



Saudi English: A Descriptive Analysis of English Language Variations in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

The paper describes Saudi English morphosyntactic and lexical features that are widely practiced among educated Saudis, who completed at least nine years of English language study. The occurrence of the morphosyntactic features is argued to be affected by the speakers' contact to the native English. Those who are in direct contact with Standard English (Std Eng) have 15 morphosyntactic features unlike those who have no direct contact to Std Eng (or EFL speakers) and who produce 15 more traits. Accordingly, the paper distinguishes between stable traits used by all the speakers and the ones that are used by EFL speakers only. The abundant features of Saudi English are further analyzed in comparison to those of other World Englishes varieties as well as in comparison to the Arabic structures. As for the lexical level, local lexemes are described. They are grouped into words that are borrowed from Arabic and words that are translated from Arabic. Overall, this study contributes to the exploration of the Expanding Circle variety of Saudi English and to the effect of language contact on language variations.

Keywords Saudi English · Morphosyntactic features · Lexical variations · Expanding circle

Introduction

While only a subset of Saudi English grammar has been discovered (Al-Rawi, 2012; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014), this paper is the first attempt to fully describe the morphosyntactic features of Saudi English, extending the discussion to include the lexical features. Saudi English is one of the 'Arabicised-English' varieties that represent the contact between Arabic and English (Al-Shurafa, 2008). No previous attempts have been made to account for

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the relation between language contact and language variations in Saudi Arabia. The current paper's contribution is to study the effect of the language contact in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi English was chosen for variety of reasons. From the perspective of English globalization, the number of English speakers in Saudi Arabia has greatly increased for the last forty years. Where only 40% of the population were educated English learners in 1972, the percentage has reached 98.7% in 2012 (i.e., more than 27 million out of 28 million citizens), as Al-Otaibi (2015) points out. This means that almost all Saudis are now English speakers which reflects a major growth point for EFL. Among other EFL Arab countries, Saudi Arabia is highly populated. With a census of over 31 million (General Commission for Statistics 2016), Saudi Arabia is the most inhabited country in the Gulf and the sixth among countries of the Middle East. From the perspective of world Englishes, the Saudi situation contributes to the typology of English varieties in non-colonized countries, a topic of recent interest (e.g., Arua, 2004; Sarmah et al., 2009; Myrick, 2014; Chang, 1987; Al-Haqq & Samadi, 1996; Jung & Min, 1999; Miyake, 2000; Bolton, 2000, 2005).

In this paper, we analyze variations on features, which are predominant among Saudi educated speakers who have acquired their English locally. These variations cannot be explained based on the level of education, only. It has been proposed that the level of education explains the occurrence of some features but not others, (Al-Rawi, 2012). Dropping the third person singular *-s*, for example, is a feature that occurs among speakers of different levels of education. This paper describes the morphosyntactic and lexical domains with reference to the contact with the standard Englishes (Std Eng). It underscores variations that appear to be stable across educated speakers and which are regularly and widely practiced to the extent that these features become informally accepted in the Saudi society. In this study, we aim at answering two research questions:

1. What are morphosyntactic and lexical features of Saudi English?
2. What is the effect of the Std Eng contact on the occurrence of the features?

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides some background information on English in Saudi Arabia as it would be experienced by our speakers. Section 3 discusses the methodology used to collect the data. Section 4 presents the morphosyntactic variations, the generalizations on the role the language contact, and the similarities between Saudi English and other World Englishes and between Saudi English and Arabic. Section 5 is a discussion of the lexical items that are both borrowed translated from Arabic. Section 6 concludes the paper.

Saudi English

The turn of the twenty-first century witnessed enormous changes in many aspects in education. Currently, English is taught in elementary schooling which started only at Grade 6 and was introduced gradually to Grade 4, with debate as to further extend the teaching of English to Grade 1 (Shah & Elyas, 2019). In 2007, due to the rising demands of Saudi families for more English, the Ministry of Education permitted Saudis to study in international schools (Bal-Tuyour, 2014) which were all founded only for the foreign diplomats' children. A positive attitude towards English was reflected by the high percentage. According to Bal-Tuyour, 70% of Saudi parents preferred enrolling their children in international schools for more English exposure whereas only 18% rejected international

schools. The remaining 12% were unfamiliar with the difference between international and non-international schools. Beside international schools, the curriculum was revised in public schools in 2008. English is now taught as a subject in Grades 4–12. As for Math, Chemistry and Physics, they are all taught in English especially in the university level. Moreover, the Indian numerals (١, ٢, ٣, etc.), (Fleg, 2002; Menninger, 1969), are replaced by the more universal Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.) which are used for example in local Arabic newspapers and public signage. Higher education becomes an important factor of the change. Based on the Ministry of Higher Education manual for higher education statistics, 10 private universities with a purely English-medium instruction were established in the last decade. In addition, 25 government universities teach some programs: namely Medicine, Engineering and Science, in English. Moreover, extensive courses of English language are compulsory in the foundation year in government universities that must be taken by students before joining any specialized program. Beside local students, the estimated number of Saudi students studying abroad has reached 150,000 for the last 9 years, as documented in the Ministry of Higher Education manual for higher education statistics. About 100,000 are in the countries of the Inner Circle and about 2000 are in countries of the Outer Circle.

Saudi English is an ‘Arabicised-English’ spoken by Arabs in the Middle East (Al-Shurafa, 2008). Unlike some countries in the area, Saudi Arabia has no history of colonization by the British, thus belonging to the ‘Expanding Circle’ for English, rather than to the ‘Outer Circle’ (Kachru, 1982). American English has the greatest impact in Saudi Arabia (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). The first contact between English speakers and Saudis on the Saudi mainland occurred in 1933 with the foundation of The Arabian American Oil Company (also known as Aramco), which was originally owned by Americans. In 1958, English was formally introduced as a regular and obligatory subject (from Grade 7 to Grade 12) in public schools (Al-Abdulkader, 1978). International schools, which are not designed for Saudis, and who are not legally allowed to join, offer an English-medium curriculum as early as Grade-one. Therefore, the effect of English in these schools is not evident on the Saudi community in general. In turn, the US interests exerted influence upon the region on many levels including education as the status of English as an international language was gaining enormous popularity since that time (Elyas, 2008). English became the sole language to be included in educational curricula and taught as a foreign language after discarding French and the discovery of oil (Elyas, 2011). Culture and language are two other aspects which are heavily affected by religion, along with most of the cultural appearances in Saudi Arabia showing Islamic and Arabized identity. Elyas et al. (2021) state that Arabic is glorified as a language of high status and a source of pride for Saudis. Other researchers also state that Arabic is directly linked to the Qur’an in addition to its impeccable grammatical system and is rich in its vocabulary (Elyas & Picard, 2010, 2018; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014).

Alshurafa (2014) describes how aspects such as insertion of Arabic expressions, creative linguistic expressions, and Gulf religious ideology are part of the emergence of a ‘Gulf English’ variety and the construction of a Gulf identity in English linguistic practice. Some researchers have stated that ‘Arabicized English’ is influenced by the Arabic interference (Al-Rawi, 2012; Elyas et al., 2021; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). Saudi English, as a variety spoken in Saudi Arabia lacks empirical research on features of Englishes or English variety in Saudi (Elyas & Mahboob, 2014; Elyas et al., 2021). Some researchers have argued for ‘Arabicized English’ in Saudi (Elyas et al., 2021; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). It has been documented that Saudis and expats have been using English Saudi English, American English, and British English interchangeably. However, it has been argued that Saudi nationals have been using ‘simple English’ with a local flavor of their ‘Saudi English’ in their

day-day communication as part of their translanguaging and ‘culigion’ mixing English with distinct Arabic linguistic repertoire creatively (Elyas et al., 2021).

English is not merely a foreign language used for communication vying with other foreign languages spoken in the country such as Urdu, Indonesian, etc. ‘It then becomes the first (or the main) foreign language, explicitly designated so and promoted in the educational system’. The situation is reflected in the preference especially among youth to informally communicate in English not only with foreigners but also with one another. The new growing trend is that Saudi youth now tend to substitute common Arabic greeting such as *Assalam alaykum* and *marhaba* with *hellos* and *good mornings* and to use their competence of Arabic to speak English. The majority believes that speaking English makes them look trendy, cultured, modern and professional (Alarabiya News 2011). If the situation of using English outside the classroom would spread to the general population, English would become ESL. The status of English appears to undergo an ongoing process toward bilingualism. Today, English plays a role of a ‘second semi-official language’ used side-by-side with Arabic in public signage. Despite that the government official language is Arabic, English is the official language of the private sector. The growing demand of using English both formally and informally along with the availability of sufficient input from the mother-tongue results in an English variety that is flavored by the first language (i.e., Arabic). A more “endonormative” (Schneider, 2004) attitude is developed, or ‘at least one that does not overcompensate to avoid transfer’ (Sermah, 2009: 207) from the mother tongue. The New English, that is deviant from the ‘standard’ English, is generally socially acceptable.

Saudi Arabia has a distinct local linguistic practice of using English situated in the fabric of Saudi society (Elyas et al., 2021). English in Saudi Arabia, in turn, is not much different from its counterparts as operationalized in Kachru’s Expanding circle. In this circle, English with the apparent influence of the US in particular and the West in general, is socio-politically imposed to be used and taught as a foreign language. Recent studies in the Saudi context investigated a manifestation of using English with a Saudi flavor (Al-Rawi, 2012; Alwzna, 2020; Bukhari, 2019; Fallatah, 2016, 2017; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014; Elyas et al., 2021). Some studies which reported the existence of a ‘Saudi English’ remain inconclusive, lamenting the scarcity of literature on this local phenomenon. Many researchers reported the existence of an emerging ‘Saudi English’ and some of its features (Al-Haq & Smadi, 1996; Al-Shurafa, 2008; Al-Rawi, 2012; Alwzna 2020; Bukhari, 2019; Fallatah, 2016, 2017; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014; Elyas et al., 2021).

Methodology

The data were collected from 93 participants in total. Two kinds of data were collected: (a) recordings of spontaneous speech; and (b) interviews. The recorded data were collected using the voice recorder feature of SAMSUNG Galaxy S20 from 55 speakers (27 men and 28 women) participating in various 6 contexts: a dental clinic (4 speakers), a bank (3 speakers), a company (11 speakers), a school (14 speakers), restaurant (8 speakers) and King Abdulaziz University (15 students), where the researchers are based. The participants’ ages range between 22 and 60 years. All of them are educated and speak English in addition to their Arabic mother tongue. Out of the 55, 13 speakers (4 dentists, 2 engineers, 1 administration specialist, 1 financial analyst, 2 fashion designers, 1 dietitian and 2 students) had the opportunity to stay in direct contact with the Std Eng living and studying in US or UK for 4–8 years. Thus, their English can be described as English as a Second Language (ESL) in

Table 1 Participants with recorded data categorised by context and language contact

	ESL speakers	EFL speakers
<i>Context</i>		
Clinics	2	2
Banks	2	1
A company	3	8
A school	1	13
A restaurant	2	6
A university	3	12

Kachru's (1992) terms. The remaining 42 speakers had no direct contact with the Std Eng. They lived in Saudi Arabia and learned their English there. Their exposure to the Std Eng is insignificant which does not exceed a period of a month or two in their whole lives and it was during a summer vacation where they spent it with their families communicating with Arabs most of the time. Their English is accordingly English as a Foreign Language (EFL) following Kachru's (1992) terminology. Table 1 below summarises the speakers, whose data were recoded, categorised by the context and their contact to the Std Eng.

In all the 6 contexts, the participants' permission to use the recoded material in an anonymous fashion was obtained. The recorded material in the clinic includes a meeting between 4 dentists: 2 oral surgeons, 1 orthodontic, and 1 prosthodontic discussing a case related to a patient and suggesting possible solutions. The meeting lasted for 20 min. The second recorded set comprised 3 customer-service representatives in a bank. Each employee was running a conversation in English with a non-Arab customer. The three conversations vary in length from 15 to 25 min each, representing a total of approximately 1 h. The third set involves a meeting of 8 colleagues discussing policies and procedures related to their company. The meeting lasted for 1 h and 10 min. The fourth recorded data was a parental meeting in a school between 14 parents and the principal. The parents were talking about the problems encountering their children. The conversation lasted for 1 h and 15 min. The fifth recorded set was a gathering of 8 friends in a restaurant discussing a movie that they watched and their last summer trip. Their conversation lasted for 1 h and 45 min. The sixth recorded material includes an informal conversation between 15 MA students and their instructor. The students were giving their feedback about the course. The conversation took 1 h. The recorded data collected from the all the six sets are written down and transcribed in a Word document. The resultant corpus consists of over 39,000 words. Table 2 below summarises the information about the recordings (duration and number of words) in each context.

The second kind of data was interviews with two groups of speakers that were altogether 38 of equal number of male and female. The first group was 18 Saudi speakers (8 doctors and 10 university professors). Their ages range between 30 and 52. They are all highly educated holding a doctoral degree, but their contact experience with Std Eng differs. After completing their first degree locally, some of them continued their postgraduate studies in a native English-speaking community while others did not. More specifically, 7 out of the 18 participants had studied either locally or in Germany. The remaining 11 participants had their postgraduate studies in either US or UK. The second group was 20 BA graduates. 18 of them took their BA degree from US or UK and only 2 had studied locally. Their ages range between 23 and 26. The participants in both groups are all English speakers. They spent their formative years in Saudi Arabia and learned their English there. The

Table 2 Recordings information in each context

	Duration	Number of words
<i>Context</i>		
Clinics	20 min	2040 words
Banks	1 h	5970 words
A company	1 h & 10 min	6990 words
A school	1 h & 15 min	7640 words
A restaurant	1 h & 45 min	10,450 words
A university	1 h	5910 words
Total	6 h & 30 min	39,000 words

Table 3 Interviewed participants categorised by language contact

	ESL speakers	EFL speakers	No of words collected
The first group	11	7	19,250
The second group	18	2	18,750
Total	29	9	38,000

Table 4 Participant speaker demographics by language contact

	EFL speakers	ESL speakers
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	25	21
Female	26	21

main topics discussed by the speakers were unusual or difficult situations, weddings in the family, an interesting book that they read. Each speaker was interviewed for 10 min. The interviews were tape-recorded and fully transcribed. The total number of data collected from the interviews is 38,000 words. Table 3 demonstrates the number of interviewed participants categorised by their language contact and the number of words collected from the interviews (Table 4).

The speaker sample of both kinds of data, namely the recorded speech and the interviews, is shown in Table 1.

This overall sample is assumed to represent a target population of “Saudi English speakers” whose production is loaded with distinctive features of the variety of English spoken in Saudi Arabia. For the purpose of describing the purely local features, by “EFL speakers”, we refer to those who had no direct contact with Std Eng unlike “EFL speakers” by which we refer to those who stayed in direct contact with Std Eng. The recurrent features that are widespread among the participants are the focus of this study. Following Arua (2004: 259), we take the features whose frequency is ‘not less than 70%’ to be a recurrent feature.

In the remaining of this paper, we describe the recurrent traits that characterize the morphosyntax and lexis domains of Saudi English variety. The next section considers the morphosyntax.

Table 5 Morphosyntactic traits of ESL and EFL speakers

Trait	Example from data
pronoun: ‘me’ instead of ‘I’ in coordinated subjects	<i>Me</i> and my colleague suggested this
noun phrase: omission of the article	There is \emptyset possibility
noun phrase: insertion of the article	I don’t eat <i>the</i> beef
noun phrase: the absence of plural marking after measure nouns	You can open the account with 100 riyal- \emptyset
noun phrase: double comparatives	This is <i>much more higher</i> than my expectation
noun phrase: demonstrative variation	I thought of <i>this</i> ideas before
tense & aspect: use of ‘use to’	We <i>use to</i> go to Spain every summer
agreement: deletion of 3rd person sg. -s	He go- \emptyset to school
negation: ‘never’ as a preverbal past tense negator	He <i>never</i> came
preposition: variability ‘in’ for ‘to’	I have never been <i>in</i> London;
preposition: variability ‘in’ for ‘on’	My colleague, <i>in</i> the other hand, is slow
conjunction: conjunction balance	<i>Although</i> there is a loss, <i>but</i> we gained knowledge
discourse organization and word order: lack of inversion in wh-questions	When <i>you are</i> going to open the account?
discourse organization and word order: lack of inversion in yes/no questions	We <i>start</i> now?
topicalisation: the use of left dislocations	Our branch manager, he will explain everything

Morphosyntactic Features

Because limited morphological and syntactic description of Saudi English has been carried out (Al-Rawi, 2012; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014), this section presents a basic overview of Saudi English morphosyntactic features, including a commentary on its usage based on the contact with Std Eng. The features will be further analyzed by comparing them to features of the speakers’ first language (i.e., Arabic) and/or to those of other English varieties.

The morphosyntactic variation is clearly affected by the speakers’ contact with Std Eng. For the sake of comparison, Table 5 presents 15 traits that exist and are practiced widely by both EFL and the ESL speakers and Table 6 presents another 15 traits that are practiced by EFL speakers only. The traits in both tables are categorized following Mesthrie and Bhatt’s (2008) and Kortmann and Szmrecsanyi’s¹ (2004) terminologies, where applicable,² indicating broader areas of morphosyntax: pronouns, noun phrase, verb phrase, tense & aspect, agreement, negation, prepositions, conjunctions, relativization, complementation, discourse organization and word order, and topicalisation. The categories are written in bold:

Based on the 70%-frequency criterion adopted in this paper, the traits in Table 5 are determined and taken to constitute the morphosyntactic features of Saudi English. To illustrate, Table 7 below combines all the 30 traits produced by EFL and ESL speakers and their frequencies. The features that occur at high frequency (i.e. 70% or more) are shaded.

¹ Both references are used because some of the features are listed in one but not listed in the other.

² Some features are not available in either reference.

Table 6 Morphosyntactic traits of EFL speakers only

Trait	Example from data
pronoun: pronoun-drop	In the summer \emptyset cannot follow a diet
noun phrase: double quantifiers	I need <i>any some</i> books to read
noun phrase: nouns have the same form as adjectives	What a <i>coincident!</i>
noun phrase: adjectives have the same form as nouns	I am a <i>graduation</i> student
verb phrase: verbs have the same form as nouns	It did not <i>effect</i> me
verb phrase: ‘is’ as a tense marker	The situation <i>is</i> occur
verb phrase: the use of ‘to’ with the modal ‘must’	We must <i>to</i> bring opinions together
verb phrase: the non-use of infinitival ‘to’	The most important thing is \emptyset be ready
tense & aspect: use of ‘already’	I <i>already</i> go home
agreement: use of <i>-s</i> as a 3rd person plural	Saudis likes Kapsa
agreement: absence of copular <i>be</i>	My mother \emptyset in Spain
preposition: variability: ‘on’ for ‘in’	I am <i>on</i> the process of doing it
preposition: variability: ‘by’ for ‘with’	I opened the can <i>by</i> a can-opener
relativization: gapping or zero-relativization in subject position	I met someone ___ was very helpful
complementation: inverted word order in indirect questions	It depends on how <i>do</i> they understand it

The unshaded traits are ones that have frequencies are not high enough (i.e. below 70%) to be considered as stable features of Saudi English.³

The frequencies in the above table not only illustrate the distinction between traits with high frequency and the ones with low frequency but also show the effect of the contact with Std Eng. This is because the frequencies of traits in general are higher among the EFL speaker. It is logical to expect that one reason could be that the EFL speakers have no direct contact to the native English, or their contact is through external norms.

It is worth noting that the 15 features of Saudi English are typical features of World Englishes. The first feature is the use of the pronoun ‘me’ instead of ‘I’ in coordinated subjects, which is feature number [10] of Kortmann and Szmrecsanyi’s (2004) catalogue. It has been reported to occur in 40 other varieties worldwide and it one of the most widely found morphosyntactic feature in non-standard English in 6 world regions: British Isles, America, Caribbean, Australia, Africa, Asia (Kortmann & Szmrecsanyi, 2004: 1157). The second feature is the omission of the article which occurs in many varieties in Asia and Africa (Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008). The third, which is the insertion of the article, is available in Irish and other Celtic Englishes. Both the insertion and the omission of the article correspond to Kortmann and Szmrecsanyi’s (2004) feature [17], which is the irregular use of articles. This feature is classified by Kortmann and Szmrecsanyi (*ibid*) as one of topmost frequent morphosyntactic feature practiced in 33 varieties and widespread among 5 regions: the British Isles, Caribbean, Australia, Africa, and Asia. The fourth Saudi English feature is the absence of plural marking after measure nouns. 37 varieties of world Englishes are characterized by the absence of plural marking after measure nouns (e.g., *four-pound, five year*) Kortmann and Szmrecsanyi *ibid*. As for the fifth feature, which is the double comparatives, it corresponds to feature [19] of Kortmann and Szmrecsanyi’s (*ibid*) catalogue

³ These traits, to use Buthelezi (1995), seemed to have fossilized and might be improved if the participants contact native speakers of English. Therefore, they are not considered as stable features of Saudi English.

Table 7 Percentage overview of the occurrence of the traits

Trait	EFL speakers (%)	ESL speakers (%)
pronoun: ‘me’ instead of ‘I’ in coordinated subjects	91	82
pronoun: pronoun-drop	31	2
noun phrase: omission of the article	93	81
noun phrase: insertion of the article	89	73
noun phrase: the absence of plural marking after measure nouns	75	71
noun phrase: double comparatives	83	75
noun phrase: demonstrative variation	91	70
noun phrase: double quantifiers	43	9
noun phrase: nouns have the same form as adjectives	52	3
noun phrase: adjectives have the same form as nouns	17	1
verb phrase: verbs have the same form as nouns	31	0
verb phrase: ‘is’ as a tense marker	38	3
verb phrase: the use of ‘to’ with the modal ‘must’	29	5
verb phrase: the non-use of infinitival ‘to’	19	0
tense & aspect: use of ‘use to’	75	73
tense & aspect: use of ‘already’	74	51
agreement: deletion of 3rd person sg. -s	98	95
agreement: use of -s as a 3rd person plural	71	23
agreement: absence of copular be	66	12
negation: ‘never’ as a preverbal past tense negator	82	76
preposition: variability: ‘in’ for ‘to’	88	72
preposition: variability: ‘in’ for ‘on’	90	77
preposition: variability: ‘on’ for ‘in’	75	41
preposition: variability: ‘by’ for ‘with’	79	29
conjunction: conjunction balance	91	79
relativization: gapping or zero-relativization in subject position	73	19
complementation: inverted word order in indirect questions	89	52
discourse organization and word order: lack of inversion in wh-questions	91	73
discourse organization and word order: lack of inversion in yes/no questions	94	81
topicalisation: the use of left dislocations	93	90

and is proven to be practiced by 34 varieties in 4 world regions: British Isles, America, Australia, and Asia. The sixth feature is the demonstrative variation in which ‘these’ is conflated with ‘this’. Similar variation is attested in American Indian English (Mesthrie, 1992) as illustrated in the example in (1) provided by Leap (1993: 57).

(1) This worms, they get into your body

The seventh feature is the use of ‘use to’ to signify past habitual extending into the present (i.e., non-completive). This feature is also available in Singapore and Malaysia as shown in example (2) (Platt et al., 1984:71):

(2) My mother, she use to go to Pulau Tikus market. (implying ‘she still does so’)

The eighth feature, which is the deletion of 3rd person sg. –s, occurs in many New Englishes including Nigerian English (Jowitt, 1991), varieties of East African English (Schmied, 1991), varieties of American Indian English (Leap, 1993), Indian English (Platt et al., 1984) Indian South African English (Mesthrie, 1992) Black English South African English (Gough & de Klerk, 2002), Philippine English (Gonzalez, 1983), Singapore English (Wee, 2004), and Cape Flats English (McCormich, 1995). The ninth is the use of ‘never’ as a preverbal past tense negator feature, which is feature [49] of Kortmann and Szmrecsanyi’s (2004) catalogue. It occurs in 49 varieties and widespread among the seven world regions: the British Isles, America, Caribbean, Pacific, Australia, Africa, and Asia. The tenth and the eleventh Saudi features, which are the preposition variability: ‘in’ for ‘to’ and ‘on’ for ‘in’ are also attested in many African varieties of English (Schmied, 1991). The twelfth is the conjunction balance. It occurs in other English varieties including Indian English (Nihalani et al., 1977), Nigerian English (Alo & Mesthrie, 2004) and Black South African English (Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008). The thirteenth and the fourteenth features, which are the lack of inversion in both wh-questions and yes/no questions, correspond to Kortmann and Szmrecsanyi’s (2004) features [73] and [74]. They are characteristics of many English varieties such as Indian English (Kachru, 1982), Indian South African English (Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008), and Singapore English (Williams, 1987). They are among the topmost frequently used features worldwide. The lack of inversion in wh-questions is practiced by 36 varieties distributed among 5 regions: America, Caribbean, Pacific, Australia, and Asia. The lack of inversion in yes/no questions are practiced by 41 varieties distributed among 6 world regions: America, Caribbean, Pacific, Australia, Africa, and Asia (see Kortmann & Szmrecsanyi, 2004). The fifteenth feature, which is the use of topicalisation, is reported for Indian English, Singapore English, Sri Lanka English, and Black South African English (Mesthrie, 1997).

Like the case with other World Englishes, the occurrence of the features in Saudi English seems to be linked to the substrate influence. Almost all the features have parallel structures in the Arabic grammar. Two of them, namely the omission and the insertion of the article, are proven to be affected by the Arabic system (AL-Rawi, 2012). The similarity between the Saudi English structures and their Arabic counterparts is illustrated in (3) and (4) below (where the feature written in bold).

(3) a You can visit the branch in **the** Mohammedia
 b I am facing **Ø** difficulty in uploading it through the website

(4) a bi-ʔimkaa-neki ziyaratat-i farf-i **ʔal**-Mohammedia
 with-possibility-you visit-GEN branch-GEN **the**-Mohammedia.GEN
 ‘You can visit the branch in Mohammedia.’
 b ʔuwaajeh s’oʔuubat-an fi rafʔ-i-ha min xilaa-l-i l-mawqiʔ-i
 facing.I difficulty-ACC in uploading-gen-it from through-GEN the-website-GEN
 ‘I am facing a difficulty in uploading it through the website.’

The insertion of the article in (3a) and the deletion of the indefinite article in (3b) may follow from the fact that in the Arabic system the proper noun *Mohammedia* in (4a) is

preceded by the definite article and the abstract noun *sofuubat-an* ‘difficulty’ is not preceded by an indefinite article. As for the remaining 13 features, the effect of the substrate Arabic system is also evident. One is the absence of plural marking after measure nouns which can be explained by the fact that the Arabic measure noun is not always inflected for plurality. In Standard Arabic, measure nouns preceded by the numeral 10 or above (i.e., 10, 11, 12, etc.) are singular in form and in the dialects of Saudi Arabia the use of the singular form is even more abundant. The measure noun is always singular except the one inflected for dual number. Compare the example from Saudi English in (5a) to both the Standard Arabic one in (5b) and the one from the Saudi dialect in (5c).

(5)	a	You can open the account with amount of 100 riyal-Ø					
	b	tastatʿiif	ʔan	ta-ftaḥ	l-hisaab-a	bi-mablav-i	100 riyal-in
		can. you	that	2-open	the-account-ACC	with-amount-GEN	100 riyal-GEN
		‘you can open an account with an amount of 100 riyals.’					
	c	təgrad	tətaḥ	l-hisaab	bi-10	riyal	
		can. you	open	the-account	with-10	riyal	
		‘You can open the account with 10 riyals.’					

The zero-plural nouns in (5b) and (5c) suggest that the absence of the plural morpheme is because the speaker production is based on his/her L1 system. Another feature is the demonstrative variation. Compare between the example from Saudi English and the one from the Arabic counterpart.

(6)	a	I took all this clothes with me				
	b	ʔxað-tu	maʔ-i	kul-a	haaðiḥi	l-malaabis-i
		took-I	with-me	all-ACC	this.gen.FEM	the-clothes-GEN
		‘I took with me all these clothes.’				

The use of the singular demonstrative in the Saudi English example (6a) may follow from the fact that in the Arabic counterpart (6b) a singular demonstrative is used with the inanimate plural noun.⁴ A further Saudi feature is the use of ‘use to’ to mark past habitual extending into the present (i.e., non-completive) which is parallel to *ʔiftaad* ‘used to’ in Arabic. This is illustrated in (7) where (7a) is an example of Saudi English and (7b) is the Arabic one.

(7)	a	We use to go to Makkah			
	b	ʔiftad-na		ð-ðahaab-a	ʔilaa Makkah-at-a
		used to-we		the-going-ACC TO	Makkah-FEM-GEN
		‘We used to go to Makkah.’			

In Arabic, the use of *ʔiftaad* ‘used to’ is important to signify the habitual meaning. Without this word, the meaning is instantaneous in the past as in (8a). In the present, the meaning is ambiguous between instantaneous and habitual as illustrated in (8b).

⁴ The number marked on the demonstrative is sensitive to animacy of the noun. Only when the plural noun is animate, the demonstrative is plural. However, when the plural noun is inanimate, the demonstrative is obligatorily singular.

(8)	a	ḍahab-na	ʔilaa	Makkah-at-a
		went-we	to	Makkah-FEM-GEN
		‘We went	to	Makkah.’
	b	naḍhab	ʔilaa	Makkah-at-a
		go. we	to	Makkah-FEM-GEN
		‘We go to Makkah [now].’		
		‘We go to Makkah [regularly].’		

Therefore, the use of ‘use to’ in Saudi English may have been motivated by the obligatoriness in the Arabic system to use this word or any other word in order to express the habitual meaning. Likewise, the feature of deleting the 3rd person singular –s also seems to be affected by the substrate grammar as shown below.

(9)	a	He work in a respectable company			
	b	ya-ʕmal	fii	farikat-in	muḥtaramat-in
		3-work	in	company-GEN	respectable-GEN
		‘He works in a respectable company.’			

The 3rd person singular morpheme, in addition to its function as a 3rd person singular marker, is considered a default or a zero-number marker as illustrated in (10).

(10)	ya-ʕmal	l-muhandis-uun	fii	farikat-in	muḥtaramat-in
	3-work	the-engineer-PL.NOM	in	company-GEN	respectable-GEN
	‘The engineers work in a respectable company.’				

The morpheme *ya-* does not follow from any agreement in number between the verb *ya-ʕmal* ‘work’ and the plural subject *l-muhandis-uun* ‘the engineers’. In Arabic neutral VSO order, the third person verb is the basic form that indicates the absence of agreement between the subject and the verb (see Mohammed 1990, among others) This suggests that the 3rd person singular –s may have been treated as a zero-marker and that can be dropped. Moreover, the use of ‘never’ as a preverbal past tense negator is more likely driven by the Arabic substrate. Compare between the example from Saudi English (11a) and the Arabic one (11b).

(11)	a	I never followed a diet				
	b	ʔana	lam	ʔattabeʕ	naḍʕam-an	ʔiḍaaʔiyy-an
		I	Neg	follow	system-ACC	diet-ACC
		‘I did not follow a diet.’				

In Arabic, there is no auxiliary comparable to English ‘do/did’, which, along with the negative adverb ‘not’, is used to negate a predicate. In Arabic, negation is conveyed using a single negator expression, which is *lam* in the past tense. This system can explain why Saudis tend to use a one-word expression like ‘never’ rather than two words combined. Furthermore, the variation in the use of the prepositions (i.e., ‘in’ for ‘to’ and ‘in’ for ‘on’) seems to be a result of the underlying Arabic structure as illustrated in (12) and (13).

(12)	a.	Welcome in Jeddah
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		b.			I am in the way
(13)	a	marhab-an Welcome-ACC 'Welcome to Jeddah.'	bi-ka with-you	fii in	Jeddah Jeddah.GEN
	b	?ana I 'I am	fii in On	t ^c -t ^c ariiq-i the-way-GEN the way.'	

The preposition 'in' in the Saudi English examples (12a) and (12b) are a direct translation of the preposition *fii* in Arabic which literally means 'in' as appears in the glosses in (13a) and (13b) but the corresponding proportions used by English native speakers are 'to' and 'on'. Thus, we can tentatively assume that the variations in the prepositions 'to' and 'on' are the effect of L1. Similarly, the co-occurrence of the 'although' and 'but' is in fact a direct parallel to the Arabic use of conjunction as illustrated in (14a) and (14b), respectively.

(14)	a	Although I was tired, but I decided to continue						
	b	ruxma although	?nna-ni that-I	kuntu was.I	mujhadat-un, tired-nom	lakin-ni but-I	qarra-tu decided-I	?an to

'Although I was tired, I decided to continue.'

Additionally, the lack of inversion in both *wh*-questions and *yes/no* questions in Saudi English as illustrated in (15) also seems to be affected by the syntax of question formation in Arabic.

(15)	a	When	you	should	leave?
	b	We	will	start	now?

There is no evidence that inversion takes place in Arabic. Compare between the declarative sentences in (16a) and (17a) the interrogative ones in (16b) and (17b).

(16)	a	sawfa will	yantahi end	l-?aqd-u the-contract-nom	ʔad-an tomorrow
	b	mata when	sawfa will	yantahi end	l-?aqd-u? the-contract-nom

'When will the contract end?'

(17)	a	sa-y-xaruj FUT-3-leave	l-?awlaad-u the-boys-NOM	l-?aan-a the-now-ACC	
	b	hal Q	sa-y-xaruj FUT-3-leave	l-?awlaad-u the-boys-NOM	l-?aan-a the-now-ACC

'The boys will leave now.'

In (16b), the future auxiliary and verb remain in the same positions as they appear in the declarative sentence in (16a). Likewise, there is no change in the order between the declarative sentence in (17a) and the yes/no question in (17b) except in a question particle *hal* that is added in the beginning. The lack of inversion in Arabic can be a reason why the inversion is absent in Saudi English. As for topicalisation, the use of the left dislocation in Saudi English as in (18) can be thought of as a transfer from Arabic.

(18)	a	The credit cards,	I will use them
	b	The managers,	they meet every week

Arabic SVO sentences (or the so-called nominal sentences) are syntactically a topic nominal (or a left dislocation) followed by a comment sentence, that predicates over the topic and contains a pronoun, which is co-indexed with the topic (see Fassi Fehri 1993 among others). The examples in (19) are illustrations of the nominal sentences.

(19)	a	l-bitaaqaat-u the-cards-NOM	l-ʔiʔtimaaniyyat-u, the-credit-NOM,	ʔana I	lan Neg	ʔastaxdim-ha use-them
		‘As for the credit cards, I will not use them.’				
	b	l-mudaraaʔ-u the-managers-NOM	y-jtamiʕ-uuna 3-meet-they	ʔusbuʕiyy-an weekly-ACC		
		‘As for the managers, they meet weekly.’				

The sentences in (19) typically represent the structure of the Saudi English examples in (18). This suggests that the topicalisation in the Saudi English could be a result of the availability of this process in the speakers’ substrate system. Note, however, that there are two features which have no parallel in Arabic or less likely to be affected by it. One is the use of ‘me’ instead of ‘I’ in coordinated subjects illustrated in (20a). Arabic is different in this respect because in coordinated subjects, the nominative *ʔana* ‘I’ is used as illustrated in (20b).

(20)	a	Me and my friend are going to do it
	b	ʔana wa sʕadiiqi sawfa na-quum bi-ʕamal-i-ha I and friend will 1P-go by-doing-GEN-it
		‘My friend and I are going to do it.’

The other one is the use of double comparatives illustrated in (21a), which is ill-formed in Arabic (21b).

(21)	a	The number is much higher than my expectations
	b	*l-ʕadad-u ʔaʕlaa ʔakṯar bi-kaṯar min tawaquʕaat-i the-number-NOM higher more by-far from expectations-GEN
		‘The number is way much higher than my expectations’

We can conclude then that except for the substitution between ‘me’ and ‘I and the double comparatives, Arabic substrate seem to influence the features of Saudi English.

Lexical Features

In addition to the morphosyntactic features, Saudi English is also seen to have number of distinctive items that reflect a local sociocultural view. These lexical items entered Saudi English through borrowing and translation.

Lexical Items Borrowed into English from Arabic

Borrowing from Arabic constitutes one source of the distinctive lexical items found in Saudi English. Borrowed words are considered ‘unsurprising’ by Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008: 110) and are analyzed as ‘vocabulary retentions’ where they ‘tend to cluster in semantic fields pertaining to local customs and cultures’. The items in our data are of two groups: expressions that are related to liturgy or religion and expressions that are related to the Saudi culture. The first group includes the items listed in (22). They are not translated into English either because the words are not equivalent to those in English or because the translation is inappropriate.

(22)

Ramadan Kareem
Ramadan Mubarak
Eid Mubarak
Eid al-Fitr
Eid al-Adha
Kaaba
qibla
al-Masjid al-Haram
umrah
tawaf
tawaf al-qudum
tawaf al-ifada
inshAlla
mashAlla
Alhamdulillah
Assalamu Alaikum
hijab

In (22), one part of the lexemes, namely ‘Ramadan’, ‘Eid’, ‘Eid al-Fitr’ ‘Eid al-Adha’, ‘Kaaba’, ‘umrah’, ‘tawaf’, ‘qibla’, and ‘hijab’, have no equivalent words in English. Ramadan is the 9th month of the Hijri and is the month that Muslims fast. Eid is the Islamic holiday, and it is of two kinds: Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Kaaba is the building at the center of the Holy mosque in Makkah. Umrah is a lesser pilgrimage to Mecca. Tawaf is the act of circumambulating or walking in circles around the Kaaba. Qibla is the direction to Kaaba. Hijab is a head covering that Muslim women wear for religious reasons in the presence of male outside their immediate family. As for the other part of the lexemes, although they have a translation in English, they are not translated because the gloss is different from the intended meaning. The word ‘Kareem’ means ‘generous’ but the phrase ‘Ramadan Kareem’ does not mean Ramadan is generous. Similarly, the word ‘mubarak’ literally means ‘blessed’, but the expression ‘Ramadan Mubarak’ does not mean Ramadan is blessed. Both

‘Ramadan Kareem’ and ‘Ramadan Mubarak’ are greetings for Ramadan meaning ‘happy Ramadan’. Likewise, the expression ‘Eid Mubarak’ means ‘happy Eid’. The compound noun ‘al-Masjid al-Haram’ is proper noun referring to the Holy mosque in Makkah, but its composite parts have a totally different meanings: ‘al-Masjid’ means ‘the mosque’ and al-Haram’ means ‘the-forbidden’. Both ‘tawaf al-qudum’ and ‘tawaf al-ifada’ refer to two types of circling Kaaba while performing Hajj or pilgrimage. ‘Tawaf al-qudum’ is literally ‘The Tawaf of Arrival’ and ‘tawaf al-ifada’ is literally ‘Tawaf of Pouring Forth’ (i.e., pouring forth or moving from Mina to Makkah). The word ‘inshalla’ (or ‘in sha Alla’) literally means ‘Allah or God willing’ or ‘if Allah wills it’ which are used when the person intends to do a particular thing in the future and hoping that God will facilitate it (Clift and Helani 2010). The word ‘mashAlla’ (or ‘ma sha Allah’), which is literally translated as ‘God has willed it’, people use it in the belief that it may help protect them from jealousy (or the evil eye). The word ‘Alhamdulillah’ (or ‘Alhamdu li- Allah’), which means Praise be to Allah, is pragmatically used when something good has happened to the person and he/she intends to thank God. Finally, ‘Assalamu Alaikum’ which is translated as ‘peace be upon you’, is greeting or salutation used by Arabic speakers.

The second group includes lexical items related to the Saudi customs and culture including terms for food, clothing, immigration, and health as shown in (23) below:

(23)	<i>kabsa</i>	‘a national Saudi dish’
	<i>sambosa</i>	‘a traditional Saudi savory pastry’
	<i>abaya</i>	‘a robe-like cloak, worn by women in Saudi Arabia’
	<i>ghutra</i>	‘a traditional headdress, worn by men in Saudi Arabia’
	<i>scarf</i>	‘a veil worn by Saudi women to cover the head’
	<i>burqa</i>	‘a cover for the face that leaves the eyes uncovered’
	<i>Iqama</i>	‘the expatriate ID’
	<i>tawakkalna</i>	‘is a Saudi Application for COVID-19’

The above words, except for *scarf*, cannot be translated into English. The word *scarf*, in addition to its English equivalent word, is available for use in Saudi English to refer to the head covering veil.

Lexical Items Translated into English from Arabic

Translation is another source of the distinctive lexical items found in Saudi English. verbs, and prepositions. The verbs and verbal phrases are illustrated in the following usages (24a–e):

(24)	a	‘ <i>enter</i>	the link’;	for:	‘ <i>apply</i>	the link’
	b	‘ <i>open</i>	the light’;	for:	‘ <i>turn on</i>	the light’
	c	‘ <i>close</i>	the AC’;	for:	‘ <i>switch off</i>	the AC’
	d	‘... <i>putting</i>	makeup or perfume’;	for	‘... <i>wearing</i>	...’
	e	‘... <i>making</i>	agreement’;	for:	‘ <i>convening</i>	an agreement’

The verbs in the above examples are directly translated from the Saudi Arabic variety. The Saudi Arabic examples in (25a–e) are counterparts to the Saudi English ones in (23a–e), respectively.

(25)	a	ʔudxul	r-rabit ^c
		enter	the-link
		‘apply	the link.’
	b	ʔiftah	n-noor
		open	the-light
		‘turn on	the light.’
	c	gaffel	l-mukayef
		close	the AC
		‘switch off	the AC.’
	d	hut^ci	mikyaj
		put	makeup
		‘wear	the makeup’
	e	ʕamal	ʔittifaaqiya
		make	agreement
		‘convениng	an agreement.’

As for the prepositions, they reflect the Arabic usages as discussed in Sect. 4 above. The Saudi English prepositions which are directly translated from Arabic are illustrated in (26) below.

(26)	a	‘trust in his view’	for:	‘trust his view’
	b	‘I’m sitting on my office ’	for:	‘... at my desk ’
	c	‘ in page...’;	for:	‘ on page...’
	d	‘look from the window’	for:	‘look through the window’

The counterparts of the prepositions in (26a–d) are the ones illustrated in (27a–d), respectively. They are taken from the Saudi Arabic variety.

(27)	a	θiq	fi	wjhat	nað ^c ar-uh	
		trust	In	viewpoint-his		
		‘trust	His	view’		
	b	ʔana	jaalis	ʕala		maktab-i
		I	sitting	on		office-my
		‘I am at my desk.’				
	c	fi	s ^c afha	10		
		in	page	10		
		‘on	page	10’		
	d	t ^c ul	min	f-jubbak		
		Look	from	the-window		
		‘look	through	the window’		

where in example (26b) above, the noun *office* is used to mean *desk*.

Conclusion

This study has given a brief overview of the main morphosyntactic and lexical features of Saudi English. The expansion of the role of English in Saudi Arabia and the increased number of English speakers has resulted in a variety of English that is distinct from Std Eng (Elyas et al., 2021; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). In the morphosyntactic domain, a total of 30 traits have been detected. The frequencies of these traits are argued to depend on the speakers' contact with Std Eng. The traits are less among speakers who have a direct contact with Std Eng (or ESL speakers) and, more among the speakers who have no direct contact to Std Eng (or EFL speakers). Traits are grouped based on their frequencies and generality into two types: the first type includes the stable features that occur at a high frequency among both speakers, and they are 15. The second are the ones that occur at a high frequency among the EFL speakers only and they are 15. The stable features are further analyzed by comparing them to other World Englishes varieties and to the substrate Arabic structures. In the lexical domain, local expressions have been described. It is claimed that these expressions have entered the semantic field via borrowing or translation from Arabic.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The three authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval The research topic “Saudi English: A Descriptive Analysis of English Language Variations in Saudi Arabia” has been approved by the research committee at the European Department of European Languages and Literature, Faculty of Arts & Humanities, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Date of the intend research period 2016–2017.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the study; (In other words, we obtained informed consent from all participants included in the study). The participants were adults only; therefore no parental consent was necessary in this case.

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