



Investigating the Cognitive Mechanisms of L2 Learners' Continuation Writing: A Conceptual Blending Perspective

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Abstract

In recent years, continuation writing has attracted growing scholarly attention in second language (L2) pedagogy and assessment. However, most existing studies have focused on learners' surface-level linguistic output, failing to unpack the underlying conceptual blending mechanism. In particular, cognitive comparative analyses across learners with varying proficiency levels remain scarce. Drawing on Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT), this study selected 18 continuation writing samples produced by L2 English learners from a key senior high school in Sichuan Province. NVivo was employed to conduct coding and cross-group comparative analyses across four dimensions, namely plot coherence, character consistency, emotional alignment, and thematic continuity. This study examined differences in mapping patterns and emergent structures within the blended space. The findings reveal that high-proficiency learners tend to effectively integrate multiple cognitive domains, producing well-structured

and thematically enriched continuations, whereas intermediate and low-proficiency learners are more prone to inappropriate mappings or blending failures. This study further underscores the theoretical value of CBT in explaining the creative linguistic output of L2 learners.

Keywords: continuation writing, conceptual blending theory, L2 learners, cognitive mechanism.

1 Introduction

Continuation writing is an integrated assessment task that bridges reading comprehension and creative production. It has gained significant traction in L2 pedagogy and assessment in China, particularly following the incorporation of the story continuation writing task into the National Matriculation English Test, where it functions as an integrated reading-to-write assessment task [1, 2]. Specifically, the task presents a source text of approximately 300 words and requires learners to compose two consecutive paragraphs that preserve thematic continuity, logical coherence, and emotional resonance—while remaining faithful to the original narrative's plot development and character portrayal.

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A central mechanism underlying the continuation task is the alignment that emerges from learners' close interaction with the source text during subsequent written production. Such alignment has been empirically observed at the syntactic level in reading-writing integrated continuation tasks, suggesting that linguistic patterns activated during source-text comprehension can influence learners' subsequent L2 production [3, 4]. Compared with conventional writing tasks, continuation writing places greater cognitive demands on L2 learners' interpretive processing, conceptual integration, and productive proficiency.

Previous research on continuation writing can be broadly grouped into three strands, each of which has certain methodological or explanatory limitations. The first strand has examined pedagogical mechanisms underlying continuation writing, with particular attention to the alignment generated by close interaction between source-text comprehension and written production [4]. The second strand examines task-design variables, including input genre [5], input enhancement [6], and prompt type or task specification [7], but predominantly measures surface-level outcomes such as syntactic complexity and lexical accuracy, rather than the conceptual processes these variables are presumed to affect. The third strand investigates the reading-writing connection in integrated L2 writing. Process-oriented studies have shown that integrated writing involves the coordination of source reading, comprehension monitoring, planning, discourse synthesis, and writing-related processes [8, 9]. These studies provide important evidence that reading and writing interact dynamically during text production. However, they do not fully explain how source-text information and learners' prior conceptual knowledge are selectively mapped and integrated to generate emergent narrative structures, leaving room for a more explicit account of conceptual integration in continuation writing. Critically, across all three strands, how syntactic patterns activated during source-text reading transfer into learners' subsequent L2 written production remains a central empirical concern in continuation writing research [3].

In summary, existing scholarship exhibits four specific lacunae that the present study addresses, namely (a) a predominant focus on linguistic output (accuracy, complexity, fluency) to the neglect of the cognitive processes generating that output; (b) an absence of systematic proficiency-level comparisons that examine

how cognitive operations differ across learner groups; (c) existing product-based studies provide only indirect evidence concerning the cognitive operations underlying continuation writing, while systematic theory-driven comparisons across proficiency levels remain limited; and (d) an under-theorization of the reading-writing nexus, which leaves the transformation from source-text input to creative output largely opaque. Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by applying Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT), a framework explicitly designed to model conceptual integration, to systematically compare how learners at different proficiency levels construct meaning during continuation writing.

This study attempts to address the following three research questions:

1. What are the discernible differences in the continuation writing performance of learners at varying proficiency levels, specifically regarding plot coherence, character consistency, emotional alignment, and thematic continuity?
2. How can these performance variances be interpreted through the lens of CBT, particularly in terms of cross-space mapping, selective projection, and emergent structure generation within the four-space network?
3. What specific differences in cognitive capacities do these CBT-based interpretations reveal, and how do these capacities interact to produce the observed proficiency-related outcomes?

2 Theoretical Framework: Conceptual Blending Theory

2.1 Rationale for Adopting Conceptual Blending Theory

Although several cognitive theories have been applied to L2 writing research, Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) presents distinct analytical advantages for investigating continuation writing tasks. Prior to interpreting CBT's analytical value, it is essential to clarify why this theoretical framework is especially suited to the analysis of continuation writing. Compared to other cognitive writing models, such as Hayes and Flower's model [10], which conceptualizes writing in terms of such recursive processes as planning, translating, and reviewing, or Kellogg's working memory (WM) [11], which focuses on resource allocation during composition—CBT offers a specific mechanism for explaining how writers

integrate information from multiple sources to generate novel content. CBT's four-space model describes how information from the source text and learners' prior knowledge can be integrated to generate emergent structures through projection and compression [12]. This renders CBT uniquely capable of modeling the reading-to-writing transformation that lies at the heart of continuation tasks, a level of analytical precision that process-oriented models do not provide.

2.2 Interpretation of Conceptual Blending Theory

According to Fauconnier and Turner [12, 13], the network architecture of Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) consists of four interconnected mental spaces: Input Space I, Input Space II, the Generic Space, and the Blended Space. Figure 1 depicts the fundamental operational mechanism of CBT.

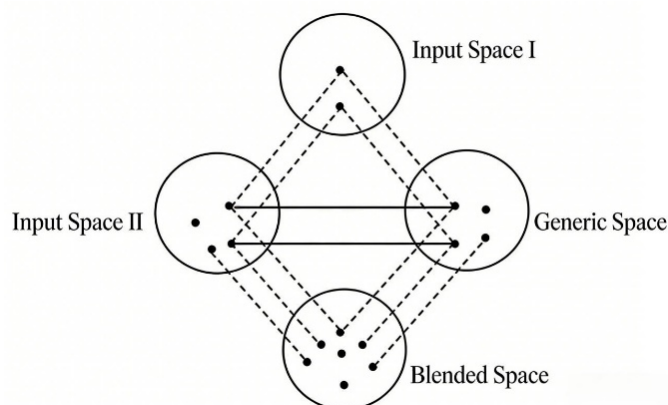


Figure 1. The four-space conceptual blending network [12].

Input Space I and Input Space II contain partial structures derived from distinct semantic domains or conceptual fields, which are activated and aligned through cross-space mapping. Positioned at a higher hierarchical level, the Generic Space captures and abstracts the shared schematic structures and frames common to both inputs, thereby providing the cognitive foundation for integration. Beneath them sits the blended space, where selected elements projected from the input spaces undergo integration and fusion. In this space, an emergent structure is generated, fostering novel semantic interpretations and inferential possibilities that were not present in the original inputs [12].

The solid lines in the diagram stand for cross-space mappings between input spaces, revealing the systematic correspondences between analogous elements within the two respective domains. Conversely, dashed lines represent projections,

marking how information transfers from input and generic spaces to blended space. This visual cue reflects the directional flow and hierarchical transmission of conceptual elements and structures throughout integration. Black dots inside each space represent discrete conceptual units (or mental nodes), which realize semantic linkage and reconfiguration across different spaces via established mapping relations.

Collectively, the diagram delineates the dynamic cognitive mechanisms underlying conceptual blending. During meaning construction and interpretation, human cognition first builds correspondences between diverse input spaces. By leveraging the abstract framework of the generic space, relevant information is selectively projected into the blended space, ultimately forming new conceptual networks and emergent structures.

According to CBT, the correspondences between two input spaces are categorized into four distinct network types: Simplex, Mirror, Single-scope, and Double-scope [12] (120-135). In a Simplex Network, the abstract conceptual frame in Input Space I carries no concrete values, whereas Input Space II provides relevant elements to fill and instantiate this frame directly. In a Mirror Network, all constituent mental spaces—the two input spaces, the generic space, and the blended space—adopt a shared organizational frame, which enables conflict-free alignment across the entire network. A Single-scope Network consists of two input spaces governed by different organizational frames. However, only the frame originating from one input space extends to structure the blended space, embodying the classical metaphorical mapping pattern between a source domain and a target domain. Lastly, a Double-scope Network features two input spaces with distinct, even conflicting organizational frames. Both frames are selectively projected into the blended space to generate a complex emergent structure [12] (120-135).

3 The Value of CBT in Linguistic Production

CBT establishes a rigorous analytical framework for unpacking the dynamic cognitive processes that drive linguistic production. Its value primarily manifests across three dimensions:

Firstly, CBT systematically accounts for the generation of creative meaning by clarifying how novel interpretations take shape alongside emergent structures. Research on narrative discourse has

demonstrated that readers and writers integrate distinct conceptual frames through blending networks, generating rhetorical meanings and narrative effects that exceed what either input domain encodes independently [14].

Second, CBT supports the analysis of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural cognitive operations. Foundational work in conceptual blending has established that meaning construction involves the selective activation and integration of conceptual structures from distinct input spaces, with the resulting blended space yielding emergent meanings that are not reducible to either input alone [15]. From the perspective of coded meaning, research has further demonstrated that literal and figurative dimensions of meaning interact within blending networks, such that the emergent interpretation in the blended space cannot be fully predicted from the conventionally coded meanings of either input [16]. Together, these findings illustrate the value of conceptual blending for explaining how knowledge from distinct conceptual systems can be dynamically integrated in meaning construction across linguistic and cultural contexts.

Thirdly, CBT provides a means of distinguishing different levels of structural complexity in conceptual integration. Blending networks vary in the degree to which they must reconcile distinct or incompatible organizing frames, with double-scope integration generally involving more complex cross-space coordination than simpler forms of blending [17]. Cross-domain mappings of the kind involved in double-scope blending are further illustrated by the relationship between conceptual blending and metaphor: when a source domain with a distinct organizational frame is projected onto a target domain, the resulting blend generates an emergent structure that goes beyond what either a purely metaphorical or a purely literal reading would yield [18].

Furthermore, L2 continuation writing functions as a productive linguistic feedback mechanism grounded in reading input. Both conceptual blending theory and the continuation task are dynamic in nature, rendering CBT potentially useful for theoretically interpreting the conceptual integration patterns reflected in L2 writing products. The multi-space integration mechanism of CBT, which consists of input spaces, a generic space, and a blended space, closely aligns with the cognitive chain of “reading–understanding–predicting–creating” that underpins continuation writing.

At the initial stage of continuation writing, learners first read and interpret the source text. They project core textual elements into Input Space I while activating their existing background knowledge in Input Space II. The two input spaces then establish cross-space mappings to extract shared abstract features, including narrative frameworks, causal logic, thematic orientations, and underlying emotional patterns common to both textual and individual cognitive resources.

In the blended space, key elements are selectively projected from both input spaces and synthesized into a unified narrative structure. Learners further supplement and refine this integrated structure through their prior knowledge, ensuring logical consistency and narrative coherence throughout the emerging content.

During the final elaboration stage, learners mentally simulate and physically polish the preliminary narrative structure by enriching contextual details, dialogues, behavioral descriptions, and psychological depictions. These cognitive and linguistic operations ultimately produce a logically consistent and creatively extended continuation text within the blended space. Rather than a simple combination of two input resources, the final writing output forms an entirely emergent structure that embodies learners’ autonomous construction of plots, characters, emotions, and themes.

4 Data Collection

The corpus adopted in this study was collected from a standardized continuation writing test conducted among students at a key senior high school in Sichuan Province. The writing task required students to continue a fable-style narrative (see Appendix A) and was scored on a 25-point scale. Eighteen valid compositions were collected and professionally graded by experienced English teachers. Based on the evaluation results, the writing samples were classified into three proficiency levels: High, Intermediate, and Low.

The classification criteria, derived from the 25-point scale, are as follows:

- High Proficiency: Scores ≥ 20 (80% and above of the total score).
- Intermediate Proficiency: $20 > \text{Scores} \geq 15$ (60% to 80% of the total score).

Table 1. Corpus preprocessing, coding, and analytical workflow.

Step	Task	Key Method	Purpose and Description
(1)	Digitization of Handwritten Scripts	Scanning and PDF Archiving	The original handwritten continuation scripts were scanned and stored as PDF files to create a stable digital record for subsequent transcription and analysis.
(2)	Text Conversion	Optical Character Recognition (OCR)	OCR was used to convert the scanned handwritten scripts into editable electronic text for corpus construction and qualitative analysis.
(3)	Transcription Verification	Line-by-Line Manual Checking	The OCR-generated texts were checked against the original handwritten scripts. Recognition errors were corrected, while the students' original lexical, grammatical, spelling, and syntactic features were retained to preserve the authenticity of the learner data.
(4)	Anonymization and Corpus Construction	Alphanumeric Coding (S01–S18)	Personal identifiers were removed and each composition was assigned an anonymous code. The verified and anonymized texts were then organized according to the predefined proficiency groups.
(5)	Development of the Coding Framework	Theory-Informed Qualitative Coding	Drawing on the source-text analysis, continuation-writing requirements, and the analytical concerns of CBT, a coding framework was established around four dimensions: plot coherence, character consistency, emotional alignment, and thematic continuity. Operational definitions and textual indicators were specified for each dimension before systematic coding.
(6)	Corpus Coding	NVivo 12 and Sentence-by-Sentence Coding	The anonymized compositions were imported into NVivo 12 and coded sentence by sentence. Relevant textual segments were assigned to one or more analytical dimensions according to their narrative functions and relationships with the source text.
(7)	Cross-Group Comparison	Within-Group and Across-Group Pattern Analysis	Coding patterns were compared first within each proficiency group and then across the High, Intermediate, and Low groups. The analysis focused on recurring similarities and differences in narrative coherence, characterization, affective development, and thematic continuation.
(8)	Representative Case Selection and CBT Interpretation	Purposive Case Selection and Four-Space Analysis	Following the corpus-level comparison, S01, S14, and S18 were selected as illustrative cases representing the High-, Intermediate-, and Low-proficiency groups, respectively. Their textual patterns were subsequently interpreted through CBT in terms of input-space activation, cross-space mapping, selective projection, and blended-space construction.

• Low Proficiency: Scores < 15 (below 60% of the total score).

Word count analysis of the 18 valid samples yielded a total corpus of 3,762 words. Specifically, the dataset comprises five high-proficiency essays (scoring 20 to 23 points), nine intermediate-proficiency essays (scoring 15 to 19 points), and four low-proficiency essays (scoring 10 to 13 points). All handwritten continuation scripts were first scanned and stored as PDF files. Optical character recognition (OCR) was then used to convert the scanned scripts into editable electronic text. To ensure transcription accuracy, the OCR-generated texts were manually checked line by line against the original handwritten scripts, with recognition errors corrected while the students' original lexical,

grammatical, and syntactic features were retained. The verified texts were subsequently anonymized using alphanumeric identifiers (S01–S18) and imported into NVivo 12 for qualitative coding and cross-case analysis.

All samples complied with the task requirement of approximately 150 words in length, although the actual mean length was 209 words per composition, reflecting the tendency of some learners to exceed the minimum word count.

The complete procedures for corpus preprocessing, coding, and analysis are presented in Table 1.

To establish a systematic analytical framework, the source text was first examined in terms of

Table 2. Operational definitions of the four analytical dimensions.

Dimension	Operational Definition	Primary Textual Indicators
Plot Coherence	The extent to which events in the continuation maintain causal, temporal, and situational continuity with the source narrative and develop toward a plausible resolution.	Causal continuity; temporal consistency; plausible event development; absence of major contradictions; logical connection between the source-text conflict and the continuation.
Character Consistency	The extent to which characters' actions, motivations, attitudes, and roles in the continuation remain compatible with the traits and narrative functions established in the source text, unless a change is sufficiently motivated by the developing plot.	Stability of character traits; consistency of motivation; continuity of narrative roles; plausibility of character development; absence of unexplained behavioral reversal.
Emotional Alignment	The extent to which the emotional tone and affective development of the continuation are compatible with the emotional trajectory established in the source text and develop through psychologically plausible transitions.	Continuity of affective tone; plausibility of emotional transitions; consistency between events and emotional responses; development of affect from individual to interpersonal or collective levels where appropriate.
Thematic Continuity	The extent to which the continuation preserves, develops, or meaningfully extends the central moral and thematic concerns established in the source text.	Maintenance of responsibility-related themes; relationship between action and consequence; development of the moral significance of the gold coins; preservation or meaningful extension of the fable's evaluative orientation.

its narrative structure, characterization, emotional trajectory, and central moral themes. On this basis, four analytical dimensions were operationalized for the coding of the student continuations: plot coherence, character consistency, emotional alignment, and thematic continuity. Plot coherence concerned causal, temporal, and situational continuity between the source text and the continuation; character consistency concerned the maintenance or plausibly motivated development of established character traits and roles; emotional alignment concerned the continuity and development of affective tone; and thematic continuity concerned the preservation or meaningful extension of the source text's central moral concerns. The operational definitions and primary textual indicators are summarized in Table 2.

Following corpus preprocessing, all anonymized compositions were imported into NVivo 12. Sentence-by-sentence qualitative coding was conducted using the four-dimensional coding framework. A textual segment could be assigned to more than one dimension when it simultaneously performed multiple narrative functions. NVivo was used primarily to organize coded segments, retrieve recurrent patterns, and facilitate within-group and cross-group comparisons; the software itself did not

automatically determine the quality or cognitive status of a continuation. Interpretive judgments were made on the basis of the predefined coding criteria and the relationship between each continuation and the source narrative.

The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, all 18 compositions were examined to identify recurrent patterns within and across the three proficiency groups. This corpus-level analysis provided the basis for characterizing broad group tendencies. Second, one composition from each proficiency group—S01 (High, 23 points), S14 (Intermediate, 15 points), and S18 (Low, 10 points)—was purposively selected for detailed CBT-based interpretation. The three cases were used as illustrative examples of patterns identified in the broader corpus rather than as the sole evidential basis for generalizing about each proficiency group. The complete preprocessing, coding, comparison, and case-selection procedure is presented in Table 1.

5 Results and Discussion

5.1 Analysis of the Source Text

The source text centers on two core morals: actions speak louder than complaints, and benevolence begets rewards. Its narrative depicts a disguised monarch

Table 3. Qualitative cross-group patterns across the four analytical dimensions.

Dimension	High-Proficiency Group	Intermediate-Proficiency Group	Low-Proficiency Group
Plot Coherence	Generally maintains causal and temporal continuity with the source text. Plot developments tend to extend the original conflict toward a plausible resolution and preserve the narrative logic of the King's test.	Generally preserves the basic narrative trajectory, but some developments are weakly motivated or unnecessarily elaborate, occasionally weakening causal continuity and narrative economy.	More frequently exhibits abrupt, weakly motivated, or source-incongruent developments. The original moral conflict may be redirected toward material reward, weakening overall narrative coherence.
Character Consistency	Characters' established roles, motivations, and value orientations are generally maintained or developed in ways that remain compatible with the source narrative.	Basic character identities are generally recognizable, but motivations or narrative roles may occasionally shift without sufficient textual support, producing partial inconsistency.	Character motivations and roles are more frequently reconstructed in ways that depart from the source text, resulting in noticeable inconsistencies in characterization.
Emotional Alignment	Tends to develop affective responses progressively, with relatively smooth transitions between individual emotion, interpersonal response, and broader moral or communal significance.	Generally maintains the basic emotional orientation of the source text, but affective transitions tend to be less elaborated and may shift abruptly toward explicit moral statements.	More frequently displays abrupt or source-incongruent emotional shifts, with responsibility-oriented affect sometimes displaced by materialistic, self-interested, or otherwise weakly aligned responses.
Thematic Continuity	Generally preserves and further develops the source text's themes of responsibility, action, and communal concern, sometimes extending individual moral action toward broader social significance.	Usually retains a recognizable moral orientation, but thematic development tends to be simplified, explicit, or formulaic rather than fully integrated into the narrative.	More frequently weakens or redirects the source text's moral orientation, particularly when responsibility and civic action are reframed primarily in terms of material reward or personal interest.

placing a boulder across a village road to test residents' civic responsibility. Merchants and villagers only vent passive grievances yet refuse to take practical action. A young girl resolves the conflict with her altruistic drive by removing the obstruction, then discovers a cache of gold coins as symbolic recognition of her personal initiative and proactive traits.

From an affective perspective, the initial narrative landscape is defined by apathy and collective inertia. The girl's emotional arc progresses from empathy for her fellow villagers to a surge of responsibility, followed by physical exhaustion from labor and eventual euphoria upon the discovery. Conversely, the King's emotional trajectory shifts from disillusionment with his subjects to gratification after witnessing the girl's deed. Establishing this affective framework is essential for learners to maintain emotional alignment in the blended space built during continuation writing.

Regarding characterization and conflict, the King serves as both tester and benefactor; the girl personifies innocence and proactive virtue, while villagers represent social inertia. The blocked road constitutes the external conflict, which sparks the internal moral dilemma between complacency and taking action. The story peaks when the girl uncovers the hidden reward, forming a purposeful cliffhanger that provides

necessary cognitive affordance for learners to construct emergent structures in their writing.

5.2 Performance Discrepancies in Continuation Writing Across Proficiency Levels

Before conducting the individual case analyses, all 18 student compositions were examined comparatively using the four-dimensional coding framework described above. The corpus-level coding revealed recurrent differences in the textual patterns associated with the three proficiency groups across plot coherence, character consistency, emotional alignment, and thematic continuity. Within the present corpus, high-proficiency compositions generally displayed stronger causal and temporal continuity, more stable characterization, smoother affective progression, and more sustained development of the source text's central moral concerns. Intermediate-proficiency compositions tended to preserve the basic narrative trajectory but showed less consistent character motivation, affective development, and thematic elaboration. Low-proficiency compositions more frequently exhibited disruptions in causal development, character motivation, emotional continuity, and thematic orientation. These patterns are treated as qualitative tendencies observed within the present corpus rather than as

statistically generalizable differences among broader proficiency populations. A qualitative summary of the recurrent cross-group patterns identified through the corpus-level coding is presented in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3, the differences among the three proficiency groups were not treated as categorical distinctions but as recurrent qualitative tendencies within the present corpus. Across the four analytical dimensions, the high-proficiency group generally maintained closer continuity with the narrative, characterological, affective, and thematic structures established in the source text. The intermediate-proficiency group typically preserved the basic narrative framework but showed greater variability in character motivation, emotional transitions, and thematic elaboration. In the low-proficiency group, departures from the source text were more frequently observed, particularly when the original responsibility-oriented narrative was redirected toward material reward or personal interest. Importantly, these observations describe patterns identified through qualitative coding rather than numerical differences in coding frequency or statistically significant differences among the groups. The table therefore serves as a descriptive synthesis of the corpus-level analysis and provides the empirical basis for the subsequent close examination of selected cases.

To illustrate the corpus-level tendencies summarized in Table 3 in greater analytical detail, S01 (High, 23 points), S14 (Intermediate, 15 points), and S18 (Low, 10 points) were purposively selected as illustrative cases (see Appendix B). These cases were selected because they exhibited several of the recurrent textual characteristics identified in their respective proficiency groups during the corpus-level coding. They are therefore used to illustrate the qualitative patterns observed across the corpus rather than to serve as statistically representative samples of the three proficiency populations. The following close analysis examines how these cases differ in narrative logic, characterization, emotional development, and thematic continuity before interpreting the observed textual patterns through the framework of Conceptual Blending Theory.

In terms of plot coherence, high-proficiency continuations go beyond framing gold coins as simple material rewards and elevate the treasure into a symbolic embodiment of responsibility. Their narrative arcs form tight closed-loop structures:

villagers shift from passive complainers to proactive community contributors, which fully matches the King's original testing intention. By contrast, intermediate-level works misinterpret this symbolic signifier, letting gold coins spark unnecessary conflicts over property interests such as the repeated cycle of extortion, disguise, and re-gifting. Such plot twists break the implicit logical setup of the source text. Low-proficiency writing suffers from severe breakdowns in narrative coherence. Its storyline deteriorates into a utilitarian farce, in which villagers crudely copy the girl's deeds purely for monetary gains. This rewrite erodes the original satirical implication and discards the core theme of moral awakening entirely.

Regarding character consistency, high-proficiency learners preserve the integrity of each character's inherent value orientation. The girl retains her altruistic traits, while the villagers experience a credible transformation from apathetic bystanders to accountable community members. For intermediate-level writings, however, the girl is portrayed as passive, lacking the proactive agency she demonstrates in the source text. More notably, the King evolves from a wise benefactor into a calculating figure obsessed with recovering the gold coins, marking obvious deviations from the original characterization. Low-proficiency works feature drastic character distortion: the girl turns arrogant after obtaining the reward, the King openly acknowledges the failure of his test, and villagers put on performative kindness merely for financial benefits. Such rewrites thoroughly overturn the original moral stance of the story.

For emotional alignment, high-proficiency narratives present layered affective progression, shifting from the girl's personal delight to her parents' pride and finally to collective awakening across the community. This emotional path delivers natural sublimation and resonates with readers. Conversely, intermediate-level texts face affective rupture: the joy brought by removing the stone abruptly shifts to rigid moral lectures from the parents, missing essential transitional emotional build-ups. In low-proficiency texts, emotional tones grow alienated. The original sense of responsibility gives way to vanity and greed, twisting the fable into a gold-chasing narrative that clashes with the original uplifting emotional keynote.

S01 (23 points)

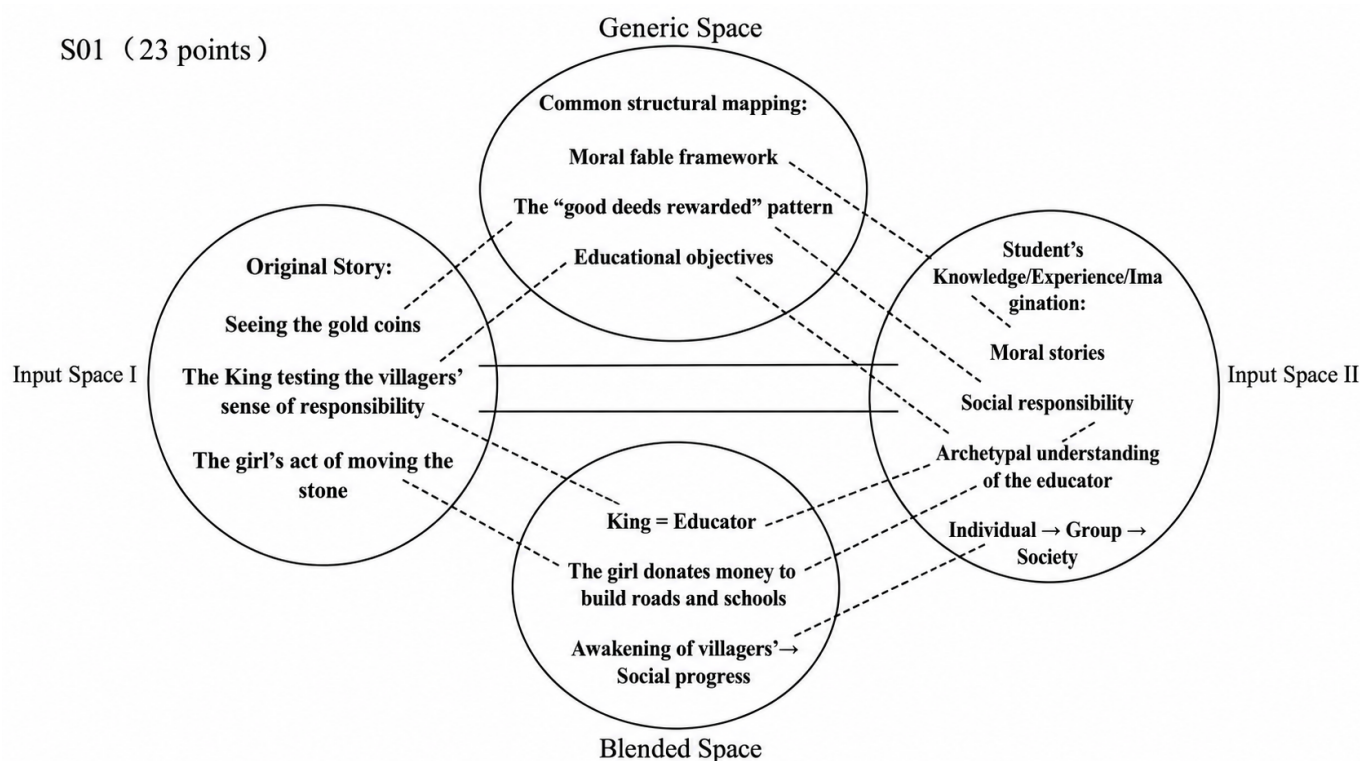


Figure 2. Conceptual blending model of high-proficiency learners.

S14 (15 points)

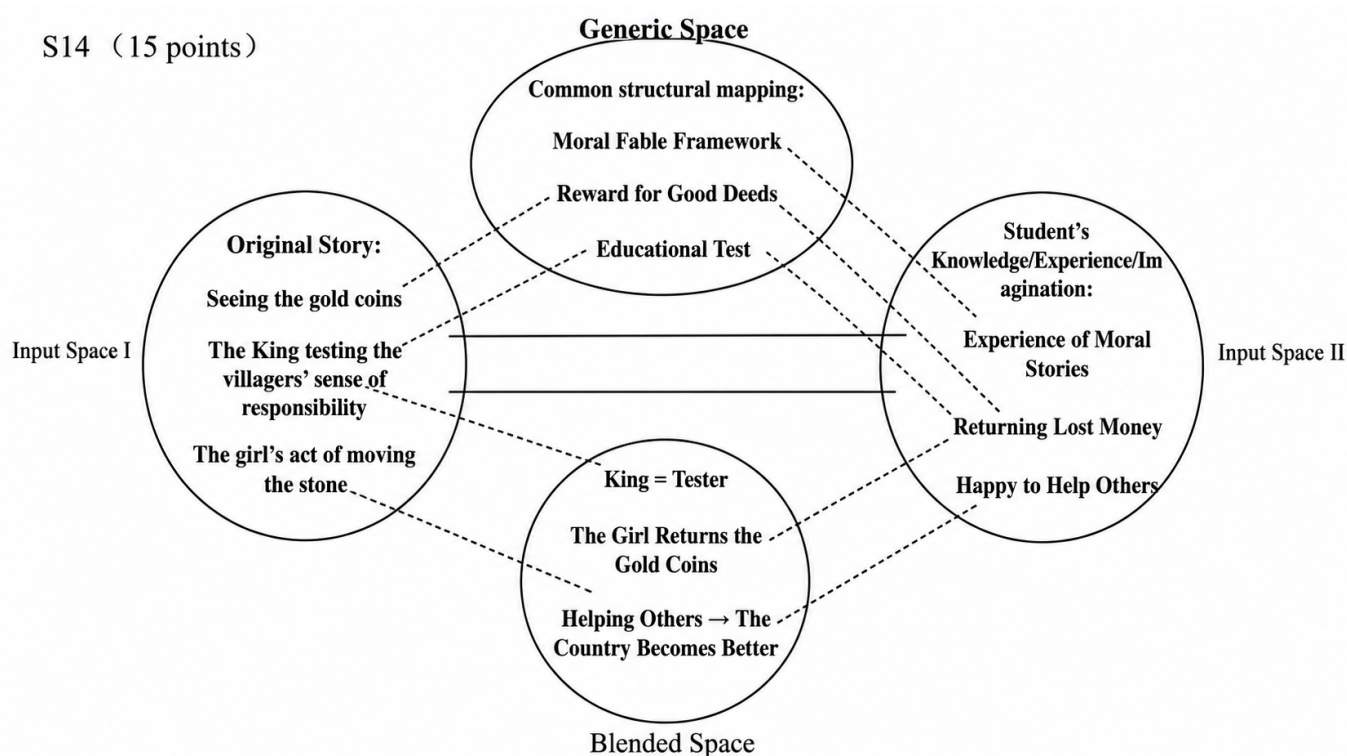


Figure 3. Conceptual blending model of intermediate-proficiency learners.

5.3 Interpreting Performance Discrepancies from the Perspective of CBT

The preceding analysis delineates the marked disparities among learners of varying proficiency

levels across the four dimensions of plot coherence, character consistency, emotional alignment, and thematic continuity. This section draws on the core tenets of CBT to unpack the root triggers behind such cognitive variances (as illustrated in Figures 2, 3

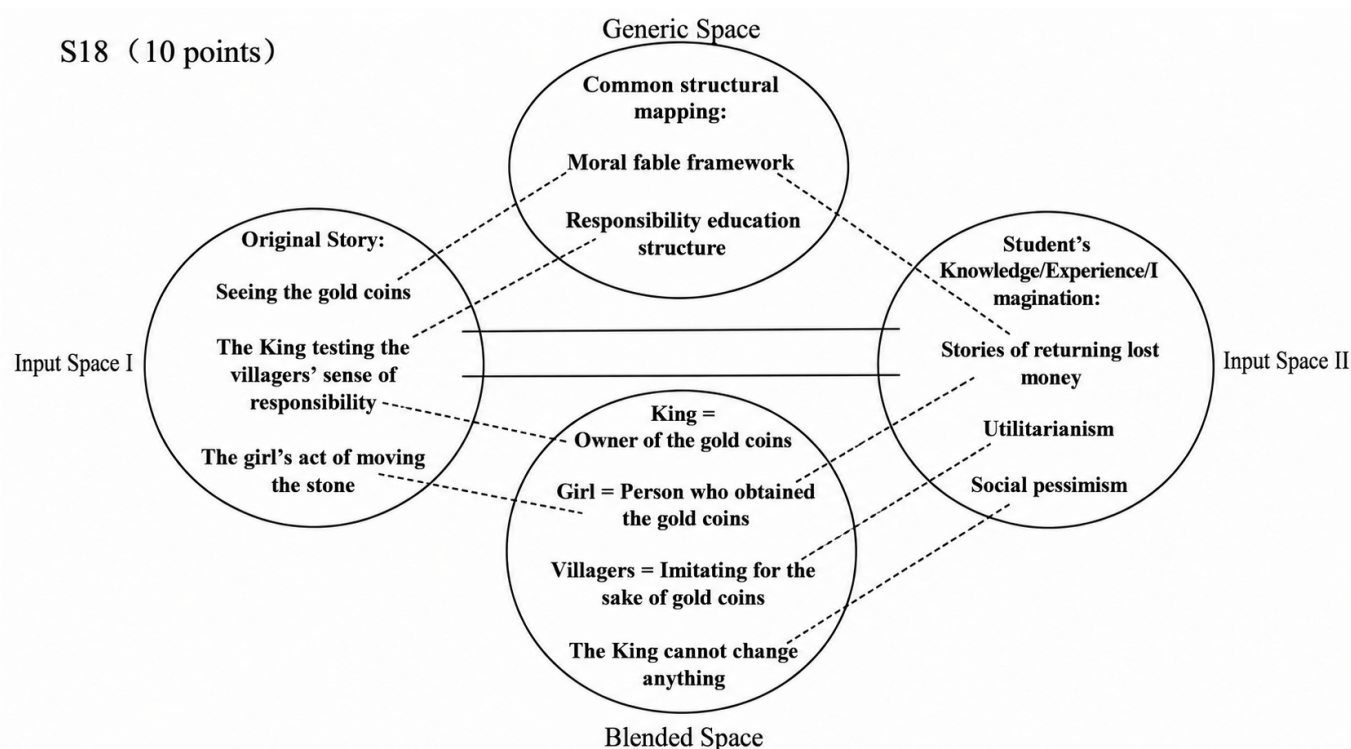


Figure 4. Conceptual blending model of low-proficiency learners.

and 4), and examine the differing cognitive capacities learners demonstrate throughout the continuation writing process.

5.3.1 Discrepancies in Plot Coherence from the Perspective of CBT

In high-proficiency continuations, learners successfully activate both Input Space I (the narrative structure of “King’s test—awakening of responsibility—girl’s success”) and Input Space II (the “fable schema and social morality schema”). Through selective projection, core elements from both input spaces are mapped into the blended space to form a logically coherent double-scope network. As a result, the gold coins preserve their material value and get elevated into a moral symbol. The villagers’ awakening echoes the King’s original metaphor of “sowing responsibility”, realizing optimal compression within the blending network and closing a cohesive thematic loop.

In contrast, intermediate-level learners exhibit a phenomenon of single-scope dominance and rupture. Their blending process is dominated by a “returning-lost-money schema” within Input Space II, which leads to the over-projection of a loser—return—reward structure. This structure cannot integrate the “test—education” logic from Input Space I into a unified network, giving rise to

redundant action sequences (e.g., the King extorting the gold, changing clothes, and re-gifting). Since mapping operates under single-scope dominance, the blended space is deprived of essential relational compression and suffers fractured narrative logic as a result.

Comparatively, the blending process in low-proficiency learners suffers from a logical inversion and eventual collapse. The schema activated in Input Space II is one of “materialistic utility”, failing to establish a functional mapping with the “moral fable framework” of Input Space I. Furthermore, the gold coins are projected into the blended space merely as utilitarian bait, transforming the villagers’ collective imitation into a cynical “gold rush”. This represents a total misalignment in the network compression, causing the plot logic to completely decouple from the original allegorical intent.

5.3.2 Discrepancies in Character Consistency from the Perspective of CBT

In high-proficiency continuations, conceptual blending operations manifest as multi-role parallel mapping. Within this framework, the King in Input Space I is fully activated and closely aligned with the “educator archetype” embedded in the knowledge framework of Input Space II. Meanwhile, the girl in the source narrative is mapped from a mere

“actor” to a “promoter of responsibility”. This consistent alignment preserves behavioral coherence in characterization, enabling the blended space to develop into a logically rigorous, well-structured blending network.

In contrast, intermediate-level learners exhibit role-misalignment mapping. In these instances, the King is erroneously reconstructed as a “property owner and rewarder”, while the girl is relegated to a “finder of lost money”. This failure to invoke the metaphorical structure of “tester–testee” from Input Space I leads to a disconnect between character identity and behavioral motivation, resulting in a distortion of core characterization.

For low-proficiency learners, the cognitive process fails to establish any functional role-structure mapping channels. The King is portrayed as a “failed gold-owner”, the girl becomes a “boastful possessor of wealth”, and the villagers are reframed as “hypocritical gold-seekers”. In this scenario, all socio-moral archetypes from the input spaces are liquidated during the integration process, such as the wise ruler or the virtuous citizen. This lack of structural grounding results in a total collapse of character consistency.

5.3.3 *Discrepancies in Emotional Alignment from the Perspective of CBT*

In high-proficiency continuations, learners successfully activate the affective keynotes of warmth, gratitude, and awakening from Input Space I. Simultaneously, they invoke “collective inspiration patterns” from the philanthropic narrative schemas in Input Space II. Through the integration of these affective dimensions, they artfully synthesize individual joy, familial affection, and a collective sense of mission, forming a progressive emotional chain that extends from the protagonist to the broader community.

Conversely, intermediate-level learners exhibit a deficiency in affective framing and mapping strategies. The emotional keynotes of “gratification and hope” from Input Space I fail to be projected into the blended space. Consequently, the emotional expression is ruptured between the initial joy of moving the stone and subsequent mechanical moralizing, resulting in an integrative output characterized by affective leaps and psychological implausibility.

For low-proficiency learners, the blending operation leads to emotional alienation. The affective schemas of vanity, utilitarianism, and self-mockery from Input

Space II override the original emotional tenor of the source text. In the blended space, the gold coins are re-signified as symbols of social posturing and greed, while collective enthusiasm degenerates into a “gold rush frenzy”. This trajectory stands in direct opposition to the original hopeful keynote, reflecting a significant deviation in both the compression direction and the evaluative framework during the emotional mapping process.

5.3.4 *Discrepancies in Thematic Continuity from the Perspective of CBT*

In high-proficiency continuations, learners exhibit strong capabilities in holistic narrative perception and thematic synthesis. Inside the blended space, they organically integrate the thematic network of “critiquing the culture of complaint” from Input Space I with the “collective responsibility” network from Input Space II, thus generating an entirely new cognitive framework. These learners not only absorb the source text’s criticism of social apathy but also enrich the connotations of universal accountability and communal guardianship in their writing practice. This mirrors their advanced competence in thematic abstraction and sustaining solid coherence throughout the integrated network.

In contrast, the performance of intermediate-level learners tends toward template-driven application. They exhibit a proclivity for superimposing a returning-lost-money narrative template onto the task, which steers the plot toward simplistic moralizing. By neglecting the profound theme of “civic duty” inherent in the source text and failing to engage in deep cognitive processing of the elements in Input Space I, their output lacks holistic integrity and creative imagination. Consequently, the thematic integration appears fragmented and formulaic.

For low-proficiency learners, the blending process culminates in thematic collapse. The original theme of awakening of responsibility is distorted into a gold-driven performance, shifting the narrative from a celebration of virtue and goodwill to a cynical display of utilitarianism and vanity. This distortion not only destabilizes the structure of the blended space but also leads to the total assassination of the King’s character. By negating the educational significance of the original test, these learners cause the entire narrative system to disintegrate.

5.3.5 Summary of Cognitive Discrepancies in Continuation Writing

In summary, high-proficiency learners demonstrate a sophisticated capacity to activate and precisely map conceptual elements across dual input spaces. By leveraging flexible composition, deep completion, and creative elaboration, these learners ultimately generate high-quality, innovative texts characterized by structural density, affective progression, and thematic sublimation within the blended space.

Conversely, intermediate and low-proficiency learners encounter significant obstacles in producing coherent, emotionally aligned, and thematically continuous continuations. These difficulties stem from a constellation of cognitive failures, including restricted activation of input spaces, biased mapping strategies, disordered compression paths, and the misapplication of organizational frames.

Such discrepancies underscore that L2 continuation writing goes far beyond simplistic linguistic output. Instead, it constitutes an intricate composite creative process dependent on a dynamic conceptual blending system and requiring learners' substantial cognitive engagement.

5.4 Causes of Discrepancies in Cognitive Capacity

Under the framework of Conceptual Blending Theory, this study posits that the disparities observed in high-proficiency, intermediate-proficiency, and low-proficiency continuation texts stem fundamentally from the varying strengths and synergistic coordination of the learners' multidimensional cognitive capacities during key phases of the blending process. Specifically, these discrepancies can be attributed to the following four core cognitive capacities.

Firstly, schematic activation and mapping precision serve as the foundation of successful integration. High-proficiency learners demonstrate the ability to rapidly and extensively retrieve background knowledge relevant to the theme, precisely projecting these elements into the input spaces to support the composition, completion, and elaboration within the blended space. In contrast, intermediate and low-proficiency learners often suffer from restricted activation because their focus is narrowed to simplistic schemas such as "returning lost money" or "material reward". Consequently, even when background knowledge is partially activated, they tend to superimpose utilitarian experiences onto an allegorical

framework, depriving the continuation of its deep conceptual grounding.

Secondly, the capacity for logical reasoning during mapping and synthesis distinguishes the proficiency levels. High-proficiency learners are adept at deconstructing the causal chains of the source text and extrapolating them into a coherent narrative trajectory. Conversely, intermediate learners produce loosened causal links, often introducing redundant plot points that disrupt the narrative flow. Low-proficiency learners frequently exhibit logical inversion or abrupt transitions, leading to a total loss of internal consistency within the story.

Thirdly, learners show prominent gaps in creative imagination and thematic expansion. High-proficiency learners excel at performing reasonable elaborations that remain faithful to the original theme. They adopt social and moral schemas to craft original plots and vivid descriptive details. In comparison, the creativity of intermediate and low-proficiency learners is largely restricted by linguistic bottlenecks, thematic misunderstanding and cognitive rigidity. Their writing features mechanical imitation of the source content or far-fetched, bizarre plots without reasonable narrative logic.

Finally, the ultimate efficacy of conceptual blending is contingent upon linguistic proficiency and communicative competence. High-proficiency learners possess a robust linguistic foundation, enabling them to articulate complex narrative structures and convey the thematic depth of their blended constructs. However, intermediate and low-proficiency learners are often constrained by limited linguistic resources, resulting in grammatical errors, syntactic monotony, weak cohesion, and a paucity of affective vocabulary. Such linguistic weaknesses ultimately undermine the presentation quality of blended outputs and create shallow ineffective thematic expression.

Consequently, four core cognitive capacities, namely background knowledge, logical reasoning, creative imagination, and linguistic application, interact closely as an integrated cognitive closed loop for learners (as illustrated in Figure 5). Within the context of the continuation writing task in this study, background knowledge underpins logical reasoning, while creative imagination is regulated and bounded by logical consistency. Furthermore, linguistic application serves as the output channel for imaginative ideas, and enriched creative outputs reciprocally expand learners'

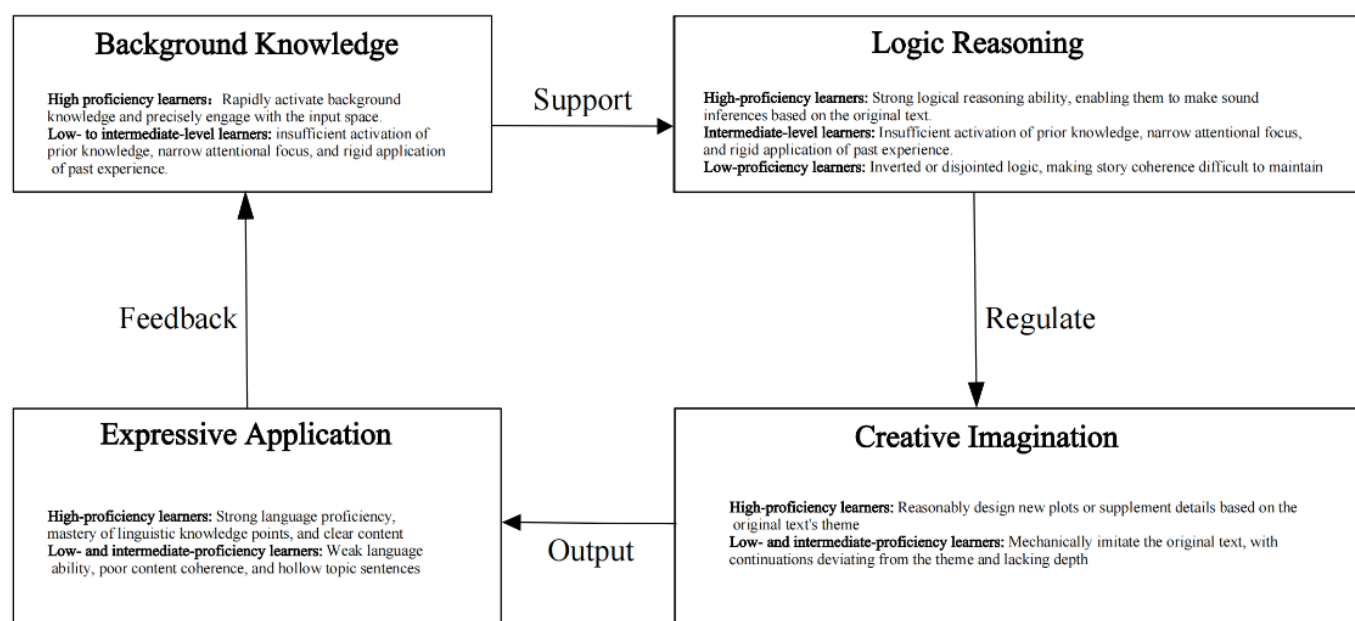


Figure 5. The closed-loop model of learners' cognitive capacity.

background knowledge inventory.

Ultimately, the quality of the continuation writing reveals the disparities in these four cognitive capacities among learners. The intricate interactions between these capacities during the composition, completion, and elaboration phases of conceptual blending collectively determine the content alignment, textual quality, and thematic depth of the generated text.

5.5 Pedagogical Implications

Language cognition is inherently multidimensional. To effectively enhance learners' continuation writing proficiency, teachers should adopt a scientifically grounded cognitive approach to instruction. Continuation writing is not a mere exercise in linguistic imitation. Rather, it constitutes a dynamic cognitive process in which learners, on the basis of comprehending textual background and foundational knowledge, absorb and internalize contextual information, restructure cognitive resources, and engage in reasoned imagination to produce creative written output. This developmental trajectory aligns closely with the operational mechanisms of CBT. Drawing upon this study and the cognitive principles governing reading-writing integration, four pedagogical recommendations are proposed:

Firstly, a foundational priority is to consolidate the input of textual or writing background and foundational knowledge, thereby enriching learners' knowledge reserve. Complete conceptual integration presupposes adequate information input, which

constitutes the primary step in continuation writing instruction. Prior to starting writing practice, teachers should provide systematic instructions on the source text's composition background, narrative context, character relationships, and core linguistic features, thereby facilitating students' comprehensive understanding of the original discourse. Sufficient background knowledge enriches learners' input spaces, provides a foundation for subsequent textual element extraction, cross-space mapping, and cognitive integration, and avoids problems such as thematic deviation or plot incoherence arising from insufficient contextual awareness.

Secondly, teachers should guide learners to internalize newly acquired information and facilitate the absorption and restructuring of background knowledge. Following the acquisition of textual background and foundational knowledge, learners need to connect the information with their existing linguistic repertoire and cognitive experiences, engaging in the selection, assimilation, and reorganization of newly acquired textual information. Informed by CBT, teachers can adopt a differentiated instructional approach, designing training tasks tailored to the cognitive characteristics of students at different proficiency levels, and promoting the establishment of effective connections between the source text space and students' personal cognitive space. This process enables learners to move beyond surface-level lexical reproduction, deepen their understanding of textual logic, and mitigate problems

such as imbalanced cognitive integration and mapping misalignment.

Thirdly, once cognitive restructuring is achieved, teachers can help learners leverage the outcomes of cognitive integration to stimulate their creativity. Following cognitive restructuring, creative imagination constitutes the core stage in generating novel continuation content and represents the critical step in which CBT produces emergent cognitive structures. Building upon the narrative logic of the source text, teachers may design appropriate open-ended thinking scenarios that encourage learners to engage in reasonable elaboration grounded in the existing textual information and integrated cognitive resources. While adhering to the logical consistency of the original plot, emotional trajectory, and thematic framework, learners are encouraged to engage in divergent thinking, enrich narrative details, and achieve the progression from knowledge assimilation and integration to creative cognitive generation.

Finally, no cognitive integration or creative thinking can be considered complete until it is materialized in well-formed written expression, making the refinement of output and post-composition revision the culminating step. After learners complete their continuation writing tasks, teachers can guide them to assess plot coherence, emotional consistency and thematic alignment against the contextual features and cognitive logic of the source text, and rectify expressive deficiencies stemming from cognitive biases. Through self-review and revision following output, learners can transform internalized creative cognitive structures into fluent, well-formed, and contextually appropriate continuation texts. This process establishes a complete reading-writing cognitive loop—comprising background input, cognitive integration, creative construction, and written output—which not only aligns with CBT but also corresponds to the closed-loop model of learners' cognitive capacity proposed in this study (see Figure 5).

These continuation writing suggestions are theoretically sound and adaptable to different educational settings, addressing classroom practice and general equity issues alike. Meanwhile, teachers' instruction and learners' self-study both demand flexible application.

6 Conclusion

Grounded in CBT, this study reveals the cognitive operational disparities among L2 learners during the continuation writing process, including the activation of input spaces, cross-space mapping, and blended-space construction. The findings suggest that, within the present corpus, high-proficiency learners tend to integrate multiple cognitive domains more effectively, producing continuations with greater structural coherence and thematic depth, whereas intermediate and low-proficiency learners are more prone to inappropriate mappings or blending failures, often resulting in linguistic errors, logical ambiguity, or thematic incoherence. These results extend the explanatory framework for the cognitive mechanisms underlying the reading-to-writing continuity tasks.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The sample (N=18) was drawn from a single key senior high school in Sichuan Province, limiting generalizability to other educational contexts. The analysis relies exclusively on written products by students, lacking process data, such as think-aloud protocols, keystroke logging, or eye-tracking measures, that could provide more direct evidence for the inferred cognitive operations. The closed-loop model of Learner Cognitive Capacity proposed in Figure 5 remains a theoretical abstraction requiring empirical validation. Future research could employ think-aloud protocols, experimental manipulations, and longitudinal designs to further explore the dynamic cognitive processes in continuation writing and to validate the pedagogical pathways suggested above. On this basis, researchers may advance both the theoretical and practical development of integrated reading-and-writing tasks, thereby contributing to the further development of L2 writing pedagogy.

Data Availability Statement

Data will be made available on request.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

AI Use Statement

The authors declare that DeepSeek and Grammarly were used for language editing and grammar

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Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate

Not applicable.

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Appendix

A Source Material for Continuation Writing

第二节 (满分 25 分)

阅读下面材料, 根据其内容和所给段落开头语续写两段, 使之构成一篇完整的短文。

Once upon a time there was a king who often thought, "Nothing good can come to a nation whose people only complain and expect others to solve their problems." One day, he had an idea.

Early one morning, the king dressed as a farmer and went to a local village. He placed a large stone in the middle of the main road and hid gold coins under the stone. Then he hid behind a huge maple tree and watched.

The first person down the road was a milkman with his cart. He crashed into the stone, spilling the milk everywhere. "What fool put this stone here?" he shouted. He picked himself up and angrily went away.

After a while, a group of women came along, each balancing a pot of water on her head. One woman tripped over the stone and her water pot went crashing to the ground. She picked herself up and limped away in tears. Neither she nor her friends thought about moving the stone out of the road.

The king watched all day as many people complained about the stone, but he found nobody making an attempt to move it. The king was in despair. "Is there no one in this village who feels any responsibility to keep their neighbours from harm?"

Just then, a young girl with her brother came along with their schoolbags on their backs. Seeing the stone, she said to her brother, "This stone is a danger to anyone who comes down the road after dark. We must move it out of the way." The brother disagreed and hurried away, for their parents were waiting for them to have supper. Ignoring him, the girl stopped and pushed the stone with all her might. After a great deal of effort, she finally succeeded in moving it to the side of the road. Removing the danger, she became wild with joy and it was at that very moment that she saw the gold coins where the stone had been!

注意:

1. 续写词数为 150 左右;
2. 请按如下格式在答题卡的相应位置作答。

Paragraph 1

Just then, the king stepped out from behind the tree. _____

Paragraph 2

On her way back home, the girl found her parents waiting anxiously at their doorsteps. _____

B Representative Continuation Texts from High, Intermediate, and Low Proficiency Levels

The representative texts are reproduced verbatim from the students' original compositions; grammatical, lexical, and spelling errors have been retained for analytical purposes.

S01 (23 points)*Paragraph 1*

Just then, the king stepped out from behind the tree. His eyes sparkled with tears of relief as he declared, "Dear child, your act of responsibility has saved this village! While others complained, you alone took action." He pointed to the coins glinting in the dusk. "This gold is your reward, not merely for moving a stone, but for planting a seed of responsibility in barren soil." The girl, trembling, whispered, "But sir, I only did what was right." The king smiled, "And that is why you've awakened a kingdom."

Paragraph 2

On her way back home, the girl found her parents waiting anxiously at their doorsteps. Before they could speak, she poured out the tale of the stone, the coins, and the king's mysterious words. Her mother embraced her tightly, murmuring, "You've shown us that true wealth lies in courage to act." The next morning, villagers gathered as the girl donated half the coins to repair the road and build a school. Whispers of shame turned to vows: "No stone shall block our path again!" From that day, the village bloomed with shared responsibility, each citizen becoming a guardian of their neighbors' way.

S14 (15 points)*Paragraph 1*

Just then, the king stepped out from behind the tree. He was surprised by the girl, who tried her best to move the large stone. The king walked to the girl when she picked up the gold coins, he said that the gold coins belonged to him. The girl did not believe him, so she decided to wait for the true owner. The king put on his expensive clothes to prove his word. The girl found that he was the king and returned the gold coins quickly. But the king didn't receive it, he explained that this is a test, the girl went through it, and the gold coins belonged too her now.

Paragraph 2

On her way back home, the girl found her parents waiting anxiously at their doorsteps. She explained all thing that happened to her, and she took the gold coins to her parents, the parents felt shocked that they said nothing. But they didn't use it quickly, they decided to use it to help others, because the king told the girl that they should help others and take their responsibility. If they do it, the nation will be better and better.

S18 (10 points)*Paragraph 1*

Just then, the king stepped out from behind the tree. He smiled and watched this girl, and said her: "These gold coins are mine. But now, I will deliver it to you. Because you are responsible girl." The girl said: "why you placed a large stone in the middle of the main road and hid gold coins under the tone? "I an your king, I want to found a responsibility people. I am very happy for you, and hope you will maintain this kind of spirit. The gin sail: "Of course ,my king."

Paragraph 2

On her way back home, the girl found her parents waiting anxiously at their doorsteps. She showed this gold coins for he family numbers and friend. she proudly told her friend all the process of this matter. In the end, everybody become a responsibility people, because they also want to found a gold coins for himself. The king also didn't solve all problems for his country.

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