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**A Research Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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Misuse of Punctuation by EFL Students:
Third Year LMD Students as a Case Study

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Abstract

Incorporating punctuation into the sentence is challenging for many EFL classes. This study aims at investigating the common punctuation errors committed by third year EFL students at Adrar University. Such errors occur systematically based on the obtained results from the analysis of the questions and the exam papers. The questionnaire contained 13 sentences and a paragraph. It was distributed to a total sample of 100 students who were chosen from the department of English in order to see their ability to use punctuation in an English text. Both instruments that used for data collection include the insertion of the fourteen English punctuation. The researcher used a quantitative method to analyze the questions. The findings revealed that EFL students at Adrar University commit errors repeatedly in the placement of most punctuation marks including commas, periods, capitalization, hyphens, semicolons and dashes. In addition, the study also aimed at identifying the different causes that lead to error occurrence when applying punctuation in writing.

Keywords: punctuation marks, difficulties, error analysis, EFL students at Adrar University.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to:

My parents for their support and encouragement.

My brother Mohammed and my sisters: Fatima Zohra, Naima,

Nabila, Louiza, Farida and Sabrina who always help me with continuous comments.

All the paternal and maternal members of my family.

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List of abbreviations

EFL: English Foreign Language

TTA: Teacher Training Agency

ESL: English Second Language

CAH: Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

MTI: Mother Tongue Influence

SR: Stimulus-Response

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

EA: Error Analysis

List of Tables

Table 1: Types of English Punctuation.....	10
Table 2: The Semantic Implication and the Prosodic Association of Punctuation.....	13
Table 3: The Classification of the Sample According to Population, Sample Size, Gender and Data Type.....	25
Table 4: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Semicolon.....	27
Table 5: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Exclamation Mark.....	27
Table 6: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Colon.....	28
Table 7: The Classification of the Punctuation Marks that Replaced a Colon.....	28
Table 8: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Comma.....	28
Table 09: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Hyphen.....	29
Table 10: The Classification of the Marks that Replaced a Hyphen.....	29
Table 11: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Dash.....	29
Table 12: The Classification of the Marks that Replaced a Dash.....	30
Table 13: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Quotation Mark.....	30
Table 14: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Apostrophe.....	31
Table 15: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Bracket.....	31
Table 16: The Classification of the Marks that Replaced a Bracket.....	32
Table 17: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Parenthesis.....	32
Table 18: The Classification of the Marks that Replaced a Parenthesis.....	32
Table 19: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Capitalization.....	33
Table 20: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Period.....	33
Table 21: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Ellipsis.....	33

Table 22: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Question Mark.....	34
Table 23: The Punctuation Errors that Found in the Paragraph.....	35
Table 24: The Classification of the Punctuation Errors that Found in the Students' Essay...	38

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
List of Abbreviations.....	iv
List of Tables.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vii
General Introduction.....	01
Chapter One: Punctuation and the Strategies Deployed in its Teaching	
Introduction.....	04
I. English Punctuation in the EFL Context.....	04
1. What is Punctuation?.....	04
2. The Different Types of English Punctuation.....	05
2.1. Capitalization.....	05
2.2. End Punctuation Marks.....	06
2.3. Comma.....	06
2.4. Semicolon.....	07
2.5. Colon.....	08
2.6. Apostrophe.....	08
2.7. Quotation Mark.....	09
2.8. Parenthesis.....	09
2.9. Bracket.....	10
2.10. Dash and Hyphen.....	10
2.11. Ellipsis.....	11
II. Strategies to Teaching Punctuation.....	12
1. Ways to Teach Punctuation.....	12
2. A Prosodic Approach to Punctuation.....	13
3. The Orthographic Approach to Teaching Punctuation.....	15
Conclusion.....	15

Chapter two: Learning Punctuation and its Challenges

Introduction.....	17
I. Problems facing Students in Learning Punctuation.....	17
1. Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis.....	17
2. Error vs. Mistake.....	19
3. Error Analysis.....	19
4. Models for Error Analysis.....	20
5. Sources of Errors.....	22
II. Types of English Punctuation Errors.....	23
1. Linguistic Category Classification.....	23
2. The Surface Structure Taxonomy.....	23
2.1. Omission.....	23
2.2. Addition.....	24
2.3. Misformation.....	24
2.4. Misordering.....	25
Conclusion.....	25

Chapter Three: The Practical Framework

Introduction.....	27
1. Sampling.....	27
2. Research Design.....	28
3. Data Collection and Procedures.....	28
1. Punctuation Errors: Identification and Categorization.....	29
2. Interpretation.....	41
Conclusion.....	42
General Conclusion.....	43
Recommendations.....	45
Pedagogical Implications.....	46

References.....	45
Appendix.....	50

neral Introduction

Writing correctly plays an important role in communication. However, it is considered as a complex language skill in the context of language learning. Many EFL learners fail to apply the grammatical rules of the target language. This linguistic deficiency might be due to the fact that writing is difficult to master. Consequently, poor written work is produced and it is an obstacle in the development of the writing of foreign language learners. One of the writing difficulties that EFL learners experience is the placement of correct English punctuation.

The little concern about punctuation by many EFL learners really affects the expressed meaning of the written text. In most of their writing including essays, reports and assignments, ideas are linked by the wrong punctuation and this is attributed to differences between the native language and the target one. Accordingly, the learning situation becomes a process of transmitting ideas, meaning, rules from L1 to L2; thereby, affects the learning process. On the one hand, the interference between two different languages does not occur in all situations because not every rule in one language has its equivalent in the other language being transferred to. On the other hand, rules are not fixed but are rather content-based. As a result, errors arise taking various forms: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. They are frequently committed in the writing of EFL learners.

The objective of this study is that it attempts to examine the students' difficulties in using the English punctuation in their writing and the causes that lead to their occurrence. The study also aims at investigating the most common errors when inserting the punctuation marks into a text. Based on this, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the common committed punctuation errors?
2. What are the causes of punctuation errors?
3. Does mother language affect the target language? If so, to what extent?

From the questions asked above the researcher hypothesizes that if EFL learners grasp the English punctuation, then this will decrease the errors in the application of the punctuation marks, or if the EFL learners at Adrar university pay little attention to the English punctuation, then they will commit errors in punctuating an English text.

In order to investigate the use of punctuation by EFL learners, two main tools are used to collect data; a list of questions that distributed to third year students of the English department at the University of Adrar and also the analysis of the exam papers of the third year students for the academic year 2014-2015. Both tools were used in order to check the students' ability to express meaning through using punctuation. The participants are supposed to have information about the punctuation.

The importance of this study is to improve the proficiency in using the English punctuation in writing and make teachers aware of such areas of difficulty, so they design their own lessons based on the students' needs. In addition, the present study is also interested in recommending the learners to use adequate English punctuation in order to organize ideas systematically and semantically.

The present study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals with the different types of English punctuation, and the strategies that help in developing the learners' proficiency in using those marks in writing. In the second theoretical chapter, the discussion is about the problems that EFL learners face in learning punctuation. The definition of errors applied by the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis has a great interest in the current research. It studies the differences and the similarities between two different languages. Moreover, this chapter also covers the various models of analyzing the errors and the types of errors committed in using punctuation. The third chapter is the practical part of the study that examines the use of English punctuation by the EFL students of Adrar University.

Chapter One

Introduction

Punctuation marks help in organizing and therefore understanding writing. Many learners do not take them into account except for the period and the comma. Punctuation marks are categorized as a subpart in the grammatical system, which are necessary in both writing and speaking. They comprise many types; some have a unique way of functioning while there is a category of marks that is a context-based. Learners commit errors when the placement is associated with the context. Accordingly, the pedagogical institutions develop many strategies that help in the improvement of using punctuation correctly in the writing compositions.

I. English Punctuation in the EFL Context

There are fourteen punctuation marks in English. They are capitalization, the period, question mark, exclamation mark, comma, colon, semicolon, apostrophe, quotation mark, bracket, dash, hyphen, ellipsis, and parenthesis. Knowing where to place the fourteen punctuation marks can greatly improve the learners' writing skill; the insertion of marks into the text helps to construct and organize the writing through dividing the text into sentences, clauses, etc, and making its meaning clear.

1. What is Punctuation?

Punctuation represents those symbols and signs that help the readers to read easily. By means of punctuation, it would be obvious where a sentence ends and the next begins, as it assists in indicating the rising and falling intonation when needed. Punctuation is therefore important, in academic writing in particular, to be used correctly. Without it, the reader would be lost.

Many scholars have been interested in identifying the term "punctuation", among them the linguist Stilman (1997) who stated that:

The word punctuation derives from the Latin for "point". That is, the mark within a sentence point to the various meaning of its words, making sense of what otherwise might be a string of sounds. They serve two functions: they define how the various elements of a sentence relate to each other, thereby ensuring clear and unambiguous communication, and they help to establish the tone....(p. 53)

Another viewpoint that denotes the advantages of punctuation is advocated by Say (1998). He argued that "punctuation marks, the symbols that assist the understanding of written text, have usually been regarded as conventions, thus as being outside the domain of pure linguistics...they have a singular function such as helping reading aloud"(p.1).

According to Say, punctuation is an effective instrument that facilitates processing information especially in reading. Its existence in the text enables the readers to make sense of what is expressed and understand the relationship between the ideas. Therefore, in order to develop as a proficient writer, it requires learning to apply punctuation correctly in writing.

2. The Different Types of English Punctuation

In English, every sentence starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop. Other marks are also essential for the written language to be formal and meaningful. They are applied depending on specific rules that govern how they are used. The following are instances of the different types of English punctuation and the way they function in writing.

2.1. Capitalization

Capitalization comes at the beginning of a sentence. The first letter of the first word in a paragraph or a sentence should always be capitalized and the remaining letters are in lower case. When capitalization takes place, it would be recognizable that it is the starting point of a sentence as illustrated in the following examples:

1. He sent his medical certification to the administration.
2. Mohamed has been elected a chairperson for our committee.
3. She decided to meet the doctor on Monday at midday.

Notice that all the statements in the examples above start with a capital letter. In addition, when the writer talks about particular nouns, uses a title of a story, article, etc in writing, capitalization must be used. Capitalization is beneficial because it help differentiating between the proper nouns and the common ones.

Capitalization should be applied for special nouns and Kirkman (2006) identifies this category of nouns; he states that the use of the: "initial capitals (capitals for the initial letters of words, but not throughout the words) is to signal proper nouns (a 'proper' noun is the name of a specific person, a place, a country, a month, a day, a holiday, a journal title)" (p. 2).

2.2. End Punctuation Marks

There are three major ways to mark the end of a sentence: a period (.), a question mark (?), and an exclamation mark (!). Each has a unique aspect in making an end to a sentence. A period is used to signal the end of declarative and imperative sentences, “to separate letters and numbers in a list or when forming an abbreviation, and between expressions including dollars, cents, and decimals.”(Smith and Curttis, 1990, p.56) Second, a question mark functions differently from the period. It is used at the end of an interrogative sentence, while an exclamation mark follows a sentence that expresses a strong feeling or emotion.

Examples:

1. There are fifty-two playing cards in a deck. (declarative sentence)
2. Go away! (imperative sentence)
3. How many victims are there in the accident? (interrogative sentence)

From the examples above, we obviously notice that cases of ending an idea in a sentence vary from one sentence to another. An informative sentence is one form to do so as in example (1). The direct question (example 3) and an imperative sentence (example 2) are other forms to express a complete thought.

Moreover, when dealing with titles of books, novels or articles, even if they take the form of a phrase or a sentence, they are never followed by a period. However, they can appear as a question or an exclamation; hence, question marks or exclamation ones accompany them (Michael, 2014, pp.15).

2.3. Comma (,)

A comma is the punctuation mark that is used to separate ideas or elements within a sentence. It makes comprehension easier. It indicates that we must take a brief pause in reading. In general, the comma shows that the words before it are linked grammatically and meaningfully to those that come after it. It is the most frequently used punctuation mark, but the most problematic because it serves many functions (Partridge, 2005, p.13).

Examples:

- a. The conference was so enjoyable; it talked about pyramids, and their different types.
- b. Fouad walked to the party, but was unable to walk home.
- c. We cannot help her, unless she tells us the truth.

Imagine that a comma is omitted in the above examples, the readers easily confuses in understanding the expressed meaning. Thus, it is needed to avoid ambiguity. This separation gives the readers the chance to pause and grasp the relationship between the ideas. This is as far as the existence of a comma in the text is important.

2.4. Semicolon (;)

Another punctuation mark that separates a sentence into two parts is the semicolon. Like the other marks, it has various functions. When encountering a semicolon in a sentence, it would be noticeable that it is used to take a brief breath; however, it works differently from a period and a comma.

According to Stilman (1997), there are two ways in which a semicolon is used. It is first used in the place of the coordinating conjunctions including 'for', 'and', 'nor', 'but', and 'yet' in order to separate the main clause from the subordinate one. The second use of the semicolon is to separate items in a list. Normally a comma detaches the elements within a list, but there are some lists that are complicated. In this situation, using a semicolon makes the list much easier to read and understand. In addition, in the sentences that are linked by the joining words such as 'also', 'next', 'in brief', etc, it is possible to put a semicolon instead (Stilman, 1997, pp.87-8).

Examples:

- a. The emergency room was closed however Fatima was helped immediately.
 - b. The emergency room was closed; Fatima was helped immediately.
- ↓
- c-The color combinations the boy can choose are black, white and grey, green, brown, and black, red, and green.
 - d-The color combinations the boy can choose are black, white, and grey; green, brown, and black; red, and green.
- ↓

2.5. Colon (:)

A colon is the punctuation mark that is used to indicate an introduction of a list of items. When a sentence includes a colon, the reader clearly sees that what follows it explains the complete thought that precedes it. Also, there would be no use of a colon and the introductory words including ‘for instance’, ‘namely’, ‘such as’, etc, together because a colon serves the same function they do (Straus, 2008). Consider the following instances of a colon being used in this way:

1. You have three options: to read a story, to go to bed, or to write your homework.
2. The meeting has been canceled: the professor’s mother is hospitalized for inability of breathing.

When writing a sentence containing a colon, be sure that a colon is preceded by a full independent clause as illustrated in the previous example. While the piece of information that follows it takes the form of a list or adds a clarification or an explanation to what precedes it.

2.6. Apostrophe (’)

Using an apostrophe is a way of showing an ownership: something belongs to somebody as in “the document had been written during the 1990’s” and “I worked in SN’s institution”. Besides, an apostrophe is also used to imply that certain letters have been left out, for instance "cannot" becomes "can't", "they have" becomes "they've" and "will not" becomes "won't".

In the uses of an apostrophe, McCaskill (1990) added that “The functions of an apostrophe are to form the plurals of the abbreviations, characters, and signs; and to indicate omitted characters in contractions”. (p.47)

Examples:

Single nouns	Plural nouns	Abbreviation
1. Boy’s personal problems.	1. Children’s rights.	1. MA’s.
2. The student’s name.	2. Tables’ legs.	2. X’s.

2.7. Quotation Marks (“ ”)

When taking someone else’s speech, it should be put between quotation marks. They indicate that the expressions are not yours. Moreover, they are used to emphasize words to show that they are not part of a sentence. The following are examples about the different uses of the quotation mark:

- a. “It is not worthy that the pitcher and the catcher are successful only to the extent that they cooperate”.J. Alder and Van Doren said.
- b. The meeting has been really “canceled”.

The uses of the quotation marks are numerous. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English (2010) listed three functions that are associated with this mark:

1. “To draw attention to a word that is unusual for the context, for example a slang expression, or to a word that is being used for special effect such as irony.
2. Around the titles of articles, books, poems, plays, etc.
3. Around short quotations or sayings”. (Hornby, 2010, p.R23)

2.8. Parentheses (())

The piece of information that provides the text with an extra illustration is put between parentheses. There are cases where things cannot be deduced from the sentence; therefore, we set off the expressions that are supplementary to the sentence within parentheses.

In determining the rules of how the parenthesis works, Barker (1997) stated that “Parentheses (()), also called **round brackets**, always occur in pair...most commonly, a pair of parentheses is used to set off a strong or weak interruption, rather like a pair of dashes or pair of bracketing commas...”. (Barker, 1997, p.119)

Examples:

- a. The author (George Yule) advocated a theory of language learning.
- b. The IPO (Initial Public Offering) is considered as a subset of the primary markets.

2.9. Brackets ([])

Brackets are the punctuation marks that help in including an explanation or extra information of a given sentence, cross-references and numbers or letters in the text. They have the same function that parentheses do. The information that is added can be a debate about someone's point of view, an explanation, or a comment to quoted materials (Tuomaite and Zindziunviene, 2002, p.82).

Examples:

- a. Lions are carnivorous [meat eaters].
- b. Motivation is the best tool for better learning [see page 66].
- d. Learning is beneficial in [1] getting a job [2] obtaining knowledge and [3] avoiding being illiterate.

2.10. Dash (–) and Hyphen (-)

A dash looks like a hyphen but is slightly longer than the hyphen and has different functions. It is applied to make an interrupting statement. In addition, when the writer uses a parenthetic sentence, he/she puts it between two dashes, while a hyphen is used to form compound words. However, it vanishes if the compound words appear more in the text (Colman, 2011, p.47). Consider the following example:

Dash:

1. The dog owner arrived–it stoped barking.
2. Malika is a good pianist–I never heard her–but she is shy about playing in public.

Hyphen:

1. Son-in-law.
2. Non-European.
3. Self-control.

Notice that in the examples (1) and (2) a dash is sentence-based, it makes a space between sentences by putting each one on its own, so that it helps the writer to expand an idea in this way, while a hyphen is used to join word units in order to form compound ones such as the prefix, suffix and letters to words.

2.11. Ellipsis (...)

The use of an ellipsis in writing indicates an intentional omission of a word, sentence, or whole section from a text without altering its meaning. It usually appears in a set of three dots. Besides, the placement of an ellipsis in a text can express a slight pause, an unfinished idea, or a nervous or awkward silence. Hence, these are the fourteen English punctuation marks and table (1) summarizes them.

Punctuation Mark	Function
Period .	Use at the end of a sentence that makes a statement.
Question Mark?	Use at the end of a direct question.
Exclamation Mark !	Use at the end of an emphatic declaration, interjection, or command.
Colon :	Use before a list or an explanation that is preceded by a clause that can stand by itself.
Semi Colon ;	Use to help sort out a monster list or to separate closely related independent clauses.
Hyphen -	Use to create compound words or when writing numbers twenty-one to ninety-nine and fractions (five-eighths, one-fourth).
Dash -	Use as a super-comma or set of super-commas to set off parenthetical elements, especially when those elements contain internal forms of punctuation
Parentheses ()	Use to include material that you want to de-emphasize or that wouldn't normally fit into the flow of your text but you want to include nonetheless.
Brackets []	Use to include explanatory words or phrases within quoted language.
Ellipsis ...	Use when you're quoting material and you want to omit some words.
Apostrophe '	Use to create possessive forms, contractions, and some plurals.
Quotation Marks " "	Use to set off material that represents quoted or spoken language.
Comma ,	Use to separate the elements in a series (three or more things), to connect two independent clauses, and to set off introductory elements.

Table1: Types of Punctuation Adopted in Jonson (2011)

II. Strategies to Teaching Punctuation

Misusing of punctuation affects not only writing but also the meaning that tends to transmit. The reasons turn back to many factors such as the lack of knowledge. Many learners fail to apply the punctuation rules in their writing; the omission of the period or the comma occurs frequently in their writing composition. Accordingly, various approaches have evolved in order to enhance the proficiency in using punctuation correctly. Each provides different techniques that can make better mastery of the punctuation usage.

1. Ways to Teach Punctuation

The traditional methodologies used in class to teach grammar in which teachers spend much times diagramming sentences and memorizing the rules do not help and may even hinder the students' efforts to become better writers. They need to learn grammar, but the old way does not work. One effective study performed by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) (1999) aimed to enhance the writing proficiency of students, especially the use of punctuation. It argued that the teaching method that is based on giving instructions to students when they encounter problems does not improve the students' learning of punctuation (Alker, 1999, p. 5). The study suggested some strategies to overcome punctuation problems are as follows:

1. "giving explicit explanations of sentences and the purpose of punctuation in written and verbal feedback;
2. encouraging pupils to read a range of texts and providing opportunities to discuss the sentence structures used with the pupils;
3. providing meaningful writing activities which motivate pupils to observe punctuation rules;
4. providing readers, other than the teacher, for pupils work;
5. explaining that punctuation is used to separate syntactical units of meaning and focusing on the meaning rather than the sound sentence;
6. modeling examples of specific features of punctuation, such as sentence demarcation and commas to demarcate clauses through texts being studied in class; and using this aspect as a focus in the next piece of writing;
7. involving pupils explicitly in monitoring their own use of punctuation, through the use of self-assessment devices;

8. encouraging teachers in all subject areas to employ these strategies". (Alker, 1999, p. 5)

In line with the strategies above, Angelillo in her book *A Fresh Approach to Teaching Punctuation* added that before starting to teach, teachers have to spend much time with learners in order to get an idea about the prior knowledge that their learners have about punctuation: how they use punctuation to make meaning when they read and write. This is considered as a first step to begin the teaching process with (Angelillo, 2006, p.5).

2. A Prosodic Approach to Punctuation

This linguistic approach represents an effective methodology of teaching punctuation in relation to prosody. In this task, students practice punctuation through respecting the different prosodic elements including intonation, pitch, accent, and rhythm. They really guide them through showing where to pause, take a breath, etc. Two important ways are suggested in order to fulfill this task which are through reading a text aloud and repunctuating (the insertion of punctuation into a text where the marks are omitted) (Wallace, 1997). Consider the following examples:

1. It rains cats and dogs today.
2. When I talk without doing gestures, the message cannot reach clearly.

As skilled readers read the examples (1) and (2) aloud through picking up their features such as punctuation and responding to them as well. They pause briefly at commas (example 2), longer at sentence boundaries (?!) as in (example 1). Their voice also changes from one given situation to another. In this example, the readers lower their pitch at the end of a declarative sentence (example 1). Thus, prosody shows how to apply punctuation in the reading tasks. EFL teachers can use it to improve their students' writing, especially in terms of punctuating sentences or texts. The following table lists the semantic and the prosodic features that facilitate using punctuation correctly.

Punctuation	Semantic Implication	Prosodic Association
Quotation marks single or double	Borders, stratification, and 'arrest' of content: used for quoted, foreign, or notable words or language.	Change in tone, hyperarticulation.

Apostrophe	An omission of sound letters, suspension.	Clipping, syncopation, apocopation
Hyphen	A connection of parts, linkage of content.	Controlled articulation, even pitch.
Capital letters	Exceptional or unique content, status, emphasis.	Louder volume, change in pitch
Question mark	Inquisition, interrogation, and questioning.	Change in pitch, rising tone.
Exclamation mark	Emphasis and emotion.	Articulatory tension, higher pitch, louder volume
Full stop	A finished idea, a signpost of completed content	Brief stop in sound production.
Comma	Juncture, a small mental break in reading	Pause, change in pitch.
Semicolon	Juncture, a larger mental break in reading	Pause, change in pitch.
Colon	Juncture, an explanation or example follows	Pause change in pitch
Ellipsis	Silence, absence, break in discourse.	Slower speed, waning volume, break induced by interruption.

Table2: The Semantic Implication and the Prosodic Association of Punctuation, Adopted in Muller (2011)

Prosody helps in using punctuation easily. This process does not work in all situations. In some cases, when the readers try to apply each prosodic cue to learn punctuation, they can be misled by it. The best example is when the readers pause at every comma even if the grammar of the sentence does not call for pausing as in "The classroom contains a board, tables, windows, and air conditioners". The application of the rules in this example makes a disrupted phrase; each word appears on its own. Moreover, they take much effort into decoding that in short time duration. The readers also fail to construct meaning and convey it expressively in this period.

3. The Orthographic Approach to Teaching Punctuation

The teaching of punctuation in this approach is totally associated with the orthographic sentence. The latter is defined as a grammatical sentence that contains one or more clauses. Patt (2013) brought this approach which based on dividing the written work (sentence or text) into smaller units such as words, clause, paragraph, etc, in order to better understand the sentence structure and use the appropriate mark that fits the context. Marks are different in terms of function; each one incorporates with a given context. Secondly, the use of punctuation in the texts is also an idea of informational grouping that is to say the writers must not only understand the structure arrangement but also know the grammatical units. The insertion in this case has a relation with the syntax: punctuating sentences based on coordinating conjunctions, relatives, independent clauses, subordinate clauses, etc. Therefore, the writers must know such grammatical classes. These classes facilitate using punctuation in the text in an effective manner.

Mastering the use of punctuation is a matter of understanding the grammar, because words, sentences and clauses are the grammatical units on which the placement of punctuation takes place as mentioned in the approach above suggested by Patt. When one can differentiate between these linguistic features, punctuation becomes easy to apply. In other words, punctuation is governed by grammar; each mark is applied based on the type of sentence or clause, for instance capitalization is applied for proper nouns only, and what inside a bracket clarifies the idea that precedes it.

Conclusion

The insertion of the punctuation marks into a text is a way of better structuring and interpreting ideas. Each mark includes the set of rules that govern it and assist in grasping the relationship with the surrounding sentences. The punctuated sentences contribute in shaping easy communication where information processing is possible. However, the absence of such symbols in writing leads to misunderstanding and difficulty in determining sentences boundary. It occurs frequently in the writing compositions of many students. Writing correctly has great importance in the academic institutions that have developed many approaches in order to get rid of this kind of surface problem and enhance the students' capacity in punctuating their writing easily.

Chapter Two

Introduction

The development of science encouraged taking care of the learning difficulty through looking for the sources that lead to its occurrence. Various methods were applied to analyze from where the problems come from. One of the main factors to which the trouble is attributed to is the interference of the mother tongue. It is the process of copying rules, ideas, etc, into the target language because of the difficulty in learning this latter. The notion of interference gave birth to what is called the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH). It is an effective model that was used in the past to study the L1 in comparison with the target language in order to identify the similarities and differences between the two languages.

I. Problems Facing Students in Learning Punctuation

One of the major challenges that foreign language learners experience is the misplacement of punctuation. They do not know, for example, how to separate two clauses that share the same idea with a colon or join two words with a hyphen to form compound ones. This kind of problems that are related to the structure occurs commonly in the writing of second language learners. Such linguistic deviation affects their writing performance and consequently there would be interference in understanding the expressed ideas.

1. Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH)

The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis supports the idea that failure in grasping certain linguistic features of L2 is traced to the Mother Tongue Influence (MTI). It examined the writing of EFL learners and came with a conclusion that those learners think in their native language and translate their thoughts into L2. Rustipa (2011) defined Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis as:

The systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities. Contrastive analysis was extensively used in the 1960s and early 1970s as a method of explaining why some features of a Target Language were more difficult to acquire than others. According to the behaviourist theories, language learning was a question of habit formation, and this could be reinforced by existing habits. Therefore, the difficulty in mastering certain structures in a second language depends on the difference between the

learners' mother language and the language they were trying to learn.
(p.17)

CAH explains the extent to which L1 affects the acquisition of L2. The two languages are different grammatically, semantically, lexically, etc. when learners assimilate the two languages to facilitate learning, they commit errors. On the other hand, the behaviourism theory posits that people learn through the process of Stimulus – Response (S, R). They transfer meaning and forms of their L1 to the target language; therefore, they carry over the habits of their mother tongue into the second language. According to Grass and Selinker (2008), Contrastive Analysis (CA) is based on the following assumptions:

- A. Contrastive analysis deals with the theory of language and sees a language as the group of practices that differs from one language to another i.e. each language has its own habits that work only for it.
- B. The native language is the main cause of error production that emerges in acquiring the second language.
- C. Through the differences that exist between L1 and L2, we can predict the amount of errors that will occur.
- D. The more differences between L1 and L2, the more errors are produced.
- E. Differences between L1 and L2 are the most important things that need to be learned.
- F. The differences and the similarities between two languages form a difficulty and ease in language learning (pp. 96-7).

Additionally, to support the hypothesis, the behaviourism theory came up with two notions: interference and transfer. The former caused mainly by the influence of the mother language on the target one. While the latter is to take a form from L1 and apply it in the system of L2 (Muriel-Saville, 2006, p.35).

Second language learners learn through transforming elements from their mother language to the target language. The transfer can be at the phonological level, lexical level or grammatical level. The learners interfere between the two languages in order to make learning easier. For example, a German learner of English utilizes the German word "blamieren" in place of the English word "blame" and this substitution may be due to limited vocabulary in

the target language (English). Thus, he/she makes a mistake in inserting a word of one language (L1) into the system of another language (L2).

2. Errors vs. Mistakes

It is important to distinguish between making mistakes and committing errors. Johnson (1988) argued that mistakes could be corrected by the learner. The reasons why errors occur are lack of knowledge and the learners need to learn them (Shaughnessy, 1977). Edge (1989) named the deviation by the term "the norm mistakes" instead of "error-mistake" classification. The following features are the characteristics of the mistakes:

- 1)-"Slips, which are a result of 'processing' problems or carelessness (Edge, 1989, p. 11);
- 2)-errors, which are comprehensible but which the learner is unable to correct, although the form has been taught; and
- 3)-attempts, which are fairly incomprehensible and uncorrectable by the learner."

In the classification of the wrong form as an error or a mistake, James (1988) stated that in error development, two things are taken into account: first learners commit errors but they do not consider it as so, second they are aware of the error but they cannot correct it. Unlike an error, when a mistake occurs, the learners are able to correct the deviant form. Furthermore, James (1994) came up with a methodology to decide whether a deviant form is classified under committing an error or making a mistake is through what is called the "gravity of error". As an example, the error must be judged by either the L1teacher or L2 teacher based on which errors are more serious.

“Error” and “mistake” are two different words but they mean the same thing; something that is done incorrectly or wrong. Such difficulty may be produced due to inattention or lack of focus. The difference between them appears clearly in the context they are used in. When the learner repeatedly misuses a word or sentence, it is done unconsciously, thus this is called an error that is peculiar to foreign language only. On the other hand, when a mistake occurs, one can determine the wrong form and it is made even by native speakers.

3. Error Analysis

Error analysis is a process of determining the errors that appear in second language learning (Corder, 1974, pp. 122-154). It is an essential way through which teachers get

information about the different errors and their sources. Based on these findings, teachers use strategies to enhance the competence in language learning. In addition, error analysis assists teachers in distinguishing the items that are mastered from those that are not and helping the students to overcome the problem (Lim, 1976, pp.335-351).

It is important to let the students themselves identify the errors that they commit in their writing. Therefore, they learn how to define them and avoid them as well in the future. However, if they fail to correct them, the teachers can help them by asking them, for instance, to underline the nouns in the essay they wrote, check the verbs tense and prepositions and as a last task, students read the whole essay by correcting all the errors. This approach is helpful for students to reduce the errors they produce when learning.

Moreover, Corder provided a new perspective about error analysis. He stated that errors are important in language learning, and he added that people are better learners when they make mistakes, simply because they learn from them in the coming learning situations. (Corder, 1967).

4. Models for Error Analysis

Error analysis is an instrument used by the EFL teachers in order to find solutions to the problems that influence their learners. The strategies followed in the investigation of the errors witnessed a change among teachers. The aim of analyzing is to plan lessons and select materials based on the learners' needs, and help them to get rid of most of the learning difficulties.

Scholars analyzed the linguistic errors differently. Each had a particular strategy of dealing with the errors. Corder (1981) came up with a method that helps in studying errors. His method is divided into three stages:

1. Data collection: Recognition of idiosyncrasy.
2. Description: Accounting for idiosyncrasy dialect.
3. Explanation: (the ultimate object for error analysis).

The following figure presents this model:

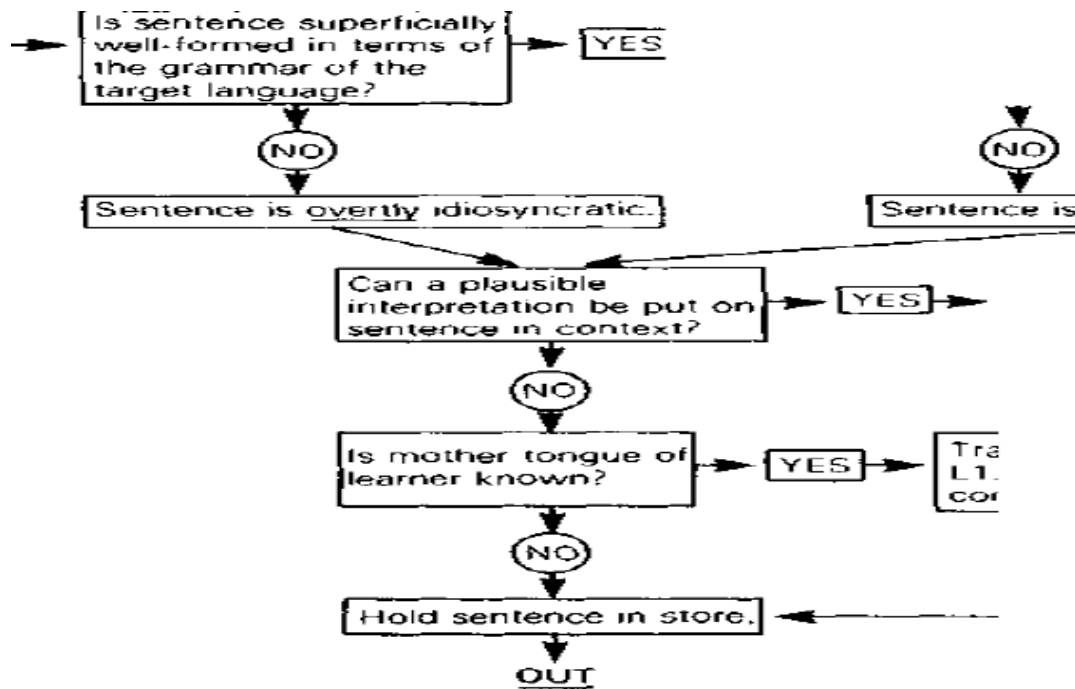


Figure 1: Corder's Model of Error Analysis (1981)

Corder's model was restricted to analyzing the occurrence of language idiosyncrasies in the utterance of the learners of foreign language as it is illustrated in figure (1). He distinguished between two types of errors; overt and covert errors. When there is a clear deviation in the form of the utterance, then the error is called overt such as "The cat drinnks the milk". Unlike an overt error, a covert one occurs in well-formed utterances but they do not mean what the speaker intends to convey as in "I was liked the neighbor whom I was helped yesterday". (Corder, 1981, pp.22-37)

According to Ellis (1995), the first step to study the errors was the choice of a corpus of language after that an identification of these errors comes in order to classify them. Each class is explained based on the grammatical analysis (Ellis, 1995, pp.18-20).

Examples:

- a. Animals is afraid of high sounds.
- b. Each person must achieve from his goal.

The teachers identify the errors. In this example, they underlined both the verb "is" and the preposition "from" and then they classify them: the first error is a verb that is not

conjugated in the right way and the second one is a preposition that is misused. However, they do not correct these errors or encourage students to correct them in order to help them to avoid making them in the future. This strategy is not effective in helping students to overcome such problems because it does not show for them the correction and they may repeat the same errors from one situation to another.

The model proposed by Gass and Selinker (2008) included six important steps: Collecting data, identifying errors, classifying errors, quantifying errors, analyzing sources of errors, and remediating errors (p.67).

5. Sources of Errors

There is no exact reference that reveals from where the errors are generated; scholars differ in determining the sources of errors that lead to their occurrence. Learners may make errors due to lack of understanding or inadequate teaching methodology.

According to Selinker, errors rooted from interlanguage: some items that are from first language origin are used in the target language and vice versa. Interference between two different languages can occur through transmitting elements from L1 to L2.

The point of view of Richard about the sources of errors did not differ from Selinker's idea. However, this latter elaborated the idea. Richard believed that learners' errors are produced because of fault deduction about the new language. These errors take different shapes: interference, overgeneralization, and assimilation. All these elements are considered as ways of facilitating the task of learning (1971b: 14). On the other hand, Dulay (1973) and Burt (1974) disagreed with Richard. Based on a study that had been done on 513 Spanish-speaking children. They found that only about 5% of sentences were interference while 87% were intralingual and those that left were unique, Dulay and Burt inferred that second language learners do not learn by carrying their first language linguistic features to second language learning.

In the stage of learning, learners pass through situations where they confront problems in understanding some features. They find ways in order to overcome these situations: they use one form in one context and extend applying it in other contexts where it should not be applied, for example they use "writed" and "buyed," to form the past tense of "write" and "buy". Therefore, they commit errors at the grammatical level. In addition, learners can commit errors at the level of lexis, for instance a German learner of English may

replace the German words “spashache” by the English word "speak". Thus, the error is produced due to the impact of the first language on the target one.

II. Types of English Punctuation Errors Made by EFL Learners

When EFL learners write, they abuse the rules of some grammatical features. This problem that affects the surface structure goes back to probably lack of information and as a result, the meaning shifts. Scholars categorized the errors differently. The following illustrates a strategy proposed by James in classifying the punctuation errors committed in writing.

In this context, James (1988) differentiated between two types of errors: linguistic category classification, and the surface structure taxonomy.

1. Linguistic Category Classification

The errors occur at the linguistic level of the target language. In this case, the rules are broken when dealing with the system of phonology, grammar, lexis, text, or discourse. In the syntactic structure, for example, the learners miss the colon or the comma and the idea is confusing. The errors in this field concern the grammatical classes including nouns, prepositions, punctuation, etc. In addition, linguistic category classification determines exactly which grammatical system is affected like tense, voice, transitivity and countability (James 1988, pp. 104-114).

2. The Surface Structure Taxonomy

The kind of errors that abuses the surface structure of the sentence takes various shapes. For instance, if the units of grammar are not well-formed, it alters the idea that is transmitted. This is generally repeated in the academic writing of most EFL learners. Dulay, Burt and Krashen suggested four ways that can affect the surface structure:

2.1. Omission

Omission is the first of these errors. Dulay, Burt and Krashen believed that

Omission is an ungrammatical error, and it is of untutored learners. Learners in the early stage of learning tend to omit function words rather than content words. More advanced learners tend to be aware of their ignorance of content words and rather than omit one, they resort to compensatory strategies to express their idea (Kellerman, 1997).

Examples:

- a. The aircraft that landed yesterday was full many foreigners.
- b. The passengers arrived time.

In the examples above, notice that there is a total omission of the prepositions "of" and "at" which must be used to formulate correct grammatical sentences. Second language learners usually produce sentences that lack grammatical units. This absence of the parts of the sentence makes them look like fragments

2.2. Addition

The addition errors are related to being not sure of the rules. As an example, the learners extend the rules of adding the "s" with nouns to make the plural form to the noun "man" which becomes "mans" and "information" becomes "informations". This kind of error can also be produced when the learners are paying more attention to write correctly and check to avoid mistakes (James, 1988). Unlike omission errors, addition ones are the presence of grammatical units that are not necessary in the structure of a sentence. This can be a result of using two markers that belong to the same sequence as in "The board does not wants to clean". This is frequently repeated in the construction of sentences in the writing of second language learners. Another example in which such kind of errors occurs is with the verb by classifying it either as regular or irregular verb as in "bringed" and "understanded" (Dulay 1982, p.147)

2.3. Misformation

The third way in which an error is committed is the misformation situation. It is the fact of misusing a correct form structure. The examples below illustrate the situation:

1. My house was dirty however the gest behav normally.
2. It is rain today.
3. She did not left any letter this week.

Examples (1) and (2) show the incorrect use of tense to the verbs "rain" and "leave". The failure to conjugate in the right tense results what is called fragment: the components of

the sentence are not linked structurally. This misformation error appears in the writing of many EFL students. They are not able to form a sentence that is free from grammatical mistakes and the reason traces to difficulty of the structure of the second language.

2.4. Misordering

This time the error is the result of the wrong organization of the words in a sentence. James stated that, misordering lacks the arrangement of the grammatical units in a correct form. The problem turns back to failure to apply the rules in the right way. For each language, there are rules that must be followed in order to avoid committing errors, but their use requires a lot of attention because of the difficulty of the structure. James illustrates the situation with examples that are taken from English about the adverbials interrogatives and adjectives, yielding errors as in: “He every time comes late home,” “Tell me where did you go”.

Learners can select the correct words to produce a sentence, however they face a problem in arranging them correctly. Misordering is another error type that weakens the structure of the sentence. It is the kind of learning difficulty in which the learners’ writing lacks the order of grammar and punctuation. Learners master enough words and the little training of integrating them into context is rare practice. That is why EFL learners are unable to construct a coherent sentence.

Conclusion

Error analysis is a fundamental technique used in the past to study the problems in second language learning. It brought good results that appeared in the learners' improvement in the mastery of L2. In addition, it is the concern of many EFL teachers who find their own teaching materials that help designing lessons that are students-based needs and better learning of L2 as well. By the emergence of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), this is simply the evolvement of EA, aimed to determine the sources and patterns of error that led to their occurrence. Therefore, error analysis means the methodology applied to diagnose the errors that learners face when producing a language, writing in particular, it is considered as an effective tool for the investigation of the error.

Chapter Three

Introduction

Difficulties in writing take various forms. However, the present study aims to examine the punctuation errors in EFL students' writing. To achieve the goal, the researcher would like to confirm or infirm the hypothesis which is if EFL learners grasp the English punctuation rules, then this will decrease the errors in the application of the marks, or if the EFL learners at Adrar university pay little attention to the English punctuation, then they will commit errors in punctuating an English text. For data collection, the researcher used the quantitative method to analyze the questionnaires that were distributed to third year students at the English department of Adrar University. In addition, the exam papers were also analyzed to see the students' ability of processing meaning through using punctuation marks. Both tools were applied to check the use of punctuation by EFL learners. Moreover, the study also aims at finding the factors that contribute to the occurrence of errors in the EFL context.

1. Sampling

The participants of the present study are 100 students chosen randomly from a population of third year EFL students at the University of Adrar: The sample is divided into two equal groups: fifty students whose exam papers were analyzed. The other fifty students received questions to answer. They are all learners with Arabic background. Table (3) describes the sample according to population, sample size, gender, and the data type.

Population	Sample size	Gender	Data type
3 ^{ed} year 2014-2015	50 students	12 males	Exam papers
		38 females	
3 ^{ed} year 2015-2016	50 students	08 males	Questionnaire
		42 females	

Table 3: The Classification of the Sample According to Population, Sample Size, Gender and Data Type

In defining a sample, Neuman claimed that "...sampling comes from researchers who use the quantitative sample, or a small collection of units or cases from a much larger collection or population, such that the researcher can study the smaller group and produce accurate generations about the larger group..." (Neuman, 2007, p.141). This means that sampling is associated with the quantitative research only. The researcher selects a group of people from an entire population. The process of determining the participants here is known

as sampling. They give information and the researchers analyze it to obtain results that represent all the population.

2-Research Design

The method employed in this study is quantitative. It is a strategy of doing a statistical analysis to data in order to obtain a numerical result. According to Harwell, quantitative research "is the use of instruments such as tests or surveys to collect data, and reliance on probability theory to test statistical hypotheses that correspond to research questions of interest."(Harwell, Research Design in Qualitative/Quantitative Mixed Method, n.d., p.149)

3. Data Collection Procedure

The researcher collected data in two different ways: the analysis of the exam papers of the pragmatics module in which the students wrote an essay. The studied sample was selected randomly in order to examine the placement of punctuation in their writing. The second way that helped in collecting data is the questionnaire that was given to fifty EFL learners of third year. It includes 13 open questions and a paragraph without any punctuation. The researcher analyzed both instruments depending on the requirements of the study which is to identify the common errors that EFL students commit and the factors that cause such errors.

The participants answered the questions inside the classroom in the last 10 minutes in the lesson of the teacher of methodology who responded positively to the request. They got information about the objective of the study and they answered immediately in the paper itself after an explanation that was provided about the exercises. The study focused on these participants because they are expected to master English language, and hence can use the English punctuation correctly.

1. Punctuation Errors: Identification and Categorization

Exercise One:

Sentence 01: People continue to write about the future; our failure to conserve resources has put the world at risk.

Sentence 01	Misuse	Correct use	Total
Number	31	19	100
Percentage	62%	38%	100%

Table 4: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Semicolon

The semicolon is among the punctuation marks that learners of English fail to use correctly. Only 19 students inserted the right mark in this example and 31 of 50 learners were not able to connect two related clauses using a semicolon. Notice that the number of the right answers are lower than the number of the wrong ones. This may go back to the Arabic interference since in Standard Arabic it is possible to put a period in place of a semicolon. Yet in English when a period is used instead, especially in this sentence, there will be no coherence, and the readers easily misunderstand the meaning as well. The marks that replaced the semicolon and the number of students who used them are: "." (16), "," (11), "-" (1), "... (1), and two papers were left without any answer.

Sentence02: I can't believe how difficult the exam was!

Sentence02	Misuse	Correct use	Total
Number	15	35	100%
Percentage	30%	70%	100%

Table 5: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Exclamation Mark

Based on the results in table (5), they indicate that most of the students (35) inserted the right mark (exclamation point). It means that the EFL students with the Arabic background know how to apply an exclamation mark to express strong feelings and emotions. Additionally, the others whose answers were wrong represented 15 students: 14 used a period and only one used a question mark. These students believe that this sentence (sentence 2) is a statement, a direct question, or they probably do not grasp the meaning behind it which as a result led to a substitution of the exclamation mark with the others that do not fit the context.

Sentence 3: The professor has given me three options: to retake the exam, to accept the extra credit assignment, or to fail the class.

Sentence03	Misuse	Correct use	Total
Number	24	26	50
Percentage	48%	52%	100%

Table 6: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Colon

According to the result shown in table (6), out of fifty students, only 26 inserted the right mark “colon”. The others (24 students) inserted other marks as follows: “;” (fourteen students), “,” (seven students), “–” (four students) or no answer “Ø” (one student). Students who answered with “;” their answer is not wrong because a semicolon can also separate list of elements that is long or complex as in this example in order to avoid confusion. In addition, the two clauses are interdependent: the second part of it clearly explains the first part. However, a colon is the best answer for better understanding. When it comes to “,” and “–”, they are not appropriate marks in this context. Table (7) summarizes the errors that were committed in using a colon:

The marks that replaced a colon	The number of students who used them
Semicolon (;)	14
Comma (,)	07
Dash (–)	04
Ø	One student did not answer at all

Table 7: The Classification of the Punctuation Marks that Replaced a colon

Sentence04: The professor has given me three options: to retake the exam, to accept the extra credit assignment, or to fail the class.

Sentence04	Misuse	Correct use	Total
Number	10	40	50
Percentage	20%	80%	100%

Table 8: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Comma

The errors that related to comma in this sentence were as follows: six answers included “;” and four included “–”, while the forty answers were right. Those who placed comma were more than the others who answered incorrectly and they represented 80% of

students which indicates the majority of them. This means that students can use a comma to separate two independent clauses that are joined by a coordinating conjunction. On the other hand, the wrong answers represented 20 %. Hence, learning to punctuate correctly is so useful because it helps considerably in controlling over meaning and tone as well.

Sentence05: There are fifty-two cards in a deck.

Sentenc05	Misuse	Correct use	Total
Number	14	36	50
Percentage	28%	72%	100%

Table 9: Misuse vs. Correct Use of a Hyphen

Table (8) is a representation of the placement of a hyphen to form a compound word. The percentage of the correct use (72%) is higher than the percentage of the wrong one (28%), thirty-six answers are correct, while the remaining ones are either “-” (5 students), “,” (3 students) or “;” (1 student) and (5 students did not answer) (see table 9). Those who used “-” do not distinguish between a hyphen and a dash. The former is smaller than the latter in shape. It is obvious that the punctuation mark that fits this context is a hyphen in order to join the units of words (fifty and two) to form a compound word that has a single meaning (fifty-two). The students who put “,” and “;” are totally wrong.

The marks that replaced a hyphen	The number of students who use them
Dash (-)	05
Comma (,)	03
Semicolon (;)	01
Ø	05

Table 10: The Classification of the Marks that Replaced a Hyphen

Sentence06: This is the end of our sentence—or so we thought.

Sentence06	Misuse	Correct use	Total
Number	50	0	50
percentage	100%	0%	100%

Table 11: Misuse vs. Correct Use of a Dash

No student put the right mark, which is “-” in sentence number (06) as illustrated in table (07). This reflects that they have problems in the use of a dash because of ignorance of

the rule. The marks that are used in place of a dash in this sentence are: twenty-eight students answered with “,”, eight with “.”, eight with “;”, two with “!”, two; one with “?” and the other with “:” again, two papers were left without any answer (consider table 12 below). A dash has many functions. It is used to make a full stop, but in this context, it is applied to set off a parenthetical expression. Comma is correct in this sentence to separate two clauses that are joined by the conjunction (or). Yet the idea is clearer when a dash is used instead.

The marks that replaced a dash	The number of students who use them
Comma (,)	28
Period (.)	08
Semicolon (;)	08
Exclamation mark (!)	02
Question mark	01
Colon (:)	01
Ø	02

Table 12: The Classification of the Marks that Replaced a Dash

Sentence 07: “I can’t wait to see him perform!” John exclaimed.

Sentence07	Misuse	Correct use	Total
Number	10	40	50
percentage	12%	80%	100%

Table13: Misuse vs. Correct Use of a Quotation Mark

The English punctuation mark (“ ”) in this sentence indicates the inclusion of the exact words that John used when he exclaimed. Forty students have answered correctly and only ten used wrong marks: four answered with (()), one with (“” and.) and five did not insert any mark. They probably did not understand it as an idea of an inclusion or they do not consider punctuation important in writing so they did not mention any mark. On the other hand, students who used (()) believed that what is inside the parentheses is additional information, but in fact it is not.

Sentence08: These children's test scores are the highest in the nation.

Sentence08	Misuse	Correct use	Total
Number	1	49	50
Percentage	2%	98%	100%

Table14: Misuse vs. Correct Use of an Apostrophe

Table (14) illustrates the percentage of the correct use (98%) which is high in comparison with the percentage of misuse (2%). The later represents only one student who got the wrong answer (.). It means that the students have no difficulty in the placement of an apostrophe in an English sentence i.e., they know how to express possession, maybe because they learn it better in their classes of written expression or because it does not contain a lot of rules that govern it.

Sentence09: She was determined never again to speak to him [Axeldro].

Sentence09	Misuse	Correct use	Total
Number	38	12	50
Percentage	76%	24%	100%

Table 15: Misuse vs. Correct Use of a Bracket

The eighth sentence shows a variation in the insertion of the wrong marks instead of the brackets as follows: eleven students put the proper name “Axeldro” between (()), seven students answered with two “!”, another seven students put “, and .”, and five did not answer this question. These were the common wrong marks that replaced the brackets. Parentheses can be used in this example to mean the inclusion of a clarification and an illustration which is “Axeldro” in this sentence to what preceded to avoid ambiguity. While the other answers are obviously wrong. The number of these students who committed errors in applying brackets is 38, they are lower than the others (12 students) who got the right answer which is ([]). Consider the following table which shows the marks that used instead of bracket by third year students.

The marks that replaced a bracket	The number of students who used them
Parenthesis (())	11
Exclamation mark (!)	07
Comma (,) and period (.)	07
Ø	05 did not insert any mark

Table 16: The Classification of the Marks that Replaced a Bracket

Sentence10: The students must return all materials (these include sample manuals and textbooks) to the instructor.

Sentence10	Misuse	Correct use	Total
Number	44	6	50
Percentage	88%	12%	100%

Table17: Misuse vs. Correct Use of a Parenthesis

The English punctuation (()) in this sentence indicates a way of putting an aside information which are not part of the main sentence inside two parentheses. It is among the punctuation marks that students fail to use in writing in the correct way as illustrated in table (17). It shows that six students put the right answer. While the other forty-four students' choices were wrong and they inserted another punctuation marks such as “;” and “:” (9 students), “,” and “.” (8 students), “,” (16 students), “[]” (4 students), “-” (2 students), and no answer “Ø” (2 students) (see table 18). Brackets can replace parentheses in this sentence because they share a function in common which is the inclusion of extra information. The percentage of wrong answers is higher than the percentage of the correct ones. This may be traced to the lack of knowledge about the use of brackets, or the students do not consider punctuation necessary in writing.

The marks that replaced a parenthesis	The number of students who used them
Semicolon and colon (; :)	09
Semicolon and comma (; ,)	08
Comma (,)	16
Bracket ([])	04
Dash (–)	02
Ø	02 did not answer

Table 18: The Classification of the Marks that Replaced a Parenthesis

Sentence11: Many people from Vietnams descent live in Los Anglos.

Sentence11	Misuse	Correct use	Total
Number	45	5	50
Percentage	90%	10%	100%

Table19: Misuse vs. Correct Use of Capitalization

In this sentence, the majority of students failed to capitalize the proper nouns (Vietnams and Los Anglos) because of lack of knowledge. They do not distinguish between proper nouns and common ones. The percentage of students who capitalized the two nouns correctly is 10%. It is lower than the percentage of those who answered partially (90%); seven capitalized “Los Angles”, and two capitalized only one noun as follows: Vietnams or Los and there is one student who did not answer at all. Thus, the students lack understanding of the exact way of applying the rule.

Sentence12: Ms. Audry Aimes is an award-winning photographer.

Sentence12	Misuse	Correct use	Total
Number	15	35	50
Percentage	30%	70%	100%

Table20: Misuse vs. Correct Use of a Period

A period has various functions such as ending a declarative sentence and. However, in this sentence (12), it is used to separate between an address (Ms) and the addressee which is (Audry). Based on the result shown in table (20), 70% of the students answered correctly, and the other applied the wrong choice and their answers were different; seven used ",", three used ":" two put "-" and three did not answer. None of these marks fit this context. Therefore, the majority of students know the way to apply the rule of period in their writing. The errors committed in using the period in this example are clearly attributed to lack of knowledge which is the cause of error occurrence in most cases of using punctuation.

Sentence13: Just before he lost consciousness, the victim whispered, "help me..."

Sentence13	Misuse	Correct use	Total
Number	49	1	50
Percentage	98%	2%	100%

Table 21: Misuse vs. Correct Use of an Ellipsis

Forty-nine from a total of fifty students did not understand the omission of the rest of the conversation in sentence (12). They inserted other marks in place of an ellipsis, for instance, eleven students used ".", thirty-five students put "!" and three students did not answer. The wrong answers represent 98% as illustrated in table (21) above which indicates the majority of the entire number of students. This can be traced to ignorance of the rules of the application of ellipses.

Sentence 14: What has humanity done about the growing concern of global warning?

Sentence14	Misuse	Correct use	Total
Number	7	43	50
Percentage	14%	86%	100%

Table 22: Misuse vs. Correct Use of a Question Mark

Only seven students inserted the wrong mark in the last sentence which represents a low percentage (14%) in comparison with the percentage of the right answers (86%). The mark that replaced the question mark "?" in this sentence is the period "." which is repeated five times, and three students did not answer the question. Such error could be the result of the lack of intention. While the others who answered with a question mark they grasp it is question. Such error probably occurs due to lack of attention because the question mark is easy to use in writing.

Exercise Two

Activity two shares the same methodology with the first one that requires the insertion of the right punctuation mark that fits the context. However, exercise number two is a short paragraph that comprises three lines and a half with simple words to make the context as much as clear and motivate the students to work better. There are forty places where the students have to punctuate depending on the context.

After the analysis of the answers, the researcher concludes that students have difficulties in using punctuation in an English text. The most common errors students committed are the insertion of a period to make an end to a sentence. The use of period in the current paragraph is in four places. The number of students who failed to put the right choice (.) in the sentence "The weather was cloudy when my dad took us all for a picnic." were twenty-one. Few students (16 students) used a comma instead of a period and five students did not insert any mark. Students who inserted a comma are not wrong; however, since the

coming idea is different from the precedent one, a period is the correct answer to separate two different ideas. This problem in punctuation was also repeated in other places in the paragraph. The second sentence that ends with a period is “I usually order pancakes too, but I don't like sausages, so I ordered bacon instead”. There are twenty-two students (22) who committed errors in punctuating this sentence: ten students put a comma (,), and the rest did not put anything. Moreover, the number of errors in placing the punctuation has increased in the third sentence. It represents thirty-five students from the entire sample who misused the right punctuation (,); eleven students did not place any mark, and the others varied between the use of a semicolon “;” and a comma “,”. The last sentence in which thirty-three students misused a period is “When we arrived and spent a long time, he told us his story when he traveled to Australia”. It contains two clauses that must be linked by a comma in order to avoid confusion. However, the majority of students inserted the inappropriate punctuation; seventy students omitted the period and eight used “,”.

Respecting the linguistic rules has a role in facilitating communication. The something in the placement of the mark in writing, there would be a misunderstanding when the rules are broken through omission or substitution. A comma is useful in writing. It is used to take a brief breath. In the sentence “My younger sister ordered scrambled eggs, and toast”, it functions as a separating tool; it splits items “scrambled eggs” and “toast” from each other in order to avoid confusion. Forty-eight students failed in using comma to separate items in a list. They all did not place the comma before “and”. The other sentence where a comma is used before the coordinating conjunction “but” is “I usually order pancakes too, but I don't like sausages, so I ordered bacon instead”. This reflects that students do not know the rule of a comma; accordingly, twenty-nine of them did not get the right answer. They did not insert any mark. The following table is a summary of the common errors committed and their types.

The type of punctuation error	Number of errors	Percentage	Note
Period	21 in sentence 1	42%	At the end of the sentence.
	22 in sentence 2	44%	
	35 in sentence 3	70%	
	33 in sentence 4	66	
Comma	48	96%	To separate elements in a list.

	29	58%	Before the coordinating conjunction, that joins two clauses.
--	----	-----	--

Table 23: The Punctuation Errors that Found in the Paragraph

After the analysis of the papers of pragmatics module in which the students were asked to write an essay about "Austin's Performative Hypothesis" or about "the different types of non-observance of the maxims", the researcher found different types of errors in punctuating an English text. The most frequently occurring punctuation marks found in the students' essays are categorized into five types: capitalization, comma, period, semicolon, hyphen, and quotation mark.

One of the common difficulties that students face in writing is "capitalization". When the researcher read the papers, most of the first letters of the proper nouns were not capitalized. Besides, the first letter t in a sentence was also not capitalized as in the instances below:

A: do you have a white nice and fast car.

infringing the maxim is to generate the implicative intentionally. it is always used by children...

Notice that neither the interrogative nor the declarative sentences start with a capital letter and after the period in the middle of the sentence "i" of the pronoun "it" is in lower case. These errors were repeated 213 times. Lack of knowledge of the punctuation use remains the main reason that leads to errors occurrence.

Second, students abuse the rule of comma in many ways: they omit it after the time sequences (finally, second), before conjunctions (but, so), in supplying elements in a list, after introductory expressions and between two clauses. The following examples show that repeated many times in the essays of the students:

1. In metalinguistic performative there are self-referent.
2. According to Austin sentence is not just to say it but also to act it.

The third category of punctuation that is misused is "the period". Students usually leave the end of the sentence without any period; for instances, in the sentences "He proposed

an hypothesis; it was called "performative hypothesis" and "we can clearly see it in Francois Holland 's last speech about "Freedom of expression". Both declarative sentences did not end with a period. Such errors occur due to lack of paying attention to punctuation use in writing. In addition, the period is also omitted in abbreviations as in "H P Grice and J L Austin". This is traced to ignorance of the way of using of a period.

The fourth error in the placement of punctuation that students repeated 62 times is "the semicolon". They omitted it before an illustration of a given idea. In other situations, a comma replaced the semicolon. This later were misused 34 times.

Examples:

- a. Levels of meaning are different; there are the contextual meaning that can be called also an utterance meaning, the abstract meaning and the force meaning.
- b. The performative verbs are true they cannot be falsified.

Using a hyphen to form a compound word is the fifth punctuation error that students committed. Words such as "non-observance, self-verifying, and self-referential" were used many times without any hyphen to formulate a single word. This punctuation omission causes an ambiguity in comprehension.

The last category of punctuation error is "quotation marks". In English, when taking someone else's speech, it should be put inside quotation marks. Students did not include the direct speech that has been said by other people within a quotation mark. When the researcher read them, they seemed as if they were a part of the students' own writing. The examples below illustrate the situation.

Examples:

1. When a person says to his wife i divorce you.
2. Metalinguistic is to use the verbs which have a relation to us to perform an action as I drive a new car.

Table (24) lists the different punctuation errors committed by the students in writing their own essay.

Types of punctuation errors	Function	frequency	Total
1. capitalization	Common nouns.	131	213
	At the begining of the sentence.	82	
2. comma	After expressions such as for instance.	15	96
	To separate two simple sentences.	43	
	Before conjunctions.	10	
	After introductory expressions.	14	
	To separate items in a list.	6	
	After time sequences.	8	
3. period	In abbreviation	56	72
	At the end of the sentence.	16	
4. semicolon	The omission of a semicolon.	34	62
	To separate two clauses	28	
5. hyphen	To form compound words.	37	37
6. quotation mark	To enclose words and expression.	24	24

Table24: The Classification of the Punctuation Errors that Found in the Students' Essay

1. Interpretation

Through the results obtained, we deduce that most third year EFL students encounter difficulties in the placement of punctuation and capitalization in their writing. This is due to the effect of the learners' mother language: when the learning is difficult, learners transmit ideas and rules from their first language into the target language. This interference between two different languages cause errors because each language has its own system that is different from the system of the other languages. In addition, lack of information about the punctuation marks is also one reason that leads to such writing problems. When reading a piece of writing with this aspect of ignorance, it reveals that the writer does not pay attention to punctuation when they write. The number of errors in both exercises was higher than the number of the correct answers. Regardless of the number of errors, a university student has to be proficient in using punctuation in order to produce structurally and meaningfully correct ideas.

Besides, it is also noticed that the students' failure to punctuate correctly is attributed to poor learning situations. When they deal with punctuation, most of the marks are put inappropriately. It appears in a way of substituting one mark with another that does not fit the context. As a result, their writing reflects that they do not clearly understand how to use punctuation. The misplacement of punctuation may be due to lack of practice. Because they are learners of a foreign language, they misuse many linguistic elements of the language being learned unless they repeat using them for a long time. Therefore, it is so important to extend the tasks that help learning punctuation in a good way.

Moreover, punctuation errors may arise due to lack of knowledge about the types of sentence. This problem is widely spread in foreign language classes. The placement of punctuation is associated with the type of sentence: independent clause, subordinate clause, interrogative sentence, direct speech, etc. Each of these sentences receives a special way of punctuating. For example, "My sister does not like soup, nor does she drink it". The writer places a comma before the conjunction that links two clauses. In the example "who invented the translation machine?", a question mark is put at the end of a direct question. EFL students have to pay more attention to the structure of sentence so that punctuation is inserted easily and correctly in the text. Listening to a speech done by the native speakers also enables the learners to understand where to pause in order to take a breath and where to change the voice.

Conclusion

The finding of this study confirms that the application of punctuation in the writing of EFL learners is a complicated process. They fail to match expressions and words with the right punctuation in order to organize them structurally and meaningfully. The omission or substitution of the marks is repeatedly occurring in their writing. This kind of writing error does not turn back to the lack of knowledge only, but also to the lack of students' interest in punctuation when writing. Other factors to which errors are attributed are the influence of the mother tongue, inadequate teaching methodology and lack of practice. They all contribute to committing errors in inserting punctuation into an English text.

General Conclusion

Through the results obtained from this study, the researcher notices that the placement of punctuation in writing is really challenging. This can be ascribed to lack of knowledge about the rules, weak language learning, and the influence of the mother language. These punctuation errors that occur in the writing of the students affect the meaning that is considered as an essential part of better communication. They appear in various ways such as omission of the mark from its logical place or substitution of the mark for another mark that does not fit the context. For this reason, the linguistic analysis of the errors provides teachers with the identification of the problem and the reasons that contribute to error production. To overcome these problems, many approaches evolved to help learners use punctuation properly in their writing compositions.

Mastering the correct way to punctuate a text is considered as a complex process in the context of EFL classes. This can refer to the difficulty of the target language in which learners must know the sentence types (clause, independent clause, subordinate clause, declarative and interrogative sentences), because the insertion of punctuation into a text is generally associated with these sentence classes. However, EFL learners face troubles in identifying such grammatical items and as a result the insertion of punctuation becomes a difficult task. It is difficult to understand a text or a sentence without punctuation. The readers misunderstand ideas because they are not joined into appropriate sentences, paragraphs or essays. Therefore, marks are important in writing in order to avoid ambiguity and the writer is able to organize ideas effectively. In this study, learners fail to use punctuation in different situations due to lack of knowledge which is the main cause that led to wrong placement of the punctuation.

Besides, analysis of the wrong answers in this study revealed several punctuation problems. Students failed in the insertion of punctuation marks in many situations. For instance, students omit the hyphen in “non-observance”, and “self-referent”, there are no capital letters at the beginning of the sentence and the middle too as in “infringing the maxims to generate the implicative intentionally”. It is always used by children...”, also the first letter in the proper nouns for example "Christian and Pope" was not capitalized. They lack understanding of the use of quotation marks such as in "when a person says to his wife I divorce you", the sentence "I divorce you was not put inside quotation marks" which reflects that it is the students' saying. In addition, omission of comma is among the

punctuation errors that were committed frequently like "In metalinguistic performative there are self-referent". According to Austin "sentence is not just to say but also act it". Misuse of semicolon is another issue that makes sentences ambiguous, as example "The performance verbs are true they cannot be falsible". It becomes clear when a semicolon separates it. Hence, these kinds of errors of omission are widely used in the EFL learners' writing.

Based on the findings, the researcher found a similarity with Kirkman (2006) & SAYDIN's research (2004) who also concluded that EFL learners of English face difficulties in inserting punctuation and capitalization when writing. Moreover, they learn through the process of interference between their mother language and the target one. Thus, relying on the results of the study, the researcher comes to confirm the hypothesis which says that EFL learners commit errors in using punctuation because the existence of two different grammatical systems in one mind leads to the emergence of errors.

Recommendations

The results of this research work showed that the EFL learners commit errors in punctuating texts or sentences due to different factors including poor learning situation, lack of knowledge, and the effect of the mother language. In this regard, some recommendations are directed to EFL teachers as follows:

1. Understanding the function of punctuation will be easy when teachers provide activities where punctuation is removed, and engage students to self-correct the marks that have been misplaced when they re-punctuate the text.
2. It would be better if the attention is paid more to the marks that are frequently misused, for example failure in using a colon to introduce a list of items or omission of a hyphen to form a compound word. Thus, this should be taken into consideration.
3. Punctuating a text will be easier when giving an opportunity to practice punctuation in reading where students have to respect the punctuation rules. It is really an effective activity that can help in overcoming the misplacement problem in using punctuation.
4. It is useful to teach students about the importance of punctuation in clarifying the meaning and encourage them to use it in their writing.

Pedagogical Implications

The misplacement of punctuation in writing overlaps ideas and cuts the boundary between the sentence structures because ideas are constructed in a single orthographic sentence. Such writing problems prevent correct language processing. The latter is difficult in most EFL classes due to not taking punctuation into account. The following are pedagogical implications for EFL teachers:

1. As English teachers, you can carry out teaching in an interactive method through empowering learners to identify the misplaced punctuation in a text and provide the right answer to justify the reason of choosing that answer.
2. Dealing with the structure of a new language is a very challenging process in EFL classes. Teachers can provide detailed explanations to the rules that govern punctuation and give opportunities to process language through respecting these rules.
3. Teachers should teach students to punctuate a text or a sentence correctly in a way where they have to read the whole text and understand the relationship between the expressed ideas and then punctuate them. The placement of punctuation is associated with both the grammatical units and the ideas. Therefore, teachers can improve learners' placement of punctuation by teaching them how to take these two elements into consideration.

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Appendix

Student's name: Nassira Mansouri. Master 2, linguistics.

Dear students, I am interested in studying the placement of punctuation marks by EFL learners, please answer carefully the following exercises. Identify your gender by using (√) in one of the options below.

Exercise1: Fill in the boxes with the appropriate punctuation marks (. , ; : () ? ! - - [] ... " " ' ') and capitalize the words when necessary.

1. People continue to worry about the future | our failure to conserve resources has put the world at risk.

↓
2. I can't believe how difficult the exam was |

↓
3. The professor has given me three options | to retake the exam, to accept the extra credit assignment, or to fail the class.

↓
4. There are fifty | two cards in a deck.

□
5. This is the end of our sentence | or so we thought.

↓
6. | I can't wait to see him perform! | John exclaimed.

↓

↓

□

□
7. These children | s test scores are the highest in the nation.

□
8. She was determined never again to speak to him | Axeldro |.

□

□
9. The students must return all materials | these include sample manuals and | to the instructor. textbooks

↓

↓
10. Many people from vietnams descent live in los anglos.
11. Ms | Audry Aimes is an award-winning photographer.

↓
12. Just before he lost consciousness, the victim whispered, "help me |

↓
13. What has humanity done about the growing concern of global warning |

↓

↓

Exercise2: Read the paragraph below, capitalize and supply the other punctuation marks that are missing.

the weather was cloudy when my dad took us all out for a picnic my younger sister ordered scrambled eggs and toast my mom ordered sausages and pancakes i usually order pancakes too but i don't like sausages, so i order bacon instead my dad put everything in the car when we arrived and spent a long time he told us his story when he traveled to australia it is really amazing trip.