

## "Continuation Task" Research Review

Caixia Chen

The University of Reading, Whiteknights, PO Box 217, READING, Berkshire, RG6 6AH, United Kingdom  
yukiccx@163.com

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**Abstract:** Professor Wang Chuming (2010) first proposed "continuation task", suggesting that reading and writing should be combined to increase interaction and improve synergy. In October 2016, reading and writing was used for the first time as a question type for the college entrance examination in Zhejiang Province. Therefore, it can be seen that reading and writing can be used as a question type for high-risk examinations, which is very valuable. Research of the question type is also very important. This article uses CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) to conduct literature searches with the subject words and years of "continuation task" and "2012-2020", and summarizes the relevant researches on "continuation task" in recent years, and some humble opinions on further research in the field will be presented.

### 1. The Background

Under the guidance of the holistic view of language, integrated tasks has focused on the comprehensive application ability of the target language, which has become one of the prominent features of language testing in the 21st century. For a long time, reading and writing has been taught separately in foreign language teaching in China and the importance of combining reading and writing has been neglected. In recent years, integrated writing has gained considerable identification in high-stakes examinations around the world. Wang(2010) proposed the "continuation task" for the first time, suggesting that reading and writing should be combined to enhance interaction and improve linguistic alignment. The most important theoretical basis for the continuation task is the alignment effect, which is based on the interactive and alignment model and conforms to the foreign language learning environment in China where reading, writing are more than listening and speaking. The main operation of the continuation task is to erase the end of a foreign language reading, then require students to write the end and complete the content on the basis of understanding the previous part[1]. Wang (2012) has demonstrated the continuation task can promote the learning from the theoretical perspective, and further verified its learning promoting effect through some empirical studies in the follow-up.

Since Wang has put forward this method, the research on continuation task has attracted much attention, which has mainly focused on the learning promotion effect, the factors that influence its learning promotion effect, the application of continuation task in second language teaching and its application in the National Matriculation English Test. Wang and Qi (2013) has verified the feasibility of continuation task from the following four aspects: rating reliability, rating scale, difficulty and concurrent validity, which has preliminary affirmed its reliability and validity and proved that continuation task has the research value for test uses. Furthermore, some other scholars has demonstrated the reliability and validity of continuation task in high-stake examination on the basis of it, and further clarified the construct. In October,2016, continuation task was put into Zhejiang National Matriculation English Test for the first time as a new type of questions, which had a profound impact on Zhejiang high school English teaching. In the following some years, other provinces also included the continuation task in National Matriculation English Test. National Matriculation English Test, as a high-stake examination, is an important means for colleges and universities to admit students, and also plays a guiding role in the development direction of basic education in China. Therefore, it is quite valuable that continuation task can be regarded as a kind

of question type of high-stake examination, thus, the research on this question type is also of great significance.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Previous Studies on Continuation Task At Home**

There are relatively few relevant studies on the continuation task abroad, which has mainly focused on the study of the integrated writing. The research on the integrated writing has also laid a foundation for the research on the new writing style of continuation task in China to a certain extent. Therefore, this research proposal mainly reviews the domestic research on continuation task, and introduces the current research status of continuation task. Continuation task has existed in China for a long time. In the foreign language field of China, length approach in composition writing, which appeared in the late 1990s, was to encourage students to write long after reading. It was not until the principle of "Learn together, use together" was proposed (Wang, 2009) that the theoretical significance and research value of the continuation task began to receive attention, and relevant studies has also arisen attention.

In 2000, Wang introduced "Writing for Learning" in foreign language teaching area, and continuation task has appeared on the basis of it. In recent years, domestic research on the continuation task has risen sharply. At the same time, large numbers of useful results have been achieved. At present in China, until November 2020, there are 676 studies about continuation task on the Internet. Of all these studies, there are 131 academic journals, including 28 core journals. There are also 391 featured journals and 151 master's theses, but there is no doctoral dissertation temporarily. In recent years, especially from 2016 to 2020, the number of published papers in this field has shown a rapid rise through the publication of annual quantitative visualization analysis. The research has mainly included the learning promotion effect of continuation task, the factors of influencing its learning promotion effect, the application of continuation task in second language teaching, and part of the research has involved the field of language testing. As more and more provinces have included it in the examination questions of National Matriculation English Test since 2019, more and more studies have focused on the teaching strategies, backwash effects, problem-solving ideas, training and preparation for the exams in senior high schools.

#### **2.1.1 Alignment in The Continuation Task**

Compared to other kinds of writing tasks, the continuation task is found to have a greater potential to promote L2 learning. In Wang's (2012) view, to complete the text in the most logical and coherent way, learners have to dynamically interact with the given text, thus they will align their output with the given input both in linguistic features as well as in content. The phenomenon that L2 writers tend to use the same or similar language forms that appear in the reading text is referred to as alignment, which was proved to exist in the continuation task [2]. More empirical studies to verify its alignment have been put forward after that. Jiang and Chen (2015) investigated the impact of continuation task on the accuracy, complexity and fluency of Chinese students' English writing. They found that continuation task not only highlighted language input and stimulated learners to pay attention to the form, but also optimized language output and speeds up the absorption of new knowledge, which was a reliable way to improve the efficiency of foreign language teaching. Follow-up studies have demonstrated that continuation task has a positive effect on the vocabulary learning of second language [3]., the grammar structure of second language (Xin, 2017), the structure and content of an argumentative passage, language, as well as the writing rhetoric of middle and advanced level foreign language learners. At the same time, Xin and Li (2020) studied the alignment of text complexity of continuation tasks, showing that alignment existed in the aspect of text complexity, but the complexity alignment was difficult to affect accuracy of writing.

### **2.1.2 The Factors That Affect the Alignment of Continuation Task**

The factors affecting the alignment effect can be summarized as follows: how interesting the input text is, the intensity of peer interaction, the genre of the input text, the prompt or the given key words as well as the opening part of the continuation and so on.

Xue(2013) conducted the empirical research and questionnaire survey on the alignment effect of the interestingness of reading material on continuation task, and found that the interestingness of reading material would affect the alignment effect and error rate of students' writing. This experiment verified the statement of "interestingness influenced alignment" proposed by Wang (2010).

Pang (2014) grouped and paired high and low level students, made them interact with each other after continuation task, and then modified the writing article. After that, she found learners, text interaction and learner interaction, and the combination of learner interaction in continuation task had a positive impact on the alignment effect. This result verifies the idea that the strength of the alignment effect depends on the strength of the interaction. Zhang(2017) applied collaborative writing to continuation task, studying the effect of cooperative writing on the continuation task for high school students, which showed that cooperation continuation writing have positive effects on the overall quality of the writing text, especially in the aspect of language and the idea of the text, but he final text length , the ways of cooperative writing has no necessary connection with the quality of writing.

Chen (2018) designed four styles of reading materials with the principle of guaranteeing the consistent difficulty: narration, expository writing, argumentation, practical writing represented by letters as the main questions of the research experiment. Then she chose some high school students to complete the continuation task and finish the questionnaire survey after writing, then analyzed the result. She found that the reading material of narration is more suitable for the continuation task in high school. Wang (2018) and Chen (2018) both studied different genres in the continuation task in junior middle schools, while Yang (2019) studied the influence of the continuation task in different genres on the English writing level of English majors. There are more and more articles about genre.

Recently, Huang (2020) made a new breakthrough in the influencing factors of continuation task, and studied the influence of different prompt types on candidates' performance in the performance and the use of writing strategies of continuation task. 120 high school students were divided into four groups in the research. The tips of four groups were as follows: no hint in the first group, the second group was given the first sentence of each paragraph, the third group was to use at least five given keywords, and the fourth group was given the first sentence of each paragraph as well as needed to use at least five given key words. It has been found in the study that the group which was given two hints can let students play its overall writing ability and promote the use of writing strategies.

### **2.2 Previous Studies on English Reading Cognitive Ability at Home and Abroad**

Reading, as a useful way to obtain information, is not only an essential skill for language learners, but an important part of language activities. It plays an important role in language research, which is also a kind of language ability. In China's Standards of English Language Ability, language ability has been defined as the ability to interpret and express intended meanings that learners and users of English exhibit when they perform language use tasks in a certain context or situation by applying their linguistic and nonlinguistic knowledge and communicative strategies, which is a practical ability. Based on the dimensional analysis of reading ability and the macro definition of language ability, it is believed that reading ability includes the reading cognitive ability and reading strategy. Reading cognitive ability refers to the ability of language users/learners to use various knowledge (linguistic knowledge, non-linguistic knowledge) and strategies to construct meaning around materials when reading and processing written materials, including the ability to identify and extract, summarize and analyze, criticize and evaluate written information. Therefore, reading cognition is a branch of reading ability.

### **2.2.1 Previous Studies on Cognitive Ability of English Reading Abroad**

As early as the 1860s, Goodman described reading as a guessing game and psychological language. Reading comprehension is an extremely complex psychological process, in which the reader is an independent participant who can understand articles based on their previous experience and their own linguistic information [4].

Rumelhart believed that reading comprehension was a process in which visual information interacts with previous readers' background information [5]. Owen believed that reading comprehension was a transaction between readers and texts, in which readers created useful information for themselves.

Grabe W&Stoller believed that comprehension was an active participation process in which readers combined personal attitudes, interests, skills and previous knowledge. The purpose of reading is to understand what is written. Reading is a purposeful activity. When learners read an article, their understanding and cognition interact with each other.

Reading is essentially a cognitive process of language. Smith (2004) emphasized the cognitive aspect of reading and insisted that "reading and cognition are inseparable". Reading is a cognitive activity and is based on cognition. According to Koda (2004), the research of reading should focus on the cognitive and neural system related to reading[6]. Pearson and Johnson (1984) proposed a three-level framework for theoretical reading comprehension, that is, literal understanding, inferential understanding and understanding the real intention of text symbols[7].

In a word, reading is a process in which readers use their previous knowledge to process text information. It is also a process in which readers decode the text symbols and reconstruct the meaning of the text.

### **2.2.2 Previous Studies on Cognitive Ability of English Reading at Home**

Du(1996) thought reading was an receptive mental skill and a decoding process[8]. Reading is a process of language symbols (words) stimulating human's ears and eyes , transmitting the language information carried by it into the brain, analyzing and making judgments. In fact, the whole reading process actually includes a higher level of understanding, which was the aesthetic appreciation of the text form and implication, and the criticism of the ideological content of the work.

Reading is essentially a cognitive process of language. Zhang and Zhu(1999) proposed that cognition was the way in which human beings perceive the world and form a concept of everything in the world. And the concepts formed on this basis are all the processes of transformation, reduction, interpretation, storage, recovery and use of sensory input . It is also the acquisition and use of knowledge, as well as one of the three major areas of psychological research (the other two are willingness and emotion) [9].

Based on Pearson's classification method, Wang believed that the level of reading comprehension could be roughly summarized into three aspects: surface understanding, deep understanding and understanding involving personal experience. Literal understanding layer is surface understanding, reasoning understanding layer is deep understanding, while evaluation understanding layer and appreciation understanding layer belong to understanding involving personal experience (Wang, 2011).

Zeng(2017) holds that reading cognitive ability refers to the ability of language users/learners to make use of all kinds of knowledge (linguistic knowledge, non-linguistic knowledge) and strategies to construct meaning when reading and processing written materials, including the ability to identify and extract, summarize and analyze, criticize and evaluate written information [10]. The ability to identify and extract written information refers to the ability of language users to accurately identify and reproduce specific information based on reading materials. The ability to summarize and analyze written information refers to the ability of language users to grasp the reading materials as a whole, clarify the relationship between information elements and make reasonable inferences and predictions on the basis of comparison and summary. The ability to criticize and evaluate written information refers to the ability of language users to reflect and judge the content, form, style and intention of reading materials by using their existing knowledge.

Zeng and Fan(2019) constructed a framework of reading ability annotation, which included text type, cognitive ability and information processing scope[11]. The cognitive ability can be divided into identification, understanding, analysis and evaluation. Among them, identification reflects the language user's ability to accurately identify and reproduce specific information based on the reading materials, including the identification of general words and difficult words. Understanding and analysis refers to the abilities the language users use to have an overall grasp of reading material, to clarify the relationship between information elements on the basis of comparison and summary, and to make reasonable inference and prediction, which contains the understanding of vocabulary according to context, the understanding of the literal meaning of text, the inference of the indirect information of text, the analysis of the author's view, value, or intention, altogether 15 specific properties. Evaluation is the highest level ability, which shows that language users combine background knowledge with the materials they read, reflect and judge the content, form, style and intention of the reading materials, including judging the logic of the text and evaluating the value of the text.

## **2.3 Preview Studies on Textual Features**

### **2.3.1 Textual Features**

Considering the usability of text features in test development and the testability of text features, this study selects the following parts of text features to explore the impact of input material selection on the performance of continuation task, including lexical complexity, syntactic complexity, textual coherence and cohesion, and text readability. The reasons for selecting these text features are as follows:

Lexical and syntactic complexity is a representation of text readability[12]. Inferring the meaning of new words according to specific context often consumes a lot of energy (Far 2016), and complex sentence structure also increases the difficulty of reading (McNamara et al. 2014).

Whether the use of cohesive devices will affect students' reading comprehension remains controversial . High level readers can infer the unknown meaning based on the text content and existing knowledge when the topic is relatively familiar. Therefore, the lack of conjunctions will not seriously affect the understanding of the text[13]. However, previous studies have shown that conjunctions and other implicit cohesive devices between adjacent clauses do reduce reading time and enhance understanding and memory of the text, especially for L2 learners with lower language proficiency . According to Goldman & rakestraw (2000), explicit cohesive devices help to establish the coherence of texts.

McNamara et al. (2014) reveals that what people sometimes call comprehension easability, reading ease or text difficulty are counterparts of readability[14]. In this study, readability refers to the text difficulty or easability of written materials for the target reader.

### **2.3.2 Previous Studies on the Textural Features of Continuation Task**

Wang (2012) put forward nine advantages of "continuation task" at the same time[1]. Two of these advantages are related to the reading materials used for "post reading". Therefore, it can be seen that the importance of the quality of the input text. Not only should the characteristics of genre and topic be considered, but also the selection of the suitable text for students' level in terms of difficulty need to be considered, so as to produce better alignment effect and better output effect.

Wang and Peng (2018) tried to explore the relationship between language difficulty and L2 learners' continuous writing[15]. The results showed that the subjects who read the simplified version had fewer pauses and shorter pauses, and their writing fluency and accuracy were significantly improved compared with the other class. As far as the writing performance of the pretest was concerned, the subjects who continued to write the simplified version wrote significantly shorter and made more mistakes than those who continued to write the original version. Wu (2020) studied continuation task from the perspective of task complexity, and tried to demonstrate the influence of task complexity on the output complexity, accuracy, fluency and alignment by designing two tasks with different complexity. The results showed that complex tasks

can better guide students to produce language expressions that match the given content. The complexity of the text is included in the study. In this field, the above several papers are related to the textural features of input text.

### 3. Conclusion

In this area, although a large number of studies have explored the factors affecting the alignment effect from different aspects, few researchers have studied the influence of students' reading ability, especially the cognitive ability of reading on the performance of continuation task. At the same time, the input text also has a very important impact on continuation writing, but in addition to the above several research, few researchers have studied the influence of the textural features of the input text on the performance of continuation task. In order to fill this blank field, more study will be needed to answer the questions of how the cognitive ability of reading and different textual features of the input text affect the students' writing performance in continuation tasks.

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