

## Some Common Punctuation Errors Made by Third-Year Secondary School Students: A case Study at Almajd Secondary School – Alkhums.

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### I. Abstract

This paper is to investigate some punctuation errors made by third-year students in writing. The researcher suggested that there are some errors made by students in using capital letters, comma and apostrophe. Therefore a sample of 50 third-year students selected randomly from Almajd secondary school- Alkhums city was given two tests (pre-test & post- test) as tools for collecting data. The result revealed that there are some common errors .Furthermore; the result revealed that there were significant differences in the number of errors among the students due to the insufficient exercises, lack of practice and explanation to these types of punctuation marks. Besides, there were errors due to L1 interference.

*Keywords: Punctuation errors, made by , Almajd , students*

### Introduction *بعض أخطاء الترقيم التي يرتكبها طلاب السنة الثالثة*

Punctuations are significant structural elements; they are essential and basic components in producing written texts. As observed in varied English as second language situations, acquiring punctuations usage is challenging to English learners in Libyan schools. It is because students do not possess the mastery over the language, particularly, the use of punctuations. In spite of teachers' efforts, many difficulties of punctuations are by far the most noticed in students' writing.

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Accordingly, this research will focus on three types of punctuation marks: capital letter, comma and apostrophe. These punctuation marks are widely used in writing. A comma, for example, is the most common mark that confuses students to be used among words and clauses.

The omission and the wrong uses of punctuation marks made by students of Libyan secondary schools are common problems in writing. Oshima & Hogue (2006:280) point out in this respect that using punctuations correctly is very important because they convey meaning just like words do. Consider these two examples: “Eat girls.”, “Eat, girls.” Both sentences are commands, but the first one would be correct only in a society of cannibals! So, students should learn and practice the rules of punctuations until they are confident about using them correctly.

## II. The Objectives of the Study

This study examines the learning and acquisition of the English three types of punctuation marks, a capital letter, a comma and an apostrophe. It has three main objectives:

- a) To determine the types and sources of the errors that Libyan secondary school students make in the use of these types of punctuations.
- b) To find out whether there are any implications in the relative frequency of the occurrence of these errors.
- c) To give some recommendations that may represent some guidelines for teachers of English.

## III. The Research Questions

The researcher addresses the following questions:

- Q1: What are the types and sources of the errors that Libyan secondary school students commit in the use of these three types of punctuations?
- Q2: Are there any implications in the relative frequency of the occurrence of these errors?
- Q3: What is the suggestion to avoid these errors and increase the students' competence in writing?

#### IV. Literature Review

When learners write, they should rely on punctuations to give successful information to readers. So, learning the use of punctuations is very important because they give a significant impact to writing meaning. Gordon (1980: ix) states that good punctuation is essential for writing to be easily, rapidly and clearly understood. Praninskas (1975:358) emphasizes the sole purpose of punctuation which is to help the reader understand what the writer means. Thus, there is a certain amount of freedom in the use of various marks, particularly the comma. According to Carter & McCarthy (2006:838) punctuation exists in order to indicate the boundaries of grammatical units and to indicate grammatical information that is marked in spoken language. Savage & Mayer (2005: 21) suggest that two sentences that run together without correct punctuation between them are called run-on sentences. A run-on sentence is not a correct sentence because an important punctuation is missing between the clauses. One way to correct a run-on sentence is to add a comma and a connecting word. For example, “\*my dog runs fast he likes to chase animals.” This is a run-on sentence. To correct the sentence, we add a comma and an appropriate connecting word. So the correct form is “My dog runs fast, and he likes to chase animals.” Therefore, students should have a strong foundation towards the function and the usage of these three types of punctuation marks.

## V. Methodology

In this paper, the researcher used descriptive analytical method. Sentences without punctuations were given to the students who were asked to insert the correct punctuation markers. The participants of this paper were third-year students of Almajd secondary school in Alkhoms city. They were chosen randomly for pre-test and post test. The two tests consisted of unpunctuated sentences on the three types of punctuations that commonly occur in writing: capital letter, comma and apostrophe.

The students were given 30 minutes to fill out all the missing punctuation marks in 15 sentences. To acquire the correct function and use of these three types of punctuation marks, the students attended classes and received instructions on these punctuation marks as well as homework assignment to get satisfactory results.

## VI. Data Analysis

The following tables show the results of: (a) pre-test and (b) post-test. Test and retest were used for reliability measurement

Table (a) pre-test result.

Statement	C orr.	Perc.	In cor.	Perc.
1 The cat ate its food.	1	22%	3	78%
2 I can't remember my students' names.	4	28%	6	72%
3 Where are the ladies' shoes?	8	16%	4	48%
4 They've just had a new baby.	2	24%	8	76%
5 We study physics, chemistry and biology.	7	34%	3	66%
6 He said, 'That's all right.	8	16%	4	48%
7 The hotel was good, but expensive	1	22%	3	78%
8 As it was late, I took a taxi.	1	20%	4	80%
9 Henry can read English and French.	4	28%	6	72%
0 1 I shall see her on Sunday, Monday and Friday.	0	20%	4	80%
1 1 Mr. Alexander lives in Italy.	3	26%	7	74%
1 1 Peter is from Malta.	4	28%	6	72%
2 1 If she doesn't do her homework, she won't learn.	1	22%	3	78%
3 1 Washing up means washing the plates, glasses and	1	24%	9	76%
4 spoons.	2	24%	8	76%
5 1 I've tried, but I can't find anything.	1	28%	3	72%
	4		6	

Table (b) post test. The result and the scores after students received sufficient use and treatment of the punctuation marks.

Statement	Corr.	Perc.	In	Perc.
1	33	66%	1	40%
2	44	88%	6	12%
3	43	86%	7	14%
4	44	88%	6	12%
5	36	72%	1	28%
6	45	90%	5	10%
7	42	84%	8	16%
8	39	78%	1	22%
9	42	84%	8	16%
1	39	78%	1	22%
0			1	
1	38	76%	1	24%
1	41	82%	9	18%
2	44	88%	6	12%
3	42	84%	8	16%
4	44	88%	6	12%
5				

## VII. Explanation of Students' errors

Accordingly, Insufficiency of exercises and lack of practice in these types of punctuation marks. For example, when they write “\*Where are the ladie’s shoes?” instead of the correct sentence “Where are the ladies’ shoes?” and “\*The cat ate it’s food.” Instead of “The cat ate its food.”

Ellis (1997:140) defines L1 transfer as “The process by which the learner’s L1 influences the acquisition and use of L2.” The lack use of capital letters in Arabic alphabet could be the reason behind the students’ misuse of the English capital letter. For example, some students write “\*peter is from malta.” Instead of “Peter is from Malta.” To the researcher’s best knowledge, the Arab learners of English over differentiate the use of comma due to the big differences between Arabic and English languages. For example they write “\*we study physics and chemistry and biology.” Instead of “We study physics, chemistry and biology.” In this respect, Carter and McCarthy (2006:844) make clear that commas are used to separate items in a list, except for a final item preceded by “and”. In American English, however, the noun is to have a comma before “and” in a list. For example, “They’ve got apricots, pears, pineapples, bananas and peaches.”

### **IX. Recommendations**

According to the results obtained from this research, the following recommendations are suggested. These recommendations may represent some guidelines for teachers of English to the Arabic students.

- 1- The wrong use of punctuations changes the meaning of the sentence. So, teachers should encourage students to look at punctuations as necessary elements in writing.
- 2- Syllabus designers should include a great amount of punctuation exercises in syllabuses to help students overcome these problems.
- 3- Teachers are advised to explain the use and function of punctuation marks using examples and rules for clarification.
- 1- Finally, teachers are advised to pay attention to interference strategy where Arabic punctuation system is different from its English

counterpart. This will increase the students' competence in writing correctly.

## X. Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the errors made by students at Almajd secondary school in AlKhums city. It has been shown that most of these errors occur due to lack of practice which hindered their ability to use some punctuations correctly.

The result of this study reveal that there are variations between the two tests (pre-test & post-test). These variations show us a great improvement of students' performance after the treatment. The results deduced from this study justify that the treatment is more effective to improve the students' standard. Therefore, more exercises and practice are considered to be beneficial in acquiring the correct function and use of these punctuation marks.

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## Appendices



The following tests (pre-test& post-test) were given to the students in class in order to check their errors before and after treatment.

**Pre-test**

Almajd Secondary School – Alkhums

Time allotted: 30 minutes

Question: Rewrite these sentences with the correct punctuation. Use capital letters, commas or apostrophes where necessary.

1- the cat ate its food.

.....

2- i cant remember my students names.

.....

3- where are the ladies shoes?

.....

4- they ve just had a new baby.

.....

5- we study physics chemistry and biology.

.....

6- he said “thats all right.”

.....

7- the hotel was good but expensive.

.....

8- as it was late I took a taxi.

.....

9- henry can read english and french.

.....

10- i shall see her on sunday monday and friday.

.....

11- mr. alexander lives in italy.

.....

12- peter is from malta.

.....

13- if she doesnt do her homework she wont learn.

.....

14- washing up means washing the plates glasses and spoons.

.....  
15- ive tried but I cant find anything.  
.....

**Post-test**

Almajd Secondary School – Alkhums Time allotted: 30 minutes

Question: Rewrite these sentences with the correct punctuation. Use capital letters, commas or apostrophes where necessary.

1- thats Jacks new car.

.....  
2- mali niger and sudan are in africa.  
.....

3- you  
know her dont you?

.....  
4- the  
students name is on the board.  
.....

5- the  
dog s chasing its tail.  
.....

6- we  
moved here last april.  
.....

7- theyre  
going on a trip to suez canal.  
.....

8- my  
father said “I cant go out.”  
.....

9-

sara

speaks arabic english and french.

10- if it rains we re going to stay in the house.

11- he asked “is mount everest very high?”

12- they sell cars to europe and the middle east.

13- i phoned the hotel but theres no reply.

14- “she cant” sami answered.

15- shes got biscuits burger and cola.

## Outline:

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III. The Objectives of The study.

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