

Features of Saudi English Research Articles Abstracts

Wafaa Fallatah

Faculty of Arts, School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics
Monash University, Clayton, Australia

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Department of Languages and Translation
Taibah University, Medinah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Abstract

The research article (RA) abstract genre has attracted significant attention in the academic community. A well-written abstract can draw journal editors' attention and improve an author's chances of being accepted for publishing and later being read and cited by peers. This study is a contrastive genre analysis of Saudi English RA abstracts within a World Englishes (WE) perspective. It aims to answer two questions. What are the genre structure and periodicity patterns in abstracts written by Saudi researchers for a local audience? What are the differences and similarities in genre structure and periodicity patterns between abstracts written by Saudi researchers and abstracts written internationally? The data comprised three sets of RA abstracts: the first was a Saudi English set with 37 abstracts; the second was an international set with 29 abstracts; and the third was an Arabic set with 27 abstracts. The three sets were analysed based on Swales and Feak's (2009) five-moves CARS model through which this study investigated the moves' presence, sequence, cyclicity, length, use of citation, use of acronyms, use of percentages, use of listing, and paragraphing. Findings show that Saudi English RA abstracts differ from the international RA abstracts in showing more move presence fluctuation; verbosity; move cyclicity; excessive use of citation, acronyms, and listings; and multi-paragraphing. Due to the scarcity of studies about Saudi English in general, this study could shed some light on this emerging variety of English and trigger more studies on Saudi English RA abstracts from new perspectives.

Key words: Abstract, Saudi English, Swales' abstract model, moves

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Introduction

During the last few decades an increasingly significant body of scholarly research has been devoted to an exploration of the features of different varieties of English as used in different parts of the world in diverse social and cultural contexts. Kachru (1986b, 1990) divides these varieties of English into three concentric circles. The *Inner Circle* includes countries in which English has traditional historical and sociolinguistic origins, such as the UK, USA, and Australia. The *Outer Circle* includes countries in which English spread through colonization, such as China and Nigeria. The *Expanding Circle* includes countries in which English is widely used as a medium of communication without playing a historical or constitutional role. According to this stratification of World Englishes (WE), English spoken in Saudi Arabia is considered an Expanding Circle variety.

WE focuses on studying the emergence of localized or indigenized varieties of English that are not considered as an exclusively European or Western language, and its development is not entirely dictated by the usage of its so-called native speakers (Ferguson, 1982). It is more concerned with being inclusive of all varieties of English and examining them, not in terms of correctness but in terms of appropriateness and equality (Proshina, 2014). Kachru (1986a) asserts that an important aspect of identifying an emerging variety of English is examination of its formal features: phonological, phonetic, syntactic, and lexical. According to Mahboob (2013), despite English playing an important role in education, the economy, and politics in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the number of studies examining English as produced by Saudi people within the framework of WE is very limited.

One of the areas of Saudi English (SE) that has been studied is the features of research article (RA) abstracts and how they could be indicative of Saudi English as an emerging variety. Hence, the research reported here aimed to address the following questions:

1. What are the genre structure and periodicity patterns in abstracts written by Saudi researchers for a local audience?
2. What are the differences and similarities in genre structure and periodicity patterns between abstracts written by Saudi researchers and abstracts written internationally?

Literature review

WE is a product of a linguistic phenomenon in which language adjusts to new environments and changes to suit its new realities. This is what Kachru and Smith (2009) explore as one of the two main ways in which English impacted the world: the Englishization of local languages and the nativization of the English language. WE is primarily interested in the latter. A leading researcher in this area was Kachru (1997) who presented one of the most influential models of the spread of English in the world, and captured it in the previously mentioned three concentric circles model of languages. The WE field has expanded to include numerous research studies employing this model, such as those by Gonzales (2010), Hartford and Mahboob (2004), Mahboob (2009), Evans (2011), and Al-Rawi (2012).

There is limited scholarly attention paid by linguists to the level of the English varieties spoken in the Arab World within the WE framework. Despite considerable research conducted on English in the Middle East from pedagogical and macro-linguistics perspectives, very few studies have used the WE framework to investigate the features of English as spoken by Arab

speakers in these countries (Mahboob, 2013). For example, Reynolds (1993) examines the pragmatics of language use in Egyptian English newspaper editorials. Similarly, Atawneh and Sridhar (1993) test the pragmatics of Arabic English as displayed in the politeness strategies employed in English language use by Arab bilinguals. While Stevens (1994) investigates the characteristics of Egyptian street hustlers' routines, Schaub (2000) has given a relatively more recent account of Egyptian English from a macro-linguistics perspective. A more recent study has been conducted by Fussell (2011) in which he investigates the features of what he terms 'Gulf English', which is spoken in the Arab Gulf area. This study provides a syntactic, phonological, lexical, and sociolinguistic account of the English spoken and written in the Gulf region and how it is pragmatically used to reflect the local, cultural, religious, and social attributes of the region.

In the context of Saudi Arabia, there have been studies that focus on features of Saudi English. For example, Wood (1983) explores the features of Saudi English (SE) by drawing attention to the semantic, syntactic, and phonological differences between SE and the other English varieties spoken in other Arabic countries. Al-Haq and Ahmed (1994) explore the features of Saudi students' argumentative written discourses for pedagogical purposes. Al-Haq and Smadi (1996) explore English in Saudi Arabia from a macro-linguistics point of view. The latter two studies, however, do not employ a WE perspective but instead label these features as errors and deviations. Other studies include those of Al-Rawi (2012), who investigates syntactic features, and Mahboob (2013) and Mahboob and Elyas (2014), who explore features of SE in textbooks.

The limited literature found about SE indicates that it is an understudied area of research that needs further investigation from different angles and within various perspectives. Hence, this research aims to fill the gap in the literature by providing an analysis of the language used by Saudi researchers in RA abstracts and identifying their distinct qualities that might be features of SE. In addition, this study could inform Saudi writers' knowledge of abstract genre writing conventions, which will improve their chances of getting their RAs accepted in international journals.

Methodology

Data Collection

This research is based on an analysis of RA abstracts written by Saudis and published in scholarly journals. The primary data source consisted of three sets of RA abstracts. The first set consisted of twenty English RA abstracts published in the *Journal of King Saud University: Languages and Translation*, henceforth referred to as 'the Saudi texts'. This journal is based in Riyadh, KSA, and published for a local audience. This set was the source from which features of SE were identified and compared to the next two sets of data. The second set consisted of ten international RA abstracts written by researchers of different nationalities and published for an international audience, henceforth referred to as 'the international texts'. Because this set was the norm against which the Saudi features were compared, the researcher considered that ten abstracts were sufficient to be indicative of the norm and enable a valid comparison to be drawn. The third set consisted of ten abstracts collected from an Arabic journal, henceforth referred to as 'the Arabic texts'. This set consisted of ten Arabic RA abstracts that were written by Arabic researchers and published in Jordan for a local audience. This set provided points of reference for

SE features that might be due to language transfer from Arabic to English. This number of abstracts was chosen because it can provide sufficient linguistic material to establish comparisons. All RA abstracts in the three sets were in the field of linguistics and published after 2011.

Data Analysis

The main framework that was employed in this research was Swales' (1981) and Swales and Feak's (2009) model of abstract analysis, in which the structure of RA abstracts is described in terms of 'moves'. 'A 'move' is a functional term that refers to a defined and bounded communicative act that is designed to contribute to one main communicative objective, that of the whole text' (Lorés, 2004, p. 282). The five moves and their functions are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Adopted from Swales and Feak's (2009, p. 5) five moves and their function

Moves	Function/description	Question asked
Move 1: Situating the research <STR>	Setting the scene for the current research (topic generalization)	What has been known about the field/topic of research?
Move 2: Presenting the research <PTR>	Stating the purpose of the study, research questions and/or hypotheses	What is the research about?
Move 3: Describing the methodology <DTM>	Describing the materials, subjects, variables, procedures...	How was the research done?
Move 4: Summarizing the findings <STF>	Reporting the main findings of the research.	What did the research find?
Move 5: Describing the research <DTR>	Interpreting the results and/or giving recommendations, implications/applications of the study.	What do the results mean? So what?

One of the issues arising when applying Swales' model is that identifying moves within abstracts can sometimes be ambiguous. However, regardless of differences in types, moves in RA abstracts aim at achieving the same functions that can be identified, regardless of the overlap in the structure. Hence, a single clause or phrase can include more than one move based on its function in the abstract. In order to clarify any ambiguity, the data was analysed by another linguistics researcher. Then the two analyses were compared for consistency. Very few inconsistencies occurred and these were discussed until agreement was reached on moves identification.

The Saudi and international texts were analysed on the level of genre for moves structures; this included the moves' presence/absence, sequence, overlap, use of citation, and use of listing. The findings were compared to identify persistent features in the Saudi texts that were distinctive from the norm as set by the international texts. Arabic texts were analysed only for move patterns and then were compared to the Saudi patterns.

In order to take a closer look at the language used within each move, thematic analysis was conducted at the clause level using Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. Thematic analysis is concerned with 'the point of departure of the message' and how information is organized within it (Halliday, 1985, p. 64). It shows how the writer adjusts the beginning of the clause (theme) to direct the reader to how he or she should interpret the information in the rest of the clause (rheme).

Every move within the Saudi texts was analysed for textual patterns, then compared to the international patterns. There was no comparison between the Saudi and Arabic texts on the level of the clause for two reasons: first, the textual structures of the two languages are very different since they belong to different language families; and second, SFL is developed within the context of English language structure, which makes it difficult to apply to Arabic language structure.

In addition, transitivity analysis was conducted on the Saudi and international texts for a better understanding of the structure of the whole clause. Comparison was made concerning emerging patterns of process types, circumstances, participants, voice, and negation.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the analysis and suggests explanations for the main findings, using extracts from the data in order to demonstrate some of their relevant aspects.

Table 2. Percentage of move presence

Column	Move 1	Move 2	Move 3	Move 4	Move 5
Saudi	45%	90%	65%	75%	50%
International	40%	100%	100%	100%	90%
Arabic	10%	100%	90%	90%	0%

Level of the whole text (genre analysis)

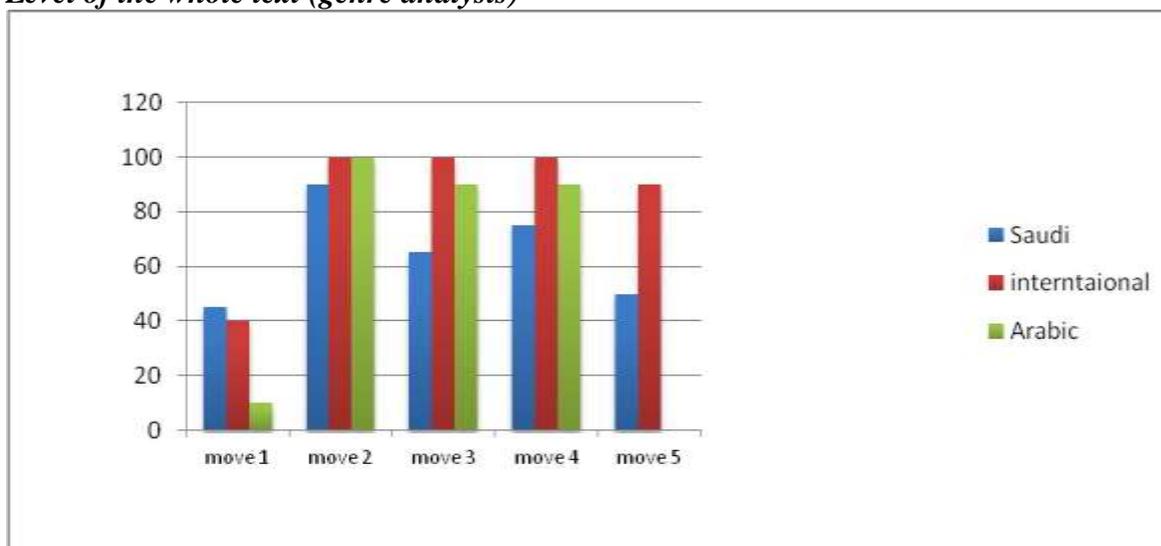


Figure 1. Percentage of move presence

As Table 2 and Figure 1 show, Saudi texts were different from both the international and Arabic texts. Only one Saudi text out of the twenty analysed contained all five moves. Move 1, which is concerned with situating the research, was present in 45% of the Saudi texts and move 5, which is concerned with recommendations, was present in 50%. The unexpected fact about the moves was that none were 100% present in any Saudi text. Move 2 was 90% present, which was the highest, move 4 was 75% and move 3 was 65%. The international data, in contrast, had moves 2, 3, and 4 present in all texts, and move 5 was present in 90% of the texts, while move 1 was the least present (40%). This indicates less consistency among Saudi researchers about which moves are obligatory or not for the formation of a good abstract. However, the Arabic texts showed a consistent pattern that differed from both the Saudi and the international sets. Moves 2, 3 and 4 were almost 100% present with percentages of 100%, 90%, and 90%, respectively. Move 1 had a 10% occurrence while move 5 did not occur in any Arabic texts.

Although abstracts could include all five moves, that is not always the case (Swales & Feak, 2009). The fact that the Saudi texts did not always include all five moves is unlikely to be caused by the word-count restrictions of the journals in which they were published. The average word count for the Saudi texts was 168.5, which is well within the common limit for an RA abstract. Furthermore, one of the longest Saudi abstracts in this data (396 words) only included move 1 and move 5, while the shortest one (85 words) included moves 1, 2, and 4, indicating the irrelevance of text length to the number of moves included.

The inclusion of move 1 (which is the orientation phase) in the RA abstracts is governed by an important factor in the three data sets. Arabic writing tends to be reader-responsible while Western writing tends to be writer-responsible (Mohamed & Omer, 2000). Therefore, it is expected that the international writers have a sense of responsibility towards the reader to include move 1 (40%), while Arab writers tend to depend on the reader to predict such information, therefore move 1 was included in only 10% of the Arabic texts. The fact that the Saudi texts presented a higher percentage (45%) for move 1 than the Arabic and international texts could be due to hypercorrection and a tendency to 'play safe' by trying to include every move.

Regarding move order, unlike the international and Arabic texts, Saudi data showed fluctuation in move order. As shown in Example 1 and 2, moves were ordered 2^ 3^ 4^ 5 in 50% of the international texts, and 2^ 3^ 4 in 80% of the Arabic texts.¹ Moves are numbered and highlighted for clarity.

Example 1. International text:

(2)This article reports a study on metaphor comprehension ... a British university. **(3)** The study participants identified words or multiword items that ... misinterpretations. **(4)** We found that of the items that were difficult ... 4 percent of cases. **(5)** As university lecturers use metaphors for important functions... metaphor comprehension.

Example 2. Arabic text

(2) تتناول هذه الدراسة صوت (الضاد)، والسعي مركز في هذه الدراسة على جَلّ جوانب هذا الصوت، سواء الجوانب المباشرة أو غي... الحرة والمقيدة للضاد، **(3)** وتحليلها على اهداء من الثقافة اللغوية اللسانية المعاصرة **(4)** وأظهرت الدراسة أنّ صوت الضاد صوت... (الفوناتيكية) لصوت الضاد، سواء التبدلات المقيدة (الفونولوجية) والمتمثلة بالمخالفة والمماثلة والإدغام.

The Saudi texts follow no pattern; although certain moves tend to start or end the Saudi RA abstracts, different types of move sequences are used, such as the order used in Example 3.

Example 3. Saudi text

(1) Given that accurate stress assignment rules can help enhance speech technology applications, (2) the present paper provides a digital processing of stress in Standard Arabic. (4) The findings indicate that stress in this language is manifested by a variety of correlates... stress assignment.

Furthermore, move overlap occurrences are different in the three sets of data. Move overlap means when a move reoccurs in a single abstract or when two or more moves are embedded in a single clause. In the Saudi data, 25% of the RA abstracts showed move overlap, in the international data the percentage was 30%, and in the Arabic data it was 0%. However, the major difference between move overlap within the Saudi and international data was in the way moves are realized within a clause. Saudi researchers tended to realize each move in a separate clause while the international researchers tended to embed one move into another, such as in Examples 4 and 5.

Example 4. Saudi move overlap

(1) The concept of equivalence is believed to be ... ([Bolaños, 2005], [Snell-Hornby, 1988] and [Nord, 1997]). (5) This paper argues that ... equivalence. (1) Many researchers have discussed equivalence in translating ... the English speaking readers (Baker, 1992). (5) In such cases, I argue that ... metaphors and proverbs.

Example 5. International move overlap

(3) Using a corpus-based approach (4) investigates the construction of stance in finite reporting clauses with that-clause complementation

Such differences in the method of move realization in the Saudi text may indicate the writer's desire to be clear about move boundaries for the sake of abstract clarity; however, it could also be due to difficulty in creating a complex semantic structure despite being able to create a complex grammatical structure.

One of the most common strategies in abstract writing is for writers to establish a niche for themselves by considering prior scholarly research and finding gaps in it, or raising some questions about it, and then announcing how their contribution proposes to remedy these deficiencies (Swales, 1990). Justifying the importance of the research topic is often accomplished in two main ways: citing other research to indicate the attention given to the topic by other scholars, stating the significance of the topic through employing textual resources, or both. Focusing on the first, Table 3 shows that Saudi texts have the highest percentage of citation usage (30%), the international texts have 10% and the Arabic texts have no citations.

Table 3. Use of citations

	Texts including citations	Total number of citations	Topic of importance claims	Number of occurrences of topic importance claims
Saudi texts	30%	19	15%	7
International texts	10%	3	30%	6
Arabic texts	0%	0	0%	0

Example 6 from the Saudi texts and Example 7 from the international texts illustrate how citations are utilized by each group to justify the topic's importance.

Example 6. Saudi text citation

Several theories on the concept of equivalence have been elaborated within this field in the past fifty years. [Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995], [Jakobson, 1959], [Nida and Taber, 1982], [Catford, 1965], [House, 1977] and [Baker, 1992]. Indeed, "Equivalence" has provided a useful theoretical ...translation processes. However, the notion of equivalence has also been criticized ... ill-defined" ([Bolaños, 2005], [Snell-Hornby, 1988] and [Nord, 1997]).

Example 7. International text citation

Central theme were our attempts to reduce power differentials between researchers ... (Norton, 2000) in our collaborative research project. Drawing on numerous small stories (Bamberg, 2004; Georgakopoulou, 2006), we argue that several researcher identities were realized... teacher educator.

In the second approach, differences can be seen in stating the significance of the topic across the three datasets. The Saudi texts state topic significance in only 15% of the abstracts, while the international texts have double that percentage. This could be cautiously interpreted in terms of comfort zone; Saudi researchers who write in English find themselves, to a certain degree, more compelled to solidify their claims with sufficient evidence, hence, they refer to other scholarly research for support. Conversely, the international writers often feel more at ease since they are writing in English to the English academic community, which leads to an assumption of shared knowledge about the topic, and therefore they may feel less compelled to justify what can be considered as common knowledge. Furthermore, it is worth noting that 7% out of the 15% of topic importance claims are accompanied by citations, which indicates that Saudi writers are more inclined to emphatically prove their point in English.

Example 8. Saudi text

The concept of equivalence is believed to be a central issue in translation although its definition, relevance, and applicability within the field of translation theory ... in the past fifty years. [Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995], [Jakobson, 1959], [Nida and Taber, 1982], [Catford, 1965], [House, 1977] and [Baker, 1992].

Example 9. International text

There has been much research on language and identity with respect to learners, teachers, and teacher educators, an important stakeholder in language education.

Finally, analysis shows that in 20% of the Saudi texts, move 4, in which results are stated, is placed in the form of a list², which is more congruent with the Arabic findings than the international ones, as illustrated in Table 4. Such occurrences could be because the Saudi researchers have transferred Arabic rhetorical properties into their English writing, resulting in a textual organization that is incongruent with the international norm. It is worth noting that one Saudi text contained two lists each of five items.

Table 4. Percentage of Listing Items

	Percentage of texts containing lists	Max. of numbering	of list	Min. of numbering	of list
Saudi texts	20%	5		2	
International texts	0%	0		0	
Arabic texts	30%	3		2	

Level of the clause

In order to have a better understanding of the thematic and textual organizations of the moves of RA abstracts on the level of the clause, thematic, process, and tense choices were examined across the Saudi and English texts.

Regarding thematic structure, apart from move 2, there is a lot of incongruence between the Saudi and international researchers. The Saudi texts employed approximately 3.84% of textual resources while the international data employed 47.82%. As stated earlier, the role of the theme is to direct the reader towards how to interpret the information. In addition, any change from unmarked theme to textual or marked theme signals a shift of topic focus (Rose & Martin, 2007). Hence, these changes work as small signs for the reader that a shift is about to take place. The fact that Saudi writers keep this textual resource to a minimum shows their reader-responsible writing pattern, which is more associated with Arabic writers than with Western writers. Examples 10 and 11 illustrate the most common textual resources employed by each.

Example 10. Saudi text

Nevertheless, similar to other types of... disharmony and even revenge.

Example 11. International text

However, the study provides ... studies can be measured.

Table 5. Move 2 thematic analysis

	Textual	Marked	Unmarked
Saudi	3.84%	11.53%	100%
International	47.82%	13.04%	69.56%

Regarding process type choices, apart from move 1, all moves employed relatively similar process choices. Move 1, which orients the reader to the field by describing its current state, understandably employs more relational and existential processes than do material, mental, or verbal ones. Hence, the fact that only 12% of the Saudi texts were relational and another 12% were existential is worth consideration, especially since international texts employed more than

33% of each process type in this move, as illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6. Move 1 process type analysis

	Material	Relational	Verbal	Mental	Existential
Saudi	12%	12%	12%	12%	12%
International	16.66%	33.33%	16.66%	0%	33.33%

Examples 12 and 13 illustrate how these processes are realized in each dataset.

Example 12. Saudi text

It **is** still conceived as a subdiscipline of applied linguistics. (*relational*)

There has also been a shift towards studies that have incorporated models from functional linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis, locating the text within its sociocultural context. (*existential*)

Example 13. International text

Truscott claimed that it **is** ineffective, harmful and should be abandoned. (*relational*)

There has been much research on language and identity with respect to learners, teachers, and teacher educators. (*existential*)

Regarding the tense choices in the Saudi and international texts, findings show that they are, apart from the future tense, very congruent, as illustrated in Table 7. Furthermore, despite their overlap, moves in Saudi texts were firmly separated with clause boundaries and not embedded into each other. This lexicogrammatical feature signals the cautious nature of Saudi writing in regard to English grammar.

Table 7. Percentage of tenses within texts

	Present tense	Past tense	Past and present	Future
Saudi	50%	10%	35%	5%
International	50%	10%	40%	0%

Points of difference that distinguish SE from international English

Looking at the findings and discussion of the data from a WE perspective gives a hint to some linguistic patterns that may be features of SE in abstracts as an emerging variety. On the level of abstract genre, Saudi researchers have a fluctuating move pattern. This is evident in two main aspects: first, the reader-responsible style, which does not give textual signals to guide readers through the text to help them adjust their expectations; and second, the use of listing, which is not a feature of English RA abstract writing style. However, Saudi researchers tend to hypercorrect their text by trying to follow the rules and playing safe, while international researchers are more concerned with getting the message through. Apparently, Saudi academic language is trying too hard to get approval from readers by using citations of scholarly literature and claiming topic importance. On the level of clause, the lexicogrammatical resources are used accurately, yet cautiously. Finally, thematic structure is not fully employed to guide the reader about the information in the rheme.

Conclusion

This research applied genre analysis to RA abstracts from a WE perspective by identifying the linguistic features of abstracts written by Saudi researchers and published to a local audience and comparing them to those written and published internationally. Swales and Feak's (2009) abstract analysis model was applied to recurrent linguistic patterns of moves. Furthermore, Halliday's (1985) thematic analysis was used to examine the texts on a clause level. Findings were placed in tables or graphs and discussed in detail. Finally, some features of the Saudi abstract text patterns were highlighted as possible features of an emerging SE variety.

Notes

1. The English translation of the Arabic text is not included in the body of the study because it will reflect the English structure, which is not the purpose of including Arabic. In all examples, moves are numbered in bold between round brackets to distinguish them from the text extracts.
2. By list I refer to using a paratactic phrase or independent clause after a colon, often with numbering, to state the findings in the RA abstract.

About the Author:

Wafaa Fallatah has a bachelor's degree from Taibah University, Madinah, KSA, and a master degree in Applied Linguistics from Sydney University, Sydney, Australia. For fourteen years, she taught English as a foreign language in KSA in elementary and primary school levels as well as university level. She presented in number of international conferences including IAWE 2015. Her research interest includes World Englishes, cultural linguistics and media discourse.

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