

# Exploration of the Effect on Continuation Task and Its Teaching Implication in High School

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## Abstract

Using primarily a literature-based approach, this paper examines the effects of reading followed by writing on students' language performance (including accuracy, complexity, and fluency) based on the theory of reading followed by writing for learning. The results show that the read-follow-up writing task requires interaction with reading comprehension to promote synergistic effects that effectively enhance learners' language output, especially in terms of accuracy and complexity. On this basis, to explore how reading followed by writing promotes fluency, accuracy and complexity in second language writing, the study shows that 1) progressively increasing the linguistic complexity of input texts contributes to the development of second language accuracy, while simplified texts with constant complexity contribute to the improvement of fluency. 2) The effect of input text linguistic complexity on the complexity of second language writing is inconsistent across indicators, with complexity Constant complexity increases the use of subordinate clauses in linguistic output, while increasing complexity significantly increases the number of parallel sentences used. The study points out that reading followed by writing is an effective way to improve the efficiency of foreign language teaching and learning by closely integrating language output and input and aiming to accelerate students' language use.

## Keywords

Continuation Task; Facilitating Theory; Language Performance; Language Complexity.

## 1. Introduction

In October 2016, Zhejiang Province opened its first English college entrance examination after the English college entrance examination reform, marking the first time that reading followed by writing was officially used in the college entrance examination. Reading followed by writing is a method that closely combines language output and input and aims to accelerate the improvement of students' language use ability. The Examination Instructions for the English Subject of the National Unified Examination for Admission to Universities defines reading and subsequent writing as requiring candidates to continue writing based on the content of the material, the beginning of the given passage and the key words indicated, developing it into a short essay of about 150 words that is logically connected to the given material and has a complete plot and structure (Examination Center of the Ministry of Education, 2015).

Based on the national goal of education, the country has proposed the subject core literacy in the Curriculum (2017 edition), which mainly includes four major elements: language ability, learning ability, cultural awareness, and thinking quality. The reading and writing questions in the English college entrance examination reform match the above language proficiency requirements. First, the questions examine students' knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and other language knowledge. At the same time, students' ability to comprehend and construct a discourse is examined by reading a text of about 350 words and then continuing to write it, based on an adequate and mature context.

I found that in the process of reading the literature, students generally reflect that the reading and subsequent writing questions are more difficult, and it is difficult to score progress. Through reading the literature, the author concluded that the main problems of students are: low initiative in writing drills, large fluctuations in scores, etc. As a result, it is often difficult for students to achieve the expected score in the exam. It is the common expectation of teachers and students to break through the above mentioned difficulties in teaching and learning.

## **2. The Effect of Continuation on Learning**

### **2.1. Facilitating Theory**

Conversation is the most basic and natural way in which humans use language, and it is logical that a mechanism of language use should be latent. To explore this mechanism, Pickering & Garrod (2004) propose the interactive synergy model, which states that synergy is derived from interaction and is the key to successful human dialogue. Pickering & Garrod (2004) conclude that comprehension and output of language are closely integrated in a conversation, and that the information is communicated smoothly. (2004) thus conclude that comprehension and output share the same representation. This conclusion provides a theoretical basis for an in-depth study of the synergistic effects between language output and language comprehension. Another important perspective of the interactive synergy model is that the mechanism by which language-level synergy occurs is structure initiation. Structure priming refers to the tendency of people to repeat in their output language structures that they or others have used or been exposed to. Structure priming allows sequencers to apply others' language and its usage directly to the sequel, making it their own language and usage, and learning effects occur naturally. The repetition of the linguistic structures that appear above and their use in the sequel is a communicative labor-saving phenomenon that reduces cognitive load and is accompanied by interaction. It is important to note that the initiation of structures in the sequel, although imitative and repetitive, is not a mechanical repetition, but takes place in the context of the discourse, in the creation of new content, and can facilitate the communicative use of language.

In summary, the main reason why reading follows writing promotes learning is that it follows the laws of language learning more fully: providing discourse contexts, provoking the will to express, closely combining reading comprehension with writing output, language learning with language use, content creation with language imitation, creating a basis, imitating a model, interacting with readings, and levelling a benchmark.

### **2.2. The Effect of Continuation Task on Language Performance**

Research on reading followed by writing has yielded initial results, identifying some of the effects of reading followed by writing, but existing research has focused on the effects of language accuracy, yet accuracy is only one aspect of language output performance, in addition to complexity and fluency, which are interdependent and intersect to form a dynamic system of language use (Larsen-Fireemnan 2006), so including all three aspects at the same time would help reveal the overall effect of reading followed by writing on foreign language development.

#### **2.2.1. The Effect of Continuation Task on the Accuracy and Complexity of Writing Language**

Language imitation, if it is to promote learning, cannot be a simple mechanical repetition of language or recitation, but needs to be organically integrated with content creation. Although propositional writing can unleash learners' creativity, it lacks synergy with reading input. Thus, it tends to activate native language knowledge in the brain and produce Middle English (Wang Chuming 2015). In contrast, reading followed by writing not only evokes learners' impulse to

create content, but also provides quality language input for imitation, which provides strong conditions for the development of linguistic accuracy and complexity, as analyzed below.

First, the combination of content creation and language imitation can highlight language input and stimulate learners' attention to language forms. Reading followed by writing requires learners to read back the original text to keep the written content and language coherent with the original text. The levelling effect is generated (Wang Chuming 2010).

Second, the combination of content creation and language imitation can optimize language output and promote the absorption and internalization of new knowledge. In order to ensure that the content and language are consistent with the original, learners have to use relatively complex forms of language that are beyond their current level, which helps to increase the accuracy and complexity of the language output. Secondly, in order to maintain a consistent language style, learners will analyze the usage of these sentences inductively, deepen their understanding, and use them effectively in the newly conceived content.

### **2.2.2. The Effect of Continuation on the Fluency of Written Language**

According to Skehan (1998), fluency involves different linguistic systems than accuracy and complexity: accuracy and complexity require learners to use a rule-based system for syntactic processing, whereas fluency requires learners to use a memory-based system for extracting existing chunks of speech. Therefore, to ensure fluency in language output, linguistic information should enter long term memory so that learners can successfully extract it with minimal attentional resources, regardless of the time of preamble. Reading followed by writing as a verbal output practice has positive factors on the fluency of students' writing language output, which are analyzed as follows.

First, reading followed by writing is an output practice at the level of discourse, which is relatively rich in contextual information. In recent years, with the rise of usage-based language acquisition theory, the role of context in foreign language learning has received more and more attention. Foreign language learning emphasizes the experience of language use in a rich context, and the organic integration of language form and contextual knowledge produces excellent foreign language learning effects. According to (Wang, 2007), all levels of language ontology (words, phrases, sentences, parts of speech) can produce contextual effects, and the higher the level, the richer the contextual information. Therefore, compared with exercises such as word recognition and sentence structure, reading followed by writing helps learners learn to use the language at the level of discourse with relatively rich and complete contextual information, which not only improves the efficiency of language learning but also ensures that the participants can use the language fluently later.

Second, reading followed by writing provides learners with the opportunity to create their own content and stimulate their willingness to express themselves. Common sense tells us that without the will to express, motivation to learn and use the language will naturally diminish. In a read-and-write task, they conceive content on their own, their interest in writing is stimulated, their imagination is released, and they get sufficient practice in English, while overcoming the psychological barrier of writing shyness. Thus, in contrast to exercises such as writing outlines and translations, reading followed by writing titillates the learners' willingness to express themselves, and the learners' autonomy to create is easily integrated with the development of language skills, thus promoting accurate and fluent language use.

### **2.3. Effect of Input Text Complexity on Fluency in Second Language Writing**

Min Wang measured language fluency by providing students with pre-reading input texts of constant and increasing complexity and counting the total number of words produced by the subjects. It was found that simplified texts with constant linguistic complexity contributed to the development of fluency, and the length of students' compositions increased significantly, while the fluency of language output improved when the input text had increasing linguistic

complexity, but did not reach statistical significance. The reason for this is that if the linguistic complexity of the input text is consistently low, learners are able to fully understand the original text and interact with it with greater intensity, thus constructing a more complete model of the situation and gaining sufficient linguistic scaffolding from the text. In this case, it is easier to create content in the sequel, and as a result, students pay more attention to the expression of meaning, which will ultimately increase the amount of language produced. Fluency primarily reflects the degree of automation in language use (McLaughlin 1990), and by providing input materials of constant complexity, the amount of language produced increases significantly, as does the degree of language automation. In contrast, if teachers provide students with input texts of sequentially increasing complexity, students need to mobilize a large amount of cognitive resources to understand the story and construct a new plot, and the cognitive load caused by meaning processing increases, which affects the development of fluency in second language output.

#### **2.4. The Effect of Input Text Complexity on Accuracy in Second Language Writing**

Unlike the trend of fluency, the gradual increase in the linguistic complexity of the input text is more advantageous in terms of improving accuracy. In the course of reading and writing tasks, students may dynamically adjust the allocation of cognitive resources according to the input features of the text and selectively synergize with different dimensions of the text. As the linguistic complexity of the input text gradually increases, students devote more and more cognitive resources to the processing of linguistic forms in order to understand the original text, and their attention to information at the word form and grammatical levels is constantly enhanced. In this process, students notice the gap between their own level of linguistic expression and the original text, and their willingness to work with it increases, thus initiating correct linguistic expressions and squeezing the space for linguistic mistakes. Conversely, if the linguistic complexity of the input text is always within the students' "comfort zone", they will unconsciously pay less attention to the linguistic form itself, thus weakening the synergy with the original text at the level of linguistic form and to some extent hindering the development of linguistic accuracy. This explanation is also in line with the sociocultural theory of the "zone of most recent development" (Vygotsky 1978: 86), which states that there is a difference between learners' performance on a task with the help of a teacher or a more competent peer and their performance on a task alone. In reading and writing tasks, the gap between the level of linguistic output that learners can achieve through interaction with the input text and their own level of output constitutes the self-driven zone of most recent development (Xin Sheng and Li Lixia 2020).

#### **2.5. The Effect of Input Text Complexity on the Complexity of Second Language Writing**

The effect of input text linguistic complexity on the complexity of linguistic expression varies depending on the measure. Skehan & Foster (1999) suggest that complexity represents the cutting edge of mediated language development and largely reflects the willingness of learners to take risks in trying out new structures. Due to limited cognitive resources, there is a trade-off effect (Skehan 2014) between accuracy and complexity in the language output of second language learners. Thus, gradually increasing the complexity of the input language reinforces students' attention to and synergy with the linguistic form and improves the accuracy of expressions, but also leads them to not have sufficient cognitive resources to focus on syntactic complexity and thus tend to adopt juxtaposition structures of lower cognitive complexity. Thus, the gradual increase in the complexity of the input language in the reading followed by writing task resulted in a significant increase in the juxtaposition structure in the degree language output likely as a compensatory strategy adopted by learners for the lack of complexity. In

contrast, interaction with simple text was more conducive to stimulating content or meaning creation and expression, and students were more willing to experiment with complex structures and capable of adopting subordinate clauses of higher cognitive complexity.

### 3. Conclusion

In this paper, I review the theory of facilitation of reading followed by writing and its effect on language effects, and find that the facilitation effect of reading followed by writing is significant, in addition to the fact that the facilitation effect of reading followed by writing is long-lasting, has a positive effect on improving students' expressive skills and improving their English proficiency, and can effectively improve students' language output performance, especially in terms of accuracy and complexity, which is significantly better than that of propositional Writing. However, the linguistic complexity of the input text contributed differently to language fluency, complexity, and accuracy. Specifically, when the linguistic complexity of the input text remains constant, it facilitates the development of fluency and complexity in the output language, while when the linguistic complexity of the input text increases, it helps learners to pay more attention to the forms in the input language and improve the accuracy of language use. Therefore, by changing the task characteristics of reading followed by writing, teachers can build learning contexts that are consistent with learners' developmental stages and instructional goals based on learner differences, and promote the balanced development of learners' language skills.

The development of its scientific and pedagogical value is still at an early stage, and as the research progresses, its pedagogical benefits will gradually emerge and more results are expected.

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