

On the Application of the Process Genre Approach in Continuation Writing

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Abstract

The process genre approach is an integrated writing method that combines the outcome approach, genre approach and process approach. It can effectively help students to solve the problem of poor writing skills at the discourse level. The process genre approach provides input to students' writing in terms of writing patterns and language knowledge. This paper discusses the necessity and feasibility of applying the process genre approach to continuation writing. It also discusses specific teaching strategies in the context of the 2020 college entrance examination on continuation writing in Shandong.

Keywords

Process genre approach, Continuation writing, Test Analysis.

1. Introduction

Writing, as an output skill, is an effective means of testing the acquisition of the target language by learners of a foreign language. Swain proposed the Comprehensibility Hypothesis, arguing that the key to true mastery of a foreign language is that learners are given the opportunity to express themselves correctly in the language (Swain, 1985). In the process of language output, the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of the target language are constantly being practiced and tested, leading to the internalization of the language. Wang Chuming, a language acquisition researcher, subsequently proposed the idea of "writing for learning", stating that productive writing can effectively promote the automation of language use (Wang, 2000). This shows the importance of writing for English learning. In the past two decades, writing teaching methods such as the "write long method" have been prevalent in English language teaching in China. It aims to improve the writing ability through the continuous extension of the text by the learners. However, this type of writing teaching method mostly gives students a fixed topic. On the one hand, students write without the prompting and input of the target language, and on the other hand, the topics are fixed with little room for play. As a result, English writing and reading remain disconnected for a long time. Students do not have appropriate reading input when they write and output, so they cannot realize the organic combination of input and output. This results in students having "nothing to say" and the teaching of writing is not very effective.

In response to this problem, Wang proposed the theory of "continuation writing". According to Wang, the efficiency of foreign language learning depends on how closely language comprehension and output are combined. The combination of these two produces a synergistic effect; the tighter the combination, the stronger the synergistic effect (Wang, 2014). Synergy refers to the convergence of the language produced and the language understood. The language output is aligned to the language input (Wang, 2012). This theory provides new ideas and methods for teaching English writing. "continuation writing" was also introduced as a new question type in the college entrance examination in 2015 in Jiangsu, Zhejiang and other places. According to the test requirements, the question provides about 350 words, and requires candidates to continue writing a short essay of about 150 words that is logically coherent and has a reasonable plot based on the textual content of the original text, the opening phrase of the

paragraph and key words. Since this is a new type of question, there are certain problems in students' learning and teachers' teaching. It is often showed that the content of students' sequels is off-topic, the plot does not make sense and the use of key words is not accurate, resulting in a scattered structure and poor readability. The teacher should guide the students to read and understand the article thoroughly, then determine the content of the continuation according to the text, and do a good job of post-writing evaluation and revision.

2. Theoretical Basis

The "process genre approach" was first proposed by Richard Badger and Goodith White (Badger & White, 2000). Badger and White compared the advantages and disadvantages of the outcome approach, the process approach, and the genre approach. They found that both outcome-based and genre-based approach have the disadvantage of not focusing enough on developing students' writing skills. However, the process approach can compensate for this shortcoming, and the outcome approach can compensate for the shortcomings of the process approach in terms of insufficient input of students' language knowledge. Therefore, the "process genre approach" can be seen as a combination of the advantages of the outcome process, and genre approach.

Badger and White do not propose any specific steps for the "process genre teaching method". Based on Badger and White's views and his own understanding, Han Jinlong, a domestic scholar, believes that the writing teaching of "process genre teaching" can consist of four stages: model analysis, imitation writing, independent writing, and editing and revision (Han, 2001). These four stages form a coherent process. First, the teacher selects a model text of a specific genre and explains the social context and communicative purpose related to the genre so that students can fully understand the context of the genre. At the same time, the teacher summarizes the genre structure and language characteristics of the model text. Then students are guided to consciously imitate and use the text in order to "internalize" the knowledge. Then students are asked to independently apply their knowledge of the genre to the given scenario and finally revise it by themselves, in groups or by the teacher.

In summary, the author believes that the "process genre teaching method" actually consists of three stages: knowledge input before writing, knowledge output during writing, and revision and reflection after writing.

(1) Knowledge input before writing

The teacher leads the students in analyzing the selected model essay. Then another article in the same genre is provided for students to imitate and analyze. Finally, the teacher and students summarize the structural and linguistic characteristics of an article in this genre. In the first stage, the focus is on developing students' genre awareness, including the structure and linguistic characteristics of a particular genre and the vocabulary and sentence patterns associated with it.

(2) Knowledge output during writing

After the first stage of knowledge input, the teacher provides the students with topics in the same context as the model texts studied in the input stage. Students imitate or compose independently based on the topics using the summarized discourse structure and language features of the genre.

(3) Revision and reflection after writing

The teacher randomly selects three essays for current revision through the projector, and then leads the students in summarizing the characteristics. Meanwhile, advanced vocabulary and sentence patterns are added as appropriate. Next, students can correct by themselves or with

each other at their desks. Students analyze their own shortcomings in the writing process and make self-evaluation.

3. Teaching Practice

3.1. Analysis of the text

This is a narrative essay on the July 2020 New College Entrance Examination in Shandong Province. The article recounts the story of Mrs. Meredith and her three children who help Bernard, a poor family, to earn money. When reading the text, we should firmly grasp the three lines of the story development, namely the time line, the storyline line and the emotional development line.

Time line: ① One morning, the day before → ② after their mother left the room → ③ for some moments → ④ when John had an idea...

Storyline: Mrs. Meredith lives in a small community. Due to the economic recession, many people have lost their jobs, but everyone helps each other to overcome the difficulties. The kind-hearted Mrs. Meredith often visits the poor people in the community and brings them food and medicine. One day she told her three children (John, Harry, and Clara) about the poor family's situation. The man was sick and the woman was at home taking care of him and couldn't go out to work. Their child, Bernard, wanted to earn money but did not know what he could do. After hearing his mother's words, all three children want to help Bernard, and finally John comes up with a good idea - making popcorn...

Emotional development line: The emotion of this text should be mainly "empathy" and happiness. The first four paragraphs are about Mrs. Meredith helping the poor, presenting a warm and sympathetic state of mind. The fifth and sixth paragraphs are about the three children, John, Harry and Clara, who have empathy for Bernard after hearing his story. They want to help him but don't know how to do it and felt depressed. The last two paragraphs are about John coming up with a great idea to help Bernard that they can all help accomplish. At this point the children become very excited. The final result of the sequel is that Mrs. Meredith and the three children finally succeeded in helping Bernard to earn money. So the emotional line of the whole essay should be the common Up a Down a Up pattern.

3.2. Teaching procedures

3.2.1. Before Writing

(1) Read the model text

A. Read the key words of the article and predict the main idea of the story

The teacher instructed students to classify the key words that appeared in the article according to the elements of characters, places, events and topics. A total of 10 keywords appear in the article. The students guessed the story according to the keywords, without caring about the specific plot of the story. The keywords are: community, Mrs. Meredith, kind, visiting, helping, Bernard, solution, popcorn, paper bags, and sell, so based on the keywords, students understand that the article involves the characters Mrs. Meredith and Bernard. The location is community and the event is helping Bernard sell popcorn.

B. Read the text carefully to clarify the textual context

The teacher asks students to sort out the text and the story by using the 5W1H (when, where, who, what, why, how).

Table 1. 5W1H information

Who	Mrs.Meredith, John, Harrys Bernard, Uncle Johns, Clara
When	One morning
Where	In the room
What	The children helped Bernard to earn money.
Why	Bernard's dad was sick and his mom couldn't go out to work.
How	The children made popcorn and Bernard sold it.

(2) Model essay analysis**A. Summarize the clues of the essay and clarify the meaning of the main idea**

A clue is the thread that runs through the whole text, linking the characters and events in the text together organically. The clues of narrative texts are time line, storyline line and emotional development line. In the text interpretation section, teachers have clarified the three clues of the text. But the general one is helping Bernard earn money through selling popcorn.

B. Analyze language features and clarify the style of the text

Students underline the sentences describing the characters' appearance, actions and psychological activities, and analyze the language features and descriptive style of the text. The writing part is consistent with the original text in terms of style and language. This article is a narrative text, and the tense of the whole text is mainly in the general past tense. The text has many descriptions of action (e.g: "He sprang to his feet and cried. The other children also jumped up all attention.") and quotes many dialogues (e.g: " I wish we could help him to earn money," His family is suffering so much."), which are in line with the characteristics of most narrative essays.

C. Analyze the opening sentences of the paragraphs to determine the direction of the continuation

Students independently analyzed the first sentences given in the two writing paragraphs to determine the direction of the story and discussed them in groups. After discussion, the general ideas of writing the first sentences of the two paragraphs are:

Idea 1: The children went to Uncle John's house to borrow a popcorn machine and learn how to make popcorn. Mrs. Meredith went out to buy paper bags for the popcorn and brought Bernard back with her. Bernard is shy at first when everything is ready, John helps him sell the popcorn together and then makes money.

Idea 2: Mrs. Meredith went with the children to tell Bernard about the project. They bought a machine and paper bags and learned to make popcorn. Everything was ready, and Bernard started selling popcorn and making money.

Using the Given-New strategy, questions are asked and answered around the central word based on the information provided in the original text and the first sentence. This expands students' ideas and perspectives, and ultimately creates a logical storyline.

From the first sentence of the first paragraph, "When Mrs. Meredith heard of John's idea, she thought it was a good one, too." we can set up the following questions.

- ① What did Mrs. Meredith do?
- ② What did John, Harry and Clara do to help Bernard?
- ③ How did they let Bernard know their idea?
- ④ How did Bernard feel?

Then the students answered the above questions in detail, and the information in the first paragraph was organized.

According to the first sentence of the second paragraph, with everything ready, Bernard started out on his new business.

- ① When Bernard sold popcorn, what problem would he meet?
- ② What did the children do?
- ③ Did Bernard sell popcorn out?
- ④ Was Bernard thankful to them?

Then the students answered the above questions in detail, and the information in the second paragraph was organized.

3.2.2. While Writing

(1) Imitation Writing

This is not simply asking students to imitate writing. Rather, students are guided to consciously imitate the knowledge of genre, language, and style acquired in this step of text analysis. By applying this knowledge, students are able to gain a deeper understanding of the text, and it is easier for them to internalize this knowledge. In the future, they will be able to write in similar genres with ease. To reduce the students' writing pressure, the writing is divided into two steps: outlining and writing paragraphs.

A. List outline points

Listing outlines and writing points is an effective writing strategy. A clear and unambiguous list of key points helps students to clarify the focus of their writing. In teaching practice, students can also share their outlines with their classmates and teachers if they have enough time to revise them.

Based on the genre structure and writing ideas summarized in the previous discussion, students outline their own writing and mark the key words they expect to use. In order to produce a detailed and uncluttered essay, students should also list three to five points for each paragraph, depending on the subject matter.

B. Writing complete paragraphs

When students are writing, teachers should guide them to use grammatical devices, lexical cohesion and other common discourse cohesion devices. Therefore, when students begin to write their essays, teachers should teach them to use appropriate transitional words to connect points to make them follow the writing style of the previous text. The content should be consistent with the original text in terms of theme, characters, clues, and language style. This is demonstrated by the natural connection between the context and the preceding and following episodes.

3.2.3. Post Writing

(1) Self-assessment and peer assessment

After students have completed their drafts, they will evaluate their essays with the help of a self-assessment sheet. First, they will check off the items they have achieved, then they will exchange comments with their peers and give revision advice to each other.

(2) Revision and Reflection

Students revise and improve their work according to the results of self-assessment and peer assessment. Then they study the model essay and compare their own work. When studying the model essay in this case, the teacher asked the students to pay attention to the descriptions of action and psychology, and whether the logic was coherent.

(3) Teacher's feedback

The teacher evaluates the students' work based on the self-assessment form above. At the same time, the teacher selects the best works with vivid action descriptions and rich and reasonable details to set examples.

Table 2. Checklist

1	Have I included at least 5 of the given words and underlined them?
2	Does the writing follow the given sentences naturally?
3	Does the second paragraph follow the first logically?
4	Does the extended part convey a message or relate to a central idea already expressed or implied?
5	Are the details relevant and helpful in conveying my message?
6	Have I described people and things in a similar tone and style to the writer's?
7	Have I employed specific words to make details vivid?
8	Have I used appropriate transitional words to make the paragraph coherent?
9	Have I used the simple past tense to narrate the story?
10	Have I used various but not too complex sentence patterns?
11	Have I avoided wordiness?
12	Are there any grammatical errors in tenses, plurals and verb forms?

Through the entire process of reading the text closely, analyzing and then writing, students implicitly master the writing style of this type of text. Students learn to analyze knowledge about the structure and language of the text and then apply this knowledge to their own writing. In continuation writing, only when the analysis of the previous text is thorough enough can one write a logically coherent text.

4. Conclusion

The process genre approach is a writing method that combines the characteristics of the outcome approach, the process approach, and the genre approach. By applying the process genre approach to continuation writing, students can compensate for the disadvantages of the traditional teaching method, such as students only following the template and writing with empty content. Before writing, students analyze and interpret the text and extract the structure of the text and relevant language knowledge. During writing, students first imitate writing so that they can apply the structure and linguistic knowledge of the original text to their own writing. The draft is then revised by themselves, peers, and the teacher. This process provides students with structure and topics to write about and allows them to have something to say that is logically related to the structure and themes of the previous text. Problems of contextualization and coherence in continuation writing can also be solved by analyzing and imitating the previous text.

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