

Exploring High School English Teaching Strategies for Continuation Writing based on Discourse Cohesion Theory

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Abstract

As a new type of question under the background of the new college entrance examination, continuation writing requires the writer to continue the article based on the context provided in the previous text, supplemented by the situational context of the article, and ensuring the logical coherence of the content. Discourse cohesion theory focuses on the coherence of grammar and vocabulary in discourse organization, aiming to construct a complete and coherent discourse text. The cohesive means under this theory can help writers to produce a well-structured, logically clear, and coherent article to a certain extent. Starting from the concept and existing problems of continuation writing, this article analyzes and explores the points of convergence between discourse cohesion theory and continuation writing, and proposes several teaching strategies to better guide writing teaching and improve students' writing ability. From the perspective of discourse cohesion theory, teachers can guide students to select appropriate referencing methods, plan the overall layout, pay attention to smooth connections, maintain logical clarity, and skillfully use substitution and ellipsis to refine language, making the writing process more efficient.

Keywords

Discourse Cohesion Theory; Continuation Writing; Teaching Strategies.

1. Introduction

In recent years, our country's high school English curriculum has initiated a new round of reforms, focusing on cultivating students' core competence and emphasizing the development of diverse abilities. Therefore, the new standard for ordinary high school English explicitly emphasizes the importance of maintaining coherence and cohesion in discourse, identifying common referential and cohesive relationships in written texts, and using appropriate cohesive devices, demonstrative pronouns, vocabulary connections, and other linguistic means to establish logical relationships and organize discourse structures, making the logic clearer, the content more organized, and the entire discourse more coherent. Against this backdrop, "continuation writing," as a form of assessment that closely integrates input and output and emphasizes coherence and cohesion, has been listed as one of the new types of writing tasks in the college entrance examination. The emergence of this new writing task poses a significant challenge for both teachers and students. By analyzing its patterns and strategies from a conceptual perspective, effective guidance for teaching and efficient cultivation of students' writing abilities can be achieved. Meanwhile, originating in the 1960s, discourse cohesion theory, after multiple rounds of exploration and research by various linguists, has discussed the internal structure of discourse from multiple dimensions, analyzed the key to coherence and cohesion between texts, and proposed effective and feasible methods and models for discourse coherence, guiding people to produce more optimal discourses.

By systematically studying and analyzing discourse cohesion theory, and delving into the connotation of continuation writing tasks, clarifying the focus of assessment and the grading

principles, it can be found that there are certain perfect points of convergence between the two. Discourse cohesion theory can provide a strong theoretical basis for smooth and coherent writing in continuation writing, and offer some guidance for writing. By applying discourse cohesion theory to the teaching of continuation writing, teachers can more effectively enhance students' ability to continue writing in discourse and cultivate their writing literacy in a more scientific manner. After reviewing literature and analysis, it was found that the application of discourse cohesion theory in the teaching and research of continuation writing for high school students is almost non-existent, lacking operability and guidance in implementing discourse cohesion theory in the actual teaching process. Therefore, this article attempts to propose corresponding teaching strategies, hoping to help teachers better utilize discourse cohesion theory to address the current challenges in continuation writing and improve teaching effectiveness.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Discourse Cohesion Theory

As early as the 1960s, Jacobson initiated the earliest research on discourse coherence by analyzing the grammatical structures and cohesive phenomena in literary texts[1]. Subsequently, linguists such as Halliday, Hasan, and Widdowson conducted a series of related explorations. Halliday was the first to propose the division of cohesive devices into grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion[2]. Through precise conceptual delineation, functional classification of cohesive devices, and analysis of discourse organization, Halliday and Hasan jointly developed a theory of discourse coherence consisting of five major categories: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion, which further advanced scholars' diverse perspectives and explorations of discourse coherence[3]. Widdowson suggested that the use of cohesive devices should be based on changes in the discourse's theme, relying on the article's main idea and specific context for effective selection of cohesive modes[4]. Parsons examined the role of discourse coherence theory in actual writing processes from the perspective of discourse coherence and discourse cohesion, providing a better demonstration of the theory's feasibility[5]. Various linguists' diverse views continually propelled the development and maturation of discourse coherence theory. Chinese scholar Hu proposed a multi-level thinking model based on discourse coherence theory, providing a comprehensive explanation of cohesive devices such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction in discourse coherence[6]. Zhu further suggested exploring the internal conditions of discourse coherence from the aspects of topic[7], thematic progression, and cohesive devices. Zhang conducted relevant research on the conditions of discourse coherence, the scope of cohesive mechanisms, and their relationship with discourse coherence[8]. From domestic to international efforts, the endeavors of different researchers have continuously deepened the discourse cohesion theories and gradually applied them to various other fields.

2.2. Continuation Writing

Foreign scholars have long been engaged in a series of related studies on the relationship between reading and writing. As early as 1982, Bracewell and Frederiksen emphasized the importance of readers' understanding of emotional attitudes and values in reading materials[9], advocating for the acquisition of various writing techniques from reading materials to enhance one's own writing quality. Swain, from an input-output perspective, emphasized the importance of learners encountering comprehensible language input during the reading and listening processes to create a more conducive language output environment, thereby providing learners with more fitting writing training to improve writing ability[10]. Carson subsequently mentioned the need to integrate language input and output[11], urging learners to focus on understanding the length and genre of texts during the reading process, mastering

the rules of discourse composition, and organizing corresponding writing patterns. Asencion also stressed the necessity of integrating language input and output to achieve effective, rational, and scientific language learning[12].

Later, Chinese scholar Wang proposed the theory of "continuation writing" based on existing collaborative theories, suggesting that through "reading to writing," language input and output can be more effectively combined to enhance students' abilities in various aspects, thereby providing new perspectives for foreign language writing teaching[13]. Subsequently, Wang further developed the "continuation writing" theory from various perspectives, discussing its practical advantages and further analyzing its rationality and effectiveness from the perspective of teaching practice[14]. In recent years, with the reform of the new curriculum and the new college entrance examination in China, the new curriculum standards explicitly mention the simultaneous use of comprehension skills and expressive skills. The continuation writing task has gradually entered the sight of more people, accompanied by various studies. Increasingly, scholars have provided new perspectives for continuation writing teaching through empirical research and applied research from different angles, creating more effective writing classrooms.

2.3. Discourse Cohesion in English Writing

In recent years, "continuation writing" has been established as a type of writing task in the new college entrance examination in China. However, there has been relatively little research by foreign scholars on this type of task, as discourse cohesion theories have mainly been applied in the fields of text composition and academic writing. McCulley made significant contributions to writing quality by identifying five discourse coherence mechanisms through relevant research[15]. Mojica emphasized the need to enhance the application of vocabulary coherence mechanisms in academic writing among graduate students to improve the level of paper writing[16]. Scott found through experiments that integrating discourse coherence mechanisms into writing instruction can facilitate students' comprehension and production of complex language[17], thereby significantly enhancing their writing proficiency and advantages.

A search of keywords on domestic academic websites reveals that there is relatively little direct application of discourse cohesion theory to the research on continuation writing teaching. Most studies focus on theoretical analysis of second language text composition or overall writing instruction, with the majority of research conducted in university settings. Dong conducted error analysis of discourse coherence and cohesion issues in English writing by university students, highlighting the close connection between discourse coherence and writing[18]. Pan conducted statistical analysis of the use of coherence mechanisms in English compositions by non-English major university students, pointing out that the application of coherence mechanisms directly affects the coherence of the article[19], thereby influencing its quality, and offering insights for English writing instruction. Li and Shi suggested, based on an investigation of the current status of Russian writing instruction, that discourse coherence and cohesion should be emphasized from multiple perspectives such as students, teachers, and teaching resources to promote writing proficiency[20]. Huang proposed, after investigating the current use of coherence mechanisms by students and teachers in university English writing instruction, that discourse coherence theory should be emphasized from multiple dimensions to enhance the logical and rigorous nature of student writing[21]. Li analyzed inappropriate usage of coherence mechanisms in current university student writing and proposed implementable coherence mechanisms for teachers and students to consider[22]. It is evident that the connection between discourse cohesion and writing is highly significant. Therefore, the application of coherence mechanisms in writing and continuation writing is rational, necessary, and effective.

3. Analysis of Existing Problems in Continuation Writing

Continuation writing is a new form of integrated writing that involves the continuation of a text primarily in the form of narrative writing. Typically, the prompt provides the beginning, development, or climax of a narrative and presents the first sentence of the continuation, requiring students to write the final two paragraphs of the story in the order of the narrative's development.

Since the introduction of continuation writing as a new type of writing task in the new college entrance examination, it has placed higher-level demands on students' writing abilities and has also guided teachers towards higher-dimensional instructional goals. Based on research into the teaching practices of continuation writing in high school English classes in various regions in recent years, as well as observations of different types of lessons and analyses of various literature, it is evident that both teachers and students encounter different levels of challenges during the continuation writing process. Through multidimensional data collection, in-depth exploration, and comprehensive analysis of existing difficulties, efforts are made to seek effective strategies to optimize the teaching of continuation writing and to achieve better completion of the writing tasks.

3.1. Off-topic Content and Incoherent Plot Development

In traditional writing tasks, students often complete unidirectional language output based on specific themes and requirements. However, continuation writing is a type of writing task that tightly integrates input and output. The continuation part needs to be consistent with the main idea of the original text, and the plot of the continuation needs to unfold with narrative clues related to the original text. An analysis of the scoring criteria for the college entrance examination essays reveals that one of the key emphases of continuation writing is the coherence between the continuation text and the original plot, the alignment of the main idea, and the coherence and natural progression of the story.

During the continuation writing process, students encounter significant challenges in logically and reasonably aligning the continuation with the original text and constructing a complete and coherent story plot. Some students with weaker foundations may struggle to clarify the relationships between characters and the story plot. Additionally, some students may have difficulty accurately locating the content, leading to the disconnection of the subsequent story plot from the main line and issues with the logical coherence of the continuation. Taking the 2022 National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) as an example, the article describes a boy named David who has a disability but possesses strong willpower and a positive attitude. David is worried about being ridiculed and giving up the competition. The author admires the boy's perseverance and effort, walks over, and sits down next to David, thus unfolding the story. The main theme of this story should be to promote positive energy, where "I" am compassionate, appreciate the student's excellent qualities, and others warmly encourage and support David, without ridiculing him. In this writing, some students may deviate from the precise grasp of the thematic tone of the article, depicting scenarios where David fails in the competition or falls into a negative state. Furthermore, some students may take excessive creative liberties, describing negative scenarios such as David's illness worsening due to participating in the competition, which creates a jarring disconnection from the original thematic plot. Therefore, it is crucial to note that the relevance of content and the smooth connection of the plot significantly impact students' ability to complete the continuation writing task.

3.2. Loose Discourse Framework, Incoherent Connection of Elements

Regardless of the type of text, the structure of the discourse framework is crucial, much like the foundation of a building. A complete and clear framework is the strong support structure of the text. Compared to traditional writing tasks, continuation writing requires a more complete

construction of the narrative framework. From the perspective of Labov's narrative model's six elements, the title text generally provides the beginning, development, or climax of the story, and in the continuation, it is necessary to improve evaluation, response, and conclusion. Additionally, another key point in the scoring criteria for the continuation is the extent to which it appropriately connects with the language materials provided in the title and the introductory language, and whether the structure of the continuation is tightly connected.

During the process of continuation writing, constructing a complete discourse framework and reasonably connecting it with the provided opening sentences, as well as smoothly linking narrative elements, is another challenge that students need to overcome. In the actual writing process, some students, influenced by factors related to language proficiency and ability, may struggle to clarify the narrative elements provided in the title text. They may only have a rough understanding of the storyline of the text and may not be able to identify the hidden clues or foreshadowing in the text. Taking the 2022 National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) as an example, the ending of the story is the content of the continuation. The point of convergence between the original text and the continuation lies in David's physical disability but strong will, his desire to participate in the competition, and his slight self-doubt. "I," as his teacher, loves the students and appreciates David's strong will. When David wants to withdraw from the competition, I will use my love to support and encourage him to overcome difficulties, face them positively, and David will accept the teacher's advice and bravely complete the competition. From the completion of this question, it is evident that some students may not be able to describe the ending of the story clearly, and the situation of David's competition is unclear. The narrative between the first and second paragraphs, as well as the events before and after the competition, also appear disjointed and unnatural.

3.3. Confusing Language and Lacks Expressiveness

As one of the expressive skills, writing especially values the language expression ability of the user, and whether they can accurately use vivid and imaginative language to express meaning. Currently, most of the texts for continuation writing are narrative prose, which tests the richness of language. The characteristic is how to describe the story in a vivid and colorful way to make people feel like they are there. Similarly, from the perspective of the scoring criteria for continuation writing, in addition to the theme, structure, logical connection, richness of continuation content and coverage of the given keywords, the richness and accuracy of the application of grammatical structures and vocabulary are the key to making the continuation text more outstanding.

Continuation writing requires a high level of language knowledge such as vocabulary and grammar for students. If the vocabulary reserve is insufficient and the mastery of sentence structure is not accurate, the article will be dull. Most of the articles for continuation writing are vivid in language, vivid in imagery, and have different styles. Therefore, when continuing writing, one should try to maintain consistency with the original text in terms of language style. In terms of sentence expression, for students, the more advanced usage is the object clause and the adjective clause. However, for narrative texts, some non-finite infinitives and independent gerund structures can make the article more vivid. At the same time, some appropriate psychological and action descriptions will add a lot of color to the article. In the actual writing process, students often use simple and rigid verbs for action descriptions, which cannot reflect how the action occurs well. For psychological descriptions, students often present them in a straightforward form of language, so the content of psychological activities described is single and lacks clever design, which cannot well reflect the psychological state of the characters.

4. Teaching Strategies for Improvement

As analyzed in the previous text, students need to improve their use of cohesive devices when continuation writing. There are also many urgent issues during the process of continuation writing, which has sparked various experiments and research by experts and scholars. Among them, the theory of discourse cohesion has been proven to be an effective means of promoting writing instruction. Introducing cohesive devices in writing instruction can help students improve the quality of their writing. Starting from the task itself, the points of examination, and the implementation strategies, continuation writing process coincides with cohesive devices. The introduction of discourse cohesion theory can just solve many problems in the continuation writing. Therefore, starting from the perspective of discourse cohesion theory, focusing on grammatical and lexical cohesion in writing, the following teaching strategies are distilled in the hope of solving some of the problems in continuation writing and improving students' ability to read and then write.

4.1. Reasonable Reference, Overall Layout Planning

After reading and analyzing the topic, extracting the clear main idea, start to plan the framework for continuation. In the continuation text, under the command of the theme, arrange the relevant materials that express the theme, plan the story plot of the entire piece, coordinate the before and after, and arrange cleverly.

Reference is one of the grammatical connection methods, through the context, it can explain and compare with each other, allowing readers to directly understand the overall structure and context of the article, helping readers to quickly find the information they need in reading and writing, and assisting writers in achieving coherence in writing and reducing redundancy. Before students continue writing, teachers should introduce and demonstrate the use of reference methods to help students better plan the overall text. Reference refers to the mutual explanatory relationship between the referring elements and the referents in the text. Reference can include personal reference, comparative reference, and demonstrative reference, selecting appropriate coordination based on the different functions and meanings of the article.

① The narrative perspective in narrative texts is often diverse. When authors cleverly change the personal perspective in the text, they should always pay attention to the coordination between the persons, select appropriate personal pronouns, possessive pronouns, etc., to establish semantic connections and strengthen the coherence of the text. For example: "Wang did in fact regret it a little at this point, but he insisted, that doesn't matter, let them know their jobs are partly in my hands." Here, words like "he," "them," "their," "my" have established good continuity of character relationships.

② Demonstrative reference is based on certain demonstrative pronouns, time and place adverbs, and definite articles to express reference relationships. In continuation text, starting from the context of the article, distinguish and identify the objects indicated by the context, and construct reasonable demonstrative coordination. For example: "Yes, at least that's how I think of it. That's the difference between Sunday snapshots and someone who does it for a living...This does not mean, however, that happiness and optimism are no good."

③ Comparative reference is relatively less common compared to other reference methods, and it is relatively difficult to identify. Its frequency of use is limited in the writing process. Comparative reference generally uses a group of adjectives or adverbs that can be compared and their corresponding comparatives to expound similar or related relationships. Students can construct a set of contrasting elements in the text to achieve the overall framework of the article. For example: "Andrew took 2 weeks to finish his task, and I used a similar time." Here, "similar" is used as a simple comparative reference.

4.2. Smooth Conjunction, Maintaining Logical Clarity

The "continuation" in the subsequent writing task emphasizes the continuity and coherence of the continuation. When constructing a discourse, attention needs to be paid to the logical connection in terms of linguistic meaning. Hu (1994) explained the concept of connection in discourse, where authors use connecting means to clearly indicate the relationship between groups of sentences, allowing readers to accurately infer the semantic meaning before and after the text.

In traditional writing, students tend to use a relatively limited set of connecting words, such as common words that express cause-and-effect relationships like "so," "therefore," "due to," "as a result," as well as words that express contrast like "but," "while," "however," "on the other hand," etc. However, connecting words actually form a complex and multi-dimensional system, with different categories of connecting words conveying varying degrees of connection. Halliday and Hasan (1985) classified connecting means into three major categories: elaboration, extension, and enhancement. Elaboration includes coordination and elaboration; extension includes contrast, substitution, and supplementation; enhancement includes manner, time-space, cause and effect, etc. Through the use of various connecting words, to a certain extent, the semantic logic of the article can become smoother, and the discourse structure can become clearer and more powerful. Therefore, in teaching subsequent writing, teachers should consciously expand and categorize other types of connecting words for students, making the connecting words in student texts more diverse and the logical meaning of the entire text more complete. For example: "as the moment," "subsequently," "following that," "at length" express temporal relationships, while "after all," "indeed," "undoubtedly," "notably" express other logical relationships.

In addition to focusing on connecting words, lexical cohesion, achieved through the selection of vocabulary, is also a particularly important point to consider for discourse organization continuity. The choice and use of vocabulary will greatly affect the coherence and logic of the structure of our subsequent writing. Halliday and Hasan (1976) proposed that lexical cohesion can be divided into reiteration and collocation. In subsequent writing, teachers can purposefully guide students to consider the cohesion of vocabulary in different relationships, among which, vocabulary reiteration is the most easily operated and effective means of vocabulary cohesion for students. By using certain original words, synonyms, general terms, synonymous or closely related words, and other forms repeated in the subsequent writing discourse, the sentences in the discourse can be interconnected, thereby improving the coherence of the text and enhancing the diversity of vocabulary use.

4.3. Cleverly Focus on Substitution and Ellipsis, Precisely Refining Language

High school students' writing emphasizes fluent, clear, and concise expression of meaning, and their choice of words should be appropriate, authentic, and refined. Therefore, students should pay special attention to language expression in the writing process, using substitution and ellipsis to precisely refine the language, matching it with the context and appropriate language domain, and accurately and authentically expressing their views. The use of substitution in the discourse can effectively avoid word repetition and create coherence between sentences and paragraphs. Before continuing the writing, teachers should guide brief substitution concepts and categories to help students understand their meaning and better optimize their own text. On one hand, it is possible to use words or phrases with noun properties such as "one," "ones," "the same" to replace nouns and noun phrases that have appeared in the previous text. For example: And Aunt Catherine gives big dinners for the old fogeys, but we do just as much good, keeping the young ones jolly. On the other hand, by using verbs or words with verb properties such as "do," "does," "so" to replace the previous verbs or verb phrases. For example: John speaks French as fluently as he does German. He said he would tell me the news, but he didn't

do so. Through the use of these substitution methods, the article becomes more naturally connected and the expression becomes more fluent.

In addition to using substitution, ellipsis often goes hand in hand. We can delete some words and phrases while following the rules and habits of grammar usage, better expressing the meaning of the sentence, and to some extent avoiding repetition and lack of smooth connection within the discourse. Similar to substitution, ellipsis can also be roughly divided into noun omission and verb omission. By omitting a certain degree of the verb or verb phrase in the sentence, the redundant action part in the sentence is reduced. For example: Somebody has taken away my dictionary by mistake, but I don't know who (has taken my dictionary). He came to see me once, but I don't remember when (he came to see me). Omitting the central word or part of the modifier in the noun phrase makes the language more concise, clear, and understandable. For example: Audra's second novel was different from her first (novel).

5. Conclusion

Looking back on the entire text and reviewing the theory of discourse cohesion and the related research on continuation writing, deeply explore its theoretical background support. By collecting real writing texts from students and analyzing the use of discourse cohesive devices, then focus on the current existing problems in teaching continuation writing. Based on the discourse cohesion theory, we propose some teaching strategies, hoping to better improve the teaching of writing after reading in high school English and enhance students' writing ability. Teachers can build a step-by-step support structure for students in writing after reading, select appropriate cohesive devices, and plan the overall layout; pay attention to smooth connections and maintain logical clarity; skillfully use substitution and ellipsis to refine language, so that students can complete the writing more efficiently.

As analyzed in the previous text, there are still many challenges in the practical application of continuation writing in teaching. This article mainly relies on the theory of discourse cohesion, focusing only on solving many language form problems in writing, and only focusing on the grammatical and lexical cohesion in the writing dimension, without addressing strategies for thematic meaning and main idea construction. Problems such as difficulty in matching the writing theme with the original text, deviation from the theme, and incomplete narrative plot construction still trouble most students in completing writing tasks. In the future, we need to explore more theoretical foundations suitable for writing after reading tasks, seek more comprehensive teaching strategies and models to improve continuation writing teaching, and truly enhance students' writing ability.

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