

## Evaluating Capitalization Errors in Saudi Female students' EFL writing at Bisha University

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### Abstract

English teaching – learning process in Saudi Arabia is often criticized for producing students with low proficiency. One of the most critical areas in which Saudi students demonstrate low proficiency is EFL composition which features low writing ability in content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Capitalization in mechanics is a micro feature of English composition which demands using upper case and lower case in English letters according to the English language conventions. This study evaluates capitalization errors in Saudi female students' EFL writing. The study is conducted in the College of Applied Medical Sciences (for females), Bisha University at Al-Namas in Saudi Arabia. A mixed method of research design is used to collect the data from the real classroom of 20 Saudi female students in the form of assignments, classroom tests and examination copies. The study is supported by the observation of writing process of the students in the EFL classroom and interview of 10 students. Ellis's procedure (1994 cited in Troike, 2006) has been used to describe and evaluate the errors of capitalization. The result reveals that capitalization errors constitute a significant area of errors in Saudi students' writing. In the composition of 12000 words by 20 students, 983 errors are committed across the 10 categories of capitalization. The study suggests that curriculum of English language in Saudi Arabia should implement new pedagogical techniques in capitalization teaching to develop mastery in the principle rules of capitalization and understanding of orthographic-linguistic-cultural conventions of English language.

**Keywords:** capitalization errors, EFL writing, interlingual & intralingual errors, orthographic malformation, Saudi female students

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## Introduction

English language has a prestigious status in Saudi Arabia although it is not recognized as the second official language. Al-Seghayer (2012) states that article 50 of the educational policy in Saudi Arabia recommends that students should learn at least one foreign language. English is the main and sole foreign language taught in public and private schools, universities, and different industrial and government institutions. English is used as a medium of instruction in most of the university departments in areas such as science, medicine, engineering, allied health, and other technical subjects. Furthermore, the demand for recruiting and training additional Saudi EFL teachers, translators, and more qualified graduates for various jobs that require English proficiency has grown significantly.

Discussing the present situation of English and attitudes of learners towards learning English among university students in Saudi Arabia, Alabbad & Gitsaki (2011) stated that Saudi Arabia is one of those EFL settings which need change in classroom teaching practices. The common belief among educators is that teaching English in Saudi Arabia is a fairly unsatisfactory process and students have negative attitudes toward the current EFL teaching method.

One of the critical areas in learning process of Saudi students is their low proficiency in EFL composition. Ezza (2010) found that lack of motivation and interests, poor educational policies and less effective approaches to teaching EFL writing are some of the main reasons. While teaching writing skill to Saudi female students, the researcher found that copying and memorizing writing paragraphs, product writing, mother tongue interference, and cultural preference of oral skills are some other reasons of low proficiency in EFL writing.

In EFL context of Saudi Arabia, ability to write accurately and appropriately is needed in order to enable learners to participate in academic discourse of higher education, business and medical sectors, and interaction with multi-national expatriates in Saudi Arabia. These social needs have been envisioned in English language programs at Saudi Arabian universities. For example, course specification for Intensive English for Health Sciences-019 states that the course should enable students to write different forms of composition, such as letters, recommendations, paragraph and emails. The writing content of the course is designed to make the students produce well structured and grammatically correct paragraphs with correct application of mechanics and rhetorical devices. (King Khalid University, 2010)

During the course of teaching, the researcher found that the students in the college of Applied Medical Sciences (Females) at Al-Namas produced writing tasks with multiple kinds of errors spreading across grammar, vocabulary, content, organization and mechanics. Many researchers also experienced that EFL writing of Saudi students contains different kinds of errors. Some of the research studies are summarized here. Al-Sindy (1994) analyzed syntactic interference errors in adult Saudi students' writing and found a great number of errors in their writing such as lexicon, semantics, phonology, and punctuation. Aljamhour (1996) studied the English writing process of two Saudi graduate students and their problems during the stages of pre-writing, writing and revising. He found that Saudi students face many difficulties in organizational, lexical, rhetorical and punctuations. Al-Arfaj (1996) studied orthographical difficulties of Saudi students in reading and writing. Smith (2002) studied interference of 22 languages with reference to English language and highlighted problems of learners at different levels including Arab learners. Al-Kahtani (2002) studied literacy experiences of a Saudi learner in two different

settings and highlighted difficulties of L1 and L2 orthographic differences, the directionality of reading and writing, and instructional background. Sawalmeh (2013) found a variety of errors in 32 essays written by preparatory year students including capitalization errors which were due to transfer from mother tongue and interference. Raja & Zahid (2013) analyzed obstacles in writing of undergraduate students and found that students faced more difficulty in organization, capitalization, vocabulary and grammar. Mahmoud (2014) evaluated effectiveness of Cooperative Language Learning Approach in which he assessed Saudi students' mistakes of spelling, use of vocabulary, grammar, punctuation as well as coherence. It is evident from the review of these studies that many kinds of errors have been studied exclusively except capitalization errors. It has always been studied along with punctuation errors rather as an exclusive study.

This study is specifically focused on capitalization errors in Saudi students' writing. It recapitulates historical background of capitalization in English language, classification of capitalization errors in Saudi students' writing, identification of the sources of errors, and suggestions for change in teaching EFL writing and curriculum. Capitalization is a prime feature of English orthography which enhances readability of the text by separating the inner elements of the text to punctuate sentences and to distinguish proper nouns from other words (Ritter, 2002). Capitalization in English language distinguishes and integrates thought units. It is very important to rectify the errors of capitalization in order to develop students' composition. While teaching writing skill to the students, the researcher found that Saudi students often commit mistakes in applying capitalization rules. The researcher collected students' assignments, examination copies and classroom works to analyze the writing samples. The findings of the study suggest that the capitalization errors are wide spread across the different rules of capitalization and the errors tend to be intra-lingual. At the same time, L1 doesn't support positively in acquiring rules of capitalization. Students are not familiar with the significance of capitalization in communicativeness of EFL composition.

### Literature Review

Writing is the most important productive activity for L2 learners. It is used as a medium of testing knowledge around the world, therefore acquiring a high level of writing proficiency is necessary for professional and academic success (Troike, 2006). Writing a text in L1 or L2 is a complex process which involves learners to communicate by producing content of thought in written form using letters of alphabet and various signs and symbols. Production of writing requires learners to use grammatical accuracy, selection of appropriate vocabulary, cohesion and coherence in the arrangement of content, proper use of punctuation and capitalization. While writing, the learners follow a process which includes planning, outlining a blueprint of composition, generating contents, drafting and putting the content on the paper, and correcting them by revising, editing and modifying. Writing is a mirror of cultural manifestation of the writer through which he communicates with the readers in linguistically accepted norms.

The difference of L1 and L2 is very significant in the context of teaching writing skills to EFL and ESL learners. It has been accepted that the process of writing in one's first language is not the same as the act of writing in one's second language (Kroll, 1994). Silva (1993, cited in Weigle, 2009) states that it is found in review of differences between first and second language writing that writing in a second language tends to be more constrained, more difficult and less

effective than writing in a first language: second language writers plan less, review less, and write less fluently and accurately than first language writers.

Ferris (2003) reviewed a number of studies on ESL writing and found that most of the studies in ESL writing came from L1 sources and ESL writing as a separate entity of research was still in developing stage. He investigated the influence of research in L1 writing on L2 writing and classified the findings in to two groups. First group of scholars (e.g., Raimes, 1985; Spack, 1988; Zamel, 1987) suggested to take the same types of instruction for L2 writers as L1 writers except that they need “more of everything”. He found that the second group of scholars (Eskey, 1983, Horowitz, 1986, Johns, 1995, Silva, 1988, 1993, 1997, and Raimes, 1985) contended that L2 writers were so different from L1 writers that every pedagogical technique advanced by L1 composition research needed to be carefully reconsidered to its appropriateness for L2 writers. Silva (1997, cited in Ferris, 2003) argued that ESL students write fundamentally distinctive and need to be (a) understood, (b) placed in suitable learning contexts, (c) provided with appropriate instruction, and (d) evaluated fairly.

Reviewing the development in ESL writing and its distinctiveness from L1 writing, Krapels (1994) studied L2 writing process research and conducted a survey of several studies and concluded the following findings: A lack of competence in writing in English results more from the lack of composing competence than from the lack of linguistic competence. (e.g., Jones 1982; Zamel 1982; Raimes 1985a)

1. The composing process of “unskilled” L2 writers are similar to those of “unskilled” L1 writers; likewise, the composing processes of “skilled” L2 writers are similar to those of “skilled” L1 writers. Therefore, differences between L1 and L2 writers relate to composing proficiency rather than to their first languages. (e.g., Zamel 1983)
2. .... one’s first language writing process transfers to or is reflected in one’s second language writing process. (e.g., Edelsky 1982; Gaskill 1986; Jones and Tetroe 1987)
3. The composing processes of L2 writers are somewhat different from the composing process of L1 writers. A finding that contradicts item (2). (e.g., Raimes 1985a,b, 1987; Arndt 1987)
4. First language use when writing in a second language, a fairly common strategy among L2 writers, varies. (e.g., Martin-Betancourt 1986; Cumming 1987; Friedlander) (Some studies offer contradictory findings on this issue.)
5. Using L1 when writing in L2 frequently concerns vocabulary, and enables the L2 writer to sustain the composing process. (e.g., Raimes 1985a; Martin-Betancourt 1986; Arndt 1987) L1 use is often an inventional (e.g., Johnson 1985), sometimes an organizational (e.g., Lay 1982) and occasionally a stylistic strategy (e.g., Cumming 1987).
6. Certain writing tasks, apparently those related to culture-bound topics, elicit more first language use when writing in a second language than other tasks do (e.g., Lay 1982; Burtoff 1983; Johnson 1985). (Krapels, 1994, p. 49-50)

Though these findings are contradictory but exhibit significant development to the overall growth in the body of knowledge concerning second language learning (Krapels, 1994). The findings differentiate between L1 and L2 composition and develop theoretical understanding about ESL/EFL composition with reference to the learning context of ESL/EFL composition, writing instructions, and cultural and linguistic background of the learners. Along with linguistic and cultural variations of the learners, L2 composition instructions also change. For example, studies on Arab / Saudi students’ EFL composition indicate the difference between L1 and L2

composition. Al-Sindy (1994) analyzed syntactic interference errors in adult Saudi students' writing and found that along with syntactic errors, Saudi students had committed a great number of errors in other linguistic aspects such as: lexicon, semantics, phonology, and punctuation. He found that the difficulty in learning EFL/ESL is not just because of syntactic interference, but it is, also, due to semantic, pragmatic, and cultural interference of Arabic. He suggested to EFL teachers to take the interference factor of L2 in all linguistic and cultural areas, as well as other factors in consideration when dealing with Saudi students, in particular, and Arab students in general.

Script of L1, shape of its letters, and directionality of writing in it also influence the process of writing and psychology of the learners. Al-Arfaj (1996) stated that ESL writers of Arabic background need more time to familiarize their eyes and brains with a different writing system of English than those who are native speakers of other languages which use the Roman alphabet (e.g. Spanish). Aljamhour (1996) studied the English writing process of two Saudi graduate students and their problems during the stages of pre-writing, writing and revising. While describing organizational, rhetorical, and grammatical problems of Saudi students' writing, he found that his subjects were unable to master the usage of capitalization in their English writing as they did not capitalize many proper nouns and even did not begin the sentence with capital letter. One of the subjects wrote the sentence: ... *'where profet mohamed was bom'* and did not capitalize the proper name of the prophet Mohammed. (Aljamhour, 1996, p. 85)

Smith (2002) has given a detailed account of characteristic difficulties of ESL learners who speak Arabic as their mother tongue and explained how these difficulties appear in their use of English language. Responding to orthography and punctuation difficulties, he stated:

“Arabic orthography is a cursive system, running from right to left. Only consonants and long vowels are written. There is no upper and lower case distinction, nor can the isolated forms of letters normally be juxtaposed to form words....Arabic speakers must, therefore, learn an entirely new alphabet for English, including a capital letter system; and then master its rather unconventional spelling patterns. All aspects of writing in English cause major problems for Arabic speakers, and they should not be expected to cope with reading or writing at the same level or pace as European students who are at a similar level of proficiency in oral English” (Smith, 2002, p. 199).

Smith (2002) has described a number of errors Arab learners usually commit in ESL writing and reading. One of them is capitalization errors evaluated in this study:

“Malformation of individual letters, owing to insufficient early training, or the development of idiosyncratic writing system.... This is most usually seen with capital letters (often omitted), with the letters o, a, t, d, g, and the cursive linking of almost any letters. Many adult Arabs continue to print in English rather than attempt cursive script” (Smith, 2002, p. 200).

Al-Kahtani (2002) studied literacy experiences of a Saudi learner in two different settings: Saudi Arabia and the United States. He elaborated the factors that affected student's growth as a reader and a writer focusing on both process and product. According to him, some problems that the

learner faced were L1 and L2 orthographic differences, the directionality of reading and writing, and instructional background. He recommended for language teachers to be aware of orthographic and linguistic factors of the learners because they may have some impacts on learner's writing ability. Nation (2009) confirmed Al-Arfaj (1996) and Al-Kahtani (2002) and found that Arab learners of English had greater difficulty in putting ideas into written form due to the difference between the writing systems of the learners' first language and the second language.

Al-Sindy (1994), Al-Arfaj (1996), Aljamhour (1996), Smith (2002), Al-Kahtani (2002), Sawalmeh (2013), Raja & Zahid (2013), Mahmoud (2014) are some studies on Saudi students' writing and present different areas of errors in Saudi students' writing. They have also referred briefly to the errors of capitalization which has been extensively studied in this research. Using correct form of capitalization is one of the prominent writing conventions in English language (Nation 2009) and capitalization errors is as significant as other areas of research in Saudi students' writing. But a review of these studies ascertains that capitalization errors have not been studied exclusively.

#### ***Historical background of capitalization***

The convention of using capitalization in English language was developed in 16th and 17th century with the development of punctuation marks. Earlier they were used as a sign of elocution and were not necessary part of syntactics. It was Ben Jonson in 1617 who first recommended syntactical punctuation in England through his English Grammar. The 1625 edition of Francis Bacon's Essays also shows the use of punctuation as syntactical feature in his writings. Robert Monteith in 1704 and Joseph Robertson in 1795 published their influential treatises on syntactical punctuation. The system of punctuation which is used by the writers today has been completed since the 17th century. Three of the most important components were:

1. The space left blank between words
2. Indentation of the first line of a new paragraph
3. The uppercase or capital letter written at the beginning of a sentence and at the beginning of a proper name or a title. (Brown, 2013)

#### ***Defining capitalization and capitalization errors***

Cambridge Dictionaries Online (2014), the word 'capitalize' (verb) means "to write a letter of the alphabet as a capital or to write first letter of word as a capital".

Capitalization refers to the peculiar feature of English language in which certain words are written in capital letters (upper case) and other words or letters are written in small letters (lower case). There are some particular rules of English language which dictate capitalization to be applied in writing. While teaching writing to EFL learners, the system of capitalization is a significant aspect of English language because it is used to punctuate sentences and to distinguish proper nouns from other words (The Oxford Guide to Style, 2002).

Capitalization makes communication clear, effective and impressive by giving the text a standard and distinctive appearance. It specifies proper and common nouns in the text and enables readers to skim and scan the text faster. Each sentence starting with a capital letter carries a new idea and helps readers to distinguish within different ideas in the text. Capitalization is also a medium to describe different kinds of moods and attitudes of the writer.

Capitalization errors means errors deviated from the established rules of capitalization in English. Viewing capitalization irregularities in the writing of Saudi students, the researcher decided to call them capitalization errors instead of mistakes.

### ***Rules of capitalization***

In the study, 8 major rules of capitalizations (1-8) are selected from students' book: Fundamentals of English Grammar by Betty Azar (2003) which is a reference book in the curriculum of the program. Other two rules (9-10) are common errors of capitalization concerned to orthographical differences (Smith, 2002, p. 200) and use of Arabic proper and common noun' (Ritter, 2002, p. 92).

1. The first word of a sentence will be capitalized for example '*We saw a movie last night*'.
2. The name of people will be capitalized for example '*I met George Adams yesterday*'.
3. Titles used with the names of the people will be capitalized for example '*Do you know Professor (Prof.) Alston?*'
4. Months, days, and holidays will be capitalized for example '*I was born in April*'.
5. The names of places. It applies to city, state, province, country, continent, ocean, lake, river, desert, mountain, school, business, street, building, park and zoo, for example '*They are from Mexico*'.
6. The titles of books, articles and movies will be capitalized '*The Old Man and the Sea*'.
7. The names of languages and nationalities and religion. '*She speaks Spanish*', *Buddhism*, *Islam*
8. The pronoun 'I' will be capitalized. '*Yesterday I fell off my bicycle*'. (adapted from Azar, 2003, p. 339)
- 9: malformation of individual letters (Smith, 2002, p. 200)
- 10: use of Arabic proper and common noun' (Ritter, 2002,p. 92)

### ***Source of Capitalization Errors***

English and Arabic originate from two different language families. English is an Indo-European language and Arabic is a Semitic language. English has 26 letters which are written with Latin script in Roman alphabets while Arabic has 28 letters which are written with Abjadiyya script in Arabic alphabets. English is written from left to right. Arabic is written from right to left. English follows strict rules of using upper case and lower case in writing while Arabic does not make any distinction between upper and lower case. The rules for punctuation in Arabic are flexible when compared to the English language (BBC, 2014). These fundamental differences between Arabic and English make writing skill complex for Saudi students resulting which they commit errors in many areas. One of the areas where errors are mainly found is in the application of capitalization by Saudi students. Many approaches and theories have been adopted to evaluate and explain the sources and reasons of errors. Contrastive analysis and error analysis are the two significant approaches used by the EFL/ESL writing researchers to explain sources and reasons of errors.

Contrastive Analysis (CA) is an approach used to explain ESL / EFL learners' errors based on comparison of L1 and L2 to determine similarities and differences. This theory is based on Structuralism and Behaviorism of the 1940s and 1950s. The founder of CA, Robert Lado (1957 cited in Troike, 2006) in "*Linguistics Across Cultures*" stated that the theory assumes that the patterns that cause difficulty and the one that do not cause can be predicted and described by

comparing systematically the language and culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the student (Troike, 2006).

Contrastive Analysis compares L1 and L2 in two ways. Firstly, it focuses on the surface forms of L1 and L2 i.e contrasting the phonology of L1 and L2 first, then morphology, then syntax, with the lexicon receiving relatively little attention, and discourse still less. The origin of this notion lies in behaviorist psychology of habit formation in the process of Stimulus – Response – Reinforcement (S-R-R). Secondly, it assumes that during learning L2, there will be transfer of acquired linguistic elements of L1 to L2. When the language elements of L1 facilitate appropriately in L2, the transfer is called positive. When the language elements of L1 cause linguistic inappropriateness in learning L2, the transfer is called negative (or interference). Lado (1957 cited in Troike, 2006) further elaborated that the easiest L2 structures are those which exist in L1 with the same form, meaning and distribution and the most difficult are those structures where there is partial overlap but not equivalence in form, meaning, and/or distribution (Troike, 2006).

Corder (1967 cited in Troike, 2006) article on “The significance of learners’ errors” launched Error Analysis (EA) as an approach. This approach described two causes of errors in L2: interlingual and intralingual. Interlingual errors happen between languages resulting from negative transfer or interference from L1. Intralingual errors happen within a language without any attribute to cross-linguistic influence. Intralingual errors are also considered developmental errors and often represent incomplete learning of L2 rules or overgeneralization of them. EA came into picture after the decline of contrastive analysis. Its emergence lies in the shift of language learning theories from Behaviorism to Mentalism. Unlike contrastive analysis, error analysis investigates not only the errors caused by learners’ L1 interference but also the errors which happen in learners’ mind during the process of constructing L2 or due to incomplete learning of L2 rules or overgeneralization (Troike, 2006).

Capitalization is a peculiar convention of English language which is not present in Arabic language. Thus, capitalization errors cannot be simply placed in the category of positive or negative interference because Saudi students do not apply their knowledge of capitalization from Arabic language to English language. But absence of capitalization in Arabic language causes difficulty for Saudi students as compared to those students whose languages use the Roman alphabet e.g. Spanish (Al-Arfaj, 1996). Thus, Saudi students have to learn capitalization rules from the beginning of EFL learning and they have to cautiously approach to the application of capitalization while writing in English. They have to develop a new habit of using capitalization which is dissimilar to the habit of writing in L1. Hence capitalization errors tend to be more intralingual problem than interlingual.

In this section, the review of literature covered the theoretical development of L1 composition and EFL/ESL writing, orthographical and mechanical differences of L1 and L2, and difficulties faced by Arab and Saudi learners in EFL composition process. The review concludes with the historical background of capitalization, definition of capitalization and capitalization errors, selected rules of capitalization, and theory of error evaluation (Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis). In the succeeding sections, the data and research design is presented.



### **Plan of Study**

The present study evaluates errors of capitalization in Saudi students' writing. This study is conducted at the College of Applied Medical Sciences for females, Bisha University, Al-Namas, Saudi Arabia. A mixed method of research design has been used. The data has been collected from the real classroom of 20 Saudi female students in the form of assignments, classroom tests and examination copies. The students are enrolled in Bachelor of Science in Nursing and are taking English language preparatory program.

The researcher collected EFL writing samples, identified the capitalization errors, described the errors with reference to the 10 major rules of capitalization, and explained the errors taking into account the theories of Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis. The data was evaluated and interpreted in the context of classroom learning and L1 background of the students. The study is supported with the EFL classroom observation and focused interviews of 10 students. Following procedures used by Ellis (1994 cited in Troike, 2006) have been used in the study:

1. Collection of sample of learner language:
2. Identification of errors
3. Description of errors
4. Explanation of errors (Interlingual and Intralingual factors)
5. Evaluation of errors (Troike, 2006 p. 39-40)

### **Rationale and Aim of the Study**

Course description of Intensive English for Health Sciences-019 aims to enable students to produce a grammatically correct and well organized text that conforms to English writing conventions such as capitalization. In reality, Saudi female students of the course produce writing text with a variety of capitalization errors. It is an institutional need to identify areas of errors in EFL writing of Saudi students and to look for effective pedagogical implications in order to make changes in teaching – learning process in EFL writing classrooms.

### **Methodology**

#### ***Participants***

The study includes writing sample of 20 Saudi female students between the ages of 16 to 19 years old. They are enrolled in Bachelor of Science in Nursing Level -1 and are taking English language preparatory program at the College of Applied Medical Sciences for females, Bisha University, Al-Namas Saudi Arabia.

#### ***Writing samples***

Samples of students' writing were collected between the periods from September 2014 to December 2014. These samples included assignments, classroom tests and examination copies. The researcher randomly selected 5 paragraphs written at home as assignments, 2 paragraphs written in class hours and 1 paragraph written in the final examination.

The topics of the assignments were 'Myself', 'My Father', 'My brother', 'My city', and 'My country'. Word limit was 60 words for each single assignment and thus all five assignments consisted of 300 words. The topics of classroom work were 'My Dress' and 'My religion' with word limit of 100 words each. Thus, classroom work of each student consisted of 200 words.

The topic of writing task in the final examination was 'My car' with word limit of 100 words in descriptive format. Samples collected from each student consisted of approximately 600 words. That will be approximately 12000 words altogether for 20 students.

### ***Procedure***

To identify the errors of capitalization, 8 rules of capitalization were adapted from Azar (2003 p. 339). The researcher also included two exclusive categories of errors in Arab students' writing which are though not taught as a rule of capitalization but it is believed to acquire at early level of EFL learning. They are (1) malformation in individual letters highlighted by Smith, (2002, p. 200) and (2) use of Arabic proper and common noun discussed by Ritter (2002 p. 92). The researcher will use the term 'categories' to address these rules or above mentioned categories of capitalization errors. The term 'category' throughout the study has been used to refer to the rules of capitalization mentioned at the end of the literature review.

The researcher supported the explanation and evaluation of the data with the observation and responses of the students to the following questions in the interview:

1. What are the probable reasons for capitalization errors?
2. Do you find rules of capitalization difficult to follow in your writing?
3. What do you expect from your teacher to do to help students in capitalization errors?

### ***Research Questions***

1. What are the capitalization errors in Saudi female students' EFL writing?
2. What are the possible reasons?

### **Result & Discussion**

The data shown in Table 1 was collected as a portfolio of 20 Saudi female students who composed approximately 600 words consisting of 5 home-written assignments, 2 classroom-written paragraphs and 1 paragraph written in final examination. Table 1 represents data of capitalization errors from two perspectives.

Firstly in Table-1, the numbers of capitalization errors committed by each student in each category of capitalization are presented horizontally. Total errors of each student are added together and presented in the percentage of errors. The percentage of errors is calculated manually out of the total number of 600 words composed by each student.

Secondly, the numbers of capitalization errors which are made in each category of capitalization by all the students are presented vertically. Errors in all categories of capitalization are added together and presented in the percentage of errors. The percentage of errors is calculated manually out of the total number of 12000 words (600 words X 20 students = 12000 words) composed by all students.

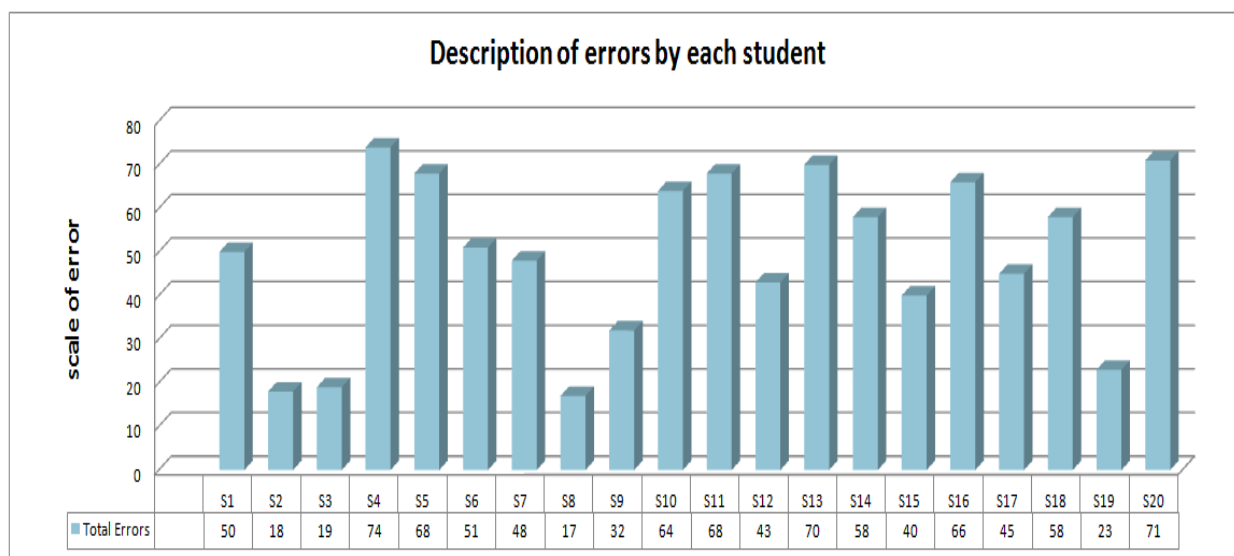
**Table 1. Description of errors by each student & categories of capitalization**

Students	Description of Capitalization Errors by Students and Categories (C)										Total Errors	Percentage
	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10		
S1	4	6	2	0	9	0	1	0	27	1	50	8.33%
S2	2	4	3	1	2	3	0	0	3	0	18	3%
S3	1	0	1	3	4	4	0	0	6	0	19	3.16%
S4	0	2	4	1	9	5	2	0	44	7	74	12.33%
S5	0	4	4	2	14	0	2	0	40	2	68	11.33%
S6	1	0	3	0	8	1	2	1	29	6	51	8.50%
S7	2	2	0	2	1	0	0	1	35	5	48	8%
S8	1	0	2	0	6	0	0	0	6	2	17	2.83%
S9	6	0	3	1	5	0	0	0	13	4	32	5.33%
S10	2	1	0	2	5	4	1	0	47	2	64	10.66%
S11	7	11	9	0	16	5	3	0	16	1	68	11.33%
S12	0	1	4	0	2	3	4	1	18	10	43	7.16%
S13	0	3	4	0	9	3	1	0	44	6	70	11.66%
S14	3	3	0	1	9	0	4	0	33	5	58	9.66%
S15	0	9	2	1	6	2	0	0	16	4	40	6.66%
S16	2	5	4	0	13	1	4	0	34	3	66	11%
S17	11	0	0	0	7	4	0	0	21	2	45	7.50%
S18	2	5	2	3	3	3	3	2	34	1	58	9.66%
S19	3	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	14	2	23	3.83%
S20	0	2	1	0	4	3	2	1	47	11	71	11.83%
Total errors in each category (C)	47	58	48	17	134	42	30	6	527	74	983	
Percentage errors in each category	0.39%	0.48%	0.40%	0.14%	1.11%	0.35%	0.25%	0.05%	4.39%	0.61%	8.19%	
Total Students' errors = 983 out of 12000 words											8.19%	

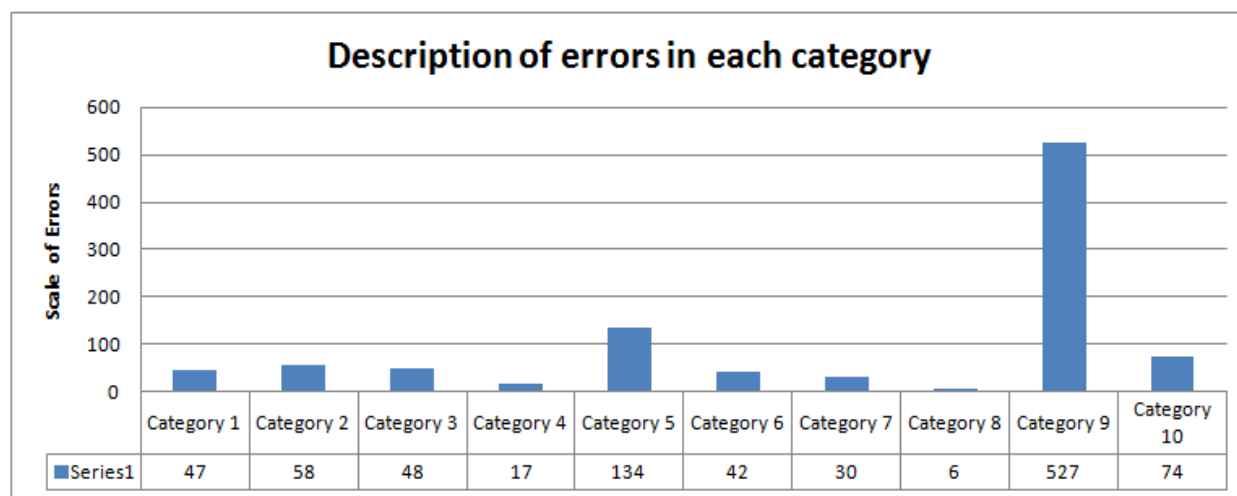
Table -1 states that out of 20 students, each student has committed errors of capitalization. Even though the students have mastered certain categories of capitalization in school education, they have committed errors in some of the categories of capitalization. Errors by all the students range between lowest number of 17 errors (2.83 %) to a highest number of 74 errors (12.3%) in all the categories of capitalization. The occurrence of errors by each student clearly indicates that capitalization errors are one of the significant areas of errors in EFL writing of Saudi students spreading across all categories of capitalization.

Graph -1 depicts capitalization errors of all 20 students. It displays the errors of each student identified from a composition of 600 words at undergraduate level. Graph – 2 depicts capitalization errors in all 10 categories (Categories refer to rules and convention of capitalization.). All errors in categories have been identified from the writings of 20 students which contain approximately 12000 words.

**Graph 1. Description of errors by each student in capitalization**



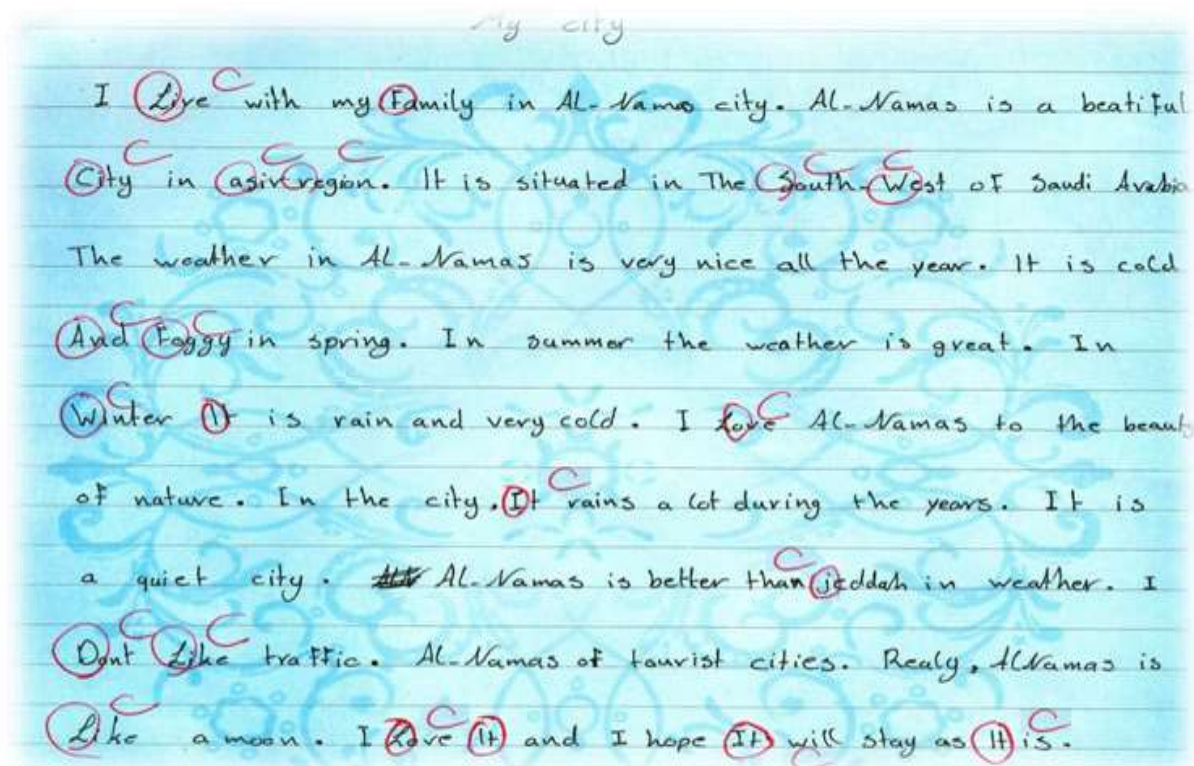
**Graph 2. Description of errors in category of capitalization**



In table- 1, each category refers to a certain rule of capitalization and shows performance of the students in that particular category. The results reveal that category-9 contains the highest number of errors i.e. 527 errors which constitute 4.39% of capitalization errors. This category describes malformation of letters as indicated by Smith (2002, p. 200). The data of EFL writing of Saudi students in category-9 indicate that incomplete learning of L2 regarding orthographic convention of English language is a prime reason of errors. Differences between Arabic and English language also attributes to disregarding the application of capitalization. The errors are because of interference of mother tongue as well as incomplete learning.

During the assessment of EFL writing of Saudi students, it was found that malformation of the letters and words is one of the most critical areas of errors. Students face problems in distinguishing and using upper case and lower case. A sample of EFL writing with errors of category-9 is presented in Sample-1:

### Sample 1. Student's writing



During the observation of EFL writing classroom, the researcher found that students face difficulty in shaping letters as upper and lower case, consequently their writing portray malformation of letters and words.

Results in table-1 indicate that category-5 is the second category with highest number of errors in capitalization. It contains 134 errors i.e. 1.11%. This category refers to the capitalization of names of places such as city, state, province, country, continent, ocean, lake, river, desert, mountain, school, business, street, building, park and zoo. Observation of EFL writing classroom revealed that Saudi students sometimes translate their knowledge of Arabic writing pattern into English and do not differentiate between the capitalization of proper noun and common noun. The pattern of errors seems confused and over generalized for example in Sample -1 and Sample -2, some proper nouns are capitalized while others are not. This category presents Interlingual and intralingual errors.

Category-10 is the third in the series of categories of errors. There are 74 errors which make 0.61% of errors in this category. This category states capitalization of words borrowed from Arabic language. Students used Arabic words such as *thob* and *al-hijab* in the composition, which are proper nouns and common nouns. No specific rule of capitalization was used for the words borrowed from L1. It can be accounted to the guidelines which are not provided by the course instructor or course materials. Consequently, the students get confused in using capitalization for the Arabic words which are common\proper nouns. These kinds of errors tend to interlingual errors. Sample-2 presents the errors.

### Sample 2. Student's writing errors

Arabic common noun	Arabic Proper noun
Thob	Al-failiyah
Ghutra	Al-islam
Bisht	Al-roba Al-khali
kabsa	Al-omrah
Al-Hijab	Al-hajj
Abaya	ramzan

Category-2 is the fourth in the series of the categories of errors in which students have committed 58 errors i.e. 0.48%. Category-2 deals with capitalizing the name of people. During the observation, the researcher found that students were largely familiar with the rule stated in category 2. The possible reason behind the low occurrence of this error is that it is a less complex category of capitalization.

Category-3 is the fifth in the series of the categories of errors. Category-3 states that titles with the names of people should be capitalized such as Mr., Dr. etc. The responses show that students have committed 48 errors which make 0.40%. Topics of writing assignments, class work and examination had little use of application of this category. In spite of little scope of using titles in the writing, the occurrences of the errors reflect that students have incomplete knowledge about the usage of this rule.

Category-1 is the sixth in the series of the categories of errors. In this category, students committed 47 errors i.e. 0.39%. This category states that the first word of a sentence should be capitalized. It is a fundamental rule in English language and a cornerstone of the mechanics of EFL composition. The occurrence of 47 i.e. 0.39% errors is high because it confirms that students are disregarding or facing difficulty even to apply the basic rules of capitalization. It may be due to L1 writing habits.

Category-6 is the seventh in the series of the categories of errors. This category presents 42 errors i.e. 0.35%. This category states that titles of books, essays, articles and movies should be capitalized. This is an elemental need of EFL composition and errors in this category show students are not very well familiar with the application of the rules.

Category-7 is the eighth in the series of the categories of errors. This category states that the names of languages, nationalities and religion should be capitalized. Students committed 30 errors which amount to 0.25%. Use of this category was minimal in the composition but the existence of errors confirms unfamiliarity of students.

Category-4 is the ninth in the series of the categories of errors. This category identifies the number of errors in capitalizing months, days and holidays such as January, Saturday and National day. 17 errors i.e. 0.14% were revealed in this category. Amount of errors are minimal and the second least in the categories. The reasons could be its minimal use in the composition. Referring to the category -3, topics of the writing assignments, class work and examination had little scope of using this rule. Nonetheless, existence of the errors is intralingual errors.

Category-8 is the last in the series of the categories of errors. This category states that the pronoun 'I' should be capitalized even if it occurs in the middle of the sentences. There were 6 errors which make 0.05%. This category has the least number of errors in all the categories. Although the existence of the errors is negligible but it is possible to be related to the problem of malformation as described in category-9.

#### ***Students' Responses to Capitalization Errors***

During the interview with the students, the researcher found that students commit errors in capitalization due several reasons:

1. When a writing task in classroom requires to be completed within a limited period of time, they could not concentrate on capitalization and their major focus is on the meaning, grammar, spelling and organization of the paragraph.
2. They started learning English from grade 6 where the focus of learning was more on grammar than on writing.
3. They used four line notebooks for practicing upper case and lower case for two years which was not sufficient to be able to write correct order of case.
4. They know the rules of capitalization but they forget while writing in English.

#### **Findings of the study**

According to Corder (1967), errors are considered a problem that should be eradicated as soon as possible. Like other errors, capitalization errors need to be addressed in ESL/EFL language programs. Findings of the study establish that capitalization errors are a critical area of errors in Saudi students' EFL writing and these errors are spread across all major categories of capitalization. The study presents the evidence that capitalization errors constitute notable part of errors in EFL composition of Saudi students. Errors from category-1 to category-8 indicate that Saudi students at undergraduate level commit errors in applying principle rules of capitalization. Errors in category-9 and category-10 confirm that orthographic differences of English and Arabic languages and low familiarity with linguistic conventions of English are main sources of errors. Highest numbers of errors of capitalization are found in the category- 9 which deals with malformation of individual letters and words. The result in category -9 corroborates the research of Smith (2002) who highlighted malformation as a specific problem in Arab learners' writing. Referring to sample -1 Student's writing, it is evident that Saudi students face problems in forming the letters such as /c/, /f/, /i /, /k/, /l/, /p/,/s/, and /w/. During analyzing the writing data,

the researcher found that the errors in forming the letters are due to unfamiliarity of distinctions between upper case and lower case. These errors have some similarity with the corresponding upper case such as C, F, I, K, L, P, S, W.

Errors of capitalization are interlingual as well interlingual. They are interlingual because orthographic differences of English and Arabic languages contribute negatively in the occurrences of errors. Errors of capitalization are intralingual because Saudi learners do not transfer rules of capitalization from Arabic language. Mastery in the rules of capitalization maximizes or minimizes the scope of errors. Learners generalize, overgeneralize and overextend in applying upper case and lower case against the established conventions of capitalization. Evaluation of students' writing and researcher's interview with the students reveals some of the following findings:

1. Malformation of letters prevails in the writing of Saudi students. It is noticeable in forming letters such as c, f, i, k, l, p, s, and w.
2. The differences of Arabic and English conventions cause malformation.
3. Saudi students do not have any fixed principle about capitalizing Arabic proper and common nouns.
4. Saudi students lack training in upper & lower case distinction and rules of capitalization.
5. Their primary focus remains on meaning, spelling, vocabulary and structure with the state of anxiety while secondary focus on capitalization and other mechanics.
6. They are more aware with capitalizing first word of the sentence, pronoun 'I' and name of the people than capitalizing name of places, geographical areas and locations.
7. Inadequate instructions at early education are one of the prime causes of the errors.
8. Mechanical parts of writing such as capitalization are considered insignificant at undergraduate level.

### **Recommendations**

To ensure that Saudi students are able to produce well organized and structured text in compliance with rhetorical devices and mechanics which can enable them to participate in academic discourse and socialize them in the academic community, EFL teachers, researchers, and academic bodies will have to consider following recommendations:

1. It is recommended for EFL writing instructors to focus on capitalization along with other mechanics of writing in EFL writing classes.
2. Teaching capitalization should be made the point of focus in teaching EFL writing.
3. Focused feedback on capitalization should be given to the students. It will help learners to know their weakness and will provide an opportunity to correct.
4. Capitalization corrective activities such as encircling capital word in a news paper and matching rules of capitalization with examples should be given.
5. EFL writing classes are to be made more engaging in actual writing practices than explaining how to write.
6. EFL Teachers should be aware of orthographic and linguistic difficulties of learners and provide exclusive treatment in the required area of improvement.
7. EFL teachers should develop their understanding about L1 and L2 composition.



**Limitations of the study:**

This study included limited categories of capitalization and limited number of female students at preparatory year programs. If this study is conducted on different levels of students of both genders, results may ascertain the study.

**Conclusion**

The study presented a detailed analysis of errors in capitalization. It investigated interlingual and intralingual errors of capitalization. Awareness with the rules of capitalization, understanding of orthographic differences in English and Arabic languages, need of reinforcement of capitalization at undergraduate levels, and awareness with regional-linguistic complexities in EFL composition were issues addressed in this study. This study has highlighted the errors of capitalization as an exclusive field of study which needs to be investigated further. The study opens new directions of research with focused analysis of capitalization errors in different EFL settings and can find new dimensions in EFL/ESL composition.

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