

# Integrative Study of Continuation Task in High School based on Thematic Progression

-- Cases of Narratives

Aohan Zhang

School of postgraduate, Chongqing Normal University, Chongqing 404100, China

---

**Abstract:** The writing component of college entrance exams now includes a brand-new form of test called a continuation task. In high school, a well-defined form of thematic growth is a midwife to improving its coherence, articulation, and logic. The narrative essay's mode of thematic progression in this study is examined using the examples "My Amazing Naadam Experience" from Unit 1 Festival and Celebration, "Li Lan's Travel Journal" from Unit 3 Diverse Culture, in PEP Compulsory Three, and "Seeing the True North via Rail: Vancouver and the Heart of Canada" from Unit 4 Journey Across, in Selective Compulsory Two. The concept and tips for the test question "Continuation Task" from the New Curriculum II Paper 2022 were examined in this study, using it as an example. The "six elements and four patterns" technique is offered, along with the evaluation criteria, hoping that this can give front-line teachers a reference for teaching the continuing assignment.

**Keywords:** Continuation Task; Thematic Progression; Narratives; English Teaching.

---

## 1. Introduction

The continuation task provides language material of 350 words or less, and students are required to write a short article with a complete plot and structure of about 150 words (Ministry of Education Examination Center, 2015). This is advantageous for improving students' understanding of the key information and linguistic features of the brief text and their fluency in using citations and citation styles. However, disjointed sequel narratives, disconnected sequel languages, disconnected sequel logic, and other issues also arise in continuation task teaching. The theme (T) and rheme (R) are two components that make up a sentence, which were first put forth by Mathesius and were developed under the Systemic Functional School represented by Halliday. The link between a clause's theme and rheme affects the text's emphasis and informational flow (Paltridge, B., 2012:130). Constant theme, constant rheme, linear theme, and divided rheme are examples of common theme types. Therefore, an obvious thematic progression is helpful to address the issues of articulation, coherence, and logical disconnection in the continuation task.

Thematic progression model is used in this study as a theoretical framework, and examples are from the narrative essays "My Amazing Naadam Experience" from Unit 1 Festival and Celebration, "Li Lan's Travel Journal" from Unit 3 Diverse Culture, in PEP Compulsory Three, and "Seeing the True North via Rail: Vancouver and the Heart of Canada" from Unit 4 Journey Across, in Selective Compulsory Two. As an illustration, the test question "Continuation Task" from the New Curriculum II Paper 2022 was examined in this study, using it as an example to investigate the theme and hints for the Continuation Task in the narrative. This benefits both the students' Continuation Task and their thinking, as well as the benefits of proposing theme progression in the teaching of Continuation Task.

## 2. Continuation Task

The continuation task is a new form of examination in the writing part of the college entrance examination in recent years, with higher requirements for students' reading and writing abilities (Yang, 2023). It is usually a narrative with a rich plot and occasionally a small number of discussion essays. It requires students to maintain a high level of self-efficacy in terms of paragraph starters, the richness of the content, accuracy of grammar and vocabulary, the logic and consistency of the context, and the degree to which the continuation should blend with the information in the original text. It can give full play to the alignment effect between reading and writing, promote writing through reading, and thus promote the improvement of students' foreign language proficiency (Ying, 2021). Therefore, the continuation task places a strong emphasis on "comprehension of information", "use of language", "logical relationships", and "creative thinking", which is conducive to improving students' ability to grasp the key information and language features of short texts, their ability to control the structure of the discourse, their rich imaginative ability, and their ability to think logically and creatively.

## 3. Thematic Progression

### 3.1. Theme and Rheme

The theme and rheme are mainly due to the theories of the Prague School of Functional Linguistics and Halliday's Systemic Functional Doctrine (Fan, 2022:14). A sentence can be divided into two groups of parts: the primary and the declarative. The theme is what the message is concerned with, with the starting point of departure for what the speaker is going to say (Paltridge, 2012:129). The remainder of the clause is the rheme. A declension is a narration, description, or illustration of the subject, usually conveying new information.

### 3.2. Thematic Progression

The four most common thematic progression patterns are as follows (Zhu, 1985): The first one is the constant theme. A parallel theme is also known as the same theme, also known as a radial theme or a parallel theme, i.e., the main theme is the same and the stated theme is different (Paltridge, 2012:131). The second is the constant rheme, also known as the centralized pattern, in which the primary position is different and the narrative position is the same. The third is the linear theme, in which the subject matter or part of the subject matter of the preceding clause is the same as the subject matter of the following clause. This is referred to as a zigzag or linear pattern theme (Paltridge, B. 2012:131). The fourth is the split rheme, when the subject matter of the preceding clause is taken up in the theme of the following clause, as in a number of subsequent clauses (Paltridge, 2012:132). The thematic progression can clearly present the information generation process of the discourse and the structural structure to help students solve the problems of unclear expression of meanings and loose structure that exist in the continuation task. However, thematic progression in EFL learners' writing should decrease the emergence of the brand new theme, double rheme, empty rheme, empty theme, overuse of constant theme pattern, and overwhelming selection of textual theme (Fitriati, S.W., & Gayatri, N. M., 2021:257).

## 4. Case Study of Thematic Progression in Narratives

Different types of discourse will choose different thematic progression patterns in order to realize their different communicative purposes. Thematic progression is an effective activity to make the students active in learning writing (M. Dahlan Bahang, 2021). The continuation task is mostly a narrative, so this study takes the three narrative texts in the English textbook of PEP High School as an example and selects one paragraph from each of them to analyze the thematic progression mode in the narrative texts in order to explain how the main position arrangement of the narrative serves the development of the story.

### 4.1. My Amazing Naadam Experience

This material is a narrative essay with six paragraphs, selected from Unit 1 Festival and Celebration, which is a compulsory part of English in high school at PEP, and its theme is people and society. The text is mainly about the writer's experience of taking part in the Naadam Festival in Mongolia, and the writer feels amazed at it. In this study, paragraph 4 was chosen to be analyzed in terms of subjective (T), narrative (R), and thematic progression patterns, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Thematic Progression of Para.4

S	Theme	Rheme		Thematic Progression
1	I	enjoyed the archery, but the horse races were my favorite part.	T1 R1 ↓	
2	I	was surprised to see that the riders were boys and girls	T2 R2 ↓	Constant Theme
3	I	heard it is because children are lighter and the horses can run faster and farther.	T3 R3 ↓	Constant Theme
4	I	was a little worried about the children's safety, but Burin said don't worry.	T4 R4 ↙	Constant Theme Constant Rheme
5	They	have been riding horses all their lives.	T5 R5 ↓	Liner Theme
6	They	will be just fine	T6 R6	Constant Theme

As illustrated in Table 1, T1 to T2, T2 to T3, T3 to T4, and T5 to T6 are in the mode of constant theme; T3 to T4 are in the mode of constant rheme; and T4 to T5 are in the mode of liner theme. In the paragraph, there are 6 sentences in total, and the constant theme mode of propulsion occurs 4 times, accounting for nearly 66.66% of the whole text; the constant

rheme mode of propulsion occurs 1 time, accounting for nearly 16.67%; and the liner theme mode of propulsion occurs 1 time, accounting for nearly 16.67%

### 4.2. Li Lan's Travel Journal

**Table 2.** Thematic Progression of Para.3

S	Theme	Rheme		Thematic Progression
1	I	headed to a local museum that showed the historical changes in California.	T1 R1 ↓	
2	I	learnt that America got California from Mexico in 1848	T2 R2 ↓	constant theme
3	Gold	was discovered near San Francisco, which started a gold rush.	T3 R3 ↓	constant rheme
4	Over 300,000 people	came from all over the world to seek their fortune, San Francisco quickly became a big city.	T4 R4 ↓	constant rheme
5	Chinese	arrived (San Francisco) during this period.	T5 R5 ↓	constant rheme
6	Some (Chinese)	opened up shops and restaurants in Chinatown.	T6 R6 ↓	constant theme
7	Many others (other Chinese)	found jobs on farms, joined the gold rush, went to build railway that joined California to the eastern region of the country.	T7 R7 ↓	constant theme
8	The museum	did a really good job of showing how America was built by immigrants from different countries and cultures.	T8 R8 ↓	constant rheme
9	They (Chinese)	carried a bit of home in their hearts, and built a new home here.	T9 R9	constant rheme

This article is a narrative essay and a travel journal. It consists of 3 paragraphs and is taken from U3 Diverse Culture, the theme of People and Society, in the Compulsory English of the High School of Renjiao Edition. The text uses time as a clue to introduce the impact of multiculturalism on all aspects of the city through what Chinese student Li Lan saw and heard during her trip to San Francisco. In this study, paragraph 3 was chosen to be analyzed for the main position (T), the narrative position (R), and the thematic progression model as shown in Table 2.

As can be seen from Table 2, T1 to T2, T5 to T6, and T6 to T7 are in constant theme mode; T2 to T3, T3 to T4, T4 to T5, T7 to T8, and T8 to T9 are in constant rheme mode. There are 9 sentences in the paragraph, and the constant theme pattern appears 3 times, accounting for 37.5% of the whole text, in which the subject "Chinese" appears the most times; the constant rheme pattern appears 5 times, accounting for 62.5%

of the whole text.

### 4.3. Seeing the True North via Rail: Vancouver and the Heart of Canada

This article is both a narrative text and a travelogue. It is a 4-paragraph narrative from U4 Journal Across a Vast Land, a selective and compulsory part of the English language in high school in the Renjiao edition. The text tells the story of two sisters, Li Daiyu and Liu Qian, who traveled across Canada by train according to chronological and spatial order. In addition to introducing the natural scenery and human geographic conditions along the route, the text also recounts what the two sisters think and feel. In this study, paragraph 3 was chosen to be analyzed for the main position (T), the narrative position (R), and the thematic progression model as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Thematic Progression of Para.3

S	Theme	Rheme		Thematic Progression
1	the two girls	arose early to take the train to Lake Louise, passing through the Canadian Rockies.	T1 R1 ✓	
2	mountains and forests of Canada	looked massive.	T2 R2 ↓	liner theme
3	They	took a taxi to Lake Louise, where the blue water literally took their breath away with its exceptional beauty.	T3 R3 ↓	constant rheme
4	They	spent night, then took a coach bound north through the Canadian Rockies to Jasper.	T4 R4 ↓	constant theme
5	They	both agreed that it was the most awesome journey they had ever taken.	T5 R5 ✓	constant theme
6	one highlight of their trip	was being able to see many different creatures, including deer, mountain goats, and even a grizzly bear and an eagle.	T6 R6	liner theme

As can be seen from Table 3, T3 to T4 and T4 to T5 are in the mode of constant theme; T2 to T3 are in the mode of constant rheme; and T1 to T2 and T5 to T6 are in the mode of liner theme. There are 6 sentences in the paragraph, and the constant theme mode occurs 2 times, accounting for 40% of the whole article, in which the subject "they" occurs the most; the constant rheme mode occurs once, accounting for 20%; and the liner theme mode occurs 2 times, accounting for 40% of the whole article. It accounts for nearly 40% of the total number of occurrences.

Through the above three cases, it is found that there are more constant theme, constant rheme, and liner theme propulsive patterns in the narrative texts. Among them, because the sentences in narrative essays start with characters, time, and place, the constant theme mode of propulsion is more often used, which can highlight the main character of the essay and make the essay unfold around a topic. The liner theme can be used to emphasize facts, actions, etc. The liner theme is in line with the purpose of the discourse, which is to promote the development of the storyline. Therefore, the three thematic progression modes, namely, the narrative theme, the constant theme, and the liner theme, are all suitable for the narrative genre.

## 5. A Case Application of Thematic Progression in Continuation Task

This study is based on the principle of "reading before writing" and takes the new standard II Continuation Task

reading text in 2022 as an example to integrate the Thematic Progression mode with "writing".

### 5.1. Reading before Writing

This study first analyzes the main position of the new 2022 II Continuation. After reading the text, one analyzes the theme and structure of the text and finally suggests clues for the continuation of the content.

[Case]

It was the day of the big cross-country run. Students from seven different primary schools in and around the small town were warming up and walking the route through thick evergreen forest. I looked around and finally spotted David, who was standing by himself off to the side by a fence. He was small for ten years old. His usual big toothy smile was absent today. I walked over and asked him why he wasn't with the other children. He hesitated and then said he had decided not to run.

What was wrong? He had worked so hard for this event! I quickly searched the crowd for the school's coach and asked him what had happened. "I was afraid that kids from other schools would laugh at him," he explained uncomfortably. "I gave him the choice to run or not, and let him decide."

I bit back my frustration. I knew the coach meant well—he thought he was doing the right thing. After making sure that David could run if he wanted, I turned to find him coming towards me, his small body rocking from side to side as he swung his feet forward.

David had a brain disease which prevented him from walking or running like other children, but at school his classmates thought of him as a regular kid. He always participated to the best of his ability in whatever they were doing. That was why none of the children thought it unusual that David had decided to join the cross-country team. It just took him longer —that's all. David had not missed a single practice, and although he always finished his run long after the other children, he did always finish. As a special education

teacher at the school, I was familiar with the challenges David faced and was proud of his strong determination.

Continuation task

Para. 1: We sat down next to each other, but David wouldn't look at me. \_\_\_\_\_

Para. 2: I watched as David moved up to the starting line with the other runners. \_\_\_\_\_

The theme analysis of this reading material is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** The theme analysis of this reading material

	Theme's changes	Text analysis
Para1	It→Students→I→David→He(David) → His big toothy smile→I→He(David)	In the first paragraph of seven sentences, the background of the "cross-country run" is explained, and then the story is introduced from the perspective of my description of David. The second sentence, "walking through thick forest," contrasts with the fourth sentence, "standing by a fence," to subtly bring out the fact that David is not involved in the cross-country run and to set up the suspense. The author uses the constant theme of the book to create a sense of suspense. The author uses the constant theme and the narrative-coherent mode of advancement. T4→T5 "He (David)" belongs to the constant theme, and T7→T8 belongs to the liner theme.
Para2	He(David) →I→I→he	The second paragraph consists of 3 sentences, T2→T3 is the constant theme pattern.
Para3	I→I→I	The third paragraph consists of 3 sentences, all of which are in constant theme mode.
Para4	David→He(David)→none of the children→It→David→I	The third paragraph consists of 6 sentences, most of which are in constant theme mode. It describes the challenges that the disease has presented to David and his determination to do all things well.

According to the above subject analysis, the essay is narrated from "my" point of view, mainly using the constant theme mode. The essay is organized in the form of a race. "I am a special education teacher who, on the day of a big cross-country race, found David, who has a brain disease, standing alone. When asked why, he said he was ready to give up the race and learned from the coach that he wanted David to make his own decision about whether or not to run because he was worried that his classmates would make fun of him." I encouraged David to follow his heart and ignore others' opinions. David eventually ran in the race, showing a strong determination to overcome himself despite the difficulties he encountered.

From the first sentence of the first paragraph, "We sat next to each other, but David wouldn't look at me," and the first sentence of the second paragraph, "I watched David walk to the starting line with the other runners," it can be seen that the first paragraph can be depicted as the author encouraging David to continue to finish the race, and David finally decided to take part in the race after a strong mental struggle. David, after a strong mental struggle, finally decided to take part in the race. The second paragraph can describe that David started to run the race, and although he encountered difficulties in the middle of the race, he still insisted on finishing the race until the end. That is, to continue the clues for encouraging David: psychological changes; deciding to participate; overcoming the difficulties; cheering Cheering; Finishing the race.

Therefore, combing the main position of the text is conducive to clearly analyzing the topic of the article, the angle of the narrative, and the chapter structure of the vein, so as to make the continuation of the content closer to the reading material of the writing ideas and writing style and to maintain coordination.

## 5.2. Teaching Implications

This article is a narrative essay and a travel journal. It consists of 3 paragraphs and is taken from U3 Diverse Culture, the theme of People and Society, in the Compulsory English of the High School of Renjiao Edition. The text uses time as a clue to introduce the impact of multiculturalism on all aspects of the city through what Chinese student Li Lan saw and heard during her trip to San Francisco. In this study, paragraph 3 was chosen to be analyzed for the main position (T), the narrative position (R), and the thematic progression model as shown in Table 2.

In-depth reading is the prerequisite and foundation of high-quality continuation writing, and Continuation Task includes two levels: "reading before writing" and "writing after reading". First, "Reading Before Writing" can follow the strategy of "Six Elements + Four Grids". Before reading, you need to sort out and integrate the six core elements of who did what at what time (when) in what place (where) in what way (how), i.e., scene (settings-when&where), character (character-who), and plot (plots-what&why&how), also known as 5W1H. The four-gram method means that the six elements usually revolve around the following four aspects: scene and characters, i.e., the background of the story; plot 1, i.e., creating a problem (conflict); plot 2, i.e., the solution; and the result. Secondly, to analyze the two sentences provided in the continuation of the writing, the analysis is to see if new clues emerge or if there are parts that echo old clues.

"Writing after reading" requires not adding characters, not adding side plots, not using too much dialog, not writing negative endings, not setting up suspense at the end of the text, not deviating from the original theme, not violating the logic of common sense, and trying to follow the original text's principles of consistency, positivity, and twists and turns. Therefore, "reading before writing" is conducive to grasping the main line of development of the article and the direction

of the sequel, which can improve the coherence and consistency of the sequel and the original text. For example, the teacher first asked students to reasonably speculate the plot of the sequel based on the “CDE” (C-Character, D-Development, and E-Emotion); and then asked students to continue the story with two paragraphs in the same classroom (Liu & Liu & Zeng, 2019: 59). Writing after reading is conducive to narrowing the language style between the sequel and the original text and clearing the direction and obstacles for the writing task. At the same time, after writing, students need to pay attention to evaluation through self-assessment and mutual assessment table refinement of the standard, which is conducive to students finding and reflecting on their own on the continuation of the confusion and problems in the assessment to promote learning and thinking and ultimately enhance the level of Continuation Task.

## 6. Conclusion

A clear model of thematic progression can help students improve the effect of Continuation Task. This study focuses on students' Continuation Task problems of disconnected plot, disconnected logic, disconnected coherence and articulation, etc., and takes three narratives in PEP Senior as examples to analyze the thematic progression in the narrative essay. Taking the test question Continuation Task in the New Curriculum II Paper 2022 as an example, the study discussed the theme and thematic progression mode of narrative text in Continuation Task, analyzed the text topic and clues for continuation, also proposed a pre-reading “Six Elements + Four Grammars”, strategies for Continuation Task, and requirements for assessment. However, more narrative texts and Continuation Task need to be analyzed to promote the integration of thematic progression and Continuation Task, in terms of coherence and articulation and to provide an opportunity for thematic progression. In addition, further

integration of the pedagogical assessment of reading followed by writing provides a direction for future research.

## Acknowledgments

Natural Science Foundation.

## References

- [1] Fitriati, S. W. And Gayatri, N. M.: Thematic progression in EFL learners' writing: A literature review. *Lingua Cultura*, Vol15(2021)No.2, p.257-262.
- [2] Halliday, M. A. K. and Hasan, R.: *Language, Context and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social Semiotic Perspective* (Deakin University Press, Geelong, 1985).
- [3] M.Dahlan Bahang, Anastasia Relin Nawun, Antonius Ali Wutun and Muhammad Nurhusain: The Use of Thematic Progression in Writing: Hortatory Exposition Text at Second Grade Students of SMA Negeri 1 Elar. *The Educational Review*, Vol10(2021).
- [4] Ministry of Education: *General Senior High School Curriculum Standards(English)*(People's Education Press, Beijing, 2020).
- [5] Paltridge, B.: *Discourse Analysis*(Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2012).
- [6] T.Y. Yang: Analysis on the Application of the Process Genre Approach in the Teaching of Continuation Task in Senior High School. *The Educational Review*, Vol5(2023).
- [7] X.Y. Sun. Thematic Progression and Discourse Analysis. *Academic Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, Vol15 (2023).
- [8] Y. Ouyang. Study on the Continuation Task of China's New College Entrance Examination Based on the Interactive Alignment Theory. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, Vol10(2021).