Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This thesis is a preliminary examination of selected aspects of organization and prominence in four Mandarin children's narratives. Specifically, the surface and notional structures of each text were investigated to see how prominent information was marked grammatically and semantically and to see how and where the two intersected. Additionally, levels of salience were examined in each text, identifying the particular characteristics of each in the Mandarin context and its correlation to prominence. Finally, macrostructures of each of the four texts were generated using five macrorules and applying them to both the Storyline and non-Storyline clauses of the texts. These resulted in reasonable summaries of the texts.

In this chapter, the conclusions of each chapter are summarized and compared to the works which inform this one. The research questions and hypotheses are reviewed and discussed along with the methods used. Finally suggestions for further research are proposed.

6.2 Summary and Comparisons

Chapter 1 was divided into two sections. Sections 1.2-1.6 discussed the objectives, hypotheses, text selection criteria, scope and limitations and gave an overview of the thesis. Sections 1.7-1.9 presented a brief overview of the Mandarin language, relying primarily on the work of Li and Thompson (1981) to give a brief grammar and phonology sketch of the language.

Chapter 2 was divided into three parts. Section 2.2 defined what was meant by the terms *text*, *discourse* and *discourse analysis* and how they are used in this thesis. In Section 2.3 five lenses were presented through which an analyst may examine a text. These were genre, segmentation of a text, surface and notional structure, Storyline and supportive material and macrostructures. Section 2.4 reviewed literature on which this thesis is based and that which aided in interpreting and explaining the selected texts.

Chapter 3 was divided into three sections. Section 3.2 first introduced the texts and then examined how boundaries in the text were marked, that is, how thematic

discontinuity was indicated. Criteria from van Dijk and Kintsch's (1983) topic change markers, Barnwell's (1980) thematic discontinuity markers and Dooley and Levinsohn's (2001) dimensions of thematic unity were integrated to define the segments of each text. The most frequent thematic disunity markers found in the texts included, but were not limited to changes in time, location, participants, action and direct/indirect speech and new paragaphs. These accounted for between 84%-95% of all thematic unit markers in the texts. Less frequent markers included conjunctions, narrative intrusion/evaluation, change of focus, rhetorical questions, aperture phrases, preview and summary statements. They all aligned with what van Dijk and Kintsch (1983), Barnwell (1980) and Dooley and Levinsohn (2001) proposed would be the case.

Section 3.3 addressed the first research question, namely what stages occur in the surface and notional structures, what were the characteristics of each and how did they correspond to each other. The hypothesis of there being seven of Longacre's nine stages found in the Mandarin children's stories was partially correct. Of the surface structure features, it was found that all the stories contained a Title, Stage, Pre-Peak Episodes, Peak and Closure. Only "Liu He Fills in the River" used an Aperture phrase. The hypothesis proposed that Finis would occur in the texts, but it was not identified. Two of the texts had Post-Peak Episodes, while the other two went directly from the Peak to the Closure. An Aside to the Reader occurs in "King Qian Shoots the Tide" which was not predicted by the hypothesis.

At the notional level, all the texts had an Exposition, Inciting Moment, Developing Conflict, Climax, Denouement and Conclusion. In terms of correlation between the two structures, Stage/Exposition, Pre-Peak Episodes/Inciting Moment/Developing Conflict and Closure/Conclusion correlated exactly together in every text. It was the Peak/Climax/Denouement correlation that shifted the most, contrary to what was predicted in the hypothesis. In the texts it was found that the Peak corresponded to Climax or to both Climax and the Denouement. When the Peak was found in Climax only, the Denouement was encoded in Post-Peak Episodes in two of the stories. These Post-Peak Episodes correlated with both the Denouement or a segment not proposed by Longacre (nor anticipated by the hypothesis), a Pre-Denouement segment which occurs between the Peak and the Denouement. Final Suspense, contrary to the hypothesis, was not found as a stage of the notional structure. In terms of the Peak, heightened vividness, a crowded stage, dialogue, faster sequence of events (change of pace), onomatopoetic words and rhetorical underlining were all found in some combination at the Peak of the texts. None of the texts had a Finis.

These patterns follow what Longacre (1996) proposed as a general etic scheme and Peak marking for narrative, along with two additional segments: Post-Denouement Episodes and Asides to the Reader.

Chapter 4 addressed the second research question which asked which salience bands occur in the selected stories and what their characteristics are. First, the clauses of each text were categorized as belonging to one of the nine bands proposed by Longacre (1996). Contrary to the hypothesis of finding seven bands, it was found that in the selected narrative texts only six bands of information were marked: Storyline, Background, Setting, Irrealis, Evaluation/Author Intrusion and Cohesion were all found in the text. Pivotal Storyline, Secondary Storyline and Flashback were not found in the texts, perhaps because these stories are for children so they need to be kept short and uncomplicated. Sequentiality was marked by temporal adverbs or by conjunctions such as *jiu⁴* 'then'. When two verbs or verb phrases appeared together, it usually meant the actions occurred one right after the other. But in some cases, depending on the context, it could mean that the actions occurred simultaneously. While promotion of clauses to the Storyline did not occur, demotion of clauses did, by the subordination of a main Storyline clause.

Next each clause was described according to its characteristics. Storyline (Band 1) clauses are marked in a much broader way than anticipated by the hypothesis. They are marked by action, motion, cognitive events and speech verbs, actions described in the passive form and events proper. Perfective aspect markers did occur in Storyline clauses but they also occurred in other bands and so do not exclusively mark Storyline bands. Directional verbs can accompany action and motion verbs. These verbs are described as being volitional, punctual, and sequential. Sequentiality is marked through temporal phrases, conjunctions and adverbs.

Background (Band 2) clauses are also more multi-faceted than supposed by the hypothesis. They describe activities that are customary, prolonged, repetitive and ongoing. These events marked by temporal adverbs or adverbs of frequency which signal the duration, habit, repetition or continuity of the verb. The durative marker 着 –*zhe* is also used to mark durative activities. Cognitive states were also included in background material and were identified by verbs of emotion and cognition.

Setting (Band 3) clauses are not only marked by verbs which are existential (e.g. 有 *you³* 'have, there is'), and stative as suggested by the hypothesis, but they are also

descriptive (adjectival verbs) and copulative (是 *shi⁴* 'be') verbs. Temporal adverbs and locative particles often accompany Setting clauses as well.

Irrealis (Band 4) clauses are marked by negation, conditionals, interjections, auxiliary verbs, particles and verbs which require a future object. This was a much broader result than the hypothesis anticipated.

Evaluation/Author Intrusion (Band 5) clauses are encoded through exclamations, interjections, quotations and references to the reader. This was quite different from what the hypothesis suggested.

Finally, Cohesion (Band 6) clauses are marked by lexical cohesion and identical grammatical constructions. These reflect cohesion at the word and phrase level and can occur in other types of clauses as well. Cohesive clauses were characterized by summary statements in the texts. These characteristics of cohesive clauses were broader than the ones supposed in the hypothesis.

In sum, the hypotheses presented for the salience scheme were too narrow. The actual findings are broader than supposed beforehand and provide a more accurate description of the salience bands.

Chapter 5 addressed the third research question, asking if a reasonable macrostructure of the text be constructed from both Storyline and non-Storyline clauses. To answer that, an abstract of "Liu He Fills in the River" was generated using van Dijk and Kintsch's (1983) macrorules. These rules abstracted information from the propositions by Generalizing (M1), Deleting (M2), Integrating (M3) and Constructing new information (M4) from them. A fifth rule called the Zero Rule leaves the proposition as is if it is already a proposition. The text base was all the clauses of the story upon which the five macrorules were recursively applied three times. Each time the macrostructure became more abstracted and closer to a summary of the story. By the third level, a reasonable summary of the story, meaning one which covers the gist of the story and is likely to be accepted by a native speaker, had been constructed using both Storyline and non-Storyline clauses. From this the clauses of the story could be generated. Thus, the hypothesis proposed was confirmed.

Now the question must be asked about how this all fits together. How do salience bands relate to the surface and notional structure segments? What is the

correspondence between the surface and notional structures, salience scheme and macrostructure?

First, what was discovered about the correlation between salience bands and surface and notional structure? Clauses with the highest salience (Storyline band) tended to have the greatest concentration in the middle segments of the story (all segments except the Stage/Exposition and Closure/Conclusion). Background clauses were spread throughout the text, but primarily concentrated in the Stage/Exposition and Closure/Conclusion. Setting clauses were found in the Stage/Exposition and at the beginning of segments to orient the reader. Author Intrusion, Irrealis and Cohesion clauses were interspersed throughout the segments. These patterns show that material with the highest notional function, that is, with the highest levels of tension, tends to occur in the middle section of the text, where the problem begins, is developed, comes to a head and is resolved. Material with medium salience is found in specific locations, at the beginning and end of the text as well as at segment divisions. Material with low salience is interspersed throughout the text, at times being concentrated for a certain purpose such as an Aside to the Reader. Thus, material with higher salience tends to be concentrated in specific areas while lower salience material is dispersed throughout the text.

Secondly, what was the relationship between the macrostructure, surface and notional structure and salience bands? In this research, the macrostructure was formed using both van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) and Greninger's (2009) suppositions that Storyline and non-Storyline material should be included in macrostructure formation as it may be of macrostructural significance. As was found, Background, Setting and Irrealis material contributed to the Level 2 macrostructure along with Storyline material, while only Storyline and Background clauses made up the Level 3 macrostructure. As the level of abstraction increased, so the level of non-Storyline material, while present, decreased. This has several implications. It suggests that in generating macrostructures for the genre of Mandarin children's stories, non-Storyline propositions have macrostructural significance at all levels. It also shows that Storyline clauses still hold the greatest weight in a macrostructure, but that higher salience non-Storyline clauses also hold weight. Because the greatest percentage of the macrostructure comes from Storyline clauses, it then follows that the macrostructure draws its material from where the Storyline clauses primarily occur, that is the surface and notional structures of Pre-Peak/Inciting Moment through Post-Peak Episodes/Denouement. Non-Storyline clauses used in the macrostructure may also be found in these segments. Macrostructural elements may

also be drawn from the Stage (Exposition) or Closure (Conclusion) as these often convey the reason for the problem and the beginning and ending states of equilibrium.

Thus we see that the identification and extraction of prominent material within a text is an interconnected process. To find the prominent material within a text, the text must first be divided into segments using thematic unity markers. This breaks the text into manageable units. Each segment is then identified as to its surface and notional structure value. The clauses within these segments inform this process; the more salient (prominent) the clause, the more it moves the Storyline forward. Once the plot structure is known, then a macrostructure is generated from the text. The method chosen for this research was to use both highly salient and less salient clauses in order to form a more rounded picture of the story. Less-prominent material accounted for a significant portion of the macrostructure at each level, though it did decrease as the level of abstraction increased.

6.3 Evaluation of Methods Used

In terms of evaluating the methods used in research, there were several areas which were weak and could be improved upon with further research. First, was the use of online texts as sources. Though the texts used in this thesis were confirmed by two native speakers to be natural, it might be of benefit for future research in this area to be based on printed stories, owing to the fact that these have a higher likelihood of being reviewed and edited before publication.

A second area in which the chosen methods were weak was in the construction of macrostructures. The process of macrostructure generation is a subjective one and particularly so for the non-native speaker. As the researcher is not a native speaker or an insider within the Chinese culture, she may select different information as prominent than what a native speaker would choose. Likewise, a native speaker may identify different aspects of the surface structure as prominent and create an entirely different set of macrostructures than the ones created here. In the end, macrostructure formation is a subjective process and will give a different outcome for every reader.

6.4 Suggestions for Further Research

There are many avenues of research for which this thesis could be the impetus. Suggestions for further research include:

1. Increase the number of texts analyzed. Study of a larger corpus will reinforce or replace the claims made here. Increase the variety of texts analyzed. Children's stories are fairly straightforward. Look at narratives written for adults or for purposes other than to entertain (such as in the newspaper). Read a wide variety of authors as they have different styles and may arrange the elements of a story differently. How are the basic structures of a story as described here encoded differently in other stories? Read authors from different time periods. How are various aspects of prominence marked in those texts? Examine the structure of oral narratives vs. written narratives. Do some of the same features as described here still apply in the oral medium?

2. Because the Peak is the most volatile region of the story, what other Peak marking features may be found when a broader corpus of Mandarin narratives is used? What role does verb density play in the marking of Peak? What other bands of information may be marked that are not found in these selected texts?

3. As children grow up to become teenagers and adults, how does the structure of the stories they read change?

It was the goal of this thesis to describe various aspects of prominence in Mandarin children's narrative. As a result, markers of boundaries were identified, the texts were divided into segments, their surface and notional structures described and correlated the characteristics of the different salience bands were categorized and described and a reasonable macrostructure created from each text. As a result, these aspects of prominence in Mandarin children's narrative are now better understood and could be used in the creation of more Mandarin texts. As a result of being identified, they can also be reorganized or modified to create stories with varied structures and characteristics. This will create further diversity and creativity in the genre of Mandarin children's stories.