COHESION, COHERENCE, AND GENRE AWARENESS IN YOUNG LEARNERS' ENGLISH WRITING: A CASE STUDY FROM GOIÁS[1]

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Abstract: This article examines the writing challenges faced by A2-level learners of English as an Additional Language, as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Drawing on written samples produced during a mock Cambridge English exam in a preparatory course in Goiânia, Brazil, the study identifies recurring difficulties in textual cohesion and coherence, such as fragmented idea organisation and misuse of prepositions, conjunctions, and pronouns. These issues are analysed in light of current theories on additional language writing development, with attention to cross-linguistic influence and the role of genre and linguistic awareness. The article concludes by proposing pedagogical strategies — such as modelling, scaffolded rewriting, and focused feedback — to support learners in producing more cohesive, coherent, and genre-appropriate texts.
Keywords: Cohesion and Coherence. Genre Awareness. Writing Development. A2-level learners. English as an Additional Language.

Resumo: Este artigo analisa os desafios enfrentados por aprendizes de inglês como língua adicional, no nível A2 do Quadro Europeu Comum de Referência para Línguas, no desenvolvimento de textos coesos e coerentes. A análise baseia-se em produções escritas durante um simulado do exame Cambridge em um

curso preparatório na cidade de Goiânia, Brasil. Foram identificadas dificuldades recorrentes na organização das ideias e no uso de preposições, conjunções e pronomes — aspectos fundamentais da coesão textual. Esses dados são discutidos à luz de teorias contemporâneas sobre o desenvolvimento da escrita em língua adicional, com ênfase na influência interlinguística e na consciência linguística e de gênero textual. O artigo propõe estratégias pedagógicas como modelagem, reescrita com apoio docente e feedback direcionado para favorecer a produção de textos mais coesos, coerentes e adequados aos gêneros propostos.

Palavras-chave: Coesão e Coerência. Consciência de Gênero. Escrita em Língua Adicional. Aprendizes do nível A2. Produção Textual.

Introduction

Developing writing skills is fundamental to language learning, particularly during the early stages of learning an additional language. Among the essential writing competencies, producing coherent and cohesive texts enables learners to convey meaning and logically organise their ideas effectively. However, while extensive research exists regarding writing instruction for intermediate and advanced learners, the specific writing challenges encountered by learners at the A2 proficiency level remain comparatively underexplored.

Given the foundational role of writing skills at this stage, understanding these learners' struggles with textual coherence and cohesion, as well as their awareness of genre conventions, is critical. This paper addresses this research gap by examining authentic written samples from A2-level students preparing for the Cambridge Exam. It identifies prevalent issues with textual cohesion, coherence, and genre awareness, and offers instructional practices grounded in

contemporary theories to support these learners.

This study was conducted at a language centre in Goiânia, Brazil, with a group of teenage learners whose English studies had lasted for one year or more. The students completed a mock version of the Cambridge A2 Key Writing paper under exam conditions. The two writing tasks analysed represent genres central to the A2 syllabus and real-life communicative situations for early language learners, namely the informal email and the narrative story (based on a three-picture frame). The email genre typically requires students to respond to a short message or prompt using an appropriate informal tone, clear structure (including a greeting, body, and closing), and functional language suited to everyday communication, such as providing information, making suggestions, or asking questions. In contrast, the picture-based story invites learners to produce a short narrative by interpreting a sequence of three images. This genre assesses the student's ability to construct a coherent plot with a clear beginning, middle, and end while using basic narrative language, sequencing expressions, and consistent verb tenses.

Thus, analysing the students' responses offers insights into how they interpret and respond to genre expectations, particularly in terms of how ideas are organised and connected — a dimension often underexplored in classroom practice at lower levels.

Likewise, in English language teaching, writing is often treated as a discrete skill, taught through controlled practice, grammar drills, and isolated vocabulary exercises. While such approaches may help learners develop surface-level accuracy, they frequently overlook the broader communicative and structural demands of real-world writing tasks. Genre-based pedagogy, grounded in systemic functional

linguistics and influenced by thinkers such as Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) and John Swales (2014), presents an alternative approach. Rather than teaching writing as a neutral or purely linguistic exercise, genre theory recognises that all texts are socially situated and shaped by purpose, audience, and context. From this perspective, writing instruction must guide learners to identify and internalise the conventions of specific genres to produce effective, meaningful texts.

Genre awareness becomes particularly relevant in high-stakes, task-based assessments, such as the Cambridge A2 Key Writing exam, where students are asked to produce short, functional texts, including notes, messages, and emails. These genres are not merely containers for language; they carry specific expectations regarding tone, structure, and content. A student may have sufficient grammatical and lexical knowledge but still fail to meet the task requirements if they ignore the genre's communicative purpose. Hence, understanding the relationship between language choices and genre conventions is critical for success at this level.

That said, the choice to focus on coherence and cohesion as markers of genre awareness stems from the observation that many students, despite having the required vocabulary and grammar knowledge, struggle to create logically connected and appropriately structured texts. Issues such as inconsistent verb tenses, lack of sequencing, overuse of coordinating conjunctions, or incorrect reference usage may hinder communication even when individual sentences are accurate. Identifying these challenges in real learner texts helps reinforce the need for explicit, genre-based instruction, especially at foundational levels like A2, where students are transitioning from sentence-level control to full-text production. Therefore, this study argues that genre

awareness should be incorporated not as an advanced skill but as an essential component of early writing instruction to help learners achieve greater clarity, cohesion, and communicative effectiveness.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative orientation (Rees, 2008), combining a bibliographic review (García, 2016) with a descriptive case study (Ventura, 2007), in line with interpretivist principles that prioritise meaning-making in local contexts. The study aims to investigate how young learners at an A2 CEFR level utilise cohesion and coherence strategies in short written texts. The focus is not only on the observable linguistic features but also on how these learners engage with genre-based tasks that reflect authentic communicative demands.

The study was conducted within the framework of the research project A EDUCAÇÃO EM LITERATURA E LÍNGUA, coordinated by the first author and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Goiás (UFG), under CAAE number 67697923.1.0000.5083. Ethical procedures were strictly adhered to, following national and institutional guidelines, including the anonymisation of learner data and the secure storage of documents.

From a methodological standpoint, this investigation aligns with the principles of qualitative inquiry as outlined in applied linguistics literature (Dörnyei, 2007; Duff, 2008). The research is guided by the belief that language learning processes are best understood through close engagement with naturally occurring data in authentic educational settings. It assumes that written performance is situated, contextual, and mediated by learners' awareness of genre, task

demands, and available linguistic resources.

A bibliographic review was conducted to establish a theoretical and analytical foundation for the study. Drawing on García (2016), the review focused on three core domains: (1) the development of writing in additional language contexts; (2) theories of cohesion and coherence in textual production; and (3) genre-based approaches to language instruction, particularly in early proficiency levels. In keeping with established standards of systematic literature engagement, the review included peer-reviewed articles, theoretical monographs, and empirical studies that have contributed to the conceptualisation of text production at the A2 level.

The case study component (Ventura, 2007; Stake, 1995; Duff, 2008) targeted the written production of fifteen students, aged approximately 12, enrolled at a private language centre in the southern region of Goiânia, Goiás. All participants had at least one year of formal instruction in English and were selected based on their participation in a mock version of the Cambridge A2 Key examination. Two writing tasks were selected for analysis due to their prominence in the A2 exam format and their representativeness of genre-based communicative performance: (1) an informal email responding to a personal prompt, and (2) a short narrative based on a three-frame visual sequence.

The analysis was designed as a detailed textual investigation, incorporating procedures standard to qualitative case studies. Learner texts were first transcribed and segmented, then submitted to line-by-line analysis to identify the use — or misuse — of cohesive and coherent resources. The analysis focused on features such as tense consistency, referential clarity, discourse markers, punctuation, and

logical sequencing. Following the recommendations of Duff (2008) and Dörnyei (2007), analytical categories were inductively generated and later grouped into broader thematic axes.

To complement the interpretive analysis, a basic quantitative layer was added to map frequency patterns, following a pragmatic mixed-methods orientation. While the study remains predominantly qualitative in its aims and procedures, the inclusion of quantifiable trends allowed for a more precise visual representation of common difficulties and emergent textual tendencies. Data were organised into tables and figures, not to generalise, but to support analytic transparency and pedagogical insight.

In synthesising theoretical constructs with real classroom data, this methodology is consistent with what Larsen-Freeman (2015) has termed a "complexity-informed approach" to language research: one that acknowledges the dynamic, interrelated nature of linguistic, cognitive, and contextual variables in learner performance. The methodology seeks not to isolate variables in the positivist tradition, but to understand how multiple factors converge in the production of beginner-level texts. Such an approach, while modest in scope, provides rich ground for pedagogical reflection and subsequent curriculum development.

Theoretical assumptions: Cohesion and coherence

In this study, cohesion and coherence are adopted as analytical constructs to interpret learners' difficulties in producing meaningful and well-structured texts in English as an additional language. While an exhaustive theoretical discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, a principled overview of these concepts is essential to support the

analysis that follows and to situate the pedagogical recommendations proposed.

Cohesion, as classically theorised by Halliday and Hasan (1976), refers to the set of linguistic mechanisms through which connections are established between different parts of a text. These mechanisms function at the surface level of language and are responsible for giving a text its structural unity. Halliday and Hasan propose that cohesive relations are realised through five categories: reference (e.g., pronouns and demonstratives), substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion (e.g., repetition, synonymy, and collocation). These devices serve to signal the relationships between sentences, clauses, and even paragraphs, enabling the reader to move smoothly through the discourse.

Antunes (2009) builds on this foundational view by conceptualising cohesion as a kind of linguistic weaving. In her words, a cohesive text resembles a well-crafted fabric in which every element is functionally connected to another. According to her (2009, p. 47), cohesion is the "property by which all kinds of connections and links are created and signalled, giving the text a sense of unity or thematic coherence[4]". Cohesion, therefore, is not simply the addition of linking words but the strategic deployment of resources that maintain thematic continuity, avoid ambiguity, and guide the reader across informational layers.

From a pedagogical perspective, teaching cohesion involves helping learners to identify and appropriately use cohesive devices according to the communicative intent and the genre at hand. For instance, learners should be encouraged to avoid excessive repetition

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4 Our translation to: "propriedade pela qual se cria e se sinaliza toda espécie de ligação, de laço, que dá ao texto unidade de sentido ou unidade temática".

by using appropriate reference terms, to use conjunctions that accurately reflect the logical relationship between ideas (such as contrast, result, or exemplification), and to develop lexical variety to prevent redundancy while reinforcing textual focus. The type of cohesion most required in a given text is often genre-specific: in argumentative writing, logical sequencing through connectives is central; in narrative writing, referential cohesion ensures clarity in the tracking of characters and events.

Nevertheless, it is vital to emphasise that cohesion alone does not guarantee textual clarity or communicative success. A text may display formally correct cohesive ties while still presenting inconsistencies in logic, gaps in reasoning, or an overall lack of meaningful integration. This brings us to the concept of coherence, which refers to the interpretative and conceptual unity of a text.

Coherence is not a purely linguistic property; instead, it is constructed through the interaction between textual organisation, the writer's communicative goals, and the reader's ability to interpret and connect ideas. According to Johns (1986, p. 247), coherence involves "the organisation of text with all elements present and fitting together logically". It operates at the level of meaning and discourse structure, encompassing both textual expectations (such as genre conventions) and cognitive processing (such as inference, topic maintenance, and thematic development).

Halliday and Hasan (1976) make a critical distinction between cohesion and coherence. While cohesion is concerned with the formal features that tie a text together, coherence is concerned with the meaningful relationships among ideas that make a text intelligible and relevant to the communicative situation. A text can be cohesive

but incoherent — when, for example, ideas are grammatically linked but semantically unrelated or when the progression of thought lacks direction.

Antunes (2009, p. 176) reinforces this view by noting that coherence is not "a strictly linguistic property, nor is it limited solely to the grammatical determinations of language. It presupposes such linguistic determinations but also goes beyond them[5]". This perspective reinforces the idea that coherence is contextually and cognitively constructed. It depends not only on linguistic forms but also on the writer's ability to anticipate the reader's interpretive process and to organise discourse in a way that is thematically consistent and logically sequenced.

Recent empirical studies support this multidimensional view. Zhang et al. (2024), for instance, developed the DECOR benchmark to identify, annotate, and revise incoherent segments in texts written in English as an additional language. Their research demonstrates that learners benefit from explicit instruction focused on detecting and resolving incoherence, predominantly when revision is guided by metalinguistic reflection and scaffolded reasoning. Saeed et al. (2022) similarly argues that coherence in adult learners' writing is significantly influenced by a range of linguistic and cognitive skills, such as lexical control, grammatical accuracy, and morphological awareness, which together contribute to the overall interpretability of the text.

Ryan (2023), adopting a translanguaging lens, observes that the use of translation and foreign-origin machine tools (FOMT) can support the development of coherence and cohesion in multilingual

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5 Our translation to: "uma propriedade estritamente linguística nem se prende, apenas, às determinações meramente gramaticais da língua. Ela supõe tais determinações linguísticas, mas as ultrapassa".

learners, provided these tools are integrated through reflective and strategic writing tasks. His findings challenge traditional scepticism toward such technologies in writing instruction, especially in contexts where learners possess limited syntactic range.

Computational approaches have also contributed to the analysis of coherence. Studies using Coh-Metrix (Graesser et al., 2004) indicate that cohesive markers such as connectives and lexical diversity are among the most reliable predictors of coherence and overall writing quality in additional language writing. Nonetheless, as Crossley, Kyle, and McNamara (2016) argue, automated tools can only approximate the reader's interpretation and cannot replace human judgment in assessing global coherence and discourse effectiveness.

In sum, cohesion ensures the surface-level connection of textual elements through grammatical and lexical means, whereas coherence guarantees that these elements work together to produce meaning that is accessible and logical to the reader. Both constructs are indispensable in the teaching of writing in an additional language, especially for beginner and intermediate learners who may struggle to balance grammatical accuracy, content development, and discourse-level organisation. A writing pedagogy that explicitly addresses cohesion and coherence can equip learners with the tools necessary to construct texts that are not only structurally sound but also communicatively effective and contextually appropriate.

Genre Awareness

The concept of genre awareness plays a central role in writing development, particularly in additional language contexts, where learners must not only acquire linguistic forms but also learn to

organise those forms meaningfully following social and communicative conventions. In this study, genre awareness is understood as the learner's ability to identify, interpret, and reproduce the structural, rhetorical, and stylistic features that define particular genres, always in relation to communicative purpose, audience, and context.

This perspective is grounded in dialogic and social semiotic traditions, which view language as a social action. Bakhtin (1986), in his theorisation of speech genres, emphasised that every utterance is situated within a chain of prior and anticipated responses. Genres are thus not static templates but dynamic, recognisable patterns of discourse that reflect and shape human interaction. Each genre carries with it a history of use, institutional expectations, and cultural assumptions, making the process of learning to write in a new genre simultaneously a linguistic, cognitive, and social undertaking.

Building on this foundation, Swales (2014) articulates genre as a "class of communicative events" characterised by shared communicative purposes and internal structure, shaped by the conventions of specific discourse communities. His contribution is particularly influential in educational settings, where genre-based instruction seeks to equip learners with the rhetorical knowledge necessary to navigate academic, professional, and everyday communicative demands. From this standpoint, genre awareness entails more than textual imitation: it involves a strategic and situated understanding of how form and function interact.

In our study, two genre-based writing tasks were selected to reflect the communicative expectations of A2-level learners preparing for international examinations. The first task consisted of composing an informal email, and the second was to write a short narrative

based on a three-frame visual prompt. These genres were chosen not only for their pedagogical relevance and cognitive accessibility but also for their potential to elicit varied discursive strategies and genre-specific conventions, such as greeting formulas, narrative sequencing, character reference, and tone adjustment. By designing the study around these two distinct genres, we position genre awareness as both a pedagogical aim and a framework for analysing learner performance in context.

The relevance of genre awareness at early proficiency levels is increasingly supported by empirical research. Genre-based pedagogy — notably as theorised by the Sydney School (Martin & Rose, 2008) — advocates explicit instruction in the social purpose and organisation of texts. It follows a developmental cycle: learners first deconstruct model texts to observe genre features in action; then participate in joint construction tasks with teacher scaffolding; and finally, progress toward independent genre production. This structured progression not only facilitates metalinguistic reflection but also promotes greater autonomy in learners' writing processes.

Research by Yasuda (2011) illustrates the transformative potential of such approaches. Her study with Japanese EFL learners demonstrated that structured engagement with genre-based tasks led to significant improvements in rhetorical control, textual coherence, and audience awareness. Similarly, Shrestha and Bhusal (2023), examining high school English teachers in Nepal, found that genre awareness fostered more responsive teaching practices, enabling educators to support learners' textual development better. Tardy et al. (2022) underscore, in a longitudinal investigation, that genre awareness develops cumulatively, particularly when teachers

integrate reflection, scaffolded practice, and explicit genre modelling into the curriculum.

In light of these insights, genre awareness should not be seen as an advanced or peripheral competence, but as a foundational element of textual literacy. It provides novice writers with a conceptual map for navigating unfamiliar communicative situations — whether composing a personal message, telling a story, or responding to a prompt in a test context. For our participants at the A2 level, even brief writing tasks require genre knowledge, including how to begin, what to include, how to close, and how to manage tone and register in line with the purpose.

Moreover, genre awareness serves a dual function in educational research: as a construct to be taught and as an analytical lens for evaluating learner production. It enables teachers and researchers to assess student writing not only in terms of grammar and vocabulary, but also in terms of communicative adequacy, textual integrity, and alignment with expected discourse structures. In this sense, fostering genre awareness contributes directly to learners' ability to participate in literate practices — academic, institutional, and everyday — in a socially appropriate and context-sensitive manner.

Thus, genre awareness must be understood as an essential component of communicative competence. It enables learners to transcend sentence-level correctness and engage in socially meaningful, rhetorically appropriate, and structurally coherent writing. When approached through careful scaffolding, model-based instruction, and reflective practice, genre awareness enables even beginner-level learners to produce writing that effectively responds to real-world communicative expectations. More than a set of

textual conventions, it represents a way of thinking about discourse: intentional, situated, and socially grounded.

THE CAMBRIDGE EXAM

The Cambridge English exams, developed by Cambridge Assessment English (a department of the University of Cambridge), are internationally recognised language proficiency tests aligned with the CEFR, ranging from A1 to C2. Widely accepted by educational institutions, employers, and governments, these exams assess reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, with additional focus on grammar and vocabulary. Exams such as A2 Key, B1 Preliminary, B2 First, C1 Advanced, and C2 Proficiency evaluate candidates using authentic tasks and formats in real-life contexts. The speaking tests are conducted face-to-face, promoting natural communication, while writing tasks include practical genres such as emails, reports, and essays. The listening and reading sections expose learners to varied accents, text types, and scenarios, thereby enhancing their comprehensive language understanding.

What distinguishes Cambridge exams is their emphasis on communicative competence and practical usage rather than rote memorisation. The preparation process fosters fluency and accuracy, promoting critical thinking and the integrated use of skills. Teachers often align their curricula with the exam structure, using it to guide language instruction and assess progress in a meaningful way. Moreover, learners receive detailed feedback by skill area, helping them target areas for improvement. These exams certify proficiency and support long-term language development, making them valuable both as formal qualifications and as pedagogical tools for shaping

effective English learning.

In this paper, we focus on the A2 Key Exam, formerly known as the KET (Key English Test), which is a level of the Cambridge English Qualifications designed for learners with a basic understanding of English. It corresponds to the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It demonstrates that candidates can communicate effectively in simple situations, understand basic information, and express themselves using clear and straightforward language. This exam is often taken by students at the beginning of their English learning journey and serves as a foundation for progressing to higher levels, such as B1 Preliminary (PET) and B2 First (FCE). A2 Key is divided into three papers: Reading and Writing, and Listening and Speaking, with the Reading and Writing paper carrying the most weight regarding time and content.

The Writing component of the A2 Key exam assesses a candidate's ability to produce texts in English that are relevant, accurate, and appropriate for the task. It is integrated with the Reading section in a single paper, and it lasts 60 minutes. Candidates complete two specific writing tasks within this paper: Part 6 and Part 7. Part 6 requires writing a short email (25-35 words) based on a given prompt. It usually involves three content points that the candidate must address. Part 7 asks candidates to write a short story (35-45 words) based on three sequential pictures. Candidates are encouraged to write a complete story with a clear beginning, middle, and end, based on the events depicted in the provided images. These tasks assess coherence, grammar control, vocabulary range, and the candidate's ability to fulfil communicative functions such as inviting, requesting, or giving information. However, the exam is guided by clear and well-

defined standards for evaluating written performance (Figure 1).

Figure 1 — Assessment of writing scale

Assessment of Writing scale

BAND	CONTENT	ORGANISATION	LANGUAGE
5	All content is relevant to the task. Target reader is fully informed.	Text is connected and coherent, using basic linking words and a limited number of cohesive devices.	Uses everyday vocabulary generally appropriately, while occasionally overusing certain lexis. Uses simple grammatical forms with a good degree of control. While errors are noticeable, meaning can still be determined.
4	*Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.*		
3	Minor irrelevances and/or omissions may be present. Target reader is on the whole informed.	Text is connected using basic, high-frequency linking words.	Uses basic vocabulary reasonably appropriately. Uses simple grammatical forms with some degree of control. Errors may impede meaning at times.
2	*Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.*		
1	Irrelevances and misinterpretation of task may be present. Target reader is minimally informed.	Production unlikely to be connected, though punctuation and simple connectors (i.e. 'and') may on occasion be used.	Produces basic vocabulary of isolated words and phrases. Produces few simple grammatical forms with only limited control.
0	Content is totally irrelevant. Target reader is not informed.	*Performance below Band 1.*	

Source: https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/key/.

To begin with, *Band 5* represents the highest level of achievement. At this stage, learners must be able to insert content that is entirely relevant to the task, ensuring that the target reader is fully informed and all the task requests are addressed. Regarding organisation, texts are generally coherent and well-connected through basic linking words and a limited but effective range of cohesive devices. Although occasional overuse of specific vocabulary may occur, everyday lexis is mainly used appropriately. Furthermore, learners must demonstrate reasonable control over simple grammatical forms. While some errors may still be present, they should not significantly compromise the

overall clarity of the message.

In contrast, *Band 3* reflects a more modest level of performance. Here, minor irrelevances or omissions may be observed, although the target reader is still generally informed. The organisation of the text tends to rely on high-frequency linking words, and while cohesion is present, it may not always be *smooth*. Language use is functional, with basic vocabulary used reasonably well and simple grammatical forms showing some degree of control. However, errors are more likely to occur at this level and can occasionally hinder comprehension.

On the other hand, to be evaluated on *Band1*, texts must present a limited ability to meet the task requirements. Content may include irrelevant information or reflect a misunderstanding of the task itself, and the reader is only minimally informed. The organisation is weak or absent, with the occasional use of simple punctuation and connectors, such as "and", offering minimal cohesion. Vocabulary is typically restricted to isolated words or memorised phrases, and control over grammar is limited, resulting in frequent and sometimes disruptive errors.

It is important to note that *Bands 2* and *4* function as intermediary levels. Band 4 indicates a performance combining features of Bands 3 and 5, while Band 2 combines aspects of Bands 1 and 3. This allows for more nuanced judgment, particularly when a learner's writing does not fit neatly into a single band. However, the figure does not offer further clarification, leaving it to the evaluator's discretion.

Finally, *Band 0* is awarded when the content is irrelevant to the task, and the reader gains no meaningful information from the response. This level reflects a breakdown in all three assessment criteria: content, organisation, and language.

Discussion: the writing tasks

To contextualise the learners' written productions, it is essential to examine the tasks that informed their compositions. The two activities analysed were drawn from a standardised *Cambridge English* language assessment mock test aimed at young learners, elaborated by Cambridge University Press (2019), each targeting distinct genres and communicative functions. The first task (Cambridge University Press, 2019, p.16) required learners to write an email to a friend inviting them to join a family camping trip planned for the following weekend. The prompt explicitly instructed them to include three content points: the invitation, a reason for the trip, and a list of items to bring. As a genre-specific task, this activity demanded awareness of informal email conventions, an appropriate tone for peer interaction, and accurate use of future time expressions to indicate forthcoming plans. In addition to these surface-level requirements, successful completion of the task also relied on the learner's ability to structure the message logically, beginning with a greeting and purpose statement, followed by elaboration on the context of the camping trip, and concluding with a clear call to action and a closing. The task implicitly tested the learners' ability to manage modality (e.g., using "should", "can", or "will" appropriately), vocabulary related to leisure and camping, and cohesion through the use of sequencing words and pronouns.

The second task (Cambridge University Press, 2019, p. 17) prompted learners to compose a narrative based on a sequence of three images depicting two boys finding money in the street, picking it up, and later using it to buy ice cream. This visually supported task required learners to translate a pictorial sequence into a written narrative, thus engaging both their interpretive and productive

skills. Linguistically, the task called for consistent use of the simple past tense to accurately recount a past sequence of events, as well as the deployment of temporal connectors to ensure chronological coherence. At the discursive level, learners were expected to construct a text with a clear narrative arc — introducing the characters and setting, describing the central action, and providing an outcome or resolution. While the prompts provided strong visual scaffolding, the open-ended nature of the task required students to make appropriate lexical and syntactic choices to narrate the events clearly and cohesively.

In terms of genre awareness, the task implicitly evaluated learners' grasp of narrative conventions, including the appropriate use of sequencing, cause-and-effect relations, and the construction of narrative voice (e.g., third-person, past narrative perspective). Pragmatically, it demanded the ability to maintain coherence through reference and ellipsis, to select vocabulary suitable for everyday events, and to produce a text that flows logically without abrupt shifts in perspective or time.

Analyses of writing responses

A total of 89 discourse- and grammar-related issues were identified across the corpus, each of which contributed to reduced textual clarity and hindered the overall coherence of the learners' writing. These instances were systematically categorised according to recurring patterns observed throughout the group (see Figure 2). The most frequent issue was the inconsistent use of verb tenses, with 24 occurrences distributed across both writing tasks — informal emails and short narratives. This pattern reflects a considerable difficulty

among learners in maintaining temporal alignment, particularly when shifting between present and past contexts. Inconsistencies in tense usage compromise the temporal logic of the text, often resulting in fragmented or disjointed communication that undermines the intended message. The recurrence of this feature highlights the need for explicit pedagogical intervention aimed at reinforcing tense control within genre-appropriate writing practices.

Figure2 — Distribution of Cohesion and Coherence Issues in Learners' Written Text
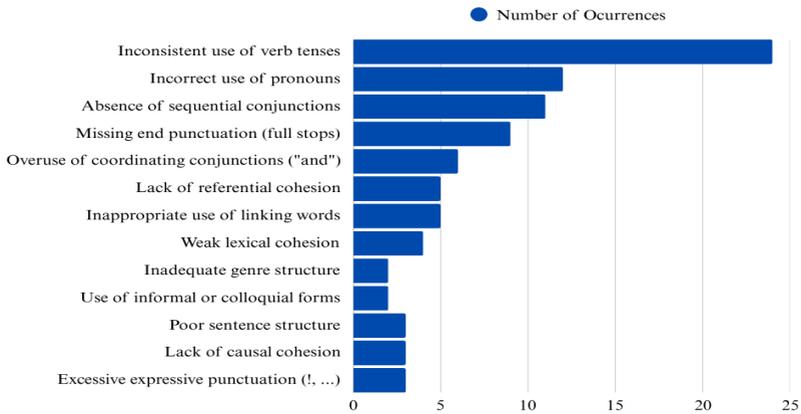
Source: elaboration by the authors.

To ensure conceptual clarity and analytical consistency, the following definitions outline each category of issues identified in the learner texts, as summarised in Figure 1. *Inconsistent use of verb tenses* (24 occurrences) refers to the inappropriate alternation between past and present tenses, which often fails to align with the temporal

demands of the genre and disrupts narrative coherence. *Incorrect use of pronouns (12)* encompasses misuse of personal, demonstrative, or possessive pronouns, resulting in referential ambiguity or grammatical disagreement. *Absence of sequential conjunctions* (11) indicates the lack of time-related connectors such as *then, after that,* or *finally*, impairing the chronological flow of events, particularly in narratives. *Missing end punctuation* (9) denotes the omission of full stops, which leads to run-on sentences and unclear syntactic boundaries. *Overuse of coordinating conjunctions, particularly "and"* (6), reflects a tendency to rely excessively on a single linking device. This limits syntactic variety and may result in structurally monotonous or overly linear prose. *Lack of referential cohesion* (5) refers to unclear or vague references to prior information or subjects, undermining textual continuity. *Inappropriate use of linking words* (5) includes errors in logical connectors, such as *but* or *because,* which result in incoherent or misleading relationships between ideas. The last two occurrences contribute to semantic discontinuity: the former by failing to maintain clear referents, and the latter by creating misleading or illogical transitions between ideas. *Weak lexical cohesion* (4) includes excessive repetition or lack of appropriate lexical variation, which undermines thematic unity and impedes the reader's ability to construct meaning across sentences.

Less frequent but pedagogically significant issues include *inadequate genre structure* (2), where learners fail to follow the expected format or conventions of genres such as stories or emails; *and the use of informal or colloquial expressions* (2), such as *"gonna"* or *"wanna,"* which are inconsistent with the communicative register expected even at A2 level; *poor sentence structure* (3) comprises errors

such as fragments, missing syntactic elements (subjects or verbs), or the use of inappropriate interrogative forms within declarative texts. *Lack of causal cohesion* (3) points to the absence of connectors like because or so, which are necessary to articulate cause-and-effect relationships. *Excessive expressive punctuation* (3) refers to the overuse of marks such as exclamation points or ellipses, which deviate from genre norms and can compromise textual tone and formality.

The most prominent issue — tense inconsistency — emerged as a critical challenge for these A2 learners, with a total of 24 occurrences identified. This result confirms prior observations in the literature, including Mayaratri (2020), who found high rates of verb tense errors among students writing in English as an additional language. These errors are not simply grammatical lapses, but indicative of a broader gap in learners' awareness of how tense operates discursively across genres. Tense consistency is essential not only to establish temporal coherence but also to meet readers' genre-specific expectations, particularly in narrative recounts, where the past simple is typically the unmarked form.

In the analysis of learners' narratives, a typical pattern was the unexpected shift from present simple to past tenses — or vice versa — within a single text. This oscillation disrupted the temporal continuity of the story and undermined its communicative effectiveness. Such misalignments illustrate a limited command of what Halliday and Hasan (1976) refer to as temporal cohesion — an aspect of coherence that relies on maintaining consistent tense structures to guide the reader through a logically sequenced discourse.

Moreover, the misuse of tenses often coincided with genre-related misunderstandings. As genre theory suggests (Swales, 2014; Martin

& Rose, 2008), linguistic choices are shaped by the communicative purpose and conventional structure of the genre. When learners fail to recognise the narrative nature of a task (e.g., recounting events from a visual prompt), they are less likely to employ the past tense systematically, thus missing one of the genre's most defining grammatical features.

This is where genre awareness intersects with both cohesion and coherence. Learners with limited genre awareness tend to focus on isolated sentences rather than the text as a whole, which impairs their ability to make appropriate global choices regarding tense, conjunctions, and textual structuring. As Tardy et al. (2022) and Yasuda (2011) point out, the development of genre awareness allows learners not only to identify formal conventions but also to internalise how these conventions function to shape meaning in socially situated texts.

In sum, the challenges related to tense usage are not merely surface-level mistakes; they reflect a more profound need for integrated instruction that combines form, function, and discourse-level awareness. Explicit teaching of genre norms, model text analysis, and guided practice can help learners at this proficiency level develop more accurate and coherent writing that aligns with communicative expectations.

In many cases, the misuse of verb tense occurred even when temporal markers signalled that the narrative should be situated in the past. A particularly illustrative example appears in the student's text:

Figure3 — Written Response to Task 2 by Student 1

The narrative opens with the expression "One day", a temporal marker conventionally associated with past-tense storytelling. This lexical item sets the expectation that the subsequent discourse will follow a retrospective mode of narration, typical of the narrative genre at both beginner and more advanced levels. However, the learner's verb choices immediately deviate from that expectation. The sequence "Lucas and Pedro is in the street and found money" juxtaposes a present-tense copula ("is") with a past-tense verb ("found"), signalling an unstable temporal framework. This tension is further amplified in the following sentence: "they go to the ice cream's shop and eat ice cream." Here again, the present-tense verbs "go" and "eat" contradict the already initiated past reference, resulting in a temporally incoherent narrative progression.

The learner does return to the past at specific points — e.g., "told to the family what happens" — but the transitions appear unsystematic

and linguistically unmotivated. From a discourse perspective, these abrupt shifts in verb tense compromise the reader's ability to reconstruct the sequence of events. Temporal coherence — defined by Halliday and Hasan (1976) as the consistent grammatical and semantic realisation of time — is essential to the comprehensibility of narrative discourse. In this case, the inconsistency generates cognitive dissonance, forcing the reader to repeatedly reorient their interpretation of when events occurred, thereby disrupting fluency and interpretability.

These errors point to more than gaps in grammatical knowledge; they reflect a limited degree of genre awareness. As noted in genre theory (Swales, 2014; Martin & Rose, 2008), understanding the social and communicative purposes of a genre influences the linguistic choices a writer makes. In narratives, the temporal framework is not merely stylistic — it is integral to the organisation and comprehension of the genre itself. The learner's inability to consistently align verb tense with the conventional timeline of narratives suggests a lack of familiarity with the rhetorical structure expected in such genres. This aligns with findings from Yasuda (2011) and Tardy et al. (2022), who emphasise the importance of explicit genre instruction in scaffolding learners' understanding of both micro-level (grammatical) and macro-level (discursive) features.

From the perspective of interlanguage development, this case exemplifies the transitional state in which learners often operate. The presence of the past tense ("found," "told") indicates partial acquisition. In contrast, the reversion to the present tense suggests either L1 transfer from Brazilian Portuguese — where present-tense storytelling is pragmatically acceptable in spoken modes —

or insufficient procedural control over tense morphology. Although the English language occasionally employs the simple present to recount past events in dramatic or literary narrative styles — a feature known as the historical present — this usage is highly marked, context-dependent, and stylistically deliberate. In beginner-level learner production, such as the example above, the oscillation between tenses appears unintentional and unmotivated, indicating that the learner is not drawing on this stylistic convention but rather exhibiting a developmental error. The learner's use of the present tense, therefore, cannot be interpreted as a rhetorical choice; it more plausibly reflects an incomplete understanding of how tense functions in written narrative genres. This supports the argument by Mayaratri (2020) that tense errors are not merely surface-level mistakes but manifestations of a broader developmental continuum.

Additionally, the text reveals a lack of cohesion, particularly in the use of conjunctions and sequencing devices. The narrative includes no clear connective elements beyond the coordinating "and," which is overused. There is an absence of subordinating conjunctions or adverbials like afterwards, then, or finally, which would normally scaffold the progression of events. This weakens both the internal logic and the narrative flow, illustrating a broader issue of underdeveloped sequential cohesion, as described by Antunes (2009).

To recapitulate, the analysis of this text underscores the multifaceted nature of tense-related errors. These are not isolated slips, but rather indications of limited control over the discourse-specific functions of grammar. The learner struggles not only with tense forms but with deploying them meaningfully within a genre-specific framework. A pedagogical response must therefore go beyond

tense drills, incorporating genre-based instruction and activities that make explicit the relationship between tense, text purpose, and reader expectations.

Examining two additional learner compositions (Figures 4 and 5) brings to light challenges of a somewhat different nature from those previously discussed. These texts offer rich evidence of the learners' evolving control over written discourse, particularly concerning their capacity to fulfil communicative tasks and demonstrate genre awareness. In this section, the analysis is guided by two primary dimensions: task completion — defined here as the accurate and complete inclusion of the required content points as per exam prompts — and genre awareness, understood as the learner's sensitivity to the structural, linguistic, and stylistic conventions appropriate to the genre in question. By focusing on these aspects, we seek to assess not only the learners' grammatical competence but also their pragmatic understanding of how texts function in context.

Figure4 — Written Response to Task 1 by Student 8

Source: Text Production by A2 Level Student 8, 2025.

Figure 5 — Written Response to Task 2 by Student 12

Source: Text Production by A2 Level Student 12, 2025.

Examining the texts in Figures 4 and 5 reveals qualitatively distinct deviations from genre expectations and task requirements. While both learners produced intelligible messages, their responses illustrate a limited ability to integrate content, structure, and register in alignment with the communicative purposes of the A2 Key exam tasks.

In Figure 4, the learner attempts to respond to the informal email task by stating that their family organises a camping trip every Friday and mentioning that a friend will join. Although there is a partial attempt to justify the invitation ("because she is my friend") and some lexical relevance to the prompt is maintained, key content points remain underdeveloped. Most notably, the learner fails to situate the event temporally in the future, despite the task instructions referring explicitly to "next weekend." The formulation "is organized"

also introduces a tense mismatch: the present passive form is not appropriate in this context, where either a simple future or planned future structure (e.g., We're going to organise…) would have been more accurate.

Lexically, the use of "acampment" for camping reflects a phonetic approximation influenced by L1 orthographic conventions, a common feature in early interlanguage writing. Additionally, the text lacks essential conventions of the email genre, including a salutation, sign-off, and paragraph organisation. The tone, although neutral, does not fully align with the expected informality of a friendly email addressed to a peer. These omissions suggest a superficial level of genre awareness, in which the learner identifies the communicative situation but lacks control over its formal and functional realisation. From a genre-theoretical perspective (Bakhtin, 1986; Swales, 2014), the learner's response reveals emerging sensitivity to purpose but insufficient mastery of audience engagement, textual structure, and stylistic alignment.

In Figure 5, the learner's response demonstrates a more pronounced deviation from the task requirements. Rather than composing a written narrative, the student constructs a dialogue between two characters, emulating a spoken exchange. This genre misidentification leads to the complete absence of a narrative voice or framing discourse. While the script-like form contains thematically relevant language (e.g., "ice cream shop," "money", "let's go"), it fails to meet key expectations of the short story genre as outlined by CEFR descriptors at the A2 level: the use of past tense to recount events, the presence of temporal markers, and an organised sequence of actions situated within a narrative framework.

The overreliance on direct speech and present-tense verbs (e.g., "is," "look," "want") aligns more closely with conversational storytelling or dramatised oral performance than with written narrative. This suggests that the learner may not have fully internalised the textual conventions of written genres distinct from spoken interaction, an insight consistent with genre acquisition literature (Hyland, 2007; Tardy et al., 2022). The absence of temporal markers and the lack of cohesive devices — such as connectors or anaphoric references—further diminish the coherence of the text. Without a narrator to mediate the action, the reader is left to infer the context and sequence of events, which compromises both comprehensibility and task achievement.

Taken together, these two responses highlight the central role of explicit genre instruction in beginner-level writing development. As Martin and Rose (2008) argue, genres are not simply formats but social processes that must be taught through scaffolded exposure to models, structured deconstruction, and guided practice. In both examples, the learners appear to have some intuitive awareness of the communicative task but lack the formal and functional resources to express that awareness effectively. Their texts illustrate the tension between emergent communicative intent and limited control over genre-specific conventions, particularly in terms of register, structure, and cohesive devices.

Thus, genre awareness must be treated not as a binary competence but as a continuum, with learners gradually developing the ability to align form and meaning in contextually appropriate ways. Pedagogical interventions should focus on making genre features explicit and on helping students connect those features to communicative purposes,

thereby fostering more principled control over writing even at foundational levels.

Additionally, essential elements of the email genre, such as a greeting, sign-off, and cohesive paragraphing, are absent. The tone remains neutral rather than appropriately informal and engaging for a peer-to-peer email, and there is no clear indication of audience awareness. These limitations suggest a superficial understanding of the genre and highlight the learner's difficulty in integrating content and form effectively.

Figure 5 presents a greater deviation from genre expectations. Instead of writing a narrative recount of the illustrated events, the learner constructs a fully dialogic script between two characters. While this approach demonstrates some imagination and lexical relevance to the images, it overlooks the narrative genre's core features: a precise sequence of events recounted in the past tense, the use of temporal connectors to structure progression, and the presence of a narrator to frame the story. The dialogue format lacks narrative framing (e.g., "they found the money and decided…"); it relies on the present and future tense, presenting limited cohesion. Though the text is mainly intelligible, it does not meet the criteria of a written story as intended by the task, thereby falling short in both task completion and genre realisation.

Pedagogical Implications: Fostering Genre Awareness, Cohesion, and Coherence in Writing Instruction

In light of the above, it becomes essential to adopt pedagogical practices that promote both genre awareness and the development of cohesion and coherence in writing in an additional language.

Contemporary approaches to writing instruction in language education have consolidated a range of practical strategies for this purpose, which can be integrated sequentially into the teaching process.

The first step typically involves modelling and deconstructing exemplar texts from the target genre, allowing students to analyse the organisational structure and cohesive features characteristic of that genre. This practice establishes a solid foundation of textual awareness, demonstrating to learners how ideas are structured and connected in effective writing.

Following this, joint construction with teacher scaffolding provides a collaborative environment in which learners begin to apply this knowledge with immediate support. During this phase, teachers and students co-construct texts, enabling learners to practise articulating ideas and employing cohesive devices with confidence before transitioning to more independent writing. This stage also promotes peer interaction, fostering a sociocultural scaffolding process in which students learn from one another, reinforcing cohesive and coherent practices collectively.

Next, students are guided into independent text production, now supported by tools such as evaluation rubrics and checklists. These instruments function as self-regulation aids for developing writers, highlighting the criteria related to genre, cohesion, and coherence that must be met in their written work. It is also recommended that this move toward autonomy be supported by a gradual task sequence aimed at reinforcing textual coherence — for instance, beginning with idea organisation in outlines or isolated paragraphs, progressing to the composition of connected sections, and culminating in complete texts. This incremental progression ensures that learners

gradually internalise the concept of logical information flow and topic maintenance throughout the text, thereby strengthening their ability to produce globally coherent writing.

Alongside these core phases, additional targeted activities can be incorporated to refine specific skills related to cohesion and genre awareness. For example, cohesion-focused workshops may be conducted to explicitly teach the use of connectives, reference mechanisms, lexical substitutions, and other cohesive resources. These sessions help learners form clearer links between sentences and paragraphs, improving both fluency and clarity.

Furthermore, contrastive genre activities — either comparing distinct text types in the additional language or contrasting the same genre across the first and additional languages — prove valuable for deepening textual awareness. By examining similarities and differences across genres and cultural conventions, learners gain critical insights into rhetorical variation and the ways ideas are organised and articulated. This awareness of differences between writing in one's first language and the additional language is crucial for avoiding negative transfer and for adjusting cohesive and coherence strategies to the conventions of the new language.

Additionally, revision and feedback practices enrich the writing development process. Peer review focused on cohesion and coherence encourages learners to critically evaluate one another's texts, identifying opportunities for improving the logical flow of ideas and the use of cohesive devices. This collaborative exchange fosters both substantive revisions and the development of learners' self-assessment skills in relation to cohesion and coherence. In addition, the use of automated writing feedback tools can provide immediate

identification of recurring issues — such as misused connectives, vague references, or weak thematic progression — complementing the interpretive and contextualised insights offered by teachers and peers. The combination of automated and peer feedback thus offers a multifaceted approach to textual improvement. While digital tools provide an objective assessment of formal aspects, peer input contributes interpretive depth, focusing on the overall intelligibility of the text.

Beyond widely adopted strategies, instructors may also consider designing integrative activities that bridge learners' personal experiences with target genre conventions, thereby fostering both genre awareness and textual cohesion. One such activity might involve students crafting parallel texts: first, narrating a personal anecdote in free form, and then transforming the same narrative into a structured genre such as a formal report, an email, or a short story. This contrastive practice encourages metalinguistic reflection, helping learners understand how purpose, audience, and format influence their linguistic choices. Additionally, implementing micro-revision tasks — such as identifying and reworking fragmented sequences in peers' drafts — can sharpen learners' awareness of local coherence and improve their control over referential cohesion. Encouraging students to create "cohesion maps" of their drafts, in which they trace pronoun references, conjunction use, and lexical ties, can also make cohesion visible and editable. These activities aim not only to improve immediate performance but to develop learners' capacity to read and write texts with greater strategic awareness, sensitivity to genre, and communicative precision in English as an additional language.

Overall, integrating genre awareness with instruction on cohesion

and coherence fosters more effective writing in additional languages. Through structured and scaffolded practice, learners develop greater autonomy, linguistic awareness, and social and communicative competence, enabling them to produce texts that are both contextually appropriate and rhetorically purposeful.

Final Remarks

This paper has explored how genre awareness, cohesion, and coherence intersect in the development of writing skills in English as an additional language, drawing on empirical data from learner responses to two distinct writing tasks: an informal email and a short narrative. The analyses revealed recurring challenges in task fulfilment, structural organisation, and the use of cohesive devices, often rooted in insufficient genre familiarity or an overdependence on features of oral discourse. These limitations resulted in texts that deviated from the communicative expectations of the genre, thereby reducing overall clarity.

By examining learners' texts in light of genre-based criteria, it became evident that writing difficulties were not simply grammatical or lexical but deeply connected to genre misalignment and underdeveloped textual planning. In particular, instances of dialogue replacing narrative prose or missing rhetorical moves in personal correspondence signalled a gap in learners' ability to draw on the conventions expected for effective communication in each genre.

To address these issues, the article proposed an integrated pedagogical framework centred on genre awareness and the targeted development of cohesion and coherence. Through structured stages— modelling, scaffolded writing, independent production, and feedback

cycles—learners can gradually internalise not only how texts are constructed, but also why confident language choices matter within specific social and communicative contexts.

Ultimately, the findings and suggestions presented here reaffirm that writing in an additional language is a complex social act. It requires intentional support that moves beyond surface-level correctness to foster rhetorical awareness, textual fluency, and audience-sensitive expression. By embedding genre, cohesion, and coherence at the heart of instructional practice, educators can help learners become more autonomous, confident, and effective writers across academic and real-world settings.

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