

Exploring Lexico-Grammatical Patterns in Saudi Press Reportage: A Multidimensional Analysis

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Abstract

This study seeks to investigate patterns of linguistic variation in Saudi press reportage, revealing how the language of press reportage in Saudi Arabia differs from or resembles that of British press reportage. This research is significant as no previous study has attempted to find the differences and similarities between the English used in Saudi press reportage in comparison with British Press reportage. This study aims to analyze linguistic variation between the categories of Saudi press reportage of the selected countries and to see which category of the news resembles British English the most. For this purpose, a corpus of Saudi newspaper reportage was compiled. Biber's (1992, 2006) multidimensional model explored the linguistic variations among the Saudi and British press reportage sub-categories. ANOVA was applied to measure the significant statistical differences among them. The results indicated that Saudi business reportage is the most informational, narrative, and explicit among all the sub-categories of British press reportage and the rest of the sub-categories of Saudi press reportage. Saudi sports reportage is the most non-argumentative, and British business reportage is the most abstract among other sub-categories. The results provided substantial evidence that English used in Saudi press reportage is a distinct register indicating that Saudi English is a different variety of English. This study will support the pedagogical practices regarding English for academic purposes and in academic language teaching classrooms.

Keywords: Arab English, multidimensional analysis, register analysis, Saudi English, Saudi press reportage

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Introduction

Wide Non-native varieties of English emerge due to the spread of English around the world. Several researchers attempted to study Englishes used in different parts of the world (Ahmad & Ali, 2017; Ali, 2020; Biber & Conrad, 2009; Shakir & Deuber, 2018). However, English, written and spoken in Saudi Arabia, has not been given considerable attention. It attempts to establish Saudi English (SE) as a different variety of English. The study investigates patterns of linguistic variation in Saudi Press Reportage, revealing how the language of press reportage in Saudi Arabia differs from or resembles that of the British Press Reportage. This study is a corpus-based multidimensional analysis of English used in Saudi Arabia. It is significant in developing a specialized corpus of Saudi English newspaper reportage and exploring how Saudi English (SE) is variant from or similar to British English (BrE).

The methods used for studying world Englishes are criticized for heavily relying on individual linguistic features yielding highly subjective and misrepresentative results. This study, however, used Biber's (1992, 2006) multivariate techniques to study linguistic variation, providing a multidimensional perspective. It further divided the news reportage of both countries into three sub-categories to draw an internal comparison and study variation in detail. Thus, the present study aimed to analyze Saudi Press Reportage (SPR) in comparison with British Press Reportage (BPR) through Biber's (1992, 2006) multidimensional approach.

Literature Review

Many researchers recognize World Englishes as non-native varieties of English (Kachru, 1983; Kirkpatrick, 2020; Melchers et al., 2019; Tupas, 2022), and they have remained the focus of great interest for many reasons. Kachru and Nelson (2011) affirmed that American and British English are acknowledged to be "legitimate for educational purposes" (p. 164) all over the world. English, however, is expanding, and at this point, 'more varieties of English are developing' (Melchers et al., 2019, p. 225). Tupas (2022) named these English "Unequal Englishes" (p. 723). Kachru and Nelson (2011) assert that as linguists, language teachers, and learners, studying the nature of the variation in Englishes is essential. Their work on World Englishes shows that "African Englishes display similar linguistic structures, language use, and abstract inventiveness as do Asian Englishes" (p. 4).

Grove (2009) investigated the status of what she termed 'Hong Kong English' in the light of the framework developed by combining Kachru's (1983) three circles, Moag's (1982) life circle of non-native Englishes, and Schneider's (2007) postcolonial Englishes. She concluded that Hong Kong English did not completely serve as a language. Tan (2012) looked at the status of Singaporean English through the framework of Kachru's (1983) concentric circle theory and Schneider's (2009) model. However, these studies were based on instances of individual linguistic features and peculiar occurrences of localized expressions, which were criticized for not being regular patterns of variation.

With the introduction of multivariate statistical techniques and multidimensional analysis emphasizing the co-occurrence of linguistic features, the approaches and methods which explore individual linguistic features became unreliable and, therefore, unpopular. A significant body of research has been produced using Biber's (1992, 2006) multidimensional approach (Biber et al., 2015; Biber & Egbert, 2016; Egbert, 2015; Nesi, 2009; Sardinha & Pinto, 2014; Shakir & Deuber, 2018). It was later enhanced by Xiao (2009), who explored variation across twelve registers and

five varieties of English in the International Corpus of English (ICE) through the MDA approach. He enhanced the MDA and annotated the corpus for grammatical and semantic categories.

So far as English used in Saudi Arabia is concerned, only a few studies have been conducted. The research by Mahboob and Elyas (2014) examined how English in Saudi Arabia has been adopted to meet local needs and practices. The paper analyzed English language textbooks used in Saudi Arabia and concluded that Saudi English mainly follows the grammatical norms of standard English. The paper pointed out certain inconsistencies in using features that represent local cultural norms and practices. The results of this study indicate that English in Saudi Arabia is being ‘nativised’, and this nativized/ localized English represents the local culture and their social and religious beliefs. Other research works (Al- Belehi, 2021; Algaraady & Mahyoob, 2021; Alghammas, 2020) studied the writings of EFL learners. However, their scope was limited to error analysis and students’ perspectives toward learning English.

While some studies analyzed newspapers from the content analysis perspective (Alarfaj, 2013), the gender perspective also gained the attention of some researchers (Akeel, 2010; Arabi, 1994; Bashatah, 2017; Basmaeel, 2008). However, linguistic analysis of the Saudi English newspaper language remained neglected. Hardly any research study analyses Saudi English from a variationist perspective using a multidimensional approach. So, there was a need to conduct a study that analyses the language of press reportage in the Saudi context by using a comprehensive approach. The current study attempts to investigate the sub-categories of SPR in comparison with BPR.

Method

A specialized corpus of Saudi English newspaper reportage was developed for this study. For the compilation of the corpus, three Saudi newspapers and three British newspapers were selected. The newspaper reportage was divided into three sub-categories: World, Sports, and Business. *Riyadh Daily*, *Arab News*, and *Saudi Gazette*, from Saudi Arabia and *The Guardian*, *The Sun*, and *Daily Mail* from Britain were selected. The data was taken from one year, i.e., 2017 to 2018. The detail of the number of texts from each newspaper is given in table 1.

Table 1. *Number of texts obtained from the Saudi and British newspapers*

Newspaper	Business Reportage	Sports Reportage	World Reportage	Total
Arab News	50	50	50	150
Riyadh Daily	50	50	50	150
Saudi Gazette	50	50	50	150
The Guardian	50	50	50	150
The Sun	50	50	50	150
Daily Mail	50	50	50	150
Total	300	300	300	900

The corpus consists of 900 text files from six newspapers. It consists of approximately one million words.

Research Procedure

The first step was to select texts and develop the specialized corpus. After the text files were marked up and cleaned, the data was tagged using Biber’s (1992, 2006) multidimensional tagger. The tagging of the corpus provided a standardized database to study the linguistic variation in Saudi and British press reportage. Later the raw scores were transformed into normalized scores.

Then factor analysis was conducted to determine the co-occurrence relationship among the linguistic features. The next step was the computation of dimension scores. After that, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to find the statistically significant differences among the sub-categories of Saudi and British press reportage. Finally, a qualitative interpretation of the functional parameters underlying the quantitatively identified co-occurring linguistic features and dimensions was provided.

Analysis and Discussion

The first dimension consists of a continuum ranging from positive to negative polarity, named *Informational* and *Involved* discourse. According to Biber's 1992 MD model, on D1, a text with a frequent occurrence of private verbs, *that* deletion, second-person pronoun, hedges, discourse particle, *wh*-questions, *wh*-clauses, etc., (the features with positive loadings) marks the presence of involved discourse, while frequent use of nouns, preposition and attributive adjective (the features with negative loadings) indicates that the text is inclined towards informational discourse.

The results in figure 1 revealed variations in Saudi and British press reportage. Saudi business reportage (SBR) is more informational than British business reportage (BBR). The mean score of SBR (-21.75) indicates that it is more informational than BBR (-12.3). Likewise, Saudi sports reportage (SSR), with a mean score of -15.52, is more informational than British sports reportage (BSR). BSR, with a mean score of -10.8, shows less informativeness in its discourse production. The results of the world reportage show the same trend. The mean score of Saudi world reportage (SWR), i.e., -19.33, is more than that of British world reportage (BWR), i.e. -12.3.

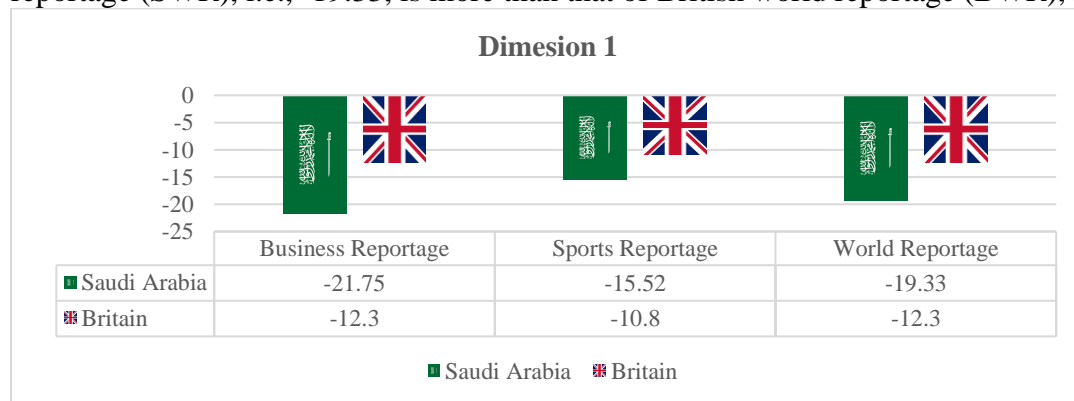


Figure 1. Linguistic variations across Saudi and British press reportage on D1

The following extract has been taken from the Saudi newspaper, *Arab News*. Linguistic features like *nouns*, *prepositions*, and *attributive adjectives* perform the function of producing informational discourse.

Al-Falih said the deals will have a positive impact both on the economy and the people of the Kingdom, as hundreds of thousands of jobs will be created for the Saudi youth. Touching on the oil sector, the minister said the Kingdom believes that extending the oil-cut agreement is enough to drain oil inventories. "Extending the current agreement on global oil supply cuts until March next year and adding one or two small producers to the pact, should be enough to reduce oil inventories. (CSST13SBAN)

Saudi Business Reportage (SBR) is the most informational in its discourse production among all the sub-categories. The bold words in the excerpt are examples of the linguistic features that produce informational discourse.

Dimension two is labeled as *Narrative vs. Non-narrative concerns*. Positive scores indicate that the specific variety is related to narrative discourse, whereas negative scores indicate that the focus of the writing is non-narrative. The positive mean scores are characterized by the frequent occurrence of the *past tense verb, third-person pronoun, verb-perfect aspect, and public verbs*, while the negative scores, by *present tense verbs, pronoun it, that deletion and place adverbial*. On this dimension, SBR and BBR show marked differences in discourse production. Where SBR, with a mean score of -1.04, produces non-narrative discourse, BBR, with a mean value of 0.74, shows narrative concerns. SSR uses narrative discourse with a mean value of -0.6, while BSR, with a mean score of -0.09, shows a mixed-purpose discourse. The closeness to the zero-dimension score indicates that the discourse has a mixed purpose (Biber, 2009). BSR uses both positive and negative linguistic features in its discourse. Both countries show narrative discourse while reporting world news. However, SWR, with a mean score of 0.99, is slightly more narrative than BWR (0.8).

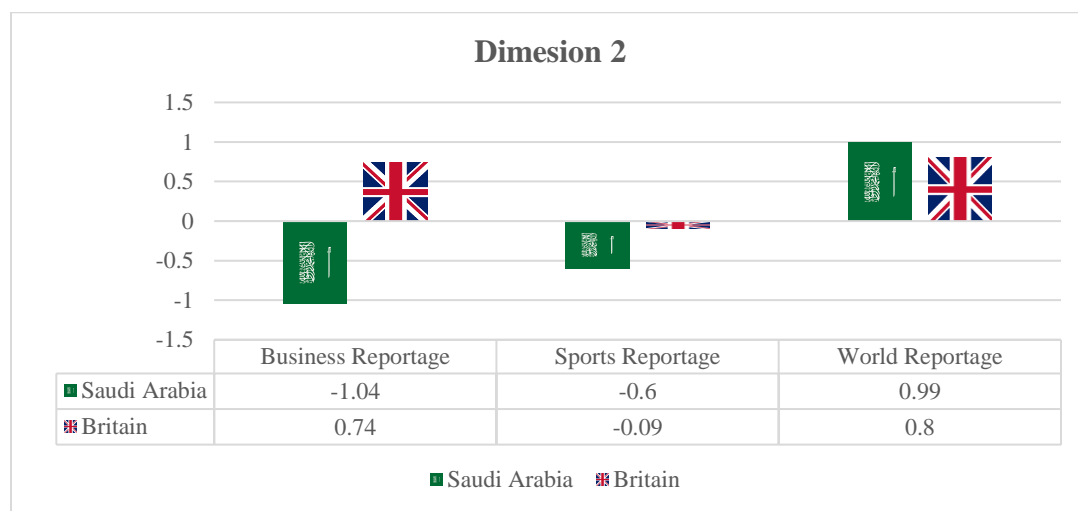


Figure 2. Linguistic variations across Saudi and British press reportage on D2

SBR is more non-narrative than British news reportage and the most non-narrative among all the other sub-categories of Saudi press reportage.

The following excerpt has been taken from the Saudi newspaper, *Saudi Gazette*.

He said the social security program counts beneficiaries and their dependents as a family, not individuals because they are registered in the data system with the possibility of adding more dependents. Khateeb clarified that what he said about Saudi Arabia having cinema houses would not be outside the framework of the official procedures and policies that the Kingdom was following in all its projects to attain sustainable development.(CSST57BSG)

In the above excerpt, the bold words are examples of linguistic features that produce narrative discourse.

On dimension three, positive scores indicate that discourse is explicit, while negative scores highlight situation-dependent discourse. Figure 3 shows that SBR (5.81) is more explicit

than BBR (3.26). In contrast, BSR, with a mean score of 0.77, is more explicit in its discourse production than SSR (0.21). Like business reportage, Saudi reportage is more explicit than British reportage in reporting world news. The results of the present study indicate a significant difference in the mean scores of SWR and BWR. Other studies on Asian Englishes also show similar patterns. For instance, Ali et al. (2020) found Indian world reportage showing a prominent difference from British world reportage. However, interestingly, while both Saudi and Indian newspapers are quite different from British newspapers in producing world reportage, they show marked differences from each other. With a mean score of 5.64, SWR indicates that it uses more linguistic features that produce explicit discourse than BWR (2.68).

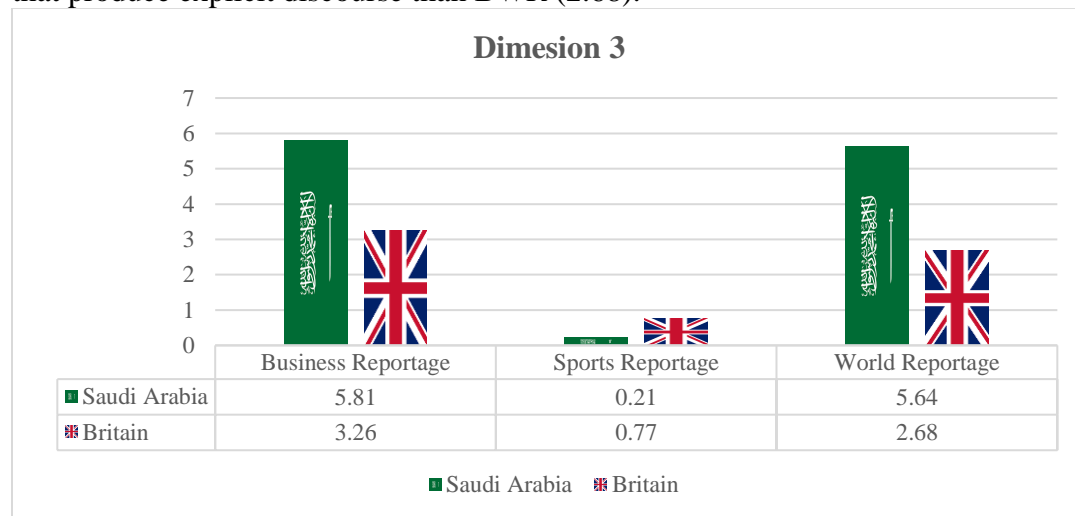


Figure 3. Linguistic variations across Saudi and British press reportage on D3

The following excerpt has been taken from the Saudi newspaper, *Riyadh Daily*.

The First Meeting for Senior Officials in charge of implementing the last Arab summit resolution on terror combat and social development wrapped up here today, under the chairmanship of Egypt's social solidarity minister Dr. Ghadah Wali, who is also the head of the executive bureau of the Arab social affairs ministers council, and the participation of senior officials from Arab countries. In a final communique, the meeting denounced all terror operations that hit the Arab as well as other parts of the world, last of which were in Barcelona and Finland. (CSST37SBRD)

In the above-given example, the presence of *coordinating conjunctions*, *nominalization*, and *wh-clauses* are examples of linguistic features that produce explicit discourse.

Dimension four is labeled as *Overt expression of argumentation/persuasion*. In the 1992 analysis, dimension four contains features with positive weight only. Linguistic features like *adverb within auxiliary*, *modal of necessity*, *persuasive verb*, *subordinating conjunction-conditional*, *infinitive verb*, and *modal of prediction* produce argumentative discourse on the positive polarity of this dimension. However, figure 4 shows that both countries have negative weight in producing discourse. On dimension four, features like third-person pronoun, private verbs, and hedges mark the presence of non-argumentative discourse.

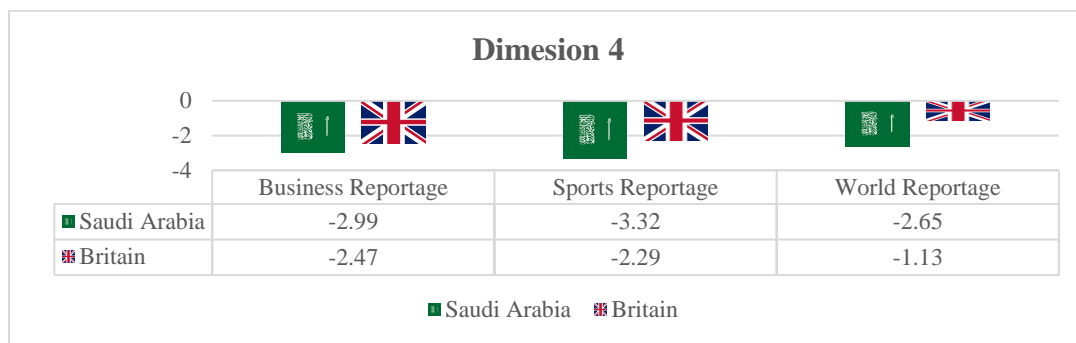


Figure 4. Linguistic variations across Saudi and British press reportage on D4

Figure 4 shows that SBR (-2.99) is slightly more non-argumentative than BBR (-2.47). Ali et al. (2021) also found that the sports category of British press reportage is less non-argumentative than other varieties of English used in South Asia. Likewise, SSR, with a mean score of -3.32, is more non-argumentative than BSR (-2.29). With a mean score of -2.65, SWR is more non-argumentative than BWR (-1.13).

SSR is the most non-argumentative among other categories. The following example has been taken from the Saudi newspaper, *Arab News*.

On Monday, they traded stinging shots, often with Sharapova — dressed in all black, from her visor to her dress that sparkled under the lights, to her socks and shoes — aiming to end exchanges and Halep hustling into place to extend them. It was quickly 4-1 for Sharapova in the second set and she held a breakpoint there to allow her to go up 5-1 and serve for the victory. But she could not convert it. (CSST11SPAN)

In the above-given excerpt, the bold words are examples of linguistic features that produce non-argumentative discourse. In the language of news reportage, various grammatical devices serve as essential techniques for journalists to express their viewpoints. Journalists commonly use passives which are primary markers of abstract discourse in the newspapers and politicians in their statements, speeches, and debates (Stojan & Mijic, 2017). In order to make the statements impersonal and the identity of the participants of the action vague, the journalists deliberately change the word order of the sentence(s) and, if needed, omit the agent of the action (Qassim, 2016).

Dimension five is labeled as *Impersonal (Abstract) vs. Non-impersonal (Non-abstract style)*. Figure 5 shows that SBR (0.85) produces less abstract discourse than BBR (1.53). There is less difference in the mean score of SSR (0.85) and BSR (0.76) in their discourse production. With a mean score of 1.4, SWR is slightly more abstract than BWR (1.12).

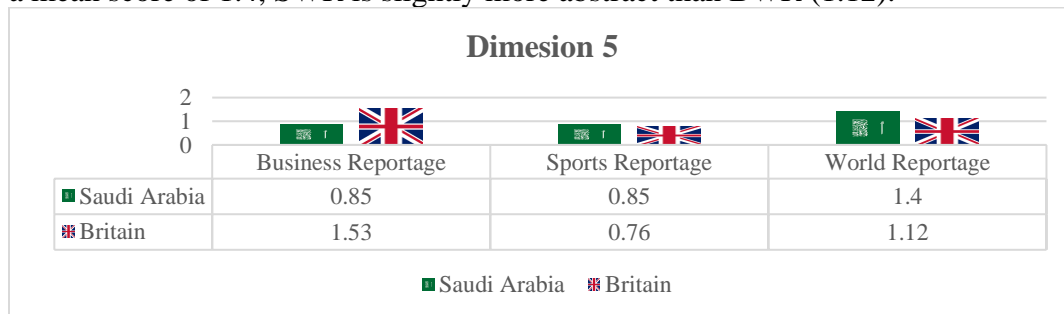


Figure 5. Linguistic variations across Saudi and British press reportage on D5

BBR produces the most abstract discourse among all the sub-categories. Among other linguistic features, *adverbial-conjuncts* and *passive constructions* are the primary markers of abstractness in a discourse. “Discourse with frequent passive constructions is typically abstract and technical in content and formal in style” (Biber, 1992, p. 112). The following example has been taken from the British newspaper, *The Guardian*.

A trade that, by large consensus, is being called one of the worst in NBA history. For all of Divac’s many failings, a list of shortcomings which are dwarfed by those of team owner Vivek Ranadivé, we must assume he is telling the truth about a better offer because the one he accepted late Sunday night could not have been much worse: franchise centerpiece DeMarcus Cousins and Omri Casspi shipped to New Orleans in exchange for rookie guard Buddy Hield, Tyreke Evans, Langston Galloway and the Pelicans’ first- and second-round picks in the 2017 draft. (CSBRBTGT27)

In the above-given example, the bold words are the example of linguistic features that produce abstract discourse. Overall, the results indicate marked differences between the two countries concerning each sub-category.

Conclusion

A comparison has been drawn between Saudi and British English to explore how far the language of the press reportage genre in Saudi Arabia is similar to or different from the British press reportage across Biber’s (1992) Multidimensional analysis. The study explored that on all the five textual dimensions, the sub-categories of Saudi Press Reportage show a remarkable difference from British press reportage. On dimension one, Saudi Business Reportage is more informational than British Business Reportage. There are marked differences in the mean score of Saudi and British sports reports in producing discourse. The results of the world reportage show the same trend, i.e., Saudi World Reportage is more informational than British World Reportage. On dimension two, Saudi Business Reportage and British Business Reportage show a marked difference in their mean scores in producing non-narrative discourse. While Saudi Business Reportage produces non-narrative discourse, British Sports Reportage shows a mixed-purpose discourse. Both countries show narrative discourse while reporting world news. However, Saudi World Reportage is slightly more narrative than British World Reportage. On dimension three, Saudi Business Reportage is more explicit than British Business Reportage.

In contrast, British Sports Reportage is more explicit in its discourse production than Saudi Sports Reportage. Like business reportage, Saudi reportage is more explicit than British reportage in reporting world news. Further, Saudi Business Reportage is slightly more non-argumentative than British Business Reportage on dimension four. Likewise, Saudi Sports Reportage is more non-argumentative than British Sports Reportage. Saudi World Reportage is more non-argumentative than British World Reportage. On dimension five, Saudi Business Reportage produces less abstract discourse than British Business Reportage. However, there is less difference between Saudi Sports Reportage and British Sports Reportage in their discourse production. Saudi World Reportage is slightly more abstract than British World Reportage. The results indicate a significant difference in Saudi and British discourse production, providing substantial evidence that English used in Saudi Arabia qualifies the status of a distinct variety allowing it to be labeled as Saudi English.

Future Recommendations

The corpus compiled for the present study and the results of the analysis of variance will be helpful for the researchers working on Saudi English. Further, the study allows several comparisons between press reportage and various other genres or registers from Saudi and other Englishes from the inner circle. The specialized corpus of Saudi press reportage can further be enhanced by adding more sub-categories from the press reportage.

Pedagogical Implications

This study has some pedagogical implications. The study findings can be useful for syllabus designers, textbook writers, and language instructors of media studies. Various text samples from the corpus can be used as authentic material in textbooks or language classrooms. Teachers can use the tagged data in ESP classrooms to explain grammatical intricacies and specific structures used by news media. The students can also develop an insight into how specific grammatical patterns and particular lexical choices make a text informative or involved, narrative or non-narrative, explicit or situation-dependent, overtly or covertly persuasive/ argumentative, abstract or non-abstract. They can be helped in acquiring mastery over recognizing such underlying patterns and producing such texts using specific lexical and grammatical configurations. Further, the data and the present study's findings can provide the basis for developing an application, like Grammarly, which can assess, evaluate and give feedback on the writings of news media students. This study also provides a base for developing a general-purpose corpus of Saudi English that can benefit both ESP and EGP classes.

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