



A Study of Iraqi EFL Learners' Use of Compound and Complex Sentences in Writing

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Abstract:

As grammar is the basis of language acquisition, EFL learners should acquire proficiency in its rules to master the skills of language, especially writing. Types of sentences and functions of phrases are pivotal for academic writings in English language. Hence, this paper fathoms the abilities of Iraqi students of EFL in composing compound and complex sentences. Definitely, these two types can be problematic to EFL learners as contrary to simple sentences that have no coordinators, nor clauses or symmetry in the tenses. Thus, this study explores the Iraqi students' competence in writing by testing their proficiency in compound and complex sentences. A random sample of fifty students has chosen from the Departments of English at the University of Thi-Qar. The survey reveals that most of the students' answers to the deductive and theoretical questions range between good and excellent. This indicates that the students have good knowledge of the theoretical instructions of sentence types and characteristics. However, the last question, that has been intended to check the students' abilities to write composition by practicing on writing paragraphs, shows that the Iraqi learners of EFL are poor in composition. In other words, their abilities to write compound and complex sentences in a form of paragraph are not good as their theoretical competences. Accordingly, the study is concluded by suggesting that the Iraqi teachers of EFL focus on the analyses of sentence parts, especially compound and complex sentences, use these types in the examples they cite for the students and analyze the sentences thoroughly, and make the students practice writing as part and parcel of their courses in every branch. Thus, the students' composition in English gets improved. Teachers should also help the students to get rid of mother-tongue interference which happens in writing full paragraph composition and explain the difference between Arabic and English syntax as regards the sentence structure and types.

Keywords: Iraqi learners, EFL, compound sentences, complex sentences



دراسة لاستخدام متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق للجمل المركبة والمعقدة في الكتابة

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الملخص:

يتعين على متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة أجنبية اكتساب كفاءة في أحكام القواعد الخاصة بها إذ إنّ القواعد هي البنية الأساسية في اكتساب اللغة. وتشكل أنماط الجمل ووظائفها محورا للكتابة الأكاديمية باللغة الانكليزية. وبالتالي، تسبر هذه الورقة البحثية قدرات الطلبة العراقيين من متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة أجنبية في إنشاء الجمل المركبة والجمل المعقدة. ومن المؤكد أنّ هذان النمطين من الجمل قد يكون موضع إشكال لمتعلمي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة أجنبية خلافاً للجمل البسيطة التي لا تحوي أدوات ربط ولا عبارات في الجملة الواحدة ولا تتطلب توافقاً فيما بينها بالأزمنة. وهكذا، تبحث هذه الدراسة في كفاءة الطلبة العراقيين في الكتابة من خلال اختبار براعتهم في الجمل المركبة والمعقدة. تم اختيار عينة عشوائية تتألف من خمسين طالباً وطالبة من اقسام اللغة الانكليزية في جامعة ذي قار، وبيّن الاستبيان أنّ أجوبة معظم الطلاب على الأسئلة النظرية والاستنتاجية كانت تتراوح بين تقدير الجيد والممتاز، ممّا يشير إلى أنّ الطلبة لديهم معرفة جيّدة بالإرشادات النظرية لأنماط الجمل وخصائصها. بيد أنّ السؤال الأخير الذي يهدف إلى اختبار قدرات الطلبة في الكتابة الإنشائية من خلال تطبيقها على كتابة المقاطع يُظهر أنّ متعلمو اللغة الانكليزية كلغة أجنبية من الطلبة العراقيين ضعيفون في الكتابة الإنشائية. وبعبارة أخرى، فإنّ قدرات هؤلاء الطلبة في كتابة الجمل المركبة والمعقدة لا ترتقي لجودة كفاءاتهم النظرية. وبالتالي، تختتم هذه الدراسة بالاقتراح على مدرّسي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق أن يركزوا على تحليل أجزاء الجملة، خاصة المركبة والمعقدة، وأن يستخدموا هذان النمطان في الأمثلة التي يقدمونها للطلاب ويقومون بتحليل الجملة بشكلٍ دقيقٍ ويشجعون الطلبة على الكتابة كجزء لا يتجزأ من مناهجهم في كافة المجالات. وبالتالي، فإنّ الكتابة الإنشائية للطلاب ستتحسّن. كما يتعين على المدرّسين أن يساعدوا الطلاب في التخلص من تداخل اللغة الأم الذي يحدث أثناء كتابة المقاطع الكاملة ويوضّحوا الفرق بين علم النحو بين اللغتين فيما يتعلق بتركيب وأنماط الجمل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المتعلمون العراقيون، اللغة الانكليزية كلغة أجنبية، الجمل المركبة، الجمل المعقدة

Introduction

Writing is a receptive skill that entails learning special rules and standards that are related to grammar and vocabulary. However, this skill is difficult and problematic for native and non-native speakers as it demands balance among multiple things such as content, grammar, spelling, punctuation and vocabulary (Abu Rass, 2015, p.49) However, this skill becomes more complicated for non-native speakers, especially when the mother tongue language is totally different from the foreign language such as Arabic and English. Hence, Arab learners face difficulties in writing in English, semantically and syntactically speaking, since the linguistic and the Arabic linguistic as well the orthographic systems of Arabic and are totally different (Alsamadani, 2010). Hence, Iraqi students face the same difficulties in writing in English as their mother tongue language is Arabic.

In order to have a proficiency in writing, students should know well how to write clauses, sentences, paragraphs and even essays. The basic unit of writing is the sentence which is defined as “a group of words which can express people’s thoughts” (Fadhilah, 2022, p.53). However, the sentence consists of one clause or



more, dependent or independent according to the sentence type Anderson, 2014). Hence, there are four types of sentences: simple, compound, complex and (compound complex. The “simple sentence” consists of one independent or main clause, the “compound sentence” consists of two main clauses, or independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction”, the “complex sentence” consists of one main or independent clause and one or more dependent clauses joined by at least one “subordinating conjunction”, and the “compound-complex sentence” consists of one or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses in forms of compound and complex sentences together (Anderson, 2014). The last type is not that much common in writing especially for EFL learners.

Simple sentence learning usually happens in early stages. Thus, according to the observation of the researcher who is also a teacher, the study has to focus on compound and complex sentence types as they are crucial for writing in English, especially for Iraqi EFL learners at the higher grades. However, few earlier studies have been done on the difficulties that the Iraqi students of EFL find in academic writings. There is no previous research that has investigated the abilities of those students to write and use compound and complex sentences and to differentiate between them. Hence, this study investigates the competence of Iraqi EFL learners in writing compound and complex sentences. The study comprises the theoretical knowledge as well as the practical skill of the students. It has a random sample of fifty students of the Departments of English at the University of Thi-Qar. Accordingly, a well-planned questionnaire of diverse tests has been given to the students in order to get accurate results of their performance in this domain.

Literature Review

There are few studies that have dwelled on the competence of writing in the Iraqi learners of EFL. However, there are no studies that have explored their proficiency in composing compound and complex sentences. As Iraqi students’ native language is Arabic, this review investigates the studies that has been done on Arabic spoken learners of EFL. English is also a foreign language for Iraqi learners. Thus, the review should include studies on writing sentences by EFL learners.

In investigating the writings of Jordanian students in English, Khuwaileh and Al Shoumali (2000) stated that They reported that 55% of the students used to write as they compose sentences in their mother tongue language which makes their writing full of mistakes in linking words use and results in incoherency in ideas. According to this study, mother-tongue interference affects the students’ competence in using linking words. Lakkis and Abdel Malak (2002) did a study on Egyptian students’ writings in English and reported the same problems of organizing ideas and linking sentences. Housen and Pierrard (2005) traced mother-



tongue interference in Arabic speaking learners of English due to the difference between the two languages. Thus, Byram (2000) along with Gass and Selinker (2008) emphasized that the teachers of languages should clarify the differences and contrasts between these languages to the students. Alsamadni (2010) asserted the great role of “mind mapping” strategy for the students and teachers for language acquisition in his study that was done on students from Saudi Arabia in Malaysian University English Test.

Abu Rass (2015) explored the Arab Palestinian problems who are specialized in English teaching at the Arab Institute for Education, Beit Berl Academic College. The study that included a sample of 205 students emphasized that Arab students commit the same mistakes due to mother tongue interference. The problems that the students face according to Abu Rass compromise writing long sentences with mistakes in using conjunction and linking words and repeating the same ideas and elaboration without being able to get into the point (Abu Rass, 2015).

In investigating the problems of writing in English for Iraqi students, Ali (2012) traced the difficulties of writing paragraphs for Iraqi students at the University of Baghdad. The study was concluded by confirming that the Iraqi students face difficulties in grammar and in coherency. Jasim (2012) conducted a study to discover the reasons of weak writing capacities among Iraqi writers. The study concluded that the learners lack practice in writing and teachers lack understanding of the writing skill. In a study that was done on the writing of Iraqi students in the final exam at the University of Kufa, Reishaan (2013) found out that the Iraqi students committed similar mistakes in the use of tenses of the verbs due to mother-tongue interference.

Fear and lack of confidence in writings can be a crucial issue that hinders good writings.

Yahya (2017) traced the difficulties that Iraqi University students face in composition writing. The study was conducted on a sample of 100 second year Iraqi students from English Department at the College of Basic Education, Diyala University. The study was concluded by confirming that Iraqi students face a lot of difficulties in composition writing, particularly. Fear and lack of confidence are two major factors that affect the students’ writings in English.

In an article entitled “Difficulties of Writing in English Encountered by Iraqi EFL Learners at University Level” that was done on a sample of 80 students whose major is English from the College of Education for Humanities at the University of Anbar, Mohammad et al. (2020) collected the Iraqi students views of writing in English in a questionnaire. The analysis of the findings revealed that the difficulties that students faced in writings could be ascribed to the lack of proper



help and guide from the teachers, poor grammar, time problem, misunderstanding of the writing skills and mother-tongue interference.

Reviewing other studies done on students from other nationalities, mother tongue interference arises as the main problem. Sari et al. (2018) analyzed the competence of the students in writing compound sentences at English Department, Universitas Negeri Padang in Indonesia. The study that included 18 students was concluded by revealing that the level of the students in writing compound sentences was average and the difficulties they faced were mostly related to punctuation, misuse of coordinating conjunction and omission in sentences. The same problems that face students in writing compound sentences were investigated by S. Fadhilah who identified similar problems related to the use of conjunction and gave suggestions of giving more practical exercises to the students (Fadhilah, 2022).

Koçak (2019) concluded that the most confusing type of students for EFL learners is the complex sentence in a study comprising 22 students from English Teaching Department at Hacettepe University, Turkey. In another study done at the English Department, FBS Universitas Negeri Padang, Princess & Syraif (2021) concluded that the students used to write long complex sentences with a lot of errors related to omission and order of the words in the sentence.

Consequently, the literature review reveals that the students of all nationalities whose mother tongue is different from English face challenges in academic writings. Arab students' general problems were investigated. However, this study fills in the gap as it analyzes the specific area of Iraqi EFL learners' competence in using and writing compound and complex sentences which are the basic units towards proficient writing.

Compound and Complex Sentences

The sentence has to contain at least one independent clause according to its type. It has been noted in the introduction that compound and complex sentences consist of more than one clause joined together. However, we have two types of clauses: independent and dependent clauses. The compound sentence consists of two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction. Whereas the complex sentence consists of one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses joined by a subordinating conjunction. The "independent clause" is "a complete thought" and "can stand by itself"; whereas the "dependent clause" is "an incomplete thought" and "cannot stand by itself" (Andersen, 2014, p.1). The dependent clause is recognized by the subordinating conjunction as is shown in the following example:

- When I go home, I take some rest.



The Independent clause is “I take some rest” as it is a complete and meaningful clause that can stand on its own.

The dependent clause is “when I take some rest” which has the subordinating conjunction “when” and cannot stand on its own.

In fact, we have two types of conjunctions, coordinating conjunctions that are used with compound sentences and subordinating conjunctions that are used with complex sentences. The coordinating conjunction links two independent clauses in the compound sentence, and the subordinating conjunction links the dependent clause or as it might be called the subordinate clause to the rest of the sentence.

Examples of these are as follows:

- I like coffee but I prefer tea in the evening. (“but” is a coordinating conjunction)
Ind. Cl. Ind. Cl.
- I will get some rest when I reach home. (“when” is a subordinating conjunction)
Ind. Cl. Dep. Cl.

The commonly used coordinator conjunctions are: and, but, or, nor, for, yet, then and semi colon (;) that is used sometimes to join clauses; whereas the most common subordinating conjunctions are: as, when, while, after, before, if, though, although, unless, because, even though, since, whereas and so.

As it is discussed by (Andersen, 2014), the compound and complex sentences are used for the following purposes:

1. combining parallel ideas, as in:
 - Water is necessary for our bodies and everyone must drink 1 liter of water every day.
(Compound Sentence)
 - Since water is necessary for our bodies, everyone must drink 1 liter of water every day.
(Complex Sentence)
2. comparing or contrasting ideas, as in:
 - She was a talented girl, but she suffered from psychological problems.
(Compound Sentence)
 - Although she was a talented girl, she suffered from psychological problems.
(Complex Sentence)
3. conveying causes and effects or series of events, as in:
 - I did not feel well, so I took leave. (Compound Sentence)
 - As I did not feel well, I took a leave. (Complex Sentence)
4. elaborating on one idea or reason:



- I wish I were you, then I would not miss that opportunity. (Compound Sentence)

- I would not miss that opportunity if I were you. (Complex Sentence)

If the subordinate or dependent clause comes before the main or independent clause in the complex sentence, a comma should be used as follows:

- If I were you, I would not miss that opportunity.

In fact, both compound and complex sentences have similar functions. Yet, the writer's choice depends on the ideas s/he wants to convey and the emphasis done on the clauses. They differ in the forms and types of clauses used. However, the students should make sure that there are symmetries in the tenses of the verbs used in the clauses of the same sentence. They should also recognize the suitable conjunction to be used in the sentence. Moreover, they should decide which type to be used according to the context.

Methods & Methodology

This is descriptive research that describes the Iraqi EFL learners' competence in composition and gives explanation of their proficiency. It is analytical as it analyzes those learners' competence through tests in a questionnaire. It is also qualitative in some of its parts and quantitative in other parts as it analyzes the numbers of the participants and assesses their writings by grades, then it analyzes these grades, turns them into percentages and gives the findings accordingly.

It is a primary data analysis of a survey made on a random sample of fifty Iraqi students at the Departments of English at the University of Thi-Qar. The survey depends on a questionnaire that has been given to the students in a form of tests. The questionnaire consists of two parts: theoretical and practical. Questions 1-3 are multiple choice questions. The first set of questions testifies the students' competence in choosing the right conjunctions and coordinators. The second set of questions checks the students' knowledge of the structure of the compound and complex sentences. The third set of questions aims to check their theoretical knowledge of the rules of compound and complex sentences. The fourth set of sentences probes the students' abilities to write compound and complex sentences. Finally, the last question is a practice on using compound and complex sentences in writing a paragraph.

The test has been given to the students as follows:

Q1: This is an English class. It is about English grammar (and /so) it is an essential lesson. The professor is an American man (but/ and/ besides) his students aren't American (so/but/;) they're foreigners. He is a good



teacher (and/but/ however) his students are (also/ too/ and).....interesting. He has tried different methods of teaching (which/ that/ so) make the application so easy.

Q2 State if the following sentences are right or wrong in their grammatical connection . Besides indicate the type each sentence:

1. We will have either to wait for them or to leave a message. (right/wrong) (compound/complex)
2. I felt very tired in order that I went straight to bed. (right/wrong) (compound/complex)
3. Even if he never been to France, he speaks French well. (right/wrong) (compound/complex)
4. It is such a beautiful evening that we should go for a walk. (right/wrong) (compound/complex)
5. I went there for to you see me. (right/wrong) (compound/complex)
6. The girl who you saw at the party is my sister. (right/wrong) (compound/complex)
7. Bill does not live in a dormitory and he has a private room. (right/wrong) (compound/complex)
8. Mr. Allen is short but George is thirty. (right/wrong) (compound/complex)
9. Jack goes downtown on Mondays; he goes to the movies on Friday nights. (right/wrong) (compound/complex)
10. Bill does like Indian movies and he likes English series(right/wrong) (compound/complex)

Q3: choose the correct answer:

1. In the compound sentence we have:
 - A. One clause
 - B. Two independent clauses
 - C. Two dependent clauses
 - D. One independent and one dependent clauses
- 2: In the complex sentence we have:
 - A. One clause
 - B. Two independent clauses
 - C. Two dependent clauses
 - D. One independent and one dependent clauses



3: “I like him because he is very helpful”, what type of sentence is this?

- A. Simple Sentence
- B. Compound Sentence
- C. Complex Sentence

4. Can the thesis statement in the essay be a compound sentence? Yes/ No

Q4. Give two examples from your own expression: One is for compound sentence and the other is for complex sentence.

Q5. Write one paragraph about unforgettable day (no more than five lines). Use appropriate connections to add, contrast, or describe your writing.

In a primary data analysis, the answers of the students are checked and the findings are given to describe the Iraqi EFL learners' competence in using and writing compound and complex sentence. Accordingly, their weak points and strong points are highlighted as well as suggestions to overcome the weak points as the conclusion reveals.

Discussion & Findings

In analyzing the students' answers to the questions comprised 4 tests, each of them is targeted to test a specific point in the students' writing skill, the answers have been analyzed and organized in tables to give the final findings.

The students' answers to the first question that tackles the use of conjunction and gives multiple choices comes as Table 1 reveals:

Table 1
The students' performances of question (1): Students' Use of Conjunction

Student no.	Item no.	right	%	wrong	%
50	1	47	94	3	6
	2	49	98	1	2
	3	42	84	8	16
	4	38	76	12	24
	5	47	94	3	6
	6	40	80	10	20



The results show that the majority of the students with (87.67%) have given the right answers. This means that the students have a good knowledge and competence in conjunction functions and use.

Table 2 indicates the students' knowledge of the grammatical structure of compound and complex sentences by referring to the sentences as they are right or wrong in part 1 and by referring to the types of the sentences as they are compound or complex in part 2 . The results come as follows:

Table 2

The students' performances of question (2), Part 1: Structure of the Sentence

Student no.	Item no.	right	%	wrong	%
50	1	50	0	0	0
	2	22	44	28	56
	3	34	68	16	32
	4	17	34	33	66
	5	46	92	4	8
	6	48	96	2	4
	7	16	32	34	68
	8	37	74	13	26
	9	21	42	29	58
	10	27	54	23	46

Table 3

The students' performances of question (2), Part 1: Recognition of the Sentence

Student no.	Item no.	right	%	wrong	%
50	1	46	92	4	8
	2	42	84	8	16
	3	43	86	7	14
	4	43	86	7	14
	5	32	64	18	36
	6	11	22	39	78
	7	50	100	0	0
	8	46	92	4	8
	9	42	84	8	16
	10	48	96	2	4



In analyzing the students' answers to part 1 of Q2, it is concluded that (53.6 %) gave the correct answers, while (46.4 %) had wrong answers. In part 2 of the same question, (80.6%) gave the right answer. This indicates that the students' knowledge in the correct structure of the sentence is moderate, but they can recognize the type of sentence, if it is compound or complex, in a good way.

Students' answers to the third question, which is theoretical and is concerned with the rules of compound and complex sentences, come as follows:

Table 4

The students' performances of question (3): Theoretical Knowledge of the Rules of the Sentences

Student no.	Item no.	right	%	wrong	%
50	1	31	62	19	38
	2	42	84	8	16
	3	28	56	22	44
	4	13	26	37	74

The results show that the majority of the students (57%) have a good theoretical knowledge of the rules of compound and complex sentences. However, the percentage is not high but it is moderate to some extent.

Q4 demands that students compose compound and complex sentences of their own to check their writings. The results are revealed in Table 5:

Table 5

The students' performances of question (4): Students' Ability to Compose Compound and Complex Sentences

Student no.	Item no.	right	%	wrong	%
50	Compound.	43	86	7	14
	Complex.	39	78	11	22

The results show that (86%) of the students have written successful compound sentences, whereas (14%) have failed to do. On the other hand (78%) of the students have successfully written complex sentences, while (22%) have failed. This indicates that most of the students are proficient in writing one or two



sentences of their own choice. However, their abilities in writing compound sentences are better than complex sentences.

Q5 is allotted to check the students' writings of compound and complex sentences in a paragraph. They are asked to write about an unforgettable day in no more than five lines using appropriate connections to add, contrast, or describe the writing which entails their use of compound and complex sentences. However, not all of the students have performed the paragraph writing.

Table 5

The students' performances of question (5): Paragraph Writing

Student no.	Performed paragraph	%	Non performed paragraph	%
50	41	80.83	9	18

The percentage shows that (80.83%) of the students have written the paragraphs, while (18%) abstained.

The findings of the results reveal that the students have good theoretical knowledge. They have successfully realized the right conjunctions according to their answers to the first and second question. However, some of their answers to part 2 of question 2 might be a guess according to the context and according to their previous knowledge of the sentence structure. Most of the students failed in recognizing the sentence type in Q2, no. 9 due to lack of knowledge that the semi colon (;) can replace the conjunction to link two clauses.

Students' performance in Q3 have been somehow good. Yet, in no. 3 few of them have given the right answer as most of them have recognized (because) to be a conjunction for the complex sentence. In no. 4 only 13 students have answered correctly as most of them have imperfect knowledge regarding essay writing.

Q4 shows that students' competence in writing compound sentences is better than complex sentences to some extent. This can be ascribed to the lack of knowledge in complex sentence conjunctions such as: (so... that, in order... that, in spite of, etc.). Q5 reveals that students' performance in paragraph writing is very poor. Nine students have abstained from answering the question and forty-one students with percentage (82%) have poor performance with a lot of mistakes related to recurring use of wrong articles and joining long sentences. Hence, the performance in the last question can indicate difficulties of writing due to the lack of practice and mother tongue interference.

All in all, it is concluded that the Iraqi EFL learners at university level have a good knowledge of compound and complex sentences. They are also good at



deducing the type of the sentence. However, they need more practice on writing and more guidance from the teachers in writing paragraphs. It is highly recommended that the teachers analyze the sentence types for the students and train them on academic writing dwelling the right use of conjunction to enable them to move to the third level of essay writing. The students should be encouraged to write in English in the previous domains of literature and science and practice writing in order to learn how to get into the points and link the clauses appropriately.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the types of sentences in English are crucial for the students to master syntax. Without mastering the rules of sentence making in all types, the students' competence will be insufficient. Moreover, the students have to know well how to use the conjunctions in these sentences appropriately. That is to say, they have to get theoretical knowledge and practical proficiency. According to the findings of this study that depends on primary data analysis of the survey given to the fifty Iraqi EFL learners as a random sample, the average of students' performance was good in theoretical questions. However, they need more training and practice on how to use these sentences in paragraph writing and how to link the clauses and sentences together to achieve symmetry in tenses and avoid contradiction as well as grammatical mistakes.

Limitation & Scope of the Study

In fact, this study comprises a random sample of fifty students from Departments of English at University of Thi-Qar. Data have not been collected from other Iraqi universities to compare and contrast the Iraqi EFL learners' performance in composing compound and complex sentences due to the difficulties in collecting data that the researcher has faced. Yet, this study can be a basis for other future study that will be done in other branches and universities in Iraq. Thus, this study can be a reference for future researchers who seek to collect data in order to check the Iraqi students' competence in sentence making and composition writing.

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