

A Literature Review on the Application of Discourse Cohesion Theory to Continuation Writing Teaching in Senior High School

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore in depth the current research status of discourse cohesion theory and continuation writing theory, and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research history of the field by reviewing the relevant literature at home and abroad. In the research background, the origin, evolution and key issues of discourse cohesion theory and continuation writing theory are elaborated in detail, providing readers with an overall understanding of the topic. The research significance emphasizes the contribution of this paper to the practical application, revealing the research value and innovation of discourse cohesion theory applied in the continuation writing teaching in high school. Finally, the direction and trend of the application of discourse cohesion theory in the continuation writing teaching in high school are proposed, which provide justifications for future scholars' useful attempts.

Keywords

Discourse Cohesion Theory; Continuation Writing Teaching; Senior High School English.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

The English Curriculum Standard for General High Schools (2017 Edition) requires students to be able to “create different forms of discourse according to their needs; use cohesion to effectively improve the coherence of the written discourse; and use special vocabulary and grammar to express meaning creatively”[23] in terms of the level of writing in high school English.

However, under the influence of exam-oriented education, most of the students' English composition writing strategy is to memorize fixed sentence patterns and recite model essays, with little attention to the key strategies of situational development, logical connection and discourse cohesion, which basically fails to reflect the nature and purpose of written expression. Continuation writing is a new type of composition derived from the new college entrance examination, which is a comprehensive test of students' reading and writing abilities. There are a lot of problems for middle school students to solve in continuation writing. Jiang Xiwen indicated the following problems in students' continuation writing[18]. Firstly, students' reading ability is poor and they cannot understand the content of the original text; secondly, students' language expression ability is weak, not vivid and specific enough, and they are influenced by their mother tongue in writing language, with frequent vocabulary and grammatical errors; thirdly, the content expression is rather empty; fourthly, at the discourse level, the content of the continuation article is not coherent and consistent enough with the content of the original text, and the logical thinking is weak and the levels are unclear.

To summarize, at present, improving students' discourse writing cohesion is a focus issue to be solved urgently in basic English teaching. Under the background of the New College Entrance Examination, in order to implement the requirements of the Curriculum Standards for high school students' knowledge of English discourse and to break through the current problems of

high school students' English continuation writing, it is necessary to improve students' awareness of the use of discourse cohesion and their ability in continuation writing. Specifically, students can consciously use discourse cohesion in continuation writing to make their writing more articulate and coherent, so as to improve the quality of continuation writing.

1.2. Research Significance

In terms of academic significance, the research direction of continuation writing at home and abroad mainly has its nature and efficacy, and this study contributes to the depth of the research on English writing discourse cohesion; contributes to the depth of the research on the application of cohesion theory in continuation writing; contributes to the understanding of the process and characteristics of the development of high school students' learning ability and language proficiency; and contributes to the further development of core literacy of English subject.

In terms of practical significance, the key issue to be addressed in this study is to help teachers deeply understand the important role and significance of discourse cohesion and coherence in improving students' continuing writing ability. Secondly, this paper examines the current situation and problems of students' discourse cohesion in high school, and then puts forward practical and effective suggestions to promote the improvement of students' sequential writing ability.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Discourse Cohesion Theory

2.1.1. Previous Studies on Discourse Cohesion Theory Aboard

Cook defines discourse as "a meaningful, complete sequence of language that serves a certain purpose" [6], and Widdowson defines it as "language that is used in spoken or written language in order to obtain discursive meaning" [34]. Hoey argues that "a discourse generally refers to a series of segments or sentences that constitute a linguistic whole" [12]. Brown and Yule argue that "a discourse is language in use" [3]. "All these definitions recognize that a discourse is a semantic unit, and that the parts within a discourse are interrelated, contextually coherent, and constitute a whole with a certain semantic meaning, regardless of variations in form.

Harris defined discourse analysis as "connected language" [11], and since then the term discourse has been widely used and become a specialized term in modern linguistics. After the 1970s, the study of discourse theory in foreign countries has gradually developed, and many scholars have put forward their own opinions on the concept of discourse. Discourse cohesion theory is one of the important theories in chapter linguistics. 1976, Halliday and Hasan proposed a set of more complete cohesion mechanism, which marked the birth of cohesion theory [10]. They divided cohesion into grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion, and discussed the relationships within and between sentences. Widdowson argues that cohesion does exist in discourse, but the realization of inter-sentential cohesion has more to do with the subject advancement of the discourse [32].

2.1.2. Previous Studies on Discourse Cohesion Theory at Home

The study of domestic discourse cohesion theory is based on the foundation of foreign discourse cohesion theory for thinking and exploring. The author mainly focuses on three aspects: supplementary explanation of cohesion means, exploration of the relationship between cohesion and coherence and the practice of discourse cohesion theory in teaching. According to Hu Zhuanglin, discourse refers to the natural language that expresses complete semantics in a certain context without being constrained by the syntax of sentences [13].

(1) Supplementary explanation of cohesion means

Huang Guowen defined a discourse as a language whole composed of a series of consecutive paragraphs or sentences, which can be a monologue, a dialogue, or a conversation among multiple people[14]. A discourse can be an article, a message, a greeting, etc. No matter how many words there are, whether spoken or written, as long as it has the characteristics of being grammatically correct and semantically coherent, it can be called a discourse.

(2) Exploration of the relationship between cohesion and coherence

Zhu Yongsheng thinks that the relationship between cohesion and coherence can be understood as the discourse cohesion means is the key element that contributes to the semantic coherence, especially pointing out the role of cohesion means such as illumination and lexical repetition in the discourse coherence to promote the topic development and topic change; Cai Jigang argues that “a chapter in a discourse requires consistency in terms of content and passage, and the content should be unified in the whole text, and the passages should not be too scattered, but should be coherent, with smooth semantic relations between sentences, and interconnections between passages”; Miao Xingwei specifies the criteria for ensuring the natural coherence of discourse content, that is, whether the constituent elements of a discourse have cohesion relations in terms of their semantic functions, and whether the excessive use of cohesion means leads to semantics that do not conform to the rules of grammar and the logic of reality[22].

(3) The practice of discourse cohesion theory in teaching

Li Xikui and Shi Tieqiang used questionnaire survey method and interview method and found that students' frequency of using discourse cohesion means in their daily writing training was low, and their proficiency was affected by the amount of daily English practice, and also pointed out that the teachers' writing instruction lacked planning, and the importance of discourse cohesion means needed to be improved[20]; Guo Changrong and He Jian conducted an in-depth analysis of the test questions of the English national paper of the college entrance examination in recent years[9]. The study found that the number of discourse cohesion means contained in the test questions each year is basically the same, and the frequency of cohesion means such as illumination, vocabulary recurrence and connection is higher, and a good mastery of them can provide students with more flexible solutions.

2.2. Continuation Writing

2.2.1. Previous Studies on Continuation Writing Aboard

The research of foreign scholars on continuation writing began in the late 20th century, Loban realized that a reader based on the close connection between reading and writing in English is a scholar who is able to write well[21], and Widdowson mentioned that reading text is an input skill and writing is an output skill, and the combination of the two skills as a whole and their simultaneous application in English teaching can strongly improve the language proficiency of language learners[33]. This is a good inspiration for language teachers and learners. Stotsky criticized researchers for always focusing on reading and ignoring the value of writing for reading[24]. Later, Flood and Lapp found that the experimenters with high writing level and appropriate use of vocabulary and sentence pattern also have strong reading comprehension ability, which proves that writing and reading are closely related[7]. Grabe and Zhang proposed that reading and writing are two kinds of linguistic skills that are interdependent and interactive, and they can be mutually reinforcing. To put it simply, in a discourse, if the meaning of a word cannot be obtained by the word itself, it is necessary to find the object to which the word refers in the discourse and to find the answer from the object to which the word refers. Aminzadeh and Bouyeh hold that continuation writing is a process of reading and writing, and it is a process of meaning construction[1]. Therefore, in this process of constructing meaning, ultimately, it is still necessary to use written expression to continue writing meaningful

paragraphs. The concept of "reading and writing" was proposed, which means that second language learners must finish reading an article before writing an essay.

2.2.2. Previous Studies on Continuation Writing at Home

In 2012, Prof. Wang Chuming proposed the teaching mode of continuation writing, which was then widely concerned and studied by domestic scholars. After analyzing and combing the domestic literature on continuation writing, the author found that the domestic research mainly focuses on the following three aspects:

(1) Research on the promoting learning effect of different factors on continuation writing

Xue Huihang pointed out that the interestingness of the readings would directly affect students' subsequent writing, and that continuation writing of interesting readings could attract students' attention and produce significantly more synergistic effects than continuation writing of boring stories[36]. From the perspective of grammar learning, Xin Sheng experimented with the acquisition effects of subjunctive mood by second language learners under the conditions of simple continuation writing and intensive continuation writing tasks, and came to the conclusion that intensive continuation writing is more capable of promoting the acquisition of grammatical structures that match the learners' existing abilities[35]. Wang Min and Cai Ning examined the effect of the linguistic complexity of the input text of continuation writing on the language development of Chinese learners in second language writing, and found that the task of continuation writing effectively promotes the development of second language output competence, and at the same time, the more linguistically complex the input text is, the more the learners can notice the linguistic forms in the input, and the more they can improve their accuracy of language use[27]. Wang Qi and Miao Haiyan discovered that situational orientation can simultaneously enhance the synergy and communication willingness of continuation writing and optimize the instructional design of promoting learning through continuation[29].

(2) Research on the impact of continuation writing on second language acquisition

Wang Chuming's study found that continuation writing can improve the efficiency of foreign language learning, combine language input and output, organically combine content innovation and language imitation, enhance synergy, and improve the ability of users to accurately utilize the foreign language[26]. Jiang Lin and Chen Jin found that continuation writing can improve the accuracy, complexity and fluency of learners' English writing language, and cultivate their practical use of language[16]. Jiang Lin and Tu Mengwei found that the facilitation effect of continuation writing is significantly better than that of summary writing in terms of lexical meaning and usage, which also indicates that continuation writing can effectively promote the learning of second language vocabulary[17]. Wang Qi and Wang Chuming explored a new approach to teaching complex English structures by using the continuation writing method based on introduction development[30]. Utilize the learning facilitation advantage of continuation writing to analyze the difficult grammatical structures, emphasizing the learning of language in context, discourse and interaction to consolidate grammatical knowledge. Sun Xin and Wang Yudan explored the role of continuation writing in the learning of English articles and confirmed that continuation writing can promote the acquisition of English articles, especially indefinite articles[25]. However, its promoting effect on definite articles remains to be studied.

(3) Research on the synergy effects of continuation writing

By exploring the synergy effects between language comprehension and output in continuation writing and its effect on foreign language use, Wang Min and Wang Chuming found that students would reuse the original words and grammatical structures in continuation writing, which once again proved the learning-promoting effect of continuation writing[28]. Wang Qi and Wang Fenglan conducted a study on Chinese learners whose native language is Korean, exploring the synergy effects of continuation writing in Chinese as a second language and its

influence on the use of Chinese[31]. The research results confirm that continuation writing is also applicable in the teaching of Chinese as a second language. Yang Xin and Song Binbin found that continuation writing training is conducive to improving second language learners' vocabulary cohesion ability, in which original word repetition is the type of vocabulary cohesion with the strongest synergy effects of the original text[37]. Based on the interaction theory, Zhang Ge, Liu Meng and Shen Huaming proposed that lexical synergy also exists in second-language continuation writing in French for second-language acquisition, and that teacher-student interaction is a more effective way of vocabulary cohesion in continuation writing than peer interaction and independent learning[38].

To summarize, for the research on continuation writing, foreign research is more on the relationship between reading and writing, which is earlier than the direct research on reading and writing combination in China. In China, the concept of "continuation writing" has been rapidly developed after Prof. Wang Chuming proposed it, but the preliminary research mainly focuses on the effect of promoting learning and synergy effects of continuation writing, and there are fewer researches on its specific application in the classroom, therefore, it is still worthwhile for scholars to explore the teaching effect of continuation writing in depth.

2.3. Previous Studies Related to Discourse Cohesion Theory in Continuation Writing Teaching

Continuation writing is a type of writing, in the process of reviewing the literature, it is found that there are fewer researches on the use of discourse cohesion theory in continuation writing teaching in foreign countries, so this paper starts from discourse cohesion theory applied to writing teaching and conducts literature review.

Overseas researchers applied discourse cohesion theory to English writing teaching in the 1980s and collected students' writing materials for empirical research. At this stage, researchers found that the quality of writing was closely related to the use of discourse cohesion means in the essays. Connor analyzed a total of twelve essays written by six native and six non-native English speaking college students and concluded that cohesion means was not the most important difference in the college students' writing[5]. At the same time, the number of words cohesion in the essays of the non-native English speaking college students was less than that of the native learners. Chiang studied teachers' evaluation of second language writing samples from university students' beginner and intermediate French courses in which the teachers rated university students' French writing samples based on a scale established by the researcher and the discourse cohesion theory, which showed that discourse cohesion and coherence are important criteria for evaluating the overall quality of an essay[4]. Ramaswamy chose sixty-four students' expository and narrative essays as experimental materials and divided the selected essays into high-level and low-level groups, and the results showed that the number of cohesion means used in the essays of students in the high-level group was more than the number of those in the low-level group, which suggests that the number of cohesion means used in English writing is related to the quality level of the article.

With the deepening of the research on the application of discourse cohesion theory to writing instruction, researchers have found that a lot of problems have arisen in the actual operation of applying discourse cohesion theory to writing instruction. How to appropriately and qualitatively apply discourse cohesion means in writing teaching is a topic that researchers focus on. Bahaziq builds on the work of Halliday and Hasan to define and describe discourse cohesion means, and emphasizes the necessity of using these means by analyzing a sample of a student's essay writing from the Michigan English Assessment[2].

Domestic studies on the application of discourse cohesion theory to continuation writing have mainly explored how to use discourse cohesion theory to guide teaching practice. Lei Yaping proposes: to raise the awareness of the importance of discourse cohesion and coherence in

English writing, to improve the knowledge of discourse and the basic knowledge of English simultaneously, to adopt the integrated writing teaching mode of “reading-discussion-writing” to implement the model essay teaching[19]. Huang Yining practiced innovatively the combination of continuation writing with writing training for college students[15]. Fu Xiao investigated in detail whether there are differences in the coherence and cohesion of high school students' continuation writing in terms of vocabulary, sentences and discourses, and analyzed the reasons for these differences from the teacher's level and the students themselves [8].

3. Conclusion

The exploration of discourse cohesion theory at home and abroad, and the research on the application of discourse cohesion theory to English writing teaching have made great achievements, which provide the theoretical basis and reference for the research of this thesis. However, on the other hand, there are still certain shortcomings in the previous studies, such as the small amount of corpus collected in some studies, the small coverage of the research object, which mainly focuses on the college students or learners who are native speakers of English, and the study of discourse cohesion for the secondary school stage is still less involved; Some scholars only study one kind of cohesion means in discourse cohesion, which does not reflect the overall application of discourse cohesion theory in texts, and even affects the researchers' judgment of students' writing level.

For the current new question type of writing in the domestic college entrance examination - continuation writing, requires a solid theoretical foundation that is conducive to enriching the content of writing and scaffolding the output of language in order to enhance the learners' language proficiency. Therefore, this study attempts to apply discourse cohesion theory in the teaching of senior high school English continuation writing, hoping to summarize the effects of the theory on students' continuation writing level and to provide valuable suggestions for teachers and students to effectively cope with the new types of questions of the college entrance examination.

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