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Schema Activation in Continuation Tasks Based on Schema Theory

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Abstract

With the deepening of education reform, the new composition type of "continuation task" has gradually appeared the college entrance examination papers in various regions. In 2016, the reading and writing task appeared for the first time in Zhejiang English college entrance examination. Compared with the conventional writing mode, the continuation task has higher requirements for students and is more in line with the requirements of the new English curriculum. Faced with this new challenge, some teachers still teach according to the type of traditional composition mode, which is obviously not feasible. The teaching of continuation task under the guidance of schema theory aims to analyze and correct students' content deviation, language confusion and cultural conflict in continuation, so as to truly improve students' ability of continuation. This paper will explore how to optimize senior high school students' abilities to continue writing after reading through schema theory, especially activating different types of schemata at different stages, in order to improve the quality of writing.

Keywords

Continuation tasks; Schema theory; Schema activation

1. Introduction

Feng (2023, p. 41) claimed that under the background of the new college entrance examination, new teaching materials and new courses, continuation tasks not only become the bottleneck restricting students to obtain high scores, but also become a big problem for teachers' teaching. Different from the traditional composition type, the continuation task closely combines language input and output. According to Zhou(2023), students need to continue writing on the basis of understanding the reading material of about 350 words presented in the test paper and combining the content and emotional changes of the article. Finally, an article with consistent content, logical cohesion and language will be formed.

However, students often face problems such as content deviation, language difficulties and cultural conflicts when they continue to write after reading. As a

cognitive linguistic theory, schema theory can effectively help students activate the existing knowledge structure, so as to improve the coherence and accuracy of writing.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1. Schema Theory

Schema theory was first used by cognitive psychologists to explain the psychological process. It was proposed by the German philosopher Kant. Later, the British psychologist Bartlett used schema theory to explain the process of foreign language learning and reading comprehension. Schema is a knowledge structure formed by one's past experience, which can help individuals understand and predict when facing new information. With the development of cognitive science, schema theory has been gradually extended to the fields of linguistics, pedagogy and language learning. Specifically, schema is regarded as an individual's cognitive framework, which helps individuals compare and integrate information with existing knowledge structures in the process of understanding and generating language. Sweller (1988) believed that the role of schema is that it not only can help people process and understand information, but also affect the storage and memory of information.

2.2. Three Type of Schema

According to different functions, schemata can be divided into three main types: content schemata, form schemata and cultural schemata. Content schema refers to the degree of familiarity with the content of the reading material or the content related to the theme of the article. Only when learners understand the main content of the article can they continue to write according to the content of the previous article, otherwise they will go the other way. Carrell (1984) noted that content schema enables individuals to understand and remember information related to a specific situation. In second language learning, the activation of content schema can help learners better understand reading materials, thus laying the foundation for subsequent language generation and writing.

The formal schema refers to the individual's knowledge of the text's structure, genre and other content, including grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure and so on. Articles with different contents, genres and forms also have different organizational structures. So, Anderson (1985) claimed that in the process of language learning, the activation of formal schema helps to improve students' language accuracy and fluency in writing. In reading comprehension and continuation writing, formal schema can help learners grasp the grammatical structure of the text, so as to better generate language. Specifically, formal schemata are designed to help learners understand the genre and structure of an article, including the writing, design and structure of the article, as well as some common forms of expression, such as argument, narration, description, comparison, or the style, expression and rhetoric

of the article. By learning these schemata, learners can better understand and apply various formal elements, so as to improve their reading and writing abilities (Yang & Xiao, 2003, p. 95).

Cultural schema refers to the knowledge structure related to cultural background, social behavior norms and values. Both language and culture have its own unique background and conventions. These cultural schemata determine the behavior and understanding of individuals in different cultural contexts. The activation of cultural schemata is crucial to intercultural communication. It helps learners understand and avoid cultural conflicts. In second language learning, activating cultural schemata can improve learners' intercultural understanding and adaptability (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003).

3. The Status Quo of High School Students'English Writing

3.1. Content deviation of continued text

Content deviation is one of the most common problems in high school students' English continuation writing. The content deviation usually shows that the students' understanding of the original text is not accurate, or they fail to maintain the consistency of plot, characters and theme in the process of continuation. This deviation in content is often related to the activation and improper application of students' content schema. The research shows that the activation of content schema has a significant impact on students' reading comprehension and writing. Carrell (1984) pointed out that in the reading task, students' content schema helps them integrate new information with existing knowledge framework, so as to improve their understanding of the text.

In high school English teaching, teachers can help students activate the relevant content schema, improve their understanding of the content of the article and reduce the content deviation in continuation by guiding students to review the background knowledge related to the topic of the article. For example, if students can activate their knowledge of environmental issues such as global warming. When reading articles on environmental protection, they can better understand the views in the article and maintain the consistency and coherence of the text content when continuing.

3.2. Language confusion of continued text

For students, continuation task is an examination of their comprehensive ability, and the problem of language expression is another problem that students often face in continuing. In the actual writing process, students often have grammatical errors, sentences are not fluent, and vocabulary is not used properly because of the lack of mastery of language structure. The root of these problems is that students' formal schema is not mature enough, which leads to difficulties in language generation. Anderson (1985) emphasizes that students' formal schema is the core tool in their

language generation process, which helps students choose the appropriate grammatical structure and organize language. In the continuation, students need to express themselves according to the structure of the article. According to Yang (2023, p. 46), if students' formal schema is not activated, they will experience a shift in focus when writing, ignoring the language characteristics of the article. In this case, students are easily able to copy other types of sentences they have memorized into the continuation content, resulting in a completely different language throughout the entire article.

3.3. Cultural conflict of continued text

In the continuation task, the most important test for students is probably the students' cultural schema. Cultural symbols play an important role in narrative writing. They help convey specific cultural values and beliefs, and enable readers to better understand the background of characters and plots. Once students do not establish the corresponding cultural background knowledge in the original reading materials, it will lead to the conflict between the content of students' continuation and the cultural context of the original text. This kind of conflict can not only weaken the logical coherence of narration, but also deviate from the theme intention due to cultural misreading. Taking cultural symbols as an example, the Cultural Connotation Differences of animals, colors, festivals and other symbols are often ignored. For example, the owl symbolizes wisdom in the west, but it is unknown in some East Asian cultures; Red is associated with festivity in most contexts in China, while it may imply danger in the West. In addition, if students simply understand “Halloween” as “playing ghosts and frightening people”, ignoring their community interaction and historical traditions will weaken the authenticity of the festival scene. The lack of these cultural backgrounds will directly lead to the breaking of the symbolic meaning of the continuation text.

4. Three Stage Schema Activation Model

What I need to emphasize here is that the schema activated at each stage is not a completely one-to-one linear relationship, and the activation of various schema may occur in the three links of reading. However, the author believes that the activation instructions given to students' specific schemata at different stages during the continuation teaching can make the teaching more effective, and the students will have more direction in their own practice. The author takes an English college entrance examination in 2021 as an example to illustrate how to activate students' existing cognitive schema through the three stages of pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. The original reading materials are as follows: Jeff and Jenna are twin brothers and sisters. On mothers' day, the brother and sister planned to surprise their mother by elaborately preparing a breakfast for her: French toast and chicken porridge. However, in the process of cooking, the two brothers and sisters had all kinds of accidents, such as the toast was fried, the chicken porridge

overflowed, and their hands were scalded. Just when they were at a loss, Dad appeared...The continuation materials provided in the topic are very common to students, and provide students with a rich imagination space.

4.1. Activate content schema in pre-reading

In view of the connotation of the sequel title, it puts forward higher requirements for the integration of the story before and after the sequel. At the same time, in the scoring standard of the new college entrance examination, it also puts forward clear requirements around “content harmony”, requiring students' continued articles to be consistent with the content of raw materials, and reasonably linked with the prompts at the beginning of the paragraph. Therefore, Xie (2023, p. 129) contends that teachers should lead students to lay out the continuation content reasonably when guiding students to carry out the continuation task, so as to maintain a high degree of harmony between the continuation content and raw materials and form a unified whole.

In this topic, the teacher can lead the students to analyze the materials, sort out the information facts related to the protagonist with the students, and then lead the students to infer from the known information in the materials from the three dimensions of “the twins, father and mother”, and lay a solid foundation for subsequent writing. For example, from the perspective of “the twins”, first guide students to find relevant known information from the article. Then, based on this, guide students to give full play to their imagination and reasonably infer the content. In this way, by combing the known information and laying the continued content reasonably on the basis of the known information, the logic between the continued content and raw materials is ensured, and the degree of integration between the two is improved. On the other hand, in order to further strengthen the synergy of the plot content of the continuation after reading, teachers should also pay attention to the first sentence of the reading material when guiding students to carry out reading, combined with the key words in it, analyze the hidden clues in the continuation reading material, and thus carry out the continuation after reading. In this follow-up after reading, the teacher first led the students to analyze the first sentence of the follow-up paragraph, and combined with the information given in the first sentence of the follow-up, designed interlocking questions for the students.

Through these questions, students can compare the basic plot of the story with their own experience or cognition, so as to activate the content schema related to family life, cooking and family affection, and prepare for subsequent writing.

4.2. Analyze formal schema in while-reading

Language is the basis of reading materials. Different themes and contents of reading materials lead to significant differences in language characteristics. In view of Guo (2022), under the synergy theory, when guiding students to carry out the

continuation task, teachers should study the language in the continuation materials at a deep level, accurately capture its style and characteristics, and carry out the continuation on the basis of inheriting the language characteristics and language styles mentioned above. The same is true of post reading writing under the guidance of schema theory. Writing in continuation is not simply supplementing content, it needs to take into account the integrity and rationality of the article. Li (2024, p. 29) believed that Students are required to find the contact point of the previous and subsequent text, reasonably imagine and arrange the content of the continuation, and use the existing English knowledge to innovate the learning schema with the help of psychological activities, actions, languages and scenes according to the story of the article, so as to complete the continuation activity and increase the readability of the subsequent content.

In the process of reading, students should not only understand the content of the original text, but also analyze the formal schema. Only when students can effectively activate the formal schema, can they maintain the language style of the original text and avoid the style deviation caused by improper language expression. In order to avoid the situation of inconsistent forms, teachers can guide students to analyze the sentence structure, grammar use and vocabulary selection of the original text, help students understand the language characteristics of the original text, so as to imitate the style of the original text as much as possible. According to Xie (2023, p. 131), When analyzing the original dialogue, students should note that verbs and phrases are used in the text, which makes fingers more vivid on the paper; At the same time, in the reading materials of the continuation, a large number of clauses guided by as, while and until are used, including time adverbial clauses, attributive clauses, and a large number of exclamatory sentences, which enhance the picture of the story and use long sentences and complex rhetorical skills, such as irony, indirect quotation, etc. Students can try to use similar sentence patterns and expressions to make their continuation more in line with the language style of the original text. By activating the formal schema, students can keep the language consistent with the original, so as to improve the language quality of the continued composition.

4.3. Reflect cultural schema in post-reading

The post reading stage is a process of reflection and revision after students complete the continuation. At this stage, students need to activate the cognitive framework related to cultural schema to ensure that their continuation content conforms to the background and values of the target language and culture. Cultural schema refers to students' understanding of specific cultural background, social norms and behavior habits. In the cross-cultural continuation task, students must understand the cultural background in the original text, and adjust and modify their continuation content according to these cultural backgrounds.

In the story of “Jeff and Jenna prepare breakfast for mother”, it involves the

interaction between family members, the expression of family affection and the way to celebrate mothers' day. These are elements related to family culture and festival habits. If students fail to understand these cultural backgrounds, they may ignore these details in the continuation, resulting in the lack of cultural connotation in the continuation. Teachers can guide students to think about the cultural background of mothers' day and the common activities in the family to celebrate this festival. The teacher can ask: "how do you celebrate mothers' day? Are there any special customs? For example, do you make breakfast or prepare surprises for your mother?" through this question, students can activate the cultural schema about mothers' day and understand the common ways of expressing gratitude and love among family members. This information can help students add culturally appropriate details when they continue writing. Teachers can also let students adjust the situation according to different cultural backgrounds to ensure that their continuation conforms to the described cultural atmosphere. For example, teachers can ask students to set the story in different cultural environments, and guide them how to modify the plot according to different cultural backgrounds to ensure that the continuation content conforms to cultural conventions.

By reflecting on the cultural schema, students can identify and correct cultural conflicts or misunderstandings, and ensure that the content of the continuation is consistent with the cultural background of the original text. This not only helps to improve the accuracy of continuation, but also helps students better understand and respect the values and social norms of the target culture.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the continued writing after reading puts forward higher requirements for students' comprehensive quality, but in practice, there are some shortcomings. Therefore, the author suggests that in the follow-up teaching of post reading continuation, we can help students establish more schemata, and use schemata to stimulate students' existing knowledge and experience, so as to improve the level of students' English post reading continuation. However, this article is only a theoretical study without actual data sources, so further experiments are needed for teaching continuation tasks based on the three-stage activation schema model.

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