

# A Study on Cross-Cultural Themed Teaching Practice in High School English Continuation Writing from the Perspective of Alignment

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**Abstract:** This study explores cross-cultural continuation writing in senior high school English, addressing students' challenges in cultural, emotional, plot, and language alignment. By integrating a "3+1" analytical framework—emotion, plot, language, and culture—the research proposes targeted pedagogical strategies. Using the 2025 NMET continuation task as an example, the paper illustrates classroom practice such as the Name Iceberg and emotional scaling to foster alignment. Results show that structured interventions enhance students' ability to produce coherent, culturally resonant continuations, demonstrating the model's potential for broader application in cross-cultural language teaching.

**Keywords:** continuation writing; cross culture; alignment effect

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## 1.Introduction

Continuation writing represents a relatively novel writing task within the framework of the National College Entrance Examination in China. It requires students to first read a passage of approximately 350 words and then, based on that text and the provided initial sentences, compose a continuation of about 150 words. This format signifies a significant shift from merely assessing students' isolated language skills, such as grammar and vocabulary, to evaluating their comprehensive language competence, encompassing reading comprehension, logical thinking, and creative writing abilities.

In 2025, the National II Exam Paper introduced cross-cultural names as a continuation prompt for the first time, shifting the focus from the traditional human and nature theme to cultural identity and pronunciation anxiety. This presented new challenges to the Emotion-Plot-Language alignment. Against this backdrop, students' continuation writings exhibited cultural aphasia, including plot avoidance of name conflicts, emotional reliance on smile-touching clichés, and loss of colloquial and humorous linguistic features. Addressing this, the study adopts Ying Kejie's (2023) three-dimensional alignment (Emotion-Plot-Language) and Zhang Yan's (2023) Character-Emotion-Plot-Language framework, adding a cultural alignment to construct a "3+1" analytical framework. This provides teachers with replicable pedagogical strategies.

## 2.Alignment Effect in Continuation Writing

Pickering & Garrod (2004) proposed the Interactive Alignment Model, which posits that during interpersonal interactions, conversational partners continuously coordinate and adapt to one another—a process termed alignment. Atkinson et al. (2007) further argued that alignment occurs not only between people but also between individuals and their physical environments.

Continuation writing is an innovative foreign language learning method proposed by Professor Wang Chuming, which combines reading comprehension with writing practice. At its core lies the theory of the interactive alignment. Wang Chuming (2010) believes that alignment also occurs between people and reading materials, and creatively proposes a path for foreign language learning: interaction-understanding-alignment-production-learning. He believes there is always a gap between people's language understanding ability and language production ability, with the former being higher than the latter. Higher language understanding ability pulls up lower language production ability, continuously improving language production ability. Continuation writing is a good way to generate the alignment effect.

Alignment is comprehensive, encompassing not only linguistic levels but also factors such as emotions, beliefs,

and context (Wang Chuming, 2011). “Through long-term reading and testing practice, people have reached a high degree of consensus in recognizing common genres. For instance, novels are typically analyzed through plot development, character portrayal, setting description, narrative perspective, central themes, and linguistic style” (Zheng Guihua, 2015). Since reading-based continuation writing often selects narrative texts, teachers can draw upon the analytical approach outlined above for novels to guide students in deepening their understanding of continuation texts through themes, plot, and language. Effective reading-based continuation writing should achieve alignment across three dimensions: emotional themes, plot content, and contextual language.

### **3.Issues in Cross-Cultural Themed Continuation Writing**

During the in-depth analysis of students’ continuation writings and through extensive teaching practice, the author has made a meticulous observation that students frequently exhibit the following types of alignment errors:

#### **3.1 Cultural Dimension**

In the context of cross-cultural continuation writing, the original text often exhibits a prominent feature: cultural identity anxiety triggered by conflicts in name pronunciation. This reflects the unique significance names carry as cultural symbols across different cultural backgrounds and the resulting clashes. However, students’ continuation writing reveals a breakdown in cultural coordination. A typical example from student cases involves directly avoiding the name altogether, resorting to simplistic expressions like “My name is Leo.” This approach completely ignores the potential cultural conflicts and identity reflections stemming from pronunciation differences in the original text. Such avoidance detaches the continuation from the core of cross-cultural engagement, failing to showcase the exchange and integration of cultures at the level of names. Consequently, it leads to a severe imbalance in cultural alignment.

#### **3.2 Emotional Dimension**

The original text follows a clear emotional trajectory, transitioning from awkwardness and self-deprecation to awakening. This progression subtly reveals the character’s inner evolution within a cross-cultural context. Student continuations, however, exhibit emotional discontinuity. In a typical imbalanced segment, emotions abruptly leap to “I felt so proud.” This jarring shift disrupts the original text’s emotional logic. The sense of pride should naturally emerge after experiencing cultural clashes and self-reflection, yet it is forced prematurely. This lack of continuity and plausibility prevents readers from witnessing the authentic evolution of the character’s emotions through cross-cultural experiences.

#### **3.3 Plot Dimension**

The original text develops its plot around classroom discussions and post-class inquiries. These two plot anchors are closely intertwined, jointly propelling the story forward and reflecting the process of cross-cultural exchange—from the collision of ideas within the classroom to further exploration afterward. However, the student’s continuation suffers from plot anchor drift. In the provided example, the plot abruptly shifts to “taking classmates out for hot pot,” a sequence entirely disconnected from the classroom and follow-up inquiry context established in the original text. This arbitrary plot diversion undermines the narrative’s internal logic and coherence, preventing deeper exploration of the core theme of cross-cultural exchange. It significantly compromises the story’s integrity and readability.

#### **3.4 Language Dimension**

The original text employs repetition, pauses, and self-deprecating humor, vividly capturing the characters’ authentic states and unique personalities during cross-cultural interaction. However, the student continuation suffers from register mismatch. A typical example features the student using the formal, grand narrative phrase “Language is a bridge,” which is overly formal and abstract, clashing with the original’s colloquial, everyday language style. In cross-cultural continuation writing, language should align with the character’s context and identity. Such overly

formal expressions fail to accurately convey the character's emotions and attitudes within the specific scene, making the continuation feel stiff and artificial. This prevents effective linguistic alignment with the original text.

#### 4. Teaching Practice of Continuation Writing Based on Alignment Effect

Based on the mentioned "3+1" aligned classroom actions for continuation writing, and using the 2025 National College Entrance Examination Paper II continuation writing question "What's your name?" as an example, corresponding explorations and attempts were conducted in teaching practice.

##### 4.1 Cultural Alignment: The Iceberg of Name Stories

To transform pronunciation anxiety into motivation for cultural sharing and prevent name avoidance during continuation writing, the teacher skillfully employed an A4 blank iceberg template with a pre-printed waterline. The teacher meticulously planned the classroom activity flow, allocated time appropriately, and structured the session with 10-minute group tasks paired with 5-minute whole-class collaboration.

In the first step - Icebreaker, the teacher gave clear instructions: "In 30 seconds, write down one letter or tone in your name that you most want others to know." After quickly jotting down their choices, students paired up to read aloud and mark mispronounced sounds. This generated incorrect pronunciation material, providing directly usable content for the continuation exercise. Next step is Iceberg Filling. The teacher demonstrated on the board: above the waterline, write *Qiuyu* → /tʃju:ju:/; below, write *autumn rain; grandparents' poetry*. Groups then completed their personal icebergs. The submerged information serves as source material for crafting cultural gems. The last step is Sentence Structure. The teacher provided two culturally embedded sentence patterns: a) ..., *a word that whispers of* \_\_\_\_ *in Chinese*. b) *If you can say* \_\_\_\_, *you're actually picturing* \_\_\_\_\_. Each student selected one sentence, filled in their name, and read it aloud. This content is mandatory for the second paragraph of the continuation, ensuring the cultural symbol is reproduced.

In the class, Student A wrote underwater: *Qiuyu = grandma's ink painting of rain on maple leaves*. The teacher immediately wrote *maple leaves* on the board, pointing out that the continuation could loop back to Irish red leaves, creating a cross-cultural imagery resonance between autumn rain and maple leaves, adding unique cultural flavor to the continuation.

##### 4.2 Emotional Alignment: Completing the Emotional Transition from Awkwardness to Self-Deprecation

To achieve a natural transition of student emotions from shrugged → forced smile → unsure to relief + pride, avoiding a direct leap to proud, The teacher employed two tools: an emotional scale tape (labeled -2 Awkward to +2 Proud and placed on the floor) and colored sticky notes. The teacher strategically allocated 8 minutes for a physical activity and 7 minutes for writing, meticulously designing the classroom flow.

Firstly, positioning. The teacher issued a key prompt: "Where would you stand after hearing the professor mispronounce it for the third time?" Students positioned themselves at -1 or -2 based on their feelings, then wrote their inner monologues on sticky notes and affixed them to their chests. These notes directly translated into psychological descriptions for the continuation writing, vividly capturing the students' awkward state of mind.

Secondly, shifting. The teacher asked: "When did you start finding it amusing rather than awkward?" Students collectively moved one space to the right while writing self-mocking words. The teacher provided self-deprecating phrases like "It's fine, you just ordered 'a dinosaur' in Chinese." This self-deprecating humor infused the continuation with authenticity and became a crucial emotional transition.

Finally, closing loop. The teacher asked: "After class, when classmates successfully pronounced your name, where did you stand?" Students moved to the +2 position and wrote one metaphorical sentence expressing pride. This generated an elevated concluding sentence like: "Their tongues finally caught the autumn rain." Such sentences draw the continuation to a satisfying end, achieving a perfect emotional elevation.

### 4.3 Plot Alignment: Opening Sentences with Question Chain and Story Mountain

To break down the two opening sentences into six writable scenes and prevent plot drift like hotpot/shopping unrelated to the theme, the teacher meticulously designed the teaching activity. Using a Double-Segment Story Mountain featuring five sections labeled “Beginning - Build-up - Problem - Resolution – End” with blank arrows, a 10-minute group puzzle-solving session was scheduled. The question chain was printed directly on the worksheet, requiring students only to fill in answers.

For the opening sentence of the first paragraph: *In a class discussion, I was invited to explain the meaning of my name*, the following question chains guided students in constructing the scene:

Q1: Students needed to consider how the professor initiated the discussion, requiring descriptions of the professor’s actions and words to establish the classroom setting;

Q2: Students were required to write their initial reaction, covering both thoughts and actions to depict the character’s starting state;

Q3: Teacher inquired about the classroom’s response, involving sounds and scenes to create a lively discussion atmosphere;

Q4: Teacher guided students to consider how to turn awkwardness into an asset, such as delivering a mini-cultural lecture, writing the pinyin on the board, or using a pun, driving the plot forward.

In the pre-prepared Story Mountain example for Paragraph 1 can be:

Build-up, *I wrote ‘qiū’ + ‘yǔ’ on the whiteboard with rising-falling tone marks*, demonstrating how writing pinyin on the board eases awkwardness. The Problem section, *A boy grinned, “So I’m actually saying ‘kiss’?” The whole class burst out*, depicting the classroom erupting over the pun. The Resolution section, *I played the 3-second rain audio from my phone, ‘That’s Qiuyu,’*, presenting the outcome after resolving the awkwardness.

For the opening sentence of the second paragraph: *Many of my classmates got interested and came up to me after class*, the question chain similarly aided scene construction:

Q5: Asking students to write at least two specific follow-up questions from classmates, reflecting the post-class interaction;

Q6: Guiding students to consider how to return the favor, such as teaching Chinese character writing, giving pinyin bracelets, or sharing the rain sound app to enrich the exchange;

Q7: Prompting students to describe how emotions come full circle, like the moment the name is correctly pronounced, bringing the story to a satisfying conclusion.

Through these question chains and Story Mountain, students not only honed their storytelling skills but also gained a deeper understanding of how to construct a narrative that is both cohesive and thematically rich. The six scenarios they produced were not only diverse in terms of plot and setting but also uniformly.

### 4.4 Language Alignment: The Three-Stage Approach

To achieve the goal of retaining the original text’s repetition, pauses and colloquial fillers within 150 words while avoiding grandiloquent written vocabulary, the teacher designed a 15-minute cyclical task. Each stage lasted 5 minutes, completed with corresponding task cards, visible classroom products, and assessment criteria.

#### Stage1: Re-reading

Teachers provided students with 5cm×5cm task cards, instructing them to highlight all instances of colloquial fillers or repetition in the original text using highlighters, e.g., *okay; over and over; I mean*. This activity allowed students to intuitively grasp the text’s linguistic style. After completion, students checked each other’s work based on the criteria: 1 point per identified instance, with a maximum of 6 points. This task deepened students’ understanding of colloquial expressions and repetitive techniques in the original text.

#### Stage2: Imitation Writing

The teacher distributed Imitation Card A, instructing students to adapt the sentence *It's okay, professor, I shrugged.* to a new scenario: a classmate mispronouncing a name. Students verbally produced their imitations, and the teacher immediately wrote the best example on the board. The evaluation criterion was maintaining the structure: *address + comma + subject + verb*. For example, a student might imitate like *It's okay, classmate, I smiled.* This imitation task allowed students to flexibly apply the original structure while further mastering colloquial expressions.

### Stage3: Creative Writing

Teacher provided Creative Writing Card B, instructing students to write a classmate echoing scenario using repetition + onomatopoeia, with at least two repetitions. After completing a 30-word continuation, students post their work for a Gallery Walk. Readers circled the sentence most resembling the original; the most voted sentence earned the Tone-Catcher badge. For example, a student might write: *Qiu-yu, Qiu-yu, he repeated again and again, like a little bird learning to sing. Oops, he stumbled over the tone, and we all laughed.*

Simultaneously, the Language Alignment No-Go List was printed in the footnote of the Card B, explicitly prohibiting formal vocabulary like cherish, magnificent, profound, and passages exceeding three lines without dialogue; It must include one colloquial marker like *you guys*; *wow*; *oops* and one instance of repetition (e.g., *again and again* or *syllable by syllable*).

Through these three-stage tasks, students can smoothly complete a 150-word continuation divided into two to three paragraphs by meaning clusters, meeting all requirements while fully preserving the original text's linguistic characteristics.

## 5.Conclusion

Continuation writing is a novel task that tightly integrates reading and writing. "Its greatest advantage lies in organically combining linguistic imitation with content innovation, unleashing users' imagination while enhancing their ability to accurately apply foreign languages" (Wang Chuming, 2012). In teaching explorations of cross-cultural continuation writing, cultural alignment has emerged as an essential new requirement, infusing continuation writing with profound cultural significance and communicative value. The iceberg diagram of name stories, as an effective teaching tool, can rapidly activate student's stored cultural potential, providing rich material and inspiration for continuation writing. Against this backdrop, the three-dimensional tool of emotion-plot-language continues to demonstrate its universality. By skillfully embedding cultural nodes, it can better serve cross-cultural continuation tasks. Looking ahead, this teaching model holds vast potential for expansion. It can be extended to micro-cultural themes like dialects; cuisine and festivals. Through careful design, it could form a comprehensive suite of culture-responsive micro-lessons for continuation writing. This would empower students to produce higher-quality, culturally nuanced writing in cross-cultural contexts.

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