An Exploration Study of Continuation Task Based on the Perspective of Collaborative Writing

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Abstract

According to the General Senior High School Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition Revised in 2020; hereinafter referred to as the Standard), writing, as one of the expressive skills, plays a crucial role in the output of the English course and the humanistic expression of the national sentiment. Concerning writing brings little outputs even if gives more inputs, that is to say, students learn to write for a long time, but few of them can write an excellent composition (Wang, 2000). To address the issue, continuation task was found a breakthrough to find a solution (Wang, 2017). It serves as a form of writing examination stipulated in the Standard, has been applied in the reform of the college entrance examination by provinces and cities. However, in practical instruction, students' composition exposed many problems: add superfluous characters and side plots; violate logical common sense; use too much dialogue; deviate from the theme and set up suspense at the end of the text. As a result, it is not conducive to the advancement of their writing quality, but increasing students' writing anxiety. How to improve the continuation task teaching has been widely discussed by scholars (Wang, 2016; Wang, 2018; Zhang, 2021; Zhang, 2021; Ge, 2021; Qiu & Wang, 2022; Wu, 2023). Collaborative writing (CW) , as an important research area in second language writing, has been supported by a large number of empirical studies on its learning-promoting effects. (Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Storch, 2005; Kim, 2008; Storch, 2011; Zhang, 2017). Nevertheless, little research has concentrated on introducing collaborative writing into continuation task teaching. For this, present study aims to explore how collaborative continuation task is conducted in high schools, in which involving learner-learner interaction and learner-text interaction, hoping to improve writing performance and raising learners' writing confidence, thus enables a better teaching and learning.

Keywords

Collaborative writing, continuation task, secondary school, English writing performance, classroom-based research.

1. Introduction

Collaborative writing refers to two or more learners working together to construct a text that combines written language with oral communication to provide learners with negotiation of meaning (Long, 1996). Storch (2013) defines it as "co-authorship (two or more writers) of a text". Swain (1998) contended that the process of foreign language learning refers to the process of learning to use other's language to express one's own thoughts. Interlocutors generate alignment in terms of language, context, and common sense through collaborative dialogues. Moreover, Wang (2018) recommended that instructors divide all students into groups of two or three to share their own writing experiences so as to learn from others' strengths.

Continuation task was first proposed by Wang chuming in China, it is to cut off a piece of material with a missing end from an original reading text, let learners read it, then continue to

write the story on the basis of comprehension to the given material. Finally, they should complete the content of the whole story (Wang, 2012). Wang (2012) suggested one shortcoming of continuation task is the one-way alignment between the learner and the reading material. From his view, the reading material is static and lacks the dynamic feedback of two-way interaction. Thus, for the sake of making up for the drawback of one-way alignment, instructors can arrange two students collaboratively completing a piece of continuation writing to strengthen the interaction. Therefore, it is necessary to combine CW with continuation task, not only focusing on the interaction between teaching and learning, but opening up new perspectives for writing instruction in high schools. (Zhang, 2017)

2. Literature Review

Continuation task and CW both focus on the impact of language output on language acquisition. While the former examines the alignment interaction between human and texts, which produces an alignment effect to bridge the lack of native language environment and enhance writing by reading, the latter examines the effect of interpersonal interaction on the written production of a foreign language and promotes learning by speaking, and the learning-promoting effects of them two are supported by many empirical studies (Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Storch, 2005; Kim, 2008; Storch, 2011; Zhang, 2017; Wang & Wang, 2021).

2.1. Collaboration in the classroom

2.1.1. Language-related episodes (LREs) in collaborative writing

Language-related episodes (LREs) refers to the collaborative dialogue when learners talk about the language they are using, question their language use, or have their language use corrected by others or themselves (Swain& Lapkin, 1998).

Colina and Mayo (2007) compared the effects of jigsaw, text reconstruction, and dictogloss tasks on LREs output among low proficiency English students at a Spanish university. The study shows that dictogloss task produced more LREs than the other two tasks, but it was not suitable for low-level learners as many language problems they can not solved. Aldosari (2008) conducted an experiment with a class of EFL learners in Saudi Arabiaand, it found that the task type affects the type of LREs produced, for instance, more meaning-oriented tasks such as jigsaw and composition produce more lexical LREs, while the editing task will produce more grammatical LREs. Deng(2021) conducted a more structured graphical description writing to 24 sophomore students, the research indicates that the low-low group produced the most LREs, and three groups had more lexical LREs than grammatical LREs, with lexical LREs focusing on vocabulary choices, and grammatical LREs focusing on preposition usage and tenses.

Leeser (2004), one of the first studies to research on the effects of level-pairing on language use, found that language proficiency seems to influence students' attention to LREs, with different groups focusing on different linguistic dimensions. The data shows that high - high group focuses more on grammatical forms, while the low - low group focuses more on vocabulary. Subsequently, as a representative study by Swain and Watanabe (2007), after comparing students' dialogues with high-level learner and low-level learner, it was shown students' conversations with high- level student produced more LREs. Then further analyzing the internal relationship between the two groups based on Storch's (2002, 2009) paired interactive model, indicated that cooperative group produced more LREs than the other groups.

In further exploring pairing mode, researchers have doubted that the relationships of group members may be more worthy of exploration. A study by Yule and Macdonald (1990) found that when a high-level learner was assigned a dominant role (information provider), the amount of conversation produced within the group was significantly less than if he had been a non-dominant role. And then, Watanabe and Swain (2007) found that learners who formed

cooperative interaction patterns in the study produced more LREs than the other interaction patterns.

2.1.2. Comparative studies on CW and independent writing

The research on independent writing and collaborative writing lies in comparing the two on the development of language proficiency, and most of the findings show the positive learning-promoting effect of CW on L2 (Ferna, 2012; Storch, 2005; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009; Yang & Cai, 2022). The first line of research is to compare the effectiveness of writing feedback between them two, the other line of the study is to compare the text quality (e.g. complexity, accuracy and fluency) of the written composition.

For the first line of the study, since Truscutt's (1996) empirical study on the effects of writing corrective feedback was published, a wave of research on corrective feedback on written has been initiated. Kim and Emeliyanova (2019) implemented an eight-week experiment with 36 ESL based on previous researches, where 18 students corrected their errors cooperatively and 18 students corrected their errors independently so as to investigate the students' cooperative and independent revision behaviors. The result shown that the co-revision group made fewer errors than the independent revision group, but no improvement was found in the writing quality between the two groups. Additionally, Mujtaba et al (2021) found that CW group corrected more errors and performed better than the independent writing group in terms of the use of verbs and correctness of vocabulary choices by comparing the feedback on error correction between two groups. For the second line of the study, Storch and Wigglesworth (2007) compared the texts of pair writing and independent writing with high-proficiency adult ESL learners, found that there was a significant difference in grammatical accuracy between the two, but the difference in fluency and complexity was small. Moreover, Lian (2018) found that co-writing group was superior to independent writing group in both content and structure dimensions, although no obvious change in grammar and vocabulary aspects has been detected. Overall, co-writing favoured the text quality.

2.1.3. Students' attitudes and perceptions of collaborative writing

Storch (2005) investigated that all participants had positive attitudes towards group work. Some participants states that co-writing given them with an opportunity to compare thoughts and learn from other's expression style. Another 6 participants states that it was beneficial in their writing grammatical accuracy and in learning vocabulary. The participants with reservations were those who were not confident enough in their language proficiency and they were reluctant to point out the mistakes of others for fear of discouraging them. Shehadeh's study(2011) were largely in line with Storch, most learners were supportive to collaborative writing. They reflected that CW not only enhanced their self-confidence and writing proficiency, but also developed their speaking skills.

2.2. Continuation task in classroom

2.2.1. Alignment and learning-promoting effects of continuation task

Pickering and Garrod (2004) construct an interactive alignment model (IAM) based on the situational model to study the language use mechanism. Taking it as a rationale, Wang (2012) extended the alignment effect produced in interpersonal dialogue interaction to the human-text interaction, and argued that the interaction between learners and reading materials during reading can also generate alignment effects. As the combination of comprehension and output generated alignment, it also explained the learning facilitation of continuation task. Combined the specific grammar patterns, Wang (2021) examined the effects of collaborative output in continuation task on L2 learning, using Chinese English learners as participants and relative clauses as target structures. The result shown that if the reading material contains a relative clause, learners will have the collaborative output of the structure in their composition as well

as a better retention; when learners was finishing the same story which containing a relative clause, the presence or absence of the alignment output of the structure in the continuation task affects their learning effect. In other words, the alignment output results in better learning and retention, however, no alignment output brings about a weaker learning effect with no longitudinal effect. Qiu & Wang's (2022) study was in line with the Wang, examined the effects of input reinforcement on alignment effects in continuation task. The study examined that input reinforcement increased learners' attention to linguistic forms, strengthened alignment effects at the linguistic level, and effectively improved the accuracy of language use.

2.2.2. The impact of continuation task on learner's writing proficiency

Song (2017) elaborated on the strategy of cultivating learners' thinking quality in the continuation task instruction from the aspects of logic, critical and innovative thinking, with the help of teaching samples. Concerning learner's writing scores, Zhan & Qin (2020) conducted an experimental study with 64 English majors, found a significant difference between the writing scores of the experimental and control classes before and after the study, the discourse structure, the language content as well as the wording were all improved substantially compared with the previous ones.

2.3. Collaborative continuation task in classroom

Take "collaborative writing" and "continuation task" as the keywords, the author conducted a literature search on CNKI and found: from 2016 to the present, only 22 domestic master's theses on CW, but the theses in the last three years accounted for 16, which shows the relevant studies on CW have been increasing year by year, more scholars have recognized its research value and importance. Sang (2017) launched a study on the impact of collaborative output on the development of learners' written language accuracy, confirmed the utility of collaborative output, which provides important insights for L2 writing instruction. Yang and Cai (2022) conducted a study on the effectiveness of L2 vocabulary facilitation under the collaborative continuation model. Collaborative continuation organically combines interpersonal interaction with human-text interaction, increasing the interaction level, which ensures the monitoring of the writing process and effect, and also effectively strengthen the interactive alignment effect and promotes L2 vocabulary learning.

Consequently, it is reasonable to apply CW to continuation task both at the theoretical and practical perspectives. Collaborative continuation task responds to the requirements of the Standards. In the third article of the Basic Concept of the Standard, it is clearly stated that it "advocates the view of activity-based learning which aimed at the development of the core competence of the curriculum and learning activities such as autonomous learning, cooperative learning and inquiry learning". Therefore, this study is aimed at broadening the exploration of writing modes, which is of far-reaching significance to improve the effect of continuation task and collaborative writing.

3. Methodology: A Teaching Practice of Collaborative Continuation Writing

3.1. Participants and materials

Participants were 128 16-17 year old Chinese learning English as a foreign language in their second year of non-compulsory secondary education. The participants came from two classes which used the same textbook FLTRP High School English Textbook 3 (2019 edition) and were taught by the same teacher. They shared the similar English learning level and writing achievements, both of the two classes were not exposed the collaborative writing task.

To elaborate how to implement collaborative continuation writing in high school, the study employed the continuation task from Zhejiang Province 2022 college entrance examination.

3.2. Procedure

In the first session, learners would go through the following process: First, they were classified as high-high group, high-low group and low-low group in the EG (Experimental Group) based on the average score of the students' writing scores in the two major exams; secondly, teachers trained students in collaborative writing. The training content included how to collaboratively understand the story of "I" and my talent partner completing their task; how to think about the subsequent storyline based on the given lines of the two paragraphs (e.g.what happened and the mental activities of characters during the meeting and drafting process; what happened to us after "my partner" was hospitalized; How "we" reacted and then successfully finished the assignment); outline for the whole story (e.g. meeting to draft - "I" was afraid of saying something wrong and kept silent and obedient to my partner - partner got sick - visiting and gaining mutual trust - working together to successfully complete the assignment - understanding the meaning of teamwork); discuss the language (e.g. the patterns used to describe the characters' psychological descriptions and action descriptions); individual writing; revising (check the grammatical structures, mechanism, punctuation, vocabulary choices, cohesion and coherence); and evaluating (the teacher first presents the high-level composition and low-level composition so as to facilitate students' correct marking).

Table 1: First session

First session	
Step 1	Grouped students into three different types
	Group types: H-H group; H-L group; L-L group
Step 2	Train students in collaborative writing
	Training content:
	How to collaboratively understand the story of "I" and my talent partner completing their task
	How to think about the subsequent storyline based on the given lines of the two paragraphs
	Outline for the whole story
	Discuss the language
	How to conduct individual writing
	How to revise
	How to evaluate

In the second session, teacher handed out the collaborative writing task sheet and the scoring rules to each group, for students to complete them collectively during writing. Writing with a clear map of the marking rules enables students to produce high-quality texts. Additionally, students may achieve a striking improvement in their writing skills as they work with the scaffolding assistance peers. Second, students were allowed to continue their writing individually after a collaborative discussion. Since students were discussing collaboratively and subsequently continuing their writing independently, to some extent, the fairness of the work was ensured.

Table 2: Second session

Second session	
Step 1	Distributes the CW sheet and the scoring rules to each group, for students to complete them collectively during writing
Step 2	Individual writing

In the third session, which is a process in which students transfer and innovate beyond the text to develop a higher-order thinking. Students were allowed to write a reflective journal (includes the best three language points in their composition as well as the three points they were most interested in). Moreover, the teacher would hand out the multi-dimensional evaluation forms to each group, which for students to evaluate peers' composition between groups after writing. In reading others' composition, they may obtain new meaning construction, integrate rich information experience, and think about their own composition in many new perspectives. Finally, the researcher would select three students in the class to conduct interviews, for the purpose of finding out the students' attitudes towards collaborative composition.

Table 3: Third session

Third session	
Step 1	Students need to write a reflective journal
Step 2	Teacher need to distribute multi-dimensional evaluation forms to each group
	Students need to evaluate peers' composition between groups
Step3	Researcher selects three students in the class to conduct interviews

4. Conclusion

This study focuses on the application of collaborative continuation writing in high school, and proposes a model for teaching collaborative continuation writing by analyzing the teaching process of real writing topic of Zhejiang Province. Through elaboration of the theoretical connotation as well as empirical studies review, the rationality and strengths of collaborative continuation writing are revealed. Overall, collaborative continuation writing is a effective teaching mode that can deepen learners' intentional attention to the pre-reading materials, increase the interaction intensity, produce a levelling effect, strengthen the scaffolding effect, and promote learning. To better employ the advantages of CW, teachers need to remember following points: first, walk through the classroom to supervise groups in the process of pairing activities. A group leader may be set up in the group to remind the students who talk about irrelevant content; second, before collaborative discussion, the teacher need to encourage the students to take an active part in the collaborative process to promote a good cooperative relationship. It is recommended that students divide their work to complete the task list while in discussion.

Indeed, this study contains some limitations. Such as a framework for teaching collaborative continuation writing designed for one class with a limited sample size and scope. Second, students were grouped only by high and low levels, and there is more than one grouping model for CW, future research can use multiple forms of group continuation tasks such as 5-6-member empowered groups or same-level groups.

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