

A Study on Teaching Strategies for High School English Continuation Tasks Based on Cohesion Theory

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How to cite this paper: Tang, L., & Tang, L. H. (2025). A Study on Teaching Strategies for High School English Continuation Tasks Based on Cohesion Theory. *Educational and Humanities*, 1(3), 56-65. ISSN Print: 3104-4352; ISSN Online: 3104-4360. <https://doi.org/10.63313/EH.9024>

Published: 2025-11-24

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Abstract

Professor Wang Chuming proposed the continuation task in 2012, and it has gradually become a significant question type in the new English college entrance examination. Against the backdrop of new college entrance examination reform in Sichuan, teaching continuation task in senior high school English is both a priority and a challenge. Cohesion Theory, proposed by Halliday and Hasan in their 1976 work *Cohesion in English*, holds profound significance and application value for teaching continuation task in senior high school English. However, current teaching practices applying Cohesion Theory to continuation task tasks still face issues such as students' insufficient continuation task abilities and teachers' lack of targeted instructional approaches. This paper addresses these problems by proposing solutions based on Cohesion Theory. These strategies can enhance students' reading and writing abilities, improve discourse construction skills, elevate teaching quality, and synergize language proficiency with subject core competencies. They are expected to drive a future shift in teaching from teaching writing to cultivating core competencies.

Keywords

Cohesion Theory; Continuation Task; Senior High School English Teaching; Teaching Strategies

1. Introduction

The National English Curriculum Standards for General High Schools (2017 Edition, 2020 Revision) (hereinafter referred to as the Curriculum Standards) set specific requirements for students' reading and writing abilities. The Standards explicitly include the use of cohesive devices to achieve textual coherence as a core language proficiency indicator and emphasize transforming comprehension into expressive skills through text analysis [1]. Against the backdrop of the new college entrance examination reform in Sichuan, this requirement has been embodied in the design of

the continuation task.

In 2012, Professor Wang Chuming first proposed the continuation task in his paper *Continuation Task—An Effective Method to Enhance Foreign Language Learning Efficiency*. Centered on the mechanism of input-output coordination, this approach requires learners to imitate the original text in terms of language structures, cohesive logic, and stylistic features. At the same time, it encourages creative plot development, enabling efficient acquisition through the principle of “learning by using while interacting with peers.” Its deeply integrated reading-writing model not only reduces cognitive load but also fundamentally bridges the gap left by fragmented traditional skill-based training [2].

Applying Cohesion Theory to the teaching of continuation tasks in high school English aligns with the Curriculum Standards’ goal of integrating language proficiency with disciplinary core competencies. It also offers a methodological pathway to address persistent issues such as fragmented knowledge delivery and superficial teaching practices, thereby promoting deep learning and competency-oriented education. However, challenges remain in current continuation task instruction, including students’ inadequate proficiency and a lack of targeted teaching strategies. To tackle these issues, this paper will propose targeted solutions based on Cohesion Theory.

2. Cohesion Theory

Discourse Cohesion Theory is a core framework in modern linguistics, particularly within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Halliday and Hasan introduced the influential theory of grammatical cohesion in their book *Cohesion in English*. This theory aims to reveal the organizational mechanisms beyond the clause level—specifically, how linguistic elements within a discourse or text (a semantically coherent and functionally complete unit of language use) interconnect to form a unified and comprehensible whole. Its central premise is that textual coherence does not arise spontaneously but depends significantly on tangible cohesive ties present in surface-level linguistic structures. These ties represent meaning relations established grammatically or lexically between parts of a text, functioning like invisible threads that bind scattered sentences together, guiding readers or listeners through the flow of information and logical progression.

Halliday and Hasan identified five main types of cohesive devices: 1) Reference: The use of pronouns, demonstratives, or comparative terms (e.g., similarly, more) to refer to other elements in the preceding or following text. This establishes referential relationships, avoids repetition, and helps track participants or concepts. 2) Substitution: The use of specific grammatical items (e.g., do, one, so) to replace previously mentioned phrases or clauses (e.g., I like this one, Do you think so?), thus avoiding full repetition. 3) Ellipsis: The omission of elements recoverable from the context (e.g., Who took the book? — I did.). This requires readers to actively fill in gaps, en-

hancing textual compactness and interactivity. 4) Conjunction: The use of conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs (e.g., but, therefore, however, moreover) to explicitly express logical-semantic relationships between clauses or sentences, such as addition, contrast, cause, or time. This is the most direct way of constructing a text's logical structure. 5) Lexical Cohesion: The richest and most frequent device, which creates semantic networks through lexical choices. It includes reiteration (repetition, synonyms, hypernyms/hyponyms, or general terms) and collocation—words that tend to co-occur based on semantic fields or habitual use (e.g., rain and umbrella, research and findings). Together, these five devices weave a dense cohesive network within the text's surface structure, significantly easing comprehension, smoothing information flow, and guiding inference of implicit meanings [3].

In English writing, Cohesion Theory is essential for building textual unity. It enhances coherence by creating semantic connections and smooth transitions between sentences and paragraphs through devices such as reference and substitution. For example, We should take action to protect our environment. This is not only for our own well-being but also for future generations. Here, This refers back to the previous action, ensuring semantic continuity. The theory also strengthens logical structure. Connectives clearly express causal, adversative, or additive relationships. When presenting arguments, terms like firstly, secondly, and finally help structure the text effectively. For instance, First, we should raise public awareness of environmental protection. Second, the government should implement stricter environmental policies. Finally, each of us should take practical actions in daily life. This clearly organizes the line of reasoning. Moreover, Cohesion Theory enriches expression. Lexical cohesion avoids monotonous wording—using synonyms adds variety, while hypernyms and hyponyms enrich semantics, aiding students in producing high-quality English texts.

3. Problems Existing in the Teaching of the Senior High School English Continuation Task

The introduction of the continuation task has undoubtedly greatly promoted the reform of the senior high school English curriculum, holding profound significance. However, against the backdrop of the new National college entrance examination in Sichuan, some problems still persist in the teaching of this new question type.

3.1. Students' Deficiency in Continuation Task Ability

The ability to perform the continuation task is composed of three aspects, namely, language proficiency, thinking skills, and writing techniques [4]. Different students exhibit deficiencies in these three areas. The following sections will elaborate on these problems and their causes in detail.

Firstly, students' language proficiency is inadequate. At the linguistic level, insufficient vocabulary, monotonous sentence structures, and numerous grammatical er-

rors lead to impoverished and inaccurate expression in their continuations. Students' lack of language proficiency manifests concretely in the following aspects, namely, inappropriate vocabulary usage, grammatical errors, short and monotonous sentences, bland language, dragging plots, unidiomatic expressions, and excessive colloquialism [5]. In actual writing, students frequently exhibit repetitive word usage (such as overusing basic words like good and happy) and fail to employ richer and more precise advanced vocabulary for substitution. Students' grammatical errors are also rampant. Some students even confuse the simple present and simple past tenses, leading to tense inconsistency. The sentence structures mastered by students are relatively limited, resulting in compositions dominated by simple sentences and lacking the use of diverse structures like complex sentences or inverted sentences. This makes their writing dull and unengaging, failing to capture the reader's attention. Furthermore, due to students' limited understanding of English cultural background knowledge, they are prone to producing Chinglish expressions. This Chinglish does not conform to the expression habits of native English speakers, significantly impacting the quality and readability of the writing.

Secondly, students' thinking skills are weak. At the cognitive level, students struggle with integrating information from the original text, grasping the main idea, and logically inferring plot developments. Consequently, they find it difficult to deeply understand the text's underlying meaning and extend it through reasonable imagination. Due to the lack of thinking skills, students' discourse analysis skills are weak, making it hard for them to grasp the original text's logic and cohesive relationships. Many students find it challenging to appropriately use cohesive devices such as conjunctions and pronouns during continuation task practice, resulting in a disconnection between the continuation and the original text at the discourse level. This disrupts the overall fluency and unity of the composition [6]. Some students abruptly shift topics or make excessive plot jumps in their continuations. However, when transitioning topics, students fail to use suitable transitional words to guide the reader's understanding of the plot development. Students also exhibit unclear pronoun usage when referring to preceding content, making it difficult for readers to determine the specific referent. Additionally, when analyzing the original text, students often focus only on surface information, struggling to delve into the text's theme, emotional cues, and logical structure. This causes their continuations to deviate from the original text's main idea, significantly compromising the overall coherence and logic of the writing.

Thirdly, students lack writing techniques due to insufficient systematic and targeted writing practice, and it is difficult for them to effectively improve writing ability. At the level of writing techniques, students exhibit problems such as unreasonable text structure arrangement, awkward paragraph transitions, and a lack of necessary transitions and references. These issues cause the continuation to be logically disjointed or stylistically inconsistent with the original text. This situation often arises

because most students, faced with a task type like the continuation task, lack effective strategies and techniques to flexibly apply their knowledge to the writing [6]. Before writing, students lack clear conception and planning. They often start writing immediately, proceeding haphazardly, resulting in loose structure and unclear hierarchy. During the writing process, students do not know how to create suspense or foreshadow plot developments, making the story lack appeal and emotional impact. Simultaneously, due to a lack of regular writing practice with diverse genres and styles, students struggle to quickly find suitable writing ideas and methods when faced with varied continuation task prompts. They can only mechanically pile up sentences, unable to create continuations with rich content and logically sound plots.

3.2. Teachers' Teaching Lacks Pertinence

First, instructional design lacks flexibility. Some teachers prioritize test-specific question types, relying excessively on past National College Entrance Examination and mock test questions. This overlooks the integration of textbook content with continuation tasks, hindering students' ability to apply learned knowledge in practice and creating a disconnect between learning and application [7]. This monotonous approach reduces learning to mechanical drilling, preventing students from grasping the text's deeper logic and emotional flow. Although short-term accuracy may improve, students often lack independent analytical and innovative skills. As a result, they struggle with flexible continuation tasks, producing rigid and unoriginal content. Textbooks contain rich literary excerpts with valuable writing techniques and emotional depth. By aligning these with continuation tasks and guiding students to learn, imitate, and innovate, teachers could foster more comprehensive writing development.

Second, teaching methods remain outdated and fail to address students' learning needs [4]. Many teachers adhere to conventional systems without tailoring instruction to the demands of the new continuation task type. Instruction tends to be one-sided, with teachers explaining writing techniques and model essays while students passively receive information. This "spoon-feeding" model limits opportunities for active thinking and practice. However, the new continuation task requires not only language proficiency but also logical thinking, imagination, and textual coherence. Teachers should adopt diverse strategies—such as group collaboration and scenario-based teaching—to engage students in discussion and immerse them in contextual understanding. Such approaches help students better grasp continuation direction and improve writing competence. Unfortunately, outdated methods lead to low engagement and diminished learning outcomes.

Third, the teaching evaluation system is inadequate. When assessing continuation tasks, teachers may overemphasize linguistic accuracy while neglecting diversity, appropriateness, content richness, and coherence with the preceding text [7]. This

narrow focus leads students to prioritize avoiding grammatical mistakes over developing substantial and creative content. While their writing may be linguistically correct, it often lacks depth, appeal, and emotional resonance. A single evaluation standard fails to reflect students' true abilities, dampening their enthusiasm and hindering personalized growth. A sound evaluation system should assess multiple dimensions—not only accuracy but also linguistic variety, content logic, richness, and cohesion. Teachers should also provide timely and specific feedback to help students identify strengths and areas for improvement.

Additionally, some teachers lack adequate research on continuation task teaching, delay updating educational concepts, and possess an imprecise understanding of students' learning conditions. They often fail to implement differentiated instruction based on varying proficiency levels and learning abilities. Uniform teaching requirements and pacing leave struggling students unable to keep up, while advanced students are not sufficiently challenged—failing to address the needs of diverse learners.

4. Teaching Strategies for Continuation Tasks in High School English Based on Discourse Cohesion Theory

In actual teaching, vocabulary and grammar often receive more emphasis than discourse cohesion instruction in writing [8]. Cheng Xiaotang points out that coherence stands out as the most prominent issue in student writing and suggests applying discourse linguistics to guide second language writing instruction [9]. Moreover, less proficient student writers tend to underuse connectives and fail to omit given information appropriately [10], underscoring the essential role of discourse cohesion in English writing instruction. Based on the problems identified in the teaching of continuation tasks in high school English and guided by discourse cohesion theory, this section proposes instructional strategies for such tasks.

4.1. Strengthening Discourse Analysis to Enhance Students' Language Proficiency

Firstly, in the pre-writing phase, teachers should focus on text analysis, helping students improve their language skills through studying reading texts. Jouhar and William, analyzing research on the relationship between reading and writing from 1970 to 2019, point out that reading improves the overall quality of narrative and descriptive writing, enhancing learners' abilities in areas such as sentence output, spelling accuracy, and text organization [11]. In practice, teachers can select classic English passages or story excerpts related to the continuation task theme for intensive reading. During reading, teachers can guide students to analyze cohesion devices within the text (such as reference, repetition, lexical cohesion), helping them understand how the author uses these devices to build a coherent discourse. Simultaneously, this approach encourages students to extract excellent cohesive expres-

sions and sentence structures to build their own language resource bank for reference and application in subsequent writing. Teachers can also organize text imitation exercises, where students mimic the original text's cohesive methods and writing style to create new short passages. This allows students to consolidate what they learned through reading via practice, thereby enhancing their language application skills. Additionally, teachers can improve the logic, flexibility, and creativity of students' language expression through sentence-level cohesion exercises [12]. For example, teachers can design specific sentence-joining tasks, providing a series of disjointed sentences and requiring students to use appropriate connectives to combine them into logically coherent paragraphs. Teachers can also introduce comparative analysis, demonstrating the effects of different cohesion methods on the same content, guiding students to appreciate the importance of cohesive devices for sentence coherence and semantic expression. Furthermore, teachers can assign sentence rewriting exercises, transforming simple sentences into compound or complex sentences by adding cohesive elements, thereby enriching the depth and variety of language expression.

4.2. Focusing on Specialized Discourse Cohesion Training to Enhance Students' Logical Thinking and Writing Techniques

Teachers should strengthen the analysis of cohesion methods between sentences and paragraphs, paying particular attention to the use of cohesive devices and connectives, and emphasizing the analysis and explanation of the overall text structure [13]. In specialized training, teachers can start with simple paragraph cohesion, selecting articles with clear paragraph structure and obvious cohesion. During paragraph cohesion analysis, teachers guide students to annotate the cohesive devices and connectives, analyzing how these elements enable smooth transitions and logical coherence between paragraphs. Subsequently, teachers can assign paragraph cohesion tasks, requiring students to complete paragraph continuations based on a given topic and partial content, using the learned cohesion methods. In this process, teachers should particularly emphasize the logical relationships and transitional links between paragraphs. For training cohesion between paragraphs, teachers can employ text framework construction. Students first determine the article's theme and overall structure. Then, teachers use mind maps to help students outline the main content of each paragraph and the logical connections between them. Finally, students use appropriate connectives and transition sentences to organically link the paragraphs together. Moreover, teachers can introduce contrastive teaching by presenting examples of well-cohered versus poorly-cohered texts. After showcasing high-quality writing samples, teachers organize students for comparative analysis and discussion, allowing them to intuitively perceive the impact of discourse cohesion on text quality, leading to a deeper understanding and mastery of cohesion techniques.

4.3. Optimizing Teaching Methods

Teachers should employ diverse teaching methods to stimulate students' writing interest and improve writing efficiency. For instance, teachers can compile problems encountered by students during independent reading and organize group discussions [14]. This cooperative learning approach can quickly boost student engagement. During group discussions, students exchange questions, helping to enhance their logical thinking skills in problem-solving. Besides group discussion, teachers can adopt situational teaching methods. Teachers need to create vivid and interesting scenarios based on the continuation task theme, immersing students to inspire writing ideas and expression desire. For example, when teaching a continuation task themed Adventure Trip, teachers can present the context by playing travel documentary clips, displaying relevant pictures, or telling real adventure stories. This creates a tense, exciting, and fun adventurous atmosphere, guiding students to imagine and helping them plot story development. Additionally, using multimedia technology to assist teaching is an effective method. Teachers can create engaging presentations, presenting discourse cohesion knowledge points through animations or charts making abstract concepts intuitive and easy to understand. Teachers can also utilize online writing platforms to enable real-time monitoring of the writing process and provide immediate feedback, facilitating teacher guidance and peer learning. Furthermore, schools can regularly organize writing competitions and work exhibitions, allowing students to gain a sense of achievement through competition and display, further stimulating writing interest and improving writing ability.

4.4. Improving the Evaluation System

Teachers should adopt diversified evaluation methods to prevent the objectivity of results from being compromised by a single approach. Evaluation can be conducted across four dimensions: text structure, writing logic, language features, and fluency of expression, with particular attention to whether students use appropriate connectives to enhance textual flow [14].

In assessing text structure, teachers should examine paragraph organization and coherence with the original text. For writing logic, they should evaluate the reasonableness of the story's development and identify any illogical jumps. Language features should be reviewed based on vocabulary richness and sentence variety, while fluency assessment should focus on sentence smoothness, proper use of connectives, and the absence of grammatical errors or unclear references. Teachers may also employ discourse analysis tools to help students pinpoint weaknesses and make targeted improvements.

In practice, evaluation should incorporate not only teacher assessment but also student self-assessment and peer assessment. For self-assessment, students can reflect on their own writing against evaluation criteria, identify issues in discourse cohesion, and propose improvements. In peer assessment, students work in groups

to review each other's work, offering suggestions from a peer perspective to facilitate communication and mutual learning.

Additionally, teachers can establish student writing portfolios that document each composition, evaluation results, and progress over time. Longitudinal comparisons help students recognize their development and areas for improvement, providing a reference for future learning. Teachers should also emphasize process-based evaluation, paying close attention to students' effort and progress throughout the writing process and offering timely guidance and encouragement—not solely focusing on the final product. Involving parents in the evaluation process can help them understand their children's learning progress and provide additional support, fostering a collaborative home-school effort to enhance students' skills in English continuation tasks.

5. Conclusion

Under the Sichuan New Gaokao reform, the English continuation task demands greater reading and writing proficiency from senior high students. Discourse cohesion theory offers essential pedagogical guidance in this context. The National English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition, 2020 Revision) highlights discourse coherence as a core language competence, which the continuation task directly embodies. Supported by Professor Wang Chuming's continuation theory and Halliday and Hasan's discourse cohesion framework—covering grammatical and lexical devices such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical reiteration—this approach addresses common student issues like ambiguous reference and incoherent logic, fostering deeper learning in English education.

As a foundational framework, discourse cohesion theory strengthens the pedagogy of continuation tasks by targeting key weaknesses in student writing. Teaching practices rooted in this theory enhance textual coherence and logical flow. However, challenges remain, including students' underdeveloped continuation skills and a lack of targeted instructional methods. To tackle these, this study proposes strategies such as improving students' language proficiency, emphasizing cohesion-specific training, refining teaching approaches, and optimizing assessment mechanisms. These measures aim to enhance integrated reading-writing literacy and support the development of core linguistic and disciplinary competencies.

Looking ahead, deeper integration of discourse cohesion theory will help teachers and students overcome current obstacles, shifting the focus from teaching writing to cultivating comprehensive literacy. Students will gain the ability to analyze textual logic and apply cohesive devices across contexts, merging linguistic creativity with critical thinking. Meanwhile, advances in educational technology—such as intelligent discourse analysis and personalized diagnostic tools—will enable precise identification of cohesion issues and tailored instructional interventions. As educational assessment evolves, the continuation task will incorporate dimensions like

cross-cultural communication and textual innovation, guiding English education toward the integrated development of language, thinking, and cultural awareness.

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