

Experimental Research of Continuation Task to College English Writing

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Abstract: Proposed by Wang in Foreign Language World (2012), continuation task is an effective method to train language writing on the base of comprehensible input. It combines reading and writing, builds creative use of language on imitation, and enables learners to immediately use what are learned. This research attempts to apply continuation task to learners of science and technology to improve writing and study efficiency. Freshmen of 2014 majored in science and technology, totally 57 learners take part in the research. Two natural classes (1405114, 1405115) The research lasts for one term and makes an analysis of these data by SPSS. With comparison of experimental group between pre-test and post-test, the results are: 1. Continuation Task is effective to enhance learner's writing proficiency to some extent. Scores of Experimental group have improved. 2. Continuation Task is helpful to promote learner's abilities of lexicon, syntax, paragraph development and thinking in some degree.

Keywords: continuation task, imitation, creative, comprehension

1. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this thesis are to testify the effectiveness of CT in teaching English writing of non-English majors. There are three questions to be proved in this thesis which are:

- 1) Whether CT can improve students' writing proficiency?
- 2) If it does, what effect CT can have on learners' (as a whole and as different levels) writing diction, syntactic devices, paragraph development and thinking pattern?
- 3) How can CT affect learner's attitude and affection towards English study?

2. SUBJECTS

The experiment was carried out in the first semester of academic year 2014-2015. The learners of computer science and technology are chosen randomly as the subjects

3. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

To testify the impact of the CT on the subjects, the author resorts to instruments of pre-test and post-test, and interview. Each of them will be discussed in detail in the following.

4. DATA COLLECTION

Data collection lasted for one semester. Three kinds of data were used: scores of pre-test and post-test, and interview.

57 subjects of EG took part in the two tests were conducted. 57 pieces of composition were completed in the first week of the semester and 57 pieces of composition were finished in 12th week of the semester. All of the compositions are valid and are collected to be graded by the two experienced teachers.

Table 1: Comparison of writing within group1

Group1
Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Pre-test	8.12	57	.927	.123
Post-test	10.91	57	1.057	.140

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 pretest – post-test	-2.789	1.013	.134	-3.058	-2.521	-20.788	56	.000

Table 1 shows that the mean of group 1 is 8.12 in the pretest and 10.91 in the post- test(the total score of the test is 15). The mean of Group 1 is 2.89 which is higher in the post-test than in the pre-test. The standard deviation of Group 1 between pretest and post test are 0.927 and 1.057 respectively, which conveys that the degree of dispersion of Group 1 between two tests is similar. The value of P (2 tailed) is 0.000 which is lower than 0.05, which means there is a great difference of Group 1 between the pre-test and post-test. Therefore, it can be concluded that the EG improved writing proficiency after one term of implementation of CT.

Besides the obvious changes in scores, there are some improvements in the use of language and the ways of thinking patterns. The following will demonstrate and discuss subjects' changes in terms of lexicon, syntax, paragraph and thinking patterns.

At the level of lexicon, the words in the pre-test are always general : adjectives such as “different”, “hard” ,“wrong” ,“same”, “important”, “strong” and “great”; verbs such as “think”, “give”, “use”, “go”, “stop”, “improve”, “have”, “get”, “know”, “make”, “want”, “find” and “help”; adverbs of degree such as “very”, “really”. Another phenomenon is that: a word is usually used more than one time even in the same paragraph. In the post-test, the situation is changed. Adjectives and adverbs of degree, synonyms and synonymous phrases make expression vivid and lively. Learners begin to use more specific words: adjectives such as “considerate”, “thoughtful”, “numerous”, “evident”, “openhearted”, and “indispensable”; degree adverbials such as “obviously”, “excessively”, “slightly”, “greatly”, “immediately”, etc. Learners start to use synonyms within the paragraphs and the whole composition, such as “perform mission”, “complete/fulfill assignment” ,“undertake task”, which enrich expression and make description more vividly.

At the level of syntax level, simple and short sentences are popular and usually composed of 5 to 8 words. Complex and compound sentences are rarely used in writing. The sentence structure “not only, but also” is always seen and reused frequently by learners, so are the passive voice sentences. Learners are anxious about using complex sentences, and prefer short sentences since long sentences are easy to make mistakes. After the CT practice, learners begin to realize the importance of syntax, and more compound and complex sentences are used. Short sentence is still used in composition, but complex sentence, compound sentence and syntactic schemes become to be used in their works. This especially happens to high level learners, and low level learners’ improvement in this aspect is little. Simple and short sentences are popular used in high and middle level learners’ topic sentences. The chances that compound and long sentences are used to explain and illustrate complex expression are few. Only four to five learners can apply compound and long sentences for illustration.

At the level of paragraph, the transition in pre-test is always simple and superficial and there is rare logic in transition before CT. Learners always use the fixed patterns to express transition, such as “first”, “second”, “ third” or “on the one side”, “on the other side”, and other fixed phrases, such as “in my opinion”, “as far as I’m concerned” to make a conclusion. They take little care of inner connection and there is little logic connection between sentences. This phenomenon implies that learners recite fixed writing patterns in senior high school which can make them get relative high scores in the CEE. Paragraph development is always casual and they always do not care about it. Since the chances for learners to write an exposition are little, most of them do not know the structure of the exposition. These cases are very popular, even in the high level learners. After the CT practice, ways of paragraph development such as definition, example and generalization are used in high and middle level learners’ writing. They care about not only the transitional phrases but also internal relation in paragraph.

At the level of thinking, there are two aspects of thinking: one is critical thinking cultivation, the other is English linear thinking pattern. Learners usually follow others’ opinion and beat about bush , which is partly due to Chinese culture and partly due to Chinese “eight-legged essay” and the qi-cheng-zhuan-he pattern. After the practice, some good learners’ thinking

patterns begin to change. For example, the structure of “TRIT” occurs to high and some middle level learners. They put topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph, and give detailed reasons afterwards. Middle level learners are not as high level learners who can use compound and long sentences to illustrate reasons. “TRIT” is not used by the majority but it is rarely before CT practice. One discussion on “self control” (unit 4 book one) can demonstrate development of critical thinking: some learners argue that if one person is sensible and has the power to resist temptation, he can control himself better. This thought can also be found in the post-test. Learners’ imagination and critical thinking are developed which is obvious to high level learners. They express their own special ideas, and some are controversial.

Here three subjects of each level were chosen to illustrate the contrast between pre-test and post-test after the CT practice.(the whole composition can be seen in appendix)

Example one (low level learner)

At the level of lexicon: in pre-test, the adjectives and adverbs are “popular”, “lazy”, “good”, “reasonable”; Verbs and verb phrases are “is” “use”, “think”, “influence”, “bring” “solve”, “will rely on”, “lose”, “give”. In post-test, the adjectives and adverbs are “severe”, “firmly”, “electronic”, “many”, “gradually”, “really”, “practical”.; Verbs and verb phrases are “are”, “has”, “influence”, “believe”, “live”, “replace”, “like”, “communicate”, “reduce”, “will be diluted”, “be lack of”, “use”, “leave”. It can be found that low level learners begin to use more specific words and formal words, and verb, adjectives and adverbs have been improved, which strengthen expression and make description more vividly.

At the level of syntax level: in the pre-test, there are six simple sentences and three complex sentences in pre-test, and three simple sentences and six complex sentences in post-test. One passive voiced sentence is used in post-test. It can be found that low level learners’ are more various from the view of syntax. Complex sentence contains more words than before.

At the level of paragraph, in pre-test conjunctions are “at the same time”, “but”, “if”; in post-test “though”, “but”, “so”, “if”. It can be found that this subject uses more conjunctions in sentence transition.

At the level of thinking, we can find the subject expresses more contents. The improvement of critical thinking and structure is not apparent.

Example two (middle-level learner)

At the level of lexicon, in pre-test the adjectives and adverbs are “bad”, “useful”, “difficult”, “really”, “brave”, “dependent”, “dull and tedious”, “many”; Verbs and verb phrases are “is”, “learn”, “can see”, “obtain”, “belong to”, “help”, “know”, “learn”, “make a good useful”, “rely”, “face up to”, “accept”, “bring back”, “are dependent on”, “find”, “have a difficult time”, “gain more”, “let”, “try our best”. In post-test the adjectives and adverbs are “already”, “good”, “bad”, “convenient and rapid”, “most important”, “true”, “correct”; Verbs and verb phrases are “come to”, “know”, “have a good influence”, “communicate with each other”, “stay at home”, “talk with others”, “want to chat with”, “pay more attention to”, “replace”, “have a correct mentality to see”. It can be found that middle-level learners begin to use synonymous adjectives and verb phrases. The new studied phrases “dull and tedious” is used in pre-test.

Another phenomenon is that in the aspect of lexicon misuse there are five in pre-test which are “is belong to”, “isn’t help”, “make a good useful”, “the more rely”, “dull and tedious to the learning”, “bad influence for us”, and there are three misuses in post-test which are “a bad impacted”, “have to face to face with”, “correct mentality”.

At the level of syntax, there are one simple sentences, five compound sentences and five complex sentences in pre-test, and there are five simple sentences, two compound sentences and five complex sentences. It can be found that this subject’s sentence type is more varied and colorful in post-test. “the more..., the more...” and “the more..., the less...” are used in both tests and syntactic devices repetition “I don’t think” is used in post-test.

At the level of paragraph, fixed phrases such as “in my opinion”, “as far as I’m concerned” are used to express subjects’ ideas in pre-test. Undertake relations phrases and “with the development” are used in post-test.

At the level of thinking, the subject proposes that internet negative impact toward human communication is different, but it can also be found from internet positive impact toward learning. The “TRIT” paragraph structure is not clear in post-test. Maybe it is hardly to alter.

Example three (high-level learner)

At the level of lexicon, in pre-test the adjectives and adverbs are “obvious”, “healthy”, “famous”, “stronger”, “complicate”, “helpful”; Verbs and verb phrases are “is”, “changed”, “learn”, “turn to”, “need”, “know”, “replace”, “train”, “create”, “become”, “said”, “forget”, “make us become”, “think”, “solve problems”, “obey basic rules”, “teach”. In post-test, the adjectives and adverbs are “difficult”, “hurt”, “active”, “electronic”, “clearly”, “same”, “well”, “close”, “deep”; Verbs and verb phrases are “use”, “communicate with”, “want”, “become”, “go out”, “talk to”, “replace”, “know”, “help”, “overcome the distance”, “help us communicate”, “feel”, “stay in”, “communicate”, “make”, “touch”, “have a deep impression”. It can be found that high-level learner uses more synonymous phrases in explanation.

At the level of syntax, there are six simple sentences, three compound sentences and four complicated sentences in pre-test and three simple sentences, three compound sentences and five complex sentences in post-test.

At the level of paragraph, it can be found this subject takes more care of inner connection and the connection between sentences is more logical.

At the level of thinking, in post-test, the topic sentence appears at the beginning or paragraph one and paragraph two, and their structure follows “TRIT” basically. The composition exposes subject’s thought directly and does not beat about bush. He explains it is necessary to maintain “face to face communication”, so develop his critical thinking.

5. CONCLUSION

Writing plays an important role in business and tests. As a good way to select candidates, it is always a crucial test item and a good effective method to select good learners. However, writing is always the short slab among all the abilities and learners’ consideration on writing

lags behind other skills. According to the condition of non-English-majors, this research applies CT to experimental group for one semester. And the main findings are that both controlled group and experimental group make progress in writing. But experimental group gets higher scores in post-test. The details are as follows:

To be specific, learners of experimental group can put newly studied words and expressions in writing, more specific words are used in their writing. In syntax, they start to realize the importance of syntax. More compound and complex sentences are used. Short sentence is still used in composition, but complex sentence, compound sentence and syntactic schemes become to use in their works. In paragraph, ways of paragraph development such as definition, example and generalization are used in high and middle level learners' writing. Both the transitional phrases and internal relation are used in paragraph writing. In thinking, topic sentences appear at the beginning of the paragraph and detailed reasons are given afterwards, which is obvious to high and some middle level learners. The same case happens to learners' imagination and critical thinking . They express their own special ideas, some are controversial. It can be concluded that CT is helpful to improve learners' writing.

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