COMMON PUNCTUATION ERRORS OF YEAR 4 PUPILS IN THEIR ENGLISH WRITING EXERCISES

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A Corpus-Based Research
Presented to the Faculty of Distance Education
West Visayas State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for LNG 502 (Structure of English)
May 2023

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the common errors in punctuations that children have in their English writing tasks. The target group was Year 4 pupils in an international school in Bangkok, Thailand. The data were randomly gathered across five different classes in Year 4. The researcher selected twenty different written outputs from the pupils' English workbooks. The twenty authentic texts were writing exercises that the children have done in their English lessons since the start of the school year. The written outputs include pen pal letters, recounts, diary entries, narrative, descriptive writing, persuasive letters, newspaper reports, and explanation texts. Corpus linguistics was the method used in this research. The twenty authentic texts were carefully read, annotated, and analyzed by the researchers to know the common punctuation mark errors committed by the Year 4 pupils in their English writing tasks. The results were then recorded using a table. Then, the punctuation errors were ranked from the punctuation mark that got the most number of errors to the punctuation mark that got the least number of errors. The findings from this study revealed that the common punctuation errors were comma, period, semicolon, colon, apostrophe and inverted commas. It was found that the comma has the most number of errors meanwhile colon, inverted commas, and apostrophe has the least number of errors.

Keyword: - *Punctuations, Common Error, Least Error*

Introduction

After acquiring the skill of listening, speaking and reading, pupils begin to understand writing as a form of communication. Writing is a great skill to have. Writing helps pupils recognize that they have opinions, ideas, and thoughts that are worth sharing. Pupils sometimes find it difficult to transition from speaking to writing. When writing becomes part of their world, there are conventions that suddenly come into play – punctuation, spelling, grammar.
Punctuation refers to the marks used in writing that help readers understand what they are reading. Sometimes words alone are not enough to convey a writer's message clearly. They need punctuation marks to illustrate relationships between words, pauses, or even emotions. Punctuations can also enable the writer to control whether the text is read quickly or slowly. Writers have something to say and want readers to understand exactly what they mean. Using punctuation marks correctly and carefully makes it possible. There are 12 commonly used punctuation marks: period, comma, question mark, apostrophe, speech marks, exclamation point, colon, semicolon, ellipses, hyphen, parenthesis, and dash.

Background of the Study

Punctuations are symbols we use to separate sentences and parts of sentences.They play a very important role in giving intended meaning to the language. Use of wrong punctuation or even wrong placement of punctuation can change the meaning of the sentence completely. Punctuation is one of the important components in writing that misused punctuation marks — commas, semicolons, quotation marks, and others— may muddle the meaning of the sentences, leaving the reader confused and frustrated. Even less egregious errors — for example, a missing or misplaced apostrophe — can give written works an appearance of carelessness and lack of attention.

In Key Stage 2, children should be able to use: full stops, question marks and exclamation marks at the end of sentences; commas in lists, inverted commas to show direct speech, apostrophes for contracted words and for possession with singular nouns. Throughout year 4, children should be using the above punctuation with increasing accuracy within their writing. They will also be introduced to using: double inverted commas, single inverted commas, other punctuations to show direct speech, commas after fronted adverbials, and apostrophes to show plural possession. In the national curriculum test: English Grammar, Punctuation and Vocabulary, 11 out of 50 questions focus on the proper use of punctuations.

The purpose of this study is to know the common punctuation errors that pupils commit in their English writing tasks. It is vital that the class teachers are aware of which punctuation errors often appear in the pupils' written outputs. To be able to identify these possible common punctuation errors will provide the class teachers an idea as well as direction to plan and scheme lessons on the proper use of punctuation marks. Lessons or activities in punctuation marks could be added and addressed during the English lessons or before the writing sessions.

Statement of the Problem

This paper aimed to know the common punctuation errors that Year 4 pupils commit in their English writing tasks. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:
1. What are the common punctuation errors that children commit in their English writing exercises?
2. Which punctuation mark error occurs the most and which punctuation mark error occurs the least in the pupils' written tasks?

Review of Related Literature

According to Marwa Boulghobra's research study, it was revealed that the third year EFL learners' most common punctuation mistakes in English essays were: comma, period and semicolon. It showed in the results of her study that students misused or missed the use of these three punctuation marks. It was concluded that the comma was the most frequently used mark in both types of mistake: missing and misusing. Period was mostly missing in the students' use. In addition, the semicolon's mistakes were low in both types of mistakes because of its rare use in their essays.

In Hammam Nasrudin research study on the students' error in using punctuation marks in narrative writing, the findings showed that the most common errors which students made were: period, comma, semicolon, and apostrophe. He explained that the students did not know the limitation and the role of the structure and context.

Another study conducted by Dini Hadi Pratiwi and Tenia Ramalia on the analysis of students' use of punctuations in writing recount text, they have observed that students made mistakes in using period, comma, and apostrophe. The researchers have found out that the Period was the most frequent punctuation error in a recount text, also they discovered the three different types of errors that their subject has done: omission, addition, and misformation.

Punctuation errors and mistakes can include a wide range of actions because students learn such a wide selection of punctuation in the classroom, it is easy and very understandable for students to make mistakes whilst they learn. Common punctuation mistakes often center around misplacing punctuation in a sentence, incorrectly punctuating

plural words, overusing and confusing the uses of different punctuation marks. Identifying errors is an essential step for learning problem areas of the learners in the target language. Knowing their errors in punctuation marks help teachers in the teaching and learning process. This will also allow class teachers in creating material and designing lessons that address these punctuation issues.

Resign Design

Corpus linguistics is a form of linguistic inquiry based on data derived from a large collection of authentic text. It is a methodology that is not only restricted to a particular aspect of language. It can be employed to explore almost any area of linguistic research. Corpus linguistics is the study of language based on examples of 'real life' language use (McEnery & Wilson 2001). According to Elena Tognini-Bonelli (2001), corpus linguistics is congenial for students of all levels because it is a 'bottoms-up' study of the language requiring very little learned expertise to start with. This research method is effective in identifying the common punctuation errors in the written exercises by the Year 4 pupils.

Source of Data

The Key Stage 2 program of study focuses on the need to extend children's knowledge of the different kinds of writing, and to provide varied purposes and a range of readers so that children can learn about the choices available to them when they write. Pupils in Year 4 are taught different kinds of writing from imaginative writing to non-fiction text. The forms in which they should write include: argument, narrative, dialogue, stories, poems, diaries, scripts, reports, instructions, explanation texts and letters.

The data used in this study are selected from a variety of writing exercises across five classes in Year 4. The collected written outputs include: pen pal letter, recount, diary entry, narrative, descriptive writing, persuasive letter, newspaper report, and explanation text. The twenty authentic texts were carefully analyzed and annotated by the researcher to know the common punctuation mark errors committed by the Year 4 pupils.

Data Analysis

Many make an error or mistake in using English punctuation marks in their writing. The scope of this study is to analyze the common punctuation errors found in the English writing tasks done by the Year 4 pupils. The researcher limits the study into six punctuation marks: period, comma, apostrophe, inverted commas, colon and semicolon. Using the twenty writing outputs by the year 4 children, the researcher did an error analysis in the pupils' use of punctuations. After the data has been carefully read, analyzed, annotated and double-checked, a frequency count is used to record the number of times that an error has occurred in each paper. To easily track each punctuation error occurrence. a frequency table was effective to organize the data. After that, the number of errors are then calculated to get the sum of each punctuation mark mistake. The data are then sorted into descending order. To answer the second question in this study, simple ranking was used to determine the punctuation that has the most error and the punctuation that has the least number of errors.

Results and Discussion

It has been revealed in the results of my study that the comma, period and semicolon are the common punctuation mark errors in their English writing exercises.
Comma is revealed to have the most error, meanwhile, colon, inverted commas and apostrophe has the least error.

With reference to Marwa Boulghobra's research study on most common punctuation mistakes in English essays by third year EFL learners and Hammam Nasrudin's research study on the students' error in using punctuation marks in narrative writing, the findings from both research studies showed that the common punctuation mark errors were the comma, period and semicolon.

Writing Samples	Comma	Period	Semicolon	Colon	Apostrophe	Inverted commas
This table shows the punctuation errors in pupils' writing outputs						
Paper 1	4	0	0	1	0	0
Paper 2	3	1	0	0	0	0
Paper 3	1	0	0	0	0	0
Paper 4	2	1	0	0	0	0
Paper 5	0	0	1	0	0	0
Paper 6	1	0	1	0	0	0
Paper 7	3	0	0	0	0	0
Paper 8	1	0	0	0	0	0
Paper 9	2	1	0	0	0	0
Paper 10	2	0	0	0	1	0
Paper 11	0	0	0	0	0	1
Paper 12	0	0	0	0	0	0
Paper 13	0	0	0	0	0	0
Paper 14	0	0	0	0	0	0
Paper 15	3	2	0	0	0	0
Paper 16	4	1	0	0	0	0
Paper 17	1	0	0	0	0	0
Paper 18	1	0	0	0	0	0
Paper 19	4	1	0	0	0	0
Paper 20	2	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**34**	**7**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**1**

It is clearly evident from the table above that the comma has the most error. A total of 34 errors for the comma, 7 errors for the period, 2 errors for the semicolon and 1 error each for the colon, inverted commas, and the apostrophe.

This table shows the rank of the common punctuation errors

Punctuation Errors
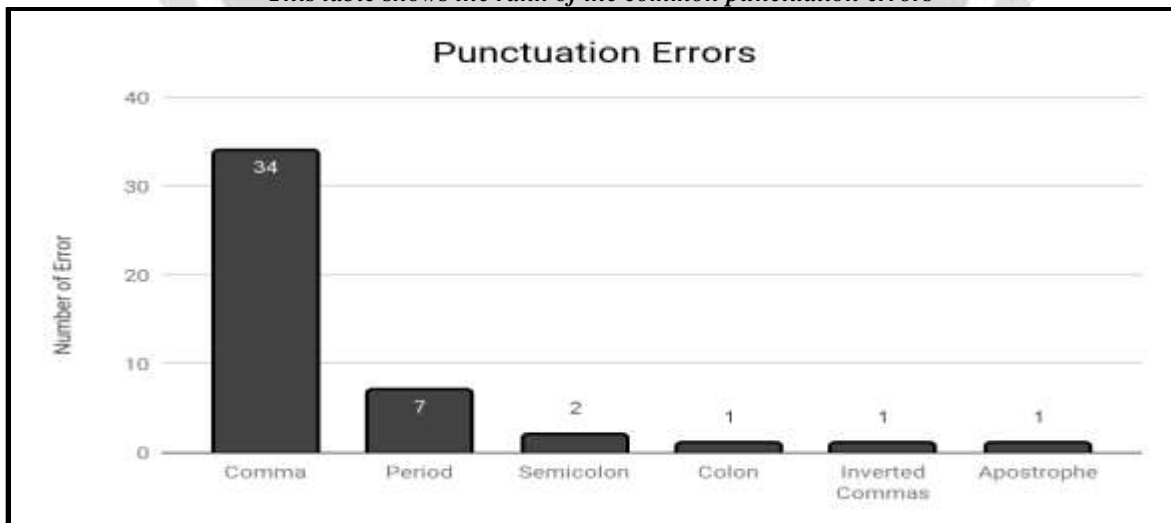
The table shows that comma is the most common punctuation error, meanwhile colon, inverted commas and apostrophe are the least common punctuation errors.

A research study to support this result is from Nurhaidah on her research on students' difficulties in using English punctuation marks. The mentioned researcher found errors in the use of commas, where it gathered a percentage error of 31.2%. There were a total of 552 punctuation errors where the most dominant punctuation error was applying the comma which occurred 172 times. On the other hand, in Pratiwi and Ramalia's analysis of students' use of punctuations in writing recount text, the apostrophe had the least error where it only gained a total of 2 errors or 2.1%.

Conclusion

The findings from this study revealed that the common punctuation errors were comma, period, semicolon, colon, apostrophe and inverted commas. It was found that the comma has the most error meanwhile colon, inverted commas, and apostrophe has the least error.
Common punctuation mistakes often center around misplacing punctuation in a sentence, incorrectly punctuating plural words, confusing the uses of different punctuation marks, and overusing them.
Correct use of punctuation is extremely important for writing as it conveys meaning, emphasizes tone and facilitates the readers' understanding. Class teachers should give emphasis on the importance and proper use of punctuation marks. Lessons or activities in punctuation marks, especially in the use of commas, should be addressed during the English lessons or before the writing sessions. Knowing the punctuation rules can help children avoid fatal mistakes that occur in their writing. Writing develops with practice; knowing and applying the rules and basic conventions of punctuation marks is a necessity.

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