

Faulty Comparison in the Writing of Saudi Secondary School Graduates: Identification and Remedy

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Abstract: this study is primarily intended to investigate the faulty cases of comparison in the writings of the Saudi secondary school graduates. Fifty compositions have been randomly chosen from about two hundred compositions written by male and female students. They were taken directly from students' exam scripts, and are intended to measure students' proficiency in English, as a foreign language. The study revealed 23 errors in the fifty compositions examined, at a rate of about 0.46 errors in every composition. Male students scored 12, and female students scored 11 errors.

Introduction:

Since the English language established itself as the international language of commerce and science, the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has introduced a weekly six-hour program of teaching English in the intermediate and secondary schools in its attempt to make the Saudis well informed about the every day means of technology and other sciences, and eventually to enable them take part in the achievements of modern world civilization.

However, several years after the course was implemented, students have begun to complain about the difficulties encountered in learning English. Several problems have been identified, and one of these problems is the inability of the students to use comparisons as they try to express themselves in English. Comparison in definition is "the inflection or modification of an adjective or adverb to indicate degrees in quality, quantity, or manner."⁽¹⁾

(¹) *Harbrace College Handbook*. Florida, United States of America: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1986 c. P. 505.

Teachers at universities and other educational institutes have been complaining about the secondary school graduates' low competence in English. Cavanaugh, who taught English at some Saudi educational institutes had realized his students' problems in English and concluded: "...with few exceptions, the greatest majority came to us after six years of English without the ability to write a simple sentence without mistakes. Our concern, therefore, should be to remedy this situation."⁽²⁾ Many other researchers pointed to this problem; El-Sayed, for example, remarked: "some of the students come to the university with almost no competence in English."⁽³⁾

Few Saudi researchers who became aware of the problems set forth to identify them with the hope of finding solutions, but most of those researchers, as it is going to be revealed in detail later, did not focus on making comparisons; rather, they centered their efforts on a larger but more important case, namely students' failure to express themselves in English. Comparison, in most cases, has not been given special treatment, and the subject has been either completely ignored or given little space in a general discussion focusing mainly on the problems the students face in writing comprehensive English.

As a result, a need for an organized study arises to look into students' compositions and specify the areas where students fail to express themselves in their attempt to compare something or someone with something or someone else, or to say that something or someone possesses a quality or qualities that cannot be found in other things or with other people of the same class. In other words, a study concentrating mainly on students' use of comparison in their compositions may help to give a long-awaited answer to the existing situation.

In reference to the present problem, this research attempts to study several cases of faulty comparison found in Saudi secondary school graduates' compositions. Fifty compositions have been randomly chosen, half of which were written by female students. The study attempts to collect the erroneous cases of comparison for classification and subsequently for analysis, so as to predict a solution which may give a chance to those unlucky students to correct their expressions of comparison, and perhaps learn how to use comparison to express themselves.

Review of Related Literature

As far as I know, none of the research that has been conducted on Saudi secondary school graduates' errors in writing has focused on, or been mainly dedicated to the subject of comparison in the students' compositions. The literature in this field of study

⁽²⁾ Bob F. Cavanaugh, "Teaching Writing, or How to Write," *Team*, 37, May, 1981, pp.17-22, cited in Abdulrahman A. Abdan, "The Effect of Sentence-combining Practice on the Written Syntactic Maturity, Overall Writing Quality, and Reading Comprehension of EFL Saudi Students. Doctorate Dissertation." University of Kansas, 1983. P.11.

⁽³⁾ Ali Mohammed Mohamed El-Sayed. "An Investigation into the Syntactic Errors of Saudi Freshmen's English Compositions." Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University 1982. P.51.

may be grouped into two main sections:

a) Studies exclusively related to Saudi students: These studies have mainly been carried out by Saudi researchers to investigate generally the student's errors in English. They covered the most frequent errors, giving little, if any, attention to the errors of comparative forms.