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**The Comma and the Period:
From Rote Learning to Efficient Classroom Practice.
The Case of Second Year Students, University of Constantine.**

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master degree in
Applied Language Studies

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Dedication

To my parents, and to all my family

To my little lovely nephews Hazar and Weil

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Abstract

In this dissertation our hypothesis states the possibility of more practice, in addition to theory, on the use of the comma and the period to achieve good punctuated pieces of writing. For this purpose, we have administered a teacher's questionnaire which helped us to know the teachers' point of view as far as punctuation is concerned. We have also conducted a pre-test and a post-test with a sample of 15 second-year English students at the Department of Languages, University of Constantine. The pre-test was an unpunctuated text that needed only commas and periods to be inserted. Similarly to the pre- test and after adding an extra practical course, the same sample of students received the post-test and were asked to place the aforementioned marks in a correct way. The obtained results could confirm our hypothesis which stated that students would produce better writing if they were given more practice on punctuation marks, especially the very frequently used ones the comma and the period.

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Introduction

It is commonly admitted that academic writing with its vast areas is designed for students at the University level. Students at this level are subjected to learn how to write different paragraphs, essays, and other assignments. In studying the Written Expression module, students usually tend to focus on some aspects as the grammatical rules and the writing techniques, but overlook the surface features particularly punctuation marks as the comma and the period that we will discuss in our present study.

1. Statement of the problem

Punctuation is a crucial aspect in the writing process since it makes any piece of writing clearer, original, and readable. Furthermore, using punctuation marks in a given text serves all the purposes of the reader. In order to know how to manipulate them, one should be more aware of their several practices and learn where and where not to put them. We observed that during writing activities, students usually find it difficult to insert punctuation marks in their right place, but rather place them randomly. This led us to assume that more efficient practical courses on how to use the comma and the period may take part in the production of clear, original, and fascinating pieces of writing.

2. Aim of the study

Our study deals with learners' poor achievement in the written production as far as the comma and the period are concerned. The main objective of our study is to determine the possibility of more practical courses, in addition to the theoretical ones, to help students place the aforementioned signals in their right position. That is to say, we want to stress the fact that it is not sufficient for students to depend only on the theoretical norms of both marks, but to rather turn to practise more on their use during their writing classes.

3. Research questions

In order to check our assumptions we have put the following questions:

1. Are students aware of the importance of punctuation marks, especially the comma and the period?
2. To what extent do they tend to use commas and periods whenever they write?
3. In addition to studying punctuation's theoretical norms, does efficient classroom practice help students place the comma and period in their right position?

4. Research hypothesis

To punctuate effectively, students must know all about punctuation rules since it is not something that they impose on a sentence after writing it out. During the writing process, students ought to insert punctuation marks in their right place, and this cannot be obtained only by learning their theoretical norms.

We hypothesize that: in addition to the theoretical rules given or introduced by teachers, efficient classroom practice is expected to help students to insert the aforementioned punctuation marks in an appropriate way.

5. Research methodology

5.1. Materials and procedure

To check the validity of our hypothesis, we intend to devise a pre-test and a post-test. During the pre-test, students will be given an unpunctuated text and will be asked to insert commas and periods in it. After giving an extra practical course on the use of both marks, the

same sample will be given another text to be punctuated for the sake of detecting the differences between them, and see whether these extra session will be beneficial or not. Besides, we intend to devise a teacher's questionnaire to enrich our findings, and see whether the obtained results go in the same direction as our hypothesis.

5.2. Subjects

The population of our research are second year Applied Linguistics English Students at the University of Constantine. Our sample will consist of 15 students who will be invited to take part in both the pre-test and the post-test. The reason for choosing such a population is that during the first year, and precisely in the first semester, the writing syllabus is about writing meaningful English sentences with less courses being devoted to teaching punctuation. It is only in the second semester that the paragraph writing is introduced. So, teachers generally do not find much time to deal with punctuation marks in a detailed way. This is why we choose the case of second year students who are supposed to have a previous knowledge of it, and who are about to start dealing with writing compositions.

6. Structure of the study

The present research will be divided into three main chapters. Chapter one contains detailed information about writing as a complex cognitive activity. It introduces the basic rules of writing which are: brevity, clarity, and simplicity in relation to punctuation marks, and the extent to which the marks of our concern in this research, which are the comma and the period, may affect these characteristics. This chapter also outlines the product-oriented approach since our main concern is the text form. It also highlights the stages of the writing process with particular attention given to the comma and the period, and contains related aspects like: revising, proofreading, and editing.

The second chapter is an extension of the first chapter in that it introduces the concept of style, writing mechanics, its history, and how it represents a crucial aspect in the process of writing through introducing the different uses of the comma and the period.

The third chapter is a field investigation and is mainly concerned with the analysis of the teachers' questionnaire, the pre-test, and the post-test in order to check the possibility of more practice on the use of the comma and the period to produce well punctuated pieces of writing. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is devoted to the description and analysis of the teachers' questionnaire. The second and the third sections are concerned with the description and analysis of both the pre-test and the post-test.

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Chapter One: An Overview of Writing in Relation to Punctuation

Introduction

In general manner, in learning a foreign language, learners are subjected to the four basic skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. The latter is increasingly becoming a necessity in life, no matter what career one will embrace. In fact, writing is a communication tool which translates thoughts into a written language, and pedagogically speaking is the means by which learners' achievements are generally examined. In comparison to the other skills, writing is said to be the Cinderella skill which is not only regarded to be the most sophisticated one, but the least easy to acquire as well. Writing, not as speech can be acquired through a process of instructions, conventions, and practices.

This chapter intends to examine the nature of writing. It also aims at highlighting the basic rules of writing which are brevity, clarity, and simplicity. Besides, it attempts to present the product-oriented approach as a significant approach which has a close relationship with punctuation marks. Equally importantly, we will shed light on the stages of the writing process, especially revising, proofreading, and editing. For the latter, we will provide instructions to show how we can manipulate this stage, since it represents the key stage where punctuation should be corrected.

1. Academic writing

University students generally feel the inevitable need to write good pieces of writing. Oshima and Hogue (1999) claim that academic writing is the writing task that students are required to perform in college. This kind of writing differs from other kinds of writing as far as its special audience, tone, and purpose are concerned. Recognizing the audience is

basically a stimulus that may help to communicate in a clear and effective way. In this process, the audience is primarily students' professors or instructors.

Whenever they write, students should also take into account the writing tone which depends to a large extent on a given subject matter, i.e. students' style and manner of expression of ideas. Those required aspects of writing can only be revealed by the choice of words, grammatical mistakes, and even the length of sentences. For example, the tone of some pieces of writing may be serious, in others it is may be amusing, personal, impersonal, and so forth.

The objective of any piece of writing determines its organization, form, and style chosen to be adopted. Thus, students produce various written assignments which generally develop millions of ideas in numerous ways of organizations and style.

It is noticeable that the process of writing, particularly academic writing, is not easy. It involves a lot of work, study, and practice in order to be developed either for native speakers, or new learners of English. Weigle (2002, p. 174; cited in Dakhmouche, 2008, p.16) explains that writing in class "is used to test students ability to plan and write an essay or other extended text without the use of outside assistance or resources." At the university level, the main objective of academic writing is to introduce students "to produce writing under timed conditions in their academic courses, and thus it is essential for them to be able to organize, write, and edit a composition in a relatively short amount of time."

1.1. The nature of writing

Just like speech which cannot be only restricted to producing sounds, the process of writing is obviously much more than the production of graphic symbols. It is admitted that this range of symbols should be arranged in accordance with the writing conventions, rules

and procedures. All that is to produce words which themselves are combined to form sentences which cannot build a meaningful communication separately, but rather by a sequence of sentences either short or long linked together to constitute a whole, coherent, unified text (Byrne, 1988).

Writing is regarded to be a complex cognitive activity which inevitably depends on the mastery of the following elements:

- A full knowledge of the alphabet.
- Knowing how to combine letters to form words in order to understand the relationship between the word and its meaning.
- Adopting the mechanics of writing throughout the text like spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and other writing conventions.
- Mastery of the rules that govern the structure of sentences.
- Ability to combine different sentences to build an effective paragraph, and then combining paragraphs to produce different compositions.
- Awareness of the importance of transitions which achieve coherence throughout all types of texts (Al Mutawa and Kailani, 1989).

In this respect, Bell and Burnaby (1984; cited in Nunan, 1989, p. 36) explains that:

Writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously. At the sentence level, these include control of content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and letter formation. Beyond the sentence, the writer must be able to structure and integrate information into cohesive and coherent paragraphs and texts.

The process of writing is a wide range of purposes. It is a good means of enhancing one's grammar and vocabulary through learning their norms and applying them. For example,

during writing classes, teachers may ask their students to write paragraphs or even sentences in which they adopt recently learned grammar, or vocabulary conventions to test to what extent they tend to manipulate their different uses (Harmer, 2004).

In this respect, Hyland (2003, p. 3; cited in Dakhmouche, 2008, p. 9) regards writing as “marks on a page or a screen, a coherent arrangement of words, clauses, and sentences structured according to a system of rules.” He views writing as “composing skills and knowledge about texts, contexts, and readers.” So, in writing one should bear in mind that stating words, sentences, or even paragraphs on a sheet of paper is not sufficient; it is obligatory to pay attention to the different rules and norms that go with every type of writing. Thus, being able to write is not an easy task because it obliges students to master various elements that shape the writing skill. Harris (1969; cited in Selmen, 2008) recognizes five general elements:

- Content, which represents the ideas expressed in the whole text.
- Form, which refers to the organization of the content.
- Grammar, which refers to the application of grammatical forms and syntactic patterns.
- Style, which displays the use of structures and lexical items to give a particular tone to writing.
- Writing mechanics, which consist of the use of surface features and graphic conventions of language.

Finally, if writing is viewed in a narrow sense it will certainly have several definitions. When considering the Product Approach, it is "a creative discovery procedure characterized by the dynamic interplay of content and language: the use of language to explore beyond the known content." (Tylor, 1981, p. 6; cited in Dakhmouche, 2008, p. 9).

When taking into consideration these definitions, it is highly noticed that it is not easy to come to one single view of what writing is since it is not a simple task and involves control over so many conventions as coherence, cohesion, grammar, tense and, of course, surface features, especially the punctuation marks: the comma and the period which are our main concern in this research.

1.2. The basic rules of writing

In order to produce good pieces of writing, it is essential to respect certain writing characteristics as brevity, clarity, and simplicity. Due to the fact that writing is an effective means of communication and self expression, good writing requires some characteristics either at the level of content; by seeking to achieve coherence, unity, and other features, or form where one should use mechanics like spelling, capitalization, and punctuation marks. The latter, are highly connected with meaning, and it is no more obvious that is the difference between understanding and not understanding, between being understood and not being understood; in short, between good and bad English.

The basic rules of writing which are “brevity”, “clarity”, and “simplicity” generally affect any piece of writing positively when they are respected and paid due attention. Gethin (1970) stresses that only if punctuation marks are used, words are grouped into sentences and into groups within the sentence in a very clear and harmonious way. Thus, their use is fundamental to the writing of good English compositions, while their wrong use or omission can affect the meaning and results in obscured or distorted meaning.

1.2.1. Brevity

In order to achieve good pieces of writing, any writer should be aware of the importance of going through all the norms that control any piece of writing. One of which is the inclusion of all words and sentences that are redundant, since wordiness obscures meaning and readers to feel boring. Consequently, it is beneficial to convey the maximum meaning in minimum words. For example, instead of expressing one idea in five sentences, it is better to put it in one meaningful, coherent, and well punctuated sentence. Adopting this way will certainly result in a brief and effective text which responds to the readers needs.

The concept of punctuation reached zenith during the 19th century, where a tendency of very long sentencing was preferred. At that time, sentences used to contain dozens or more commas, semicolons, periods, and other marks. On the other hand, nowadays sentences are highly influenced by the brevity of newspaper style and other styles. This leads to raising demands on more brief sentences separated by the suitable punctuation marks.

Periods, for example, which are used to mark the end of a given sentence are sometimes placed wrongly in students' papers. These latter may write very long sentences separated by dozens of commas without paying attention to the parallel importance of periods, or they may neglect them throughout whole essays, place them randomly, or fall in the confusion of whether to put a comma or a period. As a result, inserting commas in their right place may represent a problematic issue for students. The comma is the most complex device of all punctuation marks; this is the reason why it is frequently wrongly used, and many students feel in a great uncertainty whenever dealing with it in their writing. The comma contributes to a great extent to the brevity of any piece of writing, especially if it is used suitably (King, 2000).

e.g. She loves apples and pears and pineapples and bananas.

Using commas will result in a brief, clear statement which is:

e.g. She loves apples, pears, pineapples, and bananas.

Another example is:

e.g. Peter washed his hands and sat at the table and said a little prayer and began to eat.

Will be:

e.g. Peter washed his hands, sat at the table, said a little prayer, and began to eat.

(Sinkolongo, 2008)

Using the comma where it is supposed to be, helps to avoid long sentencing and repetition of words like the conjunction “and” because overlong sentencing and lengthy chains of clauses and groups of words can cause the failure of readers to get the point and understand what a particular writer is trying to convey. King (2000, p. 160) claims that in order to achieve brevity one should:

- Try to keep sentences variable in length, but generally short.
- Use long sentences don't necessarily make you a better writer.
- To use only full stops is as unnatural as walking without using your knee and ankle joints.

1.2.2. Clarity

Clarity is another basic rule in writing and in case it is absent, communication will certainly be impossible. To put it in other words, if this important element is missing, the texts' message will never be conveyed in a clear way. Larocque (2002) points out that students should try to make their writing as clear and as straightforward as possible. This, in fact, cannot be realized if one aspect as in our case "punctuation" is missing. Therefore, it is even wise to try to consider all the relevant aspects, and it would be quite strange if one

expects to impress readers without punctuating his writing. Trask (1997) stresses that writing with poor punctuation is a problem which makes it difficult for the reader who needs to appreciate the text he is reading. The reader is not expected to feel the writers' personal tastes in spelling and grammar, but to see standard spelling, standard grammatical forms, and the punctuation elements. Generally, readers are not interested whether the writer respects the rules or the theories of punctuation and will not be so. They will only care about a full understanding of what is written, simultaneously, they are going to have troubles in understanding it if it is wrongly punctuated.

Written English has a conventional system of punctuation which is consistent. Each punctuation mark has a particular job that helps clarify texts' meaning. If the reader feels the need to wade through a strange punctuation, he will have trouble following the meaning, as the following example will illustrate:

e.g. I spoke to the boys, Sam and Tom.

e.g. I spoke to the boys, Sam, and Tom.

In the first example, who is concerned could be either the boys and Sam and Tom, or the boys who are Sam and Tom (I spoke to two people). In the second example, who is concerned must be the boys and Sam and Tom.

Another example is:

e.g. He did not fight Mr. Barley.

⇒ Someone whose name is not disclosed did not fight Mr. Barley.

Now let us place just a tiny little comma and see what happens:

e.g. He did not fight, Mr. Barley.

⇒ Mr. Barley is becoming informed that someone did not fight.

e.g. Woman, without her man, is nothing. This example would certainly differ from:

e.g. Women: without her, man is nothing (Sinkolongo, 2008).

Finally, it is obvious that the marks of or concern in this research which are: the comma and the period certainly help readers connect and relate different sentences, thus understand the meaning which is the scope of any reading.

1.2.3. Simplicity

The objective of any writing is to satisfy readers' needs. This cannot be reached through using complicated words which may sound odd for readers. Any piece of writings' goal is to express a particular idea; it is good to be as simple as possible particularly at the level of content. At the forms' level, focusing on surface points; such as, spelling and punctuation certainly abolish complexity and helps in the creation of clear and simple pieces of writing; commas and periods are there to perform the latter characteristic. This depends on the frequency of their use, if not so, this cannot only lead to a negative impression, but also to struggle to get the point and understand what a particular information means. So, using simple sentences as well as clauses with the required punctuation marks, will create excellent pieces of writing.

1.3. Approaches to teaching writing

There are so many approaches to teaching writing. Those approaches have emerged to enhance practice in writing skills. Seeking to adopt one approach or another is highly dependent on learners' objectives; whether their teachers want them to focus on the product of writing, or on its process.

Since we are interested in punctuation marks, and more precisely in the comma and the period, the focus will be on the approach relevant to our interest. Thus, priority is given to the product approach which emphasizes the importance of a correct final product rather than

the other approaches like the process approach, the controlled to free approach, and the free writing approach, which are not of our concern in this research.

1.4. The product-oriented approach

The product- oriented approach emerged and dominated the writing area in the 1970s. This approach, not as the process-oriented approach, shed light on the final written production at so many levels as content, shape, surface features, and so forth. This approach gives much more focus on classroom practice; students are asked to imitate, copy, and transform model texts given by their teachers later on. In other words, this approach bases its study on model text through explaining different texts characteristics and applies them in writing numerous types of paragraphs or compositions. The last step is to analyze students' papers and evaluate their attempts. When such an approach is adopted, the main attention is given to the accuracy aspect for the sake of making students aware and familiar with the conventions of writing through a model text before getting the final draft (Nemouchi, 2008).

White (1988, p. 5; cited in Boussadia, 2008, p.19) considers the model based approach as follows:

Study the model→ manipulate elements→ produce parallel texts.

In this approach, the model text is given a prime priority and is considered as the starting point. Afterwards, it is studied and analyzed from all the required points of view: grammatical structures, content, sentence organization, and rhetorical features. The model text is studied at all these levels in order to check students understanding and the extent to which they are ready to produce parallel texts after they are given a new topic to write (Nemouchi, 2008).

The product-oriented approach does not show any of the ways a particular writer followed to write his paper. Thus, the process-oriented approach is given less importance since the writing stages as brainstorming, drafting, and revising are not indicated or studied. Mahon (1992; cited in Nemouchi, 2008) claims that the main interest of the product-oriented approach is highly related to the final resulted product. To put it in other words, the production of organized, grammatically correct, and well formed sentences with the essential surface feature, will surely lead to better written productions. This approach can only be detected through correcting students' papers. Kroll (1991, p. 246; cited in Dakhmouche, 2008, p. 17) summarizes the steps of this approach as follows:

- The students are taught to write according to “fairly rigidly defined principles of rhetoric and organization which we presented as ‘rules’ for writing.”
- The teacher provides “a reading text for classroom discussion, analysis and interpretation.”
- The teacher asks students to write “a writing assignment (accompanied by an outline) based on the text.”
- Finally the teacher reads, makes comments, and assesses students papers.

These steps had been adopted under an approach called “the traditional paradigm” or “traditional approach”; but recently came to be known as the “product approach”, since it was primarily about the finished written product, and not the ways it was presented. Hyland (2003, p. 3; cited in Dakhmouche, 2008, p. 17) explains that the product approach emerged from “marriage of structural Linguistics and the behaviorist learning theories of second language teaching.” He summarized the principles of the product approach in the following points:

- It “encourages a focus on formal text units or grammatical features of texts.”

- It sees writing as “a product constructed from the writers’ command of grammatical and lexical knowledge and writing development is considered to be the result of imitating and manipulating models provided by the teacher.”

During the writing process, so many aspects should be taken into account to achieve readable pieces of writing like: correctness, style, usage, and grammatical accuracy. Mitchell and Taylor (1979, p. 258; cited in Dakhmouche, 2008) consider that good writing in the product-oriented approach means the absence of comma splices and fragments, very complicated or simple sentence structures, and above all, absence of errors. So, if students’ attempts correspond to these characteristics, they certainly come to satisfying results and to a high quality product. Nunan (1989, p. 86; cited in Bader, 2007) sees the product-oriented approach as a model that emphasizes on “the end result of the learning process. What is it that the learner is expected to do as a fluent and component user of the language.” This model has proved its worth “in building vocabulary, scaffolding, writing development and increasing the confidence of novice writers.” According to Hyland (2003, p. 16; cited in Bader, 2007), the final product has to involve the following aspects:

- Getting the right grammar.
- Maintaining a range of vocabulary.
- Punctuating in a good way.
- Spelling accurately.
- Knowing how to link ideas across, to develop a topic.
- Organizing the content clearly.

Another explicit description of the product approach is proposed by Pincas (1984), who considers writing as being about the linguistic knowledge as well as the other fundamental aspects which are: familiarization, controlled writing, guided writing, and free writing. As it was explained previously, a model text is proposed and introduced by the

teacher; after that, he gives opportunities to classroom discussion. Finally, he asks students to write a composition. Before submitting their papers, students are asked to revise their writing and correct it. Then, the teacher grades the composition and makes comments on the content and pays more attention to the form of the text. Such an approach is basically teacher-centered.

The product-oriented approach has got so many advantages because it supplies the linguistic knowledge and develops it. Furthermore, it satisfies the students' needs in terms of rules and structures. The model text can be presented in the following way:

Stage One: A model text is read and specific features are highlighted. For instance, teachers deal with how to insert punctuation marks, and see how students will react towards their use at the level of paragraph writing. First of all, the students' attention is paid to punctuation marks. Each mark is identified, explained, and discussed with special emphasis on those which keep on the harmony and flow of sentences along paragraphs.

Stage Two: Students are asked to place those marks in isolated pairs of sentences which are given by the teacher. Some marks as the comma and the period are usually used wrongly or randomly even though they represent the key punctuation devices ever.

Stage Three: At this stage, students are asked to arrange and write many sentences in paragraphs where the aforementioned marks should be put. Here, students can measure the effectiveness of these two punctuation marks in their writings. The main concern is to see how the previously isolated sentences have become clear, well organized, and readable.

Stage Four: At this stage, students are asked to write a topic in which they seek to apply the comma and the period appropriately as it was shown in the model text. The proponent of this research argues that the organization of the ideas is more important than

ever the ideas themselves. Finally, the end- product of the previous learning process is, to a large extent, comparable to the model text in its form (Ibid.).

1.5. Stages of the writing process

Writing is a process made up of several stages. Although there is no total agreement on the definite number of these stages: prewriting, organizing, and drafting, for example, which are all about the writing process and care about the writing content. On the other hand, stages like revising, proofreading, and editing do care about the content as well as the form.

1.5.1. Revising

The word “revise” came from the Latin word “reviser”, which means to visit or look at again. During the writing process, this step is considered to be the most general re-examination of a particular essay. It is always worth to step back and look at the entire essay at the content level, in addition to correcting surface features as spelling and punctuation. This step is a crucial one; it is where students make sure that they have achieved the seeking goals, and whether any sections of the essay need improvements. Revising is a stage that has to be placed on a couple of levels: the essay level and the paragraph level. Apparently, it makes sense to look at your writing on these levels first before shifting to editing or proofreading.

There are two effective ways to revise. Literally, it is good to give your essay to a trusted reader or colleague for feedback. Figuratively, it is through examining their work as if they have never seen it before. As a matter of fact, professional writers never work alone, they are totally aware of the importance of getting feedback before they submit their work to the publisher; it is workable for them to share their writing with a number of trusted readers first. By following this strategy, students may actually reassure towards their writing since their expected weaknesses and strengths will be detected before giving their papers. Their

colleagues tell what works well and what does not; what is clear for them and what is odd (Chesla, 2006).

On the importance of this stage, Smith (2003, p. 13) sustains that:

The writing process has only just begun when you write the last word of your first draft. It is in the process of revising and editing that the draft takes shape and becomes a crafted piece of writing. Writing is an art, and like any good artist, a good writer continues to work on a piece until it has the desired impact.

He states that the majority of writers revise as they write. This is in fact the reason why pencils with erasers are invented. In case of using a pen and paper, it is possible for anyone to fill his first draft with arrows and crossed-out words, or use asterisks whenever getting back to add an idea or edit a given sentence. At the revising stage, students must look at their papers because it is time to evaluate what is written both at content and form levels. When reading the first draft, students might come across a number of problems as misspelled words or confusing sentences. One effective way to review different pieces of writing is to look at three main levels:

- Content: what is said throughout the paper?
- Structure: how the paper reads.
- Mechanics: The way the paper is written as far as spelling, grammar, punctuation, and usage are concerned (Galko, 2001).

It is in the revising stage that students/writers check for writing inaccuracies. The main objective in this phase is to develop students' techniques to enrich the repertoire of linguistic resources which are the essential tools for writing. During this phase, the all development word is "checking". In other words, students check how sentences are related, the division of

paragraphs, and the mechanics used to link both sentences and paragraphs. This can be achieved through a number of activities where students do not only revise their thoughts but their writing form as well (White and Andt; cited in Ouskourt, 2008).

Eventually, writing is viewed as a discovery. The revising stage certainly helps to build bridges towards this discovery, since both content and form are adjusted in this stage. Admittedly, no piece of writing is ever perfect in the first time, each time a new draft is written it is the right time to refine and improve it.

1.5.2. Proofreading

The next step is to proofread ones writing. It is in this stage where grammar, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation should be checked. The first step is to check over each sentence correctness and completeness and make sure that there are no fragments or choppy sentences. Next, is to check over each sentence for a subject and verb, subject-verb agreement, and to correct verb tense, etc. The last step should be devoted for checking the mechanics: punctuation, spelling, capitalization, typing mistakes and so forth (Oshima and Hogue, 2003).

The proofreading stage may seem at first a boring task. In fact, being a good proofreader and examiner of your final product is as important as writing the thesis statement. There is absolutely nothing that may damage a paper as sloppy proofreading does. A valuable proofreading should deal with these four basic problems: misspelled words, grammar errors, errors of citation, informational errors, and punctuation errors (Stark, 2003).

1.5.3. Punctuation proofreading

There are dozens of punctuation marks in the English language. Due to the fact that these signals are used to separate ideas, form words, and make the meaning of sentences clearer; however, poor punctuation can confuse and mislead the reader. A comma, for example, can change a sentence meaning to a large extent.

e.g. Don't call me, stupid! And:

e.g. Don't call me stupid! (Chesla, 2006).

The comma and the period propose a great deal of confusion for students who may be sometimes mean users of commas and periods, or over users of both marks. They usually tend to either insert the comma everywhere and neglect the period or vice versa. They may also introduce very long sentences separated by none of them. In fact, the appropriate use of these two punctuation devices will be discussed in the forthcoming chapter because both of them make sentences start, stop, and run smoothly.

1.5.4. Editing

Editing is the final step before students submit the final draft; it is by excellence the place where grammatical accuracy, as well as correctness of form, especially the surface points as punctuation should be verified. There are two grammar problems that should be avoided in students' papers: sentence fragments and run-on sentences.

1.5.4.1. Correcting sentence fragments

There are common errors which are usually committed by students when dealing with punctuation marks, especially the comma and the period. These errors are stated below.

1.5.4.1.1 Using punctuation incorrectly

Usually a fragment is raised when a writer inserts a period (or even another type of end punctuation) before the end of the sentence. For example in saying:

e.g. You can go out with your friends. As soon as you clean your room.

⇒ This fragment can be avoided simply by joining the second thought to the first one and say:

e.g. You can go out with your friends as soon as you clean your room.

1.5.4.1.2. Mistaking a list as a sentence

Sometimes items stated in a long list may seem as a complete sentence and confuse students, but there is always a rule to remember a complete sentence contains a subject and a verb.

e.g. Having walked ten miles, gone days without food, and lost all hope.

⇒ This fragment can be fixed by adding the list to a rather complete sentence and say:

e.g. Having walked ten miles, gone days without food, and lost all hope, Edgar collapsed from exhaustion.

1.5.3.2. Correcting run-on sentences

Run-on sentences in most of the times appear where an end punctuation mark is used. In this case, either no punctuation at all is inserted to separate two more sentences, or only a comma is placed where end punctuation is really needed.

e.g. You don't need to worry about me, I can take care of myself.

e.g. The flames are out the house is no longer on fire.

There are some ways to fix a run-on sentence:

⇒ Separate the two sentences with a period.

e.g. You don't need to worry about me. I can take care of myself.

e.g. The flames are out. The house is no longer on fire (Galco, 2001, p. 92)

Or:

⇒ The two sentences may be separated by a comma and a conjunction, such as:
and, or, nor, but, for, so, yet.

The second example will be:

e.g. The flames are out, and the house is no longer on fire.

These proposed ways to correct run-on sentences may sometimes alter the meaning.

Thus, it is good to think and rethink about the real meaning of a given sentence, then choose the appropriate manner to fix it to sustain the intended meaning it holds (Ibid.).

Conclusion

As we have seen, this chapter is a general overview of writing. It has been divided into two parts. The first part explored the nature of writing as a cognitive activity and as a language skill. It also included the basic rules of writing which contribute in the enhancement of any piece of writing. Besides, this part focuses on the approach that interests us in this research which is the product-oriented approach. The second part of this chapter is concerned with the writing stages that interest us which are: revising, proofreading, and editing.

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Chapter Two: The Comma and the Period

Introduction

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the product-oriented approach, as its name suggests, is adopted in case of concentrating on the final product and neglecting other approaches which focus on the practice of writing as the process approach. The latter gives priority to steps that precede writing as a final draft like: brainstorming, outlining, and so forth. So, the use of one approach or another depends on the surrounding context and the teaching objectives. Later on, we will describe the stages that govern the writing process.

This chapter intends to give a description of style and the writing mechanics. Furthermore, it states a brief history of punctuation and the role it plays throughout any piece of writing. As a matter of fact, many people judge the quality of what is written not only on the content, the language, and the writers' handwriting, but also on their punctuation. This chapter gives a detailed description of the comma and the period. It provides examples on their frequent use in formal writing and the numerous ways on how to use these two marks correctly.

2. The concept of style in writing

In speaking about the writing process, one of the most considerable aspects that should be more focused by learners is the concept of "style". As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, basic rules like brevity, clarity, and simplicity will not be achieved unless certain vital writing conventions as punctuation, spelling, and so forth are respected and paid much more attention.

In written English, a standard style is always followed by expert writers the reasons why their papers sound clear, original, and tidy. Teachers at the university usually advise students to be more aware of the importance of style in writing during the Written Expression classes, and try to put it into practice in a way that it accompanies other conventions as unity or coherence. All this stresses the fact that having a well punctuated, capitalized, and spelled paper contributes in the appreciation of any piece of writing (King, 2000).

2.1. Writing mechanics

The writing mechanics that we are interested in throughout this research is “punctuation”. The punctuation devices of our concern are the comma and the period. We will focus on their frequent use, where they should be placed, where they usually appear, their functions, and how they must appear in English sentences and clauses.

2.1.1. A brief history of punctuation

The concept of punctuation reached its peak during the late 19th century. This helped to understand the fashionable nonstop sentences that rose at that time. Sentences were linked by dozens of punctuation marks, but nowadays this tendency has shifted to adopt more brief styles as the ones of newspaper, magazines and other types of short texts. The majority of the English speaking populations, in fact, do not take time to think seriously about punctuation marks. They have certain parsimony in using them while they write, but if one wishes to raise his stands of communication, the concept of punctuation should be there and must not be underestimated (Ibid.).

2.1.2. The importance of punctuation

Any written language in the globe consists of marks, particularly on paper. In the English language, as in other languages, these marks are two major kinds: letters and punctuation marks. Words are built by linking letters, which are grouped into sentences and the sentences into paragraphs by the use of punctuation marks. These marks are regarded to be a part of the written English language just like words or letters; their use is fundamental to the writing of good English, on the other hand, their bad use results in nonsense sentences (Githin, 1970).

The word punctuation is derived from the Latin word “point”. That is to say, marks as the comma, the period, and the semicolon when they are placed in a sentence they point to the different meanings of its words and make sense of what seems to be a nonstop string of sounds. Punctuation marks have two main functions. First, they introduce the manner of which various elements of a given sentence are related to each other, thus they ensure clear and straightforward communication. Second, they help to stabilize the writing tone. The first function is rather mechanical and may easily be learned; the second is the one that distinguishes the skilled writer from the unskilled one. Usually the reason for choosing to insert one mark and not another has much more to do with achieving a slight difference in meaning.

In dialogues, for example, punctuation marks help to realize intonation and manner of speaking in a way that the reader receives the speakers words in the same manner the writer intended. The common subtleties of language like pauses, emphases, and changes in pitch can only be recognized through the right use of punctuation marks (Stilman, 1997).

In the process of speaking, people may help each other to understand through using gestures, facial expressions, and body language. Pauses, hesitation, and repetition are usually used to add the required force to the speech for the sake of allowing the listener to understand what a given speaker is trying to communicate. In the process of writing, other mechanics should be followed to do the same work. This is, by excellence, the work of punctuation because it helps to divide up ideas and permit the reader to understand.

It may seem strange to consider punctuation as a cohesive device when writing, as it may seem to be dividing the writing up. It is through breaking up the writing into chunks and working to create a hierarchy of importance for the different parts of the text, punctuation is by far a good means to make connections so that the writing begins to take on an overall structure (Crème and Lea, 2008).

In this context, Brown and Hood (2003, p. 34) explain that the benefits of punctuation can be summarized in the following:

- Punctuation helps your reader understand what you mean.
- Punctuation helps you keep track of what you've written and of what you are going to write.
- Some punctuation is simply convention. We do it now because it has always been done that way (e.g. capital letters, apostrophes).
- Revising is the right time to look closely at your punctuation.
- Looking at the punctuation used by other writers will help you more than learning rules.

Finally, proper and good application of punctuation helps a great deal to make a text clear to be understood. But, wrongly placed punctuation marks may cause the ambiguity of

sentences, or even whole paragraphs. Each mark serves a purpose and conveys a signal to the reader.

2.1.2.1. The comma

It is absolutely evident that there is no punctuation mark that has as many uses as the comma, or is much confusing to use for students. Olson (2006, p. 49) points out that “Commas are like road signs. They give us directions, tell us where to pause, and make information clear to us.”

Commas function to create a short minor pause in the sentence. The commas’ pause is shorter than the one that comes at the end of a sentence and is shorter than the pause that follows the marks which are known to be more complicated in the written English like: the semicolon, colon, or dash. In this respect, King (2000) sustains that the comma is the most flexible of all the punctuation marks. Besides, it is regarded to be the most complex mark, not surprisingly, many writers feel a great uncertainty about using it. Problems associated with commas arise because so many people restrict their knowledge and depend only on breath pauses. This may be the case when the language is spoken or more orally inclined, but in case of prose it is common to find commas following speech patterns. Nowadays, the placement of commas follows grammatical logic rather than to indicate breath pauses. Trask (1997, p. 12) explains that the rules that govern the comma use are rather simple, but a bit complicated by fact that the comma has four uses. “The four uses of the comma are called the listing comma, the joining comma, the gapping comma, and bracketing commas.”

2.1.2.1.1. The listing comma

This kind of commas is used in a list where “and” or “or” are used. It appears in two slightly different cases. First, it should be put in a list where three or more words, phrases or complete sentences are joined by the aforementioned conjunctions.

e.g. The three Musketeers were Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.

e.g. Hungarian is spoken in Hungary, in Western Rumania, in northern Serbia, and in parts of Austria and Slovakia.

e.g. You can fly to Bombay via Moscow, via Athens, or via Cairo.

e.g. Lisa speaks French, Juliet speaks Italian, and I speak Spanish.

e.g. We spent our evening chatting in the cafés, watching the sun set over the harbor, stuffing ourselves with the local crab, and getting pleasantly sloshed on retsina.

In all these examples, the commas can be replaced by “and” or “or”, but the result would be rather clumsy:

e.g. The Three Musketeers were Athos and Porthos and Aramis.

e.g. Hungarian is spoken in Hungary and in western Rumania and in northern Serbia and in parts of Australia and Slovakia.

e.g. You can fly to Bombay via Moscow or Athens or via Cairo.

e.g. Lisa speaks French and Juliet speaks Italian and I speak Spanish.

e.g. We spent our evenings chatting in the cafés and watching the sun set over the harbor and stuffing ourselves with the local crabs and getting pleasantly sloshed on retsina (Ibid. 14).

A listing comma is placed in a list of modifiers that modify the same thing. Here, if the comma is replaced by “and”, the meaning will not change:

e.g. This provocative, disturbing book.

e.g. This is a provocative and disturbing book (Ibid. 16).

Gethin (1970, p. 5) explains that the listing comma can also separate pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and prepositions.

e.g. I doubt whether he, you, or I will get into the team. (a sequence of three pronouns).

e.g. The clouds over the city were low, black, and menacing. (a sequence of three adjectives).

e.g. In the autumn the beans are picked, dried, and processed. (a sequence of three verbs).

e.g. He who laughs last my laugh best, loudest, and longest. (a sequence of three adverbs).

e.g. Democracy is government of, by, and for the people. (a sequence of three prepositions).

According to Smith (2003, p. 131), listing commas are those which separate different items in a series for the sake of making it easier for the reader to understand. Those language items can be words, phrases, or clauses. In this case, the writer should be consistent and seeks to make his meaning clear.

▪ **Words**

e.g. Michelle, Jordan, Andy, and Margo went to the dance.

Verbs in a list are separated in this way:

e.g. The lawnmower rumbled, backfired, and died.

- **Phrases**

e.g. The aliens landed their spacecraft, opened the pod doors, and stepped out into the sunlight.

- **Clauses**

e.g. Dave packed the snow gear, Melissa cleaned out the trunk of the car, and Felipe made some sandwiches to eat on the trip to the mountain.

e.g. The office was closed for the night, my manager was out of town, and the report had to be sent to the main office tomorrow (Ibid.).

2.1.2.1.2. The joining comma

According to Trask (1997, p. 18), there is not a big difference between the listing comma and the joining one. The later is used to join two complete sentences into a single one, and it should be followed by an appropriate connecting word. The connecting words that can be used in this circumstance are: and, or, but, while, and yet.

e.g. Norway has applied to join the EC, and Sweden is expected to do the same.

e.g. You must hand in your essay by Friday, or you will receive a mark of zero.

e.g. Britain has long been isolated in Europe, but now she is beginning to find allies.

So, a joining comma can only be used before the connecting words indicated above.

All of the following examples are, therefore, wrong:

e.g. Bangladesh is one of the worlds' poorest countries, its annual income is only \$80 per person.

e.g. The British are notoriously bad at learning foreign languages, the Dutch are famously good at it.

e.g. Brog won his fifth straight Wimbledon title in 1980, the following year he lost in the final to McEnroe.

In this case, it would be better to follow the comma with one of the connecting words listed above, or replace it with a semicolon. The same rule can be suitable for the other connecting words which cannot be preceded by a joining comma like: however, therefore, hence, consequently, nevertheless, and thus.

e.g. Saturn was long thought to be the only ringed planet, however, this is now known not to be the case.

A sentence like that once again requires, not a comma, but a semicolon.

2.1.2.1.3. The gapping comma

This comma is the easiest one. It is used to show that one or more words have been left when the missing words simply repeat the already used words within the same sentence.

e.g. Some Norwegians wanted to base their national language on the speech of the capital city; others, on the speech of the rural countryside.

Here, the words “wanted to base their national language” are omitted, yet the sentence keeps its meaning.

2.1.2.1.4. Bracketing commas

They are also called isolating commas. These are the most frequently used commas; they consequently cause more problems than the other types. Their rule is the following: a pair of this type of commas is inserted to mark off a weak interruption of the sentence, but in fact this interruption does not annoy the smooth flow of the sentence.

e.g. These findings, we would suggest, cast doubt upon his hypothesis (Ibid. 19).

e.g. Schliemann, of course, did his digging before modern archaeology was invented.

e.g. Patchett has, it would seem, abandoned Rincewind the wizard to the ravages of the diskworld.

e.g. The Pakistanis, like the Australians before them, have exposed the shortcomings of the batting order.

e.g. Rupert Brooke, who was killed in the war at the age of twenty eight, was one of our finest poets.

The weak interruption in the above examples can be removed from the sentences, and the result would still be complete sentences which make good sense.

e.g. These findings cast doubt upon his hypothesis.

e.g. Schliemann did his digging before modern archaeology was invented.

e.g. The Pakistanis have exposed the shortcomings of the England batting order.

e.g. Rupert Brooke was one of our finest poets.

Interrupting elements can be divided into four types which are: parenthetical phrases, rhetorical adverbs, antithetical phrases, and introductory words (Ibid. 21-22).

- **Parenthetical phrases**

e.g. Auxiliary meteorological data used herein, such as vorticity, have been computed from NMC isobaric height fields.

- **Rhetorical adverbs**

e.g. The time between independent measurement cannot be reliably estimated; it can be assumed, however, to lie between 20 and 120 minutes.

- **Antithetical elements**

e.g. In winter, clouds near the tropopause are associated with negative vorticity, not

with positive vorticity as most meteorologists are accustomed to believing.

- **Interrupting words or phrases**

e.g. For 33-mm diameter partial loss of laminar flow is predicted for large number densities (Smith,2003, p. 127).

So, the bracketing commas are used to set off a weak interruption which cannot be removed from the sentence without altering or destroying it. If this interruption is at the beginning or the end of a given sentence, it would be better to use only one bracketing comma.

2.1.2.2. Other uses of the comma

There are many other circumstances where the comma can be used. Smith (2003, p. 127) states, “When you proofread your draft, it is important to mark the places where commas separate words, thoughts, phrases, clauses, dates, addresses, or items in a series.”

When a comma appeared, this means that a pause ought to take place before continuing to read. Commas can be overused, so it is important to know where exactly to place them while writing.

- **Introductory words**

A comma is used for the sake of separating introductory words from the rest of the sentence.

e.g. Sadly, the summer ended.

e.g. Surprised, my father spoke with a shaky voice (Ibid.).

In this respect, McCaskill (1998) pointed out that the comma is optional in case it appears after a short introductory adverbial phrase, unless it is required for clarity. So, it is right to say:

e.g. In recent years, the delta function has been rigorously defined.

The alternative will be:

e.g. In recent years the delta function has been rigorously defined.

The comma should not be placed after an introductory phrase that immediately precedes the verb it modifies as in:

e.g. Only in recent years, has the delta function been rigorously defined.

But rather:

e.g. Only in recent years has the delta function been rigorously defined.

Other examples that concern introductory words are:

e.g. Relieved, I gathered my things and left for the day.

e.g. Surprised, I backed into a table.

■ **Introductory clauses**

Another form that should be separated by a comma is the clause. Introductory clauses are always dependent clause since they are not regarded to be complete sentences without the rest of the sentence.

e.g. When I feel down, I twisted my ankle.

e.g. Although the beach was far away, we arrived before dark.

e.g. Walking to school, I stepped in a puddle (Ibid. 50).

e.g. Looking at his face in the mirror, Jim saw a wrinkle (Burt, 2002, p. 14).

■ **Commas with appositives**

Appositives are also set off by commas. They are nouns or phrases that follow another noun or pronoun, and that identify or explain it.

e.g. Frances, the best photographer in the state, took pictures at my wedding.

⇒ The appositive phrase is: the best photographer in the state (Smith, 2003, p. 129).

2.1.2.3. Conventional uses of the comma

The comma, with its conventional uses is considered as an enclosure rather than separation. It can be used in dates, geographical names, addresses, specifying phrases, titles, affiliations, names, numbers, etc.

▪ Dates

If the year is specified in a date including the month and year, it should be surrounded by commas. When only the month or the season is listed, there will be no need for commas.

e.g. Jody came to Fargo on June 1, 1997, right after she graduated from high school.

e.g. Jody came to Fargo in June 1997 after graduating from high school.

(Olson, 2006, p. 59)

▪ Geographical names and addresses

The comma is also used in case of geographical names and addresses.

e.g. Only about 1,000 people lived in Boston Massachusetts, in the 1940s.

e.g. The liberty Bell is in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

e.g. My favorite wax museum is in Victoria, British Columbia (Smith, 2003, p. 132).

▪ Person addresses

Whenever the name of a person being addressed, it must be set apart commas.

e.g. Do you know, Kathy, when the canned tomatoes are.

▪ **Exclamations**

Mild exclamations or interjections are words, phrases or sounds that express strong emotions like surprise or pain.

e.g. Gee, the radio was turned off when we left!

e.g. Man, that movie was too long!

▪ **Abbreviations**

The abbreviations etc., i.e., and e.g., the abbreviations for academic degrees and titles that comes after a name parenthetic and must be punctuated.

e.g. Letters, packages, etc., should go here.

▪ **Question tags**

A question tag must always be preceded by a comma.

e.g. You are sick, aren't you?

e.g. The children have arrived, haven't they? (Strunk and White, 2000, p. 15)

Eventually, the comma uses differ in accordance with the numerous circumstances where it appears. In fact, of all punctuation marks the comma requires the most judgment. To punctuate with commas does not require only knowing its rules, but also a thorough understanding of the material being punctuated. This crucial device should not be added or placed randomly simply because one feels the need to separate a long sentence. It is either to put it in its correct place, or to write the sentence in a way that it conveys the required meaning without using the comma.

2.1.2.4. The period

The period (or full stop, point, or stop) is considered as the most emphatic, abrupt, and unambiguous of all punctuation marks. Stilman (1997, p. 106) stresses, “there’s not much to be said about the period expect that most people don’t reach it soon enough.” The period is similar to the knife since it is used to cut off sentences when reaching the required length. Its rule is rather simple: the period should be placed where a given thought is complete. While writing, if one feels that he is going to embark on another thought, this is the appropriate time to think about putting a period. The period has two main functions:

- It ends a sentence.
- It indicates abbreviations (King, 2000).

2.1.2.4.1. Ending a sentence

The period presents few problems, especially for those who cannot decide whether to put it or to put a comma. The period is chiefly used to mark the end of a sentence that expresses a statement.

e.g. The car was in for repair Friday. I had no transportation to work.

e.g. Terry Pratchett’ latest book is not yet out in paperback.

e.g. I asked her whether she could tell me the way to Brighton.

e.g. Chinese, uniquely among the world’s languages, is written in a logographic script.

e.g. The British and the Irish drive on the left; all other Europeans drive on the right.

(Rozakis, 1999, p. 103).

The following is an example where few periods are used, but they actually convey the required meaning:

The opening of the Ken Loach's film *Riff- Raff* in New York casts doubt on Winston Churchill's observation that the United States and Britain were two countries separated by a common language. In what must be a first, an entire British film has been given sub-titles to help Americans cut through the thick stew of Glaswegian, Geordie, Liverpudlian, West Indian accents. With the arrival of *Riff- Raff*, English as spoken by many British citizens has qualified as a foreign language in the US. Admittedly, the accents on the screen would present a challenge to many people raised on the Queen's English. But it is disconcerting to watch a British film with subtitles, not unlike watching Marlon Brando dubbed into Italian (Trask, 1997, p. 6).

To provide more explanation on the period placement, Smith (2003, p. 121) sustains that the period should be put in the following circumstances:

- **At the end of a declarative sentence**

e.g. The coffee shop closes soon.

e.g. If the weather warms up, I will mow the lawn.

- **At the end of an imperative sentence**

An imperative sentence that makes a request, gives an instruction, or states a command.

e.g. Drop your time sheet in the manager's box.

e.g. It is best to turn off the power strip before unplugging the computer.

e.g. Make a left turn at the right.

- **At the end of a sentence that asks an indirect question**

e.g. Have you read the Harry Potter books? (direct question)

e.g. My friend asked me if I had read the Harry Potter books. (indirect question)

e.g. Did you turn in the earnings report? (direct question)

e.g. Our boss wanted to know if we had turned in our earnings report.(indirect question)

e.g. The man asked me to help him change the tire. (indirect question)

In case of initials

e.g. The girl's favorite character is Junie B. Jones.

e.g. E.M. Foster wrote for many years.

e.g. Ned A. Garnett goes by his middle name Archibald, or Archie.

2.1.2.4.2 Indicating an abbreviation

e.g. The note said to call Dr. Nayel Mon. or Wed. in the evening.

If the abbreviation comes at the end of a sentence, put only one period.

e.g. This year Thanksgiving falls on Nov. 28.

e.g. I take the train to the Ditmars Blvd. Stop.

e.g. I will return to my GFT. By 10 ft. dorm room in Jan.

e.g. Mrs. Feretovic told Oscar to be ready at 6 P.M.

If the abbreviation is followed by a comma, both a period and a comma should be used

e.g. My first exam is on Thurs., and my second is the following week.

e.g. My alarm clock was set for 6 P.M., so I did not wake up in time.

Exception

Few abbreviations have become acronyms. They are either abbreviations which are pronounced as a word, like AIDS, or widely known names, like FBI or NASA. They do not take periods (Ibid. 122).

e.g. Agents at the Detroit office of the CIA traced the purchase back to Canada.

e.g. On Saturdays, I am going to watch NASCAR with my friends.

e.g. Seven Baltic states were just admitted into NATO (Ibid.).

McCaskill (1998, pp. 67-68) claims that a period may follow abbreviations except those for units of measure. Those abbreviations should be retained for many words, particularly those that may be confused with unabbreviated words.

e.g. Fig.1; Co. ; no. 209; Mr.

Periods should not be used for abbreviations of units of measure (except inch), for acronyms, or for contractions (with apostrophe).

e.g. Ft; NASA; cm; v/ stol; lb

- It should precede decimal numbers

e.g. 0.2; .68; 29.32

It should separate dollars

e.g. \$6.50

Trask (1997, pp. 6-7) sees that in formal writing it is better to avoid using these abbreviations because they are considered informal shorthand that suit only informal writing settings. One common error that is widespread among students is to put a comma when the period should be placed.

e.g. Norway has applied for EC membership, Sweden is expected to do the same.

In the above example, there are two complete statements, but the first has been punctuated with a comma. This form needs to be changed and the simplest way to fix the example is to change the coma to a full stop.

e.g. Norway has applied for EC membership. Sweden is expected to do the same.

In this case, each statement has its own period. This is correct, but it is considered as clumsy to use two short sentences in a row. This example can be changed to be a better one in a different way:

e.g. Norway has applied for EC membership, and Sweden is expected to do the same.

Stilman (1998, p. 61) points out that the period cannot be used in the following cases:

- A grammatically complete parenthesized sentence that lies within another one.

e.g. The foreign ministry said that five more diplomats would be expelled (two had been ordered out of the country the week before), and that a full investigation into the activities at the embassy would be launched.

- A comma should be used rather than a period to end a sentence in a dialogue when it is followed by more text.

e.g. I'm sure no one in the audience noticed when your toupee slid off, she said soothingly.

e.g. "I realize you didn't blow up the house on purpose", he said plaintively.

- The period should not be included if a sentence in another terminal punctuation mark, even if this mark does not refer to the sentence as a whole.

e.g. They signed their divorce papers right after lunch, and then headed off to a matinee of/Do! /Do!

Conclusion

This chapter was devoted to the notion of style in writing and the aspects it covers as punctuation. The comma and the period are introduced in turn, and their proper use is described with the aid of lots of examples. The space given to each punctuation mark reflects the degree of difficulty, for example, in asking to insert bracketing commas and listing commas, we find a great amount of punctuation mistakes thus, they receive a great deal of discussion.

Throughout this chapter, the notion of logic in dealing with punctuation marks is stressed. In other words, our learners must be made to understand that we should not rely on breath pauses to place commas, but rather on their theories and conventions.

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Chapter Three: The Situation Analysis

Introduction

We hypothesized in the introduction of this research that students would produce better writing if they had more practical courses on the use of punctuation marks, especially the ones of our interest in this study which are the comma and the period. To check and refine the validity of this hypothesis, we conducted a pre-test and a post-test with 15 second year LMD English students, in addition to a teachers' questionnaire for the sake of confirming our hypothesis.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is about the description of the teachers' questionnaire and its results. The second section is devoted to the description of both the pre-test and the post-test in terms of its aim, the population, the sample, and the context in which it took place. The third and last part is devoted to the analysis of students' responses to check whether there is any improvement after providing the practical course, and whether students applied the comma and the period in a correct way.

Section one: Description and analysis of the teachers' questionnaire

The designing questionnaire was guided by the principle of combining theoretical input suggested in the literature. A nine item questionnaire was developed to explore the different aspects of the research intended to investigate.

Question 01

Degree	Number	Percentage
BA	0	0%
MA	3	60%
PhD	2	40%
Total	5	100%

Table 01. Degree Held

As shown in Table 01, (60%) of the teachers have the MA degree and (40%) of them have the PhD. Thus, both categories represent skilled teachers who have been teaching Written Expression for many years.

Question 02

Order of Importance	Number	Percentage
1	2	33,33%
2	2	33,33%
3	1	16,66%
4	1	16,66%
Total	6	100%

Table 02. Classification

In asking them to classify the items by order of importance, both Grammar and Organization of Ideas reached the highest scores in priority 1, 2 (twice) with a percentage of (33, 33%) in comparison with other components of writing: Vocabulary (once), Punctuation (once) with a percentage of (16, 66%).

Question 03

Option	Number	Percentage
a	4	80%
b	1	20%
Total	5	100%

Table 03. The Adopted Teaching Approach

The results reported reveal that the majority of teachers (80%) tend to follow the process-oriented approach while teaching the Written Expression module.

Question 04

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	5	100%
No	0	0%
Total	5	100%

Table 04. Raising Students' Awareness

The results point out that the teacher of Written Expression always raises students' awareness about the importance of punctuation marks, though they do not follow the product-oriented approach during the writing classes.

Question 05

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	1	20%
No	4	80%
Total	5	100%

Table 05. Restricting Students' Knowledge to Learning Only the Rules of the Comma and the Period

The results reported in table (05) show that (80%) of the teachers think that it is not enough for students to learn only the rules that are related to using commas and periods.

Question 06

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	5	100%
No	0	0%
Total	5	100%

Table 06. Giving More Practice on Commas and Periods' Use

All the teachers (100%) think that providing more practice on the use of these two punctuation marks would be beneficial for students to manipulate these two crucial marks.

Question 07

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	5	100%
No	0	0%
Total	5	100%

Table 07. Papers Corrections

Here again, all the teachers (100%) responded that whenever they correct their students' papers take into consideration punctuation mistakes.

Question08

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	5	100%
No	0	0%
Total	5	100%

Table 08. Comments Given by Teachers on Both Marks' Use

Similar to question (07), all the teachers (100%) said that they usually add comments about the correct use of both marks as well as all the other punctuation marks.

Question 09

Teachers' point of view	Number	Percentage
During the lecture and each time needed, the teacher should introduce an aspect of punctuation to improve his students' writing.	03	60%
The third of global time devoted to teaching the writing is enough to learn the punctuation marks' correct placement.	01	20%
Fifteen minutes in one session will be enough.	01	20%
Total	5	100%

Table 09. Teachers' Point of View.

The majority of teachers (60%) think that the time which should be devoted to punctuation marks ought to be organized during the lecture. That is, the teacher should give the necessary time until making sure that the students have understood the point. Another teacher provided another view and thinks that the third of the global time devoted to teaching Written Expression is enough to learn how to insert punctuation marks. The last teacher thinks that fifteen minutes in one session will be enough for students to manipulate using punctuation.

Section two: Description of the pre-test and the post-test

3.1. The Aim

As specified previously, this study is mainly conducted to determine the extent to which providing more practical courses on the use of the comma and the period will result in better written production. In other words, it aims at checking the possibility more practice on how to insert the aforementioned marks to manipulate their insertion in students' writing.

3.2. Population and sampling

The target population of this study is second year Applied Linguistics LMD English students at the University of Constantine. The reason for choosing this population is that second year students have enough knowledge about the rules of punctuation marks. In fact, it would be late if we dealt with third year and early for first year students who have just started dealing with paragraph writing. The sample is chosen the basis of selecting the first fifteen students on the list who are invited to take part in the experiment.

On the whole, the participants' ages vary from 18 to 21 years. It can be said, thus, that most of the subjects are young adults whose differences of ages would certainly not alter the results of this study. Concerning gender, most participants are female. These are precisely 11 females (73, 33%) and 4 males (26, 66%). It is to be specified that girls are the dominant sex in the field of foreign language learning since many decades. The subjects are taught the module of writing according to two sessions per week.

3.3. The context

The pre-test and the post-test were conducted with the same sample after giving the extra practical course. The students received both tests in the session of Written Expression. The pre-test took place at 11 o'clock and the time allocated to it was half an hour. Students were given an unpunctuated test and asked to insert commas and periods appropriately. The extra practical course took place at 8 o'clock; the teacher explained the use of both marks and where they are supposed to occur by introducing their rules. Then, he gave two exercises; the first one contained an unpunctuated text and students were asked again to place commas and periods. Similar to the pre-test, the post-test took place at 12:30 and was done in 30 minutes where students were asked to place the aforementioned marks.

Section three: Analysis of the Pre-test and the post-test

The pre-test

The section is mainly concerned with the analysis of the pre-test answers in order to determine the extent to which students placed the comma and the period where they were supposed to be. The proposed test contains 15 commas and 10 periods. As the following tables will show, the correct use and the wrong one of both marks are counted separately. We purposefully dealt with each student's performance in a separate table because we found that the frequency and the placement for both marks differ from one student to another.

Student 01

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	1 6,66%	14 93,34%	15 100%
The period	3 30%	7 70%	10 100%

Table 10. Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

As shown in this table, the percentage for the right use of the comma for student one was low (6, 66%). It was used only once after an introductory phrase, but the rest of the commas (93, 33%) were placed randomly throughout the whole text. The correct use of the period was average since it had (30%) of the whole percentage.

Student 02

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	2 13,33%	13 86,67%	15 100%
The period	4 40%	6 60%	10 100%

Table 11. Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

For this student, the comma was inserted only twice in its right place. This percentage was low (13, 33%); the first was used after an introductory phrase, the second was used in a list of items, and all the rest were placed randomly. The periods' correct use was weak and represented only (40%) of the total.

Student 03

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	3 20%	12 80%	15 100%
The period	3 30%	7 70%	10 100%

Table 12: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

As shown here, only the listing comma was used appropriately but this still represented a low percentage (20%). The period was put in three correct positions at the end of three sentences, but still again its right uses' percentage was low (30%).

Student 04

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	10 66,66%	5 33,34%	15 100%
The period	5 50%	5 50%	10 100%

Table 13: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

For this student, the correct use of the comma represented (66, 66%) which was a rather good percentage. The joining comma was used appropriately as well as the listing one, but the rest of commas (33, 34%) were used randomly. Concerning the period, it was put five times out of ten in its right place (50%), and this represented half of the whole percentage.

Student 05

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	4 26,66%	11 73,34%	15 100%
The period	3 30%	7 70%	10 100%

Table 14: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

Here, the commas' right use was low since it represented only (26, 66%). The listing comma was used appropriately, but the other commas were used randomly. The periods' right use represented only (30%) which was a low percentage.

Student 06

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	3 20%	12 80%	15 100%
The period	5 50%	5 50%	10 100%

Table 15: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

For this student, the percentage for the correct use of the comma remained low (20%) since only the listing comma was used in a correct way. Concerning the wrong use, its percentage was high (80%). The percentage of the periods' use was average (50%) because five out of ten periods were used in their right place.

Student 07

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	0 0%	15 100%	15 100%
The period	4 40%	6 60%	10 100%

Table 16: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

Here, absolutely no comma was used where it was supposed to be, but rather in a random way throughout the whole text (00%). The period was put at the end of four sentences out of ten, thus its right use was low and represented only (40%).

Student 08

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	6 40%	9 60%	15 100%
The period	7 70%	3 30%	10 100%

Table 17: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

For this student, the right use of the comma was generally average (40%). It was used correctly after an introductory phrase and in the list of items. All the remaining commas were placed wrongly (60%). The periods' right use represented (70%) which was a rather high percentage.

Student 09

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	7 46,66%	8 53,34%	15 100%
The period	5 50%	5 50%	10 100%

Table 18: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

For this student, approximately half of the commas were used in a correct way (46, 66%), especially the listing ones. This percentage was low because (53, 34%) of them were inserted in a wrong way. For periods, half of them were used correctly and vice versa (50%).

Student 10

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	3 20%	12 80%	15 100%
The period	3 30%	7 70%	10 100%

Table 19: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

Here again, this student used the comma only in three correct positions (20%). The joining comma was placed after an introductory phrase; another one was placed in the list of items. All the rest (80%) were used inappropriately. The appropriate use of the period was average because it represented only (30%) of the total.

Student 11

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	8 53,33%	7 46,67%	15 100%
The period	4 40%	6 60%	10 100%

Table 20: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong uses of Commas and Periods

Here, the percentage for the correct use of the comma was (53, 33%). For this student, the listing comma was used appropriately as well as the joining one. But in the other seven positions it was used wrongly (46, 67%). Concerning the period, it was used at the end of four sentences, but the percentage was low and represented only (40%).

Student 12

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	5 33,33%	10 66,67%	15 100%
The period	4 40%	6 60%	10 100%

Table 21: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

For this student, the percentage for the right use of the comma was low (33, 33%). The joining comma was inserted in its right position and the listing comma as well. Concerning the period, the percentage for its right use was only (40%) of the total.

Student 13

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	3 20%	12 80%	15 100%
The period	0 00%	10 100%	10 100%

Table 22: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

This student used the comma in only three correct positions that is why the percentage for the right use remained low (20%). The wrong use was high (80%) since only the listing comma was used in a correct way. But for periods, absolutely no one was used correctly (00%).

Student 14

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	6 40%	9 60%	15 100%
The period	1 40%	9 60%	10 100%

Table 23: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

For this student, the percentage of the right use of the comma was average (40%). A couple of commas were used before and after an interruptive phrase, in addition to the listing ones which were used appropriately. The period' percentage for its right use was low and represented only (10%).

Student 15

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	0 00%	15 100%	15 100%
The period	0 00%	10 100%	10 100%

Table 24: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

For this student, no commas and no periods were used correctly throughout the whole text (00%).

The post-test

This part is mainly concerned with the analysis of the post-test answers in order to determine the extent to which students placed the comma and the period in their right place, after receiving the extra practical course. The forthcoming post-test contains a text that includes 11

commas and 11 periods. Similarly to the pre-test, the following tables will show both the correct and the wrong use, and each mark's use is counted separately.

Student 01

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	8 72,72%%	3 27,28%	11 100%
The period	7 63,63%	4 36,37%	11 100%

Table 25: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

For this student, the percentage for the commas' right use was rather high (72, 72%). He used it after three introductory phrases, one introductory word, before and after an interrupting word, and in the list of items. The rest of commas were placed wrongly (27, 28%). The periods' right percentage was also acceptable (63, 63%) since it was inserted correctly at the end of seven sentences.

Student 02

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	7 63,63%%	3 36,37%	11 100%
The period	7 63,63%	4 36,37%	11 100%

Table 26: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

For this student, the percentage for the commas' right use was equal to the one of periods which was (63, 63%). The comma was used correctly after one introductory phrase, two introductory words, before and after an interrupting word, and in the list of items. The period was inserted incorrectly at the end of four sentences (36, 37%).

Student 03

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	8 72,72%%	3 27,28%	11 100%
The period	7 63,63%	4 36,37%	11 100%

Table 27: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

For this student, the percentage for the commas' right use was rather high (72, 72%). It was used correctly after the two introductory phrases, two introductory words, and in the list of item. But all the rest were placed wrongly. The period was used appropriately seven times (63, 63%).

Student 04

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	7 63, 63%	4 36, 37%	11 100%
The period	5 45,45%	6 54,55%	11 100%

Table 28: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

Here again, the percentage for the commas' right use was acceptable (63, 63%). The listing comma was inserted appropriately, in addition to the ones that came after one introductory phrase, two introductory words, and before and after on interrupting word. Concerning the wrong use, it was rather low (36, 37%). The percentage for the periods' right use was average and represented (45, 45%).

Student 05

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	7 63, 63%	4 36, 37%	11 100%
The period	6 54,54%	5 45,46%	11 100%

Table 29: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

For this student, the percentage for the commas' right use was acceptable (63, 63%). It was inserted in a correct way after two introductory phrases, one introductory word, before and after an interrupting word, and in the list of items. The periods' right use was average, thus the percentage was (54, 54%).

Student 06

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	6 54, 54%	5 45, 46%	11 100%
The period	6 54, 54%	5 45, 46%	11 100%

Table 30: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

Here, the percentage is equal for both marks (54, 54%) and it was average. The comma was inserted correctly after three introductory phrases, before an interrupting word, and in the list of items. The period was inserted correctly at the end of six sentences (54, 54%).

Student 07

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	7 63, 63%	4 36, 37%	11 100%
The period	10 90, 90%	1 9, 10%	11 100%

Table 31: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

For this student, the percentage for the commas' correct use was acceptable (63, 63%). It was inserted after two introductory phrases, two introductory words, before and after an interrupting word, and only once in the list of items. The remaining commas were placed wrongly (36, 37%). The period was approximately inserted correctly throughout the whole text, thus its percentage was high (90, 90%).

Student 08

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	3 27, 27%	8 72, 73%	11 100%
The period	4 36, 36%	7 63, 64%	11 100%

Table 32: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

Here, the percentage for the commas' correct use was low (27, 27%). It was inserted in a correct way only in three positions; after an introductory phrase, an introductory word, and only once in the list of items. The rest of commas were used in a wrong way (72, 73%). Concerning the period, its percentage was also low (36, 36%) of the total.

Student 09

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	5 45, 45%	6 54, 55%	11 100%
The period	9 81, 81%	2 18, 19%	11 100%

Table 33: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of commas and periods

As this table shows, the students' application of the comma was average (45, 45%). The joining comma was inserted correctly before "and", in addition to the ones before and after the interrupting word and the listing comma which was used also in a correct way. Concerning the period, the percentage for the correct use was high (81, 81%) because they were placed approximately everywhere they were supposed to be.

Student 10

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	5 45, 45%	6 54, 55%	11 100%
The period	7 63, 63%	4 36, 37%	11 100%

Table 34: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of commas and Periods

The percentage of the commas' right use, here, was average (45, 45%). It was used after two introductory phrases, one introductory word, and in the list of items. All the remaining commas were placed randomly (54, 55%). The percentage for the periods' correct use was acceptable since it was inserted correctly seven times throughout the whole text (63, 63%).

Student 11

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	6 54, 54%	5 45, 46%	11 100%
The period	9 81, 81%	2 18, 19%	11 100%

Table 35: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

For this student, the commas' percentage for the correct use was average (54, 54%). It was used appropriately after three introductory phrases, two introductory words, but the listing comma was used only once. The period was used nine times where it was supposed to be, thus its percentage for the correct use was (81, 81%).

Student 12

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	7 63, 63%	4 36, 37%	11 100%
The period	8 72, 72%	3 27, 28%	11 100%

Table 36: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

Here, the percentage of the comma correct use was acceptable (63, 63%). It was used correctly after two introductory phrases, one introductory word, before and after an interrupting word, and in the list of items. All the remaining commas were inserted in a wrong way (36, 37%). The period was inserted correctly in eight positions, thus the percentage was rather high (72, 72%).

Student 13

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	8 72, 72%	3 27, 28%	11 100%
The period	8 72, 72%	3 27, 28%	11 100%

Table 37: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

Here, the percentage for the correct use of both commas and periods was equal (72, 72%) which was a rather high percentage. Concerning the wrong use, it was low (27, 28%).

Student 14

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	5 45, 45%	6 54, 55%	11 100%
The period	7 63, 63%	4 36, 37%	11 100%

Table 38: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong Uses of Commas and Periods

This student placed the comma correctly only five times, so the percentage for the correct use was average (45, 45%); it was used after three introductory words. The periods' right uses' percentage was acceptable and represented (63, 63%) of the total.

The punctuation mark	Correct	Wrong	Total
The comma	3 27, 27%	8 72, 73%	11 100%
The period	7 63, 63%	4 36, 37%	11 100%

Table 39: Calculating the Correct and the Wrong uses of Commas and Periods

This student used the comma correctly only in three positions, thus the percentage was low (27, 27%). The period was used appropriately seven times at the end of seven sentences and the percentage for the correct use was (63, 63%).

3.4. Discussion of the Results

As it is clearly noticed, the majority of the teachers being questioned were the ones who have the MA degree (60%) and the PhD degree (40%); both categories' responses are thus reliable. It is also clear that teachers of W.E usually give less importance to vocabulary and punctuation (16, 16%) and concentrate more on the organization of ideas and grammar with a percentage of (33, 33%). This is a clear indication of teachers concern with content at the expense of form, which may be a factor that leads students to use both commas and periods wrongly in most of the times, as it has been pointed in the pre-test results. The general commas' percentage for the correct use was (27, 10%), while the one for the wrong use was (72, 9%). Concerning periods, the general percentage for the correct use was (34%), while the one for wrong use was (66%). Referring again to the third question stated in the questionnaire, the majority of teachers (80%) responded that they tend to follow the process-oriented approach when they teach writing, and this can be another factor that causes students to place both marks in a wrong way. In spite of the fact that all the teachers (100%) said that they usually raise students' awareness about the importance of punctuation, the results of the pre-test do not confirm these responses. This, in fact,

may lead us to reach two predictions: it is either students do not give this aspect any interest and consider it as a bit of decoration the reason why they do not pay attention to what is said by the teachers and keep on placing these marks randomly, or it may be that teachers' methods do not work well and make it difficult for students to get the point, which inevitably cause the failure to achieve the desired results. Referring again to the questionnaire, when teachers were asked whether it is enough to restrict learning how to place the comma and the period in only studying their rules, (80%) of them said 'no'. This is significance that they are not satisfied with their students' achievements. This is also reflected in the question that followed the previous one, when (100%) of teachers responded that they expect giving more practical courses on where to place the aforementioned marks to result in better written production. In responding to another question that asks whether teachers take into consideration punctuation mistakes when they correct students papers, (100%) of them said 'yes'. In fact, when we return to the pre-tests' results we find that these responses do not prove what was found because the majority of commas and periods were placed wrongly, and even though (100%) of teachers add comments on where to put commas and periods, students still make mistakes whenever using them. When referring to the post- tests results, we can notice that there was an improvement in students' performance since (50, 75%) of the commas where used in a correct way, and that (49, 25%) were used in a wrong way. Concerning periods, the general percentage for their correct use was (55, 14%), while the one for the wrong use was (44, 86%). This proves our hypothesis which stated that providing more practice, in our case it was only one practical session, on the use of these two marks will result in better written performance.

Conclusion

The immediate conclusion one jumps on after the analysis and the evaluation of the pre-test and the post-test is that there is an improvement in students' performance after giving the extra practical course. So, one may assert that students really lack practice on punctuation marks, the reason why we observed that their application of both the comma and the period has been improved after practising more on their use. This, in fact, led us to assume that if students receive more exercises on the use of the aforementioned marks, even during their writing sessions with the possible time devoted to it, they will certainly produce good punctuated pieces of writing.

General Conclusion and Recommendations

This dissertation was undertaken to determine the possibility of more practice on the use of punctuation marks to enhance students writing and results in better written productions. It comprised two main parts: the first chapter is a general overview of writing. The second chapter of the dissertation was devoted to the punctuation marks of our concern which are the comma and the period. The second part of the dissertation was devoted to the empirical research and was divided into three sections. The first is about the description and analysis of the teachers' questionnaire, the second and third sections deal with the analysis and the description of both the pre-test and the post-test.

The interesting outcome of the first part embodied in the useful information we presented on writing: what is academic writing, the nature of writing, the basic rules of writing, the product-oriented approach, the writing stages that are highly related to punctuation which are: revising, proofreading, and editing.

The second chapter sheds light on the notion of style in writing and states a brief history of punctuation. It is also highly concerned with the marks of our concern which are the comma and the period and introduces their numerous uses.

The second part of the thesis is a field investigation which takes the form of both a pre-test and a post- test which were administered to second year English students at the Department of Languages, University of Constantine. This part is of three sections; the first one is concerned with the description and analysis of the teachers questionnaire, the second and the third ones are concerned with the description and analysis of both the pre and post- tests to check the extent to which adding more practice on the use of the comma and the period may enhance students application of both marks.

The obtained results could confirm to a large extent the hypothesis which stated that students would produce better writing if they were given much more practice on the use of all punctuation marks, especially the very frequently used marks ever: the comma and the period, in the sense that after giving the extra practical course the majority of students have inserted both marks where they are supposed to be.

In the light of the obtained results, we recommend the following:

- The product- oriented approach should be given more care by the teachers of written expression in the Department of Foreign Languages. In other words, teachers should focus more on the final shape of the students essays and let them know that all surface features play an important role in the creation of well organized, clear, and readable written production.
- Teachers should devote enough time and effort when dealing with punctuation marks.
- Teachers should not teach punctuation marks as a fixed or separated aspect during the writing classes, but rather place it within the course and bear in mind that it should be taught as a dynamic aspect whenever need be.
- Students should recognize the importance of punctuation marks, and should be told regularly that the more they use them, the more they produce better writing.
- Teachers should encourage students to place punctuation marks whenever they write by creating activities to make use of these crucial marks.
- Teachers should also motivate students to apply the necessary punctuation marks in their compositions by giving good marks to those who apply them in a good way.
- Last but not least recommendation that our research offers is that students should be provided with enough time so as to write good essays with the required punctuation marks.

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Appendixes

Appendix One

The Teachers' Questionnaire

For each item, please tick the right box or write in the space provided.

1. Degree:

BA (Licence) MA (Master/ Magister) PhD (Doctorate)

2. Classify the following items according to the importance you give them while teaching writing using 1, 2, 3, or 4:

Organization of ideas Grammar Vocabulary Punctuation

3. Which approach do you usually tend to follow while teaching writing?

The product- oriented approach The process- oriented approach

4. Do you usually raise students' awareness about the importance of punctuation marks?

Yes No

5. Do you think that it would be enough for students to learn only the rules that govern the use of the comma and the period?

Yes No

6. Do you expect that giving more practical courses on where to put the comma and the period, will result in better written production?

Yes No

7. When correcting students' papers, do you take into account punctuation mistakes?

Yes No

8. If yes, do you add comments on where to put commas and periods appropriately?

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.....
.....

9. If you are asked to give more practical courses on the use of punctuation marks, how much time should it be devoted to it with regard to the total time allocated to teaching writing?

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.....
.....

Appendix Two

The Pre-Test

Insert commas and periods where necessary in the following text:

My dormitory room on the second floor of Bienville Hall is small and crowded the dark green walls and dirty white ceiling make the room seem dark and thus even smaller than it is as you walk into the room you are stopped short by my bed which fills half of the room the two large windows over the bed are hidden by heavy dark gold drapes against the wall on your left pushed into a corner behind the head of the bed is a large bookcase that is crammed with papers books and knickknacks wedged in between the bookcase and the wall opposite the bed is a small gray metal desk it has a brown wooden chair that seems to fill the left end of the room stuffed under the desk is a woven wastepaper basket overflowing with paper and debris the wall above the bookcase and desk is completely taken up with two small posters on the right side of the room is a narrow closet with clothes shoes hats tennis racquets and boxes bulging out of its sliding doors every time I walk out of the door I think "Now I know what it is like to live in a closet"

The Post-Test

Insert commas and periods where necessary in the following text:

Another problem facing a number of elderly people is living on a reduced income upon retiring old people may receive a pension from their company or social security from the government the amount of their monthly checks is often half the amount of the checks they received when they were employed suddenly retirees find that they can no longer continue the lifestyle that they had become accustomed to even if that lifestyle was a modest one many find after paying their monthly bills that there is no money left for a movie or a dinner out of course sometimes they cannot go out because of their health may be they have arthritis or rheumatism and it is painful for them to move around this can also change their lifestyle some older people

however discover that the small amount of money they receive will not even cover their monthly bills they realize with horror that electricity a telephone and nourishing food are luxuries they can no longer afford they resort to shivering in the dark eating cat food in order to make ends meet