included the complete introduction and conclusion sections, and extracts representing the literature review and the analysis and discussion moves of the research articles; the word-count of the passages selected from each article was about 2,000 words of continuous text. The analysis of Theme realizations was carried out on the whole corpus, taking into account occurrences of the target items in the Theme zone only.

The Theme zone may display several Theme configurations reflecting whether the Theme patterning is (i) simple or multiple and (ii) marked or unmarked (Eggins, 2004; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004; Thompson, 2014). While there is obviously only one possible pattern of a simple Theme, i.e. the topical Theme, multiple Themes can display several configurations. Thus two-component multiple Themes may be realized by the unmarked configurations [textual Theme] followed by [topical Theme], or [interpersonal Theme] followed by [topical Theme]; the marked patterns comprise configurations with post-topical thematic elements, i.e. [topical Theme] followed by [textual Theme] and [topical Theme] followed by [interpersonal Theme] (cf. Hannay, 2007; Fetzer, 2008). Finally, the three-component Theme patterns include the unmarked configuration consisting of [textual Theme] followed by [interpersonal] and [topical Theme] and marked configuration made up of various arrangements of the [interpersonal], [textual] and [topical Theme].

The taxonomy of Theme patterns used in this analysis comprises the following seven sequential configurations:

- 1) [topical Theme] = TT
- 2) [textual Theme] [topical Theme] = TxT/TT
- 3) [interpersonal Theme] [topical Theme] = IT/TT
- 4) [topical Theme] [textual Theme] = TT/TxT
- 5) [topical Theme] [interpersonal Theme] = TT/IT
- 6) [textual Theme] [interpersonal Theme] [topical Theme] = TxT/IT/TT
- 7) [interpersonal Theme] [textual Theme] [topical Theme] = IT/TxT/TT
- 8) [textual Theme] [topical Theme] [interpersonal Theme] = TxT/TT/IT
- 9) [interpersonal Theme] [topical Theme] [textual Theme] = IT/TT/TxT

For the purposes of this study a discourse unit is defined as the clause; in clause complexes, only the paratactic clauses of the highest syntactic rank are considered, i.e. clauses related hypotactically to a higher ranked clause are regarded as clause constituents and are not subjected to thematic analysis. A corpus-driven approach was used for the identification of the realizations of textual, interpersonal and topical Themes in the corpus. After word lists for the two sub-corpora were generated by the *SketchEngine* tool, the potential Themes were identified and their frequency of occurrence in the corpora was counted. As to the delimitation of Theme in thematic equatives, predicated Theme, thematic comments and grammatical metaphor, Thompson's (2014) approach was applied, that is, the whole of the first clausal element is regarded as Theme; this is in contrast to Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004)

and Fetzer's (2008) approach, according to which only the grammatical subject is seen as thematic. Similarly, in existential structures, the Theme is regarded as comprising the existential 'there', which lacks an experiential meaning component, and the verb 'be', which conveys an experiential process.

The analysis of coherence is based on the assumption that the construal and perception of coherence result from an interplay of ideational, interactional and textual meanings in discourse. Theme zones contribute to the build-up of coherence as the information packed in them signals "continuation or discontinuation of the flow of discourse regarding topic, force or attitude" (Fetzer, 2008), that is, topical Themes indicate topic (dis)continuity, interpersonal Themes create attitude continuity, and textual Themes function as "discourse glue" indicating overtly discourse relations. Topic continuity may be realized by several types of thematic progression (Daneš, 1974) – linear (a rhematic element becomes the Theme of the subsequent sentence), with a continuous Theme (the same Theme occurs in a sequence of sentences) and with a derived Theme (a sequence of Themes may be regarded as specification of a more general notion, usually on the basis of hyponymy relations). The role of the thematic zone in the construal of coherence will be illustrated through a detailed qualitative analysis of selected extracts from the corpus.

## 5. Contrastive analysis of thematization in Anglophone and Czech research articles

### 5.1 Theme patterns in Anglophone and Czech sub-corpora (ENG vs CZENG)

As follows from the above-mentioned, we aspire to illustrate and support the view that thematization and thematic progression rank among major aspects through which discourse coherence and message interpretation are achieved in the first place, since the elements placed in the Theme position help the reader orientate himself/herself in the text (and the whole discourse), enable the message to unfold smoothly and realize the writer's goals (Hawes and Thomas, 2012). Thematization is equally important from the writer's point of view in encoding and communicating one's own ideas and research findings in the context of existing research as well as commenting on their relevance and importance, which also includes attitude and stance expression important for identifying possible gaps in research, other possible approaches and strands of research, research limitations and others.

With regard to the aims of the present study, i.e. comparison of thematization in English-medium research articles by English native speaker writers and by Czech EAL authors, the first stage of the analysis consists in determining the range and proportion of Theme patterns employed by experienced Anglophone and Czech scholars, which is expected to indicate to what extent Czech writers adhere to or differ from Anglophone academic conventions and form the basis for a detailed analysis of Theme realizations (see Section 5.2) as well as trace and understand the differences in thematic progression (see Section 5.3) in Czech and English texts.

As has been explained in the previous sections, a Theme pattern is either simple or multiple. Apart from ideational (experiential) meaning realized by a simple Theme (i.e. topical Theme), other meanings (textual and interpersonal) may enter the Theme zone, resulting in a multiple Theme. Multiple Themes thus always involve a topical Theme accompanied either by textual or/and interpersonal Themes in several different two- or three-component configurations, the focus of the present study being the nine main patterns defined in Section 4 above.

Simple vs multiple Themes considered, the overall results of Theme pattern analysis in the two sub-corpora summarized in Table 2 below show a strong preference for simple Themes in both the ENG and CZENG corpora (69.0% vs 66.6% respectively) over multiple Themes (31.0% vs 33.4% respectively). Within multiple Theme patterns, two-component ones constitute the majority of multiple Themes in both corpora (30.1% and 32.4% in ENG and CZENG corpora respectively) with three-component configurations representing only 0.9% vs 1.0%.

*Table 2. Simple vs multiple themes in ENG and CZENG sub-corpora*

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**Multiple Themes**

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	Simple Themes	Two-component	Three-component
ENG	69.0%	30.1%	0.9%
CZENG	66.6%	32.4%	1.0%

The prevalence of simple Theme (see Examples 1 and 2) in both corpora is unsurprising as the topical Theme (both phrasal and clausal, and not necessarily the grammatical subject) is always present and in itself it may be absolutely sufficient for the message flow and for establishing and maintaining cohesion and coherence. Topical Theme realizations, of course, involve a wide range of options with a strong potential for message communication and interpretation of the whole discourse, e.g. personal pronouns vs impersonal rhetors, or elements other than the subject (such as adjuncts functioning as a topical Theme, see Examples 3 and 4) which may also help to focus the message and convey another aspect of meaning than the subject itself.

- (1) [**Language competence**] is the ability to use means of individual language plans (morphological, syntactic, lexical and others) towards effective communication and with respect to communication objective. (CZENG)
- (2) [**This form of fictionalized history**] proved enduringly popular with readers, even as it earned her the disdain of academicians such as Nicholas Boileau. (ENG)
- (3) [**In this introductory section**], I start by clarifying the distinction between first and second order concepts of im/politeness, ... (ENG)
- (4) [**As the research sample was of limited size**], only certain tendencies were discovered that must be confirmed in further research. (CZENG)

Multiple Themes, mainly the two-component ones, also constitute a relatively high proportion of Themes identified in both corpora (30.1 and 32.4% in the ENG and CZENG corpora respectively), which indicates they deserve to be seen as a natural and necessary component of academic style. It is mainly their diversity that may help uncover differences and similarities between writers of different backgrounds, here English and Czech; therefore, a closer look into Theme realisations is the next stage of the present analysis (see Section 5.2).

The overall results presented in Table 3 show that the most frequent two-component pattern in both corpora is the TxT/TT pattern (see Examples 5 and 6 below), although the proportion in the CZENG corpus is slightly higher than in the ENG one (279 vs 181 tokens, i.e. 28% vs 22.3% of all the Theme patterns identified). This finding is in accordance with Fetzer's (2008) results concerning the occurrence of this pattern in media language, namely political interviews and newspaper editorials, where this pattern was also the most frequent one in her data.

Table 3. Theme patterns in ENG and CZENG sub-corpora (raw numbers)

	Disc. units	Simple Theme	Two-component Theme patterns				Three-component Theme patterns			
			TT	TxT/TT	IT/TT	TT/TxT	TT/IT/TT	IT/TxT/TT	TxT/TT/IT	IT/TT/TxT
ENG	811	560	181	37	22	4	4	1	1	1
CZENG	995	663	279	29	11	3	8	1	1	0

- (5) In this study, nationalistic and anti/immigrant ideologies permeated public posting forums. [**Furthermore**], [**group-based consciousness**] legitimized the process as people agreed, supported, or encouraged others who applied demeaning language to immigrant groups. (ENG)



- (6) As the research sample was of limited size, only certain tendencies were discovered that must be confirmed in further research. [*However*], [*the analysis*] showed that women and men do employ different linguistic means to minimize FTAs, in this case represented by the sensitive topic of weight. (CZENG)

Textual Themes typically involve expressions of enumeration and addition (e.g. *firstly*, *secondly*, *moreover*), contrast (*however*, *nevertheless*) or cause and reason (*thus*, *therefore*) which are easily identifiable as devices contributing to better text organization. Their slight overuse by Czech writers, although experienced ones, may be attributed to the fact that non-native writers writing in English realize that not only content but also clarity, a relatively high language level, a high level of text organization and overall cohesion and coherence are factors that influence and determine acceptance of a research article by journal editors and also acceptance of their research within their research community.

The second most frequent two-component pattern identified in both corpora, although in frequency not comparable to the TxT/TT pattern, is the IT/TT pattern, employed slightly more frequently by native speakers than Czech authors (37 vs 29 tokens, i.e. 4.6% vs 2.9%). Interpersonal Themes include, for example, stance adverbials (boosters and hedges) and attitude adverbials, and the analysis results seem to indicate that these may be more natural to native speakers (see Examples 7 and 8). We may only speculate about the reasons, which may be ample, for example, a larger repertoire of these expressions, more experience of their use in natural contexts and mainly naturally acquired knowledge of English information structure through exposure to the language (Hawes, 2015), or simply native speakers' greater confidence in expressing emphasis as well as doubt. EAL writers' production, on the other hand, may be influenced by a lack of experience, lower level of knowledge of English information structure (which needs to be learned and practised) and/or a lack of confidence in expressing their stance towards the presented content by Czech authors who despite their education and expertise are often EAL users (hence the lower occurrence of interpersonal Themes in the CZENG corpus than in the ENG one).

- (7) However, while Smallwood and Rediker understandably negate the methodology and discourse of "accounting", we should also attend to the manner in which exploiting this discourse has historically provided an effective means of resistance and subversion. [*Indeed*], [*the figuring and disfiguring rhetoric of the account*] was so pervasive in the discourse of slavery that it was necessary for the abolitionist movement itself to incorporate the language of business and bookkeeping. (ENG)
- (8) The garden is thus neither the center of the world as the garden of Eden, nor the ethical pattern showing the "ideal" to be imitated: it is a fragile, escapist image to be torn apart by the presence of an intruder. [*In fact*], [*the tenor of the poem*] dramatically changes with the entrance of Lord Fairfax's daughter, Maria. (CZENG)

Out of the two remaining two-component patterns interesting results have also been obtained concerning the TT/TxT pattern (2.7% in the ENG corpus compared to 1.1% in the CZENG one). The low number of tokens found in the CZENG corpus seems to confirm the finding discussed above that Czech writers frequently begin a sentence with a textual Theme mainly for text organization, i.e. preferably in the very first position within a multiple Theme (i.e. an unmarked pattern) whereas native speakers will also place it after the topical Theme (i.e. a marked pattern, see Example 9). The last two-component pattern, TT/IT, seems rather insignificant in both corpora, represented by 0.5% in the ENG corpus and by 0.3% in the CZENG one.

- (9) [*This article*] [*thus*] aims to describe how the selection and recognition of spatial categories is tied to object and membership categories in ways that mirror practices that find actions and predicates to be seeable as 'bound' in the first instance. (ENG)

As for the three-component Theme patterns, these proved to be rather scarce (7 vs 10 tokens, i.e. 0.9% vs 1.0% in the ENG vs CZENG corpus respectively). Still, although the three-component patterns are rather insignificant compared to simple and two-component Themes, it is worth noting that when used by both Czech and Anglophone writers, the unmarked variant TxT/IT/TT (see Examples 10 and

11) is preferred over the other three (4 and 8 tokens in the ENG and CZENG corpus respectively, while the other three-component patterns are represented by either 1 token only or none (see Table 3 above). This may have to do with the type of genre, as indicated by Fetzer (2008), who in her research into Theme zones in English media discourse found out that this pattern (TxT/IT/TT) was relatively common in political interviews (i.e. a spoken genre involving communication between the interviewer, interviewee and audience) whereas in the written genre of newspaper editorials it was the least frequent option adopted.

- (10) [Finally], [*I believe*], [**we**] need to revisit notions of competing processing for form and meaning. (ENG)
- (11) [Ultimately], [*of course*], [**the pastoral**] serves as a reminder that nature was to be understood as the second book of Revelation, as St Augustin suggested already in his *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. (CZENG)

## 5.2 Topical, textual and interpersonal Themes under scrutiny

### 5.2.1 Topical Themes: Self-mention and abstract rhetors

In terms of topical Themes, which can represent a participant/actor, circumstance or process, the prime focus of the present analysis is on the actor realized by the first-person pronouns *I* and *we*, and the noun phrases including the possessive pronouns *my* and *our*. Both our corpora were searched for the above expressions of self-mention using *SketchEngine* and all cases were examined in context to determine their syntactic position (i.e. their occurrence in topical Theme or elsewhere), and with regard to the pronouns *we* and *our*, to differentiate between their inclusive and exclusive use (cf. Hyland, 2001; Harwood, 2005; Zareva, 2013). Table 4 below offers the intercultural comparison of the use of the four pronouns in Anglophone and Czech sub-corpora.

Table 4. The occurrence of selected pronouns in topical Theme in ENG (75,000 words) and CZENG (50,000) sub-corpora, normalized per 10,000 words

Personal pronouns	<i>I</i>	<i>my</i>	<i>we</i>		<i>our</i>	
			exclusive	inclusive	exclusive	inclusive
ENG	1.7	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.3
CZENG	0.0	0.2	3.2	2.6	1.6	0.4

As can be observed, the most striking difference lies in the occurrence of the pronoun *we* in general, because it is more frequent in the corpus of research articles written by Czech EAL scholars (5.8 tokens per 10,000 words vs 1.7 in the Anglophone sub-corpus). Another considerable variation can be seen in the employment of exclusive *we* (viz Example 12 + Example 13 illustrating exclusive *our* below), which is significantly more prevalent in the Czech sub-corpus (3.2 instances vs no tokens in the Anglophone sub-corpus). However, it is necessary to point out that both differences (i.e. the more widespread occurrence of *we* in general and exclusive *we* in particular in the Czech sub-corpus) seem to be caused primarily by the ELT methodology research articles, in which Czech authors extensively overuse the pronoun *we* especially in its exclusive form. In the other two disciplines, the overall occurrence of *we* and its inclusive/exclusive use in Anglophone vs Czech sub-corpus are comparable.

- (12) At first [**we**] were monitoring selected areas of the knowledge dimension, namely metacognitive knowledge and process knowledge. (exclusive *we*, CZENG)
- (13) In general, [**our** study] shows that using English is a natural part of teaching practice of German as a foreign language and the situations that include the use of English follow mostly the IRF structure that is common in teaching. (exclusive *our*, CZENG)

Another interesting difference is the occurrence of the first-person pronoun *I*, which is more predominant in the Anglophone sub-corpus; however, its overall low occurrence in the Czech sub-corpus (with no instances in topical Theme) is due to the fact that ELT methodology Czech authors did not use *I* at all, which goes hand in hand with the preponderance of exclusive *we* mentioned above.

When comparing the use of *I* in the linguistics and literature parts of both sub-corpora, its frequency of occurrence is similar.

Abstract rhetors (cf. Halloran, 1984; Hyland, 1996; 1998) are important hedging devices in the form of impersonal subjects used rhetorically as agents of a research-related activity, when authors want to distance themselves from their propositions and imply that rhetorical acts can be achieved without human volition. Eighteen statistically significant abstract rhetors were selected – in particular *aim*, *analysis*, *article*, *data*, *discussion*, *example*, *extract*, *findings*, *goal*, *outcomes*, *paper*, *part*, *purpose*, *research*, *result*, *section*, *study* and *Table* – and their occurrence in our two sub-corpora in general as well as in individual disciplines was examined. Table 5 sums up the overall frequency of occurrence of abstract rhetors in both sub-corpora.

Table 5. The occurrence of abstract rhetors in topical Theme in ENG (75,000 words) and CZENG (50,000) sub-corpora, normalized per 10,000 words

Abstract Rhetors	Occurrence in TT per 10,000 words
ENG	16.0
CZENG	27.0

As Table 5 indicates, abstract rhetors are more popular with Czech authors – 27 instances in the case of the Czech sub-corpus versus 16 tokens in the Anglophone one, which seems to be in line with the fact that Czech EAL scholars have a tendency to avoid self-mention (see Table 4 above) and present their academic research in a purely empirical and objective way, that is, as if human agency were not included in the process. In terms of individual disciplines, the most dramatic difference is in the case of literature research articles in both sub-corpora, as these employ only a small number of abstract rhetors; in fact, the majority of the abstract rhetors mentioned above did not occur in literature articles at all, which confirms the fact that individual academic disciplines do not mediate reality in the same way (cf. Hůlková, 2017).

With reference to particular examples of abstract rhetors, the most frequent ones realizing topical Theme in individual disciplines in our corpus are as follows: *study* (ENG) and *example* (CZENG) in linguistics; *article* (ENG) and *extract* (CZENG) in literature, and *data* (ENG) and *study* (CZENG) in ELT methodology (see Examples 14 and 15 below). As regards intercultural comparison, the most frequent abstract rhetor in both sub-corpora is *study*, the second most frequent is *article* in the ENG sub-corpus and *example* in the CZENG one, and the third most common abstract rhetor in the ENG part of the corpus is *data*, whereas in the CZENG one it is *analysis*.

(14) [**This extract**] again focuses on the original problem of this article: the problem of mixing of objects with the “stuff of thought” and the resulting “double impersonality” – reassuring as well as threatening. (CZENG)

(15) [**The data reported here**] were drawn from a larger dataset derived from a nationally funded study (Economic and Social Research Council) into the linguistic characteristics and composing processes of secondary-aged writers. (ENG)

In sum, our analysis suggests, on the one hand, that the thematization in the genre of research articles mirrors the tendency towards self-effacement and humbleness (viz the avoidance of the personal pronoun *I* in the Czech part of the corpus, and consequently a much higher density of abstract rhetors); yet at the same time, authors are expected to speak with authority, construct themselves and show professional engagement and commitment to their work rather than hide behind impersonal means (Hyland, 2001). Thus, the Theme zone of the ENG corpus displays a tendency to use self-mention devices to a larger extent, which then results in a lower number of abstract rhetors. Due to these disparities we can conclude that the intercultural variation in the density of impersonal abstract rhetors and self-mention means is culture-specific and socially constructed.

### 5.2.2 Interpersonal and textual Themes

Table 6 below offers an intercultural comparison of the frequency of occurrence of interpersonal and textual Themes in both corpora.

Table 6. The occurrence of textual and interpersonal Themes in ENG (75,000 words) and CZENG (50,000) sub-corpora, normalized per 10,000 words

	Textual Themes	Interpersonal Themes
ENG	107.2	20.1
CZENG	143.0	21.0

Textual Themes vastly outnumber interpersonal ones in both sub-corpora (107.2 vs 20.1 in the ENG and 143.0 vs 21.0 tokens in the CZENG sub-corpora), which means that their frequency of occurrence is also significantly higher regardless of intercultural perspective. When only textual Themes in the ENG and CZENG sub-corpora are contrasted, the density of their occurrence is higher in the articles written by Czech EAL scholars (143.0 vs 107.2 tokens). In terms of intercultural comparison of interpersonal Themes, the frequency of their occurrence is very similar – 20.1 instances in the ENG sub-corpus and 21.0 in the CZENG one; it can thus be stated that the intercultural variation in the density of interpersonal Themes in our Anglophone/Czech corpus is negligible. However, the concrete realizations of textual and interpersonal Themes indicate further intercultural differences.

In terms of particular instances of textual Themes, the 10 most frequent ones in the ENG corpus are listed in descending order and compared to their density in the CZENG corpus in Table 7.

Table 7. Ten most frequent textual Themes in ENG sub-corpus as compared to their occurrence in CZENG sub-corpus, normalized per 10,000 words

Textual Themes	ENG	CZENG
<i>and</i>	25.7	35.8
<i>but</i>	9.6	9.8
<i>however</i>	8.3	14.2
<i>thus</i>	7.1	4.4
<i>also</i>	6.1	7.2
<i>then</i>	3.3	2.0
<i>for example</i>	3.2	3.0
<i>for instance</i>	2.8	0.8
<i>therefore</i>	2.5	3.8
<i>furthermore</i>	2.4	3.2

The most frequent textual Theme in both sub-corpora is the multifunctional device *and* – 25.7 (ENG) vs 35.8 (CZENG) – which may express coordination but can also indicate reinforcement and contrast (Fetzer, 2008, p. 1558). Although *and* is the most common textual Theme in the whole corpus, its use by Czech authors is more prominent than by the English ones. Another intercultural (dis)similarity worthy of attention is the use of the coordinator *but* and the conjunctive adjunct *however* (cf. Hůlková, 2017 for more detail on variation in terminology), both of which express contrast/concession. Whereas the frequency of *but* is nearly identical in both sub-corpora (9.6 in the ENG sub-corpus vs 9.8 in the CZENG one), the occurrence of *however* prevails in the articles written by Czech authors (14.2 vs only 8.3 instances in the Anglophone sub-corpus). The denser presence of the latter in the research articles by Czech EAL scholars may be caused by the fact that concession is regarded as “the most complex of all semantic relations that may hold between parts of a discourse” (Kortmann, 1991, p. 161), which means that it needs to be signalled overtly. Moreover, *however* is among the most frequent conjunctive adjuncts in the genre of research articles (cf. Biber et al., 1996; Hůlková, 2017) and consequently its constant presence in academic writing can be considered as automatic, expected or even desired, which is especially relevant in articles by non-native speakers (i.e. Czech EAL authors) who want to meet all the requirements of a high-quality research paper not only in terms of content but also form. This seems to be in line with the findings discussed in Section 5.1, namely that Czech authors are inclined to use textual Themes more often than English native speakers, which may be due to the fact that unlike native speakers, non-native speakers writing in English feel the urge to signpost the path to/for the reader by means of overt indicators and prevent him/her from wandering off the track (Hůlková, 2017, p. 44). Table 8 shows the 13 most frequent interpersonal Themes in the ENG sub-corpus, contrasted with their presence in the CZENG one.

Interpersonal Themes, as the label suggests, represent the interpersonal metafunction of language, which is typically realized by means of boosters and hedges (Hyland, 1996; 1998; 2004), which can be likened to Biber et al.'s (1999) and Biber's (2006) epistemic stance adverbials. Whereas boosters express the writer's certainty, his/her involvement and direct engagement with readers, hedges show uncertainty/doubt and convey deference and modesty. Table 8 shows that on the whole, in the Theme zone boosters are more common than hedges.

Table 8. Thirteen most frequent interpersonal Themes in ENG sub-corpus as compared to their occurrence in CZENG sub-corpus, normalized per 10,000 words

Interpersonal Themes	ENG	CZENG
<i>indeed</i>	3.2	1.2
<i>perhaps</i>	1.6	0.2
<i>in fact</i>	0.9	1.8
<i>interestingly</i>	0.8	0.4
<i>it is important to</i>	0.8	0.4
<i>significantly</i>	0.8	0.2
<i>clearly</i>	0.7	0.6
<i>importantly</i>	0.5	0.2
<i>in general</i>	0.5	1.2
<i>certainly</i>	0.4	0.2
<i>essentially</i>	0.4	0.0
<i>from this perspective</i>	0.4	0.4
<i>generally</i>	0.4	1.8

There are eight instances of boosters, namely *indeed*, *in fact*, *it is important to*, *significantly*, *clearly*, *importantly*, *certainly* and *essentially*, and only four hedges – *perhaps*, *from this perspective*, *in general* and *generally*; hedges can be further subdivided into those expressing approximation and ones conveying commitment to claim/view, the former represented by *in general* and *generally*, the latter by *perhaps* and *from this perspective* (when considering the selection of the 13 most frequent interpersonal Themes in Table 8). It should be pointed out here that there are also other interpersonal Themes used in both sub-corpora; however, since their individual occurrences were so low (e.g. 1 instance, which would represent 0.1 token per 10,000 words), they were not taken into account at this stage.

With reference to intercultural variation, boosters in general are more frequent in the ENG sub-corpus (7.7 instances in total vs 4.6 cases in the CZENG corpus). When looking into particular examples, *indeed* in the ENG sub-corpus is more frequent than in the CZENG one (3.2 occurrences vs 1.2). Except for the booster *in fact*, which is more prevalent in the research articles written by Czech authors (1.8 vs 0.9 tokens), the rest of the selected boosters are always more predominant in the ENG sub-corpus. By contrast, hedges are more frequent in the CZENG sub-corpus with 3.6 occurrences; in the ENG sub-corpus there are 2.9 instances. The difference is even more striking in the case of approximators (i.e. *in general* and *generally*); these are used by Czech EAL scholars more frequently (3.0) than by the English authors (0.9). Especially *generally* seems to be popular with the Czech authors (1.8 vs 0.4 instances in the ENG sub-corpus).

The results concerning the use of interpersonal Themes in the Theme zone seem to support the view that Czech authors prefer to be more tentative when it comes to presenting their ideas and views, and therefore they like to employ hedges more often, although it seems that they rely more on approximators (e.g. *generally* and *in general*) whereas expressing commitment to claim/view (represented in Table 8 by *perhaps*) is employed much less frequently. The use of hedges helps them weaken their claims and present information as opinion rather than accredited fact. On the other hand, English writers use boosters more frequently than the Czech authors; this shows that they are ready to commit to their work

and assert a proposition with confidence. It can be concluded that these intercultural differences may be caused by discourse community conventions and different cultural and social backgrounds.

### 5.3 Themes contributing to the build-up of coherence: Two examples

The extracts below are intended to show how the Theme zone contributes to the construal of textual, interpersonal and topical coherence (cf. Fetzer, 2008; Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2011), while illustrating the main tendencies in Theme zone patterning and realizations in the Anglophone and Czech sub-corpora outlined above. The sample texts are extracted from the Conclusion section of one CZENG (Example 1) and one ENG article (Example 2) in the field of ELT methodology and are comparable in size (comprising 16 and 17 discourse units respectively). In the text of the extracts, interpersonal Themes are highlighted in italics, textual Themes are underlined, topical Themes are indicated in bold, rhematic elements introduced as Themes in subsequent discourse units are indicated by grey background and thematic progression is indicated by arrows.

A comparison of the two extracts shows that while in both of them the simple Theme pattern prevails (6 occurrences in the CZENG text and 7 occurrences in the ENG text), the tendencies in the use of multiple Theme patterns differ: the two-component pattern [textual Theme] [topical Theme] is more prominent in the CZENG text, where it shows eight occurrences (discourse units 3, 6, 7, 11, 12, 15, 16 and 17) compared to only two in the ENG text (discourse units 5 and 15). All multiple-component patterns in the extracts are unmarked, i.e. occurring in the standard sequence [textual Theme] [interpersonal Theme] [topical Theme]. There are two instances of the two-component pattern [interpersonal Theme] [topical Theme] in both texts (discourse units 5 and 8 in the CZENG text and discourse units 1 and 13 in the ENG text); however, only the ENG text displays a three-component pattern – [Finally,] [*I believe*] [*we*]. This clearly illustrates the preference of Czech authors for marking the progress of their argumentation by expressing discourse relations explicitly by conjunctive adjuncts (e.g. *moreover*, *however*, *on the other hand*), often used repeatedly, as well as the slight backgrounding of the interpersonal dimension in their discourse. This tendency may reflect an effort for clarity and precision, as noted in 5.1 above; it may also tentatively be interpreted as a result of academic writing instructions, which typically stress the prominent cohesive role of conjunctive adjuncts in academic discourse. These results concur with Schmied's (2015), Wei's (2016) and Chang and Lee's (2019) findings (although performed on learner/student corpora) indicating that EFL and ESL writers tend to use more textual Themes than L1 writers, realized most frequently by additive (e.g. *moreover*) and adversative (e.g. *however*) adjuncts, whereas the differences in the occurrence of interpersonal Themes are not prominent. Yet it is notable that while the Theme zone in the Czech text tends towards impersonalization by using abstract rhetors (cf. Hyland, 1996) attributing judgements to the text (e.g. *this/our study*) and research-related subjects (e.g. *recast*, *approach*, *flexibility*), the author of the ENG text adopts an explicit personal stance by the use of self-mentions (*What I am proposing here*, *I believe*) and engages more explicitly in a dialogue with the readers by pulling them into the discourse (*we need to revisit notions...*) and guiding them through the argumentation (*perhaps the most important contribution ... , as previously stated, it remains to be seen whether*). The only explicit personal intrusion of the Czech author in the text is realized by the exclusive *our* with the abstract rhetor *study* performing a hedging function. The preference towards a lower rate of self-mention and the use of the exclusive forms *we/our* can be seen as a transference from Czech academic writing (cf. Čmejrková and Daneš, 1997; Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2014). Such transference seems to be typical of Czech and other L2 writers publishing in English (see e.g. Šinkūnienė, 2018 on Lithuanian scholars in the field of linguistics).

The composition of the topical Themes in both extracts also shows some variation. The occurrence of marked Themes, i.e. topical Themes that do not conflate with the grammatical subject, is rather high in both texts: 4 occurrences in the CZENG text realized by fronted adjuncts (discourse units 1, 2, 3, 7 and 9), and 4 occurrences in the ENG text; 3 also realized by fronted adjuncts (discourse units 2, 8 and 11) and 1 predicated Theme, i.e. cleft construction (discourse unit 3). While providing contextual framing to the message, this may somewhat reduce the focus on important information.

In the CZENG text, topical coherence is strengthened by the lexical cohesive relation of reiteration. Thus *recast* appears in the rhematic zone of discourse units 1 and 2 and then in the topical Theme of discourse units 3 and 4, whose interrelation is further enhanced by the textual Theme realized by the conjunctive *moreover*. Similarly, there is repetition of *English in German lessons/it* in discourse units 5

and 6 connected by the adversative conjunctive *however*. Further instances of reiteration occur in discourse units 8 and 9 (*initiation of/initiating self-repair*), discourse units 10, 11 and 12 (*use of/approach to English* and *it*), where reiteration is supported by the correlative adversative relation expressed by *on one hand, on the other hand*, then in discourse units 14 and 15 (*flexibly/flexibility*) connected by the adversative conjunctive *however*, and discourse units 14 and 16 (*this/our study*) interrelated by the additive conjunctive *moreover*. The CZENG text relies on an alternation of two basic patterns of thematic progression, although there seems to be a preference for the use of the continuous Theme (discourse units 4, 6, 9, 11, 12 and 16) over the linear (discourse units 2, 15 and 17). While the interplay of topical and textual Themes makes the progress of the argument in the CZENG text clear, most discourse relations are established by conjunctives at a local level, i.e. between adjacent sentences, thus leaving responsibility for understanding the global coherence of the conclusion to the readers. This is in conformity with the writer-oriented character of Czech academic writing and may be seen as transference from Czech academic writing style into the English-medium academic discourse of Czech authors (cf. Čmejrková and Daneš, 1997; Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2014).

The ENG text seems to build coherence not only on a local level, but also on a more global level, integrating the topical, interpersonal and textual strands of the Theme zone. The argument in the ENG conclusion is organized into three parts highlighting the three key points in the argument and a conclusive section, corresponding to discourse units 1 to 5, discourse units 6 to 8, discourse units 9 to 12 and discourse units 13 to 15. The three key points are indicated by two topical Themes, i.e. *the most important contribution that a curricular orientation could make* and *the second point*, the textual Theme *finally* and the interpersonal Theme *it remains to be seen whether*. Within these parts the topical Themes display mostly thematic progression with continuous Theme, which helps the reader concentrate on the key points of the message. Textual Themes are used to signal elaboration (*in other words*), sequential (*finally*) and adversative (*but*) local relations. As a result the perception of coherence is facilitated for the reader, thus abiding by the reader-oriented character of Anglophone academic writing (cf. Thompson, 2001; Hyland, 2005; Schmied, 2011).

This comparative analysis (Figure. 1, Figure. 2) not only shows that Theme zones are crucial for the perception of discourse coherence but also suggests that building up coherence bears traces of the culture specific academic discourses in which the authors are socialized.

(1) [In situations in which the other-repair is realised by the teacher as a reaction to student's English,] a so-called <b>recast</b> is usually used.
(2) [According to some scholars,] teachers usually use <b>recast</b> in situations when they apparently do not want to deal with the repaired utterance (cf. MacKey & Philip, 1998).
(3) [Moreover,] [in recast] only the language form is addressed but the meaning remains.
(4) [Recast] thus indicates mutual understanding between the teacher and the student.
(5) [From this perspective,] [English in German lessons] is seen as an error.
(6) [On the other hand,] [it] is not seen as a structural mistake that has to be thoroughly treated.
(7) [However,] [in other situations,] another form of repair can be seen, one of the actors, instead of repairing, initiates the repair of the problematic utterance (other-initiated self-repair).
(8) [It is not surprising that] [the initiation of self-repair] is realised only by teachers.
(9) [When initiating self-repair,] teachers often provide metalinguistic clues to encourage the students' reflection on their language use (Lyster, 1998).
(10) [Handling the use of English in such a way] is relatively demanding and time-consuming, the use of English in such situations is seen as a problem that needs to be discussed and/or repaired.
(11) [On one hand,] [this approach to English in German lessons] could contribute to students' metalinguistic awareness.
(12) [On the other hand,] [it] could be perceived as a clear indication that language policy permits only the target language in the class.
(13) [Many researchers] criticise such strict separation of languages, as well as the presumption that only the target language can be used in class (Cummins, 2007; Fitts, 2009; Garcia, 2009). [...]
(14) [This study, as well as previous research,] describes how in language education practice, languages are used <b>flexibly</b> .
(15) [However,] [this flexibility] is sometimes random and is used to draw students towards the target language (Garcia, 2014).
(16) [Moreover,] [our study] indicates that <b>students' languages</b> do not exist prior to and independently of the task content;
(17) [rather,] [multilingual practice] is realised within the immediate context (Kloss & Van Orden, 2009).

Figure 1. Text One – CZENG METH 01 Conclusion



	(1) [Perhaps] [the most important contribution that a curricular orientation could make] is to bolster and substantiate with evidence a developmental inflection in our thinking about instructed language learning.
	(2) [As previously stated,] the professional literature already includes deliberations that differentiate acquisition from learning and from development, referencing different theoretical reasons for doing so (de Bot et al., 2007; Lantolf, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2015a, 2017).
	(3) [What I am here proposing] is at once simpler and also more encompassing.
	(4) [Curricular thinking] would 'force' developmental thinking by shifting attention away from interpreting the individual instance of a particular learner performance [...]
	(5) [In other words,] [it] would imbue a given learner performance with an interpretive depth that foregrounds its quality of being forever emergent toward a different - hopefully expanded - repertoire of meaning-making resources.
	(6) [The second point] is the crucial need to find well-grounded and multiperspectival evidence in instructed L2 development for some of the most exciting claims being made in contemporary theorizing.
	(7) [Among these] are such notions [...]
	(8) [To become much more than buzzwords], these constructs need to be enlivened by data from real learning environments that have to be more than just longitudinal in the sense of duration, but longitudinal in the sense of deliberately seeking to enhance, over long stretches, learners' capacity for meaning-making.
	(9) [Finally,] [I believe] [we] need to revisit notions of competing processing for form and meaning.
	(10) [At present,] the interrelationships among complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) are built on assumptions about the particular challenges of simultaneously processing form and meaning, expressed in terms of limitations.
	(11) [Despite enormous research efforts,] findings remain conflicted.
	(12) [A curriculum that was explicitly meaning-oriented from the beginning and progressed to advanced ability levels] might be able to reconceptualize the dominant privileging of what is ultimately a mechanistic metaphor of limited processing space.
	(13) [It remains to be seen whether] [the human capacity for language-based semiosis, as it can be observed in adult instructed learning,] might be better served by other theoretical frameworks (e.g. the proposal for an organic approach in Norris & Ortega, 2009).
	(14) [That] does not dispute the finding that language processing will run up against memory limitations;
	(15) [but] [it] questions whether a simplistic zero sum game - either form or meaning - is the best way to tell the story of advanced adult instructed language learning (Byrnes, 2018).

Figure 2. Text One – ENG METH 01 Conclusion

## 6. Conclusion

The present paper has intended to shed light on the intercultural variation between English and Czech EAL authors in discourse coherence construal by means of the initial part of a sentence, the Theme zone, in the genre of research articles. The paper's purpose was threefold.

We first carried out a contrastive analysis of Theme zone patterning, that is, the use of simple and multiple Themes (the latter being several different configurations of topical, interpersonal and textual Themes), with the aim of determining to what extent English and Czech scientists diverge in thematization. The results indicate a strong preference for simple Themes and two-component Themes, and out of the latter the [textual Theme] [topical Theme] configuration is the most frequent in both corpora and largely preferred by Czech EAL authors, while three-component configurations are rather rare in both corpora. It can thus be observed that Czech EAL writers have a greater tendency to rely on

textual Themes in the very first position within the Theme zone (i.e. unmarked two-component Themes) than English writers, which may stem from the type of academic writing tuition the Czech academics received (e.g. emphasis on the presence of conjunctive adverbials and/or adherence to the impersonal nature of academic discourse), discourse community conventions, and social and cultural backgrounds.

Second, the intercultural (dis)similarities in the realizations of topical, textual and interpersonal Themes in the Theme zone were investigated. As regards topical Themes, our research findings reveal that Czech writers have a tendency to employ more abstract rhetors and exclusive *we* and *our*, while avoiding the first-person pronouns *I* and *my*. When looking at textual and interpersonal Themes, both Czech and English authors use more textual than interpersonal Themes. The frequency of interpersonal Themes is nearly the same in both sub-corpora; however, the employment of textual Themes is higher in the case of the CZENG sub-corpus, which goes hand in hand with the fact that Czech EAL authors demonstrate a preference for the [textual Theme] [topical Theme] configuration mentioned above. It can thus be seen that Czech authors like to furnish the reader with clear signals to indicate how particular pieces of information are organized, albeit only at a local level most of the time. In terms of interpersonal Themes, Czech writers seem to be more impersonal and incline towards hedging (typically by approximators), whereas English scholars employ boosters to a larger extent.

The third analytical part examined thematic progression in two extracts from both sub-corpora in order to find out how the Theme zone contributes to the construal of textual, interpersonal and topical coherence. The analysis shows that discourse relations in the Czech excerpt tend to be achieved via conjunctive adjuncts at a local level, that is, between adjacent sentences, which leaves the responsibility for understanding the global coherence of the text to the reader and thus conforms with the writer-oriented character of Czech academic writing. In the English extract, by contrast, a more global level of coherence can be seen, when all three Themes (i.e. topical, interpersonal and textual) of the Theme zone are interrelated and their presence helps the reader perceive discourse coherence, which follows the reader-oriented character of Anglophone academic writing.

All in all, we hope to have shown that a mutual interplay of topical, interpersonal and textual Themes in the Theme zone is vital for achieving and perceiving discourse coherence and that further exploration of intercultural variation in this respect is desirable. The findings of this study extend the body of research on Theme zone patterning and realizations by exploring a genre which has not been previously explored from this perspective, and by adding new insights into the role of cultural context and culture-specific discourse conventions on the thematic choices performed by native and EAL writers.

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