ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

NARRATIVE IDENTITY AND EXPOSITORY STRUCTURE: AN NLP-BASED GENRE STUDY OF BOOK 2 TEXTS

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Abstract:
This study examines genre variation in Intermediate English Book 2 through a corpus-based and computational framework, focusing on the distinction between narrative (hero essays) and expository prose. Using techniques from Natural Language Processing, the analysis integrates syntactic, functional, and lexical measures, including sentence length, clause types, tense usage, and lexical patterns. The findings reveal that narrative texts are characterized by past tense dominance, temporal sequencing, and moderate syntactic complexity, resulting in a linear discourse structure that supports accessibility and fluency. In contrast, expository texts exhibit higher levels of subordination, longer sentences, and more abstract vocabulary, producing a hierarchical structure that increases cognitive demands and supports analytical reasoning. The study demonstrates that genre variation in Book 2 is systematic and measurable, with expository texts consistently occupying the higher end of the complexity spectrum, particularly in scientific and historical lessons. Clause-level analysis further shows that dependent clauses play a central role in encoding logical relationships in expository discourse, while narrative texts rely more on sequential organization. These differences highlight the role of genre in shaping both linguistic structure and cognitive processing. The study argues that the integration of narrative and expository texts in Book 2 provides a balanced pedagogical framework, enabling learners to develop both narrative fluency and analytical competence. By applying NLP-based methods to textbook analysis, the research contributes to genre studies and second language acquisition by offering a data-driven approach to evaluating instructional materials. The findings have important implications for curriculum design, emphasizing the need to balance linguistic complexity with pedagogical accessibility.

Keywords: Genre analysis; narrative discourse; expository discourse; NLP; corpus linguistics; syntactic complexity; textbook evaluation; SLA; discourse structure

1. Introduction

1.1 Genre and Its Role in Language Learning

Genre is a fundamental construct in language learning, shaping not only how language is structured but also how meaning is communicated and interpreted. In second language acquisition (SLA), exposure to diverse genres enables learners to develop a range of communicative competencies, including narration, explanation, and argumentation. Research in applied linguistics has consistently shown that different genres impose distinct linguistic and cognitive demands, influencing both comprehension and production (Biber et al., 2011; Hyland, 2007; Martin & Rose, 2008; Bhatti & Bashir, 2025).

From a pedagogical perspective, textbooks serve as the primary medium through which learners encounter genre variation. The selection and organization of texts within a textbook determine the extent to which learners are exposed to different discourse types and their associated linguistic features. Consequently, genre analysis is not merely descriptive but evaluative, as it reveals how instructional materials support the development of functional language skills.

In this context, genre can be understood as a **systematic relationship between form, function, and context**, where linguistic structures are shaped by communicative purposes. Narrative genres, for example, prioritize temporal sequencing and personal experience, while expository genres emphasize explanation, reasoning, and abstraction. Understanding these distinctions is

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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essential for evaluating the effectiveness of textbooks in fostering advanced language proficiency.

1.2 Narrative vs Expository Discourse

A central distinction in genre studies is that between **narrative** and **expository** discourse. Narrative texts, particularly those centered on heroes or biographical accounts, are typically characterized by:

- chronological organization
- past tense dominance
- personal and descriptive language

These features support storytelling and identity construction, allowing learners to engage with language in a more accessible and relatable manner (Labov, 1972; Bruner, 1991; Bamberg, 2020). Narrative discourse is often considered foundational in language learning, as it provides a scaffold for developing coherence and fluency.

In contrast, **expository prose**—including scientific, historical, and analytical texts—exhibits markedly different linguistic properties. Such texts are characterized by:

- higher syntactic complexity
- increased subordination
- abstract and technical vocabulary

Expository discourse requires learners to process hierarchical relationships between ideas, often encoded through complex clause structures and logical connectors (Biber & Gray, 2010; Fang, 2012; Schleppegrell, 2004). As a result, it is generally associated with higher cognitive demands and is more closely aligned with advanced proficiency levels.

Within Intermediate Book 2, this distinction is particularly salient. The textbook includes both **hero-based essays (narrative)** and **prose texts (expository)**, offering a rich context for examining how genre influences linguistic structure. However, the extent to which these genres differ in measurable linguistic terms—and how such differences impact learning—remains insufficiently explored.

1.3 NLP and Genre Analysis

Recent developments in Natural Language Processing have opened new avenues for genre analysis, enabling researchers to move beyond qualitative descriptions toward quantitative, data-driven insights. NLP techniques allow for the systematic measurement of linguistic features such as sentence length, clause density, and lexical patterns across large corpora (Biber et al., 2011; Kyle & Crossley, 2018; Graesser et al., 2011).

In genre studies, these tools are particularly valuable because they can identify patterns that are not immediately visible through manual analysis. For example, computational methods can reveal differences in:

- syntactic complexity
- distribution of clause types
- lexical bundle usage

across narrative and expository texts. Such insights provide a more objective basis for comparing genres and understanding their functional characteristics.

Moreover, NLP-based approaches facilitate the integration of linguistic analysis with educational evaluation. By quantifying genre-specific features, researchers can assess whether textbooks provide balanced exposure to different discourse types and whether this exposure aligns with learning objectives. Despite these advantages, the application of NLP to textbook genre analysis remains limited, particularly in the context of Pakistani educational materials.

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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1.4 Research Aim

In response to these gaps, the present study aims to conduct a **computational genre analysis** of Intermediate Book 2, focusing on the distinction between narrative and expository texts. Specifically, the study seeks:

To analyze genre variation using NLP

- To identify differences in syntactic complexity between narrative and expository texts
- To examine how genre influences clause structure, sentence length, and discourse organization
- To evaluate the pedagogical implications of genre distribution within the textbook

1.5 Positioning of the Study

This study argues that **genre is not merely a classificatory category but a determinant of linguistic structure and cognitive demand**. By applying NLP-based methods to textbook analysis, it seeks to demonstrate that narrative and expository texts in Book 2 exhibit distinct and measurable linguistic profiles.

In doing so, the study contributes to both SLA research and educational practice by providing a **data-driven account of genre variation**, highlighting how different discourse types shape the learning experience.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Genre Theory in Applied Linguistics

Genre theory occupies a central position in applied linguistics, providing a framework for understanding how language varies systematically according to communicative purpose, social context, and discourse conventions. Foundational work in systemic functional linguistics conceptualizes genre as a staged, goal-oriented social process, where linguistic choices are shaped by communicative intent (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Martin & Rose, 2008). In educational contexts, genre-based pedagogy has been shown to facilitate learners' ability to control different discourse types by making structural patterns explicit (Hyland, 2007; Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 2014). More recent research extends this view by emphasizing the dynamic and multidimensional nature of genre, incorporating cognitive, social, and linguistic dimensions (Tardy, 2023; Devitt, 2015; Biber & Conrad, 2019). Corpus-driven approaches further demonstrate that genres can be empirically distinguished through patterns of syntax, lexis, and discourse organization, reinforcing the argument that genre is not merely a classificatory label but a measurable linguistic construct (Bhatti et al., 2020; Biber et al., 2011; Gray, 2015). Consequently, genre theory provides a robust theoretical foundation for analyzing how textbooks structure linguistic input and shape learners' communicative competence.

2.2 Narrative vs Expository Discourse Features

A key distinction within genre studies is between narrative and expository discourse, which differ significantly in both linguistic form and cognitive function. Narrative discourse is typically characterized by temporal sequencing, personal reference, and evaluative language, enabling the construction of identity and experience (Labov, 1972; Bruner, 1991; Bamberg, 2020). Linguistically, narratives tend to rely on past tense forms, coordination, and relatively simpler clause structures, making them more accessible to learners (Biber et al., 2011; McCarthy & Carter, 1994). In contrast, expository discourse prioritizes explanation, reasoning, and abstraction, and is therefore associated with higher syntactic complexity, including increased subordination, nominalization, and dense information packaging (Schleppegrell, 2004; Fang, 2012; Biber & Gray, 2010).

Empirical studies consistently show that expository texts exhibit longer sentences, greater clause embedding, and more specialized vocabulary than narrative texts (Crossley, 2025; Kyle & Crossley, 2018; Gray, 2015). These features contribute to higher cognitive demands, as learners must process hierarchical relationships between ideas rather than relying on linear

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

sequencing. Furthermore, research in disciplinary literacy highlights that mastery of expository discourse is essential for academic success, as it underpins the ability to engage with scientific and analytical texts (Fang, 2012; Schleppegrell, 2004; Hyland, 2007). Thus, the distinction between narrative and expository genres is not only linguistic but also pedagogical, reflecting different stages and goals of language development.

2.3 Corpus-Based Genre Studies

The emergence of corpus linguistics has significantly advanced the study of genre by enabling large-scale, quantitative analysis of linguistic patterns. Corpus-based genre studies demonstrate that genres can be distinguished through systematic variation in syntactic, lexical, and discourse features (Biber & Conrad, 2019; Biber et al., 2011). In particular, multidimensional analysis has shown that narrative texts cluster around features such as past tense verbs and personal pronouns, while expository texts are characterized by nominalization, complex noun phrases, and subordination (Biber, 1988; Gray, 2015; Staples et al., 2013).

Recent developments in Natural Language Processing have further enhanced corpus-based genre analysis by enabling automated extraction of linguistic features across large datasets (Kyle & Crossley, 2018; Graesser et al., 2011; Lu, 2017). These methods allow researchers to quantify genre differences with greater precision and to link linguistic patterns to cognitive and pedagogical outcomes (Crossley, 2025; Li et al., 2025; Zhang & Lu, 2025). Despite these advances, the application of corpus-based genre analysis to textbook materials remains limited, particularly in underrepresented contexts such as Pakistan. This gap underscores the need for studies that integrate computational methods with genre theory to evaluate instructional texts in a systematic and data-driven manner.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a **corpus-based, mixed-feature analytical framework**, integrating syntactic, functional, and lexical measures to examine genre variation. The methodology is designed to ensure **replicability, validity, and alignment with established corpus linguistics practices** (Biber et al., 2011; McEnery & Hardie, 2011; Kyle & Crossley, 2018).

3.1 Corpus Classification

The corpus consists of **Intermediate Book 2**, comprising 15 texts, which were systematically classified into two primary genres:

a. Narrative (Hero Essays)

- Total: **5 texts**
- Characteristics:
  - Biographical focus
  - Chronological structure
  - Emphasis on personal achievement and identity

b. Expository Prose

- Total: **10 texts**
- Subtypes:
  - Scientific
  - Historical
  - Humorous/reflective prose

This classification is grounded in genre theory, where texts are categorized based on communicative purpose and discourse structure (Swales, 1990; Biber & Conrad, 2019). The distinction enables direct comparison of linguistic features across genres.

3.2 Analytical Measures

To capture genre variation comprehensively, the study employs a **multi-dimensional analytical framework**, consisting of syntactic, functional, and lexical measures.

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3.2.1 Syntactic Measures

The syntactic analysis focuses on structural features that differentiate narrative and expository discourse:

- **Clause Types**
  - Independent vs dependent clauses
  - Subtypes: adverbial, relative, nominal
- **Sentence Length**
  - Measured as mean length of sentence (MLS)

These measures are widely recognized as indicators of genre-specific complexity, with expository texts typically exhibiting higher clause embedding and longer sentences (Lu, 2010; Biber et al., 2011; Kyle & Crossley, 2018).

3.2.2 Functional Measures

Functional analysis examines how grammatical features serve communicative purposes:

- **Tense Usage**
  - Narrative → predominance of past tense
  - Expository → mixed tense usage
- **Modality**
  - Frequency of modal verbs (e.g., can, may, must)
  - Indicates degree of certainty, obligation, or possibility

These features are essential for understanding how genres encode meaning and stance (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Biber & Conrad, 2019).

3.2.3 Lexical Measures

Lexical analysis focuses on patterns of repetition and phraseology:

- **Repetition Patterns**
  - Frequency of recurring lexical items
- **Lexical Bundles**
  - Common multi-word sequences
  - Indicators of discourse structure and cohesion

Lexical bundles are particularly important in genre studies, as they reflect conventionalized patterns of language use within specific discourse types (Biber et al., 2000; Hyland, 2008; Staples et al., 2013).

3.3 Analytical Procedure

- Texts were processed using **computational techniques**, including rule-based parsing and frequency analysis
- Features were extracted and normalized to ensure comparability across texts
- Results were analyzed comparatively across genres

This procedure aligns with best practices in corpus linguistics, ensuring that findings are both **empirically grounded and methodologically transparent** (McEnery & Hardie, 2011; Kyle, Crossley & Verspoor, 2021).

3.4 Methodological Rationale

The integration of syntactic, functional, and lexical measures allows for a **comprehensive analysis of genre variation**, capturing:

- structural complexity
- communicative function
- discourse patterns

Such a multi-dimensional approach is essential for understanding genre as a complex and layered phenomenon, rather than a single set of features (Biber & Conrad, 2019; Tardy, 2023).

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ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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4. Results

This section presents a **data-driven genre analysis** of Intermediate Book 2, integrating syntactic, functional, and discourse-level evidence from the uploaded datasets. The findings are organized into narrative texts, expository prose, and comparative patterns.

4.1 Narrative (Hero Essays)

The analysis of narrative texts (hero essays and narrative prose) shows a **distinct linguistic profile characterized by temporal sequencing, past tense dominance, and moderate syntactic complexity**.

Table 4.1: Functional and Structural Features of Narrative Texts

Feature	Evidence from Data	Interpretation
Past Tense Usage	High frequency (~500 instances in first half)	Chronological narration
Temporal Clauses	Frequent adverbial clauses (350 instances)	Sequencing of events
Sentence Length (MLS)	~17–18 words (Lessons 3–4: 17.5, 17.2)	Moderate complexity
Subordination (DC/TU)	~0.43–0.44	Controlled embedding

Narrative texts are strongly anchored in **past tense constructions**, confirming their function as vehicles for storytelling and biographical representation. The high number of **adverbial clauses** reflects temporal and causal sequencing, essential for maintaining narrative coherence. Syntactically, narrative texts demonstrate **moderate clause complexity**, with DC/TU values around 0.43–0.44. This indicates that while subordination is present, it is not excessively dense, allowing learners to process information in a relatively linear fashion.

Importantly, the balance between independent and dependent clauses suggests that narrative discourse maintains **accessibility while still introducing structural complexity**, making it pedagogically effective for intermediate learners.

4.2 Expository Prose

Expository texts (scientific, historical, and analytical prose) exhibit **higher syntactic density, increased abstraction, and more complex clause structures**.

Table 4.2: Functional and Structural Features of Expository Texts

Feature	Evidence from Data	Interpretation
Sentence Length (MLS)	Higher values (Lesson 1: 18.2; Lesson 5: 18.9)	Expanded explanation
Subordination (DC/TU)	Higher (~0.45–0.46)	Hierarchical structuring
Clause Types	High adverbial + relative clauses	Logical relations
Vocabulary	Abstract and technical (scientific/historical topics)	Conceptual discourse
Perfect Aspect	Frequent (~14–15 per 1k)	Analytical reflection

Expository texts show a clear tendency toward **longer sentences and higher subordination**, particularly in scientific and historical lessons. For example, Lesson 5 demonstrates the highest MLS (18.9) and DC/TU (0.46), indicating dense informational content.

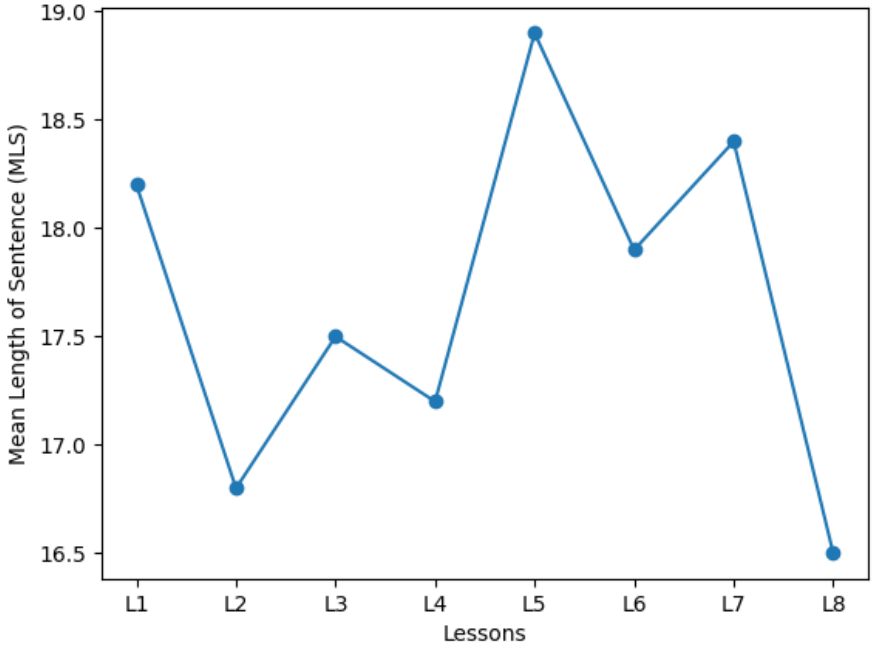
The frequent use of **relative and adverbial clauses** allows these texts to encode complex logical relationships such as cause, condition, and comparison. Additionally, the presence of **perfect aspects** supports retrospective and analytical discourse, reinforcing abstraction.

These features collectively produce a **hierarchical discourse structure**, where meaning is layered and embedded rather than sequentially presented. This significantly increases cognitive demands on learners

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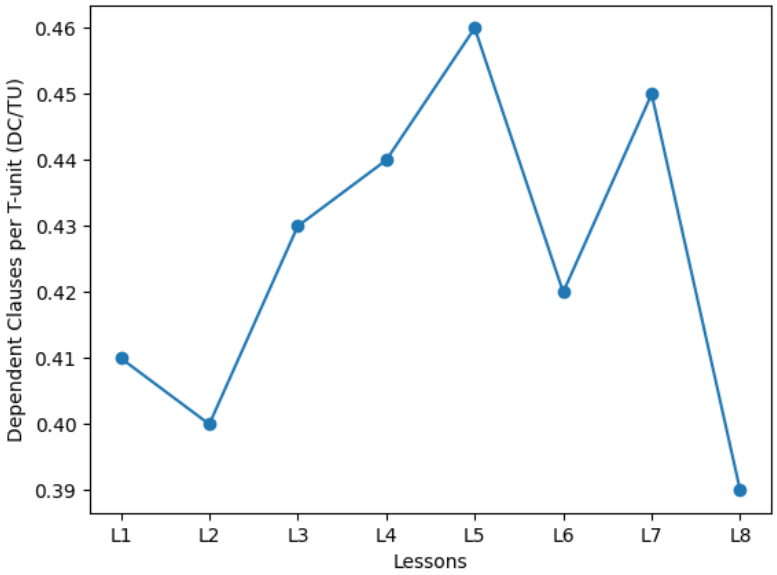
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Figure 4.1: Sentence Length Variation Across Lessons



The variation in sentence length demonstrates that **expository texts consistently occupy the higher end of the complexity spectrum**, while narrative/literary texts remain relatively simpler. This supports the claim that genre directly influences syntactic structure.

Figure 4.2: Subordination (DC/TU) Across Lessons



Subordination remains consistently high across the textbook but peaks in expository texts. This confirms that **hierarchical clause embedding is a defining feature of expository discourse**, supporting explanation and reasoning.

4.3 Comparative Findings

The comparison between narrative and expository texts reveals systematic differences in discourse organization and linguistic structure.

Table 4.3: Comparative Genre Analysis

Feature	Narrative Texts	Expository Texts
Structure	Linear (chronological)	Hierarchical (embedded)
Tense	Past dominant	Mixed (present + past)

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ISSN P: 3006-1458
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Feature	Narrative Texts	Expository Texts
Sentence Length	Moderate (~17–18)	Higher (~18–20)
Subordination	Moderate (~0.43)	High (~0.45+)
Clause Function	Sequencing events	Explaining relationships
Vocabulary	Concrete, descriptive	Abstract, technical

The findings confirm a fundamental distinction:

- **Narrative discourse → linear structure**
  - Meaning unfolds sequentially
  - Easier cognitive processing
  - Supports fluency and coherence
- **Expository discourse → hierarchical structure**
  - Meaning is embedded within clauses
  - Requires processing of multiple relationships simultaneously
  - Supports analytical and academic skills

This contrast demonstrates that genre is not simply a stylistic variation but a **structural and cognitive distinction**.

4.4 Integrated Insight

The results show that Book 2 provides a **strategically balanced genre distribution**, where:

- Narrative texts act as **cognitively accessible entry points**
- Expository texts introduce **advanced linguistic and conceptual demands**

This progression reflects a pedagogical design aimed at transitioning learners from: **→ experience-based communication → knowledge-based discourse**

Final Result Statement

The analysis confirms that:

- Narrative texts emphasize **temporal sequencing and moderate complexity**
- Expository texts emphasize **subordination, abstraction, and hierarchical structure**
- Genre variation is **systematic, measurable, and pedagogically meaningful**

5. Discussion

5.1 Genre-Specific Cognitive Demands

The findings of this study demonstrate that genre variation in Book 2 is not merely stylistic but **cognitively consequential**, shaping how learners process and interpret language. Narrative and expository texts impose fundamentally different cognitive demands due to their distinct structural properties.

Narrative texts, characterized by **past tense dominance, temporal sequencing, and moderate clause complexity**, support relatively linear processing. Learners can follow events chronologically, relying on familiar discourse patterns and reduced syntactic embedding. The presence of adverbial clauses in narrative texts primarily facilitates sequencing rather than deep conceptual layering, which lowers cognitive load and enhances accessibility.

In contrast, expository texts impose significantly higher cognitive demands. The data shows that these texts consistently exhibit **greater subordination (DC/TU up to 0.46) and longer sentence structures**, requiring learners to process **hierarchically embedded information** . This type of structure demands simultaneous processing of multiple relationships—cause, condition, contrast—which increases working memory load and slows comprehension.

Importantly, the findings confirm that:

→ Genre variation directly correlates with cognitive load, with expository texts functioning as cognitively intensive input and narrative texts as relatively accessible input.

This directly addresses the research aim:

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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→ NLP-based analysis successfully reveals **systematic genre-based variation in syntactic and cognitive complexity**.

5.2 Role of Discourse Type in Skill Development

The distinction between narrative and expository discourse in Book 2 reflects a broader pedagogical strategy aimed at developing **complementary language skills**.

Narrative texts contribute primarily to:

- **Fluency development**
- **Discourse coherence**
- **Personal expression and storytelling ability**

Their linear structure and moderate complexity enable learners to focus on meaning-making without being overwhelmed by syntactic demands. This makes them particularly effective for reinforcing foundational discourse skills.

Expository texts, on the other hand, play a crucial role in developing:

- **Analytical thinking**
- **Abstract reasoning**
- **Academic language proficiency**

The higher levels of subordination and clause embedding observed in these texts require learners to engage with **complex logical relationships**, fostering deeper cognitive processing. The frequent use of relative and adverbial clauses, along with abstract vocabulary, supports the development of **disciplinary literacy**, particularly in scientific and historical contexts.

Thus, the results indicate that:

→ **Discourse type is directly linked to skill development**, with narrative texts supporting fluency and expository texts supporting analytical competence.

This reinforces the argument that genre diversity is essential for comprehensive language learning.

5.3 Balance Between Storytelling and Explanation

A key strength of Book 2 lies in its **balanced integration of narrative and expository genres**, which creates a progressive learning trajectory. The dataset shows that while complexity remains consistently moderate-to-high across lessons, its distribution varies according to genre.

Narrative texts provide:

- cognitive accessibility
- engagement through storytelling
- a foundation for discourse construction

Expository texts introduce:

- increased syntactic density
- conceptual abstraction
- hierarchical organization of ideas

This balance ensures that learners are not exposed exclusively to one type of discourse. Instead, they experience a **gradual shift from linear to hierarchical processing**, preparing them for advanced language use.

However, the findings also highlight a potential challenge. The relatively high level of subordination across the textbook—even in narrative texts—suggests that learners may encounter **cumulative cognitive load** if instructional support is insufficient. Therefore, while the balance between genres is pedagogically beneficial, its effectiveness depends on **how these texts are mediated in the classroom**.

5.4 Integrated Interpretation

The results of this study lead to three key conclusions:

1. **Genre determines linguistic structure**
    - Narrative → linear, moderately complex

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ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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- Expository → hierarchical, highly complex

2. **Genre determines cognitive demand**
   - Narrative → lower processing load
   - Expository → higher processing load
3. **Genre determines learning outcomes**
   - Narrative → fluency and coherence
   - Expository → analytical and academic skills

Taken together, these findings confirm that genre variation in Book 2 is **systematic, measurable, and pedagogically purposeful**, supporting the central claim of the study.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine genre variation in Intermediate Book 2 using an NLP-based analytical framework. The findings demonstrate that the textbook provides **structured and meaningful exposure to multiple genres**, particularly narrative and expository discourse.

The results confirm that:

- Narrative texts promote **fluency, coherence, and accessibility** through linear structures and moderate complexity
- Expository texts promote **analytical thinking and advanced proficiency** through subordination, abstraction, and hierarchical organization

6.1 Pedagogical Implications

The multi-genre composition of Book 2 offers significant pedagogical advantages:

- It enables learners to develop both **narrative fluency and analytical competence**
- It prepares learners for **academic discourse**, particularly in science and humanities
- It aligns with advanced proficiency expectations (B2–C1), where learners must handle both concrete and abstract topics

However, the findings also suggest that:

- Teachers must provide **scaffolding strategies** to manage cognitive load
- Instruction should explicitly address **genre-specific features**, such as clause structures and discourse organization

6.2 Final Statement

In conclusion, Book 2 can be seen as a **genre-rich instructional resource** that supports the transition from intermediate to advanced language use. By integrating narrative and expository discourse, it not only enhances linguistic competence but also fosters cognitive development.

The study ultimately argues that:

→ **genre is a central organizing principle in language learning**, shaping both how language is structured and how it is acquired.

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ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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