

# On the Selection of English Discourses for Chinese College Entrance Examination in Recent Five Years (2017-2021)

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## Abstract

The paper mainly focuses on the selection of English discourses in the National College Entrance Examination papers of China in recent five years. It is found that there are four discourse types of application, narration, exposition and argumentation. The thematic contexts of the discourses in the papers involve the three categories of “man and self”, “man and society”, “man and nature”, which echoes *The National English Curriculum Standard (2017 Edition and 2020 Revision)*. In the papers, Chinese traditional culture is strengthened and the source of material selection is not limited to Britain and the United States, but expanded to the other countries in the world. The general trend in discourse materials reflects that the scope of material selection is more extensive with more attention to Chinese excellent traditional culture and multi-culture of the world for assessing culture awareness of the students.

**Keywords:** selection of English discourses, College Entrance Examination papers, the features of English discourses

## 1 Introduction

With the advancement of education and teaching reform, the revision of the curriculum standards and the implementation of curriculum reform, China's basic education reform is entering a new era of core competence. The key points of the reform in the English curriculum standard for senior high schools (2017 Edition) (hereinafter referred to as the curriculum standard) include: reversing the English curriculum's propensity to place too much emphasis on the teaching and explanation of grammar and vocabulary while ignoring the development of students' practical language application skills, and advocating for learning methods and task-based teaching approaches of experience, practice, participation, cooperation, and communication, growing students' comprehensive language using skills and making language learning a process in which students form positive emotions and attitudes, active thinking and bold practice to enhance their cross-cultural awareness and shape their autonomous learning ability.

The English curriculum reform has seen a great change in decade years from emphasizing knowledge learning to developing the ability of language using, from concerning learning content to strengthening communication, from excessive objective problems to increasing subjective problems and focusing on students' thinking, expression ability. These aspects engage the students to learn English better, improve their communicative competence in English and develop their thinking qualities and cultural awareness.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Styles of English Discourses

There have been some significant changes in the styles of the English papers of the National College Entrance Examination. The number, the styles and the scores of discourses have changed, such as the principle of vocabulary richness, the principle of interaction of grammatical structure and the principle of logical coherence in writing (Yang Yurun, Yu Jiong, 2016). Reading comprehension tests accounted for the highest proportion of the English College Entrance Examination papers. The stylistic types of reading comprehension are diversified, with different styles in discourse structure, semantic language structure and reading strategies. Among them, expository reading has always been the easier part for candidates to lose points (Du Juan, 2019).

### 2.2 Discourses in the Papers of the National College Entrance Examination

The English papers of the National College Entrance Examination in 2020 fully reflects the “core functions of

establishing morality, cultivating talents, serving talent selection and guiding teaching” in the Chinese College Entrance Examination evaluation system. The discourses of three sets of the national papers are closely around three themes: “man and nature”, “man and society” and “man and self”, which comprehensively examines the candidates’ comprehensive ability of English application and cultural literacy, draws extensive materials and has strong characteristics of the times, reflecting the compilation principle of “theme-function-structure-task” of English (new standard) textbooks (Liao Shihuan, Jiang Wenfeng, 2020). It is found that the listening comprehension of the 2017 National College Entrance Examination English Volume I generally meets the requirements of the curriculum standard and the examination outline. The discourse length and difficulty are set scientifically and reasonably. However, the discourse genre and theme are not diversified enough while the number of long dialogue rounds span is large with the speaking speed much higher than the requirements of the curriculum standard. In this regard, the questions for listening comprehension of the papers for the College Entrance Examination should be diversified, characteristic of wider coverage, more reasonable rounds and moderate speed to test students’ listening skills. Meanwhile, high school English listening teaching should provide students with more diverse genres and subjects, pay attention to the authenticity of language materials and test tasks to cultivate students’ comprehensive application ability as well as their cross-cultural communicative competence (Peng Yingying, 2018). The questions for reading comprehension in the national English paper and the independent papers for different provinces of the 2017 College Entrance Examination all meet the requirements of the curriculum standard and examination outline, with various genres, a wide range of themes, moderate overall difficulty, a wide range of reading skills and high content validity. However, there are also deficiencies in the subject matter of the individual single volume, length and difficulty of reading discourses and reading skills (Joey Huang, 2018). Wang Xingxi and Cheng Yuanyou (2021) state the choice of appropriate extended reading materials has become a prerequisite for achieving good teaching effect, and the core competence orientation projected by College Entrance Examination questions is naturally the distinct vane of daily teaching material selection. Therefore, it is believed that English teaching should be guided by the core quality of Chinese students’ development and the core literacy of English curriculum, based on the themes, the contexts and the content of the discourses required in the curriculum standard. In the process of discourse selection, we should pay attention to language input, and then gradually cultivate students to meet the requirements of talent selection in colleges and universities, and finally help students achieve all-round development.

### *2.3 Continuation Writing*

Under the background of the reform of the National College Entrance Examination, the students’ English writing ability is an important embodiment of their comprehensive English language ability. Teachers need to meet the requirements of the new curriculum reform standards, actively change the teaching concept of English post-reading continuation, and cultivate students’ interest in reading and continuation writing. In this process, students can broaden their personal cultural vision, release their personal imagination, and improve their English writing ability. Based on this, the researchers analyzed the new text style of “reading and writing continuation” in the English paper of the National College Entrance Examination, “reading and continuation writing” is flexible and the examination content is changeable. By analyzing the current situation of high school English teaching in continuation writing, the researchers proposed the adjustment strategy of English teaching in continuation writing under the background of the new College Entrance Examination (Zhao Tun, 2022; Chen ping, 2020).

## **3. Research Design**

### *3.1 Research Purposes*

With the advancement of education and teaching reform, the revision of curriculum standards and the implementation of curriculum reform, China’s basic education reform is entering a new era of core literacy. The new curriculum plan and curriculum standards further strengthen the educational function of the subject, reflect the distinct educational orientation, and significantly enhance the ideological, scientific, era and integrity. In the new College Entrance Examination reform policy, the emphasis of language perception and the ability to use language knowledge to solve practical problems.

### *3.2 Research Subjects*

This study takes the English papers of the National College Entrance Examination Volume 1 (2017-2021) as an example, with a total of five sets of the papers. The papers include 25 readings (20 reading multiple-choice questions, five out of seven), 5 cloze tests, 4 grammar tests, 4 essay corrections, 4 written expressions and 1 post-reading continuation writing. It also involves the characteristics of a small number of Jiangsu volumes and Zhejiang volumes.

### 3.3 Research Content

This study aims to explore English discourses in the papers for the National College Entrance Examination (2017-2021) from the four aspects of the discourse types, the theme contexts, the cultural knowledge and the styles involved in the discourses of the papers.

### 3.4 Research Methods

#### 3.4.1 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis mainly includes cohesive devices (common devices include grammatical devices and lexical devices), coherence, and several factors that affect implication. This paper explores the English discourses in the papers of the National College Entrance Examination through discourse analysis to find the discourse types, discourse patterns, temporal presentation features of the discourse, as well as the means and ways of moral cohesion involved in the text.

#### 3.4.2 Case Study

Through the case analysis, this paper makes relevant exploration with the test questions in the five-year examination papers on the research content. This paper draws the corresponding conclusion on the features and examination points of the English discourses in the examination papers, as well as the features and trends of English discourse selection for the National College Entrance Examination.

## 4. Results and Analysis

### 4.1 Results

According to the statistics, it is found that there are some big changes in the examination types, the theme contexts, the discourse styles and culture knowledge contained in the papers from 2017 to 2021. The results are as follows.

#### (1) Types of discourses

Table 4.1: Types and scores of the discourses

Years	types	Application	Narration	Exposition	Argumentation	Narrative and discussion
2017		2	4	2	1	
2018		2	2	3	1	1
2019		2	2	4	1	
2020		1	1	4		2
2021		2	5	2		

In 2017, there are two applied discourses for Reading Comprehension A and written expression. The discourse in Reading Comprehension A is about a tour guide and the writing is a notification letter. There are four narrative discourses, including Reading Comprehension B, Selecting Five Statements Out Of Seven Ones, Cloze and Short Correction. There are two expository discourses, including Reading Comprehension C, Reading comprehension D, among which, there is an argumentative discourse for a grammar test based on the importance of fat and salt in diet. As far as the Volume 1 of the 2018 National English College Entrance Examination is concerned, the listening materials reflect the application of English. There are two applied discourses, involving Reading Comprehension A and written expression, among which the discourse for Reading Comprehension A is about the topic of urban riding behavior, and the written expression involves the introduction of Chinese guest customs. The narrative discourse in Reading Comprehension B is about making delicious food with less budget and the discourse for correction is about the improvement of the living environment of grandparents in the countryside. And an argumentative discourse in Reading Comprehension C talks about the loss of language. The following three expository discourses, of which the first one in Reading Comprehension D tells the problem of energy consumption of old and new electronic products while the second one is about Selecting Five Statements Out Of Seven Ones followed by the third one for grammar filling. The cloze is a narrative discourse and its theme is the revelation of the chess lesson. In 2019, there are two applied discourses for Reading Comprehension A and a written expression with the topics of summer job announcement and application letter for students respectively. The two narrative discourses selected for Reading Comprehension B and an error correction, which are about the second-grade presidential campaign and the love for football. There are four expository discourses for Reading Comprehension C, Selecting Five Statements Out Of Seven Ones and grammar filling. One expository and argumentative discourse selected for Reading Comprehension D talks about the impact of popularity on the growth of teenagers. In the Volume 1 of the 2020 National English College Entrance Examination, there is one applied discourse on train information for Reading Comprehension A, and two narrative discourses of Reading Comprehension B and Cloze. Four expository discourses for Reading

Comprehension C, D, five choices and grammar filling respectively. One narrative discourse describes the scrambled eggs for the first time. A written expression talks about the introduction of the characters. In 2021, there are no change in the examination types compared to the 2020 paper.

## (2) Theme contexts

From 2017 to 2021, the selection of English discourses was centered on the three thematic contexts of man and self, man and society, and man and nature. It reflects the educational function and political mission of “adhering to the moral education, strengthening the education of socialist core value system” and “enhancing students’ social responsibility” carried by the College Entrance Examination. And it also reflects the distinct education orientation characteristic of ideology, science and integrity etc.

The Volume 1 of the 2017 National English College Entrance Examination selects discourses from visiting science and technology museums and animal protection to making stiffs, camping and learning driving, to promoting Chinese culture to guide students to love science, nature, life and the motherland. This well implements the fundamental task of cultivating people by virtue, and highlights the educational function of the College Entrance Examination. The examination focuses on the four core competences of the language ability, thinking quality, cultural character and learning ability in different situations to handle complex tasks. Students are required to have a solid discipline concept and broad discipline vision, and reflect their own practical ability, innovative spirit and other internalized comprehensive discipline literacy. In the process of learning (or problem solving), the students are engaged to continue to accumulate knowledge, improve their ability and develop their quality, and gradually form the correct core values. This also reflects the educational function and political mission of “adhering to the cultivation of morality, strengthening the education of socialist core value system” and “enhancing students’ social responsibility” carried by the College Entrance Examination. The Volume 1 of the 2018 National English College Entrance Examination has a variety of themes, and the reading comprehension part includes social life, character stories, social culture, science and technology, etc. The five topics are education, environmental protection, science popularization, diet, health, etc. Proposition design pays attention to strengthening the new curriculum concept to guide students to sort out the correct three views. In 2019, story selection for the paper includes student summer work reports, election campaigns, smart keyboards, youth growth, air and health, protecting polar bears, and promoting Chinese culture. The topic also revolves around the three thematic contexts of man and self, man and society and man and nature, which are closely related with the students’ life and experience. In 2020, the discourses cover various topics from poetry competitions, hard work, a book about Uzbekistan, dining influence on eating habits, to four suggestions for public speeches, afforestation, environment improvement, museums, 5 km cross-country events, to helping poor families. These topics all revolve around man and self, society, and nature. In 2021, the overall difficulty of the examination is roughly the same as that in the previous years. The comprehensive use ability of English is comprehensively examined around the three thematic contexts of man and nature, society and self. The discourses involve different contexts from four hotels in Rome, piano page introduction, wetland breaking and environment protection, to emotional intelligence, experience local life in Paris, the first summer work experience, mountain climbing experience, and preparing breakfast for mother.

## (3) Styles of the discourses

Overall, the style setting from 2017 to 2021 is relatively stable, with no big changes (Table 4-1: styles and scores of the discourses). Among them, the most obvious change is that the National College Entrance Examination in 2021 had removed the short discourse correction and added a type of writing, called continuation writing. More details, the Volume 1 of the 2017 National College Entrance Examination shows that reading is the main way for Chinese students to contact foreign languages. It not only helps students obtain a large amount of effective information, correctly understand the development trend of the world and China, learn foreign advanced experience and cultivate their international awareness, but also affects the improvement of other language skills to a great extent. Therefore, reading comprehension has always been an important part of the College Entrance Examination papers, and it is endowed with more content and a high score value. This year’s national volume adopts eight reading texts, five reading comprehension parts, two language knowledge application parts and one writing part, reflecting the importance of reading comprehension ability in English learning and assessment. Reading is needed to obtain the required information from a large number of written materials. Therefore, to test reading comprehension ability, we must provide various types of reading materials. Every year, the reading comprehension part of the College Entrance Examination provides candidates with a large number of different types of reading materials, and the reading volume has been maintained in a relatively stable range. In the volume 1 of the 2018 National College Entrance Examination, English reading comprehension questions are flexible and diverse, including detailed comprehension questions,

reasoning judgment questions and word meaning guess questions, highlighting the candidates' basic ability to understand and use language to solve problems. Selecting Five Out of Seven is mainly on the thematic sentences, transitional sentences and detailed questions. In terms of the number of cloze questions, there are nine verbs and verb phrases, seven nouns, three adjectives and one adverb. The overall difficulty is lower than that in 2017. The Volume 1 of the 2019 examination paper continues to maintain a stable structure. As for the paper structure, there are special tests for each individual language skill, such as listening part, reading comprehension part and writing part, and also tests for comprehensive language skills. For example, the use of language knowledge reflects the basic and comprehensive test requirements. In the design of the test situation, there are not only the listening comprehension task based on the examinee's real oral communication, but also the written writing task that requires the examinee to give full play to their imagination and creativity, which reflects the application and innovative test requirements.

The volume 1 of the 2020 National College Entrance Examination focuses on the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, highlighting the English literacy orientation of communication, critical thinking and learning. In the paper structure, there are both for the special examination of individual language skills, such as reading comprehension part and writing part, and for the comprehensive language skills, such as the use of language knowledge part. In the Volume 1 of the 2021 National College Entrance Examination, there are six questions about detailed understanding behavior, one question about the main idea, two questions about detailed understanding nouns, one question about detailed understanding time and two questions about inference. The language in reading is very authentic, and understanding the meaning of long and difficult sentences by means of reading techniques is more obvious. The language features of the selected discourses are distinct, highlighting the active use of words. For example, the word "excite" is often used followed by "ed" or "ing" as an adjective for "excitement", while in the discourse D, "excite a greater interest in" is intended for "arousing interest in...". There are many long subjects. The discourse for Cloze Filling focuses on the investigation of verbs. In addition, the use of conjunctions is not examined this year, which is also a big change. The biggest change in grammar tests is not prepositions and attributive clauses, instead, crowns and nominal clauses. Compared with the Volume 1 of the 2017 paper focusing on the theme of social care, the 2021 continuation writing focuses on family love. The topic fits students' reality, and the story background is also a common "mother's Day" for students. The language in the original text is concise and easy for the students to understand.

#### (4) Cultural knowledge

Table 4.2. Cultural knowledge in the discourses

Years	Quantity	Theme	Discourse type
2017	2	Paris and New Orleans celebrate International Jazz day Inform the plan of Chinese learning class	Narrative Practical writing
2018	3	A British diet program Learning experience and influence of free elective courses in University Introduce Chinese family visiting customs to New Zealand friends	Narrative Narrative and discussion Practical writing
2019	1	Volunteer application letter for China Art Exhibition in London	Practical writing
2020	1	The successful landing of chang'e-4 unmanned probe on the back of the moon shows national self-confidence and inspires national pride	Expository text
2021	3	Different hotels in Rome and their respective characteristics This paper introduces the author's life in France Make breakfast for mom	Practical writing Narrative Practical writing

Integrated into China's excellent traditional culture to enhance Chinese students' cultural self-confidence through the guidance of "telling Chinese stories well", the second section of the writing part of the volume 1 of the 2017 examination sets the situation for candidates to teach foreign friends to learn Chinese, and requires candidates to write an email to inform foreign friends of their next class plan, including learning Chinese Tang poetry and understanding the history of the Tang Dynasty in the ancient China. These situations are related with the students' life. The task requirements are in line with the students' ability level, and naturally integrates the content of Chinese excellent traditional culture, which can lead the students to use English to state Chinese stories well and enhance their confidence in Chinese culture. The writing part of the Volume 1 of the 2018 Examination focuses more on Chinese culture, introducing the customs of visiting China. The examinee learned that the art museum in London would hold a Chinese painting exhibition and wrote to the art museum to apply for a volunteer, which smoothly integrated into the excellent traditional Chinese culture. From 2020 to 2021, the sources of the English discourses in

the papers have changed significantly. It is not limited only to Britain and the United States, but oriented to more countries all over the world.

#### 4.2 Analysis

Based on the results of the above, the author makes an analysis from the two aspects as follows.

##### (1). Features of English Discourses in National College Entrance Examination Papers

The competence-oriented principle is necessary according to the ideas and goals of high-school English curriculum in China. In terms of the examination content, the coverage is comprehensive, and the styles are rich and colorful. And the reliability and validity of the test questions and reasonable configuration of the examination paper structure are needed so that the papers can be basic, practical, comprehensive and creative to examine students' English core competence. The examination questions are relatively stable and flexible. The paper structure is scientific and reasonable, and the proportion of subjective and objective questions are balanced to be appropriate. In the recent five years of the College Entrance Examination, English discourse selection fully reflects the requirements of English curriculum standards for the College Entrance Examination. It covers the relevant background of man and self, man and society, man and nature. The range of selected discourses is wider, not only for the UK and the United States, but gradually for the whole world. The design of the style is roughly unchanged, relatively stable, but relatively flexible, reducing the correction of short discourses, and increasing the written expression following reading. In this way, the structure of the examination paper is more reasonable, and the proportion of subjective questions and objective questions is more appropriate.

Comprehensive examination on the students' core qualities of English is significant. The proposition of English College Entrance Examination can pay attention to students' ability to understand and express meaning in specific social situations, especially listening, speaking, reading and writing. Simultaneously, through the selection of language resources, the placement of examination key points, examination items, and examination forms, students' cultural consciousness, thinking quality, and learning ability should be checked directly or indirectly. In recent five years, English discourses in the National College Entrance Examination papers, through the examination of students' reading and writing ability, are added the content of the Chinese excellent traditional culture. The discourses' topics are various, not just for the UK and the United States, but gradually for the world.

According to the actual use of English language, the proposition shall be made, and the students' life experience and cognitive development level shall be fully considered. In the English examination papers, the questions fully involve the use of English language in real life. In the choice of English discourses, besides more use of real, authentic, typical contemporary materials, the themes and genres of language materials are also diversified. For example, over the past five years, the first person is used in many discourses to describe the author 's experiences in real life. These experiences are very common in daily life and familiar to the students, including working in summer vacation, climbing mountains, making breakfast for our mother, etc. Therefore, when students meet such discourses and questions, they will be desired to read and think relating to their own personal experience.

##### (2). Trends of Selecting English Discourses for the Papers of the National College Entrance Examination

In the recent five years, the English discourse scope of the National College Entrance Examination is more extensive, although the styles are generally unchanged with continuation writing after reading added. In adapt to the requirements of the National English Curriculum Standards to the National College Entrance Examination, the questions for examination would be qualified and the discourse styles would be rich and colorful. Secondly, more attention would be paid to the selection of the Chinese excellent traditional culture. For example, in terms of the written expression, the questions are about Chinese studies in the 2017 paper, the custom of being a guest in China in the 2018, Chinese art in the 2019 and Chinese filial piety in the 2021. Thirdly, the vision involved in the discourses would be world-wide.

## 5. Conclusion

From the results of the study, English teachers should pay attention to the diversity of classroom teaching to cultivate students' ability to understand and apply English knowledge. The College Entrance Examination is a summative assessment of these abilities. Effective classroom teaching is to maximize the cultivation of students' ability in a limited period of time. Secondly, teachers' guidance ability should be improved. The complexity of cultural knowledge contained in language knowledge in the discourses makes the students somewhat difficult to understand the discourse. Therefore, it is necessary to deal with English in class in a positive way, guiding the students' development in language ability, thinking quality, cultural awareness and learning competence.

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