

## Study on the Continuation Task of China's New College Entrance Examination Based on the Interactive Alignment Theory

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### ABSTRACT

With the extensive implementation of China's new college entrance examination policy, the Continuation Task in the new college entrance examination has attracted wide attention from the academic circle, which also gives rise to plentiful relevant research. In the past, most of the research only focused on university foreign language education, which was rarely involved in English teaching in primary and secondary schools. Based on the Interactive Alignment Theory, this paper is going to analyze and study the Continuation Task, and try to put forward some teaching strategies for the teaching of the new task, so as to improve student's English proficiency level. According to the research, this paper finds out that "The Continuation Task" can give full play to the alignment effect between reading and writing, promote writing through reading, and thus promote the improvement of students' foreign language proficiency. Therefore, this essay can provide some insights into the teaching of English in high schools.

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### 1. Introduction

Since Wang Chuming first proposed "the Xu Argument" (Wang, 2012), the Continuation Task has drawn broad attention from the foreign language scholars of China, and numerous studies on the Continuation Task also came into being. By choosing an English article and erasing the second half of it, the Continuation Task demands students to complete the content of the article, asking for the coherence of meaning and a similar style with the original text. However, most of the current studies of the Continuation Task only focus on university foreign language teaching, rarely involved in high school English teaching. With the comprehensive implementation of the new college entrance examination policy, the newly added question type has become a major difficulty in English teaching, which marks that the study of the Continuation Task has extremely important research value. The Continuation Task not only injects new vitality into the English learning of high school students but also provides a new thinking direction for the teaching of high school English teachers. Therefore, from the perspective of the Interactive Alignment Theory, this paper analyzes and explores the new characteristics, new advantages, and new requirements of the Continuation Task, and attempts to provide some constructive suggestions and teaching strategies for this new type of question.

### 2. Theoretical basis

The Interactive Alignment Theory is one of the most important theoretical foundations of the Continuation Task. The Interactive Alignment Theory first was proposed by Pickering in 2004, arguing that alignment is inseparable from interaction and that alignment is embodied in interaction (Pickering, 2004). Second language learners should actively communicate and interact with native speakers, as well as cooperate and interact in abundant contextual resources comprehensively, which is one of the best ways to learn a foreign language well (Pickering, 2004). Based on the Interactive Alignment Theory, Chinese linguist Wang Chuming proposed the "Continuation Theory" (Wang, 2012) and applied it to second language writing. According to Wang, language acquisition almost follows a general acquisition path, that is "interaction-understanding-alignment-output-acquisition" (Wang, 2010).

Wu discussed the teaching strategies for this new type of question in his paper and argued that teachers should change their traditional teaching method to adapt to the new change (Wu, 2019). There is a kind of language alignment between L1 and L2, so

when people are learning a new language they can make use of the alignment and try to find the prime effect of the alignment to improve their second language learning (Abrahams, Hartsuiker & Bajo. 2019). Alignment determines the ultimate effect of language learning, and the closer the combination of second language learning and language comprehension and output, the stronger the alignment effect will be. According to Wang Chuming, a learner's comprehension always exceeds his or her output ability, and alignment means that the output of the language looks toward the input of the language and closes the gap, so the alignment effect is also known as "the leveling effect" (Wang. 2011). In this process, the interaction between comprehension and output is constantly leveled and synergistic, with the weaker output ability improving in synergy with the higher comprehension ability. Min and Li examine cohesion in alignment with source materials in a reading-to-write task from the perspective of interactive alignment, and give some valuable insights into the application of materials in integrated writing tasks and give some implications for writing teaching (Min & Li. 2019). Wu Zhonghua proposes that the Continuation Task is an effective catalyst for generating interactive synergy, students interact with the reading material in a continuous interactive way, "reading" is the process of students' creative interpretation of the text, "writing" is the process of students' creative output (Wu. 2019). And finally, students effectively combine "the input" (text reading) and "the output" (continuation of writing) to produce an alignment effect (Yu. 2017).

### **3. The Continuation Task**

#### **3.1 Advantages of The Continuation Task**

The Continuation Task question of China's new college entrance examination is an effective way to promote English learning, which combines reading and writing, and aims to test students' reading comprehension and writing ability. Its core is to promote writing with the help of reading, so as to help students to get some improvement in both reading and writing skills. It combines the input of language comprehension and imitative and creative writing, which allows students to develop their creative abilities after borrowing wonderful words and sentence structures from the reading material, making students' language skills synergistic with the original text so that produces a Levelling Effect.

Compared to the traditional Chinese high school English proposition essay, the Continuation Task places a higher demand on students' comprehensive ability to use English. The propositional composition is usually given a fixed topic by the teacher, and students can use their imagination and ability to write the composition in English, but it has the disadvantage that there is no language input, and it tends to activate the native language knowledge in the brain, thus producing Chinese English. The Continuation Task, on the other hand, can effectively combine language input (reading the original language) and effective output (continuing writing) to better utilize the alignment effect of reading and writing so as to improve students' English ability and proficiency. The new question type "Continuation Task" is based on optimizing students' ability to imitate and create language, and it can help improve students' perception and understanding of language and their overall language skills. Professor Wang Chuming ever conducted an experiment on the relationship between learning ability improvement and the Continuation Task by means of audible thinking in Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, and he has proved that the Continuation Task can effectively promote students' learning ability improvement (Wang. 2015).

#### **3.2 Students' problems in the Continuation Task**

The emergence of this new type of examination question makes both teachers and students not adapt to the situation, which is a considerable challenge for the majority of teachers and students, so there are still a number of problems that have yet to be solved. In order to find out the existing problems, I adopted the research method of error analysis and interview, collected thirty copies of senior high school students' writing of the Continuation Task, analyzed their deduct points according to the grading standard, and interviewed students in the form of chat to collect their feelings and thoughts about the Continuation Task. Finally, by analyzing the research results, I have summarized the following existing problems in the Continuation Task.

##### *(1) Plot and logic*

Most of the Continuation Task is based on narrative essays and fiction, which means that it will have a strong storyline and also shows strong logic. The plot determines the writing direction of the story, and the grasp of the storyline is the most important part of the Continuation Task, so in the continuation of the writing must need to pay attention to the plot and logic. The majority of students do not consider the criticality and logic of the writing content and cannot grasp the direction of the development of the storyline when they continue to write because most of the English teaching usually emphasizes the acquisition of information but lacks the exercise of logical thinking skills. And because of the influence of today's open and free network environment, many students ignore the content and structure of the article, resulting in the final article plot's lack of logic.

At the same time, it is also common for students to have confusing plot arrangements in their Continuation Task. The lack of students' logical thinking ability to arrange the plot sequence leads to inappropriate plot arrangement in the Continuation Task. In traditional English teaching, teachers mostly focus on teaching grammatical knowledge, but they have not paid much attention to students' ability to apply knowledge comprehensively. In writing, students should pay attention to clues and plots as well as

stylistic knowledge, but in real writing students focus all their attention on the use of vocabulary and grammar, focusing on how to create content but ignoring the grasp of logic.

*(2) Vocabulary and grammar*

The use of advanced vocabulary and grammar is an important criterion for evaluating a good essay. Some scholars have outlined the three elements of the Continuation Task: plot, character, and language; and they pointed out that the Continuation Task is not exactly the same as creative writing, but a kind of "restricted writing", which is a continuation of the story, so its storyline must be consistent with the original text before the continuation. The Continuation Task is a continuation of the story, so its storyline must be consistent with the original text while preserving the language style of the original work. However, in writing, many students do not follow the language style of the original text but only write in their own style, resulting in a composition that does not match the original text and even makes the continuation very abrupt. What's more, the use of vocabulary and grammar is too colloquial and the application of advanced vocabulary and grammar is neglected, all these factors will make it difficult for students to improve their Continuation Task level.

*(3) Timing*

Compared with the traditional high school English paper, the addition of the new type of continuation task makes the students' time tighter. Unlike traditional compositions, the Continuation Task needs more time because the theme and plot of the reading material are generally much more difficult to grasp, which is very difficult for students. In addition, because the Continuation Task is placed in the final part of the paper, so most students only left a little time and there is not enough time to think and design, resulting in the continuation writing's logic being unclear and the theme is not sharp-cut enough.

*(4) The emotional tone of the reading material*

As for the Continuation Task, students are required to find out the main idea of the article and the author's central idea through the reading material in order to conceive the next continuation of the article. Students should have empathy with the author, understand the emotions reflected by the author in the article in order to continue to express the emotions of the author in the original text when writing. It is also important to keep the emotional tone throughout the text in the continuation, which will help students to determine their own writing direction. However, due to the weak ability of the students and the lack of relevant exercises, they can hardly accurately grasp the author's emotions, so that the writing content is too simple and the theme is not clear enough.

*(5) Fear of difficult*

Many students are not adapted to this new type of question because of its difficulty, students are very easy to be fear of difficulty. With the negative feelings of resistance, students are in a low enthusiasm for learning, and their learning interest is not high, resulting in the level of the Continuation Task becoming more difficult to improve.

**4. Teaching strategies for the Continuation Task**

*(1) Focus on the training of language expression ability*

High school English teaching should guide students to pay attention to the language as a whole and focus on the training of using language expression ability. Under the background of the new standards of China's new college entrance examination, teachers should try to reduce the occurrence of students' rigid and passive acceptance of knowledge and constantly strengthen students' independent learning ability and creativity. At the same time, the way of teaching the Continuation Task should be adapted to different grades of high school students. For example, high school English teachers should guide students in the lower grades to read or recite wonderful English phrases and learn to imitate them. For high school students, most of the excellent compositions come through imitation, and only by accumulating beautiful words and phrases can they continue to improve their writing skills. For senior students, teachers should guide students to circle key phrases or words and encourage them to show their personalized expression and diverse style. In addition, teachers can use the summarization method when teaching the Continuation Task. For example, many articles will describe the psychological state, expressions and actions, the language of the character, and the environment. Teachers should summarize for students in time to help them increase their own reserves of expression materials.

*(2) Pay attention to the improvement of logical reasoning ability and the cultivation of divergent thinking.*

When teachers teach the Continuation Task, they need to guide students to analyze, understand and reason about the content they want to express in the reading materials, guide students to learn to think independently, and exercise their logical reasoning ability. For example, for narrative writing, teachers should find a good angle of explanation, analyze the plot from a spatial or temporal perspective, and guide students to sort out the logic of the text. Teachers can mark key information to guide students to abbreviate and integrate the content in the material, and they can also lead students to transcribe the core ideas after they finish reading the whole article, so as to better improve students' language organization and expression ability. In addition, teachers need to pay attention to students' awareness of text structure in the teaching process. Teachers can help students sort out the

overall chapter layout of the text by using some conjunctions such as because, last, first, however, and so on. This teaching method can effectively cultivate students' logical reasoning ability, divergent thinking, and improve the effectiveness of the Continuation Task.

### (3) Focus on the cultivation of text interaction ability

Based on the Interactive Alignment Theory, professor Wang proposes an effective way of foreign language learning, namely "interaction-understanding-alignment-output-acquisition" (Wang, 2010). Students should interact with the author of the original text when they do the continuation task, and the language output should interact with the language input, so the choice of materials in the Continuation Task is very important. In other words, it is important to pay attention to the need for the chosen topic to be close to life and with storytelling, and the plot should be extensible so that students can use their creativity to expand the material and continue the writing. In addition, according to the Xu Theory, the reading materials should be selected slightly above the students' language level. When the vocabulary, expressions, and sentence structure of the reading materials are rich and above the students' current level, the language output (writing) will move closer to the language input (reading materials), creating a leveling effect. This allows students to imitate and thus improve their language skills, while still matching their current level of ability. Finally, the reading material should be interesting. The alignment effect is closely related to attractiveness; the more attractive the content is to the reader, the more engaged the reader will be and the stronger the alignment effect will be. In this way, the Continuation Task can play a better role in promoting learning, which is conducive to the development of students' language proficiency.

### (4) Change the teaching mode

The teaching of all types of questions should not be limited to one form, and often the combination of all types of questions can produce alignment effects (Yu, 2017). The same is true for "the Continuation Task", so teachers can adopt a variety of approaches to teaching, such as "reading and writing" and "dictation and writing". Teachers can let students give full play to their subjective initiative, give them the freedom to read, think and imagine, and give them full space. When teaching, teachers can adopt various teaching methods, such as giving the beginning and the end and letting students fill in the gaps of the story, or giving keywords and letting students write a story by themselves. Teachers can also use the story solitaire game to let every student become a participant of the story, which not only can mobilize students' learning enthusiasm and interest to the greatest extent but also can cultivate students' language expression ability, logical thinking ability, and language creation ability, so as to further improve students' "reading and writing" level and improve students' English proficiency.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, "the Continuation Task", as a new type of composition in the new college entrance examination, can help improve students' language expression ability, logical thinking ability, and language integration ability, and thus better meet the requirements of quality education under the new curriculum standards. "The Continuation Task" can give full play to the alignment effect between reading and writing, promote writing through reading, and thus promote the improvement of students' foreign language proficiency. Therefore, teachers should give full play to the alignment between reading and writing in the process of teaching the Continuation Task, and guide students to accumulate good words and sentences to lay a good foundation for improving the overall efficiency level of "the Continuation Task", and then promote the improvement of students' English proficiency. In view of the shortcomings of this paper in terms of data collection and analysis as well as personal ability, there is still a need for improvement in future research.

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