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Is teacher's English good enough?: A case study of Saudi teacher spoken language

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Abstract: Solving the problem of increasing English language output has been the focus of attention in the last decade. While previous research has extensively analyzed two sources of errors, namely the interlingual and intralingual sources, found in spoken language, this qualitative study investigates the teacher's language as a source of errors for the learners. It analyzes the common grammatical errors committed by 30 Saudi teachers in their spoken English during one-to-one interviews. Error Analysis (EA), linguistic-based classification and linguistic taxonomy of the data reveal seven types of grammatical errors: the wrong use of tenses, errors in the use of prepositions, wrong use of prepositions, errors in the use of articles, omission of a/an, wrong use of articles, and subject-verb inversion in wh-questions, errors due to lack of concord and agreement, and typical Arabic constructions. The most dominant errors are due to concord or agreement and the least is errors in the use of prepositions.

Keywords: Error Analysis, grammatical errors, sources of errors, English as a Foreign Language, teachers' language, learner language.

Introduction

Speaking English has been a problem that exists not only in Saudi Arabia and the Arab world (Al-Ghamari, 2004; Bacha, 2002; Fageeh, 2011; Fareh, 2010; Heffernan, 2006; Hinkel, 2004; Kambal, 1980; Kharma & Hajjaj, 1997; Rabab'ah, 2003; Tahaineh, 2010; Zoghoul, 1987) but also in non-English speaking countries in general (see, among others, Jabeen & Kazemian, 2015; Kim, 2015; Kushner, 2003; Moss, 2010). There is "general discontentment with regard to the overall output of the Arab students learning English in the subject" (Suleiman, 1983 as cited in Al-Nasser, 2015, p. 1615). Al-Nasser (2015) states that the major problem is that "the outcomes (in the form of language proficiency) [are] painfully dissatisfying" (p. 1616). After completing 9 years of English education, attending language classes four hours a week, the learner is "unable to produce a single error free utterance" (Al-Nasser, 2015, p. 1616). The language issue became a central topic of discussion in the last decade especially after the decree of the Saudi Arabian 2030 vision, which now makes it a necessity to solve the English problem (Al-Zahrani, 2017). Despite all the efforts made by the Ministry of Education, Aslaim (2008, p. 60) states that the level of English "lags far behind the ambitions of the Saudi Ministry of Education" and motivates educators, linguists, and teachers to conduct more studies to discussing the difficulties Saudis encounter and to propose solutions. Among these studies are Albalawi (2016), Alhaysony (2012), Al-Nasser

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(2015), Alrabai (2016), Al Shumaimeri (2003), Al-Tuwaijri (1982), Al-Zahrani (2017), Asmari & Javid (2011), Elyas & Al Grigri (2014), Elyas & Picard (2010), Javid (2010), Khan (2011), Mahboob & Elyas (2014), Rahman & Alhaisoni (2013), Rajab & Al-Sadi (2015), and Sani (2018).

Given the significance of Error Analysis (EA) in providing deep insights for understanding of the process of language learning and language acquisition (Darus, 2009; Ellis, 1995; Keshavarz, 2003, 2006; Richards, 1971, 1974; 1984; Ziahosseiny, 1999), many studies have been conducted to analyze the learners' errors and to identify the sources of these errors. EA is an essential field of applied linguistics that deals with the problems related to language learning and teaching and attempts to provide solutions to these problems. It treats the errors, firstly, by distinguishing between an error, which results from an incomplete competence, and a mistake, which is not a result of a deficiency in competence, then by categorizing the error and determining its sources. Unlike its ancestor, namely the Contrastive analysis (CA), EA investigates the various sources of error, be it interlingual or intralingual transfer. That is, in EA, the source of the error is not limited to the interlingual negative transfer from L1 as is the case in CA. Although the effect of the L1 Arabic system is evident on Saudi and the Arab speakers of English, in general (Abdul Rahman, 2021; Alahmadi, 2014; Alhajailan, 2020; Al-Sahafi, 2017), not all the errors are a result of the L1 negative transfer (Albanawi, 2018; Alhaysony, 2012; Althobaiti, 2014). For example, the omission of the third person singular inflection -s on the verb and the misuse of the auxiliary "do" are not caused by the first language (L1) system (AlRawi, 2012; Aslaim, 2008). Here is where the need of this study becomes necessary. The current study investigates one source of errors that has been neglected in the past. This source is the teacher's language (or, more specifically, the errors committed by teacher). In EA, errors are of four sources: interference (or interlingual) transfer, intralingual transfer, context of learning, and communication strategies (Brown, 1994; Hasyim, 2002; Heydari & Bagheri, 2012). The interference is the negative transfer of the learner's mother tongue. The intralingual transfer is the negative transfer within the target language caused by overgeneralization of the rules of the target language (or L2). The context of learning overlaps both types of transfer which, in tutored learning, is the teacher or the textbook, and, in untutored learning, is the social situation. The communication strategies are the "conscious employment of verbal mechanisms for communicating an idea when linguistic forms are not available to the learner for various reasons" (Alahmadi, 2014, p. 87). The third source (and, more specifically, the teacher) is highly important to the Saudi society. For many families, it is the reason why they prefer to enroll their children in private and international schools where the children are taught by native or native-like speakers in order to acquire correct English. This idea is proven by Alqahtani (2021), who argues that the language deficiencies in Saudi Arabian public schools are caused by incompetent teachers. He concludes that "instructors are at the heart of the issues that affecting students'

growth” (p. 24). A similar conclusion is drawn by Almaeena (2014), who asserts that most of the Saudi teachers are not proficient speakers of English and have serious language deficiencies that make them not qualified enough to teach English. Their poor English is a main cause behind the students’ failure in learning English. Sani (2018) proves the same point stating that “if students are taught the English language by capable teachers in schools, they will acquire the necessary skills to understand and participate in the university courses (p. 189)”. Therefore, she recommends ensuring the quality of the teacher’s English language in order to “improve the delivery of English language courses in schools”. For this purpose, the current paper focusses on teachers’ weaknesses by analyzing their spoken English through EA. It hopes to contribute to improving the quality of language practiced by the teachers in public schools and ensure the proficiency of the input provided for the students in the classroom.

However, it is worth noting that, from the framework of English as a Lingua Franca, the weaknesses in a foreign (or non-Standard) English are viewed as a nativized local variety. Being part of Kachru’s (1985) Expanding Circle, the variety of English spoken in Saudi Arabia has its own features. So, the teachers’ errors tackled in this paper can be more of a local English rather than deviant forms. This is what makes it important to analyze the teacher’s language because the society may accept these forms and practice them as indigenous traits (see Al-Rawi, 2012; AlRawi et al., 2022; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014) while the Saudi Arabian 2030 vision aims at developing the language proficiency to the level of Standard English (Al-Zahrani, 2017). Therefore, regardless of whether they are deviant forms or nativized features, analyzing them will make the society aware of the non-Standard forms which is part of the goals of 2030 vision for language development. To comply with EA implemented in this paper, I will continue using the term ‘error’ rather than ‘feature’.

Research questions

This study is carried out in order to investigate the most common grammatical errors that are committed by Saudi teachers in speaking the English language, which may explain why the students commit the same errors and impedes their ability of speak English correctly. According to the main purpose of this study, the researcher attempts to answer the following research question: What are the most dominant grammatical errors in English spoken by Saudi teachers?

Aims and objectives of the study

The main aim of the study is to analyze the grammatical errors practiced by some Saudi teachers in their speech. This analysis can be good feedback to the teachers to make them aware of the fossilized errors in their competence and to improve the accuracy of the language used to

communicate with the students in the classroom. Furthermore, analyzing teachers' errors has a great impact in improving the speaking skill and accordingly in teaching/learning English as a foreign language (EFL) as it makes the teachers focus on these deviant structures and give the feedback needed to the students to enable them to speak error-free sentences.

Literature Review

As mentioned above, many researchers have shown interest in evaluating the structure of English practiced by Saudis and solving the problems behind the low English proficiency of Saudi learners. They have carried out various studies to illuminate the grammatical errors the learners make when learning EFL and to identify the sources of the errors. The researchers in this respect are of different views. One view is that the errors are mainly the result of L1 interference. For example, Alahmadi (2014) conducted a study on analyzing grammatical speaking errors made by Saudi students in their foundation year. The findings indicate that they commit nine types of errors: misuse of singular and plural nouns, misuse of verb tenses, misuse of articles, misuse of prepositions, unmarked form of verbs, nonuse of the verb, misuse of third person pronouns, and misuse of regular and irregular verbs. Alahmadi (ibid) asserts that the Arabic mother tongue is the reason behind seven out of the nine errors. Only the last two errors, which are the misuse of regular and irregular verbs, and the sentences with pronoun copy, are the ones that are not caused by the Arabic negative transfer. Another study conducted by Abdul Rahman (2021) discovers three syntactic errors made by Saudi students. The most frequent errors include the wrong use of tense, prepositions, and articles. These errors are found to be caused by the negative transfer. Moreover, Alhajailan (2020) investigated the syntactic errors of the noun phrase in written English committed by the Saudi female students at Princess Noura University. The results reveal that the source of the errors is clearly the interlingual transfer from Arabic. Furthermore, Al-Sahafi (2017) investigated the orthographic, lexical, and grammatical errors of Saudi students in their Foundation Year. The findings reveal that the errors are mainly interlingual and only some cases are caused by an intralingual transfer.

Another view shows that the sources are both interlingual and intralingual. For example, Albanawi (2018) analyzed the errors in the use of the prepositions, proving that that they are a result of both interlingual and intralingual interferences. Another study, conducted by Althobaiti (2014), explores the grammatical, lexical, and semantic errors committed by advanced and beginner Saudi students. The errors are classified into nine categories: articles, verb tense, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, wrong word selection, singular/plural, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. The findings reveal that the errors are both interlingual and intralingual, but the percentage of errors differs. In the grammatical and semantic domains, the errors resulting from the intralingual sources are higher than those resulting from the interlingual

sources while the lexical errors resulting from the interlingual sources are higher than those resulting from intralingual ones. Alhaysony (2012) accounts for the types of errors in the use of the article in written texts produced by Saudi female students at Ha'il University. The results show that 57% of the errors are interlingual while 42.56% of them are intralingual due to "the complicated system of the English articles, which is full of exceptions" (Alhaysony, 2012, p. 60).

The third view adds other sources related to the context of learning (i.e., the teacher and/or the textbook). For example, IvyPanda (2020) studies the subject-verb agreement errors committed in written exams of Saudi students in the 12th grade from King Saud Education Complex in Riyadh. The study concludes that the errors in subject-verb agreement result from the "lack of adequate [instructional] materials, outdated curriculum, poor training of teachers, and low motivation among other factors [that are] linked to the poor grasp of subject-verb agreement among the students" (IvyPanda, 2020, p. 1). Al Shahrani (2018) analyzed the errors in written essays of the students studying English as a major in their first year at Al Baha University. The errors detected are the omission of inflectional morphemes (plural -s, third person singular -s, past tense -ed, presenting participle -ing), the misuse categories (determines, prepositions, and conjunctions), and the addition (nouns, pronouns, and adjectives). The results reveal that the mother tongue interference is not the only source of errors but the developmental (or intralingual) as well as the learning process itself constitute other sources. Although the percentage of interlingual to the intralingual errors is (60.9%) to (39.1%), only three errors, which are the misuse of the articles, subject-verb agreement, and copula 'be', are the result of L1 interference. However, the rest of the errors are caused by the intralingual source and the learning-related factors including incomprehensibility of the target language rules, lack of motivation, teaching methods, lack of vocabulary, lack of writing activities and homework, spelling, and punctuation. Aslaim (2008) explored the errors in the use of the auxiliary do by analyzing English written performances of Saudi students in the ninth grade, which is the third year in intermediate schools. She concludes that the "high number of observed students' errors are not attributable to students' native language but instead to common learning processes generally adopted by learners of divergent language backgrounds" (p. 64). To this end, the current study works in the same vein to explore a possible source of errors in the learning process.

Significance of the study

This research study is very much significant in its subject matter. Its significance lies in analyzing the teacher's spoken English and investigating the quality of the language provided to the students in the classroom which constitutes an inevitable source of errors (Shekhzadeh & Gheichi, 2011). The teacher or the teaching process (also called "transfer of training" in Shekhzadeh & Gheichi's (2011, p. 161) terminology)

is a source of errors related to the context of learning (Brown, 2007). Despite that the teacher plays the main role for English language learning in Saudi Arabia (Al-Zahrani, 2017), yet the literature with respect to analyzing the accuracy of the teacher's language is limited. The focus of the previous studies of EA is the students' language rather than the teachers' language and this is where the need of this study becomes necessary. When intending to solve the students' failure, the linguist/educator should not only "seek the remedy in [the students'] background knowledge of their native language" but should 'search for many other sources of difficulty as well' such as the "transfer of training" (Shekhzadeh & Gheichi, 2011, p. 161). Ziahosseiny (1999) states that "teaching creates language rules that are not part of the L2" (p. 126). As discussed in Shekhzadeh and Gheichi (2011), when students hear their teacher saying, for example, "There is little snow," they may, by analogy, produce unacceptable sentences illustrated by Yarmohammadi (1995, p. 63) like "*The snow is little1" and "*The snow is much". Likewise, students hear their teacher saying, "The man was highly admired", and "The building was tall", may automatically utter sentences like "The man is high" and "The mountain is tall" (Shekhzadeh & Gheichi, 2011, p. 161). Furthermore, an erroneous sentence like "I am liking to continue my studies" is produced by overgeneralizing progressive structures like "I am writing" and "I am reading" (Keshavarz, 1994, p. 113). While making errors is a process that every learner passes through, "that process can be impeded through realizing the errors and operating on them according to the feedback given" (Erdoğan, 2005, p. 261). However, when the teachers, themselves, are likely to commit these errors and, accordingly, the students seem to receive no or less feedback, it becomes a necessity to analyze the errors in the teacher's language. To this end, the current paper aims at analyzing teacher's language especially that some errors (or deviant forms) that are practiced by Saudis are proven to be features of the English variety spoken in Saudi Arabia (or Saudi English) from the perspective of World Englishes (see Al-Rawi, 2012; AlRawi et al. 2022; Al- Shurafa, 2010; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). It specifically focusses on the spoken language for its communicative role in the language learning process. Siddiqui (2014) states that speaking provides "the foundation for communication of ideas, intelligent conversation, and the development of other language skills in the target language" (p. 47). Ali et al. (2019) believe that "speaking is considered to be not only important but also most immediately sought after by all sections of people" (p. 352). According to Ur (1996), speaking is the most important skill among the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing and "people who know a language are referred to as 'speakers' of that language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing" (p. 120). Additionally, speaking includes essential elements such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Sayuri, 2016). Thus, it can be said that the present study is highly significant in its traits as it provides the teachers an opportunity of self- correcting by making them aware of their mistakes.

In turn, it helps to determine the reason behind the poor performance of the students in the teaching process.

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature, describing and classifying grammatical errors committed by fresh graduate teachers in their spoken language. Data were collected during the academic year of 2020-2021 from 30 female Saudi teachers who graduated holding bachelor's degree in English. The teachers are not native English speakers. They all learned their English in Saudi Arabia and never lived in any native-speaking countries. Their ages range between 22 and 25. In order to provide an accurate analysis, I used interviews to collect the teacher's data. Each interview lasted for 10 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded using the voice recorder feature of Samsung Galaxy S20. The 5 hours of recorded interviews were more like an informal conversation between me and the teachers discussing their teaching experience in general, the challenges facing the students in learning English, their opinions about the textbook, and suggestions to improve the effectiveness the teaching/learning process. The audio recorded data collected from all the teachers were transcribed in a word document. The total amount of data collected from the interviews is 30,000 words.

The collected data (i.e., the teacher's transcribed interviews) were analyzed using Error Analysis, which is defined by Brown (2007) as a process of identifying and describing the errors in order to reveal the system operated by the speaker. Identifying the errors is not an easy task (Alahmadi, 2015). Differentiating between errors and mistakes can be achieved by either asking the learner to self-correct his/her deviant structures (Littlewood, 1984) or by "checking the consistency of [a] learner's performance" (Ellis, 1997, p. 17 as cited in Alahmadi, 2015). In this research, I identified the grammatical errors according to the consistency and frequency of the errors during the teacher's speech. Following Alahmadi (2015), the errors that were committed not less than five times by all the speakers were taken to be consistent. More than 2,500 spoken grammatical errors were identified. These errors were analyzed and classified into categories and subcategories. Because grammar includes both morphology and syntax (Sari, 2018), I adopted Keshavarz's (2012, p. 95-102) "linguistic-based classification" and "linguistic taxonomy" of the morpho-syntactic errors in order to analyze and classify the grammatical (or morpho-syntactic) errors into categories; seven categories were identified. To ensure the reliability of the analysis, I consulted a language expert and two linguists regarding the analysis and the interpretation of the data. The expert is a native speaker of British English who is holding PhD in TESOL. As for the linguists, both are theoretical linguists who are specialized in syntax. The expert was consulted for the grammaticality judgment, identification, and interpretation of the errors, and the linguists were consulted for the analysis and interpretation of the errors. In finding the dominant errors,

the frequency and percentage of each category were calculated to answer the first research question using the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Frequency of errors in each category}}{\text{Total number of errors}} \times 100 \%$$

The seven grammatical categories and their frequencies and percentages are illustrated in Table 1 below. (For the sake of consistency, I referred to the errors as grammatical rather than morpho-syntactic errors).

Table 1
Errors in the Linguistic-based Classification

	Grammatical errors	Frequency	Percentage
1	Errors due to lack to concord or agreement	562	22%
2	Wrong use of tenses	519	21%
3	Errors in the use of articles	473	19%
4	Subject-verb inversion in wh-questions	356	14%
5	Wrong use of prepositions	272	11%
6	Typical Arabic constructions	181	7%
7	Errors in the use of prepositions	167	7%
	Total	2,530	100%

Findings and discussion

The participants committed seven types of grammatical errors. They are the wrong use of tenses, errors in the use of prepositions, wrong use of prepositions, errors in the use of articles, omission of a/an, wrong use of articles, subject-verb inversion in wh-questions, errors due to lack of concord and agreement, and typical Arabic constructions. As indicated in Table (1), these errors differ in their frequencies. The most dominant type of error was the errors due to concord or agreement and the least was the errors in the use of prepositions.

The first type was errors due to lack of agreement or concord which constitutes the most dominant type produced by the speakers at rate of 22%. The lack of subject-verb agreement is illustrated in (1a) using the symbol Ø and the lack of concord within the noun group (or the noun phrase) is illustrated in (1b) using the symbol Ø.

(1)

- a) This student speak-Ø good English.
- b) I have two option-Ø.

The second kind was the wrong use of tenses. This type was one of the most frequent errors with a percentage of 21%. It was sub-classified into the use of present continuous instead of simple present, the use of simple past instead of instead of past perfect, and the wrong sequence of tenses.

Examples of the speakers' production were the sentences in (2a), (2b), and (2c), respectively, where the errors are underlined.

(2)

- a) They are repeating the same mistake every class.
- b) I suggested this idea before I asked for it.
- c) I told them I will take the final decision later.

In (2a), the present continuous tense was used to indicate the habitual action instead of the simple present tense. In (2b), the simple past tense was used instead of the past perfect. In (2c), the future tense is used instead of the past tense.

The third type was errors in the use of articles: the redundant use of 'the', the omission of 'a/an' before both professional titles and indefinite singular nouns, and the redundant use of 'a/an' before abstract nouns as illustrated in (3a), (3b), (3c), and (3d) respectively, in which the errors were indicated either by using the Ø for the omitted article or by underling the redundant article. This type was among the three most frequent errors that were uttered at a rate of 19%.

(3)

- a) I don't use the Arabic in class.
- b) I realized this problem since I received my job as Ø teacher.
- c) I had Ø headache this morning.
- d) I have a difficulty implementing this idea.

The fourth type of error was subject-verb inversion in wh-questions as manifested in (4) in which the speaker incorrectly placed the auxiliary verb following the subject instead of placing it preceding the subject. This type of errors occurred at a rate of 14%:

(4)

- a) What else I shall do for them?
- b) Why we don't change the textbook?

The fifth type was the wrong use of prepositions: 'on' instead of 'in' as underlined in (5a), 'from' instead of 'of' as underlined in (5b), 'in' instead of 'on' as underlined in (5c), and 'to' instead of 'in' as underlined in (5d). This type of error was produced by the speakers at a rate of 11%.

(5)

- a) I was on a meeting.
- b) I am happy from what she is saying.
- c) It's in page 2.
- d) That was the first day when I arrived to school.

The sixth type of errors was the typical Arabic constructions of topicalization as shown in the following example. The sentence in (6) is a typical Arabic sentence structure called nominal sentences (or topic-

comment structure (see, among others, Fassi Fehri, 1993; Aoun et al. 2010) where the sentence consists of two main parts: *mubtada* ‘topic’ (or left-dislocation), which is the initial nominal, and *xabar* ‘comment’, which is a full sentence predicating over the topic as shown in (7).

(6) Amal, her students liked this technique.

(7) #amal #aalibaat-u-ha y#ib-uun haa#ihi #-#ariiqaat-a. Amal students-NOM-her 3.like-they this.ACC the-technique-ACC ‘Amal’s students like this technique.’

(Lit. ‘Amal, her students like this technique.’)

In English, on the other hand, the sentence structure is a subject-predicate one (see Radford, 2009, among others) rather than a topic-comment one. The initial nominal in English is a subject rather than a topic and the predicate is a verb phrase rather than a full sentence. In other words, sentence (6) must be structured as (8) below rather than as (7) above. So, the speaker’s production in (7) was a typical Arabic construction reflecting L1 grammar. This type of errors was least frequent occurring at a rate of 7%.

(8) Amal’s students liked this technique.

The seventh type of error is among the least frequently practiced with a percentage of only 7%. It included the use of the prepositions either by omitting the preposition or inserting a preposition (or “redundant use of prepositions” in Keshavarz’s (2012, p. 98) terminology) as shown in the examples (9a) and (9b), respectively, where the speaker omitted the preposition ‘on’ in (7a) as indicated below using the symbol Ø. In (9b) the speaker inserted the preposition ‘about’, as indicated by the underline.

(9)

a) See you Ø Thursday.

I believe they shouldn’t discuss about the exam.

In sum, this study reported that teachers’ language is not error-free. Teachers do commit errors and these errors are of seven categories, which occurred with different frequencies. Errors due to lack of agreement or concord showed to be most frequent and the ones in the use of the prepositions were the least. These results can be interpreted in three possible ways. Firstly, it shows that the errors committed by teachers, although with different percentages, are neither different from the ones committed by Saudi students/learners nor by Saudi speakers in general. As for the students’ errors, the teachers’ errors reported in this study were proven by other researchers to be similar to students’ errors. The three most frequent errors in this study, which are errors due to lack to concord or agreement, the wrong use of tenses, and the errors in the use of articles, were proven by Alahmadi (2014) to be the top three dominant errors practiced by students. As for the misuse of the prepositions, it was proved by Alahmadi (2014) to be committed at an average of 21.33 per student and it was also shown in my study to be

committed by the teachers at a rate 11%. In Abdul Rahman's (2021) study, the most frequent errors committed by students were the wrong use of tense, prepositions, and articles. These errors were found in my study to be committed by teachers. Althobaiti (2014) discovered that the use of articles, verb tense, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, singular/plural were frequent grammatical errors committed by Saudi students. These categories were also found in my study to occur frequently in the teachers' performance. As for the Saudi speakers in general, the teachers' errors discovered in this study were reported by other researchers to be traits of Saudi English speakers (Al-Rawi, 2012; AlRawi et al., 2022; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). Al-Rawi (2012) reported that Saudi speakers frequently omit the third person agreement on the verb, the indefinite article, and the copula be, and frequently insert the definite article the. Similar results were reported by Mahboob & Elyas (2014), who asserted that the variation in the use of tense markers and the variation in the concord and agreement are features of Saudi English. Furthermore, all the errors reported in this research, except for the wrong use of tenses, were proven by AlRawi et al. (2022) to be practiced by the Saudi speakers. The similarity, whether with the students' errors or with the speakers in general, is an indication of a larger problem/phenomenon about the language practiced and accepted in the Saudi society.

The second interpretation of the results is that the errors were practiced by teachers whose English was learned and tested locally. None of the subjects attested in this research were required to have a specific score in an English standardized test such as TOEFL or IELTS. Upon their enrolment to the university, they were required to get 5.5 in IELTS, but their English was not measured after they graduate or before they practice their job as English teachers, a conclusion which is on line with Sani's (2018, p. 189) recommendation that "teachers should have an internationally recognized English language proficiency certification" in addition to a bachelor's degree.

The third interpretation of the results is that these errors are fossilized in the teachers' minds. They either applied the rules incorrectly or they simply had insufficient knowledge about the grammatical rules. Although they stayed in contact with English for 16 years (12 in the school and 4 years in the university), the feedback on their errors might not be negative enough to the extent that made them correct the errors. Therefore, for a remedial plan, it is recommended that universities and language institutions that provide a bachelor's degree in English must ensure to give the proper feedback and to graduate students who speak English professionally.

Conclusion and recommendations

The findings showed that Saudi teachers commit seven grammatical error categories in their speech. They are the wrong use of tenses, errors in the use of prepositions, wrong use of prepositions, errors in the use of articles, omission of a/an, wrong use of articles, subject-verb inversion in

wh-questions, errors due to lack of concord and agreement, and typical Arabic constructions. The most prevalent was the errors due to concord or agreement and the least was the errors in the use of prepositions. It can be concluded that these errors are fossilized in the teachers' minds. Therefore, the teachers should be aware of the fossilized errors and should try to work on them so that they can give the proper feedback to the students. This study is alarming to a source of error that can be more destructive than the mother tongue because if the teacher is not aware that he/she is committing an error, he/she will not give the proper feedback to the student. The study can also be a reference to review the curriculum for speaking skill courses at university level especially in English major programs in Saudi Arabia in order to ensure that their graduates speak correctly. However, the study is not without limitations. One obvious limitation of this study is that the subjects are female only. It would be more adequate if the results are generalized to include subjects of both sexes. Another limitation is that the subjects are all fresh graduates. Teachers who have experience may not necessarily produce the same errors. Therefore, more research is needed to test whether or not experience is a factor that could improve the language proficiency.

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Notes

- 1 In linguistics, the asterisk (*) is used to mark the sentence as ungrammatical (see Graffi, 2002).