



*Uso de conectores de orden en composiciones escritas en inglés para estudiantes adultos de B1 EFL*

*Usage of connectors of order in english written composition from b1 efl adult learners*

*Usando conectivos de ordem em composições em inglês para alunos adultos de EFL B1*

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## Resumen

Este estudio explora la frecuencia y el tipo de conectores de orden utilizados por estudiantes adultos de nivel B1 de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) en sus composiciones escritas. Basado en la Lingüística Sistémico-Funcional (SFL) y en el concepto de cohesión conjuntiva propuesto por Halliday y Hasan (1976), la investigación se centra en conectores temporales como *also*, *then* y *all while*. Se recopilaron datos de 50 composiciones manuscritas y se analizaron mediante el software AntConc. Los resultados muestran que, si bien la mayoría de los estudiantes utilizó al menos un conector de orden, el uso se concentró fuertemente en el conector *also*, que apareció en el 67% de las instancias. Una prueba de Kruskal-Wallis reveló una diferencia estadísticamente significativa en el uso de conectores según el tipo ( $p = .002$ ), lo que sugiere un rango léxico limitado y una aplicación funcional desigual. Estos hallazgos destacan la necesidad de una instrucción explícita en el uso variado y contextualizado de los conectores de orden para fomentar la coherencia en la escritura en inglés.

**Palabras clave:** Conectores de orden; escritura EFL; cohesión del discurso; conjunciones temporales; lingüística sistémico-funcional; aprendientes adultos.

## Abstract

This study explores the frequency and type of connectives used by adult B1-level learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in their written compositions. Based on Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL) and the concept of conjunctive cohesion proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976), the research focuses on temporal connectives such as *also*, *then*, and *all while*. Data were collected from 50 handwritten compositions and analyzed using AntConc software. The results show that while most students used at least one connective, their use was heavily concentrated on the connective *also*, which appeared in 67% of instances. A Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a statistically significant difference in connective use by type ( $p = .002$ ), suggesting a limited lexical range and uneven functional application. These findings highlight the need for explicit instruction in the varied and contextualized use of connectives to foster coherence in English writing.

**Keywords:** Order connectives; EFL writing; discourse cohesion; temporal conjunctions; systemic-functional linguistics; adult learners.

## Resumo

Este estudo explora a frequência e o tipo de conectivos de ordem usados por alunos adultos de nível B1 de inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL) em suas composições escritas. Com base na Linguística Sistêmico-Funcional (LSF) e no conceito de coesão conjuntiva proposto por Halliday e Hasan (1976), a pesquisa se concentra em conectores temporais como *also*, *then* e *all while*. Dados de 50 composições manuscritas foram coletados e analisados usando o software AntConc. Os resultados mostram que, embora a maioria dos alunos tenha usado pelo menos um conectivo de ordem, seu uso foi fortemente concentrado também no conectivo, que apareceu em 67% dos casos. Um teste de Kruskal-Wallis revelou uma diferença estatisticamente significativa no uso conectivo por tipo ( $p = 0,002$ ), sugerindo alcance lexical limitado e aplicação funcional desigual. Essas descobertas destacam a necessidade de instruções explícitas sobre o uso variado e contextualizado de conectivos de ordem para promover a coerência na escrita em inglês.

**Palavras-chave:** Conectores de ordem; Escrita EFL; coesão do discurso; conjunções temporais; linguística sistêmico-funcional; alunos adultos.

## Introduction

When referring to written discourse, coherence, and cohesion perform a determinant role in effective communication. In this way, connectors are one of the linguistic tools that facilitate the comprehension of the meaning of a message, particularly those that denote order or sequence. One of the most influential authors in the area of cohesion is Halliday and Hasan (1976), who introduced a comprehensive framework for understanding how various linguistic elements contribute to textual cohesion. Additionally, the same authors identified five cohesive devices: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Within this framework, conjunctions are in charge of signaling the logical relationships between clauses and sentences in which connectors are the main chain of this relation.

In written discourse, coherence and clarity are achieved through the effective organization of ideas. One of the most crucial linguistic resources for structuring information and guiding the reader through a text is the use of discourse connectors. Among these, order connectors such as *first*, *then*, *after that*, and *finally* are particularly significant in sequencing information logically. Their function goes forward as mere textual adornment; they are central to the cohesive and rhetorical structuring of discourse. In addition, they belong to the category of conjunctive cohesion,

specifically within the temporal subclass. These connectors establish chronological or logical sequences, guiding readers to flow through the information of the text, for instance, temporal connectors like then or afterward indicate a progression in time or argumentation, as a result enhancing the coherence of the text.

Regarding English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, mastering order connectors is critical for achieving fluency and communicative effectiveness in writing. In this field, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a well-constructed framework for connectors, particularly with connectors of sequence or order. Halliday and Hasan (1976) classified connectors under the category of conjunctive cohesion, identifying four types: additive, adversative, causal, and temporal. In this case, order connectors fall within the temporal category, specifically those that mark sequential relations between propositions, actions, or events.

Order connectors operate at the textual meta-function level in SFL, in this way they contribute to the logical ordering of discourse, enabling the writer to express a temporal progression, argument, development, and demonstrate a hierarchical structuring of ideas. Hence, they guarantee the coherence of the text (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Furthermore, Martín Zorraquino and Portolés (1999) argued that discourse markers, mainly the order connectors, have both textual and interactional functions. They organize the internal structure of discourse, and at the same time, they guide the interpretation of the message, signaling to the reader the writer's intentions and communicative strategies.

In academic writing, particularly in expository, narrative, and argumentative texts, order connectors are essential for presenting information in a clear and logical manner. Hyland (2005) stated that these connectors help scaffold complex information and are often required to fulfill genre-specific conventions; for example, instructional texts, laboratory reports, and argumentative essays rely heavily on explicit sequencing markers to guide the reader through procedural or argumentative stages.

In English learning, the acquisition of order connectors has become very important. Some studies indicate that learners often rely on a limited set of common connectors, leading to lexical redundancy and monotonous writing (Granger & Tyson, 1996). Moreover, according to Uçar (2023), learners tend to either overuse connectors when adding them unnecessarily or underuse them, which results in fragmented or incoherent texts. These situations are often attributed to first

language transfer, limited academic discourse exposure, and insufficient instruction on discourse strategies.

Additionally, Kayonde (2021) identified that students showed a preference for simple sequential connectors such as *then* and *next*; they also rarely use more advanced or varied temporal connectors. Finally, his study demonstrated that this limited range of usage restricted the rhetorical complexity of their texts and affected overall coherence. Similarly, Hosseinpour and Pour (2022) found that temporal and causal connectors were often misused or inappropriately placed, which led the written production to a semantic ambiguity, demonstrating the importance of explicit instruction and practice in the functional use of connectors in different text types.

Order connectors are indispensable tools for organizing information and achieving cohesion in English written discourse, for this reason, this study aims to identify the most common and frequency of connectors of order or sequence used by EFL adult learners.

### Research question

1. How frequently do B1 adult learners use connectors of order in their written production related to composition?
2. What connectors of order are mainly used in these compositions?

### Methodology

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive and quantitative content analysis approach to explore the use of order connectors in the written discourse of B1-level adult learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The framework used is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and the conjunctive cohesion proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976), which is aligned with linguistic theory with empirical data analysis in written texts.

The participants are 50 adult EFL learners enrolled in an intensive English program at a university language center in Ecuador. Their proficiency level has been classified as B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The sample was selected through purposive sampling, considering the learners at this level to examine their developing use of sequential discourse structures. Also, the participants were informed about the objectives and procedures of the study and provided a written consent. Hence, anonymity and confidentiality were

maintained throughout the research process. The study complies with the university's research ethics guidelines for studies involving human participants.

The data were collected through a written composition task in which participants were asked to write a short expository paragraph with 100–150 words on a topic related to My Hero. The task was designed to naturally elicit temporal sequencing and logical progression, encouraging learners to include order connectors. The compositions were handwritten in a classroom under supervised conditions to ensure authenticity and minimize external linguistic assistance such as translation apps, grammar checkers, and artificial intelligence.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Each composition was transcribed and imported into AntConc (linguistic annotation software). Then, Order connectors were operationally defined as temporal conjunctive expressions indicating sequence or progression. The identification process was informed by the temporal subclass of conjunctions in Halliday and Hasan's taxonomy (1976). Each occurrence of a connector was marked, coded, and categorized by type. Moreover, a quantitative analysis was conducted to determine the number of order connectors per text, the average frequency per composition, and the most frequently used connectors across the corpus.

### **Results**

The results of the data analysis related to the frequency of appearance of order connectors are shown in Table 1., most of the learners (48%) used two order connectors in their written activity. In comparison, 32% of learners only used one order connector, few learners presented a lack of connectors in their production.

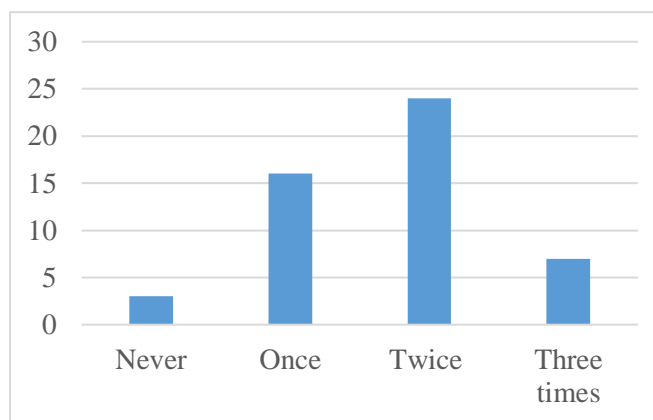


**Table 1.***Frequency of connectors of order in the written production*

<b>Items</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Never	3
Once	16
Twice	24
Three times	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>

*Note. Gathered from the written production of learners*

The findings demonstrated that almost all learners tended to use at least one order connector in their written production, mainly to indicate a sequence of ideas in the paragraph constructed.

**Figure 1.** *Frequency of connectors of order in the written production**Note. Gathered from the written production of learners*

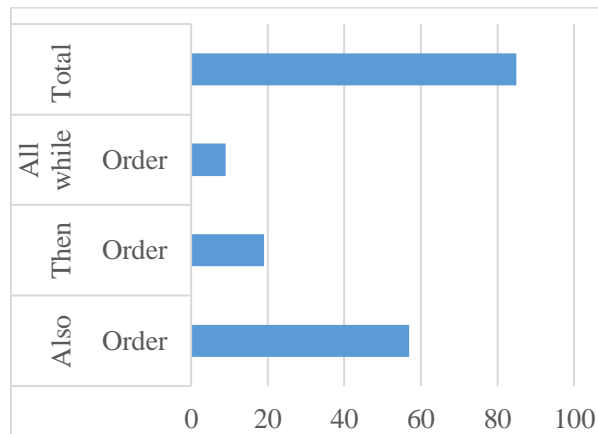
Another aspect identified throughout this research is the most used order connectors by the EFL learners. In this case, *Also* represents the order connectors with the highest preference among the learners; its appearance achieved 67% of the text-created. It is followed by *Then*, another order connector; however, its occurrence is not as frequent as also. Finally, *As while* is the least used connector, its appearance reached 11% of frequency in the 55 texts made by learners.

**Table 2.** Connectors of order used in the written production

Connector	Type	Frequency
Also	Order	57
Then	Order	19
All while	Order	9
Total		85

Note. Gathered from the written production of learners

**Figure 2.** Connectors of order used in the written production



Note. Gathered from the written production of learners

The normality test was applied to determine whether the connectors used in the written text have a significant difference; it indicated that the data does not have a normal distribution. Hence, the means analysis was done with the **Kruskal-Wallis**.

As observed in Table 3, the results of the Kruskal-Wallis Test for Independent Samples indicate a statistically significant difference in the distribution of *the total of connectors* across the categories of Type of *Connector*, as evidenced by a significance value of  $p = .002$ , which is below the established alpha level of .050.

Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, which states that the distribution of the total number of connectors used is the same regardless of the connector type. This finding suggests that the frequency with which connectors are used in the written compositions varies significantly depending on the specific type of connector (*also*, *then*, or *all while*), demonstrating potential



differences in learners' preferences, familiarity, or instructional exposure to certain temporal discourse markers.

**Table 3.** Summary of Hypothesis Testing Constrast

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of <i>Total_Connector</i> is the same across categories of <i>Connector_Type</i> .	The distribution of <i>Total_Connector</i> is the same across categories of <i>Connector_Type</i> .	0,002	Reject the null hypothesis.

*Note.* Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .050

## Discussion

These findings reinforce the theoretical assumptions laid out by Halliday and Hasan (1976), who emphasized that temporal connectors, as a subclass of conjunctive cohesion, contributing in establishing logical relationships in text - written discourse, particularly those related to sequence and progression. The appearance of at least one order connector in the majority of compositions suggests that learners at the B1 level possess a functional understanding of how to achieve cohesion through temporal sequencing.

However, the high frequency of use of the connector *also*, which appeared in 67% of the analyzed texts, suggests a limited lexical range and a possible overgeneralization of this connector. This result is related with Granger and Tyson (1996), who found the overuse of certain connectors by EFL learners due to either insufficient exposure to varied linguistic input or pedagogical emphasis on more frequent items. In the same way, Uçar (2023) noted that EFL learners often underutilize a wide range of temporal and logical connectors, being repetitive and sometimes using redundant structures.

The lack of variety in connectors previously mentions by Kayonde (2021) indicated that learners tend to be more comfortable with basic or commonly taught connectors, while struggling to incorporate in their production a more sophisticated or less frequent), which can be attributed to limited exposure in instructional materials or classroom input.

Moreover, Martín Zorraquino and Portolés (1999) highlight that discourse markers, including order connectors, have both textual and interactional functions. In the learner texts analyzed, the use of *also* may not only serve a sequencing function but also signal the writer's attempt to connect ideas in a linear and additive way.

The rejection of the null hypothesis in the Kruskal-Wallis test further validates that not all order connectors are employed with equal frequency. The statistical significance indicates that learners present distinct patterns in their usage.

## Conclusion

Most learners demonstrated a basic awareness of the role of order connectors, since all participants included at least one marker in their compositions. This result supports the argument by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) that temporal connectors contribute to the textual metafunction of language by establishing logical relationships across clauses. The consistent presence of these markers suggests that learners at the B1 level have internalized some of the essential mechanisms for achieving cohesion. However, the analysis also highlighted a lack of variety in the connector usage, with a strong dependence on the connector *also*.

The overuse of *also* reveals limited lexical storage and a tendency to overgeneralize familiar sequencing devices. The underrepresentation of connectors like *then* and *all while* suggests that more complex or less frequently taught connectors remain outside learners' active usage. Hence, while the learners demonstrated basic knowledge in using order connectors to organize their writing, the study reveals significant gaps in variety, and functional deployment. Hence, the importance of explicit instruction of usage and contextual application of order connectors.

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