EXPLORING THE MOST COMMON TYPES OF WRITING PROBLEMS AMONG ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION MAJOR SOPHOMORE FEMAL STUDENTS AT TABUK UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Learning and developing writing skills are considered a difficult task. Academic writing requires conscious effort and much practice in organization, language use and writing mechanics. There are many factors affecting undergraduate academic writing performance in ESL, like content, vocabulary, composing, developing, and analyzing ideas. Producing an organized, neat and error-free piece of writing has always been the life-long dream and the ambition of all ESL students. The purpose of this study is to explore the most common types of writing problems among English language and translation major sophomore female students at Tabuk University. The study was conducted in the Department of English and Translation at Tabuk University. Forty students participated in this study; they were asked to give a sample of their own writing modules and to answer a questionnaire about what they think the reasons behind the types of writing problems they face when they write in English. The data revealed that there are different types of writing problems among English language and translation major sophomore female students at Tabuk University. The findings of the study showed that most language problems which manifested themselves in the students' writing were as follows: 1- grammatical problems in the field of tenses, prepositions, syntactic, subject – verb agreement and the use of articles. 2-Punctuation problems at the level of the absence, the misuse or the addition of punctuation marks.3- Spelling problems in the field of substitution, omission, addition, disordering, segmentation and unrecognizable words. The findings also revealed the reasons behind students' writing weaknesses from their perspectives.

Keywords: English –Major Undergraduate, Writing, Writing Problems.

INTRODUCTION

English language is the most widely spoken language in the world. Nowadays, the use of English is more widespread because of the business-environment revolution, the ongoing advances in technology such as the internet and other businesses (Pakir, 1999). English as a foreign language and English as a second language (EFL/ESL) learners face many obstacles. Writing is one of the most difficult skills for students to acquire. Writing is unlike spoken language in that it requires the reader or the audience to understand and interpret what has been written. Nunan (1999) states that "the most difficult task to do in language learning is to produce a coherent, fluent, extended piece of writing, which is even more challenging for second language learners."Written products are often the results of thinking, drafting and revising procedures that require specialized skills, skills that not every speaker develops naturally (Brown, 2001). Emmons (2003) states that "writing is a basic skill that needs to be mastered by all English Language major students. It is believed that writing demands a great deal of skills and conventions such as writing readiness and grammatical rules for the students to become proficient and effective writers." In approaching writing tasks, students are actually searching for solutions to a series of problems (Hyland, 2008). Nanun (1989: 36) believes that "at the sentences level these include control of content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and letter formation. Beyond the sentence level, the writer must be able

to structure and integrate information into cohesive and coherent paragraphs and texts." In the history of language teaching, there have been a numerous number of studies that investigate the writing problems which hinder students from introducing a mistake-free piece of writing. Teh (2005) points out that writing is the skill most Malaysian students are less proficient in and they do not know how to accomplish the written tasks in satisfactory ways. ÖzgeRazı, (2013) states that "Turkish students who learn English as a foreign language usually find it difficult to write in."Haiwen Mo (2013) investigated the current situation of college English writing teaching in China thoroughly , and he found that college students' writing ability is far from satisfactory. Nofal (2010) conducted a study in which he investigated and scrutinized the reasons behind the weaknesses of English major students in Philadelphia University – Jordan.

He states that "it is difficult for students to express themselves adequately in writing. The most discrete characteristics of a good paragraph are virtually absent in the writing of most students. Unity, consistency, order and coherence are obviously lacking; students fail to signal the direction of their thoughts by the use of transitional words such as,' however", ' moreover', 'nevertheless', and phrases like 'on the other hard', 'in fact', 'of course', etc. " Al-Buainain (2008) elaborates that " there is a general consensus among English language instructors at the university of Qatar that most EFL students are weak in writing courses. "Ansari (2012) mentioned that more than 50% of students in Saudi Arabia do not know how to write English. Most of them are unaware of the cursive writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Of the four language skills, writing has always been the main concern of EFL practitioners and researchers (June, 2008). Writing requires knowing the factors that influence both its process and product. It contributes to the development of learners' cognitive skills in attaining the required strategies in the learning process such as analysis, synthesis, inference, etc. (Bacha, 2002). Jafari& Ansari (2012) mention the Iranian EFL students' failure in writing. They state that " the failure of Iranian EFL students in L2 writing as effectively as they should, can perhaps be attributed to a variety of factors including L2 writing instruction, lack of motivation, L2 writing feedback, lack of target language proficiency and vocabulary, the interference of L1into L2 and psychological variables such as anxiety." Salem (2007) explored the views of 50 male undergraduate students majoring in English in relation to writing in English at the University Of Al- Azhar Egypt. Most of the students felt overwhelmed when they were required to write on a certain topic. They did not know how to start, how to develop their ideas or how to conclude the essay. They also lacked the technical skills of writing acceptable compositions in English.

They often repeated their ideas, reported few if any valid points, made serious mistakes in grammar and punctuation, and included irrelevant information. Huwari, Al-Khasawneh (2013) explored the reasons behind the weakness of writing among pre-year students'at Taibah University. The finding of this study showed that students declared main themes behind their weakness of writing, such as grammatical weakness, knowledge and understanding, less practice, and educational background. Latif (2007) aimed to examine second language writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy in thecontext of English as a foreign language in Egypt. The participants were 67 Egyptian English language teaching students. The results indicated that second language anxiety was negatively associated with students' writing performance. Nacira (2010) conducted a study in which he analyzed some factors behind students' poor writing productions at Batna University. He stated that "concerning the learners, the findings revealed that the majority of the teachers assume that the effects of L1, lack of reading, motivation, and

practice result in students' poor performances in writing. They added that these difficulties occur at all levels of the sentence, the paragraph, and the essay."Several research studies have indicated that international students studying at Asian universities encounter challenges in coping with the writing demands in their disciplines Myles, J., & Cheng, L. (2003). Hourani (2008:11) remarks that the primary causes of errors can be as follows: "Interlingual errors and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors are those which are related to the native language, whereas intralingual errors are those which are due to the language being learned." Correction is essential in helping students become more accurate in using the foreign language. Russel and Spada (2006) stress that there is growing evidence that error correction is overall useful and can be helpful in L2 learning.

In the case of Saudi male and female high school students, Almarwany (2008) confirms what Elkılıç states with regard to the punctuation problems. Almarwany (2008) remarks that students' first language causes many writing problems. Among these problems arecapitalization and punctuation. According to Almarwany (2008), the results of the test revealed that the students committed various mistakes in grammar, organization, and, most importantly, in capitalization and punctuation (p. 10). Like Elkılıç, she pointed out that errors in punctuation were the most frequent. The findings indicated that errors in punctuation resulted frominadequate mastery of L2 rules as well as Arabic interference. Due to inferior language proficiency, students apply L1 rules without realizing that L1 and L2 have different systems of punctuation. There are some punctuation marks commonly used in both Arabic and English, but suchcase is not true all the time. This case holds only if there is a similarity between L1 and L2 that will lead to a positive transfer.

Spelling is addressed differently in several studies. Swan and Smith (2008) observe that "all aspects of writing in English cause major problems for Arabic speakers" (p. 199). They discuss some of the major differences between the two languages that cause Arab learners a lot of difficulties. For example, Arabic is a cursive system that rarely recognizes words written in isolated forms of letters. To illustrate, the Arabic equivalent word of the English word "*study"* is (يدرس)*,* which is formed of separate Arabic letters. However, it would be highly unusual to see this word, or most Arabic words, written using separate letters. Another important difference they mention is that Arabic is awriting system that runs from right to left, which makes Arab learners misread and sometimes misspell words that contain letters with mirror shapes such as *p* and *q* and *d* and *b*. They also add that the right-to-left writing system makes learners misreadletters within words by right to left eye movement. For example, learners' mightmisread *form* for *from.*

Bahloul (2007) believes that a main cause of spelling errors and one that seems to cause most learners of English a big problem in developing their spelling proficiency is the irregularity of the English writing system. This irregularity appears to confuse learners from different language backgrounds, including native speakers. The main cause of this irregularity is that, as Henderson (1981) indicates, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the written word and its pronunciation. Hildreth (1962) also attributes many of the spelling difficulties that most learners of English have to the "inconsistencies in English word structure" (p. 4).

Inputs Versus Outputs

Since writing is a productive language skill, how students learn the different language elements manifests itself in their writing. The input received and the output produced by the SL learner

may be oral, written (or aural), which may or may not be comprehensible (Krashen, 1985: 4).In language learning, input is the language data which the learner is exposed to. It is commonly acknowledged that for second language acquisition to take place there must be two prerequisites: L2 input available to the learners and a set of internal mechanism to account for how L2 data are processed (Ellis, 1985). A nonnative speaker is able to possess near native-like proficiency in the EFL context if he or she has plenty of time for learning English, adequate exposures to a wide variety of English, both spoken and written, a real need to use English on a daily basis and interaction with more knowledgeable ones, not treating English as a subject to be learned, but as a means of communication, where the focus is on the meaning first, then on the form of the language (Zhang: 2009). Effective teaching leads to improved student achievement. Great teachers have a huge effect on their students. They inspire their students to maximum effort and maximum accomplishment (Shearon, 2001). In thecase of the Saudi students, most of the English language input they receive occurs inside the classroom.

Definition of Terms

Writing: Zamel (1983) views the process of writing as non-linear, exploratory, and generative whereby writers discover and generate ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning. This process involves the sub-processes of planning, collecting data, drafting, revising, rewriting and editing. These sub-processes need not to be seen as sequential stages; they are rather highly dynamic, non-sequential, and interactive processes. Peters (1986) defines writing as a "… curiously solitary form of communication, addressed to an absent and often unknown reader" (p. 169). Grami (2010) commented that many researchers (e.g., Widdowson, 1983; Smith, 1989; White, 1987) have defined writing as a 'complicated cognitive task' because of the fact that it "… demands careful thought, discipline, and concentration, and it is not just a simple direct production of what the brain knows or can do at a particular moment"

Writing Problems: for the scope of this study the concept of writing problems refers to the situations when students have difficulties in one or more aspects of the writing skill such as the proper use of grammar, punctuation and spelling mistakes. When facing such problems students fail to produce a mistake-free piece of writing.

Purpose Of The Study

Like all learning problems, difficulties in writing can be devastating to students' education and self-esteem. As students progress through school, they are increasingly expected to express what they know about many different subjects through writing. If a student fails to develop certain basic skills, he/she will be unable to write with the speed and fluency required to excel as these demands increase. Indeed, for a student struggling with a writing problem, the writing process itself interferes with learning. Students faced with such difficult odds have trouble staying motivated. Levine (2010) claims that the following problems have potential impacts on writing: Attention problems, spatial ordering problems, sequential ordering problems, memory problems and language problems. This study aims to explore the grammatical, punctuation and spelling language problems made by English language and translation major sophomore female students at Tabuk University when practicing writing.

Questions Of The Study

The current study is aimed at investigating the following questions:

1-What are the most common types of writing problems among English language and translation major sophomore female students?
2- What are the reasons behind the most common types of writing problems among English language and translation major sophomore female students from their perspectives?
3- What are the suggested remedies to overcome writing problems made by English language and translation major sophomore female students from their perspectives?

Instrument Of The Study

This study was carried out in the Department of English and Translation at University of Tabuk. To achieve the purpose of the study, two instruments were used :
1-A sample of the writing modules produced by the students on their own
2- A questionnaire to be filled in by the students.
3- A written interview to obtain the students suggestions about how to overcome writing problems.

Sample Of The study

Forty sophomore students who study English language and translation at the University of Tabuk/KSA participated in this study .They were all enrolled in a writing course designed for the second semester for the academic year 2015/2016. The students were asked to write an essay of 200-250 about two among six suggested topics.

Procedure Of The Study

To answer the first question of the study and in corporation with the English sophomore female teachers at the Department of English and Translation, 40 of the English language and translation major sophomore female students were asked to write around 200 words about two of the following topics : 1) let's help the environment by…, 2) Nation is controlled by …, 3) One (or both) of your parents start with "I was born…" , 4) The place you mostly like to visit, 5) The moment your life changed forever 6) Why you can succeed in your life. The researchers analyzed and scored the students written products. To answer the second question of the study, the students were asked to fill in a questionnaire about the reasons behind the most common types of writing problems, which they face when they write. To answer the third question of the study, the students were asked to suggest   remedies to overcome the writing problems that they face when they write.

Statistical Analysis

The researchers used the descriptive statistics, namely, the percentages of the samples' respoawqwwqwwweee3nses regarding the items on the questionnaire. The sample of the students own-produced writing modules were manually checked and scored.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND APPLICATION

This part of the study is devoted to analyzing the data related to the three research questions:

1-What are the most common types of writing problems among English language and translation major sophomore female students?

2- What are the reasons behind the most common types of writing problems among English language and translation major sophomore female students from their perspectives?

3- What are the suggested remedies to overcome the writing problems faced by English language and translation major sophomore female students from their perspectives?

The First Question

In order to get insight into the most common types of writing problems among English language and translation major sophomore female students, the researchers analyzed and scored the students 'writing modules. Following an illustration of the various problems students face when they write.

Grammatical Problems

The students were asked to write an essay of 200 -250 words about two among six suggested topics. The researchers scored and analyzed the written data. The results of analyzing the most common grammatical errors in the students 'written data are the following: Errors in the use of tenses, the use of prepositions, as well as syntactical and subject-verb agreement errors, not to mention errors in the use of articles.

Classification of Grammatical Errors

A total of 358 grammatical errors were found. The distribution of the students' grammatical errors were as follows: Tenses (29%), Prepositions (9.6%), syntactical errors (18.4%) subject-verb agreement (28%) and the use of the articles (15%). See table 1 for details.

Types of Errors	Number of Errors	Percentage of
Tenses	104	29%
Prepositions	34	9.6%
Syntactical errors	66	18.4%
Subject – verb agreement	100	28%
Articles	54	15%
Total	358	100%

Table 1: Grammatical errors

Tense Errors

The errors which the students made in the use of tenses amounted to 104 errors- 29% of the total grammatical errors. See table 2 for details.

Types of Errors	Number of errors	Percentage of Errors
Present progressive	35	33%
Simple present instead of	34	32.6%
Simple past instead of	16	15.%
Simple past instead of	19	19. %
Total	104	100%

Table 2 :Tense errors

The results of the analysis of the grammatical errors shown in table 1 reveal that the most common grammatical errors were in the use of the correct tense, 108 errors making 29% of the total. In more details, 33% of the students used the present progressive instead of the present simple tense, and 32% of the students used the simple present instead of the present perfect tense, whereas 19% of the students used the simple past instead of the simple present. Finally, 15% of them used the simple past instead of present perfect tense. This may be due to L1 interference because according to the rules of Arabic grammar there is no verb 'to be' in the present tense, and no auxiliary 'do' either. There is one single present tense in Arabic, as compared to English, which implies both the simple and continuous forms and meanings according to the context. These differences result in errors such as "It beautiful city", "When you come to Dubai?", and "I flying to Dubai tomorrow" or "When they leaving?" Moreover, Arabic language does not make the distinction between actions completed in the past with and without a connection to the present. Hence, Arab students have problems with the present perfect tense, as in "I *finished my pocking. Can you check it?*"

There are no modal verbs in Arabic. This sometimes leads to wrong utterances such as "from the possible that I am late", which is intended to mean "I may be late."Another common mistake is to infer that an auxiliary is needed, and therefore a student might make mistakes such as "does she must come with us?"

Errors in the Use of Prepositions

The errors which the participants made in the use of prepositions amounted to 34 errors, that is, 9.6% of the total grammatical errors. See table 3 for details,

Type of errors	Number of errors	Percentage of errors
Omission of preposition	18	53%
Addition of preposition	9	17. %
Misuse of preposition	10	29.4%
Total	34	100%

Table 3: Errors in the use of prepositions

Omission of prepositions is a large area of uncertainty for many students as 53% of the students failed to practice it correctly. At the same time, 29.4% of the students misused the correct preposition. Finally, 17% of the students redundantly used a preposition where it is not needed. Arab students face a real problem with using incorrect prepositions when they write compositions in English because of the big difference in using prepositions in both languages. One student wrote, "Wait me" instead of "Wait for me", and that's because in Arabic no preposition is used after the verb 'wait'. Arab students as EFL learners usually try to relate the use of English prepositions to their mother tongue (MT) prepositional system. In many instances, the difference in the number of prepositions and the lack of a one-to-one mapping between the English prepositions and those of the MT can be the main reason for such resultant difficulty. In addition, since prepositional usage in English can be highly idiomatic(especially in prepositional verbs and phrasal verbs), the nuances of idiomatic usage of English prepositions are highly challenging to EFL learners and even to many native speakers who are sometimes unsure of the correct form (Gass S, 1983: 161).

Syntactical Errors

The syntactical errors which the participants made amounted to 66 errors or 18.4% of the total grammatical errors. See table 4 for details,

Types of errors	Number of errors	Percentage of errors
Omission of plural ending	12	18. 2%
Misuse and addition of	10	15.1%
Misuse of possessive 's'	16	18. 1%
Incorrectuseof	8	12.1%
Wrong word form	20	36.4%
Total	66	100%

Table 4: Syntactical errors

A wrong word form error is an error done by 36.4% of the students; another tricky area for students to learn is the omission of the plural ending's', as18.2% of the students showed deficiency in this area.18.1%of the students failed to use the possessive's' correctly .15.1% of the students misused the plural ending's'. Also, the incorrect usage of comparative adjectives proved to be another problematic area for 12.1% of the students. Research on second language acquisition has long acknowledged the important role of 'interference', as it shows the negative influence of the mother language (L1) on the learners' performance of the target language (L2). This influence results in language transfer. According to Old in (1989), "Transfer is the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired; the transfer of Arabic structures in the English students' writing has produced a number of errors on the grammatical, lexical, semantic, and syntactic levels.

Subject-Verb Agreement

The errors which the participants made in the subject-verb Agreement amounted to 100 errors or 28% of the total grammatical errors. See table 5 for details.

Types of errors	Number of errors	Percentage of errors
plural subject does not	60	60%
singular subject does not	40	40%

Table 5 :Subject-verb agreement

One of the most common type of error made by students in the study group is subject- verb agreement. In this case the subject and the verb phrase in the English sentence should agree in number and person. This was the area with a big sampling with a total of 100 attempts. The big amount of errors could be a strong indicator that the students lack a basic understanding of subject-verb agreement. In Arabic, the subject must agree with the verb that follows, that is to say, if the subject is masculine, the verb should respond to it and the same applies to the feminine. A possible explanation why students tend to add –s after plural, and omit–s after singular may due to overgeneralization of the rule. Students overgeneralize the plural by adding the plural –s to the verb that follows and omitthe –s in the verb if the subject is singular. Most Arab students confuse using the third person singular (–s) with the plural (-s). They tend to add -s to the end of the verb if the subject is plural and omit –s if the subject is singular Mori, Y. (1998).

Articles

The errors which the participants made in the use of articles amounted to 54 errors, or 15% of the total grammatical errors. See table 6 for details.

Error source	Number of Errors	Percentage of
Omission	20	39%
Addition	13	24%
Substitution	21	37%
Total	54	100%

Table 6 : Errors in the use of the articles

39% of the students' dropped an article when they should have sued it. Substitute of the right article with the wrong one was done by 37% of the students. 24% of the students added a redundant article. The Arabic article system is similar to that of English in meaning; however, the form is highly varied. While the Arabic system manifests a binary distinction between the defined and the undefined, the English system exhibits a tripartite distinction. Defined noun phrases in Arabic (marked by the definite article /al/) and undefined ones (marked by the absence of /al/) correspond to the English defined (marked by the definite article the) and undefined noun phrases (marked by the indefinite articles **a** (n) and zero). It is possible that participants may have sometimes forgotten to use articles due to the interference of their first language and this explains the occurrence of interlingual errors. The Arabic language system of the definite and indefinite articles might have a negative effect on the students' wrong usage of these articles in the target language (English) Hourani (2008). AbiSamara (2003) investigates the reason behind the students' misuse of the articles. He found that most of the errors were traced to L1 interference (interlingual errors). This implies that the article system of the L1 (Arabic) is transferred negatively into the target language. This is in line with Mizuno (1999).

Punctuation Errors

The data obtained from the students' module writing showed that students suffered serious deficiency in applying the punctuation system correctly in their writing. Due to the large amount of punctuation errors in the students writing modules, researchers found it more practical to just cite the categories of the students' punctuation errors. These error categories are as follows :
1. The absence of the capital letter at the beginning of new sentences.
2. Rare capitalization of proper nouns.
3. Incorrect usage of the colon.
4. Omission of the semicolon.
5. The absence of the exclamation mark where required.
6. Run-on sentences, with no full stops at the end of sentences.
7.   Poor or no revision of what is written and not enough spaces between words.
8. Lack of question marks.
9. Hyphens are hardly used.
10. The omission of the comma after introductory elements.

The students of the subject are in need of learning the aspects of the English punctuation system, such as the way to punctuate a question or when to end a sentence. These findings go

in line with Shoebottom‘s (2016), who found out that the most serious of punctuation mistakes are made not only by ESL students, but also by native speakers, too. The mistakes are due to the lack of a clear understanding of what a sentence is, and they result in fragments (incomplete sentences) or run-ons ('sentences' that do not end when they should).

Spelling Mistakes

Analyzing students' spelling mistakes revealed that such mistakes filled in one of the following categories (these categories were quoted from Al Jayousi (2011)) :

1. Substitution: this includes errors caused by substituting a letter or more for another, as substituting the *e*for the *i*in *big*(*beg*).
2. Omission which includes errors caused omitting one letter or more, as omitting the 'f 'in the word afect (affect).
3. Addition which, refers to adding an extra letter or letters to a word, as adding an *'i'* to the word aill (all).
4. Disordering which refers to disordering some letters in a word, such as writing 'because' (instead of 'because').
5. Segmentation which refers to writing one word as two, or segmenting the word, e.g. 'some times' (sometimes).
6. 'Unrecognizable': this category includes words that could not berecognized because they were unreadable, such as *doib*. This category was considered as awastebasket for such words.

 Investigating students' spelling mistakes is considered a rich field of research. Al-Karaki (2005), who claims that errors caused by spelling words as they are pronounced are attributed to the irregularity of English and thus are classified in the category of *Irregularity of English*. In their study, Book and Harternoted that around 25% of errors identified were caused by the tendency to spell by sound. Al- Karaki (2005) attributed the spelling errors that sheidentified into six causes. According to her, the main causes of spelling errors of ALE are pronunciation, differences between the sound systems of English and Arabic, overgeneralization, arbitrary nature of English word derivation, incomplete application of English spelling rules, or the lack of knowledge of the exceptions of spelling rules, and performance errors. Spelling Students need to understand that spelling mistakes do not usually prevent the reader from understanding what the writer is trying to say, but they can create a negative impression. For this reason it is advisable to try to remove them from important pieces of writing.

The Second Question

The second question of the study attempts to investigate the following query: "what are the reasons behind the most common types of writing problems among English language and translation major sophomore female students from their perspectives? In order to answer the second question of the study, students were asked to answer a questionnaire about how they learn English grammar, punctuation and spelling. Knowing how students learn English could be an indicator about the reasons behind the most common types of writing problems they are familiar with.

Strategies of Learning Grammar

Table 7 illustrates percentages of the students' answers about how they learn grammar.

2.1 Grammatical Errors	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Agree
1. I learn grammar items through a context.	92.5%	3%	4.5%		
2. I should master the grammatical concepts		3%	2%		95%
3. My teacher uses Arabic to simplify the rules and				98%	2.%
4. My focus should not be on the correctness and the	87%	7%	2%	3%	1%
5. I learn grammar along with other language skills.	90%	7%			3%
6. Grammar is taught in isolation and instruction				2.5%	97.5%
7. Form-focused grammar instruction is the core		5%	1%		94%
8.I practice the new grammar a lot.	93%				7%

Table 7: Strategies of learning grammar

When being asked about how they learn English, the majority of the students, 95.5 % of them, strongly agreed that they did not learn grammar items through a context. However, 98 % of the students agreed that their teachers used Arabic to simplify the rules and facilitate grammar learning. Also, 87% of them reported that they should focus on the correctness or the accuracy of the grammar production. Moreover, 90 % of the students said that they learned grammar along with other language skills. 97.5% agreed on the fact grammar is taught in isolation and instruction focuses on rote rules and memorization. In the same vein, 94 % of the students claimed that form-focused grammar instruction had been the core teaching strategy of grammar instruction in Saudi EFL classes, and93% of the students strongly agrees that they did not practice the new grammar a lot**.** See table 7.

Strategies of Learning Punctuation
Table 8 illustrates the percentages of the students' answers about how they learn Punctuation items.

Ways how l learn punctuation	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Agree
1. I learn the punctuation marks through a context.	90%	5%			5%
2. My teacher checks my use of the punctuation	94%	4%	2%		
3. I feel that I'm better this year in using the				98%	2%
4. I think that Arabic punctuation system and the	96%	2%	2%		
5. My teacher uses the punctuation marks in her	92 %	7%			1%
7. My teacher motivates me to more research the		95%	5%		

Table 8: Strategies of learning punctuation

90% of the students state that they don't learn the punctuation marks through a context. 94% of them claim that their teachers don't check their use of the punctuation marks on a regular basis. However, 98% of the students believe that they do not show any improvement in using correct punctuation. The similarity between Arabic and English punctuation systems is emphasized by 96% of the students, while 92% of the students claim that their teachers do not use punctuation in their writing modules. More than that, 95 % of them claim that their teachers do not motivate them to do enough research on the use of the punctuation marks. See Table 8.

Strategies of Learning Spelling

Tables 9 illustrate percentages of the students' answers about how they learn Punctuation items.

Ways of how l learn spelling	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Agree
1. The cause for my spelling error isthe difference between written				100%	
2. The origin of English words makes learning their spelling difficult	94%	4%	2%		
3. The cause for my spelling error is the phonological differences		2%	2%	96%	
4. I will be a better speller if I become better reader.					98%
5. Textbooks can't help to develop my spelling proficiency	92%	4%	2%	2%	2%
6. My main problem in learning spelling is lack of materials		7%	3%	%88	1%
7. My main problem in learning spelling is not the lack of interest to learn		95%	5%		
8. My main problem in learning spelling is lack of good teachers				100%	

Table 9 : Strategies of learning punctuation

All students agree that the difference between the written and spoken English and the lack of good teachers are among the main reasons behind their spelling errors. 98% of the students believe that they will be better spellers if they become better readers. Phonological differences between Arabic and English are considered a serious cause for spelling errors for 96% of the students. Furthermore, 95% of the students consider developing interest to learn spelling as an important factor to master it .The origin of English words as a cause of spelling weaknesses is agreed upon by 94% of the students. The role of the textbooks in enhancing students' spelling competence is emphasized by 92% of the students. Also, 88% of the students believe that they are weak in spelling because of the lack of extra material. See table 9.

The Third Question

The third question of the study tackles the students suggested remedies to overcome writing problems which they face when they write. In order to obtain the students suggestions about how to overcome writing problems, the researchers conducted a written interview with them to make sure that they fully understand the purpose of the question. The researchers then distributed a piece of paper to each student with three question to encourage them to participate in the study.(See Appendix B)

1-Remedies to Overcome Problems in Grammar

Grammatical concepts should be taught within a context.
Emphasize the mastery of grammatical concepts under study.
Heavy grammar practice should be emphasized.
Arabic should not be used to simplify the English grammar rules.
Focus should be on the fluency, not just the correctness or accuracy of production.
Grammar rules should be taught while integrated with other language skills.
The focus of teaching grammar should not be on rote rules and memorization.
Teaching strategy of grammar instruction should not be form-focused rather than communication focused.
The following is a summary of the students' suggested remedies:

2- Remedies to overcome problems in punctuation

Punctuation marks should be introduced within a context.
Teachers should check the use of punctuation marks consistently.
Teachers should help students to recognize the similarities and the differences between the Arabic punctuation system and the English one.
Teachers themselves should use punctuation marks in their writing modules.
Teachers should motivate students to further research punctuation marks to scaffold their understanding.
Teachers should help students develop interest towards the use of the punctuation marks.

3- Remedies to overcome problems in spelling

Teachers should draw students' attention to the difference between written and spoken English.
Teachers should draw students' attention to fact that the origin of English words makes learning their spelling difficult.
Students should learn the phonological differences between Arabic and English.
Students should read more.
Textbooks should help students to develop spelling proficiency.
Whet students' interest to learn spelling.
Teachers be trained enough to help students overcome spelling deficiency.

Summary

The analysis of the results of the students' writing modules suggests that the students committed various kinds of errors in the fields of grammar, punctuation and spelling. In terms of grammatical errors the students committed 358 mistakes .The grammatical mistakes occurred in the fields of tenses (104), prepositions(34), syntactical errors(66) ,subject –verb

agreement(100) and the use of the correct articles(54 mistakes). For more details, see tables 2,3,4,5 and 6. Concerning punctuation errors
The data obtained from the students' writing module showed that students suffered serious deficiency in applying the punctuation system correctly in their writing .Their punctuation error categories were as follows :

1. The absence of the capital letter at the beginning of new sentences.
2. Rare capitalization of proper nouns.
3. Incorrect using of the colon.
4. Omission of the semicolon.
5. Absence of exclamation marks where required.
6. Run-on sentences or not using the full stops at the end of sentences.
7. Lack of revision of what is written, and lack of enough spaces between words.
8. Hardly using question marks, if any.
9. Hardly using hyphens, if any.
10. Lack of using commas after introductory elements.

When it comes to the students' spelling mistakes, the analysis of these mistakes revealed that these mistakes filled in one of the following categories :

1. Substitution (including errors caused by substituting one letter or more for another)
2. Omission manifested in errors caused omitting one letter or more.
3. Addition which refers to adding an extra letter or letters to a word.
4. Disordering which refers to disordering some letters in a word.
5. Segmentation or writing one word as two segments instead of one.
6. Unrecognizable words which include words which were not recognized because they were unreadable.

In order to explore the reasons behind the most types of writing problems common among students, students were asked to answer a questionnaire about the reasons behind their weaknesses in the use of English grammar, punctuation and spelling. The analysis of the questionnaire results suggests that the students mention a number of factors that affect their learning of the English grammar, punctuation and spelling. Undoubtedly, poor input results in poor output. From the students' perspective, the most common factors that affect their mastery of the English grammar were the fact that their teacher used Arabic to simplify the rules and facilitate grammar learning beside the fact that grammar had always been taught in a vacuum, and instruction focused on rote rules and memorization. The students alluded to learning grammar items out of a context, mastering the grammatical concepts under study, focusing on the correctness and accuracy of production, learning grammar away from other language skills, the focus of grammar instructionsolely on grammar form and the limited practice of the new grammaras main factors in their poor grammar learning. Concerning the ways of how students learn punctuation system, students stated that they did not show any enhancement as they moved on from one year to the next. 38 students agreed that the differences between the Arabic and English punctuation systems affected their learning of the latter. Students also mentioned that their teachers failed to help students enhance their use of the punctuation system as they did not check students' correct use of punctuation marks; they did not teach punctuation through a context; and they did not use a lot of punctuation in their writing and they did not motivate students to do more research on how to use punctuation, either.

Spelling poses a major challenge and obstacle for most students to overcome. When exploring how students learn spelling, all of them agreed that the difference between written and spoken English and the lack of good teachers were among the main reasons behind their spelling errors. Students also believed that they would be better spellers if they became better readers. Not learning the phonological differences between Arabic and English is considered a main reason for spelling errors from the students' point of view. Students also regarded developing enough interest in learning spelling, the origin of the English words, and the role of textbooks in enhancing the students' spelling competence, and the lack of extra material as major factors in both assessing and bettering students' spelling abilities.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier, this study aimed to mainly explore the language problems made by English language and translation major sophomore female students at Tabuk University when practicing writing. The results of the study indicated that the students faced the following problems when writing:
Grammatical problems
Punctuation   problems
Spelling problems

The findings also showed the reasons behind the students' weakness in grammar, punctuation and spelling. These weaknesses manifested themselves in the writing skill. The following are the underlying reasons from the students' perspectives.

Teachers use Arabic to simplify the rules and facilitate instruction.
Teachers teach grammar in isolation from its authentic context.
Teaching instructions focus on rote rules and memorization.
Teachers teach grammar items out of context.
The aim of teaching grammar is to master the grammatical concepts under study.
Too much focus is given to the correctness and accuracy of linguistic output.
The primary focus of grammar instruction is given to grammar form.
Grammar practice is limited.

Concerning the ways the students learned how to use the punctuation items correctly, students emphasized that they did not show any improvement as they progressed from one year to the next. The students gave the following reasons behind their failure in using punctuation marks correctly.
The differences between the Arabic punctuation system and the English one.
Teachers do not teach the punctuation marks within a context.
Teachers do not use punctuation marks in their own writing.
Teachers do not motivate students to do more practice on using punctuation marks.

Spelling is also a challenge for students to master. When asked about the reasons behind their weak spelling, the students gave the following reasons :
The difference between the written and the spoken forms of the target language.
Teachers do not teach spelling rules.
Lack of practicing reading: the students think that they will be better spellers if they become better readers.
Not learning the phonological differences between Arabic and English.
Students do not show enough interest in learning spelling.

The passive role of the textbooks in enhancing the students' spelling competence.
The lack of extra material which allows students to practice spelling further.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations may be suggested:

1-Teachers should increase the amount of writing assignments for the students in class, during the students' free time, at home, and in their journals.
2- Teachers should give well defined essay writing rules (for the thesis statement, introduction, conclusion, transition words, etc...).
3- Students' samples of writings need to be transcribed and distributed to them for correction and analysis; in this way, they would learn from their errors.
4-To reduce students' fear of failure and to motivate them to achieve success, teachers can tell their students that they will not be penalized for errors unless the errors distort their intended meaning.
5- The classroom environment should be friendly, helpful and cooperative enough to help students overcome their writing anxiety.
6- Students should receive clear instructions and sufficient guidance about how to perform the writing task.
7-Teachers should personalize and simplify the topics to make them easier, more interesting and relevant to the students' liking and everyday real-life situations.
8- Writing tasks should be based on the students' needs and abilities.
10-Teachers should draw their students' attention to the fact that good writers are basically good readers.

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Appendix A

The purpose of this questionnaire is to explore reasons of behind the writing problems among English language and translation major sophomore female students at Tabuk University .The information gathered through this questionnaire would be kept confidential.

Basic Information:

- Name: _____
  Years learning English : _____
                        Rate the given questions according to the following criteria.
            1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree   3. Neutral 4. Neutral   5. Agree

Section-1:

Ways of how l learn grammar	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Agree
1. I learn grammar items through a context.					
2. I should master the grammatical concepts					
3. My teacher uses Arabic to simplify the rules and					
4. My focus should not be on the correctness and the					
5. I learn grammar along with other language skills.					
6. Grammar is taught in isolation and instruction					
7. Form-focused grammar instruction is the core					
8.I practice the new grammar a lot.					

Section-2:

Ways of how l learn punctuation	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Agree
1. I learn the punctuation marks through a context.					
2. My teacher checks my use of the punctuation					
3. I feel that I'm better this year in using the					
4. I think that Arabic punctuation system and the					
5. My teacher uses the punctuation marks in her					

7. My teacher motivates me to more research the					

Section-3:

Ways of how l learn spelling	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Agree
1. The cause for my spelling error isthe					
2. The origin of English words makes learning their					
3.The cause for my spelling error is the					
4. I will be better speller if I become better reader.					
5. Textbooks can't help to develop my spelling					
6. My main problem in learning spelling is lack of					
7. My main problem in learning spelling is not the					
8. My main problem in learning spelling is lack of					

Appendix B

3-What are the remedies to overcome the grammatical writing problems faced by English language and translation major sophomore female students at Tabuk University?
2-What are the remedies to overcome the punctuation writing problems faced by English language and translation major sophomore female students at Tabuk University?
3- What are the remedies to overcome the spellingwriting problems faced by English Language and Translation Major Sophomore Female Students at Tabuk University?