

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



SHENDI UNIVERSITY

Errors Analysis of Mechanics in Writing Made by EFL learners at Tertiary Level

(A case study of semester5 Students - Faculty of Education - Shendi University - Sudan)

BY

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1.1 Abstract

In this study the researcher takes the students of semester 5 at the Faculty of Education who study English as a foreign language at the University of Shendi as a sample to carry out this study. The study attempts to investigate and identify the problems facing them in using punctuation and capitalization, and to suggest suitable remedial procedures. A test of punctuating and capitalizing a paragraph was given to 36 students who represent the whole class of semester 5 at the faculty of Education. The test results were analyzed by using (SPSS). The results revealed by the test affirm that the students were very weak in using punctuation and capitalization. The majority of them failed to pass the test.

Considering the findings of the study, and in order to participate in solving the students' weakness in this area, the researcher recommends and suggests the following:

1. Mechanics of writing should be given an equal attention like other aspects of writing skills.
2. Curriculum should include enough courses about mechanics of writing.
3. Mechanics and their activities should be taught as a part of teaching writing and semantics.

مستخلص

في هذه الدراسة قام الباحث بأخذ طلاب الفصل الدراسي الخامس بكلية التربية قسم اللغة الانجليزية بجامعة شندي كعينة للتعرف والتحقق من الصعوبات التي تواجههم في استخدام علامات الترقيم و استخدام الأحرف الكبيرة في اللغة الانجليزية و اقتراح حلول مناسبة.

قام الباحث بإعطاء امتحان لعدد 36 طالبا من الطلاب المعنيين بالدراسة و هم كل طلاب الفصل الدراسي الخامس و ذلك بترقيم فقرة في اللغة الانجليزية

تم تحليل البيانات الخاصة بأداء الطلاب في الامتحان بواسطة نظام (SPSS) الإحصائي.

أثبتت النتائج المستخلصة من الامتحان الخاص بالطلاب ضعف الطلاب الشديد في استخدام علامات الترقيم و استخدام الأحرف الكبيرة في اللغة الانجليزية في مهارات الكتابة في اللغة الانجليزية.

و بناءً على النتائج المستخلصة من الدراسة و مساهمة من الباحث في حل مشكلة ضعف الطلاب في هذا الجانب كانت محاور توصياته على النحو التالي:

1. يجب أن تُولى علامة الترقيم واستخدام الأحرف الكبيرة اهتماماً مثل ذلك الذي يُولى لمهارات الكتابة الأخرى.

2. يجب أن يشتمل المنهج على مقررات كافية عن علامات الترقيم واستخدام الأحرف الكبيرة.

3. يجب أن تُدرّس علامة الترقيم واستخدام الأحرف الكبيرة والتمارين الخاصة بها كجزء لا يتجزأ من تدريس مهارات الكتابة وعلم المعاني .

1.2 Key concepts

(Mechanics, Punctuation, capitalization, analyses)

1.3 Background

Students of English as a foreign language face many difficulties in writing process which is one of the most problematic skills, this because writing comprises all the aspects and devices of the language such as syntax, semantics, punctuation e t c.

The role of writing is much more important in communicating messages, views and ideas. Students of English, as a foreign language, face many difficulties in writing process as well as the writing product which is one of the most problematic skills.

Written language is something different from a spoken language. Speakers have a lot of choices to use to enhance the meaning of their messages. They can use nonverbal language like gestures, facial expressions, stresses, pitches and body language. But writers have the choice to compensate this by using capitalization and punctuation to indicate pauses, questions and to express feelings. Capitalization and punctuation system which characterize written English are sometimes major challenge to Arab learners of English.

"If there were no marks of punctuation, sentences would be hopelessly jumbled. We would not be able to communicate ideas so that others could understand exactly what we were trying to convey." (*Idrees&Hago 2006: 38*)This study examined the ability of semester five students at the faculty of Education at Shendi University on how to use mechanics of writing (punctuation & capitalization)

1.4 Aims of the study

This study attempts to investigate and examine the ability of the students of English language at tertiary level in using mechanics of writing and eventually recommend ways of remedial work.

1.5 Significance of the study

The study is of great value to the following:

- 1- English language teachers.
- 2- Planners and designers of English language syllabus.
- 3- Learners of English as a foreign language.
- 4- Researchers in the area of English language teaching.

1.6 Methods of the study

The researcher adopts the descriptive analytical method. As data required for the study, the students were given a test of unpunctuated paragraph and they asked to rewrite it using the appropriate punctuation marks and capital letters. The SPSS was used for data analysis.

1.7 Limits of the study

The study is limited to 5th semester students enrolled in the academic year 2014 – 2015 who study English as a foreign language at Shendi University, Faculty of Education.

2. Mechanics

Written language is something different from a spoken language. Speakers have a lot of choices to use to enhance the meaning of their messages. They can use nonverbal language like gestures, facial expressions, stresses, pitches and body language. But writers have the choice to compensate this by using capitalization and punctuation to indicate pauses, questions and to express feelings. Capitalization and punctuation system which characterize written English are sometimes major challenge to Arab learners of English.

"Using the correct punctuation helps you convey your ideas exactly as you intend them."(Rozakis 2003:147)

2.1 Mechanics and meaning

In speech or spoken language, speakers can make pauses or gestures between words and phrases, and raise or lower the voice to help the listener to understand their meaning, but in writing these functions are done by punctuation marks, e.g.

My son sister Fatima and I went to the zoo.

How many persons went to the zoo?

If you use three commas, four persons went.

(Son, sister, Fatima, I).

If you use two commas, three persons went.

(Son sister, Fatima, I)

Or

Two persons went if the baby sister's name is Fatima.

Also the sentence, (*woman without her man is nothing*) is ambiguous or might reflect more than one meaning if not punctuated to the reader. If it is punctuated by men it will be like this:

Woman without her man is nothing.

And if it is punctuated by women it will be like this:

Woman without her, man is nothing.

So the comma and its position in the sentence totally change the whole meaning.

Punctuation marks are like roads signs that writers use to guide readers through their writing. The marks show readers when to pause or stop. They also connect ideas and clarify items of interest. Like drivers who must learn to read and follow road signs, writers use punctuation to avoid confusion and to make their writing flow more smoothly. (Ross & Murry: 1985: 606)

2.2 Capitalization

Capitalization is writing the first word with capital letter, whereas all other words in the sentence are written in small letters. In English written language, many words are capitalized. Capitalization helps the writers and readers to identify sentences and names of thing when they are mentioned in particular manner.

"Our system of capital and lowercase letters allows writers to point out specific words within a sentence and to signal the start of a new sentence. The rules may seem arbitrary, but you'll soon discover that they function much as

traffic signals to help travelers negotiate the highways of written language."
(Rozakis 2003:163)

"The capital letter is also called a big letter or uppercase letter, or sometimes just a capital"(Anne Seaton 2007:6)

The following words are capitalized

1. Proper names, e.g.

Hassan, Ali, November, London, Shendi, Red Sea, etc

2. Beginning of sentences, e.g.

Punctuation marks are useful in writing.

3. Names of cities, states, countries, continents, seas, oceans, e.g.

Shendi, Qatar, Sudan, Africa, Red Sea, the Atlantic respectively

4. Names of avenues, streets, roads and routes, e.g.

Alneel Avenue, Africa Street

5. Names of mountains, parks, planets and buildings, e.g.

Jabal Marra, Mugran Family Park, Moon, World Trade Tower

6. Names of months, days, special events and holidays, e.g.

June, Monday.

7. Names of departments, branches of governments, political parties, companies and organizations, e.g.

He is the **H**ead of the **E**nglish **D**epartment.

She works for the **M**inistry of **H**igh **E**ducation.

They are members of the **D**emocratic **P**arty.

Toyota **C**ompany benefit was very high the last year.

Amnesty **I**nternational seeks week country faults.

8. Words that refer to God, Religions, and sacred books, e.g.

Ramadan is an important month in the **M**uslim faith.

The **Q**uran, the **B**ible and the **O**ld **T**estament are holy books.

9. Word in a complete line of poetry, e.g.

The sea is hungry dog.

Giants and grey

He rolls on the beach all day.

With his clashing teeth and

Shaggy jaws.

10. Titles that precede, or take the place of a person's names, e.g.

The **P**resident will address the nation on Friday.

11. Words that show family relationship when they precede a person's name or when they are used in place of someone's name, e.g.

Have you ever seen London, Uncle?

Aunt Fatima went to Khartoum yesterday.

12. Abbreviation for a person's name or title, e.g.

Dr. Ali is a good dentist.

I met Mr. John yesterday in the market.

13. Names of nationalities, races, languages and the proper adjectives formed from these nouns, e.g.

A German teacher joined Shendi University.

My supervisor speaks English, French and Arabic.

14. Abbreviations A.D, B.C... A.M and P.M.... but not that for measurements, (kg, and cm)

15. Pronoun I and the interjection O, e.g.

What can I do for you?

Oh, I am so sorry about that!

"Care must be exercised in using capital letters because they can affect the meaning of words (march/March, china/China, turkey/Turkey). The proper use of capital letters can help eliminate ambiguity." (Viades 2002:103)

2.3 Punctuation

Punctuation marks are used to make a written discourse easy for a reader to understand. People would not be able to communicate ideas; moreover they could not understand each other if they don't use punctuation marks in their writing.

"Punctuation is simply a device for making it easy to read and understand written and printed matter"(Eckersley C.E. & Eckersley J. M.1981: 376)

1. The full stop (.)

Full stop means completely stop and it is used to end declarative and imperative sentences. It is also used to end abbreviations.

“Use periods to end complete sentences that are statements, commands and request, or mild exclamations.”(Eggenchwiler& Emily 2001:87)

1. At the end of a statement sentences, e.g.

He needs your help.

I go to school every day.

2. At the end of command sentences, e.g.

Help him.

Go to school now.

3. After abbreviations, e.g.

M.A. = Master of Arts.

U.N. = *United Nations*. *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *a.m.*, *Sept.* But if abbreviations are written in capital letters periods are omitted e.g.

FBI, CIA

4. After contracted words, e.g.

Nov. = *November*

Adj. = *Adjective*

But the full stop is omitted if the contraction includes the final letter of the word, e.g.

Dr, Ltd, etc

Full stops are not used at the end of phrases or dependent clauses.

5. Full stop is used when the question is used as a courtesy, e.g.

Would you please lend me your book.

2. The colon (:)

The colon is used

1. To separate two sentences when the second one explains, expands, or summarizes the meaning of the first one, e.g.

Finally she told us what was in the box: a live snake.

There is something I want to say: I love you all.

2. To introduce a speech or quoted material, e.g.

I told them: "Don't open the door"

Shakespeare said: "neither a borrower nor a lender be"

3. To introduce a list, e.g.

He offered me the choice of any one of these presents: a TV, a computer, a set of armchairs, or a refrigerator.

3. The semi-colon (;)

It is used for a longer pause than that shown by a comma and when the writer does not want to break the line of thought.

"The semi – colon is useful when we need a longer pause than indicated by a comma" (Eckersley C.E. & Eckersley J. M. 1981:378)

Semi-colon is used

1. To separate co-ordinate sentences when a conjunction is not used e.g.

Your visit pleased my children; it delighted me

I never exercise; that is why I am slight overweight.

2. With words like therefore, however, nevertheless, besides, also, otherwise and so, e.g.

You have done the work well; therefore I will pay you well.

You should exercise; otherwise you will get to fat.

4. The comma (,)

Comma is the most used punctuation mark in writing. It tells readers where a pause is needed.

“Commas are useful for indicating pauses or brief breaks within your ideas. They add pacing to your sentences and make them clear.” (Eggenschwiler & Emily 2001:93)

Commas are used:

1. To record a list of things, e.g.

At the party we had cakes, coca cola, chocolates, and biscuit.

Notice that the comma is usually put before **and** but, some writer disagree with that.

2. To mark off direct speech, e.g.

“Tell me, I said, “How you know all that”

Ali replied, “I heard in the radio.”

3. To mark off sentences or clauses where a pause is needed in reading, e.g.

Although it was raining, we played the match.

If you go there, you will meet him.

4. To mark off words used in addressing persons, e.g.

Hassan, I hope you and Ahmed can come to visit me.

I would be very glad, Ali, if you would do this for me.

5. To mark off words or phrases like however, therefore, of course, for instance, e.g.

You know of course, the way to Khartoum.

6. In descriptive titles such as:

Ibrahim Alfaki, PhD

King Abdullah, the king of Saudia.

7. To separate adjectives preceding a noun, e.g.

He bought a small, red, speedy car.

“The comma separates words, phrases, or clauses within sentences”.
(Winterowd& Patricia1985: 577)

5. The question mark (?)

A question mark is used after a direct question, but not after an indirect one.

“Obviously, the role of the question mark is to end a question”
(Eggenschwiler& Emily 2001:89)

Direct, I asked to him, “Where are you going.”

Indirect, I asked him where he was going.

“When a question is being reported rather than directly asked, it ends with a period rather than a question mark.” (Eggenschwiler& Emily 2001:90)

6. The exclamation mark (!)

The exclamation mark is used after an interjection, an exclamatory sentence or an expression of great feeling and emotion, e.g.

Hello! I didn't expect to see you.

What a nice whether it is!

Help! I am falling.

“An exclamation point is particularly useful if you're writing dialogue because it shows the feeling behind a statement.”(Eggenschwiler& Emily 2001:91)

7. The quotation mark (“”)

Quotation marks (" "), sometimes referred to as *quotes* or *inverted commas* , are punctuation marks used in pairs to set off a quotation or a piece of dialogue. A relatively recent invention, quotation marks were not commonly used before the 19th century.

Quotation marks are used to enclose direct speech, e.g.

He said, “I shall visit you this evening”.

They shouted, “What are you doing here.”

Single quotation marks are used within double quotation marks to show a quotation within a quotation

“Quotation marks are used to indicate the beginning and end of a quote. They tell the reader when you’ve used written material from other sources or direct speech.” (Eggenschwiler& Emily 2001:112)

8. The apostrophe (’)

The apostrophe (’) may be the simplest and yet most frequently misused mark of punctuation in English. It was introduced into English in the 16th century from Latin and Greek, in which it served to mark the loss of letters.

"An apostrophe (‘) is used to show possession, to indicate the omission of letters, and sometimes to form the plural. Do not confuse the apostrophe used to show the plural with the apostrophe used to show possession."(Viades 2002:108)

The apostrophe is used to

1. Show omission, e.g.

Can’t *cannot*

Isn’t *is not*

I'll *I will*

O'clock *of the clock*

2. The possessive case, e.g.

My neighbor's house

He is the headmaster of the boy's school, (singular, one boy), but He is the headmaster of the boys' school, (plural, for a lot of boys.

Use an apostrophe with s to show who something belongs to.

This is Michael's room.

This is my Dad's desk.

Are you Kathleen's mom?

This dog's tail is very long.

The teacher collects everyone's books at the end of the class.

Jack is going to his friend's house for lunch. (Sargeant 2007:142)

9. The parentheses ()

Parentheses are used across the writing process to indicate comments, additional information or more explanation.

E.g. some of the players (Ali, Taha and Ahmed for example) insisted that the match be postponed.

“Parentheses are used to enclose incidental information, such as a passing comment, a minor example or addition, or a brief explanation” (Eggenschwiler & Emily 2001:110)

So punctuation marks do the following four functions:

1. To separate
2. To link
3. To enclose
4. To show omission

“In general, punctuation works in four ways: to separate, to link, to enclose, and to show omission.” (Winterowd & Patricia 1985: 572)

3. Results and Discussion

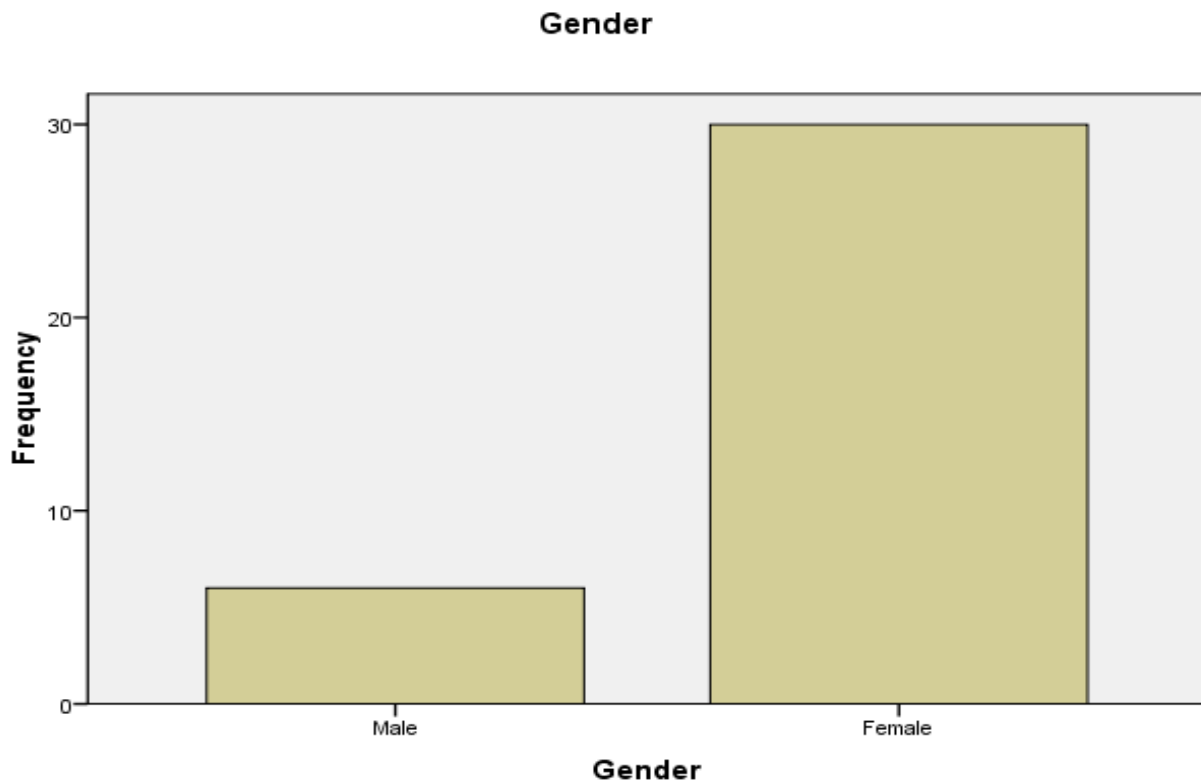
The performances of the students on the test were measured according to the following scales:

- 1- A = *very good*.
- 2- B = *good*.
- 3- C, = *pass*.
- 4- F = *failure*.

All the tests given to students were conducted as a part of their prescribed courses work at the university. The students seriously dealt with the tests as a part of the semester syllabi not as a study conducted on them. So the results of the tests were true and authentic.

Table and figure No (1) Show the number of the sample and the distribution of their sex.

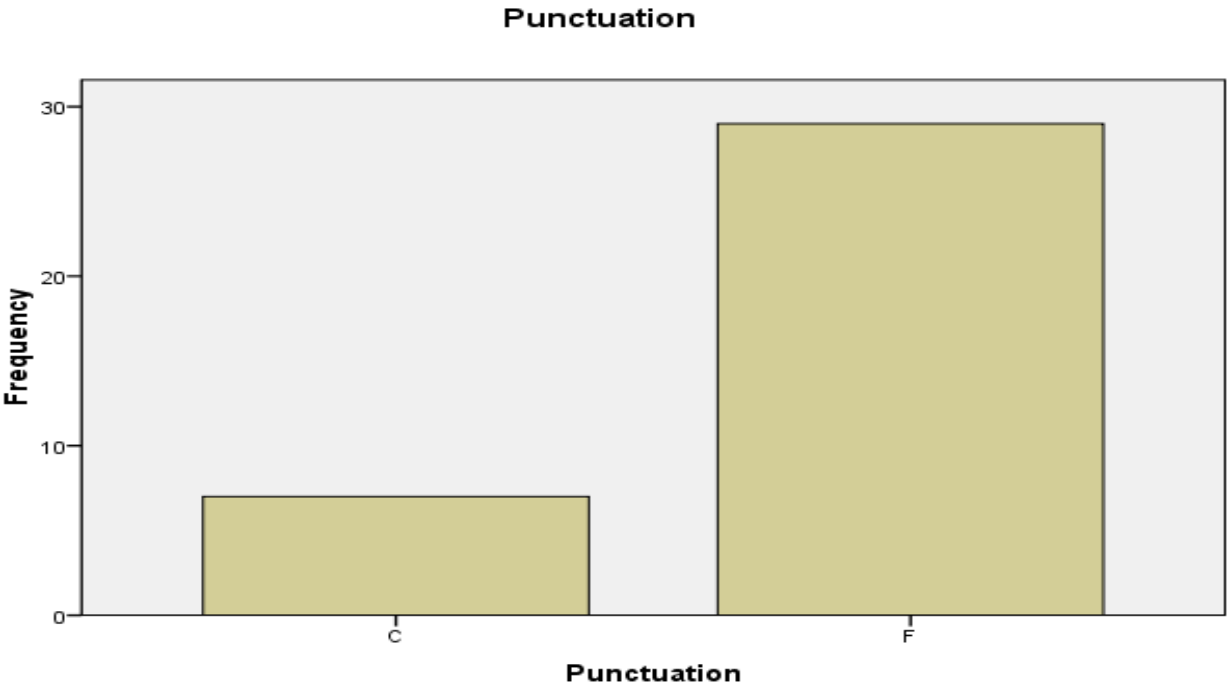
Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	6	16.7
Female	30	83.3
Total	36	100.0



Based on data presented in table and figure (1) **36** students are the sample of the study, **6** males and **30** females, and they all form **100%** of the study sample.

Table and figure No (2) Show the performance of the students regarding punctuation marks test.

Punctuation	Frequency	Percent
A	0	0
B	0	0
C	7	19.4
F	29	80.6
Total	36	100.0



According to table and figure (2), it is clear that **none** of the students scored (A) and (B), **only 7** students scored (C) and **29** of them scored (F), so that most of the students (**80.6%**) failed to pass the capitalization test.

Table and figure No (3) Show the performance of the students regarding capitalization test

Capitalization	Frequency	Percent
A	0	0
B	2	5.6
C	9	25.0
F	25	69.4
Total	36	100.0



Based on data presented in table and figure (3), it is clear that **none** of the students get (A), **only 2** students get (B), **9** students get (C) but **25** of them get (F) and they form (**69.4%**) of the sample, so that most of the students failed to pass capitalization test.

4. Conclusion and recommendations.

The results revealed by the test affirmed that none of the students scored (A) and (B) and few of them scored (C) while the majority failed even to pass the test.

Considering the findings of the study, and in order to participate in solving the students' weakness in using the mechanics of writing, the researcher recommends and suggests the following:

-Writing skill should be early taught at pre tertiary level to build a strong base for learning it at tertiary level.

- 1.** Mechanics of writing should be given an equal attention like other aspects of writing skills.
- 2.** Mechanics and their activities should be taught as a part of studying writing and semantic, as mechanics have a big impact on meaning.
- 3.** Motivating students and raise their awareness of writing skills.
- 4.** Curriculum should include enough courses about mechanics of writing.

5. References

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6. Appendices

6.1 Appendix No (1)

The test

The paragraph before capitalization and punctuation

tom lost his keys and we were all helping him to search for them we went through the whole house we looked in every drawer and cupboard then we started looking in funny places like under the bed behind the door under the carpet as well as outside in the garden but we could not find the keys oh i remember said tom. i put them into my pocket when we left London theatre sorry everyone i' will buy you an ice cream for helping me

The paragraph after capitalization and punctuation

Tom lost his keys and we were, all, helping him to search for them. We went through the whole house. We looked in every drawer and cupboard. Then we started looking in funny places like under the bed, behind the door, under the carpet as well as outside, in the garden, but we could not find the keys. "Oh! I remember," said Tom. "I put them into my pocket, when we left London Theatre. Sorry everyone, I'll buy you an ice cream for helping me."

6.2 Appendix No (2)

Mechanics (Capitalization & punctuation checklist)

Students numbers									
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