

Difficulties Second-Year Students Encounter in Composition

Dr.Uloom M. Ali*

Ahmed M. Salih*

Suha R. Hamad*

1. The problem

Composition studied in the second year English department deals with vocabulary , word order , punctuation marks , grammatical rules and so on. All these elements will be produced by the students in the composition. The second year English department students as EFL learners encounter difficulties in overlapping them. This is shown by their duties(answers). They could not do them successfully . This paper tries to investigate the reasons behind that because the teachers are very worried about their students' complaint and they consider it an obstacle in the process of learning English language. “ The obvious procedure is to teach the educated person language through the excellent written models which can be selected and ordered by his teachers , while the student is acquiring and understanding the written language of these splendid models he is himself practicing the art of producing sentences of the language(Brown and Yule , 1983 : 1). Composition represents written language and it will lead to the spoken language. This study tries to solve this problem and enable the students to communicate with the others by using correct rules.

2. Aims of this study :

This study aims at :

1. Identifying the difficulties of composition that the second year students meet.
2. Classifying these difficulties into divisions.

* Ph. D. in Psychology

* M.A. in Linguistics

* M.A. in Methodology

3. Comparing the differences between male and female students.

3. Limits of the study:

1. The study is limited to the second year students (sophomore) English department students at the college of education and the college of education for women in the University of Tikrit. The academic year 2004 – 2005.

2. It is limited to the weakness in composition only.

4. Significance of the study :

Composition is used in linguistics to refer to a hierarchical mode of linguistic structure in which larger units are composed of smaller units. e.g., the relationship between sentence , clause , phrase , word and morpheme (Crystal, 1980:77).

Is possible to say that the composition is the production of the potential sources of knowledge about a language , So the pupil or student can express his attitude or opinion by using these units to pass his ideas or feelings to the others. This will make an interaction between him / her and the others and then a communication will be made. The only thing that will link these components: students, potential knowledge, the others and the communication is composition. Because of this importance , this study deals with the difficulties the students may encounter in studying English composition.

As we know the students represent the core of the educational process, so students at the college of education must be trained very well not only in their profession but also in methodology since they will be better than those who have graduated from professional schools as well as their personality and intelligence. (Al-Hamash: 1985, 4). The students must be mastering all the aspects of English language ; this will be done during their study at the college of education because they will be teachers in the future and they will reflect themselves on their pupils at secondary schools. If there is any weakness in their levels, it will be acquired by their students; here we face a real difficulty. One of the skills that are expected at the end of secondary stage in English language is

how to correct grammar, spelling and punctuation , so it is recommended that the syllabus should match the student's specialization at the advanced stages (Al-Muttalibi , 1974 122 – 124).

English Language is an international language in terms of communication where political ,cultural and commercial contacts between various countries are done through English. Besides , international conferences are also established mainly through English. (Hillan 1981:110 – 111) It is used (spoken) for general communication purposes. Most people can listen to English on films , the radio , tapes and so on (O'Conner. 1980 : 3-5). Most modern techniques are designed to use English as the basic language like computers , cameras , calculators, mobiles, TV sets and so on. It is the language that can be understood by most people in different regions.

Definition of Basic Terms:

1. Composition

Hornby (1998 : 234) defines composition as a “short piece of writing done as a school or college exercise. The parts or elements of which something is made” .

Gurrey (1975 : 1955) states that there are six aspects of children's written works that need attention such as 1) grammatical correctness. 2) the content and ideas in the written 3) the relevance of ideas to subject 4) the continuity of language and of thought , 5) the orderly arrangement of ideas 6) and the expression of these ideas. Al-Juboury (2000:79) explains that “ composition questions, which require continuous writing , attempt to discover competence in the production of written English. Composition is a task that involves the learner in writing dramatically correct sentence and linking the sentences to form a continuous pieces of writing which expresses the writer's thought on a certain topic for a certain purpose”

2. Difficulty

Scott (1980 : 283) defines it as “ fact or condition of being difficult , degree to which something is difficult , difficulty of the job preventing someone from finishing it on

time or something which stands in the way of getting things done ,a thing that is to do or understand”.

Literature Review

It is important to shed light on the previous studies. This is to know the similar and different points of view. The relevant studies are of value when techniques, methods and results are clarified.

Mohammad(1985) presented some suggested exercises for the ESP teachers in the schools of commerce. The aim was to show some exercises to be taught to improve the learners' reading comprehension and corresponding commercial letters they lack since the textbook used pays more attention to the teaching of writing commercial letters. He emphasized the significance of the relationship between what learners feel relevant to what they study and what they want so he refers to authenticity. Salman(1981) studied the issue of testing reading comprehension in the ministerial examination of June 1981. He concluded after the criticism he presented toward the designer or designers of the test that ambiguity misleads testees and affects their performance. Clarity is important as well as testees' pre-training. Using one of the objective techniques to test comprehension owing to the stability of scores that can be obtained in such test is possible.

The Procedures of the Study

1-Population

The population of the study consist of(80) students :

(20) males and(60) females , studying English at college of Education and Education for women at the university of Tikrit. See table(1). The age is between 19 – 22

Collage	Male	Percent	Fema	Percent	Total
Education	20	25%	15	18.75%	35
Education for wome	-	-	45	56.25%	45
Total	20	0.25	60	75.00%	80

Table No.(1) shows population and percentage of the study

2. Instrument of the Study

In order to achieve the aims of this study a questionnaire is designed as follows :

1. Open questionnaire. It is directed to second year students at college of education and education for women to test difficulties students encounter in composition. See appendix(1).
2. After gathering data of open questionnaire ,the differences are ordered according to their frequencies.
3. Closed questionnaire.It is building up a closed questionnaire depending on the following : Firstly, private knowledge in the field of the study personal experience , previous studies and open questionnaire. Secondly , the items are divided into three kinds of difficulties :(15) are related to methods of teaching and(8) are related to evaluation. Thirdly, the closed questionnaire consist of 23 items with triple scale for replying(always).(sometimes) and(seldom). See appendix(2). Some statistical analysis and methods are done , see appendix(4)

The validity of the Questionnaire

Carroll and Hall(1985 : 123) mention that test is valid when we actually measure what we intend to measure. Validity is one of the characteristic feature of tests. It is an essential matter of relevance which means whether the test is relevant to what it claims to measure or not as Valetta(1967 : 36) states. Validity in language tests depends on the linguistic content of the test and on the situation or technique used to test this content. To ensure validity, the items of the questionnaire are introduced to a jury to know the difficulties of composition.Each item achieved agreement of over than 80% of jury members as in appendix(3).

Items are carefully constructed to know the difficulties Second year student encounter in composition. Those questions cover this topic and give no gap to test linguistic skills but the intended.

The pilot Study

In order to know whether the items of the close questionnaire are clear to the students of second year, the questionnaire was introduced to a group of students as a sample consist of 50 students: males and females. The items were clear to them.

Reliability

Lado(1961 : 30) mentions that a test is reliable when results are stable and given on different occasions and under the different conditions.

The questionnaire is given twice to a group of students consists of 50 students(20) males and(60) females. Their scores are recorded for these two attempts. The correction coefficient was 0.76, see appendix(4). The researchers apply Fisher formula in order to know the difficulty of each item. The researchers consider that each item takes(2) marks or more as a difficult item , see table(2).

Sequent	Item	Level of a difficulty
1.	I don't know the meanings of some words in each subject	2.62
2.	A teacher gives weak marks which are not suitable to my answer	2.23
3.	The teacher speaks quickly	2.23
4.	I cannot understand the teacher in the classroom when he speaks in English only	2.40
5.	I have no idea how to write composition	2.55
6.	Rules of grammar are ambiguous for me	2.23
7.	The treatment of the teacher is different from time to time	2.07
8.	The teacher gives words from out of the subject	2.26
9.	The teacher does not give clear theme in précis at the beginning.	2.25
10.	I feel correction of composition by the teacher is inaccurate	2.51
11.	Changing of teachers disturbs my understanding	2.18

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12.	Enthusiasm of teacher gradually becomes weak during the time	2.17
13.	Style of the English language differs from Arabic.	2.09
14.	Spelling of some words is not clear for me	2.49
15.	personality of the teacher is weak.	2.05

Table(2) explains the levels of difficulty for items

Results and Analysis

1.The first objective:

In order to recognize the difficulties in composition second year students encounter , the researchers are supposed to check the items of the questionnaire which represent these difficulties. The items seem to have different levels of difficulty. The highest level is(2.62) while the lowest one is(2.05).The researchers consider the item that its level is two or more represents real difficulty.The number of items is(15) ,see table(2). The item No.(1) “ I don’t know the meaning of some words in each subject” , has scored(2.62) that is the highest level. The second level belongs to the item number(6) and(3) “ the grammatical rules are ambiguous) and “ our teacher speaks quickly” that have been scored(2.23) for both of them. Item number(11)“ Changing of teachers disturbs my understanding ” gets(2.18).

The field of(difficulties related to a students) came in the second status. The item No.(5)(I have no idea how to write composition) achieved(2.55) while the item No.(14)(spelling of some words is not clear for me) reached(2.49). The item No.(4)(I can not understand the teacher in the classroom) took(2.40).In the same field, the item No.(8)(Ateacher gives words from out of a subject) reached(2.26).

Choosing the subject of composition is important because students should not have to encounter difficulties of subject matter and difficulties of language. It is safe to say that developing ideas in unfamiliar subject is unacceptable because it is not the target of this works in a foreign language. Practicing a language is not to know how to use new words and structure although it is one of the objectives here. The

subjects they study deal with how to handle the language they study with ease and confidence. When students start composition work , the titles should contain some definite and limited words that help them to think of and imagine one thing at a time. This aim will assist them to focus on and write vividly. Thus, it is recommended to choose titles which give no wide but small target.(benzies:1940)

The field of(evaluation) came in third status. The item No.(10)(I feel correction of composition by teacher is inaccurate) gets(2.51). while the item No.(2)(A teacher gives weak marks which are not suitable to my answer) took(2.23). In field of(Difficulties related to a teachers) which came in the fourth status, the item No.(9)(the teacher does not give clear theme in précis at the beginning)achieved(2.25).

The itemNo.(12)(Enthusiasm of a teacher gradually becomes weak during a time) reached(2.17). whereas the item No.(7)(The treatment of the teacher is different from time to time) reached(2.07). In the same field the, item No.(15)(A personality of the teacher is weak) reached(2.05).

Byrne(1980: 175-6) says “All experienced teachers would ,I think , agree that self-correction is the most effective way of extinguishing errors, but unless the clues which can be given are quite unambiguous and are interpreted correctly, further and worse confusion is likely to result comments are probably more effective if the teacher can find a spare moment to talk to students individually about their work. Giving back written work with brief comments while the rest of the group is otherwise occupied is the ideal way of doing this. On other occasions , the teacher may decide that a particular error is sufficiently common for the whole class to be told about it and given a quick drill exercise to consolidate the explanation.

Correcting composition is worthy being focused on. This is due to the fact it is helpful especially when learners acquire the habit of noticing mistakes in their own writing and speaking. This habit is acquired as early as possible if they are properly trained. Acquiring the responsibility for correction

and for their own use of their own language is urgent. If many students do not acquire such habit completely, then the task of looking for them helps to draw attention to the spellings , structure and forms that they are learning.(Gurrey, 1975:146-147).

2.The second objective:

In order to know whereas there are significant differences between males and females in the difficulties encountered by second year students, the researchers used Chi_ square as a statistical instrument to achieve this objective , see table No.(3) The results were as follows : There are statistical significant differences to some difficulties between male and female students , see table(3) whereas the male students feel difficulties due to levels they achieved.

Sequent	Item	Counted Chi-square value	Level of statistical significance
1	I don't know the meanings of some words in each subject	5.99	0.05
2	I feel a correcting of composition by teacher is inaccurate .	5.99	
3	The teacher speaks quickly.	5.99	0.05
4	The teacher does not give clear theme in précis at the beginning.	5.99	0.05
5	Enthusiasm of teacher gradually becomes weak during the time	5.99	0.05
6	The treatment of the teacher is different from time to time	5.99	0.05
7	personality of the teacher is weak	5.99	0.05

Table(3) suggests differences between males and females

Statistical significant difference in level(0.05) is as follow : item(1)(I don't know the meanings of some words in each subject) item(4)(A teacher gives weak marks which are not suitable to my answer) and item(7)(personality of the teacher is weak) , while the female students feel the following difficulties more significant than male students , they are :

Item(2)(I feel correction of composition by teacher is not inaccurate) , item(5)(Enthusiasm of a teacher gradually becomes weak during the time) and item(6)(The treatment of the teacher is different from time to time)

Conclusions:

1. Some difficulties encountered by male students are different from those by female students.
2. The difficulties that encounter second year students in composition are of four kinds : methods of teaching , evaluation , difficulties related to students and difficulties related to teachers.
3. Vocabularies should be explained and clarified .
4. The teacher could demonstrate the main idea of the subject they study.
5. The teacher should mention and explain the rules when necessary in the classroom.
6. The teacher must arouse motivation of the students by asking them to give the meaning of the new words from the dictionary.
7. The teacher must give feed back to his students after finishing any subject .
8. The teacher must be interested in the individual differences among his students by using objectivity in correcting , test building and using different methods of teaching.
9. The teacher should make enough examinations to his students in every element of composition.
10. finally, the cognitive approach is recommended to be adopted by teachers.

Recommendations

The researchers suggest the following topics to be conducted :

1. The difficulties first year students encounter in composition .
2. Comparative study between the difficulties of first year and second year students.

Appendix(1) Appendices

Open questionnaire

Dear

It is intended to conduct a study on the difficulties second year students encounter in composition. Maybe, they are in grammar , method of teaching ,or vocabularies. Please identify these difficulties and give your suggestions to overcome. Thank you very much for your co-operation.

Difficulties1-

suggestions1-

Researchers

Appendix(2) close questionnaire

Sequent	Item	always	sometimes	seldom
1.	I don't know the meanings of some words in each subject			
2.	A teacher gives weak marks which are not suitable to my answer			
3.	The teacher speaks quickly			
4.	I cannot understand the teacher in the classroom when he speaks in English only			
5.	I have no idea how to write composition			
6.	Rules of grammar are ambiguous for me			
7.	The treatment of the teacher is different from time to time			
8.	The teacher gives words from			

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	out of a subject			
9.	The teacher does not give clear theme in précis at the beginning.			
10.	I feel correction of composition by the teacher is inaccurate			
11.	Changing of teachers disturbs my understanding			
12.	Enthusiasm of teacher gradually becomes weak during the time			
13.	Style of the English language differs from Arabic.			
14.	Spelling of some words is not clear for me			
15.	personality of the teacher is weak.			

Appendix(3)

Experts of the reliability of the questionnaire

Name	Academic status	Institution	Specialization
Dr.Najdat Kadhim	Assistant professor	Kirkuk University	Drama
Dr.Esbah Shakir	Assistant professor	TikritUniversity_ ollege for Education Women	Linguistics
Dr.RiyadhKhalil	Assistant professor	TikritUniversity_ ollege for Education Women	Linguistics
Khalaf Ali	Lecturer	TikritUniversity_ ollege for Education Women	Methodology
Safwat H. Al_Bazaz	Lecturer	KirkukUniversity_College for Education	Linguistics

Appendix(4)

Statistical methods used in this research

1- Fisher formula : $(F1 \times 3) + (F2 \times 2) + (F3 \times 1)$

Total frequency (Fahmi ,1968:230)

2- Chi- square: $X^2 = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$

(Brase and Brase, 1978: 297)

3- Person correlation coefficient :

$$r = \frac{N\sum XY - (\sum X)(\sum Y)}{\sqrt{[N\sum X^2 - (\sum x)^2][N\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$$

(Hays, 1981:456)

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خلاصة

الصعوبات التي يواجهها طلاب السنة الثانية في التأليف

د.علوم محمد علي

أحمد محمد صالح

وسهى رحيم حمد

يتناول البحث المفردات وترتيب الكلمات وعلامات الترقيم والقواعد النحوية وما إلى في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية المرحلة الثانية ، ويقوم الطلبة بتكوين تلك العناصر النحوية ومن خلال تتكوينهم للتراكيب يمكن حصر المشكلات التي يقع بها الطلبة بوصف اللغة الإنكليزية لغة أجنبية .