

**GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN SAUDI STUDENTS' WRITING:
A MINIMALIST APPROACH**

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Field of Study: **Generative Syntax**

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Abstract

This empirical study is an analysis of EFL writing by third year university students. There are three aims of the current work; (1) to find out the kinds of grammatical errors Saudi students make in their writings; (2) to explicate ungrammaticality of the students' errors employing the Minimalist Program; (3) to evaluate the contributing factors that cause grammatical errors. Data was derived from compositions written by a stratified random sample of twenty junior students majoring in English at The Faculty of Arts and Humanities in King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Actually, these compositions are an assignment given by their lecturer as a kind of critical writing about the play *Trifles* by Glaspell. The study is qualitative in nature as it primarily focuses on analyzing the types of grammatical errors no matter how frequent they occur. Findings revealed that most of the grammatical errors are in sentence structure, prepositions, subject-verb agreement and wrong use of words. The results demonstrated that Saudi juniors do not completely fulfill the requirement for lexical information of an English sentence in the sense they still do not fully understand how many arguments a verb must have, what features a verb may have in terms of transitivity, intransitivity or even what kind of phrase that a verb subcategorizes for. With regard to factors causing ungrammaticality, intra-language errors were the majority of the grammatical errors in the writings whereas mother-tongue interference has no great influence on the students' writing. Saudi EFL students seem to over-generalize English rules to other positions in sentence structure. Also, they are not aware, sometimes, of the exceptions or restrictions of a rule which results in ill-formed structure. Findings of the study and its pedagogical implications are discussed in detail in chapter five.

Abstrak

Kajian empirikal ini merupakan analisa karangan yang ditulis oleh pelajar Saudi tahun ketiga yang mengikuti kelas Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing di universiti. Terdapat tiga tujuan kajian iaitu; 1) untuk mengetahui isu-isu tatabahasa yang didapati dalam tulisan pelajar Saudi; 2) untuk menghuraikan kesilapan tatabahasa pelajar Saudi dalam tulisan mereka dengan menggunakan Program Minimalis; 3) untuk menilai faktor-faktor yang menyumbang kepada kesilapan tatabahasa. Data bagi kajian ini diperolehi daripada karangan yang ditulis oleh 20 orang pelajar junior dalam jurusan Bahasa Inggeris di Jabatan Bahasa Inggeris, Fakulti Sastera dan Kemanusiaan di Universiti King Abdul Aziz, Jeddah, Arab Saudi. Karangan ini merupakan tugas tulisan kritikal tentang lakon layar yang bertajuk *Trifles* oleh Glaspel yang diberikan oleh pensyarah. Kajian mendedahkan bahawa kebanyakan isu-isu tatabahasa didapati dalam struktur ayat, kata arah, binaan ayat (subjek-kata kerja-agreement), dan salah guna perkataan. Keputusan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar junior Saudi tidak memenuhi keperluan leksikal Bahasa Inggeris dimana mereka tidak memahami sepenuhnya berapa banyak hujah-hujah yang diperlukan dalam sesuatu ayat, ciri-ciri kata kerja dalam bentuk transitif dan intransitif, dan frasa yang dibenarkan untuk diikuti bersama kata kerja yang dipilih. Dengan mengambil kira faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan kesalahan tatabahasa, majoriti daripada isu tatabahasa dalam penulisan subjek adalah kesilapan dalaman bahasa. Manakala gangguan bahasa ibunda tidak mempunyai pengaruh yang besar dalam penulisan pelajar. Pelajar Saudi yang mengikuti kelas Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing ini dilihat menyamaratakan secara berlebihan peraturan tatabahasa Inggeris kepada posisi yang lain. Malah mereka tidak menyedari bahawa pengeculian peraturan tatabahasa boleh menyebabkan struktur bahasa yang salah. Keputusan kajian dan implikasi pedagogi dibincangkan secara terperinci dalam bab lima.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADVP	Adverbial Phrase
AP	Adjective Phrase
CP	Complementizer Phrase
DP	Determiner Phrase
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EPP	Extended Projection Principle
ESL	English as a Second Language
HP	Headedness Principle
MP	Minimalist Program
MSA	Modern Standard Arabic
NP	Noun Phrase
PFI	Principle of Full Interpretation
PP	Prepositional Phrase
PRN	Pronoun
T	Tense
T'	Intermediate Projection
TP	Tense Phrase
VP	Verb Phrase